

辯證的肉身之鏡—關於曾建穎個展「木與夜孰長」

文 | 沈裕昌

曾建穎在 2022 年 12 月於「亞紀畫廊」舉辦的個展「木與夜孰長」，展題典出《墨經》。為破名家「合同異」之說，《墨經》詳加析辨各種「同」、「異」，並指出「異類不比，說在量」，異類之間不能互相比較，因為計量標準根本不同。「木與夜孰長」，即為「異類謬比」之一例。辯者之徒，之所以好作詭辭，非欲藉此亂紀惑眾。「萬物畢同畢異」之說，終是為了「去尊」、「偃兵」，使持論者能「汎愛萬物」、「兼愛天下」。墨者之徒，雖亦言「兼愛」、「非攻」，然其言務智，其文務察，故以「同異之辯」駁之。

然而，樹木與黑夜，真的不能比較長短嗎？陳傳興在《木與夜孰長》的序言中自問：「比較長短，是尺度廣延，還是時間。如果時間向度算進去，木與夜孰長？」「夜」似在時間之類，然地球之自轉，仍為物質在空間中之運動；「木」似在空間之類，然樹木之生長，仍為物質在時間中之運動。「夜」與「月」、「年」相比，仿若一瞬；然若與「山」、「川」相比，則地周萬里，又何其長也！「木」與「山」、「川」相比，或如秋毫；然若與「月」、「年」相比，則樹齡千歲，又何其長也！「木」與「夜」，其異類乎？

曾建穎在訪談中表示，他在這次展覽中，思考的是「比較」與「度量」的問題。他認為像「木與夜孰長」這般的極端對比，看似不可比較的兩樣東西，其實是可以被並置思考的。特別是藉由圖像的「並置」進行「比較」，反而可以使不同事物間之「相似性」與其「差異的意義」，被多面向地折射而出。因此，對他而言，這種「比較」並不是「斷裂」，而是「跳躍」。與「斷裂」相比，「跳躍」仍在某種「尺度」之內。但「尺度」要如何「度量」？這就涉及其創作的工夫論問題。

我認為曾建穎的展題雖然沿用了《墨經》的經典命題，但是他的創作實踐卻已對此命題進行了相當程度上的改寫。「木與夜孰長」，在他的創作中，已不再是「木」與「夜」孰長的問題；而是「木」與「夜」之間，其「類」之「異」，跨度究竟能有多長的問題。例如，〈青煙〉、〈丹霞〉、〈火炬〉，即以煙雲霧霞、重巖峻嶺、烈焰火舌等自然地景或現象，「比」之於鬢髮鬚眉

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等身體部位或菸頭、花束等手持物。當然，這種圖像上的比較，確實能夠營造出某種讓人沈吟玩味的複雜意涵，時而幽默，時而諷刺。

例如菸頭的尺寸，被放大為炎巖，喚起了吸菸者們凝視指尖的星火之光時，專注目光與鬆弛心理的對比感受。百合的花瓣，被描繪為竄動的火舌，則讓輕簡的包裝與傳情達意的符號，忽然被賦予火炬般的沈重感與烈焰般的壓迫感，喚起了收到花束者備感壓力的情緒。儘管這類通過對比生產辯證意涵的圖像，稍有不慎便易流於導向特定意涵的勸諭畫。但是曾建穎卻能通過圖像的辯證張力，與意義的懸疑不定，來避免此危險。關鍵之處，還在於其造形。



曾建穎, 丹霞, 2022, 紙本設色、墨、礦物顏料, 137.5 x 70 cm

曾建穎非常擅於使用「凹凸法」，並賦予此千年技法以一全新的表達方式。傳統的「凹凸法」，是使用暈染法來描繪物象表面凹凸起伏的繪畫技法。然而，曾建穎的「凹凸法」所描繪的，卻不是靜態的物象隆起，而是動態的擠壓張力。每次看到像〈斜陽〉這樣的人物造形，我都會想起因

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為伏貼在透明玻璃櫥窗後而擠壓變形的孩童面容。這些人物，總是有著淡漠的表情，但是在虯結的肌肉下，卻似乎暗藏著洶湧而無盡的致命欲望，與壓抑而無端的瘋狂情緒。



曾建穎, 斜陽, 2022, 紙本設色、墨、礦物顏料, 137 x 95 cm

肌肉之間似乎維持著危險的平衡，以支撐人模人樣的表情。但在頃刻之間即可能因為無端的情緒變化，而使平衡潰散為如〈莞爾〉與〈歡顏〉般猙獰而非人的面容。這種由肌肉圖像散發出的、強大的擠壓張力，不只出現在條塊狀的肌肉之間，也出現在圖像與畫面之間。畫家裝裱時慣用的透明壓克力罩，似乎就要被鼓脹的肌肉團塊擠壓至浮凸變形。此外，這些幾近赤裸的人物，對於身上僅剩的飾物，似乎有著異於常人的執著。這些金屬與珍寶，不但如〈珍珠刑〉般招陷、如〈珍寶〉般箍束、如〈天體系〉般穿刺著肉身，更因為穿戴者被描繪得表皮繭結、肌肉痙攣，而使這些飾品更顯異常沉重，形同枷鎖。

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曾建穎, 珍寶, 2022, 紙本設色、墨、礦物顏料、金箔、銀箔、黑箔, 100 x 90 cm

這種如滿弓般令人屏息的表面平衡，與在下方歧走裂變的潛勢暗流，在曾建穎的畫作中，不只可用來觀看皮膚與肌肉之間的關係，也可用來思考外在表情、姿勢與內在心理感受之間的關係。前者多用以處理人與器物的關係，後者則多用以處理人與人以及動物的關係。例如〈悠閒〉中的人物在沙發上戲犬而臥，本為悠閒之樂事。然而人物斜嘴而笑的表情、賁張的肌肉、壓制的姿勢，與犬隻掙掙的表情、掙扎的動作，卻毫不悠閒，反而讓人想起親密關係中令人心疲的角力，甚至扭曲的虐戀快感。〈挨拶〉中如狐裘般圈圍人物頸項的犬隻，身體以不可思議的曲度彎折，讓人物的表情如受外力強使之然，更形勉強刻意。犬隻吐舌舔鼻的表情與肛門並現，則如其人諂媚與嫌惡並見之複雜表情。



曾建穎 挨摻, 2021, 紙本設色、墨、礦物顏料, 78 x 110 cm

繪畫是靜態的媒介。因此，如何延長觀者駐足於畫作前的時間，一直是畫家必須思考與面對的課題。除了以圖像營造出探索不盡的意涵外，更重要且直接的問題就是如何透過造形處理生命感。曾建穎非常熟悉東亞傳統繪畫的造形手法，他筆下的人物看似強烈變形，但卻總能以同一的節奏和差異的韻律，與畫面中的背景統一起來。然而，值得注意的是，其造形的節奏與韻律完全不是來自線條，而是來自塊面。當然，在某種意義上，我們或許也可以把他的造形，看成某種以雙鉤的方式表達的、膨脹成塊面的「線條」，但是無論如何我們必須承認，這種實為塊面的「線條」，完全不是中鋒式的書寫，而更接近於側鋒式的切削營造。有趣的是，他卻以這種側鋒式的切削，去處理如玉筋篆般圓轉盤結的流動造形，因此得以形成某種如篆書碑刻般勁挺綿長、卻又不見中鋒痕的雙鉤式「線條」。

他在塊面中央做的暈染，雖即「凹凸法」，卻讓人想起浮雕或拓碑的痕跡。因此，我甚至難以將他畫面上的線條稱作「勾勒」。他透過勾描線條所包夾出的塊面，幾乎不可稱作「平面」。因為，那已不再是一個可以用幾何定義的、靜態的封閉空間，而是一個充滿辯證張力的、動態的力量團塊。因此，與其說他的畫面造形，像線條膨脹後的篆書碑刻拓本，不如說更像是泥條盤築而成的土瓦當，其中不斷玩味著視覺與觸覺的離合關係。然而，我卻更願意將曾建穎的畫中人物視為一辯證的肉身之鏡，其上並置著各種差異的圖像與意涵，投映著蓄勢待發的力量與情緒，讓人在想像中以幻視使圖像變形，同時屏息凝神以對。此刻，畫面上的肉身，不再是遮蔽心靈的屏障，而

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是洞視內在的明鏡。當我們看著畫面時，所看到的似乎不再只是時代的典型人物，而直就是我們自身。

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A Dialectical Body of Mirror—Tseng ChienYing 's Solo Exhibition

What is Longer, A Tree or A Night

Article by Yu-Chang Shen

In December 2022, Tseng ChienYing will be holding a solo exhibition titled *What is Longer, A Tree or A Night* at Each Modern, featuring a theme that alludes to the *Mohist Canon*. In challenging the School of Logicians' thought of "similarity and difference unity," the *Mohist Canon* analyzed various types of similarities and differences before concluding that heterogeneous qualities cannot be compared due to fundamentally distinct standards of measurement. Hence the determination of whether a tree is longer than a night is exactly an example of fallacy comparison. These debates are not about making false statements to confuse the general public. Ultimately, the theory of "all things being equal" aims to "remove social class" and "halt military forces" for followers to "love everything in this world." Mozi's followers spoke of the concepts of "universal love" and "anti-war," which still need to be examined from the perspective of the similarity-difference debate.

However, is it really impossible to compare trees and nights on a scale of length? Tsun-Shing Chen asked a rhetorical question in the foreword for *What is Longer, A Tree or A Night*: "Is the length comparison based on an extension of scale or time? Let's think about which is longer in the dimension of time—a tree or a night?" While "night" is a temporal concept and "tree" is a spatial concept, they both involve the motion of matter through space and time in the respective senses of Earth rotation and arboreal growth. A night is only a flash compared to a month or year, but it can be longer than a mountain or plain considering the Earth's circumference over its rotation. A tree may be insignificant compared to a mountain or plain, but a 1000-year tree is much longer than a month or year! Are trees and nights really heterogenous from each other?

In an interview, Tseng elaborated on his interpretation of "comparison" versus "measurement" in this exhibition. He believes that seemingly incompatible objects in extreme comparisons such as "What is Longer, A Tree or A Night" can actually be juxtaposed. Particularly, the similarities and distinctive meanings of different qualities can be examined from multiple perspectives by a comparison through graphical juxtaposition. To Tseng, such a type of comparison is not a contradiction but rather a measurable leap of change. The scale of this measure is a matter of creative self-cultivation.

Although Tseng's exhibition is an allusion to the classic *Mohist Canon*, he has creatively adapted the proposition in his work. Instead of comparing the length of a tree versus night, his work examines the breadth across the "type" and "heterogeneity" of these two objects. For example, *Resurgence*, *Mnesia*, and *Ace of Wands* feature

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natural landscapes or phenomena such as foggy mist, steep mountains, and burning flames in contrast to body parts like sideburns, eyebrows, or handheld objects like cigarette butts and flower bouquets. These graphic comparisons certainly create thought-provoking, complex connotations that are humorous yet satirical at the same.

For example, cigarette butts are magnified to the size of rock cliffs to highlight the contrast between smokers' focused gaze and relaxed mental state while looking at the cigarette sparks. Alternatively, lily petals are depicted as moving flames that endow flowers, originally a simple symbol of affection, with stress-provoking burden and oppression. Although this type of dialectical graphics can be easily misinterpreted as connotation-oriented persuasive paintings, Tseng manages to avoid such misleading interpretation through the tension of graphical dialectics and suspense. The key to this approach lies in the artist's styling.



Tseng ChienYing, Amnesia, 2022, mineral pigment color and ink on paper, 137.5 x 70 cm

With a specialization in the “concave-convex method,” Tseng expresses this thousand-year old technique in a whole new way. The traditional concave-convex method is one that depicts undulating surfaces through smudging. In contrast, Tseng uses the concave-convex method to paint dynamic tensions of compression

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rather than static undulating objects. The characters in *Twilight* always remind me of the twisted facial expressions when children squeeze their faces against clear glass windows. Despite the indifference on their faces, these characters seem to possess infinite surges of desires and suppressed, spontaneous madness under their muscular skin.



Tseng ChienYing, Twilight, 2022, mineral pigment color, ink and gold foil on paper, 137 x 95 cm

The muscles maintain a dangerous balance under seemingly normal human facial expressions. However, this balance can be instantly disrupted by emotional changes, as expressed by the ferocious, non-human faces in *Hoax* and *Parody*. The powerful tension of compression from these muscular graphics not only comes from bulky muscles, but also appears everywhere on the images. The beefy muscles seem to be coming out of the artist's clear acrylic frames. Furthermore, these nearly naked characters express an unusual obsession with the remaining accessories on their bodies. These metal pieces and jewelry resemble heavy shackles that either pinch, restrict, or puncture the characters' callus and spasming skin in *The Unbearable Lightness*, *Precious*, and *Metaphysics* respectively.

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Tseng ChienYing, Precious, 2022, mineral pigment color, Ink, gold foil, silver foil and black foil on paper, 100 x 90 cm

The breathtaking surface tension and the vigorous undercurrent in Tseng's paintings not only reflect the relationship between skins and muscles, but also provokes thinking on the relationship among facial expressions, postures, and internal feelings. While the former is often used to associate humans and utensils, the latter is applied to express human-human and human-animal interactions. In *Couch Chocolate*, the character is lying on the couch and playing with a dog. However, the otherwise enjoyable activity features smirky character expressions, bulky muscles, oppressive postures, and a fiercely struggling dog. As opposed to creating a leisurely atmosphere, the painting reminds viewers of frustrating wrestles and distorted heartbreaks in intimate relationships. In *Greetings*, the character appears to be quite distressed with a dog curling around and constricting his neck like a fox fur scarf. With a visible anus, the dog sticks out its tongue to touch the nose, displaying a complex mixture of flattery and disgust.

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Tseng ChienYing, Greetings, 2021, mineral pigment color and ink on paper, 78 × 110 cm

Since paintings are expressed through a static medium, it is an ongoing challenge for artists to attract viewers to their paintings for as long as possible. Other than graphically creating endless connotations for viewers to explore, the more important and direct challenge is how to display life through character styling. Tseng is very familiar with the styling techniques of traditional east Asian paintings. Despite looking intensely deformed, his characters can always harmonize with the image background like playing a distinct melody on the same tempo. It should be noted that the tempo and melody of styling are based on blocks instead of lines. In a way, perhaps we can think of the blocks in his style as a double-hooked expansion of lines. However, these blocks of “lines” are not drawn using centered tips (*zhongfeng*), but in slanted-tips (*cefeng*) instead. Interestingly, Tseng applied such slanted-tips to the round, fluid shapes of jade chopstick script (*yujin zhuan*), forming long, double-hooked lines that resemble seal script-like inscriptions with no traces of any centered tips.

By applying the concave-convex method, Tseng’s smudging in the center reminds viewers of reliefs or inscription rubbings. I do not classify the lines in Tseng’s paintings as “contour” because the blocks are barely two-dimensional or composed of geometrically static closed spaces anymore—they are dynamic, powerful blocks full of dialectical tension. Rather than a seal script-like inscription, Tseng’s image layout looks more like an eaves tile made of clay sticks that contemplates the visual and tactile relationship between separation and unity. Personally, I perceive Tseng’s characters as a dialectical body that mirrors a variety of images and connotations. Through imagination, viewers can visually transform the images by projecting energy and emotions into them and making careful observations. At that moment, the physical body in the painting is not

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a mind-blocking barrier anymore. When we look at the paintings, we see not the classic figures of our time but ourselves instead.

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