

Zhang Peili, Notes, Works, Chronology & Bibliography

[In these materials ZPL=Zhang Peili. Thanks for materials here especially to Zhang Peili and the works cited by Katharine Grube and Robyn Peckham].

Medical background in Childhood

... He [His father, who was a doctor] often brought organ specimens home—brains, hearts, and so on. I think this is what made me different from other children; I was accustomed to seeing those things and would not be afraid. When I was young I often went to where my father worked to play, where there were all kinds of corpse specimens ... that place was full of medical smells. I was already numb to such odours. ... I was fond of play and would put off going to bed so my father would threaten me, telling me my body was unhealthy to begin with and if I got sick again I would die and be just like those specimens, floating in those fluids, and I was terrified—that threat worked well on me. ... My mother was a midwife, helping with labour and working in an obstetrics. She and my father would often talk about giving birth in front of us at the dinner table, so we heard a lot of names that we quickly became used to: ‘uterus,’ ‘ovary,’ ‘massive haemorrhage’. My mother carried the scent of disinfectant and my father that of formaldehyde, and when I think of it now it was a very strange combination [Cited by Zhang Huan in Peckham & Lau, 2011, 16-17]

Early technique and anti-narrative

Early Chinese video art, from the late 1980s to the early 1990s, was like a moving camera, primarily engaging in simple documentation lacking any of the linguistic properties of digital image syntax. In Zhang Peili's *30 x 30* (1988) we see the classical symptoms of early Chinese conceptualism: a reductive and repetitive narrative style obviously influenced by minimalism, a stationary camera position, a lack of post-production editing and audio production, limitless drawing out of time, and other marks of resistance to finish or polish. [Huang Zhan in Peckham & Lau, 2011, 21]

...aside from the obvious shared attempts to dispel the temporalization model of mass advertising culture and challenge meaning, Zhang Peili uses the moving image to continue the narrative logic of psychological analysis from his early work: broken glass and the motions of endlessly breaking and repairing become strong physiological and psychological metaphors. This marker remains throughout his later work, the technical content of which grows consistently more sophisticated. [Huang Zhan in Peckham & Lau, 2011, 22]

Some people show antipathy toward technique, believing that it interferes with art and therefore contains a great many dangers. Technology is still very alien to me, and I always hope to remain between art and technique, or art and non-art. This status of being able to move in either direction is, for me, a comparatively free state. I do not want to appear as both an artist and a scientist. I am more repelled by empty talk about art. I do not want to use a fixed concept to speak and make work.” (14) In order to avoid this pitfall, he often tells himself and his students not to be overly enamoured of “professional standards,” because the price to be paid may be individuality itself. As he says, “There are only good and bad works; there is no distinction of professionalism. To rank works according to a standard of professionalism is meaningless. [ZPL cited by Huang Zhan in Peckham & Lau, 2011, 22-23]

1989 Zhang Peili on Mechanisms of Restraint

The basic conditions of mechanisms of restraint should be as follows:

1. Eliminate connoisseurship, entertainment (including entertainment that comes with an element of pain), theatricality, and reportage.
2. Have exact and neutral regulations to guide ‘appreciation’ (or ‘intervention’).
3. Everyone participates willingly.
4. There is no interference from power unrelated to art.

Of course, ‘works’ existing under these conditions would be impossible to collect in 1987 I completed two textual proposal works: *Procedure of ‘Ask First, Shoot Later’: About ‘X?’* and *Art Project No. 2*. The

former established a route through the exhibition area, regulations for viewing, and other conditions, while the latter turned the medium of viewership into the work itself by placing the audience into a relationship of ‘dialogue’ and ‘peeping.’ The regulations and procedures are detailed and exacting, and, because they restrict behaviour to an extreme degree, the audience is placed into a fully passive position within the work. In the later work *Brown Book No. 1* (1988), I used a different method to emphasize the sensibility of using force to control the tendencies of the audience—that is to say, by forcing people to accept a fact, a ‘work’ unrelated to his or her own volition, with no mental preparation whatsoever. This might be invasive in some ways, but this is not a goal in its own right just as surgeries and injections do not constitute a goal on their own. Everything is simply a reaction to the ‘decent’ postures of connoisseurship. Under these conditions, the relationship between art and the public can be made ripe with tension. Just as those with dental problems are unwilling to have their teeth extracted, audiences accustomed to appreciating art in a relaxed and undisciplined manner indubitably see constraints or alterations to their mode of connoisseurship as a form of torture. But people never ask, what in this world is not subject to constraints in some way (no one doubts the legitimacy of such constraints)? Why is art an exception? Is art doomed to provide only entertainment? [cited by Zhang Huan in Peckham & Lau, 2011, 18-19]

1980s’ conceptualist painting, installation, and performance

The Pond Association’s particular sense of rationality is, perhaps, better interpreted as a state of cool, non-desiring objectivity arrived at somewhat paradoxically – as the group’s declaration indicates [...] a decidedly non-rationalist or immersive blurring of subject-object boundaries. [There is] strong affinity with first, the Buddhist notion that enlightenment can be achieved through non-desiring meditative states; second, traditional Chinese *shanshui* [mountains & water = landscape] painting where the absence of any strict perspective geometry or unequivocal visual depth cues encourages the viewed associated with the aesthetic concept of the *yijing*; third: the [Daoist] concept of ‘tracklessness’ [...] where ‘reality’ is viewed as an abstraction shuttling somewhere between subjectivity and objectivity (the limitless and the limited) and ‘knowledge’ as something that arises out of an active and constantly unfolding relationship between subjects and objects. [Gladston, 2013, 125-126, edited, Wang Qiang in the interview in this book denies the Chan Buddhism influence Gladston has absorbed from Martian Köppel-Yang, 141. See Köppel-Yang, 2003, 61]

Zhang Peili on Pond Society notion of ‘immersion’

Immersion should not be thought of here as self-intoxication. It’s not simply a matter of subjectivity or a lack of objectivity. We wanted it to be a pure thing; a pure process and pure experience similar to an act of religious meditation. Another point is that we saw immersion in the process of artistic creation as something similar to the destruction of art; in other words, by merging art into society and social life, art could become part of life rather than existing in a closed state as before. Although it may not always be obvious when looking at our work, we felt that art should have a relevance to daily life within society. We thought that this function was of great importance. That’s why the Pond Association staged art works in public spaces [...] From our point of view, art could be judged in relation to whether it was made in response to internal needs or external influences. As for immersion, we wanted to suggest that everyone’s experience of art is different. We also wanted to suggest that everyone needs the psychological relaxation provided by art [...] because human beings are exhausted by want. In recent years the tendency towards utility has become increasingly prominent in relation to contemporary Chinese art. But I think that at least some artists continue to face these questions in a serious way and to set their own interests aside. [Gladston, 2013, 129-130].

Take for example *Water* (1992, in which the tone and speed of the narrator’s voice and her facial expression are not those of a person but more of a machine; a machine that is controlled by someone and a machine that controls people. This is interesting to me since man as a subject is always defined by a dual relationship of having control and being controlled. The works *30 x 30* and *Document on Hygiene* deal with the same issue, but in another way. Some critics would say that *Children’s Playground* is

about human fate, the aspect in our lives that we cannot control. I believe it makes no sense for man to question his own destiny, the same way we have no way of discerning if modernization is good or bad. Chinese and western people might have their own specific problems; in the end we are all the same as men. So, authority can be seen from different points of view; on a side there is a visible one which we believe is coming from outside, like the law, the police, the educational system. There is also a form we construct for ourselves. Even when we choose freely for ourselves and believe ourselves to belong to a system free of antagonism, we are still unconsciously submitting ourselves to authoritative control, also in a secular world. [Zhang Peili in an interview with Beatrice Leanza in Waling Boers & Pi Li, *Teaching the stones: China Art Now*, Beijing: Timezone 8, 2007, 49]

1988 Change in mode of documentation after recovery from Hepatitis A

I am primarily interested in the half-liquid state formed by the combination of gypsum plaster and clear varnish. I discovered that this porridge-like liquid resembled living matter, some kind of infected organic body. When the ratio of plaster to varnish is changed the state and texture of the liquid changes as well, making it rich with possibilities (as much so as true forms of life). Bringing this hybrid matter together with the symbol I have been using—medical latex gloves—was a natural move. Mixing paint into the varnish the organic qualities of the liquid are enhanced. When these liquids of different colours are poured into the gloves and made to flow naturally, I achieved effects I could not have expected. There are two types of such works: those in a comparatively whole condition and those in fragments. With the latter it is easier for the viewer to note the relationship between liquid and surface, because it is more subtle and delicate. Because of the special qualities of the material, I find this a relatively direct way to grasp the being of an organic body. Most people see a virus as a chance occurrence for such a body, calling the infected state ‘abnormal,’ but it seems to me that viruses are actually normal phenomena in all forms of life, or another phenomenon of life. Calmly observing this phenomenon, we can discover that it too is filled with metaphysical power and strength. [cited by Zhang Huan in Peckham & Lau, 2011, 20]

Meaning, ‘illusion’ and ‘reality’

I’ve always believed that people live in an illusion and that there is some kind of hidden force or “superpower” behind this illusion. This superpower is not controlled by human beings and is not subject to perception. What we perceive or discover is not the superpower. Some critics thought that some of my early works, such as *Document on “Hygiene” No. 3* (1991, see p. 118) and *30 x 30* (1988, see p. 122), had something to do with politics. I’m not sure about those interpretations, and I don’t want to explain further. What I felt during the early stages of my development as an artist was that there is a kind of underlying force or power. Sudden changes or disasters, which have been caused either by nature or by human beings, made me realize that people live in an illusion, and this feeling has become stronger as my career as an artist has developed. All these beautiful and supposedly stable states are so fragile. They are just illusions. Changeable and destructive states are inevitable. They are the realities. [ZPL with Paul Gladston in 2008, in Peckham & Lau, 2011, 39]

I was just trying to question the ideology of permanence and stability. I tried to detach this ideology from my actual experience of events. We might frequently face such an issue: a comfortable life is changed. As for the adoption of materials to show this issue, it could be a watermelon, a cigarette, or something else; it’s just an excuse, a means to an end. Behind the materials are time and the unknown power, which remains eternal. I used wind in my work. However, what is the wind? What does it symbolize? I don’t know. There might be another power behind the wind, which tries to change things through the wind. I’m not sure what that is either. I don’t want to deny real life or give up real life because of the unknown power. My attitude is not religious; religious: religion is certain and specific whilst my outlook is always uncertain. [ZPL with Paul Gladston in 2008, in Peckham & Lau, 2011, 39]

What I meant by the uncertain significance or meaning of a piece of work is that it’s very difficult to explain the complete significance or provide a concept to define the work. Even the creator of the

work finds it difficult to provide this. Someone once said a piece of work is just like a box into which you can put whatever you like. Though everyone has his or her own understanding of the works, this doesn't mean that the works have no functions or meanings for viewers. Due to the openness of the work, it can mean something to everyone. Most of the time, artists don't think too much about the impact of their works on the audience; rather, they focus on what the works might mean to themselves. It's just like the metaphor I gave earlier—the story of the spider. Artists create works out of instinct. Objectively, artists' works are like a web made by a spider, which influences its surroundings: the people, the mosquitoes, and everything else around it. As to whether the influences are positive or negative, it's difficult to tell.

... there must be some function [for criticism and critical theory] that can be either positive or negative. I personally feel it's very difficult to judge what's positive and what's negative. All comments are misunderstandings. The process of being misunderstood is part of the continuous process [ZPL with Paul Gladston in 2008, in Peckham & Lau, 2011, 42]

Awareness of time

New technology is now a kind of continuation, deepening, and opening up of the expression of time. But present digital technology also makes us have different concepts about time. In the past we gave more importance to 'true' time; time now and time then are not the same, at least conceptually, but they are all true and have taken place. For example, as they involve this time, yesterday, the day before yesterday or half a month ago, are at least already the past, but they are not illusory. Yet present media, digital technology, can produce another kind of time which is illusory. This illusory time or we may call it space and time, is one never ever experienced. It is not something you experienced in the past. You don't know if it is in the end true. This kind of illusory time can create a false impression [misconception] about true time. It can be a kind of composite. It is very difficult for you to ascertain what is true time what is illusory time. Present media technology compared with the past has brought different understandings and concepts about time. [ZPL with Clark, 2010]

Visit of Ernst Mitzka to Hangzhou in 1990: outline of a paper by Katherine Grube, reproduced with permission, from August 2016 publicly available at Asia Art Archive Hong Kong INSERT URL.....

It was through an academic exchange between the China Academy of Art and the Hamburg Academy of Fine Art in Germany that artists in China saw a catalogue of video art practices. Artists were certainly aware of video art's development outside of China through the reproduction of still images and installation views in Taiwanese and American arts journals, such as *Xiongshi Yishu* [雄狮艺术] and *Art in America*, available in academy libraries. But, it was Ernst Mitzka's presentation of the entire *Kunstkanal* program in April 1990 that allowed artists in Hangzhou to experience video art as moving, rather than still, image for the first time.

Mitzka's trip to China, though, was a happy accident, the result of a friendly invitation from his colleague and fellow professor at the Hamburg Academy of Fine Art, the painter K.P. Brehmer, who received his invitation to China from his former student, Xu Jiang. In addition to Mitzka, Brehmer invited fellow faculty member and printmaker, Rainer Oehms. The three spent twenty days between Shanghai and Hangzhou during which Mitzka gave two lectures in Hangzhou. His talks were casual, improvised affairs given in German and translated, often sparingly, into Chinese. He discussed the general trajectory of video art's development in Europe and North America, emphasizing the medium's political potential as well as the expressive opportunities afforded with by the Portapak. Mitzka's talks were couched in the language of freedom of expression and democratic access to information, a reflection, for Mitzka, on recent events in Tian'anmen.

In three two-hour sessions, Mitzka screened the entire eight episodes *Kunstkanal* program, a program for which Mitzka, with Rotraut Pape and Gérard Couty, was the artistic director and which continues to hold a significant place in video art history in Europe and American as the first instance in which video art reached a mass audience. Aired in late September 1989 on Bonn's cable station, RTLplus, *Kunstkanal's* schedule includes many of the best and best known examples of video art, including works like Bill Viola's *Anthems* (1983) and Peter Campus' "Three Transitions" (1973).

These works were shown on the academy's new, and first, video projector on a cinema-size screen in the school's large assembly hall, the hall that around 1995 would be renovated to form for the gallery space that housed "Image and Phenomena." Over 1000 students attended Mitzka's lectures, and the students were joined on the second day by individuals from local television studios, who, reportedly, blanched at nudity in works like Friderike Pezold's *The Monologue*, a raucous romp through the female nude and the gendered image. Mitzka left his collection of VHS tapes at the academy, and these works were subsequently circulated around the CAA. Tong Biao, Yang Fudong, Yang Zhenzhong, Jiang Zhi and Qiu Zhijie attended Mitzka's lectures and the tapes were left with a professor with the surname, Shu.

List of Kunstkanal videos, courtesy Katharine Grube

Kunstkanal 1989 Program Works list

Air date: September 30, 1989 to October 8, 1989

Channel: RTL

Organized by Ernst Mitzka, Rotraut Pape and Gérard Couty

Produced by Regine Wyrwoll and gallerist Philomene Magers (Bonn)

Content: television series realized in 8 parts on 8 consecutive days as part of the birthday celebrations of the city of Bonn for RTL+.

Participating Artists (34)

Klaus vom Bruch (German)

Ingo Günther (German)

Marcel Odenbach (German)

Ulrike Rosenbach (German)

Rainer Ganahl (Austria)

Frederike Pezold (Austria)

Paul Garrin (The man with the videocamera + Free Society; American)

William Wegmann (The best of William Wegmann)

Peter Campus (Three transitions)

Brenda Miller (L.A. Nickels)

Bill Seaman (S.H.E.)

Bill Viola (Anthems)

Jenny Holzer (Survival...)

Joan Logue (Portraits)

And also: Robert Adrian X, Thomas Bayrle, Gerd Belz, Peter Bruntz, Gérard Couty, Walter Dahn, Lili Fischer, Astrid Heibach, Julia Heyward, Volker Hildebrandt, Thomas Huber, Hans-Peter Keyssig, Norbert Meissner, Rainer Mucha, Norbert Nowotsch (and seven students from the Fachhochschule Münster [MünsterTechnical College]), Marcel Odenbach, Frederike Pezold, Sigmar Polke, René Pulfer, Lazlo Revesz,

Views about video art

1990-91

Unlike The Street Video Group in Germany in the 1960s, Chinese artists were not interested in documenting news, recording social reform, or fighting the museum system. On the contrary, Chinese artists took video as a new mode of individual expression, placing emphasis on its aesthetic value. [Qiu Zhijie & Wu Meichun, 2002, in Wu Hung & Peggy Wang, 2010, 233]

1994

Other videos made by Li Juchan and Tong Biao

When the mere record of than object is meaningless, action becomes ‘truth’ on the screen. In this regard, the single, fixed-focus close-up shot then is a compelling solution. [...] the original concept of these works was aimed at avoiding the subsequent problems of editing. Unavoidably. The deliberate and repeated paring down of technical elements under these difficult conditions resulted in unbearably simplified work. A love of minimalism, an interest in extreme simplification, and an obsession with process further provided a seemingly profound and self-confident basis for this. [Qiu Zhijie & Wu Meichun, 2002, in Wu Hung & Peggy Wang, 2010, 233]

1995

Art ... makes the relationships between people become more specific and direct, and helps the formation of an interaction by addressing issues whose concern is shared by many. *The role of art is that of eliminating obstacles, and this is also its meaning.* Therefore, my starting point is everyday life and normal experience. I wish for my work to stand between art and life, or, in other words, on an indefinite border. [Cited by Dal Lago in Peckham & Lau, 2011, 11].

On Cultural Interpretation

1996 At War with the West?

Zhang Peili interviewed by Dutch contemporary art historian Hans van Dyck:

During the period from the 1950s to the 1970s, as Chinese people were fed confidence by Mao Zedong's saying 'The East wind prevails over the West', they saw themselves as the centre of the world. They believed China represented the heart of justice across the globe: justice that would one day rise above the West and change the world. This self-confidence collapsed in the late 1980s when it was discovered that China was not yet as great a force in the outside world as people had been led to believe.

The real, profound influence [of western art] felt by Chinese artists has been... [producing] an art that is marketable. Many artists attach greater importance to making a name..than to exploring art itself...In China, Andy Warhol is widely regarded as an example of an artists who achieved both fame and fortune..People love to quote his 'fifteen minutes of fame' taking it as a bugle call for the march towards success...But what should we do today in the name of the avant-garde? [cited in Smith, 2008 406]

2003/2008

I think it is very important for an artist to preserve a kinds of natural attitude, that is to say, he/she should be mostly concerned with his/her own work and not use other people's opinions as his/her point of departure. In fact, among Western intellectuals there is a predisposed attitude toward and way of looking at the art of peripheral countries, which, in recent years, has become the object of attention for many artists and scholars in these peripheral areas. Of course this is a problem that I myself cannot avoid facing. It is the predicament of any artist coming from such places ...I do not agree that my work directly challenges 'the way in which the international art world looks at the cultural production of the periphery,' but this is an issue that I definitely address. I want to challenge all kind of dogmatic, one-sided, aprioristic, and colonially-coloured viewpoints. ... On a subjective level, I do not want to adopt any stance of opposition or resistance as the starting point of my creative process. I prefer a natural attitude and I do not wish to highlight the special character of my identity as a Chinese artist, nor do I use any symbol or image carrying Chinese elements to express such identity. And yet I am not consciously trying to get rid of that in order to seek a so called international character." [ZPL cited by Francesca Dal Lago in Peckham & Lao, 2011, 10]

I'm not a specialist in Chinese culture or philosophy. I'm not a specialist in Western culture and philosophy either. Comparatively, I think Chinese philosophy is more stable—not like Western philosophy, which has evolved and changed radically over time. Also, Chinese philosophy emphasizes harmony and contentment. Though it seems Western philosophy and Chinese philosophy share certain similarities after postmodernism, Western philosophy still places far greater emphasis on logic, reasoning, and analysis, whereas Chinese philosophy emphasizes feeling, experience, and meditation. As a result, we have different views towards many things. It's just like a Westerner doing *tai chi*: no matter how good this person is at carrying out the moves, it wouldn't seem as natural compared to a Chinese person doing *tai chi*. I don't know why it should be like that. I haven't thought consciously about my relationship to Chinese and Western cultures or philosophies, or how to find a connecting point between them. I sometimes try to avoid this question—whether I belong to Western or Chinese culture. I don't think it's necessary to draw a clear cultural boundary. The creativity of my work is influenced by my personal surroundings: the people I meet and the books I read, and so on. The

people and books are no longer what we saw or read thousands of years ago, or five hundred years ago, or even two hundred years ago. I think my works have both Western and Chinese elements. And I don't like to be restricted purely as a Chinese and limited by my cultural characteristics. The best thing is to be natural and to be oneself. I think others have the right to judge my works from different cultural perspectives, but it's not something I myself should think about too much. [ZPL with Paul Gladston in 2008, in Peckham & Lau, 2011, 41]

I feel a lot now about the China/West way of seeing things. Many people are relatively closed with regard to time. Considered overall there is something idealistic [about their approach]. The two big concepts of China and the West are truly from history and culture and there are very few people who have done enhanced research into such changes. This [binary] is a rather closed concept. In actual fact, speaking of artists, it is not very important to consider this problem from one angle or another. Thus a proposition for an artist, art critic and scholar is not in this sense the same. Speaking of artists, it is not important they produce a response or have a reply to this sort of proposition. An artist may have a rather conservative and closed perception about this proposition, or they can have a rather liberated and rational perception. This has something to do with their final art language. Some people may be able very rational in their understanding towards this kind of problem and they have done very deep research. This is not the same as saying their art is interesting. In the same way, some people are very one sided and conservative towards this perception, or are of extremely democratic inclination, but they are very interesting in their artistic expression. I feel that neither is important. The art of certain artists explains their concepts, and their work is strong concerning morality, culture and political concepts. But some artists don't have this; their art is not related to this. Maybe it is conservative with regard to morality or culture, but in art they are liberated. So these two things are not the same.

[...]

Art is not the tool of thought. It is related to thought, [but] on the side of this thought it must concern art itself. And it is not related to anything else.

[ZPL with Clark, 2010]

Clark: A very major problem of Chinese Modern Art is that of linguistic control.

ZPL: This is a major problem. See from the surface of things the whole environment is now very open. Apparently you can do anything at all. But in fact language is controlled completely by something which is not easily changed. A lot of Chinese art we see now [is by] artists who went through school, art college, and later started again with their own creation. When they were in school [we may ask that] with regards to art language, art thought, and the way of technical training, did this way change or was it open? At least in the art academy there are many new courses and new things ceaselessly appear like new media but with regard to what I just discussed as education in 'basic principles', that kind of closed education in ideas, there has been no change regarding the kind of education in correct and incorrect. The education artists receive is still one-track and they don't receive the influence of an open environment. Their thinking is one-track, their language is one-track. This is because from the beginning when they enter school they are told what is correct and what is incorrect. They have not perceived the difference, and the difference is more important than the 'basic principles'. Thus now even though they are young artists after the 1980s the education they receive is like this and maybe their way of thinking is like this: what is correct and what is incorrect. So very many people at any one time can immediately grab hold of what they think is correct.

[ZPL with Clark 2010]

1997 Mature problematics of Video

The problem that we face now is not what video art is but how can we use video. It's currently too early to define video art. A standard fashion of video art is emerging at the moment but it is certainly one that doesn't appeal to all. The nature of video is challenging. It is both powerful and accessible. It is once intimate and public. Easy to copy and communicable. It exposes actuality while being a flexible

outlet for one's imagination. So this exhibition indiscriminately embraces all video art. It expresses our courage to live in this multimedia world.

[Wu Meichun in Wu Meichun, 1997.]

Chinese video art developed differently from that of the West in terms of influence and rates of progress. This independent process has allowed Chinese video art to play a vital role in Chinese society in the 1990s. During the period of cultural stagnation experienced in the early 1990s video art quickly gained popularity allowing artists the ease of home-production and an effective underground distribution. By the mid-1990s, in an environment of progressive experimentation, video became an important medium. It enabled artists to display self-criticism and reflections, consequently freeing this medium from ideological constraints, and contributing towards making video a popular medium.

[..]

..initial acceptance into a more international art world has forced Chinese artists to become more aware and to articulate their own cultural and artistic role in perspective.

[Wu Meichun in *Fast Forward*, 1999, 8]

[Facing the forthcoming popularity of video art, how should it be sustained?]

In order to progress, Chinese video art must promote the strength of the medium by emphasising its sensational qualities and mass media reach. These qualities enable video to reach beyond the limitations of regional style conventions inherent in local art. Furthermore, video art can introduce a strategy that is both critical and flexible, expanding on the confines that inhibit Chinese conceptual art. At the same time, Chinese videoart must re-think and re-evaluate the set models and conventions within Western contemporary media and develop its own particular language.

It is vital that Chinese video artists do not fall into the trap of their western counterparts, i.e. not to allow the technological equipment to imprison an artistic talent. [Wu Meichun in *Fast Forward*, 1999, 9]

Focus on themes and daily life experiences:

The West views the body in terms of pleasure or evil. However, the Chinese adopt both a Taoist philosophy that the body is an inseparable part of the universe, and Buddhist interpretation of the body as a shell. The body [thereby becomes] an electronic reflection for self-revelation.

[Wu Meichun in *Fast Forward*, 1999, 9]

Wu Meichun [9 above] notes the extreme liberality of view which regards body as the essence of life rather than a self-indulgent or self-loathing relationship to the body in Wang Gongxin and Zhang Peili; Chen Shaoxiong splits the mind into two by feeding different stimuli to each eye; Qiu Zhijie shows a Chinese sensitivity towards everyday and insignificant moments in his work; Wu Ershan, and Gao Shiming/Gao Shiqiang/Lu Lei embrace drama and fantasy by capturing moments of daily activities, transforming them into an in-depth observation of life.

The real question we face concerns the uses to which video art can be put, not what video art is. It is too early to define. Although standards for video art appear to be falling into place, they are not accepted by everyone. The inherent characteristics of the medium make it powerful yet cheap, intimate yet easy to copy and disseminate. It can expose the truth and be sensitive to the imagination. This exhibition is an attempt to show everything and not to select work to illustrate a specific theme. It is broadly inclusive in its selection and indicates our courage to exist in the world of media. [Wu Meichun in the catalogue of *Demonstration of Video Art, 97 China* in Qiu Zhijie & Wu Meichun, 2002, in Wu Hung & Peggy Wang, 2010, 237]

Chinese video art in the early- mid 1990s

Zhang Peili showed more researched use of Western video art and used multiple screens to exhibit works, creating a direct visual impact across the screens

In its early years from the late 80s to early 90s, Chinese video art was more like a roaming camera whose main function was to document: it did not possess a linguistic attribute such as ‘electronic image sentence-making method’. [Huang Zhuan, 2001, n.p.]

[From 1996-97] Video art went through a process of overcoming technical limitations to elevating technicality, to raising questions on the history of the video art medium.[...] there even arose a new concept of a ‘poetic video art school which aims at studying the grammatical rules and technical characteristics of the video medium. Explorations of the methodology of video art include the linguistic traits of the medium which feature studies in the unique way of conveying time and space; similarities and dissimilarities between electronic images and traditional images; the structural relationship between video art and installation art; the social and psychological attributes of video art as a tool, and the relationship between video and electronic networks

Analytical category: Zhang Peili:

Whose works have all retained a steady analytical approach, static camera position and continuous repetitive narrative sequences

Early works of Yan Lei, Chen Shaoxiong, Wang Gongxin, Zhu Jia, Qiu Zhijie, Li Yongbin

Integrated category: Yan Lei, Wang Jianwei:

Focus more on the internal problems of video art, such as mode of expression, narration, the technical traits of it as a visual tool and others.

In the unique environment of China, video art is unable to obtain the social interaction enjoyed by its counterpart in the West which led to it becoming either a tool of social criticism in opposition to mass media and the commercial system, or a slave to them.

The main issues in the use of video in the integrated mode are: how to mobilize the potential significance of video language, master the characteristics of its communicative imagery, enrich it with traits of a certain open-ended visual experience, and turn it into a tool which conveys human nature and involves itself in social engagement.

Wang Jianwei: always treated his work as a system of knowledge; consistently expressed a contradictory state of narrative structure

Feng Mengbo, Wang Gongxin, Song Dong.

Zhu Jia, Wang Gongxin, Chen Shaoxiong, Jiang Zhi, Xu Tan, Wang Jianwei

All seek to work their doubt of subjective ideology into a criticism of the problems of urbanization, and tinge their works with a streak of socialization.

Video art was once regarded as a new form of visual myth. In this age of conceptualism, it has, on one hand become the technical proof of ‘everyone is an artist’- a democratized art concept. On the other, it is often the first reader to decipher political and social events happening in our time (Marita Sturken) providing our visual thinking and consciousness with a new window.

[Huang Zhuan, 2001, n.p.]

Later technical understanding

Since 2000 I have stopped shooting video on camera, instead using ‘ready-mades,’ one form of which has been finding moving imagery for sale on the market to use as material. I am concerned with stylized elements of a symbolic nature and with a concept of time, elements that are concentrated in Chinese narrative films of the 1950s-1970s centered on the heroic and romantic complexes of revolution—these manifest a healthy aesthetic attitude and grammatical habit. I select fragments from these old narrative films and manipulate them in simple ways, releasing them from their original linear structure

and temporal background. What I am interested in here are the different possibilities of reading that emerge through this process. [..]

Memory might be seen as a form of material, an element, an image. Man lives inside of memory, reality, and illusion; that is to say, the process of experience is a sustained blurring and mixing of the temporalities of the past and future. Old movies represent memory and time, specific meanings and principles from a special era. I am interested in the possibility that such principles and their specificity—which have already become memory, have already been defined—might be deconstructed or dispelled into the ordinary over time. [ZPL cited by Zhang Huan in Peckham & Lau, 2011, 23-24]

[2002-3, re-montage of old revolutionary films]

Revolutionary cinema is related to memory. Today, these films still retain a special meaning for many people. I am more concerned with the mode of language presented by these old movies: originating in systematic principles and symbols that still exist in our memory, influencing and determining our methods of thought and behaviour. The images and control this system and these principles exert over individual memory and everyday experience implies a certain political content, both abstract and universal but also objective and concrete. Invisible elements are more significant than visible things. “I attempt to confuse dreams, memories, and reality. I attempt to prove that there are many unrelated things in the world that can be mixed together, and in fact they are—intentionally or accidentally—being mixed together every day. [ZPL cited by Huang Zhan in Peckham & Lau, 2011, 24-25].

Symbols and elements are different. Some Chinese materials are indeed unique to the Chinese environment, and they are not merely cultural symbols. I see them as materials. Pickled mustard, dry-cured vegetables, stinky tofu, and so on—they are elements, elements of life; some are from Beijing and some are from Hangzhou. This is not the same as using readymade symbols. What we call symbols are culturally directional, making people think of China and Chinese culture in order to express identity immediately. Dragons, Chinese characters, and Chinese architectural forms are all symbolic things, which I tend to avoid. This is not to say that one cannot use symbols, but rather that it is a question of how to use them. Besides the utilitarian use of symbols there is also a destructive use, or perhaps we should call it a creative use. These are different methods, only one of which is able to deliver new interpretations. It becomes a problem only when symbols are used simply to express identity, as a strategy. I am opposed to the use of symbols as a strategy. I am opposed to the use of a cultural psychology or fixed modes of observation and understanding, as when non-Western artists must use a certain colour palette and cultural markers or symbols in order to be seen as meaningful. I feel that many artists who employ Chinese symbols try to fit this requirement. I think such things are dangerous, because this is not thinking on the level of art but rather the utilitarian use of such elements. ZPL cited by Huang Zhan in Peckham & Lau 2011, 26]

Canon Formation: Chinese Video Artists listed in some exhibitions

Wu Meichun, '97 Zhongguo luxiang yishu guanmo, Demonstration of Video Art in China, 1997.

Video artists noted:

An Hong
 Chen Shaoxiong
 Chen Wenbo
 Gao Shiming, Gao Shiqiang, Lu Lei
 Gou Zi, Tang Guangming
 Hu Jieming
 Li Juchuan
 Li Yongbin
 Lin Tianmiao
 Liu Yi
 Qiu Zhijie
 Song Dong
 Tian Miaozi
 Tong Biao
 Wang Gongxin
 Wang Jingsong
 Wong Fen
 Wu Ersan
 Wu Minghui
 Xu Ruodao
 Yan Lei
 Yan YinhongJiang Zhi
 Yang Zhenzhong
 Zhang Peili
 Zhao Liang
 Zhu Jia
 Zhu Ming

Fast Forward 1999 (seen by Qiu Zhijie in Macao)

Mainland video artists noted:

Chen Shaoxiong, *Sight adjuster II*, 1996
 Gao Shiqiang/Gao Shiming/ Lu Lei, *Visible and Invisible Life*, 1997
 Qiu Zhijie, *Objects*, 1997
 Song Dong, *Hit the table*, 1999
 Wang Gongxin, *Face*, 1997
 Wang Jianwei, *Production*, 1996
 Wu Ershan, *Looking Around*, 1998
 Yan Lei, *PAL Systems*, 1999
 Zhang Peili, *Uncertain Pleasure*, 1996

Compound Eye, Contemporary Video Art from China, Singapore 2001

Li Yongbin, *Face 8 & Face 9*, 2000 & 2001.
 Wang Gongxin, *Karaoke*, 2000
 Wang Jianwei, *Noun & Verb?*, 2001
 Zhang Peili, *Screen 2*, 1999
 Zhu Jia, *Linked Scenery* 2000.

Wu Hung & Christopher Phillips, 2004

Photography (P) & Video (V)

Video by Curatorial Categories**History and Memory**

Feng Mengbo

Ma Liuming

Qiu Zhijie

Song Dong

Wang Gongxin

Weng Fen

Yang Zhenzhong

Zhou Xiaohu

People and Place

Chen Shaoxiong Video & mixed media installation

Cui Xiuwen

Hu Jieming

Song Dong

Wang Jianwei

Yang Fudong

Performing the self

Cao Fei

Yang Fudong

Yang Zhenzhong

Zhao Liang

Re-imagining the body

Jiang Zhi

Liu Wei (b.1972)

Wang Gongxin

Zhou Xiaohu

Paintings, videos, and installations by Zhang Peili:

- 1983 *Swimmers in mid-summer*, oil on canvas, 172 x 170 cms, private collection, Chengdu.
I put all my energy into painting details within details, to creating the most perfect depiction of my subject I was capable of achieving. Such perfection was not intended to extol an unobtainable ideal, but to create a distance between the subject and the viewer, to emphasize that a painting is only a reflection of the real world, an illusion created by an artist to communicate a specific message. My goal was to stop people in their tracks, for them to consider why a perfectly pictured ideal ultimately appeared so unnatural [ZPL in Smith, 2008, 389].
- 1985 *Swimmers in the water*, oil on canvas, 135 x 110 cms, private collection, Chengdu
- 1985 *Mid-Summer Swimmers*, oil on canvas, 120 x 120 cms.
[Around graduation] I had a particular idea about painting figures [oarsmen rowing a boat] depicted from an unconventional angle. There were to be no facial expressions, the features reduced to simple forms in the same manner as the figures, [...] [by portraying rowers mid-oar, I thought I could get around the issue of correct posture and facial expression.], but the answer was no. I was informed that an artist had to convey a spirit of positive engagement in meaningful activities. So the joyful struggle of oarsmen to excel then, because excelling, winning, triumphing over the odds underpinned the national ideology, and was the goal of every cog in the modernisation programme! [ZPL in Smith, 2008, 390]
- 1986 June–November, involved in Pond Society collective works: *Work No.1 Yang-style Tai Ji series*, a series of paper cuts based on Taiji poses by Zhang Peili, Geng Jianyi, Song Ling, Wang Qiang; *Wrapping Up – King and Queen*, Zhang Peili and Geng Jianyi were wrapped up in newspaper as living sculptures in a performance in Luoyang; *Work no. 2, Strollers in the Green Space*, papers cuts suspended in a garden under trees near West Lake, Zhang Peili, Song Ling, Bao Jianfei, Geng Jianyi. [Berghuis, 2006, 48-51; Gladston, 2013, 123]
- 1986 *Doing without a score*, oil on canvas, 100 x 80 cms, private collection, Chengdu
- 1986 *X*, oil on canvas, 47 x 78 cms, private collection, Chengdu
- 1987 *X? Series no.4*, oil on canvas, 180 x 200cms, Sigg Collection.
One of the many paintings produced in relation to the radical text-based conceptual work *Procedure of "Ask First, Shoot Later": About "X?"*, this series depicts a pair of gloves, a recurring motif signifying institutional control and the hygienic instability of the body, repeated in various positions and various tints of color. All of these variations are derived from the specific instructions of *Procedure*, which called for the disinterested production of such images according to certain procedures in order to create a larger installation environment. Resolutely turning away from painting by authoring a text in which the artist would deliberately withdraw himself from the visual allusion of the "painterly" and into the conceptual approach of cognitive imagination, the maneuver was unprecedented and demarcates a new period of art production in China: that dominated by so-called new media and conceptual art. [Peckham & Lau, 2011, 136]
- 1987 *No Jazz tonight*, oil on canvas, 124 x 180 cms, private collection, Chengdu.
Like the music that is not played, making the instrument useless, the formal perfection of the image does not serve the purpose of narrative: a story can be imagined, but it is not told. [Dal Lago in Peckham & Lao, 2011, 9]
- 1987 *Roneo machine*, oil on canvas, 100 x 100 cms.
- 1987 *Procedure of "Ask First, Shoot Later": About "X?" no.11*, oil on canvas, 180 x 120 cms
The radical work *Procedure of "Ask First, Shoot Later": About "X?"* is recognized as the first purely textual conceptual piece in China. The work consists of 12 pages of written Chinese text in which the artist describes the extensive process of the work, from its conceptual origins and production to installation and visiting. This type of anti-visual, textual performance recalls the high tide of minimalist conceptual production in North America and Central Europe, linking the 1980s Chinese progressive art movement with its historical underpinnings in the West. This important but overlooked link is a key element to the artist's practice, and it is the iconoclastic attitude represented by this work that opened up a new mode of artistic production in China. [Peckham & Lau, 2011, 141].
- 1987 *Art Project no.2*
A major text-based conceptual piece, *Art Project No. 2* consists of 20 pages of typed instructions that appear to outline a game, said to be manifested one time only. The procedural regulations delimited therein refer to three basic activities: to look (referred to as "peeping"), to be seen, and to dialogue (called "tackback"), all in the rhetorical form and style of legal or contractual text. In this game, two participants at a time are instructed to engage in a severe version of conversation known as talkback under the supervision of two administrators, while some 40 others fight for voyeuristic peepholes in the wall. Both the situation and the form of its exposition seem to borrow from the procedural obsessions of institutional control, recasting a relatively pure and free form of communication as a mechanism of torture. [Peckham & Lau, 2011, 148]
- 1988 *Untitled*, oil on canvas, 100 x 134 cms, Sigg Collection.
- 1988 *30 x 30*, 1988, Single-channel video (PAL), Sound/ color, 32 minutes 9 seconds.

Artist wears latex gloves whilst continuously breaking and carefully repairing a mirror, 3 hours, shot on Betamax camera borrowed from Hangzhou Customs Bureau. First Chinese video art work, shown at Huangshan Meeting. Uses aesthetics of boredom to challenge mass-media viewing conventions and mock the social consequences of popular television [Peckham, 2008, 10]

In the key work *30 x 30*, considered by many to be the first piece of video art produced in China, the viewer witnesses the artist repeatedly and dispassionately smashing a mirror with dimensions of 30 x 30 cm into pieces and then repairing it by gluing the shards back together. Reacting to the increasing popularity of mass entertainment and home television, the work employs an aesthetics of boredom to challenge mass media viewing conventions and mock the social consequences of popular television. The work also reflects a backlash towards the narcissism and passive spectatorship of the era, opening up a possibility of critique that would be continued for at least a decade. As with several such earlier works, the process continues for approximately 180 minutes, precisely until the video tape in the camera runs out—this durational aspect is an important aspect of the definition of the action within post-studio contemporary art. [Peckham & Lau, 2011, 122]

I actually had something of a conspiracy in mind when I was composing the idea for the work, but it was ultimately never realized. At the time every household started to have television and would sit in front of it almost every evening, because it was something new. At the same time the Sony domestic video camera also arrived in China. For the 1988 forum on modern art in Huangshan artists were formally requested to bring new work for discussion and exchange, the content of which was not subject to any advance restrictions. I suddenly thought I should make a video, three hours long—the content was not important at all. I wanted to shut everyone in a room for three hours, locked from the outside while it was playing, and then open the door only after it was finished. But in the end I didn't have the courage to lock the door—I was a bit nervous. When it had been playing for two minutes people started to press me, saying that was enough and that they got the idea already. Even Gao Minglu asked to fast-forward, so the three hour video actually only lasted 10 minutes. No one had the patience to watch. Afterwards some people were particularly worked up, thinking it was really great, while others told me to take it back and edit it carefully, saying video should have changes in shot and rhythm [ZPL cited by Zhang Huan in Peckham & Lau, 2011, 21]

30 x 30 refers to size of mirror in centimeters which was broken and re-made in the video. [ZPL lecture, 2016]

1988 *Brown Cover Document no.1*, text, letter with latex medical gloves.

1988 *Report on the Hepatitis in 1988*, 1988, glass, gloves, lacquer, plaster 5 parts, 31x 19 cms each. in Sigg Collection,

1988 *Report on the Hepatitis A situation*, latex medical gloves, clear lacquer, glass, oil colours, shown at China Avant-Garde exhibition. Later in Ullens Foundation Collection.

This year re-worked exhibition proposal *About X? Exhibition Procedures* into *Art Plan no.2* first shown in Paris at Galerie Crousel-Robelin 1993. [Smith, 2008, 390-91]

1989 *Chinese Bodybuilding- tendency/ charm*, oil on canvas, 100 x 80cms

1990 *Water: 1989 Standard Pronunciation*, Oil on canvas (3 pieces), 100 (H) x 80 (W) cm each (Edited prints of the original work)

One component of a series of paintings completed between 1989 and 1993 depicting athletes and broadcasters, this piece reflects on the aesthetics of standardization through a profusion of standard aesthetic forms. The canvas becomes as flexible and as repetitive as the television screen, a moving image made standard at least for a single moment in time. [Peckham & Lau, 2011, 135]

1991 *Document on "Hygiene" No. 3*, Single-channel video (PAL), Silent/ color, 24 minutes 45 seconds Single Channel Video, installation with 4 monitors and red bricks for seating in reference to early TV collective spectatorship, single focus in close-up of artist cleaning chicken with soap and water. Sequence synthesized to soundtrack of ancient music *Chunjiang Huayue* [Moon Blossoms over Spring River]. Shown first in a garage exhibition in Shanghai, the red bricks were to evoke the sense of a meeting [Qiu Zhijie & Wu Meichun, 2002, in Wu Hung & Peggy Wang, 2010, 233; see also Wu Hung & Peggy Wang, 2010, 239]

....with these early videos Zhang Peili began to develop rigorous techniques of mediation through which the presence of the camera could transform the recorded object. [Peckham, 2008, 11]

I derive my ideas from personal life experience, and this is a good example. [In his childhood] Then life was simple and hard. Most households kept chickens and I took care of ours. They weren't pets—they were raised to be eaten—but they were the closest things I had to a pet, so I played with them and, in doing so, observed their habits. Chickens avoid water, preferring to bathe in dust; it would never occur to anyone to wash them. [ZPL in 1999, Smith, 2008, 399].

A plausible interpretation of the work is .. a subtle allusion to the ideology in which Mao bathed the people, subduing the masses with his own brand of soap [Smith, 2008, 400]

Hygiene series including washing of chicken as a kind of allegory opposed to the manner in which anti-Hepatitis A hygiene campaigns were instigated which allowed health workers to enter homes to inspect. This was absurd because hygiene was an individual matter but these interventions made it political. [Zhang Peili, Canberra lecture, 2016]

A pioneering single-channel video, *Document on "Hygiene" No. 3* records the process of washing a chicken: the artist is seen to place a live chicken into a basin and scrub it constantly with soap and water, just until the video tape in the camera runs out. No change occurs in the on-screen image or on-site scene whatsoever, again further developing the nascent Chinese interpretation of the aesthetics of boredom while also transforming the physical control of a living being into a mundane activity. Also at stake here is the relationship between subject and object, as both moving beings viewed on the screen are made to become objects; the status or role of control is made slippery indeed [Peckham & Lau, 2011, 118].

1992 *Water – the Cihai dictionary standard edition*, single channel video.

A very-well known, professional newsreader reads the dictionary definition of 'water' as if it were a news item. While the video painstakingly retains the form of the CCTV program, it abolishes its content – the news – with equal determination. The substituted text, non-narrative dictionary entries, does not fill the void left from such erasure: it only reinforces the split between form and content. What the video achieves, therefore, is a turning of the official network into an empty façade. [Wu Hung, *Contemporary Chinese Art*, London: Thames & Hudson, 2014, 177. Also see Wu Hung & Peggy Wang, 2010, 238-239]

Xing Zhibin, the female television announcer who once represented the image of the official state media in China, reads aloud from the standard *Cihai* dictionary the terms beginning with the character *shui*, or water, with impeccably standard speed and diction. The video itself is shot according to the standard style of television news in China with the production facilities of the Beijing Media Center, making this an exercise in absurdity and suggesting something of the actual content or rigor of typical news broadcasts. [Peckham & Lau, 2011, 114]

Her formal reading clashes with the seemingly nonsensical content of the text as if her orthodoxy were unfit for the irrelevance of what she reads. Zhang appropriates a highly iconic image used to validate a specific political discourse and deconstructs that same discourse by juxtaposing the "right" image with the "wrong" set of words. [Dal Lago in Peckham & Lao, 2011, 10-11]

The newsreader was paid 1000 RMB to make the video which she treated as a professional assignment. She was shot using the studio's equipment by others without ZPL being present. ZPL deliberately used a government institution, the TV company, to complete a work, like the postal work earlier. [ZPL lecture in Canberra, 2016]

1992 *Red Powder and Ashes*, oil on canvas, three panels, 120 x 200 cms.

1992 *Flesh pink and gray*, oil on canvas, 360 x 200 cms exhibited at Venice Biennale, 1993.

1992 *Children's Playground*. 10-channel ten screen video, sound, colour, 24 minutes, PAL format

Looped piece of footage of children's toy in which idiosyncratic plastic penguins rotate mechanically to the top of brightly coloured plastic steps, and slide down a sky-blue plastic ramp that returns them to the queue at the bottom of the steps. [Smith, 2008, 402]. In 1993 shown at Crousel-Robelen one-person show in Paris.

1992 *Assignment no.1*, six channel video, twelve screen installation, Silent/ color, 13-14'.

[Qiu Zhijie & Wu Meichun, 2002, in Wu Hung & Peggy Wang, 2010, 233] showed blood samples being taken from a human finger. This was first shown in Paris and was ZPL's first video installation. [Zhang Peili lecture, Canberra, 2016].

The video *Assignment No. 1* depicts the collection of blood samples for routine lab tests: cleaning the finger with a sterilized medical cotton ball; pricking it with a needle; bleeding; collecting the blood in a glass dropper; wiping away the bloodstain with a sterilized cotton ball; pressing the finger to make it bleed again; and drawing blood again. The process, played in slow speed in its entirety, is repeated several times, after which the blood collected is pooled on a glass sheet and scraped away. As with several other works, the viewer suspects that this documentation of a strict procedure is motivated by a cataloguing of the techniques of bodily control, transforming what could become nauseating into a routine and even boring list of steps. [Peckham & Lau, 2011, 110]

1993 *Copied Consecutively 25 Times*, a late 1950s' propaganda image re-photographed 25 times degrading the original image frame-by-frame.

Exhibited as a series of printed photographs, *Copied Consecutively 25 Times* involves a single picture from a 1970s pictorial magazine that is rephotographed and developed, as is the resulting photograph after it. After 25 repetitions of this procedure, the tone of the photograph gradually decays and becomes grainier, ultimately reaching an effect of abstraction. Once again the artist explores the instability of the image as it is derived from the lens, here also emphasizing the variability of content in relation to the broader technological or medium-based background of the image [Peckham & Lau, 2011, 133].

1994 *Flying device no1*, oil on canvas, 150 x 120 cms

1994 *The Focal Distance* [video installation]

A sequential distortion of a filmed cityscape across seven monitors, each subsequent image filmed from a previous monitor, effecting the degeneration in visual quality and clarity that occurs as each recording goes down one generation. The final image was a total abstraction of primary light, in blue and yellow forms, that danced across the screen like magnified atoms of energy'. [Karen Smith in a personal interview of 2001, cited in Rush, 2003, 143].

1994 *Keeping fresh period [or Best Before]*, video installation with monitors exhibited in Finland. [also see Wu Hung & Peggy Wang, 2010, 240] first work to employ multiple channels.

- 1995 *One-Thousandth of a Second to One Second*, 22 color photographs and electric fan, 7.62 (H) x 10 (W) cm each
 Photographs of an empty plot of land with no defining characteristics whatsoever are taken with the camera set at the smallest possible aperture and progressing from the fastest shutter speed to the slowest shot by shot. The lens turns 180 degrees on a level plane, photographing first the space to the front and then the rear, thus attaining two groups of resulting images ranging from the underexposed to the correct and then to the overexposed. Photographs are arranged in a horizontal row and fixed directly to the wall, each one covered with parchment paper and continuously blown by an electric fan turning from side to side. This is a relatively low-tech approach to the problem of the desire for vision and the obfuscatory facts of the lens apparatus, challenging the veracity of the photographic image in its most basic sense. [Peckham & Lau, 2011, 127]
- 1995 *Relative Space*, projector, surveillance camera, installation 5 x 2.8 x 3.5 metres, exhibited at Santa Monica Art Centre, Barcelona [also see Wu Hung & Peggy Wang, 2010, 240-241]
Three Views comprised two physical spaces closed off from the exhibition hall by a door that automatically locked itself for thirty seconds once a person had entered. On one level, it explored what people do when they find themselves stuck, albeit temporarily, in a small confined space. A mirror inside appeared to provide a private moment for checking appearances, although as one of the three views, the mirror acted as a camera and the person's actions were simultaneously broadcast to the crowd outside. All in all, it was awkwardly voyeuristic. [Smith, 2008, 404]
- 1996 *Screen I*, Single-channel video installation with two-way mirror (PAL), Silent/ color, 7'
Screen I presents on mirrored glass the private actions and expressions that typically appear only in bathroom mirrors, vanishing and reappearing intermittently: the viewer sees his or her own image, lit from above by lighting that seems to disappear altogether at times, alternate with the mirror images of the video installed on the wall of a small room. Continuing early explorations of narcissism and specularly, this piece confirms the possibility of the mirror as a whole for the first time while also defining the reflection as a fundamentally split image of the subject [Peckham & Lau, 2011, 92]
- 1996 *Uncertain Pleasure*, [*Bu queqie de kuaigan*] ten-channel video installation on ten monitors.
 ZPL: I try to recover a kind of consciousness that is somehow universal.
 Through close-ups of various parts of the body in the act of itching oneself, the artist manipulates the viewer to become a voyeur. We witness this seemingly common action of someone scratching/touching/stroking into an intimate and sensual interaction between self and image. [*Fast Forward*, 1999, 44; also see Wu Hung & Peggy Wang, 2010, 241]

For Zhang Peili video is a sort of 'electronic mirror' with powers of amplification that can be used to examine the body in minute detail. It can expose certain elements that due to the defences of our fragile psyche are usually filtered out by the naked eye. [online appendices to Wu Hung & Peggy Wang, 2010, 8. See *ibid*, 9-11 for details of other artist's works]

ZPL: In the period of transition from 'no choice' to 'freedom of choice, you find yourself burdened by the fact that you are now forced to make choices, and live in perpetual fear of making the wrong choice. So the pleasure of exercising choice becomes questionable or, at the very least, relative. [Smith, 2008, 404]

- 1996 *Uncertain Pleasure (II)*, 6-channel/ 12-screen video installation (PAL), Silent/ color, 30', installed 600 x 300 cms. In collections of Fukuoka Museum of Asian Art and Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.
 The multi-channel video installation *Uncertain Pleasure* simultaneously exhibits 10 different views of a man scratching every part of his body, including shoulders, waist, back, legs, neck, feet, and hands, on as many monitors. The images, which intermittently become lighter and darker, are haunted by a vague eroticism and call to mind voyeurism and surveillance, forcing the viewer to both question the social uses of ubiquitous video communication and seek out a new definition of mediated pleasure. In terms of reception the effect is largely one of affect, tending towards continuity, repetition, and emphasis. [Peckham & Lau, 2011, 106]
 What I try to do is 'record' or 'restore a certain kind of intuition rather than symbolizing or making a metaphor of some 'object'. What I am interested in is the public experience of the action of scratching an itch. The public sense does not need to be explained. It causes a mixture of racial, sexual and cultural differences and thus provides possibilities for communication and exchange between people. I believe deeply that there is a profound universality in the nature of man. This universality comes from man's basic needs, sensations, and reactions. It is perpetual. It is based on this point that art is meaningful today. [ZPL in the Wu Hung, et al, *The First Guangzhou Triennial*, 2002, 328]
- 1996 *Observation*
 Suppose that the lens is a mirror. It records the process of personal self-observation. The shot subject while self-observing blows his breath to the lens and rubs the foggy lens with his fingers and cotton. This confusion of the boundary between the lens (the screen) and the mirror, hence the illusion, is where my interest lies [Matsushita

- M9000 projector, VHS photography, interior light, special writing[?]. Transferred to and edited on a Betacam editing machine PAL long-speed player, about 20 minutes duration, silent. Wu, 1997, 17]
- 1996 *Focal Distance*, 1996, 8-channel/ 8-screen video installation (PAL), Sound/ color, 15'
Consisting of eight monitors arranged in a straight line, each facing outward at a comparable angle, *Focal Distance* involves a single video monitor playing back a 15 minute loop documenting the flow of traffic at a typical intersection. The adjacent monitor plays back the same loop, albeit re-recorded from the first monitor with the same camera; each successive monitor thus evinces a slightly more blurred, abstract, and painterly image, all depicting the same content but filtered through increasingly thick layers of remediation that destabilize the veracity of the initial documentation. Sound, too, becomes abstract over time, creating a temporal sculpture out of the failures of audio-visual sensation. [Peckham & Lau, 2011, 100]
- 1997 *Eating* [lit. Ingesting], three channel video installation with three monitors, (PAL), Sound/ color and black and white, 28'
'Eating' through its rudimentary equation, acts as some surreal demonstration of motor skills forming the bond between process and cognition. The utensils, cake crumbs, and tomato juice are as extraneous as the chewing, swallowing, and burping are. All become equally vanquished of their original content, leaving only the structure. Shown in Jack Tilton Gallery in 1997, acquired for collection of MoMA, presented on October 28, 1998, New York. [Borysevich in Clark, 2000, 240-241].
The three-channel video installation *Eating* presents a visual analysis of what may be one of the most basic and universal human activities, responding to a moment of cultural othering and alienation with a subversive blankness. On the top monitor in a vertically stacked column of three such objects, an extreme close-up of the side of a chewing jaw celebrates the contraction and expansion of muscle and skin; on the center monitor, the only one of the three in black and white, a camera attached to the hand of the person eating delivers a delirious and potentially nauseating view of motion at close quarters; the image on the bottom monitor, finally, is fixed on a plate, occasionally also documenting hands and utensils as they eviscerate the food at hand. [Peckham & Lau, 2011, 196]
This work was shown at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, from October 28, 1998, to February 2, 1999 [MoMA exhibitions archive website].
- 1997 *Diary* [see Wu Hung & Peggy Wang, 2010, 242]
- 1999 *Just for you*, ten channel video installation on ten monitors, exhibited at Venice Biennale, 1999. [Smith, 2008, 377; Dal Lago in Clark, 2002, 43-244]
Happy Birthday set as a sardonic karaoke tune.
Ten monitors set on ten white chest-high plinths that were arranged in a semi-circle facing the audience' With a format not too dissimilar from Juan Muñoz circles of diminutive cast figures.
ZPL: I wanted to find something that would touch base with an international audience, something simple and universal in image and sound that everyone would relate to, no matter where they came from [...] China is celebrating its fiftieth birthday this year. [Smith 2008, 377]
Just for you encapsulated a political comment in a succinct, almost self-effacing manner. [...] the pointed lack of dynamic action in favour of an intense focus on a slight gesture [...] opens his work to myriad levels of understanding [Smith 2008, 378]
- 1999 *Endless Dancing*, exhibited at Asia Pacific Triennale in Brisbane.
Zhang Peili takes as his subject the image of a couple enjoying ballroom dancing. At different times the voice of nan instructor tells the students what to do and what not to do, and advises on the health benefits of this activity. In China, ballroom dancing has become the most popular form of socialising and early morning exercise for the elderly. For the creation of this work, cameras were fixed at eight points in a circular configuration. Multiple couples float in and out of the cameras' view. Zhang Peili records a range of perspectives in real time, suggesting many different realities and constant change. In displaying the work, television monitors are placed in a circular configuration to simulate the original situation. But what is finally presented fragments the activity into infinite perspectives. The dancing and the dialogue continue ceaselessly, conveyed in a circular motion, hinting at the circularity of all things, and perhaps, their ultimate absurdity and meaninglessness [Claire Roberts in *Beyond the Future*, 1999, 44]
The juxtaposition of apparently unrelated structures of meaning—the lightness of dancing with the formality of the militaristic tune—brings out a level of absurdity focused on the coexistence of such diverse systems. [Dal Lago in Peckham & Lau, 12]
- 1999 *Screen 2*, video installation with DVD player, TV set, one-way mirror, frame, light bulb, sensor, wall paper and carpet.
This work is about 'seeing'. The nature of a one-way mirror is such that the viewer (the surveyor) and his subject (the surveyed) are continually interchangeable and indecipherable; there is no telling if we are the surveyor or the

surveyed. And what I want to make clear is that this is a relationship similar to that which exists between people in real life. To me, the most significant things are the feelings and behaviours that we are born with and are common to everyone. I believe these are the truest things buried beneath culture and knowledge. On this score, there is no barrier between humans. (Zhang Peili in *Compound Eyes*, 2001)

- 2000 *Simultaneous Broadcast*, split screen recording of 30 countries' news broadcasts [received 27 broadcasts] for new millennium shown at Shanghai Biennial 2000. Here the staff turned off the sound so breaking the effect of the cacophony.
- 2000 *Safety Instructions*, [also called *Expand Constantly*] single channel video on ten monitors, 12 students filmed blowing bubblegum but on separate monitors at different speeds.
- 2002 *Magic in a Circle*, 8-channel/8-screen video installation, Sound /color, 8'15"
The video installation *Magic in a Circle* presents a performance of stage magic recorded from eight distinct points of view. The preparation stage of the performance is played back at normal speed in order to indicate foreshadowing, while the actual act of the performance plays back at an artificially slowed speed and encapsulates the notion of exhibition, thus presenting at certain moments a glimpse of exposure; here, the role of the video apparatus is to present an impossible angle of observation, creating distinct realities of visual reception through technical means. [Peckham & Lau, 2011, 76]
- 2002 *Actors' Lines*, Single Channel Video, (PAL), Sound/ color, 6'21" edited and remixed from a 1964 film.
Moment of slippage occurs when a relationship that should be hierarchical is transformed into one that could be reciprocal and horizontal, which threatens the apparatus of military power that initially created the matrix of relationships in the first place [Peckham, 2008, 12];
ZPL: The metaphor invoked here corresponds to the image of the nation as patriarch to the masses which are the children of the revolution, required to follow the leader as see the child obeys the father. But that's an intellectual rationale. I was simply struck by the body language. [Smith, 2008 415-416]
Actors' Lines is an unabashed exploitation of the function of editing, the entire sequence built on a jarring repetition of spoken lines and gestures. Cut together in imitation of a scratched record, with edits jumping back over a section again and again, a scratch video, ultimately turning phrases or words into nonsense as the pace increases. [Smith, 2008, 416]
The video *Actors' Lines* edits and remixes footage appropriated from a 1964 state-sanctioned film, *Sentries under Neon Lights*. In the original, an older comrade lectures a young soldier on the superiority of revolutionary principle; here, appropriated body language and dialogue seem to suggest a hidden romantic relationship between the two men themselves. An exercise in minimal intervention, the artist neither adds nor subtracts from the original content but instead restores further possibilities of meaning sublimated within the affect of the original film. [Peckham & Lau, 2011, 88]
Vision is denounced as a subjective and ideologically conditioned act: it just suffices to look from a different angle or more than once to detect the thin layer of illusion that buffers the real. [Dal Lago in Peckham & Lau, 2011, 12]
- 2003 *Safety Instructions*, [also called *Expand Constantly*, 2000] supposed to have been exhibited at Venice Biennale but artist withdrew placing a letter in the exhibition space, because of dissatisfaction at technicians and curator – Hou Hanru - for failing to locate required equipment. [Smith 2008, 386]. In fact, I was present in the Arsenale when Zhang Peili arrived and found his work not installed, the monitors were still in boxes, the electricians being unavailable to install when he had to return to China next day, a trip paid at his own expense.]
- 2003 *Last words*, single channel video, (PAL), Sound/ color, 20'27", from re-shot war films
One of several major appropriation pieces, *Last Words* borrows clips from revolution-themed films of the period spanning the 1950s and 1970s depicting the final moments and dying words of martyred heroes, selecting and editing these climactic moments into a single flow. In doing so the work explores the dramatic possibilities of gesture, noting that the resulting piece does not actually continue a single moment of high-intensity emotion over several minutes but rather serves to naturalize and subsume these otherwise singular scenes. [Peckham & Lau, 2011, 84]
- 2004 *Go Ahead, Go Ahead*, Dual channel video projection, uses clips from US' and Chinese war films which make the audience simultaneously view potentially conflicting narratives. [Peckham, 2008, 13].
- 2004 *May 9th 2004*
Deployed visual trickery in the sequential placing of a photograph, and a video replayed via a flat screen monitor that made both images look identical. The subjects here were also illustrations of technology: a cake going mouldy or a vase of flowers decaying. Both were filmed in real time so the change visible to the naked eye on the video was almost imperceptible. [Smith, 2008, 413]

2005 *Watermark*, Video with still light box (LCD monitor, SD card media player), Silent/ black and white, 23'58"

In *Watermark* two similar images appear side by side, one in the form of a photograph mounted in a lightbox and the other in the form of a video monitor. Both depict a small pool of water on a surface, but, whereas the photograph depicts only a fixed state, the video actually plays back in realtime the process of the puddle drying and evaporating over the course of an hour. This change of state, however, is impossible to observe with the naked eye, thus serving to reinforce the sense of possibility inherent to audiovisual media while also casting as suspect the distinctions between the various lens-based tools available for such documentation. The resulting pair of images appears abstract and inexact, but the study of process arranged therein is anything but. [Peckham & Lau, 2011, 72]

2005-2007 *Lowest Resolution*, single channel interactive video installation; takes

footage from a sexual instruction video for newly married couples [in which the actors wear clothes] – freely available (indeed purchased by the artist in a large Chinese state-owned bookstore and therefore quasi-government-distributed) – and repositions it within a formally experimental installation [Peckham, 2008, 16]

2006 *Happiness*, 2-channel video installation (PAL), Sound/ color, 6'39", appropriates from a 1970 Cultural Revolution film.

Through editing of both the audio and video tracks [from a single scene]. It is clear that the crowd, overcome with emotion, is not actually responding to the words of the speaker at all, but rather sinking into a mindless frenzy. [Peckham, 2008, 14]

The video *Happiness* edits together footage appropriated from a classic Cultural Revolution-era film first released in 1970. The original film was a didactic moral tale; here, the work focuses on a single scene in which a zealous crowd irrationally applauds a speaker. Through editing of both the audio and video tracks, it is clear that the crowd, overcome with emotion, is not actually responding to the words of the speaker at all, but rather sinking into a mindless frenzy. The piece continues explorations of reception theory in mass media, collective crowd action, and visual affect. [Peckham & Lau, 2011, 80]

2006 *Short Comments*, double channel interactive video

2007 *Coloured scene through a window*, video projection.

2007 *Four opened-out black and white scenes*, interactive projection with 28 monitor screens.

2008 *Landscape with Spherical Architecture*, Responsive photography installation (LCD monitors and inductive sensor), 4.32 (L) m

In the reactive photography installation *Landscape with Spherical Architecture*, the camera surveys a landscape in the distance of which there is a spherical architecture, panning from left to right at an even distance and creating a parallax effect by which the distant architecture moves gradually from right to left. This landscape is presented on LCD monitors oriented horizontally and arranged in a straight line, forming a composition of continual transformation in which the image only appears when viewers activate the work through a distance sensor; the resulting formal study is thus barred from serving its stated descriptive purpose. [Peckham & Lau, 2011, 66]

2008 *A Gust of Wind*, 2008, 5-channel/ 5-screen video projection (PAL) with objects preserved from film set destroyed during shooting, Silent/ color, 13'14", a wrecked domestic house set installation and five single-sided video projections.

Furthering explorations of perspective and positionality, *A Gust of Wind* examines the middle-class domesticity that has become a dominant aspiration by offering a glance at the visual machinery behind the construction of this fragile image of success in order to reveal its inherent instability. Five joined projection images present the process by which a seemingly elegant residential space is destroyed and reduced to ruin by an unexpected gust of wind. The video is shot in the set constructed on the original exhibition site; as a component of the work, the ruins are retained on the site and presented with the video. [Peckham & Lau, 2011, 60]

... I would like to add a bit more about the way the aftermath of the disaster is represented/ reproduced by *A Gust of Wind*. The work as a whole is made up of two parts: a multi-screen video and the remains of the set used during the production of the video. The multichannel video is itself in three parts. First, it shows a very decent, elegant life situation to which most people would aspire. Second, it shows the process of the wind destroying the situation represented in the first part. Third, it's about the remains and ruins of the situation represented in the first part. The three parts are like the acts of a play. Though the third part would tend to make people feel sad, it's the most lasting part. Nothing of the original situation can remain forever. Only the state of destruction remains eternal. [ZPL with Paul Gladston in 2008, in Peckham & Lau, 2011, 39]

2008 *Mute*

... he moved an entire clothing factory into an exhibition hall while screening a video of it still in use. [Chinnery, 2016]

The exhibition space is the live site of a fictive 'event' presented in the form of the remains (or 'hard evidence') of the event, as with a burnt out car body, alongside several moving images (similar to the news media) constantly 'reporting' this 'event.' But the video is muted, and because the 'event' lacks sound it loses something, becoming specious. [ZPL cited by Huang Zhan in Peckham & Lau, 2011, 27]

- 2009 *Live Report: Hard Evidence No. 1*, Burned auto body with 60 pinhole cameras and real time video projection, Dimensions variable,
 consisted of a burnt out shell of a car with screens around it showing live images from sixty pinhole cameras installed within its husk. [Chinnery, 2016]
 A small, burnt out passenger van is installed with 60 pinhole cameras facing outwards toward all sides, capturing imagery of the “live” site from all angles. Through a video mixer and according to a procedural order, this imagery is projected in real time on the walls behind the wreckage of the car, providing a live report that appropriates conventions of television reportage. As viewers inspect the car wreckage they also see on the large screens the scene of the surroundings of the car, including images of themselves. The burnt out car is the evidence of an incident that occurred at some time in the past, as well as a witness to the live scene. This work, emerging from a decade of experimentation with interactive video installation, treats media violence, commodity idolatry, the culture of the screen, barriers to knowledge, and liveness. [Peckham & Lau, 2011, 56]
 ... video has actually become a kind of dominant language that pervades people’s consciousness. It creates realities, and these realities also influence people’s lives or minds. The reality produced by video is sometimes even more realistic than reality itself. [ZPL cited by Huang Zhan 2011, 27]
- 2011 *Standard Routine II: Ocular Gymnastics*, 6-channel video installation with student uniforms and 12 watt electric motors, Sound/ colour, 5’48” and 1’49”
 the main focus of the installation is given to school uniforms mechanically moving up and down on top of TV monitors. [Chinnery, 2016]
 Using the publicly distributed video “Broadcast Demonstration of Gymnastic Exercises for Primary School Students” as its raw material, *Standard Routine* processes a given segment into two video channels displayed on six monitors oriented upward. School uniforms hang on motor devices directly above, moving up and down and making contact with the screens by turns; each time the screen is brushed by these garments its color and contrast change. Referring back to a 1980s aesthetics of habitual imagery, the assemblage remains skeptical of the associated idealistic ethos of personal health and self-improvement and reflects on the understanding of the body as a prop of ideology. [Peckham & Lau, 2011, 52]
- 2011 *A Necessary Cube*, inflatable silver sac, electric fan, and automated control system, 410 (H) x 800 (W) x 1400 (L) cm (maximum dimensions), no video, only a mechanically expanding silver air sack. [Chinnery, 2016]
 An installation work, *A Necessary Cube* consists of a silver air sac that rapidly expands to fill the entire room, then again quickly contracts to a single corner of the space. While inflating the action provides an uncertain experience of crisis; in the moment of transition, as the sense of danger recedes, it transforms instantly into a ruined pile of unspecific form. Forming a visual dialectic in its inflation and deflation, the work gestures toward general social and cultural questions. [Peckham & Lau, 2011, 44]
- 2011 *16 July - 14 August*, Realtime video with still light box (cake, LCD monitor, 650-line HD camera, H.264 hard drive video recorder), Silent/ color
16 July - 14 August involves a cake installed within a closed space at the opening of the exhibition; on the exterior wall of this space, one screen displays the still image of the cake at the time of installation while a second screen presents realtime documentation of the transformations undergone by the cake throughout the 29 days of the exhibition. Facing the fact that a beautiful cake, even unobserved, will turn bad, the piece focuses on the paradoxical relationship between the visual appearance of the image and its other significations, warning the viewer of media control. [Peckham & Lau, 2011, 48]
- 2012 *Q + A + Q*. two channel video installation, 21 minutes 33 seconds. [apparently of interviews between policemen from a checklist, and an accused, the two channels face each other under one meter apart and the viewer is located at a tangent between them]
 Special frame between answerer and questioner. Answers are natural not pre-arranged, but they are also unnatural because this question and answer session took place using special places and people; nothing is normal or relaxed, and the tensions and imbalances of the relationship between the two parties are obvious. The filming process is an intervention, just as the camera is an intervention. [Time Test, 2016, 124]
- 2014 *Collision of Harmonies*, at Boers-Li Gallery.
 featured two megaphones hanging from a rail, converging on each other slowly while playing a romantic male/female wordless harmony. A long pile of neon tubes placed directly underneath the speakers lights up and extinguishes in response to the speaker’s movements. As the speakers and their melodic duet get closer to each other, audio feedback develops that grows to a constant, ear-splitting shriek when the speakers meet each other face-to-face, at which point all the neon tubes illuminate simultaneously, flooding the exhibition room with bright light. [Chinnery, 2016]
- 2014 *The Solemn Circle*, Boers-Li at West Bund art fair.
 consisted of a four-meter high pillar on a circular base with a large white flag protruding from it. The horizontal pole with its hanging flag circles around the central axis pillar whilst slowly moving up and down, tracing a spiral

trajectory. The length of the flag is designed so that it is constantly dragged along the ground, almost entirely at the lowest point. [Chinnery, 2016]

- 2014 *The Scene Nos. 1 & 2*, lithograph, edition of 20 (each) (Ren Space)
- 2014 *Standard head shot (4 men)*, acrylic on beveled mirror, edition of 12 (Ren Space)
- 2014 *Passport & Visa Endorsement No. 1 and 2*, lithograph, edition of 20 (each) (Ren Space)
- 2014 *CCTV 2*, water-base and acrylic pigment print on BFK rag paper, edition of 20 (Ren Space)
- 2014 *Portrait of the Female Announcer* [KG note: Xing Zhibin], Acrylic on beveled mirror, Edition of 12 (Ren Space)
- 2015 *Biaojunde, jiankang xiangshangde, you tesede yuan ji qi yinxiang* [*A standard, healthy special official and his sound*], installation: radio, television monitor, electrical motor, circuit controller, microphone, bullhorn, amplifier, wall text reading *bixu ba shouyinji shejide neng shoutng zhongguo diantai*, [radio must be tuneable to receive a Chinese radio station], dimensions variable. (ART021, Shanghai, November 2015)
- 2015 *Where there is life*, tapestry (Ren Space)

Chronology

[In this chronology I am generally indebted to work by Katharine Grube; Wu Meichun; Qiu Zhijie; Michael Rush, 2003; Sylvia Martin, 2006; Meich-Andrews, 2014; Robin Peckham and Venus Lau, 2011; *Time Test*, 2016, 248-259]

1950 about this year, both paternal and maternal grandfathers [*yeye* and *waigong*], were shot in the first campaign to suppress ‘anti-revolutionaries’. They were both landowners, local officials including provincial governor or had membership of the local assembly. They were former members of the anti-Manchu Tongmenghui who had studied in Japan. His own father did not tell ZPL until he was in middle school and from then on he understood his family had a bad social background. [ZPL interview with John Clark, August 2016]

1957 ZPL born in Hangzhou, father was a hospital pathologist, university medical college teacher and mother was a midwife.

1958 Wolf Vostell made works with modified TV sets, *TV décoll/age* 1958, six TV monitors behind a canvas which the artist slashed open with a knife [Rush, 2003, 53]

1962 first *Fluxus* festival held in Wiesbaden. Present were Paik, Vostell, Filliou, Macunias, Brecht, Higgins.

1963 Vostell's *TV Dé-collage no 1* [1958], exhibited at Smolin Gallery, New York.

1963 Paik Namjun exhibits *Zen TV* at Galerie Parnass, Wuppertal, with twelve prepared TV sets. Paik's initial work linked to *Fluxus* group, John Cage, ideas of discontinuous series, performativism of US' abstract expressionism, as well as exploration of new image technology.

1964 in *Empire* Andy Warhol films the Empire State Building for eight consecutive hours.

1965 Paik and Warhol separately exhibit video recordings.

Warhol presented with Norelco slant-track video-recorder.

Paik bought a number of Sony Portapak on the day they went on sale in USA, thus enabling work outside of TV studios. [Hand-held camera, portable video tape recorder on 0.5cm tape, \$1000-\$3000. At the time TV cameras used 5 cm [2 inch] tape and cost \$10,000-20,000. Rush, 2003, 7]

Paik shows *Electronic Video Recorder* in New York Café Au Go Go.

1966 Jean-Luc Godard's *Le Gai Savoir* eliminates a plot line.

1967 Los Angeles County Museum exhibition *American Sculptures in the Sixties* includes Bruce Naumann video installation.

1968 *The Machine as seen at the end of the mechanical age* curated by Pontus Hulten at MoMA includes work of Paik Namjun.

1969 video art dedicated galleries founded by Gerry Schum in Düsseldorf and Berlin often with VTR transfers from 16 mm film.

1970 *Expanded Cinema* first book on video art published in New York.

1970s European and N. American art schools began to teach video.

1971 Paik Nam-jun has retrospective at Stedelijk Museum.

1972 Neuer Berliner Kunstverein forms first video collection.

1974 video collection formed as sub-section of Film Department at MoMA New York, holds video presentation *Projects: Video*.

1975 Sony develops Betamax allowing TV broadcast to be recorded on video tape.

1976 photo-film-video department created by Pontus Hulten at Centre Pompidou.

1977 *Documenta 6: Art in the Media World –Media in Art* includes video art: 11 artists in video installation, ‘experimental film/expanded cinema; and a *Videothek* of 52 artists.

1979 *Videokunst in Deutschland 1963-1982* exhibition at Kunstverein, Köln.

1985? first exhibition of video art at Whitney Museum Biennale

1966 onwards, during Cultural Revolution Father not among those lined up for criticism sessions, but was very frightened. ZPL wrote big character newspapers and took part in criticism sessions of

- his school teachers. At Middle School he was told there was no need for him to take term exams, and he was not allowed to graduate from middle school. ZPL just saw teachers brought down, and this made him lose faith in the system. [ZPL interview with John Clark, August 2016]
- 1972+, ZPL not sent down to the countryside
- 1976 graduates from high school. For a period did medical illustrations.
- 1978 Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts opens to students for the first time after the Cultural Revolution. ZPL was ineligible to apply because of a damaged foot and not having done a required period in the countryside. The ban was lifted in 1980. [Smith, 2008. 387-8]
- About this time first had a TV set at home. TV would set standards for domestic comfort, and allow him to see more films as well as more foreign news when Deng Xiaoping visited the USA or Japan. [AAAA interviews, 2008]
- 1980-1984 ZPL studies oil painting at Zhejiang Art Academy, Hangzhou [later China Art Academy], with ten students in his year including Wang Guangyi, and a year below him, Geng Jianyi, Liu Dahong, and Wei Guangqing. Only 70 or so students in the Academy as a whole. From second year separated into studios.
- Preceded by the 1977 intake including Lin Lin who was expelled from the Academy, it would appear for persistent conflicts with teachers, later went to USA and was shot dead after a quarrel in Times Square. ZPL thinks students did not follow their teachers' styles and made their own choices. Others were Huang Yongping, Zha Li, Jiao Xiaojian, Xu Jin, who had a 'rational' Cezannist style. ZPL knew Zha Li quite well from before the Academy and lived nearby. Zha Li was the best at foreign languages, translating texts for them, and later founding *Meishu Sichao*, for a brief period the most important magazine introducing art theory. In the 1978 intake, ZPL thinks Hou Wenyi from Shanghai and Yu Xiaogang from Hangzhou stood out. Zheng Shengtian bought a lot of foreign art books for the Academy library from a foreign book exhibition in Beijing, and Zha Li also bought 20-30 volumes of foreign art series. [AAA interview, 2008]. Zheng was to edit *Waiguo Meishu Ziliao* [Materials on Foreign Art, no longer published] after ZPL had graduated. ZPL's reading included Camus' *The Plague*, Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, and Ionescu's *The Bald Primadonna*. [AAA Interviews, 2008]
- 1983 Anti-'Spiritual Pollution' Campaign targets imported or recently liberalized 'Western' ideas.
- 1983 Barbara London at MoMA organizes *Video Art: A History*.
- 1983 ZPL was preparing his graduation work alongside Wang Guangyi.
- I was really into 70s' style Photorealism, obsessed with painting perfect representations of reality, illusions [of objects or people] that looked as real as photographs. This led me to consider the essential nature of illusion, and of the relationship between illusions and reality. [ZPL in Smith, 2008, 389].
- This year saw the original oil paintings of Sha Qi (1914-2005) who had a late impressionist and fauvist manner at the Zhejiang Museum. Sha Qi had studied in Belgium, won a prize there, but was repatriated because of mental breakdown. [AAA Interviews, 2008]
- ZPL also saw exhibitions of the Hammer Collection in Shanghai, the French artist Jean Hélion, and probably that of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts in 1981. [AAA Interviews, 2008]
- 1984 Zhang Peili graduates from Zhejiang Academy of Fine Art Oil Painting Department with fellow studio mate, Wang Guangyi. Over the next few years debates held about the purpose of painting and of art surface in the dual "schools" of Rational Painting - Northern Art Group and the loosely affiliated Pool Society whose members were Song Ling, Geng Jianyi, Zhang Peili, Wang Qiang, Bao Jianfei, Cao Xuelei.
- 1984 6th National Fine Arts Exhibition in Beijing.
- 1984-2001 ZPL employed as a drawing teacher at Zhejiang Technical Art School [formerly Hangzhou Crafts School],
- 1985 As part of the New Currents in Art Movement [New Wave Movement] ZPL asked by the Artists' Association to organize '85 *New Space Exhibition* in Hangzhou which shows first installation work in China. Also shown was *Adam and Eve of the New Age*, by Meng Luding and Zhang Qun. After '85 *New Space Exhibition* Pond Society members went to see the Robert Rauschenberg exhibition in Beijing [Wang in Gladston, 2013, 141] at the China Art Gallery. At almost the same

time in the same building took place the exhibition of wall hangings by Maryn Varbanov (Wan Man, 1932-1989, Bulgarian see <http://www.aaa.org.hk/WorldEvents/Details/13602>) who later taught in Hangzhou. Rauschenberg did the first multimedia performance in China at The Minorities' Cultural Palace, but ZPL didn't really understand Rauschenberg such as what he meant by placement of an umbrella or a chicken on a picture, even though by this time ZPL could understand the work of Beuys or Duchamp. [AAA Interviews, 2008]

1985 May, ZPL worked with Geng Jianyi to create *Chishe* [Pond Society], an informal and irregularly meeting group in Hangzhou. It issued a declaration [given in Gladston, 2013, 128] intended to emphasize the concept of immersion in the process of making art rather than its outcome. [AAA Interviews, 2008]

1985 mid-year, ZPL invited by Zhejiang branch of Chinese Artists' Association to organize an exhibition of young, local painters. ZPL exhibited two paintings of swimmers and two portraits of jazz musicians.

I had no interest in telling a story. A painting is a painting, a composition with colour and form. It doesn't need a narrative. [...] I sought to deny any expression of personality, individuality, or emotion. I hated painting made the vehicle of emotional expression. I believed an artist had to preserve a distance from his work. [ZPL in Smith, 2008, 291-2]

1986 attends meeting held by Zhuhai Painting Institute (where Wang Guangyi had been appointed but from which he was to be dismissed by the Zhuhai *Wenlian*, League of Literary and Arts Organizations) and *Fine Arts in China* to discuss contribution to the New Currents in Art Movement. ZPL saw the quarrels which broke out as due to struggles between different Chinese regions and for power such as between the *Beifang Tuanti* [Northern Group] and the *Nanfang Yishu Shalong* [Southern Art Salon] headed by Wang Du. [AAA, interviews 2008].

From this year ZPL began to be interested in non-painting methods and procedures, and became curious about TV filming, and hadn't thought about whether it was a performance art or an image recording art. [AAA, interviews 2008]

1987 Anti-Bourgeois Liberalization Campaign and first repression of students after massive student-led protests in winter 1986-7.

By this year, some critics consider '85 New Wave Movement had waned and could largely be considered dead. Negative sides of economic reforms are being felt primarily as inflation in urban areas.

1988 November, ZPL went to, but did not speak at, Mt. Huang Conference which prepared for the 1989 *Xiandai Meishu zhan* [Modern Chinese Art Exhibition]. Showed 30×30 , single channel video, reputedly first video art work in China. ZPL was affected by what he had seen at Zhuhai, and also thought that many of the so-called anti-officials behaved in ways which resembled those of the official art world. At Mt Huang many more critics appeared such as Hou Hanru [who was very tense and gave a talk on Beuys whilst still only a research student], Fei Dawei [who had been at Zhuhai], Kong Changan, Zhou Yan. [AAA, interview, 2008].

It struck me how eager everyone was to appear avant-garde. Yet, listening to them, I was not convinced. How avant-garde could they – we – really be given the circumstances of our environment? What did their definition of avant-garde extend to? I sense the boundaries needed to be challenged. [ZPL in Smith 2008, 383, who compares the re-enacting of reparation, separation, and re-fracturing exhibits, as bearing the same sardonic deadpan impulse found in Andy Warhol's *Empire State Building*, 1964]

I wanted everyone to watch it to the end but they couldn't bear to. They demanded to know what it meant, and what I meant by showing it. I realized my suspicions had been proved right. [ZP in Smith, 2008, 385].

I thought I'd play a prank on them. [AAA, interviews 2008]

Spring, ZPL catches hepatitis. Illness allowed him time to question: what is art? And think about how to form a connection between art and life.

Yuan Goang-ming does first video work in Taiwan, *Out of Position*.

At the end of the 1980s saw rather many VCR films from about this time, but only began to see good quality ones in the early 1990s. Wim Wenders' *Paris Texas* had a particular impact in 1988 or 1989. [AAA Interviews, 2008]

- 1988-90 Wu Wenguang's *Bumming in Beijing* documentary which shows lives of five individuals including Zhang Dali, using hand-held observational shots on Betacam borrowed from CCTV.
- 1989 February, Chinese Modern Art Exhibition at China National Art Museum.
It was like a department store. There was no distinction between decorative, conventional styles, and works intended to be avant-garde. Innovation and creativity were clearly less important than metaphors for social context that critics extrapolated from them and used to illustrate their own art theory. Art should evoke those things without illustrating them. [ZPL in Smith 2008, 397]. ZPL exhibited *Report on the Hepatitis A situation*.
End of Pond Society activities.
- 1989 June 4, Beijing Massacre. ZPL:
This was an incident which had a great effect for many people. Before this had been something brave, emotionally passionate and full of self-confidence, but in the face of such a political incident we saw that intellectuals were fragile, that culture was fragile, that intellectuals had no tension, were feeble and ineffective. Any previous ideals were infinitely amplified, because you had no power at all to resolve any problems. [AAA interview, 2008]
Hans van Dijk who was in Hangzhou after June 4 1989 had a brother and a Chinese-speaking friend in Paris who tried to get him a scholarship to go to France. He was told this was agreed and he could go, but it proved impossible because he could not get a passport due to Security Ministry investigations required by unit. [ZPL interview with John Clark, Canberra, August 2016]
- 1990 artist's village organized near former Summer Palace in Beijing; preceded by a smaller one there in late 1980s where Zhang Dali, Mou Sen and others were living.
Zhang Peili and Geng Jianyi have a short stint in jail because of banners hung on overpasses after June 4.
At Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts, visiting professor Ernst Mitkza from Hamburg [see https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/CO-OP_K%C3%BCnstlercooperative_Hamburg] shows 8-hours of video made for German TV in commemoration of 900th anniversary of City of Cologne. Accompanied by showings of video art works including William Wegman, *Reel 5*. See Notes above for the list established by Katharine Grube from correspondence with Ernst Mitkza of which videos were brought from Germany and left in Hangzhou for future reference of artists. They were also shown at a conference of national TV executives then meeting in Hangzhou but the showing was abandoned after 1 hour due to their lack of interest. [Wu Hung & Peggy Wang, 2010 quoting Wu Meichun & Qiu Zhijie 2002].
ZPL did not see Mitkza videos, and saw mostly foreign films via VHS copies or some originals, being very fond of Bergman's *Persona* and *Fanny and Alexander* as well as films by Antonioni.
- 1991 This year, Han Feng a fashion designer in New York returned to China and came to ZPL's studio. He asked if ZPL had the opportunity would he go to the US? Han Feng thought of a way to ask OMI Foundation who were just starting up a visiting fellowship programme and this provided a formal invitation letter. His unit head at the Middle School Level Zhejiang Arts and Crafts College where he taught gave him a clearance. This school and all these Middle School level technical art schools disappeared in the reforms of 2000 when this one was absorbed into Zhejiang Teacher's University. [ZPL interview with John Clark, Canberra, August 2016]
November, ZPL exhibits *Document Hygiene no.3* at the *Garage Art Exhibition* in a storage space in Shanghai curated by ZPL and former classmate Song Haidong.
- 1992 ZPL a Visiting Fellow at OMI Arts Foundation, New York.
[http://www.artomi.org/cms/uploads/1992-2015_alumni_001.pdf] Zhang Peili travels to New York for the first time where he sees movies by Leone, Bergman, Wenders, Bertolucci, Schlöndorff, Antonioni [Gladston, 2013, 136]
- 1992 March ZPL exhibits in group exhibition curated by Fei Dawei at Galerie Arnaud Lefebvre, Paris, with Gu Dexin, and Huang Yongping.
- 1992 Artists' village, as East Village, formed at Dashanzi where Zhang Huan, Ma Liuming active.
- 1992 mid year, ZPL and Geng Jianyi exhibit in Beijing and ZPL offered opportunity to participate in 1993 Venice Biennale.
- 1992 onwards, rise of Cynical Realism, Political Pop and Gaudy Art.
- 1992 Qiu Zhijie graduates from China Art Academy, Hangzhou. Makes video of fifty over-workings of *Assignment no.1: Copying the "Orchid Pavilion Preface" a thousand times*.
- 1993 Zhang Peili's *Water-Standard Definition from the Cihai Dictionary* is shown in Berlin for the first time. Four other works are also included in the show, *China Avant-Garde*.

- 1993 Zhang Peili work included in *Passaggio e Oriente* curated by Bonita Olivia with advice of Francesca dal Lago at Venice Biennale.
- 1993 ZPL has solo show in Paris at Galerie Crousel-Robelin.
- 1993-94 Yan Lei after graduating from China Art Academy does video works in Beijing without narrative and long shots from a fixed position, action having 'truth' not the object shown. [Qiu Zhijie & Wu Meichun, 2002, in Wu Hung & Peggy Wang, 2010, 233]
- 1994 rise of conceptual art associated with Geng Jianyi, Song Dong, Yin Xiuzhen, Li Yongbin, Qiu Zhijie (who this year moved to Beijing).
Wang Gongxin shows video installation *Sky over Brooklyn*, Lin Tianmiao shows video installation *The Proliferation of Thread Winding*.
- 1994 Hangzhou exhibition of fifteen video artists *Image and Phenomena*.
- 1994 this year, ZPL has artist's residency in upstate New York
- 1994 end, Zhu Jia in *Forever* fixes camera to flatbed cycle's wheel as he rides around Beijing, later shown with soundtrack of loud snoring.
- 1994-1997 *China's New Art, Post-1989* curated by Chang Tzong-zung and Li Xianting tours internationally.
- 1995 French video artist Robert Cahen (b.1945, see https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Cahen) visits China National Academy of Fine Art, Hangzhou. Made *Sept Visions Fugitives*, 1995 [single channel video, colour 30 minutes], based on China trip.
The looking and listening audiences are confronted – in addition to the pure impressions – with basic questions about the work (the child using a traditional device to shake the feathers from the mattress), about freedom, about life in China...and ultimately about life and death; the burials, the bird, the man with a sheaf of straw on his back symbolizing the passage, the beyond... I had to struggle to make what I know are stereotyped images my own. The pure impressions and raw filmic material are completely re-worked, going much further than the original takes. [Cahen in Martin & Grosenick, 2006, 38]
ZPL did not meet Cahen [ZPL interview with John Clark, Canberra, August 2016.]
- 1995 Li Yongbin projects colour slides of his deceased mother onto buildings in the early morning. At dawn the image faded out. In *Face no.1* a videotaped image of an old man's face was projected onto the artist's face, the superimposed images sometimes coinciding, sometimes dislocating.
- 1995 Qiu Zhijie is inspired at Venice Biennale by Bill Viola's *Buried Secrets*.
- 1996 April, *Image and Phenomena*, China National Academy of Fine Arts in Hangzhou [first national exhibition of video art], saw the rise of experimental video nationally. Types of works: those introspective in regard to medium itself, generally simpler in structure; those works with intricately structured scenes. ZPL exhibits *Focal Distance*. Following this, solo exhibitions held in Beijing by Wang Gongxin, Song Dong, Qiu Zhijie [Qiu Zhijie & Wu Meichun, 2002, in Wu Hung & Peggy Wang, 2010, 236 lists works and artists] ZPL thinks that by this year so-called video art and new media art was [still] not so current but was broadly received in the following ten years. [ZPL with John Clark, 2010]
This year, Paik Nam-jun has a stroke which leaves him bound to a wheelchair.
- 1997 this year Sony puts first digital Camcorder on sale in USA.
- 1997 May 31- August 3, at Breda, *Another Long March* exhibition in The Netherlands includes Zhang Peili's *Document of Hygiene no.3*, and *Water – Standard version of the Dictionary Ci Hai*. This is the first time that many of the artists working with unconventional or alternative materials spend time together. Although all aware of each other's practice, the living arrangements in Amsterdam force artists into contact for a long period. Ni Haifeng meets his wife on this trip; Zhu Jia becomes close with ZPL, Ni and others. This experience was similarly important for Wang Jianwei. *Another Long March* was the positive antidote to the profoundly negative experience in Venice in 1993.
- 1997 July 11-30, Zhang Peili has one person show at Art Gallery of Centre for Academic Resources, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok called *Buque de kuaigan* (An Uncertain Pleasure)
- 1997 Documenta X includes video works by Wang Jianwei and Feng Mengbo.

- 1997 September 2-28, China visit of Associate Curator of Film and Video, Museum of Modern Art, New York, Barbara London. Her studio visits included those of Wang Gongxin, Wu Wenguang, Wang Jianwei. [visit reports at <http://adaweb.walkerart.org/context/stir-fry/>]
- 1997 September 9-30, The Beijing International Exhibition of Computerized Art and Design '97 at the Exhibition Hall of the Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing, which was seen by London.
- 1997 Wu Meichun curates '97 *zhongguo lu xiang yi shu guan mo* / *Demonstration of video art '97 China* in Beijing.
- 1997 Feng Mengbo designs a video game with political content *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*.
- [1997-2011] Song Dong makes video series *Touching my father*
- 1998 Qiu Zhijie exhibits video works at *Transmediale-98*, Berlin, *The 11th Video Festival*, *Videonale 8*, Bonn, and *Muumedia Festival 98*, Helsinki.
- 1998 Huang Yan curates *0431 China's Video Art* in Changchun.
- 1998 Chen Shaoping and Qiu Zhijie exhibit at *Videos from International Artists*, Museum Ludwig, Cologne.
- 1998 Song Dong and Wang Jianwei exhibit at Gwangju Biennale curated by Paik Nam-Jun
- 1999 Qiu Zhijie organizes *Alien Bodies & Delusion*, garage exhibition in Beijing. This year he sees Ifast Forward in Macao
- 1999 Zhu Jia and Li Yongbin attend *Worldwide Video Festival* in Amsterdam.
- 1999 Harald Szeeman includes works by twenty Chinese contemporary artists at Venice Biennale largely drawn from Sigg Collection.
- 1990s end, more capable PCs and editing equipment became cheaper and more widely available. There was also an increase in interactive installations and internet-based works. Flash 4 animation works became feasible.
- 2000 Paik Namjun has retrospective at Guggenheim Museum in New York.
- 2000 *China Internet Art* exhibition organized by Huang Yan and Hai Bo in Jilin Art Academy, Changchun.
- 2000/2001 Zhang Peili digitizes his works because much of his early work was lost to deterioration. Works like *30x30* and *Water-Standard Definition* from the *Cibai Dictionary* are shortened versions.
- 2001 Loft New Media Art Space in Sanlitun, Beijing, established above a restaurant by artists Wang Gongxin and Lin Tianmiao and owned by her brother.
- 2001 April, new media artists involved in infiltration of other media at theaters and performance halls in Beijing. Wang Jianwei produced *Screens* using, stage, lighting, scenery, performance, video and performance within the performance space.
- 2001 June, New Media Research Centre established at China National Academy of Fine Arts in Hangzhou with support of director Xu Jiang.
- 2001 September 25-30, *New Media Art Festival: Non-Linear Narrative* held at CNAFA and organized by Xu Jiang and Wu Meichun, with 100 works and 40 active new media artists from China and abroad.
- 2002 March, Loft New Media Art Space, having been active in solo video, shows it was invited to exhibit Chinese new media art in Gwangju Biennale.
- 2002 March, Berlin University professors teach intensive training courses at New Media Art Department, CNAFA.
- 2002 Phoenix Television launches a programme *DV New Generation* to lend equipment to students and then show their work each day.
- 2002 *Documenta XI* shows Yang Fudong's *An estranged paradise* and Feng Mengbo's *Q4U* an interactive game.
- 2002 Zhang Peili returns to teach at China National Fine Art Academy, Hangzhou. Exhibits at 4th International Shanghai Biennale, *Urban Creation*.
- 2003 Zhang Peili's *Safety Instructions*, single channel video on ten monitors, included in subsection of 50th Venice Biennale Z.O.U-Zone of Urgency curated by Hou Hanru.
- 2003 ZPL launches New Media Art Department courses at China Art Academy.

- 2006 January 29, death of Paik Nam Jun at Miami Beach, Florida.
- 2006 *The Thirteen: Chinese Video Art Today* shown at PS1 New York.
- 2008 in *Women zai nar / Where are we?* at opening of Beijing Centre for the Arts at the Legation Quarter.
- 2008 OCAT Shenzhen solo exhibition *Mute* which shows *A Gust of Wind* and *Mute*.
- 2010 New Media Art Department under Zhang Peili's direction incorporated into the new School of Intermedia Art under Gao Shiming and Qiu Zhijie. ZPL begins slow withdrawal from academy.
- 2011 *Thirty years of Chinese Contemporary Art – Moving Image 1998-2011*, Mingsheng Art Museum, Shanghai, China.
- 2012 Zhang Peili appointed director of OCAT Shenzhen's new Shanghai branch.
- 2015 Zhang Peili curates *Photo Shanghai* video section, increasingly organizing shows and events as his responsibilities diminish at China Art Academy, Hangzhou.
- 2016 ZPL is Professor in the Embodied Media Studio of the School of Intermedia Art, at China National Fine Art Academy, Hangzhou
- 2016 June, ZPL exhibits *Water: Standard Version from Cibai Dictionary* (1991) and *Q & A & Q*, (2012) in *Time Test: International Video Art Research Exhibition* at Central Academy of Fine Arts Museum, Beijing.

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