

DAMASESE

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What happens when you're following the full moon rabbit, and you come upon a language that is almost dead, or dying? Furthermore, what difference does this make, and then what is this vanishing dialect? A myth from the pre-Hispanic period (similar to a Korean belief) relates that the Mexicans were quite sure that there was a rabbit lying on the moon. For them, it was the reason behind the moon's craters, and it obscured the moon's brightness so that it would be less dazzling than the sun. In addition to the contrast between the two stars, the animal here signifies our obsessive desire to want to see a shape in any kind of (abstract) landscape coming before our eyes.

With eight capital letters and an invented word inspired by votive expressions, DAMASESE invites us to discover animated signs and their opposites. It plays with our vague desires to recognize (or not) a letter and a language in its most primitive attire. Starting with Ixcatec, hailing from the Oaxaca region of Mexico. Of pre-Hispanic origin (and thus contemporary with the above-mentioned allegory), this Oto-Manguan language has become extremely rare, being spoken by less than ten people. It has the specific feature of having no written form, and is as a result associated solely with the present, and its recording. Intrigued by this immaterial legacy, Seulgi Lee took this starting point to set up an exchange with a community of women basket-makers based in Santa Maria Ixcatlan, called Xula (meaning Ixcatec in Ixcatec = a nice tautology). To do this, for days on end she observed their techniques for weaving baskets, while she simultaneously discovered this unknown language. This experiment and acclimatization in turn gave rise to hybrid (as well as hybridized) tenates (baskets), extending at the same time to a pronounced word, or its association with a line.¹ In the same way as the disappearance of the lexicon, sentences have become rare because few inhabitants actually communicate in this language; some of them know a word or two, thus creating a stammering effect, and sentences with no agreements, and even without verbs. A little like when you learn sign language (bear in mind that it differs in every country) and you only know how to sign letters, which makes it hard to have a conversation!

The basket's shape is dictated by a force field that is, to be sure, in dialogue with the material, but also the word. In this respect, Tim Ingold states that : *"the action [read, the weaving] has a narrative quality, in the sense that all movement, like a line in history, is rhythmically developed based on the previous movement, while anticipating the next movement."*² In an earlier book, the British anthropologist analyzed the relation between line, weaving and text. According to him: *"The line formed on an already existing surface [...] is the trace of a movement, the one we see on a surface which has been woven using threads—like that of the blanket—develops in an organic way in one direction, through the repetition of crosswise and to-and-fro movements which go in the other direction. This distinction also offers a key for understanding the relation between weaving and writing. Because the shared derivation, [...] of the words "text" and "textile" comes from tax and "weave", the writing that is usually defined by the inscription of traces on a surface has been inspired by the weaving model,"*³ The "neo-tenates" also propose an autonomous "neo-dialect" (or a "neo-currency" of exchange) like woven palm fronds before them), whose primary syntax is these anthropomorphic structures whose typology is related to certain exotic flowers.⁴ In particular those tropical carnivorous plants with the name Nepenthes, existing in the form of different varieties and especially in the mountains of the State of Meghalaya in

these anthropomorphic structures whose typology is related to certain exotic flowers.⁴ In particular those tropical carnivorous plants with the name Nepenthes, existing in the form of different varieties and especially in the mountains of the State of Meghalaya in India.⁵ Set on structures made of metal rods, these gregarious baskets (like pink flamingoes) propose new signs constructed on a shrewd game of inside-outside, containing-contained, horizontal and vertical alike. New generation urns, in a way! And why not the other meaning of Nepenthes, referring to Homer by way of the memory of the potion which Paris gave to Helen to drink after her kidnapping, to make her forget about the land of her birth? Through the ensemble of their dots, angles and almost body-like attitudes, these "neo-petates" (woven palm fronds) are furthermore akin to astronomical constellations with powerful imaginative potential: *"Ndanga (soft as a telephone), Uburo (here and there pink horses neigh), Tundu (the madman has a blue/green broken nose) and Guashunga (a girl with neat hair)."*⁶

Here are adages that have become poems, just like in the "nubi(s)" brought together in the syllabary unit "U" with a sound somewhere between a Chinese ideogram and a Korean phonogram.⁷ These votive sculptures composed of bright, flamboyant and multi-hued colours from front to back, or else black and white (tending to interpret ambiguous and negative beliefs, as well as nightmares), are cleverly orchestrated in accordance with Chinese geomancy (called wuxing).⁸ They thus potentially establish a system of links and correlations based on a liaison between the cosmic order of things and the social order of people. In this pictorial sequence, they stimulate our powers of free association between image and language, a process in which the image becomes as right (and not just an image) as a fully-fledged proverb. See for yourselves! *"U: like a ghost singing by uttering shrill cries. =An unbelievable event"* and *"U: Out at sea a blind tortoise comes upon a plank with a hole in it, where it puts its head in order to breathe. =a very rare fact"*. But isn't the most surprising event, today, language that has become as performative as reading?

Arlène Bercelet Courtin

1-The "tenate(s)" lie at the heart of the lives of the Mexicans of Santa Maria Ixcatlan. They are also used to wrap foodstuffs, protect heads in the form of sombreros, and protect the bodies of the deceased.

2-Tim Ingold, *Marcher avec les dragons*, p. 216, ed. Zones Sensibles, 2013.

3-Tim Ingold, *Une brève histoire des lignes*, p. 89, ed. Zones Sensibles, 2011.

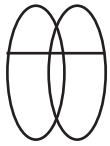
4-The prefix "neo" is used in its various qualities and in particular the one that describes a new fact, but also a constructed language, i.e. created in record time by several people.

5-Among the attractions of Mawlynnong, chosen as Asia's cleanest village in 2003.

6-The "petate(s)" are weavings made of palm fronds (and in particular mats made using this technique) which appeared in the pre-Hispanic period.

7-The "nubi(s)" are traditional Korean blankets made using the "Tongyeong Nubi" quilting technique (the equivalent of the Japanese Sashiko, the Provençal Boutis, and the Piqué of Marseille) in the city of Tongyeong in the extreme south of South Korea

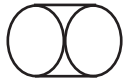
8-The system is based on five phases : wood, fire, earth, metal and water, each corresponding to a cardinal point in space (knowing that north is represented below and the earth in the middle), but also a season, a colour, a taste, and even a day of the week.



U : Even a straw sandal has its pair. = Each person has a soulmate.
 U : 짚신도 짝이 있다. Jip-sin-do Jjag-i It-da.



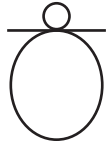
Clothes tree



U : To be accompanied by a jang-gu. = To agree.
 U : 맞장구 치다. Mat-jang-gu Tchi-da.



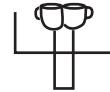
The Mapurnin are biting the scalps and spewing into a bowl to make medicine mud cakes which will be wrapped in cornhusks.



U : At sea, a turtle reaches a plank with a hole in it to put his head through so as to breathe.
 = A rare event.
 U : 맹구우목(盲龜遇木). Meng-gu-ou-mok.



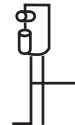
U : Words from salivating lips. = A lie.
 U : 입에 침 바른 소리. Ib-e Tchim Ba-reun So-ri.



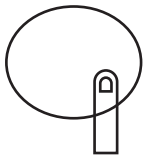
W / Young girl with neat hair.
 W / Sa² la² kwa²shu¹ngu² la² shhū¹ itzie ske².



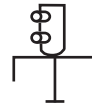
U : The cloud and the rain. = Carnal love.
 U : 운우지정(雲雨之情). Oun-ou-ji-jeung.



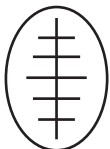
W / The madman has a broken blue (green) nose.
 W / Sa² la² si² tu¹ndu¹ tsude chi²tjū² ju²wa³.



U : Out of jealousy, to dig one's finger into somebody else's kaki fruit.
 U : 못먹는감 찌러나 본다. Mot-meog-neun-gam Jjil-leo-na Bon-da.



W / Limp like a telephone.
 W / Danga chi²ka² te²lefo²nu².



U : Inside an egg there is also a bone.
 = A series of unfortunate events.
 U : 달걀에도 뼈가 있다. Dal-gal-e-do Ppeu-ga It-da.



W / Here and there pink horses neigh (talk).
 W / Li² ka²hu² la² sa² ʔu²shi³ rosa² batzechī.



U : To cut water with a knife.
 = A quarrel between a couple never lasts.
 U : 칼로 물베기. Kal-lo Mul-be-gi.



W / To eat the egg.
 W / Sa kwa²ne² sa² ra² thwā¹.



U : Like a ghost singing and wailing. = An incredible event.
 U : 귀신이 곡할 노릇. Gui-shin-i Gok-hal No-reut.



W / Coyote
 W / ʔu²sa²chā³

Seulgi Lee thanks warmly

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