



Practising Humanity

The biggest spy exchange between the US and Russia after the Cold War took place at the airport in Vienna. Who is 'the most distant person' for you? I asked a Kurdish Iranian girl living there. After a pause, she answered me, 'The Israeli'.

In South Africa where they celebrated the 25th anniversary since the Apartheid ended, it was not only colour but also accent that became the marker for the conflicts, and the discontent to their everyday life surfaced as the violence towards people came from other African countries.

While I was wondering about the number and disposition of chairs in such society, people claiming the rights united regardless of their shades, to voice an objection and stand up against the power.

Being freed from the Soviet Union rule after its disintegration, Latvia let Latvian and Russian language to halve the city and they tried to consolidate their identity by not being the other.

I spent New Year's in Moscow and I got a mug and saucer as a present. There is a decoration of blue net with golden accents, and it signifies the cross-glued windows of houses and the cross-light of searchlights that illuminated the sky when the German besieged Leningrad during the Second World War.

To a great extent, the world moved. And it is moving and intertwined in a complex manner. In the present of the society that once experienced the process of democratisation and the people who gained the freedom, are new gaps between the people and everyday life in conflict with something else. These 'anti-' movements manifest human nature in various forms. The act of resisting and counteracting would root in one's profound emotions, and the friction energizes the actor. It appeared to me as the intense moment where one actively reflects and realises own being in the world.

人, the Chinese character of 'human' is a pictograph of a person with its back hunched, but commonly believed to represent two people supporting each other. Ubuntu I came



across in Johannesburg is African philosophy to perceive that ‘a person is a person through other persons’. It is where two distant cultures meet. Introducing the basic movement of a modern dance named contact improvisation, which I first experienced in Vienna, I conducted workshops in South Africa, in an attempt to embody the overlap of two worldviews. The dance was created in the 1970s in the US inspired by Aikido, a Japanese martial art where one receives the movement of the counterpart and responds to it. Two people back-to-back sit down and stand up, leaning on and supporting each other. In the attempts, there were successes as well as struggles, misunderstandings, new interpretations, and some moments of emotional interactions and expressions between the pairs and among those who were present at the workshops.



《Graphic Movements》 2019, workshop + installation. Workshop view.

Loss of Taste

Around the time I lived in tranquillity away from the internet in a tiny flat on the top floor in Paris, I developed a habit to read on paper while savouring my breakfast, and I came across with the writing by American writer Lydia Davis. Through collecting small thresholds and using imagination but no dictionaries, the writer took delight to carefully decipher the novel written in the language she does not understand, and she learnt the foreign language through it. Every day, I read it little by little so that it lasts until my next trip to Japan, which grew a sense of contentment in myself.

On the way from Russia to Japan, I came to spend some time in London early spring.



While I was strolling up in Hampstead, I stopped by a bookshop to look for a book by Lydia Davis. A collection of short stories in apricot, and of essays in grass green. After nibbling the two books, I could not make my mind and went down the hill. Before long, most of the shops closed in the neighbourhood, the ambulance sirens began criss-crossing day and night, and it became a luxury to take a walk once a day. Being alone at a friend's flat while she was away, I did not meet anybody for a long time after that day. Getting hold of food supplies was not easy. Feeling hungry and living in the dysfunctional society, I experienced flashbacks of the earthquake disaster. It was also not clear if I was allowed to continue staying in the UK, as I fell in the gap created by the conditions of the EU long-term residence and the UK visa for Japanese, and their exceptions.

I felt suffocated reading the news on the internet every day. It was close to my limit to go through a time of unrest alone where my existence not recognised. The flights to Japan got suspended suddenly, and I set about to arrange the flight tickets to Stockholm. A few hours afterwards, the Swedish prime minister announced the amendment to the entry ban, which caused the flight suspension from the next week on. Flights got cancelled one after another, and at deserted Heathrow Airport, I got on a packed airplane filled with choking tension, to escape to Stockholm.



Right before I left London, I contacted a curator, who arranged the online board meeting swiftly to accept me to 'quarantine residency' in Stockholm. All my close friends are in risk groups. My days continued without meeting anybody even after the first two weeks of self-isolation, but there was no pressure as if every single movement is being choreographed. Staying in one place, growing vegetables, buying the food that one can



store, brewing banana wine. I appreciated the living that is not possible in my usual life where I keep on moving, and the feelings from London started to fade.

The ferry goes back and forth between the neighbourhood I lived and the opposite shore. Taking a boat to cross the water in the ample sunshine, even just for a few minutes, I basked in liberation as if I am travelling. On the other side of the water, I visit a small annex of the city library. There is modern literature in English on the shelves, and so as the Lydia Davis's book in apricot.

The book is thick like a dictionary, and in the table of contents are the rows of titles and page numbers. I open the page of whichever story that bears a title with the words that catch my eye, and read. The next day, I read the book in the same way. I look at the same table of contents, but the words that attract my interest are never the same; I reach to not a single short story that I have read. What remains the same is the fact I can read them too smoothly and the feeling of 'out of place'.

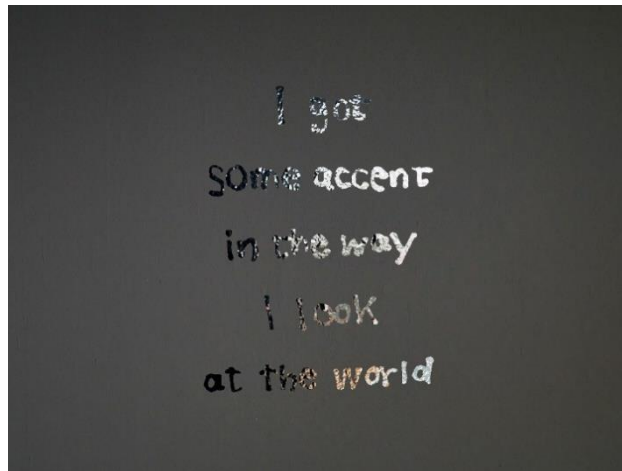
Wanted to marry a cowboy but what he would want from an English professor who is also a daughter of another English professor, she writes, and calling herself 'blue collar' by working as a typesetter at a newspaper. Her identity as an educated elite oozes out, and it makes me feel sick. And then I realise myself being cold, detaching from the writings and viewpoint that I fell in love with, summing it up as intellectual play. My heart does not leap with her writing and it does not conform with my heart, unlike how it was in Paris. It feels as if I am fraying instead of appreciating the text. I find myself being deficient to have such a distasteful perspective, and feel deserted.

Recovering the Viridity

There are translations of language and culture in the lives of people moving, and in these movements are things that change, disappear, or be added. I have attempted to scoop up what hidden in the shades of the process, such as emotions, deviations and assumed errors. I named the project 'After-Ripening & Corruption' - Walter Benjamin described the process of translation as if fruits get sweeter and softer after it leaves the tree, and the change of language is called corruption in linguistics, to perceive it as to rot; Translation has something that resonates with the organic and moderate movements in nature.



It has travelled through different platforms where I become a stranger. I develop what emerged at the last location further in the new local context through social experiments and workshops with the people I encounter. There I bring out their human instincts and active attitude, and appreciate the changes that occur in the course. The project stems from my recognition of and sentiment on the distance I earned by leaving my mother tongue and having been inspired by various cultures I experienced.



《Shifting Minds》2020, workshop + installation. Installation view.
Photo: Takahashi Kenji. Photo courtesy: Tokyo Arts and Space

I feel awkward in Japanese, meanwhile various expressions in Japanese started to appear fresh. Influenced by new surroundings, my thinking began to sail away from the viewpoints of people in Japan. Between the gaps of limited vocabularies in each language that I acquired, my thoughts grow. I am away from both what I had matured and being accustomed to the new. How do I perceive this situation? The following two phrases, freed from 'correct' use of language, make sense for me:

自分の言葉にたどたどしさを取り戻す
(I have recovered the viridity in my own language)

I got some accent in the way I look at the world

I questioned how such words could resonate with people rooted in their native land. I have thought that the great change in the living environment occurs only when one moves,



like emigration. This spring, instead of people, the world moved. The meaning of simple everyday actions, such as moving and touching other people, has changed, and our lives came to need many and great translations.

Salmon Run

熟 is a Chinese character that signifies to cook, ripen, get accustomed to, to reach to the sufficient or complete state. It depicts how the mutton being simmered – the four dots at the bottom flaming up.

I read a news article telling that they found the evidence of the world's oldest culture to cook food in a pot in the northern Japan. Inside the unearthed vessels were traces of salmon being cooked. Pot dishes can treat many people, and it exists all over the world reflecting the locality. I heard that during a long bus journey in Africa, they stop on the way to cook each meal with a pot and share among all the passengers, and continue the trip. I remember the convivial moment in South Africa, forming a lump of Pap with my fingers and eating Skopo in a circle. They cook in Potjie, a cast iron pot that stands with three legs and it can be as big as a person fits inside.

Such a pot existed in ancient China, Ding, of which form illustrated in its Chinese character 鼎. I encountered this character in the word 'trilogue'; being combined with another character meaning 'talk', it means three people facing as if the legs of the ancient Ding pot. Three generates a different dynamics than two. The Chinese character of 鄉 has various meanings such as village, hometown, and also to receive, to resonate, and to head. It represents two people seating face-to-face with a feast in-between. When we place the chairs opposite to each other, our eyes meet. When we place the chairs side by side, we have the same view. Whether it is two chairs or three, however they are arranged, is there anything that can connect the people who take the seat? Around the time I was reflecting on the question recurring in the everyday life occupied by conflicts, I received an invitation to South Korea, a neighbour of my home country.

The act of dividing the world, distancing others, resisting the invisible may be the least commonality amongst us who deal with the obscure and the absurd in our lives as human being. And so as the ageing, which we all experience and is not possible to go against.



In the culture of Korean traditional food are organic phenomena of maturation and fermentation to preserve, and it turns the material to have 'youth-preserving' properties. Juxtaposing such food culture that holds the counter-actions of ageing and resisting ageing, I like to observe how the people accept and resist ageing in society and ruminate on human nature – I am growing my thoughts while I am spending time on a remote island in Sweden close to the Finnish border.