

Time English Center

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Abstract

This article discusses two Taiwanese artists, Chen Chieh-jen and Yang Mao-Lin in relation to Taiwan's continuing debate over English language acquisition. From a multi-disciplinary perspective the question of a business language (English) is contrasted to a language that better reflects the subjective nature of language itself and the power relations that are inherent therein. Poetic language, or paronomasia, as it is discussed here, provides an outlet for Taiwan to express itself in English with all its historical and colonial history engaged.

Keywords: pornography, paronomasia, TOEFL, subaltern nation language, shadow and penumbra.

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Time English Center

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此論文將討論陳界仁與楊茂林兩位本土藝術家，與有關英文學習方面之持續論爭。從一個跨領域角度出發，（英文）商業語言，將被對立於一個更能反映語言主觀面向與內建於其中的權力關係的語言。詩語言，或是雙關語、同音異議文字遊戲，就本論文所定義的意義而言，可提供臺灣一種可表達所有殖民歷史的英語。

關鍵詞：情色，雙關語，托福，從者國家語言，陰影與半影

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If we take the speed of development as a base – for the conception of language learning and the translation of Freud’s condensation and displacement into overcrowding and accident – a materialist displacement of Freud due to the conditions of production in Taiwan, we might find ourselves searching this essay for accidents. If we take psychic processes as traffic problems and dreams as simple circulation, we should not be surprised by the resulting collisions. Looking at the social traffic of dream brings us into a realm dominated by advertising and pornography.¹ The resultant language to articulate this stage of Taiwan’s English language development should reflect all of the above.



Fig. 1, A. J. Valadka, *Time English Center*

¹ Advertising and pornography are the language of the street. They decorate our daily lives with a tough language of consumerism and desire. They promise the individual a community, in this case a community of consumers of advertising and pornography, a global community, but not a Taiwanese community.

Looking at a piece of work by Canadian photographer, A.J. Valadka, *Time English Center*, one can visualize the process I am writing about (fig. 1). In it, one is presented with a Westerner walking down the middle of an Asian street (actually Chung Chen Loo outside the train station in Chungli, Tao Yuan, Taiwan). This should bring to mind a palimpsest of all the other photos of Western Men walking alone into town, the gun battle scene, the Marlboro Man, Christ on the Cross between the two thieves. The actual acknowledged or unacknowledged reference in the structure and plot of the photo is James Dean walking through Times Square, his hands shoved deeply into the pockets of his overcoat, smoking a cigarette; but Times Square is deserted in that photograph, emptied in retrospect by his death in a car accident (fig. 2).



Fig. 2, Dennis Stock, “James Dean in Times Square”

However, what is on the Western Man's mind when he comes walking into town, straight down the road from the train station? Conquest: financial and sexual? In this, *Age of Anxiety*, as W.H. Auden named it, financial and sexual conquest have replaced spiritual journeys, leaving the road from the West to Taiwan empty of Enlightenment but increasingly lucrative. Just over to the right in the photograph, unfortunately impossible to see in this greatly reduced reproduction (the original art work was three feet by five feet) there is a sign that reads, under a clock pointing to six-fifteen, 'Time English Center'. Times Square in the original Dean photograph has been over-coded with the Time English Center. In Taiwan, if you are young and white you teach English, it is a very lucrative occupation, more so than an accredited teacher in Canada, but without the benefits. Yet if you parse the conundrum of 'Time English Center' as an advertisement for learning English rather than a Marlboro Man getting you to buy cigarettes, you get, 'time you learned English'. Learn English in Time? Or perhaps that in Taiwan time is money. As the International Community Radio Taipei, FM 100.7, Taiwan's English only radio station which targets Taiwanese wrestling to master English is continually advertising, 'English is the language of business.' The teaching of English is entirely predicated on 'time in English is worth the money,' because the Booshibans, the cram schools, while a big business, are expensive to attend.

The difference in Valadka's photograph² is the vanishing Asian crowd as the gaze focuses on the tall, male, central character. His aloneness is enhanced by the busy Asian street, as he drifts down its centre. It is as if he is dropped into a Virtual Reality matrix - a suggestion enhanced by the reproduction of the image as a frame framing the frame. The sense of a vacuum surrounding the character suggests a simulated character, dropped in

² When I turn to language, in this essay, as opposed to images, paintings or photographs, I will adopt catachresis as the leitmotif, the abuse or perversion of a trope or metaphor. Holes, tears, cuts and pricks litter this entire essay; they are the narrative disruptions through which I am attempting to penetrate a foreign culture, Taiwan's.

on an unwitting civilian population for the purpose of some kind of salvation. The English teaching gunslinger will transform the entire Asian SIM card into that of an alienated James Deans strolling unharmed through the hectic traffic in order to get to class on time.

How does this cultural collage translate from the visual to the verbal? How can the 'Time English Center' translate the lone-renegade claims of the Western myth?

How To Slaughter Time So That It Flies Bludgeoned

The image is, as Pierre Reverdy put it in a typically Hegelian fashion, 'l'image est une creation pure de l'esprit. Elle ne peut naitre d'une comparaison mais du rapprochement de deux realites plus ou moins eloignees'³: *The image is the coming together of two disparate realities to create a new one.* The two realities in question in this paper are image/words of the West and image/words of the East. How can the image do its work on the imagination of these two cultures, East and West, in Taiwan and how can we, the critics, help an English emerge in Taiwan that reflects the compressed realities of the image discussed above? What new image might emerge in the confrontation? Will it be what Benjamin called a 'profane illumination, a materialistic, anthropological inspiration,' the past rupturing the continuity of the present in unexpected ways?⁴ Or will something emerge which might be called the multi-cultural image? How does Taiwan, where I work and live, fit this image? Taiwan, which is a stateless state caught between China and the United States, between West and East; a new member of the World Trade Organization but not allowed membership in the United Nations. Taiwan is a state of capital. How can it imagine and speak out this capital state?

In the work of Yang Mao-Lin, we get the intermixture of pornography and advertising put into the context of teenage adolescent male nihilistic jokes.

³ Pierre Reverdy, ed. "Nord/Sud.", 1.

⁴ Walter Benjamin, "Surrealism: The Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia," *Reflections*, 178.

The article on Yang's works, "The Prankster Intellectual" which accompanies the artwork I am using here from his exhibition, 'Inviting the Immortals II: Baby You're Amazing' suggests Yang is playing this game to emphasize Taiwan's bastardized culture.⁵ In these paintings of Yang Mao-Lin, the emergent state of Taiwan is caught in the crossfire between superpowers Japan and the United States and an older, tradition oriented China. Taiwan is seen, in Taiwanese activist-scholar Chen Kuan-Hsing's words, as a subaltern state - not an 'other', but an other behind an other - an other to the second degree. Equally, Taiwan, in Yang Mao-Lin's work is the image created as the sexualized other between two warrior patriarchies, Japan and the United States of America. Both make use of Taiwan for the dissemination of their own sub-cultures; cartoon supermen and women, pikachu and Gester, battle for supremacy over the subculture of Taiwan. Yang Mao-lin depicts this sub-culture as fueled by toys and pornography (fig. 3).

⁵ For further discussion, see Yang Mao-Lin, Taipei Times Archives.

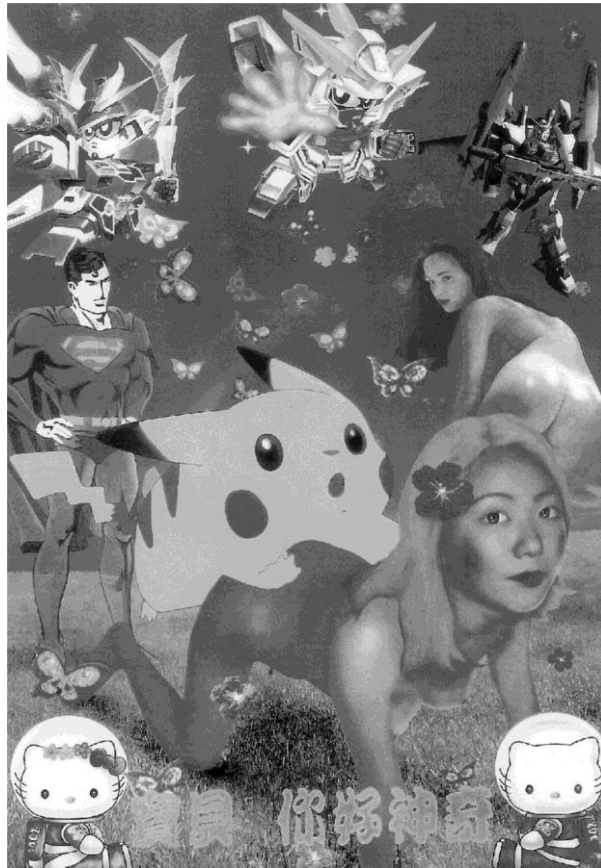


Fig. 3, Yang Mao-Lin, “Baby You’re Amazing”

Yet how does this image from Yang Mao-Lin contain the subaltern spirit of Taiwan? The image of Taiwan as a sex island, propagated by the Japanese and the Americans in the past, and Taiwan itself in the present, comes to dominate Yang Mao-Lin’s work. As the September 17, 2003 issue of the magazine *Taiwan News* puts it:

Taiwan’s ‘spice girl culture,’ which took root in the new millennium as a new and fashionable form of women’s liberation movement, has developed into a woman power and an effective marketing strategy. ‘Spice girl marketing’ is not for satisfying ‘male gaze’ or the desire of

any sexes in their pursuit of better images. It is rather a new female culture full of vitality and creative ideas advocated by men and women of all ages.⁶

This is to take the subaltern position of Taiwan's sex industry to the teasing point of submission. Taiwan appears to be submitting to the positions of Japanese and American capital, and that would be Yang Mao-Lin's relevance: what sells for the superpowers will sell twice as well for Taiwan. The resistance to submission put forward by Yang Mao-Lin could only come from those offended by his use of pornography and thereby the history of pornography in Taiwan. It would be an indignant self-righteous resistance that his work would elicit, yet it seems to do little more than elicit laughter. Like a bogus advertisement, Yang Mao-Lin, gives us the pop art seduction of Taiwan's 'Spice Girl' culture. However if Yang Mao-Lin's work provides us with the comic version of Taiwan's present and future position in relation to world economies, how then, does it interact with Chen Chieh-jen's⁷ seemingly tragic image of Taiwan. Are they two sides of the same coin?

'It is not the literal past that rules us, but images of the past'.⁸ In images of the past, as in Benjamin's dialectical images, resides a compacted future. Images of the past will not be randomly linked in the coming generation. Images of the past will be paced out and shot, in a new advertisement for Tiannamen Square, in Time English Center. In this coliseum the time and space supporting images of East and West will clash, will duel, the masses versus the virtual individual. No longer in the hereafter but in the shortly thereafter of non-Western economies coming to terms with the seamlessness of Western capital time, 7-Eleven time, but better thought of as

⁶ *Taiwan News*, 2003, September 17, 2003.

⁷ Chen Chieh-jen is a computer graphics artist as well as an installation artist. His work is well known internationally. Here I will speak of his exhibition "To Gaze is to Penetrate" presented at the Biennale de Venezia in 1999. In another chapter I will deal with his more current exhibition "Twelve Karmas Under the City" from the year 2000.

⁸ George Steiner, "The Last Bolshevik", *The New Yorker*, Dec. 17, 30.

the numbers crunching twenty-four/seven time, advertising time. In Chen Chieh-jen, I found an artist who was literally cutting up the old to infuse the new. His images of atrocities, of headless bodies and landscaped heads, provided the background relief, the counterpoint to this paper. The seeming seamlessness of Yang Mao-Lin's work is fraught with the historical tensions directly addressed by Chen Chieh-jen. Chen Chieh-jen makes an appeal to the bloody history of modern China/Taiwan. That explains the cut, the chorus of coercion, the murder of metaphor declaimed throughout his work. How else will PRC/ROC history look to the future Taiwan but as a pre-historic opposition to the coming of 7-Eleven time, the time before money, before National Reserves.

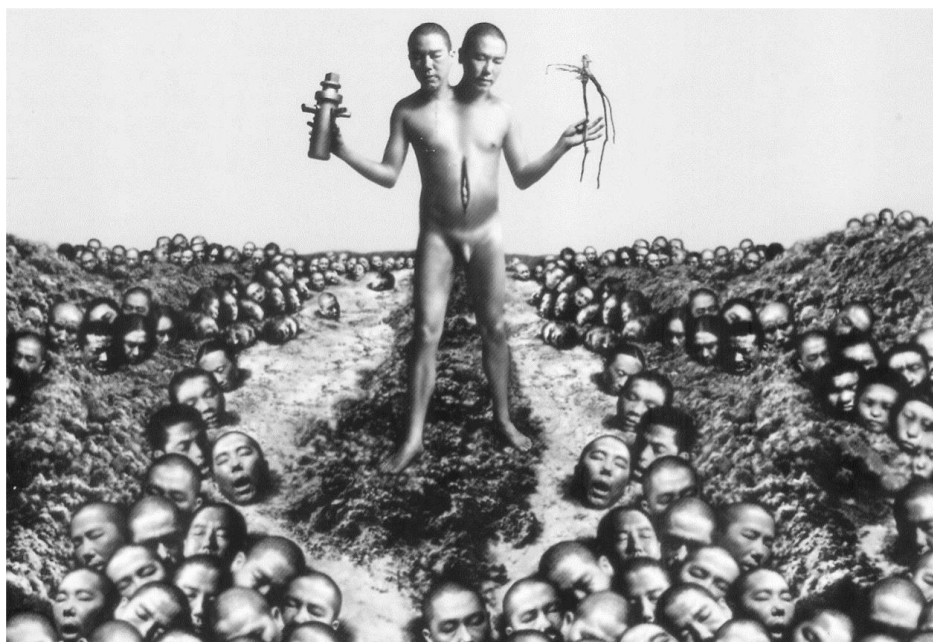


Fig. 4, Chen Chieh-jen, "Image of Identical Twins"

Here is where I would like to introduce a computer enhanced photograph by Chen Chieh-jen as a counterpoint to A.J. Valadka's *Time English Centre*. What interests me in the counterpoint with Valadka's

photograph is the surrounding crowd, not the central figure undergoing, in Chen Chieh-jen, an insistent doubling. I would suggest it is not the central heroic, in this case, the artist himself doubled onto one, figure but the surrounding, indifferent crowd of heads which disrupts the narrative condition. Where Valadka's lone figure is overlaid with references to agonized Western loners from Christ to James Dean, Chen Chieh-jen, takes the original one and makes it into two (fig. 4). The picture becomes a dream icon of a split reality where the loner is confronted not simply by his own death but by what I interpret as an attempt to suggest rebirth (through the vaginal images ripped into the belly of the central figure as well as the vaginal area of land upon which the figure stands) of the surrounding dead crowd to its own engagement in history and in the history of photography⁹.

Another photograph digitally enhanced by Chen Chieh-jen, a photograph originally made famous by George Bataille in the book, makes this spectrality even more apparent (fig. 5).

⁹ Barthes puts this very well:

The portrait-photograph is a closed field of forces. Four image-repertoires intersect here, oppose and distort each other. In front of the lens, I am at the same time: the one I think I am, the one I want others to think I am, the one the photographer thinks I am, and the one he makes use of to exhibit his art. In other words, a strange action: I do not stop imitating myself, and because of this, each time I am (or let myself be) photographed, I invariably suffer from a sensation of inauthenticity, sometimes of imposture (comparable to certain nightmares). In terms of image-repertoire, the Photograph (the one I intend) represents that very subtle moment when, to tell the truth, I am neither subject nor object but a subject who feels he is becoming an object: I then experience a micro-version of death (of parenthesis): I am truly becoming a specter. (Barthes 2000, 14)



Fig. 5 Chen Chieh-jen, “Genealogy of Self”

I would argue that this *spectrality*, visualized so powerfully in Chen Chieh-jen, originally inciting Bataille’s eroticism, is equally apparent in the ‘Time English Center’ photograph. The focus on the doubling or quadrupling of the ‘I’ in Chen Chieh-jen engages an act of photographic history commenting on the death of the subject, literally and metaphorically, in the lens of the camera. However, the lone English teacher is made into an object, even an icon, not of subjectivity, but of language itself. English in Taiwan is a specter and that specter’s time has not yet come. The surrounding indifferent crowd of Chen Chieh-jen is blind to the historical time implied by the presence of the camera, and Chen amplifies this fact by inserting himself in the crowd watching this nightmarish demise. For the crowd it is business as usual, for the icons in the photographs it is the becoming of an icon in the moment of becoming. They are made shades, shadows of themselves, observed and observers before their time. In ‘Time English Center’ the advent of English for the surrounding crowd is still to come. *Time English Center*

questions the nature of English as an icon in Taiwan directly implicating the future of Taiwan. The question at stake is who will control, or fix, the future of English in Taiwan? To answer that question I would like to put Yang Mao-Lin's art into the picture because he also addresses Taiwan and "business as usual" as his subject matter.

Between Chen Chieh-jen And Yang Mao-Lin: The Irony And The Ecstasy

Two very different artists, Chen Chieh-jen and Yang Mao-Lin are both concerned with Time. History as enigmatic torture, in Chen Chieh-jen, seems to supplement history as the domination of Super Powers in Yang Mao-Lin. In the Pop Culture Icons of Superman and Pikachu, the superpowers controlling the fate of Taiwan's future, America and Japan, seem to gloss over the possibility of an emergent Taiwanese nationalism; Taiwan acting as the melancholy consumer and producer of other's images. I would suggest that the humorous melancholy in Yang Mao-Lin is the melancholy of an Elvis Presley song - the melancholy of a desire made into a commodity, into the state of being an icon, without multiplicity - and exists only in interplanetary stasis as ideology. The ideological melancholy of Yang Mao-Lin's recent work creates a vacuum of cultural longing, an echo of sad laughter, the aftermath of pornography. Taiwan is there in his work as its own emptiness, a projector of others' films, as a crowd whose center is elsewhere. A technically proficient, even almost seamlessly proficient producer of others' images, as it itself fades into anonymity.



Fig. 6, Yang Mao-Lin, “Are You Lonesome Tonight”

Equally with the ‘Time English Center’, the language that is being foisted into the emptiness of Taiwan’s own subaltern culture, is masterminded by a set of TOEFL rules which promise ‘English’ as the language of ‘business.’ Strangely the irony of such a phrase seems to reinforce the melancholy of Yang Mao-Lin’s images (fig. 6). The robots of language will force Taiwan into a mould of pre-fabricated language application. The ‘Time English Center’ if one were to read it into Yang Mao-Lin’s work, is an ideologically frozen apparatus controlled by the machinations of international capital. The empty Chinese characters, literally and figuratively, in Yang Mao-Lin’s work, denote the traditional Chinese virtues, and seem to represent another dominant but fading cultural inheritance. His reference to Elvis Presley songs and the English subtexts that accompany his pictures are equally flawless representations of another’s culture, only to be tempted by the supposed power of ‘Spice Girl’ culture.

An unacknowledged poetry emerges in the social traffic of dreams that I posit as a model for language as a defense against capital. I search for a liquid opposition to the domination of a business language viz. an unexpected usurping of standardized language acquisition that provides an ‘accidental English’ with more local Taiwanese content than that which can be achieved by the standardized English of TOEFL. The strength of such opposition lies in its ability to surround and enfold standardized rules with the cumulative effects of ‘deny the accident’ parataxis, pun, metonymy, the entire arsenal of language slippage, engaging the powers of the decentralized conceit. This creates something as powerful as poetry as opposed to proper English - the language of business. For example, from one of my Taiwanese students’ papers: ‘Last night you showed me tears and let me touch them, you talk of it all as though you were rapt in something larger than life itself, like this meta-communication that spreads its tentacles across the universe and touches upon everything all at once, while still remaining in the same place.’ (Lydia)

Lydia has stepped out of her native tongue to see herself from the outside in an English that reverberates with something not-English. She has exo-topically opened Wittgenstein’s ‘prison house of language’ and made it her own. The collision in the word ‘rapt’ of the words ‘wrapped’ and ‘rapture’ raise this sentence from being simply misprision to accidental poetic utterance. What is released from the condensation of these two words is a shock of recognition of what I would call, Taiwanese inflected English. Or to take another example from my student Webber: ‘Climbing mountains is the best way to flat my heart when I in a bad mood. Lifting by the gradient, my heart always makes me literary to contain much thought.’ I am struck by my students’ ability to remake English from the outside in a way that accidentally undercuts ideologies.

Some expect of us intellectuals that we take action on every occasion against Power, but our true battle is elsewhere, it is against *powers* in the plural, and this is no easy combat. For, if it is plural in social

space, power is, symmetrically, perpetual in historical time. Exhausted, defeated here, it reappears there; it never disappears. Make a revolution to destroy it, power will immediately revive and flourish again in the new state of affairs. The reason for this endurance and this ubiquity is that power is the parasite of a trans-social organism, linked to the whole of man's history and not only to his political, historical history. The object in which power is inscribed, for all of human eternity, is language, or to be more precise, its necessary expression: the language we speak and write.¹⁰

In Taiwan, the scholars Ding Naifei and Amie Parry are working on a manuscript with the 'shadow and the penumbra' as conceptual tools to describe a sexual politics, delineating a space/non-space; the penumbra, the edge of the shadow, where sexual orientation is constantly in a state of fluid change. To take this model, the shadow being the other, Japan shadowing America in Yang Mao-Lin's work, and Taiwan being the penumbra of Japan in relation to America, is to bring a healthy dose of sexual politics back into language acquisition, a place where the sexual subject is formed to begin with, but in a second language, such as English, a new self can be expressed. The rapture of language, the tentacles stretching out through a linguistic cosmos, defies standardized models of learning with a much more psychoanalytically sound relation between speaker and language, encouraging rather a fluid opposition, or what Bakhtin calls a dialogism, between Chinese and English, in the case of Taiwan.

Here is another example from my student William: 'One day a young man less than 20 named Hungriness, passed by a bakery, seeing hot bread through tightly closed window.' This kind of condensation and displacement reveals more about William's life struggles than would TOEFL's formalism. His use of allegory (Hungriness), misspelling (bread/broad) and syntactic rearrangement (tightly closed window/ a window that was tightly closed)

¹⁰ Roland Barthes, "Inaugural Lecture, College de France", *A Barthes Reader*, 459-460.

illuminates Johnny's shadowy position with regard to what he is hungry for. Additionally, the presence of the penumbral Chinese grammar that haunts the entire statement does not bring a reader closer to an American understanding of what Johnny wants, but imbues the literal context with an understanding of the social, sexual ambiguity in a Taiwanese/Chinese context. This is the catachresis which I mentioned earlier as providing a linguistic alternative to Roland Barthes' pictorial punctum. It is from this kind of catachresis, or perverted trope, that a poetry is forged out of a colonizing language which resists that colonization, even as the photographs and paintings resist colonization at the level of the image.

Working within the power politics of a 'Spice Girl Culture' Naifei Ding and Amie Parry point to a shadowy position with regard to where the subject of sexuality is located, and the presence of a penumbral Taiwanese understanding of social sexual ambiguity in the power politics of debates on pornography. A Taiwan that is trying to cast itself in the mould of an English speaking nation could use the catalyst of just such a penumbral position, a subaltern poetic English, to allow a sexual creativity free play in structuring positions against the ideologically loaded binaries of pornography/sexuality, or obscenity/eroticism debates, which rage in America. This is what I attempt to argue in my comparing the work of Chen Chieh-jen with that of Yang Mao-Lin: how to keep the 'Time English Center', as a concept as opposed to the actual photograph from which I developed the concept - liminal, a peripheral center, not an abandoned center. Standardized English, while essential for business, is a cheerleading school for language acquisition which denies the secret life, the historical materiality of both the Chinese and the English language. It is useful, as advertising and business are useful. As Agamben suggests in *The Coming Community*,

Nothing resembles the life of this new humanity more than advertising footage from which every trace of the advertised product has been wiped out. The contradiction of the petty bourgeois, however, is that

they still search in the footage for the product they were cheated of, obstinately trying, against all odds, to make their own identity that has become in reality absolutely improper and insignificant to them.¹¹

Multicultural Bludgeon

Agamben identifies a problem that is particularly important to Taiwan. As Taiwan struggles to establish some form of nationhood, it is particularly susceptible to programs for the establishment of Nation, including TOEFL as the programming supposedly necessary to the establishment of an English speaking nation. Yet, TOEFL is not interested in marking the diversity of 'englishes' in the world. It is a myopic bid to present a universal American grammar of English, an American speaking mask - a cultural hegemony. As Taiwan, and particularly Taiwan's universities move toward a middle class paradigm of classlessness, they are open to the threats Agamben identifies as the 'conundrum of all petty bourgeois politics', contentless, ahistorical subject positions with no resistance to the discreet charms of pornography and advertising.

That which constituted the truth and falsity of the peoples and generations that have followed one another on the earth - differences of language, of dialect, of ways of life, of character, of custom and even the physical particularities of each person - has lost any meaning for them and any capacity for expression and communication. In the petty bourgeoisie, the diversities that have marked the tragicomedy of universal history are brought together and exposed in a phantasmagorical vacuousness.¹²

The alternative, as Allen Chun from Taiwan's elite research institute the Academia Sinica puts it, is the current attempt at the indigenization of

¹¹ Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 65

¹² Giorgio Agamben, *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture*, 62.

Taiwan, which means the political enforcing of multi-cultural values as against the monolithic cultural force of the prehistoric mainland China.

In Taiwan, the growing emergence of transnational cosmopolitanism runs parallel with the increasing rhetorical importance of multiculturalism. The latter, however, is the product more precisely of a wave of cultural 'indigenization'. At a deeper level both (cosmopolitan) 'transnationalism' and (indigenous) 'multiculturalism' are, in my opinion, largely incompatible and mask an imminent future crisis.¹³

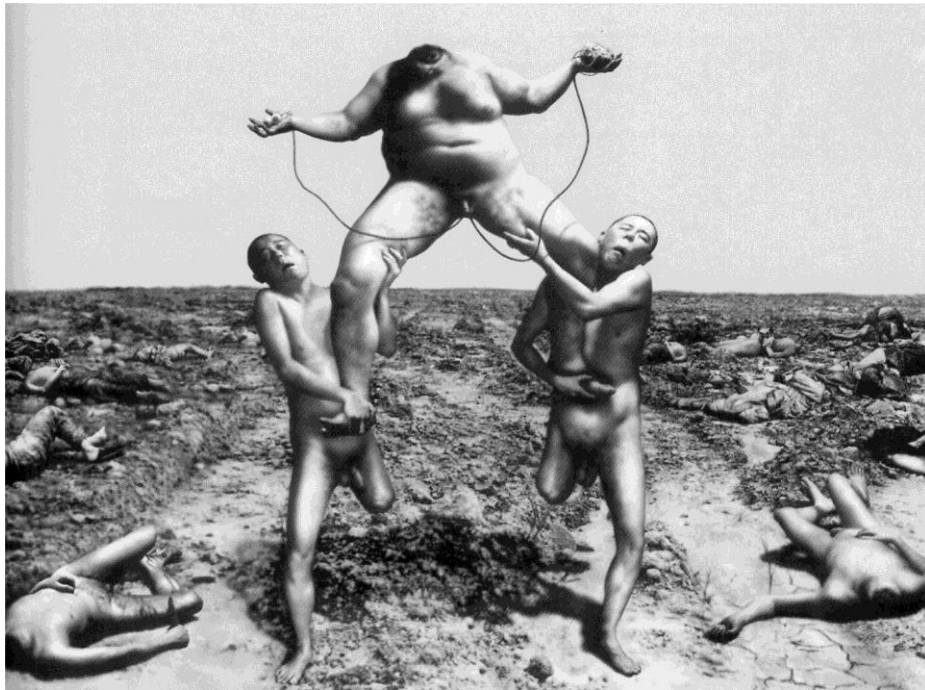


Fig. 7, Chien Chieh-Jen, "Image of an Absent Mind"

¹³ Allen Chun, "The Coming Crisis of Multiculturalism" in *Transnational Taiwan, New Cultural Formations in an Era of Transnational Globalization*, 23.

Pornography and Advertising

Thus the glorious body of advertising has become the mask behind which the fragile, slight human body continues its precarious existence, and the geometrical splendor of the 'girls' covers over long lines of the naked, anonymous bodies led to their deaths in the Lagers (camps), or the thousands of corpses mangled in the daily slaughter of the highways.... Advertising and pornography, which escort the commodity to the grave like hired mourners are the unknowing midwives of this new body of humanity.¹⁴

These are the conditions of effective pornography: Contemplation, immoderate contemplation, wide-eyed staring and a concentration effective enough to get a rise out of recalcitrant flesh. Pornography is a concentrated escape from the strictly rule-bound arena of conventional sexuality. It is an escape and a release, but the dream world of uninhibited desires it presents is not particularly instructive in an English language learning environment. The accidents of pornography are all scripted, it is a demotic language of fairly asinine poses and poseurs in the vocabulary of an emotionally arrested adolescence. Agamben discusses this immoderate contemplation of the limited vocabulary of pornography as one of the effects of melancholy. What does the Taiwanese image bring out of pornography into the flattened image of a multicultural battle for the grounds of the consumer subject? Are Pikachu and Ultra-man, signs of Japanese domination of the fetishized toy market with Superman as the American precursor in this genealogy? Are these signs of an acute melancholy, the hollowed out remains of desire? What image has the 'Spice Girl' culture of Taiwan replaced?

Agamben suggests that

In this context, melancholy appears essentially as an erotic process engaged in an ambiguous commerce with phantasms; and the double

¹⁴ Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 49.

polarity, demonic-magic and angelic contemplative, of the nature of the phantasm is responsible not only for the melancholics' morbid propensity for necromantic fascination but also for their aptitude for ecstatic illumination.¹⁵

If the images of Yang Mao-Lin intrude and fix themselves on the space of a rhapsodic cosmic canvas, and those fixed images are of basic commodities, toys, how does this playfulness elicit melancholy? Do advertising and pornography carry the same philosophic content in Taiwan as they might in Europe or America?

'I have not enough time to stud my subject. And this test, I tested very bed.' Wrote one of my students called Schedule. Not only did Schedule accidentally announce his intention to eroticize his subject, but he managed to continue the conceit in 'bed.' To me this is the form of ambiguity in language, usually reserved for poets, that opens an entire dream house of language formation which would become the basement of language acquisition in Taiwan - a base for the standardized achievement. Schedule had the audacity to begin with, giving himself a plan, a schedule, for an English name, using catachresis, but he then continues his work on the language to make it something like Chinese whispers, something unearthed in the telling.

It is in this context that I would like to return to Valadka's photograph *Time English Center*. The central figure upon whom I have focused is white, or better put, not of color. If one were to substitute a Philippino, a Thai, an Indonesian, the 'foreign' laborers who actually do the cheap labor of building highways, working in factories, in the place of the white male English teacher, the photograph would achieve an entirely different effect. This entire essay has been devoted to contesting 'non-colored', and non-colorful TOEFL English in image and word in Taiwan.

¹⁵ Agamben, *Stanzas*, 24.

Back at National Central University, Chungli, Taiwan, well known for its lovely pine trees, one of my students, Yurin, surprised me in the following surrealistic declaration: ‘When I feel upset I often go to the beguilement between the woods. As a result, I study and practice my school work repeatedly in a pig’s eyes.’ One can imagine Yurin looking up in her thesaurus a Chinese saying “in a pig’s eyes,” such that the English reader knows exactly what she means but can feel the entire history of Chinese sayings, and Chinese adjectives describing the mystery of the woods, rephrased with a much greater force than could be achieved in correct English. Walter Benjamin’s essay, “The Task of the Translator” comes to mind as Yurin manages to change Chinese into English and at the same time changes both languages into something new and strange. It is the task of the translator, according to Benjamin, to allow the translated text to change the language into which it is translated. One would readily admit it is an artistic language, but the ‘Time English Center’ must have space to accommodate poetry and play in the acquisition of language.

Reviews of Yang Mao-Lin’s work in Taiwan point out the adolescent nature of his work, its sympathy for the overblown cartoons of popular culture mixed with the fevered lust for pornography that characterizes a generation growing up fixated on the image, if not the practice, of sex. An applicant for National Central University’s English Department post-graduation program submitted a paper on how cyber-sex would be the savior of working class women, allowing them the expression of their pent up desires in cheap cyber cafes away from their responsibilities as mothers and wives in a heavily patriarchal society. This freedom of associating the cyber-image world with an escape from the boundaries of the punishing real assigns Yang Mao-Lin’s work to the scrap heap, as faddish craze for schoolboy testosterone. The paper suggests that this is not simply another empty signifier similar to how the *Taiwan News* uses ‘Spice Girl Culture’ to sell magazines; that in such work, one can read rebellions.

How does the issue of the image engage a philosophy of time? If one is to read the image as historically constructed in response to issues of capital - and it is hard not to see in this amalgam of pornography and consumer fetishes anything but issues of capital - then the bludgeoning of time depends on Taiwan's relationship to capital time. Yang Mao-Lin's images are advertising invested with the allusive allure of art borne upon the wings of pornography. How are Yang Mao-Lin's paintings different from the advertisements for Mercedes or Toyota? They have the same seamless polyethylene surface, a pure cut, in Derridean terms of the frame, from history. They float in front of the viewer as an invitation to participate in the un-messy progression of capital building a better future, sealed off from all the indignities of the past. They play with the premise of the promise, the cut becomes the smooth cut of the vagina, the smooth talk of a sex phone line, Clarke Kent's super clean cut superman performs sexual acts with other squeaky clean icons of childhood fantasy. Yang Mao Lin joins the adolescent celebration of unreal, virtual, safe sexual fantasy. In so doing he allows the art viewer to enjoy an artistic adolescent fantasy, the playfulness of perversity, as opposed to its censorship.

To exploit a pun, to deploy paronomasia, I would like to suggest that Yang Mao-Lin be viewed in relation to the ancient art of Chinese box making. In English, the Chinese box is a device cleverly designed to open out into several secretly hidden boxes, if you know the trick. If you do not, the box remains sealed. It survives in English (Chinese Box) as a cultural sign of sophisticated evasion and ambiguity. The problem for me is that every time one goes a step further in opening up Yang Mao-Lin's boxes, for the purposes of interpretation, one comes up empty. The play of opening the painting and mastering the hidden meaning leaves one with the feeling that the box is definitely not all that meaningful, that its ambiguities are not particularly ambiguous, that it is a Chinese box that denies its own cunning. The fundamental emptiness of Yang Mao-Lin's paintings, while related to the emptiness of pop art, does not ground the work in the context of Taiwan, in a virtual Taiwan, yes, but not in the messy complexity of contemporary Taiwan.

The secret of the erotic eludes it. But what if Yang Mao-Lin had titled one of his superhero melancholic paintings: ‘You see the news?! The two tallest buildings in New York were explored!!!’ This is a quote from my student Josephine, which out of the context of the American tragedy but within the context of Yang Mao-Lin’s exploration of the effect of America on Taiwan comes alive. America is a simulacrum to most Taiwanese, perhaps a computer game to be ‘explored’ and played.

The question of the Chinese boxes being shattered by capital time and a capital Cultural Revolution being interrupted leads me to an image of emptiness. A cartoon box is the attraction, an empty cartoon box awaiting the imprint of a brand name, an icon, a toy fetish, a superman doll, a pikachu doll. However, it is the editing of the cartoon image which I want to investigate: a rhythmic impulsion of time past designed to crack that negative space open. I previously found that impulsion in the works of Chen Chieh-jen, the way his cartoonish torture scenes greeted the reader in a sort of clumsy dance with repulsion and fascination. Chen Chieh-jen’s horrified and horrifying satire allowed the darkness to seep from behind the shadows, from the penumbra of history to infect his work with a looming threat, perhaps engaging the crisis identified by Allen Chun as imminent.

We might notice that Chen Chieh-jen’s use of pornography borders on the obscene. If we were to look at the distinction between a pornographic art and an obscene art we might get closer to the difference between Yang Mao-Lin and Chen Chieh-jen. If we take as a premise that traffic accidents are obscene, a literal getting beneath the skin of progress to see its inner workings; and that pornography is merely an escape from exactly the threat of the accidental obscene in a clearly orchestrated manipulation of flesh, it would be possible to see the historical benefits of the obscene and the a-historical promise of the pornographic. Perhaps that is why Bataille found the original photograph erotic. When I began this essay with a discussion of the social traffic of dream I was thinking along these lines. The obscene and the

pornographic crash into one another, and where the pornographic escapes harm, that is the premise of pornography that it is harmless, the obscene remains as the underbelly, the Freudian death drive, or thanatos of technology. I could see the following quote as a commentary on Chen Chieh-jen's landscapes of death: 'Since Dad and Mom died in a car accident, Eddie has no fear to lose what he has, so he pretends calm, but heart beaten acutely, to accept his destiny.' My student, whose name is Eddie, found a most pathetic and heartrending way to express his loss. He gave voice to a terribly tragic situation, all too common in Taiwan, the slaughter on the highways, and at the same time, 'heart beaten acutely' infused his comment with what one might sense as an almost Buddhist acceptance of the situation.

Conclusion

What kinds of dance or music or both are these cartoon images invoking? An image in time has to be enlivened, animated by the time it has passed through. The poses by their stillness, require an animating invisible hand. With advertising the hand that leads the dance is monolithic, criminal, orgiastic and extremely violent. This is being celebrated as the nature of the market, the moving spirit of the West, an advertisement for the pornography of transnational capital. As if MacDonald's cashiers were required to wear nothing when serving Big Macs, or Burger King their Whoppers - A truly naked lunch. Or as if Yang Mao-Lin's paintings were used to decorate MacDonald's or Burger King. One doubts if people would do more than laugh. However, if Chen Dje Ren were displayed in fast food outlets one can imagine the profound melancholy of burger eaters throughout Taiwan as they find their appetites dwindling.

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