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# 关小

## 奇异的节奏

### Guan Xiao

### Rhythm of Singularity

赖非  
Lai Fei

说实话,我真的不知道关小是怎么做到的。研究她近几年创作中对于材料的选择,感觉像是在看电视节目《最强大脑》里的选手微观辨析一千条金鱼。当然这是一个不恰当的比喻,今天我们每人每天通过有形和无形的网络接收到的信息、感知到的现象远不可被量化甚至描述。在这个内爆的信息社会,置身于无所不在的信息流中,每个人都成了注意力不足过动症的易感体质。而关小的工作之所以突出,是因为她的工作直接取材于来自网络世界的万千意象,却能够在这一狩猎过程中始终保持着极高的专注力,忠于自己内在的世界观,在眼花缭乱的数据世界中找到事物的一种基本逻辑。

雕塑和录像至关小的主要创作媒介。对于关小来说,两种创作开始的方式虽然南辕北辙但总是在一个中间点相遇——无论何种媒介的工作都是在用各异的编织方法传达对她的周遭环境的理解。从这一点来看,关小的工作方式其实并不和“传统”艺术家的工作室实践大相径庭,只是她的“颜料”可能是从网上下载的。而互联网,作为今天最主要的信息载体,无疑成为她创作的重要素材来源。但她的工作并不是针对网络的评述。关小对于关于媒介或技术本身的讨论并不感兴趣,她关注的是人对于信息的认知这个具有普遍性的过程,使用网络图像和现成意象也是为了突显这一过程。用关小自己的话来说,“互联网有趣的地方在于它更像是我们的原始意识。它提供了一个让我们能够高速的不断遭遇的场所,让观看者自己建立关联,并在共同作用下得到一个讯息这一点变得非常明显。互联网中,丰富的感官世界被压缩在一个层的观看方式中,我们能够主动地去追逐某种体验。互联网让我们能够去观看认知形成的过程和方式,它使我意识到关于认知的描述应该用一种综合作用的方式。”

关小2013年的三频录像作品《认知的形状》试图诠释的就是她在今天图像和信息过度饱和的媒体环境里认知世界的方式,也是她通过图像编辑的视觉结构来展现认知过程的第一个重要尝试。关小从自己庞大的数据库中的上千条视频素材(其中有的来自视频分享网站,有的录自卫星电视和DVD,还有一些自己日常的拍摄)中选取了大约30条进行采样、编辑,与自己在镜头前的表演穿插在一起,抽象地叙述着在认知过程中逐渐形成的个体世界观。录像中有这样一个瞬间:汽车的内部装饰特写、一枝花的花蕊、旋转中的义肢——三个性质迥异的图像平铺在画面上,显得均匀而平等;伴随着关小轻缓的旁白:“专注,无论专注什么,只要专注,”画面上的三个物体被剥离了原有的语境,在一个扁平的空间里同时获得了一种抽象的奇异性,人工与自然、生命体与非生命体的反差不复存在。

网络的开放和扁平化特质同时也为关小作品中关于新与旧的辩证提供了注脚。2012年的装置作品《纪录片:地心穿刺》是关小的一个突破性尝试。新兴和古老的意象在一个仿佛来自未来的拍摄现场中共同呈现,三个鲜艳的动物皮纹理的迷彩背景布前分别放置着相机脚架、镜头叠加成的图腾柱和文物一般的手工作件等文化和历史背景暧昧的物质元素,提示现代的结构(如三脚架)与古老的形式之间的共通。关小对于“新”事物和现象极其敏感,但她把这种直觉归咎于自己总能在新事物中看到恒定因素的倾向。时间的循环或不确定性始终贯穿她的创作。关小2013年在魔金石空间的首次个展“幸存者的狩猎”中,一组以“云图”命名的图腾碑是她对大卫·米切尔过去与未来碰撞重叠的同名小说的直接致意。展览中的另一系列作品“核样”,一组富有高科技感的金属三脚架,诠释的是关小对“核样”这一科学概念的解读。核样是关小从早期创作延续至今的一个重要的工作方法。它本来是一个地质学术语,指从地壳钻取出圆柱形天然物质后,对于其横截面分层的研究。来自不同时空的信息在同一个扁平的表面上垂直分布,既呼应了关小阅读世界的方

式,也为她的创作提供了一个有效的逻辑结构。

认知事物时,我们的大脑习惯于依靠非黑即白的二元对立和从上至下的分类方式来建立快速的关联。尤其在这个我们指望在搜索栏的一键敲击就能立刻获得答案的时代,新/旧、虚/实、男/女、东/西、左/右一类的二分法为我们判断事物提供了潦草的捷径。这种认知的陷阱正是关小极力排斥的。关小不相信二元对立,正如她在作品中一次次论证的,概念的正反面往往是共通的,譬如过去/未来、自然/文化、陆地/海洋、猎人/猎物、主体/客体。她对界限不感兴趣,而更愿意相信事物的永不稳定的状态、流动性以及改变的无限可能。流动的自我意识在关小为今年法国个展创作的录像作品《天气预报》中被赋予了形状——一个“点”的形状。“个体如为一条线,将世界一分为二;而个体作为一个点,又将两者合二为一。最终,能抓住我们的东西驱使我们,在万物的海洋中合并在一起,而又成为另一个广阔世界中的另一个点,”关小在录像中叙述道。以点为元素或介质,个体可以转化成无限的其他存在。这并非一个卡夫卡式的形而上小品,而是关小对于身份政治的冥思。“我们为什么不能坐在椅子上看欧洲?”这一问题贯穿《天气预报》的画面。在今天深陷难民危机和恐怖主义威胁的欧洲发出这声诘问无疑是激进的。关小将身份的流动性类比于天气的变化,每个个体在任何时间任何地点,都可以通过一系列遭遇而产生主观转变。她提示我们,“事物从来都不止有一个身份。我们是旁观者,也是环境里被观看的物体。”关小提出了一种将个体从身份政治与地缘政治解放出来的可能性。在网络的扁平空间里,文化和地理的区隔已逐渐失效,以区分人群、强调人与人之间的差异为目的的文化表征不再具有说服力。对关小来说,人与人之间的共同点比差异更具吸引力。

关小认为,我们唯一合理的身份只有“人类”,因为无论生活在哪里的人都具有同样的知觉和感官能力——认知的能力是人类共有的。对于人类认知的普遍性探讨是关小工作的核心。她在创作中寻扰的始终是一种普世的、超越语言和文化的全人类共通的传达方式。这种复合的传达在她2014年的录像作品《行动》中以节奏的形式呈现。节奏被关小看作为所有可被阅读的现象的一个公分母——各种生物和讯息都具备自己的节奏,这个节奏可以是形状、声音、动作等等,多种多样的感知都可以通过节奏来连结、重合。“所有的事物不停地相遇,在宇宙的频率里,一起共振。”画面中的人、物、动植物和风景通过韵律被编织在一起,彼此关联、互为客体。

关小从不以地域文化为框架讨论自己的创作和身份,这一点即使在今天时髦而国际化的中国年轻艺术家群体中间也相当突出。在当代艺术领域,身份标签与能见度关系紧密。年轻一代的艺术家创作中身份政治和意识形态话语的匮乏也许会削弱一个国家品牌在国际上的竞争力,但关小的实践提示了另一种可能性:成长于网络时代的年轻一代艺术家已不再需要“不用去纽约巴黎,生活同样国际化”这种不乏自卑的表态。他们在工作与生活中都全然接受了后现代性带来的身份自由和无差别。全球化经济下的后意识形态社会催生出的将是一种更为激进的超越身份的身份政治:迈向阿甘本在《来临中的共同体》中描绘的无身份的“新型星球人类”——在这个全球化的星球,任何身份认同或归属状态的表征都被摒弃,每个人都是“无论如何的奇异性”。

《纪录片:地心穿刺》(装置局部)  
2014年

*The Documentary: Geocentric Puncture* (installation detail)  
2014

Courtesy Kraupa Tuskany Zeidler and the artist  
PHOTO: Benoit Pailey







1  
*The Brain* is a popular scientific reality and talent show in search of people with exceptional brainpower in China.

2  
 Interview with Nav Haq, *Mousse*, Issue 45, 2014

P94

“一些事情发生了继续发生”  
 展览现场, ABC柏林当代艺术博览会, 2014年

左:  
 《滚动的节奏》  
 2014年  
 彩铜、汽车轮胎  
 127 × 48 × 22 厘米

右:  
 《行动》  
 2014年  
 三频录像  
 10分钟  
 View of “Something Always Happens Keeps Happening”  
 Art Berlin Contemporary, 2014

Left:  
*Rolling Beating*  
 2014  
 Colored bronze and car tire  
 127 x 48 x 22 cm

Right:  
*Action*  
 2014  
 3-channel video  
 10 min

Courtesy Kraupa-Tuskany Zeidler and the artist  
 PHOTO: Andrea Rossetti

To be honest, I don't know how Guan Xiao does it. Looking at the ways she grabs and synthesizes materials in her work, it's a bit like watching a contestant on *The Brain*<sup>1</sup> microscopically examining a thousand goldfish. This isn't a totally apt analogy, for today it's nearly impossible to quantify—and to describe, even—just how much visual information we receive on a daily basis, via networks both visible and intangible. In this imploding society, everyone is caught in the constant flow of data, always susceptible to some form of attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder. What makes Guan's work unique is her ability to maintain an extremely high level of concentration while pulling content and motifs from the massive material bank of the internet. In her process, she stays true to an internal worldview that is neither culturally specific nor general. In this dazzling world of data, she finds her own “basic logic” to connect forms.

Guan Xiao works mainly in sculpture and video. For her, these two ways of working depart from polar ends but somehow always meet in the middle. Essentially, her work is about how she understands the world that surrounds her. Whatever medium it may be, she conveys her worldview by weaving myriads of readymade materials and motifs. Seen in this light, Guan's way of working isn't as different from an old-school artist's studio practice as her background might suggest (she entered the art world through a self-enabling engagement outside the conventional academic systems, and describes herself as self-taught), the only caveat being that her paint might be downloaded from the internet. It is probably only natural that her work mirrors the appearance of the online world, as the internet has become the main repository of information for most of us on the planet, and by extension a default source of materials for Guan. Still, her art is by no means a commentary on the platform or tool itself. She is not particularly interested in the discourse surrounding media or technology. Her focus is rather on the universal process of human cognition in the context of information implosion, which she draws attention to through internet imagery and readymade motifs. In fact, much like the writer Kevin Kelly, she likens the internet to our “raw awareness,” “the fact that our awareness has never been fixed since it is always encountering something else. That's very much like the experience of browsing online.”<sup>2</sup>

Guan Xiao's three-channel video work *Cognitive Shape* (2013) is a rigorous illustration of her own cognitive process in an overly saturated world of images, as well as her first attempt at using a visual structure of images and symbols to give shape to cognition. She samples some 30 clips from her massive video database comprised of over a thousand clips. Taken from varied sources like YouTube, Vimeo, satellite TV, and DVDs, the found footage is interwoven with her own performance for the camera, narrating rather abstractly the formation of her internal worldview. At one moment in the video, a glamorous shot of an automobile interior, the stamen of a flower, and prosthetic limbs on rotation are juxtaposed, flattened, and equalized on the screen, accompanied by Guan's soft narration: “concentration, no matter what you concentrate on, as long as you concentrate.” The three heterogeneous elements are stripped of their original context, each gaining a new singularity on the flat surface of the screen. Any dialectical distinction between artificial and natural, living and non-living, becomes irrelevant.

The openness and flattening quality of the internet also provide footnotes to Guan Xiao's dialectics on the old and new. In her 2012 installation *The Documentary: Geocentric Puncture*, she devises an installation structure that emphatically calls attention to our ways of seeing in a media-inundated moment. Ancient motifs and sleek technofetishistic forms appear together in what seems like a photography studio from the future. In front of three brightly colored, snakeskin-patterned camouflage backdrops, a heterogeneous range of items with ambiguous cultural and historical backgrounds are placed: tripods, totem poles composed of stacked-up camera lenses, sculptural objects by way of museum artifacts. Pointing out the commonality between forms and the indistinguishability of subjects and objects, Guan deconstructs notions of old and new. What you perceive as a modern structure—the tripod for instance—may in fact be an ancient form. Guan exhibits a hypersensitivity to the new in her work, but attributes this to her intuition for seeing the old and the consistent underlying new creations.

《天气预报》  
 2016年  
 三频录像  
 12分48秒

*Weather Forecast*  
 2016  
 3-channel video  
 12 min 48 sec

Courtesy Antenna Space and the artist



3

Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*. Trans. Michael Hardt, University of Minnesota Press, 1993, p. 86.

The instability and cyclical nature of time is another trademark of Guan Xiao's work. Her first solo exhibition, "Survivors Hunting," at Magician Space in 2013, presented a series of monumental totems by the name of *Cloud Atlas*, a nod to David Mitchell's eponymous novel in which the past and the future collide. Another series in the show, "Core Sample," a group of metal tripods with a high-tech gleam, are Guan's translation of the titular scientific concept. The geological term refers to the practice of drilling out a cylindrical piece of material from the earth and studying its vertical strata on the cross section. Information from distinctive dimensions of time and place thereby lay flat on one single plane. Core sampling appears as a key method for Guan, and runs through her earlier work. The strategy of core sampling not only corresponds to Guan's reading of the world, but also provides her artistic compositions with a structural format.

When trying to comprehend the unfamiliar, our brains tend to establish meaning via binary oppositions and top-down categorizations. Especially in an age when we have become dependent on obtaining answers instantaneously through a click on a search bar, dichotomies like old/ new, fake/ real, male/ female, east/ west, and left/ right provide crude shortcuts for our judgment. This is a cognitive trap that Guan Xiao rejects completely. She doesn't care much for binaries, arguing repeatedly through her work that the two sides of any concept are often collusive, be it past/ future, nature/ culture, land/ ocean, hunter/ prey, or subject/ object. She eschews boundaries, and prefers to believe that things are in a constant state of flux, always subject to change, or, in her own words, to "endless possibilities of transformation."

A fluid awareness of the self is given shape—in the shape of a dot—in Guan Xiao's latest three-channel video, *Weather Forecast*, produced for her upcoming solo exhibitions in France. In it, she narrates: "all things, with individual entity as a line, cut the world into two, with the individual entity as a dot, merge the two into one; ultimately, we're driven by the things that grab us, merging together, into the sea of all things, and that becomes another dot in another vast world." With the dot as an element and medium, an individual entity can freely transform into any form of existence, Guan proclaims. Although one might be tempted to read this as a Kantian metaphysical exercise, it is in fact the artist's *Zootopian* take on identity politics. The question "Why can't we view Europe from a chair?" is punctuated throughout the video. This provocation (from someone located outside the continent) is a radical one, especially in the current context, in a Europe besieged by refugee crisis and terrorism. Guan sees an analogy between the fluidity of identity and the change of weather. Every individual can achieve subjective transformation through a series of encounters at any time, any place. Guan offers a possibility of individual emancipation from the normative constraints of identity politics and geopolitics. She rejects cultural representations of any kind that serve the purpose of differentiating one from another. After all, cultural differences and geographical boundaries have already been broken down on the flattening surface of the internet. What attracts her, far more than the differences between humans, is our commonality.

Guan Xiao considers "human" to be the only identity for us, for we all share the same cognitive abilities—the faculties for sensing and feeling—everywhere in the world. A universal discussion of our cognitive experiences is central to Guan's practice. In her work, she persistently looks for a common, and hybrid, method of communication, one that transcends language and culture, that humans everywhere can receive. This communication is delivered in the form of rhythm in her video *Action* (2014). She sees rhythm as a common denominator of everything that can be understood—all living things and existences in the material world have their rhythms. Rhythm is the linkage that connects you and me, and a stone and a wig: "Everything meets constantly. In the frequency of the universe. Resonate together." Guan choreographs shapes, sounds, text, humans, objects, animals, plants, clouds, and actions into a rhythmic celebration of human agency—our profound ability to perceive, act, and become.

The fact that Guan Xiao eschews any geographical or cultural framework when discussing her work and identity is remarkable, even among today's cosmopolitan set of young Chinese artists. Identity labelling is closely tied to one's visibility on a larger scale in the contemporary art world, and elsewhere. Some might worry that an absence of discourse around identity politics and ideology among younger artists today doesn't serve well for national branding on a global stage, but Guan's practice points to another possibility: the artists that have come of age with the proliferation of the internet no longer share the insecurities that propelled the statements of generations before "Without going to New York and Paris, life could be internationalized." In their life and practice, artists like Guan willingly embrace postmodernity as a levelling force that shapes them into a new form of being—a "whatever singularity," as Giorgio Agamben terms it. In his book *The Coming Community*, Agamben envisions a "new planetary humanity" that rejects any manifestation of identity or belonging: "the singularities form a community without affirming an identity, that humans co-belong without any representable condition of belonging."<sup>3</sup> For a post-ideological society entrenched in the global economy, this could very well be the most radical solution to identity politics yet.

## 《日落》

2012年

LED灯箱、假花、彩色金属、汽车轮胎、树脂  
灯箱: 308 × 158厘米; 车轮和树凳: 55 × 55 × 80厘米; 车轮和假花: 60 × 60 × 115厘米

*The Sunset*

2012

LED lightbox, artificial flower, colored metal, car tire, resin  
Lightbox: 308 x 158 cm; wheel and tree stool: 55 x 55 x 80 cm; wheel and artificial flowers: 60 x 60 x 115 cm

Courtesy Kraupa-Tuskany Zeidler and the artist

P100

## 《纪录片：从国家地理到BBC》

2015年

玻璃钢、相机脚架、射灯、相机镜头模型、黄铜、广告部数码打印、背景布支架  
700 × 176 × 300 厘米

*Documentary: From National Geographic to BBC*

2015

Fiberglass, camera tripods, spot lights, camera lens models, brass, digital print on vinyl, background stands  
700 x 176 x 300 cm

Courtesy Antenna Space and the artist





