

## **All Possibilities Can be Disordered but Appropriate**

– on *Microphone Test I & II* by Hsu Che-Yu

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Actually the essay titled "To Mother" written by Huang Guo-Jun to his mother before his suicide was not included in the book "Microphone Test". Hsu Che-Yu tries to employ the sense of humor in "Microphone Test" as the essence of his work by borrowing the title for his exhibition *Microphone Test: A Letter to Huang Guo-Jun*. Perhaps because the coincidence that the author's life story fits into the storyline of "To Mother", the article accidentally gains more popularity and importance than "Nothing Else to Say." Although lines such as "of course, if I don't have a loved one by my bedside, I might as well harass the nurse with a few dirty jokes because I'll be dead by the time she sues me" are not as absurd or exaggerate as the jokes on life in "To Mother", when ordinary people read: "I was writing to auntie, but she works for the tax bureau so I can't help but kept criticizing the finance minister for both his policy and hairstyle. I am very grateful to her. She used to encourage me to play rock and roll, maybe because she has a hippie soul and wants me to fulfill her dream. Unfortunately, as I was just going to take my second electric guitar lesson, the guitar teacher committed suicide at home with a gun at the age of 29. The tuition fee was refund, yet I spent them all on a suit for my teacher's funeral" probably would shiver for Huang Guo-Jun's lines of politically incorrect loser's comments besides feeling depressed.

To discuss the relationship between contemporary art and literature, putting the many artists who explore through literature aside, noticeable events such as the Whitney Museum's "Moby Dick" Readathon began from 2012 which has already started this year, or the British Museum's frequently hosted poet's lectures, even the discussion "Poem and Art, Hand in Hand" between artists and poets hosted by Kaohsiung Museum of Fine Arts last year, all such events are still only at the stage of promoting literature. Thus, as we discuss the relationship between Hsu Che-Yu's exhibition with the book "Microphone Test", besides the coincidence of their exposition of death and death itself, Hsu's exhibition is one of the rare exhibitions in Taiwan that put contemporary art into direct connection with texts from literature.

If we say Hsu Che-Yu's *Microphone Test* and *Microphone Test II* discuss about death, I would rather say Hsu's works in these two remote exhibitions discussed the sharing of the (non-) presence of language through these unnatural deaths. As Emmanuel Lévinas said: "Death is the end of what makes the thinkable thinkable, and it is in this sense that it is unthinkable..... The problem of death is incomprehensible when it concerns man not as a being subject to annihilation but as the very comprehension of being. This end finds no model in intelligibility. "<sup>1</sup>(DMT, 90- 91) Thus, the irreplaceable relationship between style and writer, argument and speaker become clear when "Microphone Test" takes the literal text of "To Mother" as a complete prophecy, and also when death in all kinds and offset are spoken out by speakers who are not supposed to speak so. Maybe we can say the prophetic attribute of "To Mother", Yuan Che-Shen's "sending off" on the phone in *Microphone Test: Farewell*, or Hsu's Mother associating deaths on news with Hsu's grandfather's suicide all seem like are based on a sense of mourning, yet any magic of these words are coming from a paradox with non-sharing death experience but seemingly sharing mourning according to language structure.

The phenomenon, that languages are identical yet the experiences are various, sounds like nonsense. However, from Hsu Che-Yu's reveal of Yuan Zhi-Jie in the whole art project to Hsu's investigation into his grandfather's suicide by drinking pesticide, it starts to show a representation of ethics in language. Or, why is Hsu Che-Yu eligible to restate his grandfather's death? What is shown here first is the conflict between the "authority" of language when discussing death and the "authenticity" of the event; then, there is the contradiction between sharing language and the idiographic quality of death; third is the gap between the non-physical quality of memory and other's experience. Hsu Che-Yu's *Microphone Test* revealed the impossibility of experience intervention by language or even sets of videos and images. But what also should be noted is that such impossibility is often the operation mechanism of various art categories.

In the form of Hsu's video works, *Microphone Test* expressed a contradiction between the testimony of foregoing discussion and the events through Chen Wan-Yin's dictation of Yuan Zhi-Jie, Chen Liang-Hui and Lo Tien-Yu, telling a testimony of his family history. In terms

<sup>1</sup> Emmanuel Lévinas(1993), *Dieu, la mort et le temps*, Paris, Grasset. *God, Death, and Time*. Translated by Bettina Bergo, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000.

of style, Hsu often replaces the real figures with animated characters using simple line drawings.

Lin Yi-Siou once mentioned the concept of “the phantom of the monetary body” in “The Reveal of The Anonym - Production and Dismantling of Schematic Diagram,” which inspires us to discuss problems from cultural consumption to video simulation with not only Jean Baudrillard’s theory. Further taking *Microphone Test: A Letter to Huang Guo-Jun* for instance, we would question the video technology which gradually formed a themed and discussable video language through the past century. Christian Metz’s book “The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema” on film semiotics, Mieke Bal's "Narratology" or Gérard Genette in “Metonymy”, taking film as an example, video images being symbolized is more than common in contemporary times. As the painterly nature of the video gradually fades away, we may confront *Microphone Test* more directly: According to Jean-Paul Sartre, has video become a non-sensory art like literal language? Or is the narrative of video art in recent years is possibly having a complete shift towards a more profound focus on video language in the social perceive structure? And can we take Chen Liang-Hui’s real figure appearing in the space or Hsu’s real face in the mirror in *A Letter to Huang Guo-Jun* as a resistance of the painterly nature of video image itself?

At the same time, as he claims himself as an artist, Hsu’s thoughts on rape cases, unnatural deaths, audio archives describing grandfather’s funereal and the reproduction of the portrait from the ancestral hall in *Microphone Test II: A Letter from Mother* are all elements that not only questioned reality and its disability, but also led Hsu Che-Yu’s work, form his animated characters to the application of News materials and even his video forms, to a fusion of fictionality between genres from a literal perspective. It is such perceptual structure that ignited the literary debate over the authenticity of prose last year. To be honest, any genre has its own internal operation mechanism. Literature and news, fictional images and social documentaries all maintain their internal stylistic autonomy by maintaining their own distances from reality. Yet it is a paradox that is socially discredited in Taiwan. *Microphone Test: A Letter to Huang Guo-Jun* is a real example of such condition. To state it more bluntly, I would say with a stranger relaying, adding more details and artist animated simulations reproducing the site, the work is not in between reality and memory; it is only a story that a third person relayed: it is News when it borrows News language; it is art when it is presented in the form of video work.

*Microphone Test II: A Letter from Mother* is one step further away from death, a rather shift to self-reflection on artist mechanism. As Huang Guo-Jun's joke at the end of "Do Not Weight Life Only More Than 100 Pounds" in the book "Microphone Test": "There are a few fictional sexual adventures in the book and I'm not stupid enough to claim " He was straight to the point to the initial power of literature and art- "fiction" is always the pass to art.

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