Reimagining Affection in a Changing Shanghai: A Rhizomatic Young Cartography of Birdhead’s Contemporary Photography

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Abstract

The article examines the dynamics of space surrounding Shanghai’s rampant urban change as experienced by the Chinese artistic duo known as Birdhead. Underpinned by the conceptual framework of the “affective turn”, this study reflects upon and addresses how the photographer’s chaotic photo-essay of Shanghai’s new state housing (Xincun, New Village, 2008) can function as a nexus of place-making. With a claim to impetuous emotion in his works, Birdhead’s contemporary photography pervades a plane of subjects, objects, and affections, in which the city is imagined and experienced as space-body performativity. Understanding Birdhead’s everyday urban practices as performative, we claim that the visual performance of these photographs not just materially shapes the bodies, but also acts as a rhizomatic catalyst for both things-in-themselves and webs of social affection inside and outside Shanghai. As a contribution, this article’s theoretical application to Birdhead’s everyday networks of unruly and frenzied emotional tactics challenges the official formulation of realism. More importantly, their contemporary photography apprehends and territorializes elements of anarchy, at the very same time deterritorializing the omnipresent affective strategies of a propagandistic post-socialist apparatus that pressures the positive over “other” emotional representations of Shanghai.

Keywords: Chinese contemporaneity, affective turn, new materialism, a rhizomatic sense of place, young “minor” bodies, performativity

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Izvleček


Ključne besede: kitajska sodobnost, afektivni obrat, novi materializem, rizomatičen občutek prostora, mlada »manjša« telesa, performativnost

Introduction

China’s Urban Rhizomatic Spaces and the Visual Arts

In the last few decades, since China’s economic reforms started to take shape, urbanization has provoked a ceaseless transformation in the design of cities. This post-socialist, fast-paced gentrification of layers of urban history has caused entire old neighbourhoods to be razed on a grand scale. The possible development of a consumer society in transition was both a painful and vibrant powerful eruption of the extensive, glimmering physical networks integrated into Shanghai’s detritus-built environment (Wu and Phillips 2004). Ever since, debates about demolition and relocation have brought together experts and scholars in the field of built heritage to discuss the spatial and aesthetic effects on the visual arts (Braester 2010; Visser 2010; Wang and Valjakka 2015; Ortells-Nicolau 2017). Physical and economic prosperity has left behind China’s soviet model in the wake of the socialist era so much associated with a “controlled urbanization” (1949–1978), which privileged the development of the countryside over the city (Murphey 1980). In contrast with this anti-urban proposition, there is another more realistic variant that sketched an urban-biased approach in its policies of
urban development, namely favouring subventions including health care, public housing programs, as well as the introduction of methods for control over rural migration to urban areas (Chan 1989). It is fair to say that Mao’s new model of national development and its strategies were both pro-urban and anti-urban. With Deng’s “post-reform” era, the economic expansion provoked a greater concentration of wealth in cities, and there was the diversification of the market economy and an urban scaling in both small and larger cities. A “floating population” of migrant workers started to be observed in the main cities across China, whilst there was urbanization of the rural areas to maintain a balance between small, medium-sized and the largest cities (Ginsburg 1993). These urban policies created differences in urban growth between coastal and non-coastal cities, as well as challenges in metropolitan areas like Shanghai, to preserve the size of the population and create a sustainable urban agglomeration (ibid., 1993). Consequently, the representation of this Chinese urbanization model has not just been reproduced in mass cultural forms, but the avant-garde has also made a genuine attempt to redefine urban culture into alternative terms. There have been attempts by contemporary artists who use photography and their bodies—such as Zhang Dali, Dai Guangyu and Jin Feng—to allocate unconventional affections that deal not just with the utopian narratives of Chinese cityscapes that stress the sight of the city as a place of representation, but also with those who are below this sanctioned distribution of sensory urbanism,¹ to expand such representations to other senses (Marinelli 2015).

This article focuses on the collaboration of two young Shanghainese artists, under the pseudonym Birdhead (a well-established collective formed by Ji Weiyu, born in Shanghai in 1979, and Song Tao, born in the same city a year later), who have been continually contributing as visual cartographers to the rapid changes the city has been undergoing. Ji and Song’s (Ji and Song, 2008) photographic book explores the hasty urban transformation of the ever-expanding metropolis during the Shanghai World Expo 2010 (Lu 2012). Building on theories of contemporaneity through affect, this paper claims that Birdhead’s visual emphasis on Xincun, as an alleged pro-Mao thinking model, produces an effective form of place-making for both a “cool” image of Shanghai’s municipal government as well as for promoting the local artistic communities of the city. Their images enact a revolution of the senses in a transitional place that establishes a series of idealized products of the imagination of the middle-class neo-bohemian condition. We argue that their visual lyric devices include a narration of bodies and affects, drawing upon emotional cartography, in which Birdhead and their friends

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¹ Sensory urbanism is here understood as a response against ways of thinking about planning and representing cities that are too reliant on our sense of vision.
are the characters who disclose the perceptions, memories and cultural emotions embedded in their bodily performances. Such a body-spatial subjective approach includes the affective dimension of the language of photography as performance art. It also includes the generational conflicts between post-1980s young artists and their previous parental artistic and humanistic know-how. And finally, their interior landscapes are emotional trajectories that are linked to the material reality of their Xincun’s quotidian cosmos, adding a peculiar sense of place.

This article aims to contribute to the theoretical framework of historical materialism and realism in the visual arts of Shanghai’s rapid transformation by exploring the Xincun as a backbone to understand the shift from a socialist to a post-socialist city. A second striking feature of Birdhead is their careful photographic treatment of the neo-bohemian (older city areas continue to innovate culturally, yet these bohemian traditions cross over with the growth of the economy). We argue that Birdhead’s poetic style has fed the fantasy of young urbanites, as power is also affective in China. This is especially true in a country where negative feelings and emotions can turn into a positive state propaganda apparatus (Yen 2005). The mixture of feelings trickles down into the everyday lives of young people who, like Birdhead, can transform it too into their own forms of affections.

The production of affective photographic urban landscapes can be a method to visualize a documented cultural lifestyle of a changing Shanghai. The concept of the rhizome is proposed to explore Birdhead’s living visual approaches to produce alternative spaces and subjectivities of the city. Deleuze and Guattari (1987 [1980]) define a rhizome as a non-hierarchical and heterogeneous structure, a rearrangement of states within the realms of life and art that can function using extension and enlargement. Birdhead’s photography resounds with Zhang’s rewriting of the “other” narrative voices of Shanghai that “undo” and “redo”: subconscious societal notions that are competing for Chinese subjectivities of the city and China, which “also shows the ruthless movements of deterritorialization and reterritorialization, by which different ideological systems seeks its own afterlife at other’s expenses” (Zhang 2002, 31). On the one hand, we acknowledge the Deleuzian notion of subjectivity, and apply it to Birdhead’s photography as a cartography of differences between subjects and objects. In other words, subjectivity is not comprehended as an identity, but as a mechanism of subversion of existing power structures in order to institute new ways of experiencing corporeality in social and community life. On the other hand, their creative rhizome is capable to connect with the emotional spaces of the Xincun as well as making connections elsewhere.
This study thus contributes to the literature on visual arts and the Chinese sense of place by enunciating and demonstrating performative photography as a specific type of creative placemaking process, which gives prominence to the expression of affection. The conceptualization of the article also puts emphasis on Deleuzian approaches to mapping a sense of place in the post-socialist city. This paper begins with a contextual description of Chinese performative photography based on the relevant literature, followed by a brief exploration of art theories on contemporaneity and a discussion on the ontological role of analogue photography in Birdhead’s digital age. The succeeding section introduces the conceptual framework of affection as a “bodily emotional cartography” and offers an outline of the methods used for data collection and analysis. The article then presents the assemblage patterns of the exemplary case of Xincun, articulating the process and interwoven relationship of affection construction and Birdhead’s everyday sense of place. Finally, the article concludes with the proposal of affection as a bodily emotional cartography in which a non-essentialist creative place-making development is formed by affects, bodies, and objects to see through what has been separated between the material and non-material of post-socialist Shanghai.

**Context: Performative Photography in China**

Birdhead map the geographies of the new villages that were created in the post-1950s Mao era, due to population growth and rural migration to the city. This pioneering model was predominantly inaugurated in Caoyang New Village in Shanghai’s Putuo District, which at the time was situated in the immediate surroundings of the megalopolis. Mao’s anti-bourgeoisie place-making strategic development stretched out the urban sprawl into rural areas, producing urban-rural socialist settlements in the city (Visser 2010). These new villages were the first archetype of a socialist community, and were motivated by the need to make available housing for the industrial workers and their families: to satisfy their everyday needs, which implied addressing the housing question in response to new standards of comfort in terms of services and hygiene. The revolutionary thought apparent here was then extended, and work and home units were originally built to mobilize grass-root initiatives, which were supervised by the central state as spaces of socialist modernity. They moulded the vicious and colonial structural landscapes, to exude a soviet experience as opposed to one of class struggle (Lu 2012). In practice, these “apparent” bottom-down policies and programs were to empower the people in these project sites, and were to improve the lives of workers and their families.
Since the end of the 1970s, the main pioneers of performance art and groups like those in the *Stars Group (Xing Xing Pai)*, filmed and documented their fluid outburst of practices as cultural and social breeding grounds to address concerns related to place (Wang 2016). There was a flood of enthusiasm for knowing and discussing a wide variety of art and literary production in the 1980s that led to self-organized avant-garde circles in different geographical locations across the country during the heydays of the cultural fever (Wang 1998). However, a genuine conversation between civil society and the established order was always associated with official reluctance (Zhang 2002). As argued by Berghuis (2008), the prevalence of performances during the 1990s set up regeneration and a real dialogue with the external world, despite the strict state censorship system. With the impossibility of confronting concrete problems and having real dialogues with the central government, subjectivity becomes a fundamental channel for artists to create an “other” sense of place. This invisible spatiality coexists with other past and contemporary temporalities of post-socialist China, being typified in Birdhead’s sensorial construction of place.

The creativity of the city and the arts in photography took an alternative route as a response to top-down post-socialist urbanism (Zheng 2010). Along with this spatial turn, the art critic Zheng (2010) established himself on the foundations for a reorientation of socio-spatial relations to pinpoint the burden of documenting the cartography of motion and life. Zheng (2010) suggests that contemporary artists began to touch on not only the aesthetics and ethics of the process of gentrification, but they often dropped such theoretical concepts as the avant-garde within a variety of leitmotifs and experimental methods to re-appropriate the city in the face of unceasing transmutations on the phenomenon of urbanization. Ortells-Nicolau (2015) has also studied the works of Chinese artists in the 1980s and onwards, and claims that the ruins of the city’s countless demolition sites were in the background of the documented performances of the new village. That is to say, photography served as a self-portrait tool and a medium to record these historical changes and bodily artistic innovations in the country (Zhu and Iturrioz 2007). In view of that, there are two cities, the “real” representational city of the architects and urban planners, as scrutinized by the Chinese government, who according to Zukin (1991) endorse the most important role in any socio-cultural process of urban transformation; and that of the artists, such as those identified in Birdhead’s visual endeavours; who can challenge the materialist view of the city “as both objects of desire and structural forms, [whose] work bridges time and space” (Zukin 1991, 39). Therefore, these images also expose how totalizing discourses of the city are responsible for defining and delimiting what it means to become young as a living transit between puberty and adulthood. Birdhead’s young subjectivities divert from the post-socialist
narratives that reinforce the idea that everything must be guided (including how to be young). Moreover, this article also demonstrates how their photography multiplies the emotional variations of the young through the effects of post-socialist totalizing discourses of Shanghai’s New Village. We look at Xincun as an object in its symbolic understanding rather than its socio-political logic, whose playful-aesthetic photography can make the image of subjective youth enlarge the diversity of the young artistic existences of Shanghai.

Non-Representational Spaces of Contemporaneity

As examined in recent Chinese art history, the works of Chinese artists have been re-enacting new forms of psychological emancipation when interacting with urban development. Wu (2008) states that when observing some key features of contemporaneous artists intervening in Chinese cities, they have internalized the accelerated urban ruins prevalent in the 1990s because of gentrification. The precarious lives of the youngsters of Beijing New Village (also known as East Village), whose first performances and installations with their own naked bodies were recorded in new media artefacts. Their role in disseminating public awareness deconstructed the symbols of the past and disjointed to turn them into “an untotalizing totality” with a new avant-garde language (Jie 2006, 323). These young creators were appropriating the Western performative style with related visual devices to demonstrate an attitude or a certain cultural behaviour between art and life (Gao 2005). Body art, which was also termed “in action art” by Berguis (2008), also reflected Chinese artistic outlooks regarding their individual-collective cohabitation and their ever-increasing desire for artistic expression, as an act of community closeness in Beijing New Village.

A prominent example of this intersection of media is the photographer Rong Rong, who is famous for his romantic performances around dilapidated buildings posing in a wedding dress with Inri, his wife. Rong Rong’s photographs give the impression of romanticism, which is thrilling in its ambiguous fusion of the Western and Chinese aesthetic appreciation of ruins that were capturing both the past and the future (Hung 2004). This historicism responds to the existence of a Chinese cultural contemporaneity that nurtures a ritualistic Daoist/Buddhist/Confucianist hierarchy and virtues, which can be considered unitary realities themselves and that indicated a mutual reciprocity in a continuum with Western forms of deconstruction (Gladston 2010).

Ruined cityscapes set up a point of departure for a greater understanding of (a-)historical references of Chinese time that sit between cultural memory and
introspective forms of being in time (Hung 2003). Facing the astounding consequences of Chinese urbanization, Gao (2008) acknowledges the notion of Chinese contemporaneity as witnessing the spatial and geopolitical reality of matter rather than just being a new epoch, or a suggestive form of “being in Chinese time”:

Thus, Chinese modernity seems to be absolutely given by a premeditated consciousness of both transcendent time and reconstructed space with a clear national, cultural, and political territorial boundary. (Gao 2008, 134)

Rong Rong was also photographing the artist Zhang Huan in *Twelve Square Meters* (2007), with the latter locked up for an hour in a public toilet in the East Village. Zhang Huan’s body was smeared with fish oil and honey, creating a stench that attracted large numbers of flies and other insects that stuck to his body. That performance was not just a direct criticism of the lack of hygiene in public toilets in urban and rural areas, but also alluded to the poet Ai Qing, father of the well-known artist Ai Weiwei, who during the Cultural Revolution was sent to work in the remote Xinjiang province, where he was forced to toil in the public latrines (Querol 2012). This experimentation, with not just photography but also other media including documenting performances in urban settings, took place in the 1990s and encompassed collective and individual memories, along with historical connections between the self and nation that inspire observers to have a conversation between the past and present. At the same time the artists could reflect on the urban precariousness of Chinese cities, while their diverse heterogeneous artistic interventions—including happenings, paintings, music, theatrical performances, and documenting parties—strengthened an important communal bond in the Beijing New Village (Hung 2003). Sheldon (2007), drawing from Foucault’s biopower forms of subjugation over large segments of the population, argues how artists’ bodies personify the state’s over-regulation as a means of reconstructing control, which is efficiently carried out as a way of disciplining Chinese society.

This article builds on the awareness that the reciprocal complexities between post-socialist visual culture and urban spaces, “considering that performance played a major role in Chinese art in the 1980s and 1990s”, are a crucial component of Birdhead’s pan-media (multiple forms of media including the body) that embodies forms of dissemination (Cotton 2009, 24). After the Tiananmen Square incident in 1989, the more immediate contemporaneity of these performative photographers was to elicit the loss of traditional values and the growth of postmodern attitudes, by ascribing a new social role to artists, who became the focus of attention in the West (Wu and Phillips 2004). Many activist artists
in Beijing New Village were also complaining about the lack of preservation policies and were supportive of the recovery of the buildings of old Beijing, giving special attention to the preservation of the historic district with the famous hutong alleys (Braester 2010). Despite the apparent bohemian collective attitude of these artists in the New Village, they were all looking for individual fame and financial support, since these were lacking from both Chinese and international institutions. The new Post-New Era (hou xin shiqi), with the arrival of art festivals for body artworks, provided a route to the world of contemporary art institutions with its cynical aesthetics of irony and trauma. Daoist practices to express the free will of the artists together with autonomous, self-indulgent and violent performances were the necessary responses to a still dark and suffocating post-reform era (Berghuis 2008). At the same time, from the 1990s on two art styles were showcasing the ideological pessimism and economic potential of the era: “cynical realism (wanshi xianshi zhuyi) and political pop (zhengzhi bopu), acquired predominance in contemporary art, articulating the idioms of pop art with an ironic and blasé critical stance” (Ortells-Nicolau 2017, 169). Contemporary art triggered the political and creative dynamics of the Western art system, which was less experimental than the 1985 new wave movements that were more in tune with Bourriaud’s (2008) relational aesthetics of embracing the “whole of human relations and their social context” (ibid. 118–119). These factors contributed to the emergence of a critical mood in the 2000s, which eroded the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), with works such as Zhang Dali’s uncanny skull on shattered walls. These works drew attention to mass media outlets making visible the Chinese officials’ obsession with transforming the city with the spreading of houses and shopping centres and moving people around under urban encroachment (Woodworth 2015). At the same time, Zhang’s bodily art street praxis also embodies the excessive never-ending urban transformations of Chinese cities that cannot exist without traces of the past:

Zhang ponders the temporalities of urban imagery: the striking disconnection between psychological perception and experiential data leads him to compare living in Beijing today, in its complexity, to ‘living in a start of trance, since it [feels] more like one thousand years have gone by’. (Marinelli 2015, 7)

Building on this reflection on place-making in the city, Braester (2010) makes clear that this spatial practice is the result of a history that has been manifesting

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2 In addition to his work as a curator and art critic, Nicolas Bourriaud (born 1965) is also an author and lecturer in the field of contemporary art.
the broad context of interaction between both political and economic policies, as opposed to everyday practices of representing the city and between the PRC’s urban leadership and the arts and cinema, in a headlong rush to urban-sprawl. Indeed, there is an endless interchange of macro (molar) and micro (molecular) contours that mirrors a social space itself in a personal, collective and historical sense (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). We claim that Birdhead’s embodied affectivity navigates across changing sensations between opacity and transparency through a network of photographic moments that move beyond Chinese rigid subjectivities of visual culture.

Birdhead’s Performative Photography in the Digital Era

Birdhead’s snippets of life manifest how their analogue photography has privileged and anticipated the importance of the medium in a post-photographic society to visualize the invisibility that exists between objects and subjects in action. The resistance of Birdhead to the use of digital technology, despite the virtual hegemony of today’s new media culture, is evident in the slow process of their casual photography, which still venerates the darkroom to the detriment of an uncertain scenario: the so-called post-photographic trend. This technological turn brings together traditional and electronic devices and is postulated by Fontcuberta as something that “does not mark a new technique in the digital age but rethinks the image in its totality” (cited in Moreiras 2017, 2). Digital photography is unravelling how the medium has ceased to be a channel of communication to become a living environment, where the owner of the image and the artist’s talented material trademark imply new dilemmas of authorship. In this convergence culture, users and consumers are members of an active ecosystem, where they all have a role in producing and appropriating images (Jenkins 2006). The role of contemporary photography and its authorial shamanistic powers of the original creation—with Baudelaire as the maximum advocate, to the death of the author as announced by Barthes and Foucault—needs to be readdressed in the current network society. These contradictions allow us to revisit the figure of the dandy, whose individuality and lack of social convention can model the artist as if he or she were their own work of art. The modernist and materialist culture of Shanghai in the 1920s and 1930s was a stage for the trope of the dandy, which became a male image that was designed for the female imagination (Lee 1999). As will be discussed later, Birdhead can also be categorized under the conception of the dandy, as a form of subjectivity that is comfortable with decadence “identified with the (bourgeoisie/anti-bourgeoisie) insubordination”, and being looked at (Hewitt 1993, 89). Reality is an artifice that one creates with one’s own
character-defining deeds; in other words, the supreme conduct of one’s own life in a Baudelairean aesthetic ideal. Birdhead’s collective authorship is interesting to analyse, since their leaning towards the physicality of cultural artifacts points to a contradictory duality that is situated in the mid-point between the authorial modernism of Baudelaire and the postmodern death of the author. Nevertheless, subjectivity is decentred in the midst of a set of snapshots that outline a Shanghai in the midst of fleeting moments, in which Birdhead play with the representation of space, and the functional architecture of the city, whilst also infiltrating a line of flight with their bodies of displacement, which are no longer formal or habitual. Indeed, Birdhead’s assemblage performs privilege with the notion of affections as the aesthetics of young artists whose individual imprints permeate into the wider socio-political structure and audiences’ consciousness to connect the two in a non-essentialist manner. It is suggested that their non-alienating detournement, and “constructed emotions” are proposed as techniques to construct their sense of place.

Theoretical Framework

Affection as a “Bodily Emotional Cartography”

This article provides some reflections on photography and the order of emotions, in which feelings can produce senses capable of transforming the motivating effects of “other” actions that are invisible from the Chinese public sphere (Hizi 2021). There is a synergy between Birdhead’s intimate actions and their network of artistic and everyday scenarios of their Xincun, which produce a creative collective of intersubjectivities within and without the habits of their everyday life. The claim being made is that their emotional ecosystem is important to offer an extra layer within a Chinese sensibility that does not reward anything related to politics in the arts, but the homogeneity of socio-cultural norms that naturalize the national mindset. A further assertion being made is that Birdhead’s transformative subjectivities represent the logic of urban youth, who seem to be either angry or are just powerless realists who are only pursuing fun. These affections are argued as pushing the boundaries of a sensibility in which youth subjectivities are subjected to “an ongoing process of meaning-making based on the negotiation between individual agency and the conditions in which this agency can be enacted” (Fu 2021, 428). Their affective photography subtly goes against the rationalism of the city, since Birdhead’s representations of Shanghai are backed by a deep-rooted antagonistic perception of its “natural” cosmovision.
This brings the analysis to the Western “affective turn” in the 1990s, which explored the metaphysical and epistemological role that emotions autonomously play out with respect to language and textual discourse (Ahmed 2004). Clough (2008) identifies this “affective turn” in the humanities and social sciences within Anglo-Saxon academia, with the question of corporeality, defined by two significant articles from 1995: Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s and Adam Frank’s “Shame in the Cybernetic Fold”, and Brian Massumi’s “The Autonomy of Affect”. At the same time, another significant body of work comes from the multidisciplinary book The Affect Theory Reader (2010), which is an anthology of some of the most renowned authors who acknowledge the processual character of emotions across material objects and subjects (Seigworth and Gregg 2012). These authors claim that the corporeal has the capacity or the will of action to affect and be affected by external objects. Thus, it is in the capacity of the body that affect can be understood as a gradated palette that draws the texture of the afflicted bodies. From these premises, it can be deduced that bodies can also be on the move, and emotions exist to mobilize them. In The Affect Theory Reader, it is also stated that affection is not an expression of inferiority or subjectivity, but that it is something that happens in between, stemming from both the psychologist conceptions derived from an individual subject as well as from the sociology of collective emotions in which the individual is trapped. The paper draws on Spinoza’s ethics about the potentiality of the body as the sole blueprint that determines our actions, as an independent substance with consciousness, which can be open to interpretation (Glezos 2017). For that reason, Spinoza postulates that everything is the same substance, including God and nature (Tomkins 2008). Spinoza simply seems to be recognizing the ignorance of the causes that control our actions. Thus, the idea that everything is a performatory utterance is rather dubious, as well as the idea that all our dispositions come from an artistic artifice.

Moreover, the second current of thought that is also pervasive in The Affect Theory Reader shows that Deleuzian authors like Massumi (1995) tap into the concept of intensity, which highlights the importance of sciences such as biology and mathematics in capturing the concept of affect. Sedgwick (2003) also acknowledges an embodied corporality as an assembled extension of the naked body. In other words, creativity embraces technological devices that facilitate its mundane development. Thus, any subjective and objectified artistic creation within the digital era arrives at an entirely new dimension, when circulating via the internet, which destabilizes the habitual confrontation between rational cognitive thoughts and any irrational feelings. Indeed, Birdhead’s photography skilfully reformulates the relationship between photography and everyday life without entering into the representational, but by penetrating into the impersonal experimentation.
and relational of bodies that are linked to the questioning of a differential and relational living material that breaks down the hierarchies of Chinese biopower between human, animal, organic and non-organic species (Figures 1 and 2). This vitalistic cartography is a compendium of material forces that is very near to but also very remote from Deleuze and Guttari’s (1987) non-linear causality of matter—and opens out into a new process of “machinic assemblages” of substances that connect organic and non-organic lives alike. Both scholars also presume that the relation between content and form in art comes from the elasticity of the work itself rather than from the intentionality of an artist.

Following the aforementioned perspectives, this article will examine the ways to consider the body’s affects of moving and being moved around Birdhead’s New Village. Contemporary arts can engulf such a space to envision and feel the new villages differently to how they are officially represented in China. Inscribing a reflection in a critical body of research that deals with contemporary aesthetic practices in China, it will be claimed that Birdhead develops affection in shaping one’s feeling for Shanghai as a dynamic threshold of cohesion and disintegration of official bodily forms and sensibilities to understand these places.

Figure 1. View of Xincun Village. Source: Song Tao and Ji Weiyu (2008)
Methodology

_Xincun's Performative and “Affective” Cartography as an Emotional Space_

The study employed a distinct case study method to describe the bodily affective approach. The case of _Xincun_ serves to highlight the problem of subjectivity and affect with regard to places through some of the photographs chosen, the selection of which came after the interviews with the Birdhead artists Song Tao and Ji Weiyu. The reason for choosing this specific case is because of its non-typicality at the time. The photobook was available in 2008, and it was a ground-breaking effort to study the dynamics of lines of flight that are interrelated and constitute the emotional fabric of these post-revolutionary areas of the city. The research methods used in this study include historical documentation, semi-structured interviews, and participant observation, in order to analyse an ontology of emotions in Shanghai’s affective cartography.

Analysis and Discussion

_Birdhead’s young performative and subjective post-socialist Xincun_

This section opens with the case study and presents the subsequent analysis and discussion of the two young Shanghainese artists who together go by the name Birdhead. The study employed a single case study model to describe the affective and spatial performative approach of Birdhead’s contemporary photography. Empowered by performative photography, Birdhead’s loose, roaming freedom hovers over the physical and sensorial ecologies that tactically punctuate the suffocating homogenization encountered in the urban-rural fabric of the Caoyang New Villages (also known as _Xincun_). Their photography becomes the place-making process by which their young subjectivity is constituted by as many forces and actors as possible. The features of the social context in which the subjectification process of Chinese young people unfolds is as follows: Party, which manifests in young people’s ambivalent attitude toward the CCP and socialist ideology; family, which involves a nexus of long-standing traditional family values and a desire to be independent of family support and control; and the pedagogy of education, which allows limited space for learning citizenship and social participation (Kloet and Fung 2016). Birdhead’s post-1980s generation has experienced a booming

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3 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari coined the term “line of flight” in _A Thousand Plateaus_ (1987) to describe the elusive moment when change occurs as it was meant to, when a threshold is passed between two paradigms.
economy and increasing material prosperity. They have had access to better education, a more diverse culture and greater information resources than their parents (Yan 2009). These conditions provide them with an expanded range of choices and possibilities for the creation of their subjectivities, extended with merging technologies and better access to information than their previous generations (Liu 2011). The immediate consequences have been a postmodern fragmented subject whose “youthscape pervades a scenario in which youth in China have some room for an agency that offers them an alternative to the same functionalist teleological cultural firewall of China” (de Kloet and Fung 2016 p. 53).

To see how this new subjectivity is structured as part of a creative and artistic process, and to see how Birdhead looks toward the (re)significance interpretation of the old processes and pedagogy paradigms, Weiyu, one of the artists highlights: “we have been trained in art schools, but we are not interested in reading” (Interview, April 14th, 2015). Here, we can appreciate their desire to be characters who exist on the fringes of society, in the ways other social outcast protagonists position themselves in films of the sixth generation vis-à-vis mainstream media or the Chinese film industry. Like Birdhead, sixth-generation movies such as *Beijing Bastards* (1993) and *Unknown Pleasures* (2002) also appropriated the realist documentary method to portray the generation that was produced during a historical moment when China embraced global capitalism. This new filmmaking impulse began documenting and foregrounding a “bastardization” of the traditional lifestyles of previous generations, and to break away from the mythical grand narratives such aesthetic and ideological permutations drift into, thus creating “confusing experiences of suddenly confronting new psycho-geography and overwhelming urban reality” that gave room for creativity and innovation with regard to old ways of thinking and doing things (Fleming 2014, 519).

Birdhead, like many youngsters and artists of their generation, reveals how this “bastardization” is a form of rebelliousness, one that fluctuates between a spatial plane of remoteness and proximity. Moreover, it is not altogether surprising that their bastardization lines of flight can be regarded as a macho, angry warning used to prove how radical they are in reclaiming their streets. This is echoed by the mixture of empty blockhouses awaiting demolition or ugly Maoist-style apartments foregrounded by Birdhead’s blasé bodies, as a type of creative contradiction (Figure 1). Such incongruity also situates these spaces in post-modern societies, within a Shanghai that accelerates and slows down in different lineal and cyclical directions. Among their collective gestures, Birdhead also shares a Daoist tolerance for the acceptance of the ugly that seems to fit into the Chinese psyche’s subjectivities of nothingness that can be manifested in two ways:
One is a negation of bodily desires, sensory experience, and everyday emotions such as happiness and anger, joy and sorrow, and love and hate. The other is a denial of the notion that beautiful and ugly, and valuable and dispensable are the content of our mental activities. (Fan and Sullivan 2010, 562)

These feelings of the ugly are the multi-sensory experiences of material and ideological circumstances in other late-capitalist urban public spaces (Ngai 2007). Their autobiographical sense of place is waiting to be rhizomatically incorporated through the hidden tensions of these new villages. Their spatial proximity and distance permeate what Lin (2019) considers the strain that lies between the suppressed Maoist past versus the “consumer society” of the post-socialist present.

Once perceived as a revolutionary footprint, the edges of the new villages were created in the post-1950s era. At that time, Mao’s anti-bourgeoisie strategic plans antagonistically ended up in megalopolises that stretched out from urban into rural areas. Here a parallel could be set with the Freudian need to quest for freedom from the father-figure, represented by old socialist Maoist ideology (and its continuity in post-socialist China), which is linked to the need to return to the nativist, the “naturalness” of the motherland in an intimate, loving way (Gao 2011). The art critic Gao (2011) notes that the contrast of several forms of authoritarian subjectivity can always sustain any Chinese subject. This is also evident, as Gao (2011) notes, in contemporary artists whose subjectivities are rounded up by what he calls “bentu” or “native land” as a kind of imagined Chinese subject: “without the sustenance of the earth it would be very difficult for a tree to be a sky-reaching tree” (ibid. 106). Gao claims that this Chinese bentu is rearticulated in an indigenous “performative body”, without necessarily conceding to nationalist cultural essentialism. This confrontation in Birdhead’s photographic subjectivities can be interpreted as an aesthetic disruption of causality that is underlined by the conflict between Mao’s socialism and global capitalism, both being torn between two Fathers and Birdhead’s nativistic love of the motherland. However, it should be noted that the tension caused by the state’s prioritization of urbanizing the rural is not a new phenomenon in China, since the city has always been confronted with discourses of “the rural and socialism” (Jie 2006, 323). All these subjectivities represent states of denaturalization, which Birdhead’s photography attempts to re-naturalize through their synthesized young subjectivities. The external differences of all those subjectivities are internalized, becoming internal differences to their photographic machinery understood as a whole entity. By doing that, Birdhead is naturalizing and de-naturalizing the temporal trajectories of new villages.
The curator Hantao notes that in the new villages and "in the new settlements, only Shanghainese have occupied these places, and a kind of local privileged status emerged with a relatively well-paid job security, since the end of the 1950s" (Interview, February 4th, 2016). It is important to stress Birdhead’s relatively privileged socio-economic status to understand part of their visual discourse, which is much more cosmopolitan than the less favourable comparative and conservative belief systems of their parent’s generation and other new marginal groups of “floating population” (mangliu, a pejorative word that categorizes migrants with beggars), who have populated Shanghai in the last decades (Ortells-Nicolau 2017). This situation has become even more critical since “Chinese urban youth appear to be both eager for individual self-expression and dismal pragmatists bent on the goal of the ‘middle-class dream’ based on material achievement” (Figure 1) (Kang 2011, 76). Birdhead’s life-journey photography can be located in this “middle-class dream” that is yelling to get access to an alternative system in which “other” desirable commodities and lifestyle experiences can be attained. This could be partly due to the fact that Birdhead’s generation “lives in an era when material things have become increasingly abundant, and the marketing of almost all products is aimed at their taste. Therefore, the ‘post-1980s’ youth naturally have a kind of feeling of superiority towards material things” (Hongping 2014, 969). Simultaneously, Birdhead’s Bourriaudian micro-utopic relational aesthetics of place evoke individual emotional performances that can legitimize heterogeneous “minor” bohemian voices of the city (Figures 1 and 2). Birdhead’s photography connotes an expression of identity that leaves room for the intersubjective individual and social bonds that actualize the creation of place in a constructive and alternative fashion.

On the other hand, Birdhead’s place-making paradigms have also been driven by their passive subjectivities that incorporate changes in the values of Shanghai’s younger generations, closely associated with their consciousness and delusions. As shown in Figures 1 and 2, the images appear reluctant to present the viewer with a real post-experience of the former industrial past of the new villages. Birdhead’s photography seems to internalize the emotions of indifference and the disenfranchised “floating population” migrants, but the Xincun appears as a minor jia (the family also understood as the Chinese nation). As the large grid in Figure 2 highlights, this time the new village is not presented with the traditional socialist body types, such as the soldier or worker, or with the usual slogans. This time the new village is an emotional cartography of playful disarrayed neo-bohemian lives who love to hang out at nightspots in such new villages. Their irrational manoeuvres do not restrain their desires to interrogate important questions about just what it means to live or to be in Shanghai, and how young Chinese people regard the modern city, without necessarily addressing these issues into a larger collective memory of place.
Still, the architecture of the Xincun has incarnated the collective (Chinese) dream life of the socialist city-planning period. In this respect, the curator Hantao enlarges the historical knowledge of the Xincun when he says: “the new villages become one of those important socialist creations of 1950s Shanghai, in which Mao wanted to conquer and expand the city into the countryside. His goal was the implementation of collective forms of social and urban management” (Interview, April 14th, 2015). From this quote, it can be understood that Birdhead divulges a characteristically socialist sense of place based on implicit development in which the industrialization and urbanization of the rural stand in the foreground. Mao became increasingly focused on the phenomena of the material growth of urban areas, where concerns regarding the fringes of the city as being culturally diverse were considered irrelevant (Visser 2010).

Birdhead’s imagery is suggestive of multiplicity, as shown in Figures 2, 6 and 7, in which Chinese characters and botanical zones and six-story socialist building blocks contrast with young-looking neo-bohemian characters, and all this anarchy together substantiates an index that it is framed as a place that could be any city in the world. This extrinsic association of the sign can be understood as a structure of memory, paraphrasing Deleuze and Guattari (1987), that can be moulded...
across time between Birdhead’s photographs and their indexical objects. Overall, Birdhead’s subjective performance constructions are meant to provoke reflection through problematizing a flow of chaotic emotions between bodies and things that “disengage the ordered flow of experience into singularities” (Colebrook 2002, 24). And it is by no means uncertain that Birdhead’s inter- and intra- multi-sensorial visual syntax revisits the moral character of Chinese figurative compositions that condense traditional collective belief systems. This question goes back to the ontology of performative documentary photography, which reformulates the relationship between reality and representational realism.

_Migrant (Sedentary)-Nomad (Cosmopolitan)-Sensorial Homely Rural-Urban Lines of Flight_

Birdhead’s corporeal intensities of the city are dense with visual detail, providing a fresh interpretation of the material. We can describe this process as a two-step flow through temporal actions related to the sedentary and nomadic. The first temporal origin refers to a parenthesis that introduces two historical planes of reversed directions in a concrete spatial and historical segment of post-socialist China (between the post-socialist and the “cyclical” timeless timeline). The second direction “actualizes” the past and present with (trans-)historical personal moments interrelated through Birdhead’s reminiscences of their lives. As will be further discussed, the present is translated and re-translated by their “bentu” domestic past and “being bentu(ed)” or becoming “contemporary” lines of time (Gao 2011).

On the one hand, Birdhead's inherited migrant experiences can be seen as a form of soulful, timeless escapism that makes the two young artists feel a sense of atomized freedom from the restraint of a rigidly controlled society. As Song Tao puts it, “what you see in these photographs is us, we are the trees, ruins, birds, friends, and the air that breathes around these places in conjunction with our own local culture” (Interview, April 14th, 2015). Song Tao succinctly explains how their experiences are moving towards gradually intensifying the sensations of the Xincun: “we like to pursue our own truths that can be found in these places. We do not like to think. You can see houses, walls, grass, people, and other types of materiality and texture all infinitely interconnected through pure old Chinese sensation: a four seasons poem” (Figure 2, 3 and 4) (Interview, April 14th, 2015). Within their migratory lines of flight towards a “being in time”, represented also by the calligraphy as a form of permanence in flux, Birdhead is reflecting ethical Daoist and Buddhist metaphysic realities. This historic logic of permanence crosses over and draws out conventional Chinese tropes of “emptiness” and “inaction” (Li and Gong 1999). This also adds an indigenous complex structure to the emotional understanding of their photography. The consequences brought by decades of globalization and rapid modernization have repurposed contemporary artists’ reflections on the identity of Chinese art and the social bonds with the artist’s sense of place (Wang 2018).

On the other hand, returning to their personal embodied narratives, Song Tao’s remarks make an explicit allusion to their cosmopolitan spaces of belonging: “our financial pressure and desire to advance professionally have allowed us to temporally travel around the world, but we always want to come back home” (Interview, April 14th, 2015). What is ventured here is the reinvigoration of both Deleuzian concepts of the sedentary and nomadic. In other words, the desire to return to their home through an imaginary past, and travel abroad as nomads, maps out their transnational forms of belonging/non-belonging and reveals aspects of the mechanical and non-mechanical laws that appear to govern their trajectories and senses of longing within the Xincun (Deleuze and Guttari 1987). Thus, these evolving standpoints of the world in Birdhead’s landscapes swing back and forth between the need to connect to a pre-revolutionary local sense of China, insomuch as they undertake the visual field of a cosmopolitan and desirable sense of place that is very much connected with advanced capitalism and mobility (Braidotti 2011). The resulting rural-urban ambiguity of this nativist-cosmopolitan synergy is manifested in the extension of the worldview they grew up with that destroys dominant codes and discourses of the emblematic new village’s communist arrangements. In one of their own ethnographic
readings, Song Tao emphatically claims, “We look for diversity. We like to travel, but we like it here too. Our photos also display the huge changes that the Xincun went through” (Interview, April 14th, 2015). From this statement, one might think of their nomadic thought as one that opens free-thinking as a way of passing through, to resist hegemony, and “reflects the existential situation as a multicultural individual, a migrant who turned nomad” (Braidotti 2011, 21). Through displaying their social practices in central galleries around the world, such as MoMA in New York, they not only receive financial support to extend their long-standing mission—to keep photographing Shanghai—but also to engage meaningfully within the contemporary art world.

The incongruities set out above can be chartered tangibly in favour of shifting perceptions of Birdhead’s creativity, thereby reimagining the metaphysics of their sense of place within a plane of imminence, which folds their own becoming as subjects and their experience of differences together (Sutton and Martin-Jones 2008). The non-human aspects of the Xincun, as Song Tao expounds, can release the functions of the architecture and objects: “when we shoot, we know everything is moving around us, feelings and emotions change. We are after the thrilling intensity of the Xincun. Noises from roosters, dogs, birds, insects, as well as smells and visualizations coming off from all types of sensory elements in the city” (Interview, April 14th, 2015). Their individuated cartography of emotional spaces resonates with Deleuze and Guattari’s “geology of affects” that stir a kind of catharsis, as one that “exists only in the mixture” in which events and the boundary definitions that have traditionally featured in classical Chinese art, such as ink painting and calligraphy, are also re-territorialized (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 474) (Figures 3 and 4). The mural landscape as a symbol within a photograph does not have a stationary symbolic meaning, but its “texture” is embodied as a mode to communicate with local audiences. The landscape feelings exist a priori, as a precondition to the interconnectedness that might affectively produce social bonds of cultural appreciation to nourish local and national identities. This is what Sedgwick (2003) affirmed about “texture” as a non-dualistic vehicle to revisit people’s own history. Despite their return to a nativist engagement with the vernacular landscape, their capacity to nurture questions of the Xincun that resound with inhabitants, and therefore, to prompt them to partake in creative dialogue, might not be straightforward. As has happened before, intellectuals and artists have not necessarily connected with the still primarily peasant population and their political agency (Zhang 2013).
This return as a form of Chinese nativism is obvious when Song Tao posits that “we are a bit literati. We like to point to the green areas of the Xincun. We collect things in these areas that may have some sort of origin in our local heritage” (Interview, April 14th, 2015). Birdhead recreates, as we have pointed out, the nativist or bentu timeline, which as Wu Hung (2012) claims is always manifested by contemporary artists, as a form of “contemporaneity”. A seeking out or returning to a kind of cyclical modern idealized paradise, as their own home-grown ways of being (in time) in the present. Birdhead’s re-interpretation of concrete ruins is also combined with a kind of abstract deep-need for lyricism inspired by calligraphy: the solitary trees, and other sensorial or inorganic elements, that place them adjacent to the literati tradition of realism —to express negative emotions or certain moods of loss (Wu
2012). The ruins as a mythic schema of romanticism in the West may have some slightly different connotations in China. Their bodies among the ruina-
tion of the Xincun might embody an inexorable process of mutation between the demolition of its past and the construction of its future. This perception surpasses the introspective gesture to lament the past, as faceless ruins of the poetic genre labelled huaigu, in the Tang dynasty (618–917). Such poetic feelings were represented by the lyrical memory of ancient Chinese poets (ibid. 2012) (Figure 5). As Song Tao claims, “ruins are internalized and represent our emotions, like sadness and the crap of the rapid changes in the city. But also, they let us remember the happy times. There is no time for melancholy, the city moves too fast” (Interview, April 14th, 2015). However, their “minor emotions” might also be so small and ambiguous that their making of a place and perception of the reality of the Xincun might be questioned.

Their poetic sense of place is also well-versed in the forces of capitalism and the echoes of socialism. Both macro subjectivities have been entrapped into their tangible and yet intangible everyday lives, which could end up in eternal emotional “returns” that establish the same relationships among them. That is to say, the eternal return of these macro-subjectivities can be appreciated from a Deleuzian prism to return to the non-identical of any given subjectivity. In other words, to heighten the form of the material without denaturalizing it. This is obtained via the principle of pleasure, where Birdhead personalizes the real. In the History of Sexuality (1985) Foucault claims that desire has never been a problematic subject in Chinese art history, but pleasure has always been absent, and this opens the possibility of a “Chinese subject” or Chinese monument that has frozen people’s desires (Deleuze 1988). For Deleuze, Foucault’s pleasure is what stops the immanent unfolding of desire, as he claims: “from my point-of-view, this is precisely how desire is brought under the law of lack, and in line with the norm of pleasure” (ibid., 131). Ji Weiyu expresses his personal pleasure in enjoying life, “we like to do what young people do, we like parties, we sexually desire and all these things are naturally part of our work. You can see this in the images. The girl in the snapshots is part of our teenage fantasies, she is so pretty” (Interview, April 14th, 2015). Therefore, Birdhead also fight to extend the outer edges without limits, using such an internalized male gaze’s encounters and other desirable spaces for young people, which are randomly replicated in their photos to establish a dialogue with the hanging clothes in the six-floor blocks and their inhabitants.
This cacophony of subjects and objects “construct situations” of multiplicity and difference to re-arrange a non-alienating daily life (Figures 2 and 5). However, this collective act of affection to objects is infused by the cosmopolitan discourse that reflects on the Westernization of youth culture in Shanghai, which could be regarded as an archive of Birdhead’s happy things. Building on this dual territory of the sedentary and nomadic, Birdhead’s sense of place is also rescued by a variety of cosmopolitan objects, more associated with popular culture, as captured within the interior of their domestic rooms that recreate such a plane of immanence across their housing estate sites. The artists show what is enclosed in the interior of their own apartment blocks (shown in Figure 6), where Japanese toys, empty Coca-Cola bottles, and television screens take the viewer further in another spatial direction, and this is more in accord with the successes of commercialization and rational progress of the post-socialist city. Ahmed (2004) elucidates how the politics of happy feelings can interconnect people and ideologies. This also conversely means that Birdhead’s archive of “happy objects” might not correspond with hegemonic objects of happiness that Chinese society expects to be consumed by masculine young subjects. In China, consumerism is also privileging this notion of “correct objects” to reorganize the world, both symbolically
and economically, as adequate material things for achieving happiness. Beyond the obvious, as Ahmed (2004) claims, the turn towards happiness comes with the intention that happiness will arrive if “we” as subjects assimilate adequate objects’ value and relevance. Birdhead do not promise happiness to everyone who interacts with their archive of happy objects, since their objects do not point toward heteronormative lifestyles. Ahmed (2004) also draws from Judith Butler, to make a similar point, which means that these objects can shape bodies. The moulding of Birdhead’s bodies through these objects might point to alternative forms of performing manhood to those sanctioned discourses of non-troubled masculine gender role expectations. This is an opportunity for young spectators to reflect upon “unhappy” or inadequate objects and subjects. It is of vital importance to explore such extreme spatiality, as Nolan (2021) asserts, where high-rise household realities and online surveillance technologies have alienated the young to the point that they are indifferent to their own localities.

Subordinating Birdhead’s artistic skills to ordinary life, and hoping that audiences are willing to accept new aesthetic experiences can be hard. Under circumstances when the relation of forces and social actors is weak, the rhizome may break. Bishop (2011) perceptively points out that artists should be devoted to maintaining a tension between art and that which is social to keep up the deception of reality and illusion being together. What is also interesting is Birdhead’s consumerist expressions of presenting the “Chinese body” as a “desired body”, one that is very sellable in popular culture magazines and among social media influencers. This obsession with the body also insinuates a certain sense of individual freedom as opposed to collective orthodoxy. Birdhead’s distinctively youthful bodies being lodged into buildings and landscapes reveal that Xincun’s Maoist dream could not last forever (Figures 7 and 8). By establishing these limits, and sustaining those tensions, Birdhead’s place-based art might still be excluding the “majoritarian” spectator, who is not able to affectively attach to this “minor” post-socialist neo-bohemian habitus.

While Birdhead’s neo-bohemian bodies shed light on alternative desired subjects, within the mechanism of celebrity culture and the entertainment industry they also reproduce neoliberal subjectivities and a “cool” cosmopolitan sense of place (Yang and Xu 2017). Emotional desires, such as fashionable and trendy postures, sexual activity, or alcohol-fuelled parties, altogether produce new spaces filled with privileged youngsters that may not be completely representative of the “new villages” or Shanghai itself (Figures 6 and 7). Their pictures of the alternative consumeristic culture attempt to go beyond the performance or the “factory”, which according to Deleuze is too disciplinary, and instead use the concept of the “theatre” as a way through which desire is mobilized in the style of “guerrilla
fashion” (Cull 2009, 6). On the one hand, this living theatrical outlook has a weak link with Deleuze’s concept of the theatre as a medium to attach their network images to real life. On the other hand, their desired machine unconscious can generate a completely transformative engagement with a “minoritarian other” to a search for rhizomatic hideaways that are accompanied by the entrepreneurial “factory” discipline of capitalism and socialism with Chinese undertones. The relationship between both scenarios of “factory” and “theatre” is continuous and synchronizes with their nomadic cosmopolitan space, whose sedentary “emotional” modes also territorialize the assemblage of traditional bentu art and a local past, unique to the Xinxun’s New Village community.

Conclusion

Drawing on the artists’ own intimate local memories and experiences as minoritarian residents, this article has looked at the role of a type of Chinese documentary photography in early 21st century Shanghai that has long been ignored by the Chinese post-socialist mainstream media. In Birdhead’s performative photography, the viewer is confronted with a large assortment of the material environment where objects and subjects interrelate and affect one another. This unearths a heterogenous interplay between technology, bodies, affects, objects, and the material environment that transcends Chinese documentary photography from the semiotic and formalist intervention of the author along with the dematerialization of digital photography. Therefore, Birdhead’s tactics with regard to “materiality”, we contend, do not strengthen a dualist opposition between the “objective” (material) and the “subjective” (Chinese art metanarratives/cognitive visions/contemporaneous ways of being in time). Instead, performative photography must work with a varies conception of visual culture that enables both the material and immaterial.

As is argued in the article, Birdhead’s performing bodies demonstrate the ways in which affections and the performing body in Chinese contemporary artistic photography theory, with its rhizomatic intersections with the city, need to be re-addressed through affective and new materialist approaches. Birdhead’s performative adventures have become competing spaces with connections and tensions between their young selves and the city, as well as between repressed socialism versus a consumer society found in these post-socialist Xincun. Their bodies and responsive photography personify a minor “collective people” whose neo-bohemian bodies and relationships with the environment become an archive of alternative affections to the official emotional strategies of the post-socialist representation of the New Villages in a changing Shanghai. However, their geographies can be either representational or non-representational, underlying an ambiguous meaning, that is, their hybrid performance impels material affects on how the Xincun come to be physically structured.

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