1 **Art under Lockdown: Artists, Bloggers and the China Nightmare in the time of Covid-19**

2 **Agenda**

1 • China Dream
• Dream nightmares
• Parrhesia
• Top down control
• Bottom up reactions

3 **I.**

Introduction:

The Dream & the Power

4 **From the American Dream to the Chinese Dream**

• ‘To get rich is glorious’
• -> Economic Success &
• Superpower Status

5 **Xi Jinping: The China Dream**

29 Nov 2012
• Xi Jinping:
  • speech at Exhibition in National Museum, Tiananmen Square
• ‘Great revival of the Chinese nation’
  • National humiliation 19C
  • Opium Wars

6 **The China Dream**

- New slogan as vision of China as 21st Century Superpower
-
- Imperial-style reign mottos:
- Xi Jinping
-
- Government's dream?
- Other dreams?

7 **How does China dream?**

- Approach:
  - What are the dreams & nightmares?
  - Perceptions of the World?
  - Hopes, fears and aspirations?
  - Utopias & anti-utopias?
- Aims:
  - To discover vernacular culture
  - <=> officially sanctioned culture

8 **Mediasphere as a Barometer of Cultural Transformation**

- Aims:
  - to understand cultural transformation in post-socialist China's mediasphere (Debray, 1991)
  - Vernacular culture & its socio-political implications
- Research Question:
  - How do China's artists / writers use social media for communicating?
- Sources:
  - Works of art & literature

- Print media
- Internet literature, digital media
- Social media

- Method:
  - Analyse art, print & Internet sources
  - Social media contents / frame
  - Digital media: New cultural dynamics

9 **II.**

Parrhesia in East & West

10 **Parrhesia in Western Culture**

- Greek παρρησία — first in Euripides (c.484-407 BC)
  - Literally: ‘saying everything one has in mind’
  - Speaking truth to power, freedom of expression, transparency, duty, idle talk, gossip.

11 **Parrhesia in Western Culture**

- Greek παρρησία — first in Euripides (c.484-407 BC)
  - Literally: ‘saying everything one has in mind’
  - Speaking truth to power, freedom of expression, transparency, duty, idle talk, gossip.
- Foucault, 1983:
  - Condition: truth-tellers face risk or danger for them in telling truth
  - But they feel bound by duty to muster the courage and do so.
    - Foucault, Michel, ‘Discourse and Truth: The Problematisation of Parrhesia’, Six Lectures given at Berkeley, 1983.

12 **Parrhesia Tradition in China**

- Duke Huan of Qi 齊桓公 (r.685-643 BC) established office of 'admonition officers' (*jian guan* 諫官) to speak truth to power—until Liao dynasty (916-1125).
- Praised by Xi Jinping's e-government: He Jing 何静, website of Audit Bureau of Guilin City, Guangxi 广西自治区桂林市审计局.

13 **Parrhesia Tradition as the Intellectual's Mission**

- *Shi* 士 roaming scholars in pre-Qin China
  - Confucius 孔子
  - Mencius 孟子
  - Roam from kingdom to kingdom to offer advice on good government to the ruler

14 **Parrhesia Risks**

- Sima Qian 司馬遷 (c. 145-c. 86 BC) & Grand Historian to Emperor Han Wudi 漢武帝 (r. 141- 87 BC)
  - Death sentence, commuted to castration and 3 years in prison after Sima Qian defended defeated general Li Ling 李陵 (d. 74 BC)
- Tradition of *xiaoshuo* 小说 — idle talk, gossip, unofficial history rather than 'fiction'
- Political critique often indirect

15 **III.**

China Dream: The Official Discourse

16 **China Dream within Political Framework of Consultative Leninism**

1. CCP to stay in power
2. Governance reform

3. Party to direct changing public opinion
4. Pragmatism in economic and financial management; and
5. The promotion of nationalism in place of Communism'

cf. Steve Tsang (2009)

17 **'One World, One Dream': Beijing Olympics 2008**

- The official Dream:
  - Xi Jinping in charge
  - Zhang Yimou 张艺谋 (b. 1951)
  - Cai Guoqiang 蔡国强 (b. 1957)

18 **'One World':**

Beijing Winter Olympics 2022

19 **IV.**

Dreams in Vernacular Culture:

The Unofficial Discourse

20 **How do artists dream?**

- Unofficial Dreams
- Dreams in China's vernacular culture

21 **Jiang Zhi, Rainbow-Series, 2006**

22 **Jiang Zhi, Rainbow-Series, 2006**

23 **… there are also Nightmares**

24 **Series of Nightmares**

- SARS-CoV-2: Covid-19 2019/2020
- Pandemic
- Ukrainian leg of Xi's Belt and Road Initiative in ruins
- Prolonged internal lockdowns entailing public demonstrations demanding Xi's resignation.

25 **Followed by Xi's BRI Nightmare**

26 **V.**

Covid-19 & Censorship

27 **Covid-19 Timeline**

28 **China's Doctors**

- Dr Zhong Nanshan was credited with discovering the virus behind the disease of SARS
- Dr Zhang Yongzhen identified the genetic code and leaked it outside against the will of the government
- The day after his lab was closed for 'rectification'

29 **Censored**

30 **Li Wenliang (1986-2020)**

31 **Blood on whose hands?: Li Wenliang**

- Letter by Wuhan Police forcing Li to sign confession that he spread rumours & lies about a new SARS-like illness
- 3 Jan 2020
- Signed Li Wenliang

32 **Top Down Control:**

Beijing Winter Olympics 2022

33 **Beijing Winter Olympics 2022**

An example of China's Zero Covid Strategy

34 **Beijing Winter Olympics 2022**

- Opening 4 Feb 2022
- Xi Jinping:
  - 'An efficient and safe event'
- Only audience:
  - CCP members
  - Staff from state companies and
  - Games personnel

36 **VI.**

Top Down Control: Propaganda Posters

38 **Go, China, go!**

1 • Refuse game, start with me!

- Go, China, go!
  Go, Wuhan, go!

39 **Go, Wuhan go!**

1 • 'Wuhan jiayou'

- Video: the eerie song of residents under total lockdown in Wuhan chanting
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t_PSSTP8ROg
- Early 2020
- Viral on social media

40 **Covid-19 posters: ‘hilariously aggressive’**

41 **War against Covid-19**

1 - War metaphors
- Fight…
- Resist…
- War against virus…

42 **War Metaphors**

- ‘Wuhan must win!
- China must win!’

43 **War Metaphors**

- Divine army descends from heaven
- A miracle cure for all ills

44

45 **CCP History of Propaganda Posters**

46 **War against Covid-19: Political propaganda posters**

- Source: Princeton propaganda poster archive, https://catalog.princeton.edu/catalog/9912047521350642 1#view

52

53 **Delacroix, 1830: ‘Liberty leading the people’**

54 **VII.**

Top-Down Control: Propaganda Banners

55 **Propaganda Banners**

“If the Coronavirus Doesn’t Scare You, the Banners Will—A Case Study of Early COVID-19 Banners”,
Dong et al., 2020.

- Official instruction
- Gentle prompting
- Humorous
- Confrontational
- Aggressive

56 **2020 People’s Daily: WeChat**

Title of WeChat commentary:

‘Read these banners and you will understand why we need to rely on our people’

“These ‘provincial’ banners are as
rough as landslides, but very “hardcore”, they achieve the purpose of Early COVID-19.”

Cf. Dong, 2020, 14.

57 **2020 Social Media: Weibo**

Hard core banner comment by Tian on Weibo, 6 January 2020:

‘I think this kind of hard-core propaganda slogans are needed. Some places are more traditional. Adults and old people don’t listen to it, and don’t listen to young generation’s suggestions at all. The recent epidemic situation is tense, so you should avoid traveling and stay at home. New year greetings are harmful, and special methods should be used during special times.’

900 reads, 17 likes

Cf. Dong, 2020, 13.

58 **2020 Social Media: kuaishou.com**

Hard core banner comment on kuaishou.com (video-sharing mobile app; since 2011; 2019: 200 million active daily users), 29 January 2020:

‘The banners in the countryside hit the nail on the head.’

1.7 million reads
71,000 likes

Cf. Dong, 2020, 13-14.

59 **“a surgical mask or a breathing tube its your call”**

60 **“a bite of wild animals today see you in hell tomorrow”**

61 **“anyone you encounter on the streets at this juncture is a wild ghost seeking to take your life”**

62 **“even Chinese gods have to wear masks the epidemic is no joke”**

63 ☐ **“if you hang out in public today grass will grow on your grave next year”**

64 ☐ **VIII.**

Bottom up Responses: Artists on Covid-19

65 ☐ **Theme A:**

Superpower - Isle of Isolation & Instability

66 ☐ **Ai Weiwei 艾未未**

67 ☐ **‘Coronation’ (2020)**
- Coronation — Ai Weiwei Films

68 ☐ **1. Ai Weiwei**

(b. 1957)

69 ☐ **To leak or not to leak?**
- Bat soup?
- Wuhan wet market?
- An “Accident” from Wuhan Top Military Biological Weapon’s lab?
- Ai Weiwei’s Dissident View

70 ☐ **Cao Fei 曹斐**

71 ☐ **Cao Fei**

72 **Cao Fei**

73 **Cao Fei**

(b. 1978)

Cao Fei, *Outlying Island – part of Isle of Instability* (2020), multimedia work.

74 **Cao Fei: 'Isle of Instability' (2020)**

- Trip to Singapore with her family to install a show,
- 10 months lockdown in a flat
- Series of home videos, drawings and sculptures
- Flat = her studio; family = collaborators; everyday life = subject of her practice
- The work is reminiscent of the artist's early low-tech DIY artworks rather than long and expensive productions
- The work is based on a documentary study conducted by the artist during quarantine
- Exploring psychological and physical implications of lockdown on artist, family and humanity
- Multimedia work: installed in Audemars Piguet space at the West Bund Art & Design Fair, Shanghai

75 **Cao Fei**

76 **Cao Fei video on "Isle of Instability"**

77 **Cao Fei video on "Isle of Instability"**

78 **Multi-media artist CAO Fei 曹斐 (b. 1978)**

79 **Multi-media artist CAO Fei 曹斐 (b. 1978)**

80 **Question: 'Whose Utopia?' (2006)**

•Video, 2006

•Siemens OSRAM light factory, Guangzhou
• workers: how to survive?
•Avatars live out dreams
•Consumer culture

81 **Cao Fei's Answer: 'My Future is not a Dream'**
- Video clip - Whose Utopia? + interview: https://youtu.be/zB9NFRWREec?t=7m28s
- >> from 7:28 until 8:42

82

83 **Theme B:**

Cyber-fake Psychology

84 **Ye Funa 叶甫纳**

85 **3. Ye Funa**

柯大夫在线 Dr.Corona online (drcorona.online)

86 **Ye Funa (1986)**
- *Dr. Corona online* (2020)
- Interactive, online work
- Commissioned by Chronus Art Center (Shanghai), Art Center Nabi (Seoul) and Rhizome of the New Museum (New York)
- Produced at the very beginning of the pandemic in China – January 2020 when there was a lot of disinformation about Covid-19
- Way to make sense of the confusion brought about by the pandemic and be digitally connected

when isolated

87 **Ye Funa**

- Anyone can contact Dr. Corona online and ask questions in English or Chinese.
- Dr. Corona draws their answers by a wide range of online material gathered by Ye on Weibo, social medias, and songs.
- The answer is not accurate to the patients' symptoms but based on an algorithm developed by Ye and a programmer. Hence, it is often very random.
- Dr. Corona refers to the popular column *Dr.Co Mailbox* in *The Family Doctor*, a highly subscribed magazine in twentieth century China. Within the Q&A section in this column, Dr. Co became a popular icon and a spiritual support for several people.

88 **Ye Funa (b. 1986)**

- Ye's practice is concerned with the relationship between the realities of everyday life.
- folklore, kitsch, pastiche, culture, digital element, participatory art

89 **Ye Funa**

- http://funaye.com/
- Instagram: @oyster
- Born in Kunming, 1986
- Lives in Beijing
- Graduated from Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing and Central St. Martin's College of Art, London, UK

90 **Michael Leung 梁志剛**

91 **4. Michael Leung**

(b.1981), Hong Kong

92 **Michael Leung**

- In his website, he has collected websites, talks, newspaper articles, projects, and other sources in response to Covid-19.
- He poses questions over our capitalist mode of production and its sustainability.
- https://docs.google.com/document/d/1WaU0UVE_JReSPhEwLajNP5HbRqGIqg8wC3qqzMqEGvs/edit

93 **Michael Leung 梁志剛**

- 1981 Born in Hong Kong
- Lives in Hong Kong
- artist,
- writer
- designer
- blogger
- Website:
- https://studioleung.com/

94 **Theme C:**

Panopticon: Prison of Surveillance

95 **Hu Jieming 胡介鸣**

96 **Hu Jieming**

- *14 Days* (2020)
- Work exhibited at the DRC No. 12, Beijing 15 Aug – 15 Oct 2020
- The work developed in DRC No. 12 in Beijing as Hu installed 12 video cameras and spent 14 days in the exhibition space

• The exhibition space becomes both the exhibiting and living space of the artist for 14 days
• The work comprises photographs, video and installations
• The video shows one minute of video footage for each of the 14 days

97 **Hu Jieming’s Diary**

98 **The First Day of '14 Days' – July 28th, Overcast**

I opened my eyes in a strange room
Memories resurrect like faint images gradually becoming clear
The gloomy sky appears as if yesterday once again
Confronting a morning devoid of distinct features
I am unwilling to contemplate its significance
Repeating the same routine ablutions as yesterday morning
Feeling a slight anomaly
I retreat into a shell, assuming the role of an actor

99 **The First Day of '14 Days' – July 28th, Overcast**

Watching the sunlight print the script from east to west
Express yourself freely, I soliloquize in the empty space
The performance has begun
Turning around, I notice a white vertical line in the corner
A peculiarly shaped pipe behind the bathroom door stands tall
Forcing me to imagine the lives and spirits wandering within
Gazing
Curious
Attempting to @ the inhabitants within the pipe
Emitting an unnamed shiver

100 **Video footage from one of 12 cameras installed in the apartment**

101 **Door / Window**

102 **Hotbed**

103 **AC/DC**

104 **My Rome**

105 **Hu Jieming 胡介鸣**

- born 1957 in Shanghai
- lives in Shanghai
- 1984 graduated from Shanghai Light Industry College in Fine Arts
- Biography:
https://www.shanghartgallery.com/galleryarchive/artists/name/hujieming
https://www.chinesenewart.com/chinese-artists9/hujieming.htm

106

Sun Xun 孙逊

107 **Sun Xun: Shanghai Lockdown, 2022**

- Stuck in a hotel room in Shanghai for 50 days across April-May 2022

108 **Sun Xun: Shanghai Lockdown, 2022**

- Stuck in a hotel room in Shanghai for 50 days across April-May 2022
- His work is inspired by T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland* (1922):
  - On the mirror of his room, he wrote an extract from the opening lines of the *The Waste Land*:
    April is the cruellest month, breeding

Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain.
Winter kept us warm, covering
Earth in forgetful snow, feeding
A little life with dried tubers.

- Below the text, he draws a body lying on the ground, almost lifeless.

109

- The Chinese characters read: ‘the spring of/in Shanghai’
- Rather than the season when flowers bloom and summer is approaching, April becomes ‘the cruellest month’
- Across April and May Chinese people have been in another lengthy lockdown
- Sun Xun was in Shanghai to install his new exhibition and got stuck in the city

110 **Sun Xun: background**

- He is renowned for his combinations of meticulously crafted woodcut prints, charcoal drawings and ink paintings, stop-motion animation techniques and installation
- *Coal Spell* (2008) reflects on the industrial coal city of Fuxin (his hometown), in north-eastern China.

111 **Sun Xun’s artistic practice**

Scholar Luise Guest interviews Sun Xun on his artistic practice: Sun Xun: Time Spy on Vimeo [3.5”]

112 **Sun Xun (孙逊)**

- Born in 1980 in Fuxin, Liaoning Province
- He works and lives in Beijing

- He graduated in 2005 from the Print-making Department of the China Academy of Art
- His work is mainly focussed on drawings and animations

113 **Theme D:**

The Sound of Nightmares: Symphony & Cacophony

114

Ma Haijiao 马海蛟

115 **Ma Haijiao: Lockdown 2020**

- *Memory About Airplane Sounds* (2020), triptych photography, collage, writing on paper, silk print on acrylics,35 x 52cm.
- 'The artist lived near the airport during the Chinese Spring Festival 2020 when the COVID-19 severely hit China. The article is a record of the changes of the aircraft noise frequency the intervenes into the surroundings of his personal life.' [sic]

- Ma, Haijiao (n.d.), 'Memory about airplane sounds', Ma Haijiao, http://www.mahaijiao.cn/memory.html, accessed 1 Feb 2024.

116 **Ma Haijiao 马海蛟**

- He was born in 1990, Hebei province, China
- He completed his BA and MFA at the China Academy of Art (CAFA)
- He now lives and works in Beijing
- He is concerned with the 'everyday' and ordinary activities

117 **Voices of Shanghai 上海四月之声**

• Recordings of calls and stories during Shanghai lockdown
https://youtu.be/UtJzvJBZZ4M?t=50 [6”]

118 **Shanghai Music Party**
28 April 2022

• Shanghai people went to their balconies and banged on pots and pans to demand food.
• The event, “Music Party” has been circulated through posters informing specific neighbourhood on how and when to participate
• This organised, collective action ‘allowed Shanghai residents to fill the city with alternative sounds—sounds that were meaningful to them’
  • (O’Donnell, Mary Ann [2022], ‘Shanghai Music Party, 28 April 2022’, Shenzhen Noted, https://shenzhennoted.com/2022/04/29/shanghai-music-party-28-april-2022/)
  • https://youtu.be/K62N8VAybZE

119 **Shanghai Music Party**
28 April 2022

2022! Shanghai
‘Looking forward for you to collectively clang pans and pots to demand food supplies’

120 **Shanghai Music Party**
28 April 2022

2022! Shanghai
‘Looking forward for you to collectively clang pans and pots to demand food supplies’

121 **Shanghai Music Party**
28 April 2022

‘We are happy to invite you to the balcony music party to demand food
on 28 April 2022, 19-20:30
Bring along bowls and wave your hands’

—> Propaganda posters bottom up: the people strike back

122 **Concluding Remarks**

- In sum: Themes on Covid-responses from vernacular culture:
  A. Superpower or Isle of Instability? Catastrophic Corona-nation or Coronation?
  B. Cyber-fake psychology
  C. Panopticon: Prison of Surveillance
  D. The Sound of Nightmares: Symphony & Cacophony

123 **Concluding Remarks**

- In sum: Themes on Covid-responses from vernacular culture:
  - Experimenting in mediashere with different strategies of direct & indirect styles of critique & comment on war
  - Anti-/Utopian visions deconstruct China Dream into a series of dreams & nightmares
  - Reveal perceptions of the official Covid responses from unofficial perspectives
  - Provide insights into vernacular culture & new media-sphere
  - Contesting voices in a network of social and cultural negotiations and exchanges.

124 **Thank you!**

125

126 **EXTRA MATERIALS & BIBLIOGRAPHY**

127 **Hezhimeng (2022),**

‘True stories under current Shanghai COVID-19 lockdown’,

YouTube, https://youtu.be/Bd87e5g9Kjw (51”)