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中国的当代艺术家群体可能是一朵社会奇葩，这伙人一贯出现在高大上的开幕式及开幕后的酒会上，交流着巴塞爾和卡塞尔的小道消息；他们又大都生活和居住在黑桥、宋庄的粗陋工作室里，面对着涨价、拆迁的威胁；偶然或经常，一些人也在酒桌或茶席前高谈阔论，讨论着朗西埃与阿甘本的最新译本；他们会因对中国近现代史的不同见解而争得面红耳赤，但又很快会在指责文化部的政策上达成一致；他们打交道的有金融资本家（大藏家）、企业主或食利阶层（小藏家）、民工（临时雇用工人）、小企业主（画廊老板）、白领（画廊员工），以及农民企业家（工作室房东），而他们自己的社会身份也跨越富豪、小企业主、国家单位雇员、自由职业者或小手工业者。不管这一群人在收入水平、生活环境、意识形态、工作及生活交往圈层，即社会阶层上都有着多么巨大的差异，但他们都把“当代艺术家”这种身份认同放在第一位。

把艺术家笼统地视为一种超阶层、跨阶层的人群，这或许是一种历史后遗症，源于艺术家把自己视为知识分子的一部分。80年代的艺术大都认同自己属于知识分子，在那个年代只要是大学生就会被认为是知识分子，同时，很多艺术家的作品，也确实能够引起尚未来得及形成文化区隔的社会整体的回应。80年代的中国尚无多少财富积累，因此政治资本与文化资本成为了社会分层的主要标准，那些受过高等教育又有着话语影响力的艺术家自然是文化精英，当然自认为属于知识分子的一部分。

知识分子是不是一个阶层？有各种不同观点。改革开放后官方提供的社会主义初级阶段理论把知识分子单独分类，与工、农并列，又整体上划分为劳动阶级，换句话说，知识分子被理解为不占有生产资料的文化及科技工作者。但是在思想启蒙的氛围下，尤其是在自由主义思想的复兴中，知识分子更认同自身的独特性与独立性，往往把自己视为超越于社会，包括各社会阶级之上的人群。80年代的艺术家更是这样，在“新潮”状态中，他们不仅把自己视为是超越社会之上的启蒙者，而且也是走在社会之前的先行者。90年代的艺术虽然从启蒙者、先行者退居为反叛者、观察者，但依然是一种游离于社会结构之外的人群——正好属于曼海姆所定义的“自由漂浮的”“非依附性”的，不可以纳入具体社会阶层去分析的知识分子。不过，艺术家所认同的这种超阶层的知识分子身份只是一种想象或诉求，毕竟王广义早在当年就表达过“为什么华君武、吴作人能住小洋楼、开汽车，为什么我们就不能”¹，而在栗宪庭看来，即使是玩世泼皮绘画也属于“中国知识分子的一种传统方式”²，似乎一旦失去了知识分子身份，艺术家们的价值就失去了合法性。

在今天，我们讨论艺术家的阶层性的时候，不可忽视的是中国社会已经发生了剧烈的重新分层，而阶层的区隔越来越清晰、坚固，也已经开始了自身的再生产。在“富二代”“贫二代”的社会话题都快过气的时候，我们还能假装艺术圈不受影响吗？尤其是对那些成长于90年代、2000年以后逐步进入艺术生涯的新一代艺术家来说，阶层性已经在方方面面影响到了他们。对于不同的阶层来说，体现在家庭出身、教育背景、工作环境、创作资源、展览机会上的差异是显而易见的。相比之下，大部分80年代的艺术家在这些差异上就显得微不足道，或只是在一些局部的因素上。

可以在年轻一代艺术家中区分出两个阶层，其一系列区别表现在：出生在城市还是农村，国外还是国内受专业教育，创作资源的多少（包括是否有足够完善的工作室、是否有长期助手、是否有经费创作大型作品等等），以及各种“趣味”上的区隔。对于大部分艺术家来说，这种区别并不是绝对的、全面的，但体现在这里那里、或多或少的差异总会形成一种明显的对比。

值得讨论的是这种阶层性到底有多少表现在了艺术作品或艺术实践中。在最基本的层面上是艺术创作资源的区别，资源的多少决定了创作规模和类型，例如大型的装置创作经费和团队需求便不是艺术家中的“下层阶级”所能承受的，除非获得了资助，而获得资助的能力本身就是阶层再生产的一部分。缺乏资源的艺术家会“偏好”某些低成本的艺术类型，比如身体化的行为艺术，行为艺术有很多种类，但身体化的行为艺术是所需资源最少的一种，因为身体是一种不需要什么成本的天然资源。无产阶级一词的拉丁语本义是“只有子嗣的人”，这暗示着，无产阶级的唯一生产资料就是自己的身体。

但很多艺术家对身体化艺术的偏好不仅只是资源状况所限定，也包含了一种“阶级趣味”的自我区隔。在他们看来，身体化的艺术是一种直截了当的、不搞各种知识繁文缛节的艺术，因此对自己身体的使用具有了一种自我宣示与强化的意味，也正因此，比狼，尤其是用自己的身体比狼成为了一个常见的策略。作为这种自我区隔的另一面，他们对画廊里的抽象绘画常常持鄙视态度，认为那只是一种中产阶级的“娘娘腔”。这里表现出的对自身“阶

1. 《如果艺术批评不上去的话，中国当代艺术永远也不会上去——对高名璐的一个访谈》，网络版本

2. 栗宪庭：《重要的不是艺术》，江苏美术出版社，2000年，第315页

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级趣味”权重性的强调,其中包含一种体制批判的态度,他们在根本上并不认同自身阶层所处的地位,而希望在价值层面上倒转这个等级序列。

2013年出现的“屌丝”一词则体现了年轻人的另一种阶层心态,“屌丝”最初是指城市下层的青年男性,包括贫寒家庭出身的学生、低端白领等人群,缺乏包括性资源在内的很多资源。“屌丝”一词能够在互联网上突然爆发,说明互联网使话语权下放,打破了很多传统的文化区隔,因此这个词很快成了一种各阶层自我解嘲的流行语,给人们带来一种自我贬低之后的心态解脱。

对于很多“屌丝”艺术家来说,互联网更是一种不需要什么成本的传播场域,于是身体化的行为艺术与自媒体的传播捆绑在了一起,变成了他们的一种生效方式。而网络传播的特性又影响了其艺术方式,只吸引眼球的风格与时效性内容成了首选,如何在社交网络上搞出轰动性成了一种新的比狠方式。

另一个“成功”艺术家群体与之构成截然对比,他们在稳定合作画廊里展出的作品正尽量变得精致与文雅,似乎需要专门的知识与趣味训练才能够“品鉴”,就像需要“懂”才能喝得出好坏的红酒一样。与“屌丝”艺术家们采取的比狠不同,“成功”艺术家们往往以知识和趣味的精细化来竞争,而画廊也为此准备了诸如讲解作品等一系列工作来为此目标服务。一旦“屌丝”艺术家们获得了稳定的画廊代理,即抓住了阶层上升的机会,他们就会逐渐放弃之前的激进策略,转型为一种稳步更新的方式,如两三年一次个展,以及一套职业化的工作方式。

不同艺术家阶层的这种差异,并不完全是艺术家成功与否所带来的,换句话说,这种差异并不是结果,而在很大程度上是原因,一个更早进入“职业”状态的年轻艺术家,总能够更快地获得“成功”,而左冲右撞的“屌丝”化工作方式,能够获得机会的总是少数。这样的事实,观察一下很多年轻艺术家自我组织群体中个体的不同轨迹就知道了。

拿阶层的影响去归纳艺术家似乎是残酷的,也容易忽略掉个体差异的影响,比如在一个有才华的“贫二代”与一个平庸的“富二代”之间,前者显然更能够获得成功。但我们得意识到,这是在现今的社会阶层差距没有进一步扩大的前提下才能成立的,如果阶层的差距继续加大,学习艺术本身将会成为一种阶层区隔的因素,偏下的阶层可能会彻底被屏蔽在成为艺术家的门槛外,除非以“素人艺术家”或“原生艺术”的名义被挑选进来。也有可能,或事实上已经发生的是,近年来当代艺术的“成功神话”使这个行业成为了阶层流动的一个捷径,吸引了大量的渴望改变自身所处社会位阶的年轻人。

近年来,在各种艺术与社会的讨论中,当代艺术本身的社会性都被视而不见了,仿佛艺术是一个纯净的容器,只有加入了社会内容才算介入了社会,而艺术家也被想象成一种超社会的主体,即那种外在于社会关系,但又能以“公分母”的位置对所有社会问题发表看法的“公知”。这已经是把社会这个概念狭窄化了,以至于田野考察,尤其是针对社会下层的考察会被认为更具有“社会性”,就像曾经的社会主义现实主义认为下乡采风才是“深入生活”一样。

当代艺术曾经是一种精英艺术,与老干部水墨、学院写实主义(主流艺术)与大芬村行画(大众艺术)和残存的乡村年画(民间艺术)构成了一个完整的社会文化层次。而今天随着当代艺术参与人群范围的扩大,当代艺术内部也形成各种分化,不同的艺术家对做什么样的作品、如何展出、做给谁看、由谁收藏等一系列问题早已有着不同的回答,在这些回答中,不可避免地有着阶层的影响。强调这一个事实,并不是要回到简单的阶级决定论,而是在提示当艺术家已逐渐被整合进了整个社会结构中,整个艺术实践链条都已事关资源如何在社会中被分配的时候,社会不应该还被当作艺术的外部客体,而需被视为内在于艺术实践本身的一部分。

程然
《信》
2014年
录像
6分13秒

Cheng Ran
Always I Trust
2014
25-channel HD video
6 min 13 sec

Courtesy the artist and
Galerie Urs Meile



但这是唯一的方式
but it's really the only place

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杨健
《谢谢！愿您有美好的一天！》
2015年
像头、塑料袋
尺寸可变
Yang Jian
Thank You, Have A Nice Day!
2015
Camera, plastic bag
Dimensions variable

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1. Gao Minglu, "If Art Criticism Doesn't Improve, Contemporary Art Will Not Improve."

2. Li Xianting, *The Art is Not What's Important*, Jiangsu Art Publishing, 2000, p. 315.

Chinese contemporary artists are a colorful bunch. They appear at openings and after-parties, deliberating on the latest gossip from Basel or Kassel. They live cosmopolitan lives, but they reside in humble studios in the Beijing suburbs of Heiqiao or Songzhuang, and are constantly facing eviction and rising prices. They can frequently be found, with a bottle of beer or a cup of tea, furiously arguing the merits of Rancière or Agamben's most recent translation. They turn red with anger over disagreements about modern Chinese history, but quickly agree on their rejection of the most recent policies put forward by the Ministry of Culture. They interact with financial elites (large collectors), business owners and rentiers (small collectors), laborers (temporary employees), small business owners (gallery owners), white-collar workers (gallery employees), and rural entrepreneurs (studio landlords), but their own identity is some combination of plutocrat, small entrepreneur, government employee, freelancer, and craft artisan. However great the differences in their income levels, lifestyles, ideologies, social statuses, or professional and social circles, they all consider themselves first and foremost, contemporary artists.

The fact that artists are believed to cross or transcend class may be a historical repercussion of artists defining themselves as intellectuals. In the 1980s, all artists considered themselves to be intellectuals. In those years, anyone who graduated from university was an intellectual. Many works of art from the period aimed to provoke social response, which had yet to develop distinctions between high and low culture. Wealth was still only beginning to be accumulated in China during the 1980s, and, as a result, political and cultural capital were the main standards that defined social classes. Artists were cultural elites with high-level educations whose words had influence, so it was natural for them to define themselves as intellectuals.

Are intellectuals a social class? There is no consensus on the question. The officially recognized theory of the "primary stage of socialism" (*shehui chujī jieduan lilun*) holds that, following the implementation of China's economic reforms, intellectuals are a part of the working class that can be distinguished from workers and peasants. In other words, intellectuals are understood to be cultural and technical workers who do not possess a means of production. However, under the current atmosphere of enlightened thinking, and especially given the revival of liberalism, intellectuals are more likely to regard themselves as unique from and independent of class labels, often seeing themselves as a group that transcends society and social class. This was certainly true for artists in 1980s. During the 85 New Wave movement, they not only saw themselves as enlightened individuals that transcended society, but also as social pioneers.

For artists of the 1990s, the status of enlightened individual or pioneer took a backseat to the roles of rebel and observer. Nevertheless, they continued to consider themselves a group set apart from society. They were what Karl Mannheim termed "free-floating" or "unattached," and could not be analyzed as part of any specific social class. However, the ideal of the intellectual who transcends class—the ideal that so many artists identified with—is an illusion. Ultimately it was Wang Guangyi who asked, in those years, "How come [officially recognized artists] Hua Junwu and Wu Zuoren get to live in mansions and drive cars? Why don't we get to?"¹ In Li Xianting's opinion, even artists working in Political Pop and Cynical Realism belonged to "a tradition among Chinese intellectuals," as if artists would lose their legitimacy if they were no longer considered intellectuals.²

When we discuss class among artists, we must first acknowledge the sudden reemergence of social classes in Chinese society. Recently, the differences between classes have become clearer and more solidified. Now they have even begun to reproduce themselves. When the buzzword "second-generation wealth" (*fuerdai*) has almost become passé, can we still pretend the art world has not been influenced? Class is already having a broad influence on artists, especially those born in the 1990s who are gradually beginning their careers. There are unmistakable class differences in artists' families, educational backgrounds, careers, opportunities to exhibit, and in the resources they have for their art. By comparison, these differences were minor for artists of the 1980s, or were due to specific local factors.

Two distinct classes of artists can be distinguished among younger generations of

whether their professional education was in China or abroad, the amount of productive resources they possess (including the state of their studio, whether or not they have long-term assistants, and whether or not they have the resources to make large-scale works), and differences in certain preferences. For most artists, these differences are not determined or all-encompassing, but they are present in various aspects which, in total, create an observable contrast.

It is important to discuss how much impact these class differences have on artworks and artistic practices. On a fundamental level, the amount of resources the artist can commit to a work determines the scale of the work. The material expenses and teams required to complete large installations are cost-prohibitive for lower-class artists, unless they receive grants, the application process for which is another manifestation of class. Artists who lack resources lean towards low-cost art forms such as body-based performance art. There are many types of performance art, but body art is the least expensive because the body is a cost-free, renewable resource. The Latin roots of the word proletariat literally means "one who has only their offspring," suggesting that the only means of production that the proletariat possesses is the body.

Many artists prefer body art not only due to limits imposed by economic status, but also because of a desire to separate and define the self based on class interests. In this view, body art is honest and direct. They don't want to make convoluted intellectual art, and their use of the body takes on the strengthened significance of a personal pledge. For this reason, competing to be the most ruthless, especially in regard to one's own body, has become a common strategy. Another aspect of this self-determination is a sense of disgust with abstract art in the gallery system, which they see as effete, middle-class art. This demonstrates the degree to which they emphasize their class interests, bringing with them an attitude of institutional critique. They fundamentally do not accept the position of their social class, and want to reverse social hierarchies.

In 2013, the neologism *diaosi* appeared to describe another class mentality. *Diaosi* originally referred to young men in the urban lower classes. It described men who lacked resources, sexual or otherwise, and included students who were born into low-income families and low-status white-collar workers. The fact that *diaosi* broke out on the internet demonstrates the decentralized authority of internet discourse. The word disrupted many traditional class distinctions. As a result, it quickly became a popular term that people of all classes used to belittle themselves, thereby gaining the sense of relief associated with self-disparagement.

For *diaosi* artists, the internet is a realm of cost-free dissemination. This led to a merging of body art and social media dissemination in a new form of artistic practice. The distinctive features of web platforms influenced this practice; eye-catching visual styles and content with a short timeframe took center stage, and the ability to provoke internet sensations became a new method of competing to be the most ruthless.

A separate group of "successful" (*gaodashang*) artists has marked a strong contrast to these *diaosi* artists. Based on their ongoing collaboration with galleries who show their work, they try as much as possible to make their work exquisite and refined. It is as if only those with specialized knowledge and distinguished taste could appreciate their art, just as only those who understand wine can discern its quality. Unlike the *diaosi* artists, who compete on who can be the most ruthless, successful artists compete by refining their knowledge and taste, and galleries participate by providing services such as the interpretation of this work. When *diaosi* artists acquire stable gallery representation and have a chance to rise in class, they gradually give up the extreme strategies they previously practiced. Instead, they begin holding solo exhibitions every two or three years and employ professional working methods.

The difference between these different classes of artists is not merely a product of whether or not an artist was successful. In other words, these divisions are not the result of professional progression, but, to a large extent, spur on the phenomenon. The earlier a young artist begins working in a "professional" mode, the faster he or she becomes "successful." By contrast, the number of opportunities available to those working in a violent *diaosi* style remains small. Given this fact, we can understand the personal trajectories of

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many young artists simply by looking at the artist groups they form.

It seems cruel to categorize artists based on the influence of social class, and doing so easily overshadows the impact that individual differences can have. For example, a talented artist from a lower-class background will still have more opportunities for success than an uninspired artist from a wealthy family. However, we must recognize that this only holds for the current class differences, which have yet to be solidified. If the disparities continue to grow, studying art itself may become an important delineator of class, as it is in many other countries. Lower-class individuals may be completely barred from the entryways to becoming an artist, except under the name of outsider art. It is also possible—and in fact this process has already begun—that tales of success in contemporary art will turn the industry into a shortcut for social mobility and attract young people seeking to alter their social status.

In recent years, the inherent social nature of contemporary art has not appeared in discussions of art and society. These discussions act as if art is a pure container into which the addition of social content is defined as art “intervening” in society. By this logic, the artist is imagined to be a subject who transcends society, who is not confined by social relationships, and who can express public opinion from the position of the lowest common denominator. This is a very narrow conception of society. It has gotten to the point that just doing field research, particularly about the lower classes, is considered social practice, much like going to the countryside and collecting folk songs was considered immersing oneself in real life under the aesthetic regime of socialist realism.

Contemporary art is an elitist art form that constitutes but one level of culture within the structure of society, other portions of which including ink painting, academic realism, Dafen Village-style painting (art for the masses), and what survives of rural painting or folk art. Following the recent expansion of contemporary art as a system, contemporary art itself has begun to fragment. Artists have long disagreed about how art should be made, how it should be exhibited, whom it is for, and who should collect it. When answering these questions, it is impossible to avoid the influence of class. Emphasizing this fact does not imply desire a return to simple class determinism, but rather to remind us that contemporary artists are gradually being incorporated into the social body. Given that the entire chain of artistic practice is related to how social resources are allocated, society can no longer be considered a phenomenon outside of art; it must be seen as an intrinsic component of artistic practice. (Translated by Orion Martin)

刘窗
《无题II（不知名的河）》
2008年
塑料水管、椅子、桌子
尺寸可变
Liu Chuang
Untitled II (Unknown River)
2008
Plastic pipe, chair, table
Dimensions variable

Courtesy Leo Xu Projects