

Buried

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Alive

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PREFACE

November 12, 2012. Afternoon. Heavy rain. Rain tapped on the somewhat grayish window panes. A middle-aged man with a top hat, and dressed in dark gray raincoat, dashed into my firm, which was located on the fifteenth floor of a building on Jiangsu Road. He presented himself as an artist and told me his name was Qian Liuxiang. I looked at him, feeling as if I had encountered some virtual reality: a KGB agent, out of some old movie from the remote past that had fallen into oblivion, had suddenly landed in the present, right in front of me; and he looked exceptionally vivid and real as if he had been re-digitized.

I understood that usually under such a scenario something was about to happen. I waited, silently. As expected, he leisurely took off his top hat and his raincoat, and put it on a hanger, smiling and walking towards me, quite slowly. He sat down in front of me, and gave me a resume. It seemed that he was here to apply for a job.

I took a glance at the resume: "I wonder..."

"You are not fast enough, Mr. Lu."

He took out from his pocket a black and white butterfly, and put it on my desk. I stared at the butterfly, wondering. My heartbeat quickened. It looked so real. It took a closer look to realize that it was a beautifully crafted reproduction. It was made of composite materials and was good quality. In its front part, rear part and lower abdomen there were several pinhole cameras of sophisticated design. It was a mini-drone.

"Are you spying on me?"

"I heard your conversation with Fu Zhou and knew you would do some investigation for him. I was a bit curious. So I decided to pay you a visit."

I guessed correctly, which made me more uneasy. It was extremely bizarre:

Fu Zhou had asked me to do some investigation, but now it seemed the answer had come to me even before I had started my investigation. I couldn't help feeling that I was trapped in some kind of virtual reality and there was no way to get out of it.

"So you are spying on Mr. Fu Zhou?"

Qian Liuxiang's smile disappeared. He nodded: "Yes, I'm spying on Fu Zhou. Mr. Lu, you don't need to carry out any investigation. I've been spying on Fu Zhou for ten years."

I was astonished: "Ten Years? How is that possible?"

"To be precise, it's a bit more than ten years, Mr. Lu. In total it's been 3,785 days."

"Why do you do that? Do you work for the government?"

"No. I only work for myself." He looked around, taking a good look at my humble firm.

I was a bit indignant. "This is outrageous! It's a crime! Are you aware of that?"

Qian Liuxiang turned around, wearing the expression indicating that he pitied me deeply: "I understand your feelings, Mr. Lu. Take it easy. Listen to me. Fu Zhou is merely one of the nineteen. I spy on nineteen people in total. I have been spying them for ten years."

Wow. I was stunned, speechless.

"I'm working on an artwork." I heard Qian Liuxiang explaining in a detached and objective tone.

"An artwork?"

"A contemporary artwork entitled *Buried Alive*."

"Contemporary artwork? I don't quite get it."

"I know, Mr. Lu. Many people don't get it. So I'm almost ready to give it up."

I looked carefully at his no-longer-young face. All of a sudden, I detected danger. "Excuse me. What did you mean by giving it up?"

"Mr. Lu, I just finishing reading your book *Collected Works on Violence*. The book was a typical example of the School of Written Words. It was beautifully written and very interesting. Hence I want to give you a chance to give Fu Zhou a heads up, telling him that I will..." He threw a quick glance at his watch, and continued: "post online all the video clips collected during the ten years that I've been spying on him in about eight hours, which would be 12 o'clock in the evening. That is to say, from tomorrow on people all over the world could have access to watching his life in the past ten years, day by day, just like watching a movie. Every little bit of his privacy will be exposed to broad daylight."

OMG. I gasped and my mind went blank.

It took me two seconds to manage to form a response: "You should definitely

not do that! Definitely not! By no means should you release those video clips!"

"I come here to give you notice, Mr. Lu, not to negotiate. I've already made up my mind."

He was right about that. I quickly calmed myself down. I knew I could not stop him. However, as a friend of Fu Zhou, I couldn't just do nothing under such critical circumstances. I must do all I could to prevent Fu Zhou from being hurt. I put on a flattering smile, trying to persuade him out of the idea. "Mr. Qian, are you really aware of the consequences? You would end up in prison for the rest of your life. If there're some irreconcilable conflicts between you and Mr. Fu, I promise I would..."

Qian Liuxiang interrupted: "It's not just about him, Mr. Lu." His eyes shone with determination. "I will also release the videos of the other eighteen people. There will be no exception."

"Are you nuts?"

"Yes, I am."

He stood up, walking towards the door. He picked up his raincoat from the hanger, putting it on in a taking-your-time manner - buttoning up the coat. Then he put on his top hat, looking like a KGB again. He waved me goodbye, opened the door and walked out, disappearing from my sight.

The highly-deceptive butterfly was still on my desk. It had not changed its form, as if its disguise was still valid and I was unaware that it was actually a mini-drone.

The above-mentioned recollections were based on my memory. Parts of them, like the conversation between Qian Liuxiang and me, were written down word by word from the video clip recorded by the surveillance camera in the firm. That was the first meeting between Qian Liuxiang and me. It was very brief. Even now that I look back, I still feel it was unreal, like some expired virtual reality.

Fu Zhou is a Professor at Huaxia University, and Dean of the Department of Politics. I got to know him during the process of writing *Collected Works on Violence*. In the videos of *Buried Alive* presented by Qian Liuxiang, every detail of our communication was recorded (details to be seen in Chapter 3). We don't meet frequently, probably just once or twice a year. In the afternoon of November 10, 2012, two days prior to Qian Liuxiang presented himself in my firm, Fu Zhou gave me a call quite out of expectation. He said he wanted to see me, the sooner the better; and we should meet at his famously huge study. It was almost dusk by the time I drove there. With the sunset reflected in the lake, the overall scenery was imbued with a sense of autumn.

The first thing Fu Zhou said to me was: "I am under surveillance."

"By the government?" I asked.

He shook his head. "No. I'm not that important. It's not worth it."

He skipped the polite greeting part and plunged right into the topic. He drove to the university today. And on the campus, he saw a butterfly in black and white flying around him in about a dozens of meters, twice. He was curious and found it strange. A female student in his class who was fond of all kinds of gossip reminded him that there was a kind of mini-drone often used by paparazzi. In order not to alert the celebrities that they were stalked, the drones were usually made in the form of butterfly, birds or dragonfly. He felt nervous upon hearing this, and immediately thought he was being followed.¹

I am an insurance investigator. Before *Collected Works on Violence* was published I had been living a life as an investigator and worked for several insurance companies. Afterwards, I resigned and spent some years travelling around in the country. Later I realized it was a mistake and decided to come back to Shanghai and return to my former career. I set up a small investigation firm specializing in the investigation of insurance compensation.

Fu Zhou chose me because of my professional background. He was eager to see me because he wanted me to find who was spying on him. He told me he was sure that the person spying on him was someone he knew and it was purely a personal matter with no political power involved. And that's why he dared not hire private detectives as he was afraid they wouldn't keep their mouth shut and hence would stain his reputation.²

Later Qian Liuxiang also confessed that it was his greed that got him into trouble. He had intended to record everything but in the end the timing for action had to be moved up. If not for that small but fatal mistake, the surveillance on Fu Zhou and the other eighteen people would have lasted at least another five months. According to his original plan, he was supposed to release the videos of *Buried Alive* in the spring of 2013.³ As the phone was hung up (when Qian Liuxiang was on phone with me, he would suddenly hang up the phone for safety's sake), I didn't manage to ask him "does the timing mean something special for him".⁴ Probably it was just a random choice. Maybe it was because he liked the warm and enchanting spring or just because he was a pervert. All in all, according to his original plan, there would be no encounter between Qian Liuxiang and me even though I was, unfortunately, recorded in *Buried Alive* thanks to Fu Zhou.

Nevertheless, the only small mistake Qian Liuxiang made during the time-consuming and tedious surveillance task, the timidity and prudence that Fu Zhou was born with, and the fact that I randomly chose such a career to make a living at the age of twenty, were intriguingly interwoven together, leading to an interesting turn in fate. I was not only deeply involved, but my hysteric passion was also inspired. And after spending so much efforts and

resources, my long-lasting passion led me to experience far more dangers than getting *Collected Works on Violence* published. In spite of all the difficulties, I wrote this book; a book featuring Qian Liuxiang and titled with in the same name as his notorious *Buried Alive*.

No matter how wildly my imagination went, I couldn't have imagined that the craziest loss of control in my personal history would have a lingering impact that lasted twenty years and was deprived of any possibility for turning back. If we traced to the source, it all began in the afternoon of November 12, 2012, when Qian Liuxiang stepped out of my firm. Now that twenty years have passed, I still remember how I drove in the heavy rain to Yangcheng Lake to look for Fu Zhou. I can still feel the sense of desperation and helplessness that overwhelmed me at that time. The following is what I experienced.⁵

There was a heavy traffic jam all along the way. Despite the rain and fog, I could still see the spying mini-aircraft floating in the air, like a bird overlooking people on the streets. Since the new millennium, Shanghai has already become a city with no privacy. Hundreds of spying mini-aircrafts fly up in the air, day and night, and millions of surveillance cameras are scattered around the city. Surveillance is everywhere.

My forehead was sweating heavily as I dialed Fu Zhou's number. But his phone was turned off. With nothing better to do, I gave an oral instruction to turn on my news feeds in order to take a break. The somehow sissy host, a virtual "general" showed up, broadcasting the news. A female suicide bomber (known as "bomb ass" among the netizens) had blown up a building up in Seattle, causing dozens of casualties... A new intercontinental ballistic missile equipped with hypersonic glide warhead had been put into service... The "general" showed off his sense of humor by commenting on the political correctness of Police State. He cleared his throat and stressed the benefits of the maintenance of stability: a strong national defense force and a ubiquitous network of counter-crime measures ensured the welfare of people and prevented them from the attacks of terrorists...

The butterfly was still in my pocket. Qian Liuxiang had left it with me as a token of friendship for it could be used as evidence.⁶ Later it was taken by the police as evidence for Qian Liuxiang's crime and his arrest warrant.

In the best luxury hotel by the Yangcheng Lake I found Fu Zhou. It turned out he was having a big feast with some other professors. They drank lavishly and ordered plumb crabs. No wonder he had turned off his cell phone and asked his student not to reveal his whereabouts. If I hadn't lost my temper and threatened his student on the phone, I wouldn't have had the slightest clue for his whereabouts.

After my brief, Fu Zhou was stunned and frenzied. He walked back

and forth so irritatedly right in front of me and kept murmuring to himself. After a while, he seemed overwhelmed by depression and sadness. I feared he would commit suicide. He found Qian Liuxiang's phone number and made a call. Qian's phone was dead, which meant the last attempt to stop Qian Liuxiang failed. On our way back to Shanghai, Fu Zhou made a call to his old friend, Wang Pinqin, a noted curator who was at that time in Shanghai working on an exhibition. He explained to me that Wang Pinqin and Qian Liuxiang were both from the art circle and they knew each other well.

The three of us met at a pub downtown. Wang Pinqin was of middle height and had luxuriant hair. He was dressed elegantly. Fu Zhou handed him the mini-drone, that is, the butterfly, asking: "Is this just a prop? Does Qian Liuxiang just want to present some kind of performance?" Apparently Fu Zhou clung to his last hope and wanted to make a last desperate stand. Wang Pinqin took the butterfly and looked at it for a good while as if he was doing his job as a curator: to examine a piece of art. After a while he looked up and said: For others I cannot say for sure, but that's definitely not the case for him.

I found Wang Pinqin was anxiety-ridden.⁷ It was only after the release of the videos of *Buried Alive* that I realized he was also one of the nineteen. We waited anxiously for the arrival of midnight as if we were waiting for death penalty. That evening seemed endlessly long. Fu Zhou called several others to come. They argued vehemently about what legal actions they would take towards Qian Liuxiang after the videos went public. I looked at them and could do nothing. All of a sudden, I felt a stir in my mind and got excited. That was the initial impulse for writing this book. But I felt ashamed right away. How could I have such a selfish idea while my old friend Fu Zhou was experiencing an ordeal? I must give it up!

Midnight. As forecasted by Qian Liuxiang, *Buried Alive* was released right on time. None of the nineteen people escaped. A huge stir among the public was ignited. People were all indignant and condemned such an act. In the meantime, viewing number soared all over the world. Tens of millions of people talked about it. Youngsters hilariously made all kind of parodies. Image consumption promoted the growth of GDP. The farce lasted over half a year.

However, Qian Liuxiang, the enemy of the state, disappeared. No one could account for his whereabouts. It was a miracle in a city like Shanghai where surveillance was everywhere. It was said that the police maneuvered many robots to track him down. Numerous surveillance images were collected (from the dozens of surveillance air-crafts and tens of thousands of cameras located at the areas that might be linked to Qian Liuxiang) to be examined for clue. But still he could not be found. Rumors were all around. I guessed he escaped under disguise and it had taken him years

of careful preparation, planning and deployment.⁸ He reemerged abruptly one morning a year later. He told me through phone that he went underground. But I didn't have the courage to tell him that I was in the middle of writing a book entitled *Buried Alive*, which featured him and the nineteen others.

Nineteen Old Poems

The full name of Qian Liuxiang's *Buried Alive* is *Buried Alive: An Imitation of Nineteen Old Poems*. The linkage between Qian Liuxiang's *Buried Alive* and a collection of the most widely acclaimed five-character poems was purely by chance. The notion of "Nineteen Old Poems" occurred to him quite accidentally, but it struck him that the poems were an ancient version of "anti-"buried alive. In other words, they noted down the various rebellions against time and everyday-ness burying individuals' lives alive. Later he admitted that he was inspired by that and came up with an ambitious and adventurous idea: by replacing written words with an enormous amount of moving images, he would do just the opposite, to present a contemporary version. The title he initially thought of was very straightforward: *Buried Alive – Nineteen Old Poems*. According to his explanation, the figure "nineteen" was rich but not complicated. It was exactly the right one. He was so excited back then and devoted himself to action in an almost frenzied way. Choosing from people he knew, it took him less than a week to pick up nineteen people. He installed surveillance cameras secretly at the places the people lived and worked, making records of their everyday life. Through his editing, he lifted them out of their daily life, becoming the visual images in his *Buried Alive*.⁹

I asked about the exact meaning of "doing just the opposite". His answer was simple and crisp: "If you cannot rule the world, then rule yourself. Otherwise you'd be buried alive." Then he hung up.¹⁰

To be ruled by others is to be buried alive. Such has been Qian Liuxiang's belief throughout time.¹¹ The chance reading of Nineteen Old Poems was merely a trigger for *Buried Alive*. The title itself indicated a certain criticism, as if it divided life into two parts: the meaningful and the meaningless. All that falling into the category of "meaninglessness" could be seen as being "buried alive". Probably in Qian Liuxiang's view, the history of the individual's body, so-called "life", is just a journey through society made by the body under the reining in of the subject, and following the trajectory of meaning. To remain autonomous and alive, one needs to advance at full speed. Any deviation or stagnation is an error and waste. It is a movement towards the meaningless. It is to be buried alive. You are alive but already dead.

In this regard, the videos of *Buried Alive* should not just be seen as records

of facts. In other words, they should not be seen as some kinds of visual live records or historical images in private to fight against personal narratives in public. They should be seen as images generated after the body has been scanned by meaning. The author's value orientation as revealed behind the images should not be overlooked. And in my view, it was extremely rigorous and classic. In one conversation, I made an arbitrary statement: the individual was the subject and there was no leeway, otherwise the subject would be faced with devaluation. Only by being put under the management of the will of the subject could the body effectively generate meaning and value. The free expansion of the body was invalid and chaotic, and would lead only to meaninglessness, emptiness and negation. Upon hearing this, Qian Liuxiang neither denied nor admitted, he just changed the subject.¹²

Perhaps it was from such a superman-style, firm belief that Qian Liuxiang managed to gain endless passion and strength for fighting against the everyday-ness, to initiate a jihad of meaning, to become an evil artist that followed none of the rules of the real world, and refused to be materialized by capitalist logic, at the cost of devastating destruction of others' life as well as his own future.

However, during the interviews I did, almost everyone, including Fu Zhou, spoke highly of Qian Liuxiang before the midnight of November 12, 2012. They could hardly imagine the gentle guy who never spoke much would turn out to be so vicious: to demonstrate their everyday private lives, including bedroom life, on the screens of tens of millions of people all over the world. Given their indignation, their appraisal of him should be considered quite credible. What pained and confused them was why Qian Liuxiang could despise and hate them this much.

As a matter of fact, this was also my question. In our subsequent conversations, I mustered up my courage to ask him, more than once, but I never got an answer. As soon as I mentioned the nineteen people, he would turn silent. He used terribly long silences to punish me. I had to give up and not nag at him. But to understand why the nineteen people were picked, and how they fitted his diagnosis of being "buried alive", was of pivotal importance for me to write this book.

I decided to get my answer through other channels. The first problem I encountered was how to watch all the videos of *Buried Alive*. To spy on nineteen people for ten years was an enormous workload. It would be impossible to watch all the videos, even if dozens of people watched them 24/7 for several years. Therefore I had to adopt a kind of police methodology. I hired a team of hackers (professional data companies charged extremely high, and anyway, they were unwilling to take the job because the videos of *Buried Alive* were

collected through illegal surveillance and they didn't want to be involved in legal trouble.) The hackers used robots to watch all the videos on a supercomputer for civil use. And following my requirements and work structure, they extracted data and made a visual survey of all the videos. The charges were high but still within a range that I could afford. I also ordered special software from an anonymous hacker to deal with data extraction, in order to capture and retrieve the visual materials that were needed for the writing of the book more efficiently.

The second task was quite tedious and enormous: to survey people around the nineteen people through interviews. I divided them into several categories: families/relatives, co-workers, friends, acquaintances, and less than acquaintances. Then I developed the list further based on how close they were to the nineteen people, and designed several questionnaires. The nineteen people all had their different conditions. But for the sake of the objectivity of the survey, the adequacy and effectiveness of the data collected, and fairness in terms of treating the nineteen people (not to create huge disparities amongst them), I confined the number of people that should be interviewed while researching each of the nineteen people to around thirty or forty. There were two ways to determine the interview list: first, from the data exacted by the hackers from videos of *Buried Alive*; and second, from the detailed survey into all those around the nineteen people by the investigation company I had hired. The second step helped me to include people who didn't appear in the videos of *Buried Alive* within my interview list. The third step was to make a comparison between the two lists and finalize the list of people that must be interviewed. The total number reached over seven hundred. Fourth, the investigation would conduct interviews and conversations and the whole process would be videotaped. Fifth, all the interview videos, of over seven hundred people, would be handed to a data company that would make data extraction and visual investigation according to my requirements and work structure. The cost for this investigation was substantial. And given my pathetic financial capacity, I only managed to make the payments in several installments and it took me three years to complete the project.

Such a methodology started to take shape while I worked on the *Collected Works on Violence*. By making some adjustments, I was able to resort to it again while I worked on this book. Though it was a bit complicated, it came in handy. The toughest part of the work was to interview the nineteen people. I found the nineteen people and approached them following the order Qian Liuxiang edited in the videos of *Buried Alive*. The first was Fu Zhou. He was surprised to hear that I intended to write a book about it. Though it was only half a year since his "Good Friday" – November 12, 2012 - he generously

accepted to take my interview after I elaborately explained the writing plan to him. But after that I received a bunch of rejections: Fan Liming, Pei Song and Wang Pinqin. Wang Pinqin's reaction was extremely fierce. He called me several times, trying to warn me not to bother his families, relatives, friends and co-workers. He was so smart that he saw through my working mode already. (I guessed he immediately read my *Collected Works on Violence* from start to finish.) He became all the more indignant when we started to interview people around him and even threatened to find someone to beat me up.¹³

Among the nineteen people, six refused to be interviewed. Apart from the three I mentioned already, the other three were: Guo Peng, Ma Guanjun and Katherine. Twenty years later they still refuse my request for an interview. Katherine's reaction was the most interesting. Every time I skyped with her, she always looked at me with full sympathy. She would shake her head and sigh, as if I were a poor, bad boy peeping at her. In a sense, I was. In order to write this book, I watched the video clips extracted from *Buried Alive* day in and day out, memorizing every little detail. I extracted data and compiled an index. I probed into the nineteen people's privacy, familiarizing myself with all the details of their bodies. I could be claimed as the number one authority on them, worldwide. I admitted that if the book was to be published, to some extent it would further the damage Qian Liuxiang imposed upon them. Given this, after I finished the first draft of the book, I postponed its publishing plan indefinitely.

With what I had experienced, together with the interviews of over seven hundred people, and data extracted from all the videos of *Buried Alive*, with a full understanding of the various micro-events and details, I started to feel that I had touched upon some answers. When they were young, the nineteen people were just like Qian Liuxiang. They were radical and rebellious against the order of reality. But eventually they changed. What was more dramatic, most of them became successful, living a gorgeous life, physically and spiritually. In Qian Liuxiang's view, they surrendered themselves to capital, to the country, to the system and the rules. The sublime vision to fight against enslavement evaporated and disappeared from their bodies for good.¹⁴ But they turned a blind eye to all that. They fit Qian Liuxiang's definition of being "buried alive". In other words, they were dominated by the order of reality.

During our conversation, I once used myself as an example and tried to discuss with Qian Liuxiang the dilemma between fighting against or acknowledging the order of reality. I argued that probably there were people (by which I referred to the nineteen people, but in order not to irritate Qian Liuxiang I intentionally talked ambiguously) who made some tiny efforts to strive for freedom, but they didn't want to be trapped in a condition that was too dangerous, and hence they struggled between resistance and compromise.

He categorically denied my defense. He believed that all that was considered safe equated with being dominated, ruled and reined. Safety and freedom were not compatible. Only freedom that was intricately connected to danger could be seen as true freedom. Otherwise it was nothing but illusion and cynicism. Or in other words, it was hypocritical. He described the society we lived in as "I will guarantee your safety as long as you surrender your weapons."¹⁵

He saw the nineteen people as shameful traitors. Probably this was the closest thought to the real answer. He despised weakness and compromise. He tended to measure daily life with the highest standards. He recklessly created illegal states, putting himself in a position beyond law and ethics. He firmly stood on the side of meaning and imposed it on the nineteen people as a kind of absolute ethics of freedom and responsibility. As far as I'm concerned, during the ten years he spied on them, he had already realized that a body was no longer the organism/social body that could be driven by the subject. That's why he became so desperate and finally decided to go underground.

However, it is our instinct to pursue happiness and success. The body is autonomous. Life is autonomous. This is the biggest difference between Qian Liuxiang and me. It is also the driving force for me to continue to write and rewrite this book over the past twenty years. But I don't deny that my initial motive was inspired by the subject matter: I wanted to paraphrase visual narratives in the form of an all-word text.

If the meaning and value judgements imposed on images by Qian Liuxiang could be deprived, then in my view all the videos of *Buried Alive* were an unprecedented long-term mapping of the life of nineteen individuals. Fragmented as they were, they demonstrated an extraordinary ten years during which they fought for survival under the background of the global expansion of capital. Numerous micro-events, like countless fragments, made records of the vivid history of the body on a daily basis, together with the various minutiae that were either amusing, gloomy or cruel. They revealed that vividness and vigour of life couldn't be prevented or extinguished by meaning or value.

As a matter of fact, Qian Liuxiang also came to realize the danger and weakness lying in his critique and the patronizing way he adopted to diagnose other people. That's why he gave up editing at an earlier stage. He wanted the audience to watch the unedited version of *Buried Alive* and to feel the meaning and value judgement he imposed on the images through their own imagination. This was why he released both the edited version and unedited version at the same time. The edited version could be seen as an introduction or lead into the unedited version (see more in Chapter 1). Nevertheless, did the free and somewhat unexpectedly bizarre editing by audiences all over the world, especially young people, exceed Qian Liuxiang's expectation? Did this

mean the smart, calculative pre-assumption failed?

I didn't think so. The audience he envisioned was not the mainstream – the tens of millions of people who were fond of watching gossip in front of their screens – but the various stragglers who quietly lived within those central cities and who fought against the system and institutes of contemporary art. They only accounted for a very small group of people. Probably they were the very last group of human beings who were still fascinated and tortured by the vision of Utopia, and were dreaming for independence and autonomy. In this regard, *Buried Alive* could be seen as a scream that Qian Liuxiang had been preparing for a long time, a desperate thump on the future. And to go underground was already on his agenda.

Given the quantity of the interviews as well as the videos of *Buried Alive*, the narratives collected were brimming with conflicts, emotions, contracts and disorders. They differed significantly. Some parts were totally opposite to each other. In this book, multiple narratives were adopted to deal with all the disagreements and disorders. I would rather let conflicting information emerge among all the hustle and bustle than conceal/whitewash/erase them through seemingly clear and fluent monologue.

Certainly I have to admit that this book is still quite subjective. My prejudice is included. Despite all the efforts I've made, prejudice could hardly be automatically and thoroughly eliminated. Perhaps the efforts I've made only make them take on a more deceptive disguise, and make them more difficult to discern within the context of multiple narratives. Please keep that in mind.

In addition, though Qian Liuxiang is featured as the protagonist in the book, it is not a biography of him. To title it *Buried Alive* is because it is based on *Buried Alive: An Imitation of Nineteen Old Poems*. It is due to *Buried Alive*, the artwork, that Qian Liuxiang and the nineteen people are delineated in this book. In this regard, this book can also be seen as a note of my personal journey, profiling the things I've experienced, the people I've met, and the spectacles I've witnessed during the twenty years since I was involved in the incident of *Buried Alive*.

Twenty Years Later

It takes only twenty years for the world to go upside down. We now have new ethics and no longer feel ashamed of making love with robots. On the contrary, it has become the coolest new fashion, and widely and passionately sought after all over the world.

Life is carrying on for the sake of creating profit: genetic modification techniques enable us to produce offspring with the perfect image that we all

desire. Various organs have been manufactured by bio-factories to replace the old organs in our bodies, imbuing youth and vitality into us, and extending our life expectancy. As a result, we never complain and take everything for granted.

Time and history will never disappear, and they will all be transformed into images and data. We are accustomed to forgetting something immediately and for good. Memory has been discarded. Seeing is recording: the cameras and sensors attached to intelligent apparels will automatically record everything we see and experience and store it in the cloud. The trajectory of our movement and health conditions are all under real-time measurement and analysis. Even a fart will be recorded as health data. Our bodies have been entrusted to databases, which know us much better than ourselves. Eventually, the gear and databases will become accessible only to a few mega corporations under the control of a small elite group and directly connected to the state machine. We all live under continuing surveillance by our gear. But we are all very calm and cooperative. Since the deprivation of privacy is inevitable and irreversible, why not accept that fact in exchange for the convenience brought about by the automatic life.

To me, it seems like the latest version of virtual reality. Life becomes increasingly like a "set-up" meticulously designed by capital. It is so unfathomable and everything around it is operating at full speed. I feel dazzled and uncomfortable, and fear that I will be dropped behind. I have to constantly refresh myself, reform myself and learn from the youngsters to use the latest gear. Despite all my efforts, a few years ago I still had to shut down my firm and retire at an early age. Insurance investigation has long been digitized and stored in a real-time manner, and human labour is no longer a must. I do some business to make a living, and in the meantime, I carry on writing as an amateur writer. And that's how I started once again to work on the book.

Qian Liuxiang has long fallen into oblivion.¹⁶ The last call he made to me was thirteen years ago. But as a known terrorist, he is still on the wanted list for the ministries of State Security of both China and the States. Each year officers from the National Security Agency in Shanghai would ask me if there were other channels to contact him. I often try to imagine where he is. I guess he must live in a place that is crappy but far away from surveillance cameras, data, images, the internet, gear, equipment and information exchanges. Only in places where capital actively surrenders that anonymity can concealment be possible. For his own safety, he has no other choice but to allow himself to be eliminated by time and to gradually become useless. The advancements of technologies make illegitimacy very costly. We are all online so that any action will be automatically detected or predicted. The network of data will never

miss anything. I think that's why Qian Liuxiang has never called me again and chooses to disappear, never making new works again.

Over the seven years from the end of November 2013 to the middle of October 2020, there were sixty-eight conversations between him and me. It was quite unusual. Even today I still can't explain why he chose me as someone he wanted to talk to. Once I asked him very directly: "Why do you call me?" He laughed and didn't give me an answer.¹⁷ Back then, such a reaction actually deepened my suspicion. I suspected that he, secretly, chose me to be the storyteller to spread his feat. This idea was not totally groundless. I had evidence to back me up. He paid a visit in person to my firm; he did me a favor by allowing me to give Fu Zhou a heads-up (from the videos he collected, obviously he knew that among the nineteen people, Fu Zhou was the only one I knew); he left me with the mini-drone in the shape of butterfly as a token of kindness; he read *Collected Works on Violence*; and he took the risk of calling me constantly to talk about his new works.¹⁸ But I also had my confusion: as quite a well-known artist among the Shanghai art scene, why did he choose me – an unknown amateur writer who had nothing to do with contemporary art?

Twenty years later I still have my confusion, but I don't care about it anymore. I tend to believe that he talked to me probably because he was too lonely. The rewriting of this book, to some extent, can be seen as a way to memorize the encounter between him and me. Today, the power of imagination has been bought out by capital and works only for profit and governance. There will never be any other artists who would do the same thing as Qian Liuxiang – to exile and even destroy himself in order to fight against the order of reality. There will never be any other contemporary artworks like *Buried Alive* that tests the boundaries of our comprehension in such a reckless way. We have been civilized and disarmed.

To re-write this book, I interviewed once again the nineteen people and their acquaintances.¹⁹ I found that the majority of the nineteen people had already downloaded the unedited version of *Buried Alive* as some kind of evidence for their memory of the past. They told me that it was a fact that Qian Liuxiang's surveillance upon them and the release of all the video footages were destructive to them. It struck them so hard that the pain caused could never be erased. Hence, they would never forgive Qian Liuxiang. However, it was also a fact that the videos were a record of their life in the past. The downloading of the videos indicated that they had recovered from the damage and they could now face the videos in a relatively calm manner and dare to use them as a kind of personal archive of themselves (see Chapter 6 for more information).

Nevertheless, another fact stunned me ever more: all the nineteen people,

including the three who rejected my request for a second interview,²⁰ had installed cameras in their home. Some even installed cameras in their bedrooms and I heard they shut them down only after they turned off the light. Not only these nineteen people, but their acquaintances, also installed cameras at their home. At first I thought they did this to prevent theft or burglary. But it turned out not. During my second interviews, I learned that in Shanghai the new generation of intelligent surveillance system built by the government was already almighty. Thieves had nowhere to hide. But the two hundred people in question all decided to keep an eye on themselves. There was no exception. They recorded their lives on a daily basis. They did exactly the same thing as Qian Liuxiang spying on the nineteen people.

Why was that? Why would all the people recorded in *Buried Alive* transform into Qian Liuxiang twenty years later?

Fu Zhou gave me an answer. "It's normal," he said. "We live within images. We make records and then play them. It's just like that. We have become visualized creatures since long ago. If you don't believe that, you could give it a try by turning off images. You would immediately feel you couldn't bear it as if you were living in primitive society. None of us could bear it. You'd feel your life is not complete, the records are not complete and your credibility is at danger. Moreover, no one could understand why you become so radical. They would only see you as a maniac. But we are not Qian Liuxiang. We never hurt others!"²¹

Fu Zhou also announced to me: in the near future when we make record of the images of ourselves, we could also record our brain wave. Surveilling ourselves and making a record of everything represent credit and social responsibility. Self-surveillance is for the sake of constructing database. Our judgment about whether someone is credible or responsible is based on whether he would record everything about himself and build a credible database.²²

It seems I have been left behind by time after all.

The first draft of the book consisted of four chapters only. The first chapter, "Buried Alive (to be continued)", gave an introduction of Qian Liuxiang's *Buried Alive* and some key points of the book. The second chapter "Artist Qian Liuxiang" briefly reviewed the life of Qian Liuxiang and his earlier works. An emphasis was put on casting more light on how he gradually became so radical, overcame his own sense of guilt, and determined to initiate the project of *Buried Alive*. In the third chapter, "The History of Relations", I wrote about why Qian Liuxiang chose these nineteen people and their relations during the ten years Qian spied on them. The fourth chapter "Biographies" featured the life stories of the nineteen people, the contents of which were based on the videos of *Buried Alive* and the interviews with over 700 people they acquainted with.

During the rewriting, two more chapters were added to the book. The fifth chapter “In Conversation” made a record of the conversations between Qian Liuxiang and me as well as the works he worked on after he turned underground. and the anecdotes about him being a terrorist. In the sixth chapter, “Twenty Years Later, A Second Interview”, I wrote about the second interviews I did and the status quo of the nineteen people.

I think even after twenty years the publishing of this book would still do harm to the nineteen people. Katherine rejected my request for an interview, again. The way she looked at me was brimming with sympathy, making me feel that I was a deceitful child. I need to ask Katherine and the others for forgiveness:

Thank you for your tolerance and for accepting my first and second interviews. Your friendliness and kindness make me feel warm and nice. But I don't want to become hypocritical because of that and to impose self-censorship upon myself. I've always been frank with you, never hiding from you the plan to write this book or the logic of my writing. I want to reiterate: in this book, I have made use of a lot of quotations from the videos of *Buried Alive*, which were collected in an illegal way. I will not delete the paragraphs or details that are of paramount importance but may make you feel uncomfortable. If this book makes you feel unbearable, embarrassed or insulted, I'm sorry. I am very, very sorry for that.

School of Written Words

I've elaborated in the preface to *Collected Works on Violence* the history and theories of the School of Written Words and why I chose to follow such a school. I don't want to reiterate. However, after all, it's been twenty years, and during those twenty years, images steadily and triumphantly continue to take a dominating role: written words are fading out; conversations are getting shorter; and only images never stop. We have all been transformed into “men of images”: We are immersed in images 24/7 as we work and shop via screens, and monitor ourselves as well as others via what we wear, and even data have become visualized. As a writer of the School of Written Words, to live such a protracted and dramatic change would naturally mean to experience ordeal and anguish, and to become increasingly radical and political. I often feel that I'm more and more like a “body bomb”. Under such an atmosphere, to rewrite this book – the second all-text book of mine – makes me feel uneasy, coming to realizing that subconsciously I have been trapped by the same dangerous confusion which overwhelmed Qian Liuxiang when he was working on *Buried Alive*: Whether or not have we been buried alive by images?

In this regard, I feel it's necessary to add a few words.

We are surrounded by books of images and are no longer confined to gazing

at screens. They are increasingly integrated with the illusionary technologies of virtual reality, confining our bodies within some brand new experience of simulation. They can be updated constantly in order to make us feel better and satisfied with being surrounded by images. As to written words, they have been transformed into some kind of voiceover for images and serve images with humbleness. As the new utopia of economy, they have attracted substantial investment from around the world.

The production of thoughts and academic research are also becoming digitized through images. Academic theses are turning into some kind of documentaries that are written, directed and performed by the same person: gorgeous pictures, grand music plus a confident author who talks with ease and fluency in front of the camera. He talks, raises questions, refutes and explains, radiating with great charm. The author is the image.

Images are invincible, which means that the suppression against independent and written words are everywhere within our daily actions. A publisher, a nice guy who has always been friendly with me, has constantly tried to persuade me to give up on written words over the past three years. As someone who finds new life within images, he despises texts composed fully of written words. He confronted me: “Nowadays who would spend time reading a classic book produced in the era of printing?” It's quite provocative. The following is a part of a recent argument between us:

The Publisher (with great frustration and indignation caused by me failing to live up to his expectation): Qian Liuxiang's *Buried Alive* contained all the images of the nineteen people's life during the past ten years. You also videotaped the interviews you did with the over seven hundred people. During your second interviews with them, you wore the gear and shot the whole process including the living environment of those people. These were precious images, so why didn't you use them? Why waste them for nothing? Are you idiotic?

Lu Huanzhi (who just wanted to briefly respond to avoid an argument that would definitely hurt our relations): I wanted to do things in a simple way. To make a book of images needed a lot of images to fill the book. And the production cost could be huge.

The Publisher (who took this seriously): That I get. I can invest in the book. You can stay assured that I would never interfere with your freedom of writing. You know me!

Lu Huanzhi (who was forced to explain): I appreciate your kindness. However, I don't need investment in my writing. I just don't want to become part of the economy. That's why I want to follow the School of Written Words.

The Publisher (who thought my intelligence was at a problematic level, which boosted his sense of superiority): You are still preoccupied with the

School of Written Words? Or you just don't want to confess the failure? All right, you're nostalgic and I understand that. But you cannot be too arbitrary and turn a blind eye to the reality. The world is moving forward and people have already redefined the notion of book. Now everyone knows that books are images and nothing else!

Lu Huanzhi (who was on the verge of losing his temper): After all, what you said is nothing but the will of capital, which intends to tame all authors through images, a logic of economy. Would it be even possible that you would never interfere with my freedom of writing? What is a book of images after all? Economy! All books of images rely on investment otherwise the authors of those books can never be able to afford the production of such books. Institutional sponsorship in nature also relies on investment. Where does the money of institutional sponsorship come from? Corporations, which expect return on their investment. Institutional sponsorship is nothing but a way of capital operation. As a conclusion: as long as there are images, true freedom cannot be achieved. Investment has to go through censorship: application, review and approval. That is exactly interference, isn't it? How could authors get the freedom to produce whatever they want? Moreover, the procedure will have permanent influence upon authors in terms of how they shape themselves. Eventually authors will start to censor themselves to see if they fit the criteria for investment or sponsorship. The more powerful and ideal the images are, the more heavily they rely on investment since the production cost would be super high. Without investment, without agreeing to follow the logic of economy, it would never be produced? Isn't that case?

The Publisher (who didn't see that I took this seriously too): In my knowledge, censorship of investment does exist. But it's definitely not that serious. You are exaggerating!

Lu Huanzhi (who, once starting to talk, would no longer fear that the relationship would be jeopardized): As a visual machine to control us, images are an integral part of the state machine. Images represent capital and the system. They are planning everything for us just like now you want to plan things for my book. If we trace the source of production, all images originate from the bastards who are gorgeously dressed and take a seat in either first-class cabins or their private jets. They manipulate global politics and economy. Images function as a visual channel for these bastards to brainwash us. It's a 100% visual way of ruling.

The Publisher (whose bottom-line was tested and hence lost his temper): I'm so disappointed! I don't see how you have become this radical, naïve and political!

Lu Huanzhi (who once again felt the pain of breaking with someone after revealing his true color): You're right. I'm a follower of the School of Written Words. It's never about nostalgia. It's always about political actions. It's not I

who turns a blind eye to reality. I'm fighting against it. It's a dead end for us if we just want to be men of images. We need to take a different path and to become someone that is invisible.

The Publisher (who was also in pain but covered that well): Invisible? What do you mean by that?

Lu Huanzhi (who couldn't help laughing): We need to fight against images and rely purely on written words.²³

Yes. To become an invisible man, a man who will not be captured or caught freeze-frame by images, means to become the opposite of a "man of images" and to resist the order of reality that is embedded in our bodies. The numerous and endless images make our bodies numb and hollow. Images discipline us, manage us, brainwash us, and drain our power of imagination, leading to the fact that innovation of the "technique of ruling" far exceeds the speed of our thinking. Image is the core for elites all over the world to take control over the society. If we don't want to die within the delight of visual sense or be overwhelmed by the coding of the all-image society, we will have to escape and to go beyond images. We will need to turn a blind eye to images, to not take them seriously, and to sabotage and subvert images from within. All in all, we will need to resort to some low-cost method that everybody can afford in order to fight back, to prevent images taking full control over us.

To become an invisible man also means to be a member of the School of Written Words: to write books, essays and slogans, etc. As a pioneer resisting images, the School of Written Words has foreseen the arrival of today's all-image society since long ago. The resistance that they launched and that has continued for several generations is also visionary: to return to and use the ancient all-words texts. It seems like an intentional retreat. But as a matter of fact it equips everybody with the power to fight back. It is convenient, efficient and requires no extra cost. Only in this way could we afford it and be able to go beyond the power of capital and to fight against our own visual sense, or in other words, the visual sense of the "men of images".

It is doomed to be a protracted war that will be arduous, time-consuming and deprived of any chance of winning.

We need written words to give a direct blow to our cerebral cortex in order to revive ourselves and to stop being someone devoured by images. We need therapy in the form of sentences rather than images. We need the courage to fight against an all-image reality. We need to shut down images and cameras.

We need to restore our instinct, our willfulness, our adventures, our insights, our irrationality, our abnormality, our laughter. We need to do that through written words.

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1. Qian Liuxiang: *Buried Alive* (unedited videos): Fu Zhou, 2012.11.10, from
 2. 1006.Ibid, from 1115.
 3. Records of conversation with Qian Liuxiang, May 16, 2014.
 4. In the following several conversations with him, I forgot to raise the question. Later, even though I had the question in mind, I felt it was a long time ago and it would seem abrupt to bring up the issue again all of a sudden. There was no need to make a fuss. So I never asked him the question.
 5. While writing this book, to make sure I remembered it correctly I checked the clips on my event date reorder of November 12, 2012. Part of the details were based on the clips recorded that day.
 6. Records of conversation with Qian Liuxiang, July 29, 2014.
 7. Twenty years later when I interviewed him again, Wang Pinqin told me that he was always very sensitive and back then he already had the feeling that he was one of the nineteen.
 8. I guess that Qian Liuxiang hired hackers at a very early stage and utilized robots. Otherwise it would be impossible for him to post the enormous video clips of *Buried Alive* online on time all by himself. As to how he managed to escape, I never figured out. Given the high sensitivity of the issue, I never asked him about that when we talked. By the way, during the twenty years, I think all the so-called speculations or explanations were nothing but rumors.
 9. Records of conversation with Qian Liuxiang, March 12, 2015.
 10. Ibid.
 11. Interview clips: Shao Zhengping (August 13, 2013), Tang Liang (September 2, 2013) and Wu Xiaoxia (February 1, 2014)
 12. Records of conversation with Qian Liuxiang, March 12, 2015.
 13. The consent of Wang Pinqin was gained before I pointed out such facts. He accepted my interview twenty years later and apologized to me. Certainly even he still refused to give his consent, I would also point out the fact without changing a single word.
 14. Qian Liuxiang: *Buried Alive* (unedited videos): Wang Pinqin, 2008.04.16, from 0918.
 15. Records of conversation with Qian Liuxiang, April 11, 2017.
 16. I have looked into the art-related archives during the past decade and the name of Qian Liuxiang is nowhere to be found.
 17. Records of conversation with Qian Liuxiang, March 22, 2014.
 18. Fu Zhou also thought the same. During our private conversation and interviews, he reiterated it several times.
 19. The three people rejected my request were: Fan Liming, Katherine and Pei Song.
 20. I got to learn conditions of the three of them through the interviews with their acquaintances.
 21. From the interview video with Fu Zhou on March 22, 2032.
 22. Ibid.
 23. Lu Huanzhi Gear 7, September 19, 2032.

CHAPTER 1 Buried Alive (to be continued)

Buried Alive is a video covering a timeline of 190 years. In other words, the contents that are not duplicated cover 69,350 days, or let's say 1,664,400 hours. And this is just a rough estimate based on the number of people; that is, the nineteen people that have been spied on by Qian Liuxiang for ten years. If we want to calculate the total length of all footage taken by the cameras, then according to the result given by robots scanning in fast-forward mode, it would reach 1,116 years. In other words, each of the nineteen people has been surveilled upon by at least five cameras. Obviously, as a piece of contemporary artwork, *Buried Alive* was not produced for an exhibition. It could even be said that it was not produced for people to watch. No one could sit through all that by themselves. Even to watch a tiny part of it is already an intimidating and arduous task.

"I could also use the same methods that the secret police of the country uses. But I am not from the secret police. What I want to gain is a process – a process that has been deeply hidden by law and by society and that is forbidden to reveal." During our phone conversation, that was the answer Qian Liuxiang gave to my question: Why did *Buried Alive* have to use surveillance cameras? As to the extraordinary length of the work, his explanation was simple: "It would not be convincing without such a length."¹

There was this one time that he, very unusually, showed an interest in discussing *Buried Alive* with me on phone. He said that originally he just intended to spy on the nineteen people for one year and edit the footage into a nineteen-hour video to exhibit. But then he changed his mind.²

As a matter of fact, there had been two plans from the very beginning. The

first was to spy on and make records of the nineteen people's lives for one year, and then a nineteen-hour video work would be edited out of the footage, and put on display. The second was to spy on and make records of the nineteen people's lives for ten years and no editing would be done to any of the footage. The first plan was out of practical consideration. After all, back then Qian Liuxiang - as an artist - still cared about exhibitions. However, after spending one year spying on the nineteen people, he changed his mind significantly. Eventually, he gave up on the nineteen-hour edited version and devoted himself to the second plan (see more in Chapter 2).

How did Qian Liuxiang manage to spy on the nineteen people everywhere they went globally? How did he manage to install and change the cameras? Did he do this all by himself? How could he store and transmit such huge amount of visual data? It all remained a mystery during the past twenty years. I have no idea for these questions. Given the super sensitivity of these issues, I never really asked him on phone. I guess he spent a lot hiring a team of hackers to do the surveillance and take care of technical maintenance. And robots were definitely used during the process. Once I asked the officers from the National Security Agency in Shanghai, who as a routine would pay me a visit once every year. They didn't give a clear answer, but implied that the FBI was also investigating whether international hacker teams offered Qian assistance.

I know almost nothing about where the funding for *Buried Alive* came from, or about Qian Liuxiang's financial status. From fragmented information gained from interviews with his acquaintances, I knew he had made quite some money from the stock market and the real estate market. I need to declare that I couldn't verify if it was real or not. It was probably just hearsay.

Moreover, *Buried Alive* had also been edited by netizens all over the world, leading to thousands of different versions with subtitles of various languages (in this regard, 'Subtitle Translators of the World, Unite!') And dozens of those versions were on sale illegally. Most of them were condensed versions ranging from five to fifty hours. The longest was an English version, which was eighty-hour long and included the nineteen-hour version Qian Liuxiang edited.

Edited Version

The nineteen-hour version, edited by Qian Liuxiang, caught worldwide attention and had been translated into fifteen languages soon after *Buried Alive* was released.³ This was the only edited part of the footage contained in *Buried Alive*. It was a piece of finalized contemporary artwork that could be exhibited. The title was straightforward - *Buried Alive: Nineteen Old Poems*, the content of which was based on the surveillance Qian Liuxiang imposed upon

the nineteen people during the first year. The nineteen people and nineteen videos were arranged in alphabetical order. Each video was about one hour long and featured one of the nineteen people. Before any images appeared, subtitles would first appear on a black screen, indicating the name of the protagonist and the place s/he lived (i.e. Fu Zhou, Shanghai).

The nineteen videos were arranged in the following order: Fu Zhou (Shanghai), Fan Liming (Shanghai), Pei Song (Shanghai), Wang Pinqin (London), Andrew (New York), Kevin (New York), Katherine (Boston), Emma (Paris), Wu Tong (Huo Village, Hunan), Dmitri (Saint Petersburg), Arturo (San Diego), Xu Chunliang (Wenzhou), Guo Peng (Beijing), Song Tingyu (Beijing), Frank (Vancouver), Rossana (Paris), Du Mingjin (Suzhou), Ma Guanjun (Tianjin) and Zhang Lei (Beijing).

Later Qian Liuxiang said the order was arranged in terms of who he had come to know first, which was greatly different from his original idea for an exhibition. Originally, he planned to set up nineteen independent, temporary gallery rooms (to keep the usual venues out of trouble, since the footage had been collected illegally) in the places where the nineteen people lived. In other words, each gallery room would have corresponded to the place of living of one of the nineteen people. Then he planned to play the nineteen videos simultaneously and in a loop.⁴ That is to prevent the nineteen videos being dispersed around the world and played synchronically without any particular order.

"To pack them together was to prevent any of them gone missing," Qian Liuxiang explained, referring to why he later connected the nineteen videos together. He admitted that he had foreseen the aesthetic effect and the target revenue that such a change might bring about. "Certainly I had my reasons...." he said hesitantly.⁵

As he had expected, *Buried Alive: Nineteen Old Poems* was hailed as a documentary that truly reflected real life. "This is not a reality show but reality itself," declared one Shanghai-based critic.⁶ In fact, this kind of dramatic reaction was quite typical, and many who watched the videos in front of their screens shared such a feeling: that the nineteen people featured in the videos had no idea they were under surveillance, and hence were not aware of the existence of cameras at all. The way they behaved was super natural and hence the footage hereby recorded was super real.

Another tactic adopted by Qian Liuxiang also worked. During the nineteen-hour videos he didn't add one single off-camera commentary. Neither was there any background music. Each video was a naked display of the protagonists' daily life. Each video consisted of visual fragments of various lengths, and images of grey screens were inserted as a mark for image conversion. These fragments were extracted from the surveillance footage collected during

the first year and their length varied from 5 minutes to 1 minute. The contents were mainly what the protagonists said, but also contained the actions they took. Some of their speeches were extremely dramatic and infectious.

For instance, in “Guo Peng (Beijing)”, a girl was complaining about Guo Peng’s boyfriend. She said he was such a loser, who seemed competent, but was totally useless when something really happened. Guo Peng, who forced a smile, said she already saw through him, but she was not very demanding as long as he was good at bed. The girl laughed out loud, saying to Guo Peng that she was good-looking and why not find someone better. Guo Peng cursed a bit and said that with the police hanging around her all the time how could she find someone better. Moreover, it was already quite rare that a boyfriend hadn’t abandon her. In this regard, he would be seen as a brave man, and she would feel sorry if she broke up with him.⁷

Guo Peng was the assistance to Sun Changyun, a human right lawyer. In 2000, Sun Changyun was arrested for “subversion of state authority”. Implicated, Guo Peng was put under government surveillance. In mid-July 2002, Qian Liuxiang included Guo Peng in his “nineteen poems” and started to spy on her. The dialogue mentioned above was from the footage collected on October 17, 2002. It also functioned as a piece of “evidence” for people to condemn Qian Liuxiang after he released the videos. To treat a dissident in this way made him even worse than the government, which only spied on her phone, not her life 24/7.

And the following was from another dialogue in “Guo Peng (Beijing)”. Teacher Yao was trying to convince Guo Peng: “To put Teacher Sun into prison and constantly postpone the trial was definitely the government’s fault. We are all protesting. I also wrote articles to express my concerns. But I think the mature thing to do is to protest, and only protest. It’s not necessary to be obsessed with it. You don’t know why his case caught so much attention from the top. You don’t know the inside story behind the case. Moreover, you don’t know that much about Teacher Sun.” Guo Peng: “Teacher Yao, I think I know Teacher Sun quite well.” Yao: “What you know is what he wanted you to know. How could what he did on the surface lead to his arrest and even a severe sentence? I think he was probably involved in some struggles among government officers and someone just wanted him to die. Such things are beyond your knowledge.” Guo Peng: “Teacher Yao, do you have any news source for that?” Yao: “I heard things. But that’s not the point. It’s OK for you to sign the petition. But don’t be obsessed with it. If you become obsessed, you will be used by certain party factions involved in the political struggles. They will sacrifice you to embarrass others in the party, to crack down on the others. In the history of political struggles, such sacrifices are almost everywhere. In

a centralized system, information is not shared in an equal way, making it impossible for any mature political action. So you definitely need to think it over. To save yourself from damage is the most important thing, unless you are willing to sacrifice yourself.” Guo Peng: “I understand, Teacher Yao.” Yao: “Sincere words are harsh to hear. It’s better to back off now to retain some decency than to embarrass yourself later, when the pressure becomes too overwhelming to handle.”⁸

Teacher Yao came to visit Guo Peng quite often. Guo Peng used to speculate his intention: “I don’t know if he wants to take advantage of someone who’s vulnerable or if he is sent by the government.”⁹ However, what Teacher Yao said was not wrong. It was based on his life experience. Given the decisions Guo Peng made later, she listened to him. It also showed that Qian Liuxiang’s decision to include Guo Peng into the “Nineteen Poems” back in 2002 and to keep this dialogue in the edited version was insightful and visionary.

Another example is in “Arturo (San Diego)”. Arturo was excitedly “scolding” a middle-aged man with a shaved head: “Don’t you ever talk about revolution with me! To drink Evian, and quality wine, and sit in a café writing, talking and working on so-called fucking performance art is one thing; to crouch in the trench with an automatic rifle in hand, keeping an eye for the drones is totally another thing. Above us, satellites of the United States are always spying on us...”¹⁰

The middle-aged man with a shaved head was Salvador, a friend of Arturo since childhood, a poet and a radical leftist.¹¹ Arturo was a very straightforward person and known for his temper. Back then he just came back from his trip to North Africa and China and he was in a serious mental crisis.¹²

“Pei Song (Shanghai)” started with a dialogue reminding people “when wine is in, truth is out”. It was instantly eye-catching. Four diners were featured in the video, and they all looked a bit drunk. Besides Pei Song, who was the owner of the house, which he had recently moved into, the other three were: Li Zhizhao, Cheng Wen and Huo Yunpeng, who were all university teachers. Huo Yunpeng said: “Tiger¹³ was showing off his collection of classic music again. I heard he had over 4,000 CDs imported from abroad.” Following his words, Li Zhizhao said: “Tiger is too greedy. He wants to have everything: the advantages given by the system, and the fame beyond the system. As a matter of fact, without the system, he’s nothing more than a fart.” Pei Song looked as if he was in pain. He sighed and said: “Tiger actually looks down upon people like them, who came from rural areas. He looks up to the west and worships the higher class. He couldn’t even move his legs when hearing Harvard or Oxford.” The others laughed. Pei Song continued: “We had a senior classmate who also came from rural village. Once during class, Tiger started to talk

about classic music and aristocracy again, as if those who did not listen to classic music were not qualified scholars. A senior classmate couldn't bear it anymore and lost it. He stood up, confronting Fu Zhou: "Teacher Fu, do you know why so many youngsters choose to follow the communist party? That's because public intellectuals like you who were born and raised in cities are too highbrow, and look down upon people from rural villages. But those people are also smart people. They know there'll be no hope for them if they follow those highbrow public intellectuals. They will be ridiculed as bumpkin for the rest of their life. That's why they choose to defend the authoritarian regime and to rely on the party for a better future and a chance to outshine the so-called public intellectuals." He left right after he gave that speech. It was so quiet that you could hear a pin drop. People all stared at his back. It was said he quit school the next day. "Fantastic!" Cheng Wen asked, "Did he really go to join the communist party?"¹⁴

"Fan Liming (Shanghai)" was more like a movie. Several fragments were edited together, and the plot was consistent. First there were two rapid-action scenes, simple and clean. The first featured a scene of family gathering. A young woman wearing a pair of glasses, mouth wide open, was in unbelievable shock, and all the people around her were looking at her with embarrassment. The second showed the receding figure of the young woman running away. Then there came the dialogue. Jin Yiran (the young woman's boyfriend) apologized to Fan Liming: "Teacher Fan, I'm sorry. I had no idea she would act like that. It was all my fault. I didn't explain to her in advance..." Then Fan Liming interrupted, saying, "It's all right. I understand her feelings." Fan Liming's husband, doctor Fang, also tried to comfort Jin Yiran: "At least it shows she is innocent and didn't try to pretend." Wang Qing agreed: "Yeah. People could be mean. They would let you do them a favor and then call you names behind your back."

Then there came another dialogue, which happened after the gathering. Dr. Fang: "Do not let it bother you." Fan Liming: "No, not at all. I know there would be this day. It's just as what I expected." Dr. Fang: "Young people tend to be impetuous. So was I when I was young..." Fan Liming: "Thanks for the comfort. I joined the communist party because I had faith in it. I sincerely believe that only the communist party can lead China to become a developed country. How can a country in which 90% of its population are illiterate grow stronger? It takes power. And only the communist party has such power. Dictatorship is a temporary phenomenon, just like Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries. I will prove that even if I am a party member and a party secretary I could still produce good poems. Take Wang Wei for example. He was a high-ranked officer in Tang Dynasty but also a great poet." Dr. Fang

laughed: "You've already proved it. People all acknowledge that you are the best contemporary female poet." Fan Liming: "They are just being kind. If they find out I am the party secretary of the hospital, they would immediately turn their backs on me. Don't you believe that?"¹⁵

In "Emma (Paris)" there was a dialogue taking place on a bed. In the video, you could not see any bodies, but you could hear people talking. Emma was complaining to her sex partner, saying that she regretted having helped those Chinese artists who came to the west. She found that they were all using her and had failed to live up to her enthusiasm and all the sacrifices she had made. They were hypercritical. They pretended to be leftists but were in fact all rightists. They often quoted from leftist writers in France to earn themselves a good impression. But actually they didn't believe in it at all. What they wanted was benefits and benefits only. There was a pause here (perhaps the sex partner on the bed made a gesture indicating he was sorry). Later Emma continued to complain. She said that the most annoying thing was that she had also been influenced by them, and had become increasingly practical. And she was also turning rightist politically speaking. She felt she could never go back. She knew she was going downhill. But she didn't know what to do. At this point, Emma and her sex partner laughed, hysterically...¹⁶

The above-mentioned examples were considered neutral and not overly political. In *Buried Alive: Nineteen Old Poems* there were a lot of dialogues among the nineteen people that were far more political. Some directly touched on current affairs. Why was that? Through the fast-speed scanning by robots, we learned that during the first year of surveillance (which was 2002), most of the dialogues by the nineteen people were about daily life. So why did Qian Liuxiang choose dialogues pertinent to politics and the system, which in fact accounted for only a small portion of the total?

Years later Qian Liuxiang admitted that back then, as an ambitious artist, subconsciously, more or less, he felt his works were for Westerners. *Buried Alive: Nineteen Old Poems* was no exception. Within the Shanghai art scene, these kinds of subconscious feelings were passed down generation by generation as some kind of special knowledge. In other words, without these subconscious feelings you would not be considered professional. You could only be an amateur who would never succeed.¹⁷

Of course, it took sophisticated skills to exchange political correctness for recognition from the west. Qian Liuxiang always believed that the body was the place where different ideologies and benefits competed with each other, and dialogues (political as they were, they were part of life) tended to cast more light on the real conditions of the nineteen people, revealing the inner conditions of our body that are visually inaccessible, and the influence of ideology

and capital (in the form of benefits) upon our body.¹⁸ As a result, to use daily conversations as a kind of sample (certainly the intention was to catch the attention of westerners through contents that were political and could be perceived as critical of China's reality) to shape the characters was a safe move.

That's how we saw the conditions of Guo Peng, the emotional struggles experienced by Pei Song in face of the system, the changes Emma and Arturo felt, and the thoughts of Fan Liming that were not known to others before. Such a visual way of narration operated to highlight the theme of being "buried alive" through the "self-exposure" of different people. That also explained why in the videos of *Buried Alive: Nineteen Old Poems* there was a lot of talking but little action or display of specific bodies.

The highlighting also relied on make-real technology. Qian Liuxiang installed cameras in the four spaces where the nineteen people spent most of their time, namely: workplace (office), work cell (study), living room and bedroom. If we took a closer look at the nineteen videos, we could draw the conclusion that during the first year Qian Liuxiang only installed one camera at each of those spaces. That is to say, each of the nineteen people was under the surveillance of four cameras. The result was the somewhat too simple and monotonous images, radiating a sense of super realism, as if the images were produced by medical devices. *Buried Alive: Nineteen Old Poems* made people feel like they were watching a documentary that truly reflected real life, and that was exactly the effect Qian Liuxiang had intended to create.

Through image analysis we would find out that the cameras installed by Qian Liuxiang in the nineteen people's bedrooms were high above their beds and positioned at a horizontal angle. As a result, viewers could only see the heads of people appearing in that footage, and the parts beneath shoulder level were invisible. The above-mentioned dialogue in "Emma (Paris)" was an example of that. It was not a random decision. It was an intentional design by Qian Liuxiang to highlight the theme of being "buried alive". If we took the many dialogues featured in *Buried Alive: Nineteen Old Poems* into consideration, we would see that during the first year of his surveillance, the bodies that Qian Liuxiang wanted to show to viewers were bodies that were socialized, subjectified, deprived of organs, but full of talking.

The second piece of evidence for this conclusion was the fact that he didn't install any cameras in bathrooms. Even during the nine years afterwards, when he installed more surveillance cameras and started to use drones, he never peeped into the bathrooms. The total length of unedited version reached over 190 years, but not a single image showed the bathroom. Bathrooms were forbidden areas.

The third piece of evidence was Fu Zhou. During the surveillance in the

first year, a camera caught Fu Zhou having sex with a female model in his study. That was purely accidental. In the unedited version, there was footage showing naked bodies and the sound they made was very clear. Such images fit the theme of being "buried alive". But Qian Liuxiang didn't edit them into *Buried Alive: Nineteen Old Poems*. He just ignored them.

The eventual giving up of *Buried Alive: Nineteen Old Poems* was a natural result of the tremendous ideological change he had experienced (see more in Chapter 2). But back then, he also reflected upon that from the perspective of art. No matter how real the moving images were, they were edited by him. Editing indicated censorship, filtering, screening, bias and subjectivity. In other words, as long as there was editing, thematic technology would become too obvious and the power of narration would be affected, or in his own words, "not convincing enough".¹⁹ After all, one year was too short to really observe any substantial change in the nineteen people. He needed to extend the timeframe and not undertake any editing or other processing of the images. He needed works that were considered hostile rather than some ordinary contemporary art that was supposed to be sold and consumed by viewers.

Unedited Version

The unedited version, namely the entire footage collected for *Buried Alive*, covered a timespan from mid-July 2002, to early November 2012. When released, *Buried Alive: Nineteen Old Poems* had been integrated with the other videos and Qian Liuxiang entitled the piece *Buried Alive: An Imitation of Nineteen Old Poems*. Judging from the resolution of the images, we could tell that the cameras had been replaced three times during the ten years. Each time the equipment was updated. The number of cameras increased, and so did the quality and resolution of the images. Qian Liuxiang explained that the replacement of the cameras was to make sure they could function well and produce ideal results.²⁰

Images taken by drones appeared for the first time in the fourth year. But they were not in operation all the time. They were mainly used to keep watch on the nineteen people when they were out or on dates. Through technical analysis, the Shanghai Police Department confirmed that the butterfly that was spotted by Fu Zhou was a mini-drone that could automatically follow the target by detecting a cell phone signal. The other drones used by Qian Liuxiang functioned the same way. Before *Buried Alive*, Qian Liuxiang had used drones in another work of his to present the angle of an intelligent bomb diving to the ground at high speed (see more in Chapter 2).

As a matter of fact, the unedited version which was 190 years in length

and the 19-hour edited version of *Buried Alive: Nineteen Old Poems* resorted to the same techniques: highlighting that the nineteen people were “buried alive” through image narrative, illusion-like hypnotism, and self-performance by the nineteen people themselves. The difference lay in that the unedited version required extraordinary patience given its timespan (ten years) and length (no one could watch it through even if s/he devoted all his/her time to it). It was so informative and complicated (that human brains were not able to process it). It presented a panoramic view of how the nineteen people had been “buried alive” in an aesthetically super realistic way as Qian Liuxiang had envisaged. During the ten years, the nineteen people experienced various changes and ups and downs, all of which were transformed into moving images so precise and accurate that every minute detail was faithfully recorded. As long as we wanted to, we could closely observe the details of their actions and dialogues. It felt like we were looking at an enlarged satellite map. The information contained within was far beyond our capacity to comprehend. As a result, it seemed all the more objective and convincing.

That was exactly the most subtle part of *Buried Alive*: it was very open, letting viewers discover images and edit images so that they could make their own diagnosis that the nineteen people had been “buried alive”. Apparently, in the unedited version, the nineteen people all went back to the mainstream. They shaped their lives according to the criteria the globalized capitalist world used to measure success. In their earlier years, they fought against the order of reality; but gradually, they were assimilated and overwhelmed by the raging flood of information. The more you got to know, the less you wanted to fight. Eventually they became invisible within the process of seeking benefits and the pleasure of consumption. In the meantime, their free will was beaten by instinct. Ten years witnessed numerous micro-events and dialogues. The fragmented images that made a record of the events and dialogues verified the authenticity of the work.

For instance, through robot scanning we learned how artist Wu Tong made his way to become a world renowned contemporary artist through a utopian village project (at Huo Village in Hunan Province) and the promotion of international curators such as Wang Pinqin. The various behind-the-scene stories and fierce struggles for benefits were more than enough to make them the typical bad guys in Hollywood film noir.²¹

Du Mingjin was also a typical example. Previously she was an innocent girl passionate about public welfare. Later she became a “kind opportunist” (a self-deprecating title she invented) and then a skillful player of the capital game, playing an outstanding role in the global market.

Ma Guanjun also witnessed several significant transformations in his life

– from a frontline human rights activist, to a gang member, to a real estate developer who gradually got to deal with the interest groups of the country – before making himself great fortune and fame. Xu Chunliang also came from a rural village. For years he had devoted himself to fighting against the dictatorial policy issued by local government despite the pressure of being arrested. Later he started his own business and, like Ma Guanjun, became a successful entrepreneur, a celebrity catching worldwide media attention.

Song Tingyu made full use of her network in Beijing, including those having a one-night stand with her, to earn the life she longed for: flying all over the world, gorgeously dressed, giving academic presentations in fluent English, and conquering others with her thoughts and insights.

When Zhang Lei, a former opinion leader, changed his career path to become a real estate developer, he spent a lot of effort pursuing Zhu Yi. Many details were recorded in the unedited version. During the interview twenty years later, Zhang Lei told me that he and Zhu Yi watched *Buried Alive* from time to time, as it was a record of how they had fallen in love. They also showed it to their friends and kids. Zhu Yi’s life was legendary. Her father was a high-ranking officer in Beijing. She was known as a bold feminist. It was said that she once confronted a contractor from Fujian Province at a construction site. She shouted loudly: “Don’t fucking see me as a woman. I am a fucking man with a dick!” The contractor was terrified and surrendered.²² In the unedited version, many images showed that the marriage with Zhu Yi greatly facilitated Zhang Lei’s business. They both studied on the East Coast of the United States. They also invested in the States and made friends with an elite group in Washington D.C.

In the unedited version, we could see that Emma paid increasing attention to how she was dressed and gradually fell in love with cuisine and travelling. She talked a lot about the importance of historical sites and traditional culture. Revolution and the Third World were rarely mentioned. The books she liked reading during the ten years were those she had harshly criticized. They were all books related to consumerism.

On the contrary, Arturo never recovered from his mental breakdown and was still very critical of the whole world.

Katherine’s transformation was thorough. After dating a venture capitalist for a short while, she started her own career on the Wall Street, totally leaving behind missions such as subverting dictatorship and fighting against globalization.

In the fifth year, Kevin profited from a misfortune. One day, he had a fight with a black guy and someone stepped out to give him a helping hand. That someone was Li Jian, a former Chinese marine. He used to garrison islands in South China Sea. After he left the army, he started business dealings in his

hometown in Zhejiang Province. Kevin and Li Jian became fast friends from their first meeting. Like an inspiring movie, the two of them collaborated and greatly expanded their business enterprises in China and the States.

In *Buried Alive: Nineteen Old Poems*, through fragments of dialogues, Qian Liuxiang revealed some early symptoms indicating that they might be buried alive. In this regard, he was truly visionary.

Their failure in fighting against the order of reality was also reflected in the decline of the opposition, their integration into the system, and fighting for the petty benefits offered by the system. For instance, in the unedited version, Pei Song lamented the decay of a democracy fighter who did nothing but type in front of a computer screen. “Thousands and thousands of words cannot compete with a protest on the street.” Once upon a time, Pei Song had been deeply inspired and motivated by such a slogan. He had worshipped this particular democracy fighter. Years later when Pei Song met him on the street, he asked him what he was doing. The democracy fighter said, “Nothing in particular, but I am now a believer”. Pei Song was shocked, asking, “A believer of what?” “Of Christ, for sure.” Pei Song joked that he thought he was now a Buddhist. To his surprise, the democracy fighter lost his temper, responding critically, “How could Buddhism be counted as a religion? It’s all about money worship. They take money and help the sinners to clean themselves.” He was so indignant and used a lot of extremely harsh words to curse Buddhism. Pei Song couldn’t bear it anymore and had to excuse himself.

However, less than six months later, Pei Song also raised his voice, quarreling with others like an uneducated man fighting for the title of associate professor. He almost got into a fight. He was very frustrated, and confessed to his friends in private that in order to earn a decent living in the city, he had long become a dependent of the system. Years later we learned from the footage that he was still fiercely criticizing the system and the authority. But he was also aware that it was nothing more than a lame act to comfort the sense of guilt he felt.²³

Guo Peng experienced the most dramatic changes during the ten years. Thanks to the nationalistic political climate that had dominated since the new century, she also grew into a nationalist and a patriotic capitalist. Her company offered assistance to state-owned enterprises such as the China National Petroleum Corporation and the China Railway Construction Corporation; and she went all the way to Africa to expand markets. It was a huge success. The unedited version made a record of the whole process of her “evolution”. She even publicly claimed that what China needed was genuine rightists, who placed China’s benefit as top priority and wanted to build China into a global empire like the United States. Democracy would certainly come one day, but

it required each of us to initiate a molecular revolution.²⁴

That most intriguing thing was that some of the nineteen people also sympathized with the unedited version. Despite the nightmarish harm *Buried Alive* had effected on them, a third of them told me during my second round of interviews in 2032 that they partially agreed with Qian Liuxiang’s diagnosis. Now that they looked back, they admitted that the fact that they were seduced by material desires could be seen as being buried alive. Many beautiful visions and dreams were lost during the way. Sometimes they felt it was a pity, but they didn’t regret their choice. Most of the nineteen people believed that they had actually gained a new life. Previously they had been ignorant and brain-washed by an attractive utopian vision. Though it took some time, they woke up eventually. Now they were practical and down-to-earth. With money and social status, you could gain more freedom to do whatever you wanted (see more in Chapter 6).

While I browsed through the unedited data scanned by robots, or as I spoke with Qian Liuxiang, a question would often occur to me: why didn’t Qian Liuxiang spy on himself and make a record of it? I supposed that if Qian Liuxiang also installed some cameras at his home and office, it would become clear as to how he had managed his surveillance of the nineteen people wherever they went. Probably we would also have been able to see how he bargained with the hackers and his feelings toward spying on the nineteen people. If the ten years of Qian Liuxiang’s life could have been added into the unedited version and formed a contrast to the life of the nineteen people, that would have been very interesting.

One day, I felt that I really couldn’t resist the temptation so I raised my question and shared my assumption. He was very calm, as if he had known I would come to this question. He told me that the idea had occurred to him. But he had thought that since he was aware of the presence of the cameras, he would have played the role of himself rather than been himself. In the end, the footage that had been gained was nothing more than a reality show. On the other hand, to play the role of himself for ten years would have affected him not only physically but also mentally. He feared that it would turn him into a freak, a madman. That’s why he gave up the idea.²⁵ Qian Liuxiang added that to spy on himself for ten years was actually a performance piece he conceived before he started to work on *Buried Alive*. But he didn’t have the guts to put it into action. And afterwards, his idea changed greatly and he became against performance and performance art. So he had abandoned the proposal for good.²⁶

Judging from the footage of the unedited version, during the ten years, the cameras in the nineteen people’s bedrooms had been replaced, but the quantity remained the same: one for each bedroom. And each camera

was always installed right above the bed. It showed that Qian Liuxiang's idea remained the same: the camera in bedroom was mainly for recording the dialogues that took place there, rather than capturing images of the bodies. But the number of cameras in spaces like offices, studies and living rooms increased during the ten years. And it was thanks to those cameras that the nineteen people's bodies were exposed more and more in front of the viewers.

As it was an unedited all-image narrative, we got to learn that the nineteen people's concerns about their bodies persisted through the whole ten years. Some used highly expensive instruments to monitor the amount of salt, sugar and calories in their food. Some would go hiking no matter how bad the weather was. Some became vegetarians. Some ate nothing but organic food. Some bicycled every week and took part in the petition for the government to build lanes designated for bicycles only. Two thirds of the nineteen people showed an almost superstitious passion for sunbathing and jogging.

Even during the first year of the surveillance, though the image resolution was low, we could still find many dialogues concerning bodies in the unedited version. For instance, they often exchanged information about healthcare with friends, or talked about physical symptoms, nutrition, top-ranked doctors and the danger of food additives, or discussed what kinds of spices could enhance the pleasures of orgasm. These kinds of dialogues were discarded by Qian Liuxiang for *Buried Alive: Nineteen Old Poems* together with any of the footage showing people doing yoga or exercising on treadmill.

The nineteen people all had pride and concerns about their bodies and appearance. They all paid a lot of attention to their teeth and appearance (spent huge on cosmetic dentistry, plastic surgery and skincare). They weighed themselves every day and tried very hard to keep fit. After all, a fit body and a beautiful face could enhance one's chances for winning and hence were closely related to their success and sense of happiness. The history of their bodies over the ten years also reflected the passion for fashion and perfect appearance commonly shared by middle class all over the world. They were passionate about plastic surgery, gene modification surgery, and organ transplants to make your body stay young. And people were not satisfied. They looked forward to head transplant surgery becoming possible one day. Wan Pinqin once exclaimed: "Nowadays even organs, embryos, sperms and ova can become commodities and be ordered, circulating globally from one body to another. Why should we make a fuss over the capitalization of art?"²⁷

Due to its record of the bodies, *Buried Alive* became more than just a contemporary artwork. It was also a contribution to other disciplines such as the history of organs, the history of human body, individual biology, and physical anthropology. According to some surveys, there were over a dozen disciplines

that referenced the unedited version of *Buried Alive* as a source.²⁸ And at least three books were influential within their professional fields. *Talks After Sex*, a widely acclaimed book on physical anthropology, was titled after a compilation of footage that an anonymous netizen edited together out the source material of *Buried Alive*. Based on the unedited version, Pan Kefen, the author, made an analysis of the dialogues the nineteen people made after having sex, casting light on the fleeting holy moments between sensual desire and conversation, when the body was totally at ease. In the book, names of the nineteen people had been substituted by English letters.²⁹ In *Beyond the Camera*, one of the few books on the history of body, author Milton Mayer probed the footage of the unedited version that focused on bodies, delineating the "subtle and slow changes" during the ten years in terms of the nineteen people's facial expressions, body movements and instinctive reactions.³⁰ *Beauty Has Spread To The Whole Body*, a masterpiece in the study of the history of organs, was written by Philip Caban. There were two chapters in the book that mentioned that many of the nineteen people spent a lot of money beautifying their genitals. The author admitted that he came to this conclusion by a close reading of the dialogues collected in bedrooms rather than from visible images. In that book it was written that, back then, it was an emerging industry and reflected the globalization of sex organs.³¹

In the third year after Qian Liuxiang went underground, he produced two works that were even more radical. These were the new works he presented after *Buried Alive*. However, everything had changed since then. Due to these two pieces, Qian Liuxiang was included on a list of terrorists by both China and the United States. Afterwards, the contemporary art circle and academia both eliminated Qian Liuxiang, as if some kind of consensus had been achieved. *Buried Alive* also disappeared from any books or theses.

But in the eye of the public, Qian Liuxiang became all the more famous because of that. It seemed as if China and the United States collectively launched a huge advertisement campaign for him, imbuing his personal act of resistance with a sense of heroism. As a result, it elevated peoples' expectations and imaginative speculations about him, igniting a spontaneous gala in the name of freedom on the cyber space. Netizens and subtitle translators became motivated to contribute to free-editing of the unedited version of *Buried Alive*. It was during this period that more than a thousand freely edited versions appeared. Diverse as they were, most of them (over 800) were sex-related.

According to the data scanned by robots, among the 800 sex-related videos, almost all of them contained footage showing Fu Zhou having sex with a female model in his study, and also him having sex with his wife in his other study in their new house. As to the others, thanks to Qian Liuxiang's precautions,

they were not too exposed. But the noises they made in bedrooms while making love - the foreplay, screams, dirty talk and after-sex conversations - played a major role in the 800+ videos.

The videos could be roughly divided into two kinds: "On Bed" and "Bed Talk". "On Bed" accounted for 75% of the total. The contents were quite similar, focusing mainly on the love making of the nineteen people during the ten years. Though no actual sex scenes were shown (except in the case of Fu Zhou), the contents were very detailed and erotic, including the sexual screams, the discussion and practicing of different positions, and the dirty talk to stimulate each other.

"Bed Talk", as indicated in the name, referred to the dialogues the nineteen people had in bed during the ten years. There were many videos of this type. They could be divided into several different styles. The "Happy Style", through the addition of cheerful music and a fast-forward playing mode, made the voices and actions of the characters amusing and somewhat ridiculous. In some of the videos, the original voices were erased and dubbed with funnier and dirtier dialogues. The "Humorous Style" edited the nineteen people's bed talks into some exaggerated plots and made humorous commentaries on the footage. The "Hoaxing Style" was mainly videos shot by youngsters who were half naked and mimicked the nineteen people having sex. Through their exaggerated performances the scenes became all the more erotic and hilarious. Some even integrated footage from the unedited version with new videos shot by themselves. The "Hoaxing Style" was very popular, inspiring more youngsters and netizens to shoot videos of their own, giving rise to even weirder versions.

There was another style of "Bed Talk" which was quite peculiar. It made an emphasis on analyzing. Some processed the bedroom footages of the nineteen people during the ten years based on a strange kind of data analysis. For instance, some focused on analyzing the characters like "at what time, who and who having sex", "how their relations were", "how it ended" and "how their marriage went". Some resorted to professional audio software to make an analysis of the acoustic frequency of the nineteen people and those having sex with them (to deduce their personality and health conditions.) Some calculated the numbers and time of duration of the nineteen people having sex over the ten years (and made the figures into detailed dynamic data charts.)

The most widely known of this type was *Talks After Sex*, edited by an anonymous netizen under the name "Huang Si Huang".³² Compared to other videos falling into the category of "Bed Talk", this video was quite serious in terms of its content. But at the same time, it was quite heavy in taste. The video was three hours in length. "Fire a gun" is a slang term for making love. *Talks After Sex* (or literally translated as *Talks After Gun*) featured talks the nineteen

people made after "firing a gun", and an analysis was made concerning their sex-related conditions, such as if they were having an affair, if they had a permanent sex partner, how things went with their marriage, the changes of their sexual organs (men getting hard and women getting wet), the changes of their taste in terms of choosing partners (whether they were more interested in slim bodies or plump bodies, in genitals or asses), the changes of the positions they preferred (all the positions they adopted during the ten years in the form of animated chart) and how satisfied they were on bed (the satisfaction degree of both parties whether they were within marriage or beyond).

Talks After Sex by Pan Kefen, a masterpiece of physical anthropology, in a sense, was a mimicry of the video version of *Talks After Sex*. The author also confessed quite frankly that to name it after *Talks After Sex* was to pay homage to "Huang Si Huang".³³

To Be Continued

The evaluation of *Buried Alive* was always very controversial; and the focus of such controversies lay in how to make an evaluation of an incomplete work. Negative comments included: the unedited version was fundamentally a bunch of raw materials rather than a piece of work (*Buried Alive: Nineteen Old Poems* was a different case);³⁴ the theme was farfetched and disconnected with the contents, and there was no difference between the contents and actual daily life;³⁵ and it was too long to make it possible for exhibition or for viewers to watch it through.³⁶

Positive comments included: the state of incompleteness redefined the meaning of "work" and the future of art, turning it into a brand new and open notion;³⁷ *Buried Alive* (referring to the unedited version) presented a "full narrative" which required full presence and was not compressible, meaning that every detail was meaningful, every second was about narrating and it was extremely anti-dramatic;³⁸ and that incompleteness also represented a form of completeness, breaking through the definition of so-called "successful" art and the restrictions imposed on individual artists by the system.³⁹

Qian Liuxiang himself agreed that the incompleteness of *Buried Alive* made it surpass a complete work. According to him, he gleaned the inspiration for "to be continued" from a drone: "By presetting the route and programme, the drone would fly by itself. It's not necessary for you edit the images it sends back. You only need to broadcast them."⁴⁰

As to *Buried Alive*, he added that what he did was to present a range and programme. Then he retreated and let the work generate on its own, allowing it to move forward as time went by, just like a ticking time bomb.⁴¹

Among the nineteen people, most held a negative view towards *Buried Alive*. I interviewed Wu Tong for a second time in 2032. By then he was already a globally acclaimed Chinese contemporary artist and Qian Liuxiang had long fallen into oblivion. Even the security departments of China and the United States were no longer seriously interested in finding him. Wu Tong still stuck to the radical comments he made on *Buried Alive* during my first interview with him twenty years ago: “It is nothing more than a large lump of shit. It’s not worth your time or money to write about it at all.”⁴²

Curator Wang Pinqin, also a practitioner of contemporary art, showed a somewhat ambiguous attitude. During my second interview, when I, as a layman, told him Qian Liuxiang’s idea of the status of “to be continued” and all the other positive and negative comments, he just looked over at me, with an elegant smile. He said all these opinions had some kinds of grounds, but they could also be seen as groundless.⁴³

Among all those who had something to do with the contemporary art circle, Emma was the only one who spoke positively of *Buried Alive*. She said that though it hurt her deeply and she hated Qian Liuxiang, she liked the work. Fu Zhou, Arturo, Song Tingyu, Rossana and Dmitri all held a completely negative view of *Buried Alive*. Fan Liming, Katherine and Pei Song rejected my request for a “second interview” (they rejected the first interview also), so I failed to learn their attitudes. As to the other eight people, their attitudes were all loud and clear: they were vehemently against the idea that *Buried Alive* was art.

When you had meaning in hand, what you gained in the end was always tragedy. Why was that?

During the last year when Qian Liuxiang and I stayed in touch via phone, we discussed this. The calmness he showed when answering my question was so impressive that I still vividly remembered it today. He said meaning could grow in your hand, indefinitely and in a non-stop manner. Such meaning was also known as freedom. It was also embedded in your mind. Only through this were we able to transcend life and prevent being buried alive.⁴⁴

I guess Qian Liuxiang foresaw his own ending. But he couldn’t help it and couldn’t stop. Not only did he produce the globally shocking *Buried Alive*, but he also made some more radical works afterwards. He, with his own hands, destroyed his career as an artist. It was the freedom that lay at the bottom of his heart that initiated the path for self-destruction. Like a flying moth darting into the fire, he darted into the realm of freedom, which was as terrifying as a black hole. In the end, he let himself be devoured by this freedom.

1. Records of conversation with Qian Liuxiang, April 11, 2017.
2. Ibid.
3. The full 19-hour version has been translated into German, English and Japanese. Parts of the videos have been translated into Korean, Portuguese, Russian, French, Italian, Serbian, Vietnamese, Mongolian, Spanish, Hungarian, Danish and Czech.
4. Records of conversation with Qian Liuxiang, April 11, 2017.
5. Ibid.
6. Ran Zhengge: *This Is Not Reality Show But Reality*, published on the website of “Art Archive” on December 16, 2012. Later the article was selected into his anthology “Cat Fighting, No Regret At All”, Shanghai Contemporary Art Press, 2014.2
7. Qian Liuxiang: *Buried Alive* (edited videos): Guo Peng
8. Ibid.
9. Qian Liuxiang: *Buried Alive* (unedited videos): Guo Peng, 2002.10.17, from 0908.
10. Qian Liuxiang: *Buried Alive* (edited videos): Arturo. All conversations have been automatically dubbed with Chinese subtitles during the fast-speed scanning process by robots.
11. Interview clips: Salvador (September 26, 2013)
12. Qian Liuxiang: *Buried Alive* (unedited videos): Arturo, 2002.11.18, from 0518 and 2003.1.15, from 0712.
13. “Tiger” is Fu Zhou’s nickname. According to him, in Shanghai dialect “Lao Fu” (meaning senior Fu) sounded similar to “tiger” (*lao hu*), so students who hated him called him “tiger” behind his back. Gradually it became widely known.
14. Qian Liuxiang: *Buried Alive* (edited videos): Pei Song
15. Qian Liuxiang: *Buried Alive* (edited videos): Fan Liming
16. Qian Liuxiang: *Buried Alive* (edited videos): Emma. All conversations have been automatically dubbed with Chinese subtitles during the fast-speed scanning process by robots.
17. Records of conversation with Qian Liuxiang, April 11, 2017.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. In my knowledge, at least two documentaries, which aimed to criticize contemporary art, made use of the parts pertinent to Wu Tong and Wang Pinqin in the unedited version of *Buried Alive* through role-play without directly citing the names. (Given that *Buried Alive* was an illegal visual source, those documentaries couldn’t make direct use of the work but hired actors to replay the scenes.) For more information, please refer to *Production Line* by Michael Rush and *The General Condition of the World* by Satake Yasuhiko
22. Qian Liuxiang: *Buried Alive* (unedited videos): Zhang Lei, 2009.11.7, from 1330.
23. Qian Liuxiang: *Buried Alive* (unedited videos): Pei Song, 2010.6.26, from 0830.

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24. Qian Liuxiang: *Buried Alive* (unedited videos): Guo Peng, 2011.12.2, from 1140.
 25. Records of conversation with Qian Liuxiang, September 19, 2019.
 26. Ibid.
 27. Qian Liuxiang: *Buried Alive* (unedited videos): Wang Pinqin, 2007.5.10, from 1410.
 28. Wang Xiangming, *Panoramic Revolution: On the Future of Image Narrative*, published on *New History*, pp35-75, New Wave Press, 2021, first edition. Qu Ying, *An Overview of New History Since 2000*, published on *History Communication* (Issue 901), pp14-38, Huaxia University Press, 2020, first edition.
 29. Ibid.
 30. Ibid.
 31. Ibid.
 32. So far the identity of the anonymous netizen who edited *Talks After Sex* remains unknown. The pseudonym “Huang Si Huang” is probably inspired from the slang of Shanghai dialect (or Suzhou dialect). It’s a pun referring to both courage and eroticism. With such an assumption in mind, this anonymous netizen is probably from Shanghai or Suzhou. But it is purely based on my speculation.
 33. Wang Xiangming, *Panoramic Revolution: On the Future of Image Narrative*, published on *Contemporary New History*, pp35-75, Archive Press, 2021, first edition. Qu Ying, *An Overview of New History Since 2000*, published on *History Communication* (Issue 901), pp14-38, Huaxia University Press, 2020, first edition.
 34. Cheng Shu, *A Crazy “To Be Continued” - A Review on Buried Alive*, published on the website Art Archive on Apr. 20, 2013. Later it was included into his anthology *Illusion and the Dark Side*, You Zhi Press, 2015. 6, first edition. He Lu, *The Shallow Games in the Era of Emptiness*, published on the website New Favor on Nov. 7, 2013. Both Cheng Shu and He Lu treated *Buried Alive: Nineteen Old Poems* as an independent and complete work, separating it from *To Be Continued*.
 35. Thomas Heather, *The Altitude Is Descending*, published on the website Contemporary Is Fine on Feb. 15, 2014. Gao Hong, *Another Failed Uprising of Art*, published on the website We Love Bragging on Mar. 2, 2014.
 36. Wu Kangliang, *From Rebellion to Surveillance*, published on the website Liaise More, Exhibit More on Jul. 4, 2014.
 37. Wang Bu, *Absolute Artist*, published on the website New Favor on Jan. 24, 2014 and later was deleted.
 38. Juri Hifumi, *All Narrative Works*, published on the website Art Archive on Sep. 28, 2013.
 39. Tang Jiayun, *The Completion of “To Be Continued”*, published on the website Favorite on Jan. 30, 2014.
 40. Records of conversation with Qian Liuxiang, April 11, 2017.
 41. Ibid.
 42. From the interview video with Wu Tong on March 29, 2032.
 43. From the interview video with Wang Pinqin on May 3, 2032.
 44. Records of conversation with Qian Liuxiang, July 17, 2020.

Buried Alive by Lu Huanzhi presents the Preface and Chapter One of a novel, working title 'Buried Alive', which is being drafted incrementally, and will be published over a series of exhibitions and events.

Buried Alive offers a contribution to two interwoven experiments with curatorial form:

The exhibition "*Habits and customs of _____ are so different from ours so that we visit them with the same sentiment that we visit exhibitions*" curated by Biljana Ciric, featuring works by 3-ply, Irena Haiduk, Ho Tzu Nyen, Siniša ilić, Li Liao, Lu Huanzhi, and occurrences of works by Eva Barto. February 20 - April 30, 2016, Kadist Art Foundation, 19bis-21 rue des Trois Frères, 75018, Paris, France.

The publication "*Habits and customs of _____ are so different from ours so that we visit them with the same sentiment that we visit exhibitions*" edited by Biljana Ciric and Fayen d'Evie, and published by Kadist Foundation and 3-ply, featuring works by Lu Huanzhi, Ho Tzu Nyen, Li Liao, Irena Haiduk, and Siniša ilić. Rizograph cover + 5 booklets, BW digital print. Edition of 500 (500 cover, 5 x 100 booklets, variable content). Pdf edition available at www.3ply.net.

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Design: 3-ply, Toby Tam and Biljana Ciric.

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