

Dear Sha Li:

Every time you asked me on WeChat if there was anything else that I wanted to say about the lockdown experience, a sense of self-blame frustrated me. I blame myself mainly for my procrastination. I realize that since the pandemic, the unpleasant syndrome of procrastination has increasingly become an inevitable presence in my work. It always makes me imagine that within ten years or even a few decades, when young people ask me what I did during this particular period, I can only reluctantly reply to them that I was attempting to re-collect my thoughts, but it doesn't seem to have worked very well...; Another aspect of my self-condemnation is that I have become aware of how quickly had I forgot all those particular details during this period of time. Had it not been for this invitation, many of the experiences of the year might have been lost in the minutiae of living and working without a reason to conjure them up.

I remember that after I first came across the website of Lockdown Post

(<https://www.lockdownpost.org>), I was haunted by a question: In comparison with the public media, self-media, writers and philosophers who produced extensive texts and images during the pandemic peak, should the artists' social observation and public sharing revolve around the crisis of contemporary art, or should it address the context of the social event at large so that we artists could forget for a moment the specificity of our circumstances? While art workers wholeheartedly aspire to a vibrant, ideal society, to physical and spiritual liberation, to disengage from old customs and dominant mentality by all means, when confronted with such an overarching catastrophe, they too, are bound to develop some sort of social ethics - as their expressions stem from specific urban and community situations.

Artists, indeed, are generally ranked last among all social groups in terms of risk resilience, not to mention being in the face of a global pandemic that has permeated every corner of the world. The mishaps and misfortunes that ordinary people may encounter in their lives are likely to trigger a sudden collapse or shattering of pride, imagination, and way of living when they happen to an artist who particularly believes in the value of individual existence. Perhaps, what art workers are most eager to express to the public is precisely their unbearable pain.

We like to believe that some things are already history. But the past could easily return to us and take over our perception of the future. For example, since the pandemic I have taken several political compass tests online and have recognized a disturbing pattern in the results: my identification with socialism turned out to be much less than I had expected. While it makes sense to me in so far as acknowledging an emotional backlash against China's unimpeded authoritarian control measures during the pandemic, as well as against the country's renewed diplomatic isolation, I still worry about whether my social perception is about to return to its pre-2008 state.

Perhaps because of this troubling feeling of chaos at the height of the pandemic, I have started to categorize all the reading materials I have at hand in a way that I have never done before - properly, according to subject classification. I intend to sort out the sources of knowledge and ideas, beyond the field of contemporary art, to which I have been partial. I also wonder which of the things that plague our perception of life have already been explained thoroughly by different subjects of social sciences - for example, humanist sociology, cultural psychology, and media communication - and which ones have not? Perhaps, I have to first confront my own ignorance to comprehend the following questions: Do the counter-globalization movement and the prevalent discourse of the far-right in China share, to a certain extent, a social reality? Could the intensified confrontation and conflict over people's social and political visions today still be mitigated by measures of economic distribution? And finally, do the companies involved in developing China's network infrastructure, beyond concerting with geopolitics and tapping into the consumption potential of citizens, still, possess some kind of technological ideal towards the improvement of families and urban lives?

In terms of myself, over the past year or so, I have been spending considerably more time with my family. But I can't really tell whether I've been going out less because of my new job at a university and my father's illness, or whether the multiple waves of the pandemic have made me subconsciously risk-averse about traveling. Working from home has revealed to me a number of emerging daily routines that are worth scrutinizing. For instance, the popularity of hardware products in tandem with the marketing of the concept "home-office"; how online grocery shopping has made people used to misperceiving scale and weight units; realizing it is always harder to take in knowledge firmly when attending online lectures; the fact that instead of experiencing massive disruptions as expected, the VPNs have become more stable and efficient; the generally vague and chaotic ideological character of our society is perhaps isomorphic to the increasing clarity of personal data; COVID-19 has exposed too early to the public the ongoing deployment of social regulatory measures through big data, while, on the other side of the story, blockchain and cryptocurrencies have made digital art creation a financial means for practicing de-regulation (I imagine that owning digital works created by digital media artists might be a realistic impetus for some to achieve physical freedom); and it seems that the young Chinese who have had to get used to self-preservation are set to become more identified with fatalism in the 21st century.

Despite the distressing situations, I hope to anticipate that a singular world would become more widely acknowledged. This past year that witnessed the race of anti-epidemic achievement and vaccination progress among all nations, the common experience of isolation and post-traumatic stress disorder, as well as the attempts at digital survival and the humanist concerns that it has generated, has for the first time provided members of societies around the world with a physical, historical experience of a "a common world". Hopefully, in the future, humans could put aside their suspicions and paranoia so that they could relate to the hidden sufferings of each other. The unbearable times of the present, in this sense, might become the anchor point for

recalibrating our world.

All the best,

Liu Xinyi

--Translated by Dakota Guo