

Expressions of the Emergent: Korean Video Art, History, & Memory

by

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Video & the Project of Emergent History

Some say the nameless deaths buried in
the Sangpae-dong Public Cemetery
are ‘whores,’ while others say they’re
‘Yankee Princesses.’

Those who resent the violence of U.S. soldiers
call them ‘Sisters of the Korean people.’

*But what shall I call them?
Those no one has remembered nor named?*

No, why do I even want to call them?

- Seung Wook Koh, “Driveling Mouth” (2008)
Single channel video installation
with color and sound (emphasis added)

The lines of text presented here are from Korean artist Seung Wook Koh’s single channel video about the lives and memories of sex workers in Dongducheon, a military camp town that lies approximately in between Seoul, the Republic of Korea and the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). This particular city, whose infrastructures were first designed and implemented by Japanese Colonists, only to be ravaged during the Korean War and later rebuilt by the U.S. Military, has become a symbol of Korea’s traumatic and contentious modern history, replete with historical narratives of colonization, rapid modernization, and postwar industrialization. Hidden somewhere deep within the gaps of these major historical narratives are the personal stories, memories, and histories of the people of Dongducheon, the civilians who have become the dispossessed of the U.S.-South Korean military order. Their lives have arguably been the most affected by the tumultuous shifts and displacements of war and colonialism yet have been rendered virtually silent and invisible from public discourses. Koh’s work serves as a documentation of these gaps just as it poses these critical questions: Who have been the people

of Dongducheon and why should we remember them, or call them forth – those who have been forgotten, unnamed, and made invisible? What does this act of remembrance provide for our understanding of the present moment and our future trajectories?

I argue that the answers lie within the understanding that the authorship of history is a claim of orders of knowledge and power, and additionally, that the act of constructing history is a social and political one, giving legitimacy to certain experiences, meanings, and subjectivities while delegitimizing others. In this process of construction, what is accepted as official history, usually crafted by a dominant regime, becomes codified as “historical truth,” creating the conditions that perpetuate hegemonic determinations of reality and orders of knowledge that serve the interests of some at the expense of others. In the context of Western civilization we have seen the results of this in the histories that have been used to legitimate colonialism, racism, sexism, and other corruptions of the Euro-American Empire. Yet, in any so-called pluralistic and democratic society – where polyphonous voice is to be valued as critical in sustaining the principles of democracy and the individual’s right to self-determination, there is a crucial need to give voice to the subjectivities that have been muted and the histories that have been suppressed. To do this means to critically look backward into time to search out the stories that disrupt, complicate, and threaten accepted notions of historical truth, shifting and enlightening our present realities and unlocking future possibilities. As one possible answer to Koh’s question, “*why do I even want to call them?*” I will refer to Gilles Deleuze who stated, “History amounts only the set of preconditions, however recent, that one leaves behind in order to ‘become,’ that is, to create something new...Men’s only hope lies in a revolutionary becoming: the only way of casting off their shame or responding to what is intolerable” (1990, 171).

Therein lies the task of a certain kind of storytelling – for the purposes of this essay, a certain kind of videomaking – that concerns itself with issues surrounding the representation of personal and collective memory, and the histories rendered silent by official narratives. What stories must be told so that we may understand our set of preconditions? How do we remember the events of the past in order to create the spaces for a “revolutionary becoming”? Additionally, because I will be investigating the ways in which time-based media approach these issues, how does the audiovisual medium of video form these narratives that often lie in the realm of the Foucauldian unthought, awaiting a language in which to think them? Within the context of poststructuralist discourse on history and how the medium of film has created new spaces for critique and revision, Robert A. Rosenstone argues that postmodern theorists have yet to bring forth a kind of writing that “brings the ways we know or think of the past into line with the poststructuralist critique of current historical practice” (1998, 199). An alternative method is needed, one that can fulfill the postmodernist claims against official history. Where Rosenstone looked to film to support these claims, I look to single channel experimental video, and its integration with the practice of what I will term emergent history, for its unformed, uncodified, and indeterminate qualities, as well as its numerous potentialities in challenging the assumptions made by prescribed “historical truths.”

Artists who create videos of emergent history must utilize a variety of formal techniques in image manipulation, editing, and sound mixing with historical fragments taken from archival documents, photographs, oral or written testimonies, recorded memories, as well as filmed or taped footage in order to build an audiovisual language to produce meaning. Emergent history is made from those stories that have yet to be told; they are the memories and pieces of history that are found in the dark passageways of time abandoned, and once activated, they work to find new

interpretations of historical events, overturning hegemonic narrative structures to reveal other truths that lie silenced, beneath, and in-between. As a mediated art form, emergent history's compositional processes refuse to be codified in terms of conventional narrative structures and seek to find alternative ways of experiencing an event through time, often implying the simultaneous flow of past, present, and future. The genre of experimental video in particular is ripe with possibilities for creating emergent histories because it is not tied to the rules of linear (analog) storytelling, but rather, as a nonlinear, digital, audiovisual art form, is more concerned with employing new methods of aesthetic, semiotic, and chronological organization to build a specifically electronic articulation for the conceptual and the nascent. Its qualities of form and of voice are by nature often poetic, open, and in-the-making. And further than being just a position of opposition, the underlying project of creating emergent history, whether through video or other forms of media, is one of claiming and making subjectivity – political, historical, and social, and creating the conditions in which these new subjectivities may be counted as legitimate actors in historical discourse.

The Korean Context

I am interested in the ways in which artists working with video and primarily located in the Republic of Korea (with the exception of Jin-me Yoon who is Korean-born Canadian) have been discovering new approaches to historical representation against the backdrop of Korea's official modern historiography. In this paper I will examine three works made between 2005-2008, and how they have negotiated issues relating to the representation of certain historical events in twentieth-century Korea. I will also attempt to delineate the various ways these artists have explored memory and historical meaning through the medium of single channel

experimental video. In her book *The Skin of Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*, Laura U. Marks defines the terms for intercultural cinema, which can aptly be applied to the video forms of emergent history discussed here. She writes that intercultural cinema “operates at the intersections of two or more cultural regimes of power. These films must deal with the issue of where meaningful knowledge is located, in the awareness that it is between cultures and so can never be fully verified in the terms of one regime or another. Yet the relationships between cultures are also mediated by power, so that the dominant regime...sets the terms of what counts as knowledge. Other knowledges cannot be expressed in its terms” (2000, 24). By this definition, the videos I will address here, while being expressions of emergent history, could also be considered intercultural, in that they operate at the intersections of two or more cultural regimes mediated by power: Korea and Japan, or Korea and the U.S. – these particular relationships having been imposed by colonialism and war. Operating at such junctures, they are concerned with the production of knowledge that counters, reinterprets, or complicates official historical claims produced by these relationships. In doing so, these videos not only challenge dominant historical narratives and their subsequent orders of knowledge, but they have also made valuable contributions to the history of new media art in Korea as a social and political practice.

Throughout this paper I will utilize various theoretical positions from media and critical theory to examine the formal and interior qualities of these works and their particular resonances within discourses on time-based media and historical representation. I have found Gilles Deleuze’s writings on cinema illuminating in the examination and understanding of the phenomenological and philosophical resonances of the works discussed here, as well as in finding a discourse in which to frame them. I will be using concepts from the time-image to

reflect upon the inner-workings of these videos, how different experiences of time and duration are created, and further, how this contributes to the understanding of video as a medium for constructing emergent histories.¹

In her video performance “The dreaming collective knows no history,” artist Jin-Me Yoon uses the body as the site of exploration into history and its interrelationship with the subject and the built environment of the (postwar) city. By integrating Walter Benjamin’s concepts on capitalism, modernity and history into the performative act of crawling from the U.S. Embassy to the Japanese Embassy, Yoon effectively creates a time-space event that critiques the present while channeling the dark passages of the past. Chan Kyong Park’s “Flying” is a poetic rendition of the historical summit between North and South Korea, which occurred in 2000 during the Kim Dae-jung administration. The artist constructs unedited television footage of the first direct flight from South Korea to the North since national division to create a dream-like semiotic reordering of the event’s historical meanings. Seung Wook Koh was one of the participating artists in the Dongducheon Project, a joint effort between the Insa Art Space (Seoul, Korea) and the New Museum (New York City) between 2006-2008. “Driveling Mouth,” alluded to earlier, addresses the plight, memories and hopes of young women serving as prostitutes in a military camp town. His work utilized images, text, and sound to create layered and haunting screen space that beckons the viewer in.

When watching or writing about such works, which utilize experimental methods of reinterpreting or rearranging dominant notions of past events, questions of mediated

¹ In general, where the movement-image follows a logical sensory-motor schema and narratological linear narrative (i.e. – past precedes present which is followed by a future), as seen in much of the films made before the Second World War, the time-image makes a clear break away from linearity and the logic of cause and effect, as seen in postwar films of the French nouvelle vague and Italian neo-realism. In the time-image past, present, and future can exist simultaneously or be indistinguishable. As well, different levels of duration can exist concurrently.

representation as historical “truth” are called forth. Furthermore, when working in the realm of memory, which not unlike history, activates as an act of creative reconstruction and under the conditions that we can never know the past event in its true state, but only try to represent it through the sayable or the seeable. Considering this, the task is not so much about historical loyalty to the event as it is about opening spaces for revelation. Marks writes, “Intercultural cinema is not sanguine about finding the truth of a historical event so much as making history reveal what it was not able to say. Any truth is lost in the event’s discursive representation, in the layers of words and things that build up over it” (2000, 29). The works I focus on operate in this way as they collectively seek out the experiences, sensations, and stories of Korea’s modern history that have been made silent if not completely ignored in public discourses concerning colonialism, national division, and the U.S. military’s presence on the peninsula. Through their various formal methods, they are determined to say what official history has not.

The places of these videos could be defined in terms of Deleuze’s “any space whatever.” Indeed, taking from his description of Europe after the Second World War, I believe it would not be inaccurate to frame the places of postwar Korea, such as Dongducheon, in this way: “...the postwar period has greatly increased the situations which we no longer know how to react to, in spaces which we no longer know how to describe. These were ‘any spaces whatever’, deserted but inhabited, disused warehouses, waste ground, cities in the course of demolition or reconstruction” (2000, xi). The people who inhabit these any-spaces-whatever are those whose lives cannot be found in the annals of official history; they are the nonexistent inhabitants of postwar Korea. Koh’s work attempts to give voice where there has been none, and where the subjects of this voice have been erased from view. The implications at work here are that where there is a gap, there is also a space to fill, a space of open potential for remaking and thus, of

becoming. It is the artist's opportunity to fill these gaps and create a vision of what may become. To do this is an operation of Deleuze's political cinema which he stated as such: "If there were a modern political cinema, it would be on this basis: the people no longer exist, or not yet...*the people are missing*" (2000, 216). Perhaps it is here that video art can serve in the task of finding a revolutionary becoming – by remembering, naming, and calling forth the people who are missing; the people yet to come.

Historical Background: Modern Korea & the Development of Contemporary Art

It will be useful to note a few characteristics found in the study of Korea's modern history, as well as how contemporary art including the development of new media art has been affected by or responded to the many political and social upheavals. Of course, to give a full account of Korea's modern history would be too exhaustive for the purposes of this paper, so I will allow the discussion of each video piece to allude to certain significant historical junctures. That said, in this section I will proceed to outline a few key events as they may help to further illuminate the historical context of the artists presented here.

To begin, we should note that Korean history since 1910, the year that marks the official commencement of Japanese occupation, has been one of contentious scholarship. Historian Bruce Cumings notes that much of this modern history appears as a peripheral afterthought in many major historical texts; much of this, he claims, is due to documents still classified in postwar North and South Korea, as well as Japan's own reluctance to disclose prewar archives. He goes on to write:

Closed archives are themselves symptomatic of deeper problems. For Korean historians the colonial period is both too painful and too saturated with resistance mythologies that cannot find verification in any archive...In the South one

particular decade – that between 1935 and 1945 – is an empty cupboard: millions of people used and abused by the Japanese cannot get records on what they know to have happened to them, and thousands of Koreans who worked with the Japanese have simply erased that history as if it had never happened... The history of divided Korea since 1945 is even more biased or nullified because of national division. (2005, 139-140)

If the gaps that fill Korea's modern history are so plentiful, then it is of no surprise that historical scholarship has split into various strains and has been used as a site to further a particular group's own political or social agendas, whether they be nationalist or colonial. Yet it is also these contentious characteristics that make the discourse of history in general and the project of emergent history in particular so rich for examination. This element of Korean historiography particularly illustrates the notion of history as a volatile and changeable construction informed by numerous political, social, and cultural interests and serving various ends depending upon its source.

What is clear is the recurrence of foreign invasion and the accompanying disruptions within Korean society that began well before 1910. Yet significant events arising from modernization, Japanese occupation, the Korean War, national division, the presence of the U.S. military, as well as authoritarian rule, and rapid industrialization changed the course of South Korea irrevocably. In many ways, the development of contemporary art in Korea has been affected and informed by such disruptions. In a paper delivered at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago's 2003 symposium entitled, "Relative Reality: Korean New Media Art Today," Wongi Sul, a Professor at the Korean National University for the Arts presented a similar historical outline of twentieth-century Korea which also included the introduction of modern art by the Japanese during occupation. Sul noted that in effect, modern art in Korea as a non-indigenous form was always trying to catch up with the international art world by looking to

foreign trends and aesthetics. Indeed, there were a number of criticisms of modern and contemporary art as hegemonic Western forms, and in response to this, later movements such as Minjung art, or People's art, would mark a return to more traditional forms of painting, drawing, and woodprint while integrating nationalist themes.

In 1956 a Korean artist by the name of Nam June Paik left his native country to study in Japan, then later to Germany and the United States. He would later join the Neo-Dada inspired network of artists known as Fluxus, and become one of the foremost pioneers of video art. But new media art would have a delayed development within the canon of contemporary art in South Korea. As Paik was forging new ground with experimentations in video, performance and the television as sculptural form, Korea was going through major political upheavals, which included the student protests of the April 19 movement, the ousting of President Rhee Syngman in 1960, and a coup d'état staged by General Park Chung-hee who would lead South Korea as President until his assassination in 1979, ushering in a period of military rule, rapid industrialization, and massive democratic protests.

The 1980's would prove to be one of the most tumultuous times for South Korean politics, seeing the rise of widespread student democracy movements. As young Koreans searched for a uniquely Korean identity and culture, they turned to folk traditions in the performing and visual arts. Minjung art, for its nationalist subject matter and rhetoric was often interpreted as pro-North by more conservative parties, and artists who identified with this movement often worked under the scrutiny of president Chun Doo-hwan's government, risking censorship and arrest. Artist, critic, teacher, and organizer Chan Kyong Park, the maker of the video "Flying," states that his artistic and scholarly work is directly influenced by Minjung art,

which is evident in the conceptual realism of his work which often examines themes related to post-colonialism, national division, and unification.

By the 1990's South Korea experienced a renaissance in film, bringing about new developments in film culture and new media art, which included experimental video, installation, and interactive works. Byung Hee Lee, curator of Project Space SARUBIA in Seoul, marks the beginnings of new media art around 1993, and also notes that its key operative characteristics critiqued traditional art forms while suggesting alternatives. New media art was also more accessible in practice and dissemination, introducing a move away from the white cube and into the public domain to create a more democratic environment for experimentations in artistic practices. With the rapid technological advancements within South Korea, and given its historical significance as a more democratic platform for expression, Korean new media art has been made accessible and pliable enough for artists to find a culturally unique voice and identity without having to look outside for aesthetic and thematic cues.

For the most part, the artists introduced here are working from this context. Though Paik remains the most well known of Korean video artists internationally and domestically, many more have come about, using video and other forms of new media in different ways. The works that I discuss in this paper are less concerned with sculptural approaches to video and installation that are predominantly abstract or conceptual, and are more aligned with a single channel format in which to investigate semiotic and thematic concerns exploring issues of embodiment, subjectivity, history, and memory.

Expressions of the Emergent

In one long 18 minute shot, a woman (artist Jin-me Yoon) dressed completely in black and lying face-down upon a dolly crawls from the U.S. Embassy to the Japanese Embassy in downtown Seoul. The camera remains low to the ground and aligned with Yoon as she navigates her body along the path. What would normally be a ten-minute walk becomes an arduously painful task, Yoon pulling her weight along the course sidewalks and streets which vary in inclines, every now and then stopping to rest, her breathing becoming more heavy and labored the farther she goes.

In her video “The dreaming collective know no history,” Yoon makes an allusion in the title to Walter Benjamin’s dreaming collective, which can be found in his seminal work, *The Arcades Project*. Indeed, through her choice of location, Yoon suggests the streets of downtown Seoul as her parallel to Benjamin’s arcades which are a “primordial landscape of consumption” (2002, 827), and stages herself as a kind of renegade flâneur. In her description of the video, Yoon states she is specifically referencing Benjamin’s “suggestion that modernity and the flows of history are phantasmagoric,” and goes on to state, “Formally tipping the vertical city of skyscrapers and bipedal humans onto a horizontal plane, I allude to the simultaneously submissive and subversive possibilities of this inversion.”² Indeed, on first glance, Yoon’s physical positioning recalls that of Seoul’s crippled and destitute whose only mobility is through dragging their bodies atop a similar dolly like apparatus. And yet by locating herself in this way, and with the conjunctive movement of the camera, Yoon also occupies a part of the city-space’s built environment that defies the normal flows of the modern urban metropolis; as people and

² <http://jin-meyoon.ca/bio>

traffic, or the dreaming collective, move around and behind her, she keeps steadily along, deliberately against the speed of capital and production.

Yoon was born in Korea in 1960, and then immigrated to Canada when she was eight. Her work in video, performance, and photography has been concerned with the constructions of identity and belonging, as well as with the problematics of history and a transnationalism that enforces a hegemonic world order, imposing the displacement of bodies while pushing its capital. In “The dreaming collective know no history” Yoon comes to South Korea as both insider and outsider, able to understand the cultural meanings of capitalism’s presence in the country’s relatively newly found economic strength in the global world order, and also able to critique a gap within public discourse concerning capitalism and modernization’s historical junctures with South Korea’s troubled Japan and U.S. relations.

Her location choices allude directly to Korea’s colonial history of occupation, subjugation, and postwar division, which as suggested by the video’s title, is lost in the frantic pace of production and consumption. It is as if Yoon is embodying historical memory itself; a black cloud which moves slowly through the streets, tracing a path of colonial and militarized occupation like a ghost that lingers unrequited, refusing to be lost to collective amnesia yet bound to the lower depths of virtual invisibility within the built spaces of modernity. In the first few moments of the video, Yoon crawls past a gate to the U.S. Embassy with guards in the distance standing by, watching the mysterious black figure as she moves across the sprawl of concrete. A moment later she struggles onto a narrow sidewalk where another group of guards minding their post stand idly. They are visible from the waist down, and their stiff postures do

not budge as Yoon crawls by them. It is difficult to tell who is real and who is imaginary at times.

The artist uses the body and site specific historical referencing to explore the ways in which narratives of the past can resonate within the time-space of the present. Yoon chooses to allow the video to play out in one continuous shot; there are no edits, nor has the material been altered in any obvious way to tell us how to read the image. In exploiting video's capacity for *verité*, the artist creates an event of Bergson's *durée*, or a qualitative shift in things over time – the present time, which the artist moves through with her body growing progressively more fatigued, and through this act, a simultaneous tracing of time past which is rendered as pervasive but invisible; phantasmagoric. Yoon creates a kind of layered experience of time, what Deleuze described in archeological terms: “Not that we are taken back to prehistory (there is an archeology of the present), but to the deserted layers of our time which bury our own phantoms; to the lacunary layers which we juxtaposed according to variable orientations and connections” (2000, 244). To apply this in direct terms, Yoon's body as the historical memory, moves through the variable orientations and connections of the path, excavating contemporary Seoul's lacunary layers of time that lay buried beneath the surface of present day capitalist spectacle, all the while becoming more exhausted against the constant flow of modernity.

The American and Japanese Embassies are specific sites that represent several significant elements of South Korea's difficult modern history. Japanese colonial rule was brutal and laden with political, cultural, and sexual violence inflicted upon Koreans, under the auspices of enlightenment and modernization. To outline just a few of the changes enforced during this time, Japanese occupation mandated compulsory worship at Shinto shrines, there was a radical

alternation of school curriculums to eliminate the teaching of the Korean language and history, tens of thousands of men were conscripted into the Japan's military during the Second World War, while thousands of girls and women were forcibly taken to Japan to work as "comfort women." The occupation ended on August 15th 1945 with Japan's surrender to the Allied Forces, but Korea's struggles were not to end there. In the years to follow, the U.S. would play a major role in determining South Korea's fate, including its unilateral drawing of the 38th parallel, its heavy involvement in the Korean War and in the aftermath, stationing its military in strong numbers along the DMZ and throughout parts of the south. In the period following the war, the rapid development of capitalism (of which the U.S. military-industrial complex has played a role) in South Korea pushed forth an era of intense modernization that has brought the country to where it is today. I outline these events to emphasize the historical and global significance of Yoon's video and the (lacunary) layers of meaning activated within her act of crawling from the U.S. Embassy to the Japanese Embassy, its simultaneous "submissive and subversive" potentialities, as well as how the historical memory of the dreaming collective, though phantasmagoric at one angle, can be activated at another. Though simple in its formal conceit, Yoon's work is a complex and multifaceted reflection on Korea's history of colonialism and capitalism, which she makes resonate through the lived experience of contemporary South Korea; through this video she creates the physical embodiment of history emerging.

Another artist, Chan Kyong Park, born in Seoul in 1965, created the video "Flying," which addresses issues from the period following occupation: the Korean War, national division, and unification. Park's work has explored Korea's current political and social status as a divided country with a post-colonial awareness, which is evident in the content of his work as well as his activities outside of his formal artistic practice. His interests as an artist, teacher, organizer, and

art critic have focused on national division, historical discontinuities caused by military dictatorship, and polarization in condensed modernization³. In “Flying” Park uses outtakes from a South Korean television station’s coverage of the historical 2000 summit between North and South Korea, which includes the entire duration of the flight from take off in Seoul to landing in Pyongyang. Park’s video condenses the journey to 13 minutes of metaphor and contemplation on unification while also creating an experience of the past resonating through the present. Through the selection of shots and editing, the video semiotically reorders meanings and references, offering a more ambiguous and complicated view of the event.

In the opening of the video, Park provides the viewer with historical background through titles, establishing the historical base from which this event is to be read. The sequence reads: “In the Korean War (1950-53) nearly five million people were killed/The American bombardment destroyed almost all of North Korea/In June 2000 after 50 years of division the first South-North summit took place/For the 1st time after the Korean War, a direct flight between the two Koreas was inaugurated.” Cue music from exiled Korean-German composer Isang Yun, and the flight begins. Park’s technique is to use edits sparingly, allowing the viewer to contemplate an image. The first image is a wide shot of the runway as the plane takes off from the ground. The camera follows its glide into ascent, the words “Republic of Korea” with the ROK flag painted prominently on its side. The image lingers on the plane as it moves farther into the sky and disappears. What follows is a montage of shots taken from inside the plane looking down onto the Korean landscape. The plane passes over the lush irrigated fields below, and at some point one wonders, how will we know when we are in North Korea? One is reminded in this moment that though the journey to North Korea feels as if entering a completely foreign and far away

³ Artist bio: <http://www.insaartspace.or.kr/html/document01.html>

place, the distance between Seoul and Pyongyang is a mere 120 miles, and that only sixty years ago there was no border that divided these lands into two nations.

In the moments to follow, there are two shots of landscape images, but flipped upside down. They are followed by another image taken from the window of a plane, but this shot is clearly different: it is archival film footage taken from the interior of a fighter plane shooting missiles into the land below. Cut to wide shot of another firing war plane in reverse motion as it hovers in the air, giving the effect of missiles being absorbed back into its cavity. Fade to black. The usage of this footage at this particular juncture has an immediate effect of placing the present event within a memory of the past. Park uses the visual association between the images to shift the viewer through time – Korea’s time, from war and national division to the present question of unification and the possibility to achieve it. The archival footage is played back in reverse, as if to ask: what if we could reverse time, how would things be different?

Deleuze wrote about two different flows of time: the present that passes and the past that is preserved. Thus there is the possibility for two different kinds of time-images, one that is grounded in the present, and the other grounded in the past. In this series of shots, Park is able to weave both kinds of time-images creating a sensation of mutual embeddedness between present and past, what Deleuze referred to in his writings as sheets of the past, which exist as a coexistence of circles. Depending on the kind of recollection we are looking for, we select a particular circle to jump into. He also describes memory as something outside ourselves that is simultaneous with the living present, which Park creates throughout this video through a sparing use of images grounded in the past. Deleuze writes, “Memory is not in us; it is we who move in a Being-memory, a world memory. In short, the past appears as the most general form of an

already-there” (2000, 98). In creating this sensation of the already-there, Park complicates the meaning of the summit. He reminds us that, even given the event’s monumental significance in current North-South relations, the Being-memory of war exists in an actual form – no resolutions toward unification have been reached and the Armistice remains.

By the time Park brings us back to the present day of the video, the plane is landing in North Korea. Outside, farmers in rice fields stare curiously at the plane descends. What follows is a sequence of slow-motion footage of the DPRK’s version of a welcoming committee. On the side of the airport is a gigantic image of Kim Il-Sung, and hundreds of soldiers stand in formation on the runway. There are also what seems to be hundreds of women dressed in hanboks (traditional Korean dress), waving bouquets of bright flowers, smiling with all the grace and generosity of Korean custom. The shots linger on these women for some time before fading to white at the video’s end.

I will note here that the composer of the music that is used in this video is Isang Yun (1917-1995), a Korean nationalist who participated in the independence movement during Japanese occupation, and who was later implicated in the East Berlin spy incident, leading to his exile from South Korea. Yun was an advocate for unification, and based this composition on a Korean fairytale about two separated lovers who live on two distant stars. In this tale, flocks of crows take pity on the separated lovers and form a bridge between their stars so that they may reunite once a year on July 7. In Park’s video, the symbolic reference of the plane within this video has multiple meanings: it is the flock of crows building a bridge for two divided lovers (South and North Korea) to be unified. Alternatively, in the South Korean context, a commercial plane such as the one used for the 2000 summit means progress, mobility, globalization, and

economic success, and for the North, a place where citizens, save for the select few, are completely restricted from travelling outside the country, the plane takes on a more menacing meaning of invasion, war, or the foreign other.

In the montage sequence of landscape images Park creates a kind of “any-space-whatsoever,” for it is never clear exactly where we are, but given the historical context of the documented event, the land holds a particular resonance of postwar dislocation. Indeed, images one may have of North Korea, specifically of its capital Pyongyang, could be the very embodiment of these abandoned and empty postwar spaces. In his use of slow motion and montage editing, Park effectively creates a sensation of being both inside and outside of the event; we are able to immerse within the pure sensuality of the images while not losing sight of their meanings and connections to division and unification. This is emphasized with the selective use of archival war footage, which creates a kind of joint dissonance between the tentatively hopeful present and the traumatic past. Park also counters dominant narratives and representations of the North as the menacing and brainwashed aggressors of the South. Any representation of the North as the foreign other, so often seen in mainstream media, is not present here. Instead, the video transcends dominant historical representations by using poetic voice to blur divisions of time and space: between the lands of the North and the South, while interweaving past, present, and future narratives. In effect, Park is able to offer a more complicated and ambiguous picture of the Korean question, which lingers still today.

As mentioned previously, since the Korean War and the division of the peninsula, South Korea saw a rapid rise and development in industrialization and modernization. The presence of the U.S. military in the country brought about numerous issues pertaining to postwar

rehabilitation and South Korea's struggle for independence as a nation. As a result, for many Koreans, military camp towns have come to represent the numerous social and political ills of these postwar phenomena. Seung Wook Koh (b. 1968) made "Driveling Mouth" as part of "The Dongducheon Project: A Walk to Remember, A Walk to Envision," Insa Art Space's joint art project with the New Museum conducted from 2006-2008. The project, which involved a collaborative group of artists, curators, cultural critics and social scientists, was intended to critically investigate the socio-political history of Dongducheon and its complex relationship with the U.S. military-industrial complex. A group of artists were invited to create works in conversation with the people of the military camp town, focusing largely on those whose lives and experiences have gone under-represented if not completely ignored by public discourses and policies concerning Dongducheon.

Koh's work is a 13-minute poetic video that intercuts text taken from interviews with government officials and sex workers, young Korean women primarily catering to soldiers of the U.S. military, with photographs of the women collected from the personal websites of former U.S. veterans who served in Dongducheon. The soundtrack is from Antonio Vivaldi's "L'Estro Armonico," which fades in and out through the image sequences, occasionally leaving periods of silence. The text appears as white font against black and Koh's technique with the photographs is to obscure the image leaving only a select part of it visible through a circular frame: a woman in a red sequined dress poses and smiles, her body engulfed by black background and visible only from the bottom half of her face to her waist, or a Korean woman poses with a U.S. soldier, his arm around her as they both smile for the camera, but they are only vaguely discernable, their faces obscured by blackness. The titles and images interchange, one appearing for about five seconds then slowly fading to black before the next fades up. The choice to cut in long pauses of

black screen creates a kind of optical resonance, and gives the images a life of their own – they become living memory rising from the darkness of forgotten time, and the text becomes their voices calling out to us from the abyss. Koh also uses black screen as a narrative and effective device, leaving gaps where one may expect an image, serving as a reminder of the gaps in official historical narrative where the women of Dongducheon are missing. The artist effectively creates a haunting screen space that is a portal to the universe of these women who, in the official narrative, have become the objects of post-colonial suppression, exiled to the darkness of societal shame and outside the borders of accepted historical discourse.

Approximately midway through the video, the sequence of images plays back in reverse with new text. There are three junctures at which Koh integrates variable-speed motion video of a man (himself) sitting in a chair in a dark room, drizzling water from the mouth: at the beginning, middle – before the image sequences plays back in reverse, and in the video’s closing. This footage is given the same treatment as the photographs, blacked out in obscurity with only part of the face and body visible. In regards to the structure of the piece, Koh envisioned a kind of folding screen of time – or perhaps also understood in terms of Deleuze’s sheets of the past as discussed earlier – with the first half representing the “memory encountered” and the latter half the “memory recurring” (2008, 85). Through this he is also creating a sense of the women’s lived beingness in time; instead of being merely abstract and static representations of themselves, they take on a presence that moves through time. A description of the video reads: “Koh addresses the issue of the nation-state’s desire to project a certain collective narrative onto forming and representing its identity and an individual’s attempts to escape from its grip. As a way to build an individual identity, one seeks for, restores and recomposes one’s memories of the past, which entails a moment of collision and collapse among the restored memories” (2008, 85). In this

collision of restored memory, we begin to see how emergent histories work to not only reclaim subjectivity from the nation-state's imposed narratives of identity, but also how that subjectivity works to form a new collective narrative.

On a formal level, Koh deconstructs and obscures the images in a way that defamiliarizes the photographs from their context and instigates the viewer's active watching. Because the images are severed from any specific, recognizable, or expected time and place, they become floating symbols rendered as faint outlines, requiring one to fill in the blanks. There is a challenge to the viewer in this, as Marks writes, "The inability to recognize an image encourages us to confront the limits of our knowledge" (2000, 47). This is an effect of what Deleuze termed the optical image, and in many cases they are images that are not clearly recognizable because they are filtered, effected, or manipulated in some way. Koh's work, as an experimental video and an expression of emergent history utilizes the optical image for both an aesthetic and a political effect. To elucidate these operations of the optical image, Marks writes, "In general, Deleuze's characterization of time-image cinema describes avant-garde works that, in their suspicion of representation, force the viewer to draw upon his or her subjective resources in order to complete the image. In intercultural cinema there is an additional, more overtly political suspicion of the image, given that its clichés bear the weight of dominant history" (2000, 46). By rendering images of the women sex-workers of Dongducheon incomplete, the viewer is asked to complete the image – *her* image. The integration of text works to counter, complicate or help fill in the picture of the woman and her life in Dongducheon. For example, one title card reads: "There seems to be no end to poverty, no matter how hard you work. No matter how hard I work, I couldn't see a future ahead" (2008, 89). Another reads: "Each and every one of you is a patriot. Keep the courage and dignity and don't forget that you're doing much to make American dollars.

American soldiers came here to help us, so when you meet them, please keep tidy and be careful not to use those bad words,” which is followed by: “What the fuck. Thought this cunt was mine, but it was the State’s” (2008, 98-99). The viewer is continually reconstructing the images of the women with the realization that there is no final or complete portrait. What is created is a composite image where competing assumptions and complicated truths play out on the representations that we are given and through those that we hold within our own imaginations. Koh’s question, “*what shall I call them?*” becomes the question the viewer must ask of herself. One is forced to confront the limits of her own knowledge, understanding, and empathy of a particular situation in postwar, post-colonial Korean history (and present day context), and the lives that have been paid for it.

Through this video, Koh answers his own question of why he should want to call these women, the unnamed dead of Sangpae-dong Public Cemetery: to lift their stories out of the abyss of silence and to find the people who are missing – those whose lives and histories can activate within us the possibilities for a revolutionary becoming, of casting off our shame and responding to what is intolerable.

Conclusion

The works that I have presented here are all expressions of the emergent; each sets an example of how emergent history is formed and articulated to renegotiate, complicate, and represent historical narratives through the medium of video, which utilizes sound, image, text, and the body. More specifically these works are experimental in nature, using poetic voice and other formal strategies to construct their meanings, rather than a conventional, linear narratological schema. Further, by being a digital, nonlinear, audiovisual format video has the

capacity for creating complex experiences of time, rendering a sensation of simultaneous flows of past, present, and future. By applying concepts from Deleuze's philosophy of the time-image, I have attempted to illuminate how the experimental video form is rich in possibilities for audiovisual representations of history and memory, and more specifically for constructing narratives of emergent history.

I argue that the authorship and construction of history is a political project often co-opted by a dominant regime that determines and legitimizes certain meanings, experiences, and orders of knowledge, while delegitimizing others. The project of emergent history is one of complicating and countering these dominant narratives while claiming subjectivity and creating new meanings and articulations for historical discourse. I have chosen Korea as the historical-political context for this investigation given the contentious nature of its historical scholarship in the twentieth-century. Since Japanese occupation, Korea has undergone massive and tumultuous changes imposed by colonialism, the Korean War, national division, and South Korea's rapid developments in modernization and capitalism as well as its complicated relationships with the U.S. military. The video works discussed here address various historical junctures within Korea's this context, each reinterpreting the established orders of knowledge of an event, while creating new ways in which to think it. Whether through the body's investigations of historical space (Yoon), the semiotic reordering of a historical event and historical time (Park), or through restored personal memory that claims subjectivity and makes new forms of collective identity (Koh), it is these kinds of videos that bring new ways of knowing the past to the table of historical discourse.

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Videography

- The dreaming collective knows no history*. Jin-Me Yoon. South Korea, 2006, 18:08 min, HDV.
- Driveling Mouth*. Seung Wook Koh. South Korea, 2008, 13:40 min, DV.
- Flying*. Chan-Kyong Park, 2005, 13:00 min, DV.