

***Labour Lung*—Nasrin Tabatabai and Babak Afrassiabi**

Date: 2020.12.26–2021.03.14

Venue: TheCube Project Space (Gongguan)

* TheCube will be closed for holidays on 2021.01.01 and 2021.02.06 – 02.16

TheCube Project Space is honored to present its final exhibition of 2020 — *Labour Lung* by the artist duo Nasrin Tabatabai and Babak Afrassiabi. The artists are unfortunately unable to attend the opening event in person due to the preventive measures against the COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, the opening reception is still scheduled to take place on 26 December.

Newly created by Tabatabai and Afrassiabi in 2020, *Labour Lung* is a part of their ongoing project that they've undertaken since 2016, and it will make its international debut at TheCube Project Space. This work comprises a set of computer-controlled sound installations that simulate the variations in the respiratory sound of a lung caused by continuous inhalation of opium, which not only traceable to the history interlaced by opium and colonial trade, but also invokes the metaphor of opium smoking to reflect on contemporary technological developments.

The artist duo was invited to present their work at the 2016 Taipei Biennial: *Gestures and Archives of the Present, Genealogies of the Future* curated by Corinne Diserens. Since then, they have developed several multidisciplinary works concerning opium/drugs. *Inhale*, the work they presented at the Taipei Biennial, has heralded their later projects that led to the new work *Labour Lung*. The artists also launched the latest issue of *Pages*, the Farsi-English bilingual magazine, which is presented during the exhibition.

TheCube Project Space would like to express its sincerest gratitude to professor and curator Corinne Diserens and the Mondriaan Fund for their support that makes this exhibition possible.

About the Exhibition

Labour Lung is part of an on-going series of works which Nasrin Tabatabai and Babak Afrassiabi have been developing since 2016. These works reimagine the contemporary boundaries between drugs, writing and technology, especially in light of the accelerating adaptation of almost all aspects of our metabolic and cognitive life by various digital technologies. *Labour Lung* is a computer-run audio installation that simulates the changing breath sounds of a lung affected by the continuous inhalation of opium. In this work opium smoke is taken as a technological substance inspiring sonic mutations in the airways, which are historically traceable to the toxic machinery of colonial opium trades but also to aberrant practices that machinate other forms of adopting the smoke.

It was during the 19th century opium trade that smoking replaced almost all previous methods of opium use. The most efficient use of opium is through smoking, which leads to a stronger level of opiate release and a more rapid impact on the nervous system, but also a higher rate of dependency. This shift to smoke not only eased opium's commodification but also the assimilation of the function of the ingesting organ, i.e. inhalation, into the apparatus of the colonial trade. This appropriation of the lung anticipated what is becoming, in the twenty-first century computational capitalism, the total bypassing of our organs by technologies to which we hand over an increasing part of our biological and cognitive functions. *Labour Lung* is made with an attention to these forms of biological, chemical and technological assimilation.

As an audio installation, this work incorporates biomedical acoustic modelling and consists mainly of a wire-less network of computers which together perform—on a probability principle—the real-time effects of the opium smoke aerosols on the air ways. Here the measure of simulated opium smoke entering the lung is based on the median daily dose of an opium smoker, however the number of breath cycles is not limited to an average human lifespan. Every breath cycle is a progression of carbon dust deposition in the lung resulting in the blockage of the air tubes and a slow alteration of breath sounds. Here, the labour of the lung is a labour of duration, in which the lung is pulled across the endless probability of its wheezes and crackles. While in medicine, abnormal breath sounds are adapted as symptom or points of departure leading to diagnoses, in this work this logic is technically inverted: the pathological condition is instead simulated to not only predict the probability of the symptom, but also to enact it as points of arrival. The breath sounds escape interpretation and are always pointing to their next sonic variation.

The artists collaborated with Anna Barney (professor of biomedical acoustic engineering) who developed the computer program for *Labour Lung*, and Jasja Zuidmeer (software developer) who adapted the codes to the installation.

About *Inhale* (Pages 10th issue)

Next to exhibiting *Labour Lung*, the artists will also present the new issue of their bilingual (Farsi/English) magazine *Pages*, which was produced parallel to the making of this work. Titled *Inhale*, this issue is inspired by opium smoke as a historical substance that forges an alchemy between intoxication, politics and writing. The richly diverse contributions to this issue rethink the contemporary conceptual and material derivatives of this alchemy that open to possible new extremities in our chemical, historical and technological relation to our contemporary world.

About the Artists

The artists Nasrin Tabatabai and Babak Afrassiabi have collaborated since 2004 on various joint projects, developed through such mediums as video, text and objects. They also publish *Pages* magazine which is edited parallel to the ongoing topical lines of their projects. In 2018, they launched *Pages'* online platform (pagesmagazine.net) which expands on the magazine's editorial focus. They often extend their work from unresolved historical narratives that demand for forms of approach that are materially, temporally and aesthetically undecidable. Their recent projects are concerned with making speculative junctures between history, archive, technology and the practice of art. Their works have been exhibited regularly in solo and group exhibitions internationally.

Organizer: TheCube Project Space

Sponsor: National Culture and Arts Foundation, Department of Culture Affairs, Taipei City Government, Mondriaan Fund

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