

*How can Historical Amnesia be
Brought to the Surface?*

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PhD Studies in Curating Contemporary Art

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This thesis represents partial submission for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the Royal College of Art. I confirm that the work presented here is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

During the period of registered study in which this thesis was prepared the author has not been registered for any other academic award or qualification. The material included in this thesis has not been submitted wholly or in part for any academic award or qualification other than that for which it is now submitted.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'J. B. M.', written in a cursive style.

9 September 2020

ABSTRACT

‘Curating’ has evolved to reflect changing artistic practice. Having worked as a curator, which means operating in a complicated network of roles as a producer, mediator and translator, I think critically about the limitations and challenges of curatorial practice through the representation of Korean art. This research focuses on the subject of historical trauma and asks how historical amnesia can be brought to the surface through the mediation of the curatorial project. It examines this by asking how artists have revealed conditions of collective trauma in their work. Artists turning to historical subjects have periodically encountered, and often opposed, the complex network of institutional efforts to enforce nationalistic narratives. Although the level of representations that artwork should be accompanied by is a contentious issue, I argue that context and history are essential to understand the fuller meaning of an artwork. Thus, I have paid attention to the 1990s in Korea, which revealed ruptures and the suppression of Korean tradition and historiography.

The thesis thus questions how a generation of Korean artists emerging in the 1990s was the result of generations of oppression, and how they were different from earlier generations. I look closely at the work of artists Choi Jeong Hwa (b.1961), Park Chan-kyong (b.1965) and Jia Chang (b.1971) and suggest a paradigm of ‘suppression’ to interpret both their work and representations of their work. Their work is contextualised by historical interviews with witnesses and influential figures of the time. I have interwoven diverse materials, findings and theories into what I call ‘a curator’s film’.

This research problematises the fact that there is not sufficient context available to apprehend contemporary Korean art in international exhibitions. Concurrently, the research asks whether historical amnesia is caused by privileging the art and history of the West. While the research reveals art emanating from various traumas caused by multifaceted suppression, this contextualisation with curators exposes the limitations of conventional curatorial formats. This process enables me to propose a new curatorial method by observing how different generations of artists from Korea emerged and internalised artistic strategies as methods.

This exploration of ‘what it means to curate exhibitions on historical subjects’ was prompted by experiences of working as the founding curator of the Korean Cultural Centre UK; and as an independent curator working internationally for 15 years. For more than 80 exhibitions, I worked with over 485 artists in international settings. These experiences allowed transnational discussions but also made me feel limited when explaining complex meanings to the public. Not only did the public have much less knowledge about non-Western art and philosophy, but there were also fewer chances to get to know the context. The artists concerned have tackled such complexities through artistic strategies, and I apply the skills learned from artists to the practice part of this research. In other words, artists’ strategies of self-reflexivity, autoethnography and the mixing of personal/public memory are learned, and *Fragments* interweaves interviews, archives, audio-visual materials, artworks and new commissions to elucidate the entangled memories.

I used an interpretative model designed as a ‘Deck of Cards’ for *Fragments*. These cards were visual symbolic cues, defined by me, and designed by an illustrator to work within *Fragments*. The cards punctuated points beyond words, using visuals coupled with numbers and symbols. The cards link the film to the thesis, which is divided into ‘Introduction’, ‘History’, ‘Context’, ‘Medium’ and ‘Conclusion’. ‘History’ narrates the history of suppression (in the film, it is signalled by a card showing a broken bridge); ‘Context’ places my research within a curatorial context (an Island card); and ‘Medium’ demonstrates how my film becomes a new proposal for a curatorial method (a Memory card). Meanings of multiplicities and mystery are signified by the Maze card, the leitmotif of the film. And, finally, the introduction and conclusion are connected to the 13 numbers. This Deck of Cards is my curatorial rendition.

Collaboration with musicians and editors became an expanded form of curatorial practice. Eight original soundtracks were composed for the film, and the editing went through several phases to create *Fragments* – an amalgamation of theory, storytelling and conceptualisation.

Through *Fragments* and the corresponding thesis, the research argues how historical amnesia can be brought to the surface through a research-based curatorial strategy and

method. It provokes the further question: as artists are shaped by history, in what ways do artists become narrators of history and reveal the collectively forgotten past?

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LIST OF ACCOMPANYING MATERIAL

1. Film *Fragments*



Title: *Fragments*

Duration: 58.54 minutes

Written and Directed by Stephanie S. Kim

Size: 840 MB

Link:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/1mYHBo4WQ0FvvXuZ0R5ouj3dMU4mccCdX>

2. Appendix

Length: 67 pages

with list of interviews, description of scenes, a Deck of Cards, the film *Fragments*, the original soundtrack for *Fragments*, the credits, additional information about the practice, bibliography and references.

End of the List

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INTRODUCTION

0.1 Aims and Objectives of the Study

My PhD research aims to find effective curatorial methods to research, examine and mediate the work of Korean artists emerging in the late 1980s and 1990s. While the work of many Korean artists has been recognised by exhibitions in museums internationally,¹ the contextual historical views of artists' work are often limited to accompanying texts or symposium papers that are not readily accessible to a lay audience. Leading public institutions like the Guggenheim and Tate were the first to problematise these unbalanced presentations and build contextual information on non-Western art by establishing research centres – as seen from the Guggenheim's Asia Initiative² in 2006 and the Hyundai Tate Research Centre: Asia in 2012.³ In my

¹ In London, the first solo exhibition by a Korean artist in public institutions was by Do Ho Suh in 2002. In 2007, Wolverhampton Gallery showed Choi Jeong Hwa's work, entitled *Welcome*. Since the first opening of the Korean Cultural Centre UK in January 2008 in London's Northumberland Avenue, there have been more exhibitions of solo and group shows featuring Korean artists. Tate Liverpool held its first Korean art exhibition with Nam June Paik's show in 2010. Sung Hwan Kim inaugurated Tate Tanks in 2012. Hague Yang was shown in Modern Art Oxford in 2011, and returned to London for a South London Gallery exhibition in 2019. The Hayward Gallery's 50th anniversary show was by Lee Bul in 2018. The biggest institutional survey show to date by a Korean artist was the Nam June Paik exhibition at Tate Modern in 2019.

Exhibitions on Korean art that demonstrated the interest in 'national grouping' in large-scale international exhibitions included *Across the Pacific* at the Queens Museum of Art, New York (1993), *Facing Korea: Demirrorized Zone* at De Appel Arts Centre, Amsterdam (2003), *Elastic Taboo* at Kunsthalle Wien (2007), *Peppermint Candy: Contemporary Art from Korea* at Santiago, Chile and Buenos Aires, Argentina (2009–2010), and *Your Bright Future: 12 Contemporary Artists from Korea* at LACMA (Los Angeles County Museum of Art) and Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (2009).

² According to the Guggenheim Asia Initiative, its purpose is 'to cement and integrate the study, research, and presentation of Asian art into its exhibition, education, and acquisitions strategies'. Comprising some 20 critics, academics, curators and artists, the result was exhibitions such as *The Third Mind – American Artists Contemplate Asia, 1860–1989* (2009), *Gutai: Splendid Playground* (2013) and *Art and China after 1989* (2018). Asian Art Initiative, Guggenheim, available at: <https://www.guggenheim.org/asian-art-initiative> last accessed 1 March 2020.

³ The current Hyundai Tate Research Centre: Transnational has its roots in the Tate Research Centre Asia. Sook-Kyung Lee proposes the new term 'transnational' as a method: 'Transnational is a way of understanding and curating and researching art. It's more of a method to look at different sides of international art or global art and different ways of understanding these connections between different nations. When we talked about international or global art previously, we looked at non-Western art as more of an addition, and Western art was always a bit of standard. So by using this new term transnational, we want to really look at the very equal relationships between different artistic practices across the world.' Hyundai Tate Research Centre: Transnational, *Tate*, available at:

research, I align myself with recent efforts to create curatorial and transcultural connections that question linear contextualisation and ‘West-centric’ historiography, but I aim to do so from a more independent curator’s point of view, mixing my observations to identify issues involved in the translation and mediation of artists’ work. I approach this task by asking: ‘How have artists revealed collective trauma in their work?’ This central research question aims to conceptualise an effective method to evaluate critical artistic practices originating from Korea. The fundamental concept of ‘suppression’ was derived from three years of research, and the first chapter charts the history of suppression through the artist’s lens from 1800 to the present.

The emphasis on the generation of Korean artists who emerged from the 1990s, and the opportunity to observe their work from this perspective, will change the perception of the issue. This activity rose directly from my 15 years of professional experience as a transnational curator: as the founding curator for the Korean Cultural Centre UK (‘KCCUK’ hereafter), as well as the curatorial director for such important international shows as the First Jikji Korea International Festival. These opportunities not only offered me the experience of working in diverse curatorial positions in institutional formats, but also enabled me to further observe the need for new subjects to diversify transnational studies. Because of the difficulty involved in fully translating artists’ statements into another cultural context, I have observed how these are often misunderstood or reduced. On the other hand, when reading their words in Korean, I have often noticed a gap that cannot be explained in English. I aim to conceptualise artists’ unique strategies that overcame this discrepancy. This methodology is then applied to a new curatorial method to demonstrate how the art in question reveals layers of trauma. In so doing, the second aim of this research is to place the field of curating within a context of collective knowledge production, and to explore further notions of self-reflexivity and the authorial position of the curator while interweaving curators’ own histories through the film and the written thesis.

<https://www.tate.org.uk/research/research-centres/hyundai-tate-research-centre-transnational> last accessed 1 March 2020.

The thesis ultimately addresses the condition of logocentric⁴ narratives, and has created a curatorial strategy that reflects artists' strategies. By resolving these, I was able to create my own curatorial strategy, using examples of artists' work to argue that art does indeed reveal historical amnesia and collective forgetting, not in a direct way but in very creative and transformative ways that transcend logocentrism. This method has involved making a film. This film, which is autoethnographic and conceptual, will demonstrate an effective curatorial method to interrogate the context of the group of Korean artists that I concentrate on in my research. These artists were born between the mid-1960s and the early 1970s. Through the research, in both the written thesis and the film, I will demonstrate the importance of my role as a curator to translate not only linguistically, but also culturally and conceptually, the artists' practice that is represented.

The title of my thesis is *'How can historical amnesia be brought to the surface?'*

My first objective in this project is to answer the above question by assembling direct and indirect evidence of collective trauma revealed in the work of the artists I discuss. I explore these artists' practice, the literature they have read, and surrounding anecdotes and theories to deconstruct their multiple meanings. Many of the artistic strategies engage with both Eastern and Western philosophies, making it difficult to justify only one interpretation and thus challenging earlier historiography, the history of writing history, that rests on a dominating top-down view. Sometimes these expressions are there to disrupt discourses governed by a centuries-old power structure. I problematise the limitations of logocentric languages, in which some concepts are just not

⁴ I use the term in the way Jacques Derrida used to describe thought that privileges the 'logos' – words/language – as the central principle of philosophy. There are more details in 'Theoretical Framework' where I elaborate on how the tendency to privilege written words, *logos*, over thought, led to logocentrism, typified by hierarchies that are embedded in Western philosophy. For instance, when the term is utilised in critical procedures of deconstruction by Derrida, terms such as men and women are never equivalent, but hierarchical. Derrida calls this bias in the Western tradition 'logocentrism' which attempts to associate philosophical discourse with universal logic and reason. The realisation of how these thoughts are rooted as far back as Plato made me realise that the differences in the origins of the fundamental beliefs of people are rooted in much deeper strata of customs and culture. Please look at the 'memory' section to see the differences.

I use artists' various examples to illustrate and share the spectrum of worldviews that are not rooted in such thoughts. Because artists' imperatives to reassert the hidden issues have led to various innovative methods, the research imposes not only a new way of writing but a way of thinking and being translated. I am suggesting that, in order to mediate the art from Korea, there have to be non-linear ways of reading and writing.

translatable. I argue these limitations through both parts of my research by using examples in the film and elaborating them through a written thesis.

My second objective is to demonstrate my new curatorial suggestion more comprehensively, and to evaluate how my research combines new ways of narrating history by consolidating the diverse narratives of these artists, archives and audio-visual material into a highly symbolic curated project. This project, which is a film, is called *Fragments*; it is 59 minutes long and is written, spoken, produced, edited and directed by me as its protagonist. It involves two major commissions: a musical soundtrack and an illustrated deck of cards as a symbolic visual mediation.

The third objective of my research is to contribute something new to the discipline of curating contemporary art. Learning more about artists' strategies has allowed me to communicate with graphic designers, cinematographers, film editors and musicians to further my work on the film. I have consulted many of these and returned to interviewees to show them edited versions in order to create unexpected and provocative connections between art and ideas within the film, similarly to the way that physical exhibitions do. This has allowed me to cross disciplinary fields to provide a broader view of the period.

The challenge was to combine this wide range of heterogeneous materials to create arguments that are not logocentric. By creating a film which, I argue, is a 'curator's film', the assemblage and editing create a rhizomatic argument. The film has a first-person perspective narration and makes the research transparent. I highlight the challenges of the 'objective' voice of exhibitions, and the 'third-person' perspective of exhibition texts.

0.2 Research questions

My central research question asks:

How have artists revealed collective trauma in their work?

This question clearly identifies that artistic practices are my interest and material for the research.

I have always been drawn to artists' work that reveals a complex and layered trauma from various forms of oppression, and I feel that these interests align with my own curatorial work. The thesis starts with two parallel stories: one is a once-forgotten author whose memoir from 1805 is now being revived as a historical narrative across different cultures, and the other involves identifying the 1990s as a critical period for understanding the ruptures in memories that seem to differ according to age groups.

The research thus takes 'How can Historical Amnesia be Brought to the Surface?' as its title, and interrogates the silenced, symbolic story of the nineteenth century to question the hybrid nature of contemporaneity, emerging from the 1990s.

The question is not an empirical one, because the artworks concerned do not serve a *prima facie* testimonial function. They use ambiguous yet symbolically creative strategies. Their subjective voices also reveal their own partial trauma, as the discourse of oppression from poverty and war is often passed on to the next generation. Thus, the following second research question frames my research and asks:

How in particular did Korean artists from the 1990s engage with the condition of historical amnesia?

To answer this question, I not only interviewed three leading artists, Choi Jeong Hwa (b.1961), Park Chan-kyong (b.1965) and Jia Chang (b.1971) but also interviewed and collected personal archives from other artists, including Jheon Soo-cheon (1943–2018), Kim Ku-lim (1936–) and Lim Ok-sang (1950–). While the latter artists truly represent the advent of Korean modernist aesthetics and avant-garde traditions in different ways, in-depth interviews with them are rare: Jheon's work won an Honourable Mention in the 1995 Venice Biennale and he was one of the first artists to exhibit in the Korean pavilion there; although Kim Ku-lim presented avant-garde art performances in 1969 that included burning grass, body painting and Korea's first experimental art film, these have been overlooked because of the hegemonic dominance displayed by the two rival movements – the figurative political art known as Minjung, and monochrome art ('Dansaekhwa'); Lim Ok-sang was one of the founders of the anti-government activist Minjung 'people's' art group in 1980, which coincided with the peak of the most austere dictatorship, and the 1990s saw the gradual politicisation of the movement.

Artists emerging in the 1990s thus had a different set of interests and were not afraid to discuss local problems. It is interesting to consider how the three critical artists in my research were born later than those who were the primary witnesses to war and poverty. The generation in Germany known as the *Nachgeborenen* (the ones born afterwards) has been discussed in the context of the work of Anselm Kiefer.⁵ Anselm Kiefer was not directly linked to the experience of the Holocaust. Still, his career developed in the context of the period of assessment in postwar Germany, breaking taboos and transcending a boundary carefully guarded by West Germany's cultural consensus.⁶

In this context, the research asks:

What strategies and methodologies have artists adopted to engage with the cultural conditions of historical amnesia?

While examining the work of the artists I am principally concerned with, I have felt strongly that artists are reconciling themselves with the violence of Korean history. Artistic methodologies employed by them, such as symbolic ritual or the re-enactment of moments of past oppression, deconstruct the older rhetoric of nationalism, colonialism and logocentric history writing. When combined with the Eastern philosophies that have been passed down to them, it becomes natural for them to transcend a familiar dichotomy of good and evil through the effects of visual images or the layering of texts and moving images. I have grouped three artists born between 1961 and 1971, and with very different artistic styles, together to demonstrate the diversity and range of the spectrum.

Grouping Choi Jeong Hwa (b.1961), Park Chan-kyong (b.1965) and Jia Chang (b.1971) together already marks a departure from conventional historiography. Not only has the conventional art historiography of Korea only recently begun to include art from the

⁵ Stephanie D'Alessandro, *Negotiating History: German Art and the Past* (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago Press, 2002) *Museum Studies* Vol. 28, No. 1, 2002), pp. 66–81. Born in the final months of World War II, Kiefer is part of the *Nachgeborenen*, p.73. D'Alessandro further compares Joseph Beuys to other Zero artists, on Beuys' importance 'in preparing the ground for a resurgence of referential, commemorative, and political artists such as Baselitz, Kiefer, Polke, and Richter, who studied with or near him (Joseph Beuys) at the Staatliche Kunstakademie in Dusseldorf where he taught in the 1960s'.

⁶ Andreas Huyssen, 'Anselm Kiefer: The Terror of History, the Temptation of Myth', *October*, 48, 25–45. One way to 'discuss context' was to discuss German cinema.

1990s, usually marking the 1990s as from 1987 to 1997,⁷ but also these have often been divided into the stylistic or ideological tendency of artistic groups.⁸ Choi was the first Korean artist to be picked up by non-Korean curators to be exhibited overseas, and his multidisciplinary activities, from product design to the design of bars, signified the burgeoning art scene of the 1990s; Park advocated the ‘post’ Minjung art that shaped Korea’s history of democratisation through his writings and art criticism in the 1990s, and how his multivocal works need to be mediated as his works on films and curations address such issues while Minjung art remains internationally unknown; and Jia Chang, the youngest of them, who was in fact taught by Park Chan-kyong at university, emerged at the end of the progressive democratic movements that dominated university campus life in the 1990s. Her work attacks the most sensitive taboos inherent in Korea’s layers of trauma but can equally be misunderstood as feminist art practice – this labelling I find limiting.

It has become a truism to say that all three have parents who experienced both Japanese colonial oppression and the Korean War, and I needed more comprehensive modes to theorise them. Their practices are transformative and multilayered, and in order to translate them culturally I had to adopt their artistic strategies.

My final question asks:

How has challenging the condition of logocentric narratives created a curatorial strategy?

Answering this question helps me to explain how learning about the strategy employed by Korean artists ultimately led me to invent a new way of exhibiting Korean artists. I asked: what challenges have past exhibitions posed to the condition of logocentric narratives? What methods allowed me to bring in all these contexts? How can I make a device that could reflect a way of working that would make it possible to assemble

⁷ Kyung-hwan Yeo, *From X to X: Connecting with Korean Art of the 1990s* (Seoul: Seoul Museum of Art, 2016), p.18.

⁸ It is only recently that artists from the 1990s have been written about in English, since it is quite a recent era. The three artists mentioned are quite different in terms of style and subject matter. Park Chan-kyong was more active as a critic and curator than as an artist in the late 1990s, and he taught Jia Chang around this time. I group them under the keyword ‘suppression’, which I believe is the overriding key influence on these artists, as well as on my generation.

interviews, visuals and nuanced terms? How can an assemblage of interviews work as a collection of insights to reveal wounds, subconscious ideas, and memories of others?

This PhD has been largely about inventing a new curatorial method. The film is the methodology with which I interrogate a new curatorial approach to the subject. In order to make a highly symbolic curated project, I have asked about the things left unsaid in my past curatorial projects, interrogated collective memory of exhibitions, devised unique interviews and constantly edited *Fragments*. The two new major commissions of musical soundtracks and an illustrated deck of cards became symbolic mediation that helped me to overcome the conditions of logocentric narratives.

0.3 Theoretical framework

As my research investigates in depth the spectrum of artists who have emerged from the 1990s, it was important to consider the key thinkers who were specific to that moment. Postmodernism, especially, was a key concept developed during this time, and various thinkers were translated into Korean. These writings provided alternative ways to think through while some may have caused a different understanding of the concepts because of the ways Korea's modernisation and Westernisation were condensed. Jean-François Lyotard predicted that an overview of the postmodern condition is difficult, as it is characterised by the 'disjunction' that challenges the metanarrative. He writes: 'the grand narrative has lost its credibility, regardless of what mode of unification it uses, regardless of whether it is a speculative narrative or a narrative of emancipation'.⁹ The artists central to my research were very critical of the grand narrative, questioned the capitalist dominance of South Korea and went through various phases to create work for both domestic and international audiences. Rooted in the earlier Minjung practice of art as being very close to life, Park Chan-kyong, for example, was a central figure writing for the magazine *Forum A*. The sociologist Seo Dong-jin observed that *Forum A* used to discuss concepts that were 'trendy' at that time, in the 1990s, such as 'realism in the Corporate Capitalist world, modernism in the imperialist world, and post-modernism in

⁹ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 37.

the post capital market'¹⁰ – concepts that were discussed widely during this period in Korea. They provided a useful set of rules by which to perceive the world, and to argue against the ‘modernist artists’ who were producing abstract art at the time. I am revisiting the theories specifically in relation to how artists used them. My research aligns with Lyotard’s approach in observing their memories to illustrate a story in a far more complex, grassroots, layered and transcultural way.

Lyotard further wrote that all cultures legitimate themselves by telling and retelling narratives of history with stories that give purpose and meaning to the culture. The importance of *anamnesis* – the recollection of what has passed, or the remembering of absence – became an important subject to the generation of Korean artists emerging in the 1990s.¹¹ Because these artists absorbed decolonialising critiques in their early teens,¹² and have seen both the flourishing and the failures of these texts in real life, the extensive readings provided fertile ground to consider a framework of critical reflection on the limits of historical knowledge; they witnessed their friends’ deaths and disappearances as a result of their uncompromising beliefs, and at the same time they saw the failure of communism and viewed their socialist ideals as emancipatory for some.

Walter Benjamin’s cultural criticism came earlier than that of Lyotard. Benjamin’s *The Arcades Project* provided me with a blueprint with which to assemble, categorise and conceptualise the extensive research material originating from artists that I amassed. I looked at Benjamin’s approach of allegorically grouping resources from literary and commercial sources, labelling these and finding common denominators to build a

¹⁰ Seo Dongjin, ‘This Forum A and that Forum A, Korean Art from the 1990s’ [online blog], *Homopop*, available at: <http://homopop.org/log/?p=1154> [last accessed 28 March 2020].

¹¹ Lyotard, ‘Anamnesis: of the Visible’, *Theory, Culture and Society* 21(1) (2004), pp. 107–119, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276404040483>. ‘Anamnesis and history keep present what is forgotten.’ Lyotard, 1979. Lyotard was included alongside Terry Eagleton and other writers in a well-known book *Postmodernism* printed in 1979; see also Kim Jiwon, ‘To Answer the Question: What is Postmodernism?’ in: Ihab Hassan and Sally Hassan, eds, *Innovation/Renovation: New Perspectives on the Humanities* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), pp.123–138.

¹² Park Chan-kyong, in an interview with me, singles out Gramsci. The ‘bible’ for all university students was called *Consciousness for before and after Liberation*, published in 1979; this series of six books was printed over a period of 10 years. Half a million books were sold, and many were used by students for autonomous seminars. Park also mentions this in his interview, file name *Park_Chan-Kyong_interview_E*, p5 (author’s own archiving).

materialist history that can ‘emerge’ from the detritus of images. *The Arcades Project* is a collection of fragmented texts about Paris as a nascent capitalist city at the end of the nineteenth century. I am using this approach to look at 1990s’ Korea, which was experiencing multiple layers of oppression and hybridity in Seoul with a delayed capitalist hegemony. In other words, Benjamin tried to get to the origin of ‘problems’ by looking at the end of the nineteenth century, although he was writing in the period from the 1920s to 1938. I too am looking at the recent past, the 1990s, from the early 2020s.

In the same way that Benjamin organised a mass of historical objects in order to create an image of the epoch through his *Arcades Project*, I approached my film as a collection of fragments. *The Arcades Project* to me was an intellectual labyrinth that Benjamin did not have time to finish, but that became close to revealing its way of working. Benjamin’s own phrase ‘a world in miniature’ worked as a blueprint for me.¹³ *Fragments* is a maze, with some suggested routes through, of which I find one – an interpretation – in the end. Some may feel *The Arcades Project* is an intellectual labyrinth because of the sheer quantity of material: the collection is composed of fragments of literary sources and Benjamin’s comments that filled over 8,000 pages. These were categorised into 36 numbered files, which Benjamin called ‘Konvolutes’,¹⁴ and I became interested in the *visceral* experience of ‘being lost’ within the fragmentary comments about Paris that are full of juxtapositions and associations.¹⁵ The actual title for one ‘Konvolute’ for instance, was ‘Baudelaire’s Dream House, Museum, Spa’, the allegorical categories of which motivated me to group my materials together.¹⁶ In other words, Benjamin’s way of assemblage encouraged me to name names while teleporting myself into the old-fashioned traditional marketplaces of Korea, where boxes of packaged goods and plastic baskets are piled up. I looked at Benjamin’s motivation for

¹³ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1999).

¹⁴ ‘Konvolutes’ means ‘bundles’ in Latin and refers to the folders that Walter Benjamin used to organise the handwritten pages of his manuscript. They are grouped under titles such as ‘Baudelaire’ or ‘Photography’. I also grouped initial interviews into groups, see Appendix Phase 1, p.11.

¹⁵ Such as this passage: ‘Underground sightseeing in the sewers. Preferred route, Chatelet-Madeleine’, *The Arcades Project*, See <C2a, 7>, p.82.

¹⁶ See *Appendix* Phases 1 & 2, pp 11–15.

wanting to construct ‘a materialist philosophy of history’ with ‘the utmost concreteness’.¹⁷

Reading these texts by Lyotard and Benjamin and deciphering them also related to my transcultural arts education.¹⁸ Because I have handled objects from the nineteenth century closely, consulted *L’Illustration* and *The Illustrated London News*, and also lived in Paris and London for 20 years,¹⁹ *The Arcades Project* had resonance for me, while reading adaptations from various disciplines – architecture, fashion, philosophy, cultural history and Marxist history – helped me to concretise my method. I was also born and lived in Seoul until 1995, and visit Seoul every year, which helps me to see two ambivalent centres clearly. It provided a mode of thinking for looking at the world from a retrospective, multiperspectival distance.

Many scholars have tried to decipher the meaning of Benjamin’s notes from 1927 to 1929 and 1934 to 1935, and two more complete sets of writings known as ‘Exposés’.²⁰ Even though the work was incomplete due to Benjamin’s suicide in 1940, his diaries and the letters he wrote to writers, philosophers and friends offer insight into his working approach. He also wrote regularly for magazines and radio programmes as a journalist after his attempt at a professorship in Frankfurt failed in 1927. I have worked with the 1982 English translation by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, which was based on Rolf Tiedemann’s edited and published volumes.²¹

¹⁷ Letter, Benjamin to Gershom Scholem, 15 March 1929, V, p.1,091 quoted in Susan Buck-Morss, *Dialectics of Seeing* (Cambridge, MA, and London: MIT Press, 1989), p. 3.

¹⁸ Growing up in Seoul until 1995, I studied calligraphy privately outside the school curriculum, and was enrolled in the special Sunhwa Middle High School and studied Dance, Art, and Music from the age of 12. In order to enter the school, there was an entrance exam with strong competition. Beaux-arts style drawing and painting were learned from as young as ten years old to prepare for the exam. When I entered the school, we learned Oriental Painting, ink painting skills, which is now called ‘Korean painting’ due to the criticism from revisionist historians claiming the Japanese colonialists used ‘Oriental painting’ as a derogatory term for Korean paintings when establishing ‘National Art Exhibitions’ during the colonial period.

¹⁹ I studied for a BA in the History of Decorative and Fine Arts at Sotheby’s Institute and have handled art objects while interning at Sotheby’s and various galleries.

²⁰ Walter Benjamin, ‘Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century’ (1935) and ‘Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century’ (1939) in *The Arcades Project*, pp. 1–14.

²¹ The work is a translation of Walter Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk*, edited by Rolf Tiedemann, 1982; volume 5 of Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, prepared with the cooperation of Theodor W.

Benjamin critiqued the ‘dreaming collective’, using his method of creating a still image from ever-flowing history. In his words,

The dreaming collective knows no history. Events pass before it as always identical and always new. The sensation of the newest and most modern is, in fact, as much a dream formation of events as the ‘eternal return of the same’. The perception of space that corresponds to this perception of time is superposition. Now, as these formations dissolve within the enlightened consciousness, political-theological categories arise to take their place. And it is only within the purview of these categories, which bring the flow of events to a standstill, that history forms, at the interior of this flow, as crystalline constellation.²²

Walter Benjamin’s *On the Concept of History* describes historical materialism as being like a master chess player that always wins chess games. Although the chess player appeared to be winning the game, the controller was hidden from view ‘inside a mirrored cube’ and was controlling a puppet.²³ For Benjamin, this ‘hidden’ player was ‘theology’. Similarly, I approach history critically to uncover the layers of these mirrored cubes that blur the actual suppression and to reveal how addressing the suppressed memories revealed by artists can be assembled, montaged and composed to create a world which one can navigate. This crystalline constellation which one can navigate was envisioned earlier in my career when I read Okwui Enwezor’s ‘The post-colonial constellation’.²⁴ The writing enables one to imagine how missing representations and mediations could bring new discussions that are also relevant to the current situation. When J. P. Martinon wrote ‘Theses in the Philosophy of Curating’, he wrote that Benjamin’s ‘idiosyncratic allegorical style is one of the most exemplary analyses of history in philosophy’ – and by evoking these analyses, Martinon wanted to be seen as ‘making a modest attempt in the same direction to provide the context for the

Adorno and Gershom Scholem, edited by Rolf Tiedemann and Hemann Schweppenhauser, copyright 1972.

²² Walter Benjamin, ‘First Sketches’, *The Arcades Projects*, <M° 14> with notes <See S2,1 and K2,5>, pp. 854–5.

²³ Walter Benjamin, (Original written in the late 1930s in French), ‘On the Concept of History’, in: *Selected Writings Volume 4 1938–1940*, (Cambridge, MA, and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), p 389.

²⁴ Okwui Enwezor, ‘The Postcolonial Constellation: Contemporary Art in a State of Permanent Transition’, *Research in African Literatures*, 34 (4) (Winter, 2003), 57–82.

curatorial approach'.²⁵ I hope to make an attempt to share the constellations of artworks close to me, and to examine conditions in which human beings problematise their actions, existences and the world we live in.

Another key reading is Jacques Derrida's *Specters of Marx*. This book references the Communist Manifesto to hypothesise that the communist spectre still haunts Europe, despite the collapse of communism in 1989; he asks, 'if it haunts, how can it be dead?' and highlights the spectral qualities of historical injustice. Derrida was also reacting to the excitement surrounding the way Western values finally prevailed, propagated by writers like Francis Fukuyama. My research shows how the communist spectre still haunted Korea in the 1990s, and how art produced now reveals the trauma of the residues or memory of subverted historical amnesia. The fact that the Korean peninsula is still a site of communist and capitalist confrontation, and has been for the last 70 years, makes it interesting in terms of addressing the myth at work.

My research is not only a study of trauma, but an essentially curatorial study, a practice-led research project, concentrating on artists' work. Thus, although Sigmund Freud's argument that group identity, based on acts of violence and feelings of collective guilt, and repeated in ritual sacrifice, has some resonance, I do not look to psychoanalysis for my research: psychoanalysis tapping into unconsciousness is located within a more individual level whereas my focus is more about the collective, social and historical suppression that made marks with Korean artists. Not only do my focused artists not use psychoanalysis in their works, but they are also more rooted in Eastern beliefs such as cycles of life that are fundamentally different from Western individualistic thinking. For these reasons, psychoanalysis is not my theoretical framework. Instead, I look at cultural studies for reference and some of the artists' own writings that show evidence of hybridity in their beliefs and philosophy.

Inspired by the theoretical framework above, I focus on the evaluation and mythology of modernist ideals in Korea in the 'History' part, and frame it under the concept of

²⁵ Jean-Paul Martinon and Irit Rogoff, 'Preface', in *The Curatorial: A Philosophy of Curating*, ed. Jean-Paul Martinon (London: Bloomsbury, 2013). p. ix.

‘suppression’. This is again pivotal for my position as a curator who has translated not only languages but also cultures that are bound by language.

The artists I looked at refuse to commit to a single idea and allow one to go beneath the network of things, institutional bureaucracy, language and tradition. I am aligning myself with the idea that any attempt to locate the origin of identity or history must inevitably find itself dependent on an always existing set of linguistic conditions. Growing up, I always felt the tensions between, and mutual permeation of, meanings in English and Korean. For instance, if I learned a new word, ‘logos’, I would look for its meaning in its origin and in its translation in different languages in order to truly grasp its meaning, while experiencing the chasm of inexpressiveness in words.²⁶ I was also subject to this ‘logocentric’ tradition. Logocentric is the term Derrida used to refer to thought that privileges the *logos*, a word, speech, thought, in Greek, as the central principle of philosophy. Logocentrism privileges speech as the primary human medium and writing as the secondary technology, and this hierarchy is embedded in Western philosophy. Korean culture is a much more verbal culture: as my interview with Brother Anthony,²⁷ professor of English literature and translator of numerous Korean texts, would reveal, a direct translation would not achieve the meaning. Derrida critiques logocentric thought for relying on an uninterrogated metaphysical assumption. In *Différance*, Derrida asks: what is other than the text of Western metaphysics?²⁸ Recognising its margins, such as the difference between Being and beings, the forgotten of metaphysics, paved the way for the identification of hauntology, derived from Jacques Derrida’s method of deconstruction. A word made up of ‘haunt’ and ‘ontology’, the word recognises this very logocentrism. For instance, Derrida writes,

²⁶ When facing a new English word, I look it up in an English dictionary, understand the meaning, then look it up in Korean, to round out my understanding. The dialectics completes the understanding of its context. For instance, when the Bible was translated, ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.’ In the Korean Bible, translated directly from Hebrew, ‘ajrch’ writes the ‘words’ with footnotes. In Chinese, they chose ‘the way’ in Chinese characters to express ‘the word’, rather than ‘writing’. ‘The way’ will be similar to ‘logos’, as its meaning explained above.

²⁷ Born Anthony Graham Teague in Cornwall in 1942, Brother Anthony is a translator and scholar, and is now a naturalised Korean citizen. He is a Professor Emeritus of Sogang University and a Chair-professor of Dankook University. In 2015, he received an MBE.

He devoted three decades to translating modern Korean literature into English, including twenty-six volumes of poetry, four fiction titles and two non-fiction books by Korean authors.

²⁸ Jacques Derrida, *Différance: Margins of Philosophy* (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1982), p.25.

‘Let us call it a hauntology. The virtual space of spectrality’ that operates in the otherwise ‘sharp distinction between the real and the unreal, the actual and the in-actual, the living and the non-living, being and the non-being.’²⁹

The Hawthorn Archive by Avery Gordon³⁰ is another example where artistic expression lies in her profound sociological depth and artistic collaboration in assembling a vast amount of materials, documenting events and conditions from prison abolition to workhouses to runaway slaves – but it is neither entirely fictional nor archival. Developed from *Ghostly Matters*, published in 1997, Gordon demonstrated that modern practices of knowledge are not only embedded in sociological domination, but also that such practices work to conceal the relationship between knowledge and power. She discloses the conditions of possibilities by forcefully arguing through absences in the stories of the origin of psychoanalysis, the legacy of African slavery, and the Argentinean democratisation movement – calling the ghostly materials ‘hauntings’.

This informs my research and practice. I read Park Chan-kyong’s *Ten Thousand Spirits* and texts such as *Sindoan*³¹ to identify grotesque ancient imagery in contemporary media culture that has parallels in Western examples. The trauma resulting from the ‘false modernity’ of colonial Asia is revealed through the resurfacing of once-concealed indigenous beliefs in ancestral rites, Buddhist beliefs in reincarnation and shamanistic rituals of praying. I also look into utopian hopes in relation to ongoing suppression: how praying for the soul to have a restful journey to reach the next life, and the issue of forgetting, have more pertinence in Asian culture. The concept of the *unheimlich* (the uncanny) has resonance in Freudian ideas, but I have looked at these ideas more closely in relation to indigenous religions that have been repressed.³²

²⁹ Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York; London: Routledge, 1994). The word hauntology brings together ‘ontology’ and ‘haunting’, suggesting that all that can be said to exist does so, due to a series of hauntings.

³⁰ Avery Gordon, *The Hawthorn Archive: Letters from the Utopian Margins* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017).

³¹ Chan-kyong Park, ‘On Sindoan: Some Scattered Views on Tradition and “The Sublime”’, *E-Flux*, no. Journal #19 – October 2010 (October 2010). <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/19/67492/on-sindoan-some-scattered-views-on-tradition-and-the-sublime/>.

³² I asked Park Chan-kyong whether people could read many texts coming out of Europe after 1968. To this, Park answered that, because many books were prohibited, and even discussing ideas was suppressed, after 1968 students became more Marxist-Leninist than more progressively Marxist. Reading Han Kang I

0.4 Themes

In this section, I look at the four themes, ‘Memory’, ‘The Curatorial’, ‘Historical Amnesia’ and ‘Autoethnography’, in order to establish how the key question of making historical amnesia visible is discussed. These themes correspond to the four suits of the cards used specifically as punctuation in my film.

0.4.1 Memory

Valuing memory, good memory, to retrieve knowledge and store it in ‘places’ has a long history in the Western world.³³ For the ancient Greeks, memory was the mother of all muses. Among the muses was history – Clio. Aristotle also distinguished between unconscious memory, which comes unbidden to the surface – *mneme* – and conscious memory, with its deliberate act of recollection. In the East, the culture of ‘forgetting well’ has been rooted in Eastern metaphysics, and this has been framed by political circumstances. The film *Fragments* alludes to this culture of roots, with references that include the 60th anniversary of the ceasefire of the Korean War and its meaning of rebirth, yin and yang, and the Buddhist and shamanistic rituals that the key artists make references to. I am interested in the intersection between philosophy and great minds. My film *Fragments*, the practice part of my research, will incorporate cross-cultural dialogues.

In relation to the concept of truth, memory has been seen as a means of recovering divine knowledge of the ideal world for Plato and his followers, and of recording experiential knowledge for Aristotle. Recollection, or the truth, is associated etymologically with the ancient Greek word *aletheia*: the word was derived from reversing the crossing of the river *Lethe*, the river of forgetting. I juxtapose this preoccupation with memory in the West with Eastern philosophy that insists on the

found my answer through one of the characters in her novel *Human Acts*: an employee in the publishing industry is tortured as her manager was trying to publish an article related to 1968. Han Kang, *Human Acts* (London: Portobello, 2016).

³³ Frances Yates, *Selected Works: Art of Memory* [first published in 1966 as *Three Latin Sources for the Classical Art of Memory*] (London & New York: Routledge Press, 1999), pp. 1–26.

significance of ‘forgetting well’. Eastern philosophy, with its opposite preoccupation with ‘forgetfulness’, is pertinent here.

Kang Shinjoo, a Korean philosopher, observes how, since Plato, Western philosophy has had a preoccupation with this act of remembering and memory. It was only with the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche that forgetfulness was finally emphasised.³⁴ On the other hand, in the East, philosophers such as Nagarjuna (c.150–c.250) talked about the ‘Sunyata’ and ‘Zhuangzi’ (c.369 BC – c.286 BC) of Taoism that emphasises forgetting. Yan Hui (c.521–481 BC) was the most important disciple of Confucius and describes his development as a forgetting of self and body, achieved by sitting and forgetting.

When Confucius asks what he means by sitting and forgetting, Yanhui replies ‘I slough off my limbs, drive out perception and understanding, distance myself from my physical form, abandon knowledge, and thereby become identical with the great thoroughfare.’³⁵ In *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Nietzsche suggests overturning the West’s preoccupation with ‘remembering’: to empty the past in order to receive the new.³⁶

0.4.2 The Curatorial

Curating is the act of organising the way art is displayed and mediated. The ‘cure’ of ‘curating’ derives from the Latin *cura*, meaning ‘care, concern, trouble’, as the position of a curator had traditionally been associated with caring for the collection of art of monarchs, institutions or private families. It is often agreed that discourses on curatorship in the public realm emerged in the 1980s as more independently motivated curators achieved central positions within the art world. The 1990s, regarded as the Biennale decade for many, also brought the emergence of biennales which gave a higher status to curators.³⁷ My research connects with these discussions of ‘the

³⁴ Shinjoo Kang, *Philosophy versus Philosophy* (author’s translation) (Greenbi: Seoul, 2010). Forgetfulness is referenced on pages 44, 45, 250–254.

³⁵ Roger T. Ames, *Wandering at Ease in the Zhuangzi: A Postmodern Critique* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1998), p. 213.

³⁶ Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality and Other Writings*, edited by Keith Ansell-Pearson, translated by Carol Diethe, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

³⁷ Paul O’Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Cultures* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012), pp. 51–86.

curatorial’ for many reasons. Firstly, my study is deeply linked to the way in which art was displayed, mediated and discussed in the 1980s and 90s in Korea. Not only have the artists I focus on evolved together with histories of exhibition-making, but also the positioning of these artists and my concern of interpretation has to be thought through these discussions of the curatorial.

Secondly, this PhD is about inventing a medium that I felt I needed as a curator. Through experiences, I needed to include grassroots observations surrounding these artists’ works. It is thus not only an extended field of my exhibition-making practice – choosing a black box instead of a white cube;³⁸ but also it enacts and performs to mediate art and to understand artistic agency, to be read by the public. Jean-Paul Martinon and Irit Rogoff write that ‘the distinction between “curating” and “the curatorial” means to emphasise a shift from the staging of the event to the actual event itself: its enactment, dramatization and performance’.³⁹

Thirdly, *Fragments* is a curator’s film – a new curatorial method I am proposing. The emphasis is on setting premises clearly to show how various observations used in the research originate from multidimensional aspects of curatorship. This discussion builds on exhibition stories told by other curators. It investigates curators’ positions in relation to collective and individual memories and accelerations of history. Through the film, I am defining ‘the curatorial’ and aligning myself with many practitioners who have attempted alternatives to the exhibition format.

In the book *The Curatorial: A Philosophy of Curating*, Martinon and Rogoff, and various contributors, investigate many ways to recalibrate the meaning of ‘the curatorial’ and highlight the significance of the materials and information that reside in artworks, so much of which is lost in the exhibition format. For instance, archives that artists engage with are often regarded as marginal within a conventional exhibition, in which the artwork takes centre stage. I am developing my own format in order to

³⁸ The separated space or ‘chamber’ inspired by religious ritual space makes the gallery’s white cube a ‘non-space’, an ‘ultra-space’ and the ‘ideal space’, Thomas McEvelley, ‘Introduction’, in Brian O’Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1986).

³⁹ Martinon and Rogoff, ‘Preface’, *The Curatorial: A Philosophy of Curating* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p.ix.

recover this. Because collective traumas are hard to identify and memories are often personal, the assemblage of the artists' anecdotes and images becomes a useful medium with which to express collective memory. I have interviewed many active witnesses of that time and have woven the audio-visual materials together with various other sources, from media footage and historical documents to commercial film clips. The process has continuously affected my view, and enlightened and shaped the research.

This theme also highlights the relevance of conventional exhibition-making as a form which has become quite exhausted. Conferences, workshops, extended publications and durational performances are all seen as expanded forms of the exhibition, and the knowledge production is becoming ever more fluid. I thought creatively to imagine the film as a three-dimensional collage in which elements that interact with each other are in movement, with time being one of the components of this collage. The collage-maker is myself whose subjectivities are also within various altitudes of the things.

Pierre Nora has investigated the global upsurge in memory studies, enshrined in museums, archives and the public's renewed attachment to heritage.⁴⁰ Nora wrote how the interest occurred at a particular moment in which consciousness of a break with the past occurred: when events such as the Hiroshima bombing or the Holocaust created a rupture with the present, breaking the continuity of the past.⁴¹ I wish to locate exhibition histories as *contexts* where historical viewpoints were reflected and could be addressed. I want to connect the interpretation of art in relation to exhibition histories to reveal what the logos, the history, omits and forgets. I have tried to demonstrate this by making *Fragments*, which can also be seen as an 'ode' to various forms of curatorship, as well as a mediation on history. Because the film has a clearer method of controlling the viewer's reception of materials – and the curatorial – I am attempting to provide a new form with which to replace the traditional exhibition format which has become the dominant expression in the field of curating.

⁴⁰ Pierre Nora, *Les Lieux de Mémoire*, vol. 1 (Paris: Quarto-Gallimard, 1997).

⁴¹ Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire', *Representations*, No. 26, *Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory*. (Spring, 1989), pp. 7–24.

Paul O'Neill defines any aspect of 'the curatorial' as considering how the exhibition of art has become part of a development, of a conceptualisation in which art and its context are understood. O'Neill writes that the emergence of conceptual art in the late 1960s and early 1970s forced curators to think about new ways to work and become visible, and curators began to conjure up new ways to resolve conceptualised and dematerialised practices: practices that, quoting Peter Osborne, negated the material objectivity, medium-specificity, visuality and autonomy of art.⁴² In the same vein, art practices originating in Korea in the '90s challenged me to find a new way of working in their complexities and in their layers. My film is an extension of my curatorial research and the expanded form of an exhibition, made necessary by the complication of context by artists. The film *Fragments* argues with force that a new mode of curating needs to engage with multiple layers of mediation for the generation of artists I focus on. This is directly reflected in my PhD project. And the filmmaking process is an integral part of the thesis, where the hidden oral history of a highly censored time can now be narrated in the words of witnesses and provides invaluable resources to mitigate the pain, coming closer to the original intention of the artworks, normally expressed by a limited paragraph, such as a caption or catalogue entry. It is curatorial in relation to mediating the abstract language of art in more comprehensive accounts for a wider audience. The ambition for the film is to include archives, dialogues and footnotes that are typically left aside when staging an art exhibition.

0.4.3 Historical Amnesia

History is regarded as the study of past events, particularly human affairs, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*. History can be categorised in terms of periods, such as 'the eighteenth century', regions, as in 'the history of Europe', or in terms of one's heritage. Amnesia was originally a medical term referring to a deficit in memory caused by a brain injury, such as post-traumatic amnesia (PTA).⁴³ The term was first used by C. P. Symonds to describe the 'state of unconsciousness and the period of clouded consciousness with disturbed memory function that follows from a blow to the head'. I

⁴² Paul O'Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Cultures* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012), p.22.

⁴³ A period of disorientation and disturbed memory function after a neurological trauma.

use the term ‘historical amnesia’ to mean the tendency to forget, omit or delete aspects of history.⁴⁴

The reasons for collective historical amnesia seem to be wide ranging. Some historians make deliberate omissions, as some aspects of history are inconvenient for the politics or policies of the present. For instance, historical amnesia in Asia is often cited as a reason for the Japanese never mentioning the war atrocities they committed amongst themselves. However, the colonised still remember imperial Japan’s brutalities, including issues of sexual slavery, *maruta* (medical experiments) and the Nanjing Massacre, of which younger generations of Japanese are blissfully unaware. The Japanese prime minister continues to visit the Yasukuni war heroes’ shrine, and the issue of historical amnesia is still the subject of ongoing debate in Asia.

Many scholarly articles on historical amnesia concentrate on the collective forgetting of profound events that have escaped the collective consciousness, despite the gravity of their casualties and repercussions. For instance, two historians, Henry Friedlander and Raul Hilberg, both argue that, unlike the Jewish Holocaust which has been accorded careful documentation and widespread publicity, the Romani Holocaust was ‘marginalized and consigned to a footnote of history’.⁴⁵ In the same way, in Asia, many events have been marginalised and consigned to the memory of the dead. Park Chan-kyong points this out in his theory of ‘Asian Gothic’, describing the symptomatic return of ancient grotesque imagery as a symbol of the repressed or traumatised local others.⁴⁶

Historical amnesia also points to the ruptures in accepted histories and power structures. Such discrepancies in historical accounts are linked to written history. C.R. Sridhar

⁴⁴ Symonds recognised the importance of distinguishing between ‘a state of complete unconsciousness’ and ‘a state of stupor and clouded consciousness with an inability to remember later the events that occurred during this clouded period’, in C.P. Symonds, ‘Conclusion and Contusion of the Brain and their Sequelae’. In: S. Brock (ed.). *Injuries of the Skull, Brain and Spinal Cord: Neuro-Psychiatric, Surgical, and Medico Legal Aspects* (London: Bailliere, Tindall and Cox, 1940), pp. 69–112.

⁴⁵ Henry Friedlander, *The Origins of Nazi Genocide, From Eurasia to the Final Solution* (Chapel Hill, NC and London: University of Carolina Press, 1997), and Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of European Jews* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003).

⁴⁶ Park Chan-kyong, ‘On Sindoan: Some Scattered Views on Tradition and the Sublime’, *E-flux*, 19 October 2010, available at: <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/19/67492/on-sindoan-some-scattered-views-on-tradition-and-the-sublime/>.

specifies Gypsy communities' oral culture as the reason when referring to the Romani Holocaust and the historical amnesia associated with it.⁴⁷

Remembering one event to the exclusion of another also has political implications. Finkelstein further argues that 'the claims of (Jewish) Holocaust uniqueness ... persist. The question is why, in the first place, unique suffering confers unique entitlement.'⁴⁸ The term in this context refers to how one holocaust occupies the forefront of the collective consciousness whilst other moments, like the Romani Holocaust or the Armenian Genocide, stand far behind. This can further imply the forgetting of the 'Global South', and of the Rwandan Genocide, for instance.

Paul Ricoeur investigates the reciprocal relationship between remembering and forgetting and writes: 'Perhaps I might be allowed to begin with an observation that puzzled me and that inspired me to reflect on the topic of memory and forgetting in history. It has to do with the spectacle offered by the post-Cold War period and the problem of the difficulty of integrating traumatic memories from the totalitarian era. Among some, especially in the West, one might well deplore a shortage of memory and an excess of forgetting.'⁴⁹

An inadequacy in imagining and experiencing great disasters at first hand is also linked to modernity's historical trauma. The generation that has experienced it is often too close to the trauma to be able to face it, and the issue is frequently taken up by the next generation. Much of the literature on Germany in the 1950s in the wake of the Second World War discusses Germany's historical amnesia. For Lyotard, the sublime signifies the incapacity of the imagination before absolute terror, and the agitated emotion of its deflection that cannot be felt through aesthesis, but only through pathos.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ C.R. Sridhar, 'Historical Amnesia: The Romani Holocaust', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 41(33) (2006), 3569–3571; quotes Agnes Paroczi, p. 3571, from *The Forgotten Holocaust* by Alex Bandy, without page numbers.

⁴⁸ Norman G. Finkelstein, *The Holocaust Industry: Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering* (London: Verso), pp. 74–75.

⁴⁹ Paul Ricoeur, 'Memory – Forgetting – History', *Meaning and Representation in History*, ed. Jörn Rüsen (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006), p. 9.

⁵⁰ Jean-François Lyotard, *Heidegger and 'the Jews'* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), pp. 44–45.

0.4.4 Autoethnography

Autoethnography is a research method that uses personal experience ('auto') to describe and interpret ('graphy') cultural texts, experiences, beliefs, and practices ('ethno').⁵¹

Autoethnographers believe that personal experience is infused with political/cultural norms and expectations, and they engage in rigorous self-reflection, or reflexivity, to identify and to interrogate the intersections between the self and social life. According to Bochner and Ellis, autoethnographic narratives share the accounts of 'people in the process of figuring out what to do, how to live, and the meaning of their struggles'.⁵²

According to Boylorn, autoethnographers provide alternatives to dominant, or taken-for-granted and harmful cultural scripts, stories and stereotypes⁵³ that offer accounts of personal experience to complement, or fill gaps in, existing research.

Insider knowledge of cultural experience can often be informative. This assumption suggests that the writer can inform readers about aspects of cultural life that other researchers may not be aware of. My research includes interviews with artists who have directly experienced institutional oppression, allowing me to extend my limited experience of these topics. There are certain nuances and anecdotes that I could translate that could be included in a more dominant field of research. Park Chan-kyong, in an interview with me, explains how in the 1980s, the Left took a backward-looking approach and became more Marxist-Leninist.⁵⁴ Beck Jee-sook, a curator who emerged in the 1990s points to the slippage caused by translating the word 'Minjung' as 'people'

⁵¹ Tony E. Adams, Stacy Holman Jones, and Carolyn Ellis, *Autoethnography: Understanding Qualitative Research* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015). p. 8.

⁵² Carolyn Ellis and Arthur P. Bochner, 'Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity: Researcher as Subject', in N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (eds), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (London: Sage, 2000), pp. 733–768.

⁵³ R. M. Boylorn, 'A Story and a Stereotype: An Angry and Strong Auto/ethnography of Race, Class, and Gender', in: R. M. Boylorn & M. P. Orbe (eds), *Critical Autoethnography: Intersecting Cultural Identities in Everyday life* (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press. 2014), pp. 129–143.

⁵⁴ See film *Fragments*.

by comparing the origins of the term in Latin American theology and literature.⁵⁵ Both examples are associated with the Leftist politics of Korea combined with Korea's own history and political past.

Thus it was necessary to utilise the full scope of the particular role of my own practice: bridging two different cultures as the curator for the KCCUK (2007–2011),⁵⁶ the diplomatic arm of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism of Korea, and taking the role of the cultural face of the Embassy of South Korea in London. This enabled me to see both sides of the culture. After I had left the KCCUK, I continued to curate multinational, state-funded exhibitions for local government bodies and public institutions.⁵⁷ As my film shows, the story was intertwined tightly with my personal experience of growing up in Western countries; these experiences gave me a sensitivity to pedagogy and the apparatus of the press.

0.5 Methodology: film as a curatorial method

The main methodology for my research is making a 'curator's film'. Both the process and the final film demonstrate how making *this* film became the central methodology. I have learned these techniques from the key artists on which I focus. I have considered the various artistic strategies undertaken by each artist, and how the methodologies employed by the artists included the installation of discarded objects into a symbolic assemblage (Choi), a symbolic ritual directed towards subordinated beings (Park), or re-enacting and creatively reversing the notion of beauty and pain (Chang).

⁵⁵ Jee-Sook Beck. 'Minjung Art in the Year 2005, or the Year 2005 in Minjung Art', in Binna Choi (ed.), *Climatization: Field Notes from the Short 10 Years (2000–2010) of Art and Making Things Public in Korea* (Korea Arts Management Service: Seoul, 2010) (originally published in 2005 in *The Battle of Visions* [exhibition catalogue] (Darmstadt: Kunsthalle Darmstadt, 2005).

⁵⁶ When I undertook the opening of the KCCUK as the Exhibition Manager in its premises on Northumberland Avenue, it was one of 12 Korean Cultural Centres; at the time of writing, in 2019, there are 32 centres.

⁵⁷ Before joining the KCCUK, I directed 'Korean Day' at the V&A Museum in 2006, in collaboration with Seoul City government. There were many other occasions for collaboration: Liverpool Biennial 2012 with Incheon Metropolitan City; I worked with Gwangju City Government for the UNESCO exhibition in Paris. Other cities include Kangjin city, Gyeonggi Province for a ceramics exhibition, Seoul Biennial for Architecture and Urbanism, and many more.

During the process of making the film, I strove to conceptualise each artist's complex world in both writing and film. The key was to curate the context by showing the spontaneity and learning process when curating happens. Thus, I pursued my intuitions about how these three artists hold the key to theorising a wider canon, including the strength and particularities of contemporary Korean art – and the film became both a stage and the archive platform.

Eventually, because I am a researcher with curatorial roots, combining these three different prisms of the past that are refracted through the eyes of the artist into one single platform came naturally. I have illustrated the layers of references to the following 'revelations' through this film: Choi Jeong Hwa wanted to blur the real and the fake by assembling cheap plastic goods to achieve a landscape that is quite spectacular at first glance but empty inside; Park Chan-kyong intended his art to convey the experience of a symbolic shamanistic ritual, and Jia Chang challenged the notion of private and collective trauma by creating a scene that addresses the core of our traditions, customs and taboos. Once the assemblage of these revelations began to speak, it also started to reveal a bigger picture, one that had historical 'blind spots'.

Juxtaposing artworks from different time periods to simply allude to differences and encourage active thinking in the audience is often used in exhibition formats. I have employed this curating format to conceptualise a history told by a curator using a montage of extensive materials, thought-provoking works by artists and a corresponding thesis. How artists used subtle nuances and artistic expression prompted me to think of ways to address the condition of logocentric narratives. While I was combining all the spectra refracted by the artists, I did not want to reduce them by confining them in words. There were limitations to articulating these findings in a conventionally written thesis. The curator's film includes montages, a layering of references, and subjective reflection by the curator, spoken from a first-person perspective.

My research is autoethnographic. My research involved interviews with key thinkers from various genres to find enlightening insights. I have juxtaposed and assembled this heterogeneous information in the form of a film to create a world shaped by artists and

informed by artists. This is also a ‘curatorial’ approach, as my inquiry has arisen from my professional career as a curator; through the trust and reputation I had thereby acquired, I was able to conduct interviews with important first-hand witnesses who are now very well respected.⁵⁸

I conducted 50 interviews and workshops in Korea and the UK between January 2018 and December 2019, many of which required negotiation to record in video form. It was through this filming, interviewing and revisiting the words of artists that I began to assemble a meaningful collection of things. Transcribing the interviews was a lengthy process. This time allowed me to reconsider the motivation behind certain choices of words, and nuanced political references. The challenge was not only to translate them as words, but also to translate the cultural context. Most of them were in Korean, so most of the texts needed be translated into English. Even the English-speaking interviewees, who included Beth McKillop, Brother Anthony and James Hoare, used proper nouns in Korean. This entailed cross-checking various terms. Because of word-count limitations, I have only selected a few transcriptions, but I have transcribed all the Korean interviews with indications of minutes. The transcription was a useful process that I learned from editing my documentary film *Sleepers in Venice*, as I needed to edit out different scenes when required.

Writing my narration in English and translating subtitles for the footage have evolved in various stages of making the film. I showed the edited film to film editors, both for technical guidance and for their opinion about the flow of the narrative. I also shared various stages of the filmmaking with composers, illustrators and potential interviewees in order to expand and situate the research.

The process of editing the film involved not only shuffling sequences of scenes, but also some considerable time to formulate a way to address the complexities of our lived experiences.

⁵⁸ Getting them to speak about sensitive issues to be recorded on camera is another important task I have achieved. Indeed, some of the key artists, such as Jheon Soo-cheon, who represented Korea at the 1995 Venice Biennale and was awarded an Honourable Mention, died a few months after the interview with me. My research also involves securing important testimonies.

To achieve various angles during an interview, I organised additional camera operators to shoot the interviews. Going through the second camera roll to find a different angle also allowed me to reflect on the conversations. I asked for a second visit to examine the interviewees' own personal footage and/or archives, and I was thus able to obtain rare footage from the past. For some interviewees, I sent back the edited version to them or watched the process with them to hear their feedback. When I completed the 50-minute version, I began working with an editor to correct the editing mistakes and three musicians to compose the original scores for various scenes.

0.6 Outline of the thesis structure

The first part focuses on the history of trauma and consists of important primary materials that depart from conventional historiography. By using scenes from *Fragments* to illustrate it, the history part narrates history through relevant artworks. It historicises 'The History of the Suppression of Korea, from 1800 to the Present'.

The second part offers a view of the mediation of Korean culture through exhibitions. I add explanations to the original materials used in *Fragments*, from rare interviews and the personal archives of those who defined the era: the second part contextualises the epoch that artists have emerged from, and is entitled 'The Context of Mediating Korea'.

The third part describes my method of 'improving' the mediation of Korean art. Because of what has been presented so far, and also by learning from the strategies of the artists concerned that defy logocentric and reductive historiography, my film *Fragments* has become the core medium for my research.

0.7 Contribution to knowledge

The research will open up an important role for the curator as a translator between culture and history. While the dominant historiography is still Eurocentric, my research points out differences in ways that are inspired by artists. Academics exploring the history of the Cold War, postcolonialism, the study of democracy and international politics may potentially be interested in my research. My research questions the fundamental oppression caused by entangled memories: Japanese colonial rule was a

profoundly ambivalent time for Koreans, as the Korean Empire, which succeeded the 500-year-old Korean monarchy, lost its sovereignty.

It is a meditation on what it means to create collective memory through art – to mediate history. The film and the thesis argue that the work of these key artists needs be seen in a wider context, and how this contextualisation is significant in relation to artworks as *lieux de mémoire*.

My film will be an important case study for mediating artistic practices in a more complex manner. The result of my research will mediate the complex entanglement of personal/collective memory and its representation through art. This research reframes history narrated by artists and creates a new curatorial model to consider.

This research will be important to art historians and academic researchers who are interested in different regions of Asia. At the same time, I argue, through my written text and the film, that the knowledge of the Western viewer is necessarily limited. With an education system devoted to West-centric viewpoints, people have a limited view of Korean art history and art. Many non-Western artists will know about Western art history, whereas audiences (artists, curators, art historians) in the West will have a limited awareness of non-Western art. This film is a way for me as a transcultural curator to insist on a more carefully articulated description of my context.

PART 1

The History of Suppression, from 1800 to the Present

Each exhibition has its own history and theme. As a curator, I have learned stories from artists that differed from the history I had been taught in school.

from *Fragments*

1.1 Prologue

Through this research, I have compiled an alternative version of history through art. I started with the hypothesis that the 1990s in Korea provided a rich springboard for the collision of all the suppressed discourses that began to happen, and that artists emerging from that era have so far produced diverse art that reflects this in very transformative ways. Grouping together three artists – Park Chan-kyong (b.1961), Choi Jeong Hwa (b.1965), and Jia Chang (b.1971) – who had not traditionally been associated with each other before was quite a departure at first. By unpacking these artists' responses, I demonstrate how each artist reveals many layers of historical trauma that are obfuscated and concealed.

Yet this chapter covers a wider period of time than that involved in investigating the works of the three main artists, and the parallel narrative of finding an ancient manuscript allowed me to rethink the issues of historiography at stake. The corresponding film, *Fragments*, has been shaped by these artists' anecdotes, theories and methodologies to reveal collective memory. Just as my key artists were interested in a bigger span of history, and oppressed narratives of power, my horizon of research has consequently been widened to reach a broader realisation and historiography: I interrogate the way that modernity arrived in Korea prior to the Japanese invasion, and how the royal manuscript of 1809 and the voice of Lady Hyegyeong could be read as an artistic voice that could be read differently in hindsight. The research – the film *Fragments* and this thesis – creates an example of one way to narrate history through art.

Fragments does not offer a chronological narrative. The film presents spiral 'histories' recovered from suppressed memories, and all the illustrations in this chapter are scenes

from the film – memories that have been stubbornly resurfacing in the artists’ works. All the historical events I discuss in this chapter appear in the film, and I will locate the corresponding script as signposts in the footnotes.

I considered presenting these materials in an exhibition format,⁵⁹ but this lost the agency I wanted to convey and fell prey to the same limitations I have felt when creating exhibitions in the past. I did not want to hide behind the ‘objective’ tone of the third-person narrative, nor mimic the documentary style of ‘transparency’. Neither did I want to use abstract language to talk vaguely about the theme through artworks. This chapter is a more detailed exploration of my film – or, as I have explained in the film, a journey through time and space, with a curator’s guide. I simply call it a ‘curator’s film’.

The fact that this conclusion was revealed to me at the end of the research, like finding a way through a maze,⁶⁰ becomes an important motif. Artists emerging from the 1990s had original ways of speaking through art: their materials and sources led me to the primary sources of this research. These materials led me to create my film, *Fragments*. This expanded timeline, from 1809 to the present instead of from the 1990s to the present, not only made sense but also explains how artists emerging from the 1990s were combining elusive voices and shamanistic and indigenous culture into their works.

From the point of view of historiography, I have realised that even the discourse of modernity was suppressed for a hundred years. The year 1809 was already seeing seismic change in modernist subjects and influences from the West. However, what we learn at school still tells us how modernity was introduced through the colonialism of 1905 or after the end of the Korean War in 1953. I will continually return to the film throughout this research, and unpack its layering. I pay attention to it because it contains original material that led me to reframe the history.

The chapter is divided into the following six periods: the introduction of modernity to Korea circa 1800; oppression under Japanese occupation (1910–45); the Korean War (1950–53) and the continuation of anti-communism; the Cold War and Korea as the

⁵⁹ As my interview list shows, I consulted exhibition designer Ab Rogers and VR technicians to create a mock exhibition as well as the physical one.

⁶⁰ The film starts with many montages of different pieces of footage, one of which shows the author inside a labyrinth of infinity mirrors– it is in fact Lee Bul’s *Via Negativa II* (2014).

stage for the Iron Curtain (the 1970s); the Democratisation movement (1980s) and anti-government, anti-colonial nationalist art; and art of the present day, since the 1990s. The conceptualisation of these artists' works has become the basis for my research, and *Fragments* embodies its conceptualising process.

1.2 The Introduction of Modernity to Korea circa 1800



Figure 1 Opening Scenes from Fragments.

The film starts with my own voice. In many ways exhibitions always start with someone's voice, but this has been disavowed because of the particular framing or the third-person subjectivity in which exhibitions are normally presented. I start the film with my own voice to show the parallel to a history that has always begun from someone's perspective.

Viewers are then introduced to the out-of-scale close-ups of some pages from a section of a folio from a royal Korean manuscript. A group of 'cartoonish' figures, hand-drawn and painted, dressed in various forms of court attire, fill the screen. Men are playing various instruments, and women, separated from the men, look like courtiers. These ladies-in-waiting, in headdresses, seem to be attending the ceremony and guarding gifts in red boxes. Although detailed, the scale of the book and its vibrant red colour could not be captured on screen.⁶¹ This scene is overlaid with the voice of a curator – Dr Seungcheol Lee, from the Early Printing Museum in Cheongju, Korea. He calls the manuscript a 'uigwe'.⁶² This is a term that denotes the group of royal Korean

⁶¹ Through this experience, I realised once again the importance of tangible and physical objects – the importance of having a memory available to be viewed in life.

⁶² The UNESCO website says: 'a unique form of documentary, *Uigwe* is a collection of Royal Protocols of the over 500 year-long Joseon dynasty that both records and prescribes through prose and illustration

manuscripts of this kind. He compares the manuscript's function to that of the contemporary Korean constitutional White Paper, recording the official ceremonies of the nation with photographs and texts. His 'statement' comparing a *uigwe* to the Korean summit was an 'inevitable' coincidence.⁶³ Working for a public museum which has to apply for the annual funds it receives from central government, Seungcheol Lee has to be sensitive to government policy, and therefore uses a contemporary example of the most significant government document to describe the manuscript's role.⁶⁴ The 'speaking subject' and the interviewee were both being affected by the fragile political climate that cast a shadow over the Korean peninsula during 2017 and 2018.⁶⁵

the major ceremonies and rites of the royal family'. <https://en.unesco.org/silkroad/silk-road-themes/documentary-heritage/uigwe-royal-protocols-joseon-dynasty>.

The history of the *uigwes*' dislocation also tells an important history. No *uigwe(s)* before 1600 exist, as all volumes from the first half of the Joseon dynasty were lost, due to many military invasions. Each *uigwe* for an occasion was made in several versions which were dispersed to four library locations in Korea. Thus, there are about 3,895 volumes still existing but none from the first half of the Joseon dynasty have survived. The story becomes complicated as the fourth library to store these royal manuscripts is situated in the most isolated part of Korea – on Ganghwa island (hence, in *Fragments*, Beth McKillop refers to *uigwes* as Ganghwa manuscripts). During the French invasion of Korea in 1866, this library was burned down, and its treasures taken away, as noted in various historical documents. As a result, about 300 volumes are kept in the Bibliothèque Nationale, France, and, among the copies, it was presumed that one of them was sold to the British Library. These particular *uigwes* were for the king's viewing and are more spectacular than other *uigwes*. Park Byeong-seon (1928–2011) went to find missing *uigwes* in France in 1955 after graduating from Seoul National University in 1950. She worked in the Bibliothèque Nationale from 1967 and discovered *Jikji*, the earliest surviving book using movable metal type, which was printed in 1377, and revealed its existence in 1972. After 20 years' research, she eventually found some *uigwes* in the Versailles storage facility for the Bibliothèque in 1975 – they had been ignored and were catalogued as 'Chinese'. When she informed Korea about the existence of *uigwes*, she was made redundant from the library. This story of *Jikji*, and my connection to this book will be illustrated in Part Two of this thesis. Also see footnote 158.

⁶³ The interview was undertaken with Lee as he is a specialist in Korean manuscripts and printed books. While researching Korean heritage and books that were outside Korea – 'lost memory' – I discovered that the royal manuscript at the British Library was unique. I had been investigating the works of Park Chan-kyong for several months, so when Lee compared the *uigwe* to the White Paper for the forthcoming Korean summit, what seemed like a distant connection became relevant in my mind – which I often observe as the curatorial.

⁶⁴ I am treating Lee Seungcheol's use of the Korean summit as what Michel Foucault defined as a 'statement' – not as an 'elementary atom of discourse': it is regarded as a part of the discursive formation of a 'deductive whole'. Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (London and New York: Routledge, 1969), pp. 79–87.

⁶⁵ Seungcheol Lee's mention of an upcoming Korea Summit allows my film to cut from the images of *uigwe* to Park Chan-kyong's *Flying* (2005). *Flying* is a 16-minute video work showing the first Korean summit in 2000. The first Korean summit was a widely televised event, and the national television channels of the time portrayed it with a particular narrative. In *Fragments*, it works as a bridge to connect a personal memory to a collective memory. Park Chan-kyong has revisited the optimistic memory of the Korean Summit that most Koreans had, from a different angle. Park does so by revealing the hidden memory of the story of the composer Isang Yun: Yun's superimposed 1977 composition *Double*

The term *uigwe* has no equivalent in English, as historically there are no equivalent forms of these documents known elsewhere in the world. If one were to call it a manuscript, one might think of it as a scroll, or folio, with hand-drawn text or images. *Uigwes* are both records and instructions, with illustrations of the ceremonies and rites of the royal family. Although there are more than 3,895 different kinds of *uigwe* in existence globally, each depicts a particular protocol of a historical event and, despite its uniqueness and historical importance, it is little known. It has never been contextualised and exhibited alongside other historical archives.



Figure 2 Beth McKillop recalling the attributing of the manuscript to the correct date, from *Fragments*.

Beth McKillop recalls her memory of ‘reattributing’ this Korean royal manuscript from 1869 to the correct date of 1809, when she was the keeper of the British Library’s Asian Department in the late 1980s and 1990s. She tells me in my film how ‘no one in London knew what it was’ and how ‘the royal Korean manuscript of 1809 in the British Library was what we call a *lost memory*’.⁶⁶ The article she wrote in 2000 gives the official title of the manuscript as *Record of the Presentation Ceremony and Banquet in the Gisa*

Concerto is about two lovers who are hated by a powerful king of gods. The king, annoyed by these lovers, bans both of them as stars to the opposite ends of the galaxy. As an only favour they are allowed to meet once a year, on 7 July, in the middle of the galaxy. On top of this, there is another layer to the story. Yun Isang, a South Korean composer, was accused of being a spy when he visited North Korea. Yun was tortured and imprisoned and was not released until a group of internationally renowned musicians, including Igor Stravinsky and Herbert von Karajan, signed a worldwide petition asking the South Korean government to release him.

He is the first of four people in my film who were tortured, corrupted by history, the series of four tormented souls that I make reference to in *Fragments*. Although it may be unclear at this point of the film, what they have seen will be explained to the viewer during the process, at the end of the film: I speak of how ‘*Four is for the four people who appear in the film who were tortured,*’ in the closing narration of *Fragments*.

⁶⁶ It is also a lost memory for Koreans, as their education focuses on a grade system for entrance examinations which has more emphasis on practical knowledge, such as English, calculus and Korean, rather than the study of history or other humanities subjects.

Year (1809). She thus corrected the erroneous information published in R.K. Douglas's 1877 *Supplementary Catalogue of Chinese Books and Manuscripts in the British Library* (1903), where the volume was originally described as the 'presentation of gifts and congratulations to the Queen of Corea'⁶⁷ on the occasion of her being 'capped' in the year 1869.⁶⁸ I add an explanation of the significance of a 60th anniversary in Asian culture in *Fragments*, and this will become more important, as it will later serve as evidence for Korean artists' emphasis on the nature of reincarnation or the cycle of life. Deeply rooted in indigenous beliefs and religion, these cyclical designations of years persisted, even though the Joseon dynasty suppressed the state religion of the previous era (Goryeo dynasty, 918–1356), when the official religion of the state was Confucianism. These lunar calendars were important to understand the deeply agricultural society that relied on the rice harvests. The moon was an important gauge to understand the flow of the water. The cycle of 60 years also shows how differently Koreans have thought about life compared to how it has been thought about in the West. This discussion starts to build up different enunciations of life, the afterlife and reincarnation.

Although I did not know it when I first asked to see this manuscript in the British Library, it was to lead me to discover very personal depictions of the time – the memoir written by Lady Hyegyeong. As Beth McKillop writes, the 1807 ceremony was held in honour of Lady Hyegyeong, by then the dowager queen mother, who had outlived her husband (the Crown Prince Sado) and her son King Jeongjo, who reigned until his death in 1800. Lady Hyegyeong is best known as the author of *Hanjungnok* (meaning 'Records written in silence'), a memoir that immortalised the tragic story of her marriage, a story about which she had kept silent until she was 60 years old, more than three decades after her husband had been killed by his father, King Youngjo. She and her husband were both aged 27 at the time. I change the subjective register of *Fragments* from *uigwe* to Lady Hyegyeong, as her subjective and retrospective voices have become more important to my research as a metaphor for an autoethnographic

⁶⁷ Korea was commonly written 'Corea', named from Goryeo dynasty, until the Japanese colonialist period.

⁶⁸ Beth McKillop, 'A Royal Manuscript of 1809 in the British Library', *The International Journal of Korean Art and Archaeology*, 4 (2010), 176–87.

voice. Her description of her husband's mental illness and her brother's death is regarded as the first Korean literary work with an individual voice. The story of Prince Sado is a tragic story that all Koreans know: the king ordered Prince Sado to be kept in a rice chest for eight days, an unthinkable homicide that broke every Confucianist ideal held by the court. As a result, Lady Hyegyong's political lineage became fragile all through her life. The king's status was influenced by the strong bipartisan politics, and the memoir becomes an important window through which to see various aspects of the society and court in which she lived. Some argue that the details Lady Hyegyong describes are accurate descriptions of clothing phobia. Even though there may have been political intentions behind Lady Hyegyong's writing of the memoir, I see it as the introduction of the modern subject in writing, and it contains superb descriptions that are artistically very convincing, even to contemporary readers.⁶⁹



Figure 3 Margaret Drabble discussing her intention to write a novel, *Red Queen*, an adaptation of the memoir written by Lady Hyegyong, from *Fragments*.

My film includes the British novelist Margaret Drabble speaking about her encounter with the memoir⁷⁰ and how she began writing a novel, *The Red Queen*,⁷¹ based on this extraordinary text, whose author, she notes, was contemporary with Jane Austen, commenting on how 'both [Lady Hyegyong and Jane Austen] were writing with such an ease'. To me these two writers were both modern subjects. Lady Hyegyong had

⁶⁹ Jahyun Kim Haboush writes, 'he lost his battle to meet her husband's demand not because he did not want to comply, but because he desired so intensely to live up to his father's expectations that the constant disapproval was too great to bear.' Jahyun Kim Haboush, *The Memoirs of Lady Hyegyŏng: The Autobiographical Writings of a Crown Princess of Eighteenth-Century Korea* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

⁷⁰ In an interview with me, Margaret Drabble spoke of how Jane Portal, Keeper of the Department of Asia, British Museum, gave the memoir to her.

⁷¹ Margaret Drabble, *The Red Queen* (London: Viking, 2004).

begun to think and speak like a modern subject. And the memoir signalled the birth of modernism in the late Joseon period.

Genre paintings by Yun-bok Shin (1758 – c.1813) painted around the time that the memoir was written reflect what Rancière refers to as ‘the reversal of the hierarchy of the representation’. Yun-bok Shin’s genre paintings were ‘revolutionary’ in depicting subjects such as a barmaid, a shaman or a dancer, according to Kim Yong-joon,⁷² who is regarded as the pioneer of Korean art history. Kim Yong-joon emphasises ‘Confucian society’ twice when commenting on how revolutionary Shin was. The Joseon dynasty was very strict in following the restrictive rules of Confucianism in everyday life. Painting and drawing also had a set of rules, and rarely did anyone draw outside these rules: if you did, your work would not be recognised as a work of art. Depicting a love story was close to taboo. Yun-bok Shin broke this taboo.



Figure 4 Édouard Manet, *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*, 1889.

This represents a parallel history to the advent of modern subjectivity in Western painting and literature. Jacques Rancière wrote about how literary forms, such as novels by Gustave Flaubert, Honoré de Balzac and Victor Hugo, for instance, first showcased the mundane lives of the working class as their central subjects, and enabled excluded

⁷² Kim Yong-joon writes that Yun-bok Shin was the most revolutionary artist of the time as ‘even though under the auspicious Confucianist spirits of the time, Shin was able to depict the habits, activities, surroundings with such an ease while most of the artists were only adding women’s clothes to the conventional Daoist deities’, Kim Yong-joon, ‘Genre paintings of Joseon Dynasty: the Pioneers of Korean Cultural Historiography’ in *Joseon Dynasty Painting and Painters* (Keunwon: Kim Yong-joon Collection, 2001), pp. 216–228.

voices to be heard.⁷³ In ‘Why Emma Bovary had to be Killed on Screen’, Elodie Laügt discusses how Rancière coined the phrase ‘*renversement de hiérarchie de la représentation*’ to refer to the appearance of Emma Bovary as the reverse of the image of hierarchy.⁷⁴ The ‘eponymous character of Flaubert’s novel’ emerged in 1857, when this reversal of the hierarchies of representation first occurs in literature.⁷⁵ Rancière thus extended the claims of the modern subject to the earlier period of Romanticism. Similarly, Joseph J. Tanke, in his rereading of Rancière’s *The Politics of Aesthetics*, talks about how artists begin to attend to a world of ‘insignificant actors and everyday objects’ to introduce a new level of social visibility and symbolic worth.⁷⁶ Édouard Manet’s painting of a barmaid (Figure 4), for instance, registered ‘a new alertness to the anonymous poetry of the undramatic, trivial and commonplace aspects of modern life’.⁷⁷ Consequently, the reading of Rancière prompted me to look at the famous genre painting series by Shin Yun-bok. *Fragments* includes my visit to Kansong Museum, where the museum’s curator, Hyun-kyu Tak, leads me to the room of original paintings by Yun-bok Shin and tells me how the painter worked from the reign of ‘King Yeongjo to Jeongjo’⁷⁸ (Figure 5), meaning that the painter was contemporary with Lady

⁷³ Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics* [2000] (First published in France under the title *Le Partage du sensible*) (London and New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014).

⁷⁴ Elodie Laügt, ‘Why Emma Bovary had to be Killed on Screen: from Flaubert to Chabrol via Rancière’, *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 49(3) (July 2013), 272–285.

⁷⁵ I am referring to Édouard Manet’s *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* (1882) in the Courtauld Gallery because of its parallel with the Korean example of the bar painted in the early nineteenth century, likely to have been just after 1800, as Yun-bok Shin, the artist who painted *At the Bar*, lived from 1758 to 1813. Open bars were prohibited until 1800. Michel Foucault analyses this painting by Manet in ‘The Place of the Viewer’, in *Manet and the Object of Painting* (London: Tate Publishing, 2009).

⁷⁶ Joseph J. Tanke, *Jacques Rancière: an Introduction* (London & New York: Bloomsbury, 2011).

⁷⁷ Toni Ross notes three primary changes in which the aesthetic regime registers a weakening of influence of the ‘representative’ paradigm. First, how Romanticism and Realism dismantle the hierarchical system of artistic subject matter, styles and genres; second, the way the art of the aesthetic regime breaches ontological divisions between fine and applied art; and last, the shift instituted by the aesthetic regime annuls the privilege assigned to the written word and art’s story-telling function in Aristotelian poetics. Toni Ross, ‘Image, Montage’, in: *Jacques Rancière: Key Concepts*, ed. Jean-Philippe Deranty (Stocksfield: Acumen Publishing, 2010).

⁷⁸ King Youngjo (1694–1772) was the father-in-law of Lady Hyegyong. Lady Hyegyong (1735–1816) lived on after the death of Prince Sado (1735–1762). Her son became King Jeongjo (1752–1800) in 1766 in succession to King Youngjo, his grandfather. The royal manuscript of the Gisa year was made nine years after King Jeongjo’s death, in 1807, during the reign of Soonjo (born 1790, reigned 1800–1834), the grandson of King Youngjo. See *Timeline Appendix*, p. 40.

Hyegyong, the writer of the memoir. People of all classes – from Madame Bovary, who was a provincial bourgeoisie, to Lady Hyegyong, a restrained but royal subject, as well as barmaids in both Manet’s and Shin’s paintings who were working-class – were becoming ‘modern subjects’.



Figure 5 Curator of the Kansong Museum explaining about paintings by Yun-bok Shin, from *Fragments*.

Yun-bok Shin belonged to the Bureau of Painting (*Hwaone*), which was the government department that executed paintings recording court life, from *uigwes* to royal portraits. Although Yun-bok Shin is regarded as a painter from King Youngjo’s reign, this painting (Figure 6) which I focus on in *Fragments*, can be attributed to a date between 1756 and 1800, as the prohibition ended with King Jeongjo’s fifth year of the reign in 1756.⁷⁹

Another similarity between Yun-bok Shin’s work and that of Édouard Manet is the subtle depiction of the duplicity of the aristocratic class. Shin shows in his series of genre paintings how they would enjoy themselves behind the curtain, away from prying eyes, with courtesans and entertainers. When Manet depicted a disengaged girl at the Folies-Bergère (Figure 4), Guy de Maupassant described the barmaid as the giver of love and alcohol. By showing one particular scene of a bar in *Fragments*,⁸⁰ I wanted to draw a parallel with the way these artistic depictions are contemporary with the period when Lady Hyegyong was writing her memoir. I emphasise this contemporaneity by

⁷⁹ King Youngjo prohibited drinking in public, and it was his grandson who ended this prohibition. The reopening of ‘bars’ can be read about at <https://educalingo.com/ko/dic-ko/eunjeon>.

⁸⁰ Author’s comparison. William Hogarth (1694–1764), Jeongseon (1676–1759), Yun-bok Shin (c1758–?), Charles Baudelaire (1821–67).

deliberately emphasising the Kansong museum curator’s comment about how the ‘rice-cabinet was an instrument in which Prince Sado was killed’ (Figure 6).



Figure 6 Yun-bok Shin’s painting of a bar, c.1800, from *Fragments*.

I see this period, c.1800, as the beginning of hybrid ideas – when the seeds of modernism and the advent of the modern subject began to emerge in Korean society. This was to be severed abruptly by the subsequent Japanese occupation; I grew up reading about the advent of Korean modernism arriving with Japanese colonialism, from the 1920s onwards. This, along with many other suppressions, paved the way to building one of the dominant economic theories to justify the residues of Japanese colonialism. And Yun-bok Shin’s work reveals how the transition from the monarchy-based Joseon dynasty (1392–1910) to divided nation states left many ‘transitional phases’ in history undocumented. The history of the Korean Empire (1897–1910) and its effort to open up the nation to modernisation and Westernisation was almost completely silenced. The curator of the exhibition *The Art of the Korean Empire* (2018), at the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea, confirms that the discussion had been taboo and that the exhibition which opened in 2018 was the first of its kind (Figure 7).⁸¹

⁸¹ Interview with Bae Won-Jung (on 12 September 2019, transcription, author’s archive). The curator of *The Art of the Korean Empire* says, ‘This exhibition is the first ever exhibition to illuminate the art of the Korean Empire. The art of the Korean Empire has never been an object of study in Korean history of art. We have focused on showing the court art of the Korean Empire ... Until now, the discussion around the beginning of modern art has been the 1930s when the Joseon Art Exhibitions began; we have shifted our focus to the era beginning in 1890 until the Japan-Korea Treaty of 1910.’

The exhibition press release for *The Art of the Korean Empire* reads: ‘Exhibiting over 200 works including paintings, photographs, and craft works from the period, *Art of the Korean Empire: The Emergence of Modern Art* focuses on how the art produced during this period has laid the foundations for Korean modern art.’



Figure 7 Curator Bae explaining about the change in court paintings in the nineteenth century.

Social historian Hyeon Park argues similarly that the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw the emergence of commercialism and modern economic activity.⁸² Art historian Charlotte Horlyck also writes on how the beginning of ‘modern Korean art’ has been an ongoing subject of debate, and notes that ‘scholars put forward dates ranging from King Yeongjo (r.1724–76) or King Jeongjo (r.1776–1800) of the Late Joseon Kingdom, to the opening up of the country in 1876, the Kabo Reforms of 1894, and the Japanese annexation of Korea in 1910’.⁸³

1.3 Oppression under Japanese Occupation (1910–45)

The rupture in Korean society has been felt in many artists’ works emerging from the 1990s. Park Chan-kyong, in an interview with me, talked of the required reading list for anti-government student groups that dominated the university campuses. One of the key books centred on the history of Korea.⁸⁴ This generation was more interested than the

⁸² Hyeon Park argues that the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had already seen the emergence of Western influence – i.e. urban culture and markets, commercialism, capitalism, the expansion of modernity and modern subjectivity – via China, exemplified by a collector who owned a set of prints by European artists. She argues that, even without the Japanese intervention, Korea would have received Western influence, which could have led to a more gradual modernisation process.

⁸³ Charlotte Horlyck, *Korean Art from the Nineteenth Century to the Present* (London: Reaktion, 2017), pp. 8–9.

⁸⁴ ‘Historical Consciousness before and after the Liberation’ (author’s translation) was the series of history books that were encouraged to be read within the circles of students who were collectively organised and protested against the Korean government’s atrocities especially its treatment of civilians during various democratic movements. The first series was published in 1979 by Hangilsa in Seoul. This book was specifically mentioned by Park Chan-kyong. The article’s reads: ‘More than 400,000 copies of the books *Historical Consciousness before and after the Liberation* were sold?’, *Hangyer Daily* newspaper, <http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/culture/book/971034.html> last accessed 26 April 2021.

previous one in the broader span of history and was also influenced by global contemporary art practices that had inevitably affected the artmaking process. The repercussions from the Japanese occupation, especially related to the future North Korea and privileged conglomerates of South Korea, have been continuously questioned by left-wing politicians up to the present, to the point that it has become more political than discursive. This brings us back to the question of the role of art in revealing the collective amnesia about this suppression. It was Park Chan-kyong's depiction of a shaman, born during the Japanese occupation in Korea, that prompted me to broaden my approach from looking at just the 1990s to examining a wider historical spectrum.

Park Chan-kyong, in fact, has alluded to multilayered trauma in Korean society in a number of works throughout this career. From *Sindoan* (2008) to *Night Fishing* (2010), the subjects of the traditional culture of religion have frequently appeared in his work. *Manshin: Ten Thousand Spirits* (2013) epitomises this storytelling in a provocative 'ritual-like' film. Kim Geum-hwa, the protagonist of Park's film *Manshin* is a real shaman who was born in North Korea in 1931. She marries into a family hastily to avoid being kidnapped as a sex slave by the Japanese Imperialist army and suffers from oppression by both her new family and the people around her. She escapes from North to South Korea – only to be suppressed again as a 'spy'. Even after the liberation and the Korean War, she is viewed with prejudice, as the indigenous religion was by then seen as pagan and degenerate. Strongly rooted in the ideas of *Chi*, the key cultural and historical sites were being suppressed and bulldozed over.⁸⁵ *Manshin* was a respectful term for shamans in Korea, but not many people know of this term, and refer instead to shamans by the pejorative term *moodang*. This was because during the Japanese occupation anything to do with the roots of, or connections with, the native land was suppressed in Korea. Ironically, Marxism was permitted to a certain degree until the 1930s, as it divided the intelligentsia who led the independence movements against the

⁸⁵ Dr Seungcheol Lee, in my interviews, talks about the suppression of the indigenous culture: 'You can actually just see that Japan has committed such atrocities. Yi Sun-shin. If you go to Admiral Yi Sun-shin Hyeonchungsa in Cheonan, you can see that Japan brought a Japanese pine tree from Japan and planted it there, then later moved it to another place. There are so many things that Japan has done to break Korea's national spirit in so many different ways. Of course some of them remain in records', p. 27 (my unpublished interview transcripts).

Japanese into smaller groups. Despite many attempts to let the world know about the 1905 Japan-Korea Treaty, and with diplomatic attempts to promulgate news about the annulment of the Treaty, such as the Hague Secret Emissary Affair in 1907, that ended in failure, the Japan and Korea Annexation Treaty was signed in 1910.⁸⁶

But even if Korea had lost its independence, the fight against oppression continued. On 1 March 1919, a declaration of independence was read in Seoul, and an estimated 2,000,000 Koreans took part in these demonstrations, with around 7,000 people being killed by the Japanese forces.⁸⁷ The movement is significant for my research for two reasons: one, these student movements find their roots in the 1919 independence movements, and two, it became a catalyst for the establishment of the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea by Korean émigrés in Shanghai on 13 April 1919. The Japanese authorities dealt with domestic insurgency severely while the guerrilla movement's 'Korean Liberation Army' in Manchuria counter-attacked Japanese leaders in various locations, supported by the Provisional Government in Shanghai.⁸⁸ One of the independent guerrilla generals was Kim Il-sung, who led tens of thousands of Koreans in the National Revolutionary Army and People's Liberation Army. The Korean Volunteer Army, which was formed in Yanan, China, later becoming the Korean People's Army of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea). In other words, one of the key leaders of Korea's independence movement was to become the founder of North Korea. These anti-Japanese and Marxist movements and the

⁸⁶ One of the pivotal moments of my research was seeing a manifesto in the British Library typed by Kim Kyusik on the way to Paris in 1919. I had read about the Hague Secret Emissary Affair of 1917, when Korean Emperor Gojong sent an envoy in secret to the Hague Conference on World Peace to protest about Japan's actions of 1907. The nations at the conference prevented Korea from attending, blocking the diplomatic mission of Gojong's representatives to assert the monarch's rights to rule Korea independently of Japan. See Carter J. Eckert, Ki-baik Lee, Young Ick Lew, Michael Robinson and Edward W. Wagner, *Korea Old and New: a History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990). Seeing Kim Kyushik's text from 1919 at the British Library prompted me to look further.

⁸⁷ Ki-Baik Lee, *A New History of Korea* (韓國史新論), trans. Edward Wagner, with Edward J. Schultz (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), p.320.

⁸⁸ The fact that King Gojong supported the independence movements has been surfacing in many recent publications. The article summarises lectures given by Professor Lee Taejin in which he recounts that *The Korea Repository*, a monthly magazine in the USA, published the article 'Majesty, The King of Korea', in November 1896. Moon Kwang-ho, 'Korea's Modern History of Rewriting and Distorting Distorted History', *Professor Newspaper*, 26 March 2018, available at: <https://www.kyosu.net/news/articleView.html?idxno=41231>.

abolition of Korean culture through various imperialist activities is a tangled history, a situation in which everyone feared and suspected everyone else.



Figure 8 Park Chan-kyong discussing the poet Kim Soo-young and the proletariat movement of the 1930s, from *Fragments*.

At a broader level, the suppression of memories was forced upon the people through the physical division of the country in two. In *Fragments*, Park Chan-kyong quotes Kim Soo-young's poem, which starts with the line 'I am at the bottom of the class' and states that the poet used to say: 'I am only respected as someone important in South Korea because all the intellectual people have chosen to go to North Korea.' Park adds what he used to hear as a child: 'grown-ups used to say how all the clever people chose North Korea' (Figure 8). And, in what was traditionally an agricultural society, in which you lived and were buried, this was of the utmost importance, and the separation of the population was experienced dramatically. After the Japanese occupation ended in 1945, the Korean peninsula was divided on the 38th parallel and people were forced to choose either the North under the USSR's communism or the South under the USA's protection. In the period between the end of the 30-year Japanese occupation and the outbreak of the Korean War, 65 established artists of the Korean Artist Proletarian Federation (KAPF) chose to live in the North.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ Choi Yeol, *Korean Contemporary Art Criticism* (Seoul: Cheongnyunsa, 2012).

1.4 The Korean War (1950–53), the continuation of anti-communism and suppression of indigenous culture

Although the poet Kim Soo-young himself modestly said how he was only recognised because all the respectable poets had chosen the North, his poems powerfully described the extreme hardship of the Korean War for many readers.⁹⁰ Kim Soo-young's poems provoked and challenged this forced norm⁹¹ as his portrayal of North Korea differed from that which presented it as an evil communist state. The artists emerging in the 1980s and the 1990s took a different stance towards North Korea, interpreting Kim Soo-young's poem in different ways, which was both a shock and a sign of threat to the hegemony of the period.⁹²

Other suppressed historical evidence involves stories of extreme suppression caused by the Western front both during and after the Korean War. Following the Korean War ceasefire, ideological nationalism was replaced by another form of ideological conflict: anti-communism. It prevailed in the now separate South side of the Korean Peninsula, and any inquiry into past injustices has been conveniently attacked as Leftist, and thus communist. Artists emerging from the 1990s tried hard to remember histories that had been forgotten by the rest of the population.⁹³

An American scholar of East Asia, Bruce Cumings, describes how, as soon as Japan surrendered, Korea saw the rise of 'People's Committees' within a few months in almost all the cities and regions of South Korea, only to be crushed by the US occupation, which built a strong anti-communist state in an alliance with the conservatives – crushing the initiative of the Left for state-building by mobilising the

⁹⁰ Hae Ri Kim, 'The Spirit of Liberation in Modern Korean Poetry: Poems by Soe Jungjoo and Kim Soo-young', *The Korean Language in America* 3 (1999), 171–81.

⁹¹ One of the poems, entitled 'Kim Il-Sung Hurrah', written in 1960, is still the subject of heated debate in Korea. Some argue that it was Kim's way of contesting the suppression of the media and student movements, while some argue that the poem reflects Kim Soo-young's socialist stance. I believe it was more about the freedom to contest and overcome the grim shadow of South Korea's reality than simple praise for the North Korean leader.

⁹² I visited the National Archive to look into the holdings of television news, and one of the documentaries on Leftist students argued consistently that the students were controlled by North Koreans.

⁹³ This strong anti-American stance appears throughout the Minjok/Minjung art movements.

state's coercive power, including the police force.⁹⁴ This history of the 'People's Committees' has been suppressed within Korea, as the government of the Republic of Korea was established in the South in August 1948 and the Rhee Syng Man⁹⁵ regime removed centrist nationalists as well as left-wing forces and set up anti-communist organisations controlled by the government in various sections of society. The result was the emergence of a far-right anti-communist system.

Kim Il-sung was a guerrilla fighter striving for the independence of Korea from Japanese imperialism. While North Korea evolved into a nation-state that believed in the 'Kim dynasty', claiming that its legitimacy was rooted in the anti-Japanese struggle,⁹⁶ South Korea also built its own narrative to legitimise military dictatorship. South Korea used Confucianist ideals to propagate the notion that Korea needed a strong father-figure to rebuild the country. These partial blind spots are often revealed in the work of artists contemporary to Park. Minouk Lim's *Wrong Question* (2006) includes a scene in which a car drives around to find a place to park in a car park with a voiceover by a taxi driver:

Our president went to Germany with great anticipation to meet them. So he took the plane ... and arrived at the Bonn Airport ... When they heard that President Park was coming, not only the nurses ... but also the miners came with their faces all darkened by coal. They all came to Hamburg and burst into tears when they saw the president.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Bruce Cumings wrote a number of well-known books on Korean history, including *The Korean War: a History* (New York: Modern Library, 2010), *Korea's Place in the Sun: a Modern History* (New York: Norton, 1997), *The Origins of the Korean War, Vol. 1: Liberation and the Emergence of Separate Regimes, 1945–1947* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981) and *Vol. 2: The Roaring of the Cataract, 1947–50* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990). Cumings writes about the decades-long left/right-wing struggles, the resistance around the time of Annexation, the so-called *Uibyeong* or 'righteous army' which engaged the Japanese in scattered quasi-guerrilla skirmishes during the years 1907 to 1910. 'In the fervid atmosphere of the war's end, this "people's regime" had established itself throughout the peninsula. Led for the most part by heroes of the resistance to Japan, it possessed a raw appropriateness, or legitimacy', Vol. 1, pp. 32–33.

⁹⁵ The first president of the Republic of Korea, Rhee Syng Man, also appears in *Fragments* visiting *The Family of Man* exhibition.

⁹⁶ In my interview with him, Park Chan-kyong talks about how 'authenticity' and 'legitimacy' became the dominant tools to legitimise the Kim dynasty. The Kim dynasty is a three-generation lineage of leadership of North Korea that started with the country's first leader, Kim Il-sung. The regime nurtured the cult of personality that was closely connected to the state philosophy of *Juche*, and passed this on to two successive generations.

⁹⁷ Minouk Lim, *Wrong Question*, 10'16", 2 channel DVD projection, (2006), available at: <http://www.minouklim.com/index.php?/videos/wrong-question/>.

This hidden ideology of ‘the nation’ involved the notion of capitalist ideology putting all injustices to rest. The government-controlled media was at the centre of this, as *Fragments* juxtaposes original news reports of Koreans going to West Germany to become miners with Park Chan-kyong’s photographic series *Koreans who Went to Germany*. While the latter series reveals real portraits of miners 35 to 45 years after they went to Germany, excerpts from K-TV’s 1963 news programme show obvious propagandist tones. Miners who went overseas to work in the toughest conditions established the basis for the Korean economy to build upon. However, these individuals’ struggles have been omitted from the success story of Korea’s economy. Moreover, behind the wealth attained, the exploitation of resources to build infrastructure too hastily affected people directly, with disastrous results appearing in the 1990s such as the collapse of the Seongsu Bridge. The media influenced the breaking of memory – literally through the broken bridge as well as through the promulgation of nationalistic propaganda.

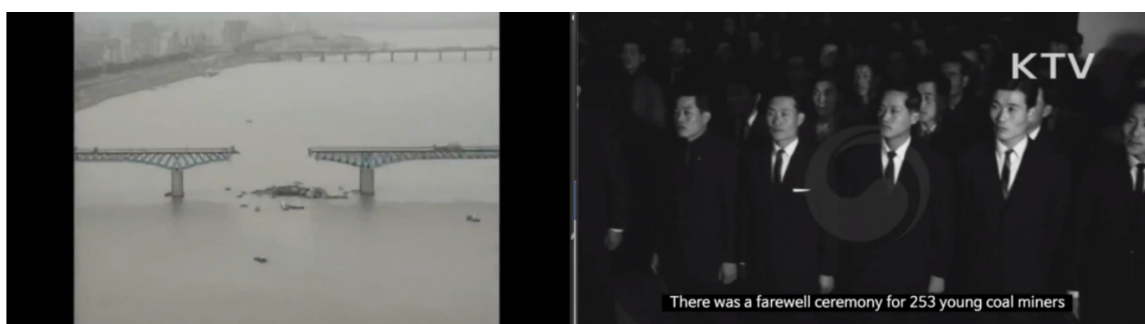


Figure 9 Reporting of the 1994 Seongsu Bridge collapse on MBC followed by the news from 1963 about 253 young coal miners who were ‘selected through stiff competition’ to be sent to Germany to work, in Fragments.

The military forces became massive as a result of the Korean War, which drastically increased the physically coercive power of the state.⁹⁸ Anti-communism became internalised in the minds of the people through state propaganda and led to the formation of an extreme anti-communist system, and, as Chapter Two will show, the United States Information Service also helped to solidify the anti-communist nature of the South Korean state.

⁹⁸ President Park Chung-hee and President Chun Doo-hwan were both military figures turned politicians, both through military coups-d’état.

In 2005, the South Korean government initiated a Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Its final report in 2010 revealed that 8,450 bodies had been uncovered, out of 11,175 cases.⁹⁹ The bodies included those killed by the South Korean army or police forces of South Korea, classed as being Leftist guerrillas, Bodo League members, local Leftist victims, and victims accused of being collaborators with North Korea. Being ‘red’ was a convenient crime. Thus, the National Security Law, which instrumentalised these arrests, became the most revered law.¹⁰⁰ My intention in the film was to convey the displaced frontier. When Jacques Derrida defines ‘hauntology’ as present in the medium of media ‘because of the medium in which it is instituted, namely the medium of the media themselves, this element itself is neither living nor dead, present nor absent: it spectralises’.¹⁰¹ As in contemporary Korean society one still sees the spectralisation, I want to reveal how artists grasp the symptomatic return of the haunted and displaced subjects in their artworks. Because the mythology of nation-building became combined with anti-communism and the suppression of ‘traditional beliefs’ in Korea, this inherited knowledge permeates everyone’s consciousness, including mine, in quite a twisted fashion. For instance, the Saemaul Undong (New Community Movement), launched in the 1970s, repeated the suppression of indigenous beliefs that the Japanese pursued, but incorporated the dogma of Confucianism to mythologise ‘the nation’ as the father-figure. Saemaul Undong suppressed the shamanistic tradition, deeming it to be superstitious. Christianity, on the other hand, was seen as Western and thus modern.¹⁰² I used to also feel guilty when participating in ancestral rites as they felt

⁹⁹ Press release, Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Republic of Korea, available online from National Library of Korea – Comprehensive Report (all four volumes) http://coreawar.or.kr/xe/board_DIQI63/78730?ckattempt=1. See also Kim Dong-Choon, ‘Korea’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission: An Overview and Assessment’, *Buffalo Human Rights Law Review*, 19 (2013), 97–124.

¹⁰⁰ I will discuss the inclusion of references to the National Security Law in the work of many artists in the following chapter.

¹⁰¹ Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: the State of Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 63.

¹⁰² Kirsteen Kim and Sebastian C. H. Kim argue that Christian politicians and church leaders were prominent in establishing an independent South Korea as the Cold War began. They were willing to work with Communists to preserve the unity of the nation at first. But their experience convinced them that communist aims were incompatible with religious freedom and with their own vision of a democratic nation founded on Christian principles. The discussion is significant to understand Korean nationalism, which is mixed with Protestant Christianity. Kirsteen Kim & Sebastian C. H. Kim, ‘The Christian Impact on the Shaping of the First Republic of Korea, 1945–48: Anti-communism or Vision for a New Nation?’, *Religion, State and Society*, 46 (4) (2018), 402–417, DOI: 10.1080/09637494.2018.1480211.

rather ‘pagan’ compared to spiritual choired churches. These double standards are emphasised in Park Chan-kyong’s film *Manshin* when the protagonist shaman is suppressed by Christians, symbolising the general prejudice held by ‘Christian’ Koreans towards indigenous religions.¹⁰³ The ironic flashback is when the shaman remembers hearing a Christian hymn in her near-death experience when the boat she was on, escaping from the North, nearly capsized. The hymn was sung by early Christians, as if to foreshadow the later suppression of her practice by Christians; however, ironically Kim Geum-hwa remembered the song as a song of hope.

By including less direct but nuanced multilayered references, Park Chan-kyong’s work recalls reports of how a strong Korean Christian Pentecostalism originated in North Korea and came to South Korea. It was combined with strong anti-communist doctrines, leading to a unique form of Christianity in Korea.¹⁰⁴ Park Chan-kyong spoke about his childhood experience of following his Catholic parents to the funeral of a distant relative for the 49th day after death.¹⁰⁵ Park questions whether anyone’s misfortune can truly be a ‘personal’ rather than a ‘social’ matter, and discusses the way he is consciously trying to ‘make this claim through my art’.¹⁰⁶ I was also challenged, as it touched on the inner contradictions I have always felt towards this ambivalence in Korean society. I wanted to evoke this entanglement of different myths and belief systems in order to get closer to the visceral world from which Korean art originates.

¹⁰³ Following Pope Francis’ stay in Korea for five days, *The Economist* writes how Christianity was brought to Korea by intellectuals in the eighteenth century, seeds were incubated under Japanese colonialism and about 5.4m of South Korea’s 50m people are Roman Catholics, and 9m more are Protestants. <https://www.economist.com/the-economist-explains/2014/08/12/why-south-korea-is-so-distinctively-christian>.

¹⁰⁴ From being home to only 50,600 Christians in 1910, the Korean peninsula now has an estimated 20.15 million Christians, making up 41.4 percent of the population, according to Colin Lewis, in ‘The Soul of Korean Christianity: How the Shamans, Buddha, and Confucius Paved the Way for Jesus in the Land of the Morning Calm’ (Honors Project, Seattle Pacific University, 2014), p. 6. <http://digitalcommons.spu.edu/honorsprojects/6>.

¹⁰⁵ Park writes about watching Apichatpong Weerasethakul’s film *Tropical Malady* (2004) with a certain sympathy because it ‘parallels my childhood memory’. Park Chan-kyong, ‘Sindoan: Some Scattered Views on Tradition and the Sublime’, available at: <http://www.parkchankyong.com/on-sindoan-some-scattered-views-on-tradi>.

¹⁰⁶ In a podcast interview for *Jin Joong-Gwon’s Culture Café*, with Park Chan-kyong (author translation), broadcast 8 May 2014.

1.5 Cold War and Korea as a stage of the Iron Curtain, the 1970s and the 1980s

Fragments returns to the year 1980 three times: stories of the Gwangju Democratic Movement, the Samcheong Education centre and the first Minjung art exhibition are told by its witnesses. These bloody events changed the course of Korea's history for good. Although these stories have been reassessed in commercial films such as *Peppermint Candy* (1999), *May 15* (2007) and *1987* (2017), where *Fragments* differs to them is that these stories are remembered and told by *artists*. I use these depictions by artists to contextualise how the Cold War and Korea as a stage of the Iron Curtain worked. I have positioned *these* valuable testimonies in the film to emphasise how these artistic testimonies are equal to and worthy of historic importance. They are flashbacks, as well as missing puzzle pieces: while the younger generations have forgotten how people fought against suppression and older people have forgotten how they were oppressed in multiple ways, art can reveal discrepancies in history. In short, I have compiled flashbacks of artists who lived through the 1970s and the 1980s in order to contextualise how artists have begun to speak about complex subjectivities through multilayered art languages. Thus, these flashbacks are not documentary per se but are nuanced and layered. For instance, in *Fragments*, I reference the poet Kim Soo-young through Park Chan-kyong's words, or Park Seo-bo's recollection of a Paris exhibition in 1963, because they communicate more about the politics of the Cold War and the position of Korean art on the world map than any other historic sources. I will discuss Park Seo-bo and the monochrome artists' efforts to legitimise the Western painting tradition into Korea's own, and there are various implications for the following chapter that discusses contexts. However, in this chapter I am analysing how I used *Fragments* to present the period that led up to the 1990s, where different voices and outlets for expression began to explode with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the Seoul Olympics. The 1980s saw a crescendo of suppression, with the military government suppressing freedom of speech and the democracy movement in an extreme way.

The 1980s thus had a changed mood, dominated by Minjung art, a figurative and political art that was anti-government and anti-colonial. The Minjung artists criticised monochrome art for being apolitical, and promoted the belief that artists should depict the 'real' sufferings of the people. Because the Minjung artists were censored and

prosecuted for being anti-government, their work was not represented overseas as ‘Korean modern art’ until 1988, contrasting with the ubiquitous representation of monochrome art as ‘Korean art’. This movement, now known as Dansaekhwa, has even had a monograph devoted to it in English. Rather than concentrating on the divisions within Korean art, I explore its continuity by highlighting artists’ efforts to find the right words within the context of ongoing suppression. This is why *Fragments* quotes Bartomeu Mari, Director of the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art Korea until 2018, saying:

The division of the two movements is like the division of Korea in two. But the next generation of artists completely kills the problem and makes works that are interesting and complicated at the same time.



Figure 10 Bartomeu Mari in Fragments, interviewed during his tenure as the Director of the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art Korea.

His words accompany the images of the two paintings below that I have inserted into *Fragments*: Park Seo-bo’s *Ecriture* (Figure 11) and Oh Yoon’s *Family 2* (Figure 12)

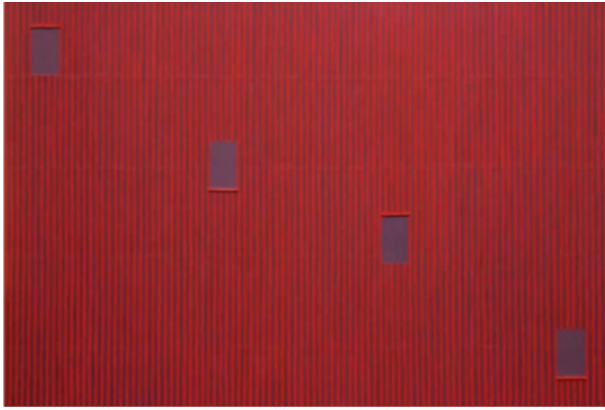


Figure 11 Park Seo-bo's *Ecriture, in Fragments*.



Figure 12 Oh Yoon, *Family 2, Oil on Canvas, 1982, in Fragments*.

Oh Yoon's painting is representative of Minjung art. In *Family 2*, the image of a modern family represents both socialist aspirations and the proletariat. This work is also the precursor to Park Chan-kyong's *Citizen's Forest*. *Family 2* represents Korea's subalterns. Park writes that *Citizen's Forest* (Figure 13) is a requiem for the many nameless people who sacrificed their lives during those tumultuous periods; it was inspired by the poem *Colossal Roots* (1964) by Kim Soo-young and the painting *The Lemures* (1984) by Oh Yoon. *Fragments* references the work of both the poet and the painter, contextualising the literature and art that Park Chan-kyong often refers to when discussing his inspirations.



Figure 13 Park Chan-kyong, *Citizens' Forest*, 2016, Video/Film 3-channel video

Similarly, I assemble references to mediate how two other artists relevant to my topic revealed this history of oppression in their own ways: Choi Jeong Hwa remembers the Nanjido landfill site as the enormity of poverty (yin) that is shadowed by sudden wealth (yang), and Chang recounts a childhood memory of seeing a ‘forbidden book on torture’ (trauma) and her interest in the history of torture (subconscious recollection). In *Fragments*, straight after these three artists’ words, I add more direct testimonials of the suppression from the 1980s, such as Lee Hyun-se sharing his story of the Samcheong Educational Centre, followed by stories told by Lim Ok-sang about the first Minjung art exhibition.

In *Fragments*, I use neither concrete reconstruction of torture nor the documentary mode of testimony. The uncanny fear is expressed subtly, seen in the way Dr Lee Seungcheol and I, as Koreans, experienced constant fear in the political climate of 2018, marking the Third Inter-Korean Summit.¹⁰⁷ The ways in which different generations of artists expressed the trauma of the division can be seen as a genealogy. Consider two scenes that are montaged together in *Fragments* (Figure 14).

¹⁰⁷ When I was interviewed by the BBC World Service, live covering the Third Inter-Korean Summit, I said ‘what we [Koreans] want is irreversible peace’. The BBC presenter then asked me, ‘How likely is that? You’ve mentioned that he (president Moon Jae-in) is trying to work as a mediator. But both Kim Jong Un and Donald Trump are unpredictable.’ My reply demonstrates the mood of the time: ‘The alternative (of not having this talk) is most worrying. I have seen how volatile peace could be. But through the Pyeongchang winter Olympics and through the summit, the mood has been much more optimistic.’ *BBC News*, 19 September 2018, Available at: <https://youtu.be/p3WJI0Ohbxs> accessed 1 January 2020.



Figure 14 North Koreans waving pink azaleas as appears in Park Chan-kyong's media work *Flying*, followed by the painting of pink azaleas in Lim Ok-sang's painting; both scenes appear in *Fragments*.

Park Chan-kyong's scene from *Flying* slows down to reveal North Koreans waving pink flowers in a highly choreographed manner. Unlike 2000, when the Inter-Korean Summit was regarded as a symbol of the imminent hope of unification, its cyclical appearance conveys the pessimistic future imagined in 2018. But still, it was a better alternative than war. Even though *Flying* was made in 2005, using the archive of 2000, the work appropriates the 'otherness' of North Korea in South Koreans' psyche through the music and the editing. The fact that all the North Koreans are wearing traditional Korean dress, *hanbok*, adds to this 'surreal' landscape the different temporalities of the separated half. In fact, in an interview, Park Chan-kyong recalls how the novelist Hwang Sok-yong spoke of this particular scene as being like 'a view from an afterlife'.¹⁰⁸ Pink flowers have traditionally been linked to the local myth of Shangri-La – full of pink peach blossoms. Ironically, North Korea became the most isolated hermit kingdom.

My research focuses not on the overriding rivalry between movements affected by ideology, but on the cultural context surrounding them, including these discussions that had become a springboard for the next generation of artists. Some artists reacted against the hegemony of Dansaekhwa art; some artists found Minjung art to be another form of hierarchical rhetoric. And some lost interest in relative democracy while some gave in to the institutionalisation of the revolutionary spirit. These historic placements connect the Koreans in the bigger picture generated from these discussions, such as how this can be seen in parallel to the recognition of the Zero group and rise of the new generation of

¹⁰⁸ This conversation was recalled by Park Chan-kyong in his interview with the critic Jin Joong-Gwon, in the podcast published in 2014, now unavailable.

artists in Germany and its discussion in relation to trauma. There are various revisions and critiques: Kim Youngna, for instance, groups the three art movements together and shifts the angle to a view of the era as reconsidering identity and tradition. The 1970s and '80s saw Park Chung-hee's long presidency, and the rise of nationalism caused 'tradition' to become a news item and topic of conversation: Kim devotes a whole chapter to Dansaekhwa, Minjung art and the revival of ink painting. She notes that Dansaekhwa artists combined tradition and modernity and Minjung artists emerged in the 1980s, rejecting Western language and forms and forming a bigger cultural movement.¹⁰⁹ I am also aware of the appropriations of historic events and Korea's cultural aspirations, exemplified by the 5·18 Archives (the Gwangju Democratisation Movement Archives) and the opening of the Asia Culture Center.¹¹⁰ It is not surprising that the Gwangju Biennale, founded in 1995, is closely linked to the history of suppression, and at the centre of its foundation were cultural practitioners from a wide range of contexts. As *Fragments* recalls, 'in the year I was born, the Gwangju Democratic Movement happened. My mum does not remember the event, since it was never reported.' I looked closely at the rupture in people's memories and at how artists remembered it.¹¹¹

Fragments talks about this period and its parallel temporal natures through various evocations of the year 1980. I was born in autumn 1980 and my extended memory, through these extraordinary testimonies of the 1980s, forms part of the film. The reference to Lee Hyun-se, the popular Korean cartoonist, adds another layer to the story, as Lee Hyun-se changed the style of his cartoons permanently because of the austere re-

¹⁰⁹ Youngna Kim, *Modern and Contemporary Art in Korea: Tradition, Modernity and Identity* (Elizabeth, NJ: Hollym, 2013), pp. 45–65.

¹¹⁰ Korea.net documents that the historic venue of the May 18 Gwangju Democratic Uprising in 1980 has now been reborn as the Asia Culture Center, and was opened in 2015. ('Asia-wide Culture Center Opens to the Public', *KOREA.net*, available at: <http://www.korea.net/NewsFocus/Culture/view?articleId=129789> [accessed 14 3.20]).

¹¹¹ The 1987 June Revolution relates to the assassination in 1979 of the military dictator Park Chung-hee, who had seized power in 1963 through a coup. Chun Doo-hwan then replaced the self-proclaimed president and was met by huge waves of democratic movements, which were only to be crushed by military oppression. In order to show an example, Chun ordered the military to suppress the civilians of Gwangju – in May 1980. This military suppression, killing many civilians in Gwangju, is now known as the '5·18 Democratisation Movement' while in other cities, through the 'Samcheong Education Camp', countless insurgents were captured and 're-educated'. My cousin also disappeared in the 1980s when he was a student leader in Yonsei University. I was shocked to hear that his mother, my aunt, believed that someone from North Korea had 'abducted' him.

education. The influence of popular culture on Korean culture was to be significant. Although its connection is often discussed in relation to the Pop artists of the 1990s, it is rarely discussed in terms of its impact on the political art of the period. My film makes visual connections, as the pages of the cartoons are replaced by satirical graphic representations of the Minjung artists. Consequently, the purpose of my film was to include the stories about artists that are normally left as ‘footnotes’. Therefore, it was important to include various testimonies from other cultural contexts in the film. In the repressive mood of the day, the cartoon was one of the most influential genres in Korea in the 1990s;¹¹² I went to interview Lee Hyun-se for *Fragments* because he was the best-known cartoonist and the most widely read in Korea.¹¹³ However, to my surprise, Lee Hyun-se told me how he was labelled ‘guilty by association’, which prevented him being employed by conventional companies. Cartooning was a freelance job, and had become his destiny. *Fragments* shares another story of a summons to the notorious Samcheong Education Camp. Although his name is known to all Koreans, up to those of my own generation, as the ‘cartoon legend’, they had never heard this story.

Just as people never knew about these real faces of the Samcheong Education Camp, older generations still choose not to believe how General Chun Doo-hwan (later the President of Korea) suppressed the democracy demonstration with tanks and bullets, and rely on the stories told by the media about how it was a ‘communist-instigated revolt’. But then there was an incident that caused waves of uprisings which will endure forever in artistic representation. Park Jong Chul, president of the student council of Seoul National University, was detained and asked to reveal the whereabouts of his fellow activists. After days of torture, he died on 14 January 1987. A huge demonstration against this followed, and many were again detained by the police. When Reuters published one photo of a young student, Hanyul Lee, being struck by tear gas

¹¹² Oscar winning Bong Joon Ho also said he wanted to become a cartoonist.

¹¹³ *Appendix* p. 8, top left shows the film director, Professor of Film at National University of Arts Korea, Kim Hongjun, being interviewed in the area called Garibongdong, an industrial borough where many factory workers have lived. For them, ‘cartoon room’ represented the entertainment that the whole population, from students to businessmen, stayed away from due to so much pressure to work/study hard. In the film Kim directed, *Rosylife*, all the cast eagerly wait for the new cartoons by Lee Hyun-se. In the film, three people meet coincidentally, and their destinies set in 1994 portray the lives of a labour agitator, a gangster, and an accidental ‘communist’ who became a target of the authorities as his novels became a success and he was considered to be degenerate.

Lee Hyun-se also spoke to me about how the ‘cartoon room’ was a sanctuary from stress and the oppressive social mood. He said ‘cartoons about sport were the only subjects allowed at that time’,

during the student demonstration, a young carpenter took action. This carpenter, Byungsoo Choi, saw the photograph of Hanyul and made it into woodblock prints (Figure 15). Thousands of prints of this image were reproduced, with the slogan ‘Let Hanyul Live!’ The following day, Hanyul died and this became the symbol of the millions of demonstrations that are now known as the June Democracy Movement. It led to direct presidential elections for the first time in Korean history, and the woodblock prints, and the placards, or banners, are typical examples of the work of artists/activists who worked in the Minjung group.



Figure 15 Photograph of the June Democratisation Movement from *Fragments*; the painting in the centre shows a typical hanging picture (*geolgae geurim*) that was used in the demonstrations. The right side displays the woodblock prints that were disseminated.

Minjung artists wore traditional Korean costumes, played Korean instruments and painted in a mixture of styles between Socialist Realist painting and traditional Korean painting in the fight against neoliberalism; they held strong anti-American views. *Fragments* shows that Hong Seong-dam has continued to work in this style of ‘placard’ painting up to the present (Figure 17), and notes the irony of his connection to a younger artist, Kira Kim,¹¹⁴ and his work *A Weight of Ideology: Darkness at Noon*. Kira Kim had worked with a psychologist treating a patient who had been traumatically arrested in 1987. *A Weight of Ideology* depicts his hypnotherapy treatment. According to Kira Kim, the patient made several suicide attempts due to the trauma he had suffered. The patient, the central figure depicted in *A Weight of Ideology* (Figure 16), was tortured by the police because of the ‘suspicion of espionage due to his *geolgae geurim* [a massive placard, or banner, that Minjung artists created to be used in demonstrations: see Figure 15]’. *Fragments* includes the scene of hypnotherapy, and the audience is able to hear his patient’s statements pertaining to state violence inflicted on an individual. Under hypnosis, the patient cries out that the interrogators are asking

¹¹⁴ Kira Kim was born in Korea in 1974 and grew up in Korea before doing a Master’s degree at Goldsmiths’, London, in 2010.

whether he knew that Hong Seong-dam was a spy (Figure 16). The film thus not only reveals Kira Kim talking about the work, but also the patient's link to Hong Seong-dam – the original Minjung artist. Hong was one of the most active painter/activists, whose work *Sewol Owul* I will discuss in the next section.



Figure 16 A scene from Kira Kim's *Weight of Ideology: Darkness at Noon*, featuring a patient/artist confessing his trauma through hypnotherapy treatment, from *Fragments*.

1.6 Art of the Present Day, since the 1990s

The closely entwined memories of the traumatic past still affect contemporary Korean society. Hong Seong-dam's 2015 painting *Sewol Owul* is a 10.5m×2.5m mural depicting the dystopian landscape of a society where ghosts live side by side with the dead. *Sewol* was the name of the ferry and *Owul* means May – May referring to the Gwangju Democratic Uprising, that in Korean is commonly known as the May 18 Democratic Uprising. Hong blames President Park Geun-hye for being a puppet, controlled by the ghost of her dead father, recognisable by his green uniform and a trademark pair of sunglasses. Many faces are recognisable, from the Japanese sex slaves, who are now in their eighties, to Kim Jung-un. The White Horse Division, infamous for suppressing the people, is on the left side while the Imperialist Japanese army is in the right-hand corner with the Japanese prime minister, Shinzo Abe, in the centre. The capsized vessel is named *Sewol*. These realistic depictions are no different from Minjung art practices, but this picture was painted in 2014 for the exhibition commemorating the 20th anniversary of the Gwangju Democratic Movement. Although South Korea is a nation with democratic freedom, this painting was censored internally, because of the depiction of the President, and was removed. In 2015, it caused a global stir as international artists began to withdraw from the exhibition in protest, and the

president of the Gwangju Biennale Foundation had to resign. President Park, who was depicted in the work, was impeached the following year.



Figure 17 Hong Sung-dam, *Sewol Owul (Sewol May)*, 2015, from *Fragments*.

Hong Seong-dam's kidnap and torture in the 1980s is well known. He, like Lim Ok-sang, are among the few who continue to raise their voices with art that directly touches politics. But many have forgotten about the struggles that hundreds of thousands of students have fought against. The historian Kyung Moon Hwang¹¹⁵ writes:

A half-century later, Korean students, particularly those in college, seem to be less motivated to forge a better society. It seems they have forgotten, or are not aware of, the sacrifices people in the previous decades made to achieve the democracy that they and the rest of society now enjoy ... It is a story filled with short-term suffering for the sake of long-term gain.¹¹⁶

Korea was facing the dawning of a new era when the fall of the Soviet bloc in 1989, shortly after the success of the Seoul Olympics in 1988, brought optimism to Korea. Student demonstrations continued, but with the first democratically achieved presidential election, most of the activist groups faced a dilemma in continuing their revolutionary motives through the reading of socialist texts. Young curators like Kim Hong Hee spoke of how her exhibition on Fluxus Art was received with a tremendous welcome by the public, who were ready to absorb new art.¹¹⁷ Park Chan-kyong was involved in the *Pool* alternative space, and Choi Jeong Hwa was shown at the São Paulo Biennial in 1998. Small groupings such as 'Sunday Seoul', named after neoliberal

¹¹⁵ Associate professor in the Department of History, University of Southern California.

¹¹⁶ Kyung Moon Hwang, 'Remembering April 19, 1960 Student Revolution', *The Korea Times*, 16 April 2014, available at: http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2016/05/633_155532.html.

¹¹⁷ See *Appendix* for a scene with Kim Hong Hee, p.10.

magazines, and ‘Museum’ (founded by Choi Jeong Hwa and Lee Bul),¹¹⁸ were the kinds of small group activities that shaped the 1990s.¹¹⁹ The retrospective exhibition of Minjung art at the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art Korea in 1994 is seen as the ‘nail in the coffin’ of the Minjung art movement.

However, the voices raised against society had not ceased to exist. Park Chan-kyong, and other artists who are associated as ‘Post-Minjung’, like Bae Kyunghwan, were still expressing these generations of suffering in more nuanced ways. Just as Minjung artists like O Yoon used to say no art can be better than a shamanistic ritual, Park makes a part of his film like a ritual. In the scene where all the film crews participate in a metal-melting ceremony in *Manshin*, film crews re-enact how shamans would traditionally go around to collect the metals, and melt them down to be used in the ritual. Even a cinematographer throws a camera into the pot to show how the film is as much a narrative as it is a ritual.

For a long time, Korea and other East Asian nations have held a very strong concept of haunting spirits, especially vengeful spirits. For example, look at (how many representations of) Korean ghosts exist in comic books, television dramas and movies. I want to tell stories from these victimised souls ... In literary science, these victimised souls are sometimes called the ‘subalterns’. They are the subalterns that have disappeared into history. I think it is important to hear what they have to say – what their resentments are.

Park Chan-kyong spoke these words to me in an interview on 4 January 2017. His words invoke Jacques Derrida’s famous book *Specters of Marx*.¹²⁰ When I asked Park whether he had read *Specters of Marx*, he answered that he had not. But he added that a lot of writing that emerged after the 1968 Paris civil unrest was quite progressively Marxist, whilst Korean Marxism ‘went backwards, to be Marxist-Leninist’, as seen in *Fragments*. Park describes this enlightening local situation in relation to Marxist ideas

¹¹⁸ See footnote 1 for solo exhibitions by Lee Bul and Choi Jeong Hwa, marking the very first Korean artists to be invited to UK institutions. Choi Jeong Hwa is one of the three main artists I focus on in my research.

¹¹⁹ See 2.5 for in-depth discussion of Choi Jeong Hwa and Park Chan-kyong’s works in the 1990s and early 2000s.

¹²⁰ Derrida, 2006, p. xvi.

compared to that of the European intelligentsia, and how the symptomatic return of those ideas was real.

During the research, I saw many artists remembering with sadness the tragedy of the *Sewol* ferry disaster, involving a civilian vessel that capsized with hundreds of passengers aboard, 415 of them young schoolchildren. Peggy Levitt commented on how she was surprised that every artist mentions the *Sewol* ferry disaster as their own. This demonstrates that South Korea is a very tight-knit society and is still affected by the Confucianism that prompts Koreans to personalise the leader of the state much more strongly. Park Geun-hye's inability to protect 'her people' was the betrayal of a strong lineage. Thus, sequences in *Fragments* show the collective memory of Koreans through a series of 'catastrophes' from the Candlelight Revolution. The *Sewol* ferry disaster seems to echo the Sampoong department store collapse of 1995, with the media, the police and the government all blaming each other.¹²¹ As these events are remembered by different generations of artists, Hong Seong-dam portrayed recognisable faces of aggressors (Figure 17) from various times in one picture.

Various writings, ranging widely from cultural studies, postmodern, postcolonial and feminist critiques, have provided breakthroughs for many younger artists who had been seeking an alternative, not only to the authoritarianism and elitism of the modernist movement but also as a response to Minjung art, with its patriarchal, anti-pluralist, anti-foreign, anti-elitist, idealised concept of 'Koreanness' and its simplified dichotomies, such as 'Korean versus foreign' or 'us against them'. The populist simplifications ceased to work in a more complex power structure. What had formerly been experienced only in terms of 'suffering' now seemed to offer Korean artists a chance to express their identity in something other than nationalist idioms and categories.

¹²¹ Francis Fukuyama identifies the 'stable state' as having three pillars: it should be strong and modern, follow the rule of law, and be accountable (Francis Fukuyama, *The Origins of Political Order, from Prehuman Times to the French Revolution* (London: Profile Books, 2011). The 'stable state' was a useful term to consider the disorder that the *Sewol* ferry disaster caused in Korea, and the threat the citizens felt. In Derrida's *Specters of Marx*, he was very critical of Fukuyama, and yet it represents the mood that had swept across the world with the fall of the Soviet bloc.

1.7 Conclusion of Part 1

Just like a maze, where one must step back and see the route at a certain distance in order to understand the path, I looked at the 1990s through the eyes of artists whose eyes directed me back to times before I was born. While pondering on how artists have revealed historical trauma in their work, I had a parallel interest in the Korean royal manuscript from 1809 in the British Library that I was not able to access immediately. By interviewing Dr Lee Seung-cheol, a scholar and a curator of early printing, I understood how the Korean royal manuscript was one of a kind: a major historical archive with a sole copy made for the king. At the same time, these manuscripts were hand-painted in exceptional detail, drawn by Royal Painting Bureau artists. These painters would depict the royal protocols in the most original way. This investigation would lead me to the realisation that 1809 saw seismic changes in society, which overturned my knowledge and understanding of the status quo.

This part charts the history of suppression. In other words: how Japanese oppression suppressed people, how ‘People’s Committees’ were established by Koreans, only to be crushed by the US who wrongly identified these committees as consisting of ‘Communists’. The debate on modernism and identity was then interrupted again by the war. Post-Korean War South Korea was a far-right and anti-communist capitalist nation that viewed any oppositional movements as degenerate, while younger generations began to emerge gradually. They shook off the old discourses, to seek and locate the original political power that was at work.

I have returned to the 1990s not only because I have my own memories of these changes – easier international travel, the advent of mobile phones and the proliferation of the internet, and the younger generation as a new consumer group – but also because I could observe how artists emerging from this era were interested in a wider timespan. Their gaze encouraged me to look beyond the conventional timeframe. I understood that the silence about the beginning of the nineteenth century was also historical amnesia.

With advances in digital technology and ever-connected internet platforms, the collective memory of the past is again being challenged. The traditional popular genres of film and television broadcasting permeate the collective memory and create what Alison Landsberg calls a ‘prosthetic memory’. Memory is based on mass cultural forms

such as cinema and television, which are commodified, portable and malleable – this historically specific form of memory is ‘made possible by the advanced state of capitalism and its ensuing commodity culture’.¹²² But Landsberg aligns with thinkers like Judith Butler who believe that, in order to bring about change, one has to work within the existing semiotic stem.¹²³ Since there is no pristine world outside of commodity culture, one must work alongside it. I have regarded the trauma revealed by artists as a potential part of the spectrum in the contemporary world that has abolished the distinction between the provider and the consumer of media, and promotes various narratives with recent history as motifs. I believe that the original keepers of the suppressed memories of the colonialist and Cold War past in the 1980s and ’90s are slowly disappearing,¹²⁴ and this was one of many significant motivations that encouraged me to actively engage with these important periods that I have also lived through and share affinities with.

Many believe memory is not equal to history; Andreas Huyssen, in *Twilight Memories*, emphasised the lack of effort to remember the commercially driven world of abundant memories.¹²⁵ As Walter Benjamin warned, ‘To articulate what is past does not mean to recognize how it really was’ but it does mean to take control of a memory, as it ‘flashes in a moment of danger’.¹²⁶

¹²² Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004). When discussing *Total Recall*, Landsberg writes of how ‘authenticity is no longer considered a necessary element of the memory’ (p. 42). She also writes: ‘instead of imply disparaging commodity culture, as many cultural critics have done, I believe that the only way to bring about social change and transformation is by working within the capitalist system’ (p.146).

¹²³ Landsberg footnoted Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1990), in *Prosthetic Memory*, p.190.

¹²⁴ The protagonist in Park Chan-kyong’s film *Ten Thousand Spirits (Manshin)*, the National Shaman of Korea, Kim Geum-hwa, died in February 2019. Kim Bok-dong also died a few weeks before her. Kim Bok-dong was a sex slave during the Japanese colonial period and later fought to hold Japan accountable for its war crimes against victims like herself. Her story became the basis for Korean director Kim Hyun-seok’s film *I Can Speak* (Myung Films, 2017). She died on 28 January 2019.

¹²⁵ Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

¹²⁶ Benjamin, *Theses on the Philosophy of History: Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969, p. 255).

My research process has allowed time for consideration, and the film enabled diverse audio-visual material to be edited together with the original artworks that could not be shown effectively in a normal exhibition format.¹²⁷ *Fragments* is a journey through time and space, like an exhibition, with contextual works and commentaries. The core of how the audience understands the film is more controlled. At the same time, *Fragments* became the practice itself, a translation through audio-visuals, and an evocation of history revealed through faces of suppression by which I have come closer to explaining these imagined connections and multiplicities. I am encouraged by artists' attempts to overcome the limitation of a logocentric approach, learned from the temporal nature of exhibitions, and was driven to answer the central question: How can exhibitions become important *lieux de mémoire*? Can exhibitions be places for reconsideration that slows down the acceleration of history, as Pierre Nora has described, and what particular format and content could I investigate as an independent curator?¹²⁸

For the next part, I turn to these exhibitions as the sites of memories to investigate the context of the era from which artists were emerging.

¹²⁷ *Flying*, *Ten Thousand Spirits* and *Fragments* are all 'moving images' but defy the traditional 'genre'. *Flying* can be seen as a short film essay, while *Ten Thousand Spirits* is a commercial documentary film that blurs the line between feature film and documentary. I refuse to call *Fragments* a film essay, as self-reflexivity is not the focus: nor is it a film – it is a 'curator's film'. I hope I have conveyed the combination of historiography, art history, literature review, audio-visual interviews, philosophical investigation and my experiences that all paved the way for the creation of *Fragments*.

¹²⁸ Michel Foucault's books, from *The History of Madness* to *The History of Sexuality*, use the notion of power as a way of understanding history. Deleuze summarises the Foucauldian method as follows: 'Not taking a position, but following and disentangling lines' in Gilles Deleuze, *Pourparlers 1972–1990* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1990), p.119, quoted by Nicolas Bourriaud in *Manet and the Object of Painting*. Pierre Nora also discusses this in 'Between Memory and History: les *Lieux de Mémoire* ', *Representations*, 26 (Spring 1989), 7–24.

PART 2

Context: Mediating Korean Art through exhibitions

Each exhibition was like diving under water, to see what hadn't been visible from the surface. I refer to this history as suppressed layers of memories. The job of the curator differs from that of artists. In order to exhibit the work to the public, curators may feel the need for more context, more history.

from *Fragments*

2.1 Prologue

This research has gone through many phases to reflect on the precise ways of translating or contextualising the work of the key artists in this study. This chapter locates the cultural background that is missing in the mediation of Korean art.

While I challenge the naive understanding of Korean art history, this part demystifies the Orientalist poetics that has accumulated over time. By weaving complex narratives told by contemporary artists reflexively, I hope to mediate the context of my key artists emerging from the 1990s. This part, as symbolised by the 'Island' card, serves to show how multiperspectival curatorial work allowed me to uncover the context of mediating Korean art. This part uses historic examples of mediations of Korean culture, including 1893 in Chicago, 1900 and 1963 in Paris, 1952 in New York, 1994 in Liverpool and 1995 in Venice. They are grouped as the earliest mediation of Korean culture in the West; exhibitions curated by Edward Steichen; Dansaekhwa artists being introduced overseas as 'the art of Korea'; and, finally, the context and impact of the Venice Biennale and Gwangju Biennale, which may have contributed to the simplified version of mediation. I link these discussions with individual/collective suppressed memories.

I ended the previous part with a discussion on prosthetic memory, to put forward the potential for having *art* in the 'sites of memory'.¹²⁹ This hypothesis was something that

¹²⁹ Landsberg's *Prosthetic Memory* proves how mass cultural commodities, images and narratives of the past are mediated through the working of intricate cultural, political and social mediations to impact on a person's subjectivities. Some political parties know of the effect and they control the stories intricately,

I developed over 20 years. First, my academic interest, from very early on, has focused on how Cold War discourses have misappropriated art exhibitions to serve the dominant ideology of the time.¹³⁰ Second, my professional experience has evolved through commissioning public contemporary art exhibitions on historical subjects; and third, whenever I exhibited Korean artists, I was automatically offering a cross-cultural critique, on the one hand as an author and on the other as a translator. These three threads of practice interweave the research back to the web of exhibitions and the context of life.

This part will thus position South Korea, both symbolically and historically, within a global history of art and art history: I explore the origin of stories told by multiple authors about these exhibitions as milestones, locate the *context* of *exhibitions* as an interpretive framework, and understand the work of seemingly disparate artists. As a curator who has grown up in three different continents and worked with various cultural and government bodies, I have compiled a new context of artmaking from autoethnographical, socio-political, economic and cultural points of view to provide for different local circumstances.

while many corporate organisations would be funding projects driven by commercial success without realising the repercussions. Art exhibitions, as this chapter argues, also worked to this end. The issues at stake are how artist subjectivities are not affected by the status quo and how progressive or counterhegemonic readings can also be possible.

¹³⁰ For my Master's in the History of Art, I read 'People, Popular Culture and the Politics of Class' as the key module, and my thesis, completed in 2004, was supervised by Professor Andrew Hemingway. His book *Artists on the Left: American Artists and the Communist Movement, 1926–1956* (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 2002) offers radical new interpretations of some familiar works originating in the United States between 1926 and 1956, reassesses the role of the John Reed Clubs and the work of artists in the Federal Art Projects (FAPs), and revises accepted thinking about art in the United States between 1926 and 1956.

2.2. Korea's national pavilion in Chicago, 1893 and Paris, 1900, in relation to *Jikji, the Golden Seed* curation



Figure 18 Exposition de 1900, Pavillon de la Corée, *Le Petit Journal*, from *Fragments*.

The illustration above highlights a building that is distinctively Korean, characterised by the naturalistic curvilinear lines of the ridges and eaves. In the foreground, people are in traditional Korean attire and headdresses. One might first recognise a simplified version of the Korean flag, with its blue and red circle signifying an adaptation of yin and yang. Most importantly, though, the caption states: ‘Exposition de 1900, Pavillon de la Corée’ – Exposition of 1900, Korean Pavilion. The French daily newspaper reported: ‘the charm of this wooden building, coloured in primary colours and covered with a roof of Far Eastern beauty, attracts the public gaze’.¹³¹ An architectural historian, Hyon-Sub Kim, writes of how this venture was first undertaken by Baron Alphonse Delort de Gléon. The Baron had facilitated the production of the representation of a Cairo street for the Egypt exhibit at the 1889 Paris Exposition, which was chastised for being ‘dirty and chaotic’. To me, the initial design reflected more of a Chinoiserie approach.¹³² After the sudden death of the Baron, Count August Mimerel took on the project. The street that was to be completed with acrobats and musicians was cancelled, and the original pavilion size was reduced by two-thirds. Consequently, compared to the Chinese and

¹³¹ Yeosu Korea 2012 World Expo, available at: <https://2012expo.wordpress.com/2011/12/23/1900-korean-pavilion-in-paris-expo-disclised/>.

¹³² Korean traditional architecture rarely had two floors.

Japanese, who had sent their best examples of work to the London International Exhibition of 1862, Korea was seen as superfluous. Chinese art had an impact that resulted in the emergence of Chinoiserie in the eighteenth century, and Japonisme swept across Europe in the late nineteenth century.¹³³ A closer investigation reveals why Korea was unable to be fully involved in a mediation of its culture at that time.

In fact, this was not the first showcase for Korean culture outside the country. Seven years earlier, in 1893, Korea had sent delegates to the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Emperor Gojong (1852–1919), the last king of the Joseon dynasty and the first emperor of the Korean Empire, ordered the delegates to erect a Korean pavilion in Chicago. However, it became a 'toy-like miniature', with a limited budget.¹³⁴ There was no carpenter within the delegation, but ten musicians were sent to play for the duration of the exposition. The *Chicago Journal* describes how the Korean musicians were professional players.¹³⁵ Emperor Gojong had a particular motivation for participating though: he wanted to assert Korea's neutrality amongst the imperial powers that surrounded the Korean Empire – Russia, China and Japan. He believed his Empire's participation in the exposition might enhance Korea's relations with the United States. With these delegations, he also sent delegates to Washington, D.C. to prepare a declaration.¹³⁶ As I argued in Part 1, the Empire had plenty of examples that showed modernist ideas and development but they were cut short by imperialist colonisation. This case also reveals how Korea had no power left to assert its cultural identity, as its survival was under constant threat. World expositions were the basis for museums, as in the case of the Victoria and Albert (V&A) Museum which was built from the World

¹³³ Hyon-Sub Kim, 'The Appearance of Korean Architecture in the Modern West', *Architectural Research Quarterly*, 14(4) (2010), 349.

¹³⁴ Hubert Howe Bancroft, *The Book of the Fair: Columbian Exposition at Chicago in 1893* (Chicago and San Francisco: Bancroft, 1893), p. 219 quoted in Hyon-Sub Kim, 'The Appearance of Korean Architecture in the Modern West', *Architectural Research Quarterly*, 14(4) (2010), 349–361. doi:10.1017/S1359135511000145, p. 352.

¹³⁵ The Native Korean Orchestra 'have with them their curious reed and string musical instruments, and the programme which they will offer during the Fair will be distinctly native in its character. They are noted musicians, and in fact are the stars of the Korean musical world. In their appearance they resemble the Japanese, though their costume is distinctive alone of the Coreans, and had but little in common with the Japanese habit,' 'From Far Away Corea', *The Chicago Evening Journal*, April 28, 1893, footnoted in the Transnational Historiography [author's translation], p. 250.

¹³⁶ Daniel Kane, 'Korea in the White City: Korean Participation in the World's Columbian Exhibition of 1893', *Transactions of the Royal Asiatic Society-Korea Branch*, 77 (2002), pp. 1–57.

Expositions. Professor Peggy Levitt, whom I also interviewed for this research, argued that museums had become the key realms where national identities are displayed. Interestingly, big expositions became the realms where Korea's first representations happened. Although these national participations were intended to assert Korea's independence, they provided me with a window through which to view the volatile atmosphere of the time.

But some argue that an even smaller exhibition in 1889, four years earlier than the one in Chicago, in fact constituted a mediation of Korean art to the West. The collection sent and exhibited in Paris in 1889 became part of the Musée Guimet collection.¹³⁷ Pierre Cambon, the Chief Curator of the Musée Guimet in Paris, explains that the small exhibition was a collection brought from Korea by Charles Varat,¹³⁸ an ethnographer who was on an expedition to Korea sponsored by the French Ministry of Public Instruction.¹³⁹ He brought a collection from his mission to Paris in 1888, and even though this act was not carried out independently by the Korean government, it was supported by it. It was in fact an important stepping stone, because it was only two years after the first treaty had been established between the two countries, in 1886.¹⁴⁰

Keith J. Wilson, scholar of Asian art, writes: 'in the waning years of the kingdom, the only true independent Korean participants at the international expositions'¹⁴¹ were

¹³⁷ 'Mask of a Youthful Shaman', *Virtual Collection of Asian Masterpieces*, available at: <http://masterpieces.asemus.museum/masterpiece/detail.nhn?objectId=12255>.

¹³⁸ Pierre Cambon, 'Korean Art exhibitions in Europe', in: *Exhibiting Korean Art* (Seoul: National Museum of Korea, 2007), pp. 206–221.

¹³⁹ His journal is available to be read in English in the translator Brother Anthony's online archive. For Brother Anthony, see footnote 27 and 129. <http://anthony.sogang.ac.kr/Varat/VaratSection05English.html>.

¹⁴⁰ This story is relevant to *Fragments* because it was the first cultural correspondence since the *uigwe* was taken away in 1886 during the French invasion of Korea. 'The Peace, Amity, Commerce and Navigation, United States–Korea Treaty of 1882' was possible because Gojong's father, the actual authority in ruling Korea, died in 1874. Gojong's father believed in the Hermit Kingdom. However, when Joseon signed a treaty with America, countries in Europe noticed Korea and soon the British Empire (1883), Germany (1883), Russia (1884) and Italy (1884) signed treaties with Korea. France was the last to sign a treaty with Korea because Korea had been delaying the treaty. The treaty was finally signed on 4 June 1886 and the exhibition Charles Varat prepared was within two years of the date.

¹⁴¹ Keith J. Wilson, 'Korean Art Exhibitions in the United States', in: *Exhibiting Korean Art* (Seoul: National Museum of Korea, 2007), p. 244.

represented at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago (1893) and the Exposition Universelle (1900) in Paris.¹⁴² Wilson adds that these were intended to reflect how 'Korea' was represented for the last time before it would disappear for the entire first half of the twentieth century. 'Exhibiting' in the newly emerging 'world expositions' is evidence of the visibility of Korean art in the West in the nineteenth century. The fact that Korea was exhibiting in 1893 in Chicago and in Paris in 1900 has not been generally acknowledged.

Just as I locate this previously omitted information about the mediation of Korean culture, this discussion was important in another light. Further research has revealed how Korean textbook timelines note that the concept of art was formed around this time in parallel with the cultures of exposition. Korea's *history.net*, a reference guide for historical studies, and further articles document how 'seeing' was developed through these expositions.¹⁴³ As the debates on class, sex, race and technology at the time informed ways of seeing, the concept of modern art, according to *history.net*, was developed through these expositions, art museums and art exhibitions that were beginning to be held. In 1902, the Korean Empire's Ministry of Agriculture, Commerce and Handicraft initiated a System for Permanent Exhibition with the Art Department in 1902, and the city of Gyeongseong held an exposition in 1907.¹⁴⁴ However, this is just one page in one of many history textbooks; Korea hardly remembers the first half of the twentieth century. On the other hand, the West used the exposition to assert its 'superiority': non-Western representations were expected to have an exotic quality. American diplomat Horace Allen expressed his hope that colourful native Korean costumes would 'add to the attraction' of the exhibit, or else perform the function of

¹⁴² Youngna Kim, 'The First Encounter with the West: Korean Exhibits at the World Expositions', in *20th Century Korean Art* (London: Laurence King, 2005), pp. 40–63.

¹⁴³ Hokyung Jeong, 'The Introduction of the Term, "Fine Art" and its Social and Historical Cognition in Korean Modern Period: Focused on the Experiences of World Exhibitions during the Open-port Period', *Journal for Art History Association of Korea* (29, 2009), pp. 7–36.

¹⁴⁴ Quoted in Lee Kooyeol, 'Historic Relationship between Korean and French Art Exchange' (author's translation) *Modern Korean Art Investigation* (Seoul: Mijinsa, 1992), p. 148.

offering an ‘entertaining exhibit for that department [the Women’s Building] from this land of female seclusion’.¹⁴⁵

The South Korean government also responded to this and organised travelling exhibitions.¹⁴⁶ These travelling shows did not consist solely of ‘contemporary art’ but were labelled ‘Masterpieces of Korean Art’, composed of various examples of decorative art such as ceramics and lacquerware, and were organised by the Korean Ministry of Culture and Information in 1957.¹⁴⁷

On the other hand, an art historian based in the United States, Joan Kee,¹⁴⁸ writes that ‘exhibiting contemporary Korean art began not long after the nominal end of the Korean War’ with the 1957 show at the University of Minnesota being the first such exhibition.¹⁴⁹ Kee notes that these exhibitions were organised because Korea was seen as the key locus of the communist threat, and were facilitated by the US International Cooperation Administration. While this claim is a useful insight to postwar politics of the US mediating Korean culture, Kee does not seem to recognise the Korean presence at the Chicago exposition of 1893 as ‘contemporary art from Korea’. I found her writing inside the catalogue for the exhibition *Your Bright Future: 12 Contemporary Artists from Korea*, which was an exhibition of Korean art organised by Los Angeles County Museum of Art and Museum of Fine Arts Houston.¹⁵⁰ Since the origins of the

¹⁴⁵ Allen to Walker Fearn (18 February 1892). Allen MSS quoted in Daniel Kane, ‘Korea in the White City: Korean Participation in the World’s Columbian Exhibition of 1893’, p. 13.

¹⁴⁶ Keith J Wilson, ‘Korean Art Exhibitions in the U.S.’, in *Exhibiting Korean Art* (Seoul: National Museum of Korea, 2007). Also, because of the bilateral political ties, the United States held a touring exhibition of Korean masterpieces, including ceramics and furniture, in 1957.

¹⁴⁷ *5000 Years of Korean Art* (San Francisco, CA: Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, 1979).

¹⁴⁸ Joan Kee is an Assistant Professor of Art History at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor.

¹⁴⁹ Joan Kee, ‘Longevity Studies: The Contemporary Korean Art Exhibitions at Fifty’, in: *Your Bright Future: 12 Korean Artists* (Houston and Los Angeles: Museum of Fine Arts Houston and LACMA, 2009), pp. 16–28 (p.18).

¹⁵⁰ Joan Kee, ‘Longevity Studies: The Contemporary Korean Art Exhibition at Fifty’, in *Your Bright Future: 12 Contemporary Artists from Korea* Exhibition Catalogue, edited by Christine Starkman and Lynn Zelevansky (Houston, TX: Museum of Fine Arts, 2009), pp. 17–29. Organised by the Museum of Fine Arts Houston and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), *Your Bright Future* was an exhibition with Bahc Yiso, Choi Jeong-Hwa, Gimhongsok, Jeon Joonho, Kim Beom, Kimsooja, Koo Jeong-A, Minouk Lim, Jooyeon Park, Do Ho Suh, Haegue Yang and the collaborative, Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries. Since the accompanying catalogue features essays by organizing curators Christine Starkman and Lynn Zelevansky with contributions by Joan Kee and Sunjung Kim, one can see how the essay was aimed more at Western readers.

museums' collections were through the collecting of Korea's decorative art,¹⁵¹ I felt that there was a discrepancy in the information. Considering Kee's investigation of monochrome art in the book *Tansaekhwa*¹⁵² – one of the very few comprehensive English monographs on contemporary Korean art – as art that is rooted in a tradition of calligraphy and Eastern philosophy, I find her contextualisation from postwar Korea limiting in explaining the world from which contemporary artists are emerging. The long-suppressed heritage was one of the fundamental driving forces for artists. Hence starting to discuss Korean contemporary art from the 1950s is like beginning a story about a man who has suffered a traumatic accident and coma, and is recovering his memory, only from the moment he wakes up from the coma.

Having said this, Kee's writings on contemporary Korean art are very comprehensive in many subjects, and she expands her argument about the 'longevity' of Korean contemporary art exhibitions. Her comment on how a collective ambition to 'author' Korean art has been a driving force for the long-lasting Korean art exhibitions overseas is noteworthy and made me think about my own motivation. I find that there are so few comprehensive publications around Korean art and culture. Of exhibitions from the 1990s, on the other hand, there are relatively more overseas. There is a more urgent need for more inclusive cultural aspects that locate art within the wider context of traditional Korean architecture and decorative art. Architectural historian Hyon-sob Kim writes that there are not many English native speaker authored books on Korean architecture, and that books on Korean architecture are not generally translated – or, when they are, it is a literal translation from Korean to English with 'little consideration for western readers'.¹⁵³ Thus, understanding my position in the greater scheme of things, I also believe that, in order to mediate Korean culture and art, you have to go beyond a spectrum of 50 years, as well as being more inclusive in mediums that go beyond just fine art. The following is an example of my mediation that proves not only

¹⁵¹ LACMA's collection of Korean art is from the Robert Moore collection, and Museum of Fine Arts Houston's Korean initiative began with the donation of a seventeenth-century celadon ware vessel with a phoenix design.

¹⁵² I have used 'Dansaekhwa' throughout the thesis because it is closer to the Korean pronunciation. Kee uses 'Tansaekhwa' in the title of her book.

¹⁵³ Hyon-Sob Kim, 'The Appearance of Korean Architecture in the Modern West', *Architectural Research Quarterly*, 14 (4), (2010) 349.

the absence of such knowledge but also the need to incorporate a broader range of art. It was through recognising the absence of Korean history and art in the collective knowledge and making sense of the world that prompted my various attempts at curating contemporary Korean art through transmedia curation.



Figure 19 *Jikji, the Golden Seed* exhibition, Fragments.

Drawing from this history, Korea's First *Jikji* International Festival in 2016, for which I curated the main exhibition *Jikji, the Golden Seed* ('*Jikji* exhibition' hereafter, Figure 19), was an example of mediation where I was working on an unbalanced world history. *Jikji* is the title of the oldest book known to have been printed using movable metal type, a Korean Buddhist document of Zen teaching; it was printed in Cheongju, in the middle of Korea, in 1377. Compared to the recognition accorded the Gutenberg Bible, 1455 marking the beginning of the 'Gutenberg revolution' or 'the beginning of the information revolution through movable type', *Jikji* has been unknown to the world. Despite the earlier date of *Jikji*, *Times-Life* magazine identified Gutenberg's 'Printing Press' as 'the most important invention of the millennium' in 1997.¹⁵⁴ *Jikji* is still in the National Library of France and unavailable even to be viewed. After much assessment of how *Jikji* is unknown, I curated an exhibition as an amalgamation of architecture, design, photography, paintings, sculptures, VR and performances. Most of the artworks were new commissions from artists, designers and historians – to weave various

¹⁵⁴ Larry Gormley, 'The Greatest Inventions In The Past 1000 Years', <https://ehistory.osu.edu/articles/greatest-inventions-past-1000-years>

When I was formulating the title exhibition of the First *Jikji* Korea International Festival in 2015, I met the museum director Hartwig Fischer in Korea. He was to join the British Museum as its first non-British director and was being interviewed by *Chosun Daily Newspaper*. My encounter with him changed my curatorial direction for the exhibition in a very unexpected way. Although the fact that he, who had been in the museological world for so long, did not know about *Jikji* was eye-opening, it was more his general comments on exhibitions that made me adopt a broader interpretation of *Jikji*. Until then, I had been more preoccupied with working out how to inform the world that *Jikji* predated the Gutenberg Bible by 78 years, but after conversing with him, I realised that my role was to link this transcultural history and to celebrate the vast potential that humans have realised throughout history.

interpretations of this historical fact that was unknown. This offering of transcultural, transmedia mediation was to be explored through the making of *Fragments*. The very first narration of *Fragments* is ‘each exhibition has its own history and theme’—showing installation photographs of the *Jikji* exhibition. Beth McKillop, founder of the Korean Department at the V&A after serving as Keeper of the Korean Department at the British Library, rewrote the timeline of the exhibition. This commission was in alignment with Foucault who conceptualises the library as a documenting, discursive field.¹⁵⁵ Not only was the timeline to be reborn as a mural by an original Archizoom member in the *Jikji* exhibition,¹⁵⁶ but the exhibition also worked to pose a question about West-centric historiography. This also had pedagogical value through the juxtaposition of artefacts assembled to illustrate different themes: religion and philosophy. Adjacent to the timeline, three cases exhibited artefacts to show different motivations around different printing processes: a replica of the *Pure Light Dharani Sutra* (684–704), the world’s oldest printed text from Korea, and *Jikji*, illustrated Buddhism’s impact on printing; examples of fifteenth-century printing in *Hangul* (the Korean alphabet devised in 1446) and Cheugugi (the institutionalised rainfall-measuring equipment by the standardised form developed by King Sejong who devised the Korean writing alphabet)¹⁵⁷ to show the monarchy’s initiative in spreading knowledge; and original pages from the Gutenberg Bible with printed indulgences issued by Gutenberg, as evidence of commercial interest in his invention, differing from Buddhist or monarchic interests. One can see that missing historical information is elucidated by the mixing of time, objects and history. These curatorial arenas became the symbolic realms where I strove for opportunities to think of new methodology, collaborations and mediums, and why I found Kee’s mediation on the history to be lacking.

¹⁵⁵ Foucault evaluates modalities present in diverse statements such as qualitative descriptions, biographical accounts and many other forms of statement found in the discourse of nineteenth-century doctors. Michel Foucault, ‘The Formation of Enunciative Modalities’, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (London & New York: Routledge), pp. 55–61.

¹⁵⁶ Tate Modern’s wall showing modern art historiography, which had 100 names of artists, was sketched by Sara Fanelli, in collaboration with Ab Rogers Design. The motivation for working with Ab Rogers for my *Jikji* exhibition also came about through seeing this wall of 100 artists that included one Korean artist among 100 names.

¹⁵⁷ The official records of the Annals of the Joseon Dynasty uses the term ‘Cheugugi’.

The provenance of this manuscript also shows how the nation's historiography can be taken away and not having tangible documents to study results in direct historical amnesia. The Joseon dynasty had officials for recording history who kept annals, diaries, medical books and *uigwes* for the protocols in the official libraries. One of these libraries was invaded by the French, and many *uigwes* were taken away, linking the history back to us.¹⁵⁸ *Jikji* was not stolen but was the possession of Victor Collin de Plancy whose private collection became the core of the Korean collection at the Musée Guimet. Conversely, libraries and museums contribute to the representation of this history. Donald Preziosi described museums as 'one of the most indispensable framing institutions of modernity',¹⁵⁹ and, as I shall illustrate in this part of the thesis, Korea began museum collecting on the wrong foot. Similarly, Peggy Levitt, who has investigated how countries display their nationalities through museums,¹⁶⁰ analyses the modern and contemporary art sections of the three most widely used introductory art history texts to reveal the limited changes in content that have been made to date.¹⁶¹ Biennales became important podiums for the presentation of art, and the accumulation of rhetoric mediating Korean art is never free from these. My research proves how, in order to mediate Korean artists, one needs to assess how the concept of culture and stories of Eastern philosophies became mixed up and convoluted during the modernisation process. *Fragments* shows how the story of reattribution of the royal Korean manuscript to the correct date is connected to this phenomenon of state-driven history-making means. The year 1994 marked the 600th anniversary of the founding of Seoul, and Korea sent historians to London to 'retrieve' its lost memories. With these

¹⁵⁸ The Joseon dynasty ran two royal libraries to conserve the important documents of the court. Kyujanggak was the royal library of the Joseon dynasty in Seoul, the capital of the Joseon dynasty, while the Outer Kyujanggak library (known as the Oegyujanggak) was built in the ancient royal palace on Ganghwa Island to accommodate the overflow of books. The island was in the estuary of the Han River, and thus controlled access to the river which runs through the former Joseon and present South Korean capital, Seoul. Its fortifications were repeatedly attacked during the nineteenth century, and it was during the French campaign against Korea in 1866, that most of the contents of the Outer Kyujanggak library were burnt, and important documents were taken to France.

¹⁵⁹ Donald Preziosi and Claire Farago, eds., *Grasping the World: The Idea of the Museum* (London: Ashgate, 2004).

¹⁶⁰ Peggy Levitt, *Artifacts and Allegiances: How Museums Put the Nation and the World on Display* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015).

¹⁶¹ Peggy Levitt and Markella B. Rutherford, 'Beyond the West: Barriers to Globalizing Art History', *Art History Pedagogy & Practice* 4 (1) (2019), available at: <https://academicworks.cuny.edu/ahpp/vol4/iss1/2>.

visits, McKillop was able to attribute the *uigwe* to the correct date in 1995 as *Fragments* shows. The same curator commissioned me to curate the first Experience Korean Culture Day ten years later, in 2006, at the V&A museum with a day of exhibitions, performances and talks. In 2016, when I was asked to curate the first international exhibition on *Jikji*, I went to talk to McKillop first. The timeline I asked her to devise was one of the 39 new commissions for the *Jikji* exhibition (Figure 19, where the middle picture shows the installation view of one room).

I believe mediating Korean culture cannot be achieved by focusing on just one genre, especially on paintings alone, since calligraphy and artefacts were the core of Korean art and culture. Without my experience of investigating *Jikji*, I would not have known about the existence of the royal Korean manuscript. Although *Jikji* was taken to another country, somehow the knowledge became available, reterritorialised for me with a Western education. Through my research and previous experiences, these pieces of knowledge became rhizomatically connected. Exhibitions are the medium I speak through and *Fragments* works by this assemblage and disruption – the key curatorial strategy I played with in the *Jikji* exhibition, and later translated into a film format and theories, in *Fragments*.

2.3. *Present from the Past* exhibition in relation to Korea: *the Impact of War in Photographs* at MoMA, 1951 in New York

In *Fragments*, Sea Hyun Lee rhetorically asks: ‘Doesn’t cultural consciousness develop through layers of time and history?’ Figure 20 shows Lee’s reply to Peggy Levitt who asked Lee why he dropped his experimental paintings after his studies in the UK. Peggy Levitt and I had a rare chance of seeing his early abstract paintings from the 1990s in Lee’s studio during the interview in 2018. Lee’s distinctive ‘red landscape paintings’ recall those of Korea’s traditional paintings in oil on canvas, the Western medium. Superimposed on the image is my voice: speaking live in a BBC World News broadcast (Figure 21). Thus, the film assembles an interview of 2018 and the reportage of BBC World covering *Present from the Past*¹⁶² of 2010 into one sequence. Lee was one of 40 artists I asked to interpret the meaning of the Korean War for the *Present from the Past* exhibition. Lee served his mandatory military service in the 1990s near Korea’s DMZ (Demilitarised Zone), and the scenery he saw through infra-red night goggles during his night watches came back to him as artistic inspiration while he was in London. However, it was the first time of hearing how the disparate cultural differences that he experienced in London (2002–2006) shaped his work. Up close, his series reveal dystopian images of both personal and collective memories, from the capsized *Sewol* ferry to a lighthouse from his childhood hometown floating peacefully. *Fragments* zooms into these images, mediating how Lee’s memories oscillate between collective trauma as a Korean and his individual experience.

¹⁶² The *Korea.net* writes ‘*Present from the Past*, marks sixty years since the Korean War began on June 25 in 1950... as a Thank You present, 80,000 special edition postcards of the artworks on show have been printed so that each member of the British Korean Veterans Association may have a set.’ <http://www.korea.net/Events/Overseas/view?articleId=231> last accessed 3 August 2020. This ‘thank-you present’ in connection to my previous experience is explained in *Fragments*.



Figure 20 Artist Sea Hyun Lee speaking to Peggy Levitt, from *Fragments*.

There is a parallel I wanted *Fragments* to convey: a Korean's personal memory is collective. Sea Hyun Lee (b. 1967) and I (b. 1980) experienced this suppression of history, to different degrees, and these are mirrored in different manifestations. This, on the other hand, can likewise signify that the Cold War hegemony permeates both personal and collective memory.



Figure 21 Sea Hyun Lee, *Between the Reds*, 2016, from *Fragments*.

Historically, the parallel I draw is with the Museum of Modern Art ('MoMA' hereafter) 1951 exhibition. In 1951, MoMA in New York held an exhibition entitled *Korea: the Impact of War in Photographs*, that later toured various cities in the United States (Figure 22).¹⁶³ It not only reveals the typical mediation of Korean culture that proliferated until very recently but also shows the cultural background that is crucial for an understanding of the work of Korean artists. *Fragments* weaves these narratives of the personal and the collective together, just as Lee's paintings of the DMZ show the surreal memory of seeing a natural reserve untouched for 60 years. The majority of the

¹⁶³ 'Korea : the Impact of War in Photographs', *MoMA*, available at <https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/2412>.

younger generation has forgotten these memories of a rural Korea that has disappeared through rapid urbanisation.

By grouping these three stories, I am compiling an autoethnographic account of how I mediated the *Present from the Past* exhibition, how I was motivated by the mediation of Korea through a powerful institution such as MoMA New York, and how the news service reported this.¹⁶⁴ Some questioned my curatorial approach, and asked why I wanted to return to an old image of Korea as poverty-stricken and full of war orphans, an image that Korea was trying to escape from.¹⁶⁵ I meant to reach the old veteran I met during my studies, as *Fragments* retells the story. I also wanted to compile a diverse spectrum of the legacy of the Korean War in the present through artists. As the artworks were made into postcards, and were sent to every living veteran, *Present from the Past* became similar to other participatory exhibitions. *Fragments* says in my voice how these were ‘dandelion seeds’ (Figure 23). Through this PhD, I have realised how the seed of making these exhibitions rooted in historical events was planted in the story of MoMA’s 1951 exhibition that I encountered in 2002.



Figure 22 MoMA, *Korea: the Impact of War in Photographs* exhibition, 1951, from *Fragments*.

¹⁶⁴ Anniversaries play an essential role in the economy of exhibition-making and mediating national culture. Two exhibitions I curated were covered by the BBC World Service because of the strategic timing.

¹⁶⁵ Korea’s image as a hip country, with K-Pop and K-dramas, is very recent. In 2007, when the Korean Cultural Centre UK opened for the first time in the UK, we did a survey about the public perception of Korea. The majority of answers about what Korea is focused on the Korean War.



Figure 23 Present from the Past (2010) exhibition postcards, shot in 2018, from Fragments.

The 1951 exhibition *Korea: the Impact of War in Photographs* at MoMA in New York (Figure 22) is a significant example of the Cold War cultural propaganda that was practised by prominent institutions, but is hardly known. This exhibition ‘haunted’ me. The methodology of looking into cultural histories revealed by other media was established when I searched for original photographs of the Korean War that had been published in *Life* magazine. They had been taken by agencies such as International News Photos or had been ‘taken automatically by gun cameras’ by the US Army Signal Corps, Air Corps and Marine Corps,¹⁶⁶ and were manipulated into an exhibition format to satisfy a curatorial narrative. The primary information on this exhibition is scarce: eleven installation images, six pages of an exhibition checklist and two pages of press releases, accessible from MoMA’s archives online.¹⁶⁷ As many of the photographs had previously been published in popular magazines, in 2003 I decided to research how the original photographs were edited, cropped, or positioned with captions to serve the dominant hegemony of the time. This assemblage is important to exemplify the mixed self-awareness of the position Korea has within the geopolitical world. This position has been acquired by the objectification of the self within foreign cultures and demonstrates how the Cold War hegemony permeates everything. Lateral research thus links different multiplicities.

Mediating Korea through the Cold War context was not confined to the USA. In the early 1950s, there was an ‘international’ competition held in the UK to select a sculptor to erect a ‘Monument to the Unknown Political Prisoner’, organised by the Institute of

¹⁶⁶ ‘*Korea – The Impact of War in Photographs* to go on View at Museum’, Press Release, MoMA NY (14 February 1951) Accessed from <https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/2412>.

¹⁶⁷ *Korea – The Impact of War in Photographs*, Installation view of exhibition, MoMA, available at: https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/2412/installation_images/15934.

Contemporary Art (ICA) in London.¹⁶⁸ The ICA Managing Committee minutes for May 1951 record that ‘a worldwide competition should be held for a piece of sculpture – “the Unknown Political Prisoner” – to be erected at Lake Success, and the ICA should organise this’.¹⁶⁹ One or two American industrialists had offered to finance the competition which was jointly organised by the Tate Gallery and the ICA. The competition received 3,502 entry applications and 146 sculptors from 54 countries were selected to take part in the competition exhibition at London’s Tate Gallery in March 1953. Shortly afterwards, it was revealed that all the artists who had received awards in the competition were from countries that aligned themselves with the West. No artists from behind the Iron Curtain were shown. The identity of the anonymous donor who paid for the competition was later revealed to be John Hay Whitney, who was Chairman of the Board of Trustees at MoMA.¹⁷⁰ Moreover, one of the winners was from Korea, a country still at war in March 1953. Centring on the neoliberal capitalist United States, the Cold War discourse promoted art from capitalist countries to symbolise freedom. Just as Abstract Expressionist artists were heavily supported by the United States Information Agency¹⁷¹ internationally, one of the artists chosen for the competition was from Korea during the bloody civil war, to emphasise the ‘struggle’. Indeed, MoMA was the epicentre of the United States’ cultural propaganda machinery. Nancy E. Bernard’s study of Cold War propaganda argues that the ‘nervous liberals’ who ran the official information bureaux understood that for propaganda to work in a capitalist democracy, it had to look like independently produced news.¹⁷² When scrutinised further, the above *Korea* exhibition portrayed Korea as a helpless nation-state. In terms of timing, this presentation was much needed because the United States and the United

¹⁶⁸ Axel Lapp, *Memories of a Monument: The Competition for a Monument to the Unknown Political Prisoner, London 1953 – A Discussion of the Powers of Sculpture that Never Existed, Memory and Oblivion: Proceedings of the International Congress of the History of Art, Amsterdam, 1–7 September 1996* (Dordrecht: Springer, 1999), pp. 1051–1058.

¹⁶⁹ ICA Managing Committee Minutes, 23.5.1951. ICA Archive (Tate Gallery Archive, London).

¹⁷⁰ The main sponsor, Whitney, paid 5,000 US dollars while the rest, 90,000 US dollars, was contributed by the State Department.

¹⁷¹ The United States Information Agency (USIA) was a United States agency devoted to public diplomacy and existed from 1953 to 1999. The overseas’ branches were known as United States Information Service (USIS). Through USIA, the US government was able to distribute and disguise its propaganda.

¹⁷² Nancy E. Bernard, *U.S. Television News and Cold War Propaganda, 1947–1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p.18.

Nations had failed in their 'Home by Christmas' strategy,¹⁷³ which had promised that the Korean War would be won swiftly and be over by Christmas 1950.¹⁷⁴ This vision became blurred due to the unforeseen Chinese intervention, and the conflict was prolonged. In the exhibition, the US Army and Navy were presented as heroic, helping the 'faces of Korea' from the war; photographs of Korea showed the South Korean president as a primitive man with a garland of flowers around his neck; a young orphan with bare breasts carried her younger brother on her back and countless ant-like humans desperately crawled over a bridge to escape the North's advance. MoMA's *Korea: the Impact of War in Photographs* toured to many cities of the United States to mitigate the public outcry about the United States' intervention in Korea.

In his autobiography, the photographer Edward Steichen later recalled how the photographs say 'something important'.¹⁷⁵ It was only later that Steichen clarified that what he meant was that they constituted 'anti-war campaigns'. John Szarkowski¹⁷⁶ later argued that Steichen's recollection of his original intention changed as time passed.¹⁷⁷ Mary Anne Staniszewski further investigates Edward Steichen's role at MoMA,¹⁷⁸ and how Steichen's commercial acumen accounted for his position. The subsequent exhibition by Steichen, *The Family of Man* (Figure 24), attracted record-breaking numbers; it was first shown at MoMA in New York and toured internationally. The fact that there were 503 photographs from 68 countries indicates its role as a precursor of the blockbuster exhibition format. While the *Family of Man* toured the world, showing in 37 countries on 6 continents from 1955 to 1960, criticism was later levelled at the

¹⁷³ Stephanie Seungmin Kim, 'Cultural Propaganda, Politics in the Cold War: MoMA's Korea exhibition of 1951', unpublished MA dissertation, University College London, 2003.

¹⁷⁴ 'Home by Christmas: October 1950 to January 1951', *BBC News* (26 May 2010), available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10162993>.

¹⁷⁵ MoMA Press Release (18 May 1951), The Museum of Modern Art Archive, New York: Department of Circulating Exhibition II.I/56:12.

¹⁷⁶ John Szarkowski succeeded Edward Steichen as Head of Photography at MoMA. Edward Steichen had been a successful commercial photographer before the MoMA post, while Szarkowski had art-historical training.

¹⁷⁷ John Szarkowski, *MoMA at Mid-Century: at Home and Abroad: Essays by John Szarkowski* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1994), p.19.

¹⁷⁸ Mary Anne Staniszewski, *The Power of Display: a History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998).

exhibition's representation of a primarily Western viewpoint, with 163 American and 70 European photographers represented.¹⁷⁹ The exhibition was not shown either in China or in Franco's Spain.



Figure 24 *Family of Man, Korea, from Fragments.*

Interestingly, about four decades later, in 2008, a large-scale survey show of Korean photography, *Peppermint Candy*, toured Chile and Argentina. This project of documenting, historicising and promoting the work of modern and contemporary Korean artists internationally was a South Korean government initiative. Mirroring the way nations used exhibitions to promote certain narratives of governance, the *Peppermint Candy* exhibition is linked to my professional development because similar rationales and sources of funding were used to finance most of the exhibitions I have curated.¹⁸⁰ While reading the catalogue essays for *Peppermint Candy*, it is evident that *Korea: the Impact of War in Photographs* was unknown to the renowned photographer Koo Bon Chang, as he mentions only *The Family of Man*. Despite the boom of the revisionist critique in the United States, Korea is still divided ideologically, making the right balance difficult. The fact that the United States Information Service was a governmental body that played an essential role in disseminating Cold War ideas, including *The Family of Man*, is accepted knowledge – *Fragments* shows the Korean

¹⁷⁹ Bill Jay, 'The Family of Man: a Reappraisal of "The Greatest Exhibition of All Time"', *Insight*, Bristol Workshops in Photography, Rhode Island, 1, 1989.

¹⁸⁰ See <https://aaa.org.hk/en/collection/search/library/contemporary-art-from-korea-in-seoul-peppermint-candy>.

The *Peppermint Candy* exhibition, organised by MMCA Korea was divided into 'Made in Korea', 'New Town Ghost' and 'Plastic Paradise'. In 2009, I curated the Contemporary Korean Art exhibition at the KCCUK London with a collection from MMCA; the rhetoric was similar. The exhibition was divided into three sections: 'Embedded in Eastern Philosophy', 'Western Philosophy fused with Local Ideas', and 'Inspired by Ideology and Politics of Korea Today'.

president, Syng Man Lee, known for his pro-American role, visiting *The Family of Man*.¹⁸¹ The representation of Korea that existed in multiple contexts and exhibition histories provides a perspective from which to consider historiography. This section demystifies the discourses that have been adopted by both Koreans and the Cold War machinery that have contributed to the persistent ideological interpretation of art.

¹⁸¹ President Syng Man Lee appeared in the *Korea: Impacts of War on Photographs* exhibition at MoMA as one of the four profiles captioned 'faces of Korea'. He is wearing a garland of flowers around his neck, and appears 'helpless', rather than like a strong leader. I re-examined the original photograph of him appearing in *Life* which looked sterner and with an entourage, but which had been 'edited' and 'cropped' in order to suit the exhibition's narrative.

2.4 The Paris Biennale 1963 and the continuation of the presence of Dansaekhwa – the Modernist Monochrome Art.



Figure 25 Park Seo-bo in *Fragments*.

Fragments shows one of the most recognisable figures in Korean art, Park Seo-bo (Figure 25), retracing his involvement in promoting modern Korean art. He was also an avid artist who was very aware of the international art scene. As early as 1961, he wrote on his own initiative to the Paris Biennale Committee, and invited himself to be a part of the Biennale of 1963. Due to some miscommunication, Park Seo-bo went to Paris a year before the actual residency, so that he witnessed the scene first hand. His painting of 1963 looked closer to Expressionist art, as Figure 26 reveals. With the Korean War having ended less than ten years previously, Park Seo-bo's artwork looked like the kind of art described by Oh Kwang-su: 'new trends of painting from the West coming with the boots of the UN troops during the Korean War'.¹⁸² In an interview with me, Kim Ku-lim also spoke of collecting *Life* magazines, which US troops in Korea were reading, to discover new art from the West. Westernisation and finding our voices were happening concurrently and exhibitions were at the centre of these discursive practices. Park Seo-bo recalling his years of organising exhibitions to challenge the Korean National Art Exhibitions¹⁸³ is captured in *Fragments*: Park introduced original exhibition formats including 'Indépendant' and 'École de Séoul' to decentralise the authorities whose power had come down from the colonial period. Yoon Jin Sub writes, 'It was Park Seo-bo who took the lead of Korea's *Dansaekhwa*. Serving a term as vice-president of the Korea Arts Association, he founded [the] Indépendants and École de

¹⁸² Oh Kwang-su, quoted without a source. *Korean Contemporary Art* (Seoul: Hexa Communications, Korean Culture & Arts Foundation), p. 29.

¹⁸³ The National Art Exhibitions in the 1930s used the term 'Oriental painting' and tried to erase 'Korean painting' as a term.

Séoul [exhibitions] and at the same time, he disseminated the Seoul Contemporary Arts Festival to other regions of Korea.¹⁸⁴



Figure 26 Article by Pierre Faucheux entitled 'The cry of vital art' with Park Seo-bo's Primordials No1-62 (1962), *Les Arts*, 1963.10. Centre Pompidou-Mnam-Bibliothèque Kandinsky.

¹⁸⁴ Yoon Jin Sup, 'Landscape of the Mind', in: *Dansaekhwa 1960s-2010s: Primary Documents on Korean Abstract Painting*, ed. Phil Lee, (Seoul: Korea Arts Management Service: 2017), p. 247.

Because Park has himself been an establishment for so long, it is easy to forget how he was also against the ‘old’ establishment that was built upon the colonial Japanese era.¹⁸⁵ Looking at how his art was mediated by a French publication also reveals another snapshot of the position of Korean art. Park Seo-bo’s *Primordials No1–62* was featured in an article entitled ‘Le cri d’art vital’ in *Les Arts* magazine (Figure 26) by Pierre Faucheux, who designed the space of the Biennale of 1963. Faucheux wrote that Korea was among the countries that had suffered a human sacrifice, together with Japan, Poland, Germany and Czechoslovakia, and that Park’s ‘symbolic image of mankind’ was ‘magical’ and ‘charged’.¹⁸⁶ Its close affinity to *Art Informel* aesthetics, like those of Jean Dubuffet or Alberto Giacometti, was not a coincidence. Kyong An writes of how the countries grouped together in this article signified the victimised countries of Soviet suppression and the Cold War, and that this rhetoric of struggle and Existentialism was similar to that of the United States’ promotion of Abstract Expressionism by USIA. This tactic is also not unlike that of the aforementioned ICA’s competition panel awarding a Korean artist in 1950 during the Korean War.¹⁸⁷ Perhaps it was because of Park’s early exposure to the international art scene that he strove to find ‘Koreanness’ in his paintings, and through his *Écriture* series,¹⁸⁸ he achieved paintings that theoretically served his new ‘modernism’ from both an Eastern and a Western perspective. Park called it ‘*myobop*’, meaning ‘*écriture*’ in Korean,¹⁸⁹ and his paintings were to have

¹⁸⁵ Oh Kwang-su writes ‘The modernist movement greatly impacted the reconstructing and reforming of the existing order of Korean art. It was only after 1957 that the dual structures of “Academism/Modernism” or the “National Art Exhibition/Opposition” became distinctly apparent’, *Korean Contemporary Art* (Seoul: Hexa Communications, Korean Culture & Arts Foundation), p. 29.

¹⁸⁶ Kyong An, ‘Observations on Korean exhibits at Paris Biennale’ (1961–1975): through the research materials at the Kandinsky library and Paris Biennale Archive (author’s translation): a paper in Korean for 4 December 2014 Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art Korea’s research centre symposium on Korean artists at International Biennales: post-1960 in Paris and São Paulo Biennales Centre Pompidou – Mnam – Bibliothèque Kandinsky, published by the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art Korea, pp. 173–190.

¹⁸⁷ Robert Burstow, ‘The Limits of Modernist Art as a “Weapon of the Cold War”’: Reassessing the Unknown Patron of the Monument to the Unknown Political Prisoner’, *Oxford Art Journal* 20,(1) (1997), 68–80. Accessed 20 August, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/1360716.

¹⁸⁸ Park Seo-bo told me in the interview how he saw his son trying to fit the pencil calligraphy within a box, and was unable to fit it in, thus ripping the paper page, and how he began making repeated pencil strokes in a fixed direction. Then he coloured the canvas and repeated the pencil strokes before finishing.

¹⁸⁹ I further wrote ‘He is preoccupied with drawing: with the drawing of lines, and the striations that repeat a rhythmical force through their repetitive, parallel connection with one another. These lines encompass the field of a painting, and thus give it coherence, a sense of wholeness, a unity of time and space, a fusion of idea and material.’ Stephanie Seungmin Kim, *Contemporary Korean Art from National Museum of Contemporary Art Korea* (London: Korean Cultural Centre UK, 2008), p. 42.

strokes applied repetitively until they disappear from the work, the act of lines filling in a single colour as ‘illusion vanishes, and the canvas and colour become united in a single colour’.¹⁹⁰

In 2008, I curated the exhibition *Contemporary Korean Art* starting with Park Seo-bo’s *Ecriture* work and wrote: ‘[he] is one of the most influential figures in Korean modern art history’.¹⁹¹ This *Ecriture* series was begun in the 1970s, about a decade after Park Seo-bo met Lee Yil in Paris. Lee Yil, one of a very small number of Koreans studying overseas, was similarly seeking to differentiate Korean modernism from *Informel*.¹⁹²

In 1975, a group of five artists held an exhibition entitled *Five Korean Artists: Five Kinds of White* at the Tokyo Gallery. The curator was Lee Yil. Joan Kee, in her book *Tansaekwha*,¹⁹³ writes that the Tokyo Gallery’s Yamamoto Takashi decided to host this exhibition because he had the writings of Yanagi Muneyosshsi’s (1889–1961) in mind: Yanagi claimed that Korean white porcelain was ‘supreme’ and praised the art of the ‘unknown craftsmen’ of *Buncheong*.¹⁹⁴ Yanagi was a well-known critic who wrote for Japanese newspapers, and some Korean artists found his praise of ‘unknown

¹⁹⁰ Youngna Kim, *Modern and Contemporary Art in Korea: Tradition, Modernity, and Identity* (Elizabeth, NJ : Hollym, 2005), p 47.

¹⁹¹ Stephanie Seungmin Kim, *Contemporary Korean Art: Collection from Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art Collection* (London: Korean Cultural Centre UK, 2008).

¹⁹² Lee Yil observed that the moment of birth was the Korean War in 1950. ‘Because it began in such precarious circumstances, it was inevitably left groping in the dark, and making wrong turns ... which artists were deemed “modernist”?’ Before answering this, we have to offer a precise definition of what modernist art means in the context of modern Korean art. Unless we do this, modern Korean art becomes an orphan in international art history’. Lee Yil, in: Biggs, *Working with Nature: Traditional Thought in Contemporary Art from Korea* [exhibition catalogue, Tate Liverpool] (London: Tate Publishing, 1992), p. 14.

¹⁹³ Joan Kee, *Contemporary Korean Art: Tansaekhwa and the Urgency of Method* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

¹⁹⁴ *Buncheong* is a form of traditional Korean stoneware with a bluish-green tone. Pots are coated with a white slip, and decorative designs are painted on using an iron pigment. *Buncheong* was adopted by the Japanese tea ceremony and influenced Japanese porcelain and the Mingei movement, and later reached the British Potters Society, a link I elaborate in this section. Phil Rogers writes ‘Buncheong has had a profound and lasting influence on Western studio pottery, largely because of the impact it had upon the works of Hamada Shoji and Bernard Leach. Both potters experienced the pottery being made in Korea at the turn of the 20th century while visiting with their Japanese mentor Yanagi Soetsu.’ Yanagi Muneyoshi was also known as Yanagi Soetsu. <https://discover.goldmarkart.com/buncheong-korean-pottery-phil-rogers/>.

craftsmanship' useful while others believed his intention was to distinguish Korean art as *folk* in contrast to Japan's *modern*. Although there may have been conflicting intentions in emphasising the monochrome tendency of Korean art, such an emphasis did help differentiate it from the abstract art tradition of the West and suggested that Korean abstract art is generated from within. Lee Yil writes that white not only represents the colour of the Joseon dynasty as seen from the purest white of Joseon porcelain; to Koreans, Lee wrote, 'white, along with black, demonstrates the presence of all possible colours'.¹⁹⁵

The progressive critics, including Park Yong-sook, critiqued Yanagi's theories and Korean art historians' naive understanding of them. In *Tari*, Park Yong-sook wrote how Yanagi's writing had been translated into Korean by then, and that artists were aware of these discussions while some artists took on the discussion partly to use it in their own way.¹⁹⁶ Alexander Munroe, the Chief Curator of the Asia Collection at the Guggenheim, explained the paradoxical nature of this claim in the same way. Monroe wrote that the construction of Korean art history, and the rhetoric built around it, was linked; the Japanese construction of Korean art history was politically biased in the 1910s and 1920s, as the Japanese cultural establishment promoted Korean culture as 'minor' and 'second rank' to justify colonial rule over the peninsula by emphasising that Korean art was of a 'humble' and 'rustic' nature.¹⁹⁷ This was a familiar rhetoric, also used by the Europeans to legitimise the invasion of Islamic and African countries by 'orientalising' the culture.¹⁹⁸

Yanagi's writings later influenced the British pottery tradition, the Korean pot that Yanagi praised later influencing potters such as Bernard Leach. This unknown history retrospectively prompted me to curate the exhibition *Traditional yet Contemporary*, in

¹⁹⁵ Lee Yil, reprinted in *Hongik University Bulletin* (Seoul, 15 May 1975), Lee Uil, *Art Critique Diary* (Seoul: Mijinsa, 1998) pp. 260–61.

¹⁹⁶ Park Yong-sook, 'A Critique of Colonial Era Aesthetics' (author's translation), *Tari* 3(3) (May 1972), pp. 116–18.

¹⁹⁷ Alexandra Munroe, *America's Appreciation of Korean Art – Thinking Beyond the Historical Paradigm, Exhibiting Korean Art* (Seoul: National Museum of Korea, 2007), p. 279.

¹⁹⁸ One of the founders of Japanese modernist aesthetics used a European model.

2006, that included 76 ceramics, in the UK.¹⁹⁹ It not only had British works side by side with Korean modern and contemporary ceramics, but also showed how Joseon white porcelain's 'perfect white' and the 'full moon' jar are technical achievements rather than the result of humble, coarse hands, as many believed them to be.²⁰⁰

For Tate Liverpool's 1994 exhibition *Working with Nature: Traditional Thought in Contemporary Art from Korea*,²⁰¹ the UK's first-ever institutional exhibition on contemporary Korean art, the curator was again Lee Yil. In the catalogue of this show, Lewis Biggs added how the 'monochromatic tendency in Korea at least might derive from the fact that the basis of East Asian art is line applied with a brush, not colour'.²⁰² Although it aligns with the calligraphy tradition, I object to this opinion; *Fragments* shows how colours were essential in Korean art and culture. Grounded in the five elements of the universe, five colours were used in every aspect from traditional architecture to dishes served for ancestral rites. I use the associated imagery of dancheong (Figure 27), Korean decorative colouring, in relation to the five elements of the Korean architecture in *Fragments*. These five colours are integrated into all aspects of life.²⁰³ I emphasise how 'twelve animals and ten signs of yin and yang of

¹⁹⁹ In 2005, I fundraised to bring 36 ceramics to London, and curated the *Traditional yet Contemporary* exhibition in 2006, showing these 36 works alongside 40 works by Bernard Leach, Lucie Rie, Emmanuel Cooper and Edmund de Waal. The 'full moon' jar by Youngsook Pak was acquired by the British Museum, in an auction that I planned in conjunction with this exhibition.

Acquisition details :

https://research.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=1666500&partId=1&object=53759&page=1

²⁰⁰ In many contexts of ceramic history, decoration was added to hide the defects in the white colour of pottery, and it was not until the eighteenth century in Europe, and the sixteenth century in Japan, that potters achieved hard paste porcelain from high temperature firing. The 'full moon' jar is produced from two semi-spheres, and in order to achieve hard paste porcelain, the clay is fired at a very high temperature, usually around 1400 °C. First made in China around the seventh or eighth century, Korean hard paste porcelain also dates from the seventh century.

²⁰¹ The exhibition included Park Seo-bo as one of six artists. The other five artists all belonged to the same Dansaekhwa movement. 'Working with Nature: Traditional Thought in Contemporary Art from Korea', *Tate*, available at:

<https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-liverpool/exhibition/working-nature-traditional-thought-contemporary-art-korea>.

²⁰² Lee Yil & Lewis Bigg, 'Working with Nature: Traditional Thought in Contemporary Art from Korea', *Working with Nature: Traditional Thought in Contemporary Art from Korea* [exhibition catalogue, Tate Liverpool] (London: Tate Publishing, 1992), p. 14.

²⁰³ In traditional Korean life, five colours are applied to the understanding of bodily organs (medicine), taste (foods), seasons (clothes) and sounds (music): these elements determine many things, from the kind of dishes served to your ancestors to how your main gate is built and how you name your children.

five elements²⁰⁴ make a sixty-year cycle'.²⁰⁵ When one understands how crucial colours were in Korean culture, one can see why Choi Jeong Hwa's colourful combinations of plastic recall shamanistic ritual, animism and the notion of 'paradise'.

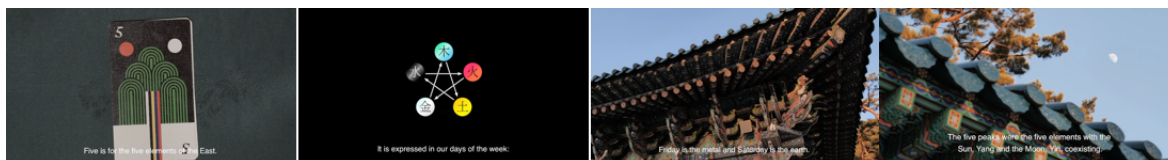


Figure 27 A sequence in *Fragments* explaining the meaning of colour in Korean culture, using the new commissioned card 'no 5'.

Nevertheless, I understand how one powerful movement of the era could represent the facet of a nation's culture that is the flashing image of the past and present. There was some truth of the moment in the sombre abstract paintings of Dansaekhwa against the dominating totalitarian government. Against these discourses, Minjung artists reacted vehemently. In 1994, Seo Seongrok wrote how the Dansaekhwa artists 'dominated all sorts of systems/organisations ... but were left inside an ivory tower'.²⁰⁶ In the 2000s, Korea's commercial art market boom further affected the monopoly of Dansaekhwa, and various discourses and theories became synthesised. In 2013, Lee Ufan's comment that Dansaekhwa art used abstract language to protest about the dictatorship was heavily criticised by the journalist Roe Hyung-Seok, who wrote that Lee Ufan could have been participating in exhibitions praising President Park Chung-hee's foundation while protesting about the dictatorship.²⁰⁷ These discussions and disagreements were contained within Korean circles, and were not communicated at an international level, because of the language barrier. Personally, I have ambivalent

²⁰⁴ Ten letters represent five elements with yin and yang characters. 'Gap' was the yang of tree and 'ul' was the yin of tree. Similarly, the next eight characters meant fire (red), earth (yellow), metal (white) and water (black).

²⁰⁵ The music for *Fragments* employed this combination of sixty by using two Korean rhythms. See Chapter Three for a detailed explanation.

²⁰⁶ Seo Seong-rok, *Korean Modern Art* (Seoul: Moonye Publishing, 1994), pp. 216–17.

²⁰⁷ Roe Hyung-seok, in *Hangyere* (the most widely read leftist daily newspaper in Korea) 'Monochrome Colours that Coloured the 1970s: Refracted and Repeated Modern Art', *Hangyere* (17 September 2014) <http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/culture/music/655702.html>.

feelings towards the movement, and witnessed how the promotion of commercial galleries and rhetoric certainly illuminated one artistic movement while leaving other movements in obscurity.²⁰⁸ In 2015, an ambitious collateral show at the Venice Biennale, entitled *Dansaekhwa*, fixed the name among the art establishment. The show attracted new international collectors who were looking for something novel. Katherine Kostyál, who was responsible for showing Park Seo-bo's work in London's White Cube gallery, noted that she had seen these works for the first time during the Venice Biennale.²⁰⁹ It was the same year that I curated the *Sleepers in Venice* exhibition and I was there to see people's reactions to the 'lesser known' Dansaekhwa.

²⁰⁸ The most widely read daily newspaper in Korea, the *Chosun Daily*, wrote: 'Monochrome to Dynamic – the Korean Art Spectrum in Venice', highlighting the 'Dansaekhwa' exhibition organised by Kukje Gallery and 'Sleepers in Venice', organised by myself. Yoonhee Huh, 'Monochrome to Dynamic' *Chosun Daily*, 11 May 2015, available at: https://news.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2015/05/11/2015051100107.html.

²⁰⁹ Katherine Kostyál, 'What is Dansaekhwa? The Korean Monochrome Movement and Park Seo-Bo', lecture at Korean Cultural Centre UK, 3 March 2016. This was moderated by Dr Sook-Kyung Lee and Dr Charlotte Horlyck (SOAS, History of Korean Art). Katharine Kostyál (Curator, White Cube) provided insights into the works of Park Seo-Bo while sharing her story of how she discovered the movement and curated Park's first solo exhibition (2016) in the UK, entitled *Ecriture 1967–1981*.

2.5. Post 1995 Venice Biennale

Sleepers in Venice (2015) marked 20 years of the permanent Korean pavilion of the Venice Biennale.²¹⁰ Through organising the show, I also came to know about the technical and logistical aspects, such as Nam June Paik's role.²¹¹ In my role as the government curator, I also understood the decision procedure for an international-scale show like the Gwangju Biennale. The Gwangju Biennale served a commemorative, political, cultural and communicative function for artists and public alike, the 20 years since 1995 having been accompanied by so many changes and contexts. Birgit Mersmann writes, 'in a strategic turn, the curators aimed at the integration of Korean art into the international art scene and the contemporary history of art, formulated from the Korean standpoint, targeted the opening of the international Western art world for Koreans and consequently, Asian art'.²¹² Oh Kwang-su, Artistic Director of the 2000 Gwangju Biennale, wrote, 'Gwangju aspires to be a geospatial metaphor of the development and transformation of Asia.'²¹³

My attention to the origin of these stories revealed not only curators or policymakers but artists being active facilitators to shake the scenes. In 1992, the Whitney Biennale had a show in Korea with Nam June Paik as a critical player, and many delegates came to Korea for the first time; in 1993, the Venice Biennale's Golden Lion went to the German pavilion where Nam June Paik was represented with Hans Haacke.²¹⁴ The 1995

²¹⁰ *Sleepers in Venice* had six crews documenting artists' movements in Venice. The numerous recordings had been dormant since the filming though, because I had not found the time or the budget to edit these heterogenous archives into one. It was during my PhD, from December 2017 to February 2018, that I understood the direction it should take, and how I would edit these interviews with flashbacks.

²¹¹ The Venice Biennale, founded in 1895, already had 28 permanent national pavilions in the Giardini. There was a piece of land that was left unoccupied, as it was where the public toilets were, and Paik was instrumental in claiming the spot for South Korea's pavilion.

²¹² Birgit Mersmann, 'Global Dawning: The Gwangju Biennial Factor in the Making and Marketing of Contemporary Asian Art', *Third Text*, 27(4) (2013), 525–35. She further writes that the 2000 Gwangju Biennale 'seems conceptually to oscillate between an international, inter- and intra-regional exhibition, and a revived Orientalism and new Asianism, thereby signally a kind of transitional stage'.

²¹³ Statement by Oh Kwang-su, artistic director of Kwangju Biennale, in: *Man+Space*, [exhibition catalogue] (Kwangju: Kwangju Biennale, 2000), p. 27.

²¹⁴ The challenge I observed from a position of creating platforms where the public meets Korean art was to understand a gap in art historiography. Nam June Paik's *Sistine Chapel*, re-enacted for the first time since the 1993 Venice Biennale, was the last room of Tate Modern's *Nam June Paik* exhibition in 2019. It was prompted by Hyundai Motors' sponsorship of Tate's Research Centre: Transnational, that enabled the exhibiting of work by Nam June Paik.

Venice Biennale has the Korean pavilion inside the already crowded Giardini. Domestically, the persecuted Minjung art of the people was now receiving a retrospective at the newly founded Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art Korea, in 1994.

I also showed Paik's work *Documenta 6 Satellite Telecast* in *Crystallize: New Media Art Lab Korea & UK* in a project space, Old Billingsgate, in London. *Documenta 6 Satellite Telecast* was his collaborative work with Joseph Beuys and Douglas Davis, and was the world's first live satellite performance.

2.5.1 Choi Jeong Hwa



Figure 28 Sequences showing three works by Choi Jeong Hwa with Seoul landscapes, from *Fragments*.

The Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art was established in 1987 for the Seoul Olympics. Not only were museums being built, but also ‘ugly’ parts of the cityscape like shanty towns and the Nanji rubbish dump were being cleaned up. In 1988, the novel *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* was translated into Korean and read by many – a million copies have been sold by 2018.²¹⁵ Why the fates of these fictional literary protagonists in the Soviet-occupied Czech Republic appealed to many Koreans may be a mystery. But through this research, and by interviewing many artists, I understood that the use of irony and of kitsch reflected the multifaceted suppression that people went through under authoritarian regimes. I understood that, amongst traumatic memories of the past, Choi Jeong Hwa found his antidote. He found ways to monumentalise the most common and trivial materials and call it ‘paradise’ – plastic paradise.

As I grew up in the 1980s in Seoul, I recall symptoms of these changes: teargas, accidents and flesh fashion. Choi Jeong Hwa’s three artworks with the scenery of Seoul used in *Fragments* are so familiar to me. Building forests of Seoul, colourful illegal banners, and plastic baskets sold by aggressive women in markets. In *Fragments* I show how Choi decorated the façade of the Arts Council of Korea’s museum with confiscated banners, and how he collected with the citizens 1.7 million plastic bottles to hang them in rows all around the Seoul Olympic stadium. At first it was not easy to understand this assemblage in relation to trauma. But gradually, in the course of intensive interviews with him, I noticed how Choi was aware of disparate and opposite forces coexisting in Korea. Choi’s father was a military man, and the strict family atmosphere he

²¹⁵ An article by the book’s Korean publisher <https://m.blog.naver.com/minumworld/221316982901>.

engendered must have added pressure. The suppressive political mood of the time dominated, and many students were taken away by the police. But then it was also the most dynamic time in terms of progress. Choi highlights this paradox with colour and material. Choi's art also feels like a Buddhist incantation where the dead can be reborn just as the lotus flowers made of plastic constantly live and die by being inflated and deflated by an electronic motor. The suppressive hierarchical social order was being subverted by the cacophony of plastics, banners and balloons in Choi Jeong Hwa's art (Figure 28).

Rebirth is connected to yin and yang, as the cycle of life inevitably gives birth to a new death. Choi updates this meaning with religion being replaced by commercialism. The way Choi worked with illegal banners is impressive: the banners were instantly eye-catching and, when hung sideways, they resembled the *political banners* that Minjung artists painted (Figure 15). They also recalled the intense colours of shamanism because political activists were reusing the qualities of traditional art that had been suppressed by colonial (Japanese) and imperial (American) powers. This meant the actual colours that had been suppressed during the colonial period were resurfacing again after the industrialisation of Korea through Minjung artists also finding a home with artists trying to emulate the rapidly changing Korean society with these idiosyncratic but parallel multiplicities. In Choi Jeong Hwa's artistic vision, religion has now been replaced by commodities.

When I curated Choi Jeong Hwa's solo exhibition *Shine a Light*²¹⁶ in London, in 2009, one reviewer wrote that the exhibition consisted of 'disposable everyday objects' that raise 'issues of domestic, industrial and conceptual recycling'.²¹⁷ I felt that I was not fully able to communicate how Choi Jeong Hwa's *Breathing Lotus* has more meaning than that of recycling. The lotus, made of synthetic materials but breathing like a living organism through a motor, bringing the paradox of liveliness through a synthetic material, now comes back to me as a more complex image, having learned more about

²¹⁶ *Shine a Light* was the closest translation of the Korean, composed of four Chinese ideograms that could be translated into 'the moment of light as if two stones are igniting', and Choi filled the spaces with a cacophony of colours and materials.

²¹⁷ Eliza Gluckman, 'Choi Jeong Hwa: *Shine a Light*', exhibition review, *Asia Pacific 64* (July & August 2009), 120.

Choi's work. In 2010, San Francisco's Asian Art Museum held *Phantoms of Asia*, which also included Choi Jeong Hwa's *Breathing Lotus*. The label read: 'internationally acclaimed Korean artist uses the lotus'; it continues: 'in many Asian cultures the lotus symbolises the spiritual path a person takes through life towards enlightenment'.²¹⁸ Although Mami Kataoka, one of the two curators of the exhibition, has known Choi's work from very early on and appreciates the work conceptually, her mediation is necessarily limited in a group exhibition. The claim that it represents 'enlightenment' is an empty one, with no clear meaning. I only understood about the meaning of kitsch in relation to suppression, the alchemical transformation of luxury items in the dump. Only ten years later, in 2019, did I have an epiphany when I asked Choi Jeong Hwa about the most decisive moment that he thinks shaped his art. Choi looked surprised, and then asked me the meaning of my question.

His answer, 'Nanjido', was captured in *Fragments*.

It was then that I belatedly understood his work in depth. The year he was remembering was 1994.²¹⁹ As my own memory of 1994 was projected to his answer, it worked like flashing images of the past. I remembered the landfill site in Seoul. The piles of discarded things were far from being luxury items but rather were imitations of something more expensive than they inherently were. They had been turned into goods for lower-class citizens while the rest of the population replaced things; they were cheap commodities for the poor who kept things 'just in case'; previously, we used to pile things up, through a habit of thrift, when the whole nation was impoverished. The 'storm called progress' was indeed blinding to many of us who witnessed the 1990s.²²⁰

I realised the 1990s was a time when artists were beginning to see their trauma, beginning to tackle it with work that began to converse in its unique vocabulary of

²¹⁸ The label is for the *Phantoms of Asia: Contemporary Awakes the Past* (2012) exhibition at the Asian Art Museum, San Francisco.

²¹⁹ I later found how Nanjido had ceased to exist after 1994, the same year from which I remember clearly the death of Kim Il Sung, the dictator of North Korea, the collapse of the Sungsu bridge, and Nanjido.

²²⁰ I see the equivalent concealment happening now. Pieter Hugo's photographs of the infamous Agbogbloshie market in Accra, Ghana, depict a toxic e-waste dump that supposedly recycles disused European computer technology.

suppression and energy with the layers of opportunities presented by the internationalisation of the art world.

Woo Jung-ah argues that the ‘trauma’ was not caused by the first shock of urban disasters, such as the collapse of the Sampoong department store, but by the second shock of not being allowed a process of collective mourning.²²¹ Woo writes: ‘the traces of urban disasters at the turn of the century, which were neither forgotten nor remembered, sprung up belatedly like symptoms of trauma, in the works of the 1990s’ most illustrious artists, Lee Bul and Choi Jeong Hwa, in spectacular or grotesque images’. She adds that, although many writers agree that Korean art finally achieved ‘contemporaneity’ in the mid-1990s, ‘in the master narrative of “contemporaneity”, the memories of contemporary traumatic events were not apparent on the surface’.²²² In a footnote, Woo acknowledges Jeon Heon-Yee as the only critic who detected the origins of the cynical attitudes of artists emerging in the 1990s in traumatic events, while the rest saw the ’90s as the product of commercialisation and urbanisation, and the growth of popular culture.²²³

Similarly, Kyung-hwan Yeo²²⁴ writes: ‘I look back on the activities of small groups, like the *Museum* movement (referring to activities initiated by Choi Jeong Hwa), which, with an almost nihilistic aesthetic sensitivity, declared not opposition to, but a break from, the older generation and aimed for loosely coupled small groups.’²²⁵

Indeed, there is a continuity of this internally self-othering process. As Korea’s door was opened in the 1990s, artists tried to break away from the older generation, but the

²²¹ Jung-ah Woo, ‘Grotesque/Spectacle: Korean Urban Catastrophe in the 1990s and Contemporary Art’, *X: Korean Art in the Nineties* [exhibition catalogue] (Seoul: Seoul Museum of Art, 2016).

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Jeon Heon-Yee, ‘The Significance of the 90s in Contemporary Korean Art, New Political Art after the 1990s: *Rascals Here/Now* exhibition’, [academic seminar resource book] (Ansan: Gyeonggi Museum of Art, 2009), p.138.

²²⁴ Kyung-hwan Yeo, curator for the 2017 *X: Korean Art in the Nineties* exhibition at the Seoul Museum of Art.

²²⁵ Kyung-hwan Yeo, ‘From X to X: Connecting with Korean Art of the 1990s’, in: *X: Korean Art in the Nineties* [exhibition catalogue] (Seoul: Seoul Museum of Art, 2017).

energy was inescapable. That is why I find the history of suppression inherently present in this genealogy of art.

2.5.2 Park Chan-kyong

One of the artists who actively critiqued the changing role of art was Park Chan-kyong. The trajectory of Park's works widely embraces writings and curating to commercial films. The way in which his works were jointly developed with curatorial initiatives needs to be contextualised. Take, for instance, the first publication of *Forum A* in 1998.²²⁶ Park Chan-kyong was one of *Forum A*'s editors while he was running a progressive space entitled Alternative Space Pool that published this magazine. His reviews included, for instance, Gwangju Biennale's edition *Unmapping the Earth*.²²⁷ Park promoted various artists through this platform, as well as being involved in pedagogy.²²⁸ Park Chan-kyong's career culminated in a large scale festival in 2014 – when he directed the Media Art Festival Seoul. From his film *Manshin* to the curatorial direction of this festival, one can understand his subjectivities. While Park Chan-kyong's work remains quite poignant, I want to contextualise his work with his writings, interviews and the curatorial backgrounds that remain quite dense and difficult.

Firstly, there was a continuation of remorse about people being marginalised, and efforts to film the unfilmable suppression. Park Chan-kyong continues to engage with the definitions of *Minjung*, terming it as 'post-*Minjung*'. *Minjung* art became meaningless with the success of the democratisation movement. The mid-1990s were different from 1987, when *Make Hanyul Live* was painted by a carpenter-cum-painter, Choi Byungsoo, at the centre of the nationwide demonstration, *Minjung* art then being

²²⁶ An art criticism journal that ran from 1998 to 2005. The first issue included the statement: 'Art is close to society as non-art, but art as pure art is becoming segregated from the community. Criticism should be the basis of art and culture, and has to be regarded as an essential part. It is quite a prevalent attitude not to be able to talk about creativity and its success.' (1 March 1998) last assessed 1 August 2020 http://www.altpool.org/_v3/board/view.asp?pageNo=1&b_type=11&board_id=84&time_type=&year=

²²⁷ The second edition of the Gwangju Biennale (1 September to 27 November 1997) invited five curators: Harald Szeemann, Bernard Marcade, Sung Wan Kyung, Park Kyong and Yoo Jun Sang. The theme was *Unmapping the Earth* which was introduced with the words 'while the visual concept of negative space often manifests itself in a limited manner in Western art, it is almost omnipresent in the East', Sung Wan-Kyung. Last assessed 1 August 2020. <https://www.gwangjubiennale.org/en/archive/past/51.do>

²²⁸ He would run 'educational programmes' with critics like Sung Wan-Kyung, who curated the Gwangju Biennale in 1997.

relevant and influential. 1987 saw the inception of parliamentary democracy and the National Museum holding a retrospective exhibition on Minjung art. Sohl Lee's exhibition on *Being Political Popular* investigates social and cultural transition as a rupture from the early 1980s' Minjung pro-democracy period to the second phase with the nation succumbing to the order of 'neoliberalism with its promise of rapid economic growth and cultural globalisation'.²²⁹ People need to look at 'Minjung' or post-Minjung as the political consciousness of an oppressed and marginalised people. Looking at Park's works can help us understand his definition of and argument about 'post-Minjung' art. Simply, there continued to be people on the margins, as depicted by Park who paid tribute to the girls of Anyang who were killed in the explosion,²³⁰ and looked into *Sidoan* – the Mecca of cult religions – and the life of shaman Kim Geum-hwa. Park's work goes deep into the trauma to discuss why people refuse to remember the past (because the memory of the Cold War is mixed with colonialism) while international globalisation exacerbated political and social inequality.

Secondly, Park Chan-kyong's art shares various assemblages of different mediums of art that had developed in multiple genres with the revolutionary spirit at hand: Minjung found its voices from political satire to poems, music and cinema²³¹ to theatres. For instance, songs used in shamanistic rituals were applied to theatres of the 1970s in *Light of the Factories*. They were disseminated using cassette tapes, away from the eyes of the authorities. These influences from shamanism are translated in different artistic expressions: Lim Minouk in *Navigation*, a work in the Gwangju Biennale 2013, retrieves an abandoned container of skulls and finds their families, inviting them and coercing their spirits through a shamanistic ritual and an artistic

²²⁹ With this Sohl Lee compares how Japan's 1960 Anpo movement and China's Tiananmen Square incident lament the impossibility of another revolution, the South Korean case ironically undergoing a different fate of being 'haunted by the ghost of ostensibly successful revolution even if the signs of its failure are visible', in Sohl Lee, *Being Political Popular: South Korean Art at the Intersection of Popular Culture and Democracy, 1980–2010* (Hyunsil Publishing, Seoul, 2012), p. 13. See also Namhee Lee, 'Introduction: Minjung, History and the Crisis of Historical Subjectivity', *Making of Minjung: Democracy and the Politics of Representation in South Korea* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007).

²³⁰ *Anyang, Paradise City* is Park's first full-length feature film of 2010, a mix of documentary and fiction. During the Olympic Games in 1988, there was an explosion in Anyang, a city not far from Seoul, in which 22 female workers were killed in a fire.

²³¹ A leftist filmmaker group called Labour New Collective (Nodongja News Jojackdan) which has produced labour newsreel since 1989 is regarded as the Minjung cinema movement.

performance of moving to the Biennale site; for the production of *Manshin*, Park asks Kim Geum-hwa to perform the ritual for unreturned North Korean defectors and nameless prisoners of war. In both cases, the artists were also the medium. Thus, Park's openly paying homage to Oh Yoon's *Lemures* through *Citizen's Forest* was an effort to communicate the importance of Minjung art. He was trying to resuscitate the rich archive of Minjung art, which was now in danger of being lost as the accessory to political movements. It is the redefinition of Minjung, intergenerational and cross-medium, that one needs to mediate and contextualise to understand the art emerging from the 1990s and 2000s. So when Tiffany Chae wrote in *Frieze* about how Park's 'proposition' through his art 'seems disappointing – after all, such ideas were already manifest in the *minjung* (people's) art movement over 30 years ago,'²³² I feel Chae is missing the nuances of visual poems, full of metaphors and allegories.

Jee-sook Beck (b.1964), director of the Seoul Museum of Art, writes that translating 'Minjung art' by 'people's art' in English does not capture the historical nuances of the word:

while Minjung would be an amalgamation of classes but Minjung does not refer to members of a frontline class alliance which has a particular historical and political mandate ... Minjung is a historical subject identified with a bottom-up history ... they are producers and at the same time uprooted, they are the oppressed masses and at the same time the revolutionary subjects.²³³

Beck explains that the word came from the 'Minjung' theology of the 1980s, which corresponds with the liberation theology of Latin America. The doctrinal understanding was that *Minjung* equates to the suffering of Jesus Christ. This is developed further in Park's work, in my opinion, as Park now talks about South Koreans othering 'North Korea', the silence over Korea's atrocities in Vietnam, and so on. Thus *Fragments* forges a diachronic linkage of three works of Park Chan-kyong:

²³² *Frieze* Issue 190, 3 July 2017, <https://www.frieze.com/article/park-chan-kyong>.

²³³ Jee-Sook Beck. 'Minjung Art in the Year 2005, or the Year 2005 in Minjung Art', in Binna Choi (ed.), *Climatisation: Field Notes from the Short 10 Years (2000–2010) of Art and Making Things Public in Korea* (Korea Arts Management Service: Seoul, 2010) (Originally published in 2005 in *The Battle of Visions* [exhibition catalogue] (Darmstadt: Kunsthalle Darmstadt, 2005). Author changed 'minjoong' to 'minjung'.

Flying depicts North Korea as ‘the other’²³⁴ rather than exoticising the people with the ethnographic gaze; through *Manshin*, Park succeeded in subverting most people’s conception of the shaman to someone who coerces the soul; and the *Sindoan* places the meaning of the sublime and fear and links them with the distanced tradition and nature we have from them. What Park reveals, in fact, are peculiarities of the trauma of his generation –who have inherited the trauma of colonialism and modernisation as well as different revolutionary success. Korean society was moving towards the single goal of becoming a capitalistically affluent nation, and the art coming after was under consistent pressure to revive *Minjung* history in the present tense. I believe it is this constant trauma to right the wrong, the urge to rectify Korea’s modernism from becoming theatricalised, confused identities, that Park is arguing against. In *Manshin*, ostracised shaman Kim Geum-hwa was becoming a media-savvy national hero in the 1990s.

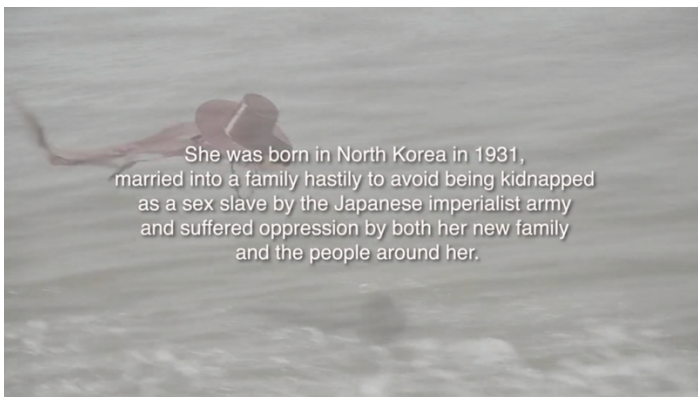


Figure 29 A scene from *Manshin* by Park Chan-kyong, reused in *Fragments* with my texts superimposed.

To avoid pinning down and inspired by how Park Chan-kyong uses dialectics to illustrate the in-between, I used associations and assemblage to disrupt the ‘norm’ or the Western concept. Derrida’s use of *Specters of Marx* further made me comprehend Park Chan-kyong’s use of the hat in his film (Figure 29). Derrida writes about Hamlet’s father who appears as a ghost in full armour, noting how the ghost is visored so that it appears without being seen²³⁵. Hamlet cursed his destiny ‘to set things right’ – but he

²³⁴ As North Koreans in Korean traditional attire fill the screen, holding pink azaleas in their hands, in a utopia-like hermit kingdom. Park writes how, for North Koreans, who have not travelled freely overseas, flying would signify ‘bombing’. It shows compassion in understanding North Koreans.

²³⁵ Derrida writes, ‘The armour lets one see nothing of the spectral body, but at the level of the head and beneath the visor, it permits the so-called father to see and speak. Some sleits are cut into it and adjusted so as to permit him to see without being seen’, in Jacques Derrida, ‘Injunctions of Marx’, *Specters of Marx* (NY & London: Routledge, 1994), p.7.

not only had to deal with the spectre of his father, he had to deal with the crime ‘*whose event and realities can never present themselves in flesh and blood but only can allow themselves to be presumed, constructed, fantasised*’.²³⁶

Just as the visor, a kind of technical prosthesis, Park uses a hat hovering in the sky (p Figure 29), representing the shaman in between the ground, the living, and the sky, the spirit. Similarly, Park entitles the show *Grandmother, Ghost and Spies* (2010), referring to three ‘othered’ – women, indigenous religion and North Korea, the spectralised, *unheimlich* – that are never straightforward. It is not a simple reevaluation of the folk tradition as the bridge of past to present, but an inability to translate the nuances, borrowing the Western construct to explain the complex layers of meanings, and his tension as both an artist and a critic.

Chung Doryun, an associate curator for MoMA New York at the time of writing, writes in *E-flux* how Park’s work *Sindoan* is a provocative study of ‘modern society’s relationship to superstition and the rational, the real and the imagined, an ambiguous territory where one set of belief systems is created in order to dismiss another’.²³⁷ As a typical exhibition’s curatorial essay, this concise account cannot be grasped fully by the first-time reader. It cannot grasp the depth of Park’s use of these dialectics. As I was partially blinded by collective amnesia, being a Korean,²³⁸ only when I acquired knowledge about the entanglement of religions and suppressed history through the socio-political and cultural workings of the 1990s did I understand the true meaning of this intermingled and hybridised world. Park warns us of our lack of knowledge.

In *Fragments*, I tried to allegorically illustrate the wish for enlightenment through the repetition of artists’ words about utopia through Lim Ok-sang (who speaks of how people in the Candlelight Revolution dreamed of utopia and covers the crate in pink) and Poet Cheon Sang Byeong (who speaks of going back to ‘Heaven’ again, dreaming

²³⁶ Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx* (NY & London: Routledge, 1994), p. 24.

²³⁷ <https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/37211/brinkmanship-park-chan-kyong-and-sean-snyder>/Park studied at the California Institute for the Arts (CalArts), Los Angeles: REDCAT, the Roy and Edna Disney/CalArts Theater, is an interdisciplinary contemporary arts centre, initially opened as an exhibition venue for CalArts. It is located in downtown LA.

²³⁸ A distant relative, a devout Christian, asked me whether our family does ‘ancestral rites’, and added that we should repent of our sins and pray to God.

of the life that will be better ‘next time’). Linked with these cycles of life deeply ingrained in people’s speech, even though we have inherited suppressed memories, there exist differences. Then why in awe? Because Korea has Buddhist temples deep in the mountains, unlike the Buddhist temples one sees located in the centre of cities in South East Asia; one has to get away from ordinary building-ridden cities to see the faces of Buddhism originating from *Mahayana* Buddhism. *Mahayana* means ‘big carrier’, and is a branch of Buddhism practised in Korea, China, Japan and Tibet. As a carrier, religion is the ‘method’ for reaching salvation. This form of Buddhism, deeply embedded in people’s way of life, is another easily misunderstood aspect, because the core of this belief relates to suffering, and through pain, one receives salvation. Thus, people have believed that, when salvation is achieved, religion will become unnecessary and disappear – affecting ‘the way’ people view the world that could be misunderstood as ‘nihilistic’.

The cycle of life, and the form of emptiness, and meditation, that is at the core of Eastern philosophy has a fundamental difference from Christian ways of thinking. This is summed up by Byung Chul Han, a philosopher of South Korean origin based in Germany, in his book on Zen Buddhist philosophy.²³⁹ Byung Chul Han quotes ‘if you meet the Buddha on the road, kill him’, from Linji Yixuan, to explain how God for Buddhists is understood not as a subjectivity, but as a void.²⁴⁰ Han was critiquing Hegel’s understanding of Buddhism and his projecting of a Western concept of teleology onto it in his *Philosophy of History*.²⁴¹ As I explained earlier, the emphasis on ‘forgetting well’ and the importance of ‘sunyata’ is ingrained in the collective psyche from these traditions. Just as Buddhists’ 49th day is mixed with Buddhism (reincarnation) and Confucianism (ancestral rites), prayers towards parents by children are supposed to guide them through nine gods and to the next, better, life. For the loop

²³⁹ Byung Chul Han, ‘Religion without Gods’ in *Philosophie des Zen-Buddhismus*, translated into Korean from German (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2002; 2012).

²⁴⁰ Byung Chul Han further explains how Hegel, in his analysis of Buddhism, was wrong to suggest writing God as a ‘neuter’ noun, not as God the Father (male) as Christianity does.

²⁴¹ Han is quoting Hegel as follows: ‘Nothingness is the principle of all things ... all proceeded from and returns to Nothingness ... To obtain happiness, therefore, man must seek to assimilate himself to this principle by continual victories over himself; and for the sake of this, do nothing, wish nothing, desire nothing.’ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sirbee; with prefaces by Charles Hegeland and new introduction by C.J. Friedrich (London: Dover, 1956), pp. 168–69.

of vindictive souls, mediums come in. In *Night Fishing*, this message is clear. A lonely man is fishing, despite the news of a storm, then he is lost. The family finds his soul, unable to rest, and the shaman becomes the medium to coerce him.

While Asia was the origin of Daoism, Buddhism, Hinduism and shamanism, the historiography of the present is focused on the West. In my experience, the study of Eastern philosophy was lacking even in Asia, where pragmatic education is more focused on the liberal arts. In *Fragments*, I summarised the synopsis of *Manshin* by Park Chan-kyong to reveal the obliterated layers of suppressed religions. A close look at the film reveals scenes where the protagonist, a shaman, is suppressed by Christians.

Fragments interprets the disjunctions and pathological symptoms that arise from the research interests of the key artists in the film. They looked into the chasm of what people remembered – Park looks at long-forgotten miners or the national Shaman; they evoked Jacques Derrida, noting elements of being neither living nor dead.²⁴²

Fragments is a flexible medium that can montage different photographic and filmic mediums.

Therefore, what is more interesting to me than the reconstitution or modernisation of tradition is the notion that tradition – as a kind of Other, and in the sense that it appears like an unknowable specter – is a sort of ‘local wound’, which has only symptoms but no identifiable scientific diagnosis. If modernity was a traumatic experience in the recent past, then tradition is this resulting wound,

writes Park Chan-kyong.

²⁴² Derrida (*Specters of Marx*, p. 63), writes that ‘this element itself is neither living nor dead, present nor absent: it specializes ... what we call ... hauntology. We will take this category to be irreducible, and first of all to everything it makes possible: ontology, theology, positive or negative onto-theology.’

2.5.3 Jia Chang

In *Fragments*, viewers see *Sitting Young Girl* (Figure 30) by Jia Chang. A girl is sitting on a glass bowl filled with water and eels. When asked, some thought that the work signified what the human race does to nature, while others suspected it might have an entirely different frontal view hidden from sight. This proves how an artwork, without a context, can generate different sets of meanings. In ancient China, a jealous empress apparently punished her rival by stripping her and enclosing her in an icy water jug filled with eels. As eels tend to look for dark, warm places, this was a well-known torture. But instead of telling this story, *Fragments* shows Jia Chang recollecting her experience of seeing a book reconstructing how the Korean military government used to use ‘water tortures’ on young girls who were part of democracy movements.²⁴³ *A Boy in Bamboo Forest* (Figure 31) is without explanation too, but these bamboo trees were also used to kill prisoners.²⁴⁴

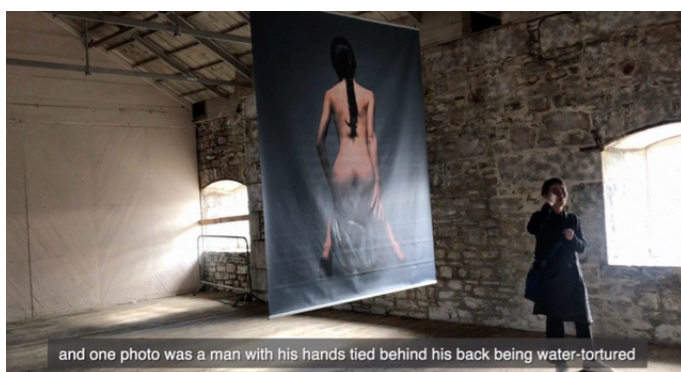


Figure 30 Jia Chang in front of *Sitting Young Girl*, from *Fragments*.

Chang superimposes unrelated East/West counterparts and eras to question what we deem to be ‘normal’. Chang’s work is often acknowledged as feminist or seen in relation to notions of the ‘object’. But I think Chang’s work goes beyond object subject matters to touch upon the deeply rooted trauma revealed by questioning what we collectively perceive as repulsive. Chang subverts stories that are normally taboo in Korean society, questioning values held by Confucian society. To be more precise,

²⁴³ Jia Chang says, in *Fragments*: ‘I once went to a friend’s house when I was in primary school and saw a thick white book on the table ... these were reconstructed photographs made to expose the kind of torture that girls who were part of the democratisation movement received.’

²⁴⁴ This again is related to a punishment in which criminals were tied to the ground, and young but very sharp bamboo, when it grew, would penetrate and kill them.

women were less important in Confucian society; and these Confucian ideals were implemented again by the military government more naively by imposing on the nation a patriarchal order; by touching this taboo in its very core, Chang questions structural violence by giving unseen but discriminating orders.



Figure 31 Jia Chang's *A Boy in a Bamboo Forest* from *Fragments*.

Jia Chang's *Heavenly, Corrupted Landscape* is not just a protest about environmental degradation, but an aspiration to escape from this inescapable world of suffering. Chang has been working around the idea of pain and pleasure since the late 1990s, and the idea of utopia is linked to her fascination with the Eastern and Western history of torture. Chang composed the landscape from cut-out pixels of bacteria, from the water that had been rotten since Korea's Four River regeneration plan. Since her wide range of work involves the exploration of the body and taboos within society, and how it is complexly engineered and made public, I asked Chang why she chose a Chinese example of Shangri-La, Peach Blossom Land. The presence of human figures within this landscape was very different from more abstract versions of Peach Blossom Land such as the well-known example by the Korean painter An Gyeon (Figure 32). She answered that when she saw the fluorescent green colour of a polluted river generated by Korea's urban project it made her think of Tao Yuanming's description of Arcadia.

Tao Yuanming (376–427 CE) was in political exile when he wrote his famous description of Arcadia being found by a fisherman and the way he described it made Arcadia seem to exist in the real world. In this isolated world, cut off from the war-stricken reality, reflecting the political situation of the time Tao was writing in, the villagers were not affected by the world outside, wore the same clothes, and told him

never to reveal this isolated ‘world of immortals’ to anyone.²⁴⁵ A scholar of Chinese poetry, Shuyuan Lu compares Tao Yuanming’s *Peach Blossom Spring* with Thomas More’s *Utopia* – and indicate they have little in common except their similarity in the literary imagination. Lu writes: ‘unlike the bright progressive, and promising Western utopia, Tao’s *Peach Blossom Spring* is a retreat and a kind of hermitage’.²⁴⁶ To understand why Chang montages the world of immortals with elements of the green algae that look a surreally fluorescent green (Figure 33), one has to understand the implications, aspirations and debates that people dreamed of, and how different concepts of the world can exist *in* the world. The English website where the works were first shown notes:

Referencing the ‘Four Major Rivers Project’ in Korea, and the pollution of the waterways that resulted. Chang draws parallels between the corruption of the landscape and of the human body, referencing traditional Chinese landscape painting of the Ming Dynasty, but made up from microscopic bacteria gathered from the polluted rivers.²⁴⁷



Figure 32 An Gyeon, *Dream Journey to the Peach Blossom Land*, 1447, from *Fragments*.

²⁴⁵ Tao Yuanming (376–427 CE) lived in southern China during the Eastern Jin dynasty (317–420) and the Liu Song dynasty (420–479). The years between the collapse of the Han dynasty in 220 CE and the Sui dynasty’s reunification of north and south in 589 were characterized by warfare and instability. It was in this context of instability that Tao Yuanming, an official, scholar, and poet, wrote his famous essay, *Peach Blossom Spring*. His essay was to inspire many literary scholars and general readers in China and Korea. The essay presents a fisherman being carried to a village of immortals. Tao himself says it is ‘a world of immortals’ which, in essence, is an idealised world of freedom and simplicity.

²⁴⁶ Shuyuan Lu, *The Ecological Era and Classical Chinese Naturalism: a Case Study of Tao Yuaming*, trans. Meng Xiangehun (Singapore: Springer, 2017), p. 191.

²⁴⁷The Atlantic Project took place in outdoor locations across Plymouth, UK, from 28 September to 21 October 2018. See <https://www.theatlantic.org/chang-jia>.



Figure 33 Jia Chang, *Heavenly Corrupted Landscape*, from *Fragments*.

Why this particular Ming dynasty depiction of *Peach Blossom Land* was chosen is not explained, and the nuances of the parallels between the ‘corruption of body and landscape’ are too abstract to understand. *Fragments* shows Jia Chang’s trajectory of work, such as *Girl Sitting Down*, with its connection to other works, to explore the relationship of taboos towards the body and the surrounding environment. Viewers might ask: ‘Why do you create an ideal landscape from a society where hope for a better future seems to have gone?’ ‘Is Chang looking at bacteria under the microscope to understand a parallel world conjured up by the hermit?’ Chang’s world of microscopic bacteria recalls Park Chan-kyong’s vision of the pink azaleas filling the whole screen of the First Inter-Korean Summit. Her work needs to be understood in relation to her trajectory of practice that expresses double negations. I, as a curator, have knowledge of, and access to, her previous work and can contribute this contextualisation. Because we accept the world, we are able to perceive it, and the way Chang expressed it challenged my perception of my own memories: *Fragments* embodies this conceptualising process.

When I showed *Fragments* to Jia Chang, Chang nodded and said,

My grandfather, my mother’s father, studied political international relations. He was fascinated by Lenin and went to North Korea. He became a spy, and my grandmother was sentenced to death. At that time, my aunt was a child, and my grandmother was tortured. My father’s family came to South Korea from North Korea. As in your film that showed people who went to Germany and Vietnam, I experienced what modern Korean history entailed, more than anybody. Just as Park Chan-kyong said about how all the clever intellectuals went to the North, we are the generation who experienced it first hand – about how the remaining family had to live ... we are the generation who were taught survival skills by parents who experienced survival. Our parents went through suppression from political ideology while economic progression was supported by the US. Their parents went through colonialism and the war. Their DNA is within us.

2.6 Conclusion for Part 2

The complicated and entangled nature of the interpretations of Korean art has evolved from a complex network of connectivity and politics that existed beyond Korea. This part has evidenced how the strata of cultural, social and political matters can be seen more clearly in hindsight. The originally perceived meanings are overturned by writing from later dates; testimonies from participating artists reveal how artists used their opportunities; organisers' memories are idealised by time. On the other hand, exhibitions funded by the public budget were often used to reinforce the governing motivations of the state, and the reverse reading of artworks within exhibitions could serve as valuable reference points where personal and collective memories meet. Therefore, I have discussed how artists constantly reiterated the rhetoric of 'Koreanness' while some critics aligned with artists to discuss modernism, which was entangled with discussions of tradition.

I also alternated discussions that concerned not only domestic but also international matters. I was professionally able to take part in cultural diplomacy, such as organising *Terra Galaxia* for the Liverpool Biennial,²⁴⁸ which became more international at the outset: its organisation was at the intersection of the UK's position as an Olympic host, Liverpool's position within the UK, Korea's Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, and Incheon as the municipal local government.

In this PhD research, drawing from these above experiences, I referenced exhibitions that were side by side with Korea's place at the turn of the twentieth century, as the country was ripped apart by its first proxy war within the Cold War machinery, and in relation to the misinterpreted and simplified cultural translations of 'exhibiting Korea'. The research links the nineteenth century with the lost century up to the post-WWII era, and by doing so legitimises the discussion of applied art as the origin of authentic Korean art. I explain why this has been neglected. I then addressed MoMA's 1951 exhibition on Korea and its cultural propaganda, the forgetting of it and its relation to Korea's collective amnesia, and how the political division has affected its divided

²⁴⁸ For 2012, the year of the London Olympics, the Liverpool Biennial's official theme was 'Hospitality'. Linking the airport cities of Liverpool and Incheon through new work by artists, I curated *Terra Galaxia* as part of the Liverpool Biennial 2012.

historiography. The Paris Biennale reflected Korea's situation as well as the intricate Cold War world politics at work. This was a different epoch again from the period during which the artists I discuss began to emerge and see the world through layers of time.

To summarise, the contexts of exhibitions mark the use of Korea's political position within the Cold War to propagate a global hegemony by both international and domestic institutions. These stories reveal, as well as conceal, the major division in Korean art, history and psychology. This divided historiography prevents a fuller understanding about the artists emerging from the 1990s whose works are more grassroots, complex and hard to pin to one school of thought or culture. My discussion reveals how artists had to define tradition, and art, in their own terms. Despite being full of idiosyncratic discussions, the ground had provided a rich basis for younger artists to react against, but also a self-justifying use of the formal qualities of modern art and theory in their global aspects. For instance, I asked artists about whether the post '68 context was known to them growing up in the 1970s. I found those answers in novels, such as Han Kang's *Human Acts*, that were written retrospectively. I began to assemble various contexts and confirmed that a multidisciplinary approach is needed in the mediation. I am not alone in believing this: with this complication, Alexander Monroe writes that any significant interpretation and presentation of modern contemporary Korean art 'must relate the work critically within the universe of modern stylistic movements and also within the larger context of modern Korean cultural, intellectual and political history. New and interdisciplinary ways or approaches – perhaps a new area of study together – are called for to establish modern and contemporary Asian art as a serious, international subject of scholarship and critical inquiry'.²⁴⁹

The next chapter discusses my proposal for this mediation.

²⁴⁹ Alexander Monroe, 'America's Appreciation of Korean Art – Thinking Beyond the Historical Paradigm', *Exhibiting Korean Art* (Seoul: National Museum of Korea, 2007), p. 286.

PART 3

Medium: Curating an Exhibition through a Film

This story is about why history needs many voices, and how a curator might tell stories through these different voices. I am curating artists who have inspired and challenged my memory. I am also adding behind-the-scenes stories from which I learned so much. In conventional exhibitions, these stories stay as footnotes, but I wanted to recover these through this film.

From *Fragments*

3.1 Prologue

The opportunity of curating a series of artworks in an exhibition comes from unexpected discoveries and connections, like walking through a maze. I wanted the audience to feel the same impulses and surprises, but with some guidelines. This is a strategy learned from the artists I discuss, whose works have become ever more multidisciplinary and require contextual information to understand them. Their works refuse the possibility of immediate gratification. I have created a space for contemplation, that is neither in a text-only format nor too allegorical. To weave the curator's position with reflexivity I kept imagining a future model to think through.

My film is a result of in-depth research consisting of primary, secondary and original material generated by a curatorial practice that is combined with theories. The rigour of the research is combined with curatorial approaches learned from the artists I have encountered. These strategies have been useful in expressing the world with which artists are engaging: the combination of West/East, the real/unreal and the true/false. The film *Fragments* is directed, written, edited and produced by me.

On the top of this, my original commission, the Deck of Cards, acts like signposts to help viewers to navigate through vast amounts of material. This commission was my curatorial rendition that dialectically works with images beyond texts. Because of all the statements above, the result, I would argue, transcends the notion of the curator as author and that of a research-driven curatorial work.

The Deck of Cards was conceptualised at later stages of the filmmaking while the original soundtrack was developed in parallel with the duration of the process.²⁵⁰ I wanted the music to evolve, and four of us, three composers and I, would discuss the flow and meaning of various parts of *Fragments*. The original soundtrack is another layer to the curatorial intervention.

While interviews were the ingredients, multivocal interviews prompted unexpected collaborations and connections. They transformed a constellation of meanings into a multitemporal work with a first-person narrative by me as the protagonist.

3.2 Project Definition and Planning: two trials before *Fragments*

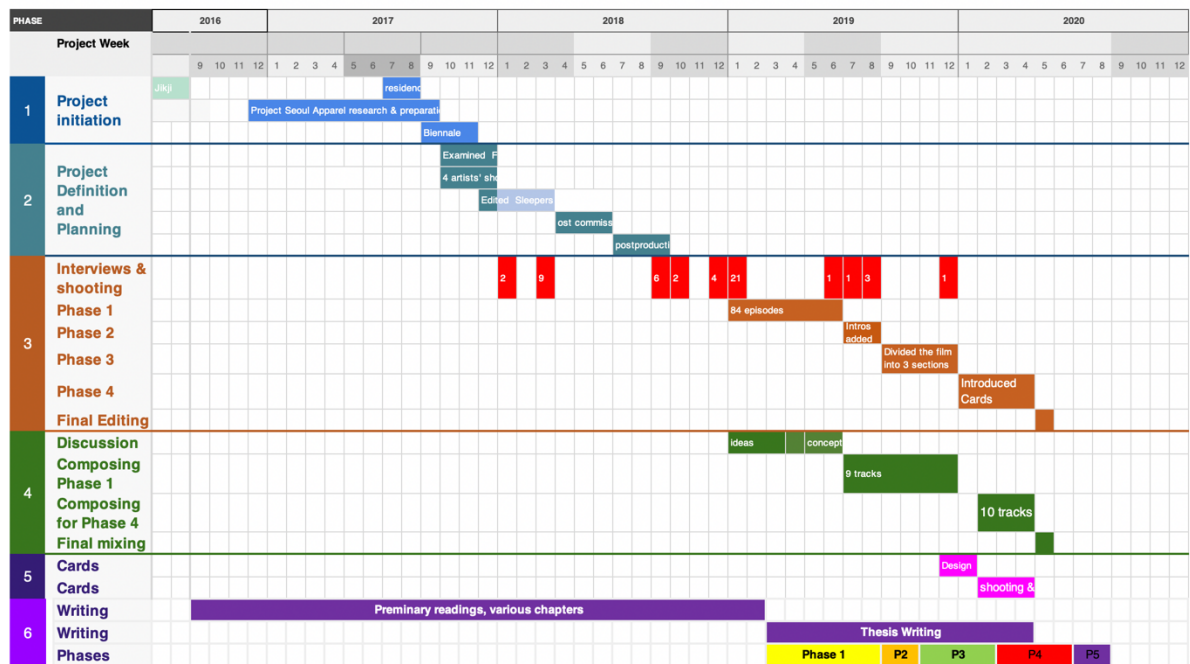


Figure 34 Project timeline.

Figure 34 shows the project timeline of four years when the research, making of *Fragments* and the writing of the thesis have formed an interwoven process spread over four years.²⁵¹ This table shows how rhizomatically the processes evolved. It begins from

²⁵⁰ Soyoung and Elsa & Han were among the nine composers I commissioned for the *Sleepers in Venice* documentary's soundtrack.

²⁵¹ I had two operations which disrupted the study due to two hospitalisations, and I took a term out for a leave of absence, but never ceased to work on the projects.

September 2016, and one can see ‘Jikji’ in the margin, just before the ‘Project Imitation’: a tribute to this unique opportunity to curate on a crucial historical subject on such a scale. After the *Jikji* exhibition curation, I embarked on long-term research in Curating Contemporary Art at RCA, focusing on the 1990s. But then totally unexpectedly, my topic came closer to ancient times as *Fragments* shows.²⁵²

Project Seoul Apparel was a part of the Seoul Architectural Biennale 2017,²⁵³ which was held from 2 September to 5 November 2017. However, the preparation was longer and I worked on it concurrently with reading and theorising from December 2016 to September 2017.²⁵⁴ I intended to use this exhibition as the practice part of my research and made the initial curatorial proposal to the Biennale’s director, Bae Hyungmin.

The ‘Production City’ theme of the Biennale was thought through before I came on board. I knew it aligned with my research interests: the production of goods was the main source of income for postwar Korea, a country without many natural resources. I believed, since Korea’s export economy had been reliant on textile industries, that the garment-making district of Seoul called Changsingdong would reveal and uncover forgotten issues. Upon uncovering these stories, the more I discovered how this site-specific project revealed the palimpsest of modern Korean history and of our retrograde amnesia. It also linked the history of the labour movement and of Minjung art to the life of Jheon Tae-il, a textile labourer who set himself on fire in 1970 to protest against the impoverished conditions of textile factory workers. Jheon became a strong symbol for the student democracy movement in the 1980s, as well as of Changsingdong. I remembered how the strong driving force that drove Korea’s GDP was the textile, and I remembered how Walter Benjamin identified the textile industry as one of the most instrumental components for modernisation in *The Arcades Project*.²⁵⁵ Some of the

²⁵² *Jikji* was the biggest opportunity for me and I was responsible for setting a curatorial example for a historic subject on such a scale that it attracted more than 40,000 visitors for 8 days.

²⁵³ I termed it Project Initiation because it was my first attempt to focus practice for project-based research.

²⁵⁴ ‘Project Seoul Apparel’ ran from 2 September to 5 November 2017 *British Council*, available at <https://design.britishcouncil.org/blog/2017/oct/25/project-seoul-apparel/> .

²⁵⁵ Exposé: ‘Paris: Capital of the Nineteenth Century’, [Exposé of 1939], *The Arcades Project*, p.15.

footage of *Fragments*, such as the Cheonggyecheon stream where I discovered the mural of Jeongjo, was shot during the time when I was trying to investigate how Seoul's production meant there exists an elliptical and compacted form of time in Seoul.²⁵⁶ Although in the neighbourhood of the Eastern Gate of Seoul, one can see how the beautiful steep mountain hosted the mansions of prominent families, this view is unrecognisable with the rock in this mountain carved away to erect modern buildings, with small sweatshops and factories built haphazardly. This 0.80km² neighbourhood of Changsindong, full of many small bedsits, turned into the cluster of small factories²⁵⁷ that still produce 80 percent of Korea's fast fashion. I only found this out through preparation for this exhibition.²⁵⁸ When my curatorial proposal was accepted, my role was extended to develop a collaboration with the RCA's Fashion programme with the help of the British Council's Architecture, Design and Fashion team.²⁵⁹ I liaised with a local architect to be my co-curator in Korea, presented the idea to the Seoul Foundation, and reached curatorial outlines that satisfied all the funding bodies.²⁶⁰ The participating artists included three architects, one urban designer, a filmmaker and three fashion designers. I accompanied two British fashion designers in their residency in Korea in summer 2017 where all the participants met onsite workers, tailors, urban historians and MP Jheon (a sister of Jheon Tae-il) who is an ardent labour activist. After a few months' residency and workshops with Zowie Broach, head of the RCA Fashion programme, and Susan Postlethwaite, a staff member at the RCA, the exhibition was presented as a 'model factory' in Changsindong. It was a collaborative project that encompassed multidisciplinary works ranging from a shop front, interior, maps, books and specific art pieces.

²⁵⁶ Fashion Street in London, for instance. In other big cities, textile industries existed within the city but have now been moved out.

²⁵⁷ Han Yongsoo and Kang Hee-yong, *Birth of Gangnam* (Seoul: Miji Books, 2016).

²⁵⁸ 'Project Seoul Apparel', *2017 Seoul Biennale of Architecture and Urbanism*, available at: <http://seoulbiennale.org/en/public-programs/educational/talk-series/psa-talk-eng>.

²⁵⁹ 'RCA Fashion Graduates Explore Seoul Garment District', *RCA*, 1 September 2017, <https://www.rca.ac.uk/news-and-events/news/rca-fashion-graduates-explore-seoul-garment-district/>.

²⁶⁰ The Seoul Foundation was interested in reviving this now forgotten part of Seoul, and the RCA Fashion programme shared an interest in Seoul, as it was one of the last cities that still contained onsite production.

Nevertheless, the result did not contain commentaries on forgotten knowledge or layers of testimonials revealed through art.²⁶¹ The final exhibition became the manifestation of artists' interpretations, and the profound meanings that artists discussed while making the show became lost. Although I transcribed all the conversations from workshops, just reprinting these words would not be curatorial. This process made me understand that, rather than vaguely talking around the question, or compiling all the texts that I went through, I needed to take a more direct approach to weave the story into a clear narrative, edit it and present it together with an exhibition.

Thus, for the second attempt, I worked on a straightforward documentary film: *Sleepers in Venice*. As seen in the table, 2) Project Definition and Planning, many ideas for *Fragments* were conceived while making this documentary film. With a clear intention to start another curatorial practice, I examined all the film footage from the exhibition from October 2017 to December 2017. The footage was about two terabytes, and was shot in London, Venice and Seoul for an exhibition with the same name (May–June 2015). Initially in 2015, I had hoped to film every step of the exhibition preparation for this parallel exhibition in Venice, but the footage had been lying in a drawer as archives. I had interviewed many of the artists with the hope of creating a comprehensive film about the roles of artists and their thoughts on art, the struggle between desire and intellect. One of the artists was Jia Chang. I reconnected with her and explained to her about my research interests in her generation. She liked my idea and we embarked on a new project that would be working with areas of forgotten issues, and invited three other artists of Chang's age to discuss taboo memories and suppression. Five of us agreed to call the exhibition *Antidotes for Fox with Nine Tales and Hydra*, considered the Freud Museum as a venue, proposed to one of four artists, Wolshik Kim, about working with North Korean defectors in London.²⁶² However, I realised that creating

²⁶¹ I had filmed various meetings, such as a meeting with Jheon Tae-il's sister, a labour movement activist, and shared all the footage with a filmmaker, Paik Jongkwan. I also transcribed the workshops with the RCA fashion department and planned to compile a publication. However, the publication was limited to only a few pages, so the transcriptions had to be jettisoned.

²⁶² Behaviour or speeches in favour of the North Korean regime or communism can be punished by the National Security Law. Enforced since 1948, the act is to 'secure the security of the State and the subsistence and freedom of nationals, by regulating any anticipated activities compromising the safety of the State'. In 2014, the legislators of the then majority Uri Party made a gesture to annul the law but failed.

another exhibition was not the answer I was looking for. Moreover, my plan also met with resistance. One of the artists, Ligyung, told me how for her the power of art lies in its aspect of fantasy, and that she prefers to keep the process unknown to the viewer. I found these conversations useful to push the subject further. In order to link Jia Chang's generation to some of the other artists' interviews I had already done for *Sleepers in Venice*, from December 2017 to January 2018 I immersed myself fully in learning editing skills and working on the first edit of *Sleepers in Venice*.²⁶³ Because the original intention of filming was to record the process of exhibition planning, I realised that it would not be the ideal theoretical amalgamation of my research; I edited the first phase of *Sleepers in Venice*, then showed the edit to seven musicians to create the original soundtrack for the film, and among them were Elsa & Han and Soyoung Lim, whom I later asked to compose music for *Fragments*. This venture not only helped me to understand the importance of cinematography, lighting, locations, recording, mise-en-scène and musical components, but also the multiple stages of post-production and storytelling. Both attempts formed the conviction that led me to the blueprint I imagined.

3.3 Interviews as methodology: transcription and translation

So when I had my first interviews with Park Chan-kyong in January 2018,²⁶⁴ I had this blueprint in my mind and scheduled other interviews in the short window of a visit to Korea. I came back to work on transcription and translation of these long interviews, and they were instrumental in my research. It was my principal methodology and the main threads holding the film together.

My *Appendix* starts with 'Interviewee List, Time and Place of Interviews', emphasising how the research and filmmaking pivoted around interviews. I knew how the interviews were to be used from the two trials I explained earlier, even though the interviewees

²⁶³ *Sleepers in Venice* is a 58-minute-long film produced and art-directed by me. It was invited to BLOW-UP International Film Festival (Chicago), London International Filmmakers Festival (London), Rome Independent Film Festival, Falcon International, Miami Independent Film Festival, Roma Cinema DOC, Ag & Art Film Festival and Hollywood Documentary Festival. The film's 15-minute trailer can be viewed at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=avYH_RMmOd4&t=381s.

²⁶⁴ See *Appendix*, 1.1 Interviewees' list, time and place of interviews, p.3.

were never fixed and evolved along the way.

From January 2018 to December 2019, 50 in-depth video interviews took place in London, Seoul, Jeonju, Tokyo and Busan.²⁶⁵ As row (3) of Figure 34 shows, the interviews were dotted around, forming an important connecting spine. See *Appendix 1* for the list of visits where interviewees allowed me to view their important personal archives.²⁶⁶

Each interview was carefully planned, and I devised questions around artists' works. And after each interview, I had to transcribe the interviews in Korean and translate them into English. For example, Lim Ok-sang's interview transcription with translation is 57 pages long, with my notes highlighting the translational variations. During the translation process, official terms needed to be checked, such as the 518 Democratisation movement, which used to be called 'The Gwangju Uprising'.²⁶⁷

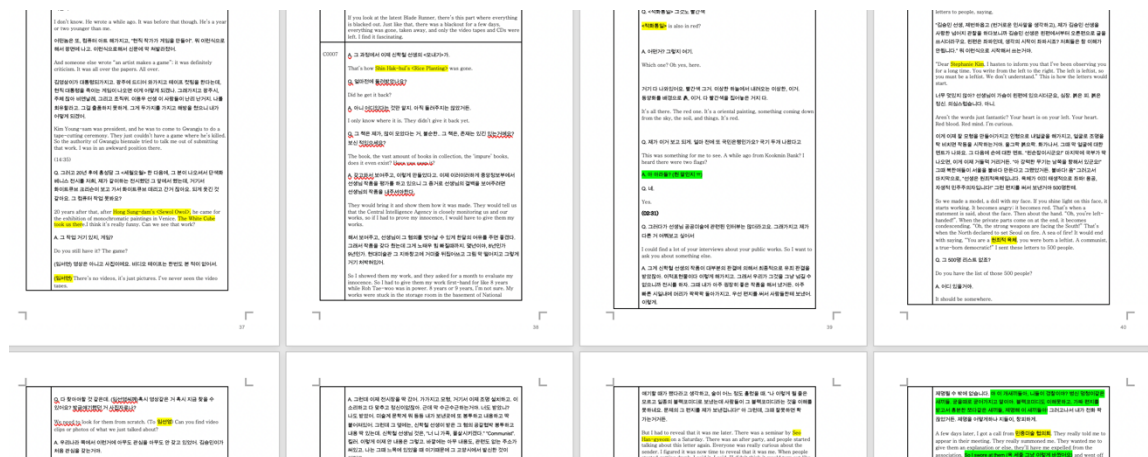


Figure 35 Sample pages of the transcription, translation, notes, video file names and timecodes.

²⁶⁵ See *Appendix 1.3 Interview scenes*, pp. 8–9, that show scenes that did not make the final film but were significant in the development.

²⁶⁶ Lim Ok-sang gave me various VHS videos that reported on Minjung art; and Park Chan-kyong shared various high-resolution media files, including *Ten Thousand Spirits*, and Honghee Kim lent me books on the *Art and Fluxus* exhibition of 1994 that provided invaluable insights.

²⁶⁷ I realised that no one system can resolve all the translation issues. I have tried my best to deliver the terms that are closest to the original connotation or the pronunciation.

Hans Ulrich Obrist, in conversation with Andrew Renton, Sabine Brummer and Sophie von Olfers,²⁶⁸ defined the interview as writing-in-process, an infinite conversation. Andrew Renton, an English curator, was citing his fellow curator, Obrist, to explain that the best way to represent curating is to explore around curating, and how discoursing with many people through interviews is a theoretical route.²⁶⁹ I understood this process, as for me the interviews allowed lateral discussions in which repeated concepts appeared, assembled and pointed to the plane of multiplicities that disrupted the things I knew.²⁷⁰ Through interviews, I collected evidence of Korea's modern life, such as colour televisions, cartoon characters, symbols and laws. And after two to three hours of interviews, the lengthy process of transcribing and translating led me to unexpected conclusions, often determining the next interviewee.

The words, on the other hand, became important 'archaeological' remains of memories and unconventional interpretation. For instance, when discussing the formation of the *Museum* group, Choi Jeong Hwa told me about his first trip to Europe; how Choi noticed so many museums full of 'dead gods'. I immediately thought of Jheon Socheon,²⁷¹ also because he was an older artist but travelling Europe for the first time in the 1990s. Jheon mentioned how seeing European antiquity with all the arms and legs cut off²⁷² prompted him to model Korean clay figures from the fifth or sixth century AD for the Korean pavilion. *Fragments* includes how Jheon won an Honourable Mention at the Biennale in 1995. Choi, on the other hand, turned to the opposite of museum relics,

²⁶⁸ 'A Conversation Between Andrew Renton, Sabine Brümmer and Sophie von Olfers'. *Arco News* 2005, Madrid, p. 33, Quoted in 'The Middleman: Beginning to Think about Mediation', *Curating Subjects*, ed. Paul O'Neill (Amsterdam: de Appel, 2007), p.127.

²⁶⁹ For example, Lee Hyun-se was 'guilty by association', and there were significant restrictions on what he could choose as a job. This rarely revealed fact led me to discover how he worked for the anti-war Japanese cartoonist Testka Asamu.

²⁷⁰ According to Deleuze and Guattari, the rhizome is made up of multiplicities; in *A Thousand Plateaus*, they describe a rhizomic framework as providing a bottom-up viewpoint from which to consider social complexities, in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

²⁷¹ Jheon travelled from London to Greece in 1994 as he was preparing for the 1995 Venice Biennale and he told me how 'Greek gods and goddesses [in museums] had all the body parts broken'.

²⁷² How marble sculptures were made from a block of marble with arms as additions made them to be easily broken off. Both Jheon and Choi would have seen Venus de Milo at the Louvre. For Beaux-art education, not only Choi but also I, though 20 years younger, practised drawing the head of Venus (and Julian, and Agrippa) from plaster casts, as seen from *Fragments*.

to raw building sites. *Fragments* shows my anecdote of looking at Giuliano de' Medici on my first trip to Florence, illustrating how this Eurocentric education,²⁷³ and the shock of identifying myself as 'the other' in the art world, would be manifested in my early exhibitions. It was through interviews I became closer to how they viewed the world in relation to me.



Figure 36 *An Event with Fire*, Kim Ku-lim, re-enactment of the original performance of 1970.

Interviews and artists' memories became 'flashing images' of the past.²⁷⁴ I finally linked Choi Jeong Hwa's plastic lotus flowers, inflating and deflating as if to suggest the cycle of life, with Kim Ku-lim's *An Event with Fire and Lawn* (Figure 36).²⁷⁵ This work starts with Kim putting a flaming torch gently on a yellow, brownish lawn, marking triangular mountain shapes on the charred ground.²⁷⁶ I then read about Kim's

²⁷³ The story of my first 'imaginary' exhibition, for which I chose 'the hand' as the theme and selected five significant works involving hands, was forgotten until I was talking to Jheon and Choi. It was their recollection of seeing the European museums that made me understand the relative absence of my own heritage when confronting major Western institutions. I included this story in *Fragments*.

²⁷⁴ Benjamin writes: 'It's not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on the past; rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation. In other words, image is dialectics at a standstill. For while the relation of the present to the past is a purely temporal, continuous one, the relation of what-has-been to the now is dialectical: is not progression but image, suddenly emergent. – Only dialectical images are genuine images (that is, not archaic); and the place where one encounters them is language.' 'Awakening', in *The Arcades Project*, p. 462; n2a, 3.

²⁷⁵ Kim re-enacted the performance for the twentieth anniversary of the founding of the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea, in 2017.

²⁷⁶ In 1973, Kim Ku-lim incorporated the notion of time into his work. He painted a brand-new shovel, and an axe, and chairs with oil paint, making them appear old. In *Wiping Cloth*, Kim wipes a dirty desk with white cloths. While the desk becomes cleaner, the wiping cloth darkens. It is a subtle visual statement in which time and action combine to show yin and yang.

work,²⁷⁷ and further interviews with Kim Ku-lim helped to construct the narrative of *Fragments*.



Figure 37 Jheon Soo-cheon, *Drawing on Han River 2*, 1989, *Moving Drawing*, 2005, from *Fragments*.

Similarly, I compiled *Drawing on Han River*,²⁷⁸ *Moving Drawing* (Figure 37),²⁷⁹ and Jheon Soo-cheon's relationship to Nam June Paik in the continuous montage. Jheon's work is aligned with Kim Ku-lim's, while his trip to Europe was contemporary to Choi Jeong Hwa's trip. These stories behind how exhibitions empower artists²⁸⁰ helped to compose *Fragments*.

Lastly, this curator's film is full of curators' interviews. Even though it was not portrayed in *Fragments*, I learned: Kim Hong Hee curated the Fluxus Festival in Seoul (1993) through Nam June Paik; later, Kim Hong Hee set up *Ssamzi Space*, which

²⁷⁷ Sook-kyung Lee, Senior Curator of the Tate Research Centre: Asia-Pacific, writes about how Kim's preoccupation with the cycle was visible as early as 1964. *Death of the Sun*, now in Tate's collection, was made by letting plastic burn alongside the oil paint. Kim Ku-lim foreshadows the trajectory he was to continue in his 'creation through destruction and innovation through challenge and negation'. Sook-Kyung Lee, Head of the Asia Pacific Research Centre, wrote a catalogue essay on Kim Ku-Lim. *Kim Ku-Lim: You Don't Know Me Well* (Seoul: Arts Council Korea, 2013), pp. 6–19.

²⁷⁸ Jheon says in my interview how he visited Korea from his residence in New York in 1995 because of participating in 'Artist of the Year' and 'when I was named *Artist of the Year* in Korea, people were saying all kinds of things about the selection process. It was the "Year of Art" of Korea. In those days, many people didn't know much about me.' The two artistic movements were Dansaekhwa and Minjung.

²⁷⁹ The Chinese character for calligraphy contains the meaning of both drawing and writing – it signifies art.

²⁸⁰ Cho Sang-in, 'Why Japan? Whitney in Korea is better, Meet Nam June Paik', *SE Daily*, [9 August 2018] available at: <https://www.sedaily.com/NewsView/1VMWJS716G>.

prompted similar spaces to spring up in the 1990s;²⁸¹ Park Chan-kyong ran an alternative space called *Pool*;²⁸² Kim Chang Dong's interview showed an intimate view of the artist/curator discussing the modernist aesthetic with avant-garde artists; Kim Woolim's interviews opened a discussion about government curators working in the 1990s.²⁸³ And these interviews provided curators' points of view retrospectively from the 1990s.

This methodology of making interviews also shaped my understanding that conventional exhibitions would provide memory. As Raphael Samuels argues, in *Theatres of Memory*: 'as it is of a great deal of contemporary ethnography, [that] memory, so far from being merely a passive receptacle or storage system, an image bank of the past, is rather an active, shaping force'.²⁸⁴ This research process enabled me to rethink artistic agency and art's ability to reframe and shape history. Thus, individual memories as recalled by the interviewees in the study can later be connected to constructed knowledge.

These interviews motivated me to return to the officially reported news. I visited public archives, such as film archives, the National Archives of Korea and the 518 Democratic Movement archives, in order to see what the public must have been seeing on television. I also had to decipher various entries, clear the rights and contact newspaper and broadcasting agencies to see how certain news was initially reported. Thus, visits I undertook to the National Archives, 518 Archive and the Arko Museum Archive gave me opportunities to see events from various angles, away from a homogenising history.

²⁸¹ I could observe her objectives changing dramatically whenever she described her work as a commissioner for the Gwangju Biennale Commission (2000), the Venice Biennale's Korean Pavilion (2003) and tenures at three public museums, the Gyeonggi Museum of Art, the Nam June Paik Centre and the Seoul Metropolitan Museum of Art.

²⁸² Kim Hong Hee described how her formative moment in becoming a curator was in 1994, when Paik persuaded the Whitney Biennial and the Korean government to hold a special exhibition and conference relating to the Whitney Biennial in Korea in 1993 and 1994 in Seoul.

²⁸³ Kim Woolim worked in the National Museum of Korea, then at the Ministry, then was back in the Museum when I interviewed him.

²⁸⁴ Raphael Samuels, *Theatres of Memory: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (London & New York: Verso, 1996), pp. xxii–xxiii.

Much of the footage that was eventually in *Fragments* was in a transitional state, not fully digital. Much of it needed a different format, as it ranged from VHS videotapes to carousel slides. I transferred it to digital files. And this was a stark illustration of how a technological development advances our ability to remember things.

3.4 Cinematography & Editing of the interviews

Many interviewees of my research are significant authorities in each of their respected fields, such that one can find many interviews with them.²⁸⁵ Nevertheless, they are quite short in length and quite general, to suit the readers' tendencies to find them amongst other news and articles. I purposely made my interviews as dense as possible and filmed the dialogues with two cameras to preserve these rare opportunities to capture their memories, knowledge and stories. Interviewees understood that some of the interviews would be presented as essential parts of my 'exhibition', and I have made several copies of the original interviews so that I could always refer back. Typically, dialogues between artists and curators are deliberately excluded from conventional exhibition formats. I am refusing this and have opened these processes up to the extended public. This has allowed me to share the space where artists work and operate with the audience.

Sharing these conversations with artists and maintaining formality was an important process. I sent an agreement form, see *Appendix I (b)*, to each artist before the actual filming. It clarified the objectives of the filming and its future use. The form was then explained face-to-face with interviewees again at the time of interview, and it was signed.

In *Fragments*, artists speak in front of their desks surrounded by their possessions: Park Chan-kyong had props relating to shamanistic rituals that were used in many of his films, but we chose the spot in front of his bookcases, a hint of his role as a cultural critic. For Choi Jeong Hwa (Figure 38), an extensive display of memorabilia and discarded goods are in various cases. He sits in front of his sculpture of a Sino-character

²⁸⁵ Choi Jeong Hwa was busy preparing for the opening ceremony for the Pyeongchang Paralympics – and was due to open the Hyundai Motors Artist of the Year exhibition at the MMCA Korea 2018 (5 September 2018 – 3 March 2019), Park Chan-kyong was in the process of preparing a Hyundai Commission at the MMCA Korea 2019 (26 October 2019 – 23 February 2020).

for ‘righteousness’.²⁸⁶ The sculpture looks ‘fluffy’ but is made from sharp nails as if to say ‘the righteous route’ may hurt. It epitomises Choi’s way of saying things like a Daoist master. This prompted me to interview the Seoul Calligraphy Art Museum curator Lee Dongkook,²⁸⁷ who explained that cultures that have their roots in Chinese characters have ‘montage’ inherent in the culture, as the characters are inherently ideograms: each character can contain several meanings within it.



Figure 38 Choi Jeong Hwa in the Studio, from *Fragments*.

Fragments includes Jheon Soo-cheon’s last interview. Jheon was keen to share his ideas about future projects and neither of us knew then that his future projects would not be fulfilled, as he passed away a few months later. At the hospital, Jheon was wearing an overcoat over a hospital uniform, and I chose a hat with him (Figure 39). I wanted the natural light on him, so we found a room with many windows and it began to snow in the middle of the interview. Looking back at the footage, there is a certain serenity and grace in Jheon’s interview, although what he said about the Vietnam War sounds naive and bizarre.²⁸⁸ One takes account of how retrospective or nostalgic the interviewees are by the way they speak. His accounts differ significantly from those of Park Chan-kyong, whose work *Koreans who went to Germany* features a veteran who also volunteered to go to Germany.²⁸⁹

²⁸⁶ 正 means righteousness.

²⁸⁷ *Appendix*, Interview scenes, p. 9.

²⁸⁸ In *Fragments*, Jheon speaks of ‘how we [Korean soldiers] did many good things’.

²⁸⁹ The Vietnam War and miners and nurses who went to Germany were major sources of foreign aid that helped South Korea’s progress.

By capturing the ways artists speak with two or more cameras, I could cross-edit their body language – of flipping the pages of their own catalogues, pausing at specific photos and recollecting long-forgotten stories. Their impressions will deliver much more to the audience, who would typically ‘read’ their words as texts – simplified, paraphrased and translated quotations from their written interviews.



Figure 39 Jheon Soo-cheon in his Jeonnam University Hospital in an interview with me, from *Fragments*.

Plans, including where to shoot angles and what microphones, recording machines and lighting to bring, were discussed beforehand. Cinematographers were significant collaborators who advised me about the speed of the shot, lighting and compositions. Once filmed, editing allowed different sequences and scenes in different orders. Gunho Jang, Roland Denning, Steve M. Choe²⁹⁰ and Kyungah Lee²⁹¹ appear as advisors in the credits, because their roles involved more than just teaching me techniques. They were the first ‘audiences’ for me, accompanied me when filming many of the interviews and discussed the editing. Choe appears as he cut the cards in the beginning of *Fragments*, to suggest how curators first mediate the art to the public (Figure 40). This scene is an acknowledgement of the collaborative spirit.

²⁹⁰ Professor of Film at the University of Arts Korea. Choe was awarded for his editing of *Snowpiercer*, a film directed by Academy-awarded Bong Joon Ho. He features in *Fragments*, see Figure 40, as I wanted to also include him as a meaningful collaborator in the film.

²⁹¹ Graduating in Moving Image (Contemporary Art Practice) from the Royal College of Art in 2019, Kyungah Lee earlier studied documentary film at Goldsmiths, University of London.



Figure 40 Author in front of Steve M. Choe, a Deck of Cards scene.

There have been five significant shifts in the film that I made from June 2019 to June 2020. Any phases before this can be regarded as work in progress; the film was completed in its full length in June 2019 (See *Appendix* and Figure 41).²⁹² These phases represent important steps I have taken to shift the main register of the film. Going back to talk to interviewees and showing them the edits allowed the transition from Phase 1²⁹³ to Phase 2.²⁹⁴ These opening narration sentences²⁹⁵ were first written in Korean to explain what the interview was for when I went to interview Jia Chang at the end of the Phase 1.

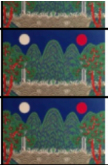
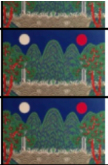
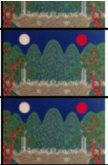




23	14	with nature	Five Peaks	
24		Did you know that in Korea only a single portrait of the King is allowed to be drawn?	Sun, Moon and Five Peaks	
25	31	Daoist painting (Living with the Nature)	Sun, Moon and Five Peaks	
26	11	1995 Venice Biennale + Kim Young Sam	Exhibition	
27	12	Jheon Soo Cheon (changed from Monochrome to Vietnam War)	Exhibition	
28		I did not know it was going to be his interview. Jheon's 60s, 70s, and 80s, and the US Drawing	Division	
29		Kim Kulim appears in A Bigger Splash exhibition at Tate Modern	Exhibition	

Figure 41 Detail of Phase 2 table, showing categories that I was developing; Sun, Moon and Five Peaks was once used.

²⁹² *Fragments* was presented to the Confirmation Exam board on 15 May 2019 with the opening scene starting from the British Library.

²⁹³ *Appendix*, 2.1 Phase 1, pp. 11–12.

²⁹⁴ *Appendix*, 2.2 Phase 2, pp. 13–15. I had introduced a new narration summarising the intention of the film.

²⁹⁵ *Appendix* 4.2 Narration, p. 33.

By editing these interviews, I could decide on what register I should have the film. I decided to shoot a new scene in the Seoul cityscape, with myself as the subject: to identify myself as the clear protagonist. The choice of my back view within the foggy scenery, walking ahead, was a metaphor.

3.5 Music: an important sonic layer adding multilayered meanings

Soyoung Lim and the duo Elsa & Han were three of nine musicians whom I worked with for *Sleepers in Venice* and I had come to trust their expertise and artistic talents. I turned to them as soon as I envisioned *Fragments*. Thus, we met regularly to discuss the progress of *Fragments*, and I explained various aspects of the added scenes. I also shared how the artists I looked at have used music in their work, and how I wanted to speak alongside this. For instance, Jia Chang's *Beautiful Instruments 3: Breaking Wheel* is an installation with 12 traditional wheels, surrounded by a white curtain with performers on saddles above the wheels (Figure 42). This scene is important because I have kept her work as it is but will have a soundtrack enveloping the scene.

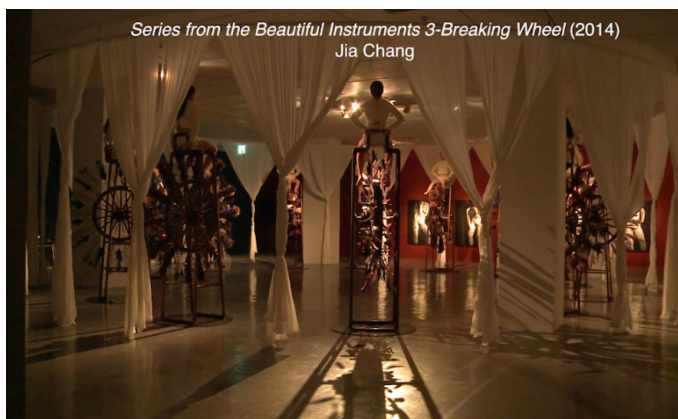


Figure 42 Jia Chang, *Beautiful Instrument 3* from *Fragments*.

In *Beautiful Instruments 3*, each performer sits on a saddle studded with protruding crystals and a hole in the middle, where attached feathers rub against the performers' genital regions. While pedalling the wheels, the women are subjected to both pain and pleasure, sweating and singing traditional folk work-songs which originated in seventeenth-century Korea. The songs may sound like Gregorian chants but are

composed using the Phrygian scale, that was banned from being used in church music as it was deemed ‘degenerate’. The wheels were chosen in reference to their potential function as instruments for torture in Europe. *Fragments* adds my voice: ‘for Chang, the body was a sensory system’ that gave ‘the body pain and pleasure originating from both the Western and Eastern worlds’, with Chang’s music. The songs we hear were a collective memory while the body marks were private.²⁹⁶ I explained to the musicians how I wanted to evoke Korea’s condensed history, resulting in different memories being mixed afresh rather than stacked on top of one another with this work, as in Chang’s embodiment. Not only did this work make me believe this brought about entirely different forms of modernity altogether, but I also imagined someone painting a new colour while the colour previously applied was still wet, resulting in unexpected colours. I wanted the section to have such a soundtrack.

E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L
Flow 3	Opinion after Prefer second	Arrangement Comment				Reference	Note
A-a		Han	Elsa	Soyoung		https://www.you	Han: Fl
		Environmental Sound				https://www.you	St panc
A-b		Ambient Music with Breaking point "There's no depiction of the King"		reptitive sounds from Korean instruments		https://youtu.be/	brian er
		위와 같은 음악에서 선율이나 리			oval kasino	https://drive.goc	bell?
				반복되는	Burn Peach	https://youtu.be/	Elsa: 다

Figure 43 Detail see V(a). Appendix p.41.

Figure 43 shows how we discussed references from environmental sound and experimental music to Korean traditional instrumental music. For instance, Soyoung Lim sampled marching band music and the New Village Movement²⁹⁷ songs to represent the repressive mood of the 1970s. For the senses of the cards, one hears sounds of LP records to original audio sources directly from media reports and ‘found

²⁹⁶ The crystals left marks temporarily on the intimate parts of the sitter and were likely to be seen by themselves alone.

²⁹⁷ The *Saemaoul Undong*, also known as the New Village Movement, was a political initiative that was initiated on 22 April 22 1970 by the South Korean president, Park Chung-hee, to modernise rural South Korea. It lost momentum in the 1980s with the assassination of Park Chung-hee. Diligence, self-help and collaboration were the slogans to encourage community members to participate in the development process. At the same time, local traditions and beliefs were strongly suppressed, similarly to how they were in China’s Cultural Revolution. *Misin Tapa Undong* (‘to defeat the worship of superstitions’) also reached its peak during the Saemaoul Undong. Practitioners of Korean shamanism were harassed.

sound' effects. Tweaking, glitching, and reverse effects were discussed to send a message of 'manoeuvred' memory through the media.

For *Samsara*, to differentiate the origins of a personal meeting with the Korean War veterans from collective ones, such as Beth McKillop talking about *uigwe*, there is a melodic transition; when the flashback reaches an emotional response, the music changes with a glitch. Later, Minchang Han changed *Samsara* to two different tracks as I wanted to enter more text to separate the Deck of Cards from the rest of the archive footage. Han also created an entirely new composition format – of 60 rhythms. They are made up of 'counterpointing' two traditional Korean tempos. Just as the sixty-year cycle of the lunar calendar of the East derived from and was made up of ten elements (five elements times yin and yang) and twelve animals, Han combined the faster tempo of *Utmori Jangdan* with ten tempos and *Gutgeori Jangdan* with twelve beats.²⁹⁸

Walking in the Memory by Jaeyoung ('Elsa') changes as the era depicted becomes more prolific – unison and counterpoint create two contradictory, or two-octave, sounds together. With the emergence of new generations of artists, the musicians begin to introduce beats to emphasise a new era, using a synthesiser. After we complemented the nine tracks, I introduced the Deck of Cards' system. As a result, I had a new set of filming that involved spreading the cards, laying them out and also explaining the meanings. Thus, in Phase 5, we assigned each card sonic elements.²⁹⁹ If you hear the last sequence of *Fragments*, you hear music that builds up with each card. Card 1 is assigned a heartbeat; Card 2 is the male and female voice becoming one, while Card 3 comes with the sound of a chord. Card 4 represents four personalities in *Fragments* who were tortured, and thus the hammering sound is played and the visual of the card shows fractured nails. This shows that the film is not just visual, but an amalgamation of sonic elements, collaborations and guidelines brought together into one whole.

²⁹⁸ Yoonchung Chang, in 'Korean Traditional Elements and Contemporary Compositional Techniques in Hyowon Woo's Choral Music as Reflected in *Gloria*' (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of North Texas, 2012) writes about the rhythmic element of *Jangdan* (literally, 'long-short') in Korean folk music. *Jangdan* is the term used to describe a group of set rhythmic patterns of varying length, which, through repetition, form the basis of extended improvisations and variations.

²⁹⁹ *Appendix*, pp. 21 and 39.

3.6 A Deck of Cards: My Curatorial Mediation in Visual form

Fragments starts with a scene in which I lay out the Deck of Cards. It was important to introduce the key device right at the beginning, and I have employed it to ‘map’ my curatorial contents³⁰⁰ to the viewers. They are guidelines, foreshadowing, signposts and hints about the essence of *Fragments*. However, they are not too explicit, as the rules of games are unknown to audiences. Four suits’ cards have texts, and they are mixed with number cards. It was important to use this curatorial mediation to explain but also to provoke curiosity and connections that will be explained in the end.

3.6.1. Four suits of the Deck of Cards

The four suit cards are also shot from above to mark the subsections of the film. Suit cards can be distinguished from number cards because texts are written on them instead of numbers. The first card that is to be turned over has written on it ‘Broken Bridge’, with an image of a ruptured bridge representing ruptures in history (Figure 44); the Island Card is then turned over at the beginning of the second part of *Fragments*, signifying subjugated stories emanating from exhibitions; and the third Memory Card signals the medium or artists’ interpretation. Just as in the introductory card scene, the last card, laid on the far right, is not turned over. The last card represents the overall leitmotif – a mystery till the end – of the research. They are repeated as *bridges* of each section. These four suits replace the spades, hearts, diamonds and clubs of conventional cards – categories I believe are arbitrary. I am going to explain what each text/theme card means next.

³⁰⁰ Deleuze and Guattari when describing ‘rhizome’ compare it to ‘mapping’ not ‘tracing’.

Broken Bridge Card

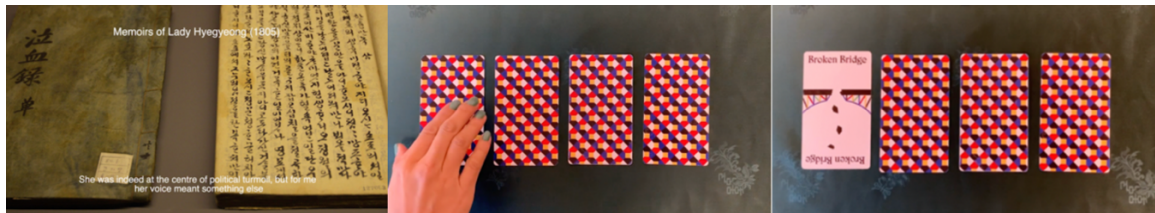


Figure 44 *Broken Bridge* scenes, a late addition to *Fragments*.

The Broken Bridge Card appears following the first episode in which I try to unearth an unavailable royal manuscript of Korea in the British Library (Figure 44). As it follows the historic catastrophe of the killing of a prince – the rupture of the father and son relationship foreshadowing the division of Korea – I wanted to create a space of inquiry through the way we collectively remember these events. I turn over the card as if enabling the audience to have their own interpretation of temporal disjunctions, memories far away from us, and the misunderstanding of our own narratives. This part transitions from environmental noises to music consisting of dark and low-pitched octaves, causing a slight tension. The corresponding part analyses the power and oppression that drove the ruptures deeper, rather than mending them.

Island Card



Figure 45 An Island Card sequence, following Broken Bridge section, from *Fragments*.

The Island Card appears after a scene within *Fragments* showing a curator, Bae Won-Jung, discussing how the king was too auspicious to draw, within her curated show *Art of the Korean Empire* (Figure 45). This signals the second part of the film, and corresponds to Part 2 of the thesis, where I discuss often neglected history of exhibitions and contexts. As the film transforms into the realm of memories concealed by a range of propaganda, including curatorial and musicological memories, the card foreshadows this narrative. At the same time, the thesis' Part 2 defines the research inside the bigger scheme of things: from the 1995 Venice Biennale to movements in the 1960s, *Fragments* traces back to reveal how *Present from the Past* was influenced by MoMA's 1951 exhibition; and how *A Soldier's Tale* was covered by the BBC to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the ceasefire of the Korean War. I wanted to convey how artworks are the 'tip' of the large sum of stories that are submerged – by having the island, in the shape of a person, being submerged under water. The examples I use manifest memories of soldiers; as artists met Korean War veterans, interviewed them and created works with soldiers' precarious memories as subjects, one might ask: whose memories are submerged under the collective memory, and what can exhibitions reveal? It was my choice to repeat the image of the tip of the iceberg – even though some might feel 'tip of the iceberg' is rather an overused metaphor, once you look closely, you will find a pine tree, a profile of a female and a deep submerged underwater image.

Memory Card



Figure 46 Memory Card with two works by Park Chan-kyong, from *Fragments*.

The Memory Card appears between Park Chan-kyong's work *Koreans who went to Germany* and *Manshin*, as if to signify the 'spectres' of the past revealed by him (Figure 46). Although the 1960s' media reported on 'young Koreans' going to West Germany to learn highly skilled jobs, Park depicts an elderly man carrying out a pedicure. These memories are intangible, like the icon of a computer folder, and fleeting, like the three birds representing three artists. The particular photograph I chose for the pedicurist represents the miner who went to Germany when he was young, when his colleagues are replaced by tombstones. The choice of the folder that was used as an icon in Microsoft computer software was a request from me to the designer to denote the early 1990s.³⁰¹ Park Chan-kyong's more recent work *Manshin* has many of the artistic strategies I have learned and applied in *Fragments*.³⁰² The assemblage of artistic, personal and collective memories (represented by news reports) becomes a statement: the film makes the difference between the narrative 'made' part of the film and the documentary part as clear as possible. The shaman Kim Geum-hwa will now be remembered by Park's film, as she passed away in 2018.

³⁰¹ The Mac computer has a different folder image. I liked the idea of intangible memory stored in an old computer.

³⁰² Park Chan-kyong, as an artist-director, creates disruption by having four 'Kims' representing different parts of Kim's life and in one scene, at the end, dispels this belief. It is as if he is consciously exposing the blinding effect of the media – asking audiences to choose what to believe and consequently making the whole thing more believable. The treatment of the film reflects what it depicts. It deals with the fluidity between what is visible and not visible. It is neither didactic nor explanatory.

Maze Card

The Maze Card is the card that was left face down in the introduction to the film. It is zoomed in on at the beginning and represents an enigmatic and complex journey that can only be understood in hindsight. It not only reflects how history is visible in retrospect but also my own journey through the research.

I drew together many literary and visual references to choose the term ‘maze’. The labyrinthine ‘library’ in Umberto Eco’s *The Name of the Rose*³⁰³ has a maze-like entrance. The architecture of the library was used as a metaphor for closely guarded knowledge. Similarly, the royal Korean manuscript, far from its place of origin, is hidden away in the massive history-making British Library. Strongly guarded and not immediately viewable, it is as if I was destined to find it, so far away from home. Its connection at the time to a collective history kept resonating in me. However, I did not want the card to be a labyrinth. A maze has many routes, unlike a labyrinth, which has only one exit. Mark Wallinger’s work *Labyrinth*, for London’s Art on the Underground, presented 270 labyrinths within the Tube network. I had worked with Mark Wallinger’s work *Sleeper* in Venice, resulting in the title *Sleepers in Venice*, and I was interested in Wallinger’s reported comment on the works, saying that they were ‘not mazes (confusing, exasperating, easy to get lost in) but labyrinths (one way in, one way out).’³⁰⁴

I also felt that the idiosyncratic universe of *The Arcades Project* was like a maze. I kept making internal connections and finding recurring formulas within excerpts and fragments of my research, as Benjamin seems to reside within these manuscripts that are full of clues. I hinted this at the beginning of *Fragments*, as I present myself inside Lee Bul’s mirrored maze, *Via Negativa II* (Figure 47).

³⁰³ To me, the heavily guarded ‘library’ of the Benedictine Abbey described in *The Name of the Rose* was a metaphor of knowledge. The library equalled the ‘institution’ that not only guarded but also concealed knowledge. ‘Only the librarian has, in addition to that knowledge, the right to move through the labyrinth of the books, he alone knows where to find them and where to replace them, he alone is responsible for their safekeeping.’ Umberto Eco, *The Name of the Rose*, first published in Italy in 1980 (London: Vintage, 2004), p.169.

³⁰⁴ Mark Brown, ‘Tube celebrates 150th birthday with labyrinth art project’, *Guardian*, 7 February 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2013/feb/07/tube-150-birthday-labyrinth-art-project>.



Figure 47 Entering Lee Bul's Via Negativa II, from Fragments.

3.6.2. Numbered cards in the Deck of Cards

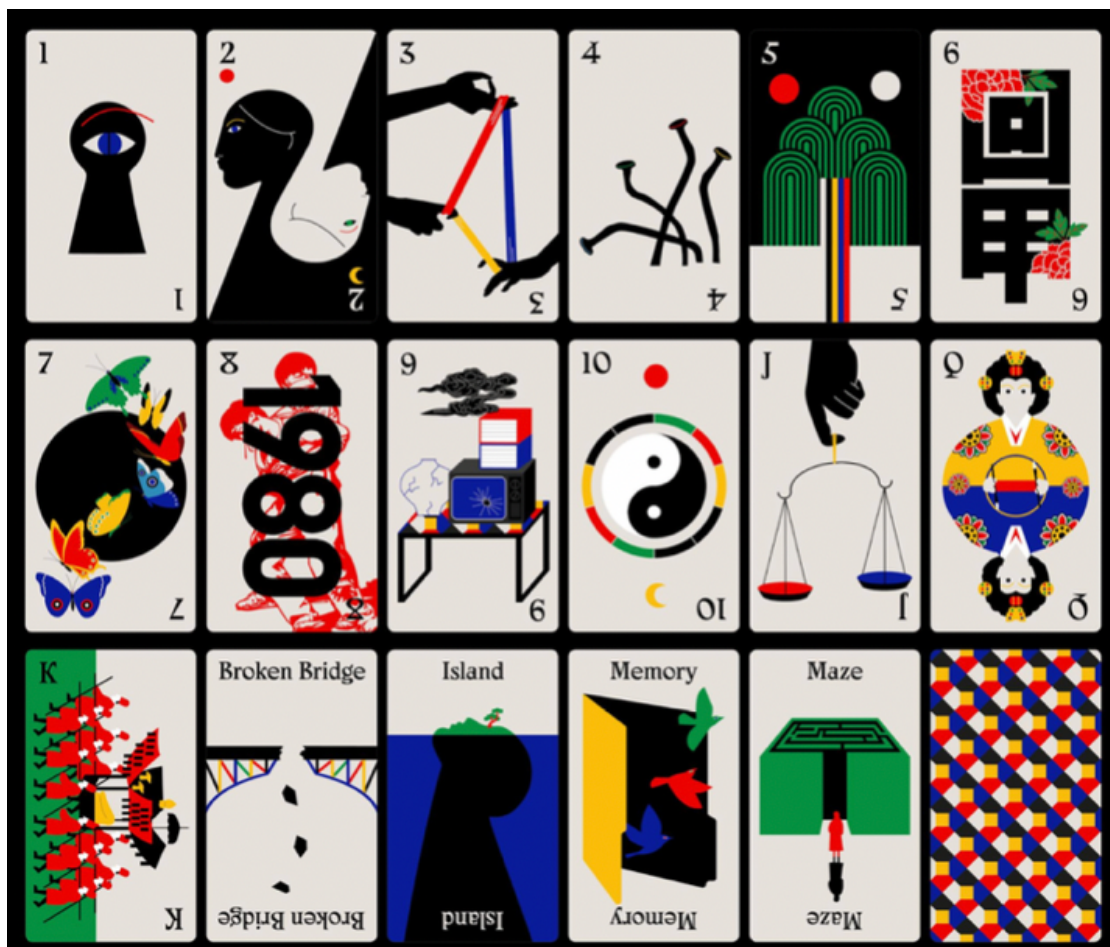


Figure 48 A Deck of Cards, numbers and the suit.

There are thirteen cards, as well as four suits of cards (Figure 48). I wrote the final narration, cross-referencing the hidden meaning of the film, like a curatorial essay one reads at the end of an exhibition. It takes viewers back to the beginning of the film like a circular history, and the number cards again start with number one, signifying the first-person perspective.

When I speak ‘One is for the first pronoun, I’ in *Fragments*, viewers see my hand putting Card 1 down. The card shows one eye, peering out from a keyhole, while a ‘beep’ continues to fill the space of the screen. The screen shows photographs of *Sleepers in Venice* without a curator, but the protagonist of the film now turns back to walk towards the audience. We saw the same scene at the beginning, but the curator had her back to us (Figures 49 & 50).



Figure 49 Card 1 and the narrator of the film.



Figure 50 Two scenes linking the film's beginning and end.

Card 2 shows two faces intertwined, signifying yin and yang (Figure 51). The music transitions from a single beeping sound to the harmony of female and male voices. It also repeats the Olympic Stadium sequence: I assembled shots of the Olympic Stadium at different times, from its projected rendering as it was reported by the media with excitement, the stadium at the 2008 Olympic Games, when Choi Jeong Hwa covered the building with garlands of rubbish, and when the stadium was being built.

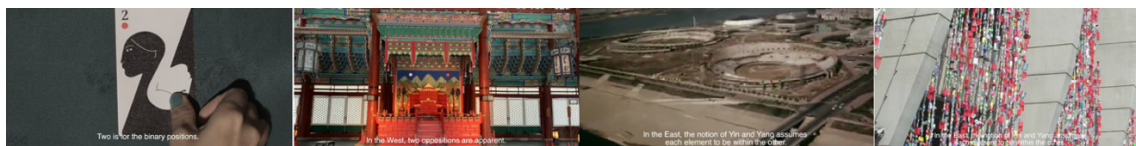


Figure 51 Card 2 and images associated with Yin and Yang.

Similarly, each number is assigned a meaning, and the illustration is the interpretation that the author created and that Yeni Kim further explored: Card 3 is expressed as a ribbon game where three fingers pull the ribbon in tension, Card 4 is represented by four nails that have been hammered in, curved but not yet broken. Hammering a nail is

repeated, signifying that artists' spirits are never broken. With Card 5, the score turns into a pentatonic scale. The five colours in the centre signify the five colours with which Koreans associate the five elements – white, black, yellow, blue and red. In Card 6 the 'cycle' is emphasised with percussion. This changes to Korean musical instruments with various scales for Card 7. When Card 8 is played, the instrumental sounds become 'echoes' of the people. I had a few options for Card 8³⁰⁵ but asked her to change the wood block print of Hanyul, a student who died from bleeding as he was hit by teargas in 1980. Card 9 shows colour televisions that are broken with some of a traditional ceramic vase – see 2.5.2 for the discussion of the 1990s. The Card Q is represented by the face of an imaginary Lady Hyegyeong, Queen of Korea, and 'K' represents the king, the voice of the monarch, also the ambivalent judgement of history, and is taken from a scene of numerous king's parades, as depicted in many *uigwes*. With the Card J, I evoke the notion of the judge, the judge of the history. One can read the narration (Figure 52) as I read these texts in the end, the film connecting dots of the hints that I dotted around. The lateral discussions showcased the ruptures and discrepancies in history while the art discussed revealed the undeniable historical amnesia being revealed by the artists.

I want the viewer to rewatch *Fragments* once they have completed the first viewing of the film. The first scenes with the cards will then make sense, and this film becomes more like mediation. I was thinking of the game of Go, in which 'Hen' players always retrace their routes backwards once the game is over; I hope to reveal deeper meanings without spelling them out in words.

As I try to demonstrate, using familiar props, these thirteen numbers from a deck of cards and the four suits of the cards illustrate my mediation.³⁰⁶ By using Western cards to express this, these numbers are on one level arbitrary, not *a priori*. Still, with symbolic cards I evoke the way the world is governed, the way people used to make sense of natural phenomena and categories of historicisation.

³⁰⁵ Appendix p.29.

³⁰⁶ The four 'faces' of the card, and the thirteen numbers (1, 2, 3...to 10, and J, Q, K make up thirteen numbers) are fifty-two weeks of a year. In the East, five symbols become decimal units of the year, and they are combined with twelve animal signs to make up the sixty years. In Korea, even now, we use both calendars. A deck of cards normally has 52 cards, representing the number of weeks in a year.

One is for the first pronoun 'I'.

The film starts with my voice. In many ways exhibitions always begin with someone's voice, but this voice is abandoned because of the specific framing or the third person subjectivities in which exhibitions are presented. I start the film with my voice to demonstrate a parallel with a history that has always begun from someone's perspective.

Two is for the binary positions. In the West, two oppositions are apparent.

In the East, the notion of Yin and Yang assumes each element to be within the other.

The sun exists alongside with the moon. The moon is the reflection of the sun.

Three Eastern philosophies in harmony. Daoism, Buddhism and Confucianism were once in harmony, but this has been suppressed through the modernisation of the Eastern countries. I also focus on three artists in my research – Park Chan-kyong, Choi Jeong Hwa and Jia Chang.

Four is for the four people who appear in the film who were tortured. The South Korean composer Yun Isang was tortured as he went to North Korea in the 1960s and died in Germany in exile. His music became the basis for Park Chan-kyong's work *Flying*. Cheon Sangbyeong was a poet. Brother Anthony cites one of his poems as the only poem he remembers by heart. Cheon Sangbyeong was completely innocent but was tortured because of something he said. Two artists, Hong Seong Dam and the anonymous painter who answers the prosecutor's interrogation through hypnotherapy, had quite different experiences. Both belonged to Minjung art movement. One continues resistance.

Five is for the five elements of the East. It is expressed in our days of the week: Sunday is the Sun, Monday is the Moon, Tuesday is fire, Wednesday water, Thursday is wood, Friday is the metal and Saturday is the earth. The five peaks were the five elements with the Sun, Yang, and the Moon, Yin, coexisting.

Six is the importance of the 60th anniversary signifying the rebirth. Reincarnation, or the Karma, all contributed to this culture of forgetting well.

Seven is for the seven works representing aesthetics that does not conform to the Western tradition of perspective and sculpture. They are the Korean royal manuscript of 1809, Lee Hyunse's cartoon, a Minjung woodblock print, Shin Yun-bok's genre painting of a bar, Hong Seong Dam's propaganda painting, the Royal screen of Sun, Moon and the Five Peaks and the Daoist painting of the Shangri-la from the 15th century.

Eight is for the year 1980. This is a year I was born, the year of the Gwangju Democratic uprising and the year of the Cartoon Cleansing movement as well as the year *Reality and Evocation* exhibition was shut down.

Nine represents the 1990s, in which the seismic social and political change was happening. Both the rise and fall of the storm called progress was met by Asian financial crisis and the Fall of the Soviet Union.

Ten is for the ten characters of the year that returns. Ten represents ten variations of the yin and yang of the five elements. The numerical equivalent of each year can be identified by the name of the year.

Q is for the Lady Hyegyong whose subjective voice brought me the revelations about what curating is for.

K the King Youngjo who was the most celebrated as well as the most feared King.

J is for the judge, referring to the judgement in the eyes of history. Can artists be different judges of the past? Can artists reveal historical amnesia?

Now we are at the end of this exhibition.

4 years ago, when I began this exhibition, memories were fragmented. This journey has revealed many puzzling pathways. Now I have found a route in this maze but yet, there may be another entry and an exit.

Figure 52 Number narrations – see Appendix for the full narration.

3.7 Curatorial Strategy of *Fragments*

First, an imaginary game played with the Deck of Cards in *Fragments* is a medium that I employed to punctuate my curatorial methodology. Artist-filmmaker Agnès Varda used tarot cards enigmatically in her film *Cléo from 5 to 7* (1961). I mixed the use of ‘number’ cards and ‘tarot’ cards to create a set of meanings. I am interested in the way Christianity has for centuries used numbers to name various kinds of architecture, such as the architecture of the library described in *The Name of Rose*, that is loaded with ‘holy’ numbers emphasising harmony and order, such as ‘five, the number of the zones of the world’.³⁰⁷ I employed my number cards to express the Eastern approach.

As curating can expand by drawing on a range of other disciplines, I used various reiterations: for instance, *Fragments* uses a ‘contrapuntal’ system of montage that brings two disparate spaces together into an insistent proximity. As Max Pensky has observed, Walter Benjamin’s *Arcades Project* was intended to reveal the gradual insinuation of a profoundly oppressive form of cultural life following the economic and political imperatives of a nascent capitalism.³⁰⁸ *Fragments*, as a curatorial project, has many references to artists’ works, various past projects and open-ended performance projects I have learned from while working/reading in the curatorial discipline.³⁰⁹ I tried to make *Fragments* performative and open-ended.

³⁰⁷ ‘Three rows of windows proclaimed the triune rhythm of its elevation, so that what was physically squared on the earth was spiritually triangular in the sky...Eight, the number of perfection for every tetragon; four, the number of the Gospels; five, the number of the zones of the world; seven the number of the gifts of the Holy Ghost.’ Umberto Eco, *The Name of the Rose*, pp.3–4.

³⁰⁸ Max Pensky, Method and Time: Benjamin’s Dialectical Images, in D. Ferris ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Walter Benjamin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 177-198.

³⁰⁹ For instance, discussing *This is*, the project that the poet Stéphane Mallarmé devised, J.P. Martinon in the book *The Curatorial* writes that how the project resembles a ‘total work of art’ as well as a ‘contemporary curatorial project before its time’. In J.P. Martinon, ‘Preface’, *The Curatorial* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013). pp. 1–6.

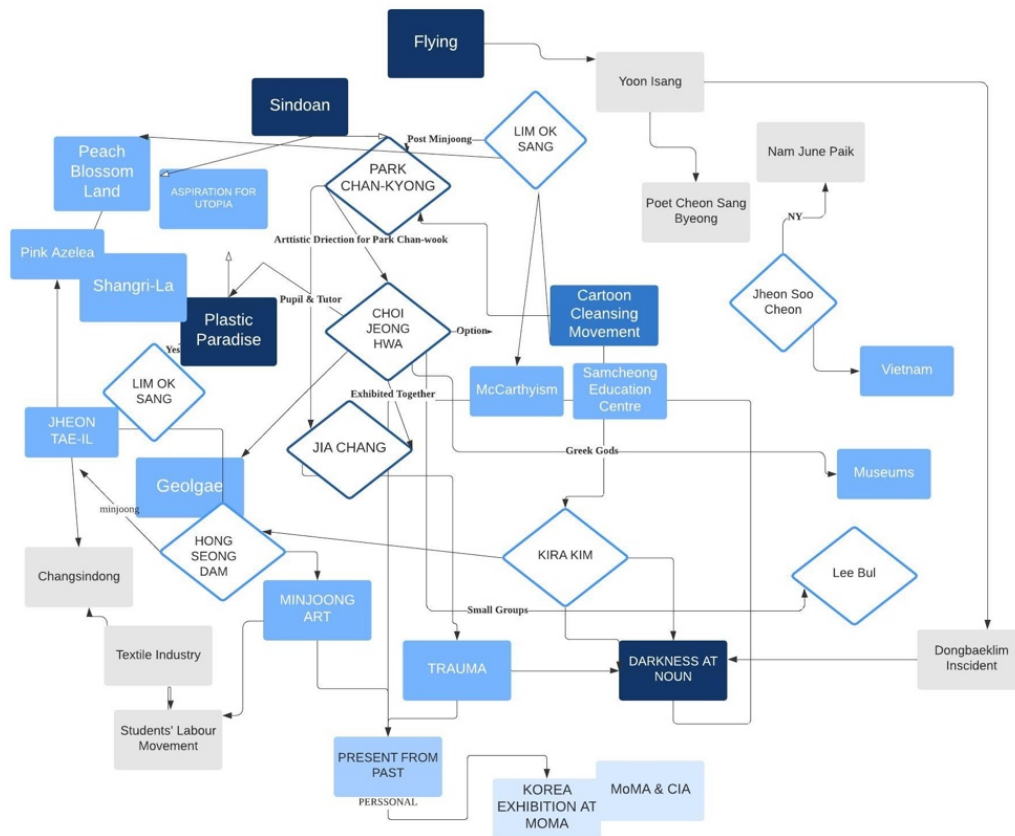


Figure 53 Rhizomic workings through interviews.

Second, *Fragments* includes materials that are normally treated as surplus within a conventional exhibition format. Jean-Paul Martinon and Irit Rogoff write that ‘the curatorial’ means to emphasise a shift from a staging of the event to the actual event itself – ‘its enactment, dramatization and performance’.³¹⁰ In a way the approach of exhibitions is juxtaposing and assembling seemingly disparate sources to enact or perform through artists’ worlds. As Figure 53 shows, in *Fragments* the narrative was developed from picking up concepts and subject matter such as ‘Peach Blossom Land’, ‘Pink Azalea’, ‘*geolgae* paintings’. Paracuratorial is defined by ‘a set of adjacent and auxiliary procedures and practices around and outside the form of the exhibition such as screenings, talks, performances, discussions, publications and other discursive events’.³¹¹ I have tried to weave the stories into one platform – film – by thinking of ways of setting ideas into other curatorial forms besides exhibition-making.

³¹⁰ Jean-Paul Martinon and Irit Rogoff, ‘Preface’ in Martinon (ed.), *The Curatorial: Philosophy of Curating* (Bloomsbury: London, 2013), p. ix.

³¹¹ Simon Sheikh, ‘From Para to Post: The Rise and Fall of Curatorial Reason’, *Springerlin*, XXIII(1, 201), pp. 16–20.

Fragments disturbs all the norms of Korean society while the general population fails to realise that these ‘norms’ were brought about by layers of suppression.

Third, *Fragments* was a response to shifting certainties of mediating art as explored by Irit Rogoff’s *Expanding Field*.³¹² The lecture and the article speak about how the basis for the ways of which knowledge and disciplines are grounded are changing. How it was up for question. Just as I intuitively and professionally felt the need to find new ways to deal with this expanding shift, Rogoff’s writing added to my understanding of how my film is a response to this shift.

³¹² Irit Rogoff, ‘The Expanding Field’, in: Jean-Paul Martinon, ed. *The Curatorial: A Philosophy of Curating* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), pp. 41–48.

3.8 Conclusion for Part 3

My film is an amalgamation and orchestration of modular layers which may superficially appear esoteric. This extrapolates from long-term research stemming from viewpoints informed by postcolonial observations, mixed with transnational fictions³¹³ and narratives that have offered hope to rise up against attractor states of a homogenising worldview. This narrative has been particularly inspired by many autobiographical and autoethnographic accounts. These have all combined to create a theoretical visual essay that is a critical evaluation of exhibition representation – not to reduce it, but to provide alternatives and models to think through.

In *Fragments*, I have historicised the genealogy of Korean art through the lens of my own subjective experience. It is autoethnographical and driven by personal representation of my past. Confusing experience of fragmentation in the present has been felt throughout my curating experience, where I was close to artists' various interpretations. It prompted my belief that artists' subjective experiences could instigate discussions about the intersections of personal and collective standpoints and consequently provide a way to understand the past by interrogating the original suppression of collective memories.

The royal Korean manuscript I studied in the British Library was one of these curatorial interpellations that seemed to represent a memory that had been taken away, suppressed and locked away. *Fragments* starts with this encounter. While I researched the lives and work of three artists, Choi Jeong Hwa, Park Chan-kyong and Jia Chang, further, the leitmotif became clearer. Like mending a *broken bridge*, I wanted to work out an intricate combination of fragments of memories to reinstate the missing link. Sharing the background to stories of an art exhibition is like witnessing a submerged part of an *island*, and I visualised diving underneath as uncovering and learning about the archival research that had gone into the making of artworks/exhibitions. The vast and heterogenous materials laid on the top of each other were not intuitively easy to predict

³¹³ *Vegetarian*, a novel written by Han Kang, shows a protagonist who becomes vegetarian in Korean society. She has a dream one day and despises even eating an egg. She aspires to become a tree. Han Kang, translated by Deborah Smith, *Vegetarian* (London: Portobello Books, 2007).

at first, but each interview or discovery led to another. This Part 3, *memory/medium*, is dedicated to the film as the medium, and how I used a curator's film as a method because I was interested in mitigating my historiography within these suppressed, generational memories. As seen from *Fragments*, artworks like *Manshin* contain haunted images of the past which in retrospect become an alternative memory.

I am aligning my studies to T.J. Demos' book *Return to Postcolony* where European artists, usually using film medium, go back to Africa to reassess the haunting of injustice and abuse. Demos writes:

Against the amnesia and misrecognition that characterises so much of European cultural and political representations, the artists addressed herein might be thought of as conjurers of the 'spectral' ... a term I use to address the haunting memories and ghostly presences that refuse to rest in peace and cannot be situated firmly within presentation.

Like the artists T.J. Demos looked at, artists I looked at used artistic strategies of expressing fragility of the presentation and conjuring up the haunted. Paul O'Neill writes that the rise of conceptual art in the late 1960s led to more experimental curatorial forms.³¹⁴ For me, it was identifying the artistic strategies that made me think through curatorial strategies. *Fragments* is an exhibition in a film, made to provoke the viewer to rethink received knowledge about art, the history of art and the cultural heritage of Korea. For me, the research consisted of examining primary and secondary materials combined with theoretical approaches that help researchers navigate through the vast amount of material like signposts. When the rigour of the research is combined with curatorial approaches and autoethnography, the result, my final film, I would argue, goes beyond the notion of a curator as an author as well as that of research-driven curatorial work.

³¹⁴ O'Neill argues because 'any evaluation of art and its institutions extended beyond mere critique of artwork, and/or self-criticism by artists around autonomy, to include a new form of curatorial criticism focused on the praxis of exhibition organisers, gallerists, critics and curators', the critique of art began to question the ways the curatorial affects the authorship and mediation of artwork. In Paul O'Neill's *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Cultures* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London: The MIT Press, 2012), p. 14.

PART 4. CONCLUSION

An inability to remember the past in Korea was in part caused by a profound attempt to suppress the collective memory, including such aspects as culture, customs and the languages. Korea suffered from multiple suppressions through the division, the Cold War and industrialisation, where a mix of indigenous and imported dogmas were confusingly mixed with cultural ideologies.

This thesis and *Fragments* started with the problematisation of this history and the mediation of the work of Korean artists in an international setting. The lack of context and misinterpretation of contemporary art from Korea not only reflected the history favoured and written by the victors, but also different origins of fundamental beliefs and translatability. While my diverse interest in memory and amnesia brought me to cases of neuroscience regarding how the human brain is uniquely capable of forming vivid yet often confabulated representations of past and future,³¹⁵ artists' spectrums were illustrating worlds that transcend words to create another window to the history with rupture. I was concerned about how the complex narratives emanating from artworks could easily be mistaken for spectacles if not contextualised appropriately. Moreover, advances in computer graphics and popular historical genres make recent 'history' more prosthetic; *Fragments* is a curatorial project working with artists. Thus, the film is not an exhibition in a virtual sphere, but a curator's film that became the method and the form that I want to propose for my PhD.

Through *Fragments*, I came up with how touching on trauma is not just a subject matter, but pain and memories could really speak to wider audiences. And because this subject matter is so powerful and opens up the intangible realm, *Fragments* has created

³¹⁵ Retrograde amnesia refers to the inability to remember the past while anterograde amnesia refers to a loss of the ability to create new memories after the event that caused amnesia. When one asked me whether I was writing about retrograde amnesia with regards to historical amnesia, I remembered the famous case of amnesic patient K.C.'s case. He shed a total loss of episodic memory after a head injury, reported a 'blank' when asked about his personal future. There are recent studies showing that imagining the future depends on much of the same neural machinery that is needed for remembering the past. See Daniel L. Schacter, Donna Rose Addis and Randy L. Buckner, 'Remembering the Past to Imagine the Future: The Prospective Brain', *Nature reviews Neuroscience*, October 2007. Also in Endel Tulving, 'Episodic memory and auto-noesis: Uniquely human?', *The Missing Link in Cognition*, eds Terrace, H. S. & Metcalfe, J., (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp 3-56.

the space for thinking for artists, audience and myself. This space is evident because we are already discussing future projects.³¹⁶

Fragments' narration came fortuitously, and was written and spoken by me. The narration went through many transformations, as did the soundtracks and edits. During the four years of research, the nature of time was at play: Korean President Park was impeached through the Candlelight Revolution, the Third Inter-Korean Summit was anticipated and then completed, the Korean generation who were engaged with the revolutionary causes in the '70s seized power. While I was trying to understand the previous generations' struggles, the present became a different era as the former revolutionaries became conservative, some denouncing the past. The past was being perpetually shaped as I was trying to find precise ways to contextualise culture and history. As the world had shifting knowledge grounds, my roles inside expanding art as discursive format had to adopt serious scholarship, discussion and considerations.

In Part 1, I show how Beth McKillop reattributed a *uigwe* to the correct date in 1995, as the curator of the British Library. The library, which used to be a part of the British Museum, was the same institution that prevented me from seeing the *uigwe*. The discovery of the *uigwe* led to Lady Hyegyong's subjectivity, her voice being reincarnated by Margaret Drabble. Drabble found out about the memoir because Jane Portal, a curator at the British Museum, gave the novelist an English translation of it.³¹⁷ History was being shaped by institutions in unexpected links while the strange fate of the composer Yun Isang was grouped with that of the poet Cheon Sang Byeong in a tragic event known as Dongbaeklim.³¹⁸ Both were tortured on account of this fabricated espionage incident in Berlin. I found about Brother Anthony through Gwangju Biennale's

³¹⁶ These collaborations are ongoing. Musicians are now making a card game based on what each card represents.

³¹⁷ Recounted by Margaret Drabble in an interview with me. I also included Beth McKillop's remark that 'you know the British Museum and Library used to be one'.

³¹⁸ Dongbaeklim means the Eastern Berlin case and refers to the coded 'incident' when many students and artists were captured and tortured. On 8 July 1967, the KCIA (Korea Intelligence Agency) published a list of spies and claimed that around 194 students in France and Germany were involved in espionage on the side of North Korea. Byung-ook Ahn, 'The Advancement of Truth Commissions on Past Affairs Along with Democratization in Korea', *The Culture of Dissenting Memory*, ed. Véronique Tadjo (London: Routledge, 2019).

theme *Ten Thousand Lives* – which was a collection of poems by Ko Un that he wrote during his imprisonment. Ko Un thought he should remember all the names because it makes history, and this collection was translated by Brother Anthony. Massimiliano Gioni, a curator from Italy, chose the title as the theme for the Gwangju Biennale;³¹⁹ In an exhibition I was curating in Venice, Hong Seong-dam was on everyone’s lips for his *Sewol Owul*. Twenty years ago, an anonymous painter was tortured because of Hong Seong-dam; while I was seeing *Darkness at Noon*, the hypnotised patient cried, ‘you knew that Hong Seong-dam was a spy’. This entanglement of unexpected encounters, artistic interventions, discordant voices, coincidences and discoveries make the history of suppression, epitomised by the broken bridge.

Part 2 deconstructs why *Fragments* interwove exhibitions as important testimonies and archives. Interviewees and artists have shaped this PhD research in many ways, including sharing their behind-the-scenes stories and memories. Making these moments into part of the experience has been my goal. In this part, discussion of how complications are revealed through haunting, enactment and transformative practices is mixed with conventional misconceptions in the mediation of Korean artists, starting with Nam June Paik, Kim Ku-lim, Jheon Soo-cheon, and Park Seo-bo representing older generations who, in their own ways, contributed emerging waves of discussion on nationalism, the role of art and ‘Koreanness’. With a vast number of primary sources from interviews and research, many related to curators’ and museum directors’ testimonials, the submerged body of the exhibitions – what actually supported the displayed works of art on view – becomes an alternative narrative in which I was interested. The fragmentary nature of the literary sources, and the poetic associations and jargon used by artists have become the subject of intensive contextualisation. When assembled together one can see how what Park Chan-kyong dubbed ‘fake modernism’ can be understood. It was a hybrid form that was entangled with so much suppressed discourse that will transcend annals, diaries and memoirs or academic journals.

I have investigated and expanded my curatorial knowledge and wanted a pause from continuing to make exhibitions to explore a research question that will be timely as well

³¹⁹ *The Colors of Dawn: Twentieth Century Korean Poetry*, Frank Stewart Series Editor, Brother Anthony of Taize, Chung Eun-gwi Guest Editors, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2015).

as conceptually challenging. The PhD was at first challenging and opaque, and marked a radical transition from being an active exhibition-maker. The effort to conceptualise a unique curatorial strategy to prove that the existing historiography is rooted in text, the interdisciplinary tactic of combining graphics, cinematography, filmmaking and musical composition was the result of co-production, shared authorship and collective decision-making. *Fragments* is an open-ended but detailed manifestation, evoking an alternative history, a curator's historiography and context that are rooted in the way Korean culture and art have been mediated. Assembling a wider range of heterogeneous materials as a logical argument to create a journey that can help a transnational audience to understand a phenomenon: mediating Korean art. Margaret Drabble, when she watched *Fragments*, commented that the film was 'meditational'. I was at first inspired by the term 'essay film', which has become increasingly used in film criticism to describe a self-reflective and self-referential documentary cinema that blurs the line between fiction and non-fiction. It is not an essay film, but it was the starting point. It is a curator's film, as an expanded form of exhibition.

Part 3 thus demonstrated how I put forward a constellation of meaning that no single art form could have generated, working just like a room filled with artworks could have done. However, it went further because, based on trust and conversations, I kept on pushing for deeper motivations from artists, diachronic materials were mixed with commentaries, and different genres made me push the curatorial limits with collaborators. These aims led to the film you see. With graphic symbolism, like the Deck of Cards designed by Yeni Kim, the audience can understand the thematic connections by addressing their initial curiosity and their own answers. The unique testimonies that came from 50 interviews have become a resource with which I can respond to the most telling issues, utilising work that fuses different materials, genres, disciplines and traditions. This resulted in realising that the scope of history was inherently larger than the historiography that I had initially considered. It contested a text-only historiography by reiterating nuances and composing scenes with visual and sonic expression: the research reveals how the trauma and memories of austere times transmit to younger generations and leave scars that are personal as well as collective.

Art that is transformative and multilayered is translated culturally, and this aligns with Lyotard's dismissal of metanarratives, reflecting what Derrida termed the apparition of 'spectres'. They then appear and combine with Eastern and Western philosophies – highlighting how what we know as 'the norm' could be challenged by the world the artists depict. The film points to discourses governed by a centuries-old power structure. The simplified interpretations of the Eastern world have been the result of cultural propaganda and power relations. This paved the way to seek a new curatorial method that defies logocentric limitation, which was a flexible process of filmmaking combining various archives, interviews and audio-visual materials into a highly symbolic curated project. It started by acknowledging the gaps between languages, images and perception. This constellatory poetics of transience and openness was in fact a part of the philosophy of history I came to understand. The suppressed stories of real lives and how artists reveal them, the visceral spectra of artists, are ingrained with generations of pain and trauma, and become knowledge. They created the boundaries that made me imagine a new paradigm to think through.

My research will become one way to understand and contextualise local artists within an ever more connected art world, internationally; art in relation to collective memory and trauma, and the translatability of culture and new curatorial methods. The film and the thesis can be read and watched simultaneously, while translatability can be deciphered through the written and the practical part of my research.

This thesis is designed to be delivered alongside the film *Fragments*, as a critical evaluation of exhibition representation, to provide a theoretical alternative and a curatorial model to think through and apply in future. My film hopes to contest a homogenising world, offering postcolonial, othered observations that stem from transnational narratives. It has offered me a critical evaluation of exhibition-making, providing alternatives and models to think through.