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Conversation between
Chang Tsong-Zung and
Raqs Media Collective (June 2013, Shanghai)

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(SS – Shuddhabrata Sengupta, JB – Jeebesh Bagchi, MN – Monica Narula)

Chang Tsong-Zung: There's an obvious question to start this conversation; let's not make it an interview. You've worked all around the world, in different places, and one can see your very dominant kind of interest and concerns. And doing a project in China, you also bring your interests and your perspective to bear on your experience in Shanghai. What would be interesting for me to know is that if you had done this similar project, not in Shanghai, but in another place, would this idea, of the football game, or the Expo, or the bank rush, have emerged in a similar way? Is it something that doesn't necessarily have to be grounded in Shanghai?

Monica Narula: Our concerns have been about the idea of experience, duration, the difference between the process and the moment, and how one encounters, experiences and then transforms these – for oneself, and for outside of the self. We've been wondering about football for a long time. Football has in it a sense that what is a moment of anxiety for one, is a

moment of relaxation for another. In a game, the tension is akin to that of breathing. It's as if one side is breathing in and the other side is breathing out; when one side is becoming quite tense, the other side is becoming quite relaxed. For us this connects to many things – from a certain kind of history of architecture, to the very idea of what one considers a moment to be, which may be experienced in one way, but can be experienced in a different way as well. Our works, with the clock for instance, think about this same thing, in different ways.

Chang Tsong-Zung: As a kind of existential condition.

MN: Yes, but also about the football match itself. We have been thinking about it. Jeebesh, for example, loves football, and I remember when we were in São Paulo, we made sure we went to watch a match.

Chang Tsong-Zung: Watching football in São Paulo must have been amazing.

Jeebesh Bagchi: Kaka was playing.

Monica: Football is a beautiful game. Even the words one gathers around it to think about it are always connected to life. But I do think that being in Shanghai and spending time here last year made the question sharper. Perhaps not so much in and of itself, but definitely in what it becomes a companion to. In thinking about a solo show, you are in the process of juxtaposition, you are constructing a meta argument. Each piece makes an argument, but how, and what, one brings together makes another kind of argument. In the show we've brought football together with the Expo, for instance. When we were here in 2010, the Expo was just ending. We knew it was there, but we couldn't get to it; the queues were so long. When we actually went, it was in the aftermath, the residue. We've thought about residues before, as a generative idea. But this idea of residue is not that obvious here. Then we thought about bringing together the idea of a certain kind of residue, of the Expo, with the idea of after-time of football. It takes years before an Expo actually happens, but once it does, it becomes entirely

about the three months in which it happens. It's as if all the 'before' time is no time. The speed of change is acute, and something gets left over. What happens in that after-time? The 'before' and the 'after' are also the point. The Expo is one kind of project, football is another kind of project, but when you bring them together, something else is also being said. That was an interesting exploration for us.

JB: The thing with Shanghai is that a lot of concepts get sharpened here; that's probably the case with China generally. When you come to China, you have to think harder, because the compression of historical time, and historical mechanisms, here is in a temporal scale that human society has never witnessed. Perhaps New York did, between 1920 and 1940. But it happens very rarely.

MN: Although, having said that, it's happening in different places – in bits of Africa, in other parts of Asia. It's a much more general condition.

JB: I was talking to Simon and he said that what is annoying about China is that the bureaucracy makes things slower, makes things very difficult. Coming from India I think the pace here is too fast. But from within, it looks slow. So there are these two moments of time you are continuously in – high compression and high decompression, simultaneously.

Chang Tsong-Zung: Do you think it's too slow here?

Chen Yun: No I don't think so, I think it's very fast.

Chang Tsong-Zung: You mean it's inefficient.

Simon: Yeah, it's inefficient, not so slow.

Chang Tsong-Zung: Yes, very fast in a lot of things but...

CY: But not enough usefulness.

Chang Tsong-Zung: Fast-uselessness. It's tautological. [Laughs]

JB: In 1972, though we were very young then and don't have sharp memories of it, there was a big Expo in Delhi, Asia '72. I think the last interesting architectural structure in India was made during that time.

CY: Is it still there?

JB: Yes, it's the Pragati Maidan, which means "progress ground". It's quite a daring structure, especially for its time. In the last forty years, we haven't seen that kind of architectural vision. When we saw the Expo here, it was quite interesting to have that memory in the background – the sense that things do get created in your lifetime, which you may not have a memory of, but which transform the way you look at a landscape, at architecture, at the possibility inherent in names. The word 'progress' can become a daily word with these kinds of moments. And so, being in Shanghai had this double-ness for us, where you are observing and trying to make sense, and are also trying to figure out how you've been written into these histories. Not just histories, but the very imagination of structures, possibilities, speed, scale, and also invitation to thousands, millions, to come and witness it.

Chang Tsong-Zung: In China one talks about this shift from one side of the cold war to the other side in the last twenty years. But for me, looking at China on a slightly longer scale, say of one hundred years rather than just 60, I still see the whole country moving in really the same trajectory, whether it was Maoist, or Deng Xiaoping, or the current regime. There is still this obsession for this very old-fashioned modernist dream and pushing it to realization almost recklessly. But the frightening thing is, the modernist dream that has been pushed forward on the global world, or the capital side of the cold war in the old days, takes on a ramification that is beyond the will of the planners. It is taken on by the movement of capital, by the autonomous movement of the economy, and by this uncontrollable development of sciences, which is actually added on by this type of ideology on capitalism. But, in China, the very curious thing is that whatever side of the ideology one is on, this obsession, which is modernist type of booming

forward is not win. And as you say, it involves, and suggests a sort of a planned vision. Even today a lot of operation is capitalistic, but it is not controlled kind of capitalism and in that sense it is more like its old socialist itself. But for me that is actually the frightening part because a lot of vision gets done. Was it Goethe who said that the frightening thing is when your youthful ideals actually become reality. And China, actually, is unfolding in that direction and is still nonstop.

JB: It will go on for another 15, 20 years.

Chang Tsong-Zung: Until it exhausts all the resources.

Shuddhabrata Sengupta: But suppose one takes an even longer view, which could be interesting since we are calling the show 'Extra Time'.

Chang Tsong-Zung: Yes, so let's give it another fifteen years, and if you say, thirty.

SS: We measure so many things by life spans, processes appear much more cataclysmic than they are. There is a certain kind of long-term indifference in historical processes. In our life times we always think of ourselves as being at the cusp of the crisis. We believe the time we are in to be the most compressed. We think we are living in extra time: If we get ten more minutes we will do this, in the next year we will do this. It would be interesting if one were to stretch that idea of extra time to a much larger scale, in which you can almost have systolic and diastolic compressions. Take the case, for instance, of the scientist-sinologist Joseph Needham who wrote seventeen volumes of *The History of Science and Civilization in China*. Quite a remarkable achievement, this, because he wasn't a scholar of Chinese studies, he wasn't a historian, he was actually a biochemist who fell in love with a Chinese woman and then became interested in China, and then became passionately interested in China. And if you look at the science of civilization in China, Needham's conclusions are that almost all the technological developments that constitute the industrial revolution were already existing in China by the 13th, 14th century — gun powder, steam ship, coal, navigation, ways

of thinking about geography and so on. And then his question is, so what happened? This is the question that comes up repeatedly in the histories of several civilizations. You can ask this question of the Islamic civilization. And perhaps we are not asking this question of what we identify as the moment of modernity because it has not yet passed. ~~I mean in the same way that we are probably in the 1421, 1451 of industrial capitalism. This is not yet passing, so this moment, this feeling of the pressure of time is very high upon us.~~ But it may be that, in the longer view – in a hundred or three hundred years – people may ask, so here was this extraordinary global culture that was able to produce so much value and so much technological expertise, and then what happened? ~~It could be, because~~ †The ‘what happened’ question is, perhaps, always relative.

MN: This is what Chang Tsong-Zung was pointing out. In a way we are already saying, all this for what?

SS: I’m not saying “for what”. To say “for what” is saying, “what is the value of?”

MN: “What happened” is the same question, because you can ask it from different vantage points. If China had all the elements of the industrial revolution and yet it did not do the industrial revolution, what could be interesting is to ask why did they not choose to? “So what happened” is also, “all this for what?” For not having an industrial revolution? For having one? For keeping quiet? For getting aggressive? For the end of things? For the beginning of things? “So what happened” is a for-what question. Usually these questions are asked outside or after the situation. But now we are asking this question now, in material terms, and in all sorts of ways. At the turn of the twentieth century, people thought they were in the midst of the craziest, fastest time ever. But it was the craziest, fastest time ever – till then. So it’s true, this is also the craziest, fastest time ever – till now. People who’ve felt it, have felt it with truth, every time, because it is always faster than the last time. But it’s interesting when you can ask the question, “so what happened”, while you’re in it. Because, then you can look at the present and the past and do something with it.

SS: That means you are, in a sense, feeling that strange experience of being inside that time and outside that time at the same moment.

Chang Tsong-Zung: But this inside-outside makes sense when actually there is an example of this experience in front of you. And for me, living on the edge of China, in Hong Kong, and having obsessed with the past and also with what is happening today all my life, the interesting thing about looking from the outside of time is how China actually has been fulfilling and pushing for this experiment of the modern, as though it was actually taking a formula from the outside and fulfilling it rather than being pushed forward by some inevitable exploration that is taking somewhere. It is almost trying to fulfill something that has been promised, but nobody's actually done it. And so, for me, the frightening thing and dismay of the situation is that we are actually witnessing a civilization turning itself into a laboratory of some ideas.

SS: But all civilizations are laboratories. I don't think China is an exception. These pressures are felt in different ways, in different times, in all sorts of places. The argument of China being an exception allows the creation of the idea of China as a threat. If you ask me what is the specific characteristic of this time, the Chinese time, I would say it's something like a translation of the Great Wall situation. Historically Chinese power has tried to maintain a certain relationship between the periphery and the center. The eastern and southern coast is a kind of center of activity, power and population, and then, as you go further and further west, things tend to shade off into all sorts of threatening realms. So many imperial projects in China have been about trying to build walls – layers of walls, not just one wall. Let's say the Forbidden City is the last system of the layers of the walls, because even then there are these layers of walls. Now supposing we move this idea from being an exertion of dominance over space into one of dominance over time. I am, of course, suggesting a metaphorical transfer, from the spacial to the temporal. The innermost courtyard of the Forbidden City, let's say, is the moment of now. And around this 'now' are these pressures from the past and the anticipation for the future. In a sense there is an attempt to create a wall, or a series of labyrinthine walls around the 'now' so that extra time doesn't come in. So if you are asking me whether there can be a culturally specific reading of this moment, this is something that I think one can offer, although

provisionally, because this is an attempt to have a 'now' that is also ahead. That's the real question. This, our, 'now' is not their 'now', or the barbarians' 'now'. Our now is special, this is our time; we have made a claim to it. Right? And that claim on time as time as being our value and our property is what we may think of in terms of these layers of wall systems. So extra time is like the question, why do you travel to the west in the classical Chinese tradition? If, having likened them as self-contained, why must one go to the outside? Because the other impetus is going to the outside and receiving people from the outside. So if one translates that again in temporal terms, if this now is so special, why must we let other times in and go out to other times?

JB: In the heart of modernity – in China and in India, perhaps everywhere – there is an impatience, there is an idea of 'lost time'. It's an idea that there's a lost time that we have to make up for. India is filled with a sense of 'we lost the 60s, we lost the 70s, that China got its rise in 80s'. History begins to be measured with a continuous lack, in which one is always losing opportunities. It's as if our resentment has almost gone to time itself. Capital can continuously harness this idea of lost time, politically, ideologically and instrumentally by mobilizing people for all kinds of ideas.

Chang Tsong-Zung: But that idea is quite interesting when we talk about modern China, or rather Mao's China. Until Mao, all the other dynasties, even the Republic of China, reset the clock, started time as year one of the Republic of China 1912. But in 1949 when Mao took China, he put us in 1949. And suddenly we lost one thousand nine hundred and forty nine years. So we started very behind, and now we have 1949 years to catch up.

JB: If you take the popular discourse – and in India right now there is a rise of authoritarian mobilization by strong leaders – the whole rhetoric is around lost time. And it goes that if we do not act now you will lose further, as if there is some kind of wager that is being put on time.

SS: Which is why I think our revisitation of the run on the bank photograph by Henri Cartier-Bresson is interesting. What is happening in that photograph? There is a pressure of time. People have to get into the bank. In

their minds the value of their money is draining by the minute. The sooner one is at the head of the queue, one saves a little more of the value of their money than when they are at the bottom of queue. The rush to get into the bank is really a race against time. And if we know anything about Cartier-Bresson, he is all about the moment, the punctum. In our work we are really slowing that moment down, stretching it in a way that restores to it a little bit of its duration, the respect for its duration. To insert extra time into that moment is to say this can be done again, it's not lost forever its time.

MN: Yes, but in more ways than one. It's not only an affirmation. Because a run on a bank has within it a perpetual relationship between panic and wealth.

SS: Because the bank has become its opposite. The idea of having your money in a bank is that with time it will become more. That's what interest is all about. When we wrote our essay on the qualities of time, we discussed this question of interest. In Christian, Jewish and Islamic thought, the reason there was problem with interest is because only God owns time. And if I say that by putting something in the bank I'm adding value, it means I'm taking time away from God and doing something else with it. So you can see that the evolution of the banking system in Europe has to have had these complicated theological arguments. And here you suddenly have that same thing – the bank is shrinking the value of the money; interest is working in the reverse direction.

Chang Tsong-Zung: So there's secularization. (Laughs)

MN: The secularization of value. I like that.

SS: So that's why when banks crash, insurance companies always say it's an act of God. (Laughs)

Chang Tsong-Zung: In this logic, the bank crash would be a true divination then!

SS: I think people experience these things at the cosmic scale. The universe comes crashing down in their minds because everything they've given value to disappears.

Chang Tsong-Zung: But the venture is that the heaven is difficult to take, that's for sure. So in this sense, the art work does a little bit of God's work.

JB: Not so much the God's, but the work of God's court jester.

SS: The Chinese phrase for extra time that we are using is Bu-she (补时). *Bu* is mending. If time is being put under a kind of stress and strain, then this kind of artwork does, or at least attempts to, repair the things that are distressed by all this.

JB: That's a very therapeutic idea of art.

SS: Therapy is for people, we are talking about the repair of time.

MN: Yes, it's the opposite.

JB: It's a bit subject-less in that sense.

Chang Tsong-Zung: The Chinese word Bu is repair, repair time. The way you describe the work on the bank run, it is actually repairing a lot of these issues that have been brought up. That could be repairing time, but also repairing some other cosmic issues.

JB: Gods have two praise-worthy qualities. One, that they are profoundly indifferent. And two, they can laugh. I think we have the power to be indifferent, but cannot laugh. If you can laugh, you become empathetic and instead of laughing you start to cry. But if you can get a combination of laughter and indifference together to understand time, or to understand big

cosmic forces, it could be interesting. It's interesting to get back to different kind of gods.

MN: One must have ambitions.

Chang Tsong-Zung: We have to repair gods; we have to find them, we have to catch them to put a patch on them. Since we are talking about extra time, the repair of time, maybe we should get back to the word we were using before we started this conversation – not time, but Kairos. In itself an inopportune moment that actually needs repair. The rest is not important. However, the problem in the world we are dealing with is that it makes all time equivalent, like interest.

JB: That's one reason for this goalkeeper work. In it you find that at all times there are other counter-moments of time, running parallelly to you. They're not the same, and the thresholds and intensities of time that you experience vary from moment to moment. Somebody else could be experiencing the same time completely differently. This kind of dehomogenizes the idea that time acts similarly at all points. You create different amplitudes around different experiences of time. On its own it's 90 minutes of time with a before and after, winning and losing. But with this work you break away into another way of looking at the same 90 minutes.

Chang Tsong-Zung: So you have to patch up a lot of different parallel Kairos.

JB: There is a beautiful line that a Russian Mathematician uses, that parallel lines don't meet because they have other interesting things to do. In that sense there could be multiple parallel Kairos doing interesting things. Art is interesting because it can bring the multiplicity of Kairos together. It can make you move with that multiplicity, not make you still with it. This generative multiplicity of Kairos and its intense presence is one of the main powers of art.

Chang Tsong-Zung: The multiplicity of Kairos actually means true

polytheism, or rather, atheism.

MN: If you think of time as a belief system, then yes that makes absolute sense. But the logic we give it is our logic, so in that sense time is a very fundamental religion.

JB: Especially with modernity it becomes a religion.

SS: There are other ways of thinking about time.

MN: It's polytheism if time is a god-like thing.

SS: If you take polytheism to its logical conclusion, you return to a kind of atheism, because polytheism then would admit to the infinity of gods, and when you have an infinity of divinities, then it's pointless to think of divinities. Chinese traditions of Mahayana Buddhism have an idea for this which is taken from what we call *pratyeka Buddha*, that is, every being attains Buddhahood. It doesn't matter that this is the Buddha. In that sense there is no particular attainment of emancipation and moksha is in some ways a project of vanity. You do not privilege one moment over others, you do not privilege one being over others. All of these beings in all of these moments are always, in terms of their potential possibilities, capable of being the entire universe. Which is why it is possible to have that vision of that multiplicity. In a Chinese Buddhist temple you are always confronted with an attempt to multiply the images of the Buddha. You may have one, but there are potentially millions of them, which is a very different thing from saying there are many gods. There are so many that it doesn't matter how many there are.

Chang Tsong-Zung: That's really the experience in India more than in China now.

MN: Although now also I think in India this is connected to the Thai argument, you meant in the way.

Chang Tsong-Zung: That's actually liberty experience we have to see.

MN: There's been a narrowing down of our pantheons. If you go to a temple now, there are a lot of lost gods.

JB: The health of gods is not good.

MN: Temples now have only very few gods, and the new temples have but the same few.

JB: The gods are not multiplying.

MN: The god that helps you in difficulties is there. It's much more pragmatic. Earlier, "me and my god" was a kind of concept, but now that's also lost. It's not monotheism yet, but the narrowing down of the pantheon says as much about our relationship with time as it does about being in this time.

JB: I can see this happening in my own lifetime; it's not even taking a hundred years.

Chang Tsong-Zung: In China it is much more evident, even in Hong Kong. My school friends would have family temples to go to, especially Cantonese (because my family was from Shanghai). There were much more religious festivals and they were adhered to as well. But the new generations don't. Almost all my friends have removed the shrines from their houses.

JB: There is almost a competition of gods, some gods are winning, some are not doing so well.

MN: Some ideas of time are winning.

Chang Tsong-Zung: In Taiwan in a lot of temples you can see there

are a lot of statues of gods in the backroom. They're the ones who didn't perform, so this is what happens to them.

MN: Non-performing gods.

JB: It's like the museum collections.

MN: No one ever wants to see them.

Chang Tsong-Zung: That's exactly the idea of the museum as well.

MN: Some museums have collections – well not contemporary art, but say the natural history museum – which collected from the entire world and became a depository. The Natural History Museum in England, for example. They can spend hundreds of years and still not show everything they have in their depository.

JB: They collect because they want to show evolution. But evolution is marked by extinction; you can't have a story of evolution without extinctions. The “new” is being produced, but a lot of things are going away. Museums have this fundamental problem: How do you deal with extinction even as you show a curve and the emergence of the new?

Chang Tsong-Zung: But the whole idea of plenitude and richness as well is that there is more than you need and more than you can actually enumerate. That gives a sense of fulfillment as well, and a sense of satisfaction, and the foundation of misères. On the other hand, it is also the foundation of true levels is that they have all the repository you don't need to dip into. Culture should be something like that. You keep developing new things and you have the repository. But now in this age when we burn fossil oil we also burn up this repository of cultural deposits.

JB: Two things have eroded the idea of plenitude in the 20th century. One was the creation of the corrosive idea of poverty. It was an economic idea

that was brought into culture. Being in poverty got translated into meaning that you have no repository. Human life is denuded very rapidly in the name of poverty – you can patronize, you can say that your life has to be transformed, without actually ever considering any sense of the repository that life may have. The other is the way we see energy. We have an exhausted idea of energy. But I also think that's going to transform radically in this century. Bataille says a beautiful thing about the sun. He said that the sun gives you its charge, and it's the same for everyone and abundant for everyone.

Chang Tsong-Zung: You cannot exhaust it.

JB: You cannot say that by being in the sun I've exhausted the sun for someone else. But hydrocarbons are burned, and this idea of energy has traveled into the way we see energy in human beings as well. If we move towards a more sun-based energy system, we may have a very different imagination of human beings.

SS: A different idea of value.

JB: And the value of human beings. Human beings as an abundant, not exhausted, source. Because the sun and wind are abundant, they can swing up and down, they can be still, they can come with additional force. This is a very different conception than what comes with the idea of the hydrocarbon, which is more psychoanalytical.

SS: It's also a repression. It's a zero-sum. The store of hydrocarbon is bound to deplete, so the more energy you use the less energy you will have. This creates a structure of values that is quite different from thinking that the more energy you use the more energy you will have. Inbuilt into the hydrocarbon economy an idea of scarcity and fractionalisation.

JB: The way of seeing human being is fearful. All ideas of power use this form of energy as the metaphor for life and for power. So they are fearful of themselves, they are fearful of life, of what they are working on, because it is

going to be exhausted, depleted, destroyed.

Chang Tsong-Zung: That's the fear for all resources nowadays.

JB: This century will see it change.

SS: The decision does not have to be made now.

MN: The decision has to be made now.

SS: I mean the decision about switching your energy sources has to be made now, but once it is made the question is no longer of priorities of greater or lesser evil. At the moment all economic structures in the world depend on some kind of weighing of choices. You can't have culture because you must have food. You can't have food because you must have work. It's a kind of a lever, if this goes up, the other goes down. So it depends on a certain kind of understanding of how you distribute your sources of energy. The moment that changes, you will have an as of now unimagined language of why we make choices.

JB: In a wind-based system, it's not about before- or after-time, because that won't make any sense. It will be a discontinuous sense of time. We can be moving towards a more durational, intensive idea of time.

MN: What you are posing is an interesting point, which is that when your relationship with something fundamentally is not one of loss or gain, the imagination of the self, the other and the world is a transformed one. That's the heart of it.

JB: That idea will come very forcefully in the world, and that will change the way power is imagined and organized.

Chang Tsong-Zung: Almost like a moral decision on issues such like production, because now production is taken to be a good. It has a value

attached to it. We don't ask what do we do with the stuff we produce. And that is now starting to be asked. When that value changes, and when the technologies doesn't change, and when they meet, is interesting. To change the value is more difficult than to change the production.

JB: I think it's changing. We've been discussing it as well in the context of a work called 'The Last International', which we'll be doing in November in New York. We're trying to think of it as if we are all inside the Last International, inside a form of thinking and being in the world which is in a transformative shift. And in these discussions, the famous image of Tienanmen Square with the young man standing in front of the tank, was an important presence. This image of the standing man keeps reappearing in the world. For instance it did in Turkey, when a man stood in front of the statue of Kemal Ataturk. People started joining him; the image of him standing before the statue became viral. And it is getting connected with other moments. What it does is to put a pause to the moment of time where the sovereign can determine life. And that moment of halt is now present in the political gesture of our time. This gesture is emerging as a very significant one, where you are faced with the sovereign, who is a kind of hollow space. Because with the divinity gone, after the king, a claim cannot be made on a divine source who will say that life will be according to my will. A kind of patch work was attempted through the idea of the people. But the French revolution produced this problem and it keeps on growing. Who is the sovereign is deeply contested. That's why you have revolutions, because sovereign needs new energies to run it. The split is wide open now, and we are living in it. It is in the air. It is all around us. It will change the way we conceive the trinity of our life – time, power, energy. In that sense we are in a very important moment. A crooked line has emerged in history. The linear line has broken down.

Chang Tsong-Zung: If that's a free sovereign, one of the first solutions to becoming the sovereign will be to stop selling time for ones survival. And the only way we can stop selling time for survival – well the agrarian society didn't sell time for survival because time is cyclical, it comes back again – is only the industrial arrival.

JB: Bargaining time for life is the foundation of the wage system. But I think it will break down.

Chang Tsong-Zung: So it will be the industrialized time turning agrarian. So the factory turning agrarian.

SS: Even agrarian time is the sovereign's time, because there could be an argument made that a transition from hunting-gathering societies to societies of agriculture was that while in the factory your life was determined by the clock of the day, in agricultural society life was determined by the clock of the year.

MN: But the seasons are always there. The fact is, it breaks the day and night divide. That is what happens that you break all divides in the factory.

JB: At least in the 20th century.

MN: Day, night, season, weather, whatever. All natural divides are broken. There are no cycles. In agrarian still there are cycles.

JB: But agrarian is also a transition.

SS: I think we are going into a regime of time that is...

Chang Tsong-Zung: Nomadic time.

Monica: Not back to a time.

JB: It's additive. Multiple.

SS: Sidereal. Our calculations of time are actually based on the perception of cosmic xxx. The perception of when the sun is setting. Now for instance this question of when the sun is setting on the sea is actually different from when

the sun is setting on land. That's why you have the idea of nautical horizons. It's slightly different always from land horizons because land horizons are perceived always slightly differently from marine horizons. So our experience of perception of temporal events depends on our vantage point, our location, and what we are doing. So I don't think it's a question of a return to an earlier kind of time. It's like a time shift of cycle. To give you an example, when you move your longitude, your sense of time changes, your sense of the day changes, your sense of how you sleep and wake changes. Perhaps it's that kind of transition, not to substitute one sense of control of time over another sense of control of time, but it is a slightly different sensibility of what time is. So it's not to say that the factory clock is now replaced by the clock of the seasons and sowing and harvesting and reaping. But a slightly different understanding of what time is. I don't think we are going to be in a future where there won't be fields and there won't be factories. Things will be produced in large numbers.

JB: Not as a factory system.

SS: They will be produced and dispersed and concentrated in different ways. It's not as if they won't be produced. But the ways in which they will be produced will give us a different sense of time. Or we will bring a different sense of time to their production.

MN: I think sidereal time is a more technical word than that, but you're basically talking about a time shift. Because sidereal time is a way – you can measure it. There are sidereal time calculators. So it's not exactly what you were saying.

SS: I'm not saying it's a calculation. I'm saying that the terms of the calculations are slightly different.

MN: Sidereal time is a term. It's a timekeeping system astronomers used to keep track of the direction, to point their telescopes, to view a given star in the night sky. It's a different measurement of time. Because you are looking at the cosmic, you are looking at the night sky, which is not the same as a day

on earth.

JB: It's about the night sky and the deep sea as parameters to judge qualities of time and, so also, the qualities of our life.

Chang Tsong-Zung: It's also xxx from the sun than you actually get more time and more quality.

SS: The sun is going to slow down.

JB: that's still a few billion years, don't worry. By then humans would maybe evolve into a species that flies away.

MN: We began by saying a slightly longer time span, now we are basically saying a few billion years. From 15 years, now a few billion years. [Laughs]

SS: This is an interesting moment because we can talk in other cultures, for instance whether it's in the time company system. You have this sense of plentitude of time. But that plentitude is always metaphorical. So the kind of expansion of time into infinite cycles and so on, is a metaphor for saying you don't even know how big the time is.

MN: Plentitude is a truly satisfying idea when it is only metaphorical, because true plentitude is exhaustive and exhausting, because it implies responsibilities as well. If one can think of it is something that gives without being depleted, only then can the idea of plentitude be less worrying. It has to do not with actual more-ness, but with the idea that more-ness is possible.

Chang Tsong-Zung: When one thinks of plentitude, one actually would have to imagine that the plentitude, whatever it is of, is actually in a state of being good. It either multiplies, it has to survive, its idea's rolling forward in the context which we actually associate with some sort of goodness, such as the inexhaustible collection in the museum. Even slightly imagining it being eaten away by rodents, of course, that all idea is spoiled.

MN: What does goodness mean here?

Chang Tsong-Zung: When I mean goodness it actually means the value of the self. It is some sort of good like plentitude, abundance in the fields so you can imagine the fields frightening without you tending to it with the seasons.

MN: Exactly. It has to fundamentally be metaphorical, because if you have to be responsible for every field, it's no longer the idea of plentitude in that sense. Because I think it's like saying there is more to draw from for me to live in a fulfilled sort of way. It's not about me owning it all. Plentitude is not the same thing as ownership. It's with this distinction that I also realize that having a museum with so much that it can show, is not plentitude. It's not plentitude because plentitude is the idea that I can pull if needed. I can turn around and ask for more or get more, which is not actuality; it is always potentiality, but a failed potentiality. That I think is opportune and remains for us part of the idea of thinking about the future in the present and the present in the future is that once one breaks that sort of arrow of time question. It's in today that you do something; the future is yet to come. But if you want to think of the fact that you are in a moment between the present and the future, there is no present and there is no future – because what you do in the present makes a future, and therefore the future is in the present. Then there can be a plentitude in this concept, because the potential of tomorrow is filled in today.

Chang Tsong-Zung: Perhaps it is a wrong thing to be applied to things which need to be archived.

MN: It cannot be applied to materiality, because that can always be eaten by rodents. Any large warehouse of grains is not actually a large warehouse of grains, because there could be a flood, there could be rats. So collecting and keeping has to be thought of differently from the idea of plentitude.

Chang Tsong-Zung: Traditionally in China this idea of plentitude was used. In fact, the word treasure does not refer to what you own, but it refers

very often to something precious, meaning you should not exhaust it. You should not exhaust by mining everything that you can find, and everything you can remind. You don't exhaust all the animals in the field because you want to let them grow and prosper. So it is about not exhausting something.

MN: That's a true treasure in that sense.

Chang Tsong-Zung: Coming back again to my constant anxiety about China, and its policies. Just recently we were talking about how we only have 700 million urbanites turned from villages, which means immediately that all the village chiefs are very happy because they can kick more people out and build skyscrapers. It is this way of turning possible treasures into exhaustive goods. That's why referring to China as a laboratory for modernity, in that nothing is sacred, in a sense that everything needs to be used up as soon as it is identified.

MN: The argument is that you can create more jobs. And that urban infrastructure needs urban people to run it and to do stuff for it. So in a way you are occupying a bigger population if you move them out of villages into the cities. This was an argument.

Chang Tsong-Zung: It's a complete consumer economic argument and it's absolutely ridiculous economy as a state to consider. But it is almost as if we are still trying to create more consumers in China so that we will be consuming more of the world, when in fact our core problem today is that we don't have enough resources.

JB: That's the most interesting thing about China. To be this economy, at its scale, the kind of resources that it needs to run itself, have to come from everywhere in the world. And China doesn't have the earlier colonial form of intellectual domination or a thesis of civilizing mission or progress, and neither does it have a military domination. So it's a very peculiar form of...

Chang Tsong-Zung: it's not colonialism. In fact it is more like the colonized actually have become the master, and now we've just taken

the logic and pushed it to the extreme, so that the system that has been instituted can thrive. So it is like trying to turn nation to prove a theory rather the other way round.

JB: So And then by 2021 it will be the world's biggest economy.

Chang Tsong-Zung: What does that mean?

JB: I don't really know.

Chang Tsong-Zung: Do you remember Brazil in the 1960s? That was actually a suitable comparison, because somehow the whole culture of China is about a kind of industrious working of the world, but working of the world in a very different way. It was working of the world that conserves as one thrives. But this kind of exhaustive working of the world is completely ... I don't know what Brazil was like in the 60s but Brazil has collapsed.

MN: There are about 200,000 people on the streets right now in Brazil, and they are making a big fuss. Actually, they are basically standing. In 14 cities of Brazil, people are on the streets every night. Last night in Rio, there were 200,000 people filling the roads.

JB: In Brasilia, they captured the state assembly.

MN: They are saying no violence, they are saying no words. And that's interesting because the ostensible reason is that billions are being invested for football, but what about peoples' lives? They are just standing there. It's like what we were discussing – the moment of halt has happened.

JB: They are out in really big numbers. Hundreds of thousands in Rio, through the night, day before yesterday. And in Brasilia, another 200,000 outside the state assembly. Simply standing there.

Chang Tsong-Zung: In urban situation you can see the economic cost.

But in the countryside it doesn't matter.

JB: Because in the urban situation, this blocks off all arterial movements. When they stand, it halts the whole machinery. You can say it halts the flow of capital; it halts the flow of materials, flow of people. It's fascinating. After the Football Confederation Cup, people start gathering and then suddenly in Brasilia, after the match, they just stood there for the entire night, and then the next night in Rio they are standing there through the night. They are just coming out and standing. It's a great moment. These are things that are not in our idea of political life and political moment – this kind of sudden gathering that doesn't make any demand, doesn't create any political program, doesn't make any claim to power, but just hangs around.

Yun: This is not even a protest.

JB: It's obviously being done as a protest, but it's something more. It's a kind of a way in which you know you can't talk to anyone. The sovereign who has been performing this act that it will better your life, that relationship has broken down. I think in China it broke down in 1989. In China it was, in that sense, the beginning. We were in college then, and the image of the guy in Tiananmen, standing in front of the tank, had become a big image for us. I had a cutout of it in my room for a very long time. It's strange. There were so many things happening in 1989, but that image stayed. If you go to Facebook now, or to Youtube, you see how much it circulated.

MN: Or variations of it.

Chang Tsong-Zung: I think the myth about the image was the man was just carrying a plastic shopping bag from a convenient store, and then becoming a political hero.

Yun: He's just on his way back home.

MN: Did anyone figure out who he was?

Yun: He's a factory worker, and then he merged into the sea of crowds again.

JB: The video is very nice. It's a small video by the Chinese television that got leaked out. It's in Youtube. He walks right up to the tank, and is trying to say something to the man in the tank. That break down – when the sovereign no longer remains the sovereign who can dictate – happened here. The idea of the sovereign who can dictate life is so much at the heart of the 20th century. It's actually a hoax. In Delhi, when the protests broke out last December, after a girl was raped in a moving bus – she died – people stood outside the Rashtrapati Bhawan, the president's state house. They all gathered, and then there were water canons on them to disperse them. They were asking to talk to the sovereign, but the sovereign isn't there. It's an empty space, it's a hollow space. It's a stamp. There's a beautiful film by Oshima. It's about Japanese society. There's a marriage ceremony, a very traditional setting. The bride doesn't arrive, but the marriage goes on, and everyone gives their customary speech. The sovereign works that form now. It's a hollow space, but the insignia, the whole structure, just keeps working. We can read Oshima's ceremony back as a reading of the sovereign rather than a reading of Japanese society.

Chang Tsong-Zung: I think in China, Mao's revolution, this concept of the masses as the sovereign, was never there even from the start. This thought about liberation is always of the masses, of the people, of another form of authority or multitude. So perhaps it was really with the passage of Mao that finally this idea of the sovereign is gone.

JB: Maybe with the Cultural Revolution that was the spilt.

Chang Tsong-Zung: Even the cultural revolution was also all right, because the king is here. He actually knows that, he tells the soldiers not to shoot you. You'll have the extra permission to ride the trains for free. He was very much in a sense I think it very interesting appears in the flower revolution in America. I was in America at that time. One assumes the society of plentitude supplies, has a place for, everything you do. People go to college, they can get along, they don't have to pay till later, and everybody has some

to pay for certain things. So in a way the 60s' revolutions were revolution at someone else's expense. So perhaps this idea of the sovereign is a good way to fill that strange gap there.

SS: It's interesting what he said in '49 that coming to this idea, was that people of China stood up, so again there is this kind of image of many millions standing. I think Mao was like radio transmitter, he received signals and sent signals. The signal he got in 1949 was that people stood up and then there were other signals he sent, and sometimes there may be a big difference between the signal he received and the signal he sent. So in his political career is always this kind of waves of like hundred flowers bloom, and then crack. Something else? Cultural Revolution? And then crack. It's like I think he is receiving signals, processing them, and sending them.