

FRAGILITY AND ETERNITY

In the works of Cécile Andrieu we experience something like the risk of walking along a sharp ridge. If balance is lost even a little bit, one is likely to fall to the right or left. In fact it may be easier to fall to either side, which is what happens in the works of many artists. There is a leaning towards formalism or expressionism, idea or matter, meaning or meaninglessness. However, this attitude of keeping a precarious balance against the wind, preserves a purity that only proud lonely people have.

The first work of Cécile's that I saw was, *HEURES*. On the floor of a compact gallery, several books were displayed, open, fan-like. On the near side of each book a black kneeling board was placed. The visitor was expected to kneel down and turn over the leaves of the books. In this position, he would discover that all the characters on all the leaves of all the books have been deleted carefully with white correction fluid, line by line. Reading books by Sartre, Lee Ufan and the like, she deleted the parts which she had just read word by word. This process continued everyday; like the copying of the sutra by apprentices. However, just deleting takes time, much more so when it must be read. Sartre's text is difficult, but for Cécile, whose native language is French, reading the Japanese of Lee Ufan, who makes free use of the philosophical language of Nishida, might have even been more difficult. It took one year to finish deleting five books.

A book exists to be read. Therefore, a book, the characters of which have been deleted, is no longer a book. It is nothing but a thing made of white paper, black ink and white correction fluid hiding the ink. Losing its essence (function), the book becomes just an existing thing. In this state, existence precedes essence, which is something that Sartre has formerly said. It was not an accident then that of the books selected were Sartre's text on existentialism and the manifesto of Mono-ha by Lee Ufan.

The rule prescribing that the characters must be deleted once they have been read also induces a tension between the reader and the characters, for there is only a single chance. This once-off opportunity creates a strong awareness of the contact between the reader and the writing (the title of Lee's book is, *In Search of Contact*). In reality, the things of the world do not exist with the same intensity for everyone. The degree of existence of each thing differs depending on how it is perceived. A book which has been deleted after reading should begin to exist more strongly than anything else; like a lover looking back from a crowd.

A book which loses its essence loses its function as a tool. Instead, it becomes the other, which is what I make contact with. In brief, by vanishing, the book begins to exist as book. This logic pervades the basic form of buddhist sutras. The

sutra, "Hannyakyo," for example, uses in repetition the logic prescribing that "X is not X, therefore it is X"(this logic is also the core of Nishida's philosophy). It is no accident that afterwards Cécile has selected the "Hannyashingyō" which is a resumé of the "Hannyakyo" for deletion.

The Mono-ha school represented by Lee Ufan considered that, by depriving things of their customary meaning, it was possible to come into contact with the actual condition of things, before their definition by man. It can also be said that this idea matches what Kant called the, "thing in itself" or the "truth" of Heidegger. So, should Cécile be considered as a member of Mono-ha? No, because if you look at her works you understand that she is not so. Her works have a special quality that the best works of Mono-ha did not have. They are beautiful. Theirs is a beauty elaborated with delicacy, like the tea ceremony, upon a frame built with a mathematical exactness and conciseness. This kind of beauty does not exist originally in nature. It begins to appear when man tries to incorporate nature to his world. The world that Cécile provides is not the world of daily life, it is a formal world of the senses. Within this world, the object, deprived of its essence and reduced to matter, such as a cadaver, tends to return to life in assuming a beautiful form. So, should Cécile be considered as a formalist? No. If she was, it would not be necessary for her to create a detour by erasing the text. Is her art concep-

tual? There is definitely some conceptual element, but her work is not to be understood by use of concepts alone, it must be registered with the eye. This thing, lying between existence and non-existence, shivers like fragile glass.

The act of deleting characters with white correction fluid differs from the work of a cleaner removing stains. The purpose of cleaner is to make stains disappear, but with the white correction fluid she does not eliminate the characters she only makes them unreadable. Traces are visible and it is clear that the layer of black ink on paper and those of white correction fluid overlap each other. Characters exist there, but they do not work as characters. Characters which cannot be read are not characters. However, the fact that they exist is apparent. In this case, characters are apprehended as neither existing nor not existing, neither idea nor matter, neither form nor content, they lie somewhere between. The same thing can be said about the book as an assemblage of characters; as, indeed, about her other works. In the works of Cécile, books, Japanese writing paper, earth, stone, the essence of which has been deleted, are dematerialized, standing between existence and non-existence. It could be said that, like translucent glass, they "are" and yet they "are not". For those who have seen them, what is felt first is the subtle beauty that translucency bestows. A transparent object is not beautiful,

because nothing catches the eye. An opaque object is heavy, because it shoulders too much meaning.

Tatsumi Hijikata, who was once the originator of Butoh (contemporary Japanese dance), urged his disciples to become 'columns of ash'. The daily body has to be destroyed by fire but not to end in nothingness. After incineration, when ashes rise up like a column, the body of the dancer acquires a new beauty. For ashes, which may be dispersed by the blowing wind, may thus retain the form of matter and yet not. Cécile too denatures language and dematerializes matter, then, without returning to nothingness, she elaborates a new form. However, the place where it stands is extremely precipice-like. A ridge, like a blade, constitutes a boundary between existence and non-existence. The risk and the fragility increase the beauty. When we see it, we necessarily feel as follows: the clear and distinct world visible on all sides is in fact vanity. What is eternal consists rather in this translucent boundary.

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