

# Utopia Aspiration and the Totalitarian Society of the Spectacle

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Dear ladies and gentlemen,

Good afternoon.

First of all I'd like to thank Seoul Museum of Art for organizing such an exhibition and the forum! Thanks to curator Ms. Kyung-hwan Yeo, and art historian and critic Mr. Jonathan Harris, with their interest in and support to my art, I could be able to show my work to Korean audience and share my art concept and ideas.

I am an independent artist from China. The art piece selected by curator Ms. Kyung-hwan Yeo for the exhibition of the NK Project is entitled "North Korea 2012 No.5", one of the artworks in my North Korea series that I produced during 2011-2014. It was originated as part of the earlier Utopia series. The North Korea series is independent but found clues from the Utopia series.

I was born in the 1960s, when China was experiencing the grand socialist cultural revolution. My childhood and high school years were in a political fanatic era, until 1980s, when China initiated the economic reform, opening up and introduced the market-driven economy. However, the political system did not change. The conflicts and contradictions between the liberalized economic forces and the centralized government administration have caused a lot of social problems in China. I grew up in such a rapid transition of the society. My art is inevitably rooted in my personal experiences, memories and reviews of the society and its transition. So the sociality has been one of the important themes in my art.

I started my art career from Chinese painting, specializing in ink painting. After graduation from the Department of Chinese Painting, Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA), in 1998, I started to diversify the mediums for art creation, using photography, video and installations. These artworks participated in many important international exhibitions.

For the Utopia series, I chose photography and video as medium of the art creation. In 2002,

one video from the Utopia series participated in The 2nd Seoul International Media Art Biennale in Seoul Museum of Art in 2002. It is a 16-minute video entitled "Chinese Utopia". The video describes the transitioning Chinese society in the 1990s, the contradictions manifested in the society has led to a real disorder. It was similar to the form of a documentary. I produced quite a number of documentaries then.

Starting from 2005, I began to concentrate on the Utopia series, photographing the iconic socialist buildings in former and continuing socialist countries. The Utopia series explore the implications of the communist ideologies and movement of the 20th century on the lives of individuals in the former and continuing socialist countries. I visited many socialist countries to photograph the buildings that follow the Stalinist style buildings in the former Soviet Union. My objective is to cover all the former socialist countries, which were collectively known as the "Eastern bloc", including about a dozen countries. The shape and style of these architectures in these countries tend to follow those built in the former Soviet Union. There are many similarities. It is a phenomena in that special period in the history of humanity. These buildings were designed and built with a strong motivation to promote the socialist ideology and the power of the state.

I first photographed the ten grand socialist buildings in China. Then I visited the former Soviet Union, North Korea and Eastern European countries including the former East Germany, the Czech Republic, Romania and Poland to complete the series.

I stand in front of the facade of these buildings, trying to precisely capture every minute details and symbolic codes to examine the aesthetic manifestation of the national will/power. The primary and foremost priority in the design of these buildings was the manifestation and statement of power. They are indeed the visual declaration of power, or the physical appearance of power.

These buildings are usually super huge and grand. I changed my standing and moving the camera to shoot hundreds or thousands of photographs on one building in order to maximumly capture visual details. I used computer to stitch these photographs together to make one large-format picture, removing the irrelevant elements, deleting the crowds and automobiles, to make the buildings look like monuments. The post-production computer work is complex and time-consuming. It usually takes several months to complete one piece. It takes more than two years to complete the whole series. These works are in large format. Some works of the Utopia series participated in The 6th Shanghai Biennale in the Shanghai Art Museum in 2006 and a solo exhibition in The Moscow Biennale in 2007.

These buildings have a high degree of uniformity and similarity: 1) they were all built in the special period of history in China with an objective to promote the socialist ideology, the national will and common aspirations of the people. 2) The buildings are so vast that individuals become tiny or be consumed. 3) The construction of these buildings was completed within 10 years in the 1950s.

In 2008, I visited Moscow to shoot the iconic socialist buildings of the former Soviet Union. These huge iconic buildings become the model for other socialist countries to follow in the 1950s.

These buildings are the so-called "Stalinist Architecture". The exterior of these buildings is decorated sophisticatedly with so many symbolic codes and layers surrounded upward to show the absolute authority and momentum. The functionality of the building was not much concerned. The primary and probably the only objective of these buildings are to show an intensive communist revolutionary passion, the communist ideology and vision of an ideal society. It is a manifestation of aesthetics of the socialist ideology and power in the public space.

These buildings were built when the World War II had just ended, when countries were devastated egregiously and there was a severe shortage of materials to reconstruct the economy. It is crazy to invest heavily in the construction of grand buildings when the countries are in deep plight after the war. Some may think the buildings are of the socialist kitsch, some call it the "Stalinist Gothic Style." These buildings are the representatives when the communist ideology and the passion for utopia control everything within that social context.

That's a brief introduction of my "Utopia" series. Now let's move on to my North Korea series.

In fact, when I initiated my work on the theme of Utopia, I was already motivated to photograph the DPRK. But at that time I thought that must be a dream, I thought it was almost impossible to access into the country to do an art project.

North Korea is the only continuing socialist country in the world. The highly centralized governance is rare and almost unbelievable in the era of globalization in the 21st century. The country seems to be confidently running its socialist system.

Starting from early 2008, I submitted my application to the North Korean government through various channels. I applied to photograph the 20th-century socialist buildings in the country. After three years of lengthy application, back and forth, I finally obtained the approval from the North Korea central government.

I first visited North Korea in March 2011 when I arrived in Pyongyang to shoot the landmark political architecture. Before going to Korea, I submitted my shooting plan about three months in advance according to the request from the North Korean government.

When I was first in Pyongyang, I have a crew of a total of five people, including an interpreter and a documentary filmmaker. The North Korean government also sent five people to work with us, including deputy director of the Committee for Foreign Cultural Relations, a translator, a staff from the State Security Department, and a photographer. We

were arranged to live in Pyongyang Hotel. Their staff lived in two rooms next to us, telling us at not to act alone at any time, not to be in contact with the non-working staff and no photograph is allowed without their permission.

In the evening on the first date of arrival, the reception staff discussed the shooting schedule with me. I found that my original plan has been modified substantially, deleting some items, while at the same time adding a number of new items that I was not interested in. There are also recommended sites that I need to visit. I raised an objection and negotiated with them trying to modify the plan. I tried my best to persuade them to allow me photographing the architecture according to my planning. But it takes time to get the government approval of the modified plan. It is a complicated process that requires to submit a new application for a new round of approvals. I worked there for two weeks but unfortunately could not receive the approval before I left. Therefore, my first visit did not carry out my plan.

Interestingly though, for the Utopia series in Moscow and Beijing, I need to use computer software to delete the crowds and the automobiles in front of the buildings. But in North Korea, the working staff accompanying me helped clear the square in front of the buildings to ensure nobody actually appeared on the picture, which saved me a lot of post-production work.

The building and its mural sculpture are the product of the state power and the controlling ideology. I think today's North Korea is a mirror of the past China, everything seemed to be both familiar and unfamiliar, including the manner of dealing with people. Everything there seemed so surreal to me that I could not differentiate the reality and the imagination. When I was in North Korea, the experience was like I was having a dialogue between my memory and me.

After the first visit, I have built a good relationship with the North Korean government. In 2012, the North Korean government invited me to shoot the celebration for the 100th birthday of Kim Il Sung and the first public speech of Kim Jong-un as the North Korean supreme leader. They issued an announcement that they would host "the biggest celebration in human history". A number of international media correspondents were also invited.

The architecture and public space in North Korea are filled with political symbols to demonstrate the highly centralized power. They are the materialized manifestation of the intangible power. The individuals were performing, singing, dancing or changing the color boards on their hands, all following a unified command. The one hundred thousand individuals have constituted the grand landscape, which makes each individual looks like a "human pixel" on my photograph. Here, people worshipping in the image, or the supreme power of the image, to build a totalitarian society. People stand together for a common aspiration. This grand spectacular scene is common in North Korea. It is a form of power statement and practice.

So, how is the life of individuals within the grand landscape? From these pictures, I see the

subtle emotional expression of the individuals in the composition of the super large-scale landscape.

This gave me a new inspiration, how is the collective or the centralized political will be able to intervene or manipulate the individuals? I think it worth me to explore further. In history, both the Swiss Psychologist Jung (Carl Gustav Jung, Swiss psychologist, 1875-1961), and the American literary theorist Fredric Jameson (Fredric Jameson, contemporary American literary theorist) have summarized the phenomena as the "collective unconscious" under authoritarian political system, or "political unconscious", which in other words means that individuals are institutionalized.

In 2014, I visited North Korea for the 4<sup>th</sup> time. This time I photographed the individuals, including workers, farmers, students, doctors, and some families of various social status.

Obviously my plan was modified again. As a matter of fact, my photographing experience in North Korea is an ongoing negotiation process. It is a staged photography that the North Korean government set the stage for me. But all what I photographed just reflect a real ceremonial DPRK. I think that adds value or implications to my artwork.

This is my effort to look from the macro narrative to the in-depth review of the micro individual life. I'm trying to explore how the real life is like with the so-called collective unconsciousness. For all my socialist themed series, including both the Utopia series and the North Korea series, I have been pursuing to maximumly showing the symbolic details which is my art language for these series. My works are usually printed in large format, some may extend to more than 60 sq.m. I hope that my work not only exhibit the space aesthetics of these exotic landscapes, but also capture these microscopic elements; Not only show the appearance of the spectacle, but also discover the underlying causes in the formation of the spectacle.

This is my North Korea Series.

Contemporary art is a global art, growing within the context of globalization. Mankind faces many common themes. However, due to the differences in geographical location, personal experience and methodology adopted by different artists, one theme may be interpreted from different perspectives. I am also very pleased to have this opportunity to present my work in Seoul and build a dialogue with the Korean audience.

Thank you all!

## 乌托邦与权力的景观化呈现

### 王国锋

大家下午好！

首先感谢首尔市立美术馆举办这样一个展览和这个论坛！感谢策展人 Kyung-hwan Yeo 和艺术史学家 Jonathan Harris, 由于你们对我艺术创作的关注, 才得以让我有机会向韩国观众展示我的作品并交流我的创作理念。

我来自中国, 是独立艺术家。这次参加展览的作品是我近些年拍摄的朝鲜系列作品中的一件: 《朝鲜 2012 No.5》。如果谈到这个系列的作品, 那么一定要谈到我所创作的以乌托邦为主题的系列作品, 因为朝鲜系列是在这个主题下的线索。

我出生于上个世纪 60 年代, 那时中国正经历社会主义文化大革命, 是一个政治狂热的时代。1980 年代 (应该是我上中学的时候) 中国开始实行改革开放, 引入市场经济, 但政治体制并没有改变, 因此经济的快速发展与政体之间的矛盾导致了在中国非常多的社会问题, 我作为一个个体成长在这样的一个飞速发展和变化的社会环境之中, 所有的经历和记忆是难以磨灭的。我的艺术创作也不可避免地根植于我个人的成长经历和思考。因此我的作品中的社会性议题一直是我艺术创作的重要线索之一。

我最早是学习中国画的, 主攻水墨人物画。1998 年前后, 也就是我在中央美院国画系毕业以后, 我开始转变我的创作媒介, 开始做录像、录像装置等形态的作品, 也参加了很多国际的重要展览。

那么, 乌托邦这个主题我选择了摄影和录像这种语言方式来进行创作。早期乌托邦系列作品也参加过 2002 年首尔市立美术馆举办的第二届国际媒体艺术双年展 (The 2nd Seoul International Media Art Biennale)。当时我参展的作品是一件录像作品《中国乌托邦》(Chinese Utopia) (图)。是一件 16 分钟的录像作品, 作品的内容是描述中国改革开放后社会发展、矛盾、无序的一种现实, 类似于纪录片的形式。我在那个阶段也拍摄了几部记录电影作品。从 2005 年开始, 乌托邦系列作品开始聚焦到 20 世纪受共产主义运动影响所产生的一些意识形态建筑及其社会景观。这些建筑景观主要分布在当时受到前苏联政治影响和规范所产生的一些社会主义国家里, 就是当时所谓的社会主义阵营, 当时也被西方国家称之为“东方集团”, 大概有十几个国家。这些国家由于受到前苏联政治文化的规范与影响, 所产生的这些建筑景观的造型与风格有明显的统一性。这是集中出现在人类历史上特定时期里、以宣扬意识形态和国家意志为目的超大型景观建筑。

我最先拍摄的是中国。之后, 我分别去前苏联、朝鲜和东欧等前社会主义国家拍摄。包括东德、捷克、罗马尼亚和波兰。

我将这些建筑的正立面做为凝视对象, 试图通过对于他们精准的描写, 来考察国家意志在美学方面的表现。这些建筑在其设计之初, 所关心的就是权力的展示与炫耀, 可以说是权力的视觉宣言, 同时也是权力景观化的空间装置。

由于这些建筑体量巨大，为了对细节有更好的表现，我前期通过移动机位进行局部拍摄，后期依靠电脑合成拼接，去掉了画面上的人和汽车等与建筑无关的元素。也是为了突出一种纪念碑感。这是一项复杂而耗时的工作，每张片子后期制作都需要几个月有的甚至一年的时间才能完成。这些作品总共是用了两年多的时间完成的。这些作品的尺幅都比较大。2006年，部分作品参加了第六届上海双年展。2007年参加了莫斯科双年展，并且在俄罗斯艺术科学院美术馆做了我的个人展览。

这些建筑有高度统一性和相似性：1）这是集中出现在中国特定的历史时期里，以宣扬意识形态、国家意志和民族理想为目的超大型景观建筑。2）体量巨大有压迫感是这些建筑的主要特征之一。3）这些建筑大多是在1959年前后建造完成的，并且大多是在10个月的时间建造完成的。

2008年，我专程去莫斯科拍摄了前苏联时期建造在莫斯科的一些超大型的标志性建筑，这些建筑成为了20世纪50年代全世界社会主义国家作为表现国家意志的建筑模版。

这些建筑被称之为“斯大林样式”，他们共同的风格就是细部装饰繁复锦密，楼层相互簇拥层层向上攀升，以显示一种真理在手不可战胜的权威与气势。而建筑的功能性并不是设计者所要考虑的因素。这些建筑仅需要表现一种强烈的共产主义革命热情以及共产主义意识形态和对理想社会的憧憬，同时也是意识形态与权力意志在美学与空间方面的占有和表现。这些建筑都是在二战刚刚结束，物资严重匮乏时期建造的，这是非常不可思议的。这些建筑是一种极尽浪费之能事的社会主义媚俗(KISTCH)趣味，也被称之为“斯大林式哥特风格”。这一系列的建筑，可以说代表了共产主义意识形态和乌托邦理想统领一切的那段历史。

以上我简单地介绍了我的“乌托邦”建筑系列。下面我来介绍一下我的朝鲜系列作品。其实在开始拍摄乌托邦这个主题之初，我已经开始计划去朝鲜的拍摄了。但当时只是一个想法，觉得这是一件比较渺茫的事情。

从实质意义上讲，朝鲜是当今世界唯一一个仅存的正在进行时的所谓的“社会主义”国家。也是在21世纪全球化时代的今天，仍然理直气壮、有条不紊地将权力景观化发挥到极致的国家。

从2008年初开始，我通过各种途径向朝鲜政府提交申请，申请的项目就是拍摄20世纪的社会主义建筑。经过了三年多的努力，终于得到了朝鲜中央政府的批准。

第一次去朝鲜是2011年3月，我第一次来到平壤，开始拍摄位于平壤的政治建筑。在去朝鲜之前，应他们的要求提前大约三个月左右的时间，我向朝鲜政府提交了我的拍摄计划书。

第一次去平壤，我们一行共五个人，包括一名翻译和一名纪录片导演。到那里我才发现，朝鲜政府也派了五个人，陪同我们一起工作，其中包括一名对外文化交流委员会的对外交流局的副局长、一名翻译和一名国家安全部的工作人员还有一名他们的摄影师。安排我们住在平壤饭店，当时我们这边住了3个房间，他们的工作人员在我们旁边住了两个房间，告诉我们任何时候不能单独行动，不能与工作无关的人员接触，更不能随便拍照……。我们的所有行为开始被限制。

到了朝鲜的第一天晚上，接待我的工作人员开始跟我讨论我的拍摄项目和日程，讨论过程中我发现，他们对我原有申请的项目进行了很多修改，删掉了一些我想要拍摄的建筑，同时增加了一些我并不想拍摄的建筑和景观。在日程里还增加了一些我必须要去参观的项目。我当时提出了异议，并谈了我的想法，希望按照我的想法修改这份批文。但修改政府批文是一个非常复杂的过程，需要重新申报和审批。我在那里工作了两周，在我即将离开的时候，重新申报的批文还没有拿到，因此，我第一次拍摄，并没有完成我的计划。

有意思的是，在朝鲜拍摄这些建筑时，他们的工作人员帮我完成了清场工作，使得我的朝鲜建筑系列作品的后期制作减少了很多工作量。

这些建筑及其壁画雕塑，同样也是权利与意识形态的产物。我认为今天的朝鲜是中国过去的影子，在朝鲜，一切都让你既熟悉又陌生，包括与人打交道的方式。一切都很有有一种超现实感，让你有一种在现实与记忆之间的恍惚，我在朝鲜的拍摄就象在与自己的记忆展开的一场对话。

通过第一次拍摄，我与朝鲜政府建立了一个关系。2012年，朝鲜政府主动邀请我去拍摄金日成诞辰100周年的庆典，当时也是金正恩就任朝鲜最高领导人以来，首次面向全世界的公开亮相。他们对外宣布，将举办“人类历史上最大的庆典”，也同时请了一些国际媒体的记者。

这些景观体现了权力展示的象征与具体实践。即是一种权力意志的固态化呈现，同时也是已经景观化了的权力的实体与活体的展现。无论是庆典还是歌舞表演，这些按照统一指令进行表演或翻弄手中彩色图板的演员，实际上已经成为了构成这些宏大景观的“像素”(pixel)。在这里，人服务于图像，也就是服务于制造这个图像的权力意志本身，因而构成了极权社会里“万众一心”的奇异景观。这种宏大壮观的场景，是朝鲜社会日常化的景观，是一种常态。也是将权力景观化、身体化的政治实践。也暴露了一个处于特定历史境遇中的国家的美学与政治。

那么，在这样的恢弘而冷漠的景观下的个体又是怎样的状态呢？在制作这些图片的过程中，我看到了组成这些大型景观里的个体的微妙的情感表现。

这给了我新的启发，这些被集体意志或者说政治意志所操控或干预的个体，他们的存在与价值也是值得我去探讨的。之前无论是心理学创始人荣格(Carl Gustav Jung, 瑞士心理学家, 1875-1961), 还是文学理论家弗雷德里克·杰姆逊(Fredric Jameson, 美国当代文学理论家), 都对这种状态有过一个简单的归纳和总结, 认为这是集权政治体制下的“集体无意识”或者说“政治无意识”, 讲的是个体被体制化, 被体制所消解。

2014年, 我第四次去朝鲜, 这一次我拍摄的是个体, 包括工人、农民、大中小学生、医生、及一些家庭。

当然这次我的申请项目同样是被修改过的。实际上在朝鲜, 我的拍摄过程也是一个不断谈判的过程。在国家掌握一切的国度里, 摄影从根本上说就是一种权利的博弈。在那里如何获得图像也变成了一种政治。最后都是由政府安排好的, 所以说是朝鲜政府在我摆拍, 但这恰



恰反映的是朝鲜的另一种真实，我认为这种摆拍也给我的作品增加了另一个层面的东西。

这是我尝试从宏观叙述进入到具体生命的微观再现。我在试图探讨在这种集体无意识下个体生命的存在状态。无论是乌托邦系列作品还是朝鲜系列作品，我在摄影的方法和语言上一直追求对细节的刻画和表达，我的作品尺幅都比较大，目的就是为了让细节能够有更好的表现。很多作品的尺幅可以达到 60 多平方米。我希望我的作品不仅仅能够呈现这些奇异景观的空间美学，同时还希望呈现构成这些奇观的微观元素，不仅仅面对奇观，同时也在探索奇观形成的深层原因。

这是朝鲜系列。

我的社会主义系列作品不仅仅覆盖亚洲，也覆盖到了东欧前社会主义国家。去年，我在波兰、罗马尼亚、捷克、东德等地拍摄社会主义时期遗留的建筑，为期两个多月时间。在这些国家里，尽管社会主义已经成为历史，这些国家都已经转变为民主国家，但无论是酒店里、机场、海关还是餐馆里，与人们的对话中，我仍然能够强烈地感觉到社会主义时期的那种逻辑和思维方式。社会转型的阵痛仍然存在。目前在欧洲许多国家，由于经济萧条等因素，关于“乌托邦”的讨论再度升温。

社会主义系列作品，主要是以摄影作为媒介或艺术表达方式。除此之外，我还做声音和录像装置作品。《来自朝鲜的声音》，这是朝鲜社会公共空间的声音集合。这些是 2002-2006 年间在瑞士伯尔尼、德国杜塞尔多夫剧院为戏剧所做的舞台装置作品。

关于创作主题，我还创作了《记忆》系列和《新闻》系列。探讨的是全人类都有着公共记忆的历史事件、比如二战也就是反法西斯战争、苏联解体东欧剧变、斯诺登、911 等这些事件，这两个系列探讨的是人类的认知和记忆，与真相之间的距离。人类认知的只是我们可以看到的经过媒体或权利过滤过的信息，并不是完整的真相。即便对事件的基本认知取得共识，形成公共记忆，在记忆与真相之间，也存在差距。不仅仅是由于历史可以被当权者更改、删除或者美化，同样致命的，是人类自身的记忆是有缺陷的，遗忘、记忆细节的支离破碎、或者有意记住或遗忘某个部分等，都是造成记忆与真相之间差距越来越大，历史真相越来越模糊的因素。

《像素 2014》系列作品我是运用构成一个图像最基本的元素---像素方块来呈现事物与景象的另一个极端，与我之前的乌托邦系列和朝鲜系列在视觉上走向了一个相反的方向。

如果从更宏观广义的角度，我所有的作品探讨的都是个体生命在不同的社会语境、意识形态或者说已经形成的体制下的生命感觉。

当代艺术是全球化艺术，并不是某个封闭的小社会里面所存在的独特的艺术。存在于全球化的语境里，人类面临很多共同的主题。但由于艺术家所在的地域、成长经历和感悟不同，在创作中对于这些主题的解读角度和方式会有所不同。我也很高兴可以有这次机会与韩国观众交流。

谢谢大家！