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China's Second World of Poetry: The Sichuan Avant-Garde, 1982-1992
Day, M.

Citation

Day, M. (2005, October 4). *China's Second World of Poetry: The Sichuan Avant-Garde, 1982-1992*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/57725>

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Author: Day, Michael

Title: China's Second World of Poetry: The Sichuan Avant-Garde, 1982-1992

Issue Date: 2005-10-04

CHAPTER 10: NOT-NOT

It is time now to take a closer look at Not-Not (非非) and the reasons for its success as a group and a journal between 1986 and 1989.

To its credit, Not-Not is one of the only Second World poetry groups in China that actively promoted its favored modes of avant-garde poetry with no apparent gender bias during the 1980s. The relatively high number of female contributors to the journal and group, in its various guises, during the 1980s and since that time, indicates that its avant-garde poetical interests are as attractive to female poets as to male. *The Woman's Poetry Paper* is further and continuing proof of this, but also of the appeal to woman poets of having an (unofficial) avant-garde poetry forum of their own.⁵²⁷

Of the three pre-1989 *Not-Not* journals devoted primarily to poetry, the 1987 issue had the highest number of woman poets (eight), while the 1986 inaugural issue had four, and the 1988 issue⁵²⁸ six. The total number of poetry contributors rose from an initial total of 24 to 39 in 1988, showing that the journal attracted new contributors of both sexes. And only two of the woman poets were contributors to all three issues: Liu Tao and Xiao An.

The question is: why were woman poets more attracted to this poetry group and not others, such as Wholism in Chengdu or *Them* in Nanjing, for example?

With regard to Wholism, woman poets were apparently not attracted to a group that praised, and tried to resuscitate, a traditional culture in which women never had a role to play other than that of “good mother and virtuous wife.” Like the Wholism group, *The Red Flag* in Chongqing, and many other unofficial poetry groupings and their journals, *Them* had all the appearances of a boys-only poetry club. In *Them*'s case, among frequent early contributors to the journal the exception to this rule was Xiao Jun, who ceased contributing after leaving China in 1988. While key female members of Not-Not – Liu

⁵²⁷ Another journal with a web magazine and poetry chat-room devoted to woman's poetry is *Wings* (翼). The journal was established in 1999, and the website in 2002: <http://www.poemlife.net/wings/>. Among the key contributors are Zhai Yongming, Tang Danhong, and Zhou Zan (a translator and scholar, as well as a poet).

⁵²⁸ The #4 issue was printed at the same time as the #3 issue in October 1988, and was entirely devoted to theory.

Tao, Xiao An, and Yang Ping – were to marry male counterparts within the group,⁵²⁹ they were fine poets in their own right, and many other woman poets also contributed to the journal without developing romantic relationships with key male contributors.

Not-Not Theory, Name, and Formation

Part of the answer to the question why a comparatively large number of woman avant-garde poets contributed to *Not-Not* may lie in the <Not-Not-ism Manifesto> (非非主义宣言), which leads off the 1986 first issue of *Not-Not*:

• 1 •

On the ruins of ancient Rome, those big, lofty stone pillars: they have always been alive, they have always been thinking – this is told us by our entirely wide open intuition – only if we are incapable of entirely benumbing ourselves, we then have no way of not deeply believing: they really are alive, without doubt they have continuously been thinking, always thinking. Up to this day, the sole difficulty has been that we have been unable to find any form of cultural artifice to “prove” whether they ultimately live in the fashion of an “animal,” or in that of a “plant.” Our present culture has been incapable of embracing them, this wondrous phenomenon of life. We also have no ready way of saying what manner of thought they ultimately follow, and what they ultimately are thinking. So ---

Today we declare:

First, they live in a not-not fashion;

Second, they are not-not life;

Third, they make us feel not-not;

Fourth, they make us become not-not;

Fifth, we are not-not.

Applaud us! --- we believe the sound of today’s applause will be permeated by a great concentration of not-not, followed by a dilution within not-not

Today with this sign that is “Not-Not,” and with the great heap of highly obscure semantics still now waiting to be sorted out behind it, we officially declare: starting with the advancement of “Not-Not,” we will vigorously enlarge the cultural field [文化疆域], until there is a profound understanding of the “body of Not-Not life” [非非生命体] and the “body of Not-Not thought” [非非思维体] indicated to us by today’s culture. Until we can see in this (en-)cultured world and (en-)cultured crowd a renewal of full “Not-Not vigor” [非非生机], and

⁵²⁹ All would marry in 1986: Liu Tao with Lan Ma, Xiao An with Yang Li, and Yang Ping with Jimu Langge. Liu Tao and Xiao An parted with their husbands in 1989.

everywhere “Not-Not values” [非非价值] abound.

This first of six sections of the Not-Not manifesto (written by Lan Ma) appears to offer a definition of the meaning of the group’s name. Stone pillars among the ruins of ancient Rome are far removed from Chinese culture, and the ideas of the Wholism group, the other well-known Chengdu-based group at the time. While Wholism claims origins in symbols of ancient Chinese culture, here Not-Not seemingly finds them in symbols of ancient western culture, although the choice of stone pillars is common to many other ancient cultures the world over, and Not-Not, like Wholism, was making universal assertions, bordering on the mystical, if not religious. Claiming that these pillars “live” and “think” in ways that are not understood by current modes of life and thought seems to justify the double use of “not” in the group name. While in modern culture these pillars are held to not live and think, the poets of the Not-Not group – though admitting they do not yet have all the answers – wish first-and-foremost to negate this currently accepted negation on the basis of a mutually-held sense of intuition and a heightened facility of direct perception. In parts 2 and 3 of the manifesto, this reading is further strengthened when Lan repeatedly states: Not-Not “is not ‘is not’” (不是不是的).

However, the ambiguous definition provided in the manifesto and in other writings and statements by the group led to years of confusion among readers and critics alike.⁵³⁰ Finally, in 1994 Zhou stated the origin of the group’s name was in the early-1986 essay written as a preface for an aborted collection of Third Generation poetry edited by Yang Li and Hu Dong: <The Second Tide of the Contemporary Youth Poetry Movement and a New Challenge> (当代青年诗歌运动的第二浪潮与新的挑战).⁵³¹ In it, Zhou

⁵³⁰ A striking example of a misreading of the <Manifesto> can be found in Spence (1990): 719, one of the few English languages reference to Not-Not to date. Here, Spence claims that the group was a reaction to the current “absurd” political situation. Decontextualized readings such as this were possible and dangerous, and such a reading by Sichuan’s public security forces may have been one of the reasons for the arrest of Zhou Lunyou in August 1989. (Zhou was released from prison camp in September 1991.) See more on this in Chapter 11.

⁵³¹ This article was first published in May 1986 in the second issue of the *Tide* (浪潮) series put out by the Flower City Press in Guangzhou. See also a slightly different version in Zhou (1999a): 186-193. Zhou also reprinted it in the May 1987 second issue of *Not-Not Criticism* (非非评论). Yang states that Not-Not was formed after the article was written, however *Not-Not* is listed as one of the “large poetry collections” published in Sichuan in the published article’s first paragraph. Presumably, Zhou added *Not-Not* to this list after he and others agreed to form a group in March 1986, and before initial publication of the article in Guangzhou in May.

characterized “the third wave” of post-Mao poets as being “not-sublime” (非崇高) and “not-rational” (非理性), and that a combination of the two nots produced the group’s name.⁵³²

The stress on intuition (returned to in Part 3 of the manifesto), on the mysterious power to perceive what lies behind, beneath, or beyond the artifices of culture and semantics, might be part of the reason this group attracted contributions from a large number of avant-garde poets – and not just women poets. That said, for women poets, here was an opportunity to create a highly personal form of poetry from which the misogynist baggage of contemporary culture (Chinese or otherwise) could be expunged. The creative freedom envisaged in the manifesto was also attractive to male poets who wished to experiment, did not wish to set restrictive codes of poetic practice (as seemed the wont of individuals such as Ouyang Jianghe), and did not seek inspiration in what seemed a failed culture tradition (as Wholism was attempting).

This iconoclasm harks back to that of the May Fourth movement of the 1920s. Apparently, *Not-Not*’s editors chose 4 May as the symbolic date on which Lan Ma’s manifesto was recorded as completed. In fact, the May Fourth movement grew out of the reformist literature- and education-based New Culture movement, which can be dated from 1915 and the founding of the *New Youth* (新青年) magazine by Chen Duxiu (the magazine’s editor and one of the founders of the CCP in 1921). The May Fourth movement of 1919 was a direct result of concessions given to foreign powers in China at the post-WWI Versailles conference, which sparked student demonstrations on Tian’anmen Square and imbued the earlier cultural movement with thoroughgoing political and iconoclastic elements, primarily directed against Confucian morality and the traditional social order.⁵³³ The choice of this symbolic date for the founding of the group

According to Yang Li, the aborted unofficial poetry collection he and Hu Dong were editing in Chengdu in late 1985 was called *Third Generation Poetry Selection* (第三代诗选) (see Yang Li (2004): 585-586), but is remembered by Zhou as being entitled *South China Poetry Book* (南中国诗卷): see Zhou (1994b): 109.

⁵³² Zhou (1994b): 109. Lan claims to remember Zhou first coming up with the group name “Pre-Culturalism” (前文化主义), which Lan rejected as too rational and too direct. It was when Lan asked for a name that would express no meaning (不表意义的) that Zhou suggested ‘not-not.’ See Yang Li (2004): 584-586.

⁵³³ For more details on these events, see Spence (1990): 312-319, Chow Tse-tsung (1960), and Lin Yusheng (1979).

indicated Not-Not was laying claim to an earlier tradition of radical literary activism that attempted to renovate China.

Given the cultural isolation visited on China after 1949, the resulting lack of ability in any language other than Chinese on the part of the vast majority of poets, and the hard experience of political and cultural dictatorship during the Cultural Revolution (and, to a lesser extent, in the aftermath of the Beijing Spring period in 1979-1980), the disillusionment of young poets and intellectuals with Chinese culture in general, and most forms of authority, is understandable. Intuition – here a faith in one’s own perception and good poetical judgment – was an agreeable common denominator that allowed a disparate group of poets from all parts of Sichuan and other provinces to contribute to *Not-Not*.

The Founding

As to the founding of the group, both Zhou and Lan Ma agree that Zhou was initially resistant to the idea of creating a poetry group in early 1986, with Zhou then holding a belief that poetry was a purely individual endeavor,⁵³⁴ perhaps because of his bad experience with the Young Poets Association. Lan had been working on his pre-cultural consciousness ideas since late 1984, and began urging Zhou to help form a poetry group in 1986 after reading an article by Xu Jingya: <China’s Poetry Scene should have the Courage to take up the Flags of Groups> (中国诗坛应有打起旗号称派的勇气).⁵³⁵ The poet Zhu Ying (who would join Not-Not in 1987) also played a role: Zhou remembers Zhu first coming to him with the idea of forming a group in late 1985.⁵³⁶ Zhu again urged the formation of a group in early 1986, around the same time as Lan. Zhou says he

⁵³⁴ Yang Li (2004): 584; Zhou (1994b): 107.

⁵³⁵ The author has not been able to identify this article, but has heard of such an article being published as a lead-in to <The Poetry Exhibition>, edited by Xu and published in October 1986. Lan may also have misremembered the name of the article. See Yang Li (2004): 584.

⁵³⁶ Zhou (1994b): 106. Before being assigned to work in Xichang in 1985, Zhu had been part of a group called Illusivism (飘渺主义) while a student at the Chongqing Medical Institute

responded to Lan's later urging,⁵³⁷ while Lan remembers Zhou coming to Lan after being convinced of the need for a group by Zhu Ying.⁵³⁸

In light of Zhou's previous involvement together with his brother Zhou Lunzuo in the creation of the Sichuan Young Poets Association in 1984, their lecture tour in 1985, and of Zhou Lunyou's involvement in the Three Musketeer forum in 1983-1984, his claim to have been disinterested is questionable. Presented with an opportunity to form a broad-based poetry group, centered on a journal whose editor-in-chief he would be, on past form, it seems unlikely that Zhou would not have jumped at the opportunity. However, it appears likely that the writing of <The Second Tide> article had a decisive effect on Zhou's thinking about this issue, if not the naming of the group.

Yang Li remembers receiving a letter from Zhou in March 1986 asking him to go to Xichang from Chengdu, where he had just returned from Chongqing with his new girlfriend Xiao An.⁵³⁹ Upon arrival in Xichang, Yang was informed about the group, asked to contribute poetry and to help Zhou arrange for contributions from other poets in Sichuan and beyond.

It seems remarkable that Zhou would again choose to work with Yang after his experience during 1984-1985, when Yang was one of those who plotted against him in the Sichuan Young Poets Association. Presumably, Yang's invitation to write the preface for the journal he and Hu Dong were editing in 1985-1986 was something of an olive branch.

In 2002, in *Not-Not* #10, Zhou publicly revealed for the first time just how far he was willing to bend to accommodate Yang Li in 1986. In <Zhou Lunyou Discusses Yang Li> (周伦佑谈杨黎), Zhou claims that Yang had taken the original 500 RMB Zhou, Lan and their friends had gathered for the printing of the journal and spent it on food, drink,

⁵³⁷ Ibid.: 107.

⁵³⁸ Yang Li (2004): 584-585. However, Zhou states that Lan was the driving force behind the creation of the group, while describing himself as merely being a poet who did not really become interested in the group idea until he was writing a theoretical article at Lan's suggestion after they had agreed to form a group. Zhou makes it sound as if he was initially humoring Lan. The apparently decisive article was <Structural Change: A Record of the Revelations of Contemporary Art> (变构: 当代艺术启示录), written at the same time as Lan was writing <An Introduction to Pre-Culture> (前文化导言) (originally entitled <Pre-Culture and Not-Not> [前文化与非非]). Both articles are recorded in *Not-Not* as being completed on 2 May.

⁵³⁹ She had been a student at the Chongqing Number Three Military Medical University, and Yang had met her in the home of her classmate Liu Taiheng, a Wholism poet.

cigarettes, rent for a new apartment, and furnishings. In May-June, Yang similarly used a further 800 RMB collected by Zhou and Lan in 60 RMB installments from poetry contributors to make up for what had been lost.⁵⁴⁰ This last act was not discovered until the eve of publication on 3 July when Lan and Zhou had to quickly scrape together money from friends in Chengdu, only raising enough to ransom 250-300 copies of the journal from the printers.⁵⁴¹

In his recently published *Splendor: The Writing and Life of the Third Generation* (灿烂: 第三代人的写作和生活), Yang does not directly address these claims of Zhou's. In a section entitled <Making *Not-Not*> (办非非), only the last two pages directly discuss events surrounding the establishment of the journal. Yang states that he was more of a speaker and not a doer, and that Zhou and Lan had made a mistake in leaving him alone in Chengdu to oversee the printing of *Not-Not* #1.⁵⁴² As a possible explanation of how he spent their money, Yang goes on to say he had an interest in setting up a “poetry religion,” and encouraged in this direction by Jing Xiaodong and Shang Zhongmin, he rented and furnished an apartment with an eye to making it something of a temple to poetry.⁵⁴³ This claim is dubious: ideas surrounding concepts of “poetry religion” in China were not circulating at the time, and would not begin to do so until after the suicide of Haizi in 1989.⁵⁴⁴ In *The Left Side*, Bai Hua also relates such a claim, but his brief history of *Not-Not* in Part 4 Chapter 3 is entirely Yang Li-centered and reads as if Bai merely recorded Yang's version of events. Yang's poetry of the time does not contain noticeable religious elements, or even the mysticism evident in Lan Man's pre-culture theories. All that said, Yang was only 24 in 1986, and it seems odd that the two older poets (Zhou was 34 and Lan 29) would put so much confidence in Yang's relative inexperience and youth.

The only credible explanation for Zhou and Lan's forgiveness of Yang is the value they placed on his poetry and, thus, his participation in *Not-Not*. This goes back to Zhou

⁵⁴⁰ See Zhou (2002d): 470. The author had heard of these incidents from other poets in Sichuan during the 1980s, but never from Zhou himself.

⁵⁴¹ *Ibid.*: 471, where Zhou says they came away with 300 copies, and Zhou (2001a): 11, where Zhou says it was 250.

⁵⁴² Yang Li (2004): 102.

⁵⁴³ *Ibid.*: 103.

⁵⁴⁴ For one of the earliest articles on the subject see Zhu Dake's <The Door of the Prophets – An Outline on Haizi and Luo Yihe> (先知之门—海子与骆一禾论纲), written in 1991 and first published in Sha Guang ed. (1994). Also, see Zhu (1991a) and Zhu (1991b). In English, see Yeh (1996b).

losing Liao Yiwu's friendship in summer 1984 because of his high regard for Yang's poetry. He Xiaozhu claims that Zhou wanted Yang in Not-Not because he was afraid of losing him to *Them*, as Yang had admired the poetry of Yu Jian and Han Dong since being introduced to it by Wan Xia in 1985.⁵⁴⁵ He Xiaozhu also states that Zhou asked him to carry 30 copies of *Not-Not* to Yunnan to give to Yu Jian in an attempt to lure him to join Not-Not – however, Yu was not in Kunming when He was there.⁵⁴⁶ The articles Zhou has written in response to these by He and Yang have not refuted these claims. In fact, the broad theoretical basis of Not-Not seems to have been designed by Zhou and Lan with the idea of creating an umbrella journal capable of housing all elements of what he and Yang termed the third wave, or Third Generation, of Chinese avant-garde poetry.

Yang has said he only went along with Zhou and Lan because he wanted to have his poetry published, further stating that his best friends were Wan Xia and Hu Dong (who left China in 1986), and that he felt a greater affinity to the poetry of Han Dong and Yu Jian than to that of any of the Not-Not poets.⁵⁴⁷ However, Yang had written a *Book of Changes*-inspired sequence, <You Girl> (汝女), in late 1985-early 1986, for the first issue of Wholism's *Han Poetry*. This suggests that he may have been an adherent of the Wholistic tendency in early 1986, and his close links with the editors of *Han Poetry* would have required Zhou and Lan to win Yang around to their group. On the other hand, the Not-Not style of Yang's contribution to the second issue of *Han Poetry*, <Quotations and Birds> (语录与鸟), written in 1988 while helping Lan and Zhou produce issues #3 and #4 of *Not-Not*, suggests that he was only seeking a place for poetry for which there was no room in *Not-Not*. Presumably, at the time, the editors of *Han Poetry* would have seen this as something of a coup.

The extent of Zhou's tolerance of Yang Li, if not also Wan Xia, is further demonstrated by Zhou's account of Yang and Wan's attempted sabotage of the first issue of *Not-Not*.⁵⁴⁸ In late May 1986, a day or two before the journal was to be sent to the printers for typesetting, Yang returned to his home with Wan Xia where Zhou was waiting for him with the journal's other assistant poetry editor, Jing Xiaodong (Yang was the other). Wan

⁵⁴⁵ Yang (2004): 549.

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid.: 556-557.

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid.: 531-532.

⁵⁴⁸ See Zhou (2001a): 3-5, and Zhou ed. (2002d): 470-471.

claimed he was not really part of Wholism and wanted to join Not-Not. Zhou agreed with this assessment and thought Wan's Part 4 of <The Owl King> (梟王) was a poem worthy of *Not-Not*, but still did not trust Wan. Zhou eventually allowed himself to be convinced otherwise by Wan, Yang, and Jing. However, as the journal was already set and there was not enough room for the entirety of Wan's poem, Jing Wendong⁵⁴⁹ took it upon himself to edit it down to the size of the one-and-a-half pages that were available. Wan was furious with the result and believed that Zhou had done it, so he quit Not-Not and set about organizing his revenge.⁵⁵⁰ In late June, after printing had already begun, Zhou and Lan discovered that an anti-Not-Not essay and a related written 'discussion' had been added to the front-inside and back-inside covers of the journal. As it turned out, the articles had been organized by Wan Xia, and the changes to the journal were approved at the printing house by Yang Li. Zhou and Lan had to rush back to Chengdu from Xichang to negotiate a reprint of the original issue with the printers, and stayed in the plant for the final 48 hours until this printing was completed.⁵⁵¹ And still they forgave Yang Li.

Yang, however, makes no mention of Wan Xia's participation in any of this, stating that he only added an article by Jing Xiaodong and a few articles of his own on his planned poetry religion.⁵⁵² In Yang's book *Splendor*, neither Lan Ma nor Wan Xia refers to these events. Nor have Zhou Lunyou, or any other of Sichuan's poets, who may have been privy to Yang Li's state of mind at this time, referred to Yang's interest in establishing a poetry religion in 1986.

What is also not discussed in these recent public revelations of events is how the production of *Han Poetry* by Wholism during 1986 may have served as a spur to Zhou and Lan to produce their own competing journal and group. However, Yang's contribution to *Han Poetry* of a Wholistic poem indicates that Zhou had to work to swing

⁵⁴⁹ Jing was named as assistant poetry editor of *Not-Not* # 1 and assistant theory editor of *Not-Not* # 2, journals to which he contributed poetry and a theoretical essay, as well as appearing on the editorial committee lists of the two issues of *Not-Not Critique* (August 1986, May 1987). However, Zhou writes that he left the group of his own accord after publication of an anti-Not-Not article, <Facing Myself> (面向自己), in the April 1988 issue of the official Chengdu poetry journal *Stars*. Zhou states Jing never did his job, and as early as July 1986 Jing had said he was not a member of *Not-Not* at a seminar sponsored by the Sichuan chapter of the official Writers Association. See Zhou (2001a): 3.

⁵⁵⁰ Zhou believes that because of this incident Wan left out 3/5's of his poem <Free Squares> (自由方块) when editing *The Complete Collection of Post-Misty Poetry* in 1993. See Zhou (2001a): 5.

⁵⁵¹ To date, no parts of this story have been refuted by Wan Xia.

⁵⁵² Yang Li (2004): 103.

Yang over into Not-Not. Yang's participation also suggests that Zhou and Lan were aware Wholism was in the process of producing their own journal at the time.

Han Poetry was originally scheduled to be printed in May-June 1986, but was confiscated and a reduced version of the original issue did not appear until January 1987. The mutual hostility between the groups is indicated by Yang Li when he states that between the years 1984 and 1990, the poets of these two groups frequented one particular alley in Chengdu:⁵⁵³ the Not-Not poets in teahouses and restaurants on the right side of the street, the Wholism poets (including Sun Wenbo) on the left. The only time they ever came together was when visited by independent poets, such as Zhai Yongming, Bai Hua, and Ma Song.⁵⁵⁴ Yang ignores his contributions to *Han Poetry* and the fraternization that this implies on his part.

The <Post-Editing Five Way Discussion> (编后五人谈)⁵⁵⁵ in *Not-Not* #1 is opened by Yang Li with comments directly relating to Wholism's journal: "The conclusion of the second wave [of Post-Mao poetry] is to be announced by the imminent appearance of *Han Poetry* – 1986, just as the first wave was concluded by Xu Jingya's [essay] <The Risen Band of Poets> (崛起的诗群)."⁵⁵⁶

In further comments attributed to Yang Li in the <Discussion>, the inspiration behind the founding of Not-Not was that of Zhou Lunyou in March 1986, after he had written

⁵⁵³ See Yang (2004), Chapter 4: 3. This street is Ancient Reclining Dragon Bridge Street (古卧龙桥街), located behind the Salt Market (盐市口) in the center of Chengdu.

⁵⁵⁴ In April 2004 at the Chinese Poetry Festival in Denmark, Jing Bute (Feng Jun) remembered visiting Yang Li in Chengdu in 1988. The appearance of Shi Guangwei led Yang to call him a traitor, etc., and roundly abuse him. Jing was shocked, but Yang's comments can be traced back to the Three Musketeer Forum in 1983-1984, when he, Shi, Wan Xia, and the Song brothers participated in those forums, as opposed to the those activities organized by the 'modernists', or followers of the *Today* poets – including Ouyang Jianghe, Zhong Ming, and other contributors to the 1982 *Born-Again Forest*, among others. The fact that *Han Poetry*, edited by Shi and the Song brothers, provided a forum for Ouyang, Sun, and others of this group, may help to explain such hostile outbursts.

⁵⁵⁵ *Not-Not* #1, pp. 78-79, 24. This consists of brief written comments by Yang Li, Zhou Lunyou, Lan Ma, Jing Xiaodong, and Shang Zhongmin.

⁵⁵⁶ An essay first written in 1981, amended in 1982, and officially published in the 1983 No. 1 issue of *Contemporary Thought Tide in Literature and the Arts* (当代文艺思潮). In praise of the *Today* poets and their poetry, this article kicked off a polemic over modern poetry and resulted in Xu being forced to make self-criticism in the form of an article published in *The People's Daily* on 5 March 1984: <Always Firmly Remember the Direction of Socialist Literature and Arts> (时刻牢记社会主义的文艺方向). A partial translation of the 1983 essay into English by Ng Mau-sang can be found in *Renditions* #19 & 20 (1983) under the title of <A Volant Tribe of Bards>.

<The Second Tide> essay. Yang effectively summarizes the essay and the reasons for Not-Not's appearance in one brief paragraph:

... [I]f it can be said that the first tide was a critique of an alienated reality and completed a negation; then the Second Tide as a return to tradition began an affirmation; the third tide is *not* negation and also *not* affirmation. The first tide was based in Beijing, the second was based in Sichuan, the third tide however is nationwide, Chengdu, Shanghai, Nanjing, Hangzhou,⁵⁵⁷

Aside from offering yet another possible meaning of Not-Not in the definition of the third tide, the adoption of the three tides trope effectively relegates the Wholism group from the third tide, or avant-garde. After forming the Third Generation Alliance in 1984, together with Zhao Ye, Wan Xia, Li Yawei, *cum suis*, Yang is here adopting Zhou's terminology and following his lead in an act of position-taking, or in an attempt to define the entire sub-field of the avant-garde. However, both Yang and Zhou would revert to using the term Third Generation: later in 1986 Yang wrote <A Train Passing Through Hell – On the Third Generation Poetry Movement 1980-1985> (穿越地狱的列车—第三代人运动 1980-1985),⁵⁵⁸ and Zhou wrote <On the Third Generation> (论第三代) in 1988.⁵⁵⁹ Yet, also in 1986, Zhou would coin the term the Second World of Poetry when writing about developments in post-Mao avant-garde poetry in <On the Second World of Poetry> (论第二诗界).⁵⁶⁰ Here Zhou is casting a wide, non-exclusionary net, catching all the avant-garde, who up until then had been practicing their craft on a primarily unofficial basis. By 1988, however, poets such as Zhai Yongming and Ouyang Jianghe had effectively moved into the literary establishment, publishing many of their new works in official literary journals, thus possibly necessitating a reversion to Third Generation. Whether Third Tide or Third Generation, it is clear that in 1986 Zhou *cum suis* had ambitions to create a nationwide forum for avant-garde poets. In doing so, he, and Not-Not as a group, revealed an urge to act as not just a broadcaster, but also an

⁵⁵⁷ Italics added.

⁵⁵⁸ First published in the July 1989 issue of *Author*.

⁵⁵⁹ Presented as a paper in May 1988 at the National Poetry Theory Discussion (Grand Canal) Conference in Jiangsu, and first published in the 1989 No. 1 issue of *Arts Wide Angle* (艺术广角). Also see Zhou (1999a): 167-185.

⁵⁶⁰ First published in the August 1986 first issue of *Not-Not Criticism*. Also see Zhou (1999a): 154-166.

arbiter of the avant-garde in poetry. Essays published in Not-Not #1 further clarify this position-taking.

Zhou's theoretical essay <Structural Change> is a thinly veiled debunking of Wholism. Zhou begins by pointing out the dualistic structure shared by traditional western and Chinese thought. The dualistic structure of western thought is characterized by such oppositional pairings as chance vs. necessity, mind vs. matter, content vs. form, and Hegel's ideas about doubles, or the logic of double-dealing; while in China examples of a similar thought structure can be found in yin vs. yang, existence vs. nothingness, and action vs. inaction. Zhou's highlighting of these oppositions brings to mind the work of Derrida and his and his followers' critique, or deconstruction, of the hierarchical oppositions that have structured western thought. Not-Not's stated desire to dismantle and re-inscribe oppositions and their related discourses is further indicative of the influence of Derrida.

The differences between western and Chinese thought, Zhou claims, result from differing aesthetic habits and ways of thought. Freudian and Jungian thought is then deployed to demonstrate how cultural traditions are created and structured, before, in the final part of the essay, Zhou turns to issues addressed in Freud's <Negation> and the impulse toward structural change in art. After dealing with symbolism and the development of ideas related to individual consciousness, and how these and other factors led to the rise of modernism, alienation, individualism, and the absurd in western art, Zhou states that this situation has led western intellectuals to turn to Buddhism, Daoism, and other New Age beliefs. One of these beliefs was a methodological concept of wholism, or holism.

Sub-headed <Wholism⁵⁶¹ – A New Dilemma> (整体—新的困惑), without directly referring to Chengdu's Wholism group, Zhou describes the origins of the various forms of western wholism and the conservative stress on stability of such patterns of thought. Zhou then points out that results have shown the stress on stability results in a neglect of the existence of unstable elements, and, in so doing, encourages change leading on to the formation of new structures.

⁵⁶¹ Zhou includes the English word "wholism" in the text; p. 59.

Effectively, Zhou returns to the argument raised by his identification of three waves of post-Mao poetry⁵⁶² – the breakthrough of *Today* and modernist poetry in the late-1970s / early-1980s; the emergence of roots-seeking, culturally conservative poetry, which culminates in the poetry of Chengdu’s Wholism group; followed by the breakthrough of a third wave, embodied in the poetry of groups such as Not-Not and *Them*. Zhou places a quote from George Santayana beneath the essay’s title – “In art heterodoxy is orthodoxy” – as seeming justification for the appearance of Not-Not, and, by implication, the repudiation of Wholism and others who seek a return to outdated orthodoxy.

While Zhou’s article sets about proving the inevitability, if not necessity, of Not-Not, Lan wrote his <Introduction to Pre-Culture> as a detailed explanation of Not-Not’s *raison d’être*. The first part of the essay’s first section, <Pre-Culture and Culture> (前文化与文化), offers readers an insight into the overall aims of the group:

“Culture” is merely this sort of “act of humankind” – in order to be a “socialized group” humankind undertakes manipulation “beneficial to humankind” on all objects and events in the universe, and will undertake “humankind’s act” of “signification” on all objects and events in the universe.

This act, no matter if carried out on the so-called material universe or the so-called spiritual universe, adopts the same crude approach – arrangement! Sign arrangement!

The result of this ceaseless activity brings about a “world of signs,” “a world of linguistic significance.”

In this “cultured world,” the fundamental danger lies in that: it possesses a violence that forces those who follow to see immediately the true world as “that type contained within semantics,” innocently receiving [what is] “imposed upon [them] by semantics.”

This sets up what Not-Not theory wants to knock down, effectively laying out a course of linguistic deconstruction, guiding the poet to a place where s/he can act as both conduit to, and seer of, the world that lies beneath the violent semantic acts of humankind. This ties in nicely with the Not-Not manifesto discussed above. It is also apparent that Lan and Zhou had been reading translations of Saussure and, probably, texts on semiotics, if not

⁵⁶² Zhou reprints the 1986 <Second Tide and the New Challenge> article in *Not-Not Critiques* # 2, May 1987.

works by Barthes, Lacan, Foucault, among others, as well. In this sense, Not-Not is noteworthy for being the first poetry group in China to address the issues raised by these theorists.

Given the apparent deadline Zhou, Lan, and Yang were working under in May, in an attempt to be in print before, or at the same time, as *Han Poetry*, what was presented as the Not-Not manifesto was, in fact, the final section of Lan's <Introduction to Pre-Culture> essay. As several central concepts of Lan's thesis were not fully explained within his essay, Zhou and Lan proceeded to write <A Small Dictionary of Not-Not-ism> (非非主义小词典) and <Not-Not-ism Poetry Methods> (非非主义诗歌方法) in order to fill this gap.⁵⁶³

One of the more interesting definitions in the Dictionary was that for "Return to Pre-Culture Origins" (前文化还原):

By way of clearing out cultural rubbish, the process and methods whereby existence is restored to the pre-culture state. Including a return of sense perception to origins, a return of consciousness to origins, a return of language to origins. Possible replacement term: not-not (as a verb).

These terms are explained within the first part of <Poetry Methods> entitled <Not-Not-ism and a Return of Creation to Origins> (非非主义与创造还原) – the ultimate goal of Not-Not-ism when applied to poetry. The process of this method is rendered as follows:

Three escapes – escape knowledge, escape thought, escape meaning;
Three transcendences – transcend logic, transcend rationality, transcend grammar.

In a second section, devoted to Not-Not-ism's relationship to language, three "not-not treatments" (非非处理) are prescribed: A) Not dualist-value directional-ization; B) Not abstraction; C) Not determination.⁵⁶⁴

⁵⁶³ According to Lan, see Yang (2004): 585-586.

⁵⁶⁴ The use of terms such as "three escapes" (三逃避) and "three transcendences" (三超越) are reminiscent of CCP terms used in political campaigns. It should be remembered, however, that such linguistic shorthand was not unique to the CCP, and has a pedigree almost as old as the Chinese language. A glance at the similar terms listed in the *Sea of Words* (辞海) dictionary under any number indicates that the CCP, and Mao Zedong, utilized aspects of the Chinese language which were already well established in religious, political, literary, and historical contexts. There is a deliberate irony in Zhou's use of such

Finally, in relation to criticism, Not-Not-ism maintains that aesthetic judgment is an innate ability, a form of direct perception. Realism and modernism are dismissed; the latter as being “determinant expression,” as its topics and meanings are ultimately decipherable, whether through an understanding of symbolism or other commonly applied literary techniques. Essentially, modernist poetry is held to be linguistically goal-oriented, if not necessarily didactic. On the other hand, Not-Not-ism is characterized by “indeterminate description,” with indeterminate topics and meanings, based on a basic tenet that in the creation of a polysemic semiotic field through the introduction of indeterminate experience into poetry, “the feeling of language” (语感) becomes more important than the sense of it (语义).

This already is a bare-bones simplification of Not-Not-ism, but what was labeled as extracts of the Not-Not-ism manifesto in Xu Jingya’s <Grand Exhibition> in October 1986 was even more so. Approximately 500 characters are haphazardly taken from the journal’s <Manifesto> and <Poetry Methods>, with no reference to important aspects such as the roles of direct perception and intuition. The 1988 book version of <A Grand Exhibition> carries an expanded version of a still greatly simplified manifesto.⁵⁶⁵ However, the comments of Xu *cum suis* again confirm their editorial recreation of the manifesto, as well as stating that, in their eyes, Not-Not-ism theory is pan-cultural and not, strictly speaking, a theory of poetry. In light of these views and the misrepresentation of the group, it is not surprising that only two contributors (Xiao An⁵⁶⁶ and Hai Nan⁵⁶⁷) to *Not-Not* submitted new poetry in 1988 as the book was being edited.

Yet, Lan Ma’s theory was indeed pan-cultural (as was Wholism’s) and became even more so in 1988 in his <Not-Not-ism Manifesto Number Two> (非非主义第二号宣言) and <Return to Origins of the Language of People and the World: Adjectives and

terminology in literary criticism, as any educated Mainland Chinese is bound to link it with similar terms found in CCP propaganda. Uncharitable, or humorless, critics may well read Zhou’s use of such terminology as the result of the influence of CCP propaganda, or the Cultural Revolution, thereby ignoring the breadth and depth of Zhou’s knowledge of the Chinese language and the subjects on which he writes.

⁵⁶⁵ Xu et. al. (1988): 33-35.

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid.: 503-504; <A Meeting with Death> (会见死亡) and <The Seaside> (海边).

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid.: 505-507; <The Wind Under the Door> (门下的风), <On Your Arm Still Lonely> (在你的手臂仍然孤独), and <Return> (归来).

Cultural Value> (人与世界的语言还原：形容词与文化价值) in *Not-Not* #3, the special theory-only issue. In the same issue, Zhou authored two similarly culture-oriented essays: <Against Values / A Reckoning with Existing Cultural Values> (反价值/对已有文化的价值清算) and <The Contemporary Cultural Movement and The Third Culture> (当代文化运动与第三文化). Following Zhou's and Yang's dismissal of Wholism in *Not-Not* #1, in #3 Shang Zhongmin authored an essay, <Words from the Heart> (内心的言辞),⁵⁶⁸ in which he denounced what he perceived as the self-mystifying acts of modernist poets such as Eliot and Pound – and thus, indirectly, their local champions, Ouyang Jianghe, Zhang Zao and other contributors to *Han Poetry* – and the modernist movement's obsession with death. These editorial acts may be seen as a continuation of hostilities, and as position-takings, within the avant-garde dating back to the publication of *The Born-Again Forest* in 1982. As a group, Not-Not was a newcomer to the avant-garde, as such a call for a return to linguistic origins was highly effective in achieving distinction and recognition both inside out of the sub-field. The initial debunking of Wholism (formed as a group in 1984) and, later, 'modernism' were classic avant-garde newcomer tactics in this regard.

To further this end, Not-Not produced the first issue of the newspaper-format *Not-Not Critiques* in August 1986.⁵⁶⁹ Along with copies of *Not-Not* # 1, *Not-Not Critiques* was sent to selected poetry critics across the country, and was quick to elicit responses. When the second, and final, issue of *Not-Not Critiques* was published in May 1987, aside from reprinting Zhou's <Second Tide> essay and an essay by a high school student in

⁵⁶⁸ The essay is divided into three parts: <Oppose the Modernists> (反对现代派), <Death is Someone Else's Issue> (死亡是别人的事情), and <Learn from Yourself> (向自己学习). The <Oppose> portion of the essay can be found in Wu Sijing (1993): 228-235.

⁵⁶⁹ This paper was given over entirely to Not-Not theory, including Zhou's <On the Second World of Poetry>, Yan Zhi's <A New Consciousness Background and Attitude to Language – A Shallow Analysis of the Applicability of the Experiment in Yang Li's Poetry> (新的意识背景和语言态度—浅析杨黎诗歌的可行性实验), and <Not-Not-ism and the Future of China's New Poetry Groups> (非非主义与中国新诗流派的前途) by Liu Tao, Fanfan, and Yang Ping. In addition to these three poetry-centered essays, there was a further installment of Lan Ma's culture-oriented theoretical essays: <A Precursor of the Birth of a New Culture – Culturalism, Anti-Culture, Supra-Culture> (新文化诞生的前兆—伪文化, 反文化, 超文化), in which the poets of Wholism and *Han Poetry* in general were seen as advocates of "culturalism" and Not-Not of "supra-culture".

Sichuan,⁵⁷⁰ all nine other articles were by literary reporters or critics (some were university students or instructors at the time) in China and Hongkong.⁵⁷¹ Names that appear here, such as Chen Chao, Chen Zhongyi, Shen Tianhong, and Gong Gaixiong, would appear again as contributors to future issues of *Not-Not* or become influential, favorable critical voices on the national poetry scene.⁵⁷² The 1988 theory-only edition of *Not-Not* seems to have been meant as a greatly expanded version of this newspaper edition.

Not-Not was in several ways ahead of its time. The group's pan-cultural theory, focus on language, and unique poetic techniques have been identified as possessing post-modernist elements by critics such as Ba Tie, Chen Shaohong, and Chen Xuguang, who may be considered neutral commentators, as well as critics with close ties to *Not-Not*, such as Shen Tianhong and Sun Jilin. Most of these critics refer to deconstructive elements present in the theory of Lan Ma and the theory and poetical practice of Zhou

⁵⁷⁰ Liang Qingtun <Direct Perception – *Not-Not* – The Art of Poetry> (直觉—非非—诗艺), the middle school is unidentified, presumably to avoid consequences for the student. *Not-Not*, as a publication, was officially banned in early 1987, as were all other previously published unofficial poetry journals and organizations in Sichuan.

⁵⁷¹ In order of appearance, these articles were: 1) Yao Xinbao, reporter for HK's 文汇报 paper <"Misty Poetry" Faces a Challenge – Chinese Contemporary Literature International Seminar Report # 3> ("朦胧诗" 面临挑战—中国当代文学国际讨论会侧记之三), featuring comments about the Third Generation from Shu Ting and Xie Mian; 2) Lin Jiong in *Thumb (Da muzhi)* <Not-Not-ism and Post-Modernism – Notes on the "New Poetry Tide" # 2> (非非主义与后现代主义— "新诗潮" 笔记之二); 3) Shen Tianhong, an excerpt from his book *Chinese Poetry: After Modernism (中国诗歌: 现代主义之后)*; 4) Zhou Dao in *The Literature Press (文学报)* 13 Nov. 1986, <Don't Get Too Used to Playing with the Bird in Our Hand – Shu Ting Talks about the Newborn Generation in Poetry> ("不要玩熟了我們手里的鸟" —舒婷谈诗歌创作中的 "新生代"); 5) Chen Zhongyi in *The Poetry Press*, 21 October 1986 <Outlook> (展望) [this article was published together with Xu Jingya's <Grand Poetry Exhibition>]; 6) Chen Chao, then an instructor at Hebei Teachers University, <*Not-Not: The Discovery of a Continent of New Art*> (非非: 新艺术大陆的发现) [Presumably this and other articles were solicited by *Not-Not* editors.]; 7) Gong Gaixiong, then an instructor at the Leshan Education Institute in Sichuan, <Not-Not-ism and Creationism Consciousness – Written Upon First Learning of *Not-Not*> (非非主义与造天意识—写在新识非非之时); 8) Chen Jingdong, a university student at Zhejiang Normal University, <The Impulse Sign Creation and the Segmental Nature of Development of the Arts – Also Discussing the Significance of Not-Not-ism for Knowledge of the Arts and Its Inadequacies> (符号创造的冲动和艺术发展的层次性—兼谈非非主义在艺术认识上的意义和不足); 9) Situ Min in *Contemporary Poetry (当代诗歌)*, 1987 issue # 1, <A Brief Explanation of Not-Not-ism> (非非主义简介).

⁵⁷² Chen Chao would edit *Chinese Exploratory Poetry Appreciation Dictionary* (1989) and select 18 poems that appeared in *Not-Not* from eight contributors for explication. In the order of their appearance in the book they are: Yang Li, Ding Dang, Li Yawei, He Xiaozhu, Liang Xiaoming, Zhou Lunyou, Shang Zhongmin, and Yu Gang.

Lunyou. Most other critics, however, make no mention of post-modernism and focus on the theories and practice found in Not-Not publications. Furthermore, given the size, longevity, and stated ambitions of Not-Not, all surveys of post-Mao poetry mention the group. Generally, the number of pages devoted to the group is an indication of the critic's attitude towards their work. Some, such as Li Xinyu, dismiss it out of hand, devoting less than two pages to Not-Not. Li Zhen, on the other hand, has 30 pages on the poetry of *Not-Not's* key contributors. Most authors of such book-form surveys manage something between these two extremes.⁵⁷³

Critics such as Cheng Guangwei, have made extremely cutting comments about *Not-Not*, reproducing elements of the analysis rendered by Ouyang Jianghe in his 1993 article <Another Kind of Reading> (另一种阅读).⁵⁷⁴ In this article, Ouyang states that the sources of Not-Not-ism can be found in the Red Guard movement, the political model of Mao Zedong's, and the ideas behind the nouveau roman as exemplified by the work and theories of Robbe-Grillet. While there is some truth in the latter charge, the former two seem overly subjective products of amateur psychological analysis and personal animosity. As has been shown, there is a firm basis for hostility between Ouyang and some of the poets involved with Not-Not, dating back to 1982 and the publication of *The Born-Again Forest*. Moreover, it is not surprising that Ouyang should respond negatively to direct attacks on his poetical practice. That Not-Not adopted western avant-garde tactics and theory to use against poets and schools of poetry in dominant or publicly recognized positions, might have come as a surprise in 1986, but by 1993 Ouyang and others could not claim ignorance of the very traditions they played such a large part in importing and adapting to China's poetry scene.

Recently, the critic Cheng Guangwei chose to reproduce and adopt some of Ouyang's comments, in particular the slur about some form of Red Guard psychology. This seems a product of the polemic over "intellectual" and "among the people," or "popular," poetics

⁵⁷³ Liao et al. (1989); Chen Shaohong (1990); Chen Xuguang (1996): 136-152, this article can also be found as a post-script to Zhou Lunyou ed.(1994c): 352-369, and independently in Chen (1994a); Shen Tianhong (1994); Sun Jilin (1989-1998); Li Xunyu (2000): 294-295; Li Zhen (2001): 168-181, 216-230; Xiang Weiguo (2002): 107-114; Chang & Lu (2002): 209-216; Xie & Liang (1993): 291-303; Wang Guangming (1993): 216-220; Wu Kaijin (1991): 225-234; Cheng Guangwei (2003): 302-307. It should be noted that Li Zhen contributed an essay to the theory-only 1988 issue of *Not-Not*: <The Musical Spirit of Poetry> (诗的音乐精神).

⁵⁷⁴ Ouyang (1993d).

that obsessed the poetry scene in China in 1998-2000 (Cheng's survey of contemporary Chinese poetry was written at precisely this time, though published in 2003). Both Ouyang and Cheng were proponents of the "intellectual" camp, which can be seen as an incarnation of the "serious, modernist" poetics Ouyang had been championing since 1982, which in its turn had drawn strong negative responses from Third Generation and other experimental poets in Sichuan during the 1980s in particular.⁵⁷⁵

A more charitable, though also harsh, assessment of the poets of Not-Not and Third Generation poets in general, is that of Chen Xuguang, a generally sympathetic critic. He sees similarities between these poets and the Dadaists, the Beat generation, the May 1968 generation in France, and – again – the Red Guard movement. Chen writes that because the younger poets missed having the power and playing the roles of Red Guards and rusticated youths, they make up for it by wreaking havoc within poetry.⁵⁷⁶ This ignores the fact that Lan Ma and Zhou Lunyou, as older poets, did not miss out. (So, was Ouyang insinuating that Zhou and Lan had not grown out of this 'phase', whereas he had?)

The concluding paragraph of Zhou Lunyou's <Anti-Values>, essay in *Not-Not* #3 sums up the position of himself and Not-Not-ism in general:

The value exercises of mankind compare well to a ball game: My father's generation and the father generations of my father's generation all enthusiastically joined in --- getting into the championship match and claiming the prize being the highest objective. They never thought about who fixed the entire set of rules that controlled the competition, or whether the rules were reasonable, and so on. Before myself, there have been some who have refused to join the contest. This wasn't because they had grown tired of the protracted competition, or because they had become suspicious of it, but because they knew full well that they could not come out victorious. They chose to adopt an attitude of refusal in order to save face. As far as I'm concerned, the question is not whether or not to refuse to join in the match, the problem I have discovered is more important by far than the match itself: The value-based behavior of mankind is merely a game, and in this game we are the ones being played with. What actually controls the game are a few terms and a self-manipulating set of rules that comes with them. These terms and their rules throw you, us, them, this flock of stupid things into a game of chance, they make us perform with ourselves as audience. After the wheel had spun a few times, I finally understood: I am in it, but I must not be in it! By way of destroying its sacred rules I will stop this

⁵⁷⁵ For more on this, and the role of Cheng Guangwei in particular, see Maghiel van Crevel's forthcoming article <The Intellectual vs. the Popular – A Polemic in Chinese Poetry>.

⁵⁷⁶ Chen Xuguang (1996): 138-139.

great game, and, furthermore, replace it with new rules – This, then, is what I am now doing and want you to join together with me to do. Let's do it together!

The realization of anti-values is, therefore, the creation of new values – only when that is achieved can one say: I have moved one step forward.

Idealistic and naïve in the extreme, certainly political, and, ultimately, unrealizable, but can these ideas be equated with the mindset and actions of a Red Guard? It seems that Not-Not as a group, or tendency, has more in common with Dadaism, surrealism, and other such western art movements of the early twentieth century, as Zhou himself states in his essays, than with the Red Guards. The Red Guards were manipulated by the political powers of the time. These powers took advantage of youth's natural tendency to challenge authority by allowing them to do so until there was a loss of control, upon which the Red Guard movement was ruthlessly crushed.⁵⁷⁷ Equating avant-garde position-takings with the real crimes and deaths that came about during the Red Guard movement is clearly excessive and inappropriate.

However, there does seem to be a greater stress on destruction, or deconstruction, than on creation in Not-Not theory. While it may seem necessary to a builder, or maker, that the ground must be cleared before a new, better structure can be built – instead of endlessly adding to the existing structure – when the building blocks are words, and not bricks, the analogy may no longer hold.

A look at the poetry of Not-Not may provide better answers to questions raised about the practicality of the theory.

The Poetry of *Not-Not*

This section focuses on the work of a necessarily limited number of contributors to *Not-Not* 1986-1988: namely, Zhou Lunyou, Lan Ma, Yang Li, He Xiaozhu, Shang Zhongming, and Xiao An.

⁵⁷⁷ For more of Red Guards in English see Spence (1990): 604-610; and Li Zhensheng (2003).

Zhou Lunyou

In <The Thirteen-Step Flight of Stairs> (十三级台阶),⁵⁷⁸ as in his pre-1986 poetry, Zhou employs irrational experience as he proceeds to map out a thirteen-step evolution of human life up until the point that he has “finished walking the thirteen-step flight of stairs / You are no longer a man of language.” Here “you” has reached a state of pure perception free of all the obfuscating cultural baggage that began to accumulate with the willful naming of things on the first step of the stairs. Presumably, this is a demonstration of Not-Not theory in practice. However, as Xu Jingya points out,⁵⁷⁹ the poem is altogether too logical to be a demonstration of Not-Not-ism as described in the manifesto.

Zhou Lunyou’s next major poem, <Free Squares> (自由方块),⁵⁸⁰ published in *Not-Not* #2 (1987), is an attempt to embody and demonstrate in poetical form the value-based linguistic game in which mankind is caught, and, in so doing, to show the reader the ridiculous nature of current linguistic practice. Zhou adopts a satiric stance to expose the discord between the individual and culture in general. The contradictions he himself must have experienced are prominent throughout the poem: man is at ease with himself, but unable to act for himself; he is impulsive but unable to act freely; he is alone but unable to keep his silence, and so on. A satiric poet is necessarily a rebel, but because the poem’s internal monologue is presented as an aside, it takes on an instructive, revelatory form. The pose of the satirist is that of having complete comprehension; the poet attempts to transcend the absurd nature of the world he lives in. Zhou’s intention is to overcome this absurdity by way of word games.

For example, part one of <Free Squares> is an expression of extreme skepticism in the believability of poses in and of themselves:

The pose should be paid attention to. As a traditional beauty pays attention to the look of her face. For example, she does not bare her teeth when laughing. For instance, not being allowed to cast sidelong glances. Pierre Cardin chooses you as a model..... Sit

⁵⁷⁸ Written in early April 1986 and first published in *Not-Not* #1. Officially published in October 1986 in Part 2 of Xu Jingya’s <A Grand Exhibition>.

⁵⁷⁹ Xu Jingya (1989): 185.

⁵⁸⁰ Anthologized in Chen Chao ed. (1989); Tang Xiaodu ed. (1992); and Zhou Lunyou ed. (1994c) (in its entirety).

by the south wall. Sit facing the wall. All these are ways in which the wise ones would sit. You're not a sage. You don't think the supreme lord is about to come down among us. You can sit more casually

“Pose” (姿势) is perhaps better translated as ‘position’. The term appears to refer to the role an individual chooses or is assigned within culture. The pose determines the individual’s relationship with culture and other individuals, but bears little relation, in Zhou’s conception of the situation, to the basic nature and instincts of the individual. This is somewhat similar to Bourdieu’s ideas about positions and position-takings. It is possible that there were already translations of Bourdieu in China, and the breadth of Zhou’s knowledge of western literary and sociological theory in 1986 is clear from his writings – something no literary critic could claim at the time. In any case, while other poets, such as Ouyang Jianghe, were writing about the technique and topics of foreign avant-garde poetry, Zhou was the only one to write about the actual functioning of the avant-garde system, and did so in a way that suggests an understanding of it not dissimilar to that of Bourdieu.

Part one of <Free Squares>, entitled <Motive I: Position Plan> (动机一：姿势设计), seeks to expose the inhuman nature of culture. Alienated man (uncertain, unsettled, with little self-control) does not know if his pose should be based on instinct or agreement with cultural conventions. The tragedy is that this person in search of a pose is not learning from the experience of life’s tragedy, but as quickly as possible searches out a pose in which to reside and there to accustom himself to his alienated reality. This act exposes the degree to which he has already been twisted by that reality. Throughout this first part, Zhou makes constant direct and indirect allusion to the figures and ‘poses’ of classical Chinese poetry, in addition to Buddhism and other ancient philosophies and practices. It is apparent that to some degree his satire is directed against certain trends among China’s poets, which he repeatedly touches upon in critical essays written before and after the writing of <Free Squares>.

Just as deliberately, <Motive I> is written in a style designed to impress upon the reader the often unconscious, reflexive nature of pose picking, or ‘position design.’ Zhou achieves this affect by stringing together allusions to Chinese classical poetry, philosophy, and religion in a way that approaches interior monologue, somewhat similar to stream of

consciousness technique. Here the poet's paradoxical relationship with traditional culture is demonstrated: using it for 'inspiration' while denying it as a living tradition.

In <Motive V: The Salt of Refusal> (动机五：拒绝之盐), Zhou writes of the individual's feelings of anxiety and atrophy. Here "you" is a sacrificial offering to traditional culture. The anxiety of "you" is the result of the simultaneous expiration of both the life of the individual and traditional culture (a thinly veiled reference to the ascension of the CCP to power in 1949), and is not the product of a post-industrial society (as it may be in modern western poetry).

When necessary learn how to shake your head or wave your hand
 If both your head and your hand are not free
 You must learn silence

All paths are closed to the individual by a list of over twenty refusals. The refusals of "you" are not those of an Ah Q-like character (self-aggrandizing), but are rooted in feelings of self-abasement, of being abandoned or discarded, and the lack of any spiritual goal whatsoever. Traditional culture has taught "you" only two things: the blind following of others (blind faith), and a lack of emotion, as mindless in the midst of all this "you" feels nothing:

Refusing is an art
 The attacking army is at the walls
 You're still enjoying your siesta
 Shuffle the chessmen idly
 At the Pavilion of Uninterrupted Leisure listen to the water and the fish

On the surface, the appearance of composed correctness is an expression of self-abasement and abandonment. "We" (which can be alternatively read as all Chinese people, the generation who grew up during the Cultural Revolution, or the poets who have emerged from that generation) are left at the side of the road by the rest of the world. The poet is in misery; he scorns his soul, his spirit, his Self, and yet cries out for them at the same time.

In <Motive VI: West of Tahiti> (动机六：塔希提以西), the concluding section of <Free Squares>, Zhou returns to one of his pet subjects, that of abstract painters and their

paintings: this time it is Paul Gauguin, who also protested against the “disease” of civilization and set out for Tahiti in 1891, there doing some of his best work and writing the autobiographical novel, *Noa Noa*. Here and in the second half of this section Zhou deals with Daoist philosophy and the illusory, arbitrary nature of attributing meaning to cultural artifacts. Ultimately:

-- **You didn't come from anywhere.** **(Where did we come from?)**
 -- You aren't anything. (Who are we?)
 -- You aren't going anywhere. (Where are we going?)

I eat therefore I am.
And that's all there is to it.

(You meditate on a step of the stair. Make a circuit of the dome. There's no door in or out. You sit down and don't ever want to get up again)

In Zhou's next major poem, <Portrait of the Head> (头像),⁵⁸¹ written in 1987 and published in 1988's *Not-Not #4*, he continues to mock the earnest nature of the various mien of humanity. A drawing of a human head complete with facial features at the top of the manuscript slowly loses those features so that by the fifth and final section of the poem nothing of the head remains at all: Man has lost himself among the illusory symbols of culture. Finally, the poet declares:

GREAT VIRTUE. Real people don't expose their faces. Like an antelope hanging its horns in a tree while it sleeps. No trace to be found.....
GREAT VIRTUE. Personality is a mask. For people to look at. Whether lofty or refined is determined by the plot of the play. A hero without a head. Without scruples

In this section of the poem, Zhou, or the I-speaker, addresses a plural “you.” It becomes apparent that he is addressing his remarks to China's modern day literati and intellectuals in general: “The world isn't a problem. Problems are a form of addiction. Fabricate a balloon out of nothing and then explode it.” Zhou appears to be referring to man's love of abstracting an unreal thing out of something real, creating problems where none had previously existed. “[You] have caused this world to lose its face,” it has been made to

⁵⁸¹ Anthologized in Chen Xuguang ed. (1994b); Zhou ed. (1994c).

become something else, just as man's innate nature has been buried beneath the abstractions of culture.

In the end Zhou appears to make an appeal for simplicity in Chinese poetry, in line with Not-Not's call for a restoration of the senses, consciousness and language to their original state, when he concludes this poem thus: "More plum blossoms and less of that / Vacancy." The blossoms are after all real, while our heads are filled with the fabrications of culture, the fictions of our own minds.

Zhou's discarding of the lyrical language of poetry is also part of his rebellion against so-called poses, even though, therefore, he has no choice but to choose another type of non-lyrical ironic pose. To the satirist, reality is revealed in an absurd form, and this then is the reason Zhou uses a bored speaking voice to express the design (affected, artificial creation) of poses in <Free Squares>, or the concealment and elimination of the portrait of the head.

Commentators point out the paradoxical nature of these two long poems of Zhou's, noting that cultural instruments (poetry and language) are used to deconstruct themselves. Li Zhen states that <Free Squares> is a non-culture text provided by a poet whose head, and writing, is full of little else but culture, and that this paradox is missed by critics who favor Not-Not-ism. However, as observed by Chen Xuguang, there is an element self-deconstruction in the poetry of Zhou Lunyou in particular, and Not-Not poets in general,⁵⁸² in addition to a general spirit of gamesmanship and a strong sense, or need, of difference. In the cases of Zhou and Yang Li in particular, Not-Not seems a logical extension of previous aesthetics practiced in earlier poetry, in Zhou's case <The Man with the Owl> and the <Wolf Valley> poems, and in Yang's <The Stranger>.

Lan Ma

More than other poets in the group, Lan Ma attempts to put his Not-Not poetical theory into practice. (Zhou does too, but his theories are pan-cultural, focused on deconstruction of semantics, cultural values, and icons, and he goes about his task both within his poetry and theory.) On reading the poetry in *Not-Not* #1, Xu Jingya felt Lan

⁵⁸² See Chang & Lu (2002): 210-211; Chen Xuguang (1996): 140; Li Zhen (2001): 168.

Ma's poems had come closest to achieving their aim of manifesting pre-cultural consciousness.⁵⁸³

Lan's stress on the sense or feeling of, or for, language is reflected in the following poem from *Not-Not* #1:

<Tone Color> (音色)

In a deep cave that substantial animal
has already begun its getaway
the curvy surface of blue iron rails rolls glass dumb-bells
and racing forward in pursuit is me instead
I'm like series of movements released beyond my body

tightly trussed by my own skin in thick grass briefly declare to stand alone
then disappear
the big tool I repair sleep with is now on a slope with a wild deer
simultaneously braving rain
pretending to be a plant

she says part the shadows of the trees
the owl and the mountain lion will be the same pure white
and that timely snowfall is turning a corner I can retreat into a grass hut
in the swaying of the rain flurry outside
the glass reflects fish
gives me a deep sense of my own color when it's time to enter dreams
still part here part not

In these early poems, Lan apparently tries to use what he calls uncultured language: words that carry no excess of cultural baggage. Unlike his later poems, these poems can, and perhaps should, be read aloud to produce the effects Lan seeks. Having said this, there appears to be a great deal of potentially symbolic language in the text. However, there is no identifiable sense to his use of imagery such as "pure white" owls and mountain lion, for instance. The references to sleep and dreams in the last stanza indicate that this poem has more in common with the surrealistic and Freudian imagery of Zhou Lunyou's <Wolf Valley> poems.

Lan, in his essays, speaks of *yuyun* 语晕, or language giddiness, instead of the term *yugan* 语感, or language feeling / sensation, championed by Yang Li among others.⁵⁸⁴

⁵⁸³ Xu Jingya (1989): 185.

The term, like Lan Ma's pre-culture theory in general, carries mystical overtones. On the other hand, Yang's choice of terminology 'sounds' more logical, more rational. In this instance, whatever language giddiness is produced seems to come from the swirl of movement and imagery within the poem. Xu Jingya and Lan Ma both apparently feel that this irrational approach to poetry and language was best suited to the purpose of Not-Not at the time. Other critics are not so understanding. As they search for meaning within the strings of tantalizing images, they were left with feelings of frustration⁵⁸⁵ – not the feelings Lan is hoping to produce.

In 1987's *Not-Not* #2, Lan chooses to approach his language concerns from another angle. What follows is the first of the poem's nine stanzas:

<6 8 (六八
48> 四十八)

to stand	
and	
not	
to stand	or sit or not sit at all
is	only open a book to read or not to read is not important
all	the whole text is only word word er er er er ⁵⁸⁶
the	[you] may also skim "a hazy road to world's ends" way of saying things
same	following the phonology sonorously chant it then stalk off didi gugu er er er er

As if in reaction to the responses of frustrated readers of his 1986 poems, Lan adopts a form that forces the reader to follow the poet's intent in their reading. Imagery is consciously denied, or ridiculed – the phrase "a hazy road to world's ends" (茫茫天涯路) being a case in point. The use of apparent onomatopoeic clusters, such as "er er" and "didi gugu," seems to be mockery of those who insist on trying to make the words

⁵⁸⁴ It is possible that this term was first coined by Yu Jian in September 1986 in Taiyuan as part of a statement about his view of poetry written for the annual officially sponsored Youth Poetry Conference. (Zhai Yongming was also invited.) As previously noted, Yang Li was a big fan of Yu's poetry, and it is possible that he chose Yu's terminology over Lan's for this reason. See Yu Jian (1986) and (1988a) for versions of Yu's original comments. It seems that Lan Ma's term predates Yu's, so it is also possible that Lan influenced Yu in this matter.

⁵⁸⁵ See, for example, Xie & Liang (1993): 302-303.

⁵⁸⁶ *Er* 尔 as a written character has the original meaning of 'luxuriant,' but also: 'near'; 'shallow'; 'you' (singular and plural); 'that'; 'this'; 'so'.

come to life on the page, and in their minds, through the traditional art of recitation. As cultural constructs, the characters themselves are now under question. In fact, the sounds produced when reading the characters aloud make the reader sound maniacal. There is humor here, but is it poetry? Now, it seems, Lan is not only working against imagery but also sound, as noted by Li Zhen.⁵⁸⁷ In fact, a reading of Lan Ma's theories on pre-culture would indicate that his distrust, even hatred, of cultured language, might logically call into question all sounds and meanings produced by Chinese characters.

The paradox inherent in such an approach to language, and poetry, led Lan to take a further, logical step in 1988:

<The Field of Life> (世的世界)

indicate boat
 indicate sail
 indicate bird
 indicate gull
 and woodland
 and graveyard
 and combine
 already acting as matter
 but emitting light
 flashing light
 then acting as a shudder
 there's east
 there's west
 must know sea has an east
 boat has a west
 read downwards
 it is
 afternoon
 sleep-like
 dreamy-like
 sultry-like
 below is
 a concept

it's both light
 and silk thread
 both glimmering

⁵⁸⁷ Li Zhen (2001): 177-178.

and fluttering
 yet the result
 is a great sea
 blossoming with white flowers
 and sail
 boats
 pigeons
 seagulls
 etcetera
 small labels

This partial translation is of the opening to Lan's only poetical contribution to *Not-Not* #4. However, it receives pride of place, opening the issue and occupying the first 12 pages of text. Essentially, the poem is a constructive deconstruction of the Chinese language. While Zhou Lunyou in his major poems deconstructs cultural values and language, Lan focuses on the plastic nature of meaning and the arbitrary nature of signification. In English translation, only an intimation of Lan's technique is revealed. A case in point being the character *ge* 鸽, translated as "bird" in the first stanza, which means pigeon in written Chinese, but does not become a "pigeon" in spoken Chinese until rendered as *gezi* 鸽子 in the second paragraph. Farther on in the poem, following on from the logical development of linguistic concepts within the poem, Lan creates new combinations of characters, or new words, which find meaning within the context of the poem. Effectively, Lan deconstructs and creates at the same time. However, the ultimate message is still that linguistic signification is arbitrary, as is the value attached to signs – an idea which Zhou and Lan must have picked up from reading translations of Saussure and semiotics.

Given Not-Not-ism's stated belief that there is life in all things and that only intuition combined with direct perception, screened free of culture, can render it to us, it seems that both Lan Ma and Zhou Lunyou, by way of their poetry and essays written during 1986-1988, demonstrate the paradoxical nature of language, and by extension poetry and themselves as poets. By 1988, both these writers had effectively negated their own poetry. The same cannot be said for the rest of the Not-Not poets, none of whom can be said to have shared the same thoroughgoing skepticism toward language and culture as exhibited by Lan and Zhou.

The critics Xie Zesheng and Liang Changzhou find *Not-Not* to be the poetry group most representative of the heterogeneous group of avant-garde poets often referred to as the Third Generation.⁵⁸⁸ The fact that Zhou Lunyou wrote several articles defining what this tendency consisted of during 1986-1988, culminating in <On Third Generation Poetry> in 1988, indicates that he was well aware of the general similarities in avant-garde poetic tendencies nationwide. In that essay, he defines the universal tendencies of Third Generation poets as being not-sublime (非崇高), not-cultural (非文化), and not-rhetorical (非修辞).⁵⁸⁹ Given the general nature of this terminology, it comes as no surprise that Not-Not, as a journal if not as a group, attracted contributions and membership from a wide array of poets throughout Sichuan and the rest of China.

Yang Li

Yang Li is a case in point. As noted previously, Yang claims that in 1985 he felt an affinity with the poetry by Han Dong and Yu Jian of the *Them* group in Nanjing, and the critic Li Zhen observes a similarity in the poetics of work produced by the three during 1984-1985.⁵⁹⁰ The following poem was written by Yang in 1985 and is the first poem in the text of *Not-Not* #1:

<Street Scenes> (街景)⁵⁹¹

This street is far from the city center
when night falls
the street is unusually quiet

At the moment it's winter
snow is drifting down

This street is long
French parasols neatly grow

⁵⁸⁸ Xie & Liang (1993): 292.

⁵⁸⁹ It should be noted that many critics, when referring to these general shared tendencies, substitute the word 'anti-' [反] for 'not-' [非], as in anti-culture.

⁵⁹⁰ Li Zhen (2001): 171-172. Li also refers to the work of *Them*-contributor Ding Dang as sharing the same tendencies – Ding contributed five poems to *Not-Not* #1.

⁵⁹¹ Anthologized in Chen Chao ed. (1989); Tang Xiaodu ed. (1992); Chen Xuguang ed. (1994b); Zhou Lunyou ed. (1994d).

on both sides of the street
 (in summer
 parasol leaves cover
 the whole street)

At the moment it's winter
 the parasol leaves
 long ago fell

The intersection is a pretty big empty space
 aside from the two garbage cans
 there is nothing

Snow
 has been falling a long while
 a thin layer has formed
 on roofs on both sides of the street

Both sides are all squat flat-roofed houses
 at this time
 the doors and windows of these houses
 are all tightly shut

It's still not too late now
 the night's just about to fall

These are only the first eight of the poem's 44 stanzas. The critic Chen Chao characterizes this poem as "coldly objective" (冷客观),⁵⁹² his adoption of this term apparently based on Yang's dedication of this poem to Robbe-Grillet. Changing perspectives, recurring images, impersonally depicted physical objects, and random events of everyday life, all of which are aspects clearly present in Yang's poems in *Not-Not #1*, as well as his earlier poems <The Stranger> and <Noon>, characterize Robbe-Grillet's novels. These techniques have been identified by critics such as Li Zhensheng⁵⁹³ as part of Not-Not's group objective of "returning to origins," in this case direct observation of things as they are, or in their 'original true' (本真) states. Wu Kaijin, for example, sees the literary experimentation of Not-Not and the nouveau

⁵⁹² Chen Chao ed. (1989): 535. [In Chen's anthology the poem is entitled <Cold Scenes> (冷风景), which is in fact the name given by Zhou Lunyou as the editor to Yang's group of three poems in *Not-Not # 1*, pp. 3-8.]

⁵⁹³ Li Zhensheng (1995).

roman as sharing the same goal of returning humanity and nature to their original state of pre-cultural existence.⁵⁹⁴ As noted by Yang himself, his poetry demonstrates an affinity with that of the *Them* group in Nanjing, in particular his use of colloquial speech and his apparent anti-mystical (反神化) approach to poetry.

However, one of Not-Not's goals, as stated in the manifesto, is to transcend semantics, and, in this regard, they also claimed the somewhat mystical belief that sound is at the core of the universe, all things in it, and even predates all creation. In *Not-Not #3*, Yang Li authored the essay <The Discovery of Sound> (声音的发现) in which he dates his discovery of this universal sound to the spring of 1984. This concern with sound and its transference into poetry is seemingly absent in <Street Scenes>. The cold description of things and actions distracts the reader from discovering the sound, or sounds, which may accompany it or rise up over the flat surface of things and events. The following poem, written in 1986, and published in *Not-Not #2*, attempts to attain a similar goal, but from a different angle:

<A High Place> (高处)⁵⁹⁵

A
 or B
 anyway very light
 very weak
 also very short
 but very important
 A, or B
 passes by an ear
 off toward a distant place
 and from the distant place
 toward a forest
 then from the forest
 toward the sky above
 A
 or B
 please close your eyes
 see here
 see a cat
 a volcano

⁵⁹⁴ Wu Kaijin (1991): 230.

⁵⁹⁵ Anthologized in Zhou (1994c).

a road
 or night
 or a stranger
 as if
 B
 or A
 I finally hear
 only a sort of sound
 I finally feel
 just them
 I finally see
 myself
 standing in front of a door
 a hat in hand
 behind is
 the whole of sundown
 B, or A

This is a translation of approximately one quarter of the poem. As noted by Cheng Guangwei, <A High Place> is an attempt by Yang to transcend semantics, one of Not-Not's stated goals, as Yang attempts to render pure sound in an abstract state. Li Zhen, points out that this sound Yang attempts to convey can be nothing other than the sound of language, no matter how hard Yang tries to extract the sound, or sensation of language, by divorcing the signifiers from the signified in his poetry. However, trying to achieve direct perception of sound (and movement) by way of the cultural artifacts that are the written language and poetry, remained an obsession with Yang Li – *Not-Not* #4 contains four long poems attempting a similar experiment: <Sound> (声音), <Big Rain> (大雨), <Aa>, and <Movement> (动作). Some readers, such as Wu Kaijin, are satisfied, even enthralled, by the sound, or sounds, Yang leads them to in these poems.⁵⁹⁶ However, even the fans of this poetry recognize the paradox *Not-Not* found itself in: the inability to escape language, semantics, and the rationality behind these structures, while using language to do so. Once the experimental phase ends, the poet is left with a new language, new semantics, and a rational basis on which it all stands, all of which is ripe for a new round of deconstruction in its turn. It must be said that this paradox is not

⁵⁹⁶ Cheng Guangwei (2003): 306; Li Zhen (2001): 174-176; Wu Kaijin (1991): 232.

a situation unique to avant-garde poetry in China, but one of the basic features of such poetry the world over.

He Xiaozhu

After entering Not-Not as the poet of the nouveau roman, Yang Li eventually developed poetry in line with the group's deconstructive ethos. Another poet to experience such a transformation was He Xiaozhu.

Between 1984-1986, He had the habit of mailing his poetry to Zhou Lunyou. While some of it was published in regional literary journals such as *The Literary Wind of Ba Country* in 1985-1986, most remained unpublished, and He unnoticed nationally, until Zhou selected a group of ten poems for publication in *Not-Not* #1. The poems, presented as a poetry series under the title <City of Ghosts> (鬼城), featured surrealistic meditations steeped in the animistic mysticism of the Ba region and the Miao people, of which He was a member.

<Chicken Feathers> (鸡毛)⁵⁹⁷

You think of chicken feathers
when looking at a snowy mountain
a soft thing

Then on the back of a feather the snowy mountain
day by day grows thin
a very feathery illusion

Always

From door cracks
there are seemingly soft fingers extending towards you
thirteen severed digits dripping chicken blood
was that page of divinations
written in this way

You think

⁵⁹⁷ Anthologized with other poems from this series in Chen Chao ed. (1989), Tang Xiaodu ed. (1992), and Zhou Lunyou ed. (1994c), among others.

never again can you stick a chicken feather in your collar
 with a pregnant expression your wife
 looks up at the strange landscape on your face

The sense of irrational mysticism in this and the other poems in the series, led Zhou to place He's poetry in second position in *Not-Not* #1, after Yang Li and before himself. Lan Ma's poetry completed this first section of the journal, which carried the title <Not-Not Demeanor> (非非风度).

The following year in *Not-Not* #2, He Xiaozhu's poetry was in a section of the same name, but now the poetry of Zhou, Yang, and Lan was placed in an untitled section that opened the journal, presumably implying that this was now true *Not-Not* poetry. He's contribution consisted of one long poem, <The City of Dimazhuo'ou> (第马着欧的城), which retained the mystical elements of his earlier, shorter poetry, but also tried to combine these with a message about the futility of cultural expression.

By *Not-Not* #4, however, He had graduated to full Not-Not status when his poem series, entitled <Poem Series> (组诗), regained second position in the issue after Lan Ma's contribution. This poem is dedicated to Lan Ma and is a product of the influence of his pre-culture theory.

In fact, He's series of poems is made up of two series: the first consists of six poems entitled <First Series: Humankind Initially Used the Left Hand for Writing> (第一组诗: 人类最初用左手写文字). This section features poems about sand, wind, trees, birds, clouds, fish, and seasons, and portray language as it may have existed in a pre-cultural setting. <Second Series: Language is a Knot Tied by Humankind with the Left and the Right Hand> (第二组诗: 语言是人类用左手和右手打上的结) is in direct contrast with <First Series> as it demonstrates the difficulties for perception created by an excess of culture, or accumulated semantic development. This series consists of three poems entitled <This is the Sun> (这是太阳) and four poems with the title of <I Open My Mouth Wide> (我张大嘴巴), the last of which consists of three numbered poems.

<I Open My Mouth Wide # 4>

2

So many times, I open my mouth at midnight, following
 the edge of language, trapping those unknown insects
 but once language is formed, then like a limitless universe
 there is no core, also no edge. Like a net,
 no matter sun moon stars,
 or my mouth, all are cornered beasts in the net,
 the most carefree dreamscape and imagination, are merely
 spiders on a web, wearily crawling here and there playing with
 one after another stiff word.
 I aspire to locate a nameless little flower, put it in my mouth
 let its green stem sterilize the poison in my mouth. I aspire
 to transcend all norms and laws, open my mouth wide, let the wind
 freely pass through my tender heart, let every cell of my skin
 get close to the sound of that wind. But the winds
 are clearly not pure and refreshing, they've long been
 breathed thousands of times by the lungs of humankind, and carry a heavy
 odor of nicotine and printing ink

The last poem has the poet closing his mouth (but continuing to write), forgetting how to use the right hand to write (the left side of his brain), and listening to another language – that of the trees, birds, and fish previously seen in <First Series>. Here is an obvious contradiction: a call for silence faced by the desire to write poetry. Li Zhen states that, broadly speaking, all poetry is like a noise, or clamor, located between silence and saying.⁵⁹⁸ However, Li is one of the very few critics who consider He Xiaozhu worth mentioning beyond placing his name in a list of Not-Not members at the time. This may be because of the obvious influence of the three more prominent members of Not-Not on He's later poetry. In fact, until recent years, very few anthologies selected any of his poems other than those found in <The City of Ghosts> series.⁵⁹⁹

⁵⁹⁸ Li Zhen (2001): 222.

⁵⁹⁹ Another *Not-Not* poet, who has reemerged together with Yang Li and He Xiaozhu in recent years, is Jimu Langge, who contributed poetry to all issues of the journal during this period. He and Jimu were the only two non-Han poets active in the Second World in Sichuan during 1986-1989.

Shang Zhongmin

Shang Zhongmin is another ‘outsider’ whom Zhou Lunyou brought into Not-Not in 1986. Shang was one of the chief poetry activists in Chongqing’s universities in 1984-1985, when he and Yan Xiaodong established the University Student Poetry group. After moving to Chengdu following graduation, Shang joined Not-Not at Zhou Lunyou’s invitation, even though he was still actively editing the *University Student Poetry Paper*. Shang authored a manifesto for his ‘group’ stating they wrote colloquial poetry that was anti-sublime, eliminated imagery, and “callous” (冷酷).⁶⁰⁰ Clearly, his group shared some of the concerns of Not-Not, but also Nanjing’s *Them*, praising Han Dong and Yu Jian as exemplars in his paper. Recently, Yang Li has stated that Shang’s membership in Not-Not and the influence of Not-Not theory destroyed Shang as a poet, becalming him.⁶⁰¹ A look at Shang’s poetry argues otherwise.

<Famous Bridge General Deng Xiaoping> (桥牌名将邓小平)

Zhongnan Hai⁶⁰² Club, getting late
 Deng Xiaoping one hand holding cards
 one hand strikes the table
 Deng Xiaoping smokes continuously
 this giant
 hums and haws a good while, calls for a card
 then smiles
 Hongkongers are just now getting on planes
 Hongkongers shake heads, sigh, and say
 one country two systems.... 1997
 Deng Xiaoping keeps a poker face
 one hand holding cards
 one hand strikes the table
 this giant
 calls for a card. Then smiles
 then lays his cards down

⁶⁰⁰ See Xu et. al. ed. (1988): 185-186. Here the date of the first issue of the poetry paper is given by Shang as June 1986, but as June 1985 in <A Grand Exhibition>.

⁶⁰¹ Yang Li (2004): 532.

⁶⁰² 中南海; The location of the living quarters of many of the CCP’s top leaders, next to the Forbidden City in Beijing.

This poem from *Not-Not* #1 is of a clearly political nature and is not anthologized in China.⁶⁰³ If Yang is referring to Shang's production of topical poems like this, then Shang was indeed becalmed in future years. However, the following poem from the same issue of *Not-Not* suggests otherwise:

<At Middle-age> (人到中年)⁶⁰⁴

I'm no longer sentimental
 there's nothing
 can make me sentimental
 I'm often by myself
 facing walls
 an entire afternoon at one sitting
 people knock at the door
 I pay no attention
 I only need say
 I'm not here
 friends will go quietly
 friends are used to my mood

This poem may be satirical in tone and reminiscent of poems by Li Yawei, but it is not clearly a portrait of someone else, as Li's tend to be. Nor is there a tone of self-mockery. Rather, this poem can be taken as a realistic self-portrayal of a poet who lacks interest in the sublime and even the pre-culture ideals that lay at the heart of Not-Not-ism.

In *Not-Not* # 2, Shang appears to try to conform by writing three long poems, but all deal with the difficulty and futility of poetry and life; and in *Not-Not* #4 he largely reverts to his preferred short poem form, but on the same subjects, as below:

<Poets> (诗人)

We leave behind a few words, but we pay such a large price
 We have nothing, are poorly nourished, look haggard
 All this is our own fault
 On this infertile earth we disperse standoffish seeds

⁶⁰³ Yet, it was published twice in official literary journals in 1986, a sign of just how liberal the atmosphere was that year. See Shang (1986d) and (1986h).

⁶⁰⁴ This is also the title of the 1980 award-winning novella of Shen Rong's, which described the difficult situation of intellectuals after the Cultural Revolution. The sentimental nature of the novella and the interest it roused in the situation of the middle-aged in China may have been inspiration for this poem.

Oblivious to all, believing too much in ourselves
 Everyday cultivating eccentric moods
 Divorced from the masses, despising friends, deceiving women of good families
 We have yet to receive deserved punishment
 But that's only because our time has yet to come

Given what was to happen to several poets in Sichuan and other parts of China in 1989, this poem has a sadly prophetic quality.

Shang himself admits that his primary interest in joining Not-Not was to be with friends, and agrees with Yang Li's assessment that the group was essentially an interest group in that all parties benefited from participation.⁶⁰⁵ Yang and Shang benefited by gaining a platform for publication of their poetry and essays, and Zhou and Lan benefited from the membership of the then well known Shang and Yang in their group.

Xiao An

As previously noted, a unusually large number of woman poets were published in *Not-Not*, particularly in issues #2 and #4. After the contributions of Liu Tao, Li Yao, Xiao An, and Shao Chunguang in issue #1, the number of woman poets grew rapidly to at least eight in issue #2. As Li and Shao were no longer contributors, there was work from six new poets, including the now well-known poet from Yunnan, Hai Nan. Apparently, Hai Nan has not yet publicly spoken of this early involvement with *Not-Not*,⁶⁰⁶ but it is not difficult to imagine the encouragement she must have received in seeing portions of her first long experimental works in print.⁶⁰⁷

Another woman poet who had her first poems published in *Not-Not* and in recent years has become well known in China is Xiao An. Below is one of her earlier works from issue #1:

⁶⁰⁵ Yang Li (2004): 511-512.

⁶⁰⁶ Hai Nan is one of the principle subjects of Jeanne Hong Zhang (2004).

⁶⁰⁷ In *Not-Not* #2 there are two poetry sequences: <On the Globe> (球上), consisting of seven poems; and <A Carpet of Flowers in the West> (西部花毯), made up of five poems.

In *Not-Not* #4 there is a collection of eight poems from the ten-poem sequence <The World of the Second Sex> (第二性世界).

<A Feeling> (感觉)⁶⁰⁸

Standing outside the door
 a late visitor wearing black
 softly whistles

Now it's sundown
 the time I always go out

You stand outside the door
 whistling
 I have no way of opening the door
 that pot of flowers also will not blossom

The sky goes dark
 and the whistle finally goes
 but outside my window
 a troop of pure white girls walks by

Whoever the whistler may be, s/he is an oppressive presence that stifles the growth of the poet. The influence of Plath – then something of a fad among women poets in China⁶⁰⁹ – also seems apparent in this aspect of this poem, although Xiao An's diction is more colloquial and straightforward.

The title of the following poem from *Not-Not #2* has been taken as the title of Xiao An's first officially published collection of poetry in 2002:

<A Woman Who Plants Tobacco> (种烟叶的女人)⁶¹⁰

Between the bed and window
 you've planted much tobacco
 (grown from concrete)
 that type of tobacco
 is soft and tender

You go out early
 smoking this tobacco

⁶⁰⁸ Other poems in this issue were <Ancestral Home> (祖宅), <Meeting Death> (会见死亡), <The Seaside> (海边), and <Untitled> (无题).

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁶¹⁰ Xiao An (2002b), anthologized in Zhou Lunyou ed. (1994c). Other poems in this issue are <Looking for a Man who Smokes> (寻找吸烟的男人), <Settled> (安) [both these poems also in Zhou ed. (1994c)], <That Side> (那边), and <The Room> (房间).

when I make food
 I smell it too
 then
 it indicates you're coming home
 my hands move quicker

Sometimes
 I secretly have a couple of puffs
 (I'm too tired)
 walking a couple of times round the little plantation
 each time a comfort and a habit

Besides planting tobacco
 I have many other things to do
 I know at what time
 to open the window
 to air the place out

Imagining you in some place
 smoking with other women
 and talking about my workshop
 I feel very happy

Privately I plan
 when the year turns to find a new place
 always planting this type of tobacco
 is too boring

Of course
 in front of you
 I'm still very proper

Again, this seems to be a poem about the man in her life at the time.⁶¹¹ This picture of a woman apparently planning to leave her partner is still quite risqué in China.

Xiao An may have benefited from her relationship with Yang Li when initially published in *Not-Not*, but this was clearly not the case with other avant-garde women poets – such as Hai Nan – who had their work published there in subsequent issues.⁶¹²

⁶¹¹ Xiao An's marriage with Yang Li ended in 1989.

⁶¹² Liu Tao's, Hailing's, and Chen Xiaofan's credentials as avant-garde poets have been examined in previous chapters. Liu Tao has eight poems in *Not-Not* #1, two sequences in #2, and one sequence a five other poems in #4 – a number of these poems are anthologized in Zhou Lunyou ed. (1994c). Li Yao only contributed to #1, Chen Xiaofan to #2, and Yang Ping to #2 and #4.

Others

As with the Shang Zhongmin, Zhou's successful recruitment of members of Hangzhou's Extremism (极端主义) group, Liang Xiaoming and Yu Gang, as well as Shanghai's *On the Sea's* Meng Lang and Yu Yu, and Ning Ke from the Hangzhou Horizon Experimental Group (地平线实验小组) served to increase the status of *Not-Not* within the avant-garde sub-field, as well as potentially expanding its influence beyond Sichuan. Additionally, Li Yawei and Shao Chunguang were well known in Sichuan and China's northeast as members of Macho Men. By 1988 and the publication of *Not-Not* #3 and #4, none would be contributing except for Liang and Yu, but there would be the additions of young aspiring poets from Sichuan and other provinces, such as Nan Ye from Hunan, Ye Zhou from Xi'an.⁶¹³ In 1988, *Not-Not* #4 offered publication opportunities and encouragement to several younger female and male poets, many of whom are active and well known today, such as (Yang) Wenkang, Liu Xiang, Wei Se, and Hu Tu.

Li Yawei would drop out of the group after *Not-Not* #2 in 1987, but not before attempting poetry clearly influenced by Not-Not theory: <Island> (岛) and <Land> (陆地).⁶¹⁴ The work Li had published in *Not-Not* #1 and #2 were still very much in the crude Macho Men's fun- and life-loving vein, in particular <Me and You> (我和你),⁶¹⁵ <The Road of Liquor> (酒之路), and <Fight to the Death> (决斗), all published in the latter issue. Much like Yang Li, Li Yawei was happy to see his poetry published in almost any publication. This led to his also very Macho Men poem <Charge through the Country: 1986> (闯荡江湖: 一九八六)⁶¹⁶ being published in the otherwise sedate first issue of *Han Poetry*. While both publications may have looked to gain prestige from his contributions, Li's poetry was more suited to the anti-traditional poetic stance of the poetry in *Not-Not*.

⁶¹³ *Not-Not* #2 also features work by Shen Tianhong from Anhui, Zhu Lingbo from the Northeast, and Jing Bute of Shanghai, who also contributed to #4.

⁶¹⁴ Both written in 1987 and published in the April 1988 issue of *Guandong Literature*.

⁶¹⁵ Anthologized in Chen Chao ed. (1989).

⁶¹⁶ Anthologized in Zhou Lunyou ed. (1994).

Conclusion

This first incarnation of *Not-Not* was to run its term immediately after publication of issues #3 and #4 in September 1988.⁶¹⁷ The reasons for the breakup of the trio at the group's center – Zhou Lunyou, Lan Ma, and Yang Li – vary with the teller of the tale, but were essentially personal, exacerbated by living together at close quarters for 2-3 months in a student dormitory in Yichang, Hubei province, while producing the last two issues (having been banned in Sichuan since 1987, they had to find a printer outside the province).⁶¹⁸ There will be more to be said about Not-Not in Chapter 12 – Yang Li and Lan Ma would publish two issues of a poetry-only version of the journal in 1990-1991, and Zhou would re-establish his own renovated version of *Not-Not* in 1992.

As the large amount of critical commentary focused on the poetry and theories of the first stage of Not-Not indicates, while the group, or journal, may have moved on in recent years, the impact it had in 1986-1989 was considerable. The only other group active during that period to receive similar attention has been Nanjing's *Them*, and both *Not-Not* and *Them* should be regarded as the most influential unofficial poetry journals since Beijing's *Today* (1978-1980).

Not-Not is unique among these three due to the large amount of space given over to experimental poetics and cultural-linguistic analysis within its publications. Li Zhen claims pre-culture theories of Lan Ma helped turn avant-garde poetry's focus to language. Chen Xiaoming states that the group's mixture of ideas gleaned from existentialism, psychological analysis, phenomenology, and the French 'absurd' helped Chinese intellectuals to break free of ideological orthodoxy and its attendant linguistic and conceptual prisons. At the time in the late-1980s, Xu Jingya felt that the theories of Not-

⁶¹⁷ This is the date given by Zhou Lunyou. See Zhou (1999a): 431.

⁶¹⁸ See Zhou Lunyou (2001a): 8; and Yang Li (2004): 579-580. Also, see Bai Hua (1996a): Part 4, Chapter 3, for an interesting, if Yang Li-centered, account of the group's history and dissolution. Zhou claims that Lan, with Yang's assistance, was turning the group into some sort of personal religion, incorporating elements of *qigong* 气功. This seems to have been Lan's inclination all along, given the mystical elements in his pan-cultural theories.

Not were as important to Chinese poetry as had been Misty poetry's poetical rediscovery of the self in the 1970s.⁶¹⁹

While acknowledging these aspects of Not-Not's influence and success as a Second World journal and group in the late-1980s, critics such as Wang Guangming claim that the group's theory was never successfully translated into poetry and that their idealistic, if poorly framed, pursuits served to marginalize them and their poetry.⁶²⁰ However, as has been demonstrated, as a group Not-Not aspired to be a home for avant-garde poets from all parts of China who shared certain general inclinations often ascribed to Third Generation poets as a whole.

Whether Zhou Lunyou, Lan Ma, and Yang Li ever achieved in their poetry what they claimed to aspire to in their theory is questionable, and this has served to justifiably weaken the strength of their poetry in the eyes of critics. However, what Not-Not demonstrably did do was to stimulate poetical experimentation in areas that had hitherto been neglected (primarily, language), and in so doing provide an impetus for change. Furthermore, the journal gave women avant-garde poets a relatively equal opportunity to publish – an exemplary practice that is still rarely seen in the Second World of Poetry. If Not-Not's poetical theories and methods had the effect of further marginalizing avant-garde poetry in China, such blame could also be apportioned to most practitioners of New Poetry, avant-garde and otherwise, during the same period. For, by the late 1980s, China was finally beginning to enter the age of modern media and consumerism. Before that was to happen, however, the poetry scene and all other segments of society in China were in for a big shock, reducing any controversy stirred up by Not-Not to near insignificance.

⁶¹⁹ Li Zhen (2001): 163; Chen Xiaoming (2001): 187-188; Xu Jingya (1989): 158.

⁶²⁰ Wang Guangming (1993): 216-220.