Semiotic Warfare
A Semiotic Analysis of the Chinese Avant-Garde, 1979 - 1989
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3.2.1. HUANG YONGPING: ROULETTE SERIES. ON NON-EXPRESSIVE PAINTING AND NON-RELATED EVENTS

Huang Yongping: Roulette Series 1 (Zhuapan xilie 1), 1985, wooden turntable, ca. 100 x 100 x 80 cm; Non-Expressive Painting (Fei biaodai huinha), 4 paintings (plus one unfinished painting): Roulette-Rectangle 1 (Zhuapan - changfangxing 1), Roulette-Rectangle 2 (Zhuapan - changfangxing 2), Roulette-Oval 1 (Zhuapan - touyuuanxing 1), Roulette-Coordinate (Zhuapan - zuobi), color on canvas, each 150 x 120 cm, collection of Annie Wong Foundation. (figs. 57, 58, 62) Roulette Series 2: Big Roulette (Da zhuapan), 1987, wood, metal, 120 x 120 x 90 cm, partly lost, reconstructed in 1996 for the exhibition Face a l’histoire in the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, collection of the artist. (fig. 59) Roulette Series 3: Small Portable Roulette (Zouxiang xiao zhuapan), 1988, wood, suitcase, ca. 127 x 102 x 41 cm, collection of Dr. Uli Sigg. (fig. 60)

Fig. 57 Huang Yongping: Roulettes (Zhuapan xilie 轮盘系列), 1985, turntable, wood, ca. 100 x 100 x 80 cm, collection of the Annie Wong Foundation. Photograph Huang Yongping.
Huang Yongping is the most provocative and controversial figure of the Chinese art scene of the 1980s. Geographically speaking, he occupied a marginal position: Until 1989 he worked in the remote coastal town of Xiamen in southeastern Fujian Province. From an artistic point of view, too, his works were far from the center. Nevertheless, his perspicacity and wit made him a central figure of the art scene of that time. Besides his performances and installations, the numerous articles written by him and his lively correspondence with artists and art critics contributed to his importance. His articles and his correspondence, a kind of “art history in progress” recorded the traces of his often ephemeral works, which he produced in what he considered an open process. In this way, he made his oeuvre accessible to contemporary art critics as well as to a larger public. Evident here, as well as in his detailed handwritten projects (fig. 66), is the inspiration of Marcel Duchamp, whose oeuvre forms an important frame of reference for Huang.1

Two major factors contribute to Huang Yongping’s significance for the ’85 Movement and the art world of the 1980s. First, his works and articles initiated and contributed to one of the most important art theoretical discourses of the second half of the 1980s, the deconstruction of the modern consciousness. Huang was one of the few avant-garde artists who looked for concepts beyond the constraints of the prevalent meaning system. Unlike the majority of the avant-garde artists of the 1980s, his eclectic assimilation of Western trends goes beyond a mere stylistic or formal reference. He employed elements of indigenous Chinese philosophy such as Daoism and Chan Buddhism, and Western philosophy such as language philosophy, structuralism and post-structuralism, along with aesthetic references to Dada, Neo-Dada and pop art as an effective means of conducting his cultural critique with structural depth.2 Second, he is one of the first Chinese artists to conceive of art as a strategy, which he developed in his works of art and in his writings. Below I shall discuss his works and his writings as equally important elements. I focus on his Roulette Series (1985-1988). The series, which has been discussed in many articles, can be considered the core of his conceptual research of the 1980s, and it has also been a point of reference for his works throughout the 1990s. Where relevant, I will include Huang’s more spectacular events from Xiamen Dada.3 The Roulette Series in to be discussed here consists of three individual roulette wheels, each of which is made from one or more turntables revolving around an axis. There is Roulette Series 1 (Zhuapan xihe 1), mounted on a wooden stand (1985), Big Roulette (Da zhuapan) fixed to a chassis (1987) and Small Portable Roulette (Zouxiang xiao zhuapan) inserted into a suitcase (1988). (figs. 57-60, 67)
Fig. 5.8 Huang Yongping 黄永平, *Roulette- Series* (Zhuanpan xilie 转盘系列), 1985, turntable, wood, ca. 100 x 100 x 80cm, *Non-expressive Painting* (Fei bianhua 为画), 4 paintings, each 150 x 120 cm. Photograph courtesy Huang Yongping.

**NON-EXPRESSIVE PAINTING, THE OVERCOMING OF AESTHETIC TASTE AND THE CONSTRAINTS OF EXPRESSION**

Huang's direct motivation for creating the *Roulette-Series*, the quest for a non-subjective mode of artistic creation, was first of all a reaction to the prevailing artistic trends of the early 1980s - the expression of the self and beauty of form. He considered these trends a dead-end for contemporary Chinese art because, attached as they were to aesthetic taste and subjective expression, they did not offer an effective mechanism for overcoming either the established formal canon nor the constraints of prevailing concepts. According to Huang Yongping, these trends did not dare to go far enough; they did not provide the intellectual groundwork for a truly new subject proposal with an in-depth engagement of identity, and of self-associates. He responded to the well with the cold, and graduated however, He followed Spray Gu with spray and gave up control, resulting in the need for a new tool to gain control. From this responding to taste and the aesthetic term, "precise," with a kind of "precise," with a kind of the intellect.10

Such considerations, such as the *Roulette Series*, because of his notes on the control of painting, but indeed the object, a human being published in aesthetic taste: he draws up statements that if control thought and style is the Wittgenstein three ways to describe as...
dare to go farther than expressionism or the Fauves. Furthermore, they could not provide new approaches, as they still had to fill in the gaps. In 1982, as his graduation work from the China Academy of Fine Arts in Hangzhou, he therefore created his *Spray Gun Series* (*Pengqiang xilie*; fig. 61). Huang Yongping took the subject proposed by the academy - "experience of real life in a factory" - seriously, and with an industrial spray gun executed a series of paintings in a factory. The abandoning of traditional painting utensils aims at eliminating the traces of the brush to reduce self-expression. The quest for a distanced impersonal artistic language associates him with groups such as New Room '85 and Pool Society, both of which emerged at the China Academy of Fine Arts in Hangzhou after Huang's graduation, as well as with the Rational Painting trend and its main proponent Wang Guangyi, who also graduated from this same academy. Huang goes beyond mere formal experiments, however. He focuses on the artist and his determining function in the creative process. With *Spray Gun Series* the difficult handling of the unwieldy tool forces the artist to give up control. The composition is determined by the characteristics of the tool, resulting in the elimination of the artist's aesthetic taste. "My method is that the tool should not merely help in representing the concept of the painting. Or in other words, the tool not only is a tool, but it has already turned from a passive agent into an active agent. From the concept through to the result [my method] is one corresponding to responding to the tool and not of forcing the tool,"⁷ Both the elimination of aesthetic taste and the aspect of spontaneity are related to Marcel Duchamp. Duchamp uses the terms "precision painting" and "beauty of indifference"⁸ to describe his experiments with "a kind of sober painting", which not only has an effect on the retina but also on the intellect. He realized these ideas in the *Broyeuse de chocolat* (1914).

Such considerations made Huang develop a tool to create his *Non-Expressive Painting*, his *Roulette Series 1* (1985).⁹ His accompanying articles provide an analytical discussion of Chinese art and of expressive art. In his notes from the years 1983 to 1986 Huang Yongping mentions that the study of Wittgenstein's philosophy during his summer vacations led him to reconsider his artistic positions. Under number 254 of his notes he states: "One should not represent a square through different kinds of painting, but one should represent a square with a square, represent an object with an object, a human being with a human being, the senseless with the senseless. This is the abandonment of representation as such." A discussion of "Tanjun yishu" ("Tanjun yishu"), published in 1985, Huang discusses the restriction of expressive painting and aesthetic taste, as well as ways of overcoming those constraints in more depth. Again he draws upon Wittgenstein, upon his ontological theory of representation, when he states that the restriction of expression is related to latent analogue patterns that control thought and perception. Expressive and representational painting of all times and styles was nothing but a mediator and mere interpretation of those patterns. As Wittgenstein put it: "The limits of language mean the limits of my world."¹⁰ Huang sees three ways of surmounting these limitations. He mentions process art, which he describes as art where "the work of art is bigger than the thought" (zuopin da yu
sixiang), conceptual art where “the thought is bigger than the work of art” (sixiang da yu zuopin), and the “Eastern spirit” (dongfang jingshen) - Daoist and Chan Buddhist concepts. Their superiority lies, as Huang remarks, in the following characteristics: non-subjectivity, chance, non-interference, spontaneity, a non-linear non-intentional creative process, use, a way and openness. With emphasis on the creative process, the work of art is a mere semi-finished product, not representing any kind of theory or system.

DE-PERSONALIZATION, CHANCE

The examination of the aesthetic structure of Roulette Series 1 exemplifies how Huang implicates these concepts in his works. Roulette Series 1 resembles a traditional Chinese geomancer’s compass. A single turntable revolves around a wooden axis that ends in a knob. The turntable is divided into eight segments, each of which is marked with a trigram. Accordingly, the canvas on which Huang Yongping prepared to paint was divided into eight sections. The painting materials, such as colors, glue and solvent, were each assigned a number. These numbers then were transcribed onto dice, and the choice of colors and materials was decided by picking up a die at random. The composition of the painting was determined with the aid of the turntable, which was to be rotated eight times eight - sixty-four - times. This alludes to the Book of Changes (Yijing), the classical Chinese book of divination, with its sixty-four hexagrams. The major references in the Roulette Series are to Marcel Duchamp and John Cage. The roulette wheel resembles a ready-made object, a concept originating with Duchamp. Huang further eliminates the artist as an operative subject, substituting chance as the major agent. Like Duchamp, he aims at objectifying the process of creation. In addition, he utilizes the Book of Changes as a determining structure, as did Cage for his Music of Changes (1951). Hence, Huang is equating traditional Chinese thought - namely Daoism and Chan Buddhism - with Dada and Neo-Dada both aesthetically, and, as I will show below, conceptually.

The regulation of the creative process through the roulette produces works that resemble abstract paintings. However, these paintings do not follow any aesthetic principles whatsoever. They are not an individual expression of any aesthetic ideal, nor do they follow rules of composition; they are non-expressive painting. Huang remarks: “There is neither contrast between cold and warm or between colors, nor between watery and oily. One can break away from all kinds of formal principles, deliberate or accidental arrangements and consider every composition a good composition. Anyway, the quality of the composition does not matter. Both color and composition should lose their importance.”
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The non-artistic regulations and the basic conditions set by the artist that replace subjective standards aim at the objectification of the creative process. The use of mathematical and Daoist symbols suggests generalization, while the creation of diagrams, such as Roulette - Coordinate, as well as the meticulous description and dating of Huang's works again suggest objectification. This kind of scientific contemplation and recording of his works of art, evident for example in Wet Method - "History of Chinese Painting" and "Concise History of Modern Painting" Washed for Two Minutes in a Washing Machine, December 1, 1987, which he created with the Big Roulette, makes reference to Duchamp, who noted the date and exact time on many of his works.20 (fig. 63)

Huang Yongping's Roulette first of all is a machine that replaces the person of the artist and his determining function. The application of Wittgenstein's language philosophy in the field of art leads Huang to the de-personalization of the creative process.21 Second, his Roulette Series is to generate a decision by chance. His article "Non-Expressive Painting" has the motto "To reduce everything to a decision by chance is closer to nature than the contingency of the decision."22 Close to nature here designates the concepts of non-interference and the non-intentional. Both, as well as objectivity, are indicated through the equal representation of symbols on the turntable and the canvas, and further through the similarity of the dice and the even rotation of the turntable. Huang relates: "Generally speaking, if one applies probability,
he does expect certain numbers. The gambler plays the roulette game with definite expectations. I do use the roulette without any expectations. All numbers that might be chosen fulfill my expectation to obtain a clear answer, without knowing what the answer is.”

Huang aims to overcome all kinds of patterns and systems, of traditions and conventions, as well as language and logic as such. In this regard, the rotation of the turntable and the open nature of the creative process indicate the instability and imperfection of systems and categories. The application of this kind of methodological chance corresponds to what George Brecht called “non-method” and “no-system-system” in the work of Marcel Duchamp. It leads to an answer that is
non-rational, that might be self-contradictory, and that therefore cannot totally be explained with the systems of language and logic. Consequently, “the interference of eye and brain”, as Huang calls it, is eliminated, and the individual limitations are abolished. The Chinese philosopher Mo Zelan discusses Huang's non-expressive painting in his rather critical article “X Comments on Y” (“X ping Y”) and names his method the “method of the probable mechanical chance”. This kind of chance was an effective method of separating art from tradition, and of overcoming latent patterns. Mo doubts, however, that a total elimination of the self and of subjectivity during the creative process is possible. Chance being a method generated by the artist further implicates spontaneous elements, which are beyond human control. This metaphysical aspect of Huang's method approaches the concept of change, to which Huang alludes by choosing the divination system of the *Book of Changes* as the formal structure of his *Roulette Series*.

**NON-RELATED EVENTS**

The artist gives up the position of a creator and takes the position of a mediator, with the work of art coming into being independently from him, quasi naturally. He acts through non-interference or, to use the corresponding Daoist concept, through non-doing (*wuwei*). In his handwritten notes of 1987, Huang calls this different understanding of the notion of creativity non-related events (*duli shijian*). This concept is inspired by Wittgenstein's non-related facts and denotes the causal independence of artist and work, as well as that of the individual works of the artist's oeuvre. Huang's experimental text, *A Paper on Art that Starts Out from A Blank* (“Cong kondong kaishì de yiopian meishù lunwen”), exemplifies his thoughts. According to Huang, while the research of non-related events was already evident in the first roulette, the latter was simply concerned with the independence of formal elements from one another and from the artist. But *Big Roulette* and *Small, Portable Roulette* had been conceived to investigate in depth the independence of time, sequence, and concept.

The *Big Roulette* is reminiscent of Duchamp's *Roue de Bicyclette* (1916). Its appearance also recalls Robert Rauschenberg's *Twenty-eight Famous Murders with Poems (Kabal American Zephyr)*, a vertical disc with colored segments that had been exhibited in the National Gallery in Beijing in 1985. The *Big Roulette* consists of one big turntable mounted on a chassis. The turntable is divided into an inner circle with sixty-four segments, and an outer circle with 384 segments. Again, the number of the segments is based on the *Book of Changes*, with its sixty-four hexagrams and six times sixty-four - 384 - places. On each segment Huang wrote an entry, the entries on the inner circle having no relation to those on the outer circle. These entries are chosen at
random from different domains and serve as instructions and hints to create works of art. They include for example the artist’s ideas or entries from a dictionary. Furthermore, the positions of the entries on the turntable are chosen at random. Huang distinguishes several types of entries, such as terms and proper names (for example, acid materials, hair-dryer), distinct instructions (for example, make a typewriter), indistinct instructions (for example, cause an apathetic reaction), and senseless groups of words (for example, hand, here, to be passed, breath, surroundings).33

Works created with the Big Roulette are Big Roulette-Entry N.47, December 1, 1987, the copy of an oil painting executed by Huang in 1980 and then washed in the washing machine for five minutes on December 1, 1987, (fig. 64) and one of his most famous works, Wet Method - “History of Chinese Painting” and “Concise History of Modern Painting” washed for two minutes in a washing machine, December 1, 1987.34 (fig. 63) Unlike Huang’s use of the roulette wheel to produce non-expressive painting, its employment here was a strategy to answer a precise question. The question addressed - what should an amalgamation of modern Western and native Chinese culture look like - had already aroused a far-reaching controversy during the early 20th century. Having obtained the answer “wet method” through playing the Big Roulette, Huang then washed Wang Bomin’s History of Chinese Painting and Herbert Read’s Concise History of Modern Painting in a washing machine for two minutes. The result of Huang’s wet method, a dirty looking pulp, as an answer to this precise question, wittily comments on the situation of the avant-garde art scene, and further represents the concept of anti-culture, crucial to Huang Yongping’s oeuvre. He employed this concept in a strategic manner, especially after his emigration to Europe. Anti-culture is the result of the battle between Eastern and Western cultures, and the artist’s solution to generate another culture, as I will show in more detail below.35 Small, portable Roulette consists of six turntables. Presented in a suitcase, and with a photograph affixed to the case’s lid, it is reminiscent of Duchamp’s Boîte-en-Valise. Having been exhibited in the China/Avant-Garde show, Small, Portable Roulette, like Boîte-en-Valise, can be read as a resume of the artist’s thoughts. Its function is to determine, if, when and where a work of art should be created. The independence of artist and creation, as well as that of the individual works of art, eliminates the coherence of the artistic oeuvre, which thus no longer represents any logical system. Because of this, the official side of the Chinese art world considered Huang’s works the expression of a nihilist tendency.

The roulette can be played by anybody. Thus, on the one hand, artist and work are indeed independent. On the other hand, paradoxically, the apparently objective method of determination by chance, conceived by the artist, results in absolute subjectivity. As Huang tries to overcome all kinds of conventions and latent patterns, the only frame of reference is the one set by the artist. Here Huang’s concept coincides with the solipsist model, which was another aspect criticized by officialdom.36

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OPENNESS AND NON-INTERFERENCE, CHANGE:
THE WORK OF ART, AN INTERMEDIATE PRODUCT

Duchamp, who for Huang Yongping was, next to Cage, the most important reference
from the domain of modern art, had discovered chance as a methodological base for a
new concept of creativity in 1913/14 with his object Trois stoppages - etalon.37 Huang
knew Duchamp's oeuvre and writings very well.38 Conversely, Huang knew John Cage's
oeuvre only through an entry in Peter S. Hansen's encyclopedia, An Introduction
 to 20th Century Music, translated into Chinese in 1981/82.39 He considered Cage's
reception of Chan Buddhism and Daoism, as well as his application of the Book
of Changes and of dice in the process of composing, to be a prime example of the
assimilation of the Eastern spirit into modern Western art, and he applied both the
Book of Changes and dice in his works.40 Huang was particularly interested in the
aspects of openness, non-interference and change in Cage's oeuvre: it is there that
Huang rediscovers Chinese thought, namely Chan and the non-doing of Daoism.41 In
his article "Art, an Ominous Thing" ("Yishu buxiang zhi wu") he described Cage's
ideas as concepts "that do not aim at structuring the chaos", do not express values,
but rather are a way to observe life. "Not wanting to interfere in life with our thoughts
and feelings, letting it take its own course, this would be wonderful! (...) We should not
be creative, but be not-creative."42
Like Cage, Huang designs the process of creating his non-expressive painting as an open process that can be interrupted at every moment or be endless. On the syntactic level, openness is expressed in the paintings through the uneven distribution of the brushstrokes - some of the segments are filled with strokes, while others are nearly empty - and thus, through an unfinished visual impression. The rotation of the turntable indicates the mechanical, serial aspect of the procedure; the work of art is conceived of as a semi-manufactured, reproducible product (banchang pin). In addition, it is transposed into the domain of ordinary life. As a serial, semi-manufactured product it cannot represent absolute ideological or moral values. On the contrary, considering the aspect of change, it obviously questions values as such. The creative process is conceived of as a pure action, the work of art envisioned as a manifestation of chance that “comes into being naturally”. Huang writes: “Every work of art can potentially be modified; the natural tendency of the modification of a work of art can even lead to its destruction.” Confirming this avowed possibility, in November 1986 he and the group Xiamen Dada burnt the works of their exhibition Xiamen Dada in front of the Art Gallery of Xiamen. (figs. 12, 13) He further brilliantly expressed this concept in The Beard Burns Most Easily (Huzi zui rongyi shao; 1986; fig. 65).

SEMANTICALLY EMPTY SIGNS: 
THE MEANING IS THE USE

The concepts advanced by Huang Yongping naturally challenged the official definition of the modern consciousness and its linear, rational and pedagogically precise logic. The artist’s ideas were considered a nihilist tendency and stigmatized as belonging to the Western modernity, which did not fit into the framework of the modern consciousness. Chance, change, and non-interference imply the acceptance of spontaneous exploitation of the text as itself. Dadaist icon non-represent the conviction to describe the use. If Huang applies Roulette Ser meaning at principle, and sources Roulette and creation: in

Huang disclaim that the signifier “Modernity” Post-Moder Chan, Chan, and sources Roulette which could meaning. They are endowed with meanings which originally designate the signifier. Only the
Huang Yongping 胡永平, *Non-Painting (Feng hua duihua 非花對花)*, 2011. Oil on canvas, each 20 cm. Photograph courtesy of the artist.

Huang discusses the concept of non-representation in two articles, "A Completely Empty Signifier" ("Wanquan kong de nengzhi") and "Xiamen Dada - A Kind of Post-Modernity?" ("Xiamen Dada - yi zhong hou xiandai?"). In "Xiamen Dada - A Kind of Post-Modernity?" Huang proposes regarding the identity of Chan and Dada: "Dada is Chan, Chan is Dada. (...) In Chan Buddhism a wooden sculpture of Shakyamuni can be Buddha and at the same time a piece of firewood." In reaction to two official articles criticizing his proposition identifying Dada with Chan, he develops this idea in more depth in his "A Completely Empty Signifier". Citing the legend of the smile of Kasyapa, to which the Chan School ascribes its origin, and referring to Saussure's theory of signs, Huang demonstrates how signs become semantically empty, and how the signifier loses the signified and is filled with new meanings through conventional application. Buddha's gesture of holding the lotus flower and Kasyapa's smile form, as Huang describes it, a completely empty dialogue, an enigma without answer, that is endowed with meaning only through the Chan Buddhist lore. Another example he mentions to show the historic-cultural metonymy of the signified is the term Dada, which originally meant, "Yes, yes" in Russian or hobby-horse in French, but now designates an artistic movement. Chan and Dada, being empty signs that obtain meaning only through their application, have deteriorated into meaningless signifiers. They are a kind of myth, as Huang quotes Barthes. He now employs the terms Chan and Dada and endows them anew with meaning, thereby defining them as myth. In Huang Yongping's works and articles both terms, like the Daoist symbols used in his *Roulette Series 1*, are a pars pro toto of cultural systems and values as such. These values, being defined as a myth, appear completely relative. The artist writes: "Once the signifier loses the signified it degenerates into a completely empty signifier. (...) Only the text is left. It is in this sense that I employ Dada and Chan. (...) The only
legacy of history is a great number of texts. Thus, there is no history one could talk about. We are amidst a huge rubbish heap of culture. (...) If we do not rise from this rubbish of texts, we will be suppressed by any kind of theories, values, and sermons. The only thing we can do is to change old and new myths into a completely empty signifier.”

In this sense, in “Xiamen Dada - A Kind of Post-Modernity?” Huang asks artists to act with a smile, and, like Kasyapa, to use a completely empty signifier to surmount categories and systems.

The semantic emptiness of the signs thus is equivalent to the rejection of representational and descriptive works of art, as well as to the Chan Buddhist principle of non-representation and non-imagery of images. The aesthetic references to Dadaism on the one hand - Duchamp's *Roue de Bicyclette* and his *Bottle-en Valise* - and to Daoism on the other hand - Daoist symbols and a geomancer's compass - equate the anti-art stance and playfulness of Dada (which is also evident in the function of the series, a roulette game) with non-representation, the non-intentional and spontaneity of Daoism and Chan Buddhism. Moreover, as with language philosophy, where language is seen as a prototype of a holistic organization of reality, Huang employs art as a means for a holistic cognition of reality. His application of language philosophy concepts in the domain of the arts thus contradicts the atomism of the causal-mechanical philosophy of materialism. In an interview with Jean-Hubert Martin Huang relates: “In the social politics of China, art is part of ideology. Doubting the nature of art is to destroy this kind of political system. If one thinks of art as a metaphor of reality, then to change the attitude towards art means planning to change the way of thinking.”

As the cognitive processing of reality through descriptive and representational systems is impossible, to insist on the application of those systems generates absurdity. However, this kind of absurdity itself can have an explanatory function, as Wittgenstein points out. Also Chan Buddhist *koans* (epigrams; *gang 'an*) employ absurdity and contradiction as a means of obtaining enlightenment. Similarly, Huang Yongping uses absurdity and paradoxical sentences such as “Chan is Dada and Dada is Chan”, to turn “unobvious nonsense into obvious nonsense”, to surmount the concealed futility of prevailing latent patterns. He considers art a tool to change consciousness: “Art is a kind of tool, a tool that changes consciousness, actions, and attitudes. To use the tool as such is not the goal. To obtain the fish and to forget the trap, to ascend and remove the ladder. We have to return the tool, but the tool has no owner.” To return the tool, the return of art into life, is Huang’s final aim: “The highest and final goal of an artist is to give up art.”

**CHAN IS DADA, DADA IS CHAN**

The aesthetical and conceptual equation of language philosophy, Dada, Chan and Daoism is the most outstanding feature of Huang Yongping's *Roulette Series*. Even though the artist wants to eliminate any logical coherence within his oeuvre, its...
structure is nevertheless discursive. German art historian Marcus Brüderlin terms the anticipation and incorporation of discourses within the aesthetic structure of a work of art “discursive aesthetics.” He ascribes this characteristic to post-modern art.64 And indeed, Huang Yongping’s oeuvre was warmly welcomed in Western post-modern art criticism of the 1990s. Most appreciated were Huang’s cultural strategy and deconstructive efforts, and his art was considered a prime example of the attempt to surmount “Eurocentric ideology, that dominated modern art and culture.”65 “Huang Yongping’s art should be understood first of all as a set of strategies of cultural resistance to the power of dominant discourses including the institutional system itself,” writes Hou Hanru.66

While living in China, with his statement “Chan is Dada, Dada is Chan” as strategy, Huang Yongping aimed at deconstructing not only the descriptive and representational aesthetic system of socialist realism and expressive trends, but also all latent patterns, and dominating closed discursive systems as such, to catapult contemporary Chinese art and culture directly from the phase of post-impressionism and expressionism into that of post-modernism.65 “Post-modernism thus is the modern renaissance of Chan Buddhism. Both are known by their openness and depth, and have no aesthetic significance. They are concerned with the fact that the real cannot be real, they doubt and do not believe. (...) For China, the time to postulate the spirit of Dada has already arrived.”66

Huang’s anti-art and anti-culture, with which he was beating the East while living in China, is based on an effect of double reflection.67 The artist propagates and demonstrates the identity of those tendencies of Chinese culture that are associated with the anti-rational, spontaneity, holism and relativism, with those Western philosophical and artistic trends that put forth these values. These Western tendencies that at some point had been inspired by

Fig. 64 Huang Yongping’s oil painting, Big Roulette Entry No. 47, December 1, 1987. (Da zhuang yao 47 hao, 1987) oil painting, object. Photograph Huang Yongping.

Fig. 63 Huang Yongping’s mixed media, Two Minutes in a Washing Machine, 1987. (Zhangqiao haihuo shi he Xuanzai haihuo hua xian zai xilu, 1987) 114 x 25 cm, 1987. Photograph courtesy of Huang Yongping.
the Chinese trends propose alternative models to Western modernity and its rational Weltanschauung and concept of a linearly progressive historicity. Huang’s anti-culture therefore is not a position opposed to culture, but an attempt to generate another kind of culture. Culture, as empty signifier, then obtains new meaning through Huang’s deconstructive strategies. Concerning his works that employ the washing of books, which he still practiced after his emigration to France, he writes: “I do not cleanse culture, I do make it dirty.” Evident here is also the concept of the creative destruction, best expressed in the Cultural Revolutionary slogan “It is right to rebel” (zaofan youli), which for Huang Yongping and the majority of the avant-garde artists of his generation plays an important role in their artistic concepts and creation until today.

RECEPTION

The Chinese art criticism of the 1980s focuses primarily on the aspect of destruction in Huang Yongping’s oeuvre. In the first sentences of his chapter on “Xiamen Dada and Huang Yongping” Gao Minglu writes: “For Huang Yongping every rule indicates an anti-rule, every motive indicates a kind of anti-motive, every choice indicates a kind of anti-choice. He therefore believes: ‘However much art there is, so much anti-art exists.’” According to this scheme Gao distinguishes four periods in Huang’s oeuvre of the 1980s: the anti-decorative period (fan qiao shi zhiyu), the anti-expressive and anti-formalistic period (fan ziwo biaoxian he xingshi zhiyu), the period of anti-art (fan yishu) and the period of anti-art history (fan yishushi). In his scheme the Roulette Series belongs to the second period. Lu Peng calls the works of Huang Yongping and the Xiamen Dada nihilist, employing the term used in the official evaluation. According to him, this kind of nihilism that he observes in

Fig. 6.5 Huang Yongping 黄永平, The Board Burns Most Easily (Hua zui rong yi zhuo 烧子容易着), 1986, drawing, photocopies, performance. Reproduced with permission of Huang Yongping.
87岁的画家，制作和活动

绘画的死亡。86岁时的读本作品是决定性
意味着绘画的死亡。它更多是艺术家个体内
的艺术表现，而不是作为艺术作品的体
验方式。明确地点出“万 landscaping”一词的消
亡，(他指的是艺术家追求成为自己灵魂
的‘肖像’)，这是‘创作’的毫无意义。他
的“绘画”一词所指的似乎是没有对象的，只
是指对绘画的拒绝和停止。尽管有
1954年画的画像，或1956年画的画像，或1961年
画的画像，确实是说‘绘画的死亡’。指不一
定是个人的绘画，而是整个的绘画。1937年画的自
我画像，不被画者在1977年向公众揭露
的死亡，向他社会是个个体，就是另一个体。同
样也不好说1957年自个个体的绘画死
亡。我从不能确定社会会使用何种心
理，(即政治，道德，或者绘画的死亡)已
经从根本上消失。这就是对于社会来
说，绘画的死亡不可逆的。‘绘画的死亡’不
过是社会死亡的一部分。这已经能流的神
经消失。就象母亲文化尚没有去表现
年幼的儿童，会思考东西，或戴着纸的
父亲于三月的眉毛；2：我不能说他是决定
自己的艺术作品的，不然它就是由社会
的前端所显现。社会肖像，或绘画肖像决
定的。黄永住说，这些肖像是满足社会对社
会里的肖像，没有选择能力的，所以
‘绘画’是说对社会发展成的选择。黄永住
肖像也思考‘违背’，如果一个艺术家做了绘画(或
阿雷)，他必须是准备著世界去接受它’。

Fig. 66 Huang Yongping. Page of his manuscripts. 1987, courtesy Huang Yongping.
the negation of tradition, culture and the self, is absurd, because it is not practicable. However, Li realizes that Huang’s nihilist attitude is a method of integrating Western trends, in particular Dada, into the Chinese context. He therefore considers the absurdity of Huang’s position a method adequate for the Chinese art scene.74 He further considers Huang’s works a provocation for the system of artistic concepts and traditional values, and hence a critique and mockery of the Chinese art scene, which according to him is best expressed in Huang’s Wet Method - The ‘History of Chinese Painting’ and “Concise History of Modern Painting” Washed for Two Minutes in a Washing Machine, December 1, 1987.

Huang Yongping’s non-expressive painting triggered a flood of reactions, as demonstrated in the numerous articles published in art magazines. In the third 1986 issue of Art Trends, in which Huang described his work, three more articles discussing the non-expressive painting were published. These articles, partly critical, analyze Huang’s concepts in detail. Further, all of the authors discuss his works from a philosophical point of view.75 Obviously Huang here transcribed concepts into the domain of art that already had been discussed earlier in the domain of philosophy.76 His assimilation of Chan Buddhism and Daoism is part of a general trend towards the rediscovery of autochthonous Chinese philosophy, in part through the reception of Japanese writings on the subject, for example Suzuki’s writings on Zen. The reception of Western philosophy and post-modern discourses was a general trend in the mid-1980s, in particular among the art students.

As Huang’s works are based on complex philosophical concepts, they were not easily accessible for the general public. That is why the majority of the official art critics only shook their heads and qualified Huang’s works as incomprehensible nonsense. Those official critiques that did argue on a philosophical level, do not discuss Huang’s works in relation to language philosophy, focusing instead on the Dadaist elements. The majority of these articles refer to the Burning Event of Xiamen Dada or to Huang’s provocative article “Xiamen Dada - A Kind of Post-Modernity.” The article “On Xiamen Dada and Other” (“Guanyu Xiamen Dada yu qita”) by painter and critic Jin Ye, an older generation former professor of the China Academy of Fine Arts, is representative of the official position.77 In this article Jin compares Chan Buddhism with Dadaism to show the nihilist and destructive character of Dadaism, which according to him has no similarities with Chan Buddhism at all.78 He accuses Dadaism of relativism, an unrestrained liberalism and extreme subjectivity, as it was a trend that aimed at creating chaos and at initiating a fundamental transformation of society, a trend that negated every kind of organization, such as governmental systems, systems of law, of family and morality. Huang Yongping’s declared aim was to increase the chaos.79 Tan Shiqi is less extreme in his critique. He admits similarities between Chan and Dada, but considers the assimilation of concepts of Western modernity and post-modernity as inadequate for Chinese society and culture.80 In his article “Program of the Art of the New Wave” (“Xinchao meishu ganglin”), published in 1990 after the Tiananmen incident Yang Chengyin finally called Huang’s
because it is not practicable.

He therefore considers the Chinese art scene. He stem of artistic concepts and the Chinese art scene, which is a flood of reactions, as magazines. In the third 1986 he never discusses the Dadaists elements, parts, partly critical, analyze discuss his works from a general trend towards the through the reception of works on Zen. The reception is a general trend in the concepts, they were not easily comprehensible nonsense. 1 do not discuss Huang’s on the Dadaist elements. 2

The article “On Xiamen and critic Jin Ye, an enemy of Fine Arts, is 

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He admits similarities of concepts of Western 

ity and culture. In his g a ganglin”, published nally called Huang’s non-expressive painting art that completely contradicted the official guidelines, and qualified it as an anti-rational trend. In 1986 Yang al ready had published a critique of the New Wave under the pseudonym Ma Nanchi. Then in 1990, after the reinstatement of the conservative faction, he dared to criticize the avant-garde of the 1980s openly as a spiritual and artistic trend contradicting the principles of artistic creation and of social determination.

Huang Yongping’s challenge of the official system was an ideological shock. He propagated and demonstrated the identity of those trends within the Chinese history of ideas that represent the anti-rational, individualism, holism and relativism with those Western philosophical and artistic trends that are based on those same values, that earlier assimilated the Chinese tendencies, and that propose critical and alternative models to the rational logocentric conception of the world of Western modernity. His evaluation of traditional Chinese values not only serves as a critique of the materialist ideology of communism, but also expresses Huang’s doubts regarding a modernization of China based on the values of Western modernity.

Fig. 67 Huang Yongping in his studio in Xiamen, 1986-87.

[2] Here I shall discuss only those influences related to the Roulette Series. In Huang’s later works, the reference to Foucault and to psychoanalysis are more important.
[3] I will not include the roulettes that Huang created in France in 1991 and 1993. The majority of Huang’s works inspired a strong reaction from the public and is well worth discussing, but that would go beyond the scope of this book.
[4] The Chinese term zhiyao can also be translated with narrative or roter. The latter expression could be an allusion to Marcel Duchamp’s Roosterroets, but Roosterroets, unlike Huang’s work, focus on perception and visual experience. Huang knew these works, but I do not think they are relevant here. I choose the term roulette, as it implicates chance and probability, both important aspects of Huang’s Roulette Series.
[6] See also chapter 2.5.
[7] See also chapter 2.5.
[8] Huang Yongping (1983): p. 22. In this article Huang discusses the creation of the Spray Gun Series, as well as the advantage of non-subjective painting in detail. Both his graduation work and his article did not have any wider influence. After Huang’s graduation, however, they provided his teacher as teacher to a middle school in Xiamen. See also Gao Mingli (1991): pp. 339, 346.
[11] The complete title of the work is “Rou-Expressive Painting, Created According to a Procedure (Rats Set by Myself) and Nevertheless Independent from Me (An expression among all my guides) or you yi wo wo guan de lei hua de shenlu)” See also Li Peng (1992): p. 285.
[12] See translation of Huang’s notes, appendix 5. Huang mentions his notes, i.e. Wittgenstein does in his "Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus."

The title of this article is "Opinions on an Artistic Trend" ("ti zu xiaozhi xiaozhi zhi gongzhu"), Ma Nanchi (1956), Yang Chenglin (1960) p. 5.

(7) In the above mentioned experimental text "A Paper on Art that Shines Out from A Blank" Huang attempts to demonstrate the inalienable link only of artists and the work of art, but also of word and meaning. One can read the text as an attempt to overcome the stability of language. Huang also names the complete empty signifier kongzhu, meaning blank. See Huang Yongping (1989) p. 32. This text can also be compared with Duchamp's seminal text "Renseignements et Documents 19-26: septembre 1917" (1916).
(11) The influence of Blaue and pop art is evident. Huang Yongping "On the Question of Language in Art", manuscript. Curation from Gao Minglu (1991) p. 334. He writes: "The attitude one has towards his own soma expresses the degree of freedom the artist has obtained." He compares this attitude with that towards cut objects in Chan Buddhism. See also: Huang Yongping (1986-2).
(15) For an analysis of Huang's works of the 1990s see a description of his strategy see my "A Transcultural Roulette Game: Huang Yongping's Roulette Series and Recent Related Works", in: Chinese Art, 2000, vol. 3, issue 5.
(17) Barbara Mitter speaks of this kind of "double reflection" or "re-reflection", as she calls it, concerning contemporary Chinese music. See Mitter, Barbara (1997) p. 298.
(18) The value of Huang's post is yet to be discussed here in detail. We will call this exhibition the exhibition's December 1991: p. 1. Rautzsch, November/ December 1985: p. 43. See also Rautzsch, November/ December 1985. See also Rautzsch, November/ December 1985: p. 66.
(26) In the 1990s Huang developed new ideas on the base of western and Chinese philosophical text, Western and Chinese literature, and texts on literature and music theory. Most of these texts had been translated into Chinese in the early 1980s. His interview with Huang Yongping, Paris, December 1997.