

Posthuman View

Xiaolei TIAN 田晓磊

The words “fragility” and “collapse” are often reflected in Xiaolei TIAN’s work, specifically, the sense of vulnerability and crisis that threatens to collapse. For him, the pandemic is the result of a chain of events, similar to a cascading reaction. No one realised at first that the virus would be so radioactive and that it would also lead to the interruption of all activities throughout society. Restrictions appear from country to country, people to people, and eventually, all life was messed up.

“脆弱”和“崩溃”常常出现在田晓磊的作品中，特别是那种脆弱感和危机感，这种危机感威胁着整个社会的崩溃。对他来说，这场疫情是一场连锁反应的结果，类似于一种级联反应。起初没有人意识到病毒会如此具有放射性，而且它也会导致整个社会所有活动的中断。限制措施从国家到国家，从人到人，最终，所有的生活都乱了套。

Thrilling stabilization

田晓磊

The astronaut is a symbol of man’s exploration of himself or a human figure cultivated by the spirit of science. He is constantly exploring new planets, and when he gets to the next one, it becomes a ball light in a ballroom, but it slowly blows up like a self-cracking explosion. And when he goes to the next one, the last one is restored, and man is like a locust, passing and exploring one by one.

宇航员是人类探索自我或科学精神培养下的人类形象的象征。他不断探索新的星球，当他到达下一个星球时，它就像一个舞厅里的球灯，但它慢慢地像一场自我破裂的爆炸一样爆炸。当他去下一个星球时，最后一个星球被恢复了，人类就像蝗虫一样，一个接一个地探索和通过。

Interview

The names are abbreviated as “Jackie”(Jackie GA0) and “TIAN”(Xiaolei TIAN)

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Jackie: As R-Lab is an organisation that explores the transformation and changes in Art during the pandemic, so our discussion will focus on the potential discourse that the pandemic provides for the transformation of art.

First, have there been any changes in your life and work since the outbreak that have impacted you?

R-Lab

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TIAN: At the beginning it was very intense, but now I feel it has become very easier in Beijing, apart from that, sometimes, we still wear masks when going into public places.

However, when the pandemic first broke out, the feeling of change was very noticeable, as if there was tension around us all the time. The city management also tended to be stricter and more closed off. Whenever we went to some places, we needed to have proof of access and went through many checks which inevitably created more stress for us.

This change has affected all aspects of society, the main impact was about traveling, and we all had to take activities indoors mostly. Everyone was like an island, seeking information with the outside world, and the only

sense of crisis that there is a possibility of collapse. As the pandemic caused a series of events triggered by a single event, it is like a chain reaction. It was not acknowledged at the beginning that it would be so destructive, even leading to a state of almost stagnation throughout society. There were all sorts of restrictions between regions and between people, and eventually everything just went haywire.

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It is as if our current situation cannot withstand any fluctuations, and a problem of any aspects could bring the whole society to a status of standstill. This vulnerability was much stronger than we thought. A problem in one area seemed to mean the whole world went wrong in an interconnected way. It felt like the current world order was not actually very solid, it only appeared stable on the surface, and it could not adapt to the change as quickly as we thought; like a wound, it takes a long time to heal, and its pain is global and continuous. So, I might rethink some of the topics about the sense of vulnerability, or the instability, etc.

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Jackie: Yes, these two words are very concrete, and they are reflected in your work. In fact, I have noticed that you have used some visual expressions in many of your works, such as the LED gallery in Hangzhou, the ‘specimen form appeared on the flat screen’ presentation in *Posthuman Zoo*, and the ‘screen formalin’ concept. I think the concept of “screen formalin” is very clever, so how did you come up with the idea of using this kind of presentation? Do these works have a

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TIAN: Yes, the audiences are free to make associations. Although they might have different perspectives to what the artist initially thought, however, it is very normal and the artist would like the audiences to do so, to have various interpretations.

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Jackie: It is. I think that is also one of the charms of art. Therefore, it has brought a lot of changes due to the pandemic, so what might be the most impressive change that the pandemic has imparted on the art world?

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TIAN: I think it is the fact that there are more artworks online, or that people have a stronger desire to showcase it. It used to seem like people were a bit secretive and would not always post their ideas on public platforms. But then I found that people were trying to promote themselves in every way possible. However, there is probably so much information on the internet that even if you do speak up, you might not always be noticed. People only have a limited attention span and most of their attention was taken up by those platforms who have a way of knowing what could get people's attention, even if it's not necessarily what they really want or like. At the same time, because of the lockdown, there were more online exhibitions.

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Jackie: That is right, you have been very specific about

the profound shifts in the Art world. So, let us go back to your work. I have seen some short videos on your Weibo account, such as *Before the Reboot* and the *Mythology* series, which have some astronaut and planet elements in them. What are your thoughts on applying these elements in a post-human context?

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TIAN: These astronauts relate to the stability, fragility, and collapse that we just talked about. In *The Thrill of Stability*, for example, the astronaut actually symbolises a human exploration of himself, or an image of a human being cultivated by the spirit of science. He is constantly exploring new planets, and as he goes onto a planet, that planet would become a ball light in a ballroom, and then slowly collapse and blow itself up, and as he is walking towards the next one, the last one resume, which could give a feeling of a human being as like the locust, going from a planet to another for plundering.

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That is also what *Before the Reboot* is about. They are having a carnival dance, but the man has started to take on a distorted and deadly character, and the background has changed from a starry sky to a blue screen, a sense of one last carnival before the end. That is how I interpret it, but audiences may see it differently.

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Jackie: I think this is also a wonderful piece of work. And as an artist who mainly works in the field of new media art, what do you think is the relationship between Technology and Art?

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Jackie: This is a brand-new point of view.

TIAN: All of these points are actually mentioned in Kevin Kelly's book, which I do prefer, and some of them I've put it out in another way in my work.

Jackie: Exactly, I could feel your self-interpretation in your work. So that concludes our interview for today, thank you for sharing.

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