THE NOISE DECADE:
INTERMEDIAL IMPULSE IN CHINESE SOUND RECORDING

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School

of Cornell University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Junting Huang

December 2021

THE NOISE DECADE:

INTERMEDIAL IMPULSE IN CHINESE SOUND RECORDING

Junting Huang, Ph. D.

Cornell University 2021

Between the 1990s and 2000s, artists across the Taiwan Strait began to experiment with recorded sound in its capacity to document shifting social relations. In the aftermath of the Cold War, both China and Taiwan were coping with the global surge of neoliberal capitalism; rising political tensions in these two societies were soon embodied in their increasingly "noisy" acoustic environments—from everyday urban soundscapes to labor protests and missile tests. Well-known artists such as Lin Chi-Wei, Yao Dajuin, Yan Jun, and Hsia Yü incorporated these sonic fragments into their intermedial experiments in music, video, installation, performance, and poetry, as they turn these timely acoustic motifs into discursive social commentaries on labor movements, spatial justice, and civil liberty. "The Noise Decade" examines this crucial but often overlooked encounter across the Taiwan Strait, where an aesthetic and political discourse on "noise" intersected with the convergence of media. It argues that the embalming of sound creates a resource for the material remains of time, memory, and histories to echo through a violent temporal rupture that radically restructures communal experience.

In resisting an ocular-centric thinking in western philosophy, scholars of contemporary sound art often take a "medium-specific" approach, emphasizing the

raw material attributes of sound in and of itself. In thinking sound as a medium, however, this study shifts the common discourse on medium-specificity to broader spatial-political relations, in order to interrogate a “borderless” bias throughout the history of media theory. The introduction chapter elaborates on how the cross-strait entanglement between China and Taiwan offers an acoustic horizon to the current theorizations of border. The following chapters are thematically organized. Each chapter focuses on an iteration of the “noise” figure—musical noise, urban noise, warfare noise, and lettristic noise.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Junting Huang was born and raised in Chongqing, China. He received his B.A. in English Language and Literature from Tsinghua University in 2013. With the support of the Ertegun Graduate Scholarship in the Humanities, he completed his M.St. in Film Aesthetics from the University of Oxford in 2014. In the same year, he joined the Ph.D. program in Comparative Literature at Cornell University.

to my parents

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am indebted to members of my dissertation committee: Tim Murray, Andrea Bachner, and Tom McEnaney. Not only have they altered the final shape of this project, but they have also been instrumental to my personal and intellectual growth throughout the years. I thank Andrea Bachner for reminding me of the value of comparison and convincing me to eventually write a dissertation on Sinophone literature and culture; I thank Tom McEnaney for introducing me to the newest and most exciting developments in media studies, while also keeping my work grounded when I got carried away. I cannot thank Tim Murray enough for helping me move forward in every possible way. I will always remember his remarkable patience to listen to my incoherent rambling, or noise, in my early days of graduate school. And more importantly, the further along I am in my life, the more I have learned to appreciate his infectious sense of humor.

The Department of Comparative Literature is always my intellectual home. I feel privileged to have had the opportunity to know and learn from professors: Laurent Dubreuil, Jonathan Monroe, Cathy Caruth, Naoki Sakai, Amy Villarejo, Karen Pinkus, Patricia Keller, Natalie Melas, Naminata Diabate, Parisa Vaziri, Debra Ann Castillo, and Tracy McNulty. I am grateful to have a small but supportive cohort of fellow graduate students: Shu-Mei Lin, Vinh Pham, Marc Kohlbry, Junning Fu, Bret Leraul, Jan Steyn, Ahmad Alswaid, Kholoud Hussein, Silvia Caserta, Hannah Cole, Nitzan Tal, John Un, Keyun Tian, and Kun Huang. Elizabeth Wijaya is a best friend, with whom I have shared the most memorable laughter and tears over the years. Jorge

Cartaya is an incredibly supportive partner, who has read almost every single piece of my writing. Beyond the department, Jeremy Braddock provided me with opportunities to get involved in Cornell's newly minted Media Studies Program. Judith Ann Peraino, with Tom McEnaney, taught me everything about punk rock and noise music.

I have benefited tremendously from sharing my work with colleagues from a number of working groups at Cornell. I thank my friends from the Media Studies Graduate Working Group and the Critical Sinophone Studies Working Group—Matthew Kilbane, Will Krieger, Sooyon Lee, Jonathan Davenport, Nick Admussen, Po-hsi Chen, Cheow Thia Chan, Amie Parry, and Xinyu Guan—for their helpful questions and comments. I have also presented many parts of the project in a number of conferences, where I had opportunities to meet and talk to brilliant scholars. I thank Paize Keulemans, Renren Yang, Cedric Maridet, Shuang Shen, Andrew Jones, Carlos Rojas, Guo-Juin Hong, Thomas Lamarre, Jonathan Abel, Yomi Braester, and Rey Chow for these conversations.

Various individuals and institutions provided support for my research, without which this project would not be possible. In the early stage of this project, the Hu Shih Fellowship in Chinese Studies and the Mario Einaudi International Research Travel Grant provided me with the financial support for my research trip to Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Mainland China. The American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) supported my writing during a global pandemic from 2020-2021. In Taipei, I want to thank Jeph Lo, Amy Cheng, Lin Chi-Wei, Wu Dar-Kuen, Yao Jui-Chung, Hong-Kai Wang, and TheCube Project Space for assisting me with important source materials. I am particularly grateful to Yao Jui-Chung, who took me to his studio and spent hours

checking sources from his impressive personal archive. Across the strait, I thank Jin Wang, Yan Jun, Yao Dajuin, Xu Ya-Zhu, and Zhou Xin, who helped me uncover an audible history that has not been told enough.

NOTES ON TRANSLITERATION

In the interests of consistency, this dissertation uses pinyin as the primary transliteration system to Romanize Chinese characters, which include all references in their original language. In addition, important phrases and terminologies in Chinese language are translated; they first appear in English translation then followed by pinyin romanizations. At the end of all chapters, Chinese characters are provided in a list of glossaries. Because naming conventions vary in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Mainland China, and other Sinophone regions, personal names follow their preferred spelling and order whenever they are available.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

INTRODUCTION

On June 3, 1989, a group of college students from National Central University gathered at Taiwan Taoyuan International Airport with colorful banners and boxes of cassette tapes.[1] As they tried to stop international travelers who passed, they handed each of them a nicely packaged cassette tape and encouraged them to smuggle it into the Chinese mainland. These students were closely followed by professional cameras from Taiwan's national television, as if their sudden presence at the airport had been meticulously planned, if not entirely staged. The cassette tape that they were handing out was the famed "Wound of History" (Lishi de shangkou), a music project that intended to support the ongoing pro-democracy movement in the Chinese mainland. The banners read, "The Fire of Tiananmen. The Love of Students" (Tiananmen zhihuo, xuesheng zhiai), "Chinese Souls" (Zhongguo hun), and "Blood of the Nation" (Minzu xue), all of which are tainted by a strong sense of pan-Chinese nationalism.[2]

In Taiwan, the music project was a rare collaboration between the KMT government and the public, where four major Taiwanese record companies and a hundred pop music artists worked with politicians and government officials to collectively voice their support for the student protesters in Beijing. As legend has it, Jonathan Lee (Li Zongsheng), Angus Tung (Tong Ange), Li Shouquan, and Chen

---

[1] Formerly known as Chiang Kai-shek International Airport, Taoyuan International Airport was renamed to its current name in 2006.

[2] "Shengyuan Tiananmen Xueyun, Lishi De Shangkou Kadai Song Dalu [supporting the Student Movement at Tiananmen, Cassette Tape 'Wound of History' Is Sent to the Chinese Mainland]," *Chinese Television System (CTS) Official Website*, June 3, 1989, https://news.cts.com.tw/cts/politics/198906/198906031749303.html.

Fuming, the guru figures in Taiwan's music industry at the time, worked tirelessly for a day and a night to compose a protest song. As soon as they finished writing, they immediately faxed the lyrics and musical notations to the students in Beijing.[3] With their reputation and connections in the industry, they managed to convince about half of the Taiwanese entertainment industry to rally behind the cause. And the Elite PR Group, a newly established public relations company in Taiwan, took the opportunity to promote the song and ran a successful commercial campaign. "In just three to four days, public relations companies mobilized their entire staff and managed to transmit the song into the ears of the students at Tiananmen Square," the Economic Daily News reported.[4] On May 30, the Government Information Office of Taiwan quickly passed the review of the song and sent it to national television and radio stations for public broadcast.[5] Meanwhile, they began looking for Chinese tourists at international airports around the world to secretively distribute the recording.

At 7pm on the night of June 3, the Chinese Television System (CTS) in Taiwan aired the story of students handing out "pro-democracy" cassette tapes at the Taoyuan Airport. "The student movement that started at Beijing's Tiananmen Square

---

[3] "Changchu Lishi de Shangkou: Changpianjie Lianshou Bianxie Cipu Chuanzhen Song Dalu [Souding Out the Wound of History: Record Industry United to Write Songs and Fax Them to the Chinese Mainland]," *United Evening News*, May 27, 1989.
[4] As one promoter from the Elite PR Group put it, "a successful movement requires people and clear slogans, but even more important is to have its own song to maintain morale. We could clearly see that the student movement in Tiananmen Square is missing this." See Han Cheung, "Taiwan in Time: The June Fourth Incident, Taipei," *Taipei Times*, June 3, 2018, http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/feat/archives/2018/06/03/2003694226.
[5] "Shengyuan Dalu Xueyun, Gesheng Jinqi Bochu, Touguo Dianshi Diantai Tuiguang [Supporting the Student Movement in the Chinese Mainland, Special Songs Are

has now developed into a nationwide demonstration. In order to support the demands of the Chinese students, Taiwan has produced a special cassette recording to send to mainland China; Taiwan stands in solidarity with the students at the Tiananmen Square."[6] Two hours later at 9pm, the song "Wound of History" was featured in a cross-strait concert entitled "Connected by Blood, Singing in Relay Across the Taiwan Strait" (Xuemai xianglian, liangan duige). A first of its kind, the concert took the format of a singing relay, with satellite telephone calls between the Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall in Taipei and Tiananmen Square in Beijing.

As volunteers gathered at the Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall in Taipei, singing the songs that they wrote for the Chinese students, they also heard the voice from the Chinese mainland for the first time. Earlier that night, student leaders in Beijing called in to thank Taiwan: "No matter what pressure we are under, we will unwaveringly defend China's democracy and freedom." "People in Tiananmen Square will not retreat willingly. We will sacrifice our lives for China's democracy and freedom."[7] Around 11 pm, however, the phone call was suspended as tensions continued to rise in Beijing. At 11:15pm, the Taiwanese musician Chen Baizhong managed to call in only to leave these words: "The entire Beijing city is boiling right now, and the people here were preparing for the military's third operation of the

---

Broadcast Today: 'Wound of History' Is on Television and Radio]," *United Daily News*, May 30, 1989.

[6] "Shengyuan Tiananmen Xueyun."

[7] "Tingjian liusi: Guangchang shang de gesheng [Listening to Tian'anmen: Singing from the Square]," *Kám-Á-Tiàm Forum of History: Perspectives from Taiwan* (blog), June 5, 2019, https://kamatiam.org.

night."[8] Although the concert was originally scheduled for eight hours, from night to dawn, it was cut short due to the brutal crackdown that soon shocked the entire world. The noises that they heard that night marked the beginning of a new decade.

Figure 1. Satellite Telephone and Tape Recorder at the Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall, Taipei Taiwan, Photo from United Daily News Group (1989).

What role does recorded sound play in writing and remembering history? Outlandish as it may appear to today's listeners, acoustic tactics like these—smuggling cassette tapes across the border—were fairly common in the late 1980s. In

[8] "Jingtouxia de Lishi, 1989 Tiananmen: Liusi Qingchen de Zhongzheng Jiniantang, Kuaru Liusi Dangtian [History in Photographs, 1989 Tiananmen: The Chiang Kai-Shek Memorial Hall on the Morning of June Fourth]," *United Daily News Global*, accessed June 2, 2021, https://global.udn.com/global_vision/story/8662/3850579.

1987, when Chiang Ching-kuo in Taiwan eventually allowed family visits to the mainland, music cassette tapes and cassette players were among the most popular contraband in China. In fact, the tapes contributed to the rising popularity of Taiwanese pop music that swept the Chinese mainland. Thanks to these cassette tapes, that night, protesters at Tiananmen Square and volunteers at the Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall were singing the same songs and perhaps also sharing the same memories about a nation's fate. In addition to "Wound of History," many other tunes sung that night were overtly nationalistic; they include Hou Dejian's "The Descendants of the Dragon" (Long de Chuanren) and "Pretty Chinese People" (Piaoliang de Zhongguoren), Xian Xinghai's "The Yellow River Cantata" (Huanghe Dahechang), and Tian Jian's "For the Sake of the Motherland" (Weile Zuguo de Yuangu).[9] As strange as it may sound to today's listeners, people felt a nationalist sentiment about being "Chinese" on both sides of the Taiwan Strait. And perhaps more importantly, they felt that their histories were so tightly intertwined despite the current "partition" (fenzhi), even though the very idea of a "Chinese" nation might be largely fabricated.

[9] "Jingtouxia de Lishi."

Figure 2. The "Connected by Blood, Singing in Relay Across the Taiwan Strait" Concert, Taipei Taiwan, Photo from United Daily News Group (1989).

Less than one year after that night, the song "Wound of History" was brought back to the Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall in Taipei. But this time, it was sung by students from the Wild Lily student movement, Taiwan's own pro-democracy movement. But long before that, the song already became such a commercial success, and almost everyone who lived through that time could sing a few lines. Nonetheless, the message of the song turned slightly different. It was no longer about China or a pan-Chinese nationalism that the KMT was hoping to forge merely one year ago; instead, the song was blended into a larger collection of protest songs that celebrated more lofty ideas about freedom, democracy, purity, autonomy, and resilience—all of which are symbolized by the Wild Lily, the symbol of the movement and also a native

Taiwanese plant.[10] As the Taiwanese music critic Shifang Ma wrote in his diary, "Here is the song that we all know. It's a song that no one needs to be taught. One year ago, a group of Taiwanese pop stars performed the song 'Wound of History' (to criticize the government on the other side), and it is the right time for us to return the favor."[11] On March 22, 1990, students in Taipei eventually retreated peacefully, marking the turning point in Taiwan's transition to pluralistic democracy. I was born that day about a thousand miles away across the strait. When I first learned about the history of the Wild Lily Movement online before China's extensive internet censorship, I clearly remember thinking: "Was the song sung for me?"

Since then, much has changed about the cross-strait relation; but what remains are the ways in which recorded sound documents the tumultuous history of the last decade of the twentieth century. In the following decades, recorded sound expanded into a wider range of cultural practices to commemorate histories of all kinds. Between the 1990s and 2000s, Chinese and Taiwanese artists began to experiment with recorded sound to document shifting social relations. In the aftermath of the Cold War, rising political tensions in these two societies were soon embodied in their increasingly "noisy" acoustic environments—from everyday urban soundscapes to labor protests and missile tests. Well-known artists such as Lin Chi-Wei, Yao Dajuin, Yan Jun, and Hsia Yü incorporated these sonic fragments into their intermedial experiments in video, film, installation, performance, and poetry, as they turned these

---

[10] See Ming-sho Ho, "Changing Memory of the Tiananmen Incident in Taiwan: From Patriotism to Universal Values (1989–2019)," *China Information*, November 24, 2020, https://doi.org/10.1177/0920203X20971454.

timely acoustic motifs into discursive social commentaries on labor movement, spatial justice, civil liberty, and geopolitical shifts.

In what follows, I examine this crucial but often overlooked encounter across the Taiwan Strait, where an aesthetic and political discourse on "noise" intersected with the convergence of media. I argue that the embalming of sound creates a resource for the material remains of time, memory, and histories to echo through a violent temporal rupture that mirrors the global surge of liberal capitalism. As two societies responded to the rise of a new global order, though in massively different ways, recorded sound has documented their transformative trajectories into the types of societies they are today. In listening to these recorded sounds at this moment, I intend to create a space for reflecting on the cross-strait entanglement diachronically. I hope to understand how people across the Taiwan strait were faced with similar struggles around the turn of the century, yet soon parted ways with each other merely a decade later.

RECORDED SOUND

Where do sounds come from?[12]

It is a question that we often ask in everyday life. Sound, reproduced sound in particular, is often characterized as a ghostly, phantom-like, and even transcendental

---

[11] Shifang Ma, *Erduo jiewo [Lend Me Your Ears]* (Guilin, China: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2015).
[12] See Brandon LaBelle, *Acoustic Territories: Sound Culture and Everyday Life* (New York: Continuum, 2010).

entity that emerges out of nowhere. In many parts of the Western world, ideas as such are inseparable from a well-known origin myth of sound reproduction. And the story often goes like this: When Thomas Edison invented the phonograph in 1876, he believed that he could preserve the ghosts of the dead, and even speak with the dead. According to Philippe Baudouin, Edison had been fantasizing about the ability to make audible that which is not, in order to capture the voice of another being.[13] In the earliest days of its existence, recorded sound was understood as "the voice of the dead," as the phonograph summons sound out of thin air.

The ontological otherworldliness of sound partly derives from the phonograph's manipulation of time. Because the phonograph allowed both mechanical recording and reproduction of sound, it also created a temporal disjuncture between sound recording and playback. This technological capability of the phonograph distinguishes itself from other forms of communicational technologies of sound. Although radio and the phonograph were invented around the same time, for example, they have come to represent different sets of acoustic properties. Unlike radio broadcasting, which is often associated with being "live," recorded sound has often been conceptualized in proximity to ideas and experiences about death.[14] Unlike radio's synchronous relation to its auditors, recorded sound invokes an asynchronous relation to its listeners. Unlike radio waves that boundlessly expand outward and forward (an aesthetic property that is often celebrated in modernist art and literature

---

[13] See Thomas Alva Edison, Philippe Baudouin, and Max Roth, *Le Royaume De L'au-Delà. Précédé De Machines Nécrophoniques* (Grenoble: Jérôme Millon, 2015).
[14] See "Radio Ontologies" in Thomas McEnaney, "Acoustic Properties: Radio, Narrative, and the New Neighborhood of the Americas" (UC Berkeley, 2011), v.

such as Futurism); recorded sound often turns inward in retrospect to reflect upon itself as well as its listeners (an aesthetic property that is associated with "postmodernism").[15] Because the recorded sound we listen to always comes from a world of the past, it represents a world of histories and memories, nonetheless, a world of the ephemeral, the vanished, the lost, and the disappeared. In other words, recorded sound, even when it is re-materialized in one's listening, is thought to be "out of this world."

About a century later, theorists of sound took the cue. At the early stage of sound studies, Jonathan Sterne poetically paraphrased the transcendental charms of recorded sound. In *The Audible Past*, Sterne describes the practice of sound reproduction as a cultural ritual of preserving the dead bodies: "As beliefs surrounding death, the preservation of the dead body, transcendence, and temporality shaped or explained sound reproduction, sound reproduction itself became a distinctive way of relating to, understanding, and experiencing death, history, and culture."[16] In *The Ethical Soundscape*, another foundational text in sound studies, Charles Hirschkind also argued that Islamic cassette sermons highlight an acoustic sensibility about death. What Hirschkind called "the acoustics of death" is an acoustic sensibility, which actively intervenes into the mundane life of Muslim communities, as well as their

---

[15] See Daniel Tiffany, *Radio Corpse: Imagism and the Cryptaesthetic of Ezra Pound* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1998); Timothy C. Campbell, *Wireless Writing in the Age of Marconi* (U of Minnesota Press, 2006).
[16] Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2003), 26.

everyday ethical practices.[17]

In theory and criticism, Jacque Derrida was particularly interested in the spectrality of the reproduced voice; he insists on an auto-affection that visual virtuality could never reach— "In the voice, self-affection itself is (supposedly) recorded and communicated" —a theoretical basis for Jean-Luc Nancy's philosophical project of a listening subject.[18] And following Derrida, Mark Fisher and Simon Reynolds borrowed Derrida's hauntology to describe contemporary electronic music's nostalgic fascination with its acoustic past. They are both interested in the sampling of old recorded sounds in contemporary music productions. They claim that the sampling of old sounds is extremely nostalgic, because we have witnessed how neoliberalism's promise of the future was broken, and how the nostalgic past becomes the only thing we can hold on to.[19] As such, even without seeing its source, we are more than accustomed to the idea that recorded sound haunts us from the past.

Indeed, one of the most fascinating "spectral" qualities of sound recording lies in its intention to be played again and again. This repetition concerns not only how histories and cultural memories are authentically archived in the form of sound waves, but more importantly when they will be heard again, who will listen to them, and how

---

[17] Charles Hirschkind, "The Acoustics of Death," in *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 173–204.

[18] Jacques Derrida, "Above All, No Journalists!," in *Religion and Media*, ed. Hent de Vries and Samuel Weber, Cultural Memory in the Present (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2001), 71.

[19] See Mark Fisher, "What Is Hauntology?," *Film Quarterly* 66, no. 1 (2012): 16–24; Mark Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures* (Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2014); Simon Reynolds, *Retromania: Pop Culture's Addiction to Its Own Past* (New York: Macmillan, 2011).

they will be remembered.[20] If we apply Mark Fisher and Simon Reynolds's logic to understand the 1990's nostalgia, we see the reason that Millennials today are still so nostalgic for the sounds from the 1990s is not in relation to the decade actually went, but to how they suffered from the material consequences of the global financial crisis of 2007-2008 (when they first entered the job market), and how that experience has reshaped their memories about the 1990s.

While the following pages are a historical project about recorded sound in the strait between China and Taiwan during the 1990s, the project is not—in any means—a synchronic investigation into all types of recorded sounds that were produced during this time period. Instead, I trace the "lives" and "afterlives" of recorded sound, in order to investigate the diachronic tensions between sound recording and sound reproduction, between histories and memories, between then and now. It is through these diachronic comparisons of the past, present, and future that we can better understand discourses about capitalism, liberalism, authoritarianism, and, of course, wars. In what follows, I present a constellation of historical fragments. As a collective, they trace the circulation of recorded sounds in their historical contexts. At times, my inquiry may resemble a mosaic approach that is not uncommon in media studies.[21] In other words, this study does not attempt to provide a comprehensive historical account about recorded sound. In my analysis, I rely on the spectrality of recorded sound not to periodize history, but to highlight the "phenomena of rupture, of discontinuity" of

---

[20] See Elodie Roy, "Displacing the Past. Mediated Nostalgia and Recorded Sound," *Volume !. La Revue Des Musiques Populaires* 11, no. 1 (December 30, 2014): 145–58.
[21] See Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, Centennial Edition (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011).

historical discourses.[22]

To that end, I return to Jonathan Sterne and borrow his idea of "embalming" to describe a heterogeneous collection of cultural practices that involve recorded sound in one way or another. "Embalming" is such a powerful metaphor, not only because it promises a sensorial encapsulation of the fleeting past, but also because it suggests that the materials being preserved are already in decay. As such, the "embalming" metaphor could not be more appropriate to describe a decade of social upheavals and political turmoil across the Taiwan Strait.[23] It was a time when Taiwan's economic liberalization led to a wide range of social movements as well as democratic reforms. It was a time when China's newly domesticated capitalism afforded a short-lived urge for self-expression, individual freedom, and identity performance. In both cases, old social orders were quickly disintegrating, or "in decay," whereas new ones were constantly being reconfigured.

While I commend recorded sound for its ability to sculpt temporality, I am advocating neither a hauntology nor an ontological otherworldliness of recorded sound because these ideas often involve a separation between sound and its source. Of course, the disembodied voice, say "the voice of god," has served as a sign of transcendence throughout histories and in many parts of the world. Yet the rise of modern sound technologies since the late nineteenth century (radio in particular) has updated an ontological argument about sound as a wireless, horizonless, and traceless

---

[22] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge: And the Discourse on Language* (New York, NY: Vintage, 1982).

entity; because we would never be able to see the true origins of reproduced sounds, they are seemingly descending from another world. When Stanley Cavell put forth a Bazinian argument about photographic images being part of the world, he also suggested that sound, on the other hand, comes from another world: "It is why sounds are warnings, or calls. It is why our access to another world is normally through voices from it; and why a man can be spoken to by God and survive, but not if he sees God, in which case he is no longer in this world."[24] His argument largely rests on the fact that the nature of hearing directs one's attention to someplace, where the source of sound cannot be located. Therefore, the world is viewed, but not listened to. Such sentiments are often seen in many of Michel Chion's writings. Chion writes, "this interdiction against looking, which transforms the Master, God, or Spirit into an acousmatic voice, permeates a great number of religious traditions, mostly notably Islam and Judaism."[25]

Similarly, Brian Kane historized a "phantasmagoric" understanding of sound in the nineteenth century as a cultural preference for concealing the source of sound, because the phantasmagoria resonates with Romanticism and the Transcendentalism movements in the West. For Kane, Arthur Schopenhauer's advocacy of a "bodily technique" is "designed to ready the listener for the experience of music's disclosure of profound metaphysical truth," while Richard Wagner's Bayreuth Festspielhaus

---

[23] See Roxing He, *Xueyun shidai: zhongsheng xuanhua de shinian [Generation of Student Movement: The Decade of Noises]* (Taipei: Reading Times Publishing Co., 2002).
[24] Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film, Enlarged Edition* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1979), 18.

hides musicians in an orchestra pit in order to preserve the "transcendental power" of the music and of the subject.[26] This "phantasmagoric" understanding of sound persists even today. Because modern sound reproduction technologies obscure the original sources of the sound, not knowing where the sound comes from becomes the everyday experience of modern life. In other words, recorded sound only exacerbates the problem of sound unseen, and reinforces this mythic idea of sound. We know sound always comes from somewhere, but the question of "where exactly" often remains mysterious.

I ask "where do sounds come from?" with the assertion that the source of recorded sound can be traced and located in the world in which we live; yet more importantly, I believe that we should attend to the source of sound regardless of its mystic appearance. I argue that recorded sound, despite the temporal displacement it enacts, is not always "out of the world" but rather equally "of the world." Like photographic images, recorded sounds also demonstrate a physical (or indexical) relationship between the original and the reproduced sound; recorded sounds have as much access to a "truth claim" as photographic images do, but their ability to capture the social reality of the world has often been underemphasized due to the "phantasmagoric" understanding of sound.[27]

In what follows, I emphasize the source of recorded sound in order to read into

---

[25] Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, trans. Claudia Gorbman, Illustrated edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 18.
[26] Brian Kane, *Sound Unseen: Acousmatic Sound in Theory and Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 10.

its social-political contexts, its time and space, its history and geography. Indeed, there has been a generation of sound studies scholars who have been exploring the political potential of recorded sound because the sounds recorded can tell us much about their contexts.[28] In following their examples, my analysis of the recorded sound intends to create a space in which we can reflect on how multiple forces of economic, cultural, and social institutions and practices interact.

INTERMEDIAL IMPULSE

Although sound studies have been around for more than two decades, it was (and still is) viewed for most parts of its existence as a conglomerate of diverse approaches that are guided by a variety of theories and methodologies. It is not until recently that sound studies scholars began to ask some fundamental questions about the object of study—sound—a focal point that seemingly connects a wide range of inquiries: What is sound? How do we understand sound? Is sound an object, an experience, an event, or a relation? Is sound even the object of sound studies? Brian

---

[27] See Tom Gunning, "What's the Point of an Index? Or, Faking Photographs," *Digital Aesthetics, Nordic Research on Media and Communication Review* 1, no. 2 (2004): 39–49.

[28] When Gustavus Stadler puts forth an argument about the political potential of recorded sound, for example, he points to a double meaning of the word "record" in M.I.A.'s "Paper Planes" — "I got more records than the K.G.B." — both in terms of an official documentation regarding one's social-political status, as well as a piece of sound and music. In bringing these two contexts together, Stadler suggests that recorded sound processes the ability to document multiple economic, cultural, and social institutions and practices. See Gustavus Stadler, "Introduction: Breaking Sound Barriers," *Social Text* 28, no. 1 (102) (March 1, 2010): 1–2, https://doi.org/10.1215/01642472-2009-057.

Kane, for example, suggested that sound studies itself might be a misnomer, because many scholars in the field are not necessarily interested in "sound" in and of itself, but rather more invested in listening as a cultural practice, or "auditory culture."[29] Because recorded sound always demands a listening, like much of early sound studies scholarship, this study concerns not so much sound in and of itself, but rather the creative use of recorded sound as a cultural practice. In other words, my examination of recorded sound also questions "sound" in and of itself as the object of sound studies.[30]

Of course, the "sound object" has its own genealogy. It is often attributed to the French musicologist Pierre Schaeffer, the creator of *musique concrète,* who coined the term to describe recorded sounds that are freed from their original contexts and could be used for musical composition; these recorded sounds are "concrete," because they are not represented by abstract notations, as in traditional music theory in the West. Interestingly enough, Schaeffer's call for the "sound object" also entails a separation of sound from its recording context. For Schaeffer, when one hears the sound without seeing its source, it also provides an ideal opportunity for the listeners to concentrate on the listening and therefore better appreciate the subtleties of musical sounds.[31]

In contrast, early practitioners of sound recording across the Taiwan Strait are

---

[29] Brian Kane, "Sound Studies Without Auditory Culture: A Critique of the Ontological Turn," *Sound Studies* 1, no. 1 (January 1, 2015): 2–21.
[30] See James A. Steintrager and Rey Chow, eds., *Sound Objects* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2019).

some of the most ferocious critics of *musique concrète*. Most prominently, Yao Dajuin founded his record label "concrete music" (yinyue juxiang), later renamed as "post-concrete" (hou juxiang), in order to critique Pierre Schaeffer's original conceptualization of *musique concrète*. Over the years, Yao Dajuin has expressed frustrations with the notion of the "sound object," even though his work has been undoubtedly inspired by *musique concrète*. The criticism of the "sound object" is particularly prominent early in his career. As early as 2001, Yao Dajuin discussed in depth his departure from *musique concrète* in interviews:

> My record label is called "concrete music" (yinyue juxiang), which can be quite misleading. I am not entirely appreciative of *musique concrète* as it is traditionally understood. I am afraid that my views on *musique concrète* perhaps also differ from the popular views. I like calling this kind of stuff "sound art" (shengyin yishu). On the one hand, I don't agree with the French and Canadian followers of *musique concrète*, who treat "sound object" as another type of musical notes; they play with it, move it around, and use it to compose music. Eventually, they end up with an aesthetics that is not far from that of traditional music. On the other hand, I want to move beyond the concept of "music." In other words, I don't care about music or non-music. If I don't call it music, how could other people use the old values to judge it? If we want to evaluate a piece of recording, we can only say whether they are interesting or not. What I insist on is an attitude towards listening.[32]

For early Chinese and Taiwanese practitioners of sound recording, the "sound object," as well as the tradition of *musique concrète* it represents, have become a critical point

---

[31] Pierre Schaeffer, *Treatise on Musical Objects: Essays Across Disciplines*, trans. Christine North and John Dack, California Studies in 20th-Century Music 20 (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2017).

[32] Dajuin Yao, "Woyao Ting Chengshi Luoji Zaipao de Shengyin! Yao Dajuin Fangtan Xia [I Want to Listen to the Running Sounds of Programming Logic: An Interview with Yao Dajuin Part 2]," Yueguang ruanjian, July 3, 2001, https://www.moon-soft.com/program/bbs//readelite205783.htm.

of departure. They believed that recorded sound should not be, in theory and practice, in service of "music." In fact, recorded sound is supposed to deconstruct "music," a task that lies at the very center of the noise movement across the Taiwan Strait. Although I will return to the relationship between noise and music later in this project, here I want to put forth another layer of argument concerning the objecthood of recorded sound, or lack thereof. In what follows, I argue that the practice of sound recording in my archive has never been only about sound—instead, it has always been intermedial and should be understood so.

In resisting an ocular-centric thinking in Western philosophy, many scholars of contemporary sound often take a "medium-specific" approach, emphasizing the raw material attributes of sound in and of itself. Be it Steve Goodman's "ontology of vibrational force" or Christoph Cox's "sonic materialism," their theoretical approaches tend to distinguish sound from other perceptions, in order to reveal the most raw and sensuous essence of sound.[33] In an attempt to move beyond discourses on representation and signification, they claim to reveal the "universals concerning the nature of sound, the body, and media."[34] Yet as much as "sound art" constitutes a heterogenous field of practices, this fascination with sound-in-itself does not suffice to explain all sounds in their artistic contexts. As Seth Kim-Cohen argues, sonic arts should move beyond the perception of materiality, and instead focus more on "the

---

[33] Steve Goodman, *Sonic Warfare: Sound, Affect, and the Ecology of Fear*, ed. Brian Massumi and Erin Manning (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2012); Christoph Cox, *Sonic Flux: Sound, Art, and Metaphysics* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 2018); Christoph Cox, "Beyond Representation and Signification: Toward a Sonic Materialism," *Journal of Visual Culture* 10, no. 2 (August 1, 2011): 145–61.

textual and intertextual nature of sound."[35] Because the history of sound art has always been so intertwined with conceptualism, argues Kim-Cohen, we should never ignore sound's "expanded situation" and "uncontainable textuality." As such, Kim-Cohen advocates for a "non-cochlear" sound art, a term that is developed from Marcel Duchamp's "non-retinal" visual art, as Kim-Cohen tries to connect "sonic arts to broader textual, conceptual, social, and political concerns."[36]

As recorded sound enters a wide range of artistic experiments in video, film, installation, performance, and poetry, artists and critics create an intermedial sensorium that reconfigures textual, conceptual, social, and political concerns. This is what I call the "intermedial impulse," a term that I have blended from Dick Higgins's "intermedia" and Yomi Braester's "documentary impulse." Braester's "documentary impulse" refers to a more descriptive style of social commentary that has emerged from the post-socialist documentary movement in China.

> The documentary impulse in Chinese cinema started, however, with a prescriptive approach akin to documentary propaganda films, thereby shaping audience response as much as providing descriptive chronicles. Post-Maoist directors, and members of the Urban Generation in particular, reacted to the prescriptive tendency by narrowing the documentary mission to matter-of-fact presentations that were sometimes lacking any narrative that might smack of subjective views. The documentary impulse in the new urban cinema became a vehicle of criticism—not only by placing a mirror in front of a numbed society but also by foregrounding the limitations of documentation in the face of

---

[34] Kane, "Sound Studies without Auditory Culture."
[35] James Lavender, "Objects, Orientations and Interferences: On Deleuze and Sound Studies," *Parallax* 21, no. 4 (October 2, 2015): 408–28, https://doi.org/10.1080/13534645.2015.1086528.
[36] Seth Kim-Cohen, *In the Blink of an Ear: Towards a Non-Cochlear Sonic Art* (New York: Continuum, 2009), xvii.

inevitable and sometimes partly desirable urban development.[37]

Like the "documentary impulse," which derives from an urge to document the social reality of China's disappearing urban landscape, the "intermedial impulse" also reveals a similar desire to document the ever-changing soundscapes across the Taiwan Strait. Like the "documentary impulse," which takes a more descriptive and documentarian style of historiography in order to actively engage its audience, the "intermedial impulse" relies on the listeners' participation to piece together fragments of histories in an archive of recorded sounds.

CROSS-STRAIT ENTANGLEMENT

In waves of decolonization and independence movements in the second half of the twentieth century, political borders have been dramatically redrawn throughout the world. Like previous moments of ruptures in history, the post-cold war moment not only created new borders, but also fundamentally transformed old ones. In the 1990s, with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, the Taiwan Strait has been one of the most important yet contentious border sites to have witnessed the ripple effects of the reconfiguration of a new world order.

Indeed, the cross-strait relation has always been a fraught one, due to the long history of political antagonism, as well as the unresolved controversies regarding

---

[37] Yomi Braester, "Tracing the City's Scars: Demolition and the Limits of the Documentary Impulse in the New Urban Cinema," March 7, 2007, 161–62, https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822390008-008.

Taiwan's current political status. Political scientists have been debating through multiple theoretical frameworks to describe the relationship between the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Republic of China, Taiwan (ROC) — integration, divided-state, partition, power asymmetry, international system, and two states, —all of which provide vastly different imaginations about the border.[38] Throughout this dissertation, I use the term "entanglement" to describe the cross-strait relationship in order to emphasize the co-evolution of two communities throughout the 1990s and beyond. I borrow Rey Chow's idea of "entanglement" here to suggest not an intimacy, but on the contrary a divide. As Chow puts it, "beyond this intimation of a tangle, of things held together or laid over one another in nearness and likeness," entanglement could also be "a figure for meetings that are not necessarily defined by proximity or affinity."[39] In my analysis, encounters across the Taiwan Strait are often understood not as conjunction and intersection, but rather as partition and partiality.

This "entanglement" has defined much of the recent history of the cross-strait relationship; it is a history that tightly revolves around a morphing identity of "Chineseness," which is national, ethnic, and cultural at the same time. As Bai-yu Chang noted, during the post-war period, Taiwan's cultural policies have fueled its many Sinification and de-Sinification (or Taiwanization) movements often in response to the politics on the other side.

---

[38] Yu-Shan Wu, "Theorizing on Relations across the Taiwan Strait: Nine Contending Approaches," *Journal of Contemporary China* 9, no. 25 (November 2000): 407–28, https://doi.org/10.1080/713675943.

> For example, the anti-communist principle and censorship were imposed in the 1950s as a means to control cultural expression; the Cultural Renaissance Movement (Zhonghua wenhua fuxing yundong) was launched in 1967 as a counterattack response to the Cultural Revolution developing in mainland China; in 1977, Chiang Ching-kuo included culture in the Twelve National Construction Projects to respond to social change; in 1995, Lee Teng-hui supported the Community Construction Movement (shequ zongti yingzao), to further his political idea of the "community of shared fate" (shengming gongtong ti).[40]

In this consideration, "Chineseness" is not only a national, ethnic, and cultural identity, but also a political device for the control of space and territory. In its original Sinitic name, "China" or "the middle kingdom" (*zhongguo*) suggests not a geographical space, but rather a metaphorical center for politics, economy, and culture. In other words, "Chineseness" has been used constantly to redraw the conceptual and geographical borders of China. Most obviously, the Cultural Renaissance Movement, also known as the Chinese Cultural Renaissance Movement (Zhonghua wenhua fuxing yundong), was launched by the KMT in Taiwan to revitalize "Chinese culture" in 1967, whereas in the PRC the Cultural Revolution began merely one year earlier in 1966 to eradicate traditional "Chinese culture" that was deemed by the Chinese Communist Party as "anti-revolutionary." In an attempt to Sinicize Taiwan, the KMT not only claimed their more authentic representation of China over the other side, but also legitimized their own governance on the island of Taiwan since their retreat from the Chinese mainland. I, therefore, mobilize the term

---

[39] Rey Chow, *Entanglements, Or Transmedial Thinking about Capture* (Duke University Press, 2012), 1–2.
[40] Bi-yu Chang, "From Taiwanisation to De-Sinification. Culture Construction in Taiwan since the 1990s," *China Perspectives* 2004, no. 56 (December 1, 2004): 1, http://journals.openedition.org/chinaperspectives/438.

"Chinese" not to prescribe an identity, but to foreground a spatial-political entanglement as well as a critique of a Sinocentric understanding of space.

In the aftermath of the Cold War, as both parties across the strait were integrated in the new global market, the cross-strait entanglement did not disappear but took a new shape. As Erin Huang described her experience growing up in Kaohsiung, a Taiwanese port city that lost its competitiveness to emerging Chinese port cities on the other side, the exchange of goods and capital not only re-triangulates the border of influence, but also transforms the conceptual shape of Chineseness.[41] Similarly, Chang's study on Taiwanization and De-Sinification in Taiwan focuses on the 1990s and beyond, because it is in the last decade of the twentieth century that the Taiwanese identity has surpassed the Chinese one in Taiwan, a trend that continues to this day.[42] Although the "Chinese" identity has been steadily in decline in Taiwan for the past three decades, a series of events in the last decade of the twentieth century have only exacerbated the mistrust between people across the Taiwan strait: the Min Ping Yu No. 5540 incident in 1990, the Qiandao Lake incident in 1994, the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis in 1996, and eventually China's objection to Taiwan's entry into the WHO during the 2002 SARS outbreak.

In the early 1990s, the Cultural Revolution was not a distant past. I grew up hearing horrifying stories about how the Cultural Revolution had destroyed "Chinese" traditions, and that the real "Chinese" culture was always better preserved on the other

---

[41] Erin Y. Huang, *Urban Horror: Neoliberal Post-Socialism and the Limits of Visibility* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2020).

side of the Taiwan Strait. For a generation of Chinese people after the Cultural Revolution, Taiwan might feel more "Chinese" than China. Of course, such contestation over the authenticity of "Chineseness" is often full of stereotypes and prejudices. When I began my graduate studies in the United States, I still heard stories about how Sinophone scholars in North America were stereotyped: "Hong Kong scholars know English well; Taiwanese scholars know Chinese well; and Chinese scholars know nothing well." Nonetheless, it was perhaps more surprising to witness how such sentiments about "Chineseness" were soon to completely disappear by the end of the decade. As Taiwan continues to "de-Sinicize" (quzhongguohua) its curriculum in the new century, China put more emphasis on the Chinese Classics (guoxue) in an attempt to reclaim its authenticity to Chineseness as part of its national pride. In other words, "Chineseness" is always being displaced.

---

[42] See "Taiwanese / Chinese Identity (1992/06~2020/12)," Election Study Center, National Chengchi University, January 25, 2021, https://esc.nccu.edu.tw/PageDoc/Detail?fid=7800&id=6961.

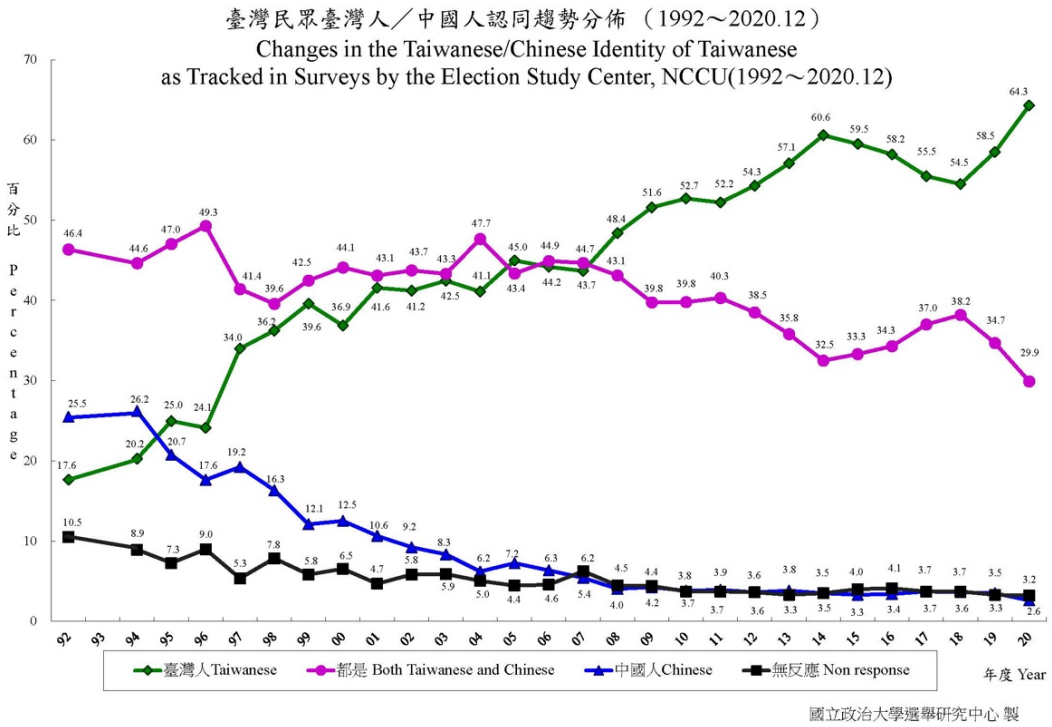


Figure 3. Taiwanese/Chinese Identity in Taiwan, Graph from Election Study Center, National Chengchi University (2021).

In this historical context, I trace a tangible network of artists across the Taiwan strait that has emerged since the 1990s. In this history, a few critical moments have solidified the cross-strait network of sound recording artists. In 1997, the Taiwanese-born artist Yao Dajuin founded China Sound Unit (Zhongguo shengyin xiaozu), which marked the beginning of a field recording movement across Chinese cities. In 2006, the Taiwanese curator Xu Ya-zhu collaborated with the Chinese sound artist Yan Jun on “Sound from the Far Shore” (Bi’an Shengyin), which later developed into a cross-strait sound art forum “Inter-Sound” (Shengjiao). In 2008, Taiwanese artists including Wang Fujui, Lin Chi-wei, Wang Ming-Hui, Chang Chao-wei visited Beijing’s Midi

Music Festival and discussed their participation in Taiwan's noise movement in the 1990s. In what follows, I focus on sound works by both Chinese and Taiwanese artists including Lin Chi-Wei, Wang Fujui, Yao Dajuin, Yan Jun, and Hsia Yü who have known and worked with one another over the decades. As I attempt to locate the source of recorded sound in its contexts, I also ask questions about how recorded sound reconfigures spatial-political relations. In tracing people and ideas across the Taiwan Strait, I ask how the circulation of recorded sound may provide an alternative way to examine the cross-strait entanglement and to imagine the contentious border space.

It is here that I respond to a spatial bias that is derived from a McLuhanian notion of "acoustic space." Ever since Marshall McLuhan declared that we are now "living in an acoustic world," we could imagine how physical space has been flattened by the electronic media.[43] The telephone, for McLuhan, is "the speech without walls," extending the human's acoustic sensorium well beyond spatial boundaries.[44] And more than an extension to the auditory perception, the telephone even transforms the space itself into a field of simultaneous information. This is what McLuhan has characterized as "the acoustic space" —a boundless, directionless, and horizonless world, reverberating with fantasies of instantaneity.[45] Yet the problem with a term such as "acoustic space" is that it comes with the promise that the acoustic medium

---

[43] Marshall McLuhan, "Living in an Acoustic World," Marshall McLuhan Speaks Special Collection, accessed February 5, 2019, http://www.marshallmcluhanspeaks.com/lecture/1970-living-in-an-acoustic-world/.
[44] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1994), 283.

mediates regardless of locality. Of course, the acoustic signal travels well beyond geographical boundaries, but the significance of these sounds is deeply embedded in their immediate contexts. Contrary to "the acoustic space," the soundscape we hear is anchored in its geographic locale. It is deeply rooted in the collective memories of people who inhabit the space.

In what follows, I focus on spatial-political tensions to interrogate the "borderless" spatial bias inherited from the earliest days of media ecology. In doing so, my examination of the cross-strait entanglement, an area often undertheorized, offers an acoustic horizon to the current theorizations of space and border. It opposes methodological approaches that privilege a decontextualized theorization of media on one hand, and an intellectual historiography of nation-states on the other.

THE NOISE DECADE

In the field of Chinese literature, culture, and intellectual history, the long 1990s has often been considered as a critical and fascinating period. It is often categorized as a period of post-socialism, even though interpretations about the legacies of socialism may vary. One common theme in the collective observation of the period is the newfound freedom and subjectivity, which was partly due to market economy and partly due to the global rise of neoliberalism. As Lisa Rofel noted, what stood out in the post-socialist period was a new neoliberal subjectivity; it is the

---

[45] Marshall McLuhan, "Visual and Acoustic Space," in *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*, ed. Christoph Cox and Daniel Warner (London: Continuum, 2004).

desiring individuals who seek sexual, material, and affective self-interest under the guise of "universal human nature." For Rofel, this desire becomes a crucial step for Chinese people to imagine themselves as new global citizens— "an essential ingredient of cosmopolitan worldliness."[46]

It is this desire of "cosmopolitan worldliness" that recorded sound exhibits an exceeding capacity to capture. When Yan Jan reflected on the history of field recording in the late 1990s, he also linked the pursuit of sexual and materialist pleasure to an urge of self-expression and identity performance.

> When field recording was emerging in China, it was also a time when social tensions were being released, when information explosion began, when discourses emerged, and when ideologies were being replaced by pornography. When people have more money and language, they would like to perform more parts of themselves, and there will be more conflicts. While all of these may seem to be progression, field recording is to question it. Like in a festive celebration, someone will not participate but observe in distance.[47]

When freedom of speech is taken for granted, and when everyone speaks whatever that they want, no one cares to listen. When Yan Jun was asked why he started recording sounds in the late 1990s, he said, "because everyone is speaking loudly, no one cares to listen, and it's all noises." This is also why I became fascinated by recorded sound in the 1990s, not merely for its capacity to archive history, but also due to its unwavering demand for "listening"—that is to listen to all differences and

---

[46] Lisa Rofel et al., *Desiring China: Experiments in Neoliberalism, Sexuality, and Public Culture* (Duke University Press, 2007).
[47] Jun Yan, "Zenyang Bei Shijie Gaibian: Xianshi Zhong De Zhongguo Shengyin Shijian [How Are We Changed by the World: Chinese Sound Practice in Reality]," *New Arts: Journal of the National Academy of Art* 35, no. 6 (2014): 47–63.

through all noises.

In the post-Tiananmen moment, such lively "noise" is also observed in a decade-long debate in the intellectual circle.[48] It commenced with reflections on the lessons from Tiananmen as well as the New Enlightenment Movement (Xinqimeng yundong) in the previous decade but soon expanded to debates on Chinese Classics (guoxue), Chinese cultural traditions, universal humanism, nationalism, and modernity. It culminated around 1998 in fierce debates on neoliberal capitalism between the Chinese New Left (xin zuopai) and the Chinese Liberals (ziyoupai).[49] To quote Dai Jinhua, "Chinese society and culture were consistently mired within the delirium and aphasia of multiple ideological discourses,"[50] and Zhang Xudong, "an internally differentiated and fragmented notion of the national selfhood […] has become the main source for the collective identity of post-socialist Chinese society."[51]

While Zhang Xudong was more optimistic about the socialist tradition in China, "the last frontier of world capitalism," other scholars questioned China's exceptionalism in the context of a new neoliberal global order. Rebecca Karl, for example, argues that the pursuit for individual rights in the 1990s was depoliticized (irrelevant to ideology) and framed as questions about legality, which also resonates with Dai Jinhua's observation that it was almost impossible to talk about "class

---

[48] Xudong Zhang, "Intellectual Politics in Post-Tiananmen China: An Introduction," *Social Text*, no. 55 (1998): 1–8.
[49] See Hui Wang, *China's New Order: Society, Politics, and Economy in Transition* (Harvard University Press, 2003).
[50] Jinhua Dai, *After the Post–Cold War: The Future of Chinese History* (Duke University Press, 2018), 5.
[51] Xudong Zhang, *Postsocialism and Cultural Politics: China in the Last Decade of the Twentieth Century* (Duke University Press, 2008), 4.

struggle" in China in the 1990s. While the purpose of post-socialist policies is to maintain societal stability, more instances of social disorder emerged at the local level because of class stratification: "social order has become more disorderly through the state-led primitive accumulation of capital and the consequent anarchic class stratification."[52] In *Postsocialism and Cultural Politics*, Zhang Xudong has defined the "long 1990s" as a span of twelve years, which begins with the Tiananmen Square Crackdown in 1989 and ends with China's entry into the World Trade Organization in 2001. A series of critical events occurred between them: Deng Xiaoping's southern tour in 1992, a milestone for China's market-oriented reforms, the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis in 1996, the handover of Hong Kong in 1997, as well as the 1997 Asian financial crisis. My definition of the decade roughly corresponds to his.[53]

This dissertation begins with noise music in Taiwan and its intersection with the contemporaneous labor movement in the early 1990s. In the first chapter, I analyze how the recorded fragments in Lin Chi-Wei's Zero and Sound Liberation Organization (1994) document the anxieties of a transitioning post-industrial society. From shuttered factories and industrial ruins to laid-off workers, I read these recurring acoustic motifs as the invisible signs of a neoliberal global order and its dematerialized labor force. I trace this artistic inspiration back to a critique of *musique concrète*—an experimental recording practice that intentionally obscures the source of sound. I argue that noise contrasts with music's phantasmagoric transcendence in that it

---

[52] Rebecca E. Karl, "The Flight to Rights: 1990s China and Beyond," in *Culture and Social Transformations: Theoretical Framework and Chinese Context* (Brill, 2014), 169.
[53] Zhang, *Postsocialism and Cultural Politics*.

foregrounds the corporeal bodies that produce the sound. My intervention into current debates on the "sound object" within critical theory and sound studies hinges on resisting the separation of sound from its source. I re-evaluate the aesthetic principle and philosophical legacy of *musique concrète* developed by Pierre Schaeffer via Edmund Husserl's phenomenological reduction to reclaim the political potential of noise. In the collective appropriation of noise in recorded sound, as I conclude, noise is not merely concretized as a sonic flux or an acoustic phenomenon, but also realized as a constellation of social indexes in a rapidly changing multi-media environment.

The subsequent two chapters further develop the attentiveness to the source of sound in consideration of spatial-political tensions. In the second chapter on urban noise and spatial justice, I situate a collection of field recording practices in China within the scholarship of acoustic ecology. Attending to the everyday soundscape from Yao Dajuin's Silver Tablet Bridge: A Sound Event (2005) and Yan Jun's Qiujiang Road (2008), I analyze how the practice of field recording documents the precariousness of habitation. Expanding on R. Murray Schafer's critique of urban noise, I consider field recording as an attempt to restore the rapport with the acoustic environment. From street cries to friendly greetings, these sounds embody a nostalgia for an intimate architectural space as well as a poignant reminder of one's righteous occupancy of the space. In conclusion, I argue that the cross-strait field recording network provides a sensorial archive of China's disappearing urban fabric and of its tumultuous history of forced demolition, eviction, and relocation.

The third chapter then zooms out from urban space to geopolitical space. It probes into the sonic warfare enacted at the height of the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis in

1996—from the propaganda loudspeakers on Kinmen Island to the test missiles fired into Taiwanese waters. In analyzing media art works such as Writing of Sounds of Writing (1999), Long Live (2011), and Sonic Territories (2018), I argue that the militaristic noise demarcates geopolitical territories, turning the Taiwan Strait into a memorial site. The chapter reconsiders Marshall McLuhan's conceptualization of the "acoustic space"—a boundless, directionless, and horizonless world reverberating with fantasies of instantaneity—as the spatial premise for electronic media. Sound does not operate as a free-floating entity transcending geographical boundaries. Anchored in its geopolitical locality, the recorded sound instead interrogates the unresolved violence embedded in territorial disputes and spatial tensions in history.

Moving from source to transformation, my project concludes by reflecting on noise's migratory trajectory from the acoustic to the digital media. In the last chapter, I focus on *Pink Noise* (2007) by the Taiwanese poet and lyricist Hsia Yü—a bilingual poetry collection made of plastic transparencies. Around the turn of the twenty-first century, numerous artists and poets in the Chinese-speaking world became fascinated with the visual trope of transparent books. Yet unlike the artist's book traditions in the Anglophone world, as I argue, these unreadable books in Chinese do not concern the decline of the print medium, but rather the unreadability of textual noise—one that is intertwined with the historical experience of information overload. Building on N. Katherine Hayles' idea of "material metaphor," I read these poetic texts as the unstructured, extraneous, and erroneous traces resulting from a failed mediation of cultures. While attending to Hsia's intermedial sensibilities of poetry, music, installation, and performance in *Pink Noise*, I conclude with a theorization of noise as

"an intermedial impulse," one that illuminates the collision of senses and the emergence of new media.

CHAPTER 1 MUSICAL NOISE

THE POLITICS OF LE CORPS SONORE

In 1998, Black Hand Nakasi (Heishou nakasi) released *Fortunate My Ass* (Fuqi gepi), the first music album in Taiwan dedicated to its tumultuous labor movement in the 1990s. The title track of the album "Fortunate My Ass" begins with a piece of recorded sound from the Great Workers Against Unemployment Protest (Gongren douzhen fanshiye dayouxing) in 1996. Among all the sounds from the lively soundscape of the protest scene, the slogan shouting was most prominently featured. And the words roughly translate to:

> We don't want unemployment!
> We don't want plutocracy!
> Today, you close the factories!
> Tomorrow, we close the government!
>
> Fortunate My Ass!

The last line "Fortunate My Ass!" was a response to a 1996 TV commercial, where the famous Hong Kong actor Chow Yun-fat told Taiwanese workers to feel "fortunate" about their country's prosperity. It was shot for Whisbih Liquid (Weishibi), a popular energy drink that specifically targeted blue-collar workers. In the commercial, Chow Yun-fat stands in front of a group of actors who dress up as construction workers. While Chow praises Taiwanese workers as the unsung heroes behind the Taiwan Economic Miracle, he also wishfully ignores the pains that they were enduring in the 1990s. He says, "My working-class brothers. Don't be sad. Don't

complain. Success is a thirty percent chance, and seventy percent hard work. Whisbih Liquid is our brother. How fortunate!"[54]

What Chow Yun-fat did not anticipate was that his line "How fortunate" soon became ironic. While the Sanyo Pharmaceutical Co., Ltd. that manufactured Whisbih Liquid made a great fortune from his advertising campaign, the blue-collar workers that they served were quickly losing their foothold in Taiwan's post-industrial economic reforms. In massive layoffs and labor protests throughout the decade, workers shouted out aloud the famous line "How fortunate" sarcastically to the privileged who had unproportionally reaped the profits from Taiwan's Economic Miracle. As the lyrics of the song also attest, "How fortunate! How fortunate! The god-damned boss made enough money and ran off."[55]

Black Hand Nakasi was certainly not the first one to sample the sounds of labor protests in their music works, not even in Taiwan. In 1994, the Taiwanese noise music group Zero and Sound Liberation Organization (the Z.S.L.O.) included a piece of sound recording from the 1994 Taipei Labor Demonstration in their first music album. For about one minute, the sampling depicts an escalated standoff between the government and the union protesters in front of the Executive Yuan Building on Zhongxiao East Road. While the police officer repeatedly orders the crowd to disband immediately, his authoritative voice is only buried by disruptive noises from the protesting crowd. In comparison, the voice of the union leader remains loud and clear,

---

[54] Peiling Weng, "Zhou Runfa Yiju Fuqila! Weishibi 40 Yi Rudai [Chow Yun-Fat Says, 'How Fortunate!' Wihsibih Cashes in 40 Billion Dollars]," Wenhua yizhou, March 27, 2008, http://jou.pccu.edu.tw/weekly/communication/1024/03.htm.

weary but impassioned. When he lifts his voice towards the end, it excites the crowd, leading up to a round of applause and an outburst of cheering sounds. This moment is archived in sound— "11:15 AM, June 29, 1994. Labor's Demonstration/Police's Declaration in Taipei" —in an almost journalistic tone; the title of the track documents the acoustic event as it occurs.

How did these music artists in Taiwan suddenly become interested in sampling the labor protests? Let us remember that the time was sensitive. In the 1990s, when public demonstrations became increasingly common in Taiwan, the noise of protests echoed through the streets of Taipei. In fact, the decade of noise is often characterized by a combination of political democratization and economic liberalization. In 1990, students in Taipei occupied the public square at Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall, demanding democratic reforms for presidential and parliamentary elections. In 1991, in its push towards a post-industrial economy, parliament passed an important revision to the existing privatization law, which provided the legal foundations for drastic economic deregulation.[56] In the following years, countless local labor unions emerged as a result of massive layoffs and worsening working conditions. In 1994 alone, almost 7,000 factories closed.[57] In the same year, the first confederation of trade unions was formed in Taipei County; local unions began to collaborate with national

---

[55] Han Cheung, "Twenty Years of Singing for the Oppressed," *Taipei Times*, February 1, 2016, https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/feat/archives/2016/02/01/2003638540.
[56] Huei-Wen Pao, Hsueh-Liang Wu, and Wei-Hwa Pan, "The Road to Liberalization: Policy Design and Implementation of Taiwan's Privatization," *International Economics and Economic Policy* 5, no. 3 (November 2008): 323–44.
[57] Yang Wei-Chung, "Guanchang, Youjian Guanchang [Factory Shutdowns, Seeing Factory Shutdowns Again]," *Puluo Minzhu Wang* [Worker Democracy], no. 38 (June 1996), https://workerdemo-hk.com/2017/07/18/.

unions of state-owned companies.[58] And the tension of a dislocated labor force eventually culminated in this fully-fledged confrontation, "11:15 AM, June 29, 1994. Labor's Demonstration/Police's Declaration in Taipei." As such, the noise that we hear in the soundtrack epitomizes a society in rupture—a society that was trying to embrace a new neoliberal global order by actively de-materializing and dislocating its massive labor force.

In many accounts, these soundtracks exemplified the beginning of Taiwan's noise movement in the 1990s. The Z.S.L.O. is often regarded as Taiwan's first bona-fide noise band, and their record label "NOISE" is also considered Taiwan's first noise record label. Of course, by incorporating a piece of unaltered audio recording into their music, the Z.S.L.O. seemingly rehearsed a familiar avant-garde strategy, one that intentionally obscures the distinction between music and noise, art and life, aesthetics and politics. Nonetheless, this recording piece also specifically invokes a recurring figure throughout Taiwan's noise movement— *le corps sonore* or "the sounding body." It is a term that originally derives from Pierre Schaeffer. In contrast to *l'objet sonore* or "sound object," which refers to the sound that is freed from its sonic origins, *le corps sonore* refers to the source of sound.[59] In what follows, I contend that the significance of Taiwan's noise music emphasizes the body that voices the sound, rather than the intrinsic qualities of sound in and of itself.

---

[58] Ming-Sho Ho, "Meiyou Jieji Rentong de Laogong Yundong: Taiwan de Zizhu Gonghui Yu Xiongdi Yiqi de Jixian [A Working-Class Movement without Class Identity: Taiwan's Independent Labor Union Movement and the Limit of Brotherhood]," *Taiwan: A Radical Quarterly in Social Studies* 72 (2008): 53.
[59] Michel Chion, *Guide Des Objects Sonores: Pierre Schaeffer et La Recherche Musicale*, Bibliothèque de Recherche Musicale (Paris, 1995), 34.

To begin understanding the ways in which the figure of noise comes to define a particular set of aesthetic sensibilities in Chinese and Taiwanese experimental art and literature in the past two decades, this chapter embarks on an investigation of the birth, the development, and the eventual demise of Taiwan's noise music. It is where "noise" was first conceptualized, both thematically and aesthetically, as a potent metaphor for the decade in question. It is where noise was imagined as an aesthetic antithesis to music, on one hand, and appropriated as an active form of political engagement, on the other. Like many other places in the world, music has always been involved in social movements. But in Taiwan the discourse of noise emerged at a particular moment. It emerged from the political turmoil created by the country's economic privatization, liberalization, and post-industrialization. It emerged at a time when noise was understood, not so much as an object of musical or aesthetic experience, but rather as a figure of discontent as well as a strategy to voice disenfranchisement. As music was becoming increasingly objectified, commodified, and disconnected from the lived experience during this time, *le corps sonore* provides an important framework for us to locate the body that voices the sound in a globalized post-industrial world.

NOISE DECADE

In the 1980s, with the rise of the U.S.-led neoliberal agenda, "liberalization, privatization, opening, and deregulation" became the unofficial guidance for the

policy reforms among many countries in "the free world."[60] In June 1984, under the pressure of a potential trade retaliation of the U.S., Yu Kuo-Hwa, the then Premier of the Republic of China (Taiwan), proposed the three principles for Taiwan's economic reform— "Liberalization, Globalization, and Institutionalization (ziyouhua, guojihua, zhiduhua)."[61] In May 1985, the Executive Yuan formed the Economic Innovation Committee to evaluate specific plans for Taiwan's economic reform. In hopes of upgrading Taiwan's industries, they decided to deregulate many state-owned industries. In the following years, Taiwan opened a selection of labor-intensive sectors for foreign trade and private investment. This had a tremendous impact on the country's labor force.

Unprioritized as they were for legislative protection, agricultural workers became the first victims of the economic liberalization. On May 20, 1988, over 4,000 farmers marched to the government headquarters in protest of the Legislative Yuan's decision to open up Taiwan's domestic market for foreign agricultural products. Tensions rose when the protesters threw cans, rocks, and even homemade explosives at the authorities. In violent clashes with police, more than 100 people were injured. Known as the 520 Farmers Protest, this became the first public confrontation after the lifting of martial law in 1987, as well as one of the most violent incidents since 1947.[62]

---

[60] Hui-ching Chou, "Lifting Martial Law and Opening-up Taiwan," trans. David Toman, *CommonWealth Magazine*, December 24, 2018, https://english.cw.com.tw/article/article.action?id=2230.
[61] Chou.
[62] Qiu Wanxing, "Sanshinian Qian 520 Nongmin Shijian, Jieyanhou Zuiyanzhong Jietou Liuxue Chongtu [Thirty Years Ago, the 520 Farmers Protest Was the Worst Bloodshed Street Clash After the Lifting of the Martial Law]," *Taiwan People News*, May 19, 2018, ET@T, http://www1.etat.com/noisetw/noiseiv.htm.

The bloodshed was televised, with its violent image and sound widely circulated.

This event was vividly remembered by Lin Chi-Wei, one of the founding members of the Z.S.L.O. In an interview, Lin recalled the farmer's movement as a wakeup moment in his life— "I did not know much about politics at the time, but I knew something didn't feel quite right. All we hear from the [state-owned] media was that the protesters were a mob, but on the other hand, I have never heard a single word from the so-called 'mob.'"[63] With these questions in mind, Lin joined a left-wing literary society—the Prairie Society (Caoyuan wenxueshe)—at the Fu Jen University. Lin was soon introduced to Western literary and critical theories. He read everything from György Lukács, Bertolt Brecht, Theodor Adorno, Louis Althusser, and Michel Foucault to structuralism, post-structuralism, feminism, and situationism.[64] It is also then that Lin made friends with many activists and artists at the college, who put theory into practice by organizing activist events that made national headlines. For Lin, it was a remarkable time, a time of energy and excitement, and a time when all things are allowed. "Everyone is questioning, everyone is starting a movement, everyone is making waves," as Lin recalled, "I regained the imaginations of the 1960s, the imaginations that Taiwan had originally lost."[65]

In the same year, another labor strike broke out in Taipei. On 30 October 1988,

---

[63] Chi-Wei Lin, "Ruguo Meiyou Xinde, Laode Yejiang Xiaoshi—Lin Chi-Wei Tan Taiwan Zaoyin Yundong De Shengyusi [If There Is Nothing New, the Old Would Vanish Too—Lin Chi-Wei on the Birth and Death of Taiwan's Noise Movement]," in *Yishu Yu Shehui: Dandai Yishujia Zhuanwen Yu Fangtan* [Art and Society: Introducing Seven Contemporary Artists], ed. Amy Cheng (Taipei: Taipei Fine Arts Museum, 2009).
[64] Lin.
[65] Lin.

the Shinkong Textile Co., Ltd. announced the closure of its factories in Taipei's Shilin District, leaving about 400 people—most of whom were Taiwanese indigenous women from Hualian and Taitung—out of work.[66] In Shinkong's official statement, the factories were closed because their production facilities were old, inefficient, and thus uncompetitive. Yet it was widely speculated that the real reason was the increasing land value of Shilin District, where the factories were based. It would be simply more profitable for the company to sell the land and cease all operations. In response, the workers at the factories organized a peaceful demonstration demanding a better solution from the company. More importantly, the protesters also for the first time in history demanded that the government should pass employment protection legislations in case of a factory shutdown. Following the 520 Farmers Protest, the textile factory protest illustrates the dire consequence of the country's economic liberalization, and the disruptive force which would continue to unfold in the following decades. As economic liberalization became part of Taiwan's official ideology, domestic capital rushed out of Taiwan for mainland China and Southeast Asian countries. As such, factory shutdowns became a recurring theme in the news. In 1988 alone, 3,658 factories were registered to close and the number rose to 6,917 in 1996.[67]

---

[66] Yang-Tang Ho, "Laogong Jitikangzheng Xingdong De Xingshi Yu Dongyuan: Xinguang Shilin Guanchang Kangzheng De Gean Yanjiu [The Form and Mobilization of Collective Labor Struggle: The Case of Shinkong's Factory Closure in Shilin District]" (master's thesis, Taipei, Soochow University, 1993), National Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations in Taiwan, https://hdl.handle.net/11296/z32u2s.
[67] Yang, "Guanchang."

Figure 4. Green Team, Still from *Labor's Battle Song: Laid-off Shinkong Textile Workers' Protest* (2016).

Nonetheless, what was also remembered from the Shinkong Textile workers' fight was the protesting music during the two months of strike. As the demonstration continued, the protesters at the Shinkong Textile Factory began to perform indigenous music and dance to keep up their morale. In *Labor's Battle Song: Laid-off Shinkong Textile Workers' Protest* (2016), the documentary collective Green Team archived the precious footage of the protesters' music performance.[68] The filmmakers refer to the protesting music as "the battle songs," emphasizing a combative rhetoric in the labor

[68] "What's the Color for Documentary? The 30th Anniversary of Green Team," Taiwan International Documentary Festival (TIDF), accessed June 10, 2019, https://www.tidf.org.tw/en/category/shows/4961.

movement.[69] In doing so, they also point to the ways in which the labor struggle is materialized through bodily engagement of singing, dancing, and sit-ins. In contrast to the ungrounded fantasies of the middle-class, the protesters voice their discontent with their body and movement, transforming the space of occupation into that of an active stage of the battlefield.

Many of these songs were recorded into cassette tapes. They were then widely circulated among the workers who participated in the labor movement. Although it is hard to track down the exact instance when recording protest songs with cassette tape became a tradition in Taiwan's labor movement, the Shinkong Textile Workers' Protest was often credited as one of the origins. According to Chen Po-wei, the creator of the Blackhand Nakasi, Shinkong's protest was the spiritual birth for the Blackhand Nakasi; ever since its official formation in 1996, the workers' band has been performing protesting music in support of Taiwan's labor movement for almost two decades.[70] Although the cassette tapes were widely circulated in reproduced copies, their liveness reverberates through layers of technological mediations. As Jonathan Sterne argues, "recording was the product of a culture that had learned to can and to embalm, to preserve the bodies of the dead so that they could continue to perform a

---

[69] Green Team, *Labor's Battle Song: Laid-off Shinkong Textile Workers' Protest*, documentary, 2016.

[70] Their band name derives from "nakasi" — a music genre that is native to Japan and Taiwan. As a genre of "live music," the music is traditionally performed by traveling workers at tea parlors and drinking bars. It is also often associated with celebrations of working-class culture. See Amy Cheng and Jeph Lo, "Seventeen Years of Cultural Intervention: An Exhibition on Black Hand Nakasi Workers' Band" (The Cube Project Space, 2013), https://issuu.com/thecube.tw.

social function after life."[71] As labor activists record and circulate these cassette tapes, the sounds that they recorded continue to perform "a social function" in reincarnation. Instead of preserving the dead body, however, these battle songs summon new living bodies and through the process form new subjectivities: On the one hand, the incorporation of the indigenous musical elements acknowledges the unique positionality of the participants, their ethnic and cultural origins. On the other hand, the lyrics often insert an identification of their working-class subjectivity ("we are the courageous workers of Shinkong Factory") to voice their frustration and discontent, both literally and metaphorically.[72]

As the protesting noise became a recurring acoustic motif in Taiwan throughout the 1990s, it is not surprising that the sounds of a protesting crowd could be blended so smoothly into a piece of a musical recording. The combination of live music, demonstration speech, and slogan shouting sculpt a familiar soundscape of the decade in Taiwan, when its public sphere was preoccupied by a wide range of social movements from environmental degradation and indigenous rights to gender inequality and working conditions. As Jeph Lo noted, noise as an artistic imagination developed precisely at Taiwan's Post-Martial Law moment in the early 1990s, when the country experienced a transformation from an authoritarian state to a civil society.

> So, what was the music of the movement? The protesters sang songs that were banned under martial law; they preferred music that had been forbidden or was

[71] Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 292.
[72] Jason Stanyek and Benjamin Piekut, "Deadness: Technologies of the Intermundane," *TDR/The Drama Review* 54, no. 1 (March 2010): 14–38.

> not easy to hear. Classical music, with its lofty status, was rejected. If the sounds rejected by mainstream society are 'noise', and the sounds accepted, 'music', then we can see how, in the course of this movement, the status of noise and music was inverted.[73]

Lo points out that noise music and the protesting song are connected, not necessarily through similarities in music styles or lyrical themes, but rather through a rather subversive attitude of making "music." Or as Jacques Attali reminds us, the evolving definitions of music expose the channeling forces of a social structure that always marginalizes the new sounds as noise.[74] Noise is configured in a violent and revolutionary rupture that provides new materials for the communal organization.[75]

Following Attali, I regard this historical rupture in the early 1990s as a potential site for noise to emerge as an antithesis to "music." More specifically, I see that this rupture was created by the series of economic liberalization policies implemented by a transitioning government in its attempt to transform its governing body into a post-industrial society. Among all these social movements, the labor movement in particular points to the dematerialization of labor, which would remain a seminal theme to noise music. Not only does later noise music constantly return to the imageries of shuttered factories, industrial ruins, laid-off workers, and unfulfilling labor, noise as an aesthetic figure also reflects on the emerging organizing principles of how labor and bodies are being regulated and governed. Understood in this way, the

---

[73] Jeph Lo, "Wasteland Utopia: The Liberation of Sound in Post–Martial Law Taiwan," *Full Stop* (blog), March 18, 2019, http://www.full-stop.net/2019/03/18/blog/jeph-lo/wasteland-utopia-the-liberation-of-sound-in-post-martial-law-taiwan/.
[74] Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985).

cassette tapes circulated among the protesting workers epitomize the material remains of this transitioning society. It is in this context that the noise movement in Taiwan began to emerge and thrive.

NOISE MUSIC

In 1992, the Zero and Sound Liberation Organization (the Z.S.L.O.) was formally established in the Xinzhuang District of the old Taipei County. The district was known as an industrial center of Northern Taiwan hosting over 6,000 factories at its peak time. In the early 1990s, however, the district began to experience the first wave of deindustrialization. The music works by the Z.S.L.O. captured a nostalgic sentiment about that change, and this was also noted by local critics— "[the group] seeks creative resources and strength in industrial areas."[76] The Z.S.L.O. consists of four members: Chan Ka-Keung, Liu Singing, Liu Po-Li, and Lin Chi-Wei.[77] Before they have earned the title of Taiwan's first noise music group, they often refer to themselves as a "multimedia" performing group. Making music was never really part of their concerns—they were never trained in music, never learned to play any music instruments, and only used instruments for props in their performance. As a result,

---

[75] James A. Steintrager, "Sound Objects: An Introduction," in *Sound Objects*, ed. James A. Steintrager and Rey Chow (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019).
[76] Zero and Sound Liberation Organization, "Zero and Sound Liberation Organization Manifesto" (Manuscript, 1997), ET@T Archive, http://archive.etat.com/etat-varchive/2699/.
[77] Zero and Sound Liberation Organization, "Ling Yu Shengyin Jiefang Zuzhi Biography [Zero and Sound Liberation Organization Biography]," ET@T, accessed June 10, 2019, http://www1.etat.com/zslo/bio.htm.

critics often described their practice as "anti-music."[78]

Of course, this "anti-music" attitude existed for a good reason. During Taiwan's transition into a more democratic society, the intellectual vibrancy on the societal level was mirrored by drastic institutional changes. This phenomenon was especially obvious in the cultural circles of literature, philosophy, fine art, and film—but not so much in music. On the one hand, cultural and educational institutions including museums, colleges and universities were transforming themselves to cultivate new thoughts propelling ongoing social movements. Meanwhile, emerging alternative spaces such as literary journals, documentary studios, gallery spaces and experimental theaters were also created for artistic experiments and critical reflections. In comparison, music was often excluded from this change. As Lin Chi-Wei noted, "Music was excluded from these institutional changes. In those four fields [literature, philosophy, fine art, and film], there were insightful critics who provided theoretical backings [to their movements], and they also had journals to publish their criticism."[79] As a cultural form, music was always less visible in the public sphere; it was often thought as more reserved in putting forth a critical discourse or a radical aesthetics.

However, this was not always the case. Between the 1970s and the 1980s, the campus folk song (xiaoyuan minge), which took aspirations from the American folk music revival, was unapologetically political. When the United Nation officially

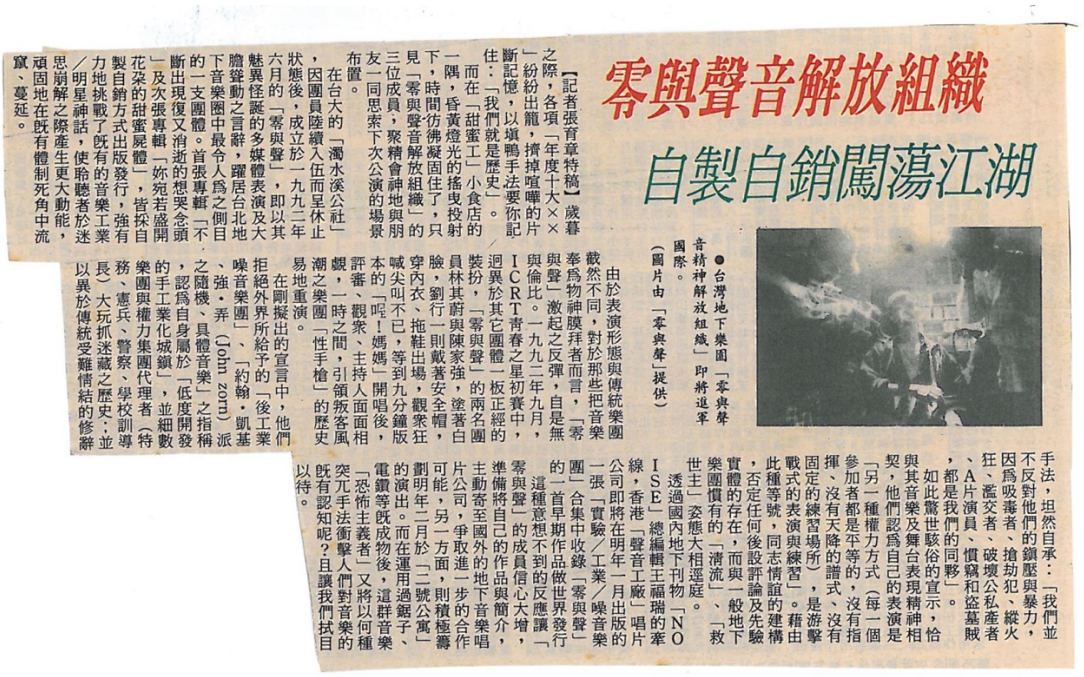
---

[78] Zero and Sound Liberation Organization.
[79] Chi-Wei Lin, "Taiwan Dixia Zaoyin: Xueyun Fanwenhua Zhi Sheng [Taiwan Underground Noise: The Sound of Anticulture in the Student Movement]," in *Zaoyin Fantu: Zhanhou Taiwan Shengxiang Wenhua De Tansuo [ALTERing NATIVism: Sound Cultures in Post-War Taiwan]*, ed. Jeph Lo (Taipei: Walkers Cultural Co., 2015), 155.

recognized the PRC over the ROC as the only government to represent China in 1971, a movement called "Sing Our Own Songs" (Chang ziji de ge) swept campuses across Taiwan to assert their distinctive cultural Chinese identities. In the 1990s, however, as Taiwan's music industry experienced the effects of its economic liberalization policies, music became cultural commodities. In July 1986, the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (IFPI) opened its first local branch in Taiwan, which became the stepstone for the five multinational corporations (PolyGram, EMI, BMG, Warner, and Sony) entering Taiwan's domestic market. By the 1990s, all five corporations had established their presence in Taiwan through joint ventures, mergers, or subsidiary operations. In the same year, the first copyright management collective in Taiwan's music industry was established, which continued to regulate the very practice of music production in the commercial market.[80] With an influx of global capital, the music industry was therefore transformed. In its pursuit of profits, the music industry produced products that were increasingly standardized and homogenized.[81] Without the same level of institutional building and intellectual engagement, music experimentation went dormant and remained largely unnoticed.

---

[80] Yawen Li, "[Zai Kuaguo Yinyue Jituan Kuaru Taiwan Zhihou: Cong Changpian Zhizuoren De Chuangzuo ZiZhuxing Tanqi] The Conflict Between Creativity and Commerce: How Major Transnational Music Corporations' Production Strategies Affect Record Producers' Creativity Autonomy in Taiwan" (Chinese Communication Society 2010 Conference, Taipei, 2010).
[81] Li.



零與聲音解放組織

自製自銷闖蕩江湖

●台灣地下樂團「零與聲音精神解放組織」即將進軍國際。（圖片由「零與聲」提供）

【記者張育章特稿】歲暮之際，各項「年度十大××」紛紛出籠，擠掉喧囂的片斷記憶，以填鴨手法要你記住：「我們就是歷史」。

而在「甜蜜工」小食店的一隅，昏黃燈光的搖曳投射下，時間彷彿固住了，只見「零與聲音解放組織」的三位成員，聚精會神地與朋友一同思索下次公演的場景布置。

在台大的「濁水溪公社」，因團員陸續入伍而呈休止狀態後，成立於一九九二年六月的「零與聲」，即以其魅異怪誕的多媒體表演及大膽聳動之言辭，躍居台北地下音樂圈中最令人爲之側目的一支團體。首張專輯「不斷出現復又消逝的想哭念頭」及次張專輯「妳宛若盛開花朵的甜蜜屍體」，皆採自製自銷方式出版發行，強有力地挑戰了既有的音樂工業／明星神話，使聆聽者於迷思崩解之際產生更大動能，頑固地在既有體制死角中流竄、蔓延。

由於表演形態與傳統樂團截然不同，對於那些把音樂奉爲物神膜拜者而言，「零與聲」激起之反彈，自是無與倫比。一九九二年九月，ICRT青春之星初賽中，迥異於其它團體一板正經的裝扮，「零與聲」的兩名團員林其蔚與陳家強，塗著白臉，劉行一則戴著安全帽，穿內衣、拖鞋出場，觀衆狂喊尖叫不已，等到九分鐘版本的「哐！媽」開唱後，評審、觀衆、主持人面面相覷，一時之間，引領叛客風潮之樂團「性手槍」的歷史易地重演。

在剛擬出的宣言中，他們拒絕外界所給予的「後工業噪音樂團」、「約翰．凱基、強．弄（John zorn）派之隨機、具體音樂」之指稱，認爲自身屬於「低度開發的手工業化城鎮」，並細數樂團與權力集團代理者（特務、憲兵、警察、學校訓導長）大玩抓迷藏之歷史；並以異於傳統受難情結的修辭手法，坦然自承：「我們並不反對他們的鎮壓與暴力，因爲吸毒者、搶劫犯、縱火狂、濫交者、破壞公私產者和盜墓賊、A片演員、慣竊，都是我們的同夥」。

如此驚世駭俗的宣示，恰與其音樂及舞台表現精神相契，他們認爲自己的表演是「另一種權力方式（每一個參加者都是平等的，沒有指揮、沒有天降的譜式、沒有固定的練習場所），是游擊戰式的表演與練習」。藉由此種等號，同志情誼的建構，否定任何後設評論及先驗實體的存在，而與一般地下樂團慣有的「潰流」、「救世主」姿態大相逕庭。

透過國內地下刊物「NOISE」總編輯王福瑞的牽線，香港「聲音工廠」唱片公司即將在明年一月出版的一張「實驗／工業／噪音樂團」合集中收錄「零與聲」的一首早期作品做世界發行。這種意想不到的反應讓「零與聲」的成員信心大增，準備將自己的作品與簡介，主動寄至國外的地下音樂唱片公司，爭取進一步的合作可能，另一方面，則積極籌劃明年二月於「二號公寓」的演出。而在運用過鋸子、電鑽等既成物後，這群音樂「恐怖主義者」又將以何種突兀手法衝擊人們對音樂的既有認知呢，且讓我們拭目以待。

Figure 5. Newspaper clipping of the Z.S.L.O.'s underground music network (1993).

In 1993, Fujui Wang was concerned about the homogenizing music industry in Taiwan. After graduating from college, he started a fanzine called NOISE to introduce a more diverse body of musical works. It was the first quarterly publication that had systematically introduced international noise artists to Taiwan. In the same year, Wang decided to create a music series called "Noise Action" to introduce local noise music bands and their social engagement. From 1993 to 1996, a total of ten issues were published covering a wide range of international artists and musicians; many of them are the most prominent figures in the global scenes of noise music, industrial music, and experimental music. Each issue was structured around a handful of foreign music projects. Each section consisted of interviews, translations, and reviews that detailed their music ideas. With the expanding readership, Wang decided to create a new

record label devoted to noise music. Under the series name "Noise Action," Wang began releasing music albums (mostly cassette tapes) that either feature a single musical group or serve as a compilation of a group of artists. During the first four years of its existence, NOISE helped to release over 20 music albums (including 6 compilations under the "Noisenet" sub-series). Its coverage ranges from internationally renowned noise artists to alternative experimental music projects, most of whom originated from either Japan or the U.S. — The Gerogerigegege (*Nothing to Hear/ Nothing to … 1985*), Jay T. Yamamoto (*Lo-Fi*), Macronympha (*Naked Denunciation of Infrasonic Exchange*), Killer Bug (*Brutal Rainbow*), The Haters, (*Silent Shovels Smashing Sut*), Daniel Menche (*Blood Sand*) to name a few.[82] Even after the discontinuation of the fanzine in 1996, Wang continued to release cassette tapes from his home studio. Around the founding of NOISE in 1993, Wang was introduced to Lin Chi-Wei and the Z.S.L.O.'s music at a local record store.[83] Impressed with their music, Wang eventually decided to release their debut album under his "Noise Action." Therefore, the Z.S.L.O.'s debut album became the third album in the series, the first local band NOISE has ever represented.

With a limited audience, the circulation of these cassette tapes remained underground because no regular record store would want to shelf them. Nonetheless, an underground identity was also arguably a conscious choice made by noise artists due to their anti-consumerist attitude. As Michael Wester noted, "Wang and Kuo are

---

[82] Wang Fujui, "NOISE Vol. 10" (fanzine, Taipei, 1996), ET@T Archive, http://archive.etat.com/etat-varchive/6017/.

their own designers, publishers, manufactures and distributors of each of their products. Each cassette is recorded from a master tape (usually on DAT) one by one on their home stereo system. The packaging is cut and pasted by hand; the graphics done on Wang's computer."[84] His homemade ethic not only resonates with the DIY aesthetics seen in the punk culture of the 1980s, but also resembles the mail art practice in the Fluxus movement of the 1960s. Because these albums cannot be purchased at a regular record store, their circulation was entirely dependent on the postal service. According to Wang, his personal mailbox served as a local node in the global noise network. "In this kind of network [that operates through the postal service], you don't need to make a purchase from other artists or record labels. It's like a form of barter, only artwork for artwork."[85] The Gerogerigegege's *Nothing to Hear/ Nothing to … 1985* was the first album that Wang released under his series. The Japanese artists approached him and asked if he was interested in pressing their CDs; Wang agreed, and the first 500 copies were made and then circulated within the fanzine's network. As Wester noted, "Most of the artists are from Japan or the West and offer already mastered tapes to Noise for local production, with no strings attached. They pay no royalties to the artists but send them a few complimentary copies of the finished product."[86]

However, listening to these cassette tapes by themselves might be an

---

[83] Fujui Wang, "Lurking Waves: Fujui Wang / Collected Objects from the '90s" (Taipei, 2013), 4, Issuu (The Cube Project Space), https://issuu.com/thecube.tw/docs/booklet_fujui_wang-b5.
[84] Michael Wester, "Churning Out Noise Music from Home-Turned-Factory in Mucha," *China News (Taiwan News)*, April 21, 1995.
[85] Wang, "Lurking Waves."

incredibly confusing experience. “It’s a cacophony of harsh sounds with no perceptible rhythm or melody,” wrote Michael Wester when reporting from Wang’s home studio.[87] Wester was listening to the first Noisenet compilation released by NOISE. As one of their most ambitious selections, this two-cassette compilation features 28 tracks and music projects from around the world.[88] But without much context, Wester could only contemplate on the sounds, trying to decipher their meanings. “Like the white noise from empty radio frequency layered with the sound of a broken synthesizer being thrown down a set of stairs.”[89] As Wester continued to work through this compilation, however, he could not fathom any nuance from the harsh noises— “you’ll find both contain more of the same.”[90]

Upon a first listen, the debut album of the Z.S.L.O. may share much of the same premise. It contains 12 different tracks, about 51 minutes in length. In most tracks, there is a variety of harsh noises throughout much of the duration, sometimes mesmerizing and mysterious, sometimes nervous and paranoid. Sometimes, the background noise resembles some random electroacoustic signals; sometimes, it resembles the static sound from the radio noise, invoking unrestrained imaginations of

---

[86] Wester, “Churning Out Noise Music from Home-Turned-Factory in Mucha.”
[87] Wester.
[88] To be fair, there might not be much curatorial effort put into the first Noisenet compilation. Unlike the later compilations that were organized by specific themes, the first compilation was overwhelmingly diverse (sometimes with obscure titles). Here is the full list of the artists: Bizarre Uproar (Finland), Cock E.S.P. (US), Cathedra (UK), dRome (UK), E.C.I. Machinery (UK), Estro Assente (Italy), Futile Existence (Finland), Hassni (UK), Heat (Italy), Herb Mullin (Norway), Hex Minora (UK), I.666 (HK), Noit (France), Poo Poo Bomb (US), Stigma (France), Synapscape (Germany), Taint (US), The Hypersexual Nymphomaniacs (Italy), Thirdorgan (Japan), X4U (I), and XCR (Italy).
[89] Wester, “Churning Out Noise Music from Home-Turned-Factory in Mucha.”

abstract forms. However, what remains prominent throughout this album is a heavy use of sampling, with recorded sounds from a wide range of sources. Apart from the unaltered audio recording of the 1994 Labor Demonstration, other sonic fragments include religious chant, opera ensemble, drums and cymbals, punk concert, radio program, desperate screaming, and water sound. Although there does not seem to be one common theme across the different tracks, these sounds seem to tell stories about an immediate acoustic environment—the sounds of religious chant, opera ensemble, drums, and cymbals tell stories about Taiwan's diverse indigenous and folklore culture; and the sounds of punk and metal music may recount the industrial histories about the Xinzhuang District. In short, the recorded sound consists of a combination of natural, cultural, and industrial sounds, whose contextual origins are not only emphasized but also carefully put into a constellation that recounts local histories.[91] In their own words, all recorded sounds they used in their music and performance are taken from the "local materials."

Nonetheless, not all sampled sounds are unaltered as is the one in "11:15 AM."

---

[90] Wester.

[91] This arrangement corresponds to their definition of noise. In their two-page manifesto, for example, the music group defined musical noise in four different categories:

> A. Original Noise: the sound of nature, the sound of wind, thunder, rain, and snow, the sound of rocks, animals and plants, and the sound of mud.
> B. Cold Noise: the sound of industrial, agricultural, and family production, consumption, and waste.
> C. Hot Noise: the sound of culture, for example, language, music, laughter and tears.
> D. Sound Effects: the imitated or reproduced sound of all three categories as mentioned above, or any new sounds that are produced otherwise.

Stylistically speaking, most sonic fragments are often manipulated to either achieve an aesthetic effect or construct a narrative arch. Each sampled segment is often spliced up into smaller pieces, mixed up with other sounds, looped in a particular rhythm, or simply manipulated in speed. In the track "I Wonder If I Can Grow Up," for example, a narrative is carefully constructed by a handful of sampled segments. The track opens with the sounds of the bamboo clappers (kuaiban), a musical instrument that is often used in traditional Chinese storytelling (or "story-singing" as in shuochang), preparing the audience for a narrative journey. This intro is then followed by a loud bugle call, an uplifting melody that carries an unsettling militaristic undertone. It then quickly cuts to the melody of "When I Grow Up" (Zhiyao wo zhangda), a well-known children's song in Taiwan that explicitly celebrates nationalism and militarism. The listeners are reminded that the song is written from the children's perspective, and the narrative describes their desires of growing up to fight for their country. Before we hear the children's singing, however, the segment is sped up, raising the pitch to a degree that is almost ridiculously comic, until it turns into unrecognizable noise. In the end, the title "I Wonder If I Can Grow Up" provides another context to this peculiar acoustic arrangement. It resonates with a subtle but pungent sarcasm that subverts the original militaristic message from the propaganda children song. By manipulating sonic segments, however, this piece does not obscure the original source of the sound. Instead, it relies on the identification of the source, exploiting the recorded sounds for their aesthetic and narrative potential.

In the history of electroacoustic music, the incorporation of recorded sound has

---

See Zero and Sound Liberation Organization, "Manifesto."

reinvented that which we consider music. Scholars often trace this experimental practice to the French musicologist Pierre Schaeffer, who famously proposed to use the recorded sound as raw material for musical composition. In his experiment Five Studies of Noises (Cinq études de bruits) in 1948, Schaeffer incorporated a varied sample of noises—trains, saucepans, canal boats, singing, speech, harmonica, and piano—into five compositional works for phonograph. Through audio effects and tape manipulation techniques, the recorded sound is modified and rearranged to achieve a musical sensibility. Despite its ominous tone, the soundtrack is appreciated for its rhythm, timbre, and melody. These preliminary studies on noise in recorded sound became a prelude to Schaeffer's compositional theory and practice. In 1949, he proposed the term *musique concrète* to describe his approach.

For Schaeffer, Western art music was too abstract. In music theory, composition always begins with abstract ideas—notations, scales, chords, and mathematical harmony— rather than the actual concrete sounds in reality. By adding the recorded sound to composition, *musique concrète* transformed noise into music. As Schaeffer claimed, "I have coined the term *musique concrète* for this commitment to compose with materials taken from [...] sound fragments that exist in reality," and these recorded sound fragments are considered as "discrete and complete sound objects." In order to obtain such sound objects for musical values, Schaeffer suggests that his listeners detach the recorded sound from its original cause, source, and production; his listeners should only concentrate on the perceived acoustic phenomenon, to entertain the finer texture of the sound in and of itself.

In order to clarify this distinction, Schaeffer proposed a pair of contrasting

terms: the sound object (l'objet sonore) and the sound body (le corps sonore).

> The sound body is the material source of the sound which can be identified from it. In French, with certain people, the ambiguity of the word "objet" adds to the already very common confusion between the sound and its causal event (*son anecdote causale*). This confusion must be avoided at all costs. The sound object as a notion arises precisely from the radical distinction between the sound and its real or imagined causality.[92]

In other words, le corps sonore (the sound body) is "the material source of the sound," through which one identifies the acoustic event. L'objet sonores (the sound object), on the other hand, is the sound phenomenon, the perceived acoustic stimuli. While the sound body requires the listener to locate the material source that produces the sound and to meditate on its "anecdotal cause," the sound object demands a listening practice that separates the perceived sound from its cause, both real and imagined.[93] In favor of the sound object, Schaeffer eventually proposed to detach the sound from its contextual origins. He believed that the sound object would allow the listeners to concentrate on the sound in and of itself, thus appreciating "its texture, its matter, its color" for an intensified aesthetic experience. "I wanted to gather concrete sound material," wrote Schaeffer, "wherever it came from, and extract from it the sonorous musical values which it potentially contained."

For the Z.S.L.O., the liberal use for sampling and a subsequently provocative statement about it being music demonstrate traces of Schaeffer's influence. It would not be surprising that the Z.S.L.O. also conveniently used *musique concrète* to label

---

[92] Chion, *Guide Des Objects Sonores*, 34.

their early works. In addition, Fujui Wang once categorized the musical group as a noise music project "with a *musique concrète* orientation,"[94] and many other published performance reviews about the Z.S.L.O. constantly make references to Pierre Schaeffer.[95]

Following Schaeffer's instructions, the Z.S.L.O. incorporates a varied sample of noises in their music works—a combination of musical instruments, human voice, natural environment, and synthesizers or computer-based digital signal processing. In addition, the use of sampled sounds in the Z.S.L.O.'s work demonstrates some resemblance to the techniques that Schaeffer had originally developed for tape and turntable—splicing, mixing, looping, and speed manipulation. Nonetheless, these recorded sounds do not operate as "the sound object." Instead, the recorded sound in their music resembles "the sounding body" in that its sonic source and contextual origin contribute to the meanings of their music works. Instead of obscuring the source, their music highlights it. Instead of creating an object for aesthetic pleasure, their music attempts to construct a dramatic narrative about the sound-making practice. Instead of emphasizing an isolated acoustic phenomenon, their music reflects on the interactions between the sound and its contextual environment. In short, their use of the recorded sound already departs from Schaeffer's original blueprint. In fact, Schaeffer would consider the anecdotal and causal aspects of the recorded sound ultimately "anti-musical."

---

[93] Carlos Palombini, "Machine Songs V: Pierre Schaeffer: From Research into Noises to Experimental Music," *Computer Music Journal* 17, no. 3 (1993): 17.
[94] Zero and Sound Liberation Organization, "Biography."

Nonetheless, to articulate an antithesis of music is exactly what noise sought to do. Although this noise music may benefit from some technical and theoretical inventions created by Schaeffer, their use of sampling is almost the opposite of what musique concrète attempts to achieve. By emphasizing the source of sound, this noise music resists severing the sound from the contextual source. By emphasizing the corporeality of the sounding body, this noise music resists reducing the sound to a phantasmagoric phenomenon. As Brian Kane argues, the theory of *musique concrète* does not give an adequate consideration to the cause, the source, or the production of sound, which leads to what Kane calls a "phantasmagoric" view of the musical material.[96] As such, Schaeffer's "thinking about music, sound, and technology is ahistorical and mythic."[97]

NOISE ACTION

As the Z.S.L.O. album demonstrates, the use of recorded sound in their music accentuates *le corps sonore*— "the sounding body," the source of sound, its contextual origins, and anecdotal traces. In their manifesto, the music group further clarified the idea of the sounding body in relation to their understandings of musical noise— "[we] propose to consider the sounding source as the subject, not the listener."[98] In other

---

[95] Sun-Quan Huang, "Taibei Guoji Hougongye Yishuji [Taipei International Post-Industrial Arts Festival]," *Pots Weekly*, September 15, 1995.
[96] Brian Kane, *Sound Unseen: Acousmatic Sound in Theory and Practice* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014).
[97] Kane, 10.
[98] Zero and Sound Liberation Organization, "Manifesto."

words, the meaning of noise music derives from a reflection on who produces the sound, rather than how the sound is consumed. As a self-identified performing group first and foremost, the Z.S.L.O. has always prioritized noise action over noise music. In other words, the actual sounds they produce always remain less essential to their sound-making practices, because they believe the purpose of noise music is "to emphasize the 'action,' and the sound is [only] the by-product of that action."[99]

Like many noise music performances elsewhere, Taiwanese noise artists often resorted to artistic happenings to explore ideas about the body and to ask questions about voice, utterance, and participation. Moreover, action was also chosen out of necessity. It was a common artistic strategy for political participation when government censorship administers the use of public space. After the Assembly and Parade Act was passed in 1988, the organization of political events was strictly regulated, which makes performing art an alternative form for political participation.[100] As Jeph Lo noted, "the most important facet of the noise movement's spirit was that it not only enabled a handful of artists, but, moreover, it helped unleash the power of the congregation."[101] It is in this context that many noise groups in Taiwan embraced the idea of performing noise with the body, and using their bodies to make noise.[102]

---

[99] Zero and Sound Liberation Organization.
[100] Chi-Wei Lin, "Zhishifenzi Yu Yiqun Bupasi De Hunhun, Linqiwei Tan Pangke Yu Taiwan Xueyun Fanwenhua [Intellectuals and Fearless Hooligans, Lin Chi-Wei on Punk and Taiwan's Anticulture Student Movement]," *ARTCO Monthly*, September 2005, 94–95.
[101] Lo, "Wasteland Utopia."
[102] In Fujui Wang's NOISE fanzines, there are a large number of articles dedicated to the discussion of performance in noise music. One example is the American musical group The Haters, who is known for combining noise music performance with conceptual art practice. In the fifth issue of NOISE, Wang wrote an article entitled

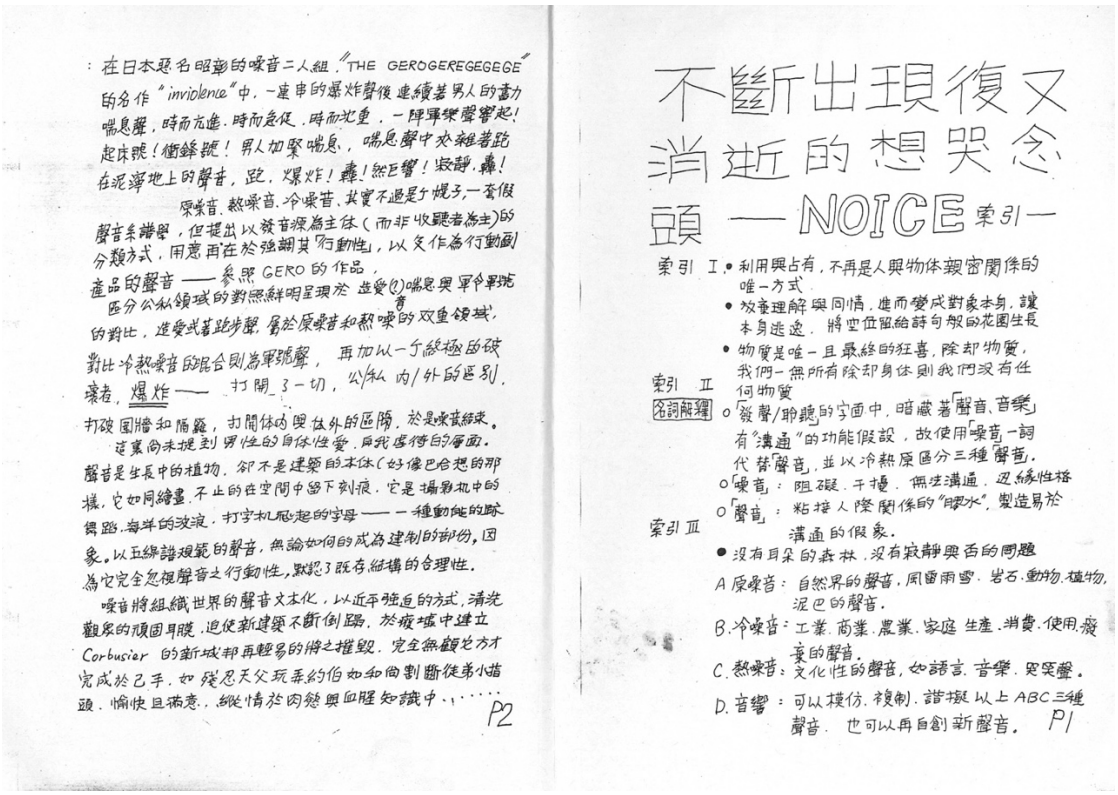


Figure 6. The Zero and Sound Liberation Organization, Photocopy of the manuscript "Noise Manifesto" (1997).

"Action, Concept, and Noise," (Xingdong, Guannian, Zaoyin), in which he introduced The Haters as a performance project; Wang also emphasizes the ways through which The Haters have transformed the acoustic noise into the conceptual one. Wang wrote, "The Haters has played a crucial role in the development of noise music. There is this avant-garde-ness in their 'conceptual' practice, both in composition and performance, which made significant contributions to noise as a music genre." The Hater's live performance often demonstrates a conceptual configuration of things falling apart. In their 1992 performance "Grinding Mics," The Haters slowly pushed a live microphone into a power grinder until it wore down to a stub. It first appeared in their Paris performance in October 1992, and it soon became one of their signature performances. Again, the point of the performance is not so much about entertaining the noise of the power grinder, but rather more conceptually about the decomposition of objects. It is an aesthetics that is also found in Merzbow's "junk art aesthetics" or "trash art." Following the conceptual configurations of noise as performance, similar experiments (especially those involving the dismantling of the musical instrument) would reappear in many noise performances in Taiwan. See Wang Fujui, "NOISE Vol. 5: Action, Concept, and Noise - The Haters" (fanzine), ET@T Archive, accessed June 30, 2019, http://archive.etat.com/etat-varchive/5651/.

Although as early as in 1990, noise performances had appeared sporadically, it was in 1992 that this type of performance began to pick up the attention of the mainstream media. In May 1992, at a student theater of National Taiwan University, the Loh Tsui Kweh Commune staged an improvised performance featuring "industrial noise." [103] In the documentary Lan Touke (2001), a snippet of the original performance footage exemplifies how noise music is turned into performance. [104] In addition to the traditional rock music instruments (electrical guitar, bass guitar, and drum kit), a strange collection of found objects is also brought to the stage—a construction frame, a metal pipe, a bird cage, a television monitor, a horn loudspeaker, and barricades. When the performance begins, two band members hit hard on the steel frames and the metal pipes. One band member inserts the handheld microphone inside the loudspeaker to amplify its feedback noise. Another band member has his mouth wide open and simply sucks on the standing microphone. Meanwhile, the television on the stage loops a series of experimental short films, bombarding the audience with odd sounds and images. As the performance continues, an audience member stands up from her seat. She follows along with the music and makes dramatic gymnastic moves. The performance gets even more physical when she suddenly takes out a hammer from her bag and smashes the performance-use monitor into pieces. One band member is then triggered by her action and hits her back with the bass guitar. It is not before too long that the noise performance devolves into violent chaos, driving away

---

[103] Lin, "Taiwan Dixia Zaoyin," 157.
[104] Jr-Shin Mao and Te-Cheng Chen, *Lan Touke* [The Broken Head], documentary (Crystal Records, 2001).

most of the audience.[105]

Despite the improvised nature at this early stage, this performance already bears some significant traits that would reappear in the later noise performances. On the first level, there is the unusual "instrument." Not only does the inclusion of these found objects add more percussive elements to the overall acoustic profiles, but it also foregrounds the material body of these sounding objects. The steel frames and metal pipes have been repurposed from an abandoned factory or a construction site. The loudspeaker and the barricade have been taken from a protesting scene. On the second level, there is the theatrical violence enacted upon the body, not only for the performers, but also for the audience. This dramatic turn to the body registers a complex combination of loss, repression, desperation, and anger. Because much of their lyrics specifically deal with economic struggles and career failure, their dramatic enactment signifies a desperate condition of material deprivation. As the body becomes the last outlet for such expressions, the performance takes a dramatic but violent turn—because the body is the last possession that one owns, the last connection with the material world. This idea again resonates with Zero and Sound's manifesto, — "materiality is the only and ultimate way to ecstasy; without materiality, there is nothing; without the body, there is no materiality." [106] With an emphasis on

---

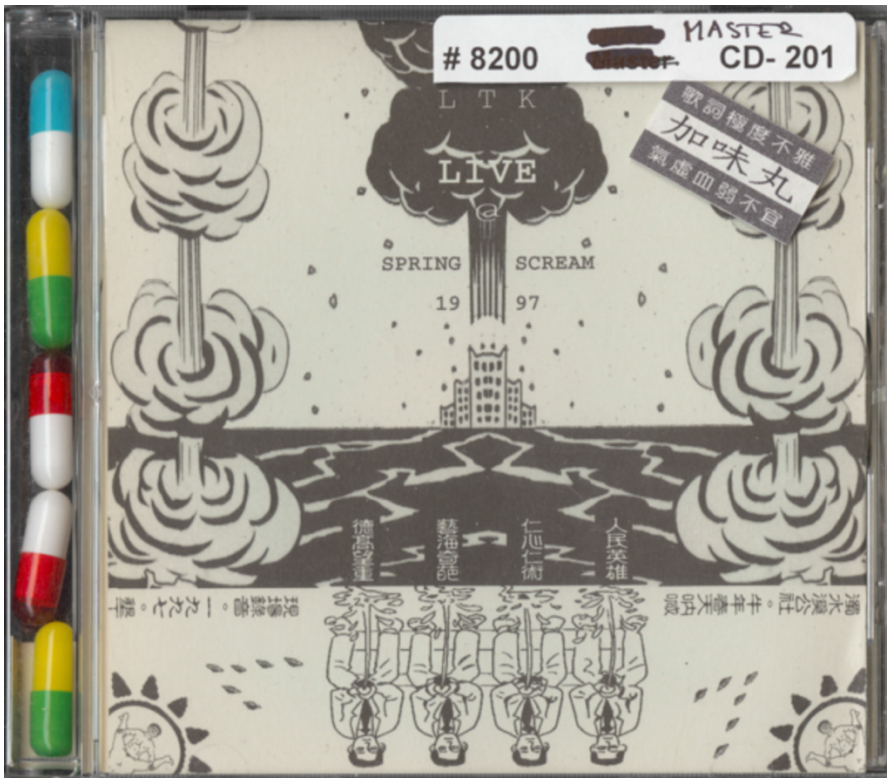
[105] Ya-Feng Mon, "L.T.K. Commune in Context: A Critical Re-Evaluation" (master's thesis, Taoyuan City, National Central University, 2007); Shen Wei-Ling, "Zaofan Xianchang: Lun 1990-2001 Nian Zhuoshuixi Gongshe Xianchang Biaoyan Zhong De Shengyin Shijian Yu Guanzhong Hudong [Noise in Rendition as Voice of Resistance: The Acoustic Practice and Performer-Audience Interaction of Loh Tsui Kweh Commune's Live Performance from 1990 to 2001]" (master's thesis, National Taiwan University, 2013).

[106] Zero and Sound Liberation Organization, "Manifesto."

the material source of the sound making bodies and its corporeality, their noise performance refutes the practice of *musique concrète* —one that obscures the source of sound for a concentrated listening, one that meditates on the sound in and of itself, and one that separates sound from other bodily senses. Although as a student group this was their last performance at National Taiwan University, this performance also marked their entry into the public space. In the following years, the LTK Commune began collaborations with the Z.S.L.O., organizing public performances and music festivals. It is through the art performance that noise music continued to explore the relationship between sound and body, material and spirit, theatricality and reality.[107]

---

[107] In April 1990, the group was established by Tsai Hai-En and Ke Jen-Chien. In February 1992, about three months before the performance, many members of the group were charged for a scandalous theft. Ke Jen-Chien was caught at the university student center carrying stolen human bones for an art installation. The report on the theft was televised on national networks, and these students were consequently forced to drop out of the school. See Shen, "Zaofan Xianchang," 17–18.


8200
MASTER
CD- 201
L T K
LIVE
SPRING SCREAM
19 97
歌詞極度不雅
加味丸
氣虛血弱不宜
人民英雄
仁心仁術
藝海會話
德高望重


正港台客搖滾
LTK Commune/ 濁水溪公社
vocal 柯仁堅
guitar 蔡海恩
bass 劉柏利
drum 任柏彰
Noir 001
produced + recorded + mixed by 沈聖德
art design 沈聖德 /back cover art 柯仁堅
黑金製作。隨意發行
LTK + Project Noir
1 998032 300016

Figure 7. LTK Commune, Covers of *Live: Spring Scream* from The Rose Goldsen Archive of New Media Art, Cornell University (1997).

In September 1995, sporadic noise performances eventually culminated in a

collective statement about Taiwan's post-industrial paranoia. [108] Organized by Lin Chi-Wei and Wu Zhong-Wei, the 1995 Taipei International Post-Industrial Arts Festival invited a dozen international noise groups to perform with the local bands. For three days, the outdoor art festival witnessed some of the most notorious moments in history. As Lo describes, the memories about this art festival still remain vividly sensual to this day— "the scorching hot weather, the hissing, the flames, the violence, the stench, the abrasive noise and bodily senses." [109] Their ambition to liberate noise and the body had led to instances of extreme chaos and theatrical violence.

> Moslar Theater rolling naked in mucus; Schimpfluch- Gruppe, from Switzerland, roaring with microphones in their mouths and provocatively confronting journalists; Con-Dom, from the UK, walking off stage and sexually assaulting members of the audience until met with violent resistance; Loh Tsui Kweh Commune (LTK Commune) acting out rape on a mannequin and performing arson; Zero and Sound Liberation Organization (Z.S.L.O.) tossing around a bucket of filthy kitchen waste, with the fetid odor of rotting food causing Japanese group C.C.C.C. to refuse to perform.[110]

Though not entirely unexpected, the event was extraordinarily chaotic. Of course, artists including Lin Chi-wei had contextualized part of their performance: the abuse of body, for example, provides an important reference point to the intimate relationship between noise and capitalism. It resonates with the Japanese noise artist Masami Akita's famous statement that considers pornography as a by-product of

---

[108] Ming-Chuan Huang, *1995 Post-Industrial Arts Festival*, documentary, 1995.
[109] Lo, "Wasteland Utopia."
[110] Lo.

commodity fetishism.[111] Nonetheless, much of this event remained downright disturbing to the mainstream media.[112] For many critics, their quest for a material bond with the body took a perverse turn and became thoroughly exhibitionist or even pornographic. Whether the intention is to invoke pleasure or disgust, the performance succeeded in drawing the attention to the material body as the source of sound. As Lin suggested, the greater success of their noise performance came from the audience, because the audience had participated in the performance by making their own noise—they threw rocks into the air; they tore down the old crumbling structures; they smashed the abandoned televisions; they made love in the corners; they fought with wooden chairs.[113]

---

[111] Wang Fujui, "NOISE Vol. 1: Merzbow" (fanzine, Taipei, 1993), ET@T Archive, http://archive.etat.com/etat-varchive/5581/.
[112] Lin had clarified, for example, the personal relationship between the performer and the audience member in the sexual assault incident, or the queer connotation behind the LTK Commune's performance of two male performers. However, this does not offset their problematic gender representations. In fact, Sun-Quan Huang had noticed the absence of the female body in the arts festival. See Huang, "Hougongye Yishuji."
[113] Lin, "Taiwan Dixia Zaoyin," 162.

Figure 8. Photos of Taipei International Post-Industrial Arts Festival (1995).

In addition to the theatrical chaos, the performing time and space also contributed to interpretations of Taiwan's post-industrial paranoia. All performances

in the art festival took place at a demolition site, sitting on the industrial ruins of the Baoqiao distillery in the old Taipei County. All buildings were scheduled to be demolished right before September 9 to make space for the new Banqiao Railway Station, but the Taipei County Culture Center was permitted to use the third warehouse space while the demolition was in process. By calling attention to the destruction of the industrial site, the art performance also situates noise as a product made in the rupture of the post-industrialization moment.

In a newspaper article, the art critic Huang Sun-Quan elaborated on the importance of the term "post-industrial" in the title. Huang suggested that the art festival heralded a new era whose material consequence was unfolding. "In the post-industrial society, the polarized situation [in the workforce] means there is more unemployment and leisure at the same time." [114] On the ground of the industrial ruins, this post-industrial enigma materialized. This abandoned industrial site witnessed the massive layoffs as well as the expanding availability of cultural commodities. It is through this strange coexistence that noise was configured as an aesthetic figure of contradiction. These structural changes in production and circulation were exemplary of the impending "information society," said Huang, when "the [manufacturing] industry becomes increasingly irrelevant."[115]

The 1995 Taipei International Post-Industrial Arts Festival was noise music's grand entry into the public view, but it was also its last appearance. Two of the most important factors contributing to the development of noise movement were soon to

---

[114] Huang, "Hougongye Yishuji."
[115] Huang.

begin disappearing. On the one hand, as the political democratization progressed, the anti-authoritarian social movements were no longer deemed as urgent. In fact, many attributed the success of the Post- Industrial Arts Festival to the oppositional party (Democratic Progressive Party), who provided their support as a political strategy against the more conservative KMT. [116] After Taiwan's first direct presidential election in 1996, this strategy became less relevant. On the other hand, as the local noise scene had inserted itself into the global network of noise music, Taiwan's economy also transitioned into an integral part of the global economy. When massive layoffs were put to an end, the political turmoil and social unrest also waned. As a result, the noise movement was eventually defueled from its source, leading to its eventual decline in the next decade.

NOISE CHAMBER

On July 8 2006, the Taipei Fine Arts Museum staged an exhibition that commemorates the history of Taiwan's noise movement in the 1990s. Entitled "The Last Strike of Lin Chi- Wei's Noise House," the exhibition reconstructed the entire studio space of Lin Chi-Wei, who remained a central figure in the movement.[117] His previous home in Taipei's Xin-Shen South Road was transferred altogether to the museum space, including his old furniture, personal items, and private collections—

---

[116] Lin, "Pangke."
[117] Chi-Wei Lin, "Kongbu Saoyin Zhiwu De Zuihou Douzheng [The Last Strike of Lin Chi-Wei's Noise House]," *Lin Chi-Wei Personal Website* (blog), June 25, 2009, http://www.linchiwei.com/archives/94.

audio speakers, glasses, clothes, beds, wardrobes, and tables. These material objects were placed inside a room-sized pit at the center, resembling a working site of archeological excavation. On the exhibition walls, the excavated artifacts—flyers, fanzines, newspaper clippings, and video materials that detailed the development of Taiwan's noise music—were displayed inside individual panels. From the Wild Lily student movement in 1990 to Lin's enlistment in the military in 1998, this room once served as one of the most important sites during the noise music movement. Taiwan's first noise band Zero and Sound convened around this table. Taiwan's first large-scale music festival was planned on this desk. The first group of international noise artists who visited Taiwan slept on this bed.

Figure 9. Photos of The Last Strike of Lin Chi-Wei's Noise House (2006).

Apart from its visual affinity with an excavation site, however, this noise chamber also resembles a burial, a funeral that laments the demise of noise music. Literally at the museum's basement, the noise chamber buried the cultural artifacts of Taiwan's noise movement once and for all. As the title suggests, the exhibition marks "the last strike" of Lin-Chi-Wei's noise music, commemorating its own decline and failure in the past decade. By the end of the exhibition, the artist Lin Chi-Wei and the curator Xu Ya-Zhu sold all artifacts in the room to an anonymous buyer from an online auction site. On 19 September 2006, the transaction was completed, and all

exhibits were successfully transferred. The disintegration of the noise chamber and the noise music movement it represents were commemorated by an exchange of capital, an ironic commodification of noise music and its material artifacts. Its elusive commentary on commodity resonates with the artist statement, a sentence was adapted from Karl Marx's famous opening line in *The Communist Manifesto*— "A specter is haunting Taipei," they wrote, "Refused by its motherland, the doomed specter from the 1990s still wonders around into another dark night of Taipei. It is about to lose its last shelter; its past is eliminated, fading in frozen time."

In many accounts, the noise movement in Taiwan was often considered as a resistance to its collapsing authoritarian regime. It was closely associated with the student movement that propelled the country's democratic transformation in the early 1990s. While this narrative remains largely true, the equally important history about Taiwan's economic liberalization and its material consequence should not be ignored. Noise was created at a time when the country was embracing the neoliberal global order by de-materializing its labor force, a time when its economic privatization, liberalization, and post-industrialization led to its political turmoil and social unrest. This history (re)contextualizes the noise movement as an avant-garde renaissance, one that has demonstrated its concerns over the material consequences of late capitalism. For this reason, however, the noise movement in Taiwan was doomed to fail. As Huang Sun-Quan noted years later, "the student movement generation were actually

the new successors of the capitalist class."[118]

> In Taiwan, noise opposes commercial rock and roll and popular music, as well as ballads and protest songs that are created with societal issues or the enjoyment of the people in mind. Inside this "structure," noise accedes to a highly specialized area of production. Its "performativity" nurtures and stimulates the cultural (and market) needs of postmodernism and pluralism, furthermore, ensuring the vitality of culture. However, this condition had already come to an end when around the year 2000 noise had become a *sine qua non* of "profanity" (an example of this being the now disbanded Loh Tsui Kweh Commune). Culture's surplus had turned into a reproduction of capital— and no more consumption meant no more noise.[119]

As Huang argues, "noise" with its marketable "performativity" and "profanity" is now turned into another type of capital. It is detached from its original site of production, becoming an abstract and immaterial form of cultural capital. It becomes the opposite of what the noise artists had originally conceptualized. In their collective effort to "liberate" sound, artists have always imagined noise as manifested through the sounding body. Even though the noise movement failed at preventing noise from being objectified, commodified, and dematerialized, it at least provided an imagination for the noise-making practices in the decades to come.

Most noticeably, the noise movement in Taiwan had a significant impact on China. A few Taiwanese noise artists and curators—who participated in Taiwan's noise movement—moved to China and/or organized music events in China to facilitate the exchange of ideas across the strait. And when a younger generation of

---

[118] Sun-Quan Huang, "If Noise Ever Was, It Was Far from Revolt," trans. Billy Tang and Connie Kang, *The International Art Portal of Contemporary China (LEAP)*, no. 16 (August 2012): 105.
[119] Huang, 106.

noise artists emerged in China, they had read Taiwanese noise music fanzines, collected their tape cassettes, and studied their outrageous performance.[120] I will discuss this cross-strait noise network more specifically in the next chapter, but it is important to remember that Taiwan's noise movement pinpoints an important encounter that briefly connects the historical imaginations in both communities before they went separate ways. In other words, the figure of noise has become an embodiment of a shared experience that connects the two communities—they had the similarly painful experience of massive layoff (due to the economic deregulations), and they shared the similar demand for political reforms (despite their disparate ideologies). In other words, Taiwan's noise movement does not simply create one common artistic language to articulate a common experience; rather, it becomes the beginning of a discursive discourse in formation, a discourse named "noise," a discourse that may have transformed the ways in which artwork engages social relations.

---

[120] For example, the famous Shanghai-based noise group Torturing Nurse once admitted that they took much inspiration from Wang Fujui's fanzine NOISE.

CHAPTER 2 URBAN NOISE

FIELD RECORDING AND THE RIGHT TO THE CITY

When OCT Contemporary Art Terminal (OCAT) opened in Shenzhen in 2015, a special exhibition on sound initiated a series of events, which examined the history and current state of Chinese sound art practice. Unlike many other exhibits with more abstract themes in the series, a collection of sound recordings documented the quotidian sounds of urban spaces; this sound archive as a whole attended to the changing urban landscape of many Chinese cities.[121] An installation entitled "Bridge Listening in Beijing" (Qiaoting Beijing) stood out as an example. The looping soundtrack was recorded at a historic stone bridge known as the Silver Tablet Bridge (Yinding Qiao) in Beijing. As one listens to the recording, a lively urban space is starting to unfold. The traffic sounds of bicycles, trucks, and ambulances rush towards the listener, who shortly learns to orient herself in the acoustic space. Because the narrow stone bridge is the only passage connecting the neighborhoods on both sides, all local traffic converges here at one end of the bridge. The listener also hears street noises—the vendor's call and the pedestrian's greeting—as they gently fade into the background. With a rich soundscape such as this one, the snippet becomes a microcosm of Beijing. Although the acoustic immersion is ephemeral, it does not fail to reconstruct a lively urban space, almost as though the listener was transposed into

---

[121] Yiting Hu, "Ting Zhanlan Qu: Shengyin Fenlie Zhanlan Xilie Uu OCAT Shenzhen Guan Zhengshi Kaimu [Let's Listen to the Exhibit: Schizophonia Exhibition Series Opens at OCAT Shenzhen]," Artron.Net, November 15, 2015, https://news.artron.net/20151115/n793131_1.html.

the old hutong areas of Beijing. Throughout the exhibition series, more and more sound recordings were introduced to the public. These sound recordings continued to spark curiosity and excitement among the visitors, while also inviting them to reconstruct the urban space through the act of listening. What happens when we hear the *hutong* sounds from Beijing inside a concrete structure in Shenzhen? What does a city's soundscape of the past tell us about its urban fabric of the present? And most importantly, what does it mean to listen to the recorded sounds from about two decades ago?

"Bridge Listening in Beijing" invokes a particular nostalgic sentiment about China's disappearing urban fabric. According to the artist, these urban sounds were recorded in Beijing between the late 1990s and early 2000s. It was a time when China's urbanization experienced a significant transformation, when pragmatism was replaced by monumentality. It was a time when massive infrastructural projects and exuberant shopping malls were being built right next to overcrowding dormitories of internal migrant workers. It was a time when China's newly domesticated capitalism afforded its own "irrational exuberance," inviting many internationally renowned architects to experiment their boldest ideas on its lands as a way to announce the country's recent economic progress and rising global standing. Although China's rapid urbanization began in the early 1980s, shortly after the Economic Reform and Opening (Gaige kaifang), it is not until the late 1990s and early 2000s that tensions of forced demolition, eviction, and relocation began to surface. In "Beijing Manifesto" in 2004, the Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas declared that "We Chose China" because "[t]he Chinese love the monumental ambition." In the same year, however, about tens

of thousands of families were evicted from their homes.[122] As such, the sounds of vendor's calls, pedestrian's greetings, or bike bells in this sound installation tell us about not only the forms and structures of the urban space, but also the histories of the inhabitants and how they occupy the space.

In fact, "Bridge Listening in Beijing" exemplifies a field recording movement that began in China around the late 1990s. This sound installation was created by the Taiwanese artist Yao Dajuin, who also organized the entire exhibition series. As a founding member of the recordist collective China Sound Unit (Zhongguo Shengyin Xiaozu), Yao Dajuin has been recording these urban sounds across many Chinese cities since the 1990s. In fact, he was among the first group of recordists who introduced the artistic practice of field recording to China, and over the years, he contributed to a unique genre of field recording that explores the relationship between recorded sound, urban space, and habitation. By recording the urban soundscape, these recordists not only documented the history of cities' changing urban fabric, but also contributed to the global revival of an old idea— "the right to the city" — in the past two decades.

In media history, the production of any media content has never emerged in isolation. It would not be a surprise that the practice of urban field recording in the late 1990s registered a social realism that resonates keenly with the cinematic experience of the same period. Within the scholarship of Chinese cinema, urban space has become a pivotal site of cultural production at the turn of the twenty-first century. In

---

[122] Rem Koolhaas, "Beijing Manifesto," WIRED, August 1, 2014, https://www.wired.com/2004/08/beijing/.

Zhang Zhen's work, for example, the cinematic practice of the period is characterized by a cinematic impulse to document the changing urban landscape, which at the same time acts as a poignant critique of class division and social inequality, among other social issues.[123] Zhang's observation is echoed by Yomi Braester, Jason McGrath, and Chris Berry, who have similarly related the representations of urban space in film to the social changes in China's post-socialist period.[124] For both film and sound practitioners, urban space was a contentious site where complex social relationships unfold. Although sound practice fits into the history of media as a result of the interactions between the technological and the social, it has been much less appreciated than cinema.

Of course, the exhibition was neither the first, nor the largest sound exhibition in China, but it was the first time that a sound exhibition in China had clearly situated itself in the global history of field recording.[125] The genealogical trace can be found in

---

[123] Zhen Zhang, *The Urban Generation: Chinese Cinema and Society at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century* (Duke University Press, 2007); Zhen Zhang, "Introduction: Bearing Witness: Chinese Urban Cinema in the Era of "Transformation,'" in *The Urban Generation: Chinese Cinema and Society at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Zhen Zhang (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 1–45.

[124] Yomi Braester, *Painting the City Red: Chinese Cinema and the Urban Contract*, Asia-Pacific: Culture, Politics, and Society (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); Jason McGrath, *Postsocialist Modernity: Chinese Cinema, Literature, and Criticism in the Market Age* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2008); Chris Berry, "Getting Real: Chinese Documentary, Chinese Postsocialism," in *The Urban Generation: Chinese Cinema and Society at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Zhen Zhang (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2007), 115–34.

[125] On many accounts, the exhibition was often framed as a "sound art" exhibition. Since the practice of field recording is often incorporated in sound art, Yao Dajuin is often seen as a prominent sound artist. Due to its complicated history and ambiguous definition, however, this article does not address the issue of sound art. On this matter, see the 2014 sound art roundtable. In addition, Wang Jing wrote a few articles on a variety of Chinese sound artists including Yao Dajuin. See Dajuin Yao, "Zhuansu Yu

the title—Schizophonia: Sonic Alienation (Shengyinfenlie, shengxiang yujing yihua), whose emphasis on a loanword might strike us as odd at first. "Schizophonia," a term that is too awkward to be properly translated, nevertheless reminds us of the interrelationship between media technology and the urban environment. The term was first conceptualized by the Canadian composer, writer, and environmentalist R. Murray Schafer.[126] It combines two Greek roots "schizo" (split, separated) and "phonia" (sound, voice), referring to "the split between an original sound and its electro-acoustical transmission or reproduction."[127] It points to a technological and sociological development of the twentieth century—thanks to telephone, radio, and phonograph—when the urban sounds we hear in everyday life in the city are separated from their original locations, no longer bound up to a physical space.

Following the discussion on *musique concrète* from the previous chapter on musical noise, the subsequent two chapters further develop the attentiveness to the source of sound in consideration of spatial-political tensions. In this chapter, I focus on urban noise in relation to the production of social space. Attending to the sounds of the everyday in urban environments, I suggest that the source of sound reveals one's righteous occupancy of the urban space. In the next chapter, I shift my focus to

---

Shisu: Zhongguo Shengyin Yishu Xianzhuang [Revolt and Stall: The Current State of Chinese Sound Art]," *Yishu Pinglun [Art's Criticism]*, no. 2 (2014): 85–89; Jing Wang, "To Make Sounds inside a "Big Can': Proposing a Proper Space for Works of Sound Art," *Leonardo* 49, no. 1 (July 7, 2014): 38–47; Jing Wang, "Affective Listening as a Mode of Coexistence: The Case of China's Sound Practice," *Representations* 136, no. 1 (November 1, 2016): 112–31.

[126] R. Murray Schafer, *The New Soundscape: A Handbook for the Modern Music Teacher* (Scarborough, Ontario: Berandol Music, 1969).

[127] R. Murray Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (Rochester, Vermont: Destiny Books, 1993), 90.

warfare noise. I trace the origin of sounds to interrogate the militarization of a contentious geopolitical space along the Taiwan Strait.

In what follows, I examine the aesthetics and politics of field recording in the context of Chinese urbanization in the late 1990s and early 2000s. By focusing on works by field recordists including Yao Dajuin, Yan Jun, among others, I explicate how urban field recording practice was introduced, developed, and reinvented in China to document the aggressive urban expansion and its impact on social relationships. From street cries to friendly greetings, these sounds embody a nostalgia for an intimate architectural space as well as a poignant reminder of one's righteous occupancy of the space. I argue that the cross-strait field recording network provides a sensorial archive of China's disappearing urban fabric and of its tumultuous history of forced demolition, eviction, and relocation. The rationale is two-fold. First, I argue that R. Murray Schafer provides a useful analytical framework for studying the urban space as a container of social events. Second, I relate the documentary impulse in field recording to a larger urban context around the turn of the twenty-first century. Through a comparison between the cinematic and the acoustic reconstruction of urban space, I suggest that the sound recordings too act as social commentaries. They also index the precariousness of the environment, community, and habitation.

THE RIGHT TO THE CITY

Around the world, the past two decades witnessed the revival of an old idea—"the right to the city." Even today, many still return to Henri Lefebvre's writings to

contemplate the politics of space. At first glance, there might be some resemblance between Paris in the 1960s and Beijing in the 1990s—both share a nostalgic sentiment about the city's disappearing urban fabric. When Lefebvre first wrote his essay "The Right to the City" in 1968, Paris was indeed undergoing a radical transformation, or even an existential crisis, where "the old could not last, but the new seemed just too awful, soulless and empty to contemplate."[128] Despite its complex intellectual genealogy, the idea of "the right to the city" was born out of an immediate sensibility about the very physical landscape of the city: the demolition of old quarters, the brand-new highway and skyscrapers. And against the background, there was also an influx of corporate capital from the United States that blended into every corner of the urban life. Although for Lefebvre's critics the specific "right" remains ambiguous, "the right to the city" exhibits a nostalgia for a city that no longer exists: "This right slowly meanders through the surprising detours of nostalgia and tourism, the return to the heart of the traditional city, and the call of existent or recently developed centralities."[129]

In the early 1990s, the housing reforms in China led to the expansion of its real estate sector. In 1990, the State Council (guowuyuan) passed interim regulations to first allow the state to transfer the state-owned lands in urban areas to private sectors for development. In 1991, the State Council released another official guidance; it stated that the final goal of the housing reform was to phase out the publicly subsidized low-rent housing and to transition into a free housing market. This marked

---

[128] David Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*, 1st edition (London: Verso, 2013), x.

a turning point for this socialist country, at least by name, where housing was officially recognized as a commodity (shangpin fang) rather than a welfare (fuli fang). In 1994, personal finance was introduced to the housing market; private mortgage and public housing funds expedited the housing reform. In 1998, welfare housing officially became history. As China's housing market grew in the 1990s, its urbanization was quickly driven by property-based development and redevelopment, which left violent urban footprints that are still clearly visible today. In Beijing, for example, an urban renewal program called Old and Dilapidated Housing Redevelopment Program initiated a series of urban developments that has radically reshaped its urban core—old traditional low-density residential buildings were quickly replaced by high-density residential and commercial buildings throughout the 1990s.[130] However, while transforming the city's urban fabric, this urban development not only displaced a large urban and rural population, but also submitted the city's space to a property-oriented urban governance. It is in this context that "the right to the city" means more than a nostalgia, but rather a right to live and to inhabit.

Both within and beyond the urban and architectural discourses, the 1990s might be a total perversion of the 1960s. Only ten years after the end of the Cold War, the expansion of neoliberalism, globalization, and information technology all converged in China in the 1990s, as China slowly moved away from its own legacy of socialism and radicalism from the 1960s. The transition is perfectly embodied by the

---

[129] Henri Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities* (Oxford: Blackwell Publisher, 1996), 158.
[130] Hyun Bang Shin, "Urban Conservation and Revalorisation of Dilapidated Historic Quarters: The Case of Nanluoguxiang in Beijing," *Cities* 27 (June 2010): 43, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2010.03.006.

commission of the new headquarters of China Central Television (CCTV) in Beijing. In 2002, Beijing sent an invitation to Rem Koolhaas for a new design. Koolhaas agreed but also allegedly pulled a big prank on this state-controlled media (CCTV) by using suggestive shapes for his designs.

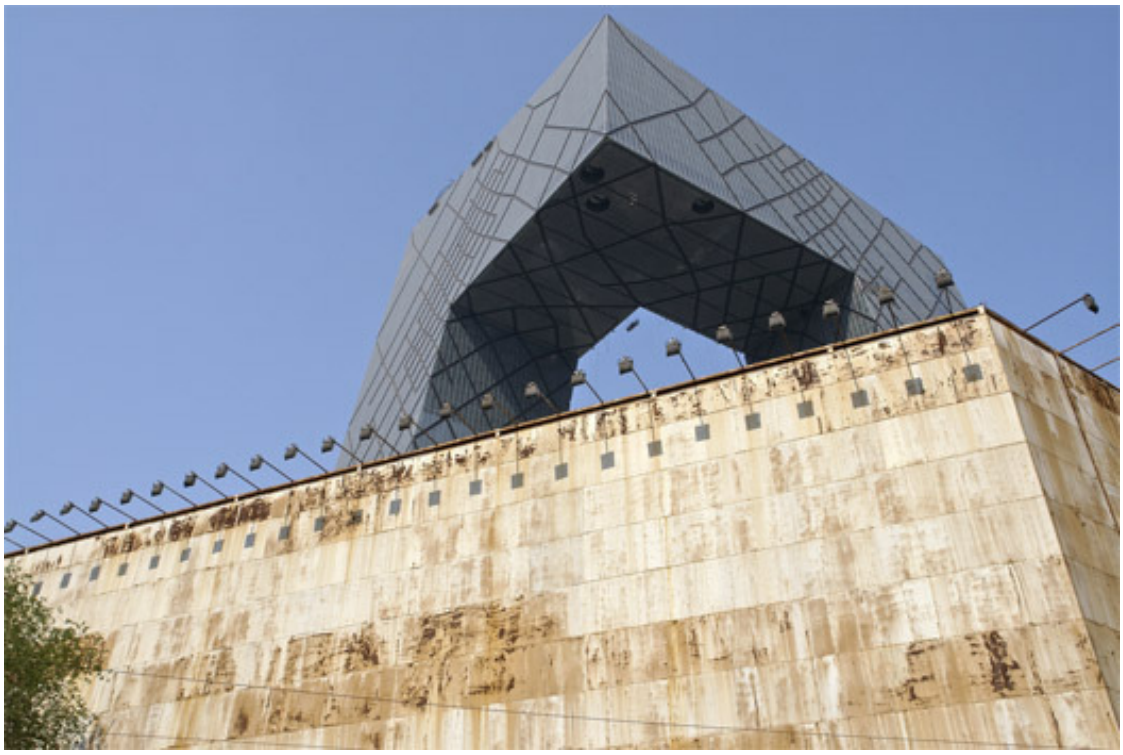


Figure 10. Photos of Rem Koolhaas's CCTV Headquarters (2012).

Views from a distance and from the street.

Although Koolhaas's cleverness may constitute a small Situationist prank, it nevertheless left an irreversible urban footprint that not only dislocated people but also rewarded the state with what they wanted—social and cultural capital. As Ellen Dunham-Jones puts it "[the] corporate ideologies co-opted countercultural revolutionary songs and slogans from the '60s to cheer on '90s-style reengineering for the information age, marketing individualism and commodifying dissent." She asks:

> Did architectural discourse similarly morph 1960s radicalism into 1990s icon-making during this period of rising faith in free markets and digital technology? What happened to architectural criticism in an era that saw the end of welfare as we knew it in the U.S. and acceptance of the widening gap

> between rich and poor as an unfortunate but necessary by-product of modernization and a healthy economy? Was it only in the '90s that Rem Koolhaas could ride this global socio-economic restructuring and emerge as one of architectural culture's leading avant-gardists while at the same moment celebrating capitalism?[131]

While people continued debating whether Koohaas's design is vulgar, the urban roots of the capitalist crisis spread in Chinese cities. In the early 2000s, the World Bank Report commended China's economic growth, but then argued that it could have liberated all of its urban land uses to free market forces for an even better economic performance. Meanwhile, the sudden influx of capital into the housing market already led to dire consequences. As David Harvey noted,

> In China millions are being dispossessed of the spaces they have long occupied—three million in Beijing alone. Since they lack private-property rights, the state can simply remove them by fiat, offering a minor cash payment to help them on their way before turning the land over to developers at a large profit. In some instances, people move willingly, but there are also reports of widespread resistance, the usual response to which is brutal repression by the Communist party. In the PRC it is often populations on the rural margins who are displaced, illustrating the significance of Lefebvre's argument, presciently laid out in the 1960s, that the clear distinction which once existed between the urban and the rural is gradually fading into a set of porous spaces of uneven geographical development, under the hegemonic command of capital and the state.[132]

It is in this context that field recording was practiced in China to document tensions of forced demolition, eviction, and relocation.

---

[131] Ellen Dunham-Jones, "The Irrational Exuberance of Rem Koolhaas," *Places Journal*, April 2, 2013, https://doi.org/10.22269/130402.

FIELD RECORDING

In the West, the scholarly interest in the urban soundscape began around the late 1960s. Due to the unprecedented growth in industries such as construction, automobile, and aviation, urban noise became a prominent health threat to the urban environment. Around the same time, R. Murray Schafer embarked on his studies on how the changing acoustic environment could alter people's experience with the urban space. As he was for long bothered by unpleasant construction noise, Schafer spent much of his life lobbying for the legislation against noise pollution both at home and abroad. Through the process, however, he also contributed to the founding of an academic discipline. The field of study, known as acoustic ecology or soundscape studies today, is devoted to studying the relationship between human society and the environment as mediated through sound. Throughout the 1970s, Schafer famously argued that soundscape, like landscape, is an ecological environment that we all inhabit. With his colleagues at Simon Fraser University, Schafer initiated the World Soundscape Project (WSP). The first milestone came in 1973, when the researchers at WSP released a series of audio recordings that detailed their study of Vancouver's soundscape — *The Vancouver Soundscape*. In their study, the audio recordings captured a variety of urban settings and social spaces; as a whole, they provide a comprehensive picture of the historical transition that the city was going through. As such, field recording in urban settings not only reconstructs a city's soundscape, but it

---

[132] David Harvey, "The Right to the City," *New Left Review*, no. 53 (October 1, 2008): 35–36.

also indicates how the space is being used and how the space operates under certain social structures. In Schafer's words, "the general acoustic environment of a society can be read as an indicator of social conditions which produce it and may tell us much about the trending and evolution of that society."[133] Since then, field recording has become a standard practice in studying a city's urban soundscape.[134]

At first glance, however, the global wave of field recording would seem to have made a belated arrival to China. When R. Murray Schafer first proposed the World Soundscape Project in the early 1970s, the domestic turbulence of the Cultural Revolution was only just coming to an end. In the 1980s, despite the economic reform's rendering the intellectual environment more welcoming towards foreign ideas, Schafer's "acoustic ecology" was apparently not on the priority import list. In comparison with other predominant intellectual waves, such as existentialism, hermeneutics, psychoanalysis, and so on that rushed ashore from the West during the translation fever (fanyire) and the cultural fever (wenhuare), acoustic ecology was, and perhaps still is, an obscure and foreign construct. It simply did not resonate with a nation that was abruptly engulfed in an erupting openness in history, a nation that was painstakingly figuring out its recent turbulent past on the one hand and fiercely debating its path towards a prosperous future on the other.

However, the situation became much different in the 1990s. Those ten years

---

[133] Schafer, *The Soundscape*, 7.

[134] Although Schafer is credited for introducing acoustic ecology to the study of urban space, he is also often criticized for "an urban prejudice" that privileges the natural sound over the urban noise. See Sophie Arkette on this important subject See Sophie Arkette, "Sounds Like City," *Theory, Culture & Society* 21, no. 1 (February 1, 2004): 159–68.

marked a drastic turn in the history of Chinese field recording. By the end of the 1990s, not only had Schafer gained noticeable recognition both within and outside of Chinese academia, but the field recording practice also began to spread among practitioners. This was partly due to the unprecedented growth of city expansion and urban construction. To put things into perspective, Schafer had once complained that the 1960s were the noisiest decade in the twentieth century.[135] Two decades after the devastating Second World War, the 1960s in the West had witnessed an aggressive growth in some of the noisiest industries. "It has been estimated that our technology is raising the sound-level of the average city by a decibel per year," cried Schafer, and this unbearable threat had prompted him to come up with a solution, that is, field recording.[136] In order to cope with the increasingly noisier urban environment, Schafer suggested that we record the "natural" sounds outside the studio, for as one records them, one must be learning to cultivate the habit of listening as well—to listen "with seismographic delicacy to the sounds of the environment."[137] In China, however, it was the first two decades of Deng Xiaoping's economic reform, beginning in 1978, that served as a parallel transition period. As these industries continued to grow, the urban landscape changed, and their old soundscapes disappeared. As such, field recording in China was also called for as a response to the urban cacophonies.

Meanwhile, China's intellectual environment has also changed during these ten years. The craze for intellectual excitement and foreign knowledge in the 1980s had

---

[135] R. Murray Schafer, *My Life on Earth & Elsewhere* (Erin, Ontario: Porcupine's Quill, 2012), 92.
[136] R. Murray Schafer, *The Book of Noise* (Price Milburn Print, 1970), 1.
[137] Schafer, 2.

largely waned in the 1990s; despite the initial shock and confusion at the beginning of the decade, the intellectual environment was soon molded into something noisier yet more palatable. As Yan Jun puts it, "When field recording began to thrive in China, it is in the 1990s, a time when information exploded, and discourses emerged, a time when social tensions were released, and political ideology was replaced by eroticism" —noisy, because countless individuals, with liberated expressiveness, were all competing to voice; palatable, because the gradually accumulated wealth afforded a kind of erotic and gratifying self-care in a freer market. "When people became wealthier and had the language to perform more parts of themselves, there were more conflicts of ideas." This situation, for Yan, created unexpected room for recording and listening; in agreement with Schafer—to record sound is to learn how to listen—Yan believes that field recording was a natural antidote to the gilded 1990s. It sought to question the highly saturated self-fashioning. "Listening is a response to performance," says Yan, and "therefore, field recording is to further question this condition, as if it is in a grand party, there is always someone who dispassionately observes everything."[138] In other words, field recording was supposed to document the changing social reality.

It is in this context that a genre of field recording began to take shape. To use Yao Dajuin's preferred term, "the Chinese phonographic recording" was born.[4] In 1997, Yao Dajuin founded Zhongguo Shengyin Xiaozu [China Sound Unit], a recordist group that is devoted to documenting the urban soundscape of Chinese cities.

---

[138] Jun Yan, "Zenyang Bei Shijie Gaibian: Xianshi Zhong De Zhongguo Shengyin Shijian [How Are We Changed by the World: Chinese Sound Practice in Reality],"

Since then, they have focused on "non-invasive observation, surveillance, documentation and re-contextualization of the Chinese sonic phenomena."[139] Although often re-contextualized in different listening settings, the recorded sounds attempt to document the everyday life of Chinese cities. As such, the recorded sound is not so much a work of composition, but rather a mosaic of phonographic curation. In the following years, Yao Dajuin's record label—the Post-Concrete Records—released over twenty albums, many of which feature creatively utilized sounds from a variety of field recordings. Yao Dajuin and his China Sound Unit became one of the most important origins of China's craze for field recording.

Despite China Sound Unit's significance, however, it is difficult to pin down its *année zero*. There is no official record as to when and where China Sound Unit was founded, or who the initial members were. At the beginning of its existence, it was a relatively underground guerrilla organization, with little indication that it would soon become a herald of the deep changes to come in subsequent years. It had no manifesto, no studio, no exhibition, no organized event, and no media coverage. Instead, an internally circulated recording manual, which detailed a few basic recording techniques and aesthetic principles, attracted a number of enthusiasts. In less than a decade, a network of field recordists then took shape. With Yao's help, the practice of urban field recording spread to many Chinese cities—Beijing, Shanghai, Harbin, Hangzhou—all of which have consequently founded their own City Sound Unit. In 2003, in preparation for 2004 Sounding Taipei, International Technology Art Festival,

---

New Arts: Journal of the National Academy of Art 35, no. 6 (2014): 49.

Yao Dajuin helped to found Taipei Sound Unit. With the growing network, their sound archive has also expanded accordingly. It was not too long before a selection of their phonographic recordings was released. The importance of the City Sound Unit networks cannot be overemphasized. Over the years, some of the most renowned and talented field recordists in China were either early members of the group, or at least became closely associated with it—especially those who released their phonographic recordings under Yao Dajuin's Post-Concrete record label: Li Jianhong (*A Brief History of Time*, 2006), Wang Changcun (*Parallel Universe*, 2006; *Insects*, 2008; *The Klone Concerts*, 2008; *Flicker*, 2009), Xie Zhongqi/Wolfenstein (*Kurojawan,* 2008; *Live at Nanhai 2007*, 2008; *ddddootttt*, 2008), Zhang Anding/Zafka (*i•Mirror: Soundscapes of SL*, 2008; *Yong©He*, 2008), Zhang Liming/hitlike (*Palliative Sedation*, 2008; *A Gift of Despair for My Friends*, 2009), and the list goes on.

While working as an urban field recordist, almost all of them have developed a stylistic and thematic consistency that could potentially be characterized as a unique genre unto itself: these recordings often regard the city as a container of social events, and the recordists see social activities as the central sound profile of an urban environment; there is a liberal use of language fragments (interviews, conversations, callings, arguments) and they are used to signal the subtle differences in one's social, economic, and political standings (the recordists are particularly sensitive to the connotations of dialects and accents for this reason); in terms of editing, sampling and remixing are often used in post-production, which then always requires a conversation

---

[139] Dajuin Yao, "Revolutions Per Minute: Sound Art China," *RPM: Ten Years of Sound Art in China* (blog), 2013, http://revolutionsperminutefest.org/.

between sounds that come from different contexts; although historical references are sometimes mentioned, the majority of these recordings come from everyday life. In short, despite the multiple origins of the recorded sound, it seems that the recordists all care about the sounds' relation to a social reality. In 2009, a recording compilation entitled *Life Soundscape: Field Recording Made in China (Shenghuo Xianchang: Zhongguo Shidi Luyin)* best exemplified the scale and sophistication of the urban field recording movement in China. To name a few noticeable examples: in Harbin, Zhang Liming's *Supper Wedding in Little Hamlet* (Xiao Cunzilide Chaoji Hunli, 2004 Corner Sound C1) depicts the elaborated procedures of a traditional Chinese wedding, whereas Zhang's *Vanishing* (2011, unreleased) carefully curates the disappearing cityscapes of Beijing, Chifeng, Tongliao, Leshan, and Harbin. In Guangzhou and Shenzhen, Zhang Minjie and Lin Zhijin have developed a unique approach to understanding a city's reality. In their *Suspended Spectacles* (2006, Stumble Records), each of them recorded the sounds of one city and then edited the recordings of the other city without knowing much about the recording location. By deliberately obscuring the recording background, they explore how these recorded sounds became "suspended" realities. In Beijing, Zhang Anding's *Yong ○ He* (2008, Post-Concrete) reveals how his soundscape recordings of the Yonghe Temple connect his personal memory of the space on the one hand, and the injustice of a city's urban development on the other.[140] By the early 2010s, we see a relatively coherent field recording

[140] Many recordists are active in cinematic practice. Zhang Anding, for example, contributed his field recordings to the renowned documentary filmmaker Cao Fei's *Whose Utopia?* (2006), a film that focuses on the lives of workers at the Osram lighting factory in China's Pearl River Delta region.

movement taking shape in China.[141] These audio recordings revolved around the imaginations of the urban space. Despite a variety of artistic idiosyncrasies, there seems to be a consistency in style, theme, and technique that—if they do not bear Yao Dajuin's personal imprint, they at least resonate with his aesthetic principles.

This is also where Murray Schafer comes in. On the most basic level, the 2009 *Life Soundscape* compilation is suggestive of Schafer's theoretical legacy. Not only is Schafer believed to have popularized the term soundscape, but he also helped to promote the practice of field recording in the urban context. On top of that, the Chinese recordists may share the same points of departure—an increasingly noisier urban environment accompanying the economic boom. However, it is also difficult to miss the differences between their approaches to field recording. In Schafer's original conception, field recording is essentially an ecological exploration—to use his own words, it is to reveal "the music of the environment."[142] And by "the music of the environment," he refers to the sound of the Nature. The "natural" soundscape without any industrial contamination is always preferred, because for Schafer the synthetic soundscape in our industrial societies has lost its musical charm. It became a victim of engineers. Meanwhile, taking on John Cage's influential idea that music relects the sounds around us, inside or outside of concert halls, Schafer also believes that field recording is a path towards retrieving that natural soundscape. To record the natural

---

[141] From 2005 to 2006, the British Council organized a series of events in Beijing, Chongqing, Guangzhou, and Shanghai. Prominent artists including Brian Eno, David Toop, and Clive Bell were invited to China, and their projects were published in an anthology entitled Sound and the City.See Yan Jun and Gray Louise, eds., *Dushi Fasheng: Chengshi Shengyin Huanjing [Sound and the City: City Sound Environment]* (Shanghai Renmin Chubanshe [Shanghai People's Press], 2007).

sounds is to practice listening with "a musician's ear."[143] Yet the Chinese sound practitioners revised the content and the method of Schafer's field recording practice. While Schafer is more interested in preserving a natural and ecological environment, the Chinese field recordists are more drawn to the language, the human voices, the urban noise, and any other synthetic sounds that index human interactions and social relations. While Schafer avoids any electroacoustic engineering of the recorded sound, the Chinese field recordists exploit it for social critique.

URBAN SOUNDSCAPE

In China, the changing shape of the urban space has become a contentious topic, particularly at the turn of the twenty-first century; and this spatial tension has been well documented and discussed in the scholarship of Chinese cinema. As Zhang Zhen (2007) noted, the 1990s is characterized by the rise of the Urban Generation Cinema.[144] Prominent filmmakers such as Zhang Yuan, Lou Ye, Jia Zhangke, and Wu Wenguang invented a new cinematic language to depict the experience of urbanization (the experience of the "migrant" or "floating" subjects in particular), bearing witness to the rapidly changing urban landscape of a decade. Zhang argues that their cinematic practice bears witness to the transforming urban space. Yet more importantly, they act as metacommentaries, "which are deployed as resources for social critique, collective recovery, memory production, and reflections on the nature of cinematic

---

142 Schafer, *The Book of Noise.*
143 Schafer, 3.

representation itself."[145] Zhang points out that visual technologies had the capacity to bear witness in that they provided abundant images of social indexicality. Zhang writes, "the ubiquity of the bulldozer, the building crane, and the debris of urban ruins," for example, became the trademark of the Urban Generation Cinema as they carry "a poignant social indexicality."[146] In their cinematic worlds, the images of bulldozers, building cranes, and urban ruins reveal not only the aggressive reorganization of the existing urban fabrics, but also the socio-economic restructuring of the urban space, which subsequently reveals issues such as class division, social inequality, and so on. In a similar fashion, Yomi Braester proposed to consider the relationship between urban space and its visual representations as that of a contract.[147] In *Painting the City Red: Chinese Cinema and the Urban Contract*, Braester examined the ways in which visual representations of the urban space forged a social contract for the city, contributing to the discourses on urban policies. By aligning filmmakers and playwrights with urban planners, Braester suggests that the interplay between visual practices and material development unfolds the shifting power structures and social changes.

The observations by Zhang and Braester are echoed by film scholars such as Jason McGrath and Chris Berry, among others, all of whom related the changing

---

144 Zhang, *The Urban Generation*.
145 Zhang, "Introduction: Bearing Witness: Chinese Urban Cinema in the Era of 'Transformation,'" 8.
146 Zhang, 3.
147 Braester, *Painting the City Red*.

urban landscape in film to the historical moment of post-socialism.[148] Despite distinct focuses, they all seem to agree that the cinematic practice of the period is characterized by a documentary impulse that acts as a social critique. The Urban Generation Cinema provided a convincing argument that social realism in artistic works indexes the evolving social relationships. Similarly, by documenting the urban soundscape, the urban field recordists also reveal the conditions of community, habitation, and social change. In other words, the synergy between film and sound is not accidental. In Chinese urban cinema, the poignant social indexicality has often manifested itself in an acoustic manner.

In fact, the cinematic representations of Beijing provided some of the best examples. The city's unique urban fabrics, such as *hutong* and *siheyuan*, are often mediated not only as the visual, but also as the acoustic reminders of the city's changing social structures. Although the disappearance of *hutong* was taking place in Beijing throughout the twentieth century, there seemed to be a particularly nostalgic sentiment around the late 1990s. In 2000, only three years after the founding of China Sound Unit, Yao decided to visit Beijing, the most important city on his soundscape recording agenda. Yao believed that the demolition process during the time had changed Beijing's urban soundscape most drastically. The construction noise, akin to what Schafer experienced in the 1960s, began to radically reshape the city's urban soundscape. Where the old residential structures, *siheyuan,* in Beijing were demolished to make room for newer apartment and commercial buildings, and where

---

[148] McGrath, *Postsocialist Modernity*; Berry, "Getting Real: Chinese Documentary, Chinese Postsocialism."

the traditional narrow neighborhood alleys were replaced by wide boulevards, the most intimate *hutong* soundscape is disappearing. In the last decade of the twentieth century, the once familiar Beijing *hutong* sounds—the callings of street vendors, garbage men, or recycling men, and even the greetings of neighbors—were gradually absorbed into a nosier urban background. This does not mean that the sounds of apartment or commercial buildings are inherently uninteresting, but rather that the difference in architectural space does create a disparate distance between individuals. The old *hutong* structure allows crisper sounds to resonate through an adequate space within one's grasp. The residential enclosures and narrow passages also enhance the echo and reverberation of the sounds that are already familiar to the residents. These sounds, in return, also remind the residents of the unreserved architectural space that they all share. The *hutong* soundscape, as we might say, becomes an acoustic intimacy produced in tandem with architectural and physical closeness. In larger architectural structures, however, the once familiar sounds are subsumed by urban cacophonies and sonic overload, barely distinguishable from one another.

The intimate relationship between one's acoustic memory and urban landscape is well-animated in the Chinese rock musician He Yong's music video "Bell and Drum Towers," released in 1994. At the beginning of the music video, we see a few low-angle shots of the towers, revealing their architectural grandeur, as well as an aerial shot of the ordered city street; the image exhibits the monumentality of the Bell and Drum Tower and Beijing's meticulous city planning. However, this order is soon undermined by the chaotic soundtrack, as the narrative continues to carefully reconstruct an intricate soundscape of the inner city, documenting the social

interactions of its inhabitants—people chatting, gossiping, and playing mahjong. A distinctive sound of some percussion instruments repeats in the background, the rhythmic beat of which is always in sync with the residents' quotidian activities—fixing shoes, hanging plates, and chopping ribs.

However, as the song continues, this intimate neighborhood is replaced by a different urban landscape. All of sudden, we see half demolished walls buried in construction waste, with the soundscape being transformed into loud and monotonic utterances. Towards the end of the song, He Yong chants "I cannot hear your voice." The "voice" here carries a nostalgic sentiment as it refers to the chimes of the bell tower. The structure stood in time only to witness the collapse of its surrounding neighborhood. The bell no longer chimes. The drum no longer rolls. When He Yong continues the line "the time is too noisy and chaotic," we can almost hear the bulldozer rumbling and thundering in the background. In the foreground, He Yong is left alone in loss and confusion.

Figure 11. He Yong, Stills from "Bell and Drum Towers" (1994).

In a similar fashion, only two years after Yao Dajuin's initial recordings in Beijing, Chen Kaige's contribution to the 2002 Cannes Film Festival was once again a short film about the disappearance of Beijing's *hutong*. In *Ten Minutes Older* (2002), Chen's segment "100 Flowers Hidden Deep" depicted a ghostly encounter between the two landscapes/soundscapes of Beijing. In the story, a local Beijing man, Mr. Feng, asks a group of movers to help him with his furniture. When they arrive at the *hutong* of One Hundred Flowers Hidden Deep, the movers find out that Mr. Feng's old house was long demolished for Beijing's modern urban construction. However, Mr. Feng still insists that his house is there and pays them to move his imaginary furniture. The mover's line "Now it is the natives that get lost in Beijing" is not only

suggestive of a rapid transformation of a modern landscape, but also reminiscent of the vulnerability of one's inhabitation of an acoustic space—it is one's acoustic attachment to or estrangement from a particular space. When they arrive at the *hutong*, a visual contrast is built up with, once again, the construction waste in the foreground and the modern high-rise skyline in the background. Up to that point, the sonic profile has been predominated by the firecrackers at the new apartment buildings, the police siren on the city highway, the radio broadcast in the car, as well as the engine noise, all of which correspond to a celebration of China's urban modernity. However, when the movers decide to immerse themselves in the man's make-believe, the extradiegetic sound comes in. While they are moving the furniture, rhythmic drumbeats start to roll in the background and then uplifting folklore music begins. With the extradiegetic music, Mr. Feng finds a lost bell and comments on its remarkable sounds— "It rings well when meeting the windy and rainy weather." As he listens, the lost urban landscape is retrieved in animated images. Despite the overtly dramatized sentimentalism and superficial characterization (Mr. Feng was simply characterized as a "crazy" person), the short film does not fail to demonstrate an aural sensitivity to the changing urban soundscape of Beijing. However, the acoustic memory of the city does not end within the fictional narrative. Not only did the *hutong* of One Hundred Flowers Hidden Deep give the short film its name, but the actual location had in fact transformed the city's soundscape at large. The narrow alley way once housed the One Hundred Flower Recording Studio, which produced some of the most iconic rock bands of the city (see O'Dell [2011] on the history of the recording studio). As such, the short film has exemplified how these urban sounds have always haunted the

memories of inhabitants and how they have formed intimate bonds between the individuals who share the historical memories.

Despite stylistic differences, both examples build up a clear contrast of disparate urban landscapes. In both examples, the contrast is not only visual but also acoustic; an attentiveness to the acoustic environment always preoccupies one's imaginations of the urban space. In He Yong's acoustic memory, the old urban fabric is symbolized by the chimes of the bell tower. When the bell sound disappears from the inner city, it is replaced by the sound of bulldozers, suggesting that the city is transitioning into another phase of urban modernity. By comparison, Chen Kaige's film depicts the aftermath of that transition. In the story, the sound of a lost bell becomes a portal between two worlds, bridging the narrow alleyways of the past and the construction ruins of the present. As such, these examples share similarities with Chinese urban cinema in that their representations of the urban space, both visually and acoustically, can be read as social commentaries on the changing social structures of that historical moment. This is not to say that the two examples are driven by the same documentary impulse, or that they bear any stylistic characteristics of cinematic realism. However, they at least demonstrate that the parallel development in film and audio recording may not be accidental; they both speak to the history of a city's urban development.

We are repeatedly told by Friedrich Kittler and Theodor W. Adorno that phonographic recordings do not lie. In Kittler's *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* and Theodor W. Adorno's "The Curves of the Needle," the indexicality of sound is illustrated by their investigations into the material surface of gramophone records—

the gramophone groove on its surface is carved by sound through physical vibration.[149] Due to this unique material and physical shaping, the acoustic signal always bears an indexical relationship with the material world. As such, the captivity of an index comes from a robust sense of presence over absence. It relates the subject to the object not only by forging a contact, a bridge, and a relationship, but also by bringing the object into presence.

In sound, indexicality is thus often contrasted to symbol. Wolfgang Ernst, for example, delineates the ways in which the gramophone record resists a symbolic reading: "As engraved index (in Peirce's semiotic sense), a sound forms a sharp contrast to its symbolic notation. Indices represent their objects by virtue of being in fact modified by them."[150] Indexicality brings the past into the present, and in doing so, it reinforces the intensity of the acoustic experience as the listeners realize the reproduced sound recreates the original sounding event. Although the original sound is substituted, it is however brought into presence, retaining its indexing properties. Similarly, Kittler famously contends that the gramophone records undifferentiated sounds, thus registering a wide range of the noise spectrum. Aligning the gramophone with the Lacanian real, Kittler grants noise an indexical power. And phonography, "regardless of meaning or intent, records all the voices and utterances produced by bodies, thus separating the signifying function of words […] as well as their

---

[149] Friedrich A. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1999); Theodor W. Adorno, "The Curves of the Needle," *October* 55 (1990): 49–55.
[150] Wolfgang Ernst, *Sonic Time Machines: Explicit Sound, Sirenic Voices, and Implicit Sonicity* (Amsterdam University Press, 2016), 59–60.

materiality from unseeable and unwritable noises […]."[151] Due to this indexical relationship, the phonograph does not impose any arbitrary rules to distinguish sound from noise. The recorded sound is not filtered through any symbolic order; the gramophone is the real. As one would argue, such "realism" is precisely the charm of urban field recording. The documentary impulse behind the cinematic realism not only resonates with the urban field recording movement of the same period, but—more importantly—they both function as social indexicality that illuminate the ways in which urban space is conceptualized as a site for cultural experience.

BEIJING: SILVER TABLET BRIDGE

Intrigued by the transitional moment of Beijing's urban soundscape, Yao Dajuin decided to visit the city. As noted in my introduction to this chapter, with other recordists of China Sound Unit, he recorded the sounds at the historic stone bridge Silver Tablet Bridge. This became part of the installation piece at the sound exhibition. Over the years, this recording became a signature work by the recordist collective, making appearances in several art exhibitions and festivals home and abroad. In 2002, an early version of this recording "Silver Tablet Bridge" was submitted to compete in Prix Ars Electronica, a renowned international festival in electronic arts. Although it did not win any award, Yao's submission had certainly won him a reputation within

[151] Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, xxviii.

the circle.[152] In 2005, Yao released parts of the recordings in *Beijing Phonomena* (2005) and *Silver Tablet Bridge: A Sound Event* (2005) under his record label Post-Concrete. In 2009, an excerpt of "Silver Tablet Bridge: A Sound Event" was also included in the anthology *Life Soundscape: Field Recording Made in China* (2009). As a result, when Yao decided to release the Beijing Sound Unit Archive at the sound exhibition in 2015, it was not a surprise that the most recent version of this audio recording "Qiaoting Beijing" was once again put on stage. For Yao, this recording has crystalized the philosophy behind their field recording practice.

At first glance, this recording exhibits the same kind of nostalgia that is often found in the new urban cinema. It is a sentiment that revolves around one's acoustic memories of the disappearing urban fabrics. In different ways, both film and audio can exhibit the emotional attachment to an intimate space of the past that we desire to inhabit. Yet at the same time, the audio recordings still differ from fiction films of the urban cinema genre when it comes to the ways in which they depict the spatial relationship. While the image can represent an urban space almost unambiguously, the sound when heard alone is often imagined as an elusive entity that can be heard in any place. It is boundless, horizonless, and spaceless. If a sound does not belong to a space, how would it be possible to establish an emotional bond between the listener and the urban space? The conundrum was diagnosed by Murray Schafer, who was long bothered by the boundless nature of sound. In *The New Soundscape*, Schafer first coined the term *schizophonia* to describe this uncanny situation, in which the source of

---

[152] Dajuin Yao, "Shengyin Yishu (Bu) Zai Zhongguo [Sound Art (Not) in China]," *New Arts: Journal of the National Academy of Art* 35, no. 6 (2014).

the sound is detached from where it is heard.[153] Derived from the word schizophrenia, this "nervous" word by Schafer dramatizes the disorienting effect of the split between sound and its source. For Schafer, the proliferation of reproduced sounds in modern societies has obscured the sounds' original spatial context. Before the electric revolution, all sounds were original, uncounterfeitable, and therefore unique to the time and space in which they were produced. After the electric revolution, the sound becomes schizophonic, split from the maker of the sound and dislocated from its original location. When the sound is perceived in another location, detached from its natural origins, it creates "a meaningless and surrealistic juxtaposition."[154]

Yao Dajuin titled his exhibition series "Schizophonia: Sonic Alienation," acknowledging the alienating effects of schizophonia. In the exhibition statement, Yao noted that "Schafer was actually using the term to criticize the sonic aberration and [noise] pollution in our modern society." Nonetheless, Yao does not condemn schizophonia for the reason Schafer provided, instead asserting it as "a crucial part of modernity." By exhibiting recorded sounds, Yao Dajuin proposed to examine "the massive possibilities offered by schizophonia."[155] He reminds us that at the moment when the sound is recorded, it will be relocated to another space. With that knowledge in mind, the urban field recordists have always committed to creating an afterlife of the recorded sound. The recording becomes a contract between the recordist and the listener, with which the urban space is reconstructed by the listener's imagination. In

---

[153] Schafer, *The New Soundscape: A Handbook for the Modern Music Teacher*.
[154] Schafer, *The Soundscape*, 90.

doing so, the act of field recording transforms the acoustic space, pulling and stretching it in front of our ears. When listening to the *hutong* sounds from the Silver Tablet Bridge, no matter how ordinary the sounds seem to be, one cannot help but attend to its liveliness and noisiness as a gathering place in the *hutong* area. Its histories as well as its changes through time (now a tourist and commercial area with renovated buildings) build into one's listening experience. For this reason, Yao has described "Qiaoting Beijing" as "diachronic schizophonia." Despite "schizophonia" meaning a radical separation from the original and discontinuity, the modifying adjective "diachronic" seems to suggest an evolution through time.

With this in mind, we can better understand the urban field recordings. In addition to "Silver Tablet Bridge," the compilation record *Beijing Sound Unit Archive XXI* (2008) has illustrated the ways in which an acoustic intimacy is retrieved through (re)contextualization. Although the compilation was first released in 2008 under Post-Concrete, the sounds were recorded about a decade ago in 1998-1999. As part of an archival vinyl series, it was once available on China Sound Unit's now defunct website, but its digital files are still being circulated around the web. As one listens to the sound archive, it is always being recontextualized by time, space, and culture. On the most basic level, the recording dates and locations are reminders of their historical contingencies: Beijing City in 1998-1999. The recorded language is listed as "Mandarin" with an emphasis of "Beijing and other regional accents." The seven soundtracks were recorded mostly in the *hutong* neighborhoods—Hutong South of

---

[155] Hu, "Ting Zhanlan Qu: Shengyin Fenlie Zhanlan Xilie Uu OCAT Shenzhen Guan Zhengshi Kaimu [Let's Listen to the Exhibit: Schizophonia Exhibition Series Opens at

Fayuan Si (Fayuan Temple), Fuxing Men Nei Dajie (Fuxingmen Inner Street)—with one exception at Yonghegong (Yonghe Temple) subway south exit.

When we start to listen, episodes of acoustic intimacy begin to unfold: a wife chastising her husband for coming home late, a son telling his father he is not coming home for dinner, a young lady flirting with her police officer boyfriend (with details about her erotic paintings). As my last example from Yao Dajuin, the soundtrack about a blind singer performing at Yonghegong subway station is particularly intriguing. This is not only because her unrefined voice evokes an immediate sympathy with anyone who listens, but also because her voice inhabits a social space that, if not welcomes, then at least acknowledges her presence. However, since 2014, all performing acts were banned in the subway areas by the city authorities, with offenders facing fines of 50 to 1,000 yuan. And now in the sanitized soundscape, what we usually hear in Beijing's subway is instead a generic station announcement emphasizing the punitive measures against begging or performing at the station. Similarly, all subway stations are no longer shelters for street performers and the homeless. Although this listening may reveal the schizophonic nature of the sound, what is more important is an intimate bond that the listening creates to the person who voices the sound and occupies the space.

SHANGHAI: QIUJIANG ROAD

Yao Dajuin had a lasting influence on China's field recording practice.

OCAT Shenzhen]."

Following Yao Dajuin, Yan Jun became another artist who was fascinated by urban noise. Before a career as a sound artist and field recordist, Yan Jun was already a well-known music critic. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the focus of his work shifted from music criticism to sound art. Nonetheless, for Yan Jun, what connects the two parts of his career was a pursuit of noise. He described his own work as "to use the new language, to the reverse word order, and to explore the noise." His first book of music criticism was published in 2002, *Under Underground, The Stalk of Chinese New Music* (Didixia, xinyinyue qianxingji) provided an overview of the rapid development of underground music in China. In it, he has vividly described a significant shift in the 1990s' music culture, where the rising individualism created a desire for new sounds that are neither dominated by one voice like Cui Jian, nor commercialized by companies like Magic Stone (Moyan). In the following two publications, *Noise Inside* (Neixin de zaoyin) and *Noise Burning* (Ranshao de zaoyin), Yan Jun began to build upon his ideas on noise. In 2001, he helped with the Noise Co-opt (Zaoyin hezuoshe), an artist collective consisting of four music groups including Tongue, Miserable Faith, The Ruins, Glamorous Pharmacy. In their manifesto, Yan Jun wrote, "In name of noise, they started to collaborate, trying to articulate the noise of music, thought, and feeling that were once slandered by the mainstream culture."

His shift to field recording was not surprising. In 2004, Yan Jun founded Kwanyin Records and devoted himself to music experimentation. He said, "I decided to create music at that moment." He did not pick up any musical instruments, but instead purchased a second-hand MD recorder and a stereo mini microphone.

> What have I been recording? To put it simply, whenever I turn on the recorder, I try to shut down my personal preferences, and this is an interesting experience. As the by-product of my experience, I recorded the background noise of life, the people I met, and the things I did; everything is related to the acoustic environment. They are all related to the historical time that I am in, and its unconsciousness. I don't think this is art, unless life itself is art.

He recorded almost everything around him—from the sounds of electrical fans, cicadas, and rains to that of airplanes, construction sites, and random conversations. His use of sound recording evolved from a few samplings in his live performance to larger stand-alone field recording projects, and Qiujiang Road (2008) is one such example.

Like Yao Dajuin's field recording projects in Beijing, Yan Jun's Qiujiang Road in Shanghai was an art project that attempts to document the city's changing urban fabric. While often unknown to outsiders, Shanghainese locals have fond memories about the place. In the early 2000s, Qiujiang Road was known to the locals as the largest hub for cheap electronic products, fake luxury products, and second-hand goods. It is a marketplace that sells everything from cheap electronic products, computer accessories, and washing machines to pirated music CDs and fake Rolex watches. In April 2007, Yan Jun visited Qiujiang Road. He took a stroll along the street. Extending a couple of miles from east to west, the street is filled with traffic, crowds, and rows of stores. With the traditional lane houses on the side and the elevated railway overhead, his walk is greeted by an endless series of acoustic events. Many street vendors use loudspeakers to play loud music or recorded calls to attract foot traffic. While deals are being made here, the sounds of bargaining, chatting, and festive music travel along the street. The walk concluded in about thirty minutes, and

the artist was soon enticed by the rich acoustic environment of the neighborhood.

Of course, Shanghai's Qiujiang Road has always been a busy and noisy marketplace. In 1914, Qiujiang (the Old River) was once at the border of the Shanghai International Settlement, connecting to the city's transportation hub Shanghaibei Railway Station. Due to its proximity to the international settlement and strategic location, the neighborhood soon attracted entrepreneurs who used the space to sell imported and used goods. It was soon known as one of the best markets (and black markets) of the foreign goods. Its status remained between 1949 and 1956, when the neighborhood attracted shop-owners and street vendors, selling merchandise of all sorts. Between 1956 and 1978, as commercial activities declined across the country, this area also experienced a period of depression, opening its space to recycling stores and cheap hardware shops. In the 1990s, when a few electronic markets began to move to this area, the reputation of Qiujiang Road as the cheap electronics market began to spread.

The sounds that the artist was hearing registered a similar ongoing transition of the neighborhood, which resulted from a combination of China's economic reform, urban development, and globalization. When China entered the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001, it played a minuscule role in the global manufacturing trade. Due to its cheap labor force and loose regulation, however, China has soon earned itself the title of "the world's factory." As cities grew to accommodate the rapidly increasing flows of goods and people, it also restructured the cities' urban fabric. Around this time, Qiujiang Road became a marketplace originally for reselling old industrial facilities and electronic waste, but it soon developed into a neighborhood

for locals hunting for all kinds of inexpensive goods. As such, it also became an affordable marketplace where all types of people meet and gather. Therefore, Qijiang Road also embodies the growing economic inequalities as well as the unequal distribution of space in the country. Qijiang Road is the place where two elevated railways meet. When sitting inside the train car from above, you are surrounded by young students, white-collar office workers, and hipsters who seem to have refined fashion tastes. Whereas looking down, you see dilapidated roofs, temporary buildings, and crowds in shabby clothes.

In January 2008, Yan Jun returned to Qiujiang Road. He brought a camera, a headphone, a microphone, and a recorder. After a few days of recording, he came up with a collection of four tracks and used them to produce a field recording album. He then found a local workshop in the Qiujiang Road neighborhood and asked them to make a thousand copies of his field recording album about the neighborhood. And the artist also playfully named his album "Qiujiang Road." When the copies were eventually ready for distribution, the artist spent days trying to convince a few local shop owners to sell his field recording to anyone who visited Qiujiang Road. As such, the production, circulation, and consumption of sounds are all contained within the neighborhood. When asked what meanings there are behind his field recording project, the artist replied, "Where the sounds come from, there should the sounds go."[156]

In the artist's production notes, his favorite sounds are categorized by a wide

[156] Qiujiang Road was later staged at The Zendai Museum of Modern Art in Shanghai, as part of the public art project "Intervention." In 2020, Yan Jun returned to Qiujiang Road again for another sound walk. He produced a field recording album entitled "Qiujiang Road 2020." It was exhibited at Shanghai's Inside-out Art Museum.

range of social activities.

the sound of handcrafting wok
the sound of electric motorcycle with loudspeaker selling disco music
the bell sound of recycling man
the loudspeaker sound of recycling man
the clapper sound of pesticide vender
the sound of fish frying
the sound of waterjet cutting steel
the sound of metro line 3 turning from Sichuan Road to east Baoxing Road
the sound of mahjong
the sound of Uyghur people selling roasted lamb
the sound of Tibetan people selling antique
the sound of the lady selling adult film
the sound of the barber stall on Baochang Road
the whisper sound of people bargaining behind the counter
the sound of loader loading goods
the sound of sorting stone and yellow sand
the sound of outdoor basketball court

As we listen to the recorded sound, the vibrant urban space begins to unfold. Unlike the residential hutongs in Beijing, Qiujiang Road is mixed with fragments of residential, commercial, and industrial spaces altogether: Many sounds identify a wide range of work as well as cultural traditions that people engage—from the bell sound of the recycling man to the clapper sound of the pesticide vender. Many sounds also imply an active site of construction—from the sound of waterjet cutting steel to the sounds of construction materials such as sand and stone. Many sounds also reveal a relaxing social space for leisure—from the sound of basketball to that of mahjong. Many sounds are about language and music, where we learn that the space has been welcoming to Uyghur, Tibetan, and people of other ethnicities. As the field recording project reveals more sounds from the neighborhood, it depicts a perhaps overcrowded

but nonetheless diverse space shared by all types of people. Although this field recording project presents a collection of sounds that feel rather mundane, it nonetheless provides a fractional piece of the urban fabric that delineates stories about migration, relocation, and habitation.

Between the late 1990s and early 2000s, many field recording projects as such began to emerge across many cities in China. By recording the city's soundscape, the recordists were exploring their relations to the urban space as they are mediated through sound. In doing so, the recordists documented not only the changing urban fabrics, but also the material consequences of China's economic reform and rapid urbanization, which dislocated a large population across the country. Although these recorded sounds might be unremarkably quotidian, they exhibit extraordinary capacities to reconstruct the disappeared urban landscape as well as the ways in which its inhabitants used to occupy the space. It reminds us of one's righteous occupancy of the space. It also reminds us that the spatial distribution of China's economic development has been unequal. Like what cinema scholars have discovered about the urban problematic in China's recent history, these sounds also operate as social commentaries during a time of rapid urbanization.

CHAPTER 3 WARFARE NOISE

WRITING ACOUSTIC TERRITORIES ALONG THE TAIWAN STRAIT

Produced at the height of the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis in 1996, Yao Dajuin's *Writing of Sounds of Writing* (1999) commemorates a history in which the proximity of war is materialized in the auditory domain.[157] Within its 20-minute duration, this sound recording features an intercepted phone call between Shanghai and Taipei, between two individuals who are caught up in an argument on writing Chinese characters. Despite the banality of their conversation, what follows takes an unsettling twist. As their argument unfolds, the woman's voice is slowly buried in a series of noise, a collage of explosive sounds that induces a visceral fear.

These explosive sounds are not coming from nowhere. They signify, as the artist reminds us, the missile tests fired into Taiwanese waters. From July 1995 to March 1996, a few sets of missile firings, accompanied by live ammunition exercises, were conducted by the Chinese People's Liberation Army as a response to the cross-strait policy change in Taiwan under Lee Teng-hui's regime. As such, *Writing of Sounds of Writing* has encoded a vicious message and a diplomatic ultimatum—should Lee Teng-hui win Taiwan's first democratic presidential election in 1996, there may very well be a war. By demarcating a militarized zone, the recorded sound has therefore illustrated a contentious border straddling the Taiwan Strait, a border that

---

[157] *Writing of Sounds of Writing* was originally catalogued in *Cinnabar Red Drizzle* (1999), a collection of experimental music released by Yao Dajuin's own record label Juxiang Music (Post-Concrète). Due to its unusual length and unique style, however, this recording piece is often considered as a stand-alone piece.

separates two political entities—the People's Republic of China and the Republic of China (Taiwan). When sound is weaponized as such, there is nowhere to hide. As Steve Goodman reminds us, the sonic warfare operates as "an immersive atmosphere or ambience of fear and dread," pervasive yet entrenched in the space in which it reverberates.[158]

Sound writes. Writing sounds. In Yao Dajuin's sound work, I was particularly intrigued by the ways in which the recorded sound translates the shifting geopolitical borders into a readable historical text. In problematizing the artistic value of sound-in-itself, such a practice also contests a spaceless bias that has been inherited from the earliest days of media ecology, a spatial bias that is derived from a McLuhanian notion of "acoustic space." Indeed, ever since Marshall McLuhan declared that we are now "living in an acoustic world," we could imagine how physical space has been flattened by the electrical media.[159] The telephone, for McLuhan, is "the speech without wall," extending human's acoustic sensorium well beyond spatial boundaries.[160] And more than an extension to the auditory perception, the telephone even transforms the space itself into a field of simultaneous information. This is what McLuhan has characterized as "the acoustic space" —a boundless, directionless, and horizonless

---

[158] Steve Goodman, *Sonic Warfare: Sound, Affect, and the Ecology of Fear*, ed. Brian Massumi and Erin Manning (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2012), xiv.
[159] See Marshall McLuhan, "Living in an Acoustic World," Marshall McLuhan Speaks Special Collection, accessed February 5, 2019, http://www.marshallmcluhanspeaks.com/lecture/1970-living-in-an-acoustic-world/.
[160] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1994), 283.

world, reverberating with fantasies of instantaneity.[161] Yet the problem with a term such as "acoustic space" is that it comes with the promise that the acoustic medium mediates regardless of locality.[162] Of course, the acoustic signal travels well beyond geographical boundaries, but the significance of these sounds is deeply embedded in their immediate contexts. Contrary to "the acoustic space," the soundscape we hear is anchored in its geographic locale. It is deeply rooted in the collective memories of people who inhabit the space.

In short, Yao's artwork regards sound not so much as a medium to bridge spaces, but rather as a mark of territorial demarcation. It considers sound not so much as a free-floating entity transcending geographical boundaries, but rather as a memorial site in its locality, an acoustic signifier in its immediate cultural, political, and historical context. Understood in this way, the recorded sound becomes a form of historical writing. It inscribes the past events and intervenes into the collective memories of the communities that are defined by borders. In analyzing such artistic practices, I use the term "phono-graphy" to describe an aesthetic strategy. Combining the elements of sound, "phono-," and writing, "-graphy,"[163] "phonograph" as a verb

---

[161] Marshall McLuhan, "Visual and Acoustic Space," in *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*, ed. Christoph Cox and Daniel Warner (London: Continuum, 2004).

[162] Recent scholarship in sound studies began to reflect on the theoretical importance of "acoustic space." Veit Erlmann, for example, argues that "acoustic space" embodies an epistemological departure for the Toronto School of Communication because the "sensed, emplaced sound" no longer needs to be "the normative epistemological space of sound studies." See Veit Erlmann, "'Acoustic Space' – Marshall McLuhan Defended Against Himself," *The Senses and Society* 11, no. 1 (January 2, 2016): 36–49.

[163] In this context, the word "phonography" has been used as a neologism referring to the practice of field recording (an audio recording produced outside a recording studio). It emphasizes the similarities between phonography and photography. For this

emphasizes an attempt to contest acoustic territories and to retrieve the site-specific memories of "the audible past."[164] To phonograph borders, as I will demonstrate in this chapter, is to interrogate the unresolved violence embedded in territorial disputes in history.

In fact, *Writing of Sounds of Writing* is not alone in revealing the acoustic territory in the Sinophone art world. It belongs to a larger collection of sonic arts that attempt to reflect on the increasingly elusive notion of "Chineseness" as an ethnic, cultural, national, and political signifier.[165] In fact, "China" has always been conceptualized as a contested space. On the one hand, "China" defies borders. Its Sinitic name *zhongguo* ("Middle Kingdom") refers to not a specific place, but rather a geographical center. Its political philosophy of *tianxia* ("all-under-heaven") assigns the imperial court with political sovereignty over the entire world, an all-encompassing space without foreseeable boundaries. On the other hand, however, both *zhongguo* and *tianxia* are constantly at odds with the modern world of nation-states. Despite its numerous territorial disputes, the contemporary state of the People's

---

reason, the artist Yao Dajuin prefers using this term to describe his own practice. See Dajuin Yao, "Revolutions Per Minute: Sound Art China," accessed April 12, 2019, http://revolutionsperminutefest.org/SoundArtChina.

[164] Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2003).

[165] In recent years, Sinophone studies exemplifies an attempt to deconstruct "China" by interrogating its "territorial integrity." In dialogue with postcolonial theory, Shu-Mei Shih argues that the desire for territorial expansion can be found in the imperial consciousness of China. "Now when China proclaims its supreme concern for 'territorial integrity' from a putatively postcolonial standpoint against earlier Western imperialist aggressions, it is simultaneously making imperial claims on the territories annexed from the Tibetans, Uyghurs, and Mongolians." See Shu-Mei Shih, "The Concept of the Sinophone," *PMLA* 126, no. 3 (2011): 709.

Republic is defined and delimited by its borders.[166] As such, the recorded sound along the Taiwan Strait provides an important site for us to re-examine these spatial tensions through sonic arts.

In this chapter, I focus on the sonic warfare enacted at the height of the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis in 1996. I provide a comparative analysis of two artists and their works: Yao Dajuin's *Writing of Sounds of Writing* (1999) and Yao Jui-Chung's *Long Live* (2011). From the propaganda loudspeakers on the Kinmen Island to the test missiles fired into Taiwanese waters, I argue that militarized sound demarcates geopolitical territories and redraws the conceptual borders of "China." In thinking "sound" as a medium, I shift the common discourse on medium-specificity in media studies to broader spatial-political relations to interrogate a "borderless" bias throughout the history of media theory. More specifically, I reconsider the notion of "acoustic space" in media ecology—a boundless, directionless, and horizonless world—as the spatial premise for the globalized cultural network. Finally, I contend that sound does not operate as a free-floating entity transcending boundaries; rather, sound interrogates the unresolved violence embedded in the territorial disputes, which has defined the cross-strait entanglement for the past three decades.

KINMEN ISALND

Only four miles away from the Chinese mainland lies Taiwan's Kinmen

---

[166] See, for example, Zhaoguang Ge, *What Is China? Territory, Ethnicity, Culture, and History*, trans. Michael Hill (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018).

Island.[167] Due to the strategic location of Kinmen as well as its proximity to the Communist world, the island is often compared to other borderlands of the Cold War era. Once a military outpost for the KMT, the island was often thought as Chiang Kai-shek's first stepstone to reclaim the Chinese Mainland. As such, the Kinmen Island has earned itself names such as "the West Berlin of Asia" or "the Dien Bien Phu of China." As Michael Szonyi noted, many considered Kinmen as a bastion of the free world: "It was the outpost from which the forces of freedom would launch their attack on communism, or the first domino whose fall would signal the failure of those forces."[168] Although these names may represent the ideological and geopolitical divide that are commonly observed at the border, they could not quite capture the unique situation in which the island is caught up in an entangled relationship between China and Taiwan.

Kinmen is not quite part of China nor Taiwan. Although the Kinmen Island has been under the control of the Republic of China (ROC) since the Chinese civil war, it never falls under the geographical border of Taiwan. In fact, along with Lienchiang County, Kinmen is among the only two counties of Fujian Province that remain under the ROC's control. Brantly Womack has described the uniquely ambiguous status of Kinmen: "It is the non-Taiwanese part of the Republic of China, and the part of Fujian

---

[167] The Kinmen Islands are often referred to in a few different ways in English. In standard Mandarin Chinese, both in Tongyong Pinyin and in Hanyu Pinyin, the island's name is "Jinmen." In English and other European languages, "Quemoy" was often used, especially in earlier documents, because it represents the pronunciation of the local dialect. Today, the name "Kinmen" has gained a more official status as it is used by The Taiwanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In this chapter, I use the name "Kinmen" also because it is more commonly used in the English language.

Province that is not part of the People's Republic of China."[169] Kinmen has had closer cultural and historical ties to the Chinese mainland than Taiwan; it does not share the complicated colonial histories that Taiwan has experienced for over four centuries. It is why, when Taiwan's democracy and a Taiwanese identity began to take shape in the 1990s, the pro-independence nationalist politicians from the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) even suggested that Taiwan should return Kinmen back to the PRC. Whereas, when the island was under the KMT's authoritarian rule, Kinmen's cultural ties to China were carefully maintained and cultivated to only propagate a Pan-Chinese nationalist narrative in Taiwan. From war hero stories to Chinese folk religions, Kinmen's local histories in the past few decades have been heavily modified by the KMT.[170] Chiang Kai-shek and his followers aspired to be "the defender and guardian of traditional Chinese culture, and in turn of the Chinese nation."[171] Caught between these two nationalist narratives, Kinmen has remained as an ambiguous border space that cannot be clearly defined.

Despite its ambiguous position between China and Taiwan, Kinmen's border status is always foregrounded by the total militarization of the island. In 1956, the KMT established the War Zone Administration (Zhandi zhengwu) to govern Kinmen;

---

[168] Michael Szonyi, *Cold War Island: Quemoy on the Front Line* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), xi.
[169] Brantly Womack, "Borders, Boundaries, Horizons and Quemoy in an Asymmetric World," *Asian Anthropology* 15, no. 2 (May 3, 2016): 110, https://doi.org/10.1080/1683478X.2016.1215076.
[170] See Michael Szonyi, "The Virgin and the Chinese State: The Cult of Wang Yulan and the Politics of Local Identity of Jinmen (Quemoy)," *Journal of Ritual Studies* 19, no. 1 (2005): 87–98; Chang-hui Chi, "The Death of a Virgin: The Cult of Wang Yulan and Nationalism in Jinmen, Taiwan," *Anthropological Quarterly* 82, no. 3 (2009): 669–89.

for civilians on the island, military officers not only governed local affairs, but also shaped their understandings about the state.[172] It was often believed that the period of military rule (junguan shiqi) in Kinmen was so regimented and authoritarian that Taiwan's own martial law rule could not quite compare. As such, the military has participated in redefining the local history, culture, and memory of Kinmen. In 1953, when Kinmen began to mass produce sorghum liquor, the military took it as an opportunity to develop a particular image of masculinity about themselves as well as the island.[173] And in the following decades, the consumption of sorghum liquor has become part of Kinmen's cultural traditions and even its own identity, even though that militant masculinity had little to do with Kinmen's longer history as a maritime frontier for Chinese emigrants. Today, after law most military personnel have retreated from the island for almost three decades since Taiwan lifted its martial law, Kinmen's culture is still largely defined by its history of military occupation.

Michael Szonyi calls Kinmen "the Cold War Island," because few other places in the world have suffered the material consequences of a global ideological confrontation as this intense. Nonetheless, even though the Cold War and the Chinese civil war provided competing narratives about mass utopias and ideal societies, as Szonyi argues, what is often remembered by the inhabitants of the island is not so much about their ideological differences, but rather the struggles of everyday life and

---

[171] Szonyi, *Cold War Island*, 187.
[172] Hsiao-Chiao Chiu, "Women's Labour, Kinship, and Economic Changes in Jinmen in the Era of Authoritarian Rule," *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 47, no. 2 (August 1, 2018): 194, https://doi.org/10.1177/186810261804700208.

of familiar encounters. Although stories about Kinmen would never be complete without a historical account of its militarization, geopoliticization, and modernization, the collective memories about Kinmen have been largely shaped by the experience of the everyday. Sound has played an important role in shaping that everyday experience of the Cold War.

Kinmen has been at the forefront of an acoustic warfare for almost a half century. While China feels palpably close from the island, so does the acoustic memory of war. What local inhabitants have been hearing on the island are the sounds of bombardment, shelling, siren, and propaganda broadcasting. In listening to the local soundscape throughout history, we can better understand how the everyday acoustic experience is intertwined by the global geopolitical forces that transformed historical memories about China.

Due to its strategic location, China has unleashed a series of artillery bombardments on the island throughout the Taiwan Strait Crises. On August 11, 1954, the People's Liberation Army (the PLA) announced its determination to "liberate" Taiwan. On September 3, the first wave of bombardment began the First Taiwan Strait Crisis. Within the first 12 hours of deafening explosions, the PLA fired over 6,000 shells onto the island. Only four years later in 1958, another series of artillery firings marked the beginning of the Second Taiwan Strait Crisis. On August 23, casualties on the island reached nearly 200 only a few hours into the battle. And this day of brutality was remembered as "the 823 Artillery Bombardment." As the deafening explosions

---

[173] Chang-hui Chi, "Learning to Drink Sorghum Liquor: Taste and Consumption in Military Front-Line Jinmen, Taiwan," *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 47, no. 2

became more frequent, the number of fired shells reached over 470,000 by the end of the first month.

In a newspaper article that commemorates the 30th anniversary of "the 823 Artillery Bombardment," Wang Kui-ying described the ear-splitting moment when the shells took the first hit:

> The bright sunshine and silence continued into the afternoon. Then, at 6:30 p.m., the air and earth erupted in sound. "We were having dinner when all of a sudden came the thunderous noise," recalls Wang Kui-ying, who was then a captain in the young women's corps stationed in Kinmen. "The next thing I can remember is that we had a lot more ingredients in our bowls." She adds, "The explosion seemed to have shattered the world into pieces," but even though the shelling was "deafening," it did not frighten her. "As the saying goes, new recruits are afraid of shelling while old soldiers are afraid of machine guns," she says. As an experienced soldier she knew if a shell was going to pass over her head or drop nearby just by listening to its sound.[174]

The initial shock was grave. "The thunderous noise," as Wang remembered, "seemed to have shattered the world into pieces." The sudden eruption of "the air and earth" reveals the monstrosity of the deafening noise. As an experienced soldier stationed in Kinmen County, however, Wang learned to orient the noise. She learned to process the acoustic cue to position herself in relation to the explosive sound. In a similar fashion, Zhao Mingtang's testimony illuminates the ways in which experienced frontline soldiers on the island locate the sound of bombardment. "In an artillery bombardment, we have nothing to hope for from the external world, but the distance between the shelling and ourselves. Everyone remains silent, paralyzed, while trying

---

(August 1, 2018): 165–91, https://doi.org/10.1177/186810261804700207.
[174] "Bombardment of Quemoy," *Free China Journal*, August 1, 1988.

to locate the sound of bombardment by calculating its loudness."[175] Zhao continued to elaborate on the different sounds they heard to map the moving trajectories of the shelling, "Boom — Woosh —Whomp." This is, what he called, "the trilogy of bombardment."[176]

War takes lives. Not everyone was fortunate enough to be a survivor. Li You Zhong, a local television host on the island, witnessed the moment when one of his classmates was killed by the bombardment. On his first day of middle school, this frightening sound took away innocent lives. "Weeeeeeeee — Boom!" Li imitated the sounds of the falling shells. "They killed many people. […] We were always scared and worried about the future."[177] The inhabitants on the island could never anticipate the intensity of the bombardment, as well as its ruthless continuation into the decades to come. They did not know that intermittent shelling would continue well into 1979, when the United States formally recognized the Communist China and severed all formal diplomatic relations with Taiwan. Although the deafening explosions are no longer heard on the island, the sound of bombardment and the painful memories that they invoke constantly return to shore. They continue to haunt the island, registering a temporal disjunction in its soundscape.

When the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis was under development in 1995, the sound of bombardment was reanimated on the ground of old battlefields. On July 18,

---

[175] Mingtang Zhao, *Jinmen Paozhan Jishi* [Documenting the Bombardment of Kinmen] (Taipei: Gexin Publishing, 1958), 21.
[176] Zhao, 21.
[177] Rob Schmitz, "On A Rural Taiwanese Island, Modern China Beckons," NPR: National Public Radio, accessed April 12, 2019,

1995, China announced its planned missile tests near Taiwanese waters. It launched six surface-to-surface missiles approximately 100 miles away from the main island of Taiwan. In 1996, three additional missiles made even closer landings—two near the northern port Keelung and the capital Taipei, 23 miles from the northern coast, one near the southern port city Kaohsiung, 35 miles from the southern coast. Although no actual battle was fought, the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis in 1996 was reminiscent of the same geopolitical tensions as we heard in the previous wars. As such, the missile firing in *Writing of Sounds of Writing* stands out as an arresting acoustic motif. Its anchoring force comes from neither its sheer loud volume, nor its penetrating high pitch, but a unique relationship between the acoustic event and its location. In other words, this explosive sound points to the site where the acoustic event originally took place. Understood in this way, the explosive sound prompts Kinmen's memories of its audible past. It brought back the painful memories of unresolved violence, ones that are deeply embedded in the place where active combats originally took place.

ACOUSTIC TERRITORY

In sonic warfare, sound becomes a form of territorial conquest. It is territorial because the clear-cut boundaries are drawn by the sound-making proprietor to maintain its own authority. It is a conquest because the spread of sound, or noise to be more precise, is never content with such boundaries. As such, the militaristic overtone

---

https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2016/09/11/493255462/on-a-rural-taiwanese-island-modern-china-beckons.

in the audio recording is unmistakably interpreted as deterrence, because the soundscape demonstrates an ambition of territorial control over the contested space. When the spread of noise is fueled by such an imperialist and expansionist ideology, as R. Murray Schafer suggests, "sound is then used to demark property—like a fence or a wall."[178] "Walls," Schafer emphasizes, becomes an apparatus of territorial control, an acoustic border that separates social spheres. Within its acoustic horizon, the proprietor of noise claims the absolute sovereignty over all subjects and properties that fall under its reign.

On the Kinmen Island, the historical trauma is haunted by the territorial conquest of sound; it is externalized as a wide range of military infrastructures activated by the sonic warfare.[179] Soon after the first bombardment in 1954, the Taiwanese soldiers on the island erected propaganda speakers, broadcasting their victorious control over the island. When loudspeakers were added on the other side of the Taiwan Strait, the sonic warfare between the Chinese Mainland and Taiwan escalated. During the Second Taiwan Strait Crisis, Taiwan added the Beishan Broadcast Station with giant broadcast towers. Its appeal to authority in the auditory domain is mirrored by its monstrous look. The broadcast towers are more than 30 feet tall, housing 48 loudspeakers. When turned up to full volume, they are estimated to

---

[178] R. Murray Schafer, "McLuhan and Acoustic Space," *The Antigonish Review*, no. 62 (July 1, 1985): 109.

[179] Recent scholarship in ethnomusicology also provided many examples linking the battlefield soundscape with the traumatic experience of modern warfare. See, for example, J. Martin Daughtry, *Listening to War: Sound, Music, Trauma, and Survival in Wartime Iraq* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); Jonathan R. Pieslak, *Sound Targets: American Soldiers and Music in the Iraq War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009).

have a 15-mile range, with the capacity to reach China's port city, Xiamen. In the following decades, four broadcast stations were constructed across the Kinmen Islands. Until the end of Taiwan's martial law in 1987, these broadcast towers remained operative, broadcasting numerous propaganda messages and music to demoralize the other side. Sounds from these broadcast stations have been one of the most prominent parts in the "psychological warfare" (xinzhan) between China and Taiwan.

Among those messages broadcast to the other side, one recorded message from Teresa Teng stood out. A cultural icon of Mandopop, the Taiwanese singer gained her popularity in the Chinese mainland in the 1980s; she was even believed to be "the favorite singer" of the former Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping. At the beginning of the decade, there was a saying in China: "We listen to Lao Deng (the elder Deng, Deng Xiaoping) during the day, but Xiao Teng (the younger Deng, Teresa Teng) at night." Since the 1970s, Teresa Teng has visited the Kinmen Island a few times. Each time, she put on military uniforms and performed for the soldiers stationed on the island. In 1991, Teresa Teng visited the Ma Shan Broadcast Station and recorded the following message:

> Dear compatriots on the mainland, how are you? I am Teressa Teng. I am now at Kinmen's broadcast station to talk to all of you along the coast of the Chinese mainland. What I want to tell you today is that I'm very happy to be here, the very frontline of the Free China—Kinmen. I hope that our compatriots on the mainland can enjoy the same democracy and freedom as we do. Only in a free, democratic, and prosperous environment, can we realize our dreams. Only when all young people can freely develop their talents, can the country have a bright future. I hope to return to Kinmen soon to see our brothers in Kinmen, and of course, to talk to you from the Chinese mainland.

Here I wish you all good health and long live democracy! Thank you!

Since 1991, the broadcast stations in Kinmen have been playing this recorded message, though at a lower volume and more as a tourist offering. Unlike the sounds of bombardment, the recorded message suggests little physical violence. Her voice was sweet, tender, and lovely, much like her music. Nonetheless, amplified by the broadcast station, her recorded voice participated in the acoustic warfare too. By emphasizing the "frontline" status of Kinmen, the recorded message also displays the same ambition of territorial control.

In Yao Jui-Chung's video art *Long Live* (2011), the ambition of territorial conquest in Kinmen is embodied by the omnipresence of sound. The video begins with a wide shot of the sea, harking back to the island's long seafaring history. As the sunlight hits the water, the water glitters as it moves across the screen. At the center of the screen, a row of metal structure divides the on-screen space into two parts, one in the back and one in the front. On Kinmen's coast, these metal structures are common: they are anti-landing spikes (fan denglu zhuang), which were often employed together with land mines as the island's last military defense. Locals often refer to them as the rail fence (guitiao zhai) because many are made from recycled metals of old railroad tracks. Although the sea seems eerily calm, the row of anti-landing spikes imposes a visual barrier, which creates an unresolved spatial tension that separates the island from its surroundings. We hear no sound in the background. And the opening credits emerge from the sea, with the title and the artist's name.

Figure 12. Yao Jui-Chung, The title sequence, Still from *Long Live* (2011).

In the next shot, noises immediately enter the screen. We hear loud noises of the wind and of the waves with an uncontrolled rhythm. With a medium shot, we see waves push against the crumbling metal structures; in the following shot, we see a deserted pillbox with lush vegetation, while the wind violently shakes the tall trees behind. Although the natural sounds from the wind and the waves remain incredibly loud, the image reveals no traces of human activity. A metal sound is suddenly introduced. It resembles the sounds of a moving vehicle, heavy and rusty. We see abandoned tanks on the islands. In just a few shots, the video pieces together a dystopia of war-stricken Kinmen. In the artist's own words, "[there is] not a single

soul in sight on the chilling battlefield." [180]

When a pan shot introduces a super-sized loudspeaker, we begin to hear the air raid siren steadily repeating in the background. In contrast to the unsettling rhythm in the auditory domain, the image prompts an eerie stillness that might be equally discomforting. As we follow the camera to the mouth of the horn, we notice that the loudspeaker in the foreground is juxtaposed with an abandoned tank in the background. In the last frame of the shot, we see the loudspeaker and the tank point to the same direction. The visual parallel is so prominent that the tank's cannon seems to be only a natural extension of the loudspeaker. It creates a visual metaphor that compares the sound-making proprietor to the sonic weaponry. And more than a metaphor, the specific positioning and framing resonate with a territorial claim— "to reclaim the mainland" (fangong dalu) —a familiar propaganda line often heard during Taiwan's martial law.

---

[180] "TCAA | Artist - Yao Jui-Chung," Taiwan Contemporary Art Archive (TCAA), accessed April 12, 2019, http://tcaaarchive.org/artist/4058/.

Figure 13. Yao Jui-Chung, The Kinmen Islands, Still from *Long Live* (2011).

When the image transitions to the broadcast tower, the soundtrack features a voice that is reverberating through the broadcasting towers— "Long Live! Long Live! Long Live!" —a voice that unconditionally salutes the authoritarian governance. As the artist described, "all we hear is 'Wansui (literally ten thousand years)!' repeatedly coming through the most powerful loudspeakers of all psychological [warfare]."[181] We follow the voice to enter the broadcasting tower. As the camera zooms in, we are transitioned to the interior of the Chieh-shou Hall, a former residence of Chiang Kai-shek in Yangmingshan, Taiwan. The name of Chieh-shou Hall translates into "Long Live (Chiang Kai-shek)," which not only resonates with the title of this artwork, but also symbolizes the country's authoritarian past. Despite the transition, what we hear is the same penetrating voice that salutes Chiang Kai-shek, as if the sound carries the

message directly from Taiwan to Kinmen.

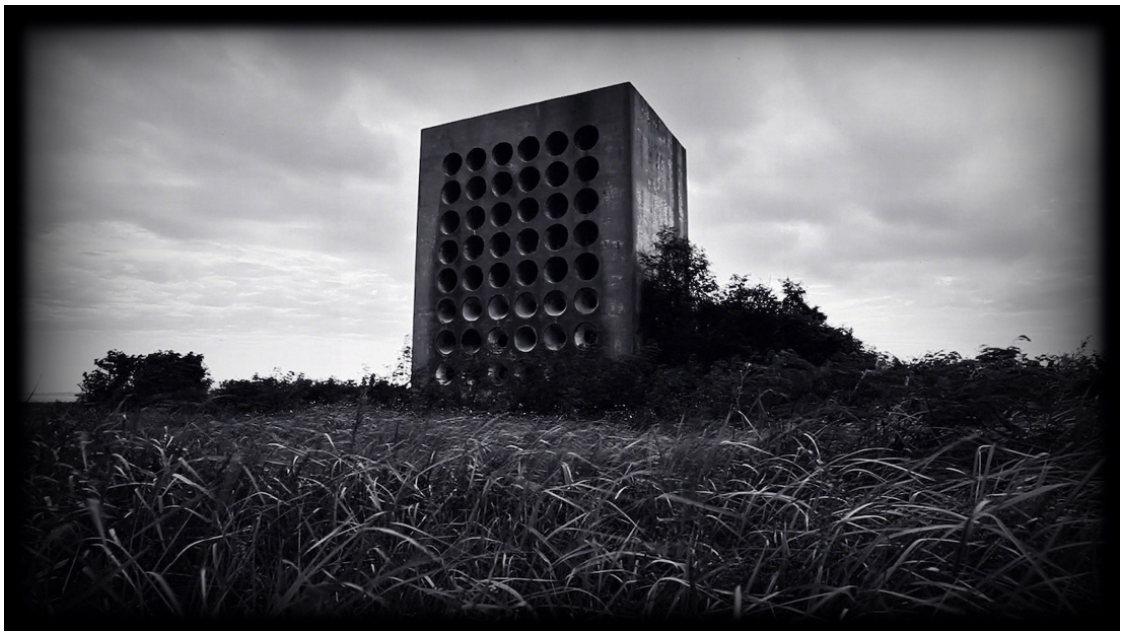


Figure 14. The Beishan Broadcast Station, Still from *Long Live* (2011).

After another cut, we identify the true source of the voice—the artist who is playing a character of dictator. He puts on a military uniform and stands at the center of a derelict auditorium stage. We see the dictator character repeatedly shout aloud "wansui" and each time lift his right arm above his head. Although his voice remains low, sturdy, and far-reaching, his military salute greets an empty floor. As the camera continues to zoom out, we are once again transitioned into the Jinsha Movie Theater in Kinmen. What is being projected on the screen was the performance of the artist inside the Chieh-shou Hall. Like the auditorium, the derelict movie theater is also entirely empty. The long transitional shot was breathtakingly surreal because only a single

[181] "Yao Jui-Chung."

continuous zoom shot reveals an overlay of different places—first from Kinmen to Taiwan, and then back to Kinmen.

While the sound travels across different places from Kinmen to Taiwan, the continuous zoom shot traces the circulation of the sound and locates its physical and metaphorical origin. While the derelict theater, the crumbling structures, and the abandoned tanks are all suggestive of a distant past in history, the recorded sound animates a proximity to the present. While the images are rendered mostly in black and white, which resembles one's fading memories, the sound echoes—it repeatedly reminds us of the ideological operations behind the sound proprietors. In the artist's own words, this eerie sound represents "the propaganda of an eternal empire [that] echoes an eternal repetition of history."[182]

Figure 15. Yao Jui-Chung, Jinsha Theater, Still from *Long Live* (2011).

Indeed, many of Yao Jui-Chung's previous works have thematized ideas about territorial control as well as its relationship to national identity. In his *Territory Takeover* (1994), most famously, the artist visited six locations in Taiwan, where different colonial powers made their first landings in Taiwan—the Dutch, Spanish, Ming Dynasty, Qing Dynasty, Japanese, and Republic of China successively. In it, the artist stripped naked and photographed himself "spraying" like a dog to mark his "territory." A golden urinal is displayed in front of the photograph with a sign that reads "Yao Jui-Chung was here spraying to mark his territory." This piece was a reflection on the rising nativism in the 1990s, as well as their own occupancy of the island. In his *Recover Mainland China – Action* (1996), the artist visited historical landmarks in the Chinese mainland. He photographed himself hopping over the ground to suggest a sense of disconnection between himself and this land called "China." In his *Long March – The Shifted Universe* (2002), the artist revisited the sites of the Chinese Civil War, where he photographed himself in a handstand position. In *The World is for All – China Beyond China* (1997-2000), the artist visited a handful of Chinatowns around the world, where he photographed himself as a potential criminal figure to reflect on land, migration, and colonial mentality.

Unlike his previous work in visual arts, however, *Long Live* centers around sound. In Yao Jui-Chung's *Long Live*, the repetition of sound provides an affordance for the repetition of history. Because the recorded sounds of bombardment, shelling,

---

[182] "Yao Jui-Chung."

siren, or propaganda broadcasting all come from the past, as the legacies of the country's authoritarian past unfold, these recorded sounds again and again return to haunt the country's present. In 2011, Yao Jui-Chung produced this video art piece at a particular historical juncture—at the one hundredth anniversary of the founding of the Republic of China. In the artist statement, Yao Jui-Chung writes:

> It has been one hundred years since the Xinhai Revolution. The Cold War has long ended, and neoliberalism has conquered the globe. In politics, the strongman was discarded by the people and buried in the ashes of history. As totalitarian governments collapsed one after another, and the logic of transnational capitalism was granted the status of a universal value. But what is the everlasting rule in history? What nationalism can exist forever? Today is the one hundredth anniversary of the founding of the Republic of China. Has Taiwan adapted itself to its current situation, or insisted on reviving its old legalism (fatong) or party-state (dangguo) systems? Was Taiwan devoured by all types of ghosts that have returned from history.

In 2020, the artist resurrected the video installation as part of his new exhibition *Republic of Cynic (R.O.C.),* which playfully shares the same abbreviation as the Republic of China. In Yao Jui-Chung's own words, the new exhibition reflected on the waves of social change that he has witnessed in the country for the past few decades, particularly the shifting identities of its people. Nonetheless, territorial control again becomes a central theme in the exhibition. The exhibition building is refashioned as "the Embassy of the Republic of Cynic." And when viewers enter the building, they are greeted by a checkpoint and a person in uniform requesting the viewer's passport.

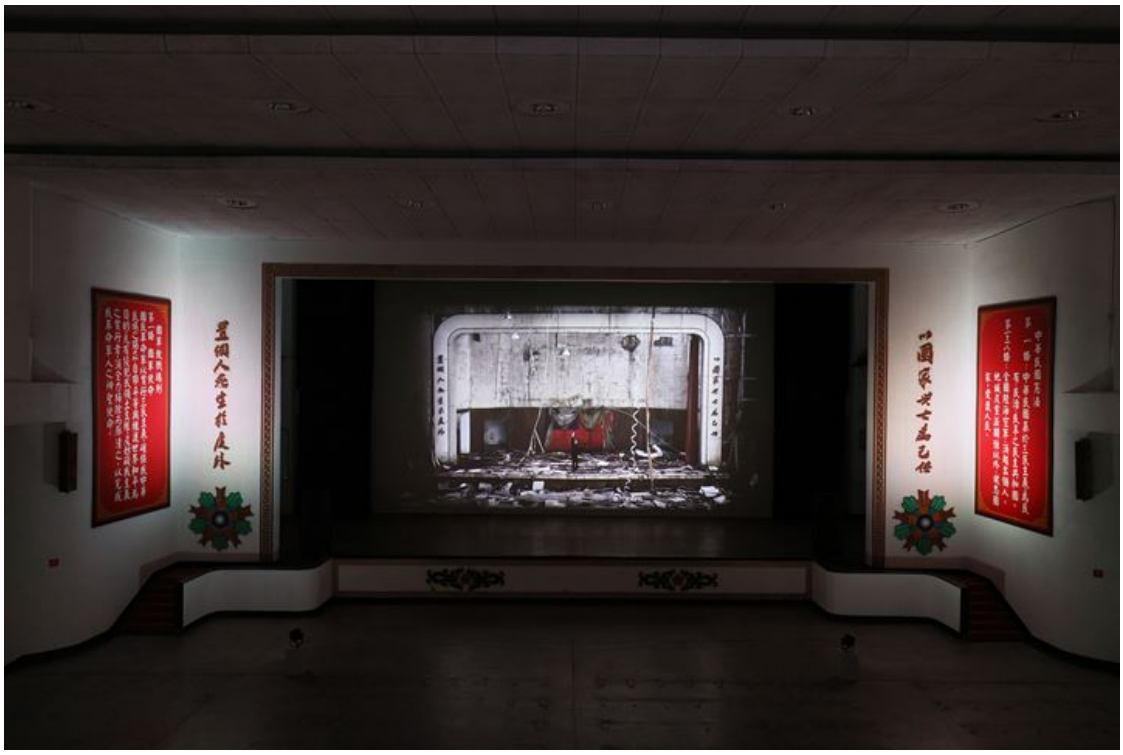


Figure 16. Yao Jui-Chung, Jinsha Theater, Exhibition photo from *the Republic of Cynic (R.O.C.)* (2020).

This new exhibition opened at the former Air Force Command Headquarters in Taipei, where *Long Live* is projected onto a screen at the very center of its auditorium's stage. This new location not only adds to the theme of a returning ghost of authoritarianism, but also bears much personal significance for the artist, who served in Taiwan's air force in the early 1990s. By staging a fictional country "Republic of Cynic" in Taipei, the artist summons the recorded sound to contest the militarization of space and to interrogate a history of unresolved violence.

ACOUSTIC HISTORIOGRAPHY

If Yao Jui-Chung approached sound from traditions of visual arts, Yao Dajuin did it through that of literature. As an early pioneer of new media art in the Sinophone world, Yao Dajuin is often remembered for his contribution to electronic literature in the Sinophone world. With the Taiwanese poet Tsao Jerlian, Yao Dajuin launched "Wonderfully Absurd Temple" (Miao miao miao), one of the first online repositories for avant-garde e-poetry.[183]

As such, *Writing of Sounds of Writing* resists being categorized by any existing genres. Instead, it takes a hybrid form that combines elements from theater, music, literature, and visual art. It draws on a wide range of interdisciplinary avant-garde traditions. In an interview with Li Shunxing, the artist framed his experiment with the recorded sound as a response to *musique concrète*, "where the objet trouvé is the human voice, rather than non-human sounds."[184] Despite its cross-genre orientation, however, many critics regard it as a piece of poetic work.[185] Cosima Bruno calls it a "long poem," situating this recording within the history of Taiwanese experimental literature. In Bruno's analysis, this recording piece is contextualized in relation to other prominent literary genres in Taiwan including "sound poetry" (*shengyin shi*), "language art" (*yuyan yishu*), and "text-sound art" (*wenben shengyin yishu*).[186] His

---

[183] Michel Hockx, *Internet Literature in China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).
[184] Cosima Bruno, "Breaking Language Down: Taiwan Sound Poetry and Its Ways of Saying," *Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies* 43, no. 2 (September 2017): 46.
[185] In fact, *Cinnabar Red Drizzle* is often labeled as a work of electroacoustic music. See, for example, Robert J. Gluck, "Free Sound Within Culturally Specific Practice," in *International Computer Music Conference Proceedings*, 2005.
[186] Bruno, "Breaking Language Down," 33.

observation echoes with the artist's own statement, as the artist often described this work as an exploration into the potential intersections between literature and sound. In fact, this recording is catalogued in an experimental album entitled *Cinnabar Red Drizzle* (*Danhong de Xiyu*), a collaboration between Yao Dajuin and the Taiwanese poet Tsao Jerlian. While listening to the album, we may find a familiar pattern through which the poetic element is deliberately integrated into the sound. In many tracks from the album, Tsao recites classical poems, novelistic narratives, and operatic phrases. In the background, Yao employs musical notes and sound effects to match Tsao's poetic lines. In its original conception as a poetic work, *Writing of Sounds of Writing* therefore promised to enact writing with sound.

Moreover, *Writing of Sounds of Writing* constructs a meta-narrative on the act of writing. In this playful title, the word "sound" denotes both "the sounds of writing" and "the writing of sounds." On the one hand, writing creates sounds. In this recording piece, we are presented with a wide range of recorded sounds that are derived from the practice of writing—the clattering sound of a computer keyboard, the sketching sound of a pencil on paper, or the tapping sound of stone rubbing in order to retrieve ancient calligraphies. These sounds are carefully curated to emphasize writing as a laborious and material practice. Writing sounds. On the other hand, however, sounding is a form of writing. In other words, the artist is not merely fascinated by the materiality of sounds, but also interested in writing as a thematic crux for his musical composition. In this recording piece, we hear an interview with an unknown writer, a friendly conversation on the purpose of writing, as well as the cross-strait phone call where two individuals argue about writing Chinese characters. In fact, this recording piece

heavily focuses on the sounds of language as well as human voice as a textual medium. And its episodic structure is also employed to build up a narrative on writing. In other words, the artist has always framed his experimental recording as a piece of writing. Sound writes.

In another interview, the artist elaborated on his narrative strategy.

> In regard to the artistic reinvention of the concrete "sound object," there are many possibilities other than sampling and representation. For example, each fragment of the recorded sound carries its own temporal-spatial reality. Let us call it the local narrative. But if you put these recorded sounds under a larger framework, they constitute a more global narrative that is operating at a different level. In other words, if there are two pieces of sound that are properly juxtaposed with each other, there will be a third meaning that is generated through this process.[187]

In the previous part of this interview, Yao Dajuin distances himself from the practice of *musique concrète*, where the recorded sound is often appreciated for its pure phenomenological presence, isolated from its source and production. Here, the artist again refutes the notion of "sound object" from *musique concrète*; he refutes the idea that the source of sound should be intentionally obscured for aesthetic pleasure. Instead, he is interested in "the temporal-spatial reality" of the recorded sound, in other words, the temporal-spatial context from which these sounds originally emerged. By retrieving these temporal-spatial realities, however, the local narrative can be re-constructed and re-contextualized in the artwork. And the artist is drawn to this generative process through which the recorded sound creates new meaningful

connections between temporal-spatial realities. For Yao Dajuin, this generative process is writing. When he is asked to define his practice with the recorded sound, he prefers the term "phono-graphy," over "field recording" or "experimental recording," because the term "phonography" subscribes to the idea that the recorded sound is a form of text and should be situated in its context. As a form of writing, the recorded sound documents historical happenings. It transcribes socio-political histories into a readable text. It reminds us about the audible past. "Phonography […] is one of the areas where Chinese sound art really shines," says Yao Dajuin, "perhaps unlike anywhere else in the world."[188]

With this knowledge in mind, we begin to listen to *Writing of Sounds of Writing*, the same way as we listen to a story, a narrative, and an audible history. When the telephone conversation begins, we first hear a female voice. With a subtle Taiwanese accent, she tries to confirm an address for postage. "—Hello, it doesn't matter if I use traditional or simplified Chinese characters for the word 'deng,' does it? Can I use traditional characters?" Her voice is gentle and curious. "— OK. OK." a man answers it with impatience. He is presumably someone who works at a post-office. The woman then asks, "— Right, tell me. How do you write the character wei?" "— Eh, oh, *wei* as in *weixin*, the one with a radical thread (*jiaosi pang*); the radical thread on the left, and the character like *jia* on the right," the man murmurs, half-heartedly breaking down the character for her.

---

[187] Dajuin Yao, "Duihua Dajuin [In Conversation with Dajuin]," *China the Sonic Avant-Garde*, September 1, 2005, 8, https://monoskop.org/images/f/f2/China_the_Sonic_Avant-Garde_1_2005.pdf.
[188] Yao, "Revolutions Per Minute."

Now the woman is confused either by the man's accent or by the interference of the audio signal, and more questions follow: "— What radical?" "— What *laosi*?" "— Is this *rao* as in the word *furao*, as wealth?" "— Is this fang as in the word *fangzhi*, as textile?" Only a few seconds later, she repeats the same question "— How do you write the character *wei*?" The man tries other ways to break down the character using a different set of combinations. Although the address is simply about two lines and both speak Mandarin perfectly, it is clear that the woman struggles to communicate. Towards the end of the conversation, the man remains silent. And a segment of the woman reading out aloud the address is looped to a strange and even alienating effect, "—Weizhou Street, Kuiwen District, Weifang City, Shandong Province, the People's Republic of China," she repeats it again and again. "— I can't hear you over the phone," and this becomes the last words that we hear from her. Her voice is then muffled by the loud noise in the background, the same explosive sound that opens this article.

Listening to the actual words of the conversation, we realize that the spatial tension unfolds itself once again. First and foremost, the exchange between the two speakers reflects on the communication channel itself, or the lack thereof. Although the Three Links (*santong*) proposal to open postage, transportation, and trade (*tongyou*, *tonghang*, and *tongshang*) between China and Taiwan was passed in 1979, official direct postage was not an option before 2008. Between 1998 and 1989, only unofficial postage between China and Taiwan was allowed to operate, and between 1989 and 2008, official postage had to go through a third place. Therefore, although postage and telephone are meant to bridge the physical separation between the two

societies, its dysfunction here rather suggests an immeasurable distance, a frustrating meander through the bureaucratic machine. This communication difficulty then exemplifies a deeply rooted mistrust between the two societies. When the woman asks if traditional characters are acceptable for an address, she is not asking about the legibility of her writing, but rather its legitimacy; she wants to know if the communication channel is truly open. As such, a seemingly innocent phone call has crystalized a capacious antagonism residing in the space between the two societies.

The use of language is also marked to demarcate spatial differences. Although both speakers clearly communicate in the same language—Mandarin Chinese—their thoughts and verbal expressions are heavily mediated by separate writing and printing systems, or what Walter J. Ong characterizes as "secondary orality."[189] Since the production of speech succeeds from, relies on, and coexists with writing, miscommunication arrives when verbal expressions register two separate writing and printing systems as well as the conflicting ideologies behind them. As the woman continues to repeat her question—how to write the words using simplified characters—we know that part of her struggle comes from a painstaking renegotiation between speech and writing, listening and understanding, orality and print, presence and absence. She wants to know if the postal system on the other side would authorize her message, even though that other side is a place where she does not belong.

As the artist suggests, his artistic experiment with the Chinese language often revolves around its regional discrepancies.

---

[189] See Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, Orality and Literary (New York: Routledge, 2012).

> And acoustically speaking, for artists using language as sound samples for signal processing, the Chinese language, being tonal (words often share the same sound and are differentiable only through pitch variations) and with so many dialects and regional variations, offers a tremendously rich resource for all types of experimentation in digital signal processing and modulation.[190]

Fascinated by the rich acoustic potential of the Chinese language, the artist invites us to read into the acoustic variations as a mark of regional differences. In *Writing of Sounds of Writing*, as soon as the woman's voice is heard, her Taiwanese accent immediately registers a regional difference, long before her words are understood. The specific ways in which she pronounces a word, and the particular stress and pitch that she puts on it, have placed her on one side of the Taiwan Strait. Rather than a visible geographical border, the audible difference in her voice operates as a self-imposed border delimited by her own positionality. When the explosive sound is heard along with her disappearing voice, the interaction between the two sources of sound then exposes her vulnerability at the forefront of this sonic warfare.

As it promised, *Writing of Sounds of Writing* writes with sound. It transcribes an acoustic phenomenon into a semiotic problematic. Beneath its mobilization of the sonic affect, in Goodman's sense, there also exists a deeper fascination with textuality. As such, when commemorating the ten years of sound art in China, instead of emphasizing the medium-specificity of sound, Yao Dajuin unexpectedly diverted to a discussion on text, writing, and literature. "Chinese culture is above all a culture of text, writing, and literature," he adds, "language has always been the core of Chinese

---

[190] Yao, "Revolutions Per Minute."

history."[191] Rather than thinking of the recorded sound as a medium for communication in and of itself, the artist points to a process of "putting into words," a process of writing, and a process of mediation.[192] Understood in this way, the recorded sound is granted the ability to write, to mark differences in space.

WARFARE NOISE

What constitutes the warfare noise? The sounds of bombardment, shelling, siren, and propaganda broadcasting. Whenever they are heard along the Taiwan Strait, they not only commemorate the lost lives in the past wars, but also mark the territorial tension between political ideologies. In these sonic arts, the recorded sound is not merely a medium for communication, but rather a form of territorial demarcation. As we hear the spatial antagonism, we are also reminded of its violent histories. As Brandon LaBelle suggests, the territorialization of sound becomes "a political process" at the moment of "the disintegration and reconfiguration of space."[193]

---

[191] Yao.

[192] In *Sound Objects*, James A. Steintrager and Rey Chow observed the ways in which image is mediated through text in the discourse of "theory." They wrote, "in their collective rebellion against phenomenology, structuralist and post-structuralist thinkers from Roland Barthes to Paul de Man countered with symbolic or semiotic systems and with an instance on the text." By attending to the theoretical legacy of "sound object," however, Steintrager and Chow also identified a phenomenological commitment in *musique concrète* that is not mediated through textual, symbolic, or semiotic systems. In a similar fashion, Yao Dajuin's emphasis on writing also shares the same sentiments against *musique concrète*. See James A. Steintrager and Rey Chow, "Sound Object: An Introduction," in *Sound Objects*, ed. James A. Steintrager and Rey Chow (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), 2.

[193] Brandon LaBelle, *Acoustic Territories: Sound Culture and Everyday Life* (New York: Continuum, 2010), xxiii–xxiv.

Nonetheless, the recorded sound from the past also prompts a historiography that interrogates the unresolved violence from territorial disputes. It concerns not only how histories and cultural memories are authentically archived in the form of sound waves, but more importantly when they will be listened to again, who will listen to them, and how they will be remembered. From the sounds of bombardment, shelling, siren, and propaganda broadcasting during the First and Second Taiwan Strait Crisis in the 1950s to the sounds of missile test during the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis in 1996, the sounds in these sonic arts constantly return to the present, reminding us of the uncertain future of the cross-strait entanglement. These recorded sounds haunt us from the past.

The most recent iteration of the sonic warfare came in August 2018, when four artists returned to the islands at the 60th anniversary of the Beishan Broadcast Station. Hsia-Fei Chang, Wang Fu-Jui, Ada Kai-Ting Yang, and Augustin Maurs reactivated the surviving military-grade sound system. Combining live performance and audio recording, these four artists repurposed the propaganda sound machine into an art installation. They named their performing piece *Sonic Territories* (2018), a title that symbolizes the territorial conquest of sound.[194] In each of the four segments, the artists explored the ways in which sound militarizes the space. Yang recruited friends from Taiwan to perform songs that were once banned during Taiwan's martial law;

---

[194] See Vivienne Chow, "Beishan Broadcast Wall: Taiwan's Eerie Sonic Weapon," BBC: The British Broadcasting Corporation, accessed April 12, 2019, http://www.bbc.com/culture/story/20180924-beishan-broadcast-wall-taiwans-eerie-sonic-weapon.; Javier Pes, "Taiwan's Supersized Loudspeakers Once Broadcast Anti-Communist Propaganda to China. Now, They're the Island's Newest Sound Art

Chang sang into the microphone of the broadcast tower, including the songs that were popularized by Teressa Teng; Wang used the broadcast tower to transmit a musical number that was converted from a piece of Morse code; Maurs invited the local Kinmen County Choir to come to the broadcasting room to sing quotes about silence. As the broadcast tower sends out new sounds, they also remind a local resident and historical Ling Ma-teng of the past. "They were loud as thunders," says Ling. "We played music, non-stop music and it became noise. It caused us mental exhaustion." In sonic warfare, silence is a luxury. As the artists brought back the noises from the past, they also brought back memories of war.

Figure 17. Wang Fu-jui, Inside the Beishan Broadcast Station, Photo from *Sonic*

Installation," Artnet News, August 15, 2018, https://news.artnet.com/art-world/taiwan-

Territory (2018).

In the 1990s, the cross-strait relationship took a dramatic turn. Yet against the background of heightened political antagonism, ironically, economic integration also accelerated. As China's economic power continued to grow, so did the economic interdependence of Taiwan on China. In this new context, Kinmen was transformed from a military outpost for Taiwan to a tourist destination for China. Today, the history of sonic warfare in Kinmen has been largely refashioned for its tourist industry.

> But ask locals, and they say the troop withdrawal in the 1990s gutted the economy. Restaurants serving roast chicken and fiery sorghum liquor failed. Laundromats closed. There were no real estate projects to speak of. But tourism was a way out. To attract ever-growing numbers of mainland visitors, Kinmen shopkeepers last year hung the Communist Chinese flags along an entire street, sparking outrage across Taiwan.

As Steve Goodman suggests, sonic warfare at its core is a technology of control. It resembles many other media technologies, which may find their origins from the military, but then blended into the everyday. Goodman warns that the military-entertainment complex, which has been powered by the new global order of neoliberalism since the 1990s, has disseminated and repurposed military technologies.

Today, when the future of the Taiwan Strait remains uncertain, acoustic historiography becomes an ethical undertaking, even though the territorial nature of sound is often obscured by its fleeting appearance and durational existence. Border is

---

kinmen-island-sonic-territories-1332893.

not merely a visual phenomenon, nor are territorial conquest and the violence that comes along with it. As such, recording the sounds from the border is not only a recognition of its violent history, but also an understanding of the conflicting socio-political orders that continue to inhabit this space. In other words, to phonograph the borders is also to undertake an ethical and political mission. It transcribes the recorded sound into a readable history and prompts a remembrance of our audible past.

In other words, all sounds have potential for textuality. Much as "sound art" constitutes a heterogenous field of practices, this fascination with sound-in-itself does not suffice to explicate all sounds in their artistic contexts. As Seth Kim-Cohen argues, sonic arts should move beyond the perception of materiality, and instead focus more on "the textual and inter-textual nature of sound."[195] Because the history of sound art has always been so intertwined with conceptualism, argues Kim-Cohen, we should never ignore sound's "expanded situation" and "uncontainable textuality." As such, Kim-Cohen advocates for a "non-cochlear" sound art, a term that is developed from Marcel Duchamp's "non-retinal" visual art, as Kim-Cohen tries to connect "sonic arts to broader textual, conceptual, social, and political concerns."[196] In this chapter, the two artists approached sound from two very different disciplinary traditions—visual arts for Yao Jui-Chung and literature for Yao Dajuin. And their sounds also come from a wide range of sources—from natural to man-made and even linguistic. Despite these differences, the artists have mobilized these sounds in similar ways to tell stories about space. In the next chapter, I further elaborate on this intermedial potential of

---

[195] Lavender, "Objects, Orientations and Interferences."
[196] Kim-Cohen, *In the Blink of an Ear*, xvii.

recorded sound.

CHAPTER 4 LETTRISTIC NOISE

INTERMEDIAL POETICS AFTER THE END OF BOOKS

> Think about it, this program has been around for who knows how many generations; it came to me as a hindsight, yet with a flash of inspiration. At the time, I had been listening to all these great noise and low-frequency acoustic art CDs, and wondering what would result if that concept were applied to words, and that was when I came across this translation program. I dumped a bunch of stuff into the program—Shakespeare, Poe, Pushkin—to translate into Chinese it set my head whirling: Yes, this must be the word *noise* I've been looking for! Why not do a poetry volume filled with *lettristic noise*?[197]
>
> —Hsia Yü, *Pink Noise*

> In an intermedium, on the other hand, there is a conceptual fusion. Concrete and some of the other visual poetries are intermedial; they lie between literature and visual art, and there is fusion between these so that we cannot deal with just one of their origins but must deal with the work as both visual and literary art. An art song has a text and music; it is a mixed medium. But sound poetry has music penetrating to the very core of the poem's being, or literature at the marrow of the heard experience; it is an intermedium.[198]
>
> Dick Higgins, *Horizons, the Poetics and Theory of the Intermedia*

Pink Noise (2007) is a bilingual poetry collection composed of found texts in English and machine-translated texts in Chinese.[199] It was published by the Taiwanese poet and lyricist Hsia Yü in 2007. And since its initial appearance, its unusual look has

---

[197] Yu Hsia, *Pink Noise* (Taipei: Garden City, 2007).
[198] Dick Higgins, *Horizons, the Poetics and Theory of the Intermedia*, Poetics of the New (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984), 19.

invoked much curiosity. The poetic texts are printed on transparent sheets of celluloid film, which are then bound together and tucked inside a translucent plastic slipcase. As the pink and black texts lay on top of each other, they cast a cloud of shades of colors to the book's transparent case. On top, a plastic book band wraps the book. On each side of the book band, we read a bilingual epigraph in bold letters. "I've always wanted to make a transparent book," writes the poet, "and after I had finished composing the 33 poems gathered here, I knew the time had come to make this book of poetry filled with 'written noise.'" With these puzzling words, the poet continues to entice us to unpack the mysteries of the book.

But how do you begin to read this book? You strip off the book band. You take out the book from the slipcase. You open the book cover. You press your finger against the book spine and turn the tightly bound pages. Regarding the transparent sheets, you put your palm under each page to foreground the printed words. And then, you begin to read the words, meanwhile processing the meanings of these contrived sentences and sometimes even nonsensical phrases. You continue to meditate on these poetic lines, even though you are—more often than not—entirely confused by their meanings. Yet this "reading" experience begins to feel more haptic, when you touch the cold and smooth plastic surface. As you continue to read the book, you may realize its poetic license transcends the flattened textual surface. This book of poetry transforms itself into a unique artifact that lies between different artforms and media. It falls between literature, printmaking, sculpture, and installation. Therefore, the question remains: Is *Pink Noise* still a book? Is *Pink Noise* supposed to be read as a

---

[199] Hsia, *Pink Noise*.

book?

Figure 18. Hsia Yü, *Pink Noise* (2007).

In everyday language, the word "book" is almost synonymous with the print medium. Although books today already come in a variety of shapes and forms, our ideas about books are often associated with the printed words that are neatly placed inside an often palm-sized object. Nonetheless, that is not what a book is, as "the book" is neither printmaking nor prints, neither a medium nor its textual content. In recent decades, the definition of "book" has become increasingly elusive. From Johanna Drucker's "artist's book" to Garrett Stewart's "bookwork" and Jessica Pressman's "bookishness," recent scholarship in literary studies and beyond also began to investigate the entangled relationships between literature, book, print, art, and

craft.[200] As these scholars have collectively shown—in various historical and cultural contexts—that not only should books never be reduced to their textual content, they also stand alone as complex material artifacts that embody a wide range of cultural and aesthetic practices. In other words, books are not merely a textual medium for communication, or a transparent material container that stores, transmits, and processes information. Because bookmaking involves cultural and aesthetic endeavors, reading a book is inherently different from comprehending a text.

This is, however, not to simply repeat Marshall McLuhan's famous line that "the medium is the message." The "book" in question ceases to be a medium, as I argue, but instead exists between mediums. In this light, I consider "interface" as one productive framework to understand the material surface of the literary text, as well as the important ways in which this "interface" shapes our reading practices. In media theory, interface has been conceptualized as the mediation between different mediatic forces and agencies. As Alexander R. Galloway argues, "interface" becomes "the point of transition between different mediatic layers within any nested system" or "generative frictions between two formats."[201] If "interface" can be understood as the threshold where one medium interacts with another, then *Pink Noise* is such an instance. Through its material presence as a book, *Pink Noise* lends it itself to an interface between literature and art, between "mediatic layers." On the one hand, this

---

[200] Jessica Pressman, *Bookishness: Loving Books in a Digital Age.* (New York City: Columbia University Press, 2020); Garrett Stewart, *Bookwork: Medium to Object to Concept to Art* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2011); Johanna Drucker, *The Century of Artists' Books* (New York City: Granary Books, 1995).
[201] Alexander R. Galloway, "The Unworkable Interface," *New Literary History* 39, no. 4 (2009): 936, https://doi.org/10.1353/nlh.0.0062.

book-art fusion represents the material remains of the print culture. On the other hand, however, with its purposeful experiment with machine translation, *Pink Noise* also operates as an art installation, or a piece of conceptual art that speculates about digital culture. In short, published at the beginning of the twenty-first century, *Pink Noise* is more than another "postmodern" poetic text. Instead, it is a cultural artifact that indexes the shifting relationships among cultural practices and the media environment. *Pink Noise* came out at a time when digital publishing began to disrupt the production and consumption of Chinese literature, and when "the death of book" discourse coincided with the techno-cultural imaginations about information.[202]

In this chapter, I borrow Dick Higgins' term "intermedium" or "intermedia" to analyze *Pink Noise*. I argue that *Pink Noise* is a work of intermedia in that it falls between the seemingly disparate traditions of literature and art (more specifically the installation "book arts"), yet still manages to interweave these strands into its own making. As such, my analysis situates *Pink Noise* between the worlds of art and literature. And it is through this "interface" that a book such as this is thrown into an intermedial space between printmaking, sculpture, installation, and poetry. In what follows, I echo N. Katherine Hayles' advocacy to adopt a comparative framework in examining the textual media.[203] I insist that "books" are not merely a medium for the literary text, but also "an intermedial interface" that exposes the dynamic interactions between old and new media, between the intertwined histories of experimental art and

---

[202] Xiao Liu, *Information Fantasies: Precarious Mediation in Postsocialist China* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019).

literature.

Indeed, *Pink Noise* has been analyzed extensively, but almost exclusively, in the context of experimental literature. However, its affinity to the contemporary art world was largely overlooked. In fact, around the turn of the twenty-first century, numerous artists in the Chinese-speaking world became fascinated with the intermedial potential of the book form. In the first section, I demonstrate the ways in which a heterogenous field of book arts—from Xu Bing and Huang Yong Ping to Wang Jin and Xie Xiaoze—constituted an important historical backdrop against which *Pink Noise* made its first appearance. Meanwhile, the publication of *Pink Noise* also coincided with the e-book revolution in the Chinese publishing industry. In the second part, I focus on Chu Bong-Foo's invention of *zhongwen dianshu* (Chinese E-book Reader). I investigate how Chinese e-readers helped to further destabilize the book form, thus not only transforming literary production, but also reimagining books in the age of information. Lastly, I conclude with my own reading of *Pink Noise* as a work of intermedia, one that has the installation, sculptural, and even acoustic art penetrating to the very core of its poetry's being. It is in this critical context that "noise" becomes a figure not only for the material remains of books, but also for books' corporeal presence in the digital age.

WANG JIN'S TRANSPARENT BOOKS

---

[203] Katherine Hayles and Jessica Pressman, eds., *Comparative Textual Media: Transforming the Humanities in the Postprint Era*, Electronic Mediations, Volume 42

Hsia Yü is not an obscure poet. Before the publication of *Pink Noise*, her popularity had extended well beyond Taipei's poetry circle. As Joyelle McSweeney once noted, "Hsia Yü's deadpan, nimble poetry is increasingly anthologized here in America," and thanks to committed translators such as Steve Bradbury, her poetic works may already be "consumed in large quantities."[204] Due to Hsia's literary fame, *Pink Noise* has been widely discussed in literary studies. As early as in 2008, Michelle Yeh proposed to consider *Pink Noise* as "a Poetics of Noise." Yeh situated Hsia's poetic intervention within the history of Chinese Modern Poetry. Yeh argued that the figure of noise has best exemplified Hsia's ambition to "push the boundaries of established modes of signification," one that is also found throughout China's New Poetry Movement as well as vernacular language reforms.[205] Yet more recently, literary scholars have continued to provide more sophisticated readings of *Pink Noise*. Although most published scholarship commented on the book's unusual design, their discussions often centered around its impact on language. And when scholars addressed the book as an art object, they also focused on its semiotic implications. While provocative questions on language, culture, and translation have been carefully examined in this previous scholarship, *Pink Noise* was often conceptualized as an interesting "text," but rarely contemplated as an intriguing "book."

In *The Century of Artists' Books,* Johanna Drucker identifies a unique art genre—what she calls "the artist's book"—which dwells upon the ideas and forms of

---

(Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).
[204] Joyelle McSweeney, "Pink Noise (Review)," *Constant Critic* (blog), accessed March 9, 2020, http://constantcritic.com/joyelle_mcsweeney/pink-noise/.

books throughout the twentieth century. Despite its highly elusive definition, the artist's book according to Drucker "integrates the formal means of its realization and production with its thematic or aesthetic issues." It is in a highly heterogenous field of practices that these artworks are "almost always at least self-conscious about the structure and meaning of the book as a form."[206] This self-conscious bookmaking practice was so prevalent throughout the twentieth century, as Drucker argues, "it would be hard to find an art movement in the 20th century which does not have some component of the artist's book attached to it."[207] More interestingly, however, Drucker borrows Higgins's notion of "intermedia" to explain the artist's book. She observes that books have served to fill the space of artistic expressions where traditional wall pieces, performances, or sculpture were not able to fully perform. In agreement with Higgins, Drucker contends that "the artist's book" operates as a form of intermedia, one that combines "all of these modes of art in a characteristically new way."[208]

Building upon Drucker's work, Garrett Stewart examines the metamorphosis of the book form particularly in the contemporary art world. In *Bookwork: Medium to Object to Concept to Art*, Stewart argues that the "bookwork" has experienced a series

---

[205] Michelle Yeh, "Toward a Poetics of Noise: From Hu Shi to Hsia Yü," *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)* 30 (2008): 173.
[206] Drucker, *Artists' Books*, 2.
[207] Drucker claims that, "A path could (and will, in a later section) be traced which would include Expressionism, Surrealism in Western and Eastern Europe, Dada in Europe and the United States, as well as post-war movements such as Lettrism, Fluxus, Pop art, Conceptualism, Minimalism, the Women's Art Movement, and Postmodernism to the present mainstream artworld concern with multiculturalism and identity politics." See Drucker, 8.
[208] Drucker, 9.

of transformations—from a communicational medium to a material object, and eventually to an artistic conception. In tracing the historical developments of conceptual art, Stewart argues that "the book-work—as material object—once denied its mediating purpose as verbal text, can only be studied for the bookwork—as conceptual labor—it performs."[209] Although his study operates at the elision of literary reading, Stewart also insists that his bookwork still constitutes a poetics—"But without a line of poetry or prose being necessarily visible, the book object […] has also, as suggested, its own poetics, where inferences come to formulation—and often specific phrasing—in the head of the gazing spectator. This is a poetics—or a volumetrics—of displaced text."[210]

My ideas about *Pink Noise*'s "intermedial poetics" derive from this tradition. From Johanna Drucker's "artist's book" to Garrett Stewart's "bookwork," we have witnessed the increasingly blurred distinctions between book, art, and literature in the past few decades, as the book form has been self-consciously employed in more and more artworks. We are constantly reminded that the book form can be an independent actor, even when devoid of any textual content, in order to communicate aesthetic and cultural ideas. Although there is no doubt that *Pink Noise* is a work of poetry, due to its unorthodox design, its readers should not underestimate its artistic engagement. When its textual content is concealed by the excessive packaging, its translucent body is always exposed to the viewer. Without reading the text, therefore, we may characterize *Pink Noise* as an artist's book, a bookwork, or simply a transparent book

---

[209] Stewart, *Bookwork*, xiii.
[210] Stewart, xviii.

that lies in a continuous field of book-arts.

As a transparent book, *Pink Noise* finds its predecessors in the contemporary art scene. In the early 1990s, Katharine Meynell and Susan Johanknecht, two London-based artists published a transparent art book entitled *Emissions* (1992). In addition to the printed text, the book encapsulated a series of material objects—plastic bags, hair, wire, wax, and photographic transparencies—to explore ideas about bodily emissions.[211] In the United States, the Florida-based book artist Claire Jeanine Satin has also been working with transparent art books for over three decades. In her bookwork *Pentimento: Seeing Language* (2017), for example, transparent pages are used to invoke ideas about interpenetration, transparency and indeterminacy. With the printed image of the head, the hand, the eye and the heart, as well as the printed words, this artwork explores ideas about language and transmission. In those cases, the transparent materials are central to the artwork because they provide a perspective to see through the book, quite literally, in order to open up a space for reflecting on the medium. Like *Pink Noise*, these book arts emphasize the act of reading as a bodily engagement, and in doing so, the transparent books become sculptural.

Nonetheless, it would be naïve for us to assume that such a practice is only limited to an Anglophone tradition of the artist's book. In 1998, the Chinese artist Wang Jin produced ten books that also consisted of plastic transparencies. Wang printed the stele rubbings of Zhang Qian's calligraphy onto the plastic sheets, bound

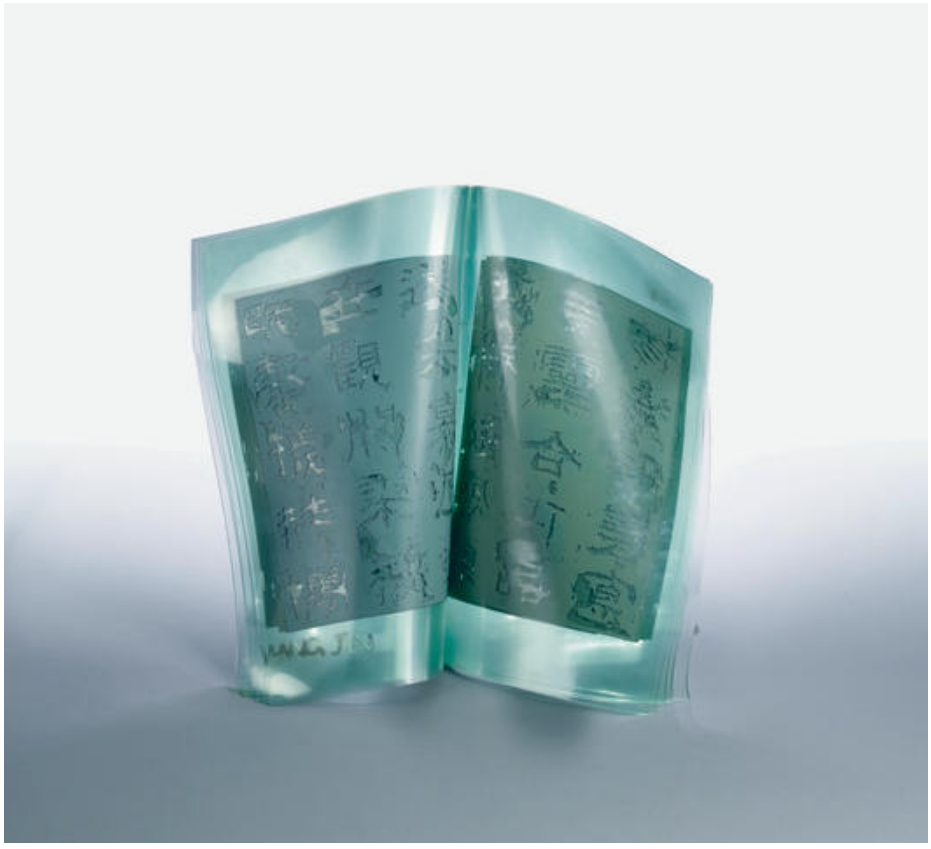
---

[211] Anna Trethewey, "A Study of Book Arts; Form as Integral to Content," *How2* 2, no. 4 (2006), https://www.asu.edu/pipercwcenter/how2journal/archive/online_archive/v2_4_2006/current/bookarts/trethewey.html.

them together, and made ten transparent books. The artist then installed these ten books in the streets of Fukuoka, Japan. Entitled as *New Ancient—Stele of Zhang Qian* (1998), this work has exemplified the increasingly blurred boundaries between art and book. On the one hand, this work is intended to be a public installation. These ten transparent books were originally displayed in public space across the city of Fukuoka—in front of a bookstore, a library, or even a pushcart. And after the exhibition, when these installations were taken down from the site, these transparent books were purchased by private art collectors. On the other hand, however, these installations continue to remind the viewers of its book identity. Despite the plastic component, these books resemble traditional paper books in size and dimension. Moreover, the artist almost always addressed his artistic creation as "my book" rather than "my artwork."

As its title suggests, *New Ancient* explores the entanglement of time, and of the old and the new mediums. On the one hand, this work exhibits a monumentality of the ancient. Its viewers are reminded of not only the ancient texts from the Stele of Zhang Qian, but also the bookmaking techniques that reproduced these printed images. The stone rubbing technique—which involves rubbing hard on the paper over a stone stele with pigment—has been used in China for centuries to retrieve calligraphies. In making his transparent books, the artist uses the same technique. Because the stele rubbing captures rough edges, patches, and cracks on the stone's surface, the viewers are constantly reminded of the book's material vulnerability (despite the fact that almost two thousand years have passed). On the other hand, the plastic surface gives the book a glossy and more contemporary look. Its plastic surface, made from

polyvinyl chloride (PVC) materials, laminates the stele rubbings and encapsulates a piece of bookmaking history. Since the plastic is a more durable material, it preserves the book in its ancient form (while also becoming a book in and of itself). By mixing both the ancient and the new ways of bookmaking, Wang demonstrates a continuous evolution of book forms. The artist shows that the book is a resilient cultural form. As Wang puts it, "Books are also extremely stubborn. Even if you don't read them, they are still there, challenging you."[212]



[212] Hung Wu, *Shu: Reinventing Books in Contemporary Chinese Art*, ed. Jung May Lee Barrett (Exhibition Shu: Reinventing Books in Contemporary Chinese Art, New York, NY: China Institute Gallery, China Institute, 2006), 73.

Figure 19. Wang Jin, *New Ancient—Stele of Zhang Qian* (1998).

In narrating the history of books, the use of transparencies in the contemporary art world becomes an important aesthetic strategy. When books are turned transparent, the printed words and images become unreadable. While traditional books are made to communicate information, these transparent books are made not to communicate. In this light, this transparency then becomes, to use N. Katherine Hayles' words, a "material metaphor."[213] It becomes a metaphor for the "transparency" of the print medium. As these transparencies foreground the material substrate of the book, they also come to problematize the ideas about the book as a transparent carrier. In the

artist statement, Wang also emphasized the transparency of the medium.

> The meaning of the work is located in the quantity of books on exhibit, but rather lies in the transparency of the medium. When light passes through the book, one can see from the front cover to the back. Some parts of the book are entirely transparent. This is due to holes in the original stele rubbings where pieces have worn away or broke off. The making of a traditionally bound book with PVC makes apparent the visual connections between the front and back sides of each page. You get a sense of its layering and are given a sense of perspective. Unlike other books where you can only see the content of a page one at a time, here you can feel the second, third, fourth pages. There is an impression of movement in this book. You feel like you can see, ever indistinctly, the layering and depth of these pages.[214]

Indeed, transparency lies at the center of his artwork. As the artist suggests, it provides a unique perspective for its readers to engage with the book. It allows the readers to see through multiple pages simultaneously in order to experience its layering, depth, and even movement. The transparent books are no longer bound to the flattened textual surface. Instead, they invite the viewers to feel its corporeal presence in space. While the artist insists on calling this installation piece a work of book, he does not expect the audience to read this book only in its textual form. As such, the transparent books provide the book form for us to re-imagine book not as a medium that is defined by the printing press, but forms that are more elusive yet enduring.

Wang Jin's interest in book's material transparency is shared by Xie Xiaoze, another renowned Chinese artist who has devoted his entire career to books. In *Transience* (2011), a single channel video installation of mixed media, the artist

---

[213] Katherine Hayles, "Material Metaphors, Technotexts, and Media-Specific Analysis," in *Writing Machines* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2002), 18–33.
[214] Wu, *Shu*, 72.

projected translucent images of books onto a stack of paper books. In this twelve-minute video, numerous books gracefully fly through the screen in slow motion. Some books are tossed upwards and then pulled back down, whereas other books enter the screen from one side and quickly slide to the other side. Some books slowly disintegrate in the air, whereas other books remain intact. Some books are protected by cloth covers, whereas other books are torn into pieces. Some books are flipped over in flight, whereas other books clash into each other. Although these books come in different shapes and it is almost impossible to read all the titles, their movement follows the same repetitive and even hypnotic pattern. In addition, these shots are dimly lit, and throughout its entire duration, there is only one source of directional lighting coming from the bottom. This lighting illuminates all flying pages, as they are not only cast in a red and orange tone, but also becoming translucent shades.

Figure 20. Xie Xiaoze, *Transience* (2011).

A single-channel video installation with sound. The translucent book images are projected onto a wall of books.

Inside a darkened gallery room, these moving images play on a continuous loop. In lieu of a screen, a wall of books stands in the front room. When these images are projected onto the book wall, they lose the sharpness as the book wall in the background creates an uneven surface. While the translucent images may suggest the ephemerality of books, the concrete book wall also implies a sense of material survival. In Xie Xiaoze's installation, this unique "books-on-books" composition reveals the same entanglement of time and media, as we have seen in Wang Jin's *New Ancient*. As Xie's title suggests, although books are of transient existence, historical

memories, thoughts, and knowledge that they carry are tested through time and space. In other words, books as material objects may be vulnerable and ephemeral. As a cultural practice, however, bookmaking is a resilient form. Despite the absence of plastic transparencies, Xie's video installation employs "transparency" as a material metaphor to self-consciously question the material presence of the book form. It is through the translucent moving images on the book wall that a stark contrast between the old and new mediums is carefully constructed.

By transforming books into transparent and translucent layers, the artist demonstrates that he is not only interested in the material surface of books, but also gravely concerned with the material survival of books. In addition to the video installation, his old oil paintings are accompanied in the exhibition. His photorealistic paintings depict the side view of old books with curling and crumbling pages, and they are in fact based on real books that have survived either natural or man-made disasters. Often regarded as one of his most political works, *Transience* explicitly comments on the eradication of books for political censorship.

> As I continued to paint books in the 1990s, I was also interested in what people have done to books. I painted monumental volumes decorated with gold-leafed edges as well as neglected books in silent decay. I also made installations based on specific historic events such as the destruction of books by the Nazis during the Second World War and by the Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution. All these led to the current project on the history of banned books in China. The books in my Chinese Library paintings are all closed and stacked; however, in the photographs in the banned books project, their pages open up for the first time. Content is brought to the fore for close examination.[215]

[215] Ami Li, "An Interview with Artist Xiaoze Xie," *Asia Society* (blog), accessed June 11, 2020, https://asiasociety.org/new-york/interview-artist-xiaoze-xie.

As the artist continues to explain the specific historical references behind his work, they continue to complicate our understandings of the video installation. The tainted tone in his video does not represent any intellectual warmth and vitality, but rather the countless book burning events throughout the history. As Alicia R. Bochi noted, "As violent as this is, the books as they levitate and fly through the air look almost graceful as they fall to their death – as they do in the paintings. The idea of book burnings speaks for itself."[216] In these paintings, the material deterioration of books again resonates with the transient existence of books in the title. All these books were banned at one point in history, but their bookness has never disappeared.[217] In documenting these dying books, the artist suggests that the death of books comes at the moment when books are no longer read, remembered, and produced. In Xie Xiaoze's examples, books are no longer considered as a material object. Instead, they provide an important form that is constantly borrowed by and represented through other mediums—oil paintings, photographs, videos, and installations—in order to self-consciously comment on the bookmaking practice itself.

---

[216] Alicia R. Bochi, "Paintings by Xiaoze Xie," *Artntheapple* (blog), May 6, 2011, http://artntheapple.blogspot.com/2011/05/paintings-by-xiaoze-xie.html.

[217] Book banning has a long history in China, dating at least as far back as the Ming Dynasty. Within the last year, the disappearance and shuttering of a number of booksellers and their shops in the once British-, now Chinese-governed Hong Kong (a partial cause of the ongoing resistance there) have become only the latest iteration of this distinct form of repression.

Figure 21. Xie Xiaoze, *Through Fire (Books that Survived the Anti-Japanese War of Resistance at Tsinghua University No. 2)* (2017).

In 2006, some of these transparent books were reintroduced to the public in an exhibition— "Shu: Reinventing Books in Chinese Contemporary Art" —organized by the China Institute Gallery and curated by Wu Hung. In the exhibition introduction, Wu identified Chinese artists' fascination with the book form in the 1990s. According to Wu, at the height of the 85 New Art Wave (85 Yishu Xinchao), two seminal art works came to mark a new beginning in the history of Chinese contemporary art, both of which have incorporated books in their conceptual frameworks.[218] They are Huang Yong Ping's *Two-Minute Wash Cycle* (1987) and Xu Bing's *Book from the Sky* (1987). In both cases, books were deliberately rendered unreadable. They were

conceptualized as a cultural form to contest personal and historical experiences. In other words, these "books" are made not to be read, but to be contemplated.

In Huang's *Two-Minute Wash Cycle*, the artist threw two books into the washing machine. When these books were washed into paper pulp, Huang piled the book waste onto a piece of broken glass inside a wooden box. Also known as "*The History of Chinese Art" and "A Concise History of Modern Art" after Two Minutes in the Washing Machine,* this work attempts to reflect on the artistic tensions between the East and the West. As these two books were widely used in Chinese art schools as textbooks at that time, they also represent the two art worlds with disparate histories, traditions, and ideas.

Xu Bing's *Book from the Sky* is perhaps a more well-known piece. This installation consists of a multicity of book forms. As Xu Bing's audience enters this installation space, they are surrounded by a multiplicity of textual surfaces—from the hanging scrolls overhead to the calligraphy steles in the wall panels and the stitched binding on the ground. Yet this is also a "book" that is never meant to be read, as the artist made up over 6,000 fake Chinese characters. In its original installation, Xu Bing visited a traditional printing factory in Henan Province, one of the last remaining facilities in China, and hand-printed the books for the exhibition. Although *Book from the Sky* is a book that is never supposed to be read, its material substrate does commemorate bookmaking as an aesthetic and cultural practice. In fact, Xu Bing has exhibited an enduring fascination with the book form throughout his career. When his Tobacco Book made its first public appearance in 2001, it soon became one of his

---

[218] Wu, *Shu*, 3–7.

signature works.[219] As a continuation to the now classic *Book from the Sky*, his *Book from the Ground* (2013) is a more recent attempt to reflect on the shifting boundaries of books. In its original installation, the audience is invited to make a wordless book using a translation software that converts English to symbols, icons, and logos.[220]

[219] Xu Bing's *Tobacco Project* is a decade-long art project, which includes a series of artworks that have incorporated book forms in one way or another. In most renditions, the Tobacco Book is made from whole tobacco leaves. On the flattened surface, the audience reads various historical accounts about tobacco, as well as the ways in which tobacco has changed global history. See Bing Xu, *Xu Bing: Tobacco Project, Duke/Shanghai/Virginia, 1999-2011* (Richmond & Charlottesville, Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 2011).

[220] Bing Xu, "Regarding Book from the Ground," *The Book About Xu Bing's*, 2014, 37–35.

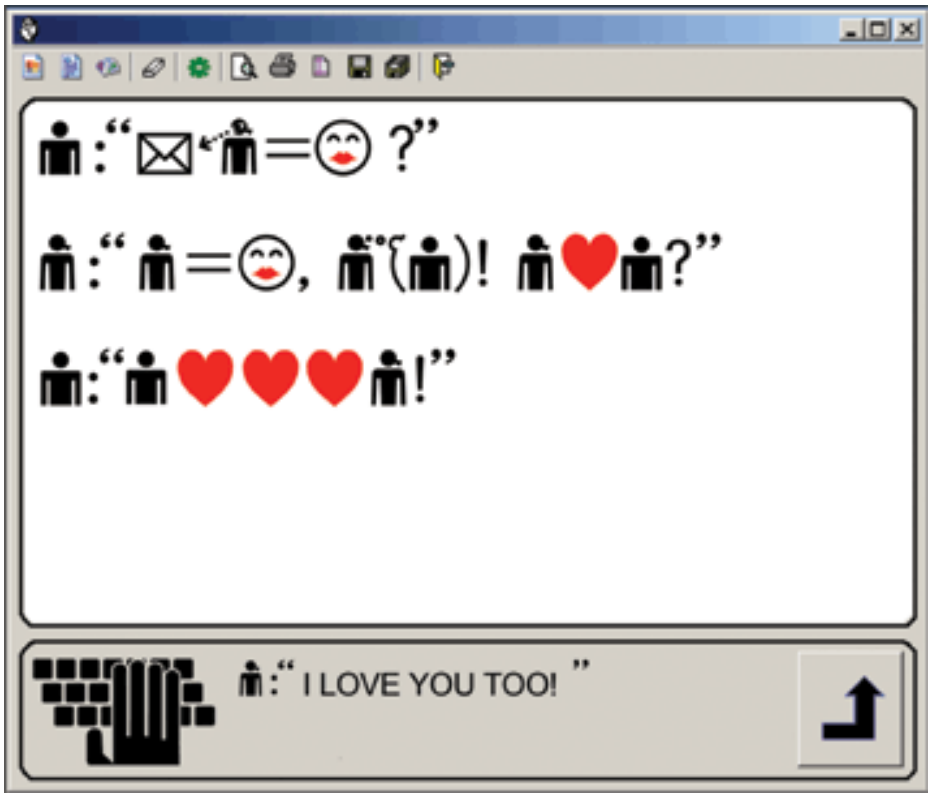


Figure 22. Xu Bing, *Book from the Ground* (2013).[221]

With a thematic focus on books, "Shu: Reinventing Books in Chinese Contemporary Art" included a variety of art genres from artist's books and paintings, to drawings, prints, and sculpture. Throughout the last decade of the twentieth century, artists in the Chinese-speaking world have been experimenting with the book form in order to narrate personal and historical experience. In an attempt to "re-invent" the book form, they have collectively transformed the ideas about the book from a material container for textual information to an aesthetic device of intermedial potential. In Geng Jianyi's *Misprinted Books* (1993), the artist superimposed layers of

[221] Bing Xu, *Book from the Ground: From Point to Point* (Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, 2013).

characters until the printed words become illegible. In Song Dong's *A Room of Calligraphy Model Books* (1995), the artist cut calligraphy books into strips. Hong Hao's *Mexico-Huun-Amate* (2004) presented a wordless book, where the fiber textures on the page are painted by his brush. As Wu suggests, all these examples "demonstrate a dual emphasis in the contemporary Chinese artists' engagement with the book: to abolish its literary content and to transform it into a visual, material, or aesthetic object."[222] In this artistic transformation, the "book" stands alone as a cultural artifact, and its significance is further divorced from its textual content.

As Wu Hung argues, the early 1990s is an important cultural moment for books, because books—often considered as a symbol of knowledge and power—have played an important role in the historical formations in the latter half of the twentieth century in China as well as in Taiwan.[223] In the Cultural Revolution, it is the book censorship that has contained artistic imaginations, but it is also "the little red book" (*Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung*) that symbolizes its dangerous power. Although references in these artworks might be specific to the personal and historical experience of the artists, their collective interests in books, speak to larger institutional changes as well as an intermedial turn in contemporary art. As Wu also observed, it is since the 1980s that "contemporary art mediums, such as installation, video, and

---

[222] Wu, *Shu*, 18.

[223] Although artists from the "Shu" exhibition largely work around the globe, many do come from the P.R.C. backgrounds. As such, the original exhibition emphasized the specific historical experience of the P.R.C. in the post-1989 period. It also specifically addressed historical events including the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution and the Tiananmen Square protests. Nonetheless, this experience of political censorship and social unrest is partially mirrored by Taiwan's martial law, so that the fascination with books in the art world might also be shared.

digital photography, have enabled these artists to reinvent books through a large number of book-related artistic experiments."[224]

One year before the publication of *Pink Noise* in 2006, we witnessed a collective reflection on books as a medium and also an intermedium in the art world. These artworks pose a challenge to the idea that books are in themselves a stable medium. Because book arts are rarely mass produced by the printing press, they exhibit an aura as "an original work of art." Each book becomes a unique material artifact. Because these book arts often lack specific textual information, their book form becomes an aesthetic strategy that spans across different artforms and media. *Pink Noise* may not be intended to be a work of art, and it is perhaps not qualified as "an artist's book" in Johanna Drucker's original definition. However, *Pink Noise* does participate in an ongoing conversation about the increasingly blurred boundaries between art, literature, and book. Its transparent look lends itself to examine the book form as a combination of cultural and aesthetic practices, as this material transparency has always been "self-conscious about the structure and meaning of the book as a form."

CHU BONG-FOO'S E-BOOK

When "book-arts" emerged as an important aesthetic form in art experimentation throughout the 1990s, it coincided with the digital revolution in the

---

[224] Hung Wu, *Making History: Wu Hung on Contemporary Art* (Timezone 8 Limited, 2008), 66.

publishing industry. In the 1990s, when the information superhighway was materializing in the United States, a discourse on "the death of the book" also emerged. In 1992, Robert Coover published "The End of Books" in the *New York Times*, announcing the print medium as "doomed" and "outdated."[225] In praise of digital writing and hypertext, Coover quoted from George P. Landow to explicate a paradigm shift in the contemporary world from the tactile to the digital—in his original words "movement from the tactile to the digital is the primary fact about the contemporary world."[226] What followed in the 1990s was a series of debates on the book's eventual destiny. While digital publishing became increasingly common in other parts of the world, traditional books were confronted with the same existential urgency. What is the future for books? And would books even be able to survive the digital age?

While Coover's prophecy remained loud and clear in the following decade, his words became even more relevant in 2007, when *Pink Noise* was first published. That year, Amazon launched its first-generation Kindle device. It is this brand-new electronic device with a paper-like display that began to accelerate the speed at which "books" were being transformed. With Kindle's increasing popularity, there was also an urge to digitize literary texts, which led to an arguably short-lived craze for the "e-books." Although computer scientists had attempted to digitize literary texts on computers many decades ago, digital texts never pretended to be a paper book before the "e-book" revolution. By contrast, however, electronic reading devices such as

---

[225] Robert Coover, "The End of Books," *New York Times Book Review* 21, no. 6 (1992): 23–25.

Kindle were designed to replicate the paper-book reading experience, or even to replace it altogether. Before Kindle, early portable reading devices already strived to resemble paper books as much as they could—they were designed in comparable sizes that approximate paper books; they included protective leather covers to resemble physical book covers; they employed electronic ink technology and backlight design to recreate a paper-feel texture.

In waves of digitalization that followed, our understandings about books have been further divorced from the print medium. When we talk about an "e-book" today, the word "book" in the term is no longer associated with the material object that we used to hold in our hands. Instead, the word "e-book" refers to the information, the content, and the digital bytes that are transmitted to and stored regardless of devices. And Amazon continued to contribute to this important conceptual shift regarding books. In 2008, only one year after the release of Kindle, Amazon announced that it would acquire Audible—the world's largest producer and store of audiobooks. Like Kindle, Amazon's Audible continued to destabilize and dematerialize the book form because the existence of audiobooks relies on the absence or obsolesce of paper books. Like e-books, audiobooks have no physical copies; they are stored in the cloud and downloaded to any devices that support them. Like e-books, the so-called "books" in audiobooks are no longer associated with the print medium, but instead become acoustic signals. Books vaporized. Books disintegrate into a digital space between mediums, a digital space that can be rematerialized in combinations of sound, image, and texture.

---

[226] Coover.

One of the most important proponents for the Chinese e-book is Chu Bong-Foo, a renowned Taiwanese-born computer scientist. In 2001, Chu released his prototype e-reader Chinese e-book (zhongwen dianshu), also known as Wenchang E-Book (Wenchang dianzishu), the first portable electronic reading device that supports the Chinese language. Though not as successful as Chu had originally wished, this electronic reading device was only part of his life-long ambition to digitize the Chinese language. He wanted to "computerize" the Chinese-speaking world in the age of information societies.

Figure 23. Promotional materials of Chu Bong-Foo's Wenchang E-Book.

Chu was born in Taiwan, but he spent years abroad working in Brazil, the United States, Hong Kong, Macau, and Mainland China. During his years in Brazil,

Chu worked in a publishing house in São Paulo, where he witnessed the communicational efficiency of alphabetical language.

> When working at the publishing house, he witnessed the process of publishing a book and was shocked: with lead typesetting, it took only twelve hours to type, proofread, finalize and print an English book, i.e., twelve hours for the manuscript to go from the publishing house to the market. Chu had worked in the publishing industry in Taiwan before and he was well aware that it took at least half a year to print a Chinese book. After in-depth research into the publishing process, Chu concluded that the bottleneck of Chinese lay in the encoding system of its characters.[227]

His bookmaking experience at the Brazilian publishing house was instrumental to his life-long commitment to the study of the Chinese language. As Chu compared the publishing processes in Brazil and Taiwan, he identified a difference not in the printing press itself, but rather in the encoding system of the Chinese language—as he concluded "the bottleneck of Chinese lay in the encoding system of its characters." After leaving Brazil, Chu spent years searching for better ways to encode the Chinese language.

After years of work and research, Chu released an encoding method for Chinese characters in 1976. With the help from Shen Honglian from the Department of Chinese Literature at National Taiwan University, Chu continued to refine his Chinese input method. His invention was later named "Cangjie" by Chiang Wei-kuo, and it became one of the most influential Chinese input methods for computers. Its popularity still remains today, particularly in Hong Kong. In hopes of promoting

---

[227] "Chu Bong-Foo Culture Foundation," 2017, http://www.cbfcfoundation.com/index_e.html.

Chinese computing, he later decided to give up his exclusive right to his input method "Cangjie" and put it into the public domain. In 1980, Chu worked with Stan Shih and released Tianlong Computer, the first computer with "a Chinese operating system, Chinese programming language, and Chinese software suites."[228] Due to his tremendous contributions to Chinese computing, Chu is often commended as "the Father of Chinese Computers."

Around the turn of the twenty-first century, Chu eventually had the opportunity to work with the Chinese publishing industry. The Culturecom Corporation (Wenhua chuanxin) in Hong Kong invited Chu to lead their research and development.[229] In 1999, Chu became a vice chairman of Culturecom, and it was during his seven years (1999-2006) at Culturecom that his e-book ambition became a reality. In addition to the reading device, *wenchang dianshu,* Chu also developed Cangjie e-books (Chinese electronic school bags) and Chinese CPU (Yixi CPU series and V-Dragon CPU series). In his short tenure at Culturecom, the Chinese-language publishing industry was preparing itself for its own digital revolution. In an attempt to digitize textual contents, they also helped to reconceptualize the book form. It does not only dematerialize books as we know them, but also further separates "books" from the print medium. It is in this context that "books," both as material artifacts and cultural practices, were being continuously reimagined.

In 2001, after two years working at Culturecom, Chu brought his invention to

---

[228] "Chu Bong-Foo."

[229] Tao Liu, "Jiumeiti Maixiang Xinjingji: Xianggang Wenchuan Jituan Zhuanxing Shilu [Old Media Marching into New Economy: The Transformation of Hong Kong's Culturecom]," *Digital Fortune*, no. 3 (2001): 60–63.

the Taipei International Book Exhibition. He unveiled his new device *wenchang dianshu* in an exhibition section entitled "Books of Tomorrow," and held a press conference promoting the use of portable electronic reading devices. Although digital books on personal computers were not uncommon, with the popularity of the PDA (personal data assistant) at that time, electronic portable readers were believed to revolutionize literary reading. In April, Culturecom announced a collaboration plan with the People's Education Press (PEP), the only official publisher affiliated with the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China. In 2002, Culturecom locked down another agreement with CPress (HK) to launch the first version of the Chinese e-Book, dubbed the *Easyread e-reader*.[230]

---

[230] John A. Mathews, "Culturecom Hong Kong: Building an Alternative to Wintel It Systems in Greater China," 2003, 7.

Figure 24. Promotional materials of the People's Education Press E-Book.

In 2003, Culturecome and Foxconn Technology (Hon Hai Precision Industry Co., Ltd.) began to collaborate on the development of their next generation portable electronic readers. They arranged another press release for their e-book reading system

at the Taipei International Book Exhibition. "Is the age of e-book coming?" a journalist from *Liberty Times* began the story with a rhetorical question, as he soon declared that the collaboration between the two companies marked the beginning of a new era of e-book reading.[231]

Indeed, *zhongwen dianshu* was a novelty largely fashioned by innovators and industrialists such as Chu. In Taiwan, Chu and his followers including "i-library Readers" or "STAReBook" did not succeed in securing any significant market shares in Taiwan. Yet Chu's legacy largely remained. His instance on making a Chinese reading machine leaves us a series of conceptual puzzles about an increasingly elusive category known as "books." How do we understand the "bookness" in the digital age? What makes *zhongwen dianshu* a book? Is it the hardware of the reading machine, its digital system, or the digitized textual content? This conceptual confusion is linguistic. As the pioneer of electronic reading in the Chinese-speaking world, Chu was never consistent in naming his own inventions. In the early years, Chu often called his electronic reading device e-book (dianshu) as in Wenchang E-Book (Wenchang dianshu) and the People's Education Press E-Book (Renjiao dianzishu). Yet he also at times talked about his invention as electronic bookbag (dianzi shubao) because he was hoping this reading device would be widely employed in the education sector and eventually replace the actual school bag.

Due to this linguistic ambiguity at the origins of *dianshu*, a conceptual

---

[231] Peixin Yang, "Xinshangji Toulu Xinyuedushidai Lailin: Dianzishu Yuedu Xitong Wenshi [New Business Opportunities Reveal a New Era of Reading: The Birth of E-Book System]," *Liberty Times Net (LTN)*, February 12, 2003, http://old.ltn.com.tw/2003/new/feb/12/life/art-2.htm.

confusion about the "e-book" still largely remains in the Chinese-speaking world. Although the equivalent word for "e-book" in Chinese is *dian zi shu* (a term that is widely accepted in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Mainland China), this term may also refer to the electronic reading device. In the 6th edition of *Xiandai Hanyu Cidian*, (when the word *dian zi shu* was first added), for example, *dian zi shu* is defined as the electronic reading device, not the digitized textual content.

> dian zi shu: A portable electronic reading device that allows the access to digital publications by connecting to the Internet, inserting memory cards, or etc. It is able to store materials up to thousands of pages. Its components include a color or monochrome LCD display and a simple button control panel.

Yet as the portable electronic reading device became more mainstream over the years, the word *dianzishu* became more aligned with the English word "e-book," which exclusively refers to the digital content that is published in book formats. By comparison, the reading device is now more often referred to as *dianzi yueduqi* (electronic reader).

In short, the emergence of the electronic reading device accelerated the obsolescence of the old-fashioned paper books. Although these devices are often advertised for their capacity to store thousands of books, they provide no textual content in and of themselves. As the digital text is further displaced from its material container in the process of digitization, the electronic readers are no longer considered as books. Instead, they become an interface that translates the old medium of the printing press for the new one. In other words, "books" have been increasingly destabilized and dematerialized.

Published in 2007, *Pink Noise* invokes a sentiment that was echoing through the last decade of the twentieth century, a sentiment that not simply laments "the death of books," but also questions the possibility of communication. Unlike traditional books where the text is neatly placed onto the printed pages, *Pink Noise* alludes to a more elusive and increasingly noisy cyberspace, where its original poetic text was generated. According to Hsia, most printed texts in *Pink Noise* were first sampled from cyberspace—from a wide range of online sources including blog articles, online advertisements, and even spam emails. Hsia Yü put them into a machine translator named Sherlock, and with the machine-translated texts, she continued to edit these contrived words and sentences. Hsia repeated the process a couple of times until these translated lines took a poetic shape.

Regarding *Pink Noise*'s digital naissance, literary scholars have carefully examined the work through questions about literary production, digital revolution, and globalized communication. Andrea Bachner contends that *Pink Noise* provides ways of thinking "the linguistic survival" of the Chinese script.[232] Lili Hsieh also argues that Hsia Yü's poetic experiment illustrates "a realistic representation of digital (uneven) globalization."[233] With a focus on the history of the e-book, I want to provide another perspective to examine the ways in which *Pink Noise* engages with the digital discourse particularly in the context of "the end of books." *Pink Noise* was published at the height of the e-book revolution. It was a time when the corporeality of

---

[232] Andrea Bachner, *Beyond Sinology: Chinese Writing and the Scripts of Culture* (Columbia University Press, 2014), 202.

books was threatened, and when the bookmaking practice was increasingly centered around information and communication. As such, the making of *Pink Noise* undeniably reflects on these disruptive changes in the publishing industries of the Chinese-speaking world.

HSIA YÜ'S *PINK NOISE*

Pink Noise intends to reimagine books after the end of books. On the one hand, the book-art movement in China and Taiwan has not only destabilized the once unquestioned relationship between book and print, but also re-emphasized bookmaking as a creative endeavor of aesthetic and cultural significance. On the other hand, the e-book revolution has further dematerialized the book form, and it is in this critical context that "pink noise" becomes a figure not only for the material remains of books, but also for books' corporeal presence in the digital age.

Pink Noise is still a book, even though not a conventional one. It is still reminiscent of what Johanna Drucker calls "the artist's book," —an artwork that takes the form of a book, even though it is never intended to be an original work of art. Unlike traditional books that present themselves through the flattened textual surface, *Pink Noise* builds up a sculptural body. Unlike traditional books that are meant to be opened and read, *Pink Noise* often gives off an impression that it resists to be read—with its excessive packaging and transparent pages. When the book is turned into a

---

[233] Lili Hsieh, "Romance in the Age of Cybernetic Conviviality: Hsia Yü's Pink Noise and the Poetics of Postcolonial Translation," *Postmodern Culture* 19, no. 3 (2009),

sculptural body, poetic words become flesh. And in the aftermath of the e-book revolutions, reading poetry is no longer for the mind's eyes. Instead, it involves the mobilization of different senses, because the poetic work is thrown into an intermedial space where books are no longer consumed in print.

As Hsia reminds us, her poetry is extremely "corporeal"— "It resembles the feeling of skin, and that is what I believe to be corporeal."[234] As Hsia continues to explain, this "corporeal" presence is not fueled by a sexual drive that many of her readers mistake for, but rather a sensualistic conception that is associated with a sculptural body. In her writing, Hsia often describes the haptic sensations from writing on a surface in detail—the itchy, sticky, or painful feelings—as if her fingers were touching the hard surface of granite, plastic, or plywood. When Hsia writes, she feels the pleasure of the ink oozing out from the tip of the pen, and of the frictions from the paper, all of which give rise to an outburst of excitement that overflows her blood vessels.[235] *Pink Noise* is a book, yet not a conventional one. Its unusual design not only encapsulates the literary text, but also becomes a sculptural body of itself own. As its readers constantly shift their reading strategies, this poetic work is experienced as something between printmaking and sculpting, between reading and imagining, between mediums and art forms.

In *Pink Noise*, as well as in other interviews, Hsia has often referred this intermedial sensibility as "poetry noise," "written noise," or most tellingly "lettristic

---

https://doi.org/10.1353/pmc.2009.0008.

[234] Beiwen Zhang, "Xiayu, Chuanqiangerguo de Lianxi Nüwu [Hsia Yü: The Witch of Words Who Can Pass Through the Wall]," *Eslite Reader* 25 (2002): 68.

noise," as she has always traced the inception of this poetic project to an acoustic experience with noise, particularly as represented by Taiwan's noise music.

> I've been inspired a lot from music, noise, off-key, low-frequencies, sampling, jazz syncopation and such, but this time I didn't want to take it too far. I just wanted to work the best form from this "poetry noise," and I think creating a space of transparency to offset the lettristic noise was a good idea.[236]

> Think about it, this program has been around for who knows how many generations; it came to me as a hindsight, yet with a flash of inspiration. At the time, I had been listening to all these great noise and low-frequency acoustic art CDs, and wondering what would result if that concept were applied to words, and that was when I came across this translation program. I dumped a bunch of stuff into the program—Shakespeare, Poe, Pushkin—to translate into Chinese it set my head whirling: Yes, this must be the word *noise* I've been looking for! Why not do a poetry volume filled with *lettristic noise*?[237]

For Hsia Yü's faithful readers, this acoustic sensibility as well as her love for noise music may not come as a surprise. In fact, Hsia has been involved in Taiwan's music industry for years. Under the pen name Katie Lee, Hsia is one of the most renowned lyricists in the industry. Some of her most famous works include many classic hits such as "I'm Not Good Looking But I'm Very Gentle" by Chao Chuan, "Impulsiveness" by Simon Hsueh, and "Feng De Tan Xi" by Mavis Hee, and many more. In 2002, she also released an album with the name "Hsia Yü's Yue Hun Band," in which she performs as the lead vocalist in the band. In the past two decades, Hsia has collaborated with the Chinese sound artist Yan Jun on a few sound-related

---

[235] Zhang, "Xiayu, Chuanqiangerguo de Lianxi Nüwu [Hsia Yü: The Witch of Words Who Can Pass Through the Wall]."
[236] Hsia, *Pink Noise*.
[237] Hsia.

projects. In 2016, they released a poetry collection entitled *7 Poems and Some Tinnitus* with various sound recordings from Hsia and Yan.[238] Sound has always been an important part to Hsia Yü's creative career. For the same reason, scholarship on Hsia Yü's poetic style often foregrounds a potent "musicality."[239]

Nonetheless, this "noise" in Hsia's poetic work may not present itself in any acoustic fashion. Instead, it becomes a figure of intermedia. As the readers continue to look for the noise in this book, they realize that their reading experience becomes increasingly synesthetic. They begin to feel the cold plastic surface, as their fingers flip through these pages. They feel that its coldness adds to the visually impenetrable depth beneath its smooth surface. They begin to hear the hissing sounds that set their head whirling. And they begin to take more suggestions from the poet, who had once claimed that the pink color they are seeing was calibrated to represent the audible frequencies of musical scales. The first edition was set in C Major and the second one in D Major.[240] They read, see, touch, and listen to the book of noise at the same time. It is at this moment that this "book" ceases to be a book, but instead evolves into an artifact that lies between mediatic layers. It lies between the established traditions of poetry, printmaking, sculpture, and installation.

---

[238] Yu Hsia and Jun Yan, *7 Poems and Some Tinnitus* (Beijing: Sub Jam, 2016).
[239] Po-Ling Chen, "Xianshe, Zai Huashang Quan: Xiayu Shi de Sange Xingshi Wenti [Shoot First, Draw the Circle Afterwards: Three Formality Problems in Hsia Yü's Poetry]" (National Tsing Hua University, 2013).
[240] "If the 2007 first edition of *Pink Noise* were set in C Major, this second edition of 2008 would have to be tuned to D Major with the pink 15% paler. Imagine with each subsequent edition the color growing gradually brighter and the decibels higher, who knows how many years from now, when the ten thousandth (plus one) copy of *Pink Noise* comes off the press, whether pink noise will have tuned into white noise?" See Hsia, *Pink Noise*.

"If sound can be translated into color, color can be translated into sound, and straightaway into instrumental timbre. That's the whole stroke of inspiration."[241] As the French poet René Ghil reminds us, such a synesthetic experience was central to many art movements including Symbolism, where the fusing of separate senses was often celebrated as a superior aesthetic experience. At the core of this poetic project by Hsia, the noise figure transcends its original acoustic register, expanding into other sensorial domains. The sound, color, scent, and touch are thus bridged together by a seemingly elusive figure named "noise." Yet *Pink Noise* does not merely register a sensibility about the convergence of senses. Instead, I borrow Dick Higgins' idea to identify *Pink Noise* as a work of intermedia. According to Higgins, intermediality comprises both the links (and crossbreeds) between various art forms, and the various disciplines with which we talk about these media. As Higgins stated in 1966, "intermedium" is the "uncharted land that lies between" different media, and intermedial works are "not governed by rules; each work determines its own medium and form according to its needs." For Higgins, "intermediality has always been a possibility since the most ancient times . . . it remains a possibility wherever the desire to fuse two or more existing media exists."[242] Intermedia[lity] thus can very literally be described as between the between.

Indeed, many poems in *Pink Noise* can be described as sensuous; with every meticulous description, they invoke the collaboration of multiple senses as they are being read. However, in order to illustrate what I mean by the "intermedial poetics" of

---

[241] Katherine Bergeron, "A Bugle, A Bell, A Stroke of the Tongue: Rethinking Music in Modern French Verse," *Representations* 86, no. 1 (2004): 53.

Pink Noise, I do not intend to provide another literary reading of the poetic texts (which has already been abundant in scholarship). Instead, I unfold a chapter of the book, where the poet envisions a possibility of the book as installation, and installation as book. In the afterword of *Pink Noise*, the poet published an interview with five questions about the making of the book. In one of the questions, Hsia takes the opportunity to describe at length an installation idea that she had for Proust's *a la recherche du temps perdu*:

> So I conjured up the idea for an installation piece: a sealed room with a Parisian ambience circa early 20th century, with sound-absorbing panels nailed to walls draped with thick, heavy blue curtains, the scent of madeleines and linden flower tisane floating in the dusky air, and projector casting the two texts onto the panels, one being Proust's *a la recherche du temps perdu* in the original French, the other a Chinese version simultaneously generated by the program. Would such a version turn out to be an incomparably spectacular Proust with its every line self-destructing and regenerating at the same time? Sentences within sentences like doors within doors, cellars within cellars, through layer after layer of intricately folded bits of this and that, describing yet another intricately layered medley: on the one hand, you have seven thick volumes, some 3000 pages containing nearly 2 million words of input, and, on the other hand, an equal amount of output. But while none of the sentences are missing, every single sentence seems to have a *vrai-gaux* ring of truth: on the left the original— "memory reclaims everything" —while on the right, the nouvelle roman— "time ravishes all" —the very themes Proust dedicated his life to.[243]

This is Hsia Yü's long answer to the second question in the afterword interview, "Poetry Interrogation." A Weng asks Hsia, "How do you regard these texts? Do you feel as much 'sensual pleasure' for them as for the poems in your previous volumes?" After a brief discussion on the machine translator, Hsia immediately digresses from

---

[242] Higgins, *Horizons, the Poetics and Theory of the Intermedia*.

the topic and instead begins a discussion on this installation idea. Upon a first reading, this paragraph may seem entirely out of place. Although the afterword may not usually require the same rigorous "literary reading" as the poetic text does, it still contextualizes the poetic text and instructs its readers how to read. Like her poetry, Hsia's prose is filled with descriptive details that involve multiple senses— "thick, heavy blue curtains," "the scent of madeleines," and "the linden flower tisane floating in the dusky air" —all of which may invoke the "sensual pleasure." Yet, this paragraph is not supposed to be part of the poetic text, at least on the surface.

However, her readers may soon realize this is an installation about books—to be precise, one particular book, Proust's *a la recherche du temps perdu*. Yet like the book-art installations we have examined earlier, Hsia's installation destabilizes the book form by displacing its texts. In doing so, it compares, contrasts, and transforms ideas about books. "[O]n the one hand, you have seven thick volumes, some 3000 pages containing nearly 2 million words" —as Hsia illustrates the concrete shape of the original paper book. "[O]n the other hand, an equal amount of output" is the machine translated digital text, ambiguous and perplexing. Hsia believes that the "folded bits of this and that" from the machine translator best exemplify the Proustian themes about memory and time. In other words, she claims to have translated the poetic ideas from Proust's book into an art installation. Although the book as a material object disappears, it is transformed into an installation. It is thus an installation of the book. On a second level, this installation idea also mirrors the exact ways in which *Pink Noise* is configured. It would not be difficult to draw parallels

---

[243] Hsia, *Pink Noise*.

between *Pink Noise* and this Proustian installation—they share the same machine translator, the same "text panels," the same word-by-word translation mechanism from English/French to Chinese. Isn't *Pink Noise* supposed to be such an installation? If *Pink Noise* is still a book, it is a book of installation.

Not only does *Pink Noise* bridge separate senses in its unique artistic constellation, but it also foregrounds the imitate connections between different art forms as well as cultural practices. It is this between-ness that revolves around the increasingly problematic coupling of literature and books. In doing so, the poetic work also registers an anxious sentiment about the changing media environment, a sentiment about the disappearing "books" in the aftermath of the digital revolution.

Hand scroll, movable type, woodprint, or plastic leaves. In artistic experiments, books have been reimagined in its capacity to transform the flattened textual surface to appeal to an intermedial sensibility that involves image, sound, and touch. It is through this series of artistic experiments that the book's form, as we know it, is divorced from its content, its physical shape separated from its textual information. Although the early pioneers of *zhongwen dianshu* (Chinese e-book) believed that the e-book revolution would improve communication efficiency, the book today is no longer a medium for the transmission of knowledge. In fact, "the end of books" has often displaced literary texts, rendering a "noisy" and "nonsensical" linguistic residue as we have seen in *Pink Noise*. Although *Pink Noise* is never intended to be an original work of art, it is situated in a temporal framework that coincided with the book arts fascination in the Chinese-speaking world, as well as a transition period between the print and the digital cultures. If contemporary art takes the book form to comment on

the cultural and personal histories in the previous decades, then *Pink Noise* borrows the same aesthetic strategy to speculate about the book's uncertain futures.

In conclusion, I borrow Jessica Pressman's term "bookish" to reflect on *Pink Noise*'s critique of digital culture. "Bookishness," as Pressman argues, "expresses desire and appreciation for books in the moment of their supposed obsolescence due to digital media."[244] This "bookishness" derives from an aesthetic strategy that renders an material artifact a "bookish" form in order to identify an artistic response to the digital age: "the threat posed to books by digital technologies becomes a source of artistic inspiration and formal experimentation in the pages of twenty-first-century literature."[245] Pressman theorized that new media gave rise to the bookishness as well as the fetishization of textuality. In this sense, *Pink Noise* is a "bookish" book in that it foregrounds the book's transient obsolescence. For *Pink Noise*, this unusual hybridity of literature and art is important because it resonates with much of the anxieties about the changing media environment at the turn of the twenty-first century, a time when dematerialized digital publishing became an increasingly dominant force in literary production. It is thus comforting to be reminded that *Pink Noise* is still a book with a corporeal presence.

---

[244] Jessica Pressman, "'There's Nothing Quite Like a Real Book': Stop-Motion Bookishness," in *The Printed Book in Contemporary American Culture: Medium, Object, Metaphor*, ed. Heike Schaefer and Alexander Starre, 2019, 156.
[245] Jessica Pressman, "The Aesthetic of Bookishness in Twenty-First-Century Literature," *Michigan Quarterly Review* XLVIII, no. 4 (Fall 2009), http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.act2080.0048.402.

REFERENCES

Adorno, Theodor W. "The Curves of the Needle." *October* 55 (1990): 49–55.

Arkette, Sophie. "Sounds Like City." *Theory, Culture & Society* 21, no. 1 (February 1, 2004): 159–68.

Attali, Jacques. *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985.

Bachner, Andrea. *Beyond Sinology: Chinese Writing and the Scripts of Culture*. Columbia University Press, 2014.

Bergeron, Katherine. "A Bugle, A Bell, A Stroke of the Tongue: Rethinking Music in Modern French Verse." *Representations* 86, no. 1 (2004): 53–72.

Berry, Chris. "Getting Real: Chinese Documentary, Chinese Postsocialism." In *The Urban Generation: Chinese Cinema and Society at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Zhen Zhang, 115–34. Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2007.

Bochi, Alicia R. "Paintings by Xiaoze Xie." *Artntheapple* (blog), May 6, 2011. http://artntheapple.blogspot.com/2011/05/paintings-by-xiaoze-xie.html.

"Bombardment of Quemoy." *Free China Journal*. August 1, 1988.

Braester, Yomi. *Painting the City Red: Chinese Cinema and the Urban Contract*. Asia-Pacific: Culture, Politics, and Society. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010.

———. "Tracing the City's Scars: Demolition and the Limits of the Documentary Impulse in the New Urban Cinema," March 7, 2007. https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822390008-008.

Bruno, Cosima. “Breaking Language Down: Taiwan Sound Poetry and Its Ways of Saying.” *Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies* 43, no. 2 (September 2017): 33–56.

Campbell, Timothy C. *Wireless Writing in the Age of Marconi*. U of Minnesota Press, 2006.

Cavell, Stanley. *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film, Enlarged Edition*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1979.

Chang, Bi-yu. “From Taiwanisation to De-Sinification. Culture Construction in Taiwan since the 1990s.” *China Perspectives* 2004, no. 56 (December 1, 2004). http://journals.openedition.org/chinaperspectives/438.

“Changchu Lishi de Shangkou: Changpianjie Lianshou Bianxie Cipu Chuanzhen Song Dalu [Souding Out the Wound of History: Record Industry United to Write Songs and Fax Them to the Chinese Mainland].” *United Evening News*. May 27, 1989.

Chen, Po-Ling. “Xianshe, Zai Huashang Quan: Xiayu Shi de Sange Xingshi Wenti [Shoot First, Draw the Circle Afterwards: Three Formality Problems in Hsia Yü’s Poetry].” National Tsing Hua University, 2013.

Cheng, Amy, and Jeph Lo. “Seventeen Years of Cultural Intervention: An Exhibition on Black Hand Nakasi Workers’ Band.” The Cube Project Space, 2013. https://issuu.com/thecube.tw.

Cheung, Han. “Taiwan in Time: The June Fourth Incident, Taipei.” *Taipei Times*. June 3, 2018. http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/feat/archives/2018/06/03/2003694226.

———. “Twenty Years of Singing for the Oppressed.” *Taipei Times*. February 1, 2016. https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/feat/archives/2016/02/01/2003638540.

Chi, Chang-hui. “Learning to Drink Sorghum Liquor: Taste and Consumption in Military Front-Line Jinmen, Taiwan.” *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 47, no. 2 (August 1, 2018): 165–91. https://doi.org/10.1177/186810261804700207.

———. “The Death of a Virgin: The Cult of Wang Yulan and Nationalism in Jinmen, Taiwan.” *Anthropological Quarterly* 82, no. 3 (2009): 669–89.

Chion, Michel. *Guide Des Objects Sonores: Pierre Schaeffer et La Recherche Musicale*. Bibliothèque de Recherche Musicale. Paris, 1995.

———. *The Voice in Cinema*. Translated by Claudia Gorbman. Illustrated edition. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.

Chiu, Hsiao-Chiao. “Women’s Labour, Kinship, and Economic Changes in Jinmen in the Era of Authoritarian Rule.” *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 47, no. 2 (August 1, 2018): 193–218. https://doi.org/10.1177/186810261804700208.

Chou, Hui-ching. “Lifting Martial Law and Opening-up Taiwan.” Translated by David Toman. *CommonWealth Magazine*, December 24, 2018. https://english.cw.com.tw/article/article.action?id=2230.

Chow, Rey. *Entanglements, Or Transmedial Thinking about Capture*. Duke University Press, 2012.

Chow, Vivienne. “Beishan Broadcast Wall: Taiwan’s Eerie Sonic Weapon.” BBC: The British Broadcasting Corporation. Accessed April 12, 2019.

http://www.bbc.com/culture/story/20180924-beishan-broadcast-wall-taiwans-eerie-sonic-weapon.

"Chu Bong-Foo Culture Foundation," 2017. http://www.cbfcfoundation.com/index_e.html.

Coover, Robert. "The End of Books." *New York Times Book Review* 21, no. 6 (1992): 23–25.

Cox, Christoph. "Beyond Representation and Signification: Toward a Sonic Materialism." *Journal of Visual Culture* 10, no. 2 (August 1, 2011): 145–61.

———. *Sonic Flux: Sound, Art, and Metaphysics*. London: The University of Chicago Press, 2018.

Dai, Jinhua. *After the Post–Cold War: The Future of Chinese History*. Duke University Press, 2018.

Daughtry, J. Martin. *Listening to War: Sound, Music, Trauma, and Survival in Wartime Iraq*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015.

Derrida, Jacques. "Above All, No Journalists!" In *Religion and Media*, edited by Hent de Vries and Samuel Weber. Cultural Memory in the Present. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2001.

Drucker, Johanna. *The Century of Artists' Books*. New York City: Granary Books, 1995.

Dunham-Jones, Ellen. "The Irrational Exuberance of Rem Koolhaas." *Places Journal*, April 2, 2013. https://doi.org/10.22269/130402.

Edison, Thomas Alva, Philippe Baudouin, and Max Roth. *Le Royaume De L'au-Delà. Précédé De Machines Nécrophoniques*. Grenoble: Jérôme Millon, 2015.

Erlmann, Veit. "'Acoustic Space' – Marshall McLuhan Defended Against Himself." *The Senses and Society* 11, no. 1 (January 2, 2016): 36–49.

Ernst, Wolfgang. *Sonic Time Machines: Explicit Sound, Sirenic Voices, and Implicit Sonicity*. Amsterdam University Press, 2016.

Fisher, Mark. *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures*. Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2014.

———. "What Is Hauntology?" *Film Quarterly* 66, no. 1 (2012): 16–24.

Foucault, Michel. *The Archaeology of Knowledge: And the Discourse on Language*. New York, NY: Vintage, 1982.

Fujui, Wang. "NOISE Vol. 10." Fanzine. Taipei, 1996. ET@T Archive. http://archive.etat.com/etat-varchive/6017/.

Galloway, Alexander R. "The Unworkable Interface." *New Literary History* 39, no. 4 (2009): 931–55. https://doi.org/10.1353/nlh.0.0062.

Ge, Zhaoguang. *What Is China? Territory, Ethnicity, Culture, and History*. Translated by Michael Hill. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018.

Gluck, Robert J. "Free Sound Within Culturally Specific Practice." In *International Computer Music Conference Proceedings*, 2005.

Goodman, Steve. *Sonic Warfare: Sound, Affect, and the Ecology of Fear*. Edited by Brian Massumi and Erin Manning. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2012.

Green Team. *Labor's Battle Song: Laid-off Shinkong Textile Workers' Protest*. Documentary, 2016.

Gunning, Tom. "What's the Point of an Index? Or, Faking Photographs." *Digital Aesthetics, Nordic Research on Media and Communication Review* 1, no. 2 (2004): 39–49.

Harvey, David. *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*. 1st edition. London: Verso, 2013.

———. "The Right to the City." *New Left Review*, no. 53 (October 1, 2008): 23–40.

Hayles, Katherine. "Material Metaphors, Technotexts, and Media-Specific Analysis." In *Writing Machines*, 18–33. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2002.

Hayles, Katherine, and Jessica Pressman, eds. *Comparative Textual Media: Transforming the Humanities in the Postprint Era*. Electronic Mediations, Volume 42. Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2013.

He, Roxing. *Xueyun shidai: zhongsheng xuanhua de shinian [Generation of Student Movement: The Decade of Noises]*. Taipei: Reading Times Publishing Co., 2002.

Higgins, Dick. *Horizons, the Poetics and Theory of the Intermedia*. Poetics of the New. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984.

Hirschkind, Charles. "The Acoustics of Death." In *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics*, 173–204. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009.

Ho, Ming-sho. "Changing Memory of the Tiananmen Incident in Taiwan: From Patriotism to Universal Values (1989–2019)." *China Information*, November 24, 2020. https://doi.org/10.1177/0920203X20971454.

Ho, Ming-Sho. "Meiyou Jieji Rentong de Laogong Yundong: Taiwan de Zizhu Gonghui Yu Xiongdi Yiqi de Jixian [A Working-Class Movement without Class Identity: Taiwan's Independent Labor Union Movement and the Limit of Brotherhood]." *Taiwan: A Radical Quarterly in Social Studies* 72 (2008): 49–91.

Ho, Yang-Tang. "Laogong Jitikangzheng Xingdong De Xingshi Yu Dongyuan: Xinguang Shilin Guanchang Kangzheng De Gean Yanjiu [The Form and Mobilization of Collective Labor Struggle: The Case of Shinkong's Factory Closure in Shilin District]." Master's thesis, Soochow University, 1993. National Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations in Taiwan. https://hdl.handle.net/11296/z32u2s.

Hockx, Michel. *Internet Literature in China*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2015.

Hsia, Yu. *Pink Noise*. Taipei: Garden City, 2007.

Hsia, Yu, and Jun Yan. *7 Poems and Some Tinnitus*. Beijing: Sub Jam, 2016.

Hsieh, Lili. "Romance in the Age of Cybernetic Conviviality: Hsia Yü's Pink Noise and the Poetics of Postcolonial Translation." *Postmodern Culture* 19, no. 3 (2009). https://doi.org/10.1353/pmc.2009.0008.

Hu, Yiting. "Ting Zhanlan Qu: Shengyin Fenlie Zhanlan Xilie Uu OCAT Shenzhen Guan Zhengshi Kaimu [Let's Listen to the Exhibit: Schizophonia Exhibition Series Opens at OCAT Shenzhen]." Artron.Net, November 15, 2015. https://news.artron.net/20151115/n793131_1.html.

Huang, Erin Y. *Urban Horror: Neoliberal Post-Socialism and the Limits of Visibility*. Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2020.

Huang, Ming-Chuan. *1995 Post-Industrial Arts Festival*. Documentary, 1995.

Huang, Sun-Quan. "If Noise Ever Was, It Was Far from Revolt." Translated by Billy Tang and Connie Kang. *The International Art Portal of Contemporary China (LEAP)*, no. 16 (August 2012): 104–6.

———. "Taibei Guoji Hougongye Yishuji [Taipei International Post-Industrial Arts Festival]." *Pots Weekly*. September 15, 1995.

"Jingtouxia de Lishi, 1989 Tiananmen: Liusi Qingchen de Zhongzheng Jiniantang, Kuaru Liusi Dangtian [History in Photographs, 1989 Tiananmen: The Chiang Kai-Shek Memorial Hall on the Morning of June Fourth]." *United Daily News Global*. Accessed June 2, 2021. https://global.udn.com/global_vision/story/8662/3850579.

Kane, Brian. "Sound Studies Without Auditory Culture: A Critique of the Ontological Turn." *Sound Studies* 1, no. 1 (January 1, 2015): 2–21.

———. *Sound Unseen: Acousmatic Sound in Theory and Practice*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014.

———. *Sound Unseen: Acousmatic Sound in Theory and Practice*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016.

Karl, Rebecca E. "The Flight to Rights: 1990s China and Beyond." In *Culture and Social Transformations: Theoretical Framework and Chinese Context*, 167–83. Brill, 2014.

Kim-Cohen, Seth. *In the Blink of an Ear: Towards a Non-Cochlear Sonic Art*. New York: Continuum, 2009.

Kittler, Friedrich A. *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*. Translated by Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1999.

Koolhaas, Rem. "Beijing Manifesto." WIRED, August 1, 2014. https://www.wired.com/2004/08/beijing/.

LaBelle, Brandon. *Acoustic Territories: Sound Culture and Everyday Life*. New York: Continuum, 2010.

———. *Acoustic Territories: Sound Culture and Everyday Life*. New York: Continuum, 2010.

Lavender, James. "Objects, Orientations and Interferences: On Deleuze and Sound Studies." *Parallax* 21, no. 4 (October 2, 2015): 408–28. https://doi.org/10.1080/13534645.2015.1086528.

Lefebvre, Henri. *Writings on Cities*. Oxford: Blackwell Publisher, 1996.

Li, Ami. "An Interview with Artist Xiaoze Xie." *Asia Society* (blog). Accessed June 11, 2020. https://asiasociety.org/new-york/interview-artist-xiaoze-xie.

Li, Yawen. "[Zai Kuaguo Yinyue Jituan Kuaru Taiwan Zhihou: Cong Changpian Zhizuoren De Chuangzuo ZiZhuxing Tanqi] The Conflict Between Creativity and Commerce: How Major Transnational Music Corporations' Production Strategies Affect Record Producers' Creativity Autonomy in Taiwan." Taipei, 2010.

Lin, Chi-Wei. “Kongbu Saoyin Zhiwu De Zuihou Douzheng [The Last Strike of Lin Chi-Wei’s Noise House].” *Lin Chi-Wei Personal Website* (blog), June 25, 2009. http://www.linchiwei.com/archives/94.

———. “Ruguo Meiyou Xinde, Laode Yejiang Xiaoshi—Lin Chi-Wei Tan Taiwan Zaoyin Yundong De Shengyusi [If There Is Nothing New, the Old Would Vanish Too—Lin Chi-Wei on the Birth and Death of Taiwan’s Noise Movement].” In *Yishu Yu Shehui: Dandai Yishujia Zhuanwen Yu Fangtan [Art and Society: Introducing Seven Contemporary Artists]*, edited by Amy Cheng. Taipei: Taipei Fine Arts Museum, 2009.

———. “Taiwan Dixia Zaoyin: Xueyun Fanwenhua Zhi Sheng [Taiwan Underground Noise: The Sound of Anticulture in the Student Movement].” In *Zaoyin Fantu: Zhanhou Taiwan Shengxiang Wenhua De Tansuo [ALTERing NATIVism: Sound Cultures in Post-War Taiwan]*, edited by Jeph Lo. Taipei: Walkers Cultural Co., 2015.

———. “Zhishifenzi Yu Yiqun Bupasi De Hunhun, Linqiwei Tan Pangke Yu Taiwan Xueyun Fanwenhua [Intellectuals and Fearless Hooligans, Lin Chi-Wei on Punk and Taiwan’s Anticulture Student Movement].” *ARTCO Monthly*, September 2005.

Liu, Tao. “Jiumeiti Maixiang Xinjingji: Xianggang Wenchuan Jituan Zhuanxing Shilu [Old Media Marching into New Economy: The Transformation of Hong Kong’s Culturecom].” *Digital Fortune*, no. 3 (2001): 60–63.

Liu, Xiao. *Information Fantasies: Precarious Mediation in Postsocialist China*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019.

Lo, Jeph. "Wasteland Utopia: The Liberation of Sound in Post–Martial Law Taiwan." *Full Stop* (blog), March 18, 2019. http://www.full-stop.net/2019/03/18/blog/jeph-lo/wasteland-utopia-the-liberation-of-sound-in-post-martial-law-taiwan/.

Ma, Shifang. *Erduo jiewo [Lend Me Your Ears]*. Guilin, China: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2015.

Mao, Jr-Shin, and Te-Cheng Chen. *Lan Touke [The Broken Head]*. Documentary. Crystal Records, 2001.

Mathews, John A. "Culturecom Hong Kong: Building an Alternative to Wintel It Systems in Greater China," 2003.

McEnaney, Thomas. "Acoustic Properties: Radio, Narrative, and the New Neighborhood of the Americas." UC Berkeley, 2011.

McGrath, Jason. *Postsocialist Modernity: Chinese Cinema, Literature, and Criticism in the Market Age*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2008.

McLuhan, Marshall. "Living in an Acoustic World." Marshall McLuhan Speaks Special Collection. Accessed February 5, 2019. http://www.marshallmcluhanspeaks.com/lecture/1970-living-in-an-acoustic-world/.

———. *The Gutenberg Galaxy*. Centennial Edition. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011.

———. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1994.

———. “Visual and Acoustic Space.” In *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*, edited by Christoph Cox and Daniel Warner. London: Continuum, 2004.

McSweeney, Joyelle. “Pink Noise (Review).” *Constant Critic* (blog). Accessed March 9, 2020. http://constantcritic.com/joyelle_mcsweeney/pink-noise/.

Mon, Ya-Feng. “L.T.K. Commune in Context: A Critical Re-Evaluation.” Master’s thesis, National Central University, 2007.

O’Dell, David. *Inseparable: The Memoirs of an American and the Story of Chinese Punk Rock*. Lulu Press, 2011.

Ong, Walter J. *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*. Orality and Literary. New York: Routledge, 2012.

Palombini, Carlos. “Machine Songs V: Pierre Schaeffer: From Research into Noises to Experimental Music.” *Computer Music Journal* 17, no. 3 (1993): 14.

Pao, Huei-Wen, Hsueh-Liang Wu, and Wei-Hwa Pan. “The Road to Liberalization: Policy Design and Implementation of Taiwan’s Privatization.” *International Economics and Economic Policy* 5, no. 3 (November 2008): 323–44.

Pes, Javier. “Taiwan’s Supersized Loudspeakers Once Broadcast Anti-Communist Propaganda to China. Now, They’re the Island’s Newest Sound Art Installation.” Artnet News, August 15, 2018. https://news.artnet.com/art-world/taiwan-kinmen-island-sonic-territories-1332893.

Pieslak, Jonathan R. *Sound Targets: American Soldiers and Music in the Iraq War*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009.

Pressman, Jessica. *Bookishness: Loving Books in a Digital Age*. New York City: Columbia University Press, 2020.

———. “The Aesthetic of Bookishness in Twenty-First-Century Literature.” *Michigan Quarterly Review* XLVIII, no. 4 (Fall 2009). http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.act2080.0048.402.

———. “‘There’s Nothing Quite Like a Real Book’: Stop-Motion Bookishness.” In *The Printed Book in Contemporary American Culture: Medium, Object, Metaphor*, edited by Heike Schaefer and Alexander Starre, 2019.

Qiu Wanxing. “Sanshinian Qian 520 Nongmin Shijian, Jieyanhou Zuiyanzhong Jietou Liuxue Chongtu [Thirty Years Ago, the 520 Farmers Protest Was the Worst Bloodshed Street Clash After the Lifting of the Martial Law].” *Taiwan People News*, May 19, 2018. ET@T. http://www1.etat.com/noisetw/noiseiv.htm.

Reynolds, Simon. *Retromania: Pop Culture’s Addiction to Its Own Past*. New York: Macmillan, 2011.

Rofel, Lisa, Professor Lisa Rofel, Judith Halberstam, and Lisa Lowe. *Desiring China: Experiments in Neoliberalism, Sexuality, and Public Culture*. Duke University Press, 2007.

Roy, Elodie. “Displacing the Past. Mediated Nostalgia and Recorded Sound.” *Volume !. La Revue Des Musiques Populaires* 11, no. 1 (December 30, 2014): 145–58.

Schaeffer, Pierre. *Treatise on Musical Objects: Essays Across Disciplines*. Translated by Christine North and John Dack. California Studies in 20th-Century Music 20. Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2017.

Schafer, R. Murray. “McLuhan and Acoustic Space.” *The Antigonish Review*, no. 62 (July 1, 1985): 10.

———. *My Life on Earth & Elsewhere*. Erin, Ontario: Porcupine's Quill, 2012.

———. *The Book of Noise*. Price Milburn Print, 1970.

———. *The New Soundscape: A Handbook for the Modern Music Teacher*. Scarborough, Ontario: Berandol Music, 1969.

———. *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*. Rochester, Vermont: Destiny Books, 1993.

Schmitz, Rob. "On A Rural Taiwanese Island, Modern China Beckons." NPR: National Public Radio. Accessed April 12, 2019. https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2016/09/11/493255462/on-a-rural-taiwanese-island-modern-china-beckons.

Shen Wei-Ling. "Zaofan Xianchang: Lun 1990-2001 Nian Zhuoshuixi Gongshe Xianchang Biaoyan Zhong De Shengyin Shijian Yu Guanzhong Hudong [Noise in Rendition as Voice of Resistance: The Acoustic Practice and Performer-Audience Interaction of Loh Tsui Kweh Commune's Live Performance from 1990 to 2001]." Master's thesis, National Taiwan University, 2013.

"Shengyuan Dalu Xueyun, Gesheng Jinqi Bochu, Touguo Dianshi Diantai Tuiguang [Supporting the Student Movement in the Chinese Mainland, Special Songs Are Broadcast Today: 'Wound of History' Is on Television and Radio]." *United Daily News*. May 30, 1989.

"Shengyuan Tiananmen Xueyun, Lishi De Shangkou Kadai Song Dalu [supporting the Student Movement at Tiananmen, Cassette Tape 'Wound of History' Is Sent to the Chinese Mainland]." *Chinese Television System (CTS) Official Website*,

June 3, 1989. https://news.cts.com.tw/cts/politics/198906/198906031749303.html.

Shih, Shu-Mei. "The Concept of the Sinophone." *PMLA* 126, no. 3 (2011): 709–18.

Shin, Hyun Bang. "Urban Conservation and Revalorisation of Dilapidated Historic Quarters: The Case of Nanluoguxiang in Beijing." *Cities* 27 (June 2010): S43–54. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2010.03.006.

Stadler, Gustavus. "Introduction: Breaking Sound Barriers." *Social Text* 28, no. 1 (102) (March 1, 2010): 1–12. https://doi.org/10.1215/01642472-2009-057.

Stanyek, Jason, and Benjamin Piekut. "Deadness: Technologies of the Intermundane." *TDR/The Drama Review* 54, no. 1 (March 2010): 14–38.

Steintrager, James A. "Sound Objects: An Introduction." In *Sound Objects*, edited by James A. Steintrager and Rey Chow. Durham: Duke University Press, 2019.

Steintrager, James A., and Rey Chow. "Sound Object: An Introduction." In *Sound Objects*, edited by James A. Steintrager and Rey Chow, 1–19. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018.

———, eds. *Sound Objects*. Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2019.

Sterne, Jonathan. *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003.

———. *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2003.

———. *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction*. Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2003.

Stewart, Garrett. *Bookwork: Medium to Object to Concept to Art*. Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2011.

Szonyi, Michael. *Cold War Island: Quemoy on the Front Line*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

———. "The Virgin and the Chinese State: The Cult of Wang Yulan and the Politics of Local Identity of Jinmen (Quemoy)." *Journal of Ritual Studies* 19, no. 1 (2005): 87–98.

Election Study Center, National Chengchi University. "Taiwanese / Chinese Identity (1992/06~2020/12)," January 25, 2021. https://esc.nccu.edu.tw/PageDoc/Detail?fid=7800&id=6961.

Taiwan Contemporary Art Archive (TCAA). "TCAA | Artist - Yao Jui-Chung." Accessed April 12, 2019. http://tcaaarchive.org/artist/4058/.

Tiffany, Daniel. *Radio Corpse: Imagism and the Cryptaesthetic of Ezra Pound*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1998.

Kám-Á-Tiàm Forum of History: Perspectives from Taiwan. "Tingjian liusi: Guangchang shang de gesheng [Listening to Tian'anmen: Singing from the Square]," June 5, 2019. https://kamatiam.org.

Trethewey, Anna. "A Study of Book Arts; Form as Integral to Content." *How2* 2, no. 4 (2006). https://www.asu.edu/pipercwcenter/how2journal/archive/online_archive/v2_4_2006/current/bookarts/trethewey.html.

Wang, Fujui. “Lurking Waves: Fujui Wang / Collected Objects from the ’90s.” Taipei, 2013. Issuu (The Cube Project Space). https://issuu.com/thecube.tw/docs/booklet_fujui_wang-b5.

———. “NOISE Vol. 1: Merzbow.” Fanzine. Taipei, 1993. ET@T Archive. http://archive.etat.com/etat-varchive/5581/.

———. “NOISE Vol. 5: Action, Concept, and Noise - The Haters.” Fanzine. ET@T Archive. Accessed June 30, 2019. http://archive.etat.com/etat-varchive/5651/.

Wang, Hui. *China’s New Order: Society, Politics, and Economy in Transition*. Harvard University Press, 2003.

Wang, Jing. “Affective Listening as a Mode of Coexistence: The Case of China’s Sound Practice.” *Representations* 136, no. 1 (November 1, 2016): 112–31.

———. “To Make Sounds inside a ‘Big Can’: Proposing a Proper Space for Works of Sound Art.” *Leonardo* 49, no. 1 (July 7, 2014): 38–47.

Weng, Peiling. “Zhou Runfa Yiju Fuqila! Weishibi 40 Yi Rudai [Chow Yun-Fat Says, ‘How Fortunate!’ Wihsibih Cashes in 40 Billion Dollars].” Wenhua yizhou, March 27, 2008. http://jou.pccu.edu.tw/weekly/communication/1024/03.htm.

Wester, Michael. “Churning Out Noise Music from Home-Turned-Factory in Mucha.” *China News (Taiwan News)*. April 21, 1995.

Taiwan International Documentary Festival (TIDF). “What’s the Color for Documentary? The 30th Anniversary of Green Team.” Accessed June 10, 2019. https://www.tidf.org.tw/en/category/shows/4961.

Womack, Brantly. “Borders, Boundaries, Horizons and Quemoy in an Asymmetric World.” *Asian Anthropology* 15, no. 2 (May 3, 2016): 104–15. https://doi.org/10.1080/1683478X.2016.1215076.

Wu, Hung. *Making History: Wu Hung on Contemporary Art*. Timezone 8 Limited, 2008.

———. *Shu: Reinventing Books in Contemporary Chinese Art*. Edited by Jung May Lee Barrett. New York, NY: China Institute Gallery, China Institute, 2006.

Wu, Yu-Shan. “Theorizing on Relations across the Taiwan Strait: Nine Contending Approaches.” *Journal of Contemporary China* 9, no. 25 (November 2000): 407–28. https://doi.org/10.1080/713675943.

Xu, Bing. *Book from the Ground: From Point to Point*. Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, 2013.

———. “Regarding Book from the Ground.” *The Book About Xu Bing’s*, 2014, 37–35.

———. *Xu Bing: Tobacco Project, Duke/Shanghai/Virginia, 1999-2011*. Richmond & Charlottesville, Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 2011.

Yan, Jun. “Zenyang Bei Shijie Gaibian: Xianshi Zhong De Zhongguo Shengyin Shijian [How Are We Changed by the World: Chinese Sound Practice in Reality].” *New Arts: Journal of the National Academy of Art* 35, no. 6 (2014): 47–63.

Yan Jun, and Gray Louise, eds. *Dushi Fasheng: Chengshi Shengyin Huanjing [Sound and the City: City Sound Environment]*. Shanghai Renmin Chubanshe [Shanghai People’s Press], 2007.

Yang, Peixin. “Xinshangji Toulu Xinyuedushidai Lailin: Dianzishu Yuedu Xitong Wenshi [New Business Opportunities Reveal a New Era of Reading: The Birth of E-Book System].” *Liberty Times Net (LTN)*, February 12, 2003. http://old.ltn.com.tw/2003/new/feb/12/life/art-2.htm.

Yang Wei-Chung. “Guanchang, Youjian Guanchang [Factory Shutdowns, Seeing Factory Shutdowns Again].” *Puluo Minzhu Wang [Worker Democracy]*, no. 38 (June 1996). https://workerdemo-hk.com/2017/07/18/.

Yao, Dajuin. “Duihua Dajuin [In Conversation with Dajuin].” *China the Sonic Avant-Garde*, September 1, 2005. https://monoskop.org/images/f/f2/China_the_Sonic_Avant-Garde_1_2005.pdf.

———. “Revolutions Per Minute: Sound Art China.” *RPM: Ten Years of Sound Art in China* (blog), 2013. http://revolutionsperminutefest.org/.

———. “Revolutions Per Minute: Sound Art China.” Accessed April 12, 2019. http://revolutionsperminutefest.org/SoundArtChina.

———. “Shengyin Fenlie Zhanlan Xilie [Schizophonia Exhibition Series].” OCAT: OCT Contemporary Art Terminal, 2015. http://www.ocat.org.cn/index.php/Exhibition/?aid=377.

———. “Shengyin Yishu (Bu) Zai Zhongguo [Sound Art (Not) in China].” *New Arts: Journal of the National Academy of Art* 35, no. 6 (2014).

———. “Woyao Ting Chengshi Luoji Zaipao de Shengyin! Yao Dajuin Fangtan Xia [I Want to Listen to the Running Sounds of Programming Logic: An Interview with Yao Dajuin Part 2].” Yueguang ruanjian, July 3, 2001. https://www.moon-soft.com/program/bbs//readelite205783.htm.

———. “Zhuansu Yu Shisu: Zhongguo Shengyin Yishu Xianzhuang [Revolt and Stall: The Current State of Chinese Sound Art].” *Yishu Pinglun [Art’s Criticism]*, no. 2 (2014): 85–89.

Yeh, Michelle. “Toward a Poetics of Noise: From Hu Shi to Hsia Yü.” *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)* 30 (2008): 167–78.

Zero and Sound Liberation Organization. “Ling Yu Shengyin Jiefang Zuzhi Biography [Zero and Sound Liberation Organization Biography].” ET@T. Accessed June 10, 2019. http://www1.etat.com/zslo/bio.htm.

———. “Zero and Sound Liberation Organization Manifesto.” Manuscript, 1997. ET@T Archive. http://archive.etat.com/etat-varchive/2699/.

Zhang, Beiwen. “Xiayu, Chuanqiangerguo de Lianxi Nüwu [Hsia Yü: The Witch of Words Who Can Pass Through the Wall].” *Eslite Reader* 25 (2002).

Zhang, Xudong. “Intellectual Politics in Post-Tiananmen China: An Introduction.” *Social Text*, no. 55 (1998): 1–8.

———. *Postsocialism and Cultural Politics: China in the Last Decade of the Twentieth Century*. Duke University Press, 2008.

Zhang, Zhen. “Introduction: Bearing Witness: Chinese Urban Cinema in the Era of ‘Transformation.’” In *The Urban Generation: Chinese Cinema and Society at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Zhen Zhang, 1–45. Durham: Duke University Press, 2007.

———. *The Urban Generation: Chinese Cinema and Society at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century*. Duke University Press, 2007.

Zhao, Mingtang. *Jinmen Paozhan Jishi [Documenting the Bombardment of Kinmen]*. Taipei: Gexin Publishing, 1958.

GLOSSARIES

85 Yishu Xinchao 85 艺术新潮

Bi'an Shengyin 彼岸声音

Caoyuan wenxueshe 草原文学社

Chang ziji de ge 唱自己的歌

dangguo 党国

Danhong de Xiyu 丹红的细雨

dianzi shubao 电子书包

dianzi yueduqi 电子阅读器

Didixia, xinyinyue qianxingji 地底下：新音乐潜行纪

fan denglu zhuang 反登陆桩

fangong dalu 反攻大陆

fanyire 翻译热

fatong 法统

fenzhi 分治

fuli fang 福利房

Fuqi gepi 福气个屁

Gaige kaifang 改革开放

Gongren douzhen fanshiye dayouxing 工人斗阵反失业大游行

guitiao zhai 轨条寨

guowuyuan 国务院

guoxue国学

Heishou nakasi 黑手那卡西

hou juxiang 后具象

Huanghe Dahechang 黄河大合唱

jiaosi pang 绞丝旁

junguan shiqi 军管时期

kuaiban 快板

Li Zongsheng 李宗盛

Lishi de shangkou 历史的伤口

Long de Chuanren 龙的传人

Miao miao miao 妙缪庙

Minzu xue 民族血

Moyan 魔岩

Neixin de zaoyin 内心的噪音

Piaoliang de Zhongguoren 漂亮的中国人

Qiaoting Beijing 桥听北京

quzhongguohua 去中国化

Ranshao de zaoyin 燃烧的噪音

Renjiao dianzishu 人教电子书

santong 三通

shangpin fang 商品房

Shenghuo Xianchang: Zhongguo Shidi Luyin 生活现场：中国实地录音

Shengjiao 声交

shengming gongtong ti 生命共同体

shengyin shi 声音诗

shengyin yishu 声音艺术

Shengyinfenlie, shengxiang yujing yihua 声音分裂，声响语境异化

shequ zongti yingzao 社区总体营造

shuochang 说唱

Tiananmen zhihuo, xuesheng zhiai 天安门之火，学生之爱

Tong Ange 童安格

tongyou, tonghang, tongshang 通邮、通航、通商

Weile Zuguo de Yuangu 为了祖国的缘故

Weishibi 维士比

wenben shengyin yishu 文本声音艺术

Wenchang dianzishu 文昌电书

Wenhua chuanxin 文化传信

wenhuare 文化热

Xiao Cunzilide Chaoji Hunli 小村子里的超级婚礼

xiaoyuan minge　　校园民歌

xin zuopai　　新左派

Xinqimeng yundong　新启蒙运动

xinzhan　　心战

Xuemai xianglian, liangan duige　　血脉相连，两岸对歌

Yingding Qiao银锭桥

yinyue juxiang音乐具象

yuyan yishu　语言艺术

Zaoyin hezuoshe　　噪音合作社

Zhandi zhengwu　　战地政务

Zhiyao wo zhangda　只要我长大

zhongguo　　中国

Zhongguo hun中国魂

Zhongguo shengyin xiaozu　中国声音小组

Zhonghua wenhua fuxing yundong　中华文化复兴运动

zhongwen dianshu　　中文电书

ziyouhua, guojihua, zhiduhua自由化，国际化，制度化

ziyoupai　　自由派