

## 民治議事廳的一道綑摺— 關於丁昶文的攝影「先知與北方」

文|簡子傑

去年九月中旬，我曾經到訪位於台南新營的民治議事廳，觀看由丁昶文與幾位藝術家友人共同參與的策展計畫「意識現場\_議事廳」，還記得當時因為這些大多回應了展覽空間的創作，讓我們這群遠道而來的觀眾不得不感知到空間的特殊性——作為過去台南縣議會所在的民治議事廳，因為縣市合併導致昔日的議事廳失去作用，現在民治議事廳雖仍有專人維護，卻失去了顯赫的代議政治地位，這棟見證了現代台灣民主歷程的建築，在丁昶文等人作品的牽引下，呈現出某種考現學現場的姿態，我們不是很確定是在看作品，還是見證了一段藝術之外的社會轉型過程。

政治氣氛的轉變不僅反映在建築過時的宮廷風格，同時也藉著行政區的重新劃分體現出不同的未來想像，台南縣新營於是從縣治所在還原成諸多地方中的其中之一，如果說風格與品味就是一種布爾迪厄（Pierre Bourdieu）意義下的區分（distinction），現在區隔場域與外面的界線已經模糊，廟殿風格的官舍褪去了高人一等的品味，擋住去路的汽車所佔據的毋寧是司機大哥眼中的停車位，而非通往代議士行使權力的舞台的通道，丁昶文告訴我，過去的民主殿堂現在變成社區居民的休憩場所。

### 前世今生

然而，就像作為展覽場域的民治議事廳需要藉由這些敘述性的前理解，要深入閱讀丁昶文的攝影「先知與北方」系列時，也必須要回到他當初在「意識現場\_議事廳」所展出的兩件錄像裝置——《先知》與《北方》。這兩件分別設置在議事廳個別房間的作品，不僅有著精鍊流暢的影像韻律，也藉由指向議事廳過往的物件，創造出一種介於紀錄與虛構的敘事姿態，作品本身像是在為我們導覽著民治議事廳的身世，同時這些故事又藉由「物」——取自議事廳本身或是其所欠缺的物，來對我們說話。

在《先知》一作中，丁昶文設定了一名青年的返鄉旅程，青年先是在一座有著折衷風格的廢棄空屋中遊蕩，事實上，這棟位於台南學甲的建物原是在日治時代成長、而後在國民政府時代擔任民意代表的首任台南縣議會議長陳華宗所有，隨後影像又將我們帶回民治議事廳，青年在這裡不經意地遇到了收納在議事廳儲藏室的陳華宗塑像，但丁昶文的影像並未著墨於說明性的語言，關於陳華宗的雕像與那逐漸被時代遺忘的歷史，在作品中只是維持著物的低限姿態，為影片中的青年所移動，為丁昶文的影像所捕獲。

而《北方》一作，丁昶文則拍攝了一整套拉胚、製作陶器的過程，但這個最後完成的有著渾圓造形的陶器卻不是什麼雕塑動機下的產物，丁昶文參考了民治議事廳當初因風水之說而被撤除的建築元素：「寶頂」，對於這個早已逸失的寶頂的重新製作，像是要象徵性地恢復地方歷史的空缺，就如同《先知》指涉的首任縣議會議長，寶頂也是在歷史推進過程中偶然的失落之物，但這個看似為了填補歷史空缺的創作姿態，最後卻仍跳出了這個容易臆測的想像路徑，這是因為，被重製的「寶頂」並未回到它原來的位址，丁昶文基於創作者的權力將它轉型為花器，「寶頂」於是被放在一個昏暗

的房間，上面慵懶地插著一些植物。

不同於一種近年來在台灣當代藝術中常見的「歷史主義」傾向，在這種傾向中，藝術家除了要先進行一連串田野調查工作，對象最好還要涉及有待改正的現代性經驗，最後則要讓藝術成為使得失落之聲得以呈現的真工具——然而，丁昶文的《北方》與《先知》雖然關注著失落與部分的殖民—現代性經驗，也透過嚴密的田調過程進行研究，但他所挑選的空間、物與對象，卻有一種奇特的中間調，好像總是被懸置在一個不是太重卻也稱不上輕盈的感性狀態中間：他的影像敘事其實也並未在首任議長於白色恐怖年代曾被關押判死、其後卻投入了當政者陣營，乃至後來深獲民心的精彩故事；而寶頂之於風水的關係，或許也不過是地方自治史中一個找不到所指的能指；失去往日功能的民治議事廳，是一個有點讓人遺憾卻無須動用道德情感予以注視的他方。

### 「先知與北方」的中間調

但經由這種中間調，我們也才比較能夠獲得「先知與北方」系列攝影一個恰如其份的觀看位置。中間調或是作為轉場的影像單元，是為了過渡到下一個場景的非敘事性調度。中間調或許什麼都不是，彷彿只是作者或我們為了獲得短暫卻直接的凝視，為了讓物重獲它在象徵秩序以外的主權所附帶產生的影像效果。中間調一向隱含在每一張訊息清楚的臉龐的暗部，我們會察覺到某人臉部肌肉細微的抽搐而自以為碰觸到心靈內部的真實。中間調是當我們意識到媒介自身的質地而非看見那總是承載著什麼樣訊息的影像時所會遭遇的東西。羅蘭·巴特 (Roland Barthes) 曾經藉著所謂的「鈍義」 (le sens obtus)，以愛森斯坦 (Sergei Eisenstein) 的電影截圖來論述電影性。

當然，作為曾到訪民治議事廳也看過《先知》與《北方》錄像的觀眾，這一共12幅的攝影就像丁昶文為其「意識現場」創作計畫所進行的側拍或劇照，例如我們會在《倉庫》中看到在儲藏室中被遮蓋的陳華宗塑像，而《故居》與《statue》則將我們帶往返鄉青年與這段幾近佚失的議事廳故事的遭遇，《花器》與《黃光》當然指涉著《北方》遺失的寶頂。

另一方面，我們卻也發現，帶著前作記憶的觀看固然有助於辨識被攝物的主題意義，但這些多半透過50mm標準鏡拍攝的影像卻因為定格而逃離了前作若有似無的意義鋪陳。儘管鏡頭有時就正對著前作的物，但過於方正的框取卻切斷了物與周遭環境、乃至與影像敘事間的前後文關係，又或者如《議事廳》雖然在標題上直接對應著議會建築，觀者卻只是看到老式風格的會議室一隅，這些維護良好的皮椅反射著光源，讓人不禁聯想「北方文藝復興」那纖細描繪著日常事物的西方繪畫傳統，物透過攝影流露出質樸的形式感，貼近於物卻不指涉，一如前述「中間調」展現的與意義間的模糊關聯。

### 綑摺

民治議事廳現在已經轉化為社區活動中心與「創新育成基地」，過去區隔內與外、決策與執行、代議士與普通市民的政治界線也逐漸消失，而「先知與北方」就如丁昶文先前在「意識現場」的創作，見證了這棟建築從政治權力的中心蛻變為「中間調」的過程，在這個過程中，過去象徵著威權的官舍解除了排他性的管制，「意識現場」也

像搭著這波平權順風車帶我們遊歷了一遍議場與其逐漸被埋沒的歷史，但作為前作的側拍或劇照，「先知與北方」，又因為它靜止不動的影像狀態，以及它投注於物本身的姿態，強化了「中間調」那習於岔出既有敘事軸線的「中立性」。

只是過去這種「中立性」像是為了維繫形式的自主，現在則成為意義過度飽滿的空間的訊息的一道綑摺，這個在故事與故事的行進間忽然的凹陷使我們逃脫了意義表達，只是看我們是要繼續向內挖掘，直到穿透所有時代積累的疊層，還是要對待這道綑摺如詩，讓我們的目光停留在它轉瞬間不再向我們傾訴的物的表面。

A Pleat in the MinJih Civic Center. On TING Choang-Wen's Photographic Works Prophet and North

By JIAN Tzu-Chieh

In mid-September, 2018, I visited the MinJih Civic Center in Xinying, Tainan to see the project "Site of Consciousness: Council Room" curated and produced by Ting Choang-Wen and fellow artists. I remember, due to the fact that the works mostly responded to the venue, we visitors from afar could not but perceived the specificity of the space. Due to county-city integration, MinJih Civic Center which used to be the site of Tainan County Council now does not function anymore. The Center has lost its glorious status of representative democracy despite regular maintenance. Guided by the works of Ting Choang-Wen and others, the building attesting to modern Taiwan's democratization process came to bear the attributes of a modernological site. We are no longer sure if we were looking at the works or attesting to a social transformation process beyond art.

The change in political atmosphere is reflected by the building's outdated palatial style. Meanwhile, a different imagination about the future is incarnated through the re-organized administration division. Xinying in Tainan County was thus restored from the site for county governmental office into one of many places. If style and taste mean "distinction" as defined by Pierre Bourdieu, now the boundary distinguishing the site from the outside is blurred. The temple- or palace-like official residence is deprived of some superior taste. Cars blocking the way rather occupy what are parking lots in the eyes of drivers, instead of a passage leading to the stage on which elected representatives exerted power. Choang-Wen told me the palace of democracy in the past has now become a recreation spot for the community.

The Past Life and This Life

However, just as the venue at the MinJih Civic Center requires such narrative understanding in advance, an in-depth reading of Ting Choang-Wen's photographic series Prophet and North also requires a return to two video installations he showed in "Site of Consciousness: Council Room" earlier on—Prophet and North displayed in separate rooms in the council room. With their condensed and smooth visual rhythms, they create a narrative gesture between documentary and fiction by pointing to past objects of the council room. The works per se seem to provide a tour about the background of the MinJih Civic Center while the stories talk to us through "objects"—drawn from the council room itself or those lacked from it.

In Prophet, Ting Choang-Wen sets the story of a youth's journey back home, starting by the latter roaming in an abandoned house in an eclectic style. In fact, the building at Xuejia, Tainan was owned by Chen Huazong who grew up during the Japanese Rule and became an

elected representative and the first chair of the Tainan County Council during the reign of Kuomintang. Later, the images bring us back to the MinJhih Civic Center; the youth encounters incidentally a Chen Huazong statue in the storage room of this center. Yet Ting Choang-Wen's images do not rely on an explanatory language. Regarding the Chen Huazong statue and the history gradually falling into oblivion with the passage of time, these images merely remain the minimal gesture of objects in the works and moved by the youth in the film, which is captured by Ting Choang-Wen's images.

As for North, Ting Choang-Wen shot the entire process of embryo and pottery making. But the final pottery piece with a rounded shape is not a product of any sculptural motivation. Ting Choang-Wen refers to an architectural element removed from the MinJhih Civic Center due to the rumor about feng shui historically- regarding the "roof crown". A reproduction of the long-gone roof crown is like symbolically retrieving a lack in local history. Just like the first chair of the county council referred to in Prophet, the roof crown is also something lost incidentally during the course of history. But the creative gesture that seems to fill the historical lack eventually escapes an imagination path that is easy to speculate, for the reproduced roof crown does not return to its original place. Ting Choang-Wen transforms it into a vase through his power as a creator. The roof crown is thus placed in a dim room with few idle plants over it.

There is a common tendency of Historicism in Taiwan's contemporary art in recent years. Artists have to make a series of field surveys whose subjects ideally involve experiences of modernity that remain to be corrected. Finally, they should make art a tool of truth that allows lost voices to be represented. However, Ting Choang-Wen's North and Prophet differ from this tendency in that, although they concern with loss and some experience of colonization—modernity with studies carried out through thorough field survey process, the spaces, objects and subjects he chooses rather bear some strange midtone. They always seem to be suspended in a perceptual state that is not heavy yet cannot be termed as light either. His narration through images actually is not the amazing story about the first council chair who went through imprisonment and sentence to death in the period of White Terror before devoting to the camp in power and becoming a popular politician. However, the connection between the roof crown and the feng shui might just be a signifier in the history of local autonomy that cannot find what it signifies. The MinJhih Civic Center that lost its past function is an elsewhere somewhat regretful yet requiring no gaze of moral affection.

#### The Midtone of Prophet and North

Yet it is through such midtone that we better obtain a proper position of viewing the photographic series Prophet and North. The midtone might be a visual unit for transition, a non-narrative mis-en-scène aiming at a passage to the next scene. The midtone might not be anything at all, as if it were just the artist or us wanting to have some temporal yet direct gaze, so as to re-endow additionally generated visual effects to the objects by the sovereignty beyond the symbolic order. The midtone is always implied in the dark area on each visage with clear messages. We perceive the slight muscle twitches of someone's face and think we touch some reality deep within. The midtone is when we are aware of the medium's textuality rather than what we encounter in looking at images which always contain messages. Roland Barthes discoursed on cinematicity through what he termed as "le sens obtus" illustrated with stills from Sergei Eisenstein's films.

Certainly, as a visitor to the MinJhih Civic Center and also a viewer of the videos titled Prophet and North, the photography series comprising 12 works is like behind-the-scenes photographs or film stills Ting Choang-Wen shot for his Site of Consciousness project. For example, in Storage, we see a covered the the Chen Huazong statue in a storage room. As for Former Residence and Statue, they bring us to a homecoming youth's encounter with this almost lost episode of the council building. Vase and Yellow Light certainly refer to the lost roof crown in North.

On the other hand, however, we also find that although viewing with memories of the previ-

ous works facilitates the recognition of thematic meanings of the objects shot, these images mostly shot with a 50mm standard objective still escape the vague connections of meaning with the previous works due to the stills. Although the objective sometimes just stares at objects from the previous works, the rather square frame disconnects the objects from their surroundings as well as their contextual relations with the narrative of images. Similarly, in Council Room, although the title directly corresponds to the council building, the viewer only sees a corner of the old-style conference room. The well maintained leather chair reflects the source of light; we cannot but associate this with the Northern Renaissance, a tradition of painting in the West which delicately depicting daily things. Through photography, the objects reveal some plain plasticity, which is close to the objects without referring to them, just like the vague links with meaning represented by the aforementioned “midtone”.

#### A Pleat

MinJhih Civic Center has now become a community activity center and an innovation incubation center. The political boundaries that used to distinguish the interior and the exterior, decision and implementation, elected representatives and general citizens also gradually disappear. Prophet and North are similar to Ting Choang-Wen’s previous works in "Site of Consciousness", attesting to the transformation process of the building from a center of political power to the “midtone”, in which the control of exclusivity of the official residence that used to be a symbol for authority was lifted. Site of Consciousness also seems to bring us on a tour around the council building and its history gradually buried along with the current wave of equal rights. Yet as behind-the-scenes photographs or film stills of the previous works, Prophet and North enhance the “neutrality” of the “midtone” which often deviates from existing narrative line due to their static status as images and the gestures they invested in objects themselves.

Only that such “neutrality” in the past seemed to maintain the autonomy of form whereas not it becomes a pleat of the message from a space overloaded with meanings. The hiatus between the progression of diverse stories suddenly makes us escape signification. The decision is left to us regarding whether to continue digging within until we penetrate all the layers accumulated across the times, or to treat this pleat like treating poetry, letting our gaze stay on the surfaces of the objects which they suddenly stop to recount to us.