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INVISIBLE
TRANSPARENCY

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THE BEGINNING OF WORDS, THE BIRTH OF LANGUAGE : THE SOUND OF TRACES

The first time I learned words was from the voice of my grandmother.

- Listen and repeat after me, '가'

-

- '가'

-

- Well, listen carefully, '가-아'

- '가-아'

- All right! Aagain, '가-아, 가-아'

- '가-아'

- '가-아'

- '가-아'

From mouth to mouth, passing the sounds, grabbing the sounds, taking them into my mouth, and exhaling breath. My Mother Tongue, literally, as the sounds departed from the tip of her tongue, arrived in my mouth, and departed again. When the sounds reaching for a new destination encounter my breath, then, a word is born.

Later, when I could read all the letters, for a long time I would not stop speaking. My grandmother said that on the street, I would read out every single letter of the signboards, recalling their name as if I had named them myself. My grandmother had heard and learned the sounds from her mother as well, and she held them with her, singing them out for me by one and one.

THE BEGINNING OF WORDS, THE BIRTH OF LANGUAGE : THE SOUND OF TRACES

Those were the names of breaths—sounds of vanished time that survived, passed down from her mother to her again to me. For this reason, although the names have are aged, at the same time, they are new-born in every moment.

The experience of learning language through sound is not limited to human beings. Long-time marine biologist Peter Tyack discovered several interesting facts through the studying the sounds of marine mammals.¹⁾ He observed how these animals used their learning, and used the ability to change what they say based on what they hear in their own communication systems. It is a well known fact that whales communicate through song. As time goes by, young humpbacks, who begin learning the songs of their mothers, start listening to other whales and modifying what they sing based on what they hear. One interesting example of this comes from Australia. Biologists on the east coast of Australia recorded the songs of humpbacks in that area. Comparing the recording of songs taken in '95 and those taken in '96, they found that the song had changed. They then discovered that the cause of this change was the typical song of the west coast whales. In other words, whales on the east coast changed their song learning from whales on the west coast. Even whales, who live in the deep sea, have their own way of communicating by listening, mimicking, and bringing changes from each other.

Therefore, sound plays a crucial role as the beginning point in the process of producing and conveying language.

1. The Intriguing Sound of Marine Mammals, Peter Tyack, TED conference, April 2010.

THE BEGINNING OF WORDS, THE BIRTH OF LANGUAGE : THE SOUND OF TRACES

Just as I came to recognize the nature of objects by hearing their names among the many words of my grandmother, just like how, the moment when she called my name, it helped me to realize that I am who I am, the starting point for my words and language was to remember sounds and to give them a name.

THE SOUND OF THE UNKNOWN : X

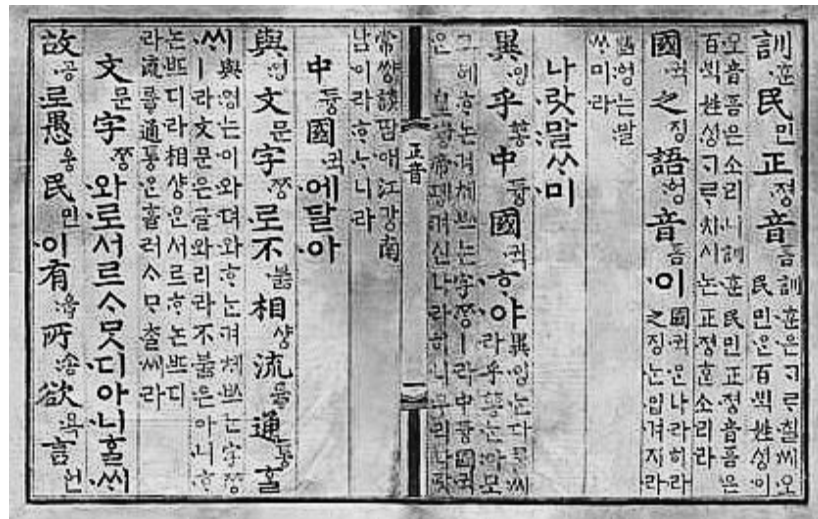
Spoken word already existed long before written language appeared. Spoken words can be regarded as outgrowths that reflect an environment, culture, and history of the people who used them. In that sense, written language is the figuration of the sounds which contain the speaker's will. Thus, when unknown sounds have to be transliterated into letters or my spoken words confront something inexpressible that I cannot accurately express, then a new language is required.

My mother tongue, Korean, has a phonetic script which began from the eager sounds of those who yearned to express Korea's own spoken words in the letters. Compared with other languages, the Korean script has a distinctive history in which it is known who invented it and what their purpose was.

Up until 600 years ago, people borrowed the Chinese characters in order to read and write books. This was a confined language in that the main users were limited to those with high social status such as intellectuals. In 1443, after careful consideration and study, Sejong the Great, the fourth king of the Joseon Dynasty, finally invented Korea's own character system, "*Hunminjeongeum*" (훈민정음). Hunminjeongeum means "the proper sounds for the education of the people," and he spoke about the motivation for creating it as follows:

"Because the speech of this country is different from that of China, the spoken language does not match the Chinese letters. Therefore, even if the ignorant want to communicate, many of them in the end cannot state their concerns.

THE SOUND OF THE UNKNOWN : X



1. Hunminjeonum Haerye, Sejong the Great, 1446.

Saddened by this, I had 28 letters newly made.

It is my wish that all the people may easily learn these letters and that they be convenient for daily use.”¹⁾

Accordingly, when Sejong the Great invented Korean character system, he thought the most important thing was the harmony of the spoken words and letters. The vowels and consonants of the Korean script were based on the figure of the throat, tongue, and lips of people when they would pronounce them.

In other words, it was transferred from people’s voices to letter that were the most natural expression of those sounds.

My words that have no expressible letters, they resemble the unknown sounds that receive names, and in that moment a new language is born.

There is an interesting story about the birth of a new language and sound. Thinker Terry Moore asked, why is it that the letter X represents the unknown?²⁾ According to his words, what we have come to think of as Western science and mathematics and engineering was really worked out in the first few centuries of the Common Era by the Persians, the Arabs and the Turks. In the 11th and 12th centuries, the Arabic texts containing this wisdom finally made their way to Europe through Spain. However, there were problems when they translated the books to their language.

One thing was that several words of the Arabs could not be rendered into Spanish. For instance, “Shalan” means “something,” exactly like the English word “something”—some undefined, unknown thing.

THE SOUND OF THE UNKNOWN : X

But the Spanish did not have an “sh” sound, so that they created a rule in which they borrowed the “CK” sound from the classical Greek in the form of the letter “Kai”. Later when this book was translated into a common European language, which is to say Latin, they simply replaced the Greek Kai with the Latin letter “X”.

Therefore, inevitably, X was chosen as a new letter by European people who could not pronounce “sh”. As X refers to the meaning of the unknown thing itself, the sound of the unknown brings about a new language.

This is that absence produce presence.

When I say, “I have no idea”, it gives a chance me to realize a defining moment of what I know and what I do not know, what does and does not exists. Although sound is invisible, its energy generates waves in the air, making and proving its existence to us.

Also in the same manner, language appears in front of us when a name is called even if we have never heard of it before.

The name “this was absent”.

The name, that this can no longer be returned to its previous state after my breath reverberates through the air.

The name of a new sound, the first breath of a new language.

A LANGUAGE
THAT PASSES THROUGH SPACE
A LANGUAGE
THAT WINDS UP TIME
: THE SOUND OF KAIROS

“The poet, who is the first man to be born, is also the last.

He is Adam, but he is also the end of all generations: the mute heir of the builders of Babel. For it is he who must learn to speak from his eyes — and cure himself of seeing with his mouth.”¹⁾

/ Paul Auster

Walking through the desert for a while

I turn my head, and before you know it, my footprints have disappeared into the sandstorm. My body is already in another place, far away from my point of departure. Even though there are no more of my footprints, it does not mean I was not there.

Before the notion of time existed, how could we prove that we existed in some place? Before places were divided by different languages, how could we explain that we lived at the same time although we were in different places?

It is impossible that a single time can take possession of every place and that one place can express all memories. Thus, language plays a role in connecting time and place, but it also disconnects them.

However, it is difficult to notice the difference between connection and disconnection when considering language in someone’s life who lives in a monolingual society during their lifetime. Therefore, the power that reminds me of my present state but can also throw it into confusion, the moment that language reveals its power is this: it occurs these times and places when one is moving to somewhere in order to stay or staying for a moment in order to leave for somewhere else.

**A LANGUAGE
THAT PASSES THROUGH SPACE
A LANGUAGE
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: THE SOUND OF KAIROS**

These places seem like a “New Tower of Babel” where words are constantly born and immediately disappear.— The airport, the train station and the bus terminal—they are only allowed a transitory identity, although they have a definite spatiality and temporality.

A train needs to leave before another one can draw into the station. Similarly, these sorts of places need creation and dissolution at the same time in order to circulate their own ecosystem.

Whenever I am in one of these places, I always feel insecure, but free. We who gather there, are stranger to one another, with strange names. It does not look like it is special things due to the fact that all the people are different, it cannot be heard anything because of that they all say different words. Consequently, the only moment, time and place would be given temporarily meaning of language when it leaves or arrives.

One of my habits is to write down the time whenever I take notes. What makes me awkward is that when I was in the airplane, I agonized over whether to follow the time at the point of departure or the destination. Of course, I can write both of them together. Yet, I hesitate over a choice because of that I feel a proper word about “now” suddenly disappearing. Recently I just write this: “unknowable now”.

Instead of omitting time, I look around the place. However, as for a sense of place, it is only possible to figure out a clear point when I am staying in one place. In-flight is literally the state of being on the move, so that as soon as I make a decision on something, another choice is waiting for me. In short, if I grab on to one of the two, time and place, they run away together.

**A LANGUAGE
THAT PASSES THROUGH SPACE
A LANGUAGE
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: THE SOUND OF KAIROS**

Sometimes, I have experienced confusion, and even been convinced that I moved from a definitely different time and place.

I have been to Osaka once. The flight from Seoul took one and a half hours to get there. During my travel, I took a metro by tunnel to catch my flight, and then another train to reach my destination.

From sky in here to sky in there, from this tunnel to that tunnel, I felt as if I had just stared at a landscape painting for a long time.

Then, my eyes stopped functioning as proper navigators to help me to recognize time and place.

Eyes always tell us lots of things, but they also obstruct the view of our mind. At times, sound can make us forget or recast time and place.

Sound has the capacity to pass through them more freely.

I listen to the Seoul traffic report on the radio in my room, in Amsterdam. My eyes gaze at people riding bikes along the path; my ears follow the sound from the radio. It carries me to Seoul as if I had traversed across in the taxi. Even though my body is 8,000km and 8 hours away, I was there, in Seoul as much as that moment. Familiar sounds and names come from the radio, and the sound of language connects me to a place where I am not, creating a completely different time and place.

Turn off the radio. Gaze out of the window. Open the door. Walk into the street landscapes. Unfamiliar sounds turn on my ears. Black scarf carries Turkish on the wind. Suitcase leave an English imprint on the road. The supermarket's receipt speaks in Dutch, Do you need me? A stranger approach me, Nihao?

A LANGUAGE
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And one more thing, Go back to your home.

On the way home, my ears shout. I listen. I am unable to listen to anything. My tongue is tied because I cannot listen. Like a missing child, I walk and walk while grasping my painful ears.

This is the Kairos that came to me. That is the sound made by Kairos.

There is the word “Kairos”. According to Jean Clair, an art historian, for the ancient Greeks ‘Kairos’ had the meaning of ‘the opportunity’.²⁾ That refers to precisely the right one, the proper occasion, and the act of making a choice in the advantageous moment. However, go back further and ‘Kairos’ was not about ‘time’, it referred to the crucial thing of ‘space’. In short, in the *Iliad* by Homer, Kairos was the vulnerable spot on the body, the chink in the armour that allowed death to enter. Accordingly, Kairos is fatal but also the place where a decisive moment can occur. There is no designated procedure, such as the pain felt after a person bleeds from the eyes or complaining of leg pain with no legs. Kairos, depending on the choice made, can be the starting point of a new opportunity or death that is not allowed twice.

My Kairos, is my ears.

For a long time, I keep and remember lots of familiar names and words in my ears. I lost my listening at a moment in time. Then I felt my language as a code which floats in the air without any sense of belonging. That is, it is directly reflected upon the uncertainty of my existence. However, I am not descended from Diaspora, I do not come from a colonial nation where people were prohibited from using their mother tongue like my grandmother.

A LANGUAGE
THAT PASSES THROUGH SPACE
A LANGUAGE
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: THE SOUND OF KAIROS

Nobody takes away my words. Nobody doubts my language.
I left myself in order to break boundaries from which a single sound
create one word, one word make one thought, one thought forms the
sole identity of people. In spite of that, I was scared.
Thus, I denied and denied every sound for a while.

At the end of denial absence, not affirmation, was waiting for me.
The absence of sound. And, at the end of the absence was the pres-
ence of the silence. The silence was waiting for me.
Slowly, it raised my closed ears, made my shaky cochlea calm,
moreover, gave place to the new sound. Thereupon, courage came to
me that I could think of what words I have, where I am now. It brought
the will to find new words, a new language. That is, not these words
which drift between mother tongue and foreign language, familiar
sound and an unfamiliar one. It is the intact, transparent language itself
which can be expressed and resonate through my own voice.
That is to say, I decided to write poetry through my own language.
When a word meets another one, then those things are woven into one
sentence, a song.
Even though language drives me to jeopardy, it gives me the opportu-
nity to proceed to a decisive time and place, because this is my Kairos.

COURAGE AGAINST THE GIVEN NAME, THE LANGUAGE OF THE RESONANCE : THE VOICE OF AEOLUS*

“There is a place in Itil, the Khazar capital, where, when two people (who may be quite unknown to each other) cross paths, they assume each other’s name and fate, and each lives out the rest of his or her life in the role of the other, as though they had swapped caps.”¹⁾

/ Milorad Pavić

In the words of the old saying,

“a man leaves a name behind him, a tiger leaves a skin behind him.”
It is a figure of desire revealed by human beings who want to leave their trace even after death. It is a thought that the existence of a name can be replaced with the body of the deceased.

From Ferdinand de Saussure’s point of view,²⁾ it assumes that a person is a sign and his name is a signifier, and the fact that we can know through this thing—ancestry, occupation, origin—are applicable to the signified. Therefore, the name is my other self that is able to reveal or hide my identity.

I come up with a scene from the book, *The Rings of Saturn*, which describes Jews during the Holocaust of the Second World War:

“Many of those who were still alive were so hungry that they had eaten the cardboard identity rags they wore about their necks and thus in their extreme desperation had eradicated their own names.”³⁾

Likewise, a person’s life can be decided regardless of his will, due to the fact of having the name “Jew”.

* The God of the Winds in Greek Mythology.

1. Dictionary of the Khazars, Milorad Pavić, 1984.

2. Writing in General Linguistics, Ferdinand de Saussure, 1996.

3. The Rings of Saturn, W.G. Sebald, 1995.

COURAGE AGAINST THE GIVEN NAME, THE LANGUAGE OF THE RESONANCE : THE VOICE OF AEOLUS

It is another place where language shows its strong power through the name. For this reason, the name might be seen as a delivery man who brings destiny to people. A few years ago, I went to the Himalayas, where I heard an interesting story about names.

Sherpa people who live in Nepal's eastern regions, high in the Himalayas, originally they came from Tibet. If you look at their names, you can see people with the same names very easily. The reason is as follows. Their names will be the day of the week on which they was born, also they choose differently based on gender.

For instance, in case of myself, who was born in Wednesday, people named me "Lhakpa" which was an expression affected by Tibetan Buddhist culture. It shows the fact that in the village, there were people who already used the same name for long time ago, and someone would be given it when they are born.

Several questions stuck me.

Do they accept their names naturally as tradition? Does it ever cause confusion within their own lives and the lives of others? Also, how can they distinguish differences between themselves? If so, it is that people are living a single huge life all together without the uniqueness of the individual?

This is not just a story about Sherpa people. In a novel of Gabriel García Márquez, for the characters in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, their names descend from father to son. However, when it comes to the role of the name in this book, this is not a compass which can help the son to represent father's life, rather it is a 'mark' or 'underline'.

COURAGE AGAINST THE GIVEN NAME, THE LANGUAGE OF THE RESONANCE : THE VOICE OF AEOLUS

That is, from the beginning until one's death, one's life can never substitute for the lives of others even though they seem to have the same destiny by name. This is the universal solitude of human beings. Thus, this is the only common thing made by inevitable differences between two people who have the same name. In short, it is the paradox of power in language.

“My doubts stand in a circle around every word, I see them before I see the word, but what then! I do not see the word at all, I invent it.”⁴⁾
- Franz Kafka

If I am unable to be sure of the name, the words, and the language that I have, it is because of the chaos of my identity. The moment that my belief were shaken, I would regard myself as “nothing,” disconnected from the world. I have lived in an isolated life before with my words and name. When my words began to become weathered, fear fell suddenly upon me. It was like the monk in the book *The Name of the Rose* by Umberto Eco--the reason that concealed the book, even killed someone, was attributed to his fear. If the book became known, it would signify the collapse of an absolute belief. It is not particularly difficult to live in a single frame of fixed thought and to obey the social order and concept. This is where language exerts its fundamental influence. Ludwig Wittgenstein emphasized the entrapping nature of language as follows.

“Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.”⁵⁾

4. Franz Kafka's Diaries, Franz Kafka, 1910-1923.

5. Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, Ludwig Wittgenstein, 1921.

**COURAGE AGAINST
THE GIVEN NAME,
THE LANGUAGE
OF THE RESONANCE
: THE VOICE OF AEOLUS**

That is, we must inspect constantly what we perceive as truths and the things we consider without doubt.

He argued that the meanings of words are constructed through the function in which people use them, not set meanings. Depending on context, they will change, and thus this possibility for change is one of the characteristics of language.

Accordingly, the names of the Sherpa people, the names from *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and my name all exist as evidence of our own lives, and those names have their own life, “The Life of The Name”.

These themes have already been pursued by many artists--they attempt to reveal the life and world of the art itself, rather than just making fossilized and stuffed art.

This is the freedom and intrinsic role of art and language, created through undefinable things such as wind and sound, with no nationality, no border.

Stepping beyond the words I have, when I try to translate my pieces that spring from my meetings with the world, then my own language starts living in its own life. It is identical to the life of art which is reinvented every day.

And I give names to these words. I hear the sound that is made by these words.

These names are not for hearing after death, they are a language for the present, reflecting the self-evident fact that I am here.

**COURAGE AGAINST
THE GIVEN NAME,
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About The Wind**

My name is wind.

The date of birth is four seasons. I am just going through a cycle, not getting old.

My gender is gas.

If you particularly want to know about my nationality, I understand all the languages but do not say it.

My passport number is a speed of 5 m/s and 0°C

It changes depending on who I meet.

My address is a moment.

My occupation is the A to Z of the breath delivery.

The Purpose of visit is to give someone a poem and a song.

The Port of boarding is the full stop of the last sentence.

The Port of landing is your lips, the first word.

INVISIBLE TRANSPARENCY

The first word that I was given in my life
is “YURI AN”.

There was a time when I make ceaseless efforts.
Just like my name, if I were broken and smashed to pieces,
I thought it would be possible for me to break away from my life I had.
Fragmented eyes, split words scattered over my lips toward people
who looked into me.
My name was the word that makes injury. It was the last membrane
and boundary that helped me to protect myself from others.
The name ‘YURI’ means ‘glass’ in Korean.

Someone with the same name as mine was the first human to journey
into outer space. He screamed and whistled toward the blue Earth.¹⁾
“The motherland hears, the motherland knows where her son flies
in the sky”.

Like him, I whistled to the moon in the night sky.
My face was fogged up. Your face has changed.
Do you hear it, where I am. Do you see it, what I am saying.
I know that what you see through me, is just yourself.
I stand in front of you with everything except my face.
In the place where seasons, age, wind and lots of things have passed
by, there are only empty names.

1. Yuri Alekseyevich Gagarin(1934-1968)

A Soviet pilot and cosmonaut, he journeyed into outer space,
when his Vostok spacecraft completed an orbit of the Earth on 12 April 1961.

INVISIBLE TRANSPARENCY

The word I picked up again, YURI AN.

Glass never has only one face. Glass cannot light up the past, and just shows the present.

Glass is the name of silence, not making a sound until smashed. Yet, I want to know it. The times that the light has passed through in order to make it to here.

I want to hear it. The sound of the world illuminated by this light. Take off the clothes on which the landscape before me is written, and write some words to invite you into that landscape.

Therefore, I want to become the eye which speaks and the ear which sings. My whole body is my manifestation(彰)²⁾ and the window(閨)³⁾ which meets you.

Even the faint sound of whispering, like the movement of light which is always traveling somewhere, it is the transparent membrane on which is projected my words, stories. That is the new color and tone of my name.

Invisible Transparency, YURI AN.

2, 3. '彰' and '閨' are homophones.
'彰' means manifestation, '閨' means window in Chinese.

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