

I hear a silent dissonance.

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Intro

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I breathe in yellow haze. Particles of ash scratch my airway as it travels into my lungs.

I force out a dry cough.

The lingering feeling of friction irritates the back of my throat.

The haze has a smoky note on the wet morning air.

It brings up the memory of sliding my head through the sweater in the morning after a campfire.

It is the smell of fire
suspended in cold air,
the smell of a contradiction.

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Friction

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My thumb and index finger gently pinch a wooden dowel. I pull my hand down.

The friction between my fingers and the surface of the burnt wood sends vibrations to the gong under the stick.

The bronze howls.

This technique requires the right amount of friction between the wooden stick and the skin.

Too much friction stops the hand from sliding.

Too little, the hand slides without making any sound.

A fragile balance between friction and motion.

The repetitive gesture of moving hands in a careful downward motion feels like a prayer:

the kind of prayer that you repeat one phrase over and over again
in the hope that your devotion will reach the more-than-humans.

Prayer is for those who feel the resistance in the motion of life.

If there is too much friction between how I wish for things to be and how the things are,

I need to change how I live.

If there is too little friction,

I don't need prayer.

I am somewhere between the two.

Suddenly I hear a noise.

I hear the metal's hardness and the thickness through my skin.

It is uncomfortably high-pitched with harsh timbre.

I have learned to sense the fast micro stop-and-release my skin makes on the surface of the burnt wood.

I listen to the gong's high threshold where it starts to resonate with my hand.

This sound has no sustain. The gong resists ringing as soon as my hands stop moving.

And so does my prayer.

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Heat

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The morning news says the BC government has declared a state of emergency.

More than 300 forest fires are burning in the province.

I want to care about the news about somebody's suffering. But I turn off the radio.

Suddenly I hear a noise.

I hear tiny fans whirling in different frequencies: the internet router, my laptop, and the fan above the stove on the lowest setting.

The quiet undertones of my surroundings come from small fans cooling off small machines creating small friction creating small heat.

The lingering feeling of friction rings in my ear.

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Release

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I was on an unmarked trail in West Kelowna where the McDougall Creek fire burned through.

I heard the wind passing frictionless by my ears. There was no sound of the wind hitting or bending around objects because the forest was reduced to ash.

I see trees burnt into charcoal standing up.

They are now the texture of a tree,

clump of carbon delicately preserving the roughness of the bark.

They are so brittle that any friction or striking will crumble the surface.

The trees absorb sound.

In this silence, it is hard not to feel that I am in a spiritual plane.

I search my memory for the sound of rituals I saw in Korea.

Often the shamanistic rituals are called untangle (풀이).

The shaman becomes a vessel for spirits to embody.

Both the people and the spirit get absorbed in the percussion music

with gradually accelerating rhythm of percussion instruments.
Through collective resonance, they find empathy, then reconciliation.
This is the basis of Korea's indigenous beliefs.

Who do I need to untangle/ resonate with?

Surrounded by charred trees, I learn that the fire is not a force we fight.
The fire is a resonance.
The fire resonates the unstoppable momentum of our consumption.
The fire resonates hotter because we are burning more.
The fire resonates in higher frequency because the pace of our lives is getting faster.

We are the ouroboros eating our own tail.
Who do I untangle/ resonate with?

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Resonance:
to feel how others feel
to become a body that shares synchronous vibrations.

My brain sends electrical signals through the nervous system.
The electrical signals contract my muscles, moving my arms to strike the stretched skin.
The impact vibrates the skin.
The vibration resonates the drum shell and the air inside.
Waves of pressurized air oscillate my eardrum
which in turn get translated into electrical signals
that travel to my brain.

Repeat in 4/4 at 150 BPM.

In the cycle of resonance, each part is reacting to the source of their signals. The reaction becomes the signal (input) for the next part.

Listen

Listen to the thickness of the hide.
Listen to the contractions of muscles.
Listen to the volume of air in the drum.
Listen to the tension of the cord pulling the hide.
Listen to the texture of the wood.
Listen to the porousness of burnt trees.

Listen
to feel how others feel
to become a resonant body.

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회모리 (whirling wind)

It's August 4th, 2023. I am listening to *The Daily* by The New York Times titled, Fighting Canada's Unending Fires.

"It used to be tempting for people...to think that, well, if the world really got together, we could get a handle on this problem. If we really invested and focused on decarbonization, we could eliminate carbon emissions and solve global warming. And if we really focused on adaptation measures, we could protect people against what was coming as a result of the stuff we'd already put into the atmosphere to this point. But I think the lesson of the new age of wildfire is that we have much less control over a lot of these forces than we like to tell ourselves"

Some of my friends have confided in me that they feel defeated by the thought of the inevitable doom. They feel that their effort to change is meaningless on the scale of the current problems. One of them told me that there is a name for this feeling: Climate anxiety.

I pause.

I wonder if climate anxiety is just another form of my usual condition of anxiety. I have experienced more severe episodes of anxiety triggered by much pettier things. Is it my illness?

Being ill means that I am not in the state of well-being that most people are in. But I wonder whether being anxious is the more appropriate response to the actions we, as a species, have been making to the others and the land. Am I an illness?

The sun glows red like a bad inflammation. Its rays scatter through the smoke particles from the fires. The sense of doom seen in apocalyptic movies and the desperate effort of a body to fight off an infection overlap.

I decide not to share my thoughts. My friend is troubled by the negative outlook of the future, not by the self-doubt that they are overthinking things.

Instead, I share that I recently had an argument with my parents.

“When do you want to have kids?”

“I fantasize about being a dad. But I am afraid that having a kid is a wrong choice.”

“Why?”

“I see that the world will be difficult to live in.”

My dad and I don't see the future from the same perspective. My grandparents survived Japan's colonization and the Korean War. Then, my parents were born in the aftermath of war. They grew up in an era of rapid changes. To them, the world has always been difficult. But they didn't let it stop their life. Family is the beauty they found in the hardship, the lotus flower in a dirty pond. They want me to find my own lotus.

I said we will experience global events on a scale that we have never seen before. We will be forced into a time of regression and extinction. I am afraid that my kids will blame me for what they will experience.

My dad asked if I blamed them for bringing me into this life. His question feels like a thorn in my chest.

As the conversation tenses up, I saw the bronze baby bowl on the shelf over dad's shoulder. Mom gifted me just before I got married in 2015. She said it is a nice bowl for baby food. After 9 years, it still hasn't been used as a baby bowl. My wife stores seeds she collected from her plants.

The bowl is an affirmation of the relationship my mom and I have shared. And it is a materialization of mom's hope that I will have my own precious relationship, except this time as a caregiver.

It is also a reminder of a choice I haven't made because of my anxiety.

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Repeat Mark

I listen to the recording of gongs holding water. The gongs' fast attack and brittle decay are muffled by the fluid. It's soothing. In music, tension makes relief feel better. Songs often end by arriving home, a relief.

I don't arrive at a relief. I come back to a place where the effects of climate change are the emotional conflict within me. I am conflicted by the fact that my response is to make an artwork while people, and non-human others have lost their lives to extreme weather events.

I was conflicted about making these instruments when I started.
And I am still conflicted by them now.
The lingering feeling of friction irritates me.

I feel obligated to feel loss.
I haven't lost anything.

I feel obligated to feel anger.
I am calm.

I feel like I should care.
I don't care enough.

I hear a silent dissonance
Because of my body's innate resonance to conflicting frequencies:
A misalignment between what I want to be and what I am now.

There is no relief to arrive after the tension.
The relief is a fiction. It sounds sweeter because I am still stuck
in the tension created by friction and motion.

I listen to a silent dissonance.

Listen
to feel how others feel
to become a resonant body.

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