

2014 Inter-Asia Biennale Forum (Taipei)

At 9th Taipei Biennial

Production Art

Organized by Inter-Asia School

Co-organized by Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Center for Asia-Pacific/Cultural Studies, NCTU (APCS-NCTU)

Sponsored by Moonchu Foundation

Date: October 11 – 12, 2014

Venues: Taipei Fine Arts Museum Auditorium (B2, 181 Zhongshan North Road Section 3),
Yue-han Hall (110 Jin Hua Street Taipei)

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Huang Chien-Hung, Taipei Biennial Forum Convener

Inter-Asia Biennale Forum Initiators:

Chang Tsong-Zung, Gao Shiming, Chen Kuan-Hsing

The *Inter-Asia Biennale Forum* is a cross-disciplinary academic project launched by a consortium of Asian intellectuals in association with the Inter-Asia School. The project aims to link together the public platforms of the various Biennales taking place in Asia, and based on each individual Biennale, to create a forum of interconnected thought grounded in the context of Asian realities. Starting with several key issues in contemporary Asian thought and art practice, the forum will respond to the academic topics of each Biennale, with an end to stimulating exchange and reflection among the artistic and philosophical communities in Asia, and to come up with shared concerns and goals for action based on individual life experiences.

The Taipei Forum of the Inter-Asia Forum will take the concept of “Production Art” as its starting point. On the one hand, this is a response to curator Nicolas Bourriaud’s (the founder of Relational Aesthetics) concepts of “co-activity” and “co-relational”. On the other hand, the Forum will seek to open up a platform for Asian thought, beginning with reflections on production art, and on the relationships of dominance among the human world, the non-human world, and the world of the things, as well as methods of creation.

Production (productive forces and production relations) is intimately related to contemporary biopolitics. Every labouring individual or act of labour contains the operations of a particular system of organisation. The syndrome of dependency that exists in the production relations between the individual and the system turns production into sites of ineffable amnesia and historical absence. Because of the intimate interrelationships between social values and hierarchal power relations in the workplace, the status of labour and the status of contracts remain indisputable; conversely, inequitable productive forces that are the result of cultural dominance and unequal production relations, make it difficult for antiquated colonial structures to be eradicated completely from present-day democratic societies. In fact, since the beginning of World War II, discussions of “total war” have always taken the assumption that war was nothing more than the conflict over production (a struggle over the means of production, the uninterrupted maintenance of the productive forces, the collaboration between production relationships and political alliance, etc.). Similarly, in the realms of art and philosophical practice, the question, “How do we deal with production?” has become the most radical issue confronting history and power. At the same time, goods and technology, as well as the labourers involved in actual production (producers, workers, artists...), have become the potential vessels of the “silence” and “blank spaces” within historical writing, created by the implacable relations of power dominance. Thus, at the present Taipei Biennial Forum, we intend to create an interface between the generating of history, individual memoirs, biopolitics, production of things, and production relations, etc., as a way of dealing with today’s most pressing issue: How to deal with Production? How to deal with production in which relationships of dominance still exist? How to deal with production and its dominance of political power and knowledge?

For these reasons, we must examine the mutually determined relationships that exist between things and production within different cultural situations, and the productive communities that are driven by these determinative relationships. In the dramatically accelerating enterprise of humanity, we discover that the productive communities in the traditional sense of the term have long disintegrated as a function of capitalism and globalisation. Man having dominated man, and man having dominated things, we now have a situation in which things dominate man. For this reason, the creation of new forms of production and exchange has become increasingly urgent; and innovation in forms of production and exchange must be based on the production of new “communities.” Exacerbation of the situation by Capitalism, the systems of OEM (original equipment manufacturing) and ideology characteristic of the Cold War era all serve to reiterate the importance of investigating the problem of the close relationship between “things” and communities. The relations of production determine the nature of things, and make possible the liberation of the materiality from the existing political and economic relations.

“Things” are no longer merely physical or inorganic objects. Rather, they are the “others” that individuals and communities use as a way of expressing or enlarging their identities. “Animism,” the notion that all things have a soul, is not just a kind of

“spiritual endowment,” nor is it merely a “deconstructed” rationality that provides a partial and abstract interpretation and contemporary “external tool.” On a deeper level, people basically rely on and deploy a wide variety of things to enable them to construct the world, this globe of domination. Is not “Colonial domination” exactly that process of reduction of the significance of every kind of thing, and the establishment of an unsurpassable class system between people and things, as a way of creating a world of singular meaning in the name of capitalism?

But “things,” in the way they are differentiated in different cultures, already provide a situation for their having a diversity of meanings; in other words, their dynamic meaning must be understood in terms of their contextual “ecological” relationships. The question being raised here is: Is there a form of development that is able to transcend culture? As things follow in the footsteps of colonialist history, migrating to all corners of the earth, thus spurring the Glocalisation of “technology” or “skills,” intercultural and interregional migration even more directly demonstrates the cultural authority of things in the web of individuals and communities, and opens up silent spaces for negotiation. Starting from this point, perhaps we may begin to address the following three notions: “the power of things”, “the community of things”, and “the negotiation of things”. From a critique of, and resistance, to every kind of “dominance” relations, perhaps attempt to collectively produce an art and philosophy of “production” that is both ecological and interactive.

The Inter Asia Forum and conference will take place on October 11 in the Audio Visual Center of the Taipei Fine Arts Museum and on October 12 in the Yuehantang at National Tsing Hua University in Hsinchu, respectively. The specific topics for discussion are as follows:

Session 1: Things and Institutional Systems
(Moderator: Chang Tsong-Zung)

“Things” are resources that are constantly scrutinised as economic asset by capitalist mechanisms. They are the “Other” awaiting exploitation, as well as the fulcrum for the manipulation of social relations by means of the system of production. In the relations of production, things have been reduced to the status of the means for class domination; yet they also possess the special characteristics of “the Other” that cannot be encompassed simply by these relationships. For example, “things” transformed by the production process that subsequently take on new forms as pollutants or environmental damages, are a perfect example of this irreducible “Otherness” of “things”. The fact that Things cannot be simply reduced to nothing or be totally abstracted, suggests that under different historical and cultural conditions, there are multiple ways in which technology can affect the character of things. In no culture can things be entirely divorced from human domination; at the same time, things can become an important medium for the domination of one social group over another. In “modern” Asia, what kind of institutional frameworks have things been assigned to? Under different systems of authority, to what extent do people dominate things, and to what extent do things in turn dominate people? If “liberation” remains

an effective historical goal, than human liberation may in the end depend on the liberation of things.

Visual Reference:

Inga Svala Thórsdóttir and Wu Shanzhuan “Thing’s Right(s)” series (1994-2009)

Inga Svala Thórsdóttir and Wu Shanzhuan’s “Thing’s Right(s)” series of videos, based on the 30 articles of “Declarations of Human Rights,” declare the equal rights of “things.” Modern Enlightenment, centered on humanism, shows its hand in the form of “Declarations of Human Rights,” exposing the human world’s oppressive arrangement with “things.” From out of this arrangement, Thorsdottir and Wu derive a new, equitable relationship between things and people. They accomplish this by pushing the ideals of Enlightenment to its logical extreme, which at the same time opens up new possibilities for the relations of production.

Session 2: Spiritual Production and the Flourishing Ruin of Things

(Moderator: Gao Shiming)

Over the course of the past half-century, under the dual-structure of imperialism and the modern nation-state, people have once again found themselves divided and reconstituted: Due to the entangled histories of colonialism and the Cold War people have been dispersed and scattered; in globalised production - consumption networks - they have consistently been subjected to allocation and consolidation. Under the influence of the power of the dual history of colonialism and the Cold War, daily life in Asia was absorbed very early on into the consumer networks of global capitalist production; within the meaning structure and signs circulation of the ‘object system’, behind the global circulation of “things” (both everyday articles and art objects) one finds increasingly brutal domination and exploitation, OEM (original equipment manufacturing) and developmental logic have left Asia with any number of ravaged sites of production. In this ceaselessly expanding empire of the “flourishing ruin” and demise of “things”, can we invent new means of cultural struggle and spiritual production?

Visual references:

Chen Chieh-jen, *Factory* (2004), *The Route* (2006), and *Realm of Reverberations* (2013).

Every object in Chen Chieh-jen’s videos is a social archive and a historical revelation, and can be viewed as a path that leads us back to history. But the door of history has never been thrown wide open, because once an event takes place, it quickly finds itself in a state of ruin. Historical experience can never be more than threadbare echoes; fragments that inform the energetic movement of constructed knowledge and of memory that circulates among the people and which, in the course of endless days and nights, months and years, expand silently and imperceptibly. Diametrically opposed to this process are the techniques contemporary society employs to obstruct, isolate,

suppress and demolish the field of memory. The artist's lens must focus on and reveal the remnants of the past, which are the leftovers of reality. As a means of spiritual production and actual mobilization, images can constantly evoke living echoes of social memories from within the multiple layers of history.

Session 3: The Consultation of Technology and the Domination of Narrative
(Convener: Huang Chien-Hung)

Technology is a form of cultural modification that is carried out on objects and materials. In the course of historical development and as events unfold, technology maintains a kind of silence, as if it bears no relationship to politics. Even the relationship between technology and history appears to be no more than a set of cultural characteristics or mere evidence of the presence of civilisation. However, whether we are discussing craftsmanship, art techniques or advanced science and technology, the continuity within the field is often made possible by a succession of cultural translations, consultations, rewriting and misreading. In fact, man-made objects inevitably harbour multi-layered vestiges of colonialism and exist in a condition of cultural modification and fusion. It is hoped that this discussion will focus on the traces left on this silent history by progressive things, by the products of science and technology or works of art.

Visual References:

Su Yuxian, *Hua Shan Qiang* (2013), *The Chair* (2012), and *Plastic Man* (2011)

The artist's works dating from 2010 and after are mostly concerned with how non-knowledge-based workers and cultural professionals structure their knowledge and culture in the course of their work. As these people came into contact with members of other communities, the artist's work began to shift its focus to the way materials and skills, within different living situations, are transformed into production relationships that are inseparable from specific lives. For this same reason, Su's work eventually became a series of complex, many-layered narratives concerned with the process of the retranslation of skills. As each of these narratives of skills is filmed, we not only observe the transformation of materials and skills, we also can see how individual lives, within specific economic and political structures, and in a kind of "named but undifferentiated" state of assignment, have an opportunity to gain individual subjectivity, as a result of the retranslation of materials and skills.

Extracurricular Conference
"What more can be done with Biennales as Platforms?"
(Convener: Chen Kuan-Hsing)

Since 2010, West Heavens and Modern Asian Thought projects, initiated by the Inter-Asia School, have worked with the Shanghai Biennales, and now with the Taipei Biennale, as platforms to engage in social thought dialogues. In this open-ended

gathering, we would like to critically reflect on these experiments and invite concerned colleagues and friends to share with us their own thoughts, and to imagine together what can be done more with the biennale as a public platform to stage new possibilities.

Inter-Asia School

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