

Features

The Ministry of the Mob in Shin-il Kim's *The Transubstantiation* (2005)

by Eliza Tan

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'You blocks, you stones, you worse than senseless things!'
William Shakespeare, Julius Caesar, 1.1.34

Standing at the nave of Kim's octagonal installation, awash in an unflinching glow of video light and the reversed mantras of a better life, a certain sense of interruption brushes past me as one, no - two, no - another seven or maybe eight Singapore Biennale exhibitiongoers enter into the space which was, just moments ago, my sole occupancy. Stepping outside the octagon, an A4 sized poster of Raphael's *The Transfiguration* on an adjacent wall comes into view. The area where the figure of Jesus would otherwise be has been clouded out to prefigure only an ambiguous shroud of white.

The crowd, or 'mob' that follows, with its frozen gestures and tendency for amazement appears to be the subject in focus. The crowd cloisters around the vacancy of a missing leader whose absence seems marked out if only by its state of incomprehension, fickleness, erratic organisation and collective bewilderment. The presence of the mob figures as a breathing metaphor for the absence and presence of judgement as well as the unquestioning subscription to leadership and the blind following of principles, both in aesthetic and ideological systems of belief and order. The mob further characterises the idiosyncratic nature of nomination and its complicit role as (blood and) body in the election and empowerment of its government, its favourite dogmas and its chosen leaders.

In questioning the 'mob' impulses that order and support the systematic frameworks of historical and cultural narratives, *The Transubstantiation* recites its own precepts of form, method and measurement in its appropriation of *The Transfiguration*. If a system and its inherent ideologies are retained and determined by its imagery and the 'mass' consumption of that imagery, then *The Transubstantiation* is an attempt to re-consider the psychology of such recognition, or perhaps, misrecognition. In place of the pyramidal arrangement of illusionary space and time (past, present, future as symbolised by its geometrical Trinity) in *The Transfiguration*, *The Transubstantiation* substitutes triangle for octagon so that event, characters, theatrical pose and gesture, are now given equal location. While the work replaces a former historical stance, its religious symbolism and sentiment with another, the octagon points inescapably to the retention of other representational systems and the consciousness they allude to - the Buddhist 8 Wheel as a symbol of Power and Infinity or the command of a 20th century road sign that reads 'STOP', the sign that points to a period.

Accompanied by an ambition to reframe Greenbergian prescriptions of representation, *The Transubstantiation* shifts along the coordinates of abstraction and figuration, materiality and immateriality, expression and impartiality. It plays on relationships between the nature of object and subject, waking transcendencies and impasses of negotiating form as well as idea. The video transpositions of the artist's pressedline drawings propose an investigation of dimensionality, perception and consciousness in an inkless line. Form and social subject undergo partial hiding and partial revelation in a trace act of casting, filming, marking, drawing, and editing as captured, creative procedure.

The unmoving form and fixed view of the two dimensional figure achieves illusory motion, life and three dimensionality through the sculptural rendering of a body's outline with video animation. The replay of video and drawing as successive mediums further exceed the self-same Cartesian equations traversed in the work's founding and substantiated by its production. A garbled recitation of the Dalai Lama's '*How to Improve Your Life*' unravels as tropes of backmasked reason in pace with the destabilisation of sound and language as fixed, objective and hierarchical systems of communication.

Almost as palimpsest, the work seems to offer a scope of references, substitutions and tangential perspectives that expose its configurations to contingencies of reading, viewing and interpretation. In so far as 'men may construe things after their fashion, clean from the purpose of things themselves¹', then *The Transubstantiation* might also come close to assuming the metonymical character of Barthes' Ship of Argo, luminous and white, constructed by paradigm, nomination and a replacement of its parts. It could be 'an object with no other cause than its name, with no other identity than its form²', posing between medium and message. Then, if *The Transubstantiation's* project moves towards transcending hegemonies of thought and representation, then it is positioned within the epileptic moment – the moment of replacement or substitution in its persistence of vision, at its own juncture of hybrid alienation.

The epileptic moment, in Raphael's synchronic depiction of Christ's transfiguration and the episode of the epileptic boy at the lower half of the painting, is problematic in as far as the dialectics of light and darkness, possession and deliverance, coherence and incoherence occur in its climax. The epileptic boy cannot be healed and delivered of his infirmity as he glimpses the light because there is none to 'minister' to him. He must continue to wait at its horizon, biting down on its promises of transcendence, salvation and transformation, returning over and over again to the impulse for revival. Elsewhere, in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, the epileptic moment envisages the fall of dictatorship and discerns the displaced allegiances of an eyeless mob that will as easily sway from one form of rhetoric on to another.

In *The Transubstantiation*, form and meaning metamorphosize into nearly

autonomous disciplines of pure light, space, movement and line within a moment of epilepsy that forshadow not only an inquisition of the authorial monoliths, favourite dogmas, and places of lack and of power which surround its practice. It perhaps also questions the audience 'mob' – the some time abstract, some time aberrant, some time schizophrenic, or some time democratic viewer-subjects who could also be the very instrument and agency of its turning, its making and its 'ministry'.

The rapt viewer stands at the brink of that unrecognisability, a mute eye roving in an invisible darkness.

Jesus Christ, the Dalai Lama and Julius Caesar – all in seizure.

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1.

William Shakespeare, Julius Ceaser, 1.3.33-35,

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2.

Krauss, The Originality of the Avant-garde and Other Modernist Myths (Cambridge, Massachusettes: MIT Press, 1985), 1.