



Excerpts from:

Theatre of the Tourist in the Age of Mobility

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Choy Ka Fai's projects always involves a lot of research; he visits "other" places where his intellectual interests and project objectives lead him. In short, he works like an anthropologist, who is supposed to have a keen interest in "other" cultures. Or he is simply a tourist. Whether to call Choy Ka Fai's project touristic or anthropological maybe a difficult question if you are not physically familiar with his work, but it is safe to call it artistic, not in a traditional sense of the word but in the sense that Ka Fai's "artistic" is somewhere between touristic and anthropological rather than beyond or below, or for that matter, on a different plane, of each categorical designation.

Here we may be reminded of Azuma Hiroki's description of the tourist in his highly acclaimed book *The Philosophy of the Tourist* (2018), in which he updated the notion of

the tourist as a possible form of subjectivity in the age of mobility. According to Azuma, the tourist is:

who meets someone s/he is not supposed to meet, who goes to places s/he is not supposed to go, who thinks what s/he is not supposed to think, thereby introducing the elements of contingency into the system of Empire and reconnecting concentrated fixed sets of branches by cancelling prioritized selections through mis-delivery. The accumulation of such practice will let the people know that there is no mathematical ground for the concentration of power at the top so it can be dismantled, subverted or rebooted at any time, and that the real world is not necessarily the best world” (Azuma 192, translation mine.)

Ka Fai, I would argue, is an artistic tourist or touristic artist; that is to say, he can be considered as a practitioner of Azuma’s philosophy of the tourist, but he does so by utilizing or rebooting the frame of art and aesthetic transaction system(s), including the high-art festival cultural norms and the sense of its hegemonic normativity of affect, on different occasions of his projects, essentially to mis-deliver.

In Choy Ka Fai’s most recent *Unbearable Darkness* seems more as Ka Fai as tourist-artist than before, more bizarre and outrageous in nature, because this time he is dealing with the Butoh legend Tatsumi Hijikata (1928-1986), or rather his spirit through the mouth of *itako* (medium/shaman), while bringing in Ka Fai’s interest in state-of-the-art technology he has been working with in other projects.

In this project, Ka Fai as artist-tourist is in his full-swing, as a sense of the double, juxtaposition, co-existence permeates the entire project, The work is both serious and not serious, sincere and not sincere, respectful and not respectful and, more importantly, authentic and not authentic or fake. It is important to add that these senses of contradiction are almost always, or at least, are meant to be simultaneously occurring and emerging. He is not interested in critiquing nor reclaiming a widely circulated Hijikata myth or very commercialized version of *itako* culture in *Osorezan* and Tohoku. He is not boasting what high technology can achieve in the age of digitality, either, as he says he is:

keen on exploring on “Post-human choreography” with the avatar glitches, limitations and aesthetic. For me the “humanly impossible” or “ghostly possible” should be explored and developed. But at the same time to perfect the technical imaging of the dancing avatar before it goes into Francis Bacon-ish Techno-sphere. (personal correspondence)

“With the avatar glitches, limitations and aesthetic,” he says. The main concept of the project therefore can be summed up to be a very personal to the degree I would like to call it “a travelogue of aesthetic conceit,” Ka Fai being an artist-tourist.

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