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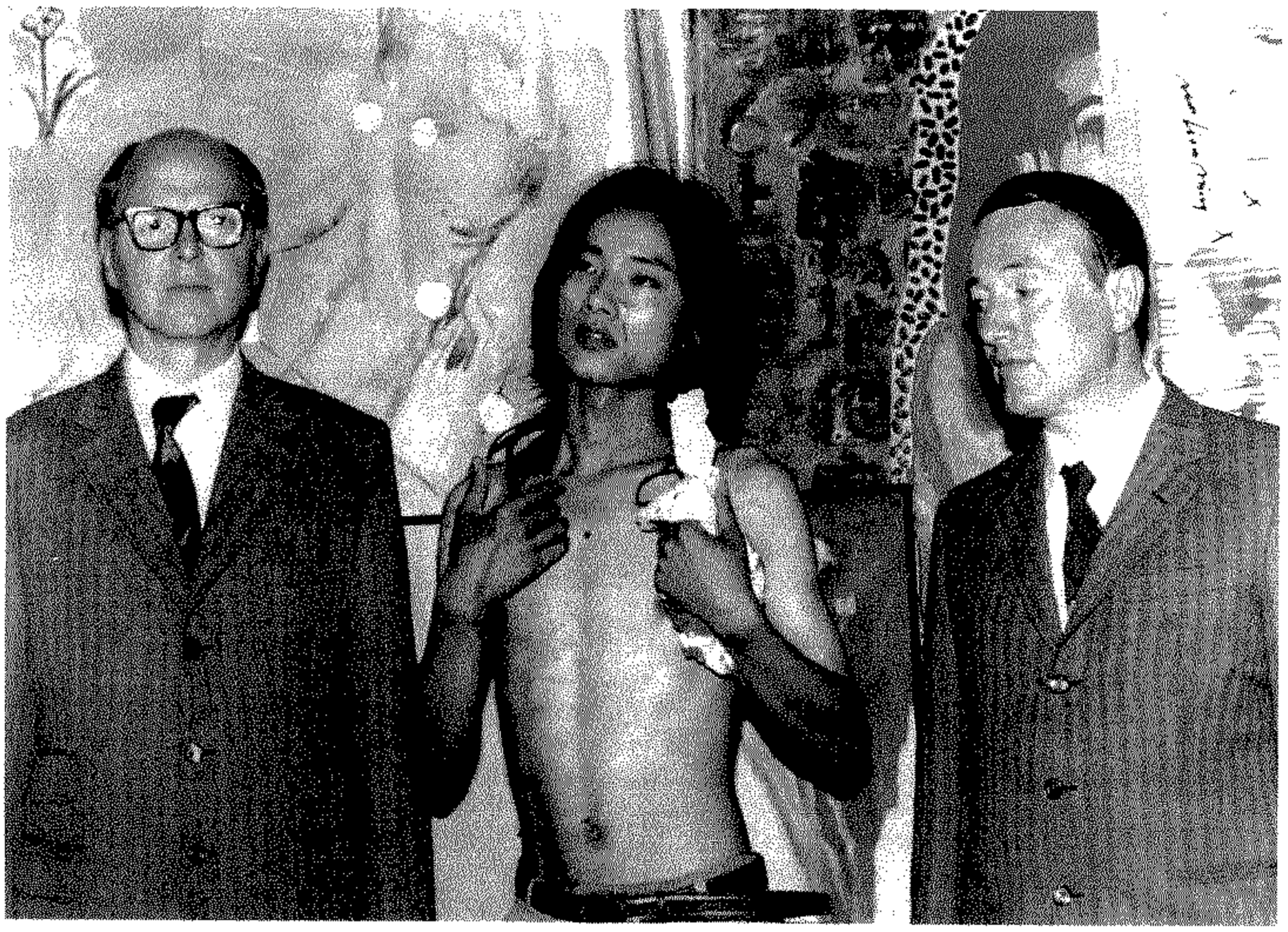
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XINGWEI YISHU
PERFORMANCE ART IN POST-MAO CHINA



[Ma Liuming, *Dialogue with Gilbert and George*, 1993, Performance, East Village, Beijing]

VOLUMES I & II

PhD Dissertation, Department of Art History & Theory

Thomas J. Berghuis, University of Sydney

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ABSTRACT

This thesis provides a historical discourse of performance art in post-Mao China. It works through a series of case studies that reveal how, in the 1980s and 1990s Chinese artists started to develop artistic collaborations that led to the development of embodied action in artistic practice. Performance art in China is known by the term *xingwei yishu*, which describes a form of 'behavioral action' by artists in front of select groups of targeted audiences that started to make increasingly strong references to the body.

For these artists the body provided the primary material with which to construct new visual structures in performance. Often the body is placed under stress to formulate the medium of a new art practice that enabled artists to visualize and embody their critical stance in the contemporary art scene. From the 1980s performance stood at the forefront of many new and challenging visual arts practices in China. It forms an important role in the development of Chinese experimental art that distinguishes itself from conventional practices taught at the academies, which provide the basis for the official discourse of modern and contemporary Chinese art.

The discussions of performance in this thesis propose the concept of the *role of the mediated subject of the acting body in art* by incorporating phenomenological perspectives on the way the body *inhabits* space, and presenting the work of artists who carry on the process of art practice through action. These works involve new visual structures that imbricate audiences through confrontation and propinquity and further attention is given to the way performance becomes part of the discourse of visual art through its inherent remediation into other forms and fields of practice.

Performance art offers direct confrontation with the actions of an individual artist, or a group of artists. Often performances oppose the principles governing correct behavior in the public space, which can lead audiences to distance themselves from its practices. This thesis concludes by proposing a durable discourse of performance that offer the potential for an insight into experimentation within modern and contemporary cultural production.

Dedicated to Jaap Berghuis

15.08.1945 – 29.07. 2005

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My recognition goes out to all the artists, critics, and scholars in China, many of whom have become close friends during the process of conducting my research. In particular, I would like to thank Li Xianting and the late Hans van Dijk for their unique spirit and for their great contributions to the field. I can only hope that this dissertation will present some return for the motivation that they, as well as many artists have given me.

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XINGWEI YISHU
PERFORMANCE ART IN CHINA

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INTRODUCTION

> Hegel remarks somewhere that all facts and personages of great importance in world history occur, as it were, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as a tragedy, the second as a farce.
>
> Karl Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte", 1869

Art, practice and performance

This is a thesis on art as practice. Not so much practice as the mastering of particular skills and techniques that have produced discourses of aesthetics and numerous analyses that constitute our common hankering in our *love for the arts*. If I were to write such a thesis, I would write about the work of my late father, Jaap Berghuis; it would affirm my love for his persistence and vigorous conviction in reproducing his relation to the world in abstract forms on canvas. I would be biased in my attempts to describe the work of someone I loved. Would it indeed be useful for me to confirm how the ambiguity of line, stroke, shape and form produced embedded storylines of physical and emotional encounters with his surroundings – depicted in these abstractions? Perhaps such close and personal examinations would go against the open character of his works. But watching my father paint helped me to formulate some of the basic parameters of my research into performance art in China. It established an interest in the laboratories of art; into the foundry of experimentalism, where art is performed. No one has ever before

been able to witness the full process behind my father's work, except me, when I used to visit him in his studio. It is this aspect of my personal experience that formed my interest in the practices of visual art – leading me to focus on the significance of the primary occurrence of such practices – at times when artists work with great effort to produce compact acts of visual communication.**[ill. 0.1]**

This thesis examines ways in which artists have visualized their corporeal existence in their work, flouting the restrictions that govern social experience and correct behavior in the public space through performance; that is, through practices that involve some type of corporeal endurance. It proposes the concept of the *role of the mediated subject of the acting body in art*. Working from the position that performances are essentially *acted out*, one can adopt a similar approach when examining other categories of artistic practice. Several researchers have argued that even painting involves the role of the mediated subject of the acting body, which led to a specific interest in the action of the artist [body] when producing paintings. This position has been widely applied in art historical assessments of the work of Jackson Pollock; particularly through the use of photographs by Hans Namuth in 1950 of Pollock at work in his studio on Long Island.[1] Following this exposure of Pollock, Harold Rosenberg in his 1952 account of *action* painting concluded that painting could clearly be seen as an *act* rather than a final object.[2] A year later, in 1953, the French Philosopher Mikel Dufrenne in his study, *The Phenomenology of the Aesthetic Experience*, continued to deliberate on possible ways to rethink the definition of art, stating how: "In truth all the arts require a performance"[3]

These close encounters with the artist as practitioner (and with the role of performance in artistic practice) have recently been used to suggest that Pollock is the "pivot between a modernist and postmodernist conception of artistic subjectivity" – a notion following the evaluation of critics such as Barbara Rose who continued to pay

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[1] In 1951 *ARTnews* published an article on the film and photographs taken by Namuth of Pollock. See: Robert Goodnough, "Pollock paints a picture" in *ARTnews*, May 1951

[2] See: Harold Rosenberg, "The American action painters" in *ARTnews*, December 1952

[3] Mikel Dufrenne, *The phenomenology of aesthetic experience*, translated from French by Edward S. Casey, et.al. (Evanston, Illinios: Northwestern University Press, 1973)

great attention to the conversion of "reality into myth" of Pollock and his work.[4] Such a perspective is imperative to those involved in the study of performance art, particularly in relation to the changing role of the acting body in art. But as can be seen in the study by Svetlana Alpers, the role of the mediated subject of the acting body in art can already be identified in the work of Rembrandt – who enjoyed having his apprentices stage broadly publicized theatrical performances in his studio, whilst he was teaching them the *act* of painting.[5]

The present thesis takes recent artistic practices in China as a primary case study to consider the role of the mediated subject of the acting body in art. The choice to focus such analysis on the field of Chinese contemporary art is due to the fact that self-representation and the sublation of personal existence by the artist happens to be more evident in China than anywhere else, especially during the 1980s and 1990s. My case study on performance art in post-Mao China coincides with a period of the gradual disintegration of the centralized authoritarian system that had governed the art system between 1949 and 1979. The discourse of art production in this period has often been divided into examining two distinctive periods; more or less separating developments in the 1980s from those in the 1990s. The ten years from late 1978 until early 1989 has often been described as the period of the Chinese avant-garde – one that must be seen as Chinese "high modernism" or its "high culture-movement".[6] It was a time when artists and intellectuals held ideals about the construction of a *new* modern Chinese culture inspired by the 1919 May Fourth Movement. For many this period of "high culture fever" ended between the summer of 1988 and the summer of 1989. In a twelve-month period, intellectuals witnessed the broadcast of *River Elegy* (*Heshang*), the *China Modern Art Exhibition,* and the massive student protest at Tiananmen that ended violently on 4 June 1989.

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[4] Quotations are taken from a detailed discussion on Pollock by Amelia Jones, *Body Art/ Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 63

[5] Following a reading of a discussion by Alpers on the "The Theatrical Model" in Svetlana Alpers, *Rembrandt's Enterprise - The Studio and the Market* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), 34-57

[6] For further reference on these concepts, see: Wang Jing, *High Culture Fever: Politics, Aesthetics, and Ideology in Deng's China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994)

After the violent crackdown of protest at Tiananmen took place all hopes and dreams of high culture disappeared and instead one witnessed the beginning of a *pop*-culture where taste was defined by the principles of *sheer* market value and of making a "fast buck" or "stir frying money" (*chao renminbi*).**[ill. 0.2]** The ideals, ideas, and icons of the recent past were replaced by 'cynical realism' and many artists were fixated on creating 'close-up snap-shot multiplication of body images' in which everyone and everything becomes truly genuine. **[ill. 0.3]** This was a time when private mentality counts; a time of personal attitude; a time to say: "Everything is 'A' 'O.K.'!" because '*we play for thrills*', but '*please don't call me human*,' for I have never been nor seen such a being.[7]

The new generation of artists, writers, poets, musicians, and intellectuals had grown up during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). They were left to become *bohemians* (*pizi*), who, for years were 'bumming in Beijing' and across other major urban centers in China.[8] **[ill. 0.4]** Between the late 1970s and early 1980s many had joined the army, somehow hoping to find their role models in Lei Feng and Liu Hulan.[9] They went to one of the reopened universities or art academies around China, where they were taught the fine arts of socialist realism, revolutionary romanticism and academic formalism. The demands to "paint from real life" now involved the invitation of 'life-models' into the classroom. But rarely were the artists invited to penetrate the character beneath the surface they were sketching, painting or carving.

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[7] In these two sentences I have quoted the English translation of the titles on two bestselling novels by the Chinese writer Wang Shuo, which first appeared in Chinese during 1988 and 1989 and sold millions of copies throughout the country. For further refence, see: Wang Shuo, *Please Don't Call Me Human* (*Qing wen bie ba wo dang ren*), translated from Chinese by Howard Goldblatt (New York: Hyperion East, 2000) and Wang Shuo, *Playing for Thrills* (*Wan de jiushi xintiao*), translated from Chinese by Howard Goldblatt (Harpenden, Herts: No Exit Press, 1997)

[8] The Chinese term *pizi* is often translated as *hoodlum* or *ruffian*. As both these terms often have become used to describe violent persons that are involved in crime, I have instead used the term *bohemian*, which more clearly describes the disreputable or undesirable characters identified in the present usage of the Chinese term *pizi*. Aside from its use in the novels by Wang Shuo, these *pizi* were also brought to life through Zhang Yimou's 1988 motion picture *Red Sorgum* that was adapted from the novel by Mo Yan. *Red Sorghum* features a group of drunken, bald-headed male riffraffs who become the heroes of this story.

[9] Both Lei Feng and Liu Hulan were revolutionary heroes, whose semi-fictional deeds were mythologized in propaganda campaigns for the Peoples Liberation Army, even after the military crackdown of the student protest movement at Tiananmen on 4 June 1989.

At the same time, a growing number of artists developed an interest in the representation of the body in the *raw* – depicting not only the external human beauty of the human form, but the multiple characters beneath the surface of soft skin: the abject and the absent body/*flesh*. Early experiments in painting included *scar-painting* that emerged in the late 1970s; these represented the physical and mental pain inflicted on the body/*self* during the Cultural Revolution – visual structures of the traumatized body. They can easily be seen as re-presentations, if not careful illustrations, of *real* historical events. However, following the all-out destruction and collapse of cultural and ideological edifices, intellectuals began to place emphasis on the mythic imagination that empowers history.

Recent studies of the work of Anselm Kiefer have described it as "a memory that itself lies in ruins" of a post-WWII German artist.[10] A similar approach can also be applied to the scar paintings produced in post-Mao China, as well as many artistic practices that followed these works. At the same time, many artists during the post-Mao reform period stressed the representation of the human body, often incorporating self-representations of the artist rather than subject matter from outside their practice of art and life. Following the demise of Mao Zedong, the artist reappears and is often, if not always, present in the works. From the 1990s, after the dreams and hopes of a high modern culture were shattered, an increasing number of artists produced ever more radical performances.**[ill. 0.5]**

To many artists, their work posed a threat to humanity, but in fact they offered a unique opportunity to promote the regeneration of public morality and to expand the order of cultural capital. As I argue later, during the past two years these barbaric displays, once attributed to the insane, are now used to endorse officially sanctioned, 'sincere' examples of experimental art. To conclude: were it not for the incentives of a new group of cutting-edge artists pushing the boundaries of art towards new extremes,

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[10] Quotation by Ernst van Alphen from Andreas Huyssen's essay "Anselm Kiefer: The Terror of History, the Temptation of Myth" in *October*, no. 48, 25-46. See: Ernst van Alphen, *Caught by History: Holocaust effects in Contemporary Art, Literature and Theory* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1997). Another notable source that discusses Kiefer in similar ways can be found in: Lisa Saltzman, *Anselm Kiefer and art after Auschwitz* (Cambridge, NewYork: Cambridge University Press, 1999)

the pioneers of the 1980s would never be in their current positions of governmental and institutional prominence.[11] As many of these artists are keen to accrue new meaning to prominent cultural and political discourses, further historical context for these later body art performances may even be recollected in the words of Mao himself. When speaking about the importance of physical education, he postulated that: "In order to civilize the mind one must first make savage the body."[12]

During the 1980s and throughout much of the 1990s, the most substantial discourses on contemporary art in China concentrated on secondary representations of aesthetic objects in the public domain. From the late 1990s the market effectively took control of Chinese art. This caused the conventional status of aestheticism in artistic representation to collapse, and be replaced by 'pure' cultural consumption. More time is needed before the international art scene realizes that artists have increasingly adjusted their practices to draw on the popular demands of the art market. Eventually there will be an understanding of the disparity between processes that assemble the 'tragic' contemporaneity of restrictively staged artistic practices and forces that arrange the farcical evocation of untainted art objects in the public domain.

Art, politics, and performance

Many discussions on the Chinese avant-garde and Chinese experimental art have been invested by politics, and researchers (in particular those from outside China) have become used to describing the ongoing conflict between the 'official' and 'unofficial' domains of art production. As a result, there has been an increased interest in analyses of the structures of the distribution of Chinese art. The popularity of Chinese art in the international art market has further led to an emphasis on the production of a small number of individual artists whose works have come to encapsulate the overall discourse on experimental art in China.

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[11] These views will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6 of this thesis.

[12] Mao Zedong, "Twenty-eight-stroke Student" (April, 1917). For this paper I have been using the selected translations in English by Stuart Schram, "*Prologue: The Pre-Marxist Period in Mao Tse-tung's* Development" in: The *Political Thought of Mao Tse-tung* (London and Dunmow: Pall Mall Press, 1963), 94-102 In addition there is a full translation of the essay published in French. See: Mao Ze-dong. *Une etude de l'éducation* physique (Paris: Mouton, 1962)

At the start of the twenty-first century, experimental art production is undergoing profound changes; it is gradually being accepted by state-run institutions that oversee the production and distribution of art in China. A broad range of artistic practices are now accepted as part of the official, national discourse of contemporary art. There seems to be increased attention to art that can be used for the promotion of national economic and social progress. For the past 25 years, the discourse of Chinese art has focussed on the production and distribution of desirable and collectible objects, both in China and abroad. In fact, the popular interest in Chinese contemporary art seems to have been grown out of a love for the arts. Some of the perceived ambiguities that surround experimental art are essentially created to pose challenges to conventional systems of style, technique, and concepts imposed by the party-state bureaucracy governing national art production in China. Nevertheless, even the discourse of experimental art is now infatuated by ideological and market-driven forces that control the distribution of some of the most valuable artworks produced so far.

Overall, there has been diminishing attention to the role of the experimental artist, and this has retarded the development of a discourse that moves far beyond the scope of popular demand, one capable of providing an alternative to the established discourses on artistic practices in the Euramerican centres for production. The discourse on Chinese art has to include a far broader range of topics; it needs to examine the specific contexts in which contemporary practices have evolved over the course of the past two-and-a-half decades.

In paying attention to its performance practices, discussion in each of the chapters of this thesis aims to provide the reader with a detailed analysis and historical overview of the artist's role in the creation of new visual structures that imbricate audiences through confrontation and propinquity. I treat art as having a vital social function, and much of my research focuses on artists who have managed to pose fundamental challenges to the underlying conservatism of Chinese attitudes to art. They challenged universal perceptions of corporeality and offered some of the most radical examples of the mediated subject of the acting body in art. They demonstrate how the social and the contextual can be transfigured through embodied performance.

Since the year 2000, when I started my research, I have noticed increasing challenges to the conventional discourses on performance art. These challenges came about because of the increased interest by the international art scene for performances operating outside the domains of theatre, dance, and other so-called 'live art' practices. The field of performance has been adopted as part of a more general discourse of visual art. But so far, research on performance art in China (outside the realm of the staged event) has been minimal.[13] The documentation used in this research can provide insight into its structures and functions. It is important to establisha proper discourse of performance; otherwise its practices will continue to be received with ambiguity. This ambiguity leads audiences to distance themselves from performance – often out of fear of being confronted by direct actions of the artist.

In my view art starts to challenge its function in ethics and aesthetics. The proper judgment of taste can only be maintained in the minds of those who wish to frown upon the assiduous processes that constitute the practice of art, and instead many who work in the art field concentrate their efforts on the production of desirable objects. This adoring positioning of art has entailed its own self-destructive process, as the creation of artworks no longer follows the profitable use of available labor in the cultural production field. Instead art production constitutes its own consumption, and is therefore capable of producing the destruction of its own utility.[14] As a result, artistic practices have emulated the *potlatch*; the exchange of gifts that cannot be confined to a simple structure, one that stimulates violence, rivalry and antagonism.[15] This, I believe, constitutes the field of contemporary art.

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[13] One of the few sources on performance art is that of Yeon Kim, *Translated Acts: Performance and Body Art from East Asia, 1990-2001* (Berlin and New York: House of World Cultures and Queens Museum, 2001). It followed an exhibition at the House of World Cultures in Berlin, in 2001, and thereafter travelled to the Queens Museum of Art in New York, in 2002. The leading essay of this catalogue by the curator, Yu Yeon Kim, contains a concise section on performance art in China.

[14] Following close readings of Georges Bataille's analysis on consumption. For further reference, see: Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share: An essay on the General Economy, Vol. 1: Consumption*, translated by Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1988)

[15] The concept of the *potlatch* is used several times in this thesis, and is adopted from Marcel Mauss, *The Gift – Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, translated from French by Ian Cunnison (London: Cohen & West, 1969 [1954])

In present-day society, art is aimed at a direct and open engagement with its surroundings. As a result, the discursive field of its practice is part of this engagement, including my own involvement in the field. This means that practice, rather than interpretation, is the focal point of a critical discourse on contemporary art. That is, at least, until it has been properly historicized and can lead to appropriately defined close encounters of the 'second', or 'third' kind (i.e. in Marx's sense, those which are capable of re-producing the farcical evocation of the initial tragedy of art practice). From this point of view, this thesis shares some of its methodology with that frequently used in performance studies; it seeks to identify the drama involved in the practice of art. At the same time, with its emphasis on choreography in the production of staged events in front of a live audience, it does not completely acknowledge the importance of dramaturgy. In fact, this thesis even has difficulties in accepting a prominent role for theatricality and its emphasis on public spectacle. Instead, the discourse of performance art has to return to the field of art history and theory; and take account of discussions that attend to the historical value of visual documentation, by means of which many performances have been analyzed. Performance art can even generate a particular function in the popular field of new media through its remediation in other fields of practice.

Art, discourse and performance

This thesis is divided into seven chapters, each describing a particular aspect of performance art in China that are linked to practices across Asia, Europe, and North-America.[16] Chapter 1 confronts some of the discourses that have historically dominated the study of performance art. It introduces the way in which performance moved from a choice of practice by artists working in different parts of the world; it outlines a new

[16] In its present form these chapters have been thoroughly edited to form the basis for an elaborate discussion on performance art in China. However, some sections have been previously published with permission from the University of Sydney. These include sections of Chapter 4, 5, and 6 which were published, respectively, in the following articles: Thomas Berghuis, "Close Encounters – Performance art practices in China during the 1990s and the role of the mediated subject of the acting body in art", Peter Lewis and Hoor Al-Qasimi, ed., *Sharjah International Biennial 6* (Catalogue), United Arab Emirates: Sharjah International Biennial, 2003, pp. 034-038; Thomas J. Berghuis, "Transcending Media and the Role of Contemporary Art Practices in China" in *Mesh* (Online Journal on New Media Art, 2004); and

model that places embodied action at the forefront of artistic practice. It is therefore imperative to recognize the fact that the practices of performance art plays a significant role in communities across the world – despite the fact that it often remains restricted to a limited number of people, in particular, amongst closely coherent groups in the arts field of a particular society.

Chapters 2 and 3 form the basis of an art historical examination of action and performance art practices that emerged in China during the course of the 1980s. These developments coincided with a movement by artists who began to position themselves outside the institutional domain, and instead strove for a new modern art culture capable of promoting artistic collaborations. As many of these collaborations incorporated experiments in action and performance, they formed the basis of a local discourse on performance art that becomes known by the term *xingwei yishu*, whereby *xingwei* marks the 'behavioral' aspect or 'conduct' (*pinxing*) of a meaningful 'action' (*wei*) that is articulated in art (*yishu*). Increasingly, artists treated the body as the primary material with which to construct new visual structures in their performances. The body under stress was particularly useful to many of these artists who started to use their own body/*flesh* as the medium of a new art practice that would enable them to visualize and embody their critical stance inside Chinese society and within the Chinese art scene.

Following the art historical analysis of early performances in the 1980s, Chapter 4 examines some of the more recent practices of performance art, many of which present highly explicit uses of the body/*flesh*. Instead of merely using the body as the 'content' of their art, these artists started to use the body as canvas, brush, frame and platform for their work. Their own bodies, or that of others come to be used as a stage where the object and subject collapses, and these artists moved from producing objects to using their own physical self for creating 'real time' performances. At the same time these performances continue to incorporate a strong role for remediation, which must be examined beyond the notion of being plain and simple documentation. Instead of limiting the discussion to traditional notions of action and performance as live art events,

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Thomas J. Berghuis, "Considering *Huanjing*: Positioning Experimental Art in China" in *positions: east asian cultures critique*, volume 12, number 3 (Winter 2004)

Chapter 4 pays attention to the role of the mediated body in art, as it becomes reflected in art – even when it concerns different works in different media made at different times within different cultural contexts.

Chapter 5 pays further attention to the topic of performance in new media art practices. Working from examples of some of the most prominent new media practices in China, this chapter challenges the dominant theoretical discourse on new media that places such great emphasis on the alteration of a direct experience of objective space and time through technological mediation. Instead, attention is given to the way performance becomes part of the discourse of new media through its inherent remediation. Aside from offering a discussion of new media from a theoretical and performative perspective, this chapter also looks at the way in which the discourse of new media has become popularized by Chinese and overseas curators, after they noticed how it offered ways to attract state and corporate sponsorship, particularly due to its popular character and emphasis on technological development.

The recent changes in the processes that preside over the institutional domain for educational and promotional activities of artistic practices in China have recently led to a regeneration of public morality and an extension of cultural capital by state-governed bodies in control of the arts. Chapter 6 discusses some of the implications for the discussion of Chinese experimental art and how it changes previous notions that describe the distinction between 'unofficial' and 'official' art systems in China. The discussion that follows can be related to the adaptation of the discourse on aesthetics in China, which shows the contradictions between traditional social harmony and modernist calls for autonomy, independence, and subjectivity. At the same time it is essential to examine how recent distinctions between 'official' and 'unofficial' are formulated within distinctions between different levels of public and private circumstances under which art mediation takes place in China.

The concluding chapter of this thesis, Chapter 7, offers further examination of the ways in which performance art practices have often become entangled with issues concerning correct behavior in the public domain, and are thereby restricted through the governing of public conduct. Direct confrontation with the actions of an individual artist,

or a group of artists can therefore challenge commonly accepted moral codes that govern the ethics of correct behavior in a public environment. Performance practices tend to break with the principles governing correct behavior in the public space. They can always be treated as an act of 'public conduct', in that it may disturb public peace, or intentionally disrupt a public meeting or sleeping community through its behavioral act. But this is part of the social function of art, or is it not? By establishing a proper discourse of performance art in China that is linked to practices internationally, this thesis will hopefully lead to a better recognition for artists who have chosen performance as their main field of practice.

CHAPTER 1

PERFORMANCE ART AND ITS CONSTRAINTS

> We must therefore avoid saying that the body is *in* space, or *in* time. It *inhabits* space and time.
>
> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 1945

> The basic structure, then, should be *of* the space and not *within* the space: not performance *in* a space but performance *through* a space [...]
>
> This is performance in the sense of 'carrying something through' (carrying through a space – performing a space – carrying myself through you throughout a space).
>
> Vito Acconci, *Steps into Performance (And Out)*, 1979

Historical discourses on performance art in Europe and North America

The term 'performance art' continues to be surrounded with much ambiguity as to the exact domain of practice that it embraces. Performance art is often associated with theatre and sometimes even with modern dance. As a result, its practices become related to the *act* of performing a play – the execution of a carefully choreographed set of physical movements and bodily expressions played out by the actor on a pre-designed stage. Performance events thereby offer the public a form of transmittable entertainment,

where the performer stages a series of choreographed proceedings in front of an audience through the careful positioning of the time, context, and space of the performance. The audience can in turn become part of the show through the experience of a series of communicative responses on the level of sensory, artistic and symbolic acts of communication.[1]

These different levels of communicative responses have recently been adapted in significant studies of theatricality and perception, and may be of use in examining the practice, secondary representation, and reception of performance art. At the same time, it is important to be aware of the numerous discourses on performance art practice; in particular, the groundbreaking texts on performance that started to appear during the 1970s, some of which became rare, sought-after classics until their republication. This has certainly been the case for *The Body as Language*, by Lea Vergine, which features an important set of documents and statements by sixty artists. Their works feature a newly emerging emphasis on the body in performance action during a time of great social-political upheaval in many parts of the world in the 1960s. Vergine invites artists to speak for themselves, and her book is certainly not limited to the major centres in Europe and the United States in her final selection. It is important to recognize the fact that the practices of performance art continue to play a strong role in a wide range of communities across the world – despite the fact that they often remain restricted to a limited number of people, in particular, amongst closely coherent groups in the arts field of a particular society. Those who remain sceptical about the role performance art has played in these societies should be aware of the renewed attention it has received (including the republication of Vergine's book in 2000).[2]

At the same time, there has been growing attention to performance art, even in more restricted territories, at least in terms of international attention. This is the case primarily in countries across Asia, where it has played an important role since the late 1970s. Early practices in these areas operated partly through the distribution of

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[1] For further reference on the theatrical event and the implications of the sensory, artistic, and symbolic levels of communication. see: Wilmar Sauter, *The Theatrical Event: Dynamic of Performance and Perception* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2000)

[2] Lea Vergine, *Body Art and Performance – The Body as Language* (Milano: Skira Editore S.p.A., 2000)

documentation of some of the most groundbreaking work from Europe, North America, and Japan during the 1960s and 1970s. The scope and character of this distribution requires more detailed analysis, but this would go beyond the scope of my thesis. However, the political and economic ties between Japan and the United States clearly strengthened the Asia-Pacific region during this period and made strong contributions to the direct and indirect flows of information across the region during, and after, the Cold War. At the same time, in many countries across Asia one continues to see strong ties with nationalist cultural traditions, which often lead to new artistic endeavours in Asia being referred back to more ethnic codes of practice. This is clearly the case for nations that are highly aware of their own cultural identities – often following violent confrontations with colonial powers that ultimately led to much anticipated modernization processes.

Meaningful research on performance art should include a proper evaluation of their increasingly complex discourse which involves a large number of artists progressively concentrating their work on direct representations of the body. Such research would allow performance art and its practices to be re-evaluated as an important field of contemporary art. The question that immediately comes to mind in reading early studies on performance art in 1970s is the way their authors often struggle to adopt proper theories on its practice. This can be seen in the introductory essay by Vergine, in which the author resists pure corporeal theses on the body which are instead treated as an 'art language' – and it therefore does not escape semiotic approaches in setting up a model on practice. Yet Vergine cannot escape linking the performances of the 1960s and early 1970s to early signs of public actions in the 1910s, 1920s, and 1930s, which involve an ultimate questioning of the word 'art'. This popular Marxist move leads Vergine to conclude that the artists represented in her book all create their works as part of a "constant struggle against the bourgeoisie" in an effort to "recreate a culture" (for themselves).[3] These early reflections on performance art stand in sharp contrast to artists' statements about their practices, which clearly indicate that the body

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[3] These comments are made in the introduction essay of Lea Vergine, "The Body as Language. Body Art and Like Stories" in Vergine, *Body Art and Performance*, 7-27

is used in a far more direct reference to physical experience and plays an important role in identifying human perceptions – by formulating far more immediate concepts about reality.[4] Such becomes clear, for example, in the statements by Guiseppe Chiari: **[ill. 1.1]**

> However, I want to make it clear that as far as I am concerned the body is a thing like anything else. I have written pieces for the woman, but also for the bicycle, for the necklace, for the tape-recorder, for the TV set, for the city, for a sheet of paper, for a stone, for anything whatsoever. Perhaps the piece in which the human body has the most important function is *Gestures on the Piano* [1972]. By starting with the hypothesis that the keyboard of the piano is a long white strip, that man does not know the existence of the keys, that man though is aware that whatever gesture he makes, the keyboard will return it as a noise having the same expression, I proposed a whole technique of gestures.[5]

The important role of the body in the creation of concepts of reality is so clearly phrased in these statements and works by performance artists during the 1960s and 1970s, that they provide an important insight into the development of novel theories on physicality, reality, and power relations – they all coincide with the arrival of new performance practices. Hence the advent of postmodernism which incorporates a desire to change the dominant role of the object and its social context with critiques of representation, and scrutinizes modern institutions of confinement, clearly finds its origins in the same social domain that these artists operated in. By closely following the timing of some of the experiments in performance art during the 1950s and 1960s, which occur prior to their theorization in Western philosophical discourse, it becomes difficult to uphold the idea that: "The postmodernist period is one of extraordinary dominance of the works of academics over that of artists", as is suggested by some contemporary

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[4] These ideas show very direct links with theories on Phenomenology, which suggest that mind and body are closely linked to each other. Of particular importance are the early works by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, many of which were published in English translation during the course of the 1960s and early 1970s; including his most renown study: Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962)

[5] Following the artist statement by Giuseppe Chiari in Vergine, *Body Art and Performance*, 77

writers.[6] Instead, writings by performance artists in the late 1960s clearly coincide with the minds of many prominent writers. Of particular importance in this discussion are Michel Foucault delineating the disciplinary discourse of human subjectivity, Jean-François Lyotard's treatise against grand narratives.[7] Here one can bring into perspective the proto-revolutionary events of May 1968 in Paris, which combined popular revolution with revolts in art and culture. New experiments in performance art took place at a time of great social and political turmoil and amidst a general mood of intellectual upheaval. Therefore, it is important to point to the direct social function of art as practice, rather than continue to point to the elusive role of universal theorization over communal practice. From this perspective it may become useful again to reiterate some of the statements made by prominent artists of the period, which clearly anticipate some of the most prominent discussions in postmodernism. For example, these statements by Rudolf Schwarzkogler in 1965 and Arnulf Rainer in 1968:**[ill. 1.2]**

Action, 1965

In the place of pictures executed by hand, the premises for the insertion of the artistic nude in performance (actions which have as background the real world of objects manipulated by actors) is now making its appearance.

The artistic nude gets out of its traditional constriction and, similar to a wreckage, it finally liberates itself from reproduction machinery used for information.

The artistic nude and spectacle by now have become a single thing. The objects and the elements of this *Panorama* move and transform themselves in the new space assigned (analysis of comparison, editing, automatic contracts, etc.). All is to allow the extension of the artistic nude to the total nude, which will place itself above the senses as an image,

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[6] See, for example: Christopher Butler, *Postmodernism – A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press. 2002), 7

[7] Here I refer to to the original publications of work by these two authors in French, see: Michel Foucault, *L'Archéologie du savoir* (*The Archeology of Knowledge*) (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1969); and Jean-François Lyotard, *La condition postmodern: rapport du savoire* (*The Postmodern Condition*) (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1979)

sometimes temporal, sometimes spatial, through the various possibilities of its repetitive gestures and its repetitive presence. [Rudolf Schwarzkogler][8]

Face Farces, 1968

When I used to draw faces I got the habit of 'defacing' them in various ways. Then in '68 the production of *Face Farces* started in an automatic photo booth located in Vienna's West railway station. Today, I still work in this way almost every week, with the help of a photographer or movie cameraman.

I emphasize the selected photos or sequences with marks in order to make the facial dynamics and mimicry evident. Since then, I have been interested in abnormal situations like ecstasy, spasm, psychoses, breakdowns, humiliations, etc.

But I do not consider these psychophysical reproductions as being just mimic expression: in fact, they are the attempt toward a surmounting which every human being can afterwards extend. As artist I limit myself to fix them in part, and only on the paper. [Arnulf Rainer][9]

By looking at the role that is occupied by artist in setting up new discourses on performance art during the 1960s and 1970s we can notice their renewed emphasis on the body which considers the changing notions of corporeal existence in the societies that they occupy. Often performance art becomes treated as part of a subculture where many of its practices operate only in a closed-off section of the cultural field. But it is difficult to escape the historical notion that these subcultures often anticipate major changes in society. Consider the fact radical art practices in Europe during first three decades of the twentieth century often coincided with momentous changes in society. These catalytic events involved a broad range of people working in the cultural field. They started to collaborate in quest of finding new and direct ways to convey their ideas to the general public.[10] A pivotal figure in identifying the early radical stance of

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[8] Following the artist statement by Rudolf Schwarzkogler in Vergine, *Body Art and Performance*, 233
[9] Following the artist statement by Arnulf Rainer in Vergine, *Body Art and Performance*, 217
[10] In recent years there has been a growing interest by several art historians to analyze the topic of collaboration in modern and contemporary artistic practices; pointing out how the works that were

performance art as the catalyst for the history of twentieth century art is, without a doubt, RoseLee Goldberg who in 1979 shook the art world with the publication of one of the most influential studies on performance art to date.[11] In the foreword to her book, she positions performance art at the forefront of the avant-garde, but adds that writers who focus their discourses on the production of objects conceal this position. Despite the criticism that Goldberg will receive for her thesis on performance, this work and its readaptation of 1987 continue to be of great significance to anyone working in the field of performance art.[12] Her work describes the way that artists aim to appeal directly to a large public by drawing freely upon a number of disciplines and media. However, as Goldberg's definition of performance is primary based on the decision by artists to perform their work in front of an audience and "challenge the viewers' perceptions of art and the limits of those perceptions", the use of different disciplines and media remains confined to the live art event in front of an audience.[13] More recently, several authors have instead started to describe the presence of performance in media including in works that are produced after the live event, and thereby creating a notion of performance clearly moves beyond the artist's decision to produce a "collage of media" in front of an audience.[14] It is therefore important to note how "artists appear in their art" and establish

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produced (many of which include performances) "change the notion of artistic identity in art." See, in particular: Charles Green, *The third hand: Collaboration in art, from conceptualism to postmodernism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001)

[11] See: Goldberg, *Performance Art: Live Art, 1909 to the Present* (London and New York: Tames and Hudson, 1979). Parts of this study were republished in a smaller-size edition in 1988, 1999, and 2001 respectively. Additional parts of the original publication were used in the 1998 publication of a study by RoseLee Goldberg that covers performance art since the 1960s. For this thesis I have used the following two copies: RoseLee Goldberg, *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present*, Revised and enlarged edition (London and New York: Thames and Hudson, 1999); and RoseLee Goldberg, *Performance: Live art since the 60s* (London and New York: Thames & Hudson, 2004)

[12] Critiques of RoseLee Goldberg will become prominent in the second half of the 1990s with the publication of several new introductions of performance including: Marvin Carlson, *Performance: a critical introduction* (New York: Routledge, 1996). A more detailed analysis of these critiques can be found in: Simon Shepherd and Mick Wallis, ed., *Drama/Theatre/Performance* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), Chapter 6, "Performance, Art, and the Avant Garde", 82-101

[13] This becomes more clear in the essay by RoseLee Goldberg, titled "Performance: A Hidden History" in Gregory Battcock and Robert Nickas, ed., *The Art of Performance: A Critical Anthology* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1984). This anthology further contains a significant set of essays on performance, many of which are produced in 1983.

[14] For example in the study by Johannes Birringer, *Media and Performance* (Baltimore, Maryland: The John Hopkins University Press, 1998). In his study Birringer describes a parallel between new performance experiments that started in the 1960s with experiments in new media arts. Birringer notices

a complex series of patterns in their works that move from the notion of the "intersection of subjectivity with medium".[15]

The year 1979 marks a turning point in the distribution of texts on performance practices during the previous two decades. Perhaps the most momentous publication, aside from the two books mentioned before, comes in the form of an anthology of texts by artists and critics published in Toronto, which at that time was one of the epicentres for new discourses on performance art.[16] *Performance by Artists* is evidently one of those sought-after publications, but one which has not been republished. Drawing on a number of documents published in the 1970s (listed in its extensive annotated bibliography), the book brings together a collection of profound texts, statements and instructions by leading performance artists from Europe and North America. These are followed by a pertinent set of commentaries covering many of the most prominent discourses on performance art of the time. The introduction by Chantal Pontbriand on early notions of performance features a wide range of topics offering astute observations for anyone interested in understanding the relevance of the term performance to a set of practices, and in formulating new ideas about contemporary cultural production. Of particular importance is the discussion on the distinction between *direct* and *deferred* performance. Drawing on examples of photography, video, film, sound recordings, and installation, Pontbriand argues that many of these works present "genuine performances in actu", instead of being "simply a matter of documentation".[17]

Discussions of performance art generally tend to operate on the basis of presence. Ultimately this leads to an awareness of the direct physical experience of the *live* event in terms of its performative function, setting aside its embedded theatrical orientation.

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how these developments are important in offering a more distinct role for performance, following the 'fall down of theatre' with the modernist avant-garde in Europe. Birringer also argues the discourse of performance precedes post-modernist theory.

[15] According to Charles Green in his introduction on "Collaboration as Sympton", these processes may appear obvious, but have developed into compounded patterns that show complex "degrees of self conscious intention" on the part of the artist. In: Charles Green, *The third hand*, ix-xvii

[16] A.A. Bronson and Peggy Gale, ed., *Performance by Artists* (Toronto: Webcom, Scarborough, August 1979)

[17] Chantal Pontbriand, "Notion(s) of Performance/ Notion(s) de Performance" in Bronson and Gale, *Performance by Artists*, 9-24. The concept of *deferred* performance is also reflected in the idea that

Such an approach describes the time-based nature of performance art and puts an emphasis on the processes of practice, in favour of evaluations of finished products. By stimulating a discussion on the role of presence, performance art becomes part of a historical discourse on modern visual art practice. It allows performance to be inform theoretical discussion, creating a new emphasis on the direct function of visual art in society. At the same time, discussions of performance art often seek to offer new perspectives in analyzing the critical relationships between artists, artworks, and audiences of contemporary art; in that performance recreates a direct awareness of the process that constitute art practice, even when these practices are deferred into medium for production.

The topic of presence is evident in the collection of manifestoes by Antonin Artaud, which were originally published in 1938 as *The Theatre and Its Double.* [18] Artaud's proposals for a 'Theatre of Cruelty' call for a particular *immediacy* between performer, stage, and audience.[19] The emphasis Artaud placed on the stage links his work with the early experiments in performance during the 1920s and 1930s. In particular, those performed at the Bauhaus at Dessau, which was the first institution to consider the role of space. These early performances encouraged passive audiences to become active spectators by introducing elements of variety theatre and circus.[20] This emphasis on stage, which continues to feature as an important theatrical notion throughout the 1920s and 1930s, became an significant point of critique for experiments in performance during the 1950s and 1960s.

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performance can be *remediated* into different artistic media, including the field of new media. The topic of performance *in* new media will be analysed further in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

[18] Antonin Artaud, *Le Théâtre et son Double* was originally published by Gallimard in *Collection Métamorphoses, No. 4* (Paris: Gallimard, 1938). The first English translation, by Mary Caroline Richards came out in 1958, published by Grove Press in New York, and was simultaneously published in Canada. For reference, see: Antonin Artaud, *The Theatre and its Double* (New York: Grove Press, 1958).

[19] See: Shepherd and Wallis, *Drama/Theatre/Performance*, 227. Here the two authors use a subsequent translation by Victor Corti published in 1970 by Calder & Boyars in London, which is likely to have been treated as the first English translation. This may produce an incomplete view on the significant role Artaud texts could have had on the developments of happenings and performance art, even before the late 1960s.

[20] See: Goldberg, *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present*, 104. A good reference in French that discusses the role of theatre models in Bauhaus can be found in Eric Michaud, *Théâtre au Bauhaus, 1919-1929* (Lausanne: Éditions L'Age d'homme-La Cité, 1978)

The break in the historical discourse on performance between these two periods is often treated in terms of the role of the performer. This moved the discussion from the collective nature of performances in the 1920s to calls for a more individualistic approach to performance starting in the 1950s. These changes coincided with new notions on space, which created a particular role for performance in discourses on contemporary art practice. Performance increasingly distanced itself from theatre practices. This is evident in the 1952 events at Black Mountain College by John Cage, Robert Rauschenberg and others. Instead of giving prominence to the stage, Cage's 'total art' performance emphasized the indisputable experience of the performer, the performance event, and the audience. Between 1956 and 1958 Cage's performances greatly influenced Alan Kaprow whose *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* at the Reubens Gallery in 1959 were pivotal in the history of performance. It gave rise to the form of happening and stood in direct opposition to theatre's thrall with theatricality, stage, and narrative. Instead it explored "how ordinary events are fractured spatially and temporarily by their simultaneous occurrence."[21]

By concentrating on spatiality and temporality, performance practices were completely overhauled during the 1960s and 1970s. They precipitated a completely new set of discourses on the topic of presence and led to an identification of a crucial difference between *direct* and *deferred* performance.[22] Presence in performance is often related to the actual occupation of the space and time of the performance and to the direct participation of audiences. However, artists who use different media often compromise these notions of presence by questioning the role of documentation. This gives rise to deferred performances that can be conducted in more private settings. Ultimately, this leads the concept of performance from constituting an *act* in front of a live audience to representing a particular performance *event* that produces a wider range

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[21] See: Robert E. Haywood, "Critique of Instrumental Labor: Meyer Shapiro's and Alan Kaprow's Theory of Avant-garde Art," in Benjamin H.D. Buchloch and Judith F. Rodenbeck, ed., *Experiments in the Everyday – Alan Kaprow and Robert Watts: Events, Objects, Documents* (New York: Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Art Gallery, Colombia University, 1999), 38. Aside from citing John Cage as an important influence, Haywood also notes the important role played by Meyer Shapiro's writings for Kaprow's happenings.

of artworks. The tendency to insist on presence as the fundamental characteristic of performance is ultimately formulated around the concept of theatricality; it is challenged by artists whose work combines different media and incorporates new notions of time and space.[23] The notion of presence in performance also brings the debate on Jackson Pollock's action paintings into perspective. These are often treated as having played a significant role in the construction of new performance discourses in focussing on the photographs made of Pollock painting by Hans Namuth in 1950.**[ill. 1.3]** These discourses need to be borne in mind as negative references as we come to formulate a theory of performance art practices in Asia. Instead, this thesis aims to underline the way in which performance art often involves calls for new ways to consider the embodied function of space and time; it will incorporate a discussion on *the role of the mediated subject of the acting body in art*. It aims to provide a more open discourse on performance, one that is capable of incorporating phenomenological perspectives on the way the body *inhabits* space, and it will feature artists who carry on the process of art practice through action.

Discourses on performance art in Asia

Discourses on performance can offer a critique of the way in which general discussions on modern and contemporary art fail to identify all the complexities involved in its practice. Even today, the attention given to modern and contemporary art tends to focus more on conventional notions of the production of artworks, rather than on work processes of artists themselves. This is in part due to the strong role of market incentives in the promotion of contemporary art. Concentration on the final object that follows practice promotes artworks as commodities on the international art market; they are also treated as *mindful objects* that can be used to challenge "our [developed] perceptions" of the "[developing] other" – both in terms of the evolution of their artistic qualities and in

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[22] Early discussions of *direct* and *deferred* performances are clearly described by Chantal Pontbriand in her essay on the "Notion(s) of Performance" in Bronson and Gale, *Performance by Artists*, 11-12

[23] Pontbriand relates these discussions to the critique by Michael Fried in 1967 on the insistence on presence by Minimalist artists. For further reference, see: Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood", in Gregory Battcock, ed., *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995 [1968]), 117-147

terms of social-political progress. Performance art often does not seem to fit in with these notions of art, as can be seen from comments made by prominent members of the art world.[24]

In Asia, performance art has additionally become enmeshed by direct interference on its practices through institutional privilege afforded to more established systems and styles. Such scrutiny of performance art, makes it very hard to for the performer to partake in representations of *real* works of art. There are often direct restrictions imposed on unconventional practices by the state, and by state funded institutions in charge of the arts. A good example is the way performance art practices in Singapore became highly controversial, following a performance by Joseph Ng in which the artist cut off his pubic hair, as well as a subsequent performance where Shannon Tham vomited into a bucket – both of which were performed at a shopping centre in Singapore on New-Year's Day, 1994.[25]

In China too, performance art practices have often been subject to public conduct laws, leading to restrictions on the public display of the body, even when the audience is limited to small, coherent groups of local artists. These laws have also led to well planned international performance art festivals being staged deliberately away from prominent public places in China. For example, the *1st Open Art Platform – International Performance Art Festival* in August, 2000, was purposely held at a remote location in the countryside outside Beijing. Even so, two of the founders of the festival, Shu Yang and Zhu Ming, themselves local performance artists, were detained for several

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[24] For example, when asked about the role of performance art in a large exhibition on contemporary Chinese art, Alain Sayag, curator for the Centre Pompidou in Paris made some very strong comments against the inclusion of performance art in such an exhibition. He stated that: "I think we should concentrate more on artists that produce real work." The interview was conducted by John Clark and myself and further discusses the curatorial procedures for the 2003 exhibition *Alors, La Chine?*, which was organized by the Chinese Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Culture and Communication of France, in conjunction with the anniversary of the cultural 'Year of China' (2003-2004).

[25] These events let to the complete banning of performance art in Singapore. For further reference, see: Lee Weng Choy, "Chronology of a controversy" (1996), Online (http://biotechnics.org/articles.html). The subsequent ban on performance became somewhat untied in December 2003 when the Substation art space hosted a performance art event, titled *Future of Imagination*. The event was curated by Lee Wen and involved works by eleven local performance artists. It became the first such performance event that was funded by the Singapore National Arts Council in ten years. I am grateful for Lee Weng Choy in providing me with some of the additional data for these comments.

hours by police, following a performance by Liu Jin who bathed himself nude in Coca Cola.**[ill. 1.4]**

Aside from these very clear examples of official sanctions imposed on performance art practices related to issues of public conduct, there can also be more scheming attempts to avert public pandemonium when there is indirect confrontation with these 'ominous' art practices. This can clearly be seen in the 2002 publication – and wide distribution – of the book, *In the Name of "Art"* (*Yi "yishu" de mingyi*), where the author attack performance art and other affiliated practices that feature representations of the body/flesh – including body painting and semi-nude fashion shows – with reference to the negative Western influences.[26] Such vilification occurs within the context of apparently sincere intellectual attempts to open up a discussion on recent developments in art practices in China and abroad. Certainly, for those who don't understand Chinese and are only able to look at the images in a book, this might be mistaken for a profound historical analysis of the practices of performance art. However, reading the accompanying text with the images, one suddenly becomes aware of the fact that this book does away with the entire field of conceptual art practice, which was previously considered a way in which to discuss works that focused on the body in Chinese contemporary art. This idea was also suggested in a discussion with two artists working in China, Zhu Ming and Chen Lingyang, about the different stance by some prominent curators, art critics, and art historians who have affiliated themselves with official institutions in the arts. Whereas both of these artists' works deal with the body and include nudity, Zhu Ming has so far been excluded from participation in prominent local and international exhibitions that were organized by government-controlled institutions. His works are also excluded from many leading art magazines, aside from independent publications. Chen Lingyang's works, on the other hand, are shown in many prominent,

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[26] Chen Lusheng. *Yi "Yishu" de Mingyi* (*In the Name of "Art"*) (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 2002). A total of 5000 copies were published for the first edition of this book. Usually art books are published in quantities between 2000 and 3000 copies. It caused great uproar amongst artists in China, including performance artists who saw many reproductions of their works had been included without their permission. Many of these discussions were published online at the arts section of Tom.com (www.arts.tom.com). Despite the huge criticism by many artists in China, Chen Lusheng remains treated

national exhibitions, and have been featured in leading art publications. According to the two artists, the reason for this distinction came from the fact that Zhu Ming refers to his works as 'performance art' (*xingwei yishu*), whereas Chen Lingyang is said to produce 'conceptual photography' (*guannian sheying*).[27] **[ill. 1.5]**

These recent experiences in official scrutiny of recent performance art in China are far removed from performance in other parts of Asia, where its practices continue to be linked to classical dance and theatre – even though there are several practices that suggest strong socio-political critiques embedded in the historical discourse on performance art. In Indonesia for example, *wayang topeng* ('shadow masked dances'), *wayang wong* ('shadow man', or 'court dance drama'), and *legong* (the 'royal dance of the maidens') are still widely practiced and continue to be known as important references for modern and contemporary art practices.**[ill. 1.6]** It is too early to draw any conclusions, but indications suggest that in Indonesia more profound discussions are conducted on even the most contemporaneous and experimental performance art practices than in China.[28] This is due to the ongoing awareness of these traditional dance and theatre forms which are believed by many be the basis for local performance practices.[29] In Korea and Japan there exists a more thoughtful public intellectual awareness of the traditional contexts behind performance art practices. At the same time researchers are able to further pinpoint very specific historical contexts in Europe and

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as a highly regarded intellectual in the official arts scene, and continues to be praised for his work by even some of the less conservative critics, such as Zhu Qi and Huang Zhuan.

[27] Following an unrecorded conversation with the two artists during preparations for the 6th Sharjah Biennale in the United Arab Emirates in April 2003.

[28] At least one can conclude that in Indonesia performance art is somewhat recognized as an artistic form, which allows some of its practices to be part of a general discussion on modern and contemporary art. In China the term performance art (*xingwei yishu*) is not accepted, and therefore it is difficult to start discussions on possible discursive field of practice on performance.

[29] In a comment by the Vietnamese art historian Huynh Boi Tran at the conference "Our Modernities: Positioning Asian Art Now" in Singapore (2004), it was suggested to me that discussions on performance in Vietnam have so far remained restricted to the practice of classical dance and theatre in different parts of the country. Nevertheless, some critics are aware of the culturally significant role that is played by traditional performance in their discussions of some of the more recent, experimental practices of performance.

North America in presenting a discourse of modern experimental theatre and dance, together with contemporary performance art.[30]

Whereas some of these observations are based on thoughtful analyses of recent performance practices, many biased accounts made within the context of visual art practice continue to exist. These studies on performance art (particular those produced in Euramerica) are often aimed at describing a wide range of new experiments with visual structures, which are realised by analysing the more direct confrontations between the artist (or artists), their work, and the public.[31] These texts provide some of the basic historical and theoretical outlines of the developments of performance art in Europe, North America, and to some extent, Japan. Nevertheless, they move from a singular notion of modernity that originated completely within the Euramerican centers, and treat the move from creating 'art objects' (such as paintings) to the production of 'more visceral, body-oriented works' as having been derived from the West. Too often, these studies further limit their concept of origin to one person, Jackson Pollock, who is conceived as the breakthrough figure in the historical discourse on performance art. According to these studies we are led to believe that the entire Gutai movement in Japan, and the works of Yves Klein and the Viennese Actionists "all owe great debt to Pollock."[32]

This chapter aims to propose a more complex art historical examination that may not necessarily use conventional concepts of origin and art practice. Instead, it identifies the artist as *actor* and the artworks as complex *acts of communication*; this leads to a

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[30] See for example the introduction essay in: *The Metacultural Theater of Oh T'ae-sôk: Five Plays from the Korean Avant-Garde*, translated from Korean by Ah-jeong Kim and R.B. Graves (Honolulu, Hawai'i: Haiwai'i University Press, 1999), 1-20. On page 19 the authors make it very clear that: "Although his [Oh T'ae-s_k] interest in native Korean performance is profound, [...] his plays and stage directing show a clear respect fro Artaud's theatre of cruelty and the social *Gestussen* of Brecht's epic theatre even as they explore native themes."

[31] As is described in: Goldberg, *Performance Art – From Futurism to the Present*, and also, more recently in Russell Ferguson, ed., *Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object 1949-1979* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1998)

[32] See in particular the essay by Paul Schimmel, titled "Leap Into the Void: Performance and the Object" in Ferguson, *Out of Actions*, 17-119. In fact the discourse on 'origin' becomes reversed on page 123, in another article in the same publication by Shinichiro Osai, titled "Body and Place: Action in Postwar Japan". Here the author referes to the findings of one particular Japanese journal on Gutai in Pollock's studio, and how "the extent of this journal's influence should not be discounted."

notion that the codes they produce are only used as "indices of positions and changes in the discourse of works and their interpretations."[33] It thereby aims to provide a brief re-evaluation of the possible functions and characteristics that surround the creation of a wide range of new experimental visual structures in different parts of the world. These are related to the emergence of performance art as well as to body art practices across Asia and the world. However, such an examination is only possible in relation to the specific contexts in which such practices originated; it will offer further ways to analyze the *role of the mediated subject of the acting body* in contemporary art practices. In addition to looking at examples in China, I shall also compare them, where possible, to examples in Japan, Indonesia, and Singapore.

The role of subjectivity in art practices in Asia

In different parts of Asia, artists started to focus on performance art as a means of representing a wide range of visceral experience, and to incorporate the *role of the mediated subject of the acting body* in creating their artworks. They started with identifying the role of the body in art practice. During the 1960s these direct experiments with the body led several writers to use the term 'body art' to describe work in which artists focused on the body-self and to differentiate them from earlier examples of performance art (reaching back to Dada) that often consisted of theatrical performance by an artist in front of an audience. At the same time the documenting of the live event became important in the analysis of performance art. This is critical for researchers in the field, who often refer to documentations of performances that they have not actually witnessed as live-events.

Therefore, even when discussing a thesis on performance art in China, I am often referring to visual registrations of these performances using photography, video, or sometimes even an installation. Perhaps the shifting paradigm in the relationship

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[33] These comments follow a close reading of John Clark, *Modern Asian Art* (Sydney: Craftsman House, 1998). In addition to Clark I have looked at the idea of treating artworks as complex acts of communication, put forward by the German system theorist Niklas Luhmann in *Die Kunst der*

between the artist, performance, and audience can be related to the growing access to equipment for the registration of visual phenomena, and to collaborative performance with photography, video, and installation. These visual registrations can then be shown to a large audience at different locations in space and time. In the words of the French philosopher, Jean Baudrillard, many of the performances we have witnessed would in fact be *simulacra*.[34]

One thing however, did not change. Performances are still acted out, although it is no longer necessary to stage them in front of an audience. This is important, not only when examining performance art, but also for understanding of other forms of artistic production, including painting, in the attempt to describe some the continuity between visual structures that often relate to the artist's self-transcendence through the work of art. Here, self-transcendence describes the passage from the artist as creative subject into becoming an intergral part of the artwork, including during its contact with the audience.

Until now, nearly all of the texts that focus on analysing the topics of action, performance, and the role of the body in modern and contemporary art practices during the second half of the twentieth century start by describing the way in which, between 1945 and 1955, several artists (and one in particular) started to challenge the traditional awareness of the relationship between the artist (eg subject) and the artwork (eg object). These analyses, most of which originated in Euramerican research, emphasise how the subject became increasingly central in the practice of modern art and formed the basis for contemporary art practices up until the present day. Many of these studies furthermore start by bringing up the example of Jackson Pollock as the *pivotal figure* in the progress of contemporary art by the way he challenges the materials he used for his paintings and by understanding his paintings as the "recordings of his actions".[35] At the same time, one can find several alternative and certainly more conjectural examinations

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Gesellschaft (*Art as a Social System*), translated from German by Eva M. Knodt (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2000)

[34] See: Jean Baudrillard. *Simulacra and Simulation*, translated from French by Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2000). This work was first translated by Paul Foss, Paul Patton, and Philip Beitchman and published by Semiotext(e), Columbia University, New York in 1983.

[35] This idea was discussed in the introduction of this thesis and is brought up by Paul Schimmel his essay on performance in Ferguson, *Out of Actions*, 18-21

of the role of performance art which feature more complex analyses of subjectivity in visual art that focus more on the direct representation of the body.

These studies provide the basis for the re-embodiment of the subject in the production and reception of art and constitute a new model that introduces postmodernism into the discourse on performance. They follow post-structural theories that introduce embodied subjectivity, and reaffirm the historical distinction (first made in the 1960s and 1970s) between performance art and body art – by treating the arrival of body art in terms of its strong role in the "activation of intersubjectivity."[36] In her renowned study on the performing subject, Amelia Jones nevertheless continues to treat Jackson Pollock as the hinge between modernist and postmodernist conceptions of artistic subjectivity. She argues that the identification of the body/self that is directly transcended in works of art must be examined further with the help of feminist and post-modernist studies of art. Jones thereby identifies a clear shift in the way an increasing number of artists have started to use their body, following the end of the dominant role played by the heroic male artist, whose body was only transcended in the work through the re-presentation by modernist art critics, starting with Pollock and Rosenberg.

The question that needs to be posed is: must we continue to look for signals of the adaptation of Pollockian action painting in order to trace the development of abstract expressionism in the historical art practices in Asia? No. Instead, we need to arrive at a historical analysis of the local development of modern and contemporary performance art and to reveal how the new subject in art became increasingly central to modern and contemporary practices in Asia. Such an analyis can be extended by tracing the adoption of commonly accepted historical conceptions of origin in performance art in Asia by looking for events that pose direct references back to early Futurist manifestoes, or by tracing them back to Dada, where "performance art can include any kind of theatrical

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[36] See in particular the work by Amelia Jones, including: Amelia Jones, "Presence in Absentia: experiencing performance as documentation, in *Art Journal*, Vol. 56, No. 4 (Winter 1997) and Amelia Jones, *Body Art/Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1998). Further discussions on intersubjectivity can also be found in: Tracy Warr, ed., *The Artist's Body*. (London: Phaidon Press, 2000), 11-15

production on the part of visual artists."[37] This would further allow a strong focus on performance art as part of the advent of conceptualism in China, which is proposed by some of the most prominent art critics working in the field of Chinese art.[38]

At first glance, and with a singular concept of modernity in mind, such an examination does offer some possibilities. For example, in China, in July 1985 teachers and graduate students at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing took part in the creation of a series of public action paintings and painting of the body/flesh in collaboration with art students from the École National des Beaux-Art in Paris, France.**[ill. 1.7]** According to some critics this event marked the beginning of a new wave of performance art in China.[39] This event also followed increasing discussion on expressionism and abstraction in modern painting in China, and came after several public exhibitions of European and American expressionism in China during the first half of the 1980s. It includes the exhibition of works from the Boston Museum of Fine Arts of September 1981, which was followed by widely distributed publications on abstract expressionism throughout the entire decade.[40]

Even more direct references that relate the advent of performance art in China to the performance art in Europe can also be found. For example, one finds them in the 'action' by a group of ten artists led by Huang Yongping and Ji Tairan under the title

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[37] Such a construction can indeed widen up the scope of studies on performance art, as is also described in a brief analysis by Amelia Jones of the way in which several critics in the 1960s and first half of the 1970s started to suggest the distinction between performance art and body art. See: Jones, *Body Art/ Performing the Subject*, 13

[38] For further reference on notions of conceptualism and conceptual art (*sixiang yishu*) in China, see: Gao Minglu, "Conceptual Art with Anticonceptual Attitude: Mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong in Jane Farver, Luis Cammitzer, and Rachel Weiss, ed., *Global conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s-1980s* (New York: Queens Museum of Art, 1999), 127

[39] See, in particular: Wen Pulin, ed., *Zhongguo Xingdong - Bashi niandai dao jiushi niandai de xingwei yishu* (*China Action - Performance art in the 80s and 90s*) (Beijing: Beijing Windhorse Mass medium Co., Ltd, 1999)

[40] Further references on these exhibitions, publications, and public reactions towards European and American abstract expressionism can be found in reports in some of the major art magazines in China during that time, including in *Meishu* (*Fine Arts* Magazine), *Jiangsu huakan* (*Jiangsu Pictorial*), and *Meishu bao* (*Fine Arts Newspaper*).

Xiamen Dada, which was held in early October 1986, outside the Xiamen City Arts Gallery of the Masses in Fujian Province.[41] **[ill. 1.8]**

However, a close scrutiny of these events in China provide a far more complex and localized analysis of the emergence of these actions in contemporary art practices that took place during the course of the 1980s. The action paintings that were done at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing in June 1985 were inspired by the discussion on *self-expression* in art practice. Such *personalized* forms of expression in working with the medium of painting, captured in two photographs documenting these performances, also involved *collaborative* aspect to these improvised events. More than anything else these events describe a particular atmosphere that was common at the time; they show young artists seeking ongoing collaborations in the production of experimental visual structures at socially and historically significant locations. It is not simply a reaction to these artists' confrontation with new discourses that were transferred from abroad. Instead, the actions were part of a complex process of assimilation, transformation and development of a wide range of discourses that, at least until 1989, were undertaken in relative autonomy, despite the presence of students from France in this example.

Clearly during the course of the 1980s art practices in China can be described in terms of the collecting of memories and in the creation of an atmosphere condusive to the construction of a modern Chinese culture to follow the eradication of traditional culture during the Mao period and, in particular, during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976).[42] This however was more of a collective enterprise than one based solely on individual expression, at least until the collapse of the student protest at Tiananmen Square in 1989. It was the disillusionment caused by internal struggles amidst different factions of protesters at Tiananmen that caused more idiosyncratic expressions amongst

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[41] It is important, as well, to make reference to the 'Neo-Dada Movement' in Tokyo during 1960, which was led by the artists Yoshimura Masanobu and Masuzawa Kinpei.

[42] In order to understand this process in China it is important to mention the production of the six-part television series *Heshang* (*River Elegy*), in which the producers called for the construction of a 'New Cultural Movement' in China. The television series was broadcasted twice on national Chinese television, starting in June and August 1988, and was watched by millions of Chinese viewers, and perhaps even several hundred million.

artists and intellectuals who had directly participated in these events. For many others, who had witnessed the events unfold the final military crackdown of the protests by the People's Liberation Army was a direct attack on the Chinese people. As a result, during the 1990s young artists in increasing numbers found ways to produce their works outside the academy, often working in small groups, as in the case of the performances produced at the East Village in Beijing between 1993 and 1997.**[ill. 1.9]** In turn, the academy in China became far removed from these types of experiences, as can be seen for example in many of the works that are produced these days at the more established departments at leading art academies in China, including the oil painting department at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing, which continues to base its teaching primarily on highly-skilled, realistic painting.

To analyze the collaborative aspect of these earlier performances and to describe the complexity of the contexts that lie behind their production is therefore very important; it can provide the basis for discussion on performance art across different parts of Asia. Simply focusing on the discussion on the adaptation and assimilation of *self-expressionism,* and placing these works within the context of a dominant Euramerican notion of a move beyond the art-object, can certainly not sustain the construction of a more flexible discourse on performance art in Asia. In fact the actions of the artists from the Xiamen Dada group in October 1986 were the result of a three-year experimentation, mainly by one of its leading members, Huang Yongping. He produced *non-expressionist* works of art, including a series of paintings for which the artist used a set of 'intermediary machines' (small turntables) which randomly selected each type of brush, each color of ink and each direction of each of the randomly placed brush strokes in his series of a total of seven paintings. Working against the popular notion of the time, that paintings had to contain meaning and the artists should be the center of producing meaningful works of art by the using self-expression, Huang Yongping instead created these "paintings that have nothing to do with *me*." [my

emphasis].[43] **[ill. 1.10]** With the later adaptation of the term Dada for the group's action outside the Xiamen City Arts Gallery, the artists can be said to have found a clear historical reference to affirm their ideas of non-expression, although this becomes localized in using the term 'Xiamen Dada'.

It is useful to examine the cultural-historical, as well as modern, transformations in the advent of modern and contemporary experimental art in China, as well as in other countries across Asia. What follows is a brief introduction to the existing discourses in performance art, many of which concentrate on developments in Euramerican centers of production. This introduction is focused on finding specific historical contexts which provide for recent experimental art practice, and analyze the way in which artists across Asia have started to produce new visual structures that challenge the notion of a singular discourse on contemporary art. In other words, one should re-evaluate the work of art historians and provide a basis on which to incorporate research on modern and contemporary art in Asia into the global historical discourse on art. Such research does not simply have to follow the more commonly accepted approaches in art historical research that formulates a reflective chronology of artistic movements. It also entails the proposition of a stylistic discourse that features different types of performance art practice.[44]

Historical discourses on action, performance, and body art

It is striking to witness the numerous ambiguities that this field of study entails. Despite the fact that performance art has a long history in visual art, it continues to be shadowed by ambiguity. At the most basic descriptive level performance art defines an art practice whereby a particular action is organized and directed by the artist, or by a group of artists collaborating in making an artwork. In what are sometimes conceived of as spontaneous actions, performance art is often highly planned by the artist, or artists who

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[43] Following an early quote by Huang Yongping that was republished in Lü Hong and Huang Zhuan, ed. *Zhongguo Dangdai Meishu Tujian- 1979-1999 Guannian Yishu Fence* (*Pictorial of Chinese Contemporary Art - 1979-1999 Edition on Conceptual Art*) (Wuhan: Hubei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2001), 1

[44] This proposition has been worked out in Appendix III of this thesis, which features a list of different types of performance art practices in China according to style.

work with assistants to produce visual registrations of the 'real time' event in photography, on video, and sometimes audio.

Despite these basic references, the construction of a discourse on performance art practice in different parts of Asia can be problematic. This is the case where it is derived from a simplified notion of the transfer of traditional cultural practice to the adaptation of modern art practice which, in the case of performance, focuses on the re-embodiment of the subject. This was first brought forward by a notion of action painting that embodies the direct expression of the subject, later followed by a more complex conception of how this 'newly-found subject in art' became increasingly central in performance art practices, starting in the early 1960s. However, these developments further an ideological justification in either maintaining the self-defined, traditional characteristic of a particular nation's discourse on art, or in adapting to a universally accepted discourse (such as that of the avant-garde) to substantiate a given position within the international art world.

The proposal of a more complex discourse on performance art in different cultures in Asia does accept the historical awareness of different modalities of transfer, which continue to take place through contact between Asia with other parts of the world, and in particular with Euramerica. Further distinctions can be made in different types of relations between different types of art discourses in Asia, and empirical qualifications about the transfer of artistic models under four distinctive categories that differentiate colonial, neo-colonial, semi-colonial, and non-colonial conditions. However, after having examined some of the discussions on the advent of modern and contemporary art in Indonesia, I am less inclined to fully accept the different types of relations between art discourses in China and Indonesia, as is described by Clark.[45]

According to Clark, China in the 1930s is placed on the axis of a "semi-colonial condition" that has produced "parallel discourses of neo-traditional and neo-Euramerican" models, whereas Indonesia is located in the "colonial condition" that has seen Euramerican art as an "art discourse initiator". Nevertheless, as can partially be

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[45] See Clark, *Modern Asian Art*, 240 that lists a table (10.1) on the 'types of relation between art discourses'.

seen in discussions on modern art in Indonesia there are those who argue that parallel discourses of neo-traditional and neo-Euramerican models have also been created in Indonesia.[46] Further research on the social-political structures of Dutch colonial rule in Indonesia (*Nederlands-Indië*) might assist in reformulating definitions of its colonial status, following the way in which the imposition of a Dutch bureaucratic system in charge of the economy relied strongly on co-operation of local (often Chinese) cohorts.[47]

While the research needed to revise the types of relations in the art discourse on Indonesia is beyond the scope of this current study, there are opportunities to expand the comparison between Indonesia and China by opening up a discussion on the formation of the neo-traditional and some of the functions of the avant-garde. The specific period chosen will be the second half of the 1970s to the end of the 1980s. These discussions will assist in identifying some of the visual structures that adapted the concepts of expressionism and abstraction in Indonesia and China. But they do not necessarily have to be used to advocate a new discourse on performance art as the 'activation of intersubjectivity', by solely referring back to Pollock and other Euramerican abstract expressionists.

Opening up the discussion on collaboration is one approach to the analysis of performance art practice in different countries in Asia. Another approach is to focus on the different levels of transfer of communications related to these practices. A particularly useful example can be found in the widely discussed works by Tzay Chuen Lim in which he plans subtle alterations to the places and spaces occupied by the public, and aims his work at turning the audience into the performer of these carefully planned stategies that work directly on challenging human behavioral patterns.[48] The discussion on documentation and the secondary representation of performance in photographs,

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[46] Further references of critiques on modern art in Indonesia can be found in: Jim Supangkat, "Two Forms of Indonesian Art" in Joseph Fisher, ed. *Modern Indonesian Art. Three Generations of of Tradition and Change, 1945-1990* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: Berkeley University Press), 158-162; and Jim Supangkat, "Knowing and Understanding the Differences", in Els van der Plas, ed. *Orientation* (Amsterdam and Yogyakarta: Gate Foundation and Cemeti Art Foundation, 1995), 41-46

[47] This would lead to a possible re-interpretation of the extent of the colonial state in *Nederlands-Indië*, as was brought forward in two presentations by a collegue, Ota Atsushi, at the CNWS Research School of Asian, African, and Amerindian Studies in Leiden, the Netherlands in 2000.

[48] These comments were made in an unrecorded conversation with Lim Tzay Chuen in Singapore in 2004.

video, and other forms is another approach that can be pursued. The latter would further enhance the discussion on the distinction between real-time performance events and the transference of such events through collaboration in setting up careful registrations between artists and documentarists (many of who also happen to be artists).

The secondary representations are often treated as removed from the actual performance event, as is the case of the Chinese performance artist Zhu Ming, who uses the date of the performance as the title for his works (which include photographs and videos of the performance) to underline the importance specificities of time in the experiencing of the live performance event.**[ill. 1.11]** For the performance artist Ma Liuming, the carefully produced registrations of the performance are not necessarily able to capture and transfer the complexity of the real-time event. This is evident in the video and photograph stills for his 1998 performance *Fen Ma Liuming Walks the Great Wall.* **[ills. 1.12 & 1.13]** In an interview Ma Liuming mentions that this performance was done twice, after the video produced of the first performance "failed to capture the true character of the performance."[49]

Another example which introduces different contexts for the reproduction of a performance is *Unannounced Performance* (1995) by the Singaporean born artist Steven Wong. His performance features the artist singing out the Singapore National Pledge over a bullhorn in Mandarin at the Singapore Airlines office in Los Angeles. The entire performance was documented in a series of watercolours which, according to Wong, can be closely related to film. Because of the popular character of watercolour – one of the most common artistic practices throughout the world – it becomes an easily approachable form of communicating the performance to the public.[50]**[ill. 1.14]**

Mappings for further research on performance and body art

Following some of the arguments and performances that are discussed in this chapter it is possible to argue that an art object ultimately deals with the acting-body of the person (or persons) who produced the object, and the body-senses of those who perceive the

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[49] Following a recorded interview with Ma Liuming in 2001.
[50] Following an unrecorded conversation with Steven Wong in Singapore in 2004.

work as an object of artistic value. Therefore – and in order to understand performance art as part of the broader discourse of contemporary art in Asia and other parts of the world – one should realise that the art object in performance art is often mediated directly through the body. The way in which these visceral actions and reactions determine the submerging of both the subject and object in visual art will be examined later in this thesis.

Recent studies of performance art tend to focus on the arrival of activities that broke away from the traditional relationship between the artist-subject and the art-object by placing emphasis on the role of the *act* in the production of a new wave of modern art.[51] However profound these types of analyses may be in describing the more recent changes in the development of performance art in Europe, the United States, and Japan after the end of the Second World War, they continue to leave much room for discussion when examining performance art practices in other parts of the world, and in particular across Asia (outside Japan).

It is further important to examine the way in which the construction of a discourse of performance art pays great attention to the role of visual registrations of performances in photographs and on film. Such a discourse can even create similar mythical figures (aside from Jackson Pollock) who can be treated as pivotal figures between modernist and postmodernist conceptions of artistic subjectivity.

At first sight the distinction between performance art and body art appears to be useful for examining the work of artists who, through their direct use of the body as a medium, start to place greater emphasis on the body: "or what I call the dispersed 'body/ self', with all of its apparent racial, sexual, gender, class, and other apparent or unconscious identifications) in the work."[52] Anyone interested in arguing for break with a modernist tradition will focus on a form of contemporary art practice in relation to postmodern discourse. However, studies that aim at re-enacting the domain of art practice note how a wide range of artists – situated in diverse localities and living through different spans in time – have been able to performatively disentangle the

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[51] See, in particular the discussion by Paul Schimmel in Ferguson, *Out of Actions*, 17-119
[52] Jones, *Body Art/ Performing the Subject*, 13

creation of new visual structures for themselves, "without the importation of recent 'high postmodernist' theory to the decoding."[53]

Following these observations, it can be argued that at a time when the majority of people still have to be freed from the taboo and stylistic erasures surrounding the explorations of the body (except when it functions as the mechanical object of sexual pleasure or the subject matter of racial, sexual, gender, class, and other apparent or unconscious identifications), the work of performance artists cannot be properly examined without dispensing with such taboos. For indeed the body/*self* is important in both performance art and body art practices, and therefore cannot be used to point to a distinction between the two, as Amelia Jones argues – unless the human body, or indeed *any*-body, suddenly becomes the primary means for expression, both as the subject and object in arts practice, be it the production of a photograph, a video or multi-media installation, a sculpture, and even a painting.

In this definition, the term body art, rather than being reduced to a particular medium, opens up the opportunity to re-examine art practice in general, and in particular the idea that an artwork is *acted out*. Instead of focusing research on artworks on the basis of their *medium* of expression, emphasis will be placed on the role of the *mediated self* of the artist that often transcends the work itself through the strong self-representation of the artist-self. This approach reintroduces the role of art practice and and identifies the artist as a performer of conventional discourses that presented clear distinctions between classical art, modern art, and even postmodern art, as well as between Western art and non-Western art, and even the classification of the masterpiece and the average work. All of these distinctions can be surpassed in the knowledge that these works all relate to the *role of the mediated subject of the acting body in art*.

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[53] Clark, *Modern Asian Art*, 232. Additional emphasis on the domain of art practice is also given in the essay by Terry Smith, "*What is Contemporary Art?" – Contemporary Art, Contemporaneity, and Art to Come* (Sydney: Artspace Visual Art Centre, 2001)

CHAPTER 2

SOCIAL-POLITICAL ACTIONS AND EARLY GROUP PERFORMANCES IN CHINA, 1979-1986

> What do we mean by saying that existence precedes essence? We mean that man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world – and defines himself afterwards. If man as the existentialist sees him as not definable, it is because to begin with he is nothing. He will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself. Thus, there is no human nature, because there is no God to have a conception of it. Man simply is. Not that he is simply what he conceives himself to be, but he is what he wills, and as he conceives himself after already existing – as he wills to be after that leap towards existence. Man is nothing else but what he makes of himself.
>
> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism*, 1946

Man is the aim, man is the center

Performance art is often not in need of third party mediation and must be treated as the realization of the direct contact between artist and audience; between the domain of art practice and the domain of reception; between the artwork and its social surroundings. The origins of performance art can often be found in the form of group actions and public manifestations, both in China and elsewhere across the world. From early Futurist performances artist left the closed environment of their studio and moved to the street in an attempt to manifest art directly to the people. In their quest for direct contact with

audiences, artists often resorted to staging open-air festivals and public events, and these instances were constitutive of performance art, especially during the 1960s and 1970s when performance artists sterted to emerge in Japan and across the North Antlantic. Under these conditions, performance performed an immediate social function, of challenging the institutional classification of cultural production through a direct engagement with the public, in particular when it emerges in China during the course of the 1980s. These early instances of performance practices have their origin in centers of production alternative to the institutional domain, and were composed of direct links between artists, artworks, and audiences.

More than anything else these performances offer the potential for an insight into experimentation within modern and contemporary cultural production. As these events involved artists who deliberately sought to disseminate their artistic practices outside of the institutional realm, they offer a new social function for art, by challenging the conventional system governing the private production and public distribution of artworks. This function usually starts with artists who form new alliances, and whose practices exceed conventional notions of stylistic and technical modes. Instead, painters, poets, writers, musicians, filmmakers and theatre practitioners drew together in public places to discuss new ways in which to portray significant transformations in society. Usually these transformations were the result of political and economic reforms, but it was the impact they had in disrupting social institutions that inspired artists to seek alternative exchange models of the production and distribution of their work. This is the realm where cultural self-organization becomes imperative – by creating new roles for individual artists in administering new directions for their practices.

The Chinese avant-garde arrives as a direct reaction to artistic practices under Mao Zedong, and features moves by artists during the 1980s who wanted to challenge former discourses in art through the creation of new, experimental visual structures across China. It may have been Mao who, during his famous "Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art" in 1942, strongly opposed any distinctions between elite and

popular culture in China.[1] Mao advocated that art would serve the Chinese people. Artists and art critics should work in the interests of the masses and take the masses as their audience. Mao appears to have been willing to promote a 'new art for the people', one based on a reciprocal relationship between the domain of cultural practice and the domain of cultural reception. However, while Mao's views were strongly influenced by Leninist literary policies adopted from the Soviet Union, as well as by early Chinese Marxist writers and art critics who emerged in China during the May Fourth Movement of 1919, he nevertheless became increasingly willing to narrow down his interpretation of artistic and literary production, and these were to be treated as tools for the class struggle.

During the three decades from the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the national system for artistic production and distribution, which served the Chinese Communist Party ideology, became increasingly dominated by Mao's own personal deification. At the same time, the artist's direct relationship with the masses remained a dominant feature throughout the history of cultural production in China, even after Mao Zedong's death in 1976. This is evident in the policies for cultural reforms that were addressed during the Fourth Congress of Chinese Writers and Artists in 1979.

On 30 October 1979, at the opening of the Fourth Congress of Chinese Writers and Artists, China's new Vice-Premier, Deng Xiaoping, stated clearly how the people needed art and how art needed the people even more. According to Deng: "[Our] writers and artists should conscientiously draw their raw materials, themes, plots, language, poetic diction and sentiment, and picturesque meaning from the people's daily experiences, then nurture themselves in the history-making, hardworking spirit of the people."[2] In a subsequent speech, the acting Vice-Chairman of the Chinese Writers' Association at the time, Liu Binyan addressed the conference participants on the concept

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[1] Several translations have been published of these "Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art". For this discussion I have used the translation by Bonnie S. McDougall, *Mao Zedong's "Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art": A Translation of the 1943 Text with Commentary*. (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, The University of Michigan, 1980)

[2] This quote is taken from Deng Xiaoping's "Congratulatory Message to the Fourth Congress of Chinese Writers and Artists" (English translation) in Howard Goldblatt (ed.), *Chinese Literature for the 1980s* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1982), 7-14

of *man being the sole aim and center in the production of art and literature*. In effect, this statement allows a more tangible conception of the changes that occured in the policy-making process on cultural production during the following decade, which becomes inspired by humanistic approaches.

In a way, Liu Binyan is a prime example of someone who had first hand experience in the control of party ideology that was imposed on cultural production in China. He joined the Chinese Communist Party in 1944 and worked actively as a writer and journalist. Throughout his career he was a strong critic of party officials who abused their power by suppressing the basic rights of the people. In 1957 this resulted in his expulsion from the party and he was sent down to the countryside. Suffering further persecution during the Cultural Revolution, he returned to Beijing in the late 1970s, where his position was rectified. In his address at the Fourth Congress, Liu told the participants that there had long been a taboo on the concepts of the 'human' and 'human nature' due to a fear of contamination by the bourgeoisie. From now on: "Literature and art should [...] destroy the various obstacles in the path of real life and in people's traditional attitudes."[3] After this speech, Liu Binyan remained a high-ranking party member until in 1986 he was again expelled during the Third Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign, instigated by Deng Xiaoping.

Despite the fact that Liu Binyan would once more become a victim of cultural campaigns – designed to suppress severe criticism of national party ideology – his views on how man and mankind should be the centre in artistic practice continued to dominate the production of literature and art throughout the entire course of the 1980s. 'Man', and indeed, the 'real life' of humans, became the aim and the centre of arts practice in China. First, during the early 1980s, there were humanistic experiments by artists who concentrated their work on painting and sculpture; this was followed by groups of artists who established an even more direct relationship between man and real life in their practice by producing conceptual installation pieces and conducting experiments in performance. These latter works would become popular during the entire course of the

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[3] Following the English translation of Liu Binyan's speech, "Man is the Aim, Man is the Centre", in Howard Goldblatt, *Chinese Literature for the 1980s*, 121-131

1980s and would facilitate the present discourse on performance art. They point to the role that many artists in China profess about their practices: they seek direct links between the work and the physical and psychical environment in which it is produced. Even today, artists in China often stress the role of personal embodiment in their work in relation to the embodiment of social circumstances. The physical and the mental body are treated as the same, and the 'total' body stands in direct contact with the environment, or social circumstances in which it operates. These roles reinforce the notion that the internal function of the body and its external behavior in society are dependent upon each other, as can be seen, for example, in the Daoist notion that the internal system of the body represents a landscape. It is a notion that is closely linked to the traditional Chinese concept of the body as process, one that essentially brings our corporeal existence into contact with the entire universe.[4]

Until recently many publications on art practice in China during the course 1980s have either remained unaware of this position, or of giving the impression of being distracted by it. They began advocating universally applicable models that place an emphasis on popular Western notions of 'personal freedom' in the creation of new and challenging artworks.[5] In fact, the strong emphasis on the role of the artist's body in relation to its direct physical and social surroundings, is not just important for artists, but for society at large. These notions are clearly set within a social and historical context, and are part of a long tradition of placing man at the center of artistic practice in China.

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[4] The notion on the 'body process' can also be described as the 'lived body'. It is crucial for understanding performance art practices in China, as it offers a clear break with popular notions in the West that have their origin in Cartesian dualism, and which deal with the separation of body and mind.

[5] During the 1990s much of the overseas discourse of Chinese contemporary art was concentrated in catalogue publications that fed into the international art market and became based on popular notions of the avant-garde and the production of new art in China. This resulted in a situation in which, even some of the more profound art historical discourses, were adapted into popular catalogue publications. These include such publications as: Chang Tsong-zung and Li Xianting, ed., *China's New Art, Post-1989* (Hong Kong: Hanart¶Z Gallery, 1993); Jochen Noth, Wolfger Pöhlmann and Kai Reschke, ed., *China Avant-Garde: Counter Currents in Art and Culture* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1993); Gao Minglu, ed., *Inside Out: New Chinese Art.* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998); and Wu Hung, *Transience: Chinese Experimental Art at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: The David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art, University of Chicago, 1999). Next to these catalogues there are some, more analytical and historical examinations on Chinese art during the 1980s, for example by Maria Galikowski. *Art and Politics in China, 1949-1984.* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1998) and by

These ideas open up new possibilities for conducting research on experimental art in China, through the examination of works by artists who have placed themselves at the center of production in the creation of a range of new visual structures. Performance art has played a significant role in Chinese art practice starting in the late 1970s. It continued to evolve during the second half of the 1980s and throughout the 1990s, and has recently received increasingly popular attention. However, until now no serious attempt has been made to formulate a comprehensive overview of these practices, except in some catalogue essays, or in writings that focus on the 'cruel' use of the body in art. Some of the most important performance works produced during this period will now be discussed.

Early signs of performance art in China

In China several terms have been used to describe a series of events that provide the basis for the present discourse on performance art, starting in the late 1970s. The first of these events occurred in Beijing in 1979 and surrounds the first open air exhibition by the Stars Group; these were followed by a series of performance art events which sprang up in different parts of China in the course of the 1980s. These events mark the start of a 'performance art' movement in China, which became known under the term *xingwei yishu*, whereby *xingwei* marks the 'behavioral' aspect or 'conduct' (*pinxing*) of a meaningful 'action' (*wei*) that is articulated in art (*yishu*). However, the term *xingwei yishu* was not used until 1987, when artists became increasingly aware of performance practices elsewhere, and in particular through accounts of such practices in Japan, Taiwan, and Hong Kong.[6] However, whereas many artists in other parts of East Asia, in particular, had adapted to the use of the term 'action art' (*xingdong yishu*), artists in China started to incorporate the term behavior (*xingwei*) Between 1979 and 1986 several alternative terms were used to describe the ways in which artists across different parts in

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Martina Köppel-Yang. *Semiotic Warfare: The Chinese Avant-Garde, 1979-1989 (A Semiotic Analysis).* (Hong Kong: Timezone 8, 2003)

[6] Further reference to the use of the term *xingwei yishu* can be found in Gao, Ling. "Zhongguo dangdai xingwei yishu kaocha baogao" ("A Report on Modern Chinese Behaviour Art") in *Jinri xianfeng* (*Avant-garde Today*), Vol. 7 (Tianjin, 1999), 62-82

China began to stage public actions. Instead of describing these events as part of a general discourse on avant-garde practice in China, the following will examine the terms that marked the arrival of performance art in China.

The first set of terms that were used by artists who become engaged in early instances of performance are *huodong* and *yundong*, which both mark the 'action' (*dong*) of a particular 'movement' (*huo*) or of a particular 'chain of events' or 'series of movements' (*yundong*). By taking into consideration the important role many social and cultural movements have on the life and practices of artists the terms *huodong* and *yundong* can be related to some of the cultural developments of the late 1970s, when intellectuals in China started to reassess the outcome of many 'mass people movements' (*qunzhong yundong*) launched between 1949 and 1976. The most decisive of these was the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution movement (*wuchanjieji wenhua dageming yundong*) of 1966-1976, in which many young people (some of whom became the intellectuals of the 1980s) had participated and even became victims of the numerous public prosecutions associated with the movement. At the same time, intellectuals demonstrated a continuing interest in the May 4th Movement of the 1920s (*wusi yundong*), which had laid the foundation for cultural modernization in China. Whereas these movements have rightfully been associated with political and cultural 'campaigns', the actual driving force behind many of them incorporates the more general term term *huodong*, which indicates the conduct imposed on group 'behavior' and 'actions' by the masses. According to Martina Köppel-Yang the entire decade of the Cultural Revolution can thus also be considered as a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, a useful term in German with which to describe the "total aestheticization of politics, society, and everyday life" and as a "general artistic performance."[7]

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[7] See: Martina Köppel-Yang. "*Zaofan Youli*/ Revolt is Reasonable: Remanifestations of the Cultural Revolution in Chinese Contemporary Art of the 1980s and 1990s" in: *Yishu -Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art*, Volume 1, Number 2 (Summer/ August 2002), 66-75. Several young members of the Chinese art scene have started to criticize this view. In their opinion, these social historical movements are far too complex to be related to specific choices by artists who use performance practice as a specific medium for artistic expression. Often these artists base their works on personal choice, including their use of national symbols, which become separated from general social inquiries into art practice. A good example is the Beijing based artists Shu Yang who, in his role as an art critic and organiser of the annual *Dadao Live Art Festival* (starting in 2003) often promotes a very direct role for artists to use performance as a particular

Reading social action into performance is useful when relating the historical discourse of modern art to its function in terms of the visualization of social-historical changes. Artists who emerged in the 1980s are frequently said to have sprung up during a period of great economic and institutional reform, in particular following the implementation of the 'open door' policies that were introduced following the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee in 1978. Artists themselves also provide a crucial role in the production and dissemination of artworks that reflect complex processes of cultural transfer, transformation, and transgression. It is therefore necessary to construct an appropriate empirical analysis of the way in which changes in the production and dissemination of artworks signal new challenges to the existing discourses of cultural production in particular historical contexts. Such an empirical analysis operates on the level of the artists and signals not simply the individual and personal complexity of their works, but also the group function – in particular the collaborations between artists. Some of the major national reform policies were accompanied by the reopening of major institutions of tertiary education, allowing new alliances between groups of intellectuals to materialize. Artists in China in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s deliberately staged their works amidst calls for the modernization of national culture, and started to challenge the conventional discourse of fine art regulated by party and state ideology. These alliances can also be related to the notion of the *Gesamt*, in that they describe how individuals formed collective gatherings to manifest their demands directly within the public domain. The historical process of cultural modernization involves the transformation, assimilation and distribution of new models of artistic practice. Prior to their production of artworks, artists have a prominent and active social role to play. Their visual practices require levels of interaction with the public, leading them to create new visual structures that have a social function. The visualizations of the social transformations in artistic practice are an important source for art historians, but their analysis also requires an understanding of the way in which they were once performed and completed, before being redistributed as images.

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medium for artistic expression. Following unrecorded conversations with Shu Yang and like-minded artists, I have noticed how they have come to treat performance art in very specific terms, which requires

During the late 1970s and throughout the first half of the 1980s, several groups of artists chose to stage open-air exhibitions as a way to present their works and practices to a wider audience. Artists started to perform their practices in the public domain, with numerous examples of public exhibitions at work units, school campuses, and on the streets.

The role of the Stars in collective action and public protest

The formation of the Stars Group (*xingxing pai*) in 1979, and their first open-air exhibition on 27 September at the gates of the park next to the China Art Gallery, marks a step in the general move by artists to use more direct ways of presenting art to the public.[9] The first Stars exhibition featured 23 artists who were asked to participate by the two main organizers for the event, Ma Desheng and Huang Rui (both of whom studied in 1979 at the Beijing Worker's Cultural Center). To create a higher profile for artists who had not been selected for major overview exhibitions, in July Ma Desheng and Huang Rui went to tertiary art institutes in Beijing and interviewed artists and teachers about the idea of staging an event that would allow them to exhibit their work in the public domain and would coincide with the Fifth National Art Exhibition that was going to be opened at the China Art Gallery on 27 September 1979.

Almost immediately Ma Desheng and Huang Rui received great support from their teacher, He Baoshen, who would become the most senior artist to participate in the event. Other important participants include Ai Weiwei, Li Shuang, Qu Leilei, Shao Fei, Wang Keping, Wang Luyan, Yan Li, Yin Guangzhong, Zhao Gang, and Zhong

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participation by trained artists who start producing their works in front of a live audience.

[8] It is important to include the entire period from the May Fourth Movement in discussing the way these public exhibitions and cultural manifestations aim to create a direct dialogue with the public and, at the same time, challenge the dominant structures for controlling the production, mediation and reception of art. In examining the way in which exhibitions were often used as a way to provoke 'the authorities' it is important to point at the structures which make up the 'official' art world. These structures are more carefully analysed by John Clark, "System and Style in the Practice of Chinese Contemporary Art: The Disappearing Exterior?" in: *Yishu -Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art*, Volume 1, Number 2 (Summer/ August 2002), 13-33

[9] There are several sources available that discuss the 'Stars Group' in more detail including: Hui Ching-shuen, *The Stars: Ten Years* (Hong Kong: Hanart TZ Gallery, 1989). Personally, I am also very grateful to Fok Siu Har who has presented me with a copy of her unpublished M.A. thesis, *The Development of the Stars (Xingxing) Artists, 1979-2000*, which she completed in 2002 at the University of Hong Kong.

Ancheng. Instead of being self-taught artists, nearly all of them had received some tertiary training at art institutions in Beijing, many of which were reopened between 1977 and 1978 and had started to enroll new students from across China. For example, Ai Weiwei studied stage design at the Beijing Drama Institute, and Wang Keping studied stage design and script writing at the Beijing Film and Television Academy, although he never completed his degree. Instead he became self-trained in sculpture and would create some significant works for the first Stars exhibition, including *Idol* (1979), featuring a carving of a cult figure that bears resemblances to both Buddha and Mao Zedong.[10]

From the viewpoint of the two main organizers, Ma Desheng and Huang Rui, the purpose of the first Star exhibition was to bring together a group of artists from different backgrounds, whose works often featured a variety of visual experiments in style and technique. Artistic quality was less important than the fact that these artists all wished to demonstrate a particular personal attitude in their works. In fact, once they were shown to the public, their works were often treated as opportunistic, and many were criticized for their 'amateurish' approaches that mixed different styles and techniques.[11] They wanted foremost to express their hopes for a new future, and many of their works were the result of political transformation and their impact on Chinese society. Many of these artists were active in the Cultural Revolution, and the works they produced in the late 1970s show signs of their disillusionment with its violent outcomes. They continued to link their practices directly to the people, but started to uphold the principle that art should not be confined to an institutional domain , which determined such contacts with the masses under Mao Zedong. The significant position the Stars occupy in the historical development of modern and contemporary art in China rest on the idea, produced by its

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[10] Martina Köppel-Yang has written extensively on Wang Keping, including on his sculpture work *Idol* (1979). See: Martina Köppel-Yang. *Semiotic Warfare: The Chinese Avant-Garde, 1979-1989 (A Semiotic Analysis)* (Hong Kong: Timezone 8, 2003), 120-130

[11] These views can be found in statements by local teachers and critics who had first hand experience in seeing many of the works by the Stars in 1979 and 1980, as can be seen in Chapter 2 of the thesis by Fok Siu Har, which lists quotes from interviews with several important members of the local Beijing art scene. These interviews show their views of the Stars as amateurs, and this attitude often is misinterpreted in later texts that emphasize these artists as having been self-taught. In Fok Siu Har, *The Development of the Stars (Xingxing) Artists*

organizers, of staging events that would free up the constrained relations between artists and their public. These artists continued to strive for an independent role in their dealings with society, and their desire for it may have been a direct result of their experiences of the Cultural Revolution.

The Cultural Revolution basically envisaged a final countdown for the implementation of a 'pure model' of cultural production that would serve the needs of the revolutionary masses through direct interpretation of Mao Zedong's ideology. It allowed a generation of young revolutionaries to distance themselves from the institutional domain in the governance of cultural production, which was considered corrupted. This gave them the opportunity to severely criticize anyone who stood in opposition Mao and his allies at the peak of the party bureaucracy. After the initial stage of the Cultural Revolution these young revolutionaries regretted taking such a radical stance, which had basically led to civil disobedience at the mercy of a personal deification of Mao Zedong. Many of these revolutionaries were forced to reeducate themselves in the countryside where they were suddenly confronted with the harsh realities of life at the grassroots. When they returned to urban centers they became part of a generation that objected to hierarchical control, and they came to rely on personal friendships, forging new contacts with some of their cohorts. [12]

The first Stars exhibition was essentially designed as a public art event that would restore a direct social function for art by visualizing public concerns in a period of great political transformation. However, due to renewed institutional restrictions, artists were not officially allowed to organize such public exhibitions. Public art events were restricted to officially recognized artist groups. Applications had to be approved by Municipal – and National – Artists Associations, the Public Security Bureau, and the Cultural Branch of the Municipal government. Registration of new artist associations depended on acquiring political status, as well as providing longstanding proof of artistic

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[12] Following interviews with a number of artists I have come to learn more about the personal situation in which they experienced the early stages in their lives in China. The Cultural Revolution is often mentioned as a time when they began to rely on close friendships with those who were going through the same experiences. This provides an important basis for the way in which these artists continue, even today, to place much trust in support from their cohorts.

standards based on national aesthetic principles. This meant that only a few artists were allowed to display their works in public, and then only through officially recognized institutions that would provide the proper context for such public displays. The Stars were considered opportunistic for wanting to organize an exhibition and to be recognized by the official art bureaucracy. At first they were told that there were no official exhibition spaces available; the Stars replied by requesting an alternative space where artists could feature their works openly. This was also refused. This led them to plan an open-air exhibition on the street in front of the China Art Gallery.

When Huang Rui, Ma Desheng set up the Stars exhibition they got in contact with Liu Xun and Jiang Feng. Liu Xun was the Head of the Beijing Municipal Artists Association. He had been labeled a 'rightist' in 1957 and was imprisoned for 10 years. Jiang Feng had lost his Party membership in the late 1950s, but his position was restored in 1979 when he became the Chairman of the Chinese Artists Association. The personal history of these two leading members of the Chinese art bureaucracy would allow the Stars to find some level of support for their ideas. Their additional purpose was to attract attention from an international audience, following the increase in cultural exchange and the availability of documentation of overseas modern art practices in China. These interactions became gave artists new ideas about ways to interact with their audiences, through public action. In the autumn of 1979 Huang Rui became acquainted with early experiments in performance art when he met Kwok Mang Ho, a visiting artist from Hong Kong who staged a series of happenings in Beijing, whilst participating in an exhibition at the Central Art & Craft Institute.[13] **[ill. 2.1]**

The example of the Stars became an inspiration for artists to shape an environment in which self-regulating international exchanges could materialize and to create alternative centres of private practice and public display of cultural production which

[13] Following an unrecorded conversation with Kwok Mang Ho in Hong Kong in April 2004 when I was told how he met Huang Rui in Beijing, where they talked about his work as a performance artist. The performances in Beijing feature the artist creating a series of installations involving balloons made out of plastic bags, including an installation at the Great Wall. In early statements on his work, Kwok Mang Ho often makes clear how his work features great concern with the direct relationship between art and the environment, and his use of everyday objects in public happenings certainly tested the conventional

challenged the institutional control over the arts. Aside from being artists, the two main organizers, Ma Desheng and Huang Rui, were amongst the first independent curators in China as they carefully selected the artists for the exhibition event. This first artist-run satellite event further allowed audiences an unusual chance to witness works that offered experimental and conceptual approaches to art and challenged conventional ones. Above all, the Stars wanted to offer audiences their personal views on the way art should reflect social change, coinciding with a time of great economic, political and institutional transformation. Art should again reflect the needs of the masses, but not restrict itself to national ideology. The Cultural Revolution had proven that ideological control over the arts had prevented the development of art in China and had prohibited artists from developing a broader range of styles and techniques – or from receiving proper international attention for their art. While allowing some form of publicrevolt to continue, artists seemed no longer to be prepared for their work to be reduced to the function of allegory. Therefore, the development of modern art in China during the 1980s often reflects a constant tension between artists posing new demands for self-expression, and striving to produce collective articulations that could be noticed by both local and international audiences.

The artists of the Stars Group soon turned their calls for self-expression into the staging of a series of collective actions that would give them their long-awaited public attention. But their first step in organizing an open-air exhibition was almost immediately cracked down on by officers from the local constabulary who started to remove their works on the morning of 28 September 1979. As chief organizers of the exhibition, Ma Desheng and Huang Rui were requested to go to the local police station where they were simply told that the decision to ban the exhibition had been taken by the superintendent of the Dongcheng Section Public Security Bureau. They responded by posting two protest letters. The first was posted on a billboard at Xidan, the site of earlier public protests, and the second was hung at the (former) exhibition site. Police officials responded on the next day by placing announcements in the park next to the

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perceptions on art practice in Hong Kong. In 1982, Kwok moved to New York, where he would stay for 15 years, until finally returning to Hong Kong in 1995.

China Art Gallery, stating that the exhibition had been cancelled for reasons of disturbing public order. After some time the artists were invited into the Gallery by Liu Xun who had arranged for their work to be temporarily stored there; he told the artists they would be allowed to continue their exhibition at the Huafang Gallery nearby, some time in mid-October. The artists responded by moving their works to the gallery, but the same evening they also held discussions that led many to organize a public protest a few days later, marking the 30th anniversary of the Peoples Republic of China. On 1 October 1979, the Stars Group organized a public demonstration involving around 700 participants at Xidan and surrounding streets of Beijing, just south of Tiananmen Square. Even more than the exhibition itself this event would attract local and international attention to the Stars, whose actions were interpreted as a direct challenge to the existing system and structures of artistic practice, and to the 'official' channels for the production, mediation and reception of art in China.**[ill. 2.2]**

As similar kinds of events had marked the early performance art in Europe and other parts of the world, the events organized by the Star Group can therefore also be seen as the first move in the direction of early performance art. Studies which examine early performance art in Europe demonstrate how artists first placed emphasis on manifestoes in their propagation of new movements. By combining sounds, scenes and gestures in staging direct collaborations with the audience (who were to be liberated from their passive roles as mere voyeurs) at the same time they challenged conventional modes of reception. Furthermore, by combining the fields of performance and art (poetry, film, theatre, sculpture and painting), the events surrounding the Stars also brought out issues of staging and directing these public actions. Chinese artists later turned this into a direct interest by relating their practices to the 'behavioral' role of the their body. But subsequent events were never as involved in political turmoil as the demonstrations of 1 October 1979.

Initially, calls were made to organize a public protest against the decision to disallow the public exhibition by the Stars because the police action was considered to be unlawful; they had no jurisdiction over the arts. The participating artists suddenly found themselves surrounded by a group of intellectuals, many of whom were concerned

about the future of their own practice if artists continued to be subjected to regulations of the local section of the Public Security Bureau, rather than to authorities who were in charge of cultural production. Huang Rui enlisted the help of two influential poets in China, Bei Dao and Mang Ke who were the founding editors of the literary journal *Today* (*Jintian*), published between 1978 and 1980. They had worked together in the previous year, when Huang Rui had submitted a critical poem to the journal. Their discussions were also attended by some leading politically oriented intellectuals, who wanted to label the forced closure of the exhibition as 'unconstitutional'. They included Liu Qing and Xu Wenli, who were both later imprisoned following the protests.

Liu Qing and Xu Wenli were the founding members of the underground magazine *April 5th Forum*, the title of which made reference to public protests on 5 April 1976 in Beijing against the political leadership, following the death of Zhou Enlai. Although Liu Qing later stated that he was against the idea of staging a protest, he did suggest to the artists that they should demand an official apology for the closure of the exhibition; this was discussed in a private meeting with the Stars immediately after the police had shut down the exhibition. At the same time these politically oriented intellectuals clearly saw an opportunity of converting the demand for an apology into a protest that would not only mark the 30th Anniversary of the Peoples Republic of China, but reanimate the public protests of more than three years before, on 5 April 1976. Liu Qing has recently described how they came to organize two teams to direct the protests: the first was commanded by Xu Wenli, Huang Rui and Bei Dao; the second team by Liu Qing, Wang Keping and Mang Ke.[14] By the evening of 30 September, the organizers still had not received a formal apology from the Dongcheng Section Public Security Bureau. It was then decided that a protest march would commence at 9 am the next morning, starting out from the Xidan Democracy Wall that was the site of large public protests less than a year before, from November to December 1978.[15] Fortunately, none of the eight Stars artists who participated in the protests were arrested, but Liu Qing and Xu Wenli were

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[14] Following parts of a telephone interview between Liu Qing and Fok Siu Har on March 6, 2001. In: Fok Siu Har, *The Development of the Stars (Xingxing) Artists*

[15] After the closure of the Stars exhibition, only three artists wanted to participate in the protests, but the next day the number had grown to eight participants (out of the 23 original Stars members).

imprisoned for three years, and again arrested after a short release in 1981 and sentenced to 15 years imprisonment. Liu Qing was finally released in 1991 and moved to the United States in 1992. Xu Wenli was released in 1992, but was frequently questioned until he was again detained in 1998.

After the first open air exhibition on 27 September 1979 and the public demonstrations on 1 October 1979, the Stars Group was finally invited to reopen their exhibition on 23 November 1979 at the Huafang Studio in Beihai Park, just north of the Forbidden City and not far from the China Art Gallery.**[ill. 2.3]** The exhibition lasted until 2 December of the same year. In the summer of 1980 the *Stars Painters Association* finally became officially recognized even though it could not register as an autonomous association under the law. On 24 August 1980 the Stars Group was allowed to stage a large exhibition of their work at one of the exhibition halls inside the China Art Gallery. This time it was with the support of Jiang Feng, who personally felt that the Stars offered a new attitude to art, but also believed that a general audience would not understand their work.[16] The exhibition was nevertheless visited by around 80.000 people; it featured a total of 149 new works, and marked the first time an independent group of artists was allowed to exhibit inside a major government owned institution. During the next few years many members of the Stars Group decided to leave China, including Wang Keping who moved to France in 1984, Huang Rui who moved to Japan, and Ai Weiwei who was the first to leave Beijing in 1981 to live in New York, from where he returned in 1993.

Public actions and social display

During the second half of the 1980s other groups of artists in China followed the Stars Group in organizing public exhibitions which challenged the official channels for the production, mediation and reception of art. At the same time they sought new ways of establishing direct collaboration with the audiences. For example in May 1983, the artists Huang Yongping), Jiao Yaoming, Lin Jiahua, Qian Xiaogang, and Xu Chengtou,

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[16] For further reference see: Michael Sullivan, "Bliss was it in that Dawn to be Alive!" and Wang Keping, "From Wang Keping's Diary", both of which are published in Hui Ching-shuen. The *Stars: Ten Years*

organized the *Exhibition of Five Artists* at the Cultural Palace in the city of Xiamen (Fujian Province). They used unconventional materials, such as wood, scrap metal, electric cables and imported plaster of Paris to create a series of installations. Three years later in late September 1986, Huang Yongping together with Ji Tairan formed a group of ten artists calling themselves the 'Xiamen Dada'. Aside from Huang Yongping and Ji Tairan other artists in the group included Jiao Yaoming, Cai Lixiong, Li Yuenian, Li Xiang, Lin Jiahua, Lin Chun, and Wu Yanping. A few weeks later, in early October 1986, on the closing day of a large group exhibition at Xiamen City Arts Gallery of the Masses, the artists took their works to the courtyard outside the gallery and burned them whilst painting various slogans in white paint on the ground, including the slogan "Dada is Dead!"**[ill. 2.4]** The works were supposed to have been shown at a Provincial Museum in the city of Fuzhou (Fujian Province) a few weeks later. But now that they had been burnt, the artists instead exhibited scrap materials they had collected from the streets surrounding the museum, under the title *Events*.

A few months before the Xiamen Dada events of Xiamen and Fuzhou, a large open air exhibition was organized at the Xuanwu Park in the city of Nanjing (Jiangsu Province) under the title *Bringing to Light*.**[ill. 2.5]** Around 500 works by artists from all over China were exhibited, and the event was accompanied by music festivals, theoretical discussions, and public manifestations which recalled the performance actions accompanying the first open air exhibition of the Stars Group in late 1979. On 2 December 1985, in the nearby city of Hangzhou, another group of fourteen artists, including Zhang Peili, Geng Jianyi, Wang Qiang, Song Ling, and Bao Jianfei, who together called themselves the Young Creator's Society (later changed to the Pond Group) opened the *New Space '85* exhibition. At this exhibition Wang Qiang set up an installation, titled *The Start of the 2nd Movement of the 5th Symphony in Adagio*.**[ill. 2.6]** It featured a statue of an invisible composer standing in a large class container comprised of a hollow two piece suit made out of plaster. Earlier, and also in late 1985, Wang Qiang staged what can be considered one of the first private performance works, where he was seen posing as a living statue, wearing a suit and covered entirely in paint and plaster with his head wrapped in white cloth. This piece was titled *After Hours Artist*

and can be seen both as an early attempt at private performance and as the basis of later installation pieces and performances produced between late 1985 and late 1986, including the installation at the *New Space '85* exhibition.**[ill. 2.7]**

Between the summer and autumn of 1986 Wang Qiang, together with the other artists in the Pond Group staged two public performance actions in the center of Hangzhou. Following their earlier collaboration in the *New Space '85*, they sought more direct ways of creating public artworks. In June 1986 they spent an entire night turning newspapers into papier-mâché which they used the next morning to create a group of figures engaged in *taiji* boxing exercises and plastered them to the exterior wall of the Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts in the city centre, a work titled *Work Number One: Yangshi Taiji – Series*.**[ill. 2.8]** Four months later, on 4 November 1986, the artists again sought ways to attract the attention of ordinary people in their daily activities. Again the artists created a series of figures who engaged *taiji* boxing exercises, but this time they were made out of large pieces of cardboard which the artists hung from trees in a local park in the city where people gathered in the morning to do their exercises. In this work, *The Performer Amidst the Green Colored Empty Space*, the artists again invited the participation of the public, many of whom turned out to be anything but pleased with these works. As a result, and following their second failure in bringing art to ordinary people, both Zhang Peili and Geng Jianyi decided to forego dialogues with the public and instead turned their performances inwards, towards a small group of artists. Following this move, one eye witness report by the late Dutch art critic Hans van Dijk, who at the time lived in Hangzhou, where he had good contact with the artists, stated that: "Their works became increasingly more provocative in their desire to force a reaction."[17] The move by an increasing number of artists to the staging of collaborative private performances, which were becoming increasingly provocative through their

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[17] See: Hans van Dijk together with Andreas Schmid, "The Fine arts after the Cultural Revolution: stylistic development and theoretical debate", in Jochen Noth, et.al., *China Avant-Garde: Counter-Currents in Art and Culture*, 26. It is interesting to see how Hans van Dijk makes this observation during the late 1980s, when he was himself studying in Nanjing, where he had close contact with Zhang Peili and Geng Jianyi. These comments are related to observations made, by several critics between 1999 and 2002, about a more recent radicalisation in the methods taken by artists for creating their work. These sources will be discussed further in Chapter 6 of this thesis.

direct use of the body, were aimed at creating novel types of social, cultural, and artistic environments.

One of the first known performance pieces demonstrating signs of this move to provocative action was *Wrapping Up - King and Queen* by Zhang Peili and Geng Jianyi on 2 November 1986 in the city of Luoyang, Zhejiang Province (East China).[18] **[ill. 2.9]** In this performance, which was done two days prior to the second piece by the Pond Group, *The Performer Amidst the Green Colored Empty Space*, the artists produced a rather different approach to the one they employed in their open-air pieces. **[ill. 2.10]**

The performance *Wrapping Up - King and Queen* was staged in a private setting near an artist's studio in Luoyang and involved the two artists wrapping their bodies, very tightly, in newspaper and rope. It remains uncertain what the title of the performance refers to, as well as how the artists came to the decision to wrap their entire bodies in newspapers. Following the observation by Hans van Dijk on how both artists were ready to stage more provocative performance, after they were disappointed by the negative responses from the public as they witnessed the first open-air action by the Pond Group, it becomes clear that these artists decided to give up a more playful approach in their performances. Instead they choose far more provocative ways to perform their works and force a reaction from selected audiences of members of the art world at the time. Chinese art historians, Lü Peng and Yi Dan, state similar observations on the performance in a report. [19] According to this report the "action piece took place on the incomplete condition level of the self, and therefore has not been influenced directly by all the things which society and its circumstances produces." The report then continues by mentioning how the performance shows clear references to "slow suffocation", although Lü Peng and Yi Dan are only able to link this idea to "having some type of unexplainable and absurd meaning". They then conclude by stating how:

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[18] The correct title for this performance is listed in Maki Yôichi. *Avan Chaina: Chûgoku no gendai aaoto* (*Avant China: China's Modern Art*). Tokyo: Kodanasha, 1998,110-111. According to some sources, this performance work was staged some time in 1987 as an untitled event. See, for example in the caption for the reproduction image of the performance accompanying the article by Li Xianting, "The Pluralistic Look of Chinese Contemporary Art Since the Mid-1990s" in John Clark, ed., *Chinese Art at the End of the Millennium* (Hong Kong: New Art Media Limited, 2000), 75

"It remains difficult to decide whether, on a larger level, this type of entertainment is characteristic of self cruelty, and has anything to do with the construction of reality."[20]

In the meantime, during 1986 two more group actions took place in China. In them artists sought contact with a large audience by staging performances in public spaces. These actions were more political; young artists started to make calls for social and institutional change. They pointed the way to the production, mediation and reception of an art that could be staged beyond the 'official' system; direct events art that would represent young people and their concerns. For example, on 4 May 1986 in Lanzhou (Gansu Province), a group of artists including Ma Yunfei and Yang Zhichao, who together called themselves the May Fourth Youth Group, staged the performance, *Rolling Canvas*.**[ill. 2.11]** They covered themselves with paint and one by one rolled themselves up in a 100 metre long piece of canvas, which they then carried around the streets of the city. Not only did this event show a public performance by a group of young graduates from the local art academy, but these artists had also carefully chosen the date of their performance to coincide with the 67th anniversary of the May Fourth demonstrations in 1919.

On 23 December 1986, amidst growing public unrest and a series of student protests at the campuses of major universities in different cities in China, another group of four artists Sheng Qi, Kang Mu, Zheng Yuke, and Zhao Jianhai from the Central Academy of Fine Arts and the Central Crafts Academy, performed their first group action on the grounds of the Beijing University, under the title *Concept 21 - Art Before your Eyes*. The artists covered themselves with pieces of white and black cloth and then poured paint over their bodies, after which they walked across the campus, loudly reciting the names of important cultural and historical places, including the "Yangzi River," "The Great Wall, " and "Mount Qolmolangma."[21]**[ill. 2.12]** Other significant figures attended the performance, included Zhu Qingsheng, Fan Di'an (the former an art

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[19] See: Lü Peng and Yi Dan, ed. *Zhongguo xiandai yishushi - 1979-1989* (*A History of China Modern Art, 1979-1989*) (Hunan: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 1995 [1992]), 214

[20] ibid.

[21] Following a copy of an article by Huang Du, "Sheng Qi's Body and Discourse", which was formerly published in the online journal *Chinese Type Contemporary Art Magazine*, Vol. 3, Issue 2 (June 2000). (http://www.chinese-art.com. discontinued in 2002)

historian at Beijing University, the latter currently Vice President at the Central Academy of Fine Arts), Kong Chang'an, Han Ning, and Ding Bin. The artistic language employed in this performance is said to refer to the American pop-artist Jim Dine, and in particular his 1960 performance *Car Crash*.[22]

A year before the performance *Concept 21 - Art Before your Eyes* at Beijing University – between 18 November and 8 December in 1985 – a large overview exhibition of works by the American artist Robert Rauschenberg was held at the China Art Gallery in Beijing. The exhibition, which was part of his *Rauschenberg Overseas Cultural Interchange* – Project, was financed by Rauschenberg himself and not subject to the same administrative control that was often imposed by central authorities over state to state international exchange exhibitions. Rauschenberg created one of the largest modern art exhibitions of works by a single overseas artist ever held in China. Over 22 days, the exhibition attracted more than 300,000 people, including artists from all over China. According to one report, a teacher of Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts in Hangzhou City brought all of his graduating students to Beijing were they spent almost a full month studying Rauschenberg's work.[23] Amongst the students who visited the exhibition, there were many young artists who have since then become renowned around the world. The exhibition also led to increased attention in China to other works by modern American artists, many more of which became known to artists and art critics during the years following the exhibition. Most importantly, the exhibition led to artists becoming increasingly interested in using new types of media to stimulate the interaction between artworks and art practice with the spatial environment and spectators. Aside from making reference to Rauschenberg and in particular the way he used everyday objects in producing installations and stage-performances that create an artistic environment, it is also important to point out that many artists in China had become used to seeing large, spatially constructed wall paintings at the Buddhist caves

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[22] Following an unrecorded conversation with Sheng Qi in Beijing in 2001.

[23] According to an unrecorded conversation with a Beijing resident and former student at the Central Academy of Fine Arts, who visited the exhibition several times during the time it was held at the China Art Gallery. Further references on the ROCI project and the exhibition in Beijing, see: Marylynn Kotz, *Rauschenberg/ Art and Life* (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1990) and Robert Rauschenberg, *Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Exchange* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1991)

near Dunhuang. Throughout the 1980s it was very common for artists (including art students) to travel to various sites that held collections of traditional art and study their works. Some academies even required students to spend their entire third year travelling to such places and many moved from Beijing to Xi'an (where they visited the Terracotta Army), and to Dunhuang (where they studied Buddhist cave paintings).[24] As their ideas progressed from producing wall paintings into creating three dimensional installations, artists started to become more aware of the relationship between work, space, and audience perceptions of art. The installations and new types of performances that artist produced in the 1980s would gradually be related to the notion of 'conceptual art' (*guannian yishu*), or 'idea art' (*sixiang yishu*) in China.[25]

Before the Rauschenberg exhibition was held in Beijing, several artists in China had already been introduced to American and European abstract expressionism. As early as January 1981, *Fine Arts* magazine started to publish reproductions of works by German expressionists, and in August an exhibition of works from the Boston Museum of Fine Arts was held at the China Art Gallery; it featured works by American abstract expressionists including Jackson Pollock. This introduction to the work of the abstract expressionists was followed by discussions on the concepts of 'abstraction' and 'self expression' in art in course of the 1980s.[26] However, until 1985 most of these discussions and the production of art that followed took place within the field of painting. Perhaps the most important exception to this were the artists Huang Yongping, Jiao Yaoming, Lin Jiahua, Qian Xiaogang and Xu Chengtou who, in 1983, organized the *Exhibition of Five Artists*, featuring early experiments in the field of installation art. More attention will be given below to artists who started experiments with theatrical performances following these discussions about abstraction and self-expression in arts

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[24] Many artists who I have spoken to, and who studied at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing during the 1980s, recall taking such fieldtrips. According to them, these fieldtrips were partly funded by a special travel grant, offered by the Academy.

[25] Further reference on the use of the term 'idea art' (*sixiang yishu*) in China can be found in the essay by Gao Minglu on "Conceptual Art with Anticonceptual Attitude: Mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong" in Farver, *Global conceptualism*, 127-139

[26] The first exhibition of modern American art that included works of abstract expressionists from the collection of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, was held in Beijing in 1981. The exhibition attracted artists from all over China. This information is provided by John Clark, who was in Beijing at the time.

practice. In creating performances that involved the staged representation of the body/*self* in a particular environment, these theatrical performances referenced performances done earlier in Europe and the United States and, in particular, those staged by Robert Rauschenberg and John Cage. They enhanced discussions on 'abstraction' and the concept of 'self expression' in arts practice that had been on-going in China and impelled artists in staging more provocative performances throughout the following years.

Abstraction, expressionist- vs. non- expressionist art, and theatrical performance

Starting in the first half of the 1980s – not long after the open-air exhibition by the Stars Group – performance gradually started focus on the behavioral role of the artist's body in action. This would produce a performance art discourse in China that is unique in its emphasis on *behavior*. The practice of performance art started in open-air exhibitions and group actions during the first half of the 1980s, many of which involved social-political actions. However, artists became interested in the ways in which a particular action can be 'staged', 'performed' or 'acted out' – all of which is defined by the term *biaoyan*. This term describes how artists collaborated in 'directing' (*daoyan*) performances featuring the body in action. This is particularly the case with the *Concept 21 - Art Before your Eyes* performance at Beijing University. The participating artists carefully planned their performance, by focusing more specifically on the role of their own body as canvas, brush, frame and platform for their actions, instead of staging a public movement, if not public manifestation (*yundong*) which involved the public presentation or public destruction of previously made art objects.

Starting around 1981, several leading art journals in China, including *Meishu* (*Fine Arts*) published a series of articles on the concept of self-expression (*ziwo biaoxian*) in painting and other forms of art. The concept had been developed during the previous years in China from the end of the Cultural Revolution and was now placed in perspective in relation to both modern and contemporary art in other parts of the world, and in particular modern painting in Europe and the United States. It was combined with a renewed interest in more traditional Chinese art forms, including the practice of

calligraphy. First, in February 1981, *Meishu* published an article by the artist Zhong Ming addressing the concept of self-expression in relation to the work of Jean-Paul Sartre.[27] One month earlier *Meishu* had introduced a series of reproductions of German expressionist works and an article on Dali and Surrealism. Later, in March 1981, *Meishu* published a three-page article by the Chinese/ Italian modern painter Xiao Qin. Born in Shanghai in 1935, Xiao Qin moved to Taiwan in the late 1940s and studied Fine Arts from 1951 to 1954, until moving to Italy in 1956. In December 1980, Xiao Qin paid a visit to China where he conducted a series of lectures on the concept of Euramerican avant-garde art in relation to Eastern (Philosophical) Thought. This provided the basis for his article in *Meishu*.[28] The article featured a reproduction of a performance installation by the husband and wife team of Christo and Jean-Claude. They had wrapped a section of the coast of Australia in cloth in 1969, and reference to this work was later made by several artists in China, who started to wrap themselves in cloth.[29]

The year 1981 is crucial for artists in China as they were introduced to expressionist painting and other overseas modern and contemporary art practices. They related these practices to the concept of self-expression and to the notions of conceptual, or idea-art. Aside from theoretical discussions and some reproductions of foreign artworks, 1981 also marks the year of at least two very important exhibitions at the China Art Gallery in Beijing. In addition to the exhibitions of expressionist German and the Boston collection of American abstract expressionist works, there was a major exhibition of *250 Years of French Painting* held from 15 September to 13 October 1982. It is still recalled by most artists in China, including some of whom are engaged in performance art, as one of the most important events in Beijing during the first half of

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[27] Zhong Ming, "Cong hua Sa Te shuoqi - Tan huihua yu ziwo biaoxian" ("Talking from Picturing Sartre - Discussions of Painting and Self-Expression") in *Meishu* (*Fine Arts*), 1981.2, 7-8. This issue further contains a series of reproductions of works by the French painter Matisse, and an article by Li Xianting discussing the concept of Modernism in art, which can be found on pages 46-47.

[28] Xiao Qin, "Qianlun dongfang gudai sixiang yu oumei qianwei yishu guannian yilun" ("Elementary Introduction on the Similarities and Differences between Eastern Thought and Euramerican Avant-Garde Art") in *Meishu* (*Fine Arts*), 1981.3, 42-44. Xiao Qin's aunt was Xiao Shufang, wife of the painter Wu Zuoren. Xiao Qin's catalogues were situated in Xiao Shufang's house when visited by John Clark in August, 1981.

the 1980s. For example, according to Song Dong, the exhibition for the first time presented them with the opportunity to see "human figures painted with expression and engaged in movement and action, rather than as dull realistic representations of still models which was often taught at the academy."[30] After 1981 and between 1983 and 1986 in particular, heated discussions took place in China on the concepts of 'formalism' (*xingshi zhuyi*) and 'reason' (*lixing*) in art. In addition, the idea of self-expression in art informed a discussion about the similarities and differences between modern abstract art (*chouxiang yishu*) and traditional Chinese painting, and in particular Chinese calligraphy.[31]

In early 1983, prior to organizing the *Exhibition of Five Artists* in Xiamen and after having just completed his degree at the Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts in Hangzhou (Zhejiang Province), Huang Yongping started to express the need to free himself from the doctrines of academic formalism which were taught at the academy. In January 1983 *Meishu* published an article by him in which he talks about some of his graduation works produced the year before and suggested that they were created from "the practices of life".[32] Two years later, between March and April 1985, he created his series of non-expressionist paintings. Working against the popular notion of the time that paintings had to contain meaning and that artists should produce meaningful works

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[29] Following a recorded interview with Ma Liuming in 2001. In 1988 Ma Liuming took part in one such performance that involved wrapping, by Wei Guangqing. This work, *Suicide Project*, will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4 of this thesis.

[30] Following a recorded interview with Song Dong in 2001.

[31] These ideas can be found in a paper by Wu Guanzhong, which he had written in June 1960, but it was not published until October 1980 as Wu Guanzghong. "Guanyu chouxiang mei" ("Concerning the Beauty of the Abstract") in: *Meishu* (*Fine Arts*) 1980.10, 37-39. This paper clearly breaks with the taboo of abstraction in China, and would be followed by other publications on these issues. For further reference, see: Mao Tubo, "Wo guo chuantong yishu zhong chouxiang yinsu chutan" ("Early Explorations on Abstract Elements in Chinese Traditional Art") in: *Meishu* (*Fine Arts*) 1983.5, 16-18; Hong Yiran. "Cong 'xingshi gan' tandao 'xingshi mei' he 'chouxiang mei'" ("Talking From the 'Feeling of Form' to the 'Beauty of Form' and the 'Beauty of Abstraction'"), Liu Xili, "Xingshi mei de chouxiang xing yu 'chouxiang mei'" ("The Character of Abstraction in the Beauty of Form and the 'Beauty of Abstraction" in: *Meishu* (*Fine Arts*) 1983.5, 4-22; and Du Jian, "Xingxiang de jielü yu jielü de xingxiang - Guanyu chouxiang mei de wenti yixie yijian" ("The Movement and Pace of Artistic Images and the Artistic Form of Movement and Pace - Observations on the Beauty of Abstraction"), [Part One and Two] in: *Meishu* (*Fine Arts*) 1983.10, 16-20 and *Meishu* (*Fine Arts*) 1983.11, 9-12

[32] Huang Yongping. "Tan wo jizhang hua" ("Talking About Some of My Paintings") in: *Meishu* (*Fine Arts*) 1983.1, 22

using self-expression, Huang Yongping instead created his "paintings that have nothing to do with me", as was mentioned earlier.

Combined with the numerous of discussions on the concepts of 'form', 'reason' and 'abstraction' in art practice which were taking place during the first half of the 1980s – and the idea that art has to somehow be based on the self-expression of the artist, Huang Yongping offered a move away from these trends. He must therefore be considered as an key figure in the general movement towards what at first appears to be more 'spontaneous' (*ziran*) artistic events – such as in the case of the Xiamen Dada events in 1986. Nevertheless, let us note that these 'spontaneous' actions often involved some form of preparation and careful coordination by the artist in collaboration with others in the live performance. At the same time artists also felt obliged to consider some type of visual registration in the form of photography (and later also video), or painting or other media, as in the case of the 'random paintings' by Huang Yongping. These are all very important signs of a discourse on performance art emerging in China during the mid-1980s. Artists were clearly moving away from public 'manifestations' and towards performances that focused more on the 'behavioral' aspects (*pinxing*) of a particular 'action' (*xingwei*). These included theatrical performances and abstract expressionist painting combined with an early form of 'body action'. Photographs taken during an early collaboration between visiting art students from France and postgraduate students from the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing in June 1985 clearly demonstrate this.**[ill. 2.13]**

The next move in the direction of artists staging theatrical performances was made a year later, in 1986, when several artists in different parts of China started to experiment with a new type of performance set on a designed stage. Examples of these were the performances organized in the *Southern Art Salon First Experimental Art Exhibition* in September 1986.**[ill. 2.14]** A year earlier, in 1985, a group of visual artists, writers, musicians and film directors in Guangzhou, had founded the Southern Salon group. Among the group members were the artists Wang Du, Dai Jianfeng, Lin Yilin, and Chen Shaoxiong. They were interested in staging some form of collaboration between visual art, theatre performance, music, and other types of media. Throughout

the following year – between the autumn of 1985 and the late summer of 1986 – they started to think about using a theatre as a venue for their collaborative public event. While it must be said that these artists did not aspire to a direct collaboration with their audience (which was the case with the open air experiments organized at the same time by the Pond Group in Hangzhou), they aimed nonetheless to interact with them.

According to one report, these collaborations were either indirectly, if not directly, inspired by the Polish experimental dramatist Jerzy Grotowski, and in particular his study *Towards a Poor Theatre* that was translated into Chinese in the mid-1980s.[33] Hans van Dijk and Andreas Schmid argue that Grotowski is important in moves by these artists in direct contact with audiences, concluding that: "The wish to develop some form of spontaneous interaction with the public was the background to many Beijing, Shanghai, Nanjing, Guangzhou, and Hangzhou happenings."[34]

But a careful reading of Grotowski, and the observation that, in the case of the Southern Art Salon First Experimental Art Exhibition, the public is kept confined behind a billboard, we can conclude that 'spontaneous interaction with the public' was only marginally important for these theatrical performances. According to Grotowski, the "personal and scenic technique of the actor" is crucial in theatre and provides the basis for examining the relationship between the actor and the audience.[35] In defining 'what is distinctively theatre' – as opposed to a combination of different disciplines – both the actor's training and the actor's technique form the bases for a proper theatre performance. This notion is applicable to performances in the *Southern Art Salon First Experimental Art Exhibition* at the theatre of the Zhongshan University in Guangzhou, in September 1986. Rather than seeing an example of 'spontaneous public interaction' in this performance, let us note that the entire performance shows signs of careful preparation on the part of all the participating artists in the stage design, costumes and the choreography of the body in the performance.

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[33] Following the essay by Hans van Dijk and Andreas Schmid, "The fine arts after the Cultural Revolution: stylistic development and theoretical debate", in Noth, et.al., *China Avant-Garde: Counter-currents in Art and Culture*, 14-39

[34] Ibid., 23-24

[35] See: Jerzy Grotowski. "Towards a Poor Theatre" in Eugenio Barba, ed. *Jerzy Grotowski - Towards a Poor Theatre* (London: Methuen, 1969), 15

Much of Grotowski's work, published in *Towards a Poor Theatre*, provides references to physical exercises and to the training of actors in the performance of complex movements of the body. In particular, Grotowki proposes that actors routinely engage in breathing and speech exercises and that they combine them with exercises in acrobatics.[36] In China these recommendations may have provided the artist with additional references to notions on the training of actors for different types of Chinese stage performance, especially Peking opera. For Grotowski: "The essence of theatre is the actor, his actions, and what he can achieve".[37] Grotowski offered these artists another reference to self-expression, this time through the body. In the *Southern Art Salon First Experimental Art Exhibition*, artists clearly focused their performances on self-expression in relation to the body/*self*. The performance received enthusiastic reactions from the public and local news reports from Guangzhou praised the show; a full report on the event was published in the *Zhongguo Meishu Bao* (*China Fine Arts Newspaper*).[38]

Another example of artists staging theatrical performances in front of an audience was the two hour long performance *A Scenic Personal Experience* by the brothers Song Yonghong and Song Yongping on 4 November 1986, from 3pm to 5pm at the Shanxi Taiyuan Cultural Workers Palace.**[ill. 2.15]** In this performance, Song Yongping was wrapped in red cloth, his face painted red and arms painted white; Song Yonghong was draped in white cloth with a face painted white and arms painted red. The stage consisted of an installation work and was covered with red cloth plus several objects: bounded tree trunks, black cooking pots, and an orange painted wheel from an old cart. The performance was structured by the body movements of the painted artists against the red colored background. It presented the viewers with an ambiguous scenic display enhanced by strong lighting and loud sounds coming from a huge pipe-like sound instrument.[39] This work is a clear example of a theatrical performance of artists

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[36] For further references also see the sections on "Actors Training (1966)" and "The Actor's Technique" in: Barba,143-183.
[37] Ibid., 143
[38] For further reference see also: Lü Peng and Yi Dan, *Zhongguo xiandai yishushi - 1979-1989*, 148-149
[39] Aide from looking at the photographs I was also told of a sound-instrument being used by the artists in an interview with one of them, Song Yonghong, in 2002.

collaborating on a set stage, rather than establishing a more spontaneous interaction with the public in the open-air.

Some comments on the performance reveal that this piece was considered very important in the development of contemporary art in China during this period. The performance showed viewers how artists could create artworks revolving around personal experience, rather than constituting the work "upon logic and carrying forward layers of different sequences, which are present in Western [contemporary] art, but do not exist in China."[40] According to Song Yonghong and Song Yongping themselves, their work can be explained in terms of the same process which controls life itself:

> When it comes to people carrying out the practice of art, this is no different from having a hand in the unconsciousness that lies beneath the driving force of this enormous natural power [of life] [...] We very much hope to alter the self-experience of performance behavior [xingwei] [...] By placing ourselves inside an entirely red colored environment and performing this completely unrestricted action [huodong], we aim at making full use of the experience of the self in suddenly different environments, in a project that gives us the feeling of being mad and feeling wonderful at the same time.[41]

From these statements it becomes clear that the artists found it very important to seek some type of personal experience by placing the self inside a completely different space or 'environment' and thereby creating an "artistic experiment that made us feel crazy and splendid at the same time."[42]

These theatrical performances draw attention to artistic experimentations by artists who start to express their ideas and their artistic practices inside a carefully designed stage. Instead of locating these practices in the open-air, where they can confront everyday audiences that may be unaware of the performance that takes place in front of them, artists located their performances inside a cultural theatre or inside an exhibition space. By carefully examining the role of these performances in terms of a personal

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[40] Ibid., 152-153
[41] Quotation translated from Lü Hong and Huang Zhuan, ed. *Zhongguo Dangdai Meishu Tujian- 1979-1999*, 5. The Second part of the quote by Song Yonghong and Song Yonping is also listed in: Lü Peng and Yi Dan, *Zhongguo xiandai yishushi - 1979-1989*, 152-153
[42] ibid.

experience, these artists abandon the need to inform a large public of social or political concepts, which take artistic practice into having a political function. This was often still the case in performances that were staged during the first half of the 1980s, as can be seen in the public actions by the Stars Group, the Pond Group, and in the public burning of artworks by the Xiamen Dada group. It can be stated that the concept of performance started to change around 1986, and also the way in which artists adopted a new notion of performance as a more personal artistic practice that could be staged in front of a smaller group of audiences.

Performances become 'acted out' (*biaoyan*) and artists started to put more emphasis on sharing their artistic experiences through artistic collaboration that led them to 'direct' (*daoyan*) a series of arranged events that focus more directly on the role of the body in action. By moving performance away from staging spontaneous manifestations (*huodong*) on the street, to the more private space of a theatre, an exhibition space, an artist's studio, or sometimes even a culturally significant open-air location, performance art starts to function as an important means with which artists see their function in the creation of art and of artistic experience. As audiences for these performance events are often part of the artists' community itself and therefore feature close group artist collaborations, it becomes somewhat difficult to list them as public events.

The second performance by the Concept 21st Century Group at the Great Wall near Gubeikou, 128 kilometers north from the city center of Beijing, in 1987, must also be considered a privately staged collaborative performance. Under the motto: "If you haven't been to the Great Wall you are not a true man", a group of artists – many of whom had participated in the performance *Concept 21st Century - Art Before Your Eyes* at Beijing University on 23 December 1986 – had traveled to the Great Wall were they staged the performance *Concept 21st Century - The Great Wall*.**[ill. 2.16]** Next to Sheng Qi, Kang Mu, Zheng Yuke, Zhao Jianhai, Zhu Qingsheng, Kong Chang'an, Han Ning, Ding Bin, and Fan Di'an, the group also included Hou Hanru, who is currently well known as an independent international curator living in Paris, France.[43] During the

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[43] According to an unrecorded conversation with Sheng Qi in Beijing in 2001, who was one of the participants in the performance by the Concept 21st Century Group.

performance at the Great Wall the artists dressed themselves in red and black clothing and wrapped strips of white cloth around their bodies and head. During the first stage of the performance the artist Kang Mu covered himself in white chalk, "as if buried alive by stone."[44] Together the artists created a spider-web from strips of black cloth that were linked to the stones of one of the former watchtowers at the Great Wall. They then performed a series of dance movements until they slowly became entangled in a web. At the time, none of the participating artists seem to have been aware of the attention that there performance would receive much later, and that it would play a significant role in the discourse on Chinese performance art. According to one participant, Sheng Qi, the entire performance started as a spontaneous event by a group of artists who wanted to create some type of event at the Great Wall.[45] Nevertheless the fact that the performance involved at least some preparation in terms of creating the motto: "If you haven't been to the Great Wall you are not a true man" does show that it was more than a spontaneous act. This can further be seen in the way the artists had decided to carefully choose a location for their staged act, made costumes from materials that were brought to the scene, and incorporated choreography in the performance. These features make it possible to relate the event to a discussion on the emergence of a general movement by artists, during the second half of the 1980s, who started to create theatrical performances which focus around the personal expression of the body/self.

The same discussion also applies on the series of performances titled *Concept 21st Century – Taji* that was done by the Concept 21 group between 15 and 16 October 1988. During these performances the group – who by that time involved 12 participants –visited different sites of cultural and historical significance around Beijing. They first went to the Exhibition Hall of Ancient Astronomical Instruments that was built around 1279 in the center-east of Beijing. Then they moved to the Ming Tombs on the outskirts north of the city, and finally they moved to the Great Wall, for the second time in their alliance as a performance group. During these performances the artists would again use paint and cloth to stage a series of performance acts that involved choreographed dance

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[44] Following a translation of a report on the performance, published in Lü Hong and Huang Zhuan, *Zhongguo Dangdai Meishu Tujian- 1979-1999*, 12

movements as well as reciting texts. Around the same time as the third series of performances were staged by the *Concept 21* group, many discussions were taking place in China about the broadcasting of a six-part television series *Heshang* (*River Elegy*). In this program, the producers had brought forward the idea that traditional Chinese civilization had to be proclaimed dead or else China would never be able to play any significant role internationally, with many countries having already moved through a long period of cultural modernization that saw intellectuals could proclaim their ideas more freely. *Heshang* was aired twice on national Chinese television; starting in June and the second broadcast ran in August 1988. Although the exact number of viewers remains unknown, the program was certainly watched by several million Chinese viwers and perhaps even by several hundred million people. In the following months excerpts of an annotated text of the program was published in several leading national newspapers that had a circulation of millions of readers and the subsequent publication of the full script in a book sold over seven hundred thousand copies in 1988 alone.[46] It had a huge impact in China and would lead many people to become much fond of the idea that the producers had brought forward by stating that China could only change its future by ending the popular belief in traditional Chinese civilization having anything to say about present day society, which would be the only way to allow China to emerge as a future world power. A modern Chinese civilization needed to be encouraged in China that was led by intellectuals who would establishing a New Cultural Movement. Essentially such a movement would allow better access to incentives coming from abroad that would be used to inspire new cultural developments in China.

The third series of performances organized by the *Concept 21* Group was part of a more general reaction by intellectuals in China to ideas that were brought forward in the *Heshang* television series. In particular the way in which these artists choose to conduct their performances at significant cultural historic sites across Beijing, provided them

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[45] Following the unrecorded conversation with Sheng Qi in 2001.

[46] Further reference can be found in Richard W. Bodman' introduction essay for the translation of the complete Chinese text of the TV series. See: Richard W. Bodman, "From History to Allegory to Art: A Personal Search for Interpretation" in Su Xiaokang and Wang Luxiang. *Deathsong of the River - A reader's guide to the Chinese TV Series Heshang*, translated from Chinese by Richard W. Bodman and Pin P. Wan (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1991),1-61

with an opportunity to be liberated from conventional notions praised traditional culture, by deliberately staging new artistic practices at these settings. At the same time, the way in which these artists choose to wrap themselves, and their surroundings, in cloth indicates a reference to the work by other artists using a similar stylistic approach which ultimately is said to have come from their encounters with a work by Christo and Jean-Claude but was transformed into a more specific practice that demonstrate how Chinese artists felt bound by the past in staging new artistic practices. Throughout the second half of the 1980s other artists in China started to wrap themselves in cloth, as can be seen for example in the work by a group of artists from Shanghai including Zhang Guoliang, Ding Yi, and Qin Yifeng. On 12 and 13 October 1986 they staged two performance pieces, for which they wrapped themselves in yellow silk. The first was held at Wusongkou Warf in Shanghai and involved the artists creating a series of abstract sculptures that were made by creating shapes through body poses inside the pieces of cloth. A day later the artists moved to a coffee shop across the road from Shanghai Fine Art Department of Shanghai Normal University in the city center, where they sat down behind one of the tables, and again they were dressed in yellow silk. Hereafter the three artists moved from the front gate of the Huadong Zhengfa School to the streets surrounding the newly opened Peoples Hotel and the Bright River Hotel in Honqiao District, where they continued to create a series of performances that featured the artists posing as human sculptures.

Less than three weeks later, on 2 November 1986 in the city of Luoyang, Zhejiang Province, Zhang Peili and Geng Jianyi staged their performance *Wrapping Up - The King and Queen*. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, this work was very novel at the time it was conducted, in that the artists sought a more private setting for their performance and provided a very provocative gesture by wrapping up their bodies so tightly that several of the viewers saw it as making a reference to slow suffocation.

Throughout the second half of the 1980s similar directions are taken by artists who sought to stage provocative action that offer some type of cruel representation of body/*self* in performances that are staged in front of a small, but active group of cohorts. The next chapter will feature more examples of these types of works. These

performances, and the artists that stage them, play an important role in the construction of the present discourse on performance art in China. They also offer important visual references that feature important settings with which to describe their artistic functions in relation to the social circumstances in which they took place. Even some of the privately staged performances can offer art historians new notions about everyday reality through their documentations and show how artists used these practices to impose some type of critique on the position of experimental performances in relation to more conventional artistic practices done within the institutional framework. By staging more provocative performances, artists tried to present a new role for arts practice in relation to new intellectual notions on the public function of art and the role of artist in society, both of which advocated a move towards creating a new, modern Chinese culture. These practices also become crucial in the construction of discourse on performance art in China, which is known by the term *xingwei yishu*.. At the same time these performances enhance a range of discourses on experimental art practices in China, as artists begin consider different types of media to register their performances, and start to combine performance practice with installation, photography and even video.

CHAPTER 3

PERFORMANCE ART AND THE ROLE OF THE BODY IN BEHAVIORAL ACTION IN CHINA, 1986-1989

> Conquerors know that action in itself is useless. There is but one useful action, that of remaking man and the earth. I shall never remake men. But one must do "as if". For the path of struggle leads me to the flesh. Even humiliated, the flesh is my only certainty. I can live only on it. The creature is my native land.
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> Albert Camus, *The Myth of the Sisyphus*, 1942

Close group collaboration of the 'lived body' and 'behavioral action' performances

The historical discourse of performance art practice in China works on concepts that give prominence to the concepts of 'behavior' and 'action'; both of which are imbedded in the Chinese term for performance art, *xingwei yishu*, and were discussed in the previous chapter. In addition, such a discourse has to pay attention to the role of the body/*self* as both the object and subject of performance. In order to understand the position of the body in relation to behavioral action it is useful to present an introduction to the cultural- historical position of ritual action in the Chinese tradition.

In China the human body (*shenti*) is strongly related to the unity of the two organismic *processes* of mind and body, whereby both require the other as the condition

of their being. This concept is unlike the Western tradition where the body is conceived as a container – following the etymological origin in *Botahha* derived from Old German, meaning container.[1] This vision of the body as container gave rise to many ideas on the body and mind as two separate entities, culminating in the notion of the *Cartesian corpse*. The Chinese concept on the body can best be examined by using the term 'lived body', which would be a good translation of the term *shenti* in Chinese –incorporating the notion of *life* (*sheshen*) with [*substantiated*] *body* (*ti*). More recently, the American scholar Drew Leder has started to use the term 'lived body' in his research, which focuses on the body as process. Leder's study of the body was preceded by a group of scholars writing during the second half of the twentieth century, who were inspired by the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty.[2] In his book, the *Absent Body*, Leder starts by listing some of Merleau-Ponty's ideas before moving to the German term *Leib* to identify the position of the lived body, in relation to the notion of "forming one body with our surroundings." This notion is derived from Neo-Confucianism – a Chinese philosophical movement, starting in the eleventh century that brought together elements of Confucianism, Taoism, and Chinese Buddhism.[3]

By giving prominence to the entire person embedded in the concept of the lived body, Chinese traditional thought and practice underlined the importance of the shaping of a person in relation to his or her social, cultural and physical environment.[4] The relation between the body and its environment provided the order in which the body is placed in the world through ritual action (*li*). In ritual action people assume certain roles and find their appropriate relationship to others, providing them with an opportunity to take part in a process that aims at maintaining and enriching the community as a whole. The body becomes the medium for personal and collaborative expression. In the process

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[1] See: Roger T. Ames, "The Body in Chinese Tradition" in Thomas P. Kasulis, ed. *Self and Body in Asian Theory and Practice* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1993), 149-156

[2] See: Drew Leder, "A tale of two bodies: The Cartesian corpse and the lived body" in Drew Leder, ed., *The Body in Medical Thought and Practice* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1992), 17-35; and Leder, *The Absent Body* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990)

[3] These notions are discussed by Leder in Chapter 6, "To Form One Body". See: Leder, *The Absent Body*, 149-202

[4] Further references on the relation between the body and the environment can also be found in Ames, "The Body in Chinese Tradition" in Kasulis, *Self and Body in Asian Theory and Practice*, 149-156

of maintaining and enriching the community, ritual action is further applied to aspects of the everyday life of Chinese citizens, including those which govern by law, moral systems, and the social conventions of the workings of society at large. The proper function of ritual action takes place in a hierarchical structure, which runs from the Emperor (or Son of Heaven), to literati officials, and finally to the common people.[5]

In contemporary Chinese society, ritual practice also play an important role in maintaining and enriching communities. For example, Chinese businessmen often perform a series of rituals in their meetings, which include rituals for greeting, eating and drinking. They are used to establish a complex hierarchical structure inside a specific community.[6] Social interactions have traditionally deployed even much more elaborate types of ritual practices including in the burial of the dead and in the initiation of Taoist priests, which establish strong links between life and the afterlife and often involve rituals of the body.[7] Commentators state that artists have historically linked their practices to ritual actions of the body. An example of this can be found in the *Book of Zhuangzi*, the first seven chapters of which are attributed to the Chinese scholar Zhuang Zhou (ca 369-289 BCE). These are followed by an additional twenty-six chapters that contain stories by scholars writing in the tradition of Zhuang Zhou.[8] One of these stories tells of a Lord Yuan of Song who wished to commission an artist to make a painting in his honor. When artists heard about this opportunity they flocked to the palace to show off their great painting skills. There was one artist, however, who did not make such haste in presenting himself. Arriving late, he was brought to the courtyard to pay tribute and present examples of his painting. Instead, he returned home after having glimpsed Lord Yuan. Shocked by this man's rudeness Lord Yuan sent a party to the artist's home.

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[5] Following important observations made by Wu Hung in his study on the role of ritual in traditional Chinese thought and practice: Wu Hung, *Monumentality in Early Chinese Art and Architecture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995). See, particularly Chapter One, "The Age of Ritual Art", 17-75

[6] Wu Hung also states how "An idea repeatedly emphasized in the [classical Chinese] ritual books is that *li* [ritual action] began from meat and drink (of sacrifices)", which can be used to exemplify how traditional ritual practices still function today. Wu Hung, *Monumentality in Early Chinese Art and Architecture*, 22

[7] A good reference on ritual practice in Taoist tradition and the important role played by the body is: Kristofer Schipper, *The Taoist Body*), translated from French by Karen C. Duval (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993)

[8] A complete English translation of the *Book of Zhuangzi* can be found in: *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, translated by Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968)

There they found the artist, sitting cross-legged, wearing no clothes – stripped naked – and staring at the wall. When the party returned home to the palace and related this event, Lord Yuan exclaimed in full approval: "Such is the nature of a true artist."[9] Following this early anecdote on the nature of a true artist, the Chinese art critic Fei Dawei expressed his astonishment at the central role of the artist's performance (behavior) in the production of art, stating: "Why is it that even as early as two thousand years ago, behavior and procedure was [were] seen as 'true art' rather than the technique of painting itself?"[10] In addition to this historical anecdote, the entire book of *Zhuangzi* contains many insights into the role of the body in Chinese traditional thought and practice, including passages about the "abandoned body" that refers to methods for "abandoning distinctions between all things in life."[11] These concepts are crucial in the understanding of the work of many performance artists using the body in (pseudo) ritualistic performance actions. This started in the 1980s and culminated throughout the 1990s. It is also important to note that when artists are asked to explain their work, they tend to speak of the use of styles and techniques in their work through the idea of creating artistic "language" (*yuyan*). However, many artists (in particular those who engage in performance) know that this concept of "language" needs to be transcended through pure *action*. [12] The concept of language includes the use of "words" (eg "images" or "forms") to create meaningful art. Art institutions often tend to emphasize the idea that art needs to generate "meaning", but in Taoist and also Buddhist tradition it is important to transcend this notion. This is further explained by Fei Dawei when he

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[9] Following a personal translation of the story in classical Chinese, as published in Yao Hansong, Xun Xiaofang, and Lin Jianfu, ed., *Zhuangzi Zhijie* (*Zhuangi: Direct Interpretations*) (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2000), Chapter 21, 534-563

[10] See: Fei Dawei. "Wanneer we kijken.../ When we look..." In: Chris Driessen and Heidi van Mierlo, ed. *Another Long March – Chinese Conceptual and Installation Art in the Nineties* (Breda: Fundament Foundation, 1997), 32-51.

[11] See for example the story about a conversation between Confucius and one of his disciples Ren Hui, which is discussed by Feng Yulan in the appendix-essay concluding his English translation of the book of *Zhuangzi*: Feng Yulan. *A Taoist Classic – Chaung-Tzu* (Beijing Foreign Language Press, 1989), 143-144.

[12] Often the term "language" is used when artists speak to people that they think of as general audiences, who will have no experience in viewing art. As I further noticed whilst translating conversations between Chinese artists and overseas audiences during my time in China, artist would also use this concept when they felt that someone did not have a proper understanding of the traditional role of pure action over form.

refers to a statement of the Buddhist scholar Zhu Dasheng (434-355 BCE), who said: "If you have perceived the meaning, forget the image; if it makes sense, forget the words."[13]

Several performances staged in 1986 further imposed an ongoing critique on art's position in the institutional framework, like those done in June 1986 by the Black Union Group, featuring artists from Shandong Province.[14] A report by Chinese art historian Gao Minglu on one of the performances, *Stretcher Series*, describes how one of the participating artists "was forced into a *cangue*, an instrument used in ancient China to restrain criminals. In this case, the *cangue* was made of canvas cut with holes and stretched on a wooden frame."[15]**[ill. 3.1]** In setting up the Black Union these artists aimed to set up a movement of 'black culture' that would substitute for the 'grey culture' that was negative, neutral, and involved intellectuals who took no particular standpoint. They said: "We refuse to participate in what is known as culture! We need a real culture! We need to set up a new culture!"[16] Interestingly, as Gao Minglu noted in a discussion on this performance piece, the artists chose to include strong references to "suffering" and imposed "acts of cruelty upon themselves".[17] Nevertheless, aside from mentioning ideas about suffering and self-cruelty, the statements listed in the study by Gao Minglu fail to provide any clear reason for why these artists made such strong and provocative references. They do however mention that the artists in the Black Union provided their desire for 'black culture' with a personal context. All the artists came from the north of China, and their call for a new 'black' culture belonged to people who came from this area; they thereby opposed to 'grey' culture of the people from the south. These statements therefore suggest that already in the mid-1980s there was a form of rivalry going on between artists living in the north and artists living in the south. With the

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[13] Fei Dawei, "Wanneer we kijken.../ When we look..." in Driessen and van Mierlo, *Another Long March*, 37

[14] Unfortunately, there are no records available on all the artists that took part in setting up the Black Union Group, and so far information on this group has been scarce.

[15] See: Gao Minglu, "Conceptual Art with Anticonceptual Attitude: Mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong" in Farver et.al., *Global conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s-1980s*, 136. For further reference also see: Gao Minglu, Zhou Yan, Wang Xiaojian, Shu Qun, Wang Mingxian, and Tong Dian ed., *Zhongguo dangdai yishu shi, 1985-1986* (*A History of Chinese Contemporary Art, 1985-1986*) (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1997 [1991]), 378-382.

[16] Gao Minglu et.al., *Zhongguo dangdai yishu shi, 1985-1986*, 379

[17] Ibid.

performances of the Black Union Group, artists started to use their own bodies as both the object and subject in creating new, and above all, provocative artworks that provide a general critique of cultural distinction in China.

These new movements clearly distinguished themselves from earlier movements in different ways. The first difference lies in their exposure to the public. Performances in the mid-1980s were aimed to appeal to small groups of targeted audiences. Their provocations not only constituted strong criticisms of society, but emphasized complex forms of conceptualization. Instead of using art as an extension for public action and to shock more general audiences, these artists started to critique members of a small, but active groups of artists involved in experimental art and its production. In an attempt to place themselves outside the institutional framework and in opposition to conventional practices, more and more artists started to display the 'suffering' and the 'wounded spirit of art' of those who saw themselves as pioneers in the creation of a modern culture.[18] By continuously experimenting with new visual structures, many of these artists detached themselves from the production of *fine arts*, which was conditioned by artists having to attain certain aesthetic qualities, of obtaining specialization in an established technical skill, and of adapting their practices to a limited stylistic discourse set forward by the academy.

A good example of a work in which artists detached themselves from conventional practice, is the performance *Archeological Excavations on a Waste Disposal Site* by Xu Yihui and Cai Xiaogang, in the summer of 1986 at a disposal site in the Lianyungang Economic and Technological Development Zone in Jiangsu Province (East China). Both artists were dressed in white suits, white gloves, dark sunglasses, and with their heads covered in cloth. In an image taken of the performance, one of the artists is seen picking up a skull from the site. It comes across as a somewhat ambiguous, but also provocative, action.**[ill.-3.2]** This work can be described as part of a movement in cultural awakening in the context of the '85 New Wave Movement (see below). The former movement consisted of young artists who had finished their studies during the first half of the 1980s

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[18] See: Gao Minglu, "Conceptual Art with Anticonceptual Attitude: Mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong" in Farver et.al., *Global conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s-1980s*, 137

and often had little or no knowledge of the early experiments done in China between 1979 and 1981.[19] For them, the notion of a *high culture* in China suggested something that could be excavated from a waste disposal site. Being an artist in China meant nothing more than conducting excavations and retrieving cultural remains in the form of a human skull, which may have been a reference to European culture, the grave diggers in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

In expressing their feelings about the 'helplessness of artists' and the 'wounded spirit of art' in contemporary China, some artists chose to stage new types of ritualistic performances using direct references to the body in behavioral action. Such was clearly the case in a series of performances by the 'M' Art Group in Shanghai in late December 1986 led by the local artist Song Haidong. The 'M' in the title stands for 'Man', 'Montage' and 'Mophist', whereby Song Haidong stated how: "'Man' expresses the sexual distinction of the group, 'Montage' signifies the unification of determination and good faith in collaborating, and the 'Mophist' is used as a metaphor for their art."[20] The M Group was an all-male collective, and apart from Song Haidong also included the artists Qin Yifeng, Tang Guanming, Yang Dongbai, Yang Xu, and Zhou Tiehai. On 21 December 1986 the M Art Group put on a series of performances at the Shanghai Cultural Workers Palace, attended by around 200 people, mainly from the local arts scene: young poets, university students, press editors, and art lovers.[21] These performances included: *Work - The Same Wasteful Objects as Smashing Women's Make-up Products* by Song Haidong (duration 10 minutes), *Pantomime Style* by Yang Dongbai (duration 5 minutes), *Ceremony* by Tang Guangming (duration 10 minutes), and *Sense of Violence* by Yang Xu and Zhou Tiehai (duration 10 minutes).[22] In nearly

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[19] See: Hans van Dijk and Andreas Schmid, "The Fine Arts after the Cultural Revolution: stylistic development and theoretical debate" in Noth et.al., *China Avant-Garde: Counter-Currents in Art and Culture*, 22-23

[20] Gao Minglu et.al., *Zhongguo dangdai yishu shi, 1985-1986*, 384. The term Mophist is used in English and it remains unclear what the artists meant, but it is most likely referring to a 'ghostly character' in the traditional story of the *Six Chapters of a Floating Life* (*Fusheng liuji*).

[21] It is striking to see the similarity in audiences that attend more recent 'private' experimental art exhibitions in China during the late 1990s and early twenty-first century, as I found out during my fieldwork in China, where I visited many of such exhibitions.

[22] For full descriptions of all these performances, see: Gao Minglu et.al., *Zhongguo dangdai yishu shi, 1985-1986*, 385-387

all of these performances the artists were half naked, bound, swaddled, gagged, hanged and beaten by other artists. In all they present provocative and ritualistic types of performances, as can be seen in photographs taken of the last two performances.[23] **[ill. 3.3 & 3.4]**

For these artists the body was the primary material with which to construct new visual structures in performance. The body under stress is the medium of a new art practice that enabled artists visualize and embody their critical stance in the Chinese art scene. The art critic Gao Ling, in a recently published essay on action and performance in China, mentions their resentment of the fine art establishment. He writes that the literal translation of the term 'fine arts' in Chinese can be the 'beautiful arts' (*meishu*), which indicates that the criterion of people's understanding of art is its "reflection of beauty or ugliness." Later, as fine arts education began to follow the example of teachings in the Soviet Union, it divided the fine arts into a few "simplified categories" including oil painting, sculpture, Chinese painting, printing, mural painting and folk art.[24] Against this concept of beauty and the strict division in simplified categories which remove art from its practice and into a field of mediated subjectivity, performance art "gave rise to an ongoing controversy and confusion about a series of issues – art works and art actions, art and not art, self-determination and social norms, art and the law."[25] Not only in China, but also in other parts of the world, performance art often coexists with a general movement towards an arts practice at the cutting edge of art scene. These movements all aim to challenge the dominant role of art institutions in the creation of categorizations and to restrict the discourses in which art can operate. By challenging the dominant categorizations and conventional discourses many artists in China during the 1980s further aimed at creating a new modern Chinese culture that incorporated a wide range of experimental practices. These included performances and experimental art exhibitions which no longer simply challenged the institutional framework (as in the

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[23] See also: Gao Minglu, "Conceptual Art with Anticonceptual Attitude: Mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong" in Farver et.al.,136-137

[24] See: Gao Ling, "Art is Action" in *Chinese Type Contemporary Art Magazine*, Vol. 4, Issue 5 (Formerly published Online at: http://www.chinese-art.com, discontinued in 2002)

[25] ibid.

case of Stars Group and Xiamen Dada), but now started to involve artists who completely abandoned the institutional framework altogether.

The role of performance in the new discourse of modern art in China

The M Art Group was formed in the midst of the '85 New Wave Movement and manifested a direct reaction against the exhibition *Full of Bumps and Holes*, which was organized from 22 November to 1 December 1986 in Shanghai by a group of 16 artists from Shanghai, including Ding Yi, Li Shan, and Yu Youhan. Following the exhibition the M Art Group made the following statement:

> Reject man-made production. Lay down the unmanned framework that lies in the eyes of the artist. Stop all the appearances of personality and arbitrary experiments that develop from man's abnormal performances. Put an end to all irrelevant wild thoughts that transcend society and the self. Correct all social ethics, contrary feelings of responsibility, and the twisted traitors of the mind and abnormal performances. Oppose styles that block life-styles. Reconsider ordinary discussions on life-styles, and take on a sacred, responsible feeling. Participate in society, participate in life, and become a regular person.[26]

From this statement it can clearly be seen that these artists advocated a new role for the visual arts in positioning themselves against both institutional and even non-institutional frameworks. These notions emerged in the 1980s and would develop in the 1990s. In the second half of the 1980s many artists had already entered into collaborations that produced challenging experimental art practices. Experimental art projects that involved only the artists together with small local audiences even emerged in the countryside. This is the case of *Country Project* in 1987, when a group of artists from Shanxi, led by Song Yonghong, moved to the country and worked and lived like the artists who had been sent down to the countryside by Mao Zedong during the Cultural Revolution. They would once again "work for the people and be educated by the people". While there they

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[26] Quoted from: Gao Minglu, *Zhongguo dandai yishu shi, 1985-1986*, 385-387

would produce all kinds of artworks and show them to the local villagers in open-air exhibitions **[ill. 3.5]**.[27]

At the same time artists throughout China started to stage performances in which they wrapped their entire bodies in cloth. Some of these performances were considered highly provocative and, in the following example, referred the body/*self* to issues of life and death. The performance in question was *Suicide Project* by Wei Guangqing with the assistance of the young art student, Ma Liuming, in Wuhan in September 1988. At the time Ma Liuming studied at the Oil Painting Department of the Hubei Academy of Fine Arts in the City of Wuhan, Hubei Province (Central China), but during the 1990s he became an internationally renowned artist, for his body art performances. In an interview in November 2001, the artist expressed the view that the experience he received from working with Wei Guangqing had a tremendous impact in his choice of body art performance as the medium for his work. Although he continued painting after his experience with Wei Guangqing, shortly after it he staged his own private performance in late 1988.[28]

For the performances in *Suicide Project* Wei Guangqing wrapped Ma Liuming in a white cloth and lay him on a white blanket with a red cross. He then performed different scenes of committing suicide. In one image we see the artist lying face up in a gallery, pushing a knife against his chest; in another he lies face down on a rail track.**[ill. 3.6]** The final installation saw Wei Guangqing himself sitting on a chair with a rope around his neck and two empty nooses hanging on his left side, still empty and waiting to be used by others to commit suicide. On the wall in the background are all the photographs taken of the previous suicide performances featuring the body of Ma Liuming. The entire project becomes more complex when we examine the catalogue, produced by Wei Guangqing, for the final installation work. It reveals that the full title of the project was *Personal Experience of the Simulated Suicide Project Relating to 'One'*. The document is an eight-page long statement in which the artist states how the concept surrounding

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[27] See: Gao Minglu, "Conceptual Art with Anticonceptual Attitude: Mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong" in Farver et.al., *Global conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s-1980s*, 136 and 221

[28] Following recorded interview with Ma Liuming in Beijing in 2001.

the number *one* is closely related to what he thinks is "the only true problem in philosophy: suicide." In the introduction Wei Guangqing further writes:

> *One* is just *one*. *One* is *a* single number, is a person, a man, a woman, is a life, is a death, is a manipulator, a manipulated, is a thinker, a practitioner, is a critic, a theatre actor, a painter, is a director, an actor, a make-up specialist, is a psycho, a psychologist, is a dreamer, an illusionist, a loner, is a superior, a subordinate, is a lover, a loser, a narcissist, a transvestite, a masturbator, is an aggressor, a victim, is a good person, a bad person, is ……In the end, what is it? *One* itself doesn't know either, or does it?. The author of *Suicide* doesn't know either and doesn't know if there is any person who knows, or does he? As for the person who wrote *Suicide*; does he in the end wants others to misread the *one*? Does he want people to see *one* as the beginning of art? In fact this is of no importance, for: *One* is just *one*.
>
> In this project all things, everything, etc., etc., etc.,

placed in relation to art criticism and theatrical performance. The text starts out with a series of opposites, such as 'a man' and 'a woman', and 'a good person' and 'a bad person,' but then breaks down, other listings include a group of strongly connected descriptors: 'a critic' is put side by side with 'a theatre actor' and 'a painter.' This is an interesting comment on the role of the painter in the field of arts and society in general. Through personal observations in China I have often found that there is a link between experimental painters and actors who have studied at one of the theatre schools. Between 1988 and 1989 the Chinese documentary filmmaker Wu Wenguang produced a documentary titled *Bumming in Beijing*, which featured interviews with visual artists who affiliated themsleves with writers and theatre producers.[32] Even in more recent times there are many art events that combine visual art, performance, and theatre.[33] In my experiences of working in China I have also encountered how artists not only have strong connections with leading art critics, such as Li Xianting, but that they also see part of their work as becoming art critics themselves. Therefore it is important to note how Wei Guangqing lists these supposedly separated fields of arts practice together.

The strong relationship between artists and art critics in the staging of performances can also be seen in the group work *The Last Supper* that was staged in Shanghai in December 1988. **[ill. 3.7]** The theme of the last meal of Jesus Christ had been chosen for the performance, and visually the work refers to Leonardo da Vinci's mural of *The Last Supper* dated 1498. In the performance the painters Li Shan, Sun Liang and Pei Jing, together with the installation artist Song Haidong, Zhou Changjiang and the art critics Li Xianting and Wu Liang, dressed themselves in light brown cloth and covered their heads with red and black hoods. The whole performance was staged in what looks like a cave, or at least an underground space. The walls and ceilings were

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[32] Wu Wenguang, *Liulang Beijing* (*Bumming in Beijing*), 1990, duration 70 minutes. For further reference on this documentary film, see: Wu Wenguang, *Liulang Beijing: Zuihou de mengxiang zhe* (*Bumming in Beijing: The Last Dreamer*) (Taipei: Wanxiang tushu gufen youxian gongsi, 1995)

[33] For example, in the annual exhibition-series *Transborder Languages* (*Yuejie Yuyan*) that is organized, since 2002 by Huang Rui (one of the former members of the Stars Group). In 2003, I acted one of the chief curators for this exhibition, which was held from 23 April to 1 May at the 798 Factory Space in Beijing's Northeast. as part of the 1st Dashanzi Inernational Art Festival. During the preparations for the exhibition, which started in January, Huang Rui insisted that we focussed the exhibition on establishing a

covered with large pieces of cloth and the scene is reminiscent of ritual procedures performed by some kind of secret society. A second act follows the initial performance, which shows the participating artists and art critics perform a makeshift traditional Chinese burial ritual for the dead.**[ill. 3.8]**

By late 1988 performance art had assumed a significant role in the nationwide, cutting edge art movement that emerged in the second half of the 1980s known by the term '85 New Wave Movement (*'85 xinchao yishu yundong*). This movement linked several artist groups across the country, many of whom challenged the conventional discourse on modern art in China. Then in August 1988 a group of forty artists, critics, editors and theoreticians gathered at a symposium in Zhuhai. They conducted a slide show of a selection of 342 pieces from a collection of 1100 works by artists from the '85 New Wave Movement. During the symposium it was decided to make preparations for a large overview exhibition of Chinese modern art in the 1980s, which would lead to the opening of the *China Modern Art Exhibition* (*Zhongguo Xiandai Meishuzhan*), also known by its alternative title in English used for the event: *China/Avant-Garde* exhibition.

From early 1989, the new discourse on modern Chinese art was increasingly focused on the Chinese Avant-garde Movement. This movement is often considered as a radical break with the entire past of artistic production, particularly in discussions outside China. However, many local critics started to link the more recent experimental artistic practices to those that appeared shortly after the May Fourth Movement of 1919 and that gave rise to the New Culture Movement in the 1920s. Nevertheless, the new discourse of modern Chinese art in the 1980s incorporated new fields of practice, in particular installation and performance. But these were not officially recognized as part of the official discourse of fine arts that was restricted to a select number of disciplines. Despite the fact that performance art had not gained an official status, it does provide a crucial role in the development of a new wave of modern art in China in the 1980s.

During the 1980s different types of performance art had brought art into the public

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strong relation between performance, installation, sound, and video art practices. For further reference, see the web-site for the festival, which also lists information on the 2nd edition in 2004: http://www.diaf.org

sphere, had reinterpreted the role of the artist as practitioner, and had helped artists address various issues related to their own physical and social existence through the direct use of the body/*self* as both the object and subject of experimental art.

Performance art thus became crucial for understanding the new discourse on modern, and contemporary art in China. It shows how artists were, and continue to be, able to assimilate, transform and transgress a range of artistic practices from China and abroad. If performance art is given proper attention in the examination of experimental art production in China over the last two decades of the twentieth century, it will demonstrate its key role in the identification of new positions and historical discourses on art and its interpretation. It can even enhance the understanding of "the artists as an actor in the production and dissemination of artworks," as John Clark argues.[34] For Clark identifying the role of the artist as actor allows art historians to collect a wide range of art historical materials, including details about works, records of interpretation, and biographical material about the artist. These materials can then be used by art historians to identify a wider range of positions and historical discourses of works and their interpretations. By extending this notion about the role of the artist as actor in the production and dissemination of artworks into the domain of art practice, and thus treating the artists first and foremost as practitioners, we can gain a better understanding of the role of self-representation in performance and experimental art in China. This is particularly relevant for work produced in the 1990s, when more and more artists started to position their works in relation to their own self existence in a rapidly changing social and physical environment, and to use their own past and present life experiences to create new discourses on visuality. These works show how artists were able to assimilate an existing range of discourses, and to transform a wide range of artistic references into new visual structures that placed great emphasis on behavioral action and the role of the body/*self* in arts practice. In addition, these artists transmitted their ideas around the country and later abroad, not only by staging performances, but also by registering their performances in photography and video. They began to use different channels for

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[34] Clark, *Modern Asian Art*, 15

distributing documentation of previous events and demonstrated how performance can be deferred (or re-mediated) into other forms.

Performance art at the 1989 'China Modern Art Exhibition'

The *China Modern Art Exhibition* (or *China/Avant-Garde* exhibition), which opened at the China Art Gallery on 5 February 1989, was one of the most important art events in China up to the present day. The chief curator for the exhibition was the art critic Gao Minglu.[35] The organizing committee further involved the participation of many leading critics at the time including Li Xianting, Fan Di'an, Fei Dawei, and Zhou Yan – all of whom were important in the actual planning of the exhibition and in dealing directly with the selection of the artists.[36] They would later be working together with curators of the China Art Gallery, and were also reporting to officials at the Municipal, - and the National- Artists Association (as was the case with all public exhibitions in China). However, those who had listed themselves in the official organizing committee would have been playing the most active part in setting up the entire event – including the way it was designed to become the first major overview of modern art in China that was led by local art critics, rather than by the state.

From an international perspective the exhibition marked a major turning point in the representation of developments in Chinese art as part of a world discourse on contemporary art. The exhibition also marked an increased international attention for contemporary Chinese art, particularly from Hangzhou and Beijing, where the two major art academies were located. In the five years before the opening of the exhibition several artists in these two cities had begun to receive a growing international interest in their

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[35] For a full report on the exhibition, see: Gao Minglu, "Fengkuangde 1989 – 'Zhongguo xiandai meishuzhan' shimo'"("Crazy 1989 – The Entire Story of the 'Chinese Modern Art Exhibition'") in *Qingxiang* (*Tendency Quarterly*), Number 12 (Taiwan: *Tendency* Publishers, 1999). This publication includes a copy of the official announcement for the exhibition that lists the names of all the members of the organizing committee. This announcement is dated on October 1988 and further contains a call for artists to submit their proposals, which was send out in November.

[36] At the time, Li Xianting was working as an editor for the *Zhongguo Meishu Bao* (*China Art Newspaper*), and the other three listed (Fan Di'an, Fei Dawei, and Zhou Yan) were all working at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing. The other organizers listed in the official announcement for the exhibition are: Gang Yang, Zhang Yaojun, Liu Dong, Liu Xiaochun, Zhang Zuying, Tang Qinghua, Yang Lihua, Wang Mingxian, and Sun Chang'an.

work, initially from international students and researchers who had moved to China for their studies. In Hangzhou, for example Hans van Dijk who was studying Chinese language at the time, was introduced to a group of artists who were producing experimental artwork that attracted his attention. They include first Zhang Peili and Geng Jianyi, but later also Ni Haifeng and Wu Shanzhuan. In 1986 the last two set up the group Red 70%, Black 25%, and White 5% (also known as the Red Humour Group). From 1986 until early 1990 Hans van Dijk remained in Hangzhou, but then moved to Beijing where he set up the New Amsterdam Art Consultancy (NAAC). Between 1993 and 1999 he organized numerous exhibitions and other activities involving the work of experimental artists in China. In 1999, together with the art critic Ai Weiwei and the Belgium collector Frank Uytterhagen, van Dijk founded the China Art Archives and Warehouse (CAAW) and the China Modern Art Foundation (CMAF). In April 2002 Hans van Dijk passed away, but his work of bringing experimental art in China to international attention is continued by the two remaining members of CAAW and CMAF.

In the late 1980s, the American scholar Julia Andrews, who at that time was studying in Beijing, became another key figure in bringing experimental art to the attention of the international art scene. She later brought it to the attention of other scholars interested in China, especially those at Ohio State University where Andrews is currently working (2005). Between 1987 and 1988 Andrews began working with the art critic and editor of *Meishu* (*Fine Arts*), Gao Minglu, to find out more about experimental art production in China. During those years, increasing interest in works by Chinese artists came from overseas businessmen and embassy personnel living in China, and several exhibitions of works by local artists were organized at different embassies and consulates in Beijing. These exhibitions opened up a new market for experimental artists in China, some of whom were now able to sell their works to foreigners. Therefore, by early 1989 there was already a growing international interest in new works by artists in China that were considered to be not only experimental, but were known in terms of a

Chinese avant-garde.[37] As mentioned earlier, this meant that the overseas discourse started to use a term that provided them with the notion that new developments in Chinese art linked to a universally applicable model of the avant-garde. The international market blissfully adapted this model that provided an environment in which Chinese art could be sold, as long as it involved works that moved against tradition and therefore in opposition to the official practices, considered outdated.

From a national perspective, the *China Modern Art Exhibition* in 1989 marked the culmination of a decade of new art practices related to a more extensive period in the development of modern art in China, starting in the 1920s. Chinese art critic Li Xianting formulated the notion that all new practices were considered to be modern, when he stated that the 1989 exhibition "led to a final playing out of modern art of the 1980s."[38] The discourse on modern art in China is essentially linked to cultural movements, stylistic discourses and social and political programs that took place throughout the twentieth century. These include the 1919 May 4th Movement, the Socialist Realism in the 1950s, the Cultural Revolution during the 1960s and 1970s, and finally the various movements that led to economic and institutional reforms during the late 1970s and 1980s. The year 1989 (just as the year 1979 and 1919) marked a key turning point for intellectuals in China, including those who were active in the field of modern art practice who, aside from the June fourth military crackdown had previously witnessed the cancellation of the *China Modern Art Exhibition*.[39]

The *China Modern Art Exhibition* was part of a long history of modern, artistic practices. Gao Minglu's opening speech for this historical event, published in the catalogue for the exhibition, speaks about the aims of the exhibition as the presentation of an overview of historically significant artworks made by Chinese artists between early 1985 and early 1989. In the final sentence of his speech, Gao Minglu remarks that

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[37] For further references on the rise of international interest in Chinese experimental art and the arrival of foreign artists salons in Beijing catering Chinese experimental artists and their works to an international crowd, see: Geremie Barmé (Bai Jieming), "Beijing de yang shalong" ("Beijing's Foreign Salons") in *Jiushi niandai zhoukan* (*Nineties Monthly*, March 1988), 94-95

[38] See: Li Xianting, "The Pluralistic Look of Chinese Contemporary Art Since the Mid-1980s" in Clark, *Chinese Art at The End of the Millennium*, 72-88

[39] Ibid., p.72

these artists had been working in a long tradition of Chinese modern art, rather than promoting the idea that they were the pioneers of modern art in China. The tradition began with a group of artists in the late 1910s and early 1920s who had taken the first steps in setting up a modern art movement following in the spirit of the May Fourth Movement in 1919.[40] This last point is of great importance for anyone who is interested in examining the events that led to both the February 1989 *China Modern Art Exhibition* and the student protest at Tiananmen Square (and protests in other Chinese cities) during the summer of 1989. For they were clearly part of a continuous movement by Chinese intellectuals in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s who commemorated people who advocated continuous social, cultural and even political modernization in various events for which the May Fourth Movement had become the leading symbol.

On May Fourth 1919 more than 3000 students from institutes in Beijing had gathered in Tiananmen Square to endorse a public manifesto denouncing the January 1919 World War I Treaty of Versailles. This had generally accepted Japan's occupation of parts of China's Eastern Province of Shandong. But rather than being seen as a spontaneous reaction on the part of a few thousand intellectuals, the May Fourth Movement was the climax of social and political awakening in China, that had been taking place since the mid-19th Century when parts of the country were invaded by foreign troups, following the first Opium War of 1839-1842. Its point was that China had to modernize itself forcefully to become a political and economic player on the world stage. In the years following the May Fourth Movement growing political awareness would lead several intellectuals to found the Chinese Communist Party in 1921. The New Culture Movement, which begun in 1917 by the Chinese writer Lu Xun, further gained support amongst many intellectuals in China after May 4th, 1919. To further understand the social and historical context surrounding the events surrounding

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[40] This can be found in the publication of the statement by Gao Minglu in the 1989 catalogue of the exhibition, *Zhongguo Xiandai Meishuzhan* (*Chinese Modern Art Exhibition*) - *China/ Avant-Garde* (Beijing: Zhongguo meishuguan, February 1989).

the February 1989 *China Modern Art Exhibition* and the student protest at Tiananmen it is also important to reiterate the influence of the six-part television series *Heshang*.[41]

The *China Modern Art Exhibition* presented the work of artists who in the previous five years had provided experimental art with a new approach. They employed new visual structures – combining painting with installation and performance art – that promoted a free and open discourse on modern Chinese art. The aim of the exhibition was: No more distinctions! No more distinctions between 'official' and 'unofficial' art, 'valuable' and 'invaluable' art, 'moral' and 'immoral' art, 'Chinese' and 'Western' art, or even 'traditional' and 'modern' art. The exhibition logo shows a red stop sign over a black U-turn arrow, and the accompanying slogan for the exhibition "No more U-turns", which meant that these artists wanted no more turning back to isolation, as during the previous Cultural Revolution.**[ill. 3.9]** Instead, artists and art critics should look ahead and produce a practice and discourse that would relate modern Chinese art to the rest of the world. The fact that the exhibition was held at the China Art Gallery further presented artists with an opportunity to attract a wider audience to their work – art critics and curators from abroad as well as well as Chinese citizens with an interest in modern art, and those who were attracted by the events surrounding the opening of the exhibition.

Aside from bringing together a large collection of works from the 1980s, the *China Modern Art Exhibition* was the first time that live performances were staged at a major national art museum in China. Initially the organizers had decided not to allow artists to stage performances in or around the gallery, with the main objection coming from within the organizational structures of the China Art Gallery. But even so some artists had sent in performance proposals as part of their applications in December 1988. For many of the artists who participated in the exhibition, and later for their colleagues who attended the opening, the performances and site-specific installations were the most important part of the whole event. It gave them the opportunity to confront each other and the audience in a direct way. The performances emphasized the role of the artist in

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[41] See: Bodman, "From History to Allegory to Art: A Personal Search for Interpretation" in Su Xiaokang and Wang Luxiang, *Deathsong of the River*, 1-61

presenting modern art, rather than on curators who merely selected previously produced artworks. Many artists who were active at the time now relate how, aside from seeing these performances and site-specific installations, the opening of the exhibition meant not much more than an opportunity to meet friends. They would have already seen many of the works on display when they were shown in events across the country. [42] These works were extensively discussed in various publications, including the *China Fine Arts Newspaper* (*Zhongguo Meishu Bao*), the *Jiangsu Pictorial* (*Jiangsu Huakan*), and in *Fine Arts* (*Meishu*). Many artists would have experienced the event differently than the general audience, for whom this would have been their first encounter with modern art of the 1980s.

The location for the *China Modern Art Exhibition* at the China Art Gallery enticed artists to submit proposals that deliberately jested with the site's cultural significance. This was clearly the case for a proposal by Huang Yongping, titled *Towing the China National Art Gallery Away*. Huang Yongping's original sketch for the work shows an old army truck standing in front of the gallery. The plan states how ropes were to be tied to the back of the truck and lead to two columns that makes up the front entrance of the gallery. The performance was planned for the opening of the exhibition and Huang Yongping suggested that he would start the truck and tow the entire building away, before audiences could catch a glimpse of the show.**[ill. 3.10]** It did not take long for the organizers to decide that this performance could not be allowed; not only because the act of towing the gallery away would have been ridiculed, but because it also added unwanted controversy to the event. Instead, Huang Yongping was invited to show the sketches that he had made next to a series of works produced earlier. One of these was the 1987 installation *"A History of Chinese Painting" and "A Concise History of Modern Painting" After Two Minutes in A Washing Machine, 1987.12.1*.**[ill. 3.11]** Before the opening Huang Yongping laid down some of the rope (intended for the performance) inside the gallery space. While Huang Yongping's performance was rejected, at least two were tolerated at the opening of the exhibition; a step taken by

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[42] Following comments made by several artists in recorded interviews that were conducted between 2001 and 2004, which have been listed in the Bibliography of this thesis.

some involved in the organizing committee that marked a significant challenge to the official declaration that no performance would be approved. This step to allow some performance and site-specific installation would have been supported by Gao Minglu, the chief curator of the show. Artists frequently remark that it was his idea to tolerate them. He is even said to have convinced other, more conservative members of the organizing committee to support his decision. [43] Gao Minglu might have felt strongly about offering these artists the opportunity to be more directly involved in the event, which many say they communicated in their proposals. Having some artists stage their performances at the opening, and allowing others to construct site-specific installations, would give visitors a chance to see how the role played by these practices in the recent development of modern art in China; it revealed the artists' desire to stage public collaborations throughout the 1980s.

It is important to consider the fact that many of those on the organizing committee (including Gao Minglu) had not been professionally trained as curators at the time of the exhibition. For them the task would have been overwhelming and a detailed report by Gao Minglu clearly shows how difficult it had been to reconcile those who were in charge of the venue for the exhibition to those who were in charge of the actual show. [44] It would have been difficult for them to manage all of the works in the exhibition; to create a balance between official policies that governed the public display of artworks and to generate an environment in which many young artists could freely express their ideas about art. This situation was particular complex since many artists deliberately wanted to challenge the institutional framework that had controlled artistic production for such a long time, while others had started to abandon this framework all together. Examining some of the available documentation of the *China Modern Art Exhibition* demonstrates that it essentially became a public art event, rather than a carefully curated exhibition. The organizing committee consisted mainly of critics who had gathered key players in the local art scene in a block to persuade the governing bodies in charge of the arts to stage a public exhibition at the most prestigious cultural institutions in China. The

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[43] Following statements made by Li Shan in Shanghai in 2001. Additional information was given to me in talks with the Gao Brothers (Gao Zhen and Gao Qiang) in Shanghai and Beijing in 2002 and 2003.

photographs and video taken of the final preparations for exhibition, just before the opening, show how the organizers worked closely with the artists in laying down a series of black banners on the ground in front of the gallery, bearing the logo of the exhibition. The logo promoted a free and open discourse of modern art in China (No more U-turns) and the collaborative act of covering the front lawn of the China Art Gallery would have been treated as a happening in itself. The critics then staged another, highly symbolic act, when they carried three billboards to the front gate. The billboards contained the logo for the exhibition and listed the different art journals that supported the exhibition including *Meishu* (*Fine Arts*), *Zhongguo Meishu Bao* (*China Fine Arts Newspaper*), and *Dushu* (*Interpretation*). Finally they all posed for the cameras in front of the billboards and joined their hands together up in the air after and exclaimed a series of victorious shouts: "*Hao!, Hao!, Hao!*" ("Good!, Good!, Good!").[45]

Overall, the opening of *China Modern Art Exhibition* presented an excellent overview of the different styles of performance developed over the previous years. By being open to such a large audience, artists who had decided to use performance as a medium were able to explore direct contacts between the artist, the artwork, and the recipients.[46] Yet their approaches to such interactions were quite different; some chose a conceptual approach, whereas others decided to adapt their performance to a comical style. Prior to the exhibition each participant received a notice listing the gallery space that they could conduct their work in. Artists who had been allowed to create site-specific installations or to stage live performances during the opening had been assigned a location in the gallery, but some of them decided not to use this space. One site-specific installation was √ (*Check*) by Yang Jun and Wang Fanshen. For their installation the artists had spent several hours registering people on one of the most popular streets in Beijing, Wangfujing (near the China Art Gallery). They had done so by placing three cameras at different angels on a busy intersection; the cameras were set to automatically take a black-and-white photograph every second. For the final

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[44] See: Gao Minglu, "Fengkuangde 1989 – 'Zhongguo xiandai meishuzhan' shimo'"
[45] As shown in a private video made of the exhibition opening by the Chinese art critic Wen Pulin. Some of these can also be found in the publication of Wen Pulin, ed., *Zhongguo Xingdong* (1999)
[46] The work by Wu Shanzhuan, Zhang Nian, and Li Shan are particularly important in this context.

installation they took an eight by two meter board and covered it with the photographs taken at the intersection and moved the piece from the campus of the Central Academy of Fine Arts (located at the back of Wangfujing) to the China Art Gallery. There Yang Jun and Wang Fanshen painted over sections of the photographs in black oil paint. They then covered the floor with ropes, red cards and some of the remaining pictures. Finally, they pasted a public notice board on top of the photographs on which two √-check symbols were painted in red.**[ill. 3.12].** At least one report on the work noted that the artists were attempting to refer to the work of Joseph Beuys and in particular to his concept of 'social sculptures.'[47] But whatever the veracity of the reference to Beuys, this work would have been one of the most provocative pieces at the exhibition; the notice board with the photographs referred to public notice boards that were used to identify and name criminals who were to be executed, the red √ (*Check*) drawn beside the name of those whose sentences had been carried out. These public notice boards were usually located at prominent locations in Beijing, including near China Art Gallery, and close to Wangfujing.[48] Next to the installation by Yang Jun and Wang Fanshen, many artists also mention how they were much inspired by the installation, *Midnight Mass (Lost Trial at the End of the Century)*, by the Gao Brothers (Gao Zhen and Gao Qiang). The work consisted of a giant sculpture of an androgynous figure made from large rubber balloons, rubber gloves, and blown-up condoms covering the ceiling. Between 1988 and 1989, the Gao Brothers had produced similar type of works, but the installation at the China Art Gallery was the largest of them all.**[ill.3.13]**

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[47] This reference to Beuys is made in a statement about the work by Huang Zhuan in: Lü Hong and Huang Zhuan, *Zhongguo Dangdai Meishu Tujian- 1979-1999*, 21. Artists in China were first introduced to Beuys in the second half of the 1980s, when several reproductions of his works and some artist statements were distributed in the local art circle. In conversations with some of these artists I was told that they were not entirely sure what to think of these works, as the information had been scarce; that is until 1991, when copies of a Chinese translation of a study on Joseph Beuys, by theTaiwanese artist Wu Mali, were distributed amongst artists working in China. In a conversation by email with Wu Mali, in 2004, I was told that the study she had translated was of the German art historian Heiner Stachelhaus (1987), which was also published in English translation in 1991. See: Heiner Stachelhaus, *Joseph Beuys*, translated from German by David Britt (New York, London, and Paris: Abbeville Press, 1991)

[48] These days one can still find one of these noticeboards next to the bus stop in front of the main entrance of the China Art Gallery, although nowadays it no longer contains lists of criminals to be excecuted; only pages from the daily newspaper.

During the opening of the exhibition at least eight performances were staged, two of which had been approved, but the other six never had prior approval – nor had the artists even consulted the organizers of the exhibition. All of the performances caused some degree of controversy, and the final performance of the day, by Tang Song and Xiao Lu, came totally unexpectedly and led to the abrupt closure of the exhibition. Some of the performances were done without major incidents. Such was the case of the work by Wang Deren, for which he had placed a paper figure on the floor of the gallery with drawn acupuncture needles covering the body, on which he had written the text: "The one who rises the sun? – 'Teaser' Wang Deren."**[ill. 3.14]** During the performance he asked members of the audience to leave their name-cards on the work. In another piece, the artist Wang Liang staged a spontaneous walk through the gallery, dressed in a ragged outfit that he had made for the event. The performance did not attract that much attention by the crowd, nor by the organizers, who by that time had started to keep a close eye on the performances. Immediately following the start of the exhibition the artist Wei Du, who had wrapped his body in white cloth, was escorted out of the gallery by Fan Di'an, one of the chief organizers. Fan Di'an had taken a particular interest in preventing artists from staging performances that would cause officials to file complaints and cause the exhibition to be cancelled. As he was escorted out of the China Art Gallery Wei Du was seen to pull himself away and shout: "I will leave by myself!".[49]

Just outside the main entrance of the gallery, Wu Shanzhuan had placed himself behind a self-made market stand and was selling shrimps to the visitors, under the title *Big Business*. For Wu Shanzhuan, the general concept of art in China was a rather peculiar subject, and the task of the artist working in a period of massive social and economic transition was ironic. He was particularly interested in how, in recent history, art and the work of artists was related to different movements in mass media: political propaganda using posters during the Cultural Revolution, and large advertising billboards that had sprung up in major cities in the late-1980s. Both were used to

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[49] The video of Wen Pulin made during the opening of the exhibition that is also mentioned earlier, shows documentation of this incident involving Wei Du and Fan' Di'an.

communicate with the masses and, at the same time, both used allegory. For Wu Shanzhuan allegory was crucial for producing socio-political satires. In many of his earlier works, Wu Shanzhuan produced humorous and witty slogans, often written in black and red paint on a white surface, in a style that can be traced back to the big character posters made by the Red Guards in the Cultural Revolution. In 1986, together with six fellow students at the Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts in Hangzhou, he had set up the 70% Red, 25% Black, and 5% White Group. Each of the color percentages in the title referred to the percentages of color to be used in their work. These percentages were based on extensive research of propaganda posters by Wu Shanzhuan, and he had attempted to produce an ideal color combination to attract popular attention.[50] From 1986, Wu Shanzhuan started to produce a series of paintings titled *Red Humour International*. In this series he used the same Chinese characters as he had in his early works, but this time made many of them unreadable. A example of this is his 1986 installation *A Certain Number of Natural Paragraphs in the Second Red-Character Chapter of a Novel*.**[ill. 3.15]** The installation consists of a square room with the walls, ground and ceiling all papered by a variety of advertisement posters that were painted over with often senseless slogans.

In 1989 Wu Shanzhuan began to treat his art as though he were an entrepreneur, and looked for different ways to sell commodities which could be marketed by providing them with the title "Art". Therefore, the title "Art" could be given to shrimps and sold as artworks during the opening of a large exhibition, such as the *China Modern Art Exhibition*. The selection of fresh shrimps to sell during this performance might have been deliberate. The shrimps produced an 'ugly' smell and were thus a clear statement about the idea that art should be 'beautiful'. Several people who attended the opening of the exhibition were appalled by the smell and complained to the organizers that it disturbed their encounters with modern art. In particular, the director of the art gallery seems to have strongly objected to the artist continuing his performance.[51] Shortly after,

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[50] This was mentioned to me in an unrecorded conversation with one of the other members of the group, Ni Haifeng, who is currently living and working in Amsterdam.

[51] Following a recorded interview with the Gao Brothers (Gao Zhen and Gao Qiang) in Shanghai in 2002 in which the artists outlined some of their experiences during the opening of the exhibition.

Wu Shanzhuan was ordered by the police to shut down his stand. According to the official statement it was because he did not possess an official independent entrepreneur license. Following this incident, Wu Shanzhuan placed a sign on the stand on which he wrote: "Closed one day for stocktaking, 89.2.5".**[ill. 3.16]**

Inside the China Art Gallery Gu Xiong staged a theatrical performance, entitled *Interior View - Fence Wall*.[52] The performance was set against a hand-made stage consisting of a few floorboards covering a small section of the gallery floor. Seven paper banners were hung on the wall in a corner of the gallery space. On these floorboards and paper banners Gu Xiong used acrylic to paint a pattern of chicken wire that simulated a large fence wall. Towards the center banner, the wire pattern had been torn, simulating a cut in the fence from which an escape could be effected. During the performance Gu Xiong stood in front of the fenced wall dressed in a *Mao suit*, (*Zhongshan zhuang* in Chinese). His face was painted in pantomime style with white with black paint dots around his eyes and lips, and in the performance he used a spotlight to follow him along the fence, like the tower light of a prison complex. In one of the images of the performance the artist is seen standing with his back to the fence wall and both hands behind his head, as if giving himself up after a failed escape.**[ill. 3.17]**

Stylistically, in the combination of simple but effective stage design, *Interior View - Fence Wall* refers to theatrical performances by the American artist Robert Rauschenberg who, four years before, had presented his large retrospective exhibition at the China Art Gallery in Beijing. As we saw in Chapter 2, Rauschenberg's exhibition had an enormous impact on Chinese artists at the time, and documents on his earlier work had been distributed in China after 1985. Clearly, a detailed examination of the Rauschenberg exhibition and its impact on artists and art critics in China has to be made, but it moves beyond the scope of this dissertation. Many artists do mention this exhibition, and according to at least one, those who had visited the exhibition did not know what to do in their own work for some months. The felt they "lacked the skill to

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[52] Next to the performance *Washing Feet*, these were the only two performances that had been prepared for the exhibition and received some form of approval by the organizers.

freely work with a wide range of materials, such as Rauschenberg."[53] The reference to pantomime by Gu Xiong could have come from many sources, including European. However, the contemporary use of pantomime style combined with body movements, painting, and installation inside a gallery space seems to contain a strong reference to Rauschenberg. Gu Xiong nevertheless managed to transform his performance into a new set of visual structures, and used the fence wall as a symbol for the way he felt trapped in producing experimental works. In addition, the small tear in the fence wall would have been a symbol for the way China had started to open up to the outside world in the previous decade. His performance at the China Art Gallery was therefore well received by the artists attending the exhibition.

The performance *Hatching Eggs* by Zhang Nian was also considered by many to be a crucial event in the opening of the exhibition. In the work, Zhang Nian sat on a bed made of rice and straw that he had covered with approximately two-dozen chicken eggs. In front of him the artist had placed some photographs and a white banner on which he had repeatedly written the slogan "awaiting" (*dengdai*). He also wore a large rain poncho made out of paper on which he had written: "During the course of hatching eggs, refuse to argue and avoid disturbing the next decade". According to one report, the performance revealed references to Dada, which had been popular among artists in China in the 1980s. The report pays special attention to the way in which the artist was "willfully challenging tradition and, at the same time, had a professional and taunting attitude in responding to theories of abstraction during the 1980s."[54] In a photograph taken of the performance, Zhang Nian is seen in conversation with Gao Minglu and Fan Di'an, who are trying to persuade him to stop his performance, after they had received complaints about the work, and in particular about how the artist used hatching eggs as a

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[53] Following a series of unrecorded conversations with Guo Jian (who now lives and works in Sydney) between 2001 and 2003. During the second half of the 1980s Guo Jian studied painting in Beijing and he recalled how many of his classmates were so impressed by the work of Rauschenberg that "they decided to give up painting all together", and felt that "they would never be able to produce such good works as were made by Rauschenberg."

[54] In: Lü Hong and Huang Zhuan, *Zhongguo Dangdai Meishu Tujian- 1979-1999*, 23

metaphor for "China's modernization process."[55] **[ill. 3.18]** His work was thus considered to be a provocative piece.

Another performance considered provocative was *Washing Feet* by Li Shan. **[ill. 3.19]** Li Shan had become a well-established painter and during the 1990s became internationally known for his pop-ish portraits of Mao Zedong. At the time of his performance for the *China Modern Art Exhibition* he was working as a teacher in Shanghai and had conducted some early performances with a group of local artists and critics, including *The Last Supper* (December 1988) mentioned earlier. In *Washing Feet*, Li Shan was dressed in a red winter clothes and wore a red woolen hat. He had seated himself on a fold-up chair inside the gallery and was washing his feet in a large washtub. Beneath his jacket he wore a white T-shirt on which he had printed black and white photographs of the President Ronald Reagan. Reagan's portrait was also printed on the inside of his slippers and at the bottom of the tub he had painted a large image of Reagan facing upwards. Not only was the performance confrontational because of its use of images of Reagan, but because Li Shan was washing his feet in public. Washing one's feet is usually considered to be a very private custom by the Chinese who, after a day at work, wash their feet in the privacy of their home. During the performance Li Shan invited the audience to wash their feet in public and to share the same tub as the artist. All of this was seen as a witty and taunting gesture on the part of the artist.[56]

Within less than two hours of the exhibition's opening Xiao Lu, together with Tang Song, staged a performance action that was totally unexpected; it was because of its violent character that the 1989 *China Modern Art Exhibition* would be closed. In preparation for the exhibition Xiao Lu had created a major installation inside one of the gallery spaces on the ground floor, entitled *Dialogue*. **[ill. 3.20]** The installation consisted of two telephone booths placed against the far wall of the hall. Inside each of booths was a fully dressed mannequin holding the receiver. Between the telephone booths a large mirror had been placed against the wall with a red cross painted over it. In front of the mirror the artists placed a white plinth with a red telephone on top of it, with the receiver

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[55] Following an unrecorded conversation with the artist in Beijing in 2001. These days Zhang Nian is still making works with eggs, but now they have been used for installations that feature fried eggs.

off the hook, hanging over the edge. The telephone in the middle was similar to a model found at street stalls and tobacconists in Beijing for public use; official telephone booths, like those in the installation, were often hard to find. Finally, the artists covered section of the floor with concrete street slabs that recreated the pavement on a Beijing street. Not long after the opening of the exhibition Xiao Lu took a pistol from her pocket and fired two shots at the installation, both of which hit the large mirror between the telephone booths.**[ills. 3.21]** This incident caused massive disturbance and the artists were quickly arrested by security officials. They were then handed over to the police, who escorted them out of the gallery.**[ill. 3.22]**

During the entire event Tang Song remained smiling and was evidently unaware of the serious consequences of Xiao Lu's action. Yet the consequences were profound, both for the reputation of the artists, and for the fact that the performance action would lead to the closure of the entire exhibition so soon after the opening. A further consequence was that performance art had earned a bad reputation because of their action, adding to the already negative responses coming on top of existing controversies about the practice. Clearly the incident must be seen as a spontaneously undertaken action by two young artists seeking attention. Tang Song and Xiao Lu were working in an artistic environment that had become increasingly competitive, and some artists were resorting to provocative actions to prove themselves to other artists.

The late 1980s sees the development of artists working in close communities, particularly in Beijing. One such coterie was located in a small suburban area, near the Old Summer Palace in the Northwest of the city, Yuanmingyuan. Here personal attitude was of great importance for individual artists, and especially for those who wanted to stand out from their older colleagues. The late 1980s artists started to separate themselves from the institutional framework, which had previously dominated education and job allocations within the arts. Job allocation programs for graduates had been gradually abolished between 1987 and 1989, and artists developed new markets for their work in catering for foreigners living in Beijing – many of whom had started to collect experimental art from local artists.

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[56] For further reference, see: Lü Peng and Yi Dan, *Zhongguo xiandai yishushi - 1979-1989*, 339

Artists adapted to the harsh environment of the outskirts of the city in areas that offered cheap accommodation but were dangerous in that they attracted petty criminals from the regions. This explains some of the violent images seen in many of the paintings by artists who lived in the village near Yuanmingyuan. An example is the work of Yang Shaobin – whose paintings feature images of violence – often in the form of two figures in a fight.**[ill. 3.23]** In January 2000, whilst visiting Yang Shaobin's studio, I saw a series of photographs that showed him involved in a friendly fight with a friend in a park near the artists' village. One photograph shows the artist being held in a strangle hold – and it features in many of his paintings of this period. Another example of a playful reference to violence can be seen in the work of Guo Jian, who is currently living and working in Sydney. Since the 1990s he has produced several paintings of the artist posing as a soldier – a reference to his time in the People's Liberation Army in the late 1970s when he was stationed in Yunnan (near the Vietnam border).**[ill. 3.24]**[57]

Tang Song and Xiao Lu, who also lived near Yuanmingyuan, came from high ranking families of government officials and military officers. Their backgrounds would not have helped them much in gaining respect from their fellow artists, many of whom came from less favorable circumastances.[58] It is likely that Xiao Lu, and probably Tang Song had used the *China Modern Art Exhibition* to prove themselves as independent artists, and what better way to attract attention than by firing shots at their own installation.[59] The two young artists tried to demonstrate their independence by an

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[57] In an unrecorded conversation with Guo Jian in Sydney, I was told that many small-time criminals were living in the same area as the artists, and that this situtation led them to become much accustomed to seeing violence around them. Some artists who lived at the village during the time have also mentioned that the bald-headed figures, which are often featured in paintings, particularly by Fang Lijun (who also lived near Yuanmingyuan), also make reference to these criminals; those who returned from prison always had their heads shaven.

[58] In particular one can think of Xiao Fei, the father of Xiao Lu, who is a Sovjet trained oil painter and former head of the *Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts* (*China Art Academy*) in Hangzhou.

[59] Xiao Lu has recently argued that Tang Song in fact had nothing to do with the shooting incident. In April 2004, at the exhibition *Transborder Language: Volume Control* that I co-curated with Huang Rui and Dai Guangyu, Xiao Lu produced a re-enactment of the *Dialogue* installation. In a performance that accompanied the piece she cut of pieces of her hair and gave audiences a document in which she stated that she had planned the entire shooting incident entirely by herself; Tang Song was merely caught in the act. She also blamed some of the organizers at the event, including art critics Li Xianting and Gao Minglu, to deliberabetly misread the event as being a joined action. In preperation of her work she wrote a letter to

irresponsible act, without having thought about the consequences. Yet, as many will now know, this rebellious act had grave consequences for the future of performance art in China and the way became perceived as an act against proper public conduct.

Shattered discourses of performance art in China

After Xiao Lu had fired a gun at the installation *Dialogue*, and she and Tang Song were arrested, the *China Modern Art Exhibition* was shut down by the officials of the China Art Gallery. In the three hours that the exhibition was open to the public, performances had caused controversy amongst the audiences, and the organizers found themselves faced with numerous dilemmas on whether to allow some of the performance artists to continue their work. Confronted by the shooting incident, it was clear that their hopes of organizing an exhibition featuring different forms of new artistic practices (including carefully coordinated performances) were shattered.

After the enforced closure of the exhibition the organizers gathered together to discuss the incident and to come up with a plan to convince officials at the museum to re-open the exhibition. By then the latter had issued a fine to the main sponsor of the exhibition, known as the Dayi Art Company, which had supported the exhibition through donations by the critics who had organized it, and by the participating artists themselves. In paying the fine, each of the organizers had to sign a statement recording their responsibility in "breaching the official exhibition contract with the China Art Gallery". It also stated that they would not be allowed to organize any public art event at the gallery for a period of two years. The organizers finally succeeded in having the exhibition reopened to the public on 10 February – after they paid the fine and agreed to sign the statement. On the day after the reopening, the Central Academy of Fine Arts organized a forum aimed to clarify the position of the organizers of the exhibition, several of whom worked at the academy: "My Concept of Art". In the forum there were heated discussions on performance art and debates about works in the exhibition and, in particular, site-specific installations and paintings with political references. The latter

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tehse critics, asking them to respond on her accustations. Gao Minglu was the only one who responded and stated in a letter to Xiao Lu that he now agreed that she should be noted as the only one involved.

had been provoked by a range of paintings depicting images of Mao Zedong, including by Wang Guangyi who, during the 1990s would become known for his role in the Political Pop movement.[60]

The day after a second forum on modern art had been held at the China Art Gallery on 14 February, several institutions (including the gallery itself, the Public Security Bureau and the Doncheng District Bureau) received bomb threats made from newspaper clippings that went something like: "Shut down the exhibition immediately, or bombs will go off inside the China Art Gallery".[61] Following the threats the exhibition was immediately re-closed, and on 17 February the entire event was cancelled for good. Several artists later stated that towards the end of February, they were invited to a bar in Beijing to discuss the closures of the exhibition. But when they arrived they found themselves caught up in discussions about political change in China, led by several prominent intellectuals. Towards the end of the discussion they were asked to sign a petition which contained some general statements about democracy and a demand for the release of Wei Jingsheng (who had been in imprisoned since 1979). While not all of the artists present at the meeting signed the petition, some did and they are still confronted about it by officials.[62] Just two months after the *China Modern Art Exhibition* was cancelled, on 15 April 1989, students were to congregate at Tiananmen Square following the suspicious death of Hu Yaobang in Beijing on the same day. These moves were to lead to large protests at the Square culminating in the 4 June by the military crackdown.

Following the events that unfolded during and after the *China Modern Art Exhibition*, performance art was seen as a highly controversial practice. Nevertheless, an public discussion on performance continued to take place, even after the shooting

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[60] The Political Pop movement was a term introduced in 1992 to describe artists who used pop-ish styles and techniques in their work, as will be discussed later in this thesis.

[61] Following a series of recorded and unrecorded conversations with several of the artists and critics in the exhibition, between 2000 and 2004, including with the Gao Brothers, Song Yonghong, Song Dong, and Gu Dexin. and with Li Xianting.

[62] Some artists have disclosed privately that they cannot get a passport to travel overseas because of signing the petition in 1989. They further explain how, at the time, they did not know of the political contents, as they had not taken an effort in reading the petition; they thought it only referred to the cancellation of the *China Modern Art Exhibition*.

incident in 1989. But these discussions demonstrate that the discourse on performance art in China had been shattered, and continues to be so.

In concluding this history of performance art of the 1980s it is important to turn to a discussion between Fan Di'an and Hou Hanru published in *Meishu* (*Fine Arts*) in July 1989.[63] In their discussion the speakers attempt to establish a much-needed platform for a dialogue about performance art. In his opening remark Fan Di'an observes that "'Performance art' is a very difficult topic to talk about" and cites some common critiques of it.[64] Both Fan Di'an and Hou Hanru briefly introduce a range of performances and relate them to historical discourses and stylistic categories and to the arrival of conceptual art in China (idea art – *sixiang yishu*). According to them, conceptual art arrived with Joseph Beuys, whose work was introduced during the late 1980s.[65] After a brief debate, Fan Di'an concludes that the "fear and horror surrounding many performances" is experienced by "people who lack understanding of the conceptual mechanisms in performance art."[66]

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[63] Fan Di'an and Hou Hanru. "Yan shen yu shanbian - Guanyu xingwei yishu de duihua" ("Elongation and Evolution - A Dialogue About Performance Art") in *Meishu* (*Fine Arts*) 1989.7 (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe), 14-17

[64] Ibid., 14

[65] Fan Di'an does not mention the exact year in which Joseph Beuys was introduced in China. As mentioned earlier, artists often describe that they first saw some documents on Beuys during the second half of the 1980s. Most likely, early materials on Beuys would have been introduced around 1984. One possibility is that they came from the painter Ma Lu, who had studied in Hamburg between 1982 and 1984, and would have possibly brought back catalogues on Beuys on his return to China. Another possibility is that artists heard about Joseph Beuys from Huang Rui, after he moved to Tokyo in 1984. In that same year Beuys had visited Japan where he talked about his work. His visit was discussed amongst many artists, including Huang Rui as he related to me in an unrecorded conversation in 2005. In this conversation he also told me that during the time of the Stars Group, none of the artists had heard of Beuys.

[66] Fan Di'an and Hou Hanru. "Yan shen yu shanbian - Guanyu xingwei yishu de duihua" ("Elongation and Evolution - A Dialogue About Performance Art") in *Meishu* (*Fine Arts*) 1989.7 (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe), 17

CHAPTER 4

PERFORMANCE AND THE ROLE OF THE MEDIATED SUBJECT IN ART, 1990-2000

> 24. *L'art pour l'art* [art for art's sake]. – The battle against purpose in art is always a battle against the *moralizing* tendency in art, against art's subordination to morality. *L'art pour l'art* means, "to hell with morality!" – But even this hostility still betrays the overpowering force of prejudice. If we exclude the purpose of moral preaching and improving humanity from art, it by no means follows that art in general is purposeless, aimless, meaningless, in short, *l'art pour l'art* – a worm that bites its own tail. "Better no purpose at all than a moral purpose!" – so speaks mere passion. A psychologist asks, in contrast: what does all art do? Doesn't it praise? Doesn't it enoble? Doesn't it select? Doesn't promote? In all of this, it *strengthens* or certain valuations ... Is this just a side effect? An accident? Something in which the instinct of the artist plays no part? Or isn't it, instead, the prerequisite for the artist's *capabilities* ...? Is the artist's most basic instinct directed at art, or instead at the meaning of art, at *life*? At *something desirable in life*? – Art is the great stimulant to life: how could one understand it as purposeless, as aimless, as *l'art pour l'art*?
>
> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols,* 1888

Performance beyond action

The 1989 *China Modern Art Exhibition* presented an overview of the many experimental trends in art and performance of the decade before. It now seems rather unfortunate that Tang Song and Xiao Lu's 'performance' overshadowed the entire *China Modern Art Exhibition*, and continues to be used as an example of why performance art remains

highly controversial. Controversy may indeed form an integral part of performance art, particularly in those performances that focus on the behavioral aspect of the body in public action. Without controversy many performances would not have received any attention. Artists wish to receive some kind of reaction from an audience when conducting a performance. Often these responses come from a direct interaction between the artist and audience, who all become aware of the performative action in the work. Then again, as with any behavioral action, artists have to carefully measure the entire process of the work, both within the time span of doing the actual performance and establishing an appropriate context.

In tracing some of the historical discourses on performance in reference to theatrical performances, I have noticed how often the latter function as a form of entertainment in which the performer stages a series of carefully planned events that make use of dramaturgy and directed performance in front of an audience. The audience thus becomes part of the show, through the careful positioning of space, time and context of the performance; these all lead to a set of sensory, artistic, and symbolic responses. These are important observations for the discussion on the impact of live performance on the audience and the controversies that arise when communicative responses only take place on the sensory level. In performances that involve the staging of a spontaneous action, without no preparation, communicative response may be limited to the sensory level. Highly controversial performances often lead to reactions of shock, anger, and fear. The sensory level of communicative responses is difficult to generalize because it operates at the level of sensibilities, which can be different for each individual. Whereas the communicative responses at the artistic and symbolic levels are much more encoded and therefore are able to draw a wide range of perceptions together. They often form the basis on which people accumulate information about the performance, connecting the performance to a particular set of coded references.

In theatre it is easier to identify the different contexts for the performance. In studies on theatre three basic contexts have so far been identified: the *conventional*, the *structural*, and the *conceptual*. Each relate to established traditions, organizations, and ideologies. Even more importantly, theatre has been given a *cultural* context and a so-

called *life world* context, both of which constitute the mutual dependence of theatre with other art forms, and with culture in general. Identifying these different contexts has clearly led to a better understanding of theatre.[1] The problem with performance art in general and performance art in China in particular is that not many people have identified the different contexts in which it operates. Here I aim to share some preliminary observations on performance art in China during the period of the 1990s. I will focus on performances which move from the artist staging a public action to artists exploring the body/*self* and the body/*flesh* in their work.

After the February 1989 exhibition at the China Art Gallery in Beijing was cancelled, several artists decided to leave China and moved to Europe, North America, Australia, and Japan, similar to the way in artists of the Stars Group had left China in the early 1980s. But this time the artists were even more keen to find what they felt would offer more artistic freedom and furnish a better infrastructure of private galleries and state sponsored modern art institutes. Although some of the artists who remained, took part in the demonstrations at Tiananmen in 1989, many in fact stayed in their studios, working unobtrusively, but unable to exhibit their works until 1992 at the earliest. All publications favoring these artists and their work were banned or rectified, and editors of prominent art journals such as Li Xianting, managing editor of *Meishu bao* (*Fine Arts Newspaper*) and Gao Minglu of the *Fine Art Magazine* (*Meishu*) were discharged in 1989 and 1990 respectively.

By 1991 it looked like any widespread dissemination and reception of experimental art in China had ceased forever. But in 1992 young artists began to produce new works and several small-scale exhibitions and group collaborations were again being organized in different parts of China. One of the people who instigated these developments was Li Xianting who again acted as a mentor to many artists. Two large exhibitions were also organized to take place in Hong Kong and Berlin in 1993; these led to renewed interest in the work of Chinese artists by audiences outside the PRC and for the first time the catalogues of these two exhibitions included articles by Chinese art critics and their western counterparts.

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[1] See: Sauter, *The Theatrical Event*, 6-11

Several artists and in particular Xu Bing managed to produce some large projects in China before leaving for abroad. Born in Chongqing, Sichuan Province, Xu Bing studied at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing where he graduated in 1987. Between 1988 and 1989 he taught at the academy and in 1988 he completed the first version of one of the most well known installations in the history of experimental art in post-Mao China, *A Mirror to Analyze the World* (later renamed *Book From the Sky*).**[ill. 4.1]** The installation consisted of 300 square meters of rice paper sheets printed with around 1200-1250 altered and 'meaningless' wood-block characters that the artist had carved out in two sizes (small and large) over several months. It was first shown in October 1988 at a solo exhibition that coincided with another solo-exhibition of work by Lü Shenzhong, both of which were held at the China Art Gallery in Beijing. It was again shown at the *China Modern Art Exhibition* in 1989 where it covered the walls and ceiling of a main exhibition hall – combined with a small set of four books that were printed with the same 'meaningless' characters which were displayed on tables that occupied the central section of the floor. The final version of the installation was completed in 1991 and supposedly contained 100 book copies.[2]

Shortly before moving to live and work in New York, between 18 May and 10 June 1990, Xu Bing completed his second large installation. Under the title *Ghosts Pounding the Wall* Xu Bing, with seven art students and eight local farmers, spent more than three weeks making a mono-print of 150 meters section of the Great Wall, just north of Beijing.**[ill. 4.2]** When the final touches had been completed, they had used 1300 sheets of rice paper to construct a 1500m² installation.**[ill. 4.3]** Photographs taken of the installation in its making indicate that the work must be seen first and foremost as a performance piece, as a highly conceptualized performance. It was the process of creating the work itself that was important for Xu Bing. In particular, the transition from an archaic three dimensional man-made wall (a national symbol) into two-dimensional rubbing using classic Chinese techniques, and then the transition into an object reconstructed as a three-dimensional contemporary art installation. By bringing

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[2] I am grateful to Britta Erickson for providing me with some of the specific details on the first and second version of this work by Xu Bing.

something like the Great Wall into an exhibition space and transforming into something new, he was able to startle the audience with a strong and emotional experience. Art's power to transform is thus related to a society in transition; its power derived from the manipulation of symbol and context in a conceptual process.[3]

Initial drafts for the installation had been made as early as 1987 when Xu Bing took some sample rubbings of the Great Wall that were installed publicly as *The Great Wall Alignment*.**[ill. 4.4]** The Great Wall also attracted the attention of other artists from both China and abroad during the late 1980s. In 30 March 1988 the performance artists Marina Abramovic and Ulay began walking along the Great Wall, one from the coast of the Yellow sea in the East and one from the Gobi desert in the West of China. Plans for the walk were made in the early 1980s and, having finally secured funds and permission from Chinese officials, the artists were to spend up to three months of walking to meet halfway at a place called Erlang Shan, where they would get married. Having started the walk from either end, the artists called the whole thing off and never completed their trip and cancelled their marriage (divorced in advance, as it were). The performance was covered by a Chinese and foreign media reports, but few artists were aware of the event at the time. As mentioned earlier, Chinese artists were inspired by the broadcast of *Heshang* (*River Elegy*) including in May 1988, when the artists of the 21st Century Group staged their second overall performance at the Great Wall. During the 1990s Chinese artists continued to stage performances at national landmarks in China, in particular the Great Wall. One of these artists was Cai Guoqiang who, from 1981 until 1985, had studied at the Shanghai Theatre Institute. Shortly after graduating he became interested in the five elements of fire, water, iron, wood and earth, and began producing a large group of paintings which contained traces of gunpowder that the artist had set on fire as part of a performance at the opening of an exhibition. In one of these paintings, *Self Portrait* (1985), layers of blue, orange, and black oil paint are topped by darkened traces of burned gunpowder, creating a unique abstraction of the surface in shape and

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[3] These comments follow a letter written by Xu Bing in December 1990, which is published under the title "Analyze and Observe" in: Yin Jinan, ed. *Duzi qiaomen: Jinguan Zhongguo dangdai zhuliu yishu (Knocking at the Door Alone: A Close Look at the Mainstreams of Chinese Contemporary Art)* (Beijing: Shenghuo, Dushu. Xinzhi Sanlian shudian, 1994), 86-91

material. The artist in this work was exploring the theme of creation versus destruction.**[ill. 4.5]** After 1987, when Cai Guoqiang had moved to Japan, he produced a series of sketches for real-time and site-specific art projects, in which he would use large quantities of gunpowder and other inflammable materials. The first of these large projects was performed at the exhibition *Chine Demain pour Hier*, in the southern French town of Pourrières. For this project, *Project for Extraterrestrials, No. 3 – Meteorite Craters* (1990), the artist filled some huge craters dug into the landscape with gunpowder; he then ignited them at the opening of the exhibition.**[ill. 4.6]** In the 1990s Cai Guoqiang continued to stage his 'extraterrestrial' projects at locations around the world. In 1993, in Gansu Province (North-West China) he ignited a stretch of gunpowder that was laid out over 10 kilometers from the last part of the Great Wall, under the title *Project for Extraterrestrials, No. 10 – Project to Extend the Great Wall of China by 10.000 meters*.**[ill. 4.7]**

The same year, Wang Fasheng staged another performance at the Great Wall of China, just north of Beijing, for which he covered a huge section of the wall with newspapers, under the title *Newspapers – Advertisement* **[ill. 4.8]**. Other artists staged further performances in small villages at the countryside, including the performance *Cycle – Planting* by Wang Jianwei, for which the artist spent a year at a small village in Sichuan Province (West China) following the 'cycle' of farming **[ill. 4.9]**. In another village in Shanxi Province several young artists, including Song Yongping, Wang Yazhong and Li Jianwei among others, together with more than 20 villagers, produced a series of paintings and video performances, for a project that had started in August 1992.[4]

As we saw earlier, in the late 1980s a group of artists decided to reside in a rural area in the north-west of Beijing near the ruins of the former Qing dynasty Summer Palace Yuanmingyuan, which had been looted by British and French troops following the Boxer Uprising in late 1898. When some of the artists in the village started to leave to live and work abroad – under pressure of local police officials – the dynamics in the village slowly collapsed and the village was abandoned in 1993. Many of the artists who

remained in China moved to the city of Tongxian and to the rural area of Songzhuang, 40 kilometers east of Beijing. Around the same time another, smaller, group of artists settled themselves into a suburb east of the city of Beijing, in an area that would later become known as the East Village. There they conducted a significant set of performances that marked the starting point of on-going experiments by artists using their own body as both the object and subject of their work.

Performance, body, and experimental art production in China during the 1990's

Initiated by Ma Liuming, Zhang Huan, and Zhu Ming the body art performances at the East Village followed the growing interest by experimental artists who swapped 'arts for arts sake' for new types of aggressive, embodied practices. In recent years these performances have often been propagated through sensitive photographs taken of the live events, particularly those by Rong Rong – a self-taught photographer who also lived at the village.[5] When treated as performances, however, these works aimed to explore ever more aggressive means of confronting the cognoscenti; they are made in the context of a delayed modern society which is itself in a state of shock. In a period of rapid economic transition, a nation filled with patriarchal values and central party ideologies is suddenly confronted by a consumer society in which individual choices of life-style is accessible to a small but growing number of people. Others are left traumatized by their sudden loss of secure social positions, and struggle to construct new identities themselves. Artists started to use the body in direct reference to the *self* more than ever before. Eventually the viewer was confronted with the physical body turned corpse (or *cadaver*), leaving the self unidentified. With the self in danger of becoming nobody, or rather *no*-body, the body becomes abject to *it*-self. Abject not just as the denial of

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[4] The project also followed an earlier event organized by Song Yongping at the countryside in 1987.
[5] Particularly in: Wu Hung, *Rong Rong's East Village* (New York: Chambers Art Gallery, 2003). A good alternative source on the performances by members of the art village can be found in Qian Zhijian, "Performing Bodies: Zhang Huan, Ma Liuming, and Performance Art in China" in *Art Journal*, Vol.58, No.2 (Summer 1999)

morality, but the disturbance of identity, of the system, of order, of rule and law, all of which suddenly deal with the self.[6]

Between September and October 1993, the London-based artists Gilbert and George paid a visit to Beijing to coincide with the start of the *Gilbert & George Visiting China Exhibition* at the China Art Gallery. [7] By early October, they were invited on a trip to the East Village artists' community. They were received by the artists who took them on a tour past their studios, hoping that they would receive a response on their works from these two highly acclaimed guests. At that time, the East Village artists were struggling to come up with new ways to express their art, but were still trapped in the medium of painting.**[ill. 4.10]** Ma Liuming recalls in an interview how he, together with other artists in the village, felt "frustrated when they could not get a response from of Gilbert and George on their works: perhaps they did not appreciate it, or were unable to understand its artistic context."[8] In a final reaction, Ma Liuming suddenly took of his shirt and started a performance that he titled *Dialogue with Gilbert and George.* In it, he staged a series of poses using red paint to cover his body, as though it were blood coming out of a transfusion.**[ill. 4.11]** Throughout the performance, which lasted for approximately 20 minutes, Gilbert and George remained highly composed, but completely in character. They were certainly not ready to become the audience of a work by another performance artist.**[ill. 4.12]** These days, however, Ma Liuming is a prominent performance artist in the international art scene, and his dialogue of 1993 would mark the beginning of a significant series of body art performances at the East Village. Several weeks after *Dialogue with Gilbert and George*, Ma Liuming staged a

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[6] These notions on the abject come from studies that have been published since the late 1970s and confronted the idea that morality can be seen, used, and identified as the driving force behind the evolution of humanity, society, mankind, and perception. Instead, the driving force has become that of seduction and hostility. See: Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror – An Essay on Abjection*, translated from French by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982); Jean Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*, translated from French by Philip Beitchman and W.G.J. Niesluchowski (London: Pluto Press, 1999), 71-112; Francis Barker, *The Tremulous Private Body – Essays on Subjection* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1984); and works by Michel Foucault, including *Discipline and Punish – The Birth of the Prison*, translated from French by Alan Sheridan (New York. Random House, 1979)

[7] The *Gilbert & George Visiting China Exhibition* was held first at the China Art Gallery in Beijing, from 3 September to 3 October, and then travelled to the Shanghai Art Gallery, where it was held from 21 October to 11 November.

[8] Following a recorded interview with Ma Liuming in 2001.

second performance in the village, titled *Fen/Ma Liuming* that was viewed by a select group of local artists and critiss. In this second performance the artist dressed himself in a floral-print dress and put on make-up. The artist, often mistaken for a woman – with his long hair and delicate features – laid himself on a sofa where he masturbated. He then mixed his own semen with water and drank the concoction to finalize the performance **[ill. 4.13]**. Ever since this performance he has used the name Fen/Ma Liuming as his artistic alter-ego: *fen*, or incense, is a girl's name, but it is also a homophone for *separation*, and thus implies the two *separate* identities of his everyday *male*-ego and artistic *female* alter-ego. A year after staging his first performance, Ma Liuming was arrested and spent three months in prison on charges of making pornographic references in his work. At the time Ma Liuming had just finished his sixth performance, entitled *Fen/Ma Liuming's Lunch I* (1994).**[ill. 4.14]**

The early performances by Ma Liuming are remarkable in that they focus attention to the stereotypifications of race and gender that are played out on the body. Rather than using the body as a canvas (on which to make an artistic expression), these performances attend to the way the body becomes both signifier and signified in performance; they demonstrate the key role of embodied action in conceptualizing the final artwork.

The work of another East Village artist, Zhu Ming, is equally important to the development of performance in the context of experimental art in China in the 1990s. In Zhu Ming's performances, his body often forms a zone where the physical and the social meet and collapse. His works reveal an interaction between the stress and pain imposed on the public body/*flesh*, and the privately conceived artist's body/*self* that is internalized through physical endurance and results in the sublation of the body/*flesh*. This can be seen clearly in the first performance Zhu Ming conducted at his studio in the East Village, *30 April 1994*.**[ill. 4. 15]** In the morning he had constructed an installation for which he used some of his painting materials, including two wooden frameworks that he had placed together to form a triangle in the center of the room. In the middle he had hung a small frame, symbolizing the absence of a painted artwork, and running through the installation were a series of twisted plastic tubes. By noon, Zhu Ming started the performance in which he spent several hours blowing soap-bubbles through the

tubes, until they filled up the entire room. Throughout this endurance piece audiences walked in-and-out of the studio. Some were art critics who highly praised the work. One of them, Li Xianting, decided to capture the entire performance on photographs and Zhu Ming had further asked it to be filmed.

Born 1972 in Changsha, Hunan Province, Zhu Ming spent most of his childhood living with his mother and sister. At the time, much of China was still in a state of turmoil because of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). By early 1971, under the guidance of Zhou Enlai, who aimed at establishing relations with countries such as the United States, China gradually started to consider new economic and institutional reforms. The official end of the Cultural Revolution came within one month after the death of Mao Zedong on 9 September 1976, afterthe arrest of the Gang of Four on 6 October.. During his childhood, Zhu Ming often played with other children on theoutskirts of Changsha. Because of his small posture, the young Zhu Ming had difficulties standing up for himself, and at home things were not much easier. According to him, his mother often used a rather strict and occasionally even violent approach to raising her two children, and her son in particular. These days, Zhu Ming does not reflect on these experiences as having been all that bad. Nor, as one might suspect by seeing his performances for the first time, did these events lead to long term trauma, which must be seen as part of these works. Writing about the artist's personal experiences and the general social and political context of China coming out of the Cultural Revolution is, however, useful for anyone who is open to the peace and tranquility that lies behind many of the artists performances. Two examples of this apparent paradox are two of his performances, *11am, 14 May 1994* and *1pm, 14 May 1994* that were staged in Xiaobao Village – a rural area far east of Beijing, near Tongzhou County.

The first performance was held in a courtyard of a local farm, where Zhu Ming had asked a couple of farm workers to bury him alive in mud, after which he spent nearly 2 hours blowing bubbles through a pipe that stuck out from the pile.**[ill. 4.16]** The entire piece was staged privately, except for the farm workers and one artist friend who captured it on photograph and video. Even watching the video of the performance one

feels anxious about the idea of being buried for so long, but according to the artist his body became completely tranquil after going through some initial stress: "I was capable of transcending the body through a form of meditation by conducting the performance."[9] The second performance was similar in that it involved a live burial, but this time the artist lay in a hole next to a graveyard and covered himself in soap-bubbles.[**ill. 4.17**] Beneath the external rawness that we, the viewers, might imagine in a naked body enduring so much stress, lays a domain where the artist's senses creating the tension are transcended. In later performances Zhu Ming started to use large plastic bubbles in which he placed himself. These works make some viewers believe that they are a metaphor for suffocation, and particularly because the artist's body is confined in a small, enclosed space. For Zhu Ming – who during his performances often places himself in a fetal position as if returning to the sleep in his mother's womb – the bubble becomes the place where *reality* and *illusion* truly exist side by side and where *life* and *death* come together.**[ill. 4.18]**

Looking more carefully, Zhu Ming's performance works certainly seem far more serene and composed than some of the other artists who were working at the East Village, such as the earlier performances by Ma Liuming and particularly those by Zhang Huan. Zhang Huan (originally named Zhang Dongming) was born in Anyang City, Henan Province (South-Central China). At the age of fourteen he began taking private lessons in painting until, in 1984, he gained admission to the Henan Academy of Fine Arts in Kaifeng. His early works were strongly influenced by the work of French artist Jean-François Millet and the Dutch painter Rembrandt van Rijn. After graduating in 1988, he worked several years as a teacher in the city of Hengzhou, until 1991 when he moved to Beijing to enroll into a graduate program at the Central Academy of Fine Arts. Two years later, in the summer of 1993, he moved to the East Village, where he conducted a series of performances. Despite intensified criticism he continued to intensify his use of the body in many self-inflicting masochist performances, for example, in the performance *12 Square Meters* staged on 14 June 1994. In the weeks leading up to the performance, Zhang Huan spent several days testing the attraction of

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[9] Following a recorded interview with Zhu Ming in 2001.

different food products to the numerous flies that inhabited the public toilet in the village used by the village chiefs. In the final performance of this work, Zhang Huan settled himself on a stool naked inside the public toilet. His entire body, covered in honey and fish oil, baked in the heat of the confined space that in summertime reaches temperatures up to 40 degrees Celsius. Soon his entire body was covered with thousands of flies feasting on his body. Despite the horrible stench and tremendous heat, Zhang Huan nevertheless managed to remain seated for another 40 minutes until he walked into the polluted pond behind the toilet building to clean up.**[ill. 4.19]**.

On 10 July 1994, a Hong Kong television crew paid a visit to the East Village after they had heard of the performances taking place there. They were accompanied by a group of local critics, and several artists from Beijing also came along. Zhang Huan, Ma Liuming and Zhu Ming had all planned to do performances. The day started with a performance by Zhang Huan held in a small warehouse in the village. First he suspended himself 3 meters above the ground using a set of chains to hold himself up. As audiences arrived they were confronted by the stench of burning blood. Zhang Huan had inserted plastic tubes in his arm from which his blood was dripping onto a metal plate placed over a burner. The whole room was covered with mattresses (which absorbed the odours), making it difficult for people to walk – but in any event many decided to leave as soon as they arrived because of the smell of burning blood. For this performance Zhang Huan had chosen the title *65 Kilograms*, which was the exact weight of the artist prior to his performance.**[ill. 4.20]** The performance was followed by Ma Liuming's *Fen-Ma Liuming's Lunch II*, that was to be followed by a work from Zhu Ming. By that time, however, the police had heard word of performances taking place at the village. Towards the end of Ma Liuming's piece the police had arrived and were startled by what they saw. Ma Liuming was completely naked making 'lunch' on a stove in a courtyard. They stopped the performance immediately and started to conduct a search of all of the artists' studios at the East Village. The police confiscated most of the works they found there, interrogated the artists, and arrested Ma Liuming and Zhu Ming, who spent 3 and 4 months respectively in a local prison cell. They were charged with producing and distributing pornography. Zhang Huan was also arrested, but was soon released when he

was able to show the police a student pass from the Central Academy of Fine Arts, where he was registered as a graduate student.

Following their release, both Zhu Ming and Ma Liuming returned to the East Village, where they continued to stage performances. In early 1995 Zhang Huan and Ma Liuming collaborated on a performance. This work, *Third Contact*, was originally designed by Zhang Huan as a solo performance, in which he would cover the surface of a small pond with his own cut-off hair, but soon got the idea to stage the performance with Ma Liuming. The performance was turned into a work about ideas surrounding the "mirroring of human existence." The final image taken of the performance shows both of the artists lying naked in the bathtub. Zhang Huan's head is completely shaved and he is seen lying in a fetal position. Ma Liuming, who kept his long hair, lies on the other side of the tub – his face covered in make-up. Their bodies, the water, and the bathtub are all covered in hair. Together they represent an ambiguous, but highly intimate moment between two people: perhaps a mother with her new born child, or a husband and wife. In an interview with Xu Xiaoyu, conducted in 1997, Zhang Huan explains how he wanted to present a "third kind of contact" between two human beings – a contact that moves beyond the "common social contact between two friends, or the physical contact between two human bodies". Instead, the performance shows a contact on a more "subconscious level, or perhaps a dreamlike level: so that we became complete."[10] **[ill. 4.21]**

For these three artists (Ma Liuming, Zhu Ming, and Zhang Huan), the naked body serves as a kind of language to reflect the innermost feelings of the self, and to express these feelings to a larger audience in staged performance. Always working within the context of concepts that relate to the artists' direct physical environment, these artists were attempting to change and expand ideas about the self. When talking about his work, Zhang Huan explained that, for him, the pain experienced in his performances "gives him the feeling of having two bodies: one that under much pain becomes able to

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[10] This interview was the second of two interviews Xu Xiaoyu with Zhang Huan, conducted in 1996 and 1997 – both of which were published in a series of interviews with artists by the author. See: Xu Xiaoyu. *Tanhua queshi daolu* (*Talking is the Road*) (Henan: Henan meishu chubanshe, 1999)", 293-295 (Part One: 25 December, 1996) and 297-303 (Part Two, 23 January, 1997)

leave the spiritual-self and becomes almost free floating, and one that becomes pure matter, or pure bodily substance."[11] Such ideas can be traced to traditional concepts in Chinese philosophy. The *Zhuangzi*, mentioned earlier, contains many passages about the abandoned body and about methods of dissolving the distinctions between all things in life.[12] According to Zhang Huan "artists establish new relations between things which would otherwise remain separate. The origin of art lies in life itself [...] and in my performance I find the means to transmit my concepts about life."[13]

Over the course of the 1990s China witnessed a growing number of artistic experiments within the field of performance art, with more artists than ever before making their own bodies the focus of their work – in an attempt to present images of the self in a rapidly changing social environment. For example in Kunming, Yunnan Province (South-West China), Zhu Fadong started to stage performances in 1993 that questioned his own identity, after years of painting in oils. The first performance staged was *Looking for a Missing Person*, and immediately received wide attention.**[ill. 4.22]** Two years prior to the performance, in 1991, Zhu Fadong had produced a series of new paintings. In two of these paintings, *Missing, Missing* and *Big Business Card*, he had produced his own, personal 'missing person-advertisement' by inserting his portrait with newspaper clippings, and listing some details about himself. At the top of the painting he wrote: "Missing Person Poster."**[ill. 4.23]** After completing these works Zhu Fadong was disappointed with the result and in particular with his use of the medium of painting. According to the artist, painting led to "highly artistic works" which did not

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[11] These comments were made by Zhang Huan in the first interview by Xu Xiaoyu on 25 December, 1996. Zhang Huan made particularly reference to the performance *25mm of Melted Iron* (1996), for which the artist, with the help of factory workers at a local steel factory, put red hot melting iron thread around his wrist.

[12] A good reference for this can be found in the discussion by Feng Yulan on the story about a conversation between Confucius and one of his disciples, Ren Hui, which is highlighted in the appendix-essay concluding his translation into English of the first four chapters of the book of *Zhuangzi*. See: Feng Yulan, *A Taoist Classic – Chaung-Tzu*, 143-144. It is important to examine how examples from traditional Chinese have recently been used in analyses of the concept of the 'absent body'. See, in particular: Leder. *The Absent Body*, 156-173. Leder quotes from sources on Neo-Confucianism (11th-17th centuries A.D.) to further discuss the concept of the absent body and examine ideas surrounding the initial separation, followed by a formation, of 'one body'.

[13] Stated in the second interview with Zhang Huan by Xu Xiaoyu on 23 January 1997 in Xu Xiaoyu, *Tanhua queshi daolu*, 297-303

seem to be able to capture the "essence of real missing person posters that were posted on the streets."[14] The figures in the posters painted by Zhu Fadong had turned into mere graphic images and were much less striking than the real-life posters he had seen hanging in the streets of Kunming.**[ill. 4.24]**

In 1994 Zhu Fadong moved to Beijing where he staged the performance, *This Person is For Sale*. The artist walked around Beijing City carrying a black briefcase and dressed in a dark blue Mao-jacket, written on the back in red characters was: "This person is for sale - Negotiate price on the spot".**[ill. 4.25]** Zhu Fadong continued the performance each day for two weeks. He would start at his house in Beixinqiao (in the west of the city), and each time took a different route around the city. One day he took a route towards the Beijing Labor Market near the city center where he sat down amongst other people who sold themselves as labor. The entire project was recorded on video, and is often seen as a critique of the way people can be turned into commodities to be sold off. The work also points at the loss of the self for all Chinese citizens who now found themselves taking part in an increasingly commercialized society. Finding inspiration from some of Karl Marx's theories of labor, Zhu Fadong was experiencing a form of personal freedom by being able to sell himself.

During the second half of the 1990s several artists made performances in which they placed emphasis on the body in action, on physical endurance and transcendence of the body, and further explored concepts surrounding the body in relation to its environment. Such can be seen for example in the work of He Yunchang. Born in 1967 in Kunming, Yunnan Province (South-West China), He Yunchang graduated in 1991 from the Department of Oil Painting at the Yunnan Art Institute. In 1998 he moved to Beijing where he prepared a wide range of performances. Initially he would move back to Kunming to stage his performances, but more recently He Yunchang has staged more of his performances in Beijing. Often He Yunchang's performances are highly conceptual, and derive from the artist's personal ideas about the contexts of space, place

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[14] See: Leng Lin, "Cong 'xunren hushi' dao 'shenfen zheng' – Zhu Fadodong fangtan" ("From 'Missing person advertisement' to ID card' – An Interview with Zhu Fadong") in Leng Lin, ed., *Its Me* (Shandong: Zhongguo wenlian chubanshe, 2000). Zhu Fadong also made similar comments on the work in a recorded interview that I conducted with him in 2001.

and time. Many of He Yunchang's performances have been staged in the open air, and combine basic natural elements such as water, earth, and fire with the physical power of the artist's own body, and the physical limitations of the body. Sometimes the artist's endeavours produce an outcome, but most of the time his performances seem to have no clear result. For example, in the 1999 performance *Talking with Water*, the artist is seen dangling from a crane above a river and holding a sword to 'cut' the running water in half.**[ill. 4.26]** Sometimes his performances were provocative in their approach, such as *Wrestle: One and One Hundred* (2001). In it, the artist wrestled with one hundred men from his hometown, Kunming. The record shows 18 wins and 82 defeats for He Yunchang, who spent several days recovering from his efforts.**[ill. 4.27]** Clearly one would say he failed, and his attempts seem to have been in vain. However, many years later people might still be talking, like in Chinese folklore, about the fool who said he could cut a river in half, wrestle with a hundred men, or push back a huge block of stone. These stories will become fables and fantasies, and the artist legendary.

Physical endurance and the role of the abject body in performance art

Since 1998 several artists have started to refer to the abject body, and to using human body parts and animal corpses in artworks that range from site-specific installations to performances and real-time happenings that directly confront the senses of the audience. These works were first referred to as "shock-art" in 1999.[15] In 2001, the Chinese art critic living in France, Fei Dawei, brought together several Chinese artists who were using corpses in their work under the title of the Cadaver Group (*shiti qun*).[16] As could be expected, these works have provoked many debates: can such work be considered

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[15] The term "shock art" (*zhenhan yishu*) was first used amongst artists and critics in Beijing in early 1999 after they had witnessed several works involving human corpses at the exhibition *Post-Sense Sensibility: Alien Bodies and Delusion* that was curated by Qiu Zhijie and Wu Meichun. The exhibition was only held for one day, on 9 January at the basement of the downtown Shaoyaoju Building 202, but had a huge impact on the local art scene, as will be discussed later. For further reference, see: Hong Wen and Gao Lin, "Gei ni yige zhenhan" ("We will Shock You") in *Wenhua* (*Culture Montly*), January 2000

[16] See: Fei Dawei, "Transgresser le principe céleste – Dialogue avec le groupe Cadavre" (Transcending Celestial Principles – Dialogue with the Cadaver Group) in *Artpress*, Special Issue on *Representing the Horrific* (*Représenter L'Horreur*) (Paris: May 2001), 60-64. The essay was originally written in Chinese and was translated in French by Meng Tian. Fei Dawei had likely adapted to the term *shiti yishu* from its use by some of the artists involved, or heard about its use from critics living in China.

art?, should they be banished from a discussion of contemporary art? As has been the case with criticism of the works by 'young British artists' (yBas), and particularly that of Damien Hirst, it often includes statements about the poor mental health of the artists, calling them "madmen," "sick minds," and not being "true artists."[17] But there were also more profound critiques by critics working in China that focus on outlining the possible 'causes' for these works to be made in the first place. In a report discussing the closed nature of the experimental art scene in China, the Beijing-based independent writer, Karen Smith, argues that artworks are often created for an audience of artists who "speak the same language" and who expect to be "challenged by a consistent turnover of more provocative works". She considers these factors to be possible causes for the "recent trends in experimental art from China."[18] But in fact, similar observations could made of works that were produced much earlier, such as *Wrapping Up - King and Queen* by Zhang Peili and Geng Jianyi in 1986, as well as the shooting incident by Xiao Lu at the 1989 *China Modern Art Exhibition.*

In another essay that discusses Chinese art of the late 1990s, John Clark attempted to show how some of these artists tended to focus on the "transcendence of the self". Thus the "flesh serves as a metaphor [...] for what flows raw, foetic and barbaric beneath the carapace of civilization." Clark makes some interesting critiques of works that tend to be explicit in "showing the aesthetic qualities in cruel or murderous social realities" – in focusing on works by Sun Yuan and Zhu Yu.[19] He concludes by stating that: "this use of the body has displayed rather ghoulish and, if enacted in almost any country outside China, implacably anti-humanist sign of the intensity of reaction by the 'unofficial.'" Eventually, "such brute materialism of buying human body parts may also be a sign that there are some social or political situations which are so cruel, or mendacious about their own cruelty, that the artists who takes them as their subject may

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[17] These terms were used in several news reports that came out after the *Sensation* exhibition opened to the public. Most of these took place in newspapers in the United Kingdom, particularly *The Guardian*. Similar discussions would take place amongst art critics in China after seeing these types of works emerge there.
[18] See: Karen Smith. "Contagious Desire" in *ART Asia Pacific*, Issue 31 (2001) (St. Leonards, Australia: Fine Art Publishing, 2001), 50-57.
[19] These comments can be found in the introduction essay by Clark on "Chinese Art at the End of the Millennium" in Clark, *Chinese Art at the End of the Millennium*, 22-23

feel no compunction about trying to re-materialize them in the work." Perhaps these cruel, social and political situations can be traced back to what the Chinese art critic Wang Nanming has called the "historical tradition of ruffianism" in China: "that is to say, the tradition of continuing to violate the human rights in a society that has no human rights in the first place."[20]

Following these early discussions let us now examine some of the more recent movements in experimental art in China, many of which present highly explicit use of the body/*flesh* in different media, including in painting, photography, installation, and above all in body art performances. By using the term *flesh art*, I am trying to hint at the use of *flesh* as a metaphor, not merely for the abject that "flows beneath the carapace of civilization", that points at the fact that the body has come to be seen as a material object, and therefore a piece of flesh "whose anatomical and functional properties can be characterized according to general scientific law."[21] More recent discoveries in genetic research have even indicated that the properties of human life itself may soon be completely characterized according to scientific laws and that, using the words of Georges Bataille, the human body has now become the ultimate "tool" (object), which "is subordinated to the man who uses it, who can modify it as he pleases, in view of a particular result."[22] This notion of how the body/*flesh* is manipulated as a tool – in this case a piece of meat – can be seen in the work of Gu Dexin; particularly his series of photographs that feature the hand of the artist grinding up pieces of beef.**[ill. 4.28]** Initially, these photographs featured in the installation, *29 November 1996* at Galerie de France in Paris. The installation also included the actual (grinded) pieces of meat, next to some sex tools that were moving on a bed covered with red-tinted pellets.**[ill. 4.29]** When more of Gu Dexin's works were shown in China, they inspired other artists who began to use the body as tool for their work, starting in the late 1990s. As these artists

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[20] In: Wang Nanming. "How to Deal with Rights – A Criticism of the Violent Trend in Chinese Contemporary Art" in *Chinese Type Contemporary Art Online Magazine*, Vol. 2, Issue 6 (Formerly published at http://www.chinese-art.com, discontinued in 2002)
[21] In: Drew Leder, *The Absent Body*, p. 5
[22] The concept of the body as tool is particularly well described by George Bataille, *Theory of Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1992)

started to use entire animal corpses and human body parts, many viewers began to comment on their "lack of morality".

Michel Foucault in his study, *Discipline and Punish*, argues how the way "the body now serves as an instrument or intermediary". His comment follows the notion that, in recent history, the body has been caught up in a system of constraints and privations, obligations, and prohibitions. This arrangement leads to a whole *new morality* that sees "the disappearance of the spectacle and the elimination of pain."[23] Over the past two centuries this new morality has entered almost every aspect of human life including politics, economy, law, and society. It has led to a change in human finality, from body to soul. The terms *morality* and *humanity* are now used by many to formulate an abnormal *other* whose soul lacks them; critiques of a person's mental health produces a madman. A common response to the 'shocking' works by artists such as Damien Hirst, Sun Yuan and Zhu Yu, often remark that "These artists must be insane!"[24] Instead of blindly accepting these critiques, it is important to examine the interaction between the body/*self* and the body/*flesh* in these artworks. The following discussion will therefore move beyond the preliminary idea of the *abjection of the self* as the result of the *disturbance of identity*. The final section of this chapter will focus on the role of the mediated body in art, as it becomes reflected in art – even when it concerns different works in different media made at different times within different cultural contexts.

In January 1999, the independent curator Wu Meichun, together with her husband and independent artist, Qiu Zhijie, organized a large exhibition in Beijing, titled *Post-Sense Sensibility – Alien Bodies & Delusion*. The exhibition was among the first of its kind to be organized in China. It featured a wide range of artworks, including oil paintings by Chen Wenbo, photographs by Feng Qianyu and Yang Yong, video installations by Liu Wei and Yang Fudong as well as site-specific installations by Chen Lingyang, Qiu Zhijie, Sun Yuan, Wu Ershan, Xiao Yu, and Zhu Yu. In the two

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[23] See: Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 11-12

[24] See a list of such reports that are reprinted as part of a large monograph by Damien Hirst, *I want to spend the rest of my life everywhere, with everyone, one to one, always, forever, now!* (New York: Monacelli Press, 1997)

introductory essays of the exhibition catalogue the curators elucidate the main concepts surrounding the origins of the exhibition. Writing on the concepts of "alien bodies and delusion", Wu Meichun remarks that many of the artists in the exhibition had chosen to deviate their work from more common themes in Chinese art by producing a series of anomalies about the delusions connected to the body.

According to Wu Meichun, "anomaly in fact is the delusion of body, or at least expresses the delusion of the body. But the delusion relevant to the body must not necessarily be expressed in the appearance of the body self."[25] Alien bodies originate from the pathological changes in the flesh, including natural mutations and mechanically regulated transformation of the body. These can be instances of pain, disease, but also in cases of cyber-sex, piercing, or in taking drugs, whereby often the body seizes a person's awareness and appears "other and opposed to the self." Derived from the context of an unstable reality, the works were selected for their insensitivity, presenting the viewer with ambiguous feelings and a form of 'post-sensibility'. According to Qiu Zhijie writing the second essay of the exhibition catalogue, post-sensibility is: "A blood trace in the breast made by a razorblade – you will feel no pain, but instead have feelings of revenge. Post-sensibility is the feeling of doubt about your bloodline relation with your parents, and it is the feeling that everyone on the street is the same to you."[26] But in Qiu Zhijie's view, post-sensibility is more than that, in particular in relation to the arts. For it is in the "action of art" that post-sensibility intends to refuse any form of conceptualization, or become part of an art movement. Post-sensibility also "works especially against the notion of pursuing deceptive knowledge and changing the arts into a tool for theories." Instead, it becomes very personal, aiming at feelings of ambiguity that can only be felt by someone in person and on the spot. As a result, it is "something

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[25] Following a statement by Wu Meichun in the introduction essay of a catalogue publication of the exhibition, "Yixing yu Wangxiang" ("Alienation (or: Alien Bodies) and Delusion") in: Wu Meichun and Qiu Zhijie. *Hou ganxing, yixing, yu wangxiang* (*Post-Sense Sensibility – Alien Bodies & Delusion* (Beijing: Private publication, 1999). The catalogue also contains an English translation of the essays by Wu Meichun and Qiu Zhijie. The references made here are all based on the Chinese language version and translations may vary from those in the catalogue.

[26] Qiu Zhijie "Hou ganxing" ("Post-sensibility") in Wu Meichun and Qiu Zhijie, *Hou ganxing, yixing, yu wangxiang*

which has been synthesized but can never be restored, nor repeated."[27] It is with these thoughts in mind that the curators selected the artists and their works for *Post-Sense Sensibility – Alien Bodies & Delusion*, starting with oil paintings by Chen Wenbo.

Chen Wenbo was born in Chongqing, China's most densely populated city, with a population of over 20 million living on the two hill slopes of the Yangzi River. In 1990 he graduated at the Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts, Faculty of Oil Painting, and practiced as an independent artist in Chongqing until 1999, when he moved to Beijing. As an artist in Chongqing, he depicted scenes of political irony in some of his paintings. As a result, his work took part in the Political Pop movement; a term introduced in 1992 to describe artists who used pop-ish styles and techniques in their work (which was a critique of the emergence of consumer society in China).[28]

One of the most renown figures in this movement was Wang Guangyi who, from the first half of the 1990s produced paintings that combined revolutionary propaganda images with advertisements of foreign consumer products, known as the *Great Criticism Series*.**[ill. 4.30]** Less well known than the paintings of the movement are various performances affiliated with it. The first was staged by Sun Ping in October 1992 at the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts. First he printed a series of stock market shares for his new company *China Sun Ping Art Co, Ltd.*[29]**[ill. 4.31]** He then started selling them in a performance called *Issuing Shares* at the opening of the *First Guangzhou Biennale of 1990s Art* at the Central Hotel Exhibition Center on 20 October.**[ill. 4.32]** Another event that shows how artists dealt with consumer society known as *New History - 1993 Big Consumer Products Art Exhibition Instruction Group* combined a series of performances in Beijing, Wuhan (Hubei Province), Zhengzhou (Henan Province), Harbin

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[27] Ibid.

[28] See: Li Xianting's comments on "Political Pop" in Li Xianting, *Zhongyaode bushi yishu* (Art is not important) (Nanjing: Jiangsu meishu chubanshe, 2000), 306-311. Aside from its reference to consumer culture, the term "Political Pop" (*zhengzhi popu* in Chinese) was introduced by critic Li Xianting to show were "Chinese art and Western contemporary art could meet in a universal discourse, but also point to some of the "cultural-specific differences." This becomes more clear in an interview with the GaoBrothers in 2000, that was published in: Gao Brothers, ed. *Zhongguo qianwei yishu zhuangkuang: Guanyu zhongguo qianwei yishu de fangtan* (*The state of China avant-garde art: A series of interviews*) (Nanjing: Jiangsu renmin chubanshe, 2002), 161-180.

[29] It seems the artist refers to the production of Marcel Duchamp's *Monte Carlo Bond Company* in 1924 that consisted of a series of Bonds made my the artist of a photocollage on coloured board.

(Heilongjiang Province), and other cities in China. In these events a group of artists led by Ren Jian staged a series of highly controversial performances and small exhibitions.**[ill. 4.33]** A day before their first exhibition was scheduled to open at a McDonald's restaurant in Wangfujing, on 28 April, 1993, several of the artists were arrested and spent a night in jail. They did however continue their tour, despite this early setback.

From his early links with the Political Pop movement, Chen Wenbo became increasingly interested in consumer culture, but unlike other artists who continued using the same pop-ish subjects as in their earlier works, during the second half of the 1990s he produced paintings that focused on the emerging Chinese rave culture. In *Vitamin Series*, Chen Wenbo painted various male and female figures who exhibit their alienated, artificial, bodies. **[ill. 4.34]** Often they 'pose' in front of a restroom mirror at a Chinese rave club, and are painted with bright pink skin; their faces become like perfectly glazed Barbie-dolls. Their eyes, staring indifferently past the viewer, are most striking: empty, resisting any invasion into their inner thoughts and feelings. Over these figures Chen Wenbo painted a raster of drops of bright colored paint, which look like jellybeans, or pills taken from Damien Hirst's *Pharmacy Series*.**[ill. 4.35]** These delusive images are emphasized by delusive titles such as *Vitamine E, No. 13*, a painting made in 1999, clearly referring to the rave drug ecstasy.**[ill. 4.36]**

Many paintings of the 1990s repeat such alienated figures. In discussing the repetitive character of these works, John Clark observes an urge on the part of artists to "secure recognition for their work"; but there is more to the repetitive character of these works than a "deferral to securing the avoidance of non-recognition."[30] In many cases the artists show a fixation on recreating a particular scene in painting – often consisting of a facial expression taken from a photograph or from a personal memory. Several examples can be used in this discussion.

The first has already been discussed earlier in the context of violence. It involved a visit in January 2000 to the studio of the Chinese artist Yang Shaobin, whose paintings

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[30] See: Clark's essay on "Chinese Art at the End of the Millennium" in Clark, *Chinese Art at the End of the Millennium*, 20

exhibit a repetitive character. During my visit I was shown a group of snapshot-photographs from which one particular image – of the artist in a mock fight with a friend – that was used over and over again in his paintings. (A similar use of snapshots can be seen in a video of the American artist Willem de Kooning in his studio at Long Island, where the artist selects photographs of his early sculptures and paintings of women, to be being integrated into his later, abstract works.[31]) The next instance concerns the work by Fang Lijun, whose photo-realistic paintings of bald headed figures have become world-renowned.**[ill. 4.37]** Interestingly, despite his profound skill in painting, Fang Lijun apparently never liked the medium that much. He always thought of painting as problematic: it was difficult to grasp different facial expressions that could easily captured in photography.[32] Despite this, he attempts in his paintings to maintain some of the characteristics of photography. He does so by painting in fine line and by using very thin, almost translucent, layers of oil. These paintings, works depicting alienated figures, reveal that many artists returned to the *corps propre* by re-presenting and transforming the body-*self* into works of art.

The mediated subject of the acting body in art

Of course, this thesis is not the first work to consider the shifting paradigm in the way the body has been used as a way to transcend the corporeal self through painful or traumatic ordeals. Generally, modern performance art is described in terms of a movement towards exploring the limits of artistic production. It repositions the artist from the reclusive environment of the studio into different common spaces, often private, sometimes public. It is well described in recent publications, for example, Amelia Jones and Tracy Warr in different ways argue that in the late 1960s and early 1970s – following the erosion of ideas of the physical and mental self, when artists began to emphasize the identification of the body/*self* in art as something inseparable

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[31] See: *Strokes of Genius: Willem de Kooning*, Directed by Charlotte Zwerin (New York: Direct Cinema Limited, 1982)

[32] Following a conversation with the late Hans van Dijk in Beijing in early 2000, in which he mentioned a range of talks with Fang Lijun during the early 1990s. The artist later confirmed these talks during several brief encounters in Shenzhen and Beijing in 2002 and 2003, respectively.

from racial, sexual, gender, class, and other apparent or unconscious identifications – several contemporary writers saw the need to differentiate these experiments with the body from earlier examples of "performance art" by advocating the term "body art".[33]

The shift into more private and personally motivated collaborations in performance art takes place in the production of experimental art in post-Mao China, in particular, in the last decade of the twentieth century. Looking at some of the recent works in which artists mutilate themselves or make use of dead animals and human body parts, and by talking to these artists, it appears that the instantaneous reputation of such experiments is due to their production of galling and impenetrable scenes of destruction. Sometimes it seems like the *potlach* described by Marcel Mauss in his renown study on the gift, in that: "The potlatch [...] is really nothing more than a gift exchange. The only differences are in the violence, rivalry and antagonism aroused, in a lack of jural concepts, and in a simpler structure.[34]

What is often described as barbaric, insane, and the work of savages and madmen, can perhaps also lead to a regeneration of public morality and to the expansion of the order of capital. Here one is thinking of the recent shifts in attitude by both Chinese Communist Party officials, acting as representatives for the people, and representatives of the experimental art scene in China denouncing the 'shocking' work by many of so-called 'avant-garde' artists – but at the same time endorsing numerous examples of experimental art exhibited in small and large venues across the nation, such as in various biennials and triennials, including the Shanghai Biennial.

To endorse the "love of art" I could have easily joined the numerous critiques published in reaction to what often seems like senseless acts of violence by artists whose aim it is to cause sensation by creating hysteria in the Freudian sense.[35] True – were it not for the fact that artists have been using their own bodies in performances aimed at a

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[33] See: Jones, *Body Art/ Performing the Subject*, 1-20 and Tracy Warr, *The Artist's Body*, 11-15

[34] Mauss, *The Gift*, 33-35

[35] The phrase "the love of art" has been taken from an essay by Pierre Bourdieu and Alain Darbal "The Love of Art", in which the authors examine the role played by museums in exhibiting artworks, and often leading to systematizing significant ideological structures. For further reference, see: Pierre Bourdieu and Alain Darbel, with Dominique Schnapper, *The Love of Art: European Museums and their Public*, translated from French by Caroline Beattie and Nick Merriman (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991)

form of self-transcendence and overcoming the physical limitations of the body-corpus, and this implies something beyond mere sensationalism. Instead of merely using the body as the 'content' of their art, these artists use the body as canvas, brush, frame and platform for their work. They use their own bodies as a stage where the object and subject collapses, moving from producing objects to using their own physical self for creating 'real time' performance art. So instead of joining the throng of critiques that characterize these artworks as merely 'shocking' the viewer, I have come to use the term *flesh art*. Rather than using this term to describe the body as a piece of meat – a material object – it aims to identify what can best be theorized as the *mediated subject of the acting body in art*.

Explicit references to the body can be seen in two installations, one by Sun Yuan and the other by Zhu Yu, both of appeared in the *Post-Sensibility – Alien Bodies & Delusion* exhibition in 1999. Produced for the first time in 1998, Sun Yuan's installation *Honey* is made up according to a three-step instruction: "1. make a big bed of 1.5m x 3m; 2. put a big piece of ice, 0.37 cm thick on the bed; 3. lay a fetus on the ice so that only his face and four limbs touch the surface." For the second edition at the exhibition he added the head of a full-grown man buried in the ice, with only the face sticking above the surface.**[ills. 4.38 & 4.39]** In another exhibition room, Zhu Yu installed his *Theologie Portative* in which he hung a deceased person's arm – which he had bought for 500 Renminbi – on a hook from the center of the ceiling. The arm is holding a long rope that runs down in a circle and covering most of the floor space with the other end of the rope at the entrance of the room. When you walk into the room you stand on the rope and simultaneously see the dangling arm. The artist planned to create a direct link between the spectator and the deceased arm. He thus recreated the ambiguity of a 'theatre of cruelty' in an Artraudian "logic of delirium."**[ill. 4.40]**[36] The installations by Sun Yuan and Zhu Yu were closely linked to an earlier installation by Gu Dexin, *7*

[36] The whole installation can lead to the construction of "delirious logic", as described by Alan Cholodenko, in that "the whole secret of cruelty" lies in "signs which knot together instead of unraveling and which rivet your eyes to the ground." See: Alan Cholodenko, "The Logic of Delirium – or the Fatal Strategies of Antonin Artaud and Jean Baudrillard in: Edward Sheer, ed., *100 Years of Cruelty – Essays on Artaud* (Sydney: Power Institute, Center for Art & Visual Culture and ARTSPACE, 2000), 153-174

November 1998, made for the exhibition *Corruptionists* (curated by Zhang Zhaohui) – that was also held in an underground space in Beijing. In it the artist had covered the floor of an entire room with pig brains and blood – making it impossible for people to enter.**[ill. 4.41]**

What is truly at stake in these artworks, which present a not simply a reference to, but the actual body of the deceased? Is it the result of a closed circle of artists operating in an environment which has seen rapid, economical and institutional change but still lacks the social morals and humanity that other societies may have adhered to in this day and age? This might be the case, were it not for the photographs taken by Damien Hirst whilst visiting a morgue during one of his classes at the well-respected Goldsmiths College in London, which were shown as part of the installation piece *When Logics Die*, in 1993.**[ill. 4.42]**[37] If it is okay for the darling of the Saatchi collection, why not the Chinese?

Early references to the deceased *Körper* (German for physical body) are evident in paintings by Rembrandt, and more specifically in his *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr Nicolaes Tulp*, which he completed in 1632 in Amsterdam.**[ill. 4.43]** It seems that the scene Rembrandt has painted could not have been a real anatomy lesson. Not just because the two persons sitting on the left-hand side may have been added after the original painting was completed, but because it was common practice to start dissection at the opening of the ventral cavity and with the removal of the perishable organs of a prisoner's dead body, as has been pointed out by Gary Swartz in his study on Rembrandt.[38] Such practice is normal in present day autopsies. A clear example of such a 'proper' anatomy lesson can be seen in another painting by Rembrandt in 1656, *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr Jan Deijman* **[ill. 4.44]**.[39] As Gary Schwartz points out in his

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[37] For further reference, see: Damien Hirst, *I want to spend the rest of my life everywhere*

[38] These important findings have all been listed by Gary Schwartz in his short outline on Rembrandt's Anatomy *Lesson of Dr. Tulp*. See: Gary Schwartz, *Rembrandt: his life, his paintings – A new biography with all accessible paintings illustrated in colour* (Middlesex, UK: Viking, 1985), 145. The study was first published in Dutch language in 1984 under the title: *Rembrandt, zijn leven, zijn schilderijen – Een nieuwe biografie met alle beschikbare schilderijen in kleur afgebeeld.*

[39] The painting, which has been cut down after it was damaged in a fire in 1723, was Rembrandts first private commission after the *Nightwatch* (*De Nachtwacht*), and the original composition can still be seen from a sketch, which is being preserved in the Rijksprentenkabinet in Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

outline on *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr Nicolaes Tulp* it had recently been argued by two Dutch anatomists that Rembrandt must have painted the dissected arm in the painting from a prepared specimen. Further examination states that: "In fact, a visitor to his house one week before his death saw there among the 'antiques and curios collected by Rembrandt over a long period of time [...] four arms and legs dissected by Vesalius.'"[40]

One could derive further insights into the production of these *shocking works* by contemporary artists from Britain, China, and other parts of the world, by looking at historical studies of Rembrandt. Svetlana Alpers' study of Rembrandt's "Theatrical Model" is particularly important. Following a much-discussed and useful approach to the practice and production of art as important factors in writing about an artist's career, Alpers examines the abiding nature of Rembrandt's interest in performance, thereby "turning the attention from the *medium* of his paintings – the paint to their *subject* – human lives". In doing so, Alpers takes up a much needed study of Rembrandt and the theater.[41]

By pointing to the way that Rembrandt often performed the role of the subject in his paintings – not just self-portraits but large commissioned works – Alpers concludes that the painter had to become an actor himself: "to get at the expression he wishes to depict, he must experience or at least play at experiencing himself."[42] Often the artist-actor had to start by learning from the model that was close to him, namely his own body. She further proposes that Rembrandt intended things to be as close to 'real' life as possible in his paintings, by staging the actions of them in his studio. He did this by using three pictorial models: first, the depiction of narrative figures in role-plays; second, staging the artist as actor in producing self-portraits; and finally to invite student-apprentices, who often served as 'actors' in paintings of biblical figures.

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[40] In: Schwartz, *Rembrandt: his life, his paintings*, 145

[41] See: Alpers, *Rembrandt's Enterprise – The Studio and the Market* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988). Of particular importance to my own research has been Chapter 2, The Theatrical Model

[42] Alpers, *Rembrandt's* Enterprise, 38 As further pointed out by Alpers one can see several precedents for proposing the actor as model for the artist, in particular through Aristotle and Horace. During the Renaissance these practices became further advocated by comments by several writers on the work of (visual) artists, so as to improve their "intellectual standing and social lot."

In understanding Chinese performance art we need a similar emphasis on the *subject*, which is being performed in many of the artworks produced over the past decade. Performing the subject can therefore be related to the body/*self*, as is evident from extensive conversations with the artists. But one must be aware of the social, historical and political-economic context in which both the artist and his work are situated. Rather than identifying each specific artist as the unique individual creator behind the work – and thereby falling into the trap of all kinds of psychobabble about the artist – one should examine the role of a specific context of time, space, and social-economic position of the artist whose work is analyzed. Instead of examining artworks on the basis of their *medium*, one can examine the *mediated self* of the artist that is transfigured in the artwork.

The works by Chen Lingyang clearly deal with the physical and social environment in which the artist found herself – and thus directly incorporates the mediated subject of the body/*self*. Following her graduation from the Central Academy of Fine Arts in 1999, Chen Lingyang experienced a period of complete withdrawal. Over a period of several months she spent many days sitting alone in her room and became totally detached from public life. She became very conscious of her own body/*self* and, in particular, the physical and mental discomfort of her own monthly cycle. She became aware of her own relation to the patterns of nature, the cycle of the moon, the sun, and the slow growth of plants and trees, the tides, as well as to the constant changes of seasons. From her experiences she started her first series of works, the photographic series, *Twelve Flower Months* (1999-2000), and the video installation, *Periodical Fairy* (2002) **[ill. 4.45]**. These works were psychological examinations of the artist's inner self disclosed through the physical identity of the female body. Surrounded by a world in which everything turns around feminine beauty and external appearance, the main subject of these works was her feeling of the physiological and psychological changes in her own body; she projects these personal feelings directly to the viewer.

Performance art, and in particular works which focus on the body, are the most striking descriptions of the mediated self of the artist. It shows how in the early 1970s between artists, critics and researchers a discourse on the body was constituted. In a

study by Liza Saltzman of the German artist Anselm Kiefer the author introduced concepts of the mediated self to formulate a new critical examination of his work.[43] In addition, James Elkins has recently published an analysis of pictures of the body in relation to pain, metamorphosis, and the body/*flesh*. These study deserve the attention of anyone whose interest lies in the continuous presence of the artist and of the body in visual structures and the structural representation of images.[44]

Next to these studies one should examine the role of the mediated subject of the performance work itself, by looking at the way in which visual registrations of earlier performances were shown at exhibitions in art galleries, museums, and other public venues. For what we see there is not only the mediated subject of the artist self, but well-established structures of tradition, organizations and ideology. By examining these structures, performance art can be related to particular *cultural* contexts, so-called *life worlds*; it demonstrates the essential interaction of performance with other forms and with culture in general. If we consider the practice and production of art as an important part of the visual structures embedded in artworks, then we can identify the performance embedded in the art forms discussed in this chapter. Hence Rembrandt's *Anatomy Lesson of Dr Nicolaes Tulp*, Damien Hirst's *When Logics Die*, Zhu Yu's *Theologie Portative*, and Chen Lingyang's *Twelve Month Flower* series, can all be related to the notion of *the role of the mediated subject of the acting body in art*.

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[43] Saltzman, *Anselm Kiefer and Art After Auschwitz*. The publication was the result of a Ph.D. dissertation that Lisa Saltzman completed at Harvard University. Rather than preoccupying herself with a pure psychological based analysis of the private aspects of Anselm Kiefer's life and family history, Saltzman's work explores the aesthetic, ontological, psychological, historical and anamnetic functions of his art, constructing an "concominant exploration of artistic identity by the question of what it means to create aesthetically, culturally", within a specific context of time and space. Here the self becomes the 'mediated self', which in the case of Kiefer is strongly related to postwar Germany. Saltzman also points out the fact that the approach also opens the possibility to study even the work of artists that have not "made their private lives a public spectacle, or [...] have created a mythic and absolutely central public persona" (p. 6), without having to follow studies that seem to aim at legitimizing and propagating a particular movement, such as in the case of shock art.

[44] James Elkins, *Pictures of the Body: Pain and Metamorphosis*. (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1999)

CHAPTER 5

PERFORMANCE *IN* NEW MEDIA, 1997-2004

> Only on conditioning of a radical widening of definition will it be possible for art and activities related to art to provide evidence that art is now the only evolutionary-revolutionary power. Only art is capable of dismantling the repressive effects of a senile social system that continues to totter along the deathline: to dismantle in order to build A SOCIAL ORGANISM AS A WORK OF ART.
>
> Joseph Beuys, *I Am Searching for a Field Character*, 1973

Discourses on new media

Standing at the apex of the technological age, it may be difficult to consider that the body continues to stand at the center of art production. As new technologies start to take over many of the functions of the body, it becomes even further dislocated from direct experience. When artists start to further incorporate technological devices in their production, the discourse on modern art is once again in need of a major overhaul.

In recent times, new media have presented themselves as emergent discursive models to be used to describe a range of practices featuring new technology in their production. The model of new media starts with photography, film, video, and then moves on to digital media and computer-based technologies. Beyond its function as a model, the art historical discourse on new media remains to be properly formulated; this has proven to be a difficult task since it is an area in constant change. As a result, several

art historians have chosen to use a thematic approach utilizing descriptive analyses based largely on their personal understanding of theories, practices, media, and technological advances that are combined as new media.[1] These studies rely almost entirely on Euramerican sources, and therefore ignore many of the developments in other regions in the world, with the exception of some references to Japan. Despite this limited projection, many of these studies have become models used to describe the emergence of a new media culture in countries across the world. In China this has led the popular discussions of new media to focus on the development of video art, video installation and, more recently, on digital art.[2]

This chapter will include a brief discussion on some of the most important events marking the development of the discourse on new media (*xin meiti*), in particular on the video art (*luxiang yishu*) that emerged in China during the second half of the 1990s. With the introduction of digital media on the mass market at the beginning of the new millennium, the discourse on digital 'video' art (*DV yishu*) has become increasingly popular in the institutional domain in China. Since 2003, leading art academies and museums in China, such as the Central Academy of Fine Arts in and the Millennium Art Museum in Beijing, started to organize high-profile events around the topic of new media. These usually involved large scale financial and logistical support from local and international IT companies in close co-operation with the Chinese Ministry of Culture and with overseas foundations for cultural exchange. A prominent example of such an event can be seen in the organization of the *First International New Media Arts Exhibition* (*Di yi xin meiti yishuzhan*) in Beijing in 2004.

Despite the increasing attention to new media art in China, its theoretical discourse remains largely unchallenged. This is partly due to the fact that new media practices continuously emerge in China and critics, curators and arts officials have found the current discourse – with its emphasis on technological advancement combined with a

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[1] A good example is: Michael Rush, *New Media in Late 20th Century Art* (London and New York: Thames and Hudson World of Art, 1999). Rush has chosen to focus his approach on new media on the themes of: 'Media and Performance'; 'Video Art'; 'Video Installation'; and 'Digital Art'.

[2] In fact, with the exception of 'media and performance' the popular discourse and the official academic curriculum on new media China have covered all of the themes selected by Michael Rush in his 1999 overview.

standard thematic approach – to be sufficient for educational and promotional activities in China and overseas. The existing discourse formed the basis for the inclusion of new media into the officially recognized disciplines at leading institutions of national art training and national art promotion in China. As the details of this process are still emerging, it is difficult to give a clear run-down of the influence new media has had on the institutional domain. However, the launch of the New Media Department at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in 2001 clearly points to the changing artistic environment in the elite insitutions. For the first time, art students could specialize in photography, video, computer graphics and the whole range of digital media production.

New media is used as a term to describe a new form of 'fine' art (*meishu*) practice. So long as artists observed national aesthetic principles, they could be encouraged to obtain particular skills in the new technologies.[3] Performance has, however, remained excluded from the official institutional curriculum, even in new media in China, despite the fact that it plays an important role in the development of their practices. Before moving into some examples in China, it is useful to provide a more detailed analysis on how performance occupies an important role in the theoretical discourse on new media.[4]

The theoretical discourse on new media generally places great emphasis on the alteration of a direct experience of objective space and time through technological mediation. This produces a discourse that focuses on the concept of *immediacy*, or even *transparent immediacy* in visual representation, whereby the viewer transcends the experience of presence of the medium, or becomes absorbed in the medium itself.[5] Equally important are discussions on *hypermediacy*, a style of visual presentation, which

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[3] The New Media Department only attracts postgraduate students who have successfully obtained an undergraduate degree in one of the other departments at the Central Academy. Most students who are admitted to do media come from the Sculpture Department, followed by those who come from the Oil Painting- and Print Making- Departments, in that order.

[4] So far, researchers have focused their attention to the topic of media *and* performance, which often provide examinations on how performance artists have come to make their works dependent on the use of different technologies and media. Aside from the study by Rush, *New Media in Late 20th Century Art*, it is also important to look at Johannes Birringer, *Media & Performance: Along the Border* (Baltimore and London: The John Hokins University Press, 1998), where the author produces an important link between perfomance and new media. Here I will instead argue how, already very early, performance is thought to have moved *into* technologies and media.

[5] See: Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2000)

requires the medium to be familiar to the viewer. Both these discussions are deployed in adapting new media to the concept of *remediation*, which does not necessarily require the 'improvement' of certain technologies, but can also involve 'refashioning' them.[6] Similar to the popular discourse on new media, remediation can be used to examine the refashioning of technologies for production. At the same time it provides insight into the social and political dimensions of remediation, which often start with Walter Benjamin thesis on how mechanical reproduction has destroyed the 'aura' of art.

Body and performance in new media

Overall, there has been less attention to the role of the body in human action, despite the fact that it proves important from the very start in discussions on mechanical reproduction, media, and remediation. The introduction of still cameras and the development of motion picture cameras were accompanied by an awareness of the significant role human actions and transformations of the body played in the emergent practices of photography and film. For that reason, the way in which the camera operates, as well as how the recorded images are perceived, both become dependent on the notion that the body *is of space*. Therefore, the way in which the intensity of 'direct' physical experience is altered in the transformation of 'real' time and 'actual' space in mediation does not diminish the role of the body and its performative function. It is clear that mechanical reproduction does not lead to disembodiment; rather it enhances the complex processes in which re-embodiment occurs.

Walter Benjamin's thesis on artistic performance in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" provides some clues to the way compound levels of re-embodiment start to operate in new, technological art productions and which are based a comparison between stage theatre and film.[7] Overall, it moves towards the notion that the role of the body in performance and action becomes far more complex, once it

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[6] Bolter and Grusin thereby redefine the term *remediation* as it is introduced as an 'anthropotropic' process by Paul Levenson in 1997. For further reference, see: Paul Levinson, *The Soft Edge: A Natural History and Future of the Information Revolution* (London: Routledge, 1997)

[7] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" was first published in 1937. Here I have used its translation in English in Hannah Arendt, ed., *Illuminations*. Translated from

becomes recorded and reproduced. In comparing the screen actor to the stage actor, Benjamin points to the way the cinema heralded a major shift in the way audiences experience performance. According to Benjamin, the cinema formed the basis for the relationship between the performer and the public to be turned into one of indirect exchanges, which are "subjected to a series of optical tests".

The actions of the performer, as well as the experiences of audiences, thus become subject to the dictates of the camera. Benjamin concludes that mechanical reproduction disrupts the "close personal contact" between the actor and the audience in performance, but this does not mean that the embodied experience of performance disappears. In fact, mechanical reproduction can allow a far more complex role for the body to be brought to the surface, since it can concentrate on "the details of human action" (close-up, repetition, montage) rather than on characterization.[8] For Benjamin, the work of Bertolt Brecht occupies a pivotal role in an awareness of physical action in performance, which can be analyzed in mechanical reproduction. In 1985, Gilles Deleuze also refers to Brecht in pointing out how the move from the "everyday body" into the "body mounted by the camera", is related to the "imperceptible passage from attitudes or postures to 'gest'."[9]

These views form the basis for a discussion about the way in which remediation of performance takes place in other forms and fields of practice. New media is one such field of practice. Until recently many discussions about new media in China were linked to the way artists adapted their works to the new technologies. That they did so was a sign that they used the new media to challenge conventional practices based on outdated media. Less emphasis is given to the way new technologies are actually being used. If

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German by Harry Zohn (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968). Of particular importance for this discussion is Chapter VIII, in which Benjamin deals with performance (pages 211-244).

[8] This can be clearly seen from note 10, in which Benjamin quotes Bertolt Brecht, stating how: "The film [...] provides – or could provide – useful insight into the details of human actions [...] Character is never used as a source of motivation; the inner life of the person never supplies the principle cause of the plot and seldom its main result."

[9] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, translated from French by Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, Fourth Edition 1995 [1985]), 189-224. Deleuze clearly observes how 'gest' can move beyond the social, and is essentially for " the development of attitudes themselves, and, as such, carries out a direct theatricalization of bodies, often very discreet, because it takes place independently of any role."

we examine the way in which artists have come to use a range of different technologies then more elaborate views of the *role of the mediated subject of the acting body* in art will emerge. It would allow the discourse of performance to be linked to new practices in photography, video, computer animation, and web-based art. In this way more complex understanding of contemporary art in the context of the global dissemination of new technologies can be developed.

In order to examine the way in which contemporary art has produced these links, some prominent concepts used in the study of art need to be abandoned, or at least greatly revised, since these all impose rigid discursive distinctions; distinctions of form, field, discipline and medium in art. With the introduction of the term *medium* into the discourse of contemporary art, the multiple complexities of contemporary practice are accommodated. The definition of medium has been described as "that which remediates."[10] This means that it can no longer operate in seclusion from other media. Thus the process of mutual interdependence turns medium into *media*. The process of remediation requires a redefinition of notions of the real; it privileges new processes of reproduction over old ones, and is essential to the discourse of *new* media. Performance becomes part of the discourse of new media through its inherent remediation, as we will see in this chapter. By focusing on performance *in* new media, we can outline a discussion on new media in China that moves beyond the established realm of video.

'Kua meiti' and the transcendence of disciplines in new media in China

Between September and November 2003, a group of artists, critics, curators and scholars from the Chinese art scene came to meet every Saturday in 'Trainspotting' (*Caihuoche*), an underground digital video club in the northeast of Beijing. The participants, including the author, gathered to discuss a various art productions that have emerged in China in recent years, many of which involved artists making use of in a wide range of media. As a result, they began to use the term *kua meiti* to describe the way in which these practices clearly offer *transmediality* in creating some of the most contemporaneous

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[10] Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*, 65

works of experimental art in China. [11] Twenty-five years of economic and institutional reform have helped produce an alternative art scene in China that is capable of promoting itself in the international art market. However, official national cultural production, especially in educational institutions and promotional channels, continues to be based upon strict separations between disciplines. For the participants in the discussions, the idea of *transmediality* formed an important concept to describe how contemporary art practices often involve dense and complex exchanges between these hitherto distinct fields of visual art, film, literature, poetry, music, and performance.[12]

The discussions in Beijing followed significant predecessors in challenging the complacencies of set styles, techniques, forms, and attitudes – many of which involved performances, which have been discussed throughout this thesis. During the course of the 1980s and 1990s contemporary practitioners overcame a complex range of social and political challenges, and as several of them entered the international art scene many more came under increasing pressure, especially when both locally and overseas critics project Euramerican models onto a complex experimental scene in China. This leads to a further limiting of the field.

Rather than concentrating exclusively on new technologies, which in China generally means video art, our present discussion will provide a survey of the increasingly diverse and complex use of media in contemporary art. In terms of Chinese video art, recent high-profile events have already produced some significant discussions. One can, for example point to the exhibition *Compound Eyes* (2001). Curated by Huangfu Binghui and with the assistance of Johan Pijnappel, the exhibition traveled to a range of venues in Asia, Australia, and Europe; it was accompanied by the publication of a catalogue profiling some of China's leading video artists. Another example is the exhibition *Synthetic Reality* held in Beijing in 2002 that, aside from producing a catalogue, can now also be viewed in an elaborate online presentation hosted by the

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[11] The term was initially proposed by the chief organizer of the event Zhao Shulin, who occupies a senior position in the state government, but in recent years has also been active as a curator and researcher of Chinese experimental art.

[12] This was also made possible through the participation of teachers and students from leading institutions for tertiary education in the arts, including the Central Academy of Fine Arts, the Beijing Film and Television Academy, Beijing University, the Central Conservatorium, and the National Drama Academy.

Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (who together with the Prince Claus Foundation helped sponsor this artist-run event).[13]

Ideas for both exhibitions came about during the late 1990s, and were derived from a particularly urgent situation in which international attention to video art remained limited, especially when compared to painting. Inside China it continued to be restricted to the experimental art scene, and would not become part of the system of privilege dispensed by the institutional domain until much more recently.[14] In its brief history, several artists have created highly elaborate video productions, which provided them with an important media extension to some of the conventional practices in which they were trained at the academies. Coming from a background of oil painting, print-making, and sculpture, these artists became increasingly involved in installation, often combining it with an interest in performance, both of which had been instrumental in developing relationships between practice, work, and audience. Artists are not only dealing with the intrinsic characteristics of video as a medium, but as a means to re-mediate their concepts and actions in the public domain, where viewers had become habituated to television. Video art would therefore not position itself as a vanguard practice struggling against the conventional art discourse in China, nor would it profile itself as a mere integration of technological advances. With neither the kudos of the established practices, nor the symbolic efficacy of performance art, video art had remained "a forlorn figure" in the contemporary art scene in China; that is, until recently.[15]

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[13] The online presentation can be found at: http://kvc.minbuza.nl/uk/specials/synthetic_reality/exhibition.html (last accessed in June 2005). Catalogues for the two exhibitions are: Huangfu Binghui, ed., *Compound Eyes: Contemporary Video Art from China* (Singapore: Earl Lu Gallery, LASALLE-SIA College of the Arts, 2001); and Ni Haifeng, ed., *Synthetic Reality*. (Hong Kong: Timezone 8, 2004).

[14] The major changes came about in 2001, when the Central Academy in Beijing established a new media department at its new campus at Huajiadi District in the Northeast of the city, and evolved into one of the most popular branches at the academy under guidance by its Head, Ma Gang. Around the same time Xu Jiang became president of the China Art Gallery in Hangzhou and he increased the curriculum on new media art with the help of one of the leading practitioners and teachers of video art, Zhang Peili.

[15] This point is also brought forward by Huang Zhuan in his essay for the catalogue of the *Compound Eyes* exhibition, in which he describes how: "Within the contemporary arts of China, video art has always been a forlorn player; it has not the opportunity for commercial success like displayed art, nor the status of performance art in assuming a symbolic role of a 'pioneering' art form." For further reference, see: Huang Zhuan. "Method and Atribute: History and Problems of the Video Art of China". In Huangfu Binghui, *Compound Eyes*, 24-27

Discourses on video art and documentations of the 'real' in China

The exhibition *Synthetic Reality* was first discussed in 1998 when, during a dinner in Beijing, a group of artists brought up the question of the position of video art practice in China. At the time, video art was still considered a new area of art practice, despite the fact that several artists in China had already been experimenting with this medium since the late 1980s. Some of the most significant works in the early development of video art in China were by Zhang Peili, including the 30 minute video production *30/30* (1988), often described as one of the first video works produced in China.[16] Although once described as part of an underground culture, video art became increasingly visible in the development of contemporary art in China during the course of the 1990s. In particular in Hangzhou, where Zhang Peili continues to teach at the China Art Academy.

Hangzhou is also the location where, in 1996, Qiu Zhijie and Wu Meichun organized the exhibition *Image and Phenomenon* that, for the first time, included a large number of experimental video works in a public event. Following the exhibition, they compiled a set of texts documenting early overseas video practices accompanied by statements by artists who had started working in the medium in China. These documents were published in 1997 in two samizdat volumes in Hangzhou, and became an important source for artists interested in experimental video art over the following years. At the same time that these publications came out, Wu Meichun and Qiu Zhijie organized another exhibition, *Demonstration of Video Art China '97*, this time held at the Central Academy of Fine Art in Beijing.

By the late-1990s an increasing number of artists in China had thus started to investigate ways to use video art in the creation of new visual structures. Through the use of video cameras and editing equipment artists availed themselves of the ability to manipulate time and space inherent in the mechanical reproduction of moving images.[17]

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[16] See: Johan Pijnappel, "What Are You Looking At? - There is Nothing Good to Look At Here!" in Binghui Huangfu, 32-33

[17] For example in the definition by Manuel Saiz, who states that: "Video art is contemporary art that creates its forms through the medium of video, either partially or totally. This implies works that include moving images reproduced on monitors or projections by means of a signal recorded on a magnetic/electronic base." Manuel Saiz, "Exceptional Routines. Video Art Since 1990", in Marko Daniel, ed., *25 hrs - International Video Art Show*. (Barcelona: TheVideoArtFoundation, 2003), 13

The manipulation of time and space can be related to the discussion of "concepts of authenticity" and to the "withering aura" in the process of reproduction, formulated by Benjamin. For even "the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place were it happens to be."[18] Following in the footsteps of Benjamin, the Euramerican discourse on art in the age of mechanical reproduction derives from (obsessive) analyses of the unique qualities of an original artwork. In China, the discussion of authenticity is far less concerned with the status of the original, and artists are instead much more infatuated by the possibilities of the medium itself, and often mention the spontaneous and creative qualities that video offers.

Starting in the late 1980s and throughout course of the 1990s several artists started to focus their work on video's documentary qualities; it resulted in the production of documentary films. These places an emphasis on proceedings in 'real time' and 'real space', using the camera as a tool to document and substantiate 'real life' events. The Chinese term for reality, *xianshi* is used in the term realism (*xianshi zhuyi*). Essentially, the term describes the *actuality* of a given event, but it also produces awareness of a certain displacement that arises with representation. It is thus associated with the term *xianxiang*, marking the *phenomenon* or *appearance of things*. In recent years, these terms have laid the foundation for artists using the concept of *xianchang*, which literally translates as the actual *scene* (of an incident), but is also used to identify the precedence of *live action* over documentation.[19] Frequently used in both video art and documentary film, *xianchang* is a model describing the way in which artworks involve the remediation of the phenomenal space and real-time of performance and behavior (*xingwei*).

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[18] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" in Arendt, ed., *Illuminations*, 214

[19] A good example of this can be seen in the bilingual title of two publications by Wu Wenguang: Wu Wenguang (ed.), *Xianchang/Document*, Vol. 1 (Tianjin: Tianjin shehui kexueyuan chubanshe, 2000) and Wu Wenguang (ed.), *Xianchang/*Document, Vol. 2 (Tianjin: Tianjin shehui kexueyuan chubanshe, 2001). These publications were followed more recently by the publication of a collection of essays by Qiu Zhijie, *Zhongyaode shi xianchang* (*The Scene is Most Important*) (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2003), which also addresses the importance of the term *xianchang* in addressing both the *scene* and the precedence of live action in many practices of experimental art in China.

Some documentary practice can be related to the deficiency of the camera, where artists work in an almost Derridean fashion: reality becomes detached from the truth or falsity of the scenario. In the Chinese context these documentations of the 'real' function as a reaction against the allegories and social-political commentary that were so popular in the formation of socialist realism. Perhaps this is where the title of the exhibition *Synthetic Reality* comes into its own, with each of the participating artists realizing that, despite an ongoing interest in documenting 'reality', no-one can escape the fact that every documentary representation depends upon its own detour of the real through the limitations of the audio-visual signifier.[20] In the recent history of video art in China, artists have been predominantly concerned with the remediation of the medium of video. With the medium in mind, many artists have tried to close the 'detour from the real' by capturing reality on film. Other artists play well on how the viewer perceives reality, once it becomes mediated. A good example is found in work of Song Dong, whose video pieces often pay attention to the distortion of perception, by integrating different perspectives into the recorded images, and in the spatial set up of the video installation. In the end, the submission to the camera and editing equipment by the artist determines the degree to which 'reality' is re-presented in the final artwork. There is always the possibility that representation will be no more than the farcical evocation and grotesque avatar of a real historical event, which can become nourished by a *legendary reference*.[21]

The artists appearing in the exhibition *Synthetic Reality* each use new media to represent their personal realities and at the same time challenge the mechanical devices at their disposal. For the visitor to the exhibition, video art offers the possibility of affecting the ways we perceive our surroundings by manipulating time and space through the technical manipulation of sounds and images. As a result, the title of the exhibition incorporates the amalgamation of our senses in our perception of the 'real'. For that reason, the concept of the exhibition stands closely related to that of the other exhibition, *Compound Eyes*.

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[20] A good reference for understanding the important topic of 'the detour of the real' in the recent discourse on documentary film is: Michael Renov, *Theorizing Documentary* (New York: Routledge, 2001)

[21] See: Karl Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Luis Bonaparte," in Lewis S. Feuer, ed. *Marx and Engels: Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy* (Glasgow: William Collins & Co. Ltd., 1959), 360.

Popular paradigms for Chinese new media practice

Since the start of the twenty-first century there has been a global trend of large international exhibitions of experimental art from China organized by the state, and with particular interest from the Ministry of Culture in sponsoring such events. With some success, it has resulted in the reinvigoration of the role of the China International Exhibition Agency in promoting the formation of a new, 'national' discourse on Chinese art – at a time when Chinese art is emerging into an 'OPEN to all' pool of cross-cultural parity. The first major international exhibition of new art from China in recent years, backed by the Ministry of Culture, was launched in 2001 at the Hamburger Bahnhof in Berlin, under the title *Living in Time* (*Shenghuo zai cishi*). This was followed in 2003 by the exhibition *Alors, la Chine?* (*Well then, [What About] China?*), and by the successful opening of the Chinese Pavilion at the 50th Venice Biennale in 2005, following an unfortunate attempt in 2003 which, according to official reports, was derailed by the SARS epidemic.[22]

These events no longer remain in sharp contrast to the international attention by overseas curators for experimental art from China, which can be witnessed all year around at Biennales and Triennales around the world. From the Chinese side there seems to have been a well-considered official attempt to establish a new discourse of Chinese contemporary art that would make it understandable from a 'Chinese' point of view. Recently, a younger generation of art critics and curators in China have found comfort in centering the discourse of contemporary Chinese art on the topics highlighting the burgeoning economic development that has brought such huge changes to the urban landscape, and on the increased commercialization of everyday life in China. After all,

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[22] Several people who were indirectly involved with the Chinese pavilion at the 50th Venice Biennalle have disclosed privately the cancellation of the exhibition actually took place at a meeting, in an undisclosed location in May 2003, between the organizers and some influential officials in the art scene (including from the China Art Academy in Hangzhou and the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing). During this meeting discussions were held on who should get the honor of being in charge of the event, with some officials clearly having the feeling of being left out from the organization. After some deliberation it was apparently decided to hold of the Chinese Pavilion until a compromise was found on who should be selected as the curator of the first national pavilion at Venice. To prevent these internal conflicts from becoming known to the public, it was decided to officially state that the exhibition was cancelled because of the outbreak of the SARS epidemic in China.

new commercial spaces are where many artists congregate and challenge the former pastorales of socialist-realism in China. The works of contemporary artists are now carefully chosen to construct the basis for a discourse that emphasizes the new social-reality, although this time the privileged discourse includes a wider range of artistic media than ever before. In recent years, the attention given to new media by Chinese and overseas curators has centered on a select number of artists such as Yang Fudong and Feng Mengbo, who were prominently displayed at *Documenta XI* in 2002, followed by the exhibition *Alors, La Chine?* in 2003.

Yang Fudong's 35 mm black-and-white films bear witness to the changing landscape in China's southeast seen through the eyes of the modern Chinese intellectual. Films such as *Liulan* (2003), with their bittersweet storylines, often have a more seductive appeal to local and international curators than the unwavering and more challenging examinations of cultural and social change in the work of some of his contemporary female colleagues.**[ill. 5.1]** For example, the work by Cui Xiuwen, *Ladies* (2000), gives viewers more than a simple voyeuristic insight into the behavioral practices of some of Shanghai's prostitutes as they prepare themselves in the restroom of a large brothel.**[ill. 5.2]** The artist carefully selected the contextual framework of the work to activate in various notions of private and public space, as well as to different levels of concealed and untied behavior. Through the lens of a hidden camera she gives the viewer a peek into the closed space of one of the many brothels across China that have become a distinct, but highly controversial, site of economic prosperity. Working in a single-shot frame, the camera functions as a recording device – documenting the behavior of women as they apply make-up, change clothes, talk about their business. There is certainly no need for witty choreography or delicate cinematography (used by Yang Fudong) as these videos operate on the level of everyday, social existence.

In contrast to these artists, Beijing-based Feng Mengbo produces far more boisterous representations of a society infatuated with violence, power and the heroic, through his videos that form the basis for interactive computer games which invite players to blast away 'alien' opponents. In works such as *Q3* (1999), additional features in the game incorporate the artist himself reporting on events from a handheld digital

video camera, engaged in CNN-style on-the-spot 'interviews' with aliens wounded in battle.**[ill. 5.3]** Subsequent installations at public exhibitions further request the physical participation on the part of the viewer by foot-operated control panels, as can be seen in the installation of *Q4U* (2003) that operates the game-version of his work, *A_Q*.**[ill. 5.4]** Many of Feng Mengbo's works further bear witness to generations of Chinese citizens growing up amidst the veneration of revolutionary struggle and the glorification of the People's Liberation Army, as can be seen clearly in the 2001 *Phantom Tales* animation series.[23]

Yang Fudong and Feng Mengbo represent an important generation of artists who grew up during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976); and their works can be used to distinguish two different approaches to new media art in China at the start of the twenty-first century. Their careers follow in the footsteps of artists such as Zhang Peili and Wang Jianwei, who are often recognized as the first artists to experiment with video art in China during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Both Zhang Peili and Wang Jianwei trained in oil painting at the Zhejiang Fine Arts Academy (now renamed the China Academy of Fine Arts) in Hangzhou. Zhang Peili obtained his degree in 1984, and Wang Jianwei did postgraduate studies in Hangzhou from 1985 to 1987, after completing his undergraduate degree at the Chengdu Painting Institute in Sichuan Province.

During the 1980s Zhang Peili, together with his close friend and artist Geng Jianyi, became interested in exploring different media in his art practice, recording experimental performance works first using photography, and later video, as in his piece *30/30* (1988)**[ill. 5.5]**. Frequently described in overviews on Chinese video art, this 30-minute video follows the continuing breaking of a mirror recorded on a Betamax camera, which he had borrowed from a close friend. From the first half of the 1990s Zhang Peili continued to produce an influential series of video works which focused on the exchanges between politics and society in the Chinese media that had become increasingly dominated by television.

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[23] This work can be viewed Online at www.diacenter.org/mengbo/ (last accessed in June 2005), hosted by the Dia Center in New York.

A good example of such work by Zhang Peili is *Water, Standard Version from the Cihai Dictionary* (1993), which features a famous CCTV newscaster reading out the definition of water in the *Cihai*-Dictionary, on the eve of the military crackdown on student protesters in Tiananmen Square.**[ill. 5.6]** By the late 1990s Zhang became interested in provoking direct physical reactions in audiences by confronting them with video surveillance, as in *Uncertain Pleassures* (1996) and *Eating* (1997). The first work consists of a video installation, using twelve monitors, featuring close-up's of people's hands anxiously scratching different parts of their body; the latter is a three monitor installation showing the process of eating a cake, screening the movements of the left ear, mouth, and hands.**[ills. 5.7 & 5.8]** At the same time, Zhang Peili maintains great interest in unraveling the use of propaganda film in Mao's China, as in the installation *Last Words*, sections of which can be viewed in the Online presentation of the exhibition *Synthetic Realities*.[24]

Wang Jianwei was an acclaimed academic oil painter throughout the 1980s until his discovery of essays on Joseph Beuys 1991, translated by the Taiwanese artist Wu Mali.[25] As he noted in the interview in 2001, these writings led to his decision to completely abandon painting and focus instead on installations and performances that incorporated new media and on everyday public and private behavior amidst the significant physical and social changes under the new reform movement in China.[26] Wang's works offer insight into Chinese sensibilities; they challenge stereotypes of submission to ideological control, and instead point to people's intricate relations to cultural and historical notions of time, space, and social embodiment. These can be seen in Wang's four hour long video *Living Elsewhere* (1998) that follows the lives of a group of farmers who have settled themselves in abandoned villas on the outskirts of Chengdu City (Sichuan Province). **[ill. 5.9]**

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[24] See: http://kvc.minbuza.nl/uk/specials/synthetic_reality/exhibition.html

[25] As mentioned before, the translation by Wu Mali of Heiner Stachelhaus' study on Beuys made a huge impact on artists in China. In a recorded interview with Wang Jianwei, in 2001, the artist further describes how this study inspired him to completely abondon the medium of painting, and instead he started to focus his work on new media and theatre productions that focus on the concept of setting up a social organism as a work of art, which is decribed in detail by Stachelhaus in his study. For further reference, see: Heiner Stachelhaus, *Joseph Beuys*, 61-78

Zhang Peili and Wang Jianwei were also influential on other new media art practitioners working in China – artists such as Zhu Jia, Li Yongbin, and Wang Gongxin. Works by these artists involve an increasingly complex use of video. They incorporate sculpture and installation and are often characterized by an interest in documenting the changes brought about by more than two decades of economic reform. Wang Gongxin's light-hearted works integrate the audience in a direct way. His video installation *Karaoke* (2000) invited the audience to sing along with a group of characters projected on a row of teeth, when it was shown in Sydney in 2002.**[ill. 5.10]** He returned to Beijing in 1997, after having spent seven years in New York. During his time in New York, Wang Gongxin had acquired extensive access to the work of leading American video artists, and now brought these experiences back to China. As a result, his work played a significant role in introducing complex ways of integrating video with installation and sculpture practices, which may have been inspired by observations of the work of artists such as Gary Hill and Bill Viola. At the same time, his installations relate specifically to the perceptions of local Chinese audiences by confronting them with specific cultural behavioral practices, and in particular, with Chinese reactions to the outside world. A good example of this is the video installation *The Sky of Brooklyn* (1997) where a monitor is dug into the ground at the bottom of a well displaying a recording of the sky over Brooklyn. The installation is accompanied by the recording of the artist's voice repeating the words "*Ni kan shenmo? You shenmo hao kan ma*? ("What are you looking at? Is their something worth looking at?").**[ill. 5.11]**

Towards a discourse on performance 'in' new media in China

In recent years, Chinese video art has become widely represented, and highly acclaimed, in leading international exhibitions of contemporary art and at specialized international and transnational video art festivals. The international exposure of video art from China, together with support from technological industries, has helped to generate local interest in video and new media arts in China. Academies across China are gradually following those in Beijing and Hangzhou in taking up the craze for new media arts, and in May

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[26] Also following a recorded interview with Wang Jianwei in 2001.

2004 the Millennium Art Museum in Beijing hosted the *First International New Media Arts Exhibition*. This state-run event was supported by the Chinese Ministry of Culture and the Mondriaan Foundation (Holland) and involved the participation of 17 international and 11 national research institutes.

Despite the increasing interest in new media arts at art education and exhibition institutes in China, they continue to be faced with many problems. A report on the *First International New Media Arts Exhibition* in the *China Daily* quotes Professor Zhu Qingsheng from Beijing University (also known as a modernist ink painter) who reported that the event had been criticized for the way Chinese artists focus too much on "conceptual issues" and were less involved in enhancing their "use of new technologies"[27]. Taking into account the situation in China where new media art has often been treated synonymous with video art, and where the use of other advanced technologies is scarce, it is possible to agree with Zhu's comments. When looking for all practices that come under the term 'new media art' – including web-based art, virtual reality, kinetic art, digital animation, and so on – one may conclude there is less diversification in the field in China than in some other parts of the world. At the same time, there are ways of arguing that new media art in China has in fact become more diversified in the way artists seek '*transmediality* in their work. This is the case when one examines the role of performance in the media art, as I shall argue.

Against the backdrop of the growing number of artists who have become very well known for creating profitable works for the global art market, like Fang Lijin and Yang Shaobin, there are other artists who continue to generate 'compound' productions that enrich the discourse on Chinese contemporary art and stimulate further practice through non-profitable local and international exchanges – like Song Dong and Zhu Ming. From a broad perspective these practices involve artists who have focused their attention on 'live art' (*xianchang yishu*). Despite having received less attention from art critics, curators, and the like, these events have played a significant role in the discourse on 'experimental art' in China. They incorporate a broad range of media and disciplines within the arts field and despite posing some emphasis on conceptual concerns, these

live art events also involve artists experimenting with a range of new technologies that broaden the discourse on time-based and site-specific visual art practices. They involve artists such as Qiu Zhijie, Wu Wenguang, and Song Dong, among others.

During the late 1980s, Qiu Zhijie became good friends with Zhang Peili, Geng Jianyi, and Wu Shanzhuan (who later moved to Germany). He received his education in printmaking at the Zhejiang Fine Arts Academy, but soon managed to improve his conceptual and technical skills, allowing his works to move beyond the conventional curriculum taught at the academy, into producing composite installation works, seen in his graduation work *About a New Life* (1992).**[ill. 5.12]** The installation, which was shown in a small warehouse in Hangzhou featured 16 glass panels of different sizes on which texts, slogans, and a wide-range of figures were printed. The installation questions the limitations offered by artworks for display by creating a translucent labyrinth that allowed people to fill up the clear sections of the glass panels, and thus take an immediate part in the work's structure. The installation informs his later works, including early video pieces such as *Bathroom* (1997) that features the artist's painted face integrated into the tiles of a bathroom floor, whilst conducting various facial expressions.**[ill. 5.13]** However, as he explained in an interview in 2001, the most significant turning point in his work came whilst producing the small installation *Public Life/ Glass Toilet* (1994), which led to an ongoing interest in opening up the 'concealed' practices in art production.**[ill. 5.14]** The work originally came accompanied by a statement by the artist, explaining how people "often focus their attention on the exterior features of a work, but fail to see what lies inside."[28] These comments, combined with an interest for Joseph Beuys, demonstrate how artists in China often treat new media art in ways that allow them to create direct interactions with the public. Often this is done through live art productions, rather than works that fall within the accepted categories of new media art. This would include, for example, Qiu Zhijie's *The West* (2001) in its use of digital video-, digital sound-, and a wide range of software-animation.**[ill. 5.15]** However, even this highly technical work features recordings and interviews of

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[27] Report in *China Daily*, 11 June

[28] Following a recorded conversation with the artist in 2001.

everyday life in China, featuring a range of people as they talk about their mixed views towards the West.

Whereas the public experience of art often comes in ways of perceiving finished products at exhibitions, one rarely witnesses the intimidating processes that precede them. This idea informed two major events that Qiu Zhijie organised in 1999, *Post-Sense Sensibility: Alien Bodies and Delusion* (together with Wu Meichun), and *Post-Sense Sensibility: Spree* in 2001. Whereas the first project will become one of the major turning points in the discourse on underground exhibitions in China, the second event involved the introduction of time-based and site-specific works that opened up the stage for radical processes of live art practices that entailed direct confrontation between artists and audiences in creating 'art processes'. *Post-Sense Sensibility: Spree* was held at a theatre in Beijing and aimed to work against the "completion of works", the "pre-eminence of conceptualism" and its relationship to "idea art" (*sixiang yishu*).[29] Qiu asked visitors to arrive at 3pm sharp, after which the doors were closed and no one was allowed to enter or leave for the entire duration of the show. During this time all events were filmed and broadcasted onto a small television outside the entrance door. Each of the productions had artists making use of sound and video projection and the audience was regularly confronted by performances that involved food, spirits, pig blood, and live chickens and rats that ran around the theatre, frightening many in the audience.**[ill. 5.16]**

Aside from these more radical examples, in recent years there also have been more serene live art events that attracted the attention of local audiences. In particular, one can look at the productions by the Living Dance Studio led by Wu Wenguang and Wen Hui. Starting in the late 1980s, Wu Wenguang emerged as an important independent filmmaker, producing documentaries such as *Bumming in Beijing* (1989) and *Jianghu* (1999). In recent years, however, Wu has become increasingly involved in producing live art events together with his wife Wen Hui, who is one of the leading contemporary dancers in China. These events combine theatre, modern dance and performance and are accompanied by new media based arrangements, using sound, video and computer

projections. For example, one of the most well received productions overseas, as well as in China, *Report on Giving Birth* (1999), produces an intricate synthesis between interview-based narrations, choreographed dance movements, and a wide range of projected images, some of which are produced in collaboration with Wang Jianwei.**[ill. 5.17]** For another production, *Report on Body* (2002), the Japanese lighting designer Nami Yakanama and the Chinese video artist Cao Fei collaborated with performers from the Living Dance Studio.**[ill. 5.18]**

In 2001 the Living Dance Studio organised the production *Dancing with Farm Workers* (2001).**[ill. 5.19]** This time, two long-time friends and a well-known artist couple from Beijing, Song Dong and Yin Xiuzhen, accompanied Wu Wenguang and Wen Hui. The result was a performance event that involved the participation of 30 migrant workers from Sichuan, who were working on construction sites in Beijing (often under very harsh conditions). These workers were trained to participate in dance and theatre performance movements that drew on their daily lives and actions. The event also led to the production of a documentary film by Wu Wenguang who recorded the entire 9-day process on digital video. The whole production played an important role in the careers of all the participants, including Song Dong, who has since become recognized outside China for his video and performance works.

In a recent conversation in Beijing, Song Dong claimed that performance is the basis of all his artworks, including his video installations. As an example he pointed at his work, *Broken Mirror* (1999) that presents 7 minutes of shots filmed around Beijing, using a mirror and a hammer to create a sudden change of scene.[30]**[ill. 5.20]** As part of this work, the artist is performing a trip around Beijing, whereby the people on the street perform a reaction on hearing the breaking of the mirror; even the viewer of the video perform a discerned response, as they witness the sudden change of perspective. Let us therefore conclude this discussion on new media art in China with Song's work, because it epitomizes the discussion on *transmediality* (*kua meiti*) that has occupied a crucial role

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[29] These comments can be found in an essay by Qiu Zhijie for the indepently published catalogue of the event, titled "The Prediction in the Age of Post-exhibition" in Qiu Zhijie, *Post-sense Sensibility: Spree* (Beijing: Private publication, 11 March 2001)

[30] Following recorded interviews with Song Dong in 2001 and 2002.

in so many contemporary art practices in China. Following Song's claim, we can point to the performative functions of his video works, including *Floating* (2004), which featured at the 5th phase of *Asian Traffic* at 4A gallery in Sydney in 2004.**[ill. 5.21]**

The different levels in understanding the performative aspects of Song Dong's video works come with the recognition of the *mediated subject of the acting body in art.* This is the realization that the body is always present in art practices and their subsequent, secondary representations. Thus there is a direct link between a video work such as *Floating* and performances such as *Writing Diary with Water* (1995-present).**[ill. 5.22]** The oeuvre of contemporary artists these days often consists of a range of works that make use of different media but, taken together, become part of the same discourse of practice.

Following in the footsteps of these artist practitioners, it is essential for critics and curators, both independent and institutionally-based, to respond imaginatively to the challenges posed by contemporary art practices in China. What we do not need is yet more 'black booth/ velvet curtains' video art exhibitions promoted as a showcase for new media art – purely on the basis of their ingenious use of digital technology. Part of the *transmediality* of new media is the challenge of organizing events that stimulate interactions between artists, audiences and public spaces.

CHAPTER 6

POSITIONING EXPERIMENTAL ART AND THE ART SYSTEM IN CHINA

> The question of modern aesthetics is not "What is beautiful?" but "What is art to be (and what is literature to be)?"
>
> Jean-François Lyotard quoting Thierry de Duve,
> *The postmodern explained to children*, 1986

'High Culture Fever': The 'official' and 'unofficial' reviewed

In November 2000, a series of small, experimental, and provocative satellite exhibitions were launched to coincide with the opening of the 3rd Shanghai Biennale. The most well known of these was *FUCK OFF* curated by the conceptual artist and former member of the Stars Group (1979-1980) Ai Weiwei, together with the critic and Chinese Artists Association member, Feng Boyi. The exhibition, known in Chinese as *Bu hezuo fangshi* (*An Uncooperative Approach*), featured a series of artworks, including performances and site-specific installations, which were considered highly controversial and, at times, shocking. Works such as an inflated cadaver of a horse placed inside the main exhibition hall by the Beijing-based artist Yang Maoyuan were exhibited, along with Sun Yuan's *Solitary Animal*, which featured a hermetically sealed glass case containing a skeleton of a large dog and, according to the artist, a type of nerve gas that would instantly kill everyone in the exhibition space if the glass was broken.**[ill. 6.1]** The live performances included Yang Zhichao's *Planting Grass*, which involved the artist having three stalks of young grass planted on his back by two young nurses, a performance that took place

without local anaesthetic.**[ill. 6.2]** Following complaints by some visitors to the exhibition, and after reports came in about the live performance by Yang Zhichao, the Shanghai police moved in a few days after the opening, and cancelled the entire exhibition.

To some critics these works were the product of a "cruel society," presenting visual images that could be described as "barbaric, insane, and the work of savages and madmen."[1] Yet to what extent will, and perhaps *are*, these works being used as an instrument for the regeneration of public morality geared towards expanding the order of capital? In this chapter, I will begin by approaching the question of whether there has been a new, national movement towards regenerating a 'High Culture Fever' in China, following the demise of an earlier movement during the late 1980's.[2]

The term 'High Culture Fever' was first used in English by Wang Jing. She describes, among other things, how "in the eighties it was undoubtedly the knowing subject that seemed to gain the upper hand over the consuming and producing subject."[3] Wang further notes that, "in the 1990s the market certainly usurped the elite as the new legitimate marker of public opinions."[4] She points to the recent and highly efficient responses of Chinese government officials in channelling experimental cultural production into the official structures of arts production, mediation, and reception. This is an interesting position that certainly deserves further attention, for during much of the 1990s, it often looked as if the state and party bureaucracies in China had lost control over the arts in China. As a result, the cultural field was and is still often divided into two distinct and opposing realms described in binary terms of the 'official' (*guanfang*) versus the 'unofficial' (*fei guanfang*).[5]

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[1] These reactions will be further discussed later in this chapter., most significantly those by Wang Nanming, "How to Deal with Rights - A Criticism of the Violent Trend in Chinese Contemporary Art". In addition, following the *Post-Sense Sensibility* exhibition (1999) where many of these works were shown for the first time, several people openly stated their criticism of these 'recent trends', including Hans van Dijk in the message board of the *Chinese Type Contemporary Art Magazine* (Formerly published at http://www.chinese-art.com, discontinued in 2002)

[2] See: Wang Jing, *High Culture Fever*

[3] Ibid., 48

[4] Ibid, 265

[5] During the course of the 1990s there are numerous examples to be found of studies that position the production, mediation, and reception of contemporary Chinese art in terms of the 'official' (*guanfang*) art

According to the Chinese art critic and curator Hou Hanru, who now lives in Paris, the way in which the Chinese contemporary art movement after the 1980s became centred on the problem of ideology calls for a 'de-ideologicalisation' of contemporary Chinese art. He points out how artists in China have also come to realise the need to look for a 'dissolution' of the opposition between 'unofficial' and 'official' art: "...in order to 'decentralise' ideologic-centricism." As a result, Hou Hanru argues that the term 'un-official art' has never existed, although he does argue that there is clearly an ongoing resistance to the 'new official ideology' and what he calls the: "pressure of 'otherisation' of the international market and media system."[6] Yet, as John Clark has recently even more clearly pointed out, the entire distinction between 'official' and 'unofficial': "may not be between the outside and inside of an art system or between an establishment and an avant-garde, but rather between different elements that are privileged differently *within the same system* [my italics]."[7]

Through the sanctioning of particular artistic styles, techniques and subjects, a re-positioning of the order of public morals and national market controls by political authorities in charge of the arts appears to constitute the more recent distinction between 'official' and 'unofficial' art in China. This new order constitutes the control of the 'mainstream' in arts production, mediation, and reception and is based almost exclusively on quasi-market values, and thus dependent on how different works appeal first to national, and later also to international audiences.

The rather clever re-positioning of the order of cultural capital in China after 2000 becomes clearer upon close examination of the way in which Chinese experimental art

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of the academy vis-a-verse the 'unofficial' position taken by many 'experimental' artists. See for example: Chang Tsong-zung, "Into the Nineties," in *China's New Art, Post-1989*; and: Wu Hung, *Transience*, 17-22. Interestingly, a year later Wu Hung comes with another publication on 'experimental art' in China in which the author starts to note more clearly the problems involved in using the terms 'unofficial' and 'official', whereby artists in particular: "[...] have found terms like 'unofficial art' and 'avant-garde art' misleading: the former exaggerates the political orientation of this art and the latter exaggerates its artistic radicalism." See: Wu Hung, *Exhibiting Experimental Art*, 11

[6] See: Hou Hanru, "Towards an 'Un-Unofficial Art': De-ideologicalisation of China's Contemporary Art in the 1990s" in *Third Text*, Vol. 34 (Spring 1996). Following the use of the term 'un-official' art by Hou Hanru, there may be a discussion on the distinction with 'unofficial', although both appear to be translated from the widely used term *fei guanfang* in Chinese.

[7] John Clark, "System and style in the practice of Chinese contemporary art: The disappearing exterior?," in: *Yishu*, 13-33

production has been promoted over the past few years. The first major sign of the re-positioning of Chinese experimental art occurred during the *48th Venice Biennale* in 1999. The focus of the Biennale was the exhibition *d'APERTutto* (*OPEN to All*), organised by the Swiss curator Harald Szeemann, which featured 19 Chinese 'avant-garde' artists and was seen by many Western critics as a landmark in the representation of art from China.[8] The concept of the avant-garde as part of the unofficial system was deployed in a clear attempt to foreground a radical subculture of experimental Chinese artists. These artists were presented as having broken free from the political mainstream of official art production operating under the control of an oppressive Chinese state and Communist party apparatus.

All the works selected by Szeemann to represent unofficial contemporary Chinese art in Venice had to be positioned outside the usual context of the nation-state and consequently they were placed inside the Palazzo dell'Esposizione, a 3000 m^2 exhibition space now known as the Italian Pavilion and were also scattered across both the Corderie and the Artiglierie, two huge barracks known as the Arsenale. These works were part of the carefully selected exhibition theme, *d'APERTutto* (*OPEN to All*), which attempted to convey a sense of openness towards a group of culturally oppressed 'underground' artists whose works have not been officially recognised at 'home'. What was ironic about this framing was that all of the artists had already become part of the mainstream, both in terms of their production and mediation as well as in terms of the wide international reception of their works prior to the Biennale. In addition, most of these artists were trained at national and provincial art academies run by the state, and were represented by commercial art galleries in China and those abroad that were owned by foreign curators working together with their Chinese counterparts. In fact, a large majority of the works came from the private collection of Uli Sigg, the former Swiss

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[8] For example in the report that was published online in the news magazine *Artnet*, it is said that: "After a long visit to China, Szeemann invited participation by 15 Chinese artists 'who have escaped the tradition of social realism.'"

ambassador to China, a fact which should have been mentioned in an exhibition supposedly intended to be an 'open to all' representation of contemporary Chinese art.[9]

However, if these background facts went unnoticed in the Western art press it certainly was not by those currently working in the field of visual art in China. It was from this position that exactly a year after the *48th Biennale di Venezia*, China played host to the Shanghai Biennale, which featured a large exhibition of 'experimental' Chinese art held at a national art museum for first time since the opening of the *China Modern Art Exhibition* in 1989. An enthusiastic international art critic described how "the permissive atmosphere lent a euphoric optimism to the proceedings, a feeling that this would be remembered as a moment of art history."[10] The enthusiasm of this reaction indicates a successful show for the Chinese government in taking another step towards recognising experimental art in China as part of national cultural production as well as in organizing "China's first international survey of contemporary art..."[11]

It was an important step for the central government to allow the focus of the *Shanghai Biennale* to be changed. The art critic Francesca Jordan, who has lived and worked in Beijing for the past 10 years or more, has taken particular note of the 'polite character' of the official exhibition in her report on the Shanghai Biennale. Jordan noted how "the opening (on November 6th) of the most important event for Chinese art this year – the 3rd Shanghai Biennale – was coinciding with the week-long annual Art Fair, and whether pro- or anti- the Biennale, everyone wanted to take advantage of the opportunity to give the international art world and press a taste of their own style of art exhibition, to ensure that both sides of Chinese contemporary art were represented."[12] The 'darker,' and 'more violent' side of Chinese art occupied its own distinct place in

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[9] The preface to the Venice Biennale catalogue Harald Szeemann uses many phrases that help in positioning the idea that Biennale has become 'open to all', a position that is understood as somewhat ironic by several people, including those writing outside Asia. See for example: Emma Bedford, "The Venice Biennale: A personal perspective", Online at: http://www.artthrob.co.za/99july/news.htm (Last accessed in November 2004)

[10] Hank Bull, "'The 3rd Shanghai Biennale November 2000' – Reviewed" in: *Chinese Type Contemporary Art Magazine*, vol. 3, no. 6 (December, 2000) (Formerly published Online at: http://www.chinese-art.com, discontinued in 2002)

[11] Ibid.

various alternative shows staged alongside the Shanghai Art Fair and the Shanghai Biennale.[13]

Somewhat similar was the approach of US-based art historian Wu Hung who specifically noted the way in which the Shanghai Biennale had quickly turned into a 'historical event' and the way in which it was carefully orchestrated from the very moment when organisers from the Shanghai Art Museum announced their plans to stage a 'truly international event.'[14] The Shanghai Biennale organisers wanted to attract an international audience, by organizing an exhibition that consisted of those critical of previous events for being too conservative and of the political authorities in charge of the Shanghai Biennale who had prevented a wide range of artworks, which would have been recognised by many in the West as 'avant-garde' or 'experimental', from being included the exhibition. The 'Chinese avant-garde', or 'experimental' art practice was recognised by many new audiences in the West as constituting the 'real' domain of Chinese contemporary art. Even in stylistic terms it could be defined as those artists who decided to work with new styles, technical modes, and artistic intent and who were thus considered as experimental, in contrast to those involved in *guohua* ('national painting') and academic realism (seen together with socialist realism), both of which were stylistic discourses known as 'official' Chinese art.

Recently, however, even these stylistic distinctions became subject to change, mainly as a result of developments in educational policies controlling the stylistic discourses being taught at some of the major, as well as smaller, academies throughout China. During the late 1990s, many of these academies, including the Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA) in Beijing, and the China Art Academy (formerly known as the Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts), started to attract new teachers and staff members, many of whom had previously been identified by international critics as being part of the

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[12] Francesca Jordan, "China Report No.1 - The 3rd Shanghai Biennale" in: *Chinese Type Contemporary Art Magazine*, vol. 3, no. 6 (December, 2000) (Formerly published Online at: http://www.chinese-art.com, discontinued in 2002)

[13] Francesca Jordan, "China Report No. 2 - 'Satellite Exhibitions'" in: *Chinese Type Contemporary Art Magazine*, vol. 3, no. 6 (December, 2000) (Formerly published Online at: http://www.chinese-art.com, discontinued in 2002)

'unofficial' Chinese avant-garde, such as Xu Jiang, an abstract painter and now the President of the China Art Academy, as well as a nephew of Jiang Zemin whom he is said to have advised on contemporary art. With these considerations, the distinction between 'official' and 'unofficial' art had to be revised in light of the newly emerging fields of artistic practice.

National aesthetics and the construct of modernity in China

In order to point out the way in which the distinction between 'official' and 'unofficial' became in need of a major overhaul at the start of the twenty-first century, it is important to provide an analysis about the way the national art system in control of the arts is linked to the historical construct of modernity in China. Such an examination has clearly been overlooked in the discussions following a popular adaptation of the avant-garde, and fail to notice how the construction of a modern culture in China has been linked to Marxist aesthetics. Therefore, by failing to take a closer look at the historical discourses that have produced such links, many of the recent essays on experimental art in China have failed to come up with any serious conclusions, and usually end up being part of popular catalogue publications.

Before moving into a discussion on the role of space and place of art mediation in China, one should address the role of ideology in determining the historical justifications for modern cultural production in China. Therefore, one must examine the cultural background in discussions on particular works of art. This becomes clear when taking into consideration one of the most significant critics of contemporary art practices in China, Li Xianting, who frequently points out the fact that the challenges facing art production in China today are ultimately informed by culturally embedded notions of reality.[15] For this reason: "When we conduct criticism to grasp an artwork, an artist, or in

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[14] Wu Hung, "The 2000 Shanghai Biennale - The making of a historical event," in *ART AsiaPacific*, no. 31 (2001), 42-49.

[15] This important conclusion can clearly be drawn from reading the collection of essays by Li Xianting, *Zhongyaode bushi yishu* (*Art is not important*) (Nanjing: Jiangsu meishu chubanshe, 2000)

grasping an ideological trend in art, one is in fact posing a cultural question. That is also how I have also come to use the phrase 'Art is not important' as the title of my book."[16]

It is certainly no coincidence that in the early-1980s, Li Xianting and other leading critics in the Chinese art scene began re-reading the works of Marx and Lenin. During the Maoist years, they had already learned that ideological transformations in society could produce tremendous assaults on art production. By itself art had no means of changing reality, but can certainly become useful in changing people's concepts of reality, as was very clear during the Cultural Revolution. It is possible to connect the present discussion on the remodelling of the art system in China to those theses that place the discourse on Marxist aesthetics at the base of the construction of Chinese modernity and its subsequent move into an alternative modernity. Aside from looking at the discussion of 'high culture fever' in the 1980s and 1990s, one should also trace the concepts surrounding official cultural production in China to the construction of modern Chinese aesthetics during the early twentieth century.[17] Evidently, the concept of 'beauty' plays a key role in the transformation by reformist Chinese intellectuals who, from the early 20th Century , start to advocate a modern culture – one that stands in opposition to Western critiques of capitalist modernism.

In China, the concept of 'beauty' is associated with the term *meishu*, and with its literal translation as 'fine arts' or the 'beautiful arts'. By treating these characters individually, it can be argued that the term *mei* comes to describe the abstracted 'sensuous realm of aesthetic beauty', whereas the term *shu* indicates 'acquiring skill' to accomplish a proper awareness of this sensuous beauty. This can be related to the Confucian scholar (*shushi*), but also points to the role of the attaining of different skills in 'fine arts practices' by Chinese nobles. The attainment of skills is important even to the present day, where state-run institutions in charge of education and distribution of 'fine arts' – the 'fine arts academies' (*meishu xueyuan*) and the 'fine art museums'

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[16] Following an interview by the Gao Brothers with Li Xianting on 5 June 2000. See: Gao Brothers, *Zhongguo qianwei yishu zhuangkuang*, 161-180

[17] An important study used to formulate these arguments is Liu Kang, *Aesthetics and Marxism: Chinese Aesthetic Marxists and Their Western Contemporaries*. (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2000)

(*meishu guan*) – determine the curricula for accepted practice skills in the fine arts. Hence, when discussing the distinction between the 'official' and 'unofficial' as constituted by different elements privileged differently within the same system, and which are based on Chinese aesthetic principles, we need to recall that these do not operate solely through the individual's attention to sensuous beauty. Instead the overall system, which is argued to be the same for everyone, does itself create a distinguishing model that places the institution at the base for the acquirement of skills for aesthetic judgment in fine arts practices in China. Therefore, unlike the previous argument by John Clark, the institutionalization of Chinese aesthetics that ultimately controls the systematic approach to the 'privileging of different elements' does produce an ideological distinction between an 'interior' and an 'exterior' system, which can be seen in operation at fine art academies and fine art museums in China.

While the aesthetic discourse in China is closely linked to the process of modernity, its development clearly moves beyond models of transfer in modernity that are said to produce a "temporary and highly restrictive process with reception."[18] This categorical approach, which identifies structured relations between various elements, can lead to important examinations of individual artists and their works, but is often too dependent on empirical analysis. As a result, it does not leave room for the social-political systems of control in examining the processes of modernity. Although further research is needed there are signs that the assimilation of the aesthetic discourse in China is governed by carefully planned strategies, and cannot merely be seen as a 'reception' that is governed by the "receiving culture's demand for a specific art style at a given epoch."[19] Looking at the way in which a number of experimental artists have been left out of the official Biennale-circuit in China it seems that the institionally based discourse on national aesthetics in China is still used as an instrument for reconciling China's own role in the process of modernity, one which will ultimately produce the

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[18] Clark, *Modern Asian Art*. Of particular importance to this discussion is Chapter 3, which describes the models of cultural transfer between Asia and Euramerica.

[19] What becomes interesting in the present discussion on aesthetics in China is how it takes part in a process that provides a strong reaffirmation of national cultural identity that aims to counterbalance the assimilation to more stylistic discourses from the West.

ongoing distinctions between interior and exterior systems that continue to govern the different levels of art practice and mediation in China that were argued to operate within the same system.

The discourse on aesthetics in China aims to transform the *ti-yong* dichotomy (*substance/function*) that was formulated after the 1895 Sino-Japanese War and which advocated a dualistic model capable of maintaining Chinese cultural substance whilst adopting Western practical science.[20] This can be seen in its emphasis on the concept of beauty that, by using the term *meishu* in Chinese, seeks to combine a more abstract level of sensibility with the clear mastering of particular skills. Ultimately, these two levels become governed by social ideology and political control in the creation of a national discourse, which does not allow experimentation outside the institutionalised curriculum. However, during the course of the 1980s and 1990s artists who sought alternative domains for their practices challenged the institutionalised curriculum of cultural production based on a Leninist variant of Marxist aesthetics. As a result, the leading model that is used to describe this move was that of a *civil society*[21] (which I shall shortly discuss), although critics and scholars in the field have often refrained from quoting its direct use in their examinations of the Chinese avant-garde and experimental art practices.[22] Yet, the model of civil society clearly highlights the discussions of cultural production in China, in particular after the Tiananmen incident of 1989.

Civil Society and the discourse on experimental art in China

This brings the discussion to the social-political level of interest in aesthetics in China – which is ultimately linked to processes that seek a compromise between the private and public domain of art practices and their secondary representation. In many popular discourses, such conciliation is associated with the tensions between the arrival of a free

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[20] See: Liu Kang, *Aesthetics and Marxism*, 4-5

[21] Of particular importance for the following discussion is the study by Timothy Brook and B. Michael Frolic, ed., *Civil Society in China.* (New York and London: M.E. Sharpe, 1997)

[22] In particular Wu Hung, who comes to use the term experimental art as the condition for the "self-positioning and re-positioning by artists in a changing society"that is motivated by "the desire to break away from the visual modes and vocabulary set forward in four distinct traditions in contemporary Chinese art." See: Wu Hung, *Transience* and Wu Hung, *Exhibiting Experimental Art*. However, he does not describe the obvious adoption of a civil society model that has produced these statements.

and autonomous civil society and a regulatory, coercive, and authoritative power of the state.[23] Yet, this approach is highly problematic, and forms the basis for the present critique of the notions of power it imposes on China. This idea relates to a Western conception of civil society that is mixed with new calls for democracy in the wake of the 1989 Tiananmen incident. More importantly, it continues to adapt to a singular concept of authoritarian power, which was already criticized by French poststructuralists in the 1960s and 1970s. The following critique aims to offer a more complex approach in identifying the roles and functions of social-political control, in a discussion of the separation between the public and the private domains, which ultimately determines the distinction between levels of official and unofficial cultural practices in China.[24]

Political power is often described in terms of a hierarchical structure of state control over society. In China, with the foundation of the Peoples Republic, this structure is adapted to the Nomenklatura system in which the Chinese Communist Party essentially controls the appointment of all higher levels of the state bureaucracy. It led to a governing system that was controlled by party ideology, which was increasingly personified through Mao Zedong's teachings, until its major overhaul in 1978, when reformist leaders began to reinstate direct control over society through the state. The model of civil society essentially works on a direct distinction between state and society where it is said to perform a mediating role between the two, by relying on analytical perspectives from Europe and the United States. As a result, the concept of civil society can only be adapted to China after the arrival of state reforms that started in the late 1970s, *and* the abolition of the Nomenklatura system; the latter has not yet been realized, as it still exists today. Furthermore, the historical and theoretical discourse on civil society is closely linked to capitalism, in that it requires reconciliation between

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[23] Liu Kang (page 4) also adapts to the more generally accepted notion on political authoritarianism in listing the different levels in which the aesthetic discourse in China "mediates and negotiates the contradictions within Western modernity." However, his discussion allows a far more complex deliberation on these notions than in many popular discourses on the Chinese avant-garde and experimental art in China.

[24] The present discussion will look at these distinctions in China, but the topic of public and private space also become useful in studying the distinctions between official and unofficial art practices in other countries across the world. This topic will be addressed in the next chapter, which examines public representations of performance in relation to the concept of public conduct.

self-regulatory systems of society and the monitoring role of the authoritarian state. In this process, the concept of civil society draws highly on Habermas' notion of power as legitimising force, part of which can be seized by a public, which is formed through a gathering of private citizens. This forms the major critique of the applicability of the notion of a civil society to contemporary China in that it questions the notion of the public sphere and instead is directed at developing new approaches in the analysis of the alternative structures featured in the processes of cultural self-organization in China, and their international interactions.[25] The critique of civil society opens up new ways to discuss the processes governing the onset of alternative centres for art production in contemporary China, and their contesting of the public sphere. These centres have cleverly adapted to a new system of social control in China, which now involves institutions who have direct access to international capital and is far more complex in its reliance on the authoritarian state.

The new system, of which many independent artists have become part, places increasing emphasis on economic performance that, in China during the course of the 1980s and 1990s, became the measure by which social-political influence was gained. At the same time, the self-regulatory systems in society were adapted to a disciplinary organization that is directed through proper codes of conduct and which allow extension into a broad range of organisational structures including through numerous institutions that uphold certain proper codes of conduct.[26] Interestingly, this disciplinary organization system can be better understood in relation to performance, as it becomes the only way to point to the complex processes that govern social behaviour.[27] Foucault

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[25] This follows a suggestion made by Kenneth Dean in an informative critique of the introduction of concepts of public sphere and civil society in Chinese Studies. Instead, Dean suggests using alternative conceptions for examining ritual performances in contemporary rural China by focussing on the term 'disruptive communities'. See: Kenneth Dean, Ritual and Space: "Civil Society or Popular Religion?" In: Brook and Frolic, *Civil Society in China*, 172-192

[26] These *proper codes of conduct* can be linked to Michel Foucault's notion of the "*normalization process* that directs the disciplinary organization of society." In Foucault's lectures at the Collège de France in 1975, which were recently published in an English translation. See: Michel Foucault, *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1974-1975*), translated from French by Graham Burchell. (New York: Picador, 2003)

[27] Throughout his career, Michel Foucault struggled to find the right methodology for his theses on new systems of disciplinary control. These clearly aim to transcend the position of the authoritarian state as being the sole entity in governing society. Here, theories of performance as a normative process can

speaks of 'normalization' as a system of inclusion rather than exclusion – one that requires institutional responsibility in which the governing of control operates through qualification and correction of the norm and which consequently lays claim to power. This can be related to the adaptation of the discourse on aesthetics in China, which shows the contradictions between traditional social harmony and modernist calls for autonomy, independence, and subjectivity. The process becomes complicated by the politicization of aesthetics through Marxist and Maoist ideology in that it requires its discourse to focus on the demands of the revolutionary subject.[28] It leads to a contesting of the public sphere in cultural practices in the application of aesthetic principles, which can be related to the 'appreciation of the beautiful' (*shenmei*) and internalised in the system that controls the production and mediation of fine arts (*meishu*). During the course of the 1980s and 1990s these principles were challenged by artists who were essentially positioning themselves outside the realm of the public sphere in the creation of alternative centres for production and mediation of their works, that became increasingly directed at an international audience.[29]

The measurement to distinguish between 'official' and 'unofficial' can lie within the adoption of an international standard, as ideological choice along values supllied internationally is perhaps already internalized in the domestic system. Ultimately the measurement is based upon particular norms of what is to be determined as 'art' and is related to what is to be the proper code of conduct for everyone involved in its production and its mediation. The local institutional domain in China continues to place strong emphasis on the criteria set forward in the historical discourse of aesthetics (*meishu*), with its emphasis on beauty and to acquiring a particular skill. The

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become useful in that they reaffirm the relationship between knowledge and power, decentralize the role of the performative subject, and point at Performativity as the domain where power acts as a discourse. See also: Jon McKenzie, *Perform or Else: From Discipline to Performance*. (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 17-19

[28] The role of the revolutionary subject becomes foremost clear in the Mao Zedong's Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Arts in which he states how cultural workers should inform the masses. See: Mao Zedong. "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art" in Bonnie S. McDougall, *Mao,* 1980)

[29] One can see the same developments in Chinese film during the course of the 1990s, with many filmmakers choosing to distribute their films through international film festivals, before obtaining screening approval in China. Overall, filmmakers make a deliberate decision to attract international audiences, even when these films become banned from local distribution.

international domain, where many of the so-called 'unofficial' artists operate, is increasingly projected as going against the institutional domain. It enlists artists whose works arouse transient sensation from mass audiences, as can be seen, in particular, during numerous Biennales and Triennales. Ultimately, there is a distinction in terms of the level of contact artists and their work make within the public sphere; this can then be related to notions of location, context, time, as well as to the direct physical level of engagement.

Re-positioning experimental art in China

The new distinctions between what was considered as 'official' and 'unofficial' art production were formulated in a way which was based on the space and place where art mediation takes place in China.[30] Indeed, the positioning of space and place in relation to the exhibition itself is an important issue from the late 1990s onwards and the way in which experimental art in China is mediated is an issue that deserves further attention.[31] Mediation may take place in raw public displays of highly controversial works, including performances and installations in which artists use all kinds of visceral references, openly displaying their interest in the manipulation of the body and of tabooed acts within the context of art. Is there some type of historically significant structure evident in the way the production of these works and their mediation has increased over the past few years since 1999? What are the implications for the various discourses of the avant-garde in China, and the commonly used opposition between the 'official' and the 'unofficial' domains in the production, mediation, and reception of art in China today? Do these works trace the pattern of an urban society in distress, bringing forth an increase in production of these 'cruel' and 'barbaric' images, starting in the late 1990s, perhaps to be followed by more extreme visual structures over the next decade?[32] Or, is it perhaps, as Jean Baudrillard again observes by citing Marx's account of the

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[30] See: Wu Hung. *Exhibiting Experimental Art*

[31] Ibid.

[32] On the notion of an urban society in distress producing this kind of 'cruel images' see also: Britta Erickson, "From the Edge of Beyond: Artists Probe the Mundane and the Horrific" in *Chinese Type Contemporary Art Magazine*, Vol. 4, Issue 3 (June 2001) (Formerly published Online at: http://www.chinese-art.com, discontinued in 2002)

reign of Napoleon III, that: "sometimes the same events occur twice in history: the first time they have a real historical impact, whereas the second time they are no more than its farcical evocation and its grotesque avatar – nourished by a *legendary reference*?"[33]

With regard to the latter point, a 'legendary reference' can be uncovered through a close scrutiny of the endogenous discourses which follow the notion of the 'disappearing exterior' as described by John Clark, who examines how often "'Western' references and works sit 'nesting' in endogenous discourses and are available without occupying a position of dominance."[34] In understanding these notions it is important to be aware of the complexity at the level of the artist. In particular, as mentioned by Clark, there is a need for understanding "the artist as an actor in the production and dissemination of artworks." Details about works, records of interpretations and biographical material about artists can signal new positions and alter the "discourses of works and interpretations."[35] The challenge for art history is to find multiple references in art and to bring all these details together and to open up the possibility of finding new discourses to work with. One reference through which art in China might be understood more clearly is the concept of *huanjing*. Artists in China often use the term *huanjing* when speaking about their art practices; the literal translation of it could be translated as 'environment,' 'circumstances,'or one's 'surroundings'[36] In the visual arts, *huanjing* can also be connected to the particular context in which an artwork operates, thereby moving the work into the context of time, place and space, that is, where and whence the work is made.[37] A number of propositions occur when the artwork is mediated through different

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[33] Jean Baudrillard's essay on "Mass Media Culture" ("La Société de consommation") in Paul Foss and Julian Pefanis, ed. *Jean Baudrillard, The revenge of the crystal: selected writings on the modern object and its destiny, 1968-1983*, translated from French by Paul Foss and Julian Pefanis (London, UK and Concord, Massachusetts: Pluto Press in association with the Power Institute of Fine Arts, University of Sydney, 1990), 63. See also: Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Luis Bonaparte", 360.

[34] See: Clark, "System and Style in the practice of Chinese contemporary art: the disappearing exterior?". in *Yishu*, 16-19.

[35] These two comments can be found in: Clark, *Modern Asian Art*, 15

[36] This was evident from a wide range of conversations and recorded interviews with artists in China during fieldwork trips conducted between 2000 and 2004, details of which can be found in the Bibliography of this thesis.

[37] Interestingly, a number of artists from other parts of Asia have mentioned a similar relationship between their work and the concept of 'environment', as can be seen in a comment by Yeoh Jin-leng, an artist from Malaysia, which Clark has quoted in the conclusion of his study on modern art in Asia. See: Clark, *Modern Asian Art*, 298

times, places and spaces. In all these mediations, it is important to find out how cognate notions of 'perception' and 'sensibility' also constitute the concept of *huanjing*. To present an example of the concept of *huanjing* in relation to the notion of a 'legendary reference,' I shall focus on one of the most provocative artworks produced in recent times – the performance piece *Eating People*, performed by the Beijing based artist Zhu Yu in 2000. **[ills. 6.3 & 6.4]** [38] In a statement on this work, Zhu Yu writes the following:

> **Eating People**
>
> One question that always baffles us – That is, why can people not eat people?
>
> Is there a commandment in a national religion in which it is ruled that one cannot eat people? In which country's law is there a clause against eating people? It is simply based on morals and ethics. But what are morals and ethics? Morals and ethics are nothing but something which human kind changes at will according to his own so-called needs of being human in the process of being oneself in the course of humanity.
>
> From this we might thus conclude:
>
> So long as one does not commit a crime, the religions and laws of a human society do certainly not bind the performance of eating people. I hereby announce to the entire world my personal standpoint, my personal objective, and my personal intention to eat people as a performance in protest against the mankind's timely moral concepts of not eating people. 2000.10.17[39]

The performance piece *Eating People* was enacted in a specific spatial and temporal context. It was performed on October 17, 2000, in an apartment most likely

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[38] One could have indeed stated that this has been *the* most provocative artwork produced in recent times, were it not for the fact that Zhu Yu continues to produce intensely provocative works, next to a group of artists who have been identified as 'le groupe Cadavre'. See: Fei Dawei, "Transgresser le principe céleste - Dialogue avec le groupe Cadavre", 60-64

[39] This translation has been made from a postcard, which Zhu Yu produced, after his performance piece. These postcards, which were distributed by the artist to anyone who asked him about his work, featured a photograph of the performance, and contain the artist's statement, printed on the backside.

located in Beijing.[40] Upon seeing the work for the first time many people responded with shock, followed almost immediately by intense curiosity. The first question that comes to mind was and is, "is he eating a real baby?" The answer is "yes." Although one should mention that the image shows someone holding a deep-fried, stillborn foetus to his mouth, this performance represents the actual act of 'eating people.'[41] Perhaps the killing and eating would have constituted an event of 'real historical impact,' were it not for the fact that such events have already taken place countless times throughout the course of history and even in the recent history of post-revolutionary China.[42] Therefore this repetition can be no more than the 'farcical evocation and its grotesque avatar of the first event' and is further nourished by the 'legendary reference' mentioned earlier by Baudrillard. This, however, can become a historical event, when such an event is transferred within the context of visual art and in particular, to the context of Chinese visual art which often involves events that touch, or transgress 'universal' moral and ethical values.

Most people initially saw *Eating People* in the form of two photographs which were reproduced in a large publication in 2000, with the same title as the 'alternative' exhibition *Bu hezuo fangshi* (*An Uncooperative Approach*) or *FUCK OFF*.[43] Following the title, many people who had not visited the exhibition assumed that the publication was the actual catalogue of the exhibition. As a result, it was soon concluded that many, if not all of the works reproduced in the catalogue, had also been featured in the

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[40] Initial press reaction suggested that the performance was conducted in Taiwan, and not in the Peoples Republic of China. This report was first published in a Malaysia tabloid magazine, and was severely criticised in Taiwan. For further reference, see the report in the *Taipei Times*, Online Edition: Staff Writer, "Baby-eating photos are part of Chinese artist's performance" in: *Taipei Times*, Online Edition (23 March, 2001) (http://www.taipeitimes.com/news/2001/03/23/story/0000078704, last accessed in November 2004)

[41] Despite the fact that during an interview on November 28, 2001 the artist told me that he did eat the foetus, I have strong doubts about the veracity of this statement. In particular, I think that the artist wants us to believe that he is actually eating the corpse of the foetus, after having already finished a bowl of Caesar salad, and is about to drink a glass of orange juice, both of which are considered to be examples of healthy "Western" food in China.

[42] See: Jasper Becker, *Hungry ghosts: Mao's secret famine*. (New York: Henry Holt,1998).

[43] Ai Weiwei and Feng Boyi, ed., *Bu Hezuo Fangshi/ FUCK OFF* (Beijing: private publication, 2000). The publication has the same title as an exhibition held at Eastlink Gallery in Shanghai simultaneously with the 3rd *Shanghai Biennale* in 2000. However, as will be discussed further, many of the works in the catalogue were not actually shown at the exhibition, including the controversial performance *Eating*

exhibition, including the performance *Eating People*. This, however, was not the case, and the actual exhibition was in fact carefully designed so as to not arouse the suspicion of local authorities; it did not stage any works which might have been seen as breaching the law.[44] All those involved in the exhibition, including the curators Ai Weiwei, Feng Boyi, the Chinese/ Australian director of the Eastlink Gallery, Li Liang, and the participating artists confirmed that the exhibition had censored itself, that is, imposed 'self-inspection' (*ziwo jiankong*) on itself prior to the opening of the exhibition. This meant that photographs of the performance *Eating People* were not shown directly to the public, according to the organizers and some of the visitors that I have interviewed. [45]

Yet the assumptions regarding the catalogue and the alleged inclusion of works in the catalogue do reveal something about the general expectations that many viewers have of experimental art in China, in particular, those viewers from the West who have certain expectations regarding 'underground' art exhibitions. Experimental art from China is expected to adhere to the concept of the avant-garde, and to position itself as a source of innovative visual structures within the context of the 'unofficial.' This expectation is based on a further assumption that the 'unofficial' stands in radical opposition to the 'official' positions and institutions controlling artistic practice, mediation, and reception in China.

There is possibly another assumption at work which is one that considers the works as symptoms of a 'deviant' and 'cruel society' gone astray; that produces artists who in turn, produce visual structures that can only be described as 'barbaric, insane, and the work of savages and madmen.' Such an assumption must have been of concern to those in charge of cultural production in China, as works such as *Eating People* might

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People by the Beijing based artist Zhu Yu. Therefore the publication can best be viewed independently as a visual overview of experimental art production in China between 1995 and 2000.

[44] For further reference on the different types of censorship and the role of different institutional authorities in censoring and cancelling exhibitions in China, see Wu Hung, *Exhibiting Experimental*, 121-126. Further references can also be found in: Clark. "System and style in the practice of Chinese contemporary art: The disappearing exterior?" in *Yishu*, 13-33

[45] Following intense discussions with the curators, Ai Weiwei and Feng Boyi, the director of the gallery, Li Liang, and several artists, including Zhu Yu, Zhu Ming, Yang Zhichao, and the Gao Brothers in 2001 and 2002.

be used to condemn the entire nation for its apparently cruel past as reflected in a present lack of morality and a sensible judgment of art.

The first response of this kind was used by the Chinese conceptual artist and editor of the Taiwan-based *Monthly Art Bulletin*, Wang Nanming. In May 2001 in an essay titled, "How to Deal with Rights – A Criticism of the Violent Trend in Chinese Contemporary Art," he writes how "Chinese contemporary art is faced with so many social problems but refuses to question them, instead focusing all its interest into a violent trend."[46] Following an intense discussion on violence in Chinese society and the advent of violent art in China, Wang concludes that "our misfortune is that we are always running into ruffians of all descriptions, big-time or small-time, who are violating the rights of others – first we met them in the realms of society and politics, and now also in the realm of contemporary art."[47] In these words, there is also an underlying subtext at work if one considers Wang Nanming's own body of work. Many of his works consist of installations made from cotton balls, which the artist has decorated with Chinese calligraphy, and a cursory survey of critics' responses suggests that these works are respected by many people in China, including Hu Heqin, a Beijing-based journalist for the *China Daily* newspaper, who praises Wang Nanming's work for its expressionist and deconstructive qualities and how it: "conveyed his revolt against the insular traditions of the 'ivory tower' by proposing a metamorphosis to Chinese calligraphy and culture."[48]

There is clearly a 'regeneration of public morality' as well as a move towards 'expanding the order of cultural capital' occurring in the representation of contemporary art from China. Part of the argument for this rests on the fact that, aside from the numerous local and so-called 'underground' exhibitions which feature experimental art, there are now also several large international art exhibitions sponsored directly by the Chinese Cultural Ministry featuring works that were previously known as 'un-official'

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[46] Wang Nanming "How to Deal with Rights - A Criticism of the Violent Trend in Chinese Contemporary Art"

[47] Ibid.

[48] In: Hu Heqin, "'Combination: Balls Of Characters' - Wang Nanming" (Published Online in the artists' section of the web-site of the Shanghai based art studio Biz-Art, at: http://www.biz-art.com/en/art/artists/index.htm, last accessed in November 2004)

Chinese experimental art. These include the exhibition *Living in Time* in Berlin in 2001, followed in 2003 by the exhibition *Alors, la Chine?* at the Centre Pompidou in Paris, as well as the Guangzhou Triennale, which was held in November 2002 at the Guangzhou Art Museum, and curated by Wu Hung together with Feng Boyi. The Guangzhou Triennale featured some works that were previously denounced as 'unofficial' and part of the Chinese 'avant-garde', but certain important works were also left out, such as those by the Chinese performance artist Zhu Ming.

At the same time new works shown in small exhibitions in Beijing, Shanghai, and Chengdu continue to be considered highly controversial. These exhibitions include *Post-Sense Sensibility - Alien Bodies and Delusion* (Beijing, 1999), *Art For Sale* (Shanghai, 1999), *Food as Art* (Beijing, 2000), *FUCK OFF* (Shanghai, 2000), *Post-Sense Sensibility Spree* (Beijing, 2001). Many other exhibitions did not produce well-distributed catalogues, but were attended by a large number of people, including the first and second *Open Art Platform Performance Art Festival* exhibitions, organised in Beijing and Chengdu in August 2000 and August 2001, and the exhibitions *Retribution* (Beijing, 2001), *Cut Inn* (Beijing, 2002), and perhaps most importantly, *Synthetic Reality* (Beijing 2002).[49] Many of these exhibitions are widely discussed amongst artists and art critics in China, including members of what is often described as the 'official' art scene. They appear to have received even more local attention than the officially cancelled 1999 exhibition *It's Me* which was an important case study in Wu Hung's account of the exhibition of experimental art in China.[50] These local exhibitions have to be noted, in order to fully understand what may be seen as contemporary art practice in

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[49] The latter was held in the exhibition *Synthetic Reality* (Beijing, 2002), which was discussed earlier. In a highly emotional interview with the two artist/curators for the exhibition, Ni Haifeng and Zhu Jia made it clear that the position of video art production in China remains complicated, despite some changes which had occurred since 1998 when the first plans for this exhibition were first discussed. Two days later I met one of the participating artists Wang Gongxin at a conference on 'new media' art at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing, where he was invited to speak on video art practice in China, after a successful appearance in the 2002 Shanghai Biennale.

[50] Wu Hung, *Exhibiting Experimental Art*. 85-130.

China, or perhaps even as 'art to come', focusing on the contemporaneity of present day art practice.[51]

Aesthetic judgment and the regeneration of 'High Culture Fever'

An important part of the discussion concerning exhibitions such as the *2000 Shanghai Biennale* or *FUCK OFF* focuses on questions surrounding the physical and social contexts in which these works and these exhibitions were found. I shall now focus the discussion on the concept of *huanjing* in relation to time, place and space, and even further to ideas of perception and notions of different sensibilities.

In relation to *Eating People* by Zhu Yu it is clear that, when artists began producing such highly controversial works, they drew an immediate array of responses from a range of people overseas who were, and are, involved in the representation of contemporary art from China. According to Karen Smith, who has been working as an independent writer and curator in Beijing: "The problem within art and exhibition-going circles in China is their closed nature. Works are created for an audience that consists largely of artists who speak the same language and mostly have the same experiences. Like scientists in closed circles who favour cloning, it is not hard to see how these artists could get caught up in ideas out of earshot of any moral debate."[52] Smith's position deals with questions surrounding the definitions and locations of the 'public' and the 'private' in the practice, mediation and reception of experimental art in China, and elsewhere. There is indeed a closed circle of artists operating in China who are creating increasingly provocative visual structures, many of which are directed towards people who already, as Smith points out, "speak the same language" and "have the same experiences."

But from the early 1990s, these 'closed' circles did not exclusively consist of artists alone, but included an increasingly wider range of viewers. This was already

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[51] See also Terry Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*. Smith identifies three 'distinct' but also 'connected' ways of naming contemporary art. These are the "institutional network", the somewhat philosophical position of "something to come", and finally the way in which: "Artists who turn their back on [the] constellation of problems and possibilities cease to be contemporary artists."

[52] Karen Smith, "Contagious Desire - The Other in contemporary Chinese art," in: *ART AsiaPacific* 57

evident in the performances of Geng Jianyi and Zhang Peili in Hangzhou (Zhejiang province) during the second half of the 1980s. As mentioned earlier, Hans van Dijk, noticed how, after many failed attempts at reaching a wide audience, both artists started to use increasingly "aggressive and provocative approaches" in their works to force a reaction from within the more privately conceived domain of the experimental art scene.[53] Moreover, in late December 1986, the M Art Group staged what was considered to be one of the most violent series of performance pieces in China. This attracted an audience of about two hundred people at the Shanghai Cultural Workers Palace, who witnessed performances that included the participating artists, many of whom were half-naked, bound, swaddled, gagged, hung and beaten by other artists, in provocative and ritualistic types of actions. [54] Who were the people attending these 'violent' events? According to curator and critic Gao Minglu, the visitors were members of the local arts scene, including young poets, university students, members of the press, and art lovers.[55] The audience for this type of event thus included more than just artists; it attracted a wide range of intellectuals and media commentators.

More recent events staged in the 1990s attracted an even wider group, consisting of international visitors, critics, curators, researchers and overseas students. If the artists who were creating these so-called 'aggressive' and 'provocative' artworks were indeed directing their works at a closed circle of people interested in being involved with the artistic language and experience of these exhibitions, the works must have had increased impact by the fact that they were directed at such an exclusive audience. Rather than merely following a 'forbidden quality', these circles often see themselves as specialists. This is also said of scientists in closed circles who favour cloning, who despite their 'closedness' have managed to create a worldwide discussion about cloning, through the use of mass media, and have instigated a discussion on human morality and the ethics.

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[53] See also: Hans van Dijk together with Andreas Schmid, "The Fine Arts after the Cultural Revolution: Stylistic Development and Theoretical Debate" in: Noth, et.al., *China Avant-Garde*, 26.
[54] See also Gao Minglu, "Conceptual Art with Anticonceptual Attitude: Mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong," in Farver et.al.,*Global conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s-1980s*, 136-137. For full paragraph descriptions of these, and other performances at the event, also see Gao Minglu et.al., ed. *Zhongguo dangdai yishu shi, 1985-1986*, 384-387
[55] Ibid., 384

Zhu Yu, in his statement on the performance piece *Eating People*, explicitly directed his piece to 'the entire world' in protest against humankind's temporally contingent moral precepts. Obviously, the artist already expected his work to be discussed by people across the globe, and must have been very pleased when Ai Weiwei selected two photographs of the work for publication in the *FUCK OFF* 'catalogue' – as much as a cloning specialist would be pleased to have his work published in *Scientific American*.[56]

After the photographs of the work were published, new discussions on the current 'state of experimental art' in China began to emerge. Many people with an interest in art, both in China and in other parts of the world (including those not directly involved with producing art themselves) become primarily interested in using these works for a wide range of discussions on the question: "are these works *art*?", or even more specifically: "are these works part of a discourse on *contemporary* art?" As long as discussions are taking place on the nature of *art* and these works are used in the discussion, then perhaps they must at least be considered as part of a discourse on *art*, and therefore be considered as works of *art*. However, the contemporaneity of these works seems less obvious.[57] This may be seen from a range of publications appearing in recent years which have focussed on the way in which many artists have been using all kinds of visceral references in their works, and on how people have been openly displaying their interest in the manipulation of the body and of taboo acts done within the context of art. Most detailed in its use of visual reference material was perhaps the exhibition *Spectacular Bodies*, which was held from October 19, 2000 to January 14, 2001 at the Hayward Gallery in London.[58] The catalogue of the exhibition further shows the long and extensive relationship between art and science, and in particular between drawing

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[56] In fact during the interview that I conducted with Zhu Yu in his studio in Beijing on 28 November 2001, the artist and I talked about the reactions that people had to his performance *Eating People*. At the time the artist appears to have been rather surprised by the enormous attention that this work had received, after it was published in the *FUCK OFF* 'catalogue'. Yet he also pointed out that artists should deliberately seek to address various problems that draw the attention of many people in today's society, including questions surrounding human morality and the law.

[57] See: note 37

[58] See: Martin Kemp and Marina Wallace, *Spectacular Bodies: The Art and Science of the Human Body from Leonardo to Now* (London and Berkeley, Los Angeles: Hayward Gallery and University of California Press, 2000). For further references on visceral references in art history, see also: Barbara Maria

and painting with an interest by both artists and scientists to visualise the human anatomy.

Flesh Art and the role of the body in experimental art practices in China

The wide range of works which feature in the *Spectacular Bodies* exhibition catalogue point to a continuing discourse on the role of the body in behavioural experience, medicine, punishment, and visual art. This discourse is clearly reflected in the work of Michel Foucault, particularly his studies of the history of sexuality, medical perception, and the condemned body.[59] Once freed from general taboo and instead acknowledging its ongoing role, the body and its representation in the physical and mental environment will continue to be the major subject and object of art practice. However, one could question the use of the term 'body' in relation to its representation in certain artworks, such as the performance piece *Eating People* by Zhu Yu. I have deliberately chosen the term *flesh art*. Here I gesture towards the recent use of 'flesh' as a metaphor, not merely for the abject that "flows beneath the carapace of civilisation," as mentioned by John Clark, but also as a sign of the fact that the body has come to be seen as a material object, i.e. a piece of flesh. Treated by Georges Bataille as a 'tool', the body can become caught up in a system of constraints and privations, obligations, and prohibitions that brings forward a whole *new morality*, as suggested by Foucault."[60]

The discussion on the *new morality* presented by Foucault complements the concept of Zhu Yu's performance piece, *Eating People*, and in particular, the way in which the artist deliberately positioned his work "in protest against mankind's timely *moral* concepts of not eating people [my emphasis]." As can be seen from this statement, the emphasis is being placed on the artist's efforts to deal with moral constraints. This seemingly 'immoral' act may indeed be part of a new code of morality, whereby questioning the current system of morality may also imply compromising a

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Stafford, *Body Criticism - Imagining the Unseen in Enlightenment Art and Medicine* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, MIT Press, 1991); and Elkins, *Pictures of the body*

[59] See: Foucault *Discipline and Punish*; Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, translated from French by Robert Hurley (London: Allen Lane, 1979); and Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, translated from French by A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Vintage Books, 1975)

new type of morality. Nevertheless, the actual performance itself has clearly proven itself only in terms of the artist breaking a practical constraint by eating a stillborn foetus. Indeed, there are clear differences between moral constraints and practical constraints in relation to the breaking of moral laws.[61] Moral constraints position themselves very clearly as part of social constraints, and operate externally to the individual as a coded set of norms. One can therefore call into question whether Zhu Yu has succeeded in breaking the moral constraint that is part of the social constraint governing the eating of people.

The artist, it must be made clear, has certainly not killed a foetus to do this performance, which would have meant the risk of being sanctioned. Instead he – along with other artists working prior to him, such as Sun Yuan and Peng Yu – managed to purchase stillborn foetuses from a hospital in Beijing. This apparently was an act that could be done without sanction, unlike the act of murder, which is governed by law. The entire process that gave rise to this performance can be understood entirely on the basis of the presence of physical constraints, since the people at the hospital who were selling the baby and the artist's act managed to evade a coded set of norms which would have been expected to be in place for this type of event. The moral constraint, which could have prevented the artist from eating a foetus, failed because this is a case of an artist breaking his own personal physical constraint by conducting a performance involving the eating of people, and thus running the risk of becoming very ill. Although it is doubtful the artist could have actually eaten the baby, if moral constraints failed to prevent this performance piece, then the artist must clearly be said to have succeeded in his performance by breaching those constraints, which are part of the general social constraints governing cannibalism.[62] This does not mean, however, that the artist does not run the risk of being somehow sanctioned for the act of eating people, and perhaps be subjected to other types of social constraint, apart from the moral one. This becomes

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[60] See: Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, 28 and Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 11-12

[61] This is discussed by Émile Durkheim in his work, *Suicide: A study of sociology*. Translated from French by John A. Spaulding and George Simpson (Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1951)

[62] In an interview with Zhu Yu in 2001, I was told that until his performance there had been no law against cannibalism in China, but that now a clause had been added to the legal code that banned such acts, and the police could now sanction him for his actions.

clear when references to criminal law are made as part of the performance piece and Zhu Yu himself explicitly mentions these references as forming an important part of this work. As is mentioned by the artist, until this performance piece was done, there was no law against the act of eating people, but now a clause has been added to the legal code; now the police would be able to sanction Zhu Yu for his actions, if he were to conduct another piece that involved cannibalism.

Apart from these laws, much of the discussion of the state of experimental art in China and elsewhere has intensified. The general question that is now being posed is whether art can be governed by moral constraints, or whether the legal sanctions are needed to control all types of experimentation in art? This is the domain where political authority is being reasserted in order to govern artistic experimentation. Pointing to the arrival of a political authority in the governing of experimental art, Lyotard indicates how: "any attack on artistic experimentation mounted by political authority is inherently reactionary: Aesthetic judgement would only have to reach a verdict on whether a particular work conforms to the rules of the beautiful."[63] Perhaps the most interesting response to the performance of *Eating People* has come from political authorities in charge of the arts, as especially denoted in the discussions and subsequent actions that took place, which sought to reintroduce questions of aesthetic judgements prescribing certain criteria by which a work could be adjudicated.

Many of the reactions by the political authorities in China in attacking 'cadaver art' aimed at regenerating public morality in the arts and even at extending the order of 'artistic' capital. This was evident in the reaction of Wang Nanming's article on the 'violent trend' in contemporary Chinese art.[64] In addition, there were many similar discussions taking place online, and in particular at the website of the Art Union in China, which is part of the Tom.com portal on contemporary Chinese culture.[65] Perhaps the most striking news following the publication of photographs taken from Zhu Yu's

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[63] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Explained to Children - Correspondence 1982-1985*, translated by Don Barry, Bernadette Maher, Julian Pefanis, Virginia Spate, and Morgan Thomas (Sydney: Power Publications, 1986), 16

[64] Ibid., 16-17

[65] For further reference, see the fine arts (*meishu*) link at: http://www.tom.com (last accessed in August 2005)

performance piece in the *FUCK OFF* 'catalogue' could be found in a report by Jonathan Napack in *Art Newspaper* Online international edition, in early 2001. According to Napack, well-placed sources in China had indicated that "China's avant-garde artists" and their works were being discussed at the annual meeting of the National People's Congress (NPC), which was held from March 5 to 15, 2001. Napack's report mentions that "cadres aligned with NPC chairman and leading conservative Li Peng's faction condemned such art in blistering terms as a 'social evil' on par with the Falun Dafa cult, and urged that it be crushed in much the same way."[66] These types of reports clearly indicate how far reaching these discussions were, denounced by the central government as "a serious 'social evil', which needed to be crushed."

However, during the same period plans were being made to stage a large exhibition in Germany, entitled *Shenghuo zai cishi* (literally: *Life is placed in this time*), or *Living in Time*, as the official English title given to the exhibition. *Living in Time* was curated by Hou Hanru, an independent art critic and curator living in Paris, together with Fan Di'an, who is currently Vice-President of the Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA) in Beijing, and the German curator, Gabriele Knapstein. The exhibition took place from September 19 to November 18, 2001, and was sponsored directly by the Chinese Cultural Ministry with the support of the Chinese Artists Association. It was thus presented as an 'official' event. Interestingly, the catalogue of the *Living in Time* featured several works that could be clearly identified as 'experimental,' 'avant-garde' or even as 'unofficial' art. This was particularly the case with *Rainbows* by Xu Zhen, which depicted the artist making very explicit references to the body/*flesh*.[67] *Rainbows*, which was also shown at the 49th Venice Biennale in 2001, is a four minute-long video work of a performance showing the naked back of an anonymous person being beaten with an undefined object, causing it to gradually swell to various shades of red. The

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[66] In: Jonathan Napack, "Chinese avant-garde art is a 'social evil' - Cadres of the National People's Congress denounce contemporary art," in: *The Art Newspaper.com - International Edition.* (http://www.theartnewspaper.com/news/article.asp?idart=5477, last accessed in November 2004)

[67] See: Hou Hanru, Fan Di'an, and Gabrielle Knapstein, *Shenghuo zai cishi/ Living in Time* (Berlin: Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, 2001), 127

rhythm of the different camera shots used is followed by the sound of a loud slap of the object hitting the back.**[ill. 6.5]**

Clearly this work uses the mutilation of the body/*flesh* in a way that would have attracted much criticism in China, particularly amidst the fierce discussions which taken place on the so-called 'violent trend' in visual art. In fact, three film stills of the performance were placed next to a report, published in March 2001 in the *Xiandai Yishu* (*Contemporary Art*) magazine, discussing a decree issued by the Cultural Ministry calling for a complete halt of the performance and display of art which involved blood and injuries to the body or pornographic references, including the display of the naked body.[68] Nevertheless, six months later the work became part of an international exhibition, which was directly sponsored by the Cultural Ministry, and supported by the Chinese Artists Association – showing how complex these political structures are. Or indeed, it may show how fluid are notions of the opposition between the 'official' and the 'unofficial'.

Works such as *Eating People* illuminate the fact that art has many faces, and one should not be confined by the judgement of aesthetic taste in a discussion about the way in which artists are creating a wide range of experimental visual structures. The question of modern aesthetics is indeed not "What is beautiful?" but "What is art to be?" Perhaps the main problem that experimental art in China faces now is the necessity of 'finding a public' for these artistic experimentations. Art needs an audience. Lyotard states that "artists and writers must be made to return to the fold of community; or at least, if the community is deemed to be ailing, they must be given the responsibility of healing it."[69] Perhaps the fact that the work by Zhu Yu has provoked so much discussion amongst different communities around the world, including 'closed' artist communities, is a sign that all these communities have indeed already been put in place and simply respond on the basis of, and in accordance with, their respective responsibilities. Will this signal the end of 'experimental' art in China?

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[68] As stated the report reproduced in the magazine *Xiandai Yishu* (*Contemporary Art*), 2001.3, which was given to me by a colleague.

[69] Lyotard, *The Postmodern Explained to Children*, 16

CHAPTER 7

RULES GOVERNING PUBLIC CONDUCT AND PRIVATE SPACE IN PERFORMANCE

> The sulphur was lit, but the flame was so poor that only the top of the skin of the hand was burnt, and that only slightly. Then the executioner, his sleeves rolled up, took the steel pincers, which had been especially made for the occasion, and which were about a foot an a half long, and pulled first at the calf of the right leg, then at the thigh, and from there at the two fleshy parts of the right arm; then at the breasts. [...]
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> After these tearings with the pincers, Damiens, who cried out profusely, though without swearing, raised his head and looked at himself; the same executioner dipped an iron spoon in the pot containing the boiling potion, which he poured liberally over each wound. Then the ropes that were to be harnessed to the horses were attached with cords to the patients body; the horses were then harnessed and placed alongside the arms and legs, one at each limb.
>
> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975)

Body, art, taboo, and the construct of public sensibility

Throughout centuries physicality continues to draw our attention. To recognize the fact that the body is always present will inevitably determine the way in which we inhabit our surroundings, particularly when we come in contact with an unknown territory. By accepting the notion that "human experience is incarnated" we are drawn closer to the primary performance of the body, even when our daily occupations excludes us from its

perpetual experience.[1] When theories of phenomenology are brought into contact with Buddhist (and also Taoist traditions), they lead to the concept of the *lived body* and connect the notion that "I am flesh and blood" to our existence in life.

The awareness of our corporeal experience can be also be directly provoked by encountering experiences of other human beings who face the notion of the lived body. In this thesis these confrontations appear in the work of artists from around the world who have started to use their own body as the stage where the object and subject collapse. They move from producing artistic objects to using their own physical selves for the creation of 'real time' performances. Eventually, these performances demand an audience whose reactions involve the physical experience of witnessing actions that use the body as the main site of artistic practices. As these actions become more and more intrusive, they challenge certain humanistic notions of correct behavior. These often concern questions surrounding the limitations of artistic creation and their relation to aesthetic practice; the latter involves the concept of beauty and acquiring a particular skill. Direct confrontation with the actions of an individual artist, or a group of artists can therefore challenge commonly accepted moral codes that govern the ethics of correct behavior in a public environment. Perhaps these art practices bring into perspective the idea that mankind's morality is ultimately embedded in human sensibility, and does not necessarily have to be invested by some type of *divine origin*.

Drawing morality away from its divine origin, and into the construct of physicality, the body replaces the construct of priesthood that has determined the laws of good and evil and surveilled so many different mythical archetypes that describe the origin of morality in terms of divinity. By removing the dependence of morality on religion, ethics has become an independent field of studies, transcending the idea that it must be treated as an integral part of *moral theology*. New studies on ethics thus provide a reexamination of social taboos and public censorship, which has become widely bestowed with religious and political clarifications, but must have their origin in the construct of embodied sensibility.

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[1] Leder, *The Absent Body*, 1

In art, the analysis of ethics as embodied sensibility can make use of recent works by Zhu Yu, Sun Yuan and Peng Yu, as well as others – all of which have challenged mankind's moral dispositions by creating performances, installations, and public interactions that involve the use of the body/*flesh*. So far, attention has been given to works that involve the direct use of corpses, but other examples can be found in the spectacular public actions that sprang up in China in recent years, as we saw in the earlier discussion of *Post-Sense Sensibility: Spree* (2001). Following this event, several artists started to consider ways in which to stage 'real-time' public actions that would directly confront the senses of the audience. Some artists chose to concentrate on the most primary senses by staging public spectacles confronting vision, hearing, smell, and occasionally taste. In late September 2003, for example, at the satellite event for the Beijing Biennale, *Second Hand Reality*, audiences were confronted by Sun Yuan and Peng Yu's installation, *Controversy Model* – located at the Dashanzi Art District (part of the 798 Factory Compound) in the northeast of the city.[2]

In one of the warehouses that make up the art district, the two artists had placed two rows of four custom-built treadmills facing each other. During daytime, assistants would place Maltese fighter-dogs on each of the mills, while others held big pieces of cardboard separating the opposing treadmills (thus preventing the two dogs from directly seeing each other). When the space was filled with people, the cardboards were suddenly taken away, resulting in the ferocious spectacle of dogs running on treadmills, viciously barking and snapping at each other.**[ill. 7.1]** Beyond the level of a public spectacle, the work must be viewed as a symbol for the fierce competition amongst people in China amidst rapid economic expansion, which is also reflected in the art scene, especially during an international event like the Beijing Biennale. In a closed meeting of a group of curators, art critics, and art historians held two weeks later, in early October, the theme of ferocious competition was discussed. According to one discussant, the art historian Yin Jinan from the Central Academy of Fine Arts, places like the Dashanzi Art District, which attract many members of the international art scene in search of the latest artistic

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[2] The exhibition *Second Hand Reality* was curated by Gu Zhenqing and apart from the installation by Sun Yuan and Peng Yu, the majority of other works were located at the Today Art Gallery in the western part

vogues, had been turned into a "Cultural Zoo".[3] Several months later, on 22 April, Yin Jinan's comment was repeated by Sun Yuan in a meeting with all of the people involved in the Dashanzi Art District, discussing its future role.[4]

Starting in 2003, the Dashanzi Art District became one of the sites where groups of performance artists staged annual performance art festivals. One of these events, the *1st Dadao Live Art Festival* was held at a courtyard in the Dashanzi Art District, during the opening week of the Beijing Biennale in September 2003. As could be expected, the event raised some controversy and ended with police officials raiding the site. By that time, however, many of the participants and people attending the event (including the author) had left for dinner, and the two organizers only came to know about the police raid the next day. In what turned out to be a peculiar incident, the police had been called by someone not only because of a live performance by one of the main organizers, Shu Yang (which involved the artist tearing up the Chinese flag), but because of a screening of performance videos in a nearby bar. The bar, which belonged to a friend of Shu Yang, had been carefully selected for this event and it was thought that the audience could be screened before entering and would therefore be restricted to members of the art scene. Despite the fact that the screening included performances that featured sexual references and other explicit uses of the body, it was not expected to cause as much controversy as some of the live performances; especially as the screening took place at the end of the day, when the general audience had already wandered off. The day after the police raid, Shu Yang was called to a meeting with Huang Rui and Xu Yong, who were the most influential spokesmen for the Dashanzi Art District. During the meeting, Shu Yang was

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of Beijing.

[3] Apart from Yin Jinan, the meeting included Feng Boyi, Gu Zhenqing, Zhang Zhaohui, Lu Jie, Pi Li, and myself.

[4] The meeting had been called by several influential people who are involved in the daily running of art spaces at 798 Factory, following a decision made by officials from the Chaoyang District Council to preserve parts of the Dashanzi Art District as an officially recognized center for contemporary culture. The discussants included the artist Huang Rui, who was amongst the first to occupy a space in 798, and the businessman Xu Yong, who is the owner of one of the largest warehouses, *798 Space*. I myself had been invited as one of the participants, following my role in co-organizing the 1st Dashanzi International Art Festival (*DIAF 2004*) that opened to the public on 24 April. The festival took place for an entire month and was directed by Huang Rui and Berenice Angremy, who is a curator and art critic from France, but currently resides in Beijing.

asked to sign a document that would prevent him from staging another such performance event, and he was further told not to publish any documentation on the festival.

To many people working in the field of performance art in China, these scenes become reminiscent of earlier incidents that led to performances being banned from public display. Earlier examples of this include the closure of the February 1989 *Exhibition of Modern Art* after the shooting incident by Xiao Lu, the arrest of Ma Liuming and Zhu Ming following their performances in 1994, and the arrest of Shu Yang and Zhu Ming on the opening day of the *1st Open Art Platform – International Performance Art Festival* in August 2000, which will be discussed in more detail. As in the case of the *1st Dadao Live Art Festival*, the decision to place restrictions on performance can come directly from cohorts within the art scene in China; creating an ongoing environment in which the self-censorship of public art events in China can expand. Such processes became much clear to me when I co-organized several performance art events in China, including one at the opening of the exhibition *Transborder Languages – Volume Control* on 24 April, 2004 that was part of the 1st Dashanzi International Art Festival (*DIAF 2004*). One day prior to the opening, the chief-curators of the show – Huang Rui, Dai Guangyu, and myself – were called to a meeting with Xu Yong, who was the owner of 798 Space where the event was staged. There we were told to restrict some of the planned performances out of fear that they would disturb the invited audience to the festival; it included city-council officials and members of the press. According to Xu Yong, the performances to be banned involved those that would break some of the implicit moral codes of public conduct in art, which ultimately formed the basis of many recent discussions on censorship. These issues had, however, already been carefully addressed in selecting performances that would not breach any of these codes. Therefore, the decision by Xu Yong were based on his own personal ideas about what type of art could feature in his space, and this certainly could not include any live performance. Moreover, a year later, Xu Yong's personal restrictions had become generally accepted, as all of the planned performances for the 2nd Dashanzi International Art Festival (*DIAF 2005*) were to be screened by police officials prior to the opening. This time the decision came directly from Huang Rui, and

this caused controversy amongst many of the invited artists, some of whom cancelled their participation.[5] These instances form the basis for the main topic of this chapter, which moves from looking at censorship to discussing the rules that govern public conduct and private space of performance.

Public censorship and public conduct in performance art practices in China

These days censorship is often linked to the suppression of free speech and free action on the part of an individual challenging the various structures that govern social cohesion. The governance of censorship and the implication of moral values often takes place through nationally and (increasingly) internationally imposed rules of law, set forward through a complex of social, political, ideological and religious conditions. In recent times, and with an increased emphasis on the status of individuality, the basic rules surrounding the imposition of censorship are often connected to the concept of public conduct, in that people are permitted to perform their actions on the basis of their own private judgment, so long as they do not intentionally harm others.

The present examination of performance therefore starts with an analysis of the way different societies determine correct behavioral practices – in particular as they are located within the public sphere. Here performance deals with a set of well-adapted social expectations that formulate the classification of individual and unified group subjects. These classifications, and the abiding set of expectations that coincide with them, work directly through corporeal identification, like those used to describe a particular race or gender. Subsequent hierarchical social constructions also bring forth a particular set of expectations, which can be used to identify a particular class or particular generation. Often these classifications are associated with certain markings that can either become imprinted directly upon the body surface, or become part of external ornamentation.

Throughout the 1990s the works by Ma Liuming dealt with such socially determined classifications. His ongoing performance series, *Fen/ Ma Liuming*, which he

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[5] At the time, in April 2004, I attended two conferences in Hong Kong, where I spoke privately with two of the artists who had been invited. One of them told me about his unpleasant surprise about the decision, in particular as it came from Huang Rui, who had previously been of the members of the Stars Group.

started producing in 1993, feature a series of dialogues driven by the twofold nature of the artist's divided embodied subject, such as *Fen/Ma Liuming in Lyon* in 2001.**[ill. 7.2]** These performances are done completely naked and directly confront the audience with the 'androgynous' features of the artist's body, which reveal feminine characteristics in his face and hands that are sharply contrasted with his male genitalia. His early performances were often undertaken in private settings and had references to classical Chinese stories that deal with the veiling of sexual urges. In his later works, Ma Liuming placed himself on a stage and invited the public to directly engage with the performance, asking them to confront their own sensuality before the audience in relation to the naked body of the artist. The public were often willing to engage with his naked body because his performances were done within the context of art in a gallery space; this evidently encouraged audience response in a situation where there was a suspension of the restrained set of rules for correct behavior in a general public environment.**[ill. 7.3]**

These socially founded identifications can therefore be used for further interrogation of the way our experiences are incarnated, and thus provide the basis for the present discourse on performance. Describing the subsequent role of the state is only important once such analysis recognizes the basic social-historical foundation through which the state became prominent in determining the principles of physicality as a social construct. Understanding performance requires a brief analysis of physical education that, throughout different ages and cultures, has played a crucial role in the construction of both the early European state, as well in the foundation of the Peoples Republic of China. The latter based its nascent principles on the ideas of Marx, which were further elaborated in the thoughts of its principal founder, Mao Zedong.

A comparison of statements by Plato in *The Republic* with those by Mao Zedong in his April 1917 speech on the "Twenty-eight-stroke Student" is instructive in that it reveals two different models of the role of physical education in the formation of the State.[6] According to Plato, principles of physicality were to be based on 'excellence of mind and character'; this therefore opened up a state governing structure that would

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[6] See: Mao Zedong, "Twenty-eight-stroke Student" in Stuart Schram, The *Political Thought of Mao Tse-tung*

place the mind over the body.[7] Mao Zedong on the other hand argued that 'virtue and knowledge already reside in the body'; this offered ways of constructing a state structure that could give a prominent role to people at the grassroots in the formation of a modern Chinese society through their physical strength.

These principles were to determine the interrogation of performance in relation to the role of the state. An analysis of the controversies that surround the practice of performance art in China can make use of this discussion which introduces a specific historically founded social-political context to describe the role of the body in modern China. This discussion deliberately circumvents one about divine origin that has determined constructs of morality, and places a stronger emphasis on the modern state in governing correct behavior in the public space, rather than behavior in divine space. With this new construct of behavior in public space came new rules governing what would determine commonly accepted social sensibilities that informed principles of public conduct in modern state-governed societies across the world. At the same time the relationship between public space and private practice became more complex when performance artists chose to document their performances. Documentation creates a different temporality or duration of performance beyond the live event; but when performance is transferred into secondary representations, through documentation, it becomes subject to the same rules governing public conduct.

Displacement of public space and private practice in performance

Performance practices tend to break with the principles governing correct behavior in the public space. That is, unless the public space can be turned into a temporary space for artistic expression, which is often the case in societies that have managed to set up a context in which art is separated from the state. These societies have consequently managed to negotiate certain sites for artistic expression including museums, theatres, festivals, and transient spaces for artistic experimentation. They permit certain degrees of public disruption, like the performances by Ma Liuming in Lyon.

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[7] Plato, *The Republic*, Part Three [Book Two]. For this thesis I have used the following copy: Betty Radice, ed., *Plato: The Republic*, translated by Desmond Lee (London: Penguin Books, 1987 [1955])

Whereas the state continues to determine the rules for these public disruptions as seen in rules that govern general public safety; subsequent rules that govern public actions derive from organizations and even groups of individuals that have got some form of control in managing a set of rules for action in public space. For example, a museum or art institution can set up its own rules of public conduct by formulating a discursive concept about art, and the artist can govern his performance by placing a set of personalized limitations on its practice in different contexts. Together these factors make up the different levels of control that surround performance art and its subsequent encounter with censorship, including the concept of self-censorship.

The different social contexts involved in the staging of performance in China relate to the specific choice of location; this need to be considered when describing performances and can help formulate a more complex understanding of performance practice. These range from more privately staged performances involving direct use of visceral experiences, to artists working more directly with a particular stage set; they may involve choreographed events aimed at target audiences, such as in modern dance and experimental theatre, or unannounced events staged in unsanctioned spaces. Yet whatever the social context, there has been a marked tendency in performance practice in China to remediate the live event through documentation.[8]

In setting up his work *Eating People*, for example, Zhu Yu carefully considered the public representation of photographs of his privately staged performance, and insisted that a written artist statement accompany their publication. One may argue that the performance continues in the numerous discussions about morality that have taken place among different audiences who have seen the reproduced photographs and the accompanying text.[9] Ma Liuming, on the other hand, seems to have selected a more cinematographic approach in the registration of his performances, and even his selected

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[8] The term *remediation* therefore becomes particularly useful in recent discussions on performance art, as was discussed in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

[9] This can certainly be the case, as I have come to learn from recent unrecorded talks with Zhu Yu that he has collected most of the reports that cover discussions about his performance art work, and in these talks he even mentioned that these reports are to an extent part of an ongoing performance process.

medium of documenting his performances by photography has often used large size contact sheets over the time of an entire section of a particular performance.

Recent performances by Yang Zhichao have shown even more complex ways to document privately staged performances. In the performance work *Jiayu Fort*, Yang Zhichao locked himself up for one month in a mental hospital in his native Gansu Province.**[ill. 7.4]** In this performance, which commenced on 30 December 1999, the artist deliberately sought to connect himself with outcasts in Chinese society who have been incarcerated because they no longer had the capability to act out correct social behavior. Yang Zhichao's own admission into the mental hospital, for which he asked the help of his sister, revealed a dark truth about such admissions, since it only needed a statement by a close relative plus payment for the duration of his stay to have him committed as a mentally unstable patient. He was immediately taken to a side room and given more than half an hour of electric shock therapy, followed by doses of sedatives leading the artist himself to believe that he was mentally unhinged.

The performance lasted for an entire month, and during this time Yang Zhichao asked his brother-in-law to visit and secretly document parts of the performance in photographs and video. Throughout his stay, Yang Zhichao recorded his personal experiences in a diary, which were published in the underground cultural magazine *Shui mo* (*Water Bubbles*) produced by a good friend his working as a local police officer in Beijing. The final documentation of the performance therefore encompasses a wide range of media, including photographs, a video documentary, and a full diary of 52 pages which, together, form the basis for a complex set of secondary representations of the real time performance.**[ill. 7.5]** This type of documentation forms the basis for an art historical discourse of performance art in China; performance becomes a field that has adapted itself to a wide range of media producing secondary representations of the actual real time event. These allow different levels of engagement with the artwork. Despite the value of documentation to analytic discourse, there continues to be a social-political context that controls all levels of public display of performance through rules governing public conduct.

The social-political gratification of artistic practices in China

China is often projected as a highly controlled environment. Chinese society has become the archetype of an authoritarian party-state imposing a strict governance of its citizens. A constant stream of information describes the dominant role of the Chinese Communist Party in setting up the basic structures for control through centralized ideology, which imposes patterns of correct behavior on all its citizens. This has furthermore led to a popular discourse on the emergence of the avant-garde in China. But this discourse is limited in the way it describes a widespread movement of artistic resistance that breaks away from ideological oppression through an 'unofficial' art discourse capable of challenging the 'official' channels for art production in China.

The year 1989 clearly marks a transition from cultural-historical actions on the part of collective movements to the emergence of artists who pay increasing attention to individual characterization and social-political detachment in their practices. The *China Modern Art Exhibition* played an important part in this transition. For the first time, the China Art Gallery would bring together an exhibition of works by a range of artists, who had sprung up across China between 1985 and 1989. They had become interested in challenging the continuing role of national institutions controlling the system of cultural production in China. This process can be linked to similar types of historical developments in other parts of the world that led artists to create new environments for their practices outside institutional domains and that ultimately encourages for the production of 'art for art's sake'.

Many artists working in China during the course of the 1980s had not yet managed to create an independent artistic role for their practices. Such independence would mean that artists had succeeded in creating an autonomous aesthetic discourse capable of separating itself from the social-political domain, and of creating an environment in which alternative practices could operate outside the party-state bureaucracy in control of national channels for art production. This is clearly not the case in the 1980s. The cultural debate during this period may have fostered a movement opposed to the cultural policies that would continue to adapt to the guiding principles of Mao Zedong, but at the

same time the participants in this movement clearly strove for the restoration of an identifiably Chinese cultural history. The way in which some of the more radical forces inside the local art scene, emerging after the Cultural Revolution, continued to adapt their practices to the historical definition of Chinese modernity, indicates how the *aesthetic discourse* remained closely linked to the *socio-cultural discourse*. This would generate numerous situations in which participants in both discourses become entangled in confrontations between tradition and modernity.

During the 1980s there were numerous instances where experimental art practices become intertwined with socio-political protest movements. These usually involved public actions that attempted to confront institutional control over the arts; I have argued that they represent the basis for a distinctive performance art movement in China. However, these artists soon found themselves taking part in radical public protest movements that involved intellectuals who were far more politically motivated in their actions. As a result, early examples of performance art in China are almost always related to socio-political action. Three of these early events are important to recall. First, the events between 27 September and 1 October 1979, which led the Stars Group from attempting to stage an open-air exhibition outside the China Art Gallery to their active participation in a protest movement at the Xidan Democracy Wall. Second, the performance event *Concept 21 - Art Before your Eyes* on 23 December 1986 at Beijing University coincided with growing public unrest that led to student protests at major universities across China. Third, there were the performances on 5 February 1989 at the opening of the *Chinese Modern Art Exhibition* which culminated in the closure of the event; while they were seen as public disruption, they also triggered leading art critics to call for a proper discussion on performance art in China.

The imbrication of art and politics again became an important factor in the development of the popular discourse of contemporary art during the course of the 1990s in China. Many researchers have concentrated their analyses on this relationship, which continues to inform an ongoing discourse on the Chinese avant-garde. The use of the term avant-garde not only aims to describe a vanguard movement of artists who want to create an environment to produce 'art for art's sake', more specifically, it is related to

the way in which certain groups of artists are thought to have started a process of liberating their practices from national ideological pressures, by retreating into themselves and adapting their works to a range of new concepts.

There are, however, major differences in the way the idea of the Chinese avant-garde is used by the local art scene and by an increasing number of writers from abroad. The latter seem to harbour different expectations about the specific function of the avant-garde – often based on their experience of the way the term has been used in Europe, North America, and Japan. It tends to focus on the distinction between official and unofficial art production in China. However, their discussions often fail to take proper notice of the fact that this distinction is the result of different artistic attitudes to the social function of modern art in the 1980s. Art continues to be treated as a socio-political tool in the domestic situation. In particular, the practices of many cutting edge artists in China in the 1980s are clearly motivated by social-politics and high culture fever. That is, factors that go beyond a discussion of the distinction between official and unofficial art.

This situation would change radically after 1989. The events surrounding the military crackdown of the student demonstrations at Tiananmen and other parts of China altered the link between art and society in China, as many young artists started to focus their work on their personal expression. These changes are often, rather loosely, described by the term *social alienation*, with many of the leading intellectuals who remained in China, including members of the cultural production field, said to have exhibited clear signs of *disillusionment* in their work (the work of Fang Lijun is often mentioned in this context). These views will also inform a range of subsequent discourses on Chinese art, although many participants in these discussions seem to struggle with finding specific terms with which to describe the proliferation of an increasingly complex field of practice. During the course of the 1990s much of the attention for Chinese art from Europe involved people who prefer using the term 'Chinese avant-garde', following their first introduction to its practices in seeing the

China/Avant-garde exhibition.[10] Across the Pacific many audiences became adapted to the term 'new art from China', following the exhibition *China New Art – Post 1989* which traveled between 1993 and 1994 from Hong Kong to Sydney and to several cities in the United States. In China, on the other hand, there was the emergence of a new discourse on 'experimental art' – a term that had its origins in discussions on literature during the late 1980s. It was adapted to visual art after 1989. More than anything else, the term 'experimental art' is useful for the analysis of the way artists in the 1990s disintegrated the close links between aesthetics and socio-politics, which had been so formative of collective public action in different parts of China in the previous decade.[11]

In recent years analyses using the term 'experimental art' have become something of a role model for studying contemporary Chinese art, particularly by offering a compound approach to the subject. Their emphasis on the role of individual artists and independent curators significantly challenges centralized production and representation of art in China. Sometimes they also tend to touch briefly on the concept of public and private space in China.[12] Despite the obvious role performance plays in the infringement of notions of public and private space, these examinations fail to pay attention to its practices, even when they illustrate significant instances that can be used to describe distinctions between the public realm and private domain in experimental art production in China. Therefore, even though these texts introduce some interesting propositions on the open and closed environments in which experimental art practices operate, they fail to point out the fact that these environments are created on the basis of a system of

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[10] The *China/Avant-garde* exhibition was curated by Andreas Schmid and Hans van Dijk and opened on 30 January 1993 at the House of World Cultures in Berlin. Thereafter it traveled to venues in Rotterdam (Netherlands), Oxford (UK), and Odensee (Denmark).

[11] The term 'Chinese experimental art' has become widely used by overseas writers, after it was initially adapted in English language by Wu Hung in 1999. See: Wu Hung, *Transience*. Wu Hung's use of the term remains somewhat sketchy in stating how "experimental artists place themselves at the *border* of contemporary society and the art world" (p. 15). In his discussion, Wu Hung fails to note the fact that the term experimentalism has already been used in discussions on the emergence of 'experimental fiction' in 1987 and 1988, which created much controversy in its attempt to dislocate aesthetic production from having a social function. Important references on this topic can be found in: Wang Jing. *High Culture Fever*

[12] See: Wu Hung. *Transience*, 152; and Wu Hung, *Exhibiting Experimental Art*, 42-46 Again Wu Hung seems to struggle somewhat in dealing with the role of public and private space in his two major works on the practice and secondary representation of experimental art in China during the 1990s.

privilege over particular styles and techniques in contemporary art production. Hence, the popular distinction between 'official' art and 'unofficial' art relates to the way aesthetics and space are determined and redetermined in China.

The privileging of particular styles and techniques in contemporary art production and its secondary representation in China plays an important role in the status of performance art practices in China. Throughout its recent history, performance art has failed to become part of the official curriculum. Ever since 2000 – 2001 even with various state institutions supporting exhibitions of experimental art in China and overseas, the discourse on performance art has remained excluded. An example of this ongoing process of denouncing significant performance art and its secondary representation can be seen in the treatment of the works by Zhu Ming who has been practicing his performance art since the early 1990s and has become well known internationally for his works involving a large translucent bubble.**[ill. 7.6]**

In 2002, Zhu Ming was invited to contribute a photograph of his performance to the First Guangzhou Triennial at the Guangdong Art Museum. The aim of the exhibition was to be an extensive overview of an entire decade of Chinese experimental art, between 1990 and 2000. Several weeks before the opening, Zhu Ming received a phone call from one of the coordinators of the exhibition in which he was informed that his contribution had been rejected on review, since it involved nudity. Around the same time, Ma Liuming was asked to change his selected work and to provide an image of one of his early performances in which he was dressed in female clothes. However, following these measures, the video and photographs of *12 Square Meters* by Zhang Huan, who now lives and works in New York, were allowed to feature at the exhibition, despite the fact that they also portray the artist's nude body.[13]

Several months later in April 2003, photographs of Zhu Ming's performance *26 July 2002*, which he had done in secret at a bay in Qingdao Province, were shown at the *6th Sharjah International Art Biennale* in the United Arab Emirates.**[ill. 7.7]** This took place despite initial controversies surrounding one particular image that displayed pubic

hair and was considered insensitive according to local Islamic principles. But in this instance, the offending hair was covered by a white dot and the modified work shown at the exhibition.**[ill. 7.8]** These distinctions in the way such photographs and videos of performances involving the naked body enter a discussion about different levels of public sensibility in different cultures are significant. However, in looking at the situation in China one should point to the selective privileging of certain artists, styles, and techniques, in addition to the idea that such judgements simply involve public sensibilities.

Performance, the art system and its popular distinctions in China

The privileging of different styles and techniques clearly produces a system based on distinction, where the work of Bourdieu is an obvious reference. His essays on photography and its representations in popular culture, offer a discursive model. Bourdieu develops a model of a particular "hierarchy of legitimacies", which describes the distinctions in a "a three-tier hierarchy of dissimilar cultural fields". At the grassroot level lies an arbitrary field of popular taste that functions on the basis of individual judgments. At the top level lies the 'sphere of legitimacy' in the judgement of taste, where several legitimate institutes govern the judgements of cultural taste. In between these two spheres lies what he calls the 'legitimisable sphere' – occupying a field that manages to avoid total consecration while surpassing the arbitrary system of individual taste.[14]

The distinctions between the different spheres of legitimisation in cultural production and secondary representation are useful in setting up a tentative model of privilege and distinction in cultural production in the Chinese context. At the same time, one has to take into consideration the cultural-historic condition of Chinese modernity, and provide an analysis of the social-political system that has brought about the

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[13] Unfortunately the issue surrounding the cancellation of performance photographs did not get any public attention, and was inundated completely by the removal of Huang Yongping's *Bat Project 2* installation several days before the opening, and following a political and administrative dispute.

[14] See: Pierre Bourdieu, et.al. *Photography: A Middle-brow Art* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), 95-98 cf Michael Hockx, ed., *The Literary Field of Modern China* (Curzon Press, 1999), in which the author adds a sino-political dimension to the matter.

centralized structure of cultural production in China. The arrival of new economic incentives in China, which led to the opening up of the market to capital investment, including in the arts, means that further complexities need to be considered in the description of the way a hierarchy of legitimisation in cultural production in China is structured. A full analysis of experimental art production during the 1990s and early twenty-first century based on Bourdieu's model would require a quantum of research beyond the scope of this thesis. At this stage, it is possible to address the fact that individual taste has been directed by the commercial system in China. This system does not merely inform popular taste, but has also been adopted by state ideology – by the privileging of certain art practices that can be used to promote national, socio-cultural identity at a time of great economic transformation. It is therefore part of the 'legitimisable sphere', described by Bourdieu.

The experimental art scene in China during the 1990s seems to have been run for a large part on market incentives. The influence of the overseas market is certainly important to mention, as it has exerted a great influence on the direction of Chinese experimental art since the early 1990s, including the field of performance art. Many performance artists find it increasingly difficult to focus their works solely on the staging of live performances and feel obliged to come up with other means of producing more marketable artworks. Several performance artists have started producing paintings, sculptures, and especially designed photographs of their works. Ma Liuming, for example, has increased his production of sculptures and paintings in recent years; they are based on themes that were previously used in his performances.**[ill. 7.9]** He manages to distinguish these works from his performance, and basically treats them as a way to make money.[15] Another former member of the East Village, Cang Xin, has had much more difficulty in making a distinction between different practices. His recent work is still considered by many to be performance, but one has to question the motives behind some of these works, which seem to be designed to produce desirable objects in which the artist is merely adding his own body to link them with performance.**[ill. 7.10]**

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[15] Following an interview with Ma Liuming at his studio in Beijing in 2001.

More recently, a range of institutions in China have played an active role in legitimising certain directions in art practices, to conform to a national contemporary cultural identity. This situation led to the further demarcation of performance art within the field of visual art. In general, artists respond to this new situation in two distinct directions. The first is to produce works that not only feature carefully designed desirable objects, but also promote themes promoted by local and international curators. The photographs by Weng Fen, for example, have been frequently used in exhibitions that focus on the topic of 'urbanisation', which is one of the themes preferred by local curators in recent years.[16] **[ill. 7.11]** The topic of 'social alienation' is turned into a romanticisation on China's future – typically, it is marked by the young schoolgirl gazing at a new urban landscape. To an international audience, these images can still be promoted as a challenging art practice by using the term 'Cynical Realism'. In fact, these works are far removed from the scepticism once identified in paintings by Fang Lijun, and other artists who emerged in the early 1990s and who *are* cynical realists.

Amidst the commercial and institutional pressures imposed on the art scene in recent years, an increasing number of artists in China find clever ways to transcend their radical position, which previously used to make them stand out from the crowd. Some of these artists can be selected for major international events if they are willing to adapt their practice to a legitimised style, often through an initial gratification to their acceptance by the international art scene. This process is evident in the recent attention to the work of Sun Yuan and Peng Yu, who have been willing to adapt to popular demands for spectacle. For Sun Yuan and his partner Peng Yu, the body is used for its sensationalism. Outside that there are no specific reason is given for its use, not even for

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[16] Exhibitions that focus on the topic of urbanization are almost certain to get sponsorship from major construction and real estate companies in China. In recent times Chinese officials in charge of the arts have also shown increasing support for these types of exhibitions, as they become useful in presenting the tremendous economic development that China has witnessed over the past 25 years. This could certainly be seen in the exhibition *Alors, la Chine?* at the Pompidou Center in Paris in 2003, which featured the work of Weng Fen. The exhibition was sponsored by the Chinese Ministry of Culture as part of the 'Year of China, 2003/2004', celebrating cultural exchanges between China and France. For further reference, see the catalogue for the exhibition: Bruno Racine et.al., *Alors, la Chine?* (Paris: Centre Pompidou, 2003)

the two dead babies in the performance *Link of the Body* (2000).[17] These marginal considerations on the use of the body are unlike the effort of Zhu Yu who attempted to contextualise the performance of *Eating People*.

Such installations are based on a form of aesthetics that generate feelings of absurdity and shock in people who find themselves confronted with the complete art's abrogation of moralityand its unconfined practices. However, some of the more sensationalist uses of the body do not have the complexity of performances in which the artist employs the body in extreme forms, including self-mutilation, masochism or necrophagy. The work by Zhu Yu and Yang Zhichao offer two examples of the latter, as both of these artists do not refrain from using their own body and that of others. *Eating People* is essentially based on the artist's personal efforts to deal with moral constraints. Another performance by Zhu Yu conducted in 2000, *Skin Graft*, illustrates this self-referential process even more clearly.**[ill. 7.12]** The performance was done in two stages: First the artist had a large piece of flesh removed from his stomach, and less than three weeks later grafted it on a piece of pork – in a wishful attempt to "heal a dead corps by applying healthy and fresh meat."[18] The performances by Yang Zhichao are also an important reference to self-mutilation. His private performance, *Jiayu Fort* (1999-2000) and the first public surgery in *Planting Grass* (2000), involved making permanent marks on his own body. Yang Zhichao started marking his body with a hand-made tattoo in a *Burning Sun* in 1989, whilst living in Lanzhou (Gansu Province). Ten years later, in 1999, he moved to Beijing and celebrated his arrival with a performance in which he smashed a beer bottle to his face. A year later, in 2000, he asked the renowned Beijing artist Ai Weiwei for his assistance in branding his ID number on to his back in a privately staged performance, *Iron*.**[ill. 7.13]** In 2002 Ai Weiwei was again asked to participate in the performance *Hide*, in which he selected a secret object to be placed via surgery into the right leg of Yang Zhichao.**[ill. 7.14]**

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[17] According to Sun Yuan and Peng Yu in an interview by Ai Weiwei in 2002. See: Ai Weiwei. Ed., *Chinese Artists, Texts and Interviews: Chinese Contemporary Art Awards (CCAA) 1998-2002* (Hong Kong: Timezone 8, 2002)

[18] Following a statement made by Yang Zhichao in a recorded interview in 2001.

In contrast to these private performances involving the body/*flesh*, artists such as Sun Yuan and Peng Yu have increasingly planned new ways to create public spectacles which produce levels of comfortable shock – so as to ensure that audiences will not distance themselves from their work. This is clearly the case for the installation *Controversy Model*, discussed earlier. Unlike other artists who respond to the public clamor for sensation, they have become increasingly willing to adapt their practices to ensure broader public exposure. This has included being sensitive to the demands of particular audiences, such as when their work is staged at art institutions, which oblige them to observe a particular code of conduct to ensure some degree of public comfort.[19] As a result, the recent installation *Unidentified Flying Objects* at the Chinese Pavilion for the 51st Venice Biennale in 2005 is far removed from their earlier works dealing with the body/*flesh* **[ill. 7.15]**.[20] Clearly they have adapted their practice to be acceptable to a broad spectrum of public institutions in China and abroad. But next to Sun Yuan and Peng Yu there are many more artists who continue to produce challenging works that redefine a public role for performance art in China.

Renegotiating the public role of performance art in China

During the early 1990s, there were several groups of artists in China who employed the body in highly complex ways. Their experiments certainly did not happen overnight, and followed more than a decade of action and performance during the 1980s, culminating in the *China Modern Art Exhibition*.

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[19] Here I have come to use the term 'public comfort' instead of 'public safety', as the former also include consideration of different degrees of sensibility by the assorted audiences who attend public exhibitions. Here it becomes obvious that a privately organized exhibition in an alternative art space will offer fewer restrictions than exhibitions at a private gallery, or at institutional backed art institutions including museums.

[20] The installation offered a playful catch on the official Chinese space program, whereby Sun Yuan and Peng Yu had acted for the help of a farmer from Anhui Province, Du Wenda, who has become renowned for creating make-shift space ships in his free time. The title of the work, however, is kept rather broad and the artists were clearly careful in preventing the work from being treated as a critical piece. Ironically, the installation failed to work properly, as the fan-belt broke just minutes before the opening, preventing it from 'lift off'. In what seems to have been a mere coincidence, the failing mechanics were perhaps the closest possible way for audiences to recognize a critique of the 'official' space program. Following an unconfirmed report, the artists mentioned to some colleagues how they felt obliged to produce a more 'general' installation because they had not been allowed to do anything that dealt with the body, made use of live animals, or would shock the public in any way.

The early experiments in performance in the 1980s often featured artists whose public actions involved strong conceptual approaches played out directly in contact with the audiences, many of whom had been disengaged from the cultural system during the Cultural Revolution. In the first half of the 1990s, some artists focused on direct approaches to the body in experiments intended to transcend the corporeal self by placing the body under stress. These performances show links to experiments in the performance art of the 1980s, such as those that involved wrapping the body in newspaper and cloth. At the same time, these performances transformed these earlier experiments by incorporating direct representations of the body/*flesh*, often in an attempt to evoke and transcend a range of incarnated experiences.

This can be seen in the performances by a group of bohemians who arrived illegally in Beijing during the early 1990s and who came from provincial towns and cities in Henan, Heilongjiang, Hubei and Hunan Provinces. They were struggled to survive in their cabin homes on the east side of Beijing; the place became known as the East Village. These artists all came from a generation who were born during the Cultural Revolution. They grew up most of the time alone while their parents laboured in the countryside or engaged in cultural warfare. Like many of their friends before them, they moved to Beijing with the expectation that the city would offer them an opportunity to sell their work – or at least ride on the wind of change in the construction of a new Chinese culture. In a repetition of their childhood experiences, they relied on their friends for survival and chose to live in close proximity to their cohorts. These days several of the artists have become figures in the international art scene, and romanticised theses have been attached to their works. They evoke a strong sense of personal innovation, and are sometimes combined with an cultural-historical analysis that uses these works as a critique of a society gone astray.[21]

The East Village performances can help in the analysis of the shifting transactions between the public realm and private domain in China. Zhang Huan is particularly clear about the function of his performances, which often involved deliberate attempts to

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[21] See: Wu Hung, *Rong Rong's East Village*; and Souchou Yao, "Two faces of contemporary art in China", in *Artlink*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (December 2003), 16-19

transcend the physical body by placing it under enormous physical stress. His early works, such as *12 Square Meters* (1994), challenged socially determined notions of public and private space.[22] His final performance involved careful planning in its use of a 'public' toilet, which was reserved for the sole use of the village leaders. During the performance, one of them started to question the purpose of this action, which he felt breached certain expectations of correct behaviour regarding public space. When asked questions about the performance, the artists who were documenting it answered that it was part of a television commercial, after which the leader walked away, his concerns allayed.

In addition to the way artist found clever ways to deal with issues of public conduct in their live performances, they have developed elaborate ways to confront issues in the secondary representations of their performances. The documentation of events produced in private can reach a general audience through photography, text, installations and film. As a result, the former discourse on performance art, which was previously said only to include real-time action staged before an audience, becomes renegotiated and remediated. These performances and their secondary representation confront specific sensibilities when entering the public domain. In particular, when they deal with direct depictions of the body, which remains to be emancipated from social taboos governing its representation in the public domain. It is clear that only when the body is further liberated from such taboos will audiences realize that the body is always present, even though at times it has the tendency to remove itself from direct experience. Performance artists have taken up the important task of confronting the rules that govern the correct behavior of the body in the public domain.

In China, performance art is directly related to issues surrounding the proper behavior of people in the public space; even when performances are done in private, they are still subject to the rules of public conduct. More recently several artists have started to relate their work more directly to this notion of public conduct, by challenging the acceptance of moral laws and ethics, which are constructed by [all of] mankind to

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[22] This can be seen in the two interviews with Zhang Huan by Xu Xiaoyu, see: Xu Xiaoyu, *Tanhua que daolu*, 293-295 (Part One: 25 December, 1996) and 297-303 (Part Two, 23 January, 1997)

define the kind of proper actions that can be taken by each individual human being. It is important to examine the ways in which these deliberations surrounding public conduct govern both art practice and art mediation. So far, no performance artist in China has broken any official laws. But the space of contemporary art practice in China can no longer be used for unlimited types of visual experimentation – common laws, which determine the conduct of proper behavior within the public domain, have been extended to the exhibition space, resulting in limitations imposed on the representation of experimental art in China.

Performance art often claims public responsiveness, and as a result its practice has been treated with caution.[23] Often this caution is based on protecting the emotional response of the public, and is evoked by an appeal to a common understanding of correct behavior in a public environment. It has highlighted the issue of the standards used in the judgment of correct human actions. Performance art is clearly a field of art practice with the capability of challenging the way in which we conceive our direct physical and social environment. Aside from action of the performing artist, it demands a physical and emotional reaction from the public. Physical experience, so it seems, is the main subject in the representation of performance art. But since physical experience cannot always be adjudicated in terms of right or wrong, performance art practices transcends common ethical and aesthetic principles, especially when the latter are based on religion or politics. As a result, performance must be judged on the basis of human perception, and this is where the role of the embodied sensibility of each individual participant in the performance becomes so important. As such, performance art can always be treated as an act of 'public conduct', in that it may disturb public peace, or intentionally disrupt a public meeting or sleeping community through its behavioral act. But isn't this one of the functions of art, if it wishes to play a continuing and vital role in society?

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[23] Certainly these concerns surrounding public incursion are not only evident in China, as was seen in Sydney in March 2003 the Chinese performance artist Zhu Ming staged a public performance on the lawn in front of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney, as part of the exhibition *Liquid Sea* (curated by Rachel Kent). During the preparations for this performance there were some concerns with the fact that Zhu Ming would perform naked, as this may have provoked complaints by members of the public. However, soon after it was decided that the location of the performance, in front of a museum for

Further attempts in formulating a public role for performance art in China

The recent past of performance art in China has unfortunately demonstrated unremitting problems for artists attempting to find ways to introduce their practices into the public realm. Despite the fact that the past few years has seen the integration of experimental art into the new, national discourse on contemporary art, performance continues to be marginalized. Even when its practices take place within an international context, and involve self-imposed restrictions on its real-time displays, performance artists continue to be the target of direct measures that restrict them from performing any type of action. These even include performances that are done within confined spaces and involve targeted audiences acquainted with the field.

Following the initial closure of the *China Modern Art Exhibition* on 5 February 1989, a few brief moments indicated changes in the usual anxiety towards the public staging of performance in China. The dialogue on performance art between Hou Hanru and Fan Di'an, which was published in July 1989 in the influential Chinese art magazine *Meishu* (*Fine Arts*), is therefore an important document for this discussion.[24] They discussed the various conceptual and contextual approaches leading to the creation of a preliminary discourse of performance art in China. Towards the end of the dialogue Fan Di'an observes that the fear and horror surrounding recent performances originated in people lacking control over the conceptual meaning of its practice and, because of this misunderstanding, that attention needed to be paid to the medium. A similarly insightful dialogue is needed today.

In the early 1990s there were two events that marked an ambivalence towards performance art at state controlled art institutes. In 1992, a few performances were incorporated in the opening of the First Guangzhou Biennial. And between 1992 and 1993, the China Art Gallery in Beijing became the location for performances by Song Yongping and Zhang Huan. These performances were done without official approval

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contemporary art, would provide enough context for people to understand its artistic distinctiveness, and that it could therefore not be treated as an act of public conduct.

[24] See: Fan Di'an and Hou Hanru, "Yan shen yu shanbian - Guanyu xingwei yishu de duihua" in *Meishu*, 14-17

from the organizers, but were made possible through an invitation to these artists to participate in a solo exhibition or a group show. Such was the case of the performance *Angel* on 26 October 1993 by Zhang Huan at a group exhibition by students from the Central Academy of Fine Arts.**[ill. 7.16]** On these occasions the staging of performances were immediately met with criticism from the museum staff and members of the audience, many of whom were frightened by the confrontation with the body-in-action at the gallery.

The ongoing anxieties surrounding public performance were clearly evident in the procedures adopted for international performance art festivals in China since 2000, including for the *1st Open Art Platform – International Performance Art Festival*, which was held in August 2000 at Huairou County in the northwest of Beijing Municipality. The initial plans for the festival were made by Zhu Ming in the late 1990s following his participation in two performance art events: the 1999 Nippon International Performance Art Festival in Japan, and the 2000 Hong Kong – Berlin Art Festival held in Germany. Following his participation in these festivals, Zhu Ming started to make plans to host a similar international performance art event in China, for which he asked the help of Chen Jin and Shu Yang (both of whom were also practicing performance artists). On 28 August 2000, the festival commenced with live performances by Wang Chuyu, Chen Guang, Cang Xin, Li Wei, and Liu Jin. These performances were held at carefully selected locations in-and-around the holiday resort in Huairou County. They essentially catered for a targeted audience that included members of the experimental art scene in Beijing, but the organizers could not prevent some local villagers from viewing works that were staged outside the perimeters of the resort.

The final performance staged that day was *Coca Cola Bath* by Liu Jin, who bathed himself naked in a large tub filled with Coca Cola. Several artists videoed the performance; one video shows the audience responding with laughter at Li Yong taking of his clothes and settling himself in the tub with Liu Jin. Suddenly the camera is distracted and a loud voice is heard over the sounds of the crowd, shouting that police officers had entered the courtyard where the performance was being held.**[ill. 7.17]** According to some of the artists present at the time, someone in the audience and

possibly even one of the artists had called in the police, after he felt confronted by the nudity. The camera continues to secretly record the unfolding events, as members of the audience are rounded up and asked to hand-over their IDs. After the documents had been checked the police officers decide to arrest two organizers of the festival, Zhu Ming and Shu Yang. Following their arrest the two were interrogated for several hours at the local police station before being released at 11 pm. That evening two performances were staged in the dark; one by the Finnish artist Roi Vaara and another by the Chinese artist Wang Deren. The next day the entire event is relocated to the private home of Chen Jin, located in the southeast of Beijing, where several artists continue to stage their work.

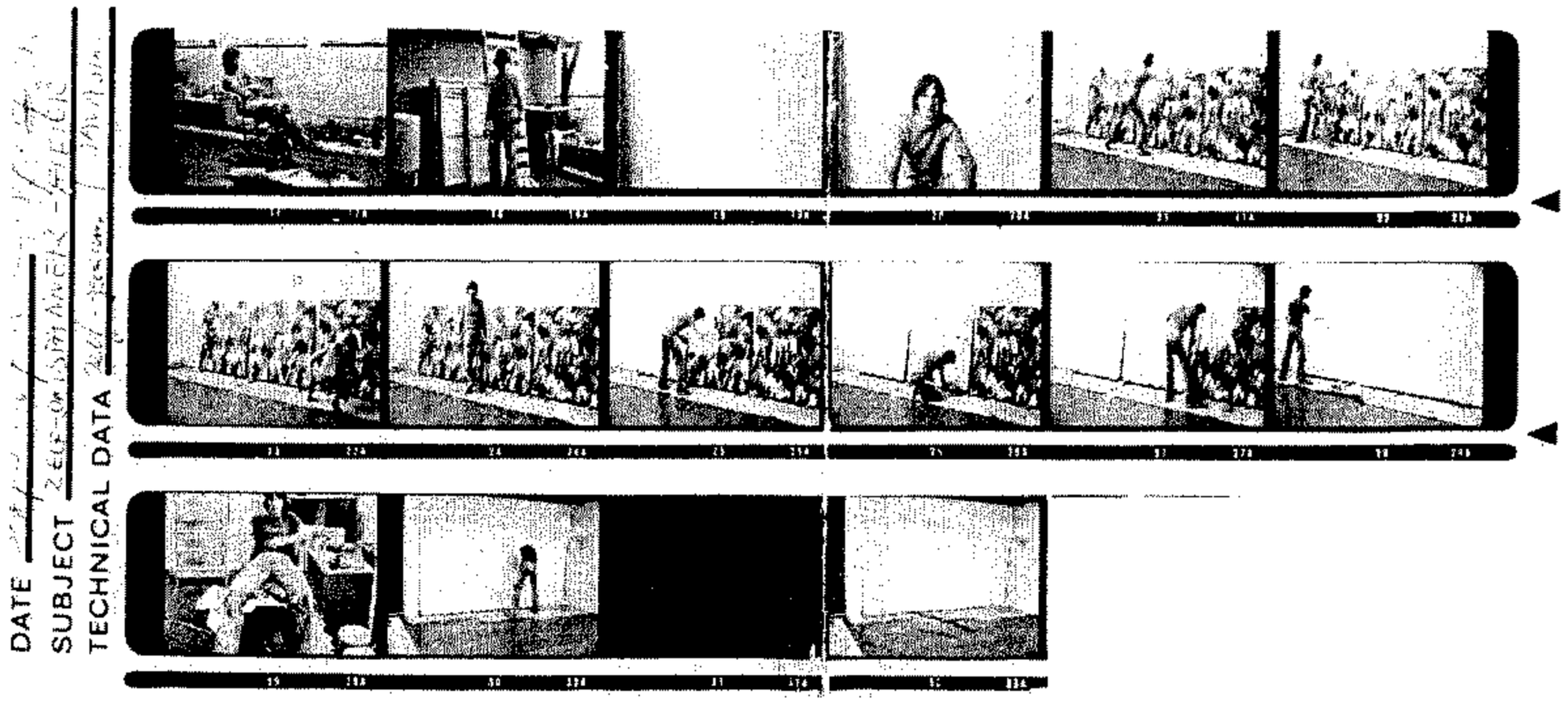
On the morning of 30 August Zhu Ming and Shu Yang were again summoned to the police station at Huairou, together with the two artists who had participated in the performance, Liu Jin and Li Yong. They are told that in order to organize these types of events they needed approval from the Ministry of Culture. Since they had not applied for such an approval, the entire event was treated as an illegal gathering and all of the confiscated documentation would remain in the custody of the police. The video that had been taken in secret is the one of the few surviving documents of the event.

Between 2000 and 2004, artists and curators continued to host internationally oriented live performance events, including subsequent editions of the annual *Open Art Platform – International Performance Art Festival* (in 2001 in Pengshan County near Sichuan; in 2002 in Xi'an; and in 2003 in Changchun). In September 2003 the performance artists Shu Yang and Wang Chuyu also started organizing the *1st Dadao Live Art Festival*, and subsequent editions were held in 2004 and 2005. These events continue to provoke strong public reaction, unfortunately, from some people holding important positions in the local art scene. This situation was evident in the organization of performances for the *DIAF 2004 and DIAF 2005* in the Dashanzi Art District, that involved the forced decision to have all performances screened by authorities prior to their staging for the public.

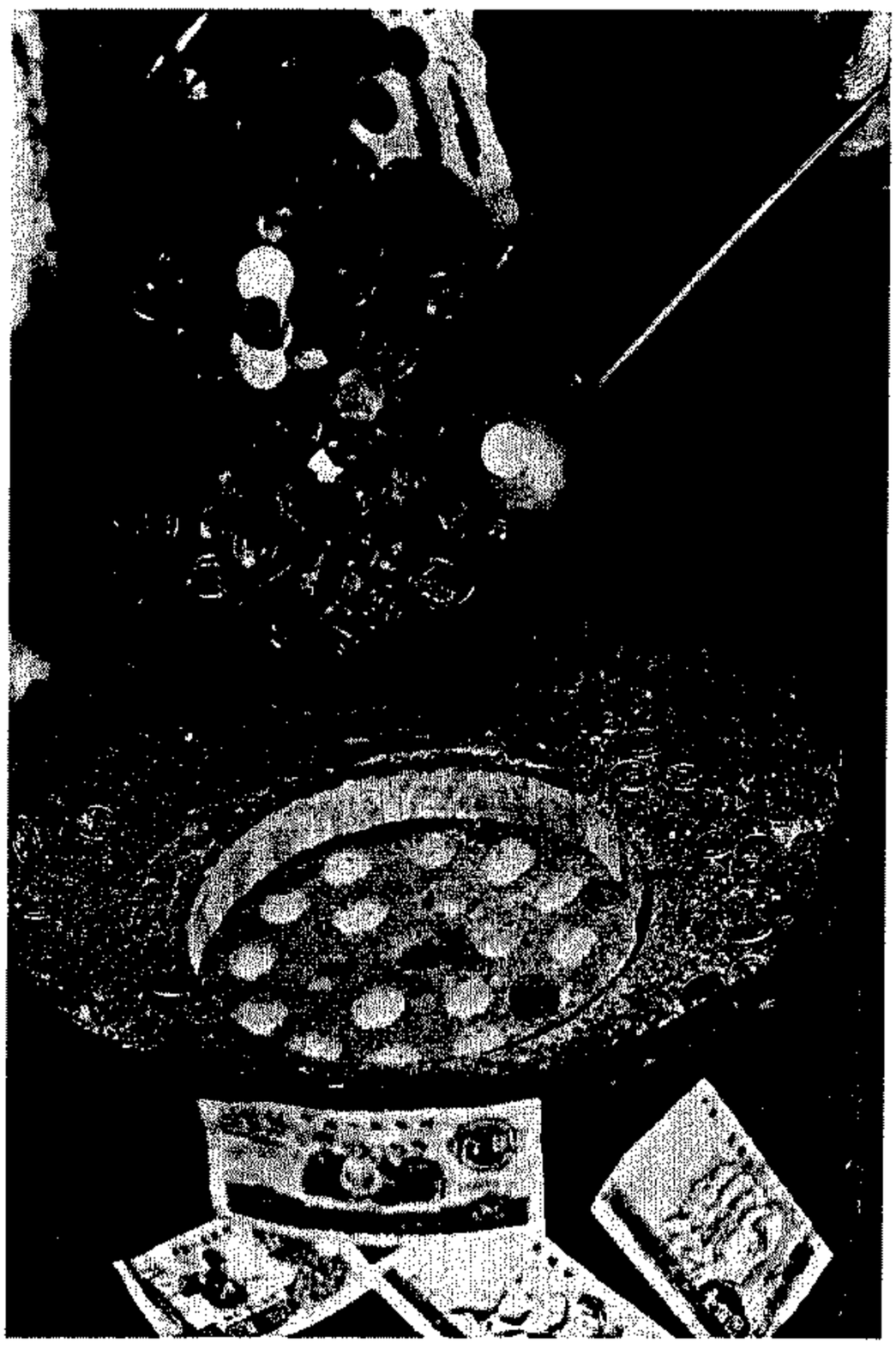
Aside from confronting the direct pressures exerted by state authorities, performance artists now regularly meet restrictions imposed by organizers and the owners of private spaces. They often hold personal fears about openly staging

performances. Their guardedness points to issues concerning public conduct, and prevents performance art from being recognized as an artistic practice capable of occupying a place in the national and international discourses of contemporary art. Unless further attention is given to the significant role occupied by performance art in (the history of) contemporary art in China, fear will continue to accompany its public reception. This document is dedicated to reversing the situation.

ILLUSTRATIONS



0.1 Jaap Berghuis, Personal photographs of artist painting in his studio, 1973, Javastraat, Amsterdam



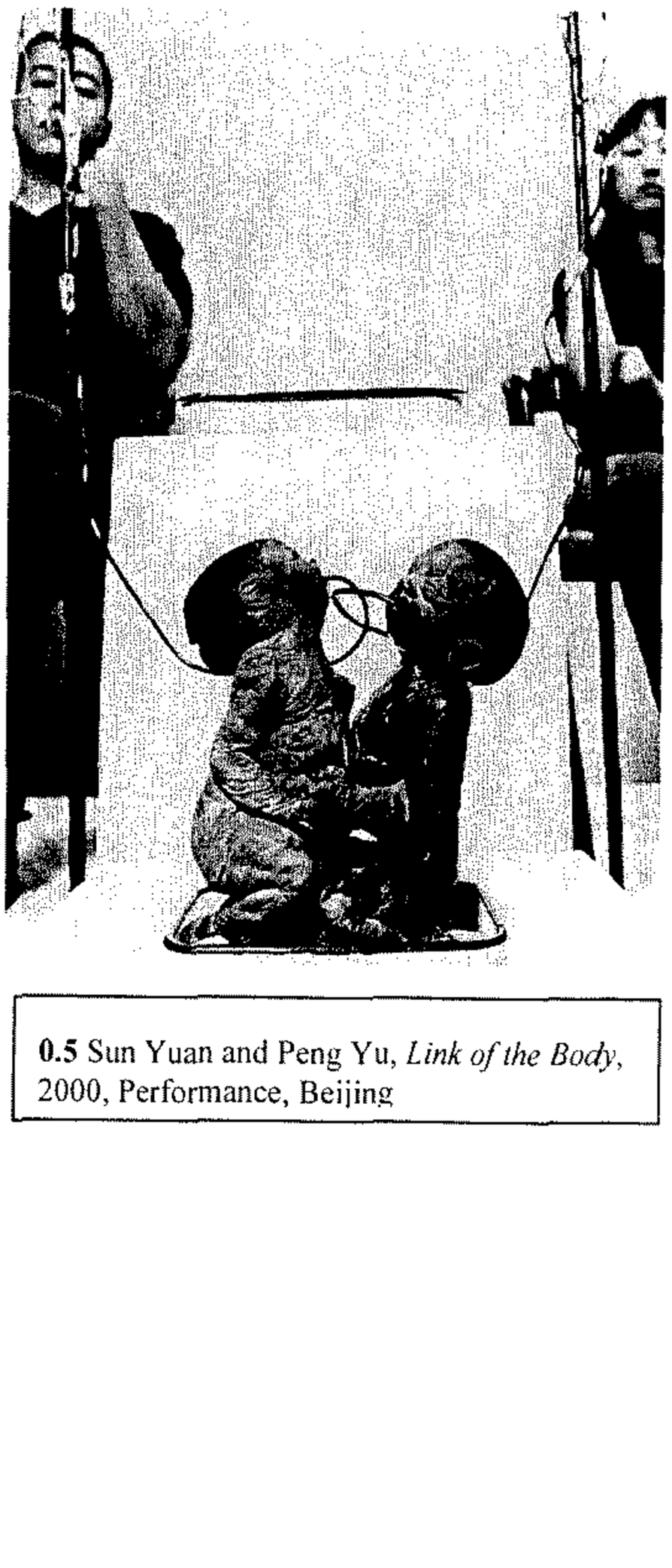
0.2 Wang Jin, *Stir Frying Chinese Yuan*, 17 February 1995, Performance, Wangfujing, Beijing, Duration: 30 minutes



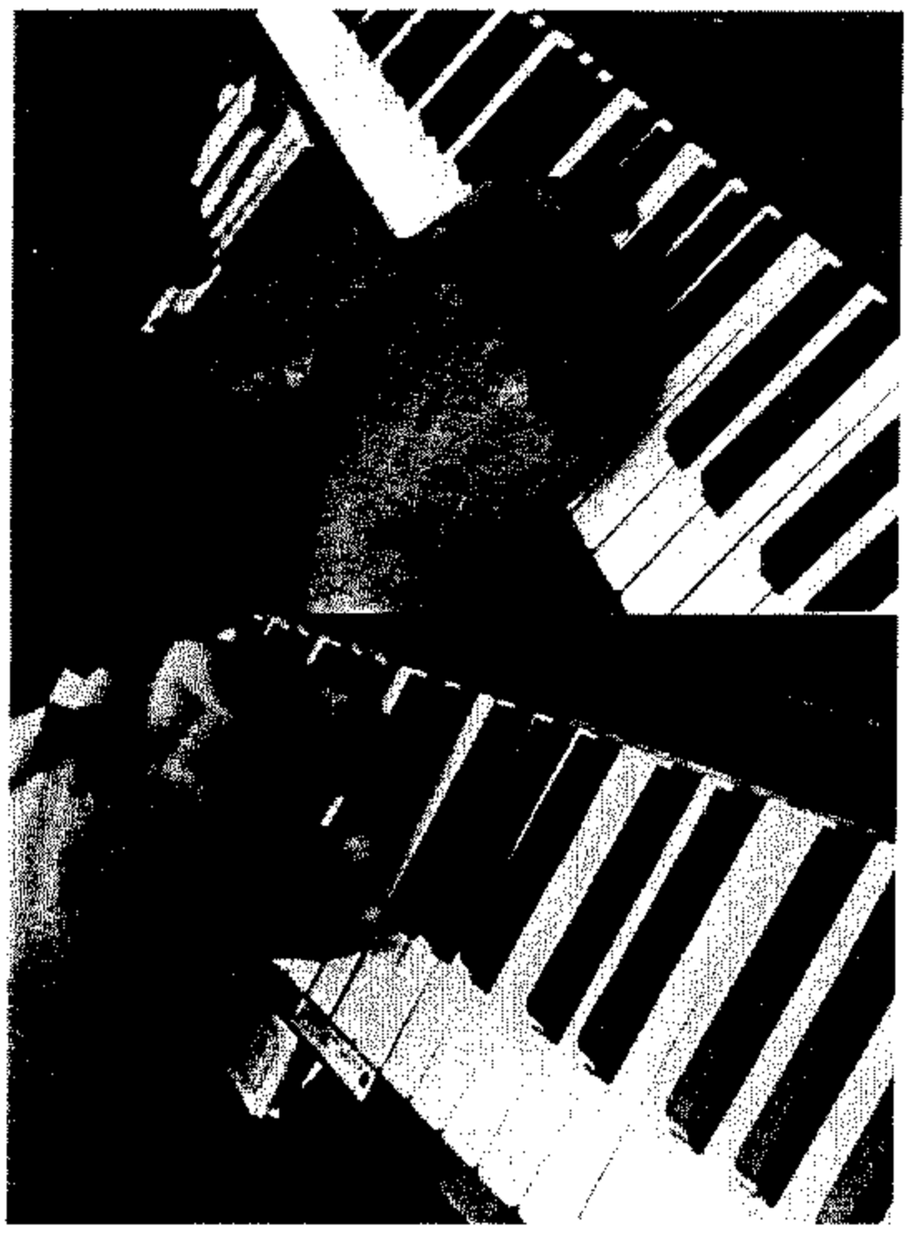
0.3 Qiu Zhijie, *Fine*, 1997. Photograph series. Dimensions variable



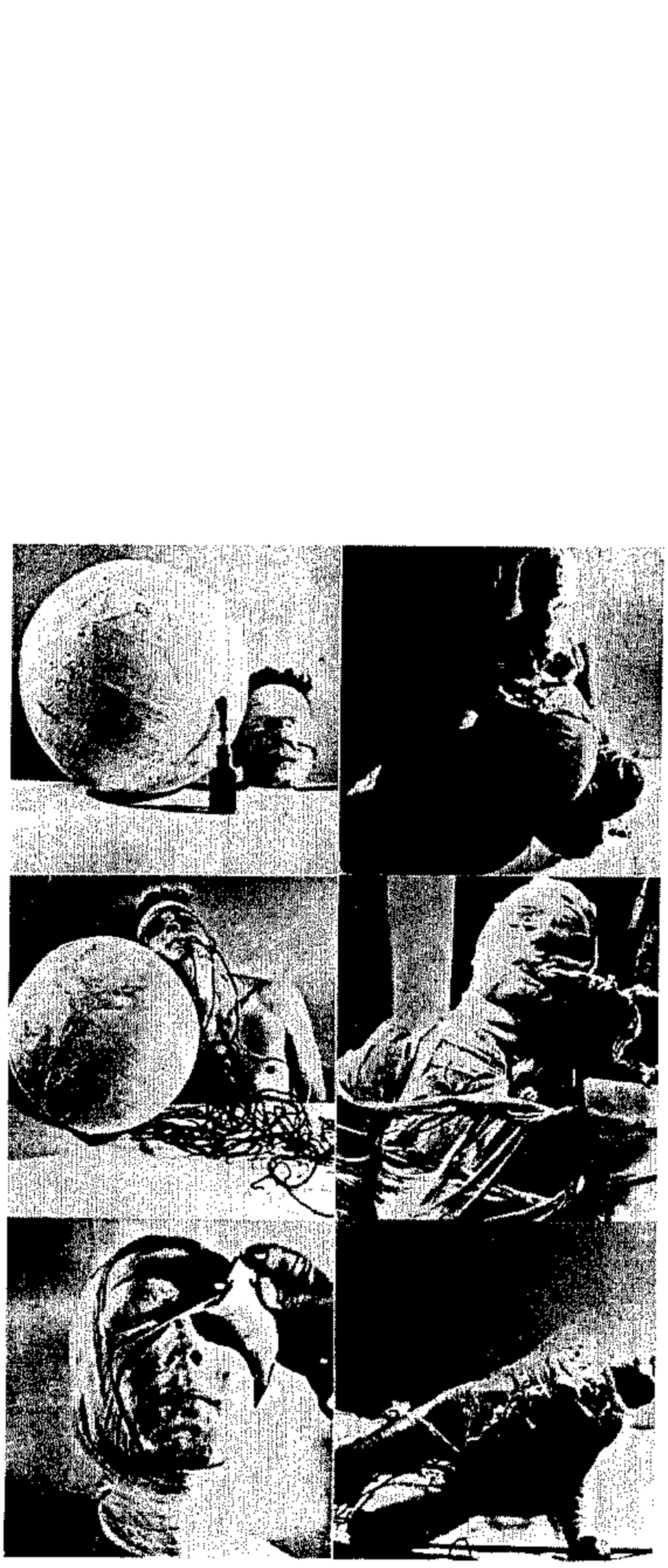
0.4 Zhang Dali, Demolition (ak-47), 1999, Performance, Ping'an Dajie, Beijing



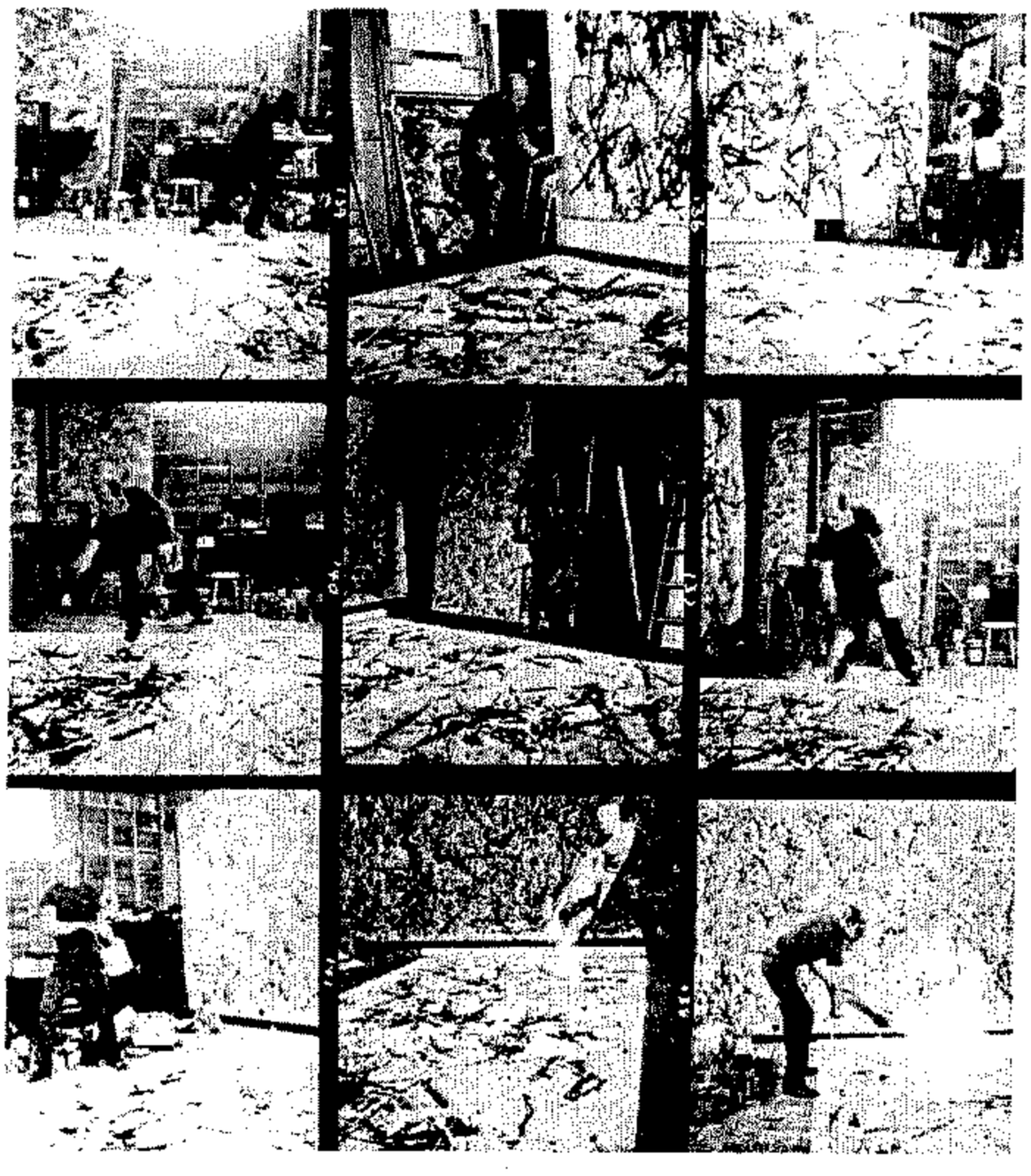
0.5 Sun Yuan and Peng Yu, *Link of the Body*, 2000, Performance, Beijing



1.1 Giuseppe Chiara, *Gestures on the Piano*, 1972, Performance



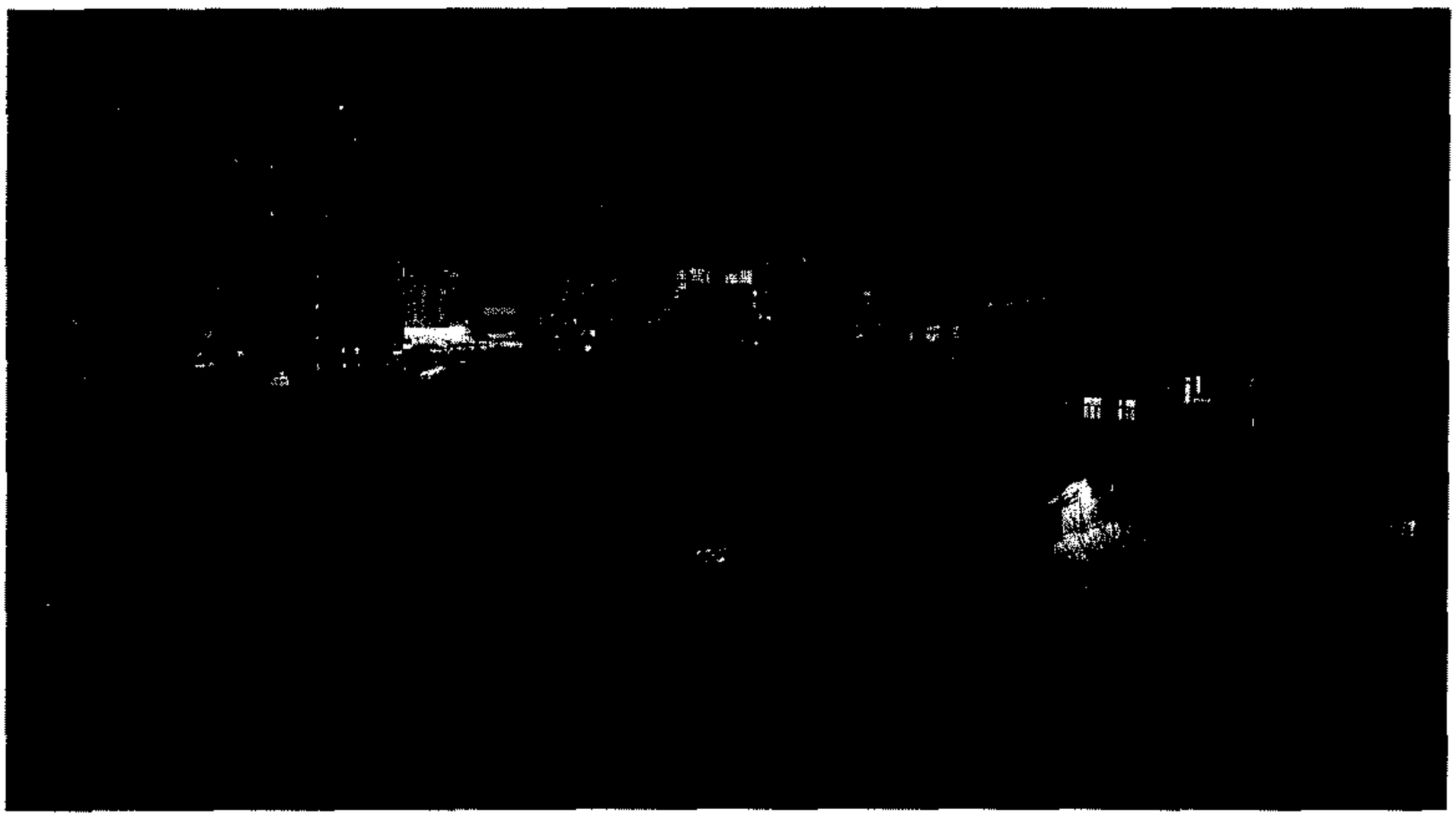
1.2 Rudolf Schwartzkogler, *Action 1965*, 1965, Performance



1.3 Jackson Pollock, Painting in his studio, 1950, Photography by Hans Namuth



1.4 Liu Jin, *Coca Cola Bath*, 28 August 2000, Performance, West Siduhe Village, Huairou County, Beijing Municipality



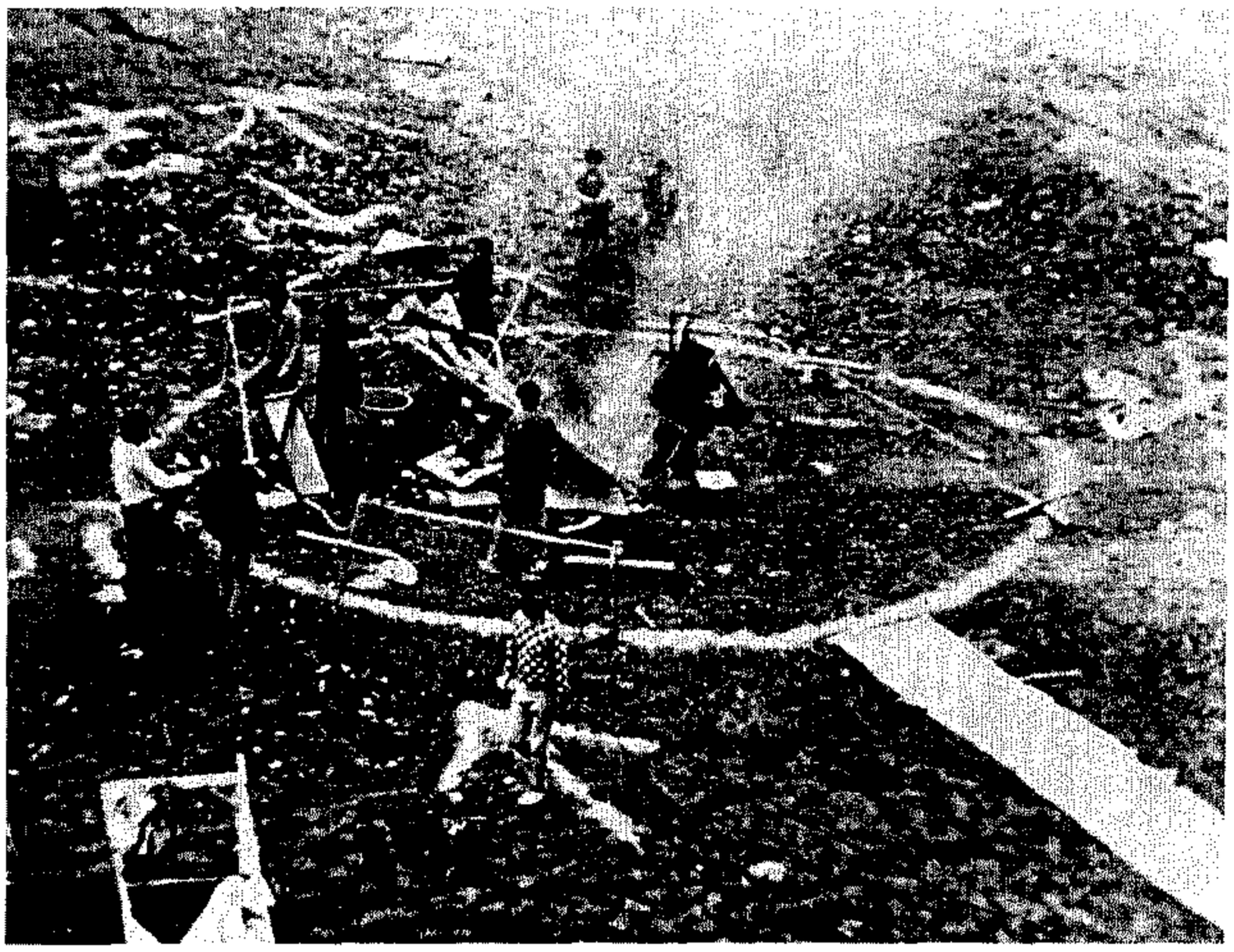
1.5 Chen Lingyang, *25th Hour, No. 1*, Photograph, Dimensions variable



1.6 Arahmaini, *Handle without care*, 1996, Performance, Duration: 11 minutes, Queensland Art Gallery, 2nd Asia-Pacific Triennale



1.7 Action Art, CAFA, July 1985, Participants include students from Central Academy in Beijing and students from Les Ecole de Beaux Arts, Paris

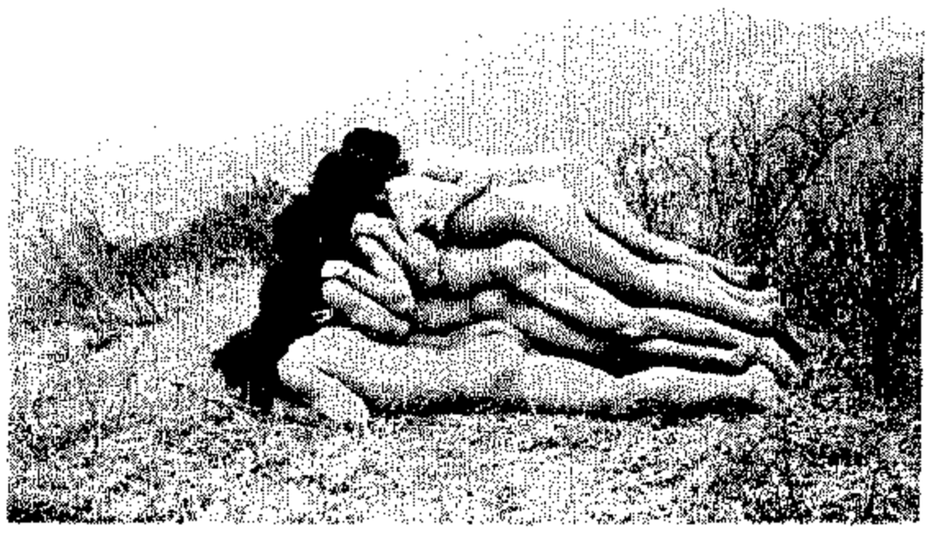


1.8 Xiamen Dada, Actions following the exhibition at the Xiamen City Arts Gallery of the Masses, October 1986



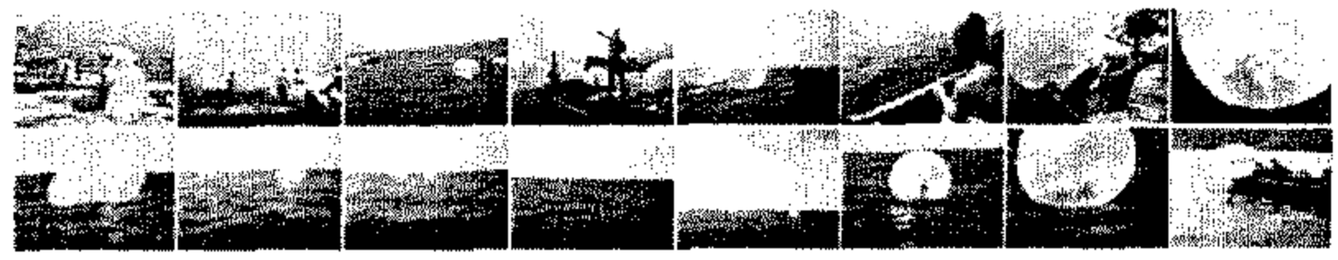


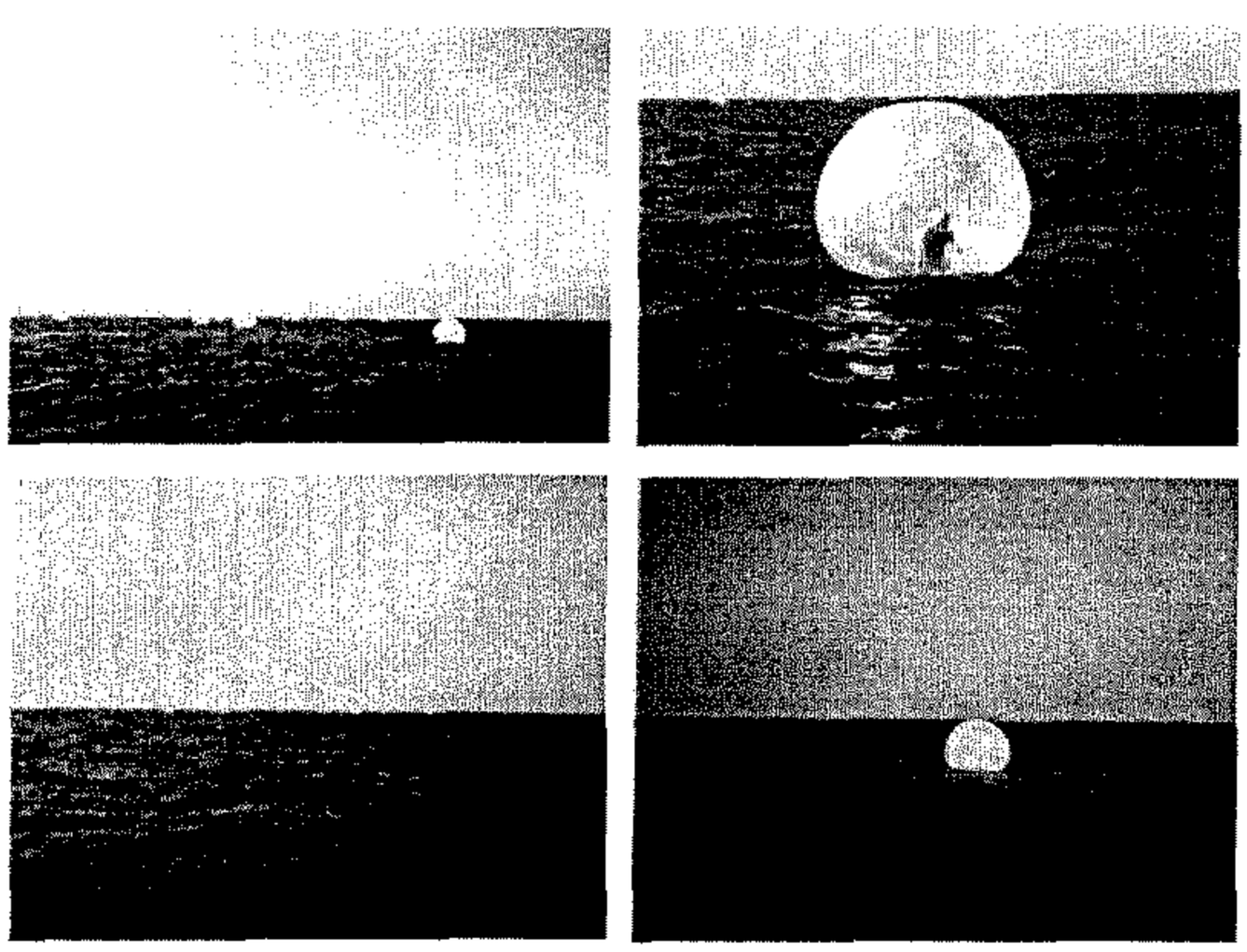
1.9 Group Performance Beijing East Village Artists, *To Add Another Meter to an Anonymous Mountain* (copy Zhu Ming), May 1995, Beijing, Photography by Lü Nan





1.10 Huang Yongping, *Non-Expressionist Painting*, 1985, Photograph of the artist taken in his studio in Xiamen





1.11 Zhu Ming, *26 July 2002*, 2002, Performance, Shanlao Mountain Cove, Shandong Province

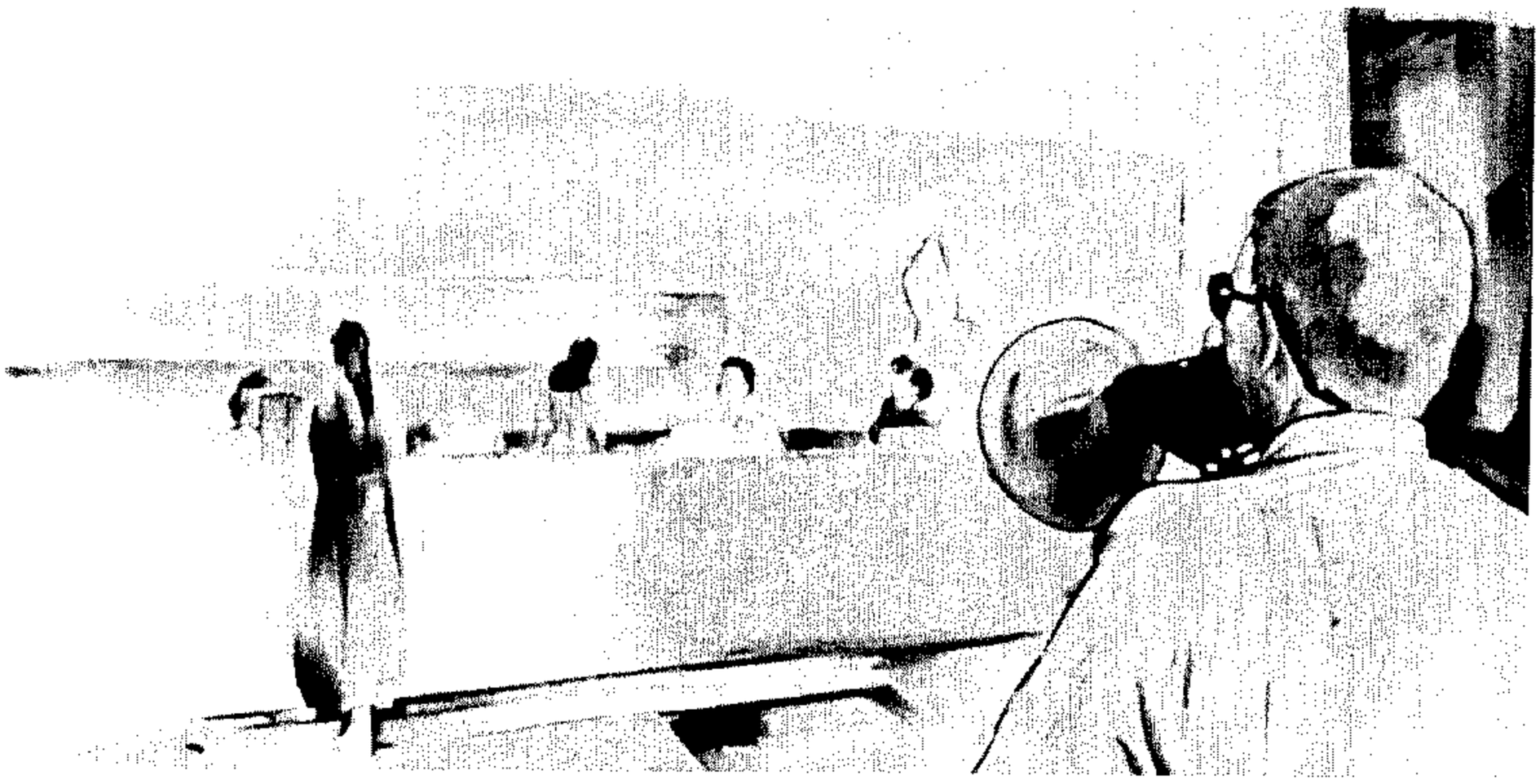




1.12 Ma Liuming, *Fen/Ma Liuming Walks the Great Wall*, 1998, Video documentation of performance

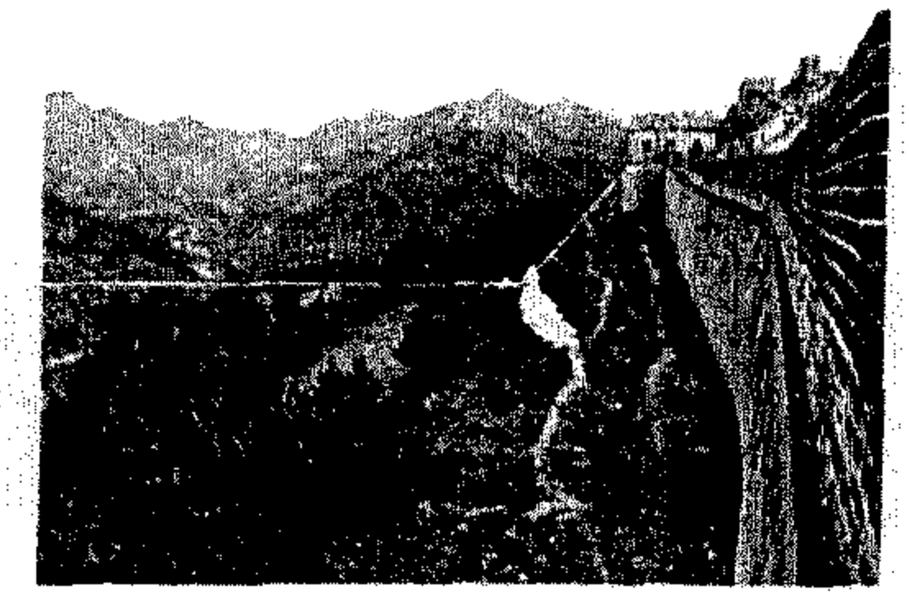


1.13 Ma Liuming, *Fen/Ma Liuming Walks the Great Wall*, 1998, Photograph series of performance



1.14 Steven Wong, *Unannounced Performance*, Singapore Airlines office located at 5670 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, Wednesday, March Eight, 1995, Description: Three pm. I walked into the offices of Singapore Airlines and recited the Singapore Pledge in Chinese over a bull horn/ power horn, Performance documented in Brush & Ink

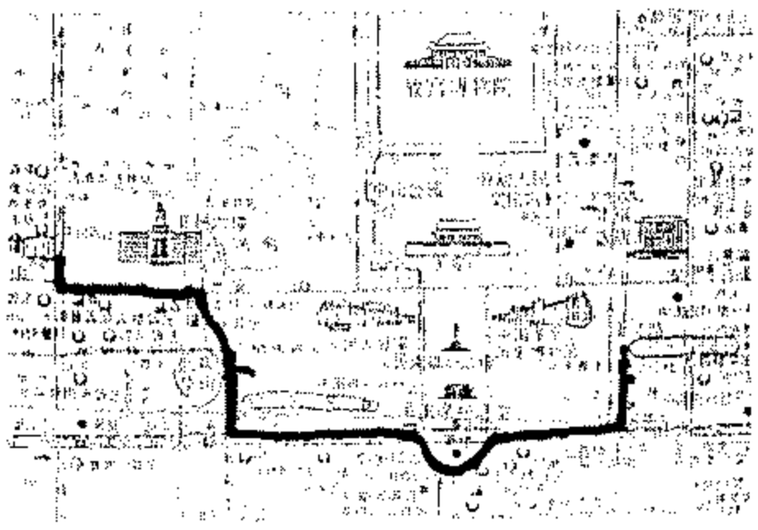




2.1 Kwok Mang-Ho, *Plastic Bag Happenings in China*, 1979









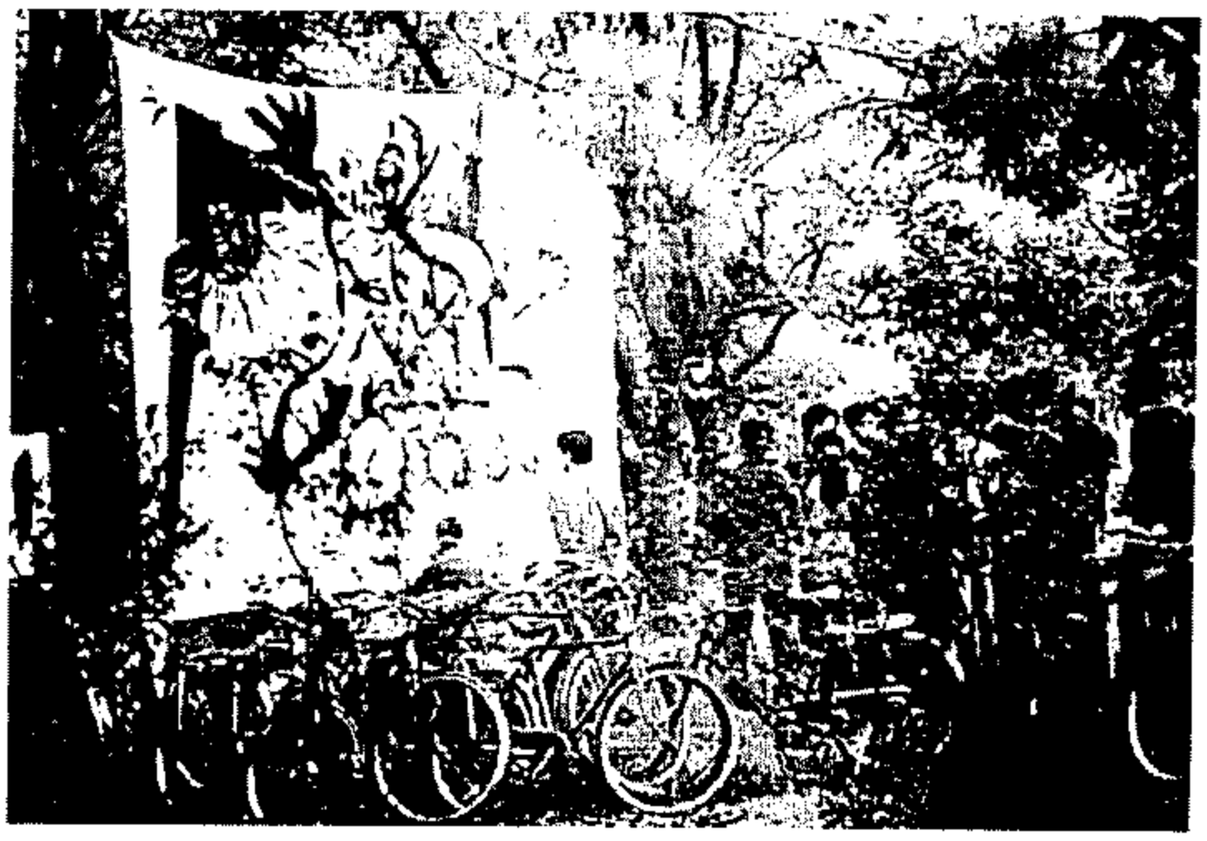


2.2 Stars Group, Public Protests, 1 October 1979, Beijing

2.3 Stars Group, Images taken at the public exhibition on 23 November 1979 at the Huafang Studio in Beihai Park



2.4 Xiamen Dada, Actions following the exhibition at the Xiamen City Arts Gallery of the Masses, October 1986



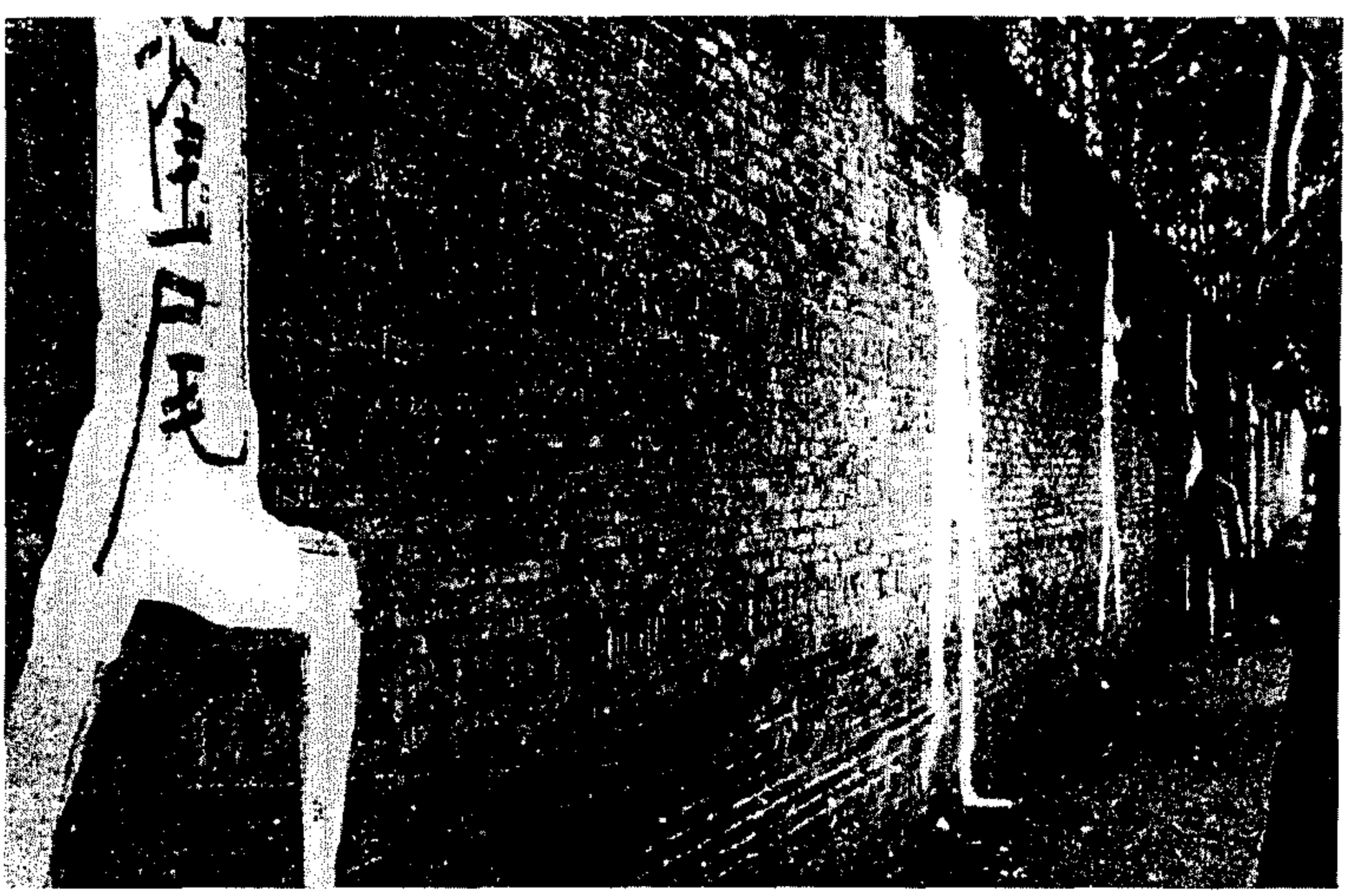
2.5 *Bringing to Light*, Open-air exhibition at the Xuanwu Park in Nanjing



2.6 Wang Qiang, *The Start of the 2nd Movement of the 5th Symphony in Adagio*, 2 December 1985, Installation for the New Space '85 exhibition, Organized by the Young Creator's Society (later changed to the Pond Group)



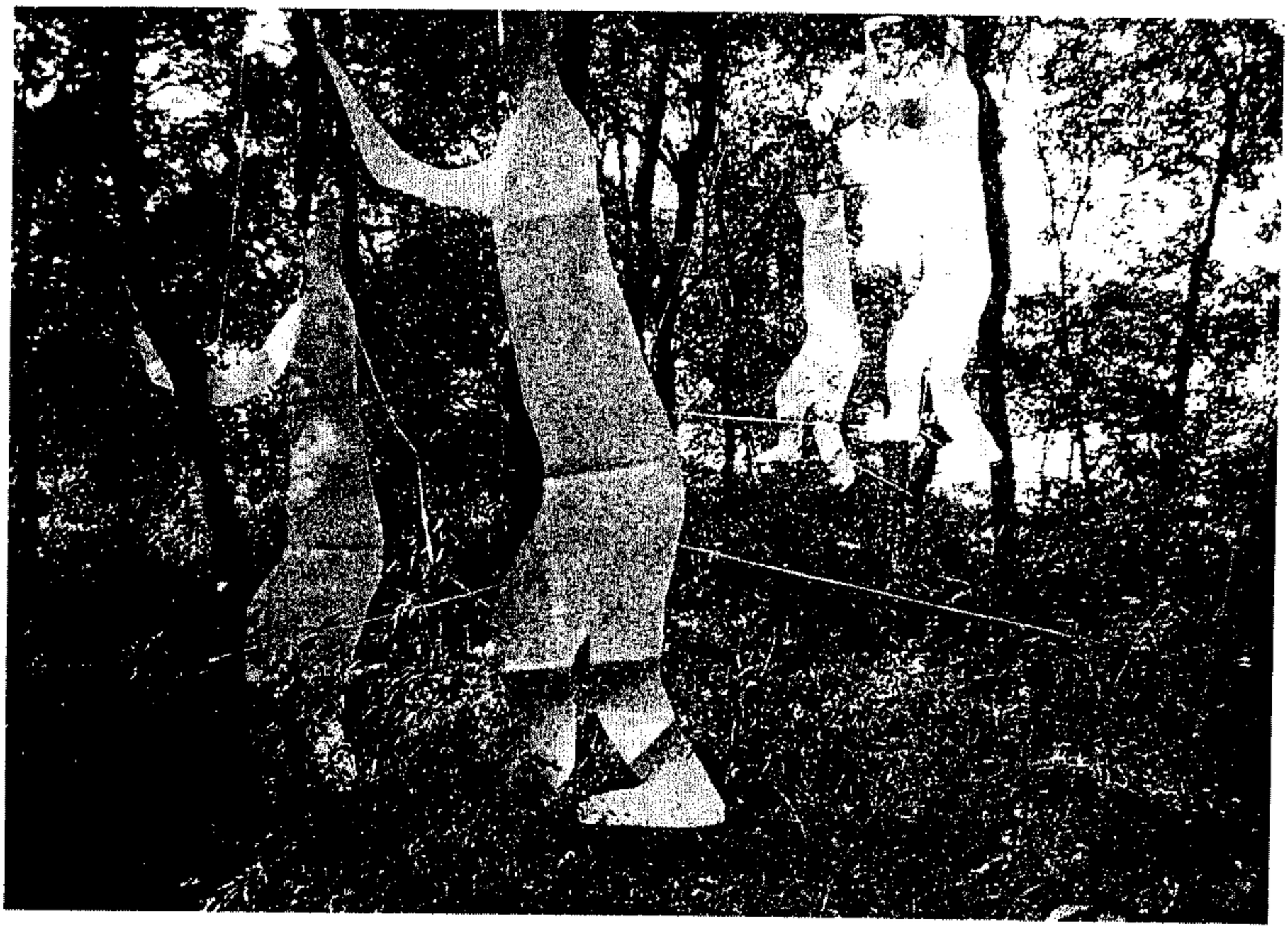
2.7 Wang Qiang, *After Hour Artist*, Performance, 1985



2.8 Young Creator's Society (Pond Group), *Work Number One: Yangshi Taiji – Series*, June 1986, Public action near the Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts, Hangzhou



2.9 Zhang Peili and Geng Jianyi, Wrapping Up - King and Queen, November 1986, Performance, Luoyang



2.10 Young Creator's Society (Pond Group), *The Performer Amidst the Green Colored Empty Space*, 4 November 1986, Public action, Hangzhou



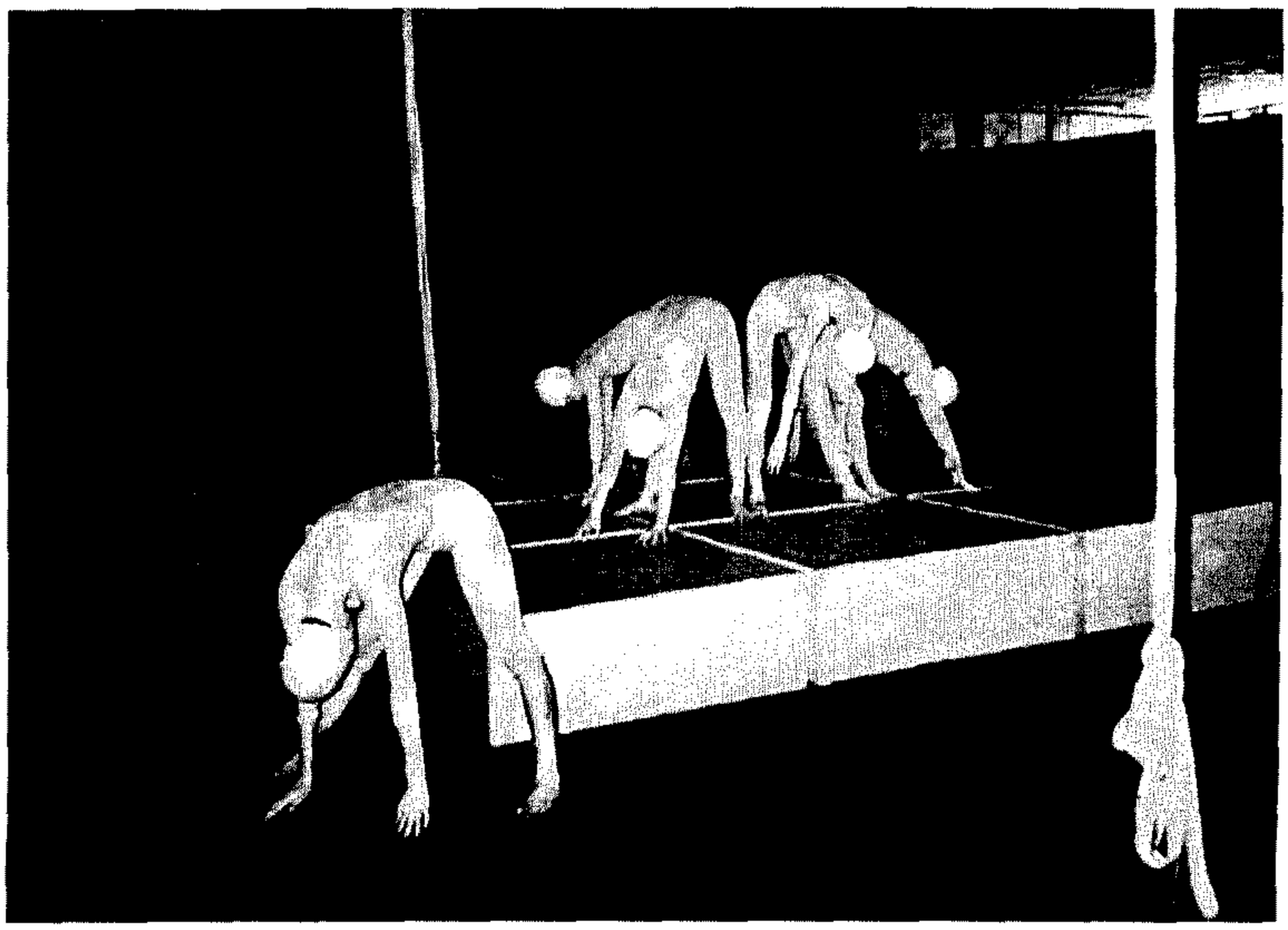
2.11 Lanzhou Art Group, May Fourth Youthday, 4 May 1987, Action piece



2.12 Concept 21st Century Group, *Concept 21 - Art Before your Eyes*, 23 December 1986, Public actions at Beijing University, Participants: Sheng Qi, Kang Mu, Zheng Yuke, and Zhao Jianhai



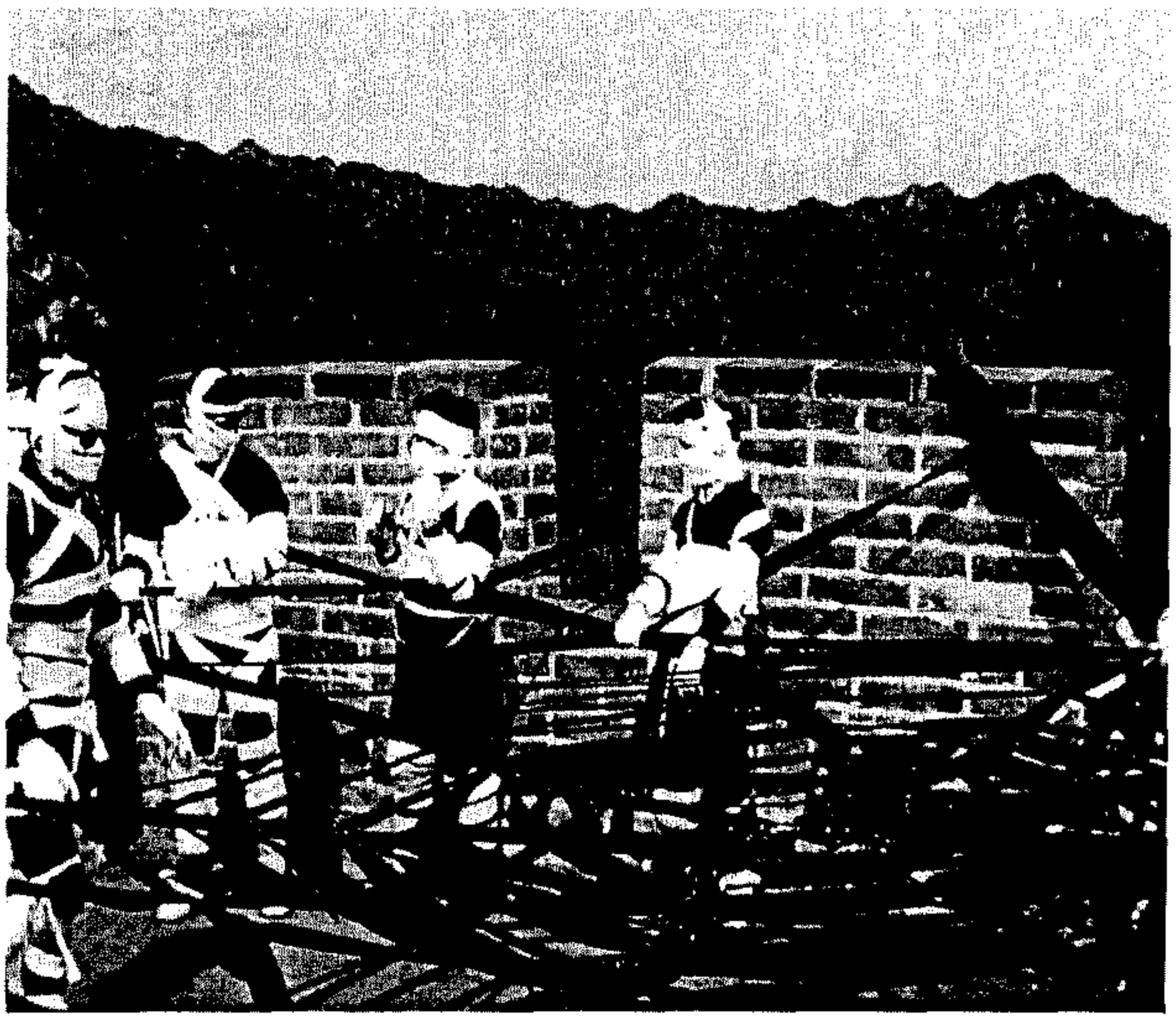
2.13 Action Art, CAFA, July 1985, Participants include students from Central Academy in Beijing and students from Les Ecole de Beaux Arts, Paris



2.14 Southern Artists Salon, *Southern Artists Salon's First Experiment Exhibition*, September 1986, Performance at the Zhongshan Theatre, Guangzhou, Participants included: Wang Du, Dai Jianfeng, LinYilin, and Chen Shaoxiong



2.15 Song Yongping and Song Yonghong, *A Scenic Personal Experience*, Performance, November 1986, Shanxi Taiyuan Cultural Palace, Taiyuan



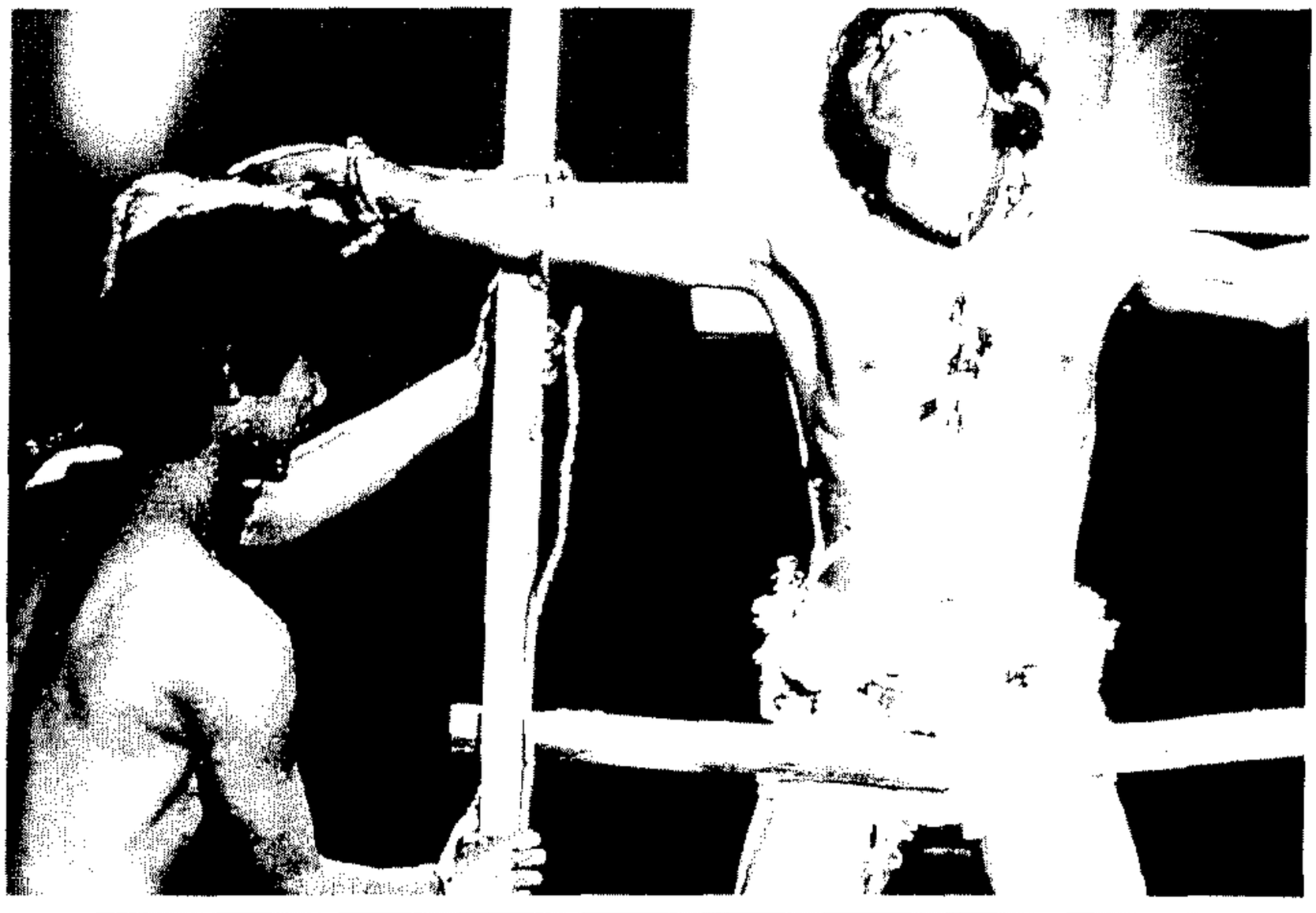
2.16 21st Century Group, *Concept 21 - Great Wall*, Summer 1987, Performance, Great Wall at Gubeikou, Beijing Municipality, Participants included: Sheng Qi, Kang Mu, Zheng Yuke, Zhao Jianhai, Hou Hanru, and Fan Di'an



3.1 Black Union Group, *Stretcher Series*, Performance, June 1986



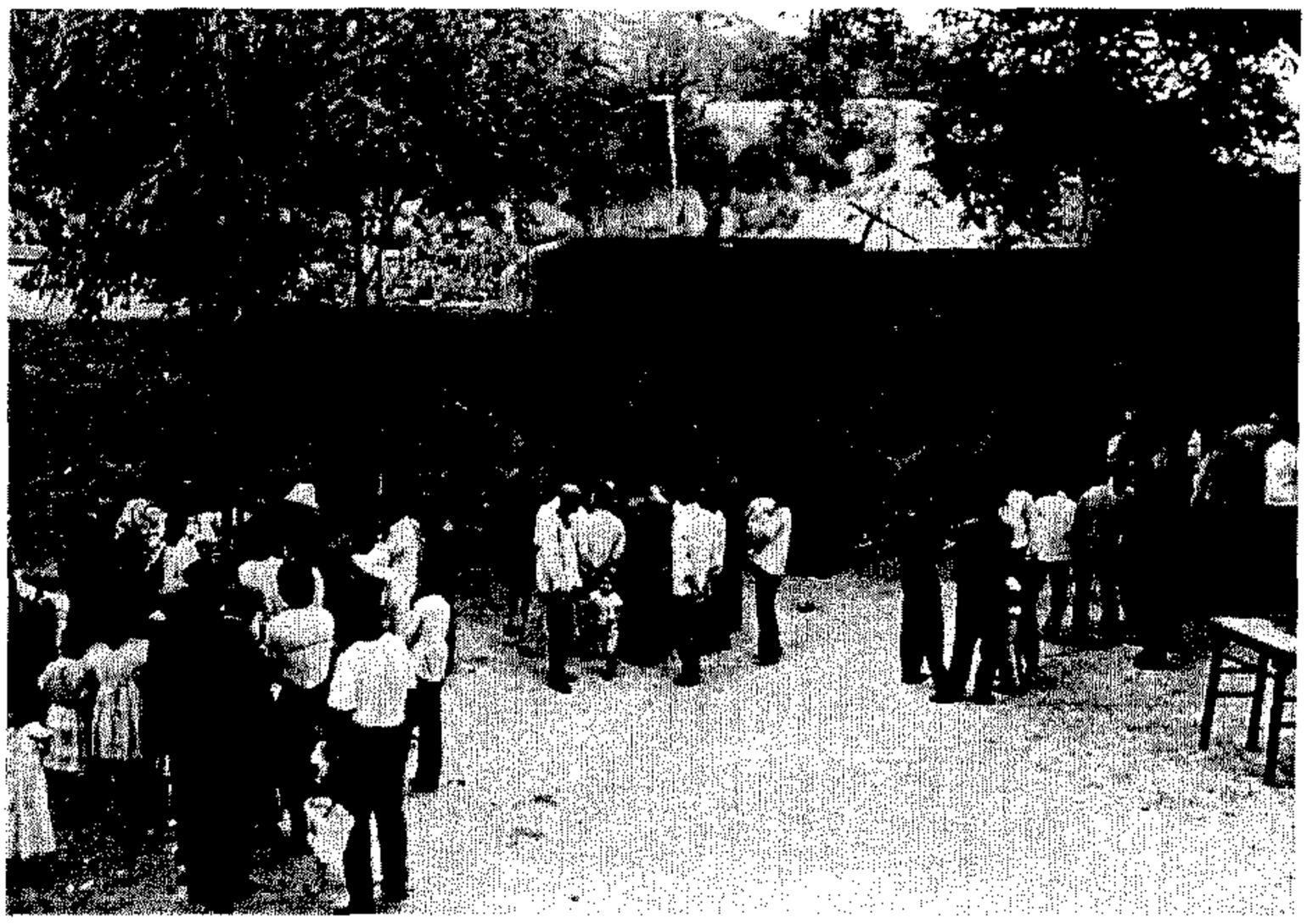
3.2 Xu Yihui and Cai Xiaogang, *Archaeological excavations on a waste disposal site*, Summer 1986, Performance, Lianyungang Economic and Technical Development Zone



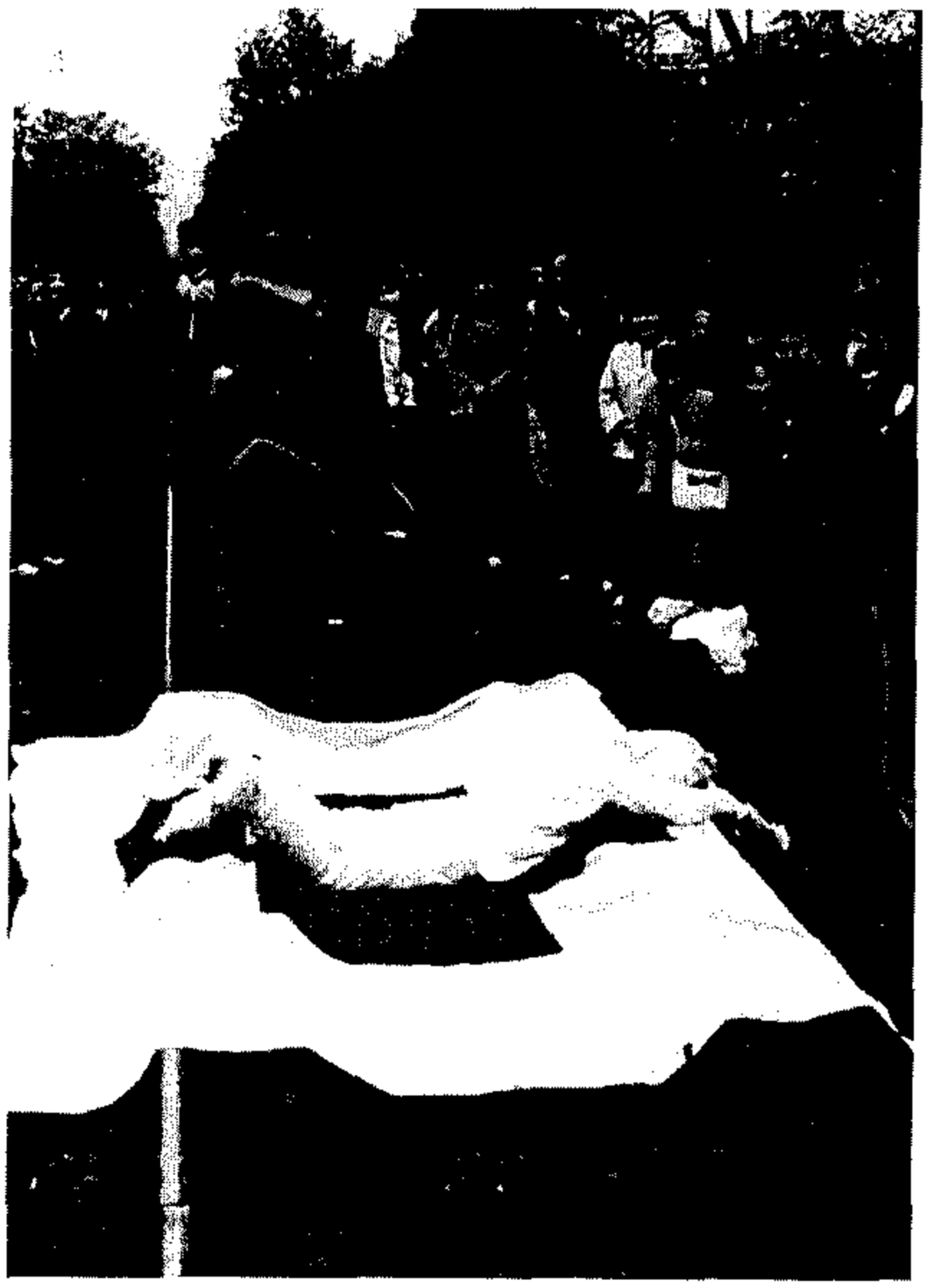
3.3 M Art Group, *Ceremony*, December 1986, Performance by Tang Guangming, Duration: 10 minutes, Shanghai



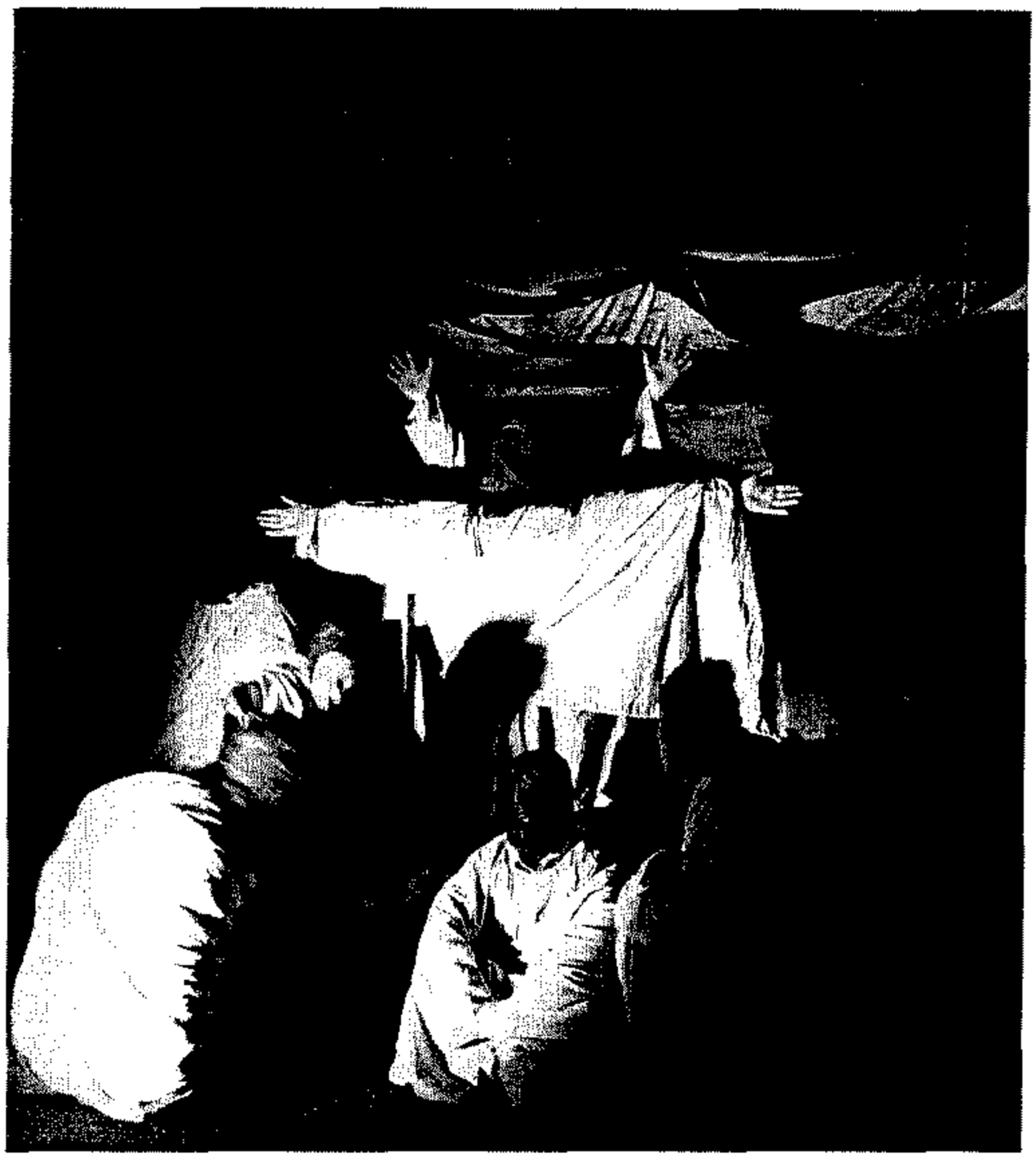
3.4 M Art Group, *Sense of Violence*, December 1986, Performance by Yang Xu and Zhou Tiehai, Duration: 10 minutes, Shanghai



3.5 Song Yongping and others, *Country Project*, 1987



3.6 Wei Guangqing with Ma Liuming, *About One - Suicide Project*, September 1988, Performance series, Wuhan



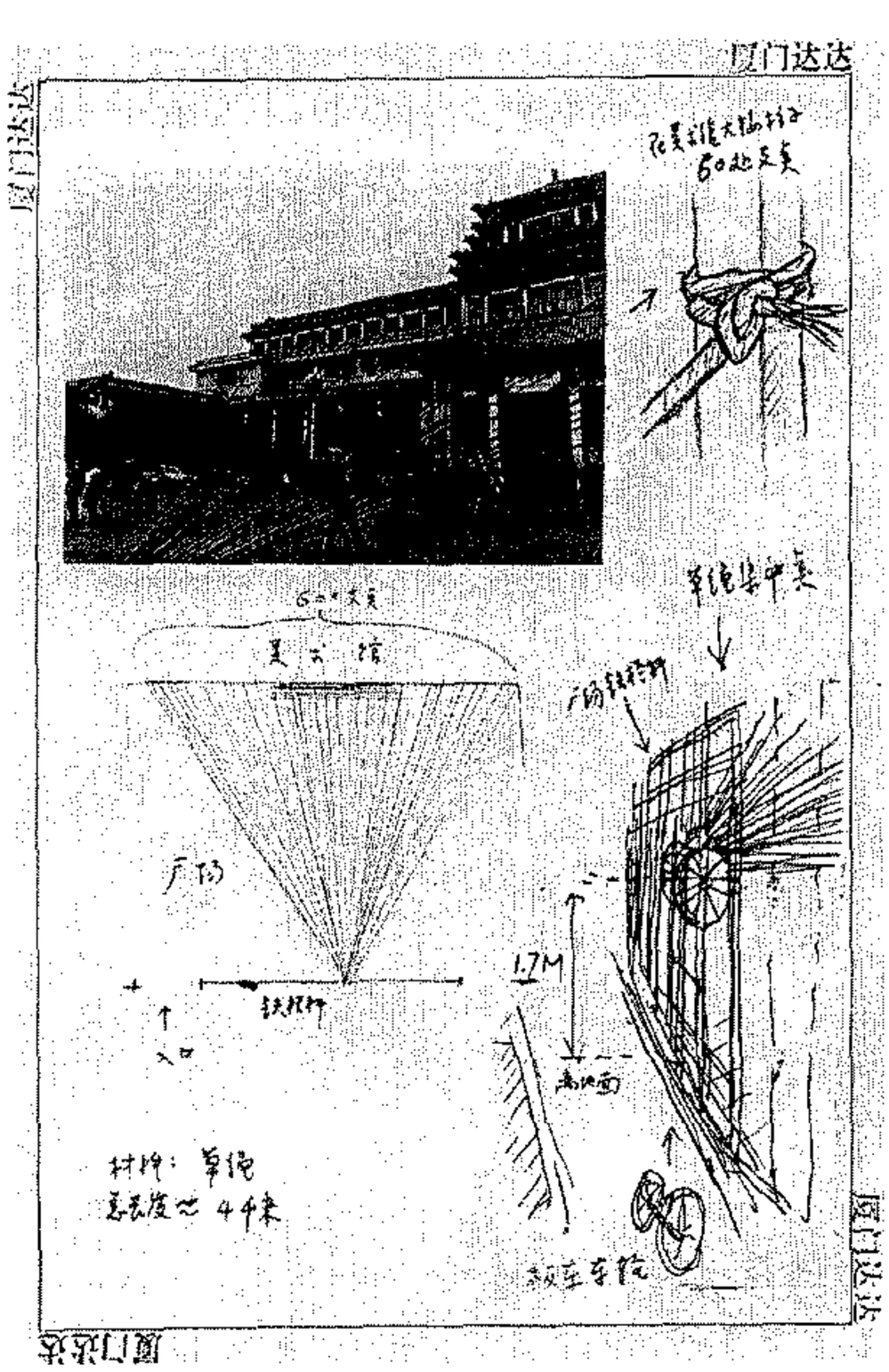
3.7 Shanghai Group. *The Last Supper* (Act One), 1988, Performance, Shanghai, Participants: Li Shan, Sun Liang and Pei Jing, Song Haidong, Zhou Changjiang, Li Xianting and Wu Liang



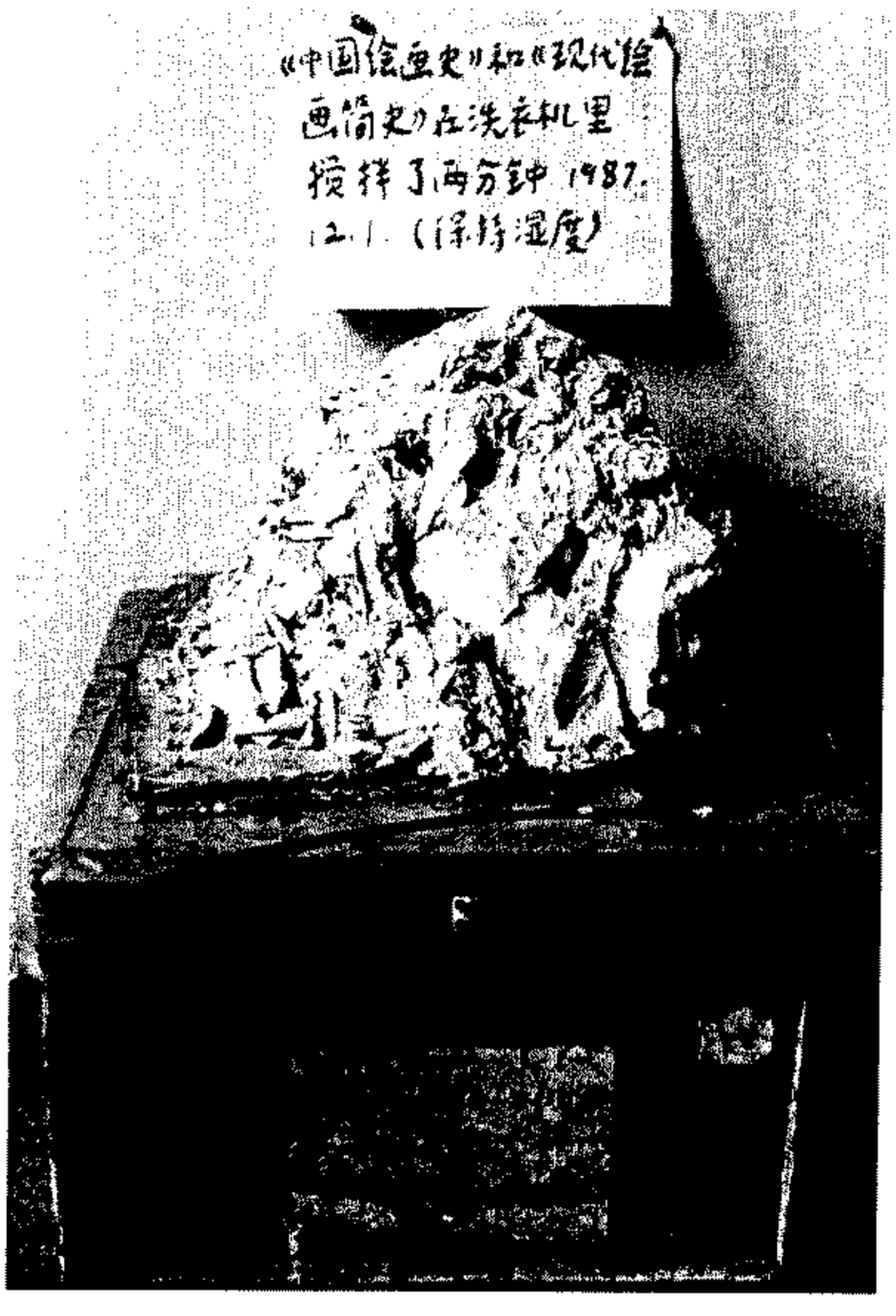
3.8 Shanghai Group, The Last Supper (Act Two), 1988, Performance, Shanghai, Participants: Li Shan, Sun Liang and Pei Jing, Song Haidong, Zhou Changjiang, Li Xianting and Wu Liang



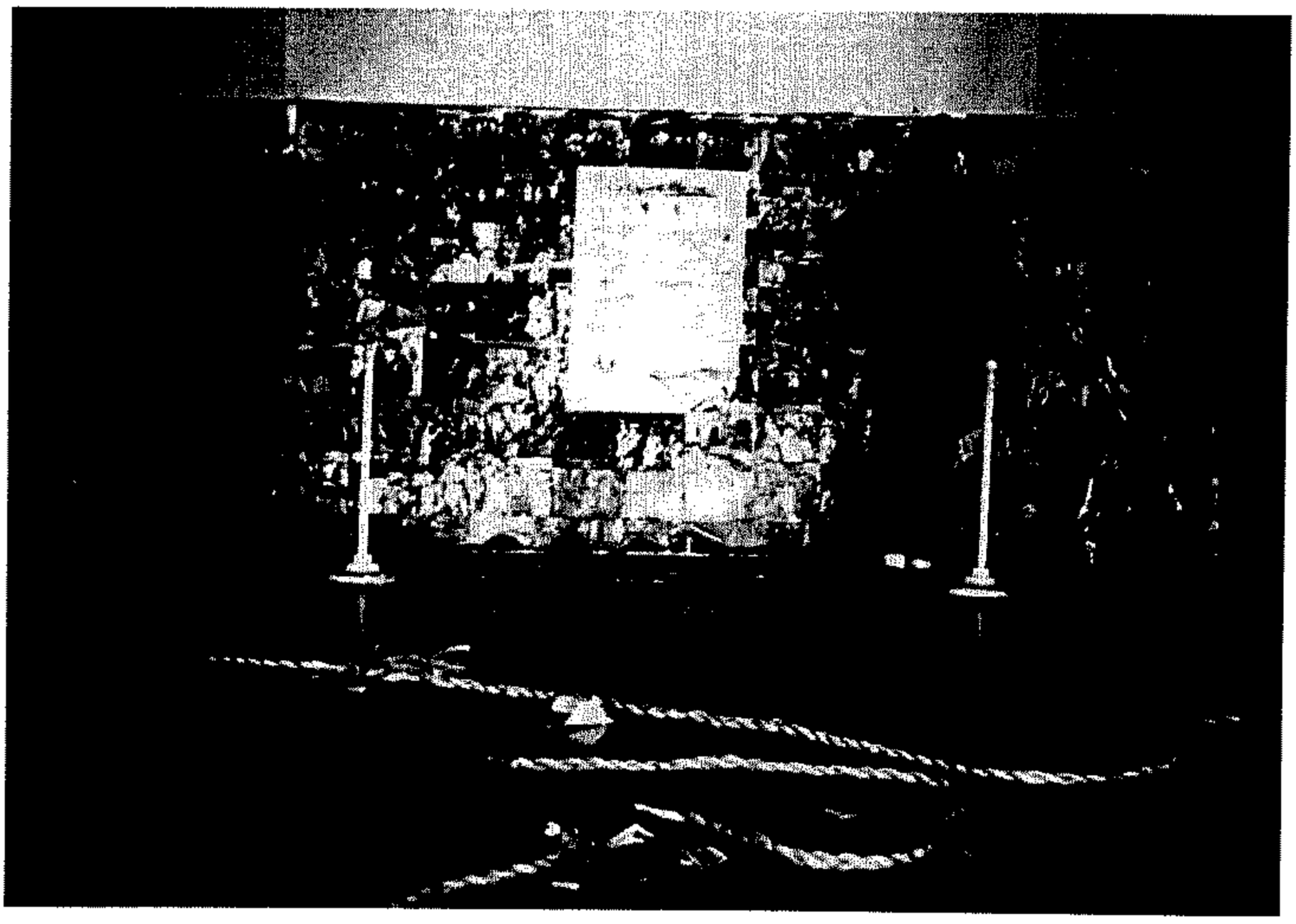
3.9 Organizers of the China Modern Art Exhibition laying banners bearing the 'No U-Turn' in front of the China Art Gallery China Modern Art Exhibition, 5 February, 1989



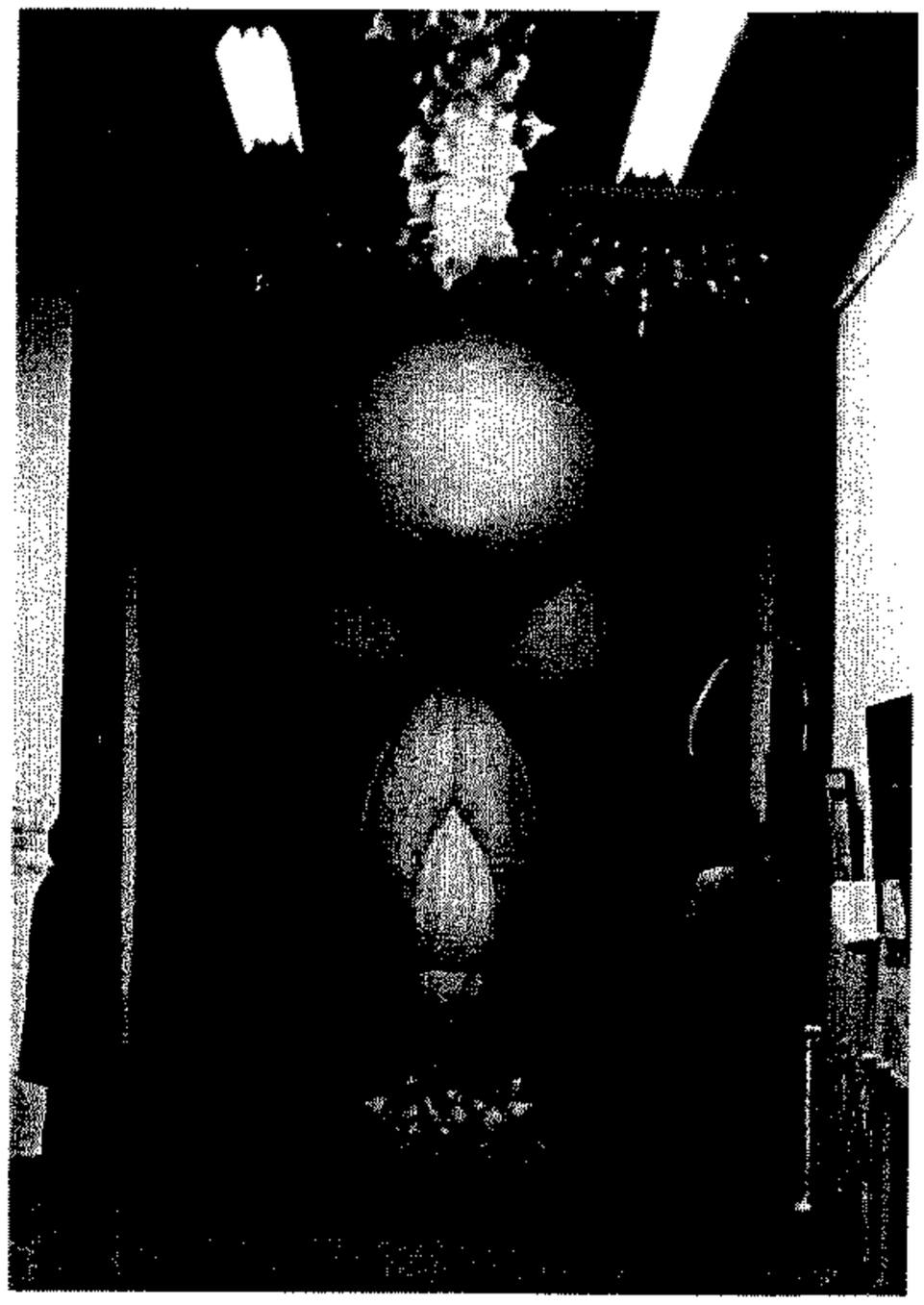
3.10 Huang Yongping, *Towing the China Art Gallery Away*, Proposal for performance piece, Submitted to the Organizing Committee for the China Modern Art Exhibition, December 1988



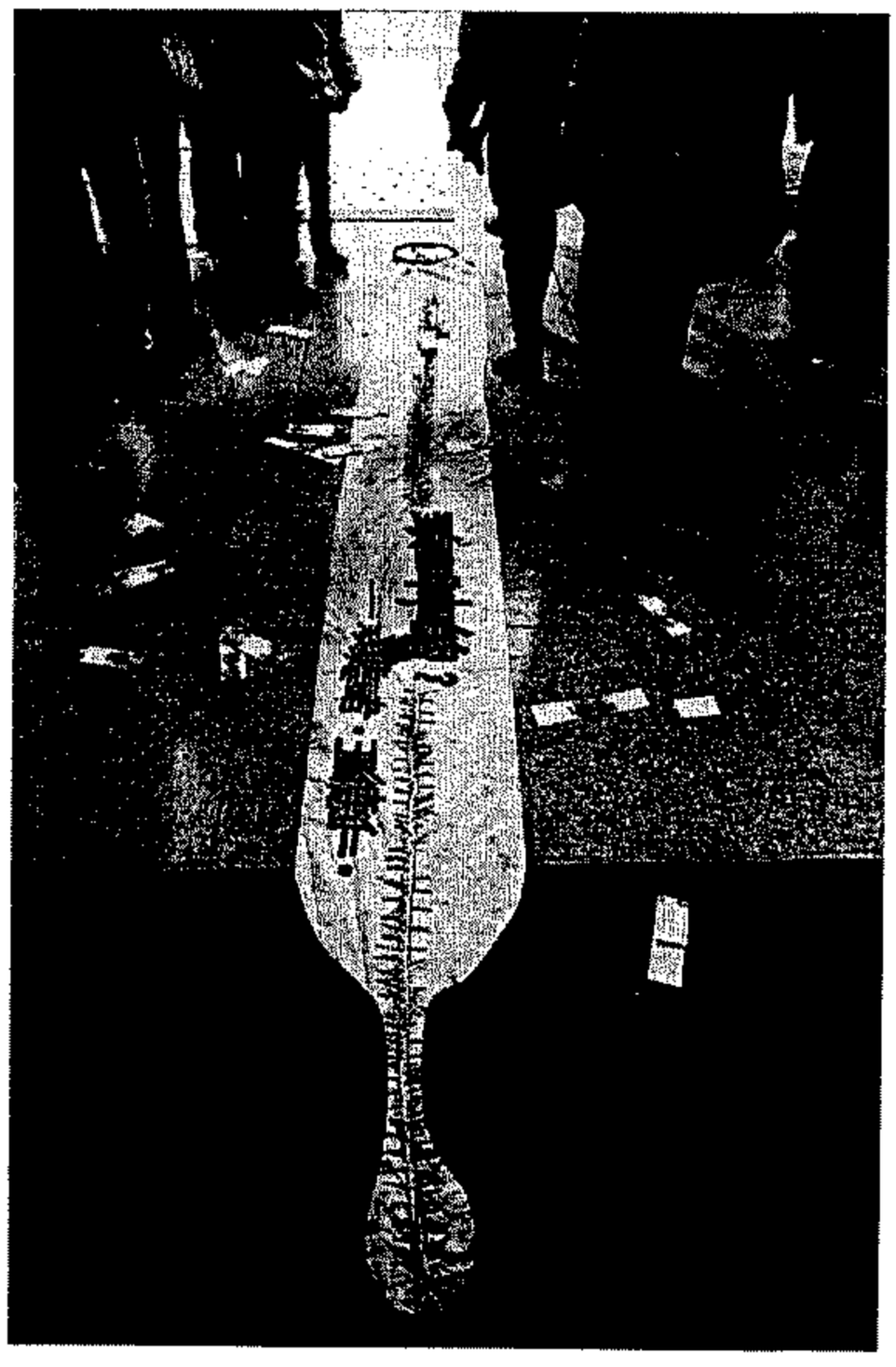
3.11 Huang Yongping, "*A History of Chinese Painting*" *and* "*A Concise History of Modern Painting*" *Washed in A Washing Machine for Two Minutes – 1987.12.1*, 1987, Installation



3.12 Yang Jun and Wang Youshen, √ (*Check*), Installation, China Art Gallery, February 1989



3.13 Gao Brothers (Gao Zhen and Gao Qiang), *Midnight Mass (Lost Trial at the End of the Century)*, Installation, China Art Gallery, February 1989



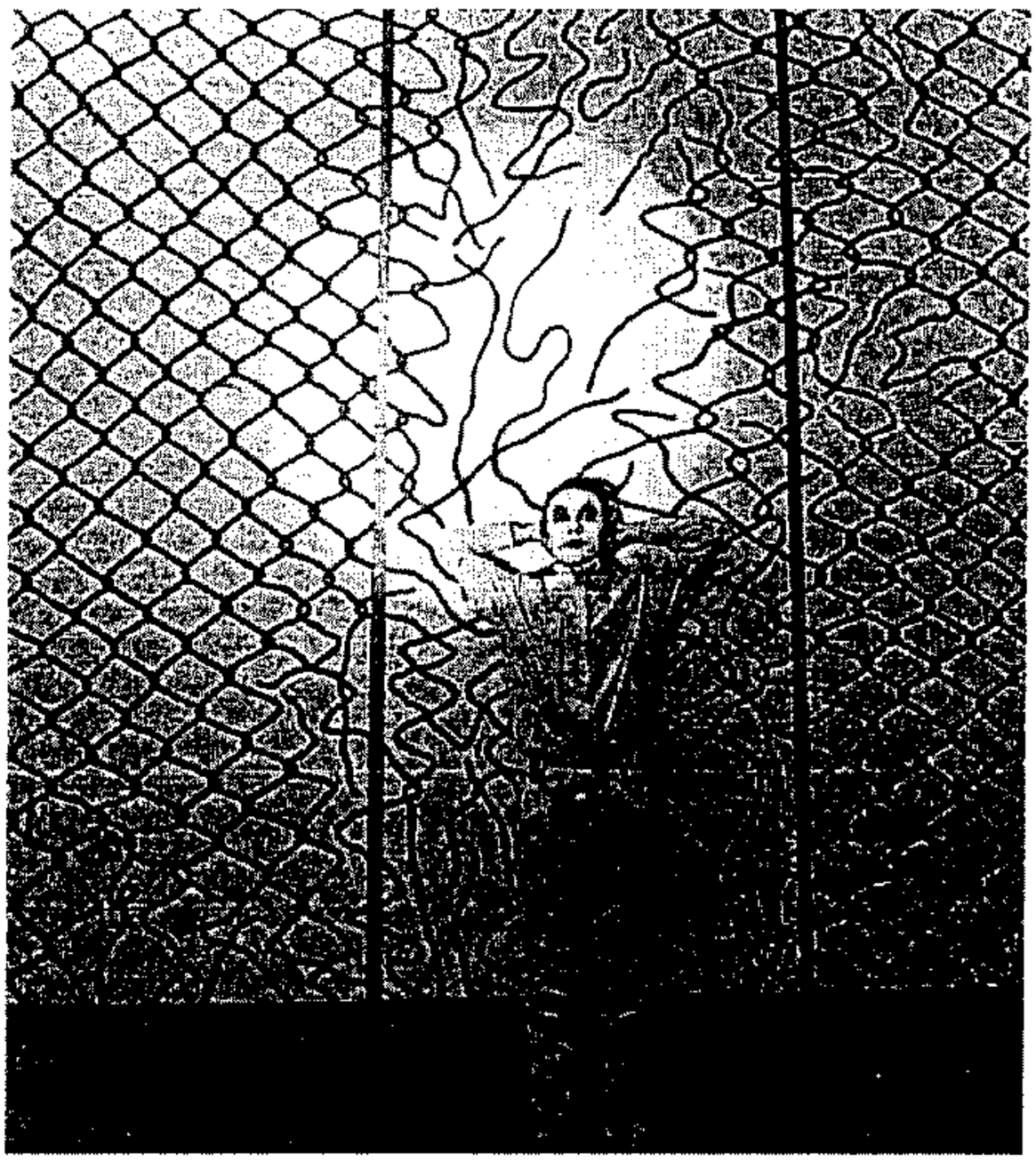
3.14 Wang Deren, The one who rises the sun? – 'Teaser' Wang Deren, Performance at the China Modern Art Exhibition, 5 February 1989, China Art Gallery, Beijing



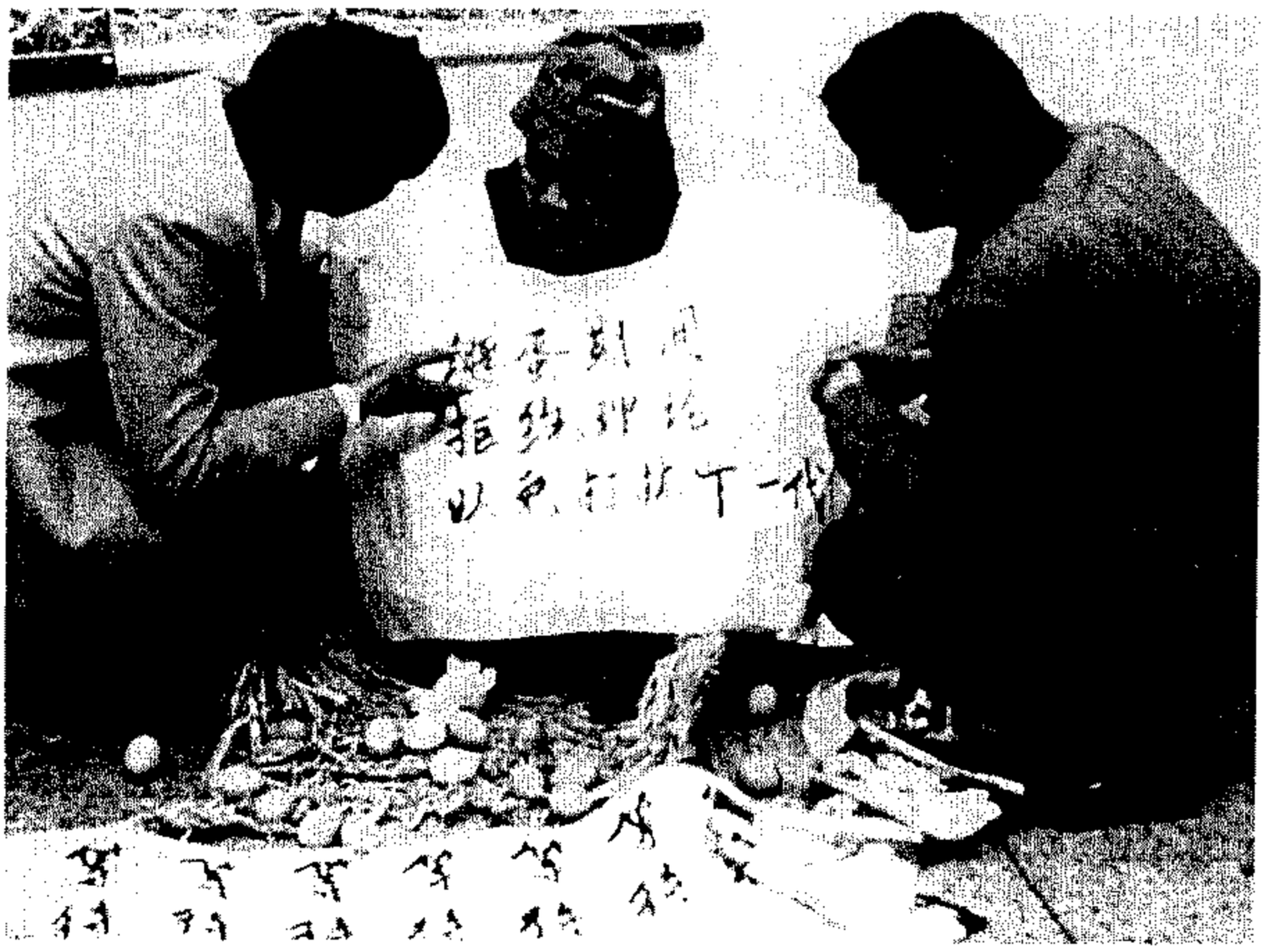
3.15 Wu Shanzhuan, Artist in front of his installation *A Certain Number of Natural Paragraphs in the Second Red-Character Chapter of a Novel*, 1986



3.16 Wu Shanzhuan, Artists writing the statement "Closed one day for stocktaking, 89.2.5" following the an order by the police to close his performance *Big Business* for which he sold Shrimp on the opening day of the China Modern Art Exhibition, 5 February 1989, China Art Gallery



3.17 Gu Xiong, *Interior View - Fence Wall*, Performance at the opening of the China Modern Art Exhibition, 5 February 1989, China Art Gallery, Beijing



3.18 Zhang Nian, *Hatching Eggs*, Performance at the opening of the China Modern Art Exhibition, 5 February 1989, China Art Gallery, Beijing



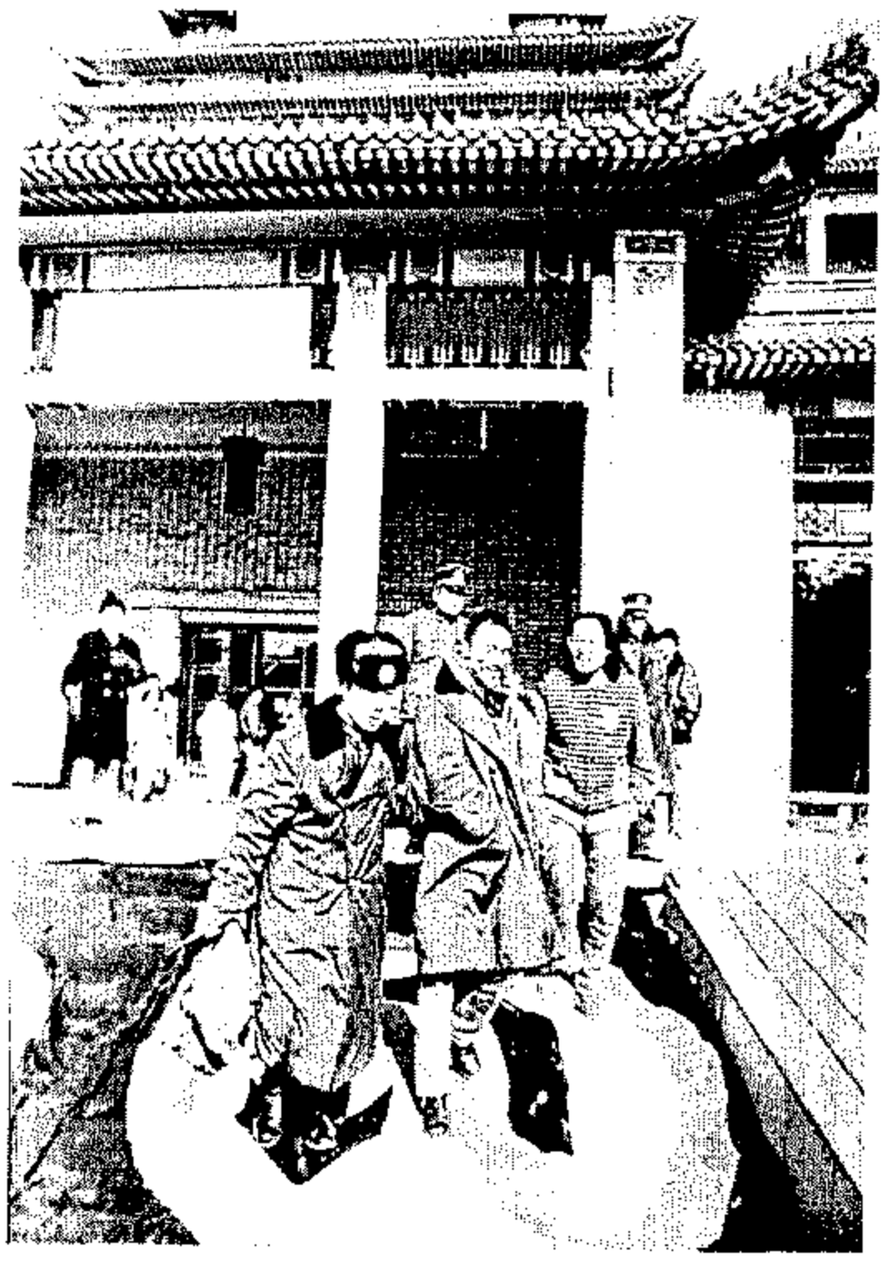
3.19 Li Shan, *Washing Feet*, Performance at the opening of the China Modern Art Exhibition, 5 February 1989, China Art Gallery, Beijing



3.20 Xiao Lu, *Dialogue*, February 1989, Installation for the China Modern Art Exhibition, China Art Gallery, Beijing



3.21 Xiao Lu, Artist firing two gunshots at her installation *Dialogue*, Performance at the opening of the China Modern Art Exhibition, 5 February 1989, China Art Gallery, Beijing



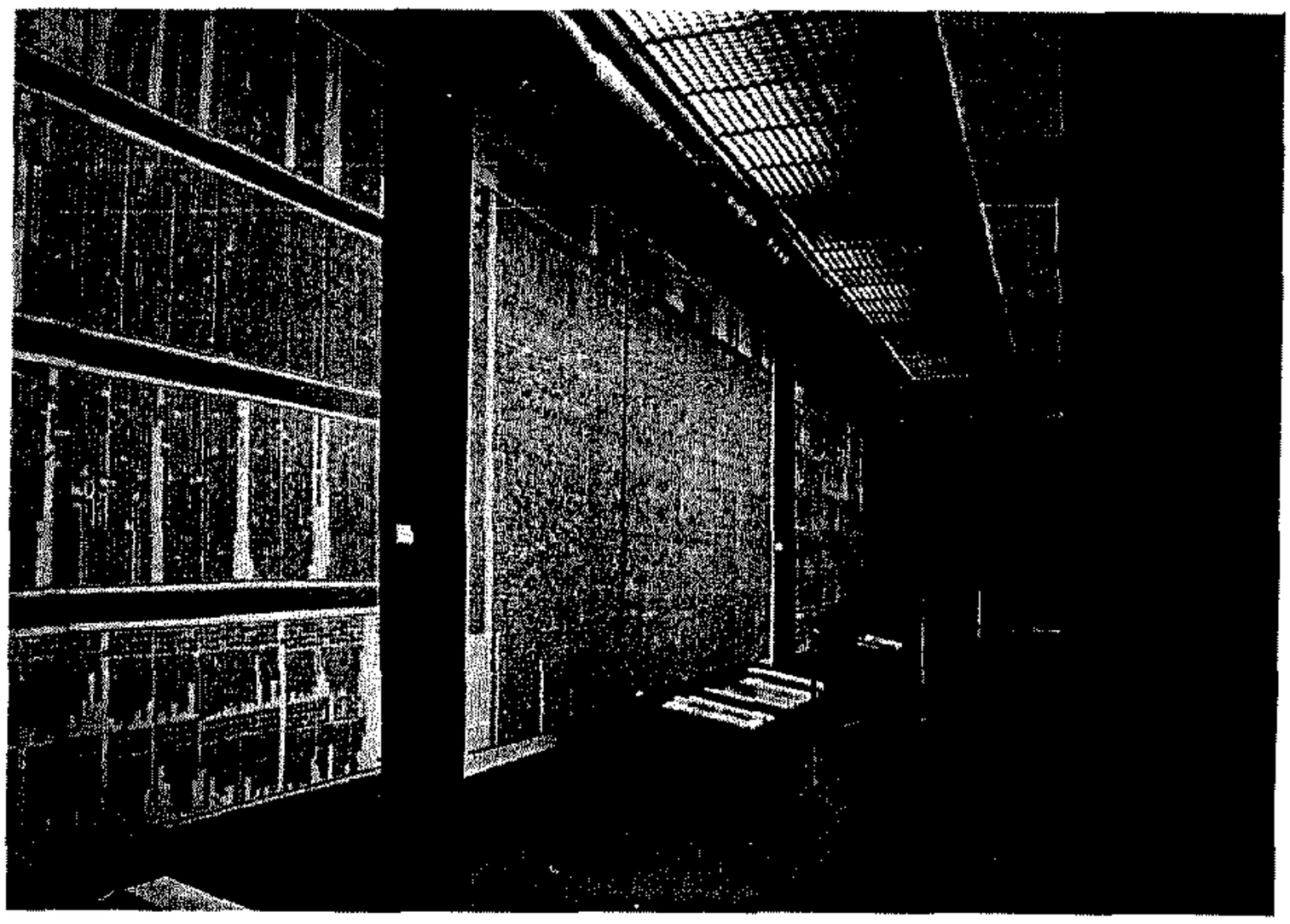
3.22 Photograph of Tang Song being arrested by police officials following the 'shooting incident' at the opening of the China Modern Art Exhibition, 5 February 1989, China Art Gallery, Beijing



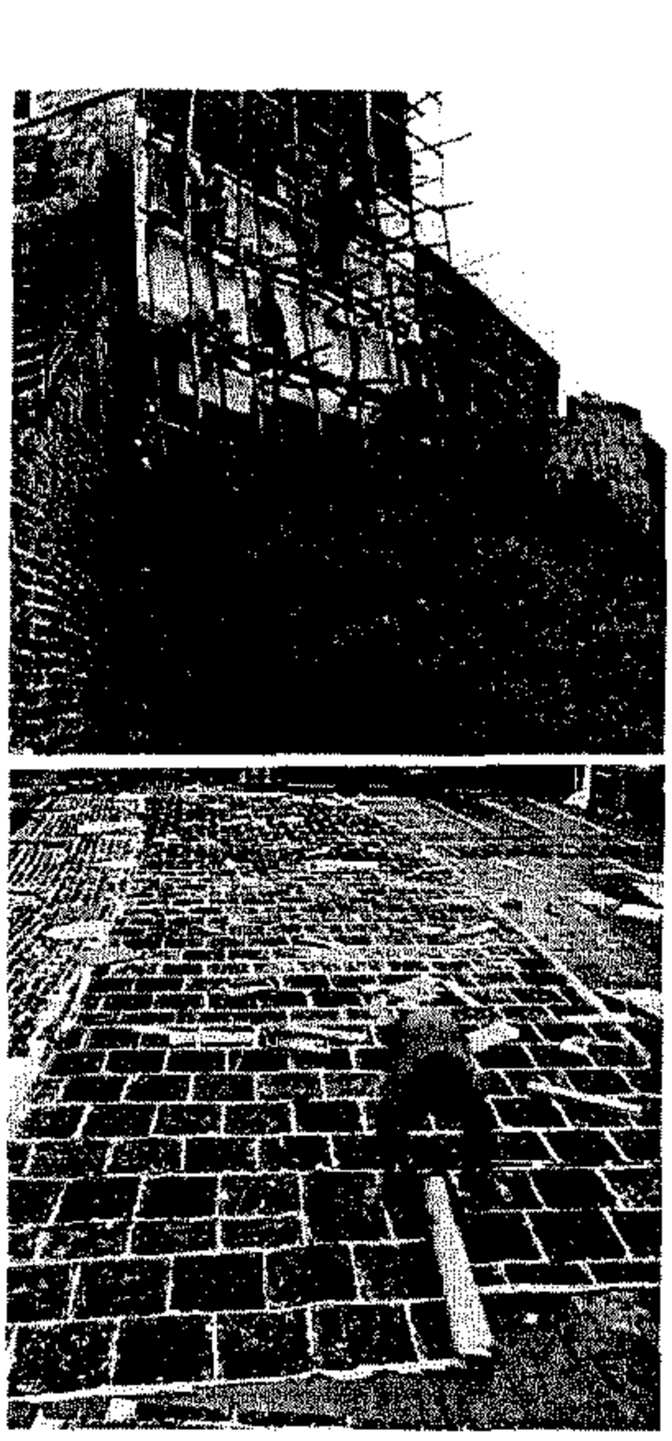
3.23 Yang Shaobin, *Untitled*, 1996-1997, Oil on canvas, 260x360 cm



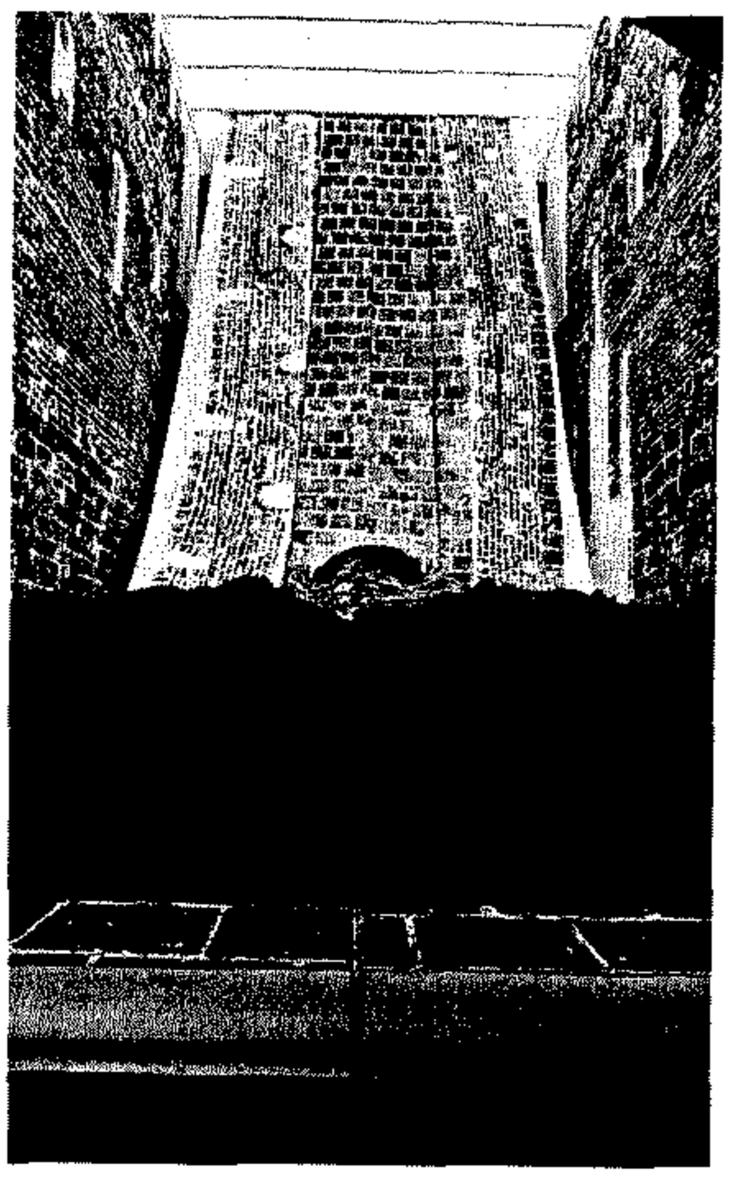
3.24 Guo Jian, *The Day You Went Away: The day Before I went away*, 2003, Oil on canvas, 152x213 cm



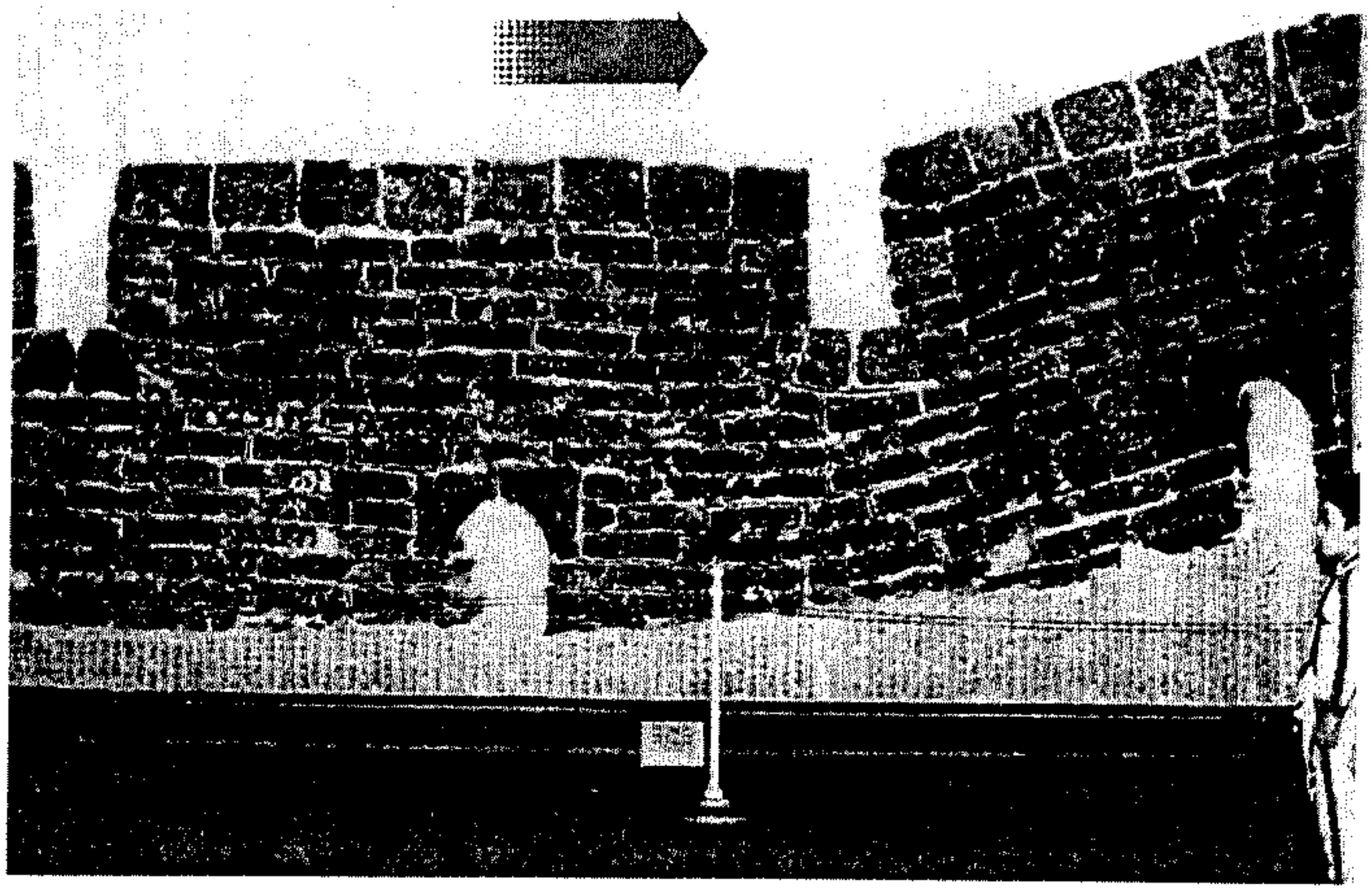
4.1 Xu Bing, *A Mirror to Analyze the World* (*Book From the Sky*), Installation, 1988-1989, Beijing, Wood prints on rice paper, Wall section, 430x540 cm



4.2 Xu Bing, *Ghosts Pounding the Wall*, Performance and installation, 1990



4.3 Xu Bing, *Ghosts Pounding the Wall*, 1990, Installation, Boston Museum of Art, 1992



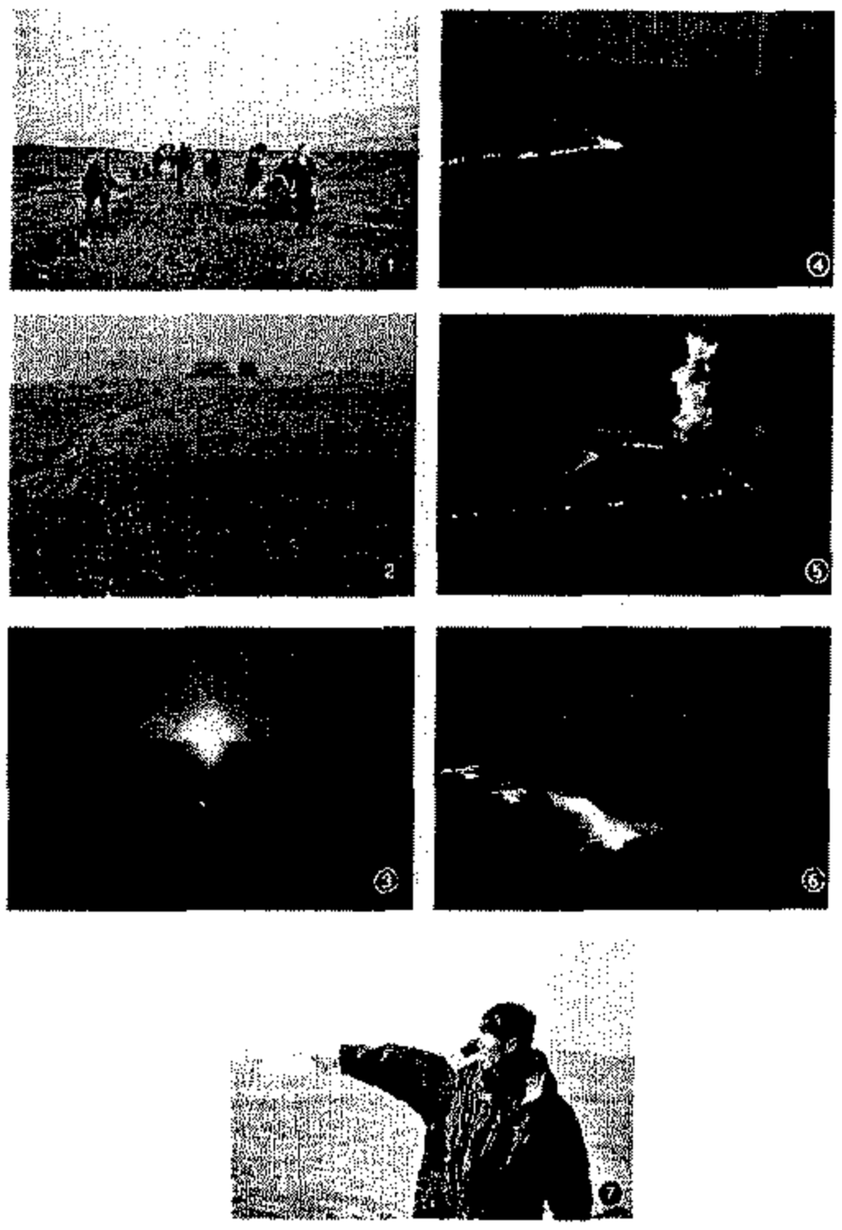
4.4 Xu Bing, *The Great Wall Alignment*, 1987, Installation, Dimension unknown



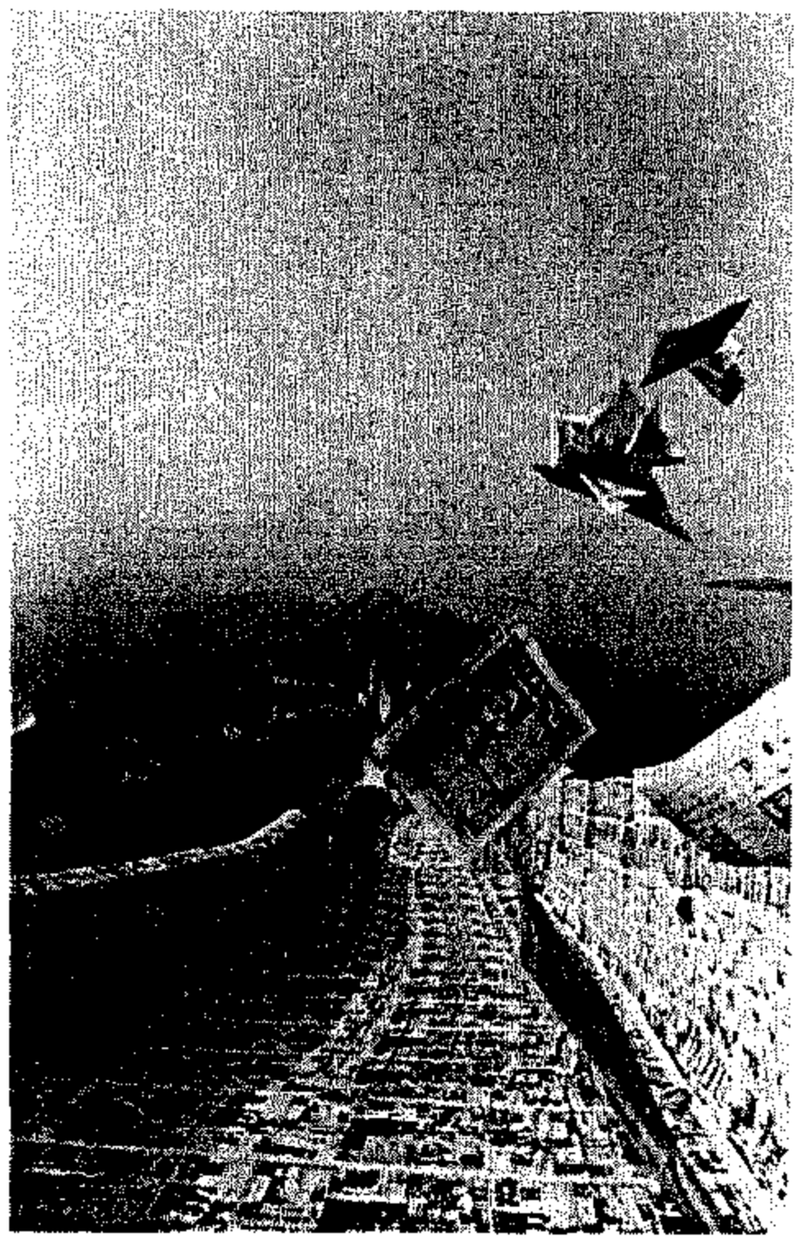
4.5 Cai Guoqiang, *Self-portrait*, 1985, Gunpowder and oil on canvas, 167x118 cm



4.6 Cai Guoqiang, *Project for Extraterrestrials No.3 - Meteorite Craters*, 1990, Performance for the exhibition Chine Demain pour Hier, Pourrières (France)



4.7 Cai Guoqiang, *Project for Extraterrestrials, No. 10 – Project to Extent the Great Wall of China by 10.000 Meters*, 1993, Performance, Gansu Province



4.8 Wang Fasheng, *Newspapers – Advertisement*, 1993, Performance, Great Wall at Gubeikou, Beijing Municipality

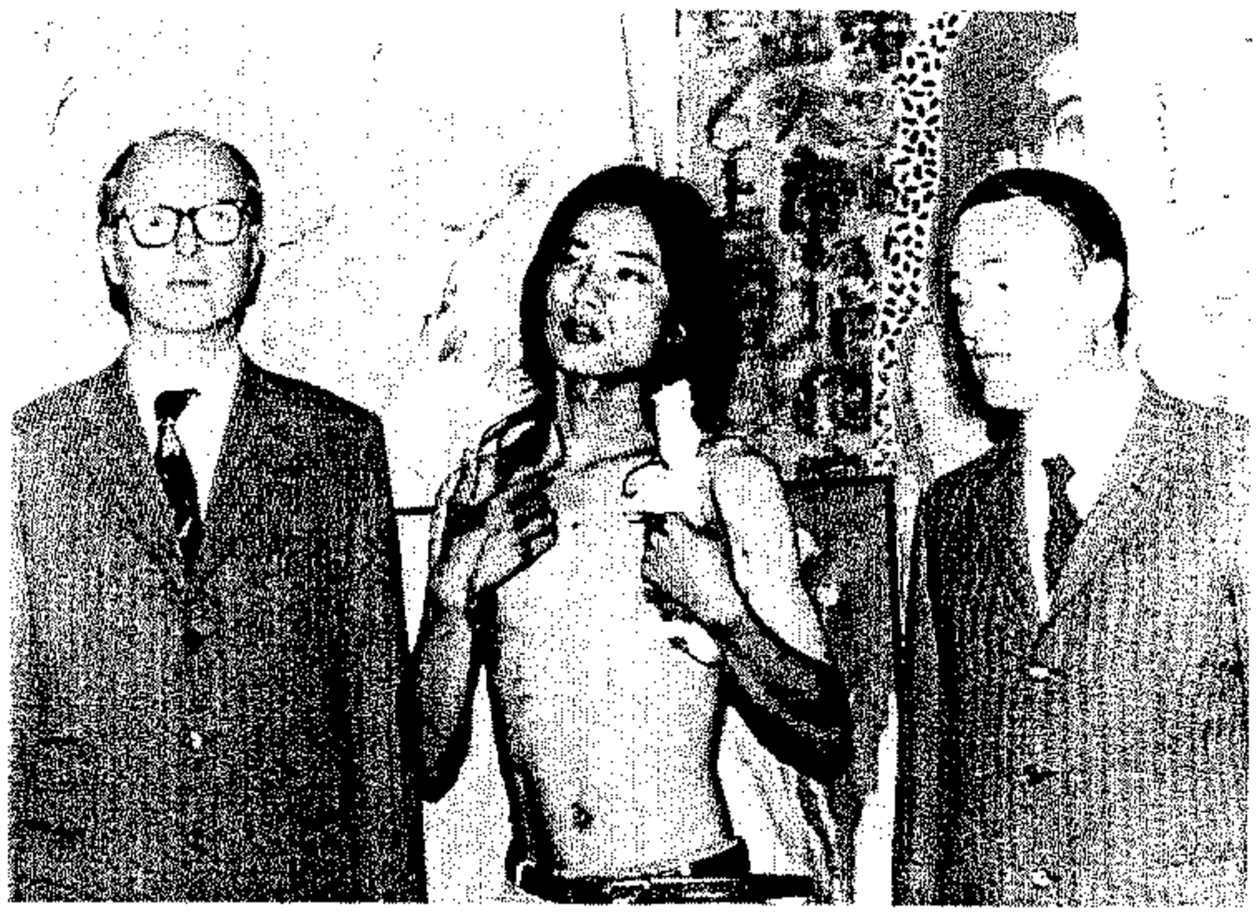


4.9 Wang Jianwei, *Cycle – Sowing*, November 1993 to May 1994, Performance, Sichuan Province



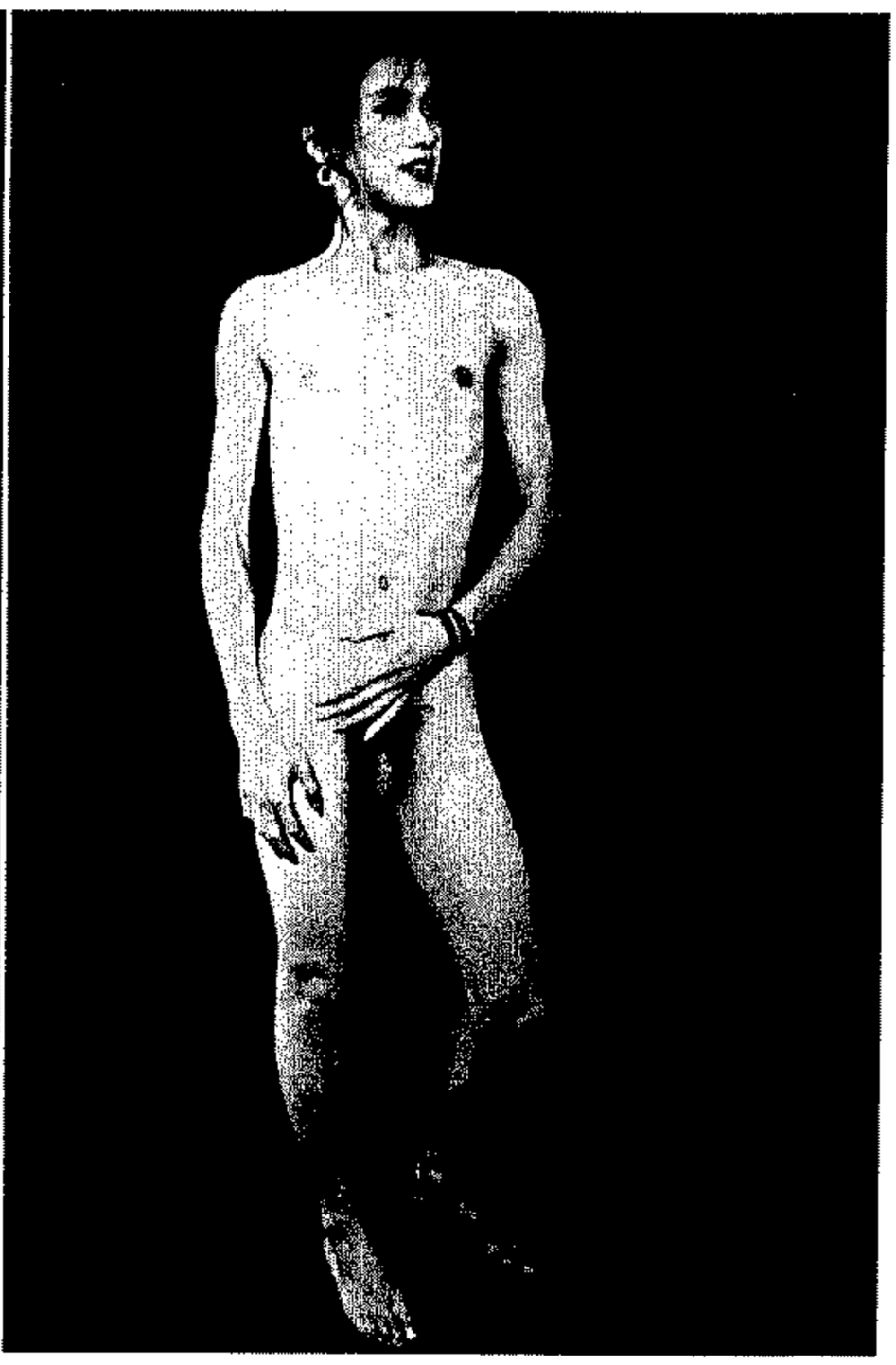
4.10 Photograph of Ma Liuming (centre) with other artists at the East Village in Beijing, 1993



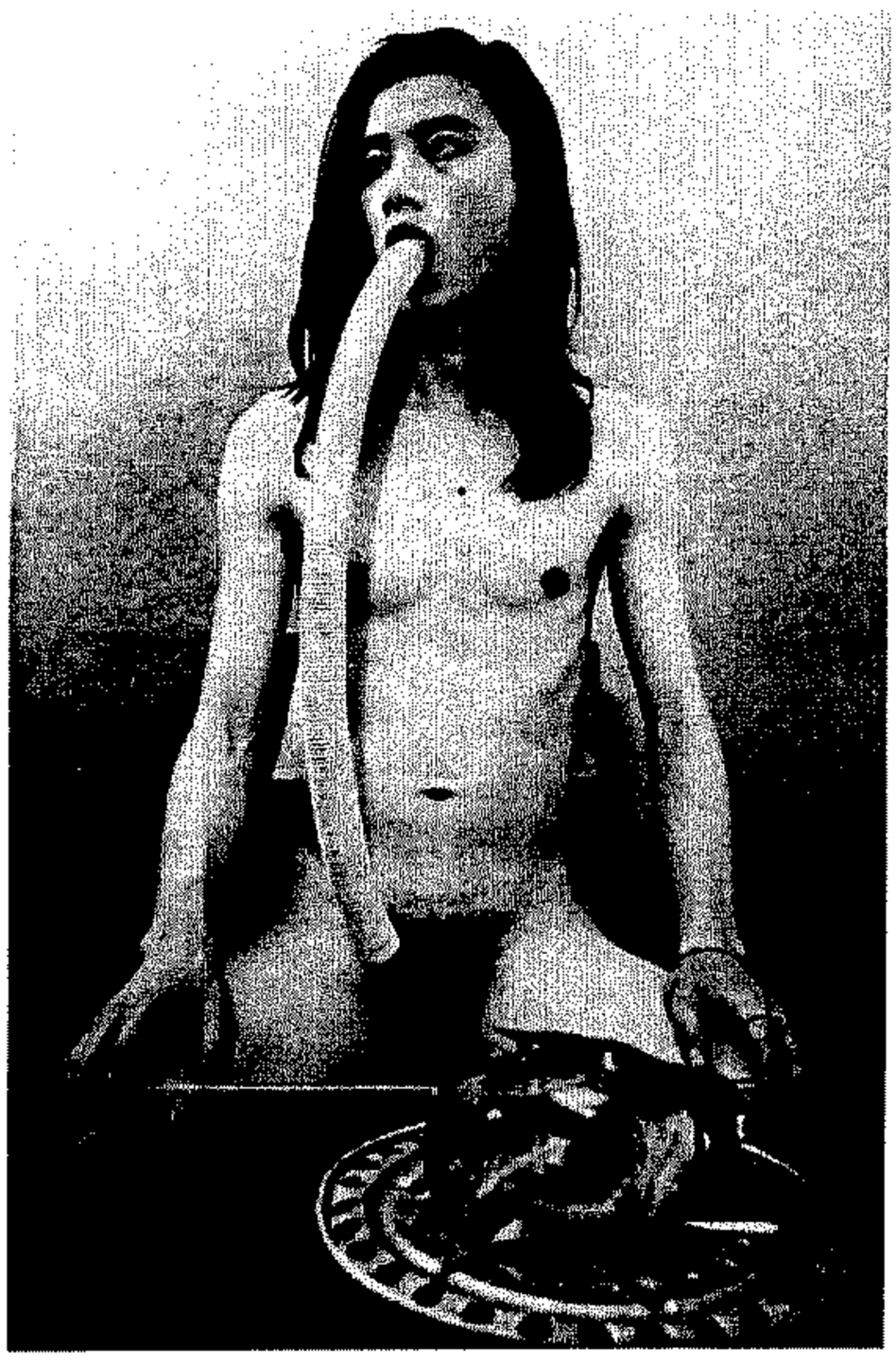


4.11 & 4.12 Ma Liuming, *Dialogue with Gilbert and George*, 1993, Performance, East Village, Beijing





4.13 Ma Liuming, *Fen/Ma Liuming*, 1993, Performance, East Village, Beijing



4.14 Ma Liuming, *Fen/Ma Liuming's Lunch I*, 1994, Performance, East Village, Beijing



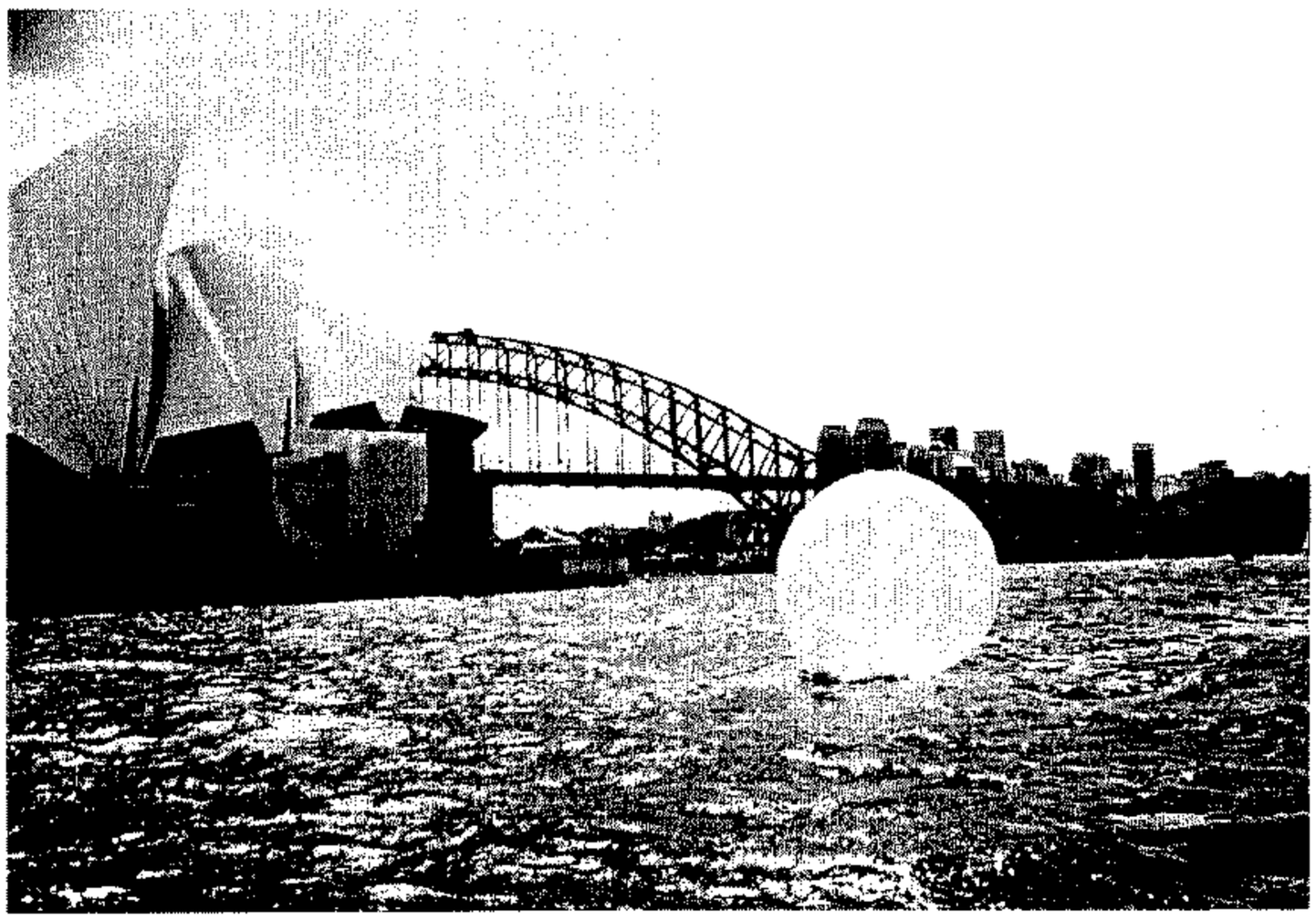
4.15 Zhu Ming, *30 April 1994*, 1994, Performance, East Village, Beijing



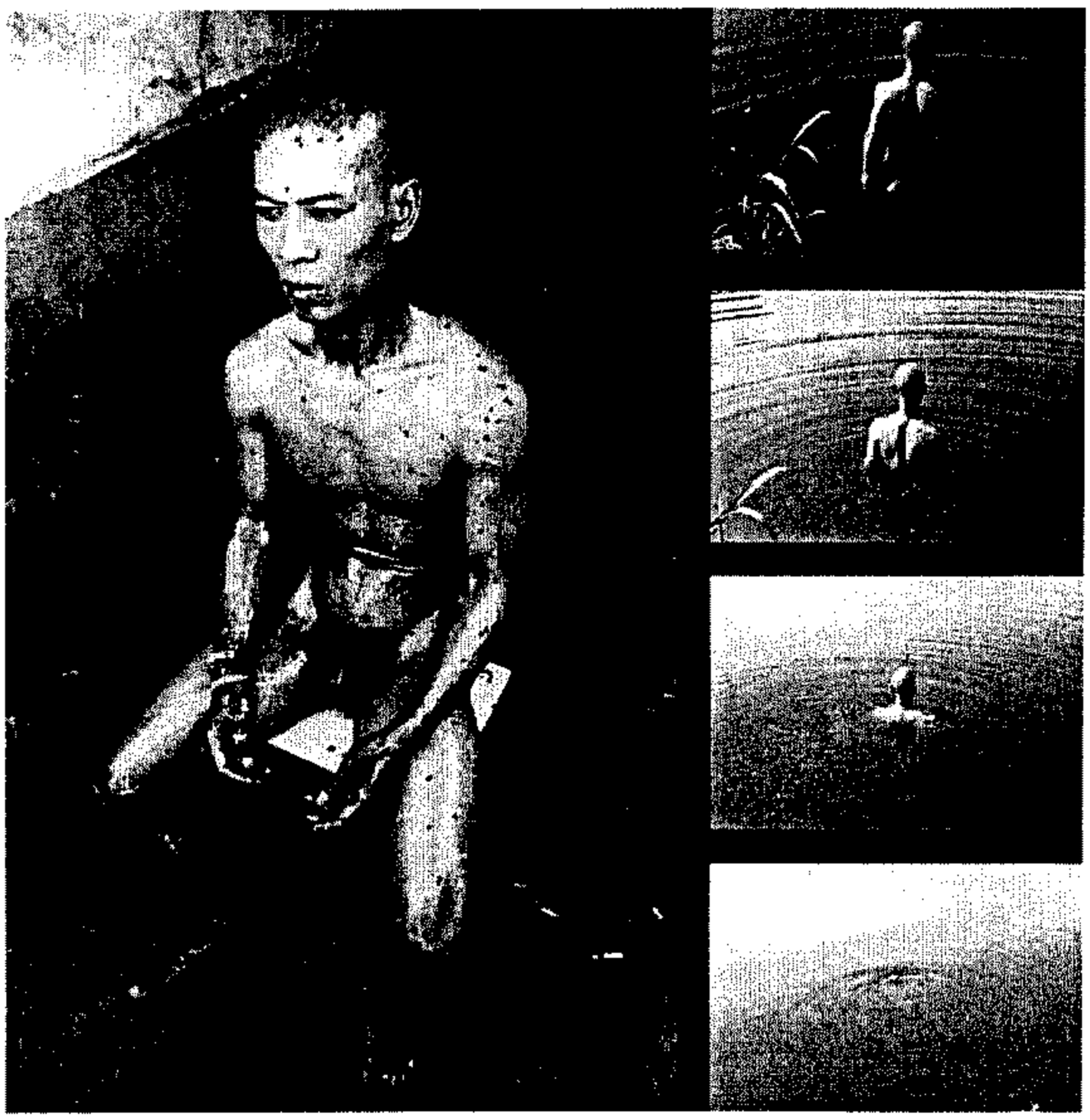
4.16 Zhu Ming, *11am, 14 May 1994*, 1994, Performance, Xiaobao Village, Tongzhou County



4.17 Zhu Ming, *1pm, 14 May 1994*, 1994, Performance, Xiaobao Village, Tongzhou County



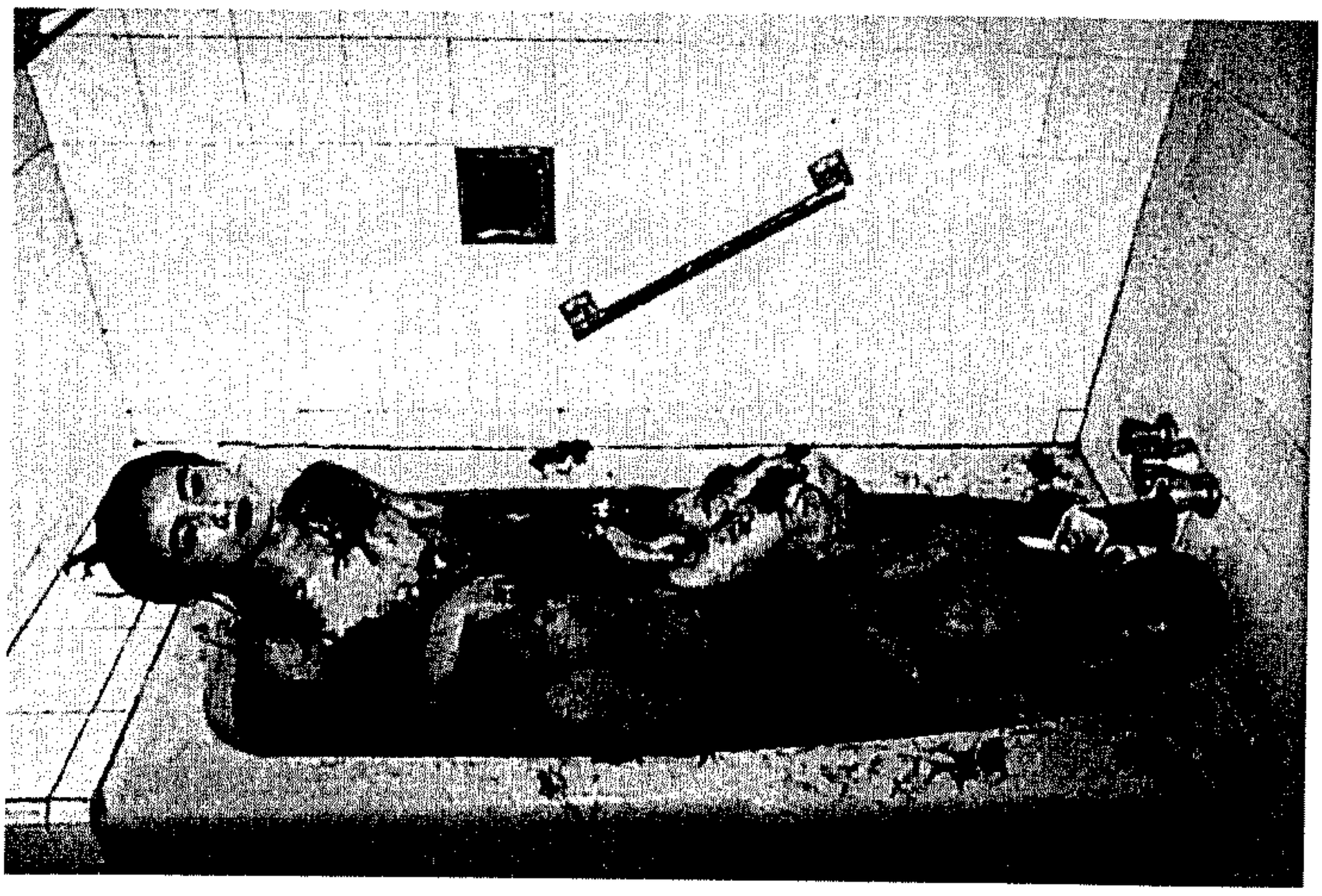
4.18 Zhu Ming, *9 March 2003*, 2003, Performance for the Liquid Sea Exhibition, Museum of Contemporary Art, Farm Cove, Sydney



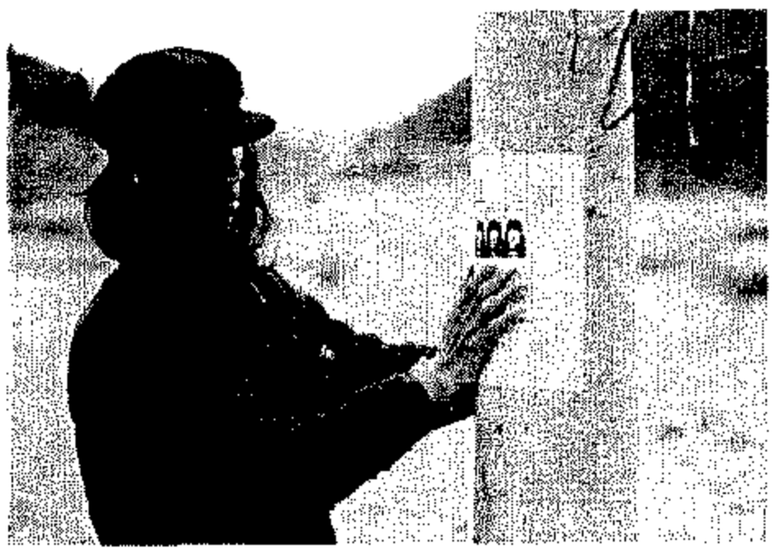
4.19 Zhang Huan, *12 Square Meters*, 14 June 1994, Performance, East Village, Beijing, Photography by Rong Rong



4.20 Zhang Huan, *65 Kilograms*, 10 July 1994. Performance, East Village, Beijing



4.21 Ma Liuming and Zhang Huan, Third Contact, 1995, Performance, Photography by Rong Rong



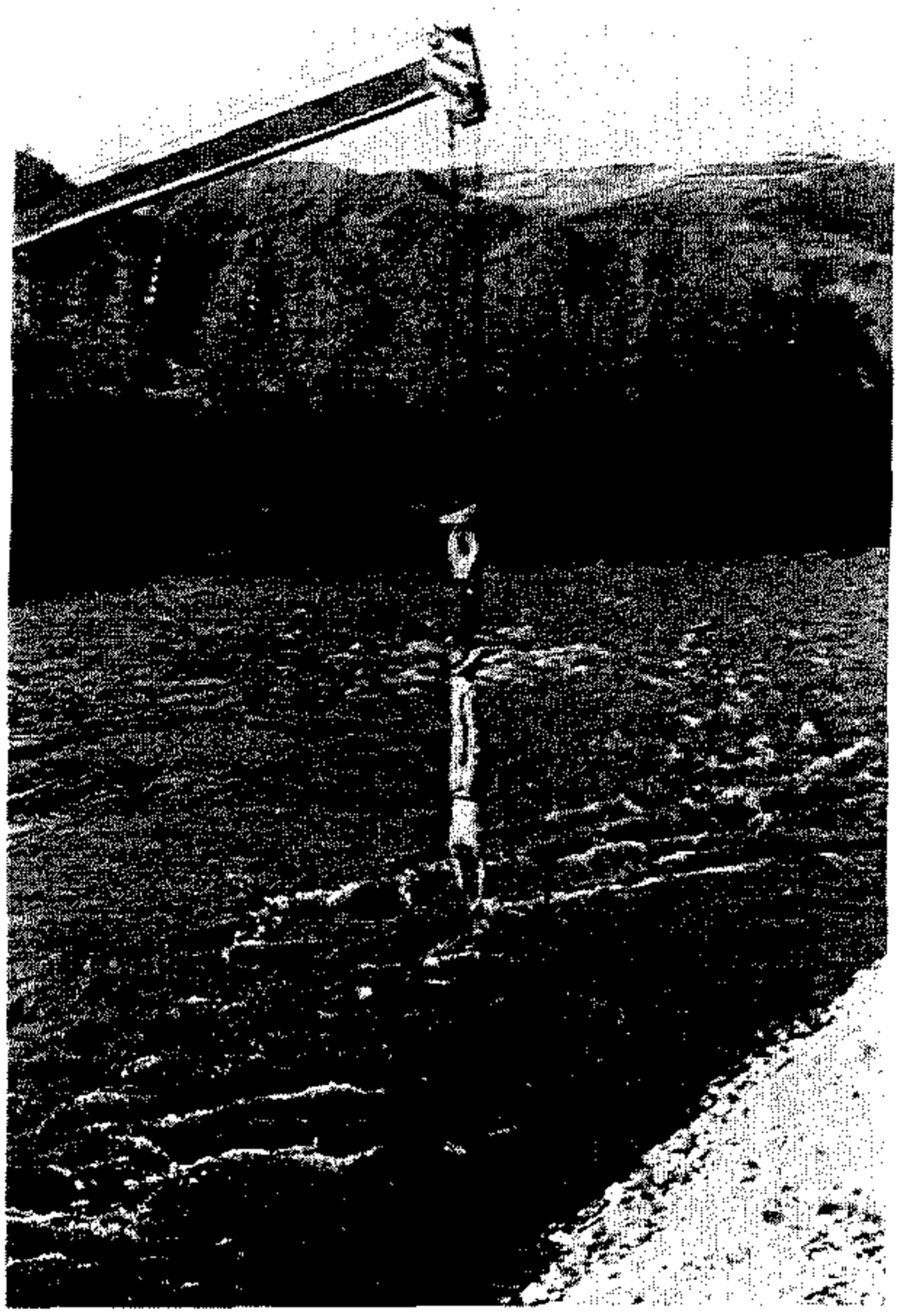




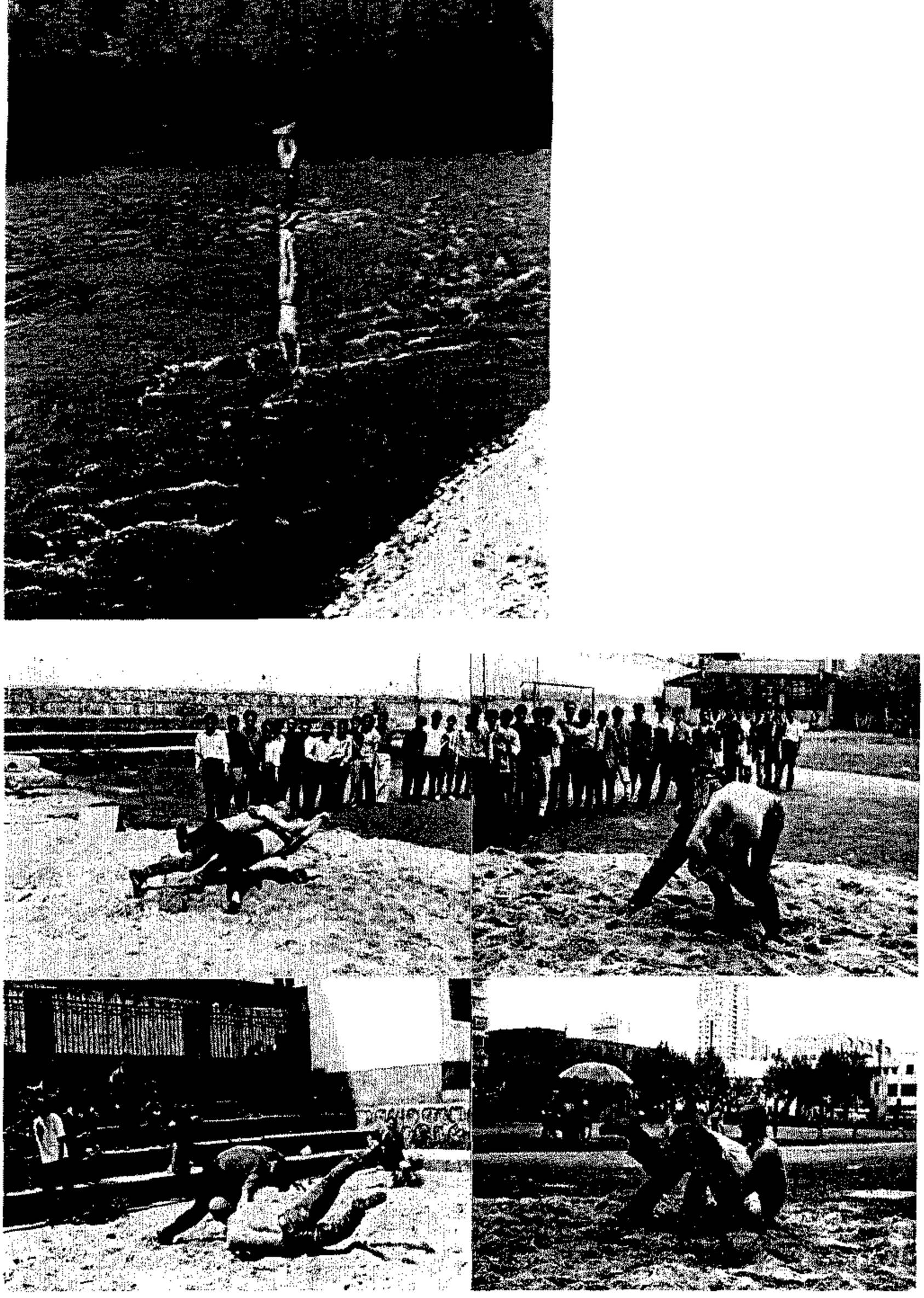
4.22, 4.23 & 4.24 Zhu Fadong, *Missing Person Announcement*, 1993, Performance, Kunming



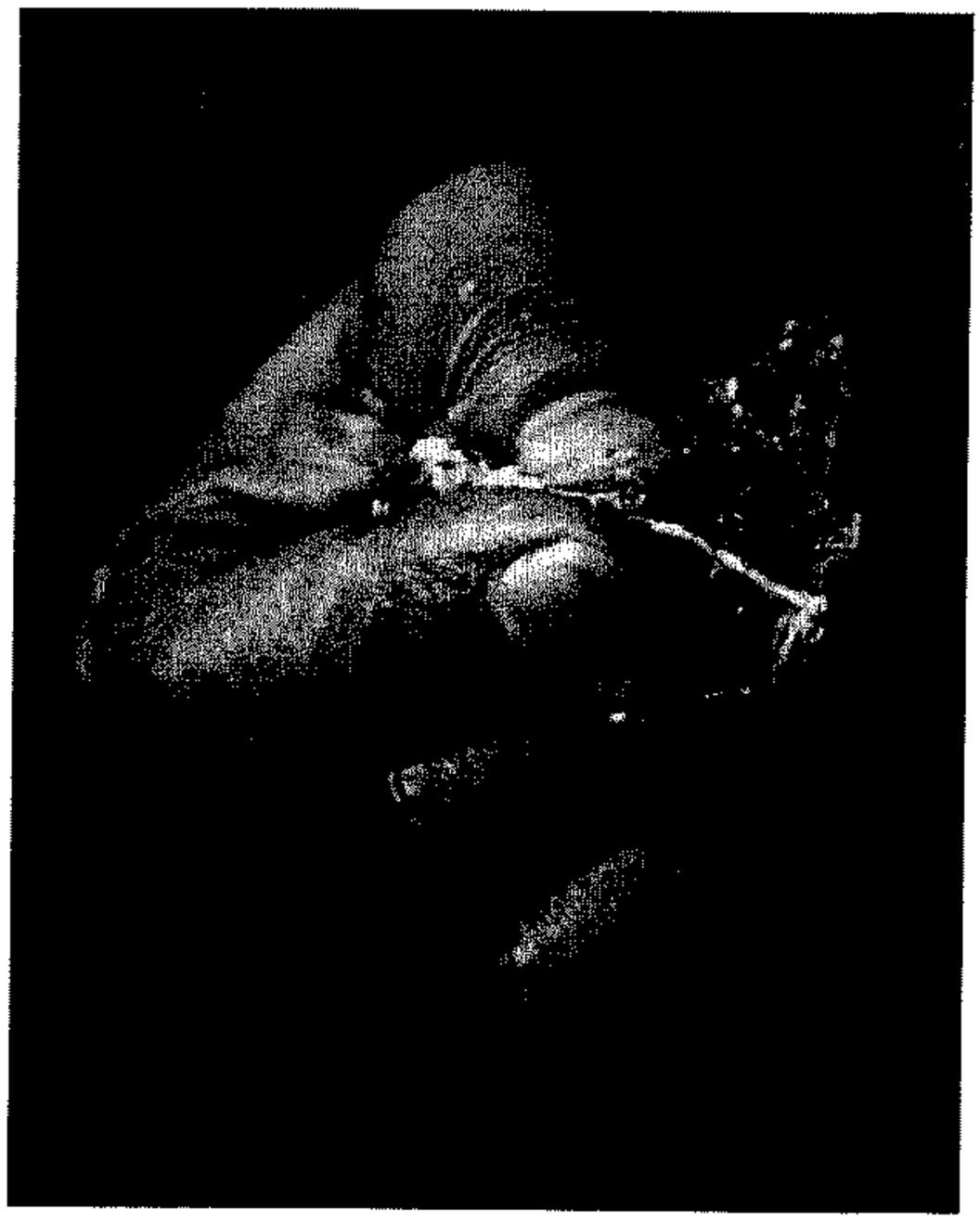
4.25 Zhu Fadong, *This Person is For Sale (Negotiate Price on Spot)*, 1994, Performance, Wangfujing, Beijing



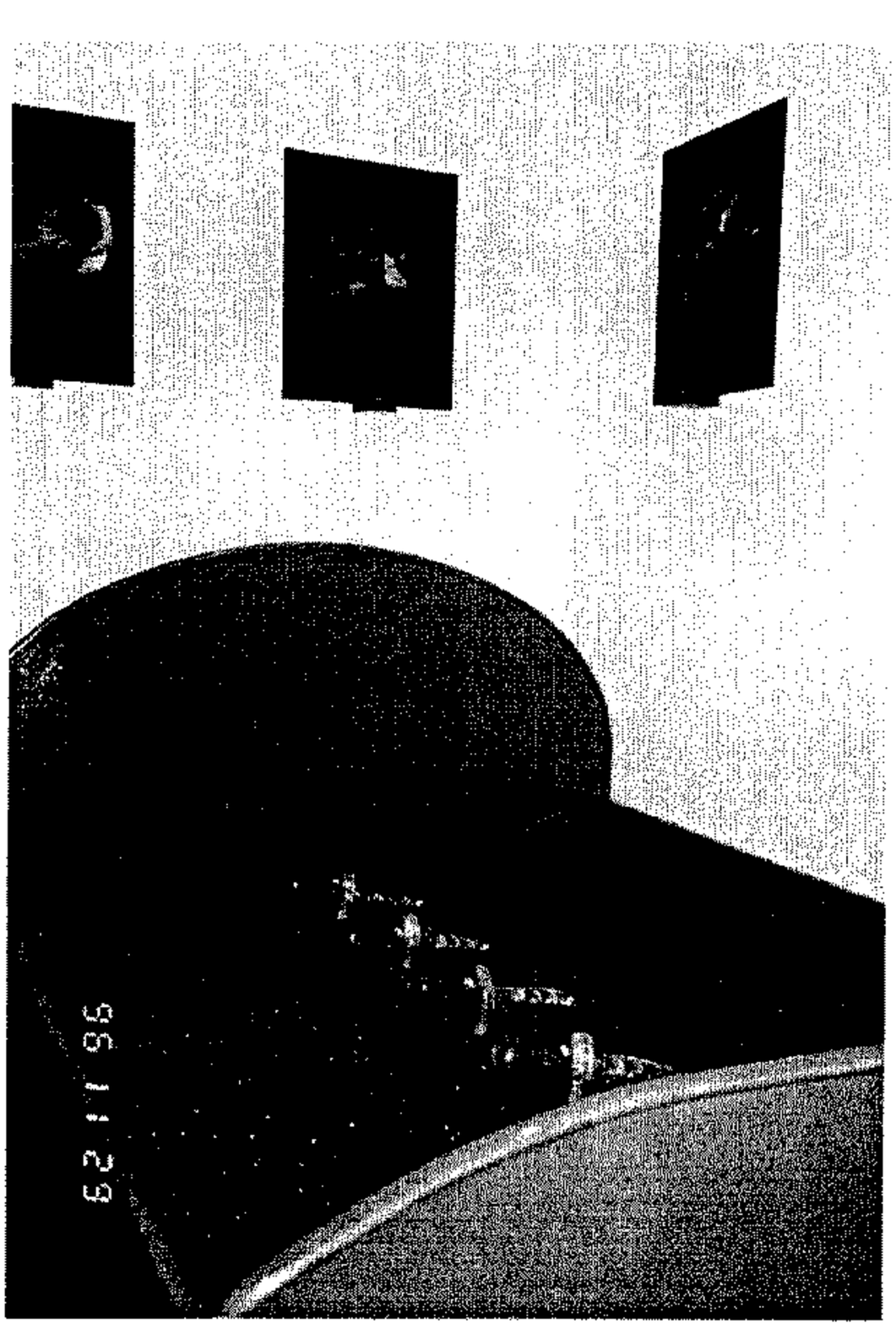
4.26 He Yunchang, *Talking with Water*, 1999, Performance, Kunming



4.27 He Yunchang, *Wrestle: One and One Hundred*, 2001, Performance, Kunming



4.28 Gu Dexin, *20 May – 31 May 1997*, 1997, Photograph Series, 60x80 cm each



4.29 Gu Dexin, *29 November 1998*, 1998, Installation, Galerie de France,



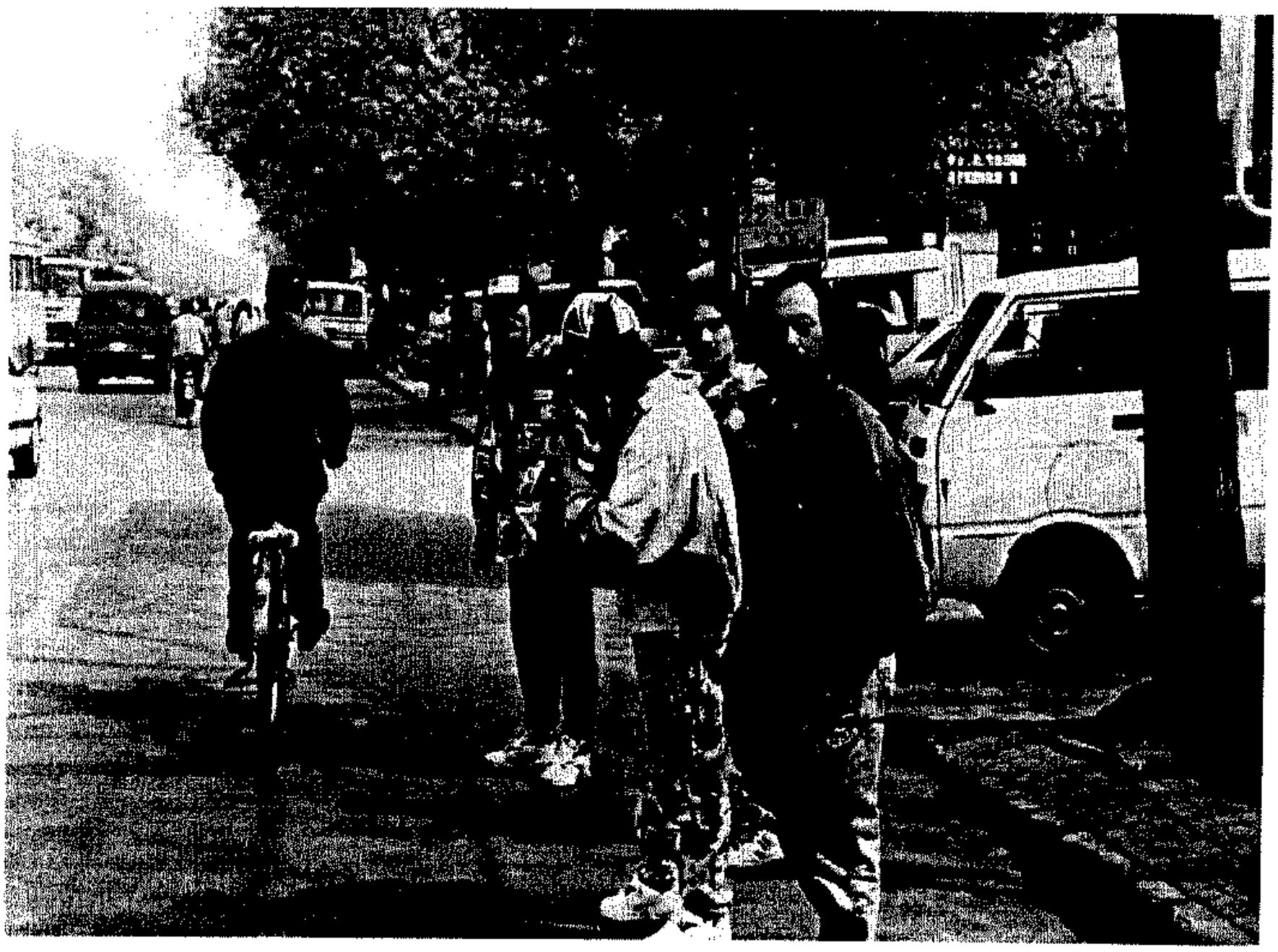
4.30 Wang Guangyi, *Great Criticism Series: Pepsi*, 1992, Oil on canvas, 175x175 cm



4.31 Sun Ping, *China Sun Ping Art Shares Limited Company - Renminbi A Shares*, October 1992, Computer print



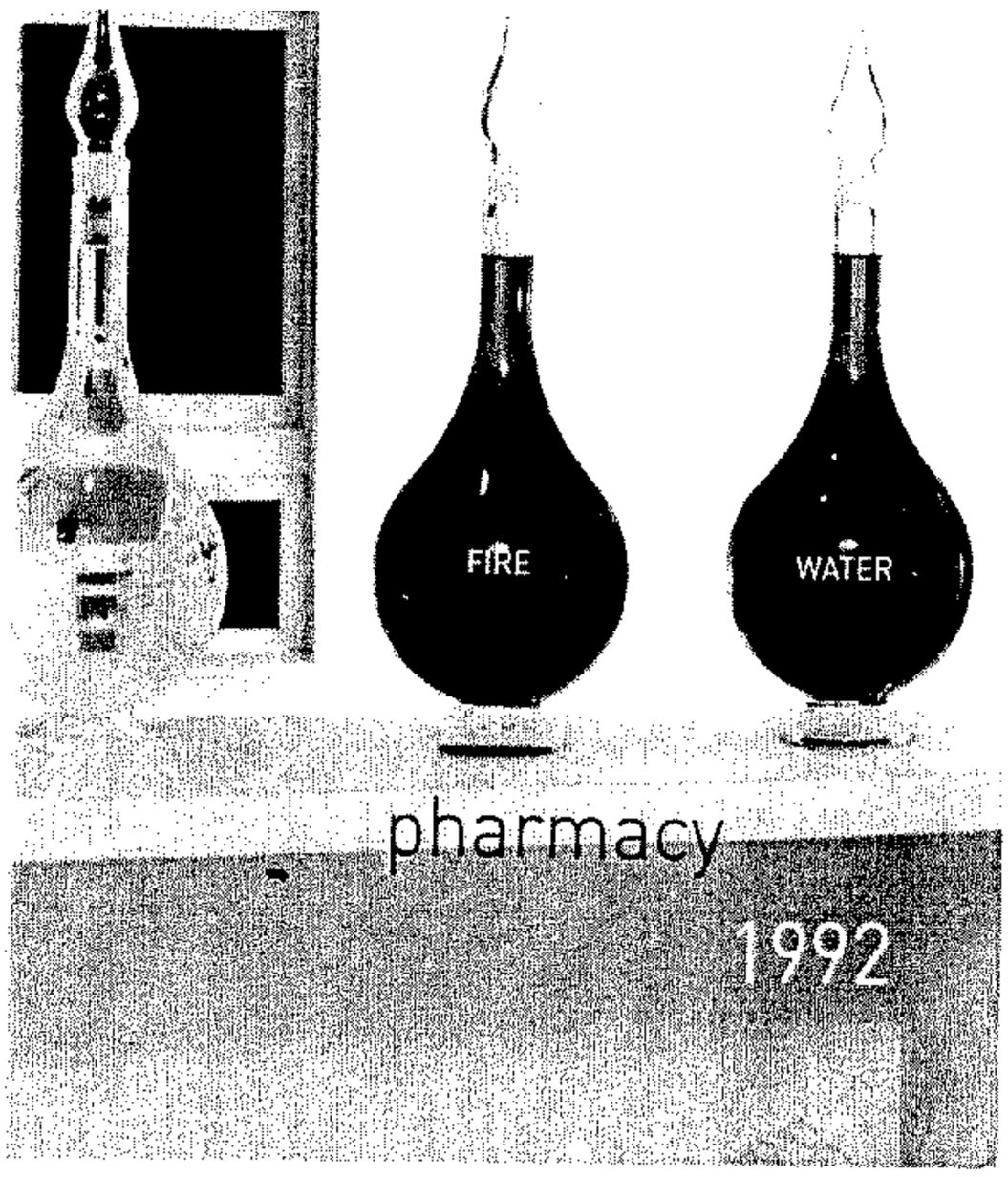
4.32 Sun Ping, *China Sun Ping Art Shares Limited Company - Renminbi A Shares*, October 1992, Performance at Guangzhou Biennale, Guangzhou



4.33 Ren Jian et.al., *Big Consumer - Ren Jian Stamp Collection*, April 1993, Performance, Beijing/ Wuhan/ Zhengzhou/ Harbin/ and other cities across China



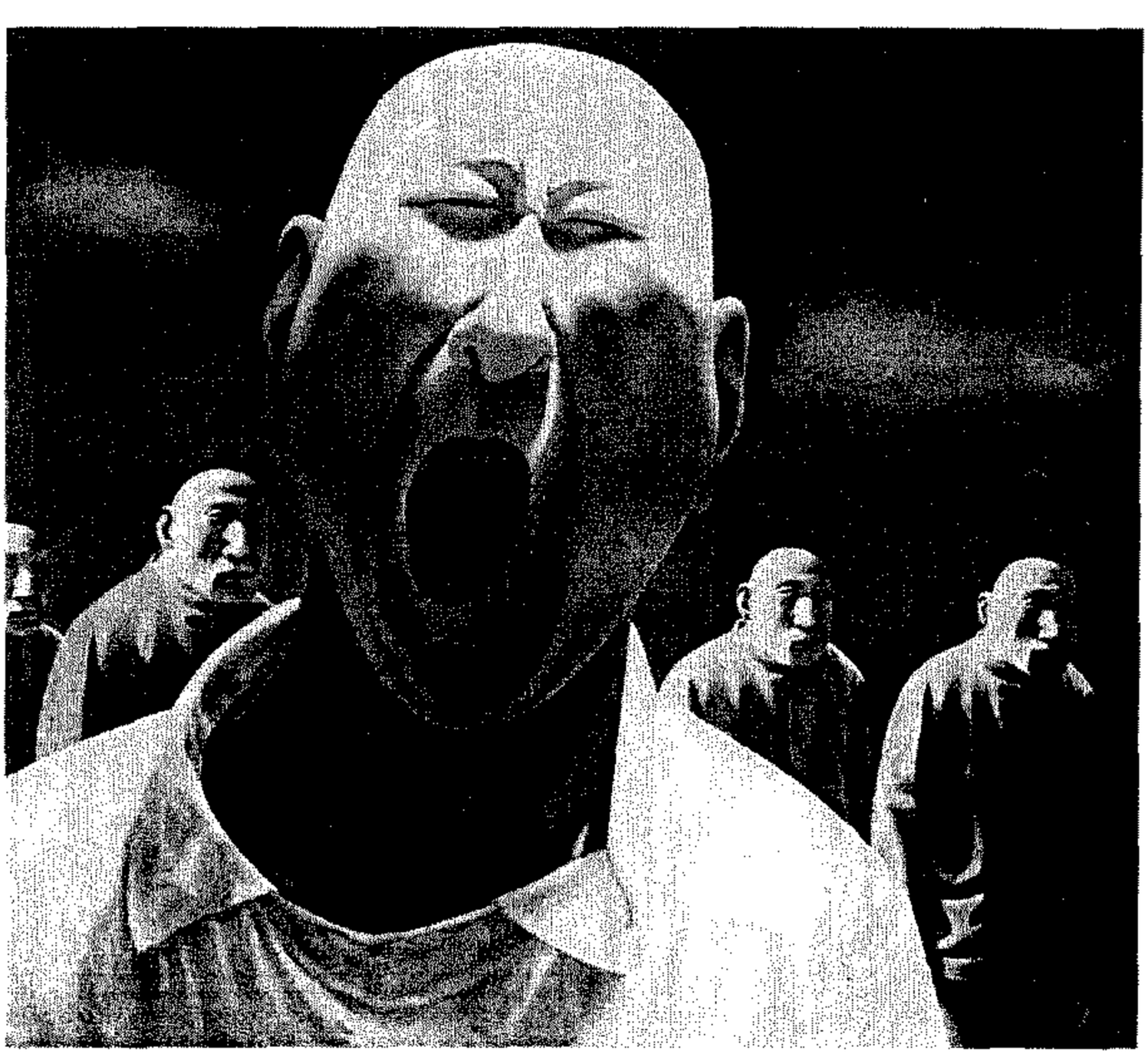
4.34 Chen Wenbo, Works from *Vitamin Series*, 1999, Installed at Polyphénolrène exhibition (Curated by Li Xianting), Songzhuang (Tongzhou County). Photograph by John Clark



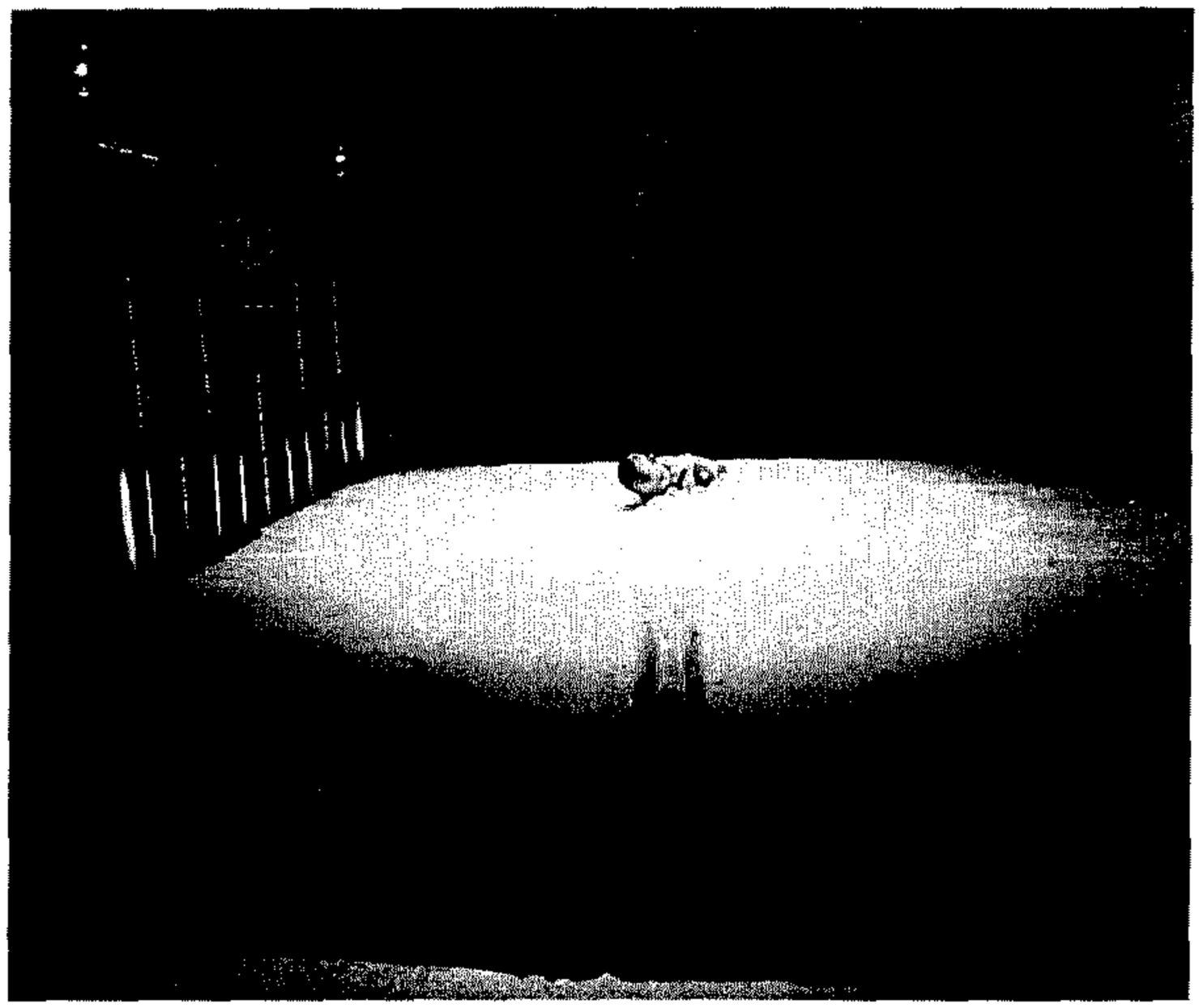
4.35 Damien Hirst, *Pharmacy*, 1992, Installation



4.36 Chen Wenbo, Works from *Vitamin Series*, 1999, Installed at Polyphénolrène exhibition (Curated by Li Xianting), Songzhuang (Tongzhou County)



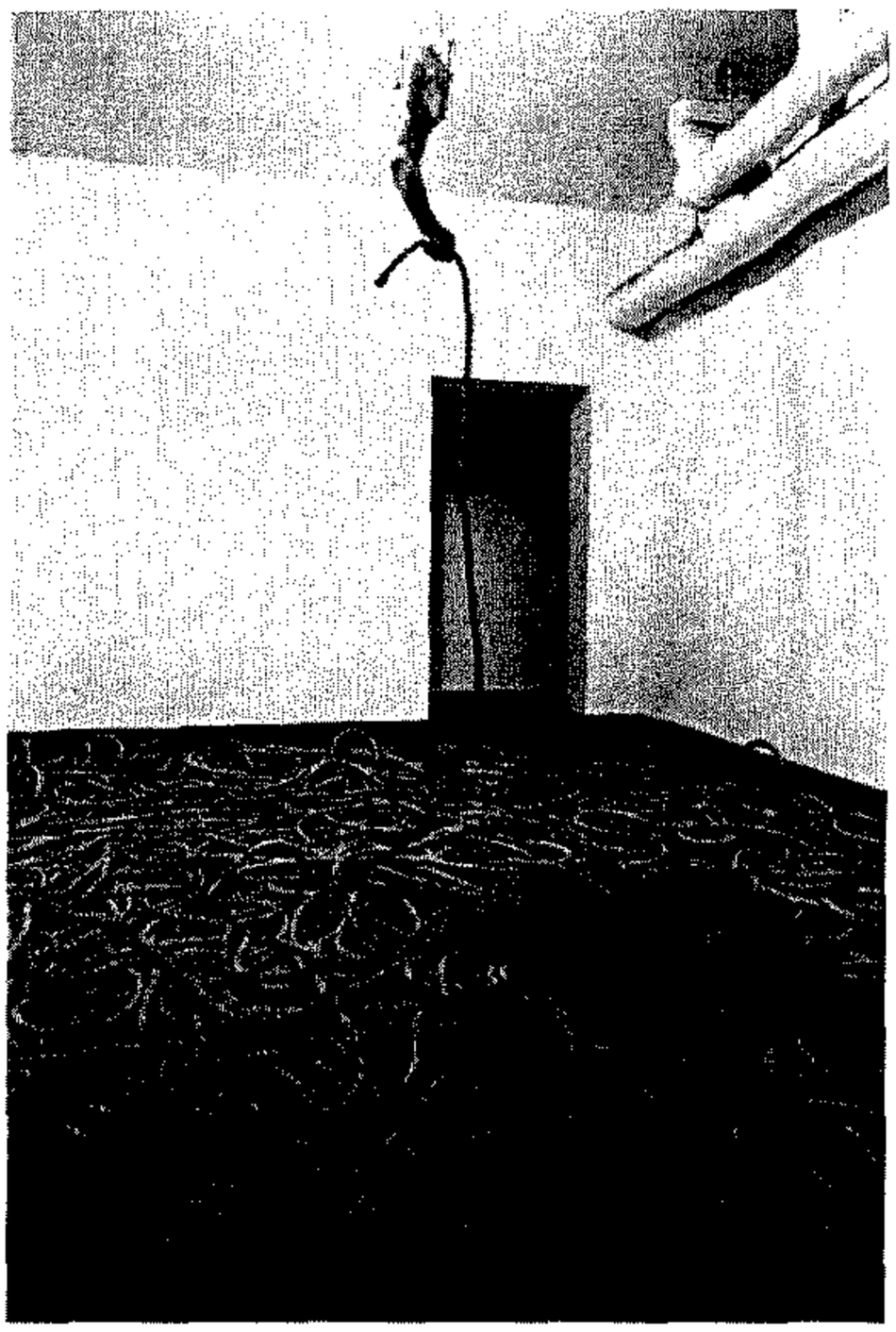
4.37 Fang Lijun, *Group Two, No. 2*, 1992, Oil on canvas, 200x200 cm



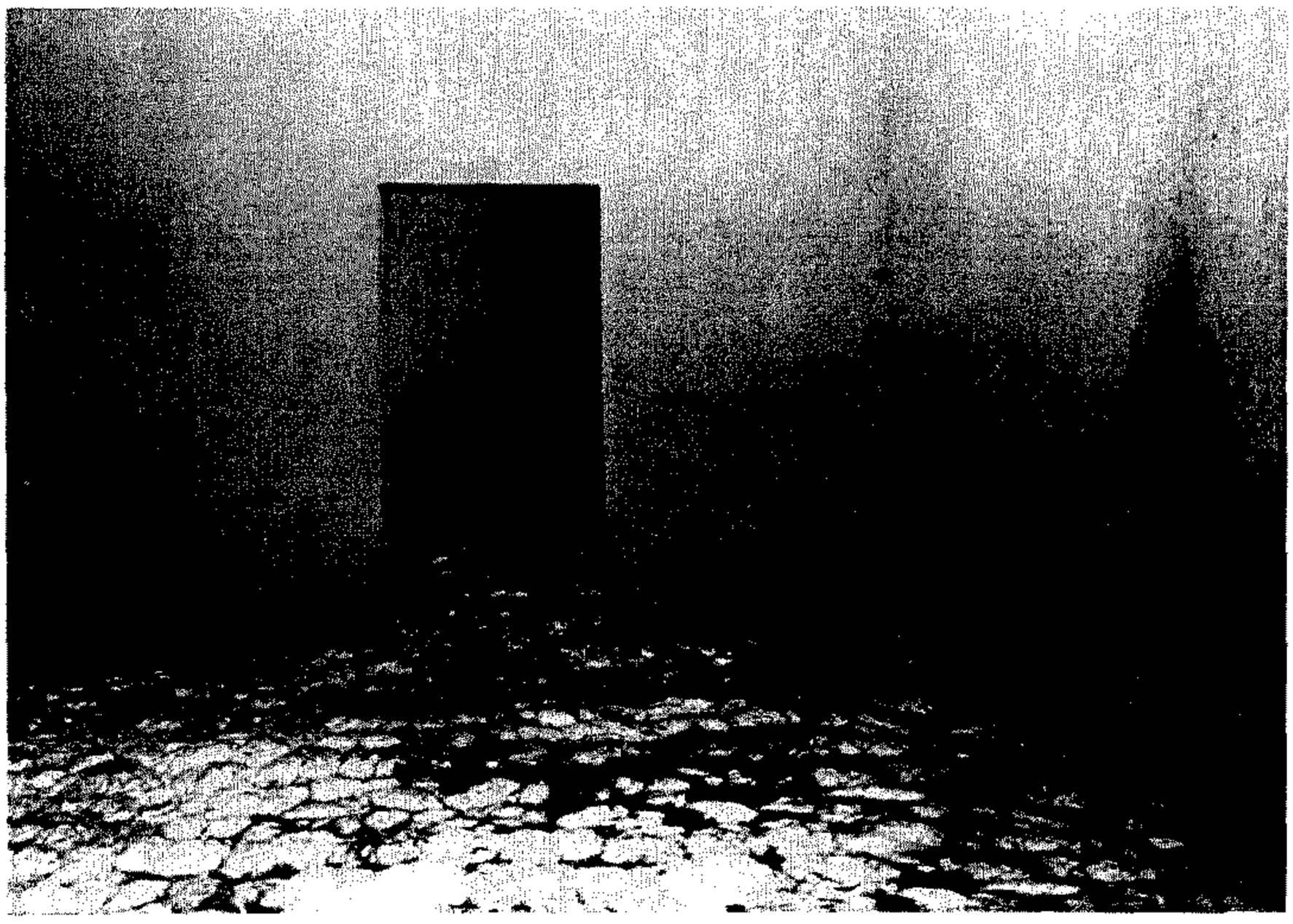
4.38 Sun Yuan, *Honey* (2nd edition), 9 January 1999, Installation at the exhibition *Post-Sense Sensibility* (Curated by Qiu Zhijie and Wu Meichun), Beijing



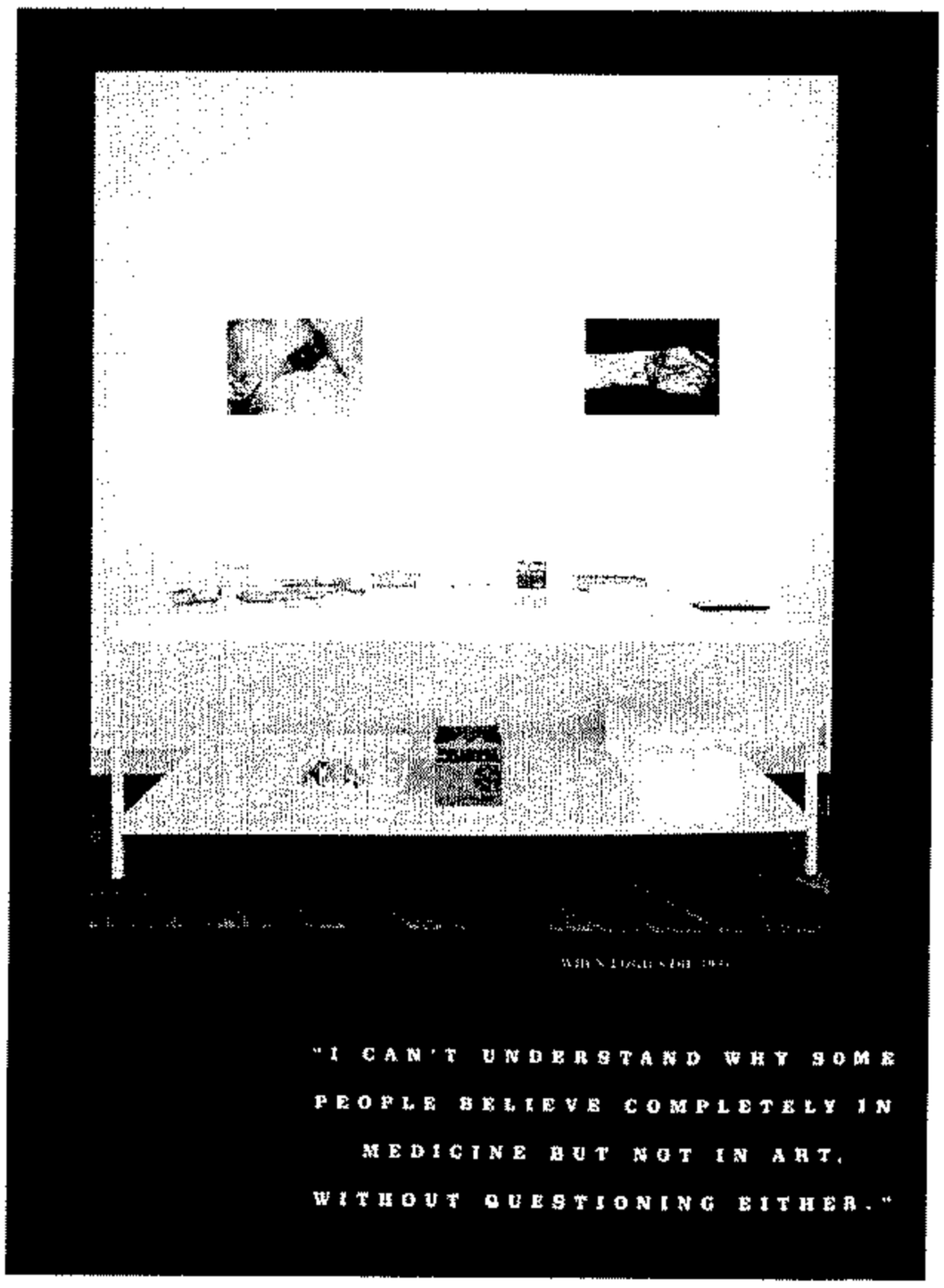
4.39 Sun Yuan, Honey (2nd edition), 9 January 1999, Installation (Detail)



4.40 Zhu Yu, *Theologie Portative*, 9 January 1999, Installation at the exhibition Post-Sense Sensibility (Curated by Qiu Zhijie and Wu Meichun), Beijing



4.41 Gu Dexin, *7 November 1998*, 1998, Installation at the exhibition *Corruptionists* (Curated by Zhang Zhouhui), Beijing



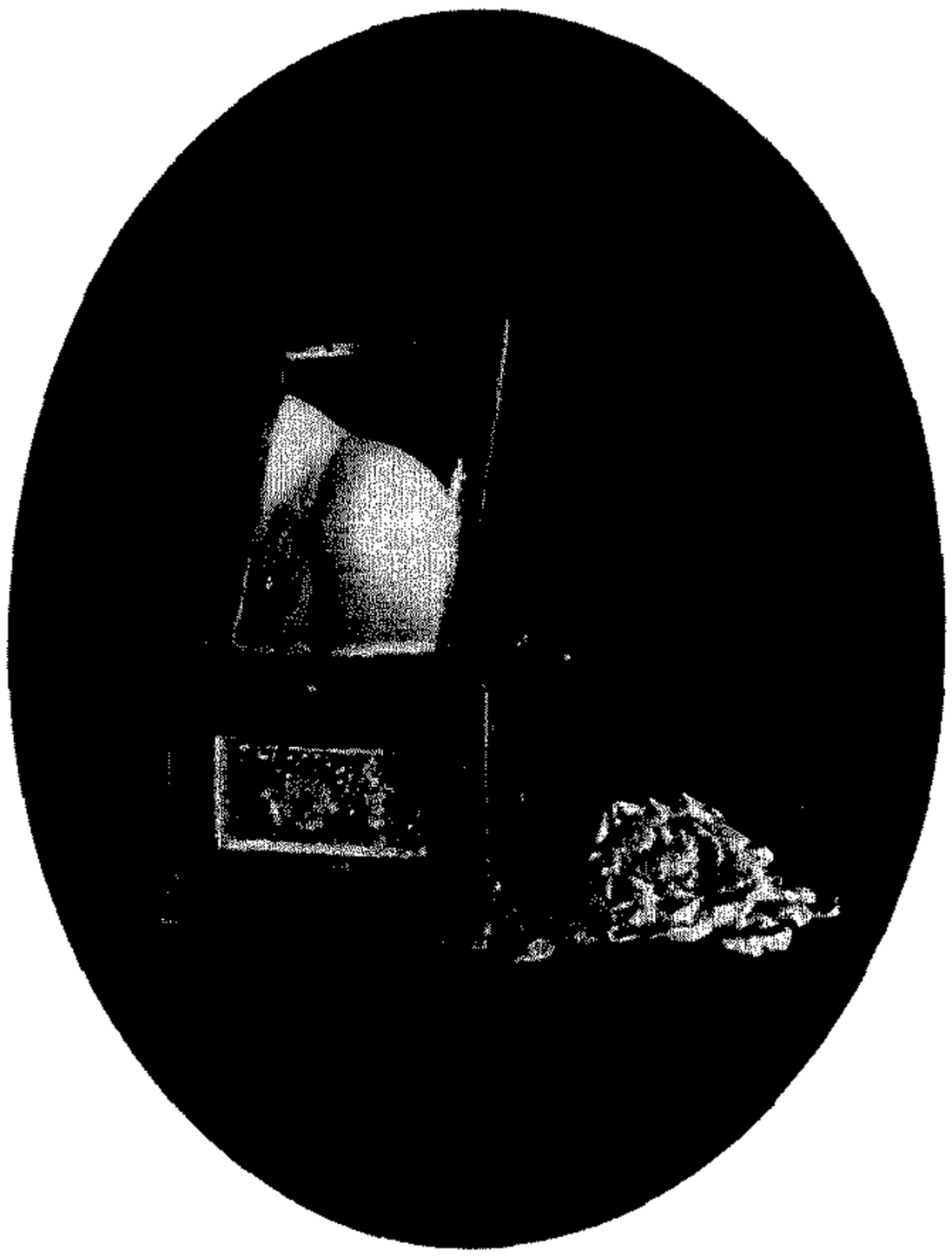
4.42 Damien Hirst, *When Logics Die*, 1993, Installation



4.43 Rembrandt van Rijn, *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr Nicolaes Tulp*, 1632, Oil on canvas, 169.5x216 cm



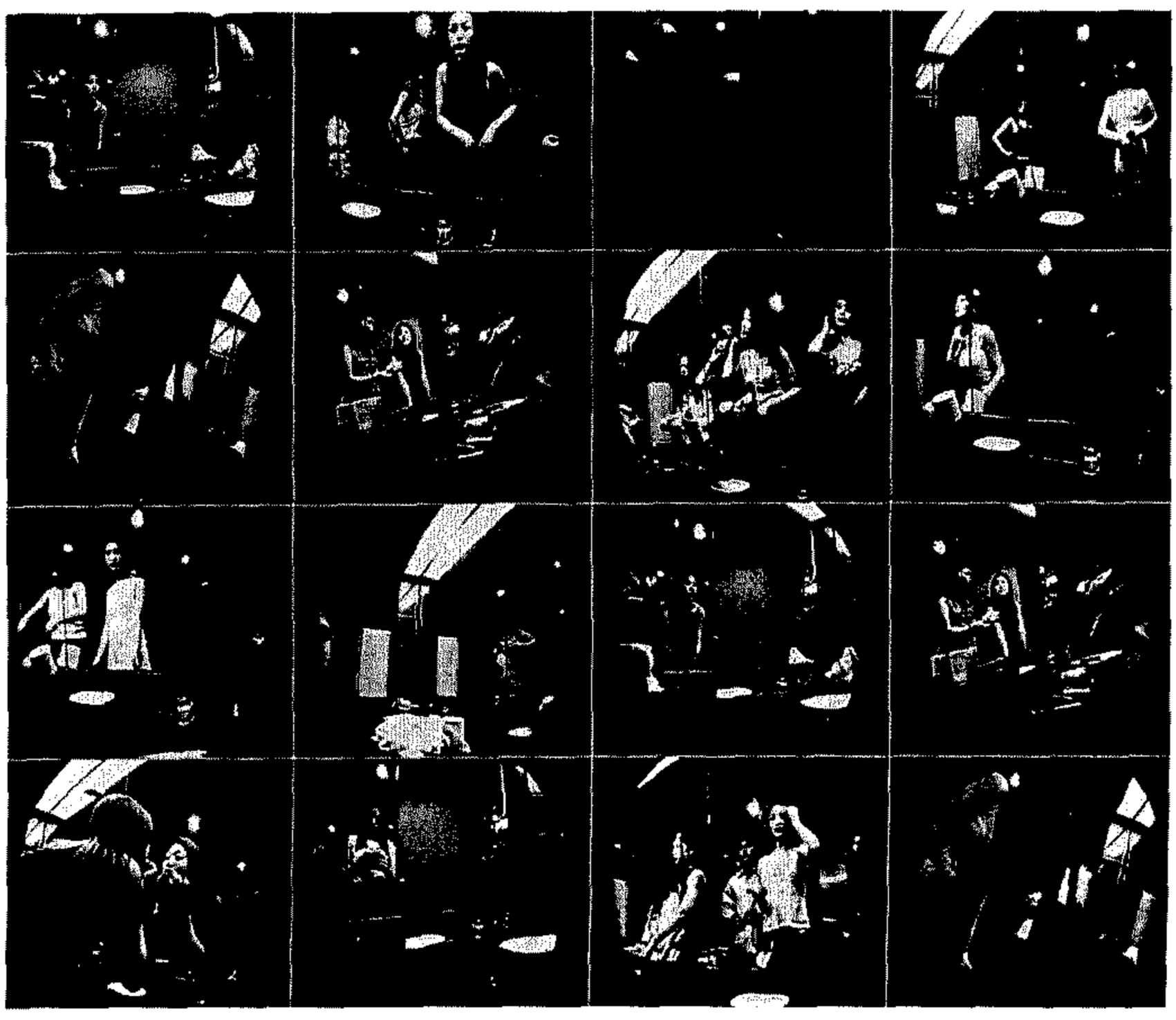
4.44 Rembrandt van Rijn, *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr Jan Deijman*, 1656, oil on canvas, Dimensions not available



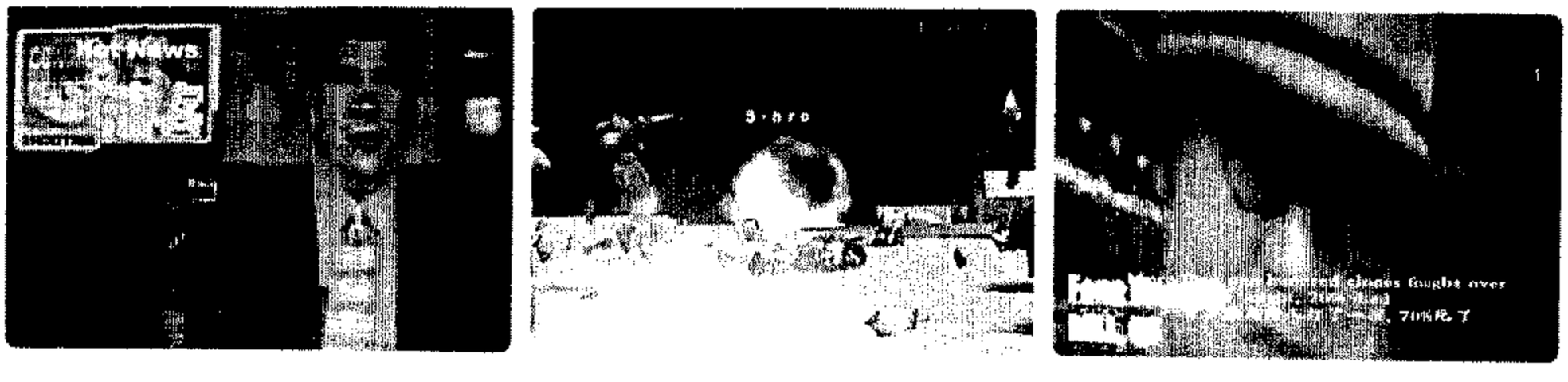
4.45 Chen Lingyang, *Twelve Flower Months* (*The Fourth Month – Peony*), November 1999 – December 2000, Beijing, Photograph Series made from performance

5.1 Yang Fudong, *Liulan*, 2003, Video Still

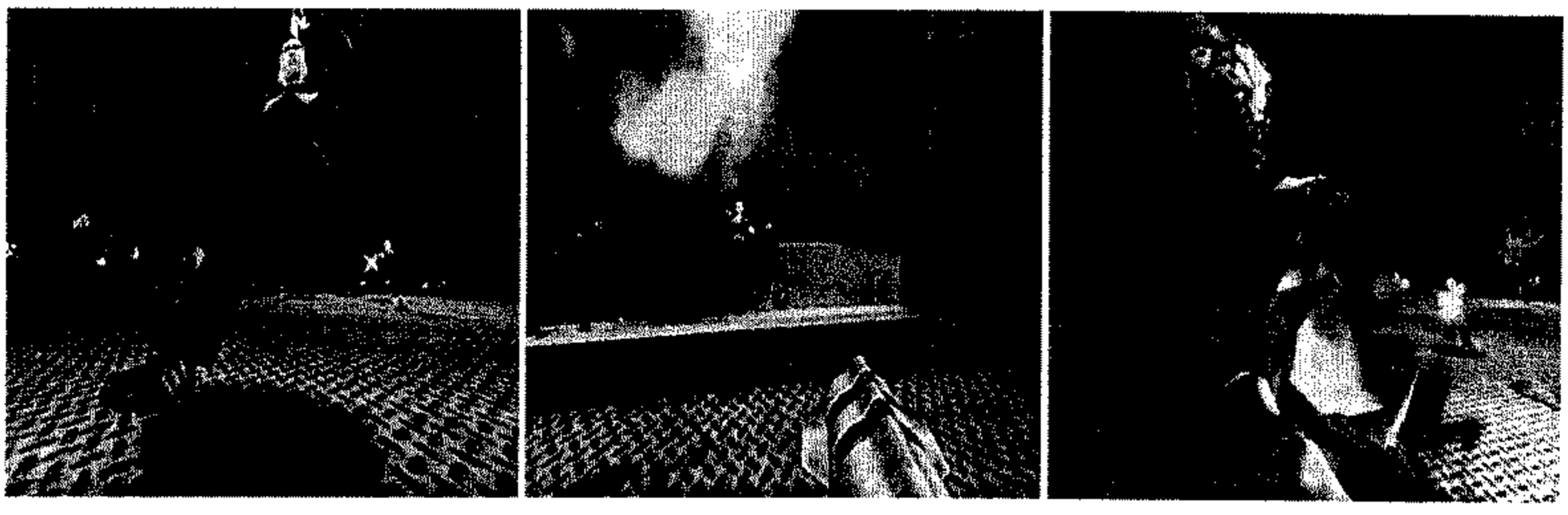




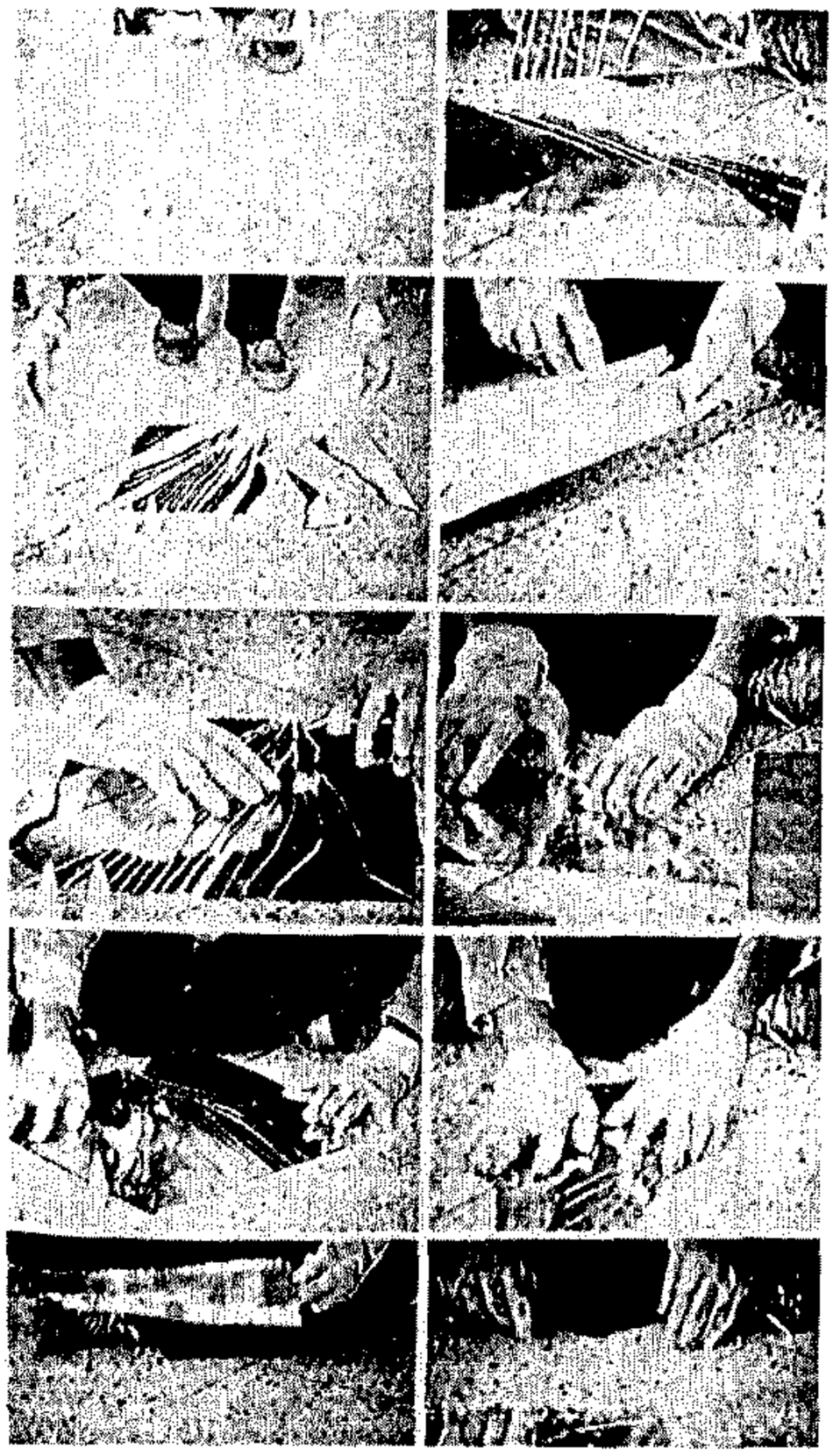
5.2 Cui Xiuwen, *Ladies*, June 2000, Video Stills, Shanghai



5.3 Feng Mengbo, *Q3*, 1999, Video Animation Stills



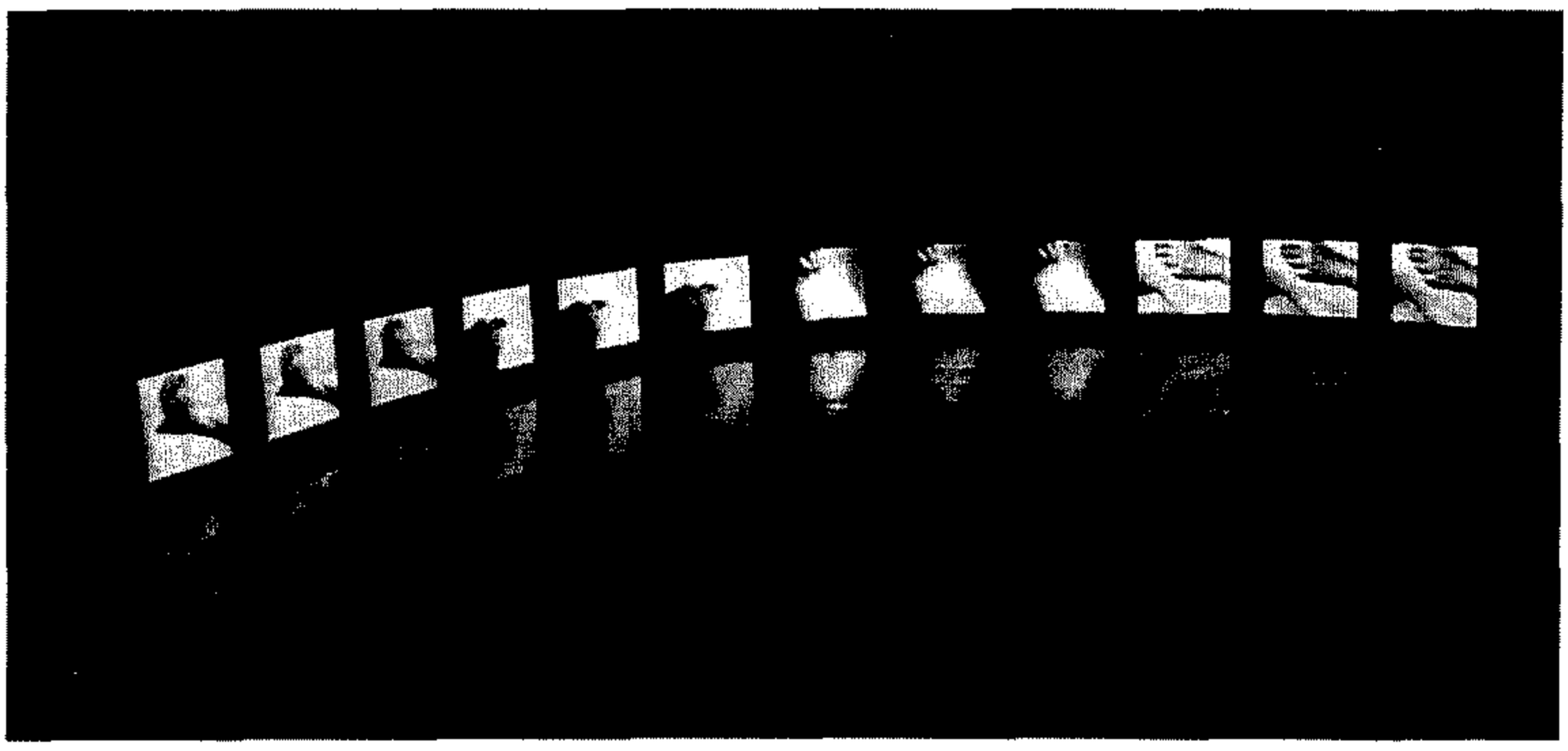
5.4 Feng Mengbo, *A_Q*, 2003, Digital animation



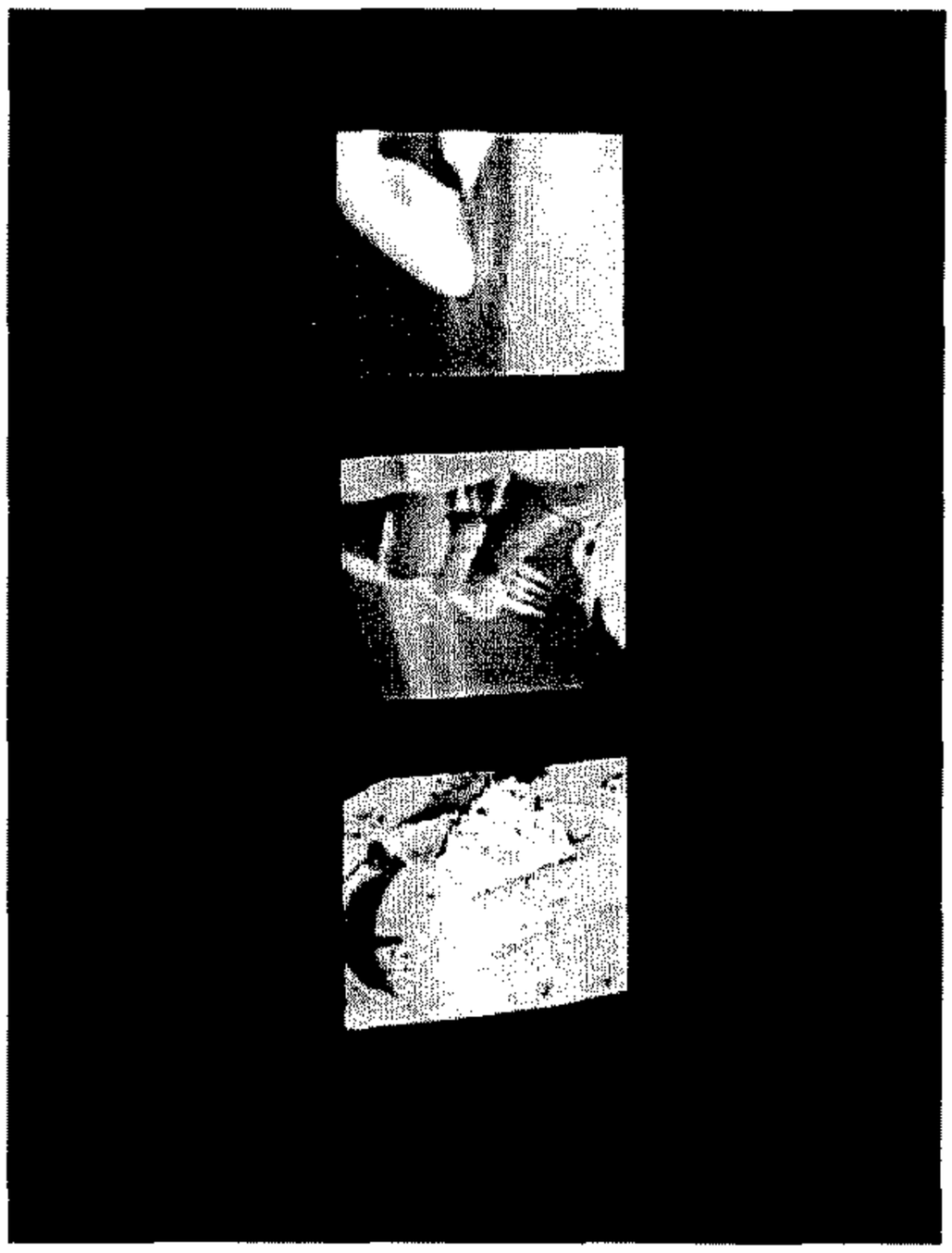
5.5 Zhang Peili, *30x30*, 1988, Video Stills, Total duration of video: 130 minutes



5.6 Zhang Peili, *Water, Standard Version from the Cihai Dictionary*, 1993, Video production



5.7 Zhang Peili, *Uncertain Pleasures*, 1996, Video Installation, 12 Monitors



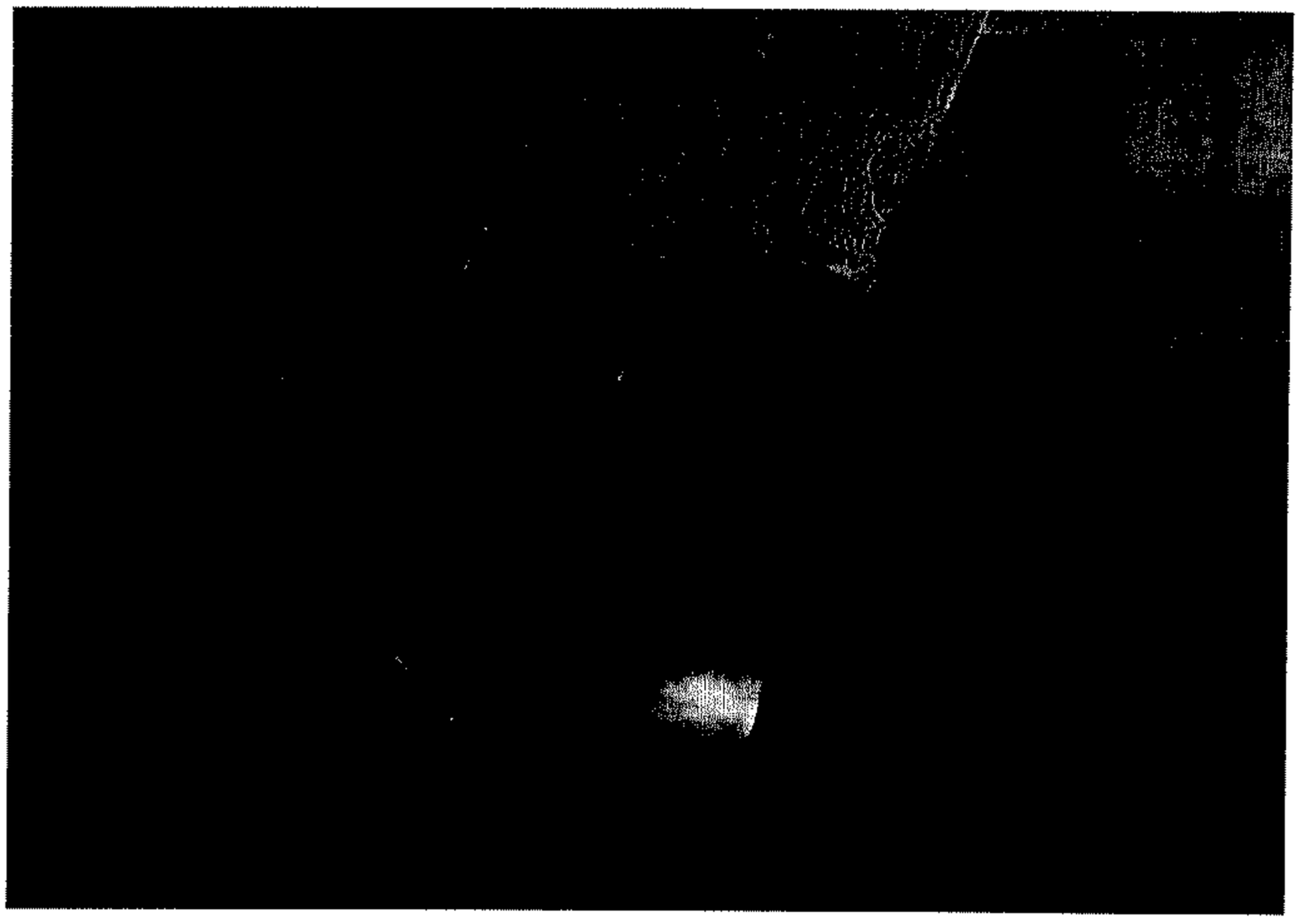
5.8 Zhang Peili, *Eating*, 1997, Video Installation, 3 Monitors



5.9 Wang Jianwei, Living Elsewhere, 1999, Video Still



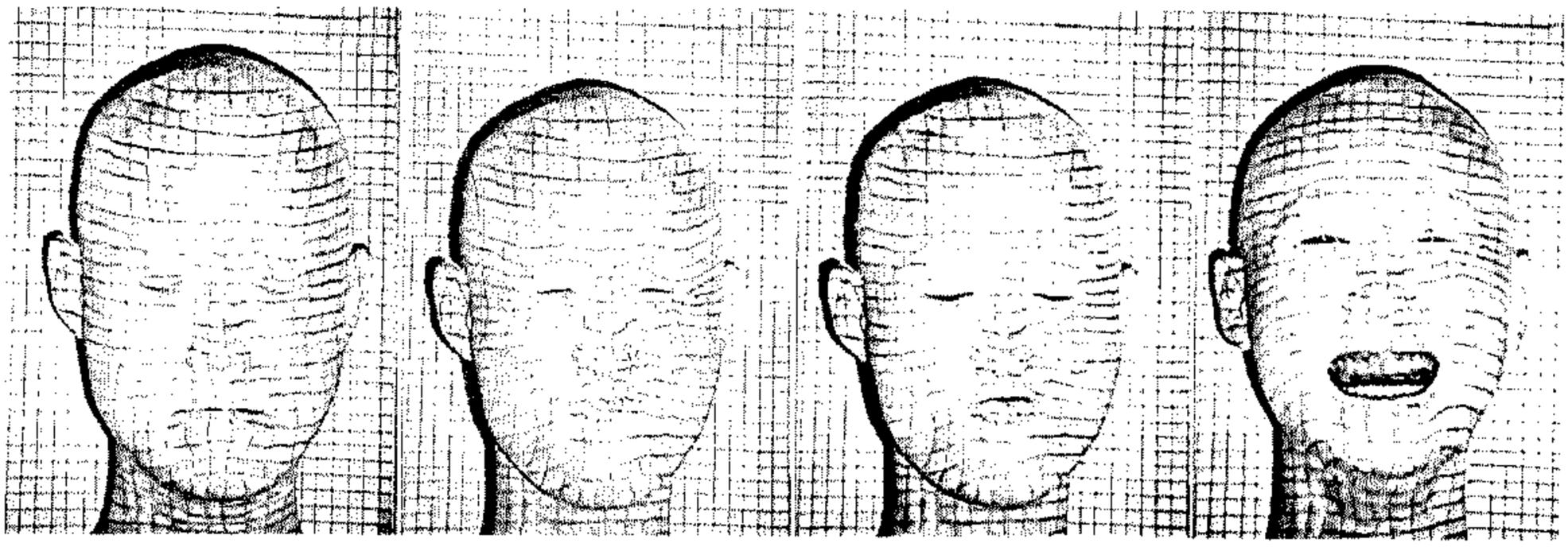
5.10 Wang Gongxin, *Karaoke*, 2000, Video Still



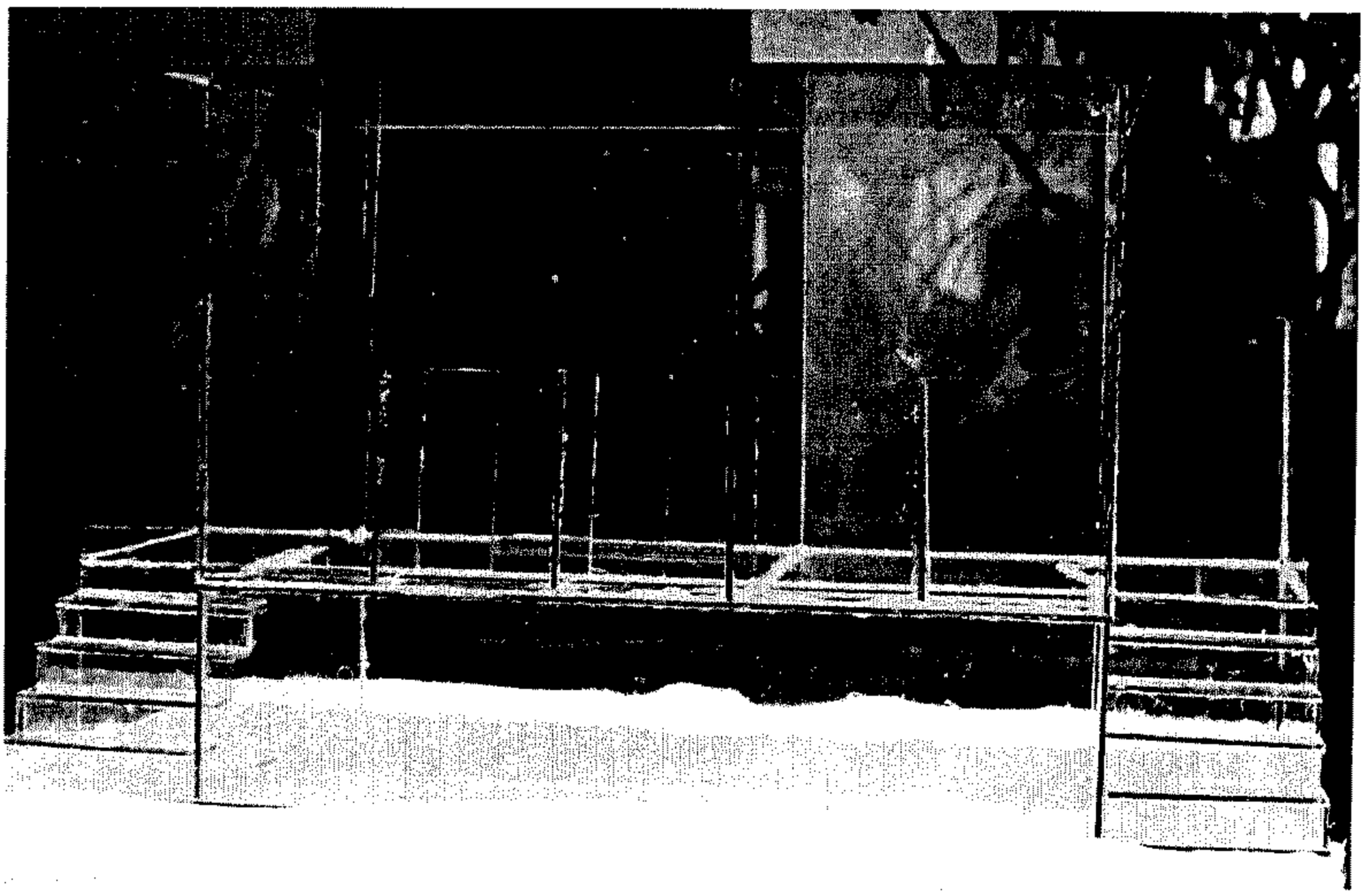
5.11 Wang Gongxin, *The Sky of Brooklyn*, 1995, Video Installation, Beijing



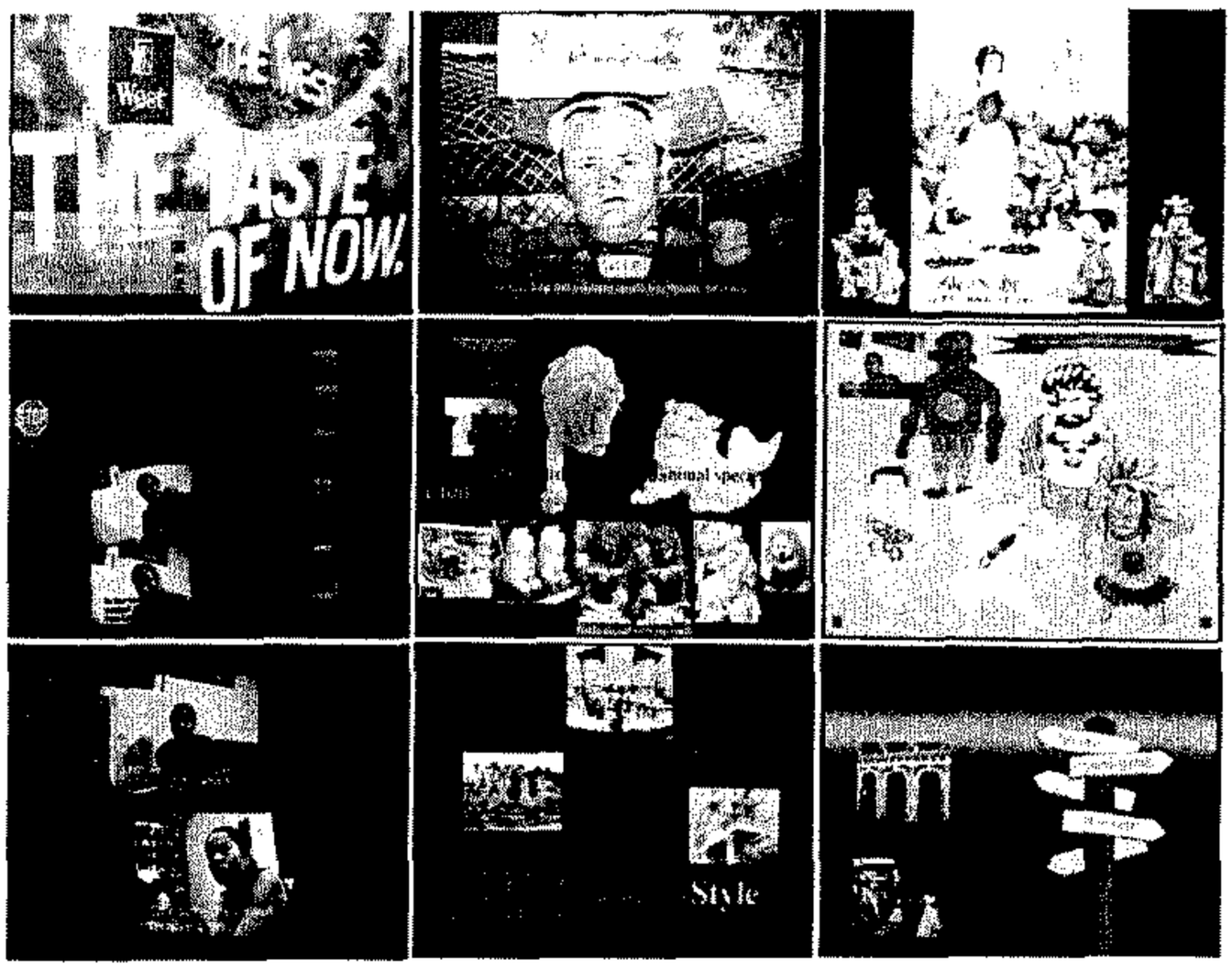
5.12 Qiu Zhijie, *New Life*, 1992, Installation, Zhejiang Academy of Fine Art, Hangzhou



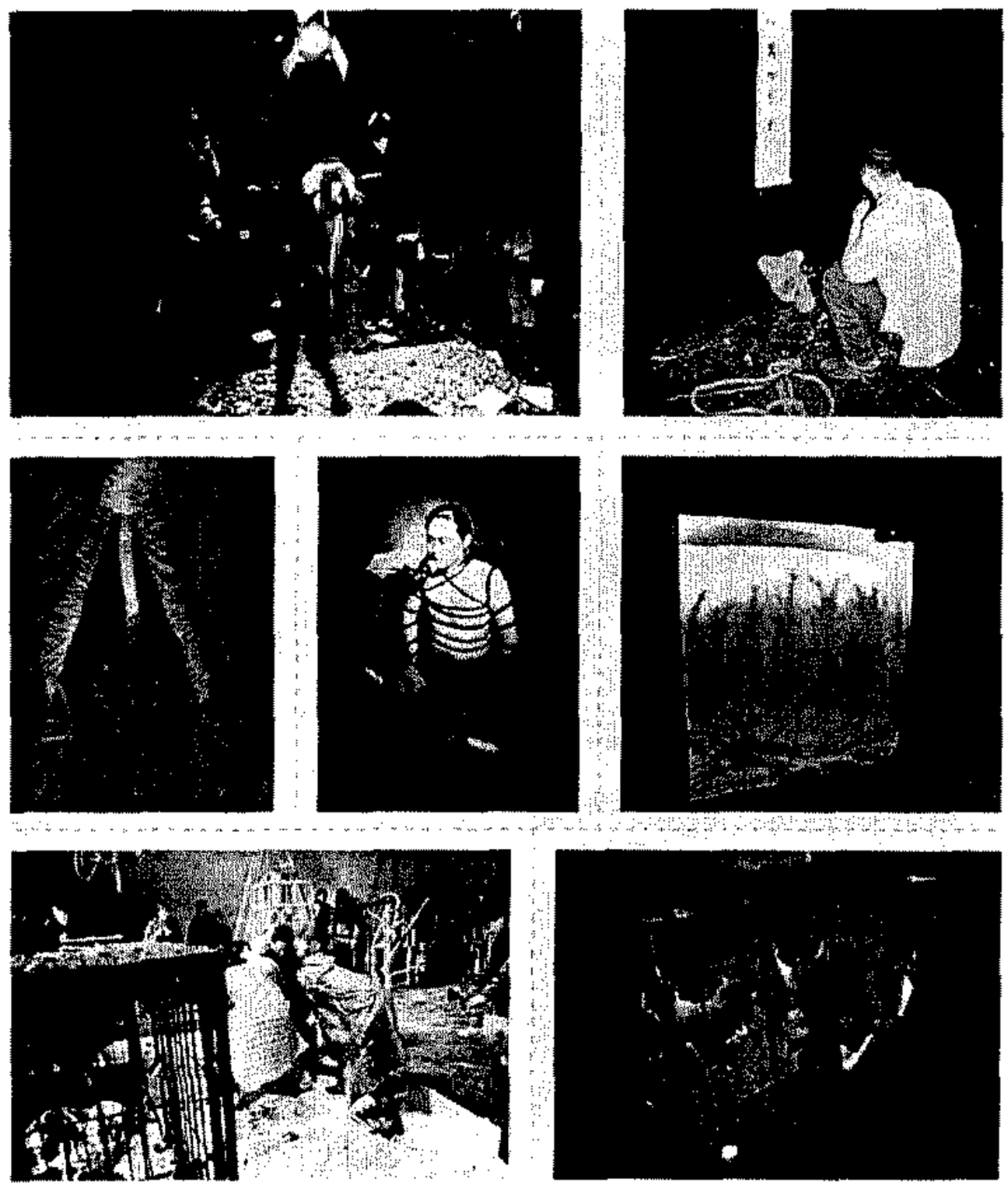
5.13 Qiu Zhijie, *Bathroom*, 1997, Video Stills



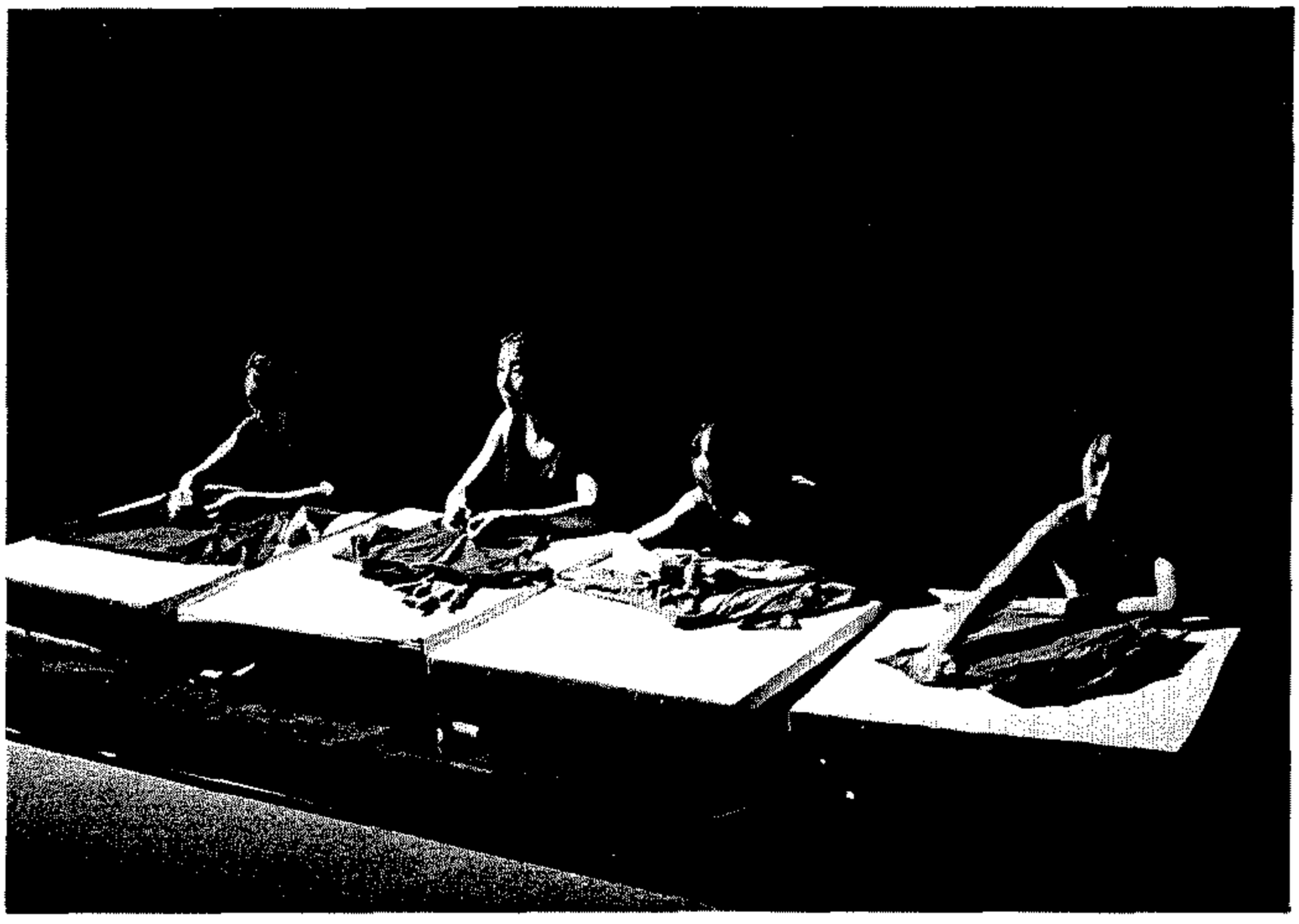
5.14 Qiu Zhijie, *Public Life*, 1994, Installation, Glass, Approx. 70x50x40 cm



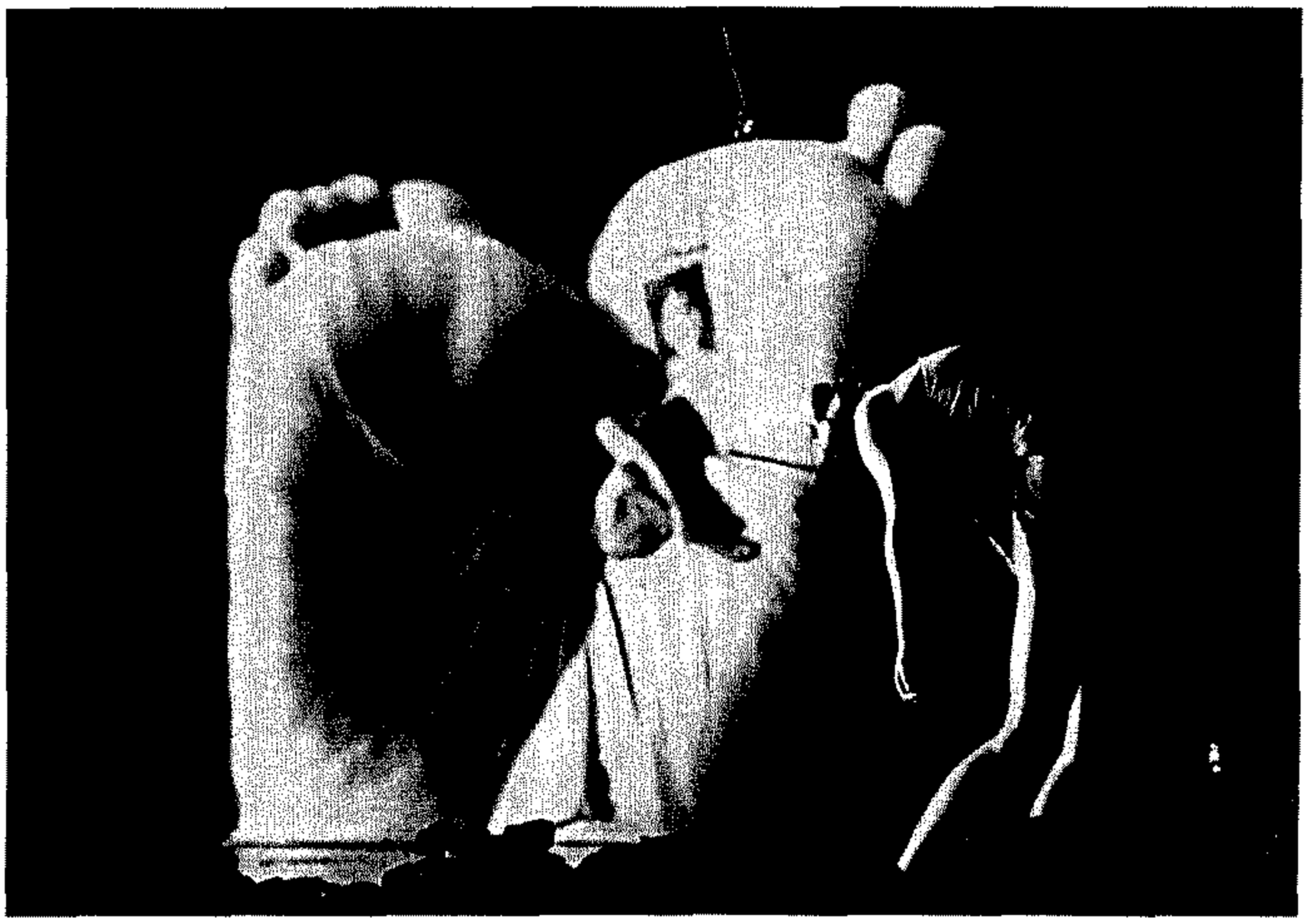
5.15 Qiu Zhijie, *The West*, 2001. Digital animation



5.16 Photographs of the exhibition Post-Sense Sensibility: Spree (Curated by: Qiu Zhijie), Beijing, 11 March 2001



5.17 Living Dance Studio, *Report on Giving Birth*, 1999, Modern dance performance production



5.18 Living Dance Studio, *Report on Body*, 2002, Modern dance performance production



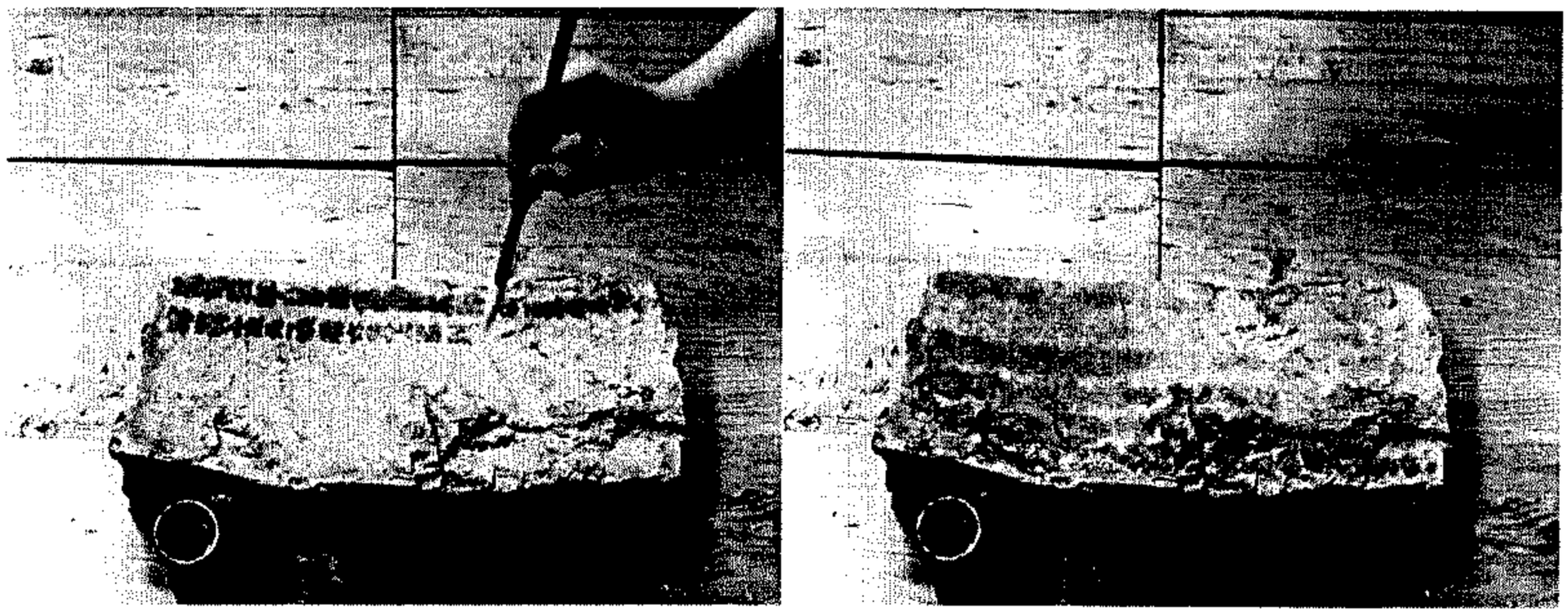
5.19 Living Dance Studio, *Dancing with Farm Workers*, 2001, Modern dance performance production



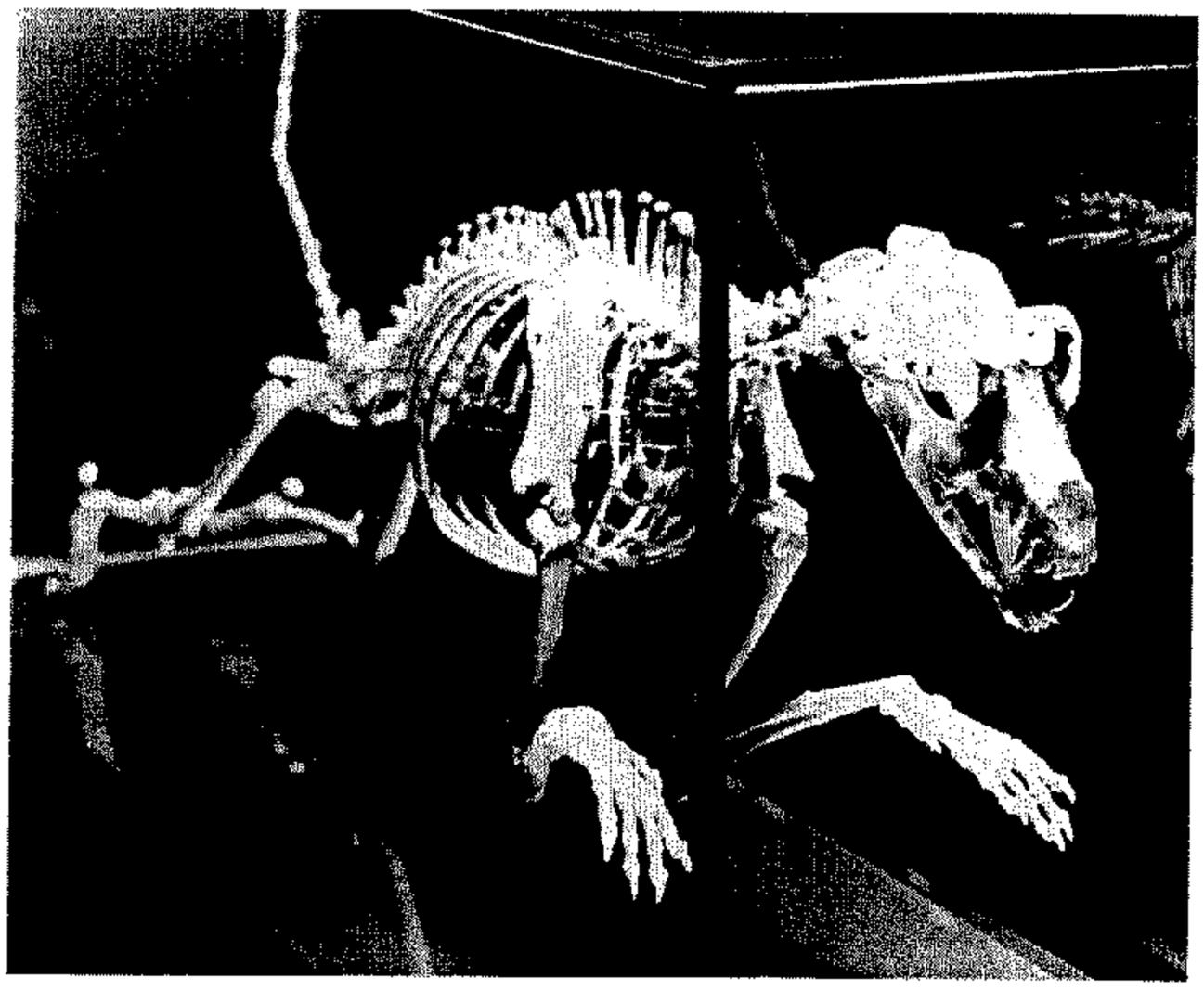
5.20 Song Dong, *Broken Mirror*, 1999, Video Stills, Total duration of video: 7 minutes



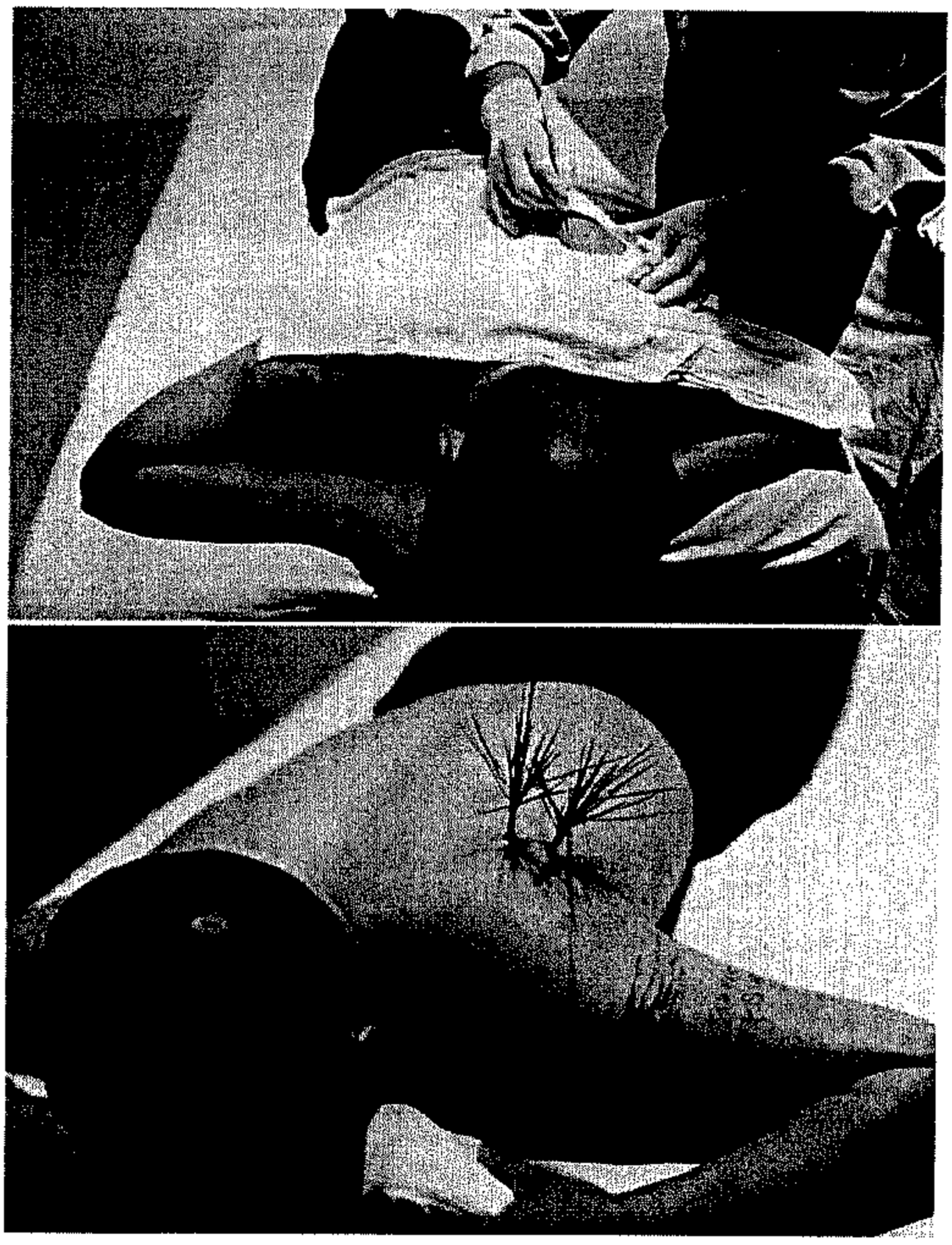
5.21 Song Dong, *Floating*, 2004, Video installation, Installed at the 5th phase of the Asian Traffic exhibition (Curated by: Huangfu Binghui), Gallery 4A, Sydney



5.22 Song Dong, *Writing Diary with Water*, 1995-Present, Ongoing performance



6.1 Sun Yuan, *Solitary Animal*, 2000. Installation, Featured at the Exhibition FUCK OFF (Curated by Ai Weiwei and Feng Boyi), Eastlink Gallery, Shanghai

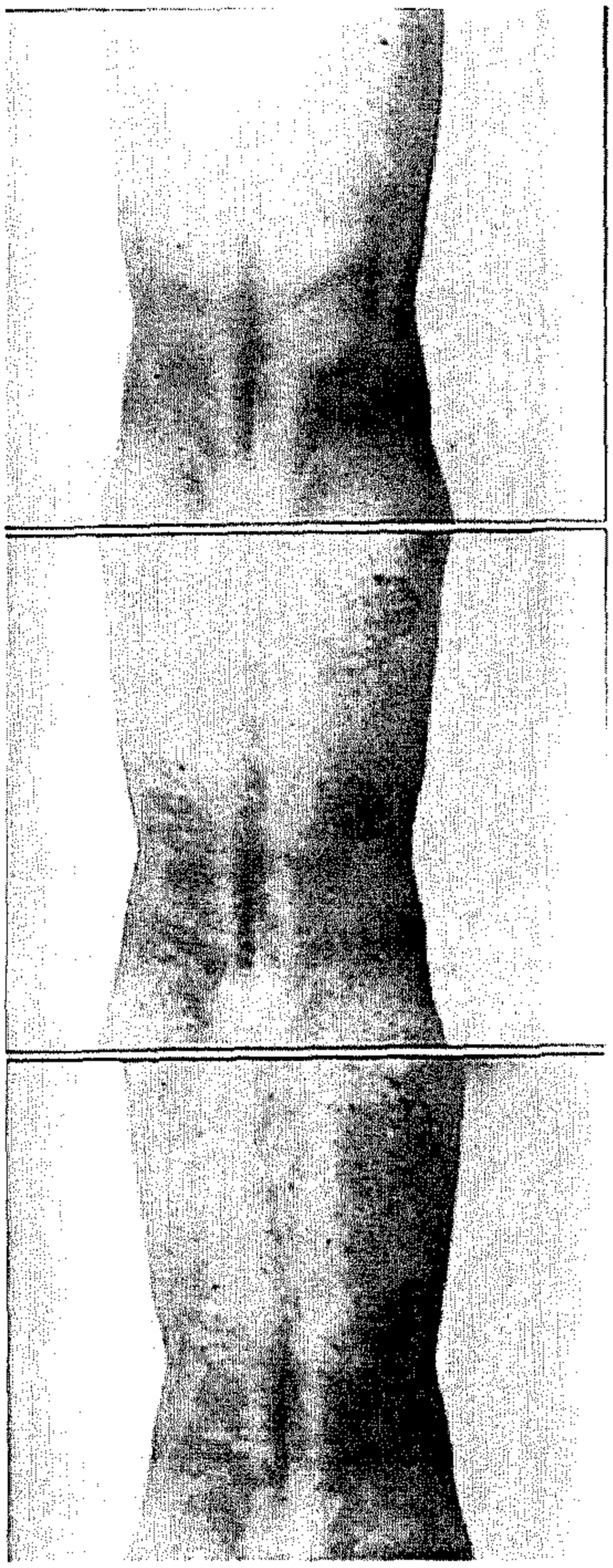


6.2 Yang Zhichao, *Planting Grass*, 2000, Performance at the Exhibition FUCK OFF (Curated by Ai Weiwei and Feng Boyi), Eastlink Gallery, Shanghai

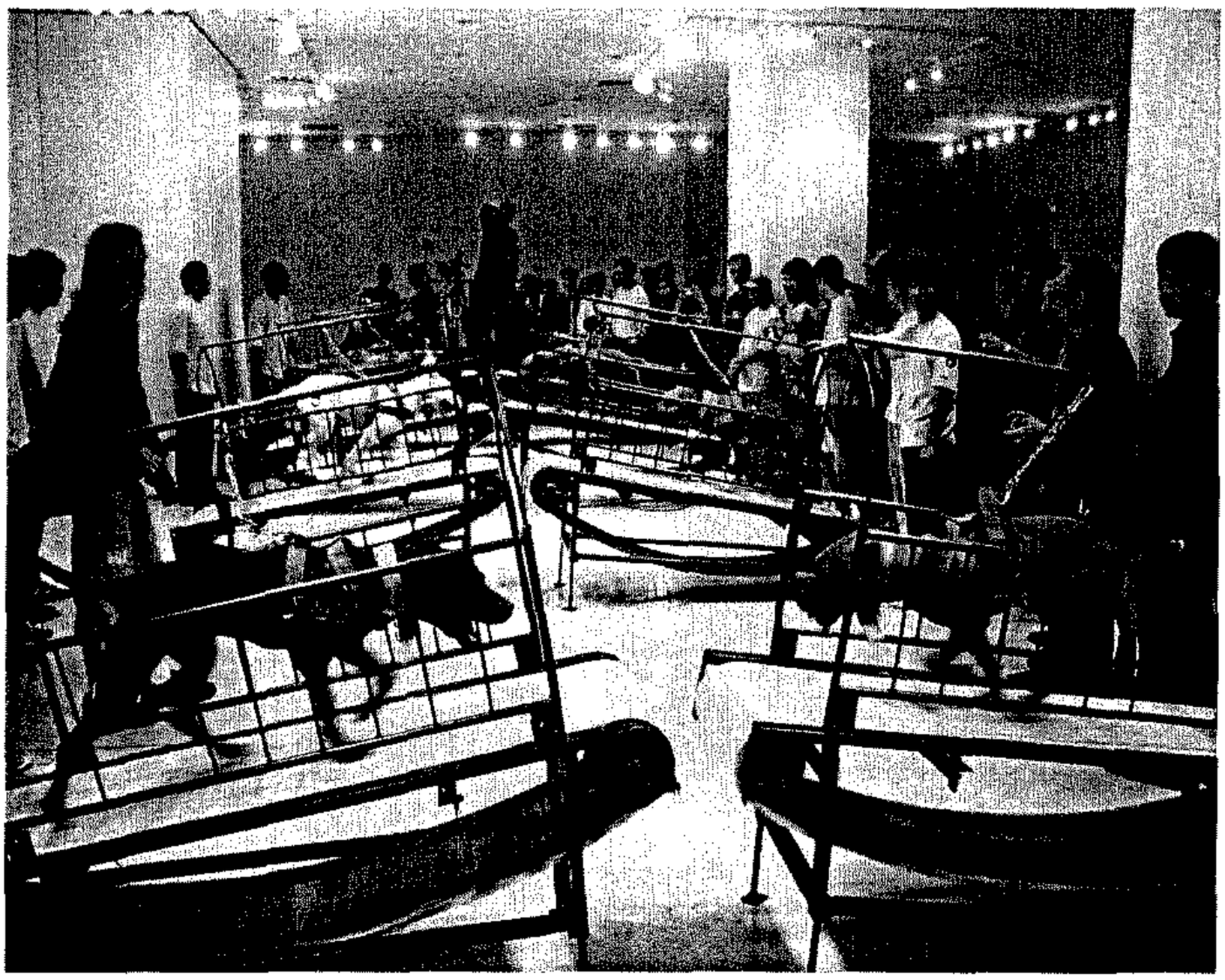


6.3 & 6.4 Zhu Yu, *Eating People*, 17 October 2000, Performance (Slide 1 & 2), Beijing

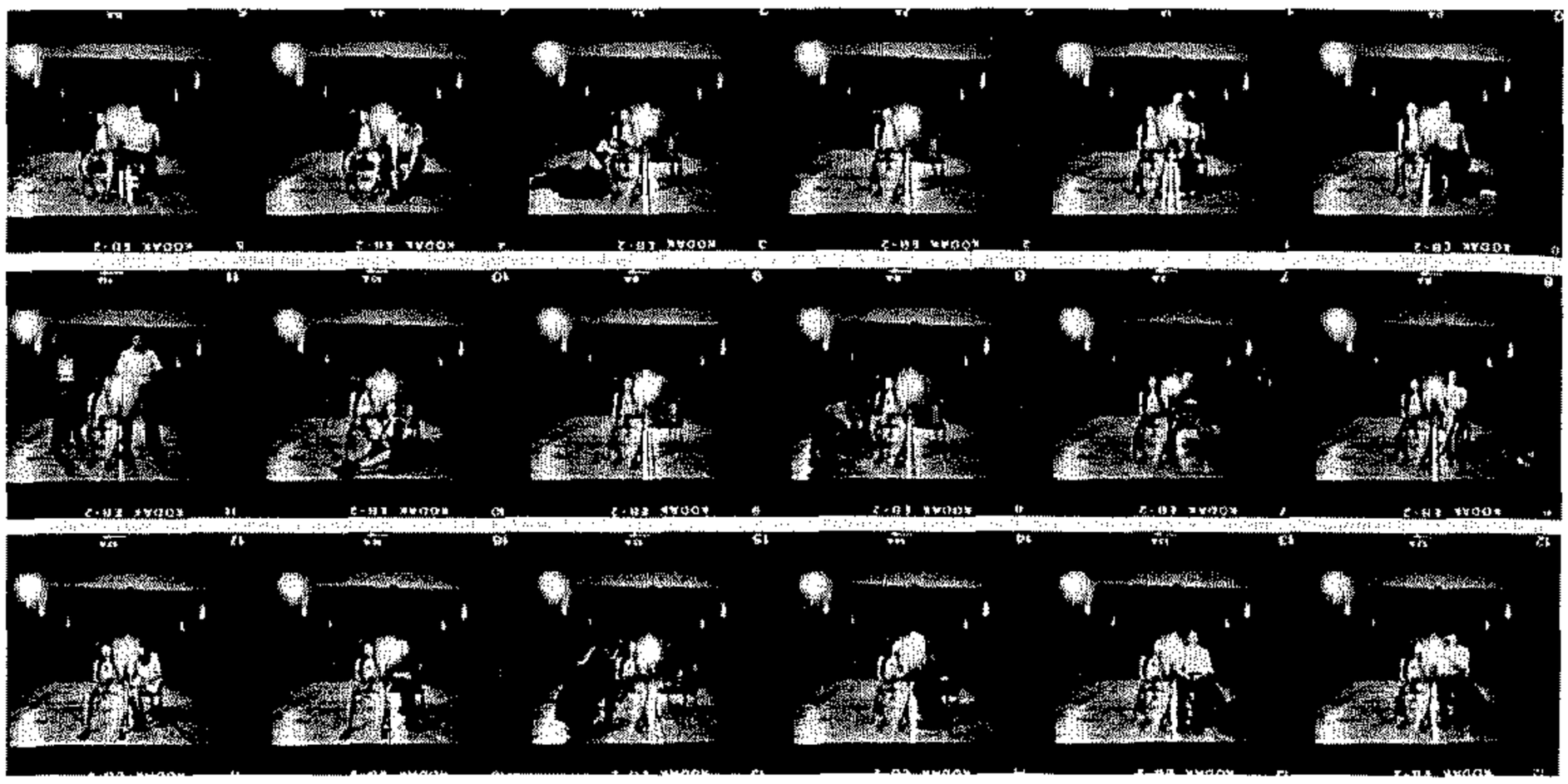




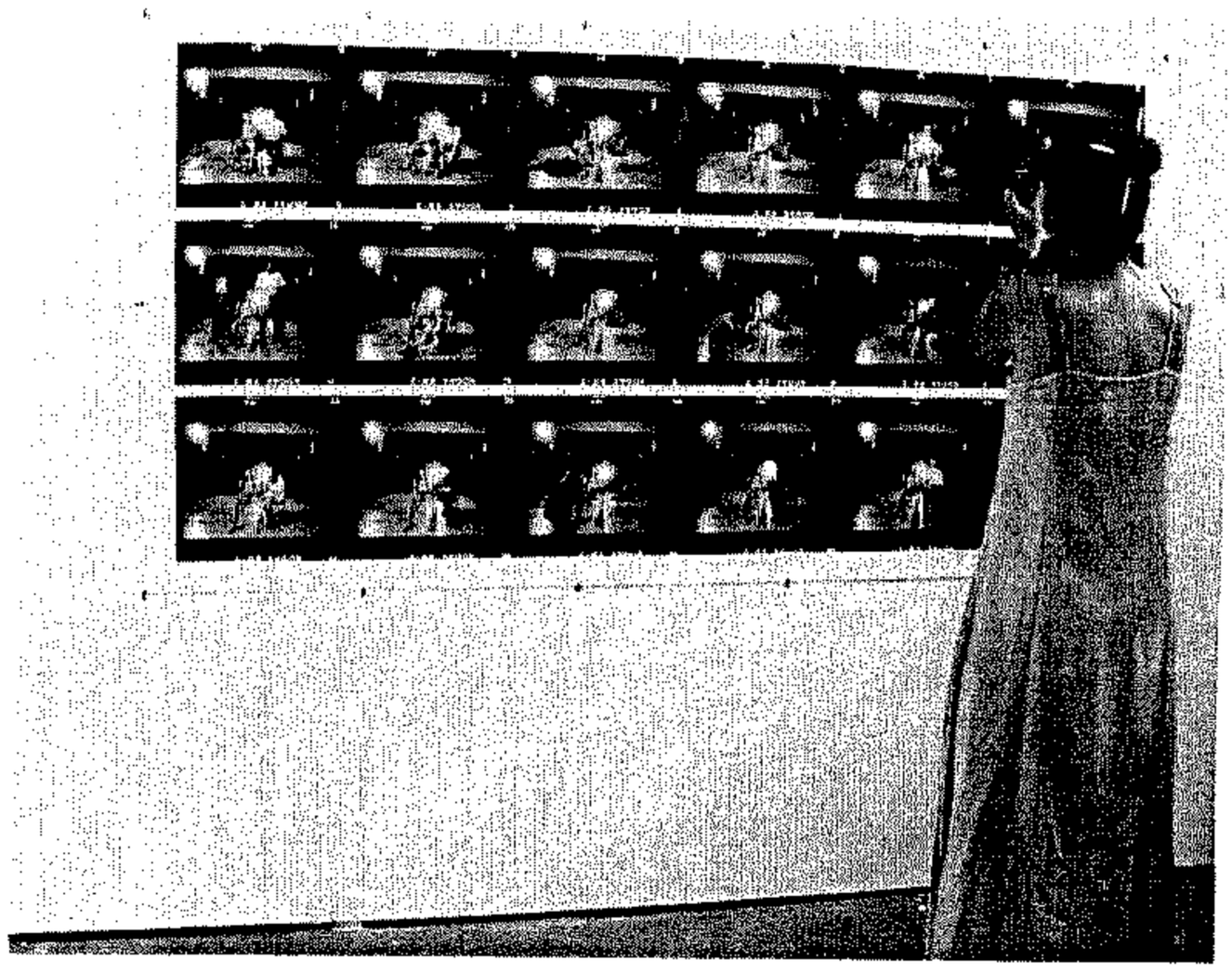
6.5 Xu Zhen, *Rainbows*, 1998, Video Stills



7.1 Sun Yuan and Peng Yu, *Controversy Model*, September 2003, Live art piece, Beijing Dashanzi 798 Factory



7.2 Ma Liuming, *Fen/Ma Liuming in Lyon*, 2001, Photograph series of performance, 127x240 cm

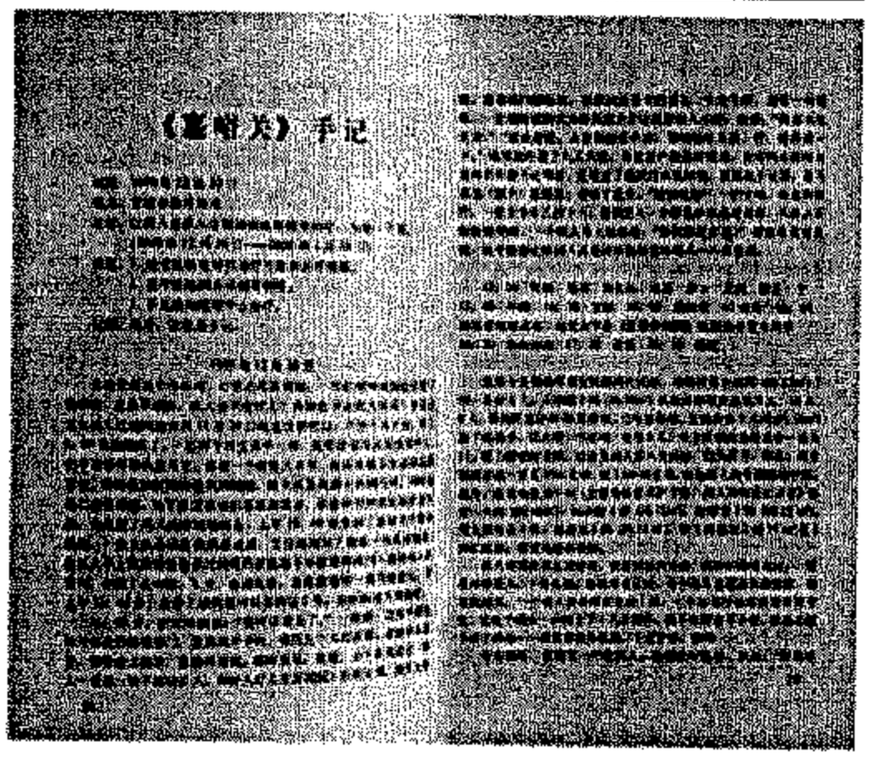


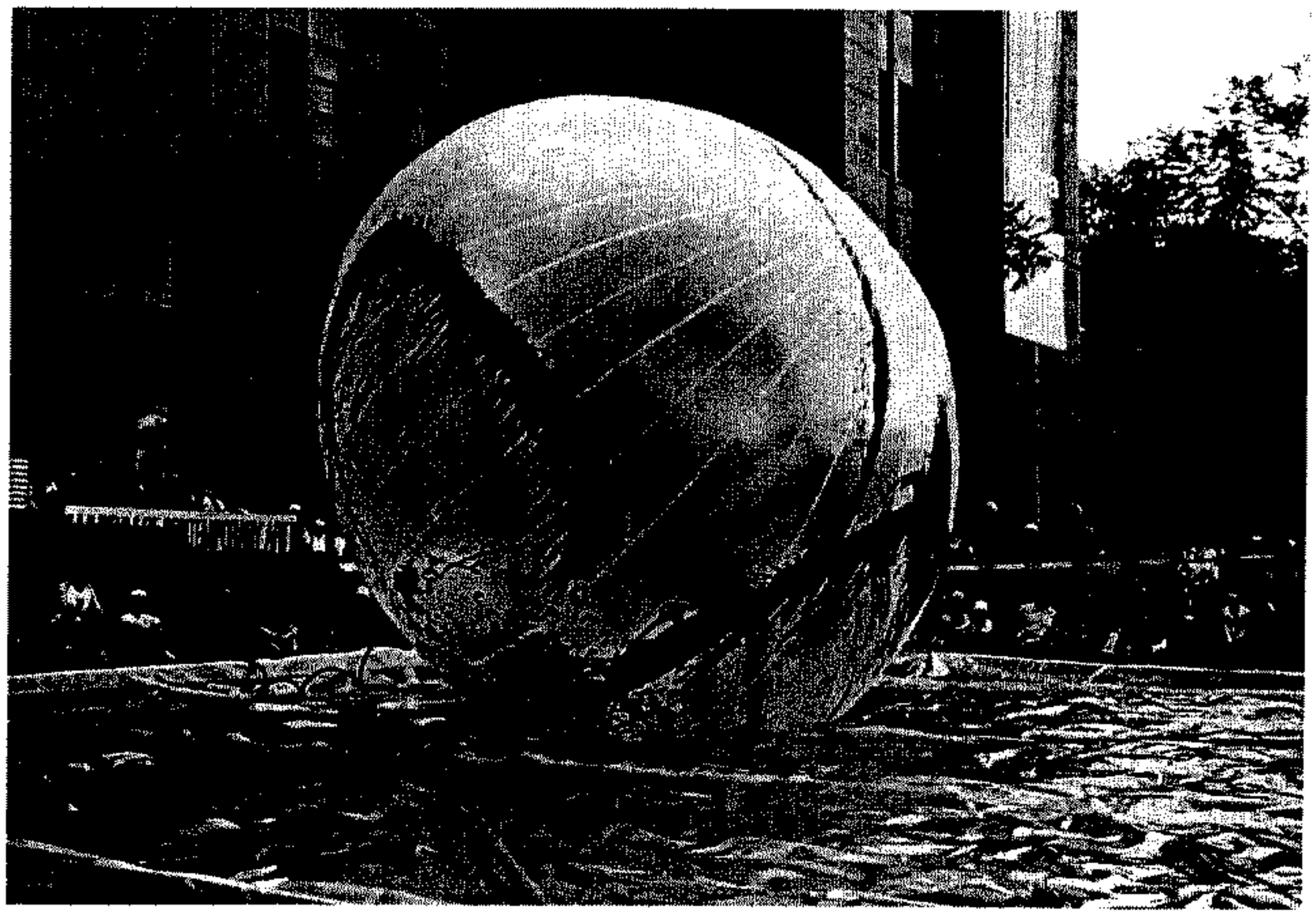
7.3 Ma Liuming, *Fen/Ma Liuming in Lyon*, 2001, Photograph series installed at the exhibition Huajiadi (Curated by Nan Nan), China Art Seasons, May 2004



7.4 & 7.5 Yang Zhichao, *Jiayu Pass*, 30 December 1999 to 30 January 2000, Jiayu Pass, Gansu Province, Duration: 1 month







7.6 Zhu Ming, *9 March 2003*, 2003, Performance for the Liquid Sea Exhibition, Museum of Contemporary Art, MCA front lawn, Sydney



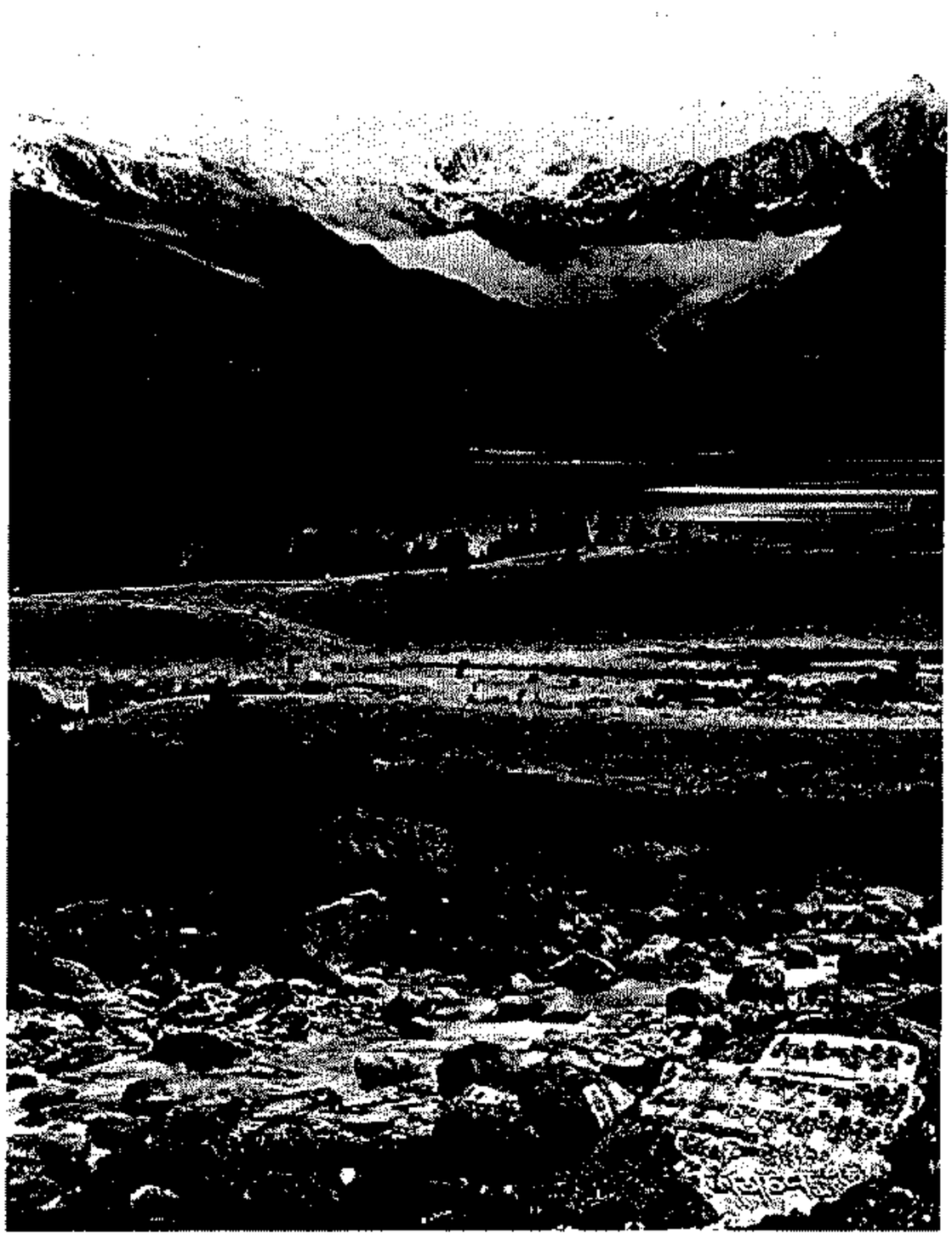
7.7 Zhu Ming, *26 July 2002*, Photographs of performance installed at the 6th Sharjah International Art Biennale (Chinese section curated by Author), United Arab Emirates, April-May, 2003



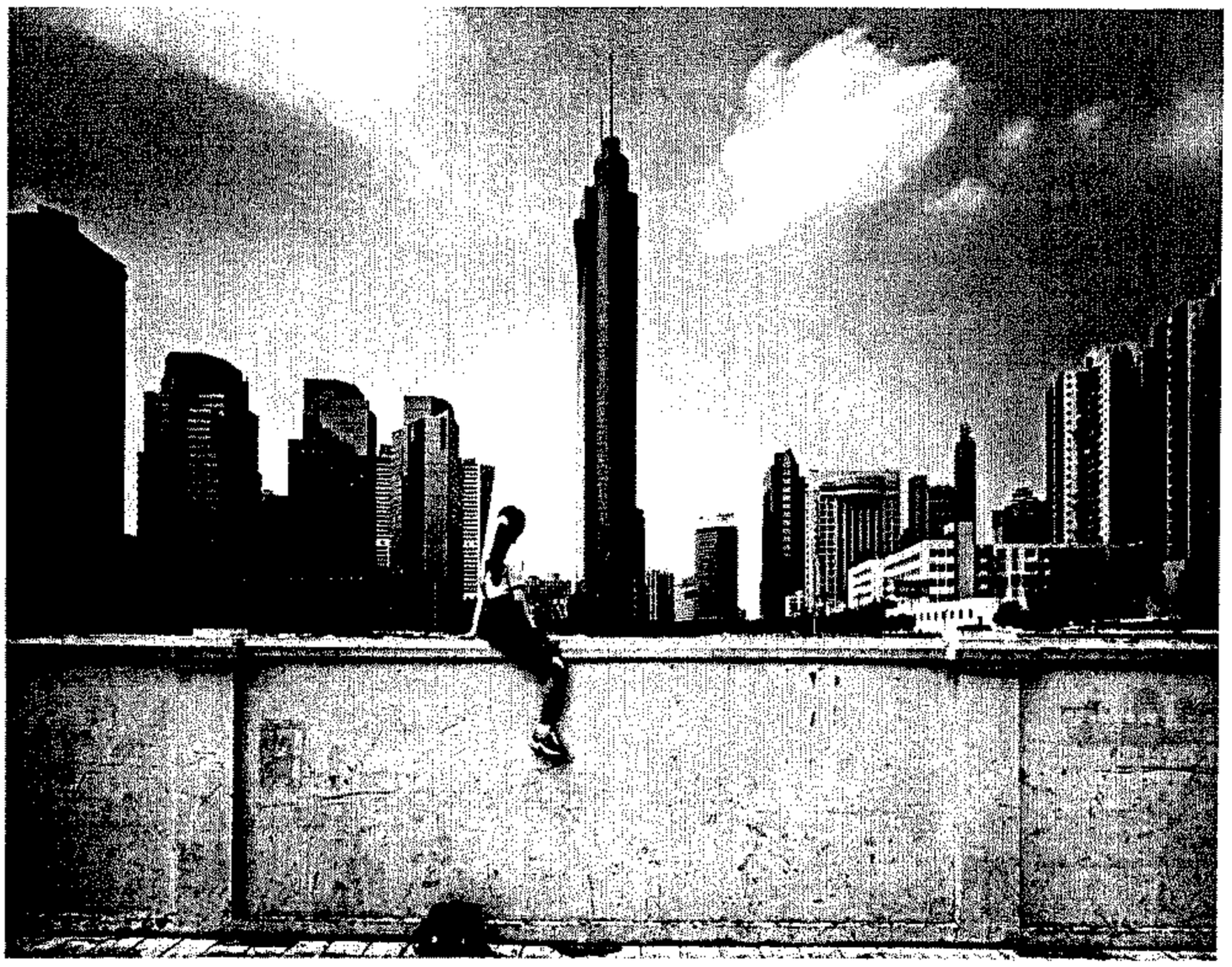
7.8 Zhu Ming, 26 July 2002, Detail of photograph censured by the Sharjah Art Museum during the 6th Sharjah International Art Biennale, United Arab Emirates, April-May, 2003



7.9 Ma Liuming, *Baby, No. 8*, 2004, Oil on canvas, 200x150 cm



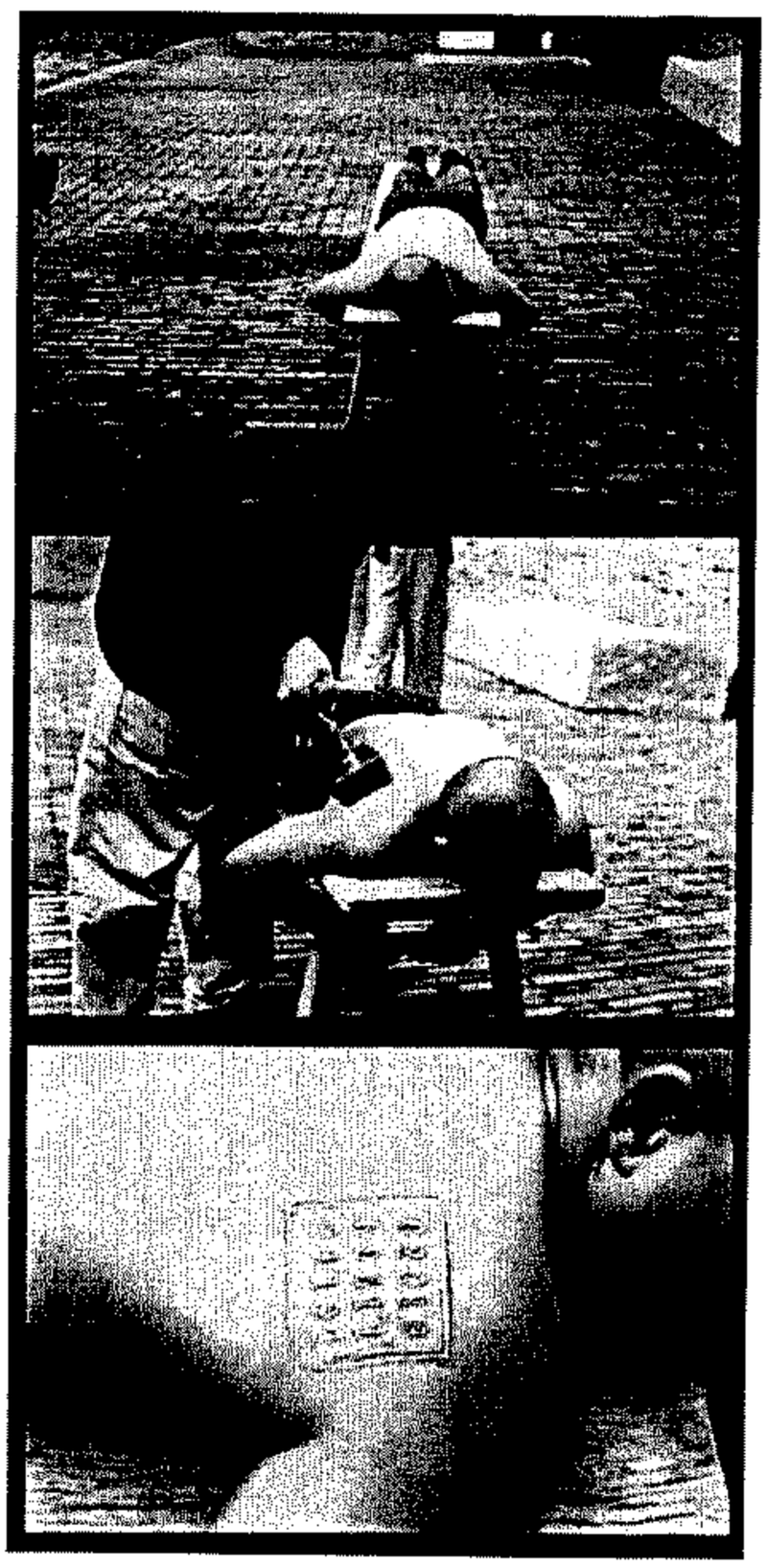
7.10 Cang Xin, *Between Man and Nature - Mountain*, 2003, Photograph of performance, Dimensions variable



7.11 Weng Fen, *At the Wall in Shenzhen No. 1*, 2002, Photograph, Dimensions variable



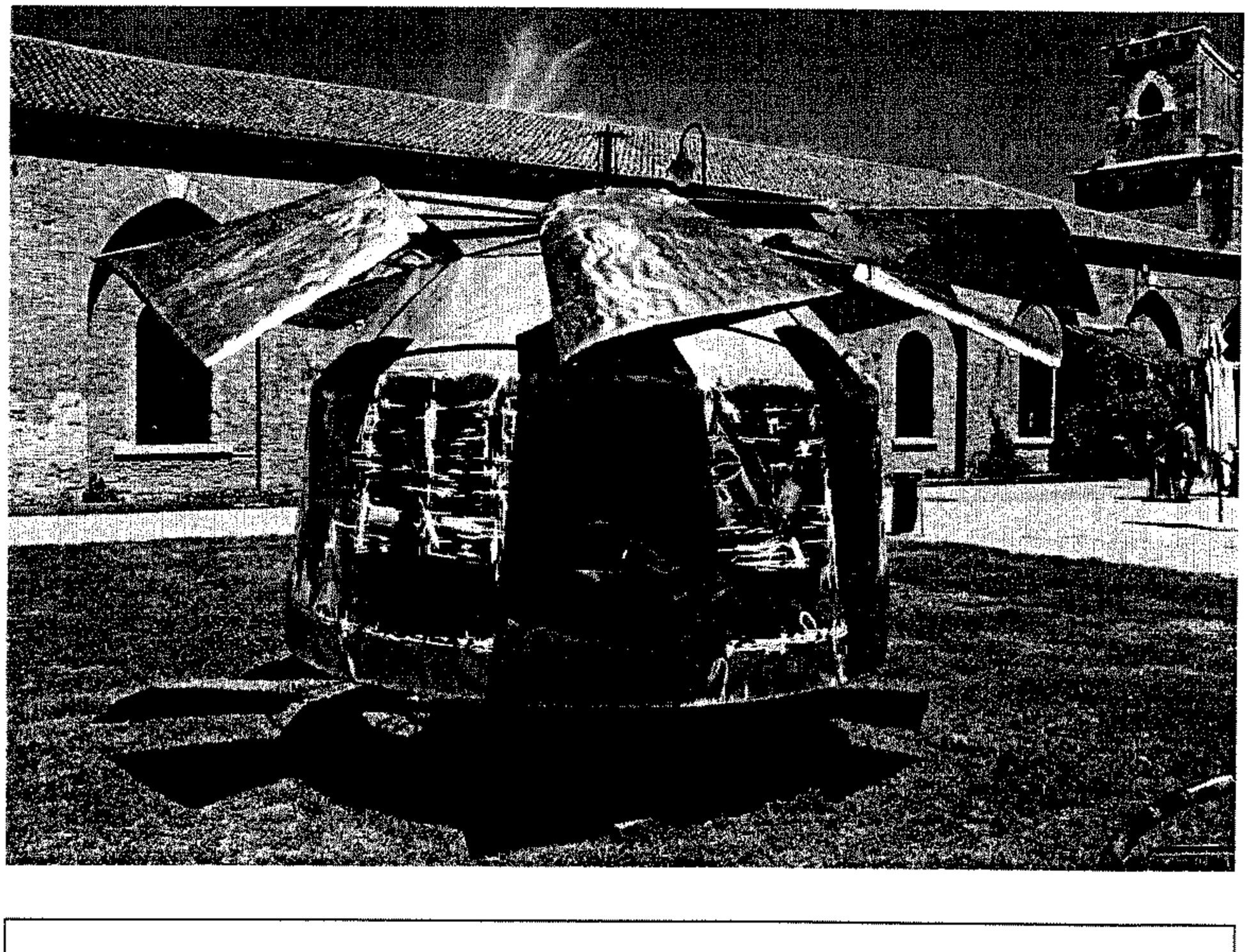
7.12 Zhu Yu, *Skin Graft*, 24 March 2000 and 12 April 2000, Performance, Beijing



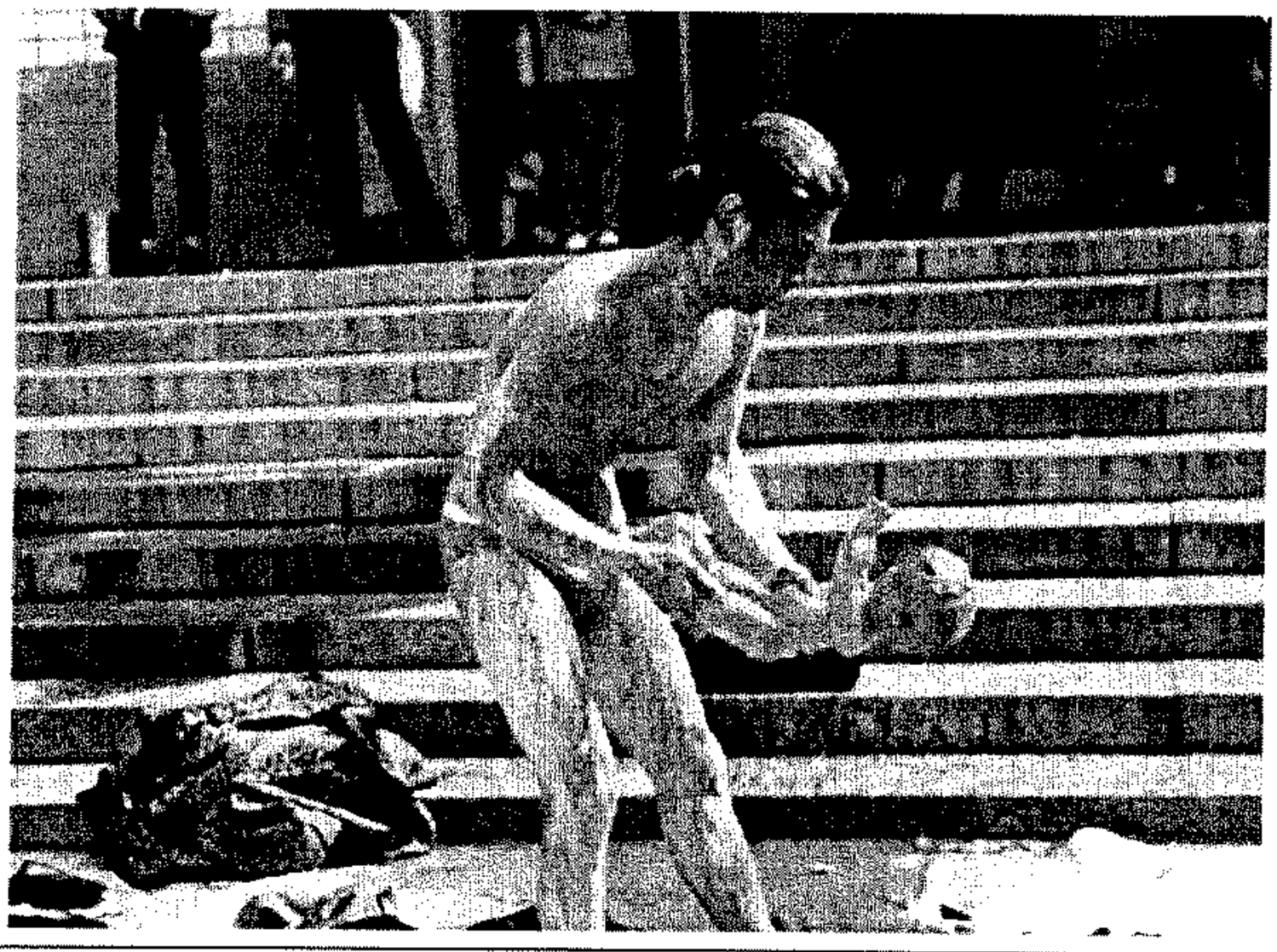
7.13 Yang Zhichao (with Ai Weiwei), *Iron*, 9 October 2000, Performance, Ai Weiwei Studio, Caocangdi, Beijing



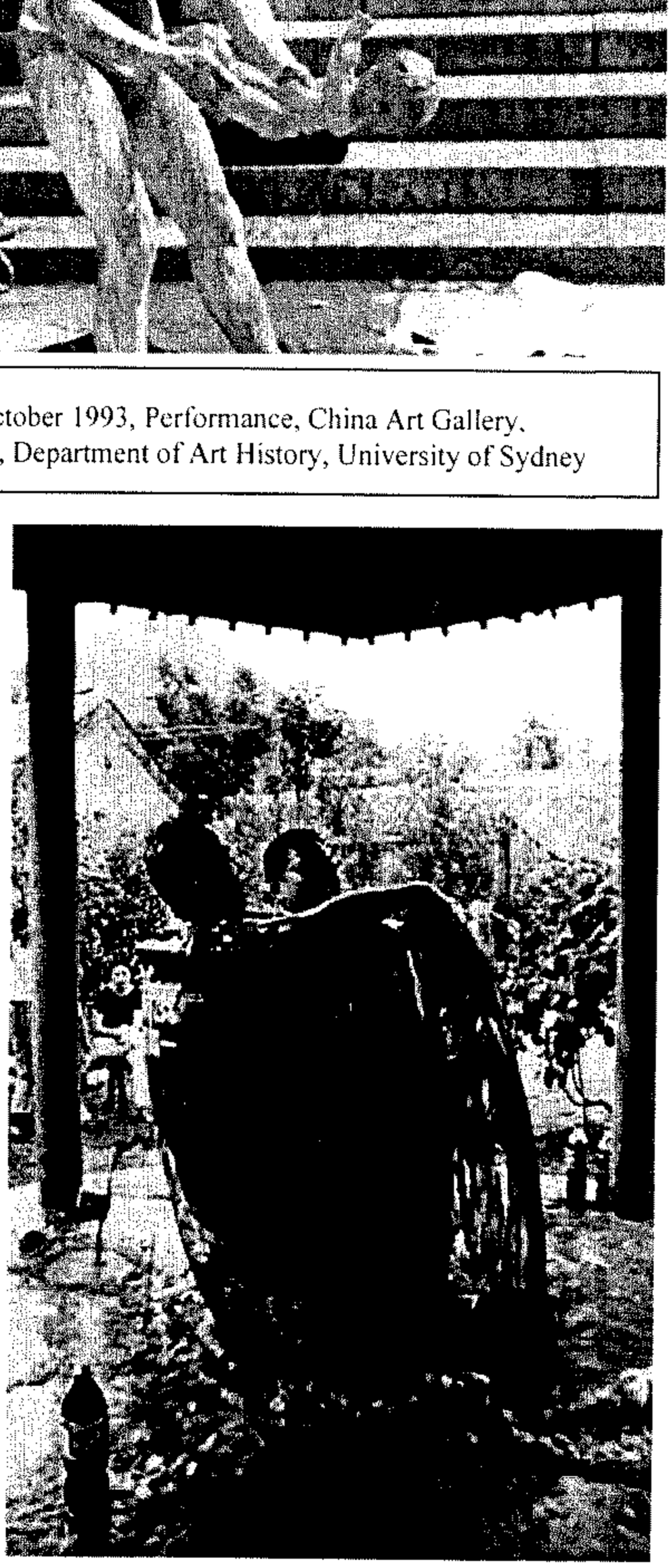
7.14 Yang Zhichao (with Ai Weiwei), *Hide*, 31 July 2002, Performance, Ai Weiwei Studio, Caocangdi, Beijing



7.15 Sun Yuan & Peng Yu, *Unidentified Flying Objects*, 2005, Installation at the 52nd Venice Biennale, 600x250x600 cm, Photograph by: John Clark



7.16 Zhang Huan, *Angel*, 26 October 1993, Performance, China Art Gallery, Beijing. Source: Image Library, Department of Art History, University of Sydney



7.17 Liu Jin, *Coca Cola Bath*, 28 August 2000, Performance, West Siduhe Village, Huairou County, Beijing Municipality, Part of the 1st Open Platform - International Performance Art Festival (Organized by Chen Jin, Shu Yang and Zhu Ming)

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Chen Guang, 5 December 2001, Approx. 2.5 hrs, Artist Home, Tongxian, Tongzhou

Chen Wenbo, 7 December 2001, Approx. 3 hrs, Artist Home, Huajiadi, Beijing

Gao Feng, 5 December 2002, Approx. 3 hrs, Artist Home, Tongxian, Tongzhou County

Gao Brothers, 24 November 2002, Approx. 2 hrs, Restaurant, Moganshan Lu, Shanghai

Geng Jianyi, 14 December 2002, Approx. 30 min., *Synthetic Reality* Exhibition, Beijing

Gu Dexin, 8 July 2004, Approx. 2.5 hrs, Artist Home, Xixia He, Beijing

Guo Shirui, 11 December 2002, Aprox. 2 hrs, Artist Home, Beijing

He Yunchang, 8 November 2001, Approx. 3 hrs, Artist Home, Tongxian, Tongzhou

Li Shan, 13 December 2001, Approx. 1 hr, Artist Studio, Shanghai

Li Wei, 20 March 2004, Approx. 2.5 hrs, Artist Home, Tongxian, Tongzhou County

Ma Liuming, 30 November 2001, Approx. 2.5 hrs, Artist Home, Huajiadi, Beijing

Qiu Zhijie, 25 November 2001, Approx. 2 hrs, Artist Home, Huajiadi, Beijing

Song Dong, 16 November 2001, Approx. 3 hrs, Artist Home, Xidan, Beijing

Song Dong (with John Clark and Shao Yiyang), 19 September 2002, Approx. 1.5 hrs, Sydney

Song Yonghong, 9 December 2002, Approx. 3 hrs, Artist Studio, Huajiadi, Beijing

Wang Jianwei, 30 November 2001, Approx. 3 hrs, Artist Home, Andingmen, Beijing

Wang Jin, 15 November 2001, Approx. 1.5 hrs, Artist Home, Fuxingmen, Beijing

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APPENDIX I

A SELECTED CHRONOLOGY OF PERFORMANCE ART PRACTICES AND RELATED EVENTS IN CHINA 1979-1989

- **1979** January. Start of official diplomatic relations between the People's Republic of China and the Unites States of America. Deng Xiaoping paid an official visit to the United States.
- Beijing, March. Crackdown of the Democracy movement in China was marked by the arrest of Wei Jingsheng in Beijing. Wei was put on trial in December.
- Beijing. Hong Kong based artist Kwok Mang-Ho staged his *Plastic Bag Happenings in China* across different locations in Beijing. One of the locations is at the Great Wall, where he created an installation of balloons made from plastic bags across the wall. He also participated in an Art and Design exhibition at the Art & Crafts Institute in Beijing. During this time Kwok met with several artists in Beijing, including Huang Rui.
- Beijing, 27 September. First open-air exhibition by a group of artists who called themselves the Stars-Group, including the artists: Ai Weiwei, Wang Keping, Qu Leilei, Ma Desheng, Huang Rui, Zhong Ancheng, Yan Li, and Li Shuang, and others. Venues were the Beihai Park, north of the Forbidden City, and the gates surrounding the China Art Gallery, north of Wangfujing. On 28 September the exhibition was shut down by several dozens of police officers, followed on 29 September by an official announcement from the Cultural Bureau declaring the exhibition illegal.
- Beijing, 1 October. The complete Stars-Group led demonstrations at Xidan Democracy Wall, on the thirtieth anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China.
- Beijing, 30 October - 16 November. Fourth Congress of Chinese Writers and Artists. Important speeches and reports included: Deng Xiaoping, "Congratulatory Message to the Fourth Congress of Chinese Writers and Artists"; Mao Dun, "Emancipate Thought and Encourage Literary and Artistic Democracy; and Liu Binyan, "Man is the Aim Man is the Center".
- Beijing, 23 November - 2 December. The Stars-Group was invited to reopen their exhibition at the Huafang Studio in Beihai Park in Beihai Park, just north of the Forbidden City and not far

from the China Art Gallery. This could be realized with the help of Jiang Feng, an important artist and former director of the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing. The exhibition attracted approximately 200.000 visitors.

- **1980** Beijing, June/July. Twelve Stars-Group Artists: Ai Weiwei, Wang Keping, Huang Rui, Ma Desheng, Yan Li, Qu Leilei, Mao Lizi, Bo Yun, Zhong Ancheng, Shao Fei, and Li Shuang, set up the Stars Painters Society and registered with the Beijing Artists' Association.
- March. *Meishu* (*Fine Arts*) published a report on the Stars-Group by Li Xianting who was the staff reporter. In the report Li Xianting cited a quotation of the participating artist Qu Leilei, saying: "I think the essence of painting as art is the self expression of the artist." This quotation triggered the ongoing debate throughout most of the 1980s about 'self-expression' in China.
- Beijing, August. The Chairman of the Beijing Artists' Association, Jiang Feng, approved of an exhibition by the artists of the Stars Painters Society. The exhibition was held in two halls at the China Art Gallery.
- Beijing, 24 August - 7 September. First officially approved Stars exhibition was held at the China Art Gallery. It featured a total of 149 recent works and attracted over 1000.000 visitors. Hereafter many of the artists from the Stars Painters Society left China to live elsewhere. Notably Wang Keping, who moved to Paris, and Ai Weiwei, who moved to New York.
- October. *Meishu* (*Fine Arts*) published a paper by Wu Guanzhong of June 1960, in which he broke the taboo on the discussion of abstraction.

- **1981** February. *Meishu* (*Fine Arts*) published an article by the artist Zhong Ming, which discussed the concept of self-expression in painting practice in relation to the work of Jean-Paul Sartre.
- March. *Meishu* (*Fine Arts*) featured a three page article by the Chinese/ Italian modern painter Xiao Qin. The article was illustrated with a reproduction of a performance installation by the French artists duo Christo and Jean-Claude. This work showed how they had wrapped a section of the coast of Australia in cloth in 1969.
- Beijing, 12 April - 5 May. The China Art Gallery hosted an exhibition of expressionist German paintings.
- Shennongjia (Hubei Province). *Meishu* organized a national conference on art and art theory. Among the many participants there were also young critics who would later become important spokespersons for the '85 New Wave Movement.
- Beijing, August. An exhibition to commemorate the Sixtieth Anniversary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was held.
- Beijing, September. After the commemorative exhibition of the CCP, an exhibition of works from the Boston Museum of Fine Arts was held, which included American abstract expressionism.

- **1982** Beijing, September. Opening of the *Exhibition on 250 Years of French Painting* at the China Art Gallery in Beijing. The exhibition was one of the first where Chinese people could see a major overview-exhibition of foreign art, including many modern artworks by leading French artists. The exhibition attracted several hundred thousand visitors, including many Chinese artists.
- Beijing, 13 September. Death of Jiang Feng, who was the Chairman of the Chinese Artist's Association.

- Beijing, 15 September to 13 October. The China Art Gallery hosted the *250 Years of French Painting* exhibition.

- **1983** Beijing, January. Li Xianting, editor of the January issue of the influential art journal. *Meishu,* commissioned a series of essays discussing abstract art. He was criticized for this initiative and was removed from his position. In 1984 he ended all cooperation with the magazine entirely.

- Hangzhou (Zhejiang Province), January. Huang Yongping started to express his need to free himself from the doctrines of academic formalism. *Meishu* published an article by Huang Yongping in which he talked about some of his final exam works and how these had been created from 'practices of life'.

- June. The terms socialist humanism and alienation, brought to attention by social critics Wang Ruoshui and Su Shaozhi, had been officially replaced by the term 'spiritual pollution' after three months of heated debates amongst leading Chinese Communist Party cadres.

- Beijing, May. Start of the exhibition of works by Picasso at the China Art Gallery.

- Xiamen (Fujian Province), 12 September. A group of five artists, Jiao Yaoming, Lin Jiahua, Qian Xiaogang, and Xu Chengtou and in the leading role Huang Yongping, organized the *Exhibition of Five Artists* at the Cultural Palace. The exhibition showed installation works made from wood, scrap metal, electric cables, and plaster.

- Beijing, October. At the Second Plenum of the Twelfth Party Congress, held on 11 and 12 October, Deng Xiaoping delivered a speech in which he officially accused intellectuals, including writers and artists, who are "pandering to the low tastes of a section of their audiences" and "commercialize spiritual productions" of "occupying an unworthy place in the world of art." This speech marked the start of the Spiritual Pollution Campaign between October 1983 and the Summer of 1984.

- **1984** Harbin (Heilongjiang Province), September. Start of the Northern art group. Led by Shu Qun and Wang Guangyi the group promoted a rational approach to art and 'northern culture'.

- Summer. Ending of the Spiritual Pollution Campaign, marked by increasing liberalization in the production and distribution of cultural products in China.

- Hangzhou (Zhejiang Province). A group of graduates from the Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts in Hangzhou formed the Young Creator's Society (renamed the Pond Group in 1986). The group included artists Bao Jianfei, Geng Jianyi, Song Li, Zha Li, and Zhang Peili. In 1985 they organized the influential show *'85 New Space*, featuring a range of new directions in Chinese art.

- Lanzhou (Gansu Province), December. A group of five local artists set up the exhibition *Exploration, Discovery, and Expression*, in which they associated themselves with the Stars Group. The artists featured in the exhibition were Cheng Li, Cao Yong, Liu Zheng, Wang Jian, and Xiang Ping.

- **1985** February. An essay in *Waiguo Meixue* (*Foreign Aesthetics*) by Shao Dazhen initiated a discussion on the role of postmodernism in art in China. The author described a range of art trends in the West since the 1960s, and stated that the use of the term 'postmodernism' to describe these trends was 'ridiculous'. According to him the term was merely an extremist view, which was being applied in confronting a 'unilateral development of Modernism'. The article was republished in November 1986 in the *Zhongguo Meishubao* (*China Art Newspaper*).

- Xiamen (Fujian Province). March - April. Huang Yongping created a series of seven 'non-expressionist' paintings. 'Intermediary machines' or 'small turntables' randomly determined each type of brush, color of ink and direction of each of the randomly placed brush strokes.

- Beijing, June. A series of action performances at the Central Academy of Fine Arts by postgraduate students from the Central Academy of Fine Arts in collaboration with visiting art students from the École National des Beaux-Arts.
- Beijing, 3 June. *Zhongguo Meishubao* (*China Art Newspaper*) was launched at the Cultural Palace of Nationalities and published its first issue on the 5th of July. The chief-editor was Liu Xiaochun and the young art critic Zhang Qiang, head of the editorial board. The newspaper became the leading publication for 'new trends' in modern Chinese art in the following four years. It was forced to close down in 1989.
- Guangzhou (Guangdong Province). A group of artists, writers, musicians and film directors found the Southern Art Salon. Important members included visual artists such as Wang Du and Lin Yilin.
- Beijing, November - December. On 15 November Robert Rauschenberg's *ROCI China* exhibition opened at the China Art Gallery. For three weeks the exhibition attracted approximately 300.000 visitors from all over China, including many artists. It closed on the 5th of December.
- Autumn. Growing social unrest in China was marked by student demonstrations in different cities in China such as Beijing and Hangzhou. During these demonstrations astrophysicist Fang Lizhi held a series of controversial speeches in which he challenged students to "break all barriers" that prevented intellectual awareness and creativity.
- Hangzhou (Zhejiang Province), Winter. Artist Wang Qiang staged, what can be considered as one of the first private performance works and is titled *After Hour Artist.* He posed as a living statue, wore a suit covered entirely in paint and plaster and had his head wrapped in white cloth.
- Hangzhou (Zhejiang Province), 2 December. The exhibition *New Space '85* was held at the art gallery of the Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts. This had been organized by the Young Creator's Society, which consisted of fourteen artists including Zhang Peili, Geng Jianyi, Wang Qiang, Song Ling and Bao Jianfei. Wang Qiang showed an installation, which was accompanied by a performance called *After Hour Artist.*
- Changsha (Hunan Province), 25 December. Start of an exhibition by Group Zero in the Martyrs Park.
- Taiyuan (Shanxi), 31 December. Opening of the *Three Step Studio Exhibition*, featuring works by Liu Chun, Ma Jianzhong, Qu Yan, Song Yongping, Wang Jiping, Wang Yazhong, and Zeng Lin. Several hours after the opening local officials enforced the closure of the exhibition.
- Hangzhou, December. *A History of Modern Chinese Painting* by Li Xiaoshan and Zhang Xiaosha was published by Jiangsu Fine Arts Press. The book was perceived as the first major publication on modern Chinese painting.

- **1986** A Chinese translation of Jerzy Grotowski's famous book *Towards A Poor Theatre* was published in China. This would inspire several artists around the nation to create new visual structures that applied some form of performance action.
- Hangzhou (Zhejiang Province), February. A group of artists who graduated at the Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts in Hangzhou in 1983 formed the 70%Red, 25%White, 5% Black Group (also known as the Red Humor Group). They staged a series of exhibitions showing installation and performance works in Zhoushan City and in Hangzhou. Participants in the group included Huang Jian, Lu Haizhou, Lu Xiaoyao, Ni Haifeng, Song Chenghua, and Wu Shanzhuan.
- Lanzhou (Gansu Province), 4 May. A group of graduate art students led by Yang Zhichao staged their first public performance action in the streets of Lanzhou, marking the 67th year anniversary of the May Fourth Movement, which was celebrated as the May Fourth Day of Youth.

- Guangzhou (Guangdong Province), 14 May. A group of young artists, critics, writers, filmmakers, and performing artists set up the Southern Artist's Salon at the Guangzhou Municipal Youth Palace.
- Hangzhou (Zhejiang Province), 27 May. The name of the Young Creator's Society was changed into the Pond Group. The new name had been derived from the notion that 'art is like a pond that contains the conditions for human experience'. Artists included Bao Jianfei, Geng Jianyi, Guan Ying, Song Ling, Wang Qiang, and Geng Jianyi.
- Hangzhou (Zhejiang Province), June. The artists from the Pond Group created their first public artwork *Yangshi Taiji Series* at the main surrounding wall of the art academy. The work featured human figures, created out of white carton board, performing Chinese *taiji* boxing- movements.
- Shandong Province, June. Artists from the Black Union group staged a series of performances in Shandong, which included strong references to the ideas of 'suffering' and 'self cruelty'. In one of the performances, *Stretcher Series,* one of the artists was put in a self-made *cangue.*
- Nanjing (Jiangsu Province), June. Several artists set up a Surrealist Art Group, which included Chai Xiaogang, Ding Fang, Guan Ce, Shen Qin, Xu Lei, Xu Yihui, and Yang Zhilin.
- Lianyungang Economic and Technological Development Zone (Jiangsu Province), Summer. Xu Yihui and Cai Xiaogang staged their performance *Archeological Excavations on a Waste Disposal Site*, during which one of the artists was holding up a skull.
- Nanjing (Jiangsu Province), 7 August. A group of 100 young artist organized a public art exhibition at the Xuanwu Park featuring more than 700 works, including paintings, sculptures, installations, and performances. A second exhibition took place on the 5th of October.
- Zhuhai (Guandong Province), August. A group of forty artists, critics, editors and theoreticians gathered at a symposium in Zhuhai. They viewed a slide show, which consisted of a selection of 342 pieces from a collection of 1100 works by artists from the '85 New Wave Movement. Several papers presented at the conference initiated heated discussions amongst the participants. During the symposium the decision was made to organize a large overview exhibition of Chinese modern art in the 1980s.
- Guangzhou (Guandong Province), September. The Southern Art Salon organized its first experimental exhibition in the shape of a theatrical performance action show, in the main hall of the Guangzhou Zhongshan High School. A full report on the event was published in the *Zhongguo Meishu Bao* (*Fine Arts Newspaper*).
- Xiamen (Fujian Province), Late September. Three years after staging their first exhibition *Events* in Xiamen in 1983, Huang Yongping and Ji Tairan assembled a group of ten artists who called themselves the Xiamen Dada group. Artists included Huang Yongping and Ji Tairan, Jiao Yaoming, Cai Lixiong, Li Yuenian, Li Xiang, Lin Jiahua, Lin Chun, and Wu Yanping.
- Xiamen (Fujian Province), Early October. The Xiamen Dada group staged their *Xiamen Dada* performance action outside the Xiamen New Art Gallery. They marked the end of their exhibition at the gallery by burning all their artworks.
- Taiyuan (Shanxi Province), 4 November. Artists Song Yongping and Song Yonghong staged their theatrical performance art show *A Scenic Personal Experience* at the Shanxi Taiyuan Cultural Palace. The performance attracted several dozens of people, including artists and members of the local community.
- Hangzhou (Zhejiang Province), 4 November. The artists from the Pond Group created their second public space artwork, *The Performer Amidst the Green Colored Empty Space*. Again the work consisted of human figures created out of white carton board performing Chinese boxing-movements. This time the figures were placed in the local Xuanwu Park, where every morning many people did their own *Taiji* exercises.
- Hangzhou (Zhejiang Province). Winter. Geng Jianyi exhibited his provocative installation *Running Waterworks*, in which the public was invited to sit on four chairs in a white box facing

north, south, east and west. Others could watch the people sitting on the chairs from the outside through peek-holes in the walls.

- Hangzhou (Zhejiang Province). Wu Shanzhuan staged his first public performance in his *Red Humor Series*, titled *Red Humor No. 1: Today No Water*.

- Shanghai, 12 - 13 October. Zhang Guoliang, Ding Yi and Qin Yifeng staged two series of performance pieces, in which they wrapped themselves in silk. The first piece was held at Wusongkou Wharf in Shanghai. The other performances were held at a coffee shop across from the Shanghai Fine Art Academy, the gate of the Huadong Zhengfa School, and the streets adjacent to the newly opened Peoples Hotel and the Bright River Hotel in Honqiao District.

- Luoyang (Zhejiang Province), 2 November. Zhang Peili and Geng Jianyi staged their performance piece *Wrapping Up - King and Queen* in which they wrapped themselves in newspaper.

- November - December. A year after his first series of speeches, astrophysicist Fang Lizhi, again traveled to universities in China and presented further views of how students should 'break barriers' by challenging authority and demand that human rights should be in the hands of each citizen.

- Beijing, December. Guan Yao, student at the Central Academy of Fine Arts conducted a performance at the Beijing University Festival of Literature and Arts, in which he wrapped himself and members from the audience in cloth.

- December. Across China students held several demonstrations in cities such as Hefei, Wuhan, Xi'an, Beijing, Shanghai, Shandong, Shenzhen, and Kunming.

- Shanghai, 22 November - 1 December. Start of the *Exhibition Full of Bumps and Holes* featured works by 16 local artists, including Ding Yi, Li Shan, and Yu Youhan.

- Shanghai, 21 December. The M Art Group staged a series of performances at the Shanghai Cultural Workers Palace, which include violent references. The group was being led by Song Haidong and included Qin Yifeng, Tang Guanming, Yang Dongbai, Yang Xu, and Zhou Tiehai. Approximately 200 people attended the performances, which included *Work - The Same Wasteful Objects as Smashing Women's Make-up Products* by Song Haidong, *Pantomime Style* by Yang Dongbai, *Ceremony* by Tang Guangming, and *Sense of Violence* by Yang Xu and Zhou Tiehai.

- Beijing, 23 December. A group of art students led by Sheng Qi, Kang Mu, Zheng Yuke, Zhang Jianjun and Zhao Jianhai from the Central Academy of Fine Arts and the Central Academy of Industrial Design, staged their first series of performance actions, called *Concept 21 - Art Before Your Eyes* at the Beijing University campus. Other artists who attended the performance included Zhu Qingsheng, Kong Chang'an, Fan Di'an, Han Ning, and Ding Bin.

- **1987** Beijing, 9 January. Fang Lizhi, Liu Binyan and Wang Ruowang are expelled from the Chinese Communist Party. The event marked the start of student protests at Tiananmen Square, which were followed by the start of a second campaign against Bourgeois Liberalization.

- 16 January. The official resignation of Hu Yaobang as general secretary of the Chinese Communist Party. Zhao Ziyang was appointed as the new general secretary of the Chinese Communist Party several months later, but Hu Yaobang remained a popular leader among many Chinese intellectuals.

- Changchun (Jilin Province). The Northern Art Group staged their first Biennial exhibition at Jilin Art College. Participating artists in the event included Liu Yan, Ren Jian, Shu Qun, and Wang Guangyi.

- Beijing, 21-26 March. Art critic and independent curator Wen Pulin organized *An Art Show by Wen Pulin* at the Beijing International Art Showroom. The exhibition featured 79 works including photography, video, and installation. The 80th piece was a performance of the wedding ceremony of Wen Pulin and Zheng Ziru, which marked the opening of the show.

- Beijing, 25-26 March. Meetings were taking place to discuss the opening of a series of modern art exhibitions that were initially planned for Zhuhai in August 1986. On the 4th of April the Chinese Communist Party propaganda department prohibited any further meetings.
- Beijing, Spring. Chinese rock singer Cui Jian produced his first album *Rock'N'Roll on the New Long March*, featuring the Beijing Philharmonic Orchestra. The album was perceived as China's first major rock record. In the following years Cui Jian would stage several concerts, which attracted large groups of mainly young people.
- Lianyungang Economic and Technological Development Zone (Jiangsu Province), 1-5 May. Artist Sheng Jun, who was a member of the Outer Space Art Base staged a durational event *Returning Art to Life* on the streets of the city. During the event Sheng Jun and some of his artist friends made portraits of people in the street and staged performances.
- Shanxi Province, Spring to Autumn. A group of artists led by Song Yongping organized the *Country Project* in which they moved to the countryside to produce artworks and to show these to the local villagers in open-air exhibitions.
- Summer. After the student demonstrations in December 1986 and the resignation of Hu Yaobang, Vice-Premier Li Peng announced his tough stance on educational policies at schools and universities across China. New rules and regulations of the educational curriculum focused particularly on readjustment of the content of the so-called 'liberal art courses.'
- Tibet, Summer. Artist Wang Deren traveled to Tibet where he staged a series of performances in a mountain range close to Lhasa City. One of his performances was *Canon of Beckoning Spiritual Appearance.*
- Nanjing (Jiangsu Province), August. Start of the exhibition *The First Relay* by the Red Brigade Group at the Najing Institute of Fine Arts, featuring artists Ding Fang, Chai Xiaogang, Cao Xiaodong, Guan Ce, Xu Lei, Xu Yihui, and Yang Zhilin.
- Beijing, Gubeikou Great Wall, Autumn. The Concept 21st Century Group led by Sheng Qi, Kang Mu, Zheng Yuke, Zhang Jianjun and Zhao Jianhai, staged its second performance, *Concept 21st Century - The Great Wall,* on top of the Great Wall at Gubeikou, 128 kilometers north from the city center of Beijing. Motto of the performance: "If you haven't been to the Great Wall you are not a true man".
- 6-7 November. An academic conference was held on the "History of Chinese Modern Painting".
- Xiamen (Fujian Province), 12 December. Artist Huang Yongping completed his provocative installation "The History of Chinese Painting" and "A Concise History of Modern Art" After Two Minutes in the Washing Machine, Dec. 1st, 1987.

- **1988** Beijing, 4 January. French performance artist Arman staged a performance at the Great Hall of the People in which he destroyed piano materials. The performance was part of the 1988 international project Saving Venice and Restoring the Great Wall.
- Beijing, February. *Meishu* (*Art Monthly*) had organized a forum to discuss the distinction between 'tradition' and 'modernity' in art, featuring Beijing-based art critics Gao Minglu, Lang Shaojun, Liu Xiaochun, Shao Dazhen, Shen Peng, and Shui Tainzhong.
- Guangzhou (Guangdong Province), December. Hou Hanru and Yang Jiechang staged their performance *Words and Men* at the Sun Yatsen Library.
- Beijing, March. Artist Wang Deren staged the performance *The Third Series, No.2: Art Revolution Drill* at Beijing University.
- Beijing, May. Kang Mu, Sheng Qi, Zhao Jianhai, and Zheng Yuke staged their second performance *Concept 21st Century* at the Great Wall near Gubeikou.

- Hangzhou, June. Zhang Peili had completed his art project *Brown Cover Book, No. 1*, which consisted of a series of dialogues by mail with students at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing.
- Beijing, June. *Meishu* (*Art Monthly*) contained an editorial, which discussed the term 'Chinese avant-garde' as an indicator of the artists' awareness of new developments in art. However the term should also reflect the distinctiveness in local cultures of China.
- June and August. First and second broadcasts of the television series *Heshang* (*Deathsong of the River*). Producers Su Xiaokang and Wang Luxiang openly criticized Chinese traditional civilization and many of its major symbols such as the Yellow River and the Great Wall. The television series attracted millions of Chinese viewers.
- Wuhan (Hubei Province), September. Artist Wei Guangqing staged a series of performances together with his student Ma Liuming *Suicide Project.* He was inspired by Albert Camus' opening-sentence of his famous book *The Myth of Sisyphus* which states that "[t]here is but one truly serious philosophical problem and that is suicide."
- Wuhan (Hubei Province), Autumn. Ma Liuming assisted Wei Guangqing in creating one of the first major performance works ever held in post-Mao China that focuses on the body. After this Ma Liuming continued and staged his first private body art performance at the campus of the Hubei Academy of Fine Arts.
- Beijing/ Great Wall, 15 - 16 October 1988. The Concept 21st Century Group, led by Sheng Qi, Kang Mu, Zheng Yuke, Zhang Jianjun and Zhao Jianha, staged its third major performance action called *Concept 21 – Taqi.* This third production was held at different locations in the City such as the Exhibition Hall of Ancient Astronomical Instruments. The group had chosen the site that was originally an observatory, which was built around 1279 in the center-east of Beijing at the Ming Tombs on the outskirts north of the city and which then had been relocated to the Great Wall.
- Beijing, October. Solo exhibition of artists Xu Bing Lü Shengzhong. This is the first time that Xu Bing exhibited his famous work *A Mirror to Analyze the World* (later re-titled *Book from the Sky*).
- Beijing, October. Founding of the Organization Committee for the *Exhibition on Modern Chinese Art*. Head of the committee was Gao Minglu and appointed committee members were Gan Yang, Zhang Yaojun, Liu Dong, Liu Xiaochun, Zhang Zuying, Li Xianting, Tang Qingnian, Yang Lihua, Zhou Yan, Fan Di'an, Wang Mingxian, Kong Chang'an, Fei Daiwei and Liu Xiaochun.
- Beijing, November. Wu Wenguang started to film a group of five artists who were living in an artists' village near the Old Summer Palace in the northwest of the city. A year later the film was completed and became known as the first independent documentary film produced in the PRC, under the title *Bumming in Beijing*.
- Shanghai, December. Artists Li Shan, Sun Liang and Pei Jing, Song Haidong and Zhou Changjiang, together with the art critics Li Xianting and Wu Liang, staged their performance action *The Last Supper*.
- Beijing, December. Proposals for the upcoming *China Modern Art Exhibition* (*Zhongguo Xiandai Meishuzhan*), or otherwise known as the *China/ Avant-Garde* exhibition at the China Art Gallery in Beijing had started. Huang Yongping presented his humorous performance proposal *Towing the China National Art Gallery Away*. The proposal was not accepted.
- Beijing, 22-28 December. *An Exhibition of Oil Paintings of the Nude* was held at the China Art Gallery. This is the first national art event featuring the nude in 135 oil paintings by 28 artists working at the Central Academy of Fine Arts. The exhibition attracted over 200.000 visitors, and was widely reported in local and international media. On 27 December the exhibition committee for the show organized *A Conference of Body Culture* at the Gallery.

- **1989** Hong Kong, 12 January – 19 February. The Hanart II Art Gallery hosted the exhibition *10 Years of the Stars*. Works by A Cheng, Ai Weiwei, Bo Yun, Huang Rui, Ma Desheng, Mao Lizi, Li Shuang, Shao Fei, Qu Leilei, Wang Leping, Yan Li, and Yang Yiping were shown in the exhibition.

- Beijing, 5 February. The official opening of the *China Modern Art Exhibition*, or *China/ Avant-Garde* exhibition at the China Art Gallery in Beijing. Performance works included Wei Du, *Title Unknown* (Living Sculpture); Wang Lang, *Title Unknown* (Living Sculpture); Wang Deren, *Avoiding Pregnancy*; Gu Xiong, *Interior View - Fence Wall*; Wu Shanzhuan, *Big* Business; Zhang Nian, *Hatching Eggs*; *Li* Shan, *Washing Feet*; and Tang Song and Xiao Lu, *Dialogue*. In this performance Xiao Lu fired a gun, aiming at their installation. This caused the exhibition to be temporarily closed until the next day and it was reopened for a select audience for only a few days. Eventually the entire exhibition had been cancelled. Reports indicated that besides from the shooting incident, all performance pieces in the exhibition attributed to its entire cancellation.

- Beijing, 10 February. The *China Modern Art Exhibition* reopened at the China Art Gallery in Beijing, and closed again on 14 February, after alleged bomb threats were send to several official institutions in Beijing, including to the China Art Gallery. On 17 February the exhibition was completely cancelled.

- Beijing, Late February. After the final closure of the *China Modern Art Exhibition,* a large group of artists and art critics gathered in a local bar in Beijing to hear Wei Jingsheng speak about setting up a democracy movement in China. Many of the participants in this meeting signed a petition drawn up by Wei Jingsheng in which he advocated a democratic China. Beijing, March. The Institute of Foreign Affairs at the China Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing hosted an official forum, which discussed the events surrounding the *China Modern Art Exhibition.* Participants were a select group of people, involved in the organization and included Fan Di'an, Guo Hongan, Tang Xuezhi, Tong Daoming, Ye Tingfang, Zheng Enbo, and Zhu Hong.

- Summer. After the closure of *China Modern Art Exhibition* several leading artists left China. Huang Yongping moved to Paris and marked the end of events surrounding the group of five artists in Xiamen during the second half of the 1980s.

- Beijing, 16 April. Days after the death of former Party general secretary Hu Yaobang, students from several universities gathered at Tiananmen Square to commemorate him. These events marked the beginning of the 1989 student demonstrations that took place at Tiananmen Square and in other cities across China throughout the spring of 1989 and ended on June 4th.

- Paris (France), 18 May - 14 August. Exhibition *Les Magiciens de la terre* was held at the Centre Georges Pompidou and was curated by Jean Hubert Martin. Prior to the opening of the exhibition, Huang Yongping, who had been invited to participate, moved to Paris were he lived and worked until the present.

- Beijing, 4 June. Military crackdown of the student demonstrations at Tiananmen.

- Beijing, July. *Meishu* (*Fine Arts*) published a dialogue between Fan Di'an and Hou Hanru about performance art.

APPENDIX II

A SELECTED CHRONOLOGY OF PERFORMANCE ART PRACTICES AND RELATED EVENTS IN CHINA 1990-1999

- **1990** Beijing, 1 January. Formal closure of the *Zhongguo Meishubao* (*China Art Newspaper*) after publication of a "Notice Concerning the Decision to Seize Publication" by the Ministry of Culture. Between 1985 and 1989 233 issues of the *China Art Newspaper* had been published. The editorial staff included Zhang Qiang, Shui Tianzhong, Lu Xiaochun, Liu Huimin, Zhang Zuying, Yang Gengxin, Zhai Mo, Tao Yongbai, Li Xianting, Chen Weihe, Gao Minglu, Wang Zhichun, Cai Rong, Xu Encun, Ding Fang, Cai Xingyi, Lang Shaojun, Zhang Huiming, Wang Yuchi, Niu Kecheng, Xiao Mo, Wang Yong, Wang Duanyan, Liao Wen, Bao Pei, and Chen Weiwei.

- Beijing, January. Reports of the emergence of an artist village at Yuanmingyuan, near the Summer Palace in the Northeast of the City. International attention for the artists who had settled in the village increases during the years between 1990 and 1992.

- Beijing, May. With the help of fifteen assistants, Xu Bing created his second major installation *Ghost Pounding on the Wall* on which they had spent three weeks of making ink rubbings from a large section of the Great Wall. It took 3 months to complete the final installation, which consisted of 1300 sheets of paper measuring a total of 1500 sq. meters.

- Hangzhou (Zhejiang Province), June. Qiu Zhijie commenced his performance project *One Thousand Times Repetitive Writing*, in which he had created a series of abstract calligraphy scrolls by repetitively writing the Lantingxu sutra on the same piece of silk. He continued repeating this procedure over a period of four years, between 1990 and 1994 and finally created a total of 1000 scrolls.

- Beijing, 4 July. The Aesthetics Department of the China Research Institute invited more than 80 local art theorists and reporters to take part in a conference on Vincent van Gogh, featuring visual material provided by the Dutch Embassy in Beijing. The event was followed by the start of the

Commemorative Exhibition for the 100th Anniversary of van Gogh, which was held from 21 to 26 July at the China Art Gallery. The exhibition featured oil paintings by artists based in Beijing. During the course of the 1990s van Gogh's works had been of major influence to many artists in China, including performance artists who often mentioned the van Gogh's action in cutting one of his ears.

Pourriéres (France), 7 July. The start of the exhibition *Chine: Demain pour hier*. Curated by Fei Dawei the exhibition featured works by artists who had moved from China in the late 1980s, including Huang Yongping, Chen Zhen, Yan Peiming, Yang Jiechang, Gu Wenda, and Cai Guoqiang. The exhibition was accompanied by a forum discussing the "Intercultural Misunderstanding and the Illusion of the Other". It included the speakers Cai Guoqiang, Chiba Shigeo, Fei Dawei, Hou Hanru, Huang Yongping, Monica DeMatte, Wu Mali, and Yves Michaud.

Shenzhen Special Economic Zone (Guandong Province), Winter. Wang Chuan staged a solo performance titled *Black Dot* at the Shenzhen Art Gallery.

- Beijing, December. A group of artists organized an exhibition at the Contemporary Art Gallery with the title *Northeast: Reality and Illusion*. The exhibition was canceled several hours before the opening.

- **1991** 14 January. Curated by Richard Strassberg, the exhibition *I Don't Want to Play Cards with Cézanne and Other Works: Selections from the Chinese 'New Wave' and Avant-Garde of the Eighties* was opened at the Asia Pacific Art Museum in Pasadena, California. The exhibition featured works by Chen Haiyan, Dai Hengyang, Geng Jianyi, Li Luming, Lü Shengzhong, Mao Xuhui, Xu Bing, Yu Hong, Xiao Peichang, Yao Yangguang, Ye Yongqing, Zeng Xiaofeng, Zhang Peili, Zhang Xiaogang, Zou Jianping. The opening of the event was accompanied by a series of lectures on Chinese contemporary art.

- Guangzhou (Guangdong Province), 29 January to 2 April. The Big Tail Elephant Group staged their first annual exhibition at the Guangzhou City First Cultural Palace. The participating artists were Chen Shaoxiong, Liang Juhui, Lin Yilin, and Xu Tan.

- Taiwan. Art historian Wu Mali conducted a Chinese translation of a study by H. Stachelhaus on *Joseph Beuys*. The translation was widely distributed amongst artists in Mainland China and many drew inspiration from this publication. Among them is the Beijing-based Wang Jianwei, who after studying the book abandoned painting and began to focus his work on mixed media installations with a reference to the concept of the 'social sculpture' that had been introduced by Beuys.

- Beijing, 29 May. Opening of an exhibition of new works by Geng Jianyi and Zhang Peili at the Diplomatic Missions Restaurant.

- Luoyang (Henan Province), 1-8 May. The *Zhixing Studio Exhibition* took place and featured works by a group of local artists including paintings by Zhuang Hui, who would play an important role in the experimental art scene in Beijing during the 1990s.

- Beijing, 9 June. Opening of the exhibition *New Generation*, curated by Yin Ji'nan and others at the Chinese History Museum.

- Beijing, 28-30 June. The gallery of Beijing's China Painting Research Institute hosted a conference titled *West Third Ring Road Art Research Documents, Part I.* Local art critic and curator Leng Lin organized the event. It featured documents of 45 artists from across China who discussed the role of contemporary art in China and its relation to the 'Euramerican cultural hegemony'.

- Fukuoka (Japan), 28 August – 29 September. The Fukuoka Museum hosted the exhibition *The Exceptional Passage of the Chinese Avant-garde*. Curated by Fei Daiwei the exhibition had been the first to represent works by the New Measurement Group in an international event, and featured Beijing based artists Wang Luyan, Chen Shaoping, and Gu Dexin.

- Shanghai, 22-24 November. In an underground garage at the Shanghai Education Convention Center a group of artists organized the exhibition *Garage '91*, featuring new experimental artworks.
- Beijing, 14 December. The Beijing Contemporary Art Museum, which is part of the Central Academy of Fine Arts, hosted the exhibition *Installations by Feng Mengbo and Zhang Bo*, but it was cancelled on the night before the opening.

- **1992** Shenzhen (Guangdong Province), 19 January. Deng Xiaoping had started his famous 'Southern Tour' from Shenzhen to Zhuhai, which were both thriving Special Economic Zones, and urged everyone in China to strive for further economic reform (instead of political reform). Deng's tour marked the end of the 1989 incidents at Tiananmen and the start of a growing consumer society in China.
- Beijing, May. The Beijing Art Museum hosted the exhibition *Paintings by Liu Wei and Fang Lijun*. Many paintings in the exhibition showed sarcastic views on everyday life in China, and would later be used by Li Xianting to describe a Cynical Realism movement in Chinese experimental art.
- Beijing, May. The *China Youth Daily* ran a report on the "The Artists' Village in the Ruins of Yuanmingyuan". Following the report, several foreign publications also started to mention the artists' village.
- Beijing, 29 May. The Beijing Diplomatic Missions Restaurant hosted an exhibition of works by the Hangzhou based artists Geng Jianyi and Zhang Peili. Two video pieces of Zhang Peili were featured in the event: *Water: Standard Pronunciation* and *Document on Hygiene*. Geng Jianyi displayed a series of paintings and installations. The exhibition was curated by the Italian art critic Francesca Dal Lago and Enrico Perle of the Italian Cultural Institute.
- Luoyang (Henan Province), Spring. Zhuang Hui produced his first series of photographs titled *In Service of the People* of factory workers, soldiers, and people at the main square of his native city Luoyang.
- Hangzhou, Summer. Qiu Zhijie completed his graduation installation piece, *New Life*, at the Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts. The installation was exhibited at the studios at the academy, and Qiu Zhijie was awarded the prestigious National Art Prize for this work.
- Beijing, June. Artists from the artists' village at Yuanmingyuan staged an open-air art exhibition in a local park near their studios.
- Shanxi Province, August. A group of artists in Shanxi started the *Countryside Project*, which led to a series of art events involving performances that were staged a year later, in 1993.
- Kassel (Germany), 13 September. Start of *Documenta IX*, featuring Chinese artists Li Shan, Sun Lang, Chou Deshu, Wang Youshen, Lü Shengzhong, and Ni Haifeng (who moved to Amsterdam in 1990).
- Beijing, September 20. Ni Wenhua and Wang Nanming staged two performances at the Beijing International Art Palace.
- Hunan Province, October. Hunan Art Press published two important books which presented an overview of Chinese contemporary art: *Zhongguo Xiandai Yishu, 1979-1989* (*Modern Chinese Art, 1979-1989*), edited by Lü Peng and Yi Dan; and *Zhongguo Dangdai Yishu Wenxian, 1990-91* (*Chinese Contemporary Art: Documents, 1990-91*).
- Guangzhou (Guangdong Province), October. At the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts, Sun Ping printed a series of stock market shares for his new company *China Sun Ping Art Co, Ltd.* This work *Issuing Shares* was commonly perceived as the start of a China Pop Movement. A prominent example of this movement was Wang Guangyi, who produced a series of paintings combining revolutionary propaganda images and advertisements of foreign consumer products, known as the *Great Criticism Series*.

- Guangzhou (Guangdong Province), 20 October. Opening of the *First Guangzhou Biennale of 1990s Art* at the Guangzhou Central Hotel Exhibition Center. The exhibition featured a total of 400 works, which included three performances. The first performance was organized by the SHS Art Group (Including: Hua Jiming, Han Liping, Li Ju, and Liu Gangshun) with the title *Twelve Colors*. It featured a series of 12 panels in white, yellow, green, red, brown, black colors, which were being painted by the artists during the opening. The second performance was Sun Ping selling the shares, which he had produced for his own 'one-man enterprise' *China Sun Ping Art Shares Limited Company*. Two types of shares were being sold: one red (*Renminbi A Share*), and one blue (*Renminbi B Share*). The third performance, *Disinfecting*, was conducted by the New History Group on 21 October.
- Guangzhou (Guangdong Province), 21-27 October. Coinciding with the *First Guangzhou Biennale of 1990s Art*, the Guangdong Broadcasting and Television University featured *A Joint Exhibition of Members of the Big Tail Elephant Group*, which would be known as the second annual exhibition of the group.
- Taiyuan (Shanxi Province), 3 December. A group of artists led by Song Yongping, Wang Yazhong and Li Jianwei staged their public performance *CHINA Shanxi Taiyuan, 1992.12.3.* They cycled around the city and used an excavator to crush several bicycles, thereby criticizing the June 4th military crackdown of the protests at Tiananmen Square.
- Beijing, 3 December. One of the student groups at Beijing University invited over 10 artists from Yuanmingyuan to hold an exhibition at the main pedestrian road on campus. Shortly after the start of the exhibition officials closed it down.
- Beijing, 8 December. After the events at Beijing University at the third of December, several artists from Yuanmingyuan were prevented from entering the campus of the People's University where they were preparing work for an exhibition. In response the artists held a brief protest demonstration at the main gate of the University.

- **1993** Hangzhou (Zhejiang Province), January. Zhang Peili organized a solo exhibition of his work entitled *Operating*. The exhibition featured the two video works *Homework Assignment, No. 1*, and *Document on Hygiene, No. 3*; the photograph *Continuous Reproduction*; and a mixed-media installation titled *Goods Not for Sale*.
- Beijing, 12 January. Opening of the Sino-Korean exchange exhibition *From Chang'an to Tiananmen – Art from Beijing and Korea* at the China Art Gallery.
- Berlin, 30 January. Start of the *China Avant-Garde* exhibition at the House of World Cultures in Berlin by Hans van Dijk, Andreas Schmidt, and Jochen Noth. After Berlin, the exhibition traveled to different venues in Europe including: the Kunsthal Art Museum in Rotterdam in the Netherlands; the Oxford Modern Art Museum in the UK; and the Odensee Museum in Denmark.
- Lanzhou (Gansu Province), January. A group of young artists consisting of Cheng Li, Ma Yunfei, Ye Yongfeng, Liu Yiwu, and Yang Zhichao, who called itself the Lanzhou Art Division staged their performance *Burial*. They conducted a burial ritual for a dummy, which represented a human body clock. The ceremony proceeded through the city of Lanzhou and continued for one month.
- Shanxi Province, 22 February – 20 April. In August 1992 a group of artists started the *Countryside Project*. By this time the group involved more than 20 artists including Song Yongping, Wang Yazhong, Liu Chun, Wang Chunsheng, Zhou Yi, Shen Guanqun, Han Fei, Chang Qing, Zhang Guotian, Fan Xiaoli, Li Shaoping, Yao Chaosheng, Li Chen, Tang Jin, Li Jianwei, and Hao Zhidong. Together they produced a series of paintings, photographs, and two films with the title *Countryside Project – 1993*. The locations for the work were rural areas near the Yellow River.
- Jiayuguan Mountain Pass Settlement (Gansu Province), 27 February 7.35pm. Over one hundred people visited the desert plain to witness the start of Cai Guoqiangs's *Project for*

Extraterrestrials, No. 10 – The 10.000 Mile Long Wall Extends by 100 Meters in which he ignited a 100 meter long stretch of fireworks in the desert next to the Jiayuguan Mountain Pass Settlement.

- Beijing, March. Artists from the Yuanmingyuan Artists' Village received an invitation for a group exhibition at the Yanhuang Art Museum.
- Berlin (Germany), March. Opening of the *Chinese Avant-gardist Exhibition* at the House of World Cultures. Artists featured in the show are Gu Dexin, Geng Jianyi, Ni Haifeng, and Zhang Peili.
- Beijing, Wuhan (Hubei Province), Zhengzhou (Henan Province), Harbin (Heilongjiang Province), and other cities across China, April. A group of artists, led by Ren Jian, toured through several cities with a series of performances and small exhibitions with the title *New History - 1993 Big Consumer Products Art Exhibition Instruction Group*. The performances were seen as highly controversial and a day before their first exhibition had been scheduled to open at a Mc Donald's restaurant in Wangfujing, on 28 April, several of the artists were arrested and had to spend a night in a police cell. This did not prevent the artists from continuing their tour.
- Beijing. Wang Youshen performed his work *Paper – Advertisement* for which he covered an entire section of the Great Wall outside Beijing with newspapers and other snippets of paper that he had collected.
- Luoyang (Henan Province). A group of artists including Yan Jun, Wang Hui, Zhuang Hui, and HeYingnan organized an event titled *Central Plains Flint Action.*
- Shanghai. Ni Weihua staged his performance *Continuous Diffusing the State of Affairs, No.2 – '93 Placard.*
- Beijing. Ai Weiwei returned from New York to live in Beijing. In Beijing he met with Zhuang Hui and together they made a tour through several art centers. They also went to a group of artists who lived in an eastern suburb of Beijing. Ai Weiwei mentioned that the East Village could be a useful term to describe the artist community. Afterwards they continued to visit art centers in other cities in China, including Zhengzhou (Henan Province) and Lanzhou (Gansu Province). There they met with a wide range of young artists.
- Changchun (Jilin Province), 25 May. Huang Yan started a durational performance, which would take ten years to complete. For this performance he took rubbings from samples of significant buildings, which represented socialist architecture. The project was called *Dismanteling and Taking Rubbings of Architectural Materials*.
- Beijing, Spring. Wang Jingsong and Xiao Hong staged a performance at a bus in Beijing, titled *Good Morning Beijing*. In the performance the two artists spent 30 minutes on a bus and some time at various bus stops near a park in the city. They were wearing brown officers shirts and a black tie and listened to the morning news on a medium-short wave radio set.
- Hong Kong, June. Opening of the "Post-1989 New Art From China" exhibition at the Hanart TZ Gallery. After Hong Kong the exhibition toured to the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney with the title *Mao Goes Pop.*
- Venice, 13 June. Start of the 45th Venice Biennale with the first participation of experimental artists from China. The exhibition *The Eastern Road* featured the artists Geng Jianyi, Zhang Peili, Fang Lijun, and Yu Hong. Art critic Li Xianting and artists Wang Youshen and Wu Shanzhuan took part in a satellite exhibition *Open '93*, featured at the Apperto section of the Biennale at the Arsenale and which was curated by Kong Chang'an.
- Beijing. Artist Xu Bing returned from New York to Beijing and staged his performance *Cultural Animals* at the Hanmo Art Centre in Sanlitun. For this performance Xu Bing used two pigs: One male with his body covered in a text using a self-invented language in Roman characters; and one female covered with self-invented Chinese characters. He then arranged them to mate with each other in the exhibition space.

- Beijing, Summer. Wang Youshen staged his performance *Wrapped Man* for which he spent a whole day walking the streets of Beijing wearing a suit made out of newspapers.
- Hangzhou (Zhejiang Province). Geng Jianyi organized the project *Marriage Law*, in which he placed an announcement, attracting 20 people to fill out a questionnaire for two hours. The questionnaire contained questions on marriage and family planning. After the performance Geng Jianyi published a report of the event.
- Shanghai. Hu Jianping performed his pieces *Running Series – Red People* and *Running Series – Van Gogh* for which he asked soldiers to put up an image of Vincent van Gogh and pose in front of the ruins of demolished buildings across the city.
- Beijing. Liu Anping staged a performance in Beijing in which he took photographs of over 20 workers. When he was asked for an explanation by some of the workers he simply replied with the word: "Institution".
- Kunming (Yunnan Province). After spending more than a year of work on the island Hainan, Zhu Fadong returned to the city of Kunming. Here he performed his piece *Missing Person Advertisement* over a period of several weeks. He had put together an advertisement in which he announced a search for himself. Over the next few weeks he had posted several thousand of copies of the advertisement in the streets of Kunming.
- Beijing, August. After a year-long project at the countryside in Shanxi Province, the final exhibition of the *Countryside Project* opened at the China Art Gallery, but was cancelled by authorities. In protest against this decision, the chief organizer of the exhibition, Song Yongping, staged a performance called *Shaving Hair* in front of the gallery and for which he had invited a street barber to shave all of his hair.
- Beijing, 3 September to 3 October. The *Gilbert and George – Visit China Exhibition* was held at the China Art Gallery. During their visit to China, Gilbert and George made a tour to a group of artists in the east of the city, in a place near Chaoyang Park, which was known as the East Village. Here, Ma Liuming did his performance *Dialogue with Gilbert and George*. Following this event, more artists at the village started to stage performances, many of which focused on the body.

  Beijing. Ma Liuming staged his performance *Fen-Ma Liuming I* at the East Village. For this performance Ma Liuming wore a floral-pattern dress, had applied make-up and had placed himself on a sofa were he masturbated. At the end of the performance Ma Liuming drank his own sperm. Several weeks later Ma Liuming conducted the performance *Ma Liuming Says*.
- Beijing, September. A group of painters from the Yuanmingyuan Artist's Village lodged an official application to stage a large group exhibition at the Beijing Art Museum. Initially they reached an agreement with officials from the Municipal Artist Association, but later their proposal was rejected.
- Hangzhou (Zhejiang Province). Zhang Peili staged a performance titled *Marriage Law* during which he posted an advertisement attracting 20 interviewees to take part in a forum discussing marriage law in China at the Moganshan Middle School.
- Beijing, 26 October. Ten minutes before the opening of an exhibition featuring post-graduate students from the Central Academy of Fine Arts, Zhang Huan staged his performance *Angel* in front of the China Art Gallery. The exhibition was immediately closed after the performance. Five days later, Zhang Huan was summoned to pay a fine of 2000 Renminbi, and the exhibition was officially cancelled.
- Yongquan Village, Wenjiang County (Sichuan Province), November. Wang Jianwei started a performance titled *Cycle – Planting* together with a local farmer named Wang Yunqian. Together they spent 6 months preparing and planting wheat after which Wang Jianwei split the grains and placed them in his house in Beijing.
- Shanghai, 21 October to 11 November 1993. After Beijing *The Gilbert and George – Visit China Exhibition* was held at the Shanghai Fine Art Museum in Shanghai.

- Huangshi County (Hubei Province), 22 October. The SHS Group staged their performance *Big Glass – Dream Temple* at the local Workers Cultural Palace, during which they presented themselves as living artworks and lay naked in glass boxes surrounded by candles. According to the artists, their work had been inspired by postmodernist readings, which had been translated into Chinese, and their performance represented a post-modern world. Participating artists included Hua Jiming, Han Liping, Li Ju, and Liu Gangshun.
- Beijing. Liu Xinhua started his performance series *Xinhua Printing Society* in which he used black ink to print his penis on range of books, people, and objects. The performances would continue until 1999. The performance was well received amongst some artists around Beijing, who highly appreciated the irony and simplicity of the performance.
- Hong Kong. During the *Exhibition of Photographic Art From China, Hong Kong and Taiwan* the Chinese artist Yan Lei featured photographs of his earlier performance *Clear* in which he had used a pair of surgeon's tweezers for taking out his armpit hair.
- 26 October to 26 December, Wuhan, Changsha, Xiangpiao, Hong Kong, Shaoshan, and other cities across China. The New History Group – which consisted of Ren Jian, Liang Xiaozhuan, Zhou Xiuping, Ye Shuanggui and other artists – staged a series of open-air performance events with the title *Sun 100* for the duration of a month. These events all marked the commemoration of the 100th Birthday Anniversary of Mao Zedong and the artists proclaimed (with some irony) how Mao Zedong had been the only, true advocator of democracy in China.
- Guangzhou (Guangdong Province), 24 November. Start of the third annual exhibition of the Big Tail Elephant Group at the Red Ants Bar, featuring works by Chen Xiaoxiong, Liang Juhui, Lin Yilin, and Xu Tan.
- Chengdu (Sichuan Province), 11 December. Start of the exhibition *China Experience* at the Sichuan Museum of Fine Arts.
- 19 December. The *New York Times* had published an article by Andrew Solomon titled "Their Irony, Humor (and Art) Can Save China", and featured a discussion on cynical realism and political pop in China. The article was illustrated with a painting by Fang Lijun.
- Beijing, 23 December. Art critic Gao Ling organized the *Contemporary Art Salon* symposium, which discussed the Chinese avant-garde movement. Participants in this important event included Chen Shaofeng, Huang Du, Leng Lin, Liu Yan, Lü Shengzhong, Pan Dehai, Shi Liang, Wang Mingxian, and Zhu Weibin.

- **1994** Hangzhou. The Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts was renamed as the China Academy of Fine Arts.
- Beijing, January. Zhu Fadong moved from Kunming (Yunnan Province) to live and work in Beijing, where he met up with a group of artists including Zhuang Hui. In Beijing Zhu Fadong conducted his provocative performance *This Person is for Sale*, in which he was walked around the center of Beijing dressed in a blue Mao suit and carrying a briefcase. On the back of his suit had been written: 'This Person is for Sale, Negotiate Price on Spot'.
- Beijing. Zhuang Hui started to publish an underground art magazine called *Experimental Village*. Copies of the magazine are now hard to find, but two copies are known to include: Volume 3 which featured an interview with Zhuang Hui, and Volume 5, which featured an important essay by the performance artist Zhu Fadong, written after his arrival in Beijing.

Beijing. Wang Peng created his installation *Wall* at the Contemporary Art Museum near the China Fine Art Gallery. He blocked the main entrance to the museum with a brick wall after the decision to ban his performance from the gallery.

- Hangzhou (Zhejiang Province). Qiu Zhijie completed his performance *One Thousand Times Repetitive Writing*, which he had started in June 1990 and for which he had reproduced 1000

copies of the Lantingxu sutra on a single piece of paper and had documented them on photographs.

- Guangzhou (Guangdong Province). Lin Yilin staged an open-air performance using bricks, titled *1000 Pieces and 1000 Pieces.*
- Beijing. Wang Youshen performed his piece *Nutritious Soil* in which he covered his living room floor with manure.
- Wuhan (Hubei Province). Li Juchuan did his so-called 'constructive' performance in which he lives together with a brick for one week.
- Beijing, East Village. Ma Liuming conducted his performance *Fen-Ma Liuming II* at the East Village.
- Beijing, 6 April. The gallery of the Central Academy of Fine Arts meant to host a solo exhibition of works by Song Dong with the title *Another Class: Do You Want to Play with Me?* Thirty minutes after opening the exhibition was closed by academy officials.
- Lanzhou (Gansu Province), 11 April. Ma Qizhi staged a performance at the Northwest Nationalities Institute titled *Sufficiently Attending to a Nine Square Meter Piece of Land.*
- Shanghai, 2-4 May. The third edition of the exhibition *Documentation of Chinese Contemporary Art* was held at the library of the Southeast China Normal School, and focused on installation and performance art.
- Wuhan (Hubei Province), 8 –20 May. The New History Group, led by Ren Jian, organized an open art event under the title *New History 1994, Green Engineering Poetic Wind and Green 2420*, in which it showed the relationships between art and everyday live in China.
- Beijing. Wang Jingsong and Liu Anping conducted a screening of their work *SW – Good Morning Beijing*. During the screening the two artists started spraying ink on the audience, which consisted mainly of artists and critics. This *Splashing Ink Incident* caused quite some controversy, and initiated a discussion on the question how spontaneous action could be related in any way with performance.
- Beijing. Ruan Haiying Song Dong, Wang Jin, Yin Xiuzhen, Zhang Lei, and Zhu Jinshi moved to the outskirts of Beijing where they staged an experimental event with the title *Central Axis.*

Beijing, East Village. Ma Liuming conducted his performance *Fen-Ma Liuming's Lunch I* at the East Village.

- Beijing, East Village, 14 June. Zhang Huan conducted his performance *12 Square Meters* during which he sat in the public toilet used by the village heads at temperatures of around 40 Degrees Celsius. For the performance Zhang Huan had covered his body with fish oil and honey. After he had sat on a wooden board inside the toilet for 40 minutes he walked out and straight into a polluted river at the back of the toilet house. According to reports some villagers had come over and asked questions about the performance, after which the artists who had been filming Zhang Huan remarked it was part of a television commercial.
- Beijing, July. Ai Weiwei published the *Black Cover Book*, which showed images and included artists' statements on the Zhang Huan's performance *12 Square Meters* (1994), Zhu Fadong's works *Missing Person Advertisement* (1993) and *This Person is for Sale* (1994) and a report on Xu Bing's *Cultural Animals* (1993). The book also contained a feature on the Taiwanese performance artist Hsieh Te-ching, who lived and worked in New York.
- Huangshi County (Hubei Province), July. Artists from the SHS Group stage a collaborative performance with artists from the New Labor Group from Wuhan who were visiting the Xinzhi Bookstore. The performance was called *Using a Piece of Rope to Fill a Bookstore.*
- Beijing, East Village, 10 July. A Hong Kong television crew visited the East Village. During this visit Zhang Huan staged his performance *65 Kilograms*, followed by a performance by Zhu Ming

and Ma Liuming's performance *Fen-Ma Liuming's Lunch II*. Towards the end of Ma Liuming's performance the local police had been called in and conducted a search through all of the artists' studios at the East Village. The police confiscated most of the works, interrogated the artists, and arrested Ma Liuming and Zhu Ming, who spent 3 and 4 months respectively in a local prison cell. They were being charged with conducting and distributing pornography. Zhang Huan had also been arrested, but was soon released when he was able to show the police a student pass from the Central Academy of Fine Arts, where he was registered as a post-graduate student.

- Beijing, Wangfujing, October. The Beijing Municipal Government decided to upgrade the whole district surrounding one of Beijing's most famous streets, Wangfujing. Old housing quarters, so-called *hutongs*, including large mansions and even ancient temples had to be demolished to make room for new high-rise office buildings, hotels, and shopping plazas. Behind Wangfujing, near the main campus of the Central Academy of Fine Arts, Zhan Wang staged his performance *The Ruin Cleaning Project* for which he careful cleaned and painted the remains of demolished houses. Other artists also participated in this performance project, including the young art student Zhu Yu who took two fish bowls, each containing several gold fish, and filled one bowl with dirt from the demolished houses, thereby mummifying the gold fish. The title of Zhu Yu's performance is *94 Crossings - Ruins Action*. After the event Wang Jin and Zhu Yu became close friends.

- Beijing, October. Cang Xing performed his first piece *Magic Mirror* in Beijing. He was wearing clothes completely covered with pieces of mirror in which the audience could see itself. The performance was part of the exhibition *Post-October*, which also featured works by Song Dong, Wang Jinsong, Wang Peng, Yin Xiuzhen, and Zhu Jinshi.

- Beijing, 25-31 October. The gallery of the Capital Normal University featured an international exchange exhibition of experimental works by Chinese, Japanese, and Korean artists including many installation works. The exhibition attracted a large crowd of young, local artists. Among them were artists from the East Village Artists' Community.

- Guangzhou, 26-30 November. The 2nd Guangzhou Art Fair featured works by the artists from the Big Tail Elephant Group in a special section of installation art including works by Chen Xiaoxiong, Liang Juhui, Lin Yilin, and Xu Tan.

- Shanghai, Zhongshan Road (Fucheng District), 12 November. Weng Fen performed his work *Thirty Days with Thirty Days of Labor*. Every day between 6 and 6.30 pm he would take photographs of the market stalls and their surroundings.

- Guangzhou (Guangdong Province). Xu Tan used photographs, plans, and prints to record the reconstruction of his apartment on 14 San Yu Road.

- Hangzhou (Zhejiang Province). Qiu Zhijie performed his piece *Standpoint* during which he stood outside a large case with a placard, which said "Each cage shuts out its own outside world."

- Beijing, East Village. Cang Xin moved to the East Village Artists' Community and staged his first performance *Colored Faces* at the village during which the audience was invited to walk over a collection of plaster castings of the artist face.

- December. *Jiangsu Huakan* (*Jiangsu Pictorial*) published the article "Strive for Ambiguous Meaning" by art critic Yi Xiang, in which he discussed the role of 'meaning' (*yiyi*) in art. During the following years the article would arouse a range of discussions about the notion of 'meaningful art' in China, with one of its main critiques coming from the artist Qiu Zhijie.

- Qiu Zhijie created the small but significant installation *Public Life*, which featured a 10x7x7cms public toilet made from glass. Ai Weiwei published an image of the installation in the White Cover Book. Originally an artist statement had accompanied the installation. This statement said that 'beneath every beautiful exterior lies an abject interior', which formed the basis for some of Qiu Zhijie's thoughts about the need for artists to point towards the abject in their works.

- Kunming (Yunnan Province), 31 December. Start of a large group-exhibition featuring works by artists from the Southeast of China at the Xinan commercial center. The opening exhibition was seen as an important moment in strengthening the ties between many artists from the region.

- **1995** Beijing, 1 January. At a birthday party for the British art critic living in Beijing, Karen Smith, artist threw the birthday cake at the attendants. The incident incited a discussion on 'spontaneous action', which was perceived as having far less validity as an artistic practice than other, well-prepared performances.

- Beijing, 1 January. In his house in the central-eastern part of the capital Song Dong had started to produce his ongoing performance work *Writing Diary with Water* in which he recorded his daily thoughts in water on a stone, whereby the characters swiftly disappear, leaving no trace of the writing. The performance had been documented in a series of photographs.

- Beijing. Song Xiaohong organized an event called *Original Sound* in the middle of the night at the City's Li Jiao Bridge, near the East Gate (Dongbianmen). The event featured sound performances by 12 artists including Cang Xin, Lu Lin, Ma Liuming, Gao Xiangfu, Rong Rong, Song Xiaohong, Zhang Huan, Zhu Fadong, Zhu Zhou, Song Dong, and Wang Shihua.

- Beijing, March. Artist Wang Gongxin had returned from New York and created a performance/installation/video work *The Sky over Brooklyn* at his house. For this work the artist had had a 3-meter deep well dug into the ground with a television screen placed at the bottom showing the summer sky in Brooklyn. A voice recording from the pit repeatedly says: "What are you looking at?" – "What is there to see?" "What is there to see, except for some clouds in the sky?"

- Beijing, East Village. Ma Liuming and Zhang Huan staged a collaborative performance, which was titled *Third Contact* in the bathroom of one of the studios in the East Village. During this performance they had put on make-up, shaven their bodies completely, brushed their teeth and finally lay down in a bathtub filled with water and their own hair. Zhang Huan had planned the performance with Ma Liuming to establish a 'third kind of contact' between them both, which would move beyond their relationship as friends and artists, but which would connect in an artwork that emphasized the role for the body. Rong Rong produced a series of images of the performance, which formed an important series of documentation of the performance.

- Beijing, 7-26 April. The exhibition *Korean Modern Art* was held at the China Art Gallery, featuring works by 36 Korean artists including Nam Jun-Paik, Li Hong-Yoom, Lee Seung-Teak.

- Shanghai. Hu Jieming performed the piece *Being Partners with a TV-set.* First he visited a hospital and had a digital heartbeat reader attached to his body. Then he went back to his home together with a hospital nurse. Here he spent 24 hours with the heartbeat reader attached to his TV-set and he would have the nurse regularly check his blood pressure.

- Huangshe (Hubei Province). Hua Jiming, one of the artists from the SHS Group, staged a performance during which he used water to clean grass off the wall and earlier attached grass off his body.

- Beijing, East Village. Cang Xin started a performance piece called *Virus Series: Announcement of Venereal Diseases*. Over a period of 316 days he hung 321 plaster castings from different people's faces on top of posters, which hung all across Beijing, warning against venereal diseases.

- Beijing, May. A group of 11 artists from the East Village assembled at a mountain in the countryside of Beijing Municipality, near the village of Huairou. Here they conducted their group performance *Adding Another Meter to an Anonymous Mountain*. Participating artists included Cang Xin, Duan Yingmei, Gao Yang, Ma Liuming, Ma Zhongren, Wang Shihua, Zhang Binbin, Zhang Huan, Zhu Ming, and Zu Zhou.

- Venice (Italy), June. Start of the *46th International Venice Biennale*, featuring Chinese artists Liu Wei, Yu Youhan, and Zhang Xiaogang. Coinciding with the Biennale the exhibition *Asiana* was

curated by Fei Dawei, and comprised of works by artists from China, Japan, and Korea. Chinese artists in this exhibition included Cai Guoqiang, Gu Dexin, Huang Yongping, and Yang Jun.

- Guangzhou (Guangdong Province). Wang Huiming conducted a performance called *I Lived in My Mirror for One Hour*. While holding a mirror he walked around in a canteen and talked to different people. Sometimes he would dance to draw their attention. All that time his gaze would not leave the mirror and he faced other people only through the mirror. The performance took one hour.
- Guangzhou (Guangdong Province), June. Lin Yilin staged his performance *Safe Crossing Linhe Road*. A photograph of the performance was published in the *White Cover Book* edited by Ai Weiwei in late 1995.
- Guangzhou (Guangdong Province), summer. Liang Juhui had created a performance installation at the construction site of a large office tower in the city. He had placed a computer game in one of the workers elevators that would go up 80 stories, and for one hour recorded workers playing games in the elevator. The entire performance was documented in photographs and on video.
- Beijing, July. Wang Jin staged his performance *To Marry a Mule* at the village of Laiguangyin Village in the northeast of the city. The performance was not open to the public, but a photograph of the performance was published in the *White Cover Book* edited by Ai Weiwei in late 1995.
- Beijing, summer. Gao Zhen and Gao Qiang conducted their performance *Invisible Flying Creatures Sweep Past in the Sky Above the Square*. During the performance they searched the sky for invisible flying creatures above a crowd of people who were gathered on Tiananmen Square.
- Beijing. In an ongoing performance series that started in 1993 Liu Xinhua completed another performance *Two Dozen New Prints*. He had emprinted his penis on twenty-four stones, on which he also printed the words *USA Weapon is Stone* in gold ink and used both Chinese characters and English translation.
- Lanzhou (Gansu Province), August. Yang Zhichao started a private performance, which would last for an entire year in which he was the babysitter for his newborn daughter. During the entire duration of the performance Yang Zhichao wore a t-shirt with the title of the performance, *Professional Babysitter*. He further kept a record of all his performed tasks and footprints of the baby throughout the course of the performance.
- Shanghai. Artist Shi Yong performed the performance piece *On the Spot Sound Recording: Overlapping Echoes from the Spaces of Personal People's Daily Lives*. During the performance, which lasted for a month, Shi Yong placed sound recording devices and megaphones across public places around Shanghai. Recordings of daily live activities were broadcasted into the space with slight time-lapse, thereby producing echoes of the actual sounds being produced by events on the streets.
- Yan'an (Shaanxi Province). Zhuang Hui conducted two performances. The first was held at the San Xia village and was called *Longitude 109.88, Latitude 31.05* and the second performance, *Longitude 109.55, Latitude 31.05,* was held at the city of Bai Di. Both villages are located close to Yan'an and at the Chang Jiang river. During each of the performances Zhuang Hui dug a hole in the riverbed and measured the diameter and depth of the hole. The entire performance was recorded in a series of photographs.
- Beijing. Dai Naizheng conducted a series of performances *Good Luck on Earth* at Tiananmen Square.
- Beijing. Zhu Jinshe staged a performance *The Houhai Connection* at Houhai river.
- Kunming (Yunnan Province). Tang Jiazheng staged a performance *Doctrine of the Earth Zone: Sacrificed Species* at Beijing Road and Dong Feng Road in the city center.
- Dongying (Shandong Province). Chen Qiangzhong traveled to the harbor city Dongying where the Yellow River reaches the China Sea, while carrying a memorial sign for the river. This

performance was part of a series commemorating the river under the title: *AGEPASS: Crossing the Yellow River.*

- Beijing. Liu Anping performed a piece, which he called *East Wing Number One*. He placed 13 kilos chicken eggs and certificates in front of the house of the art critic Mr. D.
- Changsha (Hunan Province). Xu San performed the work called *Zhong* (Center), *Zhong* (Clock), *Zhong* (Panicked), *Zhong* (Loyal), *Zhong* (Handle-less Cup), *Zhong* (Heart), *Zhong* (End), *Zhong* (Grasshopper). He went to the lobby of the outpatient department of a clinic for the mentally ill for registration, completely naked and covered with perfume. He underwent diagnoses, examinations and some investigations for having possible mental illness.
- Chengdu (Sichuan Province). American artist Elizabeth Damon organized a collaborative performance event, titled the *Movement of preserving water quality and raising the awareness of environment through art and science*. The performance involved over twenty artists from America, Beijing, Sichuan and Tibet, including Damon, Kristen, Wang Lian, Yin Xiuzhen, He Qichao, Ci Ren La Na and Ang Sang. The event had been sponsored by the American Water Preservation Society and the Education Department of the Chengdu City Environmental Bureau.
- Chengdu (Sichuan Province). Dai Guangyu performed his piece *Long Shelved Water Norm*. He had a 250 cm by 600 cm wooden announcement board placed next to a pedestrian pavement in one of the streets of Chengdu. On the announcement board he had stuck a piece of traditional xuan-paper of 30 square meters. Then he placed 12 black and white photo portraits into square hospital basins filled with wastewater. On a desk he had placed more hospital basins with sterilization cups, which were filled with wastewater and teacups with soap water.
- Chengdu (Sichuan Province). Wang Lian performed his piece called *River* in which he uses pots and rope.
- Chengdu (Sichuan Province) Beijing-based artist Yin Xiuzhen staged two performances. The first had the title *Named River*, in which she uses 50 pieces of mirror and 50 spring balances. For the second performance, *Washing River*, she had 10 cubic meter of polluted river water frozen into ice. These ice blocks were placed at the riverbank, and then she asked passers-by to clean these blocks of ice until they turned into water. The second performance took two days to complete.
- Beijing. Song Dong started an ongoing performance series *Throwing Stones*. On different occasions he would search for a stone and would throw that with as much force as possible. Then he would search for the stone, and throws it again until he can no longer find it. Soon he started to record time and location when and where he threw the stone, followed by the number of steps taken after finding it after each throw. After starting in 1995 he continued the performance and had records of 40 stone-throws. All the stones have gone lost.
- Beijing. Zhang Huan staged his performance *25mm Mosquito Net.*
- Beijing. Song Dong performed his piece *To Leak a Secret*. He hung up embroidered bags with ice in it, on the wall of one the houses opposite of no. 23 of Bin Shang Hutong in Xi Si district in Beijing. After 21 hours all the ice had melted and had leaked through the embroidered bags.
- Beijing. Wang Lian staged a performance called *Three Days* on the corner of the Tongzi River outside the walls of the Imperial Palace and the North West Pavilion. In the performance he lived three days and three nights alone in the un-restored pavilion area. The performance was documented in photographs and on sound recordings.
- Beijing. Li Haibing started a performance that involved 'selling of mystical direction' at the Pangjiayuan antique market. He offered the customers a choice of six mystical directions bearing the national flags of Albania, Bulgaria, Rumania, Russia and Yugoslavia.
- Hebei Province. Artist Shen Yu started his performance movement, the *'95 Ten Thousand Mile March for the 50th Anniversary Commemoration of the Victory of the Kangri Struggle*.
- Beijing. Song Dong organized a performance in a famous teashop at the Wanghai Pavilion, titled *Nature's Mystery*. In this performance Song Dong placed 12 talking parrots in 12 embroidered

bags on each of the tables in the shop. During opening hours the birds would mimic the words of the customers.

- Beijing. Zhu Jinshe staged his performance *Big Pearl Monk Basket*. He crumpled up a number of sheets of *xuan* papers into a bamboo basket.

- Beijing, 29-31 August. Sui Jianguo, Zhan Wang and Yu Fan (who called themselves The Three Men United Studio) invited a group of artists to their studios for the preparation of a work with the theme *New Wangfujing Field*. These artists included Jiang Jie and Lin Qing. The performance event was later renamed *Development Plan*. It took place on the rubbles of demolished buildings at the site of the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Wang Fujing in Beijing. Sui Jianguo used old school desks, furniture, and practice sculpture pieces by former students at the academy to construct his installation *Ruins* and *Celebration*. Zhan Wang used poster slogans and large self-made cement bricks to build his *Classroom Assignment* on the site of a classroom that had just been demolished. Yu Fan changed a deserted classroom into a beach resort by placing different objects on the floor and called his work *Beautiful Scenery*. Jiang Jie made an installation with plastic sheets and sculptures of babies.

- Beijing, September. On 14 September was the opening of the exhibition *Women/Here*, which coincided with the International Women Conference that was held in the Capital. Curated by The Three Men United Studio the exhibition featured documentation covering the lives of various women in China. One month earlier Sui Jianguo, Zhan Wang, and Yu Fan had set up the plan for the exhibition at a workshop in Beijing.

- Kwangju (Korea), 20 September. Start of the *First Kwangju Biennale*, featuring works by Chinese artists Fang Lijun, Feng Mengbo, Lü Shengzhong, Song Dong, and Wang Jianwei.

- Yangjiang (Guangdong Province). Zheng Guogu performed his piece *My Wife*. He used a dummy for playing the part of his bride and then had their wedding pictures taken.

- Hangzhou (Zhejiang Province). Following several early performances in the 1980s, Wang Qiang performed a new piece titled *Obstacle*. The work was made in a local garden for which the artist used pieces of jade tombstones.

- Beijing, 24 October – 5 November. The *German Modern Art* exhibition was held at the Taimiao Gallery in Beijing.

- Beijing, 10-13 November. The gallery of the Beijing Capital Normal University hosted the exhibition *Beijing-Berlin Artistic Exchange*. Organized by Huang Du and Angelika Stepken the exhibition featured installation works by German and Chinese artists.

- Tokyo (Japan), 4-22 December. The exhibition *China's New Photography* was held at the Tokyo Gallery. It featured 80 photographs by Xu Zhiwei, Rong Rong, and Xing Danwen and recorded the lives and work of experimental artists in China. Xing Danwen and Rong Rong also presented a series of photographs on the East Village Artists' Community in Beijing.

- Beijing. Artists Wei Ye and Zhao Bandi staged two separate performances at the Black Woods Bar, titled *Future Fast Food* and *Zhao Bandi and Zhang Qianqian*.

- Beijing. Towards the end of the year Ai Weiwei had published the *White Cover Book*, which featured a range of documentations of experimental art. This included Qiu Zhijie's installation *Public Life* (1994) as well as a photograph by Rong Rong of the *Fen-Ma Liuming's Lunch II* (which performance had led to the artist's apprehension). Besides these images the book also featured a wide range of documentations of other performances conducted between 1994 and 1995.

- Beijing. Song Dong and Guo Shirui, together with the Chinese art critic and curator Feng Boyi, started a project that involved collecting, translating, and publishing documentations of performance art in China. First they sent out a request form to artists across China, asking them to send reproductions of their work, artist statements, and other documents of their practice. During the following months they received many responses, which helped them to create the largest collection of documents, covering an entire decade of performance art in China, between 1985

and 1995. After setting up the collection, the three organizers of the project asked friends at the *China Daily* newspaper to translate all of the statements into English. These documents have yet to be published.

- **1996** Guangzhou (Guangdong Province), 6-7 January. Start of the fifth annual exhibition by the Big Tail Elephant Group with the title *Possibility* at a bar in the basement of the Zhongguang Building.

- Lanzhou (Gansu Province). Liu Xinhua performed another piece, which involved making prints of his penis, titled *The Day of Believing*. On this occasion he used his penis as a stamp on every page of the Bu Lie Dian encyclopedia. He also started using his penis as stamp marks on letters that he would send out. He continued doing this performance for three months. Like his earlier performances, his work was well received by the artists surrounding Liu Xinhua. He would conduct the last performance in this series in 1999.

- Beijing, January. Song Dong performed his piece in Beijing, called *Breathing*. He lay down on his stomach in the center of Tiananmen Square and breathed against the surface of a tile until a layer of ice appeared on the tile. He did this for 40 minutes. Thereafter he moved to the frozen Houhai Lake and repeated his performance for another 40 minutes. His breath did not have any effect on the frozen water of the lake.

- Zhengzhou (Henan Province), 28 January. Wang Jin staged a large public performance piece named *Ice · 96 Central Plains* together with Guo Jinghan and Jiang Bo. They had taken a variety of popular consumer goods and had frozen these in blocks of ice. Then he used the blocks as large bricks for constructing a wall around the front doors of the newly opened Tianran Shopping Plaza. The crowd, which had gathered around the scene noticed the items inside the ice blocks and started breaking down the wall. The performance then turned into a large public spectacle.

- Tokyo and Nagano (Japan), 29 February – 7 March. *Third Nippon International Performance Art Festival* was held curated by Seiji Shimoda. It featured Ma Liuming and Chen Shishen, who resided in Osaka and later had moved to Hong Kong. The participation of Ma Liuming in NIPAF marked the start of increased exchanges between performance artists in China and performance artists from other parts of the world.

- Shanghai, 2-6 March. Chinese art critic Zhu Qi organized an experimental art exhibition called *In the Name of Art* at the Liu Haisu Museum of Art.

- Beijing. Wang Jingsong conducted a performance called *Mysophobias*.

- Beijing, 13-15 April. Li Xianting and Liao Wen organized the exhibition *Gaudy Life!* At the Wan Fung Gallery, featuring paintings by Chang Xugong, Hu Xiaodong, Liu Zheng, Tian Liyong, Wang Qingsong, and Yang Wei. The exhibition marked the start of a discourse of Gaudy Art in China.

- Beijing, 20-26 April. Li Xianting and Liao Wen organized the exhibition *Models from the Masses* at the gallery of the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing, which featured works by Qi Zhilong, Wang Qingsong, and Xu Yihui. The exhibition was immediately followed by a solo exhibition called *Too Materialistic, Too Spiritualized* with works by Zhou Tiehai.

- Beijing, May. Launch of the journal *New Photography* (*Xin Sheying*), created by the photographers Rong Rong and Liu Zheng. Between 1996 and 1998 four editions were published, featuring many experimental photography works.

- Lhasa (Tibet). A series of art events by the *Water Preservationists* movement took place. The American artist Bates Damung and the Chinese scholar Zhu Xiaofeng designed and organized the plan. This would be one of the first large scale international performance art movements. The artists Dai Guangyu, Li Jixiang, Liu Chengying, Song Dong, Yin Xiuzhen, Zhang Xin, Zhang Shengquan, Zhang Lei, Ruan Haiying, Ang Sang and some American and Swiss artists performed their works in Lhasa with the theme 'water'. The event was designed to show artists' commitment to the environment, nature, life and spirit by means of performance art, installation art and other media. [The performances by Chinese artists are all listed as separate entries below]

- Lhasa (Tibet). Song Dong performed his piece *Water*. He used a large seal with the character 'water' carved in it, to continuously make stamps on the water surface of the lake in Lhasa. The performance lasted for 60 minutes.
- Lhasa (Tibet). Yin Xiuzhen performed a piece in Lhasa, called *Living Water*. For this performance she used plastic bags and chopsticks. Another performance work was called *Butter Shoes*. For this piece she used butter and old shoes that had been worn by local people.
- Lhasa (Tibet). Dai Guangyu did his piece *Attentive Listening*. He performed a ceremony after which he immersed one side of his head into the water of the lake in Lhasa.
- Lhasa (Tibet). Zhang Lei performed his piece *High Senses*, using a piece of white silk and stones.
- Lhasa (Tibet). Ruan Haiying performed his piece *Water Spirit* using funeral streamers and stones.
- Lhasa (Tibet). Liu Chenying performed his piece *Stretch Out Your Hand* using rubber hospital gloves, water, trees and rope.
- Lhasa (Tibet). Zhang Xin performed her piece *Another Road*. She used soil from the leftovers of a construction site in Xizang and spread it on a main road in Chuan Zang. The soil formed a 4 by 4 meters Chinese character for 'field'. In this she planted seeds of highland barley and watered the field daily in the hope they would sprout and start growing. However because it was a main traffic road it only took a few days for the field to disappear and for cars to turn it into a road again.
- Lhasa (Tibet). Li Jixiang performed his piece called *Antibiotic: Injection into (Qinghai-Xizang) Plateau*. He wore a white hospital uniform and measured the pollution of the water and poured antibiotics into the water.
- Lhasa (Tibet). Zhang Shengquan performed his piece *To Cross*. He carried a sheep on his back across the river and planned to kill it afterwards. However halfway the performance Song Dong intervened and stopped him from killing the animal and they started arguing for two hours at the riverbank near Lhasa. Before the performance had even been realized fully, it had become re-titled as *Release The Sheep*. Song Dong had felt an extreme compassion toward the sheep, but not towards Zhang Shengquan.
- Luoyang (Henan Province). Zhuang Hui conducted a performance piece titled *Summer*.
- Beijing. After returning from Hong Kong, Yan Lei performed his piece in Beijing called *Punk In The Subway - Office worker At The Office*. In a week's time he pretended to be a punk in the subway for three days and then worked three days as a white-collar worker at an office.
- Luoyang (Henan Province) and Beijing. Zhuang Hui started a series of works *One and Thirty* in which he had his photograph taken, together with thirty people including peasants, children, and artists.
- Beijing. Liu Xuguang performed his piece *96 III* at the Gubeikou section of the Great Wall. Using geomancy principles from the *Book of I Jing* he determined magnetic fields, position, time, temperature to produce an installation with stones.
- Hangzhou (Zhejiang Province), 14-19 September. The video art exhibition *Image and Phenomenon* was held at the gallery of the China Fine Arts Academy and was curated by Wu Meichun and assisted by Qiu Zhijie. The exhibition was often considered to be the first major exhibition of video art in China.
- Shuiyan (Korea), Beijing, and Berlin. Song Dong started a three-part performance series using a pedometer to measure the number of steps that took him to walk around three historical sites at Shuiyuan, Beijing, and Berlin. The performances were conducted between 1996 and 1997. In Korea the city of Shui Yuan or Water Wells has a history of 200 years. In ancient times it was built as the country's capital city. The form and style imitated China's ponds and have been preserved until this day. It took Song Dong 2 hours, 39 minutes and 17 seconds, or 11.458 steps to walk the whole cycle. The erection of the walls of the city of Beijing took place several thousand years back in history. In the 1970s these had been demolished and in its place the

second ring road had been built. Song Dong followed the second ring road as if it were the city walls. It took him 6 hours, 25 minutes and 9 seconds, or 32.575 steps to complete the walk. The Berlin wall in Germany only had 23 years of history (1961-1989), however it was an important mark in the history of Germany. It is now completely destroyed. Song Dong started walking from Brandenburger Gate and completed his walk at the original location of the Berlin Wall. This took him 54 hours, 48 minutes and 36 seconds, or 325.174 steps.

- Beijing. Wang Luyan performed his piece *Bicycle (25): 1996*. He changed the structure of twenty-five second hand bicycles, so that if one would peddle forwards the bicycle would go backwards. He then started selling these bicycles on a local market.

- Shenyang (Jilin Province). Exhibition at the Proper Gallery with the title *Carving a Chair: A Performance by Huang Yan* showed an installation by Huang Yan. It consisted of objects and documentation of a private durational performance that was conducted between 21 September and 3 November.

- Chengdu (Sichuan Province), December 1996. Luo Zidan conducted a daylong performance titled Half/ Half. Half of his body was dressed as a businessman, carrying a mobile phone and a hand full of 100-Yuan bills. The other half of his body was dressed in a poor farm worker's blue Mao suit and carried only a few cents. During the performance Luo walked at the streets and staged a wide range of performances. A huge and very enthusiastic crowd followed him around. However, after hearing about the performance many artists criticized Luo Zidan for using the same type of idea as Yan Lei in his performance _ Punk In The Subway _ Office worker At The Office that was conducted earlier in 1996, as well as for showing similarities to performances by Zhu Fadong.

- Beijing, December. Start of a series of collaborative events that involved artists from China and Korea with the title *Chinese City: Beijing City*. These were held at different venues across Beijing until 1 January 1997 and had been organized by Song Dong, and involved his wife, Yin Xiuzhen and Zhu Jinshe from Beijing. Other people involved were three artists from Korea, whose names in pinyin are listed as Li Jinggen, Piao Changzhi and Li Longcan. The first event was held at the Wanghai Pavilion Tea Society at Houhai Lake, followed by events at the Zhao Yao Gallery and at a section of the Great Wall.

- **1997** Beijing, 2 January. Start of a Sino-Korean exchange exhibition at the Wanghai Teahouse at Houhai with the title *Chinese City – Beijing City* that featured works by Chinese artists Song Dong, Yin Xiuzhen, and Zhu Jinshi.

- Beijing. Zhu Qingsheng conducted a performance at Huairou Village in the Northwest of Beijing Municipality, called: *Red Stones: Paying Debt to Nature Scheme*. For the performance he used red to paint a few rocks, which had been found in the wild and thus turning the rocks into artworks. In a statement about the performance Zhu Qingsheng said: "In fact the stones haven't changed. The surroundings of the stones have changed into art. In nature every natural performance is not natural."

- Beijing, 22 February – 3 March. The exhibition *Face to Face: Chinese and German Photography* was held at the Beijing International Art Palace and was organized by the New Amsterdam Art Consultancy and Siemens.

- Beijing, 5 March. The Beijing Modern Art Center, a non-profit art organization led by artists Song Dong and Guo Shirui hosted the *Wild '97* art project. This event involved 27 artists from cities across China (including Beijing, Shanghai, Chengdu, Guangzhou, Luoyang, Yangjiang, and Haikou). They compiled a series of work proposals and discussions on experimental art, which reflected the surroundings in which they work and live. In April 1999 all of these materials had been published in a book edited by Jin Feng. Participating artists were Chen Xiaoxiong, Dai Guangyu, Gu Lei, Hu Jianping, Liang Juhui, Lin Yilin, Liu Chengying, Ma Liuming, Pang Lei, Qiu Zhijie, Shi Yong, Song Dong, Wang Jin, Wang Gongxin, Wang Huimin, Weng Fen, Xu Tan,

Yin Xiaofeng, Yin Xiuzhen, Yu Ji, Zeng Xun, Zhang Huan, Zhang Xin, Zheng Guogu, Zhu Fadong, Zhu Qingsheng, and Zhuang Hui.

- Beijing, Spring. Zhu Fadong started a performance called *Lifestyle*, which lasted for a hundred days. During this period he offered his labor services to units, families or individuals and thus earned his wages. The performance was documented in photographs and in a diary in which Zhu Fadong listed all his appointments.
- Beijing. Yan Lei and Hong Hao conducted a collaborative performance with the title *1, 0 Road Warehouse Door Special.*
- Shenzhen (Guangdong Province). Song Dong performed two works at Shenzhen coinciding with the hand-over of Hong Kong to Mainland China. The performance works took place at the border between Shenzhen and Hong Kong. The first, *To Fill The Sea: 158 Coastal Stones of 1997*, took place at Shekou at the site where the sea was being refilled before the 'return'. He dipped a brush in the water and wrote the digits of the 158 years between1840 till 1997 on 158 pieces of stone. Then, one by one, he threw these into the sea and made 158 photographs. The second performance, *1997-6-30, 11:30-1997-7-1*, 0:30 took place between the dates and times listed in the title. He would repeatedly write the time with water in a wooden box filled with soil from both Hong Kong and the mainland, slowly turning the soil into mud.
- Beijing. Yin Xiuzhen staged her performance *Drying Clothes*.
- Kassel (Germany), 21 June. Start of *Documenta X*, featuring works by Chinese artists Feng Mengbo and Wang Jianwei.
- Breda (The Netherlands), July. Start of the exhibition *Another Long March: Chinese Conceptual and Installation Art in the Nineties*, curated by Chris Driessen and Marianne Brouwer. Artists featured in the exhibition were Chen Shaoxiong, Chen Yanyin, Feng Mengbo, Geng Jianyi, Gu Dexin, Li Yongbin, Liang Juhui, Lin Tianmiao, Lin Yilin, Liu Xinhua, Ma Liuming, Wang Jianwei, Wang Youshen, Xu Tan, Yin Xiuzhen, Zhang Peili, Zhou Tiehai, and Zhu Jia. The catalogue for the exhibition contained an extensive colophon featuring a list of artists, critics, curators, art magazines, exhibition spaces, and academies; including their contact details.
- Lyon (France), 9 July – 24 September. The *4th Lyon Biennale of Contemporary Art* featured a group of Chinese artists and was curated by Harald Szeeman. They were Chen Zhen and Yan Peiming (who were living and working in France), as well as Feng Mengbo, Pu Jie, Wang Xingwei, and Zhang Peili from China.
- Beijing, 28 August – 2 September. Wu Meichun and Qiu Zhijie organized the exhibition *Demonstration of Video Art* at the gallery of the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing. At the opening of the exhibition they presented two private publications, one containing documentations on video art in China and the other containing texts on international video art practices.
- London and Beijing. Zhao Bandi exchanged a piece of soil of 25x25x25 centimetres, which originated from England for a piece of soil with the same measurements from China. The performance marked the year of the handover of Hong Kong to China.
- Dujiangyan (Sichuan Province), October. Start of the performance event *Origins: Art of Life*. Zeng Xun and Dai Guangyu staged two independent performances. In the *Memorial Ceremony for the River* Zeng Xun placed incense into disposable hygiene cups, which had been filled with soil and arranged them on the riverbank. Dai Guangyu staged a performance *Demonstration of Water-Ink Painting Skills* in which he roasted vegetables and flowers and arranged these on sheets of xuan-paper. He then dipped a brush in water and used brush strokes as in traditional painting to wash the flowers. Other artists included in the event were Liu Chenying, Yin Xiaofeng, Yu Ji, Zeng Xun, Zhang Hua, Zhu Gang, and others.
- Beijing. Zhu Qingsheng staged a performance in Huairou Village in the Northwest of Beijing Municipality, titled *Tonggu Character Style*. He wore a bamboo hat and a palm-bark rain cape and started writing poems on silk scrolls in the water. The water washed the characters away.

- Chengdu (Sichuan Province), November. Start of the exhibition *People of a Copied Time* at an abandoned work unit space. The exhibition was curated by Dai Guangyu and featured the artists Liu Chenying, Xu Ji, Yin Xiaofeng, Zhang Hua, Zhu Gang, and Zeng Xun.
- Berlin (Germany), September. Start of the exhibition *China Contemporary Photography* at the NBK Art Foundation, which showed works by 16 Chinese photographers including An Hong, Liu Zheng, Lu Yuanming, Qiu Zhijie, Rong Rong, Yang Zhenzhong, Zhang Hai'er, Zheng Guogu, and Zhuang Hui.
- Kwangju (Korea), 1 September. Start of the *2nd Kwangju Biennale* featuring Chinese artists Chen Zhen, Feng Mengbo, Huang Yongping, and Xu Bing.
- Vienna (Austria), 25 November. Start of the exhibition *Cities on the Move*, curated by Hou Hanru and Hans-Ulrich Obrist, with a thematic focus on 'The Asian City in the Nineties'. Chinese participants in the exhibition that will travel past different venues across the world include Cai Guoqiang, Chang Yung Ho, Chen Shaoxiong, Geng Jianyi, Huang Yongping, Liang Juhui, Lin Yilin, Shen Yuan, Shi Yong, Wang Du, Wang Jianwei, Xu Tan, Yin Xiuzhen, Zhan Wang, Zhang Peili, Zhang Yuan, Zheng Guogu, Zhou Tiehai, and Zhu Jia.
- December. Start of the Fifth Documentary Exhibition of Contemporary Art, *The Personality of the City 1997*. Organized by Wang Lin, the project is held in more than 20 cities across China. Lasting nearly a year, the event composes a more than 100 group-, solo-, and open studio-exhibitions, featuring painting, photography, performance, video, and installation works. A selection of materials is brought together in a publication entitled *The Personality of the City and Contemporary Art*.
- Shanghai, 20 December. Art critic Zhu Qi organizes the exhibition *New Asia, New City, New Art: Chinese and Korean Contemporary Art 1997* at the Shanghai Contemporary Art Exhibition Hall. Chinese participants include Chen Xiaoixiong, Hu Jianping, Liang Juhui, Ni Weihua, Shi Yong, Wang Jiajie, Xu Tan, and Yan Lei. Korean artists in the exhibition are Kong Boh-Yun, Sim Jun-Sup, Kim Jin-Jung, Kim Jeong-Woo, Kang Lyung-Rok, Kim Byoung-Sik, and Yun Seung-Wan.
- Beijing. After living eight years in Italy, Zhang Dali returns to Beijing where he starts an ongoing performance series entitled *Dialogue*. He moves around the city using graffiti on walls, featuring a profile of his head (indicating the identity of the artist), 18K (commenting on increasing commercialism) and AK-47 (commenting on increasing violence)

- **1998** Beijing, 2 January. Start of the exhibition *Trace of Existence*, curated by Feng Boyi and Cai Qing. The exhibition features works by Wang Gongxin, Yin Xiuzhen, Qiu Zhijie, Wang Jianwei, Song Dong, Zhang Yonghe, Zhang Defeng, Lin Tianmiao, Gu Dexin, Zhan Wang and Cai Qing. It was held in a private factory workshop at a warehouse compound north of Yaojiayuan Village in Beijing Municipality. The artists produced their work in accordance with the environment of the space for the exhibition.
- New York, 13 January. Start of the exhibition *Inside Out: New Chinese Art* at the Asia Society and P.S. 1. Curated by Gao Minglu the exhibition features 60 artists from China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, and is accompanied by a catalogue publication featuring a range of significant essays on contemporary art across the three regions. During the following years the exhibition travels to San Francisco, Mexico, Tacoma, Japan, Hong Kong, and Australia.
- Changchun (Jilin Province). Huang Yan stages the performance *Huang Yan News: Future News*. He sends out 120 questionnaires by mail featuring questions on the 'future-world'. The questionnaire is aimed to provide a survey regarding lifestyle. 40 surveys are returned and Huang Yan publishes the outcome in a specially published newspaper.
- Shanghai, 11 July. Opening of the exhibition *The Development of Chinese Installation Art* at the Wuyue Movie Studio. Organized by Wang Nanming and Professor Rong Nianzheng (from Hong Kong) the exhibition features a range of installations by artists from Mainland China and Hong Kong.

- Taipei, 13 September – 3 October. The Taipei City Museum of Art hosts the 1998 Taipei Biennale, *Site of Desire*, featuring Chinese artists Cai Guoqiang, Chen Zhen, Gu Dexin, Lin Yilin, Wang Jingsong, Xu Bing, Xu Tan, and Zheng Guogu.
- Beijing, 12 September. Start of the exhibition *Mosaic: Works by Qin Ga, Sun Yuan, and Zhu Yu* at the Corridor Gallery of the Central Academy of Fine Arts, featuring works by three artists who will later become known for producing works that involve the use of human body parts.
- Zurich (Switzerland), October. Former Swiss ambassador to China and collector of Chinese art, Uli Sigg sets up the Chinese Contemporary Art Award (CCAA). The first prize in its inaugural year is given to Zhou Tiehai.
- Changchun (Jilin Province), 24 October. Start of the exhibition *0431 Video and Computer Art*, featuring new media works by 18 artists from Beijing, Changchun, Nanjing, and Shenyang. Curated by Huang Yan the exhibition takes place at the School of Industrial Design.
- Qingdao (Shandong Province), 5-15 October. Wang Nanming organizes the *The Possibility of the Media: Conceptual Art Exhibition* at the International Artists' Studio.
- Beijing, 7 November. Start of the exhibition *Corruptionists – The Moment of Exposure*, curated by Zhang Zhaohui. The exhibition takes place in the basement of the Chinese Literature Association and features a range of works by Chinese and overseas artists including Huang Yan, Liu Zheng, Wang Qiang, Zheng Guogu, Zhang Dali, Nadine Minkwitz, and Christian Boltansky. Most controversial is the installation *1998.11.7* by Gu Dexin, who has covered the entire floor of one of the main exhibition spaces with sheep brain. The installation becomes an important reference for many artists who later started to use animals and human body parts in their work. A day after opening the exhibition is closed by the local police.
- Beijing, 21 November. The exhibition *Shi Wo!* (*It's Me!*) is scheduled to open at the Workers' Cultural Palace inside the Forbidden City. Just before the opening the exhibition is cancelled. Several months later Leng Lin publishes a book containing essays and documents on experimental art in China under the title *It's Me: A Profile of the Development Art in the 1990s.*
- Shenzhen (Guangdong Province), 15-18 December. A large academic forum discussing the relevance of art in contemporary Chinese society takes place at the He Xiangning Art Museum, featuring intellectuals who are working in a range of different fields including in art, architecture, cultural studies, literature, and philosophy.

- **1999** Beijing, 9 January. The exhibition *Post-sense Sensibility: Alien Bodies and Delusion* is held at the basement of the Shaoyaoju Building 202. Curated by Wu Meichun and Qiu Zhiujie the exhibition features a wide range of works by artists from across China, including several installations that have the artist make use of human body parts and dead animals. Participating artists in the exhibition are Chen Lingyang, Chen Wenbo, Feng Qianyu, Gao Shiming, Gao Shiqiang, Jiang Zhi, Liu Wei, Lu Lei, Qin Ga, Qiu Zhijie, Shi Qing, SunYuan, Wang Wei, Weng Fen, Wu Ershan, Yang Fudong, Zhang Hanzi, Zheng Guogu, and Zhu Yu.
- Chicago, 18 February – 18 April. After a year of research in China, the Chinese/ American art historian Wu Hung returns to Chicago to present his exhibition *Transience: Chinese Experimental Art at the End of the Twentieth Century* at the Smart Museum of Art. The exhibition features works by 22 artists and is accompanied by a publication, containing several profound analyses on experimental art in China.
- Paris, 25 February. The Chinese art critic and curator Fei Dawei, who is working and living in Paris, is awarded the prestigious title of *Chevelier d'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres* by the French government.
- Beijing, 27 February. Opening of the China Art Archives and Warehouse (CAAW). Founded by the Dutch critic and curator Hans van Dijk and the Chinese artist Ai Weiwei, CAAW consists of a gallery space and an archive of materials on experimental art in China located at Longgua Village, south of the third ring road. In early 2001, following increased problems with local

police officials at Longgua, CAAW moves to a new space at Feijiacun Village in Beijing's northeast.

- Fukuoka (Japan), 6 March – 6 June. The First Fukuoka Triennial of Asian Art is held at the Fukuoka Museum under the title *Communications: Channels for Hope*. Chinese artists participating in the exhibition are feng Mengbo, Xu Bing, Zhang Peili, and Zhuang Hui.

- Shanghai, 10 April. Start of the exhibition *Supermarket: Art for Sale* at a department store in Shanghai. The exhibition is organized by the Modern Art Center, an organization led by Guo Shirui, which in previous years has sponsored several exhibitions of experimental art in China. The official curators for the event are Xu Zhen, Yang Zhengzhong, and Fei Pingguo. Beijing-based Song Dong also has an important role in the organization of the exhibition, which also includes the selling of reproductions of artworks by artists, which are places on shelves inside a supermarket. Participating artists in the event include Chen Xiaoxiong, Geng Jianyi, Hu Jieming, Luo Zidan, Shi Yong, Song Dong, Wu Ershan, Xu Zhen, Yang Fudong, Yang Zhengzhong, Yin Xiuzhen, Zhang Peili, Zhao Bandi, Zheng Guogu, Zhu Jia, and Zhu Yu.

- Belgrade (Republic of Serbia and Montenegro), 7 May. NATO planes accidentally bomb the Chinese Embassy during a raid on the City. The event sparks several protests in China, whereby foreigners are beaten and harassed by Chinese youth.

- Nanjing (Jiangsu Province), 7 May. Start of the exhibition *Unusual Way of Writing* at the Art Academy, Nanjing Normal University. Curated by Jin Feng and Su Lü, the exhibition brings together a group of artists from across China, many of whom make use of performance in their works. Among the 27 artists featured in the exhibition are Cang Xin, Chen Xiaoxiong, Dai Guangyu, Gao Qiang, Guan Ce, Huang Yan, Jiao Yingqi, Liang Juhui, Lin Yilin, Lu Ming, Shu Jie, Song Dong, Xu Tan, Zhao Bandi, and Zhou Xiaohu.

- Beijing, 8-9 May. Curated by Li Xianting the exhibition *Polyphénolrène* is held in the southwest corner of Zhongshan Park. Artists featured in the exhibition include Chen Wenbo, Gu Dexin, Hu Xiaodong, Lu Hao, Wang Jin, Zhang Lei, Zhao Liang, and Zhu Ming.

- Venice (Italy), 12 June. Start of the 48th Venice Biennale curated by Harald Szeeman, under the title *dAPERTutto* (*OPEN to All*). An unprecendented number of 19 Chinese artists participate in the event, with many of the works coming from the collection of the Swiss collector Uli Sigg. Cai Guoqiang wins the international art prize for his installation *Venice Rent Collection Courtyard.* The decision causes great controversy as the work consists of a copy of the famous Socialist Realist sculpture work *Rent Collection Courtyard*, made during the Cultural Revolution.

- Tianjin (Hebei Province), June. Li Xianting and Liao Wen organize an exhibition titled *Ouh La La Kitch*, which works on the theme of Gaudy art in China.

- Shanghai, 3 September. Artists Alexander Brandt, Xu Zhen, Yang Fudong, and Yang Zhengzhong stage an exhibition titled *The Same but Different*, featuring works by 14 photographers. The exhibition is cancelled one day before the official opening.

- Beijing, 1 December. Sheng Qi realizes a performance at the China Art Gallery entitled *Concept 21 – AIDS*. The piece, which refers back to the *Concept 21st Century* performance series in the late 1980s, marks the first time that a performance is done inside the China Art Gallery since the February 1989 *Chinese Modern Art Exhibition.*

- Beijing, 17 December. The experimental art exhibition *Back and Forth, Left and Right* is held at a private residence in Beijing, bringing together works by an important group of local artists who live in Beijing including Hai Bo, Sheng Qi, Song Dong, Sun Xuexue, Wang Mai, Wang Qiang, Wang Wei, Wu Wenguang, Xu Ruotao, Zhang Nian, and Zhu Ming.

- Chengdu (Sichuan Province), 31 December. Start of the exhibition *Gate of the Century* at the first fully privately funded museum in China: the Chengdu Museum of Contemporary Art. This event also marks the largest retrospective exhibition of contemporary Chinese art to-date, featuring works by 200 artists and produced during a period of two decades, from 1979 to 1999.

APPENDIX III

A PRELIMINARY OUTLINE FEATURING TYPES OF PERFORMANCE ART PRACTICES IN CHINA 1979-2001

Group manifestation in public space:

- Ai Weiwei, et.al., Stars Group (Beijing, 1979-1980); Geng Jianyi, Zhang Peili, et.al., Pond Group (Hangzhou, 1986-1988); Sheng Qi, et.al., *Concept 21 – Art Before Your Eyes* (Beijing, 1986)

Close group action performance:

- Central Academy of Fine Arts and Ecole National des Beaux-Arts student collaboration (Beijing, June 1985); Huang Yongping, Huang Yongping, Ji Tairan, Jiao Yaoming, Cai Lixiong, Li Yuenian, Li Xiang, Lin Jiahua, Lin Chun, and Wu Yanping, *Xiamen Dada* (Xiamen, September 1986); Yang Zhichao, et.al., Lanzhou Art Division, *Funeral* (Lanzhou, January 1993)

Theatrical performance:

- *Southern Art Salon* (Canton, 1985 -1986); Song Yongping and Song Yonghong, *A Scenic Personal Experience* (Taiyuan, November 1986);

The ritualized body in performance:

- Zhang Peili and Geng Jianyi, Wrapping Up - King and Queen (Luoyang, 1986); M Art Group: Work - The Same Wasteful Objects as Smashing Women's Make-up Products by Song Haidong, Pantomime Style by Yang Dongbai, Ceremony by Tang Guangming, and Sense of Violence by Yang Xu and Zhou Tiehai (Shanghai, 1986); Wei Guangqing and Ma Liuming Suicide Project (Wuhan, 1988); Zhang Huan and Ma Liuming, Third Contact (Beijing, 1995); Li Shan, Li Xianting, et.al., Last Supper (Shanghai, December 1988)

The body as performative subject:

- Zhang Guoliang, Ding Yi and Qin Yifeng *Untitled Wrapping* (Shanghai, 1986); Wang Chuan, *Black Dot* (Shenzhen Special Economic Zone, 1990); Various artists grouped in the SHS Group, *One Dozen Colors* and *Big Glass - Temple of Dreams* (Guangzhou, 1993) Ma Liuming, *Fen/ Ma Liuming* (Beijing, 1994); Cang Xin, *Communication Series* (Various locations, 1995-); Wang Jin, *To Marry a Mule* (Beijing, 1995); He Yunchang, *Having an Appointment Tomorrow* (Kunming, July 1998), *Golden Rays of Sunlight* (Kunming, October 1999)

The body in endurance and transcendence:

- Zhang Huan, *12 Square Meters* (Beijing, 1994) and *65 Kilos* (Beijing, 1994); Zhu Ming, *Untitled* ongoing project (Beijing, 1994-1997); Chen Guang, *New Mankind* (Beijing, 1999), *Light Speed 1/1 Second* (Beijing, 2000), *Zero Plus Zero* (Changchun, 2000), and *Survivor* (Beijing, 2000); He Yunchang, *Dialogue With Water* (Yunnan/ Lianghe, July 1998), *Moving a Mountain* (Yunnan/ Lianghe), *Shanghai Water Story* (Shanghai, 2000), *Wrestle: One and One Hundred* (Kunming, March 2001) and *Gunman* (Kunming, March 2001)

Public interaction with the environment and landmarks:

- Xu Yihui and Cai Xiaogang, *Archeological Excavations on A Waste Disposal Site* (Lianyungang Economic and Technological Development Zone, 1986); Wu Shanzhuan. *Red Humor No. 1: Today No Water* (Hangzhou, 1986); Wang Deren, *Canon of Beckoning Spiritual Appearance* (Tibet, 1987); Sheng Qi, et.al., *Concept 21 – Taqi* (Beijing/ Great Wall, October 1988); Ni Haifeng, *Zhoushan Insland* (Zhoushan Island, 1988); Zhan Wang, *The Ruin Cleaning Project* (Beijing, 1994); Lin Yilin, *Safely Crossing Linhe Road* (Guangzhou, 1995); Cang Xin, Ma Liuming, Zhang Huan, Zhu Ming, et.al., *To Add Another Meter to an Unknown Mountain* (Beijing/ Mentougou, May 1995); Zhang Huan *Raising the Water Level in the Fishpond* (Beijing/ Nanmofang, 1997); Song Dong, *Breathing* (Beijing, 1996) and *Stamping the River* (Tibet, 1996); Zhang Dali, *Dialogue* (Italy/ Bologna and Beijing, 1993-1999); Cang Xin, *Communication Series* (Beijing, 1999-2001)

Public policy interaction:

- Geng Jianyi, *Running Waterworks* (Hangzhou, 1986); Wu Shanzhuan, *Red Humor Series, No. 1: Today No Water* (Hangzhou, 1986) *Big Business* (Beijing, February 1989); Zhang Nian, *Eggs* (Beijing, February 1989); Tang Song and Xiao Lu, *Dialogue* (Beijing, February 1989) Ren Jian, et.al., *Big Consumer* (Beijing, Wuhan, Zhengzhou, Harbin, and other cities, April 1993); Sun Ping, *Issuing Shares* (Guangzhou, October 1992); Zhu Fadong, *Looking For a Missing Person Advertisement* (Kunming, 1993) and *This Person is for Sale* (Beijing, 1994); Sui Jianguo, Zhan Wang and Yu Fan, *Women Document* (Beijing, August 1995); Yin Xiuzhen, *Washing the River* (Chengdu, August 1995); Luo Zidan, *Half/ Half* (Chengdu, December 1996); Wang Jin, *Ice '96* (Zhengzhou, 28 January 1996); Yang Zhichao, *Within the Fourth Ringroad* (Beijing, 1999) and *Jiayu Fort* (31 December 1999 – 30 January 2000); Sheng Qi, *Giving Art the Finger-1989* (Beijing, 1999), *Give Me Your Hand Please* (Beijing, 1999) *Defend Aids* (Beijing, 1 December 2000), and *Back To the Past* (Beijing, January 2002); He Yunchang, *Unusual Exit* (Kunming, 2000)

The body in repetitive practice and routine:

- Li Shan, *Washing Feet* (Beijing, February 1989); Yang Zhichao. *Professional Baby Sitter* (Lanzhou, August 1995 to August 1996); Song Dong, *Water Diary* (Beijing, 1995-) Qiu Zhijie, *One Thousand Times Repetitive Writing* (Hangzhou (Zhejiang Province) and Beijing, 1990 to 1995)

The body in self-mutilation, masochism or necrophagy:

- *Yang* Zhichao, *Burning Sun* (Lanzhou, 1989), Yan Lei, *Clear* (...); *Beer Bottle* (Beijing, 1999), *Airing* (July 2000), *Planting Grass* (Shanghai, 2000), *Branding* (Beijing, 2000); Zhu Yu, *Basics of Total Knowledge - No. 4 Brains Manufacture* (Beijing, 1995 – 1998), *Pocket Theology* (Beijing, January 1999), *Skin Craft* (Beijing, 2000), and *Eating People* (Beijing, 2000), Peng Yu and Sun Yuan, *Link of the Body* (Beijing, 2000) and *Oil of Human Being* (Beijing, 2000); Sun Yuan, *Honey* (Beijing, 1999); Xu Zhen, *But I Don't Need Anything* (Shanghai, 1999)

Disconcerting events:

- Qiu Zhijie, Wang Wei, Wu Ershan, et.al., *Post Sense-Sensibility: Spree* (Beijing, March 2001)

APPENDIX IV

DETAILS OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Note: Performance works are listed in accordance with the information provided by the artists or secondary source. Duration of the performance and details on collaboration with photographers and video camera operators are only listed on the request of the performance artist.

Introduction

0.1 Jaap Berghuis, Personal photographs of artist painting in his studio, 1973, Javastraat, Amsterdam. Source: Courtesy of the author.

0.2 Wang Jin, *Stir Frying Chinese Yuan*, 17 February 1995, Performance, Wangfujing, Beijing, Duration: 30 minutes. Source: Courtesy of the artist

0.3 Qiu Zhijie, *Fine*, 1997, Photograph series, Dimensions variable. Source: Courtesy of the artist.

0.4 Zhang Dali, Demolition (ak-47), 1999, Performance, Ping'an Dajie, Beijing. Source: Courtesy of the artist.

0.5 Sun Yuan and Peng Yu, *Link of the Body*, 2000, Performance, Beijing. Source: Ai Weiwei and Feng Boyi, ed., *Bu Hezuo Fangshi/ FUCK OFF*. (Beijing: private publication, 2000).

Chapter 1

1.1 Giuseppe Chiara, *Gestures on the Piano*, 1972, Performance. Source: Lea Vergine, *Body Art and Performance – The Body as Language* (Milano: Skira Editore S.p.A., 2000).

1.2 Rudolf Schwartzkogler, *Action 1965*, Performance. Lea Vergine, *Body Art and Performance – The Body as Language* (Milano: Skira Editore S.p.A., 2000).

1.3 Jackson Pollock, Painting in his studio, 1950, Photography by Hans Namuth. Source: Paul Schimmel, ed., *Out of Actions: Between performance and the object, 1949-1979* (London and New York: Thames and Hudson, 1998)

1.4 Liu Jin, *Coca Cola Bath*, 28 August 2000, Performance, West Siduhe Village, Huairou County, Beijing Municipality, Part of the 1st Open Platform - International Performance Art Festival (Organized by Chen Jin, Shu Yang and Zhu Ming). Source: Courtesy of the artist.

1.5 Chen Lingyang, *25th Hour, No. 1*, Photograph, Dimensions variable. Source: Courtesy of the artist.

1.6 Arahmaini, *Handle without care*, 1996, Performance, Duration: 11 minutes, Queensland Art Gallery, 2nd Asia-Pacific Triennale. Source: Image Library, Department of Art History, University of Sydney.

1.7 Action Art, CAFA, July 1985, Participants include students from Central Academy in Beijing and students from Les Ecole de Beaux Arts, Paris. Source: Wen Pulin, ed., *Zhongguo Xingdong - Bashi niandai dao jiushi niandai de xingwei yishu* (*China Action - Performance art in the 80s and 90s*) (Beijing: Beijing Windhorse Mass medium Co., Ltd, 1999).

1.8 Xiamen Dada, Actions following the exhibition at the Xiamen City Arts Gallery of the Masses, October 1986. Source: Wu Meichun, ed., *Dangdai yishu yu bentu wenhua – Huang Yongping* (*Contemporary Art and Cultural Transformation Series – Huang Yongping*) (Fuzhou: Fujian meishu chubanshe, 2003).

1.9 Group Performance Beijing East Village Artists, *To Add Another Meter to an Anonymous Mountain* (copy Zhu Ming), May 1995, Beijing, Photography by Lü Nan. Source: Courtesy of the artist.

1.10 Huang Yongping, *Non-Expressionist Painting*, 1985, Photograph of the artist taken in his studio in Xiamen. Source: Wu Meichun, ed., *Dangdai yishu yu bentu wenhua – Huang Yongping* (*Contemporary Art and Cultural Transformation Series – Huang Yongping*) (Fuzhou: Fujian meishu chubanshe, 2003).

1.11 Zhu Ming, *26 July 2002*, 2002, Performance, Shanlao Mountain Cove, Shandong Province. Source: Courtesy of the artist.

1.12 Ma Liuming, *Fen/Ma Liuming Walks the Great Wall*, 1998, Stills from video documentation of performance. Source: Courtesy of the artist.

1.13 Ma Liuming, *Fen/Ma Liuming Walks the Great Wall*, 1998, Photograph series of performance. Source: Courtesy of the artist.

1.14 Steven Wong, *Unannounced Performance*, Singapore Airlines office located at 5670 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, Wednesday, March Eight, 1995, Description: Three pm. I walked into the offices of Singapore Airlines and recited the Singapore Pledge in Chinese over a bull horn/ power horn, Performance documented in Brush & Ink. Source: Courtesy of the artist.

Chapter 2

2.1 Kwok Mang-Ho, *Plastic Bag Happenings in China*, 1979. Source: Courtesy of the artist.

2.2 Stars Group, Public Protests, 1 October 1979, Beijing. Source: Maki Yôichi. *Avan Chaina: Chûgoku no gendai aaoto* (*Avant China: China's Modern Art*) (Tokyo: Kodanasha, 1998).

2.3 Stars Group, Images taken at the public exhibition on 23 November 1979 at the Huafang Studio in Beihai Park. Source: Maki Yôichi. *Avan Chaina: Chûgoku no gendai aaoto* (*Avant China: China's Modern Art*) (Tokyo: Kodanasha, 1998).

2.4 Xiamen Dada, Actions following the exhibition at the Xiamen City Arts Gallery of the Masses, October 1986. Source: Wu Meichun, ed., *Dangdai yishu yu bentu wenhua – Huang Yongping* (*Contemporary Art and Cultural Transformation Series – Huang Yongping*) (Fuzhou: Fujian meishu chubanshe, 2003).

2.5 *Bringing to Light*, Open-air exhibition at the Xuanwu Park in Nanjing. Source: Jochen Noth, Wolfger Pöhlmann and Kai Reschke, ed., *China Avant-Garde: Counter-Currents in Art and Culture* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1994).

2.6 Wang Qiang, *The Start of the 2nd Movement of the 5th Symphony in Adagio*, 2 December 1985, Installation for the New Space '85 exhibition, Organized by the Young Creator's Society (later changed to the Pond Group). Source: Lü Peng and Yi Dan, ed., *Zhongguo xiandai yishushi - 1979-1989* (*A History of China Modern Art, 1979-1989*) (Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 1995).

2.7 Wang Qiang, *After Hour Artist*, Performance, 1985. Source: Lü Peng and Yi Dan, ed., *Zhongguo xiandai yishushi - 1979-1989* (*A History of China Modern Art, 1979-1989*) (Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 1995).

2.8 Young Creator's Society (Pond Group), *Work Number One: Yangshi Taiji – Series*, June 1986, Public action near the Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts, Hangzhou. Source: Lü Hong & Huang Zhuan, ed., *Zhongguo dangdai meishu tujian- 1979-1999 guannian yishu fence* (*Pictorial of Chinese Contemporary Art - 1979-1999 Edition on Conceptual Art*) (Wuhan: Hubei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2001).

2.9 Zhang Peili and Geng Jianyi, Wrapping Up - King and Queen, November 1986, Performance, Luoyang. Source: Timezone 8 Publications, Hong Kong.

2.10 Young Creator's Society (Pond Group), *The Performer Amidst the Green Colored Empty Space*, 4 November 1986, Public action, Hangzhou. Source: Lü Hong & Huang Zhuan, ed., *Zhongguo dangdai meishu tujian- 1979-1999 guannian yishu*

fence (*Pictorial of Chinese Contemporary Art - 1979-1999 Edition on Conceptual Art*) (Wuhan: Hubei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2001).

2.11 Lanzhou Art Group, May Fourth Youthday, 4 May 1987, Action piece. Source: Courtesy of Yang Zhichao.

2.12 Concept 21st Century Group, *Concept 21 - Art Before your Eyes*, 23 December 1986, Public actions at Beijing University, Participants: Sheng Qi, Kang Mu, Zheng Yuke, and Zhao Jianhai. Source: Wen Pulin, ed., *Zhongguo Xingdong - Bashi niandai dao jiushi niandai de xingwei yishu* (*China Action - Performance art in the 80s and 90s*) (Beijing: Beijing Windhorse Mass medium Co., Ltd, 1999).

2.13 Action Art, CAFA, July 1985, Participants include students from Central Academy in Beijing and students from Les Ecole de Beaux Arts, Paris. Source: Wen Pulin, ed., *Zhongguo Xingdong - Bashi niandai dao jiushi niandai de xingwei yishu* (*China Action - Performance art in the 80s and 90s*) (Beijing: Beijing Windhorse Mass medium Co., Ltd, 1999).

2.14 Southern Artists Salon, *Southern Artists Salon's First Experiment Exhibition*, September 1986, Performance at the Zhongshan Theatre, Guangzhou, Participants included: Wang Du, Dai Jianfeng, LinYilin, and Chen Shaoxiong. Source: Lü Peng and Yi Dan, ed., *Zhongguo xiandai yishushi - 1979-1989* (*A History of China Modern Art, 1979-1989*) (Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 1995).

2.15 Song Yongping and Song Yonghong, *A Scenic Personal Experience*, Performance, November 1986, Shanxi Taiyuan Cultural Palace, Taiyuan. Source: Courtesy of the artist.

2.16 21st Century Group, *Concept 21 - Great Wall*, Summer 1987, Performance, Great Wall at Gubeikou, Beijing Municipality, Participants included: Sheng Qi, Kang Mu, Zheng Yuke, Zhao Jianhai, Hou Hanru, and Fan Di'an. Source: Courtesy of Sheng Qi.

Chapter 3

3.1 Black Union Group, *Stretcher Series*, Performance, June 1986. Source: Gao Minglu, ed., *Zhongguo dandai yishu shi, 1985-1986* (*A History of Chinese Contemporary Art, 1985-1986*) (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1997).

3.2 Xu Yihui and Cai Xiaogang, *Archaeological excavations on a waste disposal site*, Summer 1986, Performance, Lianyungang Economic and Technical Development Zone. Source: Jochen Noth, Wolfger Pöhlmann and Kai Reschke, ed., *China Avant-Garde: Counter-Currents in Art and Culture* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1994).

3.3 M Art Group, *Ceremony*, December 1986, Performance by Tang Guangming, Duration: 10 minutes, Shanghai. Source: Jane Farver, Luis Cammitzer, and Rachel Weiss, ed., *Global conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s-1980s* (New York : Queens Museum of Art, 1999).

3.4 M Art Group, *Sense of Violence*, December 1986, Performance by Yang Xu and Zhou Tiehai, Duration: 10 minutes, Shanghai. Source: Jane Farver, Luis Cammitzer, and Rachel Weiss, ed., *Global conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s-1980s* (New York : Queens Museum of Art, 1999).

3.5 Song Yongping and others, *Country Project*, 1987. Source: Jane Farver, Luis Cammitzer, and Rachel Weiss, ed., *Global conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s-1980s* (New York : Queens Museum of Art, 1999).

3.6 Wei Guangqing with Ma Liuming, *About One - Suicide Project*, September 1988, Performance series, Wuhan. Source: Lü Hong & Huang Zhuan, ed., *Zhongguo dangdai meishu tujian- 1979-1999 guannian yishu fence* (*Pictorial of Chinese Contemporary Art - 1979-1999 Edition on Conceptual Art*) (Wuhan: Hubei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2001).

3.7 Shanghai Group, *The Last Supper* (Act One), 1988, Performance, Shanghai, Participants: Li Shan, Sun Liang and Pei Jing, Song Haidong, Zhou Changjiang, Li Xianting and Wu Liang. Source: Wen Pulin, ed., *Zhongguo Xingdong - Bashi niandai dao jiushi niandai de xingwei yishu* (*China Action - Performance art in the 80s and 90s*) (Beijing: Beijing Windhorse Mass medium Co., Ltd, 1999).

3.8 Shanghai Group, The Last Supper (Act Two), 1988, Performance, Shanghai, Participants: Li Shan, Sun Liang and Pei Jing, Song Haidong, Zhou Changjiang, Li Xianting and Wu Liang. Source: Wen Pulin, ed., *Zhongguo Xingdong - Bashi niandai dao jiushi niandai de xingwei yishu* (*China Action - Performance art in the 80s and 90s*) (Beijing: Beijing Windhorse Mass medium Co., Ltd, 1999).

3.9 Organizers of the China Modern Art Exhibition laying banners bearing the 'No U-Turn' in front of the China Art Gallery China Modern Art Exhibition, 5 February, 1989. Source: Lü Peng and Yi Dan, ed., *Zhongguo xiandai yishushi - 1979-1989* (*A History of China Modern Art, 1979-1989*) (Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 1995).

3.10 Huang Yongping, *Towing the China Art Gallery Away*, Proposal for performance piece, Submitted to the Organizing Committee for the China Modern Art Exhibition, December 1988. Source: Wu Meichun, ed., *Dangdai yishu yu bentu wenhua – Huang Yongping* (*Contemporary Art and Cultural Transformation Series – Huang Yongping*) (Fuzhou: Fujian meishu chubanshe, 2003).

3.11 Huang Yongping, *"A History of Chinese Painting" and "A Concise History of Modern Painting" Washed in A Washing Machine for Two Minutes – 1987.12.1*, 1987, Installation. Source: Wu Meichun, ed., *Dangdai yishu yu bentu wenhua – Huang Yongping* (*Contemporary Art and Cultural Transformation Series – Huang Yongping*) (Fuzhou: Fujian meishu chubanshe, 2003).

3.12 Yang Jun and Wang Youshen, √ (*Check*), Installation, China Art Gallery, February 1989. Source: Jochen Noth, Wolfger Pöhlmann and Kai Reschke, ed., *China Avant-Garde: Counter-Currents in Art and Culture* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1994).

3.13 Gao Brothers (Gao Zhen and Gao Qiang), *Midnight Mass (Lost Trial at the End of the Century)*, Installation, China Art Gallery, February 1989. Source: Courtesy of the artists.

3.14 Wang Deren, *The one who rises the sun? – 'Teaser' Wang Deren*, Performance at the China Modern Art Exhibition, 5 February 1989, China Art Gallery, Beijing. Source: Wen Pulin, ed., *Zhongguo Xingdong - Bashi niandai dao jiushi niandai de xingwei yishu* (*China Action - Performance art in the 80s and 90s*) (Beijing: Beijing Windhorse Mass medium Co., Ltd, 1999).

3.15 Wu Shanzhuan, Artist in front of his installation *A Certain Number of Natural Paragraphs in the Second Red-Character Chapter of a Novel*, 1986. Source: Image Library, Department Art History, University of Sydney.

3.16 Wu Shanzhuan, Artists writing the statement "Closed one day for stocktaking, 89.2.5" following the an order by the police to close his performance *Big Business* for which he sold Shrimp on the opening day of the China Modern Art Exhibition, 5 February 1989, China Art Gallery. Source: Lü Peng and Yi Dan, ed., *Zhongguo xiandai yishushi - 1979-1989* (*A History of China Modern Art, 1979-1989*) (Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 1995).

3.17 Gu Xiong, *Interior View - Fence Wall*, Performance at the opening of the China Modern Art Exhibition, 5 February 1989, China Art Gallery, Beijing. Source: Jochen Noth, Wolfger Pöhlmann and Kai Reschke, ed., *China Avant-Garde: Counter-Currents in Art and Culture* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1994).

3.18 Zhang Nian, *Hatching Eggs*, Performance at the opening of the China Modern Art Exhibition, 5 February 1989, China Art Gallery, Beijing. Source: Lü Hong & Huang Zhuan, ed., *Zhongguo dangdai meishu tujian- 1979-1999 guannian yishu fence* (*Pictorial of Chinese Contemporary Art - 1979-1999 Edition on Conceptual Art*) (Wuhan: Hubei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2001).

3.19 Li Shan, *Washing Feet*, Performance at the opening of the China Modern Art Exhibition, 5 February 1989, China Art Gallery, Beijing. Source: Lü Hong & Huang Zhuan, ed., *Zhongguo dangdai meishu tujian- 1979-1999 guannian yishu fence* (*Pictorial of Chinese Contemporary Art - 1979-1999 Edition on Conceptual Art*) (Wuhan: Hubei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2001).

3.20 Xiao Lu, *Dialogue*, February 1989, Installation for the China Modern Art Exhibition, China Art Gallery, Beijing. Source: Lü Peng and Yi Dan, ed., *Zhongguo xiandai yishushi - 1979-1989* (*A History of China Modern Art, 1979-1989*) (Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 1995).

3.21 Xiao Lu, Artist firing two gunshots at her installation *Dialogue*, Performance at the opening of the China Modern Art Exhibition, 5 February 1989, China Art Gallery, Beijing. Source: Image Library, Department of Art History, University of Sydney.

3.22 Photograph of Tang Song being arrested by police officials following the 'shooting incident' at the opening of the China Modern Art Exhibition, 5

February 1989, China Art Gallery, Beijing. Source: Image Library, Department of Art History & Theory, University of Sydney.

3.23 Yang Shaobin, *Untitled*, 1996-1997, Oil on canvas, 260x360 cm. Source: Courstesy of the artist.

3.24 Guo Jian, *The Day You Went Away: The day Before I went away*, 2003, Oil on canvas, 152x213 cm. Source: Courtesy of the artist.

Chapter 4

4.1 Xu Bing, *A Mirror to Analyze the World* (*Book From the Sky*), Installation, 1988-1989, Beijing, Wood prints on rice paper, Wall section, 430x540 cm. Source: Jochen Noth, Wolfger Pöhlmann and Kai Reschke, ed., *China Avant-Garde: Counter-Currents in Art and Culture* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1994).

4.2 Xu Bing, *Ghosts Pounding the Wall*, Performance and installation, 1990. Source: Jochen Noth, Wolfger Pöhlmann and Kai Reschke, ed., *China Avant-Garde: Counter-Currents in Art and Culture* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1994).

4.3 Xu Bing, *Ghosts Pounding the Wall*, 1990, Installation, Boston Museum of Art, 1992. Source: Lü Hong & Huang Zhuan, ed., *Zhongguo dangdai meishu tujian-1979-1999 guannian yishu fence* (*Pictorial of Chinese Contemporary Art - 1979-1999 Edition on Conceptual Art*) (Wuhan: Hubei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2001).

4.4 Xu Bing, *The Great Wall Alignment*, 1987, Installation, Dimension unknown. Source: Lü Peng and Yi Dan, ed., *Zhongguo xiandai yishushi - 1979-1989* (*A History of China Modern Art, 1979-1989*) (Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 1995).

4.5 Cai Guoqiang, *Self-portrait*, 1985, Gunpowder and oil on canvas, 167x118 cm. Source: Dana Friis-Hansen, Octavio Zaya, and Serizawa Takashi, ed., *Cai Guo-Qiang* (Artist Monograph) (London and New York: Phaidon Press, 2002)

4.6 Cai Guoqiang, *Project for Extraterrestrials No.3 - Meteorite Craters*, 1990, Performance for the exhibition Chine Demain pour Hier, Pourrières (France). Source: Jochen Noth, Wolfger Pöhlmann and Kai Reschke, ed., *China Avant-Garde: Counter-Currents in Art and Culture* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1994).

4.7 Cai Guoqiang, *Project for Extraterrestrials, No. 10 – Project to Extent the Great Wall of China by 10.000 Meters*, 1993, Performance, Gansu Province. Source: Lü Hong & Huang Zhuan, ed., *Zhongguo dangdai meishu tujian- 1979-1999 guannian yishu fence* (*Pictorial of Chinese Contemporary Art - 1979-1999 Edition on Conceptual Art*) (Wuhan: Hubei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2001).

4.8 Wang Fasheng, *Newspapers – Advertisement*, 1993, Performance, Great Wall at Gubeikou, Beijing Municipality. Source: Lü Peng, *Zhongguo dangdai meishushi, 1990-1999* (*90s Art China*) (Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 2000).

4.9 Wang Jianwei, *Cycle – Sowing*, November 1993 to May 1994, Performance, Sichuan Province. Source: Courtesy of the artist.

4.10 Photograph of Ma Liuming (centre) with other artists at the East Village in Beijing, 1993. Source: Zou Jianping, *Nüxing yu yishude shengtai zishu* (*An Account of Life Conditions of Women and Art*) (Changsha: Hunan meishu chunbanshe, 1993)

4.11 Ma Liuming, *Dialogue with Gilbert and George*, 1993, Performance, East Village, Beijing. Source: Courtesy of the artist.

4.12 Ma Liuming, *Dialogue with Gilbert and George*, 1993, Performance, East Village, Beijing. Source: Courtesy of the artist.

4.13 Ma Liuming, *Fen/Ma Liuming*, 1993, Performance, East Village, Beijing. Source: Courtesy of the artist.

4.14 Ma Liuming, *Fen/Ma Liuming's Lunch I*, 1994, Performance, East Village, Beijing. Source: Courtesy of the artist.

4.15 Zhu Ming, *30 April 1994*, 1994, Performance, East Village, Beijing. Source: Courtesy of the artist.

4.16 Zhu Ming, *11am, 14 May 1994*, 1994, Performance, Xiaobao Village, Tongzhou County. Source: Courtesy of the artist.

4.17 Zhu Ming, *1pm, 14 May 1994*, 1994, Performance, Xiaobao Village, Tongzhou County. Source: Courtesy of the artist.

4.18 Zhu Ming, *9 March 2003*, 2003, Performance for the Liquid Sea Exhibition, Museum of Contemporary Art, Farm Cove, Sydney. Source: Courtesy of the artist.

4.19 Zhang Huan, *12 Square Meters*, 14 June 1994, Performance, East Village, Beijing, Photography by Rong Rong. Source: Wu Hung. *Transience: Chinese Experimental Art at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: The David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art, University of Chicago, 1999).

4.20 Zhang Huan, *65 Kilograms*, 10 July 1994, Performance, East Village, Beijing. Source: Lü Hong & Huang Zhuan, ed., *Zhongguo dangdai meishu tujian- 1979-1999 guannian yishu fence* (*Pictorial of Chinese Contemporary Art - 1979-1999 Edition on Conceptual Art*) (Wuhan: Hubei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2001).

4.21 Ma Liuming and Zhang Huan, Third Contact, 1995, Performance, Photography by Rong Rong. Source: Lü Hong & Huang Zhuan, ed., *Zhongguo dangdai meishu tujian- 1979-1999 guannian yishu fence* (*Pictorial of Chinese Contemporary Art - 1979-1999 Edition on Conceptual Art*) (Wuhan: Hubei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2001).

4.22 Zhu Fadong, *Missing Person Announcement* (Posting), 1993, Performance, Kunming. Source: Courtesy of the artist.

4.23 Zhu Fadong, *Missing Person Announcement*, 1993, Collage for Performance, 29.7x21 cm. Source: Courtesy of the artist.

4.24 Zhu Fadong, *Missing Person Announcement* (Street Pole), 1993, Performance, Kunming. Source: Courtesy of the artist.

4.25 Zhu Fadong, *This Person is For Sale (Negotiate Price on Spot)*, 1994, Performance, Wangfujing, Beijing. Source: Courtesy of the artist.

4.26 He Yunchang, *Talking with Water*, 1999, Performance, Kunming. Source: Courtesy of the artist.

4.27 He Yunchang, *Wrestle: One and One Hundred*, 2001, Performance, Kunming. Source: Courtesy of the artist.

4.28 Gu Dexin, *20 May – 31 May 1997*, 1997, Photograph Series, 60x80 cm each. Source: Courtesy of the artist.

4.29 Gu Dexin, *29 November 1998*, Installation, Galerie de France, Paris. Source: Courtesy of the artist.

4.30 Wang Guangyi, *Great Criticism Series: Pepsi*, 1992, Oil on canvas, 175x175 cm. Source: Chang Tsong-zung and Marc Decrop, ed., *Paris-Pékin* (Paris: Chinese Century, 2002).

4.31 Sun Ping, *China Sun Ping Art Shares Limited Company - Renminbi A Shares*, October 1992, Computer print. Source: Wen Pulin, ed., *Zhongguo Xingdong - Bashi niandai dao jiushi niandai de xingwei yishu* (*China Action - Performance art in the 80s and 90s*) (Beijing: Beijing Windhorse Mass medium Co., Ltd, 1999).

4.32 Sun Ping, *China Sun Ping Art Shares Limited Company - Renminbi A Shares*, October 1992, Performance at Guangzhou Biennale, Guangzhou. Source: Wen Pulin, ed., *Zhongguo Xingdong - Bashi niandai dao jiushi niandai de xingwei yishu* (*China Action - Performance art in the 80s and 90s*) (Beijing: Beijing Windhorse Mass medium Co., Ltd, 1999).

4.33 Ren Jian et.al., *Big Consumer - Ren Jian Stamp Collection*, April 1993, Performance, Beijing/ Wuhan/ Zhengzhou/ Harbin/ and other cities across China. Source: Wen Pulin, ed., *Zhongguo Xingdong - Bashi niandai dao jiushi niandai de xingwei yishu* (*China Action - Performance art in the 80s and 90s*) (Beijing: Beijing Windhorse Mass medium Co., Ltd, 1999).

4.34 Chen Wenbo, Works from *Vitamin Series*, 1999, Installed at Polyphénolrène exhibition (Curated by Li Xianting), Songzhuang (Tongzhou County) Photograph: by John Clark. Source: Image Library, Department of Art History, University of Sydney.

4.35 Damien Hirst, *Pharmacy*, 1992, Installation. Source: Robert Violette, ed., *Damien Hirst – I want to spend the rest of my life everywhere, with everyone, one to one, always, forever, now* (New York: Monacelli Press, 1997).

4.36 Chen Wenbo, *Vitamine E, No. 13*, 1999, Oil on canvas, 200x150 cm. Source: Courtesy of the artist.

4.37 Fang Lijun, *Group Two, No. 2*, 1992, Oil on canvas, 200x200 cm. Source: Jochen Noth, Wolfger Pöhlmann and Kai Reschke, ed., *China Avant-Garde: Counter-Currents in Art and Culture* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1994).

4.38 Sun Yuan, *Honey* (2nd edition), 9 January 1999, Installation at the exhibition *Post-Sense Sensibility* (Curated by Qiu Zhijie and Wu Meichun), Beijing. Source: Image Library, Department of Art History, University of Sydney.

4.39 Sun Yuan, Honey (2nd edition), 9 January 1999, Installation (Detail). Source: Image Library, Department of Art History, University of Sydney.

4.40 Zhu Yu, *Theologie Portative*, 9 January 1999, Installation at the exhibition Post-Sense Sensibility (Curated by Qiu Zhijie and Wu Meichun), Beijing. Source: Courtesy of the artist.

4.41 Gu Dexin, *7 November 1998*, 1998, Installation at the exhibition *Corruptionists* (Curated by Zhang Zhouhui), Beijing. Source: Courtesy of the artist.

4.42 Damien Hirst, *When Logics Die*, 1993, Installation. Source: Robert Violette, ed., *Damien Hirst – I want to spend the rest of my life everywhere, with everyone, one to one, always, forever, now* (New York: Monacelli Press, 1997).

4.43 Rembrandt van Rijn, *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr Nicolaes Tulp*, 1632, Oil on canvas, 169.5x216 cm. Source: Collection of Mauritshuis, The Hague, Netherlands.

4.44 Rembrandt van Rijn, *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr Jan Deijman*, 1656, oil on canvas. Source: Image Library, Department of Art History, University of Sydney.

4.45 Chen Lingyang, *Twelve Flower Months* (*The Fourth Month – Peony*), November 1999 – December 2000, Beijing, Photograph Series made from performance. Source: Courtesy of the artist.

Chapter 5

5.1 Yang Fudong, *Liulan*, 2003, Video Still. Source: Courtesy of Gu Zhenqing.

5.2 Cui Xiuwen, *Ladies*, June 2000, Video Stills, Shanghai. Source: Courtesy of the artist.

5.3 Feng Mengbo, *Q3*, 1999, Video Animation Stills Source: Chang Tsong-zung and Marc Decrop, ed., *Paris-Pékin* (Paris: Chinese Century, 2002).

5.4 Feng Mengbo, *A_Q*, 2003, Digital animation. Source: Courtesy of Pi Li.

5.5 Zhang Peili, *30x30*, 1988, Video Stills, Total duration of video: 130 minutes. Source: Image Library, Department of Art History, University of Sydney.

5.6 Zhang Peili, *Water, Standard Version from the Cihai Dictionary*, 1993, Video production. Source: Lü Peng, *Zhongguo dangdai meishushi, 1990-1999* (*90s Art China*) (Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 2000).

5.7 Zhang Peili, *Uncertain Pleasures*, 1996, Video Installation, 12 Monitors. Source: Lü Hong & Huang Zhuan, ed., *Zhongguo dangdai meishu tujian- 1979-1999*

guannian yishu fence (*Pictorial of Chinese Contemporary Art - 1979-1999 Edition on Conceptual Art*) (Wuhan: Hubei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2001).

5.8 Zhang Peili, *Eating*, 1997, Video Installation, 3 Monitors. Source: Courtesy of Ni Haifeng.

5.9 Wang Jianwei, Living Elsewhere, 1999, Video Still. Source: Courtesy of the artist.

5.10 Wang Gongxin, *Karaoke*, 2000, Video Still. Source: Courtesy of the artist.

5.11 Wang Gongxin, *The Sky of Brooklyn*, 1995, Video Installation. Source: Courtesy of the artist.

5.12 Qiu Zhijie, *New Life*, 1992, Installation, Hangzhou Zhejiang Academy of Fine Art (China Art Academy). Source: Courtesy of the artist.

5.13 Qiu Zhijie, *Bathroom*, 1997, Video Stills. Source: Courtesy of the artist.

5.14 Qiu Zhijie, *Public Life*, 1994, Installation, Glass, Approx. 70x50x40 cm. Source: Courtesy of the artist.

5.15 Qiu Zhijie, *The West*, 2001, Digital animation. Source: Courtesy of the artist.

5.16 Photographs of the exhibition Post-Sense Sensibility: Spree (Curated by: Qiu Zhijie), Beijing, 11 March 2001. Source: Courtesy of Qiu Zhijie.

5.17 Living Dance Studio, *Report on Giving Birth*, 1999, Modern dance performance production. Source: Courtesy of Wen Hui and Wu Wenguang.

5.18 Living Dance Studio, *Report on Body*, 2002, Modern dance performance production. Source: Courtesy of Wen Hui and Wu Wenguang.

5.19 Living Dance Studio, *Dancing with Farm Workers*, 2001, Modern dance performance production. Source: Courtesy of Wen Hui and Wu Wenguang.

5.20 Song Dong, *Broken Mirror*, 1999, Video Stills, Total duration of video: 7 minutes. Source: Chang Tsong-zung and Marc Decrop, ed., *Paris-Pékin* (Paris: Chinese Century, 2002).

5.21 Song Dong, *Floating*, 2004, Video installation, Installed at the 5th phase of the Asian Traffic exhibition (Curated by: Huangfu Binghui), Gallery 4A, Sydney. Source: Courtesy of Gallery 4A.

5.22 Song Dong, *Writing Diary with Water*, 1995-Present, Ongoing performance. Source: Courtesy of the artist.

Chapter 6

6.1 Sun Yuan, *Solitary Animal*, 2000, Installation, Featured at the Exhibition FUCK OFF (Curated by Ai Weiwei and Feng Boyi), Eastlink Gallery, Shanghai. Source: Courtesy of the artist.

6.2 Yang Zhichao, *Planting Grass*, 2000, Performance at the Exhibition FUCK OFF (Curated by Ai Weiwei and Feng Boyi), Eastlink Gallery, Shanghai. Source: Courtesy of the artist.

6.3 Zhu Yu, *Eating People*, 17 October 2000, Performance (Slide 1), Beijing. Source: Courtesy of the artist.

6.4 Zhu Yu, *Eating People*, 17 October 2000, Performance (Slide 2), Beijing. Source: Courtesy of the artist.

6.5 Xu Zhen, *Rainbows*, 1998, Video Stills. Source: Ai Weiwei and Feng Boyi, ed., *Bu Hezuo Fangshi/ FUCK OFF*. (Beijing: private publication, 2000).

Chapter 7

7.1 Sun Yuan and Peng Yu, *Controversy Model*, September 2003, Live art piece, Beijing Dashanzi 798 Factory. Source: Courtesy of Gu Zhenqing.

7.2 Ma Liuming, *Fen/Ma Liuming in Lyon*, 2001, Photograph series of performance, 127x240 cm. Source: Courtesy of the artist.

7.3 Ma Liuming, *Fen/Ma Liuming in Lyon*, 2001, Photograph series installed at the exhibition Huajiadi (Curated by Nan Nan), China Art Seasons, May 2004, Photographed by the author.

7.4 Yang Zhichao, *Jiayu Pass*, 30 December 1999 to 30 January 2000, Jiayu Pass, Gansu Province, Duration: 1 month. Source: Courtesy of the artist.

7.5 Yang Zhichao, Jiayu Pass, 30 December 1999 to 30 January 2000, Performance documentation in photography and diary notes. Source: Courtesy of the artist.

7.6 Zhu Ming, *9 March 2003*, 2003, Performance for the Liquid Sea Exhibition, Museum of Contemporary Art, MCA front lawn, Sydney. Source: Courtesy of the artist.

7.7 Zhu Ming, *26 July 2002*, Photographs of performance installed at the 6th Sharjah International Art Biennale (Chinese section curated by Thomas J. Berghuis), United Arab Emirates, April-May, 2003. Source: Courtesy of Universes in Universe.

7.8 Zhu Ming, 26 July 2002, Detail of photograph censured by the Sharjah Art Museum during the 6th Sharjah International Art Biennale, United Arab Emirates, April-May, 2003. Source: Courtesy of Universes in Universe

7.9 Ma Liuming, *Baby, No. 8*, 2004, Oil on canvas, 200x150 cm. Source: Courtesy of the artist.

7.10 Cang Xin, *Between Man and Nature - Mountain*, 2003, Photograph of performance, Dimensions variable. Source: Courtesy of the artist.

7.11 Weng Fen, *At the Wall in Shenzhen No. 1*, 2002, Photograph, Dimensions variable. Source: Courtesy of Pi Li.

7.12 Zhu Yu, *Skin Graft*, 24 March 2000 and 12 April 2000, Performance, Beijing. Source: Courtesy of the artist.

7.13 Yang Zhichao (with Ai Weiwei), *Iron*, 9 October 2000, Performance, Ai Weiwei Studio, Caocangdi, Beijing. Source: Courtesy of the artist.

7.14 Yang Zhichao (with Ai Weiwei), *Hide*, 31 July 2002, Performance, Ai Weiwei Studio, Caocangdi, Beijing. Source: Courtesy of the artist.

7.15 Sun Yuan & Peng Yu, *Unidentified Flying Objects*, 2005, Installation at the 51st Venice Biennale, 600x250x600 cm, Photograph by: John Clark. Source: Image Library, Department of Art History, University of Sydney.

7.16 Zhang Huan, *Angel*, 26 October 1993, Performance, China Art Gallery, Beijing. Source: Image Library, Department of Art History, University of Sydney.

7.17 Liu Jin, *Coca Cola Bath*, 28 August 2000, Performance, West Siduhe Village, Huairou County, Beijing Municipality, Part of the 1st Open Platform - International Performance Art Festival (Organized by Chen Jin, Shu Yang and Zhu Ming). Source: Courtesy of the artist.

APPENDIX V

SELECTED LIST OF ARTISTS CITED

Ai Weiwei, 艾未未, 1957

Bao Jianfei, 包剑斐

Bo Yun, 薄云 1948

Cai Guoqiang, 蔡国强, 1957

Cai Lixiong, 蔡立雄, 1960

Cang Xin, 苍鑫,1967

Cao Fei, 曹斐, 1978

Chai Xiaogang, 柴小刚, 1962

Chang Qing, 常青, 1965

Chen Guang, 陈光, 1971

Chen Jin, 陈进, 1963

Chen Lingyang, 陈羚羊, 1975

Chen Shaoxiong, 陈劭雄, 1962

Chen Wenbo, 陈文波, 1969

Chen Xiaoping, 陈小平

Chen Zhen, 陈箴, 1955-2000

Cheng Conglin, 程丛林, 1955

Cheng Li, 成立

Cui Xiuwen, 崔岫闻, 1970

Dai Guangyu, 戴光郁, 1955

Ding Fang, 丁方, 1956

Ding Yi, 丁 乙, 1962

Fang Lijun, 方力钧, 1963

Feng Mengbo, 冯梦波, 1966

Feng Qianyu, 冯倩钰, 1974

Gao Qiang, 高强, 1962

Gao Shiming, 高世名, 1976

Gao Shiqiang, 高世强, 1971

Gao Yang, 高炀, 1965

Geng Jianyi, 耿建翌, 1962

Gu Dexin, 顾德鑫, 1962

Gu Lei, 顾磊, 1971

Gu Wenda, 谷文达,, 1955

Gu Xiong, 顾雄, 1953

Guan Ce, 管策, 1957

Guan Ying, 关颖

Guo Jian, 郭建, 1964

Hai Bo, 海波, 1960

Han Fei, 韩斐

Han Ning, 韩宁

Hao Zhidong, 郝志东

He Yunchang, 何云昌, 1967

Hu Jieming, 胡介鸣, 1957

Huang Jian, 黄坚

Hu Jianping, 胡建平, 1962

Huang Rui, 黄锐, 1952

Huang Yongping, 黄永 石水, 1954

Huang Yan, 黄岩, 1966

Ji Tairan, 糜泰然

Jiao Yaoming, 焦耀明, 1957

Jiang Bo, 姜波

Jiang Jie, 姜杰, 1963

Jiang Zhi, 蒋志, 1971

Jin Feng,,金峰, 1962

Kang Mu, 康木

Kong Chang'an, 孔长安, 1953

Kwok Mang-Ho, 郭孟浩, 1947

Li Chen, 李晨

Li Jixiang, 利继

Li Jianwei, 李建伟

Li Shan, 李山, 1944

Li Shaoping, 李少平

Li Wei, 李帏, 1970

Li Xianting, 李先庭, 1949

Li Yongbin, 李永斌, 1963

Li Yuenian, 利跃年, 1958

Liang Juhui, 梁矩辉, 1959

Lin Chun, 林春, 1960

Lin Jiahua, 林嘉华, 1953

Lin Tianmiao, 林天苗, 1961

Lin Yilin, 林一林, 1964

Liu Anping, 刘安平, 1964

Liu Chengying, 刘成英, 1957

Liu Chun, 刘淳

Liu Jin, 刘瑾, 1971

Liu Wei (1), 刘炜, 1965

Liu Wei (2), 刘伟, 1972

Liu Yan, 刘彦, 1960

Liu Xinhua, 刘新华, 1956

Lu Haizhou, 吕海舟

Lu Lin, 鹿林, 1962

Lü Shengzhong, 吕胜中, 1952

Liu Zheng, 刘铮, 1969

Luo Zidan, 罗子丹,

Ma Desheng, 马德升, 1952

Ma Liuming, 马六明, 1969

Ma Yunfei, 马云飞, 1961

Mao Lizi, 毛栗子, 1950

Ni Haifeng, 倪海峰, 1964

Ni Weihua, 倪卫花, 1962

Pei Jing, 裴晶, 1962

Peng Yu, 彭禹, 1974

Pu Jie, 浦捷, 1959

Qi Zhilong, 祁志龙, 1962

Qin Ga, 琴嘎, 1971

Qin Yifeng, 秦一峰, 1961

Qiu Zhijie, 邱志杰, 1969

Qu Leilei, 曲磊磊, 1951

Ren Jian, 任戬, 1955

Rong Rong, 荣荣, 1968

Ruan Haiying, 阮海鹰, 1961

Shao Fei, 邵飞, 1954

Sheng Qi, 盛奇

Shi Chong, 石冲, 1963

Shi Qing, 石青, 1969

Shu Qun, 舒群, 1957

Shu Yang, 舒阳, 1969

Shi Yong, 施勇, 1963

Song Haidong, 宋海东, 1958

Song Dong, 宋冬, 1966

Song Ling, 宋陵, 1962

Song Xiaohong, 宋小红

Song Yonghong, 宋永红, 1966

Song Yongping, 宋永平, 1961

Sui Jianguo, 随建国, 1956

Sun Liang, 孙良, 1957

Sun Ping, 孙平, 1953

Sun Yuan, 孙原, 1972

Tang Guangming, 汤光明

Tang Song, 唐宋, 1960

Wang Chuyu, 王楚禹, 1974

Wang Deren, 王德人, 1962

Wang Gongxin, 王功新, 1960

Wang Guangyi, 王广义, 1956

Wang Huimin, 王惠敏, 1962

Wang Jianwei, 汪建伟, 1958

Wang Jin, 王晋, 1962

Wang Jinsong, 王劲松, 1963

Wang Keping, 王可平, 1949

Wang Luyan, 王鲁炎, 1956

Wang Nanming, 王南溟, 1962

Wang Peng, 王蓬, 1964

Wang Qiang, 王强, 1957

Wang Shihua, 王世华

Wang Wei, 王卫, 1972

Wang Yazhong, 王亚中, 1962

Wang Youshen, 王友身, 1964,

Wei Guangqing, 魏光庆, 1963

Wen Pulin, 温普林, 1957

Weng Fen, 翁奋, 1961

Wu Ershan, 乌尔善, 1972

Wu Liang, 吴亮

Wu Mali, 吴玛,

Wu Meichun, 吴美纯, 1969

Wu Shanzhuan, 吴山专, 1960

Wu Wenguang, 吴文光, 1956

Wu Yanping, 吴燕萍, 1957

Xiao Lu, 肖鲁, 1962

Xiao Hong, 肖红, 1966

Xiao Yu, 萧昱,1965

Xing Danwen, 邢丹文, 1967

Xu Bing, 徐冰, 1955

Xu Chengtou, 许成头

Xu Lei, 徐累, 1963

Xu San, 徐三

Xu Tan, 徐坦, 1957

Xu Yihui, 徐一晖, 1964

Xu Zhen, 徐震, 1977

Xu Zhiwei, 徐志伟, 1961

Yan Lei, 颜磊, 1965

Yan Li, 严力, 1954

Yang Feiyun, 杨飞云, 1954

Yang Fudong, 杨福东, 1971

Yang Jiechang, 杨诘苍, 1956

Yang Jun, 杨君, 1963

Yang Maoyuan, 杨茂源, 1966

Yang Qing, 杨青, 1969

Yang Shaobin, 杨少斌, 1963

Yang Yong, 杨勇, 1975

Yang Zhengzhong, 杨振忠, 1968

Yang Zhichao, 杨志超, 1963

Yang Zhilin, 杨志麟, 1956

Yin Xiaofeng, 印晓峰, 1965

Yin Xiuzhen, 尹秀珍, 1963

Yu Fan, 于凡, 1966

Yu Ji, 余机, 1965

Yu Youhan, 余友涵, 1943

Zeng Xun, 曾循, 1962

Zha Li, 查力

Zhan Wang, 展望, 1962

Zhang Binbin, 张彬彬

Zhang Dali, 张大力,1963

Zhang Guotian, 张国田

Zhang Hanzi, 张涵子, 1969

Zhang Huan, 张洹, 1965

Zhang Jianjun, 张健君, 1955

Zhang Lei, 张雷, 1968

Zhang Nian, 张念, 1961

Zhang Peili, 张培力, 1957

Zhang Xin, 张新, 1967

Zhao Bandi, 赵半狄, 1963

Zhao Jianhai, 赵建海

Zheng Guogu, 郑国谷, 1970

Zheng Yuke, 郑玉坷, 1964

Zhong Ancheng,

Zhou Changjiang, 周长江, 1950

Zhou Tiehai, 周铁海, 1966

Zhu Fadong, 朱发东, 1960

Zhu Jia, 朱加, Beijing, 1963

Zhu Jinshi, 朱金石, 1954

Zhu Ming, 朱冥, 1972

Zhu Qingsheng, 朱青生, 1957

Zhu Yu, 朱昱, 1970

Zhuang Hui, 庄辉, 1961

Zu Zhou, 诅咒

APPENDIX VI

SELECTION OF CHINESE CONCEPTS CITED AND THEIR DEFINITION IN THE EXPERIMENTAL ART SCENE

biaoxian	表现	show, display, manifest
biaoyan	表演	stage, act, perform, play
biaoyan yishu	表演艺术	performing arts
chouxiang yishu	抽象艺术	abstract art
daoyan	导演	direct
fei guanfang	非官方	un-official
ganxing	感性	sensibility
guanfang	官方	official
guannian sheying	观念摄影	conceptual photography
guannian yishu	观念艺术	conceptual art
guannian	观念	concept
hou ganxing	后感性	post-sense sensibility
huanjing	环境	surroundings, circumstances, context
huodong	活动	action, movement
kua meiti	跨媒体	transmediality
lixing zhuyi	理性主义	rationalism
lixing	理性	reason, ratio
luxiang yishu	录像艺术	video art
mei	美	beauty, fine
meishu	美术	fine arts
pinxing	品行	proper conduct, behavior
qunzhong yundong	群众运动	mass movement
rou ti	肉体	human body, flesh
routi yishu	肉体艺术	body art, flesh art

shen	身	body, substance
shenti	身体	body
sheshen	舍身	life
sheying	摄影	photography
shiti	尸体	corps
shu	术	art, skill, technique
sixiang yishu	思想艺术	idea art
sixiang	思想	idea
ti	体	body, substance
wei	为	act, behave
xianchang yishu	现场艺术	live art
xianchang	现场	live action, document, scene
xianshi zhuyi	现实主义	realism
xianshi	现实	real, actuality
xianxiang	现象	phenomenon, appearance
xin meiti yishu	新媒体艺术	new media art
xin meiti	新媒体	new media
xingdong	行动	action
xingdong yishu	行动艺术	action art
xingshi zhuyi	形式主义	formalism
xingshi	形式	form
xingwei	行为	action, behavior, conduct
xingwei yishu	行为艺术	performance art, behavioral art
yishu yuyan	艺术语言	artistic language
yishu	艺术	art
yundong	运动	movement, chain of events, series of movements
zhenghan	震撼	shock
zhenhan yishu	震撼艺术	shock art
ziran	自然	spontaneous
ziwo biaoxian	自我表现	self-expression
ziwo jiankong	自我监控	self-inspection, self-censorship

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