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### Making it News in Contemporary Poetry

This essay identifies a shared response to news media in poetry written over the past three decades by writers working in Chinese, Russian, and English. These poets often directly incorporate texts and images from news media into their work. Some scholars have argued that this tendency towards the collaging of texts derived from news and social media reflects a shift in poetic subjectivity. However, when seen from a comparative perspective, these and other cut-ups of news and social media are better understood as, on the one hand, an extension of a much longer tradition of literary and artistic responses to the news and, on the other, a renewal of that tradition in response to the intensification of the intertwined pressures of new media and globalization since the end of the Cold War and the rise of the Internet. The article identifies this shared response to media and globalization among a variety of examples in Chinese, Russian, and English, including Kirill Medvedev's «Текст, посвященный трагическим событиям 11 сентября в Нью-Йорке» (“Text Devoted to the Tragic Events of September 11 in New York”); Stanislav Lvovsky's «Чужими словами» (“In Other Words”); Dmitri Prigov's «По материалам прессы» (“Based on Material from the Press”) and “ru.sofob (50 x 50)”; Lin Yaode's 林耀德 “Er erba” 《二二八》 (“February 28”), Hsia Yü 夏宇 and her collaborators' group project “Huadiao huadiao huadiao” 《劃掉劃掉劃掉》 (“Cross It Out, Cross It Out, Cross It Out”), Yan Jun's 顏峻 2003 multi-media video performance “Fan dui yiqie you zuzhi de qipian” 《反对一切有组织的欺骗》 (“Against All Organized Deception”); online video poetry produced in response to the 2008 Sichuan earthquake; and Brian Kim Stefans's mashup of “New York Times” articles with texts from the Situationist International. On the one hand, these texts operate between various media and art forms: between poetry and contemporary art, music, journalism, and social media, between the print newspaper and digital file, between the webpage and live performance, and between image and text. But on the other hand, and inextricably, they also operate within global information networks. They are better understood as addressing not the transformation of the poetic subject but

the undoing of the boundaries of poetry and of the concept of a nationally defined literature.

*Keywords: poetry, news, media, globalization, China, Russia, Taiwan, United States*

Poets have for centuries responded to the news. Early examples of poetic uses of the news range from broadside ballads that conveyed the news of the day in verse to the late eighteenth-century poems created by reading across the columns to highlight, in the words of Caleb Whitefoord, the inventor of this satirical “cross-reading” genre, the “hodge-podge, or mess-medley” that “is a London news-paper!”<sup>1</sup> Over the past century in particular, writers have frequently defined their work in relation to the news.<sup>2</sup> In their responses, poets have also engaged the new media through which news media have developed from the telegraph and rotary press that spawned the information revolution and mass-circulation newspapers of the late nineteenth century to the newsfeeds of social media enabled by today’s digital networks.<sup>3</sup>

Already in the eighteenth century, writers like Whitefoord deployed not just the contents of the news but also its form, namely, the cut-up, collage, montage, or juxtaposition of various discrete news items and advertisements. Although pioneered in the eighteenth century by Whitefoord, Georg Christoph Lichtenberg, and others,<sup>4</sup> such literary uses of the news became increasingly common in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in the work of writers such as Stéphane Mallarmé, Bian Zhilin 卞之琳, James Joyce, Tristan Tzara, Kurt Schwitters, Walter Benjamin, William Carlos Williams, and John Dos Passos. These and other writers produced texts that mimicked the juxtaposed articles of a newspaper, as in the “Aeolus” episode of Joyce’s “Ulysses”; that drew directly on those newspaper sources, as in Bian Zhilin’s “Juli de zuzhi” 《距離的組織》 (“The Composition of Distance”), which weaves together two news articles amongst other sources in a mere ten lines; or that simply treated the newspaper itself as a literary text, as in

<sup>1</sup> Whitefoord (1770).

<sup>2</sup> “Under modernity the news is one of the major discursive others with and against which it [poetry] defines itself” (Ramazani 2014: 81). Similarly, Collier (2006: 1) argues that the newspaper is “the most controversial medium of the age of modernism.” On Russian literary and artistic responses to the newspaper at the beginning and end of the Soviet periods, see Edmond (2016).

<sup>3</sup> On the impact of the nineteenth-century information revolution and its parallels with the digital revolution, see Bayly (2001).

<sup>4</sup> Lichtenberg borrowed the technique from Whitefoord in „Nachahmung der englischen Cross-readings,“ which he wrote in the 1770s but which was only published posthumously. Lichtenberg (1853: 63-65). For a discussion of the links between cross-reading and twentieth-century collage, see Riha (1971).

Tzara's 1920 Dadaist debut in Paris, in which he stood on stage and read a newspaper aloud to the outrage of the audience.<sup>5</sup> A few years later Sergei Tretyakov would repurpose Tzara's avant-garde gesture to promote what he termed "the literature of fact," hailing the newspaper as the "epic" and "Tolstoy" of the twentieth century.<sup>6</sup>

This essay identifies a renewed interest in responding to news and new media among contemporary poets working in Chinese, Russian, and English. While the long history of literary and artistic uses of the news should cause us to be wary of overemphasizing the novelty of these poets' work, their use of the news nevertheless points to the ongoing importance of news media to literature and art.<sup>7</sup> In encountering the news today across multiple media and platforms, contemporary writers must negotiate a far more bewildering "hodge-podge, or mess-medley" of competing voices, words, and images than that of the eighteenth-century or even twentieth-century newspaper. Today's global information networks make available copious snippets of information from around the world nearly instantaneously. The collage-like structure of these news snippets produces our experience of the world as both instantly accessible and overwhelmingly complex. In response, poets working in China, Russia, Taiwan, and elsewhere around the world have in recent years developed modes of writing that draw on the news to highlight and negotiate the fragmentary, multi-media, and global nature of our contemporary news-inflected experience of the world.

In the first decade of the new millennium, Russian poetry began increasingly to respond to news and social media whether as a prompt to reflection, as in Maria Stepanova's «Свадьба принца Чарльза и Камиллы Паркер-Боулз в прямой трансляции немецкого канала RTL» ("The Wedding of Prince Charles and Camilla Parker Bowles Live Broadcast on the German Station RTL"), through direct repetition of media reports, as in Stanislav Lvovsky's «Чужими словами» ("In Other Words"), or through a combination of the two, as in Dmitri Prigov's «По материалам прессы» ("Based on Material from the Press") and "ru.sofob (50 x 50)."<sup>8</sup>

This tendency in Russian poetry was already recognized in 2008, when Dmitri Kuzmin claimed that Lvovsky's just published work "In Other Words" bookended a crucial era in Russian poetry that had begun with Kirill Medvedev's «Текст, посвященный трагическим событиям 11 сентября в Нью-Йорке» ("Text Devoted to the Tragic Events of September 11 in New York"), published in his 2002 collection «Вторжение» ("Invasion").<sup>9</sup> These works exemplify what Ilya Kukul'in has called "documentalist" poetry, or what, extending Kukul'in's

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<sup>5</sup> On Bian Zhilin's newspaper sources for "The Composition of Distance," see Klein (2018: 31-32). On Tzara's Paris performance, see Banash (2013: 81-82).

<sup>6</sup> Tret'jakov (1927: 35).

<sup>7</sup> For examples of the vast range of artistic uses of the newspaper over the past century, see Brodie (2012).

<sup>8</sup> Stepanova (2006), Lvovskij (2008), Prigov (2006), *ibid.* (2007).

<sup>9</sup> Kuz'min (2008). Medvedev (2002).

analysis, Kirill Korchagin terms «монтажная „документальная“ поэзия» (“montage ‘documentary’ poetry”).<sup>10</sup>

As Kukulin’s terminology suggests, the use of montage and collage techniques was hardly new to Russian art and literature. Montage was key to the Soviet avant-gardes of the 1920s, as well as to many unofficial artists and writers of the late-Soviet period.<sup>11</sup> These and other writers and artists responded to the news by using collage or montage techniques that themselves arguably derive from news media and especially from the juxtaposed articles of the newspaper.<sup>12</sup> The collage and montage of the newspaper, photojournalism, newsreels, and later television inspired and shaped the turn to collage, montage, and juxtaposition in twentieth-century art and literature around the world from Dada and Soviet photomontage to William Burroughs and Brion Gysin’s cut-ups, and the “technological poetry” of Lamberto Pignotti and Gruppo 70.

A similarly international upswing in the use of cut-up news media accompanied the digital news revolution of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. To illustrate the international nature of this upswing, I will here compare the turn in Russian poetry to news-based documentary montage poetry – and its implications for what Korchagin has analyzed as the consequent «„диффузный“ характер субъективности» (“‘diffuse’ character of subjectivity”) – to similar uses of the device of documentary montage in Chinese-language poetry of a similar period.<sup>13</sup> For instance, like Prigov, Taiwanese poet Hsia Yü 夏宇 produced poetic texts by writing directly onto, or erasing text from, print newspapers. In the group project “Huadiao huadiao huadiao” 《劃掉劃掉劃掉》 (“Cross It Out, Cross It Out, Cross It Out”), Hsia Yü and her collaborators produced lyric poems by crossing out texts from newspaper articles, advertisements, and other print media, leaving only a few words remaining. Similarly, the mainland Chinese poet Yan Jun 顏峻 combined poetry with the news and multimedia in works such as his video of a 2003 performance of his poem “Fan dui yiqie you zuzhi de qipian” 《反对一切有组织的欺骗》 (“Against All Organized Deception”), a performance that combined audio recordings and live poetry reading with news media images.<sup>14</sup>

While I will concentrate here on the comparison with these and other Chinese examples, I also wish to note at the outset the broader nature of this turn to documentary montage techniques. We see, for instance, a similar turn in Anglo-American poetry of the period.<sup>15</sup> For example, in “The Vaneigem Series” (2002),

<sup>10</sup> Kukulin (2010); Korčagin (2013).

<sup>11</sup> Kukulin (2015).

<sup>12</sup> Banash (2004).

<sup>13</sup> Korčagin (2013).

<sup>14</sup> Yan (2003a).

<sup>15</sup> On the renewed interest in responding to the news in early twenty-first-century US poetry, see Galvin (2018: 306-326).

Brian Kim Stefans copied the webpage template of the “New York Times” and replaced parts of some articles with extracts from English translations of Raoul Vaneigem’s « *Traité de savoir-vivre à l’usage des jeunes générations* » (1967; published in English under the title “The Revolution of Everyday Life”) and « *De la grève sauvage à l’autogestion généralisée* » (1974; published in English under the title “Contributions to the Revolutionary Struggle”).<sup>16</sup> In one piece from the series, for instance, Stefans has UK Prime Minister Tony Blair speak in the words of Vaneigem’s treatise “The Revolution of Everyday Life”:

Seeking to sway the opinions of the many critics in Britain who agree that Mr. Hussein is dangerous but believe he has been effectively contained and question the need to attack him now, Mr. Blair said:

“If the element of boredom it cost me to write it comes through when you read it, this will only be one more argument demonstrating our failure to live.

“For the rest, the gravity of the times must excuse the gravity of my tone. Levity always falls short of the written words or overshoots them. The irony in this case will consist in never forgetting that.”

“This book is part of a current of agitation of which the world has not heard the last,” he told Parliament. “It sets forth a simple contribution, among others, to the recreation of the international revolutionary movement. Its importance had better not escape anybody, for nobody, in time, will be able to escape its conclusions.”<sup>17</sup>

In this passage, the first paragraph comes from the “New York Times” article “Blair Presents Dossier on Iraq’s Biological Weapons” and the following three paragraphs come from Vaneigem’s introduction to “The Revolution of Everyday Life” in Ken Knabb’s English translation.<sup>18</sup> Here Stefans deploys the technique of *détournement* advocated by Vaneigem and other members of the Situationist International. Following Debord, Stefans uses documentary montage to engage in the “construction of situations” that are intended to produce a “revolutionary movement” by highlighting and upsetting our normal expectations of an everyday cultural form – in this case, a newspaper article.<sup>19</sup> Stefans achieved at least some limited success in his attempt to disrupt everyday life. His articles appeared, at first glance, so like the originals that the “New York Times” threatened Stefans with legal action.<sup>20</sup> By contrast, in his 2010 work “Suicide in an Airplane (1919),” Stefans does not attempt to reproduce the look of the “New York Times” article that he appropriates. Instead, he mixes an article on civilian deaths caused by US airstrikes in Afghanistan with allusions to the futurist celebration of war. Stefans combines text from the article with Leo Ornstein’s futurist score of the same name. He uses Adobe Flash to animate the text as a series of exploding

<sup>16</sup> Stefans (2002a). The English translations that Stefans uses are Vaneigem (2009) and *ibid.* (2000).

<sup>17</sup> Stefans (2002b).

<sup>18</sup> Hoge (2002); Vaneigem (2009: 6)

<sup>19</sup> Debord (2002); Vaneigem (2009: 6).

<sup>20</sup> Stefans (2006: 248).

letters, so underscoring the relation of the journalistic text and futurist aesthetics to the atrocities of US bombing.<sup>21</sup>

The key purpose of this paper is not to interrogate examples such as those of Stefans, Medvedev, and Hsia Yü in detail but is instead to offer a provisional argument as to why we see a similar turn across these literatures. Why is this trend observable in different literatures with different cultural and political backgrounds and contexts? Scholars such as Korchagin argue that the use of documentary montage in Russian poetry primarily relates to a shift in poetic subjectivity. However, this emphasis on the lyric subject downplays the collective and public texts of news and social media that constitute the source of these poems. By placing the documentary montage turn in Russian poetry in a global context and emphasizing the importance of new and new media and globalization to these changes, this essay questions the privileging of the lyric subject.

To read contemporary news poems solely as expressions of lyric subjectivity, however dispersed, is to ignore or downplay their emphasis on public and often traumatic events whose significance is hotly contested in the multi-authored texts of news and social media. While the global capitalist system and politics in the age of social media might seem to promote the individual over the collective subject, these poems suggest an alternative view: they map how the intertwining forces of news media, digital networks, and competing nationalisms and internationalisms produce and negotiate forms of collective and contested identity.

Equally, to approach such poems as the expression of a lyric subject, however diffuse or conflicted, is arguably to misunderstand the long tradition of lyric uses of found text. Such approaches project a lyric hero onto utterances that overtly display the absence of a single voice or speaking subject.<sup>22</sup> In the found poem, subjectivity is not produced in the act of composition but is, if at all, produced through a work's publication and its encounter with its readers: "The lyric, lying on the ground like a leaf or a feather [...] finds its speakers, who are its readers."<sup>23</sup> From this perspective and from a view that encompasses oral traditions and the longer history of written literature, the found or collage poem is the norm, and the lyric as container for an expressive subject is the aberration: "lyric subjectivity [...] becomes the anomaly in need of explanation."<sup>24</sup> The modern reassertion of this norm, of the poem as collage, comes arguably with the "ur-medium of twentieth-century collage": the newspaper.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Stefans (2010). For a detailed discussion of these two works by Stefans, see Tierney (2013: 65-70, 89-119).

<sup>22</sup> Reed (2011: 772-773).

<sup>23</sup> Saussy (2017: 120).

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>25</sup> Banash (2013: 30).

Building on these arguments, I want to suggest that rather than simply trying to pinpoint a new kind of lyric subject, we might attend to other conditions and transitions that are equally pertinent in such texts and that have less to do with poetic subjectivity and more to do with the combined forces of new media, competing nationalisms, and globalization as they coalesce in often traumatic and contested public events. Korchagin has argued that texts like Medvedev's and Lvovsky's present either the diffusion of the subject or the establishment of a new kind of subject that coheres around its very condition of diffusion: «субъект распылен, но однороден в своей распыленности» (“the subject is dispersed but is homogeneous in its dispersal”).<sup>26</sup> But we might equally understand this process of diffusion and of fusion-through-diffusion as being not about the poetic subject but about the diffusion of the boundaries of poetry and of the concept of a nationally defined literature. Such work highlights poetry's transition from a largely text-based art form demarcated by language and national borders to an art form defined by movements across national and media boundaries. It also suggests the need for a transformation in our approach to poetic analysis – a conceptual shift from subjectivity to media.

Texts made through the verbatim reproduction of other texts, frequently from mass or social media, challenge the understanding of poetry on which the search for the poetic subject was founded in the first place. Instead of seeing such poems as staging the lyric subject as a battle between what Korchagin terms «„чужая“ и „своя“ речь» (“the other's' and 'one's own' speech”), we might better understand these poems as being about the battle over what and where poetry might be located in an age of global information networks.<sup>27</sup> Pavel Arseniev's more recent “ready-written” poems, for instance, frequently merely reproduce verbatim part or all of an existing online news or magazine text.<sup>28</sup> They eschew the complex negotiation of different texts found in poems like Lvovsky's “In Other Words” and thereby further undermine readings that seek to attribute to such texts lyric subjectivity. Such poems seem fundamentally to reject the basic assumptions about the lyric and how it should be read that have dominated, particularly in the Russian literary tradition, right up until the present.

We can see this privileging of the lyric subject by noting the limits of what has generally been included within the concept of documentary montage poetry in Russia. Many insightful and important writers about contemporary Russian poetry – including Kukulín, Korchagin, and Kuzmin – have identified the use of others' words, often taken from online media, as marking a new tendency in Russian poetry of the 1990s and the first decade of the new millennium. In fact, however, we can find many earlier cases where Russian writers and artists have presented mass media texts as art. Examples range from a 1963 issue of the samizdat journal

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<sup>26</sup> Korčagin (2013).

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Arsen'ev (2015), *ibid.* (2018).

«Искусство коммуны» (“Art of the Commune”) that includes a speech from the chairman of the Ideological Commission, L. F. Ilichev, cut and pasted from an official Soviet newspaper; to Komar and Melamid’s 1972 «Идеальный лозунг» (“Ideal Slogan”) series, which simply reproduces Soviet slogans as art.<sup>29</sup> It is just that works such as Komar and Melamid’s are more commonly approached as visual art rather than as poetry.

Take, for example, Prigov’s 1989 «Видеоперформанс с газетами» (“Video Performance with Newspapers;” figure 1; video 1). I have, elsewhere, offered the following description and analysis of the performance:

Prigov’s performance begins with a close up of his face. He appears to be lying on a pile of newspapers with an edition of “Pravda” carefully arranged behind his head. For the first minute or so, Prigov silently mouths words apparently read from the newspaper. Then he begins to read aloud as the camera pans out to reveal him lying on a couch of newspapers with further sheets of newsprint engulfing what appears to be an apartment. Prigov then rolls about in the papers, picking up, seemingly at random, various items of news, including an article about Gorbachev speaking on perestroika, which Prigov reads with rising volume and agitation.

By placing his performance piece in the interior of an apartment, Prigov emphasizes the newspaper’s role as a liminal object between the domestic realm and the outside social and political world, [...]. After reading the article on perestroika, Prigov spends several minutes searching through deep piles of newspapers that at one point threaten to submerge him completely. [...] Prigov’s body touches, is seemingly soothed then roused by the newspapers, whose crinkling white noise matches the confusing and overwhelming verbal noise produced by glasnost and by the rise of previously suppressed nationalisms. Prigov registers these competing nationalisms and their challenge to Soviet [...] unity by reading, in an increasingly hysterical voice, the Central Committee’s condemnation of the August 23, 1989 protests in the Baltic States as “nationalist hysteria.” The disordered newspapers and seemingly disordered mind of the speaker produce a sense of proliferating fracture and dispersion that matches the diverse opinions found in perestroika-era newspapers and the confusion of Prigov’s newspaper-strewn apartment.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> On the former work, see Komaromi (2008: 652-654). On the “Ideal Slogan” series and US conceptual poetry, see Edmond (2017).

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. (2016: 320-322).



*Figure 1: Still image from Prigov (1989)*

Like Medvedev's poem, Prigov uses direct quotation to give voice to extremism (in this case Soviet anti-separatist nationalism).<sup>31</sup> But unlike Medvedev, Prigov embodies the text without ever even offering an alternative viewpoint, just as he gives voice to the official party line rather than the confusion of Internet babble. One might impute a lyric hero to Medvedev or Lvovsky's poems: the subject who struggles to negotiate between the words of others and one's own words. Prigov's work would seem to offer no such possibility.

Of course, not everyone would recognize Prigov's performance as a poem, though his strategy of simply repeating newspaper text verbatim recalls Tzara's 1920 Dadaist performance in Paris and anticipates such works of US conceptual poetry as Kenneth Goldsmith's 2003 book "Day," a retyping of an entire issue of the "New York Times." Yet the rise of poems made out of mass and social media texts and the now common genre of the video poem make it increasingly possible to recognize a work like Prigov's "Video Performance with Newspapers" as poetry. Such citational poems put pressure on the boundaries of poetry not simply in relation to other forms of language and discourse but also in relation to other art forms and media (print newspaper, video, contemporary art). We can see this pressure, for instance, in Anton Ochirov's «Израиль» ("Israel"), where animated

<sup>31</sup> Prigov reads from Central'nyj komitet KPSS (1989).

text and images compete for attention with the regular text, forcing the reader to reconsider where poetry ends and video art begins.<sup>32</sup>

We can register the kinds of pressures that these poems put on the boundaries of poetry through their paratexts. Medvedev's book "Invasion" is presented as containing «стихи» ("poems") and «тексты» ("texts"), with the title of his September 11 work clearly signaling it to be a text rather than a poem. Likewise, the editors introduced the publication of Lvovsky's 2008 work "In Other Words" by noting the difficulty of classifying it: «В нашем рубрикаторе не было формата, под который подошел бы этот текст Станислава Львовского» ("In our list of headings there was no category under which Stanislav Lvovsky's text would fit").<sup>33</sup> In fact, they had to create a new category on OpenSpace.ru especially for the work. The title of this category, «Вещь» ("Thing"), itself signals the difficulty of categorization. Nevertheless, the editors presented the text as an artistic work: an attempt to address Russia's invasion of Georgia through art: «одна из первых попыток осмыслить ситуацию средствами искусства» ("one of the first attempts to make sense of the situation through art").<sup>34</sup>

Of course, as Kuzmin first pointed out, Lvovsky's text does quite clearly signal its location within a literary tradition through its citations of Goethe, Hölderlin, and others.<sup>35</sup> Kukulin argues that Lvovsky's text differs from Medvedev's because of its invocation of literary tradition and history – the Spanish Civil War, the expulsion of the Sudetenland Germans and, between these events, the Second World War.<sup>36</sup> For Kukulin, "it is precisely this quality of history that allows the narrator to break out of the isolation of the contemporary world."<sup>37</sup> However, it is equally important to note that this refusal of isolation involves a transnational and transmedia appeal: to a variety of different places as well as times (albeit with a European orientation) and to various art forms and media.

Writing in 2003, Prigov noted the challenge to traditional concepts of poetry posed by works that occupy a liminal position between media and art forms, and between national traditions:

Попытки выхода в пограничные зоны – типа перформанса или визуализации – которые могли бы стать сильными возможностями расширения аудитории – так и не были приняты литературной средой (все-таки неотвратимо укорененной в культуре XIX века) и были попросту абсорбированы музыкальным и визуальным сообществами – по причине их нынешней доминирующей массы и влияния.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Očirov (2010).

<sup>33</sup> L'vovskij (2008).

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Kuz'min (2008).

<sup>36</sup> Kukulin (2010: 613)

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 614.

<sup>38</sup> Prigov (2003).

Attempts to withdraw into boundary zones – of performance or visualization – which could provide feasible possibilities for expanding the audience – have never been accepted by the literary milieu (still inevitably rooted in the culture of the nineteenth century) and have simply been absorbed by the musical and visual communities because of their current dominant size and influence.

Documentary poems not only absorb other non-literary discourses and speech acts; they also – like the visual and performance works to which Prigov refers – contest the nature of poetry itself. Is, for instance, Prigov’s short film – or so-called “media opera” – «Россия» (“Russia”) a work of contemporary art, music, or video? Or could we treat it as a poem that channels other voices, particularly those of Russian nationalism, through a single word: «Россия» (“Russia”)?<sup>39</sup>

In a work published in 2007, the year prior to Lvovsky’s “In Other Words,” Prigov makes explicit this attempt to challenge the boundary of what is considered poetry. In “ru.sofob (50x50),” Prigov begins by asserting that «всякие слова» (“any words”) can form a poem, including «простые и прямые выдержки из ежедневной прессы» (“simple and direct extracts from the daily press”), extracts that he uses in the work.<sup>40</sup> Prigov’s “ru.sofob (50x50)” comprises fifty of Prigov’s columns for polit.ru and fifty poems from his serial poetic work “Based on Material from the Press” with one poem integrated with each column and often one or both rewritten in the process. Begun, like Medvedev’s text, just after September 11, 2001, “Based on Material from the Press” presents a series of poems based on contemporary newspaper articles.<sup>41</sup> In this respect, the work highlights the other lives of the poet as a journalist, a feature also, as Kukulin has noted, of Sukhotin’s «Стихи о первой чеченской кампании» (“Verses on the First Chechen Campaign”) which could be seen as “born out of Sukhotin’s experience as a journalist rather than a poet.”<sup>42</sup>

If such texts are located in an uncertain position between art forms and media, they equally occupy an in-between position in relation to nation. It is no accident that the texts of Medvedev and Lvovsky repeatedly cited as key examples of the documentary tendency in 2000s Russian poetry each engage perspectives from different nations and concern cross-border conflicts with global geopolitical implications.

Published just the year after Prigov’s “Performance with Newspapers,” Taiwanese writer Lin Yaode’s 林耀德 “Er erba” 《二二八》 (“February 28”)<sup>43</sup> similarly involves the verbatim reproduction of text from a newspaper and similarly uses this device to link the collage-like confusion of texts in a newspaper to the confusion of competing nationalisms and the contested history of traumatic public

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. (2004).

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. (2007: 122). For more on this work, see Edmond (2014: 298-300).

<sup>41</sup> Prigov (2006).

<sup>42</sup> Kukulin (2010: 598).

<sup>43</sup> Lin Yaode (1990).

events. Like the Soviet Union, Taiwan underwent political, social, and media liberalization in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and in both countries the lifting of political repression brought a confusion of competing voices and nationalisms and battles over historical memory that had, potentially, global consequences. Like Prigov, Lin Yaode stages this confusion through the verbatim reproduction of the news.

“February 28” highlights the tension between the newspaper as a vehicle for national collectives – what Benedict Anderson terms “imagined communities” – and as an embodiment of confusing and competing information and voices.<sup>44</sup> The poem comprises 21 sections, with all these texts taken entirely from the February 28, 1947 edition of the Taiwanese newspaper “Xin Sheng Bao” 《新生報》 (“New Life News”; figure 2). This edition includes a brief article about an incident of police brutality that was to spark violent unrest across Taiwan and a bloody crackdown by the Chinese Republican forces of Chiang Kai-shek’s 蔣介石 Nationalist Party (the KMT or Kuomintang). The incident, which has come to be known as “2/28” or February 28, has become an historical touchstone and source of ongoing dispute between Taiwanese and Chinese nationalists in Taiwan. Public commemoration of the incident was suppressed until the mid-1980s, when the KMT government finally lifted martial law. Published just a year after Hou Hsiahsien’s 侯孝賢 landmark film “Beiqing chengshi” 《悲情城市》 (“A City of Sadness”), Lin Yaode’s work was part of the “post-martial law boom” in artistic and public commemorations of this dark chapter in modern Taiwanese history. But Lin Yaode’s approach differs from other more partisan and emotive artistic representations: he uses the newspaper as both a historical document and a collage form to stage the event as a confusion of contemporaneous voices rather than as a key chapter in a retrospective and univocal nationalist history.

If the newspaper can allow people to imagine themselves as part of a national community – as the demonstrations sparked by the article in “New Life News” illustrate – it can also serve to undermine single national narratives through its collage-like juxtapositions. While citing a key moment in Taiwanese nationalist narratives, “February 28” deploys the collage-like structure of the newspaper in a way that highlights the limits of simplistic nationalist narratives and of the opposition between those aligned with the then KMT government, who see Taiwan as a province of China, and those now associated with the opposition Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), who view Taiwan as an independent nation.

The framing of the February 28 incident in these binary nationalist terms, for instance, obscures a more complex history of colonialism as experienced by Taiwan’s indigenous peoples: “the period from the seventeenth to early-twentieth centuries witnessed numerous, often bloody, confrontations between the aborigines and Dutch colonisers, Han migrants, Qing dynasty troops, and finally the Japanese.”<sup>45</sup> Lin Yaode highlights this more complex history in his novel “1947 Lilium

<sup>44</sup> Anderson (2006).

<sup>45</sup> Vickers (2009: 90).

Formosanum”, which also addresses the February 28 incident through a snapshot in time: the entire novel takes place in the afternoon and evening of February 27, 1947. The novel disrupts the Han-centric views of Taiwan shared by both Chinese and Taiwanese nationalists by emphasizing indigenous Atayal voices alongside Dutch, Japanese, and Han colonists. It challenges a “univocal interpretation” of Taiwanese history by attempting to “deconstruct the Han-centered history with Atayal myth.”<sup>46</sup> By highlighting the position of indigenous Taiwanese in “Lilium Formosanum,” Lin Yaode emphasizes the aporia at the heart of the opposition between Han Chinese nationalists and Han settler Taiwanese nationalists. Both sides tend to take for granted the centrality of Han language and culture to Taiwan and to ignore the plight of Taiwanese aboriginals, who continue to struggle against the colonialism of both sides.

In “February 28,” Lin Yaode does not address this complex history directly but instead deploys features of the newspaper to disrupt the competing Han Taiwanese and Chinese narratives. The poem interrupts these linear narratives and narrow nationalisms through the non-linear collage structure of the newspaper and its international reach. Lin Yaode reproduces advertisements, notices, and news articles that are seemingly unconnected to the incident and that situate Taiwan within a larger international context. The poem, for instance, includes references to Hong Kong and Hollywood movies, American soldiers, and a smallpox outbreak that was local but nevertheless linked with the ongoing global struggle against smallpox after the Second World War, marked, for instance, by a smallpox outbreak in New York City in March and April 1947. After a range of such newspaper extracts, numbered consecutively from 1 to 20, the poem concludes with the brief article that allowed news of the incident to spread and led to the beginning of mass demonstrations against the Republican government. By numbering this final section “0,” Lin Yaode emphasizes the non-linear structure of this collage of newspaper texts, from which readers must draw their own conclusions. The opening part of the poem, for instance, is an advertisement for a martial arts film starring Wu Lizhu 鄔麗珠. The accompanying teaser promises bloody action so inviting the reader to link this seemingly innocuous advertisement to the final text and the real-life slaughter that it presages. Yet by presenting this collage of news items and advertisements without comment, Lin Yaode refuses to make such connections explicit and so offers an alternative to emotive memorialisation of the incident. In this way, “February 28” counters monolithic history and the clarity of a nationalist agenda – be it Chinese or Taiwanese – with the multiplicity and confusion of the newspaper.

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<sup>46</sup> Lin Pei-Yin (2010: 76, 70).



Figure 2: Page 2 of “Xin Sheng Bao” 《新生報》 (“New Life News”) from February 28, 1947, with the article that helped spark widespread demonstrations circled.

One might be tempted to read “February 28” as Korchagin reads similar Russian documentary montage poetry, that is, as staging a diffuse subjectivity that emerges in the struggle with others’ words and texts. A number of critics take a similar approach to Korchagin. They cite Lin Yaode’s poem as a form of ironic, post-modern pastiche that is avant-garde in its collaging of different forms of language.<sup>47</sup> Such readings attribute agency to the avant-garde writer who, as

<sup>47</sup> Chen Zhongyi (2003); Zhu Shuang (1996: 63); Zhang Weizhong (2013: 95).

Korchagin would have it, engages in a struggle between “one’s own” and “others’ language.” Thus even a critic who recognizes that Lin Yaode’s poem “does not contain an assertion of feeling, leaving it to the reader to decipher” (不帶情感的陳述，端看讀者的解讀) still attributes to the poem an expression of the author’s subjectivity: the poem might appear to be a “game” but in fact “hides Lin Yaode’s concern with politics” (隱含了林耀德對政治的關注).<sup>48</sup>

But to frame the poem only in terms of subjectivity would be to downplay its engagement with media, traumatic public events, and geopolitics through the form of the newspaper. The pressure on readers to sift through the various kinds of language and to reach their own conclusions is a quality of the “collage logic” of newspaper itself, rather than of an expressive subjectivity.<sup>49</sup> In this sense, any account of an expressive or subjective quality of Lin Yaode’s selection of language needs to be tempered by a recognition of how the work opposes understandings of the lyric as the expression of an individual subject by turning instead to the public and collective form of the newspaper. “February 28” uses the form of the newspaper to pinpoint and enact a key tension in global modernity: between the imagined communities of nations that the modern newspaper has done so much to construct and perpetuate and the proliferating and fracturing confusion of voices and interests that the newspaper’s collage-like form also embodies.<sup>50</sup>

Published in 1990, Lin Yaode’s “February 28” also has a more historically immediate if only implicit referent: the bloody repression of protests in the People’s Republic of China on June 4, 1989. This event not only echoed the violent government repression of protesters in Taiwan in 1947 but also heightened tensions over Taiwan’s disputed relationship to China. Equally, it highlighted the role of the news media in conveying or suppressing information about a government massacre and so in perpetuating or questioning these competing nationalisms.

The mainland Chinese poet Liao Yiwu 廖亦武 also responded to the June 4 massacre by turning to news collage. Liao Yiwu collaged diverse news sources to connect the bewildering juxtapositions of the news to the difficulty of coming to terms with the enormity of a traumatic historical event. In March 1990, he produced a video poem that combined a montage of footage culled from the news, past and present, with voice-over poetic text. Although Liao Yiwu’s video work was censored and apparently destroyed, “various reports indicate that the film was a collage of scenes featuring newsreel footage of notorious world leaders, such as Stalin and Hitler, Mao Zedong reviewing Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution, TV news footage of demonstrations in China during May–June 1989, and

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<sup>48</sup> Xu (2004); Chen Weiren (2001: 237-239).

<sup>49</sup> Banash (2013: 30).

<sup>50</sup> On how the daily ritual of reading the newspaper helps produced the imagined community of the nation, see Anderson (2006: 62). On the tension between the newspaper’s collective temporal rhythm and its fragmented mapping of global space, see Edmond (2016).

new footage shot on the streets of Chongqing using amateur actors. The soundtrack is said to have consisted of dramatic readings of ‘Requiem’ and a part of ‘Slaughter’ by Liao Yiwu, and readings of avant-garde poetry by other poets.”<sup>51</sup> Liao Yiwu’s poem “Tusha” 《屠杀》 (“Slaughter”), later renamed “Datusha” 《大屠杀》 (“Massacre”), was itself partly composed in direct response to the news. On the night of June 3 and the morning of June 4, 1989, Liao listened to news reports from the BBC about the shooting of unarmed Chinese civilians by the People’s Liberation Army.<sup>52</sup> He wrote the final two parts of the poem in response, as this extract from the penultimate part illustrates:

扫射！扫射！扫射！多好玩啊！人类和星星一起倒下。一起逃跑。分不出彼此。追到云上去！追到地缝和皮肉里去扫射！把灵魂再打一个洞！把星星再打一个洞！穿红裙子的灵魂！系白腰带的灵魂！穿球鞋做广播体操的灵魂！往哪里跑！我们要把你从泥土里挖出来，从肉上扯下来。从空气和水中捞起来。扫射！扫射！好过瘾！好过瘾啊！<sup>53</sup>

Machinegun them! Machinegun them! Machinegun them! It’s so much fun! Mankind and stars fall together. Flee together. Can’t make one out from the other. Chase them up to the clouds! Chase them into the cracks of the earth and into their flesh and machinegun them! Blow another hole in the soul! Blow another hole in the stars! Souls dressed in red shirts! souls with white belts! Souls wearing running shoes doing gymnastics to radio! Where can you run to? We will dig you out of the earth, tear you from your flesh. Scoop you out of the air and water. Machinegun them! Machinegun them! It feels so good! It feels so good!<sup>54</sup>

Liao Yiwu’s assault of words with its sarcastic condemnation via celebration of the massacre differs from Prigov’s or Lin Yaode’s use of text culled directly from the newspaper. And yet while the text of the poem is far more direct, Liao Yiwu’s juxtaposition of news collage with voice-over from multiple poems and poets likewise shifts the onus from the poet to the viewer to negotiate its multiple texts, images, and media.

As the examples discussed so far illustrate, the presentation of material from the news in contemporary poetry can serve very different political purposes and can range from politically engaged works to works that seemingly eschew any political position. I will illustrate the different directions that the news poem might take with two further examples from mainland China, both of which mix video collage of news images with voice-over. Despite their formal and ideological differences, they both illustrate the problems that such news poems pose for approaches to contemporary poetry that privilege lyric subjectivity.

First, consider the 2003 performance of Yan Jun’s “Against All Organized Deception” as it was staged in Beijing and subsequently released as a video

<sup>51</sup> Day (2005: 355-356).

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 351-352.

<sup>53</sup> Liao Yiwu (2010).

<sup>54</sup> Translation adapted from Liao Yiwu (2004).

recording.<sup>55</sup> Yan Jun's poem is dated December 2000. However, the Beijing performance took place in the aftermath of the 2003 US invasion of Iraq and just as the seriousness of the SARS outbreak was becoming clear. In the performance, Yan Jun, well known as a DJ, read the poem accompanied by music and by a video montage. As with Liao Yiwu, it is the video montage that makes the work a documentary montage piece, since the text itself is not made of citations. By overlaying some of the lines of the poem with images, however, Yan Jun entangles his own words with the news, so staging an encounter between poetry and mass media that is simultaneously an encounter between the poetic text and contemporary music and video and performance art.



Figure 3: Still image from Yan Jun (2003)

The opening lines of the poem, for instance, are superimposed over news footage of Donald Rumsfeld, US Secretary of Defense, speaking at the Pentagon (figure 3; video 2):

昨夜 我梦见了酱油  
last night, i dreamed of soy sauce<sup>56</sup>

What the translation does not capture is that in the context of the US invasion of Iraq and this image, “jiangyou” 酱油 (“soy sauce”) also alludes to “shiyou” 石油

<sup>55</sup> Yan Jun (2003a).

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. (2003b).

(“petroleum”), since both share the word “you” 油 (“oil”). Yan Jun points to the unspoken greed – the US desire for oil – that motivated the invasion of Iraq, even as he transforms such political analysis into a culinary absurdity.

In Yan Jun’s poem, we can see both the utility and limits of a lyric framing of such a poetic event. Yan Jun’s poem is built from a series of refusals, which begin: “against all organized deception! // against meetings at dusk, stars twinkling. against yelling my name from a tree-top.” And it continues with lines like “against entertainment journalists and their twisted grins,” before ending:

反对。反对一切。  
 反对我们自己。反对我们反对的一切。  
 反对我们没有反对的一切。  
 反对我们自己的一切。  
 反对一切不可以反对的和不可能反对的。  
 反对  
 against. against everything.  
 against ourselves. against everything we are against.  
 against everything we are not against.  
 against everything about ourselves.  
 against everything we must not be against and cannot be against.  
 against.<sup>57</sup>

Yan Jun here presents a series of contradictory viewpoints that undermine the notion of a single subject position. His approach resembles the use of contradiction and negation analyzed by Kukulin and Korchagin in Medvedev’s and Lvovsky’s works of documentary montage.<sup>58</sup>

However, Yan Jun’s refusal also has a specifically Chinese poetic lineage. It echoes, in particular, Bei Dao’s famous poem “Huida” 回答 (“The Answer”), which was penned in the 1970s, became an emblem youth rebellion in the 1980s, and which is built on a similar anaphoric structure of refusal:

我不相信天是蓝的；  
 我不相信雷的回声；  
 我不相信梦是假的；  
 我不相信死无报应。  
 I don’t believe the sky is blue;  
 I don’t believe in thunder’s echoes;  
 I don’t believe that dreams are false;  
 I don’t believe that death has no revenge.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Kukulin (2010: 601) describes the “solidarity with comments that completely contradict one another” in Medvedev’s text, while Korčagin (2013) similarly notes «противоречащие друг другу высказывания» in Lvovsky’s poem.

<sup>59</sup> Bei Dao (1987: 25-26). Ibid. (1990: 33).

Bei Dao's poem was widely read as an assertion of the individual subject against the collective voice of socialist realism and the Cultural Revolution.<sup>60</sup> Yan Jun mobilizes the same rhetoric of rejection, but turns back to a collective subject, "we" (我们), only to insist on the refusal of any position whatsoever. This difference between the two poets is marked by their differing use of anaphora. Whereas Bei Dao stresses the individual subject by having each line begin with the word "I" (我), Yan Jun begins not with a subject but with a negation: "against" (反对).

In Yan Jun's work, negation is no longer a means of individual self-definition against the collective, or against official discourse. Instead, what Kukulin says of Medvedev's September 11 text and other Russian documentary montage poems is equally true of Yan Jun. Yan Jun presents, in Kukulin's words, "an image of a world torn apart by interminable hostility without adopting the standpoint of any of the opposing camps."<sup>61</sup>

In his performance, Yan Jun uses a montage of video images and the collision of various media and art forms – electronic music, experimental film, and poetry reading – to emphasize this poetics of refusal in the face of a myriad of equally unacceptable positions. The video montage includes news footage of the recent US invasion of Iraq, of the concurrent SARS outbreak, and of the toppling of Lenin statues in the Soviet Bloc.<sup>62</sup> By combining this news media footage with his poetic text, Yan Jun emphasizes that the opposition to "all organized deception" encompasses everything from Soviet ideology to the lies justifying the US invasion of Iraq and to the initial failure of the Chinese government to publicize and address the SARS outbreak. Thus, while on the one hand some images and text might seem to toe the Chinese government's official line (for example, in opposing the US invasion of Iraq), the collage of images and the opposition to "all organized deception" stages a more critical relationship to government positions and reflects the confusion of voices and opinions found in the online bulletin boards through which news was shared and debated in China in the early 2000s.<sup>63</sup>

However, one would be wrong to assume that there is any essential link between the use of news collage and resistance to political propaganda, as we can see from another example of a mainland Chinese poem that responded to a major news event and that circulated widely in the form of a video news collage. In the aftermath of the May 12, 2008 Sichuan earthquake, a large number of poems commemorating its victims circulated widely on the Chinese internet. For example, the poem "Haizi, kuai zhua jin mama de shou" 《孩子快抓紧妈妈的手》 ("Child, Quickly Grab Hold of Mama's Hand") went viral within days of being posted on May 13 and was rapidly "adapted into multimedia versions that were

<sup>60</sup> Van Crevel (2008: 26).

<sup>61</sup> Kukulin (2010: 601).

<sup>62</sup> This account of the video montage used in the performance is based on Yan Jun (2003a), Yan Jun (2003b), and Van Crevel (2008: 465-467).

<sup>63</sup> Woon (2011).

uploaded to the Internet and broadcast on television.”<sup>64</sup> These videos often included background music, and they were frequently accompanied by subtitles carrying the poetic text and image collages of often graphic news media images of victims of the earthquake.<sup>65</sup>



Figure 4: Still images from YouTube video poem version of “Haizi, kuai zhua jin mama de shou” 《孩子快抓紧妈妈的手》 (“Child, Quickly Grab Hold of Mama’s Hand”) posted May 19, 2008 by bibiex, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GeibnWyQfc8>

Most of these earthquake texts were, like “Child, Quickly Grab Hold of Mama’s Hand,” amateur poems expressing a sincere sense of loss and so seemingly far away from the overt avant-gardism of some of the examples discussed here. However, the adaptation of these earthquake poems as video news collages illustrate the same onus on the reader or viewer to negotiate a myriad of news images and texts. For example, one of the video versions of “Child, Quickly Grab Hold of Mama’s Hand” presents images of body bags, dead children, and grieving parents (figure 4). The poem’s text takes the form largely of a dialogue between a dying child and the child’s mother. The poem concludes with the child urging the mother not to cry and to let her dead child go. Accompanied by this poetic text, the news montage could be read as highlighting the tragic results of the failings of officials, who were criticized for not enforcing safe building construction, particularly of the schools in which thousands of children perished.

<sup>64</sup> Inwood (2014: 172).

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. 173.

However, the poem's expression of acceptance and stoicism in the face of loss also allowed it to be swiftly mobilized by official media outlets to enforce a nationalist message of collective struggle in the face of the catastrophe and in the run-up to the Beijing Olympics, through which the government sought to showcase China's successes.<sup>66</sup> Mobilized by state media in support of nationalistic ends, video news montage versions of the poem demonstrate another more propagandistic use to which the texts and images extracted from the news are put in contemporary poetry. And yet their openness to differing, more critical interpretations also illustrates how such works are best read not as the expression of a lyric subjectivity but rather as staging a collective and conflicted negotiation of the often traumatic public events that we encounter through the news.

We can see a similar cut-and-paste negotiation of the news in a Taiwanese poetic project undertaken in the same year as the Sichuan earthquake and the Beijing Olympics. In "Cross It Out, Cross It Out, Cross It Out," the poet Hsia Yü and her collaborators produced lyric poems by crossing out texts from newspaper articles, advertisements, and other print media, leaving only a few words remaining. The "Cross It Out" project again demonstrates the different kinds of relation and transformation at stake in news poems that reproduce text verbatim from mass and social media. We might read the act of crossing out parts or all of a newspaper's text as an expression of the search for one's own words amidst the bombardment of others' words – as an expression of just the kind of conflicted or fragmented subject identified by Korchagin in Medvedev's and Lvovsky's texts. In doing so, we would follow Mikhail Martynov's argument that particular kinds of deletion practice can be associated with the expression of particular kinds of poetic subjectivity.<sup>67</sup> However, the Taiwanese project highlights the equal importance to such works of public and often contested experiences and desires that frequently emerge out of moments of crisis and that occupy a space between media and art forms and between national and global contexts.

The "Cross It Out" project connects the liminal space between private and public discourse to the liminal space between poetry and contemporary art and between the local or national and the global. The initial 2008 exhibition project, for instance, appears much more easily connected to the contemporary art context of "relational aesthetics" – in which the audience is invited to participate in the art making – than to poetry.<sup>68</sup> Hsia Yü and her collaborators, however, then placed the project in the context of poetry by publishing a selection of work from the project as an issue of "Xianzai shi" 《现在诗》 ("Contemporary Poetry"; issue 9) in January 2012, and again in the April 2012 issue of "Asymptote," an online international journal dedicated to literary translation into English.<sup>69</sup> They also

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 175, 178.

<sup>67</sup> Martynov (2018).

<sup>68</sup> Bourriaud (1998); Bishop (2004).

<sup>69</sup> Hsia Yü (2012); Hsia Yü et al. (2012).

highlighted the tension between lyric poem and journalism and between verbal and visual media by presenting the works both as photographic reproductions of the crossed-out newspaper pages and as typeset lyric poems.



整天未進食 / 寫字  
 倒頭就睡，但翻來覆去，睡得不安穩。  
 吃個中午餐  
 沒有吃飽，喝半杯繼續睡覺  
 轉個  
 繼續睡覺。  
 穿自己的衣服  
 拿了那件我的長袖居家休閒服，以及那褲子  
 倒頭就睡  
 翻來覆去  
 起來吃飯  
 再入睡。  
 這睡覺得比較沉，  
 下午4時醒  
 吃飯  
 再睡覺。

Go straight to bed, but toss and turn, can't sleep soundly./Wake up to have lunch./  
 Didn't eat, continue to sleep after having some water/wake up/turn off the light, sleep.

Figure 5: From Hsia Yü et al. (2012).

Hsia Yü uses crossing-out to highlight and question the newspaper format in “Zheng tian wei jin shi” 《整天未進食》 (“Hasn’t Had a Meal All Day”), her deletion of and transcription from a newspaper article on former Taiwanese president Chen Shui-bian’s 陳水扁 first day in prison. Chen Shui-bian had been detained late on November 11, 2008 on charges of corruption, and the article appeared on the November 13, 2008 front page of “Pingguo ribao” 《蘋果日報》 (“Apple Daily”). Chen Shui-bian’s jailing came during an ongoing and heated political struggle between Chen Shui-bian’s Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) and the Chinese Nationalist Party (the KMT or Kuomintang). The KMT had been returned to power in both parliamentary and presidential elections earlier that year and sought to exploit the charges against Chen Shui-bian for political gain. This political conflict took place in the wider context of the economic downturn generated by the global financial crisis and shortly after the 2008 Beijing Olympics, which functioned as a symbolic assertion of China’s rise to the position of a major global power. All these contexts were very immediate when Hsia Yü’s work was first presented as part of an exhibition in Taipei that opened on November 22, 2008.

In her cross-out work, Hsia Yü reduces the layered repetition and juxtaposed words and images of the newspaper article to a bare, linear account of a day. She presents both the original newspaper page with her cross outs and the poem she has extracted from the remaining undeleted text (figure 5). Hsia Yü crosses out almost all the text, aside from part of the large headline and a few words describing the spare factual outline of Chen Shui-bian's first day in prison:

整天未進食

倒頭就睡，但翻來覆去，睡得不安穩。

叫醒用中餐

沒有吃飯，喝水後繼續睡覺

睡醒

熄燈睡覺。

穿自己的便服

拿了 3 套共 6 件的長短居家休閒服，以及 3 顆橘子

倒頭就睡

翻來覆去

起來吃飯

再入睡。

這回睡得比較沉，

下午 4 時醒

晚餐

9 時熄燈。

*Hasn't Had a Meal All Day*

Goes straight to sleep, but tosses and turns, can't sleep soundly.

Is woken to have lunch

does not eat, after a drink of water, continues to sleep

wakes up

switches off the light, sleeps.

Wears own everyday clothes

took three sets of altogether six pieces of long and short casual home clothing, as  
well as three mandarins

goes straight to sleep

tosses and turns

gets up to eat food

goes to sleep again.

This time sleeps relatively deeply

wakes at 4pm

dinner  
at 9 switches off the light.<sup>70</sup>

Here one might connect Hsia Yü's repetition of the newspaper text to Anderson's account of the newspaper as a vehicle for the imagined community of the nation.<sup>71</sup> The newspaper article emphasizes this national imaginary through its presentation of Chen Shui-bian, a symbolic figure for the Taiwanese nation and its claim to independence. This position within a national context was further emphasized in the exhibition of which Hsia Yü's cross-out work was a part. In the exhibition, members of the public were invited to create works by crossing out old newspapers and other texts supplied for the purpose, so openly inviting a focus on highly politicized acts of deletion and on media censorship. Hsia Yü's choice of text also focuses attention on the connection that Anderson stresses between the daily (the newspaper is called "Pingguo ribao" or "Apple Daily") and a day in the life of its readers. Hsia Yü's repetition of the newspaper text emphasizes the sense of shared daily repetition on which the temporality of the newspaper and the imagined community of the nation depend.<sup>72</sup> By conveying the entire story of the front page in fourteen spare lines, she also highlights the wordy, repetitious nature of the original article, which effectively gives the same banal description of Chen Shui-bian's day twice.

Like Lin Yaode, Hsia Yü explores political tensions between Chinese and Taiwanese nationalisms through the banality of the everyday and the dailiness of the newspaper. And like "February 28," her poem stages the tension between the newspaper as a vehicle for nationalism and as a vehicle for dissolving national collectives. The poem's bare description of a day in a human life evokes the shared daily experience of reading the news, which allows people who will never meet to imagine themselves as part of a national community. And yet Hsia Yü deletion work eliminates the newspaper article's national context, shifting the terrain of the piece towards a universal depiction of the basic human activities of sleeping, drinking, and eating – a banal description of daily human existence. In her deletions, Hsia Yü removes the identifying name of the former president, the references to the prison officials, and indeed the entire situation of imprisonment. She thus erases both the political context and the newspaper article's emotive description of how Chen Shui-bian was unable to eat because "he had not slept all night" after being taken into custody. At the same time, this universalizing by negation also highlights the global geopolitical importance of what might appear at first to concern only the imagined community of one nation and the life of one man. Chen Shui-bian's DPP party and his KMT opponents were divided over what imagined community they belonged to: Taiwan or China. And that question in turn is not just one about the Taiwanese or Chinese nation but is the focal point for tension involving

<sup>70</sup> Hsia Yü (2012: 60-61). My translation.

<sup>71</sup> Anderson (2006).

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 33-35.

China, the United States, Japan, and other North-East Asian powers, including Russia. The question therefore has serious global geopolitical implications.

Just as Lin Yaode's verbatim reproduction of newspaper texts refuses to assert the author's view of a contentious national trauma, so Hsia Yü's banal description of a day in the life of one man stands in implicitly absurd relation to the same competing nationalisms. Her text poses the problem of speaking of a life, of individual – and indeed of national – experience in a world in which our news of the globe is already mapped out and determined by forces beyond our control.

To pick up a print newspaper today, let alone to turn it into a work of literature, is increasingly an act of nostalgia, a reference to a time long gone. And yet, as I have argued here, poets and writers continue to turn to the texts and collage-like structure of the news because they provide a vital means for negotiating a world of proliferating media. While the collaging of the news is a centuries-old practice and one that was already substantially explored in the first half of the twentieth century, it has taken on renewed resonance in recent decades as writers negotiate increasingly complex and global media contexts, rising nationalisms, political polarization, and news events with worldwide repercussions from the global financial crisis to Covid-19. The ability to negotiate multiple juxtaposed sources of information from around the world has become more, not less, relevant in our current era of globalization and digital networks. Evincing this ongoing relevance, the year that the global financial crisis reached its peak was also the year that the Sichuan earthquake video poems circulated virally and that the "Cross It Out" project took place. That same year, Lvovsky published "In Other Words," and, citing the poem, Kuzmin hailed a new tendency in Russian poetry.

We could treat these contemporary poetic negotiations of the news as an extension of the modernist turn to new forms of fragmented subjectivity in response to the impossibility of comprehending an increasingly complex world. We can, for instance, read Hsia Yü's text as staging a lyric subject whose own words are visible only in the repetition, selection, or negation of the words of others. Such a lyric reading for poetic subjectivity remains possible for all the works mentioned here, including those by Hsia Yü, Lin Yaode, Yan Jun, Lvovsky, Medvedev, Prigov, Goldsmith, and Stefans.

Yet, as I have argued, any inward-looking focus on the lyric subject, however diffuse, must be tempered by an outward-looking recognition of how the poetry of the news presents the lyric as collectively constructed by multiple authors and readers and from various media, genres, and art forms, including poetry, contemporary art, filmmaking, music, journalism, digital and social media, and live performance. For Fredric Jameson, the modernist artist responded to the overwhelming complexity of global networks by turning to the subjective: to "a tiny corner of the social world" and the inner life of the individual.<sup>73</sup> Jameson can

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<sup>73</sup> Jameson (1988: 349).

only make this claim by sidelining modernist engagements with the collage-like structure of the news. Contemporary poets, by contrast, extend this engagement, decoupling their poetic texts from lyric subjectivity so that they become instead a means of negotiating the multiple texts and global networks of contemporary media. Contemporary news poems show another side of modernism, one that is still with us today: the turn not inwards but outwards to the myriad news stories and feeds that constitute the collective text of our time.

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