Self as Archive

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Subjective Thinker
in Everyday Life

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Abstract

In this thesis, my starting question is how can I performatively reflect lived experiences that are anchored in everyday life? I first explore the connection between subjectivity, self-care, and truth by appropriating notions from Kierkegaard and Foucault. I would like to be an embodied subjective thinker as exercising of higher order care. I propose to turn inward to comb through all the threads of personal experiences and make sense of them as a method of self-care (self-formation). For this purpose, I regard the self as an archive that stores all the past experiences that are chaotic and twisted together, waiting to be untied and reviewed. I name Aby Warburg, Tehching Hsieh, On Kawara and Song Dong as examples to illustrate how artists exhibit their personal/subjective contents in an archival way, followed by two ways for me to do self-archiving and the general process for my practices.

As I continue, I find that I have to face or address interpersonal relationships and the puzzlements accompanying those relationships. In other words, I have to deal with power relations. And in the process of making, I discover that the majority of my works are based on the idea of futile resistance – I have to accept the situation passively, but I still need to do something. I find two other alliances, Li Liao and Pilvi Takala, who are exactly the artistic embodiment of what Michel de Certeau calls a tactic. If nothing will change outside, why not change from the inside? Thinking from the self, embodying inquiries, performing critique. In my graduation project, I want to question the relationship between the individual and the institution. If there seem to be only negative trends and, at the same time, you cannot be too radical, what else can you do then?

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"All I wanted was to try and realize whatever was in me. Why was that

so difficult?" – (Hesse, 2017, p. 77)

To Start with Questions

In the first couple of months of Covid-19 pandemic, I was so overwhelmed by the negative news and rumors that were circulating on the internet both physically and psychologically that I felt the need to retreat from social media and from my not-always-working phone. Getting tired of overwhelmingly grand narratives and abstract slogans in both political and artistic scene in China, I set my feet on the ground of my everyday experiences. Committing to the everydayness is my way of investigating and questioning the routine while remaining sensitive and aware of what is happening around me. As artist and filmmaker Stephen Johnstone (2008, p. 13) argues that this commitment has a profoundly political manifesto, to notice the voice of the private lives is the first step to change everyday life irreversibly.

I started to meditate and read about astrology. I began to care about my immediate surroundings and turning inward to have deep and long conversation with myself. Then I realized that it is the unpredictability and uncertainty of life that fascinates me, and what happened in the everyday triggers me to think about my life and my practice at large. Endless questions and confusions hit me again and again like ocean waves pounding on the shore. The one that bothered me the most is literally what is the purpose of my life? Every now and then I would fall into an existential crisis and I assume it is because I am not doing what I was born to do and I am not who I was born to be.

Shaping and producing experiences situationally and relationally has become increasingly an indispensable part of artwork's concept since the 1960s (von Hantelmann, 2014). The notion of the performative in relation to art actually takes into the discourse the conditional and evasive impact that art generates both in a specific space/context and in relation to the public. What needs to be noticed is that the focus once was on the artist or the object now shifts to the viewer's aesthetic and non-aesthetic experience. These redirections trigger me to think:
how can I integrate my experiences into my practice so as to encourage others to recall and reflect on their own experiences in a creative way?
If I want to set myself as an example for others, then first, I need to figure out:
how can I performatively reflect lived experiences that are anchored in everyday life?
And why is making sense of personal experiences important?
If it is important, how to comb through all the threads of personal experiences and make sense of them as a method of self-care (self-formation)?

During the making/researching process, am I reclaiming/redefining my subjectivity?

I will start with the connection between subjectivity, self-care and truth.

Truth from Subjectivity

In his 1989's essay, Edward F. Mooney elaborates on Kierkegaard's account of subjectivity. Although for Kierkegaard, subjectivity is preeminently the key to Christian faith, we can still learn from his take on subjectivity and the self. Mooney proposes that for Kierkegaard, "Becoming Subjective" or cultivating "Inwardness" is becoming a self, exercising capability for higher-order care, which will entail "Double-Reflection". A first-order reflection is merely a passive gathered data or facts. But if we want to attain the sort of selfhood, Kierkegaard recommends that we must enact a second, "subjective" reflection. When the issue is about sustaining our integrities, the predominant concern then is the subjective one — how we see the objective world and how do we place ourselves in it. Self-formation, as Mooney (1989, p. 384) noted, is "an ongoing series of second-order reflective commitments or cares that shape a character or identity". With his claim that "Truth Is Subjectivity" Kierkegaard suggests that subjectivity is the truth, the ultimate fulfilment, the aim or essence of us human beings. In order to be true to "what we are and should become, we must live lives of reflective self-responsible agency", even if the path of subjectivity will be "a difficult venture full of suffering, dissonance, and disappointment" (Mooney, 1989, p. 386).

Twenty-five years later, Adam Welstead examines Kierkegaard's movement inward towards the subjectivity as a remedy for the malaise of the contemporary age. What's interesting to me is that Adam went deep into the notion of 'subjective thinker' as opposed to the 'abstract thinker'. The subjective thinker approaches philosophy in a concrete way in which he must face the problem of existence – thinking and existing cannot be separated. In *Postscript*, the pseudonymous Johannes Climacus sees the subjective thinker as an artist rather than a man of science, who is "aesthetic enough to give his life aesthetic content, ethical enough to regulate it, and dialectical enough to interpenetrate it with thought" (Kierkegaard, 1992, p. 314). If for Kierkegaard thinking and existing is inseparable, I would say it is the same for me with art (thinking) and life (existing), just as Fluxus believes that "the separation of art and life was a false notion, and artistic production could become a way of life, as life could become a means of artistic production" (Waxman, 2017, p. 211). Thus, I would like to be an embodied subjective thinker by archiving my lived experiences and transferring them into artworks as exercising of higher order care. The work has to touch me before it can touch others. I can feel the genuineness as if it is growing out of the soil, rather than something that seems elegant or exquisite at first sight, but somehow is

floating in the air. Therefore, there is no need to decorate the work with big fancy words to make it more complex to confuse people.

To align with Kierkegaard, I believe truth comes from subjectivity, especially we've already lived in the era of post-truth, or actually, as Vasyl Cherepanyn (head of Visual Culture Research Center, Kyiv) put it, "we are currently living in a pre-truth world – a world in which the truth has not arrived yet" (Mors et al., 2018, p. 74). It seems like we can only believe in ourselves. When living under an imposed ideology and when the streets are full of abstract and implicit political propaganda, it is too easy to forget and to be numb about every detail that is too nuanced to be remembered. However, it is those specific moments and feelings that will help to reaffirm our subjectivities and to protect us from becoming lost and depressed. The search for subjectivity politically and philosophically is extremely urgent in the time being, considering not long ago, the world just witnessed widespread A4 Revolution and multiple outbursts of protests in mainland China, which were the urging pursuit for truth and political subjectivity by those courageous/disobedient Chinese people, with whom I would like to identify. And the simplest way for me to subjectivity is to stay true to myself. I must be true to myself as I am the first audience of my work which is the outcome of countless conversations with myself when I am alone in a space where I feel comfortable and safe. In these conversations I don't need to put on a social mask to perform in the public, which means it is the only time that I can be totally true to myself. And I am quite bad at telling a lie, so I must be honest; otherwise, I would get hurt.

"For he who creates must be a world of his own and find everything within himself and in the natural world that he has elected to follow.

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I think everything has been emphasized as it should be; and all I wanted to do in the end was advise you to go through your development quietly and seriously; you cannot disrupt it more than by looking outwards and expecting answers from without to questions that only your innermost instinct in your quietest moments will perhaps be able to answer." – Rilke (2011, pp. 19, 20)

Turning Inward for Self-Care

In order to be true to myself, I have decided to turn inward to take care of myself. It seems to me that in our fast-paced and screen-based world, with the pursuit of faster better, more efficient and productive lifestyles, people are too busy to slow down to think about themselves. For many, it may be time-consuming, difficult or even painful to look inside, when there is so much to take in from the outside. However, for Foucault and ancient Greeks, it was counterproductive not focusing on the self, for it is a vital point for individual freedom, positive relationships with others, and, potentially, ethical participation in politics. Take care of yourself, self-knowledge and self-understanding would follow, and alter in tune with new discovery and experience.

I started to turn to my hair – drawing my lost hair after shower. I turned to my teeth – filming 'close mouth exercise' that my doctor suggested to help with my occlusion disorder. I turned to my eyes – cutting onions to moisturize them after hours of screen time. I turned to my hands – zooming in and out objects through transparent surfaces with my magic finger. I turned to my feet – measuring space, one step at a time. I confessed 25 things that are hard for me, in the hope of acknowledging my own limitations and finiteness. When I continued to proceed, I found that I had to face or address interpersonal relationships and the puzzlements accompanying those relationships.

An individual must first explore how they situate in the power relations and how they may change that relationship in order to maintain freedom from internal or external states of domination (Batters, 2011, p. 9). This self-awareness – concern with the self and care of the self – is essential for individual freedom. When Foucault talks about relations of power, he doesn't mean a fixed political structure, such as a government, a dominant social class, and so on. Rather, his focus is on a whole range of power relationship that may come into play among individuals, within families, in pedagogical relationships, political life, and so on. Even if power is everywhere, this does not mean that we are not free, according to Foucault (1994):

> In order for power relations to come into play, there must be at least a certain degree of freedom on both sides. Even when the power relation is completely out of balance, when it can truly be claimed that one side has 'total power' over the other, a power can be exercised over the other only insofar as the other still has the option of killing himself, of leaping out the window, or of

killing the other person. (p. 292)

This also implies that there is necessarily the possibility of resistance in power relations, because if there were no possibility of resistance, there would be no power relations at all. Now the problem is where resistance will develop and what form it will take. I will come back to this in the following paragraphs.

Self as Archive

Inspired by Chinese anthropologist Biao Xiang and his book *Self as Method*, which encompasses three extensive interviews between him and a young journalist, Qi Wu, in which they discuss Xiang's life as a child and a student, as well as his experiences as a researcher and his reflections about how to think about China, the world, globalization, and many other issues. Xiang sets himself as an excellent example of how to think for oneself and through one's own experiences in making sense of the contradictions around them. In this book, he encourages young Chinese people to take an interest in the small world they live in and consciously tell the story of their lives in their own words, without the need to analyse it, just describe it.

As a researcher and anthropologist, it is natural for Xiang to write down his research and fieldwork as his main practice. On the contrary, I am more inclined to think and to express visually, and I do consider some of my works as visual diaries. Making work is my way of doing research, and the urge to make something usually comes from questions that are transformed from real-life experiences. If we can only talk about something we already know, I believe I could only know and tell after I experienced it. To experience something is to grow with it; it is a process of knowing from the inside. Hereby, I would like to regard the self as an archive that stores all the past experiences that are chaotic and twisted together, waiting to be untied and reviewed.

Why do I use 'self as archive' instead of 'personal history'?

First, let's look at history. History is a discipline in which historians seek knowledge of the past by using narrative to describe, examine, question and analyse past events, while investigating the reasons and results of such events. It is an official narrative based on the materials (texts, objects) that have already been collected and stored in certain archive. In this process, however, other stories or anecdotes are excluded from the written history. Where can people find those ignored and unheard voices? What if people start to write their own history? This is where personal history comes into play. It is usually the history of a person, family or community. It is a process of looking back, tracing past events. For me, it's not my intention to learn from my lived experience, nor do I want to know the cause and effect of certain events, and my works are not about narrative. Instead, I always need to experience things first. If something happens that triggers my

certain feelings, I would reflect on it and try to transfer that specific feeling or event into a work.

As for archive, it is more about the accumulation of historical records or materials that are normally unpublished and almost always unique. People who engaged in personal archive consider all media/materials to be relevant sources as long as they relate to the life, memories and experiences of that person. Such an archive may not need to be published, or may never be published. Instead, it is formed for people to re-live those moments/fragments of their life personally. Meanwhile, it also has the potential to become a valuable source of historical and cultural record (*Personal Archiving*, 2022).

The Aesthetics of Archive

In order to form an archive, time is needed for collecting and accumulating things. The exhibiting of archive, or the archive-like exhibition is often about how to categorise what are in the archive following or forming certain sequences. Early in the 1920s, the Hamburg-based art and cultural scholar Aby Warburg (1866-1929) created his *Bilderatlas Mnemosyne* to provide a pictorial representation of the influences of the ancient world in the Renaissance and beyond. With this project, Warburg created a visual reference system that was far ahead of its time (Welt, 2020), and was fundamental to modern disciplines of visual and media studies. However, it now seems a bit outdated and too objective/dry for me. I will instead tell about how artists exhibit their personal/subjective contents (or moments of their life) in an archival way in the following part.

When I think of archive, images and texts are the two main elements that first come into my head. Since its invention, photography has been seen as an objective mechanism to record reality. There has always been an urge for people to document, and when it comes to the realm of Performance Art, in its early era, photography went with it hand in hand. Now, when we look at those photos again, it is hard to tell if they are documentations of the performances or if the photos themselves are indeed the performances. Tehching Hsieh (1950) is one of the performance artists who made huge amounts of photographs, statements, and posters as evidence of his performances. In his *Time Clock Piece*, he shaved his hair and photographing himself punched into a time-clock card every hour for one year on a 16mm film. I once encountered this piece at BAK in Utrecht, where the film was projected on the wall. There was no sound; images were fast flashing, his hair gradually growing, and his face expressionless. Japanese conceptual artist On Kawara (1933–2014) meticulously finds ways to mark time since his date paintings (the *Today* series) from 1966. Days after days, years after years, he kept records of all the details of his everyday life. He sent telegrams and postcards to his friends to tell them at what time and place he got up, and that he was still alive. The presentation of the very personal and subjective contents is neutral in the way that his works are displayed as mere data or information.

Inspired by both their approach and attitude to their life while reflecting on my relationship with my parents, I started taking pictures of myself holding a piece of paper with the word '平安SAFE' on it and sending them to my family group

chat since Christmas 2022. Besides taking photos mostly by myself, sometimes I asked friends for help; I also took screenshots of our chat as evidence. I appropriated the style of administrative forms and made my version of safety reports that require me to filled in the date of the report, the number of the report, the location and who did the report. I also signed my name on each of them to make them legally authentic. It's never too much when your safety is your parents' highest concern. And a good daughter should always report her safety. After filling all the forms, I sorted them by month to make them easier to examine. I then present what supposed to be warm-hearted conversations in a family group chat in a cold-hard office style. I was constantly thinking of Tehching Hsieh's film when looking at the photos I made, as I was trying to figure out how to present the one-year passing time. Certainly, I could not just display all my photos like a slideshow because I was also thinking how to make them performative. Then I realized I could maybe do it by adding sound. Thus, the video starts with my mom's voice message asking me to be careful and stay safe, then I respond to her with all the photos I took throughout the year accompanied by a monotonous sound piece resembling war-drum, and with me keep saying or rapping 'I AM SAFE' to emphasis to her that 'I AM SAFE' although in a provocative attitude. And the video is another kind of report – my oral report (or 'rap-port').

Coincidently, Chinese artist Song Dong (1966) also implicitly discussed Chinese family relationships in his work *Waste Not*, which displays over 10,000 domestic objects formerly owned by his late mother who "had suffered poverty during China's turmoils in the 1950s and 1960s and had acquired a habit of thrift and re-use that led her to store domestic objects of all kinds in her tiny house in Beijing" (*Waste Not*, 2019). This installation is a perfect example of self-archiving in my point of view. Those objects are not only traces of his mother's memories, but also evidence of a particular culture and history.

How to do self-archiving

There are two ways for me to create archive. The first is active archiving, which usually starts at the beginning of one project. For example, in *Safety Report* (2021-2023) I am archiving certain moments of myself every day for one year, collecting and accumulating screenshots, making and filling report forms. Active self-archiving could also happen when I am involved in something, and I suddenly sense the potentiality of making this thing/event into a work. Then, I would collect relevant stuff related to that particular situation. In my graduation project, I collected all the emails exchanged between myself, school and two Dutch embassies in China. At that time, I could tell that something was a bit off, and I knew I would do something with those emails in the future.

On the other hand, I believe we are archiving unconsciously in our daily lives. Every photo we take with our phone, every website we visit, every book we read... all contribute to passive archiving. In this kind of archive, things may not speak to you at that certain moment, but someday when you are in the middle of something else, previous events/experiences may jump into your head, and they somehow become alive waiting for you to say hi to them. In other words, passive archiving needs to be activated by certain triggers. One example of this type is my previous work

Close Mouth Exercise (2021). After I started my second orthodontic treatment due to occlusion disorder, I collected every clear aligner that had been used. Because in my eyes, they equal the money I spent on the treatment, so of course, I could not get rid of them easily. As the treatment proceeded, I found that sometimes I could not fully close my mouth during sleep and would unconsciously drool on my pillow. My doctor suggested me to do what she called 'close mouth exercise' 200 times every day, so I follow her instructions and do every one hundred morning and evening. Since I had to come to the Netherlands for my study, she also asked me to film a video every three months and send it to her, so she could supervise the condition of my teeth. In the winter of 2021, while studying about Vito Acconci, I came across one of his videos called *Open Book* (1974). It is a close-up shot of his open mouth as he attempts to speak to the viewer. I was caught by a bizarre and eerie feeling while watching it. Plus, I am very addicted to close-up shots, so I could not be more excited to film my close mouth exercise in such a setting. The close-up shots of a repetitive action put my mouth under an intensive inspection, which

magnifies the strange feeling that I have when my treatment, in fact, brings me new problems.

General Processing

Daily routine is the essential fuel for generating ideas that would hit me during unproductive time – when I am taking showers, lying in bed, reading, walking, etc. Then, a safe space is needed for self-care – having a dialogue with myself, mediating between the past and the present, unravelling the knot in my mind, and letting myself flow into the ocean of unconsciousness. I don't seek solutions here. What's important to me is the immersive process and embracing whatever comes after it. For me, ideas matter more than material. Ideas or questions come first, followed by the need to find proper materials and approaches to realise them.

Normally, after I have written down my ideas, I would execute the ones that don't require further thinking or the ones that can be done much more easily. At this stage, the task is to find the right materials to actually make them. The media I choose do not require difficult skills or complex technologies, such as lens-based mediums, found objects and texts. All of which carry with them the quality of simplicity and directness. Most of my works are repetitions of small gestures/simple actions. Through repetition, simple actions and small gestures can turn into something strong and powerful. I guess that is how we feel when we see Sisyphus keep rolling the stone up the hill.

Before I started to make the work, I had certain anticipations, for instance, how the work should look like and what effect I want to create. It is in the making process with trials and errors, plus sharing with my peers and tutors that helps me to adjust my plan with a clearer idea, and sometimes I would get unexpected results out of it. Because one can never know beforehand what will happen during the making process, just like one cannot predict what will happen in their daily life, both are about how to respond to unknown situations.

While our life is being mediated, so is my practice. In my practice, I use the camera to help me enact double reflection, for it firstly functions as a mediator between me and happenings, and secondly, it allows me to check if something was wrong during the filming/performing process, then I can know what to do next. I couldn't know and proceed if I didn't actually make it. Thereby, the making process is experiential and

educational for me to rethink and rearrange my projects. At this point, the project is semi-finished. The computer is the digital storage place for self-archiving, and meanwhile, an instrument for re-creation. Because I am working mostly with lens-based medium, post-production on the computer is inseparable from the making process. It is also a reflective process in which I revisit the videos/photos/sounds that were made/found, edit them based on the thinking of how I want to exhibit them. In addition to post-production, my recent practices also involve elements from design as I want my works to get as close as possible to life, and design is omnipresent in our virtual and actual surroundings. Additionally, in my graduation project, I am using AI tools to help me brainstorm, gather information for research, and generate speech from text at a later stage. Those media help me drifting back and forth between real-life experiences and speculative alternatives, which makes visible the absurdity in life without twisting it too much so that it will not end up becoming an ungrounded utopian.

"The experimental artist today is the un-artist. Not the antiartist but the artist emptied of art. The un-artist, as the name implies, started out conventionally, as a modernist, but at a certain point around the fifties began divesting her or his work of nearly every feature that could remind anyone of art at all. The un-artist makes no real art but does what I've called lifelike art, art that reminds us mainly of the rest of our lives." – (Kaprow, 2003, p. 227)

Artistic Alliances

Even though Kaprow spoke about the un-artist in the 80s, his idea still echoes in my head, which has somehow enlightened my journey in the artworld. Here, I would like to share two artists who create artworks based on their own living experiences while addressing/critiquing social/political issues in a simple, direct way, and sometimes with a sense of humour.

In *Art is Vacuum* (2013), Chinese artist Li Liao (1982) turned an argument with his now father-in-law into a video that questions the value of Li as an artist in which the father commented "You're living in [a] vacuum." Alongside the video, Li showed a torn sweater and a broken remote control. At the time, he was nominated in HUGO BOSS Asia Art Award and received a production budget of 40,000 RMB (around 6,000 Euros). Li then gave all the budget to his girlfriend's father to ease the father's unhappiness about having an artist for a future son-in-law. Six months after that, his daughter was born, and Li transferred the patriarchal cycle from "Li Liao vs. father-in-law" to "Li Liao vs. his daughter". He taught his daughter to say "Art is vacuum" in Chinese as the first line that came out of her mouth. One year before this work, he had just finished his most prominently featured work, *Consumption* (2012), in which the artist took a job making Apple iPads at the Foxconn factory in Shenzhen, then quit his job once he had earned enough money to buy the product he was involved in assembling. The installation displayed his work uniform, contract and ID card, as well as the finished iPad bought with his wages. Li admits that, "[he] doesn't read or follow art news that much, but that most of [his] information comes from life experiences, and as it relates to art, his insights come from those around [him]" (Arthub Asia, 2016). His works are often semi-autobiographical with an ironic and playful approach to revealing the absurdity in daily life. When he decided to investigate middle-class lifestyle, he set out to embrace it with the belief that if you look like them, then you will eventually become one of them. After observing the general sign of this class, he chose to exercise and learn English, doing these two things every day for one year while strictly following his wife's work hours, getting up at nine and going to bed at nine, in order *To Be A Better Man* (2019).

While in most of Li Liao's video work, there's almost no interaction with other people, he is the single protagonist enacting every simple action normally without dialogues; Finnish artist Pilvi Takala (1981) is always working with, or creating dialogues with strangers and put herself into the crowds, intervening from the

inside. In her work *Broad Sense* (2011), which was awarded first prize at Prix de Rome Visual Arts 2011 (NL), Takala inserted herself into the European Parliament in Brussels. She first sent emails to the office of each member state regarding the dress code in the European Parliament. The varying responses were then printed on nineteen T-shirts that she wore inside the Parliament over the course of three days, where she repeatedly tried to pass the security check at the entrance, attending different hearings, visiting bars and restaurants, roaming around in the building. Her appearances in different parts of the building, along with the varying responses from guards and receptionists, reveal the confusing security protocol and limited rights of accredited visitors within the Parliament. (Holert, 2020, p. 217)

For both Li Liao and Pilvi Takala, doing nothing is the most effective way to question the constructed norms and rules in office culture and capitalism. Li Liao once asked someone who worked in an office building to lock him outside of the building and unlock him until the person was off duty. His outsider's approach draws a precise picture of the mental suffering experienced by many Chinese employees. Introduced as a new trainee, Pilvi Takala enters the marketing department at the Finnish headquarters of Deloitte (an international accounting and consulting firm) for a month. We see her doing almost nothing (or, as she replies to her co-workers, "just doing some brain work"), sitting in the open-plan office space, or in the tax department library. In one video, she is riding up and down in the elevator without any purpose or destination. The absence of action and being seemingly unproductive gradually becomes problematic and even intolerable for other employees, as some of them request their superior to remove her from the office space (Johnsen et al., 2018, p. 419). By doing something that does not follow the rules of certain places, Takala smartly finds the crack of such a system and intervenes artistically from the inside, thus forcing those rules to become visible.

I am fascinated by and, at the same time, feeling that the way they situate themselves and operate in different situations is how exactly I want to approach my work – experience first, create later. When introducing themselves into a new arena, there is a gap that opens up for them, allowing them to operate in it artistically and strategically with their fresh eyes, without too many rules and limitations. This is exactly the artistic embodiment of what Michel de Certeau calls a tactic.

Tactic: Futile Resistance

A tactic is an art of the weak, it is the space of the other. (Certeau, 1988) It offers a trick in the space imposed on it by introducing many different ways of operating within the visible field of power. It is subtle, ready for every opportunity, making use of cracks, fragments and lucky hits in the framework of a system. Time is its comrade. If it utilises the time cleverly, it can change the organization of a space, find the possible intersections of durations and heterogeneous rhythms, transform the circumstances into a favourable situation under the precise instant of an intervention, etc. As an Asian female living alone in the Europe, I am the weak, the other. I would never be recognised as "us" by the locals. Now I am living in-between two different ideologies, how do/can I position myself between them, since it's hard for me to take side. Maybe this in-betweenness opens up a tiny crack for me to step aside, detach myself from the familiar and the not-yet familiar world, reflect upon my past experiences while trying to find an anchor point for all the fleeting thoughts and questions that would be easily forgotten, which somehow provide me time and space to reclaim or redefine my subjectivity.

The majority of my works are based on the idea of futile resistance, whether it is the futile resistance against screen-based fast-paced lifestyle, traditional Eastern family relationship, bureaucratic government, and such. Why are they futile? And if they are futile resistances why did I make them?

I call them futile resistance because I didn't do anything like protest or demonstrate to resist whatever I want to resist. In fact, I had to accept the situation passively. Because I and people who live in China really can not do anything to change the macro environment, and when I talked with my friends, we all felt helpless and pessimistic about the social-political status quo. Even so, I still need to do something, which is better than doing nothing, even if doing something may lead to nothing, but still I have to do something (and there is a Chinese phrase "不做白不做，做了也白做，白做也得做" to describe such paradox), because "The first act of politics is simply to act" (Duncombe, 2002, p. 7). Therefore, by creating works I express my discontent with certain situations, which in turn also serves

as my futile resistance. This resonates with Duncombe's pessimistic view about culture resistance as an escape valve from politics and a way to release dissatisfaction that might be expressed alternatively through political activity, in such a way it somewhat creates a safe sanctuary, within which "problems are resolved magically, but outside nothing changes at all" (Duncombe, 2002, p. 6). If there seem to be only negative trends and, at the same time, you cannot be too radical, then perhaps you just need to go on; but maybe you can still try to use satire and humour as a tactic for your futile resistance. If nothing will change outside, why not change from the inside? Artists Li Liao and Pilvi Takala have already set perfect examples for us – thinking from the self, embodying inquiries, performing critique. What is more, is that they set examples for a turn to the social from the personal, and they testified that instead of setting a clear division of one or the other, the personal and the social can be intertwined perfectly – the social can be tackled from the personal, the personal can entail the social; which may illuminate the route for my future practice. When encountering artworks like theirs that are mediated by a camera, even if they are just documentations of what has happened, I find it hard to tell if they are fictional or they are real. Yet this kind of crossing/blurring boundary between factual and fictional somehow is also manifested in my work.

To End Is Heading Towards A New Beginning...

Now, I seem to understand why people are crazy about superhero movies from Marvel and DC. Because in their fictional universe, the world still can be saved by someone who has superpower. But such a thing would never happen in reality.

Reality is always disappointing.

Coming all the way from taking care of myself to questioning my family relationship, now I want to investigate the relationship between the individual and institutions – why do individuals have to bear the consequences of institutional misconduct? Returning back to my graduation project, as mentioned above, I had collected emails and left them untouched for more than a year. Learning from Pilvi Takala, I decided to take every chance and submitted my complaint to the IND (Immigration and Naturalisation Service). One of their employees asked me to make a phone call to her, I could not miss the chance to record our conversation. But, I knew from our conversation, this time I would be disappointed once again. Two weeks after our phone call, I received their letter stating that my case took place more than one year, therefore, the IND is not obliged to handle it. Another door has been closed. With the hope to use the recording in my graduation project, I wrote to ask for the employee's permission. Permission denied. Everywhere I went there's a "no" waiting for me. I am not Wonder Woman. What can I do then when my resistance finally becomes futile? I feel the need to think otherwise, using satire and humour as my tactical critique. Instead of thinking from my perspective, I decide to think otherwise, from the perspective of a bureaucratic institution: how to avoid taking responsibility and deny misconduct. Thus, I turn myself into a fictional academy – Avoidance Academy.

Starting from the personal, I hope to make visible social-political issues that I have experienced in a performative way. Making sense of my everyday experiences is my way to subjectivity. In the process of turning inward to comb through all the threads of personal experiences, which is my method for the care

of the self, I propose to regard the self as archive. Both active and passive archiving are contributing to my practices, which are mostly repetitions of small gestures or simple actions. Through making, I have gradually realised that my practice is linked to what Micheal de Certeau calls a tactic, which I have named as futile resistance based on my feeling and real-life context. During the process, I am trying to reclaim/reaffirm my subjectivity by staying true to myself. As life is in constant flux, so are my practices. After completing this master program, I hope to embark on socially-engaged and participatory art as a new beginning for my practice.

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