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IN SOUTH KOREA SINCE 2009

### **Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8n62t0tj>

### **Journal**

Critical Planning, 23(0)

### **Author**

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### **Publication Date**

2017

### **DOI**

10.5070/CP8231038134

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# SKILLS OF OCCUPATION AND TECHNE OF SQUATTING: SIT-IN PROTESTS IN SOUTH KOREA SINCE 2009

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## **Introduction to Neoliberalism in South Korea**

David Harvey (2007) defined neoliberalism as the combination of several factors: monetization, globalization, and privatization. The events following 9/11 and the Great Recession reinforced the totalitarianism of the state in pursuing its project of privatization and expansionary war industry (Wolin, 2008). In South Korea, the continuing frantic pace of urbanization supported by the state exacerbates these trends. Following the logic of “primitive accumulation” (Luxemburg, 1913) that transcends every stage of capitalism, the state exploits the country’s shared resources. The first decade of the 21st century saw redevelopment—gentrification—reach its zenith in South Korea. Its economic paradigm between 2000 and 2010 encompassed two bubbles, the first caused by financial openness and the second by an overheated real estate market. As a result, urban lots have increased almost threefold in the nearly since 1960 (Cho, 2010). State-led redevelopment provided two million homes

from 1976 to 2010, and today the urbanization level tops 90%. However, only 8% to 15% of the original residents could settle after the redevelopment. Therefore, higher income residents replaced 85% of low-income residents. Land prices rose between 48% and 258% after the redevelopment (2004 to 2008), escalating urban inequity (Korea Urban regeneration total information system, 2011). The state continues to invest heavily in urban infrastructure, enabling corporations through the privatization of key services, such as utilities, health insurance, and transportation systems (Ji, 2011). The quality of labor is also getting fragile; half of the laborers are precarious temporary workers (Korea Employment Relations Association, 2013), and the gap between the highest and the lowest income is the second biggest among the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries (OECD, 2014).

As equity in South Korean society is increasingly threatened, there are countless squats and sit-in demonstrations against these neoliberal processes. When the people raise their voices against injustice and inequity, activists and civic actors often choose sit-in demonstrations as their mode of advocacy. Most of these demonstrations take place on the streets or in open spaces. The police permitted more than 12,690 demonstrations in 2014 in Seoul alone (Korea National Police Agency, 2014).

Franco Berardi (2012) argues that sit-ins, squats, and the occupation of space are inefficient strategies of demonstrations because neoliberal society is made of invisible, not physical, capital. *If this is the case, then why do South Korean activists continue to occupy urban spaces?* Even though Berardi's argument is persuasive, sit-in protests remain the dominant tactic of nonviolent movements. There are four hypotheses to explain the persistence of this strategy. First, because neoliberal economic systems are strongly connected to real estate (Harvey, 2012), privatization of public spaces, and exploitation of the Third World's territories and nature, occupations reveal the hidden foundations of these methods of capitalist accumulation. Second, South Korean protesters believe in direct democracy rather than a representative democracy. Third, South Korean protesters have a long history of occupying streets and public spaces against colonialism and dictatorship, and the underpinning of modern-day protests is a collective memory of gathering in open spaces. Fourth, demonstrators can stop the flow of traffic, which hinders the rhythm of urban life and subsequently the flow of capitalism; in following this strategy, sit-in protesters can expose the existence of the neoliberal economic systems to the public. To examine these hypotheses, this article will first analyze how the state and corporations have plundered the commons and

how civil society has fought for them through sit-ins and squats.

The “commons” I refer to in this paper are the rivers, the mountains, and the wind—assets that cannot be owned by anyone. Michael Hardt (2010: 136), writes:

Here it is useful to distinguish between two types of the common, both of which are object of neoliberal strategies of capital ([and] this can serve as an initial definition of “the common”). On the one hand, the common names the earth and all the resources associated with it: the land, the forests, the water, the air, minerals, and so forth. This is closely related to 17th century English usage of “the commons (with an ‘s’).” On the other hand, the common also refers, as I have already said, to the results of human labor and creativity, such as ideas, language, affects, and so forth. You might think of the former as the “natural” common and the latter as the “artificial” common, but really such divisions between natural and artificial quickly break down. In any case, neoliberalism has aimed to privatize both these forms of the common.

### **Skills of Occupation and *Techne* of Squatting**

In this essay, I use the phrase “skills of occupation” to denote the methods used by the South Korean state in association with corporations to plunder the commons as a geographic stratum over the past decade. To avoid confusion, I refer to the methods of squatting a citizen uses, as a form of direct action to oppose this current, as the “*techne* of squatting”. This section explores in greater detail the implications of “skills of occupation” and “*techne* of squatting”. Crucially, the plundering of the commons cannot be reduced to a mere economic issue, nor should it be regarded simply as a kind of class conflict. It is impossible to understand the frenzy that grips Korea today simply through the lens of equal rights in its cities. One of the biggest issues is the failure to empathize with the pain of others, an exclusion of one’s neighbors that is akin to racism, and the vanishing capacity for empathy, which are not traceable simply to inequality. It consists of many levels, including the death of art and the humanities, a lack of practical experience with the ecosystem and nature, and the absence of a general cultural style of the kind described by Henri Lefebvre as an overall culture of living (Lefebvre, 1974).

The reason I focus specifically on sit-in demonstrations—among the possible forms of collective behavior—is that they open possibilities for the sharing of space, regeneration of actual sense, and experimentation with direct

democracy. Making South Korea into a society of entities who are sensitized to one another requires long-term, practical efforts to change the community sensibility, to protect commonality, and to transfer modes of living. Programs like Seoul's village making are quite popular today, but communes and communities are not formed through policy. If we envision a different kind of community, if we are to make it a reality, then we have to reflect on the power of the voluntary communities that are rising today—and on the meaning they hold. We have to understand urban development methodology and the land-occupation methods of grassroots movements—as well as the politics that inform them—if projects like “eco-cities” and “village making” are to be more than gentrification efforts and do more than create new gated communities. It is a matter for in-depth examination, but for reasons of space, I provide here a general overview.

### **Skills of Occupation**

South Korea today faces a number of crises: a democratic crisis, an economic crisis, an ecological crisis, and a crisis of human dignity. We find reverberations of these crises in the suicide rate, which is the world's highest, and in the near-daily occurrence of inhumane, unthinkable tragedies like the April 2014 sinking of the ferry Sewol, which claimed more than 300 lives (Choi, 2015).

The 2003 expansion of the high-speed train network required the boring of 85 tunnels on the Seoul–South Gyeongsang line alone, depleting Cheonseong Mountain, the country's only high marsh. The Saemangeum Restoration Project claimed its largest tidal flat.<sup>1</sup> The Four Major Rivers Restoration Project, launched in 2009, resulted in the disappearance of 67% of riverine wetlands; dam construction resulted in more than 600 km of rivers being legally turned into the non-flowing reservoirs, yet the Korea Water Resources Corporation now plans to build another 15 large-scale dams. Even after the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster in Japan, Korea plans to build more nuclear power plants. These projects are only part of an ongoing parade of massive engineering efforts taking place as “state projects”—new cities, golf courses, airports, and so forth. The question that emerges is this: how has this society managed to rationalize actions that seem to defy common sense?

Antonio Gramsci characterized the modern state as the construction of

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1. “Saemangeum” refers to an estuarine tidal flat in the southwestern part of the Korean peninsula. The Saemangeum Reclamation Project was launched as a national project in 1991 to reclaim a large coastal area of 401 km<sup>2</sup> by constructing a dyke that is 33 km in length. The final dyke enclosure in April 2006 has transformed the tidal flat into lake and land (Cheol-Ho, 2008).

the “imposition of political society and consent of civil society” (Gramsci, 1971). This process of gaining civil society’s consent to the plundering of the commons that I call “skills of occupation” may also be termed “strategies of rationalization.” Of the various hegemonic concepts Gramsci proposed, this process overlaps most with what he referred to as the “method for constructing a system of national governance.” I use the term “occupation” here because the plundering of the commons is an extension of the colonial system of occupation of non-European states since the 17th century. Colonial occupations of Europe and the United States from the 17th to 20th centuries became a foundation of today’s global inequality. (Mikander, 2016; Seliger, 2009) “Occupy” may be the same word that is used in protest movements such as Occupy Wall Street, but it is employed in the opposite sense. Indeed, a number of people who took part in the Occupy movement raised concerns along similar lines. The word is a product of imperialism, and its use in a movement for justice and the restoration of public service is itself a contradiction. Some of Occupy Wall Street participants were aware of this but were unable to find another word to counter it (Blumenkranz, 2011). It suffices to say that word choices are crucial to the fate of any movement for justice. In this section, I examine some of the chief strategies by which the state, corporate power, and political forces loot the commons. I focus solely on four of the strategies: the enactment of supralegal laws, occupying language, turning resistance into the *homo sacer* (Agamben, 1998), and the “gated community (Bauman, 2000).”

### *Supralegal Law: The Special Law in South Korea*

“Special laws” enable nearly all urban and nonurban developments in South Korea. These laws effectively exist above the law in defiance not only of ordinary laws, environment preservation laws, and cultural heritage protection laws that restrict indiscriminate development in the country, but also of constitutionally granted citizen residential rights, property rights, health rights, and international agreements such as the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. In the early 2000s, the government was labeled as “democratizing” in practical terms, but it failed in practice to balance the natural environment with the human presence. Former president Roh Moo-hyun’s administration (2003 to 2008), in particular, enacted some 50 special laws pertaining to special local districts, enterprise cities, innovation cities, administrative multipurpose cities, and Free Economic Zones for the sake of “balanced development” (Jeon, 2003). The following administration, of Lee Myung-bak (2008 to 2013), reached the apex of development-oriented special laws with the implementation of the Electric Source Development Promotion Act and the Special Act on Hydrophilic Zone Utilization. The latter legislation, in particular,

designated the area around four of the country's major rivers as "hydrophilic zones," permitting local governments and local public enterprises to promote tourism and build leisure facilities, housing, and distribution and industrial facilities. Two kilometers of land on either side of a 3,002 km stretch of rivers was developed, for an area totaling 12,008 km<sup>2</sup>, or about 12% of the entire area of South Korea. Sixty thousand farmers were forcibly relocated under the Special Act on Hydrophilic Zone Utilization, and the available land for vegetable farming was reduced by 20% from its 2010 levels (Kim, 2013). Farmers tilling the rich soils along the banks were forced out by the special law for allegedly "contaminating" the river, but passage of the law made way for the building of facilities for tourism, leisure, residential, distribution, and industry.

### *Occupying Language*

Terms like "green growth" and "eco-city" pose their own problems. Green growth does not create a utopia of South Korea but another type of dystopia. These days, creators of the "new cities" have sought to counter opposition to rampant development by renaming themselves "eco-cities"; we even find that name, and "green growth," applied in cases like Songdo and Saemangeum, the building of which relies on the utter devastation of entire ecosystems.

### *Skills of Exclusion: Creating the Homo Sacer*

Giorgio Agamben (2005), borrowing a definition from Carl Schmitt, described the sovereign individual as the "he who decides on the state of exception" (1). He saw the biopolitical meaning of this "exception-hood" as a fundamental structure whereby the law seduces the living by suspending its own validity. In the early 2000s, the online generation received its information via the Internet as it responded to supranational neoliberal governance frameworks like free-trade agreements and agreements of the G8 [Group of Eight] countries that enabled international acts of plunder. States and companies used police force as an agent of suppressions, which triggered a major backlash. The 9/11 terrorist attacks, however, would offer a new avenue for the state/corporate governance methodology: security.

Labeling someone a "terrorist" activated a supra-legal authority to deprive that person not just of civil rights but of all rights as a human being. The blatant methods used to strip people of rights in the wake of 9/11 were almost without precedent (Wolin, 2008). Agamben began paying attention to the Patriot Act (enacted by the U.S. Congress in 2001) and the internment camp at Guantanamo Bay. Individuals became "bare lives"—alive, yes, but without any rights. He dubbed the Guantanamo prisoner "*homo sacer*," or "accursed

man.” Giving the example of Guantanamo, he offered the term as a description of the state faced by one with no rights, someone whose very life was in the hands of others (Agamben, 1998).

In truth, we are surrounded by many prisons without bars. South Korea may not have internment camps, but it has adopted invisible “skills of exclusion,” such as when demolition protesters and striking workers are labeled “terrorists” and effectively deprived of their status as citizens. The Yongsan tragedy in 2009<sup>2</sup> and the occupation of the Ssangyong Motor<sup>3</sup> factory provide illustrations of the ways in which the South Korean government deprives resisting citizens of their civil rights. In Yongsan, ordinary merchants suddenly saw their stores taken away for a redevelopment project, the “Yongsan International Business Zones.” Faced with demolition, protesters seized the building where they worked and attempted to fight the development. In January 2009, several tenants went up in the structure in subzero weather to fend off hired thugs with Molotov cocktails. At around 4:00 in the morning, police sent in a commando squad specializing in terrorist threats. For reasons as yet undetermined, a fire broke out; five protesters and one police officer lost their lives. The police then proceeded to “make off with” the bodies. That same year, workers at the Ssangyong Motor factory in Pyongyang took it over after abruptly being notified that they were being laid off. Instead of trying to resolve the problem peacefully, the government sent in a commando squad, which deployed flesh-melting tear gas and tear gas guns to quash the occupation; they also named the protesters terrorists. Later, 25 of the workers took their own lives. They were confined to their prison without bars not just by the police or the authorities but also by the entities that excluded them from the community. This phenomenon is what I refer to as the “gated community.”

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2. Around 5:00 in the morning on January 19, 2009, several tenants and organizers occupied a building in the Yongsan redevelopment area in Seoul, South Korea. They fortified its roof and stockpiled homemade weapons and supplies, preparing to undergo a long siege by police. At 6:45 a.m. on the 20th, the brief siege came to a sudden end as police commandoes were lowered to the roof of the building in a cargo container. That moment, friction between the iron container and the rooftop surface resulted in flames, igniting almost 370 gallons of paint thinner on the fortified roof, and the building was quickly consumed in flames. Five protesters and one police officer were killed in the blaze (Lee & Anderson, 2010).

3. From May 22 until August 5, 2009, a core of approximately one thousand worker militants at the Ssangyong Motor Company in Pyeongtaek, South Korea, occupied the plant and withstood a 77-day siege in a failed attempt to prevent mass layoffs. The employers used police, thugs, and scabs in a quasi-military attack on the plant, which the workers repeatedly repelled with slingshots, crowbars, and Molotov cocktails. The Ssangyong strike was the most militant worker action in South Korea in many years. Many workers from nearby factories joined the struggle and helped defend the plant. Even though the struggle ended in defeat and was followed by major lawsuits and legal action against many strikers, the serious attempt at a class-wide strategy breaking out of the isolation of a single factory may spark other struggles to expand further (Goldner, 2009).



*Horizontal Violence: The Gated Community*

Perhaps the most fundamental and crucial of occupational skills is the use of the media and educational reproduction to cultivate human beings who are focused on economic value, or corporate individuals who are skilled in self-help and competition. When several of these individuals come together, the result is the gated community. This is not the “vertical violence” perpetrated by state or corporate authorities but everyday violence instantiated among the citizens of communities and cities—a violence that operates alongside the vertical violence, and the type that we must be wary of. Lee Chung-yeon, who served four years in prison despite being a victim who lost his father in the Yongsan tragedy, pinpoints two areas of focus at the heart of the Yongsan issue: the violence of the state, and the battle for survival rights. Six years have passed since the tragedy, yet no compensations have been adopted for the tenants’ businesses, and the violence by the state has not stopped. The most important thing to note here, though, is that even if the state decides to apply the “terrorist” label to the Yongsan protesters, that framing would not succeed if nobody recognized the frame. The real problem is the “gated neighbor”: the person who saw the protesters, saw the people waging their struggle, and had no qualms about calling them “unreasonable” or “a mob.” One time, I was riding in a taxi in front of the burned-out remnants of the Namildang Building in Yongsan, and the driver looked over at the building before coldly saying, “That’s what you get for being unreasonable. It’s their own fault.” I encountered similar, equally nonsensical attitudes at the Yongsan District Office and on the Internet. I use the term “gated community” to refer specifically to ways in which the people in the city who are seen as posing a potential threat to our interests are treated: as if they were criminals. It is a bit different from the purely geographic sense of the term, but it is also one of the most important issues in cities today. As the idea of “community” fades away or gets twisted in people’s minds, the gated community is becoming a way of excluding those who do not meet the standards of the middle class—those who are deemed unqualified, which could be considered a kind of racism. (Bauman, 2000)

The people who live in cities strive to gain status by establishing regional distinctions in their identity. Housing complex brands stretch from north to south across the Han River in Seoul. As residents, we divide and discriminate constantly according to the area we inhabit. We create our own ghettos, safe and undisturbed, and we express a powerful desire to interact only within their confines. We block access between the smaller and larger apartment blocks; we put up iron gates to keep the public housing occupants out of

the brand-name apartment avenues. Some people “belong”; from others we ask for security. Street stall operators have become obstacles on our sidewalks. The homeless have become people without any human rights. The Yongsan protesters, then—who opposed a gentrification effort that was an act of violence to them—were seen as terrorists rather than neighbors in an unfortunate predicament. This horizontal hate is the true shame of the city, the thing it tries so hard to hide. And the task that lies before the resisters of today is to change this gated sensibility among urbanites, the urban grammar that urbanites have internalized, the endless distinctions among “you” and “me,” “normal” and “abnormal.”

### **The *Techne* of Squatting**

For the purposes of this paper, the phrase the “*techne* of squatting” comprises the methods employed in social movements against inhuman neoliberalistic governance. The previous section revealed the thorough and powerful workings of neoliberal governance. Together, the state and large corporations hold sway over a system that depends on money, the media, and the unwilling participation of subordinate subjects who are well versed in exclusion and competition.

It is impossible to cover all the movements in South Korea here, but I would like to focus on the candlelight protests of 2008 (the movement against the United States–Korea Free Trade Agreement), Yongsan and Duriban (the anti-gentrification movement), the Ssangyong Motor workers’ anti-layoff movement, and the Hope Bus movement (the 2011 protests against the massive layoffs at Hanjin Heavy Industries). Those movements are diverse in purpose, but sit-in and squatting were the main tactics used in all.

The use of the sit-in is common to nearly all the campaigns in South Korea. To participants, its use may seem obvious, but they always try to hold down spaces that are symbolic in regard to their battles. The Ssangyong Motor workers pitched tents in front of the Daehan Gate in downtown Seoul and fought fiercely to defend them. Some of protesters climbed cranes, chimneys, and transmission towers, even though doing so was dangerous.

So why choose sit-ins and squats as protest methods? Sit-ins and squats are difficult. You have to fight the police and hired thugs. You have to live somewhere that is not your home. It’s exhausting. You don’t have any electricity, any running water or bathrooms, when you’re living under plastic sheets; you can’t really feed yourself. You don’t have heat or air conditioning, so you’re always fighting temperature extremes. Summers in South Korea bring

temperatures of 90° to 100°F; in the winter it falls to 0°F. There is very little of what one might call “good weather.” The questions I explore in this following section are how and why resisters opt for occupation in spite of such extreme circumstances, how they still manage to pull people together into one space. Why do occupations keep happening, and what kinds of communities and politics emerge there?

### *Do Sit-In Protests Work?*

Berardi argued that the Seattle counter-globalization movements<sup>4</sup> never went beyond ethical declaration because they had failed to explain how globalization and exploitation are linked. (Berardi, 2011: 123) In another essay, Berardi criticizes the riots in London suburbs in 2011, when mobs burned banks and police cars. He argues that such acts were useless because financial power is not located in physical buildings but in the abstract connections between numbers, algorithms, and information. (Berardi, 2012: 53) He writes that neoliberal society is built not on physical space but on numbers :

The bourgeoisie, which was once in control of the economic scene of modern Europe, was a strongly territorialized class, linked to material assets; it could not survive without relationships to territory and community. The financial class which has taken the reins of the European political machine has no attachment either to territory or to material production, because its power and wealth are founded on the total abstraction of digital finance. (Berardi, 2012: 51)

As a consequence, the exploitation inherent in neoliberalism is accomplished more through symbols, language, and numbers. The Occupy Movement against financial capital was therefore a contradiction, finding its expression in the occupation of a physical space: Zuccotti Park and the streets that are the locales of power in the bourgeois age. Instead, Berardi finds critical possibility in WikiLeaks, the information-hacking movement.

WikiLeaks has displayed the infinite potency of the collective networked intelligence. The unleashing of the creative force of the general intellect is the momentous event that Julian Assange has been able to orchestrate. The activation of the potency of this connected intelligence, autonomously from its capitalist use, is the

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4. The massive protests at the Third Ministerial Meeting of the World Trade Organization in November 1999 resulted from broad and accelerating changes in global social and political relations. Many protesting groups had been involved in previous struggles for global economic justice that shaped their identities and strategies in Seattle. (Smith, 2001)

lesson WikiLeaks has to offer. And the new generation of rebels will find in this lesson a way to the autonomization and self-organization of the general intellect. (Berardi, 2012: 142).

Here, Berardi explores the possibilities of non-spatial occupation, as exemplified by WikiLeaks, the hackers of Anonymous, and the intelligence leaks of Edward Snowden (Berardi, 2012). In short, the single most defining characteristics of neoliberalism is capitalization, financial power has become deterritorialized, and the “occupation” of algorithms is now a more effective means of resistance against financial capital than occupying streets or buildings. The Occupy movements in New York and Europe, the 2008 candlelight protests in South Korea, and the recent demonstrations in Turkey all fall short of what Berardi described as fundamental change.

For all this, collective movements involving the occupation of spaces continue all over the world. Although they may have devolved into chaos now, the grassroots demands for equality and freedom born of populist rallies in the public squares of the Middle East during the Arab Spring and Tunisian Revolution did succeed in changing regimes in Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya and in putting pressure on countries. The list of occupation movements around the world is too long and diverse to describe. I cannot say those attempts are all in vain. In *Direct Action and Democracy Today*, April Carter (2005) describes the occupation of spaces as one method of direct action, typically manifesting as a response to a democratic deficit and a sense of frustration among citizens. The “sit-in” as a concept does not lend itself to precise dictionary definition; it only came into being as a product of longstanding grassroots resistance, and sit-ins vary widely by culture and context.

### *The Meaning of Sit-Ins and Squats*

The question remains: *why does this form of protest persist in the age of financial capitalism?* There are several possible reasons.

First, sit-ins expose the hidden foundations of capitalist accumulation. Neoliberal ideology does not consist in “finance” alone. Capitalization is obviously one of the chief characteristics of neoliberalism, but it doesn’t explain everything. As Harvey notes, neoliberalism is an economic, political, and psychological ideology that takes on different forms in different countries and geographic contexts; we find different economic structures in the Southern and Northern hemispheres, in developing and developed countries. The issue in neoliberalism is one of geographically unequal accumulation (Harvey, 2000). In countries like South Korea and China, engineering and

construction (based in the looting of the commons) still make up a large portion of capital increase as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP). In 2009, construction projects accounted for 19.7% of the country's GDP, the highest rate among the OECD countries (K.-W. Park, 2010). This is why physical-space-based resistance in developing countries like South Korea, or in other states with aggressive development, exposes the concealed foundations of capitalist accumulation.

Second, sit-ins mean surrendering the “urban body”—the daily life of the city. Movements and demonstrations exist to share a message with others, but there are actually four parties involved in that message. The first is the self. The second is the authority that is being battled. Third is the activist community, other practical agents of resistance who may be able to help. Fourth, there is the undefined multitude of citizens who might become aware of the protest. The conditions of occupation are “anti-urban.” That is to say that they are a symbolic rejection of the urban body, the city infrastructure, which includes waterworks, electricity, gas, and restrooms. These conditions represent and reproduce the suffering of those living the urban life; they present images that force others to think. Physical occupation signals that the demands are important enough for people to be willing to live in such extreme circumstances, which engenders sympathy. One example is Kim Jin-suk's 2011 occupation of the No. 85 crane at the Hanjin Heavy Industries and Construction shipyard. She was a 51-year-old labor activist who protested 400 job cuts announced by the chief executive officer of Hanjin Heavy Industries and Construction, confining herself in the cab of crane No. 85, a huge industrial apparatus in Young-do in the Pusan city in South Korea. Kim's protest lasted more than 300 days (Eom, 2011).

Third, sit-ins remind people that land—the commons—is fundamentally outside anyone's ownership. Sit-ins force us to ask who has a right to the earth. The greater the number of people taking part in an occupation, the more people become aware of the fact that the land belongs not to any one person but to everyone.

I happened to be staying in Istanbul in 2013 and took part in an urban-development protest in Taksim Square. Although there were a number of reasons for the Turkish uprising, including the desire for democracy and resistance against authoritarian Islamist governments and fascist treatment of the Kurds, the chief factor was a desire to protect a common space, Gezi Park. In short, “Occupy Gezi Park,” as some called it, was fundamentally a question of who actually owns space.

Fourth, sit-ins encourage contemplation of the meaning of homelessness and the separation of humans from the land. The senior citizens of Miryang<sup>5</sup> waged a fierce protest over losing their homes and farmland to transmission towers that went up in their hometown. The people of Miryang—and of Naesongcheon, a riverside farming village displaced as a result of the Four Major Rivers Restoration Project; Dumulmeori, another riverside organic farming village displaced as a result of the Four Major Rivers Restoration Project; Gangjeong Village, a village located in Jeju island that was destroyed during construction of a naval base—force us to consider the attachments and nostalgic feelings that we possess toward spaces, things that cannot be reduced to matters of compensation or economics. They (the senior citizens of Miryang and activists of Naeseong, Dumulmeori, Gangjeong) are subjects confronting issues that are fundamentally lost to the urban residents of today. Martin Heidegger used the term “*Heimatlosigkeit*” to describe the age in which we live today. The literal translation is “homelessness” or “unhomeness” (in the sense of not belonging, of being estranged); it may be that this primitive element, land, and the temporary communities that arise there offer us a path toward overcoming the limits of our sensibilities.

Fifth, the “sit-in protest spaces” are places for experimenting with new politics. They are the products of collective action, attempts to restore the occupied land to common hands. Voluntary communities arise out of the will of the many who seek to preserve the spaces; sometimes, direct democracies emerge within them. We have seen such spaces of liberation in history, and in modernity. From large-scale settings like the Paris Commune, in 1871, and Occupy Wall Street to the smaller-scale occupations of *Duriban* restaurant squat and Mari Café squat in Seoul—protesters have sought, internally at least, to achieve politics of equality and autonomy. *Duriban*, a small noodle soup restaurant, sits along one of the busiest commercial streets near Hongik University in Seoul. On June 8, 2011, Ahn Jong-yuh, the owner of *Duriban* and her husband Yoo Chae-rim, reached an agreement with a construction company over compensation and relocation (S. Park, 2011). They squatted for 531 days after the couple was evicted from their restaurant for a redevelopment project on Christmas Eve in 2009. This movement was significant in

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5. About 100 elderly villagers of the southeastern city Miryang, in South Korea, protested against the proposed building of 52 transmission towers. The Korean government still wants to build more nuclear plants, even after the Fukushima tragedy, which means that the government will need more transmission towers to send the electricity to the city from the nuclear plants. The villagers' struggle provided insight into issues surrounding nuclear power to the South Korean civil society (Choe, 2013). The towers were finally built in 2016 after 10 years of painful struggle.

Korean anti-gentrification history because many young artists and musicians joined in the squat and held cultural events almost every day to attract public attention.

They also held regular open meetings to welcome new people. Meetings are a time-consuming process wherein various opinions must be heard and a sense of the collective will has to be extracted from the tangle of views and differences. If an occupation goes on for a long period of time, meetings become part of the daily routine. How to organize a meeting at a squat place is very important because it is directly linked to modes of politics. If the meetings are hierarchical, the character of the place also becomes authoritative.

Turning a space of liberation into an everyday space involves a complex negotiation of livelihoods, distribution of labor, and collaboration. In the process, there are various experiments in how to assign the relevant tasks and how people who have withdrawn from their urban life or their factory routine are to use their new daily time. Sometimes there are seminars or strategic meetings. Sometimes, the new tasks include cooking or perhaps art.

Art plays a unique role in many of these squatting spaces. People are not simply playing the part of the kind citizen, producing wall pictures or made-to-order images for the sake of spectacle. They serve as agents in the movement, practicing a politics of sensibility wherein distinctions between “artist” and “nonartist” don’t apply.

“Art” in this sense is a kind of public knowledge that serves to restore commonality. I am not referring to art in the sense of pure art as formulated by the Romantics of the 18th century. Rather, it is life as an accumulation of public knowledge that takes possession of the lives and behavior of agents. The term “the techne of squatting” can refer to all these techniques. I opted to use the Greek word “*techne*,” rather than “technique” or “art,” because it is the origin of “art” as well as a practical term encompassing all experience and knowledge. “Techne” also encompasses methods that are shared and experimented with in other spaces once an occupation has ended. For example, the different cultural programs attempted at the restaurant Duriban to fight the gentrification movement were adopted as part of the Mari Café antigentrification movement in Myeong-dong. And although the Occupy Wall Street protesters ended up losing their space in a battle against the winter cold, the methods of experimentation and communication they adopted were carried on in other cities and countries. Some of the people who joined the Duriban and Mari movements became experts on gentrification, and most currently

act as antigentrification activists and help each other.

### **Conclusion**

Berardi argued that “poetic language” and art must become therapeutic if we are to forge a process of assigning agency to collective wisdom. “Politics and therapy,” he writes, “will be the same activity in the days to come.” (Berardi, 2009, 220p) It is not only the spaces of occupation that serve as spaces for liberation. The tasks that lie ahead as we develop a collective wisdom will involve constant experimentation with culture in small units and the restoration of language, so that these autonomous political models become the everyday. The activities of young musicians, artists, filmmakers, and poets at Duriban, and the efforts seen in the protests against the Four Major Rivers Project and at Dumulmeori, Gangjeong, and Miryang, show possible avenues both for resistance and for reviving sensitivity as communities. There is no one messianic alternative that solves every problem in the world. Rather, a collective sensibility and an ecological sensitivity that resist co-opting—and our repeated lessons with autonomous politics within it—are what will aid us in our struggle.

That said, many of the alternative movements in cities today do not fully address the fundamental issue—namely, that cities themselves are destructive to our collective ethos. Sabu Kohso describes the masses of today as the urban grassroots and defines a number of movements as the right to live in the city in a way befitting an urban citizen. It may be that we escape this governance the moment we begin to emphasize our right to the city. (Kohso, 2012) Neoliberal governance has held power only by thoroughly domesticating the masses with urban infrastructure, and by degrading real contact, sensibility, and the joys we are capable of sharing with our neighbors and the community to the level of individual competition. What we need is a politics of small-scale sensibility practiced in the spaces of occupation—much as the Zapatistas maintained their way of life through cooperating with the community and considering questions of land and language.

This essay is intended simply as a brief introduction to the possibilities of sit-in protests and squats. I hope it can help to guide further debate. David Graeber (2004) has argued the necessity of “low theory” an applied ethics, so to speak, to record the activities and history of the masses, and my hope is that this writing can offer a practical example.



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