Writing in Taiwan Contemporary Art

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'Writing' is the most fundamental form with which we describe, think, and criticize the art, it contains in itself the possibility or the virtuality to produce art. There's a difference between 'possibility' and 'virtuality.' The former is one of the contingencies, while the latter is one of the invisible powers constantly generated along with 'actuality.' In other words, the practice of writing itself is a critical expression, one of infinity. If it is transformed into the operation of artistic concepts, writing becomes an art production with reflexivity. In this way, the elements of writing, such as reading, editing, publishing, distribution and words, discourses, stories, archives, constitute a series of operative methods of artistic production. In this series of production art methods related to writing, in addition to being 'representation,' the most reflexive operation is the discourse, story, and archive. The discourse should be the most closely related and most commonly used in modern and contemporary art because we use the discourses to 'declare' the position and concept of art production; while stories are different ways of reflecting on 'things' because of the operation of 'narrating'; and the archives establish the relationship between various elements through certain systematic conception, so its operation inevitably creates tension between concept and existing system.

Avant-garde and writing

Contemporary art in a number of obviously repetitive avant-gardist movements continues to create different sensible elements or forms under different historical and social conditions or in different political and cultural contexts. In other words, the transformation of reproductive forms and the transition of aesthetic perception always occur and advance in two contradictory temporalities. One is criticizing the existing reproductive forms and various experiments of new sensitivities, in which the 'issue' represents an excuse for art criticism, but also the reason for developing the new forms.

The results often present the denouncement of rights and the deprivation of public resources from existing forms and aesthetics and remained some functions in a more pro-people way. In fact, the way of changing perception is often 'shocking.' In contrast, the other is the change that takes longer to be perceived, which means that the aesthetic experience of daily life will really change, often 'unperceivable,' after the 'issue' gradually becomes vulgar and even disappears, and the experimental form slowly becomes new beauty that could be comfortably consumed. From these repetitive avant-gardist movements and the schizophrenic (conflicting) development of its internal temporalities, we can observe two important actions that promote and change artistic expression and aesthetic perceptions, namely discourse and circulation, or writing and trading.

I give here firstly a brief description of how the writing and the trade could configure the avant-garde movement. The avant-gardist movement mainly includes several parts: 1) The existing mainstream art thoughts and forms cannot respond anymore the actual social life, which means, the criticism of existing arts; 2) Analyzing the urgent need for new perceptions in the current social reality; 3) Providing the image of future vision through imagination, which means 'newness'; 4) Rationalizing or legalizing some different experimental methods based on this 'newness.' However, the creativities occurring in speculations, quickly stimulating new models of consumption and investors, especially with new values, new materials, new forms, new identities, and communities, are new phenomenal signs that activate and create new markets and even trading forms. Here, Lyotard's "(politico-) economics of judgment" in his analysis of the Kantian sublime seems to have profound meaning; in "Interests of sublime" he investigates how ethical and aesthetic judgments are assembled in the "disinterested interest," and until the paragraph about the absence of form or no relationship with form in sublime, says that "reason in such an open fracture" intuitively did "return to the Idea considering the moral as its proper telos."* There is no doubt that the avant-gardist writing 'actively' presents itself as an 'absence of form' and removes all 'interests' that can be evoked by past forms, while the "disinterested interest" is derived from moral practice or juridical command. In other words, Lyotard understands the economics driven by the "disinterested interest" of the "sublime" in a more dynamic way, that is, the ethical benefits generated by it. Therefore, it is necessary for us to think about the relationship between the economics of sensible, aesthetic economics and market economy, especially since we should be conscious that the writing of the avant-gardist movement itself is the operation of creating "disinterested interest."

However, we can say that the 'absence of form' in the avant-garde movement has two levels. One is the need to abolish previous forms, and the other is to point to the sublime 'nothing to do with form' through various experiments. The avant-gardist movement could claim 'newness,' only through the aspirations (benefit or interest) of 'nothing.' Therefore, we can say that the writing of the avant-gardist movement is the writing creating "sublime," a way to dissociate the existing structure of sensible and call for the reconfiguration-to-come. In short, writing during the art movement or in the manifesto puts art in front of a bifurcation of a temporality (or time), because in the practice of an ethical judgment, the writing always could generate imagination of the future work or project, and under the guide of words the imagination could let memories of experience away from the existing dispositif of interests in paradox or schizophrenic way.

If understanding the relationship between avant-gardist stories of contemporary art and the 'people' uniquely through the new ideas or creativity in the writing, it's certainly not enough, or it's limited if we understand the writing only with the expression of text or

meaning. At least in the development of modern and contemporary art, 'writing' is not only the carrier of feelings or concepts but also the ability to connect with other carriers and create relationships between different carriers. Rethinking writing experience and actions through artistic experiences won't be a manifesto with writing. Even if 'literary' alone covers already a lot of things, there is also the logic, time order or structure drawn by words, and the physical space of writing, virtual space affected by writing, in additional, the reading and writing as expression, action or documenting, social relationship and spatial relationship of reading, writing media and media writing, writing is archiving, etc. ... When visual, audial perceptions, experience models, media interpretations, documentations, and archiving that constitute the important aspects of contemporary art, are connected to the considerations and conceptions of writing in various art projects, we will find that the writing becomes more than expression in these projects, because the writing as a particular way to construct perceptions and to interact and collaborate with creative practices in different procedures, could generate the multi-layers of perception and the perceptive dynamic with context links.

Prosaicalization of Human Stories

If we look back at the practice of 'writing' in the visual experiences in contemporary art in Taiwan, it is inevitably the writing of 'story.' However, after a long period of martial law and the consistent superiority of commercial media in Taiwan, the 'human story' of different individuals seems more precious. And it is also the living resource often mobilized by artists. The operation of the 'human story' in contemporary art develops in general into cultural narratives based on research and image poetics based on the recording.

The former can be represented by Tang Huang-chen's *I Go Travelling* performance and trans-media project (1999–2015), while the latter develops more and more as a technological painting on which the human world and stories disappear. Tang Huang-chen tried to link the narrative suggestion of family photos to her travel practice, and because of the immediacy of performing, the narrative became more and more fragmented even close to delirious on the one hand, corresponding to the still time of family's commemorative moment and travel gazing moment. But on the other hand, it is more and more inclined to the grand narrative by quoting epics. In the end, the arrangement and flow of speeches and words in 'space' became her way out of dealing with this entangled narrative, which has achieved the wonder of contemporary art *Ulysses' Machine*.

But what can be used as an example of connecting two ends after the 1990s, is undoubtedly Chen Chieh-jen's video plan since *Lingchi* (2002). In this video, he dealt with the narrative of historical photos on one hand, and he sneaked the protest workers as extras and the still images of political injustice sites during the White Terror into the film through

hidden ways. This video becomes the foreshadowing of a series of modern historical narratives that he later handled. Like *Factory trilogy* (2003–2006), the narrative in videos is an extended fiction based on the real stories of the workers' movements and situations, and the fictive performance is operated by the artist as a virtual practice of history. Therefore, we can say that he tried to link extended fiction and realization of action (laboring) based on historical truth to the image superposing epics and documentaries. Borders of Empire series (2008–2010) brought social investigation (acquisition of human stories) and scenic reconstruction (extended fiction) closer up, and the big change in these videos is that the spatial condition of the site and the stories of participants constitute the important elements of content. Such development until *Happiness Building* (2012) and *Realm of Reverberations* (2015), we can see that on the one hand, the traces of acquisition of stories become more and more evident, and at the same time, the narrative is introduced into the real spaces of filmmaking. In the practice of Chen Chieh-jen, we can see that artist has multiplied the carrier of human stories, certainly not unreasonable multiplicity, but presented as a social connection through specific relationships.

Leo Liu's *Walking School* (2004–2012) is initiated under the consideration that the people in the city have forgotten many stories and events in history, and tries to evoke new physical practices and exchange of community via human stories. Among all kinds of strangeness and accidents by passing and facing the landscape, the participants try to develop and differentiate the historical narratives, and to form a new human story. A narrative aesthetic that does not rely on any visual reproduction or solely on text. This may be a very particular example of narrative aesthetics in Taiwan.

Then in 2008, Hsu Chia-wei's *Story of Heping Island* and Yu Cheng-ta's *She is My Aunt*. Their creative methods for human stories mainly rely on the real materials on the gap and re-connection between image and sound. The images refer to the scenic realities, while the over-voice and story are fictive. Hsu Chia-wei's fiction is often a kind of poetic fable, while Yu Cheng-ta is a current instant discourse. The narrative space created by 'distanciation of voice and image' undoubtedly has strengthened the position of the image (an aestheticization) in the development of the later works of two artists, and the stories are increasingly dependent on politically correct interpretations of history or social recognition. Otherwise, the series of *Sea Cucumber*, *King of Seafood*, and *Acanthus King* of Fuhsin Han Studio connect the sub-narrative of sci-fi culture of memes to the daily metaphors of physical labor, then opened up a sci-fi narrative which creates a quotidian implosion through laboring. This narrative develops in a completely opposite direction to the aforementioned distanciation of voice and image. Therefore, Wu Chi-yu develops after then the science fiction and myth narrative projected from the microscopic of daily life, and an experiential

narrative of Li Cheng-liang tries to combine science fiction and daily physical sensation through the moon landing project.

In addition, Huang Bo-chi's *Five Hundred Lemon Trees* (2013–) cites the human stories of 'small-holder farming economy' as a starting point of the project, linking the moral discourse of social enterprise-like with the personal emotional narrative of family, and integrating relationships in art projects with writing and publishing. Therefore, what we see in the exhibition is the conceptual installation of the product and the desks (pedestal) with documents. The story is divided into the explanation of works and the publication of stories. The former is the recited note, while the latter is occupied by the intimate story of a performer (farmer). In terms of narrative, it is an emotional privatization of practical knowledge. This tendency of privatization also includes Kao Jun-honn's *Ruin Image Crystal Project* (2014) marks the enthusiasm of contemporary art for 'history' and 'field investigation.' Based on many historical sites with traces of events during the Cold War to globalization, the behavioral practice of revisiting, and then the apprehension and feeling of the artist's own body, then the most fundamental description of a scenic place. What he completed is a triple narrative that reflects the 'existence' complex of contemporary democrats. The first one is the human story in the database, the other is the 'private story' that he has investigated, and the third is the mysterious, implicated visual traces. We can say that it is a highly pathetic ideological operation. But it is really different from the narrative space created by Hsu Chia-wei's and Yu Cheng-ta's 'distanciation of voice and image' (the former is an ambiguous poetic image, and the latter is often anatomy of the schizophrenic state of daily discourse). It is a high degree superposition of actions of voice and image.

Su Yu-hsien's *Hua-Shan-Qiang* (2014) can be considered as another fictional superposition of triple narratives, mainly human stories of democratization, colonial cultural stories, and artisan work stories. But his superposition remains many embarrassing and breaking points. Comparing to Kao Jun-honn, he expresses more paradox, helplessness, and flexibility. But at the same time, he applied this multi-layered narrative as 'knowledge archaeology' to the visual 'materials' involved in the religious ceremony and narration. We can say that he touched the atmosphere of cluster of narratives like Chen Chieh-jen and Chang Wen-hsuan. However, in *Hua-Shan-Qiang*, the 'sponge-like' colorful scene combines (stratify) research, reading, and writing into a moving image scenography of the sublime. The same 'stratification' can also be seen in a 'stratified narrative' attempting to use 'depth of field-superposition' in *Singing from the Grave* that Li Hsu-pin recently extended his research on 'landscapes after disaster.' Continuing thinking of the 'stratified narrative,' we can also see that Chang Wen-hsuan and Tseng Po-hao, two young artists, deal with narratives in completely different ways. The former transforms the stratification into an intensive gender narrative space, where the 'publishing' functions as an artistic practice. The latter re-

disposed the stratification in the site of field investigation and performance space, and compressed the stratification into the body of a rapper musician of solo. These two artists are special because they do not 'reproduce' stories in the name of historical justice (the 'ctrl + c / ctrl + v' stories in the Internet era are actually the murder of the story).

In other words, from the perspective of art practices of these artists, the difference between narrative and archive is not the difference between fiction and evidence, but rather a deeper entanglement and dialectics. However, the large combination of figures, images, and 'writings' makes the 'prosaic turn' in recent years, but it must not be confused with the mistranslation of 'essay,' because this is the most terrifying and pseudo-reading feature in recent years. In such a 'prosaic turn' in particular between 2014–2018, most artists who involve in political issues and historical archives, seem to be satisfied with the surficial 'touch,' while and the allusion caused by 'touch' often transforms into a narcissistic imagination, more precisely a narcissistic empathy for the other (such a term does not deliberately point to negative judgment).

1) The massive collection of different mediums and the extraction of online information are elements of the prosaicalization in many works, and use their own experiences and sensibilities as the axis of narrative and the limit of archiving, or introducing many fragmental traces of life into the daily landscape and daily materials of huge urban structure. Undoubtedly, the superposition of archiving and prosaicalization exaggerates a kind of bigness and emptiness. 2) In addition, the imagination of landscape and topology launched by geographic data in paper, on internet, or in the writing (archive) expresses its fictive and fragmental through narratives related to one's own experience or decision, and allows the emergence of fictionality when our body enters the real world. It means that texts, archives, and databases become the components of prose when they penetrate through one's experiences; 3) Making alterations of data and archives as prosaicalization, means implanting the weight and characteristics of their own existence in the processing and change of this quality. So, the database or archives become the entrances to the empirical world, but it has also returned to various 'touches' that have been fantasized in prosaic writings and installations.

It is true that many writings as archives have become the material for many artists to develop their recognition and imagination. It is indeed obvious that these artists did not attempt to enter the archives in order to capture the meeting of history and reality but immerge oneself in the Ego after 'touching' the archives. Writing as a technique in the performance of contemporary art in Taiwan, copied archive as true-disenchantment has indeed been excessively, quickly, and extensively transformed into 'materials.' However, in the reorganization and arrangement of material, the narrative is obviously completely replaced by the self-prosaicalization. From the above-mentioned deliberation and analysis,

we are in-between of the digital life where we inform ourselves as 'data' and the 'archive' where we project ourselves to the other and the 'autrui.' The operation of 'prosaicalization' is like a kind of redemption under the double impossibility of reality and truth, when we face the disintegration and fragmentation of narrative.'

* "On the noble" (De Sublime), co, Belin Poche , 1988 (2009), 211 .