

Interpretation of Testimony

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Here I write a story about a testimony which is dewed round and convex and remains thus and about the possibility or impossibility of the literacy of testimony.

The voice of the people who have lived through a unique history that is marred by physical and mental sufferings is transcribed as testimony. Unique is an apt description based on the number of people who directly experienced the event, but as the wound of history leaves a conventional agony and self-reflection, it becomes less certain whether it is correct to describe it as something unique with all the accumulated history.

Testimony is the resilient return and manifestation of a voice that could have disappeared. A movement of lips that disappeared beyond trace, buried in a grave, or disappeared into thin air comes back all of a sudden and is empowered in the medium of voice or writing. How much of this reappearance can we see, willing to see, and get to see?

'Round, Convex, them' is a work about this testimony. What I get to inquire through this work is where to this testimony disappears, gathers and heads, or if we can understand this testimony. Is not saying that a testimony lacks literacy equivalent to sending the revived voice and writing back to grave? Jane Hwang wondered, "what kind of monuments will be raised on the premise of this testimony." But I questioned myself whether we have the literacy and if it was possible that the testimony would be so scattered that even a memorial could not be erected.

In the sense that individual testimonies are subjective and lack hard evidence, they do not settle well like a paper fluttering in wind. Like a piece of transcript of a speech that came from a grave and sought to seep into the city somewhere but ended up flapping away due to its lightness, its weight belies its substantive weight. Is it not because our literacy for testimony falls short of that for fictions that sometimes novels, movies and theatrical works carry more weight than real stories?

These fluttering testimonies flock together in this digital space for a soft landing. Applying the framework of debate between reality and virtualism to this is the limit of today's controversialists. The conversation about reality and virtualism that is so prevalent in the art scene may not have any bearings on improving the literacy of this testimony. Framing this as an attempt to materialize the power of voice and writings in the digital space, which is easily treated as non-material, will only be read as self-contradictory. I thought this digital space was meaningful only in the sense that it allowed the artist to shape it most freely. Despite the fact that this testimony is covered in documentaries, mass media and many other art works, to tell this story, it is imperative to have the easiest and the most flexible framework for artists to control—which in today's world is sadly the digital space. One can think of this as a futile attempt, and this bitterness was felt during my conversation with Jane Hwang. But what I am thinking more of than such emotion is that we should think of this as a compass for the misty road of how we have brought the testimony here and where we can go afterward.

I described them as fluttering pixels in the digital word, but these testimonies are sometimes translated into English and presented in Berlin. What power does the context of our testimony have in the background of Berlin that is located at the apex of languages of colonial superpowers and debate for decolonialism? Will this testimony be included and united from the perspective of conventional historical retrospection or be diagnosed as a trauma left on an Asian nation by history? The reason why we can't look at this project, which intertwines a digital medium and the geographic locations of Korea and

Berlin, from the context of reality and virtualism could be because of this expectation. Just like the powerless shouting in the online community of the meme that says “get a life.”

The audience who are invited to this website start their engagement from a computer in a private space other than an art gallery or a history museum. A decently well-structured narrative exists, but in the face of this bundle of testimonies which only unfolds by moving hands and moving forward rather than appreciating the narrative arc, do our explorative power and literacy function properly? If this space with strictly limited autonomy is treated as a test, the scores and tiers would make no sense. Among all the voices and writings that surround us, who are fed by all kinds of stories—many untrustworthy—and constantly betrayed by stories, the testimonies that are dewed round and convex are staring at us from inside the monitor screens. Testimony sees us now, and we cannot help but see it.

Min-hyung Kang is a curator, researcher, translator (Korean, English, and Japanese), artist, and director of Barim—an independent artist-run space in Gwangju (barimart.wordpress.com). With a focus on trans-locality and decentralization, her research interests include the potentiality of practicing art locally that is not bound to the conventional locality, especially with new technology. Most recently, she curated Digital - in your hands—an exhibition hosted at Sewoon Building, Seoul—which seeks alternative forms of art that deal with digital technology (degitalarts.xyz). She holds a MA in New Media from Tokyo University of the Arts and a BA in Psychology and Japanese from University of Wisconsin-Madison.