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*(Language)*Critical Journal

LEA (Ye Gyoung) Choi

Master of Fine Art

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Language has been a dominating theme in my life. I am from South Korea, where the hierarchies of the society are reinforced on a constant basis through the tiers of formality in the language (Jondaemal¹, banmal², etc.³), and the honorifics and grammar structures themselves. As I learned English, new avenues of thinking and a previously unknown ability to directly express my thoughts became available to me. It begs the question, did a new me emerge? Or was it the me that was always there? When I speak Japanese, I feel similar as I do with Korean, but more delicate and indirect. When I am speaking Norwegian, it feels very direct to me in the compound vocabulary.

Language and its relationship to thought is the foundational concept of the series of films that I have been making over the last year, *Elementene*⁴, *Barabonda*⁵, and *Language*⁶. *Elementene* is a brutal dark homage to propaganda and the language of fear that has dominated the global discourse from the United States of America, to Russia, to North Korea, to South Korea, to China, to Japan. *Barabonda* is an exploration of the role of the words themselves in an individual's ability to think in abstract terms, terms that we share symbols of but may have asymmetric definitions. *Language* is about the future. What structure will we use to communicate with computers? Will the imperfections of our systems of communication be the undoing of our thinking machines?

This essay will analyze each of my films in turn and offer my further thoughts on the themes and research behind them.

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¹ 존댓말; Jondaemal is one of the grammar rule in Korean language with honour.

² 반말; Banmal is one of the grammar rule in Korean language for casual conversation.

³ Korean language has a unique grammar structure, that can be changed in 7 different levels according to authority, formality and honor.

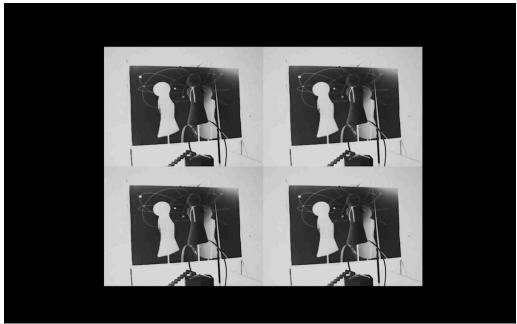
⁴ LEA, *Elementene* (Dundee: Generator Project, 2018).

⁵ LEA, *Barabonda* (Oslo: Kunstakademiet, 2018-).

⁶ LEA, *Language* (Oslo: Kunstakademiet, 2018-).

ELEMENTENE: Conflict and Propaganda

Issues of justice and victimization for the marketing of the war industry provide the backbone of *Elementene*. The film is focused on how various medias are simplifying and translating the conflicts between countries. Elementene also describes the visual language and sound(rhythm) of language with the political slogans and symbolic images of the tension between North-East Asia and the Cold War. These techniques could also represent the tension between an individual's existence in social definitions. I depict the way media and political campaigns use symbolic terms as a technique to dehumanization the other.



[Fig.1] LEA, screenshot of Elementene, 6 mins 19sec, 16mm film and digital video, 05. 2018

Elementene is a repetition of a simple object, a rotating humanoid form on top of a small stage [fig.1]. The shape could be an atom or human, and I refer to it as an Element. The film is accompanied by a narration of phrases such as 'I am your enemy, don't worry your enemy doesn't have a face. I live where you don't live.' The narration repeats the symbolic terminology such as 'I am not an attacker. I am a victim. I need sympathy. I need help. I need food. I am afraid of you. I need weapon. I want to be free'. In counterpoint, another narration echoes a similar sentence, but replaces 'I' with 'you'. The narration is whispering, repetitive and ambiguous.⁷ As the film progresses the shots of the Element multiply into two identical images. The frames continue to split and multiply. Then the multiplying images become layers. The front layer can represent "I" as the viewer and the back layer represent "you" as the others, or vice versa. The scene then divides, subdivides, and multiplies Elements until

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⁷ LEA, *Elementene*, 2018, quoted at 18sec to 3mins 53sec.

finally the scene dissolves into the conflict universe.⁸ The universe perhaps could be a micro universe, universe of mentalities of individual thoughts, mind or ideas or the universe out of earth. The cinematography concludes by zooming back to the Elements from the universe and repeats the sentence that 'I have no face, because I am your enemy. You have no face because you are my enemy.' Until the sound and visions fade away.⁹

The messages of *Elementene* are influenced by Harbert Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man*¹⁰ and Naomi Klein's idea of branding.¹¹ Marcuse's One-Dimensional Man shows how humans and human language with capital and politic engagements simplify our various conditions of living and lead us toward a false ideal of living, enemies, and war.¹²

I incorporated Marcuse's ideas about the Cold War between America and Soviet Union in 1960's into *Elementene*. He outlines the social repression in both societies as examples of Negative Thinking and tries to highlight the importance of maintaining a dialectical mind against the dominance of Positivism, which creates the form of our lives. He was focused on linguistic syntax, and how language shapes the idea and human's (One-dimensional) behaviour. This is especially relevant because the framing of West vs. East was reduced to a good vs. evil simplicity, a technique routinely used by leaders to control their message and to dehumanize the "other".

The concepts which comprehend the facts and thereby transcend the facts are losing their authentic linguistic representation. Without these mediations, language tends to express and promote the immediate identification of reason and fact, truth and established truth, essence and existence, the thing and its function¹³... a syntax in which the structure of the sentence is abridged and condensed in such a way that no tension, no "space" is left between the parts of the sentence. This linguistic form militates against a development of meaning. ¹⁴

Marcuse warned of the danger of designating life and thoughts with abridged language expressions. He was referring to forms in the political discourse such as 'freedom' 'equality' and 'peace', and how these terms work as magic-functional formula.¹⁵ Marcuse was

⁸ LEA, Elementene, 2018, screened at 2mins 13sec to 4mins 42sec.

⁹ LEA, *Elementene*, 2018, quoted at 5mins 1sec.

¹⁰ Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 1964).

¹¹ Naomi Klein, "No Logo", No Logo, 2000 http://www.tcnj.edu/~allyn/No%20Logo%20-

^{%20}Naomi%20Klein.pdf [Accessed 17 November 2018].

¹² Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, pp.59-86.

¹³Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* p.88.

¹⁴Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* p.90.

¹⁵ Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* p.91.

concerned that these categories of functional formula were catch all expressions that had no meaning, but carried populist sentiment when used. These magic functional formulas with abridged (syntax) of language are well-known techniques in the advertisement industry.¹⁶

The contents of *Elementene* represents the one-dimensional human being, behavior, thoughts, style and boundaries from the individuals. The individuals (the Elements) are part of the syntax of language and let the audience think about them as a third-party observer of the swamp of One-Dimensional situation in language. Alternatively, the viewer may be drawn to one narrative or the other depending on the culture of condition that they were raised in. The conflict between nations of politics, individual needs, personal hopes and will are unifying and separating according to usage of language with symbolic powers. These language syntaxes resemble us as part of a nation, humans and the Earth.

The sounds in *Elementene* consist of the abridged sentences and repetitive sloganistic expressions that Marcuse¹⁷ and Klein¹⁸ both wrote about. The visuals of *Elementene* also serve to dehumanize the individual by subdividing the image into hundreds of identical. The intention of the film is to match the hypnotic methods of politics and media. Elementene is giving the fundamental question of what is you? Who am I? Who do we belong to? What is us? And what are others?

¹⁶ Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* p.91.

¹⁷ Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, pp.138-140.

¹⁸Klein, *No Logo*, pp.286-293.

LANGUAGE 1: Language Games

The film *Language* is asking the fundamental question of what language is. *Language* is essentially my visualization of Wittgenstein's concept of language games. He proposed that language can be a smaller and simpler collection of words and actions, independent from the entirety of a language, and referred to these more primitive expressions as language games. The film describes how we study to classify the world when we are children, how we try to define phenomena, and transform objects into words. We are also communicating ideas by these object tools such as language. In *Language* I used sound pulses instead of oral communication to push the conceptual idea of language into a synthetic form. The idea of language as programming, and using sounds that connote Morse code, should allow the viewer to reflect on the way the process of abstract thoughts filter through our language.



[Fig.2] Screenshot of Language (on progress), digital video

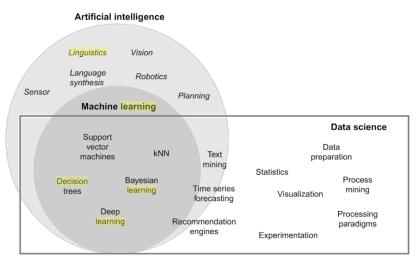
Language is supposed to be visually simple so that it mimics the language learning process from childhood with vivid pictorial memory.²⁰ I wanted to allude how AI might be learning the language by million and billions of possibilities and experiences between the choices of words (or code).

According to the chart below, AI is learning the algorithm of data science. Those data sets are allocated to the AI for decisions by the extraction of meaningful patterns from observation of human behaviors and archives. Which is re-classified through inputs and outputs of program from the data science. How AI study the phenomenon by machine learning

¹⁹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1953), pp. 3-21.

²⁰ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, pp. 3-21.

resembles the understanding of human existences and experiences. These ideas are represented by chart below [Fig 3-1/2].²¹



[Fig.3] Artificial intelligence, machine learning, and data science

All essentially uses deductive reasoning from the input/output data from data science in a way similar to the human learning process.

The data is an archive of human symbols.²² This includes the errors of data from humans by fundamental language learning process, according to Wittgenstein.²³ These AI are condensed versions of human intelligence, and observation of human data. Then, are those Artificial Intelligences hybrid-versions of the humans? We created the idea and thoughts in language, and these languages re-dominate us. I tried to depict those potentially chaotic relationships between language and machine(human) in the film *Language*.

The beginning scene of *Language* is slowly showing an apple, (a nod to the metaphor of enlightenment) the standard idea of the apple, and different shapes of apples, exceptions of an apple shape, which is still called an apple. The repeating images reinforce the connection between the language and phenomenon. After some sort of practice of understanding, the visual starts to flicker faster with repetitive sounds to mesmerize the viewer with uncanny syntax; in other words, this discipline could be the data research (or observations) by AI to find the deductive reasons and algorithms of patterns of data. With this language practice, I

²¹ Vijay Kotu and Bala Deshpande, *Data Science: Concepts and Practice*, 2nd edn (Massachusetts: Morgan Kaufmann Publishers, 2018), pp. 3-5.

²² Hugh Clapin, *Philosophy of Mental Representation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 11.

²³ T Binkley, *Wittgenstein's Language* (Berlin: Springer Science & Business Media, 2012), p. 105.

intended that the cognition of language by humans or Al could be instant recognition and connection to my pattern. The video is escalating to complicate (or abstract) concepts of thoughts (or feelings) into language such as hurt, bad and good. Those instantly recognized and understood images create the phenomenon of feelings without conscious thought, language without language.

This practice is simply described by Ludwig Wittgenstein in Tractatus-Logico-Philosophicus. The film *Language* shows the sequence of phenomenon, and it gives the comparison between objects(data). According to Wittgenstein, humans comprehend the states of affairs by combinations of others. ²⁴ He believed that the understanding of phenomenon needs a comparison and distinguish the form of an object by other objects at least. ²⁵

LANGUAGE 2: Language and Rhythm

Commercial language gets stronger when it is combined with repetitive sound and visual rhythms. The films *Language* and *Elementene* try to achieve the idea of relationships between language and sounds to recall the pictorial and instant memories.²⁶ The rhythm of language could include tone of voice, the rhythm of words, the melody of slogans or a poem, and lyrics of the songs, as well as strong visual examples in timed repetition.

In *Language*, for the certain consistency and connection of memory I constantly rotated the object in the same position and made the sound more rhythmical, which was inspired by Len Lye's Rhythm (1957)²⁷ Len Lye was an experimental film maker and *Rhythm* was intended to be a commercial for the Chrysler car company. Even though it was rejected by Chrysler, the use of visual and sound editing to produce rhythm became common in the commercial field. Adding the technique of abridged slogans to catchy melodies and repeated exposure. Such as McDonald's 'I'm lovin' it'. ²⁸ The combination of slogan and rhythmical sound and visuals make ideas easily recallable and the unconsciously remembered. This advertisement technique of rhythmic slogans with language also makes Marcuse's idea even more germane in mass media and data.

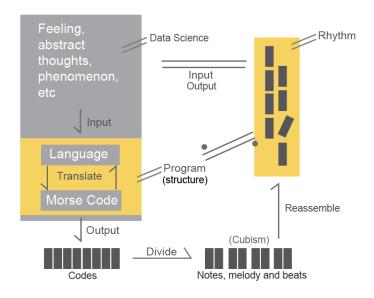
²⁸ Klein, *No Logo*, pp.63-67

²⁴ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractactus Logico-Philosophicus*, 1st edn (New York: Routledge, 1922), p. 6. ²⁵ Wittgenstein, *Tractactus Logico-Philosophicus*, pp.5-7.

²⁶ Garry L Hagberg, "Wittgenstein, Music, and the Philosophy of Culture", in *Wittgenstein On Aesthetic Understanding*, Kindle edn (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 1777-1778.

²⁷ Len Lye, Rhythm, 1957 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=acZgomt5A2I [accessed 17 November 2018]

Wittgenstein wrote about 'the rhythm of our language, of our thinking and feeling".²⁹ For example, most poetry follows the rule of rhyme and rhythm to lead the emotion from the abridged words. In addition, when readers recite the poem, the mood and intention of the sentence can change according to the tone of voice, melody of words, facial expressions and body movements. In other words, non-verbal language can add to the symbolic intentions of simple words; and these additional messages can spread to our daily lives (or data science) spreading the political tension, advertisement purpose, etc. In *Language* and *Elementene*, I re-created the expression from data science, and re-ordered those chaotic elements with another sense of communication.



[Fig.4] Idea of language transformation in the film Language.

In the films Language and Elementene, I divide (Cubism) and redevelop (Surrealism) the readymade objects with abstract expression using collage (Avant-garde). [fig.4] Like the chart above, I re-imagined language and communication by order of rhythm, that could perhaps represent the grammar structure in human language. I re-ordered the chaos of my own data science (feelings, abstract thoughts, phenomenon, etc.) into my language with rhythm. Furthermore, the rhythm will be my new structure and organizer for communication.

²⁹ Hagberg, "Wittgenstein, Music, and the Philosophy of Culture", in *Wittgenstein On Aesthetic Understanding*, pp.1784-1785.

This practice of disassembling and reassembling data by artists has already been expressed in the art field by Kandinsky and Hugo Ball, among others. Kandinsky's Composition³⁰ represents Cubism, Surrealism, Symbolism by musical structure into the rhythm of visual structure. Hugo Ball depicted the skeptical (meaningless) feeling from the war by his poem Karawane³¹. In Karawane, his "language" was reduced to abstract sounds presented according to the rhythm with his visual expression [fig.5], and this became a language itself as communication tool with the audience.



[Fig.5] Karawane (1917), Hugo Ball

I tried to transform these ideas of Kandinsky and Hugo Ball into my films. I have transformed my abstract thoughts and expressions into my own medias (mediums)- which is a hybrid between old concepts and new phenomenon; between old techniques and new technology.

The rhythmical approaches in the visual and sound in *Elementene* and *Language* depict the idea of making sense of the structure of elements (symbol and signs). The sequence of symbols and signs, images and sounds, build the narrative. Duncan Campbell's essay film, *It for Others*, is at heart a meditation on value. Campbell uses a variety of images and sounds to symbolize effort, time, work and art, and I was especially interested in how the robotic voice, without emotions, conveyed a "matter of fact" experience. On the other hand, once in a while the scene of the film creates a density and tension of feeling by rhythmical sounds

³⁰ Wassily Kandinsky, Composition 8 (New York: Musée Guggenheim, 1923).

³¹ Hugo Ball, Karawane (Zurich: The Cabaret Voltaire, 1916).

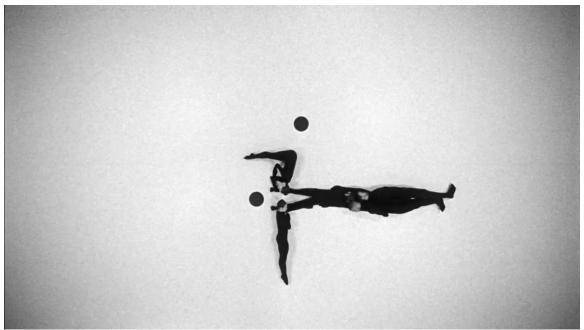
and fast chopped moving images. In my film *Language*, I wanted to pick up on the cold, factual feeling of a machine, but use the rhythm of my images and soundscape to push people into a very human emotional experience of panic or catastrophe.

Elementene and Language discuss language and de-humanization to give extreme examples of the current social phenomenon and future. In addition, I tried to recreate my language according to these feelings. People as the "others" but not "us"; which can stand for foreigners (and foreign countries) or AI (an uncanny future). In addition, as a South Korean, who speaks a 'foreign language', who speaks the same language as 'North Koreans', who speaks the language of the enemy, who speaks the original language of enemies or foreigners or the countries with the tension of nuclear war, that translated millions of foreign newspapers (and these newspapers are spreading out of mechanical reproduction in World Wide Web). I decided to speak my 'own story' in my last piece of this series, which is *Barabonda*. In the story of *Barabonda* me, myself, could be AI, could be human, and could not be human.

BARABONDA: Visual Communication as Language

Barabonda is one of my most personal stories between language and identity. As a South Korean, who speaks Korean language, which is translated around the world of terror of North Korea. I personalized the language as an observation tool of individual emotions, thoughts, and feeling, and translated into 2nd languages as subtitles.

The film is written in Korean, and I also translated it on my own into English. After the first translation, a native English speaker trimmed the sentences once more. The original intention of language loses the meaning as soon as we translate the language to another language. The Japanese writer Natsume Soseki was also an English teacher. He taught his student to translate 'I love you' in Japanese as 'Tsuki ga tottemo aoi naa' (The moon is so blue tonight).



[Fig.6] Screenshot of It for Others (2013), Duncan Campbell

Losing the original meaning of thoughts are intentional, and the context of *Barabonda* is considering the confusion between expressions in language from the phenomenon, comprehension, sense and feeling.

³² Sato Kenji, "More Animated Than Life: A Critical Overview of Japanese Animated Films", *Japan Echo*, 1997.

Barabonda supports my language with visual art forms like *It for Others* (2013)³³. Both films have diagram or mapping-looking moving images, which support the visual communication. This visual interconnection with language provides the perspicuous representation. In *Investigation* by Wittgenstein, he suggests 'finding and inventing intermediate cases'; William Day analyzed this as 'understanding consists in seeing connection'³⁴ The amalgamation between visual expression and original language (includes the tone of personal voice) perhaps helps to understand 'the fact'.³⁵

In *It for Others*, Campbell provided the simplistic visual examples in an artistic way about Capital by Karl Marx. The hint he depicted either using the direct terms or symbols from the book (for instance, C-M-C or measure of value)³⁶ or in-direct(abstract) movements of metaphors such as people were doing the labouring and manufacturing or showing the pyramid shapes at the end of black and white film part [fig.6]. The film *It for Other* is almost like moving diagram. He shot the film from the top down onto human bodies wearing black suits on a white background and mapping the objects or body as [fig.6] and [fig.7].



[Fig.7] Screenshot of It for Others (2013), Duncan Campbell

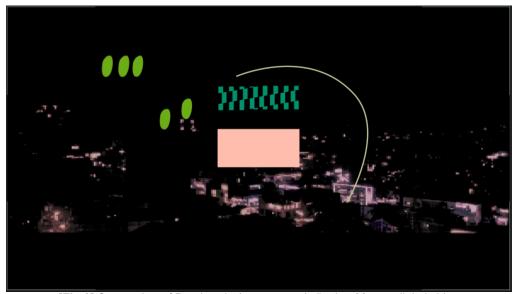
³³ Duncan Campbell, *It for others* (Ireland, 2013).

³⁴ William Day, "The Aesthetic Dimension of Wittgenstein's Later Writings", in *Wittgenstein On Aesthetic Understanding*, Kindle edn (Cham: Philosophers in Depth, 2017), p. 362.

³⁵ Day, The Aesthetic Dimension of Wittgenstein's Later Writings, pp.441-442

³⁶ Karl Marx, Capital (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp.22-23

I assume the technique of mapping on the screen with a hint of oral language with visual communication; such as diagrams or charts in an essay or a newspaper. The visual information is abstract, yet alludes to a process or an order of operations. These expressions perhaps create the stronger communication than oral language itself. In comparison, I express the phenomenon and thought through the language and visual communication to support the internal communication with audience. I divided the visual expression in the atomic level to re-assemble the idea from my data science[fig.4]. *Language* is focused on rhythm and sound, and *Elementene* was symbolic terms and individuals, and Barabonda is visual. The elements of shapes and diagrams became a moving image and it supports to understand the original idea of thoughts with my oral language.



[Fig.8] Screenshot of Barabonda (on progress), 5 mins 28 sec, digital video

In *Barabonda*, I wrote the poem of the idea of 'looking at' in my oral language and gave the example of abstract chart of visions that perhaps the idea of diagram of Language Transformation [fig.4] or my actual vision of thinking without language. I mapped or gave the hint of the diagram of my intention of the poem, that perhaps can be the last puzzle piece of my language expression.

Barabonda is a narrative film between *Elementene* and *Language*, that could bridge (or fill the gap) between the errors of language structure. I tried to shape (construct) my own language with a personalized story, personalized perspective, personalized observation, personalized comparisons and contrasts, and personalized vision with my own voice. *Barabonda* is my personal hope in a foreign language with fundamental concern to approach

the true communication with audience. Moreover, I wish to express closer my thoughts and vision to the others besides using language of branding, national politics and symbols.

Conclusion

Conflict; or comparison and contrast; a dialectic; is important to understand the fundamental issue. I tried to express those conflicts in *Elementene, Language* and *Barabonda*, that not only require the experience of 'my side', but 'others'. As Wittgenstein said, we understand the phenomenon through the comparison of others.³⁷ The language structure often shapes the idea of human consciousness and cognition instead of thoughts and objects themselves.³⁸ Then how can we see those errors of language and reach to the fundamental information?

I started from *Elementene* to show the conflict between political language choices and nations. I used the 'representative' or 'symbolic' or 'syntax' of language to describe the dehumanized "others", (which could be us at the same time.) In *Language*, I compared between the understanding of phenomenon with the Language Game and AI, which could also resemble human learning or cognition. Furthermore, in *Barabonda* I depicted my personal thoughts with my visual choices and mother tongue with foreign subtitles (English). This shows the imperfection of words as information.

The world is evolving with the power of language, formatting our personalities, individual attitudes, cultures, and borders. I tried to consider the alternative choice of language in this project, that perhaps became a playful method with dystopic aspect of language. I tried to accept and be conscious of the errors and imperfections of language as communication instead of unconditionally believing in the understanding. We should all be aware of how language allows us to have ideas, but also how the limitations of our language in turn limits and indeed manipulates our capacity for what ideas we are capable of having at all.

³⁷ Wittgenstein, *Tractactus Logico-Philosophicus*, pp.5-7.

³⁸ Robert Chobat, " Is a Narrative a Something or a Nothing?", in *Wittgenstein On Aesthetic Understanding*, Kindle edn (Cham: Philosophers in Depth, 2017), p. 2220-2224.

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