"PLACING" CULTURE IN URBAN CHINA: TOWARDS A TRANSDISCIPLINARY DIALOGUE

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WORKSHOP ABSTRACTS

Contents

The (Re)branding of Shanghai: Why Culture Matters

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In the light of rapid deindustrialization, global restructuring and competition, cultural policies have obtained a significant place in both local and national policy agendas (see, for example, McGuigan 2004; Pratt 2005; Hesmondhalgh 2005). This has spurred urban policymakers' interest in global trends and 'best practices' of culture-led urban development where culture as 'display' (Williams 1984) is often employed to enhance the civic identity of the city, and to retain or strengthen its image or 'world city' status (Grodach and Silver 2012; Yeoh 2005; Zukin 1995). In recent years, Shanghai has also been actively pursuing a goal to establish, or rather to *re-establish*, itself as an International Cultural Metropolis. Drawing upon interviews and policy documents analysis, I examine the rationale behind this policy strategy, and investigate some of the major roles that policymakers in Shanghai attach to culture as 'display', or more specifically, to global templates of international cultural events. In a broader context, this study attempts to demonstrate how global policy scripts of culture-led urban development are contextualized as they move within and across policy-making sites.

Yuanshengtai Branding, Urban Soundscapes and Everyday Music in a Small City

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This paper explores the relationship between culture-oriented place promotion, public spaces, and everyday music-making in the small city of Kaili in Guizhou province, through textually and ethnographically-based research. City branding has portrayed Kaili as a tourist destination for the experience of yuanshengtai, that is, the culturally authentic folksong and dance of local minorities. This branding has led to the construction of squares and other public spaces which feature architectural representations of minority customs, as well as the occasional performance of these customs. However, this branding has been evasive in the representation of urban culture, with its depictions of costumed dancers and instrumentalists in seemingly rural settings rather than of everyday leisure activities in the city. City branding has also stressed the visual and neglected the aural aspects of yuanshengtai, to leave the soundscapes of public spaces dominated by the sounds of construction, commerce, and square dancing, rather than unamplified folksong. Meanwhile, actual everyday music-making in Kaili – including retiree choirs, open mike nights, and guitar gatherings – has been largely hidden, as musicians seek more secluded spaces, away from the aural chaos of designated public spaces.

Urban Reactivation through the Creative Industry: Outlining a Frame for Selected Contemporary Case Studies in China

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Art production, exhibition and trade have been one of the key elements of urban regeneration projects in China. The comparison in between a few case studies from Shanghai and Beijing could better illustrate the different arrangements that derived from these experiences, both in terms of physical transformation and social interaction.

A. Re-use and recycle - Architecture as a stage

Concerning urban transformations, Tianzifang (as urban neighbourhood) and 1933 Abbatoir (building preservation) in Shanghai show a regeneration approach that "re-use and re-cycle" existing buildings and their urban framework to create new stages for cultural industries. Tianzifang shows the potentiality of art and creativity in expanding from the initial stage including the surrounding. Abbatoir 1933 shows the potentiality of architectural preservation together with architectural "programme" and functional mix.

B. Urban complexity - multiple stages and mixed functions

On the other hand, M50 in Shanghai and 798 Art District in Beijing show a completely different situation. That is not just due to the dimension of the projects, and to the presence of "masterplans" with specific phases and stages of realization. These urban interventions mix old and new buildings, accordingly to their use and potentiality within the new functions framework. Spaces for art and cultural production are needed, together with exhibition and stages. Offices, trade and other functions are also included in complex and multiple functions arrangements. Art production and trade are strictly related, as it is shown exemplary through the 798 3.0 Art Space.

Sustaining Culture: Dialectic Relationships with Urban Tourism

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Culture has been widely considered as cities' attractiveness that dealing with pressure in the inter-urban competition. Associated with tourism, culture can assist cities to achieve broad socio-economic and political objectives. Given the importance of culture, it is surprising that few studies have sought to establish a more comprehensive understanding of the processes and issues involved in urban cultural tourism. The study develops a relational and dialectical conceptual framework that simplifies the relevant complex relationships

between culture and urban tourism. The framework draws certain ideas from the circuit of culture conceptualisation of the assembly of contemporary material artefacts and from previous studies of cultural heritage tourism in cities. The applicability and value of the framework is considered for the case of paper cutting skill in Nanjing, a distinctive context due to the city's rich cultural resources and the major changes in China's economy, society, politics and governance. The assessment is based on triangulation using a range of sources, including semi-structured in-depth interviews with industry officials and managers and tourists, observation, documents, photographic records, and social media. The research findings demonstrate the framework's value, notably through its integrated approach, its focus on dialectical relationships, and the prominence given to their connections with each other and their context. These relationships had to be seen as reflecting and affecting China's political, economic and socio-cultural context. Conclusions are also drawn about the wider applicability and value of the model for researchers interested in culture and tourism in other urban contexts.

Cao Fei's 'Magical Metropolises': Chinese Video Art and the City

Prof Chris Berry   King's College London

The urban sprawl of the Pearl River Delta inspired star architect Rem Koolhaas's writings on the 'generic city', which he celebrates precisely for its blandness. Cao Fei herself is from Guangzhou. Yet, in works like RMB City, Haze and Fog, Whose Utopia and Hip Hop Guangzhou, Cao Fei creates what she calls 'magical metropolises'. What kind of responses are Cao's 'magical' works to contemporary Chinese urbanisation? This talk proposes four hermeneutic frameworks to analyse the works themselves: heterotopic imaginations that encourage viewers to crystallize the city's woes and at the same time hope for its future; participatory art, enlisting the subjects of the artwork as collaborators to rehearse alternative urban possibilities; the use of dance and rhythm to re-enchant these disenchanted spaces and make them magical; and, gestural cinema understood as itself an ethical as well as aesthetic practice, in so far as it calls upon collaborators and audiences to imagine a transformed Chinese city. Taken together, these frameworks demonstrate that Cao's work does not only reflect current Chinese urban condition, but also participates and intervenes in it.

Post Avant-Garde 'Movements': from Yundong to Spatial Change in 1990s Beijing

Christen Cornell   University of Sydney

The early 1990s are often interpreted within Chinese art and intellectual history as marking a historical turning point, bringing an end to a decade in which the country's artists and intellectuals typically envisaged themselves as part of a self-conscious political movement, or avant-garde. These years were also, however, a period in which artists began to move to Beijing from around the country and live in self-styled 'painters' villages' (*huajiacun*), exploiting the socio-economic and physical flux in the city for the development of their own relatively autonomous communities. This paper is a study of two artist colonies – Dongcun and Yuanmingyuan – each of which existed in the newly created margins of Beijing in the 1990s. Drawing on spatial theory, art history, archival research and personal interviews, it offers a uniquely spatial perspective on this period of Contemporary Chinese Art. In considering these villages' cultural and political status, however, it also enables a reworking of the idea of a political or artistic 'movement', taking it from its forward-looking, revolutionary sense (*yundong*) to consider the socio-political effects of movement within the city and the spaces of everyday life. Ultimately, the paper argues that these colonies represented a new means of social and critical engagement, one that was insinuated in the realm of the spatial rather than direct confrontation in discourse.

The Reappropriation of Hutongs for Art Spaces: Arrow Space, Za Jia Lab, Homeshop

Julie Ren   Humboldt University Berlin

Sourced from a larger study of art spaces, Arrow Space, Za Jia Lab and HomeShop signify several trends in the cultural production scene in Beijing. First, based on their location choice of the *hutongs*, they represent an aesthetization of urban space that makes explicit certain forms of nostalgia and material preference. Second, they describe their location preference and artistic practices as alternatives to dominant art market-oriented art works/spaces/districts. They make an explicit departure from sanctioned, managed and market-oriented art spaces and modes of artistic practice. Third, their practices often conflate the making of the art space and the making of artwork. This begins to blur divisions between everyday and art space, recalling Situationist and Dadaist attempts to "leave the gallery and enter everyday space" (Bonnett 1992: 83). Modes of artistic production can thus be contextualized within the Second Ring in relation to urban discourses in which art is not solely an instrument of urban regeneration interests but also an actor in shaping urban space based on their own artistic and political agendas.

Urban Revolution and Chinese Contemporary Art

Dr Maurizio Marinelli   University of Sussex

Urban transformation in China has been hailed as a revolution. The pace and scale, as well as the grand narrative of transformation have been characterized in terms of superlatives – the tallest skyscrapers, the largest shopping malls, the longest bridges and highways, the fastest trains – testifying to the teleology and progress of China's dream of prosperity. However, behind the sleek and glittering facade lies a story of exclusion, violence, dispossession, and destruction – the ruins of a civilization. This article engages with this side of the story by exploring the dialectic between urban transformation and the parallel development of the visual arts, which has created new regimes of visibility and new hierarchies of representation. In new and large cities alike, the visual arts have been manifesting affections that permeate the contemporary world, creating new possibilities for 'distributing the sensible'. This article focuses on the artworks produced by Zhang Dali, Dai Guangyu and Jin Feng whose subject matter involves common people, and engages with three crucial discursive formations: violence, socio-economic inequality, and utopian dreams. These artists are producing a 'history from below' --to borrow Thompson's famous expression (E.P. Thompson, 1960): rescuing the common people from 'the enormous condescension of posterity'. They are making ordinary people assume the importance of the extraordinary. From the point of view of aesthetics, they are enacting a total revolution of the senses and, in Rancière's words, making 'heard as speakers those who had been perceived as mere noisy animals' (Rancière, 2009).

Humour as Détournement: Chinese Artists Mock the Architectural Spectacle

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In China, government and private investors commission cutting-edge architecture as icons of progress and power. Many Chinese artists, however, irreverently jeer at these urban status symbols as symptoms of the problematic nature of Chinese capitalism. Informed by theories of humour and Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*, this paper examines works of contemporary Chinese art that ridicule China's new landmark architecture. Photographer Chi Peng (b. 1981) mocks Rem Koolhaas' monumental CCTV headquarters as an anthropomorphised monster and thereby questions the role of the media within the spectacle. The video art of Chen Shaoxiong (b. 1962), on the other hand, restages the terror attacks of 9/11 in China with an unexpected twist: Unlike the World Trade Centre, the Chinese skyscraper survives the aircraft attacks through witty self-defence. Chen's video spoof makes us smile and temporarily disencumbers the burdened relationship of architecture and politics. However, it also hints at China's as yet uncertain role on the global stage as well as

the increasing homogenization of urban space. The representations can be seen as subversive appropriations of images pertinent to the spectacle. However as will be shown, they are indeed complicit with the capitalist urban spectacle they originally set out to critique.

'Everybody's Donghu (East Lake)' Art Project: Resistance through Representing Urban Space

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This paper presents a study of *'Everybody's,Donghu,(East,Lake)',* art project initiated by an architect and participated in by artists and non-artists in the city of Wuhan in China. Through analysis of the motivation, process and impact of the art project, this paper explores how participants intervened in the transformation of an urban space, in this case, the *Donghu,(East,Lake)*, from urban scenery to an urban commercial area, and reclaimed it through the tactical production of various forms of 'art' in a broad sense and utilisation of online space. Specifically, it outlines the process of empowerment from both an individual and collective level through producing alternative meanings of an urban space to oppose the promoters of urban transformation. Informed by Henri Lefebvre's concept of *the production of space*, this paper presents this case and argues that representation of urban space can be regarded as a form of culture resistance to power and control in the process of urban transformation.