Intermedia (poetry-film-computer-video-smartphone) involves people living in a mediated world. We perceive and process the world through e-products. Some of these are assembled and produced by the manual labor of Chinese workers on the other side of the Pacific Ocean and consumed by customers everywhere in the world, and the resultant e-waste is often shipped across the ocean, back to China. In a world of socio-ecological crises, many people have taken up intermedia as a form to expose the horrors of the global chain of manufacture and consumption, the dehumanizing aspect of the assembly line, the brutality of animal products, and globally manufactured waste. Film, videos, and poems tell stories about the reification of the everyday and the exploitative nature of transnational capitalism.

Our daily existence is in a state of indefinite mediation via various media. We may sit in an office in California, on one side of the Pacific Ocean, and receive information and write messages through an Apple computer, an iPhone, or an iPad. Apple Inc.’s headquarters is located in Cupertino, California. And yet the platforms and devices that we use are the result of an international network of manufacture and consumption across oceans and countries. Many of Apple’s products are assembled by a transnational corporation, a Taiwanese-owned company, Foxconn, which has set up factories in parts of China, such as Shenzhen, a port city close to Hong Kong. The countless young people who work in such a transnational corporation come from relatively poor rural areas in the interior of China. A glimpse of the overwhelming scale of such assembly lines in China’s factories is vividly captured in the opening shot

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of *Manufactured Landscapes* (directed by Jennifer Baichwal, 2006), a documentary that features the work of renowned photographer Edward Burtynsky.

It is all too easy for the individual stories of these workers to be buried under the massive, impersonal scale of such a vast global chain of production. Yet a remarkable phenomenon has been the emergence of migrant worker poetry in contemporary China. These otherwise nameless, poor workers whose menial labor has fueled the Chinese and the global economy have voiced their emotions, suffering, and experiences in media—poetry and film intertwined. A documentary, *The Verse of Us* (*Wo de shipian*, directed by Feiyue Wu and Xiaoyu Qin, 2015), follows the lives and poetry of six such migrant-worker poets, of different ages and from different parts of China. These workers are also diverse in the nature of their jobs: they are a blaster and a coal miner in the mining industry, a forklift driver and a dressmaker in the clothing industry, a down-filling worker of Yi ethnic origin, and a Foxconn assembly-line worker. The film touches upon pressing issues such as the nature of production and consumption, the complex relationship between human labor and machinery, conflicting feelings between individual labor and collective labor, discipline and punishment of the worker’s body, and, most importantly, social justice. Staging these poets as well as their poems on-screen gives expression to their sentiments and humanistic aspirations. The documentary functions as a form of activism and constitutes a call for social change in the age of globalization. (For migrant worker poetry in English translation, see the anthology *Iron Moon* [Qin 2017].)

One of the poets in the documentary, Xu Lizhi (1990–2014), is the most famous of them all. He worked on the Foxconn assembly line in Shenzhen. He wrote poignant poetry about environmental degradation, unemployment, alienation, dehumanization, despair, and hope. He was one of the young workers who have committed suicide in Foxconn factories. Ever since his highly personal and equally disturbing poems were published and widely circulated in social media after his tragic death, many issues have been raised and numerous debates have been generated on the nature of being a manufacturing worker in contemporary China, not only in the intellectual community but also in the general public. Chinese netizens followed, shared, and commented on these poems with ardor and anger. In the last scene of his film *A Touch of Sin* (*Tian zhu ding*, 2013), Chinese director Jia Zhangke makes a reference to these recurring instances of suicide. In the film, Xiao Hui, a young factory worker from Hunan Province in China’s interior, is disillusioned with the monotonous, dreary life of working on an assembly line in a Foxconn-style factory. He leaps to his death from a prisonlike dormitory. Unlike the migrant poet Xu Lizhi, who left behind a collection of poems waiting to be deciphered, Xiao Hui leaves no traces in this world—the camera quickly shifts back to the assembly line as if implying that human life in the factory is as trivial and lifeless as the inanimate products on the assembly line.
Xu Lizhi’s case is exemplary because of his poetry and his tragic fate: he committed suicide at a young age. The anthology *Iron Moon* takes its title from his poem "I Swallowed an Iron Moon":

I swallowed an iron moon they called it a screw
I swallowed industrial wastewater and unemployment forms bent over machines, our youth died young
I swallowed labor, I swallowed poverty, swallowed pedestrian bridges, swallowed this rusted-out life
I can’t swallow anymore, everything I’ve swallowed roils up in my throat
I spread across my country a poem of shame (Qin 2017, 198)

The moon has been one of the most enduring and endearing images in Chinese and world poetry. It normally evokes romantic sentiments. But here the moon has become an "iron moon," a symbol of the cold dehumanization and ruthless industrialization that have entered the interiority of the soul.

The poetic persona, the "I" in Xu’s poem, has swallowed the moon. The poet decries the bitterness of swallowing industrial waste, of suffering horrendous alienation. The labor and the products of individual workers are turned against them. Nature, or the universe, as represented in the image of the moon, is made of iron, mechanized and rusted. Postindustrialization in the form of assembling computers, iPhones, and iPads engulfs the entire ecological system. Xu’s suicide is the result of a disequilibrium between humanity and the environment.

Xu’s poem "A Screw Plunges to the Ground" prophesies his own method of suicide by jumping from a building:

A screw plunges to the ground
Working overtime at night
It drops straight down, with a faint sound
That draws no one’s attention
Just like before
On the same kind of night
A person plunged to the ground (Qin 2017, 197)

Xu’s poetry, and migrant worker poetry in general, speak of the hardship and tragedy of working-class lives in the era of globalization. These workers might be situated in a specific locale, such as Shenzhen, China, but they are also part
of an immense network of production, distribution, and consumption in the world economy. In this sense, Chinese migrant-worker poetry resonates with the feeling and plight of the laboring class in all places under the moon, under the sun, and "all under heaven" (tianxia).

Another good example of the global chain of production and consumption is the documentary My Fancy High Heels (Wo ai gaogenxie, 2010), by Taiwanese filmmaker Chao-ti Ho. It narrates the stories, the cruelty, the suffering, and the profits generated from the transnational production of high-end commodities such as famous-brand shoes. Impoverished young women from the interior of China come to southern China to make high-heeled shoes for wealthy customers in the rest of the world. The leather is taken from young cows in China’s northeast, processed in a shoe factory owned and managed by Taiwanese businessmen, and ultimately transformed into brand-name high-heeled shoes for global consumption by people living in metropolises such as New York, Seattle, and Taipei.

The visualization of the global chain of production and consumption not only encompasses the manufactured goods that first enter the circle of consumption but also includes the afterlife of these goods, or, more precisely, the distribution of trash. Indeed, globally manufactured and circulated waste is the subject of the Chinese documentary Plastic China (Suliao Zhongguo, 2016), directed by Wang Jiuliang. In this documentary, the director discovers imported plastic waste from everywhere in the developed world (Germany, Australia, the United States, Denmark, etc.) in several remote Chinese villages where children are hired to sort the plastic for further consumption. The film traces the plastic to its origin and uncovers a surprising, little-known story of the global circulation of waste.

Such intermedia practice—socio-ecologically concerned poetry and documentary—visualizes and at the same time challenges the chain of production and consumption that has long been normalized and naturalized. It may contribute to a public culture that enhances people’s awareness of the environment, the living condition of workers, and the everyday production of waste.

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