

Deflected Prophecies

Sungbum Heo (architectural/practice)

review. prformance <Square practice> (12 July 2025)

The event had already begun in silence. After some time, Suhwa Kim, a performer, picked up a roll of tape and began drawing a square on the floor. It seem that the performance was still amid chaotic preparation, like a bustling construction site. I felt that it was still too early for tension to set in, but the artist sat down in front of the square, and I had, without realizing it, become an audience member. Like an actor's improvisation, where the starting point is hard to pinpoint, Suhwa's individual self and her artist self became intertwined in the moment. Where, then, was the beginning of the performance? Was it when the artist first gripped the tape? No. Was it when the audience believed the performance had started? No. I soon sensed that asking about the starting point was meaningless. The event had already begun with silence.

"An apple." After a long wait, a voice broke the silence, erupting from some device. Suhwa quickly placed an apple into the square drawn on the floor. Transmitted through Wi-Fi, refracted through her body's movement, the phrase "an apple" was repeated once again, and the apple crossed the boundary. Triggered by the distorted signal, a second word, "water," appeared. She began pouring water into a transparent bottle. The simple linguistic relationships produced by the speaker—apple-사과, water-물—were transformed into choreography by the performer's bodily intervention. The apple was moved more rapidly, the bottle filled dangerously to the brim. Amid the interacting and repetitively entangled signals and actions, muscles were drawn taut. The frantic movements grew unstable, and the tension reached its peak. The moment the performer bit into the apple, and continued pouring even as water spilled from the bottle, the tension eased, shifting into a raw, primal doubt. The functional relations that had operated like a formula began to break down, and the question, "What does it mean?" lingered in the audience's mind. Yet, this sincere attempt at interpretation only lead to inattentional blindness¹,

1 Christiansen, Morten H., and Nick Chater. *The Evolving Language: From Apes*

for an artist's actions and the audience's interpretations seem to follow different rules and constantly misalign. The audience is watching, yet not fully perceiving the situation. An apple is not an apple. Water is not water. Perhaps they are nothing at all. There is merely a process of sending and receiving signals through Wi-Fi. The audience's a priori right to seek meaning is violated, and the relationship between artist and audience collapses. We all encounter each other in the middle of nowhere. Messages are erased, and a game of gestures, where only form remains, begins. The square advances into an unknown space that refers to nothing, and the signal-body-object is reconfigured.

Suhwa Kim confesses, "As a choreographer, I cannot properly achieve a result."² And she does not hide her self-deprecating stance: "I will put my hands behind my back to resist the intangible and remain among them." Suhwa, revealing that she did not come here as an artist, does not summon the audience. The audience is no longer an audience. The signal-body-object transforms into an arbitrary performance, occurring without artist or audience, linking new events and spaces. This mechanical computational process, operating without the mediation of translation, resonates with the primordial creation of language, oscillating between misunderstanding and understanding. It pushes the performance's starting point into a distant past, transforming the square into a terrain of events where perspectives constantly shift. Multiple bodies engage with the Wi-Fi signals, existing as both agents and variables that generate new events. It forms a state of overlap, where disparate moments coexist simultaneously and sporadically—like a ritualistic scene of a priest and their followers dancing, or like electrons making unpredictable quantum leaps across energy orbits.

<Square Practice> begins as an empty space born of silence but soon becomes a collective landscape filled with indeterminate events. The

to Cyborgs, *How Language Is Created and Evolved*. Translated by Hye-kyung Lee, Wailbook, 2023, pp. 64–65.

"As revealed through the research of Ulric Neisser, our ability to perceive the world is far more limited than we think."

² In a work note shared prior to the performance, Suhwa Kim dismissed the idea of choreographing Wi-Fi signals as impossible.

artist and the audience dissolve, leaving only bodies, while the subject of “we” and its linguistic representations unravel. At the end of the performance, anonymous bodies, belonging to no one, move together like a game of gestures, and simultaneously, a new language, belonging to no one, emerges. Different languages refer to different objects and construct different worlds. The arbitrariness of the signal–body–object transcended past and present, present and future, shaking the space. The austere geometry of the absolute square transforms once again into a fluid environment, shaped by overlapping landscapes of space-time, ceaselessly distorting the plane. In this moment, Suhwa Kim sheds the identity of the artist and dematerializes. Like an unnamed existence³, she folds all of us—including signals and objects—into overlapping layers of dilemmas. A precarious parallel stretches endlessly, where nothing may mean anything, or everything. This was a new leap, easily transcending the boundaries between human and non-human beings, and realizing Foucault’s prophecy that the human face drawn on the sand at the seashore would be swept away by the waves⁴. Words, objects, and bodies—dehumanized or transcendent—departed from all meaning, crossing the horizon of the event. After a brief silence, incomprehensible words flow from the speaker. News from nowhere⁵, bringing a certain order and reorganizing reality. What we see is not what we see, and what we hear is not what we hear. No one speaks, and no one understands. Yet, something moves.

3 ‘Nameless’, a character played by Woohee Cheon in the film *The Wailing* (2016).

4 Kyu-hyun Lee, Michel Foucault, *Words and Things: Landscapes of Knowledge and the Black Sun of Language*. Salim Publishing, 2019, p. 71.

5 *News from Nowhere* is also the title of a utopian novel published by William Morris in 1890.