

Experimental Writing Manifesto

Words from a Brick in the Wall
(Or, What the Dialectical Poet Tries
to Say but Fails to Say, and
What He Might Whistle or Sing)

Manifesto by Xiaolu Guo

Abstract: This is the manifesto from the end of Xiaolu Guo's novel *I Am China*. The novel is about a Chinese punk musician in exile in the west and his love-hate relationship with the state as well as his relationship with his poetess lover in China. The novel is written in an epistolary form: in the story, an English literary translator from Britain discovers the letters and diaries. The manifesto is supposed to have been written by the musician Kublai Jian, and focuses on the political nature of being an artist in this world and the possibility/impossibility of revolution. The manifesto suggests that a true artist is committed to perpetual revolution.

Keywords: manifesto, perpetual revolution, state and myth, China, art and politics, love is political

By a former member of YUAN VS DOLLARS

DREAM:

I had a dream. I dreamt I was a great nation. I was a state. My power stretched over the land and its peoples. I felt power running through my veins, and felt it strong in my heart. No part of my body could disobey me without punishment. I was China. Then I woke up.

Like Zhuang Zi dreaming of being a butterfly, I wondered: was I a man waking up from a dream of being China, or was China, awake, dreaming a man?

If it was me dreaming I was China, it's not a surprise. Like anyone, part of me wants to rule the world. To be a great state, with people like small animals beneath me, and a dread power to create and destroy.

If it was China dreaming me, that's no surprise either. China dreams me. I am just a dream in the mind of China. I am living out the myth of that great state. My thoughts and desires are not my own but are taken from China. China rules my heart, even when I try to resist.

POWER AND MYTH:

The state needs myth: it creates a mythical vision for the people to live through and live for. That is so true of China. China is a great myth-maker, and people dream the myth.

GUNS ≠ POWER:

Why does China need myth? Is it not enough that a state has guns? If there are guns, can't the guns be used to control the people? Mao said: Power flows out of the barrel of a gun. Isn't that it? Gun = power?

No. The rule of gun is not the greatest power. There are only so many bullets, and people will always resist, and if they are all shot there will be no people to grow rice, build cars, and create luxury for the rich. And anyway you need myth to control the soldiers who fire the bullets. They have to believe in their myth of being great soldiers who pull the trigger. So the state needs a myth.

With a great myth the people control themselves. China's myth used to be that of Tian Zi—the emperors. Now it's the myth of the great democratic middle-class life of consuming this and that in a sphere of commercial freedom. China dreams me. I live her myth, even if I die from it.

INVISIBLE:

I am a drop in the ocean, in an ocean I cannot see.

I am a brick in a wall that I cannot feel.

I am a citizen of a state, but of a state that is invisible.

I am a citizen of China, but China throws an invisible cloak over itself.

China is invisible. Just like the West is invisible in the Western world.

Why is China invisible?

Our leaders hid themselves after the revolution and became secret manipulators. They held up images of great leaders. They appeared in our dreams. The real state hides itself. It must, to hide how it works. If the citizens dream, they know nothing of who makes their dream.

THE INVISIBLE MYTH:

The state has a myth. The origin of myth is always invisible. It comes from nowhere, like HEAVEN. That's why it is so powerful. That way, it can look as if it was always there, like it's part of nature.

It then becomes like the ocean: we move through it, but it can never move. If you are an invisible ocean through which all things swim, you are the greatest power. No one sees you, and no one doubts. We all sleep and dream. The invisible state dreams us, and like sleepwalkers we act out the dream.

YOUTH OF TIANANMEN SQUARE:

But there can be glimpses of truth. We youth of Tiananmen Square saw it when the impossible happened. The People's Army murdered us. Suddenly, the invisible became visible to those with minds to see. (For some, even then, it was impossible. It was like it did not happen.) The blood in the streets was the colour of power.

Then, at that moment, you see. You see you are a sleepwalker.

REVOLUTION:

Revolution is impossible. That is the first fact about revolution. Nevertheless, the impossible should be exercised.

Revolution is when politics happens. The only real political act is revolutionary. There is only revolutionary politics. Otherwise, it's just the day-to-day grind of the state, the day-to-day buying and selling, and the pretending (without knowing that you are). In a democracy the people think there is politics. But there isn't any. It's just theatre.

That's why people live with the injustice of the world and do nothing.

That's why they look to their leaders and read their works.

That's why we read the words of our great helmsman, Mao.

INCONCEIVABLE:

Revolution creates something that's inconceivable.

Revolution happens when we strip off the invisibility cloak and show the emperor.

Revolution happens when the water in which the citizens swim is frozen so that it breaks and shatters, and the fish are cast out onto the dry, gasping for air.

And wake up.

REVOLUTION IN CHINA:

In China the impossible happened more than once. In '49, Mao's forces finally took control: then, the impossible happened. But soon the impossible vision faded into concrete reality and became a state.

COCK / GUITAR / ME:

I looked down at my cock, and my cock looked at my guitar, and my guitar looked to me. We all looked at each other. Who is playing whom? Who is the artist here? Each said: "I am!"

But I said: "Together, if we join forces, we can become a great artist. All we need is a great myth, like states need a myth. Then we can act, and make strong art. Art comes out of power and self-mythologizing. And the artist needs his own myth. Therefore, an artist needs to rule himself. So he doesn't become an ordinary mediocrity. He has to overcome himself. Lazy artists are not artists.

ART AND THE ART OF POLITICS:

Why is art always a political thing? What is a political thing? The political is just power exercising itself at the moment of revolution. It's when we create the impossible. That's art.

Art is the politics of perpetual revolution. Art is the purest revolution and so the purest political form there is. A great artist is a revolutionary.

PERPETUAL REVOLUTION:

The perpetual revolution is the revolution that even revolutionizes itself. Perpetual revolution is complete freedom. Art is complete freedom.

OUR DEEPEST EQUATION:

It's this: revolution = art, and art = perfect freedom. Right now, we have no perfect self-revolution, no real art, and no freedom. These are dark times. And I have never created art. I have fought to make it. But I always knew what I was doing.

IMPERFECTION AND LOVE:

What does the Realist say to this? You, my Realist, say this: "I am a Realist, and what you say is unrealistic. It is of no interest since it is unreal and unrealizable. I can only feel and respond to what is around me. And love, which must be there in the end, comes with this." You, my friend, want us always to live in the world of everyday imperfection and appearance, of compromises and small steps. Yes, you do. And your talk of "love." You speak as if there is no love in me. But that is not true. Our love is the hardest, that's all. And often it just doesn't look like love. It looks like a battle.

YOUR ANSWER:

Your answer is that love only lives in the work of imperfection. That's the world of failure, of breaking up, of ending nowhere, of compromise, of making do, of never getting there, of falling short, of incompleteness. You don't think we can live in the place of perfect revolution. My answer to you is that I agree, to some extent. There is no PLACE of perfect revolution since it's not a place. It's a process. It's not something we arrive at, but an imperative. It's an arrow. It always moves beyond itself.

BREAK THE SPELL:

I am China. We are China. You are China. The people. Not the state.

End of Manifesto