Fables of the Demon Spirit—"Lunar Dial" and Gao Yuan's paintings

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Specifically speaking, I am not interested in a concrete thing, but rather everything besides what I am writing about, the topic I have selected, as well as all its possible variants and the relationships in between; it is everything that this topic may encompass in time and space.

- Italo Calvino "American Lectures"

The backdrop of the animation "Lunar Dial" consists of acrylic paintings Gao Yuan created in the past six years. Green trains, open streets flanked by lowrise buildings, a tall parking pole set against the night city scape, dilapidated, lonely, and possessing a stale industrial stench, like the forgotten ruins of a once mighty city and its periphery, ruthlessly plundered of former lustre. Yet, during the period of a few years, Gao Yuan rarely left her Beijing studio to conduct rural 'ethnography'. "Lunar Dial" has a distinct structure and rhythm. It is obvious that the paintings included within the animation are not focused on the technical handling of the interior of the painting, but also contain 'animated elements', that is, a state of consciousness that changes the nature of the 'momentum' of the animation.

"Eternal Return" features "Lunar Dial" and paintings that appear in it. Within one of the paintings, "Artificial Beach", three stoplights are erected in a harbor surrounded by high-rise buildings, their lights mingling with the sunrise (or perhaps, sunset). With no roads in the water, the stoplights appear to be rulers of little relevance. Thus, a sentimental landscape becomes an expression of old-fashioned 'order'.

This symbolic divergence broadens the scope of the metaphor until it seems meaningful. Throughout the animation, the artist's approach remains direct and images are simple, with repeated action so that objects contain the ideographic system that initially captures viewers' attention. Objects are simplified to an extent that can be identified, but not reduced to mere lines and color.

If some animation undergoes change according to the tautology of 'A equals B', resulting in the continuous transformation of images (young artist Wang Haiyang's "Animated Painting Trilogy" belongs in this category) and embodiment of a visual way of thinking, then "Lunar Dial" is more akin to a film. Like Alain Resnais' "Last Year at Marienbad" (1962), Gao Yuan uses montage to create a more complete narrative and a suspenseful temporal 'wormhole'. Three obscured figures ride a bicycle, row a wooden canoe and walk throughout the animation. The three figures slowly approach 'closer' to a 'destination' under a moonlit sky. It is worth mentioning that 'closer to a destination' is only a rhetoric; their journeys do not end with the conclusion of the animation, and at no point is a sense of forward progression, hardships of the journey or joy of reaching a final destination conveyed. By using a cyclical narrative, many other topics with rich meanings are interspersed throughout the 'journey', creating a visual rhythm that includes: flowing water (water sounds, droplets, an ocean displayed on a phone camera), moonlight and other light (an incandescent bulb, traffic lights, streetlights, flashlights), and objects representing knowledge (a human anatomy, library, flipping pages of a text, and burning book) and so forth. These themes incorporate visual, form, concept and metaphor. They are arranged to intermittently 'attack' and switch, summoning viewers to form an impression with the fragmented and difficult to digest scenes that create a certain rhyme and meter.

For example, flowing water appears in the opening scene and becomes a weak element (water droplets under the simmering glow of street lamps), embellishing the ever more prominent presence of the moon throughout the animation.

According to French philosopher Bernard Stiegler, a temporal object is temporal when its flow coincides with the stream of consciousness of which it is the object. It is precisely because of this that "Lunar Dial" effectively mobilizes viewers' consciousness with visual montage. Perhaps we can cite German philosopher Edmund Husserl's phenomenological concept of the 'second hold' to explain the strange ambiguous feeling of those already passed 'moments' that precede the present 'moment' that although gone, remain temporarily in the present 'moment', like a lingering demon spirit, simultaneously present and absent (the exhibition name "Eternal Return" alludes to this). Similarly, the shape of consciousness is also embodied in the transmission of the media itself: the language of animation exhibits inferior documentary utility compared to an image, and presented as a sense of encroachment, is digested again, alluding to a richer image, as well as becoming more similar in format to the visual information of the mind.

Gao Yuan incorporates her own state of consciousness in her paintings and animation, allowing these media to constantly recount the past while flowing toward the future, forming a self-contained structure. "Lunar Dial" refers to the ancient time measurement tool based on the shadow of moonlight. Due to the oblong shape of the lunar orbit, deviation is very common. In this way, the lunar dial incorporates uncertainty generated by cyclical movement and conversion. Reality is determined by intuition and feeling of the formation of a silhouette, flowing out like a dreamlike implication.

讲寓言的怨灵 ——《月晷》及高源的绘画

杨紫

确切地说，我感兴趣的不是某个具体的东西，而是我要写的东西之外的一切东西，是我选择的那个题目及其全部可能的变体、异体之间的关系，是这个题目的时空可能包括的一切事件。
——卡尔维诺，《美国讲稿》

收录于动画《月晷》之中的场景源自高源六年来创作的丙烯架上绘画。守候绿皮火车的铁轨，低矮建筑间开辟的街道，城市夜景高高扬起的停车杆，破败、寂寥，又承载着一种陈旧的工业感，仿佛是一处处被忘却的遗迹，预言着不可一世的超级城市步入衰落后的景象，也接近这些城市边缘被无情掠夺光彩的乡镇面貌。然而，在创作的几年间，她绝少离开北京的工作室"下乡采风"。《月晷》是一部具有她个人意识结构特质的动画。它所包涵的绘画及动画自身，均在对绘画与动画进行着区分——即便是她的绘画（显而易见，绘画的着眼点并不在于技术性地处理绘画内部的问题），也含有"动画性"，即随着意识的状态变化性质的"动势"。

高源的每一幅画面都是思维的一次跳动。本次展览"不已"将《月晷》以及其中出现过的多幅绘画共同展出。在其中一幅《人造沙滩》中，被城市楼层环抱的港湾水面上竖起了三排红绿灯，与清晨（抑或黄昏）的光辉交相呼应；水面上不存在道路，交通灯俨然成为了几位不合时宜的规则裁定者。于是，一幅含情脉脉的风景画成为了一副讽喻古板"秩序"的表情，一个对象征性有所发掘的过程。这种象征性持续发散，拓宽着被象征喻体的范围，直至显得意味深长。纵观整部动画，艺术家直接的、未受程式化规训塑形的描画手法，让物件所蕴含的表意系统比绘画性率先抓住人们的注意力——被描绘人物的形象简单，动作反复；那些物件被削减到可被辨识出的程度，却又不至简化为线条和色彩的堆砌，最终被消减为准确造型，却又具备吊诡之处的意象。

如果说，一些动画在对"A 是 B"的重言式命题进行改造和偷换，引导不同的形象持续地变化（青年艺术家王海洋的"动画绘画三部曲"即属于这一类），是视觉推导思维方式的体现；那么，高源的《月晷》更接近于电影。宛如阿伦·雷乃的电影《去年在马里昂巴德》，她通过蒙太奇的方法切换和剪辑场景，在一个较为完整叙事内部，制造时间的"虫洞"，将悬疑的氛围悬置起来。三位面目不清的动画角色，分别以骑乘自行车、驾驶单人木船和徒步的方式，缓缓"接近"于各自的"目的地"——天空、月球与地表之下的黑暗。值得一提的是，在此，"接近目的地"只是一种修辞，他们没有随着动画的结束而停止自己的旅程，亦从没有以任何方式显示出对出行的憧憬、旅途的艰辛和到达的喜悦。同时，以循环的叙事方式，许多其他具有着丰富寓意的主题被穿插于"行进"的过程中，敲击出观看的节奏，其中包括：流动的水（水声、匍匐前进的水滴，以及被手机拍摄着的大海等等），各种景别的月亮及其他的发光体（白炽灯泡、交通灯、街灯、手电筒），以及代表着知识的物件（人体解剖图、图书馆、翻动的书页、被焚烧的书本）等等。这些主题既是视觉的、形状的、图像的，也是概念的，充满隐晦的比喻性。这些主题被安排于间歇性地"发作"和切换，召唤回观众对它们的印象，为似乎显得碎片化而难以下咽的画面，组织起一定的格律。例如，流动的水在动画开头集中出现，之后便以非常微弱的形态（例如水滴声和灼热得滴落的街灯光芒）点缀其中提示着它之前的亮相；月亮却从始贯穿动画，更为强势和重要。

按照贝尔纳·斯蒂格勒的说法，影像这一时间客体与以之为对象的意识流，即观众的意识，都在时间之流中展开自己，所以总能够轻易地产生共鸣并相互重合。也正因为如此，《月晷》能够有效地调动观众视觉的蒙太奇。或许，我们能使用胡塞尔的现象学概念"第二持留"来解释这种奇特的暧昧感受：那些已经过去的"此刻"先于当下的"此刻"，虽已逝去，却还寄居于当下的"此刻"之中，宛如挥之不去的怨灵，既在场，又不在场（展览名"不已"影射着这种记忆不曾绝对消失的时间观）。同样，意识的形状也具体地体现在媒介本身的传达上：动画的语言不如影像那般具备记录性，而呈现为历经了意识染指的、被再次消化过的、能指更为丰富的图像，也更接近于头脑存储视觉资料的格式。

高源将自己的意识状态融入她的绘画和动画，让这些媒介通过不断回溯过去和流向未来，构造着一个自足的闭合结构。动画作品名所引用的"月晷"如日晷，是古代利用月光丈量时间的工具，但由于月球轨道并非正圆，偏差十分普遍。

在此，月晷被引申为时空和秩序不确定的轮回和转换——它到底是凭借着直觉和感受形成侧影，而非一板一眼地照亮和丈量现实，却流淌出来梦境般的意蕴。

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