「半遺忘」的圖像生命
——關於陳建榮繪畫的幾個思考

文 陳寬育

在擺滿顏料、畫布、畫稿和許多模型玩具的工作空間進行的一場對話中，陳建榮說道：「我覺得自己是一個寫實畫家，不過不是那種傳統處理光影的寫實繪畫。我據實再現所見之物。」事實上，陳建榮那介於具象與抽象之間的繪畫風格是鮮明的；大量幾何式的建築意象、某個角落的城市風景等，都是人們對其作品的印象。我試著從陳建榮的對話表達中進一步追問，自稱「寫實畫家」的陳建榮其所見之物是什麼？什麼又是「據實再現」的真正意涵？

依循著「Landscape」、「Aircraft」、「Finders Keepers」三個系列的作品脈絡，本文大致可分成三個討論面向。首先，儘管陳建榮主要使用壓克力顏料和畫布創作，但我試著擴大「材料」的意涵，將所有集結、組裝成為繪畫的物件和影像都視為繪畫素材，進而從材料的效果所形成的風格，探究對於媒材選擇的思維，以及在畫布前每個創作當下的圖像感性。

同時，旁觀陳建榮作品生成過程的思索與程序，我似乎瞥見阿岡本眼中那「內在於自己卻又不屬於自己」的「守護神」（Genius）的體現。那是關於控制與失控、預期與非預期，以及陳建榮繪畫中許多裂縫、不完美細節、讓自己躲藏其中的纖細力量；這是相對於那類總是要求完整與精確的畫面表達之穿透與瓦解。守護神的存在形成兩極。在拋向守護神那屬於靈感的一方，以及回歸自身那屬於作者的權威，所謂創作便是對守護神的召喚與背離之間的張力，是守護神與自我兩者間對於「創造性」的署名者之爭奪與沉默，更是關於創作者的揭露、轉化和隱藏。

此外，也在探討陳建榮作品中的「繪畫—材料」，與「材料—繪畫」問題時，稍微帶到了「繪畫主體性」的問題。第三個面向，則以當代圖像充滿植物生命意象的分植（clone）、嫁接（graft）與其流變生命，從陳建榮對圖像的態度與其轉換成藝術作品的手法，將繪畫圖像視為當代以圖像分植表現的「生命—圖像」。

瓦解虛空

小說家卡爾維諾（Italo Calvino）在參訪佛羅倫斯觀景碉堡的梅洛蒂（Fausto Melotti）雕塑展時看見一群飛入碉堡的蜉蝣，於是他為碉堡和蜉蝣創造一段寓言式的對話。蜉蝣說：「我們以風所至之處為家，震動翅膀以測量時間。你說何謂存在？」「時間在

我身上流逝，而我依然在。」碉堡回答。蜉蝣回應道：「如果沒有我們，就只剩下無所不在的虛空，若想瓦解虛空，需要輕盈、快速、纖細的力量。」

在〈碉堡之蜉蝣〉中，卡爾維諾援引梅洛蒂的創作書《線條》裡的文字，述說藝術家與材料之間的合作與緊張關係，「對材料有愛，以及尊重。愛是熱情，也可能變成恨：材料的運用對手工型的藝術家而言是生氣勃勃的一齣戲。尊重則像是合法分居，材料可以爭取其權利，然後關係降到冰點。真正的藝術家既不愛也不尊重材料，雙方關係永遠在『試煉』中，一切都可以走向毀滅（例如達文西、米開朗基羅和他們的大理石雕刻作品）」卡爾維諾以寓言談論藝術作品之纖細，也觸及了創作材料的選擇與使用問題，而梅洛蒂的雕塑便是經常使用廉價脆弱的材料，例如細繩、卡紙、石膏、碎布、銅條、烏干紗等，雖然有著細膩柔軟異變，能快速建立起一個視覺世界的材質語言，卻也代表著這類雕塑作品的某種臨時性、易毀壞特質。

顯然，以繪畫為主要創作手法的陳建榮，其材料以壓克力顏料與畫布為主，因此，上述的例子並不是要說陳建榮的材料選擇眼光類似梅洛蒂。在這裡，由於繪畫是一種知性的歷程，我試著擴大關於「材料」的觀點，結合藝術家在作畫之前那些思想發生的眾多時刻，將其對素材的取捨與畫面構成的程序，做為看待構成陳建榮作品各種元素之理解方式。陳建榮的創作素材來源多樣，在那些包含著不同程度的隨機、纖細感知、意外、感觸、誤會、戲謔與易逝的素材來源中，往往也同時具有象徵著理性的線條、圖表、網格化圖像、硬邊格式與清晰的邊界等。在陳建榮拓開的那個繪畫的世界裡，平塗與髒污、蘊染與黑色直線、幾何與滲流、建構與剝落、格柵與爆破、文字與印痕、意外與控制、壓力與空白等，就像是一場眾多事態同時在發生的繪畫事件，一個宛若冷與熱持續流動與交換的能量狀態。

小把戲與守護神

「像是畫出影印紙草稿上摺線的小趣味，也可說是我的把戲」，陳建榮有許多玩弄材料與抵抗「應該畫些正經東西」的小把戲，是實驗、趣味、也是效果。像是提到蠟筆做為材料的那種未定狀態，永遠是粉末沾黏的未乾狀態，或者製造摺痕或裂縫效果的破壞肌理，陳建榮都試著用無酸白膠將這些狀態封存。這令我想起阿岡本（Giorgio Agamben）在提到瑞士作家羅勃・瓦澤（Robert Walser）以極度纖細的筆跡完成了豐富、密集且難以辨識的文本時指出，「這種孩子氣的激動是瓦澤在保衛其不可辨識性之境況中所感受到的豔麗的愉悅。」這種隱藏自己的方式，在阿岡本眼中就像是孩子在捉迷藏中獲得的特殊愉悅——不是因為最終會被找到，而是孩子們的愉悅來自躲藏這個行動。「這裡存在著一種不可比擬的快樂，一種特別的激動。而這種愉悅和這種慾望都是在孩子們秘密藏身處向其昭示的那獨在的榮光的守護者。」

守護神跟創作的關係高度密切，阿岡本談論的那個守護神可以具體化為這樣的姿勢：「在困惑與迷惘的時候手撫著前額，這樣的姿勢即是無意識地召回了崇拜守護神之儀式的姿態」。關於創作中的主體，我們應該把主體設想為一個張力構成的力場，其對立的兩極就是守護神與自我。守護神就是寓居載我們身上卻不屬於我們的東西，持續地達成妥協；因此變化的不是守護神，而是我們與他的關係，這關係在明亮清澈 luminous and clear 與朦朧晦澀 shadowy and opaque 之間轉變。守護神不僅是性的能量的擬人化（例如男人的 Genius 和女人的 Juno 兩者所展示的生產生命和使生命得以延續的豐饒），在某種意義上也是（創作者）個人的神聖化（divinization）。

陳建榮的作品其實也在隱藏、不可辨識性、「自我—非自我」的張力場中，持續結合又背離。他經常用來做為畫面元素的建築圖面、說明書、平面圖、組裝圖等，代表的是不容許錯誤的高度理性空間，但這些空間也同時寓涵著各種有待填滿，以及得以隱身其中的空白。在「Aircraft」系列中，飛行器的平面圖、玩具、說明書或其部件拆解圖，以及因模糊而帶有朦朧詩意的流動筆觸，不斷以隱晦又愛現的方式登場。這些玩具是與藝術家的生命經驗密切相關的圖像，或者說是「生活—創作—記憶」三位一體的繪畫母題（motif）。而綜觀陳建榮其他系列作品中所呈現的剪影、拼接、擦塗、重新組裝、挪用、轉印、修圖再輸出等手法，都有點像是躲迷藏的行動——在不承認被發現中等著被發現，在「不希望被看穿」與「疑似被看穿」的過程中具體化其存在，在暴露中設法隱藏，在隱藏中又成功現身。

繪畫的主體性

以往用來輔助繪畫的小物品，如膠帶、木條、影印稿，都成為陳建榮試圖處理的對象，對他而言，繪畫的問題感來自於形成一幅「被宣告完成的繪畫」的過程；也就是，什麼時候才算是開始畫一幅畫，又是何時能宣布完成？而繪畫過程中的種種大小行為，例如構思、疊加、清理、捨棄、擱置等不同階段之狀態，以及那些嚴肅和恍惚、疲累和專注；哪些屬於創作的步驟，哪些又只是日常生活？這些真的是可分開的嗎？

而那些關於隱身的小把戲，便是陳建榮的畫布表面上有許多張玉音所說的「創作上的『誤會』」，像是污痕、錯位、磨擦過頭的紙張的纖維、畫反了、剩餘角料的印痕、錯誤的筆觸等；某方面而言，這或許將成為「陳建榮的繪畫」得以脫離「陳建榮」而獲得的「繪畫主體性」。這種將繪畫賦予個性與思想的觀點，其實是一種投射，但它讓作品不只「在定義中叛逃」（張玉音語），也在藝術家的作者權威下逃逸。「我以前的作畫方式是不先畫素描，而是直接不斷在畫面上累積生成。但這樣的問題是，我比較難以言說畫的是什麼。」我想，陳建榮似乎也不是沒有過眼睜睜地看著作品在眼前逃逸自身的經驗。

繪畫有一個不同於創作者的「自身」聲明？法國藝術史學者于伯‧達米施（Hubert Damisch）曾將繪畫的筆觸（brushstroke）形容為展現繪畫的「主體性」（subjectivity）之所在。在達米施看來，不同於口語的語音，繪畫顯現的是針對眼睛的活動所留下之痕跡（traces），而這乃是經由筆觸的表現來達成。簡言之，在達米施那裡，繪畫是某種活動的痕跡，並透過此痕跡喚起繪畫的主體性；但是，這個主體性並不是畫家透過繪畫所展現或宣稱的屬於藝術家的主體性，而是說，這個繪畫的主體性有屬於繪畫「自身的論述」與「自身的敘事」。這番投射出繪畫有自己的想法、語言、個性，也就是繪畫宛如有生命、具備主體性的觀點，可看作是一種關於繪畫的「活力論」（Vitalism），而這其實也是許多法國藝術史學者如路易斯馬丁（Louis Martin）或迪迪─于伯曼（Georges Didi-Huberman）等人也都曾採取的觀點。

然而，繪畫與藝術家之間強烈的「索引性」（Indexicality）關係可謂各種藝術媒材之最，我覺得這樣的關係極為精妙，它表現出藝術家活動的痕跡，也同時指向藝術家的缺席，而涉及繪畫的主體性的看法某方面正來自這個缺席。在陳建榮的作品中，我認為這種索引性特質是更加強烈的，它不只是繪畫與藝術家之間的關係，在那裡，材料的索引性所形成的觀念更是作品的核心。

事實上，關於繪畫的「自主性」（autonomy）問題也多少搭接上形式主義繪畫的脈絡。甚至也可以說，在葛林伯格（Clement Greenberg）的「平面性」（Flatness）還原，以及麥可‧弗律德（Michael Fried）對「劇場性」（theatricality）與極限主義者的關於「物性」（objecthood）的「實在主義」（literalism）的批判中，這些的形式主義繪畫主題，繪畫之物彼此的互動、與環境的互動等，這段經典的繪畫史公案或許更能進一步成為「客體導向本體論」（Object Oriented Ontology, OOO）關於「關係性」的極佳凝視對象。但這不只是對葛林伯格和弗律德的再梳理，更是以「人」和「非人」之視野處理關於「感覺之物」（Sensual Objects）與「感覺的品質」（Sensual Qualities）等。所有的元素都不斷生成屬於自身的不連續的背景，一種無盡關係的模型，一種摩天輪中還有摩天輪的世界觀。

當然，把繪畫視為活力論者的投射（vitalist projections），或「客體導向論」者注目的主題，可以為繪畫做為「物的材料」與做為「圖像的內容」的古老課題之間，值得發起的一場重回聖地的再探查行動。但是在這裡，我打算從另一種角度來理解圖像的生命，即借助米契爾（W. J. T. Mitchell）的「生命─圖像」（bio-picture）觀點，將焦點從繪畫的本體論議題進一步聚焦在陳建榮處理圖像手法的問題上。

圖像分植與嫁接

「生命―圖像」是米契爾〈形象科學的四個基礎概念〉一文的主題之一,「生命―圖像」做為當代新版本的「圖像轉向」(pictorial turn),主要來自其圖像「複製/分植」(clone)問題。米契爾從「clone」的希臘文意義「薄片或細枝」(slip or twig)所意指的植物移植生命狀態,以及延伸的生物細胞生殖意義,米契爾將「分植」視為一個強力的隱喻,是「蘊含了深刻的倫理與政治意涵的生物學現實。」

「你可以懸掛一幅圖像(picture),但不能懸掛一個形象(image)。」從米契爾的名言開始,「圖像轉向」是言詞朝向形象的關係,那麼圖像和形象的關係,就是朝向物性(objecthood)的迴圈;亦即,形象是一個抽象的存有物,可以輕易喚起,是一種弔詭的「不在場的在場」(absent presence)。進一步地,形象與圖像之間的關係正是體現了分植的意義。每一個被複製的圖像都是分植,而整個系列的形象、其家族相似性,也都是分植關係,而不只是某個圖像的實體。

在一場圓桌式對談中,米契爾解釋當前科技生產的圖像狀態,便是這種他稱之為「生命―圖像」的圖像。這種圖像有某種生命活力(liveliness)的特質,不只是由於圖像的逼真性(verisimilitude)、栩栩如生感(lifelikeness),也是關於圖像的轉移的性質(metastatic quality),及其流通的方式。而這一點,我認為有益於思考陳建榮作品中的圖像素材的多元脈絡與畫布上豐富圖層的圖像意涵。

從圖像使用的觀點來閱讀陳建榮的繪畫,可以獲得一連串涉及當代各種觀看介面的影像流通與變形狀態的關鍵字,例如:圖像轉換、畫質差異、失敗影像、失真、挪用、影印、修圖再輸出、擬仿現成物(不是直接置入,而是描繪它們),這些紛紛表現在陳建榮對於設計師海報的擬仿、草稿紙面皺褶的光彩、印表機髒掉的噴頭、影印機的碳粉轉印、畫的是手機截圖所以畫布上下方保留兩塊黑色等,諸多「感覺偏掉了」的物事之興趣。陳建榮捕捉這些圖像在轉換與複製過程中的瑕疵與不完美狀態,專注在不同影像介面本質差異所形成的各種不精準、錯位與失真。比較早先的作品,陳建榮會尋找他人遺留的顏料或物件,再從中選擇想要保存或是消弭的部分;這幾年則偏向尋找現成物,只是那個現成物可能大部分是圖像。

「我經常以手機隨機拍攝,可能之後滑手機時覺得喜歡便發展成作品。我會用不專業的軟體像是 Instagram、臉書或手機內的簡便功能修改,開展各種讓影像失真的過程。它就會變成一個新的東西。」若把陳建榮的繪畫視為圖像創造技藝的一套自我技術,我認為其創作手法的最為關鍵處,或者幾乎是驅動其創作之核的動力系統,即是其繪畫總是關於圖像的圖像、來自他處的圖像,以及某種關於圖像在不同的媒介、情境,甚至是隨機的感覺所擷取、複製、挪用等,不斷轉換與流變的圖像生命。同時,陳建榮也提到「原本淘汰掉的某些作品的初稿,後來在新的觀看角度變得有趣,於是這些從別的作品延伸出來的淘汰物又來到了新的作品中。」

可以說，陳建榮的繪畫圖像，是分植，也是「嫁接」（graft）。我所指的嫁接，是圖像在不同的脈絡中不斷增添與疊加（superimpositions）的一種植物型生命比喻，圖像在畫布上展開其「共生」（symbiosis）與「形變」（metamorphosis）的組構能力。在我眼中，陳建榮作品中的圖像元素，呈現的就是像這樣的關係：一方面，圖像展現其分植的生命，在不同介面中流轉，並在持續地在藝術家微調設定甚至暴力裁切的手段中，集結或組裝到畫布上。這些先後來到畫布上的圖像元素隨即展開向著彼此開放的嫁接，無論是建築圖樣或是模型平面圖、手機快拍或是影印碳粉翻印、植物或捷運燈箱等，這些圖像展露離開先前脈絡後仍保持的自身固有特質、也能「半遺忘」（semi-forgotten）原先所在的脈絡，並對其他圖像元素開放，繪畫痕跡與其基底的差異變得模糊甚至消失，陳建榮繪畫中具時間意涵的圖層，將共時地啟動圖像生命的無限潛能。

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The "Semi-forgotten" Life of Picture
—A Few Thoughts on Chen Chien-Jung's Painting

Text / Chen Kuan-Yu

During a conversation in his studio space, which was filled with paint, canvases, drafts of drawings and innumerous model toys, Chen Chien-Jung stated that "I consider myself a realist painter, but not one that paints traditional realist painting, which deals with light and shadow. I represent what I see as is." In fact, Chen has a vivid painting style posited between the figurative and the abstract. Be it the large number of geometric architectural imageries or cityscapes of urban corners, these are all what come to mind when one thinks of Chen's work. Based on my dialogue with Chen, I try to ask further: By calling himself "a realist painter," what is it that he sees? What is the underlying meaning of "to represent as is"?

Following the creative context of Chen's three painting series – *Landscape*, *Aircraft* and *Finders Keepers* – this essay can be generally divided into three aspects. First of all, although Chen primarily creates acrylic paintings on canvas, I attempt to expand the meaning of "material" and see all objects and pictures gathered and assembled into his paintings as painting materials before examining the style formed by the effect of said materials to explore Chen's mindset in terms of media selection as well as his pictorial sensibility that informs every creative moment in front of the canvas.

Meanwhile, as I contemplate on the ideas and procedures related to the formation of Chen's work, I seem to have glimpsed the manifestation of "Genius" that Agamben describes as "our life insofar as it does not belong to us." It is about control and the loss of control, the expected and the unexpected as well as the many interstices, imperfect details and the delicate power in Chen's painting that allows him to hide. This is his way of traversing and destabilizing the type of image expression that always seeks completeness and precision. The existence of "Genius" is characterized by antithetical poles—one end is "Genius" that is associated with inspiration, and the other end is "Ego" that individuates oneself as the author. Artistic creation consequently arises from the tension between evoking Genius and moving away from it; it is the contention and quietude between Genius and Ego in terms of signing in one's name for being "creative"; and it is still more about the revelation, transformation and concealment of the artist.

Furthermore, while the essay discusses the issue of "painting—material" and "material—painting" in Chen's work, it also touches upon the issue of "the subjectivity of painting." The third aspect examines contemporary pictures based on botanical imageries – from cloning, grafting to its changing life – and investigates Chen's attitude towards pictures and

his approaches to convert them into his works of art to view painted pictures as the "bio-picture" embodied by the cloning of pictures in the contemporary era.

Dissolving the Void

When the novelist Italo Calvino visited the sculpture exhibition of Fausto Melotti at a fortification in Florence, he saw a swarm of day-flies flying into the fortress; he later created an allegorical dialogue between the fortress and the day-flies. The day-flies said, "We live in the space of air, we beat time with the vibrations of our wings. What else does living mean?" "Time passes over me: I remain," replied the fortress. The day-flies then said, "Without us, there remains nothing but an almighty and omnipresent void… complete void that can only be dissolved by that which is light and rapid and subtle."

In "Day-flies in the Fortress," Calvino quoted the words from Melotti's book *Lines* (*Linee*) that described the collaboration and tensional relationship between an artist and the material: "There is love and there is respect for the material… Love is a passion, it can turn into hate: this is a revitalizing drama for an artisan-artist. Respect is like a legal separation: the material demands its rights and everything finishes in a frosty relationship. The true artist does not love or respect his material: it is always 'on trial' and everything can go completely wrong (Leonardo, Michelangelo and his works in marble)." Through the allegory, Calvino discusses the delicateness of artworks, and also touches upon the selection and use of creative materials. Melotti often used inexpensive, fragile materials, such as strings, carboard paper, plaster, rags, copper rods and organza. These materials utter a delicate, soft, mutable language that can be used to quickly construct a visual world; but it also indicates that sculptures made of such materials are temporary and perishable.

It is clear that Chen's main creative approach is acrylic painting on canvas; therefore, the abovesaid example is not to address the similarity between Chen's choice of material and that of Melotti. As painting is an intellectual process, here, I attempt to expand the viewpoint of "material" to further combine the moments of thinking before the artist wields his brush and views his selection of material and the process of composing images as a way to understand the elements that constitute the artist's work. Chen's creative material comes from variegated sources, which, despite their different extent of randomness, subtle perception, surprise, sentimentality, misunderstanding, playfulness and transience, often carry lines, diagrams, grid images, hard-edge formats and sharp borders that are usually deemed symbolic of rationality. In the world of painting unfurled by Chen, there are flatly applied colors and stains, color rendering and black straight lines, geometry and seepage, construction and flaking, grid and explosion, text and imprint, contingency and control as well as pressure and blankness—it suggests an event of

painting with multiple situations taking place simultaneously, a state of energy with constantly flowing and exchanging coldness and warmth.

Tricks and Genius

"The small fun things, like incorporating folding lines of drafts on copier paper into my painting, are also my tricks." Chen has many tricks of playing with material and resisting the idea of "one should be painting serious subject matters." These tricks are experiments, fun as well as effects. For example, he mentions the indeterminate state of using crayon as a material, which is always in an undried state created by the sticky, powdery texture, or the damaging of texture by producing folds or cracks. Chen tries to preserve these states with acid-free white glue. This reminds me of what Giorgio Agamben says when he comments on Robert Walser's extremely delicate handwriting that comprises Walser's rich, dense and incomprehensible text—"this childlike excitement is the source of…Robert Walser's voluptuous pleasure in securing the condition of his illegibility." For Agamben, such self-concealing approach brings something similar to the special pleasure that children experience in playing hide and seek—whether one is found at the end is not the point here; the pleasure enjoyed by children comes from the action of hiding. "There is an incomparable joy, a special excitement… this pleasure and this desire are the guardians of the solitary *glory* revealed to children in their secret lairs." (Agamben's italicization)

Genius is highly associated with the activity of artistic creation. In Agamben's discussion, it adopts a specific gesture of "bringing the hand to the forehead – which we enact almost without realizing in the moments of confusion and disorientation… – recalls the ritual gestures of the cult of Genius." In terms of the creative subject, we should consider the subject as a force field of tensions whose antithetical poles are Genius and Ego. Genius is what resides in us but does not belong to us, a consistent process of negotiations and compromises. Therefore, it is not Genius that undergoes a changing process, but our relationship with him—this relationship turns from "luminous and clear" to "shadowy and opaque." Genius is not only the personification of sexual energy. (For example, a man's Genius and a woman's Juno both manifest the fertility that generates and perpetuates life.) In a certain way, Genius is the divinization of the person (artist).

As a matter of fact, Chen's work is also continuous merging and separating in hiding, illegibility and the force field between the tensions of "the self and the non-self." The architectural figures, instruction manuals, layout prints and assemble charts, from which he often extracts his elements to constitute images, represent the space of rationality that permits no errors. At the same time, however, this space also includes a wide range of blankness that is to be filled and allows one to hide. In the series of *Aircraft*, layouts, toys, manuals and component breakdown diagrams of aircrafts, along with fluid brushstrokes

that appear hazily poetic due to their blurriness, keep surfacing in an ambiguous yet conspicuous manner. These toys are images closely related to the artist's life experiences. One can also say that they form a motif with the trinity of "life—creation—memory." Moreover, taking a general view of Chen's other series, the approaches of making silhouette, collage, wiping and smearing, reconstruction, appropriation, transferring, retouching and printing all seem to be part of his hide-and-seek—an action of waiting to be found without acknowledging of being found, a way of manifesting his existence in the process of "avoid being recognized" and "being allegedly recognized," trying to conceal while revealing, successfully manifesting oneself while in hiding.

The Subjectivity of Painting

Those small, assistive objects used in painting, ranging from masking tapes, wood sticks and photocopies, have all become his painting subjects. For him, what he seeks to question through painting is the process of creating "a painting that can be declared completed"; that is, what is the moment that can be defined as the beginning of a painting, and when is a painting considered finished? Furthermore, regarding the various actions and procedures taking place during the painting process – the different states and stages of seeking inspiration, layering, cleaning, removing, setting aside, as well as those moments of being serious, feeling unfocused, exhausted and concentrating – which of them can be counted as procedures of artistic creation, and which are just part of the everyday life? Can one really tell them apart?

What Chen terms as "tricks" that make hiding oneself possible, in this case, can be found in Chang Yu-Ying's description of Chen's canvas surface, on which, according to the art critic, there are many "creative 'misunderstandings,'" such as stains, misplacement, ruptured fiber of over-rubbed paper, inverted images, indentations from leftover timber, mistaken brushstrokes, etc. In a certain way, they might be the reason why "Chen Chien-Jung's painting" is able to be freed from the name of the artist and gain its "subjectivity." This idea of bestowing painting its personality and thinking is in fact a kind of projection; however, it not merely allows the work to "renege on its definition" (Chang's words), but also enables the artist to escape from the authorial authority. "I used to paint without making sketch drafts, and directly created images through accumulating formations. The problem of the approach was that it became difficult to describe what the subject matter was." I think Chen must have had the experience of being eluded by his own works right in front of his eyes.

Could painting make "its own" statement different from that intended by its creator? French art historian Hubert Damisch argues that the "subjectivity" of painting lies in the brushstroke. For Damisch, what painting reveals, different from verbal sounds, are traces

of visual activities, which are expressed through brushstrokes. In short, Damisch believes painting to be the traces of a certain activity, and its subjectivity is manifested through these traces. Nevertheless, the subjectivity in this respect is not the subjectivity of the artist, which a painter demonstrates or claims through his painting; instead, the painterly subjectivity carries "its own discourse" and "its own narrative." Such point of view that presumes painting has its thoughts, languages and personalities – that is, painting has a life of its own and its subjectivity – can be categorized as the "vitalism" of painting; a viewpoint shared by many French art historians, including Louis Martin and Georges Didi-Huberman.

On the other hand, the strong "indexicality" between painters and their painting is perhaps the most compelling among all art media. I find such a relationship rather incredible because it simultaneously visualizes traces of an artist's activity and points to his or her absence; and to a certain extent, the subjectivity of painting originates from the artist's absence. In my opinion, the indexical quality is more distinct in Chen's work for it does not simply beckon at the artist-painting relationship—in this case, the concept formed by the indexicality of Chen's chosen material is integral is the core of his work.

As a matter of fact, the subject of painting's autonomy can more or less be discussed from the perspective of formalism in painting. One can even extend this statement further: from Clement Greenberg's restoration of "flatness," to Michael Fried's and minimalists' critiques of the literalism of objecthood, these subject matters of formalist painting have revolved around the interaction between the subjects of painting as well as their interaction with the environment. This classic case of painting history can perhaps be extended as an ideal subject for contemplating on the issue of "relationality" in "Object-oriented Ontology" (OOO). This is not mere a re-examination of Greenberg's and Fried's ideologies, but also indicates the different approaches to deal with "sensual objects" and "sensual qualities" from the "human" and "non-human" perspectives. As all elements consistently produce non-continuous background of their own existences, a model of infinite relations is revealed, a worldview that reminds us of the nesting Russian dolls.

Surely, to view painting as vitalist projections or subjects examined by advocates of OOO can be a way to launch a worthy re-investigation of the ancient topic of painting as "material of object" and "content of picture." However, in this article, I approach the life of picture from a different angle, borrowing W.J.T. Mitchell's viewpoint of "bio-picture," and shift the focus from the ontological issues of painting to how Chen handles pictures.

Picture Cloning and Grafting

"Bio-picture" is one of the main topics discussed in Mitchell's essay, titled "Four Fundamental Concepts of Image Science." As the "pictorial turn" in the contemporary era, the concept of "bio-picture" arises from the "cloning" of pictures. Examining the original Greek meaning of "clone," which means "slip or twig" that indicates a botanical process of grafting or transplanting, Mitchell extends the implication of biological cellular reproduction and views "cloning" as a powerful metaphor beckons "a biological reality with profound ethical and political implications."

"You can hang a picture, but you can't hang an image." Beginning with Mitchell's aphorism, the pictorial turn indicates the relation between words and images; and the relation between a picture and an image indicates the loop of objecthood. That is, an image is an abstract existence that can be easily evoked. It is a paradoxical "absent presence." Furthermore, the relation between an image and a picture embodies precisely the meaning of cloning. Every reproduced picture is a clone; and the similarities shared by an entire series of images and their resemblances also suggest the relation between clones rather than mere physical entities of a certain picture.

In a roundtable, Mitchell has explained that the technologically produced pictures in the present time are what he calls "bio-pictures." These pictures possess a certain liveliness, which does not only come from the verisimilitude and lifelikeness of the picture images but also their metastatic quality and the way they are circulated. This comment, I believe, is rather helpful in thinking about the diverse context of Chen's pictorial materials as well as the pictorial meaning of the rich layers on his canvas.

To study Chen's painting from the viewpoint of his use of pictures, one can get a string of keywords related to the circulating and mutating state of images found on various contemporary viewing interfaces, such as pictorial conversion, pixilation difference, failed images, distortion, appropriation, photocopying, retouched print, simulating readymades (instead of directly using them, the artist depicts them). They are expressed through Chen's numerous interests in objects that "feel a bit off the mark" – designer poster simulations, glossy folds on paper drafts, dirty printheads of inkjet printers, carbon transferring by photocopy machines, the black areas on the top and bottom of canvases inspired by captured images on smartphones, etc. Chen retains these pictorial defects and imperfections occurred throughout the process of conversion and reproduction, placing his emphasis on imprecisions, misplacements and distortions resulting from the inherent differences of varying image interfaces. In his earlier work, Chen used to look for paint or objects left by others, from which he then selected the parts his wanted to preserve or remove. In comparison, in his work from recent years, he tends to search for readymades, which, in his case, have been pictures mostly.

"I often take random photos with my phone. If I find images I like when reviewing them later, I develop them into works. I use non-professional software apps, like Instagram, Facebook or built-in functions that come with the phone to modify the images, initiating a process of distorting them in various ways. Then, they turn into something new." If we are to view Chen's painting as the technologies of the self for creating pictures, the most crucial aspect of this creative method – or the power system that drives his art-making – is that his painting is always about the pictures of pictures, the pictures from elsewhere, and even the randomly captured, reproduced and appropriated the life of pictures that constantly transforms and changes in different media or situations. At the same time, Chen has also mentioned that "drafts of some works that have been previously cast away might become interesting from a new perspective later. So, these eliminations derived from other works are again used in new works."

One could say that Chen's painted pictures are a form of cloning as well as "grafting." Here, the term "graft" serves as a metaphor stemming from botanical life that denotes unending additions and superimpositions in varying context. It refers to the constructing ability of "symbiosis" and "metamorphosis" that pictures unveil on canvases. From my perspective, the pictorial elements in Chen's work display the following relation: on the one hand, pictures demonstrate their cloned life, changing in different interfaces while continuously being gathered or combined on canvases through the artist's slight modification or arbitrary cropping. These pictorial elements that land on Chen's canvases one after another soon engage in the process of grafting with each other. Be it architectural drawings, model diagrams, smartphone snapshots, carbon transfer prints, plants or MRT lightboxes, these pictures, though removed of their previous context, still preserve their original characteristics, rendering their previous context semi-forgotten while opening up themselves to other pictorial elements. As painting traces and their fundamental differences become blurry or even disappear, the layers that carry a temporal implication in Chen's painting will synchronously awaken the unlimited potentiality of the bio-picture.

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