

## The Post-Repetition Ego

Text: Su Wei

*“The situation was perhaps no better with regard to repetition: in another manner, this too is thought in terms of the identical, the similar, the equal or the opposed. In this case, we treat it as a difference without concept: two things repeat one another when they are different even while they have exactly the same concept. Henceforth, everything that causes repetition to vary seems to us to cover or hide it at the same time. Here again, we do not reach a concept of repetition. By contrast, might we not form such a concept once we realize that variation is not added to repetition in order to hide it, but is rather its condition or constitutive element, the interiority of repetition par excellence? Disguise no less than displacement forms part of repetition, and of difference: a common transport or diaphora. At the limit, might there not be a single power of difference or of repetition, but one which operates only in the multiple and determines multiplicities?”<sup>1</sup>*

*-Preface to the English edition of Difference and Repetition, Giles Deleuze*

In Robert Musil’s novel- *The Man Without Qualities* (*Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*), Musil describes the qualities of the virtual as: some sort of power, with the ability to imagine everything possible, and not seeing existence as more important than non-existence. People could see that this creative intelligence is worthwhile, unfortunately it always make the things that humans value seem artificial, making what they prohibit seem facilitated, or perhaps both just seem insignificant. <sup>2</sup>The virtual is an essential constitution for creativity, artists step into this world as “romantics”, “weak”, “egotists” and “hypercritics”<sup>3</sup>, desperately attempting to reveal every obscurely hidden truth.

However, we constantly revise these values and restrictions in the discussions of contemporary art, as if they have possessed the artists’ ability to recreate. We are desperately after every possibility in the world, constantly expanding our visions for the future. In this context, the virtual becomes a natural guide for the Arts, a standard for practice, sometimes over-exposing Art in the projection of social and cultural needs. The situation that artists are in have become increasingly difficult, they remain romantic, weak, egotistical and hypercritical, but finding themselves incapable of things other than recreation - works of Art have become products of an echo or in relation to others. Artists realize that the worst scenario is where Art has been over-exposed and could no longer be produced, and any brave attempt would just end up being fed through different sections of the system, finding itself in a loop, chasing a ghost.

As a matter of fact, in Li Ran (born 1986, Hubei province)’s solo exhibition – *Mont Sainte-Victoire* at the Magician Space is also an attempt in recreation. Using the name of the mountain where Cezanne had resided and worked, and often the subject of his paintings, as the title of this exhibition, Li attempts to find his perspective into modern aesthetics, while revisiting the fragments of our history. The artist has compiled a four-act performance: “The Reflecting Scenery”, “The Gaze”, “The Tournament”, “The Chance Encounter”, where he performs live mimicking the dubbing in Chinese cinema in the 1970s and 1980s. In this piece of work, Li’s perspective is a recollection of contemporary replicas. On the surface, it presents modernist aestheticism as its subject, as if it were the artist’s own private investigation into Art history, this is where the spectators are misled into a seemingly safe trap - in its visualization and content, *Mont Sainte-Victoire* has the “approved” intelligence in the contemporary standard, which is substantial for theorists and critics to chew on, but the modernist aestheticism that the artist has chosen embodies an indescribable contingency, as it is recreated both in and out of the work. The main focus of this piece of work is not only Art itself, but also the sort of creativity that relies heavily on sensational impact and span. Chance encounters, bodily experiences and one’s commitment towards Art create a unique turning point for where works of Art could be conceived. At the end of the day, the ego of an artist that s/he recreates is just an artist, who Musil describes as the egoistic, hypercritical and spirit- liberating creators – the enemy of the critics, and the

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<sup>1</sup> Gilles Deleuze. *Deux régimes de fous. Textes et entretiens, 1975-1995.* ©2003 Éditions de Minuit, Paris.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Musil. *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften.* Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag GmbH (February 1990). P. 25.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

nomad who roams within Art.

Li challenges the sternness that Art has obtained within the system; perhaps it has not reached the point where the virtual is impossible, because Art itself is everything that the virtual is. On one level, this brings this piece of work into the narrower, specified context within the group of spectators, each of them yielding their own path into the work, basing on the way they understand and think about the system. At the same time, the contradicting relationship between the traditions of art history, critical theory and creativity, survival, and cultural context all appear as fragments seeped into the thoughts of the artist, distilling to a point where the ego and the act of recreation merges. The presentation of the work is momentarily powerful and attractive, asking us to identify with the small but tough ego of the creator.

During the performance, Li will be isolated in the room on the left where there will only be a window for the audience to look through. He reads from a “Dubbing Script” that he holds in his hands, sitting at a round table covered with a dark green cloth, under a light suspended above his head. He is dressed in a grey suit, wearing a pair of retro spectacles, disguising the artist, but at the same time revealing him as the performer. Three projectors are placed in the center of the exhibition hall projecting images that he collected in different speeds. On the right hand side displaces a video of a pre-recorded performance that will be run on loop after the performance.

Although the jocosity and irony that the dubbing brings into the scenes are not the artist’s initial intention, it fits perfectly with the work. The irony within is not the same as passion-gone-wrong, but a highlight of the limited amount of freedom during its creation. The subject of irony is never to govern any rules, as it is constantly on idle, away from the utopian goal, it grasps reality prematurely, denying “all that is real in history”<sup>4</sup>. In Mont Sainte-Victoire, irony allows the artist to roam between reality and the virtual – We should distance ourselves from the boredom that occurs after displacing ourselves as the subject of execution and modernist discussions, it emphasizes more so on the existence of the artist as an individual in the artistic context and the more general spectrum of the industry.

In Li’s four-act script, he transforms into different speakers – a proud youth, a left-winged youth, a youth, a middle-aged man, a frail elderly, an elderly, a female youth and narrators – a life coach, a show host, a sarcastic narrator... quoting and editing descriptions of creativity, Art history, the industry and contemplations of existence. These speeches include the artist’s own thoughts and also the borrowings of others’, constantly replicating and advancing, regardless of its ignorance and even self-contradiction. Under the mask of repetition, the repetition itself is cancelled out at the moment of its creation, where the artist has somehow altered in its process, creating a leap (Sprung) between reality and the virtual. Repetition and leap are two sides of the same coin, leaving us with the question – when leap means the constant advancement and elimination of things, could we survive the great nothingness that exist in-between?

In the post-millennium Chinese contemporary Art, there is a notable drop of the level of creativity and non-advancement in Art itself. In the past decade, the system started to rapidly become capital-driven and very political, where the individualism in theoretical and practical independence have been compromised. It is just recently that some practitioners with a strong sense of individuality have been surfacing, being very different from the Chinese contemporary Arts that are theme and pattern driven, constantly revising the self and the history around, and in their own unique ways, penetrate and influence their environment and the system. As one of them, Li’s practice presents a unique perspective, hopefully a beginning of a maturing practice, providing a real point of reference for our Art system.

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<sup>4</sup> Søren Kierkegaard. *The Concept of Irony*. With continual reference to Socrates. Edited and translated with introduction and notes by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton University Press, Princeton: 1989(304). P. 275.

# 重复后的自我

文：苏伟

“说到‘重复’，事情也许并未变得更好，虽然我们不再像思考‘差异’那样从同一性、相似性、相同性或者相对性等角度出发。我们把‘重复’塑造成一个没有定义的‘差异’：当两种东西互不相同、却拥有一个相同的概念时，它们就会重复。因此我们觉得，所有重复之中改变了的东西都会同时将重复覆盖或者隐藏起来。我们在这里同样也无法获得有关‘重复’的概念。如果我们意识到，改变并非附加在重复上的东西，而是重复的前提或者构成性因素，或者说就是它的内在性，我们可不可以反过来塑造一种‘重复’的概念？正如延宕是差异的一部分，伪装也是重复的成分之一：各自身上都体现出一种共同的运动，一种属差(Diaphora)。那么最终会不会只存在一种权力——差异的权力或者重复的权力——独自在各处显现出来，并且决定了各种多样性的形式？”<sup>1</sup>

——吉尔·德勒兹

在罗伯特·穆奇尔(Robert Musil)的小说《没有个性的人》(Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften)中，穆奇尔这样描述“虚拟”的特征：“不妨把虚拟感说成一种能力，能够料想得到一切可能会发生的事物，而不把存在的事物看得比不存在的事物更重要。人们看到，这样的创造性资质的作用可能是值得注意的，可惜它们往往让人类所赞赏的东西显得虚假，让人类所禁止的东西显得是被允许的，或者大概也会让二者都显得无关紧要。”<sup>2</sup>虚拟是艺术创作必需的体质，艺术家作为“空想家”、“懦弱的人”、“自以为是的人”、“爱挑剔的人”<sup>3</sup>进入与我们所处相同的世界，艰难地尝试着揭开现实某个褶皱的角落。

然而在当代艺术的讨论中，那些“人类所赞赏”或者“所禁止”的东西被我们重复观看和反思，这仿佛占用了艺术家虚拟能力的地盘，让艺术显得无处藏身。我们更加急切地挖掘世界的可能性，无时无刻不在寻求建立未来的视野。在这种语境里，虚拟成为了艺术系统的常态指标，一个实践的标准，有时让艺术过度暴露在社会和文化投射而来的渴求的目光中。艺术家的境遇变得艰险而微妙，他们仍然是“空想家”、“懦弱的人”、“自以为是的人”、“爱挑剔的人”，却发现自己掌控的除了虚拟能力本身之外别无其他，每一次作品的编织都是关联和呼应的产物。艺术家发现，最大的困境在于艺术无可虚拟，艺术被去蔽，任何一次诚惶诚恐或者野心勃勃的尝试只是在艺术系统不同的环节被消化，最终不过是自圆其说的一次循环，一次没有对象的对话。

无疑，艺术家李然(1986年生于湖北)此次在魔金石空间举办的个展“圣维克多尔山”也是一次虚拟的尝试。他取用塞尚画笔下反复出现的圣维克多尔山的名字作为展览题目，试图自我建造一条通往现代主义美学的通道，再次观看消沉于我们自身历史之中的经验碎片。艺术家自我编纂了“反射的图景”、“凝视”、“竞技”、“偶遇”等四个剧目的陈述，并以模仿70、80年代中文译制片配音的方式进行现场表演。在这个作品中，李然切入的角度恰恰是对当代虚拟的反思。表面看来，作品呈现以现代主义美学为探讨对象，似乎显现为艺术家深入艺术史内部的一次实地考察。这无疑给观看者设置了诱人的陷阱，误导你的观看经验进入安全通道。作品在视觉和内容编织上具有了当代性标准中“合法化”的资质，足以挑动理论家和探险者的神经。但是，艺术家选取现代主义美学具有不可描述的偶然性，这在更本质的层面上决定了这一项目的当代性。现代主义美学既在作品之中，又在作品之外，艺术家虚拟了一次情境，真正的关注有且仅有艺术本身，这与某些以辐射和跨度为特征的“内容性”创作有着本质区别。偶遇、身体经验、对艺术的忠诚构成了作品实施的契机，艺术家虚拟的自我最终只是一个艺术家，是穆奇尔描述中的那类兼具自大与自卑、挑剔与开放精神的创造者：一个批评家的敌人，一个绝对处于艺术内部的游牧者。

<sup>1</sup> 参见 Gilles Deleuze. Deux régimes de fous. Textes et entretiens, 1975-1995. ©2003 Éditions de Minuit, Paris. 此处引自此书德文版。

<sup>2</sup> Robert Musil. Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften. Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag GmbH (February 1990). P. 25.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

李然试图打破艺术在艺术系统中练就的坚硬，艺术也许并没有陷入无可虚拟的境地，因为艺术本身就是虚拟所拥有的一切。这让这件作品在某一层面上进入到更为狭窄和限定观看人群的语境中，观众建立进入作品的自我通道将直接由行业感和对艺术系统的体认决定。同时，艺术史传统、批评与创作的矛盾关系、行业生存、艺术系统、文化语境变迁，全部显现为经验的碎片而被纳入到艺术家的思考中，最终凝聚为一次自我精神与虚拟行为的连接。作品在呈现的刹那强大而魅惑的，这要求我们在体验的欢愉过后保有哪怕一丝对于创作者弱小而坚韧的自我精神的认同。

表演现场，艺术家将自己封闭在展厅左侧的附翼空间中，只留下一个窗口供观众观看。在头顶一束灯光的投射下，艺术家手持“配音稿”，松弛地坐在铺有暗绿色桌布的圆桌前，对着电容麦克风朗读剧本。艺术家似乎刻意打扮过，佩戴老式挂链眼镜，身着灰色西装，掩饰又暴露着艺术家作为表演者的身份。三架投影仪摆放在主展厅中央，表演过程中在正面墙上以不均等的速度播放艺术家各处采集的二百多幅图片，这其中大部分是艺术史上的作品，也穿插有关于各种历史事件的图片，播放中时而出现墙面留白。右侧墙壁上悬挂着李然提前录制好的相同表演视频，表演结束后即时滚动播放。

在李然塑造的这一虚拟情境中，李然用模仿译制片配音的朗读方式直接冲击观众的听觉感受。配音带来的戏谑和讽刺效果尽管并非艺术家有意为之，却出人意料地达致作品的诉求。作品中的讽刺（Irony）不等同于摧毁的热情，而是凸显出主体创作的（有限）自由。一个讽刺的主体天生与规则制定者的身份绝缘，他的内在性时刻处于充盈与空无的间歇中，偏离着乌托邦的目标。讽刺者不塑造现实，他抓住现实形成之前的七寸，否定了“一切历史的现实性”<sup>4</sup>。在《圣维克多尔山》中，讽刺给予了艺术家游走在现实与虚拟中的空间——需要注意的是，这一实践方式与现代性探讨的主体抽空后的无聊感（Boredom）保持了距离，它更加注重在具体的行业和艺术语境中个体艺术家的存在状态。

在李然自我编纂的四幕剧本中，艺术家化身为不同属性的叙述者（高傲的青年、左翼青年、青年、中年、脆弱的老年、老年、女青年）和旁白（励志者的旁白、主持人式的旁白、调侃的旁白），引用、编织不同出处的叙述，描述了关于创作、艺术史、行业以及自我存在的思考。这些叙述既有艺术家自我的感受，也有他人思考的重复。这种重复保持了向前的姿态，尽管它也是暧昧不明甚至自我矛盾的。艺术家伪装在重复的外表下，甚至掩藏了重复的形式。在重复的刹那，重复自身被消解，一切被重复的叙述反而以全新的、激进的、非派生性的面貌重新出现。那些历史叙事忽然出现了断层，艺术家的自我面孔在未消偃的过去和可能的未来之间若隐若现。通过重复，艺术家似乎改变了什么，这些得到改变的东西掩埋了重复，在现实和虚拟之间完成了一次跳跃（Sprung）。重复和跳跃是硬币的两面，留给艺术家和我们的疑难是：跳跃意味着不断扬弃（aufgeben）主体，我们是否能经受住跳跃间隙产生的巨大虚无？

在2000年之后的中国当代艺术中，我们深刻感受到一种创作强度的减弱和艺术本身的停滞。在这个十年中，我们的艺术系统开始不断繁殖以利益化和政治化为目标的艺术创作，严重损害了艺术家的个体精神和理论实践的独立性。而现在，一些具有强烈自我精神的实践者正逐渐浮现。他们与那些主题化和形式实践为基础的中国当代艺术创作保持了距离，不断重新观看自身和周遭的历史，以各自独有的切入角度慢慢影响着我们所处的艺术生态和艺术系统。作为其中的一员，李然的实践展露出独特的面貌，希望这次个展是他展开更为丰满的实践系统的开始，为我们的艺术系统提供真实的参照。

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4 Søren Kierkegaard. *The Concept of Irony. With continual reference to Socrates.* Edited and translated with introduction and notes by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton University Press, Princeton: 1989(304). P. 275.