

# WORLD FACTORY

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*Zhao Chuan and Grass Stage*

COMPOSED BY THE FOLLOWING GRASS STAGE MEMBERS: Wu Meng, Yu Kai, Wang Yifei, Wu Jiamin, Yu Lingna, Zhao Chuan, Yuan Jian, Christopher Connery, Xu Duo, Qin Ran, Liu Nian, Lü Lü, Wen Haishao, Chen Jingjie, Ding Bo, Jia Ying, Wang Ren, Li Ziyi, and Li Mengxi.



<https://tinyurl.com/Zhao-World-Factory>

ENGLISH TRANSLATION FROM THE CHINESE Lennet Daigle and Christopher Connery

TRANSLATION RIGHTS Grass Stage and Christopher Connery

WITH (in order of appearance)

STREET MUSICIAN, XU DUO – Xu Duo/Li Ziyi

MASKED CLOWN, WORKER C, HR MANAGER, CROWD MEMBER – Yu Lingna

PSYCHOLOGIST, PASSERBY, ENVIRONMENTAL EXPERT, WORKER A, CROWD MEMBER – Lü Lü

PERSON IN SMOG, NEW INDUSTRIALIST, CROWD MEMBER, YU KAI – Yu Kai

PERSON IN SMOG, WORKER B, YOUNG MAN, LEFT-BEHIND CHILD – Wu Jiamin

PERSON IN SMOG, FEMALE WORKER, CROWD MEMBER – Wu Meng

ASSEMBLY LINE WORKER A – Christopher Connery

ASSEMBLY LINE WORKER B – Jia Ying

DIRECTOR, WORKER D, CROWD MEMBER, WANG YI – Ding Bo

FINAL COMPOSITION, STAGING, AND ORGANIZATION – Zhao Chuan

PREMIERE June 5, 2014, at the Xi'an Academy of Fine Arts, China

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## 1. Introduction: Eight Easy Steps

*Audience enters. Street musician sits at a table in front of the stage playing the guitar and singing "In Love with the World" to the audience.*

STREET MUSICIAN: (sings)

Qi duo le, Qi duo le,  
Have a look at this world.  
This world is so lovely,  
I want to make love to it.

How lovely, how lovely,  
How lovely is this fine world?  
Like goods on display in the store window,  
You can look but you cannot touch.

Why is this? Why is this?  
Someone left this world in despair.  
Have we given up on the world?  
Or has the world betrayed us?

Be patient! Be patient!  
We've been patient all these years.  
But we have no time to grieve,  
For we're making love with this world.

Ai, we love you so very much,  
Although you say you love us too.  
But all you ever bring is harm;  
You take everything we have made  
And cruelly make it yours.  
But still but still.  
We keep on firmly loving you.  
Because we want, we want to conquer you.

Ai, we still love you fiercely.  
Because we want, we want to conquer you.

Making love, making love,  
We have paid so very dearly.  
And you are so heartless,  
But we still want to conquer you.  
You are so heartless,  
But we still want to conquer you.

Hei, you cruel-hearted beast;  
Let's wait and see!

*Fall in Love with the World. Lyrics/Music: Xu Duo.*

*The masked clown enters with two toy figures at her waist, holding a stack of paper and a pair of scissors. She flitteringly climbs onto the stage and dismissively tries to shoo the musician away. She spreads out the paper on a stool, uses the figure at her waist to trace shapes on the paper, then cuts out a number of male and female forms. She clips the cutouts to a string and stretches it out, humming and dancing. Finally, she forces the street musician off the stage. The masked clown dances, now joyfully, now sadly, with exaggerated gestures. She dances for a while then stops.*

MASKED CLOWN: Why hasn't the performance started? Where are the actors? Where is the World Factory? (stops, looks around) How lame—How about (suddenly excited) I act out a scene called "Healthy and Wealthy in Eight Easy Steps" for your amusement.<sup>1</sup> Wealthy and healthy, 8, 8, 8, 8, 8, making the leap to wealth! (stops, looks around). Now what I really need is an assistant. (looks at the audience). Ahh, isn't that Professor Lü—I hear you are a psychologist, can you come give me a hand? Come on!

*The psychologist excitedly jumps up on stage and greets the audience.*

MASKED CLOWN: Professor Lü, welcome. Last time I saw you, you were in pyramid sales (*he helps the Masked Clown by holding one end of the string*). So tell us, in a factory with ten thousand workers, why do some commit suicide while others do not? What kind of person commits suicide?

PSYCHOLOGIST: Well, that's a very good question, and you've come to the right person. In psychology we use the special term "psychological resilience," which refers to a person's ability to deal with setbacks. Some of the young people who work in factories are raised by loving parents, they are physically healthy, and they have broad knowledge of the world. So when they encounter some difficulty, they are able to put it behind them and move on. Other people do not get enough love from their parents, and they're physically and emotionally unwell, so when something bad happens they just can't take it and throw themselves off a building. HaHaHa –

MASKED CLOWN: Professor Lü, could you take a look at these people and tell us which ones seem to be lacking in psychological resilience?

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1 Healthy and wealthy is a pun on the Chinese word for Foxconn, the company noted for employee suicides.

PSYCHOLOGIST: Well this one for instance (*pointing to a blue paper person hanging crooked*) can't even stand up straight. The psychological resilience in this case is most assuredly weak.

*Masked clown takes the scissors and cuts, and the paper figure falls to the ground.*

MASKED CLOWN: (*excitedly*) HaHa! Who else? Who else?

PSYCHOLOGIST: This one works day and night; 14 hour shifts, six days a week. Can't handle it. He's a jumper –

*Masked Clown cuts him down.*

MASKED CLOWN: HaHa! Professor Lü, who else?

PSYCHOLOGIST: Look at this girl, thin as a rail. She can deal with the overtime, but not heartbreak. Lost love sends her straight over the edge.

*Psychologist takes the scissors and cuts her off at the head, and the headless paper figure floats to the floor.*

MASKED CLOWN: Professor Lü! What a heartless guy you are! No compassion for the fairer sex. Is there anyone else?

PSYCHOLOGIST: Take a look at this honest lad (*points to a blue figure*), what a sad case. He worked a whole year and when New Year's came, he didn't get paid. His boss ran off with his mistress and the money, HaHaHa (*gleefully cuts him down*).

MASKED CLOWN: (*Pointing to another blue paper figure*) How about this one?

PSYCHOLOGIST: HaHa! He worked at a factory for several decades, took his overtime in stride and got his pay. No heartbreaks either. But he did run into the glass ceiling, and with no hope for promotion, he jumped too (*cuts another down*).

MASKED CLOWN: Looks like they've all jumped. There's one left though, what about him?

PSYCHOLOGIST: HaHa! One left. I'm not sure what's going on with him, but he's got to die, regardless (*cuts down the last blue figure*).

*The masked clown and the psychologist cut down all the remaining paper figures and watch them float to the floor, occasionally yelling "Jump! Jump!" and laughing.*

*Their actions are nervous, excited, exaggerated. When all the paper figures have fallen, the masked man looks at the empty rope and sighs.*

MASKED CLOWN: Ai... you poor things.

PSYCHOLOGIST: Yes (*looking at the floor*), look at this: heads cracked open, brains splattered, missing arms and legs... Ai, the best years of their lives and they're willing to die like this, long before their time, throwing it all away like a pile of chicken feathers. 'Death lies on them like an untimely frost upon the sweetest flower of the field'. Well, it seems like in this day and age, you're either brave enough to stare death in the face, or so weak that you starve to death. You have to risk it all to win.

MASKED CLOWN: (*suddenly excited again, speaking to the audience*) That's right! Thank you, all of you! Thanks to the tech team! Thank you GDP! Thank you MoFo! Thanks to our corporate sponsors! And many thanks to all you consumers! Cheer up everyone! Hahahaha! (*points backstage*) Look! The actors are coming, let's go...

## 2. In the Smog

*Several people come onstage. Some sit at tables in front of the stage, turn on the stage lights and busy themselves with their work. Others pull out a large drop cloth resembling a cinema screen. Darkness.*

*A projected image of a line of small boxes resembling factories, chimneys smoking. Behind the boxes is a group of elegantly dressed people vigorously sucking fluid from the boxes. The harder they suck the more smoke emerges from the chimneys. The smoke gradually obscures the people's faces, and the words "World Factory" appear on the screen.*

*The screen descends. Dim light.*

*The drop cloth now covers people's heads, wrapping around their faces like a haze. People get in each other's way as they try to go about their daily lives in the smog...*

PEOPLE IN THE SMOG: Towers rise from the earth, cars clog the streets; it's hard to tell if spring is still spring, to distinguish a person from a dog, to see Mao's face on a banknote. Who blackened the rivers? Who greyed the skies? Who trashed our lives?

*A fashionably dressed man clutching handfuls of shopping bags arrives by motorcycle. He is caught up in the smog and struggles to free himself, only to be caught up again and again...*

PASSERBY: (*yelling*) Who did this? Who did this? Who did this to me? (*shouting until he's exhausted*)

*The man sinks into the smog.*

### **3. The Workers' March through History**

*The new industrialist stumbles out of the haze. Light.*

*She brushes off her clothes and hair and walks forward to look at the assembly line.*

NEW INDUSTRIALIST: Who was it just now talking about “working endless overtime, 14 hours a day, six days a week...” I was a laborer too at one time, but now I own my own factory, and we develop new technology to take care of industrial waste. (*pauses*) A few years ago I went abroad to learn about labor protection and stopped in Manchester, a city that played an important role in the early industrial revolution...

*A deafening sound comes from the machinery on the assembly line and gradually fades.*

NEW INDUSTRIALIST: You can just imagine Manchester at the time, full of cotton, spindles and cloth... the steam engine had just been invented, passengers awaited the world’s first trains at the world’s first train stations, and the world’s first industrialists were hard at work. It was also here that the world’s first proletarians appeared—and the world’s first capitalists too, they all came from these very streets and houses.

*An image is projected: whirling machinery inside Quarry Bank Mill.*

NEW INDUSTRIALIST: The Quarry Bank cotton mill is now a museum. Walking through its many workshops, it was as if I could still hear the roar of the machines, smell the lingering stench, and see the toiling workers. The factory was in operation from 1784 to 1959 and at its peak employed 434 people.

DIRECTOR (*voice only*): Stop –

*Projected images stop.*

DIRECTOR: (*speaking to two actors set to go onstage*) Thank you. (*turning to the New Industrialist*) Could you say something about how long they worked?

NEW INDUSTRIALIST: Sure (*getting back into character after the interruption*) Prior to 1847, workers at the Quarry Bank Cotton Mill worked 13 hour shifts, from 5 AM to 8 PM, plus overtime when necessary.

*(stops, addressing the director)* What's strange is that the museum guide says "Working conditions at the time were very different from today," but I used to work 14 hour days. Who says things have changed? In factories and work sites all over, people work ten or more hours a day, and that doesn't include overtime.

*(back in character)* At Quarry Bank cotton mill workers were also punished: weights hung from the ears, fines, overtime, beatings and verbal abuse were all common—*(remembering)* my boss used to yell in my ear everyday: country girl! ...

DIRECTOR: *(stopping her)* OK, OK – I know... When Quarry Bank Mill was founded, there still weren't any laws regulating working conditions. Later in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, workers began protesting en masse, destroying machinery, pushing for legal reform, eventually forcing the government to regulate labor conditions. Of course, laws have to be enforced...

BUSINESSWOMAN: We know all about this from handling industrial waste. Director, do you think big capital cares about this stuff? They only care about making profits. I've met any number of investors, and they go on about globalization, and how they need to think globally when they consider production inputs. For them the social problems that come with cheap labor and environmental degradation are merely matters of investment risk. They're not things investors should worry about. The governments should take care of that.

DIRECTOR: Capital treats people like money-making machines – Play that other video from Manchester, the one that shows the beginning of a different historical trajectory—

*A group of workers comes onstage and sets up a white cloth as a screen. The workers on the assembly line stop what they're doing and turn to watch. The projection shows Manchester's Chetham's Library. The librarian opens a cabinet and takes out a stack of books. He talks about them as he walks toward the reading room, then opens them.*

DIRECTOR: This is England's first public library, Chetham's Library, next to one of Manchester's big churches. When I met the librarian, he said to me "All the way from China are you? Here, I'll show you the books Marx read when he was here." Engels was sent by his father to work in a cotton mill here in 1842, supposedly to get rid of his radical ideas. Several years later he wrote *The Condition of the Working Class in England* based on his experiences. In the summer of 1845, Marx came here from Germany to study. That's where they read that summer. Marx mostly read classical economics, including *The State of the Poor* published in 1797, a study of the lives of the poor since the 11<sup>th</sup>

century. He also read *A Survey of the Responsibilities of the English Upper Classes and State of the Nation: Thirty or 40 Factories in and Around Manchester*. The librarian said that this was also the beginning of Marx's turn away from Hegel and philosophy toward economics.

*Image: Prints of the Peterloo Massacre.*

*The sound of applause as the assembly line workers come forward and stand in front of the screen.*

ASSEMBLY LINE WORKER A: Word has it that once there were 80,000 people who gathered at St. Peter's Square in Manchester. On August 16, 1819, the infamous Peterloo Massacre occurred. People were demanding electoral reform, repeal of the corn laws, and freedom of association for workers. When the political leader H. Hunt was arrested, in the violent repression that followed, eleven people died and 400 were injured.

*The images stop. The screen is lit from behind. They start marching to the beat of a drum.*

ASSEMBLY LINE WORKER B: (*marching*) The industrial revolution started in England and spread through Europe. It brought large scale urbanization and gave birth to the working class.

WORKERS (*Gather together from everywhere, singing "Warsaw Workers' Song."*)

Workers have longed lived on the verge of starvation.

Brothers we cannot remain silent!

We are comrades in arms, young and brave;

How could we fear the scaffold?

Our soldiers were cut down in the glorious fight for our cause.

Through our victory song their names will live on in the people's hearts.

Our struggle is sacred and just.

Ever forward brothers!

Our struggle is sacred and just.

Forward ever forward brothers...

*Song ends, white cloth descends, people disperse.*

ASSEMBLY LINE WORKER A: (*Going back to the line, singing*)

I have always dreamed of another world,

A world without bosses and factories.

Let the workers create a new world!

A meaningful life is within our grasp...

*Assembly line workers return to their tables and continue their work. Several workers remain onstage after the others have left, still marching and holding signs. As they talk and throw down their signs, we see the backs of the signs on which are written "strike," "8-hour workday," "deportation," "NGO," "negotiations," "protecting the status quo," "police," "law," "protecting rights," "unions," "brain-washing" etc.*

WORKER A: Before the 17<sup>th</sup> century, there were no capitalists.

WORKER B: But once capitalists appeared, they began accumulating capital.

WORKER A: First they enclosed the commons and made them into their private property.

WORKER B: And left us only one road: the one leading to the factory.

WORKER A: At the factory, we got to know each other; we organized.

WORKERS: First, we smashed the machines.

WORKER B: They brought in bosses, laws and police to discipline our bodies and regulate our sense of time, and clocks to regularize our movements.

WORKERS: But we kept fighting back.

WORKER A: We stayed united; we kept our hope for a better society. They gave us religion, patriotism, male chauvinism, racism...

WORKERS: We kept fighting back.

WORKER B: They made an empty formalism out of our democracy.

WORKER A: They made bureaucratic authoritarianism out of our revolution.

WORKERS: We kept fighting back.

WORKER B: They gave us social welfare.

*The workers stop throwing down their signs. Only one remains, with the word "I" written on it.*

WORKER A: They made a consumer society for us. They gave us TV, movies, soft drinks, computers, cheap clothes, mobile phones you have to upgrade all the time...

WORKER B: They created self-centeredness.

WORKER A: They made me this I.

WORKER B: And ceaselessly, they make my desires for me.

WORKER A AND B: (*calling*) I—there's only I.

*They continue to throw signs, but they all have "I" written on them. They disperse. The New Industrialist arrives.*

NEW INDUSTRIALIST: I learned that Manchester was the first "World Factory."

Later, financial capital flowed into the rest of the world, and industries moved where labor was cheaper, eventually landing in China.

(pauses) It's said that China is undergoing its own industrial revolution, one that is not only changing our own lives, but the lives of people around the world. Perhaps one day our industrial historians will speak knowingly about it, about the cities and industries and business parks, about the technology and brands and factories...

*The New Industrialist picks up the signs and looks at the words written on them.*

NEW INDUSTRIALIST: From the very beginning, the "World Factory" has been a labor-intensive form of manufacturing notorious for its atrocious working conditions! With all the changes that have occurred over the past two centuries, how can China assume that it's on the right side of history? How can we know what it means any more to be part of the history of the World Factory? As long as people are making money, does that mean everything's OK?

*A song is heard then fades, leaving only tiny spots of light.*

STREET MUSICIAN: (*singing Industrial District*)

Thrown off a train, I ended up in Canton;  
In those southern skies, it never ever snows.  
I moved through the nights, moved through my dreams,  
And in the end where I got was a crowded industrial zone.

A street of factories, one led to another.  
All I heard there was the din of the machines.  
Signs all around, help wanted ads,  
I wonder which of them will deign to take me in.

(*Industrial Zone, Lyrics/Music: Xu Duo*)

#### 4. Hands of the Assembly Line

*The new industrialist moves forward, reaches out her hand, looks, and pretends to have an injured hand.*

NEW INDUSTRIALIST: I've seen many hands, many shocking hands, disfigured hands, missing hands... not in Manchester, but in Guangdong, China.

(*Looking carefully at her own hands*) This is a young person's hand, a skinny hand, just skin covering bones—the new skin is still very tender—each finger is deformed, they don't seem to fully extend—the ring finger and pinkie are particularly crooked, as if they're stuck together—and the pinkie is missing a piece—and then there's the deep scar running across the palm –

(pauses) I asked him how old he was at the time, and he said it happened two years ago when he was twenty. I intentionally looked away to keep him from feeling self-conscious. He said that when he was in the hospital one day, he couldn't stand the waiting any more so he went to an internet café to chat with his cousin on QQ. His cousin's first question was "Are you typing with your feet?" He said he'll always remember the touching concern shown by his friends and relatives. Everyone was worried that his hand couldn't be fixed. They made him show his hand at job interviews, and he'd stretch it out. Eventually he started working again. The hand that got mangled in the lathe has a big scar, but he served me tea with it. "Will it return to normal?" He said with the right skills it would. I knew he was talking about advanced medical technology, those kinds of skills. He said it so casually.

*The New Industrialist thinks of that hand and strains to open her own, extending her fingers over and over—then turns slowly and calmly.*

*Workers come onstage and together create an assembly line.*

BUSINESSWOMAN: (walking into and through the assembly line) In 1913 this kind of assembly line was developed by Ford Motor Company. It's as if you can hear the machinery yelling "Higher! Higher efficiency! Higher profits!" From Detroit the assembly line spread from one city to another and, in the end, it stretched all over the globe.

*The New Industrialist leaves the stage.*

*One by one the workers describe their tasks. As one finishes, the next begins*

FEMALE WORKER: Punch three sockets, put it on the lathe and push the button. Take the red head and push the three coated wires through it and push the button. Put the copper wires into a plastic tube and add a plastic connector.

Then add three more different colored plastic connectors. Turn on the electricity, look at the numbers, test for noise, and attach the inspection sticker.

WORKER D: Push the button, put the copper wire into a plastic tube, add the first plastic connector, then the second and third. Turn on the electricity, look at the data, test for noise, and attach the inspection sticker.

WORKER B: Extract a binding wire. Tightly wind the stator connected to the inlaid wire starting at the unwired end and tie securely. Cut off the excess wire. Manually mold the embedded wire stator moving outward toward the packets at both ends until it is uniform in shape in order to facilitate further assembly.

WORKER C: With the left hand select a component for inspection from the assembly line and locate the position of the name decal. Tilt 45 degrees. With the thumb of the right hand affix the name decal, barcode and inspection sticker to the top and bottom covers. With the thumbs of the left and right hands press and smooth the name decal.

ASSEMBLY LINE WORKER B: Extract a binding wire. Tightly wind the stator connected to the inlaid wire starting at the unwired end and tie securely. Cut off the excess wire. Manually mold the embedded wire stator moving outward toward the packets at both ends until it is uniform in shape in order to facilitate further assembly.

*Eventually the voices blend and turn to noise as the workers repeat themselves over and over. The voices suddenly stop but the work continues.*

FEMALE WORKER: We –

WORKER D: We –

WORKER B: We –

WORKER C: We –

WORKERS: Our hands repeat the same motion for ten hours, pressing the red button.

Ka-chink—Ka-chink—Ka-chink—Ka-chink—Ka-chink—

Our hands do the same thing for ten hours, fitting wires with transparent connectors.

Affix one and step on it, boom—Affix one and step on it, boom—Affix one and step on it, boom—

For ten hours, every movement of our hands is precisely regulated by the clock. There are no smiles, no sighs, no gaps, no breaks. Da, Da, Da, Da, Da, Da, Da, Da ...

FEMALE WORKER: The foreman berates me: Clumsy country girl! You're not on the farm anymore! You need to learn how to behave!

*The 50s era film Huang Baomei is projected. It shows a textile worker's hand. In the following scene, workers enthusiastically discuss technology and are given awards. A fashionably dressed passerby, wearing headphones and absorbed in their own world, dances and plays in front of the black and white images of the workers on the screen.*

FEMALE WORKER: I am a component of the assembly line. My hands are components for making components. My hand is a component that makes component after component. To make a pair of athletic shoes takes two hundred pairs of hands. How many hands does it take to make a mobile phone? How many hands does it take to make a pair of jeans? How many hands does it take to make a car? We are changing the world, but -

WORKERS: Our hands are empty, our legs are sore, our eyes are wide with wonder—What kind of factory should we have ? What kind of world should we have?

*(stops and different workers begin to speak, one after the other)*

The hands of the world's workshop come in all colors  
In the past American hands replaced English hands  
Japanese hands replaced American hands  
Taiwanese hands replaced Japanese hands  
Today mainland Chinese hands replace Taiwanese hands  
Rural hands replace urban hands  
Anhui, Sichuan and Hunan hands replace Dongguan, Zhejiang, and Jiangsu hands  
Young hands continually replace calloused hands  
Black hands, white hands, yellow hands, brown hands, green hands, red hands:  
These are the hands of the World Factory.

*The workers on the assembly line pass a box to the person on the street. He opens it, and opens another, and takes out the buns inside and devours them greedily. He throws the box on the ground without a second thought. The assembly line produces another box, which he opens with great force. He throws away the box. Inside is an*

*electrical bird that sings. He is fascinated and begins playing with it. But soon he throws it aside and leaves.*

## **5. A Scream, a Body in Pain**

*The HR manager appears among the audience.*

HR MANAGER: Can anyone jump rope? Can you jump rope? Can you jump rope?

*The HR manager finally finds someone who can jump rope*

HR MANAGER: What kind of work do you do?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: .....

HR MANAGER: How much do you earn each month?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: .....

HR MANAGER: I know of a job that will earn you more, something I'm sure you can do. You interested? You only have to jump rope. Let us go up on stage.

*The HR manager convinces the audience member to take the stage and jump rope.*

HR MANAGER: You get one *fen* for every jump. At a normal pace you can jump 60 times per minute, 3600 times per hour. That's 36 RMB per hour, at least three or four hundred RMB per day, so eight or ten thousand per month no problem. And we don't require a physical exam...

AUDIENCE MEMBER: .....

*A female worker comes onstage and starts jumping with the audience member. The HR manager helps the audience member count jumps and tells him/her to collect payment from the director after the performance. The HR manager praises the audience member and sends them offstage for pre-employment training.*

FEMALE WORKER: (alone onstage, jumping and mumbling to herself) 1 *fen*, 2 *fen*, 3 *fen*, 4 *fen*, 5 *fen*, 6 *fen*, 7 *fen*, 8 *fen*, 9 *fen*, 1 *jiao* 1 *fen*, 1 *jiao* 2 *fen* ... I don't know why I have that dream, the same one every night. The dock, the river, all very familiar, as if I've been there countless times

(Keeps jumping) When did I start having this dream? A month ago I worked overtime until 11:30 three days in a row. Then on Sunday morning we had to move into a new dormitory. I was exhausted and sore from head to toe. I couldn't

control or stop the pain, as if my body weren't my own. Everyone else was out, the room was empty. All that was pent up inside me came out in a horrific scream. I couldn't believe how loud it was.

(*still jumping*) That sound terrified me. From then on I've been having that dream and screaming, over and over

*Keeps jumping rope and counting to herself.*

*Other female workers can be heard in the background.*

FEMALE WORKER A: (*Recorded voice*) There's something wrong with my back, it's extremely painful. I'd only been here a few months when it started hurting. You know, my work isn't as hard as the girls who work on the line, they have to sit there all day. But I don't know why my back hurts so much. Sometimes it's my back, sometimes it's my neck.

FEMALE WORKER B: (*Recorded voice*) You know, no one wants to work in the clean room. So they send the new people in there, and I can't get them to transfer me out. It smells so bad in the clean room you can hardly breathe. The acid makes me dizzy and I can't concentrate. If I keep having these headaches, I'm going back home.

FEMALE WORKER C: (*Recorded voice*) If the wafers are damaged, they can't be fixed, so we have to be really careful. There's a lot of pressure—when I'm on the night shift I don't have any energy so I move slowly—when my stomach hurts they give me drugs, I'm not sure what kind—some people say it's birth control or pain killers—sometimes I'm afraid that the supervisor won't give me any, so I've hidden a few.

FEMALE WORKER: (*still jumping*) I've woken up screaming every night for a month. It bothers me hearing other people talk about it. It's the same dream every night: I dream I'm walking toward the dock, to take a boat across a river. The river separates me from my children. I'm worried because I see that the boat is leaving, I'm very nervous. But my body won't move, it's sore and tired, it won't move—I see the boat about to leave, and I'm about to be left behind. It's getting darker, and I'm stuck...

*It gradually darkens, leaving only points of light.*

*The rope falls and the woman squats down dejectedly.*

*Images are projected: A worker from Hangzhou describes her ideal job: right now, she's just a laborer, but she hopes to open her own cosmetics shop one day... the video cuts to a noisy, smoky, dusty work environment and other images of industrial pollution.*

## 6. The World's Garbage Dump

*The Masked Clown comes onstage and sees the images of pollution. Her movements are exaggerated and a bit erratic.*

MASKED CLOWN: What's this? Those chimneys, pipes, machines, it's all so grand! Production – production – this is the great age of mechanical industry! That noise you hear is the sound of human progress! That smoke is the dust kicked up by the wheel of history! (*Hears something and stops her exaggerated movements to look at the audience*) What? Smog? What's smog?

*Walks around, and suddenly sees an environmental expert in the audience.*

MASKED CLOWN: Hey, aren't you Professor Lü, the environmental scientist? The last time I saw you, you were still at the Chinese Academy of Sciences Institute of Psychology, and now you're in environmental studies? Professor Lü, please come up. Just now someone mentioned smog; can you tell us what smog is?

ENVIRONMENTAL EXPERT: (*Comes on stage excitedly, as before*) That's an excellent question. Smog is... smoke and fog, HaHa! Water vapor condenses on tiny particles and turns into tiny droplets suspended in the air (*imitates a suspended water droplet*) This is fog. Smoke is particles of dust and ash suspended in the air (*the masked clown throws powder into the air*), tiny little particles.

MASKED CLOWN: (*Playfully throwing powder at the environmental expert*) Oh, Oh... smog smog, smoke plus fog.

ENVIRONMENTAL EXPERT: HaHa, yes! That's what smog is.

MASKED CLOWN: And where does this smog come from?

ENVIRONMENTAL EXPERT: Smog comes primarily from factories, but different industries create different types of smog, and they affect people in different ways.

MASKED CLOWN: (*Teasingly*) It affects our bodies?

ENVIRONMENTAL EXPERT: Oh yes, HaHa! For example, smelting factories produce smog high in heavy metals, and breathing it can lead to chest pains and swelling in the lungs and sometimes even respiratory failure... and then you die, then you die...

*The Masked Clown puts powder on the face of the Environmental Expert, who imitates pulmonary failure.*

MASKED CLOWN: (*laughing*) HaHaHa! You poor thing!

ENVIRONMENTAL EXPERT: HaHa! Then in other places with power plants and chemical factories, where garbage is being burned, there are lots of organic gasses in the air. These organic gases contain sulfides and dioxin that damage the human nervous system and cause headaches, vomiting, diarrhea and loss of consciousness. You won't necessarily die from it, but if your nervous system is damaged then you turn into an idiot, an idiot...

*The Environmental Expert imitates an idiot.*

MASKED CLOWN: (*laughing*) HaHaHa! You've turned into an idiot; there's no helping you now.

ENVIRONMENTAL EXPERT: Then there's the dust produced by mining companies. If you breathe it in, it hurts your lungs, gives you black lung and lung cancer.

MASKED CLOWN: (*laughing, reaches out toward the Environmental Expert's tie*) HaHa!, Black lung, I don't believe that. Let's open you up and take a look –

ENVIRONMENTAL EXPERT: (*nervously*) Go away! You can't touch the Environmental Expert! Listen, this "World Factory" is just a "world outsourcing factory." In a lot of places, like shoe factories, there is a heavy odor from organic gases, and there's a strong possibility that women who work in these places will become infertile.

MASKED CLOWN: Wow, you make all that money, and after you die there's no property to fight over –

ENVIRONMENTAL EXPERT: Our world factory is actually nothing but a world garbage dump!

MASKED CLOWN: Shh! This is a big secret; you can't just tell everyone.

ENVIRONMENTAL EXPERT: Everyone in the factory already knows! You think I'm the only expert –

MASKED CLOWN: What? So Professor Lü is an expert on garbage dumps now? HaHaHa—Turns out we live in a filthy dump! (*pointing to the audience*) Look at them, all dressed up suits, thinking they're so clean when really they're maggots in a latrine, living on shit, HaHaHa –

ENVIRONMENTAL EXPERT: (*Dragging the Masked Clown with him*) Shhhh—that's the real secret. We're all trying our best to get by in this hopeless world. You can't just tell people that. Let's go.

## 7. Far from the City, Farther from Home

*The People's Liberation Army March starts playing  
"Forward forward forward!  
We march across our homeland into the sun  
Carrying the hopes of our people; Ever victorious  
Sons and brothers of the people  
We are the weapon of the people ..."  
A young man marches out holding a notebook. He suddenly breaks into wild, child-like movements, then suddenly stops.*

LEFT-BEHIND CHILD: (*Rolling the notebook into a microphone and speaking loudly*) Dad, mom, I love you! Dad, mom, come back soon!

*A crowd appears and watches from the wings.*

CROWD: What do you want to be when you grow up?

LEFT-BEHIND CHILD: (*As before*) A worker.

CROWD: Do you miss your parents?

LEFT-BEHIND CHILD: No.

CROWD: Do you like studying?

LEFT-BEHIND CHILD: No.

CROWD: What do you like?

LEFT-BEHIND CHILD: Playing.

CROWD: Do you want to go to university?

LEFT-BEHIND CHILD: Yes.

CROWD: If you don't study now, how will you get to university?

LEFT-BEHIND CHILD: I'll be able to when I grow up.

CROWD: Are you happy when your parents come home?

LEFT-BEHIND CHILD: Yes.

CROWD: Do you miss your parents?

LEFT-BEHIND CHILD: Yes.

CROWD: What do you want to be when you grow up?

LEFT-BEHIND CHILD: A worker.

CROWD: What do you want to be when you grow up?

LEFT-BEHIND CHILD: A worker.

*The crowd disperses.*

LEFT-BEHIND CHILD: I was born in a small town in Sichuan in 1990. I was raised by my grandmother for a while, my mother's mother; but the relatives laughed and said "How silly for an old woman to be raising her daughter's child!" When I was two my parents took me on a train back to Wenzhou. The scenery there was pretty. But my parents crossed a river, and left in a pedicab. My dad started taking cotton to Sichuan to sell, and mom went south to work.

*Workers on the assembly line, humming "Industrial District."*

LEFT-BEHIND CHILD: (*Pauses*) In Wenzhou I had cousins, a grandfather and grandmother, and lots of uncles. I went to school during the day and at night grandpa took me to church to pray (*Imitates a pastor and in a heavy accent says "Bless you, bless you!"*) Summer evenings we went up to the roof, spread out mats and looked at the stars, counting the stars. My relatives say that when I missed my parents I would hold their picture and cry. Three or four years later my parents took me to Sichuan.

*Squats down, like people used to look at him.*

LEFT-BEHIND CHILD: When I got back, people would say "Oh! Look at this little baby! HaHa! Wenzhou pig!" "Sichuan pig!" "Wenzhou pig!" "Sichuan pig!" "Wenzhou pig!" "Sichuan pig!" "Wenzhou pig!" "Sichuan pig!" "Wenzhou pig!" (*Yelling and working himself into a rage*)

(*Calms down from this agitated state*) My mom says that she was determined that I would go to school! In the county seat! The villagers said "It's a waste of

money, going that far." When I went to the county seat to study I couldn't see my parents. Different relatives took care of me, or I lived by myself.

(Pauses) I remember in 2000 when I was ten, I was watching the Sydney Olympics in the apartment I rented, and when I saw the Chinese flag go up I was so happy, my hands were sweating. Later on, my parents settled down in a different city and brought me to live with them. I went to elementary school there, and middle school, and high school. Then I came to the big city for university.

(Looking around) Now I'm back in the Sichuan countryside with no land and no house. The place I rent used to have a tree out front but they cut it down and sold it. Some fields don't have anyone to farm them. The rivers I used to swim in are used to raise ducks and fish. Lots of people go to the city to work or do business, try to make a living.

*The crowd gathers again, talking back and forth among themselves.*

CROWD: Where is your *hukou*?<sup>2</sup>

CROWD: People in the city don't want their daughters marrying into villages.

CROWD: China has 200 million workers and 61 million kids left behind in the countryside. Over 40 million of them are under 14. Over 30 percent of these parents will be gone for over five years.

CROWD: Three billion trips are made at spring festival, which shows how many parents are separated from their children and from their native land.

CROWD: The workers who come to the city from the countryside are leaving a labor shortage behind them.

CROWD: Don't encourage rural children to go to university, because they'll never return home and that would be a shame.

CROWD: Traditional China lives on in the countryside. If the villages are abandoned, Chinese tradition will fade away.

CROWD: When will we be like the people in the city, really be accepted as urban workers?

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2 Hukou refers to the household registration record that identifies a person as a permanent resident of a certain area.

*The People's Liberation Army March is heard again. The young man with raised hands marches and sings forcefully. The crowd gradually surrounds them, and the circle gets smaller and smaller.*

YOUNG MAN: (*singing, but the song gradually falls apart*) “Forward forward forward!/We march across our homeland/Towards the sun/Carrying the hopes of our people/Ever victorious/Sons and brothers of the people/We are the weapon of the people ...”

*The singing turns into shouting and ranting, and he finally throws his diary up into the air. The young man quietly walks out of the crowd. He collects the diary and moves to a corner of the stage.*

YOUNG MAN: (*opening the diary and reading*) Wu Jiamin, Sichuan Province, Jingyan County, Sanjiao Village, No. 2 Sanjiao St.

*The young man holds open the diary showing a picture of himself with his parents in front of their house.*

*Images: A rapidly changing village along the high-speed rail line and workers inside a factory... In the background can be heard a recording from rehearsals of discussions about production, working conditions, and the working class.*

RECORDING: “Even though I've only been in this environment for a short time, I think “operator” or “laborer” is more appropriate than “worker.” In the past to be a “worker” was an honorable thing. Now there is no sense of honor, only shame. These operators or laborers belong to the lowest class, the lowest profession.”

“They aren't workers. I worked on construction sites for 25 years and had countless supervisors. The supervisors are in it for the money, they're there to tell you what to do. If you don't work for a day or two then they don't want you. That's how it is, we're beggars.”

“This is our European business. This is in Chile. This is in the US. And that's how the structure worked. Our head office was over here, and accounting was in Hong Kong. I worked my way up, in billing, and then I started doing foreign procurement billing.”

“There are lots of strikes at private companies. But that's mainly a symbolic thing. Do you know why Honda was under so much scrutiny? Because those workers weren't getting minimum wage, they were making more than the average wage for that region; but their strike represented a shift in their awareness of the workers' rights. You can see for yourself, in the Pearl River Delta there are strikes happening all the time.”

(English) “Ford was a good employer. He paid his employees well. It's because they reduced their own costs with research on time and movement, and

through mass production and assembly lines. He was dictatorial, but people have jobs and they pay well. So lots of people are willing to stay with them.”

“It’s just a turn-around point. You go out and earn money and come back home all happy. If you don’t earn any money, you can still come home, it’s a warm place to come back to. Out there, like I said it’s just a turn-around point. It’s a struggle, and it’s all up to you.”

“I know a woman who makes packaging for cosmetics. She’s been doing it for seventeen years; every day she makes thousands of little boxes. But when people buy those cosmetics, they throw the box out. So her life’s work is thrown out after just a few seconds.”

“To put it bluntly, labor contractors are just human traffickers. It’s a systematic violation of human rights, isn’t it? These people don’t have any production resources, no tools or anything. So how do they earn money? They just make introductions and then they charge a management fee. But people cannot be bought and sold.”

(English) “In the 1970s capital started to shift. Fisher Bendix, who made washing machines, moved from Liverpool to the Far East, like a lot of other capitalists. At the time a lot of people were trying to save their jobs. They were used to standing up for themselves and they were willing to fight. Because their jobs had never been stable, and they had formed themselves into a true working class.”

“Work is work, right? They’ve got to give you what they owe you, nothing less. If they don’t then you’re not a worker. If you don’t give me what I deserve then you’re exploiting me, and we’ve got a problem.”

“If you invest in a company that’s manufacturing something, you want it to outsource, you don’t want it investing in all these fixed assets. So you wind up with this. You want them to use the world factory and not go do it themselves. When this kind of globalization leads to political problems, for investors these problems become a matter of risk.”

“It’s connected to the national system, anyway, the whole system of household residence. Now this problem, although it’s going to be a top-down solution, but still I’m certain that the country will think of a way to solve it, including the problem of workers’ children who have to register for entrance exams in their official residences.”

(English) “I know a lot of people who are proud to call themselves working class.”

“There are lots of silly conspiracy theories out there. Like if you’re a migrant worker you will be treated differently in the city.”

“In today’s China, how are we supposed to understand the notion of “work,” after the chaos of the socialist period, and after the conversion to capitalism, and now after globalization? Marx said that labor makes people, this was one of his fundamental principles. So how are we supposed to understand labor today? What does it mean for us?”

*The voices become noisy and indistinct.*

## **8. Is That Your Spot?**

*Workers enter the city, moving among the audience and onto the stage. From the cotton work gloves they're wearing, they pull out long threads, forming a web of linked threads on the stage and above the audience.*

FEMALE WORKER: The assembly line brings components and takes them away, brings the world and takes it away. Where are the hands that will replace ours? They say –

WORKERS: (*Saying the names of countries*) Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Bengal, Sri Lanka, India, and Myanmar; Cambodia, the Philippines, Laos, and Vietnam; the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Peru, and Nicaragua.

FEMALE WORKER: The assembly line moves faster and faster, and the blood in my veins pains me more and more, but...

WORKERS: Our hands are empty, our legs are sore, our eyes are wide with wonder. What kind of factory should we have? What kind of world should we have?

*The line in their hands breaks and they begin explaining frantically.*

WORKERS: We must work overtime; we must make money. We must work overtime; we must make money. We must work overtime; we must make money. We must make money to buy the mobile phones we assemble. We must make money to buy the jeans we sew. We must make money to buy the computers we assemble. We must make money to buy the toys we make. We must make money to buy the shoes we make. We must make money to buy the cosmetics we make. We must make money, just like everyone else in this world. We must make money, just like everyone else in this world.

*Suddenly conflict breaks out among them, they push and shove and are about to fight.*

WORKERS: (shouting) Is this your spot? This is my spot! Is this your spot? This is my spot! Is this your spot? This is my spot!

*But gradually they calm down, sitting back-to-back and resuming their work on the assembly line.*

## 9. The World Factory or the End of Labor-Intensive Production

DIRECTOR (*voice coming from the back*): An American think tank reports that China's role as the world factory will be taken over by 16 as yet undeveloped countries called the PC16. Will these countries turn into the new "world factory"?

*The New Industrialist enters.*

NEW INDUSTRIALIST: What's this about the PC16? That's just capital lying to you! They just want to scare companies and workers: you want more? Higher wages? Better working conditions and environmental protection? Well, there are plenty of people waiting to take your jobs!

DIRECTOR: Tell them about your trip to Pingchuan and how it affected you.

NEW INDUSTRIALIST: It startled me. They proudly call themselves "new workers." The village is changing. They work in both industry and agriculture. They grow their own grains and vegetables. Now that the persimmons are red and the other fruits are ripe, ecotourism is attracting people from the city. The villagers can't afford to live in the cities, they can't afford the houses they built or the products they've made; but here they can build their own homes. There are no tearful left behind children. Kids live with their parents, and study in their own schools. There is even a worker's university and a worker's museum. Listen, one of the Worker's Art Troupe members Xu Duo is singing his song.

*Singing is heard. Xu Duo comes to the front.*

XU DUO: In this world factory, you're nothing but a component  
And they're slowly grinding you down, grinding away your youth  
And they want to kick you out  
And then you realize, your rage has no place to go.

*The New Industrialist breaks character and returns to normal.*

YU KAI: (*laughing*) Thank you Xu Duo! Hello everybody, I'm Yu Kai. My role was originally played by Wang Yi at Grass Stage

*Wang Yi enters, Yu Kai exits.*

WANG YI: I'm Wang Yi, I design environmental protection equipment for a living. Based on my work experience I've written this (*takes out a paper*) "The World Factory or the End of Labor-Intensive Production." (*reads*) 95 percent of in-

dustrial products wind up as garbage, and only five percent find practical application. In order to improve working conditions and ease workers' burdens, we must change the current consumption-driven mode of production. We must promote forms of social cooperation not based on employment and consumption. We must promote production units of under 100 people. We must promote the production of complete products rather than the production of components. We must promote the use of robots and high technology. We must promote shared ownership and use of production resources and democratic forms of management. We must promote public governance, public transportation, public factories, schools and research. We must promote conservation of resources, shared responsibility and communal living.

*(stops and looks at the audience)* This was my plan for the finale of this play.

*The Expert controls a group of little blue figures. He makes them dance and looks scornfully at Wang Yi.*

*The Masked Clown eventually appears and runs toward the audience.*

MASKED CLOWN: HaHa! If you do things his way, will you still have iPhones? Will you still have name brands to wear? Will you still be able to play mahjong, watch your stocks and wait to die? If you listen to him your lives will have to change. Scary isn't it? Is that what you want? Are you scared? Is that what you want?

*Masked clown laughs madly and leaves.*

*Xu Duo's song is heard. The entire cast rushes on stage with little blue figures and start singing.*

*The assembly line workers climb up the scaffolding at the back of the stage holding large numbers of little blue figures that they have made and let them fall.*

XU DUO AND THE CROWD (*sing We Quit*):

In this world factory, you're nothing but a component  
And they're slowly grinding you down, grinding away your youth  
And they want to kick you out  
And then you realize, your rage has no place to go  
How do you like being a piece of dust?  
How do you like floating in the wind?  
How do you like having them above you?  
How do you like them babbling?  
How do you like the incurable ignorance?  
How do you like not caring whether or not you even exist?  
How do you like feeding on illusions?  
How do you like living in a dream?

We quit—we quit—we quit!  
Wherever there is oppression there is resistance  
The light of a star can start a wildfire  
The true path is always world changing  
Marching boldly forward for the sake of those who follow...

*(We Quit, Lyrics/Music: Xu Duo)*

*During the song Wang Yi picks up discarded gloves and signs from the ground printed with “Strike” or “Unity” and looks at them blankly. Then he walks toward the audience and steps over the seats of audience members, climbing in the dark toward the back and toward higher ground.*

The End

