

II.

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Performance is often preoccupied with the idea of mistake, whether committing one or avoiding one. Excuses can be used in defense of the performance before or after the mistake: “Do not stop when you make a mistake. Nobody will notice,” or “I meant it to be like that.”¹ These excuses can be understood as the author’s need for acceptance by the viewer when a mistake is made, i.e., the author might feel embarrassment, anxiety, or the right² to be justified. At other times, however, excuses can be inserted as part of the performance from the beginning. For instance, I could start this lecture by saying, “This lecture will not be coherent.” I will not frame the preemptive naming of excuses to be a product

1 Sometimes audiences also ask a similar question: “Was it intentional?”

2 I say “right” because the author often feels that only he, not others, has the essential right to either correct or admit the mistakes in his work.

of any culture, but I slip in the following information: When I made my first Japanese friend, I was puzzled by how many of his sentences started with “I think . . .” Even for what I considered to be a definite situation, he would not say, “Yes.” He would say, “I think, yes.” This expressive hang-up comes from the translation of the frequently used verb *omoeru*.³

Lecture space, like TV channels, is a space occupied by a certain number of audience members. If coherence is not consciously chosen amongst other forms by the lecture-giver, it is possible to call coherence in a lecture “habitual.” Habitual coherence is not necessarily the will of the lecture-giver but instead a format imposed by the channel-space, either by the convention (although this sometimes coincides with the very will of the lecturer), the lecturer’s upbringing (whether familial or academic), or requests. When I say requests, I mean a request from the inviting institution for the lecture-giver to come up with a proposal for the lecture before the lecture is given. Sometimes, we can trace the origin of such a request back to the previous budgetary calendar, which inserted into the institution’s program an invitation to lecture-givers under a specific theme.

You can turn on the CD.

[FI and FO⁴: sound of cicada,
recorded August 2011 in Seoul⁵]

I want to talk about this incident. When I was a student a while ago, I made a film about a woman. This woman was a friend. I attached a contact microphone to her chest, and I rolled the camera after saying, “Please cry.” There were some ideas behind this film that I do not have to describe here. The

film lasted approximately three minutes (the whole roll of Super 8 film) and showed her frontally, from the shoulders up. In the American college system, there is a form of review called “crit.” Your fellow students and professors are present, and after the presentation of your work, they talk about it. One of them said that it was difficult not to think about this image in relation to what was going on in Afghanistan. This was 2001, after the 9/11 attack. I said it was not about that. Or that I didn’t think about that. The woman, my friend, is an Indian-American, raised in the U.S. Her name is Tanu, but I guess she could be an Afghan. I became conscious of Tanu as an image.

Emotion faces two directions at such moments. One is to feel, “That is not what I meant.” The other is, “Oh, should I have meant that?” The first is to feel that there is a miscommunication. The second is to feel a desire to be accepted by the world of reception and that Tanu’s actual identity is irrelevant to the viewers’ reception of her identity: the image is going to mean something else to others anyway. The first is to keep differentiating, and the second is to be accepted. “You are right. I meant that. If I didn’t mean it before, I eventually will mean what I didn’t mean before.”

The woman in *Summer Days in Keijo* – written in 1937 (2007) is a Dutch artist, Mieke Van de Voort. In the film, there is a scene where Mieke goes inside the Saewoon Market building that was to be demolished the following year. Again, I will skip here the reason why this building was built or destroyed. The rest of the scenes involve a series of

3 To think; to believe; to judge.

4 Conventional script-writing abbreviations for “fade-in” and “fade-out.” (Ed.)

5 Track 01, from *howl bowel owl* (2013).

faux-façades⁶ of different sites, in the sense that what I show in the film is different from what Sten Bergman, the author from 1937,⁷ saw in the past, although they are the same sites. The scene in the Saewoon Market building is the only place where Mieke is inside something that we knew at the time would also become a faux-façade one year later. I found this to be a magical experience: to be inside something that is mostly seen from the outside. To be more precise, to be inside something for a moment that has mostly been seen from different outsides in the past and will be seen from different outsides in the future.

I realize in this sense that by using “I,” the construction of interiority can be presented. “I” will inevitably be destroyed, but the construction of that interiority will be documented. Whether the construction is fabricated or already exists is a separate issue. As in architecture, interiority is a presentation of floor plans, sections, textures of surface, and the navigation of the space within. Interiority is separated from the symbolic meaning of the façade, but it puts the architecture in vector space by giving a direction: it starts from here and it arrives there. Tanu, for instance, is an American, but she was seen as an Afghan in 2001. Chris Marker says somewhere — I cannot quote exactly but somewhat along these lines — that using the personal subject in filmmaking is one of the most modest gestures as a filmmaker. This is an interesting take from a filmmaker in the era of cinéma vérité →⁸ There is something awkwardly clean and general about the beautiful film *Battle of Algiers* (1966).⁹

If “I” did not matter, what gives it such an amount of attention and care even to exclude one? Naturally, aging makes one conscious of oneself as a sample of society, but at the same time that is a separate issue from designing a way to relate my interiority with whatever produced a person

like me. That design is a construction of the bridge between the world of data (totally meaningless without context) and emotion attached to it (which transforms data into reality).

I am going to read what was written on the wall of the installation version of *Summer Days in Keijo – written in 1937*, when it was first shown.

[read the wall text]

[show *Summer Days in Keijo – written in 1937*]

The governor’s palace, or the gate, is not seen correctly by Bergman. One gate disappears and another appears.

The governor’s palace, or the gate, is not seen correctly by Mieke, and so forth. Another disappears and the other appears.

If two incidences of disappearance in two different times are in one site, we can reduce the details (how, why, or what changed) on both sides of the equation as in

6 Even if the façade of a building in 1937 is different from the façade in 2007, for instance a reconstruction after arson, the text can refer to the façade in 1937 while the vision refers to the façade in 2007. I am using the word faux-façade to describe the present-image that stands for the ghost-image of the past.

7 “Summer Days in Keijo,” *Korean Wilds And Villages*, trans. Frederic Whyte (London: John Gifford, 1938).

8 → is a mathematical symbol for the function “if ... then...” (Ed.)

9 “I was mainly interested in showing this unstoppable process of liberation, not only in Algeria, but through the entire world.” Edward Said, “The Dictatorship of Truth: An Interview with Gillo Pontecorvo,” 25 *Cinéaste* 2 (2000). If an unstoppable process of liberation can be deduced by the filmmaker in any case, then why is it not enough for the film to show a specific process of liberation in Algeria instead of through the entire world?

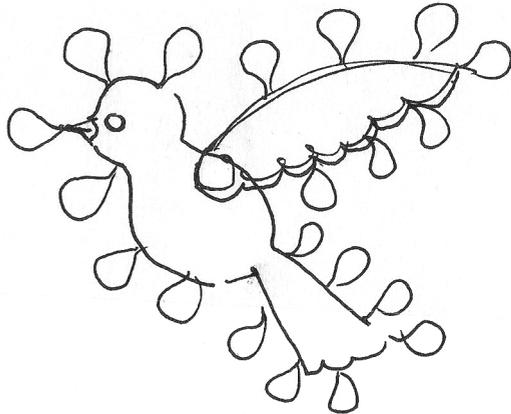
mathematics. What is left in the end after reduction is the gesture of misinterpretation or the very desire to reduce what you have seen into a singular, summarized text. In 1937, Bergman did so, and it was done many times afterwards whenever there was another reason to move the gate from one place to another. The gesture of looking back with lament at what used to exist is often called nostalgia. What do you call the repeated gesture of nostalgia in two different times at one site when you don't know the specific context of what is being lamented? Turning of the neck?

[play *Washing Brain and Corn* (2010)]

The didactic text was written by me both in Korean and in English at the same time. The two texts were different content-wise. Such texts have their own target audience. Often there is a word limit. If the writing is exceedingly (often a bureaucrat in public relations decides this) poetic or complex, it is chopped or re-phrased. *It becomes something different.*

Summary is usually quicker to read and quicker to write. Time frame has much to do with the need for such a text. Similarly, when I hear from exhibition curators about the problems with showing a long film in an exhibition space (often not a major complaint from the general public), I am reminded of Béla Tarr's decision to elongate film rolls as a resistance against the maximum duration of a shot predetermined by Kodak's 11-minute-long film rolls. Is this a resistance in order to differentiate his film? And then I am reminded of how, when Susan Sontag wrote of Béla Tarr in her widely distributed essay,¹⁰ the *New York Times Magazine*

10 "The Decay of Cinema" (1996).



editor who reprinted the essay in the magazine deleted Béla Tarr's name and the mention of his work because the editor thought that no one would know who Béla Tarr was. This "no one" is evidently not in the know but in the general public of no-knows. Then Jonathan Rosenbaum and others protested the omission by writing about it, which is probably why I know this fact. Are these second writings also a form of resistance along those lines? This is before Béla Tarr's first retrospective at MOMA in 2001, initiated by Gus van Sant. In 2003 in *Elephant*, Gus van Sant quotes the long-duration follow-shot from Béla Tarr. One more question along the same lines: Does the form that Gus van Sant quotes still contain resistance?

I recently went to a talk by my former film teacher, Alfred Guzzetti. He made many of his works on film, and it is only in the late 90's or early 00's that he started making his work on video. I asked him questions about distribution and collection of his films. He is certain that each medium has its place (agreeable statement), but he also realizes that there is vanity¹¹ at work in the effort of keeping his films in the appropriate distribution format (disputable statement). Is this resistance? He wonders, if the appropriate distribution path becomes obsolete after his death, what has he been producing in his lifetime? I am not pointing this out to lead us into a world of Buddhist aphorisms. (Although I do like this format of writing: *empty hand comes, empty hand goes.*)

Making a work often doesn't start with the proposal in the same way that work doesn't end with the final cut. Accepting a residency, choosing a primary language, choosing a mode of distribution, and endorsing a particular reverberation constitute a series of moments of moral (which is at times very practical) dilemma in terms of where I should draw the line. When do I say, "Yes, that is what I

meant. How you understood is what I meant. The way you cannot see a certain color in video that is essential for *rayon vert* is what I will mean from now on (cf. Éric Rohmer and Tacita Dean). This film will eventually be seen on YouTube in fragments, and that is what this film will mean." What is noticeable in my generation, although I cannot confidently speak for others, is the readiness to accept the rhapsodic destiny of the work even at the very time of making. The makers of work are readily prepared for proposal, budgeting, and distribution. I remember when I was at MIT, my fellow student said in a meeting, one month before his thesis due date, "I have been very busy for the last few months. I had successful meetings with the grant committee director, the dean . . . and now I am waiting for their answers." He was mainly dealing with so-called pre-production or conditions of the work.

In *Washing Brain and Corn*, I asked David¹² to cover Monteverdi's *Vespers* (1610) after having watched *Mouchette* (1967) by Robert Bresson. Bresson is a filmmaker who consistently depicts characters who readily give up giving excuses. Bresson's characters differentiate themselves by not explaining to others their crisis, which would otherwise be willingly excused. When I say "otherwise," it implies, for instance, *Mouchette's* presentation of her need to be accepted. If she showed remorse or embarrassment about her crisis, others would have condoned, forgiven, or even accepted her. Resistance is a slap in the face to those who want to help the one in crisis. Portrayal of such a character does not mean that Bresson himself assumed a similar role of resistance. I presume the director and producer roles to be somewhat at

11 Meaning "in vain."

12 dogr aka David Michael DiGregorio.

the crossroads of negotiation and communication. Repeated presentation of such a character by Bresson, however, was my main focus (cf. Walser, Rilke, and Bernhard all portray similar characters).

Do not bite the hand that feeds you.

These words of wisdom did not inspire the writings by various writers that from the start were not meant to be published. Barthes talked about the act of writing without publishing as one of the many techniques used to relieve authors of their writer's blocks. (Can this imply that some people have blocks due to the overwhelming amount of moral dilemmas?) Flaubert says — I quote without glamorizing this trait — “If I show [the finished work] to the public, it is out of stupidity and in compliance with a received idea that *one must publish*, something which I personally don't feel the need to do.”¹³ Baudelaire: “Is it in the end, absolutely vital that it should have been written for *someone*?”¹⁴ Or Agnès Varda's post-script videos about her films in the DVD extras that show objects in an interstitial space, somewhere between publication and obscurity.

Or Roberto Bolaño's poetry. He wrote a number of volumes without publishing. His publishing came successively in one go later in life, in part, “in order to make money.” Especially all English translations coincide with his death. Poetry, as we know it, is a genre that suffers from decrease, or delay, in acceptance whereas methodical writing of contemporary data is sold, read, and discussed in real time via other media such as Twitter.¹⁵

On the opposite side of this polarity is the object with a long life span. This kind of object possesses a multi-functional nature. Again and again, this object can be reused

without the so-called original intention of use. It is willing to submit the previous intention to an alien intention. These receptacles of foreign intentions satisfy the desire to be accepted. There is a book, *Soliciting Darkness*, about the obscure nature of Pindar's poetry and the longevity of his work.¹⁶ One of the memorable quotes from the book:

Horace's poem works to give a particular definition of the Greek term *mimesis*. The alternative of the “bee's manner and mode” is offered as a way to weather the Pindaric storm that rushes down from the past and threatens to wash the poet away in its wake. The bee's project depends on the non-representational qualities of language, of language that dissolves its referential function. It exploits the divisibility of language. To adopt the governing metaphor, in fragmenting the poetic tradition it receives,

13 Quoted in Roland Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel: Lecture Courses and Seminars at the Collège de France (1978–1979 and 1979–1980)*, trans. Kate Briggs (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), p. 269.

14 *Ibid.* at p. 270.

15 I use the word “suffer” because I happen to enjoy poetry as a form, but there is also an anticipation and hope that novel content can be created with a new medium. I heard that Homi Bhabha teaches a class at Harvard called “The Art of Reading” that devotes a section to “reading technologies,” focusing on “new forms of digital expression, such as Twitter, with its imposed limit of 140 characters.” Jonathan Shaw, “Toward Cultural Citizenship: New gateways into the humanities for students ‘still fully molten as human beings,’” *Harvard Magazine* (May 2014).

16 John Hamilton, *Soliciting Darkness: Pindar, Obscurity, and the Classical Tradition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

the bee-poet produces the honey of fresh, original song. This theory of mollification is one of the most important ways in which the Western¹⁷ tradition overcomes the dilemma of imitation.¹⁸

[show *Temper Clay* (2012)]

For this film, I will simply list some of the elements that stand outside it. In both the production process and composition, the film uses repeated presentations of the border line between resistance and excuse. Conveniently, I use devices already established in the mediums of poetry and music, such as rhyme, unison, speed, voice, variation, chromatic harmonic shifts.

King Lear

construction of tragedy as a receptacle
 Hyundai apartment
 the site where three other stories unfold
 maid and other women in the house in the 1970s
 dream of summer house
 (1. use of summer house
 2. sale of summer house)
 main property and investment opportunity
 urban development and regeneration of class
 through urban planning
 marriage and separation
 inheritance and re-use of space
 re-use of space and justification of the use
 reclamation (or land-fill)
 aphorisms and a story¹⁹
 thunder and curse

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17 What an interesting choice of words.

18 *Ibid.* at p. 119.

19 The four characters, 刻舟求劍, elicit the following story:
There was a man from the state of Cho who was crossing a river. His sword fell out of the boat into the water. He swiftly made a mark on the boat and said, "This is where my sword fell." When the boat stopped moving, he got into the water to look for his sword at the place where he notched the boat. The boat had moved, but the sword had not. Is this not a foolish way to look for a sword?