

De-Colonizing Art Institutions

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Zou Zhao

Contemporary art is kidnapped by the concept of pain. But, I much rather rehearse enlarging my appetite for pleasure, than practice enduring pain.

The Apology Workshop



“The violence, and potential of a sophisticated apology”



Distributing the task of representation #01 (duo-representation), Video Documentation of live performance, 2017

On the threshold of listening

Spivak asks: "Can the Subaltern speak? ...Are those who act and struggle mute, as opposed to those who write and struggle?"

Lawrence Abu Hamdan asks: "If this is the neoliberal nightmare of the freedom of speech, then everyone is speaking. But, who is listening?"

I ask, if the Other is what I need to listen to, in order to transform, for exactly how long am I able to listen? What are the limits of my intuition, listening, and empathy? How can I transform in the face of others, without resulting in its annihilation?

I much rather rehearse my appetite for pleasure, then practice enduring pain.

In a world where, gratification is mistaken for joy, and sublime for ecstasy, contemporary art remains kidnapped by the concept of pain. Against all odds, enduring pain is seen to promise the sublime, that is the limit of transformation, and must be suffered alone. And yet, man banished into perfected solitude is an impossible image. If realized, it defeats the purpose of life, if there is one at all. Movement, the symptom of life on the other hand is motivated through our desire towards the Other. Rehearsing the enlargement of a capacity for pleasure enables transformation. It is only in the presence of others, that one finds the possibility to overcome the limit of that promise.

Instead of applauding solitude, now is the time to reconsider our strategies of being-with-others, instead of a being-towards-death. I explore strategies of listening in speech, writing, or the posturing of the body. This task must take priority.

Distributing the task of representation #01 (Bryan McGovern Wilson and Zou Zhao)

Considering the dual quality of representation: proxy-as-speaking-on-behalf of, and portraiture-as-image, participants distribute the workload of a written transcript, sometimes detaching voice and gestures.

Distributing the task of representation #02 (Neo Jia Ling, Sarah Oh, Priscilla Low, Koh Hwee Ling, Zou Zhao)

The Apology Workshop/ The Apologize to Zou Zhao Workshop

The Apology Workshop takes on an inquisitive method to analyze, and intervene into the rituals, habits, and body techniques of the day.

It is interested in the ways in which we express regret, and shame through the apology, as complex emotion are fertile grounds for collective transformation. Distinct from the neoliberal consensus, that works to remove of spaces of arguments and conversations, the apology thrives on acknowledging differences, and does not ask for unity. The crafting of an apology requires rigorous treatment of its content, and its effectiveness is directly evident in events of the everyday. It is an incredibly economical device to rehearse for improvements, and accessible for intervention.

The Apology workshop is a seminar that aims to dissect the structure of a well-crafted sample apology in order to shed light on the crisis that is the state of our apologies today. It is a classroom for the artist, where participants are invited to examine the proposed structure of an apology. It is a rehearsal room that invites for a collective edit of the script using the sample apology. It is a theatre, where the drama of final edits is performed for the public, and for each other within the gallery.

Through the invitation to alter the script of the sample apology, the workshop hopes to introduce debates- an element integral to the formation of social relations. The participants are encouraged to use the artist as the object for rehearsal (Apology to Zou Zhao).

How do we apologize to one another, and on what grounds do we apologize to each other? The attempt to write, and rehearse our collective apology will reveal ethos, and pathos of our time. The apology is in focus here. A well crafted apology exemplifies a hope for reconciliation, camaraderie, and a promise to listen. It requires the structure of representation, (for one could only apologise on behalf of another, even if a different version of the self), defense of an idea (motivation for the action to apologize for), emotional intelligence to read the feelings and attitude of others, and an effective mode of address...

Structure of an Apology

An apology should do three things at once. First, it should clarify the motivation of a previous action. It is in essential the defense of an action. Second, it must be able to address the public by paraphrasing the feelings of those it seeks to speak to. In doing so, it demonstrates the labour of listening, and resultant transformation. Third, it proposes an image for futural reconciliation.

A successful apology thus acknowledges the hurt, takes responsibility, and acknowledges its own position of privilege, while insisting upon asserting an image for reconciliation. In its own version of utopia, the addressee is interpellated into the narrative of a picture. In short, a good apology consists a good argument, is made in public, and is a reaches out for negotiation.

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**Sample Apology
Invitation to edit:**

The Translator's apology

****原来,**

So, and so, and so, and so....

****姹紫**

This is an outdated tune in Chinese popular music. No one sings it anymore.

****嫣红开遍**

Red and purple flowers bloomed.

Here, a parody of the translator.

Translation is impossible.

Our relationship with 'present-ness', now depends on a song. The dilemma becomes more acute. TRUTH IS, WE ARE ALL STUCK IN A KIND OF A PERPETUAL PRESENT. WE ARE DEFINED OF A PAST, BUT BARRED OF A FUTURE.

A woman will later appear to us through a dead song. Modern language's attempt to decipher her nuances puts us on a spot.

****姹紫, 嫣红开遍, 似这般的付与断井颓垣。**

Red and purple flowers bloomed. I am speculating on it alone. There are only cracks on the walls. Now, my task is to capture the thought in one dead language, and the reality it claims to put before me, and then, express it in a way hoping that you will understand.

****姹紫, 嫣红开遍, 似这般的付与断井颓垣。**

Red and purple flowers bloomed. I am speculating on it alone. There are only cracks on the walls. The deeply problematic aspiration becomes the chief concern of our current conversation. My aim today is merely to provoke a feeling of agreeability, some sort of consensus between you and I, and nothing more. On that regard, I think we are doing alright. The rest can wait. The rest can wait!

So you will see I push on further here. But it is not without the unusual insistence that is the translator's conventional warning and apology.

And then, I take the liberty. I move on.

****良辰美景奈何天**

Good hour, beautiful scenery.

How do I wait for time to come?

How do I share this with you?

****姹紫, 嫣红开遍**

Red, and Purple Flowers Bloomed. I wish you could see them.

FINALLY, I RECOMMEND CHINESE SOCIALISM AS REMEDY TO SAVE AMERICA FROM ITSELF!