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Korean American Artists and the 1992 Los Angeles Riots

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy

in

Art History, Theory and Criticism

by

Eun Jung Park

Committee in charge:

Professor Grant Kester, Chair
Professor Norman Bryson, Co-Chair
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2013

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2013

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- May 2010 The Marcuse Award for Outstanding Curatorial Research
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- 2012 "Korean American Rhythms," *Koreans in America*. Edited by Grace Yoo, Cognella Academic Press

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Korean American Artists and the 1992 Los Angeles Riots

by

Eun Jung Park

Doctor of Philosophy in Art History, Theory and Criticism

University of California, San Diego, 2013

Professor Grant Kester, Chair
Professor Norman Bryson, Co-Chair

The historiography of the 1992 Los Angeles Riots have several trajectories within the history of Los Angeles that reshape the contours of the transnational turn in the humanities. The riots move the discursive framework towards a comparative scope that allows for an overlap of the structures of migration, inequality, and globalization. The state of emergency that framed the riots exposes the ideological state apparatus within multiple levels of hegemony. This

dissertation synthesizes the event, the art objects, and the *Kunstwollen* that are intertwined to produce art historical research. A foundational understanding of the visual culture and the riots provide a clear subtext to the political and economic genealogy of art objects in this dissertation. The overarching argument in my dissertation is that art practice yields a particular kind of knowledge production. The rhetorical positions articulated by Korean American artists about the L.A. riots elucidates localized geopolitical struggles.

Instead of a biographical survey of one artist, the analysis of multiple artists centered around one event propels art historical analysis towards a transdisciplinary approach that extends the hermeneutics of art practice towards cultural geography, critical media studies and epistemology. My work intervenes the rhetoric of the necessary third to fourth generation gap for the kind of assimilation and development of identity formation that should not be unilaterally assumed and applied to all immigrant histories. Rather than regurgitating a multicultural thesis, my framework uses the arguments made visual in the artwork that de-romanticizes the story of migration. Therefore my analysis of the artworks elucidates alternative approaches to Korean American history.

Prologue

For fear that the riots would spread to our home, my parents hid my brother and I deep in the valley, in Northridge. We received many calls from relatives living in South Korea, demanding that we return immediately. During the second day of the riots, I received a frantic call from my mother. She was crying, and suppressed her hysteria enough to utter, "It's all burning; we're ruined." When I heard this, I turned on the television to find that the Compton Fashion Center where I had worked every weekend and holiday since junior high was flanked by two other buildings consumed by fire.

The building where my parents had two booths, used to be a Sears Department Store, but after the capital flight of the aerospace industry, it was converted into an indoor swap meet (Figure 103). The detritus of post-Fordist structural adjustment integrated the globalization of the inner city community, as most of the proprietors were Korean, with a few Latino and black proprietors, all under the same roof. Even though it was in one of the most dangerous cities in the United States, the low overhead, the minimum amount of phrases to memorize in English (the language of bartering and commerce), and lax permit restrictions made it easy for Koreans to seek a source of income that was relatively independent of municipal restrictions. Like others, my parents invested their life savings into the down payment for two booths that sold apparel and jewelry.

Going from the parking lot to the entrance of the building was a nerve-wracking endeavor, especially at night. Often times, the danger level got so high

that police helicopters lit the walkway between the entrance to the complex and the parking lot.

These proprietors faced the same market forces where eighty percent of small businesses fail after five years, but the additional danger of doing business was life and death. Still, most of these booths were occupied by families, with sons, daughters, cousins, uncles and aunts earning a living, often “under the table,” alongside the undocumented Mexican day laborers hired during the busy Christmas season.

The main job requirements were vigilance and quick eye for safety and sales. Often, I was ashamed to eat lunch, exposed like a specimen in a zoo, as customers looked on with their noses covered. My the lunch break was not much of a break at all. Across the street from the Compton Fashion Center was the Shields for Families Project. Another housing project was Project Cry No More on North Long Beach Boulevard. Most of our customers lived in these projects, and were on welfare. Sales on the first and the fifteenth of every month were always higher, because that was when the welfare checks were distributed.

Like most Korean immigrants, we did not have fire insurance. Over the phone, my mother told me that my father, uncles and older male cousins have gone to the Compton Fashion Center to guard our booths against fire and looting. I wondered if the body-memory of my father awoke to his military training from South Korea. I wondered if he would be taken by surprise, because he was deaf in his left ear. A bomb had gone off to the left of him, during his military training exercises.

Did the looters have guns? Or were they going to use sticks? My mind went back to the time when we were robbed, and I saw my dad swiftly breaking a broomstick, and jumping over the counter to chase after the two teenagers that had robbed us.

Guarding property in Koreatown is one thing, but guarding it in Compton is another. The dire situation of those living in the projects in Compton was something that was all too familiar to me. All those rap songs boasting about murder and nihilism were true. Murders, robberies and death threats were part of doing business. The first time I saw a gun inside the purse of one of my regular customers, my heart sank to think that this person, who I saw in a regular basis, was capable of taking a life, or at least felt threatened enough to carry a deadly weapon.

All the faces of the customers that had threatened my father, came flooding into the forefront of my anxious mind. My mother was telling me that she tried to stop him from leaving, but not many things can break a Korean man's machismo.

After the L.A. riots, any racially charged media event, from the trial of O.J. Simpson to the retrials, was always another potential disaster to my parents. The rainy day that the O.J. Simpson verdict was read, I remember waiting in front of the television at the student center at UCLA, holding my breath. Regardless of whether he was innocent or not, it was more a matter of whether there was going to be another riot.

Chapter 1: Rhetorical capture, already diagnosed

In the foreground, a man in a suit and straw hat stands looking towards the horizon, holding his bicycle against him (Figure 55). Ribbons of previously laid bicycle tracks direct the viewer's gaze towards the groups of male and female bicyclists peppered throughout the middle ground of a dirt road. The background consists of a barren landscape with mountains that delineate the horizon towards a sky absent of clouds. It is the blank slate on which the metropolitan imagination will inscribe the ethnic enclave of Koreatown, within the city now known as Los Angeles.

The fact that the well-dressed figures are riding towards no particular destination shows that these jaunts are a leisure activity. This photograph is of the *Los Angeles Times* Bicycle Club, riding north on what is now Western Avenue from Pico Boulevard, in 1895. Today, this same area is a cacophony of electric signs, lit billboards, and LCD monitors screaming for a few seconds of a driver's attention in the midst of heavy traffic. The bombardment of these flickering lights, if not in Korean, are advertisements directed at Korean Americans, or they are businesses declaring their existence on this heavily congested corner. The composition of the photograph taken in 1895 is easy to follow. One man on the corner stands in for the viewer, like Rene Magritte's universal man. He positions the viewer as a well dressed middle class man looking out onto a vast empty landscape, on which he will build his city.

Any downloaded photograph from Google Earth, of the same approximate area, does not have such a straightforward composition. The eye darts from car

to car on the congested streets of the foreground. The middle ground consists of a cluster of buildings, business signs, and billboards that cover what would have been a view of the mountains on the horizon. Now, the horizon is a jagged line created by the varying heights of buildings packed close together. Only the background remains the same: a sky without clouds.

This comparison shows a stark contrast of space and, even more so, a dramatically different point of view, from one conceptual point of view of the male gaze gesturing towards a manifest destiny of the last frontier, to multiple points of view that ricochet wildly.

Conversely, a Google Earth downloaded image, like the bicyclists with no particular destination, shows no focal point, no clear destination, no place for the viewer's eye to rest. In comparison, these two views provide differences in not only the subject of the image, but in the ways in which Los Angeles is perceived. The artworks in this dissertation provide a particular perception of Los Angeles.

Unlike the cyclists and the well-ordered compositional flow of the previous photograph, the point of view presented by the Korean American artists have a particular destination that directs the mind's eye towards the past, rather than the future. This past is grounded halfway around the world in a small peninsula between the Island of Japan and the landmass that is China. This past includes an immigrant's rite of passage that is part of a civil rights history that continues to rage on, a voice in a tumultuous sea of many other pasts, that are grounded in many other countries vying for recognition of their existence, and the right to representation as citizens of the United States.

Background on the 1992 Los Angeles Riots

The historiography of the uprisings of what is popularly known as the 1992 Los Angeles Riots, have several trajectories within the history of Los Angeles, and Asian American Studies, that reshape the contours of politics, and the trans-national turn in the humanities. Previous scholarly contributions to the study of the Los Angeles Riots have analyzed documentary film and theatre, where often the arguments in these contributions include the underlying warrant that the arts play a critical role in animating community-wide reflection, but exclude art that circulates in museums and galleries.

Several anthologies that include such contributions are centered around Critical Race Theory, which foreground a narrative diversity and analytical diversity. Edward T. Chang posits that, “The 1992 unrest is a turning point in academic research on race.”¹ In other words, the riots move the discursive framework towards a comparative scope that allows for an overlap of the structures of migration, inequality, and development. Anthologies that fall under this loose category, that are often cited in this dissertation are: *Los Angeles - Struggles towards Multiethnic Community: Asian American, African American, and Latino Perspectives* edited by Edward T. Chang and Russell C. Leong; *Reading Rodney King/Reading Urban Uprising* edited by Robert Gooding-Williams; *Koreans in the Hood: Conflict with African Americans* edited by Kwang

¹ Edward T. Chang, “Introduction: From ‘Chicago to Los Angeles - Changing the Site of Race Relations,” in *Los Angeles: Struggles Toward Multiethnic Community*, ed. Edward T. Chang and Russell Leong, (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1995), 3.

Chung Kim; and the special issue of *Amerasia: Los Angeles Since 1992* edited by David K. Yoo.

In the many books, articles, and anthologies on the L.A. Riots, I have deduced three types of investigations. First, those that are written by academics in the social sciences, which include, Cultural Studies, Ethnic Studies, Asian American Studies, Black Studies, Film Studies, American History, and Comparative Literature. The best example of this type of work is *Blue Dreams: Korean Americans and the Los Angeles Riots* by Nancy Abelmann and John Lie. No other work explicates the interpenetration and complexities between South Korea and the U.S., in terms of the complex nature of subjectivity construction, power relationships, and respective domestic policies that are tethered to each other. Many of these sources posit that structural problems are the source of what resulted in the L.A. riots.

The second type of investigation is more political and empirical in nature, and puts the statements of the previous group of works to the test, as it analyzes the statements made by this first group with specific policies enacted, failed, or ignored. A resource that has proven to be decisively cogent in this regard is *No Fire Next Time* by Patrick D. Joyce, because it is the only resource that details the gap between the ideals of the previous group of books, and the actual policies enacted by city government. Joyce's comparative approach in regard to the different types of political machines between Los Angeles and New York municipalities, demonstrates just how incredibly complex city politics can be. He

astutely describes the political hurdles that are often not mentioned in works that remain in the realm of ideology and conjecture.

The third group of resources is anthologies and books by investigative journalists. The strength of this group's evidence is too compelling to ignore. An anthology compiled by the staff of the *Los Angeles Times*, entitled *Understanding the Riots*, provides a comprehensive presentation, including reprinted articles and photographs.

The journalistic acumen of *Official Negligence: How Rodney King and the Riots Changed Los Angeles and the LAPD* by Lou Cannon, is without parallel. *Official Negligence* has proven to be the only source so far that meticulously interrogates the failure of the Rebuild Los Angeles (RLA) project. This book, consisting of 706 pages of writing by Canon, provides thorough evidence supporting the analysis from the second group of resources. Canon's background in investigative reporting provides him a unique point of departure, and a productive view of the LAPD, which other scholars, such as Scott Saul, posit as a source that historians should consider.² Canon foregrounds the long history of the cultural development of a paramilitary organization, which is a fundamental cornerstone of the history of racism in California.

One of the most interesting developments in the research for this project was witnessing the maturation of a spatial paradigm where scholars such as Mike Davis and Edward Soja provide the vocabulary that comes from what is

² Scott Saul, "Gridlock of Rage: The Watts and Rodney King Riots." *The Blackwell Companion to the History of Los Angeles* (Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 147-164.

now known as the Los Angeles School of Urbanism, which identifies and approaches the late capitalist structures and neo-conservative urban policies that dissect the structural factors that led to the urban unrest. A description of what scholars are calling the *spatial turn* is outlined in great detail, in the first chapter of Soja's latest publication spearheading this shift, and entitled *Seeking Spatial Justice*.³ Critical geography is a very productive layer to my investigation of art and the L.A. riots. Art historians and critics such as Margo Machida approach their field with an invigorated sense of spatiality that is positioned to be on par with race and gender in their art historical investigations.

There are monographs focused on the economic and social dynamics of Korean American immigrant entrepreneurs, such as *Legacies of Struggle: Conflict and Cooperation in Korean American Politics* by Angie Y. Chung, and *Imperial Citizens: Koreans and Race from Seoul to LA* by Nadia Y. Kim. These texts show that a Korean American body politic was bred from the riots that honed in on the goal of political utility through coalition building of the immigrant generations, with conservative homeland orientation, and a refocus from identity to geography. For example, two of the largest Korean American community-based organizations (CBO), replaced what the "K" stood for in KYCC and KIWA, changing it from Korean to Koreatown. These organizations are now known respectively, as the Koreatown Youth Community Center and the Koreatown Immigrant Workers Association.

³ Edward W. Soja, *Seeking Spatial Justice* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

These CBOs took on social services and political advocacy, as reflected in the changing of the names, and the collaborative activism centered around the community at large included more than just Korean Americans. KIWA organized Latino garment works against sweatshops in 1997, and was an integral member of the strategy committee in the BRU (Bus Riders Union) vs. The Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transit Association, initiated in 1994.⁴

Other studies fall under Critical Media Studies, such as *Screening the Los Angeles "Riots": Race, Seeing, and Resistance* by Darnell Hunt; *Strange Future: Pessimism and the 1992 Los Angeles Riots* by Min Hyung Song; and *Iconic Events: Media, Politics, and Power in Retelling History* by Patricia Leavy.

Song, author of *Strange Futures*, contextualizes the riots within the anxieties of larger national ideological currents. He posits that, "The Los Angeles riots have become a cultural-literary event, an important source of tropes for imagining the seemingly endemic social problems plaguing the United States and the country's possible future."⁵ These studies provide a different framework of analysis with regard to visibility and causality, that I synthesize along with more traditional art historical methods.

SA-I-GU

⁴ In 1997, KIWA helped win over \$2 million for workers from retailers and manufacturers connected with the infamous El Monte "slave shop" operators. KIWA organized 55 Latino garment workers and was part of the legal team that eventually won this landmark case that exposed Southern California's modern day sweat shops.

⁵ Min Young Song, *Strange Future: Pessimism and the 1992 Los Angeles Riots* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), viii.

In Korean political history, chains of numbers incorporating the month and the date mark significant uprisings, demonstrations, and political turns. The March First Demonstration against Japanese colonial rule is known as *Sam-il undong* (3-1 Movement), while the Student Revolution of April 19, 1960, is called *Sa-il-gu* (4-1-9). Most Korean Americans call the 1992 Los Angeles riots: *Sa-i-gu* (4-2-9). The sense of abandonment and displacement felt by the Korean American community during the L.A. riots is supported by the fact that 1,079 of the 1,120 commercial properties that sustained significant fire damage or complete destruction were Korean owned.⁶ Sociologist, Kathleen Tierney concludes that, “The riot damage data make a strong *prima facie* case for a selectivity hypothesis.”⁷

Although there are many who see the 1992 L.A. Riots as a reprise of the 1965 Watts Rebellion, this facile comparison belies the multiethnic composition of the looters and the victims. A common definition of a riot is a violent disturbance of peace by an assembly or body of persons, or an outbreak of active lawlessness or disorder among the populace. The event that occurred between April 29 to May 2, 1992 is different things to different people. For progressives it was a “civil uprising or insurrection.” Robin D.G. Kelly, a professor at Michigan University, wrote:

As I watched ‘on the ground’ video tape of the black and Latino poor seizing property and destroying what many regarded as

⁶ Kathleen J. Tierney, “Property Damage and Violence: A Collective Behavior Analysis,” in *The Los Angeles Riots: Lessons for the Urban Future*. ed. Mark Baldassare (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), 153-173. Although there are varying reports, all of them consists of a similar ratio.

⁷ Kathleen J. Tierney, *The Los Angeles Riots: Lessons for the Urban Future*. 155.

symbols of domination, I could not help but notice the joy and sense of empowerment expressed in their faces. It strengthened my belief that the inner cities are the logical place for a new radical movement in post-Cold War America.⁸

Among mainstream liberals, the L.A. riots offered an occasion to criticize twelve years of Republican presidency from Ronald Reagan (1980-1984 and 1984-1988) to George Bush Senior (1988-1992). Conservatives pointed to the riots as proof of the breakdown of family values, personal responsibility, and social order. It was proof that the social welfare programs caused a welfare dependency that perpetuated these breakdowns.⁹ The national debate on the origins and meanings of the L.A. riots reached no specific consensus or conclusion in mainstream American society. The broadcasted images of the multiethnic riot feature the prevalence of Korean-language signs near downtown Los Angeles. The very existence of Koreatown was news for some viewers. Many reports on the riots identified Korean Americans as prosperous ghetto shopkeepers, or proof of the “American Dream” for the “model minorities.”

However, to the minorities in the interstices of mainstream media and to American society for that matter, the consequences, and even the consensus,

⁸ Robin D.G. Kelley, “Straight from Underground,” *Nation*, June 8, 1992, 796.

⁹ For a detailed description of this argument see Charles Murray, *Losing Ground: American Social Policy, 1950-1980* (New York, NY: The Perseus Book Group, 1994). Murray makes a compelling argument that the social welfare program is the reason for the social ills of the U.S. First published in 1984, this book continues to be a popular resource for many of the arguments made by mainstream conservatives. More than two decades later, many of the proposals made by Murray had been signed into law by Bill Clinton. The significance of this book cannot be overstated. To John J. Miller of the Philanthropy Roundtable, it is one of eight books that changed America. John J. Miller, “Eight Books that Changed America,” *Philanthropy Roundtable*, July 1, 2002. <http://www.philanthropyroundtable.org/printarticle.asp?article=1000> It is a book I have read cover to cover several times, as it provides astute insights on the workings of the complex social welfare system in a clear and concise manner.

were utterly concrete. Hundreds of Mexicans and El Salvadorians were deported. Hundreds of independently owned businesses were never rebuilt. The hope of the “American Dream” died.¹⁰

Even with these hard facts, many of the books and articles published on the L.A. riots continue to perpetuate existing paradigms. The *LA Times* published a photo essay of the L.A. riots on April 29, 2009, which consisted of the same images: burning buildings, armed Koreans, and military presence on urban streets. Aside from the fact that these same images have been endlessly repeated, one wonders just how much the meanings behind those images have changed in the seventeen years between 1992 and 2009. As many scholars continue to investigate the shards of this broken record, criticism of the news media seems to have had no effect, since the same images are repeated in 2009.

Korean American scholars and activists have labeled the L.A. riots as the birth of Korea America.¹¹ University of California, Berkeley professor Elaine Kim states, “What they [Korean immigrants] experienced on 29 and 30 April was a

¹⁰ Three hundred and sixty Mexicans and sixty-two El Salvadorians were arrested and deported during the L.A. riots. George Ramos and Tracy Wilkinson, “Unrest Widens Rifts in Latino Populations,” *Los Angeles Times*, Washington edition, May 8, 1992, 1. This is the most conservative figure, as sources dated later show that additional individuals from the Latino population were deported shortly after the unrest. Approximately one quarter of the Korean owned businesses that were destroyed during the L.A. riots, reopened. Kwang Chung Kim and Shin Kim, “The Multiracial Nature of the Los Angeles Unrest of 1992,” in *Koreans in the Hood: Conflict with African American*, ed. Kwang Chung Kim (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1999), 26.

¹¹ Edward T. Chang believes that to say the riots are the birth of Korea America is to undermine and belittle the work of Korean American activists before the L.A. riots. Chang suggests a more responsible interpretation -- that the '92 riots were the rebirth of Korean Americans. Edward T. Chang, “Session I: Perspectives: Tales from the Frontline, First Person Perspectives.” *Hope Out of Crisis: Lessons from Sa-I-Gu*. Conference at the Garden Suites, Los Angeles, CA, sponsored by the Young Oak Kim Center for Korean American Studies at UC Riverside. April 28, 2012.

baptism into what it really means for a Korean to become American in the 1990s.”¹² For Angela Oh, a Korean American attorney who became an activist as she was pushed to the forefront of political debate, appearing on *Larry King Live*, the riots are “our [Korean American] rite of passage into American society.” She equates the event with the legacy of other such violent baptisms, such as the internment of Japanese Americans.¹³

Methodology

Central to all questions of art history is causality, with “the hypothesis that an artwork is reflective, emblematic, or generally representative of its original time, place, and circumstance of production,” according to Donald Preziosi, editor of *The Art of Art History*.¹⁴ These presumptions might seem to undermine the formal features of objects, rendering the formal features ancillary, yet the formal components of any art historical investigation are, in fact, primary. Although an oscillation between formalist and contextualist views has been the subject of debate in art historical methodology since its inception, these views are interdependent. A careful formalist reading yields components for contextual analysis that might have been missed if the scholar used the art object as a secondary source.

¹² Elaine H. Kim, “Home Is Where the *Han* Is: A Korean-American Perspective on the Los Angeles Upheavals,” in *Reading Rodney King/Reading Urban Uprising*, ed. Robert Gooding-Williams (New York, NY: Routledge, 1993), 219.

¹³ Seth Mydans, “Giving Voice to the Hurt and Betrayal of Korean-Americans,” *New York Times*, May 2, 1993, E9.

¹⁴ Donald Preziosi, *Art of Art History*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 13.

The methodology in this dissertation is, broadly described, an effort towards a synthesis of the object, context, and *Kunstwollen*, which are intertwined to produce art historical research. The discursive bind of art history is aptly described in the introductory chapter to *Visual Culture: Images and Interpretations*: “It is in fact, art history’s continuing adherence to a theory of immanent aesthetic value that has prevented historians from fully examining the ways in which the work is related to all the other institutions and practices that constitute social life.”¹⁵ With regard- to context, the discourse of race is central to the context of American history. According to David Theo Goldberg, “Race is irrelevant, but all is race.”¹⁶ In the years since 9/11, the cultural misunderstandings between the Judeo-Christian and Muslim worlds are subsumed under the broad Orientalist strategies and, accordingly, this point of departure with the media images of armed Koreans on roofs with guns during the ’92 riots, is activated in several of the artworks. As such, the registration of art historical approaches involves a complex matrix of signs about masculinity, racial fear, and political power. A foundational understanding of visual culture and the riots provides a clear subtext to the political genealogy of art objects in this dissertation.

The broad art historical framework that guides this project is more akin to anthologies such as *Race-ing Art History*, edited by Kymberly N. Pinder, that

¹⁵ Norman Bryson, Michael Ann Holly, and Keith Moxey, ed. *Visual Culture: Images and Interpretations*, (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), xviii.

¹⁶ David Theo Goldberg, *Racist Culture: The Politics of Meaning* (Cambridge, MA: Wiley Publishing, 1993), 6.

pose important questions such as why the works in my dissertation feature so many self-portraits of one kind or another. The answer to that question, applied to this particular investigation, is that the Korean American artist becomes subsumed by his or her subject, whereas the Western canon of art history positions the artist more as a subject than a producer, and must, therefore enter it as a subject.¹⁷

That is not to say that there is a monolithic Korean American aesthetic. Instead, there is a dynamic; one filled with conflicting interests and identities.¹⁸ To be Asian American is to occupy the paradoxical position of a shared struggle of immigrant life in the U.S., within the diversity of the Asian continent, with its diverse cultures, histories, and differing relations between those cultures and the U.S. The artists in this dissertation are cultural producers who feel the burden of race on art history. Pinder's anthology spearheads a trajectory "towards an effort to create a better language with which to understand race in our visual culture and our lives."¹⁹

¹⁷The adaptation of the answer regarding self-portraits was cited in Pinder's anthology, however, she credits the following article with the concept of the artist as occupying both the subject and producer position. Lowery Stokes Sims, "Subject/Subjectivity and Agency in the Art of African Americans," *The Art Bulletin* 76, no. 4 (December 1994): 587-590.

¹⁸ To further clarify the subject position, it is extremely important not to attribute the categorial qualities of unity to identity, nor to conflate consciousness of numerical identity to the notion of a person. Accordingly, Kant insists that the "identity of the consciousness of myself at different times is only a formal condition of my thoughts and their coherence, and in no way proves the numerical identity of my subject." Immanuel Kant. *Critique of Pure Reason* First Edition, 363, quoted in Karl Ameriks, *Kant's Theory of Mind: An Analysis of the Paralogism of Pure Reason*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 134.

¹⁹ Kimberley N. Pinder. *Race-ing Art History: Critical Readings in Race and Art History*. (London: Routledge, 2002), 8.

Another anthology that attempts a similar epistemological interrogation of art history is Lisa Blooms' *With Other Eyes*, which organized itself within the allied fields of art history: philosophical aesthetics (utilizing its development via classical empiricism), continental philosophy, and cultural studies. The anthology seeks to foretell the contours of a new paradigm in art history, both from within and outside the field of art history, by reexamining mainstream ways of looking, gazing, spectatorship, and the problems with the anachronistic eye. This anthology looks at the global forces that shape expressions of identity in the art world, that aligns with the central task of this dissertation. Like the author of the aforementioned anthology, Bloom seeks to provide a vocabulary, pushing art history in directions already mapped by cultural studies and postcolonial theory.

As such, some of the often-used texts in this dissertation reflect the frameworks set out in these anthologies, by utilizing concepts from Arjun Appadurai, Chela Sandoval, Anne Anlin Cheng, Kandice Chuh, and Lisa Lowe, among others.²⁰ Accordingly, I adopt Thomas Cripp's five identifying characteristics of Black genre films,²¹ as applied by Jun Xing's analysis of the Asian American aesthetic.²²

²⁰ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity At Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996). Chela Sandoval. *Methodology of the Oppressed*. (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000). Anne Anlin Cheng, *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Grief*. (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 2001). Kandice Chuh, *Imagine Otherwise: An Asian Americanist Critique*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003). Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996).

²¹ Thomas Cripps, *Black Film as Genre*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), 9.

²² Jun Xing, "A Cinema in the Making" *Asian America Through the Lens: History, Representations, and Identity*. (Latham, MD: AltMalraPress, 1998), 44-52.

The five identifying characteristics of Korean American art are: an authentic Korean American in-group point of view, a sensitive narrative treatment of Korean American history, an accurate anatomy of Korean American social mores, the symbolic repertoire of Korean American symbols, and an urgent sense of advocacy for the Korean American cause.

Building the boundaries of investigation for a critical analysis for this project involves delineating Korean American artists between generations that contextualize the L.A. Riots differently. Taking into account the cumulative effects within Los Angeles and immigration, there are various stages and strategies of representation and intervention. Cultures of themes and subjecthood-in-formation emerge from the Korean American social and cultural landscape. The dramatic changes involving major military conflicts (Japanese Occupation, WWII, and Korean War), deal with family histories and, in some cases, the personal experiences of the artists. By opening up artworks to their full dimensionality, and not just to the disembodied eye, creativity can be located in a dialogical structure that frequently is the result of a number of individuals, rather than an autonomous self-contained individual. Tracing the lineage of the visual traditions from which the formal qualities of the work originate, the life experiences of the artists shape the artwork. The work is the intentional manifestation of the mind, and a deliberate discursive act. The methodology of analysis outlines a Korean American aesthetic as an intertextual position through adopting a particular consciousness and sensitivity that arises out of who they are and how they

position themselves. The reading of artworks involves the emergent and evolving textual coalition of both context and intertext.

Most of the artists belong to the 1.5 generation, with the exception of Erica Cho, who is a second generation Korean American. All of the primary artists in this dissertation have postgraduate degrees from U.S. institutions. Many of them are professors in MFA programs or various other departments in the humanities in the U.S. They participate in the international forums such as biennales and conferences. Yong Soon Min and Grace M. Cho are theorists in their own right, with several published articles and or books that inform their positionality. I am approaching these artists as knowing subjects, who respond to specific concerns and experiences. To that end, I have interviewed all of the artists, some of whom I have had extensive conversations with, regarding my project.²³

The meaningfulness of an artwork is not limited to the practitioner's intentions, but nevertheless, the self-understanding of the practitioner may be transformed by a hermeneutic engagement, where understanding remains an indispensable point of departure and return for critical reflection.²⁴ Hence the conversations I have had with the artists expand the understanding of the immediate historical horizon. Artwork cannot be separated from the totality of its

²³ The interview methods that I learned as a Research Assistant and Interviewer in the Ethnic Studies Department of San Francisco State University not only gave me a more nuanced knowledge of the diversity of the Korean American community, but also the basic skills in sociological research methods.

²⁴ Hermeneutics broadly fuses two theses: the Kantian view that we assimilate the world and express ourselves within it according to a shared cognitive and expressive framework, and the Heideggerian view that such frameworks emerge and evolve through time.

interpretations.²⁵ This reflective dialogue opens what is an inexhaustible potential for meaningfulness within an artwork. According to Nicholas Davey, hermeneutic thought “resists the false certainties claimed by every form of theoretical reductionism.”²⁶ It recognizes that any interpretative thematization of a work must acknowledge the practitioner’s viewpoint. Without that acknowledgement, hermeneutic thematization could not offer me a well-rounded interpretation. It would prevent me from recognizing a reconfiguration of my own viewpoint.

Keeping in mind that I am bringing my own subjectivities, a dialogue-based orientation is the overarching theoretical approach. In particular, Barbara Tedlock’s claim regarding the researcher’s inalienable and active role in the process of cultural analysis, combined with Steven G. Crowell’s synthesis of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Jacques Derrida’s model that yields a “fusion of horizons” is where I position my hermeneutic efforts.²⁷ Instead of concentrating my efforts on the Self versus Other debate, I am focused on the character and process of dialogue. Both Tedlock and Crowell’s methods exhibit the primacy of dialogue that calls forth Mikhail Bakhtin’s work on the dialogical imagination.

²⁵ Gadamer embraces such differences between history and art because they magnify interpretations of subject matters not afforded by our immediate historical horizon. Hans-George Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. J. Weinsheimer and D.G. Marshall (New York, NY: The Seabury Press, 1975), 118, 263, 432.

²⁶ Nicholas Davey, “Hermeneutics and Art Theory,” in *A Companion to Art Theory*, ed. Paul Smith, Carolyn Wide (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, Ltd., 2002), 445.

²⁷ Barbara Tedlock, “From Participant Observation to the Observation of Participation: The Emergence of Narrative Ethnography.” *Journal of Anthropological Research* 47, no.1 (Spring 1991): 69-94. Steven G. Crowell, “Dialogue and Text: Re-marking the Difference,” in *The Interpretation of Dialogue*, ed. Tullio Maranhao (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 338-360.

Bakhtin's method helps to organize these two data gathering strategies into a cohesive tactic that allows me to encompass a range of attitudes and interpretative approaches.²⁸ According to scholars of Bakhtin, such as Ken Hirschknop and Graham Pechey, democracy lies below the surface of Bakhtin's passions. According to Hirschknop, "the dialogical text incarnates... moral responsibility."²⁹ It represents subordinate social voices, and heteroglossia utterances that idealize the give-and-take that characterizes a democratic society.³⁰

I justify my overarching methodological use of the dialogical framework for a socio-political point of view, through its oppositional stance that champions disagreements, and renders meaning, shape, and content as the secondary outcome. In a broader sense, it is also an investigation of how meaning and interpretation shift over historical and experiential time, of how they are constructed through art practices and shaped by social structures that they are beholden to or interpellated by, and how, in turn, the experiences of this small, yet global, community of artists are objectified.

²⁸ In such a project where democracy is the *raison d'être*, one might think that Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the dialogical imagination is inappropriate. After all, as Ken Hirschknop noted, the word "democratic" or "democratize" is mentioned only a few times in Bakhtin's work. Scholars like Hirschknop and Graham Pechey argue that democracy is central to any study that seeks to utilize a Bakhtinian methodology. Ken Hirschknop, *Mikhail Bakhtin: An Aesthetics for Democracy*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). Graham Pechey, "Bakhtin and the Postcolonial Condition," in *Critical Essays on Mikhail Bakhtin*, ed. Caryl Emerson (Detroit, MI: Gale, 1999), 347-354. Other sources consulted were Mikhail Bakhtin, *Dialogical Imagination*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1981), 239-267.

²⁹ Ken Hirschknop, *Mikhail Bakhtin: An Aesthetics for Democracy*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), viii.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

The art object retains its primary significance as the site for the dialogical processes of experience that unify the entire dissertation project. The flexible methodology, grounded in field research, takes into account the subjectivities of the researcher. In this context of complementary discourses, a creative interference between the artist, the theoretician, and the historical position of both theory and practice, and their mutual susceptibility to art's subject matters, -- allow a significant overlap of concern. This reciprocal dependence of idea and instantiation within aesthetics makes the meeting of interpretive and expressive practices almost unavoidable. The proximity of one perspective (interpretive) incites the other (expressive) to an increased reflexive awareness of its nature and limits. Individual aesthetic experience is not a solitary monologue on private pleasure, but an integral part of a shared historical discourse. The historicization of Korean American art reveals the anxiety and ambivalence experienced, as artists continually negotiate the amorphous zones. Their works are beyond solipsistic concerns, and instead reflect a collective sense of dislocation. The analysis of Korean American art involves not just literary or visual registers, but also sociological, historical and cultural enterprises.

Setting the Stage

Rather than a strictly biographical project, the thematic organization of this dissertation, grounded in the 1992 L.A. riots, yields the delineation of the different processes by which artists engage with their cultures of origin, with sites of passage and settlement. The different ways in which each artist reconciles himself or herself to each vector of analysis centered around the L.A. Riots,

provide multiple points of entry into the subject matter. The task then is to parse the mechanisms that propel the shifts of emphasis amidst multiple concerns shaping artistic practices. These concerns are configured along axes of nationality, culture, religion, and class.³¹ The poetics of positionality and social imagery underscore the significance of subjectivity as a valid source of knowledge about one's condition and place in the world, in an ongoing process of positioning oneself and being positioned by society as Korean American. The intimacy with which the work of art touches us is a shattering and a demolition of the familiar.³²

Los Angeles makes for a relatively facile defamiliarization, as it has been described as a place with no memory.³³ Los Angeles is where collective consciousness is fractured and dissipated into a heteroglossia of utterances that is positively charged with the role and function of collective and revolutionary enunciation. The meanings of the artwork are as multivalent as the histories embodied in the utterance of a chronotopic enactment within the visual field. I am treating the image and artwork as an artifact of social relationships, and the view as a subject constructed by the very object from which it formerly claimed

³¹ This approach is influenced and informed by Katharina Schliben, "Polyphonous Language and Construction of Identity: Its Dynamics and its Crux," in *Taking Matters into Common Hands*. ed. Blake Stimson and Gregory Sholette (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

³² Defamiliarization and subjectivism, as Nietzsche understood them, can drive theory, especially when they are understood as modes of instrumentalist reasoning. Under the influence of Nietzsche, both Heidegger and Gadamer were acutely conscious of the imperious presence of a guiding subjectivity, or the will to power. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, Third Essay, Section 27, trans. Walter A. Kaufmann (New York, NY: Vintage Press, 1969). Joost van Loon, "Chronotopes: Of/in the Televisualization of the 1992 Los Angeles Riots," *Theory, Culture and Society* 14, no. 2 (1997): 96.

³³ Norman M. Klein, *The History of Forgetting: Los Angeles and the erasure of memory* (New York, NY: Verso, 1997).

detachment. The artworks in this dissertation help us to map the shifting intellectual and political terrain of Asian American studies, and to develop grounded understandings of how larger social processes relate to globalization, warfare, migration, and intercultural contact, that are swiftly reconfiguring today's world.

On the other hand, the reason why I am concentrating on Korean American art as a point of departure, is not only because of my familiarity with the work, networks, and history, but because of the micropolitical, as explained by Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze.³⁴ Foucault is often cited for the concept of the micro-physics of power, as constituted by strategic and tactical maneuvers, rather than acquired, preserved, or possessed where power and knowledge are one in the same. Deleuze and Guattari develop this further by positing that the micropolitical framework resists the reduction of being constituted on the basis of identity politics, but rather tends toward a multiplicity of desiring production between the molar realm of representation against collective signifiers.³⁵ Further applying this framework, literary theorist Julian Murphy claims that Los Angeles is a place where everything becomes minor - it is a place of perpetual becoming.³⁶ Applying Murphy's theoretical framework about Los Angeles to visual art, I position Korean American artworks as the interrogator (or major literature) that I

³⁴ Paul Patton, *Deleuze and the Political* (London: Routledge, 2000), 2-10, 30-62,88.

³⁵ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 219.

³⁶ Julian Murphet, *Literature and Race in Los Angeles*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 1-7.

use in order to examine American ideology. This reversal positions American ideology as a minor one. By doing so, I show the ways in which Korean American artistic responses to the L.A. riots collectively deterritorialize the ideology of American neoliberalism. The importance of recognizing the alignments between these ideological forces is critical to this dissertation project. The subject is treated as both knower and agent, as each artwork shows how groups co-constitute one another in the grand hope stated by Boaventura de Sousa Santos: “There is no global social justice without global cognitive justice.”³⁷

The following chapter examines the historicity of Korean American Art within the context of the L.A. riots. Riots in general present a rich historical interplay of national memory, such as the Zoot Suit Riots in 1942, the 1965 Watts riots, and the role of these incidents in the development of ethnic enclaves in the U.S. The artworks created in response to the '92 riots offer a reflection of Korea's twentieth century history, as inextricably tied to the U.S. The collection of works in the history chapter elucidates the development of Korean American culture as rooted in the peninsula of Korea, delineated by the parameters set by the political economy of the U.S., and informed by the aforementioned texts, *Blue Dreams* and *Imagined Citizens*.

The artists deliberately deform the foundations of history in their efforts to evoke epistemological modesty within the viewer. Modesty recognizes that there

³⁷ Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *The Rise of the Global Left: The World Social Forum and Beyond* (New York: Zed Books Ltd., 2006), 44.

are more sides to official accounts of history, that need to be intelligently and sensitively translated through a visual language that encourages a defamiliarization. This second chapter of my dissertation begins with the hermeneutic challenge posited by Nam June Paik's *Korea 100* (2003), a painting commissioned by the Smithsonian Institution for the centennial tribute of Korean immigration (Figure 56). Utilizing the research unearthed in the Stanford Asian American Art Project and the California Asian American Artists Biographical Survey, I peel through the palimpsest of Korean American history, exposing Korean American artists who were engaged in the American modern art movement, such as Charles Park, Whanki Kim, Tschaung-Yeul Kim, Po Kim, and Young Bae, who traveled from Tokyo, to Paris, to the U.S.

The lives of these artists expose the transnationalistic character of the dialectic between context in history and intertext in the present. Since the 1920s, Korean artists have lived and worked in California, as they traveled outside of the peninsula of Korea, to avoid the political strife going on in their homeland at various moments in history, such as the colonialization by Japan (1910-1945), and the civil war (1950-1953). This is a requisite chapter for a discussion of Korean American art, as it is important to clarify positionalities of these artists as the artist/reformer, with subjective claims made evident in their work about the L.A. Riots. An artist occupies a particular race, social position, and class. The artist/reformer mediates between the viewer, the history, and the disenfranchised.

The work, therefore, is an appeal to the viewer on behalf of the other, but also as the other.³⁸

The third chapter features several artworks that weave together war memories with the L.A. Riots, utilizing an iconography that highlights certain historical markers, such as the 1919 Independence Movement, the Korean War (1950 - 1953), the 1960 April Revolution, and the 1980 Gwangu Rebellion. Engaging with the idea of transgenerational haunting as that which is unspeakable, artistic engagement elucidates the detritus of trauma that does not die with the first person that directly experienced it, but rather utilizes the absences and gaps in family history as the subject matter for the artworks. Concordantly, a psychological study conducted after the L.A. riots reported that only seven percent of Korean Americans sought professional help for the diagnosis of post traumatic stress disorder, showing the continuation of the cycle of silence.³⁹ It is this pre-occupation with silence and absence of direct experience from which the trauma is derived, that are the ingredients of the haunting. Therefore, the haunting is not produced by the original trauma, but by its absence.

Defining Moments (1992) by Yong Soon Min is a series of six photographic composites that highlight these aforementioned events (Figure 1).

³⁸ For an exemplary application and further explanation of this dynamic, see Grant H. Kester, *The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 155-171.

³⁹ Mikyong Kim-Goh, Chong Suh, Dudley David Blake, Bruce Hiley-Young, "Psychological Impact of the Los Angeles Riots on Korean-American Victims: Implications for Treatment," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 65.1 (January 1995): 141.

Erica Cho's *Our Cosmos Our Chaos* (2004) is a video installation consisting of a recoiled tiger-snake with six videos on a loop depicting the dreamscape that begins in Koreatown, Los Angeles and traverses the history of war in Korea (Figure 16-21). The artworks in this chapter show that the Korean American experience of the riots exhibit the psychological triggers that directly challenge the scripted context of war trauma perception. Erica Cho's video animates that which has been lost or forgotten, in order to recognize the ways in which, in the words of Jill Bennett, "the past seeps back into the present, as sensation rather than representation." Cho illustrates that what hovers in liminal space can open up to inform histories through the detritus of unspoken trauma.⁴⁰

It is through historical references that the hermeneutic endeavor galvanizes the artistic contributions that position psychological experience as the very place where law and society are processed, and where the assignment of social meaning to psychological processes are located within the raced subject. Some of the consistent iconography of dystopia and trauma includes: news footage from the aforementioned events, people running from fire, riot police, and other scenes of violence.

Dusting off the shackles of Cold War propagandistic images from leaflets dropped from U.S. planes during the Korean war, utilized by Y. David Chung (Figure 35), the imposition of a balanced symbolic structure is proposed, because if the second chapter is the "what" of genealogical hermeneutics, the

⁴⁰ Jill Bennett, *Emphatic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 42.

next chapter deals with the “how” or narratology. The epistemology of contemporary artistic expressions of Korean American artwork about the L.A. riots can be seen not only in iconographic and stylistic lineages, but in collisions of purpose and intent that are delineated in this chapter.

The fourth chapter considers cultural geography and how the geographical imagination is manifest in the artwork of Korean American artists. The historical events that artists chose to evoke necessitates the open-ended hermeneutic approach that presupposes the primacy of space over that of temporal contingencies in productive interpretation. The palimpsestic landscape of Koreatown expands the geographical imagination from the idea of *holding a territory* to a *transformation of territories*, in the metropolitan imagination that is necessary for the articulation of Korean American existence in Los Angeles. This chapter begins with a semiotic description of Koreatown that takes the cityscape of Koreatown today, and locates the signifiers and describes the myths of a post-riot metropolis. This description is then used as a springboard for what the artworks tell us about this myth, and the geographical imagination that is made visual in the work.

Geography is an epistemic category on par with race and gender, and as such the vortex of spiraling narratives of the artwork in this chapter address the cultural and physical plasticity of the connection between place and identity formation. Throughout the aforementioned artworks, the metaphoric shift of cars in transit as a state of being in Los Angeles (Figure 42), planes as a contemporary image of diaspora passage (Figure 44), and the ambiguities of

origin myths, are some of the iconographical designations (Figure 50). The artworks show that culturally specific filters need not be an excuse for nostalgia for romantic notions of authenticity or points of origin, but instead, in the words of Machida, “it can serve as a compelling epistemic resource for dealing with an ever-changing present - in the midst of plural power centers and ongoing cross cultural movement”.⁴¹ History with a strong geographical emphasis is a prominent feature in all of the artworks in this dissertation.

The fifth chapter looks at the sociological and historical attributes of the Korean American identity, where Christianity is the conduit of community development. Since the beginning of Korean immigration to the United States in 1903, the Christian church has been an integral factor in favor of immigration, as missionaries encouraged Koreans to leave Korea for the United States, so that they could live in a “Christian” nation.⁴² The attitudes towards Christianity are presented in the artworks in the following way: the mobile sculpture, *Korean Roulette* (1992) by Sung Ho Choi, offers the crucifix as part of the Korean American gamble (Figure 22). Sections from the *Defining Moments Series* by Yong Soon Min present a prayer that I interpret as being connected to the politically progressive history of Christianity in Korea (Figure 6). Sections from Y. David Chung’s video from the *TBH* installation (1992) position Korean American

⁴¹ Margo Machida, *Unsettled Visions: Contemporary Asian American Artists and the Social Imaginary*. (London and Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 268.

⁴² SuCheng Chan, “The Historiographer’s Role,” *Quiet Odyssey: A Pioneer Korean Woman in America*. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), 138-167.

Christianity within the contemporary context of social capital, and also address a Christian worship that is specific to Korean Americans (Figure 45, 46).

The Christian conduit in Korean history is evidenced by such documents as the Declaration of Independence (from Japan in March 1, 1919). Fifteen of the thirty-three signatories were Korean Protestants. According to historian Wi Jo Kang, “Many Christian leaders strongly believed that the success of Christian missionary work among the Koreans was the best way to liberate Korea from Japanese rule” during its annexation.⁴³ Community development and the Korean American church’s role in ameliorating racial tensions are also discussed in this chapter.

The sixth chapter concerns Critical Media Studies. Most people experienced the riots on television, and Koreans were confronted with the images of burnt buildings, buildings that they had poured their savings and countless hours into, forging a traumatized collective historical memory, which is reinvoked at contemporary sites of conflict. By widening the gap between the professed content of news media and the firsthand experience of Korean Americans, artists do not seek to represent the world and locate subjects, but to present the effect that is not seen. Drawing upon news footage from the '92 riots and the Korean War as raw material, Y. David Chung’s *Turtle Boat Head* installation and video utilize images of fire as an element of narrative coherence that serves as the crucible of Korean American identity formation (Figure 41, 43,

⁴³ Wi Jo Kang, *Christ and Cesar in modern Korea: history of Christianity and politics*. (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1997), 37.

51). The riots were a rebirthing of sorts, as Koreans realized their vulnerability in misrepresentation and exclusion within the popular dialogue. Critical media studies sharpen the contours of how the disenfranchised are differentiated from the collective American identity. It is often posited that Asian American scholars' hesitation in dealing with visual culture comes from the history of racist depictions in the U.S. However, the power that ironically accumulated from this oppositional viewpoint is confronted in this chapter.

The last chapter begins with my own experience of the L.A. riots, and is followed by an interview that I conducted with artist Sung Ho Choi, that expressed the specific relevance of living with history. In his description of one of the pieces in my dissertation, Choi recounts the following (Figure 24),

Choi's Market was produced during the coincidental time of my family hardship and the events of LA riots. Less than a year after this piece, my family members separated for nine months due to my wife's illness. One survived sapling on the installation is bearing apples in my backyard, and one of my children graduates college this spring.⁴⁴

Also included in this chapter is an overview of several artworks by artists who are not Korean to present an overview of work that engages with the dominant discourse of the L.A. Riots, which follows a reflection of an exhibition that I curated at the Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles, as part of the 20th anniversary commemoration, entitled, *Civil Space: A Transformative Memory of the 1992 Civil Unrest*. The exhibition featured an installation by Maggie Hazen,

⁴⁴ Sung Ho Choi, e-mail message to author, February 25, 2011.

called *Of Departed Delineations* (Figure 91).⁴⁵ In this concluding chapter, I seek to describe the evolution of the Korean American politics, in light of the re-districting debate of the areas where Koreatown is located, and the ways in which the riots inform the changes. Accordingly, this chapter deals with the twentieth anniversary of the riots, in regard to the different ways in which scholars and artists ejudicate their previous assessments of the riots, and their relevance in ongoing dialogue in the humanities.

Korean vs. Korean American

Before an art historical investigation begins, the continuities and discontinuities between South Korean nationalism and Korean American nationalism generate concurrences and conflicts of their respective concerns regarding the L.A. riots. I will first attempt to circumscribe the definition of Korean and Korean American national formations. Second, I will posit three contact zones, which are essential in the constitution of Korean American artists' responses to the L.A. riots.⁴⁶ These contact zones will be delineated through three vectors of analysis: transnationalism, ethnonationalism, and centripetal/centrifugal forces. The genealogy of these three concepts will be unpacked, utilizing a technique questioning the commonly understood emergence of various

⁴⁵ The organization of this exhibition included community involvement in art production. The sculptural installation was in the shape of Los Angeles, and individuals who were affected by the riots were asked to create a vessel, and reflect on the geographical location of where they were placing each vessel. The program also included a panel of artists, activists, and scholars, in addition to a children's workshop led by Los Angeles urban planner James Rojas.

⁴⁶ Contact zones is a term that Mary Louise Pratt used to refer to social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths, as they are lived out in many parts of the world. Mary Louise Pratt, "Arts of the Contact Zone," *From Ways of Reading*, 5th edition, ed. David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrofsky (New York: Bedford/St. Martin, 1999).

philosophical and social beliefs, by postulating alternative and subversive histories of Korean and Korean American nationalism and cultural development.⁴⁷ This binary is further complicated by the fact that 2012 will be the first time an election will feature an “incorporation of absentee ballots from overseas Korean citizen-residents, students, and public officials.”⁴⁸ An interesting caveat of this broadening of Korean democracy is that Koreans must still have citizenship in Korea, must register for this program in person with all the identifying paperwork, and that the only office for registration is located in Los Angeles, CA.

There are frequent mutual exclusions between South Korean nationalism and Korean American nationalism . South Korean nationalists exclude Korean Americans/immigrants from a Korean national identity, and do not recognize them as the disenfranchised group (minjung).⁴⁹ Often, Korean immigrants are

⁴⁷ By genealogy, I am specifically referring to Foucault's use of Nietzsche's historic philosophy as a consideration of oppositional tactics, that embraces the conflict between historical and philosophical accounts. Foucault expanded the concept of this genealogy into a counter-history of the position of the subject, which traces the development of people and societies through history that envisions a new subject for the constitution of knowledge, discourses, and domains of objects. Hence, it is with Foucault's critical use of genealogy, as that which seeks to show how plural and sometimes contradictory pasts reveal traces of the influence that certain power mechanisms had on truth, as part and parcel of the operations of power. Genealogy is the epistemic (interpretive) tool that allows access to the micropolitical world where criticism is always situated and evaluated, orienting the focus towards the identification of certain constraints and restraints. Michel Foucault, *Power and Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon; trans. Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham, and Kate Soper, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980). Michel Foucault, “On the Genealogy of Ethnics,” in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984). Todd May, *Between Genealogy and Epistemology: Psychology, Politics and Knowledge in the Thought of Michel Foucault*, (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993). Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals* trans. Francis Golffing, (New York: Anchor Books, 1956, reprinted 1990).

⁴⁸ _____, “Political party realignments in South Korea,” *Korean Quarterly Newspaper*. <http://www.koreanquarterly.org/Newsbriefs2.html>. Accessed on 11 October 2012.

⁴⁹ This is a generalizing statement, as not all Koreans feel this way, but it is a necessary statement to calibrate my argument, which begins with this dualistic set up.

referred to as *gyopos* (교포), a term which is often interpreted as derogatory, signifying a critical representation of Korean Americans, who function as the despicable embodiment of U.S. imperialism on South Koreans.⁵⁰ In regard to ethnonationalism, as immigrants incorporated as workers, but not as full-fledged citizens, Korean Americans construct an “ethnic” identity that alludes to the discursive forms of a Korean “nationalist” identity that obscures actual social and political realities of their homeland. My critical position of these two nationalisms is that, although the anti-Americanism inherent in dissident South Korean nationalism is legitimate, it displaces anti-American sentiments onto Korean Americans, that territorize them. The movements and tenets of Korean American nationalism, are based on romanticized appropriations of certain historical events in the homeland that are inaccurate - a position that is further explained in the following sections.

Transnationalism

The dangers of the transnational framework that are identified by such scholars as Kandice Chuh and Margo Machida, are that the conflation between nationalities can produce cursory analysis, where important positions can fall through the cracks.⁵¹ This is not to say that I am against transnationalism.

⁵⁰ *Gyopo* can be a neutral term to most Korean Americans. However, to some Korean nationalists, it carries a negative designation. This sentiment is supported by the fact that males who were born in Korea but immigrated elsewhere, can be prosecuted for avoiding the mandatory two year military service for all Korean males. For this reason, some Korean born immigrants do not return to Korea for an extended stay.

⁵¹ Kandice Chuh, *Imagine Otherwise: On Asian Americanist Critique* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003). Margo Machida, *Unsettled Visions: Contemporary Asian American Artists and the Social Imaginary* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

However I have been chastised by enough Korean nationalists to approach interpretive frameworks very cautiously. The definition and usages of transnationalism are hotly contested.⁵²

What is transnationalism, and how is it useful in analyzing art works in my project? Given that most of the artists are from or in academia in one way or another, I conceive of their work as theoretical devices that help capture and unravel the narrative dimensions of naturalized racial and national positionalities. In addition to this, the Japanese annexation of Korea (1910-1945) profoundly affected the nature of Korean nationalism, and also signaled the first transnational efforts toward national independence from Japan.

A question that was brought up in separate conversations with Yong Soon Min and Y. David Chung, is the relevance of the “nation-state.” The nation-state is an invention of Enlightenment thought that is tethered to transnationalism. To claim that the nation-state is irrelevant is to say that it no longer has the hegemonic integration within the diaspora, which is simply not true. Scholars such as Bhabha and Appadurai seem to suggest that there is a “death of the nation,” or that “states throughout the world are under siege.”⁵³ However, I claim that transnationalism is sustained in activities across borders of nation-states. Let's look at the ways in which the Korean nationalist consciousness and the

⁵² For varying definitions and usages of transnationalism in regard to the Asian continent, see Brenda S. A. Yeoh, Katie Willis, *State/Nation/Transnation: Perspectives on Transnationalism in the Asia Pacific*, (London: Routledge, 2004).

⁵³ Homi Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, (London: Routledge, 1994) 139-169, 236-257. Arjun Appadurai, “Disjuncture and difference in the global cultural economy,” *Theory, Culture and Society* 7 (1990): 305.

Korean American consciousness have been created through and are constitutive of transnationalism.

About ten years ago, on March 1st, I stopped by a liquor store for a pack of smokes. The Korean man behind the counter asked me if I knew what day it was, and I answered March 1st. He said in a condescending manner, "You don't even know what this day means, do you?" He turned to his friend next to him. "You see? This is what is wrong with kids today." He turned to me and said, "You need to know these things; you're Korean aren't you?"

I mention this anecdote to point out three things in this casual encounter.

First that there are first generation Korean Americans who still remember, and take seriously as part of their subjecthood, an event that happened almost one hundred years ago. March 1, 1919, known as *sam-il-undong*, is Independence Day. This man, in his own way, was trying to make me feel like less of a Korean for not knowing the significance of that historical event.

The second point is that independence from Japanese colonialism was a transnational endeavor, in that it was an event created in conjunction with Korean expatriates and exiles who were living in California, Hawaii, Shanghai, and Mexico, who helped organize and fund the Korean community involvement from abroad. Hard to imagine that during times when telecommunication was nascent, such a transnational movement would take place, but it did. Grounding transnationalism historically is important, as it shows precedence and inspires new and different interpretations of history and nationhood. Like the L.A. riots, an event that deserves a numerical integer like *sa-i-gu* was felt in the Korean peninsula and throughout the Korean diaspora, although in different ways constitutive of each discursive framework. Transnationalism is not a new

phenomenon, but an attribute that is part of the Korean subject, regardless of where they happen to be during the events such as *sam il undong* (Independence Day), *sa-i-gu* (L.A. riots), and more recently, the protests against the Free Trade Agreement of imported beef in 2009.

The third point is that historically we know that this Independence Movement was not successful, as the revolution was quickly quelled by Japanese forces. However, Koreans still call it Independence Day, because a statement was made and continues to be made, as national monuments of the movement are visible in the cities of South Korea (Figure 115).⁵⁴ Korean historians posit that it was because of the violence and damage from the March 1st riot that the Japanese started to rethink their colonization policy.⁵⁵

In Sucheng Chan's introduction of Mary Paik Lee's *Quiet Odyssey*, she provides a detailed history of early Korean immigrants and the organizations established to support Korean national independence movements.⁵⁶ These organizations established the provisional government in Shanghai, the Korean Commission in Washington D.C., and the Korean Independence Army in

⁵⁴ On May 24, 1949, March 1st was designated a national holiday in South Korea. Not August 15, 1945, which is the date that the Japanese surrendered unconditionally to the Allies, resulting in Korean liberation from Japan.

⁵⁵ The March 1st Movement resulted in a major change in Japanese imperial policy towards Korea. Japanese Governor General Hasegawa Yoshimichi was replaced by Saito Makoto, as it was thought that Yoshimichi was losing control of the situation in Korea. Makoto replaced the military police with a civilian force, gave Koreans limited press freedom and other relaxations of the cultural policy. This resulted in the publication of such journals as *Sin Yoga* (New Woman) and *Yoja Kye* (Woman's World). On the other side of the discursive fence, the March 1 Movement was a catalyst for the establishment of the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea in Shanghai, in April of the same year, 1919.

⁵⁶ Sucheng Chan, "Introduction" and "The Historiographer's Role," Mary Paik Lee, *Quiet Odyssey: A Pioneer Korean Woman in America*, ed. Sucheng Chan (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1990), xxi-ix, 135-177.

Manchuria and China. These groups sent money to the family members of the thirty-three signers of the Korean Declaration of Independence, who had been arrested, imprisoned, or killed. The transnational nature of the movement also positioned the Japanese annexation in an unfavorable light in the international political forum, which led to a loosening of some restrictions. Following the movement, the Japanese allowed the Koreans to publish their own newspapers, form colleges, and to hold juried art shows.

Between the two superpowers of Japan and China, a small peninsula managed to exist for thousands of years, losing more battles than winning them. What and how do we define winning or victimization? Manuel Castells defines social movements as purposive collective actions, in which the outcome in victory *as in defeat transforms the values and institutions of society* (my emphasis).⁵⁷ This changes how we interpret history in general, in terms of agency and the pitfalls of victimization.

Ethnonationalism

Along with the racially class-stratified society, even after the 1965 reform of U.S. immigration laws, the emergence of Korean American neoconservatives that espoused individual advancement, assimilation, and elitism, produced an antagonism of not only those in South Korea, but also within the Korean global diaspora. My interaction with the Korean diaspora beyond the United States, such as in Germany, Canada, Kazakhstan and Japan, has made clear that the byproduct of U.S. revisionist history produced an kind of ethnonationalism that

⁵⁷ Manuel Castells, *The Power of Identity* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, Inc., 1997), 3.

excludes the diaspora in other parts of the world. Ethnonationalism refers to a particular strain of nationalism marked by the desire of an ethnic community to have authority over its own political economic and social affairs, especially in diasporic enclaves.

The racialization of Korean Americans to the United States is a complex case that shares aspects of other racializing processes, yet it is distinct, because this racialization is significantly shaped by the U.S. involvement in Korea's liberation from Japan in 1945. Grace M. Cho and Chungmoo Choi argue that the internalization of the gift of liberation, in terms of Mauss and Bourdieu's concept of the gift economy, pressures the recipient into an obligation of reciprocity.⁵⁸ In particular, Cho posits that the intragenerational make up of the Korean diaspora is constituted by traumatic events that they are not allowed to know, which is interpellated in the family, and the ethnic community, as well as in official history. It is the psychic condition of forced forgetting. For example, the Korean War is often referred to as the "Forgotten War." Cho locates a critical site of subjectivity formation from a reciprocity in which Koreans cannot shame their protector. This explains the psychological mechanisms that are exponentially powerful when

⁵⁸ As Chungmoo Choi explains, "...gifts require the recipient's self-degradation and surrender of dignity to the power ...garnering symbolic capital from the recipients." This gift economy is "suspended between the sen of dignity and desire, between indebtedness and self-pity, agonizing in ambivalence." Chungmoo Choi, "Nationalism and Construction of Gender in Korea," *Dangerous women: gender and Korean nationalism* ed. Elaine H. Kim, Chungmoo Choi (New York:Routledge, 1998) 9-30. According to Pierre Bourdieu, symbolic capital is disguised profit drawn from the ideological labor of honor, rather than from direct economic exchange...[that] anticipates obligatory reciprocation from the recipients, which allows the gift-giver's political and economic domination. Bourdieu arrives at the notion of symbolic capital by way of the theory of gift economy, developed by Marcel Mauss. Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977). Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies* (New York: Norton, 1967).

discursive forces support the containment of the acknowledgement of war time atrocities, such as the mass civilian murders, rapes, and illegal warfare committed by U.S. military forces during the Korean War.

The field of “Psychology, Public Policy and Law,” considered as one field, assesses different public policies and legal alternatives in light of scientific knowledge based in psychology. It is an important triangulation of paradigms that will be further developed in the following chapters, as it is crucial to the understanding of the artwork. For example, the entry of the *Turtle Boat Head* installation is flanked by the profiles of two heads, signifying that, as one enters the installation, one is entering the interiority of the Korean American imaginary imagination (Figure 29). It is interesting to note here, however, that Chung was born in Bonn, Germany in 1959, and emigrated to the U.S. in 1975. He is what many sociologists are calling, “Third Culture Kid,” which is a common term in international schools all over the world that teach a U.S.-based curriculum so that children can go to college in the United States. Although the artists in my project are aware of the internal colonial model and the dangers of ethnonationalism, Chung exhibits a specific sensitivity based on his personal background, that will be further explained in the following chapters.⁵⁹

The Korean Americans affected by the L.A. riots felt the isolationism from both the U.S. and the South Korean government. This galvanized the Korean American nationalist discourse further away from the Korea diaspora globally,

⁵⁹ Michel Foucault, *Power and Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon; trans. Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mapham, and Kate Soper (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 126.

and at the same time, a counterhegemonic formation to the U.S. nationalist discourse created a separation, but also an alignment of Korean Americans with other disenfranchised racial groups, such as Chicanos and African Americans.⁶⁰ Korean Americans identified themselves with the dissident nationalist forms from the homeland, evidenced by the visible markers of national consciousness, such as the South Korean flag used by the demonstrators on May 2, 1992; aggrandizing Edward Lee like a political martyr in the South Korean political tradition; and the use of *p'ungmul* as part of the protest, are all forms of popular protest in South Korea. However, the meaning of these enactments were distinctly different from South Korean derivations, because they arise from the position of U.S. racialized class consciousness.

A key determinate of this isolated position is that Korean Americans did not receive substantial funding, if any, from the South Korean or the U.S. governments, to rebuild their businesses. South Koreans did not reciprocate the efforts of Korean Americans' supportive efforts in the past, such as the aforementioned organizations during the Japanese annexation, which sent money to South Korea from abroad. The Rebuild Los Angeles (RLA) project directed attention away from supporting Korean Americans to buttressing the corporate support of multinational companies. Under the direction of Peter Ueberroth, RLA developed into a network of interlocking constraints, rather than

⁶⁰ Such alliances have a long history that is slowly starting to recalibrate the discourse of American history, from the alliances made in 1968 in San Francisco (Figure 9), to the establishment of the Black-Korean Alliance in 1986. Additional archival footage of this movement is available at <http://www.oac.cdlib.org/search?style=oac4:titlesAZ=p;idT=da686f49c11d1f9a994dd945e6891c94>.

restraints of the existing overlapping power mechanisms. This contributed to an outcome where no significant change took place in city governance.⁶¹ Rather, the hierarchy of the political network was maintained.⁶²

Centrifugal and Centripetal Forces: Still Present Pasts (어제 안에 오늘)/ The Homeland and the U.S.⁶³

The ideology of Korean American nationalism is based on a diachronic development of phenomena that correspond to the present needs. Examples of the kinds of output that result from the creation of certain elements that attain a mythic characteristic, are subsumed into history. The turtle boat is an example of such an output. During my preliminary research for *TBH*, I found no mention of archeological evidence of such a boat (Figure 119). The existence of this iron-clad warship that Admiral Yi used against the Japanese armada in 1592, is mentioned in historical texts without any cross-references in Japanese sources, or a shred of physical evidence.⁶⁴ Surely, basing an entire mythos of Korean

⁶¹ For details on Peter Ueberroth's efforts, see Lou Canon, *Official Negligence: How Rodney King and the Riots Changed Los Angeles and the LAPD* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1999), 47-75.

⁶² For details of how and why this hierarchy was maintained, see Patrick D. Joyce, *No Fire Next Time: Black-Korean Conflicts and the Future of America's Cities* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 154-166.

⁶³ The literal translation of 어제 안에 오늘 is "yesterday inside today," which are the words loosely translated into Still Present Pasts. *Still Present Pasts*, is a traveling exhibition that opened in 2005, is an exhibition of Korean American art that includes direct responses to the Korean War. . For an exhibition schedule, see http://stillpresentpasts.org/exhibit_sites.

⁶⁴ It is generally accepted that this boat actually existed. See Figure 5 for a model of the ship from the MIT Naval Museum. However, it is also generally accepted that this boat did not outlive the war. Korean history texts that have been used widely, including during my undergraduate and graduate education, both present the existence of the boat as fact. KiBaik Lee, *A New History of Korea*, trans. Edward W. Wagner, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 210-213. Peter H. Lee and Wm. Theodore DeBary ed. *Sources of Korean Tradition*, vol. 2, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 252-254.

identity on one source is shaky at best. And yet, this turtle boat is one of the major symbols of Korean identity, along with the gold crown from the Silla Kingdom (57 BCE - 935 CE). Such “artifacts” are mass-reproduced as paperweights and other kitschified forms (Figure 119).

This gap in information was so astonishing to me that I contacted a former professor of Korean and Japanese art in San Francisco, who taught at Ewha University in South Korea, Dr. Hanna Sigur. Her response was that such inquiry is just one of those things that is not discussed in history, archeology, or art history departments in the universities in South Korea.⁶⁵ In addition to this, the introductory lecture of Dr. Donald MacCallum, who still teaches at UCLA, included the fact that much of Korean history is contested, because of competing nationalist agendas of South Korea, North Korea, Japan, China, and the U.S., that interpret artifacts and historical texts differently, and often contradict one another.⁶⁶ If the academics are on such shaky ground, the general populace is even more so. However, the truth does not seem to really matter, because the influence of these varying accounts attaches itself to divergent constituencies.

⁶⁵ Aside from the fact that I remember seeing the Silla Crown in person during a school field trip, my recollections of my primary education in South Korea are extremely nationalist. I still remember the nationalist songs that I had to learn, and the educational constitution for Korean nationals that all elementary school children had to memorize, which begins, “We are born in this land to fulfill our task and responsibility to the nation.” In addition to this, I remember that every day, the world stopped at sundown, regardless of where I was living at the time in South Korea, from Daedeok-san, which is where I spent my formative years, to Gungchon, where I went to school. The nearest city hall would blast the national anthem, all television and radio stations also played the national anthem, and everyone stopped to salute.

⁶⁶ MaCallum, Donald. “Introduction.” Art History Department. University of California, Los Angeles, California. 7 January 1996. Lecture.

The power of the discursive hold of these events has different meanings for Koreans in the homeland, and for those in the U.S. , During the riots, Radio Korea (KBLA) in Los Angeles was an interpellating apparatus of Korean American nationalism. Radio Korea had called upon the Korean people for collective action, directing volunteers to specific trouble spots during the riots. My father, uncles, and older male cousins all joined in, and I did not see them for days as they stood watch over Korean American businesses, to defend them against looters and fire bombs. The specifics of these broadcasts suggest the critical role of collective memory for the members of a community, in perceived moments of national crisis. During the riots, KBLA featured a narration of the story of *Hangju san sung*, a fortress-castle in Korea. It is a story about how Koreans fought Japanese encroachment during the Imjin War (1592-1594, 1597-1603).The story of *Hangju san sung* is often told in Korean children's history books, and is as true as the tale of George Washington cutting down a cherry tree.⁶⁷

These vehicles of the inculcation of nationalism are rife with inaccuracies. While listening to this narration, I questioned the validity of the interpretation, because I know that the word *Hangju* in Korean means wash-rag. However, in the story *Hangju* refers to the aprons that the women used to carry stones to

⁶⁷ The analysis of children's books that foster Korean and Korean American nationalism has been conducted by many scholars. For an example of the depth and breadth of the study of this type of literary production, see John Stephens and Sung-ae Lee, "Diasporan Subjectivity and Cultural Space in Korean American Picture Books," *Journal of Asian American Studies* (February 2006): 1-25. I still have some of these picture books and, looking at them now as an adult, I find them appalling and, at the same time, affirming. This ambiguity is something that I have come to terms with as part of what it means to be Korean American, in that I live in a contrapuntal space of competing ideologies.

fortify the walls of the castle. Regardless of such inaccuracies, the point is that the story raised an ethno-nationalist consciousness.

This selective choosing and omitting certain details occurred because the creation of a fictive unity was more important than historical accuracy.

Diachronically, the homeland can become more deeply embedded in the collective consciousness of a minority abroad, as concrete experience is replaced by myth. In myth, the past is actively reconstructed and grafted onto the present. Korean Americans reinvent their ethnicity by invoking the homeland, at the risk of romanticizing and distorting its history. A diachronically fabricated history is enacted upon the synchronic linearity of the immediate situation in Korean American politics. Each type of time, “big time” and “small time,” as influenced by my readings of Walter Benjamin, encourages me to come to terms with the fact that myth and reality can and do exist at the same time, and that they can be delineated to elucidate the validity of genealogy and multiple epistemic outcomes of Korean and Korean American constituencies.⁶⁸

The Contrapuntal Score

The Korean and Korean diasporic consciousness is sustained not only through a centrifugal movement towards the outside (future and global), but also through its centripetal incorporation of the inside (past and Korean history), depending on the material and psychological transference on the present. The

⁶⁸ Walter Benjamin, “World Time,” “Types of History,” “Meaning of Time in the Moral Universe,” *Selected Writings*, Vol. 1. ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, (Cambridge: Belknap, 1996), 115, 226-227, 286-287. Walter Benjamin, “On the Concept of History,” *Selected Writings*, vol. 4 ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, (Cambridge: Belknap, 1996), 389-400.

two forces of Korean and Korean American subjectivities are like ionic forces that repel each other, but also need each other to continue their respective articulations of self. This syllogism between the *philia* and the *phobia* in the contrapuntal composition of the Korean self and the Korean American self, is where subjectivities of both groups can be found. There are inherent limits that prevent a sense of identity from being fully incorporated into one, and only one, identity. This contrapuntal nature shows that trauma can lead, not only to the openness of diasporic identities, but to dogma and delusion as well. By centripetal and centrifugal forces, I mean states of being repelled and impelled by the discourse of the majority in varying intensities, as politically valanced by the present condition.⁶⁹ Implicit in this argument is a rejection of dualities.⁷⁰

I end this response by looking at *Choi's Market* (1993) by Sung Ho Choi, as a sample of the ways in which I intend to analyze the Korean and Korean American subjectivities (Figure 24). The family is framed by the door as they stand at the precipice, visually both inside and outside. Above the heads of the

⁶⁹ Such syllogisms are quite common. For example, capitalism and nationalisms are incompatible, given that capitalism is driven by competition that necessitates a division with, and of, opposing forces, whereas nationalism rests on the unity and the monologic rhetoric of nationalisms. Yet both exist. Other syllogisms are violence and law, as Walter Benjamin describes in his "Critique of Violence" and "The Right to Use Force." Walter Benjamin, "Critique of Violence" and "Right to Use Force," *Selected Writings*, vol.1, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, (Cambridge: Belknap, 1996), 236-252, 231-234.

⁷⁰ Here, I am referring to the work done by Gloria Anzaldua on mestiza consciousness that holds particular relevance in the case of Korean American positionalities. Anzaldua states that "The work of mestiza consciousness is to break down the subject-object duality that keeps her prisoner and to show in the flesh and through the images in her work how duality is transcended. The answer to the problem between the white race and the colored, between males and females, lies in healing the split that originates in the very foundation of our lives, our culture, our languages, our thoughts. A massive uprooting of dualistic thinking in the individual and collective consciousness is the beginning of a long struggle, but one that could in our best hope, bring us to the end of rape, of violence, of war." Gloria Anzaldua, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Spinster/Aunt Lute, 1987), 78-80.

figures are the letters, “MERIC.”⁷¹ The frame that covers the letter “A” before and after the word is quite telling in its negation of place -- globally, locally and politically. I interpret this omission as signifying that the family is not Asian, and not American, in terms of the past and future allegiances to the present condition of the aftermath of the L.A. riots. This serves as a rebuttal against idealizing the flaw and fissures of identity. The omission shows that fragmentation can engender petrification, just as it can also be a consequence of historical alienation. The omission allows an openness to the “other,” as well as to the divided and unresolved fragments of the other self, leading to a very different kind of fragmentation - one which is, in Freud’s own words, “devastating,” and causes identities to batten down, to go the other way, towards dogma, exhibiting the dangers of coercive and coercing forms of faith.⁷²

⁷¹ My initial reaction to this piece was that “MERIC” referred to meritocracy because it is a central element of Korean American neo conservative assimilation. It is only after I recently reviewed my notes from my readings of Frantz Fanon and W.E.B. DuBois, that my understanding of double consciousness was deepened. As Fanon writes, “In order to terminate this neurotic situation, in which I am compelled to choose an unhealthy, conflictual solution, fed on fantasies, hostile inhuman in short, I have only one solution: to rise above this absurd drama that others have staged round me, to reject the *two terms* that are equally unacceptable, and through one human being, to reach out for the universal.” (My emphasis), Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 197. According to Du Bois, “It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, - an American, a Negro, two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keep it from being torn asunder.” W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Penguin, [1903] 1989), 45, quoted by Kwando Mbiassi Kinshasa, *Emigration vs. assimilation: the debate in the African American press, 1827-1861* (Jefferson: McFarland, 1988), 40.

⁷² Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism: Three Essays*, 1939 [1934-38], *Standard Edition*, vol. XXIII, 85. Jacqueline Rose, “Response to Edward Said,” *Freud and the Non-European*, (New York: Verso, 2003), 76.

CHAPTER 2: Historicity of Korean American Art⁷³

We need to remember as intellectuals that the battles we fight are battles of words... What academic intellectuals must confront is thus not their “victimization” by society at large (or their victimization-in-solidarity-with-the-oppressed), but the power, wealth, and privilege that ironically accumulate from their “oppositional” viewpoint, and the widening gap between the professed contents of their words and the upward mobility they gain from such words.⁷⁴

Art has the power, not to represent the world or located subjects, but to imagine, create and vary affects that are not already given.⁷⁵

Epistemology & Genealogy

According to Michel Foucault, genealogy is the study of non-sovereign operations of power in the present.⁷⁶ Genealogy as a historical technique, where one questions the commonly understood emergence of various philosophical and social beliefs by showing alternative and subversive histories, allows access to the micropolitical world. With this in mind, I seek to posit a hermeneutic framework for Korean American art. The shared struggle of Korean Americans and the transnational history of migration and cultural exchange within the continent, necessitates a broadening of the inquiry, to incorporate the shared struggle of Asian American artists. The practical value of a fundamental shift is not only an intellectual one for the progress of the humanities, but also an

⁷³ A version of this chapter was presented on February 2011 at the College Association of Art Centennial Conference in Los Angeles, CA. The panel from which this paper was presented was called Confrontations in Global Art History.

⁷⁴ Rey Chow, *Writing Diaspora* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 17.

⁷⁵ Claire Colebrook, *Gilles Deleuze*. (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 103.

⁷⁶ Michel Foucault expanded the Nietzschean approach into a counter-history of the position concerning the subject that is actively engaged in a history without history. Michel Foucault. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. trans. by Alan Sheridan, (London: Tavistock, 1972), 117-127.

epistemological one, where the panoramic view of American Modern Art in the libraries, bookstores, and encyclopedic museums is reorganized to reflect the historical evidence unearthed. What this entails is a significant recalibration of the relevance of the lived experience of many Asian Americans that are unaccounted for, because they are dismissed as the exception to the canonical history of art.

The history of American Art at its present state is dysfunctional. At its most basic level, art history is about establishing sameness, towards a development of a systematic canon from which interpretations can be made. With revisionist history, the efforts shifted towards looking for difference, which opened new avenues of intertextuality as an accompanying methodology. The maturation of Asian American history as a field of study is, a guiding template for Korean American history.⁷⁷ The description of *Korea 100* (Figure 56) by Nam June Paik, which follows, relies on a fundamental repositioning that is established through utilizing the findings from projects such as, the Stanford Asian American Art Project and the California Asian American Artists Biographical Survey (CAAABS).⁷⁸

A Profound Confusion

In 2003, the Smithsonian Institution presented an exhibition celebrating one

⁷⁷ For further information, see Lili M. Kim, "Doing Korean American History in the Twenty-First Century," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 11, 2 (June 2008): 199-209.

⁷⁸ The Stanford Asian American Art Project is directed by Gordon H. Chang, Mark Dean Johnson, and Sharon Spain. The headquarters of this ongoing project has been Stanford University since 2004. The California Asian American Artists Biographical Survey is directed by Mark Dean Johnson and Sharon Spain. The headquarters of this project has been San Francisco State University since 1999.

hundred years of Korean Immigration to the United States. I worked as a docent in the Los Angeles version of the show, at the Korean American Museum. I was excited to see the ways in which American art history would be redefined to become more inclusive, and where the Korean artists who were members of the American Artists Associations in the early years of American avant-garde art, would finally be recovered and exhibited in celebration of American art history. Modern abstract painters like Charles Park (Figure 57), Whanki Kim (Figure 58), Tschang-Yeul Kim (Figure 59), and Young Bae (Figure 60), would finally be discussed in the appropriate historical and formalist context of Mark Rothko, Hans Hoffman, and Jackson Pollock.⁷⁹

Needless to say, the paradigm shift never happened, and the only modern artist of historical relevance in this exhibit was Po Kim (Figure 61). However, Kim's works were exhibited without any effort towards a contextual connection, with regard to artistic practices of American art history. The shallow analysis ended with the recognition that he was Korean. This show, entitled *Dreams and Reality: Celebrating 100 Years of Korean American Art*, is a vicissitude of the multicultural rhetoric -- a backhanded complement, in that it appears to be a

⁷⁹ Charles Park traveled to the United States as a student in 1914, and attended the Art Institute of Chicago. By 1924, he was living in Los Angeles and was a student at the Otis Art Institute, where he was enrolled until 1929. *Asian American Art: A History, 1850-1970*, ed. Gordon H. Chang, Mark Dean Johnson, Paul J. Karlstrom, Sharon Spain, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 408-409.

great opportunity, but is shot down by the reality of what it celebrated in 2003.⁸⁰ In 1903, one hundred and three laborers came to Hawai'i to work on the sugar plantations. Of course, Nam June Paik had to be included in the show, since he is the only ethnic Korean who is part of the art historical canon, providing the exhibition with a "token" of artistic validity. In comparing other works by Paik that deal with Korea, I contend that the painting he executed for this exhibit is a sardonic performative gesture, rather than one of celebration. Art historians are familiar with Paik as the artist associated with the Fluxus movement, seminal to the development of video and performance art. He rarely dealt with specifically Korean elements in his artwork, but when he did, those elements were poignant, serious, and sincere.

On the other hand, we know Nam June Paik the jester, whose work with John Cage contributed to a fundamental development of the redemptive value of parodic performativity. John Cage's work challenged the aesthetics of art and performance, incorporating the concept of aleatoric or chance-controlled music. A famous collaboration between Cage and Paik includes a performance where Paik cut Cage's tie, then washed his co-performer's hair with shampoo, while his *Etude for Piano* was being played.

Cage was one of the primary influences on Paik's work. Paik's memorial

⁸⁰ The exhibit was also a celebration of the fact that, on June 27, 2002, the U.S. Senate passed a historic resolution (S.R. 185), recognizing the 100th anniversary of Korean immigration to the United States. In accordance with the resolution, President Bush issued a proclamation recognizing the centennial, on January 13, 2003, commending Korean Americans for their "important role in building, defending, and sustaining the United States of America." John H. Kim Esq., Ji-Yeon Yup, Elaine H. Kim and Eui Young Yu, "In Observance of Centennial of Korean Immigration to the U.S.," *National Association of Korean Americans*, 2003. Web. February 9, 2011. <http://www.naka.org/resources/history.asp>.

tribute to John Cage included a pastiche of Cage's performances, anecdotes, interviews, and examples of Paik's participatory music and television works, that paralleled Cage's strategies and concerns, incorporating chance, randomness, and democratization of sounds, which included Cage's most famous piece 4'33," and Paik's *Zen for TV*. Zen Buddhism was a fundamental influence and affinity of John Cage's.⁸¹

The few pieces where Paik's ethnicity are part of the artistic production are: the 1992 Shaman Rite for John Cage's memorial (1992) (Figure 62); *Mother* (2005) (Figure 63), which is the last work signed by the artist, before he died in January 2006, and the painting entitled *Korea 100* (2003) (Figure 56), for the *Dreams and Reality* exhibit. The composition of the small painting, only 24 by 36 inches, centers around a representation of a steam boat, where the smoke from the boat resembles the shape of the Korean flag's central component (Figure 114). This is reinforced by the Taoist directional symbols that appear on the four corners of the flag that is loosely replicated in the painting. To the upper left side of the flag are the words 음양 (yin yang), which designate this central symbol of the Korean flag. Below this, are the characters 대한 (Korea), and below that 사람 (Person). This is an odd way to denote "Korean person," because 대한 is usually in the context of 대한민국, which refers to the political designation of the Republic of Korea; however, when referring to a Korean person without political designation, instead of 대한, one would use the prefix 한국, which denotes the

⁸¹ A version of this collaboration was performed at Harvard Square in Cambridge, Massachusetts, produced by the New Television Workshop and the TV Lab at WNET on Aug 12, 1992.

people from the Korean peninsula, including those living on the northern side of the 38th parallel.⁸² On the other side of the painting, there are variations on the character, 백, which, when alone, indicates the numerical value of 100, connoting the centennial celebration, the artist's last name, and the first character from 백 채 (Peakche, which is one of the Three Kingdoms during the historical period of the same name, lasting from 18 BCE to 660CE). Below this is the character 白, which is the Sino character for 백, and which also has the numerical value of one hundred. Other numbers in the painting are: 103, referring to the number of laborers and 1903, the year of their arrival. These numbers are from historical documents that detail the exchange brokered by Horace Allen, a missionary, medical doctor, and self-appointed diplomat between the kingdom of Korea and the Hawaiian Sugar Planters Association (HSPA), directed by William G. Irwin.⁸³ The rest of the painting consists of English words referring to the Smithsonian exhibition, the artist name, and the date of the exhibition's opening in Washington D.C.

The painting that Paik contributed conveys the mixed emotions of a Korean artist requested to execute a work in response to this historical marker. I

⁸² A possible reason for this now awkward compound is that, like Paik, the Korean national anthem conflates the two types of connotations within the refrain: 무궁화 삼천리 화려 강산 대한 사람 대한으로 길이 보전하세, which translates to: Roses of Sharon and Three thousand Li full of splendid mountains and rivers; Great Koreans, To the Great Korean way, stay always true! Also, 민국 is a Chinese origin word, where as 사람 is strictly a Korean word, meaning that there is no Chinese derivation of that word. The Chinese derivation of "people" in Korean would be 인간.

⁸³ It is of note that most of the laborers were coming out of a famine suffered in 1901, and were recent Christian converts, who were encouraged to immigrate, to live in the land of God-fearing people.

interpret the painting as a flippant response, that a celebration of a ship full of laborers is asinine, especially in the context of America's history of slavery of the African diaspora. In addition, specific juridical dispositions, particularly the Chinese Exclusion Act, that targeted migrants from the Asian continent, produce, in the words of Judith Butler, "a certain tension...between modes of being or mental states, temporary or provisional constellations of mind of one kind or another, and juridical and military complexes that govern how and where we may move, associate, work, and speak."⁸⁴ In fact, this broadens the connotation of laborer, to the field slave; in the case of Koreans, instead of cotton, it was sugar cane.

The quality of the work, in addition to these indexical markers, led me to interpret Paik's painting as a performative sardonic gesture, when compared to the gravity of his other pieces that refer to Korea. The Korean shamanic rite that Paik performed in 1992 was his way of releasing his friend and colleague, John Cage. Nam June Paik's video installation entitled *Mother* consists of a one-channel video, where two children appear to be playing under the protective diaphanous silk linen of a traditional Korean dress. This installation evokes the idea of the motherland, and the two children refer to the separation of the two Koreas that came out of one mother. In contrast to *Mother*, the criticality of

⁸⁴ In 1924, the U.S. Congress designated Asia as a "barred zone" from which immigration was totally prohibited. About three hundred Korean students were admitted with Japanese-issued passports between 1925 and 1940. In 1913, California passed the Alien Land Act, which prohibited immigrants ineligible for citizenship - i.e Asians - from buying property. Thus, many Korean Americans engaged in tenant farming and small businesses, such as barbershops and rooming houses, which catered to people not permitted to use facilities reserved for whites. Judith Butler, *Who Sings the Nation-State?*, (New York, Seagall Books, 2007), 4.

Korea 100 has more similarities with the approach of Asian American art historicity. The uncharacteristic nature of *Korea 100*, in contrast to the level of artistic rigor and intensity of Paik's other works that deal with the land of his birth-- support my interpretation of *Korea 100* by Paik. The painting de-romanticizes the consulate's rhetoric of peaceful migration, because the thesis of the painting is an evisceration of a proletarian romanticism.⁸⁵

The crisis of history here is that Korean immigration is romanticized to be that of a proletarian story. That this framework and the knowledge production therein has gone on for so long, is partially due to the fact that documents like those from the South Korean consulate, from the exhibition catalog, show that the *modus operandi* of South Korea is to toe the line of the rhetoric of the Smithsonian, and by extension the U.S., which is a simplified monolithic history of one people.⁸⁶ This is further supported by the fact that their "token" artist, Paik, comes from a different socio-economic class, that of the rich, internationally

⁸⁵ In the preface to the exhibition catalog, Han Sung-Joo, Ambassador for the Embassy of the Republic of Korea, to the U.S.A., writes, "This year we are celebrating the centennial of Korean immigration to the United States, and the 50th anniversary of the Korea-U.S. alliance. Friendship and bond between people are created when they share a common dream, and cultural events such as this one help us build even a stronger bond and a deeper understanding." Such celebratory statements belie the conditions under which the laborers came to Hawai'i, in order to convey a message and seek to solidify diplomatic ties between the two countries." *Dreams and Reality: Korean American Art, Celebrating 100 Years of Korean Immigration to the U.S.* exh.cat. (Washington, DC: Smithsonian International Gallery, 2003), 3.

⁸⁶ See the letter from Consul Kim that is included in the prologue of the exhibition catalog of the show. This view was made crystal clear to me when the Korean American Museum in Los Angeles, which has the support of the South Korean Consulate, pulled out of the *Still Present Past* exhibit because the exhibit cast the United States in an unfavorable light. To me, a docent for the Korean American Museum, as well as the curatorial consultant for the *Still Present Pasts: Korean Americans Artists and the Forgotten War*, this was an unfortunate awakening to the realities of South Korean obedience to American imperialism.

educated Korean diaspora, which tells a different history, one characterized by transnational development.

In fact, all of the aforementioned Korean artists have a similar socio-economic background and transnational biography. This gap between official rhetoric and critical hermeneutics complicates preconceived notions of subjectivity, as described by Lisa Lowe:

Asian American culture is the site of more than critical negation of the nation -- it is a site that shifts and marks alternatives to the national terrain by occupying other spaces, imagining different narratives and critical historiographies, and enacting practices that give rise to new forms of subjectivity and new ways of questioning the government of human life by the national state.⁸⁷

The term “Asian American” was coined in 1968, but historical documents have confirmed the existence of a thriving Asian American artistic community in the U.S. since 1896.⁸⁸ The recent retrieval and compilation of archives from the aforementioned projects in effect accomplish a similar de-romanticizing gesture against the story of migration and the historical vacuum of Asian American history.⁸⁹ This chapter is a gesture towards a new way of looking at the past, as these findings necessitate a major shift in the ways in which we can begin to understand Korean American history and the hermeneutics of the artwork, as

⁸⁷ Lisa Lowe, “The Power of Culture,” *Journal of Asian American Studies* 1.1 (1998): 5-29.

⁸⁸ Gordon Chang, Ed., *Asian American art: a history 1850-1970* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008).

⁸⁹ The archives I refer to are the Stanford Asian American Art Project, directed by Gordon H. Chang, Mark Dean Johnson, and Sharon Spain. The headquarters of this ongoing project has been Stanford University since 2004. I also refer to the California Asian American Artists Biographical Survey, directed by Mark Dean Johnson and Sharon Spain. The headquarters of this project has been San Francisco State University since 1999.

demonstrated in my interpretation of *Korea 100*.

The unearthing of archives exposes multiple epistemologies and validates a certain level of comfort with the complexity and confusion of information gathered because, according to the Director of the Stanford Asian American Art Project, this is not a literal recapturing of the past.⁹⁰ What he means here is that “accidents” of history demonstrate that a fundamental change in the way we approach American history needs to occur, to accommodate the findings that not only show the existence of a different class of Asian Americans, but specifically that they had an active artistic community.

Different from the approach of early Asian American Studies, which consisted of projects about self-assertion like portraits and documentaries to correct misrepresentation, this new approach describes forms of modernism as a vehicle for an expression of an ideology specific to Asian Americans.⁹¹ According to Chang, the bottom-up history of the Asian American Studies did not include “intellectuals,” which I am assuming that Chang is using as an interchangeable term with artists. I interpret these individuals as the “organic intellectual” who, as

⁹⁰ Gordan Chang, “Asian American Artists in California Symposium,” *Hammer Lecture Series*, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, CA. March 14, 2009.

⁹¹ Jim Supangkat. “Art and Culture in the Third Space: The Case of Indonesia,” *Cubism in Asia; Unbounded Dialogues, International Symposium Report*, ed. by Yasuko Furuichi. (Tokyo: Japan Foundation, 2006), 248-257.

Antonio Gramsci describes, is outside of nominal class categories.⁹²

Art and art history was thought of as elitist in the survival mode of early immigration, as delineated by John Adams, in his vision of America for his sons.

The science of government it is my duty to study, more than all other sciences; the arts of legislation and administration and negotiation ought to take place of, indeed to exclude, in a manner, all other arts. I must study politics and war, that my sons may have liberty to study mathematics and philosophy. My sons ought to study mathematics and philosophy, geography, natural history and naval architecture, navigation, commerce, and agriculture, in order to give their children a right to study painting, poetry, music, architecture, statuary, tapestry, and porcelain.⁹³

A similar spirit exists in the early interpretation of artistic production among Asian Americans. The linear progression of enlightenment hierarchy, as described by John Adams, negates the possibility of the simultaneous existence of difference

⁹² As theorized by Gramsci, an Organic intellectual, unlike a traditional intellectual, is a bourgeoisie scholar who cultivates strong roots in his/her community, working to maintain links with local issues and struggles that connect to the people and their experiences. While traditional intellectuals imagine themselves as an autonomous group with an historical presence above and separate from political class struggle, they are in fact strongly allied with the dominant ideology and the ruling class. On the other hand, organic intellectuals openly recognize their location within the dominant ideology and their function in perpetuating it, and use their positionality to cultivate strategies for helping their communities develop a self-inspired, organic consciousness. As an Italian Marxist interested in socialist Revolution, Antonio Gramsci privileged the role of education in building a counter hegemonic revolutionary class consciousness, and emphasized the importance of the working class proletariat in creating its own insurgent movements. Recognizing the capacity of all humans to contribute to the intellectual pursuit, he reconceptualized the classically elitist intellectual realm as a fundamental part of everyday life, bringing it into the grasp of the average working class subject. Because he believed that ideological transformation was imperative before Revolution became possible, he wanted a revolutionary socialist consciousness to be generated organically within the communities that he saw leading the future Revolution. He called upon the working class to produce its own organic intellectuals as well as traditional intellectuals, and an accompanying class consciousness that would appreciate the local experiences of the people. Gusto E. Fischman and Peter McAllen, "Rethinking Critical Pedagogy and the Gramscian and Freirean Legacy: From Organic to Committed Intellectuals or Critical Pedagogy, Commitment, and Praxis." *Cultural Studies Critical Methodologies* 5.4 (2005): 425-47.

⁹³ John Quincy Adams to Abigail Adams, 1780, in *The Letters of John and Abigail Adams*, ed. Frank Shuffelton (New York: Penguin Classics, 2004), 378.

within a group at certain moments in history, where life is experienced at multiple speeds and states of being. The rhetoric of the necessary third to fourth generation gap for the kind of assimilation and development that John Adams describes should not be unilaterally assumed and applied to all immigrant histories.

A new spirit that critical artistic efforts can be both academic and political, is further explained in the first chapter of Kandice Chuh's *Imagine Otherwise: An Asian Americanist Critique*.⁹⁴ A similar attitude is exhibited in Lisa Lowe's *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics*, which encourages readers to look for the possibility of new forms of subjectivity. To further contribute to this discourse, I posit the following query: What if we look at Asian American modernism as a way to rework the hermeneutic efforts beyond that of politically-driven self-assertion or the canonically oriented trope of Greenbergian modernism? The synthesis of modernism and early Asian American art is identified and expanded upon in recent scholarship that necessitates a recalibration of both categories. Unfortunately, Greenbergian theories of modernism, applied to Korean modern art, are still written today in a superficial and fragmentary way that is not very productive.

For example, the similarities between EuroAmerican monochromatic and minimalist paintings, to that of Korea's *Art Informel* period of the 1970s, is only external, and it is primarily extrapolated from external appearance. The reason

⁹⁴ Kandice Chuh, *Imagine Otherwise on Asian Americanist Critique*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

for this digression is that the artwork of Korean American Young Bae is abstract, rather than representative or politically self-assertive (Figure 60). Under the surface, the life of the man exhibits an intimate understanding of Korean American struggles, though this is not explicitly evident in his artwork. Like the Informel artists, it is Bae's interpretation of his own works, and implicit aesthetic, is particular to a Korean spirit. Though the works of Informel artists appear similar to works such as Franz Kline, they have a different intent that is politically philosophical and philosophically political. Just as the French and German artists were reacting to WWII, Korean artists went through a similar existential moment that formed the theoretical basis of expressions between existentialism and psychological trauma.

For example, “during the 1950s, such magazines like *Life*, *Time*, *Art in America*, and *Art News*, which were easily available in Korea, mainly focused their attention on unconventional techniques of Euro-American Abstract Expressionism. For Korean Informel artists, these stylistic characteristics became effective tools for accommodating the specific nature of the national experience,” according to Moojeong Chung.⁹⁵ The fundamentally different foundations of Korean modernism described by Chung, radically alter the hermeneutic engagement with the artwork. For example, *Foule* (1987) by Lee Ungno (Figure 64), employs the calligraphic characteristics of the Informel to denote one of the first characters for “man” 大, in order to convey a scene of

⁹⁵ Moojeong Chung, *Abstract Expressionism, Art Informel and Modern Korean Art, 1945-1965*. Diss. City University of New York, 2000.

people running in different directions. A similar approach to calligraphy is evident in *People* (1999) by Seo Se-ock (Figure 65), which is an abstraction of a steel fence where the individual wire crossings appear bound together as one people, conveying an expression of unity.

From this framework, a space for artists such as Charles Park, Po Kim, Whanki Kim, Tscheung Kim, can be incorporated into an epistemological understanding, where a hermeneutic effort can begin. A recalibration of this framework opens up a possibility of alternative interpretations for the development of Asian American art history and, in turn, Korean American art history. Furthermore, a more nuanced understanding of the abstract works that “look” modern, for all intents and purposes, such as those from Cuba, also have a similar inherent quality.⁹⁶ For example, the ways in which Luis Camnitzer describes the work of Flavio Garciandia in the 1980s, with its modern and postmodern (kitsch) elements, is described as camouflaging rhetorical gestures against Cuban foreign policies, or lack thereof.⁹⁷

Therefore, privileging a formalist understanding of modern art across the board is reductivist. On the other hand, privileging race as the primary analytical category stymies other possibilities for organizing Asian American studies.

⁹⁶ For a description of the evolution of Cuban art with these types of modernist tendencies, see Gerardo Mosquera, “Introduction to New Cuban Art.” *Contemporary Art from Cuba*. (New York: Delano Greenridge Editions and Arizona State University Art Museum, 1999), 23-30. Antonio Eligio Fernandez (Tonel), “Tree of Many Beaches: Cuban Art in Motion (1980s-1990s), (New York: Delano Greenridge Editions and Arizona State University Art Museum, 1999), 39-52. Luis Camnitzer, *New Art of Cuba*. Revised Edition (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003).

⁹⁷ Anna Indict, “Nuyorican Baroque: Pepon Osorio’s Chucherias, *Art Journal* 60.1 (Spring 2001): 72-83.

Korean American art history is productive, precisely because of its categorical flux.⁹⁸ Transnationalism as a concept advances and complicates Asian American studies, since the production and logic of race must be understood as a “technology of U.S. national identity,” according to Kandice Chuh.⁹⁹

What is American Art History?

What is American art? Simply, “art by inhabitants of the United States of America,” according to www.artlex.com.¹⁰⁰ If that is the case, enrollment records from the San Francisco Institute of Art and the Otis Art College show that Asian American artists were not only enrolled as early as 1867, but also won awards, and were celebrated in their time.¹⁰¹ Furthermore, the first recorded Korean American art student is Charles Park, who attended Otis in the 1920s, even though, in the 1920s, Korea was not recognized as its own nation, but a colony of Japan.¹⁰²

The aforementioned Stanford and CAAABS projects unearthed catalogues and brochures showing that Asian American artists exhibited in the Chicago

⁹⁸ A similar conclusion was proposed by Kandice Chuh, in her analysis of Filipino American identity discourses. Kandice Chuh, *Imagine Otherwise on Asian Americanist Critique*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 56-58.

⁹⁹ Kandice Chuh, *Imagine Otherwise on Asian Americanist Critique*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 56-57.

¹⁰⁰ <http://www.artlex.com/> (accessed August 19, 2010).

¹⁰¹ Sharon Spain, “Introduction to Biographies of California Asian American Artists, 1850-1965,” in *Asian American Art: A History 1850-1970*. Eds. Gordon H. Chang, Mark Dean Johnson, Sharon Spain (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 283-290.

¹⁰² Sharon Spain, “Chronology of Asian American Art,” in *Asian American Art: A History 1850-1970*. Eds. Gordon H. Chang, Mark Dean Johnson, Sharon Spain (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 408.

Worlds Fair, and an exhibition in New York, now called the Whitney Biennale.¹⁰³

The argument made by Linda Nochlin in the essay, “Why Are There No Great Women Artists?” was that socio-cultural and institutional barriers were to blame for the absence of women in art history. Her argument is further complicated when applied to Asian American artists, because historical evidence shows that there was institutional support. So, why were Asian American artists not included with the Polish Americans, German Americans, and Russian Americans? The answer to that question gets to the heart of the matter - race.

Invisible Men

The February 1943 cover of *American Artist* (Figure 66), featured a Chinese American painter, Dong Kingman (Figure 67). In the issue, Dong Kingman said, “Western painters call me Chinese. Chinese painters say I’m very Western. I would say I’m in the middle. Everyone writes that my work is half East and half West, that I’m in between. I don’t know, I just want to be myself.”¹⁰⁴ We need a new vocabulary to discuss the “people in the middle.” However, just as the work of literary criticism and ethnic studies seeks to break out of the east/west, Orientalist/Occidental divide, in addition to the prison of hybridity’s precipice, it is visual art that has yet to completely free itself from the broad categorization of these “people in the middle”.¹⁰⁵ The ethnic identity of the individual is primary to

¹⁰³ The event began as an annual exhibition in 1932. <http://theartreserve.com/art-resources/art-fair-directory>

¹⁰⁴ Quoted in Leonard Slater, “Sight and Sound,” (*McCall’s*, September 1961): 12; and “Meeting of East & West,” *Time* 53, no. 16 (April 19, 1949).

¹⁰⁵ Michael Franti, “People in the Middle,” *Spearhead*, PFA Media NYC compact disc.

formal aesthetic contribution because, “aesthetic judgment in America was never race-free but always racially constrained,” according to Gordon Chang.¹⁰⁶

However, we need to keep in mind the lessons learned from negritude in literary analysis; that it is never enough to simply reverse the semiotic values, because it often reproduces the very boundaries it attempts to overcome.

Kingman gracing the cover of *American Artist*, and other accolades by the American Artists Association that have recently been compiled, demonstrate that the absence of Asian American artists within the general canon of American art will become more difficult to overlook. As art criticism is a fiction between the canon and sleight-of-hand via the metonymy of race in the U.S., it is in a position to affect the epistemology of American art history in a significant way.

Beyond the debate over inclusion into the canon, I claim that a lack of the ways in which the canon is constructed, is mostly to blame for the epistemic dysfunctionality. Artists were forging a distinctive American artistic profile that reflected multiple artistic styles. Some set about creating a synthetic visual language that bridged their own lives in the U.S. with the transnational lived experience as well as many who embraced a Euro-American modernist sensibility, while some worked in Mexican murals, and others focused on social realism. Mainstream American art used to be, as America itself, entirely Europe-derived. This is not to say that modernist works of Asian Americans are just as good as European-Americans, but that they can be used to reframe the definition

¹⁰⁶ Gordon H. Chang, “Emerging from the Shadows: Foreword, The Visual Arts and Asian American History, in *Asian American Art: A History, 1850-1970*, ed. Gordon H. Chang, Mark Dean Johnson, Paul J. Karlstrom, Sharon Spain, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), x.

of American modernism as a whole.

Like most historical endeavors, I am looking into the past to better understand ourselves in the present. Although some may dismiss the entirety of Asian American art as one of self-assertion, there are works that are completely formalist in the most Greenbergian sense, abstractions composed with great finesse. Therefore, it is not for a lack of historical evidence in the form of the art work itself, nor about the terms of documentation for the artistic achievement on the national stage, as evidenced by the *American Artist* cover, and other such historical evidences that are being recovered. Marginalization, in downplaying the transnational connections of Asian Americans, is to me antithetical to the tenets on which the country was founded. One of the major problems with Korean American history is that it homogenizes a people according to the economic class of the laboring masses. I seek to problematize this history, via Korean American artists who were not in the laboring class.

Transnationalism: Dialectic between context (history) and intertext (present)

Among the countless Koreans whose immigrant stories do not fit the romanticized proletariat history of laborers in the sugar plantations, is the paradox of Philip Ahn, Korean screen actor from 1936 to 1973. Pil Lip Ahn was born March 29, 1905, in Highland Park, California, the first ethnic Korean recorded to be born in the United States. His father was the Korean patriot and activist leader Dosan Ahn Chang Ho. There is a freeway named after him in Koreatown, Los Angeles. Pil Lip Ahn's identity as a Korean American was known

by many, yet the fact that his family history does not fit within the dominant historiography is a testament to how dense the blindfold is that keeps us from imagining a different history of Koreans in America. Like many other Korean Americans, Philip Ahn's family did not come to the United States on a labor boat. In addition, he is a well known actor, but the anomaly of his background is dismissed as an exception. Due to the growing number of family histories such as these, the nominal paradigm of the history of Korean immigration as a proletariat story needs to be sufficiently modified in order to interpret and analyze the artwork in its historical context, which will enable the analysis in its intertextuality of the present.

The early history of Korean Americans centers around the West coast, specifically Hawai'i and California's agricultural sectors. Asian American history begins in earnest in California. If California thrives on the back of agriculture, then one can argue that Californian history is impossible without Asian American history. Similar arguments are made in terms of Mexican American history.¹⁰⁷ The recent scholarship from such figures as Gordon Chang, Margo Machida, and Karin Higa shows that we do not see what is right in front of us.¹⁰⁸ Gordon

¹⁰⁷ Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

¹⁰⁸ Gordon Chang, Mark Johnson, Sharon Spain, Karin Higa, "Panel 1" *Asian American Artists in California - A Symposium*, University of California, Los Angeles, Los Angeles, California, March 14, 2009 (California: UCLA at the Armand Hammer Museum and Cultural Center, 2009). Although the proceedings were not published, the conference was webcasted and is available in many platforms, such as <http://www.clicker.com/web/hammer-museum-lectures/Asian-American-Artists-in-California-A-Symposium-Part-1-212696/> (accessed August 19, 2010) and <http://www.artbabble.org/video/asian-american-artists-california-symposium-panel-1> (accessed August 19, 2010).

Chang stated in a conference that Asian American scholars are doubly guilty because, not only did we apply the canon of art history to Asian American artwork, but a byproduct of our duplicity was the unintended consequence of a blindness to ourselves, a self marginalization that reproduced the boundaries intended for dismantling.¹⁰⁹

Imagining Otherwise

What are the terms of art history, beyond acknowledging that these artists were there? If we consider the non-proletariat paradigm of Asian American art, the possibility of bourgeois artists opens up a new direction that shifts this paradigm. Artists like Young Bae, Sung-woo Chun, Ernie Kim, Charles Park, and Lanhei Kim Park, all lived and worked in California between the 1920s and 1970s.¹¹⁰ This framework opens up a complexity to the story behind the monolithic canonical historical cornerstone of the one hundred and three laborers, towards people like Nam June Paik, and others previously mentioned, who lived a very transcultural and transnational life. This is a different class of people than laborers; they are people from rich families in Korea, who traveled outside of the peninsula to avoid the political strife going on in their homeland at various moments in history, from colonialization by Japan and civil war, to U.S. imperialism. Many of them supported the liberation movements, which were headquartered in San Francisco, with networks that extended from Manchuria

¹⁰⁹ Gordon Chang, UCLA at the Arman Hammer Museum, February 2009.

¹¹⁰ *Asian American Art: A History, 1850-1970*, ed. Gordon H. Chang, Mark Dean Johnson, Paul J. Karlstrom, Sharon Spain, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008).

and Shanghai, to Mexico, Brazil and Venezuela.¹¹¹ In fact, the aforementioned artists Charles Park and Young Bae were members of Ahn Chang Ho's liberation movement.¹¹²

The immigrant stories of contemporary 1.5 generation of artists are not that different. Their family histories are not proletariat ones. Yong Soon Min's family was allowed to immigrate before the 1965 Immigrant Act, because of her father's status in service to the U.S. military. Y. David Chung's family first immigrated to Germany, like Nam June Paik's family, before their sojourn to the U.S. Many families, including my own, came before this judicial boundary in 1965.¹¹³ These exceptions to Korean American history should no longer be thought of as exceptions. As Foucault's genealogies of power demonstrate, bodies of knowledge do not have discrete points of origin, and are not stable in configuration.¹¹⁴ If we take the Hegelian materialist approach and posit that artistic production parallels the development and character of a people, then Bae's works should be about the proletariat plight of immigration and the liberation movement that he supported.¹¹⁵ However, the evidence of artistic

¹¹¹ *Displacements and Diasporas: Asians in the Americas*, ed. Wannu W. Anderson and Robert G. Lee, (New Jersey, Rutgers University Press, 2005).

¹¹² *Asian American Art: A History, 1850-1970*, ed. Gordon H. Chang, Mark Dean Johnson, Paul J. Karlstrom, Sharon Spain, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 408-410.

¹¹³ Before the 1965 Immigration and Nationality act, the only immigrants from the Asian continent who were allowed to immigrate were: military personnel (and their families), missionaries, and the adoption industry, which funneled thousands of Korean children into the U.S., fueling the diaspora. <http://www.america.gov/st/educ-english/2008/April/20080423214226eaifas0.9637982.html>

¹¹⁴ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1975).

¹¹⁵ Charles Larmore, "the Concept of a Constitutive Subject" in *The Talking Cure*, ed. by Colin Macabe. (London: the Macmillan Press, 1981), 117.

production explicitly says otherwise (Figure 60).

One of the challenges to Korean American history is that the peninsula was not recognized as a nation until 1948, so the records kept in the U.S. database are not accurate, because Koreans were categorized as either part of China, Japan, or Other.¹¹⁶ When I looked at a map in my elementary school classroom in Los Angeles, and saw that Korea was not labeled in the world map, the realization fundamentally altered my state of being. I am sure many Korean Americans share a similar experience or sentiment of not belonging. As Adrian Rich noted,

When someone with authority, of a teacher, say, described the world and you are not in it, there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium; as if you looked into a mirror and saw nothing. It takes some strength of soul-and not just individual strength, but collective understanding - to resist this void, this non-being, into which you are thrust, and to stand up, demanding to be seen and heard.¹¹⁷

Korean immigrants, “in their concerns for and actions on behalf of their homeland were, nevertheless, bounded by their realities of living in the United States and the restrictions and constrictions imposed upon them by the United States”, according to historian Lili M. Kim.¹¹⁸ Thus, a transnational history of Korean Americans should neither negate nor disregard the power of the nation in its

¹¹⁶ Census information from U.S. Census Bureau: www.census.gov/population/documentation/twps0056/tab19.xls; www.Census.gov/population/documentation/twps0056/tabC-11.xls. The census shows inconsistent data gathering methods, whereby Koreans are categorized as such until 1940, when 1,711 are recorded- In 1950, the number of Koreans are left out of the census, and “Korean” is included in “other race” category.

¹¹⁷ Adrienne Rich, *Blood, Bread and Poetry 1979-1985*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1986), 199.

¹¹⁸ Lili M. Kim, “Doing Korean American History in the Twenty-First Century,” *Journal of Asian American Studies* 11, no. 2, (June 2008): 204.

many manifestations.

From a physical map to a conceptual one, where am I in the field? The roots of Asian American studies are located in social activism, in San Francisco State University, which casts a long shadow on artistic and academic production. Therefore, it is difficult to frame examples of artistic production beyond social activism, in the academic institutionalization of Asian American studies, because the field of study is overshadowed by dominant discourses on self-assertion. According to sociologist Grace Yoo, the stages of migration is contingent upon “the push-and-pull factors” between the homeland and the host country, however, if we imagine beyond this paradigm, we see an important demographic that is neglected in this case the Asian American artistic community where “scattered hegemonies” is a more apt characterization.¹¹⁹ Accordingly, thinking beyond binaries, toward a system of multiple epistemologies, is a productive approach, as it allows for not only inclusion, but an expansion of American art history. Multiculturalism, the dominant U.S. academic paradigm in the 1990s, taught us that thinking in terms of an all-encompassing paradigm is extremely dangerous, as it blinds us to historical evidence that is right in front of us. Jagged relations of power occupy the landscape, where the “push and pull” factors of immigration are more difficult to identify.

To answer the question posed earlier, which was how to insert difference

¹¹⁹ “Scattered hegemonies,” though at first seems oxymoric, is just that. It is a productive conflation of multiple epistemologies. The mix of those terms haunted me when I first came across it on Kandice Chuh, *Imagine Otherwise on Asian Americanist Critique*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

into the canon, if we examine the term “Asian American” or “Korean American” - the adjective describes the object and the noun describes the subject. In conflating these two, we are looking at a state of internal contradiction, where undoing and becoming are one in the same, where a paradox of identity formation allows for a more accurate point of departure for Asian American art criticism.

Art Historical Context of the 1990s

In “The End of the American Century: Current Scholarship on the Art of the United States,” John Davis assigns “American Art” a cut-off date of 1945, which is more or less confirmed in university curricula and textbooks. The art since 1945 is assumed to have lost references to nationality, and falls under the rubric of “Contemporary Art,” taking into account the global sweep of the later 20th century.¹²⁰ This framework deliberately minimizes nationalist baggage.¹²¹ So does this render national identity a less productive factor in artistic discourses?

On the other hand, the art historical context of the 1990s tells a different story, of a new definition of nationalism that contains a multicultural rhetoric that essentializes ethnicities. As art critics and scholars attempt to wrestle their way out of paradigms, by synthesizing the specific within the structure of the general,

¹²⁰ John Davis, “The End of the American Century: Current Scholarship on the Art of the United States,” *The Art Bulletin* 85 (2003): 544-580.

¹²¹ Christin J. Mamiya, “The ‘Triumph’ of American Art?” in *Internationalizing the History of American Art* edited by Barbara S. Groseclose, Gotten Wierich, (University Park: The Pennsylvania University Press, 2009), 179-194.

paradigms necessarily occlude the view of important specificities.¹²² Looking at art as a product of its socio-political context, in and around the 1990s, where identity politics within the art world at large were the *modus operandi*, the Whitney Biennale in 1993 and the Decade Show in 1981 are two seminal shows that set the tone for a description of art in the 1990s. Artists of color emerged visibly in an unprecedented manner that crystallized an extension of the postmodernist movement.

The Decade Show, for example, sought to survey the phenomenon, addressing issues of gender, sexuality, and politics.¹²³ It and the Whitney Biennale that followed, were accused of “jumping on the bandwagon” of multiculturalism.¹²⁴ The discussion around the '93 Biennial became so focused on multiculturalism, no other reading of the work was possible in mainstream art criticism. The discursive space suffocated the possibility of any other readings

¹²² Dipesh Chakrabarty, “The Time of History and the Times of Gods,” in *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital* ed. by Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 35-59.

¹²³ *The Decade Show: Frameworks of Identity in the 1980s*, exh. cat., (New York: The Museum of Contemporary Art, The New Museum of Contemporary Art, the Studio Museum in Harlem, 1990).

¹²⁴ Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Silvia Kolbowski, Miwon Kwon, Benjamin Buchloh, “The Politics of the Signifier: A Conversation on the Whitney Biennial,” *October*, Vol. 66 (Autumn, 1993): 3-27.

surfacing, with the exception of a few.¹²⁵ Ironically, by the time the '93 Biennial opened, the discursive winds had changed, and “compassion fatigue” was in vogue, according to Miwon Kwon.¹²⁶ The critics normally supportive of activist art and transgressive aesthetics in general, began to express disenchantment with the aggressiveness of art embraced in mainstream locations. Paradoxically, the discursive space influenced the interpretations of artist of color, who used this opportunity to insert themselves into the mainstream.

According to Homi Bhabha, difference is integral within the fabric of its meaning - integral in the sense that its existence can be hidden and, when mobilized and encountered, can materialize both itself and that which has previously “hidden” it, in such a way that the fabric of meaning can itself be transformed.¹²⁷ Bhabha asserts that interstitiality explains how such artworks by artists of color underscore the “foreign” with “what seems invisible” to meaning,

¹²⁵ Miwon Kwon was the only critic of note that stated an oppositional interpretation of *Synecdoche I*, explicating the ways in which looking for signs is in itself a different mode of production. She acknowledged the formal qualities of the work, but also distinguished the context from the content. A context which pressured the artists to play along with the rules of the game not of their own making, and to consciously fulfill an implicit performance contract in order to get some time on the stage. Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Silvia Kolbowski, Miwon Kwon, Benjamin Buchloh, “The Politics of the Signifier: A Conversation on the Whitney Biennial,” *October*, Vol. 66 (Autumn, 1993):3-27. Needless to say, there were others who agreed with her but were muffled by the dominant discourse of multiculturalism, from “compassion fatigue” to “Trojan horse” triumph. In regard to the Trojan horse, I’m referring to Lucy Lippard, “Trojan Horses: Activist Art and Power,” in *Blasted Allegories: An Anthology of Writings by Contemporary Artists*, ed. by Brian Wallis, New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1987), 341-358.

¹²⁶ Kwon, Miwon. “The Wrong Place.” *Art Journal* 59.No. 1 (2000): 33-43.

¹²⁷ Homi Bhabha, “Beyond the Pale: Art in the Age of Multicultural Translation,” in Elizabeth Sussman, Thelma Golden, John G. Hanhardt, and Lisa Phillips, eds., *1993 Biennial Exhibition*, (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, in association with Harry N. Abrades, Inc., 1993), 62-73.

because these qualities grow interstitially, out of view, in the “superfluity of [meaning’s] folds and wrinkles.”¹²⁸ Furthermore, in the hierarchical canonicity of art history, the scholarship around the artworks of Korean American artists in the 1990s does not focus on the object of the gaze, but rather the context of the gaze.

Although Bhabha provides many productive avenues, such as the one mentioned above, it is of note that Rasheed Araeen exposes some crippling assumptions.¹²⁹ He asserts that new structures, like postmodernity, are camouflaged by the spectacle, and we are only dealing with the camouflage, not the structures. He characterizes this maneuver as the liberal strategy to deflect and displace, where exclusion becomes an act of historical rationality.¹³⁰ Another assumption for analysis is the fallacy to presume that migration causes psychic displacement, loss, and exile, a fallacy which handicaps different discursive avenues of analysis.

Instead of reversing the center-periphery binary, as artistic production by minorities are lumped into an avant-garde rhetoric of globalism, the binary reversal is also a way of maintaining institutional power that is under-girded by a colonial structure. Therefore, Araeen asserts that Bhabha’s “hybridity” is not a

¹²⁸ Homi Bhabha, “Beyond the Pale: Art in the Age of Multicultural Translation,” in Elizabeth Sussman, Thelma Golden, John G. Hanhardt, and Lisa Phillips, eds., *1993 Biennial Exhibition*, (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art in association with Harry N. Abrades, Inc., 1993), 62-73.

¹²⁹ Rasheed Araeen, “A New Beginning: Beyond Postcolonial Cultural Theory and Identity Politics,” *Third Text* 50 (Spring 2000): 3-20.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

triumph of neoliberal multiculturalism and global capitalism, but rather it displaces the struggle of the subaltern. The most poignant criticism that Araeen makes regarding Bhabha's framework of analysis, is that hybridity and liminality mean that the subaltern is always stuck at the precipice, and the subaltern is not allowed to enter the canon because of the badge of ethnicity.¹³¹ What this does is reinforce the sympathetic gaze that deflects the critical subjectivity of the subaltern.

To synthesize the object and the context, an excavation of the ways in which meaning develops involves an interactive process between the thing and the observer; and at the same time, the interaction ossifies into a hegemonic apparatus, producing intellectual automations. This neutralizes the power of a dialogical process, and yields an obfuscation of the structural limitations of interpretative codes. The discursive space of art criticism and art history has a fundamental slippage that often goes unnoticed, concealed by rationality. In the last thirty years, there has been a conflation of art critic and art historian, consolidating cultural capital, as the two-fisted historian-critics championed certain artists, creating a hierarchical canonicity. This stymies the dialogical dynamism, which results in the displacement of the rest of the world out of history in a Hegelian sense, or relegated to a peripheral mention at best. Many attribute this phenomenon to the reassignment of the object as commodity after Marx, or as sign after structuralism. However, one should heed the words of a Marxist speaking on structuralism, Fredric Jameson, who describes the structuralist

¹³¹ Araeen, 16-17.

discovery as “the prison house of language.”¹³² He describes “structuralism as a study of superstructures; its privileged object is thus seen as the unconscious value system or system of representations which orders the discourse at any of its levels, and replaces the older opposition.”¹³³

The difference between tactic and strategy is of note, as Michel de Certeau distinguishes between “strategy” and “tactic” in the following terms. A strategy has the ability to transform the uncertainties of history into readable spaces.¹³⁴ Strategic analysis is that which is “sustained and determined by the power to provide oneself with one’s own place.”¹³⁵ Therefore strategy is about “an economy of the proper place,” and those who are committed to building the infrastructure of discursive space which is that of a “field.”¹³⁶ This is also the modus operandi of the earlier Asian American art history, which unintentionally reproduced the boundaries they were fighting against.

But now, after the first flush of recognition, what is next? A tactic, according to DeCerteau is “a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus.”¹³⁷ A tactic “concerns an operational logic whose models may go as far back as the age-old ruses of fish and insects that disguise or transform

¹³² Frederic Jameson, *The Prison House of Languages: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 101-150.

¹³³ Jameson, 101-103.

¹³⁴ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans by. Steven Rendall, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 36.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ de Certeau, 55.

¹³⁷ de Certeau, 37.

themselves in order to survive, and which has in any case been concealed by the form of rationality currently in Western culture.”¹³⁸

Concluding Remarks

An interrogation of the premises upon which artists and their work are gathered together under the collective rubric of Asian American art was addressed, which is necessary before I begin a discussion on Korean American art. According to Margo Machida, there are potential analytical pitfalls associated with projects that foreground race, ethnicity, and other markers of identity as frameworks in which to situate visual art and its producers.¹³⁹ Korean American art and the larger rubric of Asian American art pose particular challenges to artists, critics, curators, and viewers, and most of these challenges revolve around the need for an informed epistemology.¹⁴⁰

In addition to these challenges, and those posed by institutional hurdles, the paucity of critical engagement on visual art by Asian American scholars results from the conditions specific to the genesis and ideological roots of Asian American Studies. Many Asian American scholars find visual culture suspect, because it has long been recognized as a tool of suppression and stereotyping. Even after the pivotal moments, such as the 1968 establishment of the Asian American movement in San Francisco, and the multicultural rhetoric of the 1990s, according to Margo Machida, “no single discourse or ideological shift

¹³⁸ de Certeau, icxi.

¹³⁹ Margo Machida, *Unsettling Visions: Contemporary Asian American Artists and the Social Imaginery* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 118.

¹⁴⁰ Machida, 3.

proved to be decisive”.¹⁴¹ Our understanding of art is as discursive and dialogical as our understanding of language, which is grounded on multivalent points of departure. An understanding of the dynamics of linguistic intercourse gives insight into how artworks communicate. Individual aesthetic experience is therefore not a solitary monologue on private pleasure, but an integral part of a shared historical discourse concerning the realization of meaning, rather than insertion into the canon. Grouping artists together based on shared perceptions of ethnicity, culture, or Asian Americanness does not necessarily contradict a critical recognition of internal diversity. In this way, one may speak of collectivities, without necessarily positing a totalizing homogeneity, as Deleuze and Guattari posit in *Towards a Minor Literature*.¹⁴² Extrapolating the argument in this text towards art criticism, I position minor literature as great literature, not necessarily the literature of minorities, although this can be the case. Artworks in the following chapters do not claim to represent humanity, it disrupts and dislocates tradition, and it is the vehicle for the creation of identity, rather than expression of identity.¹⁴³ Accordingly, I position these artworks within the debates between expression and content, within the discursive field. As Claire Colebrook explains, “affect is at once singular and collective. Affect is singular because it has no reason or justification, no order or relation, outside itself.”¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan. (Minneapolis and Oxford: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

¹⁴³ Deleuze and Guattari, 16-17.

¹⁴⁴ Claire Colebrook, *Gilles Deleuze*. (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 103-104.

Under the influence of Nietzsche, both Heidegger and Gadamer were acutely conscious of the imperious presence of a guiding subjectivity (will to power).¹⁴⁵ A theoretician who does not recognize this is only seeking to have his/her methodological presuppositions confirmed. For such a theoretician, the artwork is rendered secondary to the theory it is employed to demonstrate. The intimacy with which the work of art touches us is at the same time, in an enigmatic fashion, a shattering and a demolition of the familiar. Subjectivism, as Nietzsche understood it, can often drive theory, especially when it is understood as a mode of instrumentalist reasoning.¹⁴⁶ My engagement with the subject matter of Asian American artwork does not merely seek to interpret (appreciate) a subject matter, but through interpreting (engaging with) it, open up what has still to be expressed within it, and thereby open pathways that future practices might travel.

¹⁴⁵ Nicholas Davey, "Art, religion and the hermeneutics of authenticity," in *Performance and Authenticity in the Arts*, ed. E. Kernal and I. Gaskell, (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 66-94.

¹⁴⁶ Friedrich, Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, Third Essay, Section 27, ed. by Walter Kaufman (New York: Vintage Press, 1969).

CHAPTER 3: The (CON)text of history and the Korean American Experience

[T]he L.A. riots present a rich play of national memory and ethnic identity. Korea's twentieth-century history offers a repository for reflection on the riots. The riots are rendered as but another chapter in age-old stories. In the process, ethnic or national portraiture is posited as a reflection of this past.¹⁴⁷

This history chapter occupies the hermeneutic phase, which is further divided into two sub-claims: first, a detailed description of the murals from the *Turtle Boat Head* installation, and an unearthing of the issues that emerge out of the description; and second, the representative case study of works by two artists, Yong Soon Min and Erica Cho. These works will be used to delineate a pattern of commonalities which, when approached together, yield a description of an artistic practice that engages theoretical theses of social scientific endeavors.

During therapy sessions with Korean Americans, psychologist, Ramsay Liem noticed that many of his patients that were second generation Korean Americans exhibited similar behaviors of trauma that is specific to Korean War survivors. Ultimately this resulted in the traveling exhibition entitled *Still Present Pasts: Korean Americans and the Forgotten War*, which consists of Korean American artistic responses to the Korean War, based on oral histories of civilian war survivors. There are several pieces that weave together war memories with the L.A. riots, some directly using print or television media, and others utilizing a unifying iconography of fire, the humiliating nature of victimization, and scenes of dystopia, consisting of riot gear from footage of the uprisings throughout Korea's

¹⁴⁷ Nancy Abelmann and John Lie. *Blue Dreams: Korean Americans and the Los Angeles Riots*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 19-20.

tumultuous history. It is within this oeuvre that I see a pattern emerge in the iconography utilized to highlight certain historical markers to describe the Korean American experience of the L.A. riots.

The primary artistic responses for analysis in latter section of this chapter are: *Defining Moments* by Yong Soon Min, and *Our Cosmos Our Chaos* by Erica Cho. Min's piece is a series of six photographs highlighting significant events in the artist life and the history of South Korea. Cho's piece is a video installation consisting of a recoiled tiger, with six videos on a loop that depict the dreamscape that begins in Koreatown, Los Angeles. Secondary sources include artworks from *Still Present Pasts: Korean Americans and the Korean War*, and other works before and after the riots. Through it all, I seek to formulate an iconography for Korean American art. It is through historical references that the hermeneutic endeavor galvanizes a program from which we can unpack the meanings behind the Korean American responses, which in turn reveal a particular psychological experience. Echoing Alain Badiou's concept of the oscillation between being and the appearance of being, according to Ann Anlin Cheng, melancholia describes both an American ideological dilemma and its constitutional practices.¹⁴⁸ The artworks in this section elucidate the assignment of social meaning to psychological processes for the raced subject. The internalization of discipline, rejection, and installation of a scripted context of

¹⁴⁸ Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*. Trans. Oliver Feltham (London: Continuum, 2005). Anne Anlin Cheng, *Melancholy of Race* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

perception embody a web of negotiations that expresses agency as well as abjection.¹⁴⁹

According to theorist Anne Anlin Chen, “psychical experience is not separate from the realms of society or law, but is the very place where the law and society are processed.”¹⁵⁰ She asserts that an intellectually rigorous vocabulary to talk about racial grief, not as merely a symptom but as an analytical paradigm, that is responsive to the material and imaginative realities of racial dynamics, is necessary. These claims are similar to what Slavoj Žižek posits, where the only way to “heal its wound” is “via the imposition of a balanced symbolic structure”.¹⁵¹ Taking this theoretical paradigm as a critical basis for unpacking the fragility and bravado that haunt American national integrity, racial melancholia is both the technology and the nightmare of the American Dream. My approach in this chapter builds on the analysis of the previous chapter, by applying a synthesis of psychology and politics. More particularly to the analysis of artworks in this chapter, the approach is the most akin to theorist Todd May’s description of Genealogy and Epistemology, where he states that: “What is needed for an adequate grasp of the place of psychology in the social and political field is not an analysis of how psychological knowledge is used after it is gained, nor how it is related to the current state of production, and a tracing of its emergence as a discrete field of knowledge - its multiple sources, its various

¹⁴⁹ Anne Anlin Cheng, *Melancholy of Race* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 16-17.

¹⁵⁰ Cheng, 11.

¹⁵¹ Slavoj Žižek, ““I Hear You with My Eye”: or, The Invisible Master,” *Gaze and Voice as Love Objects*. eds. Renata Salecl, Slavoj Žižek, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 114.

relationships, its heterogeneous effects”.¹⁵² I attempt to apply what Žižek describes as a balanced symbolic structure, in order to unpack the artistic context of the works in this chapter. Dusting off the shackles of Cold War propagandistic images from leaflets dropped from U.S. planes during the Korean War, to the cartoons that demonized Asians, it is with this new attitude that I look at the artwork of Korean American artists. As Margo Machida concludes in *Unsettling Visions*, “simply presenting an image is not in itself sufficient to convey the meaning or intentions behind it.”¹⁵³ Therefore, some of the explanations are a requisite of the hermeneutic process. An extension of this approach is the idea that each artwork performs its claim and is not stagnant. It is a living, breathing entity that is initiated by the artist, but has a life of its own.

Introduction to the *Turtle Boat Head* Installation by Y. David Chung

The history of Korea in the 20th century, as well as the history of Korean America in the 21st century, are inextricably tied together. The side of the story that is heard less often is the community of ordinary Korean immigrants in the U.S. that constituted the backbone of the independence movement from the annexation by Japan between 1910 - 1945.¹⁵⁴ This is another reason why a section regarding the annexation is included in Y. David Chung’s explication of

¹⁵² Todd May, *Between Genealogy and Epistemology: Psychology, Politics, and Knowledge in the Thought of Michel Foucault* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), 39.

¹⁵³ Margo Machida, *Unsettling Visions: Contemporary Asian American Artists and the Social Imaginary*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 362.

¹⁵⁴ Kingly K. Lieu, “Korean Nationalist Activities in Hawaii and the Continental United States, 1900-1945, Part I 1900-1919.” *Amerasia Journal* 4 no. 1 (1977): 23-90, and “Korean Nationalist Activities in Hawaii and the Continental United States, 1900-1945, Part II: 1919-1945.” *Amerasia Journal* 4. No. 2 (1977): 53-100.

the Korean American experience, confirming that they are shackled together. The family histories of the Korean American artists of focus in my project do not trace their lineage to laborers who came en masse to work the sugar cane fields of Hawai'i. Rather, they are the "accidents" of history described in the previous chapter. Also the fact that they occupy multiple social classes in different worlds, parallels the complexities of multiple histories. In the second part of this section, I attempt to make an argument using works by Korean American artists which, taken together, articulate the ways in which a practical memory exists and crucially informs Korean American lived realities that are delineated via the aesthetic encounter with the artworks. The interpretative applications to follow reveal a presentation of the things unseen, and make visible the the invisible.¹⁵⁵

If the previous chapter the "what" of genealogical hermeneutics, this chapter deals with the "how" or narratology¹⁵⁶ -- the ways in which the artworks that deal with the L.A. riots include references to specific moments in the history of the Korean peninsula and the Republic of Korea. The historical events that artists chose to evoke necessitate the open-ended hermeneutic approach that presupposes the primacy of space over that of temporal contingencies in productive interpretation. This primacy of space is further explained in the

¹⁵⁵ The idea that artists make visible the invisible is an old staple of art history and visual culture; however, I must give credit to Donald Preziosi, who inspired me when I was an undergrad to make readable the invisible that the artist has made visible.

¹⁵⁶ I am using the specifically Foucaultian interpretation of genealogy as "the study of nonsovereign operations of power" or "the micropolitical science"... "those small, and at times overlapping, practices...[that] create new fields of power by constraining action, by joining power to forms of knowledge, by seeping into the social fabric and tracing lines of obedience." Todd May, *Between Genealogy and Epistemology: Psychology, Politics, and Knowledge in the Thought of Michel Foucault* (University Park, PA: 1993), 111-113.

cultural geography chapter. The epistemology of the contemporary artistic expressions of Korean American artwork about the L.A. riots can be seen, not only in iconographic and stylistic lineages, but in collisions of purpose and intent.

In the media chapter, the video portion of the *Turtle Boat Head* is introduced in terms of critical media studies. Here, I will look at the work in the context of the installation as a performative history of Korean Americans. Y. David Chung's multimedia installation *Turtle Boat Head* chronicles the history of a Korean immigrant, and examines the palimpsest construction that characterizes life in urban America, juxtaposed with the ideals of the American Dream for Korean Americans. The installation illustrates that the transnational and deterritorialized attributes are a product of multiple historical currents, which interact and overlap. Through the video, Chung presents the confluence of the multifarious trajectory of events eliciting the intersection between personal experiences and historical events. Chung draws on his family's experience as proprietors of an inner city convenience store to examine the invisibility of individuals and entire cultures. The *Turtle Boat Head* installation consists of a series of large charcoal murals covering the walls of the exhibition space (Figure 29-54).¹⁵⁷ In the center of the room, amid large murals, an architectural element decorated in charcoal represents a convenience store. The title of the installation refers to a historical account of 1592, wherein admiral Yi-Sun Sin defeated the

¹⁵⁷ The exhibition history of the *Turtle Boat Head* Installation is as follows: Whitney Museum of American Art at Philip Morris, New York, 1992; Wadsworth Athenaeum, Hartford, CT, 1993; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA, 1994; McLean Project for the Arts, McLean, VA, 1995; and Rice University Art Gallery, Houston, TX 1995.

invading Japanese armada by designing ironclad warships in the image of huge fire-breathing turtles.¹⁵⁸

Chung uses this image in the first of three large murals, which presents a visual analogy between the events of 1592, to those of the present-day Korean diaspora (Figure 34). In the second mural, he traces the history of Korea from the assassination of the country's last queen, to the Japanese Occupation (1910-1945), to the end of the Korean War (1953) (Figure 35).¹⁵⁹ The third mural illustrates the invasion of western culture into Korea, and the resistance it meets there (Figure 36).

The charcoal murals are monochromatic black on white, with shades of gray used very sparingly. The starkness of this simple black against a white background conveys a consistent and unifying visual rhythm. Similar to the ways in which the set of *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* is a representation of the psyche, the monochromatic nature and the monumental size of these murals evoke a surreal and disorienting atmosphere.¹⁶⁰ The presentation of the subject matter evokes a sense of the historical, but a history in which the events and the historical timeframes seem to topple on top of each other. Chung's stylistic

¹⁵⁸ Ki-baik Lee, *A New History of Korea*. Translated by Edward W. Wagner with Edward J. Schultz. (Cambridge, MA, 1984), 210. It is interesting to note that there has been no archeological evidence of the actual boat, and yet the Turtle Boat has become one of many national symbols. Other symbols of this kitsch variety are the Silla Crown, and the Olympic mascot.

¹⁵⁹ Queen Min, also known as Myong Hwanghu, was the last queen of the Yi Dynasty (851-1895). She is known for her diplomatic shrewdness in posturing China against Japan, which resulted in a war between the two, as well as positioning Russia against Japan to divert attention from Korea. She created diplomatic ties with China and Russia, in efforts to deflect Japan from Korea. She was assassinated by the Japanese, a charge that was denied.

¹⁶⁰ *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari*, Dir. Robert Wiene. Perf. Werner Kraus, Conrad Veidt, and Lil Dagover. Goldwyn Distributing Company, 1921.

characteristic of quick expressive gestures depicts odd urban landscapes characterized by a cartoon-like economy. The Turtle Boats also appear in the murals, with the largest depiction in the third mural (Figure 34), in which Chung's angular figures and careening perspectives forcefully convey an immigrant's experience of the turmoil and isolation of American urban life. The sense of personal and interior space of the video is starkly contrasted with the world of external events represented in these drawings.

A critical understanding of the L.A. riots forces us to deal with the history and structure of the Korean diaspora, which are featured in this installation in a seemingly chaotic manner. However, through a recognition of the events and their significance to present identity formation, I will reveal that they are not as random as they seem. The installation reveals many elements that evoke a cultural, political and economic displacement. The subject matter in the installation consists of the Korean American suburban life and family, including the role of Christianity in Korean immigrant culture, to the regional racial conflicts manifested in the L.A. riots of 1992. Through the video and elements repeated and highlighted in the murals, Chung emphasizes how the sociological impact of these traumatic events play a role in the production of Korean American identity.

In the sections to follow, I will first explain the meaningfulness and relevance of the historical events to that of the L.A. riots, and the Korean American identity formation. The second aspect of focus will be sections of the artwork that deal with the resistance of the Korean people to U. S. Imperialism, and the philosophical groundwork of the *Min Jung* movement, its influence on art,

the politics and culture of protest in South Korea, and the diaspora. The concluding section concatenates these interpretations, delineating the process by which the installation yields the possibility of seeing a complex and dynamic process, with which art can articulate the multiple engagements that are involved in self-representation.

The *Turtle Boat Head* Film (7:30 minutes)¹⁶¹

As one enters the installation of the convenience store, one will note that the interior is covered with drawings executed in the same style as the exterior and the murals. The interior drawings consist of products and signage that one would expect to see in a liquor store. A Plexiglas window protecting the area behind the counter separates the viewer from the video projection. A life-size video image of a male Korean American shop owner, presumably playing the part of the artist's father, appears wearing a peach-colored Lacoste polo shirt. He is situated behind the counter, behind the Plexiglas, and he begins to wait on customers, who can be heard on the soundtrack. This configuration positions the viewer in the role of the customer. Brief conversations take place during these transactions.

After the first encounter with a female customer, the shelves of products behind the man melt away to reveal an old black and white film of a street scene

¹⁶¹ In 1993, the *Turtle Boat Head* video won "Best of Show" at Washington, D.C.'s Rosebud Awards. It has been seen extensively, both in its installation form, and as a video, in festivals and television broadcasts, which include: Filmfest DC, Washington, DC, 1993; Arts Festival of Atlanta, Atlanta, GA 1994; American Film Institute/Sony Video Festival, Los Angeles, CA 1994; Seattle Human Rights Film Festival, Seattle, WA 1994; Asian Cinevision, New York, NY 1994; Los Angeles Asian Pacific Film Festival, Los Angeles, CA, 1994; and, "New Light-The Electronic Cinema: American Video Art 1965-1994," National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, 1995. It was also broadcast in 1994 by KCET, Los Angeles, CA.

in Seoul. Columns of Japanese soldiers march down the street – the occupying force. A young boy, suggesting the storeowner in his youth, runs along the street, peering between the lines of men. This scene dissolves to reveal a scene of an armed Japanese soldier ushering Korean civilians, then the film cuts to scenes of burning houses, groups of Korean civilians walking with all the possessions that they can carry (Figure 40). This section of the film parallels the mural depicting the Japanese Occupation and the Korean War (Figure 35). Although film footage of Queen Min is not included in this section of the video, perhaps due to unavailability, she is the central figure in the corresponding mural, the significance of which will be further developed in later sections of this chapter. Then, the film shifts back to the present, as we hear the sound of another customer entering the store.

After the completion of the transaction, the shop owner's reverie continues with historical footage of planes flying across a rice paddy, a devastated urban landscape of a war-torn Korea, more scenes of displaced Koreans trying to avoid the line of fire and the aggressive carpet bombing, scenes of soldiers running through a city, and civilians futilely trying to extinguish a burning house, then to scenes of American planes flying over a bombed-out city, dropping propaganda leaflets, which transform into pieces of candy, as the images of candy wrappers are superimposed onto the footage of the convenience store, returning the viewer to present day (Figure 39).¹⁶² Some of the images from the film are again

¹⁶² Ji-Yeon Yuh, "The Korean War: A Still Present Past," *Still Present Pasts: Korean Americans and the 'Forgotten War.'* exh. cat., (Cambridge, MA: Liem Foundation, 2005), 23-31.

mirrored in the second mural (Figure 35), such as the representation of houses burning, Japanese soldiers on the lower left, and planes dropping propaganda leaflets on the upper right. These images are reminiscent of Chong Suk Dickman's account, "My first contact with Americans came in the form of fliers dropped from planes. The fliers read 'You are safe. We are here'."¹⁶³

Subsequent images in the collage of moving pictures include the storeowner in his present day activities within the community. These scenes are in color, whereas the historical footage remains in its original black and white form. These scenes about the individual fade into historical footage from the Korean War, which then dissolve into scenes of armed Korean merchants guarding their store during the 1992 Los Angeles social upheaval.¹⁶⁴ Superimposing black and white historical footage of urban warfare with color footage from the L.A. riots creates a collage of similar elements, such as people scattering to avoid harm, buildings burning, armed soldiers, and destruction of an urban landscape, where Koreans have settled and have been displaced yet again. These images fade to a historical reenactment of the Turtle Boats firing canons, which is then overlapped with images of candy, then back to the liquor store and another exchange with a customer. The images and sounds of the video emphasizing the maddening quality of fades and collapsed images are visually repeated in the dynamic composition of the murals. In short, the

¹⁶³ Chong Suk Dickman, "Thank You," in *I Remember Korea* ed. Linda Granfield (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2003), 74-77.

¹⁶⁴ These scenes occur in Koreatown as identified by the store signs in Korean, as well as a street sign referring to Western Avenue, which is the main street of Koreatown in Los Angeles, California.

installation chronicles the history of a Korean immigrant by examining the meshing of historical moments that characterize life in urban America, juxtaposed with the ideals of the American Dream for Korean Americans.

Scenes from the Past

In Mural 2 of Chung's *TBH* installation, the central female figure is depicted heralding the people forward, in a composition reminiscent of Eugene Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People* (Figure 68). I initially interpreted the central female figure as Queen Min, however in the iconographical context of critical artistic production of Korean American artists in this dissertation, this figure is the metonymy of *han*, as expressed in the form of the Korean mother.

Queen Min, the last queen of the Yi Dynasty (851-1895), also known as Myong Hwanghu, is renowned for her diplomatic shrewdness and her controversial death.¹⁶⁵ She has been the subject of artistic expression in many different genres from contemporary art, such Chong Byun's *Channel No. 5*, to theatre (Figure 69).¹⁶⁶ The claim that this female figure is a metonym of *han* is

¹⁶⁵ She postured China against Japan which resulted in a war between the two, as well as positioning Russia against Japan to divert attention from Korea. She created diplomatic ties with China and Russia, in efforts to deflect Japan from Korea. She was assassinated by the Japanese, killed then burned, covered in kerosene. The Japanese government at the time denied that they had any involvement in her death.

¹⁶⁶ *Channel No. 5* by Chong Byun features a historic photograph of Queen Min, and was featured in an exhibit at the Smithsonian Gallery entitled *Dreams and Reality* in 1992. *The Last Empress* is a musical about Queen Min, which opened on August 23, 1998 at the New York State Theatre at Lincoln Center, and has since traveled to London. It was directed by Ho Jin Yun, with music by Hee Gab Kim and lyrics by In Ja Yang, historical adaptation by Kwang Lim Kim. For a review of the musical see <http://www.curtainup.com/empsec10.html>. There will be a major film production centering on the story of Queen Min, that began shooting in the summer of 2006. It's from what can probably be called Korea's leading production company, Sidus FNH. There was also a popular TV drama from 2001 with Lee Mi-yeon, and a music video. For further information on see <http://tinyurl.com/9ztb8>.

supported by the works of Kim-Gibson, Nam June Paik, the performers of 625, and selected examples from the Minjung art movement.

It is important to trace the hermeneutics of *umma* (Korean for mother) in contemporary Korean and Korean American art. The relevance of the subject of mother to the L.A. riots is further explored in Dai Sil Kim-Gibson's projects regarding the L.A. riots, *Sa-i-gu* (1993)(Figure 70). This evocation of *umma* is not without precedent in Korean modern art, as the iconography of *umma* in traditional Korean hanbok is often used to signify the salubrious and sanguine characteristics in Min Jung art during the 1980s. From Minjung artwork, like O Yun's *Dance* (1985) (Figure 71) and *Grandmother* (1983) (Figure 72), that exhibit a popular Minjung medium of the woodcut print -- to Park Saeng-Kwang's, *Shamanism 8* (1994) (Figure 73), and Nam Jung Paik's *Mother* (2006) (Figure 63), these artworks establish an innovative re-examination of contemporary Korean artwork, and transcend the turmoil in Korean culture, with a blending of Shamanism and Buddhism; both position the iconography of the Korean female in a traditional *hanbok* as one of auspicious power and spiritual rootedness. Korean art historian Choi Yeol describes such works as the vitality of folk customs, that artists celebrate as being resistant to the rationalism of modernity, and yet it is the freedom of modern experimentation that engenders the dynamic compositions of the artwork.¹⁶⁷ The historical film footage of the Japanese occupation and sections of this mural depicting soldiers wearing uniforms of

¹⁶⁷ http://www.koreanculture.org/bbs/view.php?id=exhibition_eng&page=5&sn1=&divpage=1&sn=off&ss=on&sc=on&select_arrange=headnum&desc=asc&no=14

colonial Japan reinforces the psychic residue that highlights the significance of history's effect on identity formation.

Through a process of assimilating official historical time and space, and the articulation of historical persons such as Queen Min or the metonym of *Umma*, the Japanese Occupation, and the Korean War, Chung enacts a chronotopic gesture invoked by his narrative construction of the shopkeeper. Therefore, the chronotope becomes a metaphor for a society, where identity formation takes place. It is a space where, in the words of Mikhail Bakhtin,

abstract elements--philosophical and social generalization, ideas, analyses of cause and effect--gravitate toward the chronotope and through it take on flesh and blood, permitting the imaging power of art to do its work.¹⁶⁸

The liquor store is the place in which temporal and spatial elements intersect. The nature of the places of encounter undergoes a modification from the daily activities of shopkeeping, to that of reverie.

The shopkeeper behind the glass is metaphorically and literally separated from his customers, who in turn have little understanding of Korean culture and history, as one of the customers calls him "*papa-san*." "*San*" is an honorific suffix in the Japanese language. Japan was once the oppressor of Korea, which triggers memories of the Japanese colonization. The first daydream image after this encounter with the customer that calls him "*papa-san*" is the footage of Japan's occupation of Korea with scenes of Japanese soldiers marching through Korea. This evokes a speculation that the customer who called him "*papa-san*"

¹⁶⁸ Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* ed. Michael Hoquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 250.

might have had no malicious intent; his use of the suffix was used with no knowledge of what the term signified to the storekeeper.

The Japanese colonization (1910-1945) was a seismic change for Korean culture. It was a time when Koreans were not allowed to speak Korean, as that was indoctrinated as the inferior language. All Koreans were given Japanese names, amongst other cultural atrocities, such as hijacking Koreans to be used in forced labor camps, military service, and sex slaves that were euphemistically known as “comfort women.”¹⁶⁹ This oppression created an international diaspora of Koreans, as many of them were sent to Japan and other colonies under Japanese control at the time.¹⁷⁰ Another outgrowth includes many Korean artists who went abroad to study art.

The part of the video in which American planes fly over a bombed-out city dropping propaganda leaflets, which then transform into pieces of candy as they fall into the store, inspires a deeper interpretation into the fetishism of power.

¹⁶⁹ Young Korean women during the Japanese occupation were forced to be sex slaves for Japanese soldiers. They were initially told that they will be getting training as nurses or bureau workers, but were subjected to group rape, where Japanese soldiers would stand in line and soldiers were given a set amount of time with the women, whether they liked it or not. Some of the accounts of Japanese soldiers show that they just waited inside the room without raping the women, as they too were forced to abide by the Japanese policies of cultural obliteration of the Korean culture. Maria Rosa Henson, “From Comfort Woman,” *Women on War: An International Anthology of Writings From Antiquity to the Present*, ed. by Daniela Gioseffi, (New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2003), 144-147.

In addition to this, in the war crimes tribunals led by the Western Allies after World War II, the Japanese were exonerated for testing the technologies of human torture and biological warfare on the bodies of forced Korean laborers, many of whom had been comfort women. According to Sheldon Harris, the condition for Japan’s exonerated was to share these technologies with the U.S. Military, which later redeployed them against Koreans during the Korean War. Grace M. Cho, *Haunting the Korean Diaspora: Shame, Secrecy, and the Forgotten War*, (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 51-52. Sheldon Harris, *Factories of Death: Japanese Biological Warfare, 1932-1945, and the American Cover-up* (London: Routledge, 1994).

¹⁷⁰ Y. David Chung directed a film about 180,000 Koreans that were transported to Kazakhstan in 1937 during the Great Terror. *Koryo Saram: The Unreliable People*. Dir. Y. David Chung and Matt Dibble. Tangunfilms, 2008.

This image is repeated in one of the murals (Figure 35, upper right corner). The memories of the Post-War period of Korea deeply inscribe the power relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, which is translated into material terms as illustrated by this part of the video. This particular inscription into the psyche has been the topic of discussion and analysis in many publications by Asian American scholars, such as Chungmoo Choi, Grace Cho, Anne Anlin Cheng, Elaine H. Kim, David Eng and David Kazanjian.¹⁷¹ The depth and breath of this body of research and analysis shows that the power dynamic solidified in the years between 1910-1945 made the transition from Japan to the U.S. hegemony a seamless one.

The power of the U.S. and its material representations are irresistibly seductive, and at the same time repulsive to many South Koreans, who harbored a hidden sense of shame for the self-contradiction. According to anthropologist Chung Moo Choi, this ambiguity was repressed by the totalizing discourse of anti-colonial nationalism.¹⁷² Many Post-War Korean writers, such as Ahn Chong-hyo, painfully recall the seductive taste of powdered milk and chocolate received from passing U.S. soldiers.¹⁷³ The reification of such commodities is the subject

¹⁷¹ Animating the remains of history, the question of how loss can be productive, rather than being merely a lack, is delineated in various different ways by these scholars. Chung Moo Choi, "Dangerous Women." In *Nationalism and Construction of Gender in Korea*, ed. Elaine H. Kim and Chungmoo Choi (New York: Routledge, 1998), 9-32. Anne Anlin Cheng, *Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation and Hidden Grief*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2001). David Eng and David Kazanjian, eds., *Loss: The Politics of Mourning* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

¹⁷² Chung Moo Choi, "Dangerous Women," in *Nationalism and Construction of Gender in Korea*, ed. Elaine H. Kim and Chungmoo Choi. (New York: Routledge, 1998), 9-32.

¹⁷³ Jung Hyo Ahn, *White Badge*. (New York: Soho, 1989), 7-10.

of other Korean American artists, such as Ji-Young Yoo's *BooDaeChiGae* (Figure 74), and Deann Borshay Liem's film *Practical Hints about Your Foreign Child* (Figure 75).¹⁷⁴ This ambivalence may be attributed to a postcolonial denial of the status of the materially deprived recipient. The candy and cigarettes that the American soldiers handed out to Koreans were a sensuous signifier of colonialism to the dispossessed and dominated people in the war zone.

In *6.25 History Beneath the Skin*, a childhood song that the narrator sings: "Hello, hello, chocolate give me, hello, hello, cigarette, give me..." shows the transmission to second generation Korean Americans, as explained by Grace Cho after the completion of this song (Figure 76). Historical awareness here stems from a power differential that was reified into "thingness" in the form of a charitable gift. Chungmoo Choi applies Pierre Bourdieu's analysis of the gift, wherein charitable gifts require the recipient's self-degradation and surrender of dignity to the power that not only produces the fine commodity, but affords a luxury surplus to be dispensed, thereby garnering symbolic capital from the recipients.¹⁷⁵ Symbolic capital is disguised surplus profit drawn from the ideological labor of honor, rather than from direct economic exchange.¹⁷⁶ The investment or display of material power anticipates obligatory reciprocation from

¹⁷⁴ *BooDaeChiGae* and *Precious Objects of Desire* were part of a traveling exhibition entitled *Still Present Pasts: Korean Americans and the 'Forgotten War,'* which had its inaugural opening at the Cambridge Multicultural Arts Center on January 29, 2005.

¹⁷⁵ Chung Moo Choi, "Dangerous Women," in *Nationalism and Construction of Gender in Korea*, ed. Elaine H. Kim and Chungmoo Choi (New York: Routledge, 1998), 12.

¹⁷⁶ Bourdieu arrives at the notion of symbolic capital by way of the theory of gift economy developed by Marcel Mauss, Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 171-183. Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies* (New York: Norton, 1967), 69-76.

the recipients, which often allows the gift-givers political and economic domination.¹⁷⁷ Therefore, in this gift economy, one is suspended between the sense of dignity and desire, between indebtedness and self-pity, which is an agonizing ambivalence. The Korean and U.S. cultures have been interlocked since the Korean War, and a majority of Koreans are exposed to the hegemonic U.S. culture before immigration.

Korea as we know it today is a result of the Cold War that has been left neglected, as the war has yet to be resolved.¹⁷⁸ As highlighted by Nancy Abelman and John Lie in *Blue Dreams* at the start of this section, “the L.A. riots present a rich play of national memory and ethnic identity. Korea's twentieth-century history offers a repository for reflection on the riots. The riots are rendered as but another chapter in age-old stories. In the process, ethnic or national portraiture is posited as a reflection of this past.”¹⁷⁹ A significant aspect of this reflection is the effect of the Korean War that resulted in the division of

¹⁷⁷ Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*. (New York: Norton, 1967), 69-76.

¹⁷⁸ In 1945, the Japanese surrendered to the United States. However, Korea did not truly attain independence because, since 1943, different world powers (United States, the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union and China), declared that Korea needed to be under “international trusteeship,” with the logic that Korea needed to be schooled in the modern ways of governance. This eventually led to the Cairo Declaration, which solidified the “international trusteeship” and was eventually ratified at the Yalta Conference in 1945. Ki-baik Lee, *A New History of Korea*. Translated by Edward W. Wagner with Edward J. Schultz. Cambridge, MA, 1984, 210. By 1945, when the Japanese surrendered, the Allies already had a plan in place, in which the Soviets would occupy the North side of the 38th parallel, and the United States would occupy the southern half, under this “international trusteeship.” It was important for the United States to keep their presence in Asia, because of the fears of Soviet domination in that part of the world. Hence, since the birth of “modern” Korea, a paternal relationship with the West has been cultivated.

¹⁷⁹ Nancy Abelman, and John Lie. *Blue Dreams: Korean Americans and the Los Angeles Riots*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 19-20.

Korea known to most Koreans as *pundan* (분단).¹⁸⁰ This evocation of the division is meaningful because many families are currently divided, due to the political decision made by the dominant world powers at the time. Many Koreans feel that *pundan* is an externally imposed national tragedy. These sentiments are compounded by the neglect that the Korean American community felt during the L.A. riots, as the governmental infrastructure did not support them in terms of protection during the riots, and neglected to provide financial support after the destruction.

Historical allusions of wartime in relation to the L.A. riots, illuminated by Chung's installation, is a view that many Korean Americans share. The repeated images of people moving with all of the possessions that they can carry, juxtaposed by relatively recent events of the L.A. riots in the film, are a visual presentation of the close relationship between the historic events and present perceptions. All Korean American families have members who experienced the war directly. Their stoic silence about their war time experiences have created a gap between the generations. Older Korean Americans who have experience war feel that the 429 *p'oktong* (the L.A. riots) was like war. It is in this context of anguish and confusion that the question of Korean American culture can be analyzed, as seen in Elaine H. Kim's article "Home is Where the Han Is."¹⁸¹

¹⁸⁰ Kye Young Park, *The Korean American Dream*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 10.

¹⁸¹ Kim, Elaine H. "Home Is Where the Han Is," in *Reading Rodney King, Reading Uprising*. ed. by Robert Gooding-Williams, (New York: Routledge, 1993), 215-235.

In the days before the retrial of the police officers in 1992 for the beating of Rodney King, liquor store owner Jay Shin monitored his store from the mall's parking lot, surrounded by men who were armed, and he told *Boston Globe* reporters: "I've been in Vietnam, the Korean War, and I've owned a liquor store in South Central L.A. So I guess I've been in danger all my life."¹⁸²

These comments are echoed by the footage featured in the video of the installation, which shows Korean Americans with Uzis and AK-47s, guarding their own and compatriots' shops, which also inspired comments by Chinese American writer Frank Chin: "The Alamo in Koreatown was a mini-mall. In the race war that's started, are we all going to choose up sides and appear at the appropriate mini-mall to man the barricades?"¹⁸³ These comments, highlighted in Elaine Kim's article, and synthesized with the artistic expressions, show the powerful bodily memory, like Dr. Liem's second generation Korean American patients, trying to understand why their bodies recoil when they hear airplanes. These triggers are passed on from one generation to another. Although the index is further away, the signifier of the bodily reaction remains, and so does the damage.

The People's Movement

In the most dynamic mural in the series (Figure 36), a male figure is depicted in mid-air, about to kick another figure standing on the lower left, and occupying nearly half of the foreground. Opposite this figure on the lower right,

¹⁸² Gorov, Lynda, and Tom Mashberg. 1993. "Peace in the Streets Source for Elation in an Anxious City." *Boston Globe*, Apr. 18. 15.

¹⁸³ Frank Chin, "Hello USA, This Is LA." in *Inside the L.A. Riots: What Really Happened, and Why it Will Happen Again: Essays and Articles*, ed. Don Hazen (Texas: Institute for Alternative Journalism, 1992), 40-42.

sharing the foreground, is another turtle, as a marker of continuity to the installation, but also a symbol of epistemological uncertainty, and the evocation of myth. A cluster of figures wearing white headbands occupy most of the middle ground. The background consists of an urban landscape in which debris consisting of bricks and other building materials appear to be emanating around the central figure depicted in a mid-air kicking pose. The cluster of figures on the middle ground of the mural are reminiscent of many murals and banners utilized in *Min Jung* art work, that were used during protests in South Korea (Figure 77, 78). Figures wearing white headbands occupy a dominant field of vision in Chung's murals, and the photograph from the 1992 Peace Rally after the L.A. riots (Figure 113). The headband was traditionally associated with peasants' dress and, according to Timothy Tangherlini, the headbands were also associated with dangerous, even sacrificial, quests to protect communal integrity.¹⁸⁴ These visual similarities show the confluence in the development of the history of protests that has become integral to the Korean American identity. It is important to extract elements that are an integral part of the situational consciousness elucidated in the installation. Therefore, in pursuit of this analysis, it is necessary to describe certain elements of the *Min Jung* movement, which started as an ideology first introduced in theology and literature, and later in painting and other visual and performance arts.

¹⁸⁴ Timothy R. Tangherlini, "Remapping Koreatown: Folklore, Narrative and the Los Angeles Riots," *Western Folklore* (Spring 1999): 59-93.

During the 1980s, the backdrop of the cityscape of South Korea often included protests and *Min Jung* art (people's art), which propelled the democratic movement of South Korea. The South Korean government coined the term Min Jung when it tried to oppress the movement. It was also an avant-garde art movement that created a large following among intellectuals, the middle class, students, factory workers and farmers. It transformed the 1980s into a period of sweeping social and political change. Factors that contributed to the dominance of the *Min Jung* art movement in the 1980s are summarized by Young Chul Lee as follows.

First, the forced industrialization during the thirty years following the Korean War had created a large group of alienated people, some of whom immigrated to the United States.¹⁸⁵ Second, the U.S. involvement in Korea meant the Cold War had a serious impact on the nation, which affected the political, social and economic aspects of life in South Korea.¹⁸⁶ Third, the political oppression of the fascist military regimes, under American hegemony, manifested itself in several peoples' rebellions, and led to a sense of deep resentment against the United States.

¹⁸⁵ Many Koreans immigrated as their visas were approved, particularly after the 1965 Immigration Act. Young Chul Lee, "Culture in the Periphery and Identity in Korean Art," *Across the Pacific*, New York: Queens Museum, 1994, 10-17. In 1965 Lyndon Baines Johnson managed to persuade Congress to pass the Immigration and Nationality Act Amendments that eliminated many restrictions to immigration to the United States. Most importantly it abolished the national origins quota system (under the Immigration Act of 1924 and the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952), eliminating national origin, race, or ancestry as a basis for immigration to the United States. For a complete list of the provisions under the Immigration and Nationality Act Amendments of 1965 see <http://uscis.gov/graphics/shared/aboutus/statistics/legishist/526.htm>.

¹⁸⁶ Young Chul Lee, "Culture in the Periphery and Identity in Korean Art," *Across the Pacific* (New York: Queens Museum, 1994), 10-17.

When Hyuk Um and Wan Kyung Sung introduced *Min Jung* art in an exhibition at Artists Space in New York in 1989, artists in New York were surprised to find such a huge collaborative artist movement in South Korea. Political art in such epic form, with such directness and collectiveness, had rarely been seen in the U.S. by foreigners.¹⁸⁷ As an offspring of Korea's democratic movement, *Min Jung* art has gradually evolved in response to political developments, and has become part of the mainstream since the early 1990s.

In 1994, the Kim Young Sam government felt secure enough to allow a large-scale exhibition entitled *Fifteen Years of Minjung Art: 1980-1994* in the National Museum of Contemporary Art in Gwacheon, Korea. Even though art in Korea seems to be moving in a different direction, the effects of this movement on the Korean people, including that of the immigrants, have been lasting, as made evident during the May 2nd rally in Koreatown, following the L.A. Riots, which will be further developed in Chapter Six.

The influence of *Min Jung* art on Korean American artists, although at times subtle, is consistently evident. In addition, *p'unngmul* performances during the May 2nd rally made further reference to the tradition of protest in South Korea, and thus furthered the role of the march as one designed to reclaim or rewrite the

¹⁸⁷ Countries such as Cuba and Korea, as well as many South American nations, had a similar schizophrenic political economic development, incorporating censorship laws and other pressures to change the subject manner of artistic production to mimic government propaganda. Some of the most insightful analyses of this kind are conducted in the field of Contemporary Cuban Art. See Kevin Power. "Cuba: One Story After Another," *While Cuba Waits: Art from the Nineties* (Santa Monica: Smart Art Press, 1999), 39-40. Gerardo Mosquera. "New Cuban Art: Identity and Popular Culture." *Made in Havana* (Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 1988), 10.

erased markers of Korean American identity in Los Angeles.¹⁸⁸ *P'ungmul* is a form of music and dance grounded in the indigenous belief systems of the Korean peninsula. The significance of *p'ungmul* will be further developed in the next chapter. *P'ungmul* drumming, chants accompanied by rhythmic clapping, elaborate hand gestures, banners written in Korean, and the wearing of white headbands, were clear visual elements that made direct reference to the culture of protest movements in South Korea.¹⁸⁹ Chung utilizes situational consciousness, not only of the Japanese Occupation, the Korean War, and the *Min Jung* movement, but also illuminates the ways in which these were used as instruments of identity formation, along with the space and situations enacted by the diaspora in Los Angeles.

Defining Moments: A History

Defining Moments (1992) is a photography series composed of six black and white photographs by Yong Soon Min (Figure 1). The first image from the photography series is of a female torso, omitting the face (Figure 2). The photograph is presented as a negative, so that the roles of black and white have been reversed. Spiraling outward from the navel, curvilinear lines are drawn in between the following numbers, creating a circular pattern: “1953, 4/19/60, 5/19/80, and 4/29/92.” “Heartland” is written across her chest, between her breasts and collarbones. The word “Occupied” is written on her left arm, and the

¹⁸⁸ The history of Korea is marked by protests from 18—Tonghak that sought to – to March 1, 1919 that sought to – to the 419 and 529 which will be described in detail in subsequent chapters. Timothy R. Tangherlini, “Remapping Koreatown: Folklore, Narrative and the Los Angeles Riots,” *Western Folklore* (Spring 1999): 59-93.

¹⁸⁹ Tangherlini, 59-93.

word “Territory” is written on her right arm. The words “My Body Lies” are sandblasted onto the glass in a plain type font, whereas the rest of the words appear to have been handwritten directly onto the body. Below the spiral, the following words are sandblasted on glass in the same fashion: “Over the ocean/ My body lies over the sea/My body lies over the DMZ/Oh bring back my body to me/Bring back bring back Oh bring back my body to me.”¹⁹⁰

This first photograph in the series serves as an index for photographs two through five, which consist of historic photographs depicting events that correspond to the dates on the spiral. On each of these photographs depicting historical events, the same image of the artist has been superimposed onto the image with the letters “DMZ” written across her forehead, and the word “Heartland” written across her chest. The sixth and final photograph is presented in a similar fashion, with the same portrait of the artist superimposed onto an image (Figure 7). However, this final photograph does not correspond to the dates on the first photograph, nor is it referencing an event. The image here is a landscape, consisting of a body of water and a mountain range. The following narrative is sandblasted onto the glass on top of this image:

No ordinary landscape/This one is recognized by most Koreans as/
Mt. Beaktu and its heavenly lake/a landmark located near the
Chinese border in/ North Korea/This seemingly innocuous
landscape image is/politically charged in that the opposition/
movement in South Korea has claimed this place to/symbolize its
quest for reunification./Notwithstanding official North Korean claims
that/this is Kim Il Sung’s birthplace, it is also the/legendary

¹⁹⁰ These words are similar to the chorus of a traditional camp song or nursery rhyme, “My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean.” Its origins are believed to be from Scotland. Available from <http://www.ucamusic.com/textdocs/Mother%20Goose.pdf>.

birthplace of the Korean People and/Nation. This origin myth attributes to this/landscape expansive notions of/a motherland and a fatherland/in short an imaginary homeland that is situated/over my heart.¹⁹¹

The same image of the artist is used in photographs two through six. This portrait of the artist is frontal, confronting the gaze of the viewer. Her mouth is closed and the expression on her face is ambiguous, and can be interpreted as either confrontational, or passive and emotionless.

The knowledge that these images are of the artist penetrates the viewer's experience and appreciation of the works. Beyond the identification of the portrait as that of the artist, the image, and by extension the artist herself, becomes the medium from which a deeper subject is made visible. The sequence of the series represent a birth that has yet to occur, in that the events spiraling out of her belly, ends in a mythic birth in an imaginary homeland in the sixth photograph. This imaginary homeland consists of both the Korean peninsula and the west coast of the U.S., as reiterated in the composite image that Min created for *Writing Self, Writing Nation*, an anthology of responses to Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictee* by Hyun Yi Kang, Norma Alarcón and Elaine H. Kim (Figure 8).

I will present an interpretative analysis for *Defining Moments* in two sections. First, I will briefly describe the events that are presented in the series, in order to illustrate the historical backdrop that Min uses as signifiers to

¹⁹¹ It is of note that North Korean refer to Korea as the "fatherland" and South Koreans refer to Korea as the "motherland."

construct the narrative of the photography series. Second, I will present an interpretation that seeks an intersection between collective history and personal narrative, as constructs of a diasporic consciousness that will be presented as the central theme in the work. According to cultural anthropologist Kye Young Park,

Korean immigrant culture is based on the diaspora experience... Korean American culture is rooted in Korea; however its parameters are set by the political economy of the U.S., (i.e. the impact of the restructuring of the U.S. economy on the immigrant community). Although the state plays the major role in resocializing and enculturating ethnic immigrants, people are not passive, but rather dynamically engaged in the process of cultural construction.¹⁹²

The sentiments expressed in the quote above are visually explicated in this photography series. The events in the *Defining Moments* series are examples of the dialectic relationship between the process of cultural construction amidst, and at times opposing, the state's role in resocializing people and the synthesis created from this dynamic. Min uses the body as the inevitable locus of "being," where in the context of the United States, "being" depends on a series of bodily fictions, where the veracity of flesh registers itself significant by representing an ontological failure, by foregrounding corporeal signs that appear only through the writing on her body.

1953 is the year that is written closest to the navel, where the spiral begins. It is also the year that Yong Soon Min was born in a small village near

¹⁹² Kye Young Park, "A Cultivation of Korean Immigrants on American Soil: The Discourse on Cultural Construction," (paper presented at the Institute for Corean-American Studies, Inc., Blue Bell, PA, 13 August 1999), The ICAS Lectures No. 99-0614-KYP.

Suwon in South Korea.¹⁹³ The abdomen is the place where *chi'* (life force) is stored. The corresponding image is a historic photograph from the Korean War in which an image of U.S. troops in a rice paddy is overlaid with Yong Soon Min's portrait (Figure 3).¹⁹⁴ As noted above, the same portrait with "DMZ" written on her forehead and "Heartland" written on her chest, is composited on top of this historic photograph of the Korean War. The "DMZ" refers to the demilitarized zone.¹⁹⁵ In addition to the year that the artist was born, 1953 is also the year in which the cease-fire was signed, which resulted in the division of Korean peninsula on the 38th geographical latitude.¹⁹⁶ This war devastated the Korean landscape, including people's homes, as well as the infrastructure of a civilized society. One-third of the nation's housing was destroyed, and substantial proportions of the country's public buildings, roads, bridges, ports and the like

¹⁹³ H.Y. Choi Caruso, "Art as a Political Act: Expression of Cultural Identity, Self-identity and Gender in the Work of Two Korean/Korean American Women Artists" (Ed.D. diss., Columbia University, 2004), 167.

¹⁹⁴ North Koreans refer to what is commonly known as the Korean War as The Fatherland Liberation War, or the Victorious Fatherland Liberation War, which they claim and almost believe that they won. South Koreans refer to the Korean War as Han'guk Jeon Jaeng, which translates to the Korean , but also, South Koreans use the tradition of designating important historical and political dates using integer-chains, therefore it is also referred to as yuk-i-o sa byeon, which refers to the date of June 25, 1950 as the beginning of the Korean War.

¹⁹⁵ The demilitarized zone in Korea is a strip of land running across the Korean Peninsula that serves as a buffer zone between North and South Korea. The DMZ cuts the Korean Peninsula roughly in half, crossing the 38th parallel on an acute angle.

¹⁹⁶ The DMZ was the original boundary between American and Soviet occupied zones established at the end of World War II, and became the border between North Korea and South Korea upon the formation of those two countries. When a cease-fire was agreed upon in July 27, 1953, the DMZ was established along the stalemate line of the Korean War. Owing to the stalemate, large numbers of troops are still stationed along both sides of the line, each side guarding against potential aggression from the other side.

also were reduced to ruins.¹⁹⁷ But the damage wrought by the Korean War cannot be measured in material terms alone. The war forced the Korean people, who were long conscious of their ethnic unity, to painfully face the tragic reality that their nation had been divided.¹⁹⁸ This state of being was further exacerbated by the social and familial separation that continues to plague the Korean diaspora today. A popular Korean sentiment is that “blood ties of a people are eternal,” and “philosophy [can] undergo changes, and political and economic theories are ephemeral,” according to Korean historian Ku Kim in reference to this division.¹⁹⁹ The historic photograph of the Korean War, along with the composite of the artist’s portrait signifies a divided homeland.

In the midst of the national peril occasioned by the Korean War, a political crisis also began to take shape within South Korea. This was due to a gradually increasing drift towards authoritarian rule, ever since the U.S. placed Syngman Rhee as president of South Korea in 1948. Pursuing a militant anti-Communist policy, Rhee utilized persons who had previously served under the notorious

¹⁹⁷ South Korean casualties in the fighting alone are estimated at 150,000 dead, 200,000 missing, and 250,000 injured, while more than 100,000 civilians were abducted to North Korea, and the number of war refugees reached several million. Ki-baik Lee, *A New History of Korea*, trans. Edward W. Wagner with Edward J. Schultz (Cambridge, MA: 1984), 380-381.

¹⁹⁸ Korea was first united under the Silla Dynasty in 668. Korea had been a united polity for 1285 years until it was divided in 1953. Ki-baik Lee, *A New History of Korea*, trans. Edward W. Wagner with Edward J. Schultz (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 387-394. The section on Y. David Chung details the circumstances around this division in regard to the role of the United States and the Soviet Union, explaining that Korea as we know it today is a byproduct of the Cold War.

¹⁹⁹ Ku Kim, “My Wish,” from Na ūi sowŏn, in Kim Ku, *Paekbŏm ilchi*, To Chinsun (Seoul: Tolbegae, 1997), 423-433, as cited in Yong-ho Ch’eo, Peter H. Lee, and Wm. Theodore de Bary, ed. *Sources of Korean Tradition: Volume II From the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Centuries* (New York: NY Columbia University Press, 2001), 387-395.

Japanese police.²⁰⁰ The social unrest spawned by those who opposed Syngman Rhee's authoritarian rule reached a climax in the presidential elections of March 1960. Syngman Rhee and his Liberal Party mobilized government employees, and the aforementioned police in particular, to carry out remarkably blatant acts of election rigging. In many cases, ballot boxes had been stuffed with votes for the government candidates before the voting took place.²⁰¹ On April 19, 1960, which refers to the second date on Yong Soon Min's photography series, students from nearly all of Seoul's colleges and universities, as well as from many high schools, poured into the city's streets, shouting such slogans as, "We demand new elections!" and "Defend democracy to death!"²⁰² Here, the overlaid image shows a crowded street rally in Seoul (Figure 4). This event, now known as the April Revolution or *sa-il-gu*, was the first in the history of Korea wherein "people armed with nothing but their bare fists succeed in overthrowing an oppressive government."²⁰³ The power of the people, united in their opposition to a dictatorial government, held bright prospects for the development

²⁰⁰ For thirty-five years, from August 1910 until August 1945, Japan occupied Korea, and many Koreans were under the employ of the harsh colonial rule of the Japanese government. Some of these positions included a localized police force that was part of a tightly-knit hierarchical bureaucracy of the Japanese government. Yong-ho Ch'eo, Peter H. Lee, and Wm. Theodore de Bary, ed. *Sources of Korean Tradition: Volume II From the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Centuries* (New York: NY Columbia University Press, 2001), 333-339.

²⁰¹ Kim Ku, "Declaration of the Seoul National University Students Association, April 1960," from Yong-ho Ch'eo, Peter H. Lee, and Wm. Theodore de Bary, ed. *Sources of Korean Tradition: Volume II From the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Centuries* (New York: NY Columbia University Press, 2001), 393.

²⁰² At first, the students were met by a hail of police bullets, which roused the students to a frenzy, as they watched their classmates dying before their eyes. This incited the students as well as the citizenry to set fire to a number of government structures. Eventually, martial law troops refused to fire on the demonstrators, giving President Rhee no further hope of maintaining himself in power. Lee, *A New History of Korea*, 383-385.

²⁰³ Lee, *A New History of Korea*, 381-385.

of democracy in Korea at the time. The utilization of this historic photograph depicting the April Revolution in this section, is used to reference the people's desire for democracy.

The third date in the series refers to the Gwangju uprising on May 19, 1980.²⁰⁴ In the composite corresponding to this date, Min utilizes a photograph of troops clearing the streets of Gwangju province of student demonstrations, which are visible on the lower right corner, as well as the center of the photograph (Figure 5). The event began on May 13, 1980 as a peaceful and organized demonstration by university students against the authoritarianism and antidemocratic actions of the government.²⁰⁵ Several events occurred that exacerbated the demonstration into a riot. May 18, 1980 is known as "Bloody

²⁰⁴ At times Gwangju is spelled with a "k," therefore in some texts, one may encounter the spelling as Kwangju.

²⁰⁵ It is important to place the Gwangju uprising in the contemporary historical context of South Korea. During the 1960s and 1970s, South Korea was seen as a rapidly developing Asian country. However, such development was a result of a brutal dictatorship, an exploitative economy, and an oppressive political system. General Park Chung-hee, who grabbed power after a military coup in 1961, continued his one-man dictatorship for eighteen years, suppressing any political dissent and often using violence through state machinery. He introduced Yushin, or the "Revitalizing Reform" system, which legitimized the authoritarian-led development. People were fed up with the Yushin system, and student demonstrators in 1979 intensified in the latter half of the year with labour and student demonstrations in the Pusan and Masan areas, which was later called the "Pu-Ma Uprising." The Yushin system led to economic instability and unrest, which cumulated in Park's assassination in October 1979. Park's assassination led to calls by students and laborers for the abolition of the Yushin system, and direct elections. Such hopes were dashed at the end of 1979, when General Chun Do-hwan and Roh Tae-Woo seized power from the interim government through a *coup d'état*. In the first few months of the 1980s, worsening economic conditions led to massive labour protests in South Korea. In the spring, student protests were renewed with the reorganization and unification of student unions throughout Korean universities, demanding an end to martial law. In May 1980, nationwide student protests took place. University students in Gwangju were a part of such demonstrations. In response, thousands of combat troops were sent to all the large cities, particularly Gwangju. The overwhelming purpose of these demonstrations was the future of democracy in Korea. David I. Steinberg *The Republic of Korea: Economic Transformation and Social Change* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1989), 59-68. Philip West, Steven I. Levine, and Jackie Hiltz, eds. *America's Wars in Asia: A Cultural Approach to History and Memory* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), 72-73.

Sunday,” because students were violently attacked by paratroopers, which escalated the demonstration into a riot. May 19, 1980 marks the day on which citizens from all walks of life joined 16,000 students in a demonstration against the government. This uprising, however, was brutally suppressed by the military, who killed and wounded a large number people. Many Koreans accused the American military of condoning the Gwangju suppression, since the South Korean military was still under U.S. command, in accordance with the armistice signed in 1953. This incident, along with trade and other issues, gave rise to strong anti-American sentiment. Student activists, together with labor unions and ordinary citizens, fought back against riot police and paratroopers.²⁰⁶ On this day, the people effectively wrested the city from government control, raiding government facilities and radio stations.²⁰⁷ Therefore, the historic photograph used in this section is a reference to the power of the people to affect their governance.

By positioning these events together, Min shows that these events that happened in Korea are very much a part of the Korean American psyche. April 29, 1992 is the last date on the spiral, and corresponds to the fifth photograph in the series, which references the 1992 Los Angeles riots (Figure 6).²⁰⁸ Images of

²⁰⁶ These student activists, who were mostly from Seoul National University were the children of middle and upper class families that were ironically benefiting from the incumbent regime.

²⁰⁷ Henry Scott Strokes, *The Gwangju Uprising: Eyewitness Press Accounts of Korea's Tianamen* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2000), 110.

²⁰⁸ Since the details of the L.A. riots have been described in previous sections of this dissertation, this section will highlight the significance of the L.A. riots as they relate to the events previously described in this section.

the aftermath of the L.A. riots, taken from Korean newspapers, have been overlaid onto Min's portrait. According to Abelman and Lie, "Koreatown Los Angeles is a major symbolic destination of Korean immigration to the United States. The portable homelands that immigrants carry in their minds have been materially re-created near downtown Los Angeles."²⁰⁹ Much like the displacement and destruction caused by the Korean War, a new "homeland" or a "simulacrum of Seoul in Southern California" had a similar effect on the Korean psyche during the L.A. riots.²¹⁰ A survey conducted in 1994 in *Asia Source* revealed that one out of three Korean-owned businesses in the area were not rebuilt, and many Koreans moved out of Los Angeles altogether.²¹¹ This statistic is representative of the creation of a second wave of diaspora, specifically the displacement within the host country. It is also of note that, after the L.A. riots, 1.5 and 2nd generation Korean Americans began to take a more aggressive role in politics, which included collaborative efforts to learn more about family stories during the Korean War, as an effort to assert their identity in the cultural landscape of the U.S..²¹² In this case, the interpretation by Calvin Reid,

²⁰⁹ Nancy Abelman and John Lie, *Blue Dreams: Korean Americans and the Los Angeles Riots* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 85-118.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ _____, "Special Report: The Impact of the Los Angeles Riots on the Korean American Community, May 03, 2002; available from http://www.asiasource.org/news/at_mp_02.cfm?newsid=79441. accessed on October 21, 2004.

²¹² Such efforts are a nation-wide phenomenon that started shortly after the L.A. riots. Examples include the study conducted by Chung Suh, Kevin Ryu, and Grace Hong, who are members of a Boston-based organization that formed shortly after the L.A. riots; Grace Yoo from San Francisco and Barbara Kim from Los Angeles, who are conducting a study from a series of interviews of female Korean War survivors; and Ramsay Liem's project, which is to create a database of oral histories about the Korean War.

describing Min's work as "hybrid reconfigurations of individual life caught in forced cultural dispersion," is very apt.²¹³

The ramifications of the end of the Cold War reflected in Min's piece can be interpreted as referring to the events that followed in South Korea. Such events are President Roh Tae Woo's (1987-1992) pursuit of a so-called Northern Policy, and the construction of railroads that connect Kaesŏng (개성) in North Korea and Incheon(인천) in South Korea. Hence, this sixth and final image in the *Defining Moments* (1992) series refers to the possible reunification of North and South Korea (Figure 7). This section features a photograph of Baekdu mountain (백두산), which is the mythic birthplace of the Korean people and is often used as a symbol of reunification in both North and South Korea.

Similar to the ways in which the historic photographs in composites two through five serve as signifiers of a divided Korea, the desire for democracy, the power of the people, and the displacement within the host country, respectively -- symbolic utilization is employed again by Min as expressed on the narrative that is sandblasted on this image referencing the reunification. As in photographs two through five, written across the artist's forehead and chest are the words "DMZ" and "Heartland." In this context, the words written on the artist signify both the political and symbolic separation, and connection of the Korean

²¹³ Calvin Reid, "Yong Soon Min at Art in General," *Art in America*, January 1999; available from http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1248/is_1_87/ai_53560715/print, accessed on July 18, 2005.

people.²¹⁴ Heartland (evoking the idiom, “home is where the heart is”) is fractured because it lies somewhere between North and South Korea, and Koreatown in Los Angeles, California, highlighting the view that these dispersed people share blood ties that go beyond the ideology that separates them, regardless of varying affiliations to each respective nation-state.²¹⁵

Calvin Reid interprets the *Defining Moments* photography series as a complex weave of Korean diasporic reflection and memorialization replayed for the viewer against a backdrop of geopolitical conflict and Cold War demystification.²¹⁶ Min utilized symbolically charged materials that poetically evoke Korean history, while dissecting Korean and Korean American identity. In the following section, I will take the historical and biographical interpretation further, by synthesizing the various interpretations of *Defining Moments* by Luis Camnitzer, Sharon Mizota and H.Y. Choi Caruso, in order to construct an interpretation that seeks the construction of a diasporic consciousness, as a defining element of Korean American identity,

²¹⁴ Gary Hesse, *Allan DeSouza, Yong Soon Min, AlterNatives*. Gallery Catalogue (Syracuse, N.Y.: Robert B. Menschel Photography Gallery, Syracuse University).

²¹⁵ Min has created numerous other pieces that deal with the issue of “home” as a construct rather than a physical space. *Half Home* (1991), , is an installation about the “superficial aspect of getting back to one’s culture that can really be akin to being a tourist in your own culture.” Min, therefore, has challenged and worked through the commonly-held notions of “home” with her own contradictory relation to the idea of the “heartland.” Additional pieces that address this issue are: *Dwellings*, a mixed media installation completed in 1993; *Talking Herstory*, lithography, 1990; *Kindred Distance*, photography, 1996; *Bridge of No Return*, mixed media installation, 1997; and *deColonization*, mixed media, 1991.

²¹⁶ Reid, “Yong Soon Min at Art in General,” 1.

Min states that she seeks to juxtapose documented history with her own life, in order to critique existing power relationships.²¹⁷ Therefore, interpretations about the works concerning the April Revolution and the Gwangju uprising will be discussed together, as they are both about democracy and the power of the people over that of the state. Between the reality of a divided Korea, emphasized by the letters “DMZ” on her forehead, and the idealization of the “Heartland” that is written on her chest, lies the force of the people to affect their own governance. These events are instances in which people were engaged in the process of cultural construction and political governance.

On a personal level, Min states that the event of April 19, 1960, also known as “sa-il-gu,” was an event that she witnessed as a child.²¹⁸ It is also the year in which her family left Korea for the United States.²¹⁹ The Gwangju uprising that occurred on May 19, 1980 was a very important turning point in Korean history, according to the artist.²²⁰ In addition, learning about the event made her “more politically aware and interested in Korean history.”²²¹ In regard to the “power-relationship” between the United States and South Korea, it is important

²¹⁷ Yong Soon Min, “Artist Statement,” *Contemporary Art and Multicultural Education*, ed. Susan Cahan and Zoya Kocur (New York, NY: Routledge, 1996), 141.

²¹⁸ Caruso, 200.

²¹⁹ “Sa-il-gu” translates to numbers 419, which refer to the numeric date of the April Revolution. A common tradition in Korean political history is to designate important political and historical events by their numeric dates.

²²⁰ Caruso, 200.

²²¹ Ibid.

to note that the United States' role in the Gwangju Uprising has been a controversial subject.²²²

After the Korean War, the United States supported South Korean authoritarian military rulers Park Chung Hee and Chun Doo Hwan, invoking the security threat from North Korea as grounds for overlooking the repressive character of the generals' regimes. United States General John A. Wickham, Jr. had released South Korean troops from the South Korea-United States Combined Forces Command to end the rebellion, and President Reagan had strongly endorsed General Chun's actions to seize control of South Korea through a *coup d'état*. The U.S. involvement in this incident goes even further back to when senior officials in the Carter administration approved South Korean plans to use military troops against pro-democracy demonstrations, ten days before former General Chun Doo Hwan tried to seize control of the country in May 17, 1980. U.S. officials also knew that the contingency plans included the deployment of Special Warfare Command troops to Seoul and Gwangju.

In Gwangju, two brigades of Special Forces were later held responsible for killing hundreds of people in a massacre that drew worldwide attention. Later documents contradict key statements made in a 1989 State Department white paper on U.S. actions during the Gwangju Uprising. In that white paper, the United States said the Carter administration was alarmed by Mr. Chun's threats

²²² For further details, see Tim Shorrock, "The U.S. Role in Korea in 1979 and 1980," *Korea Web Weekly*, <http://www.kimsoft.com/korea/Gwangju3.htm>, accessed on November 8, 2005. For a more detailed account of these events, see Henry Scott-Stokes, ed. 2000. *The Gwangju Uprising: Eyewitness Press Accounts of Korea's Tiananmen* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2000).

to use the military against the nationwide demonstrations in May 1980, and did not know in advance that Special Forces were being sent to Gwangju. The State Department said in an official statement "We stand by the integrity of that report and our actions".²²³ Some contend that the uprising had important ramifications that are still being felt now, both inside Korea and beyond its borders.²²⁴

According to historian Bruce Cumings, the U.S. was supporting the military regime in South Korea, and was much more worried about stability, in regard to the Cold War and North Korea, than it was about democracy in South Korea.²²⁵

The Chun presidency (1981-1988) was marked by repressive rule. As the government silenced open criticism, the anti-governmental protest movement became increasingly centered on activist students and labor organizers, who became correspondingly more militant. This agitation popularized the Minjung movement, which aimed at mobilizing peasants and workers by exposing social and economic inequities. A typical issue in the debate on "guided democracy" in Asia, or the so-called Asian model of development, is the claim that only a strong authoritarian rule can provide the political stability needed for economic growth.²²⁶ Other scholars of 20th century Korean history contend that the events

²²³ Tim Shorrock, "The U.S. Role in Korea in 1979 and 1980," *Korea Web Weekly*, <http://www.kimsoft.com/korea/Gwangju3.htm>, accessed on November 8, 2005.

²²⁴ Becky Brandford, "Ghost of Gwangju: Lingering Legacy of Korean Massacre," *BBC* article cited in *The Seoul Times*; available from <http://theseoultimes.com/ST/?url=/ST/db/read.php?idx=1940>, accessed on November 8, 2005.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*

²²⁶ Yong-ho Ch'eo, Peter H. Lee, and Wm. Theodore de Bary, ed. *Sources of Korean Tradition: Volume II From the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Centuries* (New York: NY Columbia University Press, 2001), 395.

in Gwangju in the 1980s poisoned relations with the U.S. in the minds of Korean citizens.²²⁷ These negative feelings resurfaced for many Koreans after the L.A. riots. Just as Min's family left for the United States shortly after the April 19, 1960 social upheaval, many Koreans left for the United States shortly after the May 19, 1980 uprising, due to the civil unrest and the fear of war from the military dictatorships at the time.²²⁸ Hence, this photography series is very much about diaspora, as these subtexts depict events that caused the dispersal of Koreans at different waves of immigration.²²⁹

On the image of the artist, "DMZ" symbolizes the reality of a divided homeland, and can also allude to the divided or broken source of identity. The other side of the spectrum is the "Heartland," which is a dream or hope of a unified homeland and a unified source of identity. This unattainable sense of "home" is illustrated and repeated in photographs two through six, by the use of the same image of the artist composited onto historic photographs, which include

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ The Korean War had such a powerful effect, that many feared the possibility of war, and didn't want to experience it again. The reason why the effect is so strong, is because many Korean families were torn apart by the war. Many Koreans today have family members living in North Korea, who they might never see again. In addition, the military dictatorship that created these uncertainties did not end until 1987, when student radicalism forced the Chun Doo-hwan government (1980-88) to hold "democratic" presidential and parliamentary elections in 1987 and 1988, respectively. Manwoo Lee, *The Odyssey of Korean Democracy: Korean Politics, 1987-1990* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1990), 1, 54.

²²⁹ By subtexts, I refer to the specific historical events that are used in the construction of the whole narrative by Min. The study of Korean immigration is very complex, and I acknowledge that each wave of immigration has multiple factors; however I am merely interpreting the narrative strategies used in the *Defining Moments* series, which delimits some important elements in Korean immigration. Most scholars would agree that these events were a major factor in Korean immigration. For an overview of the Korean Diaspora synthesizing various scholars in the field, see Kichung Kim, "Affliction and Opportunity: Korean Literature in Diaspora, a Brief Overview." *Korean Studies* 25, no. 2 (2001): 261-265. Much of his references on the history of immigration is from Segye hanminjok p'yonlam [A handbook of the Korean people in the world] (Seoul: Kungmin Saenghwal Ch'eyuk Hwoe'uihwoe, 1993).

South Korea, Koreatown in Los Angeles, California, and North Korea, respectively. These two extremes in the spectrum of identity formation between reality and dream, are repeated in the photographs that highlight various subtexts within that spectrum. These subtexts are events that caused the dispersal of Koreans throughout history, and can also serve as symbols of this dispersal in the visual context that Min employs. The year 1953 locates the beginning of the division of her homeland, which was realized when the demilitarized zone was established in July 27, 1953, as well as one of the major events within Korea that caused the dispersal of many Koreans. On a personal level, Min was in Korea during her formative years, and her first memories are of a Korea devastated by war.²³⁰ Min's private memories no doubt interact with this historical event, especially since her father was a translator for the United States Army.²³¹

On a collective level, the memories and effects of the Korean War resurfaced for many Korean Americans, as the landscape after the L.A. riots resembled the demolished landscape of Seoul after the war.²³² Many of the Korean immigrant shop owners who were affected by the L.A. riots are in Min's generation, therefore memories of the devastation of a war-torn Korea were the first memories of many Korean Americans affected by the L.A. riots. The precarious involvement of the U.S. in the Korean War, the Gwangju Uprising and

²³⁰ Min immigrated to the United States at the age of seven.

²³¹ Caruso, 167-168.

²³² For example, a European American National Guardsman posted in Koreatown during the riots reflected on his tour of duty in South Korea, and remarked how the streets of Los Angeles reminded him of Seoul after the Korean War. Abelmann and Lie. *Blue Dreams: Korean Americans and the Los Angeles Riots*, ix.

the L.A. riots have a common link, in terms of the callousness of the U.S. in regard to the Korean people, as opposed to the political and economic interests of the U.S. in the international division of labor, in the minds of Korean Americans.²³³

In the aftermath of the L.A. riots, racial hierarchy, guided by economic interest of a few, is repeated in the Rebuild Los Angeles project (RLA), as its focus resulted in the gentrification of the area.²³⁴ As Camnitzer describes, the repeated use of Min's portrait provides the continuity and sanity amidst the external events. They are also part of a series of "defining moments," because they reaffirm the survival and integrity of Min's image, and that of the Korean American identity onto a new landscape in the United States.²³⁵ As described in detailing the historical events and the effect that these events had on the artist and the specific group of people that she embodies, this photography series involves the intersection between history and memory, as well as the politics of repression, when coupled with Dr. Ramsay Liem's work on Korean war survivors, and the effect of trauma transference on their children. The *Still Present Pasts* exhibit that he organized includes this piece by Min. The ways in which Yong Soon Min employs narrative strategies address issues of cross-cultural

²³³ This link is further developed in the Y. David Chung section of this dissertation, which explains the relationship between the U.S. and Korea in more detail.

²³⁴ "History of Rebuild LA," in *Rebuild LA Collection*. CSLA-6. History. 2009. Web. January 2, 2010. http://library.lmu.edu/specialcollections/CSLA_Research_Collection/Rebuild_LA_Home/Rebuild_LA_Collection_CSLA-6_History.htm

²³⁵ Luis Camnitzer, "Yong Soon Min: Defining Moments," *Fresh Talk/Darning Gazes: Conversations on Asian American Art* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003), 123-124.

transmission inherent in such works that place questions of positionality firmly on the foreground. *Defining Moments* gives visual form to the thicket of thorny questions and sentiments that are difficult to comprehend.

Each date in *Defining Moments* holds personal and historical significance, attesting to the intertwining of public and private experiences in identity formation. Collectively, these dates create a chain of “defining moments” that have shaped Min’s life, as well as the Korean American identity. The analysis of this series as a whole shows that the meanings embedded in this series are very complex, and deal not only with positionality, but also narrative strategies that evoke a diasporic consciousness. Emanating from her navel, the dates and corresponding events form a lifeline of sorts, or a link back through time; a way of remembering and commemorating the past. Min positions her body as landscape or homeland, labeling her chest “heartland” and her arms “occupied territory.”²³⁶ This is evidenced by her choice of images. For the section on the Korean War, she used an image of a landscape of a rice paddy, which is an integral part of the historical development of Korean society, rather than choosing images of a devastated urban landscape, or images of the war casualties. For the section on the April Revolution and the Gwangju Uprising, she used a cityscape instead of the highly politicized images of wounded students. Home has become a construct that she embodies, rather than occupies. The image of the artist becomes a landscape. Here, body and landscape become an

²³⁶ Sharon Mizota, “Interchanges,” *Fresh Talk/Darning Gazes: Conversations on Asian American Art* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003), 125.

individualized unity, visually and conceptually, which allows for the theorizing of the bodily experience into the larger discourse of identity politics. The psychosis observed by Dr. Liem's patients shows that the second generation are witnesses once removed, but witnesses nonetheless, and they experience the same trauma of things not seen.²³⁷

Furthering the discussion on narrative strategies, the metaphor of the spiral and the dialectic between the center (the navel), and the spiraling outward towards a suggestive infinity, demonstrate a particular type of narratology, akin to Russian formalism. Min's composite portraits serve as a synecdoche that demonstrates a limited number of narrative elements and roles, which are combined in different ways to generate an almost infinite number of stories. The narration that generates them is not spontaneously available to us as we view the work, and neither the viewer nor artist is truly aware of the iconography on which it depends.²³⁸ Self-reflexivity of the aesthetic is reclaimed and refigured through the host of memories that remain in the collective memory.

The words etched on the glass of the first photograph in Min's series recall a Scottish nursery rhyme. One might ask, what does Scotland have anything to

²³⁷ Ramsay Liem, "History, Trauma, and Identity: The Legacy of the Korean War for Korean Americans," *Amerasia Journal* 29.3 (2003/4).

²³⁸ This part of the analysis was influenced by the arguments found in Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (London: Methuen), 1983.

do with Korea?²³⁹ To me, this is no coincidence. Although the artist herself admits that she did not see the historical similarities, I would like to suggest that perhaps it was a subconscious decision that bubbled up and manifests itself here. The melody of the Korean National Anthem, *Aegukga*, is based on the Scottish folk song *Auld Lang Syne*, introduced to Korea by John Ross, a Scottish missionary who contributed to the first Korean language Bible in 1886.²⁴⁰ Many Christian hymns include the theme of an exilic existence, where the earthly realm is not their “true” home. This metaphysical sense of a homeland that is located elsewhere perpetuates a need that always remains unfulfilled.

Defining Moments establishes a relationship with the property of the landscape, as much as the face does, by individualizing the landscape.²⁴¹ The original landscape is located in memory, and is incompletely accessible due to the division of Korea and the limitations of memory. The new landscape remains forever a borrowed one that consists of a mix of origins separated by an ocean,

²³⁹ Again, there is a commonality with modern and contemporary Cuban art, where *El Patio de Mi Casa* by Maria Brito is based on a Cuban nursery rhyme, and reflects the persistence of her childhood memories in Cuba. Strongly affected by her exile from Cuba at the age of thirteen, Brito pieces together elements of her dislocated past to create her sculptures. As expressed in this installation, exile permanently alters the immigrant’s perception of his or her place in the world. Communicating this experience is the purview of the artists who transform a psychological crisis into a creative act of transculturality, which Fernando Ortiz described as a bridge between two cultures. According to David H. Brown, Fernando Ortiz coined the term transculturation in the 1940s to describe the cultural changes generated in specific encounters and subsequent instances of cultural expression. The term expresses the different phases in the transitive process from one culture to another, because this process does not only imply the acquisition of culture by the term acculturation, but also involves the loss or uprooting of one’s preceding culture – what one would call partial disculturation. Moreover, it signifies the subsequent creation of a new cultural phenomenon. David H. Brown, *The Light Inside: Abakuá Society Art and Cuban Cultural History* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Books, 2003), 110.

²⁴⁰ On August 15, 1948, the Scottish tune was replaced by the Finale of Korea *Fantasia* composed by Ahn Eak-tae.

²⁴¹ Camnitzer, “Yong Soon Min: Defining Moments,” 123-124.

and divided by the 38th parallel. In her biography of landscaping historical and personal traumas, she records these events onto the new landscape of her face and body, marked and utilized as a representation of the Korean American identity. She situates her body as a synecdoche for the body of the nation and the Korean American identity. In a sense, history breathes through all aspects of this photography series, as Yong Soon Min's image punctuates the historical narrative with the shock of the present, marking the syntax of crisis that is made visible by its palimpsest-like construction.

Synesthesia: Phantasmagoria and *Our Cosmos Our Chaos*

Trauma is never faithful to linear timelines, and there are multiple points of entry into excavating the remnant of trauma. Artworks by Yong Soon Min, Y. David Chung, and Erica Cho construct layers of collective trauma and fantasy in this manner. Grace Cho introduces her application of phantasmagoria as the process of nurturing a ghost through shame and secrecy that is made manifest. In the next section I will attempt to apply Grace Cho's analysis of phantasmagoria, to Erica Cho's *Our Cosmos Our Chaos* (2004).

A discussion of the different ways in which Y. David Chung and Yong Soon Min delineate the history of the present exhibit several commonalities, such as the gesture towards the same historic events, enacted in different ways. Formally, Chung uses historical film footage, whereas Min uses historical photographs (Figure 2, 3, 4). This close relationship between the Korean War and the L.A. riots confirms a characteristic of the Korean diaspora experience. The existential state of knowing that one's homeland is separated is exhibited in

the fact that both artists use the Korean War as one of many focal points. Min's first photograph appears as a negative, which gives a deliberate look of a ghost, a specter living within the body. Trauma is inherently unintelligible and unrepresentable, therefore "the ghost gesticulates, signals and sometimes mimics the unspeakable as it shines for both the remembered and the forgotten," according to sociologist Grace M. Cho.²⁴² The struggle to "translate racial grief into social claims" forms a central drama for the artworks in this chapter.²⁴³ "By taking in the other-made-ghostly," a gesture towards a description of trauma is made visible.²⁴⁴

Erica Cho, a second generation Korean American artist, attempts to create an installation and video that ties together Koreatown and the generationally-removed memories about the Korean War that are transmitted through a nightmare in *Our Cosmos Our Chaos*. Erica Cho's dreamscape is about the ghosts of her ancestors that inject themselves in to her present nightmare in Koreatown, Los Angeles. Like Chung and Min, artwork is a source of a possible means of reading unacknowledged trauma carried over to the diaspora. John Johnston describes this in terms of "distributed perception."²⁴⁵ According to Grace Cho, "In searching for bodies through which to speak, the ghost is distributed across the time and space of the diaspora, in order to create another

²⁴² Grace Cho, *Haunting the Korean Diaspora: Shame, Secrecy, and the Forgotten War* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 162.

²⁴³ Anne Anlin Cheng, *Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation and Hidden Grief* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2001), 3.

²⁴⁴ Cheng, 8.

²⁴⁵ John Johnston, "Mechanic Vision," *Critical Inquiry* 26 (Autumn 1999): 44-47.

type of body, an assembled body, whose purpose is to see and speak traumas that could not be seen and spoken by those who directly lived them.”²⁴⁶

What is perceived is therefore, in the words of Johnston’s description of “mechanic vision” is that memory is “not located at any single place and moment in time, and the act by which this perception occurs is not the result of a single or isolated agency, but of several working in concert or parallel”.²⁴⁷ The artwork does this through altered repetitions of past experiences.²⁴⁸ Both Yong Soon Min and Erica Cho utilize the spiral as a literal and conceptual mode of organizing the subjects in their artwork. For Yong Soon Min, the spiral works to convey the temporality of trauma as nonlinear. While there is a certain chronology to keep in mind, her use of the spiral makes visual the circular evocations of trauma that are often expressed in similar literary works by such figures as Nora Okra Keller in *Fox Girl* and *Comfort Women*.²⁴⁹

Our Cosmos, Our Chaos by Erica Cho consists of a stylized depiction of a tiger, with six round apertures that frame an animation loop about IN (Figure 13-21) . IN is the main character of a 40-minute animation. The turbulent history and ancient animistic traditions are constructed through a dream-like narrative that moves between the present and the past, between present-day Koreatown, Los Angeles and pre-industrial Korea. IN is drawn to a gated fortress that leads

²⁴⁶ Grace Cho, *Haunting the Korean Diaspora: Shame, Secrecy, and the Forgotten War*, (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 166.

²⁴⁷ John Johnston, “Mechanic Vision,” *Critical Inquiry* 26 (Autumn 1999): 44.

²⁴⁸ Cho, 167.

²⁴⁹ Nora Okra Keller, *Fox Girl* (New York: Penguin Group, 2002).

her through a secret landscape of ancestral ghosts, evil spirits, and supernatural forces. Through sacrifices, battles, and animal deities, IN joins the fortress' tortured souls in battle against a gang called the Skeleton Boys.

This piece explores the connection between mystical practice and social resistance. IN leaves her home in present-day Koreatown for a secret world filled with both fantastic and historical figures. In the dream, repressed crimes committed by forces of greed and war against the populace during the Korean War, return in the wake of historical amnesia. Guided by animal deities, alive to her new surroundings, and coming to terms with her own ignorance and power, IN struggles to understand her place in unrecorded history. She faces a pair of twins from Los Angeles, who have invaded her dream in their own quest for historical redemption. The first and last part of the video consists of a circular map of Koreatown that spins centripetally and centrifugally, allowing an appropriation of social space and historical time in her narrative.

Applying transgenerational haunting as that which is unspeakable, trauma does not die with the first person that experienced it, but rather, the artwork reflects the notion of unresolved trauma that is unconsciously passed through generations. Silence, as a subject matter for *TBH* and *Our Cosmos Our Chaos*, shows that the absences and gaps in family history speak volumes. It is the preoccupation with silences, and absence of direct experience from which the trauma is derived, that are the ingredients of haunting. Therefore, haunting is not produced by the original trauma, but by the silence. Concordantly, a psychological study conducted after the L.A. riots, reported that only seven

percent of those affected by the riots sought professional help for the diagnosis of post traumatic stress disorder, showing the continuation of the cycle of silence.

Erica Cho is further removed, as a second generation Korean American. She expresses the psychic effects of intergenerational trauma. In the words of Grace M. Cho, “Such an act of memory reveals not only hidden histories of grief, but also continuities with contemporary geopolitics, and thus raises questions about the ways in which the United States is a neocolonial power, rather than a peacekeeper bestowing the gift of democracy”.²⁵⁰ The analysis propelled by this installation shows that the public identity of Korean Americans is not inaccessible or impenetrable by the majority; rather, it is displaced as an undesired object. Through the video, Erica Cho animates that which has been lost or forgotten, in order to recognize the ways in which, in the words of Jill Bennett, “the past seeps back into the present as sensation rather than representation”.²⁵¹ Erica Cho illustrates that what hovers in the liminal space can open up to inform histories and practices of domination.

Akin to Saidiya V. Hartman’s method of “foraging and disfiguration”, Erica Cho creates a story about diaspora and trauma, in which it becomes unclear whose memory is being recounted via transgenerational haunting. Hartman describes Cho's methodology as an

attempt to read against the grain [that] is perhaps best understood as a combination of foraging and disfiguration - raiding for

²⁵⁰ Cho, 51.

²⁵¹ Jill Bennett, *Emphatic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 42.

fragments upon which other narratives can be spun, and misshaping and deforming the testimony through selective quotation and the amplification of issues.²⁵²

IN is the personification of the silent detritus of unspoken trauma in regard to how it is made relevant to the following generation of Korean Americans. In this way, Hartman's description is made visual in *Our Cosmos Our Chaos*, in its anachronistic presentation of IN's story.

The dreamscapes from Y. David Chung's *Turtle Boat Head*, and Erica Cho's installation, demonstrate an evacuation of the sense of progress that is associated with the passing of time. In the words of Grace M. Cho, "what these moments have in common is that they are articulated by a similar haunting, tenuously held together by some ghost that emerged from the space of evacuation".²⁵³ Y. David Chung's installation shows the world imagining the interiority of the man, with memories that fold on top of another, making visible a complex topology. In Chung's installation, we as spectators inhabit the space, not through an identification as the witness of trauma, but through a transmission of a place where our condition of perception provides the necessary warrant to complete the narration. All the self portraits in this chapter, therefore, function as a synecdoche towards the present-future and also as a ventriloquist to the present-past. These moments that have been knotted tight by the passages of time and repression, are loosened during the shock of the L.A. riots, as the sense

²⁵² Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of subjection: terror, slavery, and self-making in the nineteenth-century America (Race and American Culture)*, (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 12.

²⁵³ Cho, 54.

memories once buried resurfaced. As the Korea War itself is known as the “Forgotten War,” historians often do not prioritize the magnitude of civilian damage. By one estimate, seventy percent of the Korean War’s death was composed of civilian casualties, compared to forty percent in World War II.²⁵⁴

A proposition for looking at trauma

Umma is the bearer of trauma. The iconography of “mother” is repeated and has a long history in literature and art. All of the female depictions in Chung’s murals are either the idealized female as either Queen Min or the personification of Liberty, or commodified versions of the female body, as evident in the mock-advertisements inside the store. The female body is almost dismissed as one with agency, as they are symbols or personifications, whereas the male body is the conduit of history and personal experience, as expressed in the video. However, the artwork does not deal with male issues in particular, like the effects of socio-economic demotion that characterizes the Korean male immigrant experience.

The negative appearance of Min’s naked body evokes the history of women’s sexual labor during the Japanese Occupation and the Korean War. Historian Ji-Yeon Yup asserts that “Korean military brides have been on the frontline of Korea-U.S. Cultural and social contact for the past half-century,” in the context of the neoimperialist relationship between South Korea and the United

²⁵⁴ Ramsay Liem, “History, Trauma, and Identity: The Legacy of the Korean War for Korean Americans,” *Amerasia Journal* 29.3 (2003/4): 114.

States.²⁵⁵ If the positive markings in white are there to communicate historical events and present situations, the negative is without history, but occupies the same psychic body. This viewing draws the living and the dead closer together to the point where the viewer is also moving towards nonhistory.

By presenting an organic body, in *Defining Moments*, and an interior psychic depth in *TBH*, these works make possible a host of new frameworks that require a rearticulation and strengthening of the corporeal as the bearer of race's meaning, and a deepening of that meaning as ultimately lodged beyond the assessing gaze. The epistemology of the visual that enables natural history, is thus displaced by an emphasis on the organic nature of the body in *Defining Moments*. In *TBH*, the intimate view of daily experience, on its seemingly definitive historical functioning of these personal narratives, is presented. Furthering the concept of Russian Formalism, the victim, perpetrator, and bystander are positions that are interchangeable, depending on one's point of view. However, cycles of violence, from the Korean War to the L.A. riots, engender certain psychological effects that are revealed and studied as a political phenomenon, and as the matrix of power that continuously oscillates. What we are left with is "affect" as the object of analysis, which is effectively extracted from the rigid framework of static identity.

Art is not only about the capacity to signify, represent, or embody an individual subject or event - it is rather the sensation arising in space that is the

²⁵⁵ Ji-Yeon Yup, *Beyond the Shadow of Camptown: Korean Military Brides in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 3.

operative element. Art has the capacity to sustain sensation, in addition to a communication of meaning. I claim that we need to move trauma away from the postcolonial anxieties of the past. We need to configure memory in trauma as lived history, and connect affect to a larger series of interconnected events and political forces in the present. In other words, emotion does not dwell in the past. It is always present; it is a living entity, as explicated in the artworks that reliably connect the past with the present. The way to plot a mode of subjectivity and agency in the larger global picture, is through moving away from seeing trauma as a condition that is mimicked or appropriated from the past, and reframing it as a life experience, albeit one sublimated by the socio-cultural stigma of mental illness.²⁵⁶

Beyond the postcolonial anxiety of first World subjectivities of the past, I propose an extension of victimology, to pit passivity against agency, so that the focus of our view is towards relations of power. The subtle difference from an analysis of individual agency to understanding interconnectedness, is to be invested in, and even produce, the directionality of the forces in motion constituted through us, consciously or subconsciously, which yield a focus towards a bigger picture and a vision of multiple registers of interpretation. These works provide a way of thinking about trauma, but they are not symptomatic of trauma culture or “wound culture,” as described by scholars such

²⁵⁶ Sylvia Shin Huey Chong, “Look, an Asian!”: The Politics of Racial Interpellation in the Wake of the Virginia Tech Shootings,” *Journal of Asian American Studies* 11.1 (2008): 227-60.

as Mike Seltzer.²⁵⁷ Hence, the pieces in this chapter are linked not strictly by the theme of the L.A. riots, but also by modes of political engagement.

Concluding Remarks

My uncle's store was located near the intersection of Western Avenue and Pico Boulevard in Los Angeles. The complex that housed the row of stalls where he sold discounted athletic shoes, was leveled as a result of the '92 riots. There was nothing to recover; everything was burned to the ground. Weeks after the riots, I noticed that he had not been coming to church. I later found out that he had a nervous breakdown in his car on the way to church. The breakdown was triggered when he approached an overpass on the freeway. Although he has never exhibited a fear of bridges, the riots awakened the memory of seeing a bridge full of civilians being bombed during the Korean War. Since then, he moved his business and immediate family to Oxnard, far away from Los Angeles and major overpasses. My uncle's story is reflective of the mental illness suffered by many Korean Americans during and after the riots.

A team of psychologist investigated the psychological impact of the 1992 Los Angeles riots on two hundred and two Korean American victims, which correlate to many of the themes addressed in the artwork. From statistics on specific symptoms of post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), to generational differences, this study elucidates and confirms my interpretations of the artwork in this chapter. In support of the interconnected nature of the riots to the Korean

²⁵⁷ Mark Seltzer, *Serial Killers: Death and Life in America's Wound Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1998).

war, this study shows that “older subjects, regardless of income or length of time spent in this country, evidence more severe psychological reactions than the younger ones”.²⁵⁸ The older generations’ memories of the Korean War are more vivid than those of the the younger generation. Therefore, the generation of artists with direct experience use historical sources, whereas Erica Cho’s experience is once removed, showing a less concrete source of trauma. The study also confirms the gender divide, in terms of the different symptoms that manifest in the victims, to the different subject matter addressed in the artworks. Women had significantly higher rates of somatization and recurrent dreams, averaging 96.5%, correlating with Erica Cho’s subject matter.²⁵⁹ In addition, the symptom that was most evident in both genders were “recurrent and intrusive recollections” at 96% and “concentration difficulty” at 94.9%, a symptom that describes the male shopkeeper in Y. David Chung’s *TBH* video, where his reverie is notably and purposefully distracting.²⁶⁰

In Figure 34 of *TBH*, a row of figures in the foreground leads the viewer into the scene of a vegetable and fruit stand that is situated in front of protestors.

The juxtaposition of the cityscape and the turtle boat on the same horizon line

²⁵⁸ Mikyong Kim-Goh, Chong Suh, Dudley David Blake, Bruce Hiley-Young, “Psychological Impact of the Los Angeles Riots on Korean-American Victims: Implications for Treatment,” *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 65.1 (January 1995): 141-142.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁰ Recurrent dreams were the most frequent symptom (96.5%), followed by recurrent and intrusive recollections (96%), sense of foreshortened future (94.9%), concentration difficulty (94.9%), and irritability or outbursts of anger (94%). Of the participants, 151 (75%) participants qualified for a diagnosis of PTSD, and 112 (55%) had a severe form. Only fourteen participants (7%) had actually sought professional psychiatric help. Mikyong Kim-Goh, Chong Suh, Dudley David Blake, Bruce Hiley-Young, “Psychological Impact of the Los Angeles Riots on Korean-American Victims: Implications for Treatment,” *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 65.1 (January 1995): 141.

accentuates the synchronic presentation of Koreanness, emphasizing the theme that enriches the complex thesis of the installation. Many themes are evoked in this mural, from transnationalism, to diaspora, media, trade, urbanism and labor. The title and main subject matter of the installation remains that of the Turtle Boat. In addition to the historic account of Admiral Yi-Sun Sin's battle, the turtle also signifies the indigenous mythologies of the Korean peninsula that are the subject of Chung's other works, such as *First Circle* (Figure 53, 54). The turtle is evident in many visual artifacts throughout the history of Korea, the most famous being the turtle snake from the Goguryeo caves, dated 357CE (Figure 79, 80).²⁶¹ The turtle, in colloquial Asian beliefs, symbolizes long life. However, in the last few years, economists have identified the *haigui*, Chinese mandarin for sea turtle. *Haigui* refers to those who studied overseas and returned to contribute to their home country.²⁶²

The development of critical art practices advances a politics of heterogeneity, in lieu of those that work with the equality-through-identity promised by nationalism. According to Kandice Chuh, "In a politics of heterogeneity, difference is neither celebrated nor subjugated, but is instead

²⁶¹ Junghee Lee, "The Evolution of Koguryeo Tombs," *Korean Culture*, (Summer 1992): 12-17, 40-44. Web. January 5, 2011. http://eng.buddhopia.com/_Service/_ContentView/ETC_CONTENT_2.ASP?PK=0000594065&danrak_no=&class_cd=&top_menu_cd=0000000808

²⁶² According to official data, China currently sends more students abroad than any country in the world. In an investment in human capital, between 1972 and 2009, about 1.39 million Chinese students went abroad to study. Ju Li-ghyun, "'Sea Turtles' Find Their Niche in China," *Want China Times*. (October 31, 2010). <http://www.wantchinatimes.com/news-subclass-cnt.aspx?cid=1102&MainCatID=11&id=20101031000029>, accessed on December 3, 2010.

historicized and particularized.”²⁶³ Accordingly, it is important to bring to the surface a potentially transgressive transnational cartographic imaginary articulated in the narratives of the artworks, one that is suppressed in both U.S. nationalist and Asian Americanist nation-based paradigms, and will yield productive insights. As such, the artworks contribute to the project of dislocating the dichotomous spatial logic that has long held together the boundaries of the field of Asian American Studies. According to Chuh, “the inadequacy of nation as conceptual parameter for understanding the complexities of subject formation is understood here as not simply a question of accuracy, but rather as one that is specifically ideological”.²⁶⁴ The artworks “advance the work of inviting Asian Americanist discourse to revisit its spatial groundings, by narratologically emphasizing the synchronic character of the multiple systems of subjectification that converge to produce social identities”.²⁶⁵ Like the novels that Chuh analyzes, the artworks in this chapter point to Korean nationalism, Japanese colonialism, and U.S. racism as distinguishable but inseparably linked historical narratives that simultaneously underwrite the production of Korean and Korean American subjectivities.²⁶⁶ Kandice Chuh’s readings of *Clay Walls* and *A Gesture Life* “focus on their respective deployments and interrogations of “Korean” and Korean American” identities as metaphors for different kinds of

²⁶³ Kandice Chuh, *Imagine Otherwise: On Asian Americanist Critique* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 86.

²⁶⁴ Chuh, 88.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

relations of power that we shorthand as colonialism, nationalism, racism, and sexism".²⁶⁷

The hermeneutic frame, developed as an ideology, links American claims to Korean responses, designated as assimilation, acculturation and the like. However Chung's installation shows that such dialectical analysis exposes the problems in representing culture and ethnicity. The parameters set by the political economy of the U.S. elicit a pattern that consists of an environment of a common condition of communities, connected through multiple registers of transnational networks, as explained through my reading of *Defining Moments*. The dialectical approach is limited in that it isolates cultural products from their social context and offers no analysis of the relations that exists between the individual, the community, and the conditions by which the historical and social organization of the participants continue to interact. Chung abolishes the boundaries between the public and private spheres, between the storeowner, customer, and spectator establishing a reflexive system of intertextuality. In other words, the *Turtle Boat Head* installation offers a mosaic of references to the present and past, as existing not in a closed system, nor in isolation. The elements from Chung's installation, Min's photography series, and Cho's installation, are not simply a matter of influences which pass from one culture or generation to another, but of the multiple and complex relations that exist between varying contexts in both synchronic and diachronic terms. What is produced, as an attempt to interpret the artworks in this chapter, is the conclusion

²⁶⁷ Chuh, 91.

that contemporary analysis and historical reconstruction cannot exist without each other.

CHAPTER 4: Geography Matters in Koreatown, Los Angeles

Introduction

In a chapter entitled “Mapping the Korean Diaspora in Los Angeles,” authors Nancy Abelmann and John Lie state that, “Koreatown, Los Angeles is a major symbolic destination of Korean immigration to the United States. The portable homelands that immigrants carry in their minds have been materially recreated near downtown Los Angeles.”²⁶⁸ As cogent as that statement was in the late 1990s, the evolution of Koreatown since then requires a recalibration of that observation. The palimpsestic landscape of Koreatown expands the geographical imagination from the idea of *holding a territory to a transformation of the territories* in the metropolitan imagination, which is necessary for the artistic articulation of cultural existence in Los Angeles. This chapter begins with a semiotic description of Koreatown that takes the cityscape of Koreatown today, and locates the signifiers and describes the myth of the post-riot metropolis. I will use this description as a springboard for what the artworks tell us about this myth and the geographical imagination that is made visual in the artwork.

I claim that this geographic imagination is contrapuntal between movements that are centrifugal and centripetal. My description of Koreatown to follow, allows for a positioning of Koreatown as a space where intra and inter ethnic identities within generations are flexibly contested and combined through localized global interactions. All of the artists in this dissertation have an affinity

²⁶⁸ Nancy Abelmann, and John Lie. *Blue Dreams: Korean Americans and the Los Angeles Riots* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 85-118.

for the multiethnic metropolis. For example, each section of the *TBH* video by Y. David Chung is separated through the metaphoric shift of cars in transit, complete with sounds of the street (Figure 42). The idea of the transformation of territories previously mentioned is conveyed through scenes of cars passing, and through driving as a state of being; planes as a contemporary image of diaspora passage; and the mythic turtle boat as a metaphor of the ambiguities of origin myths (Figure 42, 50, 51). Erica Cho's *Our Cosmos Our Chaos* (2004) begins in Koreatown, as the protagonist traverses a phantasmagoric narrative of the Korean War (Figure 13-21). Yong Soon Min deliberately uses historic footage of landscapes in *Defining Moments*, that are bookended by a centripetal origin of the spiral of dates, and the mythic birth place of the Korean people in the Diamond Mountains of North Korea (Figure 7).

Geography Matters

Geography is an epistemic category on par with race and gender. The vortex of the spiraling narratives of the artwork in this chapter speak to the cultural and physical plasticity of the connection between place and identity formation, raising complicated issues that transcend the hermeneutics of the artwork in this dissertation. A framework suggested by Margo Machida, called "culturalist conceptualism" stresses how "the intellectual and associative thought processes behind art are culturally enmeshed, and thus often influenced by an artist's background and experience;" it is a model rooted in cosmopolitanism.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁹ Margo Machida, *Unsettled Visions: Contemporary Asian American Artists and the Social Imaginary* (London and Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 268.

According to Machida, such conjectures demonstrate that framing the contemporary world through culturally specific filters need not be an “excuse for nostalgia or a fixed reference” for romantic or atavistic notions of authenticity or points of origin, but instead it can “serve as a compelling epistemic resource for dealing with an ever-changing present - in the midst of plural power centers and ongoing cross-cultural movement.”²⁷⁰ Unlike Chinatown or Little Tokyo, where Asians tend to predominate, Koreatown is a mixed urban setting. The analysis of artwork about the storefront, such as the exhibition entitled *L.A. Koreatown: A Celebration of Continuity and Change*, at the Korean American Museum in 2006, needs a significant recalibration because the Rebuild Los Angeles project never intended to rebuild the neighborhood stores that were destroyed during the riots.²⁷¹

Although Asian migrants have historically made niches for themselves as small businessmen, such as the family-operated neighborhood store, restaurant, laundry business, etc., Koreatown, Los Angeles is no longer a place where a small business can afford to do business. The businesses in Koreatown now operate under a different paradigm, with transnational flows of capital that is supported by municipal assignment of specific visas that foster the growth of a new generation of Korean Americans after the 1990 Immigration Act. The

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

²⁷¹ see Kyong-Hwan Park, “Transnational Urbanism in Diaspora Space: Multi-scaled Urban Redevelopment of Los Angeles Koreatown” (PhD diss., University of Kentucky, 2005). The exhibition entitled *Storefront Live: KA Small Business* opened at the Korean American Museum on the Fall of 1999, however it was a multi-site exhibition. <http://www.kamuseum.org/programs/base.htm>

contrapuntal centripetal and fugal development, with multiple centers of exegesis, is foretold in the artwork about the L.A. riots by Korean American artists. It was through an application of Machida's approach of culturalist conceptualism, that this analysis is able to take the aforementioned conjunctures described by Machida further, by claiming that disjunctures in transnational economies is what is exhibited in Koreatown. Another source that influenced this chapter is Cultural Geography, which includes ethnographic accounts of urban subcultures, as well as issues of memory and performance, in regard to how these concepts construct a societal and political framework.²⁷² The different approaches to looking at space were introduced to me at a graduate seminar by Gary Fields entitled, "Geographies of Exclusion," at UCSD's Communications Department. This seminar looked at how power influences perceptions of difference, and creates exclusion and conflict within broad spatial concepts, such as the body, the landscape, the nation, the city, the map, the reservation, and the border. There, I developed a need to incorporate discussions of space in my dissertation; particularly, the ways in which Korean American artists conceptualized space in their works about the L.A. riots. Another aspect of influence is the emphasis on field research incorporated into the methodological framework of cultural geography, which resulted in frequent trips to Koreatown, taking pictures and, of course, driving.

²⁷² For a description of the development of cultural geography, see Tim Cresswell, "New cultural geography - an unfinished project." *Cultural Geographies* 17.2 (2010): 169-174.

Los Angeles is a microcosm of world cultures, from Little Armenia, near the intersection of the 10 interstate freeway and Santa Monica Boulevard, to “Little Tokyo” near city hall. Michel De Certeau posits that one needs to walk the city, in order to know the city.²⁷³ In other words, there is knowledge gained from first-hand experience, rather than abstractions on a map. However, to really know the City of Angels, one needs to drive through it. Maps show the distance from one neighborhood to the next but, the ways in which the scenery changes, are abrupt from one block to the next. Driving around pre-riot Koreatown in the 1990s is dramatically different from the cityscape today. The majority of the small businesses are gone, replaced by high rises and big budget shopping complexes that foster transnational business practices. I will present a few case studies detailing the factors that went into the development at the intersection of Western Avenue and Wilshire Boulevard that was a result of private funds on land slotted for renovation by the Rebuild Los Angeles project.

Driving the city

Driving along Olympic Boulevard, the main artery of Koreatown, I stop at the intersection of Western Avenue. While waiting for the light to turn green, I saw a huge mural depicting a sequence of movements of a *p'unngmul* drummer in mid-air dance, with his traditional Korean attire and *chang'go* hourglass drum (Figure 81). Next to him is a b-boy in a similar sequenced representation, showing a series of movements that end in a classic b-boy pose of a modified

²⁷³ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Los Angeles and Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 91-110.

handstand. This larger than life mural is sponsored by Hanmi Bank, with its accompanying slogan “Life Gets Better.” The similarity of rhythm and movements evokes comparisons between *p’ungmul* and breakdancing. *P’ungmul*, a traditional form of Korean music and dance, and breakdancing, share a similar generative story, in that they are both expressions of the common people.

My thoughts drift to the documentary by Benson Lee, called *Planet B-boy* (2007), that documents a phenomenon that presents the recent history of international b-boy competitions in Berlin, where dance crews from South Korea have been dominating. Aside from the inherent similarities between the two art forms, I wonder what the connection was between Koreatown, Hanmi Bank, *p’ungmul* and breakdancing. Taking Lee’s idea of another planet, is Koreatown a new planet, representative of a new order of urban development? Hanmi Bank is a Korean American bank that was established in 1982, and it is one of several Korean American companies that invested heavily on the urban renewal project in Koreatown after the 1992 Los Angeles riots.

Korean involvement from multinational companies like Samsung, LG, and Hyundai sought to transform the cultural visibility of Koreans and Korean Americans in Los Angeles, tapping into a new market of nouveau riche Korean immigrants. Many of the smaller businesses being financed by banks such as Hanmi, Nara, Saehan, and Woori, proved the slogan that life can get better, as the community rebuilt after the damage from the 1992 riots, not only materially but also fundamentally, by changing the cultural identity of Koreans in the U.S.

from within the community's imagination. The names of these banks speak to the aspirations of Korean Americans. A translation of the names of these banks is evocative of the cultural identity of Korean immigrants. For example, Hanmi means "Korean American," Saehan means "New Korea," Nara means "Land," with the plural possessive pronoun "our" implied, and Woori means "our."

As the light turns green, I continue my drive toward the intersection of Western Avenue and Wilshire Boulevard, where I see the local chapter of KYCC (Koreatown Youth Community Center) *p'ungmul* group drumming and dancing to an audience of Los Angelenos, at the main entrance of the Metro station. As I continue to drive, the sound of drumming fades as the pulsating LCD screens and neon lights in *han'gūl* flash and flicker in the twilight landscape of palimpsestic significations. Aroma Wilshire Center, which opened in 2001, a \$35 million spa, mall, and complex, with its \$3 million audio-visual screen, is visible for half a mile west (Figure 104).²⁷⁴ The pulsating images consist of advertisements for Korean companies like Samsung, Daewoo, and LG, as well as ads for products that are popular among the Korean American community, like Crown Royal.

As Ernesto Laclau argues, any social identity is determined by the relation to its external force, in this case the cityscape, and the operation of that force functions to transform the identity of a given society.²⁷⁵ The crucial role of

²⁷⁴ Aroma Spa is a subsidiary of Hanil Development Co., a cement and construction behemoth that ranks as the 35th largest privately held corporation in Korea. Roger Vincent, "Luxury Spa to Open Its Doors to Wealthy in Koreatown," *Los Angeles Times* June 18, 2001.

²⁷⁵ Ernesto Laclau, *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time* (London: Verso, 1990).

language in the formation of Koreatown as a border between South Korea and the U.S., brings up a tension between English and other languages in the formation of the American nation. If business signs are suppose to draw customers in, the Korean language signs communicate “Koreans Only” like a relatively implicit version of the “whites only” signs before the Civil Rights Movement (Figure 120). It is of note here that the image from Sung Ho Choi’s *Centrifugal* (1999) is from a whites only sign that he duplicated around the circular painting (Figure 25). According to Benedict Anderson, vernacular language plays a crucial role in forming community consciousness.²⁷⁶ The reverse of that is also true, in that language not only builds community consciousness, but also delimits its boundaries, an observation made by Boo Eung Koh, a professor from Yonsei University’s English Department, regarding the cityscape of Koreatown.²⁷⁷ The present look of Koreatown in Los Angeles partly explains the fallacy of assimilation, as Korean Americans who live and work there establish a different subculture within Korean America that is specific to the characteristics of that locality.

Multinational Companies and Koreatown, Los Angeles

Street parking in Koreatown is always a gamble, so I turn left on 6th Street to double back into the parking lot of the Madang Courtyard that opened in the summer of 2010 (Figure 105). The levels of the parking lot are divided by color

²⁷⁶ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

²⁷⁷ Boo Eung Koh, “Koreatown in Los Angeles: A Transnational Borderline in the American Nation. *Situations* 1 (Fall 2007): 44-59.

and symbol. The symbols are the immortal animals like the phoenix, tiger, and tortoise that is featured in many of Y. David Chung's drawings, from the *Turtle Boat Head* installation to the *Folding Screen* (1999) (Figure 34, 53). Madang Courtyard is across the street from the Solair development, a 22-story building with 186 condominiums and 40,000 square feet of commercial retail space, located on the Metro line and bus layover zone (Figure 109). The Solair development project is the private/public sector development on the Metro-owned property (Figure 110). Financing for the project includes the Genesis Real Estate Funds, which is a "community-based non-profit organization...to stimulate development projects in low-income communities."²⁷⁸ The condominiums here are drastically different from the projects in Long Beach described in the prologue of this dissertation. They are high-tech residences, complete with a rooftop pool. The real estate agents that represent these units give seminars to help a new class of Korean immigrants get E2 and E5 visas for their income bracket, which is at least \$100,000 and \$1MM, respectively.²⁷⁹ They also provide recommendations for supplemental education centers, another Korean American business that is a growing phenomenon in the United States, offsetting the low-quality urban public education system in the area.²⁸⁰

²⁷⁸ <http://www.genesisla.org/about.php> accessed 26 August 2011.

²⁷⁹ <http://www.masterplans.com/business-plans-for-immigration-visas.php?gclid=CMBqI8-UqKsCFQwaQgodBA8fzQ> accessed 3 September 2010.

²⁸⁰ For a detailed study of the culture of these supplemental education centers, popularly called Ha'gwons, see the introductory chapter of Keisha Janice Nalty, "Hagwons and their supplemental education programs in Georgia's growing Korean immigrant community" (PhD diss., University of Georgia, 2008).

Looking at the advertisements for rent in Solair, I wonder, since when did \$3,400 per month equal the cost of rent for low-income families?²⁸¹

Developments like Solair are for the city's expanding Korean community that has grown into the Wilshire district after the riots. Korean companies bought high-rises that once housed Fortune 500 companies, and opened shopping complexes with spas, boutiques and restaurants. The South Korean IMF crisis in 1997 was a catalyst to the influx of wealthy Korean immigrants with E-2 investment visas, which enable them to stay in the States by investing at least \$100,000 in a U.S. business. This E-2 visa is preferred by recent transmigrant investors, because it requires a lesser amount of money and provides renewable status to the visa holder.²⁸²

Diner and Movie at Ktown

I find a parking spot on the green-immortal tortoise level, and I head into the Madang plaza complex. Madang, which is Korean for courtyard, was designed by architect David Kim from Corbel Architects, and is a synthesis of Joseon palace architecture and postmodern design. Featuring paintings by Joseon genre painters like Shin Yun-bok and Kim Hong do (Figure 106, 83-86), recently made popular by Korean drama mini-series such as *Painter of the Wind* and *Yi-San* (Figure 87, 88), incorporate *trompe-l'oeil* elements, popularized in

²⁸¹ <http://www.dixco.com/losangeles-lofts-condos-for-sale-lease-listing.asp> accessed 26 August 2011.

²⁸² The E-2 visa is preferred by recent transmigrant investors, because it requires a lesser amount of money and provides renewable status to the visa holder. Youngmin Lee and Kyonghwan Park, "Negotiating hybridity: transnational reconstruction of migrant subjectivity in Koreatown, Los Angeles," *Journal of Cultural Geography* 25.3 (October 2008): 245-262.

the *chaekkori* decorations of the Joseon aristocracy (Figure 82). These trompe-l'oeil elements collapse the two dimensional surface with the faux courtyard architecture of the plaza (Figure 106).

I look for the people that I came to meet, Esther and Daniel, who are first cousins on my mother's side. They are what sociologists would consider "third culture kids" -- they went to primary school in the U.S., high school at an international school in Tokyo, Japan, and college in the U.S. Our plans are for dinner and a movie. Among the many businesses in this plaza, School Food (Figure 107) was recommended by these "organic intellectuals," Esther and Daniel, who live and work in Koreatown as designers and artists. The U.S. branch of the popular South Korean chain School Food consists of food that one would pack for school in South Korea, called *doshilak* (도시락). School Food established a lucrative business out of the Proustian moment of transporting themselves into memory's past through food.

Then it was onto CGV Theaters, another Korean company, part of CJ, an major entertainment conglomerate in South Korea (Figure 108). The movies playing include all of the current U.S. releases with Korean subtitles, and a smattering of newly released Korean movies with English subtitles, representative of *hallyu* (할리우), otherwise known as South Korean Wave cinema and popular culture. Esther and I noticed some Caucasian hipsters, and she told me that every time she sees a white person, she wants to ask them, "Are you lost?".

After the movie, we went to a restaurant known for its *boodaе chigae*, a dish that was invented during the Korean War, which includes the throwaway contents of U.S. C-rations cans in a Korean broth (Figure 112). We talked about the irony of this dish as we enjoyed this stew made of American cheese, hot-dogs, spam, kimchi, and other vegetables, in a restaurant called Johnson's (Figure 111).²⁸³

According to researchers Youngmin Lee and Kyonghwan Park, "Koreatown is a commercial district rather than a neighborhood community."²⁸⁴ The Los Angeles riots, therefore, represent more than just damage to property, they also tell "a story of social fluidity and capital exchange, thrust in motion by politics and power, all played out in the public realm".²⁸⁵ Accordingly, the battling over the use of public space is dynamic - the ebb and flow of power exchanged vary over time, space, and intensity.

Contrapuntal Turns

The artworks force a widening of the understanding of the event, as they produce a map where data points of riot destruction are tied together with specific spatial locations to personal stories that shine attention on the human experiences of the riots, lending insight to the processes that not only caused the riots but also foretell what will come afterwards. The high-rise developments

²⁸³ Joseon - written in Korean, when enunciated out loud, it sounds like Johnsons.

²⁸⁴ Youngmin Lee and Kyonghwan Park, "Negotiating hybridity: transnational reconstruction of migrant subjectivity in Koreatown,, Los Angeles, *Journal of Cultural Geography* 25.3 (October 2008): 245-262.

²⁸⁵ Paul Watts, "Revisiting the 1992 Los Angeles Riots: An Analysis of Geographical Perspectives" (Masters Thesis. Louisiana State University, 2003).

after the riots make me wonder, where did all the previous generation of small businesses and the Korean owners of those businesses go? They went to other areas of the county, contributing to the development of smaller versions of L.A.'s Koreatown. Some of them started their businesses anew in indoor swap meets like the Compton Fashion Center in Long Beach, where rent and overhead cost are cheaper. Others set up shop in Cerritos, and other suburban neighborhoods closer to their residences. Census data shows that in 1990s approximately 30% of Korean Americans in Los Angeles County resided in Koreatown. In 2000, Korean Americans living in Koreatown accounted for less than 23% of its population. During the same period, suburban areas experienced an increase in Korean Americans.²⁸⁶ Korean Americans view settling in suburban areas as a status symbol and evidence of economic success. The residential centripetality of Koreatown is weakening, so what accounts for the increase in Korean signboards and businesses that signal a strong sense of ethnic identity? Political economic conduits created a cultural landscape of consumption that presents a strong sense of Korean commerce of a different kind than that of the pre-riot generation.

***Our Cosmos, Our Chaos* (우리의 우주, 우리의 혼돈)**

The change in Koreatown reflects the transnational hegemonic structure that is composed of multinational companies and politicians on top, smaller retail and rental agents in the middle, and those employed by the latter two, creating a

²⁸⁶ Youngmin Lee and Kyonghwan Park, "Negotiating hybridity: transnational reconstruction of migrant subjectivity in Koreatown, Los Angeles, *Journal of Cultural Geography* 25.3 (October 2008): 245-262.

combination of three kinds of economic-geography: foreign investment, municipal ownership, and consumption. Like the high-rise residential-commercial spaces such as Solair, Erica Cho's drawing features high-rise buildings, apartment complexes, billboards, and store-fronts with Korean signs. The video in the installation begins with this circular landscape of Koreatown that rotates, vacillating between clockwise and counterclockwise turnings. Her circular rendering can be any city, without the word "Ktown" prominently featured on one of the billboards of Cho's circular cityscape. The rotations lead into the dream sequence described in the history chapter, evoking a juxtaposition between the legibility of the drawing, versus the video's deliberate narrative opacity. Like Bakhtin's inspiration for the chronotope as a metaphor for narrative construction draws upon Einstein's theory of relatively, the relations between time and space described in this chapter, and visually articulated by Erica Cho, convey a composition much like the worlds described in the novel *Einstein's Dreams* by physicist and novelist Alan Lightman, which is a collection of fictional dream journals during the time when Einstein came up with the theory of relativity. The first and last part of the video in *Our Cosmos, Our Chaos* consist of a circular cityscape rendering of Koreatown that spins centripetally and centrifugally that allows for a chronotopic analysis as an act of appropriating social space and thematic mapping (Figure 16). Cho's spinning narrative like the short stories in *Einstein's Dreams*' chronotopic narratives, feature images that transport the viewer to and fro in space and time, evoking one of the descriptions from *Einstein's Dreams*: "In this world, time has three dimensions, like space. Just as

an object may move in three perpendicular directions, corresponding to horizontal, vertical, and longitudinal, so an object may participate in three perpendicular futures."²⁸⁷ The narrative space in *Our Cosmos, Our Chaos* is not linear; rather it is circular. The artworks in this chapter present a world-view of a different social actor whose movements duplicate the perimeter, from the mythic origins of Yong Soon Min's final photograph in *Defining Moments* (Figure 7) to the bounds of rationality with chance and fate in Sung Ho Choi's *Korean Roulette* (Figure 22).

The thematic mapping of circular space, rather than Euclidean space and linear sequential time, is evident in all of the major artworks in this dissertation; they help elucidate the events in time as doomed to repeat without a set origin, direction, or destination. The evolution of the social space of Koreatown that displaced independent businesses after the riots, has been replaced by a peculiar gentrification, where the economic source is from South Korean multinational companies, heralding a new phrase of immigration with the destination of a new Korea, that includes both the peninsula in the east and California in the west, as shown on an illustration that Yong Soon Min contributed to for an anthology about Theresa Cha's *Dictee* (Figure 89).²⁸⁸

Koreatown is circular in Cho's rendering, because it is a starting point as the incubator for business small and large, as well as identity construction for the

²⁸⁷ Alan Lightman, *Einstein's Dreams* (New York: Pantheon Books), 22.

²⁸⁸ Hyun Yi Kang et al. *Writing Self, Writing Nation: A Collection of Essays on Dictee by Theresa Hak Kyung Cha* (Berkeley, CA: The University of California Press, 1994).

individual and the community. The development is outward metaphorically for urban beginnings to suburban settlements, as seen in the narrative structure of *TBH* (Figure 47, 48, 49). Like Cho's rendering of Koreatown, the city is a portal for the urban beginnings of immigrant life, from which the connection to the landscape with South Korea is made via the geographical imagination of ethnic Koreans, be they recent immigrants, or those living in Korea. The cultural and emotional resonance of Koreatown as a point of departure by Erica Cho shows that it is important to recognize that place, and the movement between places is a focal point of the Korean American imaginery. Place is not a backdrop against which the L.A. riots occurred, but it is central, as a *container of experiences* that shape perceptions and understandings of the self in the world.

Cho begins with Koreatown. Though the dream is about Korea and the Korean War, she does this in order to trace and assert the presence of Koreans in Los Angeles as the site of ongoing war interwoven with the development of affinities, synergies, conflicts, and collisions that connect Koreans to Los Angeles as much as the Korean peninsula itself. Much like the decorative elements in the Madang Courtyard, Erica Cho deliberately draws in an archaic style; for example, the tiger-snake with stylized clouds is reminiscent of Joseon palace decorations (Figure 14, 15). The central figure of IN is rendered in a way that evokes a folk craft tradition of *dak-hanji* (*papier-mâché* doll) popularized during the Joseon Period. The five holes on the body of the tiger-snake from Cho's installation, the five elements from the Korean flag, and the five mythic animals at the Madang Courtyard parking lot are all tied together *vis-à-vis* the continuous conduit of a

narratological structure that is distinctly expressive of a Korean attribute.²⁸⁹ The visualization of a world-view via the South Korean flag as a map with the symbols designating the cardinal directions and an ideal existence at the center, has never meant so much as when I began writing this chapter and critically thinking about the Korean American geographical imagination (Figure 114).

Cho's decision to entitle the piece with two words marked by a passive pronoun "our" necessitates a pause of reflection in the context of the South Korean flag as a map of the cosmos, and the evocation of war and riots as chaos. These two forces are ever-present -- from our propensity to contain the cosmos with our understanding, and the futile efforts of this endeavor in the midst of chaos. In addition, the pronoun "our," if translated into Korean, is Woo-Ri (우리), not only the name of a Korean American Bank, but also a state of mind, as many sociologists have pointed out in describing the Korean sense of self being tethered to a pluralistic idea.

Complicating the concentric analysis, the unpredictability of an ocean is evoked in Sung Ho Choi's land piece, where the landmasses in water represent north and south Korea: always shifting, never meeting at the DMZ (Figure 26). Sung Ho Choi's land art piece, *Morning Calm* (1999) reminds me that the concept of diaspora identity has limitations, if we try to use them to locate an overarching framework, because diasporas are part of a larger network of push and pull factors. The literal and figurative artistic metaphor of disjunctive worlds

²⁸⁹ I interpret the Korean Flag as a time-map. As the corresponding figure shows, it represents the cardinal directions and the center, as well as the elements of the universe and, in regard to time, it has all four seasons with the center representing transitions.

in space and time by Choi, warns against essentializing and fetishizing the concept of origin, whereby the state of being overly dependent on the definitive relation to place, overlooks political and societal pressures. The idea of diaspora as conceived by all of the major artworks in this dissertation, speaks more to the process of identification based on formations of temporality, affect, and corporality, than a singularly overt relationship to geographical origin.

Yong Soon Min's first photograph in *Defining Moments* utilizes a spiral that has no determinate beginning nor end, a spiral with no inside or outside, with centrifugal and centripetal implications (Figure 2). Yong Soon Min evokes the origin myth of the Diamond Mountain referenced in the history chapter and Y. David Chung uses a historically controversial conduit of the turtle boat for the purpose of deliberate ambiguity as point of origin (Figure 34, 50). Both artworks deliberately refer to the ambiguity of origin myths, from the birth of the Korean people in Baekdu Mountain, to a possibly fallacious account in Korean history of a Turtleboat that is now kitschified as a national symbol of Korea. Although the centrifugal and pedial interpretation implies a center, it is a center that is indeterminate by its dependence on the spiral that is constantly turning contrapuntally between past and future, as well as there and here. It is also important to remember that the objective is not to supplant the "cultural figure of the 'native' with the intercultural figure of the traveler, but rather attend to the concrete mediations between multiple points," as noted by James Clifford, who also evokes the chronotope to describe the use of alternative localizing strategies

in the construction and representation of cultures.²⁹⁰ He uses the notion of the chronotope as a “setting or scene, organizing time and space in representable whole form that resembles as much a site of travel as of residence.”²⁹¹ He continues to postulate that the chronotope establishes a stationary process - “traveling-in-dwelling,” “dwelling-in-traveling” - and focuses on the in-between as a cultural site.²⁹² Ali Behdad fills in the mechanisms of the “in-between as a cultural site“ when he describes the development and maintenance of diaspora cultures as one with crucial networks of material and symbolic exchanges with their homelands, as well as with various social groups in receiving countries.²⁹³

Accordingly, my departure from the Abelman and Lie thesis on Koreatown is that Korean American patterns of migration confirm that disenfranchisement needs not translate into disempowerment. The aforementioned international circuits of migration that finance local economies, like the Madang Courtyard, point to a trajectory of empowerment, not a discourse of victimhood. In addition to this, I’d like to add the importance of cultural geography. The bifurcation between sociology and geography handicaps both fields, as Manuel Castells warns about the fetishizing of space at the price of political and social aspects in

²⁹⁰ James Clifford, “Traveling Cultures,” in *Cultural Studies*. ed. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula Treichler (New York: Routledge, 1992), 101.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² Trui Veters, “Night on Earth”: Urban Practices and the Blindness of Metatheory,” in *The Urban Condition: Space, Community, and Self in the Contemporary Metropolis*, Ed. By Ghent Urban Studies Team, Project Directors: Dirk De Meyer and Kristin Versluys, Collaborators: Kristin Borate, Bart Eeckhout, Steven Jacobs, and Bart Keunen (010 Publishers, Rotterdam, 1999), 343-358.

²⁹³ Ail Behdad, “Global Disjuncture, Diaspora Differences, and the New World (Dis-)Order,” in *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies*, ed. Henry Schwarz, Sangeeta Ray (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, Ltd., 2000), 396-409.

social analysis, which also speaks to the cost of hyperspecialization in academia.²⁹⁴ In this sense, narratives of diaspora that rely on a politics of victimhood are as inaccurate and inadequate as those which prematurely celebrate diasporas' dismantling of national and ethnic borders. Moreover, the layered and confusing economies of those diaspora movements draw attention to the disjunctive nature of global culture, which is not a bad thing. "Disjunctures," Arjun Appadurai argues, "have become central to the politics of global culture," as "people, machinery, money, images, and ideas now follow increasingly in nonisomorphic paths".²⁹⁵ The fragmented mode of cultural reproduction and the fractured experiences made evident in the artwork, support Appadurai's proposal that we need to "begin to think of the configuration of cultural forms ... as fundamentally fractal," at the same time that we need to account for their overlaps and resemblances in a nonreductionist way.²⁹⁶ The contextual coalition of the artwork shows that particular experiences of the riots in the Korean American community make evident that these disjunctive global flows are fundamentally context-dependent. As a result, the artwork confirms that only a historical approach that remains attentive to the particular configurations of power in sociocultural relations can account for the complexities of diaspora experiences.

²⁹⁴ Phil Hubbard, *Key Thinkers on Space and Place*, ed. Phil Hubbard, Rob Kitchin and Gil Valentine (London and Los Angeles: Sage Publications, Ltd, 2004), 72-76.

²⁹⁵ Arjun Appadurai, "Disjunction and Different in the Global Cultural Economy," in *The Anthropology of Globalization: a Reader*. ed. Jonathan Xavier Nida and Ranato Rosaldo (Pondicherry, India: SPi Publisher Services, 2008), 37.

²⁹⁶ Appadurai, 62.

Finally, the examples of diaspora studies I have cited above are useful in providing us with certain methodological criteria to broach the complexities of social movements in Koreatown. According to Arjun Appadurai, existing methods of global cultural economic analysis are deficit because they do not deal with fundamental disjunctures between economy, culture, and politics. The disjunctures he is referring to are the more subtle and subversive ways in which current nation-states force homogenization within their own minorities, by posing global commodification as more real than the threat of the state's own hegemonic strategies. As an alternative to existing methods, he suggests the following vectors of analysis: ethnoscaples, mediascaples, technoscaples, finanscaples, and ideoscaples.²⁹⁷ On the other hand, Roger Rouse concludes his discussion of the particular experience of Aguilillans by suggesting that "we should look not only to art and literature, but also to lives of those 'ordinary' people who inscribe their transient texts in the minutiae of daily experience".²⁹⁸

As I have suggested above, as well as in previous chapters, post-colonial discussions of diaspora have problematically privileged literary and artistic expressions of displacement. Furthermore, Ali Behdad warns that such efforts "have constructed salutary models of exile that conflate the experience of the cultural elite with the everyday struggles of the ordinary immigrants."²⁹⁹ The artwork complicates the conflation of geography and history, which are

²⁹⁷ Appadurai, 295-310.

²⁹⁸ Roger Rouse, "Mexican Migration and the Social Space of Postmodernism," *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 1, no.1 (Spring 1991): 19.

²⁹⁹ Behdad, 407.

interdependent via the chronotopic framework. Michel Foucault articulated that the narrative voice involves a geographical rather than a historical projection.³⁰⁰ In other words, it is space, not time, that has the potential to elucidate productive interpretative strategies, via the hermeneutics of the artworks about the L.A. riots by Korean American artists. This is the reason why I conclude that history with a strong geographical emphasis is a prominent feature in all of the artworks in this dissertation. Positioning the analysis from multiple points of departure allows the analysis to occupy a chronotopic framework that in turn allows for a synthesis of both Manuel Castell's emphasis on a socio-historical context over space, with Foucault's knowledge-to-power emphasis on space.

Contrapuntal reinscription

On May 2, 1992, after the riots, Korean Americans took to the streets, in what is now known as the March of Solidarity. During the March, Koreans enacted culturally charged expressions such as: *p'ungmul*, wearing of white headbands, and chanting rhythmic slogans. Korean American citizens presented a visual and sonic expression that emphasized Koreatown as a site for Korean American identity formation. In the often cited article by Timothy Tangherlini, he posits that "Ultimately, one can view the May 2 march as serving an inscriptive function alongside its expressed political function."³⁰¹ Through the deployment of Korean cultural enactments, such as *p'ungmul*, the demonstrators performed

³⁰⁰ Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," trans. Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics*, 16,1 (Spring 1986): 22.

³⁰¹ Timothy R. Tangherlini, "Remapping Koreatown: Folklore, Narrative and the Los Angeles Riots," *Western Folklore* (Spring 1999): 59-93.

culturally meaningful, spatially situated acts that began the process of “reinscribing the erased legacy of the Korean language signs that once marked Koreatown.”³⁰² Like a scribe retracing the palimpsest of a hidden text, the cultural performances, both explicit and implicit during this march, began the process of reproducing the environmental text of Koreatown.³⁰³ Events such as the march on May 2 exhibited the close connection between identity and place, and although Chung’s *TBH* narrative can be interpreted as a reflection of a continuous sense of displacement, the previous section opens up a productive void to imagine beyond this discourse of disenfranchisement.

A small peninsula managed to retain its ethnic specificity throughout thousands of years of attacks and annexation from its superpower neighbors, Japan and China. The haggard question of “Are you Chinese or Japanese?” is the continuation of the struggle for negotiating a Korean American existence and identity in the global culture of Los Angeles. Geographically, the peninsula neighbors superpowers of the Asian continent and, instead of becoming absorbed by them, Korean merchants set up posts deep within the governmental framework of both countries, that secured Korean survival through trade and commerce. The current status of transmigrants working to confirm and affirm the integrity of ethnic identity in Koreatown, Los Angeles is executed through a similar political and economic strategy.

³⁰² Tangherlini, 59-93.

³⁰³ Ibid.

The public-private partnerships, such as the aforementioned Solair development, conceal the politics of hegemonic actors. For example, cultural geographer Kong-Hwan Park's analysis of the Korean Monument Project shows how politics inevitably essentializes notions of ethnicity, and reproduces unequal dualism between the Korean American community and what they call mainstream society (Figure 118).³⁰⁴ Park's interview of the director of the Korean American Chamber of Commerce of Los Angeles (KACC/LA) present a direct quote that "the city-wide governmental support to this project should be understood as an accomplishment of the Korean Americans' political empowerment movements since the 1992 riots by increasing voter registrations and donations to politicians."³⁰⁵ This quote shows that the Koreatown Pavilion Garden and other such developments are not just monuments signifying Korean heritage and ethnicity, but symbols that commemorate how the Korean American community in Los Angeles has won collective political power and influence via the aforementioned strategy of securing political survival through trade and commerce. The downside to this kind of development and ethnic politics is that the Korean American Chamber of Commerce of Los Angeles, ideologically employed, was blind to internal diversity, and excluded other economic and ethnic groups, such as the working-class Korean and Hispanic residents that live as the majority in Koreatown. This entry into mainstream culture, as expressed

³⁰⁴ Kyong-Hwan Park, "Transnational Urbanism in Diaspora Space: Multi-scaled Urban Redevelopment of Los Angeles Koreatown" (PhD diss., University of Kentucky, 2005), 322-323.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

above, represents a rehearsal of the same conflict described in the preceding chapters. In other words, this pattern signals a development that points to the attitude that led to the L.A. riots in the first place.

Although separate from the discussions of social capital from the previous sections, social capital is important to discuss here, as it is a viable way to understand the power struggle in the forthcoming section on the redevelopment of Koreatown, where the efforts by Korean American churches as well as smaller non-profits, were squeezed out by the locomotive of multidimensional investment that blurs the lines between public good and corporate profit through the often used loophole of “eminent domain.” One of the first scholars who popularized the concept of social capital, Robert D. Putnam, describes social capital as a set of horizontal associations between people with social networks and associated norms that affect the productivity of a community.³⁰⁶ However, the aforementioned triangle of multinationals, politicians and workers, point to a macroeconomic model that goes beyond the networks described by Putnam. When comparing the types of community based organizations characterized by Angie T. Chung in *Legacies of Struggle: Conflict and Cooperation in Korean American Politics*, to the interpretation presented in the history chapter, the artistic responses are comparatively more Korean than Korean American.³⁰⁷ In

³⁰⁶ Robert D. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 163-171. He furthered this concept in his subsequent text *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

³⁰⁷ Angie Y. Chung, *Legacies of Struggle: Conflict and Cooperation in Korean American Politics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007).

other words, taking the symbolic account of the images and artistic strategies used, the fact of the matter remains that the artworks are more about Koreans, particularly in reference to “the interpenetration of South Korea and the United States” that aligns to the analysis done by Nancy Abelmann and John Lie in *Blue Dreams: Korean Americans and the Los Angeles Riots*.³⁰⁸ Angie Chung delineates an intergenerational divide of different Korean American community groups, consisting of ethnic elites, like the Korean American Federation that is mostly Korean speaking first generation immigrants, versus groups like KIWA (Koreatown Immigrant Workers Advocate) and KYCC (Koreatown Youth and Community Center), that are mostly 1.5/2 generation immigrants whose primary language is English. One of the most telling differences is the language barrier, not only between generations, but also in communicating with existing institutions within the municipality, a point that is further confirmed by the different artistic approaches of non-Korean artists about the L.A. riots, that will be made evident in the concluding chapter of this dissertation.

One of the most significant challenges in the academic landscape of the L.A. riots, is coming to terms with the fact that methodologies that exclude experiential data are dangerously flawed. One case study of the ways in which experiential data can intersect with the academic landscape in Los Angeles are projects such as the exhibit entitled *7 Architectural Thoughts*, featured during the 20th anniversary of the L.A. Riots. The Korean Cultural Center founded in 1980

³⁰⁸ Nancy Abelmann and John Lie, *Blue Dreams: Korean Americans and the Los Angeles Riots* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1995).

asked seven Korean and Korean American architects and designers to create pieces about new ways of imagining Koreatown. The works in this exhibition emphasized a utopian view, with academic and economic models as points of reference for their designs, rather than the practices of everyday life of the residents of Koreatown. I went to the exhibition with Kyong Park, who was trained as an architect and produces innovative art installations using the city and public culture as the medium for his art practice. Our conversational review of the show was that it was cold and detached from the community. His commentary regarding such projects was that they do not deal with the disease that is underneath the city, a cancer that has been evident since the 1965 Watts Riots. This case study shows that the gap continues, and will continue to exist, between academics, artists, community activists, for what they view as the utopian vision of Los Angeles.

CHAPTER 5: A Korean American Christian Nation

Introduction

In a mixed media mobile sculpture by Sung Ho Choi entitled *Korean Roulette* (1992, 1993) (Figure 22, 23), an electric ceiling fan is transformed to look like a roulette wheel. There are four arms on the ceiling fan. Korean utility gloves are fitted at the ends of each arm. These gloves that are commonplace in any Korean household are white with a dark blue trim and red paint that is loosely applied on the tips. A collage that consists of columns from a Korean American phone book is placed behind the fan. The objects on the wheel consist mostly of plastic fruits and vegetables. Placed in between a series of two to three fruits and vegetables are: a utility knife, a gun, a box of cigarettes, a bottle of *soju* (a potent Korean rice liquor), a calculator, and a crucifix. When the wheel turns, the gloved hands shuffle from side to side. In a game of roulette, one spins a wheel and the possible outcomes are represented around the wheel. Choi's roulette wheel can be interpreted as including the following possible outcomes: products that are difficult to sell due to a bad harvest, an armed robbery, a financial crisis due to a Korean credit system, daydreams of playing golf, and the health problems exacerbated by smoking and drinking.

In *Korean Roulette*, Choi utilizes a circular motif which in this context, which can be interpreted as a representation of a Korean grocer's life as a state in which he or she is limited to going around in circles, whereby he or she is in the "Hell of Incessant Suffering," that exist in the world we live in, according to the

Buddhist sutras.³⁰⁹ The circular motif is often used by Choi for visual continuity of composition and repetition, but also as an overall conceptual integration within his work. For example, the following works utilize the circle as a literal and figurative argument construction within the artwork: *Centrifugal* (1999)(Figure 25), *Morning Calm* (1999)(Figure 26), *American Pie* (1996)(Figure 27). Choi is known for site-specific sculptures that explore issues of identity in multi-ethnic societies. In one of his most famous pieces, entitled *American Pie* (1996), Choi incorporates collage techniques utilizing newspapers, text, and paint, to configure a target motif. Choi uses the circular motif again in *Korean Roulette* in a similar way, in order to coalesce the conceptual ideas about the objects that he has placed around the circle or the roulette wheel.

Literary theorist Elaine H. Kim interprets *Korean Roulette* as a representation of the grocer's life as a game of chance.³¹⁰ The gun positioned between the banana and tomato represents the possibility that an armed robbery is a part of the daily violent realities of Korean American shopkeepers. In 1993, nineteen Korean merchants were murdered by non-Koreans in Los Angeles.³¹¹ In addition, the shooting death of Latasha Harlins exacerbated longstanding

³⁰⁹ A similar interpretation has been made by Elaine Kim, "A Different Dream: Eleven Korean North American Artists," *Across the Pacific Contemporary Korean and Korean American Art*, exh.cat., (New York: The Queens Museum of Art, 1993), 18-19. Kyōtūs Hori Nichiren, *Writings of Nichiren Shōinn: Doctrine 2*. ed. George Tanabe, Jr. (Honolulu, HI, University of Hawaii'i Press, 2002), 314.

³¹⁰ Elaine Kim. "A Different Dream: Eleven Korean North American Artists," *Across the Pacific: Contemporary Korean and Korean American Art*, exh.cat., (New York: The Queens Museum of Art, 1993), 18-19.

³¹¹ Edward Teahan Chang and Eui-Young Yu, "Chronology," *Black-Korean Encounter* (Los Angeles, CA: Institute for Asian American and Pacific Asian Studies, California State University, Los Angeles, 1994), xiii-xvi.

tensions between Korean American shopkeepers and African Americans in Los Angeles. In the aftermath of Soon Ja Du's lenient sentence, Korean-owned businesses were boycotted and several stores were firebombed.³¹² Only one week after the killing of Latasha Harlins, a nine-year-old daughter of a Korean American minimarket owner was shot in the chest during an early morning holdup.³¹³ According to an *LA Times* article, Korean American shopkeepers did not blame the African American community for this shooting, but cited the incident as an example of the danger they face every day.³¹⁴ It is also of note that a few months prior to these events, the video of the Rodney King beating was occupying the minds of many African Americans.

The only direct signifier in this sculpture that can be associated with Korean ethnicity, other than its title, is the bottle of *soju*, which is a potent Korean rice liquor. The *soju* and the box of cigarettes reflect some statistical realities of these items, in relation to the Korean community. Excessive drinking and smoking, in addition to the stress from the pressures of running a business, can be major factors in one's health. The health problems associated with drinking and smoking are a reality that Koreans face either within themselves or in someone that they know. Therefore, the placement of these items can be part of

³¹² Darrell Y. Hamamoto, *Monitored Peril: Asian Americans and the Politics of TV* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 233.

³¹³ According to the police report, the girl had been watching TV in a room at the rear of the store, when a black man armed with a handgun jumped over the counter, took no more than \$500 from the cash register, and then shot the child without provocation. Jesse Katz, "Anguished Merchant Returns to Work after His Daughter, 9, Is Shot by Robber," *Los Angeles Times*, 21 Oct. 1991, Orange County ed., A25.

³¹⁴ Jesse Katz, "Anguished Merchant Returns to Work after His Daughter, 9, Is Shot by Robber," *Los Angeles Times*, 21 Oct. 1991, Orange County ed., A25.

a commentary by the artist on the epidemic caliber of the health problems associated with these objects within the community.

By incorporating objects referencing the grocer through a mixed media mobile sculpture, Choi is taking mundane objects and transforming them into a narration of cultural identity. For Choi, “art making is a process of collecting, signifying and formulating systems... to observe the way different cultures clash, conflict, destroy, and heal each other that form certain patterns”.³¹⁵ In *Korean Roulette*, he has narrowed down the search for this pattern to that of a greengrocer, which is presented as a cyclical pattern of life that involves a number of gambles.

The crucifix, positioned between a plum and an ear of corn, might appear to signify a type of spirituality or a good luck charm; be that as it may, a further sociological and historical interpretation clarifies the meaning behind this object that speaks to the evolution of Korean American churches in identity construction and composition of Los Angeles. The art historical context of vegetables as a signifier of greater meaning, like in *Vegetable Parinirvana* by Ito Jakuchu (1716-1900), is well known and a tempting hermeneutic direction (Figure 90). This also compliments the use of the circle as an articulation of the Hell of Incessant Suffering also from Buddhist interpretation. Choi’s belief system aside, the synthesis of Taoism, Confucianism, Buddhism, Christianity and Shamanism

³¹⁵ Artist’s Statement, *At the Crossroads: Celebrating the Centennial of Korean Immigration to the U.S.: Twenty Contemporary New York Artists*, exh.cat., (Gallery Korea, New York, sponsored by the Korean Cultural Service, 2003), 42.

is part of the ever-evolving transcultural Korean American identity, as made evident in the Korean American artistic responses to the L.A. Riots.

Since the beginning of Korean immigration to the United States in 1903, the Christian church has been an integral factor in favor of U.S. immigration.³¹⁶

According to historian Peter Park,

The role of the Christian church in promoting the flow of immigration; the U. S. immigration policy which makes it easier for ministers to immigrate; the ministry as a career channel for Korean immigrants; and the material support given by American churches to affiliated Korean congregations, played a large part in Korean immigration.³¹⁷

In addition to this infrastructure, the first wave of Korean immigration from 1903-1905 had the economic pull from the United States, which was the need for foreign laborers in the sugar plantations of Hawaii that was buttressed by the church, as missionaries encouraged them to leave Korea for the United States. so that they could live in a “Christian” nation.³¹⁸

In addition to the *Korean Roulette* by Sung Ho Choi, other works mentioned in the previous chapters will become the point of departure for the analysis of Christianity reflected in the artworks in the following way: sections from the *Defining Moments Series* (1992) (Figure 6) by Yong Soon Min and a particular kind of prayer that I interpret as being connected to the politically progressive history of Christianity in Korea; sections from Y. David Chung’s video

³¹⁶ For details on this link see, Mary Paik Lee, *Quiet Odyssey: A Pioneer Korean Woman in America*. ed. SuCheng Chan (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), 138-167.

³¹⁷ Peter Park, “Review of *Korean Immigrants in America* by Won Moo Huh and Kwang Chung Kim.” *Amerasia Journal* Vol. 9 No. 2 (Fall/Winter 1982): 140-145.

³¹⁸ Lee, *Quiet Odyssey: A Pioneer Korean Women in America*, 139-143.

from the *TBH* (Figure 45, 46) installation position Korean American Christianity within the contemporary context of social capital, and also addresses a particular kind of Christian worship specific to Korean Americans. This discussion will lead into community development and Korean American church's role in ameliorating racial tensions. The chapter will conclude with an analysis of *Choi's Market* (1993) (Figure 24), which includes a recent reflection regarding the installation by the artist.

Genesis

The academic currency of Korean American Christianity has gained momentum in the last few years, as evidenced by the various panels at the Asian American Studies conferences, as well as separate conferences about the very subject, such as the "Symposium on Race, Gender, and Theology in Korean American Christianity" at UCLA's Center for Korean Studies in 2004, that brought together historians, political scientists, anthropologists and theologians.³¹⁹ Needless to say, an art historical offering has yet to be made. Therefore, I will attempt to do it here, using *Korean Roulette* as the bookend to the other works mentioned in the previous chapters that address Korean American Christianity in one form or another, to show the ways in which the responses to the L.A. riots by

³¹⁹ *Symposium on Race, Gender, and Theology in Korean American Christianity*. April 23 2004. University of California, Los Angeles. <http://www.international.ucla.edu/korea/events/showevent.asp?eventid=1528>. Symposia on the subject has now become an annual event at UCLA.

Korean American artists also speak to the integral nature of a type of Christianity that is specific to Korean Americans.

Just as the artworks showed the interconnectedness of the Korean War with the L.A. riots, the particular reoccurring components of Christianity necessitate an explanation of their role before, during, and after the riots. Most importantly, there is a different significance to Christianity communicated in the artworks that address its progressive role in political protest practices. Therefore, there will be several elements regarding Korean American Christianity that I will not address, because each vector of analysis will be guided by the components made evident in the artwork.

Tong-sung ki-do

In Yong Soon Min's *Defining Moments* series (1992), the fifth photograph includes an elderly woman with hands clasped in prayer (Figure 6). She is wearing a plain white blouse reminiscent of traditional Korean funerary attire. The funerary attire reflects Min's use of clothing. For example, the *hanbok* has been part of Min's repertoire to mean many different things, from feminist commentary and Orientalist commercialization in the *Ritual Labor of a Mechanical Bride Bowing* (1993) (Figure 9), to the diaspora in *Dwelling* (1994) (Figure 10). She continues to investigate identity and history using clothing in

Wearing History (Figure 11, 12).³²⁰ The caption on the lower right side of the Min's photograph reads, "Prayer for Peace," under which there are the words, "An elderly woman wears a white headband." This white headband can also be seen in some of the people on the image that overlaps Min's face from the same newspaper page. The headband is a visual marker that transposes the tradition of protest in South Korea to Los Angeles, according to folklorist, Timothy Tangherlini.³²¹ Based on the lighting of the photograph, most likely this elderly woman was photographed during an outdoor event. Her weathered face is not serene but intense, as if she is willing something to happen through prayer. A modest estimate of her age would have her very much alive during the Japanese Occupation of Korea(1910-1945). She was alive to experience the attempt at the systematic erasure of culture, where survival depended on silence, and speaking Korean in public, let alone, praying out loud in Korean became a courageous act of faith and resistance.

Tong-sung ki-do, literally meaning "praying together out loud" or "crying out in one voice," is a unique Korean and Korean American form of Christian worship. Someone unfamiliar with this act would find it rather threatening, strange, and even demonic, upon approaching a room full of Koreans in their

³²⁰ *Wearing History* has been documented in 2007 at the Cultural Center of the Philippines in Manila, in an exhibit entitled, "Trauma, Interrupted." The installation of hanging clothes shows spray-painted clothing with dates on them that she wore, to signify her personal daily connection to the history of comfort women and their struggle for justice. The date begins with 1932 to signify the 75 years since the first comfort women station was established in Shanghai in 1932. "FEATURE: Art exhibit 'interrupts' trauma of wartime sex slaves" *The Free Library* 23 July 2007. 11 August 2011 <<http://www.thefreelibrary.com/FEATURE: Art exhibit 'interrupts' trauma of wartime sex slaves.-a0166703398>>.

³²¹ Timothy Tangherlini, "Remapping Koreatown: Folklore, Narrative and the Los Angeles Riots," *Western Folklore* 58, no. 2 (1999):149-173.

Sunday-best, praying out loud. The cacophony is suffocating as each individual pleads with God. Some of the motions include rocking back and forth, hands moving up and down, hitting the ground with a fist, beating the chest, and pounding the ground or seat. *Tong-sung ki-do* is something that takes intense concentration, as each devotee must actively block out the shouts around them and concentrate on their own prayer. It is like trying to say a series of numbers, while people around you are shouting a different series of numbers in your ear. It is an intense embodied prayer. Trying to locate a discernible word in the cacophonous landscape is close to impossible. Though some people might be familiar with the tradition of speaking in tongues, such as Southern Baptists or Pentecostals, the juxtaposition of the reserved Confucian culture with that of crazed cathartic atonement just described is one of several paradoxical characteristics of Korean American Christianity.

According to an anthology of Korean American practices of faith, there are “four ... historical markers [that] shape identity and religious expression for Korean immigrants: Japanese colonization (1909-1945), the Korean War (1950-1953), political unrest during oppressive military dictatorship (1961-1992), and immigration.³²² Through various informal oral histories, many Koreans believe that the genesis of *tong-sung ki-do* is in the public declaration of independence on March 1, 1919.³²³ Since speaking Korean in public was

³²² Su Yon Pak, Unzu Lee, Jung Ha Kim, Myung Ji Cho, *Singing The Lord's Song in a New Land: Korean American Practices of Faith* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 38.

³²³ Ibid.

forbidden during Japanese Occupation, praying out loud in Korean became an act of resistance. This declaration and protest against the occupation was quickly quelled by the Japanese military, but the victory in defeat was a spiritual one.

Fifteen of the thirty-three signatories of this Declaration of Independence were Korean Protestants.³²⁴ Christianity was linked even more with the patriotic cause when Christians refused to participate in the worship of the Japanese Emperor, which was required by law in 1930s.³²⁵ According to historian Wi Jo Kang, “Many Christian leaders strongly believed that the success of Christian missionary work among the Koreans was the best way to liberate Korea from Japanese rule”.³²⁶ Particular circumstances of Korean history “afforded Christianity a unique opportunity to offer a compelling salvation ethos and promise of both personal and national empowerment,” according to Koreanist Andrew E. Kim.³²⁷ Such circumstances include Korea’s long history of vulnerability to Chinese and Japanese control, Japanese colonialism and the

³²⁴ Sebastian C. H. Kim, *Christian Theology in Asia* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 129-134.

³²⁵ Colin Whittaker, *Korea Miracle* (Eastbourne: Kingsway Publishing, 1988), 40.

³²⁶ Wi Jo Kang, *Christ and Cesear in Modern Korea: History of Christianity and Politics* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1997), 37.

³²⁷ Andrew E. Kim, “A History of Christianity in Korea: From Its Troubled Beginning to Its Contemporary Success,” *Korea Journal* 35, no.2 (Summer 1995): 34.

Korean War.³²⁸ In addition to this, during the military regimes of Chung Do Hwan and Park Jung Hee, silencing dissenters of the authoritarian regime and government enforced curfews, created a context in which a group of protesters praying outloud was again an act of resistance, breaking the imposed silence.

Singing a New Song

In Y. David Chung's *TBH* video, there is a section where the shopkeeper is shown in a Korean American church, wearing a suit, and greeting other parishioners as they enter the church (Figure 45). Shortly thereafter, there is a scene of him in the church participating in praise worship, which has developed into its own unique form of worship amongst immigrant churches (Figure 45, 46). Music is an important part of academic and personal edification for Koreans. Although some scholars have associated western forms of musical assimilation as a negative product of immigration, the hybrid form of Korean American praise worship is a mix of western music with shamanic characteristics. Shamanism is at the core of popular Korean religiosity and culture. Populist forms of Korean and Korean American culture developed in the crucible of shamanic practices. In the case of Korean shamanistic ritual called *kut* for instance, the role of music is extremely important. Shamans dance, chant, and sing to the percussion music, in order to "enter into the ecstatic state of meeting with the gods and spirits,"

³²⁸ Two events in particular that Koreanists point to as the ones that forged the link between Christianity and Korean nationalism, were the Conspiracy Trial of 1911 and the Independence Movement of 1919 or Samil Undong. In early 1911, 124 Koreans were arrested, suspected of a plot to assassinate the Japanese Governor-General. One hundred twenty-three were prompt to trial. Most of them were acquitted, however ninety-eight of the men arrested were Christians, which left a strong impression of Korean Christian leaders "as the defenders of Koreans' national aspiration. Andrew E. Kim, "A History of Christianity in Korea: From Its Troubled Beginning to Its Contemporary Success," *Korea Journal* 35, no.2 (Summer 1995): 42.

according to Jung Young Lee, a professor of Asian philosophy and systematic theology at Drew University.³²⁹ This is also true of Korean Christian worship, as the fever-pitch of praise and body worship is something that is particular to them.

The theme of nationalism is also evident in Korean American church worship, where on Korean national holidays such as *sam-il-ju* (the Sunday that is closest to the March First Independence Day), and *kwang-bok-jul* (the closest Sunday to the day of liberation from Japan). The closing hymns on those Sundays usually include the South Korean national anthem. Koreans identified strongly with the story of Exodus, especially within the context of Japanese occupation, and the hymnals often contain songs of hope and liberation. The history of the Korean hymnal includes the incorporation of Korean musical scores, along with the more direct translations of the traditional western hymns. Often, instruments such as the *chang-gu* (hour-glass drum) and *ka-ya-geum* (stringed instrument) substitute or accompany the organ and piano as instruments, and synthesize the melody and tempo using the Korean modality for a particular hymn. Although the *chang-gu* and *ka-ya-geum* are historically associated with aristocratic entertainment, the *chang-gu* is an integral part of *p'ungmul*, which is a traditional form of musical culture closely associated with indigenous shamanic practices. The incorporation of indigenous musical practices have met many challenges from within the Korean American Christian communities, because of the unfortunate legacy of missionary work that devalued Korean culture. Some Korean and Korean American Christians identify

³²⁹ Jung Yong Lee, *Korean Preaching* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1997), 53.

Korean music and instruments with popular religiosity manifest in shamanic rituals; some see Korean music as not sacred, because it is not Christian and not Western; and others see Korean music as simply inferior and inappropriate for church music.

In Korea, *p'ungmul* music groups often perform during demonstrations, as the music is considered to be a sonic and visual representation of the culture. The presence of *p'ungmul* in the demonstrations following the L.A. riots marked the duality of the spatial organization of Koreatown.³³⁰ As noted by Tangherlini, “they were essentially mapping the borders of Koreatown with their music.”³³¹ The performances have a multilayered message that significantly contributes to the reinscription of the Korean American identity onto the landscape damaged by the riots. Following the L.A. riots of 1992 traditional performances of *p'ungmul*, were part of “the tactical deployment of cultural practices” that reinscribed place and identity.³³² As Timothy Tangherlini explains, “in the aftermath of the L.A. riots, a landscape that had been defined by the spatial practices of people, posed an implicit challenge to the identities associated with those places embodied in

³³⁰ Tangherlini, 59-93.

³³¹ Ibid.

³³² Ibid.

that destruction.”³³³ The streets of Koreatown became the primary sites of these folkloric performances, and folkloric traditions were utilized by Korean Americans to reassert control of the contested space of Koreatown. In a march for solidarity through Koreatown on May 2, 1992, Korean Americans enacted such culturally informed practices in the peace rally at Ardmore Park. According to the most conservative estimates, more than 10,000 people attended the rally.³³⁴ The route of the march was west on Olympic Boulevard to Western Avenue passing the location of a huge mural of a *p’ungmul* performance (Figure 81), north to Third Street and east to Vermont Avenue.³³⁵ The marchers made use of the farmer’s band music like *p’ungmul*, and linked the march to the *Min Jung* movement and the tradition of protest in South Korea.

Min Jung literally means “the people,” and is used to designate the disenfranchised masses, who have been historically subjected by the ruling

³³³ Tangherlini, 59-93. “Spatial practices” is in reference to what Edward Soja defines as “the new topography” of race, class, income and ethnicity, which has produced an incendiary urban geography that cannot be depicted or explained by reading a map of the city. This new topography describes culturally charged places such as Koreatown in Los Angeles, inhabited by various ethnicities, the majority of which are Koreans Americans, Latinos and African Americans all living and working in close proximity to one another, which creates “a landscape filled with violent edges, colliding turfs, unstable boundaries, peculiarly juxtaposed lifespaces and enclaves of outrages wealth and despair.” Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Malden: MA Blackwell Publishing, 1996), 448.

³³⁴ This is the most conservative estimate that was noted in Timothy R. Tangherlini, “Remapping Koreatown: Folklore, Narrative and the Los Angeles Riots,” *Western Folklore* (Spring 1999): 59-93. Several other sources claim that it was attended by more than 30,000 people. These sources include, Elaine H. Kim “Home Is Where the Han is: A Korean American Perspective on the Los Angeles Upheavals,” in *Reading Rodney King, Reading Uprising*, (New York: Routledge, 1993), 215-235. K.W. Lee “It’s That Awful Déjà Vu Time Again,” *KoreAm Journal* 1, no.4 (April 2005): 88-89.

³³⁵ Tangherlini, 59-93.

elites.³³⁶ In the 1980s in South Korea, an anti-Occidental and anti-Capitalist political avant-garde movement called *Min Jung* Art (People's Art) was founded by a group of artists. These *Min Jung* artists and critics related art directly to the streams of cultural politics. They aimed at mobilizing farmers and factory workers by exposing the social and economic inequities they suffered as innocent victims of exploitation by the rich and powerful.³³⁷

Intercultural Performativity in Korean American Churches

The Korean American protestant affiliation being far higher than for any other ethnic group in the U.S. can be explained as a result of both selective immigration and the successful social functions that immigrant churches perform for their congregations. The churches have served the immigrants' needs for social prestige and power, which they lost through under employment, as a cost of immigration to foreign society. Immigrants are more religious than they were before they left home because through religion, immigrants retain their cultural identity and form a cohesive community, according to Raymond Williams.³³⁸

Like Protestant churches in Korea, Korean American churches contain an amalgam of shamanism, but also Confucian ethics, culture, and conservatism,

³³⁶ Folk culture in particular is the source of pride and inspiration for the populist *Min Jung* artists who have consciously identified the core of the nation with the history of the common people (or the masses). For more information on the *Min Jung* art movement see, Frank Hoffman, "Images of Dissent: Transformations in Korean Min Jung Art," *Harvard Asia Pacific Review* 1, no. 2 (Summer 1997): 44-49.

³³⁷ Yongho Ch'oe, Peter H. Lee, and Wm. Theodore de Bary, eds., *From the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Centuries*, vol. 2, *Sources of Korean Tradition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 371-373.

³³⁸ Raymond B. Williams, *Religions of Immigrants from India and Pakistan: New Threads in the American Tapestry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 11.

where gender and age hierarchies are sustained through church organizations. The cultural expression of *p'ungmul* permeate various aspects of immigrant life, including Korean American ethnic churches. The authors of the book *Singing The Lord's Song in a New Land: Korean American Practices of Faith*, have gone as far as to argue that the Korean understanding of the Holy Spirit of Christianity is mixed with the idea of shamanism, citing the practice of *tong-sung ki-do* as irrational, loud, and akin to shamanic practices that bring out emotions.³³⁹

P'ungmul instruments like the *chang-go* accompany hymns in progressive Korean American churches that do not follow the unfortunate legacy of Christianity that devalued Korean culture, though there are still those who consider *p'ungmul* as inappropriate for church music. The intercultural performativity occurs in those musical spaces in hymns and spiritual music, in which one hums meditatively or sings in nonsense syllables. Unlike most Euroamerican hymns that are filled with a certain number of words for every musical note, the shouts that are uttered by the audience during *p'ungmul* occur without self-awareness, because the performers draw them out of the audiences' abdomens. This is to contrast the light "flying" shallow vocal technique that is deemed as insincere. A balance is established between the percussion sound through nonsense noises, which are additional markers of a verbal and musical orientation. Collective consciousness is achieved through the

³³⁹ Su Yon Pak, Unzu Lee, Jung Ha Kim, Myung Ji Cho, *Singing The Lord's Song in a New Land: Korean American Practices of Faith* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005).

dance and play of *p'ungmul*, as it unites the sacred bond of societies by an ideal, rather than material bonds or physical geography.³⁴⁰

In the *TBH* video, the juxtaposition of the service-oriented shopkeeper and the well-dressed church goer receiving bows of respect from other parishioners exhibits the difference in social capital. Sociologists such as Hyunsun Choi have long noted that religious institutions enhance ethnic entrepreneurship through social capital.³⁴¹ The network of religion-based social capital has benefited small business development, where churches function as incubators for small businesses through social networking and capital accumulation. This network is largely responsible for the fact that Korean Americans in the Los Angeles metropolitan area have a higher self-employment rate (27.2%) than in any other region, including Atlanta (24%), Chicago (20%), New York (20.3%), San Francisco (16.8%) and Washington D.C. (21.8%).³⁴²

However, in addition to self-interest as the mitochondria of capitalism, regression analysis using data from the 1999-2002 World Values shows that

³⁴⁰ These observations are an abridged version of a lengthier paper entitled "The Politics of P'ungmul" that was presented on February 2009 at the College Art Association Conference in Los Angeles, California.

³⁴¹ For a detailed study of this phenomenon, see Hyunsun Choi, *Social Capital and Community Economic Development in Los Angeles Koreatown: Faith-Based Organizations in Transitional Ethnic Community*, Graduate School of University of Southern California Dissertation, 2004. It is of note however that the majority of work linking the development of social capital to religious membership derives from Western experience. P.E. Becker and P.H. Dhingra, "Religious Involvement and Volunteering: Implications of Civil Society." *Sociology of Religion* 62 (2001): 315-335. K. Beyerlein and J.R. Hipp, "From Pews to Participation: The Effect of Congregation Activity and Context on Bridging Civic Engagement." *Social Problems* 53 (2006): 97-117. A.C. Brooks, *Who Really Cares: The Surprising Truth About Compassionate Conservatism*. (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2006). D. Burlingame, *Philanthropy in America: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia* (Oxford, JK: ABC-CLIO, 2004).

³⁴² Hyunsun Choi, "Religious Institutions and Ethnic Entrepreneurship: The Korean Ethnic Church as a Small Business Incubator." *Economic Development Quarterly* 24, no. 4 (10 August 2010): 372-383.

Christianity increases individuals' civic engagement.³⁴³ Other scholars, such as Hoi Ok Jeong, add to the previous assertion that churches “provide an important incubator for civil skills, civic norms, community interests, and civic recruitment by helping people learn to give speeches, run meetings, manage disagreements, and bear administrative responsibility.”³⁴⁴

Korean American churches play a central role in the development of local and international communities for Korean and non-Korean communities. For example, nearly half (43.5%) of Korean households in L.A. County have an income of less than \$25,000, yet the level of giving reported by Korean American churches are in the millions.³⁴⁵ Through fostering a large pool of volunteers and human capital, transnational church networks, active small business connections, and increasing physical assets, the Korean American community churches continue to be the crucible of “social networks and societal norms that effect the productivity” of the community.³⁴⁶ One of the ways in which these churches have changed due to the L.A. Riots is in the restructuring of their efforts away from transnational missions, and towards local community needs.

Concluding Remarks

³⁴³ <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org> and Hoi Ok Jeong, “How Do Religions Differ in Their Impact on Individuals' Social Capital?” *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 39 no. 1 (February 2010): 142-160.

³⁴⁴ Hoi Ok Jeong, “How Do Religions Differ in Their Impact on Individuals' Social Capital?” *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 39 no. 1 (February 2010): 143.

³⁴⁵ Angie Y. Chung, *Legacies of Struggle: Conflict and Cooperation in Korean American Politics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 41.

³⁴⁶ Robert D. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 163-171. He furthered this concept in his subsequent text *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

Among the many and diverse incarnations of Christian practice, Korean American Christianity continues to evolve to serve the changing needs of its community. Since its beginnings as the unaware “scabs” for the Hawaiian Sugar Plantation Association, and satellite headquarters of the Korean Liberation Movement from Japan, Christianity has always been tied to the political history of South Korea and Korean America. The evolution of religious practices is driven by the centrality of Korean American agency for incorporating survival strategies, and the Marxist materialist line of economic reasoning. Similarly, discussions on the role of Christian missionaries spreading a peculiar ‘gospel’ of the United States as “heaven on earth” and “the land of milk and honey,” in order to offset the ethnic labor politics on Hawaiian plantations at the dawn of the Japanese annexation of the Korean peninsula, became the oft-cited eco-religious context for understanding Korean immigration to the United States.³⁴⁷ Indeed, the early eclipse of Korean immigration points to not only transnational politics among Korea, Japan, and the United States, but also to the interplay of economic and religious undercurrents.

By the late 1980s, there were about five hundred Korean American Christian churches in Los Angeles, gradually asserting their ethnic presence and also establishing a base of solidarity.³⁴⁸ The reasons for such a large number of Korean immigrant churches are not just historical or evangelical, as previously

³⁴⁷ Su Yon Pak, Unzu Lee, Jung Ha Kim, and Myung Ji Cho, *Singing a New Song in a New Land: Korean American Practices of Faith* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 4.

³⁴⁸ Abelmann and Lie, 68-71.

described. For Korean Americans, there are also sociological and economic reasons for the incorporation of Korean immigrant churches in their lives. Korean immigrant churches serve as important community centers. They are gathering places where immigrants can feel comfortable, socialize with other Koreans, and form *kye* associations.³⁴⁹ *Kye* is a rotating credit system from which many Korean immigrants get the capital to start a small business, such as a grocery store.³⁵⁰ In a *kye*, there is no formalized structure of insurance. *Kye* is a gamble because it involves large sums of money and relies solely on the honesty and character of the people involved. Such particularities manifest in the crucifix as one of the objects on Choi's *Roulette* wheel, showing the deep-seated nature of Christianity within Korean American immigrant life.

Even though many families have moved to the suburbs from Los Angeles, they congregate every Sunday in Koreatown, located in Los Angeles proper. In addition to churches, Korean grocery stores, Korean appliance stores, and the like are also on the agenda on Sundays, congesting the town with Koreans from the suburbs doing their Sunday errands.

The events of the 1992 social upheaval in Los Angeles compelled Sung Ho Choi to create the installation entitled *Choi's Market* (1993) (Figure 24), which

³⁴⁹ In a *kye*, an agreed-upon group of individuals pledge a monthly amount, and the participants receive a stipulated sum of the collected monies that they can ultimately withdraw once during the rotation. Most Koreans are involved in this system or know of this system. Since it is based on good faith and there is no enforcement of good faith, the person involved in the *kye* is vulnerable to one or more of the members within their *kye* taking a sum out of turn.

³⁵⁰ For additional information on *kye* and the way it is used to finance property ownership, see David Listokin and Barbara Listokin, "Asian American for Equality: A Case Study of Strategies for Expanding Immigrant Homeownership," *Housing Policy Debate* 12, Issue 1 (2001): 53-55.

is a replica of a burnt-out storefront. The architectural elements, composed of distressed wood, consist of a door with a window, two windowpanes on each side of the door, and shelves below each set of windowpanes. Various types of live plants and one watering can are positioned on the shelves on each side. On the window of the door, the artist affixed a collage that consists of a black and white photograph of two adults, each holding a child, which is layered on top of a wall of lottery tickets. The letters "MERIC" are faintly visible above the figures in the photograph.³⁵¹ The photograph is a portrait of the artist's family, wearing tailored clothing. The positioning of the photograph gives the illusion that the figures depicted on the collage are inside this fabricated edifice. The green, yellow, and red colors of the plants contrast with the drabness of the rest of the installation, which consists of the muted colors of the distressed wood and the black and white collage. The fabricated damage to the awning partially obscures the numbers 429 that are situated on the left side, which might indicate the store's address. Next to the numbers 429, the words *Choi's Market* are prominently positioned in the center. The way in which the wood has been distressed with blow torch and the fabricated erosion on the awning are elements that suggests fire damage to the storefront. Specific elements in this installation illustrate how Choi utilizes situational consciousness of the L.A. riots, and relates them to the narration of the Korean American experience.

³⁵¹ The photograph is placed in front of one of his earlier works, which has the words "American Dream" spelled out, and which incorporate the numbered boxes of 300 lottery tickets.

The awning is an important part of any storefront, because it contains information defining the type of business and the exact location of address in relation to other buildings. The positioning of 429 on the left side of the awning signifies the store's address, which can also be interpreted as locating it in the context of a seminal event in the history of Korean Americans. In Korean political history, integer-chains mark significant uprisings, demonstrations and political turns. The demonstration on March 1, 1919 against Japanese colonial rule is known as *sam-il-undong*, which translates to 3-1 demonstration. The Korean War, which began on June 25, 1950, is referred to as *yuk-i-o* which translates to 6-2-5. The Student Revolution of April 19, 1960, is referred to as *sa-il-gu*, which translates to 4-1-9. The L.A. riots signifies the same level of importance to Koreans as the event is commonly referred to as *sa-i-gu* which translates to 4-2-9, marking April 29, 1992 as the first day of the L.A. riots. Choi utilizes this tradition to place the L.A. riots as a defining moment in the political history of Korean Americans. As Homi Bhabha explains, for the immigrant, tradition bestows a partial form of identification.³⁵² In restaging the past by utilizing the tradition of the integer-chains marking this event, the significance of the event is reinforced as a moment of historical transformation and identity construction of Korean Americans. Therefore, in this context, 429 evokes a transformation, where in the words of Bhabha, "the present [is positioned] into an expanded and ex-centric experience and empowerment."³⁵³ 429 is not an actual address, nor is

³⁵² Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 1-18.

³⁵³ Ibid.

“Choi’s Market” an actual place, but in this installation, it locates the event in the political history for Korean Americans. It refers to the event of April 29, 1992 that happened in Koreatown, an area that became more clearly delineated through the event.³⁵⁴

Interpretations by Jane Farver and Eleanor Heartney of *Choi’s Market* include the relationship between the two children in the photograph of Choi’s family and the plants on the shelves.³⁵⁵ Although the information has yet to be verified, Farver and Heartney suggest that the plants could be young fruit and/or vegetable plants. Farver extends this interpretation by connecting the plants with the children depicted in the photograph, suggesting that the plants and the children signify Choi’s hopes that the new seeds he has planted in the United States will yield a fruitful harvest, both for the economy and the people.³⁵⁶

In Suk-Man Kim’s interpretation of *American Dream* (1988-1992) (Figure 28), which is another installation by Choi, he notes the Korean proverb that states, “in death tigers leave their skins, and people leave their name. All people, not just Koreans, leave their names behind when they die. To leave a name

³⁵⁴ For a detailed deconstruction of the ways in which the identity of Korean Americans’ relationship with Koreatown was affected by the L.A. riots see, Tangherlini, “Remapping Koreatown: Folklore, Narrative and the Los Angeles Riots,” 59-93, where he notes that during the riots, the places that the police did not respond to were that of Koreatown which delineated not only the lowered priority of property owned by Korean Americans, but also delineated the cultural enclave. Hence, the text of the city, in a deCerteau sense, had been forcibly rewritten by the destruction. In regard to reading the city as text, see Michel deCerteau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), ix-xi, 43-45, 91-111, 115-131.

³⁵⁵ Jane Farver, *Across the Pacific: Contemporary Korean and Korean American Art*, 49; and Eleanor Heartney, “Hybrid Identities” – Korean art, various artists, Queens Museum, New York, New York.” *Art in America*. (September 1994).

³⁵⁶ Farver, *Across the Pacific: Contemporary Korean and Korean American Art*, 49.

means to leave a memory. Victims of natural catastrophe, when asked what they would salvage in a moment of crisis, often say that they would take their photo albums.”³⁵⁷ This stems from a belief that when the material base of life is destroyed, new life can be built on memories of the past.

The visual context of these ideas are presented by building the relationship between Sung Ho Choi family name on the awning, to that of his children on the photograph, and the hopes for the future that they signify, along with the live plants in the installation of the burnt-out storefront. In a recent conversation with the artist, Choi said that “*Choi’s Market* was produced during the coincidental time of my family hardship and the events of the L.A. riots (sic). Less than a year after this piece, my family members separated for nine months due to my wife’s illness. One survived sapling on the installation is bearing apples at my backyard, and one of my children graduates college this spring.”³⁵⁸

The greater body of Choi’s oeuvre deals with the broader issues of identity formation within a multicultural metropolis. For example, *American Pie* (1996) (Figure 27 and 27a) and *American Dream* (1988-1992) (Figure 28), are about “the theme of contrasting identities in a society that is becoming more multicultural.”³⁵⁹ *Choi’s Market*, a burnt replica of a storefront is a direct visual reference to the events of the L.A. riots. Here, he has broken away from his

³⁵⁷ Suk-Man Kim. “Sung Ho Choi: Suitcase of Memories,” *Fresh Talk Daring Gazes: Conversations on Asian American Art*, ed. Elaine H. Kim, Margo Machida, and Sharon Mizota (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2003), 91-93.

³⁵⁸ Sung Ho Choi, e-mail message to author, February 25, 2011.

³⁵⁹ Ibid.

circular motif to create a personalization of the events of the L.A. riots directly in relation to himself, his family and the Korean American community by the unprecedented act of including the image of himself and his family prominently at the center of his artwork. *Choi's Market* is not about formulating cyclical patterns of society, which deviate from the main focus of his prior works, but about the galvanization of the Korean American identity as a result of an event that affected this specific community of people within the United States. It is not easy to transform these ideas into art. It entails absorbing and communicating ideas with a genuine spirit of experimentation, exploration and reflection. The fissure created in the juxtaposition of the subjects in Sung Ho Choi's work, with many discourses, in terms of interlacing the experienced with the officially consumed, construct a poignant political comment via a sophisticated visual practice.

Statistical observations, such as 1992 as the year of a record number of violent crimes in L.A. County, with 2,589 homicides and more than 800 gang related killings, contextualizes the violent realities of the shopkeepers.³⁶⁰

³⁶⁰ Edward W. Soja, "Los Angeles, 1965-1992: From Crisis-Generated Restructuring and Restructuring-Generated Crisis," in *The City: Los Angeles and Urban Theory at the End of the Twentieth Century*, ed. Allen J. Scott and Edward W. Soja (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1996), 458.

CHAPTER 6: Critical Media Studies - The Aperture Widens

Here I believe one's point of reference should not be to the great model of language (*langue*) and signs, but to that of war and battle. The history which bears and determines us has the form of a war rather than that of a language: relations of power not relations of meaning...³⁶¹

Introduction

Much of the academic discourse about the 1992 L.A. riots assumes that the subject of inquiry is not about the event, but rather it is about the historical and socio-economic nature of the event. As such, three videos are noted as signposts of the '92 L.A. riots: the King beating in Lake View Terrace (1991), the shooting of Latasha Harlins by Soon ja Du (1991), and the chaos on Florence Boulevard and Normandie Avenue (1992).³⁶² Only one of these events is directly related to the reporting of the riots that began on April 29, 1992. The other two are events that occurred in March of the previous year. So why and how are these events integrated into the presentation of the riots in news media? Two broad analytical structures to my interpretation of the politics of representation consist of the poetics of semiotics, and a discursive approach to existing research in critical media studies. My preliminary objective is to deconstruct the news coverage, in accordance to Robert M. Entains' process of clarifying a fractured paradigm by selecting "aspects of a perceived reality and mak[ing] them more salient in a communicating text, image or video, in such ways to

³⁶¹ Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon, trans. Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham, Kate Soper (New York, NY: Random House, Inc., 1980), 114-115.

³⁶² Kaman Afary, *Performance and activism: grassroots discuses after the Los Angeles Rebellion of 1992* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009), 26-27.

provide a particular problem, definition, causal interpretation, ethical evaluation and recommendation.”³⁶³ What the television news does or does not say about the spatial organization of the world is also largely shaped by the practices, technological constraints, and the journalism industry’s organizational demands. As any perfunctory text on critical media studies proposes, the preliminary step to looking at the power of televised news to shape and frame the cultural meaning and identity of places and people lies not only in “what is said,” but also in “the way it is said” and “what is not said that could be said.”³⁶⁴

I will first describe selected artworks by Dai Sil Kim-Gibson, Yong Soon Min and Y. David Chung, which utilize imagery from mainstream media. Then I will synthesize the artists’ interpretations of the media coverage via the artwork, in order to deduce their position within the mechanisms at work within the discursive frame of mass media and existing research. I will explain the ways in which specific sections of the artworks bring to the fore a deliberate disruption of the spatio-temporal configuration of experienced-space, by collapsing historical moments that are reorganized through the arguments presented by the artists.

I am not positioning myself as the *vox populi* of Korean Americans, but rather as one among the many who believe that a critical intervention into media is possible. Evoking the thesis of Walter Benjamin, in his essay “Mediated Solidarity,” where thinking about my position in the process of discursive

³⁶³ Robert M. Entman, “Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm.” *Journal of Communication* 43.4 (1993): 51-58.

³⁶⁴ M.C. Heck, “The Ideological Dimension of Media Messages.” in *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972-79*, eds. Stuart Hall, et al. (London: Hutchinson & Co Ltd., 1980), 122-7.

production changes my role from being a reproducer of prevalent discourses, into an engineer who sees her task as the effort of adapting that apparatus towards the aims of positing a progressive view of the discursive machine,³⁶⁵ I hope to assert the critical potential of artistic responses to the coverage of the riots in mainstream media. Using history as material for artwork yields a productive void, evoking a tactical transversal of the discursive framework.

The Rodney King case was mediated through, and arguably pre-scripted by, the corporate entertainment industries, which include news agencies and the entertainment industry, including music, film and television. George Holliday's original homevideo of the beating was appropriated by these industries, as it was played over and over again both in national and international broadcasts. In addition, the live televising of the uprising itself was used by the rioters to direct their activities, whereas the broadcasts on Radio Korea were used to prevent further riot damage to Koreatown. Before, during, and after the King affair, these industries exploited several highly inflammatory representations of Korean Americans that ossified into idealized forms of Korean Americans that still permeate the public imagination today.

Critical Media Studies

³⁶⁵ My position in the apparatus goes beyond this project, toward a pedagogical imperative, which includes creating a undergraduate course as part of this research project on the topic of Asians and Mass Media. Walter Benjamin, "The Author as Producer," *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, ed. by Peter Demetz; trans. by Edmund Jephcott. (New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 237.

Before we can discuss artistic disruptions, it is necessary to consider the complexity of race representation in media as a product of racial interpellation.³⁶⁶ The L.A. riots as a media event have been, and continue to be, a topic of critical media studies that bring together disciplines from sociology, anthropology and geography, to literature and political science, that seek to develop a nuanced understanding of how audiences produce meaning from discursive forces. The relevance of critical media studies against the “post-race” globalized cosmopolitanism, as proposed by such scholars as Kwane Anthony Appiah, is to elucidate the socio-historical tendencies as ideology that reoccur as part of the larger racial context relating to colonialism and imperial powers in the United States. One of the most provocative developments in critical media studies is the extension of television as place that has been extended into the virtual pockets of meaning in the internet. This is especially significant, as most people experienced the riots on television, including those who lived in the riot zone. This is an effect of the tradition of journalism, reporting “live on site,” to suggest real-time authenticity.

³⁶⁶ Although the analysis of race is executed with Korean and Korean Americans as the primary unit of analysis, the methods with which I analyze race as representation can be applied to the large number of minorities that were fundamentally affected by the L.A. riots. Although Darnell Hunt does not include Koreans in his analysis of black, white, and Latino representations in his book *Screening the Los Angeles “riots,”* his method of analysis is valuable in isolating components of the discursive frames at work during the covering of the L.A. riots. Darnell Hunt, *Screening the Los Angeles “riots”: Race, seeing, and resistance* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

The looting were themselves abnormalizations that were normalized by the reporters inscribing the event, according to Michael Barnard-Donals.³⁶⁷ The polyvalent nature of the interviewee's lexicon can be seen as effects of the social structures, which are complexly overdetermined and must be described, not merely in hermeneutic terms of "voices in conversation," but also as having a material constraint in an enactment of infralanguage and racialization.³⁶⁸ Racialization is a social structure and a process of interpellation, through which a racialized subject comes into being. The interviews exhibit this process of interpellation and infralanguage. Portuguese philosopher José Gil describes infralanguage as,

the activity of the body as a translator between codes, the operation depends on the articulation of the force of language with the affective energy of the body. Because the body comprises the site where discursive force is constituted, it simply cannot be reduced to a product or materialization of discursive performance, it is the site where performative significations get correlated with the affects that grant them meaning and substance.³⁶⁹

The interviewees' descriptions are denied existing contextualization within the extant discourses, and therefore demonstrate that the event has yet to be contextualized in the 1990s. Below is a sampling of the "man on the street" (M.O.T.S.) reporting, with interviewee quotes in bold.

³⁶⁷ Michael F. Bernard-Donals, "The Rodney King Verdict, the "New York Times", and the "Normalization" of the Los Angeles Riots: Or, What Antifoundationalism Can't Do," *Cultural Critique* 27 (Spring 1994): 61-87.

³⁶⁸ José Gil, *Metamorphosis of the Body* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1998) 110.1.

³⁶⁹ Jose Gil, qt. in Mark B.N. Hensen, "Digitizing the Racialized Body or The Politics of Universal Address," *SubStance* 104, 33 no. 2 (2004): 23.

“Wearing dark glasses and a cap that said “DESERT STORM,” he aimed to look menacing. As cars passed, he would thrust his right arm up in a clenched fist salute; while his left hand rode the inside of his waistband where he said he had a pistol. Its outline could be plainly seen. **‘All of this is a statement of unity,’** said the 33-year old man who refused to identify himself. **‘This,’** he said as he scanned the tangle of police and firefighters and looters against a backdrop of burning storefronts some 20 yards away, **‘ is about the black community coming together.’**³⁷⁰

“...entire blocks of buildings were left in ruins...took on the atmosphere of a street party as black, white, Hispanic, and Asian residents mingled to share in a carnival of looting.”³⁷¹

“This is the ‘90s,” he screamed. **‘They killed the first King,’** he said, referring to the assassination of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King. **‘Now they want to mess over the second King,’** he said, referring to Rodney King. As looters packed their goods in their cars with the unhurried ease of weekend shoppers, [he] looked up from his car’s trunk and whispered, **‘We have been cool too long.’**³⁷²

The overturning of traditional roles, and resistance to normal habits and behaviors, are both defining characteristics of Mikhail Bakhtin’s notion of the carnivalesque. Bakhtin’s concept of the dialogic imagination is helpful in analyzing the mechanisms at work in the discursive framing of the riots. A visual presentation of another reversal was the televised event of the white trucker, Reginald Denny, who was pulled out of his truck and severely beaten by black men on April 30, 1992, which entrenched the ostensible threat to white America.

³⁷⁰ Michael Marriott’s article dated May 1, where the inability to ‘speak’ the riots becomes most clear, is entitled “The Sacking of a Neighborhood.” The article describes some of the looting on Western Avenue. “The Sacking of a Neighborhood: An Orgy of Looting, a Carnival of Crime.” *New York Times* (1 May 1992): A21.

³⁷¹ Seth Mydans, “23 Dead After 2nd Day of Los Angeles Riots.” *New York Times* (1 May 1992): 1+.

³⁷² Marriott, A21.

The contradictions between efforts to normalize in the news coverage, and the abnormal actions and comments of the looters interviewed, also illustrate Homi Bhabha's concept of "nonsense" inspiration that "baffle the communicable verities of culture with the refusal to translate."³⁷³ Michael Bernard-Donals traces the efforts towards normalization by using televised statements from people of authority, such as when then-president George H. Bush noted that "[y]esterday's verdict in the Los Angeles police case left us all with a deep sense of personal frustration and anguish. Yet, it is important that we respect the law and the legal processes that have been brought to bear in this case."³⁷⁴

Presenting the riots as an aberration from the norm takes the aforementioned dialogic utterances and converts them into monologic judgment that inscribes specific voices and intonations as abnormal, confirming the priority of order over trying to understand and interpret the event. The removal of the abnormal must be accomplished in order to "carve out abstract concepts and judgments from living words and responses, and cram everything into one abstract consciousness, and that's how you get dialects," according to Bakhtin.³⁷⁵

News coverage of the L. A. riots sought to make commensurable the accounts of material events that were difficult, if not impossible, to understand

³⁷³ Homi Bhabha, "Articulating the Archaic: Notes on Colonial Nonsense." *Literary Theory Today*. ed. Peter Collier and Helga Geyer-Ryan (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 203-18.

³⁷⁴ Bernard-Donals, 71.

³⁷⁵ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans by Vern W. McGee, ed. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1986), 147.

linguistically.³⁷⁶ A careful reading of the news coverage shows that a normalization strategy served to disseminate information that ignored complex material conditions, which preceded and fueled the riots. The normalization in effect stalls, rather than promotes, the social change that this enactment of collective violence could have encouraged. To complicate the issue of reporting even further, it was also election season. The reception of the event and its reporting can be divided into stages of surprise, then recognition. It is troubling that the general political discourse, which the news media had been using in coverage of the Gulf War, was used to normalize the situation in Los Angeles.³⁷⁷ The simplistic language of political campaigning informed and influenced the description in similar stages where the then-presidential candidates, George W. Bush and Bill Clinton went from coping with a complex phenomenon to inscriptions that glossed over the dissonance.

The then-president used words that reflected Americans' reactions to both the verdict and the rioting that followed. While a great deal has been written about the L.A. riots, very little research has focused on how prominent politicians framed the event. The TV spectacle of a city in flames and, more significantly, the narrow parameters of the discussions around these images, support the authoritarian issue of law and order as more important than the causes of the

³⁷⁶ Michael F. Bernard-Donals, *The Practice of Theory: Rhetoric, Knowledge, and Pedagogy in the Academy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 212-215.

³⁷⁷ For similar analysis see, Roger Stall, *Militainment Inc.: Militarism and Popular Culture* (Northampton, MA: Media Education Foundation, 2007).

riots, as evidenced by Bernard-Donals thorough analysis.³⁷⁸ A single narrative of the race war demonstrates an enactment of monologism, where the narrative depends on the centrality of a single authoritative voice. The monologicistic character of these dominant frameworks produce a blind spot that is more or less irrational, but nonetheless palpable to a white-American audience. Through this sleight of hand, political leaders appeal to the language of law that is paradoxical, in that it was the rule of law that was seen as directly responsible not only for the failure of the jury to convict the four officers, but also the fact that the beating on trial was executed by the representatives of that same law.

The potentiality for substantial change after the '92 uprising was stymied by linguistic structures, both intentional and unintentional. The intentional structures refer to the need to retain order. The unintentional structures refer to the linguistic framework influenced by the proximity of events that preceded and followed the L.A. riots, such as the Gulf War and the presidential election of Bill Clinton. What this does is connect the racial division in Los Angeles to the grounds of other foreign situations in order to satisfy the need to tell a coherent causal story. President George H. W. Bush's speeches addressing the riots suggest the ways in which riots in general are constructed, between condemnation of the rioters, and the confirmation that even after more than hundred years, Korean immigrants are still foreigners, still newcomers to

³⁷⁸ Michael F. Bernard-Donals, "The Rodney King Verdict, the "New York Times", and the "Normalization" of the Los Angeles Riots: Or, What Antifoundationalism Can't Do," *Cultural Critique* 27 (Spring 1994). Other such analyses include comparative methods of representation, such as: Hyun Ban and R.C. Adams, "LA Times Coverage of Korean Americans Before and After the 1992 Riots," *Newspaper Research Journal* 18 (1997): 3-4, 64+.

American society. The lack of public empathy with Korean immigrant entrepreneurs was based in a larger condemnation of the rioters who, in Bush's assessment, demonstrated America's vulnerability.³⁷⁹ The political implications of these linguistic transpositions play a part in the construction of race and identity, specifically in regard to the L.A. riots.

The corporate media obfuscated the complex material forces at work in the riots, producing a narrative that is more conducive to moral complacency and social retrogression. The reportage exploited the riots, limiting analysis implicitly and sometimes explicitly, supporting the commercialization of a variety of stereotypes, including that of the city itself. , While the smoke was still rising from the gutted neighborhoods, TV talk shows were trivializing the issue, displaying T-shirts proclaiming "Come to LA, It's a Riot."³⁸⁰ Several studies of the news coverage at the time show that ethnic minorities were highlighted as problematic for society, even when they were reported as victims.³⁸¹ The analysis of news coverage from the *Los Angeles Times*, *New York Times*, and a sampling of papers from the UK, indicates that coverage focused heavily on the tension between Korean shopkeepers and blacks, that coincidentally came from,

³⁷⁹ Even more disturbing is that fact that George H.W. Bush worked with Thomas J. Devine, who worked for the CIA during the 1960s, when the office declared that minority resistance, particularly in the case of the black power movement, was a major threat to national security. In addition to this, the then-congressman, George H.W. Bush opposed the 1964 Civil Rights Act. It is not surprising, therefore, that he would become the director of the CIA in 1976.

³⁸⁰ Amitava Kumar, "Los Angeles Riots and Television," *Economic & Political Weekly* 27.26 (June 27, 1992):1311.

³⁸¹ Hyun Ban and R.C. Adams, "LA Times Coverage of Korean Americans Before and After the 1992 Riots," *Newspaper Research Journal* 18 (1997): 3-4, 64+.

and also fed into, the raw materials used and mimicked by the entertainment industry, both before and after the riots.

In regard to George Holiday's home video of "the irrefutable evidence of police brutality," and the innocent verdict of those officers, Charles Hayden notes that "photographic images of all sorts remain essentially ambiguous, an image can be made to fit into a number of widely disparate narratives."³⁸² Korean news media in the U.S. saw its function as that of putting into circulation the same images as the U.S. media, with Korean-language narratives that were suppressed in U.S. coverage. The Korean narrative incorporated the existence of racial hierarchy and media hegemony, that regulate popular opinion. By using the same images, but superimposing their own voices in Korean, Koreans tried to make the mass media images speak from the Korean American perspective. This narrative, however, was only available to those who understood the Korean language.

The spatial and temporal reconfiguration of media coverage provides the metaphorical space of reflection, ordering, classification, and visual and cognitive structuring for the artists.³⁸³ The L.A. riots as a media event involves a parallax

³⁸² Charles Hayden, "Photography View: The Power of a Video Image Depends on the Caption," *New York Times*, May 10, 1992, sec. H32.

³⁸³ Although some of the sources in this chapter are from scholars who work within the poststructuralist or postmodernist schools, that is not the primary methodology with which the artwork will be analyzed. Therefore, the repetition of postmodernist and poststructuralist claims is applied as its own artifact of discourse that helps delineate the identification of the cause and effect of the slippages, in a heuristic rehearsal for a different epistemological offering. Representations of Asians in mainstream film and television are overdetermined by the requirements of the media itself. The academy confirms this visual language when writing about it within the same theoretical framework that produced the very *imagos* that they are fighting against.

view, because even though people were experiencing the same event, each viewing experience is from a different point of departure, a different historical and sociological basis of understanding, that is fundamental to how the viewer sees the event. On the other hand, a parallax view also produces a blind-spot due to the same reason, in terms of one's position, historically and sociologically. I posit that the dynamic interaction between mass media and the T.V. audience is a dialogic one, with each interpretation depending on what a particular audience brings to the process of meaning-making history, geography, or socio-economic forces (Figure 122, 123). However when mass media is converted into raw material for artworks, as in the works of Dai-Sil Kim-Gibson, Yong Soon Min, Y. David Chung, and Grace Cho, the relationship is fundamentally altered. The artworks reveal the frames that govern our generation of meaning; moreover, they illustrate that the aperture is not fixed, but contested by collectivities that congregate to promote and subsidize a specific frame that generates varying perspectives. As frames operate at a level where they resonate with cultural and symbolic characteristics in society, artists alter and appeal these norms.

The participants and witnesses of the urban rebellion "...did not come to this event as a blank slate, in a mental void or *ab novo*," according to Kaman Afary.³⁸⁴ The print media and television audience viewed the rebellion through a host of past events that they either witnessed personally, or heard about from their parents and grandparents. Memories passed down of the Mexican

³⁸⁴ Kaman Afary, *Performance and activism: grassroots discourses after the Los Angeles Rebellion of 1992* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009), 207.

Revolution of 1910, the Zoot Suit Riots of 1943, the Japanese American internment camps, the mass expulsion of Mexican agricultural laborers during WWII, the Watts Riots of 1965, the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, the Vietnam War, and the feminist movements of the 1970s and 1980s, are but some of the historical baggage of each and every ethnic, racial, and gendered group, which complicates the nexus of interpretations that are the subject of critical media studies. This chapter is in effort to add to that toolbox of interpretative strategies of critical media studies and race relations, by utilizing artworks that present the contours of the media frame.

The tension between the Korean and black communities has been palpable since the mid 1980s, and has heightened in the early 1990s, with boycotts and protests against Korean owned businesses in New York, Detroit, and cities all over California. The reductivism of the news coverage developed into a format that exhibits the political-ideological imperative of storytelling. Los Angeles is the cinematic set where the cause and devastation of the riots is the background, and the main story-line is what the viewer fills in, based on an aggregate of similar image types. These similar image types developed into archetypes for entertainment media in films and popular music.³⁸⁵

³⁸⁵ Rap artist Ice Cube voiced the anti-Asian hostility of many African Americans in his forty-seven-second diatribe "Black Korea," on Ice Cube, *Death Certificate*, Priority Records, November 12, 1991. The cut expressed the common sentiment among many black customers of Korean-owned businesses that they have been treated with suspicion and disrespect. The narrator even goes so far as to threaten a Korean shopkeeper with burning down his store, unless more respect is shown to black patrons. For further information, see Darrell Hamamoto, *Monitored Peril: Asian Americans and the Politics of TV*, 234-235. A Korean popular culture example includes the commentaries by Margaret Cho, such as the animated short entitled "The Grocery Store," from the *Notorious C.H.O.* Tour DVD in 2002. The animated short describes the sources of some of the misunderstandings that result from cultural differences between the two groups.

The familiar character of the Korean shopkeeper is firmly established in the Hollywood lexicon, while the televised killing of Latasha Harlins and trial of Soon Ja Du further galvanized this stereotype. Such films include *Falling Down* (1993), in which the stingy Korean shopkeeper refuses to exchange Mike Douglas' character's dollar for the coins he needs to use the pay phone. In *Do the Right Thing* (1991), the Korean shopkeeper as a symbol of black economic oppression is used to explain the misdirected black antagonism towards Koreans. In *Boyz in da Hood* (1991), the capital flight and post-Fordist consequence of neighborhoods in California is expressed, as the father of the main character explains the injustice of Koreans buying property in their neighborhood to his son. There are also films that portray the Korean subject as a figure with an overzealous work ethic, such as *It Can Happen to You* (1994), where shopkeepers are murdered during the police beat of Nicolas Cage's character. If their ethnic identity is not explicitly stated, confirmation for the Korean audience is from the mispronunciation of the Korean dialogue in the film, because more often than not, these actors are not Korean. For example, the opening scene of *Menace II Society* (1993) involves an incident where a Korean shopkeeper is killed; the actors portraying the shopkeeper is Toshi Toda, who is Japanese American. A comedic example of the shopkeeper is the Margaret Cho Animation (2002), produced by Cho Taussig Productions, where a mock public service announcement shows how black customers and Korean shopkeepers can get along, by playfully dissecting the dialogue between the customer and the shopkeeper, to reveal that misunderstandings are due to differences in the

misperception of both ethnic groups. Although there are justified arguments in favor of colorblind casting, the precarious position between colorblind casting and “Yellowface” leads to a reflection of the problematic term, “Asian American” in Hollywood.³⁸⁶

Korean Americans do not identify with the stereotypical “media self” of the Asian American. Similar to the mother’s admonitions in *6.25: History Beneath the Skin* (Figure 76) to exist unnoticed, such as, “don’t stand in the front, always stay in the middle!”, Korean Americans’ relative anonymity is in part self-imposed. In terms of the history of Asian Americans in the media, the contemporary figure of “the Asian” is in a conglomerate of characteristics from the Charlie Chan mysteries in the 1920s and 1930s, to David Carradine in *Kung Fu*, from the 1970s. Today, there is still a fair amount of “Yellowface” perpetuated in media constructions of Asians, such as Alex Borstein as Ms. Swan on *MADtv*, featured between 1997 through 2002. Moving on from these vague signs of Asianness, the first time that Koreans entered the popular culture *mise-en-scene* was the 1970s situation comedy, *M*A*S*H** (Mobile Army Surgical Hospital). There were

³⁸⁶ The term Asian American is very problematic, and is a detritus of multiculturalism. The burgeoning language of multiculturalism exhibits the heightened awareness of, and concern with, the increasingly problematic and disjunctive relationship between race, ethnicity, and national identity. This accounts for why multiculturalism has remained a controversial concept, despite its now common circulation. The unrealistic utopia of a rootless cosmopolitanism, where everyone is supposedly a “world citizen” in a borderless world, is fallacious, but it is still necessary as an heuristic concept that points to the uneasy and contested space between exclusionary and homogenizing modes of nationalism. Multiculturalism depoliticizes and aestheticizes difference by emphasizing the cosmetic celebration of cultural diversity, rather than the socially transformative struggle against racism or white supremacy. In this way, multiculturalism is a strategy of containment of resistance and revolt, rather than a true desire for the elimination of racial and ethnic oppression.

no specific Korean characters, other than the geographical location, hence the media identity of “Korean” remained extremely vague.³⁸⁷

This detour into media history is to prove the point that there was no symbol of self or a celluloid reflection of the self for Koreans. Asians serve as the backdrop, and if they are in the forefront, they are played by Caucasian actors mimicking a desexualized individual, where the castration complex of the *other* has already occurred through a surrogate. Artists take the same apparatus of narrative, fetishism, and stereotype, and enact an intervention against the interpretative machine of the television viewing experience (Figure 122, 123).

Korean Americans accused the news media of presenting an unbalanced image of the L.A. riots’ many racial groups that allegedly attributed to the increase in street violence against Korean businesses, and to the idea that Korean merchants had been disrespectful to their African American customers, and had profited from them without returning anything to the community. These stereotypes lumped all Korean Americans into a single community that exhibited a monologicistic character, and in turn yielded a dialectical explanation of events, positing that the riots were due to the black-Korean conflict.³⁸⁸

³⁸⁷ Soon-Tech Oh was one of the few Korean actors who played multiple roles. He was born on 6/29/1943 in Korea, the then occupied Japan; attended high school in Gwangju, immigrated went to USC, got his MFA at UCLA. It’s true that no *major* characters on *MASH* were Korean, but there were quite a few minor/recurring Korean characters, many with names and story arcs. For example, Max Klinger, one of the major characters, marries a Korean woman, who I’m pretty sure was in several episodes -- as well as the entirety of the spinoff, *AfterMASH*, which, if I recall correctly, was all about the Klingers.

³⁸⁸ Monological text depends on the centrality of a single authoritative voice. For a complete definition see, *Glossary of Literary Theory* by Greig E. Henderson and Christopher Brown, 3/31/97. <http://www.libraryutoronto.ca/ute/glossary.html>, accessed on 25 April 2009

Concordantly, the frameworks with which scholars pontificated the causes of the conflict perpetuated the idea that the *ressentment* of the black community that incited the riots is partially to blame as the *ressentment* was transferred by blacks towards the fallacious middleman model minority myth.³⁸⁹ These speculations in effect assume that news coverage of minorities influence the audience, but in what way and to what extent are they influenced? In terms of a psychological economy, media serves the function of performing and repeating the human subject's insertion into the symbolic world. The news coverage shows a utilization of the popular use of dramatic and crisis-oriented storytelling practices. A performance of law and desire, akin to the cinematic showdown, in a self-referential phantasmic identification with the symbolic materials, circuitously derives from the television screen.

Politics of Reflexivity between Art and News Media

Artistic interventions in media events have a long and rich history in art, from the controversies around Édouard Manet's *The Execution of Maximilian* (1868-1869) (Figure 92), to Picasso's *Guernica* (1937) (Figure 93). The difference between these two is that, although the point of departure for both works were journalistic reports, *Guernica* employs mimicry of the media aesthetic as part of its overall artistic expression. The monochromatic tone references the

³⁸⁹ *Ressentment* here refers to the Nietzschean usage, where the substitution via the scapegoat of hatred is replaced from straightforward antagonism to the sense of hostility directed at that which one identifies as the cause of one's frustration, an assignation of blame for one's frustration. The sense of weakness or inferiority, and perhaps jealousy, in the face of the "cause" generates a rejecting and justifying value system, which attacks or denies the perceived source of one's frustration. The ego creates an enemy to insulate itself from culpability. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Vintage, 1969).

fact that the images in the painting echoed those Picasso saw through the media in black and white film footage or newspapers. Though the images were from German (enemy) sources, he created a piece that garnered sympathy for the Spanish Republic. Therefore, each layer of signification is at odds with each other.

Similarly, the argument presented in Korean American artistic responses consists of its own history to the figurative and sometimes literal utilization of media footage as raw material for the artwork. Lesser-known works by Picasso that are worth mentioning here, are the paintings he executed in protest against the atrocities of the Korean War, with the same processes of mediation via news footage as seen in *Guernica. Massacre in Korea* (1951) (Figure 94) by Picasso is about the massacre of over three hundred Korean civilians by U.S. troops at No Gun Ri in 1950.³⁹⁰ Recent investigations by the Associated Press news agency led by journalist Charles Hanley, have shattered the conventional picture that all the atrocities in the Korean war were committed either by North Koreans or their Chinese allies.³⁹¹ U.S. commanders ordered units retreating through South Korea to shoot civilians as a defense strategy against disguised enemy soldiers, which is a major war crime. Those that died at No Gun Ri were mostly

³⁹⁰ It is of note that *Korean War* (1951) by Pablo Picasso is one of a series of seven paintings he did on the subject of the Korean War. For more information, see "Greatest Artist of the 20th Century: "Massacre in Korea" to Make Seoul Debut," *The Seoul Times*, Web. September 6, 2005. <http://theseoultimes.com/ST/?url=/ST/db/read.php?idx=480>, accessed on August 9, 2008.

³⁹¹ Charles J. Hanley and Martha Mendoza, "The Bridge at No Gun Ri: Investigative Reporting, Hidden History and Pulitzer Prize," *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics* 5.4 (2000): 112-117. In addition to investigative reports such as this one, recently declassified documents reveals several similar blunders during the Korean War. "Declassified Documents Show CIA Blunders in Korean War," *The Chosun Ilbo*, Web. http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2010/06/18/2010061801077.html, accessed on June 18, 2010.

women and children, not spies. The Cold War fiction that the United States is the Third World's savior is challenged by war survivors' memories that conflate rescue and annihilation. The title of Picasso's painting is confirmation that such facts were known early on by the rest of the world. The historical evidence of this painting addresses the way in which war and geopolitics are reported in the U.S., which reveal the contours of the U.S.- driven media frame. The work created by Korean American artists in response to the coverage of the L.A. riots brings such issues of media framing to the fore. The L.A. riots story by itself, as it currently exists, is incomplete without a broader sense of Korean and Korean American history.

As described in the previous chapters, *Defining Moments* by Yong Soon Min consists of six photographs that correspond to historical moments that are overlaid with Min's portrait, where symbolic words are written on her face and body. The first photograph is an index of the following four dates written on her stomach: 1953 - the Korean War; 4/19/60 - Student Revolt; 5/19/80 - the Gwangju Uprising; and 4/29/92 - the Los Angeles Riots. April 29, 1992 is the last date on the spiral, and corresponds to the fifth photograph in the series, which references the L.A. Riots (Figure 6). Images of the aftermath of the riots, taken from print media, are overlaid onto Min's portrait, while "DMZ" is written on her forehead and "heartland" is written across her chest. The print media that she chose consists of three images with the following captions: "Historic Rally in Koreatown"; "Gettn' Busy: Volunteers from the Community Spring Out of the

[Their] Homes”; and “Prayer for Peace: An Elderly Woman Wears a White Weadband”. Different from the majority of artworks in this dissertation, *Defining Moments* does not reference fire as a signifier of identity development. Instead Min chooses images of solidarity and hope for photograph five, which conveys a different mood than the rest of the historic photographs in this work, which are of destruction and upheaval. The irony of the DMZ designation is highlighted in the artwork, since a *demilitarized zone* is a place rife with military presence. The image of solidarity on the fifth photograph consists of a crowd of Los Angelenos, mostly Korean Americans, wearing headbands during what the caption labels as a “historic” rally. The historic designation is dubious, since history is what it is because it is not forgotten; and when media outlets revisit the 1992 riots, they are usually represented in terms of destruction and violence, rather than community building. In this way, the positioning of photograph five as the odd one out, opens up a critique of collective memory. The images overlaid on the section where “Heartland” is written across her chest, consist of civilians cleaning up the rubble from the riot’s destruction, signifying the coming together of a community seeking to rebuild, which is not how the L.A. riots are remembered, or rather this is not the popular image of the events. Next to this photo is an image of an elderly woman wearing a white headband and a white *hanbok*, with all of its historical and political connotations described in the Christianity chapter. She is in a position that suggests the Christian pose of praying, however she is wearing the headband of protest that also has historical connotations associated with Korea’s history of protest. The layering of meanings here reveal the palimpsest

nature of the Korean American identity and its connection to Koreatown as the new Jerusalem, collapsing hope, religion, and politics of a particular brand of Korean Zionism, as described in the Christianity chapter.

In contrast to these moderately positive images in Min's work, the last scene of the *Turtle Boat Head* video emphasizes a narrative of destruction in one series of moving pictures, which consists of burning buildings and civilians scattering from harm. The collage of moving pictures consists of historic footage from the Japanese Occupation, the Korean War, and the conflagration of the riots, using the image of fire as a unifying visual and conceptual component, and concludes with a historical recreation of approaching turtle boats emitting smoke from the firing of dragon-shaped canons (Figure 50). As the reader might have already noticed, both descriptions of these pieces end by evoking a leap of faith in the verities between Korean history and myth. Like Min's image that collapse faith and protest, the idea of faith as a marker of identity is elicited, as the turtle boats have dubious historical validity. The earliest extant documentation of the turtle ship dates to the late 18th century, written over 200 years after the war of 1592, when Admiral Yi is recorded to have defeated the oncoming Japanese armada with these boats. Even though there are historical written accounts of these boats, there is no archaeological evidence to support these accounts. Without physical evidence, it is difficult to say with certainty that these boats actually existed. Notwithstanding the absence of evidence or corroborating extant texts, the turtle boat has become the kitschified form of Korean nationalism, as one can find replicas of turtle boats in tourist shops and the like

(Figure 116). Between fact and myth, any ontological closure is rejected.

Accordingly, rational knowledge and imaginary myth are never fully reconciled, but rather rely on a certain *salto mortale* or "leap of faith."

In the artworks, history is just an illusion, functioning as the transcendental apperception of a given the event, be it the battle of 1592, or the 1992 L.A. riots. This indefinite judgment opens up a third domain, which threatens the underlying distinction between Christianity, history, and myth: the parallax is this third space between phenomena and noumena. Furthermore, it is only within this space that free play persists, insofar as our horizon is that of the phenomenal, as the noumena domain remains inaccessible to us. Intervening in this gap between the event and media coverage of the event is sustained in a fragile balance between the said (seen) and the unsaid (unseen). Therefore, artistic interventions associated with the L.A. riots reveal the full consequence of that which mainstream media refuses to articulate, to 'posit as such'. Concordantly, in Hegelian terms, beyond the veil of phenomena, consciousness only finds what it itself has placed there.³⁹² This collapse of faith and knowledge is made explicit in the artwork. The strategies by which artists in this chapter disrupt the spatio-temporal configuration of experienced-space opens up that space for critical reflection.

The media's interpretation of the riots as a black-Korean conflict, was a product of popular images of the 1990s in entertainment media, and the

³⁹² G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1977), 103.

multicultural paradigm that is dependent on essentialized identities that have no specificity and agency. According to Cynthia Liu, who is a novelist-screenwriter and professor of American literature at UC Berkeley, groups of individuals that exist in varying intensities formed through specific negotiations of lived experience, had no “recourse to an origin outside of mass media.”³⁹³

So, in the tradition of Asian American media, independent films were produced to convey a different perspective of the same event. Koreans felt that there was a misunderstanding and misrepresentation of Koreans in the media coverage of the L.A. riots. *Sa-i-gu: From Korean Women’s Perspectives* by Dai Sil Kim-Gibson is an example of such efforts. In *Sa-i-gu*, the subject of the film is the “Korean Woman.” The film follows a group of women who lost their store during the riots. Their experience is bookended by the story of Eddy Lee’s mother, whose son died in an accidental shooting during the riots. Much in the style of the Asian American film movement of the 1970s, *Sa-i-gu* seeks to record the interstitial moments of everyday life, which are more important than the sound bites of news reporting. The quote below, from director Kim-Gibson, reflects similar characteristics of the low budget Asian American documentary films in the 1970s, which were born out of a sense of necessary intervention and social justice.

“Three months after the eruption of the LA crisis, I went to that city with two other Korean American women (Elaine Kim at UC, Berkeley and Chris Choy at New York University). With borrowed

³⁹³ Cynthia Liu, “When Dragon Ladies Die, Do They Come Back as Butterflies: Re-Imagining Anna May Wong,” *Countervisions: Asian American Film Criticism*, ed. Darrell Y. Hamamoto and Sandra Liu (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2000), 27-29.

equipment and surrounded by a labor of love, I rushed to Los Angeles in anger, fury, and sorrow. Alas, we had neither funds nor time for thorough, systematic preparation for the film. It became clear that the focus should be narrow. First and foremost, we wanted to present the LA crisis with a Korean perspective. Even that was too much. What was most missing in the report?... A fair number of Korean Americans were interviewed by the media but they were mostly second and third generation Korean Americans, the children of the direct victims who had language problems. I wanted to provide a chance for the direct victims to pour their hearts out in Korean....I decided to present the views of Korean American women victims, to kill two birds with one stone. Even prior to interviewing them, I knew how strong those women were, women who not only work with their husbands, sons and father in their businesses but also had to run the family!”³⁹⁴

If these Korean women were portrayed by the news media, it was often images of hysterically crying and wailing women who spoke broken English. The academic discourse of hysteria elucidates the damaging effects of such representation. According to Freud, hysteria is a “dissociation of consciousness,” however a Korean description of *han* provides a more accurate description of what these women were expressing.³⁹⁵ As Kim-Gibson describes it,

“*Han* is long sorrow, suffering and resentment turned inward, tightening the people’s parched chest. *Han* is chewing tears and sighs inside. *Han* describes the experience of Korean *minjung* (the *min* literally meaning “the people” and *jung* “the mass”), who have experienced political and economic oppression throughout the country’s tumultuous history.”³⁹⁶

This concept is often represented in *Minjung* Art through the figure of an aging mother, as in O Yun’s woodcut of *Grandmother* (1987) (Figure 72). The same

³⁹⁴ Dai Sil Kim-Gibson, “Behind the Scenes: What Prompted Me to Make Sa-I-Gu,” *Two Tigers*. Web. <http://twotigers.org/main.html>, accessed on August 19, 2009.

³⁹⁵ Sigmund Freud, *Collected Papers* (London: Basic Books, 1959), 20.

³⁹⁶ Kim-Gibson, “Behind the Scenes: What Prompted Me to Make Sa-I-Gu,” *Two Tigers*. Web. <http://twotigers.org/main.html>, accessed on August 19, 2009.

iconography is used as a focal point by Kim-Gibson, as she continues to describe the meaning of what *han* means to her. “The *han*-ridden Korean people frequently invoke in me an image of a mother in soiled white clothes standing on a dusty road waiting for her son to return from the big city with the family’s future in his palm...The image of the ‘waiting mother’ represents resilient hope despite soulful sorrow.”³⁹⁷

The strategy of the Asian American independent film movement, as described by novelist-screenwriter Cynthia Liu, is one of “refunctioning representation” that involves “dismantling stereotypes by posing a media-crossing solution.”³⁹⁸ She describes the refunctioning of representational strategies as an intervention in the network of signification, by examining media crossing resignification of iconic images. The purpose of refunctioning representation is to “arrive at an open-ended analysis rather than an oppressively deconstructive one in which Orientalism is always and everywhere diagnosed.”³⁹⁹

Although *Sa-i-gu* was criticized for its bias towards Korean women, which the title purports as such, the film presents a view that is unequivocally absent in mainstream media.⁴⁰⁰ To refunction representation, according to Walter Benjamin, is to transform a seemingly straightforward process by intervening in

³⁹⁷ Dai Sil Kim-Gibson, “A Waiting Mother,” *Two Tigers*. Web. <http://twotigers.org/main.html>, accessed on August 19, 2009.

³⁹⁸ Liu, 27-29.

³⁹⁹ Liu, 36.

⁴⁰⁰ In response to criticism that *Sa-i-gu* presented a biased view of the L.A. riots, Kim-Gibson produced and directed a follow-up documentary in 2004, entitled *Wet Sands: Voices from L.A. Ten Years Later* in 2004. A more extensive interpretation of this video is found in the concluding chapter of this dissertation.

the “productive apparatus” by instigating a self-consciousness about the relationship that the film has to the viewer.⁴⁰¹ The artwork discussed in this chapter evokes a definition of the social being of the self, as created through roleplaying, gender, choice, risk and consumption. It is through their works that an active perceived level of agency in self-shaping is synthesized, as the artwork shows the multiplication of the narratives of self as a site for reconfiguring relations between society, culture, and knowledge. The distance between the self as a symbolic project, and the artists themselves, is collapsed, as the point of departure for the narratives in the artwork stems from the various autobiographical sources of the artists themselves. An extrapolation of the media framing explained in the previous sections, reveals the pathology of the American collective memory machine, and the Korean and Korean American collective memory, and how that extrapolation informs the artwork.

Politics of Reflexivity in “Technologies of the Self”⁴⁰²

The self in the artworks described above is resistant to ordered structures, therefore concepts of the self are central to emerging forms of political struggle. Such concepts inform and help constitute forms of resistance to regimes of power, in everything from signs and ideology, to international relations. *Sa-i-gu*

⁴⁰¹ Walter Benjamin, “The Author as Producer,” *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Peter Demetz; trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 228-237.

⁴⁰² The concept “Technologies of the Self” is from Michel Foucault, *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, ed. Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, and Patrick H. Hutton (Amherst, MA: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1988). The text recapitulates many of Foucault’s previous works towards identifying the mechanisms with which “care” and “domination” are effectively one and the same, and in turn an attribute of the nature of social organization.

provides a rich rebuttal to the fallacious interpretation that was so prevalent after the riots, which is that Korean merchants are merely “actors in a play scripted by larger forces,” and that they were targeted by blacks because, in the words of Patrick D. Joyce, they were “nonetheless the immediate agents conducting business.”⁴⁰³ I disagree with this interpretation because it perpetuates a self-marginalization that unwittingly ossifies a peripheral position of victimization. The postulation that Korean Americans are not implicated in the broader history of the American racial conflict perpetuates what Tamara K. Nopper and others call the “Asian American Abandonment Narrative.”⁴⁰⁴ This narrative that is consistently reproduced in Asian American accounts, is one where Korean immigrants were abandoned by the state during and after the 1992 riots, and were not protected from rioters.⁴⁰⁵ Nopper claims that, “the notion of Asian American particularity as it relates to the abandonment narrative [and the L.A. riots] has actually served as

⁴⁰³ Patrick D. Joyce. *No Fire Next Time: Black-Korean conflicts and the future of America's cities* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 33.

⁴⁰⁴ Tamara K. Nopper, “The 1992 Los Angeles Riots and the Asian American Abandonment Narrative as Political Fiction,” *The New Centennial Review* 6.2 (2006): 73-110.

⁴⁰⁵ The Rebuild L.A. Project headed by Peter Ueberroth was more interested in the gentrification of the areas destroyed during the riots, which drove out small businesses. Sumi K. Cho, Korean Americans vs. African Americans: Conflict and Construction. In *Reading Rodney King/Reading Urban Uprising*, edited by Robert Gooding-Williams. (New York: Routledge, 1993). Edward T. Chang and Jeannette Diaz-Veizades. *Ethnic Peace in the American City: Building Community in Los Angeles and Beyond*. (New York: New York University Press, 1999). Elaine H. Kim, Home Is Where the Han Is: A Korean American Perspective on the Los Angeles Upheavals. In *Reading Rodney King/Reading Urban Uprising*, edited by Robert Gooding-Williams. (New York: Routledge, 1993). Elaine H. Kim. Between Black and White: An Interview with Bong Hwan Kim. In *The State of Asian America: Activism and Resistance in the 1990s*, edited by Karin Aguilar-San Juan. (Boston: South End Press, 1994). Kwang Chung Kim and Shin Kim. The Multiracial Nature of Los Angeles Unrest in 1992. In *Koreans in the Hood: Conflict with African Americans*, edited by Kwang Chung Kim. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999). Michael Omi and Howard Winant. The Los Angeles “Race Riot” and Contemporary U.S. Politics. In *Reading Rodney King/Reading Urban Uprising*, ed. Robert Gooding-Williams (New York: Routledge, 1993).

an *a priori* conclusion, rather than a possibility to investigate.”⁴⁰⁶ In efforts to extend Nopper’s call to investigate, the next few sections will look at the middleman model minority, from which much of the abandonment narrative depends, as the primary variable in its equation.

When Koreans are squeezed into a definition of a middleman model minority, it devalues their agency. In addition to this, it belies the rich history of Korean struggles in the U.S. since 1903. Autobiographies by Korean pioneers, such as *Quiet Odyssey* and *Doing What Had to be Done* helped to challenge this absence of agency. The extensive cross-references in the appendices of the autobiographies, by social scientists and historians, confirm not only the active engagement of the Korean American community with the civil rights struggle, but the historical accuracy of the biographies as well.⁴⁰⁷

One of the most widely accepted interpretations of the L.A. riots among Asian American scholars and activists is that as Koreatown burned, Korean American identity was born. For the first time, the Korean American community was confronted with the perception of how America saw them. Whether they identified with these images or not, the images that were broadcasted on national television featured hysterically crying women, gun-toting vigilantes, and foreigners who spoke broken English. What was not communicated in the coverage is that individual lives were going up in flames. Pieces of the *American*

⁴⁰⁶ Nopper, 73-110.

⁴⁰⁷ Mary Paik Lee, *Quiet Odyssey: A Pioneer Korean Woman in America*, ed. by Suchen Chan (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1990). Soo-Young Chin, *Doing What Had to be Done: the Life Narrative of Dora Yum Kim* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1999).

Dream, that took a life time to build, were being destroyed. Their dreams and hopes for the future of their children and their community were smashed and violated. Their homes were pillaged by rioters, as law enforcement officers stood by doing nothing.

This birth of Korean American identity refers to many things.⁴⁰⁸ In this chapter, it implies the process of media framing, and the entry into symbolic selfhood. In the artworks, the self, from the perspective of symbolic interactionism as the social product, is presented with images of actual Koreans, rather than the yellow-faced, Hollywood driven imagos previously described. The majority of the *TBH* video, and virtually all of the *Sa-i-gu* documentary, feature images that appear only in private moments, as emotional explosions are never a public image that a Korean wants to present in the arena of symbolic interactionism. What makes the outburst of emotions even more awkward to strangers is the exposure of the unsocialized self, which is composed of an assortment of personal dispositions that are not for the public. Of the many versions of self that *TBH* projects, one of them is the composed socialized self that the Korean self would want to exhibit - a self that is composed of the internalized attitudes. Therefore, the public subject consists of presentations of the golfer, church goer and family man in *TBH* (Figure 49, 45, 46, 48). This shows that the self is not only constructed from the inside out, but the outside in.

⁴⁰⁸ I agree with Edward T. Chang's repudiation of this statement because it is more accurately described as the rebirth rather than the birth, because to call it the birth belies the efforts of early Korean American pioneers like Ahn Chang ho and the efforts of the early Korean American political movements.

Now, applying that same insight to the television experience of racial constructions, the interdiction of the nuclear family is exhibited and replayed in the installation video.

It is my claim that neither internal nor external frames of reference should be privileged. In addition, in the words of Anthony Elliott, in *Concepts of the Self*, “racialized, hybridized, sexualized and gendered production of identity are intimately interwoven with differing levels of economic disadvantage, of social marginalization, and political exclusion.”⁴⁰⁹ Instead of a dialectic, prioritizing multiple selves, cultural differences, and other instabilities of identity make up the transnational subject, which is the argument presented in the artworks. This interpretation applied to *TBH* yields a recasting from the derivative of political structures or social practices, toward identities-in-formation and media-images as a site of possible restructuring for interpersonal relation and public life. The end product is a registration of a more sophisticated understanding of individual subjectivity, incorporating the history of inter and intra national exchanges between Korea and the U.S. As the history chapter establishes, the exchange between countries and generations of immigrants differs in experience and social class; and it is this very site of exchange that constitutes identities-in-formation. This interconnection of global forces and personal disposition fundamentally alters the discursive framework, in terms of understanding the anxieties and controversies over the self. The self, in the artwork, is portrayed among the ordered structures that exhibit the concepts that are central to emerging forms of

⁴⁰⁹ Anthony Elliott, *Concepts of the Self* (Polity Press, Malden, MA: 2001), 12.

political struggle, which constitute subjective forms of resistance to regimes of power, in everything from signs, ideology, to international relations. In the artworks, the self is at once individuality and generality, agent and recipient, sameness and difference. Hence, Chung shows that the normalization of the riots enacted by the media, needs to be critically examined and redescribed in an attempt to escape the already written stereotypes that are confirmed and perpetuated by the discursive field. *TBH*, *Sa-i-gu*, and the fifth photograph from the *Defining Moments* series show that news coverage is not about the reality of conflict, but about the conflict over reality.

Parallax Reflexivity: Antinomy

The primary act of selection and exclusion implicit in the unavoidable advance screening of the L.A. riots shape the secondary acts of representation with which Korean American artists attempt to reclaim the meaning of these images. In Chung's installation, the murals that surround the liquor store highlight the historical moments in the video. However, scenes from the riots are conspicuously absent in the murals. The installation produces a negation that is necessary, in order to convey the purported message. These two components, of the mural and video, operate through a double negation, as the thesis of each component is at odds with each other. The murals depict a continuous mise-en-scene of moments in Korean and Korean American history with spatio-temporal collapses, like a postmodern collage, the story is reordered into impossible spaces in order to emphasize common themes of displacement and revolt. One of the murals is composed with the turtle boat in the background, the ocean in

the middle ground and, an impossible upper-deck in the foreground (Figure 34). This foreground consists of a line of rowers that recede into a scene of produce stands, and behind them are protestors, alluding to the boycott of Korean-owned grocery stores in New York in the 1990s. The Twin Towers, now gone, further suggest these events. In contrast, the majority of the video clips are chronologically ordered, in terms of the succession of flashbacks and daydreams of the shopkeeper.

The anachronistic development of myth from the organization of the socialized-self is presented in the historical reenactment of the turtle boats that bookend the video. The murals do not show day-to-day activity, whereas the video does show day-to-day activity in pursuit of the *American Dream*. The middle-aged Korean man, presumably playing the part of the liquor store owner, is a synecdoche of the Korean immigrant experience. What is prioritized in the video is the ordinary habitual actions of this synecdoche. As Walter Benjamin notes, “the course of events cannot be changed at its peaks, not by heroic virtue and resolution, but only through strictly ordinary habitual actions through reason and practice.”⁴¹⁰ Concordantly, as the authors Kent A. Ono and John M. Sloop argue in “The Critique of Vernacular Discourse,” it is crucial to give as much critical and analytical attention to resistant and vernacular representations - those

⁴¹⁰ Walter Benjamin, “The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov,” Web. http://slought.org/files/downloads/events/SF_1331-Benjamin.pdf, accessed on Jun 14, 2010.

produced by localized communities - as to these dominant representations that circulate broadly within corporate, commercial and public spaces.⁴¹¹

Korean American artistic responses consist of a utilization of mass media as raw material for their artwork. The interpellated relationship between signified and signifier is deconstructed and stripped, then put back together again into an intentionally manipulated context. This process reveals the Korean American confabulation, providing a rich counterpoint to the dominant frame, whereby the contours of the dominant frame are made visible through artistic intervention. To envision the riots critically is to see the event neither from one's own view point, nor from the viewpoint of others, but to acknowledge that the difference of positions and viewpoints is indeterminate. In other words, the artworks provide a productive void, whereby an explanation of the riots by the purpose they serve in Korean American identity formation, can be made, rather than a postulation of their causes. Applying Howard Cayhill's definition of the Kantian term *antimony*, the arguments presented side by side visually and conceptually with each other, offer a "decisive experiment, which must necessarily expose any error lying hidden in the assumptions of reason."⁴¹²

In *TBH*, the aforementioned last scenes of the footage from the Korean War fade into scenes of armed Korean merchants guarding their stores during the riots, the latter being the type of footage that was replayed often in the news

⁴¹¹ Kent Ono and John Sloop, "The Critique of Vernacular Discourse," *Communication Monographs* 62 (1995): 19-42.

⁴¹² Howard Cayhill, *A Kant Dictionary* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 1995), 76.

coverage. The collapse of space and time between these two moments is visually implied by a composite image of fire. Fire is a common visual theme replayed in the video, from the wars to the riots, footage is deliberately conflated. As Elias Canetti points out, there is a symbolic likeness between fire and crowds.⁴¹³ If we consider the several attributes of fire together, we get a productive analogy.⁴¹⁴ Fire is the same wherever it breaks out: it spreads rapidly, it is contagious and insatiable, it can break out anywhere; and with great suddenness, it is multiple, it is destructive, it has an enemy; it dies; it acts as though it were alive, and is so treated.

All this is also true of a crowd. Arguments are often described as heated. People figuratively explode in anger. A dangerous crowd has a propensity towards incineration. A crowd is like a fire: it rages, it burns, it dies. Thus, the manifested fire in the artwork represents the latent incendiarism of the dangerous crowd. The dangerous crowd is conceived of as a destructive one, represented by the buildings on fire. Again, Canetti claims, “Of all the means of destruction the most impressive is fire. It can be seen from far off and it attracts ever more people. It destroys irrevocably; nothing after a fire is as it was before.”⁴¹⁵ David Bates draws on Freud’s essay “The Acquisition of Control of Fire,” to describe the L.A. riots as an orgy of looting and looking, where desire is inflamed.⁴¹⁶ Chung

⁴¹³ Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, trans. by Carol Stewart, (Harmondsworth: Peregring/Penguin, 1984).

⁴¹⁴ Canetti, 89, 361.

⁴¹⁵ Canetti, 20.

⁴¹⁶ Bate, 7.

constructs the potentiality of incendiary moments via a productive void of dialogue and interaction and, through the construction of the self through the aggregate accumulation of exchanges between persons and images in television and film, confirms the conflation of fires throughout Korean and Korean American history. The following section explains my interpretative process in greater detail.

Between Race Relations & Dialogue

The concept of symbolic interactionism was first posited by sociologist George Herbert Mead to describe the process by which the self is fashioned through engagement with other selves.⁴¹⁷ Across the entire spectrum of representation in film and television, Korean American self-perception, as other people see them, adjusts and transforms through ongoing interaction and dialogue. As if, pushed towards a phase in “Americanization” that they were not ready for, the L.A. riots forced issues of self-identification on Korean Americans. My interpretation of artistic practice is focused on the subtle processes by which symbolic interpretation of televisual experience shape identities and interactions between the Korean American self and other Americans in the course of day-to-day social life. This approach is also evocative of Bakhtin’s concept of the dialogical process, by which “we literally author one another”.⁴¹⁸ Language and communication are pivotal to the fabrication of the public and private self, and the

⁴¹⁷ George Herbert Mead, *Mind Self and Society* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1934 [1974]), 164.

⁴¹⁸ Such concepts, as described by Deborah J. Haynes are: answerability and dialogue, outsideness and the chronotope, and unfinalizability. Deborah J. Haynes, “Bakhtin and the Visual Arts,” in *A Companion to Art Theory*, ed. Paul Smith, Carolyn Wilde (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 2002), 292-302.

development of self-consciousness is intimately interwoven with empathy through roleplay, or taking on the role of others. Accordingly, *TBH* implicates the viewer in a roleplay in which the viewer is positioned as racist, and even sexist, just as Bates implicates the media spectator into the role of the rioter, in his analysis of front page photography used during the coverage of the riots.⁴¹⁹

The scripted dialogue in *TBH* is not much of a dialogue at all, because it is the customers that are doing all the talking, and the shopkeeper remains silent, though making communicative gestures, as if the Plexiglas is an auditory one-way mirror. The script is based on Y. David Chung's experiences of working at his father's store. It also reflects some of the dialogues in the films mentioned in previous sections of this chapter, such as the curt exchange between the Korean shopkeeper and William 'D-Fens' Foster, in *Falling Down* (1993). The way in which we think about the particular dialogue that takes place in a Korean-immigrant owned retail setting is influenced by popular media, as well as the personal experience of individuals living in a multiethnic city. Dialogue and social interactions between blacks and Koreans have been the topic of several studies in linguistics and sociology.

Benjamin Bailey, an anthropologist, video recorded liquor stores in Los Angeles and New York, in order to document the dissonance created by different behavioral expectation and forms of social inequality. He attributes the differences to linguistic and cultural systems, by applying an analysis of the

⁴¹⁹ David Bate, "Orgy of Looking: The Construction of the L.A. Rebellion in the British Press," *Afterimage* 22.3 (1994): 7+.

behavior that he records within the economy of the Durkheimian symbolic act.⁴²⁰ According to Bailey, Durkheim “describes how sacredness or value can be accorded either through avoidance or through intimate contact (‘positive’ and ‘negative’ cults),” where blacks see what they perceive as negative behavior in terms of the history of racism in America.⁴²¹ According to scholars such as Bailey, these negative encounters represent the re-enactment of a pre-existing conflict, emphasizing the socio-historical relations of inequality that also stem from a history of economic inequality over which each group has no control. In reaction to this argument, scholars such as Hye-Kyung Ryoo claim that the disproportionate focus toward the negative and conflictive nature of black-Korean interactions obscures positive interactions and prevents a more accurate assessment of the nature of race relations.⁴²² She executed her own study in the same journal, as a rebuttal to Bailey’s argument. Ryoo’s analysis is analogous to Yong Soon Min’s interpretation of the L.A. Riots, which is very different from the majority of the artworks, like *TBH, 6.25 History Beneath the Skin*, and *Sa-i-gu*, because it does not focus on destruction, fire, and violence, but rather on rebuilding and reconciliation.

⁴²⁰ Benjamin Bailey, “Communicative Behavior and Conflict between African-American Customers and Korean Immigrant Retailers in Los Angeles,” *Discourse and Society* 11 no. 1 (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2000):91.

⁴²¹ Bailey, 86-108.

⁴²² Hye-Kyung Ryoo, “Achieving Friendly Interactions: A Study of Service Encounters Between Korean Shopkeepers and African American Customers,” *Discourse and Society* 15 no. 1 (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2000):79-105.

Ryoo, like Bailey, utilizes video recordings of social interaction between Korean-owned businesses and their customers to account for cultural and historical differences. In *TBH*, the components of my analysis are: how the artist manipulated space; the auditory composition, including the script; and the visual composition of the murals, and the video's frame and pace. In the *TBH* script, the Korean shopkeeper has no voice; the only voices that can be heard in the installation are those of the customers, who are predominately black. Even though the customers cannot be seen in the video, the reflection of voice and terminology used evokes the viewer's presumption that the customers are black, which in effect leaves the viewers to confront their own stereotyped influence of this assumption.

If *TBH* was inserted into Bailey or Ryoo's analysis, how would the scholars interpret the interaction in the installation? The study itself would be problematic, because the *TBH* video is a one channel recording with only one point of view that faces the shopkeeper, positioning the viewer in the role of the customer. Hence, the physiognomy of the customers are taken out of the pool of data, which significantly limits the interpretation of the interaction that could be made. If the subject of the installation is the psychic interiority of the Korean shopkeeper, as suggested by the title, the interiority does not include a visual referent to the black customer, only the auditory referent. In other words, the customers are heard but not seen, and the shopkeeper is seen but not heard. Like subconscious bits and pieces of a daydream, we are only given parts to create a whole.

One wonders what the interiority of Soon Ja Du would have been, as described in the quasi-fictional story by Suki Kim about Du's interpreter.⁴²³ In the novel, the concern for the public self is further played out in the narrator's voice, the interpreter, who is so desperately trying to make Koreans look good in the public eye.⁴²⁴ From this imbalance between what is heard and what is seen in *TBH*, especially in regard to the script by Chung, one might deduce that this is a racist portrayal of blacks as people who smoke, drink, and gamble, and who express resentment towards the shopkeeper. The shopkeeper's response is to pretend not to hear some their negative remarks, which communicates disrespect to the black customer, as if their comments are not worthy of a response. What should the shopkeeper's response be? Is he a self-centered solipsistic individual reflecting on his own past and present, and isolated in the Korean American community, as suggested by the images displayed in his daydream? As with most great works of art, these questions are left incomplete for the viewer's self-reflection.

Concluding Remarks

The view of the shopkeeper's consciousness in both *TBH* and *Sa-i-gu* also elicits a discussion of impression management, or role distance as the means by which an individual expresses a separation between their social role and the self. Presentations of the shopkeeper situated within interactive frameworks involving social convention, ethical assumptions, and the positioning of bodies in relation

⁴²³ Suki Kim, *The Interpreter* (New York, NY: Picador), 2003.

⁴²⁴ *Ibid.*

to the physical feature of the setting, yields the idea that the individual creates these distinctions. At the core of this concept of self is reflexivity, a self-defining process that depends upon monitoring of, and reflection upon, psychological and social information about possible trajectories of life. Through the mixings of certainty and anxiety, this concept of self produces an interpretation that allows an individual to read cultural life, and its textured flow of social action, as they negate the unsocialized reaction for self monitored projection.

In a Foucauldian sense, one can argue that this negation is a form of social control. It is important to note, however, that reflexivity does not presuppose binary relationships, but rather an equilateral equation that is regulated through the pressures of the Foucauldian social machine. In other words, the disciplinary society within the the panoptic model functions as a self monitoring subject in social interaction between practical day-to-day activities and revolutionary gestures. The cultural resources and socio-symbolic materials that individuals draw on to construct personal experience are always creatively, and therefore artificially, engaged with, interpreted, and transformed, in the process of being represented to the world.

TBH, *Defining Moments*, and *Sa-i-gu* postulate the self as something which the individual actively constructs and develops, drawing on symbolic resources to forge a sense of identity through engagement with familial figures and the generalized other. In so doing, both *TBH* and *Sa-i-gu*, in particular, perpetuate the idea that socio-symbolic interaction is anchored in the routine, practical situations of day to day life. What this suggests is that reflexive function

is a form of social control. Reflexivity refers to not only the ways in which these artworks can be interpreted, but also to the ways in which postcolonial scholarship, including the work of Asian American scholars, has interpreted such works as vehicles of self marginalization, which ironically position themselves towards the periphery of critical art discourse.

The synthesis of historical moments presented in *TBH, Defining Moments*, *Sa-i-gu*, and *625: History Beneath the Skin* with the Korean American accounts of the '92 riots, challenges the assumed applicability of history that produces ontological closure. According to Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The naturalism of historical time lies in the belief that everything can be historicized."⁴²⁵ These artworks call into question any easy arrangement of chronology, elucidating the proposition that the universal applicability of history assumes that an event is always assigned to people, places and objects in a naturally existing, continuous flow of historical time. In these artworks, time, whether fast or slow, cyclical or linear, "are normally treated not as part of a system of conventions, a cultural code of representation, but as something more objective, something belonging to 'nature' itself".⁴²⁶ As noted already, Korean language news broadcasts of the L.A. riots used the same footage as the mainstream media, but with commentaries dubbed over in Korean voices. The artists discussed here take this strategy a step further, by interweaving representations from the mass media

⁴²⁵ Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Time of History and the Times of Gods," in *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital*, ed. Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997), 36.

⁴²⁶ Chakrabarty, 36.

with past and presentist spectacles that reveal that the diachronic patterns of personal narrative are not productive in identity construction.⁴²⁷ Rather, a synchronic constellation of events based on geography, rather than time, yields productive insights into the local, national, and transnational points of entry in a multiplicity that is dynamically pivoted by the singular event of the L.A. riots.

The aims of privileged history, as elaborated by Chakrabarty, and the limits of this genre of history as unworkable, are made visible by Korean American artists. Although Asian American writers argue that the middleman model minority myth (with its long history in U.S. popular culture), contributed to attacks on Korean immigrant business owners during the riots, this notion however, remains a stereotype. Studies that take the “model minority” concept as a point of departure are extremely problematic, because this myth denies Korean American agency. To say that Korean Americans were simply caught in the middle by misguided looters, and ignored by the police during the riots, positions the Korean immigrant as a bystander in the conflict, rather than part of it. This perpetuates the belief that Asian Americans in general are still disconnected from American racial conflict. In efforts to connect to the American racial conflict, organizations such as the Asian American Journalist Association joined UNITY Journalist of Color, along with the Native American Journalist Association, National Association of Hispanic Journalists, and National Association of Black Journalists, consolidating their efforts, and officially announcing their alliance in

⁴²⁷ Identity construction refers to identity-in-formation, meaning that it is always in flux, but the equation remains the same, with the variables that are contextually specific.

1994.⁴²⁸ The Media Watch program under AAJA “addresses issues of unfair and inaccurate news media coverage about Asian Americans”.⁴²⁹ ⁴³⁰

As Robert Siegle argues, reflexivity implies “a turning back on the turning back,” where “our relation to ‘actual’ states of reality” has the potential to transform the ways in which we organize and constitute reality, linguistically and discursively.⁴³¹ Accordingly, Bakhtin treats the aesthetic as a sphere in which the cognitive-theoretical and ethical-practical spheres may be brought together, each of these spheres describing reality differently. The analysis in this chapter shows that aesthetic activity elicits, enriches, and completes different spheres of the public and private self, so that the artwork can create the concrete intuitive unity of multiple points of view. The historically embedded media types are re-prioritized in the artworks, from primarily violent mass media representations, to one of community building, and from sound-bites to descriptions of everyday life. What is registered in these works is based not only on categories such as the aesthetic object or beauty, but on the phenomenology of self-other relations; relations that are embodied in actual bodies, in space and time. The dialogic

⁴²⁸ <http://www.aaja.org> 2010, accessed on January 14, 2011.

⁴²⁹ Ibid.

⁴³⁰ In addition to this, the Korean American Journalist Association (KAJA, the pronunciation of the acronym in English means “Lets go!” in Korean) was revived in 2005. Inspired by the legacy of the '92 riots, and the inadequacy of the media coverage on North Korea, by Jinah Kim of KNBC, Eleanor Hong of [washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com), Hyunju Chappell Hine of the Washington Post and independent journalist Carolyn Ayon Lee. Vincent Lim, “Journalists and experts weigh in on media coverage of North Korea: News about North Korea needs better sources, more analysis, say panelists at Korean American Journalist Association event,” *AsiaMedia*, (November 7, 2005). Web. <http://www.asiamedia.ucla.edu/article.asp?parentid=33016>, accessed on January 14, 2011.

⁴³¹ Robert Siegle, *The Politics of Reflexivity: Narrative and the Constitutive Poetics of Culture* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1986), 3.

sensibility in the artworks are characterized by contestation, rather than the automatic consensus inherent in mass media production. In this way, works of art and the cultural products of the mass media are in dialog with each other and the act of looking becomes a form of processing, affirming that art must exist in an integral relationship with life.

Korean American artists open up the possibility of thinking about the redemptive factor of differentiating from “the domain of signifying structure” that the model minority is beholden to, and position “relations of force, strategic developments and tactics” as a problem, inviting the viewer to examine and interrogate the discursive battle that is deconstructed by the artist in all of its component parts.⁴³²

According to Tom Crow’s mordant phrasing, the avant-garde may be little more than the “research and development arm” of the culture industry, as the very concept of art has been “liquidated,” according to Buck-Morss, by new forms of visual culture, material culture, mass culture, or just plain culture.⁴³³ This definition of art synthesized by W. J. T. Mitchell in *New Keywords* shows that at times, the reverse of this concept needs to occur, and that the answer to this era’s version of “the death of art” is not merely resolved through new media, like web-based art or new configurations of artist collectives, but rather, that the

⁴³² Stuart Hall, “The Work of Representation,” *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, ed. Stuart Hall (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 1997), 43.

⁴³³ W.J.T. Mitchell, “Art,” *New Keywords: A Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, ed. Tony Bennett, Lawrence Frossberg, and Meaghan Morris (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 6-8.

continuing counter-reversal between art and media in the discursive battle needs to occur, in order for art to continue its turning and evolve.⁴³⁴

⁴³⁴ Mitchell, 8.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Given that the reception of art objects is contextually contingent, I have sought to locate moments of indeterminateness, and posit a specific Korean American process of understanding, which the artwork catalyzes. In so doing, common themes in history and cultural contexts were identified throughout the different chapters, that are particular to Korean American history. The analysis of the artwork posits some of the contingencies that catalyzed a reassemblage of the regime of images associated with the significance of the L.A. Riots to Korean American identity formation. Based on artists' interviews, I acknowledge that this view is but a small facet of the multifaceted representation of the L.A. riots. My motive in delineating this nuanced communicative experience, from the abstract to specific identities of knowing subjects, yielded a reciprocally-open dialogical exchange, wherein the transformation of the subject is made evident. The paths of inquiry sought to escape the shackles of the circumscribed discourse in American Art.

The concentrated specificity of calibrating the L.A. riots exclusively within Korean American artists responses elucidates the cultural capital at stake for Korean Americans, and yet it can also appear to obfuscate or belie other forms of cultural capital from the discussion. In order to attend to this, a cursory introduction to some of the artworks by artists who are not ethnically Korean, will be presented in the pages to follow. This sampling elucidates important issues that highlight concerns dominating the discursive field of the 1992 riots, which is notably different from the concerns of Korean American artists. The content of

these works circulates around issues of police brutality, other civic disturbances in American history, cross-cultural exchanges, common strategies of mythic signification, and capitalism and merchandizing. Re-calibrating the L.A. riots with the 1965 Watts riots, the 1967 Detroit riots, and the New York boycotts in 1990s, exhibits the multiple historical trajectories that are specific to the cultural make up of each respective city, and the relationship between the citizenry and public policy.

A broad issue within American history that is deduced from these artworks is that conflict is a necessary attribute for the survival of a democratic ideology. The reason why this is being brought up in the concluding chapter, is because the purpose of the discussion is to present the marked differences between the dominant discursive field and the concerns of Korean Americans. This part-to-whole argument is useful, because it can also be used to elucidate the significantly large difference between the viewpoints regarding this complex event. For example, Hector Tobar's scholarly and literary contribution shows a completely different set of concerns in expressing the depth and breath of the L.A. Riots specifically for El Salvadorians. His novel *Tattooed Soldier* jumps back and forth between the homeland and Los Angeles in the 1990s, and presents a specific view that is just as vast and multifarious as the views that I tried to outline in my analysis of Korean American artworks. The best way to describe this difference is through a parallax where one's positionally can significantly alter the aftermath of the encounter, in this case the L.A. Riots.

Another reason why I position a presentation of artworks about the L.A. Riots by non ethnic Korean artists in the concluding chapter, is in the hope of making explicit the assumptions that were utilized throughout previous chapters, which is that the issues raised by Korean American artists exist in the interstices of the dominate discursive field. The implicit assumption that I would like to make explicit here necessitates a presentation of the dominant discursive field, using artworks from non Korean artists in order to explain what constitutes the 'sensus communis' within the discursive field of the L.A. riots. Art history, at its most fundamental disciplinary description, postulates the causality and categorization based on shared common features, where the energies of the discipline are placed in looking for shared features and creating arguments regarding the cause of why they look the way they look. Markedly different from this disciplinary supposition, my implicit assumption is about what art does, and how it intervenes in the general distribution of the ways of understanding forms of visuality.

The artworks presented in this section are critical loci where the artists grappled with their artistic, cultural and political positions, vis-à-vis other Americans, as they consciously chose certain sociopolitical terrains in response to the L.A. Riots dominance of the discursive field. Lucy Lippard's piece (Figure 95), articulates the glass ceiling as white. Jose Sarinana (Figure 96), and David Khang & Henry Tsang (Figure 97), sardonically explore the consequences of capitalism, branding and merchandising from both ends, being the exploiter and the consumer. Elaine Brandt (Figure 98), and Mark Bartlett & Jeffrey Skoller

(Figure 99), present the disjunctive nature of popular forces as cathartic and courageous. *Faith for Miracles* by the Other: Arab Artists Collective (Figure 100), cross-references the archival footage from the 1967 Detroit riots with footage from the documentary by Christine Choy, Elaine Kim, and Dai Sil Min-Gibson, *Sa-i-gu*. Finally, *Body Burden, Placebo, Early Bird* by Carlos Andrade and Todd Ayoung (Figure 101), and *Raising the Baton* by Salvatore Reda (Figure 102), focus on the baton that evokes issues around police brutality.

Artists and backgrounds

Lucy Lippard was born in New York; though she is a prominent scholar, she has executed several such Barbara Kruger-esque pieces as the one featured here. Jose Sarinana's piece (Figure 96), is made by an artifact of the riots, that includes, amongst other things, two bricks from Vermont Avenue and 3rd Street, and a liquor store paper bag. David Khang and Henry Tsang are Vancouver-based artists who designed a banner with matching T-shirts for sale, branding the city with stylized cityscapes in blazing flames, and its iconic palm tree, which doubles as an explosion. Elaine Brandt was born in Cleveland, lives in Venice Beach, and teaches at CSU, Los Angeles. Her parodic reprise of Henri Matisse's *La Joie De Vivre*, which encapsulates the violence that erupted, addresses the eventual circular circumstance of life in Los Angeles. There are several things that these pieces have in common, besides the fact that they are made by non-ethnic Koreans. Humor is one of the major components. For example, the two bricks in Sarinana's artwork refer not only to the weapon for rioters, but specifically refers to an actual situation, where his grandparents

bought a box assumed to contain a VCR from a looter off the street during the riots. When they opened the box, they found two bricks.

A theme that often dominates the discussion about the L.A. Riots is police brutality, like *Body Burden*, *Placebo*, *Early Bird* by Carlos Andrade and Todd Ayoung (Figure 101), and *Raising the Baton* by Salvatore Reda (Figure 102). Each piece engages with the history of the injustice and passive approval of incompetent behavior of the Los Angeles Police Department. The specific issue regarding police brutality around the PR-24 model of the baton that was used to replace the lethal choke hold method of restraint, is evoked in *Body Burden*, as the handle of the baton points to a different meaning of the acronym, CPR as “Cruel Perverted Reckless.” The most blatant case for these three words is the acquittal of Officer Laurence Powell, who failed a baton test at roll call less than two hours before he beat Rodney King repeatedly with the baton.⁴³⁵

Reda’s piece evokes an anxiety of the moments in between - is it before or after a beating? The quiet elegance of the watercolor, composition, framing, and odd positioning of the body, all work together to make this painting a disquieting one. The issue of police brutality and its various conduits of institutionalized violence are particularly not evident in the work by Korean American artists. This does not mean that the issue is not dealt with at all. Koreans have a very specific affect to the police, that is specific to historically, socially and politically interpellated responses, which is connected to their initial contact with U.S.

⁴³⁵ Lou Canon, *Official Negligence: How Rodney King and the Riots Changed Los Angeles and the LAPD* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1999), 579.

military during the Korean War.⁴³⁶ Accordingly, the measure of the authoritative affect of the LAPD is different from one cultural group to another.

The two primary functions of violence or force, as delineated by Walter Benjamin, is that it is used for law making (military) and law preserving (police).⁴³⁷ The loophole, as it were, is the power of discretion, which is the most effective, yet dangerous to the maintenance of civic society. In the discretionary case of the LAPD, they are both the law makers and law preservers, distorting and transgressing boundaries of (un)acceptable applications of justice.

The reason why I am concentrating on Korean American art as a point of departure is not only because of my familiarity with the work, networks, and history, but because it is a gesture towards the micropolitical, as explained by

⁴³⁶ An example of this interpellation is in the introduction of an essay by anthropologist Chungmoo Choi, "Driving on the Pacific Highway one glorious afternoon, I spotted, in the rear view mirror, a military vehicle being driven by a young soldier in a khaki uniform. Momentarily, I caught myself in the act of preening, but at the same time straightening my back and holding my chin up. At first I was at a loss to explain my actions, which were but the long-forgotten habits of another time. I felt overwhelmed and confused. The pounding of my heart was clearly audible. Then inexplicable anger welled up inside me. I suddenly realized that my reaction to this encounter with the specular image of an American soldier [any American in uniform for that matter] was the reified *habitus of a woman who had endured foreign domination in "postcolonial" Korea*. I chastised myself, as many Korean would do under such circumstances, in order to overcome that persistent specter. I muttered to myself, "Wait! You no longer need to act like this. You are not a young girl. You are a professor. Besides, this is America." It was as if my age and social standing - living in a metropolis as a professional - would protect me...These memories that have been so deeply inscribed in me that they threaten to expose my vulnerability at the slightest provocation. That the soldier behind me may not have even recognized that I was Korean..." Chungmoo Choi, "Nationalism and Construction of Gender in Korea," *Dangerous Women: Gender and Korean Nationalism*, ed. Elaine H. Kim and Chungmoo Choi (New York: Routledge, 1998), 9-10.

⁴³⁷ Walter Benjamin, "Critique of Violence" and "Right to Use Force," in *Selected Writings*, Vol.1. ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge: Belknap, 1996), 236-252, 231-234.

Foucault and Deleuze.⁴³⁸ As Julian Murphet explains, in L.A. every thing becomes minor - it is a place of perpetual becoming.⁴³⁹ In an ironic reversal, I position the work of Korean American artists as the interrogator (or major literature), in order to examine and put to the test the American ideology, positioning the dominant ideology as a minor one. This repositioning shows the various mechanisms that collectively deterritorialize discourse and produce political claims.⁴⁴⁰ Each piece that was introduced in this section is distinct from the others, yet all are aligned in the conceptualization of a theory and method of oppositional consciousness that I identify as the dominate discursive element in the artwork about the L.A. riots. It is ironic, since the 1990s in art criticism is dominated by identity politics, yet the artwork about the L.A. Riots bypasses identity politics in favor of engagements with the ideological state apparatus in one form or another in their artwork.⁴⁴¹ The importance of recognizing the

⁴³⁸ For Deleuze, the machine is a concept that offers ontological mobility, and can capture what overflows to the dogmatic image of political thought. In so doing, he exposes the problem in the unit of analysis - the concept of the individual. This machine is a self-regulating apparatus located in the micropolitical. The mechanism of power therefore can be seen, if we exchange the telescope for a microscope. Foucault calls these machines capillaries. Todd May, "The Politics of Difference," in *Gilles Deleuze: An Introduction* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 114, 115, 121-132. As Paul Patton explains, to Deleuze, philosophy is a political activity, in short jurisprudence. Different from Foucault, as extrapolated in his collaboration with Felix Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus*, they rejected the idea that contradiction is the motion of historical progress in support of deterritorialization and lines of flight. Paul Patton, *Deleuze and the Political* (London: Routledge, 2000), 2-10, 30-62, 88.

⁴³⁹ Julian Murphet, *Literature and Race in Los Angeles* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 1-7.

⁴⁴⁰ This is a concatenation of Deleuze's three characteristics of minor literature: it is always political, it deterritorializes, and is always collective. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

⁴⁴¹ By ideological state apparatus, I am referring to the concept initiated by Louis Althusser, in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. trans. Ben Brewster (Monthly Review Press, New York and London, 1971), 127- 186.

alignments between these ideological forces is critical to this project, because the “subject” is treated as both knower and agent, as each work shows how groups co-constitute one another in the gesture towards a progressive criticism.

One of the most discussed works of art, in regard to the L.A. Riots, is *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*, a one-woman performance piece that uses interviews conducted by Anna Deavere Smith with individuals involved in the L.A. riots. In my assessment, the reason why *Twilight* resonates as one of the most powerful and lasting pieces about the riots, is because it presents the dilemma of responsibility, with a presentation of competing claims for the viewers to analyze and adjudicate. The pieces in this dissertation evoke empathy, but have a limited dimension of responsibility and accountability regarding the riots, toward the transnational political and economic factors, particularly between the U.S. and the Republic of Korea.

In the midst of research for this dissertation, developing a transdisciplinary method was necessary, because no art historical investigation of the riots exists. Rather than utilizing the number of existing methods in the humanities, my obdurate insistence on art history as the vehicle for productive investigation is based on my belief that art offers the possibility of a comprehensive reflexivity within the socio-historical field, rather than any other form of knowledge production in the humanities. Theoretical analysts outside of art history, for example spatial theorist Edward Soja, also used art as a vehicle for insight into the riots, for example, the conference that he was involved in at Los Angeles

Contemporary Exhibition center (LACE).⁴⁴² As such, the insights of his latest publication, *Seeking Spatial Justice*, elucidate the components that are appropriate for this concluding chapter. His analysis of Los Angeles from his latest publication will be followed by an account of the recent redistricting debates, which will lead into my involvement as the project manager and chief curator for an exhibition at the Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles, which was initiated by the Korean Churches for Community Development (KCCD), and part of the 20th anniversary commemoration of the riots.

Civil Space: Transformative Memory

“If Rodney King had simply complied or he wasn’t on drugs the night he got pulled over, do you think that the L.A. Riots would have still happened?” asked an attendant at an artist talk that I organized at the Museum of Tolerance. My answer was yes, because the riots were not a response to one event. They were a response to the history of police brutality and of greater socio-economic pressures. After the Q&A session of the artist talk at the Museum of Tolerance, I wanted to get to know this audience member, who would ask such a rudimentary question. It turns out that he was a professor of Comparative Religion at Biola University, and he had lived in Orange County for most of his life. I was disappointed, because an educated Californian was so clueless.

⁴⁴² An exhibition on *Just Space (s)* was held in Fall 2007 at the Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions Center (LACE), to coincide with the publication of the special issue of *Critical Planning*. The exhibits and panel were intended to encourage active participation in producing more just space(s). Edward W. Soja, *Seeking Spatial Justice* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 47-50.

“Because of the Trayvon Martin case, do you think another riot is possible?” asked another attendant at the same event. My answer was that as long as government is still in the mode of containment, where token minorities are in positions in city government, violent events will continue to galvanize marginalities, rather than breaking through the divides; hence, another riot is possible.

Those in city government know that then-Mayor Tom Bradley and Police Chief Daryl Gates did not speak to each other for years -- yes years -- even though they worked for the same city. If our city government continues to operate in such a manner, and the police department loses sight of the fact that they serve the community as much as they protect the community, there can be another riot. In addition, the Rebuild Los Angeles (RLA) project exacerbates riot conditions, because it is a crisis-generated restructuring program that was external in its composition (where individuals were brought in from out of state), yet endogenous, meaning internally-created within the mayoral office, with a multiscale economic program of a very insulated group of individuals.

Being a budding “specialist” on the Los Angeles riots, I have gotten into a habit of doing monthly internet searches on the subject, during which I found a call for the chief curator position for the 20th anniversary of the L.A. riots exhibition at the Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles, initiated by the Korean Churches for Community Development (KCCD). KCCD is a non-profit, faith-based organization that “seeks to provide a bridge between the Asian American community and the greater community at large,” according to their brochure. The

title and featuring artist for the exhibition had already been selected before the open call for the curator position was announced. The experience was truly enlightening, for the following reasons. First, it gave me a laboratory of sorts to test out my ideas in the midst of several contested groups, from Koreans and Korean Americans, to other Los Angeles in the community, to the Museum of Tolerance, KCCD, and major donors to the project, all of whom felt entitled to their say as to the final presentation of the exhibition to the public. Second, the truly shocking experience of witnessing public ignorance, the inherent racism of self-identified liberals, and most importantly, learning about the utter disfunctionality of city government from retired LAPD officials and city journalists who were consulted by the Museum of Tolerance, was a reality check. It was like a bucket of cold water dumped over my inchoate aspiration for progressive government. During curatorial meetings, all of the supplementary artworks that I suggested, some of which are analyzed in detail in this dissertation, were rejected by the Museum of Tolerance educational and curatorial staff, for their potential for political controversy. After these initial meetings, I realized that the reason why Maggie Hazen's piece was chosen by the Museum of Tolerance and KCCD was because of its innocuous yet aesthetically pleasing qualities.

Hazen's piece, which she titled, *Of Departed Delineations* (2012), reproduces a map of riot destruction that is based on a Master's Thesis by Paul Watts entitled, "Revisiting the 1992 Los Angeles Riots: An Analysis of

Geographical Perspectives.”⁴⁴³ The components of the large-scale installation include: a modular platform consisting of a wooden structure lined with resin, that reproduces the geographical composition of the riots damage through modular height differentials based on the extent of the damage. In addition to this, there are approximately 2,000 individually-crafted vessels made of white plaster, that contain white and brown rice, white bleached flour and yellow corn meal. The artwork is activated through a collaboration whereby individuals that were directly affected by the riots create and fill the vessels with one of the aforementioned food staples, and place the on the fabricated map, in locations that are relevant to them. In a poignant and painful way, the roughness and raw beauty of the plaster evokes the ashes that were left after the conflation of a community. I coordinated an outreach program and participated in the creation of these vessels, as well as the installation of the modular sculpture itself. I produced all of the didactic and public relations material, including supplementary slides on a continual loop that consisted of images and relevant statistics, which played on two flatscreens, one along the hallway leading to the installation, and the other positioned in the same room as the installation. I also organized several programs in concert with the exhibition, including a round table discussion that included artists who produced and exhibited artwork on the ‘92 riots, such as Elaine Brandt, Michael Massenburg, Maggie Hazen, and writer-film producer Carol Park. Included in this round table discussion were urban planner and

⁴⁴³ Paul Watts, “Revisiting the 1992 Los Angeles Riots: An Analysis of Geographical Perspectives” (Masters Thesis. Louisiana State University, 2003).

architect James Rojas, and community activist Michael Mata, who moderated the discussion. Also included in the programming was a *Place It!* Workshop for K-12 students, where participants were given various art materials to create their ideal version of a modular map of their neighborhood in Los Angeles.

The content and subject matter of *Departed Delineations* revolves around issues of cultural geography, which is of particular interest to all the artists in this dissertation, including Maggie Hazen. Her previous project was a similar modular cartographical project of the heavily contested areas of Israel and Palestine. The viewers' responses that I observed were first an indexical exercise of trying to link sections of the sculpture with the abstraction of a map, then perhaps to a spatial memory of that space, and then a temporal memory of the riots in that place. This installation evokes within the viewer comparisons between 1992 and today.

I wanted to include supplemental didactics that show the economic development of the areas on the map, but the museum administration felt that might be too controversial. One of the possible reasons for the rejection of this idea is because there has been no significant economic change in most of the areas reproduced on the installation.

One of the most comprehensive studies that analyzes the effectiveness of development efforts that were enacted as a result of the L.A. Riots is "An analysis of the Los Angeles Revitalization Zone: Are Place-Based Investment Strategies Effective Under Moderate Economic Conditions?" by James H. Spencer and Paul Ong. The study examines the measurable components for

development, such as building permits, income of the residents, employment, private investment and housing values, to record the effectiveness of the Los Angeles Revitalization Zone (LARZ), along with supplemental analysis of other programs, such as the California State Enterprise Zone program in Los Angeles and the Federal Los Angeles Empowerment Zone.⁴⁴⁴ Like the Rebuild Los Angeles (RLA) project mentioned in previous chapters, LARZ was a temporary program created in response to the crisis of 1992. Since it was established that the pattern of discriminatory investment shaped the geography of Los Angeles, such programs sought to ameliorate a spatially and ethnically diverse constituency. The programs comprise of tax credits on sales, hiring, property, and other economic activities, to lure private sector investment with a quasi-public financing authority vested with the ability to raise capital and finance redevelopment projects. The recommendations centered on marketing, tax incentive financing, and capital pool financing for areas affected by the 1992 violence.⁴⁴⁵ The aggregate effect was that riot-affected areas developed more businesses and less housing, as shown in the changes in business income versus individual income.

In addition, the jobs created in the area targeted by the aforementioned programs were from the service sector, which later led to the 1996 class action lawsuit brought against the Los Angeles Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) by a

⁴⁴⁴ James H. Spencer, Paul Ong, "An Analysis of the Los Angeles Revitalization Zone: Are Place-Based Investment Strategies Effective Under Moderate Economic Conditions?" *Economic Development Quarterly*, 18, no. 4 (November 2004): 368-383.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid.

coalition of grassroots organizations, including the Koreatown Immigrant Worker's Association, on behalf of those who depend on public transit for their basic needs. The court decision acknowledged that discrimination exists against the transit-dependent urban poor, and made the MTA redirect their highest budgetary priorities for guaranteeing equitable access to all forms of mass transit. This case of *Labor/Community Strategy Center et al. v. Los Angeles county Metropolitan Transit Authority* signaled a revival of the civil rights movement that stimulated comparisons to the racial desegregation of schools and other such separate but equal rulings. The court's consent and degree was a reversal of the conventional workings of urban government that usually favored the wealthy residents, rather than the needs of the inner city and largely minority working poor. The systemic geographical and racial discrimination was noted as a violation of Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, "the generative act that defined and propelled the civil rights movement."⁴⁴⁶ The decree was later overturned, as people realized the extent of what this might mean for other government services.

The consent and degree triggered immediate reactions to reverse the decision with legal appeals. The radical potential for this decision concerned those in the Bush-Cheney regime, who sought to increase presidential power into the judicial system. The Supreme Court blocked further legal application of precedent for this consent and degree in a five to four decision, where they ruled

⁴⁴⁶ James H. Spencer, Paul Ong, "An Analysis of the Los Angeles Revitalization Zone: Are Place-Based Investment Strategies Effective Under Moderate Economic Conditions?" *Economic Development Quarterly*, 18, no. 4 (November 2004): 368-383.

that the intent to discriminate had to be proved, drawing on earlier decisions that seriously weakened the entire civil rights movement, and stated that private parties cannot sue the Department of Transportation, or any other federal agency, based on disparate action claims on the basis of alleged discriminatory practices.⁴⁴⁷ Although the fight for equitable transit ultimately lost the battle, it stands out as an exemplary model “of a successful urban insurgency in the search for racial, environmental and spatial justice,” according to Edward Soja. He also adds that such battles “can become effective springboards for a much larger movement seeking to erase injustices wherever they may be found.”⁴⁴⁸ Another potentially productive defeat in the fight for spatial justice is the recent redistricting debates over Koreatown, Los Angeles. Like the 1990 lawsuit that found that Los Angeles County’s redistricting process had prevented Latinos from electing one of their own, a similar lawsuit was filed by a group of Korean Americans in response to the last decennial process that redraws electoral districts to reflect the latest census data.

Even with what *Koream* reporter called, “the greatest mobilization of Asian American people power since the aftermath of the 1992 riots,” during the latest 2012 redistricting debates, the Korean American community failed to keep their community whole.⁴⁴⁹ The 2012 district map split Koreatown into two electoral districts, the 10th district under Herb Wesson, and the 13th district represented by

⁴⁴⁷ Edward W. Soja, *Seeking Spatial Justice*. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 19.

⁴⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴⁹ Eugene Yi, “How K-town Lost, and Won,” *Koream*. May 12, 2012: 46.

Eric Garcetti. The day that the new map was submitted for approval was the same day that this lawsuit was filed, alleging that Wesson's appointee on the commission explicitly sought to increase the black population in his district at the expense of keeping the Korean American community whole. The redistricting meetings brought out the who's who of Korean American community leaders, from the Korean American Coalition (KAC), to the Koreatown Immigrant Workers Association (KIWA), because what was at stake for the Korean American community was the potential to elect one of their own onto a council seat charged with representing Koreatown. Moreover, this lawsuit claims that "the city has diluted and negatively impacted the voting power of Koreatown residents by unnecessarily, unlawfully, and unconstitutionally dividing their community."⁴⁵⁰

The reason for this tangent is not only because the content of Hazen's work consists of the 10th and 13th districts, aka Koreatown, but also because she was a supporter and activist who participated in the Keep Wilshire Center-Koreatown Neighborhood Council (WCKNC) initiative.⁴⁵¹ The WCKNC had actively protested for a unification of Koreatown since the beginning of the redistricting debates on February 2012.⁴⁵² During several conversations with the artist, it was made explicitly clear to me that her artistic practice seeks to weave together spatial justice with immediate issues. She interviewed several members

⁴⁵⁰ David Zahniser, "Koreatown Redistricting Fight Moves to Federal Court." *Los Angeles Times*. July 31, 2012. n.p.

⁴⁵¹ "Keep Wilshire Center-Koreatown Neighborhood Council" initiative was created in 1999 to more effectively channel local concerns to elected officials.

⁴⁵² Eugene Yi, "How K-town Lost, and Won," *Koream*. May 12, 2012: 46-54.

of the community, from small business owners to activist-scholars like Michael Mata, in order to get a sense of the zeitgeist of the area in relation to the 20th anniversary of the riots, and more importantly, the issues that are important to people in the most immediate and relevant sense.

As an interlocutor of her practice, I was fortunate to be present during many of these interviews that she conducted, where often I served as a translator for Hazen with Korean merchants. It is through this immersive process that she arrived at the medium for the pottery to be gauze and the contents in the vessels to be basic food staples, as she sought to find some common ground with a diverse constituency that she was requested to represent. In addition, since the installation project was a participatory one, the signifier had to be a relatively straightforward one that people who normally do not engage with art could easily understand and produce. The process of creating each individual vessel was like mending a broken bone, where the participants were given strips of white gauze that they would dip in water and wrap around balloons of various sizes. After a few minutes, once the gauze dries, the participant punctures the balloon then, fills the vessel with the aforementioned food staple of their choice. Depending on the time volunteered by each participant, each person produced anywhere from two to two dozen vessels.

This process was scheduled a week before the 20th anniversary of the riots, but during that week, there were commemorative events throughout the city, hosted by nonprofit organizations, community activists, churches, universities and museums. The local radio stations like KCRW had special

programming, where they would broadcast roundtable discussions featuring special guests from architects, politicians, and city planners, to local residents. During the month of April 2012, I lived in Koreatown and went to work every day at the Museum of Tolerance. Living at the site of rupture, listening to and viewing the local media that reported on commemorative events, I felt an entire city collectively remembering the event. The next section is a presentation of two different events that I attended during this period, which show how political power can be enabling, creating the foundations for resistance and potential emancipation just as much as it produces oppressive and unjust material manifestations.

The differences in the two events show the range of the different conversations, as well as reveal the intentions of the organizers of the events. The two events are: the Rebuilding Los Angeles Conference held at the Garden Suites in Los Angeles, organized by the Young Oak Kim Center for Korean American Studies at the University of California, Riverside on April 28, 2012; and Rebuilding the American Dream Together: 20th Anniversary of the Los Angeles Riots Commemorative Service at the former Grand Olympic Auditorium, now the Glory Church of Jesus Christ in Los Angeles, organized by KCCD on April 29, 2012.

The event at the Garden Suites was chronologically organized into the following three panels: Perspectives- Tales from the Front Line; Transformations- Where is Our Community Today; and, Looking Ahead- A Roundtable Discussion. The panels were moderated by senior academics Nadia Kim, Kyeyoung Park,

and Jerry Kang, respectively. The event opened with Angel Oh, who gained national prominence as a spokesperson and mediating force for the Korean American community during the Los Angeles riots; and, the event closed with reflections by K.W. Lee, a community activist and journalist who has been on the frontlines of Korean American activism since the 1960s. I characterize the conference at the Garden Suites as a sincere revisiting of the past that evoked genuine emotion and tears; I witnessed what appeared to be a sincere and genuine exchange of ideas, experiences, and conversations that encourage the formation of new alliances in academia, community activism and conversation about structural problems that limited the agency of citizens. I witnessed an honest conversation that dealt with accountability and self-reflection within the Korean American community.

Speakers also included several individuals from the African American Community and the Chicano Community, in a concerted effort toward identifying the problems that are often cited as the reason for the riots, and which still continue today. Several of the individuals that attended were also members of the aforementioned WCKNC. The event at the Glory Church of Jesus Christ in Los Angeles, organized by KCCD, also included several members from WCKNC. I interpret the event organized by KCCD as an awards ceremony that presented a tedious series of political posturings by local politicians and Hollywood celebrities. Unlike the event at the Garden Suites, the speakers at KCCD's event presented a prescribed and rehearsed agenda. Even presentations that professed not to be scripted had hints that, if they were not scripted, they were at

least rehearsed.⁴⁵³ This “awards ceremony” was peppered with performances by choirs from African American churches, such as the Crenshaw Elite Choir, and Korean American churches such as the Wilshire United Methodist Church Choir, and a rendition of *Twilight Los Angeles 1992* by CASA0101, a non-profit theater company in Los Angeles. The event ended with a *p’ungmul* Korean drumming performance by KIWA’s Cultural Resistance Drummers. From local churches, to *p’ungmul* drumming and local politics, the event mirrors many of the elements discussed in the Christianity chapter.

The different ways in which these two events approached the death of Eddie Lee, is representative of the markedly different ways in which the riots were commemorated by different factions of the Korean American community. Of the 54 deaths that were reported during the riots, Eddie Lee was the only Korean American death directly attributed to riot violence. During the event at the Garden Suites, it was clear that Eddie Lee’s death was positioned as the fault of Korean Americans -- first and foremost because his death was a result of an accidental shooting by another Korean American; and secondly because Eddie Lee’s death was approached metaphorically to refocus attention towards Korean American accountability for the problems that led to the riots, problems which still exist and will continue to exist. This point was made clear during K.W. Lee’s

⁴⁵³ A particular example of this is when it was Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa’s turn at the podium. He began by saying to the audience that he was not going to read the speech that he prepared for the event, but rather speak from his own experience. The duration of his turn at the podium was about ten minutes. When he addressed the Spanish-speaking audience, I noticed that everything he said was repeated in the same order, but in Spanish. Therefore, anyone who was bilingual could have noticed that the content and order of what was said was exactly the same. This lessened the self-professed “off-the-cuff” presentation by the mayor.

closing remarks, where he charged citizens to reflect on the damage that Korean Americans are doing to their own communities by misdirected energies that should be directed at coalition building for lasting and significant change. It was a battle cry that encouraged accountability and collective reflection by K.W. Lee. Korean Americans need to be accountable for their own habits of insularity, meritocracy, and self aggrandizing gestures, such as superficial community festivals.

I interpret that the way in which the event organized by KCCD approached the death of Eddie Lee is an exemplary case of ideological demystification, wherein Eddie Lee became a martyr who took on the loss of the Korean American community, which can only be understood in terms of a postmodern dimension of signification, where the signified loses indexical relationship to the signifier. Although KCCD had convinced Eddie Lee's family to come to their event, where they were introduced with all the pomp and circumstance of some of the other celebrities who came to the event, such as actor Edward James Olmos, they successfully bypassed the fact that Lee was killed by Korean Americans. Moreover, the exaltation of Eddie Lee by KCCD is exactly what K.W. Lee argues against, particularly the self aggrandizing superficial gestures that obfuscate Korean American accountability for the problems that still exist, such as insularity of the in-group mentality.

Concluding Remarks

I conclude my dissertation by returning to the image of Los Angeles as a vast contact zone for a platform for self-narrativization. In this regard, the

subject of the L.A. riots forces a separation between what I hope the subject will be, to what the subject is, separating my hope of what could have happened in the last twenty years since the riots, to the harsh reality of what remains unchanged. Although Cultural Studies is shedding the old enlightenment shroud, one must ponder what exactly will be lost with the deletion of deductive analysis. At the same time, I am utterly dissatisfied with the ultratheoretical mode of critical theory, as anything other than the detritus of impotent and disinterested bourgeois reflection. However, there is a new paradigm on the horizon, which is spurred by a critical re-examination of ethnic studies and cultural studies, and which seeks to realign and define itself in the humanities, a paradigm similar to K.W. Lee's closing remarks encouraging self reflection and serious thought about the potential cost of ignoring accountability.

Multiculturalism, Postcolonialism and other branches from this same trunk are not just neutral subjects to me. My own sense of self is dependent on how this dialogue will play out economically, socially, and politically. In a way, I am both the subject and the object of study, which brings to bear the usefulness of the subject-object dichotomy. It is the moments where I acknowledge that I am the object, that yield the most productive ideas. There are reasons why concepts such as Deleuze's work on minor literature make sense to me; the comfort level that I have with multiple meanings through intensities exists because I have lived it.⁴⁵⁴ Therefore, I agree with Kandice Chuh's claim in *Imagine Otherwise: On*

⁴⁵⁴ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

Asian Americanist Critique, where she argues that the formation of Asian American studies as an empirical discipline based on an essentially racial or racialized identity politic, is inherently problematic. According to Chuh, transnationalism “arises not only from globalization, but also from recognizing the transnational within the national.”⁴⁵⁵ It is this conceptualization of the “transnational within the national” that loosens the borders that seem to be so rigid and immutable around identity of race (Korean), space (Los Angeles), and place (Korean Americans and Koreatown).

I propose that to imagine these fields together, is precisely the way to imagine Korean American art, as not necessarily a strictly subjectless one that Chuh might imply, but that it is subjectless to the point that it is always in a dynamic flux between a multitude of factors that are engaged with throughout this dissertation. Again, this is not to imply that there is no subject within these works; rather I envision the subjectless subject to be one that embodies multiple positionalities (rather than identities), in terms of race, space, and place. Moreover, the hermeneutic engagement yielded, in Ranciere’s words, “a dialogical encounter in which subjectivity itself is transformed.”⁴⁵⁶ Two decades after the riots, an argument for a dialogical encounter can be made, wherein subjectivity’s shifts can be observed. Redistricting debates reassert the historical divide of the DMZ, like the artworks do, wherein the subjectivity is not about

⁴⁵⁵ Kandice Chuh, *Imagine otherwise: On Asian American Critique* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 69.

⁴⁵⁶ Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (New York, NY: Continuum, 2004), 156.

existence, but a reaction to a transformation of territory. Arguments were made in the geography chapter that placeness is no longer about holding a territory but a transformation therein. The arguments made by the WKNC rely on this transformation as the basis for the redistricting of Koreatown. Like the lawsuit, the artist in this dissertation posits problems based on the ethics of communicative exchange.

In the history chapter, I showed the ways in which artists rearranged the rational logic of history by blurring the borders between the logic of facts and the logic of fiction, “that render a new mode of rationality that characterizes the science of history.”⁴⁵⁷ Again, in the words of Rancière, the images and objects in the artwork present a “circulation within this landscape of signs [that] defines the new fictionality, a new way of telling stories, which is first of all a way of assigning meaning to the empirical world of lowly actions and commonplace objects.”⁴⁵⁸ Commonplace moments, such those presented in the *TBH*, and commonplace objects such as those represented in *Korean Roulette*, these material rearrangements of signs and images, relationships between what is seen and what is said, between what is done and can be done, form a knowledge construct of fictions that intervenes in the general distribution of the ways of doing and making, as well as the relationship they maintain to modes of being and forms of visuality.

⁴⁵⁷ Rancière, 36.

⁴⁵⁸ Rancière, 32-39.

These artists show that the conceptual capture of identity resists the stability that supposedly exists in conjunction with them. In regard to the L.A. riots, Korean immigrant experience present a unique type of violence, primarily because they were not white and not Asian. As Tamara Nopper explains, in “The 1992 Los Angeles Riots and the Asian American Abandonment Narrative as Political Fiction,” the Korean immigrant entrepreneur is an outsider who is caught in the conflict between the state and the consumer, but who is supposedly disconnected from both sides.⁴⁵⁹ Many scholars locate Korean Americans as caught between various forces, in regard to the riots. I am taking this interpretation a step further by claiming that the Korean American position can be utilized as the embodiment of the mechanism of power relations. It is through the analysis of the Korean American artists' responses to the L.A. riots, that I have come to this proposition. The theoretical gestures that have been solidified through constant negotiations, eventually “graduate” into maneuvers, and these are the maneuvers that are applied in the dissertation project. It is through a concatenation of the strategies employed by Korean American artists, I recognize the tactics that organize the strategies that constitute the fiction of history. In the context of this dissertation project, the emphasis is on social political history and memory, and my personal experience informs the visual analysis. Similarly, works featured in this project incisively rely on their forms, materials, and artistic processes for their content, which inextricably ties the

⁴⁵⁹Nopper, “The 1992 Los Angeles Riots and the Asian American Abandonment Narrative as Political Fiction,” 73-110.

personal experiences of each artist to the artwork produced. My project seeks to advance a critical approach to the study of American Art History that conceives of the art object as a theoretical device that can help apprehend and unravel the formal and structural dimensions, in order to break the shackles of naturalized racial and national identities. It is an investigation of not only the structures of power, but also the forces that restrain and constrain the mechanisms of power. Navigating through these forces and recognizing the political implications of multiple epistemologies around the catalyst of the L.A. riots, shows how racism has served to unify the Korean American community, at the same time it has allowed Korean Americans to become a cultural and political entity in battle with other constituencies within their own community.

Figures

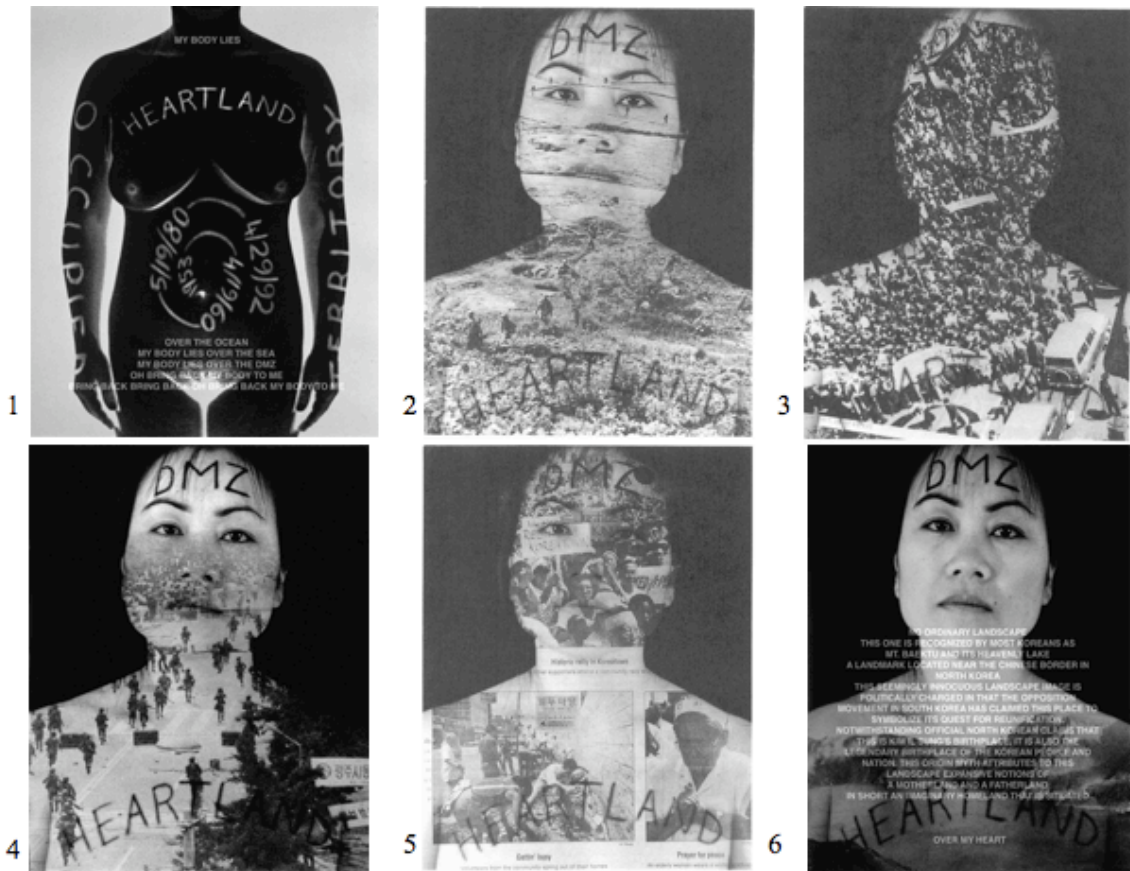


Figure 1: Yong Soon Min, *Defining Moments* series, 1992. Six 20" x 16" Gelatin silver print with etched glass.

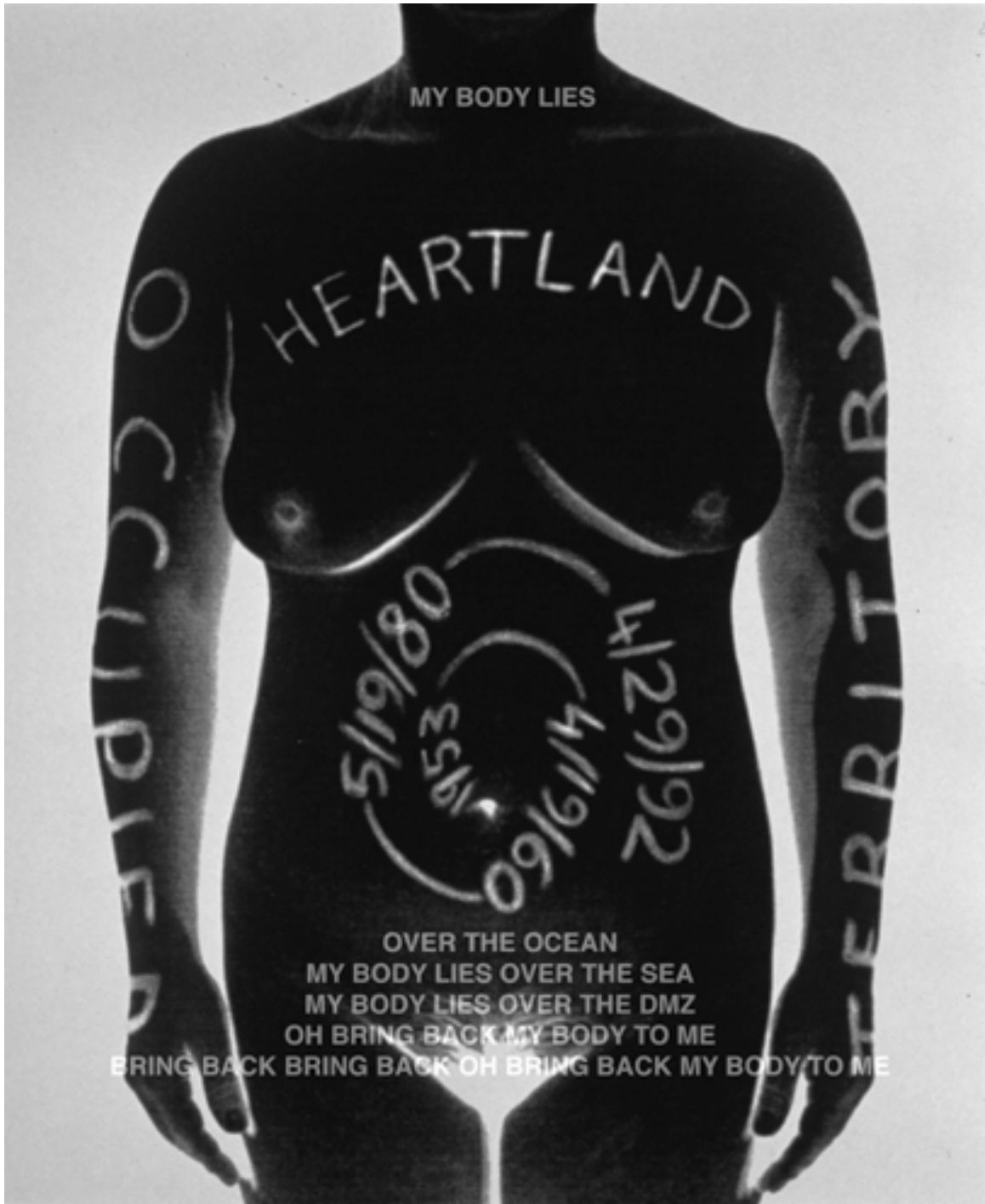


Figure 2: Yong Soon Min. "Number 1 of 6" from the *Defining Moments* series, 1992. 20" x 16" Gelatin silver print with etched glass.

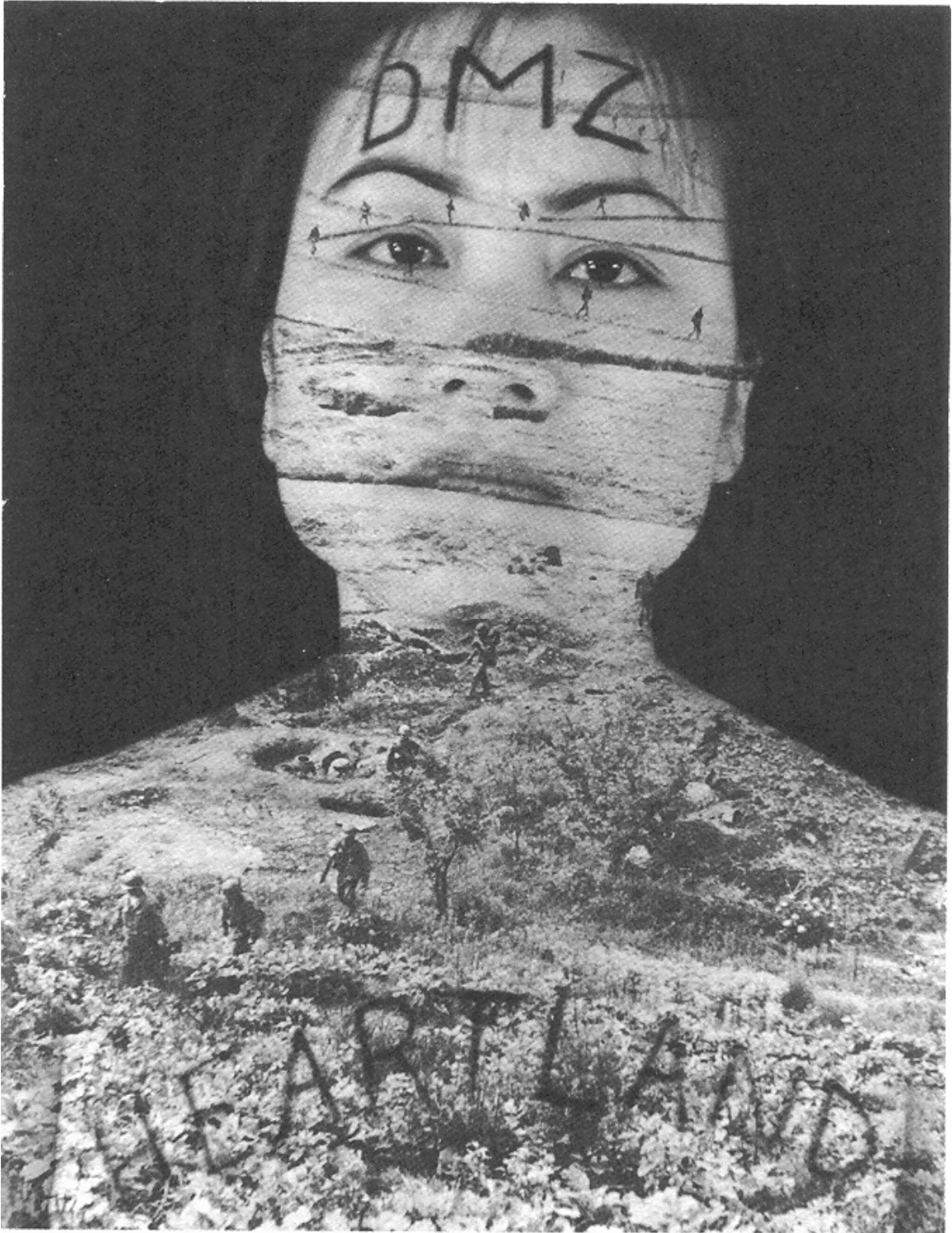


Figure 3: Yong Soon Min. "Number 2 of 6" from the *Defining Moments* series, 1992. 20" x 16" Gelatin silver print with etched glass.

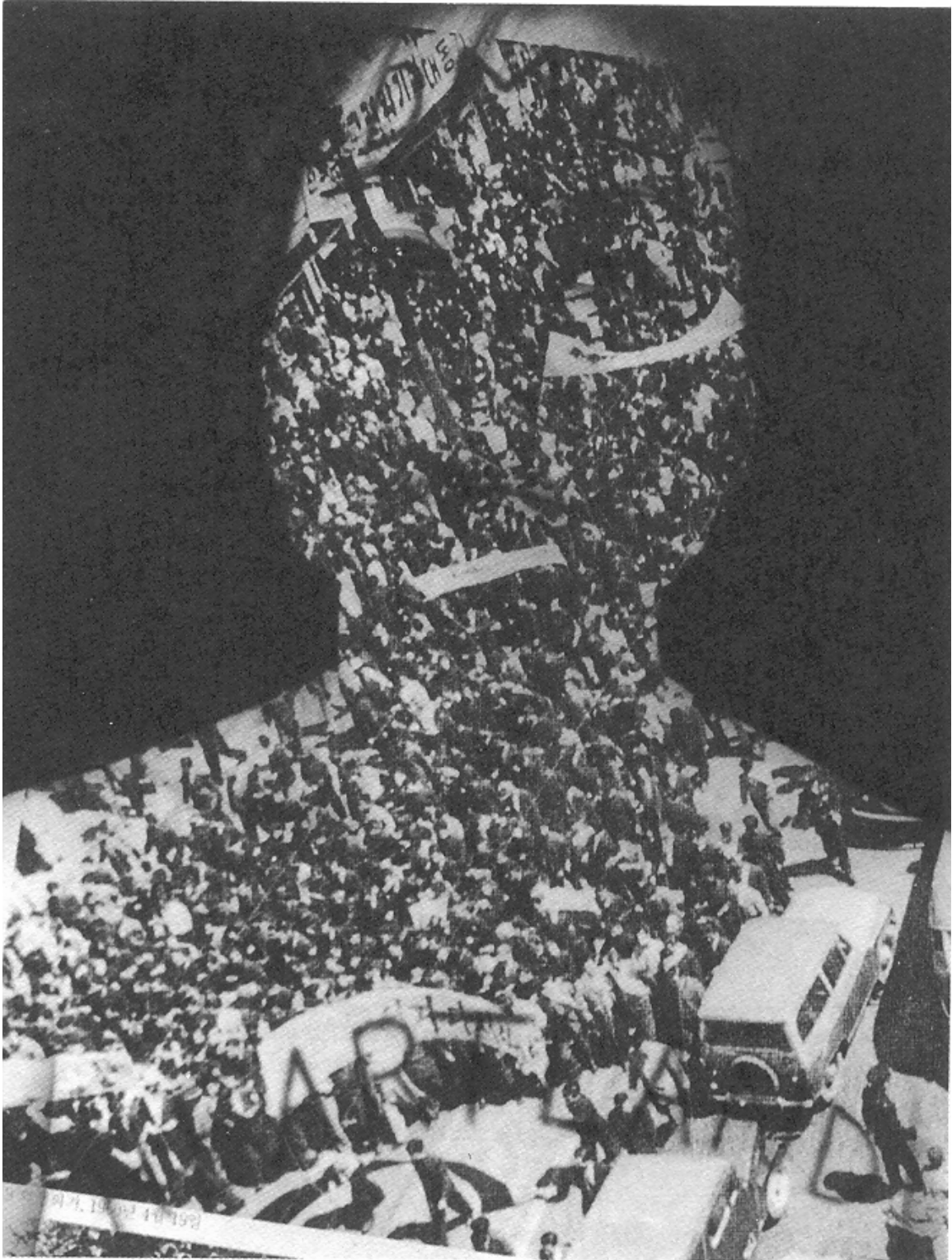


Figure 4: Yong Soon Min. "Number 3 of 6" from the *Defining Moments* series, 1992. 20" x 16" Gelatin silver print with etched glass.

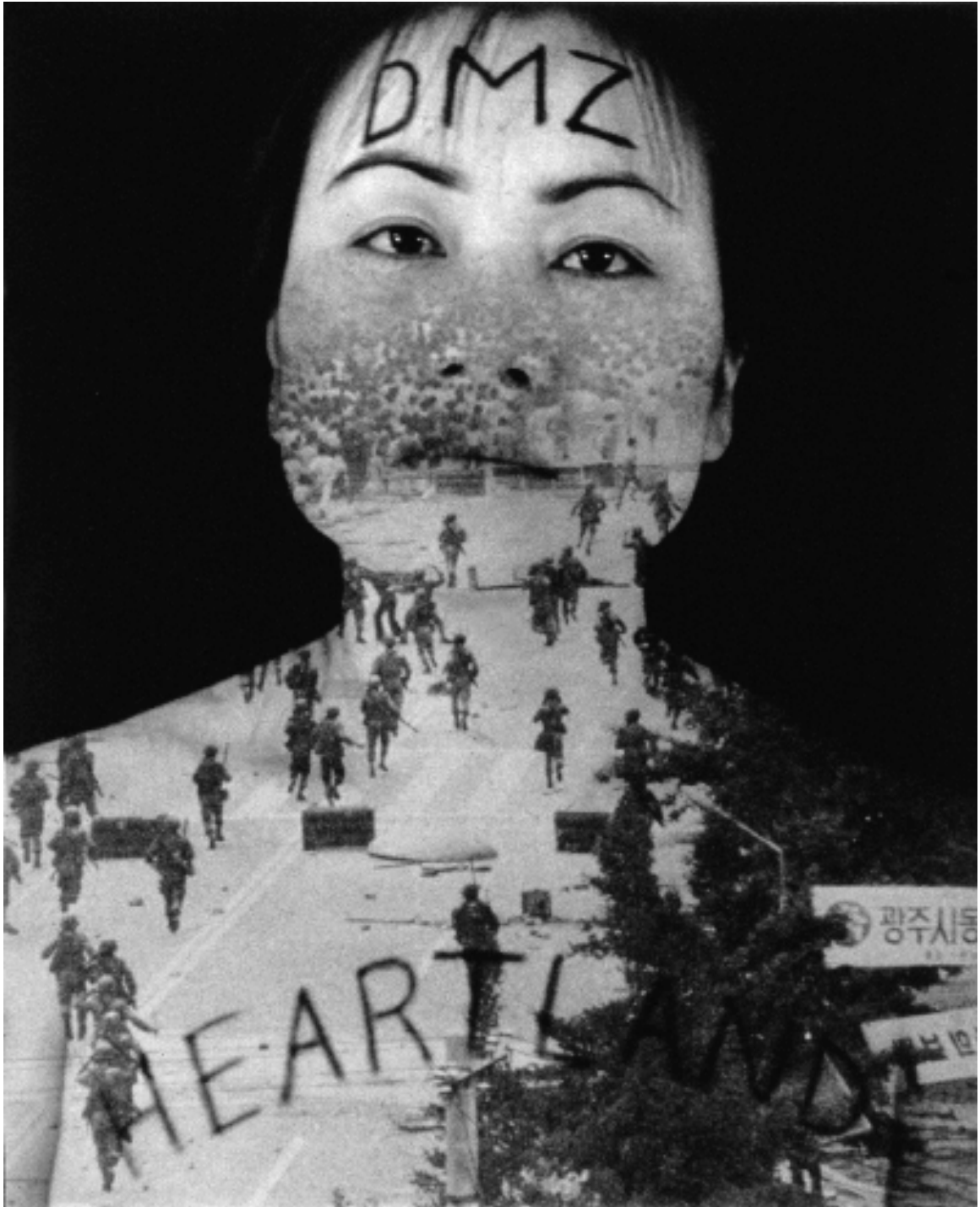


Figure 5: Yong Soon Min. "Number 4 of 6" from the *Defining Moments* series, 1992. 20" x 16" Gelatin silver print with etched glass.

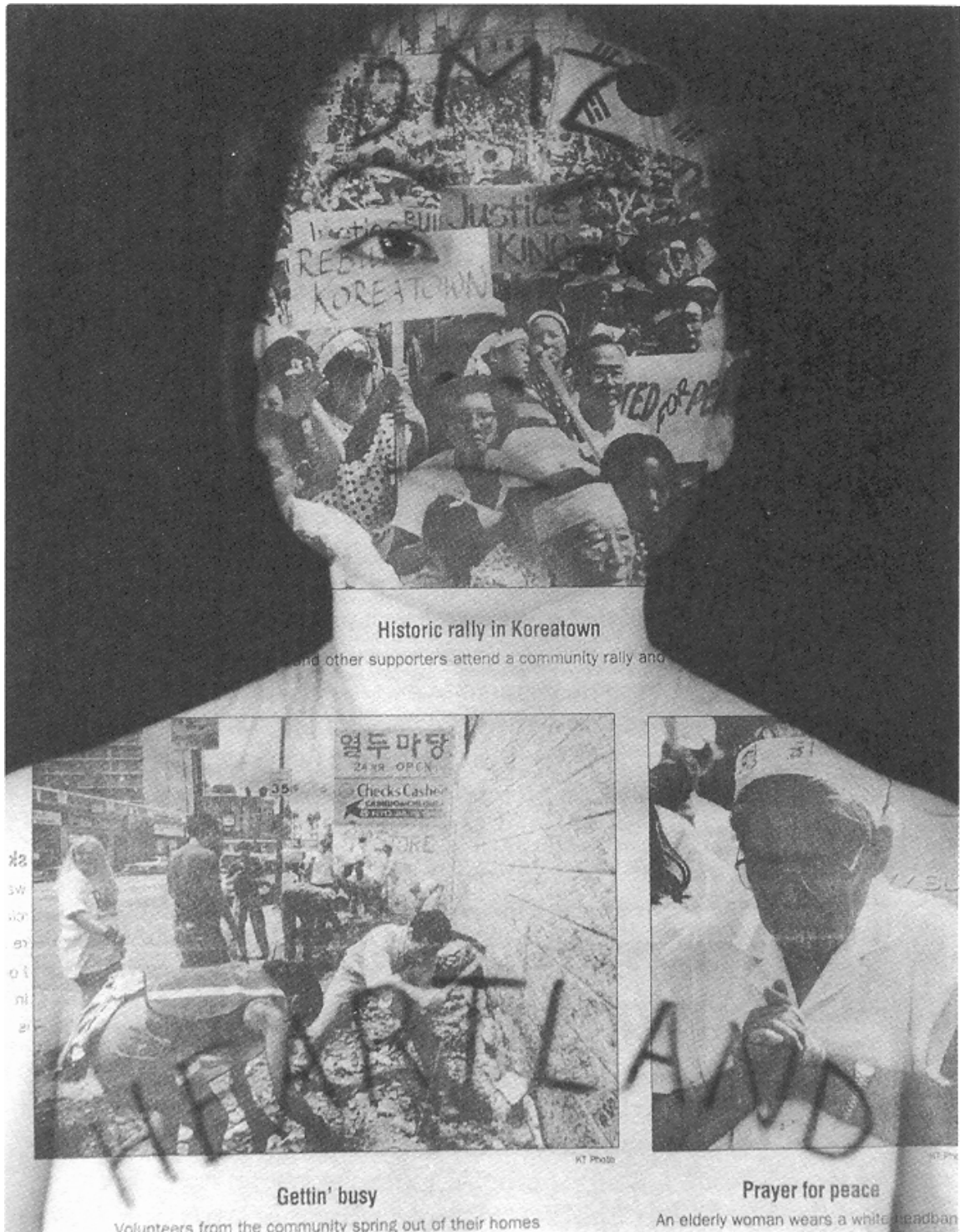


Figure 6: Yong Soon Min. "Number 5 of 6" from the *Defining Moments* series, 1992. 20" x 16" Gelatin silver print with etched glass.

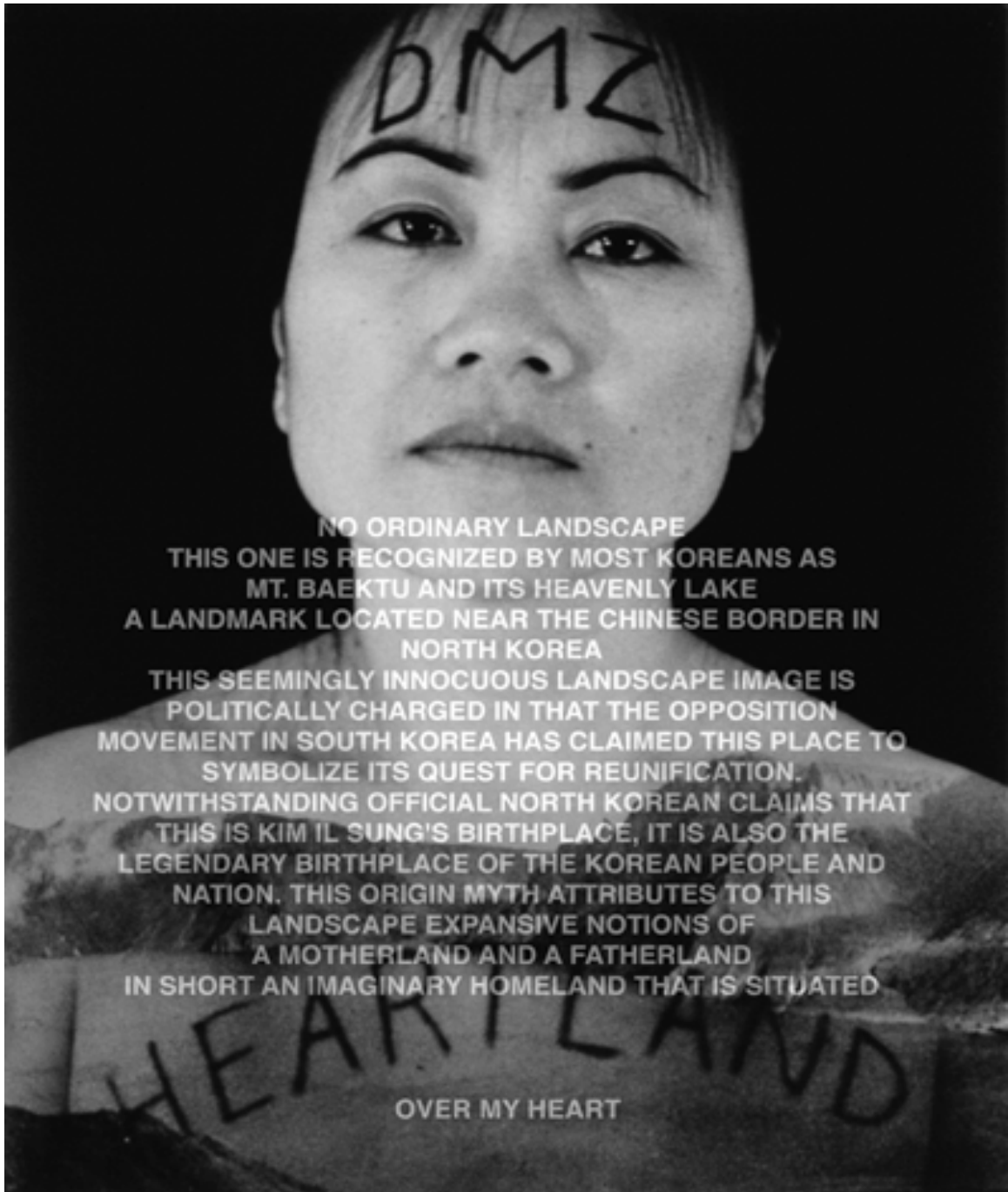


Figure 7: Yong Soon Min. "Number 6 of 6" from the *Defining Moments* series, 1992. 20" x 16" Gelatin silver print with etched glass.

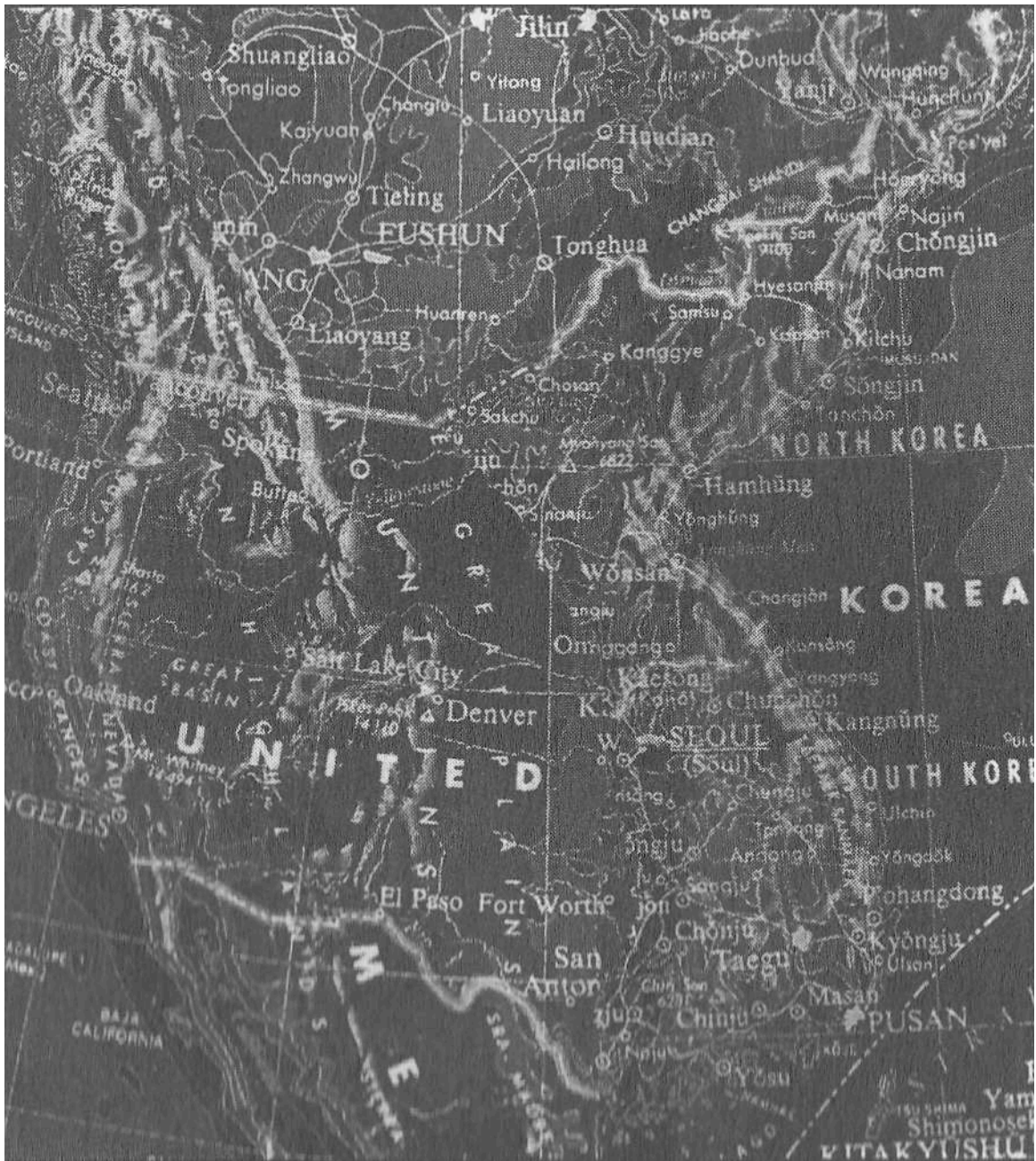


Figure 8: Yong Soon Min, California Korea composite map from *Writing Self, Writing Nation: A Collection of Essays on Dictée* by Theresa Hak Kyung Cha. Edited by Elaine H. Kim and Norma Alarcon. Third Women Press; 1st edition. 1994.



Figure 9: Yong Soon Min, *Ritual Labor of a Mechanical Bride Bowing*, multimedia installation, carpet, Korean wedding dress, 1993.



Figure 10: Yong Soon Min, *Dwelling*, Mixed Media, Korean mourning dress, paper, 1992.



Figure 11: Yong Soon Min, *Wearing History Installation*, initiated in 2007 in the Philippines, on-going.



Figure 12: Yong Soon Min, *Wearing History Installation*, initiated in 2007 in the Philippines, on-going.



Figure 13: Erica Cho, *Our Cosmos Our Chaos*, Installation View, 2004.



Figure 14: Erica Cho, *Our Cosmos Our Chaos*, Installation View, detail, 2004.



Figure 15: Erica Cho, "Tiger Snake, *Our Cosmos Our Chaos*, Installation View, set detail, 2004.



Figure 16: Erica Cho, *Our Cosmos Our Chaos*, Video Still, 2004, Ktown.



Figure 17: Erica Cho, *Our Cosmos Our Chaos*, Video Still, 2004, IN.



Figure 18: Erica Cho, *Our Cosmos Our Chaos*, Video Still, 2004, Ox.



Figure 19: Erica Cho, *Our Cosmos Our Chaos*, Video Still, 2004, Ritual Bowls.



Figure 20: Erica Cho, *Our Cosmos Our Chaos*, Video Still, 2004, Tiger



Figure 21: Erica Cho, *Our Cosmos Our Chaos*, Video Still, 2004, In & light string.



Figure 22: Sung Ho Choi, *Korean Roulette*, 1992. Mixed Media, electric fan, gloves, wood, paper, plastic. 48"x48"x10".

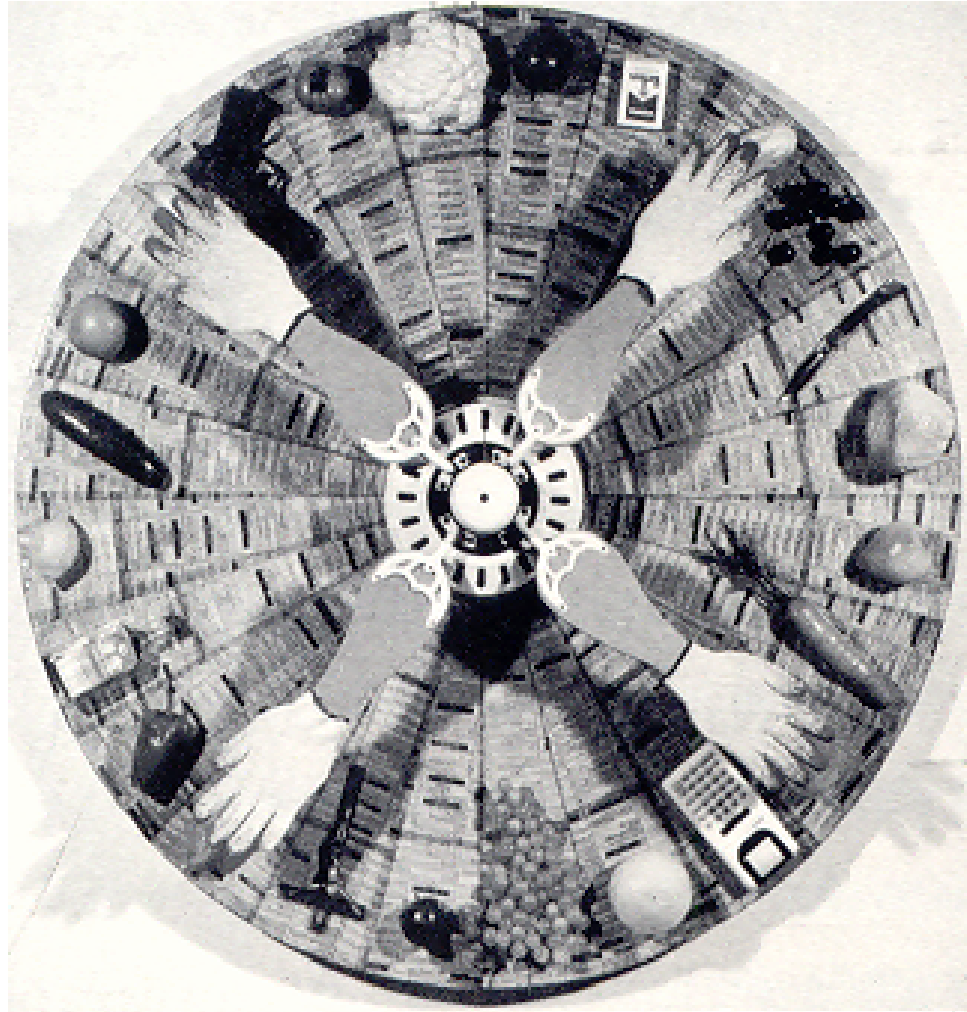


Figure 23: Sung Ho Choi, *Korean Roulette*, 1993. Mixed Media, electric fan, gloves, wood, paper, plastic. 48"x48"x10".



Figure 24: Sung Ho Choi, *Choi's Market*, 1993, Installation. Mixed Media, light fixtures, live plants, paper, charred wood.

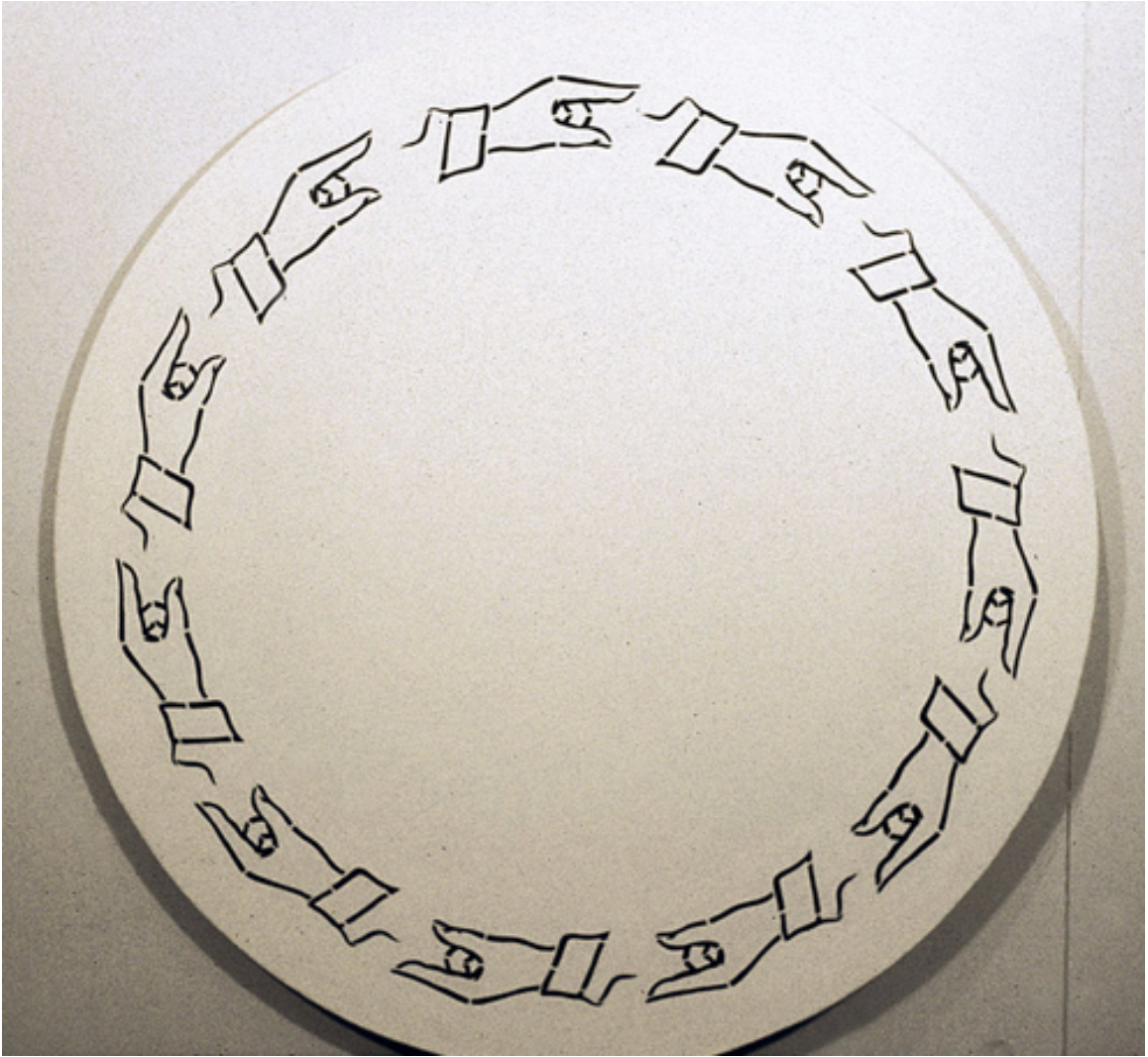


Figure 25: Sung Ho Choi, *Centrifugal*, 1999, 48"x48" acrylic paint, wood.



Figure 26: Sung Ho Choi, *Morning Calm*, 1999, from the Five Sites Project at Sand Point. 276"x384"x24" glue; gravel; moss; plaster; screws; sod; soil; styrofoam (tm); water; wood (plant material).



Figure 27: Sung Ho Choi, *American Pie*, 1996, 22" in diameter, silkscreen on acrylic, plywood, 22ft. Diameter. Mural project at IS-16, Queens, commissioned by New York City Board of Education, New York City School Construction Authority, and New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, Percent for Art.



Figure 27a: Sung Ho Choi, *American Pie*, 1996, 22' in diameter, silkscreen print, acrylic paint, plywood, newspapers, text, paint, and collage

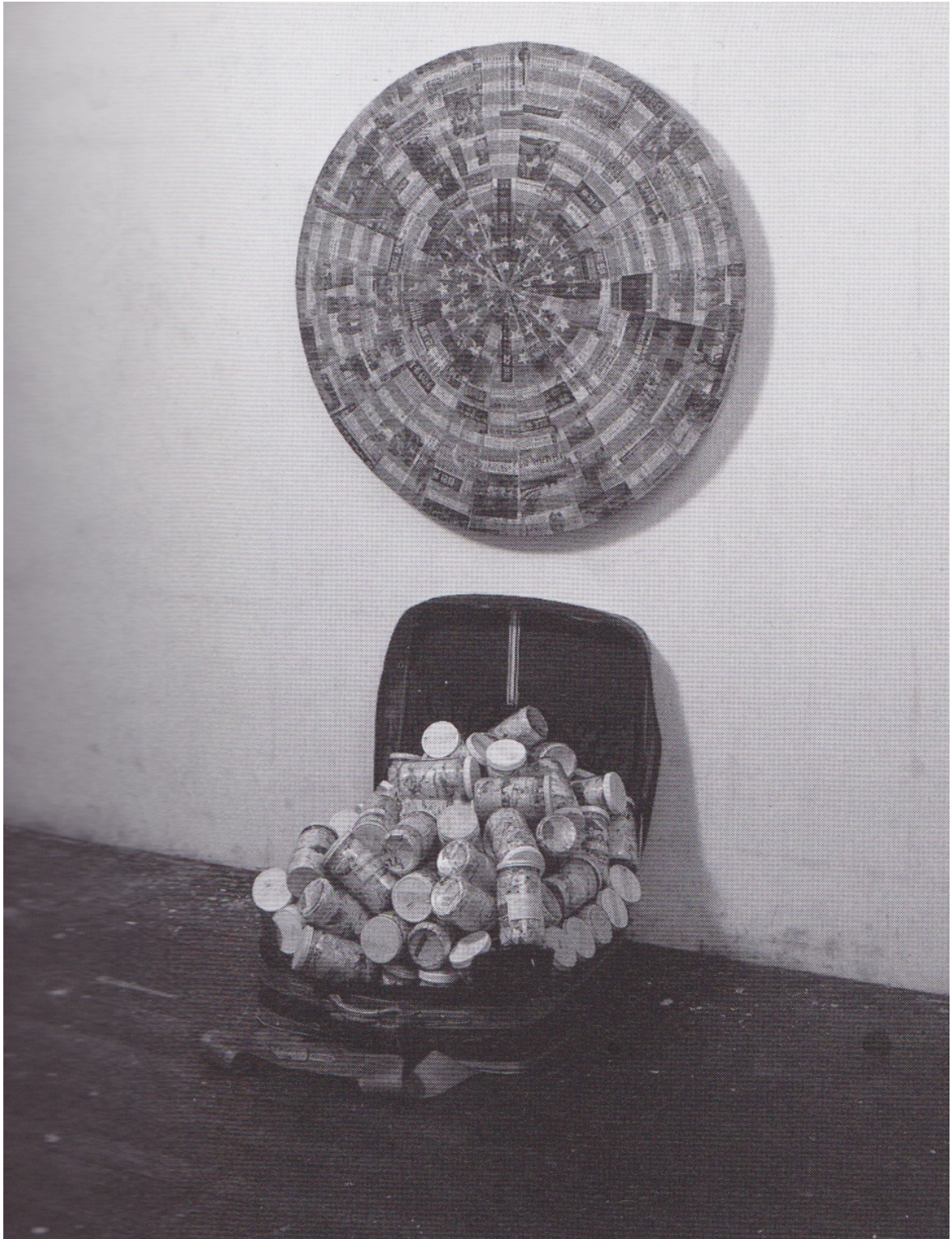


Figure 28: Sung Ho Choi, *Suitcase of Memories*, 1988-1992, mixed media, kimchi jars, silkscreen print, acrylic paint, plywood, newspapers, text, collage.



Figure 29: Y. David Chung, *Turtle Boat Head*, 1992, Installation Entrance View.

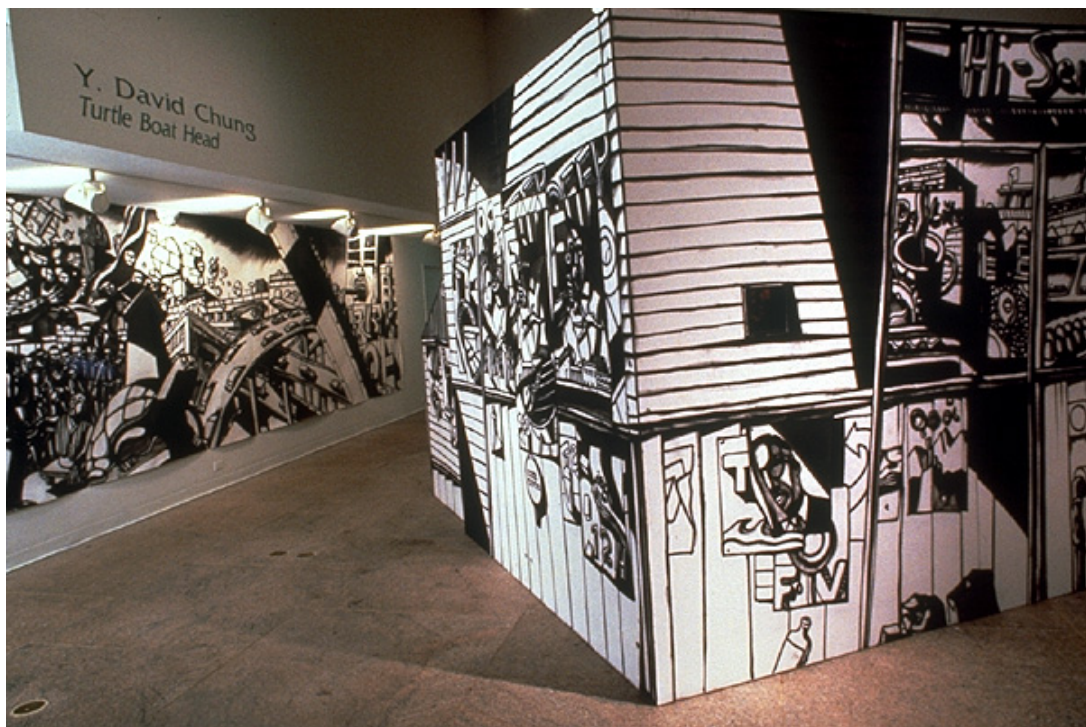


Figure 30: Y. David Chung, *Turtle Boat Head*, 1992, Installation View.



Figure 31: Y. David Chung, *Turtle Boat Head*, 1992, Installation View.



Figure 32: David Chung, *Turtle Boat Head*, 1992, Installation View.



Figure 33: Y. David Chung, *Turtle Boat Head*, 1992, Installation View



Figure 34: Y. David Chung, *Turtle Boat Head*, 1992, charcoal mural detail, boat.



Figure 35: Y. David Chung, *Turtle Boat Head*, 1992, charcoal mural detail, leaflet.



Figure 36: Y. David Chung, *Turtle Boat Head*, 1992, charcoal mural detail.



Figure 37: Y. David Chung, *Turtle Boat Head*, 1992, Installation view, detail.



Figure 38: Y. David Chung, *Turtle Boat Head*, 1992, installation view, detail.



Figure 39: Y. David Chung, *Turtle Boat Head*, 1992, video still, Liquor Store with Candy Overlay.



Figure 40: Y. David Chung, *Turtle Boat Head*, 1992, video still, Korean War, displaced Civilians, Japanese Annexation.



Figure 41: Y. David Chung, *Turtle Boat Head*, 1992, video still, Korean War, People Running from Fire.



Figure 42: Y. David Chung, *Turtle Boat Head*, 1992, video still, Car Transition.



Figure 43: Y. David Chung, *Turtle Boat Head*, 1992, video still, Korean War & 1992 Riots.



Figure 44: Y. David Chung, *Turtle Boat Head*, 1992, video still, Family Portrait at Airport.



Figure 45: Y. David Chung, *Turtle Boat Head*, 1992, video still, Church.



Figure 46: Y. David Chung, *Turtle Boat Head*, 1992, video still, Church overlay with Korean War.



Figure 47: Y. David Chung, *Turtle Boat Head*, 1992, video still, Suburb, store owner, money overlay.



Figure 48: Y. David Chung, *Turtle Boat Head*, 1992, video still, dinner, Korean War overlay



Figure 49: Y. David Chung, *Turtle Boat Head*, 1992, video still, Golf.



Figure 50: Y. David Chung, *Turtle Boat Head*, 1992, video still, Turtle Boat Re-enactment.



Figure 51: Y. David Chung, *Turtle Boat Head*, 1992, video still, Turtle Boat with '92 Riots Overlay.



Figure 52: Y. David Chung, *Turtle Boat Head*, 1992, video still, '92 Riots, looters.



Figure 53: Y. David Chung, *First Circle Folding Screen* 80x216x7, silkscreen on fabric, wood, metal, 1996.



Figure 54: Y. David Chung, *First Circle Folding Screen* 80x216x7, silkscreen on fabric, wood, metal, 1996, detail.



Figure 55: The *Los Angeles Times* Bicycle Club north on Western Avenue from Pico Boulevard, 1895. (source: Katherine Yungmee Kim, *Images of America: Los Angeles's Koreatown*, Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2011) 11.

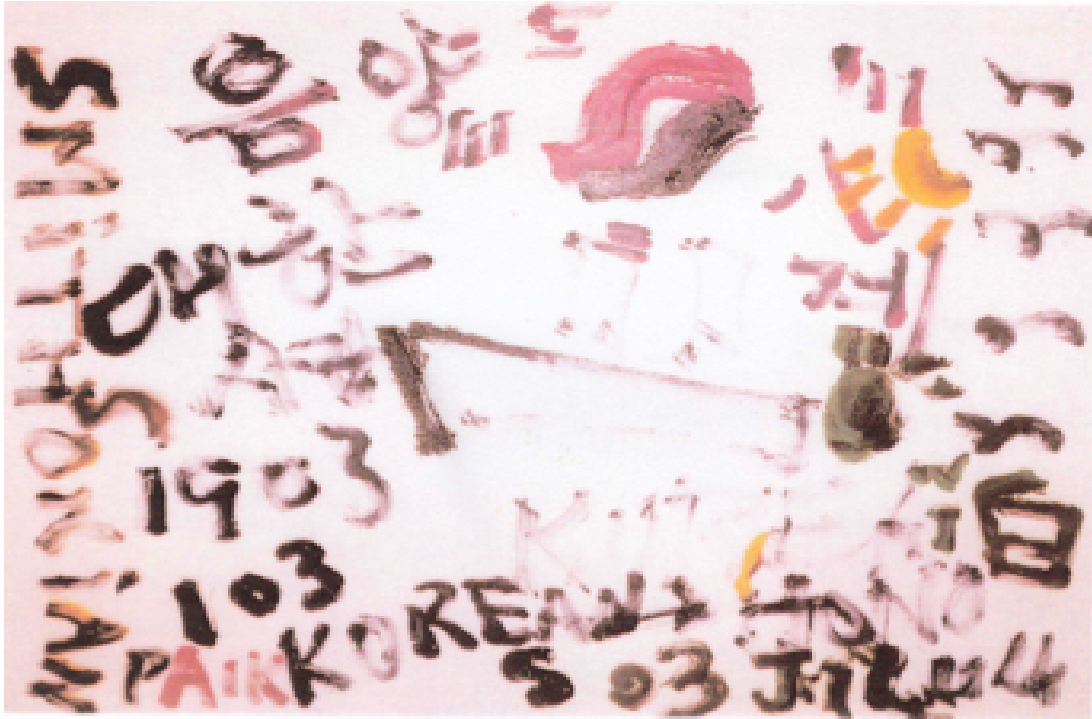


Figure 56: Nam June Paik, *Korea 100*, 2007, 24"x36", Acrylic on Canvas.

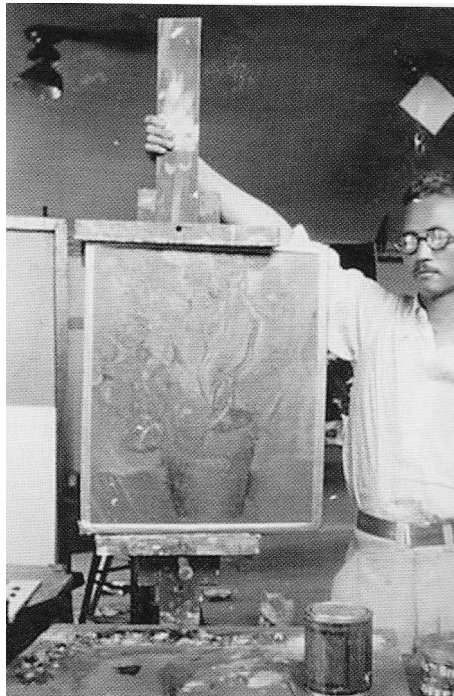


Figure 57: Charles Park at the Otis Art Institute, ca. 1927 (source: California Asian American Artists Biographical Survey).

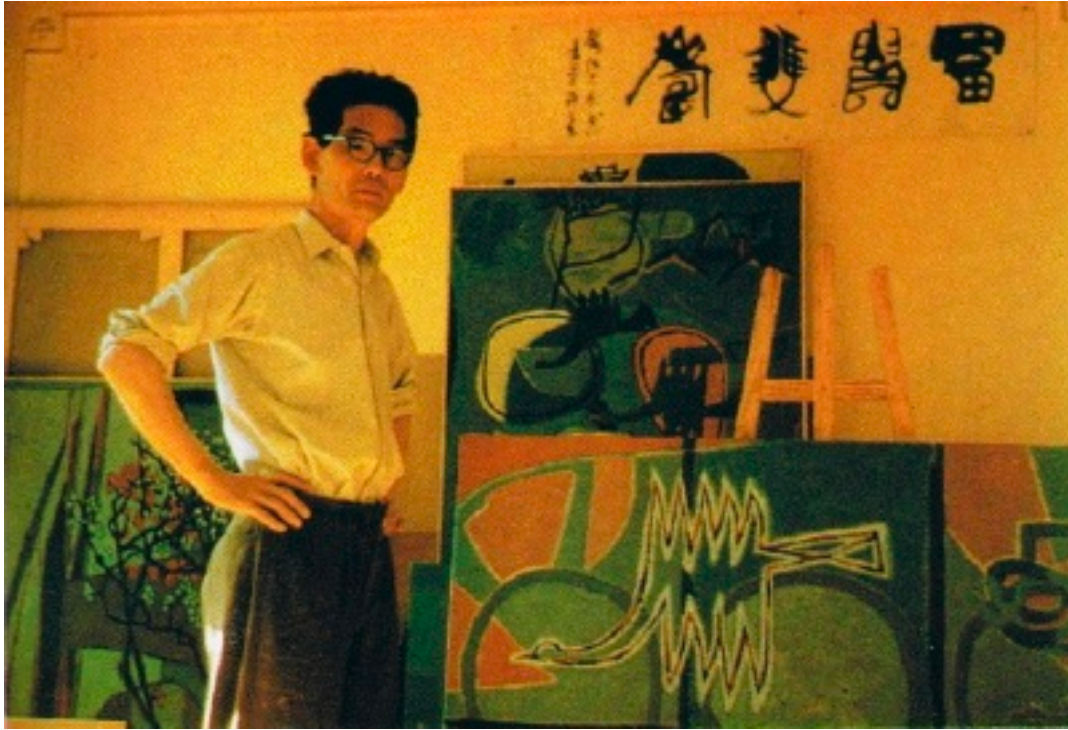


Figure 58: Whanki Kim, Paris Studio, 1956.



Figure 59: Tschang Yeul Kim, *Rites*, 1965, Oil on canvas, 64"x51".



Figure 60: Young Bae, ca. 1961 (source: California Asian American Artists Biographical Survey).



Figure 61: Po Kim sitting in wheelchair in his studio, photo taken by author on July 17, 2012.



Figure 62: Nam June Paik, *Memorial for John Cage*, Hyundai Gallery, Seoul, Korea, 1992.



Figure 63: Nam June Paik, “Om-Mah [Mother],” 2006, one-channel video installation on 19-inch LCD monitor, silk robe.



Figure 64: Lee Ungno, *Foule*, 1987, Foule series, ink on paper, 43.3"x45.7".

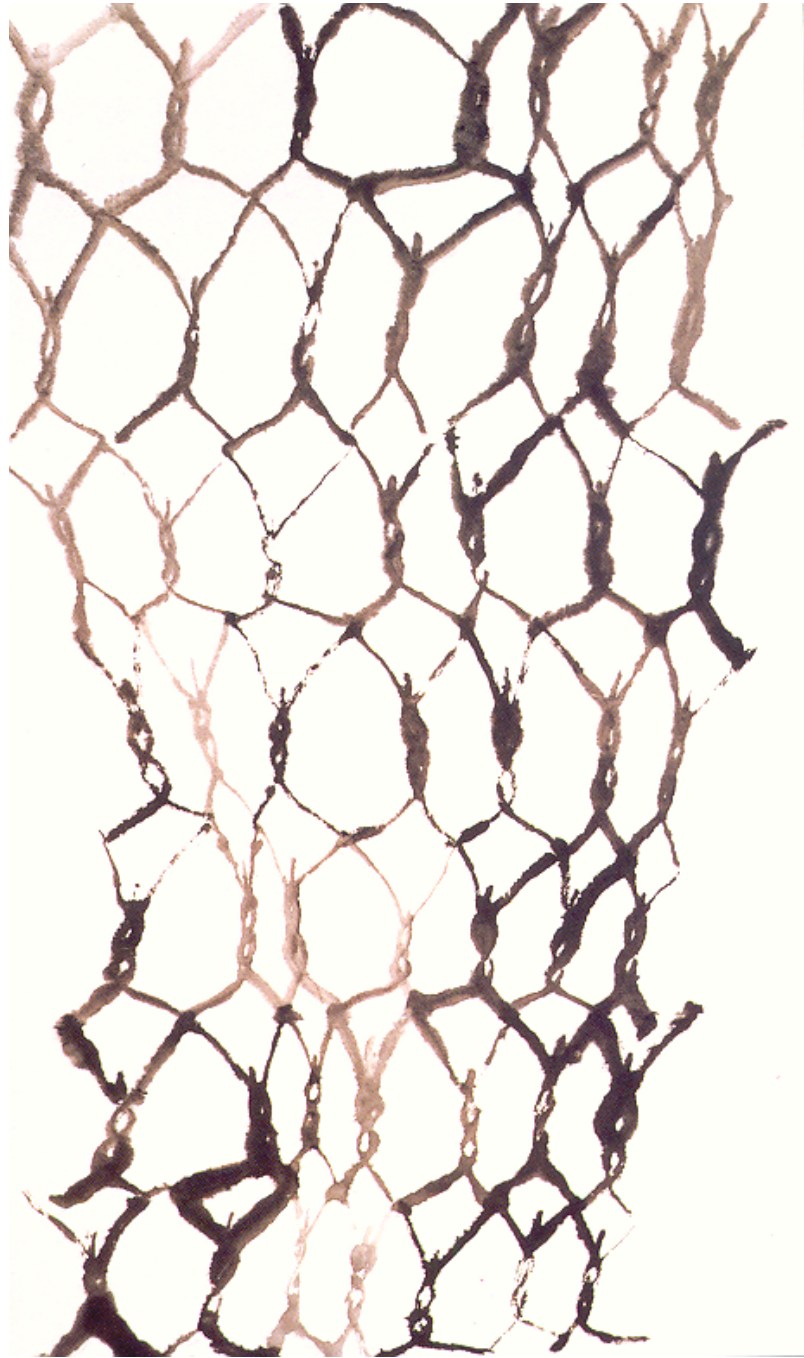


Figure 64: Se-ock Seo, *People*, 1999, Period series, ink on rice paper, 89.5"x71.4".



Figure 66: *American Artist*, 1943, Magazine Cover.



Figure 67: Dong Kingman, *South Street Bridge*, 1955, Watercolor on paper, 21 1/2" x 29 7/4".



Figure: 68: Eugene Delacroix, *Liberty Leading the People*, 1830, 102.4" × 128.0" Oil on canvas.

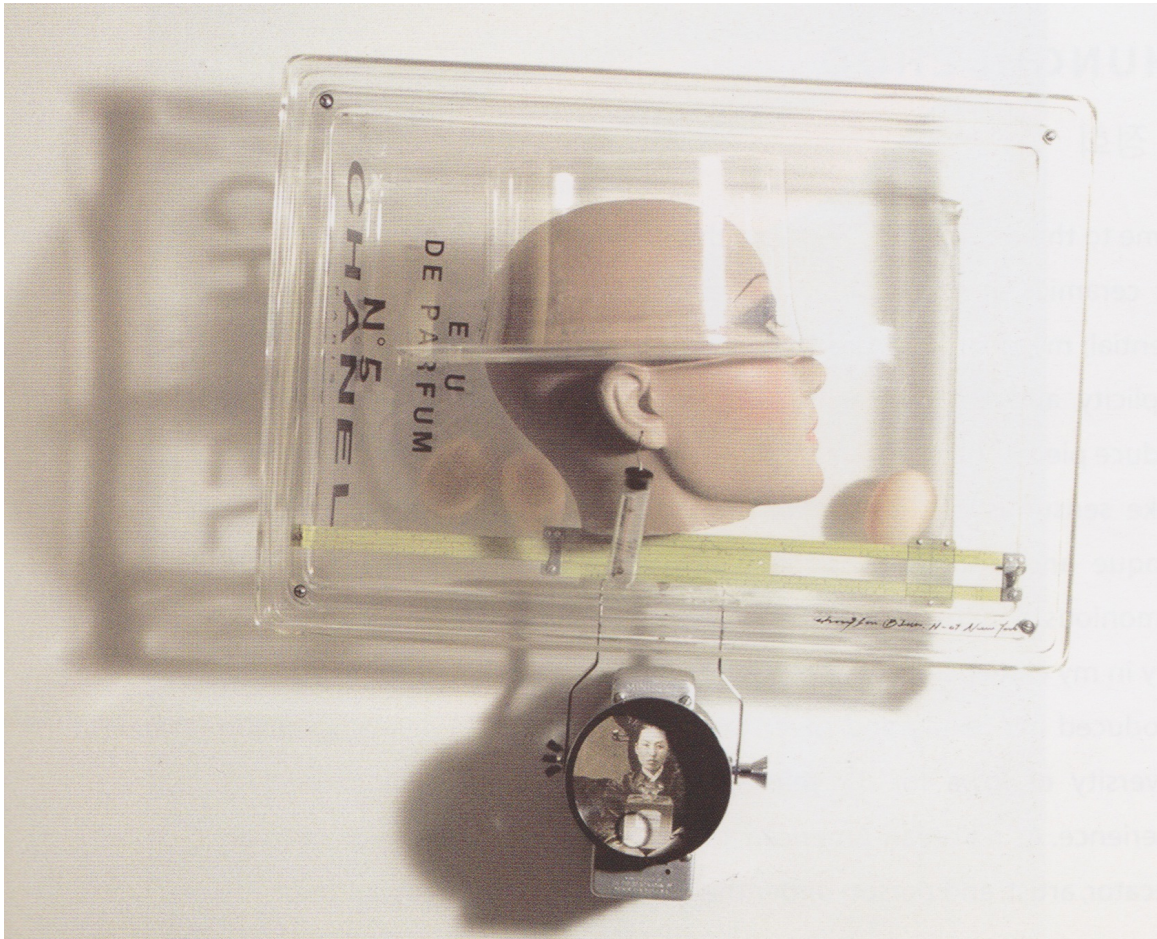


Figure 69: Chong Gon Byun, *Channel No. 5*, 2001, Mixed Media Assemblage, Digital Print, 9"x 20 3/4" x 9 6/8".

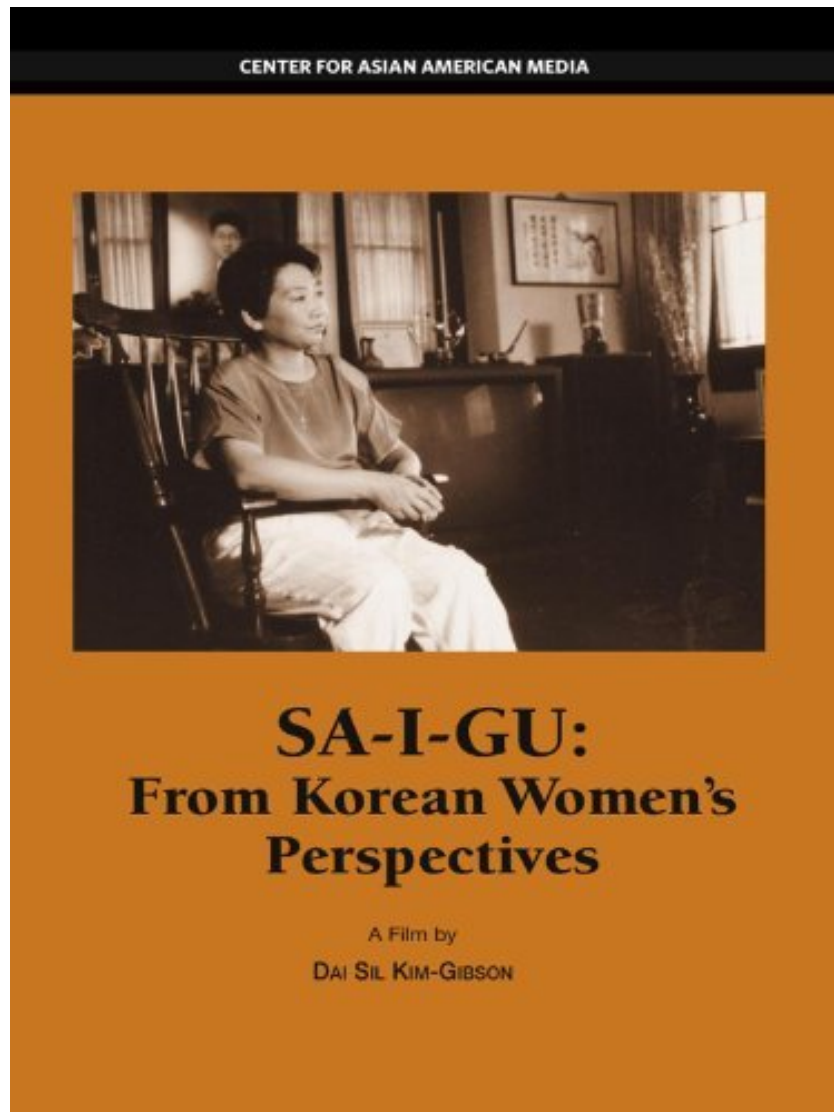


Figure 70: *Sa-i-gu: From Korean Women's Perspectives*, directed by Dai Sil Kim-Gibson (1997; San Francisco, CA: Center for Asian American Media, 1997), DVD.



Figure 71: O Yun, *Dance*, 1986, Woodcut print, 14.17"x10.24".



Figure 72: O Yun, *Grandmother*, 1983, Colored woodcut print, 20"x14".



Figure 73: Saeng-Kwang Park, *Shamanism 8*, 1994, colored ink on paper, 66.5"x67".



Figure 74: Ji-Young Yoo, *BooDaeChiGae*, 2001, video, Korean rice paper, Korean table, C-ration cans, video monitor.

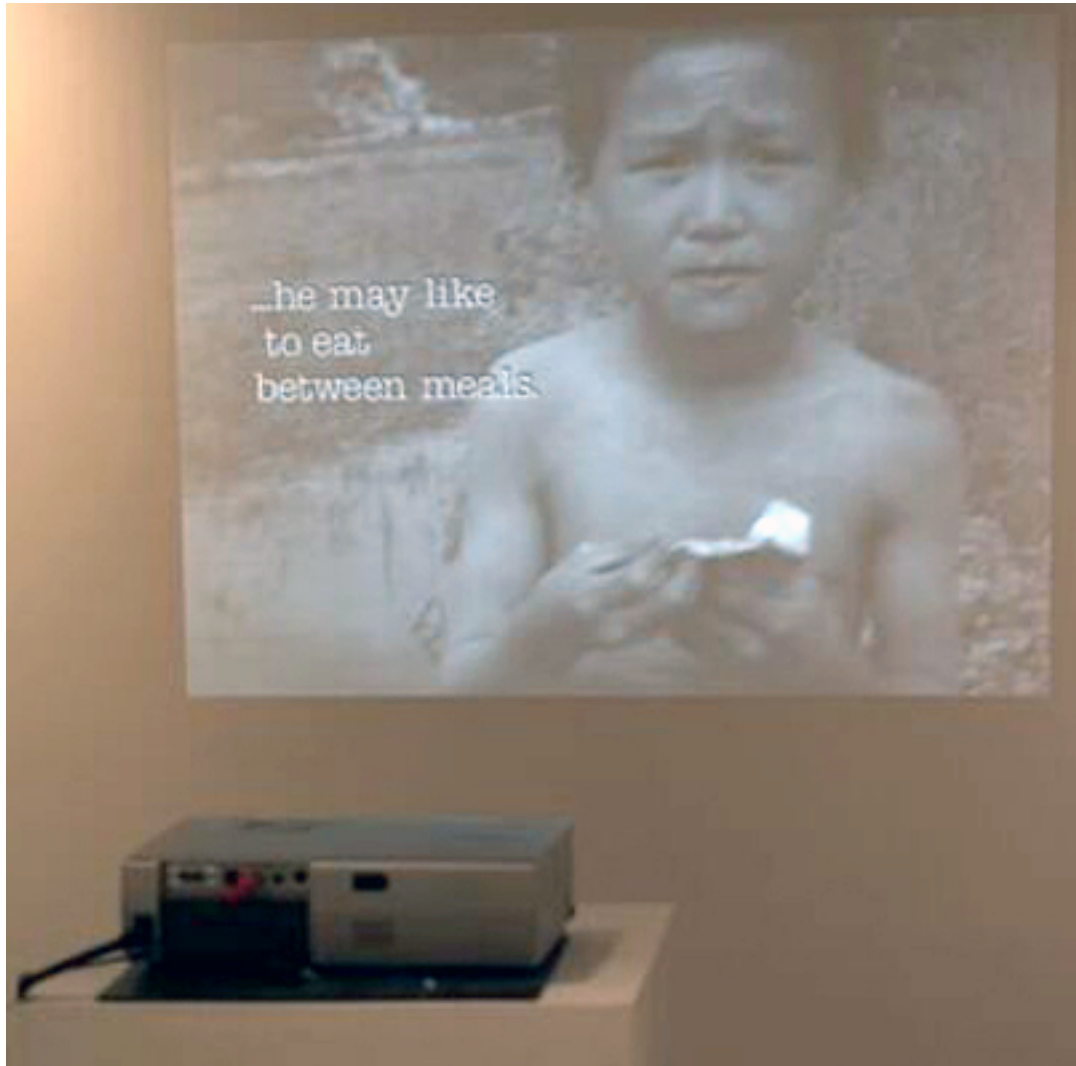


Figure 75: Deann Borshay Liem, *Practical Hints about Your Foreign Child*, 2006.



Figure 76: Hyun Lee, Grace M. Cho, and Hosu Kim, *6.216: history beneath the skin*, performance art, 2002.



Figure 77: Minjung Protest Banner, 1980.



Figure 78: Minjung Protest Banner in situ, 1980.



Figure 79: Black Warrior, North Wall, Sasinch'ong (Tomb of the Four Deities), Chi-an, Kirin province, 6th century.



Figure 80: Tortoise and snake, North wall of tomb mural, Great Tomb of Kangso, 7th century, Koguryo, Three Kingdoms Period.



Figure 81: Dong-In Park, *Mural*, Vermont Avenue and Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA 2002.



Figure 82: Yi Ungnok, Chaekkori, 19th century, Asian Art Museum, approximately 4ft x 6 ft.



Figure 83: Shin Yun-Bok (1758 - early 19century), "Dance with two knives"(쌍검 대무 雙劍對舞) from an album of genre paintings called Hyewon pungsokdo (1805). 10 7/8" x 9".



Figure 84: Shin Yun-Bok (1758 - early 19century), "Waiting for drinks being served at a hongru" '혜원풍속도첩 (蕙園風俗圖帖)' from an album of genre paintings called Hyewon pungsoedo (1805), 10 7/8" x 9".



Figure 85: Kim Hong-do, *Album of Scenes from Daily Life*, Late Chosen dynasty, 19th century CE. 11"x9 1/2".



Feature: 86: Kim Hong-do, *Album of Scenes from Daily Life*, Late Chosen dynasty, 19th century CE. 11"x9 1/2".



Figure 87: *Painter of the Wind*, directed by Jin Hyeok and Tae-yoo Jang, (2008, South Korea, SBS, 2008), DVD.



Figure 88: Screen shot of Royal Painting Workshop from *Yi-San*, directed by Kim Keun Hong, (2007, South Korea, MBC-TV Korea, 2008), DVD.



Figure 89: Thesesa Hak Kyung Cha, *Dictee*, (San Francisco, CA: First Third Woman Press, 1996).



Figure 90: Ito Jakuchu (1716-1800), *Yasai Nehan (Vegetable Parinirvana)*, 1792, Ink on paper.



Figure 91: Maggie Hazen, *Of Departed Delineations*, Installation, 2012, Plywood, Resin, Plaster, brown rice, white rice, bleached flour, corn. 10x12ft.



Figure 91a: Maggie Hazen, *Of Departed Delineations*, Installation, 2012, Plywood, Resin, Plaster, brown rice, white rice, bleached flour, corn. Detail.



Figure 92: Edouard Manet. *The Execution of Emperor Maximilian*. 1868–69. 8' 3 3/16 x 9' 10 7/8". Oil on Canvas.



Figure 93: Pablo Picasso, *Guernica*, 1937, 137.4" x 305.5". Oil on Canvas.

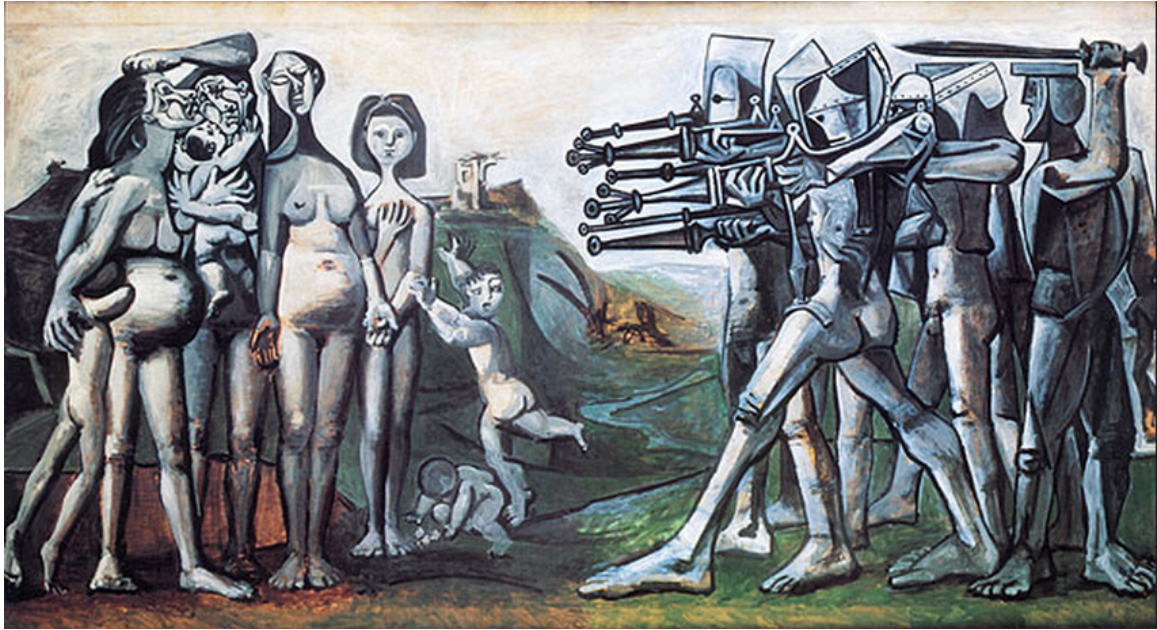


Figure 94: Pablo Picasso, *Massacre in Korea*, 1951, Oil on plywood, 43.3"x82.7".

In my house, the walls are yellow, the trim is red and black, the floor is brown...

the ceiling is

Figure 95: Lucy Lippard, *"In my house, the walls are yellow, the trim is red and black, the floor is brown...the ceiling is white."* 2007, vinyl lettering.



Figure 96: Jose Sardinana, *Untitled (Vermont & 3rd)*, 2006, 2 bricks, liquor store paper bag, primer paint, one acrylic tongue, ashes in the fall.



Figure 97: David Khang & Henry Tsang, *Untitled*, t-shirts, 2007.



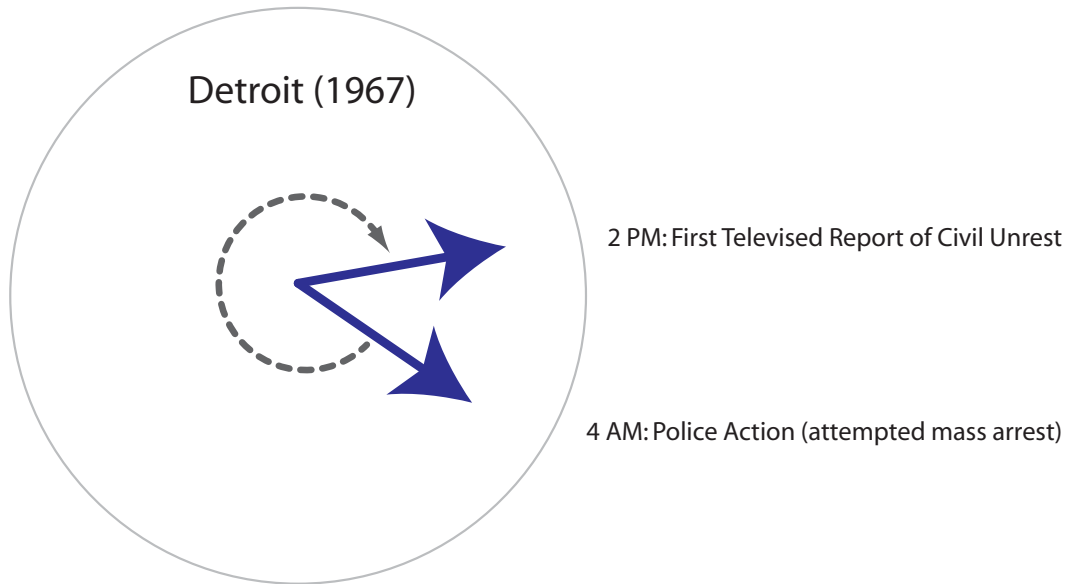
Figure 98: Elaine Brandt, *Catharsis*, mixed media collage, 2006.



Figure 99: Mark Bartlett & Jeffrey Skoller, *Please Please Please*, 2007, digital photo montage.



Figure 100: Other: Arab Artists Collective, Joe Namy, Rola Nashef, Sarita See, Bill St. Amant, *Faith for Miracles*, 2007, video.



Citation: B. Singer, "Mass Media and Communication Processes in the Detroit Riots" (1970)

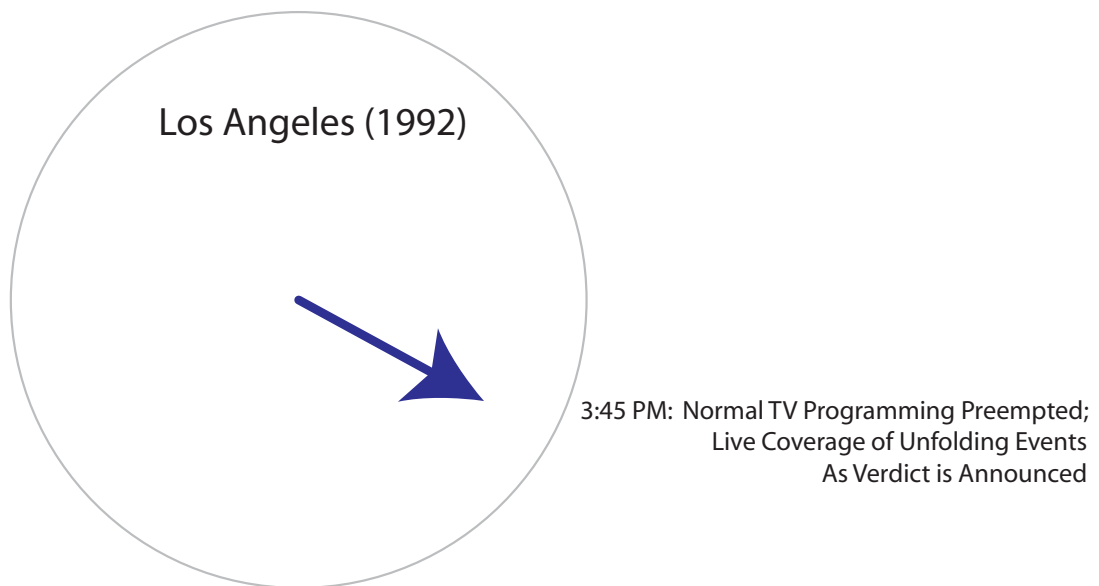
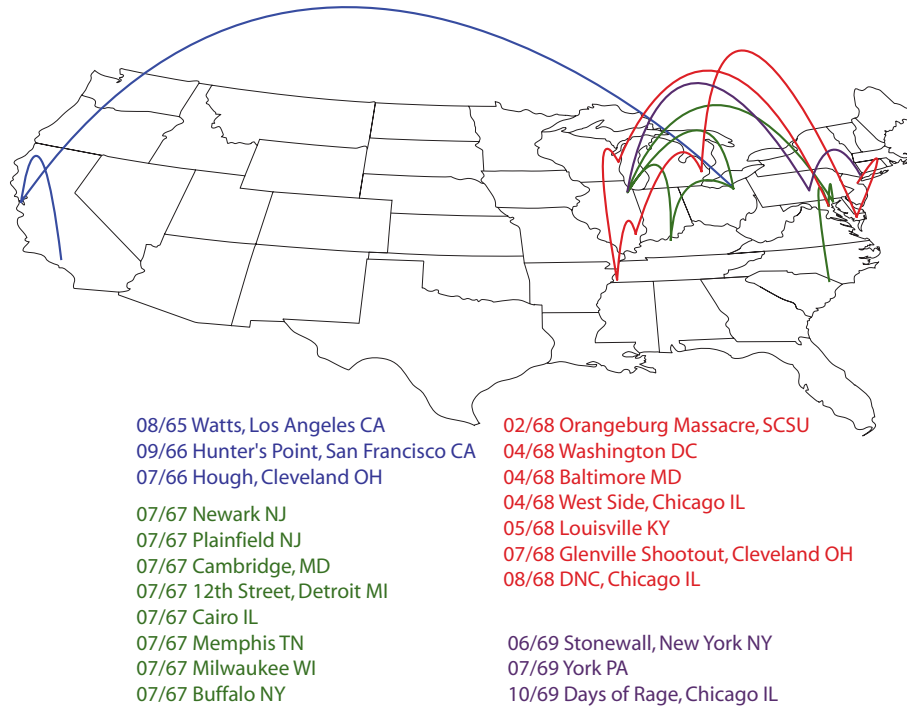


Figure 100a: Other: Arab Artists Collective, Joe Namy, Rola Nashef, Sarita See, Bill St. Amant, *Faith for Miracles*, 2007, video.

PARTIAL LIST OF CIVIL DISTURBANCES FOR FOUR YEAR PERIOD (1965-69) IN 48 STATES



PARTIAL LIST OF CIVIL DISTURBANCES FOR SIX DAY PERIOD (1992) IN 48 STATES



Figure 100b: Other: Arab Artists Collective, Joe Namy, Rola Nashef, Sarita See, Bill St. Amant, *Faith for Miracles*, 2007, video.

MESSAGES BY DIFFERENT MEDIA FOR DETROIT RIOT 1967
["How did you hear about the civil unrest, and what did you hear?"]

| Message | Radio | Television | Telephone | Person |
|--|-------|------------|-----------|--------|
| Riot (general) | 11.0 | 11.9 | 21.8 | 18.7 |
| Riot on Twelfth Street | 32.1 | 22.0 | 45.5 | 44.4 |
| Police actions | 3.6 | 10.2 | 3.6 | 2.1 |
| Looting, stealing | 16.5 | 18.6 | 10.9 | 11.2 |
| Arson | 14.7 | 10.2 | 12.7 | 12.4 |
| Streets blockaded | 1.8 | 0.0 | 1.8 | 2.1 |
| Curfew | 8.3 | 11.9 | 1.8 | 2.9 |
| Unlicensed club raided | 7.3 | 11.9 | 0.0 | 3.3 |
| Ideological statement | 0.9 | 1.7 | 0.0 | 2.9 |
| No response <i>[incomplete answer]</i> | 3.7 | 1.7 | 1.8 | 0.0 |
| Total | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% |
| Number of Respondents | 109 | 59 | 55 | 241 |

Data set based on interviews with 491 persons, representing some 10% of all direct arrests during four day civil disturbance.

Table drawn by B. Singer, "Mass Media and Communication Processes in the Detroit Riots" (1970); *emphasis and comments added.*

CHANNELS THROUGH WHICH THOSE ARRESTED
 FOUND OUT ABOUT DETROIT RIOT 1967

| Channel | Percentage of Responses |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| Direct Experience | 26.9 |
| Interpersonal: Phone | 8.8 |
| Interpersonal: Person | 30.0 |
| Radio | 16.5 |
| Television | 9.0 |
| Total | 100.2% |
| Number of Respondents | 491 |

After B. Singer, "Mass Media and Communication Processes in the Detroit Riots" (1970)
 Table based on interviews with 491 persons, representing some 10% of all direct
 arrests during four day civil disturbance.

Figure 100c: Other: Arab Artists Collective, Joe Namy, Rola Nashef, Sarita See, Bill St. Amant, *Faith for Miracles*, 2007, video.



Figure 101: Carlos Andrade & Todd Ayoung, *Body Burden, Placebo, Early Bird*, 2007.



Figure 102: Savatore Reda, *Raising the Bar*, ink, pencil, watercolor on canvas, 2007.



Figure 103: Compton Fashion Center, 2100 Rosecrans Ave., Long Beach, CA 90802.



Figure 104: Aroma Wilshire Center, 7680 Wilshire Boulevard Los Angeles, CA 90010.



Figure 105: MaDang, 621 South Western Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90016, South Entrance.



Figure 106: Faux Courtyard at MaDang, 621 South Western Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90016.



Figure 107: School Food at MaDang, 621 South Western Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90016.



Figure 108: CGV Theaters at MaDang, 621 South Western Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90016.



Figure 109: Solair Development, 16742 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA 90016.



Figure 110: Los Angeles City Councilman Herb Wesson, foreground center, Metro Board Member Yvonne Burke, center in blue suit, and Metro Property Management Chief Roger Moliere, center back row, join Koar Development Group officials in topping off ceremony where construction crews hoisted a potted tree onto the 22-story high roof. (Source: http://www.metro.net/news/simple_pr/metro-031008a/)



Figure: 111: Johnson House, 7777 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 100, Los Angeles, CA.



Figure 112: Johnson House, Boo Dae Ji Gae.



Figure 113: Photograph from the March of Solidarity, May 2, 1992.

음양 (yin yang)
 대한 (Korea) 대한민국 (The People's Republic of Korea)
 사람 (Person) 한국사람 (A Person from the Korean Peninsula)
 백 (Paik)
 백채 (Paekche)
 日 (100)

Nam June Paik, Korea 100, 2003

Flag, Republic of Korea (South Korea)

| | | | | |
|---------|-------|------------|--------|------------|
| | | | | |
| SOUTH | WEST | NORTH | EAST | CENTER |
| FIRE | METAL | WATER | WOOD | EARTH |
| SUMMER | FALL | WINTER | SPRING | TRANSITION |
| RED | WHITE | BLUE/BLACK | GREEN | YELLOW |
| HEART | LUNG | KIDNEY | LIVER | STOMACH |
| PHEONIX | TIGER | TORTOISE | DRAGON | SNAKE |

Flag, Symbols

Figure 114: Korean Flag with Painting Diagram.



Figure 115: The Monument of *Sam-il* Movement 1919 at Tapgol Park in Seoul, South Korea.



Figure 116: This replica can currently be purchased for \$57 at http://www.korean-arts.com/dolls_figurines/wood_and_stoneware/turtle_ship.htm.



Figure 117: Korean Business Signs, Harvard and Olympic Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA.



Figure 118: Korean Monument Project, Los Angeles (Renamed Seoul International Park).

Conceptual model for interpreting *Turtle Boat Head* Installation, 1993

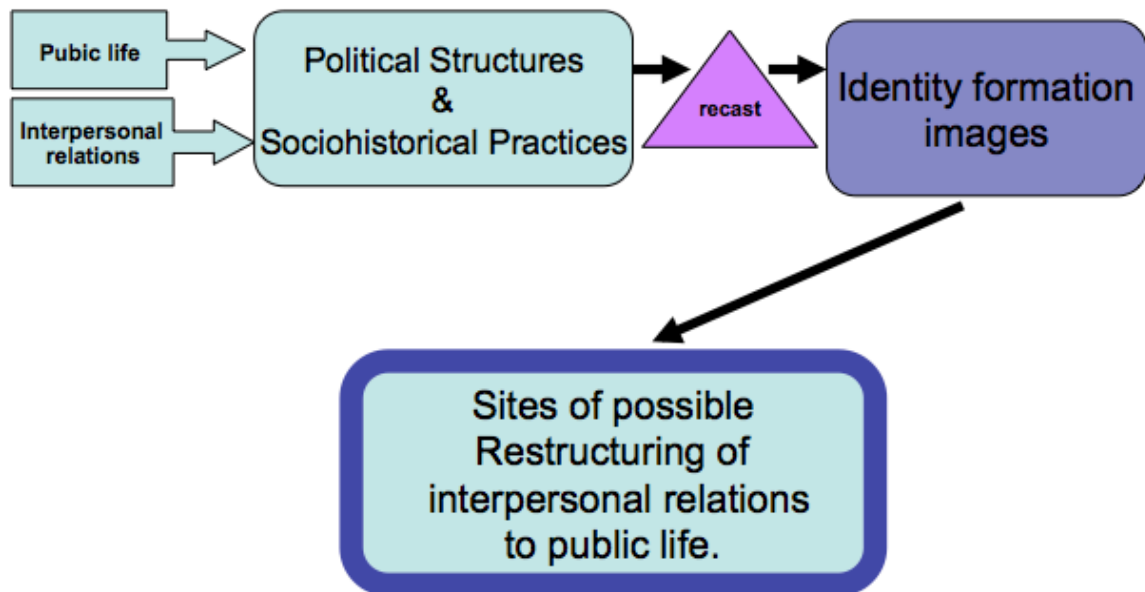


Figure 119: Audience diagram. Based on Darnell Hunt, *Screening the Los Angeles "riots": Race, seeing, and resistance*. (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 182.

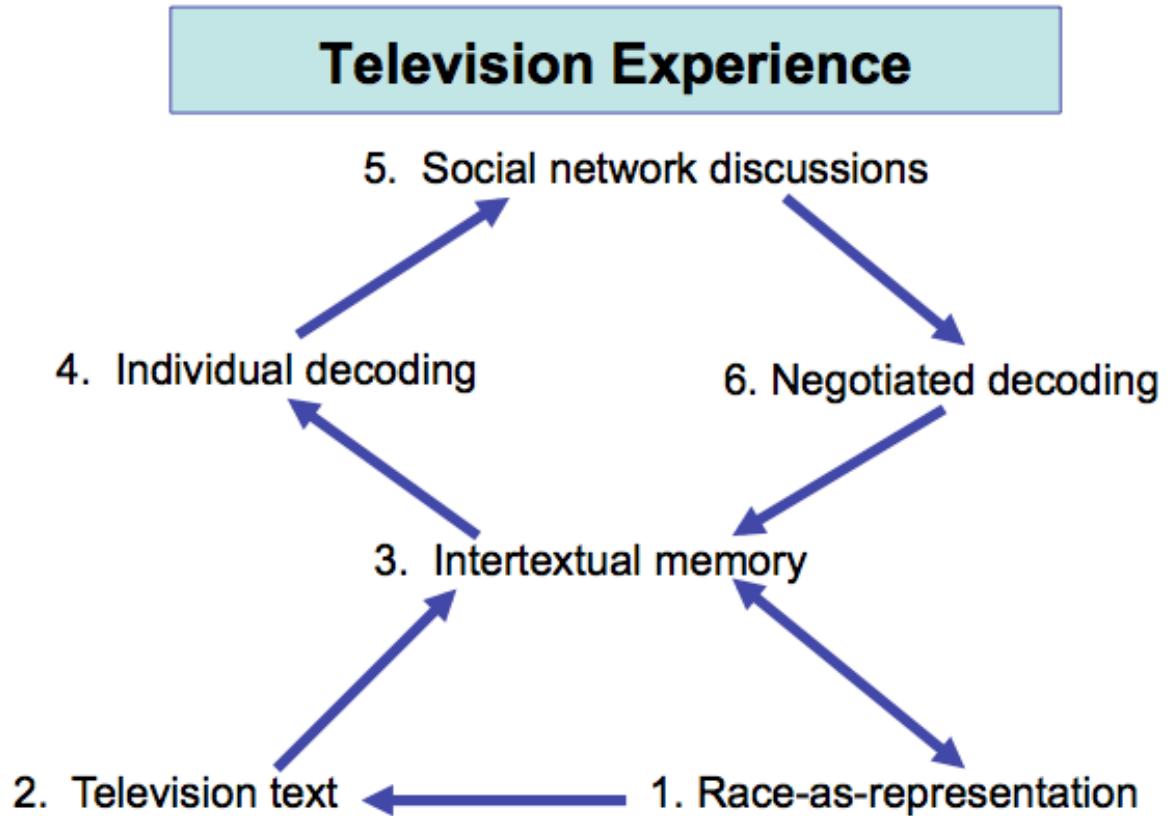


Figure 120: Audience diagram. Based on Darnell Hunt, *Screening the Los Angeles "riots": Race, seeing, and resistance*. (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 182.

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