

Ming has been told since he was a kid that he is an "illegitimate child" whose birth violates China's laws. With the end of the onechild policy in 2016, he finally became a legal member of his family at the age of 17. He is not the only one. There are a large number of "illegal" children born in the 1980s to 1990s who share the same experience of not being visible, as well as the beings who, because of forced abortions, didn't make it into the world. The illegitimate children remained hidden in cities and crowds, left their hometowns, changed their names, and had their Hukou¹ registered to show that they lived in households that were not their own.

Under the authoritarian administration in China, life is an instrumentalized offering to the revolution, a string of numbers, a curved line representing economic growth, a set of data that can be tracked and analyzed. The one-child policy turned "family" into the site of radical experiments in intergenerational communication, a complicated mechanism producing intimate relationships, and an alternative mode of management. This has changed how we think about our methods and strategies for representing the sense

1

of belonging provided by the traditional ideology of family.

In this experiment of passive participation, the "self" (individual) is the code that is used to regulate the system, through which the self is then redistributed to participate in the broader social infrastructure. Today, the knowledge of "self" and "society" is being propelled in a dystopic direction by big data, large-scale monitoring, and hackers. New policies and regulations have blurred the boundary between control and obedience, the "individual" is in the process of being graded, while the "self" and the "user" nourish and transform each other, and become an integral part of the database. Our bodies are being edited, our behavior is being predicted, and our lives are being woven by an invisible hand into an array of vast networks of systems and infrastructures.

By opening with the personal story of an "illegitimate child," the exhibition attempts to center a discussion around the dialectic of "self and society," while foregrounding how the battlefield is formed between governance and illegitimacy, marginal and mainstream, and the disenfranchised and establishment. The works by the three groups/individual artists selected for the exhibition respond chronologically to the relationship between the body and biopolitics.

2

The sound installation and performance by the artist collective Future Host (Ma Tingying and Kang Kang) evokes memories of the socialist period and depicts the life experiences of the Chinese community growing up in a post-socialist era that is undergoing the process of globalization. The collective's new performance commissioned for this exhibition, Little Canon, developed from the piece Future Host: A Speech Opera. In Little Canon, the work is presented by one child and combines sound, performance, and writing. The presence of the child's small body becomes a key component of the work. Children as a clearly defined social group are a product of modern society; they exist at the margins of society, collecting some of the toys, clothing, and trinkets abounded by adults; at the same time, they are seen as the newest hope of society, especially in the early stages of construction in socialist countries, where children hold the keys to the future of the nation, and where the topic of "children" is in itself a political discourse regarding the future.

For Future Host, the ideal audience includes those "children" who grew up in a collectivist environment, who have an individuality that was developed during the process of nonlinear modernityin short, the post-socialist successors whose DNA is encoded with the culture of globalization. For those members of the audience

3

who have never experienced collectivist/socialist life, this work may present a kind of tug-of-war in the form of cross-cultural communication: the vivid, resonant language of Chinese vows, the screams or sudden blasts of music that echo throughout the exhibition space, the center stage where a girl with an Asian face tries to concentrate and carry out a performance in response to the multitude of sounds descending from above, finally finding her chord at the end of the *Happy Birthday* song.

In terms of technological development, artist Li Shuang's work shares a chronological thread with Future Host. In the video T ("T" may stand for th Ta ("he" in Chinese) or th Ta ("she" in Chinese) or transgender, all of which start with "T" in Mandarin Chinese), Li incorporates Internet slang familiar to the generation born after 1980 to create a soliloquist character, whose gender is ambiguous. From the protagonist's lines, we learn that the story is about a character who has been constantly recollecting gender-shaping experiences since childhood. By the end the protagonist's boss, a Taobao (a large Chinese online retail platform) shop owner, completely shreds the boundaries of gender. The material that can be seen in the video includes a park, a fish tank, and footage from videos on the Internet, all spliced with a pair of dangling, grotesque 3-D feet². A series of identity struggles

4

emerge-for example, memories of being laughed at by peers if the protagonist didn't play a game as well as a girl, working a menial job in e-commerce after graduation and how the protagonist's mother saw it as disgraceful, being forced to talk to customers like a girl because the customers preferred it, and so on.

What lies behind these internal struggles is the booming e-commerce industry that has sustained the development of China's economy throughout the twenty-first century. Li's writings reveal not only the colossal, invisible power in China known as the digital working class, but also the trauma those workers have experienced in the form of emotional labor (affective labor). Unlike physical trauma, this emotional trauma is not compensated for or taken seriously. At the same time, Li's work points to a once private, biological body that under competitive markets has lost its boundary and is in the process of being invaded by a far more micro form of power. As the video ends, an unidentified electronic voice tells the protagonist, "Well, now you have no gender."

Artist Dachal Choi's work *Carve and Crave* brings the exhibition's timeline back to the undetected surveillance taking place in the present. In *Neighbors*, a monitoring software used in smart electronic doorbells sold by Amazon, the artist discovers a fundamental problem regarding the ownership of the body and public

5

space, as well as the private and public domain. People embed these smart devices in their homes for privacy purposes, at the same time allowing the devices to monitor public spaces. As a result, people also run the risk of their own privacy being invaded: you can easily be exposed to your neighbor's camera, your image uploaded to the cloud and then shared with more people, where it finally becomes part of the larger commercial mass of data. Is the physical activity that is caught on camera and defined as illegal in the process of reversing the rules of the game and becoming part of some brand's performance? If in the past the law was the sole criterion for monitoring violations within the public domain, how can the legality of images and actions captured through increasingly common surveillance devices be assessed?

- Hukou is a legal document that records the household population's basic information, including the name of the citizen, date of birth, relatives, and marital status. Introduced 60 years ago, a hukou is a key identification document for Chinese citizens and an important administrative tool for the government to monitor its population. Some have criticized the hukou system, stating that it prevents the free flow of labor, creates idle capacity, and results in economic losses.
- In the video, the small, grotesque 3-D feet refer to foot binding, a practice in which a young girl's foot is tied up and bound into itself. It was common in China during the Qing dynasty.

FUTURE HOST

Future Host: A Speech Opera Performance, 2018 Installation, 2020 Two-channel sound installation 38 min 49 sec

Future Host [noun.] is an epithet commonly bestowed upon children in officially socialist countries. Children become the agents, products, and sites of a speculated future, for which they must always be ready-a command of absolute urgency and ecstatic optimism.

This two-channel sound installation samples from Future Host: A Speech Opera, a performance featuring an eight-channel sound installation composed of voice recordings of an original text and live improvisational music by a children's marching band. Disembodied fragments-idiomatic expressions, ideological detritus, consumerist slogans, and second-rate lyricism-are gathered into a landscape of infinite conflict and recombination, turning a theatrical event of assembly into a more intimate listening experience where the audience encounters and negotiates with a lost history and a future that never was.

Original Composition: C. Spencer Yeh; Musical Arrangement and direction: Chatori Shimizu; Spatial Sound Production & Composition: Kamron Saniee; Technical Sound Director: Gus Callahan; Musical Performance: High School Affiliated to Fudan University Wind Ensemble, Shanghai.

Little Canon Performance, 2020

Solo performance by a child musician of a composition by C. Spencer Yeh, creating a stunted deviation from the canon defined as both a set of fixed rules and a key technique in musical pedagogy. The future is here, yet Future Host keeps stumbling into the present via an involuntary inheritance of the past. ¹ CHORUS ALL ¹ We are all XXXXXX ² We are here to take the oath ³ We shall take our collective leave ⁴ We shall cease and desist ⁵ from any issues that exist

> ² CHORUS 2 ¹ While taking the oath, ² we must not attempt to grasp eternity.
> ³ Eternity has already eroded us. ⁴ We shall be consumed by anxiety, ⁵ without recourse to suicide.

² CHORUS 1 ¹ These issues will no longer be our issues. ² No need to make settlement with us. ³ All must empty their hands ⁴ All must turn around and leave. ⁵ Taking effect from now.

> CHORUS 1 ¹ I vow that I shall not be responsible.

⁵ CHORUS ALL ¹ I vow that I shall not be

⁶ CHORUS 1 ¹ I vow my disavowal.

> CHORUS ALL ¹ I vow my disavowal. ⁸ CHORUS 1 ¹ I vow my

HORUS 1 ⁵ the constant flow of matter, an unsuspicious joy, a permanent violence, ⁸ or the feeling of being listened to, ⁹ a gentle, caressing hand ¹⁰ or a surprise delivered at home. ¹¹ I want any and all of these things. ¹² I feel restless at times, ¹³ because I don't have them yet. 14 Not yet. ¹⁵ I'm still waiting, ¹⁶ I believe piety will conquer all science. ¹⁷ Piety is so rare nowadays, ¹⁸ there must be something invalu129 CHORUS 2 (repeats eight times) ⁴ My existence is full of meaning.

⁶² CHORUS 1 ¹ I dream of ants in the park, their not-so-sufficient food supply for winter and the bright green lawn they call home. ² And I feel hopeful. ³ I hope we all eventually get the happiness we deserve. ⁴ Happiness that can't be robbed. ¹³⁰ CHORUS 2 ¹ I'm the most unreliable person I've ever seen.

² CHORUS ALL ¹ I vow your vow. ² My vow shall be valid for a given period of time. ³ My vow is deafening I cannot hear my own voice. ⁴ My vow is deafening I cannot hear your voice.

¹⁰ CHORUS 1 ¹ My vow includes you.
² excludes myself.

> ¹¹ CHORUS ALL ¹ My vow excludes you. ² It's all about myself.

¹² CHORUS 1 ¹ Nay, ² I cannot bear to be in the same room with you.

> ¹² CHORUS 2 ¹ Nay, ² Being in this room with you makes me want to leave. ³ Actually I want to leave right now, ⁴ but to announce my leaving already accomplishes my goal. ⁵ Therefore I shall remain standing, ⁶ being here as a statement.

³¹ CHORUS 2 ¹ You are the dumbest person I mow. ² Really. ³ I feel stupid just by looking at you. ⁴ It will be snowing in a couple of days, ⁵ but you've run out of wits to cope with the cold.

³² CHORUS ALL (repeats six times) ³ Don't blame me for not telling you. ²⁵ CHORUS ALL ² answering my call ³ answering my call

> ¹⁴ CHORUS 1 ¹ You cannot confine me into any moral calculation. ² If I look right into your eyes, ³ tell you my absence shall be your biggest loss, ⁴ would you cherish a friend like me? ⁵ Would you simply turn away, ⁶ staring instead at an ant on the wall? ⁷ I can assert with confidence ⁸ the ant condemns you as much as

> > I do.

¹⁵ CHORUS 2 ¹ Being with you in the same room I'm unbearably thirsty ² Being with you in the same room the air is scorching ³ Everything is worrisome ⁶ Because we are under the same roof ⁷ This is the best ending ⁸ for both of

us.

16 CHORUS 1 1 I never thought you felt so obliged to me² All I want is to eat at ease and sleep in peace. ³ You are always here to interrupt me ⁴ preventing me from eating at ease ⁵ sleeping in peace ⁶ Always interrupting, ⁷ distracting me from learning how to eat and sleep. ⁸ My grades are suffering immensely. (CHORUS ALL: answering my call)

¹⁵ CHORUS 1 ¹ Your individual existence ² doesn't matter to me at all. ³ On the contrary, ⁴ my being here seems more meaningful for you. ⁵ Why don't you go explore ⁶ find out what I am to you, ⁷ what kinds of thoughts you hold ⁸ towards me.

¹² CHORUS ALL ¹ My thoughts about you are very simple ² that is: I care about you. ³ I care about you. ⁴ I want to watch you sleep ⁵ eat ⁶ study ⁷ and interrupt you. ⁶ Wake you up when you sleep ⁹ Distract you when you study ¹⁰ Choke you when you eat.

> ⁷¹ CHORUS 1 ¹ Where exactly is the God?

72 CHORUS 2 ¹ The God is everywhere.

 $\frac{17}{2}$ CHORUS 2 ¹ I interrupt you, ² calling your name outside the classroom, ³ luring you with games, ⁴ these are all acts of caring. ⁵ In this world, ⁶ someone who eats at ease sleeps in peace ⁸ and focuses on studying ⁹ simply doesn't exist. ¹⁰ If you decide to be that person, ¹¹ you will be hellishly lonely. ¹² I sympathize with you, ¹³ I can't stand your loneliness ¹⁴ Your loneliness is insufferable ¹⁵ nothing is more worthless than your loneliness Therefore I decided ¹⁷ to interrupt you ¹⁸ make you realize ⁹ there is someone else here in the world, it's

²² CHORUS ALL ¹ Never someone like you, talking to me ² caring about me, ³ warming up to me, ⁴ tutoring my study of dialectics ⁵ talking kindly behind my back ⁶ In the darkness you stare at me with your dark pupils ⁷ warding me off the alluring path to Evil ⁶ Sincerely I wish you: ⁹ good luck ¹⁰ and happy everyday!

¹⁴³ CHORUS ALL ¹ The moment won't wait. ² On ninety-ninth day of snow, ³ we are running out of words. ⁴ We keep talking about the weather, ⁵ repeating ourselves over and over, ⁶ but no one could stand up and CHORUS 1 ³⁴ Listen, ³⁵ it's a language, ³⁶ a solace of the mind.
 ³⁷ Your being alive, ³⁸ is love in itself.
 ³⁹ It's a right that the world has given to you.
 ⁴⁰ Just go on living, ⁴¹ even though you cannot find the meaning of life.

¹²⁵ CHORUS ALL ¹ Everything is full of meaning, ² I'm filled with meaning, ³ Meaning is here with me and we are united as one.

⁷ We've been holding back pee ⁸ The air is thin, ⁹ The oxygen is sufficient,

¹⁰ sand stuck in our eyes, ¹¹ tongues are boiling. ¹² tears not yet arrived, ¹³ throat is dry. ¹⁴ We imagine the shape of a well, ¹⁵ but despise its

dampness. ¹⁶ There are things that we are afraid to waken. ¹⁷ No, not the Party, ¹⁸ Don't laugh. ¹⁹ We really do have something that we are afraid to waken. ²⁰ We not only love it, ²¹ but are also afraid of it. ²² We revere it, ²³ but also want to climb on its back and ride it, ²⁴ leaving the rest of the crowd. ²⁵ But reality is fluctuating, ²⁶ How can

we ever release the bridle.

nowhere I can go.² You dwell in my mind ³ but there are other things on my mind. ⁴ For example: money ⁵ materialism ⁶ liquid food ⁷ leftovers from last night in the refrigerator ⁸ maybe they already turned sour.

138 CHORUS FEMALE
1 Mother!

139 CHORUS MALE 1 I want milk!

⁴⁰ CHORUS FEMALE ¹ Good boy, ² Grow up quickly.

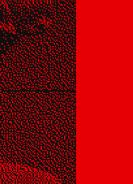
141 CHORUS MALE ¹ I will never grow up!

> ¹⁴² CHORUS ALL ¹ I am malnourished.



T 2017-18 Four channel video, 15 min 17 sec Music by Eli Osheyack

Starting with the imagery of feet, Li subtly interweaves the experience of a straight male customer service representative for Taobao women's socks with reminiscent self-narrations, Internet slang, and cultural symbols. Through the non-linear narratives and fragmented visuals, the film exposes the stereotypes imposed on sexuality within familial and social constructs, and its performativity in a virtual, suppositional world.





If Only the Cloud Knows: Interview With Li Shuang By Mengna Da

Mengna Da: Your work T (2017-18) explores shattered and mixed identities in cyberspace. In the 15-minute animation, a male online-shopping customer service representative, who must act like a woman as part of his job, talks about his gender-transformation experience at work and his observations about gender stereotypes. Yet, the narration is voiced by a woman and, in the end, is replaced by a computerized female voice that says, "Now, you have no gender." How did you come up with this concept?

Li Shuang: One day, I was browsing on Zhihu [a Chinese question-and-answer website] and saw a post by a customer service representative for Taobao, the biggest online shopping platform in China. In the post, he explained that he is a man, but he has to talk like a woman when online-chatting with customers. He claimed that the job requires him to "have no gender." This inspired me to do a piece about gender performance.

I was raised to be like a boy, or, to be more accurate, genderless. But when I turned 15 or 16, my parents suddenly thought I wasn't

"girly" enough and put me on estrogen. Maybe it was my biological condition, but I still felt very confused. As an adult, I read Testo Junkie (2013), by Paul B. Preciado, in which he records his experience of wearing testosterone patches and discusses what testosterone, or "maleness," means biologically and socially, and how hormonal changes could affect the gender roles inscribed on the body. These all piqued my desire to discuss these topics, as well as the confusing parts of my own identity. In T, the protagonist is a straight guy who has never been exposed to gender issues before, but to succeed at his job of selling women's socks, he must look to his life and childhood and learn what women are like. He even needs to perform what he observes and thinks of as femininity. I wanted to discuss these issues outside of the Western framework of gender studies, since the protagonist's story is already outside of the Western framework. The narration is sourced from history, literature, and my childhood experience. The narrator was a girl who hadn't read the script beforehand, and the music was composed by my friend Eli Osheyack.

Mengna Da: Multiple works [of yours] reference early Internet culture, such as eating

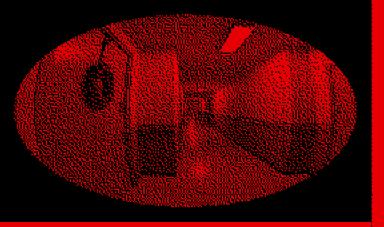
instant ramen at an Internet café. Are you nostalgic about that time?

Li Shuang: I grew up in Wuyi Mountain, which was quite boring. But I got connected to the Internet and found out about many American bands-I was quite into punk and emo culture. I was only allowed to use the computer for an hour every week, so I spent most of the time downloading music and posters. I met some of my best friends online too.

It's hard to say if I'm nostalgic. I can tell you that when I first came to New York, I felt the same way as I did in the early Internet world: Who am I? Where am I? What am I supposed to do? One of my favorite games was Uncharted Waters; I recently found out its English title, which is so beautiful, so romantic. The phrase "uncharted waters" pretty much sums up my impression of the early Internet age. In the game, at first, the map was all black except for my starting point, and then as I traveled to different continents, my boat lit up the black blocks on the map one by one. Nowadays, I can still find a nice surprise around the corner in New York, even if the city can be difficult to live

in. But on the Internet, everyone's domain is getting smaller and smaller, regardless of firewalls.

This interview was first published at www.artasiapacific.com, August 3, 2018, and has been excerpted here.



DACHAI CHOI

Carve and Crave 2020

Carve and Crave stems from footage of a stranger trespassing and peeping into a keyhole, shared in the Neighbors app. The work extends the narrative of invading a space and a body through the mixed perspectives of the suspicious men in the footage, the device user, business capital, and the artist. All search for space, yet their thirst is never slaked.



Note on Carve and Crave By Dachal Choi

Trespass

While doubts about liberalism and individualism arise with contemporary science and economics, the degree to which humans are abstraction oscillates between data and identity, the anonymous and the personal, and pattern and life. Under surveillance capitalism, where human futures are sold for a certain market,¹ the definition of a body, the methodology of bodily control, and the agents that maintain that control have shifted.

Invisible pixels track a user's location and desire. Bio-psycho-social profiling feeds personalized ads curating what to wear, what to know, and whom to believe at a specific moment. Following behavior proliferates the businesses in the next seconds. A body leak-the mass of flickering signals-forecasts the stock market of tomorrow. If algorithm technologies learn how to make meaning and educate themselves, then how will humans think?

The question continues in outer space. The Russian startup StartRocket plans to test its first orbital display-a celestial billboard advertisement-in January 2021. The authorities and brands wait to deliver their

messages in the sky. When the new moons rise, learn to surf in the new waves of information.

Fear

Fear is a business. Amazon acquired Ring, a smart surveillance equipment company, and launched its Neighbors application in 2018 to "empower customers with a suite of security."² To be a good parent, a good neighbor, and a good citizen, Ring users voluntarily police the subjects captured by their devices by posting them under categories, such as "stranger," "suspicious," "unknown visitor," or "criminal."

The federal regulations on data privacy remain unresolved in most states of the US (as of this writing), yet Ring's alignment with law enforcement³ and the increase in its sales⁴ have solidified. Trust, an essential ground of defense, in this case means relying on the surveillance company, which only temporarily paused the use of most third-party analytics services in its app.⁵ When the right of data usage and its purpose are obscure, how can the boundaries of security be defined? Where is the control of bodily policing? Who protects what from whom?

- Shoshana Zuboff, You Are Now Remotely Controlled, https://www.nytimes. com/2020/01/24/opinion/sunday/surveillance-capitalism.html, Jan. 24, 2020.
- "We will continue to move quickly and work hard to empower customers with a suite of security solutions that provide an affordable, effective way to secure homes and neighborhoods." The statement of Dave Limp, senior vice president of Amazon Devices.
- Ring has partnered with more than 900 police departments across the US since 2018.
- According to the NPD Group, a market research firm, the sales of smart doorbells increased by 58 percent from January 2019 to January 2020.
- 5. Ring's announcement on February 18, 2020.

About Artists

Dachal Choi

Born through the fictional birthdays (#Rent to Own), Dachal Choi is an artist seeking a home (#New Yorks) and searching for a belief (#Blue Christmas). While doubts about liberalism and individualism arise with contemporary science and economics, her recent interest lies in the degree to which humans have become abstract data (#The Spicy Statement, #Untitled (after Eutheria)). She questions the autonomy and ownership of humans (#Carve and Crave) under surveillance capitalism, where the human future is sold for certainty market.

Choi's work has been presented at Times Art Center Berlin; Para Site, Hong Kong; Triangle Arts Association, New York; Socrates Sculpture Park, New York; Franklin Street Works, Stamford, CT; Hyundai Motorstudio, Beijing; and Seoul Art Space Seogyo, South Korea, among others. She is a recipient of an Artist Community Engagement Grant from Rema Hort Mann Foundation, an Individual Grant from the Asian Cultural Council, the George R. Bunker Award, and the Sylvia Lipson Allen Memorial Award. She holds a B.F.A. from the School of Visual Arts, New York, and an M.F.A. from Yale University.

Future Host

(Tingying Ma & Kang Kang)

Born in dreamworlds and catastrophe, we are two female artists and writers who consider the world to be emotive, sentient, and only able to be processed through epistemic inquiries. Espousing the perspective of post-socialist realist emotional mismanagement, we help each other to write with ecstasy and readiness. Our work has been presented at the Museum of Chinese in America, Knockdown Center, Movement Research at Judson Church, Dixon Place, the Wild Project, and Eli Klein Gallery, all in New York, as well as TPAM Performing Arts Meeting in Yokohama, Beijing's Ullens Center for Contemporary Art and Institute for Provocation, and Ming Contemporary Art Museum in Shanghai. Future Host are currently artists-in-residence at Shandaken: Governors Island, New York.

Li Shuang

Born in 1990, in the Wuyi Mountains, China, Li Shuang received her M.A. in media studies from New York University in 2014. Situated in globalized communication systems and inspired by various localities and uneven information flows, Li's work encompasses performance, interactive websites,

21

sculpture, and moving image installations and explores various mediums that make up the contemporary digital landscape. Crucial to this practice is the interaction between the medium and its users, as well as among the mediums themselves. These diverse forms of intimacy form a motif that runs through the artist's practice, as she investigates how different forms of technology bring us into contact with each other, and how they form part of a neoliberal apparatus that regulates the body and desire. Her focus is not limited to the virtual but also includes the material lives of those digital landscapes, such as the infrastructure and logistics systems that support it, and, more importantly, the cracks in between.

Li currently lives and works in Yiwu, China. She has had solo exhibitions at Open Forum, Berlin; and SLEEPCENTER, New York; and has participated in numerous institutional exhibitions including at the Guangdong Times Museum, Guangzhou; Tai Kwun Contemporary, Hong Kong; Centre Pompidou in collaboration with the Mao Jihong Arts Foundation, Chengdu; Taikang Space, Beijing; Flux Factory, New York; K11 art museum, Shanghai; and Oberlin College, Oberlin, OH.

About Curator

Jianru Wu

Jianru Wu (born 1985) is a curator and writer based in Guangzhou and a curator in residence at ISCP in 2020 sponsored by the Jane Farver Memorial Fund. Her practice looks at the consequences of rapidly diversifying structures of relationship and power in East Asia within the digital era. Her curatorial projects include *Re/sentiment* at A+ Contemporary, Shanghai; *Southern Climate* at N3 Gallery, Beijing; and *Forget Sorrow Grass: An Archaeology of Feminine Time* (co-curated with Sirui Zhang) at Guangdong Times Museum, among others. Wu has been the Director of Media Lab at Guangdong Times Museum since 2019.

One (Illegitimate) Child is curated by Jianru Wu, ISCP Jane Farver Curatorial Resident, and coordinated by Juliana Cope, ISCP Director of Development and Programs Manager.

This project is supported by the Jane Farver Memorial Fund. It is also supported, in part, by New York City Council District 33; New York City Council District 34; New York City Council Member for the 33rd District Stephen T. Levin; New York City Council Member for the 34th District Antonio Reynoso; New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, in partnership with the City Council; New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew M. Cuomo and the New York State Legislature; Hartfield Foundation; and Stavros Niarchos Foundation (SNF). Special thanks to John Moore for his continued support.

Image Captions

- Cover Future Host: A Speech Opera, 2018,
- p.7 production still, Photo by Qinrui Hua.
- p.13 Li Shuang, T, video still, 2017-2018, four-channel video, 15 min 17 sec.
- p.17 Dachal Choi, Carve and Crave, video still, 2020.

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23
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Published on the occasion of the exhibition One (Illegitimate) Child March 17-June 12, 2020

Artists Dachal Choi, Future Host, Li Shuang

Curator Jianru Wu

Editor Jianru Wu

Copy Editor Anya Szykitka

Published by International Studio & Curatorial Program

Design Studio Pianpian He & Max Harvey

Printer Little Mountain, New York

iscp

International Studio & Curatorial Program 1040 Metropolitan Avenue Brooklyn, New York 11211 USA +1 718 387 2900 www.iscp-nyc.org

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