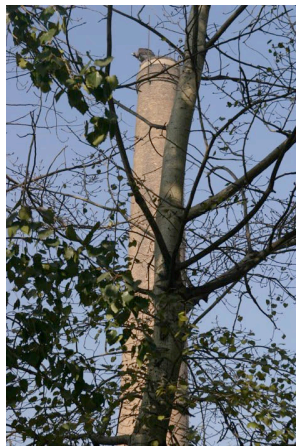


Down and Under, Up and Over: Animalworks by Sun Yuan and Peng Yu

Meiling Cheng

I. Scenes of Animalworks

Deng ni (Waiting for You, 2006). A vulture crouches on top of a forty-meter-high chimney, scanning at the people who are curiously pointing at it from the ground. [1]



1. *Waiting for You* (2006), by Sun Yuan and Peng Yu, in the exhibition, *Double-Kick-Cracker: An Exhibition of Chinese Contemporary Art*, in Beijing, China. Courtesy of the Artists.

Ming tian (Tomorrow, 2006). Four old men, fully dressed in suits and pants, float face down on a lake in an odd square formation. Three hours later, policemen order these corpses to be removed.



2. *Tomorrow* (Sept. 2006), by Sun Yuan and Peng Yu, in the exhibition, *China Pavilion: 2006 Liverpool Biennial*, in Liverpool, England. Courtesy of the Artists.

Quan wu jin (*Dogs That Cannot Touch Each Other*, 2003). A bell rings. Eight Pit Bull Terriers, groomed to their prime and barking periodically, ascend onto eight modified treadmills, which are evenly divided into four parallel sets of two, with each set blocked in the middle by a cardboard barrier. Once the pitbulls are securely harnessed, their human attendants pull off the cardboards, leaving the dogs to face each other. Barking menacingly, the dogs attempt to attack the ones they face, but they manage only to activate the treadmills, on which they run nonstop.



3. *Dogs That Cannot Touch Each Other* (Sept. 2003), by Sun Yuan and Peng Yu, in the exhibition, *Second Hand Reality*, in Beijing, China. Courtesy of the Artists.

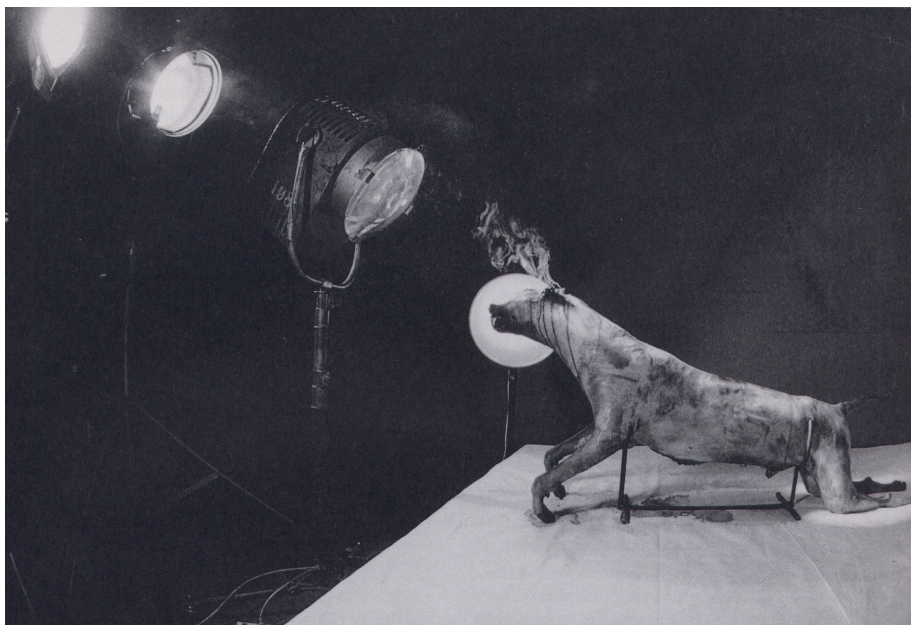
Zheng ba (*Contend for Hegemony*, 2003). A bell rings. Three human boxers—each in a different weight category—step onto a boxing ring. They greet the cheering crowd ceremoniously and proceed to fight with one another. A fluid alliance-and/or-opposition

structure is quickly formed: At times two boxers join to fight the third; at others all three get entangled in a storm of fists and kicks. When one boxer falls, the other two immediately confront each other to pick up the fierce combat.



4. *Contend for Hegemony* (Dec. 2003), by Sun Yuan and Peng Yu, in the exhibition, *Left Wing*, in Beijing, China. Courtesy of the Artists.

Linghuen zhuei sha (*Soul Killing*, 2000). A spotlight with a 5000-watt bulb stands behind a raised magnifying glass, which focuses the light's energy onto the head of a frozen greyhound dog, propped up upright on a metal rack. The heat induces a steam to rise from the dead dog's skull, while its thawed blood flows downward.



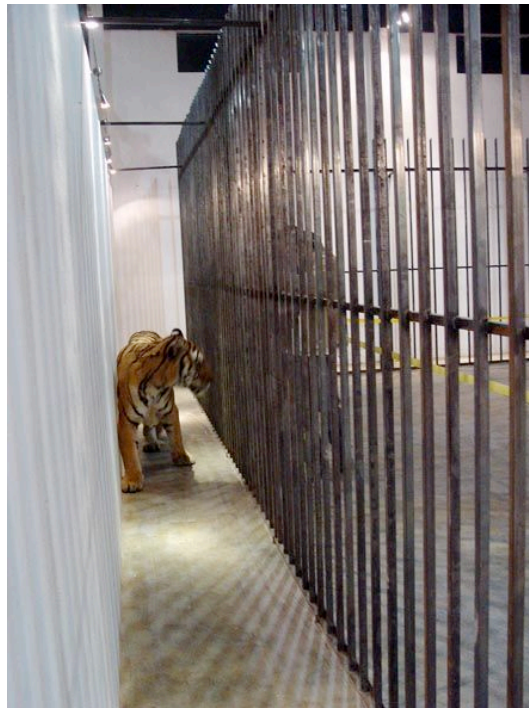
5. *Soul Killing* (Feb. 2000), by Sun Yuan and Peng Yu, in the exhibition, *Food as Art*, in Beijing, China. Photo by Wu Hung. Courtesy of the Photographer.

Lian ti (*Linked Bodies*, 2000). A man and a woman sit placidly on two symmetrically placed chairs. From their arms extend two intravenous catheters, allowing their blood to drip incessantly to the mouths of a Siamese infant twin, two tiny cadaver specimens attached in their abdomens. Finding no viable outlets, the blood seeps through the orifice and overflows to drench the twin's side torsos.



6. *Linked Bodies* (Apr. 2000), by Sun Yuan and Peng Yu, in the exhibition, *Infatuation with Injury*, in Beijing, China. Courtesy of the Artists.

An quan dao (*Safety Island*, 2003). A live Asian tiger paces inside a large steel cage, which is constructed alongside an exhibition hall's four interior walls, creating a corridor for the walking tiger and serving as a virtual moat for the human spectators. Those who wish to enter or exit the gallery must gather around the only two convertible 'drawbridges'. Depending on the tiger's position, the cage's steel bars may be folded sideways to create a narrow passageway, allowing single-filed spectators to go through it.



7. *Safety Island* (Oct. 2003), by Sun Yuan and Peng Yu, in the exhibition, *Trojan Horse: Return to Nature*, in Nanjing, China. Courtesy of the Artists.

Yiwan nian (*Ten Thousand Years*, 2005). A lone figure moves on top of a glass roof. Dressed in a dark suit, the figure resembles a man, yet an abundant layer of thick black hair covers his face and body. From time to time, the figure walks toward a broken pane of glass on the ceiling and looks through the zigzag hole at the activities inside the building.



8. *Ten Thousand Years* (Oct. 2005), by Sun Yuan and Peng Yu, in the exhibition, *Ten Thousand Years*, in Beijing, China. Courtesy of the Artists.

As divergent as they are, the eight scenes that I just described have several features in common. First, they are all time-based artworks created by a duo of Beijing artists, Sun Yuan and Peng Yu. Second, each of these artworks revolves around a striking image, a center of visual gravity, even as this image also evokes, stimulates, and relies on the surrounding trans-visual drama to enrich its production and display. Third, although unintended by the artists, these performance and installation pieces have considerably expanded the possibilities of what I call "animalworks," a genre of ephemeral artworks that incorporate animals as in/voluntary performers and/or manipulated art objects (see Cheng 2007).

While my first two observations address Sun and Peng's materialist aesthetics and interactive public art, my last point puts forward a proposition, one that questions the ontological distinction between human and nonhuman animals by virtue of their—or rather, our—shared mortality as locomotive organic beings. 'Animals are born, are sentient and are mortal', writes John Berger in his iconic essay, 'Why Look at Animals?' (1977), which argues that humans and animals are 'both like and unlike' (1980:2). By contemplating Sun and Peng's animalworks from a posthuman angle, I wish to substantiate my last claim, pushing Berger's argument further to conceptualize the differences between human and nonhuman animals as those between different biological species rather than those that distinguish the primary and auxiliary creatures on our planet.

To oppose the hierarchical division between the *Homo sapiens* and other animals is to regard all animals, both human and nonhuman, as occupying diverse positions in a biological spectrum of organic motile beings. In this sense, my proposition builds on Berger's observation of the existential kinship between humans and animals as sentient co-inhabitants of the Earth. Humans and animals, as Berger traces, have endured a similar historical process that renders obsolete their original proximity in natural surroundings, while transforming them into distant and isolated parallel units in the civilized world. Since humans consider themselves active agents of the civilized world, this analogous historical process has not diminished, but rather heightened, humans' sense of distinctiveness from animals. Correspondingly, in human perceptions, animals have changed from their

primordial status as those dualistic beings that were 'subjected *and* worshipped, bred *and* sacrificed' (5), to machine-like utilitarian entities used for food, labor, and transport in the eras surrounding the Industrial Revolution, and eventually, in the post-industrial societies, to 'raw material' (11), serving various alimentary, commercial, scientific, domestic, and recreational functions. Thus, a dire consequence to humans' self-differentiation from animals is the utter marginalization of the latter.

After three decades, Berger's analysis remains incisive and timely. His genealogy of how we humans related to other animals, however, stops at the historical juncture when nonhuman animals were reduced from myth, to tool, and to pure mass: 'raw material.' The recent advent of our globalized information age, however, enables us to add a contemporary coda to Berger's critique: *humans and other animals are now more like than unlike*. Although information resources in our present world remain unevenly distributed, for those of us who reside in well-networked cosmopolitan locales, a new global order has appeared, one that is radically insistent in its emergence and irresistibly pervasive in its coverage. This new global order has not only altered the nature, rhythm, and pattern of our quotidian lives, but it has also reshaped our human identities as coextensive with those of our intelligent machines. Our daily dependence on communication technologies (on the Internet, the cell phones, the Emails, and various other software and hardware) has enmeshed us into a wired cosmology where no stable boundary exists between sentient and non-sentient, en fleshed and virtual, beings. Such an emergent global order has prompted many theorists to characterize our current existence as 'the posthuman condition' (see Pepperell 2003). The process of 'mathematisation' associated with our posthumanism, as Pramod K. Nayar succinctly puts it, 'produces a new way of looking at humans: as a set of data' (21). How much longer must we go, then, to regard all other animals, even all non-animals, as sets of data? Seen from the posthuman perspective, the moment has long arrived. The material bases of all life forms are becoming equitable research subjects; barring concerns over bioethics, they exist as biological data able to be tracked, scrutinized, manipulated, and modified. The mapping of the human genome, completed in 2003, and the ongoing genomic research into the DNA sequences of other animals (see *Genome Research* online, *Genomics* online), represent only two relatively more recent and overt evidences that we are acquiring a certain digital epistemology—if not yet fully bound by a

digital phenomenology.

Against this highly technologised backdrop, we humans, as reproduced, sentient, and mortal beings, are closer to other animals than ever before—even in our common potentials as raw material. A pig's heart might one day pump in a man's chest, which could possibly gain a second chance in life with the gift of xenotransplantation (see Goodenough 2004). And the pig compelled to gift the man might be just as involuntary as a child kidnapped for her kidney by an illegal transnational organ trafficking chain. In these parallel situations, both the pig and the child are sacrificed, commoditized as animal bodies with functioning organs, extractable for the cause of prolonging another living being's survival. Moving deeper to the molecular level, we see animal bodies serving as raw material for genetic manipulation in the neo-alchemical enterprises of bio-medicine and genetic engineering: from cloning, to stem cell research, to organ farming and harvesting, from the controversial GMO's (genetically modified organisms) to transgenic microbes (see Avise 2004; *Bio-medicine* online). Biotechnology crisscrossed with transnational capitalism writ large: these utopic/dystopic scenarios, no longer science fiction proper, point to realistic turns of events that have complicated our emergent global order. These contemporary scenarios provide sociocultural fodder for posthuman animalworks.

So far in their oeuvres, Sun and Peng have not directly addressed this late capitalist nexus of biotechnology and commercialism. The duo's artworks employ mostly pre-industrial technologies, mobilizing metaphors rather than motorized genetic chimeras, and tampering with real flesh and bones rather than artificial 'metacreations' (see Whitelaw 2004). Staking their claims on the realms of the actual and the plebian (vs. those of the virtual and the scientifically patrician), Sun and Peng deal with tangible found materials in unexpected, low-tech, and imaginative ways. Their artistic approach evinces a blunt hyper-literalism; whatever they lack in fancy laboratory apparatus they more than compensate for with a style specializing in producing high-impact effects. The two artists pursue an ingenuity born of a resolve to impress others deeply and quickly, even with brutality. This particular tendency, or aspiration, seems to reflect their own country's quite recent advance into the rank of international superpowers and its widely uneven economic and technological developments. In a place where human rights is still a contentious subject, posthumanism

might sound stratospheric, if not far-fetched, at least extravagant. I argue, however, that Sun and Peng's animalworks point to posthumanism in that they share the same logic of reconceptualizing human and nonhuman animals as terrestrial peers, who differ not in their intrinsic corporeal qualities but in their respective evolutionary stages and socio-historical developments. Admittedly, Sun and Peng have not related their artworks to such an emergent theoretical context. Moreover, it's likely that the two artists have derived at what I may describe as their pan-species egalitarianism from largely indigenous cultural sources, such as the Daoist concept of the universe as one constantly transmuting body or the Buddhist concept of transmigration (see Qiu 2003:89). Nevertheless, I submit, posthumanism—with its project to displace anthropocentrism—does offer an incisive angle from which to assess Sun and Peng's animalworks.

II. Animalworks and Bodyworks in Violent Zooësis

In a tribute to Cary Wolfe's pioneering work on 'zoontologies', Una Chaudhuri proposes the neologism, 'zooësis', to signify 'the myriad performance and semiotic elements involved in and around the vast field of *cultural animal practices*' (2003:647). Zooësis refers comprehensively to those embodied and discursive engagements that have shaped our understanding and interpretations of animality in human life. So widespread and multifarious are these animal practices that the effects of zooësis, as Chaudhuri observes, saturate 'our social, psychological, and material existence' (647). What zooësis maps out are, then, the epistemic, experiential, imaginative, and behavioral domains that have inspired many contemporary artists to create animalworks.

I use the term, 'animalworks', to name a certain type of zooësis that has its specific location within the realm of contemporary art. My coinage both identifies those durational artworks that bring into play the figure and presence of animals and evokes another time-based genre, 'bodyworks' (1975), as their counterparts in performance art. Characteristically, a bodywork treats the artist's body as the basis, perimeter, material, subject, and object of a performance action. An animalwork, in contrast, involves the artist's interaction with or manipulation of another body, that of an animal in its various guises as a concept, a somatic mass, a sensorial stimulus, a material symbol, and an alien spectacle. Bodyworks

and animalworks have a common interest in the intersection between corporeality and temporality—that is, in the nature and attributes of a mortal body. Both genres tend to challenge normative sensibilities and thrive on the violence of the unexpected, the grotesque, or the extremely visceral. Bodyworks and animalworks nevertheless energize the performance medium from almost opposite standpoints. The potential danger associated with a bodywork comes from a predetermined stable element: the artist's willingness to subject his/her own body to an endurance task, which includes self-harm. Conversely, an animalwork often derives its thrill from a relatively uncontrollable risky element: the strength, volition, motility, and aggression of a body other than that of the artist.

As an experimental art medium, performance art (translated into Mandarin as '*xingwei yishu*') joined China's two-decade-plus history of contemporary art in the mid-1980s, and it became more widely practiced among visual artists during the 1990s (see Lu and Sun 2006; Cheng 2004). Whereas other static mediums such as painting and photography have been gaining uncomplicated popularity and profitability, *xingwei yishu*'s tenure in China has suffered from police censorship, general suspicion, and critical controversy. According to Lu Hong and Sun Zhenhua, who coauthored the first book on performance art in China, a succession of extreme artworks that 'frightened the world and shocked the populace' has made the term *xingwei yishu* synonymous with 'evil, mischief, grotesquerie, and anarchy' in the popular imagination. [2] Although the majority of *xingwei* artworks could, to varying degrees, qualify for their sensational epithets, Lu and Sun have refrained from highlighting the most disturbing pieces. Instead, they subsume an array of their token incendiary selections under one chapter entitled, 'The Seismic Impacts from "Violence"' (79). Intriguingly, all the performance pieces that Lu and Sun analyze as 'violent' fall under my proposed categories of bodyworks and animalworks.

To me, Lu and Sun's authorial restraint suggests their strategic curtailment of the two phenomena that have made *xingwei yishu* notorious: (1) the prevalence of bodyworks and animalworks in the history of this time-based art medium in China; and (2) the propensity of these viscerally charged artworks toward self-induced and/or other-directed violence. These phenomena were already evident in the live artworks by two pioneering performance artists:

Zhang Huan and Ma Liuming, who began their *xingwei* careers furtively in the immediate post-Tiananmen era. Let's take Zhang's *12 Square Meter* (1994) and Ma's *Fen•Ma Liuming and the Fish* (1995) as quick case studies here (see Zeng, et al 1994: 41, 66, 70; Edition 2004: 86).



9. *12 Square Meter* (1994), by Zhang Huan, in East Village, Beijing, China. Courtesy of the Artist.



10. *Fen•Ma Liuming and Fish* (1995), by Ma Liuming, in East Village, Beijing, China. Courtesy of the Artist.

Both pieces were hybrids of bodyworks and animalworks; both exercised certain degrees of violence. Zhang exposed his naked body, half coated with honey and another half with fish oil, to the delectation of flies in a public toilet, and Ma allowed his *xingwei* alter ego, Fen•Ma Liuming, to tremble without any clothing in a freezing temperature while a live fish was burning to ashes in a frying pan. Zhang played both host and prey to his insect cop performers, while Ma employed two surrogates, his gender-ambivalent character, Fen•Ma Liuming, and his sacrificial fish, to embody his anguished mental state. If Zhang's piece reflected a traumatic re-staging of the 'wounded literature' (see Wang 1996: 160) that swept over China in the early 1980s, Ma's project expressed his frustration with the current police's censorship of his art, having just been released from a two-month prison term for

his 'pornographic performance' (Edition 2004:88-89; Ma 2006).

Before returning to the topic of violence, I shall first clarify certain structural issues. Zhang's and Ma's examples demonstrate that bodyworks can easily merge with animalworks when the artists relocate the crux of their performance from an introspective engagement with their own bodies to an interactive encounter with other bodies. Since *xingwei yishu* privileges the artist's own experiences while executing certain planned behaviors, most *xingwei* pieces are bodyworks. Thus, insofar as *xingwei yishu* is concerned, we may consider animalworks a subgenre of bodyworks. This relationship between bodyworks and animalworks becomes reversed when we move to another time-based medium: *xingwei-zhuangzhi*, a contemporary art genre that has been increasingly pervasive in China since the late 1990s. *Xingwei-zhuangzhi* comprises both *performative installation*, when a *zhuangzhi* (an installation) contains ephemeral and mutable components, and *performance-installation*, when a *xingwei* (an embodied action) is joined with a *zhuangzhi* (a constructed environment). In *xingwei-zhuangzhi*, bodyworks become a subgenre of animalworks. We can find animalworks more frequently than bodyworks in *xingwei-zhuangzhi*, probably because the artist's corporeal presence is considered optional rather than indispensable to the displayed installation.

Unlike Zhang and Ma, who are famed *xingwei* artists, Sun and Peng have taken *xingwei-zhuangzhi* as their primary art medium—a choice that, I believe, accounts for the preponderance of animalworks in their oeuvres. Similar to Zhang and Ma, however, Sun and Peng's earliest reputations were inextricably tied to the debates among Chinese critics over the 'violent tendency' in extreme *xingwei* or *xingwei-zhuangzhi* artworks (see Qiu 2001; Cheng 2005). Lu and Sun's inclusion of 'violence' as an analytical theme refers to these debates, which raged in the Chinese press at the turn of the millennium, leading eventually to an official 3 April 2001 policy 'Notice' issued by the Department of Cultural Affairs, which 'sternly prohibits the performance and display of bloody, violent, obscene settings or materials in the name of art' (see 'Wenhua Bu', 2001; Feng 2006). The 'Notice' denounces as 'unethical' and 'antisocial' those exhibits and behaviors that manifest a tendency toward excessive corporeal manipulation—be it through self-harm, animal torture, or corpse display. Despite their harsh tone, the censors from Cultural Affairs maintain an air

of abstraction throughout the 'Notice', which takes pains to avoid naming any perpetrator of 'bloody, violent, obscene' acts. Aping the conservative art critics who regard most sensational *xingwei*-pursuits as deliberate baits for infamy, the government censors steer away from negatively rewarding those they proscribe. Their stoic vigilance notwithstanding, the 'Notice' unmistakably implicate some well-known *xingwei yishu* pioneers, such as Ma and Zhang, as well as a younger generation of the so-called 'Beijing shockers', also known as the 'cadaver school' [3]. Sun and Peng belong to the latter group.

Sun and Peng began making their marks respectively in Beijing's contemporary art scene in the late 1990s. This pair of artists, who would join forces in 2000 to form a collaborative life and work partnership, had each abetted the emergence of 'violent tendency' in extreme artworks. Indeed two of their earliest signature *xingwei-zhuangzhi* pieces—Sun's *Shueizu qiang* (*Aquatic Walls*, 1998) and Peng's *Mang* (*Curtain*, 1999)—appear to justify their viewers' perceptions of violent art, if not necessarily their detractors' morally righteous censure. Although it's debatable whether violence is a mere effect or the very purpose of *Aquatic Walls* and *Curtain*, the two artists could hardly deny their complicity in subjecting some maritime, reptilian, and amphibian animals to utterly brutal treatments for their animalworks.



11. *Aquatic Walls* (Sept. 1998), by Sun Yuan, in the exhibition, *Inlaid*, in Beijing, China. Courtesy of the Artist.



12. *Curtain* (Sept. 1999), by Peng Yu, in the exhibition, *Culture • Life*, in Beijing, China. Courtesy of the Artist.

Sun's *Aquatic Walls* and Peng's *Curtain* both employ live animals as art materials and compulsory performers; both presented these animals' dying struggles as the evanescent microcosms that showcase the destiny universal to all mortal beings (see Cheng 2007:78-79). *Aquatic Walls* exhibited an array of sea creatures half-immured in a U-shaped corridor of double-layered walls; the piece's multi-sensory textures emanated from the odor, stare, movement, and tactility of those displaced and parched animals. *Curtain* poured forth an

avalanche of sonorously despairing preys—'400 kilograms of lobsters, 30 kilograms of eels, 30 kilograms of snakes, and 20 kilograms of bull frogs' (Zhang 2001)—hung up to dry and die, to spin around and stink up their human gazers for three days.

Echoing many other spectators who had vociferously rebuked the two animalworks, I pale before the ruthlessness with which Sun and Peng tortured their animal victims en masse. Yet, I am also intrigued by the artists' abilities to deflect critical accusations of their sadism. Their excuses coalesce into two defensive fronts, which I may describe as the anti-anthropomorphic and the homeopathic. With the former defense, they countered those who attacked them for the animals' pain by exposing the critics' own acculturated fallacy: 'Pain is a human-defined emotion', as Sun remarked (Sun and Peng 2005). With the latter defense, they argued that their animalworks, though unbearably intense, only hint at the large-scale violence committed by their fellow meat-eating, live shrimp-swallowing Chinese: 'an iris for an eye', so to speak. Nevertheless, I wonder, can we split pain from the instincts for life and the process of dying? Can we exploit others' pain as the price for our art? Can we cure blindness with blindness?

Aquatic Walls and *Curtain* anticipated a major trend of animalworks in China that handles non-human animals as 'food' for art—to construe 'food' loosely here as material for consumption rather than as resource for care and preservation. Treating animals as food in animalworks exercises a literalist zooësis, which mirrors what Gang Yue analyzes as the ravenous 'carnivorism' of the postrevolutionary China (1999:262-287). In its government-sanctioned campaign to 'catch up with the level of consumption of late capitalist societies' (Yue 1999:378), the post-Deng China has emerged as an effervescent environ voracious for ever more sensational commodities, especially for those consumed orally. Although animalworks like *Aquatic Walls* and *Curtain* neither originate nor advocate such carnivorousness, they play into the tune of this unselfconscious social gluttony. Their startlingly mimetic art induces critical catatonia.

By pushing to the extreme their practice of cultural citations, *Aquatic Walls* and *Curtain* function to expose the rampant carnivorousness in their larger national context. If we are shocked by the savagery of both pieces, Sun and Peng seem to ask, how do we respond to

the even greater and more insidious violence committed to a multitude of human subjects, those circumstantial victims of China's socialist market economy, unrelenting in its pace and callous toward its unfit castaways? In this light, both animalworks appear to have adopted homeopathic tactics, applying their 'smaller' dose of cruelty to resist the grand-scale incursion of a non-discriminating appetite. Homeopathic solution, however, has the methodological limit of having to re-produce the very ill against which it seeks to oppose. Sun's and Peng's homeopathic inoculations against this all-consuming palate have incurred such exorbitant cost of lives that I am compelled to question the ethical merit and aesthetic economy of their two animalworks. Nonetheless, tempted as I am to denounce *Aquatic Walls* and *Curtain* for their stupendous waste, I must also concede that the power of both pieces derives in large measure from the horror of their animal sacrifices. Were their fish, lobsters, eels, grass snakes, and bullfrogs fake, *Aquatic Walls* and *Curtain* would have become merely decorative rather than unforgettable animalworks.

III. Let the Animals Multiply!

Aquatic Walls and *Curtain* established Sun's and Peng's early notoriety for making heart-stopping artworks. If notoriety signals the acute degrees of (negative) popular fascination, then it suggests the duo's considerable abilities to provoke audience responses through the sheer ferocity of their aesthetics—which the critic Wei Xing once dubbed as 'lively and fierce', facetiously evoking the pet phrase used by many Chinese restaurants to advertise fresh seafood (see Sun and Peng 2007). I would stress, however, that the 'shock values' produced by the duo's animalworks emanate not only from their ferocious spectacles, but also from their conceptual inventiveness. Moreover, this combination of visceral and cerebral intensity that we've seen in *Aquatic Walls* and *Curtain* would continue to characterize Sun and Peng's collaborative outputs.

In a way, the significance of Sun and Peng's aesthetic inquiry—which has adopted the ephemeral genre of *xingwei-zhuangzhi* to stage animalworks—lies precisely in its temerity. They dare to go where most shy to even dream. Temerity, however, may assume different guises: it may cut with an in-yer-face audacity, enrage with a blunt coolness, or surprise by eschewing well-honed precedents. Although it would be facile to trace a lineal progression

in Sun and Peng's shared outputs from youthful cruelty to mellowing sophistication, I discern their consistent drive to transgress their personal limits. More than the desire to shock and the necessity to outwit the changing fashions, it is this drive for constant self-renewal—if only to keep their own nerves on edge—that has pushed Sun and Peng to diversify the expressions for their joint animalworks.

In my view, Sun and Peng succeed in multiplying the possibilities of animalworks with three crucial conceptual interventions: (1) They brought in dead people; (2) They incorporated bodyworks into their animalworks; (3) They allowed their live animal performers to survive their installations. Each intervention contributes to what Chaudhuri defines as 'the work of a critical zooësis', which interrogates the traditionally assumed 'ontological distinction' and 'ethical divide' between human and nonhuman animals (2003:647). I shall cite from my opening sampling of Sun and Peng's animalworks to test my hypotheses.

Let us begin again with an apparent counter-example to the stance of critical zooësis: *Soul Killing*, the animalwork starring a canine corpse, which made its unsalivating one-evening public appearance in a show called *Food as Art*, at Beijing's Club Vogue Bar (see Wu 2000: 190-95).



13. *Soul Killing* (Feb. 2000), by Sun Yuan and Peng Yu, in the exhibition, *Food as Art*, in Beijing, China. Courtesy of the Artist.

If 'animals as food' is a metaphorical theme in *Aquatic Walls* and *Curtain*, this theme goes through several complex twists and turns in *Soul Killing*. The theme is literalized in its exhibition context, 'food as art', suggesting that all artworks on display are also food. Sun and Peng pursue this literal edge by purchasing their leading art supply from a food market and by moving the dog in its original frozen pose unto their table at Club Vogue (Sun and Peng 2005). They proceed to integrate a culinary event with a scientific experiment, using the heat from electricity and the property of the magnifying glass to barbeque their animal food stock. Yet, the artists also use their disconcerting title for this animalwork—*Soul Killing*—to trouble this rational food preparation sequence. The steam coming out of the dog's brain henceforth doubles as a natural and mystical phenomenon: it gives a visible physical shape to what some of us believe to be a spiritual entity, soul, and exposes what some others believe to be an incontrovertible fact: 'an animal doesn't have a soul'. Here we see the light murdering the soul, can we bear eating this soul-bearing flesh in the form of a dog under broad daylight?

Soul Killing raises an as-yet-unverifiable conundrum, boiled down to a simple question, 'Did your food have a soul?' I phrase the question by modifying the slogan from a PETA poster, which Chaudhuri cited, 'Did your food have a face?' (2007:14). The PETA poster answers the question with a moral injunction: 'GO VEGETARIAN'. Sun and Peng, instead, follow up their provocation with another conundrum: 'Is there a fundamental difference between live and dead animal bodies?'

In *Linked Bodies* (2000), the artists' animals of choice are humans, and their own human bodies are among the displayed samples. This performance-installation piece was shown for 20 minutes to a largely uninvited audience at the *Infatuation with Injury* show in Beijing's Research Institute of Sculpture (see Wu 2000; Cheng 2006a). In one aspect, *Linked Bodies* retains the theme of 'animals as food', but here the food source is the artists' veins. Simultaneously, the duo alters their *xingwei-zhuangzhi* convention to insert their bodies into their condensed chain of being. By physically connecting their adult and vital bodies with those of the dead Siamese twin infants, Sun and Peng consent to having their mortality, humanity, and animality implicated in the process. While their spilt blood visually encodes the lack of reciprocity between live and dead parties, the densely somatic ecology on their

stage hints at the equivalent status among all linked bodies. What has kept some of them apart appears to be an ordinary temporal event: death, which always lurks at the corner of our mortal consciousness.



14. *Linked Bodies* (Apr. 2000), by Sun Yuan and Peng Yu, in the exhibition, *Infatuation with Injury*, in Beijing, China. Courtesy of the Artists.

I am aware that my analysis of *Linked Bodies* as an animalwork might be contentious. Other available labels include 'flesh art', proposed by Thomas Berghuis, following George Bataille's notion of the human body as the ultimate 'tool' (2006:116; 2001); 'hoodlum art', derived from Wang Nanming's critique of the Chinese 'hooligan subculture', which, as Wang reproves, confuses the exercise of individual *power* (*li*) with the respect for human *rights* (*li*, homonymic with the Chinese word for 'power') (2004); or 'meat art', my parodic coinage from Qiu Zhijie's essay, 'What's Important Is Not Meat' (2001), written as a polemical response to the 3 April 2001 Department of Cultural Affairs' 'Notice' against 'bloody, violent, obscene' art. 'Flesh art' might be useful as an indicator of the corporeal materiality featured in *Linked Bodies*; 'hoodlum art' might capture the semi-clandestine atmosphere associated with the show *Infatuation with Injury*, which exhibited *Linked Bodies* as a live action; 'meat art' might conjure up the controversies surrounding the artistic use of cadavers—a practice that, as Qiu defends, incorporates the presence of 'meat' to articulate

the Chinese traditional home-grown (Daoist+Buddhist) attitudes toward death. None of the three labels, I believe, can replace my usage of 'animalworks', for neither addresses the dynamic interrelations between the artists and other bodies I examine here.

I contend that *Linked Bodies* pushes the agenda of critical zooësis further because the piece *both* continues and mutates Sun and Peng's line of inquiry into animalworks. The artists treat different kinds of animal bodies equally as their art medium and materials, granting no special provision for their human performers. Sun and Peng also adds a new element to their repertoire, enclosing a bodywork within their animalwork, thereby refusing to exempt their own mortal animal bodies from scrutiny. I fully acknowledge that my present reading of Sun and Peng's selected artworks is filtered through the lens of critical zooësis. Further, this analytical viewpoint has received no endorsement from the artists, especially with regards to those pieces that involve no nonhuman animals. In fact, in various interviews and talks, Sun and Peng have often stressed their changeability; they prefer not to recycle their old ideas. The artists might well take exception to my categorizing the bulk of their *xingwei-zhuangzhi* pieces as animalworks. Nevertheless, I maintain, as shown in my opening collage, Sun and Peng have consistently and similarly engaged human and nonhuman animal performers in their *xingwei-zhuangzhi*, so much so that we can make a case for their evolving zooësis.

I will take *Dogs That Cannot Touch Each Other* (Sept. 2003) and *Contend for Hegemony* (Dec. 2003) as my immediate examples. Both pieces depart from the theme of treating animals as food to focus on intra-species aggression. Both revolve around the negotiations—whether voluntary or compulsory—of their performers with certain pre-established regulations. The more lively and inventive their performers' responses to the game, the better their show. Thus, the performers' subjectivities are encouraged, even though their actions are bound by the rules of the game.

In *Dogs That Cannot Touch Each Other*, Sun and Peng rented the eight Pit Bull Terriers from a provincial breeding and training institute for fighting dogs. These pitbulls were so territorial and violent toward each other that they had to be transported to the exhibition site individually in eight limousines, with their human coach and attendants in tow. Like the

limos, the custom-made treadmills separated the dogs, yet the machines were also lined up to keep the dogs in plain view of their rivals. As the dogs' bloodlust urged them forward, the human-made restraints succeeded in turning a would-be-deathly fight into a fierce sonic and muscular sport event. Incidentally, the dogs' regular coach found the machines so effective for canine training that he purchased four treadmills from the artists after the show.



15. *Dogs That Cannot Touch Each Other* (Sept. 2003), by Sun Yuan and Peng Yu, in the exhibition, *Second Hand Reality*, in Beijing, China. Courtesy of the Artists.

The performance strategy that Sun and Peng use in *Dogs That Cannot Touch Each Other* resembles those in *Aquatic Walls* and *Curtain*: the artists cite from an existing social animal practice and transform it into art. The earlier animalworks expose the human practice of meat eating by exacerbating the suffering of those animals deemed 'meat'. In *Dogs That Cannot Touch Each Other*, Sun and Peng reference the brutal sport of live animal combat, which involves animals from crickets, cocks, dogs, to bulls in various parts of the world. The artists intervene into this preexisting context not by overtly challenging the ethics and legitimacy of staging live animal shows, but by modifying the competitive structure with numerous performance procedures. Sun and Peng appropriate a common exercise mechanism from the human world to shape the dogs' game, thereby demonstrating how humans may sublimate the dogs' aggressive behaviors into a physical training/gaming

regimen. The artists also divide their event into three precisely timed seven-minute segments, beginning with a round of match, followed by an equally long intermission, and closing with another round of match. During the intermission, the human trainers cared for the dogs diligently, giving them water and rubbing down their furry bodies to relax their muscles, treating the dogs like star athletes (Peng 2007). These restorative rituals conducted by humans on dogs are as much part of this *xingwei-zhuangzhi* piece as are the dogs' running and barking matches. Although Sun and Peng's art event remains coercive to their involuntary dog-performers, their modified game rules protect the dogs from excessive physical harm, which is a routine consequence suffered by the canine performers in conventional dog fighting games.

The setup of Sun and Peng's installation physically enforces the rules for *Dogs That Cannot Touch Each Other. Contend for Hegemony* adopts a more complex set of rules to challenge their more sophisticated human players.

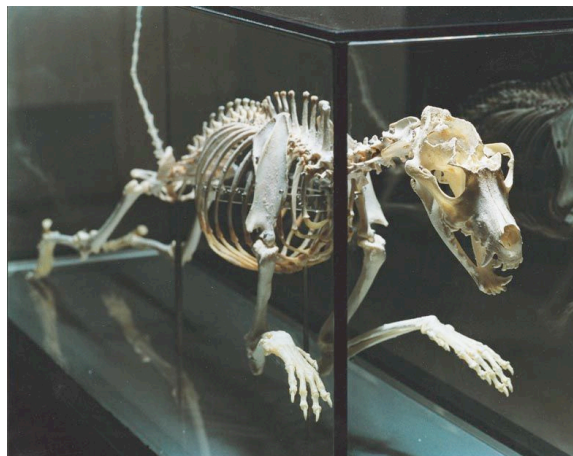


16. *Contend for Hegemony* (Dec. 2003), by Sun Yuan and Peng Yu, in the exhibition, *Left Wing*, in Beijing, China. Courtesy of the Artists.

This dynamic *xingwei-zhuangzhi* piece takes the form of a sparring contest among three professional athletes, each belonging to a different weight category (80 kg, 75 kg, and 70 kg respectively). The contest's goal is to accumulate the most points. A contestant can

score points by hitting on the opponents' targets, located on the front of the different-colored vests worn by all participants. Each contestant can team up with any other at any time to attack the third; when one falls, however, the other two must leave him alone and immediately turn against each other. Except for hits to certain restricted parts of the body that will constitute foul, all other techniques, including punching, kicking, and wrestling, are permitted. In the actual performance, which lasted for 17 minutes, the first player to lose out belonged to the lightest weight category; the final winner was the medium-weight player. I suspect, however, that this result was accidental, contingent upon the impromptu tactics adopted by the mixed fighters. The humor of this animalwork derives from its mixture of distortion and allusion: It distorts certain existing rules in gaming, boxing, and wrestling matches, but alludes to some analogous procedures that are happening elsewhere in human societies, such as business competitions and political rivalry in international relations.

As Sun once mentioned in our interview, after *Soul Killing* and *Solitary Animal* (2000), in which he displayed a complete canine skeleton inside a sealed glass box, allegedly filled with poisonous gas, he sought to use animals not merely as art materials, but for their 'intrinsic nature' (Sun and Peng 2005).



17. *Solitary Animal* (Jan. 2000), by Sun Yuan, in the exhibition, *Fuck Off*, in Shanghai, China.

Courtesy of the Artist.

The two animalworks with running pitbulls and hegemonic boxers offer clues to how Sun and Peng pursue this quest, which, to me, approximates a critical zooësis.

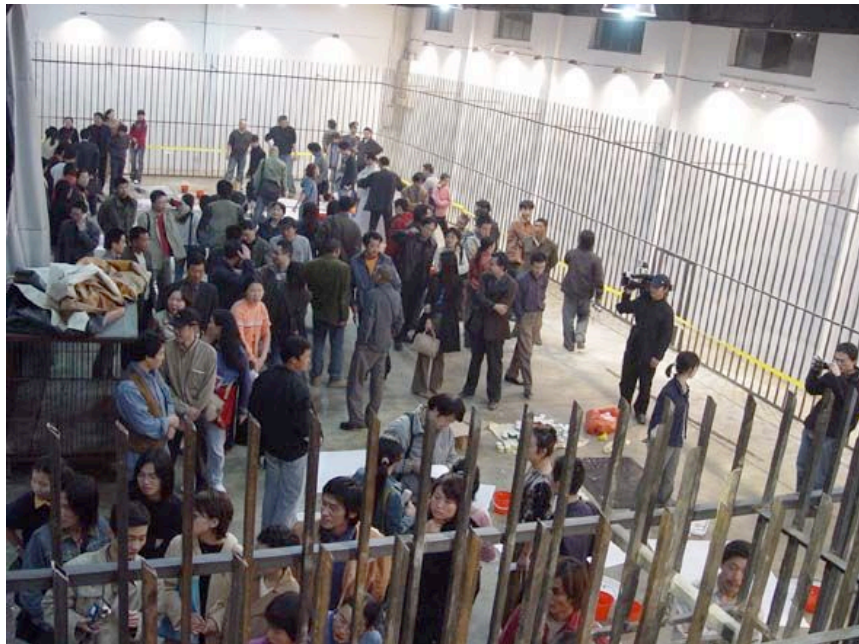
In *Dogs That Cannot Touch Each Other*, Sun and Peng have chosen a canine species deliberately bred by humans to enhance their belligerent traits. Since the dogs have no say in either their breeding or their occupation, it's hard to ascertain whether these dogs are intrinsically—rather than cultivated to be—violent. What the artists have accomplished is to place these animals in a durational design and to show how the dogs interact impulsively with the situation. The dogs also remain intact when released from their spirited display.

In *Contend for Hegemony*, Sun and Peng stage a behavioral allegory about the competitive human society. The artists employed their performers from the actual national sparring teams; their art event offered the contestants an opportunity for some fun and profit. The fighters consent to the terms of the artists' contract, which urges them to demonstrate their dexterity in attacking one another. These para-performative procedures offer a process-oriented context for the displayed action in *Contend for Hegemony*. As this animalwork reveals, what's 'intrinsic' to the 'nature' of its players is less interpersonal aggression than the human capacity for consciousness and volition, which provide the basis for professional negotiations and transactions in human society. As far as the performers' voluntarism goes, I consider *Contend for Hegemony* a step ahead of *Dogs That Cannot Touch Each Other* in approaching a critical zooësis.

Given their differences in the degrees of empowering their players, both *Dogs That Cannot Touch Each Other* and *Contend for Hegemony* have nevertheless maintained a unitary species boundary for their coperformers: dogs fight with dogs and men with men. This constraint contradicts what a critical zooësis aims to undermine: the discrete borders between human and nonhuman animals. I find this contradiction convincingly resolved in *Safety Island* (Oct. 2003), where the boundary between species becomes loosened up, even to some extents permeable.

Safety Island contains a cage within a cage: one for a tiger, the other for people. The tiger came on loan from the local Nanjing Zoo; the people were viewers attracted to a group exhibition called *Trojan Horse*, which included *Safety Island* (Peng 2006). [4] Based on their observation that the tiger tended to pace back and forth ceaselessly in an unfamiliar

environment, Sun and Peng designed an installation that included a large and unimpeded corridor for the tiger to pace around—and to rest when it so desired. They also surrounded the entire exhibition hall with this corridor, creating a restriction for the human traffic. The title of this animalwork—*Safety Island*—therefore has a double meaning: as a substantial partition between opposite traffics and as a protective zone for its inhabitant and visitors. Inside this 'safety island', the tiger's instinct to evade capture is allowed expression, even if its carnivorous appetite is kept at bay. Although the tiger remains caged, it enjoys a certain freedom of movement that simultaneously deprives its human spectators their autonomy to move freely. In a move that both quotes from and subverts the rules of the zoo, Sun and Peng turn their viewers into a kept herd, leisurely shepherded by their tiger patrol.



18. Spectators as a kept herd in *Safety Island* (Oct. 2003), by Sun Yuan and Peng Yu, in the exhibition, *Trojan Horse: Return to Nature*, in Nanjing, China. Courtesy of the Artists.

While the artists risk frustrating their viewers' innate desire to remain in control, they also count on their viewers' human potential for curiosity and their hunger for novelty to tolerate, even enjoy, temporary confinement.

Safety Island offers a refreshing instance of zooësis because it questions the normative condition in human society that assumes domination over other animals. Although the

manufactured cage indicates the tiger's captive status, the animal is symbolically granted the agency of determining its captors' possibility of movement. Whereas this animalwork remains complicit with the logic of the zoo, which isolates wild animals for human observations, it also forces its human spectators to encounter captivity. The art event's interactive structure makes explicit the viewers' different *and* shared experiences with the tiger and recalls metaphorically the multifarious restrictions in human society. If nonhuman animals are domesticated, placed in zoos, or driven to the fringe of survival by humans, are we humans really free to do all that we will in a world ruled by our own species?

IV. Alternative Animal Bodies

In the three latest animalworks laid out on my opening table, Sun and Peng add new dimensions to their evolving critical zooësis. *Ten Thousand Years* questions the conventional distinction between humans and other mammalian animals based on their dissimilar phenotypes. *Tomorrow* and *Waiting for You* both mix up the natural and the artifactual, while foregrounding mortality as the universal phenomenon that erases all distinctions.



19. *Ten Thousand Years* (Oct. 2005), by Sun Yuan and Peng Yu, in the exhibition, *Ten Thousand Years*, in Beijing, China. Courtesy of the Artists.

Ten Thousand Years was included in a group show of the same title curated by Sun and Peng, who required all participants to use art materials available ten thousand years ago,

such as water, mud, plants, and stones (Sun and Peng 2007b; Peng 2006). The show began at 3PM and ended at the onset of darkness; no electricity was used to extend the exhibition hours. Sun and Peng's own animalwork juxtaposed a found and a fabricated elements: They found a man named Yu Zhenghuan, nicknamed Mao Hai (literally Fur Child), who was born with an abundant layer of black hair all over his body, including his face. The artists presented their concept to Yu, and then the three of them collaboratively devised the action score: Yu would stay the entire time on the glass rooftop of the loft space where the exhibition took place. He would pace around and periodically peer through a custom-made broken pane of glass.

Strictly speaking, both found and fabricated elements in Sun and Peng's *Ten Thousand Years* violate the material restriction imposed by their curatorial scheme. The man they found exists in the contemporary world—although, according to the artists, their hairy protagonist expresses certain genetic traits that recall those of our prehistoric ancestors (Sun and Peng 2007b). The broken glass window that Sun and Peng fabricated is made of a material probably first invented in Egypt around 2500 B.C. (Encyclopedia Britannica online)—although the artists may argue that they were only simulating the removal of a fragment from the existing glass ceiling rather than using glass as their material. In any case, these actual, if somewhat defensible, violations heighten the ambiguity of the piece's title, which could point backward to the past or forward to the future. A narrative of temporal flux and convergence results: the figure walking on top of the glass roof appears to have descended like an avatar from ten thousand years ago or ahead. Perhaps the impact of his descent, like a precipitating comet, breaks the window. Yu's ostensibly interspecies presence portends an alternative evolutionary path. He gazes at his others, those hustling and bustling art patrons down below, from his vantage point as literally a 'higher' being. This Fur Child exemplifies the power of a voyeur as a perceiving subject.

My identification of *Ten Thousand Years* as an animalwork follows the internal logic of my critical project, which has elected 'animals' as the totalizing taxonomic term to subsume both humans and other animals. While my analysis has problematized the ontological distinction between human and nonhuman animals, I did not address the functional differences specific to each species. In other words, I call all of us animals without asserting

that all animals are therefore humans. The presence of Yu in *Ten Thousand Years*, however, brings up a provocative question: If not all animals are humans, how do we identify a human being? This general question presents different challenges to the artists and to me, their critic/interpreter, in our different roles in constructing and assessing *Ten Thousand Years*.

A professional singer who aspires to move into an acting career, Yu desires to present himself as an extraordinary human being rather than an interspecies freak. Although Sun and Peng's concept in *Ten Thousand Years* hinges on Yu's hairy appearance, the artists must remain sensitive to their performer's particular identity and avoid creating a scenario that would exploit Yu's external features to his disadvantage. As the action score suggests, their solution is to let Yu occupy a dominant position—being the one on top and in the know—while making the spectators who attended the group show *Ten Thousand Years* his spectacles. Within this performative reframing, Yu enjoys reversing the power dynamic that he often experienced in daily life by gazing at those who might otherwise feel licensed—by virtue of their own majority status—to gawking at his otherness.



20. "Windowman Banner," a poster from a freak sideshow posted at www.phreeque.com. Courtesy of Elizabeth Anderson, the site's sole proprietress.

Ten Thousand Years, therefore, subverts the convention of a freak sideshow by placing Yu outside the exhibition frame, endowing the one who might qualify for the epithet of a 'human

oddity' the privilege of moving, seeing, being seen, or turning his back to remain partially hidden spontaneously.

My challenge in critiquing *Ten Thousand Years* lies in nomenclature, which results not from Sun and Peng's aesthetic scheme but from my own analytical agenda. Since Sun and Peng do not claim *Ten Thousand Years* to be an animalwork, they evade the kind of taxonomic pitfall that I risk. By definition, a performer's human identity in a time-based performance-installation does not necessarily contradict my conception of animalworks. Yet, because of Yu's unique appearance, my naming of *Ten Thousand Years* as an animalwork might inadvertently obscure his human identity, thereby conflating my strategic deconstruction of human and animal dichotomy with the knee-jerk denial of the performer's species status: "How can that hairy ape be a man?" My semantic dilemma may be resolved, I submit, by honoring Yu's preferred identity. Giving Yu the final say in *Ten Thousand Years* would then answer our earlier question about how to identify a human being. Yu's self-identification as a human male indicates that genetics, parentage, upbringing, education, individual characterization, community affiliation, and societal agreement are some of the criteria with which we may recognize a human being. In this sense, I affirm, *Ten Thousand Years* is an animalwork that exemplifies the visible disparity and diversity within the human species.

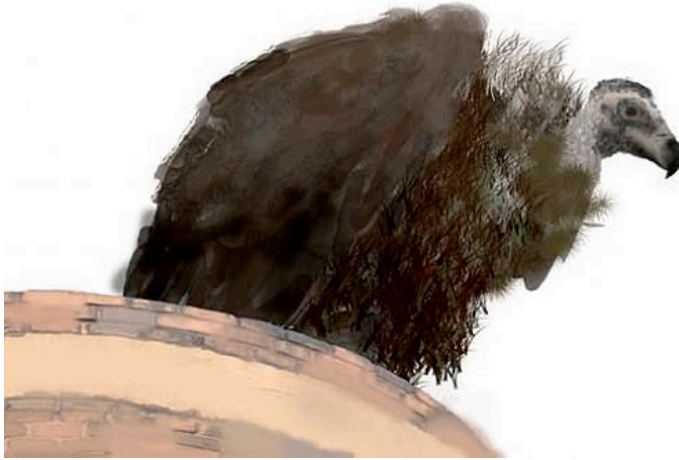
In *Tomorrow* and *Waiting for You*, Sun and Peng return to their perennial preoccupation with mortality. These two animalworks, though produced independently, happen to form a continuous thematic sequence: Today, we live; tomorrow, we die; and the vulture knows when its preys are ready; it hovers above us, waiting for us at the next instant to become dead meat. We may characterize this sequence as our own uncooked process of *becoming-food*, giving a more altruistic slant to the famous Deleuze/Guattarian conceit, 'becoming-animal' (1987: 233-309). While the theme is not new, Sun and Peng have significantly reshaped their aesthetic terrain by crossing the border between the live and the static, the real and the verisimilar.

In terms of their material usage alone, both *Tomorrow* and *Waiting for You* differ from most of Sun and Peng's animalworks in their compositions as straightforward sculptures, made of relatively stable substances (such as fiber glass, steel, plastic, etc.), which would not

expire with the end of their public exposure. By integrating synthetic materials into their artistic comments on death, Sun and Peng have eschewed their previous literalist approach to move further toward the symbolic property of art. This move might indicate the duo's attempt to test new grounds, exploring the provocative potentials of the figurative rhetoric. It also implies a redefinition of animality, transforming it from what's innate to an entity into what's provoked by the entity's phenomenological presence. The time-based element in the two pieces no longer consists of their animal objects' essence (as, for instance, procreated sentient, motile, and mortal beings), but is rather interactively produced by their perceiver's impression ('Look, there is a vulture up there!').

Responding to my query about the change of their art material, Peng stated that they never insisted on using any particular substance, but always tried to find that which fit best with a given project (Peng 2007). Put otherwise, the generation of Sun and Peng's art depends much on the interactive context that informs a particular project rather than on a predetermined artistic agenda. Since the duo often produced an artwork in relation to a commissioning exhibitor, they have used the logistic circumstances surrounding the exhibition (from its budget, location, to its theme, etc.) to orient their artistic response.

Take, for example, the case of *Waiting for You*. During a scouting trip to their group exhibition site in Beijing, Sun and Peng spotted a high chimney nearby (Peng 2007). The presence of the chimney then inspired their concept of placing on its top a vulture, angled predatorily towards its future human preys. Because of the chimney's height, the artists decided not to use a live vulture, which would be too small in size and too counter-productive to confine; instead, they hand-made a gigantic vulture to give the scavenger more visual weight. The vulture's extraordinary stature overcomes the optical constraint imposed by physical distance to cast an ominous presence over its ground-standing viewers. Sun and Peng's flexible creative process suggests a deep interest in making their site-specific installation *perform* in an aggressive way, so as to elicit certain turbulent sensations from their viewers. Entitling their piece *Waiting for You*—rather than *Waiting for Us*, in the diplomatic way I've described above—serves the same purpose of agitating their audience, best to the point of a scandal.



21. *Waiting for You* (2006), by Sun Yuan and Peng Yu, in the exhibition, *Double-Kick-Cracker: An Exhibition of Chinese Contemporary Art*, in Beijing, China. Courtesy of the Artists.

Sun and Peng's preference for initiating an impudent contact with their audience at times caused great difficulties in their production process. Such hardships were aggravated when they exhibited abroad. Their experience of mounting *Tomorrow* in Britain offers a case in point (Peng 2007; see also Sun and Peng 2007b). Invited to participate in the 2006 Liverpool Biennial, the artists proposed the scheme of letting adrift on water four prostrated mannequins, created after the images of older European men, dressed in formal suits implying their different economic classes. The dummies, moreover, would be weighted such that they would simulate the way real human bodies would float in water. Characteristically, the artists had chosen a sensitive site for their four artifactual European men to drown: the port of water in front of a building that houses the Tate Museum on the second floor and the Beatles Story, a shop devoted to the Beatles memorabilia, on the ground floor. Despite the potential for controversy, the Biennial's organizers approved Sun and Peng's proposal, for they favored projects that utilized outdoor sites as a means of engaging their viewers throughout the city of Liverpool.

There are elements in Sun and Peng's *Tomorrow* that petulantly flirt with the history of the Beatles, who, as the artists noted, are both native and 'sacred' to Liverpool (Peng 2007). The fact that the duo had created *four* European-looking dummies and their specific choice

of the site to display their floating quartet both belong to this pro-Beatles category. Even the title of their piece, *Tomorrow*, which, as Peng admitted, obliquely echoes the famous 'Beatles' song, *Yesterday*, reinforces these references (Sun and Peng 2007a). But the artists also make sure to disrupt these references with other elements. Their quartet of simulated humans act as corpses, whereas two members from the former Beatles band are still alive. Their naturalistic mannequins, though appearing male and Caucasian, also bear no facial resemblances to the four Beatles. 'The four dummies merely look like old people', insisted Peng, 'We all look the same when we are old' (Peng 2007b). Peng's remark serves to reclaim *Tomorrow* back to the duo's thematic repertoire of archetypal zooësis: before death stands our increasingly longer prospect of *aging*, which is another leveling factor in all animals' zero-sum game.

No matter the artists' rationalization, the city of Liverpool had determined not to release its jealous guardianship of the Beatles' memories, which haunted the entire mounting process of *Tomorrow*. The moment Sun and Peng's four dummies hit the British soil at the Liverpool Airport, they were subject to a scrupulous inspection by the custom officers, who took upon themselves the duties of ruling out any potential sacrilege to their city's music idols. Having been sufficiently *un-identified* from the Beatles, the dummies were allowed to proceed to their destination, where awaited a troop of skeptical policemen, about to pounce with a pending official disapproval from the Liverpool Police Department. *Tomorrow* managed to float for three hours only because the banning order from the Police Department was delayed, and the policemen, without the paperwork, could not stop the Port Authority workers from installing the artwork.

With the shadows of the Beatles stalking in the subtext, the Police Department eventually prohibited the aquatic display of *Tomorrow* on the ground of public safety: 'Suppose some drunkards might mistaken the dummies for real people and endanger themselves by trying to save the dummies!' (Peng 2007). The artists responded with an alternative method of display, which involved no threat of anyone possibly drowning.



22. *Tomorrow* (Sept. 2006), by Sun Yuan and Peng Yu, in the exhibition, *China Pavilion: 2006 Liverpool Biennial*, in Liverpool, England. Courtesy of the Artists.

On the next day (let's call it 'the post-censorship tomorrow'), Sun and Peng tied up the four dummies on a hired pick-up truck and had their mobile museum circling around the city of Liverpool (Sun and Peng 2007b). Their hired driver spontaneously volunteered herself to be a docent, engaging in longer and longer conversations with the camera-snapping tourists, explaining to them about the artwork in a language that the Chinese artists could barely understand. Meanwhile, ready to swoop down on any hint of a traffic violation, the Liverpool policemen continued their surveillance nearby.

Unforeseen by the artists, their site-specific installation, *Tomorrow*, evolved into a comedy of mistaken identity. The Liverpool policemen mistook the artists' fake human foursome as too closely resembling the Beatles; they also excused their censorship by resorting to the threat of mistaken identity: some drunkards might remain clear-headed enough to mistake the fake for the real and would try to save the fake at the risk of killing the real—the drunk saviors themselves! While amusing in retrospect, this sequence of 'unfortunate' events for the artists attests to their abilities to arouse strong emotions from their viewers, especially from those who decline to grant their art a sanctuary. The strong emotions that had prompted those to censor *Tomorrow*, in turn, indicate that, as far as the viewers' visual perceptions are concerned, little functional difference exists between the simulated and the

real. Representations of animals are then bodies of sorts, whether these bodies are procreated or manufactured, corporeal or plastic, verisimilar or abstract, ephemeral or relatively permanent. I've mentioned earlier how Sun and Peng induce trans-visual drama surrounding a particular piece to enrich their work. All the para-theatrical hysteria occasioned by the artists' process of mounting *Tomorrow* in Britain serves as an apt example. When the dust in Liverpool settles, this animalwork emerges as an acute study of intercultural communications, or the lack thereof, in human societies.

Provocatively, this intercultural comedy of mistaken identity has also affected the critical reception of *Tomorrow* in China. Because of Sun and Peng's choices to produce dummies in the images of Caucasian males and to fake their drowning in a European site, some critics read post-colonial critiques from *Tomorrow*. The artists jokingly deflected this interpretation by pleading their own ignorance of post-colonial critiques (see Sun and Peng 2007a). I find that such a reading errs on the side of mistaken identity because it essentialises the artists' Chinese lineage as the only criterion to judge their art. Conversely, I would counter that Sun and Peng preempts such a post-colonial critique by choosing to place British-looking dummies at a British site: their floating corpses are therefore 'native' to the environment within which they immersed and their foreign origins become, to some extent, camouflaged. Indeed, I believe, a post-colonial critic could make a better case arguing for Sun and Peng's politicized stance, had the duo chosen to display four Chinese-looking dummies drowning in Liverpool. The specters of the Opium War might have loomed accusatorily then and there!

During the brief span of three hours when *Tomorrow* actually appeared floating in Liverpool, all four dummies had their faces buried in water. Perhaps they proffer a poetic coda to our mortal end: on we go, solitary and serene. That is, of course, until we rot into ashes to join all our animal ancestors.

V. Animal Reveries

The present inquiry covers only a sampling of Sun and Peng's prolific outputs, which also include many projects that defy my label of animalworks. In a career that has tirelessly

pushed against the edge of popular taste, the duo began by digging the grave of forbidden thoughts: crucifying innocent animals (see *Aquatic Wall; Curtain*), distilling human oil from adipose tissues of fat (*Civilization Pillar*), crushing human bones collected from crematoriums (*One or All, Part 2*), and exhibiting pathologically deformed infant cadavers (*Human Oil; Linked Body*).



23. *Civilization Pillar* (Sept. 2001), by Sun Yuan and Peng Yu, in the exhibition, *Yokohama 2001 International Triennial of Contemporary Art*, in Yokohama, Japan. Courtesy of the Artists.



24. *One or All, Part 2* (June 2004), by Sun Yuan and Peng Yu, in the exhibition, *The Monk and the Demon*, in Lyon, France. Courtesy of the Artists.



25. *Human Oil* (Apr. 2000), by Sun Yuan and Peng Yu, in the exhibition, *Infatuation with Injury*, in Beijing, China. Courtesy of the Artists.



26. *UFO* (June 2005), by Sun Yuan and Peng Yu, in the exhibition, *China Pavilion: Venice Biennale*, in Venice, Italy. Courtesy of the Artists.

Their evolving zooësis, however, leads them to move skyward: hiring an ostensibly species-ambivalent professional singer to walk the rooftop (*Ten Thousand Years*), taking a

scientific-minded peasant to Venice Biennale to test out his flying saucer (*UFO*), and adopting a vulture's perspective (*Waiting for You*). From down and under, Sun Yuan and Peng Yu surge ahead, jumping up and crossing over.

NOTES:

I wish to acknowledge the Zumberge Individual Research and Innovation Fund at the University of Southern California, which supported the initial field research for this project. I presented a brief version of this essay in a panel entitled, 'Animal Acts', organized by Una Chaudhuri and Michelle Lindenblatt for the *Performance Studies international* Conference on 9 November 2007, in New York City. A special thank to Peter Eckersall for his enthusiastic encouragement of my work.

[1] Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from Chinese into English are mine, including all the artworks' titles and citations from my interviews with the artists and from referenced Chinese articles. All artworks discussed in this inquiry appear with brief descriptions in the Artists' Website by Sun and Peng. For Chinese names, I follow the local convention of listing the surnames first, given names next, unless those cited desire otherwise.

[2] Lu Hong and Sun Zhenhua's book is published in Chinese, but has a bilingual title: *Zhongguo Xingwei Yishu: Shenghua de roshen/China Performance Art*.

[3] This media-hyped term, 'Beijing shockers', refers to several Beijing-based artists, including Zhu Yu, Sun Yuan, Peng Yu, Xiao Yu, Qin Ga, etc., who were contributors to two secretive—underground but highly attended—exhibitions: *Post-sense Sensibility* (1999), curated by Wu Meichuen and Qiu Zhijie, and *Infatuation with Injury* (2000), curated by Li Xianting. The Chinese press also dubbed these artists the 'cadaver school' for their use of cadavers and body parts in art (see Berghuis 2006:173-200; Cheng 2006a, 2006b).

[4] According to Peng, Sun Yuan and her had planned to do *Safety Island* originally in Beijing, but they couldn't find a suitable tiger for the project. Since the tiger is on the

government list of protected animals, they could not transport any tiger from outside of a particular province. The group exhibition *Trojan Horse* happened to take place in Nanjing, where they found their star tiger in a local zoo (Peng 2008).

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