

“Languaging” the Third Space: Language as an Activity in the Prosody of Myung Mi Kim

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A way is open(ed), a hole is made
(From *Dura*)

In an interview, the poet Myung Mi Kim explains her prosody as a temporal/spatial concept, existing in “the space between time and space”¹ that can only be understood through an experience of the “sensorium,”—when “all your senses are involved in understanding.” There is clearly much that needs to be unpacked from such a statement. What does she mean by this inter-temporal/inter-spatial site where her poetry is located? Why is her prosody—her (mis/dis)use of meters, lines, rhythms, beats, sounds, poetic melodies—so “different” and “difficult” (two comments that Kim admits she has received most frequently) and what does this say about her concept of the nature of poetry? How does one overcome ocularcentric tendencies and use one’s breath and ears when reading her poems, and how is this central in the understanding of Kim’s idea of versification? These are, of course, vast questions that have no definite answer(s), but we believe that they lay adequate groundwork on which our study of the Korean-American poet Myung Mi Kim, a veritable *tour de force* in contemporary American poetry, may proceed.

The hyphen between “Korean” and “American” in the previous sentence, then, would be a good point of departure for our discussion on Kim. In her talk at the 5th KAFSEL conference entitled “Translingual Consciousness: A Meditation in Four

¹ An interview with the poet was conducted by our research team on June 18, 2009 at the BK English Lab, thanks to the generous efforts of both the BK and HK organizations. Unfortunately, as the interview content has yet to be published, all remarks referred to will be missing paginations. The full transcript is attached at the end of paper.

Movements,” Kim talks about “the predicament of the hyphen”:

I could be (and am often) variously hyphenated as a Korean-American poet, a Korean-American woman poet, an immigrant Korean-American woman poet, a Korean-American woman poet of the diaspora, a bilingual Korean-American woman poet, and so on. These markers of ethnicity, gender, displacement, migration, and linguistic affiliation, however, tend to reiterate the “purity” of languages, inviolability of nation boundaries, and fixity of categories that elide the complex geopolitical and historical forces that produce these hyphenations. (F 30)²

What is implied through the small punctuation sign of the hyphen is a forced conjoining between two uncombinable languages, cultures, and socio-political ideologies. For Kim, a subject who left Korea at the tender age of nine, “Korean” and/or “American” are categories that cannot specifically define her own current position. Though her ethnicity as well as her childhood memories depicted in her poems are both intensely Korean, her Korean language itself is “truncated, stunted, and ruptured,” and thus “something [she] do[es] and do[es] not know or ‘possess’” (F 30); hence she is a Korean but not really a Korean. On the other hand, though her tongue finds English more effortless to pronounce and her hand finds Romanized alphabet more comfortable to write, she is still an “otherized” figure in the landscape of America because of her Korean appearance; hence she is an American but not really an American. Perhaps this tension between the two categories that are neither

² All citations concerning “F” refer to the proceedings of The 5th International Conference of the Korean Association for Feminist Studies in English Literature, held June 12-13, 2009 at Ewha Womans University.

equivalent nor selectable to Kim is shown best in the following line from “And Sing We”:

Um-pah, um-pah sensibility of the first grade teacher, feet firm on the pump organ’s pedals, we flap our wings, butterfly wings, butterfly butterfly, fly over here (*UF* 14)

Here Kim describes a Korean memory, abundant with Korean sounds (“Um-pah, um-pah”) and melodies (“butterfly butterfly, fly over here”) in an anglicized mode, but this instance is much more than a mere transliteration. If transliteration is an act that is linear in its dynamic and is based on the assumption that there is a fixed co-relation between word A and word B, what is taking place here is significantly different from such an act in that a *communication of languages* is occurring. It is not so much a “tension” between two words and/or phrases that is taking place, than an act of what Kim refers to as a “hybridization” of language, a formulation of a third linguistic mode C through the dialogic interaction between language A and language B, in her case English and Korean: “I am constantly aware of this particular English I participate in—perhaps an English that behaves like a Korean, an English shaped by a Korea” (JKL 94)³. Thus Kim can be seen acknowledging how languages are continuously influenced by other languages, whether that be through emulation or

³ All citations referring to JKL are from James Kyung-Jin Lee’s interview with Kim included in *Words Matter: Conversations with Asian American Writers*, ed. King-Kok Cheung. Honolulu: U of Hawaii P, 2000. 92-104.

repulsion, and that through this process, “the spectral, the remaindered, the asymmetrical, and the incommensurable in traversing languages and cultures” (F 30) is revealed. The “residual” material that emerges from this process is what comes to compose the language of languages, namely the language Myung Mi Kim aspires to transcribe and enunciate in her own writing.

For Kim, then, capturing the access to a language that is both permitted and denied becomes the site of attention she wishes to delineate first and foremost in her poetry:

So, in this effort and failure of bridging, reconfiguring, shaping, and being shaped by loss and absence, one enters a difficult negotiation with an Imaginary and a manner of listening that to me *is* the state of writing. (JKL 95)

Writing for Kim is an act that occurs in the interstices and/or ruptures of languages and cultures; it is the ongoing “effort[s] and failure[s]” of narrating the “spectral” and the “incommensurable” that has been unseen/dismissed by so many other writers in the past that characterize Kim’s poems. She accepts the trauma of her displacement and her diasporic positioning and utilizes it to examine how “the space between the two languages [becomes] a site of mutation between an English and a Korean” (JKL 94) and thus a hybridization of language occurs. This third space Kim’s prosody finds itself located on is a space that is situated on the process of “linguaging,” on the intersections of temporal and spatial construction.

“Languaging,” then, as Kim explains, “is a practice of language that reconfigures legibility, intelligibility, and sense-making by heeding the liminal—the not-yet-available to culture” (F 31)⁴. If “language” implies a conforming to a fixed set of rules and is judged according to whether it has been mastered or not, “languaging”—language as an ongoing act of (re)creation—is a *process* which accepts that there can never be an either/or situation when it comes to lingual orality and/or textual legibility. Language “factors in, layers in, and crosses fields of meaning, elaborating and extending the possibilities for sense making” (C 110), and it is this continuous fluidity and subsequent polysemy of language that enables “[a] measure, a page, the book to embody the multivalent, the multidirectional—a cathexis of the living instant” (C 111). In other words, for Kim it is the incommensurability of language that both limits and legitimates one’s recognition of his/her present space at the moment. Because language is always approximate, and “diction(s), register(s), inflection(s) as well as varying affective stances ... have and will continue to filter into [language]” (C 110), it can never comply to the demands for a linearly-coherent history nor a narrative that can be encompassed by all. This respective specificity of language is what liberates one to express an individual experience, to make visible the invisible, to let the unheard be

⁴ All citations concerning “F” refer to the proceedings of The 5th International Conference of the Korean Association for Feminist Studies in English Literature, held June 12-13, 2009 at Ewha Womans University.

heard through non-teleological enunciations, and thus what Kim strives to articulate through her poetry.

How does this idea of language as an activity manifest in Kim's poetry? An instance where the "lyric as it embodies the processural" (C 111) and the ongoing act of languaging is depicted by Kim can be found in the third part of "The Bounty":

attenuate	in measure and in collusion	separate and bound	wrench
mill	by nine entries in the figure of nine	propertied	cell
given	by nine entries in one acre shallow	well and pump	force
familiar	hairy snouts	arrows in wealth parade of gifts	precisive
bestiary	rain soaked	evergreen	tooth
reflex	note circles	heat swelling	need
root	familiar diphthong	again siege	defer
temper	wrench its nature	alloy encumbering	pool
espouse	quality of light	mineral	dulled

(TB 91)

This is only the first page of Part III; eight more pages continue in exactly the same format—three pillars of words placed in three rows (except for the last page, which is to be discussed in detail later on in this paper). How is one supposed to read, moreover understand, this passage? Of course the obvious answer would be that there is no definitive interpretation, and as Kim always emphasizes, "confusion [can] be productive ... [as] reading and poetry are sites of self-reflexivity, even if they fail." In other words, it is the *process* of reflexivizing that Kim valorizes, and there are various possibilities of such an act of languaging that can occur here. A reader, for

instance, could read the words/phrases line by line, from left to right: “attenuate / in measure and in collusion separate and bound / wrench / mill / by nine entries in the figure of nine propertied / cell” The thought process starts in medias res with forceful imperative verbs that seem to command the reader to participate in actions of violent pounding and weakening (“mill,” “attenuate”), twisting (“wrench”), and tying up (“bound”). *What* is being separated and beaten to a pulp, so as to be fragmentized to the minimal size of a “cell” is yet to be revealed. The second column on the following page, however, provides a hermeneutic opening: “village home for bridal bequest fish by dozens to fry” ... “proffer armfuls of just pressed noodles” ... “ivy and clematis unhurried / one and one conjoined” (*TB* 92). By ceasing to read from left to right, and applying a vertical reading, from the top of a respective column to its bottom, an environment of patience and generosity can be seen to be depicted, which is juxtaposed with the brutal violence drawn on the previous page; while the piercing sounds of “wrench / cell / force / precise” are accentuated in the third column of page 91, more rounded out sounds, in the form of “o”—“threshold” ... “rotation / born”—occur on the third column of the following page. There is also a contrast that emerges in the imagery: the “unhurried” (92) sense of the past, where communal rituals of “hairy snouts arrow[ing] in wealth parade of gifts”⁵ (91) and

⁵ It is Korean tradition to place a head of a pig on a table at the beginning of a financial endeavor (such as an opening of a store, the first day of planting crops, etc.), and put money into its mouth as

meals of “armfuls of ... noodles” along with “fish by dozens to fry” (92) on wedding days, are suddenly forcefully ceased; “the property of daughters” (96) ends up having to resort to sparse resources (“shallow well and pump” [91]) and even endure a surrender of language—“familiar diphthong [sic] again siege” (91). Hence the vowel diphthongs in the left column (“familiar,” “bestiary,” “espouse”) are “in measure and in collusion separate[d]” (middle column) to become a “cell” (right column) and/or its “nature” is “wrench[ed]” as its “alloy [is] encumbering” (middle column) and thus meaning is “force[fully]” (third column) extracted. What we see here is not only how language “bloom[ed]” in the “fertile” “unctuous hills” (92) is grinded, “dulled,” and “defer[red]” (91) by external forces, but also how the middle column acts as phrasal bridges that connect whichever word on the left with whichever word on the right, thus enabling numerous chiasmatic readings to be possible. If the interpretation focused on a convergence towards the word “need” (third column), then the ominous reading of a language “wrench[ed]” out of its due environment would be overturned, and one would be able to assume that the reading is actually championing a “need” for redemptive measures, thus tinted with a more optimistic hue. This myriad of polysemic interpretations is especially apparent in page 98, where Kim writes, among other words, “resilient” and “bare” on the right column. Whichever action in the left

a way to pray to the gods for success.

column (“envision” / “recitation”) and phrasal bridge in the second column (“her, and reading” / “object and word”) is used, the meaning of the resulting line will differ greatly. Compare, for instance, “envision / object and word / resilient” and “envision / object and word / bare”; while the former opts for the possibility of language, the latter rejects it and thus the “bare” ends up sounding inconsolably hollow.

As noted earlier, the final page of the poem is drawn out differently from the previous pages, with its disorganized form and erased/missing parts of the column:

ground	its own property chemical and	fiber
	bricks free of straw	reading
acute	alter primacy	
jaw	strike	fluent
	firmament	method
sinew	brush mound and gravel	
	synaptic	
	unruly enter	

(TB 99)

Gaps occur in the columns that were, in previous pages, so meticulously formed to perfection with nine words on each left and right column and nine phrases in the middle. Here, in not only the final part of the poem but the final page of the book itself, the reader’s participation is maximized through the processural space of languaging opened up by the poet. The “synaptic / unruly enter” may, as Kim points out, “fire or misfire, connections can be constituted or dismantled [and] no

conclusions are possible” (JKL 101) but it is because the blank spaces can resonate a sound of their own, according to the voice the reader hears from it, that “the synapse of language” and the “perpetual motion toward the beginning and not necessarily toward knowing” (JKL 101-102) is deemed so important in the Kim’s poems. Both the words/phrases and the gaps are like tesserae that create a textual mosaic according to the method of languaging the reader implements, thus producing a different picture for each respective process of cognitive organization. Kim’s third space of language, then, becomes an inter-temporal, inter-spatial plane on which not only the writer participates in the act of creating her own language, but where also the reader joins in the act of writing as well; the act of languaging becomes a joint endeavor.

It is important to explain, at this point, why Kim locates herself in the spaces *between* languages and finds it impossible to recite her story in a putatively conventional way. For Kim, the story she wants to tell about herself is a specifically personal one, meaning that it is one that cannot follow the narrative trajectory that has been traditionally agreed upon nor be transcribed with the tools of an accepted storytelling mode. If there has been an assumption (or at least an agreement) between the writer/transmitter and the reader/recipient that the historical continuum is linear and existing on a single plane, in Kim’s poems such an assumption ceases to exist; it is only through the refusal of a chronological linearity that migratory, diasporic, and

traumatic experiences can be faithfully written out. As she remarks in her own talks, this is the only way she can “show a respect” to her own particular specificities. The polysemic reading of the three columns, whether it be from left to right, from top to bottom, or in the form of chiasmus, is, essentially how Kim understands her own fragmented experiences and thus the only way she knows how to write it out in paper.

Her experimental uses of meters and rhythms can further be seen in “Hummingbird,” a poem included in *Dura* (1998). In the following passage the reader is able to experience Kim’s own modification of the caesura, here visually re-created to divide and/or connect syntactic phrases and meanings:

Argue: precedents, oaths, public record, witnesses
Deliver: introduction, narration, statement of the case, and peroration
The writing hung on the wall] [whose writing is it
Meal means: *stuff, material*
Hummingbird happens as a sound first
Is it clear] [then it is
Heal] [landed parole
Continuous, as of line or time
A perceiver without state (*D* 100)

In the lines “The writing hung on the wall] [whose writing is it” and “Is it clear] [then it is” the brackets and the space between act as visualized caesuras that not only break or interrupt the flow of thought but act as, to quote Kim’s explanations, “a pivot.” Kim defines her use of the caesura as a device similar to the “hinge,” for

it is a “break in the measure [that] travels both ways ... like sense breaking and joining simultaneously.” If caesura in traditional English verse was simply an audible pause used to break up the line, Kim’s caesura acts as a transhistorical space where the line not only shifts forward but thrusts backwards as well: one sees “the writing hung on the wall” and subsequently asks “whose writing is it[?]” but this questions sends one back to look at what is written on the wall once more and the process is continued over and over again until an answer is deduced. But can there be an answer? Do we know whose writing consists the language of “precedents, oaths, public record, witnesses” not to mention the formulaic linguistic modes utilized when “deliver[ing]” an “introduction, narration, statement of the case, and peroration,” for these are all very static forms of language that were concocted and solidated before we even learned how to speak our own first words. Thus we are made to believe that language is resolute and knowledge exists in corresponding equivalents, shown through the use of colons; A:B means that A and B are the same, and therefore “meal” comes to automatically mean “stuff, material.” But this is far from how language truly exists for the poet and moreover ourselves, too; “meal” does *not* mean “stuff, material” and the words and language used in “argu[ments]” and “deliver[y]” are not commensurate to the actual experience itself. This is what Kim means when she writes “Hummingbird happens as a sound first,” for it is never the written words

but the resonating sounds that can be most truthful to the re-enunciation of the experience. Hence the question “whose writing is it[?]” naturally shifts to “is it clear[?]” for clarity (the basis for transmission/communication) is of more importance than the actual writer—if it is sincere toward expressing the truth, “then it is.” In this sense, through this use of an end-stopping and simultaneously open-ended caesura, Kim emphasizes the “perceiver without state,” always in the fluid process of experiencing without the linguistic means to re-create his/her perceptions; experience, for Kim is “continuous, as of line or time” and she strives to implement language as an “instrument for gauging, approximating, and rendering” (JKL 103) the ever-changing world and her own specifically shifted/shifting position in the “clear[est]” way she can.

It is Kim’s aforementioned attention toward the sounds of experience and language (“Hummingbird happens as a sound first”), most prominent in Part I of “The Bounty,” that makes her poetry so rich in its portrayal.

Lilacs to the post foretold
 Learning fetch of water
 ranges lingering
 Funnel thirty
 merges temporal wreath

For shelter the pounding sheet rain	ponder shir rain roof
Hovers it starts start over field and	mute forging how compass
plain	

Locate a thousand arrows deciphering degree salted (down)
one

By granite specked by pink fraction to aim so
Uterus as uphill child's heartbeat repentant am in
Distinct from awash of mother blood rimless to whole

Without specifics, wind broken participle
Pins joints held forth two a nestle axis to tunnel
As axis what revolves three behest insistence

Lilacs to the post foretold
In the first in three as
Signal and hook fey lingual
(TB 67)

Kim remarks that she when she wrote this she was able to hear the five columns “more or less simultaneously,” as if five voices are speaking all at once. Her focus on the “materiality of language” in which “[e]very world, every syllable—each sound, each rhythm jostles meaning, contributes to meaning-making” (*F* 32) enables a prosody of the polyvocal to materialize; poetry for Kim is no longer limited to the confines of the page, but rather, its lines are able to sonorously resonate in a cognitive space created by a sensorium—a place where sensory reception and interpretation all converge. Using one’s ears to hear the reverberating “r” sounds in “For shelter the pounding sheet rain” and “ponder shir rain roof” spoken at the same time, or breathing out the spaces between “Learning fetch of water / [] ranges lingering / Funnel thirty / [] merges temporal wreath” to feel the slow movements of

“lingering” and “merg[ing]” occurring here is the way one needs to experience Kim’s poems, for they tend to demand a synesthetic application of senses. “The essence of poetry,” Kim explains, “lies in what emerges at that very moment of encounter with the written text, with your ears, body, psyche, historical condition.” Reading and writing, speaking and listening all become acts that not only Kim partakes in, but acts she urges the reader to join in as well, so that language can reach its potential of dialogism to its fullest extents, and so that the process of communication can be observed.

In this sense, Kim’s own personal experience becomes a metaphor for the possibilities of language itself; her loss of language (Korean), her newly acquired but still awkward new language (English), and the third space on which she can only reside in her linguistic endeavors becomes analogous to what all experience in today’s world where the locus of enunciation is ever-shifting and the belief in a historical continuum where experiences can be faithfully expressed becomes shaky. For Myung Mi Kim, who often finds it difficult to find by herself an exact word to replicate an experience—“Hummingbird No word for its size” (*D* 94)—writing becomes an act that is simply a part of a larger process in “the language of languages, the communication of communications” that she so emphasizes. The ideal reader of her poetry is not one who extracts meaning from the text, but one who accompanies it

and the process in which it was created. The third space erected for the progression of understanding and/or language is what needs to be acknowledged by those who endeavor to both study Kim's poetry and participate in the translingual experience.

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[녹취록 Transcript of an interview with Myung Mi Kim]

... Why do you think readers think of your poems as difficult?

MMK: Also, the way that I think part of when people say that the text is difficult, it's that the not only the presence of the fragments, which we spoke about, but that there are many voices in these poems. I think so often when we read a poem we imagine the writer herself as the kind of conveyor or the carrier of the consciousness. But, as you see, like when we talked about that part that was sort of a quotation from the documents that I explained, imagine that's happening sort of all the time. So the site of who is speaking, who or what is speaking, is multiple. There are many presences in my poems. When we think of poetry, often we think of the author as a kind of solid, unitary subject that's speaking sort of the whole time. And in my poems, I think what I am trying to understand is that there is no such single location.

(최주리T: So you are not trying to control your meaning, in a sense?)

MMK: Or, let me put it this way, I am trying to understand how meaning might be produced multiply.

(최주리: But, then, depending upon the hearer's subject position, it could be a completely different poem, [depending] on very different knowledges?)

MMK: It could be. But, see, I am not worried about that potential confusion, because I think that confusion could be productive. For me, reading and poetry are sites of self-reflexivity,

even if they fail. So even if someone says to me, “In a million years, I never would have understood that there were those five voices, one from a document, one from your mom, one from your *** [self], and, in a way, even if that failure happens, the fact is somebody had to go “I don’t get it, what’s going on?” and in that moment of not understanding, I truly believe that it is a form of inquiry. 그냥 모르겠다 끝나는 게 아니라, 그 모르겠다, 그 condition 안에 something is taking place. I believe it is actually an ethical space where you have to rethink, “what do I mean by understanding, what do I mean by comprehension, what do I mean by I have a feeling?”우리가 보통 그냥 생각하는 게 알았다, 생각했다, 이해했다, 느낌이 있다, 그런게 자꾸만 돌아가는거죠. 그러면서 there is a further engagement with those things.

(최주리: 이 부분을 이해하셨죠? 이해한다고 느끼는 것 자체를 깨고 그 안에서 일어나는 질문들 자체가 시의 작업이고 그것을 “ethical”한 공간이다 그렇게 표현하셨는데, 그것을 우리말로 어떻게 설명하면 좋을까요? 윤리적인 개념이 들어간다는 거예요. 그러니까 정말 내가 이해한다는 것 자체가 어떤…자기도 모르는 오만일 수가 있잖아요. 그거를 깨고 정말 모른다는 것 자체에서 시작한다는 것, 그것이 이 작업의 중요한 의미다, 말씀이십니다.)

MMK: 그러니까 뭐 여기서만 아니라 미국에서도요 시라는 게 아름답다, expression을 한다, 그거를 떠나서 다르게 시가 뭐를 할 수 있냐, what can poetry do? Beyond what it has already done for culture. That’s really one of my questions.

(황준호: 그게 이제, 제 관심분야이기도 한데요, like Auden says, “Poetry makes nothing happen.” But you say that ... Yeah that’s my question too, I mean some other Asian Americanists try to talk about the divide between the aesthetics and the political Asian American poetry and Asian American literature. But I don’t think that is really separated. But still we have to think about that aesthetic aspect of literature as well. 교수님은 그 두 가지 점을 어떻게?)

MMK: I think you cannot equate aesthetics and political efficacy. You can’t ask of poetry, you know, “Can you do something on behalf of culture?” I don’t think it works like that. It doesn’t work by equivalents. And those literatures, to some degree in my mind, can only reach a certain degree, like protest literature let’s say, opposition, in and of itself, or to ask any aesthetic object to do political work, I think it’s a miscalculation, because you can’t ask the art object to work in a direct and causal way in culture, I think it’s not in equivalence. And so I believe the political or the transformative, the aesthetic isn’t because you see some manifestation out there. 내가 이거를 써서 culture가 이렇게 바뀌어졌다, never, it’s never going to happen, that way. That’s why I am saying, if it’s going to happen, it happens with every one of us at the scene of reading. 그거를 읽는 중간에 something happens to me as a reader.

Something happens to me as the writer. That, to me, is as political as something like a mass action. It's a different idea of the political. But, to me, it's where the political and the ethical and the person and the human all somehow meet.

(This is something I want to ask, a general question, but there must be better readers of Myung Mi Kim than other readers, right?)

MMK: That's probably true. That's probably true.

(최주리: Now that's something very interesting. I was looking up the Internet, there are many debates about what does this title mean, or what does you know. And as the author, although you are saying that there are many things in play and it is not you as the solitary author controlling your meaning, and yet there is an idea in your mind as to what kind of play you would like to see occurring in the ideal reader. So what is your ethical stance on that because to some readers, your poetry will mean nothing (MMK: That's right) and that could be seen as an exclusionary act almost (MMK: That's right). For those of us who read Korean there is so much more that we can understand, but you are, in some sense, blocking that kind of understanding (MMK: Right) to non-Korean speakers.

MMK: Right. My response to that would be I could think you can have an experience of language without understanding the semantics.

(But it's different.)

MMK: I know it is different. It is different. But I guess, and I am not trying to be evasive, but as a poet, you know, not something else, not as an essayist, not as you know, that's why I don't write in those genres. I'm not writing an essay, I'm not writing criticism, I'm not writing a novel.

(최주리: But your presentation, many people thought that was a poetry performance, when you spoke at the conference. Is that usually how you speak?... Malcolm, is it true? Is she like an oracle?)

Hahahaha.

(정덕애: Even at home? "Study, not play...")

MMK: (Laughs) That's right. No I don't, it's very hard for me to write discursive prose.

(Hmm. That's interesting.) I can't be definitive. That's why I write poetry! Yeah it is fun for

me to write, like, argument, thesis, prove my point. (Marshal to your points) I believe there is a way to make a point that is not necessarily definitive. But, yeah, I mean, exclude people who don't know Korean, right, that's possible. Right, um, but I think, on the other hand, people could argue you get excluded because you don't know why I am using the methodo..you know, the ways of working that I do. Like if you don't get it about the fragments, or you don't get it about the citational practice, then you'll think the same thing, so it's not just about language, or you know, like linguistic elements but just the whole thing. I mean, it doesn't matter where I go, many people ask me, you know, about the difficulty in my poetry, um, and I keep saying the difficulty is where something happens.

(황준호: Yes, 그래서, some people believe that you are a Language poet. I don't quite agree with them, but 어떻게 생각하세요, how would you respond to [that]?)

MMK: I think, first of all..

(Call them what?)

(Language poet)

MMK: Language poet is a kind of aesthetic movement or school in contemporary American poetry that emerged in the late 70s and 80s, and I think the problem there is that Language poetry has come to stand for anything that's not, like, mainstream poetry. And I think that's a terrible mis.. you know, mistake cause Language school is a very specific intervention and it's not, it should not stand in for everything that has an experimental uh.. stake. And that actually happens to a lot of women poets who write in an experimental vein and they get called "Language Poets." And so part of what I have been trying to do, as a woman who works in an experimental vein, is to say, of course we share common concerns with the "Language School," primarily their stance that language has been, sort of, uh absorbed into the commodity/society, it's a dead thing, and how can we, in some sense refurbish language through an emphasis on its materiality. To, in some sense, loosen it from the ways in which it has been absorbed by, literally, by the language of capitalism, the language of, you know, advertisements, I mean so that language is the, how can we revitalize language away from, like, imperialist, capitalist discourse. That's basically the basic position of the Language school and I absolutely agree with that. I mean who wouldn't want to rescue language from, you know, it's dead, ossified condition. However, I think, where it is really important to distinguish, Language poetry has a very specific ideological stance. It is a rally or call to opposition, which I wouldn't also mind, you know. But this goes back to the aesthetic/political question. In other words, um, Language school, as a kind of rally, a call for protest, I don't think change or transformation happens from a binary "I Oppose This." I don't believe in that process of transformation. I believe transformation is much more

complicated than opposition. So the kind of ideological stance in the Language school is where I depart from it, as a woman, and as a woman of color.

(황준호: In the US, at SUNY Buffalo, that is the poetics program, Bernstein was there, and Susan Howe is still there...)

MMK: No, yeah, no absolutely. Certainly Buffalo is seen as the ___ because of Charles. But Susan was never really, you know, we're all connected somehow by ... because people don't make such distinctions. And you have to remember, Language school was basically founded by white men. So the women are very very very very tertiary, like dust. They are all the people writing the essays, getting the word out, doing the magazines, and maybe Lyn Hejinian, on the west coast, who edited Poetics Journal, with Barrett Watten, I would say she is the only woman who is really in the thick of the beginning of the Language movement. But someone like me, someone like Susan Howe, we're like a generation apart, I mean Susan Howe is probably now, 69 or 70 so (Really?), yeah, so but, to call, what I, I think, experimental women in America have made a very different contribution to the question of experiment than the Language school proper. So if you are interested in thinking about, you know, the question of how art can be transformative, it's really important to look at the nature of the experiment and to try to sort of understand that, you know, to make an oppositional, or what I am calling a binary split is very different than, you can share the same ideology actually, I want to oppose many of the same things that Bruce Andrews or Charles ... I mean I adore Charles by the way. He's a good friend. But as a school, I do believe, I also, I fundamentally believe that poetry is about song, and in a way that I think the Language school actually wants the materiality of language to be, in some sense, *flat*. So if you listen to a lot of, what I am calling like second generation Language poetry, young people, their poetry readings are just like 총쏘는 것 같아요. Tick tick tick tick. And I am just not interested, I mean like my ears are tuned very differently. So I do believe poetry is something about prosody, I don't mean melody only, 그냥 뭐 beautiful하다가 아니고요, 그러니까, as a poet, how can you use the line as a measure for thinking and for experiencing. This has been the task for poetry for centuries, for a millennia. I don't care what historical era you are looking at. I mean, a poet who is really thinking about the nature of poetry thinks about the line, thinks about prosody.

(최주리: 잠깐 summary 해드려요? 제가 기억나는 대로 하자면, Language School이라는 파가 있는데, 그 파에 속하시냐고 질문을 많이 하시고, 선생님은 그렇게 생각 안하신다 그러는데 그렇게 분류가 되는 거에 대해서 어떻게 생각하냐고 질문했을 때 비슷한 점도 많고 그런데 그 Language Poetry는 주로 그 언어를 되살리는 그런 목적을 가지고 하는데 자본주의나 신자유주의나 이런 현상들 때문에 죽은 그 언어를 되살리려는 노력을 하는데 선생님은 그걸 반대하시는 게 아니지만

선생님은 사상적으로 그것을 반대를 해서 그런 목적을 가지고 시를 쓴다 이것은 너무 단순한 생각이다 그렇게 생각을 하신대요. 그러니까 본인은 그런 면에서는 Language Poets하고 다르다. 그리고 Language Poets들은 주로 백인 남성들이었고 여성들은 거의 그 movement에 핵심부분에 속하지 못했고, 여성으로써, 또 백인이 아닌 여성으로써는 자기의 그 입장은, 본인의 입장은 좀 다르다. 그리고 Language Poet하는 분들은 주로 언어를 되살려 놓는다고 하지만 그 시를 보면 그 시가, 선생님 생각에는 시가 우선적으로는 music, 음악인데 그런 부분에는 덜 민감하신 것 같다고. 그러니까 그분들이 시를 읽는 걸 보면 따발총 소리처럼 music이 아니라, 근데 선생님은 그렇게 생각하지 않으시고 정말 her first idea is 시는 그 한 줄 한 줄 그 line의 그 운율이라든지 그런 그 부분, 내가 이 한 줄을 그려서 어떤 것을 전달할 수 있을까, 의미 뿐만이 아니라 그 소리나 그 리듬이나 그 모든..)

(Prosody)

MMK: How do you say prosody in Korean?

(정덕애: We call it 작시법.)

(시를 만드는 법이지.)

(But that's a Chinese term, so it's kind of difficult.)

MMK: See, I am really interested in 그리니까 법이라는 게 rule, rule이 있으면서 you have to know the rule to break it. I think it's that you really have to, over and over, train yourself to think about what is an existing measure so that you can understand that there is a potential to do it some other way. But it is always the wonderful tension between what has to be and what can be otherwise, and that kind of listening is what I think poetry can be for. So what you are calling difficult is difficult, it's not an accident. But, I think, can you sort of retune your ears to hear the difficulty as one person trying to figure out how to say something, how to hear something and to render it in a language and in a rhythm that may be sort of unavailable, but that's precisely, see that's also where I think the political comes in, or the ethical. [Be]cause my question is how can you rethink what your own habits of listening, thinking, reading, perceiving. So my fundamental question as a poet and as a person is how can you rethink the habituated, anything that is habituated, which is not just to say it's bad, I don't mean in any way that it is negative, but simply can you have an awareness of the ways in which your habituated, as a thinker, writer, reader, listener, and then do something with that observation. It's like when people often think, a la Language School, that somehow you're dismissing meaning, or dismissing subjectivity and so forth and so on, and I'm not, if anything, I am trying to recuperate person, subjectivity, but understanding that it's more more plural than we tend to think.

(정덕애: Let me just say that as a non-native reader, and even for a native speaker too, reading poetry on the text is much more difficult, but if you hear it, if you are at the poetry

reading, [and] if somebody reads the poetry in the right way then you seem to understand much more than just reading on the text. That was my experience. For instance, Myung Mi's lecture, was, I thought that I had understood 100 percent, when she was delivering it, but if you look at it in the text it's so difficult. I guess I had a similar experience at Adrienne Rich's poetry reading. Some of her poems are very difficult, but when she reads, when she delivers a poem according to her own prosody, I mean it's much more easier to understand. So that's why I usually ask my students to read out loud the poems that we study, which is very [helpful] I think.)

MMK: Absolutely. That's funny, because all week I have been saying that we are very ocular-centric. I mean not just in relationship to text but to anything. You use your eyeballs much more than any other organ. [like when we are looking at the computer screen] We're glued to something we are reading with our eyes. Anyway so I have been trying to emphasize that language, or experience in general, is much more about the conduit between your eye and your ear, for example, so the idea of reading something. And in fact not just my poetry, but any poetry, if you say it out loud you do have a different understanding of it, because, especially when you are taught to read literature, you're taught, "What does it mean?" "What does this say," "What does it mean," "What do you think she means by this image?" like that. So it's really important to have, what I call a "sensorium," that when you read something all your senses are involved in understanding, not just what I call your "forehead." (이마를 가르키시며) 바로 여기서만 읽고 이해하고 no. You got to use your ears, you got to use your breath.

(황준호: 여쭙보세요. I have studied her poetry for many years so painfully but she answers so many questions I had in twenty minutes so...)

MMK: Ask more questions!

(황준호: Ask her!)

영미시팀: There are a lot of sentences without a subject, even without a verb. There are words after words, how can we read this kind of poetry? Is there any special way to read it? It doesn't make sense.

MMK: Exactly. And my position would be, you're already making sense out of it, by saying, look at what you already did, you're saying there are sentences without objects, there are phrases without syntax, there are things that don't connect up ... I think you are understanding it! I think you are making sense out of it! That sounds like making sense to me! That does not sound like lack of understanding. That's understanding, right there, and

this is what I am trying to demonstrate to people. Because when you say it doesn't make sense, you are expecting it to behave like models of sense you already know. But you are already doing a lot of work, you have to think, "This is not grammatical," "Oh, these are this is just items on a list," "What does she expect me to do, you know, this is like a list, it's not a sentence, it's not a phrase, it's not anything." Already you are having an experience of language much more acutely than if I said to you, "Here is a plate on a table." Whole sentence, or whatever, part of a syntactical unit. I'm going, "Plate." "Table." OK. But somehow, because of what is around it, I think you start reading that, that lack of connection. So my deep devotion is how can you figure out new relations both grammatically, but it's really more a philosophical space. About what does it mean to make relation. It just happens to be on the level of language because I am a poet. But I think I am asking a much, a different kind of question too. You see, what I was saying earlier, we work on ourselves when we read something. You're noticing, "There's no subject. What do I do with that?" I feel like, "I don't know what to do, with this *thing* that doesn't have a subject." That means something to me, that you ask that question. It's not just a question about the poem, it's a question about how we experience our own way of putting information together, and that's a deeply human activity, how you put information together, it has a deep political meaning, in upon that exclusion or inclusion (?), can this be understood is a fundamental human question. "Do I understand this, and how do I know?"

(최주리: 이것을 어떻게 Summary 하지요?)

(정덕애: As a non-native speaker, trying to learn English and [being] so self-conscious about English grammar, the right grammar, has deeply affected your reading of Myung Mi's poems.)

MMK: That's right, and, I'm saying, see, one of my basic questions is language is not about mastering. I think anyone can have an experience of language even if they don't know it well. And what you just told me, you are having an experience of language. It's not that you are not understanding it, and that's why I write the way I read, eh, I read the way I write, well both too. But, I mean, can you explain why I think that is very moving and political at the same time, what she [just said]?

최주리: 아까부터 조금 summary를 하자면 선생님 시가 어렵다고 하는 사람이 많잖아요. 그런데 그 어렵다는 것이, 아까 선생님께서 중요한 말씀을 하셨는데, 룰을 알아야 룰을 깬다. 그러니까 시라는 건 영어에 주어진 그런 리듬들이나 그 미터라는 게 있는데 그거를 잘 알아야 그거를 가지고 장난을 칠 수도 있고 그걸 깰 때 그 tension 같은 게 생겨가지고 이제 생각하게 만든다, 그런 말씀을 하셨었어요. 그런데 이렇게 선생님 지금 설명하신 모든 것 중에 핵심적인 게 "낮설게 하기," 그러니까 내가 익숙치 않은 경험을 할 때 아까 그 ethical이란 표현을 쓰셨지만, 이게 무슨 뜻일까, 나는 왜 이 경험을 하고 있을까, 이것이 내가 보기에선 완전하지 않은 문장인데, 아까 그 한 질문이, 양선이가, 여기에는 뭐 주어도 없고, 여기는 제대로 된 sentence가 아닌데, 그렇게 스스로가 질문하기 시작하는 게 선생님 시의 시발점이고 목적이라는 거죠. 낮설게 해서 생각하게

하는 것, 그리고 언어라는 게 완벽한 그런 컨디션에 존재하는 것이 아니라 한 언어를 내가 완전히 이해하지 못해도 그 언어가 작용하는 게 있고 살아 움직이는 게 있고 또 우리가 잘 이해를 못할 때 스스로 할 수 있는 질문 그러니까 모든 게 그 관계, 내가 생각하는 나 안에서 일어나는 생각, 이런 것들이 낯설어짐으로써 새로운 생각, 새로운 공간을 형성할 수 있다. 그러니까 지금 한 질문도 굉장히 감동을 받으신다고 해요, 그러니까 이런 작용을 할 수 있는거구나 내 시가. 이런 질문, 이런 흔들림, 그렇게 본인한테 너무 중요한 작업이라는거죠.

MMK: You're great!

정덕애: It sounds even better than your talk. Haha.

최주리: Remember I am the nine year old who left Korea and never was educated here. (MMK: I could never do it!) If you stayed here a couple of years you could do it. (MMK: No, no way.) You have a lot of potential. Because, you know, our other guest, Min Jin Lee, she too left as a nine year old. (MMK: Really?) There's something about nine year olds leaving Korea.

정덕애: Is there any English poet whom you think you were affected by...most?

MMK: Oh, so many. So many. I really believe writing is reading so you can't really have a life as a poet if you don't read poetry, like a lot of it, vast sweeps of it. So, let's see. Contemporary poets, I would say, and this is like a group that's not necessarily even well known in the US but the group loosely called the Objectivists, they're people like Louis Zukofsky, Carl Rakoski, Charles Reznikoff, uh, a lot of them have their start in the social unrest of the 1930s, many of them are very very avidly engaged in Leftist politics, and they precisely answer this question of what can poetry do in a time of, you know, tremendous social upheaval and many of them refuse, if you will, to join what was sort of the party line of literature should be out their in the streets for protest, and so forth and so on, so in a way, they kind of fell away from their first, sort of I don't know, coming together in the 30s. And then there is what we call sort of second wave of Objectivism where someone like George Oppen, who stopped writing, he published his first book in 1930, 1931 [실제로는 1934년], called *Discreet Series*, and then he stopped writing for something like 30 years. He moved to Mexico, but you have to remember that in an American cultural context in the 50s, the Cold War, if there were any trace that you were ever involved in, any kind of, I mean forget like Marxist nothing like that but even in any kind of alternative politics you were blacklisted. And so he lived in Mexico for a bit, a while, and then he came back and started writing. Imagine thirty years of not writing and then beginning writing again. So he for me is a very important American poet.

최주리: How do you spell that last name?

MMK: Oppen, O-P-P-E-N. George Oppen.

황준호: You said that, in that interview, I forgot but you mentioned the name Oppen.

MMK: Yes, and that's the background for why he's important to me because that... three decades of trying to figure out will I write, how will I write, what is the meaning of writing, how do I understand making an intervention on the level of poetry and language, and what does that have to do with, you know, real human beings in their current, you know, present condition, historical condition. So all the Objectivists, and Louis Zukofsky because, he, you want to talk about ears, he's like the most intricately, metrically complex poet that, you know, I can think of in 20th century American poetry. Just incredibly beautiful and dense and you just feel like language is about to break apart, that's what people also see here, right? You see language, a particle of language, but how can that be an intensification of music, not a breaking down of music. These are the kinds of questions Zukofsky asks and that I think I also try to ask in my own way. So I mean, there are many, and also ok so I'll go back in time, Susan Howe is a great example for me, both in terms of how she thinks about prosody, form, but history, so she would be a contemporary American poet, Susan Howe, H-O-W-E. Um, and Gerard Manley Hopkins, very important to me. His thinking of versification I have read and studied a lot.

최주리: I see similarities between you and him

MMK: Oh do you? Thank you for noticing because his thinking on versification is very useful and that he's thinking about versification not just as a compliance to prosody, but how can you think with prosody as a human being to make you do something? Um. And of course in 20th century American context William Carlos Williams would be an American example of Gerard Manley Hopkins. So, I go all the way back to, I'm going back in time, to medieval literature I'm very interested again, because it's such an acute example of what the line does and doesn't do, that mid-line caesura in medieval literature, something that you'll see (최T: You'll see visually in a lot of ...) Yes, caesura rather than just a break or interruptions I see as a pivot. It's like something like, it's like a hinge, it can be a break in the measure but it travels both ways then, so that mid-line caesura is fascinating because it's a pivot, it's like sense breaking and joining simultaneously. So, you really have to think transhistorically if you're going to be a writer, I think, so I'm just giving you examples of what do I mean when I say prosody or thinking you know for living. So you can see for half a millennia people who have really tried to figure this out and it doesn't stop.

황준호: Objectivism이라는 시파가 있거든요. 그래서 그 시파의 영향을 받으셨고, 그 쪽의

Oppen이라는 사람, 50년대의 미국 정치사회가 너무나 정치적으로 너무나 블랙리스트에 올라서 30년동안... 30년뒤의 좌파. 안들림~

정덕애: Gerard Manley Hopkins is one of the favorite poets among Korean students. When I taught the survey of 19th century or 20th century literature I was amazed that the students responded to Hopkins more than reading any other [writer] that we read

MMK: Interesting, I wonder if there is something in the sound

정덕애: Something in the ear. Have you read Gerard Manley Hopkins, in the survey course right, at least one or two, like a [시구절낭독] that's a Windhopper....

최영: 시 좀 하나 읽어주세요.

MMK: Which one?

최영: The one that you would think Korean students would like.

박환희: I was thinking Korean students like those kind of unexpected rhymes. I think we're not used to these rhymes and the way English poetry is supposed to sound like, the unexpectedness of Hopkins and others will seem to appeal more to non-English speakers

MMK: This is so interesting, that's great. Why don't you pick something that you "just don't get," haha, which is all of the poems so just pick one.

최주리: 양선, you choose one. 하나 골라서 읽어달라 그러자. *The Bounty*?

MMK: OK.

최주리: Dura, I asked her what does Dura mean. I saw all these discussions about duration, dure, all these things, and then she said well actually dura is a part of your brain.

MMK: It's the hard covering over the brain but there have been a number of essays that have come out and people are saying, dura is, first of all, dura apparently is crosses all kinds of language groups, Arabic에도 있고 India에도 있고.

최주리: Somebody even wrote "들어" in Korean (MMK: I don't know where they got that one) and in the footnote "I thank my Korean students for giving me this idea" (MMK: I don't know what Korean student said Dura sounds like "들어라.")

황준호: 선생님 맞췄어요. One reader figured out that it was part of the brain, 몇 년 전에 an American..

MMK: But it's also, for me, duration, thinking about...Now that I said, talking about prosody which is really a kind of a temporal but also spatial, that's why I keep on saying ear, right? It's not just time in a line, but as time or music unfolds it also becomes...it's the space between time and space. So duration, in that sense, different ways of thinking about time, duration, are critical to me. I was reading a lot of Henri

Bergson, so dure from Bergson, absolutely. And, but also, durable, what is it that durable in human beings? We go through a lot to be a human being, lots of suffering and loss, but there is something that endures, perdure, endure, duration. [다시 Dura에 대해] It's like a hard covering for the soft part of your brain, and it's not quite bone and it's not quite skin, so the texture of it. (최T: So it's something under the skull?) Yes, but skull 밑이죠, 왜냐면, it's what covers the brain. (최T: How interesting, it's like membrane.) Many of my words I choose because they have multiple meanings to begin with and many of them have both an organic base, like it's anything from anatomy to texture, like it's durable, it's hard, but duration also is something that's quite open, like it's undetermined. So you've got anything from hard, to undetermined, to it's part of your body, to ...

최영: 그럼 어디서 그런 단어를 찾아야돼, Oxford OED or what?

MMK: You know what, I tell you, often, words come to me. I hear them before I know what they are. (최T: It's the muse, they were right!) It's spooky sometimes, and many of my titles, especially, you don't know what you're thinking, you start writing down notes, I don't know what it is indeed.

최영: Dura, 여자 이름 아닌데?

MMK: That sounds like it could be.

정덕애: Do you know that a certain part of this part of the skull opens when you were a child.

MMK: Absolutely, that's right. It's a plate. That's why you're not supposed to drop a baby on its head when it's really little.

최주리: Really scary when you have a baby and you're breastfeeding it and 여기가 팔락팔락거려요.

최영: My mother warned us when my baby sister and brother [were young], "don't touch this part," so we just touched it. Hahaha.

MMK: We started talking about this [Dura] but I think someone wanted me to read from this [Bounty], but we can do both.

정덕애: Read whichever you like.

MMK: Well I want to read what you want to talk about.

최주리: Cause she said *Bounty*, so *The Bounty*.

MMK: How about the rest of you, do you have other questions, or?

황준호: Yes, they have, they have many questions.

MMK: Then I can read.

최주리: 우리가 가야지 할 거 같애.

최영: 한국말로 해.

황준호: 갑시다.

MMK: 가셔야 돼요?

최주리: 선생님이 가셔야 돼서. 빨리 질문을 하라고.

MMK: 아니에요 괜찮아요. I'm happy.

영미시팀: So we were discussing about what you said just right now, and it kind of relates to how you were talking about how you want to express the space between time and space, and that's very, it sounds right but then we were having a discussion about why you continuously valorize the medium of the text, when in some cases the song could be more efficient to express what you are trying to say, and even the text that you use, you use conventional the words, we know the meaning of the words but the you are using them in a very unconventional way, why do you still limit yourself to the space of the page (MMK: As opposed to doing what?) As opposed to, like in your case, you said the polyvocal, you said six voices coming at the same time, so that could be expressed like a song? And then people would understand it better, it could be?

MMK: Well, let me put it this way, because ultimately I am a poet and not a performance artist, I think. I could go that way, people have approached me to do hypertext, because my poems are like that, I mean if you are technologically savvy you can read these poems as hyperlinks, like from page one to page 82, there's really, you know.... But ultimately, I am devoted to what you can do on the page, I believe in that iteration of poetry, even if I can certainly hear in space, or in time, or in different modes, but it's a real challenge for me to try to communicate all these different layers and potential on the page.

영미시팀: Have you ever thought of maybe thinking of new words, like a new lingua franca, instead of using just the conventionally used terms.

MMK: I think, I don't do it, I would never make a point of it. I would never make an agenda of it, because I am much more interested in when it happens naturally, so there's a, actually one of the pages that I asked 최선생님 to produce for the Ewha conference, is on page 20 of *Commons*. The very last four words, this goes to Jin's question about what about the idea of making a lingua franca and using that. But I would never do it exclusively, because it would be sort of a, it would be over-performing something, rather than "it happens when it happens." So if you just look at the last constellation on that page, 여기 보시면요 제일 끝에. So to answer Jin's question, to me that is a moment where it's lingua franca, bellrag is not a word, bellslip is probably not a word (최T: Sounds like a flower to me) I know, I made it up though, it doesn't exist. But I know you mean than just words, a whole syntax and the whole bit, and in a way I think I am doing that, that's what you mean by "there's no subject or it's only a list of words," so I could definitely push it in that direction where the entire text is like that. But I am more interested in when it happens and I'm not making it happen. It's not a decision to make a lingua franca,

it's not a decision to mutilate or redo syntax, but when it happens can I hear it, can I catch it, can I render it, can I put it on a piece of paper. Yeah, absolutely. A lot of people, I mean the whole hyperlink thing, people have asked me why don't you do all of your poems as a hyperlink text, a hypertext, because I think it could absolutely be done that way. But there's something about the relationship between the line and the page which I am still very...the field of the page is something that I absolutely still think about.

최주리: It's much easier to cut the pie than translate. (MMK: Are you sure?)

영미시탐: Another question we had was in one of your talks you talk about trauma becoming a site that activates the unperceived and the unaddressed within. So, in a way, in your case, your moving to America at the age of nine, a very traumatic situation, actually in some ways empowered you to become who you are right now, it gave you the opportunity to become translingual, so in a way, do you think that concepts that have a negative connotation for just displacement or trauma, that can actually be an opportunity that reaps beneficial consequences, in a way?

MMK: Let me put it this way, I think we have to be very careful not to too readily go from "Oh there's a positive aspect to trauma." But what I am saying is, both personally and as an artist, and as a person who belongs to other human beings, I think there is often a discourse that surrounds trauma as a kind of wound that keeps wounding you. I agree with that, that's why trauma is hard to shed. (최T: I didn't hear that answer, there's a wound?) Right, the idea in discourse that trauma, it keeps re-traumatizing you, and I actually agree with that and that's why trauma, in some sense, is hard to, be whatever, you can't shed it, because it is a continual re-making of the trauma. While I believe that, I also think, what I mean when I say the poem can be a site of attention, we can see how that trauma keeps re-expressing itself and by making that observation, in a sense, something is, a kind of counterpoint, so that the re-wounding isn't always the same pattern but like a little disruption in the pattern. And just that little disruption becomes generative, not like it heals you, not like it, you know, alters the trauma, but it alters how you understand the nature of the trauma and that's what I mean by can you go from, like say, border trauma, like displacement, you know, losing a language, to border thinking, something becomes active, and I don't mean it's some easy, "suddenly we're going to be better or healed or whole," but I mean can you have new and re-newing opportunities to see how that trauma is working on you. So, I mean I think your question is on the right track, it's just that it's not like a quick slide from trauma to not-trauma.

영미시탐: So the motif you were talking about, of Penelope weaving and re-weaving that could also be applied here. (MMK: I think so.) So it's, the process is a very...

MMK: That's a critical word for me, "process." Everything is an ongoing process.

Everything meaning the poem, the person, trauma, historical trauma, all of that. Ask away.

영미시팀: Another question we had was, interestingly, when we were reading articles written in Korean about you, some articles refer to you as Myung Mi Kim, while others write your name as Kim Myung Mi, in the Korean way. There's an implicit dynamic trying to find you as a Korean poet, to pinpoint your ethnicity as Korean and words that highlight the homogeneity, when you yourself, in your poems, seem to embrace the heterogeneity and the difference in the reader and the writer and whatnot. So how do you feel this issue of how you write your name and how we read your name, how does this connect with your ethnic identity and also the commodification of what should and should not be written by an ethnic writer?

MMK: That's a big one, that's a big question. You know, actually many people have asked a question similar to that on this trip to Korea. A young lady came up to me yesterday after something I did and said, "Why don't you have an American name?"

But she was curious for similar reasons. (Malcolm: You have a story about this.)

Right, so I did tell her, when I first came to America 이름이 명미니까, 쉽게 할려고 미미라고 불렀어요, 닉네임 미미, it's easy. (Malcolm: Well it's like, an America family that gave everyone and your three siblings American names. Some of them got good names which they used, like David, but you got Mimi.) Mimi to me is like a nickname for a French poodle, that's what I think when I think of Mimi, I think of a cute French dog. That lasted about six months and I was done with that, I'm not Mimi, give me my name back. I was very clear (You were nine at this time?) I knew that just sounded wrong, very early I knew I am I am. 김명미지 왜 미미야, 말이 안되더라고. I knew very early. Now, whether it's Myung Mi Kim or Kim Myung Mi, I think that part of that's just cultural convention, 여기서 김명미하라면 that's fine. But the second part of your question I think is more difficult, in other words, if you're marked by your ethnicity, absolutely there's some idea that the ethnic marker should connect to the content, and this is also where people have difficulty with 김명미 or 명미킴, either way. Because the ethnic marker for me, cannot be already a packaged idea, and I think so often in literature, what people are asking for is, literally people have said, "Why don't you write about your immigrant experience?" And I'm like, "I *am* writing about my immigrant experience." It's just that to many people, it doesn't sound like the typical, "I went here, this happened to me," because there's a lack of, what people would call, "the story," I think they believe I'm not talking about that experience, that's so fascinating to me. But the demand for a certain, as I was saying, equivalence between ethnicity and theme and content, so in other words, I think that's doubly, it's a kind of double oppression, because first you are being marked by your race or ethnicity, and second, you're being, in some sense, oppressed by saying ethnic

writers write about the ethnic experience in a single way, and if you don't then somehow you're not writing about your ethnic experience. So look at that, right? It's very well worked out. First, you get oppressed by your race or ethnicity; second, you get oppressed by people telling you that if you're of that race or ethnicity you write this way. So that's the kind of double oppression that often happens to ethnic writers. 최영: 시 좀 읽어주세요.

MMK: Ok, I am taking requests. 제일 difficult 한거, don't say all of them.

“Under Flag” 낭독

That's actually very strange to read it here in this context, oh my god, because, that second page, I was talking to 최선생 about the nature of memory, and the second page where it says, “and this breaks through unheralded,” that passage right there, all that imagery underneath that line, the sardines, we would cook out in my family when we were big eaters, barbeque. 청어. So in the right season, they have roe, it's just the most amazing texture, 입안에서 it pops. 작은 일인데 아무생각도 없는데 그런 기억이 나더라구요. That's what I mean, 누가 얘기한 것도 물어본 것도 아니고, suddenly you're swept into a memory, but memory comes from nowhere, it's always moving around. Sometimes it's a smell, most of us think it's an image, but it's not, often, it could be.. Sardines, it's a smell, it's a text, it's a texture, it's memory cooking out with my family. But when it says “elicited from nothing,” I think that's a part of diaspora, it's not connected to anything. You don't know when it's going to hit you, but there it is. That's partly what is scary and beautiful, for those of us who move from place to place or whatever. And this idea of “falling in that way,” 진짜 빠지는 것 같죠, 생각해 보세요, I wasn't thinking anything, there you are, you're almost taken into this space. 그거 “음파음파”는 아시겠죠. You know in the old schools, 발로 이렇게 하는 것 아시죠, organ, so you have to count with your feet on the pedals. 그게 아무래도 올라가고 내려갈 때 그런 소리가, 음파음파, very sort of mechanical, like a mechanical box cause you're using your feet to get sound into the pipes. 그리고 맞추셨어요, 나비아 나비아..(노래) That's the song, and if this was a hypertext, I would have a link to the Korean [song]. But again, it goes into this meditation, once we leave a place is it there, that's what it feels like it to me 사람이 어디 떠나면 거기 있어? Korea's still here, right, here I am right now, and it's still here, but somewhere, where does it go for the person, once we leave a place is it there. It almost feels like when we're leaving a place, it ceases to be, but of course we know this is not true, that's not real. But the internal experience of where did that place go? So that's very strange to read it here on my first return back to Korea, just have to say.

최주리: We were just driving around, and Kim Myung Mi 선생님 was talking about all

these 생각지도 않은게 갑자기 떠오르는 것, 백화점에서 포장 테이프 이렇게 붙여놔가지고..정말 기대하지 않았던 것들이 떠올라오는 것들이...

MMK: And that's where it's, difference between actual ethnic writing I don't think is about, "And let me tell you what happened when I immigrated to America." I don't think that's how it works. That's what the expectation is from those people who are not ethnically marked. In a way it is very voyeuristic and (최T: It's almost prewritten for you) that's right, I'm supposed to conform to a pre-existing script of how I am supposed to be an ethnic person. That's what is happening on the next page, that last sort of stanza "what we might have explored already discovered," that's saying in a way exactly this condition, people are telling you how you should write your own ethnic story or immigrant story, in other words, "what we might have explored," 내가 발견할 수도 있었겠는데, 다른 사람들이 they are already saying, "it's already discovered, you should think of it this way." That's what I was thinking about right there; I wanted to explore on my own terms but somehow my story was already supposed to be written.

But you'll see, somebody pointed out there are many birds in my poems, and here it is in the very first book, I mean something about birds and quality of song, the figure of the bird, must be important. Because my "fallback, callback, whippoorwill," that's all sound, I'm not necessarily talking about any single bird.

Why don't we look at a difficult poem? ...

영미시탐: Did Malcolm tell you about the experience we had in the subway? We were talking in English inside the subway and this man got really mad at us saying that we should speak Korean in Korea. (최T: Oh, this happened recently?) Yesterday. I was thinking of making that into a question, I was having trouble, I thought it could get tied into the concept of ethical responsibility, and how much of an ethical responsibility the writer has towards people who are so adamant in their position not to hear, not to read, and does the writer have to persuade these people into reading what she has to write or can they just..?

MMK: I don't know. I think, what I mean by responsibility I don't think it's about persuasion, I think it's about connection. But, I mean quite honestly, that's one of the reasons it took me such a long time to come back to Korea. Like, that kind of incident as a metaphor, if you will, of how I felt as a Korean who is more American at this point, because I mean language is the one thing that demarcates human beings from each other. I mean I thought I might hear that 한국사람이 왜 한국말 안하냐고, 그렇게 충분히 나올 수 있죠. And I don't know what to say to that, because I think their actually not wrong. (Malcolm: Well, when I told you about that you said, well, maybe he's just the one guy who was crazy enough to speak up about it but other

people might have been thinking it.) No, I think many people think that, right? I mean felt like, Malcolm and I were at a terrace, a coffee place, and we sat down, and suddenly I realized people were turning around to look at us because we were speaking in English. 이렇게 안 생겼으면 they don't assume, but 이렇게 생긴 사람이 영어를 하니까 but it's there, it's definitely there. But I don't know that you can do anything about that necessarily, it's not the job of the poem to necessarily persuade, but it could be the job of the poem to look at the phenomena.

최주리: That's partially related to what I was trying to say earlier about this country that there are too many people who think they know what it means to be Korean, and what it means to be a true Korean, and there's no questioning, no curiosity, and to come out and tell you up and say in Korea you speak Korean.

정덕애: Besides you two don't look like Korean, at first glance.

MMK: Maybe that's a part of it. It's not just the linguistic thing, but like are you Korean? There's a race thing, so there's a language thing and a race thing.

정덕애: Well, from *The Bounty*?

전양선: Addendum?

MMK: What did you make of it? Could you get a feel for the connection, maybe?

염진: I think the first poem is really... I actually talked about this with a classmate about this Fraulein Anna O, in a way, it says she is deprived of words, but her silence, and her inability, her miscommunication, it becomes a whole new language in itself. And the classmate was saying that you could just maybe use just three or four words and just express everything through ...

MMK: Let me say a little about what interested me in getting these two quotes talking to each other. They come from very different locations about the nature of language. Freud's comment on Anna O as part of his case-study in hysteria, so to me, there is definitely a question about gender, language, pathologizing language production by women. So to him, this becomes ultimately the way to gage her dissent and disintegration on a psychic level by saying her language is literally falling apart, ergo her psychic economy is also falling apart, so that connection, especially at the scene of hysteria and women is what caught my attention. And look at how specific he is, "she couldn't conjugate verbs and could only use infinitives," my god, the horror that she would have no verbs and only infinitives, I mean he is really saying, you know, she can't make sense. That's what he is positing. But like if you just had "has" and "has been" and no verb...She has been falling..down..I don't know, past participles are weird in the first place, but he's so overly specific about what she can't do in language. "She omitted the definite and indefinite articles," this, as a Korean person, because as a teacher of English, I know for Korean students this is the hardest thing for them. How do you decide which is definite and which is

indefinite article. And so almost all of the Korean students that I have ever worked with, even the most brilliant ones, get stuck on that one. So it's really struck that he broke it down to that degree as a measure of how ill she is, so by this standard, we're pretty much all ill! That's what, the pathologizing of the breakdown of language that's happening in this Freud passage. "She put them together laboriously out of four or five languages and became almost unintelligible." So ergo, unless you speak in one language, it gets associated with intelligibility; if you pull in any other languages suddenly you're risking unintelligibility. Clearly that spoke to me in many ways, something about hysteria of women, breakdown of language, pathologizing the breakdown of language rather than something... I look at that and I go, "Hey she's got something going on! This is interesting." For him, it's like ... And then, the reason I put this, I wanted these two quotes absolutely to reverberate and echo off of each other. I don't mean them only as contrast, although they are. So for all of this kind of pathologizing in the Freud quote, Jabes, do you know who he is? Did you look him up? He's a displaced Egyptian Jew who had to leave Egypt because of the oppressive political regime there for Jews and he lived most of his life in Paris, he's a very important writer to me along with the German, well he writes in German, although it's a very anguished German, the poet Paul Celan, so these two writers, Edmund Jabes and Paul Celan are critical to me. Their both poets of the Holocaust, their both displaced Jews, their both displaced Jews who write, have the awareness of like two, three, or four languages. So Edmund Jabes, whose life work is called *The Book of Questions*, at one point says, "There is no such thing as a word." Compared to Freud's insistence, "there's words, there's grammar, there's all this," and Jabes says there's no such thing as a word, there are consonants waiting to become vocables, and of course, in Hebrew, it's only when you pronounce the vowel that you actually have a word. In Hebrew, you only have consonants, and this is why the reading of Hebrew text is actually not just a reading, but like the way, what you think the vowel value is in that word changes it entirely, depending on if you put in, you know, "a" or "e" or "long u," it changes the word itself, which is why reading the Hebrew text is also already, always already, an interpretive reading activity. (최T: I didn't know this, so in Hebrew they don't write the vowels?) Well, in the ancient texts. (최T: I thought it was only Yaweh or God's name that couldn't ...) No, but that's pervasive into all the holy documents. That's why it's an engagement with Yaweh, it's an engagement with, it's where your understanding is transferred, like the way you interpret the vowel sound changes the meaning, so every person could alter the meaning, could alter the correct meaning, wrong meaning, neutral meaning. Anyway, such different takes on language—language, pathology of language, the infinite openness of language in someone like Jabes. So after that what were you going to

ask me, after the epigraphs?

영미시팀: Maybe you could read the one “For Malcolm.”

MMK: For Malcolm, that would be funny, do you want to leave?

Malcolm: Well, it’s just a dedication, wait I didn’t read it, is it about me? (MMK: No of course not. Haha.) Exactly.

낭독할 시 고르는 중. 사진 촬영할 장소 이야기 중. 제본 책/원본 얘기 중.

MMK: Actually that looks good on that size. That’s better. (Malcolm: Is that a second edition?) No, bootleg. (황T: Illegal copy, OK? Haha) I like the way it looks. See this page, it looks a lot better than this, because it’s too cramped, this is how I think of it. Also, the reason, Jin, to go back to your question, why don’t I do, I don’t know, things that are not text? Because I love the idea that, OK I’m asking something that’s probably undoable, but I really see some of this as quite simultaneous, in other words, I’m not saying read this, then this, then this, when you see these double columns I see them more or less simultaneously. (Malcolm: Can you hear that simultaneously?) Sometimes. You know the one I showed you, with bellrag, bellslip, “ㅈ/jw” I heard that all at once. That’s why it’s all together (I don’t get the “ㅈ” part.) It’s just the phoneme, a consonant. But it looks really, I think that’s much better.

감사의 인사. Thanks for lunch and dessert. 폴브라이트 장학금 이야기하면서 한국 돌아와달라는 선생님들의 당부. 명미킴 선생님은 이화여대가 가장 맘에 들었다고, 학생들이 “intellectually vibrant” 했다는 말씀을 하시며 만약 나중에 오게 되면 우리학교로 오고 싶으시다는 말씀으로 좌담회 마무리. 끝.