"Spectacle East Asia"

Invisible Culture
Issue no.15
Fall 2010

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Contents

Sangdon Kim, *Discoplan*, 2007. Courtesy of the artist.

Introduction: The Sociality of the Spectacle 1
Godfre Leung

The Politics of Spectacle: The Gwangju Biennale and the Asian Century 12
Okwui Enwezor

The Candlelight Girls' Playground: Nationalism as Dialogy, the 2008 Candlelight Vigil Protests in South Korea 40
Hyejong Yoo

Between Absence and Presence: Exploring Video Earth's *What is Photography?* 79
Rika Iezumi Hiro

Public Surfaces Beyond the Great Wall: Communication and Graffiti Culture in China 102
Caitlin Bruce

Curatorial Statement for Seven Videos: The Metaphor of "Flying and Falling" in Contemporary East Asia and Visual Arts 125
Sohl Lee

Seven Videos (see online version of issue) —

Afterword 146
Barbara London

About the contributors 149

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Introduction: The Sociality of the Spectacle

Godfre Leung

In the Fall of 2008, when our colleagues in the Program in Visual and Cultural Studies at the University of Rochester began formulating the theme of the "Spectacle East Asia: Publicity, Translocation, Counterpublics" Conference, from which this issue's contents are drawn, most of us had the Beijing Summer Olympics closely in mind. Having just witnessed much discussion in both academia and the mainstream press about the "spectacular" nature of the Beijing Games, it seemed prudent to investigate what was meant by this newest version of our old cultural studies warhorse, the Spectacle. For example, David Barboza wrote of Zhang Yimou's opening ceremonies in the *New York Times*: "Nearly two years in the making, [Zhang's] spectacle is intended to present China's new face to the world with stagecraft and pyrotechnics that organizers boast have no equal in the history of the Games."[1] China's "new face to the world," however, was not limited to its reputation abroad; its (self-) representation through the "spectacle" of the Games, according to commentators, was to have a profound effect on the way the nation and its constituents understand themselves. China's ascension in this decade to a leading—perhaps *the* leading—actor in international geo-politics was reflected in the fact that, in the Summer of 2008, the world's eyes were focused on Beijing. How China understands itself was thus not only mediated by how it represented itself to the "world" through the Games, but also in the very fact of spectacle itself, that is, in being seen. As Kevin Caffrey argues, in China, the Games "became an issue of educating young people to take their place as members of a world community of nations."[2]

The spectacle of the Beijing Games thus impacted social life on both the domestic and global registers, and established the global arena as the ground of domestic social relations. In his epilogue to a special issue of *The International Journal of the History of Sport* devoted to the 2008 Olympics, Caffrey refers to this interpretation of the Games as a "productive spectacle," and other articles in the issue work to establish the interconnection of global media images with specific local concerns.[3] Following from the central thesis of Caffrey's issue, that abstract global forces, international geo-politics, and worldwide media are productive in the sense that they bring people together in a manner that impacts the sociality of everyday life (a point well taken here), this concept of a "productive spectacle" seems to fly against Guy Debord's original characterization of spectacle as a device founded on separation.

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[1] David Barboza, "Gritty Renegade Now Directs China's Close-Up," in *New York Times* (August 7, 2008). http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/08/sports/olympics/08guru.html (last accessed June 2010).

[2] Kevin Caffrey, "Epilogue: Approaches to a Productive Spectacle," in *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 26:8 (July 2009), 1147.

In *The Society of the Spectacle*, Debord defines spectacle as "a social relationship between people that is mediated by images."[4] "The fetishistic appearance of pure objectivity in [these] spectacular relationships," he continues, "conceals their true character as relationships between human beings and between classes."[5] Debord's target in his influential 1967 text was a "reigning economic system" whose basis lay in the isolation of the subject, a system for which spectacle was deployed as its "perfect image."[6] With now more than forty years distance from Debord's observations, it is our goal in collecting the essays and video art works that comprise *Spectacle East Asia* to explore the social life of spectacle, as it exists in contemporary China, Japan, and South Korea, and to revisit and reconsider the critique of spectacle by Debord and the numerous scholars who followed his lead. To invoke Debord's famous line for a second time, might a social relationship between people through the mediation of images also possibly result in productive modes of sociality if the apparatus is not one of monolithic, integrated spectacle and its emphasis is reoriented from the atomization of the subject-turned-bourgeois consumer? Furthermore, might this possibility already be present in Debord's thinking?

In contrast to many of his successors, spectacle, as articulated by Debord, was not visual at its core. For Debord, the "images" that mediate the subject of spectacular society's material social relations constituted rather an *imaginary*, which is to say that spectacle bespeaks a fictitious, *represented* world that masks the alienation of an actual world dominated by advanced capitalism. In the social theory of more recent decades, the concept of the imaginary has proven useful in theorizing social life as it is mediated through forms of cultural exchange across space and time. For thinkers such as Benedict Anderson, Michael Warner, and Charles Taylor, print technologies and other communicative media enable a mode of discursive sociality among participants who may or may not be proximate to one another.[7] Like Debord's spectacular society, the social imaginary also bespeaks a kind of imaginary world, and its basis is also in culture as experienced through media. Taylor characterizes the social imaginary as "the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between themselves and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations."[8] Here, we return to the visual: while the respective "images" discussed by Debord and Taylor are not necessarily visual, the conditions of the contrasting imaginaries that they theorize have their respective bases in the dissemination of culture through a media apparatus that has become with each decade ever more visual.

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[3] In addition to Caffrey's epilogue (cited above), see also: Xuefei Ren, "Olympic Beijing: Reflections on Urban Space and Global Connectivity," and Hua Guangtian, "Olympian Ghosts: Apprehensions and Apparitions of the Beijing Spectacle," both from the same issue.

[4] Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (1967), trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone, 1994), 12.

[5] Ibid., 19.

[6] Ibid., 22, 15.

It is not our goal here to transvalue Debord's terms, nor do we wish to "correct" his critique of spectacle with the social theory of later decades. It furthermore will not suffice to simply pose a critical, *ad hoc* or guerilla "counter-spectacle" to the affirmative, integrated spectacle that Debord describes. Rather, this issue proceeds from the pursuit of the modes of sociality that, for Debord, are effaced but always nonetheless present in the experience of spectacle. In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Jürgen Habermas counterposes "critical publicity" with "manipulative publicity," tracing the function of mass media "to obtain the agreement or at least acquiescence of a mediatized public" in the service of private interests.[9] I invoke this opposition not to repeat the well-worn and too easy binary of critical and affirmative culture, nor even to advocate for a (re-)appropriation of the means of media dissemination—though surely it is a worthwhile goal—but because there lies in Habermas's formulation a stress on the role of the public. Hijacking the spectacular apparatus is only the first step in recuperating spectacle; the sociality embedded in spectacle ultimately lies in a different kind of production: not in the production of images in the literal sense, but in the production of an imaginary. For what makes the public *public* in Habermas's sense is not that it receives *publicity* but, rather, that it constitutes and thus produces *publicness*.[10] Herein lies the rational-critical debate that subtends Habermas's theorization of the public sphere.

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[7] See: Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (New York: Verso, 1983); Michael Warner, *The Letters of the Republic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), and *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone, 2002); and Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

[8] Taylor, 23.

[9] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962), trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), 177-178.

In the 21st century, new communicative technologies have augmented the bourgeois public sphere first described by Habermas almost fifty years earlier. The rapid growth of mass media in the second half of the twentieth century, particularly television, remained for the most part a means for one-way communication. However, the popularization of the internet in the last decade has enabled almost instantaneous discussion across great distances and has made cultural producers out of people who would have been, twenty years earlier, only consumers of information. One thread that runs through the essays that comprise this issue is the self-orientation of the cultural practices they analyze to the West. What Pheng Cheah had called, with some trepidation, "a global civil society or an international public sphere" seems clearly to be one intended target of the counterpublics described by Hyejong Yoo and Caitlin Bruce, whether or not a truly global audience in fact exists.[11]

We began to work on this issue in the Summer of 2009, in the weeks leading up to the twentieth anniversary of the Tiananmen Square protests and massacre in Beijing. In response to the Chinese government's blocking of social media websites such as Twitter, Facebook, Flickr, and even Hotmail in order to control the dissemination of information from Beijing to the rest of the world, local social media sites such as the now-dormant Fanfou.com—an almost exact replica of Twitter—invented a national holiday on June 4th, 2009 called "Chinese Internet Maintenance Day." These websites erected splash pages with satirical messages such as: "In order to provide better service, the Fanfou server will undergo technical maintenance, effective immediately. We expect to resume service before dawn on the 6th of June," while making the rest of their sites inaccessible for the days surrounding the anniversary. As with the Beijing Games, the Chinese government sought to preempt dissent around the June 4th anniversary, and, also like the Games, its stress was two-fold: on the one hand, the "Great Firewall of China" was aimed at curtailing the ability of dissidents to self-organize, while at the same time attempting to control China's reputation and public image abroad.

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[10] For a discussion of this passage in Habermas and the coining of the neologism "publicness" as the term "publicity" began to be inextricable from consumer culture and advertising, see: Sven Lütticken, *Secret Publicity: Essays on Contemporary Art* (Rotterdam: NAi Publishers, 2006), 28-30.

[11] Pheng Cheah, "Introduction: The Cosmopolitical—Today," in *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation*, eds. Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 37. In the same volume, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak reminds us that uneven access to the internet and uneven levels of media literacy across the globe render the "global" largely—and hegemonically—Euro-American, as she sarcastically declares: "Hail to thee, *pax electronica*." Spivak, "Cultural Talks in the Hot Peace: Revisiting the 'Global Village,'" in *Cosmopolitics*, 332.

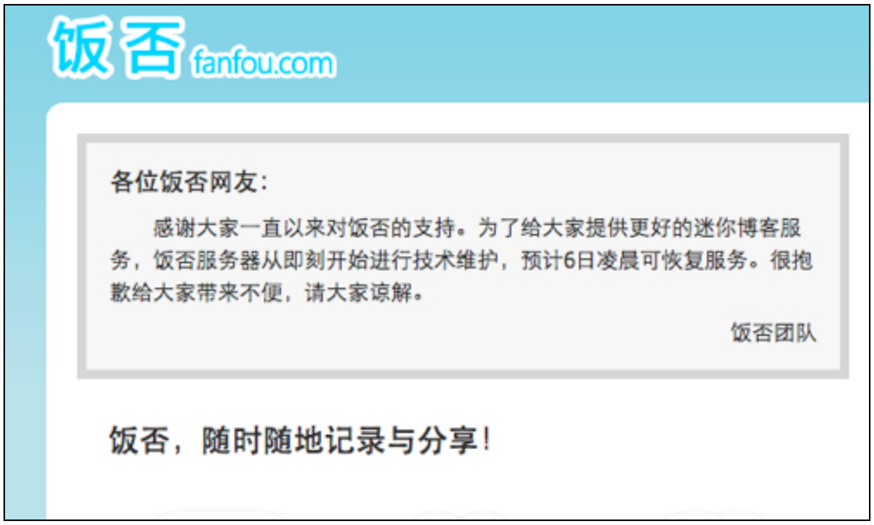

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Figure 1. Splash page from Fanfou.com, screenshot, June 2009.[12]

I read this gesture as a barricade of sorts. Conspicuously absent of any hyperlinks, the splash pages denoting "Chinese Internet Maintenance Day" block all inroads from the "information super-highway," redoubling the Chinese government's own barricade to restrict public discussion. To these eyes, they also evoke the barricades of 1989. To say nothing of the literal barricades erected to block the advance of the People's Liberation Army in the days leading up to the events of June 4th, most of us most vividly remember the Tiananmen Square protests and massacre by the photographic or video image of a lone man's human barricade before a queue of four Chinese tanks. In a recent study on photography in public culture, Robert Hariman and John Lucaites refer to the iconic photograph as a "democratic spectacle," arguing that its afterlife "subordinates Chinese democratic self-determination to a liberal vision of global order . . . that reinforces individualism and apolitical social organization" and represents "a progressive celebration of human rights while also limiting the political imagination regarding alternative and perhaps better versions of a global society."[13]

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[12] "Thank you for your continued support of Fanfou. In order to provide better service, the Fanfou server will undergo technical maintenance, effective immediately. We expect to resume service before dawn on the 6th of June. We apologize for the inconvenience and hope that you understand."

The "Maintenance Day" barricades reflect the limits of democratic spectacle exemplified by the famous tank photograph, marking the very same absence of politically-engaged and necessarily collective social organization that Hariman and Lucaites identify in the ideology of Western liberal democracy. Here we see a virtual community of dissent, whose collective action is waged not as an explicit political program, or in the name of a sectarian party politics, but is marked, rather, by the voluntarism of a mediatized public arena in peril. I propose a *dynamic* form of spectacle at play here: we do not know which site first "underwent maintenance" at the beginning of last June, and by all accounts "Chinese Internet Maintenance Day" arose in an *ad hoc* manner. We presume that some of these sites may have been in communication with one another, but it stretches credulity—particularly as the lines of communication may have been monitored and restricted by the Chinese government—that the observance of this "holiday" *en masse* was the result of scrupulous planning by an underground cadre of internet radicals.[14] Instead, we see here a politics *in process*, engaged above-ground and in plain sight: the dynamism I have identified has its basis in spectacle's constitutive properties of seeing and being seen, in which a potential actor views a website declaring itself under maintenance and repeats the gesture on his or her own site, often redeploying the message—"We are undergoing maintenance on the days before and after June 4th, 2009"—with its own phrasing, irony, and wit.

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[13] Robert Hariman and John Lucaites, *No Caption Needed: Iconic Photographs, Public Culture, and Liberal Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 209.

[14] One estimate counts 393 websites participating in "Chinese Internet Maintenance Day." http://cnreviews.com/life/events/chinese-internet-maintenance-day_20090604.html (last accessed June 2010).

The significance of "Chinese Internet Maintenance Day" for my purposes here is a kind of site-specificity that it displays: its participants are mostly limited to Chinese language websites and, framed as a satirical national holiday, its public consists of those whom we might call the "netizens" of China. Furthermore, its stakes are mnemonic—its barricade is also a disguised monument commemorating the violent June 4th repression—but the form of memory that it aims to preserve is not international, but rather local. "Maintenance Day" is not as readily assimilable to a narrative of individual, Western liberal democracy as the iconic image of the lone man before the tanks because the form and poetics of its publicity necessitates reproduction by its intended (local) public and is, thus, participatory in nature. Its goal is to effect a collective recognition by its intended public that its constituents do in fact constitute a public, which I want to distinguish from the more conventional international distribution of power that we encounter in subaltern activist appeals to what we might call an international or global public sphere (e.g., the circulation of the iconic tank image from the Tiananmen protests among first world actors arousing cosmopolitan concern and the subsequent international, but predominantly Western, shaming of the Chinese government for its "backwards" attitude towards civil liberties).

There are two distinct social imaginaries at play here. In the case of "Maintenance Day," we have the self-declaration of a social imaginary as an activist public. Meanwhile, the "democratic spectacle" that Hariman and Lucaites describe abstracts local self-determination to reinforce the commonsense liberal ideals of an international cosmopolitan class, whose own social imaginary purports to give voice to imagined, unfortunate others: to empower the powerless by shaming the perpetrators in the international public arena. The rhetoric of international shaming brings us back to David Barboza's *New York Times* article on Zhang Yimou's opening ceremonies, which I quoted at the beginning of this introduction. In it, Barboza refers to Zhang as a "Chinese Leni Riefenstahl." The implication, of course, is a comparison between the Beijing Games and the 1936 Olympics in Berlin, between Zhang and the fascist spectacle of the Third Reich, and, if we follow this comparison further, between the Chinese government and Hitler, Goebbels, et al. While not quite the Tea Party, I contend that Barboza's implied comparison is reckless and irresponsible and, furthermore, that such a comparison rests on our indelible collective memory of that image of the lone man and the four tanks, and on the narratives of Western liberal democracy that this image anchors.

The "Maintenance Day" barricades echo a different image of self-sacrifice from Tiananmen Square, one that can also be read as a barricade: the *Goddess of Democracy* statue erected in the Square—facing the portrait of Chairman Mao—by students from the Central Academy of Fine Arts on May 29th, 1989. Wu Hung stresses the distinctness between the *Goddess of Democracy* and the American *Statue of Liberty*, to which its physical form alludes. The statue, Wu writes, intentionally and distinctly represents a young Chinese woman, and became an image for collective identification among the protesters: "Soaring above the cheering demonstrators, she was immediately understood by everyone in the Square: 'She symbolizes what we want,' explained a young worker. Then, stabbing his chest, 'she stands for me.'"[15] The *Goddess* statue differs from the more famous "tank man" image both in terms of the collective mode of its construction and because, unlike the lone figure before the tanks, the statue was surrounded by protesters, seemingly draped in their flying banners.

The *Goddess* statue's mode of publicity, Wu argues, was in its status as a temporary monument: "a monument that was *intended* to be destroyed," the product of "an attempt to carry out a kind of planned suicide."[16] The Academy students purposely built the statue as large as they could so that it could not be easily removed—indeed, the statue was ultimately plowed into and toppled by a tank, in Wu's words "lying together with those murdered youths."[17] "Chinese Internet Maintenance Day" was also a temporary monument, marking the Chinese government's repressive censorship in the days leading up to the anniversary with a euphemistic self-sabotage. However, while its self-censorship repeated that of the Chinese government but in a more plainly observable manner, its memorial function takes on another sense of "seeing." To follow the theme of memorialization also engaged in Okwui Enwezor and Hyejong Yoo's contributions to this issue, the internet barricade *observed* the prohibited anniversary of June 4th under the guise of a national holiday, each site forcing its visitors to *observe* the holiday—to *see* that the site is down is already to have *observed* "Maintenance Day"—while at the same time impelling the visitors to observe both the disguised anniversary and its prohibition. As previously stated, the moment of this multivalent "observation" then enters into a dynamic process of reduplication, and in turn remakes the government barricade against its intention, into a site of public debate. At the same time, the multi-sitedness of the "Maintenance Day" barricades counters both the ubiquity of the government's integrated spectacle and the omnipresence of its surveillance apparatus, not only adding the condition of being observed to observing (as in Habermas's opposition of critical and affirmative spectacle), but placing the two in dialectical relation.

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[15] Wu Hung, *Remaking Beijing: Tiananmen Square and the Creation of a Political Space* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 46.

[16] Ibid., 49. Emphasis is in the original.

[17] Ibid., 46.

The essays that comprise *Spectacle East Asia* each contribute to a larger understanding of contemporary spectacle that is rooted in the social. Okwui Enwezor looks at two anniversaries—the 40th anniversary of May '68 as he was curating the 2008 Gwangju Biennale and the 15th anniversary of the May 18, 1980 Gwangju uprising in South Korea that the Biennale was founded in 1995 to commemorate—and counterposes the commemoration of May 18, whose "events of resistance . . . are still marked on the present," to the retrospective rhetoric of avant-gardist revolution and narratives of universal liberation (and heroic failure) that have both falsified a true memory of May '68 and rendered it (merely) historical. From his thoughtful analysis of how the historical event of May 18 resonates with present concerns, Enwezor examines how the building of cultural institutions in South Korea based on the commemoration of spectacular street protests comes to engender local debate while mediating the local with the global arena.

Hyejong Yoo's essay on the 2008 Candlelight Vigil protests in Seoul also reflects on the spectacle of protest. Her argument departs from a critique of conventional politics and illustrates the manner in which the nation—an unfashionable and seemingly regressive concept in our so-called cosmopolitan age—was, for the Candlelight protesters, a counter-figure waged against the global economic interests of the South Korean state. The actions of President Lee Myung-bak's government, she contends, were interpreted by the protesters as acting against the "national" interest and, thus, a "rhetoric of purity" emerged in which conventional, ethnic-based nationalism was replaced by a nationalism in which "purity" stood for the democratic civil society promised by the nation-state's constitution and reflected in the memories of the democratic protests of May 18, 1980 and June 10, 1987. This fundamentally rights-based protest, disguised as a recuperated nationalism, presents a compelling and forceful reading of the poetics of tactical spectacle in the internet age, and the manner in which those in want of political agency might mobilize it.

Enwezor and Yoo both begin from the relatively recent industrialization and global-economic ascendancy of South Korea; Rika Hiro revisits a similar moment in Japan in the 1970s. The "Spectacle East Asia" Conference ended with the observation that its two papers on Japanese topics concerned the art of the '70s while its only Japanese video art submission (the ethnically Korean, Japanese-born and raised artist Kwak Duck-jun's *Self-Portrait '78*) was from the '70s. With the recent international prominence of first Chinese, then Korean art, had Japan, I wondered, been relegated in East Asian cultural discourse to the historical?

It is tempting to account for our conference's unintentional emphasis on Japanese art from the '70s (as well as the larger cultural trend that it symptomizes) by looking at contemporary Japanese culture's earlier moment of "contact" with the West, but Hiro's essay on the Japanese art group Video Earth provides us with a model that complicates this kind of Western cultural determinism. Her essay analyzes Video Earth's basis of its collectivity around the democratic potential of the video medium, reading the formal characteristics of video (as opposed to those of photography) alongside the social possibilities of the newly available technology. Japanese modernity, she argues, created new economies of vision based on a redefinition of the public and private spheres. She uncovers a kind of publicity in Nakajima Kō's "self-censorship" of Video Earth's dual-projection video work *What is Photography?* (the work would have violated obscenity laws if shown publicly), a publicity that is intimately tied to Japanese modernization and which cannot be reduced to international art trends and movements, or to the precedence of Nauman and Graham, *Chelsea Girls*, even Paik.

Caitlin Bruce returns us to the present and analyzes graffiti culture in 21st century Beijing and Shanghai in relation to the branding and marketing of the new Chinese mega-city. She begins from the premise that a truly social space must depart from its branded international image (*mianzi*, or "face value") and engage its inhabitants in local, face-to-face social relations.[18] Exploring the competing impulses of nationalism and globalization in contemporary Chinese urban planning, Bruce proposes local graffiti culture as a counterpublic reclamation of city space in response to its commodification by state and corporate interests.

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[18] This definition of *mianzi*/"face value" (面子) is intimately connected to public image. In Chinese, to "give face" is to publicly show respect, and here "face" takes on a meaning similar to that of the English idiom "save face."

In 1987, Krzysztof Wodiczko characterized the Situationist International's strategies of *détournement* and *dérive* as a "public intervention against spectacle" and a "tendency toward alternative spectacle." This alternative spectacle, he argued, engaged in the "manipulation of popular culture against mass culture."[19] At stake here is the opposition that Wodiczko draws between popular culture and mass culture, between the public and integrated spectacle. Spectacle, in its guise as the late-capitalist boogeyman of cultural studies at the end of the 20th century, was a device aimed to deceive and control the *masses*. The undifferentiated masses, following its various definitions by cultural critics such as Siegfried Kracauer and Raymond Williams, must be rendered specific, re-embodied in their physical and social localities as *people*—i.e., the antecedent of both the *public* and of *popular* culture.[20] The goal of the essays in the following pages is to explore the parameters of this definition of *people*, and to investigate and theorize the deployment of a larger definition of spectacle in its name.[21] The authors of *Spectacle East Asia* follow spectacle down many roads: from the rarefied seats of high finance and urban planning to the graffiti-laden walls of soon-to-be-gentrified neighborhoods, from World Expositions and international art fairs to impromptu art galleries whose doors cannot be opened to the public, from sites of large-scale political protest to internet message boards. Together, they pursue what I take to be the utopian moment in Debord: in giving *La Société du spectacle* its name, he must have envisioned some room for a *social* life within it.

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[19] Krzysztof Wodiczko, "Strategies of Public Address," in *Discussions in Contemporary Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (Seattle: Bay Press, 1987), 44.

[20] See: Siegfried Kracauer, "The Mass Ornament" (1927), trans. Barbara Correll and Jack Zipes, in *New German Critique* 5 (Spring 1975); and Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society: 1780-1950* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1958).

[21] The Chinese *renmin* (人民) and Korean *minjung* (민중) have their distinct historical and discursive resonances—*renmin* has its indelible association with the communist ideologies of the People's Republic while *minjung*, as exemplified in Hyejong Yoo's contribution to this issue, is inseparable from the nation's democracy movement—but the general sense of "people" to which both terms speak underlies both the fluidity of *people* that I am identifying here, and the possibility of imagining in these terms new or alternative modes of sociality. See also: Sohl Lee's engaged discussion on the rethinking of *renmin* and *minjung* in her curatorial statement in this issue, to which I happily defer on this topic.

The Politics of Spectacle:
The Gwangju Biennale and the Asian Century

Okwui Enwezor

21st CENTURY COSMOPOLITANISM

As can be expected, organizing a large international exhibition with global ambition requires some proximity to various scenes of artistic production scattered in near and far-flung corners of the globe. An important requirement for the curator or researcher working to know these artistic scenes, entails being equally alert to the dark murmurings in the cultural and political scenarios that are adjacent to the spaces where the activities of art occur. For example, to reach artists working in Havana from New York necessitated passing through Toronto, thus exposing one such political scenario, namely that artists and curators living on each side of the dividing walls of the U.S./Cuba ideological separation must constantly negotiate.

My several trips to Cuba for more than a decade have invariably involved the kind of triangulation that requires passing through way stations such as Montego Bay, Mexico City, the Bahamas, and Toronto. My recent visit was no different. In all these trips—from Havana to Caracas, Singapore to Berlin, Seoul to Beijing, Mexico City to New York, Cairo to Mumbai, Sydney to London, Kuala Lumpur to Istanbul, or taking the ferry from Tangier to Tarifa—one witnesses not so much a change of geocultural agendas, as much as witness, especially as the trip to Havana shows, the accelerating ideological irrelevance to which many of these diverse geopolitical spaces once subscribed. During this period, I spent most of the time preparing for the 7th *Gwangju Biennale* by visiting artists; speaking with writers and filmmakers; visiting galleries, art schools, and assorted cultural brokers. Otherwise, I lie awake in hotel rooms, many of which appear no different in design, ownership, and amenities than the ones in other cities. As with global hotel brands, the television channels come with their own packaging of global

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[*] This essay was originally published in the catalogue for the 7th *Gwangju Biennale*. The author would like to thank James Thomas for his research assistance during the development of this essay, and for his thorough reading and invaluable editorial comments through its various drafts.

news, transmitting real-time reports on the latest disaster or political crisis; issuing communiqués from the floors of global trading exchanges on the state of the global economy; or tracking the latest trends in information technology. Across CNN International, BBC World News, Deutsche Welle, RAI, and a smattering of local channels that one hardly watches, these reports are leavened with analysis by commentators serving a variety of interests or with expertise on a range of issues and topics: for example on North Korean disarmament, or speculating on the shadowy trade in nuclear reactor designs to produce fissionable material by the Khan network.

The constancy of these global hotel brands and the media packaging that comes with them may, at first impression, provide the kind of comforting reassurance that we are indeed in the world, in a 21st century cosmopolitanism, no matter where our cultural adventures and curatorial research may lead us. That is, until we realize that instead, we may be cocooned in an ideological bubble whose ether of antiseptic familiarity provides only an ambiguous sense of levity over the sprawling cacophony, and the teeming sprawl once we venture outside our rooms.

OPEN FOR BUSINESS

During the course of the nine months I and my colleagues spent traveling, my constant companions were the day-old "global" newspapers such as the *International Herald Tribune* and the *Financial Times*. Each of these are available, on the ready, along with the facsimile versions of the *New York Times*, the London *Guardian*, the *Wall Street Journal*, or *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, on the way to the breakfast buffet or at the concierge desk. As usual, I availed myself of these snippets of news, and have used them, albeit superficially, as a measure by which to keep my internal global positioning system coordinated with those of other cosmopolitans doing business in hotel lobbies and moving between worlds. Navigating the worlds crisscrossed by the news and commentaries of the global media helps to provide a small window into the shrinking space once ruled by the imperial ambitions of the Western Alliance, a mid-20th century consortium comprising the nations of Western Europe and the United States. But as many commentaries now make clear, multiple changes and realignments are opening up huge cultural seams within traditional circuits of power to reveal the emergence of new ones. In the past, artists from what was then known as the margins, were eager to enter what was then considered to be the center or mainstream, and the strategies of the artists were usually aligned to accomplish such an objective, namely to join the cosmopolitan sphere of artistic visibility, both in the art market and museums. However, as the idea of centers and mainstream become part of the anachronism of the cultural politics of the past, artists have oriented themselves not towards centers and mainstreams, but towards a more transversal process of linkages, networks, and diverse communities of practice. For example, if recent global events reveal anything about present cultural and artistic reorientations, they indicate that the changing stakes within a series of geopolitical spaces are now challenging the traditional American-led Western Alliance. If this is indeed the case, it would mark the end of a historical cycle of overwhelming influence, power, and prestige of the entire Western Alliance, its institutions, structures of legitimation and, with it, a worldview shaped by the constancy of the American brand.

The paradox of this evident decline of the American brand—which partly owes to the disastrous performance of the Bush administration and exacerbated by its foreign policy stances around the world—is that it has come about not through the old ideological wars and market-based competition, but in the global race for natural resources and consumer markets. While there remain firm ideological differences between the American/Western Alliance and countries like China, Russia, and Iran, it is not of the same ideological order as the one between the United States and the Soviet Union in the heyday of the Cold War. Rather, global politics have moved from a stance of mutual annihilation to one of mutual accommodation; in other words, the world is open for business and the potential for economic boom demands it. As the fervor of modernization propels the economies of China, India, and Russia into ever-increasing infrastructural investments, then the world is definitely open for business. This situation became even more prevalent in the last decade, as these emerging economies are now in direct competition with the U.S. and Europe for political and economic influence. They are, as well, competing for intellectual and natural resources in different parts of the world. This competition is noticeable across all areas, not least of which is the trade in symbolic goods, including the domains of art and culture.

Nowhere is this competition more pronounced than in the energy industry, of which Russia is greatly endowed, and in turn uses as a political lever to keep allies in line and frustrate competitors like Europe and America. In addition to Russia's new position of power, the emergence of India in the outsourcing of services, and China in the manufacturing sector have created opportunities for a nascent great-powers race that is reminiscent of previous races, such as the Scramble for Africa in the 19th century and the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union from the mid-1950s to the early 1990s. If the two leading Asian powers, India and China—with a combined population pushing toward a third of the planet—are yet to tap their vast economic potential, when they do so, will this not only be a change of stakes, but also portend an ambition that can only be designated as the Asian century? And when one also considers that vast stretches of Russia are in Asia, we have a picture of the scope of the changes already taking place.

All these changes have contributed to a sense of an expanded global scene in which the traditional American guarantee of balance of power, with the United States at the top, no longer holds. The prominent American neo-conservative Robert Kagan, had it exactly right (though in a decidedly outmoded ideological manner) when he wrote that China and Russia's rising power is a threat to that of the United States. In a recent article he writes: "In a world of rising great powers, of which two happen to be autocracies, the United States needs its fellow democracies to be as strong as possible."[1]

THE ASIAN CENTURY AND THE EMERGENCY OF A NEW CULTURAL POLITICS

While it is premature to announce the dawn of the Asian Century, might it be possible, nevertheless, to assume that we may be in a critical moment in which a new cultural politics is about to emerge? During my travels for the *7th Gwangju Biennale,* I witnessed glimpses into the working methods of artists in different artistic contexts which suggest that these artists are seriously reflecting on the changing political landscape. What was immediately obvious was that artists are working less on ideological grounds. Of course, economic forces within the art world are paying some heed, but so far, none of the activities have made any credible attempt to organize their thinking and practices along the articulation of what may be the emerging cultural politics of the 21st century, especially one in which the dominance of Western ideas would no longer be the norm, even as the West fights to maintain its cultural influence across the board.

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[1] Robert Kagan, "Sliding Toward Irrelevance," in *International Herald Tribune* (June 27, 2008), 4.

Yet, in speculating on the possibility of a new cultural politics, the ground of the coming debates will be less focused on the idea of clash of civilizations, and more on a growing global cosmopolitanism devoid of margins or centers of cultural influence. This is already apparent with the expansion of the art market and the formidable role being played by new elites from Russia, China, India, Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and South Korea. For instance, Beijing perhaps rivals New York in the growth of new art galleries. These are not simply Chinese only, but international galleries. Every month, yet another major gallery announces the opening of a branch somewhere between Shanghai and Beijing. In addition there are biennials, triennials, art fairs, and, according to a recent article by Barbara Pollack, 1,200 museums under construction in China alone.[2] If we move away from China and East Asia, and look toward the Middle East in Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Sharjah, Bahrain, and Qatar, similar developments are occurring. What is fascinating is not the pace of these developments, but the staggering scale, the very ambition of their imagination.

What I am describing here is not the utopia of Thomas Friedman's *The World is Flat* simplification.[3] Instead, I am enunciating what global culture might mean after the cultural dominance of the European 19th century and American 20th century. Can the global moment currently unfolding, the scale of which would have been unimaginable just a generation ago, be possibly an intimation of a coming Asian Century? On one level, there can be no predictions of the future outcome of the power of Asia to shape our view of the world, let alone become an epistemological global reference; however, the circumstances of Asian global emergence are no longer a distant fantasy. Whether economically successful or not; politically influential or not; and culturally the reference point for the years to come, judging from the shape and turn of events, the clockwork convergence of Asia's polyglot cultures, the large and still-growing consumer society and middle class, and the rapidly changing technology that knits them together, it may not be premature to think that we are facing an Asian moment. This emergence of global Asia, in fact, does not benefit Asia alone; it creates a model for other societies in transition, especially in Africa and Latin America. The United Nations is already considering the expansion, with strong American resistance, of the five permanent members of the Security Council, while the membership of G8—an international forum among the governments of the United States, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Russia, Great Britain, and Japan—will surely change in less than a decade from now. All of these shifts reveal that the regimes put in place by the United States after the Second World War, alignments that created the United Nations and the Bretton Woods institutions—such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization—will be giving way to the postcolonial reality of new regional conglomerates in the 21st century. These changes are what I mean when I refer to the politics of spectacle. They include various notions of the idea of spectacle: from the spectacle of capitalism, to cosmopolitanism, culture, power, and identity. Such spectacles though, are not, as Debord's critique of spectacle suggested, only simply mediated realities. Rather, they are manifested within various scenes of struggle, and as such have moved from logics of mediation to what could be called visceral realities. These include sartorial decisions, grooming habits, religious expression, social modes of representing the self, among other visceral representations.

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[2] See: Barbara Pollack, "Making 1,200 Museums Bloom," in *ArtNews* (March 2008). http://artnews.com/issues/article.asp?art_id=2456 (last accessed June 2010).

[3] Thomas Friedman, *The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the 21st Century* (New York: Picador, 2007).

With this realization, and with scores of other non-Western societies undergoing structural, economic, political, and cultural transformations, it is certainly plausible to imagine that the far-reaching influence of Western ideas and the epistemological roots of modernity are being tested and reconsidered. This may not mean the decline of the influence of ideals such as democracy and free-market economy. But as new, credible players emerge regionally, and the power of the United States and Europe over the global polity wanes, necessary adjustments of these ideals will occur to match the complex geopolitical and cultural surroundings into which they are imported. In addition, the zealous proselytizing that characterizes the export of Western epistemological models and political institutions will be less effective in a global marketplace of competing models of modernity and governance. After the disastrous miscalculations in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran, there is no doubt that the West will, from now on, be responding in more nuanced fashion to conditions on the ground.

This means, then, that the cultural politics to come would not be a debate about the hegemony of Western epistemology alone. Nor will it exclusively focus on its exported cultural values, which have been dominant since the early beginnings of globalization in the 15th century. Given the anxiety over the confident steps of political Islam—of which only a part is globally radicalized—and its transnational reach into the cultural spaces of Western societies, what is emerging is a reverse debate, in this case about the very survival of Western culture. Perhaps that may be overstating the case, and may also be part of the emergence of cultural xenophobia in Europe. Certainly, debates involving Muslim headscarves in France,[4] the Niqab in Britain, the assassination of the Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh in Amsterdam,[5] the Danish cartoons pillorying the Prophet Mohammed, the railway bombings in London and Madrid, all add up to this tendency of cultural dispute.

It seems to me that artists, cultural critics, and institutions ought to devote greater attention to exploring the seams of these disputes and examining the productive critical tensions that lie beneath them. While museums may not always be the places for exploring these disputes, the transitional and temporary quality of biennales makes them natural spaces of thought and curatorial experiments capable of addressing them. From curators to intellectuals to artists to cities, the convergence of these forces of extra-Western epistemology, the evident decline of the cultural influence of the United States and its allies, along with the ascendancy of the economic power of China, have all inevitably created a reaction. On one level is the anxiety that often accompanies the loss of influence by the powerful. On the other is the ripe over-confidence that comes with the rising self-realization of those formerly less powerful.

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[4] In 2004, a controversial legislation outlawed the wearing of headscarves by Muslim girls in all French schools, and also banned other traditional religious garb. Beards worn by Muslim men represent another point of cultural contention: Though having a beard is not governed by any French laws, doing so nevertheless tends to evoke discriminatory responses in non-Muslims, thereby targeting those who choose to wear them. At the time of this writing, a Muslim Moroccan woman who is a legal resident of France and is married to a French Muslim man had her application for French citizenship denied because she wears a Niqab (a traditional Muslim garment that covers the entire body, leaving only a horizontal slit around the eyes through which to see). This sartorial choice, which is a form of private religious expression, nevertheless was deemed incompatible with French values, which includes the *laïcité* law of radical secularism that governs French social compact. According to Fadela Amara, the French minister of Urban Affairs of Algerian descent who is herself a practicing Muslim, the Niqab was also deemed "a prison and straitjacket" and "an insignia of a totalitarian political project that promotes inequality between the sexes and is totally lacking in democracy." Upon the Muslim woman's appeal to the Council of State—the last judicial institution she could count on for reversal—the court affirmed the denial of citizenship, citing her wearing of the Niqab and her religious choice as representing "insufficient assimilation." See: Katrin Bennhold, "A Veil Closes France's Door to Citizenship," in *New York Times* (July 19, 2008), A1, A8. Many European countries have recently wielded similar judicial decisions as tools of inclusion and exclusion and, more implicitly, as mechanisms of defense against the kinds of social transformation being wrought by the visceral realities that challenge traditional European notions of the self and of culture.

[5] For a treatment of the issues and the cultural debate in the Netherlands surrounding van Gogh's killing, see: Ian Buruma, *Murder in Amsterdam: The Death of Theo van Gogh and the Limits of Tolerance* (London and New York: Penguin, 2006).

Already, China's ambiguous economic adventures in Africa, its lack of commitment to human rights in Darfur, and the recent reactions to its crackdown in Tibet are producing reactions of global magnitude. As China continues to grow immensely wealthy and powerful, will anti-China replace the old comforting anti-Americanism? The shock to Chinese sensibility regarding this possibility is registered in the wounded nationalistic responses to the widespread protests against its Tibet crackdown as the Olympic torch made its way through London, San Francisco, Seoul, and Paris. China is quickly realizing that to be powerful means to invite resistance, critique, resentment, envy, and of course fear in equal measure. At a time when a new Chinatown gate was recently erected in Ojota, Lagos, the first of its kind in Africa (though Johannesburg has had a Chinatown for at least forty years) it is no longer a figment of the imagination that the Chinese dragon is poised to roar, and its phoenix ready to unfold its resplendent wings. But will these two emblems of Chinese power, invested in the figure of the emperor and the empress, translate culturally in Lagos or Abidjan, African cities where Chinese merchants have alighted in recent years? Or will they make the local populations view China differently because of its increasing economic power and its thirst for natural resources to keep the machinery of modernization going?

Contained within these questions, and the quest for resources and influence of global China, is the seed of a potential cultural politics to come. As one can see, the axis of cultural politics is surely turning in multiple directions: Europe, Asia, Africa, the United States. The debates are at once directed internally, such as in the United States, with discussions involving immigration and the massive simultaneous marches by Hispanic communities across the country demanding recognition.[6] The rising Hispanic population in the United States is quickly redrawing the geocultural map of the country, and with it, the face of its political demographics. This is occurring, as well, in places like Lebanon and Iraq, in the sectarian battles being waged by different religious communities. Or in the secular movement of jurists and lawyers in Pakistan that eventually forced the government of President Pervez Musharraf into a minority in parliament. There are, equally, externally directed disputes between the United States and Iran, or Iran and Israel. If one adds the drawn-out disputes between India and Pakistan in Kashmir, and the muddle that is Afghanistan today, it is quite obvious that the world is in the midst of an unfolding of cultural politics. But why is the artistic sphere responding only to the economic potential of emerging Asia and not to some of the disputes besetting the global cultural sphere?

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[6] In March 2006, millions of protesters marched in cities large and small across the United States. From Los Angeles and San Francisco to Chicago, Washington, and New York, they demanded legal recognition of undocumented Latino immigrants.

SOCIAL ICONOGRAPHIES: SCENES OF SPECTACLE AND CULTURAL POWER

As the financial world reels from a still unfolding crisis precipitated by the meltdown of the U.S. economy, new political and cultural indicators in global networks and geopolitical arrangements foretell the emergence of new images and imaginaries that will affect, not only how the global economy will be rebuilt, but what the cultural sphere and its social iconographies will look like when the 21st century becomes a fully functioning global space. Judging from the manner in which these rapid changes have been occurring, whether in Moscow or Beijing, Dubai or Mumbai, Istanbul or Lagos it is already undeniable that new forms of cultural politics are on the horizon, alerting us to shifts in social iconographies across Asia, Africa, South America, and Europe. The dominant machinery of Hollywood cinema, for example, might no longer foreground the professional benchmark for the cultural worth of cinema. Nor is the European tradition of the auteur cinema adequate to satisfy the demand for new narratives, stories, images, and participants from outside the Western system of legitimation.

One prime example is the transformative effect of the Nigerian cinema industry, commonly known as Nollywood, on the entire apparatus of African filmmaking. Nollywood has introduced not only a viable alternative to Western filmmaking; it has also created an authentic African model that has been adapted by other African countries. Nollywood and its acolytes, sponsors, and investors have built from the ground up a new industry, narratives, and a robust and engaged transnational African public. In effect, Nollywood is deeply engaged in contemporary filmmaking, but with a decidedly geocultural and transnational perspective. In this cultural scenario, not only will the coordinates of culture forge new connections, more significantly they will also admit new participants: producers, brokers, consumers, and decision-makers. This will happen such that, for instance, the habits and iconographies of say, the world of fashion will be less reliant on the same monocultural physiognomic aesthetic of Nordic, Teutonic, and Slavic body types. Therefore, with the increasing numbers of consumers of luxury fashion in Kuwait City, Dubai, Doha, Beijing, Seoul, Busan, Kuala Lumpur, and Mumbai, for example, it goes without saying that the new cultural politics will equally mean a new *body politics*.

In this global cultural and aesthetic sphere, what is being called into question is not the resilience of old models of institutional discourse and canons, but the utility of those models as the sole determining and methodological instruments by which to guide the reading, translation, and analysis of global cultural practice. In Asia, for instance, it is already clear that the growing economy is not only creating a new class of wealth, it is also creating new audiences, participants, creative systems, and an awareness of cultural confidence that cannot be taken for granted. Throughout Asia, social imaginaries and cultural iconographies are emerging from the meshing of local classical traditions with global trends. These look nothing like what they were at the end of the 20th century when predictions of the end of history were pointing us to a long 21st century of American triumphalism.

POLITICS OF FORM

It seems obvious, from the perspective of cultural analysis, to reflect more concisely, especially as biennials, exhibitions, and museums press their claims for global relevance, to note how the spaces of contemporary art in different localities are as diverse as the works that are made and shown there. Though the works of individual artists I encountered during my research in these localities have distinct grammars that are personal, varying according to each place, to its concerns and to social preoccupations, one constant impression that emerged in encounters with these artists is the diversity of their approaches. But what is even clearer is their engagement with the unruly present and the persistence of personal and social narratives. In Seoul, for example, I was struck by the commitment and critical confidence of a generation of younger artists, whose ideas and the resulting works have a kind of radical modesty. Because many of these artists have found no strong support in the market, this modesty, however, seems to suggest not the cliché of Asia, but rather reflects strongly and powerfully a choice against inflated gestures, against overwrought, grandiose rhetoric; it is a stance against the imperatives of the hyper production that is the basis of much of the contemporary art admired by the market.

Rather than a mere reduction of scale, the many different modes of working, the ways of using materials, and the life of those materials in the social milieu of different cities contest some of the assumptions of the nature of modesty as a strategy. In fact, from the many works one encounters among contemporary artists working in Seoul, Lagos, Dakar, Havana, Caracas, and even in Eastern Europe, scale and the repurposing of material is not just about the "unmonumental," at least not in the same way suggested by the New Museum of Contemporary Art exhibition, *Unmonumental: The Object in the 21st Century*.[7]

What I noticed is both a play with materials and scale, narrative and gesture. But these are not meant as mere reactions to markets and formalist grandiosity, rather the artists seem at once to veer away from the consistency of what is found in the marketplace and, through their work, articulate a distillation of how their ideas fit the immediate aesthetic cultures surrounding the works. These works are marked by stripping down the work to its basic anatomy, to the bare components of what becomes a work. Surprisingly, the strategies have tended toward drawing, or delicate filmic exposés, the fabrication and referencing of everyday objects, the recording of the dry facts of social anomie. All these methods and positions are as much cultural as artistic processes for building relationships between ideas, concepts, forms, materials and socio-cultural paradigms. For instance, drawing is now not simply used as shorthand for an elusive formalism, but as a vernacular device to develop a more consistent language. In this way, what becomes evident is the raw quality of the work as a means of achieving a voice. An artist like Seoyoung Chung, in her highly personal stripped down aesthetic, exemplifies this quality of rigor, while Jewyo Rhii transforms hers into a field of play, as notations of an ever unfolding and unfinished narrative between past and new work. At the same time, artists like Matthew Monahan and Lothar Hempel work more with a sense of theatricality and stage-like setting.

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[7] See: Richard Flood, Laura Hoptman, and Massimiliano Gioni, *Unmonumental: The Object in the 21st Century* (New York and London: New Museum and Phaidon Press, 2007).

Though quite heterogeneous, at the same time, the overarching energy of these individual works can best be described as being engaged with what I will refer to as the politics of form. This politics is concerned with how artists manage the aesthetic demands of their artistic principles and the social necessity of discovering new terms of production. The politics of form also addresses how artists organize their aesthetic criteria and their conceptual principles, how they constitute the critical parameters for the reception and experience of the work of art, but, more fundamentally, how the artists' work resists formal orthodoxies. Time and again I found that these artists were concerned with the performative, with deconstructing complex conceptual problems between form and content, between material and skill, between the social and the cultural. In the background, there is always the political, but not simplistic politics, rather such politics as are affiliated with questions of power and social repression, with violence. Then there are works that range across cognitive borders in the kind of spaces of negation carved out by geopolitical violence—say, violence against women or ethnic and religious minorities, against the disempowered and the dispossessed, across transnational sites of production—to insist that contemporary art is not so much a shared language across the de-territorialized global flow of ideas, but both an individual and collective ethic, as well.

While all these modes of working may not all appear at the *7th Gwangju Biennale,* they do offer a sense of the lively discursive environment that the exhibition would be initiating. *Annual Report,* with its related projects, circles around a constellation of forms and ideas, artistic economies and modes of production, all of which, I hope, will enliven the dynamics of the audience's experience in the movement toward being the staging ground for a new "politics of form."

Part of the preparation of this project also involves engagement with the exhibitions and the curatorial premises of colleagues, thinking through divergent proposals in different localities and how historical experiences shape the reception and historicization of art. As already mentioned, the question of radical modesty and politics of form surely have different historical purchase depending on the locality being investigated or analyzed. This, for me, was dramatized by the schism in historical judgment evidenced in how such a concept was interpreted by The New Museum in its exhibition *Unmonumental: The Object in the 21st Century*. In this series of exhibitions that occurred over several months, serving as the inaugural mission statement of the museum's view of contemporary art in its supremely new, pristine, but non-luxurious architecture, the idea of modesty was explored more as an aesthetic tendency. The overarching idea of these exhibitions was stated as a series of essays on alternative modes of production by contemporary artists who eschew the highly finished, sleek productions that have elevated contemporary art to the status of luxury goods. To my mind, this topic is both timely and necessary. *Unmonumental* seemed to make a virtue of degraded, low materials, yet in many instances, in reifying the objects and materials, the exhibitions inadvertently seemed to create the terms for the potential commodification of the very same objects' sense of critique. In tracking the history of the object, what was largely absent and undiscussed and, more importantly, undeclared was any discussion of the socioeconomic politics of using recycled material as also directly tied to the politics of resources and their scarcity, between the developed and underdeveloped parts of the world. In a global economy where a mountain of garbage in Manila, Lagos, or Mumbai is not merely garbage, but a site for economic survival, how does one read the idea of modesty in assemblage? What perhaps could be derived by a possible revisiting of the political and anthropological reading of, say, bricolage, in the sense used by Claude Lévi-Strauss to expand the present reception of collage or to advance a critique against the modernist tendency toward reification that marks the formal systems of collage?[8] These are questions, though not directly explored in *Unmonumental*, do have resonances within the exhibition. And as the terms of the object and the material fissures in which such objects function in the production of contemporary art, thinking about the range of ideas that artists traverse in building their forms necessitates further reflection, especially if one is to properly locate the status of the object in the 21st century, as the exhibition seems to suggest.

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[8] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

USES OF SPECTACLE

With these issues in mind, how does one react to two separate anniversaries that each seeks to make general political claims on the nature of cultural and social processes after an uprising instigated by disaffection with the institutional status quo? I point to two recent anniversaries that occurred in May 2008. With the first, the commemoration of the fortieth anniversary of the student protests and general strike in Paris, May 1968, we are bewildered by the mythology that has accompanied the retrospective recollection of what the students set out to accomplish. But did not the Paris *Spring* end in the ignominy of defeat, as well as signaled the end of the optimism of leftist politics and the utopian dream of radical social realignment in Western society? Though the tendency for latter generations who embrace May '68's utopian dream is to devise a retrogressive notion of its universal cast of actors and as a global moment in history when the world spoke with one voice, it is far from clear how the event of May '68 was ever the epochal global moment that it has been so designated. Here again, we have to revisit the evident schism in historical experience between how events in the West are historicized and how similar events outside the West are received. But in its writing, the indelible mark of May '68 could be felt—in a kind of chain letter to the dispossessed and dispirited of the earth—from the instance the battle cry of French students issued from the Sorbonne and was heard on the streets of Paris. The idea, even if not directly articulated as such, was that the Paris *Spring* was both the harbinger of, and catalyst for, a global reaction which, in every corner of the earth, had its own little May '68. And so it is, forty years after the fact, that this tale of the universal dimension of that gloomy period when it seemed as if Western society was teetering on the edge of crisis, has been retailed so often, that its legend has become transformed into a historical fact. We know this from the flurry of events, symposia, books, recollections, exhibitions, and gatherings that have marked this anniversary.

But in the midst of all the celebration, it might be necessary to recall, as well, that May '68, far from being the triumphant event of leftist-inspired change, may be written paradoxically as the historic moment of defeat for progressive politics and the rise of the right in Western politics. The rightist ascendancy is partly borne out by the particular form of neoliberalism exemplified in conservative politics, including the Republican party dominance in the United States, beginning with Richard Nixon through Ronald Reagan; Margaret Thatcher in Britain; and Helmut Kohl in Germany. The key exception is the socialist led government of François Mitterrand. Mitterrand, however, came to office after a long Gaullist occupancy of the Elysée Palace. May '68 should also be seen alongside a number of parallel events that preceded it: for example, the escalation of the Vietnam War, a long trajectory reaching its farcical apotheosis with the Bush regime and its brutal, merciless prosecution of the Iraq War. By the same token, at the time May '68 came to claim the pride of place as a watershed event of the global cry of the oppressed—again wielding the force of Western de-politicization and de-historicization of other historical emblems of radical resistance—Che Guevera was already dead in the jungles of Bolivia; Martin Luther King had been assassinated in Memphis; Malcolm X had been killed in Harlem's Audubon Ballroom; Frantz Fanon was dead of leukemia in a Washington hospital; Nelson Mandela was imprisoned in Robben Island; Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah had been deposed in a military coup; Biafra was engulfed by a genocidal war, and C.I.A.-sponsored military juntas were running amok in Latin America. But perhaps most striking of all in that year was the launch of the massive Tet Offensive by the armies of the Communist National Liberation Front, the Vietcong, and those of North Vietnam's Peoples Army of Vietnam, in a bold attempt to inspire widespread uprising against U.S. forces and the South Vietnamese government. Though the offensive by the communists took American forces by surprise, it was ultimately beaten back. But the net effect was that it forced the withdrawal of President Lyndon Johnson from the American presidential campaign and the ultimate defeat of the democrats by the Republican candidate Richard Nixon in the general elections of November 1968. In recalling some of these historic moments, many of which lie completely outside the frame of reference for the riots fomented by Western bourgeois students in Paris, the question to ask is, on what basis does May '68 claim the signal place it has allotted itself in the mid-20th century global insurrection against oppression, imperialism, and colonialism?

This question is important, in light of the second anniversary. This one is far more relevant to the project of the *7th Gwangju Biennale*, for its commemoration was the very basis for the founding of *Gwangju Biennale* in 1995. In 1980, May 18, as it is today famously known, began in Gwangju, when the citizens of the city took to the streets in a concerted oppositional resistance against the military junta led by General Chun Doo Hwan, who had seized power after the assassination of the authoritarian President Park Chung Hee.[9] The Gwangju uprising, however, should be seen in the context of the history of Korean popular resistance, both to colonial powers and to dictatorships. May 18, along with the subsequent June 1987 uprising, laid the groundwork that finally eroded and peacefully overthrew the entrenched powers of previous dictatorships. This event finally led to a representative democracy in 1993. Given such a history, May 18 was not one singular, convulsive event out of which newness was born. It was part of a gradual trajectory, lasting many years and decades, in which social movement organizations (SMOs) mobilized and gained the participation of a broad coalition of publics focused on the emancipatory struggle.[10] The gradualness of the SMOs' success in Korea is contradicted by the kind of grand narrative that often accompanies the retelling of May '68, which hardly acknowledges the importance of the successful rebellious movements of previous decades against European colonialism. Even the recent memory of the French defeat in Algeria in 1962 was not seen as central to the events of May '68.

These two events, then—in May 1968 and May 1980—provide a study in contrasts in the uses and the politics of spectacle. While the spectacle of May '68 is today a totem of leftist nostalgia, the May 18 spectacle has a different sociopolitical purchase. I would argue that the continuous cultural uses of these instances of political spectacle demonstrate two divergent relationships to the social motivations of spectacle. May '68 is often read in the tradition of Western avant-garde practices of instantaneous shock, rupture, and attack on the legitimacy of prevailing political orders, social norms, and aesthetic logics.[11] For May 18, the kernel of its radical reform is not embedded in the tradition of an aesthetic renewal of decayed traditions; rather, it was motivated by a tradition of postcolonial cultural resistance, and the collectivized vision of a common politics. The configuration of this collectivized vision has been described by the political theorist Choi Jungwoon, as the formation of an absolute community.[12]

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[9] For an important retrospective of the history of the Gwangju uprising of May 18, 1980, along with recollections by participants and scholarly analyses, see the excellent collection edited by Gi-Wook Shin and Kyung Moon Hwang, *Contentious Kwangju: The May 18 Uprising in Korea's Past and Present* (Lanham, MA: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2003).

[10] See: Gi-Wook Shin, "Introduction," in *Contentious Kwangju*, xxi–xxii.

[11] For a discussion in which the events of May '68 are linked to the legacy of European historical avant-gardes and their subsequent re-articulation in the strategies of 1950s and 1960s neo-avant-gardes, see the analysis of the Situationist concept of *détournement* as it pertains to, and in relation to May '68, in Tom McDonough, *"The Beautiful Language of My Century": Reinventing the Language of Contestation in Postwar France, 1945–1968* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), 13–50.

Of course, it could also be allowed that May '68 and May 18, 1980, present a set of ideological proposals whose operative symbols of resistance and triumph read like lines taken from propaganda manuals. The difference is that while May '68's effect is now largely seen as historical, thus only inspiring in the past, and as such will always be nostalgically recollected, the events of resistance that began on May 18 are still marked on the present. For example, two years after the election of the democratic government in 1993, the *Gwangju Biennale* was born, as a signal to the forces of civil assembly that coalesced on the streets of Korean cities that their actions actually did have a serious critical purchase in relation to cultural production. Of course, with this constant reminder of the heroic nature of the May 18 uprising, Gwangju is also manipulated, to various political ends, in creating its own myth of heroes and antiheroes.

I do not so much wish to read the Gwangju *Spring* against that of Paris, however, as much as to draw some important contrasts between their respective narratives. May 18, in Gwangju and, by extension, in South Korea as a whole, is justifiably commemorated as a specific localized and national event founded on Korean experience and responses against oppression. It did not aim for anything so grandiose and pompous as the liberation of humanity or overthrowing the bourgeoisie. It in no way assumed any overarching or universal meaning that is not supported by the Korean experience and experimentation with democratic and popular mobilization of social will. May '68, on the other hand, was as grandiose as it was inflated in its assumptions of changing the world order. Thus that event is often narrated under universal rather than local, or even continental principles.

As is so often the case with Western universalism, the narrative of the events of the Paris *Spring* is positioned as an historic moment when the fate of Western liberalism finally converged with the illiberal gestures of forces seeking relief from the superstructures of modern totalization. Forty years after that moment, it has become axiomatic to treat those events as the sort of mystical convergence of forms of revolutionary spectacle whose mediated description now lends to its image an aura of the sacred. Popular sentiments about May '68 have tended to share the view that "everything" changed, claiming that it helped bring about a change in the political and social orientation of many Western democracies and, therefore, the world. This manifests a delusion that is found in a mocking joke in Senegal, that "when it rains in Paris, they bring out their umbrellas in Dakar." However, the question to pose is whether these changes, as important and as welcome as their effects may be, can necessarily be understood in the proper sense as world-changing?

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[12] See: Choi Jungwoon, "The Kwangju People's Uprising: Formation of The 'Absolute Community,'" in *Korea Journal* 39:2 (Summer 1999), 3–10.

The benefit of retrospection is not simply to look back in reminiscence and nostalgia. Nor is it to mourn the so-called last Utopia of that moment. But to question "why such a frenzy of nostalgia?" as the writer Jean-Claude Guillebaud did in a recent reflection on the tendency of the French to universalize the meaning of May '68. Guillebaud suggested that the reason may lie in what he describes as the ambiguous character of the moment.[13] Looking back at that ambiguity provides us the means of reappraisal. The act of looking back or, as Chris Marker would have it, *Staring Back* (which does not have a retrospective aspect to it whatsoever, but more a quality of confrontation) is not so much for pure retrospection but of reconsideration, and possibly about social and cultural demystification of historical plots that tend to thicken into the hard mica of delusion and propaganda.[14] In the fortieth year since May '68, we can look back together and observe both the moment and its aftermath.

But can we indeed insist that the world changed during those brief three days of confusion on the streets of Paris? Were the changes that occurred truly long-lasting? Can their effects be traced beyond the boundaries of Western self-conceptions of the destiny of the social democracies that emerged in postwar Europe after the illiberal years of Fascism and Nazism? Or, as having penetrated the core of other historical moments and therefore marginalizing the achievements of other regions? Did everything truly change? And for whom did it change and in what ways? Or posed in reverse, what were the consequences for Western societies, and the world at large of historical events occurring in Africa, Asia, and Latin America? Are those places marginal to the West's conception of its own historical destiny? Posing these questions is not necessarily meant to repudiate the outlandish claims that have been made about May '68; rather, it is to enable us to place it in historical context. In so doing, our retrospection will not lapse into reminiscences or nostalgia. Neither will our recollection be based on the longing gaze with which some may peruse searchingly, in the faded sepia of countless news accounts and film reels of that period, for the heroes and antiheroes who inaugurated what is today considered a seminal moment.

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[13] See the essay by Jean-Claude Guillebaud, "Remembrance of Hopes Past," in *International Herald Tribune* (May 25, 2008), 6.

[14] *Staring Back* is the title of a large collection of black-and-white photographs taken by the great documentary essayist and filmmaker Chris Marker over a period of more than forty years of documenting revolutions and social upheavals across the world. The images range from street skirmishes around the Algerian War to the massive march in France against discrimination organized by minorities, immigrants, and those in solidarity with them. These photographs are images of faces looking directly at the viewer not in retrospection, but in a direct challenge against the machinery of opacity that destroys vision. See: Chris Marker, *Staring Back,* essays by Bill Horrigan and Molly Nesbit, ed. Bill Horrigan (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007).

As we begin exploring the various registers of the effects of that entire historical period, at the moment when the 'sixties were coming to an end, and what seemed in the beginning of that decade as the onset of postcolonial utopia, slowly turned into the world of postcolonial reality, we will find it necessary not to universalize, nor give in to the nostalgia of propaganda. Rather, by way of some counter-historical signposts and examples, we are required to ask whether we can view other anniversaries that litter the field of 20th century modernity as capable of commanding the same aura as world-changing events. For instance, can the years 1947, 1949, 1955, 1956, 1959, 1960, 1962, 1965, 1979, or any other date mean much to us beyond their localized and administered historicizing functions, as do the dates "1945," "May '68," or "1989"? Writing specifically about French nostalgia towards May '68, Guillebaud suggests that though the French (nay the entire West) may have managed to convince themselves and to enact "May '68" . . . as a sort of Parisian exception . . . it was part of an effervescence that touched all the industrialized countries and even a good number of those of the Southern Hemisphere. Comparable uprisings took place in Japan, Latin America, Germany, Britain, and Africa. Today we mention those foreign examples, but only in passing, without making them part of our collective memory."[15]

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[15] See: Guillebaud, "Remembrance of Hopes Past."

ADVENTURE-TIME, EVERYDAY-TIME

Our questions are not simply meant to seek redress for myopic and hegemonic manipulation of historical symbols or to demand universal recognition for other paradigmatic events of social transformation, as much as they are designed as chronotopic (time-space) devises which reflect not simply a chronology but a space or locality necessary to avoid any claims to universality. In his book of essays, *The Dialogic Imagination,* the Russian philologist and literary philosopher Mikhail Bahktin reflected on the idea of the chronotope, by suggesting that it is "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships."[16] In further reflection, he observed about the chronotope (from the Greek *chronos topos*, or time-space): "what strikes us is the mix of adventure-time and everyday-time" in order to suggest the inseparable nature of event from its context.[17] This is to say then, that events such as May '68, despite all claims to the contrary, are essentially local and, therefore, the adventure-time on the streets is precisely a part of the everyday-time of lived experience on the ground. That is where their powers of importance lie. The locality of May 18, 1980, in Gwangju is justly recalled as one of local and national significance, as an instance of self-empowerment and liberation. However, in contrast to Paris, part of the lesson of the Gwangju uprising is the fact that it is not an exception within Korean national formation, but one of the moments, among other exemplary historical moments, in Korea's path towards democracy and democratization.[18] Such recognition gives us pause and therefore moderates the all-too-understandable enthusiasm to cast our own histories as an exception to other historical trajectories, and thus infuse it with a uniqueness of universal quality.

To do so is important, because in the simplified reflections offered by the epigones, or distant followers, of the events of May '68, the reading of the street manifestations, strikes, labor protests, barricades, placards, pamphlets, manifestoes, and campaigns of social insurrection have been packaged as the narrative of avant-garde renewal. The reading also tends towards the implicit promotion of the idea reflecting the West's rescue of the promise to bring not only revolutionary modernity that would free both social and economic classes from within, but also would bring along with it the emancipation of women, minorities, and the colonized, and all those others on the margins of the national allegory of modernity. The irony of this tendentious display of historical narcissism, is not only that it is historically flawed, especially, in the leading role that the acolytes of May '68 assigned themselves on the historical stage, but that the narrative itself manifests the very form of blindness to other historical developments that have often plagued the West's historical constructions of modernity.

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[16] Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 84.

[17] Ibid., 111.

[18] Gi-wook Shin makes the point that the uprising in Gwangju is bound up with a more complex history of resistance in Korea that goes back to the Tonghak peasant uprisings of the late 19th century and to those of the early-20th century postcolonial resistance to Japanese colonialism, especially the anti-Japanese student movements of 1929. Citing these histories and other contemporary examples across the country, Shin argues that "Kwangju was no exception to this national trend; rather, it was the culmination of this broad democratic movement." See: Gi-Wook Shin and Kyung Moon Hwang, *Contentious Kwangju*, xviii.

Moreover, to put it in the starkest terms, the narratives of May '68, in bypassing or assigning minor roles to the many other great social and liberation movements occurring outside the Euro-American orbit (Algeria, Cuba, Vietnam, China, Egypt, Ghana, Bolivia, etc.) during the entire postwar period up to the 1960s, and seeing the *petit récit* of the Paris students' protests as the earth-shaking moment of global reckoning betrays the same form of imperial hubris usually displayed by the dominant sociopolitical institutions that the protests were reacting against in the first place. Thus, fittingly, the spasmodic activities of a few days in Paris and the spontaneous solidarity the students gained in other European cities were transformed, not simply into world-making, but also world-changing events.

USES OF SPECTACLE: GWANGJU BIENNALE AND THE ASIAN CENTURY

I have suggested the possible uses to which the politics of spectacle have been put in relation to aesthetic and cultural practice. The Paris model typifies the common agenda of the Western avant-garde which is how May '68 has been consistently read. This version of spectacle is deeply rooted in the Marxist critique of capitalism and the postmodern analysis of consumer culture, and in modern forms of technological dissemination of desire, in the form of mass media. Some of these critiques of spectacle are indebted to Guy Debord's theoretical work and the strategies of *détournement,* against which he and his colleagues in the Situationist International tested their critical models. This critique was developed and formed out of the unique insight of Western capitalism, electronic media, and consumer culture. Part of the challenge of the Western avant-garde was to bury and terminate the death-hold of the spectacle on modern subjectivity. This critique of modern capitalism is consistent not only with the activities and tactics of avant-garde groups such as Situationist International, of which Debord was a founder, but have since become reified as the very model of neo-avant-garde artistic strategy. It is in the spirit of this reification, that the tattered remnants and faded images of forty years ago have been recovered in a fascinating but fundamentally flawed sense of historical remembrance.

If we examine events like the Gwangju uprising, however, events happening in socio-politico-economical circumstances where neither capitalism nor consumer culture, nor technological capability, were developed to any tertiary degree until late into the 20th century, the strategies are far from being driven by an avant-garde aesthetic legacy. Rather, these events mobilize what may be called an anthropophagic or carnivalesque display of massive shock through modes of coalition-building and the establishment of absolute communities that are based on a shared and longstanding impulse of resistance to colonial power.[19]

This contrast, between May '68's identification with Western historical avant-gardes and May 18's rootedness in colonial resistance is what sets the social recollection of the Gwangju uprising apart from the student uprising in Paris. The cultural outcomes of the two events can also be understood to move in different directions, in terms of social relevance. While the Paris *Spring* ended as a defeat of models of progressive politics (a defeat yet to be acknowledged by the multitude of celebrants who utter scant words on the return of reactionary political forces after the failure of the students on the streets of Western democracies) the Gwangju *Spring* emerged as the triumph of *Minjung* as a fundamental part of people's power, which helped to usher in democracy in South Korea.[20] This recognition led to *Minjung* art, a popular style of socially committed art which dominated the artistic scene in South Korea in the late eighties and early nineties. *Minjung* art combined both a tinge of progressive aesthetic strategy of representation, à la social realism, and a strange type of nationalism in which images of the massive street protests of the late 1970s and the 1980s were set in relief. *Minjung* art though, had a series of internal contradictions, for while it sought identification with broad-based social movements, it can also be accused of over-identification with ideologies of nationalist nostalgia, a type of South Korean exception. This, strangely, is the moment when the images and concepts underpinning the Gwangju and Paris *Spring* tend to converge, through the aesthetic deployment and identification with the spectacle of mass mobilization. Yet there is a difference between Gwangju and Paris to the extent that in Korea, May 18 is a designated national holiday. Another difference is perhaps best explained by the structures through which both events are remembered and how the recollections function as part of the past and present. Paris tends to be focused almost exclusively in the past, while Gwangju is caught up in a ritual of annual passion over the meaning and symbolism of May 18. At the same time, representations of the two tend to associate with two distinct historical legacies: the modernist avant-garde on the one hand and the peasant and anti-colonial resistance on the other. Yet, whatever the distinct differences between Paris and Gwangju, or the modes in which they are commemorated, what is indisputable is how they each set in motion a fervent belief in the politics of spectacle.

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[19] The cannibalizing of other cultural practices as a mode of social and political resistance acquired critical resonance with José Oswald de Andrade's 1928 *Manifesto Antropófago*. A poet, literary critic, and one of the founding members of the Brazilian modernist movement, Andrade strategically embraced long-running European fears about native cannibalism, calling for the unapologetic re-appropriation of Western culture. Seminal to a broader history of Brazilian post-colonial cultural and aesthetic practice, the *Manifesto Antropófago* profoundly influenced many members of the Brazilian visual and musical avant-garde, including the *Poesia Concreta* poets and members of the *Tropicália* movement of the 1960s. In the 1998 *São Paulo Biennial*, Paulo Herkenhoff, the artistic director, based his seminal, and highly provocative, exhibition project around anthropophagia.

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[20] As a form of counter-cultural political expression, the *Minjung* (literally, "people" or "folk") movement of the 1970s and 1980s is central to the Gwangju uprising and the broader formation of political subjectivity in postwar South Korea. The very model of *People's Power* has been a constant in the politics of mass spectacle and street mobilization in Asia for at least the past thirty years. But it also underscores the commitment of a multiplicity of civil society initiatives, and social movement organizations in reshaping not only the political, but equally the social and cultural landscape. At the same time, one of the fundamental reasons for the unleashing of protests on the street owe much to the fact that the scenarios that have been the occasions for mass mobilization are often in societies undergoing transition. Recent expressions of *People's Power* have been as much about acquiring the tools of governance as they are about the invention of new discursive spheres of everyday practice. If we compared the much lauded events of May '68 to some well-known recent examples, which include the students' movement during the Iranian revolution in 1979, the South Korean student movement throughout the 1980s, the massive street protests and uprising in Manila and throughout Philippines that drove Ferdinand Marcos to exile in Hawaii in 1985, and the Tiananmen protests of 1989, we notice striking differences not only in the scale of mobilization and in what the students sacrificed, but also in the concreteness of what was accomplished.

As I have argued throughout, Asia is undergoing a period of unprecedented change. Across both geopolitical and geoeconomic indices, the 21st century can only be properly apprehended as the coming of the Asian Century. What makes fascinating observation as Asia grows is not only the pace, but also the scale of that transformation. Whether in the deserts of Western Asia in Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Doha, or Bahrain in the Persian Gulf, or in China, Malaysia, India, or South Korea, where new cities emerge overnight, the building of Asia is today, disproportionately absorbing natural resources at an alarming pace. Regardless of this unusual circumstance, there is a boundless idealism and sense of confidence among both old and young that the time of Asia is at hand. The *Gwangju Biennale* and the slew of other biennials, triennials, museums, theaters, cultural centers, universities, schools, etc., that have been established in Asia in the last two decades, gives only the slightest indication of what is to come.

In keeping with the recognition that the 21st century is emerging as an Asian-dominated one, the challenge of establishing a major international biennial exhibition in Gwangju coincided with the rising impact of globalization at the end of the 20th century and the prosperity that has profoundly redefined Asia's economic and political role at a global level. Propelled by technology, modernization, and the rapidly expanding role of economic and cultural networks in the global system, the triumph of the Four Asian Tigers (Taiwan, South Korea, Hong Kong, and Singapore) and the Asian economic miracle have profoundly shaped the growth of cultural and artistic perspectives. Economic liberalization and cultural expansion have provided a horizon of new possibilities for reflection within emerging spheres of technology, politics, society, and knowledge. In South Korea this new horizon first became visible through a commitment to industrialization, and then the paradigmatic political transformation that brought democracy to the country and the entrenchment of new forums of civil society.

The first steps toward claiming the political importance of open civil and cultural forums as indicators of a stable democratic sphere were made, with the support of the government in Seoul, by launching the first *Gwangju Biennale* in 1995. The inaugural exhibition was presented to more than one million visitors as part of a festival commemorating the courageous Gwangju citizens. Over the past decade, the *Gwangju Biennale's* critical experiment in the field of contemporary art has worked in tandem with the image of the city as a site of human rights and civil society. While the biennale has had an impact in Asia—not the least of which is the attempt by other projects in South Korea and neighboring countries to replicate some of its curatorial ambitions and to emulate its example—its unique brand is its alone. Perhaps the *Gwangju Biennale* is unique only in the manner that it ties its brand: not to the growth of Asia in the future, but by way of the link it makes to the uprising by using the spectacle of street protests as a symbol for establishing an open structure of cultural interaction.

The city is equally sanguine about the growth of Asia, however, and is positioning itself to play a cultural role within that growth. This can be seen in the investments the national government in Seoul and Gwangju are making in cultural infrastructure and in buildings that accommodate mass meetings or conventions. A new major project attached to this cultural master plan—part of a larger economic development agenda directed to the underdeveloped Southwest Korea—is the massive Asian Cultural Center currently under construction in downtown Gwangju, located on ten acres of land that lie adjacent to the same municipal government building where the uprising ended in 1980. The importance of the *Gwangju Biennale* to the city's idea of its role in the 21st century globalization of Asia is, at least, twofold: on the one hand, it is one of the key international cultural institutions to emerge from Korea's unique modern, national, and historical experience; and second, Gwangju city is now linked, in its second phase, to the dynamism of Asia in the 21st century.

The significance of using the biennial as a model for historical reflection is further underscored when one considers Korea's postcolonial status and Gwangju's marginal economic position in South Korean industrialization. At the same time, the *Gwangju Biennale* has evolved into one of the few pioneering international exhibitions to engage in the task of analyzing the impact of globalization on the field of contemporary art, and to challenge an older system of international exhibitions based on the outmoded system of national pavilions. It is perhaps due to the history of its own marginalization that the *Gwangju Biennale* has provided the space in which to explore the changing nature of international artistic networks and to examine new modes of artistic subjectivity and the conditions of contemporary cultural production that extend beyond national borders or focus on regional identification. Yet as part of the cultural initiatives of the city, the *Gwangju Biennale* is simultaneously linked to the network of the global exhibition system and is situated at the geopolitical nexus of the cultural policies of the nation state.

These links have allowed the institution to constantly rethink its biennial exhibitions around experimental praxis and innovative curatorial ideas.

In providing such a reflexive site for the presentation of contemporary art, the *Gwangju Biennale* has today assumed a dialectical position in debates focused on the task of reorienting the role of cultural and institutional networks of contemporary art, both in national debates and in the development of its own civic forums. The *Gwangju Biennale* deliberately positions itself as a resolutely global, open-ended exhibition model, as a discursive site for both exhibition-making and cultural debate. However, it is not only to the network of global culture at large that this biennial seeks connection, but to a diverse cultural infrastructure in South Korea organized on local, regional, and national levels.

These local and regional emphases include projects and institutions such as the *Gwangju Biennale* in the JeollaNam-do province; the *Busan Biennale* in GyeongsangNam-do province: *Anyang Sculpture* project, located just outside of Seoul in GyeongGi-do province; the *Seoul Media Biennial* (formerly *Seoul Media City*); and a network of national and city museums spread across the different provinces. At another level is the role played by the national government through Art Council Korea, which serves as an international broker for the export of South Korean contemporary art to international venues such as the *Venice Biennale*, *São Paulo Biennale*, and other similar global art fairs. Art Council Korea also provides funding to alternative galleries and directly manages two institutions, Insa Art Space, and Arko Art Center, both based in Seoul. These two institutions, modeled after an alternative art exhibition space and archive and a *kunsthalle,* or arts center, are oriented in their programming to what could be called experimental art practices and curatorial models. In the case of Insa, the focus tends to be on emerging artists and experimental practices, while Arko is focused on more evolved practices. These cultural strategies have been further bolstered by a strong commercial gallery system, a number of which are expanding internationally. At another level are private museums sponsored or directly overseen by private patrons led by large, family-controlled multinational businesses (the so-called *chaebols,* or business oligarchies). It is not unusual for such *chaebols* from Samsung, Daewoo, or Kumho to build museums, collect and exhibit art, organize exhibitions, and offer educational programs devoted either to Korean antiquity or to modern and contemporary art.[21]

All these activities are fairly recent, no more than two decades old, and in many instances are newer than that. Due to the relatively small size of South Korea, in comparison to its larger neighbors—China and Japan—international culture plays a key strategic role in helping South Korea compensate for its lack of political and economic influence in Asia. Fundamentally, South Korea is built on an export economy. The country's high gross national product derives from the manufacture and exportation of technology, electronics, semi-conductors, shipbuilding, refineries, containerized trade, financial services, automobile manufacturing, and telecommunications—areas in which it is a global leader. Much of South Korea's industrialization occurred between the early 1960s and 1980s, a period that completely transformed the South Korean economy and led to unprecedented increases in income and personal wealth, bringing them to the level of other advanced economies. At the same time, the prosperity of South Korea is built on a highly controlled national economy that tends to bestow privilege on local, albeit giant, global multinationals such as LG, Samsung, Hyundai, Daewoo, POSCO, etc., over foreign competitors. Doing business in South Korea, whether on the pragmatic side or cultural sphere, involves a delicately balance of many forces, the negotiation of national and global logics, and the articulation of a view that is open to the rest of the world, but fundamentally Korean-centered.

In the course of organizing this biennale, the questions posed, the issues raised, the observations made, have each contributed to the sense I have in organizing an exhibition of this scale at a time when the role of Asia in the global world is indisputable. Yet I have also found that the strongest sense and growing importance of contemporary art is not properly captured only through the lens of globalizing forces, as the very resolute localized conditions of production vividly remind us. It is, also, the case that contemporary art continues to elude the universalizing frames to which forces of the market tend to fix it, and therefore continuously rejuvenates our interest in its multiple temporalities and scenarios by offering not a set of homogenizing principles or world views. To fashion a space to articulate the shifting borders of artmaking and contemporary art's multiple audiences, curators cannot eternally confine themselves to the judgment seat of authority, but must readapt their modes of analysis towards unraveling the intricacies of cultural situations that do not produce only one type of contemporary art. The very structure of *Gwangju Biennale* and the curatorial models it has adopted from the very beginning employ these two tracks and logics, balancing the local and global and vice versa. From its inception in 1995, the biennale has engaged in a wide-ranging global collaboration and dialogue with curators and artists from Europe, North and South America, Asia, Africa, and Australia. In fact, it is perhaps, the most international of all biennales in this regard. From the very first biennale in 1995, a significant number of artists who have been invited to participate in the biennale have been from the global south. This accords with South Korea's identification as both a postcolonial nation and a developed one, and provides it with a sense of levity with regards to its global ambition. The importation of innovative curatorial models and exhibitions—interfaces in which new artistic models and cultural production could be tested—is part of a strategy of expanding both the global visibility and the influence of the South Korean development model, the so-called "miracle on the Han River." Today, the *Gwangju Biennale*, along with a number of biennales that emerged in the 1990s, at the end of the 20th century, can rightfully claim the mantle of being, from the outset, pioneers of an inclusive global exhibition model, in which the curatorial imperative is not narrow but expansive, not regional but global, always with consideration of the present. Therefore, a remarkable legacy of the *Gwangju Biennale's* accomplishments is borne out by the fact that it has enlarged its critical mandate while remaining fundamentally an institution based in an artistically underdeveloped region of South Korea. The biennale has therefore continuously fashioned itself as a critical force in the disruption of those traditional networks of cultural authority that have been centered in the metropolis.

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[21] These include Leeum Samsung Museum, Kumho Museum, Rodin Gallery, Artsonje Center, and Art Center Nabi, to name a few of the largest.

The Candlelight Girls' Playground:
Nationalism as Art of Dialogy,
The 2008 Candlelight Vigil Protests in South Korea

Hyejong Yoo

"The Republic of Korea is a democratic republic! All of the Republic of Korea's powers are from its citizens!"[1] These words come from "The Constitution Article One," a song that, along with popular protest songs from the 1970s and '80s democratization movements, was widely sung during the 2008 Candlelight Vigil protests. The reappearance of earlier protest songs reflects not only the citizens' recurring memories of Korea's previous democratization movements, but also their ongoing struggle for democracy. In this paper, I explore how the diverse group of Koreans who participated in the Candlelight Vigil protests attempted to re-make the Korean nation-state outside the framework of existing politics by integrating the notion of democratic civil society with their creative, cultural, and tactical dissent.[2] Here, they aspired to re-envision their national community as a place where citizens directly intervene in the political decision-making process through everyday civil discourse, in opposition to the incommunicative government of Lee Myung-bak (2007-2012).[3]

In examining the Candlelight Vigil protest of June 10, 2008, held in commemoration of the June 10 Democratization Movement in

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* I would like to thank the editors Godfre Leung and Sohl Lee, and other readers for their meticulous reading of my paper and their feedback. I also would like to thank Claudia Pederson and Soraya Murray for reading my draft and sharing their ideas, Thembinkosi A. Goniwe for introducing me to several essays on South African literature and culture in the 1980s, and Kim Yunki for his wonderful photos of the Candlelight Vigil protests.

[1] In my discussion, I will use the terms citizens and people interchangeably.

[2] I will alternately refer to the participants of the Candlelight Vigil protests as the Candlelight protesters, Candlelight participants, or Candlelighters.

[3] The Candlelight protesters' imagining of a new democratic civil society can be conceptualized in terms of both Jürgen Habermas's notion of the public sphere and Gerard A. Hauser's rhetorical model of public spheres. Habermas defines the public sphere as a discursive space in which individuals and groups discuss their shared concerns and reach decisions, thereby influencing political action. Likewise, the Candlelighters actively participated in communal discussion in order to influence and intervene in current political discourse. In addition, as Hauser argues, "a plurality of publics within the Public Sphere" interlaces itself and creates a common ground through dialogue. In a similar fashion, the Candlelighters effectively create an on- and offline network by conjoining their plural issues with "a common reference world." Gerard A. Hauser, *Vernacular Voices: The Rhetorics of Publics and Public Spheres* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), 56.

1987, I argue that the Candlelight protesters deliberately sought to reformulate Korean nationalism in the conflict between their conception of democracy and the market economy. In addition, the Candlelight protesters' nationalism was very much shaped by the Internet and online networks in the era of globalization, so it robustly challenged the earlier conception Korean nationalism that was much influenced by the conventional concept of the national boundary. The Candlelights imagined their nationalism as a dialogical point within the context of international collaborations struggling against the ever-growing prominence of neo-liberalism and collectively working towards a globalized world in which they want to live. Nevertheless, the protesters' imagining of their nationalism outside of the conventional political system had somewhat limited their potential for reworking the current socioeconomic structure.

REMAKING A COUNTERPUBLIC SPHERE

The Candlelight Vigil protests articulated multiple changes and contentions made in the post-1987 democratization movement, especially in South Korean progressive politics. Although the Candlelight protesters identified with and reenacted the earlier democratization movement, they also critically challenged the nationalism that had been actively mobilized, especially during the 1970s and '80s. In order to situate the protests in such a social milieu, I will first look at the 1980s *undongkweon*, which the historian Lee Namhee has framed as a counterpublic.[4]

A term that refers to an individual activist or the *minjung* (or people's) movement, *undongkweon* denotes the creation of a separate and competing "counterpublic sphere" in which the norms and values differed from those commonly associated with the public.[5] The *undongkweon*'s counterpublic sphere was often portrayed as "marginal" and "insignificant" by the mass media and government, and even as ideologically threatening to the rest of society.[6] They actively carved out their community through their distinctive discourse, values, ceremonies, and culture in opposition or as an alternative to the dominant culture and values.[7] In this way, the *undongkweon*'s counterpublic stance was crucial not only in forming its counter-identity but also in enabling them to envision "an emancipatory program for the whole of society" as an integral part of the development of civil society.[8]

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[4] Namhee Lee, *The Making of Minjung: Democracy and the Politics of Representation in South Korea* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007), 8.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

In opposition to the state's nationalism, these intellectuals and university students envisioned *minjung* as the sovereign power of the Korean people's nation-state. They defined the idea of *minjung* as "the common people," in opposition to the elites, the educated, and the state; thus, the *minjung* is conceptualized as being alienated from the political decision-making process and from capitalist production, at the same time as its constituents serve as the building blocks of capitalist society.[9] They are a "group" that cannot be neatly categorized within existing notions of classes or other specific social groups, and yet they were capable of rising up in opposition to "the meta-narrative of state-led development" as "a true historical subjectivity."[10] Nonetheless, the idea of *minjung*, a sweeping term that purports to represent all of the oppressed, tends to gloss over particular problems of other social minorities such as women, prioritizing its political agendas over others.

When defined by its dynamic engagement with historical reality, the dissidents' idea of *minjung* is firmly grounded in their perception of modern Korean history, particularly in its failure to build a sovereign nation-state after liberation in 1945. The dissidents perceived that the legitimate foundation of the Republic of Korea was obstructed by the re-entry of pro-Japanese collaborators into politics, anti-communism, the division of the nation into South and North Korea under the U.S. Army Military Administration, and dictatorships and foreign interventions.[11] For that reason, the legitimacy of the foundation of the Republic of Korea and the undemocratic regimes that followed (1948-1992) has long been contested.

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[7] Won Kim, *Ich`yojin kottul e taehan kieok: 1980-yondae Hanguk taehaksaeng ui hawi munhwa wa taejung chongch`i* [Remembering forgotten things: the 1980s South Korean university students' sub-culture and the public politics] (Seoul: Ihu, 1999). 76. All quotations from Korean texts have been translated by the author.

[8] Lee, *The Making of Minjung*, 10.

[9] Ibid., 5.

[10] Ibid., 5, 6.

[11] Since their establishment as separate states, South and North Korea have had ideological, political, and military confrontations under a constant threat of war. Moreover, their politics have been heavily affected by the complex interests of the United States, Russia, China, and Japan, each fighting for hegemony in East Asia since the Cold War. The anti-communist and pro-United States South Korean government saw communism and North Korea as diametrically opposed to democracy and modernization. As a way to claim legitimacy over North Korea, expounding strong anti-communism, the state mobilized the entire nation for rapid modernization and industrialization following the 1960s under a military dictatorship that severely infringed on the constitutional rights of many Korean people.

Unlike the *undongkweon,* the Candlelighters harbored no doubts about the legitimacy of the Republic of Korea per se as their nation-state. Because the Grand National Party's presidential candidate Lee Myung-bak was democratically elected by a majority of voters in 2007, legitimacy should not have been a problem in principle. However, because the Candlelight participants perceived that Lee's government did not represent the interests of the citizens or listen to their expressions of concern—instead heeding the interests of the establishment and the U.S.—they challenged its legitimacy as their state. The protesters believed that they needed to guide the government to work properly, and that if it did not listen to its citizens, it should be overthrown to make way for a new state.

Nonetheless, the Candlelight protesters were skeptical about aligning with dissident nationalism and its progressive politics, not only because they had failed to deliver their promises even after democratization (1987), but also because their approach to current socioeconomic problems differed little from those of the conservative party. Although the Candlelight participants shared, as well, a yearning for a people's nation-state, if the *undongkweon* imagined its nationalism in the meta-narrative of "the nation, *minjung*, and democracy," the Candlelight protesters re-imagined their national community in their everyday civil discourse through self-organization.

Their refusal to align with conventional leftist or rightist politics and their creative form of dissent bears a natural affinity to the Italian Autonomia movement, which emerged in the early 1960s and dominated left-wing politics and social action in Italy in the 1970s. Like the Candlelight protest movement, Autonomia diverged from traditional left-wing politics. It grew into a political and social movement that expanded beyond activist factory workers (the usual socialist or communist constituency of post-war Europe) to embrace others that it considered to be alienated from capitalist economy. The Autonomists included intellectuals, unemployed youth, precarious (non-union) workers, and even housewives, who were viewed as unpaid laborers. Unlike traditional Marxists, who acted through party politics and trade unions, they spurned rigid ideology and hierarchical organization. Instead, the Autonomists attempted to disrupt the existing socioeconomic structure through decentralized wildcat strikes and other actions, in effect reinventing "their own forms of social 'war-fair'" through pranks, squats, pirate radio broadcasts, collective re-appropriations, and so on, reflecting the rebellious spirit of May 1968.[12] Their movement, in which the literary critic and cultural theorist Sylvère Lotringer saw a future politics, articulated "a new form of political behavior, experimental and imaginative, ideologically open, rhizomatic in organization, non-representational and non-dialectical in action, with a healthy sense of humor and zest for life."[13]

Like the Autonomists, the Candlelighters attempted to re-envision their nation-state by realizing democratic aspirations in their everyday lives with their cultural and political dissent. Here, "everyday" can be read as "ordinary," a concept developed in *Rediscovery of the Ordinary* by the South African scholar and literary author Njabulo Ndebele. Ndebele argues that the ordinary is antithetical to spectacle and embodies lived realities that are profoundly embedded in everyday life.[14] He asserts that a meta-narrative of freedom that does not engage with the concrete realities of people is paradoxically destined to be dialectically equivalent to the oppressive apartheid system.[15] In other words, when the people's intimate lives and stories are subsumed by the goal of the anti-apartheid movement, their lives can be easily manipulated and instrumentalized for the sake of ideological and political logic. Instead, the ordinary daily lives of the people, "the very content of the struggle," should be the basis for the collective imagining and creation of the future through a continuous process of collaboration between individuals and groups in their everyday lives.[16]

Ndebele's theory of the ordinary speaks to the Candlelight protesters' deliberations, particularly how they conceptualize everyday life, not only as a powerful thrust for a collective re-envisioning of their nation-state, but also as a place where their activism is rearticulated in the everyday practice of democracy. The Candlelight protesters enacted the idea of the everyday practice of democracy through free, boundless exchanges of thoughts, opinions, and information in a common arena, such as the online community Daum Agora, envisioning a democratic civil society in these activities. The protesters expressed such an ideal of democracy in their action of civil disobedience in front of the shipping container barricade on June 10, 2008. By doing so, they projected their aspirations within a counterpublic space for their new national community. Before looking into their community-making actions, I will examine the socioeconomic background in South Korea following the 1987 democratization.

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[12] Hedi El Kholti, Sylvère Lotringer, and Christian Marazzi, *Autonomia: Post-Political Politics* (Los Angeles and Cambridge, MA: Semiotext(e), 2007), v.

[13] Ibid., vi.

[14] Njabulo Ndebele, *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 50.

[15] Ibid., 23.

[16] Ibid., 55.

POST-1987 SOUTH KOREA

The Ch'eonggye Plaza was flooded on May 17, 2008 with thousands of lit candles, offering a magnificent spectacle. The Ch'eonggye Plaza was created by the Ch'eonggyech'eon reclamation project during Lee Myung-bak's tenure as Mayor of Seoul (2002-2006), and it was considered his most visible achievement. However, it became the site of protests against his government that night in 2008, as a banner was unfurled reading: "No Mad Cow, No Mad Education!" Men and women, young and old, came with their families and friends and sat on the ground in the packed space, enjoying performances by popular singers, as if they were at a summer picnic. In the middle of the concert, the audiences shared their ideas on current politics and others responded with enthusiastic applause and speeches of their own. It was not only through speeches and anti-2MB pamphlets that people showed their opposition ("2MB" is a derisive nickname for President Lee that pokes fun at his brain capacity—2 megabytes); many people also brought their own signboards and wore costumes as gestures of protest, for example cow costumes (presumably representing mad cows) and masks from the movie *V for Vendetta.*

The Candlelight cultural festivals, which would develop into the Candlelight Vigil protests, were started less than one hundred days into Lee Myung-bak's presidential term (2007-2012). Lee, the candidate from the Grand National Party, was elected president in December 2007. His election was expected, not only because the preceding president Roh Moo-hyun and his Progressive Party had failed to represent the people's interests in a term that began in 2002, but also because the 1987 democratization movement had not successfully represented the people's interests in building a new democratic society and establishing socioeconomic justice, a state of

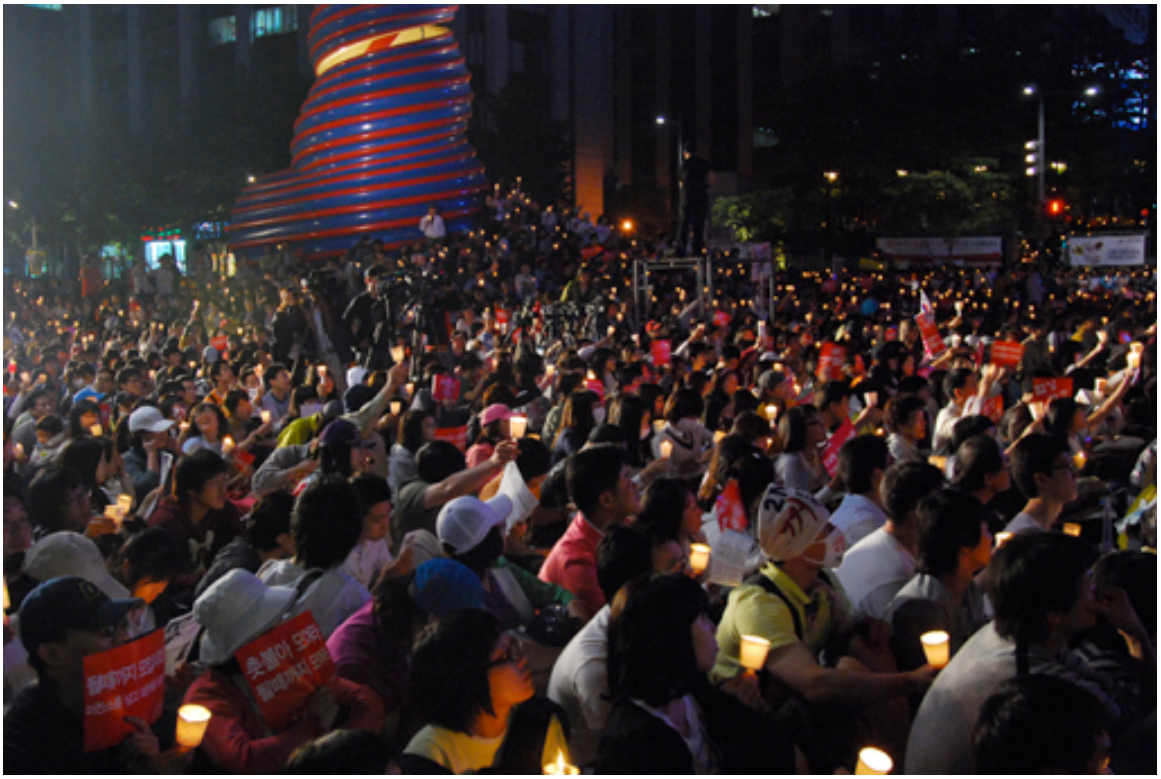

Figure 1. The Candlelight Cultural Festival at Ch'eonggye Plaza, 2008. Photograph by Kim Yunki.

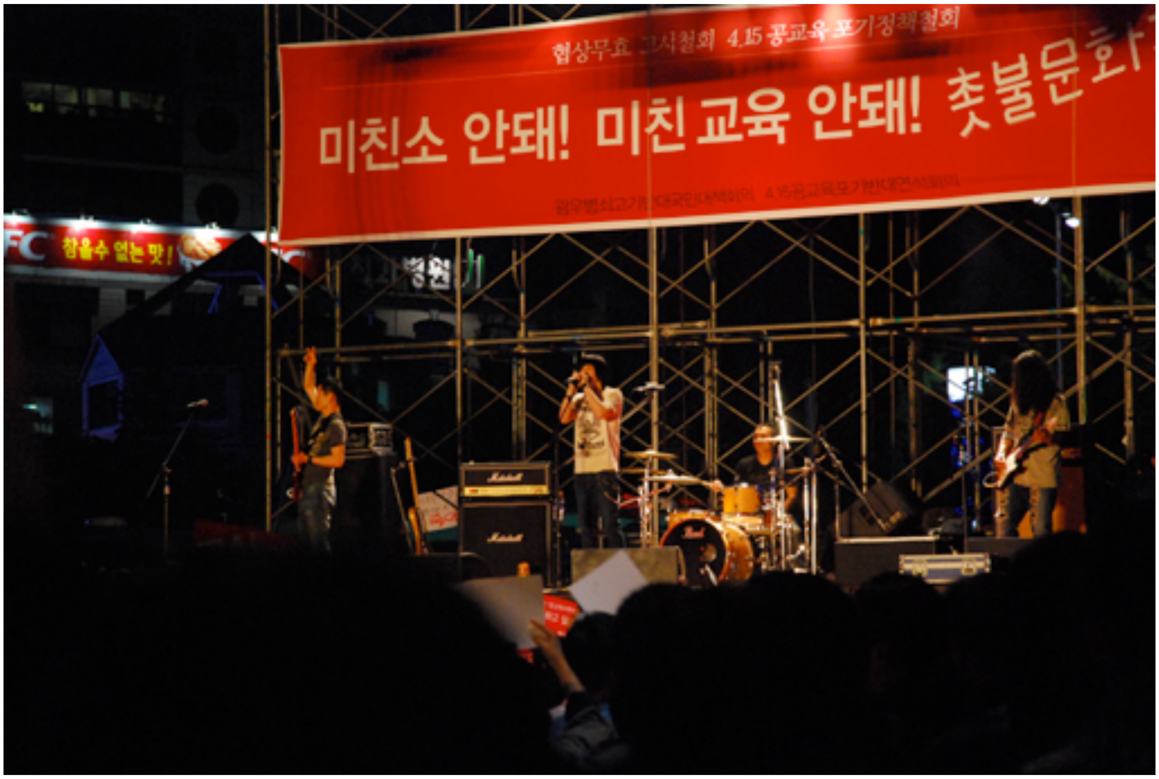
협상무효 고시철회 4.15 공교육 포기정책철회
미친소 안돼! 미친교육 안돼! 촛불문화
참을수 없는 맛!

Figure 2. The Candlelight Cultural Festival at Ch'eonggye Plaza, 2008. Photograph by Kim Yunki.

affairs widely believed to have worsened as a result of the IMF (International Monetary Fund) intervention (1997).

During the ten years following democratization, the growing middle class became a new civic power and the country enjoyed a period of economic flourishing. Nevertheless, from the mid-1990s on, there were already serious symptoms that suggested economic depression was under way in South Korea.[17] The 1997 Asian Financial Crisis (also known as the IMF crisis) hit South Korea and other Asian countries hard. Faced with a major financial emergency, the South Korean government received a bailout loan package totaling $57 billion from the IMF in December 1997. The day the government decided to accept the IMF package became known for many Koreans as a "National Humiliation Day":[18] South Korea's economic sovereignty was handed over to the IMF, under the usual terms for economic reform.[19] Many Koreans tied the issue of economic sovereignty to national pride, so they enthusiastically participated in pan-national movements by collecting gold and dollars for the revival of Korea's economy; this became known as "IMF Nationalism."[20]

Although the IMF crisis united Koreans through their collective efforts to regain Korea's sovereignty, it violently broke apart their everyday lives in a way no one had expected, causing a daily suicide rate of twenty-five people and a fifty percent increase in the crime rate.[21] As the central goal of the IMF reform package was to make the labor market more flexible, salaried workers suffered under a bleak job market and economic slump. As a result, the middle class became more focused on the success of family members. The rhetoric of competition dominated all aspects of people's lives as never before. The conservatism of the middle class rapidly separated the civil and labor union movements, resulting in the exclusion of workers' interests and perspectives from the formation of political discourse.[22]

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[17] Hagen Koo, "Engendering Civil Society: The Role of the Labor Movement," in *Korean Society: Civil Society, Democracy and the State*, ed. Charles K. Armstrong (New York: Routledge, 2007), 86.

[18] Kim Yeonghwan, "Wigi ui hanguksahoe reul wihan silcheonjeok je'an" [Practical Suggestions for the Korean Society in Crisis], in *Sahoe pip'yong* (Spring 1999), 150.

[19] Cheong Kyuchae, Kim Seongtaek, "Oehwadaeran teukpyol chwijaetim," in *I saramdeul cheongmal keunil naegetkkun: Silrok wehwa daeran* [The record of foreign currency crisis] (Seoul: Hanguk kyeongjae sinmunsa, 1998), 227–28.

[20] Kang chun-man, *Hanguk hyondaesa sanchaek. 1990-yondae pyon: 3-dang hapdang eso sutabeoksu kkaji,* [The contemporary Korean history, 1990s: from merging three parties to Starbucks Coffee], no. 3 (Seoul: Inmul gwa sasangsa, 2006), 173.

[21] Kang, *Hanguk hyondaesa sanchaek. 1990-yondae pyon,* no. 3, 182.

[22] Chang Jip Ch'oe, *Minjuhwa ihu ui minjujuui: Hangguk minjujuui ui posujeok kiwon gwa wigi,* [Democracy after democracy: the conservative origins of Korean democracy and its crisis]. 198.

This meant that civil society had lost the biggest latent force of resistance against business conglomerates (including mass media powers) and the government.[23] As several commentators have pointed out, many factions in the civil movements became apolitical and did not bring class-consciousness to the forefront, focusing instead on the interests of the educated middle class.

Nonetheless, these developments reflect changes in the social movements of the late 1980s and 1990s. After democratization, many activists and social organizations found it difficult to replicate their earlier mass mobilizations because there was no common target, as there had been in the pre-1987 era.[24] As a result, new civil associations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) began to work with the emerging civil society. These civil society groups addressed a wide range of new social issues, and their members included ordinary citizens, journalists, professors, social workers, artists, and farmers.[25] The development of grassroots NGOs accelerated rapidly and spread nationwide, ushered in by the new national online network.

THE LEE GOVERNMENT'S DEAFNESS

Globalization and neo-liberalism tightened their influence over Koreans, and their effects were deeply felt in everyday life. Under these circumstances, Lee Myung-bak's promise to promote the resurgence of Korea's economy was eagerly received by the public. However, many of his policies, such as the liberalization of education and the privatization of medical insurance and other public services, provided little benefit to the average Korean. Furthermore, his ambition to create the pan-Korea Grand Waterway was anti-ecological and public work-based, which seemed to repeat the 1960s and '70s style of economic development. The people were forced to confront the reality that the government's vision for the nation-state clashed with that of the people.

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[23] Ibid.; The separation of the middle class and the labor workers should not be understood as a particular result of the IMF crisis but should instead be perceived as evidence of the middle class's innate conservatism, which was also manifested in the General Labor Strikes of July, August, and September 1987.

[24] Sunhyuk Kim, "Civil society and democratization in South Korea", *Korean Society: Civil society, democracy and the state*, second edition, edited by Charles K. Armstrong (New York: Routledge, 2007), 59.

[25] Ibid., 61.

Above all, what brought about strong opposition to the Lee administration, eager to create a better relationship with the United States, was its decision to import U.S. beef. Such importation included meat and other body parts from thirty month-old cattle that had been banned from the U.S. food supply because of the perceived high risk of mad cow disease. Many Koreans were incensed at the government's humiliating deal with the United States, particularly its failure to protect its population, and indeed its apparent indifference to food safety. However, the government did not renegotiate the agreement, prioritizing economic logic and South Korea's ties with the United States above all else. Many people believed that the government's deafness to the desires of its citizens led directly to this decision and was the biggest obstacle to true democracy in Korea. They viewed the unresponsiveness of the government as undemocratic and, instead, envisioned democracy as an everyday civil discourse among people of varied opinions.

FORMING NEW POLITICAL VOICES

When Lee's government announced the liberalization of education at almost the same time as it signed the U.S. beef import agreement in 2008, many female junior high and high school students, who were already living under severe pressure to achieve academically, called the current education system "mad education," comparing it to the beef import in their slogan "No Mad Education, No Mad Cow!" The young students, known as the Candlelight Girls, appropriated social media and used it for creating political dissent. Their creative and techno-savvy methods of networking represented a new form of protest to many people, although these technologies had existed for a while.

Unlike their parents' generation, the so-called "386 generation,"[26] these students had already lived in a democratized society.[27] The historian Han Honggu states that their parents' generation studied democracy and struggled for it harder than any generation had since the foundation of the Korean nation. However, they were more familiar with the operations of the authoritarian system. In contrast, these young students might not have had clear ideas of democracy, but they responded to democracy as part of their daily life. For many young students, democracy was not just another political ideology or catchphrase, as was the case with conventional politics; instead, democracy was the way in which they expected their society, or the Republic of Korea, to function.[28]

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[26] The term "386 generation," which was coined in the 1990s, refers to the generation that experienced the dawning of the democratization movement during the 1980s student movement.

[27] See: Han Honggu, "Hyeondae hanguk ui jeohang undong gwa chotpul" [South Korea's Resistance Movement and the Candlelighters], in *Changjak kkwa pip'yeong* 36 (Fall 2008),18-19; Kim Jongyeop, "Chotpu rui kyeongjaehakgwa 87-yeon cheje" [The Candlelighters' Resistance and the 1997 System], in *Changjak kkwa pip'yeong* 36 (Fall 2008), 3.

In the process of creating dissent against Lee's government, a netizen (or citizen of cyberspace) with the username "Andante," who identified him or herself as a high school student, started a petition to impeach President Lee on a Website called Daum Agora.[29] Daum Agora, the popular Web portal Daum's discussion board, selectively appropriated the concept of the ancient Greek *agora* to denote an open discussion space in which netizens could contemplate the direction and tactics of their activism in a collective manner. Andante's petition brought the people's dissatisfactions together in one arena and helped Daum Agora function as the virtual headquarters of the Candlelight Vigil protests during the summer of 2008:

> With Ten Million Signatures I demand that the congress impeach President Lee. Lee Myung-bak took a solemn oath that he would work for the citizens. However, for the last three months President Lee has not devoted himself with great sincerity to national administration. He pushed the construction of the pan-Korean Grand Waterway and immersive English education, which many people have resisted. . . . Also, by changing or ignoring the election promises, he deceived the people. . . . He said he will not charge Japan with responsibility for the colonial past. . . . As he referred to the king of Japan as the "emperor," he bowed low to him. By using force, he violently arrested the people who were marching peacefully and enforced an announcement of the U.S. beef import. . . . The president who throws out Korea and its citizens' self-respect . . . we cannot acknowledge such a president.[30]

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[28] Ibid.

[29] http://agora.media.daum.net/petition/view?id=40221 (last accessed June 2010). I could not retrieve Andante's first petition for the impeachment of President Lee because he or she has updated the petition several times since then, but the original content of his petition remains in the updates.

[30] Ibid.

Andante's petition listed the Lee government's offenses and detailed their undemocratic nature, in addition to condemning the government's humiliating diplomacy with Japan, its former colonizer. At first glance, Andante's rhetoric appears no different from earlier forms of nationalism in its very political nature, based on its opposition to dictatorship and imperialism. However, by closely examining the protesters' on- and offline activities, we can see that the Candlelighters' particular form of nationalism aspires to re-envision a new Korean nation-state outside of conventional politics, while retaining the fundamental characteristics of constitutional democracy. In this atmosphere, Andante's petition and the police's attempt to verify his identity kindled the fire of the people's resistance against the Lee government. In less than forty days 1.3 million netizens signed the petition for the impeachment of President Lee.[31]

The initiative of these young students invited people from all walks of life to engage with everyday concerns and respond to them in a communal manner. Their exchanges evolved into the Candlelight cultural festivals at the Ch'eonggye Plaza where thousands of candles created a magnificent spectacle. The government's unresponsiveness to its citizens' desires resulted in the summer-long Candlelight Vigil protests, which were brutally combated by the police.

DIFFERENT "TRUTHS" OF THE NEWS MEDIA

Many Koreans were afraid of mad cow disease due to the extensive media coverage of the epidemic, online journalism, and citizen networks. What was known about mad cow disease became highly politicized and muddled by conflicting scientific ideas, by the news media's negligence or manipulation of "facts," and by the fear propagated through blogs and online networks. Nevertheless, the Candlelight Vigil protests were not driven simply by fear and ignorance. In the midst of the fear-mongering, the true nature of the government and the conservative news media was revealed. Although the Candlelight protesters supported the anti-government news media, in their re-envisioning of a democratic Korean national community they also distanced themselves from progressive politics.

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[31] *T'aehan minguk sangsik sacheon: Agora* [Dictionary for Common Sense in the Republic of Korea], ed. Agora pein (Seoul: Yŏu wa durumi, 2008), 20.

On April 29, 2008, PD Note broadcasted a television program on mad cow disease, titled "The American Beef, Is It Safe from the Mad Cow Disease?" The program showed alarming images of downed cattle and individuals who supposedly suffered from the human variant of mad cow disease. The program also claimed that 94 percent of Koreans have genes that can make them more susceptible to developing vCJD (variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, the human mad cow disease). However, this information had not yet been rigorously verified. The government and the conservative newspapers *Chosun*, *JoongAng*, and *DongA Daily* accused PD Note of fabricating and distorting information to manipulate public sentiment to further the leftists' political agenda.[32]

The government and the conservative newspapers continued to portray the Candlelight Vigil protests as illegal, violent protests influenced by anti-government, anti-American instigators. For instance, newspaper editorials ran headlines such as "The Candlelight Vigil Protests Become Anti-Government, Illegal Protests," "The Candlelight Vigil Protests: It Should Not Spread a Banquet for Wrong Groups," "Instigation by Ghost Stories and False Information, It Goes Way Too Far," and "[The Government] Should Take a Decisive Measure Against the Violent Protests According to the Law."[33] This rhetoric gave the government a rationale for forcefully suppressing the protesters to reestablish law and order. Using nationalistic rhetoric, the government and mass media outlets accused the Candlelight protesters of undermining Korea's democracy and of causing the current economic crisis. Above all, what concerned these powers most was that many ignorant people would be alarmed by the information on mad cow disease and manipulated by anti-American and anti-government groups.

The netizens' "spreading fears" by "false information" was in actuality the Candlelighters' "tactics" to reveal the government and pro-government newspapers' real face, by imitating the news media's hyping of mad cow disease during the tenure of the liberal party's ex-President Roh Moo-hyun. The major conservative newspapers, *Chosun, JoongAng,* and *DongA Daily*, had warned of the danger of mad cow disease in opposition to the Roh administration's attempt to open up to the U.S. beef market a year earlier: "Koreans are genetically more susceptible to mad cow disease than Western people"; "If you eat beef from ill cattle and are infected . . . the death rate is 100%"; "What! Only Koreans eat old American beef?"[34] However, under the Lee government, these newspapers radically changed their position on mad cow disease, reporting the government's public statement that "The probability of mad cow disease is similar to the probability of getting a hole-in-one and getting struck by a thunderbolt at the same time."[35] The pro-government newspapers clearly demonstrated their willingness to switch their stance depending on their immediate political and economic interests by manipulating public sentiment, obstructing the people's access to the facts.

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[32] Since their airing, the PD Note programs have been at the center of debate on the media's manipulations of public sentiment in relation to the Revision of the Media Law. The program was also charged by the citizens' legal organization and others with terrifying the people using inaccurate information, but the court rejected their petitions in 2010. Nonetheless, with the government's unilateral placement of pro-government figures as president and in other high-ranking positions in broadcasting corporations (i.e., KBS, YTN, and MBC), progressive organizations perceived the PD Note case as illustrative of the government's attempt to seize control of the news media.

[33] *T'aehan minguk sangsik sacheon: Agora* [Dictionary for Common Sense in the Republic of Korea], ed. Agora pein (Seoul: Yŏu wa durumi, 2008), 191.

In the face of competing "truths" regarding mad cow disease, the protesters' agenda was not simply about opposition to importing American beef, the overthrow of the 2MB government, or revealing the mass media's manipulations. The Candlelighters' aims were more fundamental to resolving the country's deepest problem: remaking the Republic of Korea from the ground up on the basis of democratic ideals. Hence, the protesters playfully yet carefully maneuvered visual images, performances, and rhetoric to cast themselves as democratic citizens and to push the Republic of Korea closer to its ideal of a new democratic national community.

CYBERSPACE AS THE SITE FOR CONCEIVING DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP

Such massive online participation was made possible by the widespread Internet access afforded by the network infrastructure of South Korea, the most heavily connected country in the world. Extensive online availability made the Internet an effective instrument for challenging the existing political system in both creating dissent and in forming on- and offline communities committed to social mobilization. Interestingly, the Koreans' online interactions often have developed into off-line social movements, shaping and shaped by public sentiment, as the 2002 presidential election illustrates so well. When candidate Chung Mong-jun withdrew his support for Roh Moo-hyun, a reformist candidate, on the night before the election, an Internet newspaper providing citizen journalism, *ohmynews*, published an article on the new electoral development that was accessed by more than 570,000 people within the ten hours that preceded daybreak. Its discussion boards were flooded with messages urging the people to vote.[36] Netizens also used cell phones to urge voters to exercise their rights on Election Day, thereby helping to elect Roh as president in 2002.

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[34] Ibid., 276-281.

[35] http://article.joins.com/article/article.asp?total_id=3135065&ctg=1000 (last accessed June 2010).

As this example shows, the people's involvement in on- and offline politics in 2002 shares some similarities with the Candlelighters' online communities and activism. The immediateness of the connection between online networks and offline activism throughout the development of the Candlelight Vigil protests demonstrates not only how online communities can work with popular movements but also the tenuousness of the distinction between on- and offline communities. For instance, as a way of intervening in the pro-government news media, citizens wanted to represent their activism in their own terms. Some protesters carried their laptops, microphones, video camcorders, and cell phones into the demonstrations. While they were recording and uploading the protests in real time, they also interviewed other Candlelight protesters. People at home or in offices who could not make it to the protests responded directly to these real-time broadcasts. In turn, they often asked citizen reporters to go to certain spots where they had heard that police violence was taking place. Sometimes, if those at home or at work found things were getting serious, they came out and joined the scene of the protests—even in the middle of the night. Such citizen reporting exemplified how porous on- and offline networks were and how participants collaborated to achieve their political goals.

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[36] Ibid, 931.

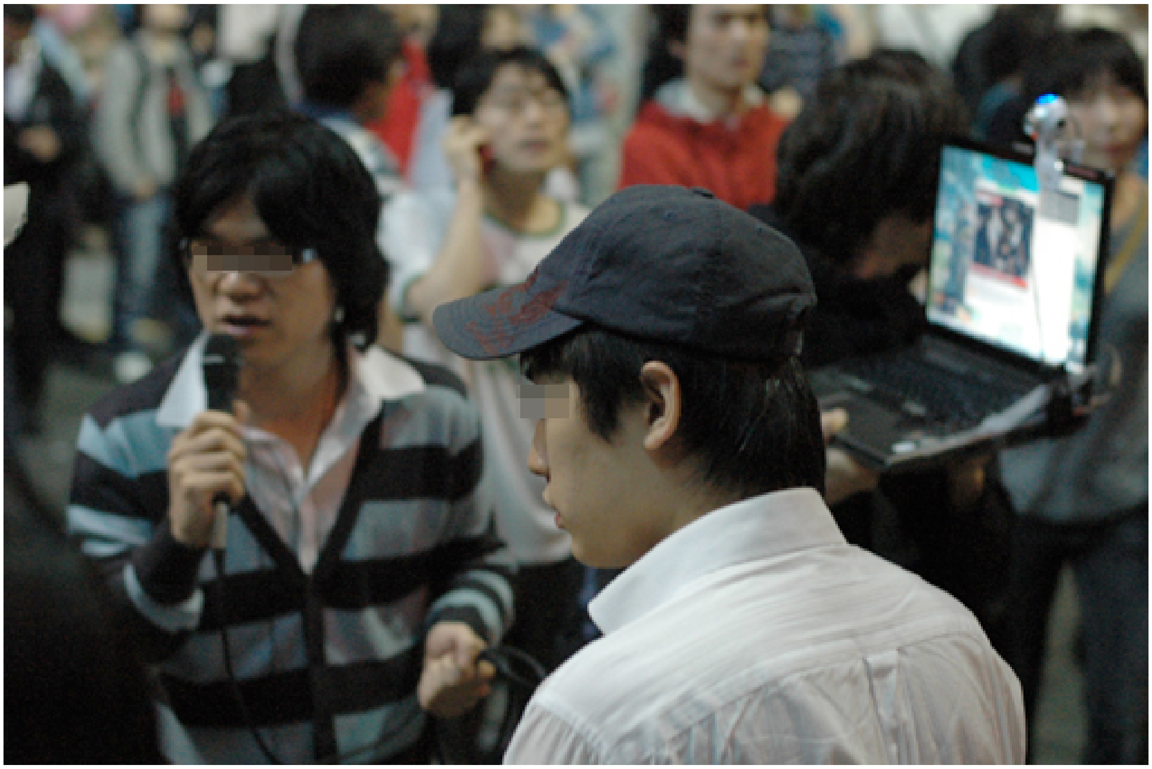

Figure 3. One-Person Reporters. Photograph by Kim Yunki.

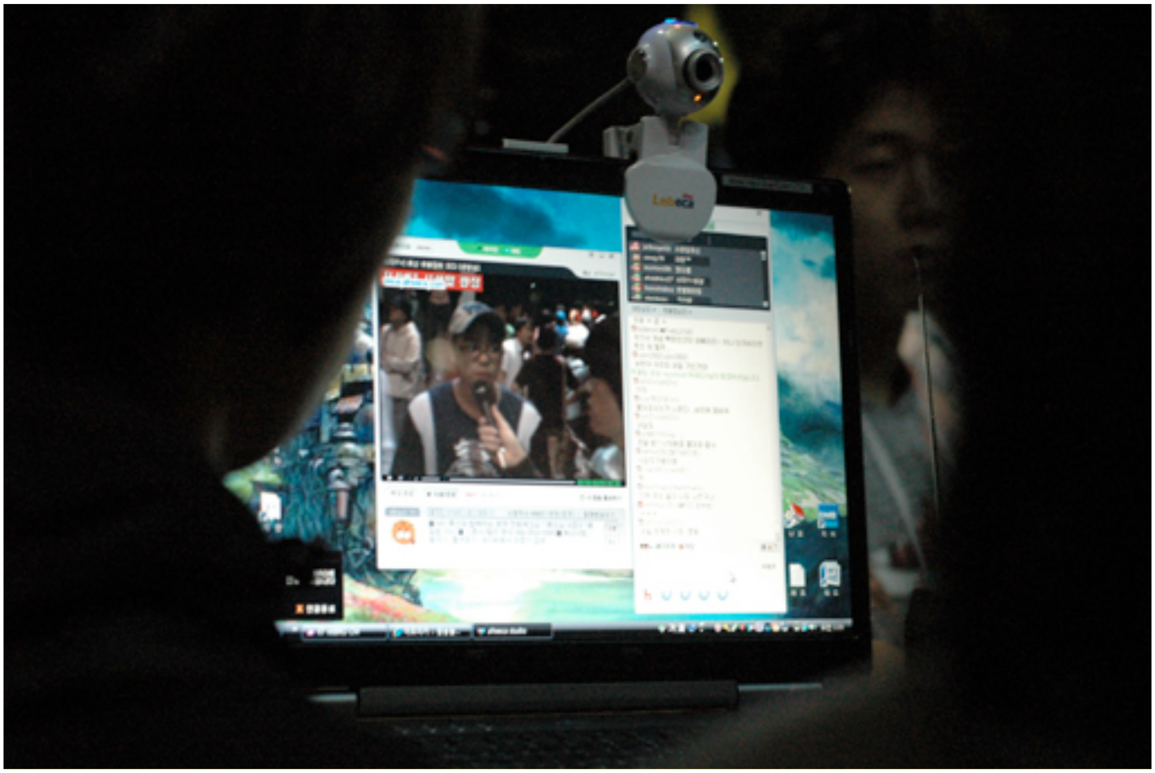

Figure 4. One-Person Reporters. Photograph by Kim Yunki.

Such on- and offline relationships went a further step: the Candlelight protesters brainstormed about democratic citizenship in their online discourse, while working on and enacting democratic civil society in their offline activities. If "netizen" means a person active in online communities, the Candlelighters interpreted the term in a more literal or active way (as citizens on the net or cybercitizens); yet they also expanded the definition by connecting the online communities with their vision of the national community. The Candlelighters identified themselves as a community in the act of civil discourse, and they saw hope for the democracy of Korea in that identification. We can see an expression of this hope in one netizen's reflections on what it was like to communicate using Daum Agora (this individual's net ID is *hyan'gi naneun maeul*—"village with fragrance"):

> I, a middle-aged woman, have never participated in political protests ever before in my life. [But] I decided to go on the picnic of Daum Agora . . .
>
> *Azumma* [the Korean term for a middle-aged woman; here, Azumma is the netizen *hyan'gi naneun maeul*] had a difficult time adjusting to the crowded and noisy place [Daum Agora], feeling knocked in a heap. . . . It is a plaza, literally an agora. In the open plaza [Daum Agora], from a distance I looked at the people, who constantly shared their ideas. When the news or postings are uploaded, they read them and voted for pros or cons. If postings received many pros, they would be selected as the best recommended opinions. Otherwise, postings would be buried by other people's postings. Although it is not an agora exactly as it was in Greek city-states, the early democratic form is still intact in Daum Agora. If the majority vote is the most important principle of democracy, Daum Agora perfectly follows this idea . . . . In the process of sharing their ideas, [I learned that] the people are much wiser than I thought. Even several months ago, I used to let out my pent-up anger about the people's ignorance and the limitations of representative democracy, but [from Daum Agora] I began to have a change of heart. Although some people call Daum Agora a dumping ground, I see hope for this country in Daum Agora.[37]

As *hyan'gi naneun maeul*'s comment indicates, many of the Candlelighters who participated in Daum Agora defined their identities through the free interaction of ideas and opinions and the decision-making process, calling themselves Agorians. The Agorians projected their re-envisioning of the Republic of Korea through their online discourse. This vision was clearly manifested again in the Candlelight Vigil protest on June 10, 2008. In order to explore their new community, I will identify four moments during the course of the protesters' engagement with the Myung-bak Fortress on that day, forming a progression in the re-imagining of their new national community.

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[37] *T'aehan minguk sangsik sacheon: Agora* [Dictionary for Common Sense in the Republic of Korea], ed. Agora pein (Seoul: Yŏu wa durumi, 2008), 60-61.

FIRST: ENCOUNTER WITH THE MYUNG-BAK FORTRESS

In commemoration of the June 10, 1987 Democratization Movement, the Candlelight protesters planned the One Million Candlelight March for June 10, 2008.[38] The Candlelight protesters anticipated June 10 with great excitement but also with some anxiety over whether their protests would be a major watershed. This protest was accompanied by memorials for the martyrs Lee Hanyeol and Lee Byungryel.[39] The death of Lee Hanyeol, who was killed by a police tear gas canister in June 1987, proved once more the state's brutality and undemocratic nature and provoked the nationwide democratization movement that ended Chun Du Hwan's military dictatorship. Twenty-one years later, Lee Byungryeol, a public transportation worker, immolated himself while protesting the importation of U.S. beef and the privatization of public service sectors, at the same time advocating the overthrow of Lee's administration. His death somberly illustrates how the Korean people's yearning for the democratization of society had not been fulfilled even twenty-one years after the death of Lee Hanyeol.

Because of the significance of June 10 in the history of democratization, the government was also preparing for the possibility of the biggest anti-government protest in twenty-one years—since the 1987 Democratization Movement—by building a two-story barricade of shipping containers in Gwanghwamun, Central Seoul, a few blocks away from the president's office. The police filled the containers with sand bags and coated them with industrial grease so that people would be unable to scale it. The protesters interpreted this barricade as a visual articulation or

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[38] http://www.ohmynews.com/nws_web/view/at_pg.aspx?CNTN_CD=A0000924274 (last accessed June 2010).

[39] Ibid.

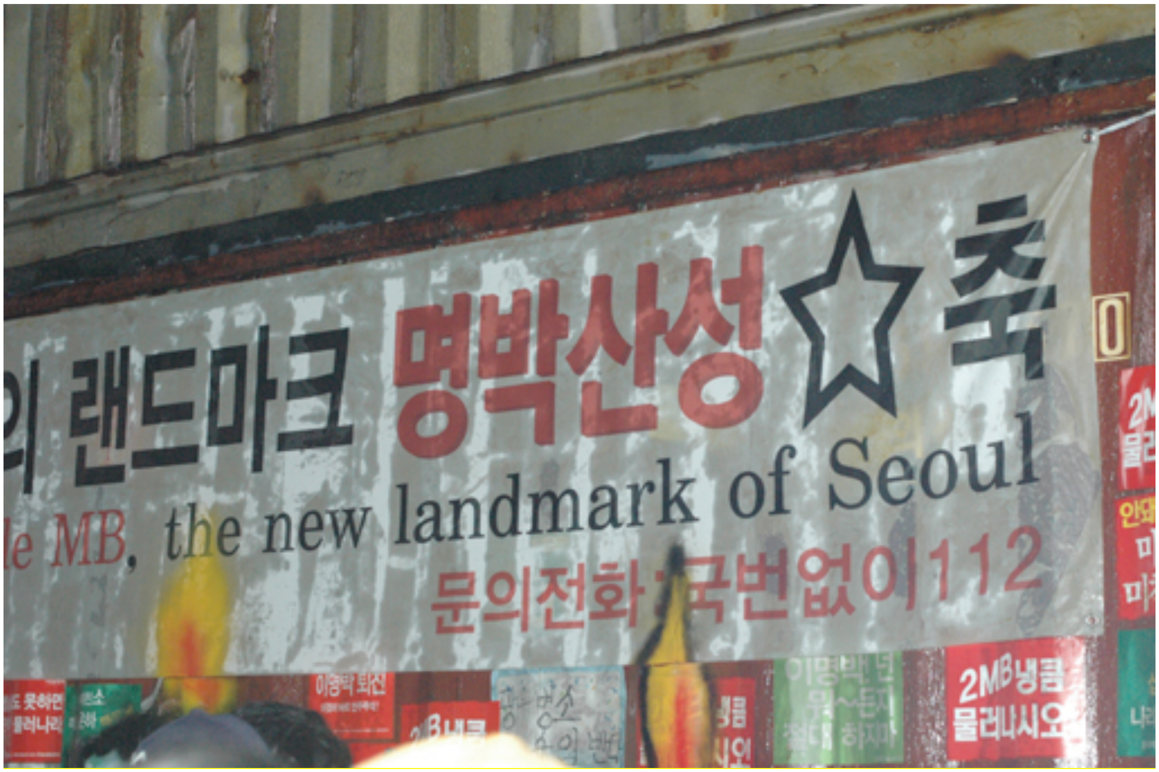

Figure 5. Myung-bak Fortress, June 10th, 2008. Photograph by Kim Yunki.

hypostatization of the president's will not to communicate with the people.[40] In response to government's use of shipping containers—ironically symbols of trade and communication—to figuratively block dialogue, the protesters re-appropriated the barricade as a stage for criticizing and mocking the government with humor and satire.

When netizens and bystanders found that the police were building the barricade, the Internet message boards were flooded with denunciations of the government:

> In the 21st commemoration of the June 10th Democratization Movement, [the government] responded with a pro-government counterattack and the container blockage. . . . However, [the container wall] exposes the incapacity of the Lee government, and as the symbolic structure of the deaf government, it will be the worst monumental blemish remembered in history.
>
> —khsyy698

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[40] http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/society/society_general/292546.html (last accessed June 2010).

> Because of the status of the hero Yi Sun-shin (the admiral who led several victories against the Japanese invasions in the sixteenth century), [the police] confused [the Gwanghwamun intersection] with wharfs, but even confusion should have some limits.
> —dolsee62
>
> The tourist attraction in the Gwanghwamun intersection makes [the site] perfect for a one night, two days' tour.
> —mirine2s
>
> Although [the police] worked hard to construct it, causing traffic jams since the morning . . . it would be so much fun if the citizens don't show up . . . . It's so ridiculous.
> —kimmin3927[41]

The netizens also gave President Lee Myung-bak nicknames such as "Welding Myung-bak" and "Lego Myung-bak."[42] Many were so "impressed" with their government's ability to build "the great monument" in such a short time that they joked that it should be registered as a UNESCO world cultural heritage site. They went on to list it as the "Myung-bak Fortress" in Wikipedia, defining it as emblematic of "Lee Myung-bak's style of communication."[43] The barricade wall, which was placarded with "2008 Seoul Landmark Myung-bak Fortress," was full of graffiti derived from leaflets: "Wailing Wall," "2MB," "Expert of Communication," and "This installation art stinks," with a dismissal notice for the president, his cabinet, pro-government mass media, and the new right wing.[44] The playful satire of the protesters was a tactic in their effort to counter the staid politics of the government, which many people viewed as either lacking imagination or stuck in a 1960s and '70s mentality in twenty-first century Korea. The consciousness gap between the government and the protesters might also be regarded as illustrating their alternative ideas about Korean democracy, and the urgency felt by the people in taking action to protect their emerging civil society.

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[41] http://www.ohmynews.com/nws_web/view/at_pg.aspx?CNTN_CD=0000924360 (last accessed June 2010).

[42] Ibid.

[43] http://ko.wikipedia.org/wiki/명박산성 (last accessed June 2010).

[44] http://www.ohmynews.com/nws_web/view/at_pg.aspx?CNTN_CD=0000924360 (last accessed June 2010).

SECOND STAGE: DEFINING THE BOUNDARY OF OUR NATION-STATE

The Candlelight protesters' attempts to re-envision the people's nation-state were manifested in their conceptualization of the barricade as the imagined territorial line between two nation-states: that of the people and that of the government of Lee Myung-bak. Their statement, "This is a new border of our country. From here starts the U.S. state of South Korea," implied that the barricade served as both a spatial and conceptual division between the two nation-states.[45] It also expressed the people's strong feelings of betrayal and alienation toward their own government, which had a more amicable relationship with its foreign allies than with its own citizens. For them, the government's exclusion of the protesters proved its illegitimacy as the representative of the Korean people and pushed the protesters to fashion their own nation-state.

In his essay "From Their Nation-State to All Our Nation-State," the philosopher Kim Sangbong argues that the Korean state authority has never considered the people as citizens of the nation but rather as its potential enemies.[46] That the first mass firing on protesters by the military during the Gwangju Uprising in 1980 started with the national anthem playing from speakers in the Gwangju city hall[47] suggests that the people have never fully belonged to the Korean nation-state.[48] The state's disregard for the people and the atrocities it committed ignited their unrelenting desire to realize their own nation-state in opposition to the existing one. The Candlelight participants' nationalism can be read in a similar vein, but it is very much shaped by Korea's globalization.

Here, if dissident nationalism was created by the dissident intellectuals' engagement with Korea's postcolonial condition, one must ask: after "the first year of globalization (*segyehwa*)" was declared by Kim Young Sam's government in 1995, how might nationalism adjust and further transform itself, given that a younger generation of Koreans had not grown up under the same nationalistic state rhetoric?[49] To distinguish the Candlelight participants' nationalism from the earlier state-sponsored or dissident nationalism, I will explore the forms of nationalism manifested in the IMF crisis and the 2002 Japan-Korea World Cup Game, not as starting points for a new nationalism but as the backdrop against which the Candlelighters articulated their fiercely-felt identification as Koreans.

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[45] http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/12/world/asia/12seoul.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=candle_light%20vigil%20protests%20seoul&st=cse; http://www.ohmynews.com/NWS_Web/View/at_pg.aspx?CNTN_CD=A0000923096 (last accessed June 2010).

[46] Kim Sangbong, "Keudeu rui narae sei uri modu ui nara ro," in *5.18 keurigo yeoksa: keudeu rui narae seo uri modu ui nara ro* [May 18th and history: From their nation-state to all our nation-state] (Seoul: Kil, 2008), 322–73.

[47] I could not identify who turned on the national anthem at the site.

[48] http://www.518.org/main.html?TM18MF=A030103 (last accessed June 2010).

As discussed earlier, the IMF crisis plunged Korean society into "IMF nationalism," which I define as the people's desire to recover their earlier economic achievements, because many people felt that Korea's economic sovereignty was now threatened and its national pride deeply wounded. The day the relief package was received was equated with the day Japan annexed Korea. In addition, like the 1907 National Debt Compensation Movement to gain economic independence from Japan, Koreans participated zealously in the pan-national movement for the revival of the national economy.[50] In this nationalistic atmosphere, which was continuous with that of the earlier nationalism, Jo-Han Hye-jung observed the reaction of teenagers:

> What I found interesting was the reactions of teenagers. [The teenagers] who are eating pizza and hamburgers, enjoying Japanese comic books, and following foreign fashions actively participated in "the patriotic march." On the one hand, I was amazed at the power of media, which pushed them [in that direction]. On the other hand, I was surprised at the fact that the consumerist new generation, who did not seem to be interested in patriotism, participated so readily in the patriotic march. . . .
>
> [I am sure that] you have seen the teenagers wearing backpacks with the Korean national flag. . . . Although it is true that coercion is at work in the

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[49] Kang, *Hanguk hyondaesa sanchaek. 1990-yondae pyon,* no. 2, 146-151.

[50] The National Debt Repayment Movement in 1907 was a national movement aimed at repaying the Korean empire's debt, which was thirteen million won, through individual donations. Begun in Taegu by Seo Sangdon, Kim Kwangjae, Park Haeryeong, and others in February 1907, the movement spread nationwide. Many newspapers such as *Taehan Maeil Sinbo*, *Hwangsŏng Sinmun*, *Jaeguk Sinmun*, and *Mansebo* actively participated in collecting funds. To repay the debt, many people gave up smoking, and women participated by selling their accessories and creating several fund recruitment centers through women's organizations. Even in Japan, many Korean students studying abroad collected individual donations. By the end of May, the Korean people had collected more than 203,000 won. Nevertheless, the Japanese colonial government viewed this effort as an expression of Korean nationalism and tried to impede and stifle the movement. Finally, the colonial government falsely charged the assistant administrator of the National Debt Repayment Assembly for misappropriation of funds. Because of this incident, the National Debt Repayment Movement failed.

> case, for instance, of having elementary school students bring proof of participation in the gathering-gold movement, or a school principal's "recommending" that flags be attached to backpacks, and so forth, it is very obvious that the consumerist atmosphere is being changed to a nationalistic atmosphere. To be precise, [they] could [now] consume things that contain nationalistic content."[51]

Jo-han suggests that the teenagers' consumerist attitudes allowed them to buy into nationalism eagerly, and to appropriate the national flag like it was any other brand. Although such an interpretation is plausible, the questions remain: what is nationalism's appeal to Korean teenagers? And does their participation in patriotic rituals in fact indicate some change in Korean nationalism? Before I answer these questions, I want to explore the 2002 Japan-Korea World Cup tournament as a means of explaining changes in the people's attitudes toward the Korean nation-state.

During the World Cup tournament in 2002, hundreds of thousands of Koreans, old and young, men and women, spilled into the street, wearing red and creatively wearing or displaying the national flag and the Taegeuk symbol. The national flag, which people once rejected as a symbolic instrument of the state's control and state nationalism, had become fashionable. The city hall in Seoul, the symbolic site of the democratization movement during the 1980s, was filled with Red Devils (supporters of the Korean team) celebrating the World Cup. As the *New York Times* reported: "On the vast city hall plaza where a half-million demonstrators shouted protests against dictatorial rule a generation ago, about 200,000 red-shirted young people roared a new set of slogans this rainy afternoon with an equally nationalistic message" (June 11, 2002).[52] The national flag and national anthem became the central signifiers for unifying the Korean people—rooting for the home team's victory—and for stirring up national pride. This is evident in the Red Devils' cheering at the soccer field:

> Right after the Japanese team had a big match in Saitama soccer field, Busan Asiad Stadium, which was holding the Korea versus Poland game, presented a magnificent spectacle of red-colored waves. While playing the national anthem, massive-sized national flags were moving in a grand

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[51] Jo-han Hye-jung, "Teukpyeol taedam: asia jisigin neteuwokeureul mandeulja" [Special talk: making the Asian intellectuals' network], in *Hyeondae sasang* (Fall 1998), 17–18.
[52] Quoted in Gi-wook Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea: Genealogy, Politics, and Legacy* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), 1.

> swell over the red-colored waves, making the stadium at once a battlefield. Over fifty thousands spectators were all shouting "Taehan min'guk" (the Republic of Korea), in red-colored shirts with the national flag in their hands. After the victory over Poland and the following games with the United States and Portugal, etc., the Red Devils colored soccer stadiums and the street with red and national flags, making it impossible to distinguish between the Red Devils and non-Red Devils. Whenever the national anthems were played, the Red Devils spread giant flags, overwhelming the opposing team even before the game began.[53]

While at least ten million Red Devils were cheering for the home team, Koreans in the United States, France, Germany, the Netherlands (the birthplace of the Korean soccer team's head coach), and other countries joined as well. The sociologist Gi-wook Shin believes that the Korean people's fervor was not only about winning but also a matter of "national pride, identity, and confidence."[54] Indeed, when Korea defeated Spain, President Kim Dae Jung declared it "Korea's happiest day since Tan'gun (the founding father of the Korean nation in 2333 B.C.)." Shin perceived that Kim interpolated Korea's soccer victory into the nation's historical narrative, thereby suggesting that Korean nationalism was deeply engrained in "a common bloodline" and "shared ancestry."[55]

However, while Shin identified the core of the Red Devils in ethnic nationalism, other commentators characterized the phenomenon of the Red Devils across a diverse spectrum of descriptions, such as "the collective hysterical symptom forgetting reality," "standardized, totalitarian attitudes which remind one of the Nazi party convention in the era of Nuremberg," "the logic of commodity form seized by colossal capital," "a sample of national pride freed from 'red complex [communism],'" and "the victory of citizenship which observed order and cleanliness without disorders."[56] Diverging from these opinions, the cultural critic Lee Dong-yeon emphasizes that the multiplicities of the Red Devils and their various desires coexisted in that national space.[57]

Among these commentators' diverse perspectives, I want to focus on a few interesting points: the young people's voluntary participation in a nationalistic event; their desire to represent themselves collectively through various forms of performance or by appropriating state nationalism's symbols for their own purposes; the Red Devils' strong awareness of what they represented to the global audience; and Korean nationalism, as it embraced the people's multiple and individual aspirations in fluid form. In addition, the Red Devils' massive cheering at city hall and their pride as citizens of the Republic of Korea indicate that it is difficult to discuss current Korean nationalism within the frame of earlier forms of nationalism. Korean nationalism, as a malleable form of imagining the Korean nation-state, was in 2008 more inclined toward re-envisioning the people's national community in the ideal of democracy by reworking many of the features already manifested by IMF nationalism and the 2002 Japan-Korea World Cup.

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[53] Yi Dongyeon, "Bulgeun angmawa chuch'ehyeongseong: naesyeoneollijeumin'ga seutairui chwihyang'in'ga," [The Red Evils and formation of sovereignty: nationalism or style and taste], *Munhwa kwahak* 31 (2002): 169.

[54] Gi-wook Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea: Genealogy, Politics, and Legacy*, 1.

[55] Ibid., 2.

[56] Yi Dongyeon, "Bulgeun angmawa chuch'ehyeongseong: naesyeoneollijeumin'ga seutairui chwihyang'in'ga," 165.

[57] Ibid., 4.

How, then, did the Candlelight protesters re-imagine their nation-state according to democratic principles, as promised in the Constitution? First, they manipulated the dissident discourse contesting the Republic of Korea's legitimacy to in turn question the legitimacy of the Lee government specifically and to drive a wedge between the people and the government. At the same time, they carefully controlled their political discourse so as not to be subsumed by existing leftist politics. Second, the Candlelighters articulated their vision of the Korean nation-state as a democratic civil society through the rhetoric of the everyday practice of democracy, as well as through multiple performances.

2.1. QUESTIONING THE LEGITIMACY OF THE LEE GOVERNMENT

In order to question the Lee government's legitimacy, the Candlelight participants revived the earlier dissident rhetoric of legitimacy involved in the foundation of the Republic of Korea and its perceived sympathy with authoritarian governments. The Koreans have long questioned the failure to eradicate pro-Japanese collaborators when the Republic of Korea was founded; many people believe that these "traitors" continued to prioritize their and their allies' interests over those of the Korean people at large, distorting the fate of the Korean nation. Likewise, the protesters perceived the Lee government's pro-

United States attitudes to be similar to the pro-Japanese collaborators' betrayal of Koreans during the colonial era (1910-1945).

The protesters' crude logic was in fact a powerful discourse of identification for the members of the Korean national community as such, while excluding the government and its history of pro-Japanese collaborations or relations with dictatorships. Many people strongly believed that the government and ruling party's half-hearted engagement in the colonial past (i.e., a few ruling party members' participation in the fiftieth anniversary of Japan's Self Defense Forces in 2004) and its hard-line North Korea policy resulted from the fact that some members of the government and the establishment were descendants of the pro-Japanese collaborators or colonial sympathizers.

Nonetheless, some commentators viewed with concern the protesters' "othering" of President Lee and the government as xenophobic nationalism, especially because the protesters had stressed the president's birthplace: Osaka, Japan. By focusing on this in their critiques against President Lee, these commentators suggested, the Candlelight participants marked the president as Japanese in order to control the national boundary or to take advantage of the Koreans' general hostility against the Japanese. However, their pun, which involved changing the name of the ruling party Hannara-dang (The Grand National Party) to Ttannara-dang (or, literally, "party for another country"), suggests that, for the protesters, "Japanese" should not be understood as Japanese citizens per se but as Koreans serving others and selling out their nation. Hence, if one views the othering of the president simply in terms of anti-Japanese sentiments or ethnic nationalism, one misses the Candlelight participants' maneuvering of dissident nationalism for an alternative agenda.

They viewed their efforts toward a democratic civil society as part of a historical continuum tracing the Korean people's unaccomplished project of self-determination after liberation. In addition, they determined the national boundary themselves based on their views of Korea's democracy: just as the Korean government treated those whom they deemed to be illegitimate with brutality in the name of anti-communism, so the participants in turn disqualified the government from their nation-state because its vision of a democratic Korean society was irreconcilable with theirs.

2.2. NEW POLITICS IN BOUNDARY-MAKING

If the Candlelight protesters excluded the current government and the establishment from their national community, they also made use of self-censoring and exclusionary mechanisms for controlling the internal boundaries of the process of re-imagining their community, just as similar communities have done elsewhere. In my discussion of the internal boundaries within the anti-government forces, I concentrate mainly on the issue of the Candlelight protesters' failure to represent the concerns of the underprivileged as well as on their discourse of purity. Here, the "rhetoric of purity" can be defined as the protesters' desire to frame their activism as an ideal practice of democratic citizenship that makes no concessions to conventional politics. [58] Although the Candlelighters controlled their boundaries as a way of creating a new politics, doing so unintentionally resulted in ignoring the interests of the people who most needed their attention and in diminishing the Candlelighters' radical potential for social evolution.

LOSING THE VOICES OF THE UNDERPRIVILEGED

Many people noted that "newness" and political radicalism were articulated when the Candlelight girls brought their voices together. Junior high and high school girls have no formal way to intervene in the political decision-making process, so their lives have been very much determined by adults' votes or the government's decisions. For instance, the students are at school from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m., including regular class time and the preparatory after-school academy. Nevertheless, the Ministry of Education has often changed the format of the university entrance exam without giving much thought to the long-term consequences, causing great confusion among students, teachers, and parents.[59] In these circumstances, the students have no say but are expected to modify their study plans accordingly. Also, in the job market, teenagers as well as those in their twenties are exposed to serious exploitation, but there was no discussion of, or consensus on, the problem of teenage labor, not to mention any guarantee of a living wage.

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[58] Yi sanggil, "Sunsuseong ui moral: chotpul siwie natanan oyeome gwanhan tansang," in *Kuedaenun we chopureul kkeusyeonnayo* [Why Did You Extinguish Your Candles?], ed. Dangdae pip'yong (Seoul: Sanchaekja, 2009), 110.

[59] For instance, if the Education Ministry suddenly changed the weighting of the components of school records that it deemed most important in its evaluations with respect to college entrance exam requirements, students needed to re-focus their studies in order to be competitive.

In the Candlelight cultural festivals, these teenagers, who had not been heard, voiced their concerns—concerns shared deeply by many Koreans—with acerbic wit. The teens' emergence indicated that their subaltern position had the potential to connect the diverse issues of other underprivileged groups (e.g., temporary workers and migrant workers) through their shared, unacknowledged rights as citizens. However, as many observers complained, instead of listening to these grievances, the parent generation of the Candlelight Girls took over the students' activism and changed it into a middle-class (consumers') movement with its own issues, which caused many disadvantaged people to feel alienated and ignored.

A labor union committee member from the company E-Land commented on the Candlelight protesters' indifference to the predicaments of temporary workers, comprising 8.5 million Koreans:

> When I first saw the Candlelight protesters, it was literally hope itself and so beautiful. Four hundred days had already passed since our strikes started. . . . The union members who have been suffering gave a shout for joy and appeared to momentarily find hope. Seeing the great spirit of the Candlelight Vigil protests as if it overthrew the Lee administration, we had high expectations that the protests would help to resolve our troubles. . . . If these citizens were interested in the issues of precarious and temporary workers a bit, we might be able to break away from this stifling situation. . . . Someday, I wish we can all be Candlelight citizens. . . . I wish the Candlelighters would march toward us. The Candlelighters had not come to us after all. The precarious workers whom I met in the protests, which I attended ten or more times, were outcasts. . . . The people who are so passionate about mad cow disease, which will break out in ten years, are indifferent to the problems of precarious and temporary workers whose right to live is taken away.[60]

Based on this account, it is likely that many temporary workers did not feel part of the Candlelight protesters' new community, no matter how much they wanted to be. Much of the protesters' agenda was so closely related to middle-class issues that these workers had little reason to care.[61]

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[60] Yi Namshin, "Areumdaun chotp'uri homebeo maechang'ero oji aeun kkadalgeun: picheong' kyujik tujaeng saeopjang nodongjaga bon chotpul" [The Reason Why the Beautiful Candlelighters Did Not Come to Homever: The Candlelighters from the Perspective of the Precarious Workers in the Strike Site of Homever], in *Naei reul yeoneun yeoksa* 33 (Fall 2008), 145–47.

However, this does not mean that the Candlelight protesters intended to exclude other underprivileged Koreans in the protests; many groups of citizens freely joined the protests by merging their issues with those of the protesters, as in the case of the Freight Carrier Solidarity. It is not my intention to argue that the exclusion of temporary workers was owing to their incapacity to incorporate their issues in the general agenda of the Candlelight Vigil protests. I refuse to perceive the Candlelight protesters' innate conservatism as stemming simply from the middle-class status of many of its participants; instead, I contend that the perceived exclusivity might have resulted from the fact that the Candlelight participants were not successful in conceptualizing neoliberal problems at the level of socioeconomic structure, or from their hesitation to do so because such an attempt could be easily seen as the expression of an ideological inclination toward the left, relegating the protesters' efforts to the binarism or partisanship of conventional politics.

In addition, the Candlelight protesters' conceptualization of the neoliberal problem in terms of everyday issues is very much circumscribed by the nature of the online network that the protesters actively mobilized for their activism. The online network connects diverse issues in a horizontal and endlessly open manner instead of linearly and hierarchically. The difference between the horizontal and linear ways of linking various issues might be translated into dissimilarity between the Candlelight protesters and the earlier dissidents in their approaches to South Korea's socioeconomic problems.

While the dissidents attempted to understand the Korean people's predicament at the structural level, in the information age the protesters connect their issues through the online network. The Candlelighters' careful positioning (bringing the neoliberal problem home in the form of everyday issues), as well as their networking, helped to create a fluid dialogical space between various groups of citizens and introduced a new way of working on varied yet intertwined issues, embracing the painful realities of other citizens as their own. Nevertheless, by addressing their deteriorating lives as everyday issues rather than as a fundamental structural problem, the Candlelight protesters could not effectively intervene in the current socioeconomic system and failed to represent the needs of those who were suffering most from economic insecurity.

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[61] Ibid.

"THE RHETORIC OF PURITY"

At the heart of the Candlelight protesters' insistence on looking at neoliberal problems as everyday issues was their strong desire to envision their politics as distinct from existing state and progressive politics. In the development of the Candlelight Vigil protests, many people pinned their hopes on the emergence of a new democracy through discussions on Daum Agora, through the people's voluntary participation in politics, and through the political discourses that directly touched on people's everyday lives. Hence, by aligning the Candlelight participants' national community with the image of ideal communities, they wanted their activism and community to be conceived as the vanguard of a new social experiment. They refused to fall in line with conventional politics, a system of which they were suspicious and which they detested.

The Korean scholar Yi Sanggil explains the protesters' desire to create new political ideals and subjectivities through the concept of "the morals of purity." He argues that the morals of purity operated at multiple levels in imagining and realizing the Candlelighters' community, as well as in their interaction with the dominant discourses.[62] Nevertheless, I will limit my discussion of the Candlelight participants' refusal to be "political" in relation to the rhetoric of purity and its limitations.

Yi Sanggil approaches this ambiguous concept, the rhetoric of purity, by looking at the icon of the Candlelight Vigil protests: the Candlelight Girl. The Candlelight Girl is a representation of a cute young girl in a school uniform, presumably a junior high school student, who initiated the Candlelight cultural festivals. The Candlelight Girl's stylized body, innocent yet determined facial expression, rosy cheeks, and the large candle she holds all help to evoke feelings of innocence and youth that made adults feel protective.[63] The Candlelight Girl was popular among various groups of Candlelight protesters, and its image was widely circulated on stickers, leaflets, posters, T-shirts, and so forth. Along with the

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[62] Yi, "Sunsuseong ui moral," 96.

[63] Ibid., 102.

Candlelight Girl's image of purity, the junior high and high school girls' active participation in the Candlelight cultural festivals helped people to conceptualize a new democracy in everyday civil discourse: the "adults" were learning a new way of engaging in politics while they were listening to other people's diverse issues with laughter, applause, and sympathy.

Although Yi Sanggil's reading of the Candlelight Girl is convincing, I wonder if it brings the movement back to the grown-ups' bosom and too easily equates the students' self-representative activism with their image of "purity" and "innocence." Instead, I argue that the Candlelight Girl should be understood more in terms of "playfulness" and "mischievousness," distinctive qualities of children as well as of the Candlelight participants' engagement in current politics. Thus, I propose that the ideas of "purity" and "innocence" should be examined in the context of the Candlelighters' playful activism and their self-representative democracy.

It is precisely the protesters' "playfulness," as manifested in their civil discourse, that enabled the people to conceive of its political engagement as "pure," in diametrical opposition to the

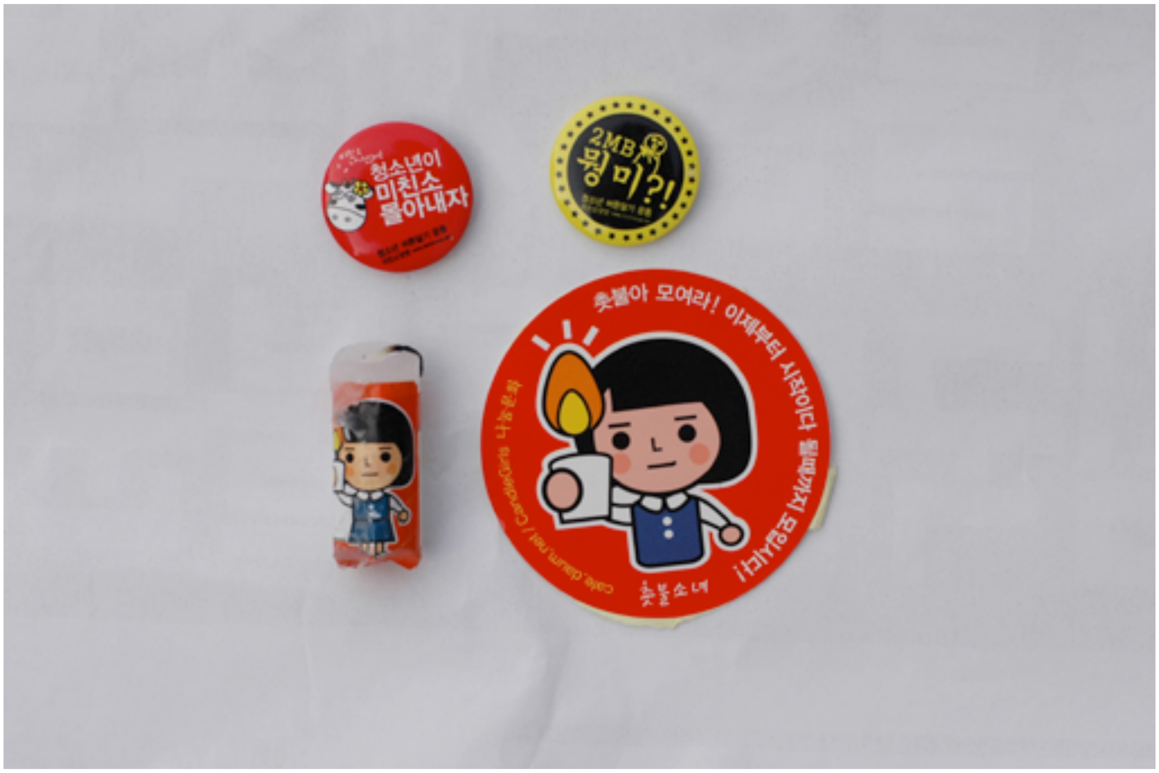
청소년이
미친소
몰아내자
2MB
뭥미?!
촛불아 모여라! 이제부터 시작이다 끝까지 모입시다!
촛불소녀
cafe.daum.net/Candlegirls

Figure 6. The Candlelight Girl. Photograph by Kim Yunki.

existing political system as something "impure" or "contaminated." "political" and "ideological," relating these terms to conventional politics. They envisioned their activism as standing outside the existing political ideology and structure. The conceptualization of their activism as pure, however, influenced and limited their tactics and the subjects of their debates. For instance, many protesters strongly opposed the use of violence, distinguishing themselves from earlier protesters. Moreover, by rejecting active collaborations with existing political factions, the Candlelight protesters significantly decreased the potential for change within the larger political landscape in South Korea. As Yi Sanggil cautiously muses, this is why the protesters might not be able to do more than share the fundamental principles of democracy, as suggested by the fact that the song "The Constitution Article One" was most often sung in the protests.[64]

In addition, the Candlelight participants' discursive logic of "pure" and "impure" or "contaminated" could be hijacked by the government and conservative news media all too easily and rhetorically altered to control the Candlelight protests. [65] The pro-government mass media deployed the rhetoric of "purity" and "contamination" as the criterion for distinguishing "good" protests from "bad" ones. For instance, a May 27, 2008 editorial in the *Han'guk Daily* newspaper showed great concern that the Candlelight Vigil protests arose from the people's voluntary expressions against government policies but were spoiled by labor unions and civic groups and became just like the general anti-government political struggles of the 1980s. The conservative newspaper *Chosun* framed the citizens' protests against mad cow as a "pure-hearted" reaction, while their overall opposition to the government's policies was "impure" and "contaminated."[66] By viewing the labor unions and civic groups as corrupt forces going along for a free ride, the news media attempted to deny the Candlelighters' radical potential. Nevertheless, the protesters' vision of their activism as "pure" could result in sustaining, however unintentionally, the logic of the state authority's suppression as an act of separating contaminants from the rest of the population.[67] It is ironic to see that the protesters' attempt to place their politics outside the framework of existing politics in fact became a good excuse for the government's usual oppression of dissident movements.

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[64] Ibid.

[65] Ibid., 98.

[66] Ibid.

[67] Yi, "Sunsuseong ui moral," 100.

THIRD: THE BARRICADE AS THE PLAYGROUND OF THE CANDLELIGHTERS

The intersection of Gwanghwamun, where the barricade stood, was transformed into the Candlelight protesters' "playground," or a liberated area in the spirit of the community formed by the Gwangju people during the May 18 Gwangju Uprising. The Candlelight participants, who had organized street protests from the direction of Seodaemun, the Seodaemun police agency office, Angukdong, and so forth, flocked to the Gwanghwamun area. In every quarter, people were participating in diverse cultural activities, such as *pungmul* performance (traditional Korean percussion music accompanied by dance) and small-scale musical performances. Also, there were impromptu forums to discuss future Candlelight activism. The Candlelight protesters consisted of various groups: college students, junior high and high school students, labor union workers and farmers, fathers and daughters, babies and mothers, nuns and monks, and artists and performers.

Although the June 10 Candlelight Vigil protests took place simultaneously in several major cities of South Korea, the focal point of the Candlelight Vigil protests during the three month-long period was Seoul, South Korea's foremost economic, political, and cultural center. As much as the lengthy duration of the protests was a major factor in the limited geographical diversity of its participants, it also reflects the aforementioned middle-class status of the Candlelighters.

One middle-aged man took a picture of the Candlelight Tower in front of the *DongA Daily News* Building, saying that he was waiting for his daughter, who would arrive after work. He commented: "[The Candlelight Vigil protests] remind me of anti-Yusin protests in my school years [1972–1979]."[68] Another citizen commented: "It is like a night market. As Lee Myung-bak became president, 'Lee Myung-bak cultural festivals' were created."[69] Also, a woman who worked in the area said: "Although President Lee couldn't communicate with the citizens, [he] helps the citizens to communicate with each other beyond generational differences."[70] This diverse body of people articulated a sense of everyday life by re-creating their daily interactions with ordinary people in a public space. Likewise, the mingling of the various generations and their memories among the protesters revived the people's struggle for their nation-state. This diverse representation helped them to conceptualize their long debate as an exercise in democratic citizenship.

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[68] http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/society/society_general/292459.html (last accessed June 2010).

[69] Ibid.

After midnight, through impromptu free debates, the Candlelight protesters decided to build a "citizens' fortress" out of Styrofoam in front of the container barricade to use as a "free-speech platform." At the Citizens' Fortress, unlike at the Myung-bak fortress, the protesters could openly express their thoughts in the form of free speech and debates. They heatedly debated for several hours whether they should climb over the container barricade. Among those who supported such a crossing was Pyun Seunghun, who argued that the protesters should do it to show their conviction: "Today, the biggest crowd gathers. We should at least pass over the line that the state created! That's our voice. The government's building of the container is itself violence. All actions which confront [the barricade] should not be viewed as violence. [I am not suggesting that] we should lift iron pipes."[71] Park Seungsu and others opposed this idea: "There is not much change if we climb up the barricade wall, but if the protests become violent, it will provoke the government, and the *Chosun*, *JoongAng*, and *DongA Daily* newspapers will 'chew' (attack) us wholeheartedly. . . . We will lose the citizens' broad support. Peaceful protests are our weapons."[72]

These conflicting positions were not resolved, so for a time the citizens tried to decide by clapping. Several participants who were trying to assert their opinions were even shouting and pushing, which concerned others. In the end, several people, mostly students, climbed to the top of the barricade and shook their banners as a symbolic gesture against the government.[73] Although they could not

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[70] Ibid.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Ibid.

[73] http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/society/society_general/292549.html; http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/society/society_general/292545.html (both last accessed June 2010).

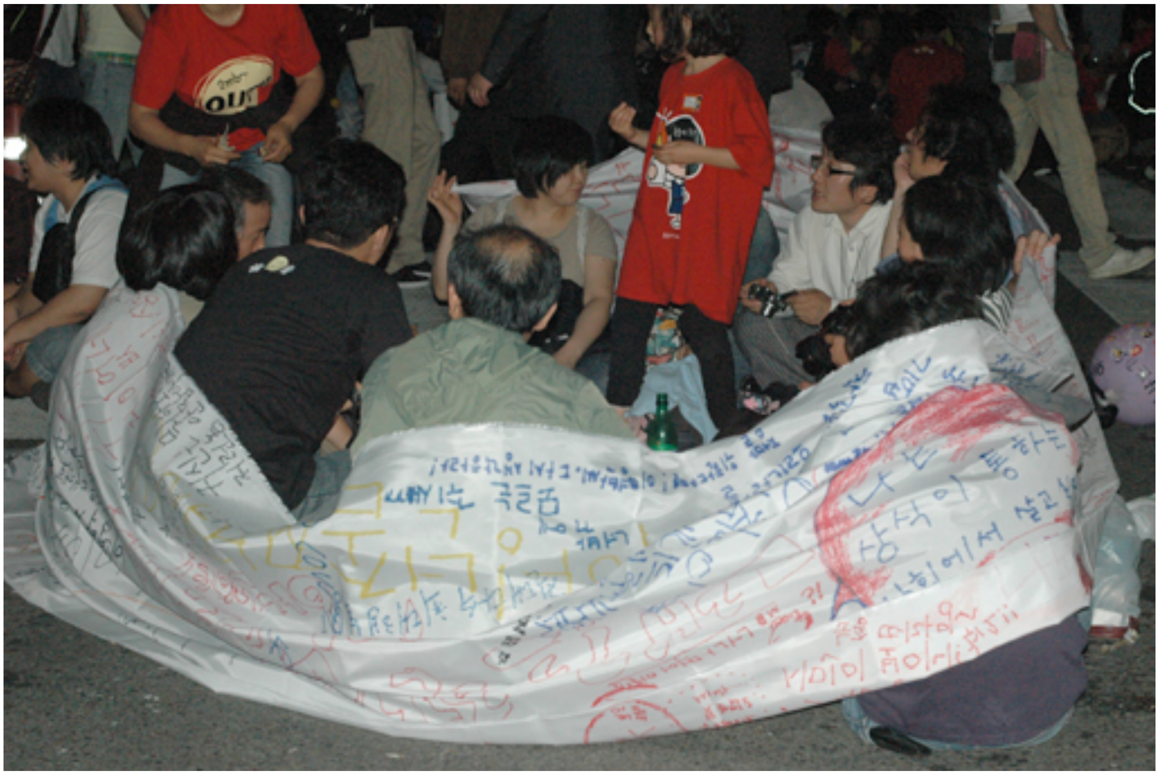
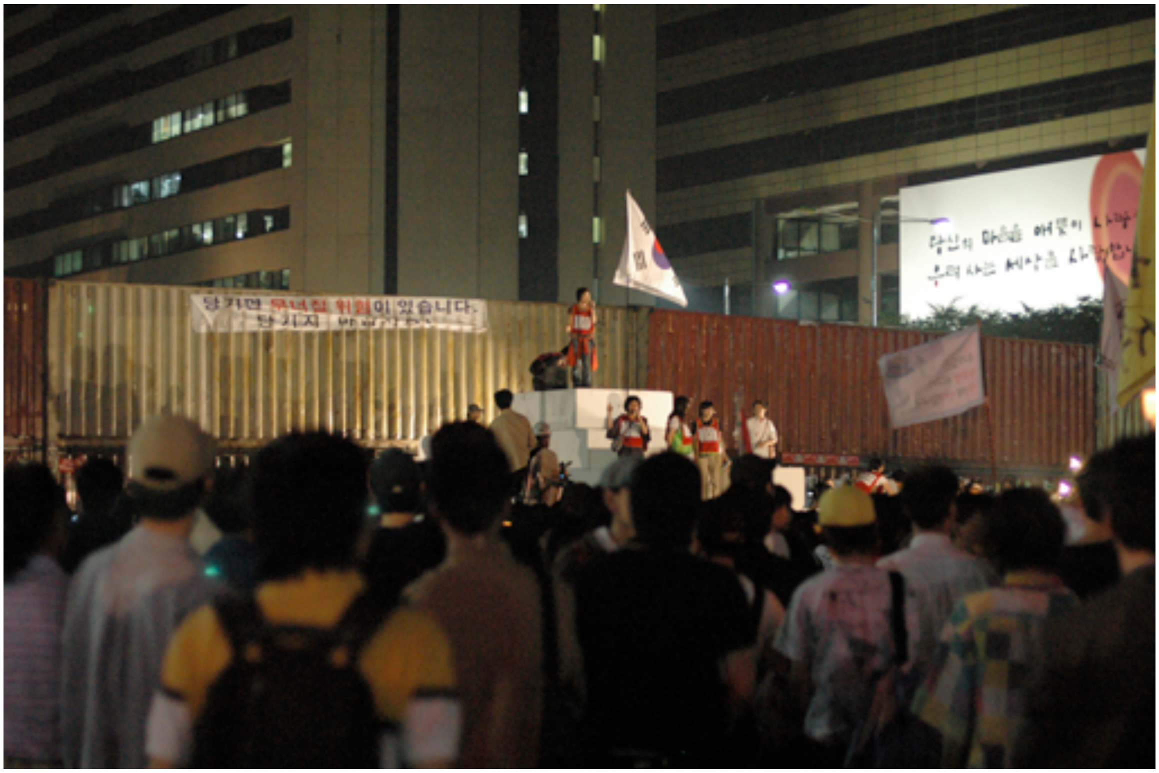


Figure 7. Gathering of Family and Friends. Photograph by Kim Yunki.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당기지

Figure 8. The Citizen's Fortress. Photograph by Kim Yunki.

reach any concrete consensus, many citizens were satisfied with the peaceful end because they had shared their opinions on the protests and had been able to influence its direction through a democratic process.[74] This discussion was not only about the citizens' collective contemplation of the future of the Candlelight Vigil protests; it was also about the democratic process of decision making. Thus, they perceived their performances as an alternative to or necessary interventions into current Korean politics.

FOURTH: KOREAN NATIONALISM AS A DIALOGICAL POINT

How, then, was the Candlelight participants' struggle to create a new national community received by the global audience? On June 10, I encountered an American man picking up pamphlets and other papers with his trash clamps, close to the barricade. Many citizens found it interesting to see a foreigner cleaning up the site, so I asked him in English what he was doing there. He said that he was practicing "love," the teaching of Tan'gun (the founding father of the Korean nation in the founding mythology), which he had learned from four years of living in South Korea. He was carrying a backpack with miniature South Korean and American flags, as if his humble act reflected his desire for resuming an amicable relationship between the two countries. After a few friendly exchanges of questions and answers with people around him, he suddenly pointed at a child next to me and began to yell at the protesters, asking why the Korean people were teaching this little child hatred and violence. He made a long, aggressive speech about the anti-Americanism of the Candlelighters without giving bystanders any chance to express their opinions. They were at first stunned by his shouting, but soon many people surrounded him in a circle, saying, "It is not about anti-Americanism!"

This brief encounter revealed the tension between the appearance of Korean nationalism and its reality and aspirations in the global era.[75] In South Korea, only in part because of its long history of state oppression, as Song Tuyul and others have noted, the national division into South and North Korea and the complex international politics surrounding the Peninsula made it impossible to easily abandon nationalism even in the global era.[76] Furthermore, the country's division has created an unusual space in which nationalism and globalism are both competing with and reinforcing each other. Hence, in the globalized world, it is crucial to reinterpret and rework Korean nationalism as a creative process of examining one's existence and intervening in the disjunctions between democracy and the market. The protesters reinvigorated their national community's enthusiasm to fight against the neoliberal restructuring of their life. However, they cautiously re-imagined it in a democratic civil society that not only embraced the Koreans' aspirations to create a just society, but which also opened itself to the possibility of global collaborations that seek to transform the fundamental condition of the economy. These goals were not explicitly articulated in the protests. However, the Candlelight protesters showed that they were interested in creating a dialogue with others and in seeking international support for their causes.

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[74] http://www.ohmynews.com/nws_web/view/at_pg.aspx?CNTN_CD=A0000926055 (last accessed June 2010).

[75] The historian Jacqueline Pak uses the idea of appearance vs. reality to discuss the prominent nationalist leader Ahn Changho's independence movement under the colonial reality (1910–1945). Pak, "An Ch'angho and the Nationalist Origins of Korean Democracy," Ph.D. dissertation (University of London, 1999), 267.

The Candlelight protesters followed news coverage of their protests in the foreign press and shared it with other netizens to demonstrate their legitimacy against the government and the pro-government mass media.[77] In addition, the coverage was used to reveal and counterattack the government and the conservative mass media's falsification of foreign news coverage. Some Candlelight protesters participated in discussion boards to explain to foreign netizens the current situation in Korea or to correct distorted information.[78] However, these discussions were contested and despised by many U.S. netizens who perceived them as demonstrations of anti-globalism and anti-Americanism by hyper-nationalistic Koreans. Like the American man who demonstrated hostility in front of the barricade wall, they perceived Koreans as "very simple-minded and short-sighted," commenting that they "had no lives and nothing better to do. . . . I wish they would fight for causes that are just and based on fact and science," and that "they hate America while they use us . . . BOYCOTT KOREAN GOODS!"[79]

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[76] Song TuYul, *Minjok eun sarajiji annueunda: chaedok ch'eorhakcha Song TuYul ui tongil sidae sesang ilki* (Seoul: Hankyŏrae sinmunsa, 2000). Song Tuyul was charged under the National Security Law with being a spy for North Korea for taking several trips to North Korea. Hwang Jangyeop, a former major politician and defector of North Korea, asserted that Song was a member of North Korea's Workers' Party of Korea.

[77] http://bbs1.agora.media.daum.net/gaia/do/debate/read?bbsId=D101&articleId=1675958; http://bbs1.agora.media.daum.net/gaia/do/debate/read?bbsId=D003&articleId=850128; http://bbs1.agora.media.daum.net/gaia/do/debate/read?bbsId=D003&articleId=844242 (last accessed June 2010).

[78] http://www.boston.com/bigpicture/2008/06/south_korean_protests_over_us.html#comments; http://www.newsweek.com/id/157506 (both last accessed June 2010). I saw some Candlelighters' interventions at the discussion board on www.washingtonpost.com as well, but I could not retrieve it.

In fact, these charges frame the anti-Candlelight protests within the earlier conflicts between nation-states. Those leveling the charges failed to see the United States as a global hegemonic power and so could not recognize the Candlelighters' Korean nationalism as an intervention into multiple complications created by the contentious relationship between nationalism and transnationalism. In spite of the protesters' eagerness to communicate with the international public, it would be too optimistic to say that they intended to expand their protests into an international people's movement. However, the Candlelight participants did demonstrate the potential for transforming nationalism into a point of convergence for transnational collaborations to re-envision the globalized world and to work for a common political agenda in a collective manner.

CONCLUSION

The Candlelight protesters engaged in a collective re-envisioning of the Korean national community to create a democratic civil society and to intervene in the debilitating process of neo-liberalism. To re-imagine their nation-state, the protesters mobilized their form of nationalism by selectively engaging with earlier forms of dissident nationalism, while opening up new possibilities for international collaborations and overcoming some of the limitations of dissident nationalism. However, we can also see that the Candlelighters ran up against certain limits: a lack of attention to the representation of the underprivileged, their failure to form a new political subjectivity, a new political figure that could act on and transform twenty-first-century Korea's socioeconomic system; the Candlelighters' appropriation of the Constitution as justification for their activism and their lack of political alternatives;[80] and the separation between the progressives and the citizens, as well as that between the representative political system and street politics. Following the Candlelight Vigil protests, some were skeptical of the extent to which the movement had advanced the democratization of society, particularly because of the tightened government control that followed, including the pressing of charges against some "violent" Candlelight protesters and the revised media legislation that followed. Despite these challenges, the Candlelight Vigil protests demonstrated great potential to radically rethink and reformulate nationalism as a new people's collectivism in the globalized world.

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[79] http://www.boston.com/bigpicture/2008/06/south_korean_protests_over_us.html#comments; http://www.newsweek.com/id/157506 (both last accessed June 2010).

[80] Yu Yeongju, "Chotpul minjuchuui chachihal taeani inneunga" [The Candlelighters' Democracy: Are There Alternatives?], in *Kuedaenun we chopureul kkeusyeonnayo* [Why Did You Extinguish Your Candle?], ed. Tangdae pip'yeong (Seoul: Sanchaekja, 2009), 84.

Between Absence and Presence: Exploring Video Earth's *What is Photography?*

Rika Iezumi Hiro

WHAT IS PHOTOGRAPHY?: ABSENCE

What is Photography?/Shashin to wa nanika? (hereafter, *What Is Photography?*)[1] is a 1976 video performance made by Tokyo-based video artist and film animator Nakajima Kō and Video Earth, the video art collective co-founded by Nakajima in 1973 (fig. 1).[2] Mimicking a commercial photo shoot with a nude female model, the work consists of a double-channel projection featuring a 26 minute black-and-white video of the performance on the left, and an approximately 21 minute "slide show" of black-and-white photographs of the model taken by the participating artists on the right. In its ideal presentation, a wall display of selected photographic prints should accompany the projection. The work was screened only once in Japan, without any photographic prints, as part of a self-curated video screening event at a "rental gallery"-cum-auditorium at the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum in the late

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* In addition to the conference organizers and participants in "Spectacle East Asia: Translocation, Publicity, and Counterpublics," I would like to thank Richard Meyer and Reiko Tomii for their insightful comments and suggestions. In this paper, Japanese personal names are listed in the traditional order: last name first, followed by given name. Exceptions are applied to those who live and work outside Japan, such as Yoko Ono and Shigeko Kubota. Macrons are used to indicate prolonged vowels, such as ā, ē, ī, ō, ū. All translations from Japanese texts are by the author unless otherwise noted.

[1] The original title of the work, given both in Japanese and English, is *Shashin to wa nanika?/What is a Photograph?* However, in light of its grammatical slip, I adopt in this paper an alternative title, *What Is Photography?*, which more accurately reflects the conceptual nature of the Japanese title, *Shashin to wa nanika*. This alternative English title is also taken from Nakajima's biography, which appears in *New Video: Japan*, ed. Barbara London (New York: The American Federation of Arts, 1985), 25.

[2] Video Earth, initially founded in 1971, did not become active until its official launch in 1973. For Nakajima's biographical information, see: Christophe Charles, "Media Arts in Contemporary Japan," Ph.D. dissertation (University of Tsukuba, Department of Art and Design, 1996). Video Earth is also referred to as Video Earth Tokyo; however, to emphasize their projects outside Tokyo such as overseas workshops and programs for a cable television station in Shizuoka Prefecture, I have adopted Video Earth in this paper.

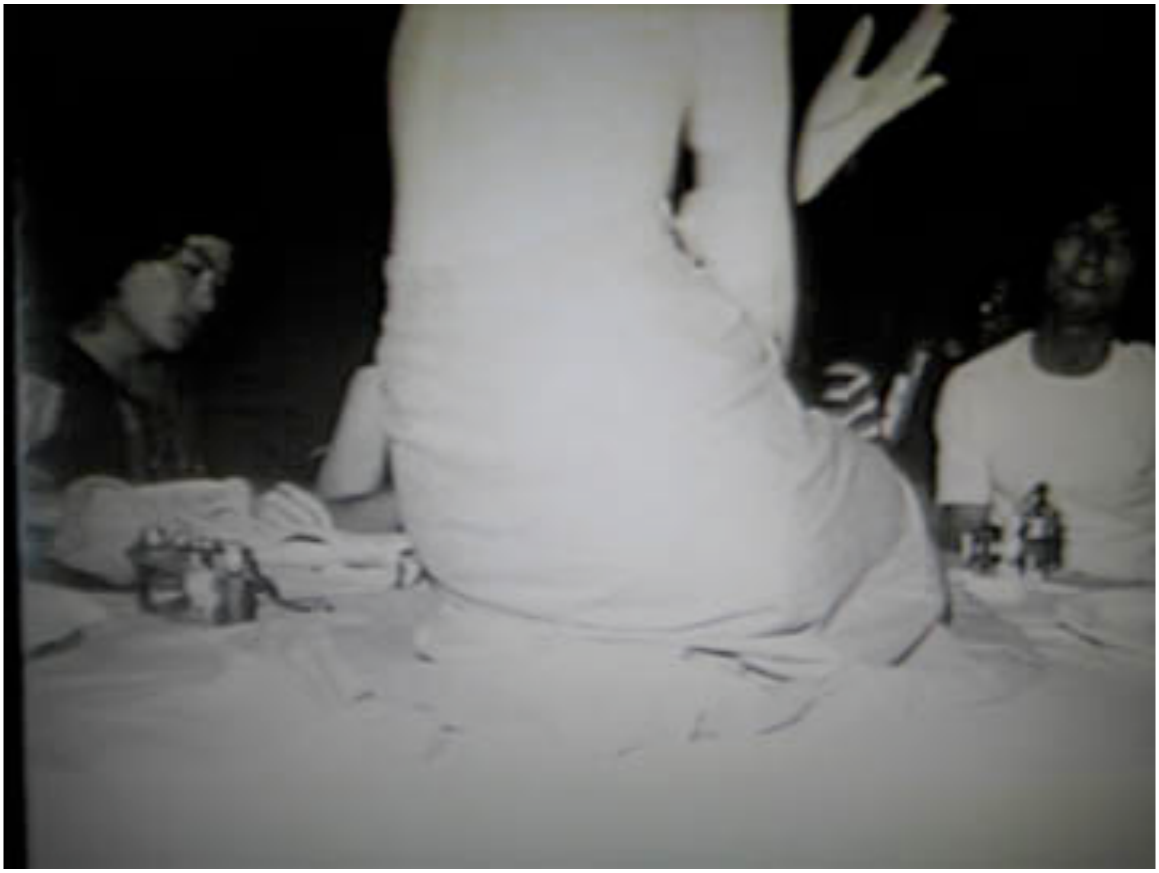

Figure 1. Nakajima Kō and Video Earth, *What Is Photography?/Shashin to wa nanika?*, 1976.

1970s.[3] However, there was no "public," so to speak, in this audience, which was wholly comprised of the group's members and their close friends. Furthermore, the entrance was tightly restricted in order to prevent possible complaints about "obscenity" in the video, with no sign announcing the screening.[4]

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[3] "Rental galleries" were a popular practice at Japanese public museums, in which a space was available for artists and community-based art circles for a nominal rental fee.

[4] Nakajima, interview with author, October 28, 2008. The screening date is yet unknown. The artist remembers that it was in circa 1975, which was in fact before the production of *What Is Photography?* The chronology of Japanese video art in the exhibition brochure of *Japan Video Art Festival*, one of the first international exhibitions on Japanese video art organized by Centro de Arte y Comunicación (CAYC) in Buenos Aires in April 1978 lists several entries pertinent to Video Earth: In 1975 the collective conducted the first Video Life Shop and in 1976 it carried out an event titled "Video Menu" at Contemporary Music festival. However, there is no mention about the screening at Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum. In addition, *Bijutsukan nyūsu* (*Museum news*), the Museum's monthly newsletter, which normally includes the exhibition listings of their rental galleries, does not have any entry pertaining to Video Earth.

What Is Photography? is a work that has been "absent" from the public view in more than one way. Nakajima explains that he had forgotten about the work because "no one [had] asked about the work or about the collective" for a while.[5] The artist's claim to forgetfulness aside, *What Is Photography?* was kept deep in storage for several other reasons. Nakajima himself points out a few problems in showing the work publicly: the apparatus of double-projection, particularly around the mid-1970s, was difficult to facilitate. Also, the showing of genitalia—or more precisely, of pubic hair—in public was controversial.[6] In a sense, the artist had censored his own work.

As suggested in the title, *What is Photography?*, the work itself addresses a set of conceptual issues about the materiality and conditions of photography vis-à-vis video, and the relationship between still and moving images. However, Nakajima's explanation for not showing the work raises another set of questions that demands investigating the socio-cultural context in which the work was situated at the time. Although Nakajima is not a prominent figure in the current art scene, he received recognition as an experimental animator in the 1960s and in video art circles, particularly in the 1980s, for his integration of computer-manipulated animation and robotics (fig. 2).[7] However, few major exhibition catalogues on Japanese video art have referenced Video Earth, and when they have, they merely touch on its name in association with

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[5] Nakajima, interview with author, October 16, 2006.

[6] The distribution and display of obscene materials in the public is regulated by Article 175 of the Penal Code of Japan (for the English translation of the Article, see: Japan's Ministry of Justice, http://www.japaneselawtranslation.go.jp/kwic/?re=02). The display of the obscene rarely became an issue in art until the 1990s. One example from the 1960s is a photograph by Yoshioka Yasuhiro, in a publication by the radical student group Hanzaisha Dōmei (Criminal League), *Akai fūsen aruiwa mesuōkami no yoru* (Red balloon or night of a she-wolf) (August, 1963). The case was dropped in the end; ironically however, the reproduction of a 1,000-yen bank note by ex-Hi Red Center member Akasegawa Genpei in *Akai fūsen* led to Akasegawa's guilty verdict for currency fraud. For further discussion on the incident, see Reiko Tomii's "Gensetsu toshiteno 'Mokei senensatsu jiken'—Genshiryō niyoru saikōsei (Model 1,000-Yen Note Incident as discourse—Reconstructed from primary documents)," in *Bijutsu hihyō to sengo bijutsu/Art Criticism and Postwar Art in Japan,* edited by the International Association of Art Critics (AICA), Japan (Tokyo: Brücke, 2007): 169-192. One of the best-known prewar debates on the display of a female body is Kuroda Seiki's painting, *Morning Toilette* (1893). For further discussion, see Alice Y. Tseng's "Kuroda Seiki's Morning Toilette on Exhibition in Modern Kyoto" in *The Art Bulletin*, XC: 3 (2008), 417-440.

[7] The Museum of Modern Art's video curator Barbara London describes Nakajima as an "international hero" in her dialogue with Nakaya Fujiko, a Japanese artist and former E.A.T. member, in "Form and Content: A Dialogue on Contemporary Japanese Video Art," in *New Tools New Images: Kunst en Technologie in Japan*, ed. Barbara London (Antwerpen: Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst, 1989), n.p. Indeed, Nakajima's work was shown internationally, including in France, Canada, and the United States.

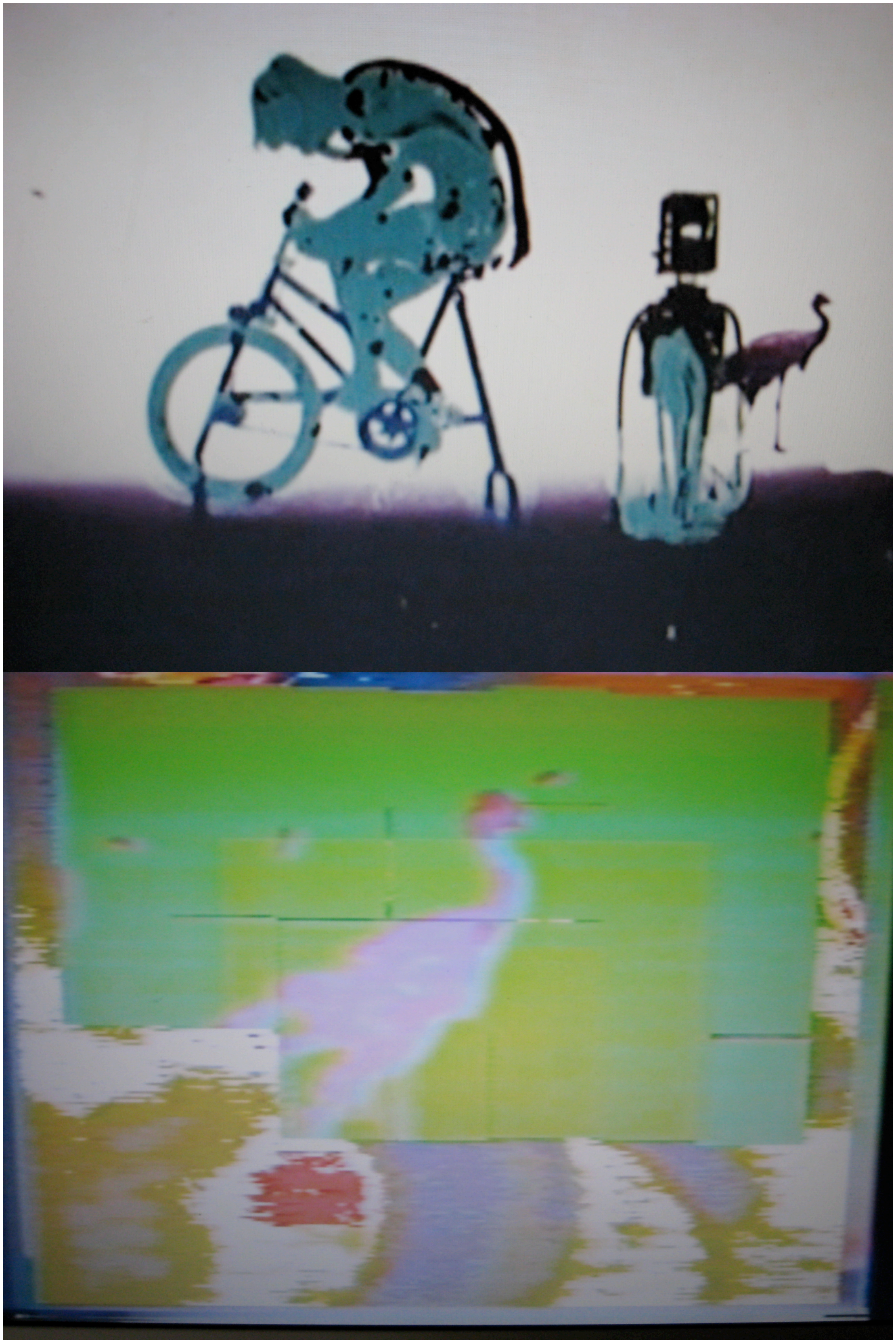

Figure 2. Nakajima Kō, *Biological Cycle*, 1971-present.

Nakajima. Furthermore, the Japanese art media paid little attention to the collective; for example, between 1973 and 1976, when the collective was at its most active, the leading contemporary art magazine *Bijutsu techō* (*Art notebook*) did not cover it at all. The lack of attention is rather curious, considering Nakajima's recognition as an individual artist and in view of the fact that Video Earth was one of very few video art collectives active throughout the 1970s.

The absence of attention raises more questions: Why has Video Earth been unrecognized? How can we deal with a work that has no public visibility? How does self-censorship function when the group's work has had virtually no artistic, public recognition? Writing about homosexuality and its prohibition in American art, Richard Meyer describes "a history in which absence matters as much as presence."[8] Partly inspired by Meyer's study and in the hope of tackling some of the aforementioned questions, this paper attempts to examine the absence of public visibility of *What Is Photography?* and the consequent absence and under-representation of the collective in the history of Japanese art. I will further explore how the work's dislocation from the public domain and its indeterminate status conversely illuminate the social reality of the time and how it ultimately contributes to bridge existing and new visual languages, as well as art and activism.

WHAT IS VIDEO?

Video art in Japan began in 1968, with a five-day symposium entitled *Expose 68*.[9] Bringing together architects, media artists, and critics, *Expose 68* functioned as a forum of cross-genre collaboration, in anticipation of the first world's fair held in Asia, the Japan World Exposition in Osaka (popularly known as Expo '70) (fig. 3). Among the participants was Yamaguchi Katsuhiro, who gave a live video performance at the symposium.[10] He had been recently appointed an executive producer of the Mitsui Pavilion at Expo '70, where Nakajima would participate as a contributing video artist. Nakaya Fujiko, a female artist-participant in *Expose 68*, was also involved in Expo '70 as part of Experiments in Art and Technology (E.A.T., 1967-present) an international collective founded by Robert Rauschenberg and Swedish scientist Billy Klüver that oversaw both the design of the Expo's Pepsi Pavilion and its programming.[11]

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[8] Richard Meyer, *Outlaw Representation: Censorship and Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century American Art* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 23.

[9] *Expose 68: Say Something Now, I'm Looking for Something to Say* was organized by art critic Tōno Yoshiaki and curator-theorist Nakahira Yūsuke. For the history of video art in Japan, Barbara London writes extensively on the early days of Japanese video art in several publications, including: Barbara London, *Video from Tokyo to Fukui and Kyoto* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1979), and *Japanese Art after 1945: Scream against the Sky*, ed. Alexandra Munroe (New York: Abrams, 1994). The most complete books on the history of Japanese video and media art to date are *Possible Futures: Japanese Postwar Art and Technology* (Tokyo: NTT Inter Communication Center, 2005), and *Retrospective Exhibition of the Early Video Art*, ed. Sakamoto Hirofumi (Nagoya: Exhibition Committee of Retrospective Exhibition of the Early Video Art, 2006).

After Expo '70, Yamaguchi used the money he had earned as Mitsui Pavilion commissioner to purchase Sony's Portapak, a portable video recording system.[12] With support from Canadian video artist and activist Michael Goldberg, who was in Tokyo on a residency program, Yamaguchi co-founded Video Hiroba (literally, "Video Plaza") in 1972 with twelve other members, including Nakaya. Its mission reflects Michael Shamberg's and the Raindance Corporation's proposal to transform this consumer technology into alternative media,[13] and Goldberg's conception of video as a communication tool that allows on-going, mutual exchanges with the public.[14] At the same time, video art in Tokyo was also founded on the artists' critical reflection on their participation in Expo '70, which had been heavily attacked by the cultural left as marking their conversion from anti-institutional and anti-modernist radicalism to conformism and complicity with the state. As social historian Thomas Havens points out in his study of Japan's non-verbal arts during the 1950s and 1960s, the avant-garde arts converged with new technology, money, and state politics at Expo '70.[15] Tokyo artists' involvement with video in the context of Expo '70, and thus the idea of communication with the larger community, led to a distinct style, markedly divergent from that of Kyoto artists, for example, whose conceptual exploration led them to experiment with this new device as an artistic medium with less interest in its facilitation of the artist's interaction with the public.[16]

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[10] Yamaguchi Katsuhiro, a veteran intermedia artist, was one of the primary members of Experimental Workshop/Jikken Kōbō (1951-1957) that embraced "total art" in its integration of art, design, music, and technology. For further study of the Experimental Workshop, see: Miwako Tezuka, "Jikken Kōbō (Experimental Workshop): Avant-Garde Experiments in Japanese Art of the 1950s," Ph.D. diss. (Columbia University, 2005).

[11] The dome-shaped Pepsi-Pavilion was a living responsive environment—a technologically operated space with which visitors could interact—and indeed an embodiment of an experimental collaboration between artists and engineers. The Pepsi-Pavilion's design, construction process, and public programs are compiled as *Pavilion by Experiments in Art and Technology*, ed. Billy Klüver, et al. (New York: Dutton, 1972). For the interaction of E.A.T. and postwar Japanese art, see: *E.A.T.: Geijutsu to gijutsu no jikken/The Story of Experiments in Art and Technology* (Tokyo: NTT Inter Communication Center, 2003).

[12] Sony first marketed a portable video camera, CV2000, in 1965 and released a portable camera with a recording kit, popularly called Portapak, in 1967. In these years, video equipment was still costly for individual artists, thus often acquired collaboratively or through schools. This was indeed the case of Video Hiroba and Video Earth. In addition, video artists frequently collaborated with corporations. For instance, Video Hiroba's first exhibition *Video Communication: Do-It-Yourself Kit* was held at the Sony Building in Ginza, Tokyo. Nakajima also collaborated with Sony in developing "animaker," the frame-by-frame animation kit for one-half-inch beta video (SL2000) and with JVC to build a computer animation device called "aniputer."

[13] Video Hiroba members Nakaya Fujiko and Kawanaka Nobuhiro translated Shamberg's *Guerilla Television* (1971), published by Bijutsu Shuppan-sha in 1974.

[14] Michael Goldberg, "Bideo de comyunikēto!" (Communicate with a video!), in *Bijutsu techō* (*Art notebook*) 353 (March 1972), 221-230.

In 1971, before Yamaguchi founded Video Hiroba, Nakajima loosely organized Video Earth. Although the group included a stone dealer and a fish merchant, the majority of Video Earth's members, encompassing both men and women, were colleagues and students at the Tokyo College of Photography, a school geared to commercial photography. Nakajima began teaching photography there in 1971, and video a year later. As the group's name implies, it aimed to establish a worldwide network through video, partly inspired by Marshall McLuhan's theorization of the "global village," and its membership eventually reached as many as three hundred, including members in Canada, China, and France.[17] Although this number may sound unrealistic, Nakajima was vigorous in his outreach attempts, primarily holding Video Earth workshops inside and outside Japan; however, it should be noted that the number includes what counted as "extended members" in Nakajima's mind—that is, all participants of his workshops were counted.

The launch of video art collectives such as Video Hiroba and Video Earth coincided with the cooling of the festive mood and technocratic imagination sparked by Expo '70. In Tokyo, Sōgetsu Art Center closed in 1971, after thirteen years of enthusiastically organizing screenings of experimental animation and film, concrete music concerts, and performance art.[18] Nakajima was one of the major contributors to its experimental animation program. In Osaka, Gutai Art Association was disbanded in 1972.[19] These events signaled a shift in contemporary art in Japan. On a socio-political level, the sanguine feeling that accompanied the robust economic development throughout the 1960s, stimulated by the Korean War (1950–53), the Tokyo Olympics (1964), and Expo '70, began to wane in the early 1970s. The oil shock was the final blow to the social and technological optimism.[20] A sense of devastation and disappointment struck the young people involved in radical politics, especially after the United Red Army incident in 1972.[21] Environmental concerns, which had been raised in the 1960s, continued to grip the nation. In marked contrast to the Expo's utopian slogan of "Progress and Harmony of Mankind," in its aftermath, Japan was fraught with social fatigue and burdened by the negative legacy of its rapid economic growth.[22]

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[15] Thomas R. H. Havens, "Art, Money, and Politics," in *Radicals and Realists in the Japanese Nonverbal Arts: The Avant-Garde Rejection of Modernism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'I Press, 2005), 205-217.

[16] A series of video and film exhibitions at the Kyoto Municipal Museum of Art, *Eizō hyōgen* (*Expression of moving images*), was a locus of conceptual video works. Among the participants were members of The Play as well as some Tokyo-based conceptual artists, such as members of Bikyōtō (Bijutsuka Kyōtō Kaigi/Artists Joint-Struggle Council).

[17] Yoshitomo Morioka, "Formative Indeterminancy in Japanese Technology Art," in *New Tools New Images*, n.p.

In discussing collectivism after modernism, art historian Reiko Tomii posits the idea of "collaborative collectivism" as one of the pivotal facets of art in Japan between 1964 and 1973.[23] This is in opposition to what she calls "exhibition collectivism," practiced by art organizations that primarily functioned as exhibition societies and salons, which were the prime force in the development of modern art since the Meiji period (1868-1912). In addition, artists involved in "collaborative collectivism" often carried out their projects in the public sphere outside of cultural institutions, in places such as streets and stations, and in doing so challenged the modern institutions of art.[24] The number of artists' collectives was in decline in the 1970s, in contrast with the thriving radical collective experimentation of the previous decade. However, the spirit of "collaborative collectivism" was also manifest among these video collectives that emerged in the early 1970s and more so in the late 1970s. However, more pronounced with Video Earth and Video Hiroba was a sense of urgency: their mission was to revive a dialogue with their immediate community, investigate everyday realities rather than technocratic utopianism, and, though belatedly, respond to the political activism that had characterized the late 1960s.

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[18] The activities of the Sōgetsu Art Center are chronicled in Ashiya City Museum Art & History and Chiba City Museum of Art eds., *Sōgetsu to sono jidai 1945-1970* (Sōgetsu and its era 1945-1970), exh. cat., Ashiya and Chiba: Sōgetsu to Sono Jidaiten Jikkō Iinkai, 1998.

[19] The Kansai region encompasses Osaka, Kyoto, and Kobe.

[20] In response to the U.S.'s support of the Israeli military in the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC) instituted an oil embargo from October 1973 to March 1974. In the context of Japan, this embargo accelerated price inflation and resulted in the end of Japan's "post-war economic miracle," which began in 1955.

[21] The student protesters in Japan particularly objected to the second renewal in 1970 of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty (Anpo), which allowed a U.S. military base to be stationed in Japan.

[22] For general information on Expo '70, see for example: the site of the Commemorative Organization for the Japan World Exposition '70. http://www.expo70.or.jp/e/index.html (last accessed February 6, 2010).

[23] Reiko Tomii, "After the 'Decent to the Everyday': Japanese Collectivism from Hi Red Center to The Play, 1964-1973," in *Collectivism after Modernism: The Art of Social Imagination after 1945*, eds. Blake Stimson and Gregory Sholette (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 44-75.

Their "collaborative collectivism" was thus more politicized and closely tied to the economics of video art, such as the necessity of collectively acquiring video equipment, than the artists' collectives discussed by Tomii. They shared spaces and engaged in collaborative practices, yet preserved individual heterogeneity—if also haphazard working relationships—within their group practices. Their political nature can be understood through one of the earliest projects that Video Hiroba's members worked on: a documentary about the sit-ins to support victims of Minamata disease, which was caused by mercury poisoning from the Chisso Corporation's chemical factory in Kumamoto (*Friends of Minamata Victims—Video Diary*, by Nakaya Fujiko in collaboration with Kobayashi Hakudō, 1972) (fig. 4). Video Earth operated much less visibly than Video Hiroba, whose programs were shown at prominent venues, including the Sony Building in Ginza, one of the prime commercial districts of Tokyo. However, Video Earth's relative anonymity in the art world might have prompted the collective to operate on a more grassroots level, or perhaps Video Earth's grassroots-oriented activities contributed to its anonymity. Interestingly, the work of Video Earth differed markedly from Nakajima's technology-savvy solo projects, as the collective more strongly embraced an activist mentality in its work. The members were involved in and videotaped anti-whaling protests held in Okinawa, Japan's southernmost island, which had just been returned to Japan from the United States in 1972; collaborated with a group of people on wheelchairs climbing Mt. Fuji (*Wheel Chair standing on Mount Fuji,* 1978); and carried out a guerrilla filming of a homeless man and his life under a bridge (*Under a Bridge*, 1976). Video Earth also aimed to expand viewership of its own works in particular, and video art in general, through a local cable television station in Shizuoka Prefecture at which one of the members was working.

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[24] Ibid., 69.

Video Earth's performances, by contrast, were more radical and disturbing than these politically conscious and socially provocative documentary video works. For instance, they rolled a gigantic ball, like the kind multiple schoolchildren roll together at sports days, on the streets of Shinjuku, one of the busiest areas of Tokyo (date unknown); stole electricity from a bullet train to cook rice while traveling in it (ca. 1975); and had a mobile picnic in a Tokyo subway car with unwitting passengers before running away after only a few stations [*Shokutaku ressha* ("Dining table train")/*Video Picnic*, 1975] (figs. 5 & 6). On the one hand, Video Earth used the video camera as a communication tool to promote communal awareness and alliance to challenge institutional and social norms; on the other hand, the camera functioned as a tool of creation and authoritative power, allowing it to disturb the everyday.

Figure 5. Nakajima Kō and Video Earth, *Video Picnic*/*Shokutaku Ressha*, 1975.

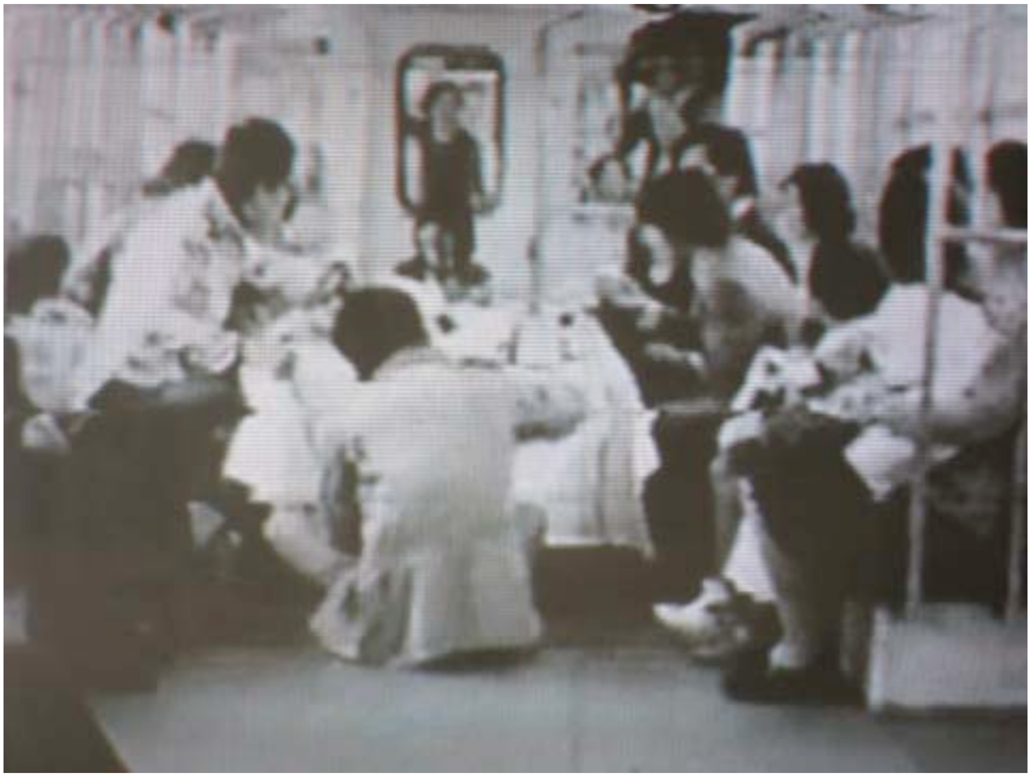

Figure 6. Nakajima Kō and Video Earth, *Video Picnic/Shokutaku Ressha*, 1975.

WHAT IS PHOTOGRAPHY?: PRESENCE

Today, it is easy to see what is present in *What Is Photography?*, which at first glance demonstrates the artistic dimension of Video Earth. According to Nakajima, the performance lasted for a few hours.[25] The black and white photographs in the slide show depict the beginning of the event, with a fully clothed female model seated on a cloth-covered table, among dinner plates set formally in a Western manner. A still camera is placed on each plate (fig. 7). More than a dozen chairs were positioned around the table for the male photographers, who were also fully clothed at the beginning of the performance. The video begins with a scene of the now semi-naked model, encircled by the photographer-members stripped to the waist, their mouths covered by duct tape.

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[25] Nakajima, interview with author, October 28, 2008.

In this feast, the model is the main dish and the cameras are utensils. Instead of tasting the dish, the photographers use the cameras to examine and record visual sensations. As in a regular photo shoot, photographers tell the model what to do. However, the model is argumentative with the photographers from the very start. She is clearly irritated by their unprofessional manners and the setting is distinctly different from an ordinary photo shoot. Many are giving directions simultaneously, with mouths covered with tape; thus, they are mostly incapable of articulating the poses they want. At one point, when the photographers order the model to take off her panties and stand on the table, she responds: "I am a model . . . not a stripper. . . . I didn't come to show [you my genitals]." She emphatically states that she is not an object of display for the photographers' visual pleasure. After some back-and-forth, the photographers take off their pants and stand up to confront her eye to eye (fig. 8). The conventional equilibrium between the model, as speechless object, and photographers is thus broken, and the model orders them to be naked as well.[26] Though it is hard to determine who first suggests that she shoot a video, we see the photographers seated on the table while the model freely walks around them with a video camera in her hand (fig. 9). In contrast, she never holds a still, photographic camera. Then, all of the participants mock the regular studio shooting, posing in turns in front of a plain backdrop with and without the model. Toward the end of the video, we see a group of cameramen tossing the model up in the air as if it were her glorious moment, a celebratory gesture typically associated with sporting victories in Japan.

According to Nakajima, most of the participants in *What Is Photography?,* especially the nude model, received no prior instruction about the session, and none of Video Earth's female members participated in the performance.[27] In other words, Nakajima only invited the male members to the session. The unexpectedly "excited" photographers shot close-ups of the model's body parts, such as her breasts and buttocks.[28] And, indeed, most of the photos in the slide show are fragmented, faceless body parts. However, instead of sexual politics or the objectification of the female body, which I will discuss later, Nakajima's initial intention was to examine

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[26] Nakajima, interview with author, October 16, 2006.
[27] Nakajima, interview with author, October 28, 2008.
[28] Nakajima, interview with author, October 28, 2008.

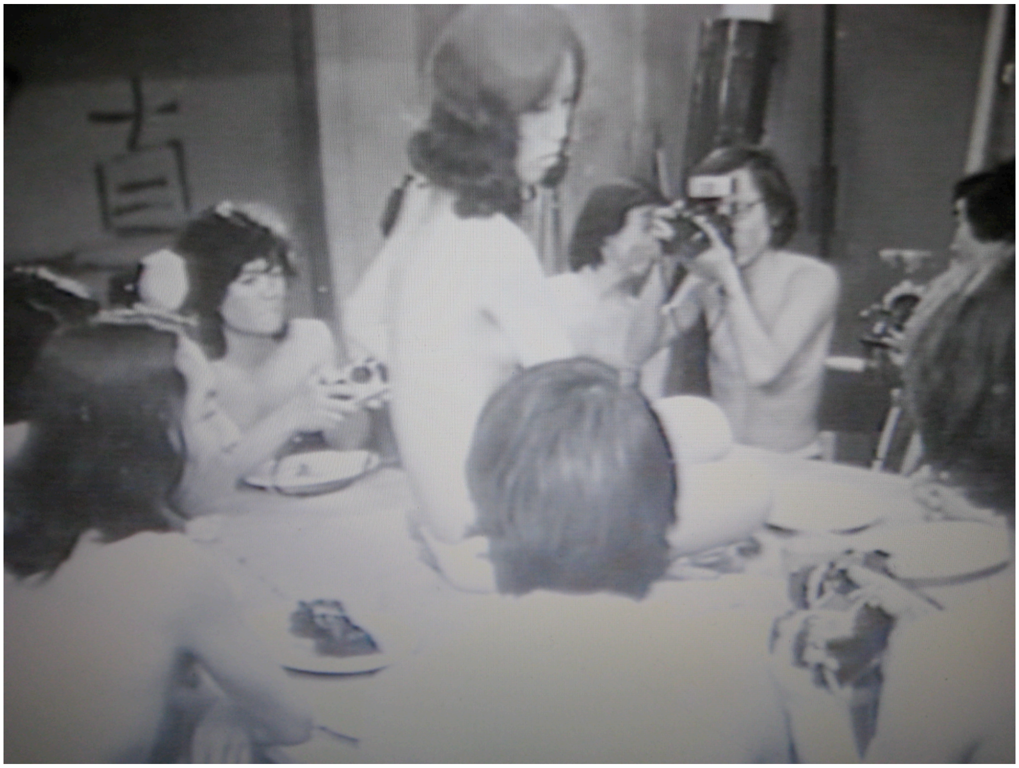

Figure 7. Nakajima Kō and Video Earth, *What is Photography?*, 1976.

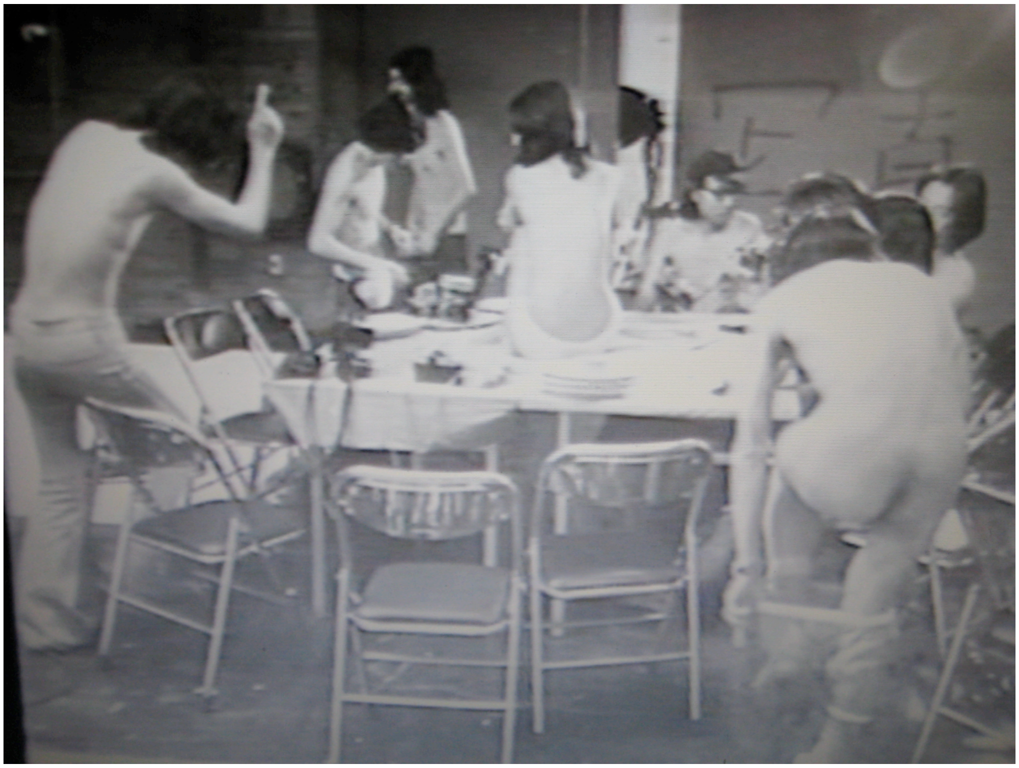

Figure 8. Nakajima Kō and Video Earth, *What is Photography?*, 1976

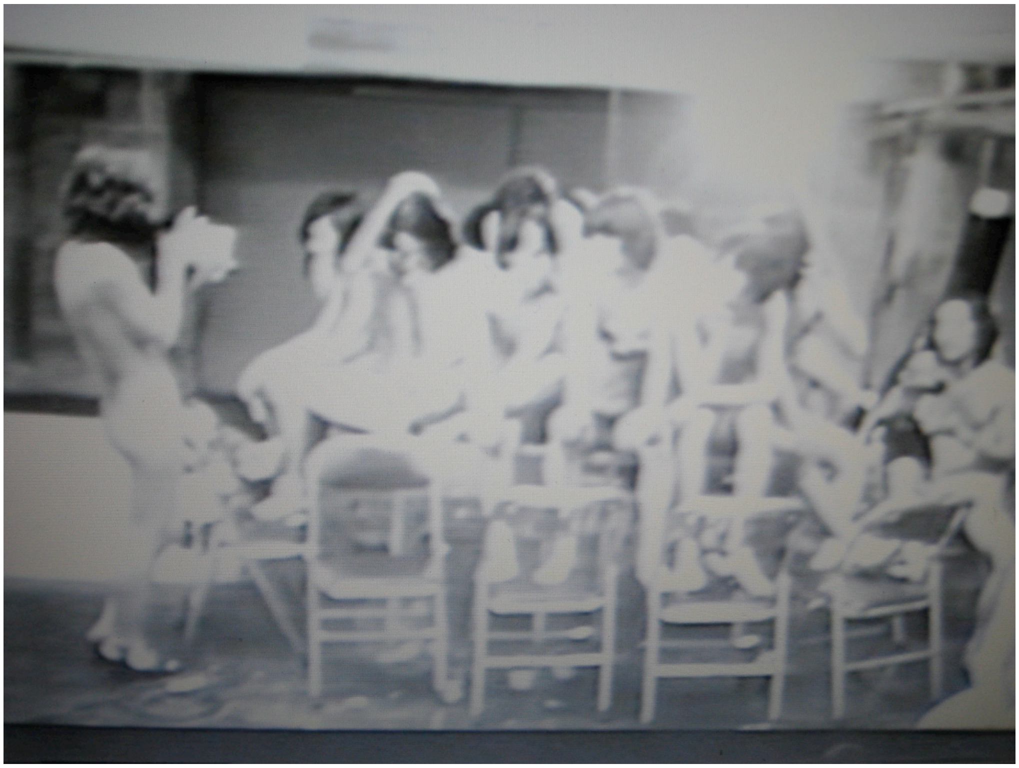

Figure 9. Nakajima Kō and Video Earth, *What is Photography?*, 1976.

whether and how the intervention of video would alter the photographic medium itself and illuminate the complementary nature of the two mediums. Nakajima has characterized the difference between photography and video thusly: while a photographic camera is suitable for capturing the special moment, or "the decisive moment" in Henri Cartier-Bresson's words, a video camera allows an observation of the natural and the everyday.[29] To enhance the different or complementary nature of the two mediums, Nakajima employs side-by-side dual projections in *What Is Photography?*. While the video projected on the left reveals the proceedings of the performance in its "natural" flow, the photographs by the male participants projected on the right are, in the words of Nakajima, "the accumulation of answers and results" of the photo-shoot.[30]

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[29] Christophe Charles, "Chapter 8: Kō Nakajima," in "Media Arts in Contemporary Japan," 4. http://home.att.ne.jp/grape/charles/texts/phdj/phdj-08_nakajima.pdf (last accessed December 3, 2008).

[30] Ibid., 9-10.

Each medium reveals a distinctive approach to the subject while both focus on the same performance. On the one hand, the video shows that the videographer mostly steps back from the actions to document the totality of the performance. At the most, two video cameras were used, due to their limited availability. Thus, whoever was in charge of the video was most likely asked to record the performance rather than take part in the performance. In other words, the video depicts or attempts to depict a third-person perspective, or an analogue of the spectator's view, which seems true to the model's sequence, while the still cameras maintain a one-to-one relationship with the model as she and the photographers actively participate in the performance. In this sense, the two mediums offer distinct images of the performance and are "complementary," to borrow Nakajima's term.

Christophe Charles, a French media artist and historian of Japanese media art, briefly touches on *What Is Photography?* in his dissertation on the history of media art in Japan.[31] Quoting Nakajima, Charles observes that video represents "reality," whereas "fragmented," "blurry," and "out of focus" photographs constitute objectivity. Charles writes:

> [Photographs show] fragmented, out of frame, blurry, sharp-cut, and obsessive [images]. . . . [Nakajima says that the work asks:] [w]hat do you see in-between the motion and the stop-motion? In other words, viewers are expected to choose between the reality and the objectivity.[32]

Certainly, the video shows an aspect of reality through a third-party observer's eye. However, it captures no more than one-tenth of the actual performance, which lasted a few hours. In addition, the "slide show" of photographs of the nude model reveals numerous manipulations that defy the idea of photographs being simple "answers" and "results" of the event. First of all, the intervals between the images are not consistent. While most of them are on view for a few seconds, some images are shown only for a split second, in such a way that the sequence of photographs feels like animated footage. Furthermore, a number of images are used multiple times, with their temporal order occasionally reversed and the speed accelerated or decelerated. Like the model's body, the timeline was also fragmented and rearranged. This in turn unsettles the sequence of time in the video. Finally, the photographs are filmed by a video camera after the event and projected as a continuous sequence. In other words, photographs are used to deconstruct and reconstruct the experience and memory of the event. Although some images are blurry at the start, the videographer frequently adjusts the focus so that a given image goes from blurry to crisp or vice versa. Ultimately, neither video nor photograph is closer to or further from "reality." The work as a whole—the video and the photographs in motion viewed side by side—reveals a more reciprocal and even dialectical relationship between the mediums, somewhat antithetical yet complementary to one other, forcing its viewers to move between the respective representations, between the flux of movement and the frozen moment, both video and photography. And by projecting the photographs in motion, the work complicates the simple comparison and complimentarity of the mediums.

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[31] Charles's dissertation is one of the two publications I have found thus far that examines the work of Video Earth at any length. The other is a short description of the collective's work as part of a review of Nakajima's solo exhibition in Jean-Paul Fargier, "A tombeau puvert," in *Cahiers du cinema* 321 (March 1981), x-xi.

[32] Charles, "Chapter 8: Kō Nakajima," 10.

WHAT WAS PHOTOGRAPHY?

What type of "photography" is at stake for Video Earth then? When working on *What Is Photography?*, Nakajima explained that he did not think of any particular contemporary photographers active in Japan, be they Tōmatsu Shōmei or the Provoke group (figs. 10 & 11). Still, the Provoke photographers' visceral approach, known for its "grainy, blurry, out-of-focus" (*are, bure, boke*) effect, strongly resonates in *What Is Photography?* It is thus instrumental to understand the ways in which artist-photographers dealt with imagery, particularly the way they blurred and fragmented the image and the body, and how such visuality reflects the nation's urbanization and the resulting fragmentation of social and public space. In describing the work of Moriyama Daidō, one of the Provoke members whose photographic work is most studied, art historian and curator Charles Merewether writes that the unsettling vision presented in Moriyama's photographs is a vestige of the clash resulting from the shift from pre-modernity to modernity.[33] In other words, the "grainy, blurry, out-of-focus" style emblematic of Provoke's photography, particularly Moriyama's, is best suited to portray the psychological reality and uncanny feeling about one's existence in a modern city that is mired and destabilized by political disturbances (such as student riots), expanding consumer culture, and the society of the spectacle. Furthermore, his photographs of indistinct, fragmented bodies of prostitutes reflect on the consumable and anonymous nature of the body lost in rapid urbanization. While Merewether, with reference to Walter Benjamin's writings on the *flâneur*, characterizes Moriyama's work as an emblem of modernity and by the persistent anxiety that goes with that modernity, art critic Midori Matsui suggests that Moriyama's photographs present a distinctly postmodern mode of vision.[34] Comparing them to works by Andy Warhol, Sigmar Polke, and Robert Smithson, Matsui identifies in Moriyama's photographs a rejection of the unified focus or stable subject of modernist visuality, arguing that they make testimony to Japanese culture's involvement with postmodernity without having achieved a mature character of modernity.[35]

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[33] Charles Merewether, "Roaming the Thresholds of Modernity: Exposure and Secrecy in Moriyama," in *Daido Moriyama Complete Works,* vol. 3 (Hiroshima and Tokyo: Daiwa Rajiētā

Generally speaking, grainy, blurry, and out-of-focus photographs are undesirable, often considered to be technical or amateur mistakes which undermine the mnemonic function that photography has held since its invention in the nineteenth century. It was only much later that the aesthetics of out-of-focus or blurry photography would be taken more positively, as a depiction of a movement and thus of time, or what we might associate with the cinematic.[36] Indeed, Merewether describes Moriyama's photo-book as cinematic in a sense, looking at images in relation to those on a preceding or subsequent page, and acknowledging the depiction of time even in a single photograph. Whether Moriyama's work falls under the category of modernism or postmodernism aside, both Merewether and Matsui agree that his "grainy, blurry, out-of-focus"

Seisakusho and Taka Ishii Gallery, 2003), 572. For further discussion on art and Tokyo's cityscape, see: Reiko Tomii, "Thought Provoked: Ten Views of Tokyo, Circa 1970 (1967-73)," in *Century City*, ed. Iwona Blazwick (London: Tate Modern, 2001), 200-221.

[34] Merewether, "Roaming the Thresholds of Modernity: Exposure and Secrecy in Moriyama," 573-574.

[35] Midori Matsui, "Through the Optical Net: Radical Perception in Daido Moriyama's Photography," in *Daido Moriyama Complete Works*, vol. 2 (Hiroshima and Tokyo: Daiwa Rajiētā Seisakusho and Taka Ishii Gallery, 2003), 535.

[36] Thierry de Duve, "Time Exposure and Snapshot: The Photograph as Paradox" (1978), reprinted in *The Cinematic*, ed. David Campany (London: Whitechapel, 2007), 52-61.

photographs destabilize a lucid or totalized mode of vision and psychology.[37]

When Nakajima deploys the dissolution of focus in the slide portion of *What Is Photography?*, the viewer recognizes the blurriness of its photographic imagery as the process of adjusting the video lens. That is to say, the frame-by-frame images are mostly only momentarily blurry and, when they are, they are *accidentally* so, because the video camera's focus will be adjusted so that, in the end, the viewers will see a clear image of the model's body parts. In other words, the apprehension about rapid societal transformation observed in the Provoke members' blurry images, for instance, is eased here technologically, by employing a video camera. In this sense, *What Is Photography?* not only speaks to "whether and how the intervention of a video would alter the photographic medium," but also illuminates the way in which the work deals with video and the distinctness of the filmed subject, which to say the model's subjectivity. Video Earth's photographs offer sharply focused views, yet the model's body is largely fragmented. In this regard, the filmed photographs still speak to the economy of the female body, or anonymous "prostitute as the quintessential figure of modernity," as seen in Moriyama's photographic work.[38] However, by providing the sound recording of the model's voice fighting back against the photographers and by giving the video camera to the model, Video Earth reverses the photographic gaze and the power structure latent in the relationship between the cameraman and his nude model. In discussing the encounters between photography, film, and video, David Campany points out how photography is historicized with the advent of new technology.[39] In *What Is Photography?*, the photographic camera is treated as a device of phallogocentrism: the video portion of *What Is Photography?* shows a moment in which photographers are all lined up against a backdrop in the studio holding cameras in front their genitals, seeming to suggest an analogy between phallus and camera. And by mechanically adjusting the blurry images, the video and the filmed photographs come together to capture the transitional moment in which the model moves away from being the anonymous object of the gaze and becomes a speaking subject. The intervention of a video camera evokes the presence of the female body, her empowerment and agency.

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[37] The discussion of modernism and postmodernism in Japanese art is worthy of a paper in itself. For instance, Havens observes Japanese art of the 1960s as a pursuit of "post-Western," "alternative Modernism." "Introduction" and "Alternative Modernities in the 1960s: Locating the Everyday," in Havens, *Radicals and Realists in the Japanese Nonverbal Arts*, 1-12 and 119-204. However, to clarify his claim, as well as the debate regarding modernism versus postmodernism in Japan, Japan's unique location as both colonizer and colonized should also be examined. In a somewhat similar manner to Matsui's reference to the contemporaneous characteristics of the 1960s art of Japan, Reiko Tomii postulates the idea of "international contemporaneity," initially used by art critic Hariu Ichirō, to articulate the location of Japanese art of the 1960s in the "global" art arena and discursive practice. Tomii, "International Contemporaneity in the 1960s: Discoursing on Art in Japan and Beyond," in *Japan Review* 21 (2009), 123-147.

[38] Merewether, "Roaming the Thresholds of Modernity: Exposure and Secrecy in Moriyama," 581.

[39] David Campany, "Introduction: When to be Fast? When to be Slow?", in *The Cinematic*, 10-17.

WHAT IS PHOTOGRAPHY?: BETWEEN PRESENCE AND ABSENCE

In Japan the women's liberation movement emerged at the dawn of the 1970s, which seems the perfect moment for *What Is Photography?* to have been publicly shown. In retrospect, the work reveals the male artists' *contribution* to the burgeoning feminism in Japan, rather than being merely an aesthetic challenge against the status quo that prohibited the portrayal of the genitals and pubic hair of both males and females. Why, then, did Video Earth self-censor the work? Nakajima was indeed hesitant to screen *What Is Photography?* because he feared "offending fanatic feminists."[40] By saying so, Nakajima implies that he was fully aware of the movement.

In the realm of art, feminism was not yet developed as a movement in the early 1970s. A nascent feminist consciousness in the 1960s might be gleaned in such performance works as Yoko Ono's *Cut Piece* (1964–'65) and Shigeko Kubota's *Vagina Painting* (1965), which questioned the patriarchal portrayal of femininity in Japan (figs. 12 & 13). In the medium of video, Idemitsu Mako worked on *What a Woman Made* (1973), which depicts a black-and-white abstract image of a used tampon in a toilet (fig. 14). Though Ono first performed *Cut Piece* in Japan, she and Kubota presented their proto--feminist work primarily in New York, and Idemitsu was exposed to feminism in art on the American West Coast.[41] There were also a number of female artists associated with radical art movements and collectives in post-war period Japan, such as Zero Jigen/Zero Dimension and Kyūshū-ha ("Kyūshū school"); however, they were often under-recognized even then, and continue to be so in the written histories of art that came later, compared to their male counterparts.[42] In such a cultural milieu, it was perhaps a necessary move that *What Is Photography?* was done in a closed studio space and shown in semi-private circumstances instead of in the streets of Tokyo, which were no longer a locus of protest or a site for artistic experimentation (fig. 15).

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[40] Nakajima, interview with author, October 28, 2008.

[41] Ono received a college degree in the United States and Kubota relocated to New York by the mid-1960s. Idemitsu learned filmmaking and documented the early days of the Womanhouse while she lived in Southern California as the wife of Sam Francis. Idemitsu started working on her own art work after she went back to Japan and became a member of Video Hiroba. However, her work was rarely discussed from a feminist perspective until the 1990s. In addition, a group called Woman & Video was founded in April 1977, but details about the group are unknown. For

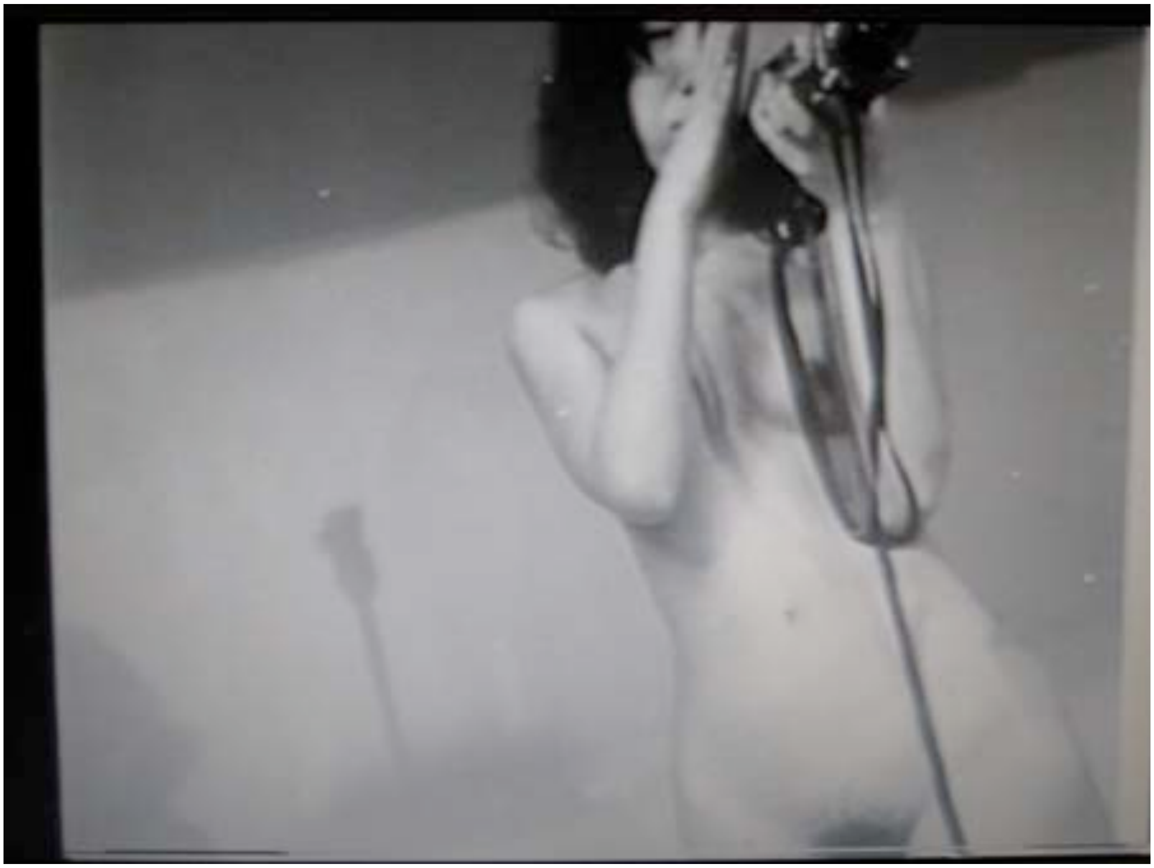

Figure 15. Nakajima Kō and Video Earth, *What Is Photography?*, 1976.

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the discussion of Ono, Kubota, and Yayoi Kusama as artists drifting between Japan and New York, see: Midori Yoshimoto's *Into Performance: Japanese Women Artists in New York* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005). For Idemitsu, her autobiographical writing provides the most complete account on her early work: *Howatto a ūman meido: Aru eizō sakka no jiden* (*What a woman made: An autobiography of a video artist*) (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2003).

[42] For further discussion of Japanese women artists in and around the avant-garde art movements, see: *Zen'ei no josei 1950-1975/Japanese Women Artists in Avant-Garde Movements, 1950-1975*, eds. Kokatsu Reiko and Yoshimoto Midori (Utsunomiya, Tochigi: Tochigi Prefectural Museum of Art, 2005).

Notably, in the same year *What Is Photography?* was made, one of the representative New Wave filmmakers in Japan, Ōshima Nagisa, was indicted for obscenity after publishing a book containing a script and stills of *In the Realm of the Senses* ("Ai no korīda," released in 1976). The film was a French production, and Ōshima, who was zealously critical of censorship, developed the negatives in France. Thus, Japan's National Police Agency could not make a case against the film itself.[43] In the publication, Ōshima writes:

> *In the Realm of Senses* became the perfect pornographic film in Japan because it cannot be seen there. Its existence is pornographic—regardless of its content. Once it is seen, *In the Realm of the Senses* may no longer be a pornographic film.[44]

Ōshima indicates that though *In the Realm of Senses* was not fully released in Japan, the knowledge of the film was already in the public domain, which made the film "the perfect pornography." In Video Earth's case, by keeping *What Is Photography?* in a private or semi-private domain, the artists made the work private and deprived it of the opportunity to be judged publicly obscene or as political art. "Censorship is a productive power: it is not merely privative, but formative as well," Judith Butler writes.[45] Though Butler's writing is primarily centered on speech, her argument for censorship as a productive power in making the speakable subject is instrumental in understanding *What Is Photography?* In short, the work's indeterminacy allows it to hover over the semi-private domain, but in doing so, it links pornography and art, and simultaneously constructs and conceals the emerging feminist subject.

In a roundtable discussion on film and video featured in the December 1972 issue of *Bijutsu techō*, the then aspiring TV director Konno Tsutomu speaks of video as "a medium that nullifies censorship."[46] In Konno's view, in photography and film, as well as in the print media in Japan, self-regulation often occurs when negatives are developed or prints are made, lest the developers or the printers should be accused of collaborating to produce pornographic images. Accordingly, the printers and developers often refuse to develop film that may be deemed pornographic. In contrast, video artists can skip the intervening process of developing and printing, and can thus be freer and more direct. Konno had hoped that the medium would remain so. Following Konno's account, in making *What Is Photography?*, Nakajima and Video Earth were faithful to the ideal of the medium of video.

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[43] Ōshima's argument was not about whether the film was art or obscenity, but "what's wrong with obscenity?" For his plea, see: "Text of Plea," in Ōshima and Annette Michelson, *Cinema, Censorship, and the State: The Writings of Nagisa Oshima, 1956-1978* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 265-286. The case was finally dropped in 1982.

[44] Nagisa Ōshima, "Theory of Experimental Pornographic Film," in *Cinema, Censorship, and the State*, 253.

[45] Judith Butler, "Ruled Out: Vocabularies of the Censor," in *Censorship and Silencing: Practices of Cultural Regulation*, ed. Robert C. Post (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 1998), 252.

[46] Based on the symposium that accompanied the Video Fair at the American Center in Tokyo (December 11-12, 1972), the article documents the discussion among Arthur Ginsberg, Kataoka Mitsuru, Konno Tsutomu, Nakahara Yūsuke, Tomioka Taeko, and Yamaguchi Katsuhiro. "Ishin denshin mienai gengo: Video o saguru" (Heart-to-heart communication, invisible language: Exploring video), in *Bijutsu techō* (*Art notebook*) 361 (December 1972), 51-52.

ILLUSTRATIONS

(See online version for full illustrations)

Fig. 1: Nakajima Kō and Video Earth, *What Is Photography?/Shashin to wa nanika?*, 1976. Double-channel projection of b/w video (left) and slideshow of b/w photographs (right).

Fig. 2 (two images): Nakajima Kō, *Biological Cycle,* 1971-present. Color video stills.

Fig. 3: Pepsi Pavilion by Experiments in Art and Technology at the Japan World Exposition in Osaka (Expo '70) with Nakaya Fujiko's *Fog Sculpture*.

Fig. 4 : Nakaya Fujiko with Kobayashi Hakudō, *Friends of Minamata Victims—Video Diary*, 1972. B/W video still.

Figs. 5 & 6: Nakajima Kō and Video Earth, *Video Picnic/Shokutaku Ressha*, 1975. B/W video stills.

Figs. 7-9: Nakajima Kō and Video Earth, *What Is Photography?,* 1976. B/W video stills.

Fig. 10: Tōmatsu Shōmei, *Protest Tokyo*, 1969. B/W photograph.

Fig. 11: Moriyama Daidō, from *Provoke 2*, 1969. B/W photograph.

Fig. 12: Yoko Ono, *Cut Piece*, 1965, Carnegie Hall, New York. Performance documentation.

Fig. 13: Shigeko Kubota, *Vagina Painting*, 1965, New York. Performance documentation.

Fig. 14: Idemitsu Mako, *What a Woman Made/On'na no sakuhin*, 1973. B/W video still.

Fig. 15: Nakajima Kō and Video Earth, *What Is Photography?,* 1976. B/W video still.

Public Surfaces Beyond the Great Wall: Communication and Graffiti Culture in China

Caitlin Bruce

The Great Wall of China is an iconic and complex sign that has been used by both state officials and Chinese avant-garde artists since the end of the Cultural Revolution to make claims about and on behalf of Chinese society.[1] This state/artist confrontation around a singular, fixed object contributes to an oppositional reading of China's public sphere, a standoff between a monolithic state and a monolithic society around a singular symbol of antiquity. Graffiti in Beijing and Shanghai complicates this reading, and throws into sharp relief China's status as a fraught territory trying to navigate the dual tides of globalization and cultural nationalism.[2] Projects like Zhang Dali's "Dialogue"/*Duihua* endeavor in Beijing and multiple graffiti interventions like those along Moganshan Road in Shanghai highlight the development of an emerging revision of Chinese public culture, with graffiti art acting as both *evidence* of and communicative *infrastructure* for often subtle but significant changes. Rather than mere embellishment, graffiti is a composition in traces: an enigmatic address by an author who is absent to an audience of unpredictable strangers. In contrast to models of "democratic" dialogue that are rooted in abstract claims to rights, practices of polemic and confrontation, and clear identities and interests, graffiti points to another idea of democratic communication. This alternative culture is always in process, based on affiliation between strangers with temporary bonds, and advanced by strategic use of available artistic resources in response to threats to shared living space such as urban renewal, cultural engineering, and national identity promotion.

This essay will proceed in two movements. First, I will analyze Zhang Dali's "Dialogue" project with attention to the way that the work both functioned to generate visibility for public spaces and places being erased by nationally-led urban renewal policy, and brought into being a provisional public through the dialogue it generated about itself. I will then turn my attention to television interviews with Shanghai graffiti artists Popil, Mr. Lan, and HKer to think through the more local interactions and communicative practices generated by a growing graffiti youth movement. Finally, I will conclude with suggestions for critical inquiry regarding visual arts and urban citizenship.

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[1] Gao Minglu, "The Great Wall in Contemporary Chinese Art," in *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 12:3 (2004), 773.

[2] Anne-Marie Broudehoux, *The Making and Selling of Post-Mao Beijing* (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2004), 15.

BEIJING, ZHANG DALI, AND AMBIGUOUS PROVOCATIONS

There are three spheres of art in China: official art, non-official art, and unofficial art.[3] Official art is monitored through artists' associations, publications, and state-sanctioned exhibitions; non-official art is regulated through markets and private consumption, and not subject to state checks precisely because it is not typically threatening to state legitimacy; and unofficial art challenges state and market authorities either through its content, mechanisms of distribution, or both.[4]

Both state-sponsored and unsanctioned graffiti art exist in Beijing. State sponsored graffiti is usually paired with advertising campaigns. Olympics wall murals and a 1.25-kilometer stretch of wall in the Chonqing sponsored by the municipal government are two examples of the former category.[5] The Olympics graffiti exemplifies the way art can be marshaled into the service of affirming the incontestability of a unified, historically continuous urban public sphere, and a particular narrative of nationhood.[6] Prior to the 2008 summer Olympics, Beijing's Spiritual Civilization Office and Radio Beijing sponsored a competition on the topic of the Olympic Games.[7] Over 10,000 square meters of graffiti was painted all over Beijing, and artists had to submit an outline of their pieces prior to painting to the organizers, thus ensuring that their pieces conform to strictures that would prevent "vulgar words and pictures" according to Radio Beijing worker Wang Chong.[8] Both individual participants (mostly college students) and more experienced graffiti crews took part, generating over 100 art works.[9] On June 8, 2009, one such event occurred on a 500 meter wall of the Beijing Institute of Technology. Graffiti crew ABS painted a 30-meter piece entitled *Duo Nan Xing Bang* (Trials and Tribulations Serve Only to Revitalize a Nation) to commemorate China's difficulties after the Sichuan earthquake: Premier Wen Jiabao lauded the piece as a "boost" for those who suffered.[10] While images of pained earthquake victims *could* be used to criticize the government's neglect and slow response time, the *framework* for the graffiti work—in the context of a contest about images affirming national unity under strict censorship—allowed Wen to predetermine the image's meaning, short-circuiting critique.

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[3] Taru Salmenkari, "Implementing and Avoiding Control: Contemporary Art and the Chinese State," in *China: An International Journal* 2:2 (2004).

[4] Ibid., 236.

[5] "Graffiti Artists Grapple with Bricks in the Wall," in *Peoples Daily China* (June 6, 2009).

[6] Broudehoux, 279.

[7] "Graffiti Artists Grapple with Bricks in the Wall."

[8] Ibid.

The arrest of James Powderly, activist and leader of the American new media group Graffiti Research Labs, when he was trying to project laser graffiti in downtown Beijing after being excluded from the state-sponsored new media exhibit at the National Art Museum of China attests to the existence of a continued divide between official and unofficial art spheres. At the same time, Robin Peckham's framing of the event in *Artforum*, that "the failed attempt speaks powerfully to political miscommunication and the growing irrelevance of political art in China," still conforms to a centralized interpretation of political practice in which artistic interventions "succeed" or "fail" instead of being part of a more complex formation of an emergent, youth-based, culturally transmitted public.[11]

According to Wang from Radio Beijing, Graffiti is also used as a promotional mechanism by businesses and the government for "city beautification." This combination of non-official and official sponsorship demonstrates how privatized art practices can depoliticize what might otherwise be incisive critiques of official policy: a logic of appropriation.[12] Song Wei, a graffiti artist, explains how official graffiti writing is a double-edged sword: participating in commercial graffiti contests allows his work to endure longer, helps to make graffiti more widespread and socially legible, and provides him with scarce and often prohibitively expensive graffiti materials. At the same time it is interpreted as an advertisement, not self-expression, and the content of his pieces is pre-determined by corporate sponsors.[13]

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[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Robin Peckham, "Best of 2008," in *Artforum* (Chinese edition, December 10, 2008). http://artforum.com.cn/words/1357 (last accessed June 2010).

[12] See: Rosalyn Deutsche, *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), 275.

Graffiti artist Seven criticized corporate sponsorship and the way that graffiti is used to market urban renewal:

> Graffiti has nothing to do with city beautification, and shouldn't be used as advertising. . . . It's self-expression and personal art practice. Western graffiti might bomb the streets with tags and fiery speeches, but it is just a new form of painting for China's artists and young people. . . . Rather than vent anger, I paint for art's sake.

He adds with a laugh: "Maybe calling graffiti 'art' satisfies my vanity."[14]

These complex constellations of official, non-official, and unofficial graffiti art where artists often voice their desire for a space between official regulation and artistic production in the name of "art's sake," while at the same time denying that it is "oppositional" or "fiery," were prefigured in the discussions that surrounded Zhang Dali's "Dialogue" project over a decade ago. With this recurrence in mind, the body of this essay will map different kinds of graffiti art to illuminate the contours of emergent and complex publics, with varying connections with state, corporate, and social organizations.

DIALOGUE

Zhang Dali's *Duihua* project provides a clear example of unofficial art that departs from a programmatic model of direct confrontation. In 1995 an outbreak of thousands of spray-painted silhouettes of Zhang's head covered the walls of Beijing. His first painting was placed at the Deshengmen flyover in central Beijing, and it was signed "AK-47," after the Soviet assault rifle. In an interview, Zhang described walking by a portrait and seeing the words "What the hell are you doing? Who are you?" written underneath. He took a photo, and titled it "Dialogue."[15]

The name of the project reflects its aim to produce dialogue about transformations taking place in Beijing. Typically placed adjacent to *chai* symbols, which signal a building's impending demolition, the placement of the raw-looking heads was intended to spotlight the rapid destruction and rebuilding that was taking place at the time without much public discussion.[16] The figures are ambiguous:[17] an abstract, empty human head without any captions or other interpretive aids that creates an affective jolt for the passerby, creating a sense of strangeness in an increasingly rationalized and modernized Beijing cityscape.[18] Zhang has painted over 2,000 two-meter high images of his bald head on dilapidated buildings, walls, and highways since 1998.

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[13] "Graffiti Artists Grapple with Bricks in the Wall."
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid.

Demolition and rebuilding have been rhythms central to major cities in China since the 1990s. Beginning with post 1989 reforms and the commercialization of the urban landscape in 1992 via Deng Xiaoping's reforms, the Chinese state has attempted to link the "market" to a "socialism market economy."[19] Since China's accession to the World Trade Organization in 2001, Chinese cities—its largest cities in particular—have undergone accelerated economic and social change. Beijing and Shanghai are experiencing a large influx of migrants due to increased foreign investment and economic growth, and since the economic openness policy of 1999, the two cities have been the main locations for multi-national corporation (MNC) relocation to China, only increasing since 2001.[20] As the hinge between state power and national image promotion, the urban built environment in China is a space where the workings of state power and capital are highly visible.

In China, the concept of *mianzi*, reputation and prestige (literally: "face"), is crucial. There exists a strong concern with international recognition, and "keeping face" requires constantly policing image and identity in both the individual and collective registers.[21] Urban renewal is a powerful mechanism for image control. It is both a technique for modernizing spaces, and for rationalizing them to promote an immense faith in the power of architecture and design to generate progress, even if it occurs at the expense of displacing already-existing populations who employ different representations of space and thus have different lived experiences.[22] While "face" is obviously important to all cities globally, in China—and in Beijing and Shanghai in particular (the former being understood to be an imperial city and the latter being a metonym for China's growing "cosmopolitanism")—how these cities are managed and designed crucially impacts the way that China is understood as a nation, both domestically and internationally. While it is beyond the scope of this essay to explain the history of national or municipal image-construction, the ideologically-based apparatus of state power, and their control over the urban built environment, these relationships are crystallized in moments such as the dramas of international *refusal* of recognition to China prior to Richard Nixon's 1972 visit and the importance of propaganda in Maoist China for maintaining political control, as well as the way trade recognition makes foreign direct investment more or less likely, demonstrating that image construction has meaningful material stakes in terms of state power and economic inflows.[23]

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[16] Ibid., 222.

[17] For an image of Zhang's work (photo also by Zhang), see: http://www.wcma.org/img/press_thumbnails/06Regeneration/Zhang_Dali_2_sm.jpg (last accessed June 2010).

[18] Broudehoux, 221.

[19] Yuezhi Zhao, *Communication in China: Political Economy, Power, and Conflict* (Lanham, MD: Rowmand and Littlefield Publishers, 2008), 4-5.

[20] George C.S. Lin, "The Chinese Globalizing Cities: National Centers of Globalization and Urban Transformation," in *Progess in Planning* 61 (2004), 144-145.

[21] Broudehoux, 29-30.

Symbolic value and the representation of city space are thus intimately linked to the production of economic value and the control of the image of a city.[24] There is a strong relationship between promoting a certain representation of local culture (i.e., carefully managing it), economic and property value, and physical construction in cities. Spectacular urban design that promotes an image of a coherent and harmonious city is used to legitimize state policy,[25] and street movements like Zhang's *Duihua* project disrupt these image management endeavors.[26] Graffiti challenges purely state or market-driven cultural and symbolic flows by positing a model of public policy ratified by diffuse networks of value-creation rather than centralized legislation. Graffiti takes place in the spaces of representation—the lived spaces of urban citizens—in a less direct way, shaping their experience of the everyday and challenging the top-down production of urban identity through stylistic engagement and affective suggestions. By engaging a public through the production of images that serve as an alternative to shiny state-modernization representations, directing attention towards marginal parts of the city instead of economic centers, graffiti makes abandoned factories and brown-fields the place for an alternative "cultural policy."[27]

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[22] See: Broudehoux's discussion of representations of space, concept cities, and spaces of representation. Ibid., 32-33.

[23] Ibid., 33.

[24] Zhao, 11.

[25] Broudehoux, 11.

[26] Brenda S. Yeoh, "The Global Cultural City? Spatial Imagineering and Politics in the (Multi) Cultural Marketplaces of Southeast Asia," in *Urban Studies* 42:5 (2005), 946.

It is not a surprise then that Zhang's *Dialogue* project inspired negative reactions at first, since it intervened into the state's hegemonic hold on the city image. The Beijing municipal government initiated an intense cleanup campaign to erase Zhang's faces from walls, and police questioned him until he made it apparent that the project did not advocate government subversion.[28]

More broadly, the presence of the majority of his heads were met with silence instead of "Dialogue," and according to Wu Hung, the early phase of *Duihua* should instead be called "Lack of Dialogue," since "Beijingers do not speak the language of graffiti art."[29] This frozen response in 1995 marks graffiti as an aesthetic and language of incommensurability and illegibility. As a result, Zhang loitered around his pieces anonymously to eavesdrop on reactions, hearing his pieces called a "Mafia symbol like those in Hong Kong kung-fu movies," and observing them cause anxiety that they might be demolition symbols or merely be witnessed by a blank gaze. The latter was captured in pictures Zhang took of two young boys walking by one of his heads.[30] Only a year after the project began did Zhang's work begin to receive media coverage. Many early local newspaper reports conjured a unified "public opinion" that Zhang's street-level voyeurism indicates did not exist.[31] The project was dismissed as a meaningless, effusive act by statements like: "Encountering it for the first time you wouldn't take it seriously. . . . But this is far from the truth, because when you go out again the same day or a few days later, the same monstrosity boldly greets you in another location, and you repeat this disturbing experience over and over. This ghost-like face seems omnipresent and to be chasing you around, and you feel powerless to avoid it," or that it was a poor imitation of Western graffiti art, or merely ugly.[32] Wu suggests that these articles are interesting because there is an attempt made to create space between public opinion and official reactions, citing a diverse array of individuals, including middle-aged professors, local restaurant owners, a construction worker that used to be a farmer, "a college freshman, an American art student, an architect, an 'old

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[27] Ibid.

[28] Broudehoux, 222.

[29] Wu Hung, "Zhang Dali's *Dialogue*: Conversation With a City," in *Public Culture* 12:3 (2000), 754.

[30] Ibid., 756-757.

[31] Ibid., 758.

[32] Ibid.

Beijing guy,' a member of the local residential committee, and a policeman 'who happened to be at the spot.'"[33] However, in all their diversity these sound-bytes formed a unified reaction of confusion, rejection, and dislike, and no alternative views were presented.[34]

In 1998, however, many cultural newspapers and magazines engaged in a debate over graffiti, generating articles such as: "Someone's Graffiti on Ping'an Avenue," "Beijing Youth Daily," "Exclusive Interview with Graffiti Artist," "Why Draw a Portrait on the Wall?", "Street Portraits—Are They Art?", "Marks on Walls," and "Cultural Logic of Outdoor Art."[35] Increasingly charitable readings of Zhang's work were offered, and larger social issues about urban development, violence, performance, and the role of the artist were raised; Zhang even gave up his anonymity to join in the discussion, via a newspaper interview in March 1998.[36] The Beijing press' outrage, characterizing Zhang as a vandal, and the faces as a kind of pollution, gave way to the larger 1998 discussion, wherein Zhang was given accolades for inspiring civil dialogue on public art, urban renewal, violence (state sponsored and otherwise), and other issues.[37] In the interview, Zhang responded warmly to the press and used it as a mechanism for communication with Beijing publics.[38] The fact that Zhang sparked a dialogue rather than censorship has created new possible fields for discourse and alternative possibilities for collective affiliation—the potential for meaningful interaction at a horizontal level instead of deferring to vertical urban planning mechanisms to dictate social relations.

The Western press read Zhang's project through the lens of a repression hypothesis, interpreting resistance within a vocabulary of Western protest movements instead of contextualizing them within specifically Chinese histories.[39] The indirect and non-argumentative element of graffiti relates to broader practices of political dissent in China, which depend on irony, metonymy, and indirection, wherein low-level protest does not use Western social movement-based framings (targeting an explicit enemy, suggesting a solution, and involving a definitive public) but rather allusion and evocation. One example of this practice is the doorway couplet (*menlian*), a two-line poem written on paper and hung to frame a house's front door. It may include political content but usually does so within the guise of purely poetic, aesthetic description.[40] Understanding Zhang's project as part of a growing Chinese public may help challenge scholarship that overly radicalizes or freezes Chinese publics.[41]

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[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid., 768.
[36] Ibid., 759.
[37] Broudehoux, 224.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Li Cheng and Lynne T. White III, "A Dialogue with the West: A Political Message from Avant Garde Artists in Shanghai," in *Critical Asian Studies* 35:1 (2003).

Zhang's work has brought into relief Beijing's complexity—its fraught status as an imperial, historical city that is rapidly modernizing—and he has inspired copycat graffiti artists, providing a context for the circulation of the *chai* symbol with a layered meaning (not just relating to demolition, but also articulating resistance to new buildings).[42] Zhang's project, and the broad exposure it has received nationally and internationally, has re-signified the *chai* symbol from being a largely indicative sign to one which also includes a reference to Zhang's own critique. It is thus a way to evoke references to other instances of displacement without making explicit criticisms about dominant powers. Students of the Central Arts Academy (which was relocated because of renewal policies) have painted red *chai* symbols on new buildings that they dislike, using what had been an official discourse as a method of resistance.[43] These acts create a symbolic terrain for Beijing inhabitants to participate in the production and reproduction of contemporary Beijing.

The project contains an awareness of its own conditions of circulation and inter-textual relations. The term *duihua* had been used frequently in the 1989 democracy movement during negotiations with the government. It was employed as an alternative to *jianghua*, or top down political discourse, and suggested that in the future, dialogue between the state and its citizens might be more symmetrical.[44] The resurgence of the language of specifically Chinese protest suggests that Zhang's work, if not immediately successful in changing the spatial arrangements of the city, may at least function as a site for activating collective memories, awareness, and affective investment in the street as a site for mass communication.

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[40] See: Patricia Thornton, "Framing Dissent in Contemporary China: Irony, Ambiguity and Metonymy," in *China Quarterly* 21:3 (2002).

[41] Zhao, 14-15. Zhao reminds us that communication is central to China's social transformation, with uneven development being a crucial site for political contest, suggesting that art that makes explicit and politicizes unequal development can be an important tactic. Furthermore, he argues that the power of language, *huayu quan*, is critical for social struggle.

[42] Broudehoux, 225.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid., 236.

International readings of his work often deploy analytic categories that frame his intervention as a dramatic stand taken by a lone citizen against a repressive state. All of these reactions, mixed and contradictory as they are, remind us of the impossibility of *directing* and *controlling* dialogue, and force us instead to pay attention to circulation, citation, and intertextual negotiations (for example, the way his street art was taken up by other artists who transformed it into newspaper form, how Zhang himself photographed not just his art but the *reception* of his art).

Zhang's shift from location-based visual dialogue (waiting for reactions on street corners) to media event was mirrored in the increasingly doubled character of his work. This includes not only interventions of "deconstruction/construction" at the level of the street, where he would spotlight abandoned areas and create something new, but also the fact that his painting was done with the intention creating a mobile, circulating photographic image.[45] Wu Hung suggests that this is evidence of Beijing's (and unofficial Chinese art's) growing cosmopolitanism.[46] Instead of cosmopolitanism alone, I would suggest that Zhang's project *produced* and is the *trace* of a nascent public that is created through multiple media (newspapers, photographs, street reactions, magazine articles) and communicates through what Michael Warner calls "stranger-relationality."[47] Here, the public is brought together for discussion by drawing attention to shared conditions of public space such as rapid destruction/reconstruction of older Beijing neighborhoods.

Because Zhang and his addressees do not know each other in advance, the only way to generate commonality is by *paying attention*, since the artist's connection to the reader is mediated by the text of the work, or by other texts citing, quoting, and circulating the work.[48] The anxiety produced by the silhouettes—the various readings of them as gang signs, demolition signs, or mere childish play—demonstrates that there were multiple meanings that could be ascribed to the project, and that it was not a one-to-one dialogue but rather an elliptical, poetic kind of public expression that avoided direct argument or polemic.[49] The fragmented discussions brought into being indirectly through Zhang's project alongside the unified

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[45] Wu Hung, 762.

[46] Ibid., 767.

[47] See: Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2005), 74-75, 89.

[48] Ibid., 90.

[49] Ibid.

"public opinion" constructed by media outlet highlights the complexity of an emergent public sphere that is not reducible to being anti-state or anti-corporate, yet contains varying ideas about how public space should be used and what the function of urban aesthetics should be. Zhang's politics is not about taking over the government for some "people" or even representing those denied representation, but instead is founded in articulating the way that urban space shapes social possibilities, and how spatial practice, not direct argument, is crucial to urban citizenship.

Zhang argues that his was a way of spotlighting the rapid change occurring on the urban landscape.[50] Zhang notes:

> Walls seal off the Chinese. . . . They are afraid of others entering into their life. I go on these walls and enter their life. I open a dialogue with people. I assault them with the knowledge that this city is changing. I don't care if you take part or if you don't take part, you still have to look at me.[51]

Zhang's statement constitutes an emergent urban public based on attention and a kind of stranger-sensibility. He does not require institutional action, external mediations, or immediate structural changes to create political change, only that the passerby pays attention. The introduction of a human head into urban spaces that are increasingly places of *non*-encounter makes a demand for attention to *fraying* public social networks, which are mirrored by the decaying and vulnerable architectural forms marked by the *chai* symbol. The act of looking then creates a kind of epistemic community. Life is entered into through a spatial relationship; the graffiti mediates the relation between Zhang and an anonymous Chinese other, and that relationship produces knowledge of the change inscribed on the environment, itself experiencing urban renewal.

Zhang is not criticizng the Chinese government, but rather the passivity of the Beijing populace and its failure to position itself as an engaged public that is sensitive to how transformations to built space change lived space. His heads are an assault on alienation from other citizens, and on an ephemeral space (placed on buildings to be demolished).[52] The site-specificity of his art is indeed a political specificity that puts a face on the future displacement that will be caused by the demolition that precedes gentrification. The empty faces that he inscribes onto buildings constitute a local face, in contrast to the notion of *mianzi*, which is concerned with international prestige instead of local standards of living. Instead of calling on solidarity borne out of an abstract nationalism, Zhang invokes historical and temporary affiliations, based on momentary attention and the dynamic and affectively shaped experience of embodied urban subjectivity (the woman who was made anxious by the belief that they were demolition symbols being one example of this).[53] Zhang advocates a politically optimistic vocabulary for the social imaginary by spotlighting the greed of developers and city planners who speak on behalf of the nation. He argues:

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[50] Zhang had left the country in 1989 and returned in 1995, when Deng's economic reforms were in full swing.

[51] This also should be read in light of the growing social inequality occurring in the wake of urban renewal, and suggests that we should understand his project as polysemous. It meant very different things to the housing committees who wanted to eliminate narrow, older buildings (*hutong*) in Beijing's ancient districts; residents who did not want to move because compensation was not enough for them to afford the houses replacing them; and developers, tourists, and city boosters who understood the *hutong* to be a kind of urban blight. See: Broudehoux, 130-131.

> Much like generations of emperors before them, present-day leaders transform the urban environment for their own personal benefits and their unquenchable thirst for power. In their desire to impress the world and leave their mark upon China, they sponsor the construction of colossal monuments celebrating their own glory but whose oppressive monstrosity crushes the hopes of anyone spirited enough to say: "I am an individual and I can influence my environment."[54]

Zhang's argument reveals the way that urban renewal both takes over territories where people can live and colonizes imaginative and emotional geographies: the hope and energy necessary to imagine oneself having agency, and to make things otherwise. This demonstrates the importance of graffiti as an index of a nascent public that creates spaces for imagination, slowing down the collapse of local lived-in spaces into abstract, nationally marketed images. Anne-Marie Broudehoux suggests that, following Henri Lefebvre, this opposition between "representation of space," or a "concept city," and its lived-in, physical image, understood as "spaces of representation," reveals the importance of the materialities and lived experience of architectural realities in shaping place-based identity, "self perception," and "collective consciousness."[55] In other words, the rhetorical techniques of place-based marketing have material effects on both the built environment of the city and the self understanding of its inhabitants, and graffiti practice functions as a way to drive a wedge between top-down "concept cities" and their full integration into "spaces of representation" by activating a space for creativity, imagination, and personal expression. Zhang's project displays an understanding of the relationship between official semiotics and control over material landscapes. His interventions highlight the need to interrupt discursive practices like urban branding, which facilitate top-down urban renewal projects, in order to create the conditions of possibility for individuals to have the political and social energy to collectively transform their lived material realities.

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[52] Broudehoux, 222.

[53] In some respects the proliferation of empty faces Zhang inscribes on the Beijing landscape functions as a way to orient collective attention to the space of the city in the same way that widely distributed official pronouncements and newspapers orient and synchronize attention to problems facing the nation. This establishment of an "imagined community" uses fleeting responses, visually or textually based, to create a sense of community in a continually shifting present. See: Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 2006), 37.

[54] Quoted in Broudehoux, 222.

Furthermore, the appearance of thousands of heads on at-risk structures brings the body and the relationship between urban residents' bodies and public space to the attention of passersby who otherwise might not think about these issues consistently. The construction of business improvement districts like Wanfujing, which is functioning as the model for redevelopment in Beijing, has serious social and cultural costs. Already, the Dong'an Market and the Jixiang Theater, an opera house with a rich history and dynamic community role, have been demolished, and the Xinhua Bookstore and China Central Academy of Fine Arts, which was the "cradle of modern Chinese painters" and a hot-bed for intellectual activity, have been closed to make room for a retail center.[56] The eradication of the network of neighborhood alleys, *hutong*, and hundreds of homes that served as a key part of central Beijing's architectural identity to make way for rationalized street systems displaced hundreds of elderly and poor. This occurred without any consultation of the public, and with limited monetary compensation for the displaced, disproportionately eliding the needs of the elderly, as their limited mobility rendered mere cash insufficient to compensate for the destruction of decades of social networks.[57] However, these processes are depoliticized through the language of "local identity preservation": the discourse of historical preservation is often marshaled in the service of producing the cultural capital that draws in tourists and investors interested in an "authentic" cultural experience.[58] Making complex histories palatable to outsiders, so that they meet the expectations of first world tourists, requires streamlining history and its spatial evidence into an orderly narrative: this is manifested empirically in the construction of business improvement districts as such the one in Wangfujing, where undesirables that pose "threats" to the urban environment are excluded, unsightly architecture is demolished, and a rigorously sanitized and policed mall is left in its wake.[59] Urban experience is reduced to "shopping experience," and foreign-investment oriented urban renewal reduces the level of dialogue, contact, and stranger sensibility that can occur in the street.[60] Yuezhi Zhao notes that radical social inequality is reinforced through market-state practices like privatization, commodification, and reinforced divisions between different kinds of people.[61]

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[55] Broudehoux, 26.
[56] Ibid., 125, 128.
[57] Ibid., 130-31.

However, these processes are largely invisible, and the rapid temporality of urban renewal makes histories of displacement merely spectral. Zhang's inscription of faces on vulnerable building sites thus makes these urban ghosts visibly present, highlighting the frailty of any cohesive notion of a Beijing "public" on whose behalf redevelopment purportedly serves.

Here we see that the urban terrain is a space for social action, and that agency is possible outside of formal legal avenues. Zhang's critique is not a simple claim about the need for a more open society, or a democratic versus undemocratic government, but instead communicates that profit motives, combined with a lack of dialogue, produce an imagined community with tenuous links to human geographies on the ground in Beijing, and creates a sense of collective disempowerment. The inscription of a human face appropriates the concept of *mianzi* from government and corporate control, giving it to the hands of a broader, complex public.[62] And here we must think back to how the urban "face" is crucial to attract foreign investment, establish a national image, and justify urban renewal projects.

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[58] Ibid., 42.
[59] Ibid., 41.
[60] Ibid., 94-95.
[61] Zhao, 7.
[62] Broudehoux, 223.

SHANGHAI

Similar to Beijing, Shanghai faces a great deal of urban renewal and transformation, along with its vibrant street art scene. Reading Zhang's *Duihua* project alongside graffiti work in Shanghai suggests that while graffiti functions as a local communicative practice it also enables inter-city and international linkages.

Using place and product promotion (venue promotion, event organization, investment attraction, and renewing the built environment), state officials have set Shanghai on a trajectory, augmented by various cultural strategies, to become an economic leader.[63] Cultural strategies link global integration to modernization by creating an architectural ecosystem attractive to foreign capital precisely by using a modern aesthetic. Cultural events, venue growth, and investment boosts are linked to transformations in the physical urban space, with the three most heavily promoted industries all being cultural: TV and film production, publishing, and the arts and entertainment industries.[64] However, while there is a large amount of investment in hardware, the artists themselves are not supported, and all art is overseen by Shanghai art bureau censors, meaning that graffiti is posed as a definitive challenge to institution-based cultural strategies.[65]

GRAFFITI—M50/MOGANSHAN ROAD

Moganshan Road, or M50, is the hub of the Shanghai contemporary art scene.[66] It is a street filled with abandoned factories and workshops, one being the Chunming Slub Mill.[67] Moganshan is located along the Suzhou River, adjacent to gargantuan real estate projects and luxury condominiums that have increased property values in the area. Despite the increasing fame and notoriety of the district, M50 is threatened by the rapid rate of urban change and gentrification, and is perpetually at risk of dismantlement.[68]

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[63] Weping Wu, "Cultural Strategies in Shanghai: Regenerating Cosmopolitanism in an Era of Globalization," in *Progress in Planning* 61 (2004), 167. Wu quotes Ju Huang, the former mayor of Shanghai: "[the] Shanghai of the future must be a metropolis equal to New York or London."

[64] Ibid. 167-68.

[65] Ibid., 174.

[66] Li Danni, "Shanghai's Blossoming Arts District," trans. Wei Ying, in *ArtZine: A Chinese Contemporary Art Portal*, 2008. http://www.artzinechina.com/display.php?a=81. For images of Moganshan Road graffiti see: Chris Osburn's article at http://tikichris.blogspot.com/2008/06/shanghai-graffiti-juxtapoz.html, and Adam Schokora's website: http://56minus1.com/tag/urban-art/ (all last accessed June 2010).

[67] Li.

The large amount of graffiti found in Moganshan can be linked to the level of city censorship, which is lower than in Beijing. In June 2008, Adam Schokora, American native, Shanghai resident, and producer of an online internet community that promotes cultural events in Shanghai, interviewed three Shanghai-based graffiti artists on the television program *Shanghai Beat*.[69] The show is directed towards both Western and non-Western audiences. The narration is in English, interviews are in Mandarin, and subtitles shift between Chinese characters and English. Schokora asked three artists, Popil, HKer, and Mr. Lan, about where they graffiti, about their interactions with police authoritits, and how they feel their work is received by the Chinese population at large. The interviews take place in different settings. Popil's occurs in an apartment interior, while Mr. Lan's occurs at Rucker Park, a skate park, and HKR's occurs at a brownfield while he works on a new piece.

Speaking first with Popil, a young Chinese woman who had recently graffitied on Moganshan Wall, Schokora asks what she painted. She responds: "Its just my name [POPIL], and I've included some Chinese elements that make up me and my style: a young woman, a cat, some clouds, happy stuff . . . like me. . . . I'm trying to channel my feelings into a uniquely Chinese-style graffiti piece."[70] When asked if the piece was painted at Moganshan, Popil silences the interviewer, saying: "Shhh! You can't say that!" Schokora responds that it is obvious, and Popil agrees, noting that everyone knows about the area. She adds that she does not recommend painting in other areas of Shanghai, because Moganshan is unique in how it is "very open and the police don't pay it much attention." When asked if she paints elsewhere Popil responds: "Well, I have, but it's probably best for me not to mention where." When asked if she has had problems with the police she says, "Yeah . . . sure. But actually it's not a big problem. They don't really know or understand what we're doing anyway. The worst they ever do is make you clean up the wall. The police in Shanghai won't lock you up just for painting graffiti."

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[68] Ibid.

[69] Adam Schokora and Ginger Xiang, "The Shanghai Beat: Graffiti Shanghai" (June 9, 2008). http://www.danwei.org/featured_video/the_shanghai_beat_graffiti_sha.php (last accessed June 2010). All quotations from Popil, Mr. Lan, and HKer are from this source.

[70] For photographs of Popil's work, see: http://www.fotolog.com/popil/53191377 (last accessed June 2010). Here we see an example of what Popil means by graffiti being used as "pure expression": "Dreaming of Being a Cat" is not an explicitly political claim, but it does exert a kind of collective ownership, or at least presence, on a space that is coded as public and nationally owned. In fact, the painting of a dream on a street makes explicit the ways that lived-in urban space and imagined urban space are mutually constitutive. For Popil's work in situ, see: Chris Osburn's photograph *Walking Along Moganshan Road* (2008). http://www.artismessy.org/wp-content/uploads/2008/09/shang-06.jpg (last accessed June 2010).

As Popil indicates, graffiti writing has an intimate relation to law and legibility, and what is permissible and impermissible. Graffiti is not subject to intense state backlash precisely because it is not read as outright dissent, and yet there is still a necessity to maintain secrecy; as Popil relates, it is "best not to say" exactly where less tolerated graffiti occurs. This contradiction does not necessarily suggest a confusion about what graffiti denotes, but a lack of consensus over how it ought to be judged, and whether it is a legitimate form of public expression or not. Its unintelligibility can be discerned then from its outsider position in community population flows—in the program's scenes of the graffiti, it is only artists who engage with the walls (look at them, manipulate them, gesture towards them), while passersby keep walking, without stopping to contemplate or respond to the work.

Graffiti is not an explicitly political act: Popil says that it is "pure personal expression" for her, insisting that her art remains on the level of the individual, the affective and expressive.[71] However, even though it is not polemical, it is communicative and expressive. It is a way for Popil to inscribe, to state a kind of ownership over a public space, which makes it a space of representation and not just a "concept space."[72] Popil's artistic intervention functions as an example of "cultural policy" made from below, where local spatial imaginaries can be used to reframe and redefine the image that state and market institutions attempt to impose from above.

Finally, the differences between Chinese and foreign graffiti is articulated by Popil as a difference in style. Chinese graffiti is "bomb style" (quickly writing a name or pseudonym), whereas foreign artists do more "legitimate" (meaning institutionalized) graffiti, painting more time consuming and detailed "pieces."[73] Popil claims that many Chinese artists have the wrong "objective," being preoccupied with writing their names "randomly." She suggests that mere tagging is not graffiti (which she defines as self expression and affective expenditure). She states: "graffiti is in life and life in graffiti." The difference between "tags" and "pieces" is a difference both in addressivity and grammar. A tag is a way of merely marking presence, while a piece is a more extensive and elaborate endeavor, presumably more aesthetically appealing or demanding, and functioning to communicate something: to *express* rather than merely *denote*. Tags and pieces both occur in public places, but they operate with different kinds of publicness. Popil's concern about "backwards," ego-driven taggers who do not develop their art resonates with my earlier discussion about "face" and "saving face," and the importance of recognition. The fact that such negotiations can be seen at the micro-level in a young woman's musings about graffiti as a national art demonstrates the way the visual imaginaries and representations of the city (place based identities) function to produce certain types of subjectivity.

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[71] This individualist graffiti is in sharp contrast to Zhang's work, which directly engages in issues about social inequality and politics of representation.

[72] For an analysis of oblique dissent, see: Thornton, 662-666. I would suggest that, much like the public posting of "subversive doorway couplets" that Thornton discusses, graffiti here functions as a mechanism of social action—and potentially dissent—based on *indirection*, using "ironic, ambiguous and metonymic frames" that circulate in full public view, creating "free conceptual spaces" where new identities and potentials for collective action can be created, and "evocative transcripts" that evoke interpretations beyond their immediately visible meaning but which still "masquerade as politically irrelevant." This is more obvious in the case of Zhang's project.

Mr. Lan is a young man interviewed at Rucker Park, an indoor/outdoor street ball building that is "hidden on the third floor of a defunct silk screening factory." Mr. Lan notes that the first piece he ever did was called "NO SARS," painted when the severe acute respiratory syndrome epidemic was in full swing. The camera shifts to the interior of the skate park, showing images of a red and green, approximately two-meter tall tag that reads "NO SARS." He then goes on to list the most prominent graffiti artists in Shanghai (Shi, AK, Kimi, Sim) and "newcomers"—a community that is relatively open and fluid, with membership that can increase at any point. There are resonances here of Michael Warner's definition of publics that emphasizes non-ascriptive, fluid modes of belonging based on shared objects of interest rather than thick enactments of identity. This evidence of a growing graffiti community is an index of an increasing youth culture finding alternative ways to participate in urban life. Mr. Lan paints at Moganshan Road, Nanpu Bridge, and Jin Sha Jiang Road. After offering this more expansive list, he characterizes the Shanghai police as "very reasonable," saying: "they typically just let us finish painting and even support us!" He relates an anecdote in which he and thirteen other artists were painting when a police officer asked them what they were doing. They told the officer that they thought "the wall was too dirty and we wanted to give it a make-over . . . make it pretty." The officer responded that it was fine, but if they returned and the artists "did a shitty job, I'm gonna take you in." Here, a playful relationship with authority is established, in which the artists use the vocabulary of urban beautification and cleanliness associated with urban planners to justify their work, while the police reply in kind, basing their treatment of the artists on the visual aesthetic quality of their work.

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[73] Popil's claim that graffiti in the west is more institutionalized is reflected in the large amount of media attention paid to Banksy's recent film *Exit Through the Gift Shop*, and his iconic status internationally.

While the police, for Mr. Lan, are reasonable, most Chinese, he relates, "don't like" and "don't understand" graffiti, primarily because it uses mainly English words, and local graffiti writers rarely use Chinese characters. "Everyday people can not read the pieces, so most just think graffiti is messy and ugly with too many busy colors . . . and so it's deemed inappropriate for public environments." Mr. Lan positions the nascent graffiti public against the dominant Chinese public based on graffiti writers' stylistic uses of excess—they aesthetically contest the conventional architectural order and subsequently challenge the naturalness of a public environment that reduces decorum to the vocabulary of restraint. The public of graffiti writers—initiates who can decode the work and understand its artistic value—are contrasted with the majority of the Chinese population, which does not understand it as art and so interprets it as out of place in public space. By art, I understand Mr. Lan to be framing graffiti as intentional, communicative, and possessing its own grammar or hierarchies of aesthetic distinction. Art might also be understood as an institutionalized or, at least, permissible form of production and is thus opposed to vandalism, which is criminal. Instead of a different *style* of enacting citizenship, this second conception of art is what resulted in the officially recognized art from the Beijing's Olympics' graffiti contest.

It seems like Mr. Lan does not want to advocate for a model of graffiti which is disruptive, but rather one that resonates with a local culture: a site-specificity based on being legible, embedded, and in tune with its surrounding community.[74] Mr. Lan attributes the preponderance of English-based graffiti to the difficulty of making

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[74] This might be contrasted with Miwon Kwon's definition of "site-specific discomposure," in which the work alarms and polarizes the community. See: Miwon Kwon, *One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002).

Chinese characters, but also suggests that he will in the future attempt to write in Chinese. He notes that Beijing graffiti is very "cultural" and has a "Beijing flavor or distinct Chinese style," potentially because of the city's greater isolation from foreign influence, or because there is some state-permitted graffiti, while in Shanghai the style is more "international" with American or French influences.[75] Finally, when asked about whether the commercialization of graffiti is desirable, Lan responds that it is desirable insofar as it increases education about graffiti and expands its potential public, but undesirable when people who do not understand or appreciate it use it purely for profit. This resonates with Sei Wang's comments about commercialization in Beijing that I noted earlier. Lan imagines an ideal future public for graffiti art that is both capable of reading graffiti, and of resisting its full integration into a system of pure profit, invoking instead a space where the market-state does not fully eviscerate the social, articulated here as non-instrumental expression.

Popular interpretations of Chinese graffiti as "non-artistic" should be placed within the context of the clashes between artists like Mr. Lan and HKer, and the effects of image-driven urban renewal based on intelligibility and marketability. Unofficial graffiti poses a challenge to the easy consumption and sale of Shanghai by making visible a variety of stakeholders who are impacted by urban design and who participate in shaping space by directly intervening on the surfaces of the built environment. It is an unofficial art and so, unlike in Europe or the United States, graffiti is not considered "real art" and has yet to be shown in galleries on Mainland China. Lan's diagnosis of graffiti being rejected as art might also be understood as a clash in values about city design, and about what public spaces should look like: whether they should be highly rationalized or acknowledge the excessive, spontaneous, temporary, and affective dimensions of urban citizenship that are represented by ephemeral, unofficial, emotionally-driven graffiti art.

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[75] It is interesting to note that the relative sophistication of graffiti is here linked to its institutionalization—its sanction by the state, as well as its legibility in Chinese. This raises the question of graffiti's desired addressivity: whether it is communicating with an art-public (of international graffiti artists and supporters) or a specifically Chinese public and, thus, incorporated into the cultural fabric of the nation. For centuries there has been anxiety about language standardization, ethnic separatism, and the coherence of the nation. In the 1980s the People's Republic of China adopted an explicit policy of language standardization and assimilation (Mao of course made some of these moves earlier) and the dubious reception of graffiti is a historically contingent product of an intense sensitivity to language issues tying into social stability.

The way that graffiti culture exposes the temporal frailty of the built city environment is further worked out in Schokora's interview with HKer. The interview takes place at an abandoned brownfield, a space to write that is not easily accessible to the general public. This is a venue for graffiti that attests to the scarcity of available spaces for public communication, as more and more of the city is colonized by business-friendly developments that are carefully designed through centralized institutional control. In contrast, HKer characterizes graffiti as a "free and liberating form of self expression." He paints around the Yangpu district, in Pudong around the Jin Mao Tower, and, like Mr. Lan, characterizes the police as relatively relaxed, himself telling a story about how, upon encountering police officers while painting, he was told that if he made the wall look nice there would be no issue. However, HKer notes that his pieces are temporary, due to the majority of the population not "understanding" graffiti, with "average Chinese" thinking that it "negatively impacts the city's appeal," and "the government" [distinct from police in this instance it appears], when it notices pieces, destroying them, particularly in urban spaces.[76] We see a very local, personal experience with the effects of image-driven urban renewal, where the standards for the city are based on intelligibility and marketability. For the "average Chinese," according to HKer, graffiti's failure to be legible, and thus to serve as a commodity, is at fault.

Also important is the spread of graffiti writing skills. HKer's discussion of the history of China's graffiti culture exposes the transnational, circulatory element of graffiti publics at work. HKer was influenced by the Hong Kong-based grafitti and hip-hop artist MC Yan, who had learned about graffiti in France and in turn taught it to Hong Kong and Guangzhou crews. Even though the places in which graffiti appears are local, its derivation is global. Graffiti is still in its nascent stages in China, and HKer predicts an arc of improvement as local writers stop fully using European styles and start to use Chinese characters to develop a distinct style. HKer mentions MC Yan's use of Chinese characters in Hong Kong, and observes that he is using increasingly more Chinese characters in his own work. HKer ends his interview with the comment: "Everybody, keep painting! . . . Grab a can and get on the street!" This injunction to an imagined public of both strangers and allies demonstrates the way that the dissemination of graffiti art and expansion of nascent graffiti culture depends on stranger-affiliations. As a transnational art, graffiti spreads not just throughout local urban walls but also through discourse, discussions about different artists, hype about them (in the form of digital photographic images), and in the spread of practices and techniques in the way that MC Yan learned from crews in Europe and then taught crews in Hong Kong and China. These affiliations are formed by hearsay on the street, and on the Internet through digital images and blogs. Graffiti is an international aesthetic that is also a marker of urbanity, and so it is fundamentally dependent on the anonymity, limited temporality, and density of urban environments.

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[76] See HKer's work at: http://www.neocha.com/HKer (last accessed June 2010).

The interviews discussed above demonstrate that Shanghai graffiti culture is not explicitly anti-state, but that it does inject a presence onto the street that is not readily accepted by "the government" or the "Chinese public" at large. Shanghai artists define graffiti as an art form, a mechanism of self-expression and a creative force that is radical only insofar as it does not fit into the gallery scene and is not fully intelligible and institutionalized. The content of graffiti is not polemical or argumentative, but based in expression and circulation through multiple cities, and addressed to known and unknown audiences. It is transferred through citation and copying, and by artists trying to get noticed. For example, the P.E.N. crew (standing for "Paint Every Night" and pronounced "pēn") is a Shanghai-based group, whose name is taken from the Chinese character "喷," which means "to spray." The content of their pieces is not anti-government but is instead based on colorful tagging of monsters and cartoon characters.[77] Bright colors and chaotic, lilting English characters offer a visual jolt in comparison to the gray and white-toned boxed buildings that comprise their place of inscription. Graffiti currently operates in a liminal space where it is intensely local in terms of its site-specificity, but also global (especially as the still-dominant Roman alphabet is commonly used). The desire of the artists discussed earlier to use Chinese characters prompts one to ask whether graffiti will ultimately become the ideographic extension of official writing or if it is an assertion of non-reproducible individual *style* against such standardization (i.e., the standardization of the Chinese written language, or the state-sanctioned speech that similarly proposes a unified and coherent nationhood). Another way to think through this question is whether the adoption of a standard language will diffuse the effect of a minor writing form (in the Deleuzo-Guattarian sense of a minor literature) because of its increased transparency.[78] The excessive, unruly aesthetic of most graffiti and its ability to mark loss (to make visible papered over urban transformations that frequently end in displacement) is dependent on operating at the periphery of dominant codes of both national belonging and communicative practice.

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[77] Maggie Ma, "P.E.N. Every Night," in *Art Zine: A Chinese Contemporary Art Portal*, 2008. http://new.artzinechina.com/display_print.php?a=211 (last accessed June 2010).

CONCLUSION

Graffiti in Beijing and Shanghai demonstrates the ways that local spectacles participate in problematizing binary logics of contestation that posit a strict divide between state, society, and market, or those that politicize and depoliticize urban renewal. By indexing an emergent public communicative framework based on citation, allusion, ambiguity, attention, and play, graffiti troubles the stability of these divides and brings attention to the dynamic and ephemeral nature of urban citizenship globally. Failure to analyze developing artistic or cultural publics within China makes it easy for debates to devolve into simple affirmations or condemnations of spectacles like the Beijing Olympics, creating insufficient oppositions such as state versus civil society or imperial versus communist regimes. Understanding the fraught, site-specific negotiations of urban transformations that are spotlighted by graffiti exposes the way in which markets, citizens, the city, and the nation are joined on the plane of the visual, through imaginary linkages. The stakes of recognizing graffiti as a growing art form are as simple as Zhang Dali's gesture—it is a question of whether as visual scholars we let our attention (and our affiliations) be determined by grand, coherent spectacles, or an understanding of the personal inscriptions that hail us: the lived realities of urban space.

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[78] See: Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

Curatorial Statement for Seven Videos*: The Metaphor of "Flying and Falling" in Contemporary East Asia and Visual Arts

Sohl Lee

All of a sudden, I feel an itch under my arms. Aha! The itching is a trace of where my artificial wings once sprouted. Wings that are missing today: pages from which my hopes and ambition were erased flashed in my mind like a flipped-through dictionary.
I want to halt the steps and shout out for once:
"Wings! Grow again!"
"Let's fly! Let's fly! Let's fly! Let's fly just one more time."

—Yi Sang, *Wings* (1936)

His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.

—On Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus* (1920),
Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History" (1940)

At 3:00 p.m. on Wednesday the 18th of February, 1931, I will take off from Mercy and fly away on my own wings. Please forgive me. I loved you all.
(signed) Robert Smith,
Ins. agent

—Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon* (1977)

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* For the video art works discussed in this statement, see the online version of this issue: http://www.rochester.edu/in_visible_culture/Issue_15/index.html. I would like to thank Shota Ogawa and Zheng Bo for their assistance with selecting and bringing the video art works together for the screening, and I extend my thanks to Kyung Hyun Kim, Soo Youn Lee, and Shota Ogawa for providing me with textual and visual materials I needed to write this essay. I am also grateful for editorial comments by Rachel Haidu, Godfre Leung, Genevieve Waller, and Iskandar Zulkarnain.

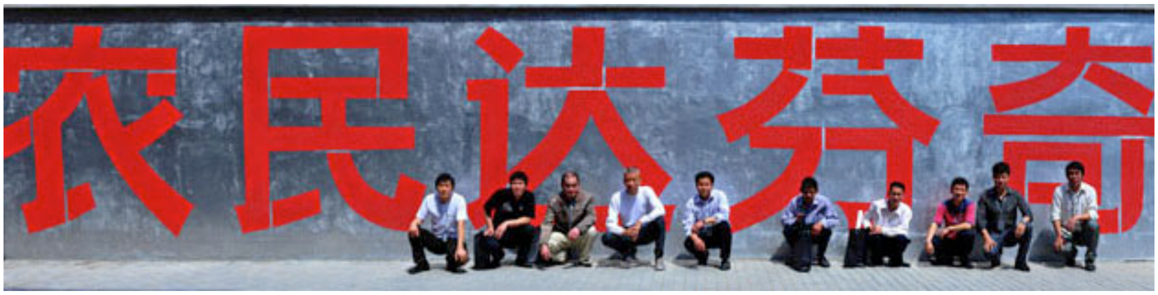

Figure 1. The inventors of *Cai Guo-Qiang: Peasant Da Vincis*, Rockbund Art Museum, Shanghai, 2010. Photo by Lin Yi, courtesy of Cai Studio.

Earlier this year, Cai Guo-Qiang, the Chinese-born artist who is by now globally known for his orchestration of the 2008 Beijing Olympics' majestic and spectacular fireworks, curated an exhibition titled "Peasant da Vincis" (*nongmin dafenqi*) at the newly inaugurated Rockbund Art Museum (RAM) in Shanghai. The original building for the RAM was built in the 1930s as one of the first modern art museums in China. Located amid the Bund (*waitan*) where dozens of large-scale neoclassical buildings line along the Huangpu river, the building is a part of the legacy, and the evidence, of the city's early 20th century heyday. In this historical site, which now features a redesigned interior as a contemporary art gallery, Cai unravels his story about temporality and subjectivity in contemporary China. Cai's curatorial project resulted from his years-long collecting of flying saucers, air planes, submarines, and other curious gadgets invented by more than fifty peasants from all regions of China, hence the exhibition title named after Leonardo da Vinci, the 15th century Italian artist and Renaissance man who also wished to fly. One of the works featured in the exhibition is titled *Fairytale*, for which dozens of apparatuses suspended in the air fill the vertical space of the three-story high atrium, with live birds flying freely and chirping rhythmically in between the makeshift gadgets. This monumental display of individual creativity, fantasy, and romantic dreams opposes the Pudong district's cityscape just across the river. In Pudong, the techno-centric post-industrial future that has yet to exist is reified as an image, as evidenced in a cluster of skyscrapers. This particular logic laden in Pudong is not dissimilar to that in the 2010 Shanghai World Expo, which was held concurrently with Cai's exhibition, and in which national and commercial pavilions represent the desire for a better future, rather than the future itself. Situated amid the city's bygone glory of the early 20th century while safely distanced from the neoliberal-postmodern future across the river, Cai's exhibition pays affective homage to the Chinese subalterns transported from the more recent, socialist past of the People's Republic of China, and in so doing disrupts the strong sense of linear temporality that the city has imposed on a spatial scale.

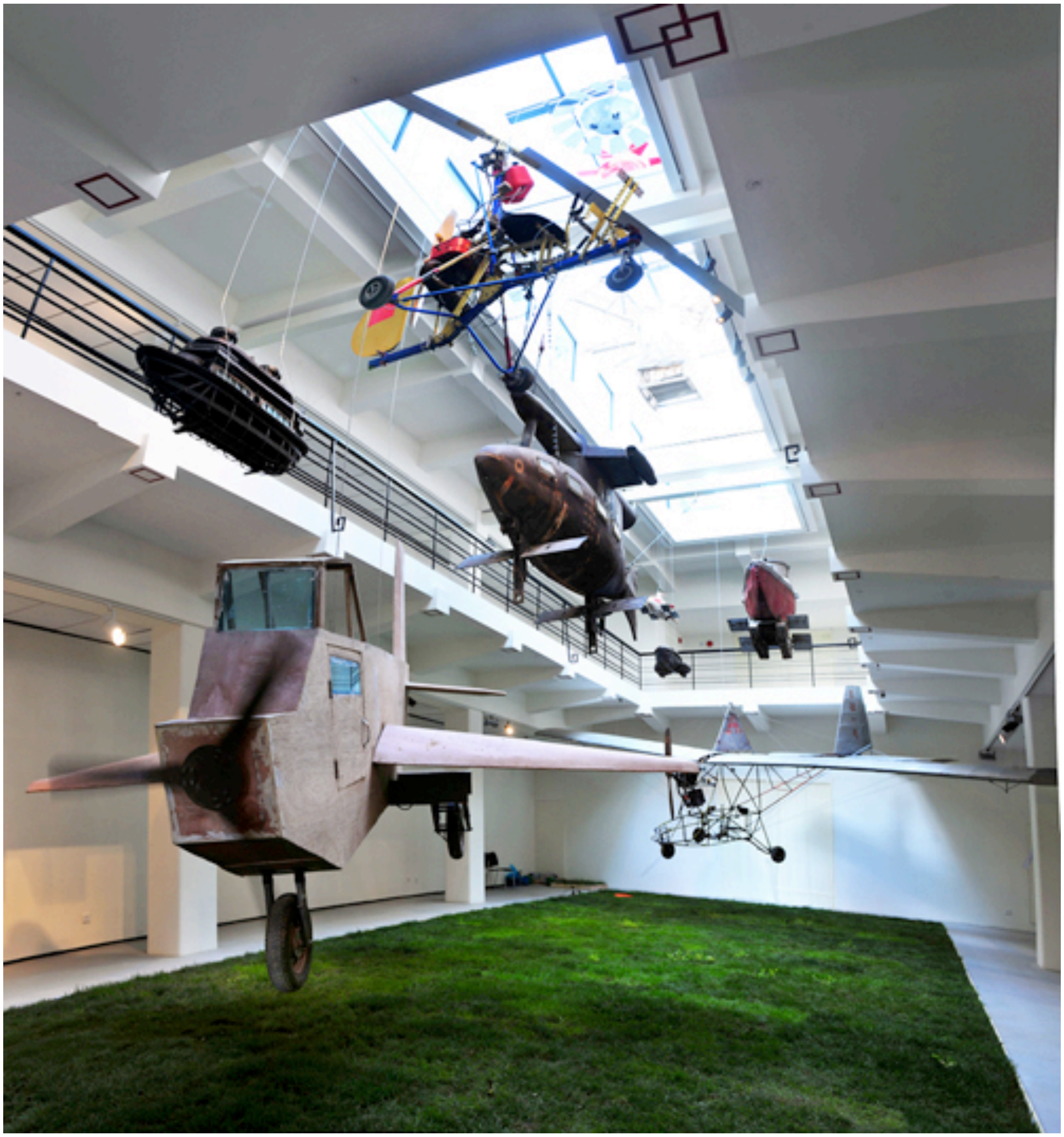

Figure 2. Cai Guo-Qiang, installation view of *Fairytale,* Shanghai, 2010. Photo by Lin Yi, courtesy of Cai Studio.

My curatorial statement to the seven video art works screened during the conference "Spectacle East Asia: Translocation, Publicity, and Counterpublics," held in spring 2009 at the University of

Rochester, begins with Cai's artistic project because "Peasant da Vincis," like the video art works, calls for a closer examination of a certain temporality and historicism in place in today's East Asia. Another element that connects Cai's exhibition to the art works is the artists' strenuous effort to explore subjectivity expressed via such issues as the public, ethnic minority, *renmin* (the people) or *nongmin* (the peasant) in socialist China, *minjung* (the people) in 1980s Korea, etc. This effort, it should be noted, reveals the limitations of these existing paradigms by addressing new ways of imagining sociality and agency. Though my essay will trace how these art works elucidate questions around temporality and subjectivity, no single theme or characteristic of "Asianness" links them all together. What might be "Asian" about the art works is that they, with varying degrees, step outside the rapidly calcifying standard narrativizing impulse of current discourse on the visual arts and cultures in, from, and of contemporary East Asia.

Preserving the past as heritage and imagining the future as it ought to be, post-socialist China seems to pursue a state-planned, immensely androcentric process of technology-driven modernization and urban development at an unprecedented pace and scale, all under the banner of the socialist market economy. This future-oriented trajectory in China in particular, and in East Asia more generally, is not only manifest in urban transformation but also practiced more broadly in the discourse of culture and the visual arts. The narrativization of the relatively nascent scholarly field of contemporary East Asian arts and visual cultures is dominated by the acts of chasing after annual reports from auction houses and of counting the number of newly established film festivals, art biennales, and other touristic, cultural sites in key cities like Beijing, Seoul, Shanghai, and so on. This stagist, development-oriented temporality embedded in the discursive and institutional formation of discourse reinscribes the existing cultural and geographical hierarchies: the sophistication of the field and the diversity of objects of study in these emerging centers are deemed to be rapidly catching up with, but *not yet* quite parallel to, those of other, Western centers such as New York, London, and Berlin. The current discourse on visual cultures of contemporary East Asia, albeit celebratory in its tone, is therefore one that is fraught with limitations.

One way of countering these limitations is unraveling the intricacy and density in artistic languages with which artists visualize the very undercurrents of each locale in transition. Curator and critic Okwui Enwezor, for example, has been invested in mapping the aesthetic relations among these locales, with the understanding that in developing economies and democratizing societies different imaginations for political subjectivities emerge together with a range of aesthetic languages.[1] His project with the 2008 Gwangju Biennale in South Korea is closely aligned with the larger vein of his work, in which he actively seeks a reconceptualization of visual cultures arising from regions and areas that are widely considered postcolonial.[2] In more recent projects, curators such as Enwezor and Nicolas Bourriaud have suggested geographical and temporal multiplicities in modernity via concepts like "offshore" and "off-center."[3] Through the lens of re-defining modernity, the temporal linearity established between, say, Paris and Shanghai can be challenged, or at least newly understood, as multiple "habitations of modernity" (a term that Enwezor borrows from postcolonial Marxist historian Dipesh Chakrabarty) become the very sites of heterotemporality. And these are the sites where the vexed relationship between aesthetics and subjectivity is rearticulated or even contested. This intellectual conceptualization of multi-directional, heterochronical modernities is highly significant if we are to re-think the "belated entry" of Asia into studies of contemporary visual arts in a way that is not solely dependent on neoliberal expansion into the market and production sites.

As art historian Miwon Kwon recently stated in the journal *October*'s Questionnaire on "the Contemporary," the rigidification and categorization of the field of art history can be shaken up by an emerging "subfield" like contemporary Chinese art, which does not comfortably fit into the conventional parameters of contemporary art history (historically defined as having no geographic marker except for that of Western Europe and North America) or Chinese art history (which is considered pre-modern).[4] Not as a mere addition to the existing paradigm but as a driving force for change, East Asia's entry into the discourse has the potential to cause a fundamental epistemological shift in our ways of thinking about modern and contemporary visual arts and cultures. In order for this to happen, the complexity of the aesthetic languages that have always already existed in the works of visual arts and cultures themselves need to be discussed and critiqued in equally rigorous theoretical frameworks, as the essays by Caitlin Bruce, Rika Hiro, and Hyejong Yoo have showcased in this issue.

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[1] The danger in privileging these transitional locales is that other locales that are more or less stabilized may seem left out of what is perceived as a vibrant cultural scene. The impulse to historicize Japan that the conference participants felt during the "Spectacle East Asia" presentations and discussions in Rochester can be one possible example of counterproductivity.

[2] See, for example: Okwui Enwezor, "Mega-Exhibitions and the Antinomies of a Transnational Global Form," in *Documents* 23 (Spring 2004).

[3] Nicolas Bourriaud (ed.), *Altermodern: Tate Triennial* (London: Tate Publishing, 2009); and Okwui Enwezor, "Modernity and Postcolonial Ambivalence," in the same issue. See also: Enwezor's "The Politics of Spectacle: The Gwangju Biennale and the Asian Century," republished in this issue, and originally from *The 7th Gwangju Biennale: Annual Report*, ed. Okwui Enwezor (Gwangju: Gwangju Biennale, 2008).

[4] Miwon Kwon, untitled statement, in *October 130* (Fall 2009), 13-15.

My way of imagining a range of possibilities for contemporary East Asia and its artistic production is bookended by analyses of Cai's exhibition "Peasant da Vincis," an artistic project that I consider to be a representation of flying and falling, and which can be also commonly found in the allegories of paradoxical subjects: the narrator in the Korean colonial writer Yi Sang's *Wings*;[5] Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus*, as read by Walter Benjamin, the Jewish intellectual who was living as a stateless citizen in Paris, hiding from the Nazi regime in Germany when he wrote his "Theses on the Philosophy of History";[6] and Mr. Robert Smith, a suicidal black character selling life insurance door-to-door during the Great Depression from Toni Morrison's novel *Song of Solomon*.[7] These are the moments where heterotemporality has produced hopes and aspirations of transitional times and the violence therein. On the very sites where all of past and present, colonialism and postcoloniality, emancipation and re-pression, and fascism and liberation exist together as potentialities, transitional times can never end because they are infinitely stretched. Or, flying high can meet a sudden fall, with no time for either transition (to a landing platform) or rescue (from a fatal wound). On these sites of intersection, convergence, and uncertainty, how do art works then visualize the glimpse of hope in face of the endless deferral for a utopia and the threat of instant collapse?

Through the inopportune presence of rural peasants in Shanghai's urbanity, Cai's exhibition metaphorically interferes with the seemingly invincible linearity of the temporality deeply rooted in today's Chinese society (what Dipesh Chakrabarty calls "secular, disenchanted, continuous time").[8] The viewers entering into the RAM complex are welcomed by slogans painted in red Chinese calligraphic style, reminiscent of propaganda banners that until recently decorated factory walls and farming areas across China. Among them is: "Peasants—Making a Better City, a Better Life" (*nongmin rang chengshi geng meihao*), a spin on the Shanghai Expo's slogan of "Better City, Better Life" (*chengshi, rang shenghua geng meihao*).

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[5] Yi Sang, *Wings* (1936), trans. Walter K. Lew and Youngju Ryu, *Modern Korean Fiction: An Anthology*, eds. Bruce Fulton and Yong-min Kwon (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 83-4.

[6] Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken), 257-8. Original version in German completed in Spring 1940, first published in *Neue Rundschau* 61:3 (1950).

[7] Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1977), 3.

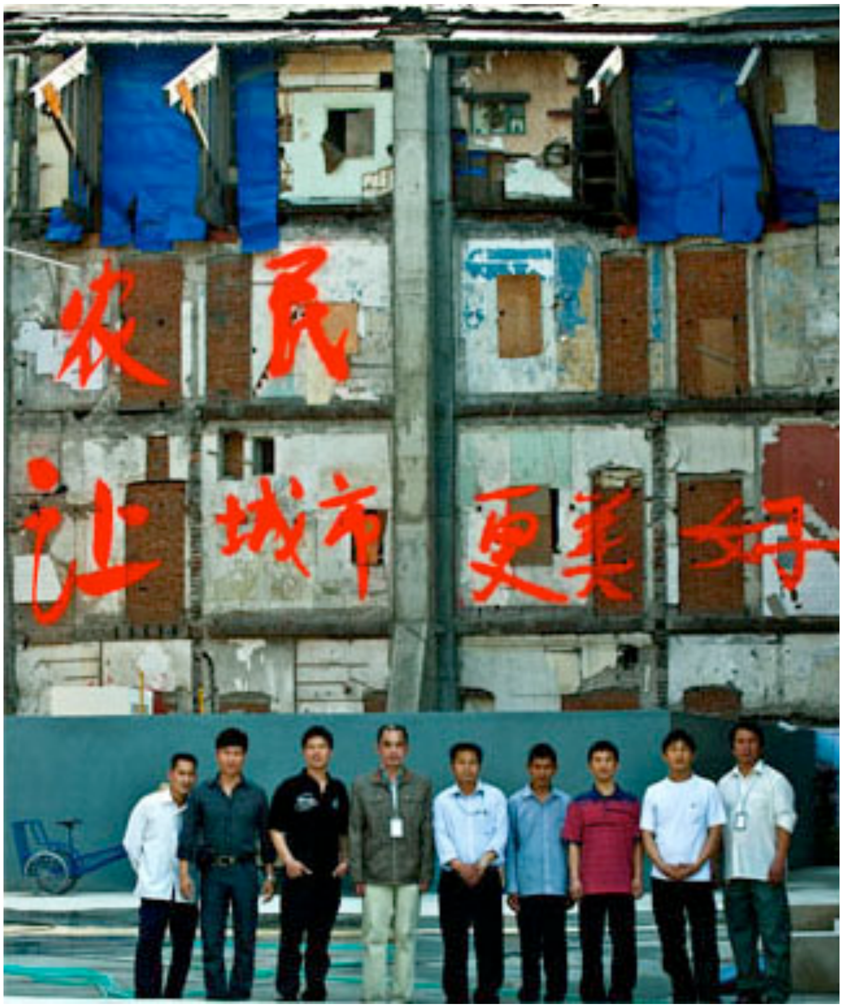

Figure 3. Inventors in front of *Peasants—Making a Better City, a Better Life,* Shanghai, 2010. Photo by Lin Yi, courtesy of Cai Studio.

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[8] Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Post-colonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

How can peasants be seen as part of the Expo-generated spectacle of modernization, except through a merely rhetorical repetition of peasants as the true owners of the Republic or through peasants-turned-migrant workers from provincial towns mobilized as manual labor in the construction of the Expo's world village, or its service industry?

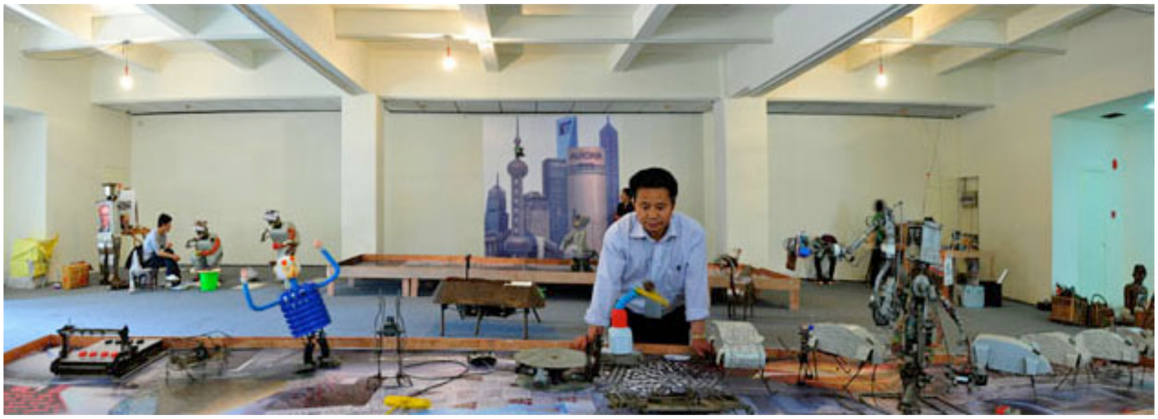

Figure 4. Cai Guo-Qiang, installation view of *Wu Yulu's Robot Factory*, Shanghai, 2010.
Photo by Lin Yi, courtesy of Cai Studio.

On the one hand, Cai's exhibition takes a pleasant look at small, entertainment-driven, participatory inventions, along with hand-crafted, human-sized metal robots imitating Western masters such as Jackson Pollock, Damien Hirst, and Yves Klein. For instance, a pre-programmed Pollock robot reenacts the "dripping" of acrylic paints on mass-produced canvases, as if to mock Harold Rosenberg's investment in the artist's unique expressions. The exhibition can be seen as arguably more entertaining than the Expo itself, as if aptly demonstrating the utopian investment of the Cultural Revolution—the peasants can do it too, perhaps even better. The wildest imaginations and dreams (*mengxiang*) of individuals seem to be the theme, and inventiveness and creativity go hand in hand with the product designs with which the World Exposition format has been so closely intertwined since its inception in 19th century Europe.

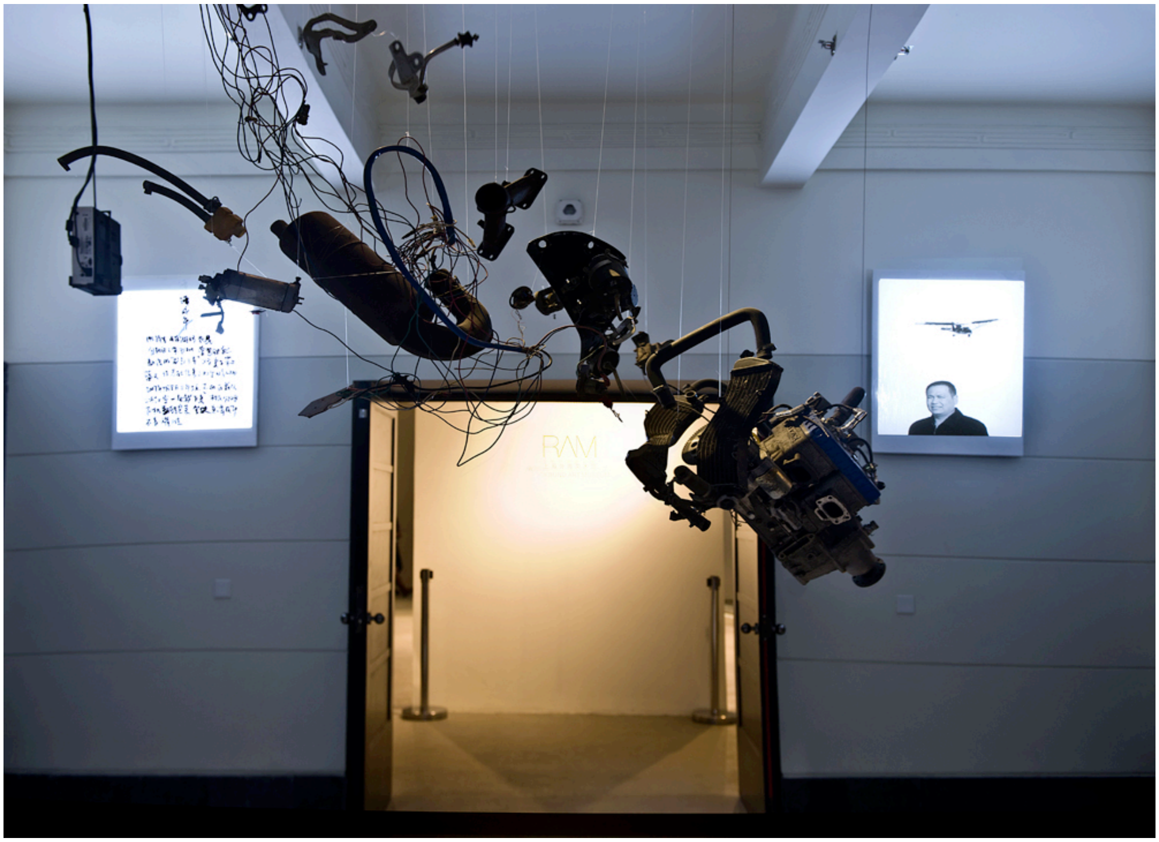

Figure 5. Cai Guo-Qiang, *Monument*, Shanghai, 2010. Photo by Lin Yi, courtesy of Cai Studio.

Despite the somewhat benign emphasis on peasants' creativity, the presence of rural peasants in 21st century cosmopolitan Shanghai seems out of place and out of sync, as peasants have the historical connotation of Chinese subalterns with whom enlightened workers will march into socialist revolution in China and the world. The figure of the Chinese peasant can thus be nostalgic, in the sense of Rey Chow's definition of nostalgia as not "an attempt to return to the past," but "an effect of temporal dislocation" and "something having been dislocated in time."[9] Instead of considering the peasants as backward, thereby comfortably putting them within a stagist understanding of modernity, we can consider them as figures of non-synchronism, or those that resist synchronization, like ghosts who return from the limits of time and haunt the present.[10] The first and only work exhibited on the ground floor—which thus cannot be avoided or skipped by visitors—is a composite of three objects: a picture of Tan Chengnian, a peasant inventor from Shandong province who died in 2007 from injuries sustained during a trial flight of his homemade airplane; the engine of the very wrecked plane from that 2007 accident; and an epigone-like text that narrates his tragic story. This narrative of a man who lived and died for his dream warms our hearts affectively, bringing us into the realm of sentimentality and the romance of daily lived experience, and away from the rationality-driven state development plans, of which the Expo is a part. Before the homage paid to the ghost of Tan Chengnian, we too become nostalgic figures, out of place and out of sync in today's Shanghai.

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[9] Rey Chow, "A Souvenir of Love," in *Ethics after Idealism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 147.

[10] Bliss Chua Lim, "Spectral Times: The Ghost Film as Historical Allegory," in *positions: east asia cultures critique* 9:2 (Fall 2001), 287-329.

In the case of South Korea, the uncanny ghostly figures who break the ostensible homogeneity of time by returning to the present are not peasants but migrant workers from other developing countries in Asia such as Nepal, Indonesia, and Vietnam. It can be argued that when a South Korean citizen encounters the sites of the labor rights protests of "dark-skinned" workers, she or he may recall the *minjung* labor movement of the 1970s and 1980s that ultimately achieved the initial step toward the nation's democratization by making possible the first democratically-held presidential election.[11] Although Korean workers have lost the political leverage needed to incite large-scale social change, their legacy has nonetheless been inherited by migrant workers. During their own struggles, the migrants have appropriated the symbols and references of the *minjung* labor movement. There is a dramatic irony in this, however: the term *minjung*, roughly translated to English as "people," encompasses political subjects who are projected to rise above authoritarian regimes and colonial oppression, and *minjung* has always been conceptualized as ethnically Korean, thus precluding the foreign migrant workers from this historical categorization.

But what if today's subalterns in South Korea are these very workers who are at the bottom of the socioeconomic order, fighting against the utter denial of their basic rights amid a constant threat of deportation? What role does their presence play in questioning South Korea's collective past of social revolution and its representation of a national community? Several projects by Mixrice, a collective composed of native Korean artists and transnational migrant workers, vehemently deny sympathy-generating mass media representations of the workers. In other projects, Mixrice challenges the closed identity and collective memory of the Korean nation-state, and moreover questions the possibility of forming a stable identity at all. *Conversation 02* is edited from audiovisual documentation of a Nepali community theater group's rehearsal for a performance entitled *Illegal Life*. During a practice performance, the Nepali director insists on a better translation of "emotion into action," and the exploitation and eventual death of a worker *sans papiers* is repeated, honed in on, and later applauded by other worker-viewers at the site. The camera zooms in to closely capture a worker-cum-actor who, with a sense of confidence in acting, demonstrates to his colleague how to express pain and "die" on stage. The editing is done carefully to draw the viewers' attention to the repeated nature of practice for a better enactment of "real" agony that the workers experience in Korea. In highlighting the apparatus of fiction with which this verisimilar story is constructed, *Conversation 02* questions the politics involved in the formation and representation of community, be it an ethnic majority or a minority in a given society.

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[11] Hagen Koo "Engendering Civil Society: the Role of the Labor Movement," in *Korean Society: Civil Society, Democracy and the State*, ed. Charles Armstrong (New York: Routledge, 2002), 109-131; and Yong Min Moon, "The Illegal Lives: Art within a Community of Others," in *Rethinking Marxism* 23:1 (July 2009), 403-419.

A collective past in the form of unrecognizable fragments also returns to the present in Hangzhou-based artist Gao Shiqiang's *Great Bridge*. A black-and-white rendition of two middle-aged male characters living in substantially different socioeconomic situations is dubbed with repeated female ghost whispers of "*daqiao* (great bridge)." *Daqiao* in this case refers to the nationalistic project of constructing the world's largest bridge in Hangzhou during the 1950s state-sanctioned economic plan. While Gao does not show any visual image of the bridge, he employs sound as the primary symbol of the socialist past for people living in the current moment. The outdated socialist agenda that was executed in the name of the people cannot simply be denied or put into the past, as it has an undeniable physical and material effect on the diverse bodies that occupy the here and now. *Great Bridge* seems to insist on the necessity of resurrecting past wrongdoings, even though the whirlwind in the name of progress takes the "angel of history" off the ground and into the future. What other subjectivities are imagined in artistic practices which, like Benjamin's angel, counter the homogeneous, empty subject?

Touching upon the issue of collective subjectivity, artist Zheng Bo begins a participatory art project *Karibu Island* with a video that asks those taking part to envision a place where time flows backward. After watching audiovisual material composed of rewound movie clips—men and women running backwards, and

Siddhartha returning to Maya's womb—the participants are invited to the Karibu Islands. There, the participants are born as fully-grown adults and eventually become babies. A group exercise of making birth certificates brings forth such questions as profession, assets, family relationships, nationality, gender, and sexuality: How many kids would I have when I am born, at, say, age eighty five?; What kind of profession would I have?; Where would I be born? During the three consecutive workshops for gay, lesbian, and "straight" groups held at the Beijing Queer Community Center in 2007, this activity provided the participants with an unreal space within which they could discuss various possibilities of policy-making and social transformations. The division between here and there is created by a distorted temporality that the artist sets up, while the constant oscillation between fantasy (What kind of person would my partner be at the time of my birth in the Karibu Islands?) and the practicality of achieving this fantasy in reality (If I want to have this type of partner in the future in Beijing, what steps would I go through to meet her and make a living with her?) brings the future into the past tense and vice versa. This oscillation results in bringing the participants back to the visceral reality of the present and calls for potential changes to be made as they are envisaged, verbalized, and hoped for during the workshops.[12]

Although the artist emphasizes the dialogical aesthetics of building a new community, I want to highlight the spatial dimension of the Karibu Islands. As if to reflect the kinds of "other spaces" that Michel Foucault conceptualized as heterotopias—"counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted"—the Karibu Islands exist in a particular, physically-existing site: a not-for-profit organization's office housed in a high-rise apartment building in the financial district of Beijing.[13] Contingent on a real space, Zheng's Karibu

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[12] The Karibu Islands project can be considered as what cultural critic Grant H. Kester would call "the facilitation of dialogue among diverse communities" and "the creative orchestration of collaborative encounters and conversations, well beyond the institutional confines of the gallery or museum." Borrowing British artist Peter Dunn's words, Kester then defines these artists as providers of "cultural context rather than cultural content." In his attempt to develop models of such artistic activities that derive from conversations, Kester theorizes what he calls "dialogical aesthetics," which induces the linkage between "new forms of intersubjective experience with social or political activism." Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community + Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 1-9.

[13] Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," trans. Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics* 16 (Spring 1986), 24. Originally written for a lecture given by Foucault in 1967, the text was first published in French in *Architecture-Mouvement-Continuité* in October, 1984.

Islands project creates a specific *public* and a specific *public space*, challenging the larger societal insistence on a homogenous time, space, and subjectivity especially prevalent in the most rapidly developing capitalist regions.[14] If the project's dialogical aesthetics results in an inquiry into subjectivity, the video opens up the participants to imagine (or fly to) an "other space," an effective utopia.

In his *Self-portrait 78*, Kwak Duck-jun constructs a space whereby a complex play with mediums such as a glass pane and a camera results in the processes of dis-identification and re-identification, all the while revealing the social and cultural heterogeneity of the space that a subject occupies. A Zainichi Korean, born in Kyoto, Kwak began the large-scale photography series *Presidents and Kwak* in the early 1970s. He photographs a scene in which he superimposes a mirror (a quintessential heterotopia for Foucault) onto the bottom half of an American president's face (that of Ford, Carter, Reagan, and so on), as published on every *Time* magazine's cover that celebrates the winner of a presidential election, reflecting his own face in the mirror and thus montaging his minority self with that of the "world face."[15] On the surface of Kwak's photograph, not only the subjects depicted but also the sites of representation are juxtaposed as disparate entities.[16] The *Presidents and Kwak* series, demonstrating the importance of mediation and representational tactics to Kwak's work along with his reiteration of the self as an "other" in Japanese society and the world, shares similarities with his performative video *Self-portrait 78*. Othering of the self takes place in the shooting process of *Self-portrait 78* through the use of a glass pane that functions like the mirror that Kwak holds for *Presidents and Kwak*. Shot at a frontal angle, the video consists of Kwak pressing his face up against a broken pane of glass while a monitor, standing before the glass pane, live streams his performance. In this closed feedback loop, Kwak is able to glare at the image of himself featured on the monitor screen while the glass pane reflects Kwak's projected image on the monitor. Although it may seem like a *mise-en-abyme*, this set-up is not an effort to create a gesture of endless reference. While the glass-cum-mirror distances Kwak from his self-representation, facilitating the process of dis-identification, Kwak's rubbing of his face against the cracks in the glass and licking them with his tongue provokes the viewers' physical discomfort, as if we were standing in person before him. Indeed, the viewers, whose position is that of the camera, are those who stare at Kwak and to whom Kwak returns his gaze. Through a series of mediations, our sense of proximity to Kwak is enhanced even to the point of assisting us, however imaginatively, in taking the place of Kwak who stands before the "mirror" and who carefully observes the distorted self-portrait over there in the "mirror." Watching the video, the viewers also become highly aware of their own socio-cultural positions, as Kwak, through his uncomplicated emphasis on the materiality of his body, strives to deliver his own cultural status to the viewers.[17]

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[14] Heterotopias, according to Foucault, have a function in relation to all the space that remains: "Either their role is to create a space of illusion that exposes every real space, all the sites inside of which human life is partitioned, as still more illusory. . . . Or else, on the contrary, their role is to create space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled. The latter type would be the heterotopias, not of illusion, but of compensation." Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," 27. For more discussion of *Karibu Islands*, please see the artist's own writing in which he situates his own practice within a critical dialogue on socially engaged art in mainland China. Zheng Bo, "Creating Publicness: From the Stars Event to Recent Socially Engaged Art" in *Yishu: Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art* 9:5 (September/October 2010), 71-85.

[15] The artist denies allegations of anti-Americanism. See: Tatehara Akira "Kwak Duck-jun: The Artist's Journey," in *Kwak Duck-jun: 1960s-1990s* (Seoul: Donga Gallery, 1997). Originally published in Japanese and Korean; the text in Korean is also available on the National Museum of Contemporary Art, Korea's website: http://www.moca.go.kr/item/itemManage.do?_method=writer_detail&idx=5446 (last accessed July 2010).

[16] It should be noted that the photograph includes not only the two-dimensional montaged surface but also the act of representation: we can see a glimpse of Kwak holding the mirror while looking straight at it, with the camera located behind his shoulder. Two visual effects take place in this case. First, the fragment of Kwak's body turning back on the viewers makes it clear that Kwak is highly aware of the coordinates of his own position vis-à-vis historical and spatial heterogeneity (i.e. the self who is aware of where it stands in the heterogeneous world). Secondly, the process of dis-identification with the self occurs in the doubling of Kwak's image, which is related to the first effect in that this splitting disallows stability and permanence in self-assertion and promotes a constant awareness of one's shifting historical and social position.

The metaphors of being beside an other, or the efforts to form an ethical relation with others who occupy divergent sociopolitical positions, are also provocative in the aesthetic language of both Chen Chieh-jen and Lim Minouk. For *Portraits of Homeless People, Renters and Mortgagers*, Chen constructs a film set with wooden molds recycled from construction fields. In the spectacular yet melancholic vision of a modern city's ruins, Chen films his friends stepping over the molds on the floor to arrive at the center stage on which rises a

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[17] In terms of formal language, Kwak's video work can be discussed within the context of previous artistic experiments with the portable video camera and with instant video feedback during the 1960s and 1970s, as explored by Rika Hiro in her contribution in this issue, or by other scholars on such works as Andy Warhol's experimental films and Dan Graham's video installations in mirrored rooms. My reading of Kwak's work, however, tries to remain faithful to the feeling of discomfort delivered by Kwak's blatantly sado-masochistic emphasis on his bodily presence—a self-portrait that confronts the viewer head-on.

cement model of an apartment building. On his work, Chen comments: "All of my friends in the film, except for one who is homeless, have to work to pay their high rent or mortgage just like most people in the city. Although they live in these homes, they don't really own the spaces. This kind of depressed [and] anxious situation where people have to endlessly work for their living space and worry about losing their jobs is what I wish to depict in this film."[18] Although the subjects' identities are not explicitly stated within the video's narrative, their collective agony has infiltrated the audiovisual elements of the video, as in the case of the sound of a propeller mixed in with slowly pulsating monotone electronic notes. In its structure, the video is segmented into individual portraits or sometimes double portraits: the opening scene captures an empty set; the subjects appear from the left or right front of the screen and start walking toward the center stage, where they pause for a moment; the screen then fades into dark before it returns to the opening scene of an empty urban landscape; and another subject enters into the screen to repeat the journey to the center. In a gallery setting, Chen wants the video to be screened continuously in order to enhance the sense of repetition, thereby achieving a *collective* portrait in the sense of a *chain* of separate portraits that are metaphorically equated within the setting that they inhabit—a modern city in the aftermath of extensive urbanization, devoid of warmth, care, and affection of inhabitants for one another.[19]

Lim's subjects of ethical equation in her video *Game of Twenty Questions* are the artist's own daughter and the participants in the Seoul municipal government-sponsored 2007 Multicultural Festival.[20] Interested in modernization and industrialization in South Korea, Lim probes the social phenomenon of the country's rapidly increasing multiracial population, which includes her own daughter, born to a Korean mother and a French father. Lim is acutely aware of the Korean racial hierarchy according to which a Korean interracial child with a Caucasian parent stands higher than "dark-skinned" migrant workers' children. In Lim's split-channel video, these latter, ethnically "other" children are frequently shown singularly on the left screen, juxtaposed with Lim's daughter who is featured on the right screen. The structure of a split screen has a visual function that is different from the other mediating tools used by Kwak (the glass pane, camera, and mirror) or Chen (a theatrical setting and ambient sound), which put their emphases on identification: the immeasurably tiny, seemingly insignificant gap between the two screens—just a thin line, in fact—symbolizes the insurmountable gulf between the subjects portrayed on the two sides. Within this visual structure, the image of Lim's daughter, a surrogate of Lim herself, on one side meets images of other loners (migrant workers, their children, a guinea pig, and balloons, often featured individually) on the other side. Single balloons strangely rolling on the ground of the Multicultural Festival site, usually shot from afar, sporadically appear on screen from the beginning. Lim only reveals the origin of the balloons towards the video's end, with a shot of hundreds of multicolor balloons being released into the sky to signal the beginning of the festival. With her daughter's image as an entry point to the world of fallen balloons—an allegory of the resistance to and critique of the naïve optimism embedded in Korean-style multiculturalism—Lim expresses a sense of crisis, one that gains a heightened urgency for viewers since the fate of these balloons is presented in a reversed temporal sequence.

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[18] Artist's statement sent to the author by the artist.

[19] Here I am making a loose reference to the idea of "a chain of equivalence" conceptualized by Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau. See: Mouffe and Laclau, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (New York: Verso, 1985), xviii.

[20] The festival is the fourth incarnation of an annual event organized by the city of Seoul, with its official name changing from "The Foreign Workers Festival" to "Migrant Workers Festival," and to "Multicultural Festival" in 2007. This change reflects the shift in the government's cultural policy towards migrant workers. And it also attests to the increasing rate of interracial marriage that is forcing both the central and municipal governments to make policy decisions on the country's unanticipated multiculturalism.

Like the balloons in Lim's work, the kites and paper gliders in Sangdon Kim's *Discoplan* also take off the ground only to fall right back to it. The driving force in *Discoplan* is the artist's continual dream of an alternative world, despite his recognition of inefficacy and futility in his attempt to intervene into social reality. In the name of a community outreach and participatory art workshop, Kim opens up a dialogue among his artist friends and residents of Dongducheon, a small city located midway between Seoul and the Demilitarized Zone. Due to its surrounding mountains (which are geographically advantageous for military purposes), the region had been a base for the Japanese imperial army during the Japanese colonialization of Korea in the earlier part of the 20th century, which was succeeded by the U.S. army base in the latter half of the century. The specific site captured in *Discoplan* is near Dongducheon's Camp Nimble, the ownership of which has recently been transferred from the U.S. military to the Korean Ministry of Defense, only to be re-sold to real estate developers. After the shift in ownership, it was discovered that the site cannot be used due to serious soil contamination and thus public access to it has been denied. When Kim looked at the helicopters flying over the barbed wire fence around the site, he was inspired to invite residents to build flying gadgets with the mission of transporting flower seeds over the fence—an emblematic act of resisting the military imperialism that is now coupled with neoliberal logic.

Kim heavily edits the documentary footage taken during this activity in order to help viewers witness the participants' incessant efforts to overcome the physical and symbolic barrier, and moreover to let viewers discover humor in the resistant gap between the participants' agenda and their actions. The former goal—the political and environmental regeneration of the century-old military base identified with colonialism and imperialism—is grandiose to say the least; yet, the latter seems trivial and tedious, ranging from filling emptied egg shells with seeds to throwing them over the fence (and ultimately failing at it). Watching their flying gadgets fall back at them because of the reverse wind (the literal manifestation of casting stones against the wind), the participants themselves burst into laughter. Amid their enjoyment and sheer fun in the activity, they laugh. Due to the absurdity and futility of their actions, they laugh again and we the viewers laugh too. The shots are fast-cut to interlink the visuals with the sound effects of exclamatory voices (e.g. "oh!," "wow," "argh!," "oh, no!") and other sounds (e.g. "whack," "bam"), enhancing the entertainment value of the video. During the *minjung* period in Korea, artists attempted to situate art at the core of the social movement, but the art often delivered uncomplicated, two-dimensional representations of present-day dystopias and a coming utopia. Kim's video is an example of what might be considered a "post-*minjung*" aesthetics that demonstrates in the most candid way the excruciating longing for change expressed through the performance of translating utopian dreams into tangible tactics, even in the case where these tactics are proven ineffective towards the end goal of a societal-level revolution.

Revolution, dreamed by many in various parts of East Asia during the 20th century—is it possible in the 21st century? In South Korea and China, where one of the most blatant manifestations of neoliberalism is executed on the state-corporate level, what kind of utopia is and can be envisioned by artists? Or, in the case of Japan, a country that has repeatedly fallen into economic recessions for the past two decades and that still has not reconciled with its own past as an imperialist colonizer, what form can the returning of "the oppressed" from the repressed past take in artistic practice?[21] And we have not even begun to discuss the art of North Korea, a country where the regime is constantly susceptible to temporal synchronicity and considered as a towering example of failed socialism. Bearing in mind the combination of complexity and multiplicity in the region of East Asia, I want to end this essay by citing the parallels that I see in the work of Cai Guo-Qiang and Sangdon Kim as a way of disturbing the tradition of national histories while simultaneously emphasizing the very specificities that allow intricate connections between the two artists working in disparate sociopolitical and cultural conditions.

In both Cai and Kim's work there exists dual moments of social critique and dreaming of a utopia. What is significant is that they both return to a point in history that they critique by reinventing and retranslating the subjectivities necessary for a socialist revolution (in Cai's work) and for the *minjung* democracy movement (in Kim's work). In "Peasant da Vincis," on the one hand, the notion of peasants as revolutionary subjects in total solidarity is proven false in the highly individualized creativity that drives these peasants. An array of material manifestations of their inventiveness challenges the monolithic, ideological image of suffering peasants depicted in, for example, the *Rent Collection Courtyard* sculpture commissioned by the Communist Party in 1965.[22] On the other hand, the very utopian construct of a political subject devoid of private ownership and capitalist impulse also exists in these flying gadgets, as none of the participating peasant-artists explicitly tries to make a profit from their "assets" (i.e. technical skills and materials like scrap metal). Various desires, and above all the desire to fly, a symbol of wanting a world alternative to the current one, are projected onto the objects on display.

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[21] For Harry Harootunian and Tomiko Yoda, the post-war economic prosperity and military security that Japan was promised by the U.S. came with the price of keeping the imperial dynasty intact and thus of delaying the very social reforms necessary for "[eliminating] prewar fascism and [putting] into place the foundations of a genuine social democratic structure." In the immediate aftermath of the war, Japan, with American help, absolved the emperor of responsibility for the war, which began Japan's endless deferral of acknowledging its war crimes. This long lasting post-war paradigm in Japan ended in the 1990s, with the recession that shattered the myth of Japan's endless economic affluence. Harootunian and Yoda, introduction to the special issue "Millennial Japan: Rethinking the Nation in the Age of Recession," of *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 99:4 (Fall 2000), 619-627.

[22] As art historian Michael Sullivan recounts, *The Rent Collection Courtyard* epitomizes the Chinese government's demand for sculptures as political propaganda. A group of anonymous sculptors collaborated to produce dozens of life-size sculptures in clay plaster to be housed in the courtyard of a former landlord in Sichuan. The contrast between feudal landlords and suffering peasants is rendered in the Soviet-style socialist realist depiction of human figures. Sullivan, *The Arts of China*, 5th ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 307-308. Cai Guo-Qiang is in fact the one who re-interprets this historical collection from a contemporary perspective by staging the process of sculpting *The Rent Collection Courtyard* in 1999 at the Venice Biennale's Arsenale, and positing it as representation of the "failed promise of socialist China." See Britta Erickson, "Cai Guo-Qiang Takes the Rent Collection Courtyard from Cultural Revolution Model Sculpture to Winner of the 48th Venice Biennale International Award," in *Chinese Art at the End of the Millennium*, ed. John Clark (Hong Kong: New Art Media Limited, 2000), 184–89.

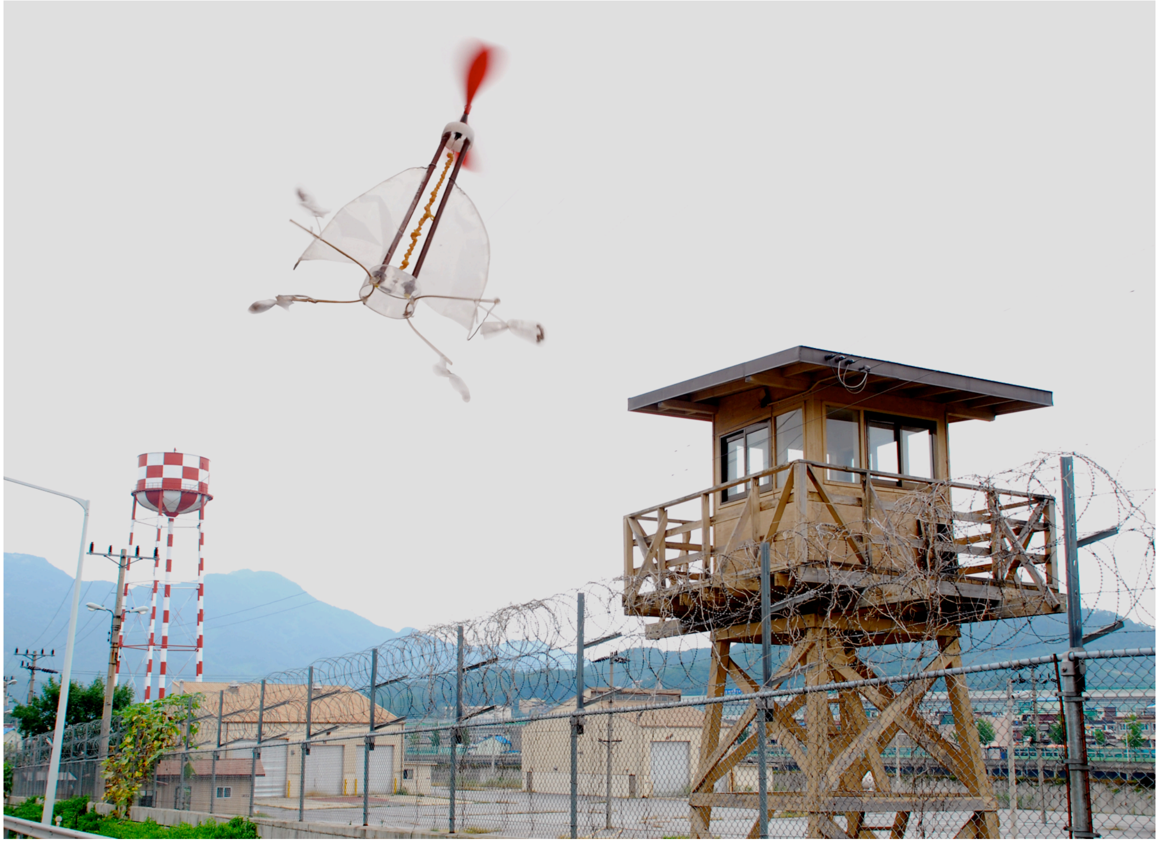

Figure 6. Sangdon Kim, *Discoplan*, 2007. Courtesy of the artist.

In Kim's *Discoplan*, the direct critique of *minjung* subjectivity derives from the participants' "play" in which each individual, not as a group marching together, endeavors to devise a possible means to fly. The participants-cum-characters arrive with divergent agendas, and they each have equally diverse experiences: a local activist in a black suit spews statistical information in a stern manner; a child receives help from her father to shoot a glider; and an elderly resident, after his sobering explanation of the area's polluted ecology, ends up flying a kite better than others because he had played with one while in refuge during the Korean War (1950-1953). Without the combination of all qualifications that make up *minjung*—ethnically Korean, working class men—the subjectivity that is in the making at the site of Dongducheon refutes the exclusive nature of *minjung* identity. As the video is edited from footage taken with four different cameras, *Discoplan* deters the viewers from establishing a singular perspective or point of identification, merging its critical commentary on *minjung* with its form. Critiques of *minjung* aside, it is nonetheless evident that the participants' struggle springs from a powerful will to fight against inequality and a strong desire for social justice. And this desire is no less—or perhaps, even more—genuine or real than that of *minjung* protesters during the 1970s and 1980s, making the site that the viewers witness the very site in which a new *form* of struggle is being actively grasped and conceived.[23]

While the little success that Kim's participants have in flying objects over the fence presents a dilemma for the ways in which to continue the struggle for a more just society, the danger in dreaming an alternative world is manifested in Cai's work as an ever-lasting dilemma—one that is violent, and fraught with fatal tension. The aforementioned three-story high installation of flying gadgets never reveals itself as a whole, as on each floor the viewers perceive a different aspect of the installation. While the viewers climb up a spiral staircase in order to reach the top gallery, which is linked to the rooftop with a clear skyscraper view, their viewing route seems to mimic the bunch of captured birds that fly upward within the three-story high atrium. The dream of flying, or the impulse to fly, in both birds and peasants is translated to viewers during their poetic journey upward. Upon arrival at the rooftop, the viewers are resituated within the larger frame of the urban space, welcomed by a partial view of Shanghai and fresh air; at the same time, Cai's exhibition, contingent and incomplete on its own, is fully contextualized in the viewers' vision within the city's sociopolitical, cultural, and institutional landscapes. Furthermore, the moment of re-connecting with the external world and fresh air at the top of the building prompts the viewers to feel suddenly freer than the captured birds in the gallery. Can we the viewers fly? Or, at the very least, can we learn to fly? But in Cai's project, we are disjointed and incomplete in ourselves, as we cannot achieve our own dream of flying. To do so on a sunny day in Shanghai, amid the modern buildings and postmodern skyscrapers, means jumping off the roof, ending one's life. This violent act only would repeat the tragedy of the peasant inventor Tan Chengnian, Mr. Robert Smith in Toni Morrison's novel, Walter Benjamin, and the first person narrator in Yi Sang's *Wings*.

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[23] *Discoplan* was produced in collaboration with and exhibited in 2008 in the former Insa Art Space as part of a larger project, "Dongducheon: A Walk to Remember, A Walk to Envision," which investigated the concepts of the border and neighborhood near the De-Militarized Zone. A small part of the exhibition was shown at the New Museum, New York in 2008 summer. http://www.newmuseum.org/exhibitions/398 (last accessed July 2010).

Afterword

Barbara London

My fascination with contemporary art in Asia began in the early 1970s upon meeting Nam June Paik, the Korean-born, Japan and German educated artist living in New York. An avid reader (in at least four languages) of cutting edge information (in a range of disciplines including history, philosophy, economics, science, and art), he exuberantly exchanged ideas. With a mischievous smile and a twinkle in his eyes, Paik thrived on experimentation and surprise. While he shared John Cage's interest in chance operations, Paik's concerns had more to do with discovering new possibilities. He relished the aleatory's correlations to modern software and hardware music composition tools, synthesizers, and effects processors with their "randomization" features, which became central to his creative processes in video. Recycling became a fundamental aspect of Paik's work for practical (economic) and aesthetic reasons, with the TV as a core building block.

I took great delight in Paik's observation from a public lecture: "I believe in timing. Somehow, you have to be at a certain point at a certain time. You have to 'meet the time,' as they say in Chinese history." As art historians and curators we meet the past from the vantage point of the present, on the cusp of the future. Our challenge is how best to use today's knowledge and technologies as we dig deeply for a better understanding of complex cultures. We begin by contextualizing encountered work, contemplating aesthetics and formal aspects, on the level of visual information. Getting down into the intellectual or philosophical content slowly comes with study and time.

When I started out my career as a young curator in the mid-1970s, artists in disparate parts of the world experimented with alternatives to traditional art-making. Intangible, time-based practices became options, best suited to seat-of-the-pants style, artist-run events and venues that were sprouting up in metropolises everywhere. Viewers became participants and engaged in a more active relationship with image and sound. This was decades before fax and the Internet, when international phone calls were prohibitively expensive. Artists discovered kindred spirits abroad by reading interviews in art magazines and by creating such grassroots exchanges as self-published 'zines and mail art.

The late 1970s in Asia, North and South America, and Europe marked the transition from avant-garde art to contemporary art. Each region had its own distinct history. Artists were reading, and a handful traveled to participate in international shows like *Documenta*. Today we discuss contemporaneity, and embrace multiplicity and regional divisions. Media, installation, and performance have become the lingua franca of *globalized* art. Some artists have international followings and many opportunities abroad, and are able to avoid being fenced in.

How do we best look back at art made in Asia between the 1960s and the present? How do we contextualize the practices of international, interventionist artists? Ferreting out primary reference materials, often in overlooked archives, and by using original documents and resources we come up with new insights. (Asia Art Archives in Hong Kong is an invaluable resource.) In this way, previously unrecognized or barely acknowledged movements, artists, and groups from non-Western backgrounds are being incorporated into canonical narratives of 20th and 21th century art history.

The speakers at "Spectacle East Asia: Translocation, Publicity, and Counterpublics," many of whom have the necessary language skills and backgrounds in cultural studies, are in a strong position as the youngest generation of thinkers to articulate new perspectives on contemporary art practices where variety and diversity have replaced unified value. Their papers in this publication reveal how they are set to unravel information and establish new frameworks. This vivid "mosaic" of methods and intentions is effectively putting contemporary trends into a broader historical or cultural context.

The papers probe substantial topics with relevant new insights.[1] Zheng Bo deftly traces the advent of Chinese contemporary art back to the late 1970s Stars group, which stated that every artist is a star, as the group confronted their formative years stifled by the drab uniformity of the Cultural Revolution. He contextualizes how the Stars generation's activities occurred within a political and cultural movement that constructed a transient public sphere. By using the format of outdoor, public exhibition of artworks, the artists adhered to the method of public display for Communist Party-sanctioned posters. He cogently argues that that the artists derived much of their energy from the public sphere.

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[1] Here, the author limits her discussion to the articles in this issue that concentrate specifically on art. We regret that Zheng Bo was unable to contribute his essay from the "Spectacle East Asia" Conference on the Stars Outdoor Art Exhibition to this issue; it is scheduled to appear in an upcoming anthology on Chinese contemporary art. —*ed*.

Caitlin Bruce explores the processes of writing in public, both as protest and as social communication. She carefully develops her position, basing her arguments around the practice of Zhang Dali, who during the 1990s spray-painted more than two thousand giant profiles of his own bald head on buildings scattered around Beijing. He placed the profile alongside "*chai*" characters painted by city authorities to indicate that a building was scheduled for demolition. Bruce poignantly concludes with a word of caution about how attention often is engaged by art that is designed as grand spectacle rather than the more authentic voice that lies in the engaging, personal inscriptions discovered in urban spaces.

Rika Hiro examines an early media work by Kō Nakajima, the video pioneer acclaimed for his early animations. Nakajima had fervent utopian ideals for media and worked with community groups and early public access cable television in Japan. Hiro uses Nakajima's bold action, *What is Photography?*, to delve into this artist's exploration of video's live aspect and photography's time delay (the need to send exposed 35mm film to a lab to be processed and developed.) The contrast between the immediately accessible image, as opposed to the delayed one, was set up as an interaction between a nude model and ten male photographer/artists confined together in a closed room. The reactions Nakajima did and did not elicit ranged from general apathy to video as a new art form, to having his use of "traditional" subject matter taken as pornography. The artist's self-censorship in the face of strict censorship laws and his anticipation of a feminist backlash has kept the work largely unknown to this day.

The papers by the first-rate art historians collected in this publication point to a dynamic decade ahead. The future is bright with new understandings and new insights as evidenced by the innovative scholarship here.

Contributors

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Godfre Leung is a Ph.D. candidate in Visual and Cultural Studies at the University of Rochester. He has taught art history at the University of Rochester, Eastman School of Music, and the Ontario College of Art and Design. Currently, he is working on a dissertation entitled "The White Wall in Postwar Art: From the Death to Rebirth of Painting."

Caitlin Bruce is a third year student in the Rhetoric and Public Culture Ph.D. program in Communication Studies at Northwestern University. Her research interests include public art, urban space, affect, urban subjectivity, ephemeral collective formations, graffiti, mural art, and digital mapping.

Okwui Enwezor is a globally renowned curator and has served as the artistic director of the Second Johannesburg Biennale in South Africa, Documenta 11 in Kassel, Germany, the 2nd Biennial of Seville in Spain, and most recently, the 2008 Gwangju Biennale in South Korea. Among his books are *Reading the Contemporary: African Art, from Theory to the Marketplace* (MIT Press, Cambridge and INIVA, London) and *Mega Exhibitions: Antinomies of a Transnational Global Form* (Wilhelm Fink Verlag, Munich). He is a recipient of awards and grants from Prince Claus Fund for Culture and Development, Ford Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation, International Art Critics Association, and Peter Norton Curatorial Award. He was until recently the Dean of Academic Affairs and Senior Vice President at San Francisco Art Institute.

Rika Iezumi Hiro is a Ph.D. student in the Art History and the Visual Studies Graduate Certificate program at the University of Southern California. Her primary interest is in post-WWII art and visual culture in Japan, especially the Anti-Art movement of the 1960s and its global interactions. She is a regular contributor to the Japanese contemporary art magazine *Bijutsu Techō/BT*; co-curated "Art, Anti-Art, Non-Art: Experimentations in the Public Sphere in Postwar Japan 1950-1970" and "Radical Communication: Japanese Video Art 1968-1988," both at the Getty Research Institute; and co-founded the non-profit art space Art2102 in Los Angeles.

Barbara London is Associate Curator in the Department of Media at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and founder of the institution's video program and collection. Since the 1970s she has tracked media art and has organized more than 120 related exhibitions at MoMA, including one-person shows of early mavericks such as Laurie Anderson, Joan Jonas, Nam June Paik, and Bill Viola. She recently presented at the museum the group exhibition and film series "Looking at Music." Her essays and criticism have appeared in *Artforum*, *Modern Painters*, *Art Asia Pacific*, *Leonardo*, and elsewhere. Her research and curatorial engagement with East Asia has continued since the 1970s.

Hyejong Yoo is a Ph.D. candidate in Art History and Visual Studies at Cornell University. She is writing a dissertation on Minjung Misul ("the People's art") in 1980s South Korea entitled "Minjung, Dialogue, Community: Reimagining Art into Minjung Misul."