A Search for a New Paradigm in Korean Contemporary Art

A Proposal for an Exhibition 'Beyond Surface Culture: The New Grammar of Korean Contemporary Art'

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I hereby declare that the work presented in this thesis is my own.

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Acknowledgement

When I began my doctoral study in 2005, I had little knowledge about the PhD program at Goldsmiths University and life in London. Therefore I was not lacking difficulties and hardships in adapting to my new life in London and to the academic environment at Goldsmiths. Luckily I was able to continue my study, benefited by many warm-hearted people, especially my supervisors Professor Nick de Ville and Dr. Andrew Renton, as well as various friends who I have met in London.

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I feel the deep appreciation for completing the PhD program at Goldsmiths University which has been a remarkably valuable experience, and at the same time hope my study can contribute to the contemporary art and curating field even a little bit.

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the character of Korean contemporary art. I argue that an intense time-space compression produced by communication technology and the information revolution of the late 20th century has meant that Korean society has experienced the symptom of 'schizophrenia', as theorized by Fredric Jameson, which understands the modern capitalist world as being a perpetual present and characteristically depthless. Facilitated by this flourishing media culture and the rapid diffusion of digital technologies, I claim that a new 'surface culture' emerged in Korean society as Korean society became accustomed to identifying information through images and adopting the concomitant superficiality that this engenders.

The Korean art world has also been heavily affected by Western artistic and cultural content through various media and exchanges with the international world, largely as a consequence of the nation's 'globalization policy'. I assert that Korean artists have experienced a new type of visual sensation and stimulation amid the torrent of information and started to understand the world as raw material by registering the received content based on its surface and turning it into modules.

However, instead of looking at the current situation in a negative way, I argue for a positive evaluation based on Mario Perniola's 'philosophy of the present', as the basis to propose a new paradigm in Korean contemporary art. According to Perniola, contemporary society is a full world where everything is available, and what is important is to manage the data and use it appropriately.

I argue that one-way communication and the actuality of mass media influence in Korea has reached its peak, and that Korean artists have begun to develop a new

paradigm of accumulating data and have begun arranging it according to their own criteria throughout the last decade.

In conclusion, I propose an exhibition featuring the art practices which embrace this new paradigm, and which explore innovative ways of making inventories and classifying history and culture.

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INTRODUCTION

In this thesis, I examine the recent history of Korea in terms of social and cultural change and their effects on the Korean art world, in order to define new paradigms in recent art and their transitional moments. I do this as a curator interested in producing an exhibition which characterizes what I see as significant developments in the realm of Korean contemporary art. The practice element of this thesis, therefore, is an exhibition entitled "Beyond 'Surface Culture': A New Grammar of Korean Contemporary Art" which was held at Space Can in Seoul, Korea from January 29th, 2010 to February 11th, 2010.

I argue, as the preliminary grounds for conceptualizing this exhibition, that internationalization and Korean globalization policies of the early 1990s increased dramatically Western cultural influences in the country. This was allied with the development over the same period of an extensive digital culture (via a revolution in information and communication technologies, and the rise in global connectivity), and its resulting time-space compression. As a result Koreans became accustomed to receiving and processing unprecedented quantities of information. This led to the development of an understanding of diverse cultures and histories through their 'surface'. I term this 'Surface Culture'.

Fredric Jameson characterizes the psychological state caused by these mass-media influences, as 'schizophrenic', adopting Lacan's term meaning an experience of a perpetual present. Jameson argues for a 'depthless' culture of synchronicity and intertextuality, which results in the 'schizophrenic' quality of the post-modern condition. This argument is, in part, based on Debord's influential views developed in the 'Society of the Spectacle' that media images have become commodities and have the power to affect the market and people's lives in the late capitalism,.

However, I argue that Korean artists became used to living in the midst of the constant

information flow of the mass-media; that they transcend the 'schizophrenic' cultural paradigm outlined by Jameson. I assert that in the last decade they not only mastered their reception of multi-media information through the paradigm of the 'surface', but also began to handle it flexibly and creatively via digital technology. I claim that this new visual cultural paradigm can be understood and analyzed via Italian philosopher, Mario Perniola's positive assessment of contemporary culture.

Perniola rejects Guy Debord's negative critique of the 'Society of the Spectacle', which is based on the assumption of one-way communication and the 'actuality' of mass-media that grants great importance to instantaneous transmission. Instead, Perniola maintains that with the arrival of the digital information society artists could move to a stage of 'virtuality' where everything is available and information is arranged and used according to appropriate needs. He claims that contemporary artists should assume the image of a 'full world', and explore and integrate many oppositional systems which he describes by an analogy to the characteristics of ancient Egyptian culture. According to Perinola, 'the fullness of time' as in ancient Egyptian culture which asserts the present as time's sole dimension, removes the boundary between different times and spaces, and interchange far-flung categories and hence produces an 'enigmatic synchronicity'.

I argue that experiencing a period of constant social and cultural changes, Korean artists have come to develop the attitude proposed by Mario Perinola and continued to experiment with innovative ideas and ways of classifying and re-interpreting history and culture. My claim is that during the last decade Korean artists have traversed the boundaries of different genres and notions in art and culture and finally developed flexible and inventive points of views to manage information via digital memory databases and by adopting a two-way communication system. Moreover, I argue that while constantly selecting appropriate information from databases and resourcefully composing it according to their own perspectives for each work, they have created a new paradigm which develops individual syntaxes and accordingly imposes new meanings on previously used

cultural content. This I term 'Post-Surface Culture Art'. While 'Surface Culture' allows access to a literally endless range of cultural information, its contents are de-contextualizing in a 'schizophrenic' way as theorized by Fredric Jameson as an attribute of postmodern culture, I maintain that 'Post-Surface Culture' finds the means to re-contextualizes this information flow, and it accordingly regains a 'depth' which was lost.

In my research I investigate the different perspectives and attitudes of Korean contemporary artists that allow them to transcend the limit of mass-media society and 'complete' time by imaginatively understanding and compartmentalizing history and culture. By defining 'Post-Surface Culture' as a new paradigm, I affirm that my research suggests possible bridging points reconnecting severed temporalities and spatialities in contemporary Korean society and culture. This analysis I have used as the basis of my exhibition "Beyond 'Surface Culture': A New Grammar of Korean Contemporary Art" which forms the practice element of the thesis.

CHAPTER I

The Growth of Digital Media and Globalization: 'Surface Culture' in Korean Society

1) The Economic Growth and Media Liberalization in Korea

1.1 The History of Economic Growth in Korea between the 1960s and the mid-1990s

After the Korean War (1950-1953), Korea was one of the poorest countries in the world. However, with substantial assistance from the US, the Korean economy slowly recovered during the 1950s and finally achieved the miracle of rapid economic growth through the export-oriented industries of heavy machinery, electronics, automobiles, shipbuilding and microchips throughout the following three decades. Despite many negative side-effects, such as the high rate of foreign debt and the market concentration, the average growth rate of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in Korea was 8.5% between 1962 and 1989. Charles Harvey and Lee Hyun Hoon report: 'Over the long period of 1962-89 per capita income increased from US$87 to US$5,199, the economy's GDP expanded from US$2.3 billion to US$220.7 billion, and exports increased from US$55 million to US$61.4 billion.' (Harvey and Lee, 2003, p.1)

Park Chung Hee's government came to power in 1961. Between 1962 and 1976, with the successful implementation of its three consecutive Five-Year Plans[1] for economic development, the Korean economy underwent a huge transformation, finally achieving the status of being one of the highest income developing countries. The main focus of Park's government was

[1] Five-Year Plans were the long-term economic development policies of the Park Jung Hee's administration (1961-1979) in Korea. The first Five-Year Plan was carried out from 1962 to 1966 and aimed to benefit the textile industry and make Korean economy self-sufficient. The second (1967-1971) and the third (1972-1976) shifted its focus to support heavy industries and aimed to make the Korean economy more competitive.

was to build a nation through export by promoting light industry and infrastructure:

> *Attaining ambitious government-set export targets, and then exceeding these targets, was regarded as the height of achievement for businessmen and public officials in charge of export promotion... If [larger Korean firms] succeeded in fulfilling their export goals they obtained numerous benefits reserved for exporters, including preferential credit and loans, administrative support, tax and other benefits. Thus Korean exporters saw the over-fulfilment of their export targets – usually determined jointly with the government – as the keystone of their business strategy. (Harvey and Lee, 2003, p.4)*

Overall, this development strategy proved very impressive: 'Economic growth, which had been between 4 and 5% prior to 1962, doubled to an average annual growth rate of 8.8% during 1962 to 1971 and per capita income increased from US$82 in 1961 to US$286 in 1971.' (Harvey and Lee, 2003, p.12)

However, by the 1970s the export-driven economy's adverse side effects had intensified, with an imbalance between the light and heavy industry sectors and the widening gap between export business and domestic business, such that the government was forced to revise its policy and to focus more on the development of strategic Heavy and Chemical Industries (HCI) such as steel, heavy machinery, automobiles, industrial electronics, shipbuilding, non-ferrous metals and petrochemicals, again providing generous government assistance. This overemphasis on the HCI sector itself produced problems, necessitating the rapid increase of external borrowing and the market concentration by industrial conglomerates. Furthermore, from 1976 to 1978 it created an 'overheated economy' as wage increases were in excess of the growth of productivity. The situation was exacerbated by the Middle East construction boom of the mid-1970s during which huge fortunes were invested in real estate, causing a rapid rise in property values. These factors finally resulted in the country's worst inflation, which consequently weakened its export competitiveness and slowed down economic growth. Lee Jong Wha describes the situation:

Economic performance of the Korean economy deteriorated throughout the 1970s. As the economy was hit hard by price increases in oil and raw materials and [by] the ensuing world recession, export growth slowed. Inflation rates measured by consumer price index, jumped from 3.2% in 1973 to 20% in 1974, and remained in the double-digits throughout the 1970s. (Lee, 1997, p.5)

By the 1980s, Korea was undergoing a period of domestic political turbulence following the assassination of Park Chung Hee in October 1979 and the establishment of the military government of Chun Doo Hwan the following year. Consequently, the Korean economy suffered a major crisis, exacerbated by the second oil shock and a bad harvest: 'For the first time since 1957, Korea faced a negative GDP growth rate of -2.7%, and the inflation rate soared to 22.4% in 1980.' (Lee, 1997, p.5)

Nevertheless, the country soon began its recovery largely on account of the market liberalization and price stabilization policies launched by the Chun Doo Hwan's administration:

Perhaps realizing the consequences of its previous industrial policy during the 1970s, the government now shifted from a strategy of direct intervention toward one of indirect guidance. All subsidized policy loans were reduced and eventually eliminated under the financial market liberalization programme. The Ministry of Finance reduced its tight control over the management of commercial banks. Other elements of this liberalization programme included partial deregulation of foreign investment and acceleration of import liberalization. (Lee, 1997, p.6)

By 1983, the economy was fully recovering with GDP growing at 12% and a steadily improving balance of debt payments, while between 1986 and 1992 the inflation rate also remained under control. Since 1986 Korea has experienced a remarkable economic boom:

In 1986, for the first time in Korea's modern history, the nation's current account shifted into the black, where it remained until 1990, the balance of payments was in sizeable surplus, exports

exceeded imports and domestic savings exceeded domestic investment for the first time since the First Five Year Plan. The economy registered a high annual growth rate of 12%. (Harvey and Lee, 2003, p.14)

In the 1980s, the Korean government also concentrated on developing technology-based industries and restructuring its industry from labour and capital intensive to technology intensive. For example, the Korean government began to liberalize FDI (Foreign Direct Investment) regulations aiming at inducing the transfer of new technologies and promoting domestic market competition for such activities. As a result this has brought vast amounts of foreign investment into Korea: 'Of the total US$3.6 billion of inward foreign investment during the period 1962-86, nearly 50% took place between 1982-86.' (Harvey and Lee, 2003, p.16) Assisted by a highly educated labour force, Korean conglomerates like Samsung and LG achieved new success in hi-tech industries in the international market, and this facilitated a flourishing Korean economy between the late 1980s and the mid-1990s.

1.2 Political Deregulation and Media Liberalization since the late 1980s

Alongside the economic development, the Korean government considered the media as a way to control the public and so achieve the nation's political and economic goals. Shim Doo Bo describes:

As economic growth based on export-oriented industrialization was a national goal for the country, the Korea media industry was locked in this paradigm throughout the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. In other words, the major role of the press was to promote national interests and contribute to the country's economic modernization. For this purpose, limiting the freedom of the press was taken for granted. (Shim, 2002, p.338)

Both Park Jung Hee's and Chun Doo Hwan's administrations had exercised tight surveillance of the media under the *National Security Law*. In the late 1980s Chun's regime exerted more thorough

control by integrating all independent news agencies into one state-run agency and absorbing two independent broadcasting companies into the state run Korean Broadcasting System (KBS). The *Basic Press Act* was set up in December 1980 by the Chun's government to strengthen media control through the censorship of newspapers, periodicals and broadcast media, as well as through the regulation of the professional qualifications for journalists.

By the mid-1980s, the Chun administration's censorship of print and broadcasting became a heavily criticized issue, and the political deregulation of the late 1980s heralded the loosening of media regulation. Although temporarily still under the management of the government, MBC television, a commercial network that had been under control of the state-managed KBS since 1980, resumed independent broadcasting in 1987. Shim Doo Bo reports:

> *In the 1980s, wide-ranging democratization measures led to deregulation in the media sectors, leading to the birth of a new commercial TV channel in 1991, increasing the number of registered periodicals in the country from 2,411 in 1987 to 6,847 in 1994 and the inception of cable TV services in 1995. (Shim, 2002, p.440)*

Moreover, the Korean government started to use media liberalization as means to better embrace the globalized economy of the 1990s and began to realize the importance of the cultural industry. (For more description, see p.33-34.) Ryu Woong Jae observes:

> *Starting in the late 1980s, Korea adopted media liberalization as a way of managing the pressures of globalization in the context of economic deregulation and the convergence of new information technology and traditional media. To attract foreign capital, the state planned overall market deregulation. But the state has not left media industries entirely at the mercy of market logic. While such a media liberalization is sometimes viewed as an alternative path for the achievement of democratization, the Korean state also actively involved and encouraged domestic content production as a means of restricting foreign content. (Ryu, 2005, p.13)*

After the Uruguay Round Accord[2] was made in 1993, the Korean government started to make diverse polices and investments in order to cultivate the media industry and adopt advanced digital technologies, as it felt a sense of the urgency in this matter. Shim records:

> *[I]f Korea neglected these sectors, it would be conquered by foreign service providers. Furthermore, the United States continued to pressure Korea to open the TV programming sectors, both through World Trade Organization (WTO) negotiations and in bilateral talks... New information technology posed a bigger crisis for the Korean content industry. The spillover of foreign satellite broadcasting such as Japanese NHK-Satellite TV into Korean homes was already a reality by this time. Hong Kong-based STAR-TV was slated to kick off a 32-channel satellite broadcasting service in 1996 targeting East and Southeast Asia. (Shim, 2002, p.339)*

Shim further notes:

> *In this context, in 1989 Korea decided to build a digitized, integrated cable television infrastructure that would be unveiled in 1995. In August 1993, the Ministry of Information selected 20 companies that would become 'cable television programme providers'. The Cable Television Act and the Presidential Decree on Cable TV services devised a plan to initiate 20 channels with 11 programme categories in order to ensure diversity of content in cable services. They were: news, movies, sports, arts and culture, entertainment, education, music, children, women, religion, and transportation and tourism... [Most notably] [t]o promote the domestic cultural software industry, the Presidential Decree stipulated that foreign-produced content should not exceed 30% of cablecast time. (Shim, 2002, p.338)*

[2] The Uruguay Round (UR) accord was a result of a trade negotiation lasting from 1986 to 1994, which introduced a multi-lateral international trade liberalization by abolishing quotas,cutting tariffs on industrial goods and reducing agriculture subsidies. Most importantly this requires all 116 member countries of General Agreement of Tariffs and Trade (GATT) to open their markets for services including financial services, communications, constructions, wholesaling, transportations and tourism.

Despite of the government's efforts, however, I want to emphasize the fact that there was a substantial lack of domestic programming in these new cable and regional commercial broadcasting services in Korea, which consequently was dominated by foreign programming. Along with the impact of a film industry dominated by Hollywood, I argue this resulted in the increasing induction of Western cultural contents into Korean society in the 1990s.

2) The 'Internationalization' and 'Globalization' Policies of the Korean Government & their effects on Korean Society and Culture

2.1 'Internationalization' and 'Globalization' Policies

The first civilian government of Kim, Young Sam (1993-1998) set out on a political and economic reform as soon as it assumed power, ushering in the 'Creation of the New Korea'. Until 1993 when his government came into power, Korea had experienced military political regimes for 32 years, which greatly restricted the political and cultural freedom of the Korean public. The major direction of the reform policy was towards 'internationalization' in 1993 and 'globalization' in 1994[3] in order to improve the status of Koreans within global society. (Young, 1993) According to Yim Hak Soon at the Korea Culture and Contents Agency:

> *For this reason, Kim Young Sam's government asserted cultural democracy, the creativity of the people, regional culture, cultural industries and cultural tourism, unification, and the globalization of Korean culture as being its main cultural policy objective. (Yim, 2002, p.41)*

President Kim publicly announced on 18 November 1993 that 'internationalization' would be the policy goal of the government with the emphasis on 'deregulation' of market and other business practices to overcome an economic slump. The discourse of 'internationalization' was further

[3] Despite different definitions and usages of the two terms, 'internationalization' was often used interchangeably with 'globalization' in Korea.

reinforced when the Uruguay Round trade negotiation was concluded in December 1993. (Lee, 2003, p.92) In 1994, the government began to adopt the discourse of 'globalization' when President Kim announced it as the principal government policy concept in November 1994, and became the dominant concept of the political discourses throughout his regime. Like 'internationalization', 'globalization' was also aimed at strengthening the competitiveness in global society by fostering a new economic system and an appropriate mindset that would match the 'global standard'. (Lee, 2003, p.99-102)

2.2 Social and Cultural Effects of the 'Globalization' Policy

I claim that this new political climate of globalization drew an unprecedented stream of Western culture into Korean society through diverse types of cultural exchanges. Most of all, deregulation policies concerning business practices encouraged and legitimized the process of Western capital inflow through various forms of business activities. More and more Western-style family restaurants such as TGIF and Hardrock Café opened franchised branches in Korea, and numerous fashion and furniture brands as well as other designer products from Western countries were imported, which proved extremely popular among the emerging upper and middle classes.

The creation of a new vibrant consumer culture in Korea was the outcome of the booming economy and the emergence of a new bourgeois class. Parents of this new bourgeois class were preoccupied with ensuring their children would receive better higher education, guaranteeing their future success in this highly competitive society. The term 'Orange Tribe' was coined to refer to the young bourgeois group who enjoyed an extravagant life-style by freely spending their parents' money. 'Apgu-jung culture'[4] refers to the culture of this group in the newly developed wealthy district of Gang-Nam. According to the Korean cultural theorist Kang Myung Koo:

> *...so-called 'Apgu-jung' culture (the new upper- and middle-class yuppie culture) is most readily encountered in the newly developed downtown which is located south of the Han River and surrounded by luxurious shopping malls, upper-class restaurants and lavish apartment complexes.*

[4] Apgu-jung-dong' is the first and most representative wealthy town in Gang-Nam, a newly developed downtown district in Seoul, Korea.

Those who consume and practice Apgu-jung culture come mainly from the ruling bourgeois class. They enjoy extravagant materialistic life-styles, foreign travel and participating in expensive sports like skiing and scuba diving, etc. The presence of this Apgu-jung culture is integral to postmodern discourse in Korea, which advertising agencies appropriate in order to promote consumer culture. (Kang, 1999, p.25)

With the rejuvenated economy of the mid-1990s and freer international travel regulations, greater numbers of Korean people went abroad and experienced Western culture. More students studied in Western countries and as a result began to introduce diverse Western sub-cultures into Korean society. Popular cultural genres such as TV, film and pop music were the major areas where these new cultures were explored. Moreover, assisted by the Internet's inception in 1994 and cable TV in 1995, mass-media constantly introduced Western – especially American – culture to the Korean public, which made the younger generation, in particular, rapidly assimilate Western culture and lifestyle.

2.3 Negative Effects of Globalization and Issues of Cultural Identity

According to Yim Hak Soon, the Korean government's cultural policies have emphasized the establishment of cultural identity and the economic importance of culture and the arts. (Yim, 2002, p.41) Yim Hak Soon comments on the negative aspects of Western cultural influences on the cultural identity of Korean nation:

Western culture, which started to permeate Korean society [in] the late 19th century, has spread rapidly since the Korean War of [the] 1950s. In particular, throughout the process of modernization since [the] 1960s, Western popular culture based on capitalism and commercialism has swept the country, and as a result, has substantially affected the way of life of the people. The problem is that the characteristics of the Western culture differ considerably from that of Korean traditional culture. From the Korean point of view, it has been argued that Western popular culture tends to be synonymous with commercialism, materialism, violence and sensuality as compared with the Korean traditional culture... What was worse, the swift pace of modernization tended to increase extreme

individualism and hedonism. Indeed this trend led to a certain confusion and crisis within Korean cultural identity. (Yim, 2002, p.39-40)

Yim asserts that Korean people viewed the influence of Western culture on national cultural identity as a negative one and that they perceived globalization as a threat to cultural identity as well as domestic cultural industries. As a result, he explains that there was an increased focus on promoting a sense of competitiveness within cultural industries in a global society and strengthening national cultural identity.[5] (Yim, 2002, p.39-40)

It is generally acknowledged that Korean people in the 1990s had to adjust to increasingly Westernized ethical values and the fast-changing cultural atmosphere of their society. However, I argue that the government's excessive emphasis on competitiveness and globalization resulted in a crisis in Korean society: class conflict and the corruption of political and economic powers are the more obvious effects, together with the increasing level of competition for higher education and secure professions.

More fundamental problems lie in the local history of Korea, with the conflicts between the Confucian tradition and a newly Westernized society creating much confusion in the social hierarchy and moral values. In other words, the great haste with which Korea transformed itself by adopting western political, social and economic systems led to conflict with those ideals particular to Korean culture and its traditional values, resulting in unexpected but inevitable symptoms of social disruption such as the idealization of wealth, egotism and social alienation. Despite this emphasis on establishing a national cultural identity through government, the constant influences of 20th century western culture led to the erosion of traditional culture[6] and the creation by default of a hybrid culture.

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[5] For example, Kim Young Sam's government viewed the establishment of cultural identity as a significant goal of cultural policy and emphasized the economic importance of culture and the arts. The 'new five-year plan for promoting cultural development' (1993), 'the master plan for cultural welfare' (1996), and 'the cultural vision 2000' (1997) all highlighted the competitiveness of cultural identity as major policy objectives. (Yim, 2002, p.41)

[6] For example, the Korean government's efforts to preserve traditional culture by vigorously building museums to store traditional art objects, did not consider contemporary Korean life and mentality, and consequently Korean traditional culture was isolated.

Korean art historian and cultural critic Park Shin Eui critiques the social situation at the time:

> *[A] recent campaign by a leading local newspaper featured on a big video board in downtown Seoul, read, 'Let's be forward with information society, though we were [backward] in industrialization'. As this absurd slogan shows, the very reason for the contradiction is the desire itself to meet change and make a profit from it rather than solving real problems that have been left behind. This impetuous competitive drive, which intensifies and accelerates over time, gives a dynamism to Korean society but simultaneously 'collapses' the speed by creating new contradictions and accumulating them unsolved... The vulnerability of the dynamism parallels the difficulty of apprehending the substance and identity of Korean society. (Park, 1997, p. 39)*

The fast changes in political, social and cultural conditions – the miracle of rapid economic growth through its intensive labour force and the strength of the hi-tech industry in the late 20th century – were the effects of the nation's efforts to keep up with the competitive level of international society. However, this symptom created a gap between contemporary reality and Korea's adjustment to it. Moreover, in the process of focusing on the competitiveness of culture, the Korean government impetuously promoted western life styles and cultural values, but failed to protect and embrace the traditional Korean values of Confucianism such as spirituality, ethical morality and harmony.

The rushed progress from industrialized society to information society, as the slogan in the above quote exemplifies, has caused a 'breakdown in the signifying chain' for Koreans in the late 1990s. As a result, Korean society has experienced dominant psychological patterns of what Fredric Jameson calls 'schizophrenia'.[7] Moreover, intensified by the mass-media, the experience of the inconsistency between temporality and spatiality has resulted in a surge of hybrid culture during the last decade.

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[7] Fredric Jameson describes the psychological symptoms of the period in connection with Lacan's account of schizophrenia, not as a clinical description, but rather as an analytical one. He briefly defines schizophrenia as 'a breakdown in the signifying chain'. Jameson interprets schizophrenia as 'an experience of pure material signifiers or a series of pure and unrelated presents in time'. (Jameson 1991 p.27)

2.4 The advent of *Shinsedae* and the creation of hybrid culture

Park Shin Eui also observes that under the cross-cultural influences of the mass media a new generation, referred to as *Shinsedae* in Korean, has emerged since the late 1980s and created the hybrid image culture. (Park, 1997, p.39)

The creation of hybrid cultural forms was one of the major symptoms of this period in Korean society. For example, pop music industry was the first to accommodate different sub-cultures of the West and to produce various kinds of cross-cultural music styles and genres. Shim Doo Bo, Professor in New Media & Communication at the National University of Singapore describes the situation:

> *Changes originating from globalization trends and democratic reforms began to transform the local music market... With the sharp rise in disposable income in the early 1990s, many Koreans purchased satellite dishes to pick up Japanese stations and Star TV. Against this backdrop, Korean music fans came to have a better grasp of global music trends, and hungered for new tunes from local musicians... In this context, the three man band Seo Taiji and Boys (Image 1), composed of underground bassist-singer-songwriter Seo Taiji and two rap dancers, released the single 'I Know' in 1992. This was arguably the first rap track in Korea, and it excited local music listeners... (Shim, 2006, p.36)*

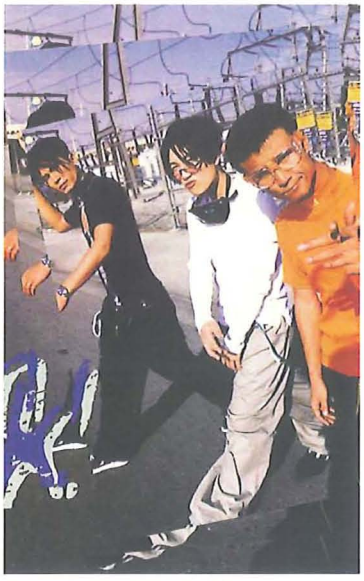

Image 1. Seo Taiji and Boys.

The popularity of Seo Taiji and Boys was based on the innovative hybridization of different musical forms. This represents an inaugural moment of the age of *Shin-sedae*, the new generation of young Koreans. Shim Doo Bo describes the popularity of Seo Taiji and Boys as being based on innovative hybridization of music by creatively mixing genres like rap, soul, rock 'n' roll, techno, punk, hardcore and even *ppongjak*[8] to produce a unique music form. Shim describes their musical experimentation:

In their first album, they showed how Korean rap would sound. In their second, they experimented with a crossover between 'high and low' music by inviting the traditional Korean percussionist Kim Deok Su and modern jazz saxophonist Lee Jeong [S]ik to play for their album recordings. [For] their third album, they became 'vocal' in sending out social messages, with an attempt at gangsta rap. Since Seo Taiji, the syncretism of a wide range of musical genres in one album has become commonplace in Korea. What has come into existence is a hybrid but distinctively Korean pop style. (Shim, 2006, p.36-37)

Most importantly, Seo Tajiji and Boys initiated the new music style in Korean pop music by excluding those romantic sentiments particular to traditional Korean music. Rather their music explored adolescent thought and emotion, criticizing social corruption, the ills of the school system and expressing the public's desire for the unification of North and South Korean. Despite being a high school dropout, lead singer Seo Tai Ji gained a reputation among young people, not only as a pop idol, but as a symbol of a new generation. This has helped change the ideas of Korean parents about stardom for the positive: a big shift in conservative Confucian society.

This new generation is often described as the 'Korean X generation' (born between 1972-1981). They shared strong cross-cultural influences and rejected the idea of fitting into a single socio-political category.

According to Seo Yong Seok and Jim Dator's research about Korean popular culture, this generation is also known as the 'Silent Cohort', whose members grew up in a relatively abundant material environment with little interest in politics. Preferring to immerse themselves in computer games and animation, they were the first generation accustomed to using computers and the Internet (unlike the earlier generation, which had experienced the transition from analogue to digital technology via CDs, computers and cellular phones etc. in the 1980s). Seo and Dator describe the attitude of this generation towards culture:

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[8] *Ppongjak* is the term for a traditional form of the Korean pop song that usually has an easy melody and sentimental lyrics. It is often associated with the sentiments of the older generation and considered as a representative genre of Korean folk culture in the 20th century.

For them, nationality and the origin of cultural product are not important as long as they are satisfied with the sensitivities and emotions, and there is no such thing as cultural periphery inferiority complex, nor is there a strong desire to enter into the cultural centre. (Seo & Dator, 2004, p.15)

I claim that the deluge of images of foreign culture through the mass-media industry such as video, film, cable TV, animation and video games encouraged the unlimited consumption of hybrid images by the young generation of Korean people. As a result, 'Korean X generation' in the 1990s has experienced Western cultures with an unparalleled openness and created a new cultural pattern of hybridity[9]. Unlike the older generations, this generation did not rigidly draw up the boundaries between inherent culture and external cultures, influenced by the fluid characteristics of new digital technology.

Korean cultural theorist Kang Myung Koo analyzes the TV advertising culture in Korea in the 1990s as a major postmodern discourse[10], which promoted Western sensibilities through representing images of reality. He posits college students and upper-class youth as both the main target consumer group and the promoters of the new hybrid culture. Korean TV advertisements have produced numerous images of this culture and diffused the new cultural tastes into the general public through the mass media. (Kang, 1999, p.18-26)

According to Kang's analysis, Korean advertising practices have made the Western life-style a significant part of Korean youth's value structure by copying the 'hyperreal encoding'[11] of the US,

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[9] The terms such as hybridity and hybridization are used in many different fields to indicate varying forms of the conjoining of two (usually) distinct, disparate elements to form a new entity. These terms throughout this chapter are used in that general sense rather than in relation to a more specific discourse such as used by Homi Babba in his theory of the 'hybridization' of discourse and power.

[10] Kang Myung Koo analyzes the meaning of postmodern theories in Korean television advertisements in the early 1990s. Based on Fredric Jameson's understanding of postmodernism as 'the cultural logic of late capitalism', Kang conceives advertising as one of the primary practices that generates postmodern culture because it produces commodity aesthetics through its media practices. He describes the features of representation in postmodern advertisements as: anti-form, irrational appeal, destruction of linear narratives, image-centered ways of seeing and 'feminist' perspectives. (Kang, 1999, p. 21-26)

[11] In postmodern advertising, the experience of seeing images does not permit any direct or indirect experience of the thing as referent. Rather, it means the reception of simulacra in which reality is represented as a hyperreality, constructed through the deprivation of authenticity and purity. The distinction between the real and the represented disappears, and everybody lives in the world of simulacrum where goods provide consumers with no fixed identity but with the appearance of difference through a collage of fragmentary images. (Kang, 1999, p.28) (For further information on 'hyperreal', see Baudrillard, J. 1983. *Simulations*. London: Penguin Books.)

which blurs the distinction between the real and the simulated, both in the world of representation and in 'reality' itself. Moreover, the perception of reality in postmodern advertisement includes nihilistic and cynical visions of the world about 'the social contradictions between the corporate structures of capital and labour, neo-Fordist labour control, and anti-nuclear, feminist and the black movement'. (Kang, 1999, p.29) He explains that when the Korean advertising agencies interpreted and transferred foreign culture, there was an inevitable process of copying and imitating cultural practices without taking the substance into consideration. For example, postmodern advertisements in Korea (Image 2) don't have the same nihilistic and critical views as their Western counterparts, and often depict a technological utopia where social contradictions are resolved by technology. He also asserts, however, that the translation of these cultural practices into local forms such as 'technopia' and 'computopia' was an effort to fit local consumers' tastes, which resulted in the diversity of appearances of advertisements.

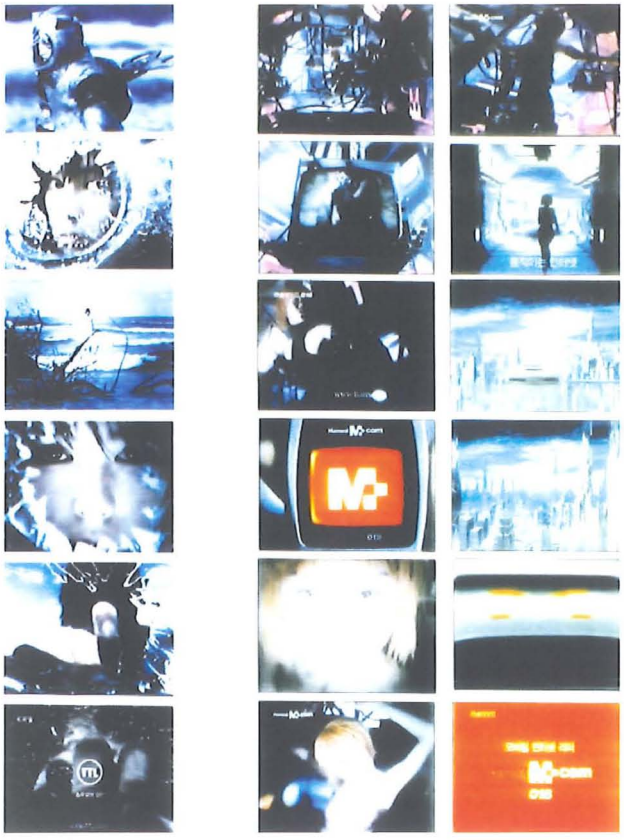

Image 2. Korean TV Commercial for Mobile Phone Services, TTL 'Astronaut'(left), Hansol 'M.com'(right).

More importantly, he argues that the process of copying and imitating was a 'voluntary accommodation' of the other culture by local producers of advertising exploring the Western postmodern advertisements primarily as rich sources of codes and symbols. (Kang, 1999, p.31) Kang explains that Korean advertising used the grammar of international advertising, especially that of American 'hyperreal encoding', copying and adapting the new look of postmodernism without taking it seriously as an endeavour to overcome the contradictions of the modern. Kang calls such a modality a 'postmodern consumerism without postmodernity' (Kang, 1999, p.30), and which I described as 'without

the substance' in the earlier paragraph.

Kang Myung Koo describes that postmodern advertisements usually use non-linguistic codes and make use of overlapping and fragmented images, which promotes 'image-centred ways of seeing'. (Kang, 1999, p.26-27) Throughout the 1990s, this tendency was reinforced by the popularization of the Internet and the further development of other information and communication technologies in Korean society. I assert that this 'image-centred way of seeing' is what Korean people have become used to during the last decade. It has also encouraged them to assimilate foreign cultures so efficiently as to embrace diverse cultural information without distinguishing its origins and history[12].

Furthermore, as with postmodern advertising, other diverse cultural practices in Korea have developed ways of blending different cultures and appropriating foreign cultures to local customs and tastes through this culture of 'image-centred seeing'.

3) Further Political Changes and the Digital Culture in Korean Society

3.1 The New Cultural Openness arising from the Political Deregulation

In the late 1990s Korean society was facing further political and social change under the new administration of Kim Dae Jung. People from the long oppressed region of Jeollanam-do formed the majority of the ruling political party *Minju-dang* for the first time and exercised power in many influential institution, which engendering liberal and pluralistic attitudes towards different culture and values. Also, the increased communication with North Korea due to the government's 'Sunshine Policy'[13] of financial support to the North Koreans has brought a new atmosphere of openness towards hitherto clandestine areas.

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[12] I find the explanation for this condition in Fredric Jameson's discussion of a new kind of 'depthlessness' as a postmodern culture of the image where the content becomes a set of texts or simulacra caused by the disposition of the subject and the weakening of historicity. (Jameson, 1991, p.6-10) For further analysis, see chapter III.

[13] The Sunshine Policy is the South Korean doctrine towards North Korea begun in 1998 by Kim Dae Jung. It emphasizes peaceful cooperation, seeking short-term reconciliation as a prelude to eventual Korean unification. It has fermented better political contacts between the two countries together with business ventures that have given much financial support to North Korea.

The Korean government had strictly regulated cultural products related to communism, which could have been seen as legitimizing the North Korean regime, especially during the period from the first republic of Lee Seung Man (1948-1960) to the fifth of Chun Doo Hwan (1980-1988), and this consequently repressed artistic freedom in South Korea. Also there were few exchanges between South and North Korea until the late 1980s. (Yim, 2002, p.43)

According to Yim Hak Soon, however, beginning with the sixth republic, the government started to encourage exchange and cooperation with North Korea and created policies for socio-cultural exchange programmes. Yim states that despite adopting an open-door policy towards North Korean culture, it was not until Kim Dae Jung's government that these policies were pursued in a more practical way.

Kim Dae Jung stressed that the development of unified national culture was the cornerstone of peaceful reunification between South and North Korea. (Kim, 1999) As a consequence of the Sunshine Policy, the '6.15 Agreement between the South and the North' was brokered on 15 June 2000, leading to the promotion of cultural exchange between South and North Korea. The numbers of exchange programmes between the South and the North increased considerably in the form of joint programmes and mutual visiting programmes of various cultural genres. (The Ministry of Unification, 2000, p. 36-39)

Besides this more open approach towards ideological difference, there was also a change of the government's policy towards importing Japanese culture in the late 1990s. Due to the historically antagonistic relationship with the Japanese (mainly because of Japanese occupation of Korea during 1910-45), until as recently as 1998 the Korean government restricted cultural exchange between the two countries. According to Yim, there was a fear that the import of Japanese cultural industries would – with their substantial capital and technology – threaten the domestic market of Korean cultural industries. (Yim, 2002, p.42) Nonetheless, Kim Dae Jung's government began to see things from a positive perspective, stating that it was important to develop national culture and the globalization of national culture through the promotion of cultural exchange with other nations, including Japan. (Kim 1998b, 1998c) In practice, Kim Dae Jung's government started to open the door to Japanese film, video and publishing in 1998 and to the performing industry of Japan in 1999. In 2000, animation, pop music,

music recordings, games and broadcast programmes from Japan were permitted. (Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2000b p.3-59)

This new atmosphere of cultural openness in Korean society, coinciding with the new globalized capitalistic culture, has encouraged a liberal and inventive attitude towards culture. And it led to the creation of the hybrid culture at the end of the last century, which blends and synthesizes different cultures across borders and times. Furthermore, assisted by the proliferation of digital culture in Korean society, there ultimately emerged the surface culture where people understand culture and society based on images in order to keep up with the volatile and transient quality of social and cultural changes at that time.

3.2 Expansion of Digital Technology

Another important focus of Kim Dae Jung administration was on establishing a digital society, which, I claim, has contributed to the distribution of images of external cultures and ultimately to the promotion of the hybrid culture. The focus on the information technology industry continued as the government announced the building of 'e-Korea'. (Kim, 1998a) For example, the government supported the broadband development for the Internet service, which consequently resulted in the rapid expansion of digital technology throughout Korean society.

The Korean sociologist, Kim Hye Soon, states in his paper 'Sociological Analysis of 2002 Digital Formation of South Korea':

> *The OECD report released in June 2001 listed five top nations in broadband access per 100 persons: Korea was the top with 13.9, followed by Canada (6.22), Sweden (4.52), the US (3.24) and Japan (0.9).*
>
> *Yunhap News Agency reported on 24 July 2002 quoting a report by Nomura Research Group that Interrnet access has reached 53.9% in the US, 51.5% in Korea, 39.3% in Hong Kong. The achievement of Korea is impressive considering the figure was a mere 6.7% in 1998, increasing to 23.4% in 1999 and 40.3% in 2000. Percentages of broadband access reached 48.4% in Korea, followed by*

29.4% in Hong Kong, 18% in Singapore, 17.9% in Taiwan, 7.4 % in the US and 6.4% in Japan.

Hankyorae Newspaper reported on 31 July 2002 several statistics from a report released by the Hyundai Institute of Economic Research. If the US is 100 in average Internet speed, Korea is equivalent to 408.9, Japan 22.2, and the UK 4.0. The number of mobile phone users per 100 persons is 78.3 in UK, 60.8 in Korea, 57.2 in Japan, and 44 in the US. The number of personal computers per 1,000 persons is 639 for the US, 492 for UK, 430 for Japan, and 399 for Korea. (Kim, 2002, p.1)

Jonathan Watts, writing as Seoul correspondent of the *Guardian International*, reports on the importance of Internet culture in Korea:

Almost 70% of homes have a broadband connection compared with about 5% in Britain. Koreans are said to spend 1,340 minutes online per month. And 10 % of economic activity is related to IT – one of the highest levels in the world. (Watts, Guardian Newspapers, 24 February 2003)

3. 3 New Digital Culture

In the last decade digital technology has proliferated in Korea, resulting in the establishment of a highly efficient Internet system. Furthermore, information and communication technology corporations have constantly produced new digital products, which are widely purchased and used by Korean consumers. This condition of the late 1990s has facilitated the promotion of the unique image culture through devices such as digital cameras and mobile phones as Koreans have become increasingly engaged with the diverse digital activities available though mobile-phone services, including games and photo-mails. Moreover, they are now used to personalizing these activities by selecting, appropriating and customizing the available information and contents of unique signs and images. The unprecedented connectivity of mobile communication through diverse services such as mobile banking, text-messaging and diverse digital entertainment, has enabled Korean people to create the distinctive digital culture in which they are perpetually in contact with a plethora of both

images and information, which are grasped and organized in an instantaneous, 'depthless'[14] manner.

Meanwhile, online games and Internet blog sites have been the main contexts for exploring these new digital technologies, through areas such as digital illustration and simulation. For example, Koreans use the Internet site called 'Cyworld'(Image 3), where they create their own web pages and interact with other people via their avatar. They typically upload photos of memorable occasions, spectacular sites, etc., to which other people add comments and communicate with each other. The BBC's Seoul correspondents, Spencer Kelly and Rory Cellan-Jones, report on the vibrant condition of digital culture in Korea:

Korea became a technology heaven because, after a major financial crisis in the mid-90s, the government decided to invest almost everything into IT. It poured billions into the building of a countrywide optic fibre grid and pushed companies to bring high-speed broadband to the masses... Today three quarters of Koreans have broadband, making South Korea the most wired country on the planet. Having access to a fully networked home encourages outrageous thinking and possibilities. Gaming is so popular here that there are two TV stations dedicated to the game Starcraft (Image 4) at championship level. Away from the home, internet access is equally abundant – super-cool internet cafes, or PC bangs, mean you are never very far from your online life, and what a life it is. (Spencer, BBC News, 3 November 2006)

Image 3. Cyworld mini-homepage (mini-hompi).

Image 4. Online game, 'Starcraft'.

[14] Fredric Jameson describes the similar symptom of the postmodern as a new 'depthless' culture where people experience the breakdown of temporality and 'inhabit the state of the synchronic rather than the diachronic'. (Jameson, 1991, p.16) In this culture, 'depth is replaced by surface' and people tend to focus on the appearance rather than the content of the culture.

To this, Cellar-Jones adds:

Cyworld [an online social network] – a website which provides Korean people with a virtual social life. Anyone who signs up gets a homepage, featuring a so-called mini-room and an avatar – a miniature representation of themselves. The room is bare – and to furnish it they pay a fee for every new virtual item. Then it becomes a vital part of their lives. They link up with friends who have Cyworld mini-rooms, post photos on the site of everything that happens to them, and then spend countless hours visiting each other in cyberspace. One in three South Koreans has a Cyworld membership and amongst people in their twenties the take-up is 90%. At Cyworld's headquarters, 3,000 servers handle traffic for the virtual world in a control room fit for a space mission...But some Koreans may be spending a little too much time in cyberspace. In one of Seoul's cyber cafes, row upon row of people packed together like battery hens play endless online games. (Cellar-Jones, BBC News, 3 May 2006)

I assert that social networking through virtual reality in Korea promoted ways of self-expression and interaction through images and signs. According to Cellar-Jones's report, 'Young Koreans are now so accustomed to running their lives via the internet that they find it difficult to conceive of how life would work if the technology were not there. (Cellar-Jones, *BBC News*, 3 May 2006)

Online games in Korea are a highly advanced industry, and often involve the expression of self-identity through avatars. Seo Yong Seok observes the recent status of the online games export market:

More recently, online games exported from South Korea are enjoying sensational popularity in Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines, Indonesia and Vietnam. (Seo, 2004, p.3)

As the *Weekly Chosun* reports in a feature on NC Soft:

The Korean firm, NC Soft, said to be the biggest online gaming company in the world, earned royalty income of $25 million from foreign countries in the year 2003, and the company is forecasting $40 million of overseas sales (mostly from Asia) in 2004. (Baek, Weekly Chosun, 11 March 2004)

Many Korean people participate in the digital culture of personal 'blogging' and online gaming, assisted by the easy access to Internet through numerous Internet cafés, called 'PC-bang' (Image 5) in Korean. Kim Hye Soon describes the PC-bang culture:


Image 5. 'PC-Bang' in Korea.

[The] Cyber café or PC-bang, its Korean version, has been considered to play a significant role in countries of newly developing digital formations of the ITs... Bang is a Korean word for a room, and is used for shops where customers actively engage in activities, mostly leisurely ones... The peak number of PC-bangs in Korea was 23,032 as of June 2001 according to [the] Ministry of Culture and Tourism, which mandates registration of PC-bang by law... [They are] open 24 hours a day — some using PC-bangs as a place to spend the night [and are found] almost everywhere in downtown and around universities. [Prices are] very reasonable, usually less than US$1 for an hour and half-price during slow time, and equipped with the fastest and most up-to-date Internet PCs... PC-bang is almost synonymous [with] game-bang. That is, the [emergence] and spread of the PC-bang in Korea is a commercially driven phenomena for games and entertainment purposes, while it has helped to reduce gaps in Internet access. (Kim, 2002, p.6)

Seo Yong Seok notes the general sentiments about the Internet and digital technologies in Korean society:

...significant numbers of Koreans have had access to pop culture via the Web for some time, and pride themselves on being early and among the world's most prolific users of the most advanced digital technologies. (Shim, 2004, p.13)

Korean people enjoy diverse mobile phone and internet blog culture, in this 'one-person media era' of personalized and interactive digital systems. The important meaning of this culture is that Korean people, especially the younger generation, adapted to constantly advancing digital technologies so efficiently that they have cultivated creative methods of handling a variety of new digital

products and their contents. The 'Network Cohort', which emerged in the late 1990s, comprises the generation of Koreans who were born since 1982 (Seo, 2004, p.14) and the main force of cultivating this culture, armed with online network power. This unique condition of digital culture ultimately promoted the surface culture in Korea, where people understand the world based on images and their superficiality.

4) The Emergence of Surface Culture in Korean Society

4. 1 The Vibrant Mobile Phone Culture and its Socio-Cultural Impact

On the whole, the strong drive for internationalism and globalization provoked many changes in political and economic policies, resulting in the transformation of Korean society and culture throughout the 1990s. However, the unbalanced focus on competitiveness in Korean society and its economy triggered the IMF crisis[15] in 1997, and Korea has struggled to overcome this, going through vast changes in its economic system such as the collapse of many conglomerates.

The Korean government recognized digital technology as the key to boosting the recessed economy, as Yoon Kyong Woon describes:

> *...after the financial crisis of 1997 the government aimed to promote the information technology (IT) industry and a series of policies was initiated. For example, the Ministry of Information and Communication launched a four-year policy entitled 'Cyber Korea 21' in 1999 and a subsequent project, 'Korea Vision 2006', in 2002. Since the late 1990s, the government has expressed a clear aim to construct an Internet-literate country... [It aspired] to overcome the economic downturn via Internet business and literacy. (Yoon, 2006, p.757)*

In his paper about the culture of young mobile phone users in South Korea, Yoon states that from 1997 the domestic market for mobile communication service began to expand to its full potential due to the

[15] After an average economic GDP (Gross Domestic Product) growth of 8.2% over a period of three decades, there was an economic recession in Korea in 1997, due to excessive debts, the currency crisis and the corrupt government-*Chaebol* (conglomerate) alliance system. On average, the amount of conglomerate debts was four times greater than their equity bases. Korean currency was pushed from 844 Won to the US dollar in January 1997 to 2,000 Won in December of that year. Eventually, 60 billion won dollars were promised as a loan to Korea by the IMF.

launch of a personal mobile communication service (PCS) by several companies. (Yoon, 2006, p.754) However, he points out that contrary to the positive notion of the computer as an information and communication technology (ICT) contributing to successful globalization, the mobile phone has gradually become associated with economic and moral problems caused by Korea's period of globalization, such as excessive consumption and harmful effects to local sociality. (Yoon, 2006, p.758)

In the late 1990s, domestic telecommunication companies launched network services segmented by different target groups, with different brand image marketing for each segment. According to Yoon's report:

> *The mobile telecommunication market was segmented when the market grew rapidly. Indeed, the major telecommunication companies in Korea have produced clearly differentiated brands aimed at three distinct age groups: 13-18 year-olds, 19-24 year-olds and 25-35 year-olds. (Yoon, 2006, p.767)*

However, this vibrant mobile phone culture in Korea (the result of highly diversified services introduced in the late 1990s) is the major factor behind people's distinctive socializing patterns via digital technologies, and more importantly the visual communication culture. Young people started to categorize mobile phone contacts into different groups, applying different ring-tones and symbols to each group so that they could distinguish each when answering calls. Also they would take photos of themselves and their friends using mobile phones in order to use them as on-screen images for each contact. Not only do the Internet network services such as *NateOn* and *MajicOn* provide mobile users with various Internet services (including e-mail, games and information services), they also offer services enabling the choice of different types of images and sounds, and the customization of phones to personal tastes and needs. A service called 'emoticon' offers many different digital illustrations for use with each individual occasion and purpose. A combination of the words 'emotion and 'icon', 'emoticon' was originally composed of symbols comprising simple shapes indicating different emotions, but has been constantly developed to include a wider choice of illustrations and graphics.

The flourishing digital connectivity culture in Korea has been promoting image-based (rather than letter-based) interaction enabling people to express their feelings and transmit messages much faster than face-to-face and Internet interactions. As it is much easier to recognize images than letters on small screens, the new communication culture of mobile phones ultimately promotes 'surface culture', which is reliant on superficial appearances of social and cultural contents.

A further example of new social behaviour engendered by mobile phone culture is the pursuit followed by many young Koreans of raising a digital pet 'inside' their mobile phones. This clearly illustrates how the conventional meaning of life for the young generation in contemporary society has changed from valuing the internal meaning of experience to appreciating its exterior meaning by focusing on the surface rather than the depth. This generation of Koreans want the sentimental gratification of owning a pet without any of the responsibilities of real-life animal care. The cute puppy exists only in cyber-space, but its 'owner' can enjoy its winning ways, while feeding or training is a simple matter of pushing the keys.

A study shows that Japan has experienced a similar situation in mobile phone communication culture in that almost 40 % of Japanese people have access to the Internet services via mobile phones and developed distinctive communication patterns. Kenichi Ishii describes:

> *According to a nationally representative survey in 2001, 7.2% of mobile phone users had a virtual e-mail friend (Mobile Communication Research Group 2002). These virtual relationships [of meru-tomo (e-mail friends)] are unique in that they do not disclose objective self (name, address etc.) but disclose only their subjective self (emotional state) in frequent messages. An example of Japanese inclination to disclose emotional state is seen in frequent use of "picture characters" in e-mail over mobile phones. Picture characters are like non-standard characters like "smiley" in English. They are especially designed for e-mail via most phones by the operators. Most of the characters are used to visually express emotions in e-mail... These patterns reflect a conflicting feeling of young Japanese seek to enjoy communication by expressing personal feelings but want to avoid direct contact with friends. (Ishii, 2003, p. 54-56)*

However, compared to Japan, I purport that Korean people have further developed a unique culture of integrating digital culture with real-life activities, which promotes more direct social interactions (i.e. Cyworld). (For more information, see Chapter I, p.31.)

Although the surge of techno-cultural influences has compelled Koreans to embrace the digital age by exploring various digital products and services since the late 1990s, it is also important to note that Korea's new globalized culture of digital technologies has been modified to fit its indigenous culture – perhaps as a protection against globalization's homogenizing and materialist character. The result is a unique digital culture of 'real virtuality'[16] where the virtual world has begun to modify the real-life socializing patterns of Korean people. Korean people now construct their own lineages by making categories of relatives such as first and second cousins in the Cyworld sites, which classify social acquaintances by the level of intimacy. They make certain information exclusive to particular groups and even end relationships by barring entrance to their site.

In my view, this condition that especially the younger generation have experienced since the late 1990s through the flourishing network culture of diverse ICT technologies has resulted in 'surface culture'. They handle all the received information as raw material, regardless of time and space, and sort it according to their own criteria – of contact, information/opinion exchange, common interest sharing, recreation etc. – for their digital communities and cultures of the 'real virtual' world. In this culture, Koreans are an 'active audience' that constantly engages with new technologies, exploring different possibilities of virtual reality while effectively accustomed to continuously updated digital technologies. For this audience, there is no distinction between those regional and foreign cultures that have been encoded

[16] Manuel Castells argues that the new communication system, organized around the electronic integration of all communicative modes from the typographic to the multi-sensorial, does not induce, but constructs 'real virtuality'. Reality, he explains, has always been virtual because it has always been perceived through symbols that escape strict definition: '[This communication system that generates "real virtuality"] is a system in which reality itself (that is, people's material/ symbolic existence) is entirely captured, fully immersed in a virtual image setting, in the world of make believe, in which appearances are not just on the screen through which experience is communicated, but they become the experience. All messages of all kinds become enclosed in the medium because the medium has become so comprehensive, so diversified, so malleable that it absorbs in the same multimedia text the whole of human experience, past, present and future…' (Castells, 2000, p.404)

in accordance with the visual mode of multi-media communication systems. For example, members of Cyworld communities download a wide range of images from the sites of other members all over the world and use them to decorate their own sites in accordance with their own contexts.

4.2 The Exchange Value of Cultural Identity and the booming Korean Cultural Industries

Since successfully adjusting to cultural globalization – assisted by the advanced information technology of the 1990s – the Korean government has recognized that the economic value of cultural industries is closely connected to its efforts to define cultural identity as a reaction to the effects of globalization. Yim Hak Soon states:

> *[From] the late 1980s, the government has gradually opened its door to foreign cultural industries. From 1988, the importing of films and music records from foreign countries was formally permitted and foreign film companies were able to distribute their products directly within Korea... Meanwhile, the construction of cultural identity has also been stressed as a significant rationale for fostering cultural industries and cultural exchange with other nations as cultural identity has been regarded as an essential part of the competitiveness of the state within a global society. (Yim, 2002, p.46)*

The issue of the economic value of culture and arts in creating cultural policy has provided a new rationale for government subsidy for cultural industries. Kim Dae Jung has emphasized the cultural industries as a significant resource in creating national wealth. (Kim, 1998c) Since the end of the 1990s his government has enhanced its policies for domestic cultural industries with the intention of improving their international competitiveness. And this has encouraged a strong support for the cultural industry sector by the Korean public, who regards cultural industry products as a base for cultural identity. (Yim, 2002, p.46)

The government's refining of cultural identity in the late 1990s focused on popular cultural entertainment genres such as film, pop music and online games, which were viewed as having greater economic exchange value. As a result, the Korean Cultural Contents Agency was established in 2001 and followed by other subsidiary institutions for the purpose of promoting Korean cultural industries. This government support has led to the unprecedented popularity of Korean mass-media culture such as TV drama, film and pop music – not only in Korea, but also in other Asian countries. And this phenomenon illustrates that these aspects of Korean surface culture emerged at the turn of the century.

Shim Doo Bo describes the recent phenomenon:

Over the past few years, an increasing amount of Korean popular cultural content – including television dramas, movies, pop songs and their associated celebrities – has gained immense popularity in China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and other East and Southeast Asian countries. News media and trade magazines have recognized the rise of Korean popular culture in Asia by dubbing it the 'Korean wave' (Hallyu or Hanryu in Korean) (Image 6)... Yet a few years ago Korean popular culture did not have such export capacity, and was not even critically acclaimed by scholars. (Shim, 2006, p.25)

The 'Korean wave' can be traced back to the media liberalization that took place from the late 1980s to the early 1990s. In 1988, under constant lobbying from the US, the Korean government allowed Hollywood film studios to distribute films directly to local theatres, which drastically reduced the market share of the local film industry. In 1994, Hollywood's share in the local market reached 80%, from 53% in 1987 (Yi, 1994, p.45) Until then, Korean films were generally considered poorly made,

Image 6. A *Hanryu* shop in Tokyo, Japan / The *Hanryu* star Bae Yong Jun in Tokyo, Japan.

and hence ignored by the public. The beginning of cable television in 1995 and satellite broadcasting (Star TV and NHK Satellite) brought in massive amounts of foreign programming and posed a serious challenge to the local media industry and hence national cultural integrity. (Shim, 2005, p.31)

Later in the 1990s, however, the situation improved, with the Korean government recognizing the importance of the cultural industry and its potential contribution to the economy. According to Shim Doo Bo, in accordance with the globalization-cum-information discourse, Korean cultural pride became a key topic for the Korean government at that time. The government established the Cultural Industry Bureau within the Ministry of Culture and Sports in 1994, and instituted the Motion Picture Promotion Law in 1994 in order to attract corporate investment in the Korean film industry. (Shim, 2006, p.32) Kim Dae Jung also established the Basic Law for the Cultural Industry Promotion in 1999 by allocating a total budget of $148.5 million. (Shim, 2006, p.34) During the Kim Dae Jung administration, the cultural industry sector's budget relative to the total government spending per fiscal year increased from 757.4 billion won, or 0.94% of the total government budget in 1998, to 1,398.5 billion won, or 1.2% of the total government budget in 2002 (Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2004, p.8)

Shim Doo Bo states that after the 1990s the Korean film industry adopted the slogan 'Learning from Hollywood' to develop large media companies as well as a more commercial media market. A major investment in the media industry by Korean conglomerates, which ended with the economic crisis of 1997, strengthened the Korean film industry: earlier big business management had introduced sophisticated business acumen, such as audience research in film production and marketing. Shim explains that, since the mid-1990s, there has been an unprecedented entry of young talent into the film industry, coinciding with a new generation of creative young directors, actors and other personnel with formal training from film schools all over the world. Moreover, venture capitalists and investment firms started to fill the financial gap left by the termination of Korean conglomerate investment. (Shim, 2006, p.33)

Starting with the huge success of the Korean action thriller *Shiri* in 1999 (Image 7), through to the massive 2006 hit *Goe-Mul* (monster) (Image 8), Korean films have been enjoying local box-office success and a newly earned reputation from prestigious international film festivals. Benefiting from domestic success, the Korean film industry exported 164 movies in 2003, earning total revenue of $30,979,000, a huge increase from 1993's figure of 14 movies and $173, 838 in earnings. (Shim, 2006, p.34)

I claim that, besides the favourable condition of the government's support, the reason for the success of the Korean film industry can be found in its skilful imitation and adaptation of the American cultural industry system (at least in terms of that system's contents and methods).

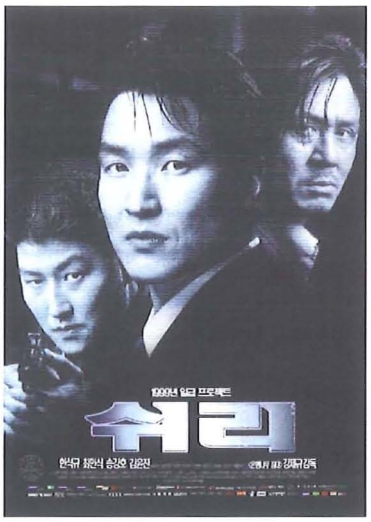

Image 7. A Korean movie *Shiri*, 1999.

Image 8. A Korean movie *Geo-Mul*, 2006.

Koreans not only learned the diverse business and production techniques of foreign film companies, but also blended them with their own indigenous culture and unique tastes, producing creatively hybridized forms of film practices. In this cultural hybridization and appropriation of global culture, Korean people have evolved to perceive external cultural contents and information based on the surface of foreign cultures and use them selectively to create their own culture, thus exemplifying the surface culture of Korean society. Large-scale production and marketing are some of the strategies learned from Hollywood, and frequent spectacular scenes in many contemporary Korean movies such as *Shiri* (1999) and *Friend* (2001) are also evidence of its influences. However, a distinctive local history – of the division between North and South Korea, and of the Korean gangs – has been skilfully combined with Hollywood-style production strategies such as advanced special-effect techniques, whose level of realism appeals to Korean audiences.

I maintain that the Korean film industry's method of hybridization, which copies the look of foreign culture and adapts it to the local cultural settings, is a prime example of surface culture in Korea. This type of hybridization also appears in a wide range of cultural practices in Korea, including contemporary visual art, promoting the 'depthless' perspective from which surface matters more than substance due to the waning of the subject and its effects. Koreans have, for example, developed a new image culture in which people pose for glamorous photos almost like celebrities (known as 'Star-photo') and by constantly entering contests for the best-looking people ('Ul-Jjang syndrome') via Internet sites.

But above all, it is the vibrant digital connectivity culture of the Internet and mobile phones that has made the Korean public well accustomed to image-based interaction, through the construction of a 'real-virtuality' culture by which the virtual world of digital technology interrelates with real-life experiences. Ultimately, during the past decade these new forms of social interaction have produced and promoted a 'surface culture' wherein Korean people understand culture based more on surface appearances than content.

CHAPTER II

The Recent State of the Korean Art World and the Emergence of 'Surface Culture'

In the second half of the 20th century, Korea experienced radical changes in its social and political situation. During this time it constantly imported cultural influences from the West, particularly America, while achieving rapid and unprecedented economic development in manufacturing: notably shipbuilding, heavy industries, automobiles, electronic appliances and microchips. However, it was not until the late 1980s that this economy opened up to foreign imports and investment, which have dramatically changed the cultural climate of Korean society. I want to emphasize the importance of political deregulation and media liberalization in Korea since the late 1980s to the mid-1990s, which have exposed the Koreans – both artists and general public alike – to a huge volume of Western cultural information.

During the military regimes of Park Jung Hee (1961–1979) and Chun Doo Hwan (1980–1988), the Korean media was strictly controlled by the state, and was seen as a means of public control and a vehicle for promoting the national interests of economic growth and other processes of modernization.

The collapse of the Chun military government in 1988 heralded a loosening of regulations for both the print and broadcast media, and facilitated their rapid expansion throughout the 1990s. Until then Korean television had been restricted to just two channels, the government owned KBS (Korean Broadcasting System) and the commercial network MBC (Mun Hwa Broadcasting Corporation), which during the 1980s had been under the control of KBS. MBC resumed independent broadcasting in 1987, while the first cable television services were introduced in 1995, soon to be followed by satellite and new regional commercial broadcasting. The rapid increase in foreign television programming as a result of these expansions made available an unprecedented amount of Western cultural products.

The rise of hi-tech industries developed by Korean companies like Samsung and LG greatly enhanced the country's economic situation over this same period. Kim Dae Il and Robert Topel observe that over the period 1970–1990 the Korean economy grew more than twice as fast as that of Japan and approximately three times faster than that of the United States and other countries of the OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development). Its yearly per capita growth rate continued at an exceptionally high 7% between 1970–1988, with the highest annual increase of 11.4 % between 1985 and 1988. By 1990, average per capita income stood at $5,584 – increased from $1,023 in 1970 – although still only 30% of the American level of $18,482 in the same year. (Kim and Topel, 1995, p.230)

The advent of *Shinsedae* (new generation) coincided with the creation of a new vibrant consumer culture. This was the result of the thriving economy and its flourishing mass-media industry, which fostered the formation of a liberal, pluralistic attitude toward other cultures and subsequently the creation of hybrid culture within Korea itself. (I have described this aspect as a late capitalistic symptom in Chapter I, p.18–19, p.22–25.)

In achieving economic growth through export-oriented industrialization focused on manufacturing, until the late 1980s the Korean government had ignored the importance of the cultural industry except where it directly served its economic strategies. In the 1990s, however, the government turned to media liberalization as a means of addressing the demands of globalization. Under pressure from America, from 1987 the Korean government permitted Hollywood studios to distribute films directly to Korean cinemas, to the detriment of local film production. However, as a result of the Uruguay Round (UR) accord in 1993, which required all 116 member nations of GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) to open their markets for international competition in respect of diverse services like banking, communications and tourism, the Korean government began to realize the importance of strengthening the cultural industry, and its potential for making an economic contribution. As a result, it instigated various investments and policies to support the visual media industry and its content (as I have illustrated in detail in Chapter I, p.36–40.) It is my contention that the resulting changes enabled the unprecedented distribution of

cultural information from other countries that subsequently created the atmosphere of cultural hybridity in Korean society.

Another important aspect of Korean society at that time was that it achieved a rapid advance in Information Communication Technology (ICT) and built up the network for high-speed telecommunication during the last decade under the government's plan to boost an economy that, in the late 1990s, had been in recession. Internet connections were possible from 1994, and the Korean government's 1997 policy to build 'e-Korea' facilitated the development of an efficient broadband Internet service and the creation of a new digital culture by the turn of the century. (For a more detailed description, see Chapter I, p.28–32.) Kushida Kenji and Oh Seung-Young maintain that, with the rapid growth of Digital Subscriber Line (DSL), a technology involving sending high frequency signals over existing copper telecommunication infrastructure, Korea's penetration became the highest worldwide by 2001, and 70 out of 100 households subscribed to broadband connections by 2002. (Kushida and Oh, 2006, p.3)

I claim that this distinctive background of political, social and economic developments in Korea in recent decades has made the cultural effect felt more intensely than in many other countries. Because of the media liberalization and unprecedented technological developments, the flourishing media industry has reinforced the cultural changes in Korean society by introducing and promoting various Western cultural contents to the Korean public and has led to the creation of a hybrid culture. And the intense effect of this media culture (which Fredric Jameson characterizes as 'depthlessness') resulted in the creation of what I term here for the sake of my argument as a 'surface culture' in Korean society from the late 1990s, which is based on a superficial understanding of cultural knowledge. For Korean artists this media deluge has opened up new possibilities for exploiting all kinds of artistic and cultural information and appropriating images regardless of time, space, or context in their art works, which I argue is a distinctive characteristic of 'surface culture' in Korean art practices from the late 1990s.

In the following pages, I will describe in detail the historical background of the Korean art world in previous decades that led to the construction of this 'surface culture'.

1) International Exchanges in the Korean Art World and the Seminal Influence of Paik Nam June

Since the late 1980s the Korean art world has faced the unprecedented influence of Western art as the government's internationalism has encouraged vigorous exchanges with Western cultures. With freer travel regulations over this period, more and more Korean artists travelled abroad to study and work, while at the same time postmodern theories were introduced to Korean society, encouraging Korean artists to turn away from diachronic and authoritarian approaches to their art making.

Several notable exhibitions toured to Korea in the early 1990s, including *Trans Avant-Garde* [1] (Image 9) in 1992, which included the works of American and European artists who came to prominence in the 1980s, which showed a tendency toward pastiche, and *Four Postmodern New York Artists*[2] (Image 10), which exhibited the works of David Salle, Julian Schnabel, Robert Longo and Eric Fischl in 1993 at the Ho-am Art Gallery.

Image 9. The *Trans Avant-Garde* exhibition catalogue.

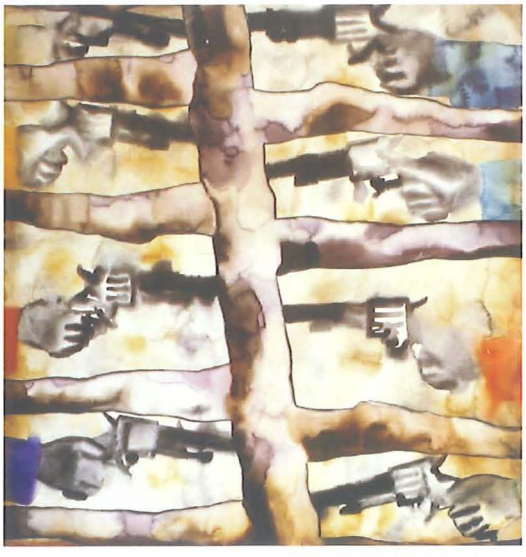

Image 9-1. Francesco Clemente, 'Tree of Life', 1991, watercolor on paper, 117 x 113 cm in *Trans Avant-Garde*.

Image 9-2. Enzo Cucchi,, 'Quadro Minore Marchigiano', 1980, oil on canvas, 205 x 205 cm in *Trans Avant-Garde*.

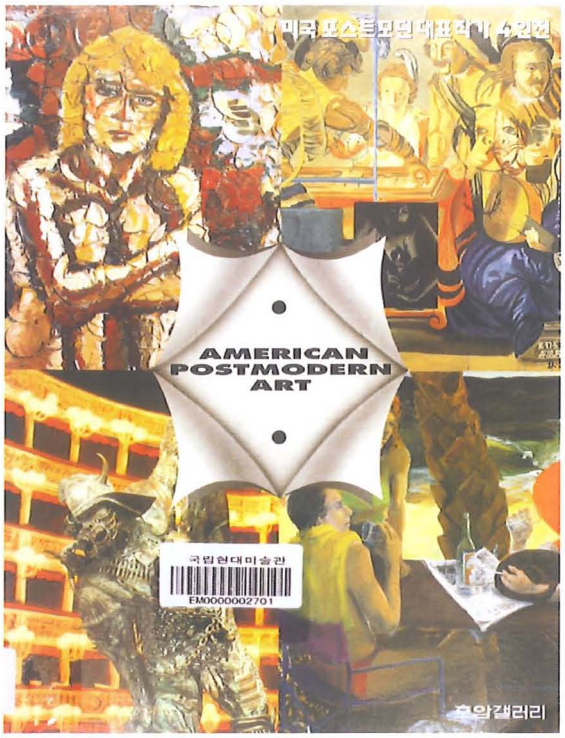

Image 10. The *Four Postmodern New York Artists* exhibition catalogue in 1993 at Ho-am Art Gallery.

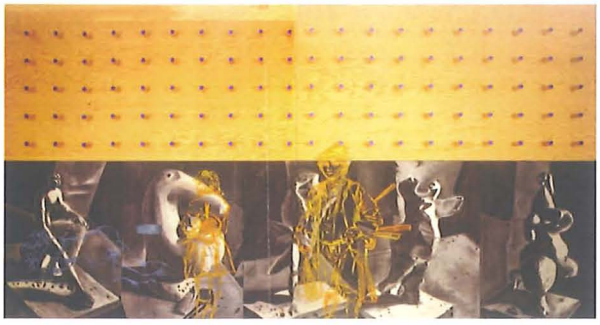

Image 10-2. David Salle, 'My Head', 1984, oil, acrylic and wood on canvas, 305 x 534 cm in *Four Postmodern New York Artists.*

Image 10-1. Julian Schnabel, 'Untitled', 1987, oil and broken ceramics on wood, 183 x 183 cm in *Four Postmodern New York Artists.*

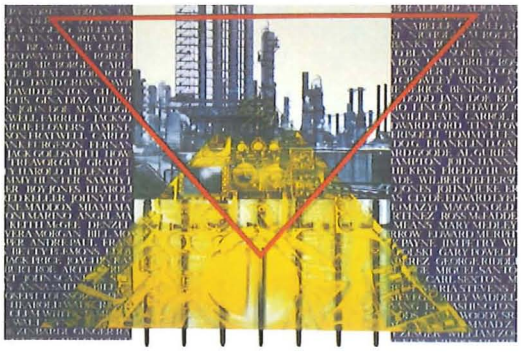

Image 10-3. Robert Longo, 'Meat Shot and the Homeless Count', 1983-1986, silkscreen plate steel, plexiglass; oil on canvas, 232 x 375 cm in *Four Postmodern New York Artists.*

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[1] Its original version was the 'International Trans Avant-Garde' exhibition held in Milan, Italy in 1982, and curated by Achille Bonito Oliva. The exhibition was composed of European and American artists who shared the traits of 'trans avant-garde', a mix of different kinds of cultures and appropriate art works of the previous generations. Bonito states: 'In fact, the artists of the trans avant-garde work from the standpoint of the present, without forgetting that they live in a mass society, barraged by mass media images. These artists frequently combine various levels of culture, the high level of the historical avant-garde movements and the entire history of art, and the low level derived from popular culture, which also has origins in the culture industry.' (Bonito Oliva, 1982, p.54)
(For more information see Bonito Oliva, A., 1982 *International Trans Avant-Garde*. Milan: Giancarlo Politi Editore.)

[2] I recognize the very important influences of this exhibition along with Trans *Avant-Garde* in forming 'surface culture' later in the 1990s, since they introduced the works of the international artists who practiced pastiche in diverse ways. And I maintain that postmodern pastiche provided a base for the art works of the 'surface culture' generation who sees art and culture of the past as raw material for new works.

These and other shows contributed to introducing the international trends of postmodern art practices. And, the *Whitney Biennial Seoul* [3] (Image 11) at the National Museum of Contemporary Art in 1993, co-curated by Paik Nam June together with the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, and *Fluxus Seoul Festival* at the Seoul Arts Center in 1993, acted as catalysts in provoking Korean artists to think about their place in the global art scene and new approaches about art. The exhibition projects *Circulation* and *Creation* and *In the Far Side of the Future* at the Dae-Jeon Expo in 1993 were also the crucial exhibitions in introducing a wide range of contemporary Western art practices and trends such as performances, installations and technology art.

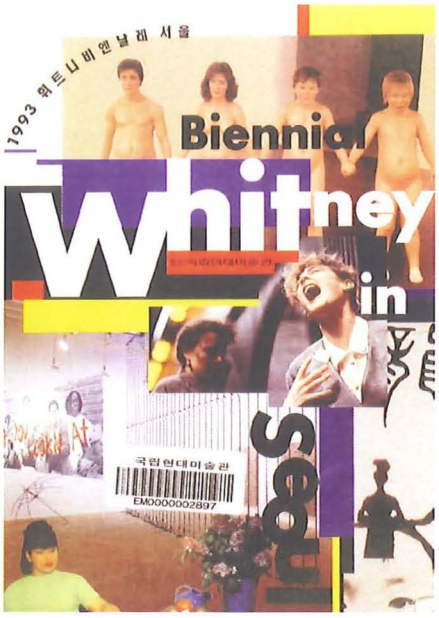

Image 11. The *Whitney Biennial, Seoul* exhibition catalogue.

Image 11-1. Janine Antoni, 'Human Care', 1993, head-painting on floor, 752 x 752 cm in *Whitney Biennial, Seoul.*

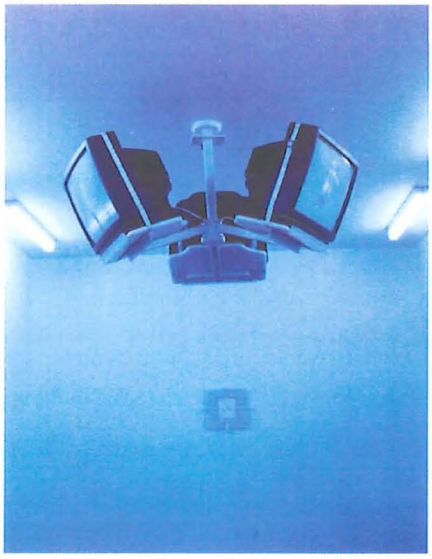

Image 11-2. Matthew Barney, 'Suppression', video installation, graphics on paper and plastic frame, 37 x 54 x 25 cm in *Whitney Biennial, Seoul.*

[3] The exhibition included many technology art works as well as art works of political and provocative subject matters for which it received severe criticism; with Korean people feeling it was inappropriate for the conservative sentiments of Korean society at that time. Nonetheless the exhibition provided Koreans with a valuable chance to see the progressive art trends of the time. Art critic Kim Hong Hee illustrates: "*Whitney Biennale* at the National Museum of Contemporary Art in 1993 received the criticism that it was too political and obscene to fit the cultural atmosphere of Korea at that time.." (Kim, 2003, p.83)

There was also renewed interest in Korean artists who had worked abroad and captured the attention of the international art scene throughout the 1990s, coinciding with the new wave of globalism in Korean society. Jheon Soo Chun (b. 1947) (Image 12), an artist who studied in Japan and lived in New York, was one of three Korean artists exhibited at the Venice Biennale in 1995, for which he received a special award and subsequently achieved popularity in the Korean art world. Kang Ik Jung (b. 1960) (Image 13) and Lee Bul (b. 1964), who participated in the Venice Biennale in 1997 and in 1999 respectively, also gained wide publicity and repeated awards, giving Korean artists encouragement and impetus to enter the international art world. Lee Bul was also invited to exhibit at the Guggenheim Museum in New York in 1998.

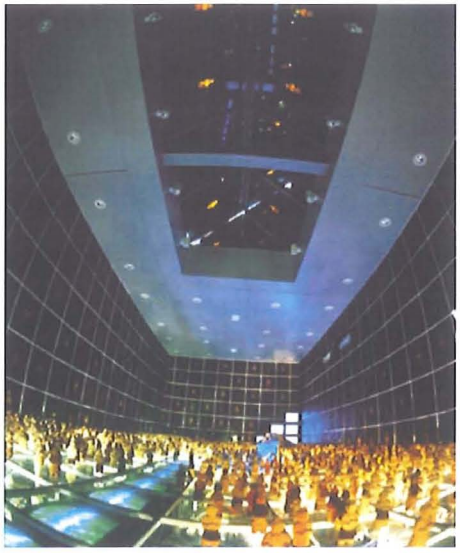

Image 12. Jheon Soo Cheon, 'Tou II', 1995, terracotta, neon, glass, industrial waste, aluminium, lighting, 1200 x 600 x 380 cm.

In the mean time, since the mid-1990s art biennales and expositions were domestically created to promote exchange with the international art world. The *Gwangju Biennale* (Image 14, Image 15), established in 1995, has provided Korean artists with the chance to see international art works of great renown and also introduced Korean art onto the world stage. In 2000, *Media City Seoul* was created with the purpose of promoting media art, and the *Busan Biennale* was established in 2002 to promote contemporary art and culture by combining the existing annual art events in Busan: the Busan Youth Biennale, the Sea Art Festival and the International Outdoor Sculpture Symposium.

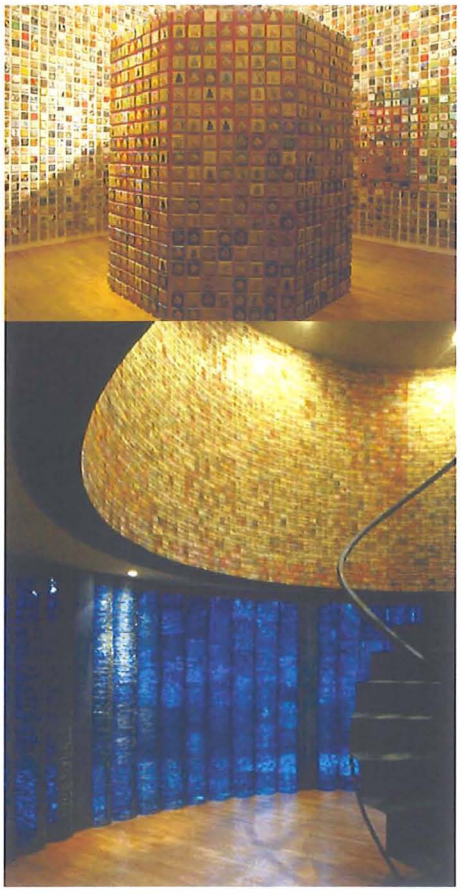

Image 13. Kang Ik Joong, 'Throw Everything Together and Add', 1997, mixed media installation in Venice Biennale Korean Pavillion, Italy, 7.6 x 7.6 cm (each).

Image 14.The first Gwangju Biennale catalogue.

Image 15. The second Gwangju Biennale catalogue.

Later in the 1990s further international exhibitions were held and increasingly Korean artists participated in exhibitions and fairs abroad. In 1998 Doe Yoon Hee took part in Miami Art Fair and sold six large pieces, and Koo Ja Seoung received an award at the International Art Expositions in Monte Carlo. Also in the same year Kim Soo Ja's and Choi Jeong Hwa's works had positive responses at the Sao Paolo Biennale. (1999, Koh, p.3)

Domestically the National Museum of Contemporary Art held the *Distinctive Element: British Contemporary Art* exhibition (Image 16) in 1998, while the Seong Gok Art Museum introduced Swiss Contemporary Art through the *Swiss Contemporary Art* exhibition the same year.

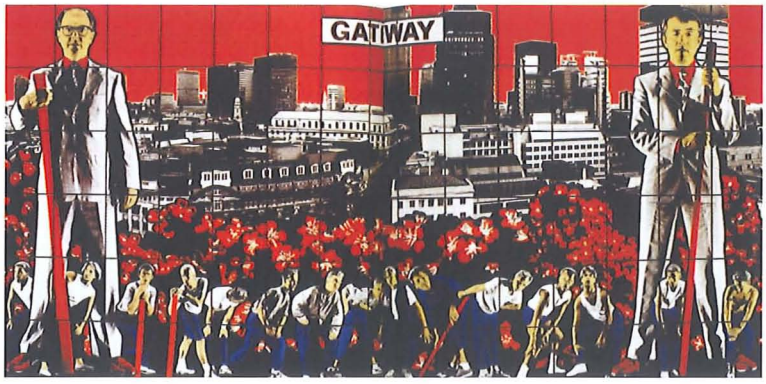

Image 16-1. Gilbert & George, 'Gateway', 1986, hand-painted photograph, framed in *British Contemporary Art.*

Image 16-2. Gillian Wearing, 'My Favorite Track', 1994, video installation in *British Contemporary Art.*

Image 16. The *British Contemporary Art* exhibition catalogue.

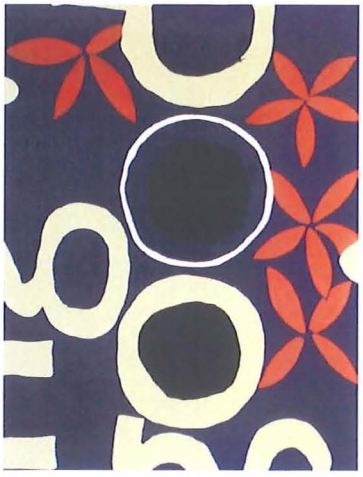

Image16-3. GaryHume,'LookingGood', 1996, gloss paint on panel in *British Contemporary Art.*

Another distinctive symptom was that diverse exhibitions were held exposing video and other new media employing digital technologies that encouraged the tendency of mixed genres. The 98 *City and Video* exhibition at the Seoul City Museum of Art installed a digital gallery using digital advertisement boards at several locations within the city. Gana Art Center was established in 1998 and had an opening exhibition *Sale! Sale! Sale!* developed by the Gana Media Research Team, where 18 emerging artists' works were transformed and displayed in the virtual store 'Cyber Fashion Plaza' on the Internet.

In the history of video and other new media work in Korea, the impact of Korean artist Paik Nam June (1932-2006), who studied in Germany, moved to New York in 1964 and received international recognition, has been substantial. His work was first known to the Korean public through the satellite broadcasting of *Good Morning Mr. Orwell* (Image 17) in 1984, which created something of a sensation in the Korean art world. This work was a global satellite project, involving the participation of performers and artists around the world including John Cage and Joseph Beuys, of which synthesized images were broadcasted in New York, Paris and other countries including Germany and Korea on 1 January 1984. Paik's work was subsequently introduced via the Asian Games in Seoul and the 1988 Seoul Olympics. The video art of Paik Nam June acknowledged the dominant position of TV culture in contemporary society, and its exposure encouraged Korean artists to explore the new possibility of fusing high art with the public realm through new media like video and digital technology. As Noh Jae Ryung, a prominent curator in Korea, observes:

Image 17. Paik Nam June, 'Good Morning Mr. Orwell', 1984, satellite network project.

Paik has continued to experiment with video-projected images and technological apparatus, and his work has set an example for a large following of younger artists, such as Park Hyun Ki (Image 18), Kim Young Jin (Image 19), Kim Hyung He and Yuk Keun Byung (Image 20) and Hong Sung Min, who have been working with video and technology since the 1980s. (Noh, 2001, p.90)

Image 18. Park Hyun Ki, 'Untitled', 1991, wood,stone, monitor, 730 x 520 x 30 cm.

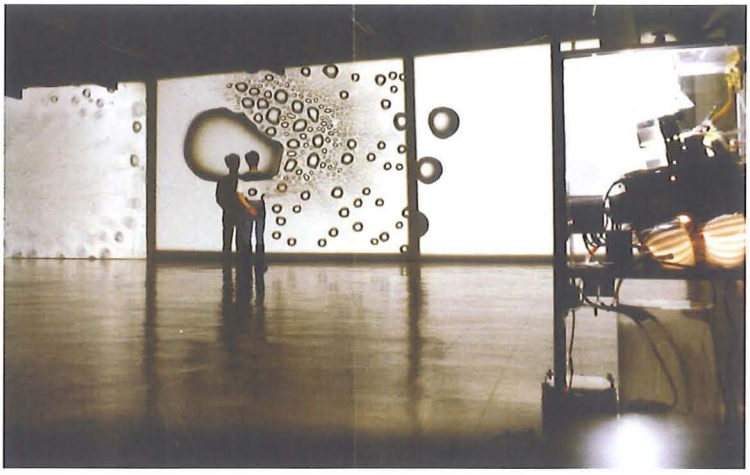

Image 19. Kim Young Jin, 'The Memory of Amniotic Fluids', 1996, invented projectors,compressor, timer, installation view.

Image 20. Yuk Keun Byung, 'The Sound of Landscape + eye for field= "Redezvous"/Western Eye', 1992, mixed media, video installation in Documenta 9, Kassell, Germany.

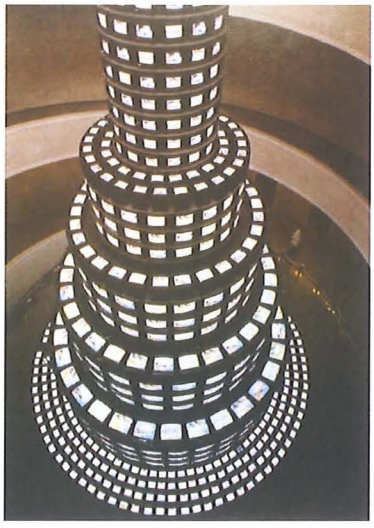

Image 21. Paik Nam June, 'The More The Better',1987, 1003 TV monitors, video installation view at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 1,800 cm (ht.).

In 1993 the National Museum of Contemporary Art in Korea held an exhibition of Paik Nam June's work, and in the same year Paik curated the exhibition *Whitney Biennale Seoul*, which revealed the current state of video and other technology to the Korean art world. Two years later he curated the new media art exhibition *Info Art* for the '95 Gwangju Biennale with Cynthia Goodman and Kim Hong Hee, as well as exhibiting new works in it. Within Korea, this was the first extensive exhibition to investigate interactivity in video art and other multi-media (hi-tech) art, and it further stimulated an interest in digital technology and new media art. In 2000 his retrospective exhibition at the Guggenheim New York (Image 21) travelled to Korea and was held at the Rodin Gallery and the Ho-am Art Gallery simultaneously. It showed the entire range of his video works and also laser art, a new genre he'd developed, which helped motivate a later generation of artists to make new media art works.

2) Postmodern[4] Tendency in the Korean Art World & Mixed Genres

In the late 1980s, Korean artists started to experiment with new styles and forms of art to overcome the limits of modernist art movements such as the Korean *Art Informel* [5] (Image 22) of the 1960s and Monochrome art [6] (Image 23) of the 1970s. Korean art critic Suh Seong Rok [7] argues that:

It was the change and achievement in the mid-1980s that contemporary art publicly criticizes the autonomous purity of modernism... Whilst [the] 'Anti-modernism' movement [of Minjung Misul][8] (Image 24) values social practices, the 'De-modernism'[9] tendency focuses on supplementing the problems that modernism couldn't solve and withhold, and historicizing the limits of modernist art. (Suh, 1992, p.38-39)

[4] The term postmodern here is limited to the tendency in Korean art from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s that rejects the stagnated formalism, the monopoly of certain art circles and their authoritarianism predicated upon the formality of modernism. Also the term postmodern used in Korean art critique usually refers to the acceptance of plurality and multiplicity.

[5] Korean *Art Informel* was the starting point for Korean modern art by the Contemporary Artists Asso ciation (*Hyundae MIsulga Hyeophoe*), which first consisted of members such as Kim Tschang Yeol, Ha In Du, Kim Seo Bong and Cho Yong-Ik, but was soon joined by Park Seo Bo, Yi Yang Ro, Yi Su Heon and Jeon Sang Su. Under the leadership of Park Seo Bo and Kim Tschang Yeol, the *Art Informel* trend appeared around 1958 and continued until around 1965. Most of the members made paintings in thick layers of pigments or aggressive brush strokes on a huge canvas. Influenced by American Abstract Expressionism or European *Art Informel*, they found affinity with those art movements in their Eastern appearances and their gestural brush strokes similar to the 'one stroke' technique in Eastern calligraphy. However, the Korean *Art Informel* artists used the canvas as a reflection of life and pathos, different from Abstract Expressionists who expressed creative energy through radical pictorial experimentation with intense colours and gestural brush strokes. (For further description, see Kim, Y. N., 2005. *Modern and Contemporary Art in Korea. Seoul*: Hollym, p.45-52.)

[6] Monochrome art is the term for Korean modernist minimalist abstraction painted in grey, white, brown, or other single colour neutrals. Led by the Korean artists such as Park Seo Bo, Ha Chong Hyun, Kim Ki Rin, Choi Myong Young and Kwon Yong Woo, the Monochrome art movement first appeared in the 1970s as an attempt to find an identity for Korean art by exploring traditional characteristics such as neutral colours and the unique surface texture found in Korean earthenware and white porcelain while maintaining the Western form of abstract painting. Although Monochrome Art has similarities with Minimalism in terms of minimal expression and the use of neutral colours, its refined and intuitive effect is different from Minimalism's impersonal and logical nature. Mono chrome artists often abandon form and materiality to seek after naturalness by conveying the inner qualities of materials which can be found in traditional landscape paintings and 'uniting artist's will with materials' as Ha Chong Hyun declares. The artists of the movement pursued the Eastern philoso phy of unity between human beings and nature in their work by asserting the spirituality of the tran scendental state of nothingness, which is the traditional Eastern concept of Taoism. Art historian Kim Young Na describes: 'In traditional landscapes based on this kind of thought, space and force, order, and harmony with nature were conveyed. To become one with nature, traditional artists sought a pro found understanding of nature, through which they hoped to attain a sense of the essence of the natu ral world, and to feel its creative energy. Similarly, Monochrome artists also surpassed the material, tactile world of the canvas in order to locate themselves within a [mental] space spreading to infinity.' Kim also points out that these notions of 'nonchalance and unpretentiousness along with the adapta tion to nature' pursued by Monochrome artists echo the aesthetic traits of Korean traditional art as de scribed by the first Korean art historian Ko Yu Seop (1905-1944) in the early 1940s. Ko depicts Korean art as 'not striving for elaborate perfection,' 'unsophisticated and naive,' or 'having sense of warmth and generosity.' (For further description, see Kim, Y. N., 2005. *Modern and Contemporary Art in Korea*. Seoul: Hollym, p.45-52.)

Image 22-1. Park Seo Bo, 'Poltoplasm No. 1-62', 1962, oil and mixed media on canvas, 162 x 130 cm.

Image 22-2. Choi Wook Kyung, 'Untitled', 1965, oil on canvas, 76, x 76 cm.

Image 22-3. Choi Ki Won, 'Ancient Times', 1963, bronze, 59 x 32 x 8 cm.

Image 23-1. Park Seo Bo, 'Ecriture No. 3-72', 1972, pencil and oil on canvas, 100 x 81cm.

Image 23-2. Choi Myung Young, 'Equality 75-P', 1975, oil on canvas, 194 x 130.3 cm.

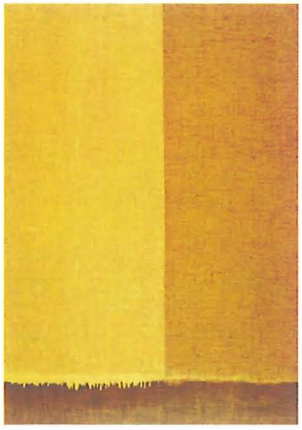

Image 23-3. Ha Chong Hyun, 'Conjunction 79-11', 1979, oil on canvas, 160 x 120 cm.

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[7] Elder critics such as Oh Kwang Su and Kim Bok Young do not distinguish between 'Anti-Modernism' and 'De-Modernism' movements when discussing postmodern pluralism. On the other hand, Suh Seong Rok views *Minjung Misul* as an 'Anti-Modernism' movement, and the proposal of new images by the late 1980s art groups such as Metabox, Nanjido and Pheonomenon and Image as a 'De-Modernism' movement. Finally he defines the 1990s *Shinsedae Misul* (new generation art) as pluralistic postmodern art practices. On the other hand art historian Kim Hong Hee analyses 1980s groups' new art practices as an 'Anti-Modernism' movement and the *Shinsedae* artists' practices of the 1990s as a 'De-Modernism' movement influenced by 'Deconstructionism'. Although there exist different views to distinguish the periods and characteristics of 'Anti-modernism' and 'De-modernism' movements in the postmodern practices of Korean art among critics and theorists, I focus on Suh Seong Rok's analysis here because he is the most influential critic of Korean postmodern art, and I find his description of it useful for my argument.

[8] *Minjung Misul* (art of the masses) insisted on the necessity of incorporating the daily life of the masses into art and criticized Monochrome art as a derivative of Western modernism's formalist school. At its core, *Minjung Misul* refused to follow Western art forms and sought to revive indigenous traditions. They opposed bourgeois culture and capitalism, and wanted to create a culture based on the banality of public culture. In the early 1980s the movement first started from folk art traditions such as mask dances, *Pansori* (Korean traditional opera) and other outdoor performances, and gradually moved onto art practices, which showed the influence of marginalized art forms like Buddhist paintings, woodcuts, and genre paintings, and admiration for the agrarian culture of the past. *Minjung Misul* adopted narrative pictorial forms to express its ideals, and having its peak in the mid-1980s, its supporters were often involved in student demonstrations against the military government of the time and the introduction of American cultural forms into Korea. (For further information on *Minjung Misul*, see Kim, Y. N. 2005. *Modern and Contemporary Art in Korea*. Seoul: Hollym, p.52-61.)

Image 24-1. Oh Yoon, 'Marketing V: Hell' 1981, mixed media on canvas, 174 x 120cm.

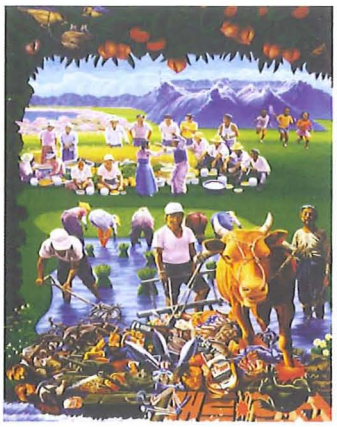

Image 24-2. Shin Hak Chul, 'History of Korean Modernization-Rice Planting', repainted in 1993, oil on canvas, 130 x 160 cm.

Image 24-3. 'One', 1988, wall painting in Kyungi University, Seoul, Korea.

Nanjido (Image 25), Meta-Vox (Image 26) and Phenomenon and Image were the first, representative 'De-Modernist' art groups of the mid-1980s to actively try to develop the secession from modern art practices and to overcome the formality and canonization of autonomous modernist art movements. Suh explains:

Image 25-1. Park Bang Young, 'Myth', 1987, mixed media in *Nanjido.*

Image 25-2. Shin Myung Jae, 'Forest', 1987, oriental ink on wood in *Nanjido.*

Image 25. The Third *Nanjido* exhibition catalogue.

As the groups such as Nanjido and Meta-Vox emerged in the mid-1980s, the concrete reflection on Korean art began to be made. They observed the fact that modernism denied the innate role of art by being too aesthetically inclined, self-attached and focused on purity, and at the same time progressively investigated issues such as art and environment as well as culture and communication.

[9] 'Anti-Modernism' and 'De-Modernism' are the terms that Korean art critics characterize to describe the tendency in Korean art that tried to move away from modern art and to form the postmodern art movement in the 1980s.

Also from the formula that modernism is painting and postmodernism is installation, they aim to inspect diversified pictorial issues that painting cannot solve, through the 'extended use of language' and 'material experimentation'. (Suh, 1992, p.38)

Image 26. The second *Meta-Vox* exhibition catalogue.

However, Suh points out that these efforts did not investigate the significance of pluralism's coexistence with the social changes of multi-national, late capitalist culture, as this movement rigidly focused on the separation from modernism. Emphasizing postmodern art practices as a reaction to social changes, Suh Seong-Rok observes that post-industrial culture[10] has flourished in Korean society and as a result art works reacting to the changes emerged since the late 1980s.

Image 26-1. 2Oh Sang Gil, 'Variable Object', 1985, acrylic, cloth, copper, 60 x 288 cm in *Meta-Vox*.

Radically changing life-styles since the mid-1980s, from increasing numbers of apartments and cars to the fast-food industry, brought huge changes in our product distribution structure. Furthermore, the advent of new media and the flourishing consumer culture induced the image-based perception of reality in Korean society. In this situation Korean people had to

Image 26-2. Hong Seoung Yil 'Pheonix', 1985, wood, gunny, acrylic, 275 x 260 cm in *Meta-Vox*.

[10] The term 'post-industrial society' was first outlined by Daniel Bell (b.1919) in 1973 referencing the transition from industrial to post-industrial society (PIS) that occurs through an economic evolution from manufacturing industry to service-based industry. He also claims: '[P]ost industrial society is an information society, as industrial society is a goods-producing society.' (Bell, D. *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society: A Venture in Social Forecasting.* 1999. New York: Basic Books) Korean art critics often mix it with terms such as consumer society, media society and late capitalist society without distinguishing the critical rigour of each term, which describes contemporary society from a different perspective. I find this as a sign of 'surface culture' in Korean society of the 1990s, which under stands the world from the surface without looking into the internal meaning.

pay attention to these new symptoms of post-industrial society, and art practices were naturally shifted from creator-centred to audience centred, from monotone to colour, from plane to mixed-media, and meaning search to communication. (Suh, 1992, p.40)

As Suh and other Korean art critics[11] commonly observe, it is important to note that the acceptance of the postmodern trend in Korea was a cultural reaction to society. He explains its process:

Korean people have experienced flourishing entertainment and advertising industries, public culture represented by fast-food and fashion industries and new forms of consumption as well as the visual media's penetration of life and popularization of the computer, which are the indications of a new society, the so-called 'post-industrial society, multi-national capitalist society, consumer society and media society'. Accordingly they understood postmodernism as a criticism of materialism, the decadence of mind and the exhaustion of morality as well as of the industrialization symbolized as modernism's speed admiration, which made it much easier for Korean people to accept the trend. (Suh, 1992, p.60)

Suh also emphasizes the impact of information distribution on contemporary society due to the expansion of electronic industries, such as TV and computer, as well as software businesses, such as advertising and cultural industries. He explains that these kinds of new businesses and industries basically cannot be possessed or monopolized by specific classes, but its consumption has a decision-making quality by itself. Consequently, the ubiquity of information is achieved as in this [technology based] society information is revealed to all classes of people and shared by them.

[11] Prominent Korean art critics on postmodern art such as Suh Seong Rok, Yoon Jin Seop, Kim Hyun Doh and Lee Jae Un all recognize postmodern art practices as a cultural reaction to social and economic changes in the age of late capitalism. (For further analysis, refer to Seo, S. R., 1993. *Korean Art and Postmodernism.* Seoul: Mijinsa, pp.39, 61.)

He concluded: "The range of cognition got broadened relatively, and the diversity of values brought the pluralism of multi-layered viewpoints and interpretation. (Suh, 1992, p.66) (I have examined the cultural impact of advertising as a major postmodern visual culture of mass-media and digital technology, on younger generation of Korean people. For further description, see Chapter I, p.22-28.)

3) The Museum Group as a Beginning of Shinsedae *Misul* (New Generation Art) in the Early 1990s

Postmodern characteristics such as plurality and mixed genres were continuously investigated in the practices of new generations of artists throughout the 1990s. The Museum group led by Lee Bul, Ko Nak Beom and Choi Jeong Hwa was the first to practice mixing genres without an ultimate inclination to certain ideology, suggesting a paradigm of Shinsedae (new generation) art. They advocated: "We want to make our studios laboratories for all kinds of modes." (*The 'Museum' Exhibition*, 1987, Introduction) The diverse art practices starting with the Museum group promoted this new trend further. (For more information, see p. 57-58.) Art Historian Kim Hong-Hee describes the characteristics of these new art practices:

> *[Shinsedae Misul (new generation art)] in the 1990s challenged the existing values by liberalism, popularization and separation, and pursuing a rejection of formality, ideology, politics and genres, and fostering underground culture. They formed small art groups whose members worked together temporarily for each project and dispersed when a project was over. The groups made 'extended' art practices regardless of genres such as paintings, installations, performances, concerts and dance by insisting on diversification, pluralization and decentralization of media, genres and formats. (Kim, 2003, p.43)*

She continues:

Postmodern mixed genre is the most distinctive trait of the new art, which denies genre itself and comes to achieve the deviation from specific medium, formality and genres by breaching the limits of media, formats and styles. (Kim, 2003, p.44)

This trend is closely related to the advent of *Shinsedae*[12] a new generation who possess new kinds of sensibility and lifestyle emerging with the economic growth in the early 1990s and the flourishing consumer culture at that time. Kim describes:

The Shinsedae (new generation) artists in the 1990s experimented with mixed genres in art practices and, in comparison to the previous generation, focused on developing a new medium by using public media and experimenting with non-art 'found objects'. [As] a result [they] broadened the horizon of technology art by using video, computer and multi-media. (Kim, 2003, p.44)

Following the inaugural exhibition Museum in 1987, the Museum group had a series of exhibitions such as *Print Concept* in 1987, *U.A.O.* (Unidentified Art Object) (Image 27) in 1988 and *Sunday Seoul* (Image 28) in 1990. Through these liberal and experimental exhibitions, they challenged modernist aesthetics, the museum's authority and art history's tradition, embodied provocative

[12] *Shinsedae* is a Korean term for new generation, which is represented by *Apgujeong* culture in Korea and frequently regarded as the 'Korean X generation'. (I have also discussed its characteristics in Chapter I, p.24-29.) Its culture came to flourish in Korean society by the mid-1990s, which required media and academics a closer analysis of its definition and effects. A Korean journal about contemporary culture *HyunSilMunHwaYeonGu* writes: '...Our interest in *Shinsedae* began from the fact that they possess the unique sensibility and image, different from [the older generation]). Generally *Shinsedae* refers to the children who were born into the new social environment and cultural conditions of modern projects or progress theory in the dominant discourse of Korean mod ern history. And they are also distinguished as consumers in affluence, children of image-society and young people who are born and die in cities.' (*HyunSilMunHwaYeonGu*, Introduction, 1995)
Art critic Yoon Jin Seop points out that *Shinsedae* leads the diverse areas like pop culture, fashion, advertising, interior design, computer industry, hi-tech science and art, and brings changes in these industries through unique ideas and new sensibilities different from the older generation. He also points out that the advent of this new generation is the outcome of changing culture from the destruction of meta-discourses and the ideological vacuum after the end of Cold War. Furthermore he observes that the power of globally growing information and cultural industry came to provide *Shinsedae* with synchronous, multi-national sense and new sensation. (Yoon, 1997, p.35-36)

issues like death, sex, pleasure, fantasy, poverty and existence, and presented examples of new generation's modality with kitsch-like sensibility. They preferred humour and play, lightness and unconventionality, and shock and frivolity to tragic, serious, heavy and noble matters, and valued fragmented, disruptive, transient, fortuitous and private matters. Furthermore, they published catalogues for text-centred exhibitions and doubled communicative effect by attending to language and text, and combining visual images with letters. (Kim, 2003, p.45-46)

Image 27.The *U.A.O.* exhibition pamphlet.

Image 28. The *Sunday Seoul* exhibition installation view: Lee Bul on the ceiling, Ko Nak Beom on the wall, Choi Jeong Hwa and Myung Hye Kyung on the floor.

Image 28-1. Lee Bul's work in *Sunday Seoul.*

Image 28-2. Choi Jeong Hwa and Myng Hye Kyung collaboration in *Sunday Seoul.*

Starting with the exhibition *Sunday Seoul* (the name of a Korean weekly tabloid magazine) in 1990 representing Korean pop culture by the Museum group, in the early 1990s group exhibitions such as *Golden Apple* (1990) (Image 29), *Sub Club* (1990) (Image 30), and *On and Off* (1991) (Image 31) [13] saw the fully-fledged blooming of postmodern art practices by *Shinsedae* artists. Korean postmodern art practices are characterized by playing with intertextuality, denying the existing rule of language interpretation with predetermined signified and signifier in modernism, and showing a conviction about the absence of truth through a playful use of texts. Art critic Yoon Jin Seop describes:

Image 29. The *Golden Apple* exhibition pamphlet.

Image 29-1. Lee Sang Yoon, 'Untitled', 1990, mixed media installation in *Golden Apple.*

'The exhibitions of Shinsedae artists show 'text-centered thinking' of these artists by publishing temporary magazines concentrating on the combination of image and text material. (Yoon 1997 p.40)

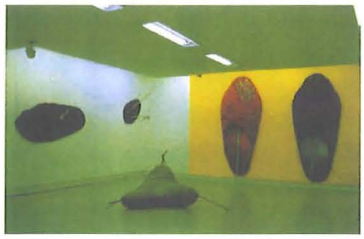

Image 29-2. Paek Jong Sung, 'Untitled', 1990, mixed media, 630 x 420 cm in *Golden Apple.*

Image 29-3. Details of 'Untitled' by Paek Jong Sung.

Image 29-4. Yoon Kab Yong, 'Wind', 1990, mixed media, 400 x242 cm in *Golden Apple.*

Image 29-5. Details of 'Wind' by Yoon Kab Yong.

Image 30. The exhibition *Sub-Club* pamphlet in 1990.

Image 30-1. The exhibition *Sub Club*: Natura Naturans pamphlet in 1991.

[13] The *Golden Apple* (Lee Sang Yoon, Lee Yong Baek and Paek Kwang Hyun) aims to seek artistic reality by granting more meaning to artistic language itself than to the social role of art, and by em bodying a personal dream. *Off and On* (Lee Dong Gee, Park Hye Sung and Jeong Jae Yong) valued the artist's individuality and taste over the semantic modality of established artists. *Sub Club* (Kim Hyun Tae and Lee Sang Yoon) tried unconventional artistic expression through various experimentation of performance, experimental music and image concerts, and through changes in medium and modes of publication such as printed material. Mainly they worked with cafés like Ozone and Power Plant. These small groups did not have consistent members, but invariably invited the artists needed for each project, and these project-style exhibitions together with café activities characterized the new generation art group of the early 1990s. (For further information see Kim H.H., 2003. *The Korean Art World and Contemporary Art.* Seoul: Noonbit, p.46-47 and Yoon J. S. 1997. *Issues of Contemporary Art&Its Scene.* Seoul: Mijinsa, p.45-46.)

Image 30-2. Installation view of Oh Jae Won, 'Body and Spirit' in the exhibition *Sub-Club: Made in Korea* in 1991.

Image 30-3. Installation view of Kim Hyung Tae & Goo Hee Jung's collaboration in the exhibition *Sub-Club: Made in Korea* in 1991.

Image 30-4. Choi Jeong Hwa, 'Benefits of Lightings, Make-up, Photos and Plastic Surgery', 1990, plastic baskets, mixed media in the exhibition *Sub-Club: Made in Korea* in 1991.

Image 30-5. Installation view of Kim Hyung Tae & Goo Hee Jung's collaboration in the exhibition *Sub-Club: Made in Korea* in 1991.

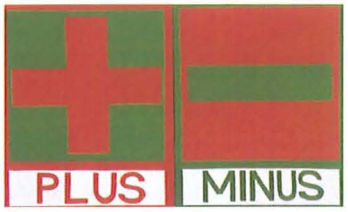

Image 31. Lee Dong Ki, 'Plus & Minus', 1990, acrylic on canvas, 160 x264 cm in the exhibition *Off and On.*

Image 31-1. Lee Ki Beom, 'I prefer vending machine coffee', 1990, mixed media in the exhibition *Off and On.*

These project-style and café exhibitions (Image 32) were representative of the styles of the *Shinsedae Misul* (new generation art) groups in the early 1990s. Kim Hong-Hee comments:

> *They were the postmodern group with 'De-Modernist', kitsch-like and public media-friendly characteristics. Possessing a [participatory] critical sensibility they formed an underground culture beyond the system. For example, they made café as site-specific exhibition spaces for the public. (Kim, 1999, p.228)*

She analyzes: 'Alternative spaces like event café, performance bar and live club themselves become the media for expression and exhibition, through which an alternative reality is created.... For them café is a metonymical space that echoes city life.' (Kim, 1999, p.228-229)

Image 32. Choi Jeong Hwa, Ko Nak Beom & Lee Hyung Joo, 'Union Installation' in 1990 at the 'Unicorn' club, Seoul, Korea.

4) *Shinsedae Misul* (New Generation Art) as 'Late Capitalistic' Symptom and a Sign of 'Surface Culture' in the late 1990s

Throughout the 1990s *Shinsedae* artists adopted a new attitude of cultural openness as the political deregulation and economic growth promoted continuous international exchanges and mass-media industry developments. Accordingly, these artists were exposed to a tremendous amount of Western cultural content, and developed a hybrid culture mixing all kinds of cultural and artistic information. Finally, supported by the unprecedented IC technology development, in the late 1990s the *Shinsedae* artists saw the formation of 'surface culture', which comprehends information from the outside instead of distinguishing its internal meaning in the image deluge of diverse media.

In order to explicate the character of *Shinsedae Misul* and 'surface culture', I want to call attention to the work of Yoon Jin Seop and his clarification of art practices by this generation in relation to the traits of post-industrial society. Yoon observes that the main difference in their practices came from the use of new media such as printing, performance, computers and other multimedia technology that can transcend the binary structure between modernism and *Min-Jung Misul* (art of the masses) as Anti-Modernist art. He also comments: 'These *Shinsedae* artists advocated disavowing all the existing ideologies as a longing for the negation of authority and for freedom.' (Yoon, 1997, p.38) He continues: 'The difference between the old and new generations is the latter does not care about the centre at all whereas the former does despite their resistance to it.' (Yoon, 1997, p.42)

Most importantly Yoon asserts that the social background of *Shinsedae Misul* is related to the prospect of post-industrial society at that time. He records:

> *They aimed to explore new forms of art to meet new expectations and paid attention to mass media as a new way of communication. Mass media's openness to all kinds of human senses makes it stimulating and effective for communication. As contemporary society is characterized as 'society of the spectacle', 'media society', 'post-industrial society' and 'information society', its visual environment overflows with a deluge of images. Naturally many Shinsedae artists took note of this*

view and developed a growing interest in electronic images via visual media. (Yoon, 1997, p.43)

He emphasizes that the power of the electronic media, which enables synchronic viewing across the world, brought about the cultivation of multinational sensibilities. He describes: 'They prefer the light and burden-less feelings of words like "universal", "cosmopolitan", "everyday", and "contemporaneous" to the heavy feelings that words like "Korean" or "national" give.' (Yoon, 1997, p.44)

He explains the close relation between *Shinsedae Misul* (new generation art) and pop culture:

The diffusion of colour TV in the 1980s increased graphic images in art works. The senses and sensibilities of Shinsedae have close relations with advertising, fashion, hair-styles, consumer patterns as well as the contents of pop music, technological engineering and the leisure industry in that they are the outcome of contemporary culture. Virtual reality created by the increase in the reproduction of images and illusionary postmodern entertainment facilities represented by the Lotte Adventure World[14]*, pastiche and simulacra, the rap music of Seo Tae-Ji and Boys, Deux, Hyun Jin-Young, Rula and EOS, punk hairstyles*[15] *and fragmented advertising images are the nutriments of Shinsedae sensibilities. (Yoon, 1997, p.44)*

Kim Hong-Hee also maintains this view in pointing out that *Shinsedae* art is an outcome of post-industrial society, and has a direct connection to the everyday and the use of public media and technology. She describes how artists intended to capture the contemporary culture by using public media like colour TV, video, fax, computers and the Internet as artistic media, which had the consequence of increasing the public's affinity to and recognition of art.

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[14] Based in Seoul and opened in 1989, Lotte built its World Adventure amusement park as the world's largest indoor theme park.

[15] The *Shinsedae* pop singers of the 1990s received wide popularity among young Koreans, bringing not only new styles to Korean pop music but also a fashion trend for punk hair styles with colourful dyes, that lasted throughout the late 1990s and early 2000s.

From the viewpoint of 2003, Kim points out that *Shinsedae* artists were divided into two groups: those artists in their mid-to-late 30s who had begun by leading *Shinsedae Misul* in the early 1990s and artists in their late 20s who only appeared at the end of the 1990s. Moreover, she maintains that the initial group of *Shinsedae* artists of the early 1990s had studied only in Korea, whereas the artists of the late 1990s had studied abroad. (Kim, 2003, p.57) Most importantly, Kim Hong Hee argues that these *Shinsedae* artists have brought about big changes in the structure of the Korean art world, since their work was separated from the former Korean art historical genealogy and older generation artists' work, and produced totally new forms of experimental, progressive art. (Kim, 2003, p.65)

I want to throw some light on this sudden disconnection from the previous traits of Korean art and culture prior to the *Shinsedae*, a severance that I claim as symptomatic of 'surface culture'. I assert that this disconnection is due to the effects of internationalism on Korean society, reinforced by the diffusion of digital media and information technologies in the late 1990s, which has collapsed temporality and caused a synchronic approach to history and culture. I have observed that from the 1990s, not only were Korean artists able to share diverse information with the rest of the world instantaneously through the public media, they were also able to manipulate it via diverse new reproduction technologies such as video camera and scanner as well as via new computer graphic technology. Hence *Shinsedae* artists effectively mixed all kinds of cultural information, regardless of its historicity or genre, and formed a hybridized character to their art that resulted in a breach with the previous generation of Korean artists.

Through the multiplicity of images within the public media, objects turn to 'sets of texts or simulacra' where reality is understood by surface or multiple surfaces. I maintain that it is in this process that a new kind of superficiality deprived of depth (i.e. deprived of historicity – which Fredric Jameson observes as the main character of late capitalism) was created, causing Korean artists to understand the world based on its image, which I recognize as a distinctive character of 'surface culture'.

5) Cross-Cultural Development and Hybrid Identity in *Shinsedae* Art since the mid-1990s

Kim Hong Hee claims that exhibiting internationally has been the ultimate goal of the Korean art world since the 1990s, encouraging Korean artists to be part of the 'star system' of the international art world. Kim points out that internationalization's negative effects – such as post-colonial culture and global homogenization – became important aesthetic and political issues of the international art world in the 1990s. She explains that accordingly Korean *Shinsedae* artists in the mid-1990s created new kinds of visual images and new concepts of political art by paying attention to issues like post-colonialism and the third world. For these artists who have inherited the history of the Japanese occupation (1910–1945) yet aimed for internationalization, identity issues were a poignant subject. (Kim, 2003, p.58)

In the meantime, the *Shinsedae* artists began to examine the issues of nomadism, muticulturalism and hybrid culture by relativizing the Western culture-based cultural hegemony by aestheticizing traditional sensibilities or commercializing Asian qualities, while at the same time mixing folk culture and indigenous customs with Western pop culture and hi-tech. (Kim, 2003, p.59) For example, the work of *Shinsedae* artists Lee Bul (b.1964) and Choi Jeong Hwa (b.1961) can be analyzed in such context.

Lee Bul participated in the 1999 Venice Biennale with an installation entitled *Gravity Greater Than Velocity* (Image 33), a capsule-like mock-up of a karaoke room in which the audience could select and sing along to American pop songs. In her *Cyborg* series (1997-98) (Image 34), Lee made sensuous, handcrafted, female body forms, resembling the exaggerated shapes of the Cyborg that features in Korean animations. In these works she expresses the hybrid identity of contemporary Korea by combining Korean pop cultural icons

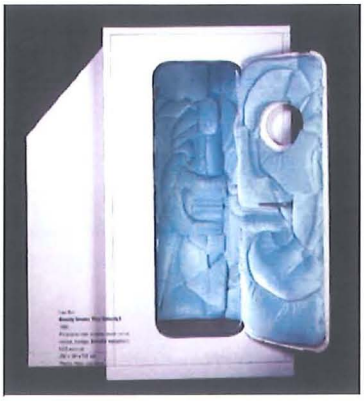

Image 33. Lee Bul, 'Gravity Greater than Velocity', 1999, Polycarbonate sheet, steel frame, velour, sponge, karaoke equipment, LCD monitor.

Image 33-1. Interior detail of 'Gravity Greater than Velocity', 1999.

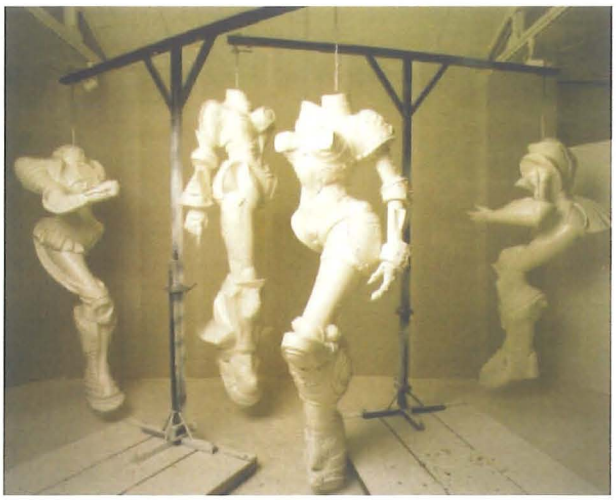

Image 34. Lee Bul, 'Cyborg', 1997-1998,
cast silicone, polyurethane, paint pigment.

(like karaoke or the robot character) with foreign cultural components such as American pop songs and the feminine figure from traditional Western painting and sculpture, developing her own language of 'hybrid culture'.

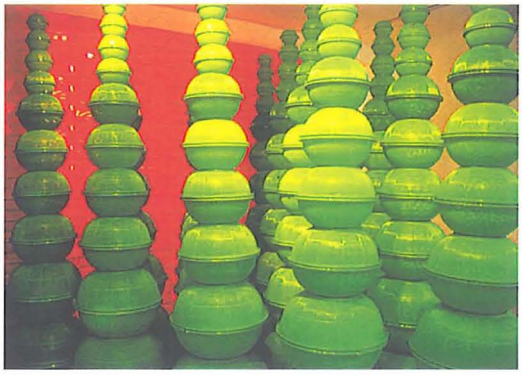

Image 35. Choi Jeong Hwa, 'Plastic Paradise', 1997,
plastic baskets, 260 x 200 x 200 cm.

Choi Jeong Hwa examines the identity of Korean society through works using consumer products and cheap industrial materials representative of contemporary pop culture in Korea. Diverse plastic products of 'flim-flam fabrication' (as the artist put it) are the symbol of an unconditional acceptance of Western cultural influences during the period of Korea's rapid economic growth in the late 20th century. For example, in his work *Plastic Paradise* (1997) (Image 35), the plastic baskets from street-market stalls succinctly capture the language of everyday life. The artificial, theatrical quality of his kitsch objects echoes the multilayered, conflicting identity of contemporary Seoul: a radically different approach to that of older, patriotic notions of Korean national identity.

In the late 1990s, facing the difficult task of balancing globalism and localism, such artists endeavoured to cultivate creative tradition and a dynamic identity by focusing on oppositional issues between the West and East, past and present, centre and periphery. Also as another effect of the opposition between globalism and localism, Korean Shinsedae artists, especially the ones who correspond with the international art world, stood for a cultural hybridization that leaned toward 'glocalism'.[16] *Shinsedae* artists of the late 1990s began to construct hybrid identities by paying attention to nomadic culture instead of adhering to the fixed idea of race or nationality. Kim Hong Hee comments:

These hybrid dynamisms and cultural nomadism, which liberalized old paradigms, were the sentiments of the later group of Shinsedae artists. These artists, who had studied abroad, escaped from the exclusive single-race ideology of our ancestors and their dislike of others, and tried to harmonize with the external world by possessing liberal openness and chaotic cross-cultural energy. (Kim, 2003, p.60)

For example, Nikki Lee (b.1970) who graduated from Jung-Ang University in Korea, produced a series of photographic works (Image 36) between 1997 and 2001 in which she herself assumes the characteristic appearance and behaviour of people from other cultures. To make this convincing, like an actor she absorbed herself in different cultures such as Hispanic, punk, or senior citizen for weeks or even months. She then made herself up to look like a member of each culture and arranged for random passersby to take photos. Through this process, although she felt empathy with them, she came to realize certain cultural differences that she could never assimilate. Eventually, she concluded that living with others helped her to know herself better – although not necessarily the others themselves – and that a collective, fixed identity of a race or a culture does not exist as Koreans have traditionally thought. Through this work she tried to suggest that an identity changes continuously and forms through the interaction with different cultures.

Image 36. Nikki Lee, 'Hispanic Project (1)', 1998, Fuji flex print, 53.8 x 71.6 cm.

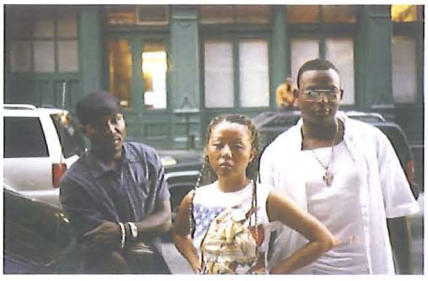

Image 36-1. Nikki Lee, 'The Hip-Hop Project (16)', 2001, Fuji flex print, 53. 8 x 71.6 cm.

Lastly, the mass-media culture that continued to flourish in Korean society at the turn of the century and the development of new digital technology promoted the mixture of different areas of

[16] The Oxford Dictionary of New Words: 'glocal' and 'glocalization' are 'formed by telescoping global and local to make a blend,' Japanese *dochahkuka*, 'one of the main marketing buzzwords for the beginning of the nineties.' The idea of glocalization in its business sense is closely related to what in some contexts is called, in more straightforwardly economic terms, micromarketing, the tailoring and advertising of goods and services on a global or near-global basis to increasingly differentiated local and particular markets.

culture ranging from pop entertainment to digital media. I observe this has encouraged *Shinsedae* artists to further examine the hybrid notion of art and culture in this media society. Kim Hong Hee illustrates the character of the *Shinsedae* artists' work:

> *As the children of the information age and popular consumer culture, some of these Shinsedae artists find their identity in the hybridized popular culture that already became familiar to them by paying attention to information circulation, cultural production and consumption, and entertainment culture than to political ideology or pure elite culture. [Often] they constructively create new combinations by mixing and jumbling heterogeneous elements like art and entertainment, East and West, and past and present. (Kim, 2003, p.60)*

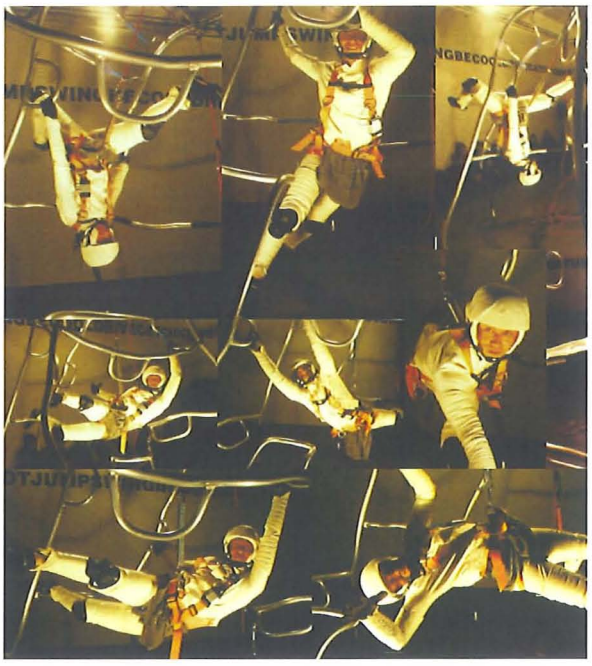

Image 37. Kim Hong Seok, 'Heromaniac', 2000, performance, photo documents.

Image 37-1. Details of 'Heromaniac', 2000.

Kim Hong Seok (b.1964) investigates social issues of contemporary popular culture by vigorously integrating them into art practices. In his works *Heromaniac* (2000) (Image 37) and *Making a Star* (2000) (Image 38), he questions the cultural tendency of Korean society, such as success driven culture and extreme pop-idol syndrome via the media. In *Heromaniac* he stages the scenes resembling media images of heroes, performing and posing as one himself. He also produces texts explaining the processes of making a hero and the diverse aspects of being a hero in a contemporary society. In *Making a Star* he staged a performance by two young women. After meeting at a karaoke bar, he suggested to these women that he could turn them into pop-singers. He commissioned a composer to write four songs, himself working as

manager while they practiced the songs at a professional studio under the guidance of the composer for two months. He managed their schedule, advertised their performance and prepared costumes and stage to be designed by professionals. As there was no budget for choreography, he persuaded them to simply dance untutored, which produced a successful effect similar to that choreographed by professional dance tutors. Through this work, he emphasizes the ordinariness and fortuity of the star system in contemporary society.

Image 38. Kim Hong Seok, 'Making a Star', 2000, performance, photo documents.

Kim Hong Hee maintains that the artist finds the true nature of democratic hybridism in the everyday popular culture of instability and uncertainty, such as dance, pop-songs, sports and parties, which circumvents the authority of single culture. (Kim, 2003, p.61)

6) De-contextualized Hybridity and the Construction of Simulacra in the Art Works of the *Shinsedae* in the late-1990s as Characteristics of 'Surface Culture'

I argue that the hybridized traits of the *Shinsedae* art works are closely connected to 'surface culture' in the late 1990s. The *Shinsedae* artists at this time abandoned any linear connection with the previous generation as they didn't discriminate between internal and external cultural contents or genres, creating hybridity in their art practices. I assert that the intense compression of time and space due to the Internet and other mass media caused this 'schizophrenic' (Refer to Chapter I, p.21, footnote 7.) symptom in the mentality of these Korean artists. I argue that at this moment, and certainly by the turn of the century, 'surface culture' appears in the Korean art world as artists lost the clear distinction between space and time, and experienced a new type of visual sensation and stimulation amid the torrent of information available via the Internet and other mass media. For them, there is no division

between regional and foreign cultures, or between low and high cultures, and this creates art practices of hybridized characters. I observe that this symptom has been intensified throughout the last decade predicated upon the creation of a unique digital culture in Korean society (see Chapter I, p.29-32.) and as Korean artists began to understand the world as raw material by registering the received contents as images and turning them into modules.

In order to illustrate the ways that Korean artists develop de-contextualized hybridity in their art works, I want to highlight the creation of simulacra, one of the distinctive traits to be found in many *Shinsedae* artists' work throughout the last decade. For example, in *Amaryllis* (1999) (Image 39) Lee Bul creates a metamorphosis of the feminine body composed of mechanical body parts that resemble a chest and buttocks with the intertwined legs. The result is an eerie, hybridized body-figure, but ironically attractive and sensual, which both attracts and confuses the viewer. The work is the simulation of the male desire for the ideal female as as connoted by the title *Amaryllis*, the narcissus family of flowers symbolizing femininity. This figure presents a simulacra of the female body, through which the viewer questions the original notion of feminine identity.

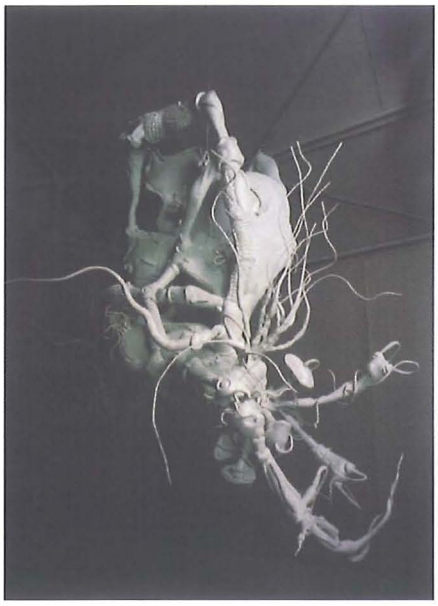

Image 39. Lee, Bul, 'Amaryllis', 1999, Polyurethan, aluminium wire, enamel coating, 210 x 120 x 180 cm.

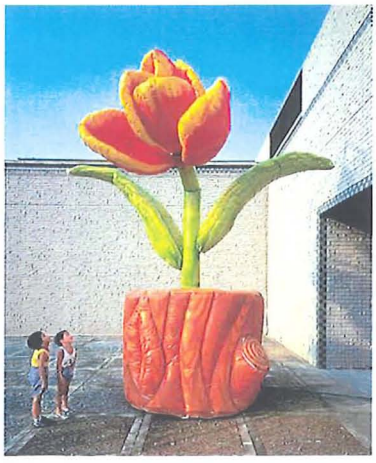

Image 40. Choi Jeong Hwa, 'SuperFlower', 1995, waterproof textiles, air compressor, 500 x 350 x 150 cm.

Made of an oversized, helium-filled balloon in flower shape, Choi Jeong Hwa's *Super Flower* (1995) (Image 40) presents us with the symbols of the illusionary reality of plastic culture, by which he constructs the simulacra of a spectacular culture in Korean society. As the artist comments: '...often the fake is more real and appetizing than the real thing.' (Noh, 2001, p.14) Through this work, he also recalls the unnatural, harmful reality of contemporary society by hybridizing the flower as a beautiful and fragile subject matter of high culture with the unsophisticated material and gaudy colours

representative of mass-produced industrial culture.

In Suh Do Ho's *Seoul home, New York home* (1999) (Image 41) the artist creates replications of his homes in New York and Seoul, the outcome of his longing for the absent home no matter where he is currently living. By creating the simulacra in which dream and reality mix, and a hyperreality which enables the co-existence of his two different homes, Suh contemplates his multi-cultural identity and disorientating living condition as a Korean artist who alternates between Korea and America.

Image 41. Suh Do Ho, 'Seoul Home, New York Home' 1999, mixed media.

Image 41-1. Details of 'Seoul Home, New York Home'.

Image 41-2. Details of 'Seoul Home, New York Home'.

One of the younger generation of Shinsedae artists, Jeong Yeon Doo (b.1969) also creates a virtual reality of dreams in his series *Bewitched* (2001–) (Image 42, Image 43). This is an ongoing project in which he interviews diverse people (e.g. an actress and a boy who works at a gas station) about their dreams, then makes their dreams come true temporarily by staging simulated scenes of their ideal lives with themselves acting as imaginary characters. He photographs the simulated images and slide-projects the simulacra of people's dreams superimposed with images of their real lives, through which the viewer is invited to imagine and interpret their actual situations and stories. Through this project he performs as 'dreamweaver '[17] – one who realizes other people's dreams by encouraging their imagination.

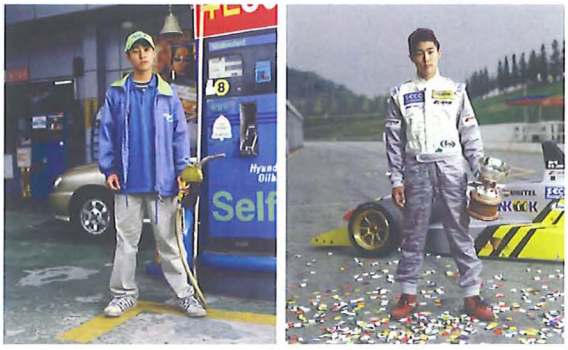

Image 42. Jeong Yeon Doo, 'Bewitched #1 ', 2001, slide projection, 250 x 160 cm.

Image 43. Jeong Yeon Doo, 'Bewitched # 21', 2006, slide projection, 250 x 160 cm.

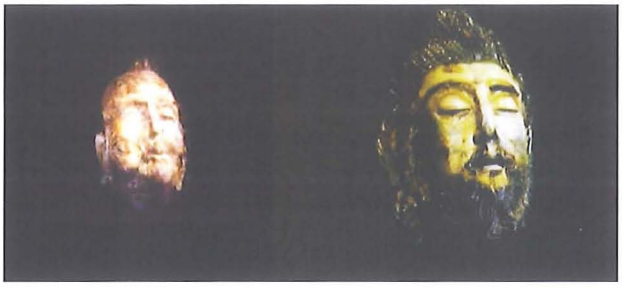

Image 44. Lee Yong Baek, 'Christ and Buddha', 2002, single-channel video projection.

Since the late-1990s Korean artists began to actively use digital technologies in constructing simulacra in their art works. They paid much attention to video and other new media, affording greater freedom to experiment with the notion of virtual reality and the possibilities of better communication. For example, Lee Yong Baek (b.1966) experiments with the possibilities of virtual reality by creating hybrid images via digital media. *In Christ and Buddha* (2002) (Image 44) he takes photos of various images of the smiling Buddha and crucified Christ, regardless of their periods and origins. He synthesizes these images of contrary sentiments – such as sadness and complacency – to produce hybrid images as video. He then removes the original still-images, offering viewers only the transformed and coalesced process, and ultimately the digital simulation without the original. This work is a simulacra of contemporary Korean culture, where Eastern and Western cultures merge, impacting upon each other and producing a new kind of de-contextualized hybrid that transcends time, space, culture and religion.

Lastly, various exhibitions and activities addressing the new media and digital technology were realized later in the 1990s, fostering changes not only in art making and exhibition formats, but also the way artists recognize things and process ideas. With the support of the Korean government's policy to promote digital technology culture, and along with the establishment of large-scale media art institutions such as Art Center Nabi and Il Ju Art Center,[18] the dynamic scene of new media-related activities in the Korean art world was created around the new millennium. I claim that the hybridization of different cultures has been further developed in Korean art of the period as the new digital technology provided an efficient means to overcome the limit of different time and space, mix all ranges of art and culture, and ultimately facilitate the development of 'surface culture'.

In the next chapter I will show how this development of 'surface culture' in the Korean art world can be explained through Fredric Jameson's analysis of late capitalistic culture.

[17] A term that coined by Yukie Kamiya, curator of The New Museum in New York, meaning a person who realizes another's dream by weaving one thread with another.

[18] Il Ju House was the first Korean multi-media art center founded by the Korean Insurance Company Hung Kook Saeng Myung in 2000, and Art Center Nabi was established by Korean telecommunications conglomerate SK Telecom in 2000 to promote new artistic, cultural expressions and mutual collaboration among art, the humanities and science, coinciding with the advance of digital media and information communication technology.

CHAPTER III

Understanding 'Surface Culture': Guy Debord's and Fredric Jameson's Theories

In this chapter I find one explanation for 'surface culture' in Korean society and in the art world of the last decade (see Chapter II for further description) in Fredric Jameson's assessment of the 'depthless' culture of late capitalist society. I observe that Jameson's argument is based on the assumption that the power of the market at this stage lies in the form itself, also as outlined in Guy Debord's theory of media image as the final form of commodity reification. In this chapter along with Debord's two texts, *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967) and *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle* (1988) I aim to examine Jameson's critique of postmodern culture in the two texts, *Postmodernism or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991) and *The Cultural Turn – Selected Writings on the Postmodern, 1983-1998* (1998).

1) Debord's Theory of the Society of the Spectacle as a Foundation for Jameson's Critique of Postmodern Culture

1.1 The Spectacle Separates Society by Turning Reality to Image

Guy Debord's notion of the 'society of the spectacle' maintains that late capitalism nurtured a situation in which the spectacle is the predominant means by which society represents itself. For Debord, writing in 1967, streams of images detach life experience from reality, representing the world in a partial way, solely as an object of contemplation. Debord asserts:

> *Images detached from every aspect of life merge into a common stream, and the former unity of life is lost forever... The tendency toward the specialization of images-of-the-world finds its highest expression in the world of the autonomous images, where deceit deceives itself. The spectacle in its generality is a concreted inversion of life, and, as such, the autonomous movement of non-life. (Debord, 1967, p.12)*

As the goal of late capitalist society, the spectacle justifies the existing system both in terms of form and content:

In all its specific manifestations – news or propaganda, advertising or the actual consumption – the spectacle epitomizes the prevailing model of social life. It is the omnipresent celebration of a choice already made in the sphere of production, and the consummate result of that choice. (Debord, 1967, p.13)

Although the spectacle is viewed as a means of unification through which all attention and consciousness converges, it causes an illusory and false consciousness, dividing people with its isolating character. It reduces all social life to mere appearance, mediating direct experience through generalized abstraction, assembling a wide range of apparently disparate phenomena on its own terms. However, the spectacle cannot be the opposite of social reality because the spectacle and social reality relate reciprocally to one another:

The spectacle proclaims the predominance of appearances and asserts that all human life, which is to say all social life, is mere appearance... Reality erupts within the spectacle, and the spectacle is real. This reciprocal alienation is the essence and underpinning of society as it exists. (Debord, 1967, p.14)

Debord describes the separateness of the spectacle:

Separation is the alpha and omega of the spectacle... The modern spectacle, by contrast, depicts what society can deliver, but within this depiction what is permitted is rigidly distinguished from what is possible... [I]t makes no secret of what it is, namely, hierarchical power evolving its own, in its separateness, thanks to an increasing productivity based on an ever more refined division of labour, and ever greater comminution of machine-governed gestures, and an ever-widening market. In the course of this development all community and critical awareness have ceased to be; nor have those forces, which were able – by separating – to grow enormously in strength, yet found a way to reunite. (Debord, 1967, p.20-21)

He also emphasizes the spectacle's false unification:

The origin of the spectacle lies in the world's loss of unity, and its massive expansion in the modern period demonstrates how total this loss has been: the abstract nature of all individual work, as of production in generation, finds perfect expression in the spectacle, whose very manner of being

concrete is, precisely, abstraction. The spectacle divides the world into two parts, one of which is held up as a self-representation to the world, and is superior to the world. The spectacle is simply the common language that bridges this division. Spectators are linked only be a one-way relationship to the very centre that maintains their isolation from one another. The spectacle thus unites what is separates, but it unites it only in its separateness. (Debord, 1967, p.22)

Describing the characteristics of the modern economic system founded on separation, Debord explains that fundamental experience is being transferred to a realm of non-work or inactivity. As alienated products proliferate and production becomes more concentrated, communication and reviewing processes become the exclusive assets of the system's administrators who manage workers' activities. In truth, all real activity is channelled into the global construction of the spectacle, the ultimate product of the system. He emphasizes the separating nature of the spectacular economy:

The reigning economic system is founded on isolation; at the same time it is a circular process designed to produce isolation. Isolation underpins technology, and technology isolates in its turn; all goods proposed by the spectacular system, from cars to televisions, also serve as weapons for that system as it strives to reinforce the isolation of 'the lonely crowd'. The spectacle is continually rediscovering its own basic assumption – and each time in a more concrete manner. (Debord, 1967, p.22)

1.2 The Spectacle Creates the Falsification of Life

'The spectacle is *capital* accumulated to the point where it becomes image.' (Debord, 1967, p.24) Debord's theory is based on the condition of the spectacle as a commodity in late capitalist society. By exploiting all human use value and the fulfilment of that value, the spectacular economy substitutes exchange value for use value. He describes this process:

Use value was formerly implicit in exchange value. In terms of the spectacle's topsy-turvy logic, however, it has to be explicit – for the very reason that its own effective existence has been eroded by the overdevelopment of the commodity economy, and that a counterfeit life calls for a pseudo-justification. (Debord, 1967, p.32)

As a result, the real consumer becomes a consumer of illusion, which is the commodity, the spectacle. He explains commodity fetishism as 'the domination of society by things whose qualities are at the same time perceptible and imperceptible by the senses'. (Debord, 1967, p.26) And for Debord, the spectacle embodies this principle because it replaces the perceptible world with 'images that are superior to that world [which is hard to achieve], but at the same time impose themselves as *eminently* [accessible]' (Debord, 1967 p.26): therefore, the world of the commodity rules over all lived experience of social life.

Debord explains that while each commodity asserts its sole presence everywhere as if it were alone, 'the commodity as *abstract form* continues on its way to absolute self-realization'. (Debord, 1967, p.43) In a time of disappearing use value, the commodity creates its value *qua* commodity. Debord asserts that the media propagates enthusiasm for particular products and commodity indulgence with unprecedented speed. And the limitless artificiality of the commodity creates the illusion of ceaseless fashions, which Debord calls the 'falsification of life'.

1.3 Monopolization of the Appearances by the Spectacle and its Removed Historicity and Perpetual Present

Debord asserts that the spectacle manifests itself as a blandly 'positive' phenomenon by dominating the area of appearances. He argues:

> *Everything that appears is good; whatever is good will appear. The attitude that [the spectacle] demands in principle is the same passive acceptance that it has already secured by means of its seeming incontrovertibility, and indeed by its monopolization of the realm of appearance. (Debord, 1967, p.15)*

He also asserts: 'Whatever representation takes on an independent existence, the spectacle re-establishes its rule.' (Debord, 1967, p.17) As a result it turns the real world into images: images that are transformed into real beings.

Consequently, a world no longer directly perceptible is only seen through visual mediations, elevating sight to the place once occupied by touch. Debord describes sight as the most abstract of the senses, the most easily deceived, and naturally the most readily adaptable to contemporary society's generalized abstraction.

In explaining this process of dominating the field of appearances through its visual mediation, Debord presupposes the incontrovertibility of the media by describing its one-way communication system. (This point will be opposed by Mario Perniola's view on enigmatic reality in Chapter IV, but will not be developed further here.):

> *[Media] has nothing neutral about it, and that it answers precisely to the needs of the spectacle's internal dynamics. If the social requirements of the age that develops such techniques can be met only through their mediation, if the administration of society and all contact between people now depends on the intervention of such 'instant' communication, it is because this 'communication' is essentially one-way. (Debord, 1967, p.19)*

Debord notes that '[s]pectacular domination's first priority was to eradicate historical knowledge in general, beginning with all rational information and commentary on the most recent past'. (Debord, 1988, pp.13-14) 'The evidence for this,' he claims, 'is so glaring it hardly needs further explanation. With consummate skill the spectacle organizes ignorance of what is about to happen and, immediately afterward, the forgetting of whatever has nonetheless been understood.

He states that 'when social significance is attributed only to what is immediate and to what will be immediate immediately, always replacing another, identical, immediacy' (Debord, 1988, p.14) through the media, everything becomes insignificant. The spectacle has hidden the recent past, and made people forget the spirit of history by outlawing history: we live in a perpetual present that conceals the tracks of its conquest over history. Debord gives a powerful description of this condition, as the spectacle seems so familiar that people have become oblivious to it. (Debord, 1988, p.15-16)
I argue that it is in this context that the origin of 'surface culture' in the Korean art world – which is based on surface information devoid of historicity and depth – can be located in the 'Society of the Spectacle'.

1.4 Jameson's Interpretation of Debord's Theory in regards to the Media's Penetration on Reality in Late Capitalist Culture

Debord's claim that dehistoricity and the perpetual present are the essential characteristics of the integrated spectacle, is closely mirrored in Fredric Jameson's account of depthless culture in late capitalist society; in fact, Jameson's critique is rooted in Debord's analysis of the image as the

final form of commodity. Jameson continues to develop this theory by analyzing the media's relationship with the market in contemporary society and its impact on culture, resulting in the world of simulacrum where no original exists.

Jameson explains that the media offers free choices of programmes that consumers can select, and in the gradual disappearance of the physical marketplace and the contemporaneous identification of the commodity with the image, a symbiosis between the market and the media occurred. The boundary between economics and culture has been gradually blurred in postmodern culture, and the market products have become the very content of the media image that both domains share as the common referent.

Jameson proposes that today the products are diffused throughout the spectrum of the entertainment sectors, which makes it even more confusing to distinguish the narrative content from the commercial. He also asserts that upon the arrival of the new informational or computer technology of the third stage of capitalism, the media projects a fantasy image of a unified market through the recent advance of information and communication technology, which makes the current market rhetoric more pervasive. Jameson elaborates on the process:

> *Much of the euphoria of postmodernism derives from this celebration of the very process of high-tech informatization (the prevalence of current theories of communication, language, or signs being an ideological spinoff of this more general 'worldview.' This is a [moment] in which... the media 'in general' as a unified process is somehow foregrounded and experience...; and it would seem to be this 'totalization' that allows a bridge to be made to fantasy images of 'the market in general' or 'the market as a unified process.' (Jameson, 1991, p.276)*

He notes a change in the form of the current market, explaining that the final feature of the analogies between media and market recalls:

> *Guy Debord's remarkable theoretical derivation (the image as the final form of commodity reification). At this point the process is reversed, and it is not the commercial products of the market which in advertising become images but rather the very entertainment and narrative processes of commercial television, which are, in their turn, reified and turned into so many commodities. (Jameson, 1991, p. 276)*

For example, even the production of stars and celebrities now converges with public culture, strengthening the new market power by permeating reality. At this moment, the cultural contents of the media itself have become commodities, and ultimately market and media become indistinguishable. Jameson argues that:

> *Today culture impacts back on reality in ways that make any independent and as it were, non- or extracultural form of it problematical... so that finally the theories unite their voices in the new doxa that the 'referents' no longer exist. (Jameson, 1991, p.277)*

In summary, the new logic of the simulacrum in late-capitalist culture is based on the creation of pseudo-needs by the media system, which results in the 'falsification of life', to use Debord's term. He describes:

> *It is doubtless impossible to contrast the pseudo-need imposed by the reign of modern consumerism with any authentic need or desire that is not itself equally determined by society and its history. But the commodity in the stage of its abundance attests to an absolute break in the organic development of social needs. The commodity's mechanical accumulation unleashes a limitless artificiality in face of which all living desire is disarmed. The cumulative power of this autonomous realm of artifice necessarily everywhere entails a falsification of life. (Debord, 1967, p.44-45)*

Debord's concept of 'the falsification of life' strikes chords with what Fredric Jameson defines as 'absolute change through standardization' (see Chapter III,p.84-86.) from the constant creation of fashions in late capitalist culture, which removes temporality and hence weakens historicity. The result is that everything becomes nothing but mere texts removed from their historical context and used as raw material in creating the new space of the simulacrum where no 'referent' exists.

Jameson argues that the new spatial logic of the simulacrum changes temporality and the implication of historicity. The past itself can be modified and becomes a vast collection of images and photographic simulacra, leaving nothing but mere texts:

> *Guy Debord's powerful slogan is now even more apt for the 'prehistory' of a society bereft of all historicity, one whose own putative past is little more than a set of dusty spectacles... the past as*

'referent' finds itself gradually bracketed, and then effaced altogether, leaving us with nothing but texts. (Jameson, 1991, p.18)

2) Jameson's Assessment of Postmodernism as the Language of Late Capitalism as a Background to *Shinsedae Misul* (New Generation Art) in Korea

I identify what happened in the Korean art world at the turn of the century (I have described the influences of postmodern culture in the late 1980s in Chapter II, p.44-50.) and the subsequent development of new art by the younger generation of artists called *Shinsedae Misul* (New Generation Art). In my view, the principal characteristic of this art trend is closely akin to what Fredric Jameson has defined as postmodern culture in that it appropriates the language of late capitalism, the culturally dominant trend in Korea at this time. Jameson states:

[I]ndeed, theories of the postmodern – whether celebratory or couched in the language of moral revulsion and denunciation – bear a strong family resemblance to all those more ambitious sociological generalizations which, at much the same time, bring us the news of arrival and inauguration of a whole new type of society, most famously baptized 'post-industrial society' (Daniel Bell) but often also designated consumer society, media society, information society, electronic society of high tech, and the like. (Jameson, 1991, p.3)

Jameson finds the base for this argument in the economist Ernest Mandel's[1] theory of late capitalism, which categorizes contemporary society as 'a third stage or moment in the evolution of capital' and as 'purer stage' of capitalism which penetrates to uncommodified areas, produced by the multinational capitalism system.

Jameson elaborates on this postmodern culture as an ideological formation of late capitalism by using the examples of a new kind of emotional state – which he calls 'euphoria' or

[1] Based on Ernest Mandel's theory of late capitalism, although contemporary society is often called post-industrial, Jameson suggests the term multinational capitalism as its proper description. (Jameson, 1991, p.33) He also asserts that instead of taking the notion of a postindustrial society of which technology is the 'ultimately determining instance either of our present-day social life or of our cultural production', the technological mode of communicational and computer networking in our time is only the figuration of the whole world system of a present-day multinational capitalism. (Jameson, 1991, p.35) However, Korean art critics often do not distinguish the term postindustrial society from the term multinational capitalism – despite their different definitions and implications – when they describe the state of Korean society in analyzing the background of postmodern culture or *Shinsedae Misul* in Korea.

'intensities'[2] – in postmodern art practices. He emphasizes the impact of technology on contemporary society as a result of the development of capital. Based on the analysis of Ernest Mandel, Jameson points out:

> *[Multinational capitalism, the] purer capitalism of our own time thus eliminates the enclaves of precapitalist organization it had hitherto tolerated and exploited in a tributary way. One is tempted to speak in this connection between the original penetration and colonization of Nature and the Unconscious: that is, the destruction of precapitalist Third World agriculture by the Green Revolution, and the rise of the media and the advertising industry. (Jameson, 1991, p.36)*

Jameson also identifies that this ultimately leads us to the problem of aesthetic representation in contemporary society as the representation of machine shifts dialectically in relation with different stages of technological development.[3] This process of changing relation to the machine in the 'Third Machine Age' produces 'a postmodern or technological sublime' by utilizing all the reproductive processes of the new technology in various media. Jameson explains:

> *Such machines are indeed machines of reproduction rather than of production, and they make very different demands on our capacity for aesthetic representation than did the relatively mimetic idolatry of the older machinery of the futurist moment, of some older speed-and-energy sculpture.*

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[2] Jean Francois Lyotard (1924-1998) claims that, based on Freud's theory of locating the unconscious order, 'expression is the presence of operations of the unconscious system, and internal in the psychoanalysis of artistic and literary expression'. Lyotard continues that art is a reconciliation between pleasure and reality, and an artwork belongs to reality by the gap opened up by the absence of any hope that the wish will become the actual world and that reality will become a game. He also proposes that the purpose of art is to reveal the unfulfilled wish reflecting the artist's impatience and dissatisfaction. He states that the function of art is not to provide a true simulacrum of wish-fulfill ment, but to show through the play of its figures to achieve deconstructions such that a figure of an unconscious order can be discerned through its very elusiveness. While the purpose of expression is neither knowledge nor beauty, but truth, the power of expression 'does not lie in its harmony (nor in the "victory" of the Ego); [but lies in] what contains and maintains open and free the field of words, lines, colours, and values, so that truth can figure itself therein'. Lyotard maintains that the truth-bearing power comes from 'the fact that the field should be left free for the elusive to leave its trace'. Most importantly he claims that the greatness of work is in proportion to the 'intensity' of the psychic disorder from which an artist suffers. (Lyotard, 1980, pp.3-7)

[3] Ernest Mandel (1923-1995) classifies three fundamental moments of capitalism according to three stages of technological revolutions since the original industrial revolution of the late 18th century: market capitalism of machine production via steam-driven motors post-1848; the monopoly stage or the stage of imperialism of machine production via electric and internal combustion motors since the 1890s; our own multinational capital of machine production via electronic and nuclear-powered systems since the 1940s (see Mandel, E. *Late Capitalism*, 1978, London.).

Here we have less to do with kinetic energy than with all kinds of new reproductive processes; and in the weaker productions of postmodernism the aesthetic embodiment of such processes often tends to slip back more comfortably into a mere thematic representation of content-into narratives which are about the processes of reproduction and include movie cameras, video, tape recorders, the whole technology of the production and reproduction of the simulacrum... Yet something else does tend to emerge in the most energetic postmodernist texts, and this is the sense that beyond all thematic or content the work seems somehow to tap the networks of the reproductive process and thereby to afford us some glimpse into a postmodern or technological sublime, whose power or authenticity is documented by the success of such works in evoking a whole new postmodern space in emergence around us. (Jameson, 1991, p.37)

At this point the technology, he states, functions as a means of understanding the seemingly impossible totality of the contemporary world and hence reinforces the power and control of the new de-centred global network of the third stage of capitalism.

Jameson takes as an example of this new cultural characteristic called 'euphoria' or 'intensities' through Photorealist cityscapes of such artists as Richard Estes (Image 45) and Ralph Goings (Image 46), which offer hallucinatory effects through their gleaming surfaces. He comments:

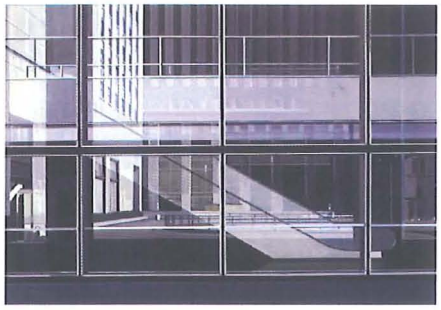

Image 45. Richard Estes, 'Urban Landscape III, Manhattan', 1981, silkscreen, 35.6 x 50.8 cm.

Image 46. Ralph Goings, 'Diner', circa 1990, serigraph, 88.9 x 1029.2 cm.

The exhilaration of these new surfaces is all the more paradoxical in that their essential content-the city itself-has deteriorated or disintegrated to a degree surely still inconceivable in the early years of the twentieth century let alone in the previous era. How urban squalor can be a de-light to the eyes when expressed in commodification, and how an unparalleled quantum leap in the alienation of daily life in the city can now be experienced in the form of a strange new hallucinatory exhilaration – these are some of the questions that confront us in this moment of our inquiry. (Jameson, 1991,p.33)

He also explains that the human body in Duane Hanson (Image 47)'s [4] works represents the notion of simulacrum as a sign of this illusionary experience of postmodern culture:

> *Your moment of doubt and hesitation as to the breath and warmth of these polyester figures, in other words, tends to return upon the real human beings moving about you in the museum and to transform them also for the briefest instant into so many dead and flesh-colored simulacra in their own right. The world thereby momentarily loses its depth and threatens to become a glossy skin, a stereoscopic illusion, a rush of filmic images without density. (Jameson, 1991, p.35)*

Image 47. Duane Hanson, 'Tourist II (Chelsea location)', 1988, installations.

Jameson connects this experience to the theme of the 'technological sublime' by using Immanuel Kant's analysis of the sublime in terms of its notion of aesthetic representation:

> *[T]he object of the sublime becomes not only a matter of sheer power and of the physical incommensurability of the human organism with Nature but also of the limits of figuration and the incapacity of the human mind to give representation to such enormous forces. (Jameson 1991 p.34)*

Jameson explains, however, that unlike Burke's or Kant's concept of the sublime, our society has to identify with technology. Jameson describes:

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[4] Duane Hanson (1925-1996) was an American artist, known for his lifelike sculptures of people, cast in various materials, including polyester resin, fiberglass, Bondo (plastic body fillers) and bronze. His work is often associated with the Pop Art movement, as well as surrealism and hyperrealism. The works are the perfect simulacra of ordinary people in contemporary society, often deluding viewers, but provoking them to question the issues of mass-culture such as over-consumption and mass-tourism. (For more information, Livingstone, M.,1997, *Duane Hanson*. London: The Saatchi Gallery. Hobbs, R., 1990, *Duane Hanson: The New objectivity*. Florida: The Florida State University Gallery & Museum.)

[However] unlike the conventional notion of the sublime, which can only empathize with precapitalist society and its organic landscape that represents the image of Nature, our society has to identify with something else, [technology] as the nature was radically destructed by late capital's development of cities. (Jameson, 1991, p.35)

Therefore I argue that the new generation art of the Korean *Shinsedae Misul* of the late-1980s and 1990s evolved as an extreme reflection of globalization and technological development, with the influences of late multinational capitalism leading to the development of a specific artistic language. (See Chapter II, p.57, footnote 12.) This was directly related to the economic growth of Korea and consequential changes in its society and culture. For example, this group of artists showed growing attention to electronic images of the media and new technology, and at the same time developed a universal language of multinational sensibilities under the influences of global capitalism. (I have illustrated the cultural condition of Korean society through its economic development and globalization in Chapter I.)

I observe that this situation has exposed Korean people to the 'logic of fashion' through the instantly-changing media images of simulacra. (see Chapter III, p.86-87.) And I maintain that this has ultimately created a unique mode of 'understanding' a culture stripped of its coherent meanings, which is the defining trait of 'surface culture' in Korea. The artists of 'surface culture' created increasingly fashionable art works by crossing boundaries between internal and external cultures, especially through the construction of simulacra in their works. The frequent creation of simulacra in *Shinsedae Misul* art is how these Korean artists coped with the external cultural influences via the media deluge through which the border between different cultures became blurred, and most importantly their contexts were removed. (I have illustrated examples of this tendency in Chapter II, p.68-71.)

3) Fredric Jameson's Theorization of the Temporal Paradox in Postmodern Culture

3.1 The Creation of 'Absolute Temporality' and the World of Simulacrum

Fredric Jameson proposes that in the antinomies of postmodernity Kant's 'a priori representations' of time and space are considered formal frames that change according to the mode of production. He identifies that '[t]ime is today a function of speed, and evidently perceptible only in terms of its rate or velocity as such...' (Jameson, 1998, p.51) He discusses that in postmodern culture change without its opposite takes place as time and space are not at opposite poles any longer:

What emerges then is some conception of change without its opposite; and to say so is then helplessly to witness the two terms of this antimony folding back into each other, since from the vantage time, it becomes impossible to distinguish space from time, or object from subject. The eclipse of inner time (and its organ, the 'intimate' time sense) means that we read our subjectivity off the things outside. (Jameson, 1998, p.52)

He concludes, however, that the end of the subject-object dualism produces another paradox that: '[E] liminating the subject does not leave us with the object, but rather with a multiplicity of simulacra." (Jameson, 1998, p.53)

Based on Guy Debord's theory of the society of spectacle, Jameson maintains that contemporary society is the world of the simulacrum where no original exists. He states:

Appropriately enough, the culture of the simulacrum comes to life in a society where exchange value has been generalized to the point at which the very memory of use value is effaced, a society of which Guy Debord has observed, in an extraordinary phrase, that in it 'the image has become the final form of commodity reification' (The Society of the Spectacle). (Jameson, 1991, p.18)

He notes that this culture of simulacrum flourishes in a society where exchange value is substituted for use value (see Chapter III, p.75-76, for further description.) through the constant creation of 'pseudo-needs'[5] of fashions through media images.

I assert that it was under the powerful influence of the media's commodification of the world by transforming it into images and spectacles that Korean artists in the 1990s began to develop a worldview detached from history and coherent order, and create a world of the simulacrum. For example, alternative realities that frequently appear as subjects in *Shinsedae Misul* point to the existence of reality as image, representation, signs and spectacle, which connect to the image culture of late capitalism to which this generation of artists belongs. I have already noted the use of café, clubs and performance bars as alternate exhibition spaces by *Shinsedae Misul* groups are examples of creating the alternative reality of simulacra, as discussed in Chapter II, p.57-58. A member of the group (see Chapter II, p.56.), Koh Nak Beom creates in his 'Mannequin' series of the early

[5] Debord states: 'Replacing [economic] necessity by the necessity of boundless economic development can only mean replacing the satisfaction of primary human needs, now met in the most summary manner, by a ceaseless manufacture of pseudo-needs, all of which come down in the end to just one – namely, the pseudo-need for the reign of an autonomous economy to continue.' (Debord, 1967, pp.33-34)

1990s an alternative ego by painting the images of mannequins in diverse medium and styles, suggesting issues such as estrangement and simulacra. Also Choi Jeong Hwa's plastic objects, such as baskets and electric lights in vivid colours, are representative of contemporary Pop culture, which in turn reflects many of the social problems arising from the rapid industrialization of late 20th century Korea, and deconstructs paradoxical reality to create an alternative reality of illusionary effects of the spectacle.

3.2 The Logic of Fashion in Postmodern Culture

Jameson elaborates on the shifting notion of changes due to the temporal paradox of media in post-modern culture. He argues that 'absolute change' through standardization occurs in our time by the homogeneous process of global capitalism. He explains that the peculiarly repetitive temporality of our time leads to the reformulations of old logical and ontological paradoxes. He notes: '[A]ppearances (simulacra) arise and decay ceaselessly, without the momentous spellbound totality of everything that is ever flickering for the briefest of instant or even momentarily wavering in its ontological prestige.' (Jameson, 1998, p.59)

Jameson points out that the logic of fashion through the penetration of omnipresent images had changed our social and psychological patterns as well as our system itself, and that the value of perpetual change governs all levels of culture. He emphasizes that the standardization of society at its extreme makes human, social and historical temporality flow so homogeneously. Fundamentally what begins in postmodern temporality is its total submission to 'the perpetual change of fashion and media image that nothing can change any longer'. (Jameson, 1998, pp.59)

He also claims that a rhetoric of 'absolute change' through standardization creates 'the persistence of the Same through absolute Difference' and hence the 'end of history', which is the final form of the temporal paradoxes and ultimately prevents thought of changing the system.
In postmodern temporality of simulacrum, Jameson insists that the violent death of individuality by absolute change is abstracted and becomes meaningless, since any historical framework to interpret individual deaths has been destroyed and that this results in a world without time or history.

> *[H]ere the antimony really does result in the blocking or paralysis of thought, since the impossibility of thinking another system except by way of the cancellation of this one ends up*

discrediting the utopian imagination itself, which is fantasized as the loss of everything we know experientially, from our libidinal investments to our psychic habits, and in particular the artificial excitements of consumption and fashion. (Jameson, 1998, p.60)

He concludes that the constant creation of fashions in postmodern culture immobilizes temporality through the process of standardization. Hence, temporal paradox through perpetual change of standardization in postmodern culture gives way to the spatial categories.

Jameson explains that postmodernity requires some essential spatialization, that everything we try to figure out about temporality – from urban change to global 'development' – will necessarily have to go through a 'spatial matrix' to come to expression. He states:

If time has in effect been reduced to the most punctual violence [of the abstraction of individual death through permanent revolution], then we can perhaps affirm that in the postmodern time has become space anyhow. The foundational antinomy of postmodern description lies then in the fact that this former binary opposition, along with identity and difference themselves, no longer is an opposition as such, and ceaselessly reveals itself to have been at one with its other pole in a rather different way than the old dialectical metamorphosis. (Jameson, 1998, p.62)

I recognize a similar situation in Korea of the 1990s, wherein Korean artists were exposed to the logic of fashion, removing any identification of coherent temporality and individuality within its history. (I have described the cultural changes in Korea at that time in Chapter I.) I argue that this absolute temporality of standardization through constantly changing fashions blocked Korea artists' from conceiving radical changes in artistic practices or escape from the existing system. Rather they began to understand information based on its surface and appropriated it regardless of its original context in the drive to make ever more fashionable work. And this ultimately led to the creation of 'surface culture' art practices in the late 1990s.

3.3 Media Paradoxes and Their Implications for 'Surface Culture'

Most importantly, Jameson locates the reasons for 'surface culture' in the media effects, which cause temporal and spatial paradoxes.

[There] are now media paradoxes, which result from the speed and tempo of the critical process, as well as the way in which all ideological and philosophical positions as such have in the media

universe been transformed into their own 'representations' (as Kant might put it) – in other words into images of themselves and caricatures in which identifiable slogans substitute for traditional beliefs (the beliefs having indeed been forced to transform themselves into just such recognizable ideological positions in order to operate in the media marketplace). (Jameson, 1998, p.57)

He explains that this has caused the paradox between an unparalleled rate of change in social life and an unparalleled standardization of everything from consumer goods to language:

It is a paradox that can still be conceptualized, but in inverse ratios: that of modularity, for example, where intensified change is enabled by standardization itself, where prefabricated modules, everywhere from the media to a henceforth standardized private life, from commodified nature to uniformity of equipment, allow miraculous rebuilidings to succeed each other at will, as in fractual video. The module would then constitute the new form of the object (the new result of reification) in an informational universe: ... in which raw material is suddenly organized by categories into an appropriate unit. (Jameson, 1998, pp.57-58)

I argue that this is the same paradox that was confronted by Korean *Shinsedae* artists in the 1990s when creating their art works with cross-cultural qualities that combine many different kinds of cultural references. More importantly, this paradox represents 'surface culture'. For the artists of 'surface culture', information encountered through diverse media gets registered as an individual component in their own system. Korean artworks of hybridity[6] and simulacrum in this period are the outcome of this mode of receiving information as a unit and organizing the units to fit each artist's own 'hyperreality'. (See Chapter II for more description.)

4) Fredric Jameson's Examination of 'Depthlessness' in Postmodern Culture & the Creation of the 'Syntagmatic' View

4.1 A New Culture of Superficiality and the Waning of Affect

Fredric Jameson describes the main cultural character of late capitalism as a new 'depthlessness'

[6] Terms such as hybridity and hybridization are used in many different fields to indicate varying forms of conjoining distinct, disparate elements to form a new entity. These terms throughout this chapter are used in that general sense of mixture rather than in relation to a more specific discourse such as used by Homi Babba in a theory of the 'hybridization' of discourse and power.

– 'superficiality' through a whole new culture of the image and a consequent weakening of historicity. He argues that a new kind of superficiality has appeared in postmodern culture where people experience mesmerizing visual sensation through the deluge of media images, causing fundamental transformation in the object world itself and in the disposition of the subject: objects become a set of texts or simulacra, and thus more subjectively mutable. He observes:

> *The first and most evident is the emergence of a new kind of flatness or depthlessness, a new kind of superficiality in the most literal sense, perhaps the supreme formal feature of all the postmodernisms... (Jameson, 1991, p.9)*

Jameson describes this characteristic in contemporary art by analyzing Andy Warhol's *Diamond Shoes* (Image 48), arguing that the work lacks any sense of immediacy, the shoes becoming depthless and bereft of historical context. He explains:

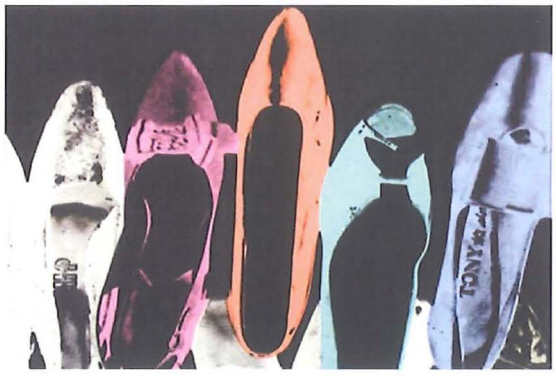

Image 48. Andy Warhol, 'Diamond Shoes', 1980, acrylic paint and silkscreem inks and diamond dust on paper, 101.6 x 152.4 cm.

> *[W]e have a random collection of dead objects hanging together on the canvas like so many turnips, as shorn of their earlier life world as the pile of shoes left over from Auschwitz or the remainders and tokens of some incomprehensible and tragic fire in a packed dance hall. There is therefore in Warhol no way to complete the hermeneutic gesture and restore to these oddments that whole large lived context of the dance hall or the ball, the world of jetset fashion or glamour magazines. (Jameson 1991 p.8-9)*

He emphasizes Warhol's career as a commercial illustrator for shoe fashions and a designer of display windows that would have led to this character of 'commodity fetishism of a transition to late capital'[7]. This culture of 'depthlessness' in contemporary culture is related to the process of 'commodification' of culture through the media in late capitalism, which Debord has explained in his claim for the image as a final form of capital. (see Chapter III, p.75-77.) And I argue this process has diminished the depth of cultural contents under the influence of image deluge and its constant creation of fashions.

Jameson also analyzes the overarching effect of this change as the waning of affect, which is illustrated by the critique of the hermeneutic model that separates the inside from the outside in contemporary theory. Jameson explains that with this new 'syntagmatic'[8] model, depth is replaced by surface, or multiple surface reading (often called intertextuality).

Jameson continues to describe that Warhol's human subjects show this trait of 'the waning of affect' through their commodification, for example when he asserts that 'stars – like Marilyn Monroe – ...are themselves commodified and transformed into their own images.' (Jameson, 1991, p.11) He asserts that these figures do not show any signs of emotional expressions such as anxiety and alienation, which were the prevalent themes during the period of high modernism.

Jameson states that this symptom can also be found in the shift in the dynamics of cultural pathology where the alienation of the subject is replaced by fragmentation and is connected to a popular theme in contemporary theory: the 'death of the subject' – the end of the autonomous bourgeois ego or individual. This has diminished the importance of high-modernist unique style and the collective ideals of an artistic or political vanguard. He proposes that the end of the psychopathology of bourgeois ego (the waning of affect) means liberation from all kinds of personal feeling and the embracement of free-floating and impersonal feeling of a usually euphoric kind (what J.F. Lyotard calls 'intensities'):

> *[I]t means the end of much more – the end, for example, of style, in the sense of the unique and the personal, the end of the distinctive individual brush stroke (as symbolized by the emergent primacy of mechanical reproduction). As for expression and feeling or emotions, the liberation, in*

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[7] Karl Marx (1818-1883) defines commodity fetishism as: 'A commodity appears at first sight an extremely obvious, trivial thing. But its analysis brings out that it is a very strange thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties.' (Marx 1976 p.163) However, he maintains that the mystical character of the commodity does not come from its use-value, but its manifestation as the products of labour representing the social relation between the producers: 'The mysterious character of the commodity-form consists therefore simply in the fact that the commodity reflects the social characteristics of men's own labour as objective characteristics of the products of labour themselves, as the socio-natural properties of these things. Hence it also reflects the social relation of the producers to the sum total of labour as a social relation between objects, a relation which exists apart from and outside the producers. Through this substitution, the products of labour become commodities, sensuous things which are at the same time supra-social or social.' (Marx, 1976, pp. 164-165) (See Marx, K., 1976. *The Capital: Volume* 1. New York: Penguin Books for more information.)

[8] The Oxford Dictionary of English defines a 'word syntax' as the arrangement of words (in their appropriate forms) by which their connection and relation in the sentence are shown.
The 'syntagmatic' model in postmodern theory refers to interpreting cultural information based on its syntax or surface instead of its relations to other coherent factors from the hermeneutic model.

contemporary society, from the older anomie of the centred subject may also mean not merely a liberation from anxiety but a liberation from every other kind of feelings as well, since there is no longer a self present to do the feeling. (Jameson, 1991, p.15)

He also points out that the waning of affect can be characterized as the waning of the great high-modernist thematic of time and temporality such as *durée* and memory in literary criticism. He emphasizes that we now live in the synchronic rather than in the diachronic,[9] and our daily life is dominated by categories of space rather than by categories of time as in the period of high modernism.

Most importantly, Jameson posits that the weakening historicity in postmodern culture stems from the change in our private temporality, thus offering new 'syntagmatic' perspectives:

The crisis in historicity now dictates a return, in a new way, to the question of temporal organization in general in the postmodern force field, and indeed, to the problem of the form that time, temporality, and the syntagmatic will be able to take in a culture increasingly dominated by space and spatial logic. If, indeed, the subject has lost its capacity actively to extend its pro-tensions and re-tensions across the temporal manifold and to organize its past and future into coherent experience, it becomes difficult enough to see how the cultural productions of such a subject could result in anything but "heaps of fragments" and in practice of the randomly heterogeneous and fragmentary and the aleatory. (Jameson, 1991, p.25)

Furthermore, Korean artists in the late 1990s faced a surge of information at an unparalleled speed through diverse media, consisting of a wide range of images and texts from multicultural sources. I assert that under this influence of this 'syntagmatic' perspective and in the process of encountering all the existing art practices of previous generations and diverse cultures, Korean artists of the 'surface culture' came to use these images and texts as raw data, de-contextualizing their history and original meaning, and thus creating a new artistic practice. The examples of art works showing this trait were described through some works of the *Shinsedae* artists such as Lee Bul and Jeong Yeong Doo in Chapter II, p.69-70.

[9] In the diachronic, subjects are viewed as formed in successive points in time and with reference to their historical development, while the synchronic considers subjects as existing at one specific point in time, i.e. not within their historical context.

4.2 The 'Schizophrenic' Mentality & Its Implications for 'Surface Culture' in Korean Art

Jameson characterizes the outcome of social and cultural changes in the era of late capitalism as a 'schizophrenic' mentality that enables the experience of a perpetual present, using Jacque Lacan's account (i.e. not as a clinical diagnosis but as an analytical description that suggests an aesthetic model). Lacan describes schizophrenia as a breakdown in the signifying chain, which results in the coexistence of distinct and unrelated signifiers, and the experience of a series of pure and disparate presents. Jameson elaborates on the effect of the symptom:

> *Meaning on the new view is generated by the movement from signifier to signifier. What we generally call the signified – the meaning or conceptual content of an utterance – is now rather to be seen as a meaning-effect, as that objective mirage of signification generated and projected by the relationship of signifiers among themselves. When that relationship breaks down, when the links of the signifying chain snap, then we have schizophrenia in the form of a rubble of distinct and unrelated signifiers... (Jameson, 1991, pp.26-27)*

Jameson illustrates the aesthetic and cultural effects of 'schizophrenic mentality' as the present time released from 'all the activities and intentionalities that might focus it and make it as space of praxis.' (Jameson, 1991, p.27) The result is that the isolated present overwhelms the subject with 'indescribable vividness', which successfully intensifies the power of material/literal signifier in isolation:

> *This present of the world or material signifier comes before the subject with heightened intensity, bearing a mysterious charge of affect... [which can be interpreted as a more positive emotional state of] euphoria, a high, an intoxicatory or hallucinogenic intensity. (Jameson, 1991, pp.27-28)*

Jameson also points out that the postmodern experience of form is what different, seemingly unrelated components relate, stressing the heterogeneity and discontinuity in art works. He explains that contemporary art is 'no longer unified or organic, but now a virtual grab bag or lumber room of disjoined subsystems and random raw materials and impulses of all kinds'. (Jameson, 1991, p.31) He emphasizes the extent to which past works have become texts that contemporary art works can appropriate and differentiate.

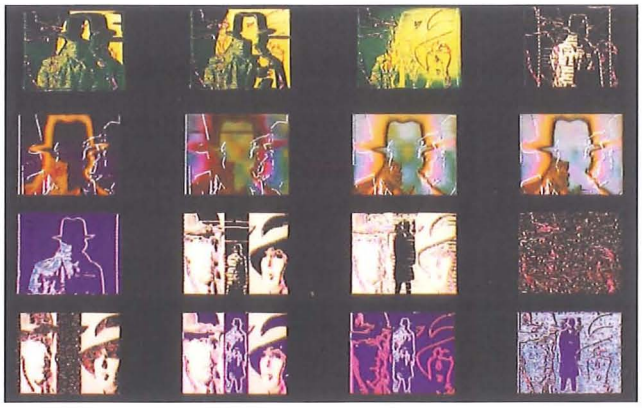

Image 49. Paik Nam June, 'Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman', 1986-87, video projection.

Jameson detects the new direction of schizophrenic culture in art arguing that this mode of differentiation may sometimes achieve new and original ways of thinking and perceiving, inducing new and often unconscious mutations. He analyzes the work of Korean video artist Paik Nam June, whose stacked television screens show 'strange new video stars' (Image 49) in prearranged sequences or in loops of images at dysynchronous moments. The more conventional way of viewing the TV screen – concentrating on a single screen as if there is a certain order to follow – is replaced by the simultaneous (though impossible) viewing of all the screens at once: viewers somehow come to gain 'a new mode of grasping what used to be called relationship: something for which the word *collage* is still only a feeble name'. (Jameson, 1991, p.31)

I believe Jameson's argument of schizophrenic mentality in 'depthless' culture of late capitalism holds true for Korean artists in the late 1990s. In the torrent of media images, Korean artists developed a 'syntagmatic' view with the collapse of conventional temporality of coherent movement, and at the same time took on synchronic perspective which is governed by spatial logic than temporal category. Furthermore, this symptom was promoted by the collapse of hermeneutics in contemporary theory, which removes the subject and replaces depth with surface, often creating fragmentation and intertextuality. Accordingly, Korean artists came to understand cultural content as fragmented components and use them as raw material for their own new works, as I have explained above. In the process the notion of simulacra in postmodern culture was prominently investigated by Korean artists such as Lee Bul and Lee Yong Baek, and more importantly the new kind of hybridity decontextualized from their original meanings/coherences, was developed in Korean contemporary art works. (see Chapter II, p.69-71.).

5) Postmodern Appropriation and the Practice of Pastiche

5.1 Understanding 'Surface Culture' by Using Jameson's Description of Postmodern Appropriation

Jameson describes that the main characteristic of spatial turn in postmodern painting is the rejection

of painting's old utopian vocation. He asserts that painting in the postmodern era is free of all its former ideological missions and histories, and now exhibits 'a nomadic attitude' that experiments with the reversibility of artistic languages of the past. He explains that this conception tends to remove the fixed meaning of those languages, making the language of painting interchangeable, and hence creating practices that seek inconstancy. Accordingly the coexistence of different styles produces a succession of images changing and evolving in a fluid manner. He insists that the result is 'a sort of mildness of the work',[10] which does not project an authoritative manner or an ideological inclination, but dissolves in numerous directions. (Jameson, 1991, p.174)

Jameson raises a pertinent issue to this characterization of postmodern paintings as historicism: namely, its secession from a genuine history or dialectic of its styles and of the content of its forms. He explains that here painting styles are recovered as a kind of found object, detached from their semantic references and symbolic association, which have been destroyed in the execution of the work. (Jameson, 1991, p.174) He emphasizes that it is for this reason that the renewal of meanings and the interconnection of different cultural contents are possible. Jameson asserts that the result is the creation of 'superficiality' replacing the historic depth by grafting unprecedented kinds of hybrids and various displacements of artistic language from their historical context. (Jameson, 1991, p.174)

He continues that the other issue related to this nomadic attitude of painting is 'the death of the subject, the end of individuality, the eclipse of subjectivity in a new anonymity'. (Jameson 1991, p.174) (I have explained above that this trait resulted from the new 'depthlessness' of decreased historicity in postmodern culture and its effect of the waning of affect – see Chapter III, p.88-91.) Jameson describes the character of the new painting:

> *[I]n which the most uncontrolled kinds of figuration emerge with a depthlessness that is not even hallucinatory, like the free association of an impersonal collective subject, without the charge and investment either of a personal unconscious or of a group one. (Jameson, 1991, p.174)*

[10] Based on Achille Bonito Oliva's analysis of 'transitional art', Jameson observes the 'nomadic attitude' of postmodern artistic practices, which promotes the interchangeable use of painting's linguistic form from the past. This results in the 'mildness of the work', which offers painting a flexible identity dissolving in multiple directions. Bonito states: 'The numerous directions are those of the language and its points of recovery, which at this stage can no longer be circumscribed, for they are subjected to an assiduous search, an intense courtship without preferences and preclusions. The new art draws on an endless reserve where abstract and figurative, avant-garde and tradition coexist. (For more information, see Bonito Oliva, A., 1982.*Transavantgarde International*. Milan: Giancarlo Politi Editore.)

Using the examples of neo-figurative paintings such as David Salle's work (Image 50), Jameson illustrates this character:

Image 50. David Salle, 'Awning with Pipe Smoker', 1988, oil on canvas with blanket collage, 176 x 264 cm (2 panels).

> *[N]eofigurative paintings today is very much that extraordinary space through which all the images and icons of the culture spill and float, haphazard, like a logjam of the visual, bearing off with them everything from the past under the name of 'tradition' that arrived in the present in time to be reified visually, broken into pieces, and swept away with the rest...[David Salle's] archetypal category (for it is not a form, exactly) seems to be the empty organization of the dyptich or double panel (sometimes rewritten in the form of superpositions, overdrawing and overdoodling), where, however, the content that traditionally accompanied such a gesture... –authetification and deauthentification, unmasking, the puncturing of one sign system in the name of another, or of 'reality' itself – remains absent; while at the same time the end of ideology, in particular the end of Freud and the end of psychoanalysis, ensures the incapacity of any hermeneutic or interpretive system to domesticate these juxtapositions and turn them into usable meanings. (Jameson, 1991, p.175)*

In its practice of fragmentation, David Salle's work displays the pertinent character of appropriating images from the 'syntagmatic' perspectives. And I argue that although Salle's work is not a new-media work, it is in the same context in which Korean artists developed 'surface culture' in the late 1990s by removing all the existing contexts of cultural information and freely juxtaposing different information regardless of its historical references, vigorously creating art work of 'de-contextualized hybrid' identity. I maintain that Korean artists at that time came to possess the temporality of 'syntagmatic' structure and synchronic perspective amid the constant changes to tempo and speed of late capitalism. This resulted in 'surface culture' art works showing this trait of combining a seemingly unrelated range of cultural and aesthetic practices in a 'depthless' manner.

For example, Korean artist Shin Mee Kyung (b. 1967) creates sculptures made of soap and shaped like traditional ceramic vases (Image 51) or classic figures such as the Buddha or Venus. In these works, the formal content deriving from various sources in conventional high culture is contrasted with the commonplace medium, soap, producing a work of new hybrid quality that mixes different cultural elements, detached from their original contexts. Here, and elsewhere, it is the surface patterns or texture that confuse viewers as to the origin and identity of these sculptures, creating the simulacra of hybridized reality from 'syntagmatic' perspective.

Image 51. Shin Mee Kyung, 'Translation Vase', 2006, soap, 30 x 30 x 40 cm.

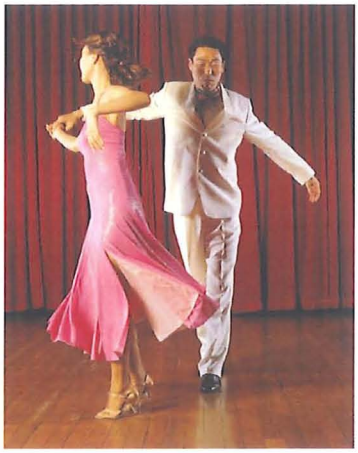

Image 52. Jeong Yeon Doo, 'Borame Dance Hall' 1999, heat transfer print on wall paper, floor, music.

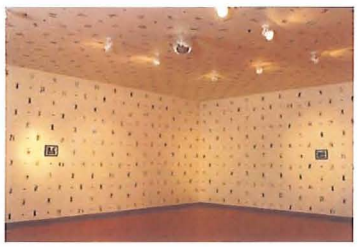

Image 52-1. Details of 'Borame Dance Hall' print.

Jeong Yeon Doo's *Borame Dance Hall* (Image 52) series depicts a dance school where Korean people learn Western dances such as the waltz, cha-cha and tango. He makes a wallpaper from images of these anonymous dancing couples in their 'kitsch-like' costumes, which he has photographed in the Borame Dance Hall. While ballroom dancing has long been a traditional cultural activity in the West, in Korea it is largely associated with the middle-class and their unachievable fantasy of romance with Western high-culture. The artist creates a temporary ballroom-like space in his exhibition venues – such as subways – incorporating various elements such as wallpaper and music that allude to this ironical identity with an appropriated cultural activity. I argue that this is a hyperreal space of 'de-contextualized hybridity' in which the distorted images of high-culture and middle-class fantasy co-exist.

5.2 The Practice of Pastiche as the New Spatial Logic of the Simulacrum in Postmodern Culture

Jameson observes that the disappearance of the subject and personal style engenders the universal practice of pastiche. Accordingly, modernist styles thereby become mere codes for diverse

postmodernist practices. He proposes: '[T]he advanced capitalist countries today are now a field of stylistic and discursive heterogeneity without a norm." (Jameson, 1991, p.17) He explains that pastiche is like parody, the mimicry of specific styles, but without irony and satirical impulse. Therefore it is a neutral practice, but at the same time it rejects the existence of normality or standard.

Jameson elaborates on the meaning of pastiche in relation to the notion of simulacrum that with the collapse of the high-modernist ideology of unique and original style, cultural production has turned to the past by imitating the dead styles 'stored up in the imaginary museum of a now global culture'. (Jameson, 1991, p.18) This rubric, which is called 'historicism' by architectural historians, cannibalizes all the styles of the past, making random stylistic references.

I maintain that this is what happened to Korean artists in the late 1990s in encountering the unprecedented amount of media images with heterogeneous cultural contents via ever advancing information technology. My claim is that while viewing numerous images and information synchronically, they had no choice but dividing them as fragmented data in a 'depthless' manner, and turning them into raw material to be used for their own work regardless of their linear, historical connection.

For example, the work of Ham Kyung Ah (b. 1966) – such as *Travel and Journey* (2004-2006) (Image 53) and *Chasing Yellow* (2001) (Image 53-1) – takes the form of the video images from her many trips to different places in the world, a collage representing the life-habits and viewpoints of people in different cultures. *Chasing Yellow* comprises videotaped conversations with people that reminded her of the colour yellow as she journeyed through various South-East Asian countries. She reveals the process of getting involved in each person's life and finally arranges the images of these heterogeneous stories to fit her own narrative of chasing yellow. I observe this work shows an example of how 'surface culture' generation of artists have used different cultural contents as raw text to fit their own cultural system.

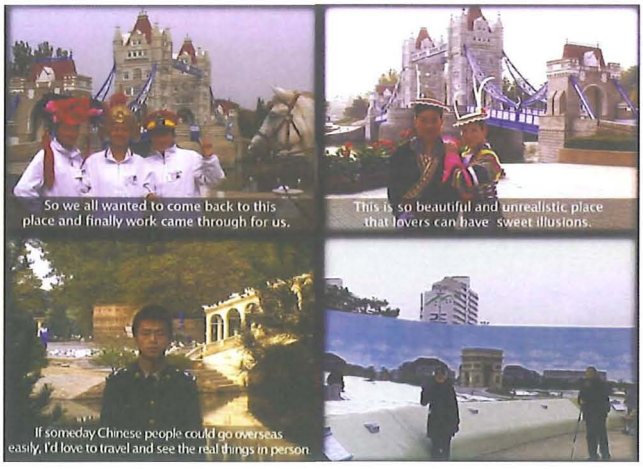

Image 53. Ham Kyung Ah, 'Travel and Journey', 2004-2006, video installation.

In summary, I find the reasoning of 'surface culture' in Jameson's description of a 'schizophrenic' mentality in postmodern culture that experiences the perpetual present results from the breakdown of

Image 53-1. Ham Kyung Ah, 'Chasing Yellow', 2001, 8 channel DVD projection.

Image 53-2. Installation view of 'Chasing Yellow'.

the signifying chain. My claim is that the collapsed temporality due to the distinctive influences of the media culture and its resulting 'syntagmatic' perspective of 'depthelessness' in postmodern culture produces an unique mode of understanding information based on the surface, which is the main characteristic of 'surface culture' in Korea. Furthermore, I observe that postmodern practices of appropriation and pastiche gave Korean artists a firm ground to freely appropriate images and styles of various cultures without considering their historical depth and original contexts.

However, I argue that the paradigm of 'de-contextualized hybridity' in 'surface culture' resulted from postmodern 'schizophrenic' mentality has been transcended by Korean artists in the recent decade as they became increasingly accustomed to understanding the received contents based on its surface and turning them into modules. Supported by the unprecedented development of digital technology and its fast diffusion, Korean artists began to inventorize and arrange them more flexibly, and finally created a mode of imposing a new syntax for their art practices, which I term as the 'post-surface' cultural model. And in the following chapter I will examine this new cultural paradigm through Italian philosopher Mario Perniola's overview of the present, which asserts a more positive assessment of contemporary society.

CHAPTER IV

Beyond 'Surface Culture': Using Mario Perniola's Philosophy of the Present and its Notion of Virtuality to Critique Guy Debord's Society of the Spectacle and Fredric Jameson's 'Depthless' Culture of Late Capitalism

In Chapter IV, I examine Italian philosopher Mario Perniola's overview of the present as outlined in *Enigmas, the Egyptian Moment in Society and Art* (1995).

The proposition central to this chapter is that Perniola's arguments allow me to show that the conditions attached by Fredric Jameson to the Postmodern may present us with a credible diagnosis, but that those conditions are temporary, a pathology that can be transcended. And if we look at the Korean art world over the period 1997-2007 we can clearly see developments that support Perniola's analysis, just as we can see developments that support Jameson's analysis in the period 1987-97. Perniola offers us a critique of Jameson's totalizing approach that in turn is predicated upon Guy Debord's negative evaluation of modern society. I argue Jameson's exposition of late capitalist culture does not provide enough ground for explaining the present state of art and culture as the 'schizophrenic' mentality of perpetual present due to the collapsed temporality in late capitalist culture has been transcended by the culture of virtuality in information society.

In this chapter I hope to show that the key concepts in Perniola's argument allow us to transcend the schizophrenic mentality of media culture. The key concepts are, I will argue, as follows:

1. The Enigmatic Reality of the Fold
2. The Philosophy of the Present
3. Virtuality

At the heart of Perniola's critique of Debord's theory of the society of the spectacle, and hence Jameson's own interpretation, is his objection that Debord presupposes that society is based on secrets to which only a small number of people have access. Perniola proposes that Debord's argument assigns thinking as a secondary and an inessential role:

> *What I find unsatisfactory and at bottom naive in Debord's argument and, by extension, in the entire notion of the secret, is precisely this conception of truth as something that at different times will just appear or disappear quite independently*

of thought. This concept of the secret relies on the existence of a simple truth, the route to which may be long, complicated and tortuous; but once it is sighted, the secret is effaced. Each time that thinking is presented in terms of a police investigation, its dignity is assaulted, its primacy is compromised and any exit from the cultural framework of [the spectacle] that Debord himself has outlined is barred. (Perniola, 1995, p.4)

By contrast, Perniola argues that our society is an 'enigma' and assumes a reality that is more complex and intricate than Debord envisages, in which nobody knows what is really happening nor is capable of predicting exactly what will happen next. (Perniola, 1995, pp.9-11) He explains this disposition as follows:

Unlike the secret, which is dissolved in the process of being communicated, enigma is capable of simultaneous explanation on many different registers of meaning, all of which are equally valid, and it is thus able to open up an intermediate space that is not necessarily bound to be filled. The secret is based on a simplistic conception of reality and on the subjective intention to veil, mask and hide its evidence. Implicit is the existence of someone who possesses the secret and knows how to maintain a total mastery over its management through communication processes targeted at a small number of people 'in the know' and signalling processes targeted at the vast majority that is shut out. The moment that the secret slips from the control of its owner, because reality assumes a shape that is more complex, intricate many sided and contradictory than was previously imagined, a different horizon, that of the enigma, comes into play. For instance, within the context of the society of the integrated spectacle outlined by Debord, this can occur when those in power find themselves at the point of confluence of a great many plots that to a large extent elude them. (Perniola, 1995, pp.10-11)

Perniola asserts that contemporary thinkers should embrace the enigmatic world and try to suspend the subjective, opening up enigmatic areas that transcend the logic of identity. His philosophy emphasizes present time instead of past and future and challenges negative thinking such as nihilism and cynicism, and instead dwelling upon everything positive that the past can convey. He explains that his philosophy is driven by the image of a full world in which everything is in hand, in contrast to the image of an empty world as projected in the society of the spectacle.

Perniola proposes a 'philosophy of the present' that presupposes the fullness of the world where everything is available and ready to be used. And through this philosophy he celebrates the notion of virtuality and its cultural paradigm of memory and deferred consumption, which facilitated the overcoming of the actuality of a mass-media society that gives great importance to immediacy.

But, above all, Perniola explains that his philosophy of the present is based on Gilles Deleuze's notion of the fold and its conception of enigmatic reality, the concept and positioning of which I will clarify within the Perniola's critique of Debord's theory. In the end I will also describe Perniola's examination of the 'completion of time' defined as the 'Egyptian effect' in contemporary art, which I will use as the basis of my exhibition.

1) Philosophy of Enigma against Debord's Society of Secret and Its One-way Communication

1-1. The Fold and its Enigma

Perniola argues that contemporary society is that of the enigma in contradistinction to the notion of secret in Debord's society of the spectacle. And he maintains that the notion of the enigma will lead us to break through the problematic of the secret.

Perniola develops the philosophy of enigma based on Gilles Deleuze's philosophy of the fold[1] in Baroque[2] culture. The fold presupposes the world that is composed of

[1] Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995) describes that the Baroque endlessly produces folds. The Baroque fold develops all the way to infinity, fold over fold. He explains that the Baroque develops its folds in two ways as if infinities were composed of two stages or floors: the pleats of matter, and the folds in the soul. He states: 'Below, matter is amassed according to a first type of fold, and then organized according to a second type, to the extent its part constitutes organs that are differently folded and more or less developed. Above, the soul sings of the glory of God in as much as it follows its own folds, but without succeeding in entirely developing them, since this communication stretches out indefinitely.' (Deleuze, 2003, p.3) He emphasizes that matter has a degree of hardness as well as a degree of fluidity, which gives a flexible or elastic force to bodies, '...the expression of the active compressive force exerted on matter'. (Deleuze, 2003, p.4) Therefore matter cannot be separated into independent parts but rather divided to infinite small folds which always maintain certain cohesions, thus the continuity in bodies' curvilinear movements of inflections. (For further information, refer to Deleuze, G., *The Fold*, 2003. Continuum: London, pp.3-14.)

[2] Deleuze analyzes Baroque culture not as to an essence but as to an operative function. He analyzes the operative concept of the Baroque is 'the Fold, everything that it includes, and in all its extensiveness'. He explains that the Baroque has been being seen limited to one genre like architecture, or to certain periods and places, or even to a radical disavowal of its existence. He claims that by examining the concept of the Baroque as the 'sovereign developing' of all things, it would enable to investigate architects, painters, musicians, poets, and philosophers within the category. (For further information, refer to Deleuze, G., *The Fold*, 2003. Continuum: London, pp.30-43.)

numerous folds, which creates the conception of thinking as 'explanation' (the process of unfolding) and hence entails the experience of development:

> *Gilles Deleuze's The Fold, the subtitle of which is Leibiniz and the Baroque, introduces a world not of secrets but of folds. The activity of thinking is presented here not as the revelation of a secret, nor as an illumination, nor as a clarification... but rather as an ex-planation or ex-plication, literally an 'unfolding'. If the activity of thinking never in fact remains within hard-and-fast limits, but always tends to go beyond them, it is because thinking entails the experience of a development. Explicatio and explicare signify de-velopment and de-veloping, literally 'unwrapping'. It follows that knowledge is not simply the revelation of a secret, nor the illumination of something ,that was obscure,... but the drawing out, the unwinding, the ex-pression of something that is tangled, wound up, gathered in. (Perniola, 1995, p.5)*

Perniola emphasizes the importance of this concept of development in making ways out of the current historical urgency of the negation of history:

> *What is important is that the static conception that underpins the notion of the secret should yield to a dynamic conception whereby the entire universe is constantly animated by incessant micro-movements, miniscule shifts, through which a real, continual and almost imperceptible transformation occurs. (Perniola, 1995, p.6)*

First, Perniola maintains that the concept of development implies that there is 'a certain affinity of shape, structure or substance between the point of departure and the point of arrival... Explanation and the fold belong to one and the same world'. (Perniola, 1995, p.6) He argues that in order to accomplish the development through explanation, a thinker should remain in direct contact with society and history to catch small and subtle movements and shifts. Secondly, he underlines that explanation leads to something new and different: either better or worse, because such notions as 'progression and regression, advantage and disadvantage, improvement and deterioration' are relative and apt to turn into their opposites. Therefore, he asserts that the fixed conception of the notion of the secret should yield to a dynamic conception of the universe where 'incessant micro-movements, miniscule shifts, through which a real, continual and almost imperceptible transformation occurs.' (Perniola, 1995, P.6)

Perniola explains that Deleuze's notion of the fold opens up four conceptual fields derived from Latin verbs: *volvo, plecto, flecto* and *clino.* The first, *volvo,* means 'to encircle' and produces the world of the volute – as in the spiral form of sea-shells. Perniola indicates that '[i]n a spiralling movement, although progress is not straightforward, it is none the less forward'. (Perniola, 1995, p.7) The second field is *plecto*, from which fold or pleat is derived. This is connected to the idea of interweaving of woven tissue. The concept of the fold produces an idea of truth as something that is clothed, like an onion to be peeled. Hence, the philosophy of the fold involves incorporating and interweaving of different things. The third semantic field is *flecto*, which means to fold, to flex, to bend. This concept promotes the fluctuation of the norm and the replacement of the definite law. He explains that inflection enables modulation, transformation and a continuously variable modelling process, and ultimately produces a continuum by minuscule transitions without abrupt twists or sudden shifts. Perniola emphasizes that '[t]he opposite of inflection is rigidity, hardening, sclerosis and inflexibility'. (Perniola, 1995, p.7) The fourth field is the verb *clino*, which refers to the notion of transversality and the relationship between two planes such as top and bottom. In describing the term, Perniola compares it with the verb *clinare* (to decline): 'The movement denoted by *clinare* involves infinitely small displacements [as opposed to vertical motion]. The effectiveness or impact of a fall is in inverse proportion to its degree of divergence from the vertical.' (Perniola, 1995, p.8)

Perniola argues that these four concepts create a world where continuity prevails over fragmentation through the dynamic terms of a passage, transit from one state to another. He notes that in order to achieve this condition the philosophy of the fold emphasizes '[a philosopher should accord to] the fluidity of material, the elasticity of bodies and the innermost recesses of the mind... through which the immense subtlety of things are revealed and infinite colours refracted'. (Perniola, 1995, p.8) Most importantly, Perniola claims that 'the philosophy of the fold depicts a world that is not empty, but full, indeed crammed, packed to overflowing, in which there is a maximum of matter in a minimum of space' (Perniola, 1995, p.8), whereas the philosophy of the secret emphasizes the negative aspects of reality in which nothing is successful. Therefore the fold symbolizes this fullness and expresses the Baroque world as one in which everything is folded to occupy as little space as possible. Ultimately it entails the conception of the contemporary world where everything is in the present and available here and now in full supply. Perniola argues that there have been numerous minute movements of development in contemporary society, which created subtle changes of transit that Perniola defines as the enigmatic effect. He summarizes that 'the nature of enigma is transit, and imperceptible inching towards something that is different'. (Perniola, 1995, p.12)

1-2. The Fold as the 'Philosophy of Plenitude'

Perniola points out that Debord himself also regarded the 'anticipatory character of the Baroque' appropriate for describing the trait of contemporary art. Debord explains that Baroque was the art of a world that had lost its centre and embodied the principle of the ephemeral that it recognized in the world. Debord asserts that baroque culture is also observed in contemporary art practices:

> *The baroque ensemble, a unity itself long lost to the world of artistic creation, recurs in a certain sense in today's consumption of the entirety of art of the past. The historical knowledge and recognition of all past art, along with its retrospective promotion to the rank of world art, serve to relativize it within the context of a global disorder which in turn constitutes a baroque edifice at a higher level, an edifice into which even the production of a baroque art, and all its possible revivals, is bound to be melded. Only in this era of museums, when no artistic communication remains possible, can each and every earlier moment of art be accepted – and accepted as equal in value – for none, in view of the disappearance of the prerequisites of communication in general, suffers any longer from the disappearance of its own particular ability to communicate. (Debord, 1967, p.135)*

However, Perniola asserts that there is no room left for the Baroque legacy in the world of secret drawn by Debord. And it is through Deleuze's philosophy of the fold, which continued to investigate the legacy, that Perniola finds the way out of the fixed state of the society of the spectacle where no change or escape from the existing system can be made. Perniola claims that the conception of enigmatic society in the fold, which assumes a much more complicated and multi-faceted reality, opposes the simple notion of reality in the society of the spectacle, which presupposes the existence of secrets.

Perniola claims, the conflict between the philosophy of the secret and that of the fold arises because the latter maintains that the worst reality is always better than the best utopia, precisely because it is reality whereas the former regards the society of the integrated spectacle as the worst society ever. He elaborates: 'It adopts the Stoic mentality, according to which something, whatever form it takes, is always better than nothing.' (Perniola, 1995, p.9) He insists that the philosophy of the fold is post-nihilistic not because it provides a justification for giving up and giving in, but rather the basis for a philosophy intending to remain in direct touch with reality. (Perniola, 1995, p.9)

Furthermore, Perniola explains that the fold in the Baroque world means that the world is so crammed and full that everything takes up as little space as possible, and it introduces the consequent 'philosophy of plenitude'. He explains:

Whereas the philosophy of the secret lays the greatest possible emphasis on the negative aspects of reality and describes a world in which nothingness is triumphant... [The philosophy of the fold] describes the Baroque world as one in which everything is folded to occupy as little space as possible. It also describes the contemporary world, in which everything exists in the present, is available in the here and now and nothing is in short supply. (Perniola, 1995, p.8)

And I want to underline that it is through this conception of a full world that incessant, diminutive and subtle movements of transit in enigmatic reality can be made and hence we evade the condition of de-historicity and its eternal present in the society of the spectacle.

2) Philosophy of the Present – The Transformation of the Actuality of Mass-Media Society to the Virtuality of the Information Society

2.1 Philosophy of the Present

Most importantly Perniola highlights that both Debord and Deleuze consider the present the most important temporality. However, the great difference is that for Debord contemporary society is represented by the negative notion of perpetual present via the media's removal of historicity through imposing importance on novelty, whereas in Deleuze Perniola finds the fullness of a world in which everything is currently available, providing a plenitude of chances to transcend the limits of mass-media society. Hence this philosophy of the fold regards reality better than any kinds of utopia and proposes an attitude to remain in direct touch with reality.

That is the basic principle of the philosophy of the present, which asserts enigmatic reality based on the mutual belongings of society and philosophy:

The fundamental hypothesis upon which my philosophical work was founded... [on the viewpoint that] in spite of certain appearances, there exists, between society and thought, a relationship of complicity, indeed of essential reciprocal belonging: thinkers take to society like ducks to water. And this is so from the moment that philosophy ceases to be metaphysical and boldly declares for historical reality, phenomena, things, or rather from the moment that philosophy is itself a historical reality, a phenomenon, a thing. (Perniola, 1995, pp.40-41)

Perniola proposes enigmatic philosophy based on much more positive analysis of contemporary society, through which people can overcome the totalizing and static condition of the society of the spectacle.

Perniola explains that today's public are more interested in people than in theories and are seduced by the *'mise en scene'* of subjectivity rather than the abstractness of impersonal words, which requires the contemporary thinker to be someone with a self-image and fixed identity. However, he insists that practicing philosophy is not any way subjective and is not the expression of personal identity. He asserts that contemporary thinkers should embrace the enigmatic world and try to suspend the subjective, opening up enigmatic areas that transcend the logic of identity. He describes that 'to read, to think and to write does not mean to express one's subjectivity or to fulfil oneself; [but] to lose oneself, to feel that one is the intermediary, the passage, the transit to something different and foreign.' (Perniola, 1995, P.40)

Perniola explains that his philosophy is founded on the hypothesis that there is a complicit relationship, essentially reciprocal, between society and thought when philosophy stops being metaphysical and becomes more realistic:

> *The terrain in which it moves is not that of the eternal verities, of imperishable values, of absolute ideals, but the open terrain of the historical world. (Perniola, 1995, pp.40-41)*

Of the three dimensions of historical time – past, present and future – Perniola highlights the *present time* as well as what is 'present' for contemporary society. He argues that neither interpretation of hermeneutics focused on the past nor hope of utopianism focused on the future can solve the problems of contemporary society, because such problems resulted from a direct contact between 'thinking and reality, meditation and action, and the cloister and the outside world'. (Perniola, 1995, p.41) What is important is the here and now:

> *What is certain is that the philosopher can move at his/her ease through a world that no longer has any recollections, but memories that are constantly available, that has no hopes, but only consolations: its emotional tonality is characterized by a trustful and active calm, shot through with sudden flashes and raptures. (Perniola, 1995, p.41)*

He also defines the philosophy of the present in opposition to negative thinking because it does not mourn absence, but rather appropriates everything positive that the past can deliver. (Perniola, 1995, p.42) Peniola explains his philosophy is driven by the image of a full world in which everything is to hand – in contrast with the image of the empty world that for Guy Debord constitutes present-day society. Through this philosophy, Perniola asserts that the notion of the simulacrum does not have to be understood as a lie or trick, but as evidence of the physical presence of the past in the present.

Given the fact that contemporary society is enigmatic, Perniola asserts that the philosophy of the present is an enigmatic philosophy as it presupposes mutual belongings between society and philosophy. He points out that 'philosophers are now able to operate in society with even greater agility than could journalists, teachers and revolutionaries during the preceding two centuries.' (Perniola, 1995, p.43)

He also claims that the 'philosophy of the present' means that 'the present' as a main historical temporary dimension is no longer the object of philosophy, but the subject as it thinks itself through philosophy. He declares that philosophers now turn themselves into mediators of the present and all its enigmas by repressing their own desires, inclinations and opinions in order to prevent placing obstacles and misleading barriers in the way of understanding history's manifestations:

> *The philosopher turns him- or herself into nothing but an intermediary, a transit zone, a gateway for phenomena that because they present themselves in an unexpected and unpredictable way, surprise, disturb and astonish. (Perniola, 1995, p.43)*

Perniola emphasizes that once arrogant, haughty metaphysics has become humble and modest in regards to history, the contemporary philosopher can now remain in direct contact with society as never before. (Perniola, 1995, pp.43-44) And this attitude connects to the enigmatic philosophy of microscopic, flexible, reciprocal movements through which Perniola purports to solve the enigma of contemporary society.

Perniola suggests the philosophy of the present as appropriate frame of mind to assess contemporary society and culture. By taking a positive attitude about what the present society can deliver, Perniola finds an alternative cultural model in our time. He argues that the concept of virtuality enabled by digital technologies in information society has overcome the actuality of mass-media society.

2.2 Beyond the Actuality of Mass-Media Society

Perniola explains that contemporary society is best described as actuality and standardization based on a mass-communication that transmits messages to a vast number of people at the same time. He claims that the actuality of mass-communication can be understood as the instant, a shifting border between past and future, which is instantly corrupted and vanishes. Therefore, actuality is not the experience of the present, but of lack and insubstantiality. 'The idolatry of opinion polls and audience ratings, an inevitable result of the identification between actuality and the effectual, is linked to the tendency to standardize all products that are exhibited.' (Perniola, 1995, p.60) What draws people's attention is not the intrinsic qualities of these products themselves, but the simple empirical and quantitative fact of their simultaneous transmission and reception. However, the standardization in a single register (the spectacle) of all the messages and all the products of mass culture, melt down all oppositions and all differences. For the collective imaginary of actuality, the only thing that exists is what appears in the instant.

Perniola warns that the media's actuality and standardization have hindered the deferred consumption and long-term selection process of books. He emphasizes that to overcome the actuality of the spectacle, audiences should distinguish between 'the ephemeral and the historical, between short-term speculation and long-term investment'. (Perniola, 1995, pp.60-61)

He insists that a transformation has occurred in contemporary society's communication mode from the simultaneous reception and the levelling of mass-media to the accumulation and selection through the information revolution and digital culture. What becomes significant now is not the actual and the instant, rather the virtual and the deferred (memory). However, unlike McLuhan[3]'s claim that the medium conditions the experience, Perniola asserts that the information revolution does not give one instrument of communication more importance over another, and what matters is making a choice not between the reading of a book and the viewing of an electronic image, but between a simultaneous and standardizing consumption, and a deferred and critical one. He explains that the information revolution has separated listening and viewing from one another, inviting consumers to choose from a bewildering array of, for example, videos, information and reading material – one consequence of which is that we are forced to arrange data into files and develop habits of classification and selection.

[3] Media theorist Marshall McLuhan (1921-1980) posits the power of media at its largest and predicts media itself will determine human interactions and social behaviors in his famous writings such as *Understanding Media and Gutenberg Galaxy*. With the famous expression "the medium is the message" he declares that a medium affects society not by the contents delivered by the medium, but by the characteristics of the medium itself. (For more information, see Mcluhan M. 1964.*Understanding Media.* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.)

He highlights that the era of actuality and standardization in mass-media society has had its day, and an era of virtuality and discrimination is beginning. In this way the book, for example, does not take precedence over other types of communication, and the conventional library is but one among many kinds of institutions, including 'the video library, the media-resources centre, the newspaper library, the art gallery, the museum'. (Perniola, 1995, p.62) He continues: '[T]he main thing is to wake at last from the dream into which actuality plunges us and to gain access to as broad a range of virtuality as possible.' (Perniola, 1995, p.62)

Most of all, he claims that the conditions of deferment and difference that are the essential traits of reading and writing now become the fundamental model for every form of cultural consumption, since everything is being transformed into reading and writing, deferred in time and ordered for its proper purpose:

> *What is really essential is to start ordering materials in accordance with criteria that respect the relevant differences and statuses, that each item be placed in the right heat to enable it to perform to its own personal best. (Perniola, 1995, p.62)*

Perniola draws a line between mass-media society and the information society, pointing out that the information revolution has made all kinds of communication modes available for flexible use, enabling the critical and selective consumption of messages.

3) The Culture of Virtuality

Perniola maintains that the new digital culture entails a deferred consumption and long-term selection by breaking the simultaneity of message consumption and therefore creating the habit of classification and of selection of data.

Perniola claims that mass-media society, founded on actuality and standardization, has reached its zenith, and what is crucial now is no longer the actual and the instant, but the virtual and memory. Therefore, what is required for contemporary viewers in receiving messages is critical and deferred consumption through a constant process of storing, arranging and ordering data according to their own criteria.

Perniola stresses that the creation of new cultural model of virtuality through the information revolution has fostered a positive and 'virtuous' attitude that aims for 'spatialization of time, for a motionless progress, for a transit from same to same' (Perniola, 1995, p.63). He also states that this new culture of virtuality calls for a philosophical enquiry into the notion of the virtual.

Above all, he explains that the concept of the virtual is not the same as that of the potential as conceived in the philosophical tradition going back to Aristotle,[4] which is based on the opposition between potentiality and actuality. This notion places emphasis on the act, the very existence of the object, Perniola describes, through which potentiality is mere 'pre-formation, pre-determination and pre-existence'. (Perniola, 1995, p.63) And in this way, the actuality of the mass-media might be viewed as the extreme culminating point of the misunderstood concept of potentiality: 'The assertion of the primacy of actuality over potentiality, by consigning to irrelevancy all that is seminal, subterranean and buried lends weight to those who argue that Aristotle is the prime source of contemporary nihilism.' (Perniola, 1995, p.63-64)

Furthermore, the virtual is also essentially different from the possible as 'something that may or may not be, something that is neither necessary nor impossible'. (Perniola, 1995, p.64) However, Perniola contends that the insistence on the reality of the possible cannot be disconnected from an 'eschatological' appeal to the future because it creates a hope that what in the past was only 'possible' might become real in the future. He also warns that this attitude might lead us to the scientific utopianism by overestimating new information technology's capability to open up a realm of possibility.

And again, Perniola clarifies that the virtual is not the same as the practical in the opposite sense to the formal. The usage is particularly apparent in the adverb 'virtually', he explains 'when people say, for example, that so-and-so is 'virtually the winner' or that the matter is 'virtually closed'. (Perniola, 1995, p.64) He asserts that this practice reveals disrespect for form and creates 'an apology for a brute and violent effectiveness'. (Perniola, 1995, p.64) He also cautions that it is in this context that mass-media actuality frequently claims that it is the only force that is 'virtually real', and that mass-media standardization is enabled through 'this interchangeability of metaphysical oppositions.' (Perniola, 1995, p.65)

Lastly, Perniola also examines the notion of the virtual through its use in theology. Moral theology distinguishes the actual intention of the priest from his virtual intention when praying. While the practical intention is defined at the moment of decision, the virtual intention persists and continues to operate even if the priest does not say or act on it. Perniola insists that:

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[4]Aristotle delimits the indefinite as 'what is potentially and not in complete reality'. (See Aristotle, *Aristotle's Metaphysics,* 1971. Oxford University Press, pp.12-13) Perniola analyzes that: 'The Aristotelian opposition between potentiality and actuality places greater emphasis on the act, which is the full and final form of being, the very existence of the object, in comparison with which potentiality is mere pre-formation, pre-determination and pre-existence. God, in as much as he is the perfect completion, pure substance, is pure actuality and hence devoid of matter and potentiality.' (Perniola, 1995, p.63)

This use of the term 'virtual' is particularly significant because it confers to virtuality an efficacy that is chronologically subsequent to actuality, as well as a degree of stability that is independent of consciousness. Unlike... the potential and possible, which precede the actual and the real, in this case the virtual follows the actual, preserves it and keeps it in a kind of memory that is external to the subject, yet present, effectual, available. (Perniola, 1995, p.65)

He claims that the library and the computer database belong within the horizon of the virtuality of 'moral intention', and represent a memory that is external to the spirit and to the actuality of consciousness, but is ever present. On the other hand, mass media replaces memory with forgetfulness through commemoration and repression, attempting to capture a present that is constantly slipping away. Through this conception, reality shifts from actuality to virtuality because what is real is not what appears at any moment, but what is conserved in memory. Retrieval, display and visualization are subsequent and selective: 'they are accessory and serialized'. (Perniola, 1995, p.65)

Perniola applies the notion to the cultural paradigm of information society, which has broadened the horizon of what is real through the transformation of reality as taken from actuality to virtuality. And the status of the subject in metaphysical tradition has collapsed, as consciousness in information society does not come from a subject but from something external to humans, memory: 'The library and the computer represent a memory that is external to the spirit, to the actuality of its acquisition of consciousness, yet ever present.' (Perniola, 1995, p.65)

He argues that the world we are heading towards is not one to be filled by the projective reason of the subject, but one that is replete, in which everything is ready and available through the structure of information technology.

If effectual reality is no longer conceived as actual (as in the metaphysical tradition that survived until the advent of mass-media society), but as virtual (as in the society of information technology), the entire humanist world vision that conferred upon the subject its ontological meaning collapses... What memory represents, instead, is something that is external to humans and in relation to which they indeed find themselves in a state of listening and reception. (Perniola, 1995, pp.65-66)

Perniola argues that the contemporary world is that is already full and in it everything is ready to be ordered via information technology. Whereas mass-media society makes everything flow and intermix in a stream of images, in information society everything is fixed and arranged in a spatial order. He explains:

> *A world whose basic tonality consists in a seamless subjective psychological temporality thus gives way to a world whose basic tonality consists in the parcellization and spatialization of psychological experience.... Our sprit is no longer a stream, but an archive, a media resources centre, a library. The Principle upon which mass-media society was founded was ephemeral consumption, an ever more dizzying 'use and discard' approach. The principle upon which the society whose advent is now announced is based, is on the contrary, the accumulation of data, information and images and their orderly management. (Perniola, 1995, p.66)*

4) Critique of Debord's and Jameson's Theories through Perniola's Cultural Paradigm of Virtuality

4.1 Overcoming the One-way Stream of the Spectacle

Perniola's investigation of the society of enigmatic reality opposes Debord's society of the integrated spectacle,[5] which is characterized by generalized secrecy. I find that de-historicization of the spectacle that maintains this secrecy, as argued by Debord, is based upon the observation that the spectacle is fundamentally a *one-way* communication. He claims: 'The spectacle is by definition immune from human activity, inaccessible to any projected review or correction. It is the opposite of dialogue." (Debord, 1967, p.17)

[5] Debord asserted that the spectacle had become more integrated over the twenty years since the publication of *The Society of the Spectacle* in 1967, raising a whole generation according to its laws; even those who would criticize it have to speak its language. He explains that the integrated spectacle is a combination of the *concentrated* and *diffuse* spectacles. The concentrated form is normally characterized by bureaucratic capitalism, but was also used by totalitarian governments in Communist Russia and Fascist Germany. The commodity that the bureaucracy appropriates is the totality of social labour for society's survival. The diffuse form, on the other hand, is represented by American-style modern capitalism, which offers the freedom to choose between a wide range of commodities (each commodity being justified by an appeal to the commodity production in general). However, the consumers will only be presented with various fragments of this spectacular commodity world, fragments that often exhibit contradictory logic – and of course logic that is different to that of the whole. In summary, the integrated spectacle skilfully applies both diffuse and concentrated forms on a grand scale; but most importantly it has integrated itself into reality and reconstructed the reality to the extent of totally describing it. (Debord, 1988, pp.9-11)

Guy Debord maintains that one-way communication of the spectacle guarantees the separation of contemporary society through the spectacle's domination of appearances. However, Perniola purports that an alternative mode of information consumption through accumulation and selection of data has transcended this monologic condition. Perniola explains that digital technology separated the simultaneity of message consumption and diversified the ways messages are used by broadening the horizon of what is available and real, and hence surpassing the mass media's one-way communication.

Debord maintains the spectacle's influence on social life and its monopolization of appearances gives rise to a monological condition; that dialogue between the producers and observers of the spectacle is impossible. This enables administrators and authority figures to use the spectacle to pursue hidden agendas without being answerable for the consequences.

Elaborating on the dynamics of modern media, Debord asserts that a principle of secrecy governs the spectacle, deciding all that it displays and its most vital operation. Debord explains that with the destruction of history, contemporary events became unverifiable stories with unlikely explanations: 'For every imbecility presented by the spectacle, there are only the media's professionals to give an answer, with a few respectful rectifications or remonstrations.' (Debord, 1988, p.16) He emphasizes that these professionals are bounded by wages and controlled by their masters' or organizations' motives.

In this analysis, Debord assumes the existence of experts and authorities that have hidden motives and secret agendas. At the technological level, when images are chosen and constructed by someone else and become the individual's principal connection to the world, all things can be juxtaposed and understood without contradiction. The reason for this is that the producers of the images simplify the sensible world and control the flow of information according to their own criterea, eliminating what is 'unnecessary' or 'inconvenient' to realize an (often secret) agenda, giving no opportunity for reflection by the spectator. Debord concludes that spectacular discourse 'isolates all it shows from its context, its past, its intentions and its consequence', which is thus completely illogical. (Debord, 1988, p.28)

Debord also contends that although the modern spectacle depicts what society can deliver, 'what is *permitted* is rigidly distinguished from what is *possible* within this depiction'. (Debord, 1968, p.20) He explains that the spectacle does not hide the hierarchical power in its own separateness – a separateness reinforced by an exponential productivity based on increasing division of labour, automated production and a widening market. And in this process all community and critical awareness has been diminished.

However, I argue that this assessment underestimates the capability of human thought and the enigmatic reality of society as outlined by Mario Perniola. According to Perniola's theory of the society of enigma, it is through the enigmatic reality of society that subtle and continual changes can occur because secrets can slip out of the numerous plots of complex, intricate reality (See Chapter IV, p.99-100.). Although Debord insists that people's critical awareness has diminished in the powerful process of the spectacle's separation[6] (I have described this process of separation in Chapter III, p.73-75.), I agree with Perniola's claim that people have overcome the one-way communication of mass-media and accomplished an interactive media culture through the digital technology revolution of the last decade, and I maintain this has encouraged critical consciousness and creativity. For example, I observe that the advance of interactive media through digital technology developed at the turn of the century has offered Korean artists much more flexibility in critical thinking and diverse possibilities of communication with viewers. I assert that media art works – with the quality of interactivity – investigated ways of thinking beyond the static notions of communication and showed the possibility of reaching beyond the 'absolute temporality of standardization' in postmodern culture. Relevant examples of this artistic practice will be illustrated in Chapter V.

4.2 Transcending the 'Schizophrenic' Mentality of Mass-Media Culture via Interactive Digital Technology

This new cultural paradigm of digital technology also guides a way to overcome the problematic of postmodern culture defined by Fredric Jameson. Fundamentally Jameson critiques the technological mechanism of late capitalism as it functions as a mere representation tool, does not possess any possibility of creation and accordingly it promotes the 'depthless culture' of the simulacrum:

> *It is immediately obvious that the technology of our own moment no longer possesses [the] capacity for representation: ... rather the computer, whose outer shell has no emblematic or visual power, or even the casings of the various media themselves, as with that home appliance called television which articulates nothing*

[6] Debord states that: 'Separation is THE alpha and omega of the spectacle.' (Debord, 1967, p.20) He asserts that the spectacle completes the separation between worker and product by concealing the importance of individual work through its fundamentally abstracting nature. Furthermore, the spectacle divides the world into two parts: the existing world on the one hand and what is superior to the world on the other. And the spectacle is the common language to connect these two sides as well as spectators through its one-way communication. Debord concludes, therefore, that the spectacle unites what is separate, but only within its own separateness. (See also Debord, 1967, pp.20-22.)

but rather implodes, carrying its flattened image surface within itself. (Jameson, 1991, pp.36-37)

He continues to explain:

Such machines are indeed machines of reproduction rather than of production, and they make very different demands on our capacity for aesthetic representation than did the relatively mimetic idolatry of the older machinery of the futurist moment, of some older speed-and-energy sculpture. Here we have less to do with kinetic energy than with all kinds of new reproductive processes; and in the weaker productions of postmodernism the aesthetic embodiment of such processes often tends to slip back more comfortably into a mere thematic representation of content-into narratives which are about the processes of reproduction and include movie cameras, video, tape recorders, the whole technology of the production and reproduction of the 'simulacrum'. (Jameson, 1991, p.37)

However, I want to underline a recent change in the technological mode of late capitalism in opposition to Jameson's analysis. I argue that this view of Jameson has become outmoded because the continuous advance in information technology enabled diverse kinds of the developments in the modification of the technological modes. I have observed that in Korea new technology of interactivity in digital culture and its integration into mass-media have progressed in the last decade: one-way communication system of mass-media has been overcome by two-way system of digital technology as well as its skilful use. Most importantly, new digital technology has shown more possibilities of exploring beyond by creating other dimensions of representation and communication through the development of virtuality. And this argument provides the ground for my claim of 'post-surface' generation in Korean contemporary art, which I will exemplify in Chapter V.

Based on Debord's analysis of removed historicity in the society of the spectacle through the domination of appearances and the creation of perpetual present, Jameson also criticizes the negative effect of media through its standardization of endless changes that causes temporal paradoxes in late capitalistic culture. Jameson argues that the constantly changing fashions through the diverse penetration of media images changed people's social and psychological system, and made human, social and historical temporality flow homogeneously. Moreover, Jameson argues that the penetration of incessant media images on culture has collapsed linear temporality through its continuous creation of fashion. And this has caused the experience of perpetual present, the symptom of a 'schizophrenic

mentality', and most importantly blocked people's criticality through the stagnant condition of homogenization. (See Chapter III, p.86 for more description.)

Jameson also argues that this temporal paradox resulted in a schizophrenic mentality that experiences a perpetual present, and ultimately the creation of a 'depthless' culture of synchronicity and intertextuality in late capitalist society. However, I argue that Jameson's depthless culture and its 'schizophrenic' symptoms as a result of mass-media's dominant aspects of one-way communication and actuality have been transcended by many Korean contemporary artists, especially those using new media because they have not only become used to receiving the torrent of information through various media, but also have constantly experimented with organizing it regardless of temporality and spatiality, and developing innovative ways of managing the data according to their own perspectives.

And I find that this new symptom is better explained by Perniola's positive assessment of contemporary society and its new conception of virtuality. (See Chapter IV, p.107-112.) I have observed that, in the deluge of media images in the late 1990s, there was a creation of surface culture (see Chapter II p.43, p.61-63, 68-69.) in which Korean artists understood culture based on the surface regardless of time and space due to what Jameson would call the schizophrenic mentality of collapsed temporality and its 'syntagmatic' perspective in late capitalism. However, it is through the pursuit of virtuality via digital technology, as outlined by Perniola, that subtle and continuous changes took place in the handling of different cultural influences to create art works of 'de-contextualized' hybridity in Korea in the last decade. I observe that Korean artists moved away from superficial ways of understanding and mixing different artistic contents based on the surface to accomplish more masterful ways of selecting, ordering and arranging data for appropriate criteria, which ultimately entails 'post-surface' cultural art practices, which I term as a new art paradigm in Korea for the sake of my claim (I will show its examples in Chapter V.).

Perniola's proposition is for a new cultural model of virtuality in information society that provides a way out of the postmodern condition of a 'depthless culture of schizophrenic mentality'. I assert that Korean artists in the recent decade have overcome 'one-way stream of subjective temporality and consciousness' through the 'spatialization of time and compartmentalization of psychological experience' enabled by storing, arranging and ordering of data via new digital technologies. I argue that through the constant experimentation of understanding heterogeneous cultural contents based on the surface and appropriating them regardless of their depth, these artists have achieved the flexible use of information and its masterful management, and finally created a syntax of imposing a new meaning according to their own criteria, transcending the 'surface

culture' paradigm. For example, the interactivity of new information technology promoted Korean artists to freely investigate the possibility of better communication by testing the meaning of the digital and the virtual, and the boundaries of existing concepts in art and society, which consequently helped them to overcome the one-way communication of mass-media. (Relevant examples will be examined in Chapter V.)

Lastly, I want to assert that Perniola's new cultural paradigm marks a subtle change of enigmatic development from Jameson's postmodern cultural model of 'syntagmatic' perspective of the 'schizophrenic mentality'. I maintain that the creation of 'post-surface' cultural art practice in Korea is the outcome of continuous exercises of the artistic paradigm of 'de-contextualized hybridity' (see Chapter III.) by Korean artists of 'surface culture', and the gradual, delicate shifts of attitude led to the creation of a new syntax, assisted by the versatile communication through the more effective management of data via digital technology throughout the last decade.

5) Egyptian Effect: Completion of Time

I claim that by actively embracing digital technology and experimenting with their diverse possibilities, Korean artists in the recent decade have created a 'post-surface' cultural paradigm that transcends the 'schizophrenic mentality' of 'surface culture' through the new temporality of 'enigmatic synchronicity', which Perniola describes as the 'Egyptian effect'.

Based on the notion of virtuality in information society, which changes our temporality from the subjective psychological trajectory of the one-way stream to the spatialization of psychological experience, Perniola proposes a 'completion of time', the trait of Egyptian culture as a new paradigm for contemporary art, which will be used as the main theme of my exhibition.

Perniola examines the present state of contemporary art by comparing it to the 'Egyptian effect':

> *The tendency to collapse the ancient and the new into a simple temporal dimension, arranging them alongside one [an]other and leaving the resulting contradiction wide open, was indeed typical of ancient Egyptian civilization. (Perniola, 1995, p.74)*

He analyzes that the link between artistic form and historical and social time has been broken. He explains that time can no longer be identified with a single form, but

associates with 'every artistic form from every age and country, every style and revival, every avant-garde and fashion.' (Perniola, 1995, p.72) He also states that artistic form is not bound to the will to express its own time – or the will to anticipate a time to come – as 'the meta-historical absoluteness of the work would mesh, paradoxically, with the artist's most subjective of decision'. (Perniola, 1995, p.72). Perniola observes:

> *It is not a time without art and an art without time that is being forecast but a time that contains all the arts and an art that is master of all times, a contradiction of all times into a single time that contains every form and a mixture of every form, none of which claims unique pre-eminence in the name of historical necessity or the logic of seasonal alternations. (Perniola, 1995, p.72)*

Perniola argues that the creation of an enigmatic synchronicity and a concomitant 'completion' of time is reminiscent of ancient Egyptian civilization. He states that:

> *This fullness of time [through the] assertion of the present as time's sole dimension is manifested in the contradiction, identification and mutual cancelling out of notions of actuality and repertory, evidence and archive, exhibition and storage, which until yesterday were opposed. (Perniola, 1995, p.74)*

This phenomenon, Perniola argues, is well illustrated by the latest television technology, as, for example, video recorders and other TV technology allow the present to be returned to immediately, freed from its own unique temporality. He argues that if everything can be delayed, nothing is present, and that if anything can be present, everything is mere repertory. It is an enigmatic coexistence of past and present that does not distinguish the lived moment from a beginning, an origin: 'The present has become a past immediately returning, and the past a potential present, which can be summoned up at a moment's choice.' (Perniola, 1995, p.75) This is what he understands as the 'completion of time' in contemporary society and art.

Perniola states that the Egyptian effect means that nothing can take exclusive possession of time or claim a mutual relationship with the present. Thus, time is completed because it cannot define an artistic will or a formal identity. 'Completed time relativizes the entire artistic universe, transforming actuality into chance event and repertory into inventory by providing multiple opportunities.' (Perniola, 1995, p.75)

> *The one-way street of actuality, the blackmail of newness, the compulsion of increasingly spasmodic and inconclusive updating is replaced by a multiplicity of*

opportunities, by the confidence that anything can find its chance, by the conviction that late and early are tactical rather than strategic notions. (Perniola, 1995, p.75)

Furthermore, Perniola emphasizes that if the notion of occasion severs the relation between present time and form, the notion of inventory disconnects past time from form, showing that a different way of ordering material can destroy traditional formal unities. The Egyptian effect is named after the fundamental mentality of ancient Egyptians, which advocated the principle of interchangeability, the possibility for every element to be substituted for another: 'The world was viewed as a vast combinatory system in which high and low, male and female, light and dark, life and death, organic and inorganic never cease to trade places and to merge.' (Perniola, 1995, p.76)

Perniola asserts that the important thing for contemporary artists is to operate a system of 'transversal taxonomies', exposing affinities between far-flung aspects and differences between seemingly similar aspects. Therefore the inventory leads to an activity that investigates and organizes the past from new and original standpoints. He claims:

If we set out to inventory, the past in a different way, its link with an established form appears very fragile and arbitrary... Far from entailing the recording and standardization of the universe, the completion of time throws it open to an infinity of classifications. (Perniola, 1995, p.77)

Finally, Perniola asserts that the completion of time requires a cross-cultural theory that can accommodate crossovers between the most widely divergent formal traditions without accepting just anything and without claiming a monopoly of meta-historical values. (Perniola, 1995, p.78)

CHAPTER V
Applying Mario Perniola's Philosophy to Current Korean Art Practices: A Proposal for an Exhibition 'Beyond Surface Culture: The New Grammar of Korean Contemporary Art'

The Creation of 'Post-Surface' Culture in Korean Art

After more than a decade of continuous advance in digital technologies in Korea, 'surface culture' (see chapters II and III.) has been sufficiently absorbed into Korean culture and mastered by a younger generation of Korean artists who investigated the notion of 'virtuality' in the sense outlined by Mario Perniola. Perniola's notion of 'virtuality' is developed by the process of arranging data and selecting materials according to relevant criteria in the information society (see Chapter IV, p.109-112.). I claim that Korean artists became accustomed to receiving all kinds of information through diverse mass-media and to understanding them based on the surface of the spectacle, and began to cross-examine further possibilities of 'virtuality' (see Chapter IV, p. 116–117.) by crossing the boundaries of cultures of different spaces and times via increasingly advanced digital technologies. And I argue that this has inspired the era of 'Post-Surface' culture.

In the process, I argue that these artists have acquired a positive attitude that is redolent of Perniola's philosophy of the present (see Chapter IV p.105-107, 116.), which assumes 'the fullness of time' that asserts the present as time's sole dimension and hence achieves the enigmatic synchronicity that cancels out contradictory notions such as 'actuality and repertory, evidence and archives and exhibition and storage' and finally integrates 'the ancient and the new into a single temporal dimension' (see Chapter IV, p.105–106, p.117–118.). In so doing, it enables innovative ways of re-interpreting history and culture. Accordingly, I observe that Korean artists have developed a new system of classifying existing information and using it masterfully.

Supported by Korean society's vibrant digital connectivity culture of the last decade, Korean contemporary artists have embraced a wide range of cultures, integrated them into their own archive and used them from a new perspective of 'virtuality'. I assert that the concepts of accumulation and selection in the development of 'virtuality' are crucial to defining this new paradigm of Korean art ('Post-Surface' culture). And most importantly I maintain that the time of one-way media communication and actuality has been supplanted by this era of interchangeable inventory and unlimited classification, as in 'the Egyptian moment of completed time' delineated by Perniola (see Chapter IV, p. 117-119.), which I find appropriate for explicating the recent situation of the Korean art world.

Furthermore I argue that this generation has moved away from the 'de-contextualized hybridity' of 'Surface Culture' art practices (see Chapter II, p.68–71.) and created a new cultural syntax (see Chapter IV, p. 116–117, Chapter V, p.120-121.) according to their own original criteria, which grants new meanings to their art practice.

In this chapter, I discuss seven artists whose works exemplify these traits for a proposed exhibition which fulfils the analysis set out in this thesis. I analyze the seven artists' artworks as examples of 'Post-Surface Culture' that I propose achieve 'the Egyptian effect' of enigmatic synchronicity and inter-changeability by exploring a new dimension of temporality through virtuality. They demonstrate, I argue, ways of handling data via information communication technology, which ultimately creates a new cultural grammar.

Before I go into the further analysis of each artist's work, however, I want to restate the distinction between 'Post-Surface Culture' and 'Surface Culture' within the specificity of recent Korean experience, as argued for in this thesis.

I have defined the most distinguishing trait in the art works of' Surface Culture' generation appeared in the second half of the Nineties as 'de-contextualized' hybridity (as explained in Chapter II, p.68-69.) in which the original contexts of appropriated information are removed, and its contents are organized based on an understanding of culture as surface appearances. I claim that this 'de-contextualized hybridity' gave rise to the 'Post-Surface Culture' generation artists who created a new syntax via infinite classification and reinterpretation of existing cultures.
I maintain that this generation created the effect which corresponds with Perniola's delineation about 'the fullness of time' via virtuality of information technology (See Chapter IV, p.109-112 for more description.). My argument is that 'de-contextualized hybridity' of 'Surface Culture' artists developed and matured alongside the unprecedented development of digital technology. Their innovations helped the 'Post-Surface Culture' artists to investigate cross-over meanings, as well as transversal temporality and spatiality more flexibly and masterfully. Although the process of 'de-contextualization' was initiated by the 'Surface Culture' generation, I maintain that using digital technologies in a new way 'Post-Surface Culture' artists freely mix and fabricate diverse cultural contents, separate themselves from existing contexts and finally create a new type of cultural system according to their own criteria (Chapter IV, p.117-198). Most importantly. I claim they selected and organized information more specifically and systemically rather than just juxtaposing information and using them linearly as in 'Surface Culture'. However, for these artists the process is not just driven by

subjective reason via one-way flow of information, but rather by the constant two-way communication process of linking, searching as well as selecting and managing information. As a result, I maintain that 'Post-Surface Culture' artists have moved away from a rigidity of thinking about the boundaries between cultures and gone on to form their own cultural grammar of 'enigmatic effects'(Chapter V, p.120.).

Moreover I also want to draw attention to the difference between 'Surface Culture' and 'Post-Surface Culture' in terms of their relationship to postmodern art practices. While 'Surface Culture' art resembles postmodern art practices of 'superficiality' as in Fredric Jameson's analysis (See Chapter III, p.91-93.) where different cultures are mixed regardless of original contexts, in 'Post-Surface Culture' art practices they are purposefully selected and organized by their new syntax, and rather attain new meaning within the new system (Chapter IV, p.116, Chapter V, p.120-121.). Therefore I argue that the new 'Post-Surface Culture' paradigm has transcended the 'schizophrenic' mentality of the 'perpetual present' in postmodern culture as observed by Fredric Jameson, and constructed a new cultural structure of 'completed temporality' via virtuality (Chapter IV, p.114-117.), which I argue can be accounted for in Mario Perniola's positive assessment of contemporary art and culture, which he terms the 'Egyptian effect'.

The selected artists that I argue represent these characteristics of 'Post-Surface Culture' are: Kim Tae Eun, Jeong Jung Ju, Mok Jin Yo, Park Sang Hyun, Roh Jae Oon, Ryu Bi Ho, Yang-ah-chi.

The Exhibition 'Beyond Surface Culture: The New Grammar of Korean Contemporary Art'

Kim Tae Eun (born 1970)

Kim investigates the possibility of a new visual language by using digital media as a palette for his work. He is interested in different media and notions in visual language such as icons, narratives, and perception as well as perspective. He asserts that the icons in different visual languages are similar but that the media of representation change according to the times. He states that: '...virtual reality via digital technology increases the scope of representation, and conversely affects the perception of reality.'

Kim often questions the changes in temporality and interactivity in contemporary art and experiments with the ways of investigating them by integrating various media. He argues that digital media is the new political tool of our time, and explores its mechanisms and meanings often by

combining various basic analogue systems of machinery. He observes that computer technology affects the social and psychological tempo of contemporary society as it quickens the speed of people's reaction and interaction.

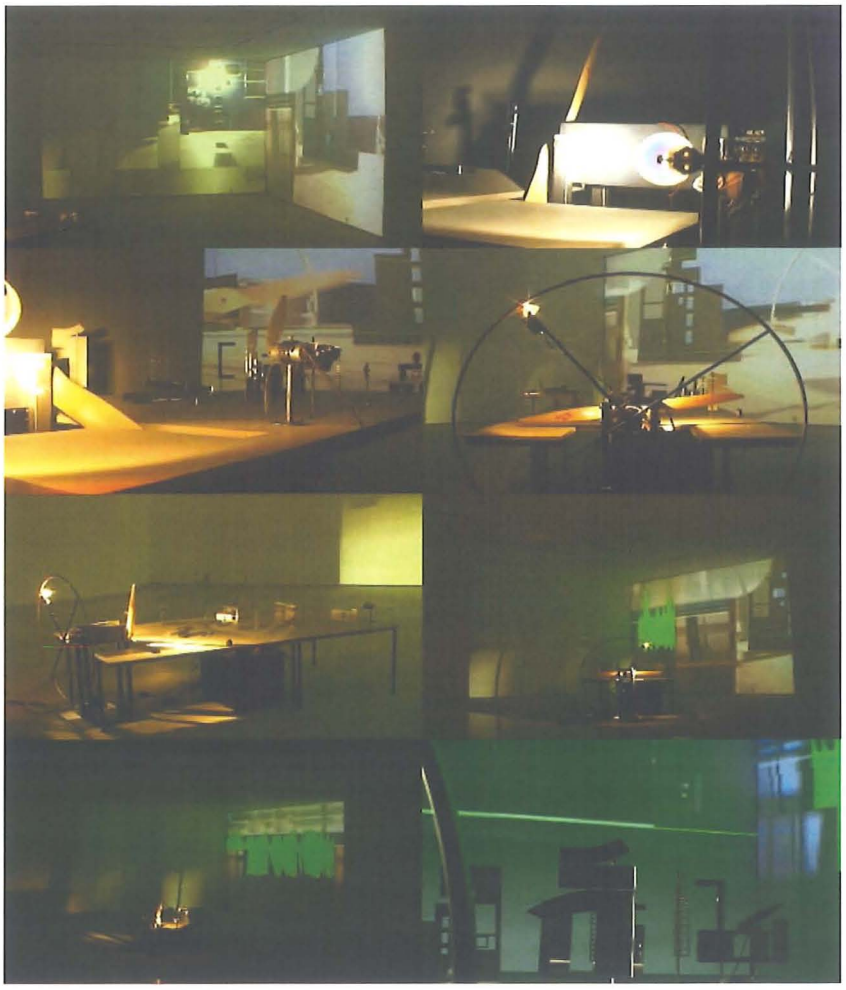


Image 54. Kim Tae Eun, 'Triad Gallery', 2006-2007, 3DC monitor, AC motor, 2 web cameras, 2 projectors, PC, plastic, wood, steel, 600 x 400 x 600 cm.

In *Triad Building Unwrapped* (2006-2007) (Image 54), using the web camera and computer technology he recomposes the outer wall of the Triad building – a media art gallery in Seoul – reflecting the changes in that building's architecture due to ephemeral elements such as wind, air, light, and time. Kim created his model of the outer wall of the gallery using computer 3-D modelling technique, including a simulation of natural conditions such as seasonal change, wind, etc. The work presents the interactive process between the model and the 'natural' elements, producing an image of gradual accumulation and constant change that reflects 'the law of destruction and renewal by the wind'. (Kim, 2006) The image reflected on the sculpture is transmitted to the computer by web-camera, which then projects abstract images of the reconstructed structure of the building on a wall-screen. The artist states: 'The course of abstraction and conceptualization occurred in this process depend on [changing] the look of the building.' (Kim, 2006)

Through this work Kim seeks to convey the changing role of the medium, i.e., the changes to the building that blur the boundaries between subject and object, and even grant new meaning to the art work. What matters is not the resulting image, but the process of creation achieved through delayed temporality and a new spatial perspective, which produces an unpredictable outcome according to the interactions with external components. And this highlights the importance of virtuality through which the limitless possibilities of creation exist. In the process, this work juxtaposes contradictory media – the digital technology of the social matrix and the analogue system of the machine – which produces a crossover of different times: the outer wall of the building is translated into the indoor space, and the building is reconstructed in deferred time through the virtuality of digital technology, which relativizes temporality and spatiality.

An interactive art work, *Scene Keeper* (2005) induces an interaction between the viewer and the piece, investigating the possibility of active communication through new media.

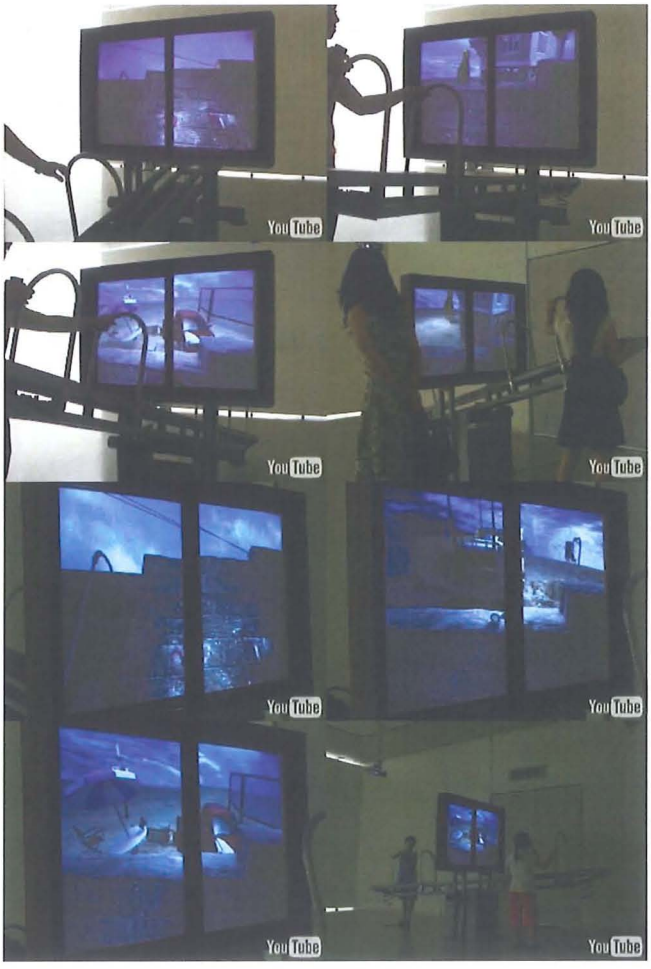


Image 55. Kim Tae Eun, 'Scene Keeper', 2005, 2 projectors, sloping sensor, steel, wood, 3ds max program, 370 x 170 x 176 cm.

A screen is placed across the middle of a seesaw, where a video projection shows simulated scenes of an abduction taking place on the other side of a fence. However, as the projection can be viewed from each side of the seasaw, viewers can imagine they are on different side of the fence depending on which end of the seesaw they stand. Moreover, it is only visible upon reaching to certain height. Although the screen blocks people's sight of each other, the work only functions through mutual collaboration via an analogue apparatus, i.e., the seesaw. Here the artist again tries to juxtapose the two contradictory elements of the analogue and multimedia as well as two opposed viewpoints of a single incident, which completes the temporality of the work. Moreover, this work limits the viewer's vision through its unique structure and ultimately changes their perception of reality. This process symbolizes the effect

of virtual reality created by digital media, which conversely broadens the scope of representation and affects the object world itself. In this work it is not the actuality of the subject inside, but the virtuality of the object outside, which creates a new system that allows viewers to understand the whole story only through the interaction between viewers on each side, and hence completes the meaning of the work.

Kim frequently tests the boundaries between two things such as the dream and reality as well as the original and the copy, traditional art media and new media and their relative relations, seeking a solution to integrate and balance them. Ultimately such means the artist tries to find his own visual language by experimenting with different media and genres, and crossing boundaries of time and space. For example, the artist has continuously investigated cinematic language, testing the boundary between fine art and cinema.

Kim explains that contemporary video art tends to omit narratives as it frequently consists of fragmented images – like advertisements – although viewers and critics often question the existence of narratives. On the contrary, Kim's work differentiates by possessing a specific story-structure dealing with the constantly repeated issue of the 'representation of representation' in art. He tests the possibility of reinforcing the meanings, symbols and values realized in the world reproduced in artworks by using cinematic language. For example, he leads his audience to experience specific temporality inside his work, just as in movies, beyond the repetition of figures made by representation in traditional art. And this produces the interchange of artistic language and cinematic language, which promotes the communication between the artwork and the audience by reinforcing the conveyance of symbols and codes. This constant interest in representation is manifested in the work *Scene Keeper* (2005) where the representation of reality becomes unreal through the communicative experience of temporal space via the cinematic language of the video image.

In his video work, *Rectangle System* (2005) (Image 56) the artist again investigates the notion of the 'representation of representation' by projecting a simulated space in which a square table with two coffee cups is situated in an empty room, leading the audience to anticipate a certain narrative. In this room, there are two speakers on each side of the table, which the sounds of two people having conversation. These sounds are visualized into waves which are projected onto the table from the ceiling, and the accumulated waves turn to small squares and move across towards either side of the table by the flow of waves, according to the direction of the conversation.

Kim asserts that square shapes define certain relationships in our society, i.e., two people facing each other at the table, playing chess or playing ping-pong. The artist also points out that the parallel edges of a square and that its sides are same length seem to make people assume equal/even

position when sitting in front of each other. Kim investigates these abstract, symbolic meanings, which create what the artist calls the 'in-between spaces' of relationships as they fill past experiences with fragmented images of memory. Therefore, they conceal the distinctions between simulated spaces and real space. By creating a cafe space of assumed narratives symbolized by meaningless squares which remove the gap between reality and virtuality, the artist conveys that representation is reckless and pointless.

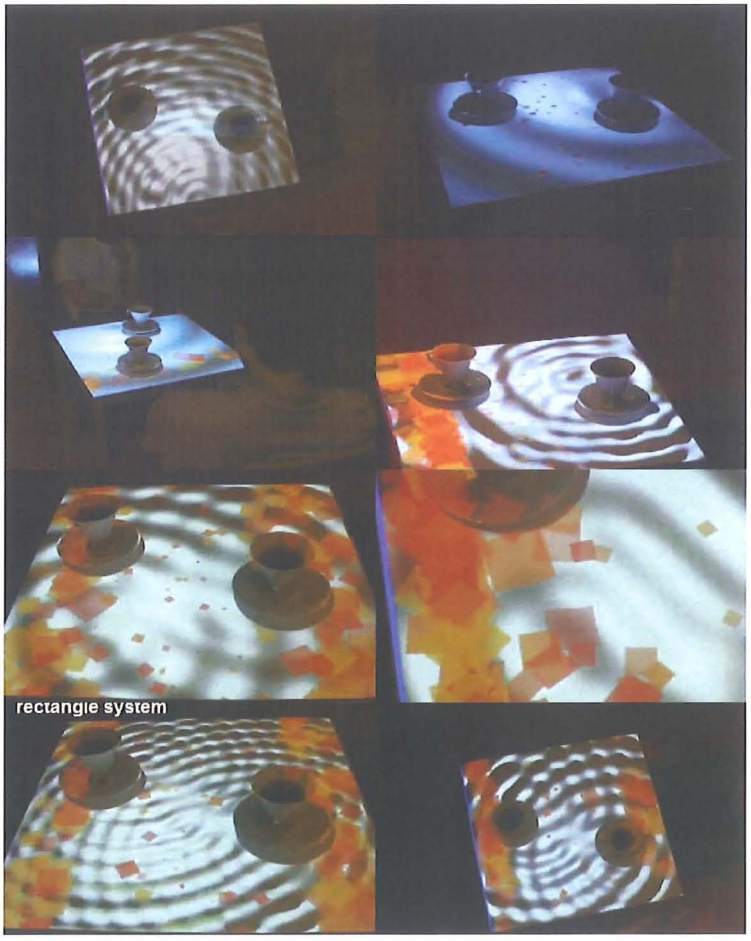


Image 56. Kim Tae Eun,
'Rectangle System', 2005,
interactive installation, 3ds max program.

Moreover , Kim wants to expand the possibility for reinterpreting artistic language by using different layers of images such as taking a microscopic view and creating a temporal refraction by using a hi-speed camera. He observes that this way of creating layers of imagery resembles a traditional artistic language, resembling the look of medieval icons, and at the same time is a highly most cinematic model of communication. (Lee, 2005) This promotes not only a crossover of two different art genres, but also transcends their differences, finding a new syntax of one genre within the other.

I find that this attitude exemplifies the 'Post-Surface' Cultural paradigm that flexibly assembles and interchanges a range of cultures in every 'fold' (see Chapter IV p.117–119.) by accomplishing the relativization of oppositional values – such as subject and object, and time and

space – and ultimately created new meanings and innovative viewpoints. I argue that Kim's work achieves the Egyptian moment of 'completed time' outlined by Mario Perniola, which promotes cross-cultural theory and infinite classification through its enigmatic synchronicity.

In this context he also combines philosophical components with scientific mechanical devices, through which he sets out to find flexible and innovative ways of representation. For example, the artist places historical context within a digitally produced environment or combines a different genre of visual language with contemporary art practice.

In his work, *Convergent Cube* (2005) (Image 57) he projects around a small cube scenes taken from the Korean nobility's manual for success that appeared in a 'lifetime' painting of the Josun Dynasty (1392–1910), combined with scenes of contemporary life. Through this work, he deals with the concepts of velocity and convergence:

Image 57. Kim Tae Eun, 'Convergent Cube', 2005, web camera, PC, projector.

[1] It is a type of Korean traditional genre painting of the Josun Dynasty (1392-1910) which draws a series of memorable events in one's whole life. It was created especially to commemorate the achievement of aristocrats who became government officials and record their important government posts, displaying their life and career success of Josun Dynasty aristocrats. It was usually painted on folding screen and often in a folk painting style, or in large quantity as a lithograph. (The Academy of Korean Studies. 2009.*Digital Encyclopaedia of Korean Culture*.)

Lifetime paintings generally depict a main character surrounded by others. Usually the main character behaves appropriately according to the demands of the situation, while the others observe this character's conduct. Their gazes seem to clarify the action of the main character and of the topic. By looking at the painting at home repeatedly, the effect on Korean people of the time would have been one of conforming their own lives to the lifestyle depicted in the painting. (Remake Korea, 2005)

Kim proposes that the gazes of these people can be identified with the viewers' gaze, which produces an effect of 'convergence'. He explains that this effect results from all the glances being continuously focused on one point, concentrating on the subject matter. The artist ponders the similarities of this occurrence within contemporary life, although the meaning of a lifetime painting has now grown 'thin', as people's viewpoints and purposes have become increasingly diverse. He points out that contemporary people seek 'velocity' as their gazes seem to gather on one point despite the dynamism of contemporary society.

The experience of a fast-moving car is to create a single 'dot', for the effect of high velocity is convergence. Contemporary people seem to have a common goal although the speed of everyday life gets faster and ever more diversified, and the more they are absorbed into that goal, the more they speed up. The obsession of the 'all-in' resembles the past's efforts to concentrate on a lifetime painting and follow it. Perhaps it is the continuation of the spirit that causes people to keep a lifetime painting.(Remake Korea, 2005)

I claim that Kim connects the history of Korean culture to the contemporary situation by reinterpreting the history according to his own criteria. At the same time he creatively connects the recent technology of digital media with a traditional artistic format, in order to search for his question. In *Convergent Cube* (2005), he skilfully uses digital techniques to overlap details from paintings with video-projected scenes of contemporary life, which effectively conveys his concept of multiple viewpoints.

I assert that it is this inventive and flexible approach to using culture and media that characterizes the creation of a new syntax in'Post-Surface Culture'. As a result of his appraoch Kim's work produces the effect of 'completed time' and its 'enigmatic synchronicity' by classifying cultural data across different time and space (i.e., Josun Dynasty and the present time, life-time painting and everyday life of contemporary society) according to his own criteria , and re-arranging them to cross-over via digital technology. For example, in this work the contents of a 'life-painting' in its historical time are re-created within the contemporaneous time and space via the process of mutual communication.

Jeong Jung Ju (born 1970)

Jeong's work starts from personal memory about spaces, as he believes that spaces exercise great influence on human experiences and social relationships, and furthermore have their own organism. He questions different layers of reality by working with the models of various spaces, from living rooms and dormitories to commercial buildings such as CVS (24 hour-open convenient store), libraries, gyms and shopping centres as a way to investigate human experience and social relations. He believes that the structure of certain architectural spaces is parallel to the human body structure, just as their spatial relationship is to people's social relationship with the outside world. He states:

> *I have always been interested in space since I was young. One thing that stimulates my imagination is the house where I lived during my elementary school and high-school years. We renovated it three times and the structure of the house was very distinctive. We transformed the existing rooms into one room and turned the kitchen to a library. Also there was a storage room with no door that we could only enter through a window. One time, my younger brother almost burned the whole house while he was playing with matches in that storage. Each space was connected irregularly, and they exist intertwined with memories. (Jeong, 2007)*

To reveal these points, he makes models of architectural spaces. He asserts that when they are empty they reveal an organic vitality of their own traits such as walls, ceilings, windows, and entrances. The artist states: 'They receive lights through windows during the day and emit it at night. They also receive gazes from outside and release them from the interior.'(Jeong, 2005)

Jeong tests the relations of the components in the visual experience of his work – for example, the camera's gaze and audience's gaze, simulated spaces and real spaces, camera and people, the model and the original space, the observed and the observing – and investigates their endless cycle of circulation.Models of buildings, the camera and the camera's gaze are mechanically transformed into the representation of the real world. The artist also states that he imagines space as a symbol of the human-body and he tries to interrogate the human mind by revealing space-structure and reversing the relationships between space and human.

In his work, *Pavilion* (2006) (Image 58), he made a small-sized clay model of the pavilion where he used to play when he was growing up in the small town of Jeollado. Jeong describes the process of viewing the work:

...viewers relate to the model while changing their positions to look inside the small space in an effort to find the camera. The process is taken to the next level when they notice their movements on the screen – [they have become] the observed.(Jeong, 2007)

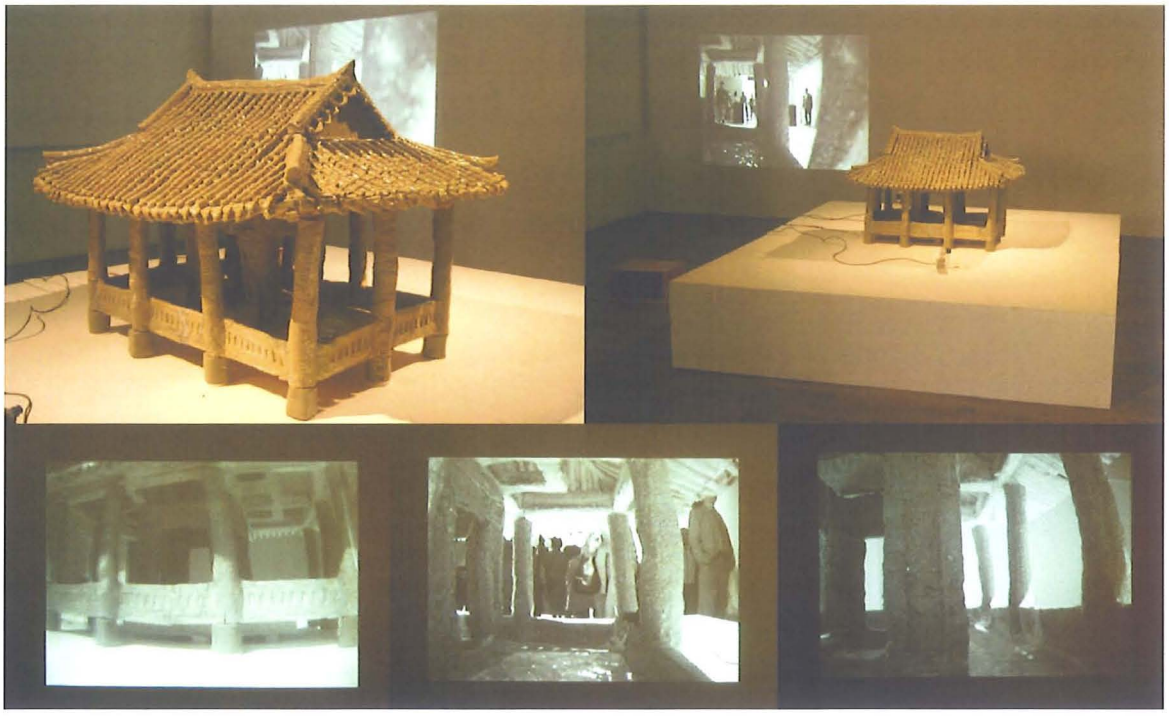


Image 58. Jeong Jeong Ju, 'Pavillion', 2006, wood, acrylic, 3 video cameras, fluorescent lamp, video projector, 4 motors, 100 x 80 x 60 cm.

The artist explains:

My work represents my interest in the relationships between spaces and human beings, which are elaborated and diversified through the process of visual recognition. The relationship between the camera's gaze inside the modelled spaces and audience's gaze from outside the model is the main mechanism of my work. (Jeong, 2007)

He remembers the strange link between the outside gaze and his own existence when he lived in a dormitory in Germany. Here he used to see the communal garden through his living room window and exchange gazes with the people there:

And different traits of architectural models and of exhibition spaces add the variations of relationships in my work. The model and the cameras inside are another representation of the real space, and the bodies and gazes that had existed within the space. (Jeong, 2007)

Jeong usually uses a combination of model and camera as an effective way of showing the intersecting relationship of two different gazes: those of the watching and the watched. However, he emphasizes that the main point of his video modules is the estrangement between our recognition of real spaces and the image of those spaces onscreen made by the cameras, rather than the relationship between the seeing and the seen. When he installs a camera, he considers the movements of his gaze, as he experienced real spaces, remembering the feelings that he felt there. For example, in the work *Livingroom* (1999) (Image 59) Jeong explains that he made the camera rotate slowly as he look around the space of his living room, and, likewise, the camera makes different movements in each different space.

He believes that digital media such as the web-camera and other new media technology drastically changed the way people view their lives and express their feelings. The artist states:

Image 59. Jeong Jeong Ju, 'Livingroom', 1999, wood, video camera, motor, monitor, desk, chair, 150 x 180 x 100 cm.

It is interesting to compare our eyes with the lens of a video camera. If what we see per day is compared to operating a video camera for about 16 hours, considering the fact that the number of video frames in PAL format is calculated as 25 images per second, it can be said that we see 1,440,000 images per day and that these images are saved in the brain. This saved data is brought in front of our eyes by the special function called memory. But this data in our brain does not seem

complete as old memories are increasingly less well remembered, and even those memories are often fragmented. In the process of seeing, listening, and remembering, the unconscious selection procedure is included. If we slowly rotated our eyes from right to left toward the white wall, we would realize that our eyes stop moment to moment and adjust focus at the point of stopping. In this short moment, our eyes and brains automatically exercise our selecting processes. In my work, our eyes are replaced with a small camera, and eye movement with a camera movement. Compared to our eyes that repeat the process of stopping and adjusting focus, cameras continuously move and hence record the images according to motor's rotating speed and direction unless interrupted by outside factors like mechanical glitches. (Jeong, 2005)

This observation makes the point that the images of the camera can help people to see more than they remember, and offers more possibilities of perception beyond the capability of the human body. Jeong remembers that he started working with the camera when he bought one in a flea market. At first he wanted to put light inside the model, then thought of recording the images of inside of the model, such that the recorded images would look like the inside of real spaces. The artist emphasizes that these two transformations from the real space to its model and then to the internal images recorded by the camera provided the space where he could put his feelings and thoughts.

Commenting on the way he uses the digital media, Jeong says that whereas sculpture exists as a medium through which the artist communicates, new media considers space itself as the main component for communication by using fixed or moving images of space as a communication medium. He states:

As an artist who majored in sculpture, my work still begins with an interest in sculpture, as I first consider the sculptural characteristics of space and medium in making models. But I create the image of unfamiliar space through the different perception of a camera instead of the typical viewer's angle. However, these images are exceedingly realistic as they exist in the identical time and space, react to viewers' movements, and incorporate the audience in the work. I intend to expand the scope of the artwork, which is composed of the media images of camera and the sculptural object, to the ambivalent space between reality and virtuality. (Jeong, 2007)

He also describes the role of media in his work:

New media does not form a mass, but rather it creates another kind of virtual spatiality through images of space. The things like light, sound and air are not tangible or visible, but they exist within the space. The interest in the substances of which our environment consists, and their manipulation, constitute the important way of dealing with space in my work. (Transpace, 2005)

He emphasizes his interest in architectural space as a potential for promoting communication:

I am interested in spatiality of architectural spaces. They control and change the nature of things such as light, air, humidity and sound, and give people a spatial environment. Also buildings have been infused by personal experiences, history as well as social relationships and meanings. And the relationships between the inside and the outside formed through them produce the symmetry between private and public spaces, restraint and freedom as well as stability and instability. I want to include various levels of emotion and meaning in the spaces to promote communication between myself and the surrounding environment, including the audience. (Transpace, 2005)

Most of all, Jeong also tests the possibility of communication between his message and the audience through his work. He tries to induce the interactions and participations of the viewers via media technology:

The models, camera and the images that the camera records are not the solid object of viewing as in traditional artworks, but devices that encourage the participation of the viewer who experiences the mechanism between the space and the gaze, and hence realizes the work. (Transpace, 2005)

Image 60. Jeong Jeong Ju, 'Westernized House (*Hapjeong-dong*)', 2005, wood, acrylic, 6 video cameras, fluorescent lamp, video projector, 4 motors, 300x200x200cm.

For example, in his work, *Westernized House* (*Hapjeong-dong*) (2006) (Image 60), viewers are led to look inside the model by the light it emits, but when they notice the camera staring at them, they suddenly realize that the video monitor on the wall projects the image of themselves twenty-five times per second, and that they are also being watched by the camera's eye. As the process repeats, the viewer questions the irony of reciprocal relationship between the work and themselves, and that between the model and the space, as well as that between other viewers.

Although new media technology plays an important role in his work, Jeong emphasizes that it is not the medium but from his sentimental experience that his work always originates. Just like the reversed relationship between subject and object, works and viewers, and space and human, the artist asserts that his emotional motivation and personal experience cannot be separated and are therefore intermixed with the selected media of his work, which mutually affect each other. I claim that Jeong's work produces the crossover of different genres and notions through the blurred boundaries and the two-way interactions between oppositional areas as in Periola's delineation concerning the interchangeability of the 'Egyptian effect' (see Chapter IV p.119.).

Through the creation of simulated space and eyes, Jeong extends the spatiality of his work to the experience of virtual reality, and hence the possibility of human experience and memory. Jeong tries to investigate a new perspective about our life by investigating physical spaces through the psychological experience of personal memory. I assert that his work interchanges these two different areas in our life through the 'spatialization of temporal experience' (see Chapter IV p.109-112.),

which Perniola defines as a new paradigm of the information society. Accordingly this process achieves the 'completion of time' by removing the boundaries between different notions in art and society such as subject and object, space and time, and model and original, as well as the watching and the watched, and by extending the limits of fixed temporality and spatiality.

The spatial relationship between people and specific spaces in the past is reproduced by the model and camera flexibly and creatively, based on the artist's own memory. And its new meaning is constructed through the creation of the virtual space of the video image as well as the participation of viewers in the present, which disrupts linear temporality. And this process eventually promotes a new cultural syntax by showing ways to classify human experience and re-locate it within the new system, which is main characteristic of the 'post-surface culture' paradigm.

Mok Jin Yo (born 1969)

Mok's artworks celebrate the possibility of making media and digital technology in harmony with human beings. His work always proceeds from himself, his own needs and perspective to make it useful, functional and interactive. Mok states:

> *The objects in my imagination are primarily functional. The function is my channel for interaction. When I think of a function, I fantasize about a person's engagement. In this fantasy, I see the common threads uniting the separated traditions of artistic creation and technological invention, which I then enjoy playing with. (Mok, 2003)*

Mok uses media and digital technology to realize his imagination and personal needs. His works are focused on technological development and interactivity, which are typical characteristics of the so-called new media art, but they have simple origins since his art objects all start with his imagination and often with his childhood interests. He also experiments with the interactive function of his works purely for his own pleasure and for the better realization of his intent. The artist emphasizes: 'My object is the actualization of imagination and the interaction is its tool.' (Mok, 2003)

He considers communication and interactivity between people and new media art the most important factor in making his work. However he insists that he does not necessarily intend to involve the audience, but the interactive element makes viewing his art more interesting than just showing how he uses it. Most of all, he wants to provide the same kind of pleasure he felt when he played a music box to the audience.

The artist recalls the time when he first went to the United States to study:

I was startled by how much advanced technology was valued in net art, so I tried to accrue as much knowledge as necessary in media technology, such as computer programming languages. However, the limit came when I realized that this language could never become my own, that it was just mimicry. (Lee, 2004)

Then Mok found a music-box, reminding him of its simple but direct effect, and finally prompted him to start his music box project series from 2000.

He approaches digital media from the actuality of the web, but always returns to real life. For him, media technology is interaction materialized in everyday life and his study of digital virtuality sets reality as the interface.

Mok remembers his childhood when he first saw an orgel ('music box' in Dutch.) and was fascinated by its enticing effects: '…it is fun, very simple and easy to figure out its structure once seen, and hence familiar, nonetheless its sound appeals to me very efficiently. A little bit of lightness, structure and technology makes a great difference.' (Paek, 2006) For Mok, the orgel evokes nostalgia for a time when it spoke to him not intellectually but emotionally. And this experience is the motivation behind his music box series and other interactive works such as *Sonicolumn* (2006) (Image 61).

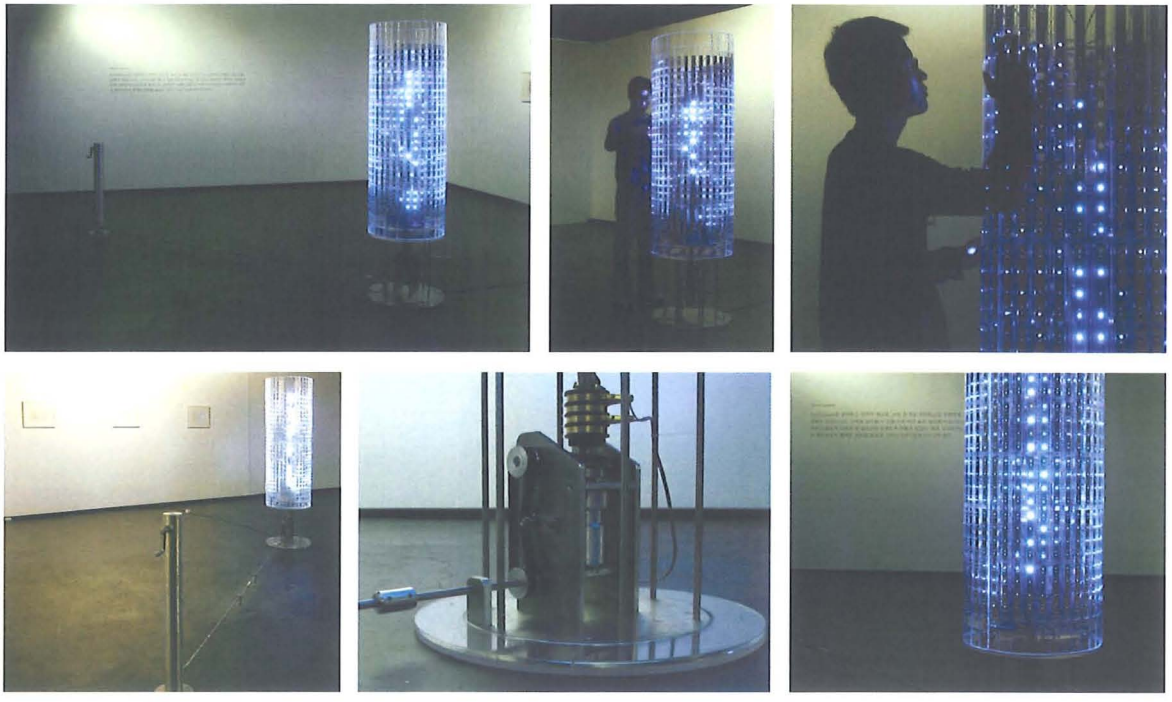


Image 61. Mok Jin Yo, 'Sonicolumn', 2006, interactive sound installation.

His music box (2004) not only reproduces nostalgia for the past, it also renews the memory as the audience plays it. The users of this work can create new music, save and share it with other people online, as well as playing the music others have saved. It approaches people via the digital technology web, which is based on interactivity. However, it is not a simple toy as Mok went through the long process of evolving, developing and establishing this work through the web. Mok worked on this research for five years. During this time he made a version of the music box where he became the cylinder of the music box, and where he transmitted the notes via his fingers. During this period he made another version of the music box in the form of a bead curtain, like those used to keep insects from entering through open doors.

The artist calls it 'the record of creation' (Paek, 2006). For him making a simply toy alive by turning it into an organism belongs to the realm of creation, and the creation in new media means inventing new technology. Therefore, his music box is realized after a careful conceptualization process on the web. He connects the system of the traditional music box to the internet through diverse kinds of experimentation.

MusicBox (2004) (Image 62) is a physical installation, which consists of an old-fashioned music box with a crank handle. In this work, the pins of the music box have been replaced with LEDs (Light Emitting Diodes) and the musical notes with photo sensors for user interaction over the Internet. The patterns of the LEDs light on the cylinder of the music box as users draw them on the screen. Perceiving the light from LEDs, the sensors play music when the audience spins the crank handle on the cylinder with a mouse. Users can save patterns or music in the database, which will be shared with other users.

Image 62. Mok Jin Yo, 'MusicBox' 2004, interactive sound installation.

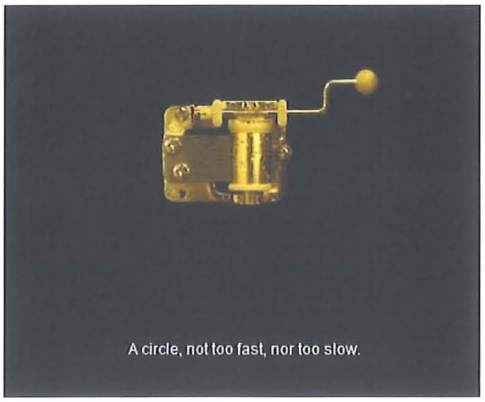
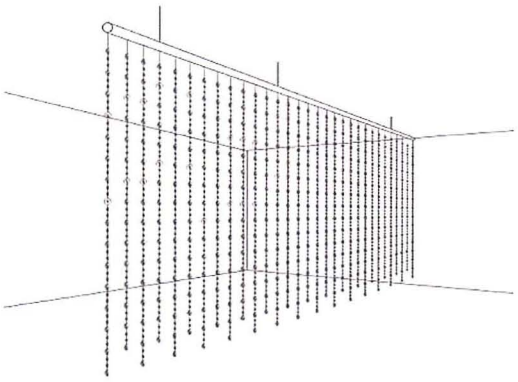


Image 62-1. Online project of 'Music Box', 2000.

In the later work *Light Bead Curtain* (2005) (Image 63) Mok applies what he learned from the earlier music box series to familiar objects – such as a bead curtain – for more direct interaction. In this work each bead lights and emits a unique sound as people pass through the curtain, touching the beads, which are equipped with LEDs and sensors capable of reading the electricity present in human skin. Each person's movements create a different environment of light and sound, as they act and play with it diversely. Through this simple application of digital technology Mok encourages people to take a fresh look at everyday objects and inspire their imaginations. He constantly tries to realize imagination, which he terms 'physical imagination', as he believes it is important to recognize the limit of dreams in the present moment, and to plan and actualize what is possible. His invention is the realization of dreams he imagined long ago.



Sketch of curtain in a room.

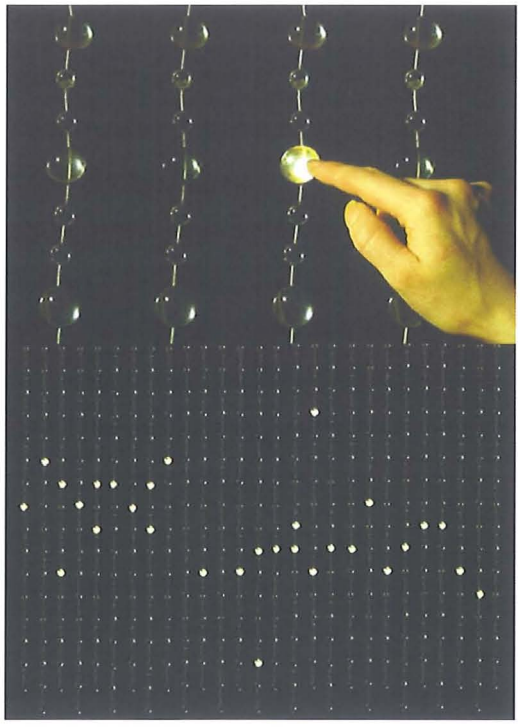


Image 63. Mok Jin Yo, 'Light Bead Curtain', 2005, interactive sound installation.

Although he is known as a new media artist, Mok just wants to be called an inventor, who creates objects not because he needs to, but because he wants to. In this context the artist has created the work *EMAN*,(2000-2006) (Image 64) Mok's digital puppet named *EMAN* which he created to always pray for him and does what he orders on the web. Mok started *EMAN* as an online project for constructing and documenting his birth and life. The work initiated in a very personal experience, when the artist bought a small wooden bear at the art supply shop and later sculpted it to a boy-shaped doll combined with a smiley face. He then created whole new life for *EMAN* via a 3-D computer graphic. He states: 'It is a creation of my playful imagination about THE CREATION.'(Mok, 2003)

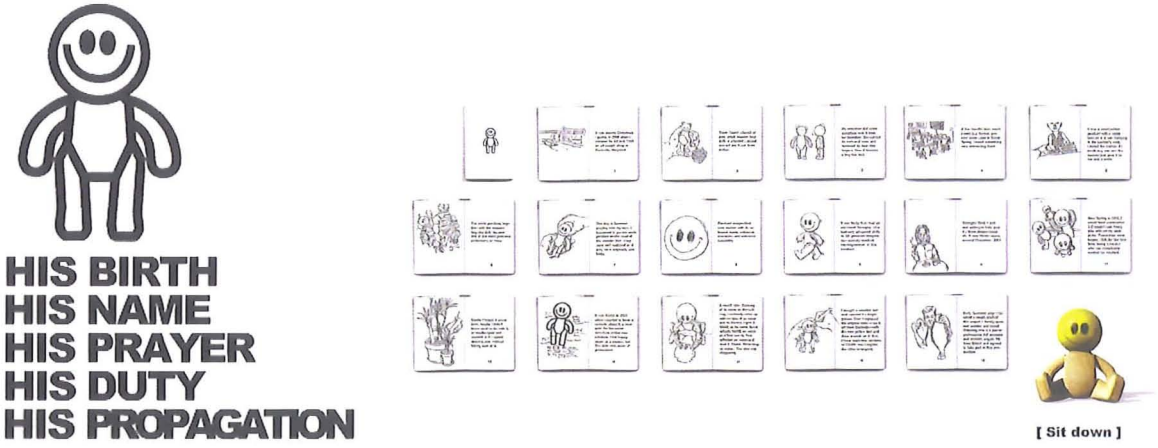


Image 64. Mok Jin Yo, 'Eman', 2000-2006, online project, flash, maya.

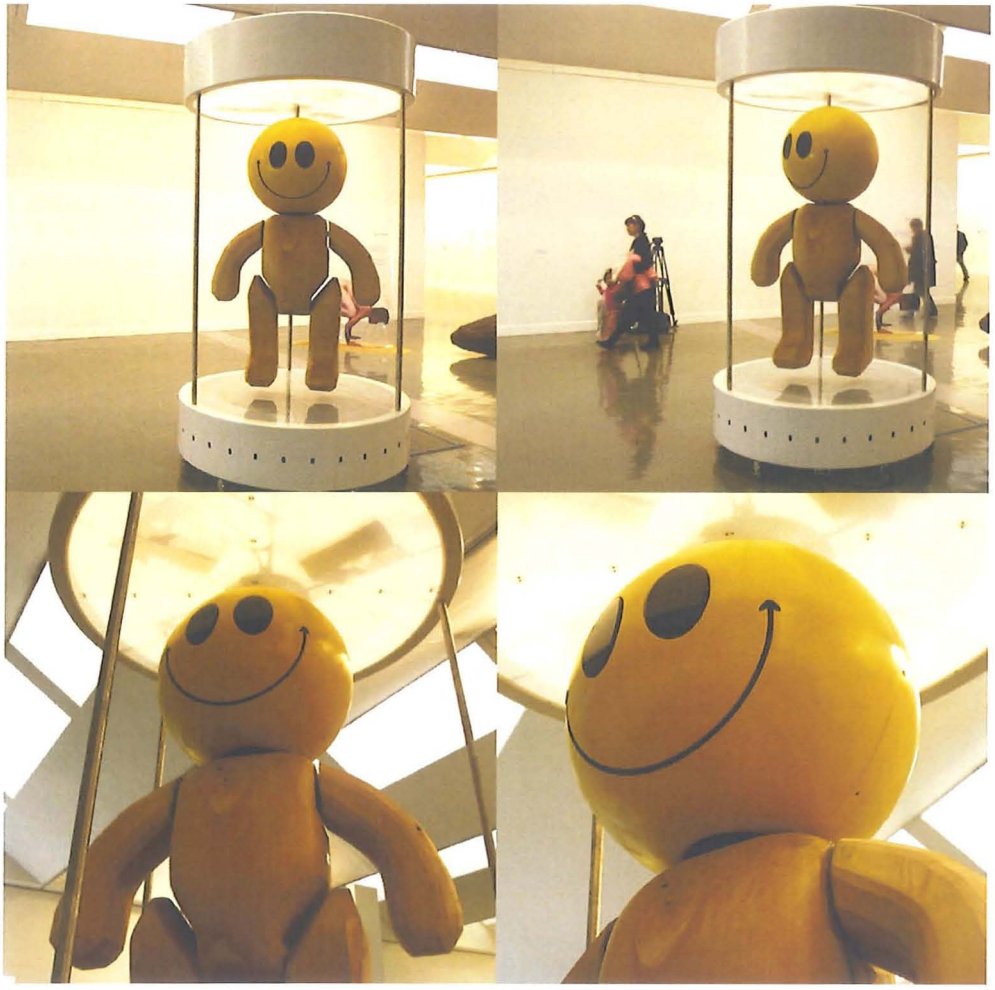


Image 64-1. Mok Jin Yo, 'Eman', 2006, interactive installation.

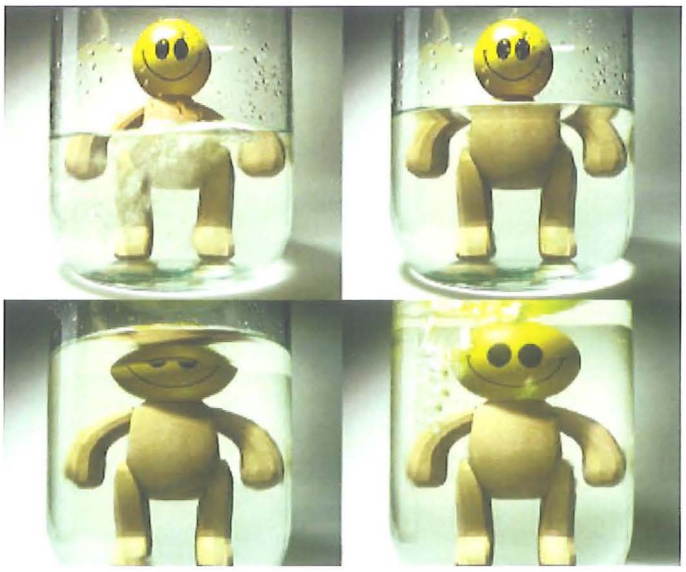


Image64-2.MokJinYo,'Eman',2002,singlechannelvideoprojection,1minute.

Mok questions the notion of creation and originality by experimenting with the process and the method of inventing an avatar. He also presented a large-scale sculpture of *EMAN*, which made movements in response to the audience in the exhibition of 'Korean Young Artists, 2006' at the National Museum of Contemporary Art in Korea. Through *EMAN* reacting to and connecting with the audience, the artist asserts that contemporary creation does not require a mighty god, but rather can be enabled through the interaction of ordinary people. In its digital life, *EMAN* multiplies when people connect to the website (http://www.geneo.net). A whole new structure and meaning are given to this creation of simple origin through the artist's own needs and creative imagination, which is why I assert Mok's work is a good example of 'post-surface culture'.

Ultimately, *EMAN* is simply the product of Mok's imagination, born of wanting to create a kind of avatar. *EMAN* traverses the boundaries between different categories – creator/creation, body/machine, art/technology, digital/analogue, etc. – by creatively combining digital technology with his own imagination. The artist is critical of the recent trend in media art that places serious philosophical meaning upon a work based on existing theories of media art – often with a political motive – preferring to focus instead on creating only those technologies necessary for what he wants to say. Motivated by a sense of 'fun', in making his work Mok first develops imaginative content out of his personal experience, which in turn determines the types of media technology and the ways they will be used.

Mok states that media technology provides numerous artists with unlimited possibilities to realize their dreams and thus he believes that – by relying entirely on technology – new media art challenges art's autonomy. (Huh, 2007) Therefore rather than distinguishing his identity as designer or artist Mok just wants to be a person who masters media, selects and actively uses it for his own purpose, by even creating the one appropriate to convey his message, which makes the media as an end itself. This way Mok's work is always inventive – content-oriented – as he believes that new media artists should take

versatile approaches to making their dreams come true and sharing their messages.

He further draws a distinction between new media art in which media technology becomes the goal/subject in and of itself, and more traditional art practices in which artists merely use advanced technology as a means to an end.

He insists that at the present time new media technology has already become familiar to the public, and that people have naturally come to recognize digital media as one of the numerous components in the pantheon of both art-making and everyday life. And he asserts that, by drawing on this very familiarity, his work can evince participation from audiences who effectively share a common currency of experience through the digital media.

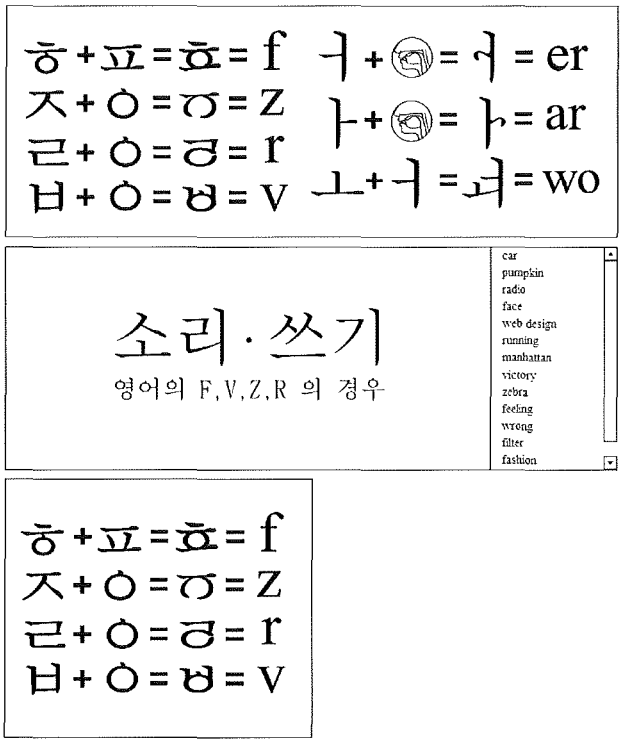


Image 65. Mok Jin Yo, 'Imaginary Hangeul', 2003, Imaginary Korean project, typography.

The artist also experiments with diverse offline media such as toys and texts, and interactive methods such as hearing and touch to communicate with his audience. In his work, *Imaginary Hangeul* (2003) (Image 65), Mok changes existing characters of the Korean language, in which he finds similarities with the digital system in so far as each is strictly divided and combined according to proscribed rules. Mok points out that the rigidity implicit in using proscribed characters restricts the potential for flexible manifestations within digital technology.

In his work *Toys of Mine* (2003) (Image 66), he displays 36 photos of his ready-made toy collection. These simulate scenes taken from contemporary life experiences, with added sound effects. Through this work, the artist practices a genuine interaction with viewers, stimulating their memory to encourage imagination and empathy, instead of compelling or manipulating fixed meanings or metaphors, as is often the case in digital media.

Mok stresses that a new media artist should use diverse media flexibly without boundaries, creating a cross-cultural paradigm. He uses digital technology as a medium to re-interpret culture and history for his own purpose, and to investigate the meaning of contemporary society. He integrates imagination into reality, narrowing the boundary between the virtual and the real.

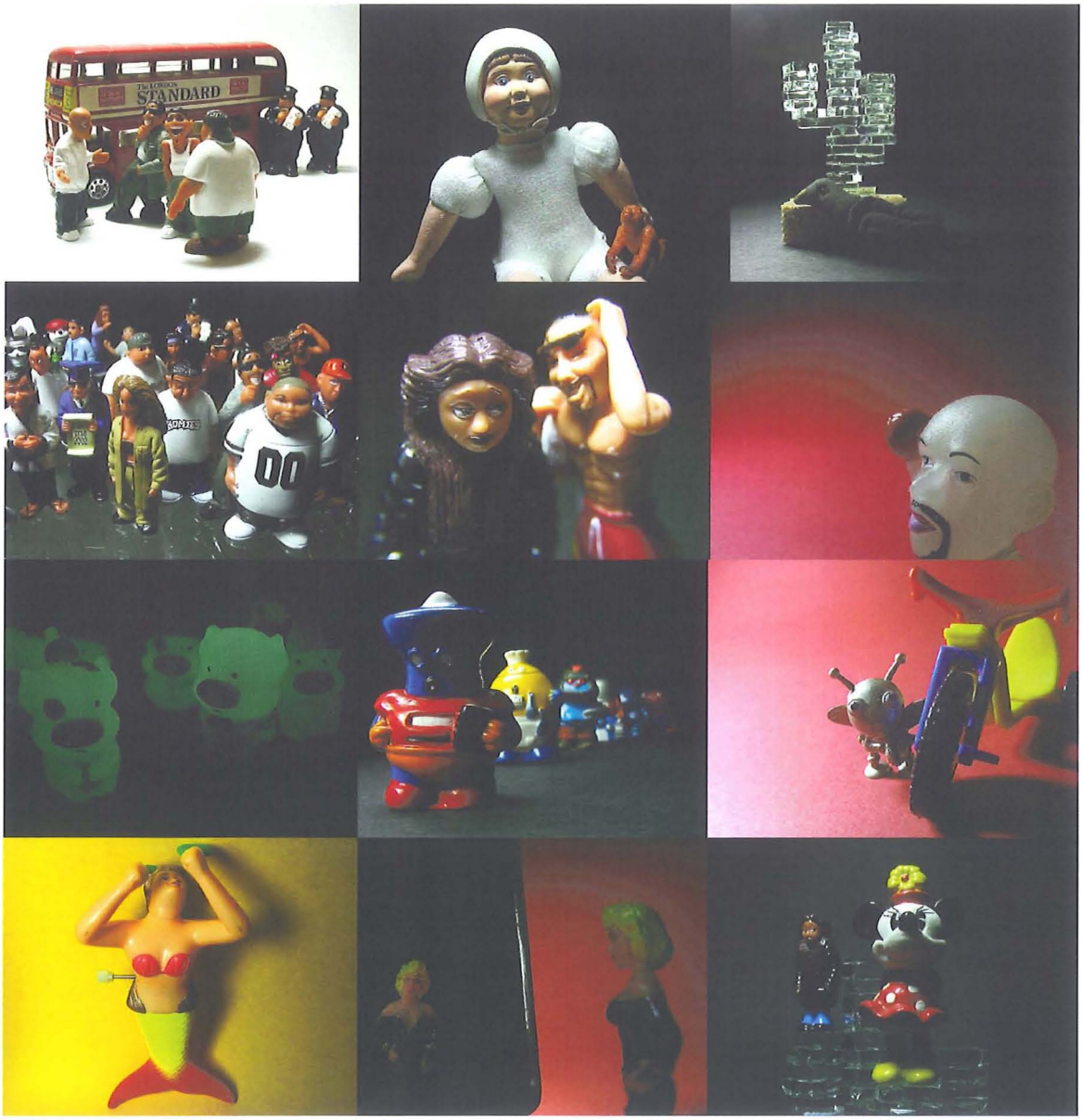


Image 66. Mok Jin Yo, 'Toys of Mine', 2003, 35 pictures, culmulative photography.

Most importantly it provokes a two-way communication between the artwork and people by connecting viewers via the work's reaction. The artist inspires us to believe that it is artist's own imagination and creativity that can make the most use of new media technology and nurture people's cultural experiences. I assert that through his work Mok achieves the 'Egyptian effect of transversal taxonomies' capable of 'uncovering affinities between apparently far-flung aspects and, likewise, oppositions between aspects that are well known to be similar' and practiced the activity that 'carves the past up from new and original standpoints' (see Chapter IV p.119.).

I claim Mok's approach shows 'the Egyptian effect' wherein he dispenses with contradictory concepts such as subject/object, ancient/modern, ultimately traversing different categories and cultures (see Chapter IV p.117–119.). And this effect was enabled by constantly inventorying and arranging available information, and choosing appropriate data according to the artist's own criteria via digital technology (see Chapter IV p.109–112.). I maintain that Mok's work represents the paradigm of 'post-surface culture' that produces possibilities for creating a new cultural syntax via more flexible and inventive viewpoints (see Chapter IV p.116-117, Chapter V, p.120–121.).

Park Sang Hyun (born 1971)

Park searches for a new way to expand and diversify human perspectives and expression through digital media, by testing their synchronicity and interactivity. He states that he wants to find a new way of using texts. He observes that human communication was dominated by images before text was developed; a phenomenon that has made a return with the age of digital media, and asserts that they, as a synchronic medium, provide much more flexible ways of communication than texts.

In his work, *Diachronic Synchronicity* (2004) (Image 67) he connects texts – a diachronic medium – with paintings – a synchronic medium. This he achieves via digital technology, employing a creative use of existing orders and creating flexible viewpoints. He states:

> *By mixing texts, a diachronic media, with other synchronic media in my work, the text loses its diachronicness and ensures synchronicity. Text that is read in this system does not perform its original function and does not acquire objective information either. (Park, 2004, p.7)*

Park asserts that although the image came first, with text following as a means of description, text has been historically the most important medium for human communication. The advent of new media challenged the dominant position of text, and heralded the returning of the image and new functions such as the database and interactivity. He questions the paradoxical reality that although text serves people just like other communication technologies or media, at other times ironically people are at the service of media and text. He also points out that it has long been foreseen that the influence of text would decreased as Manuel Castells observes that audiovisual culture has dominated human communication, first with film and radio, and then with television in the 20th century, but text still retains enormous influences on our society. Therefore, his ambition is to interrogate the status of text as a medium that has hitherto been considered an objective and rational component of our social system.

Park maintains that the dominant order of the content of painting is totally different from the order of text, as the order in paintings is not an explanatory order, but a comprehensive order. He defines that image-based information, such as paintings, can be called a synchronic message, the reason being that its components are arranged so they can be read simultaneously.

The artist describes the characteristic of painting as:

> *the synchronic medium for reducing concrete four-dimensional relationships to a two-dimensional plane. However, paintings can also represent imaginative expression of possible relationships, which shows not as it is, but what is possible and what we can do to make our dreams come true. (Park, 2004, p.1)*

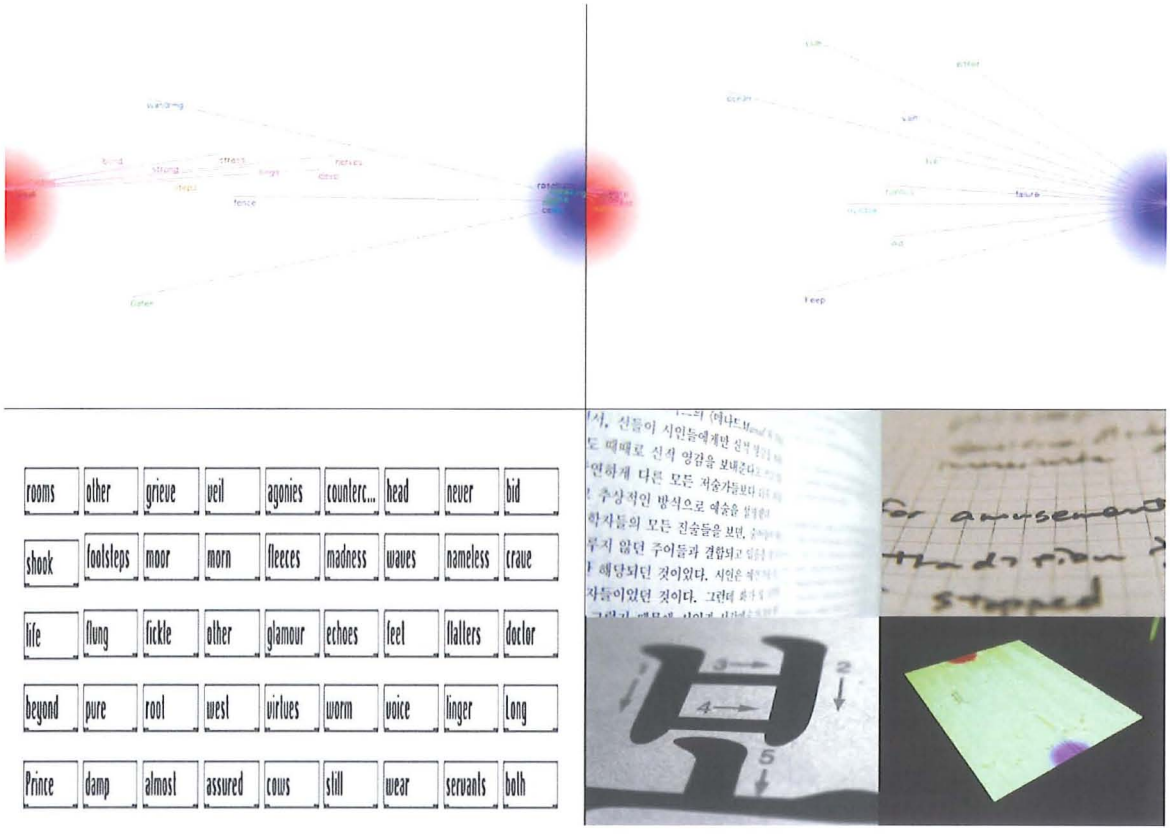


Image 67, Park Sang Hyun, 'Diachronic Synchronicity', 2004, media installation.

He continues:

> *Imagination is the ability to cipher and decipher paintings. It is rooted in the discussion of the meaning of symbols that can be fabricated and the ability to create a specific code. It is a method for human beings to understand each other and impose meanings on their world and lives. And to paint and assign meanings is not a practiced conduct or innate talent as it was once defined, but just technique. (Park, 2004, p.3)*

In *Diachronic Synchronicity*, Park creates a computer programmed work in which the screen is filled with texts from poems from the 13th century to the present. He explains:

> *Each text possesses a number, by which the changes seen on the screen and the sound are controlled. Ultimately these changes stimulate the imagination of the audience as the words are selected according to the programmed numbers and seen in a variety of spontaneous combinations. In the process the audience can try to combine diverse characters and also create different sentences and meanings even within the same texts.(Park, 2004, p.1)*

He stresses that the purpose of this work it is to promote diverse, imaginative and flexible audience perspectives, and hence enhance human communicative culture by changing the diachronic and seemingly objective structure of texts by appropriating the synchronic system of paintings:

> *Although there is literature, it is not self-purposeful. In this work I use pre-existing texts not as a tool for projecting the world, but as a self-purposeful entity like paintings. I create relationships between texts through technological forms and sounds instead of grammar. Numerous texts borrow the comprehensive order of paintings rather than the familiar order of writing from left to right. These texts finally create chaos, following the rules of nature. They draw in the human brain instead of the eyes by over-riding cognition through their own life force. The same arrangement of texts can be interpreted through the different perspectives of the audience's subjectivities, and the impoverished possibility and objectivity of text media can be turned to endless possibilities and subjectivities. (Park, 2004, p.7)*

Furthermore, the artist compares the process of the viewer's participation in this work to automatism:

> *Via the technological infrastructure of the computer , this art work produces an arbitary selection of words from poems and other texts to make a database similar to how the human unconsciousness is made. The computer generates these texts and sounds as a result of automatism. (Park, 2004, p.6)*

Through his works, Park searches for the possibility of cultivating new kinds of human communication via digital technology beyond the existing rules of using media. He states:

> *Digital media enables dynamic and continuous communication and has become the central means of communication for our generation. Another reason why I use digital media is that the development of new technology or science has influenced the artists throughout the history of art in their search for new artistic expression, and I expect the same sort of effect from new media. For example, work using computers can benefit in many different ways, such as generating databases, networks and interactivity, none of which have been available to art previously. (Art Spectrum, 2006, p.22)*

The artist emphasizes the importance of digital media as its system resembles human beings through various functions such as memory and interactivity, which enables more versatile communication between media and people. He acknowledges that:

> *The advent of the computer makes the expression of the 4-Dimensional possible because programming enables real-time generating and interactivity, and databases and networks resemble the characteristics that define 'human being', which are cognition, language use, judgment, memory and the ability to form relationships with other people. Understanding computer language and communicating with the computer via that language create a little universe. If past art is about creating the universe within the plane, space and time, computer art can make a cosmos that can manipulate thinking or judgment, and, according, human responses. (Art Spectrum, 2006, p.23)*

In his work, *Polyphonic Text* (2006) (Image 68), he uses the discount store as a subject instead of poems and biblical texts. The artist states: 'The combination of the words in the Bible has been the

symbol of beauty.' However he emphasizes that in our time commodities are another form of truth. Park continues:

> *The combination of texts that serve the hegemony of consumer society such as the fulfilment of consumer desire and corporate profit explain existences that are truer than the Bible and more beautiful than poems. I want to examine what kinds of imagination the combination of texts – as the best quality products that serve consumer culture – can bring us by blending these texts. (Art Spectrum, 2006, p.23)*

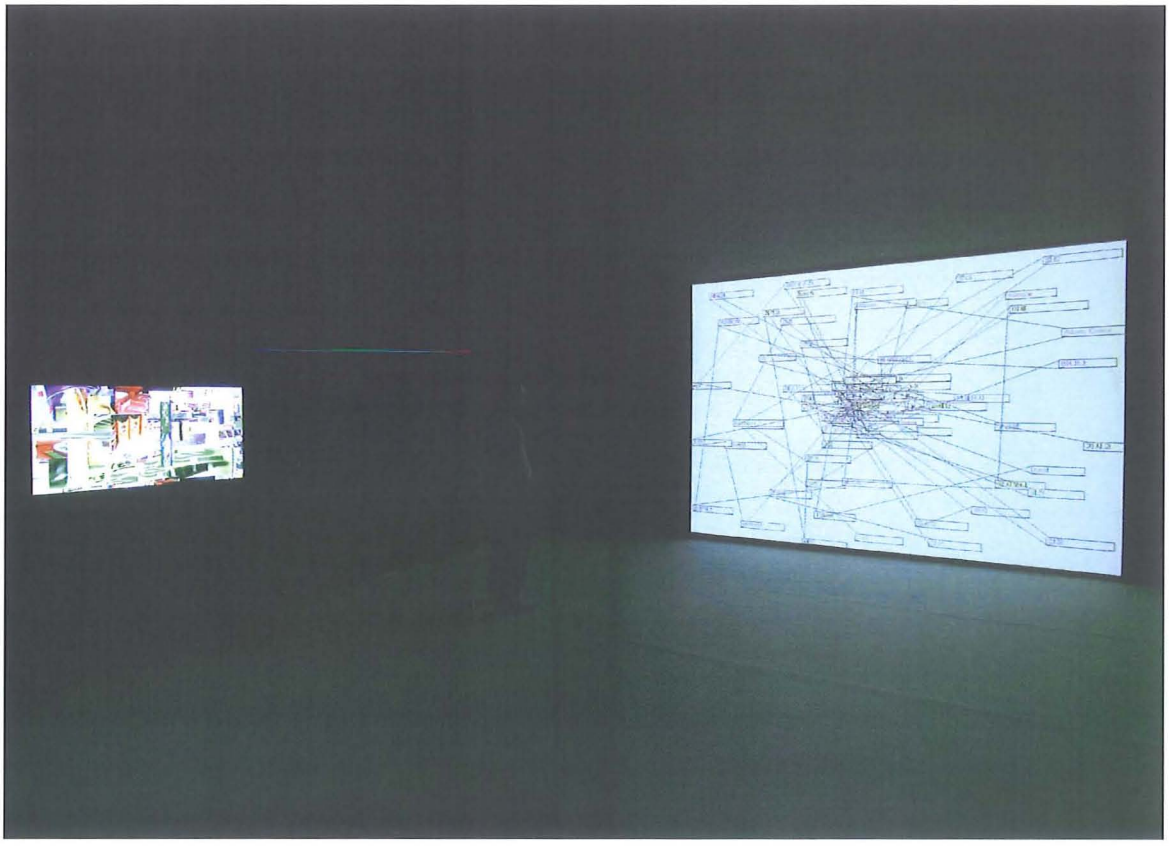


Image 68. Park Sang Hyun, 'Polyphonic Text', 2006, media installation.

The artist also imagines developing senses unrecognized by human sensory organs in order to increase the extent of human communication. He thinks about connecting the limits of human cognition directly to brains, even if that necessitates using supplementary instruments such as writing with planes of colours instead of by using an alphabet, or by communicating with 100Hz electronic waves instead of pronouncing the letter 'A'. He observes:

Musical codes are physical, mathematical and rational, but their sum does not read like objective information as they stimulate subjectively and emotionally, stimulating sense out of logic. Hearing is more ambiguous and emotional than seeing. A computer-generated electronic wave is simpler and purer than natural composite sounds. (Art Spectrum, 2006, p.23)

He considers the possibility of combining these pure sounds with either images, colors or texts/meanings. He explains that this visual or auditory data can be transferred to *ASCII* code,[2] and finally to binary machinery language. He also assumes that, if the human brain can understand binary codes, people can likewise analyze any kind of information either visual or auditory. Therefore, Park argues that sound is another expression of text and image. (*Art Spectrum*, 2006, p. 23)

Through this process, Park leads the audience to traverse different areas of information by flexibly and creatively selecting, mixing and arranging data according to their own perspective, which eventually grants new meanings to them and promotes two-way communication between the media and viewers.

I see Park's observation of painting's synchronic ways of interpreting information as being closely connected to the 'surface culture' paradigm that understands culture without distinguishing its time and space (see Chapter II.). Park belongs to a generation who are used to the full extent of digital media, which enables the flexible management of data. And this has led him to investigate beyond the existing methods of using text by mixing it with another communication system: painting. The artist encourages the crossing-over of different genres via synchronic perspective, which is the character of the 'Egyptian effect' of the 'completed of time' and its interchangeability, as outlined by Perniola (see Chapter IV p.117-119.).

And through this system of 'transversal taxonomies', Park creates a new communication system in which the audience can develop its new syntax, flexibly investigating existing information from new points of view. And I claim this is the main quality of the 'post-surface culture' paradigm, which has passed beyond the 'de-contextualized hybridity' (see Chapter III p.91–93, p.96–98.) of 'surface culture', assigning new meanings to history and enriching our ways of understanding culture.

[2] ASCII code (American Standard Code for Information Interchange) is a 7bit standard code system to manage data and exchange it between communication systems. It was established by the American Standard Association in 1963.

Roh Jae Oon (born 1971)

This artist rejects the idea of his art being distinguished as net art or web art. He believes that digital media is merely one medium among many, although a cultural phenomenon of our time. Therefore, he uses diverse media and artistic formats such as installations and paintings for expressing his ideas, considering any medium a means to find answers to his questions. Roh states that his principle subject matter is people and their relationships, as well as new social phenomena and he tries to investigate the ways to interconnect them and experiment with new perspectives.

He believes that we have been largely influenced by the filmic language of cinematography, which edits images freely and produces innovative effects such as new relationships between time and image. He asserts that the digital media enables the editing process to be conducted in a much more effective way. The artist is interested in the notion of visual perception and recognition, and to communicate with his audience he maintains three respective websites: vimalaki.net; c12p.com; time-image.co.kr (Image 69). In an exhibition space as his new interface, he leads viewers to the flexible flow of thinking by selecting different images and diverse effects from these websites and interweaving them in diverse ways to express a common theme, regardless of their temporality or spatiality.

Image 69. Roh Jae Oon websites: www. vimalaki.net.

Image 69-1.www.c12p.com.

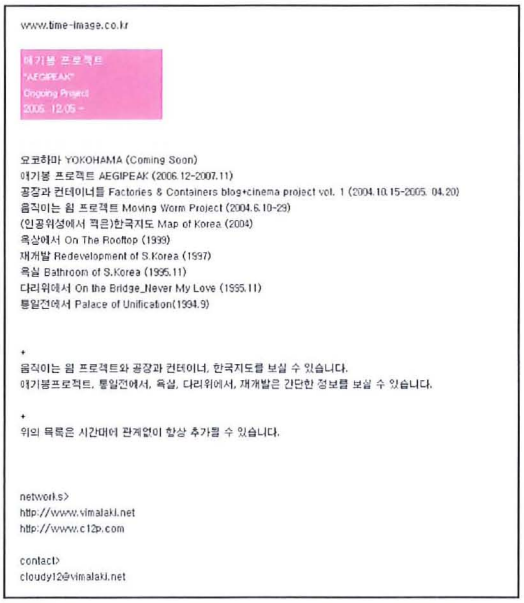


Image 69-2.www.time-image.co.kr.

His websites contain a wide range of information (such as his ideas and works) which are easily accessible to users; a kind of brain for his CPU[3] (Computer Processing Unit) world. He enjoys making all this information accessible for viewers as he believes being digital means not being exclusive – i.e., available to anybody, anytime, anywhere – which is contrary to the way analogue

[3] CPU refers to Central Processing Unit, a processor that runs computer programs.

information was distributed. Roh states that 'the digital attitude is not to make certain data one's own, but to share information and data with other people without the boundaries of time and space'. He criticizes Korean digital culture as an extreme form of the analogue, as Korean people often use it to make their own virtual spaces on the web confined to personal use and narratives which fit the existing system. Therefore, he uses simple formats of popular culture and imposes humour by applying those images and information to the artist's works, which restrains them from producing meta-narratives in order to give room for the imagination.

Roh explains his work always begins from his interest in social situations even though his work is based on the web-space using digital technology as his artistic medium. The artist aims to stimulate viewers' imagination about the intricate nature of reality in contemporary society. Roh also insists that to connect seemingly unrelated topics about our society and culture from each individual's different point of view gives the flexibility necessary to understand the complex reality of present-day society. This attitude parallels Perniola's notion of enigmatic reality in which nobody knows what the definitive answers or truths are. Through this process of flexible creation and the constant accessibility of data, I believe his work creates the effect of 'completed time', as explained by Perniola, which does not possess any exclusive time or form. Roh masterfully uses digital technology, which uses the limitless memory of CPU space as an archive with boundless information, and transcends temporality through the 'spatialization of psychological experience' (Perniola 1995 p.65) via virtuality, which expands the horizon of the intellectual experience of reality. He also interconnects far-ranging subject matters and media through his imaginative perspective, which removes the limits of different genres, time and space that Perniola calls the 'Egyptian effect' of interchangeability.

In his first solo exhibition, 'Skin of South Korea' (Image 70), he utilizes a series of digital images in various forms from diverse sources, which, as the artist describes, exist in Korean culture. Roh maintains that these images function as the skin[4] of his subject: South Korea. He explains:

> *Usually images downloaded from the Internet are exhibited after digital processing that I specifically created via the computer.... These images are generally memories and people related to Korea directly or indirectly, the particular signs of our everyday life, or sometimes the*

[4] Here 'skin' refers to the external display of computer software programs. The artist describes that internet users can use the 'skins' of various programs; such as Winamp skin and Zeroboard skin. The easiest way to understand its meaning is that when you change the display theme of Windows, it can be said that you are changing 'Windows skin'.

images revealing certain aspects of the world. However, these are hard to categorize as particular genres. Although they are common forms of images existing on the net, they are also the combination of the images that fragmentally exist regardless of time and space. Anyhow, the resulting printouts remind us of diverse artistic forms, but more importantly become components of certain narratives from the viewers' imagination or reveal the places of intertwined, complicated reality, creating ambiguous differences from those existing forms. Here the exhibition space is where the original temporality and spatiality of these images disappear and become the part of 'interface' that makes people imagine hyper-reality, which starts from the connectivity of whenever, wherever and whatever is possible.. (Roh, 2004)

Image 70. Roh Jae Oon's first solo exhibition 'Skin of South Korea' (2004) leaflet.

On his websites – known as the 'South Korean Trilogy'– he displays a variety of images describing different facets of Korean society based on seemingly random topics. Users are intended to reinterpret the subject matter for themselves, taking elements such as the image or sound and imposing new meanings and thus completing the work. And I claim that this represents the paradigm of 'Post-Surface Culture', which not only uses all kinds of information flexibly, but also masterfully composes them according to a new syntax of the artist's own criteria.

For example in his work, *3 Open Up* (2001-2004), which is composed of three chapters, he presents us with three images from the internet combined with voiceovers of unrelated narratives. In the first chapter, 'Factory' (Image 71), a satellite image of the nuclear installation in Yeong Beun in North Korea is superimposed with the sound of South Korean TV broadcasters describing the visit of South Korean government officials to pig and chicken farms in North Korea. In 'Fire' (2001-2004) (Image 72), a static shot of a fire in the DMZ (Demilitarized Zone) photographed from a lookout point in South Korea is juxtaposed with a broadcast about the fire on Korean news. Lastly, 'Airborne Early Warning' (2001-2004) (Image 73), shows the image of the latest AEW (Airborne Early Warning) aircraft with a voiceover explaining the difference between the South Korean and North Korean languages, followed by a short burst of military radio traffic. The work puts us in mind of the ironical reality of the political situation of Korea, where confrontation and reconciliation co-exist. At the same time it suggests multi-layered nuances of reality and suggests the alleviation of political tensions through the comical effects of the mismatch between the soundtrack and the images.

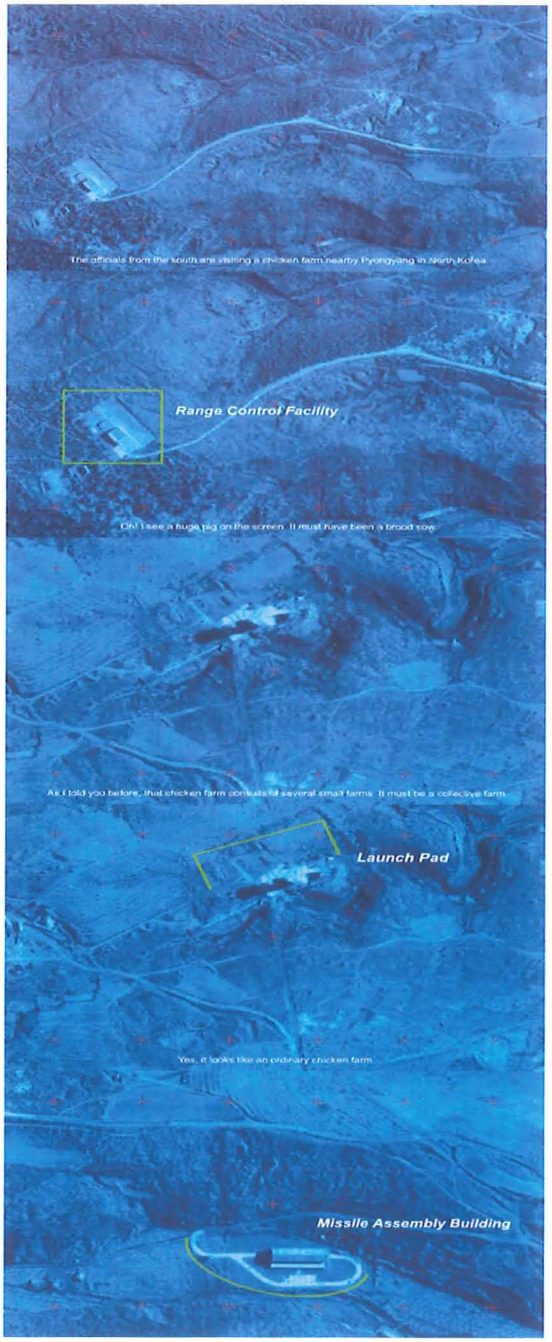


Image 71. Roh Jae Oon, '3 Open-up (Factory)', 2001-2004, digital media, sound on the web.

Image 72. '3 Open-up (Fire)', 2001-2004, digital media, sound on the web.

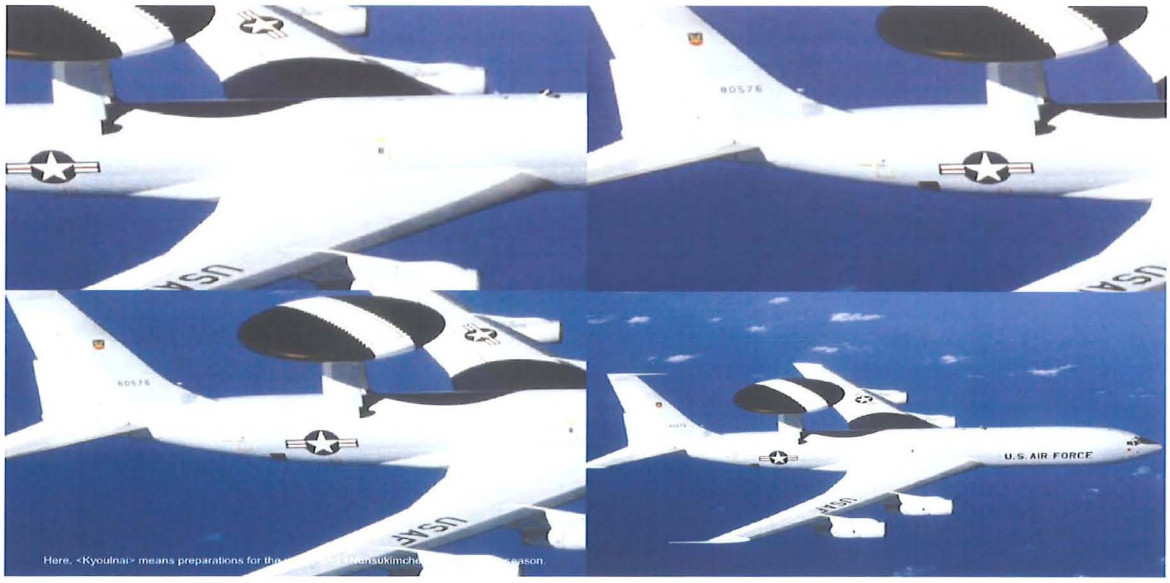


Image 73. '3 Open-up (Airborne Early Warning)', 2001-2004, digital media, sound on the web.

Also in another work, *Fatal Beauty* (2001-2004) (Image 74), Roh presents a montage of images of North Korean female cheerleader groups at the Busan Asian Games in 2002, a political event staged as a reconciliatory gesture between the two countries. The material was collected by the artist through keyword-surfing on the internet, and the static images animated by rapid cutting between slow zooms. His resulting imagery reminds us of some kind of bizarre 'fatal beauty' (as the artist names it) by showing the women's ecstatic expressions at the climax of their performances. The soundtrack of an

Image 74. Roh Jae Oon, 'Fatal Beauty', 2001-2004, digital media, sound on the web.

equally ecstatic yodelling song eliminates the scene's original context. Roh provides a different perspective on the event and imposes new meaning, which ultimately reminds us of the 'enigmatic reality' of society. In this work Roh attempts to question the typical male gaze that might view this event as a sexual issue, which functions as some sort of disguise of the political tension. Nonetheless, it also reminds us of the backward-looking culture of North Korea, the difficult political situation, its awkward moments and the cultural gap that exists between north and south, all of which conceal a dreary, scary political, social situation in North Korea.

In another work, *Mars Crashes* (2001) (Image 75), Roh juxtaposes the images of two different incidents – the scene of the accidental crash of U2 spy-plane in Hwa Sung (also meaning Mars in Korean) in Korea in 2003 and the ruins of the World Trade Center collapse in New York in 2001. He also projects the image of the sky, which works as a connecting scene or jump-cut between these two scenes. Set to the soundtrack of an electric guitar playing 'funk' music (that the artist also found through internet surfing), the two incidents seem to merge, blurring the differences in their temporality and spatiality.

In interpreting his work, Roh emphasizes the status of his images as a 'skin', where the subject matters such as the North Korean visit and the World Trade Center's collapse are no more important than the colours or the visual effects. In his web art pieces, he meticulously plans these

visual effects by using diverse formats and digital techniques such as the divided structure of a screen and the timely cross-over of images. I assert that these formations produce a compressed effect, but always leave room for individual applications, interpretations about the work through imagination and focusing on visual and auditory effects. Most of all, Roh rejects the one-way communication of a certain narrative that would provoke a rigid interpretation and limit the possibilities of interactivity.

Image 75. Roh Jae Oon, 'Mars Crashes', 2001, digital media, sound on the web.

Roh creates various visual languages by using diverse information (images and sound) that exist on the surface, and by flexibly arranging and adapting them regardless of time and space. In this way,

the artist continues to provide viewers with possible ways to overcome the restriction of the media's one-way communication and to create their own truth/meanings from their individual imaginations and perspectives by fully taking advantage of what's available in the digital culture of contemporary society (which can be found in Perniola's *Philosophy of the Present* – see Chapter IV p.105–107.). And finally this creates a 'fullness of time' that rejects the exclusive possession of time by certain subjects or forms, and traverses the boundaries of specific time and space through the flexible use of available information and the interchange between different cultures.

Ryu Bi Ho (born 1970)

In his work, Ryu Bi Ho interrogates about the conflict between society and individual, which he tries to resolve by using a poetic approach. Instead of focusing on the difference and contradiction between reality and his idealised memories of society, the artist adds his own witty interpretation into the work, and resolves conflicts by producing simulated images of his own sentimentality and meditation via the flexible use of diverse digital media.

His first solo exhibition, 'Steel Sun', deals with this question. In his work *Black Sun* (2000) (Image 76), the sun symbolizes the reasons of contemporary human beings, which can be harmful just by looking at it directly. On seven monitors he displays the images of gigantic men in black goggles and suits, their hair floating freely as if they are in space. These are interspersed with the images of rows of small men who are moving with haste, changing their postures, that remind us of the frenetic path of everyday life and stand for people's energetic efforts to fit into contemporary society. These figures are contrasted with the aloof faces of the gigantic men who represent the contemplative attitude of rational human beings who can overcome the dilemma of modern society and its conflicts. The horizontal rays from the gigantic men's eyes contemplate and penetrate the busy movements of the small men turning the scene white and neutral, and ultimately creating a calm, meditative ambience that contrasts with the vertical progress of society, symbolized by the pollution of a factory chimney in the far distance. Through this work Ryu suggests human reason can be used in a more reflective way to harmonize the conflicts between individual's need for freedom and society's reckless pursuit of economic growth. The curator Lee Ki Yong describes this idea:

'Steel Sun' is another name for human eyes that look at the world. These eyes are the heat-mass that consist of a black spot and corona resulting from nuclear fission and fusion. Also 'sun' is another name of Apollo and the archetype of human rationality . All humans obey and worship bright white sunlight, and the light of existence turns to white. Therefore, 'Steel Sun' is another name for the contemporary human being's rationality. (Ryu, 2000)

Image 76. Ryu Bi Ho, 'Black Sun', 2000, 4-channel video projection.

Ryu leads the audience to the space of artistic metaphor and imagination created by his own discerning insights and creative viewpoints out of a deep understanding of the subject and media, combined with his unique sensibility. Most importantly he searches for ways in which the conflicts between the social system and human individuality can be visually manifest. For him, media is a useful tool to freely describe the reality of contemporary society.

He uses a variety of media to test the boundaries between these contradictory areas and create images of his dreams more masterfully using various digital media. He majored in painting, but he finds digital media a more flexible and effective means of expressing his concepts and feelings. He produces images in his mind by sketching preliminary images and then putting them into a more detailed visualization via various digital graphic technologies.

For example, his works *Hello! Mr Go* (2000) (Image 77), and *Morph* (2000) (Image 78), Ryu uses diverse media inventively and effectively exploring the issue of the infinite possibilities of visual communication in this time of multi-media. In *Hello! Mr Go*, he combines the image of Francisco de Goya's *Great Deeds, Against the Dead* – plate 39 of his *Disasters of War* series (1810–20) – with the modern city landscape, giving a sense of verisimilitude despite the two-hundred-years temporal gap. In this work he skilfully unites the notion of reality and the actuality of image by creating a meta-image via the techniques of imitation, re-editing and morphing, which eventually enables the forming of an aura about our reality.

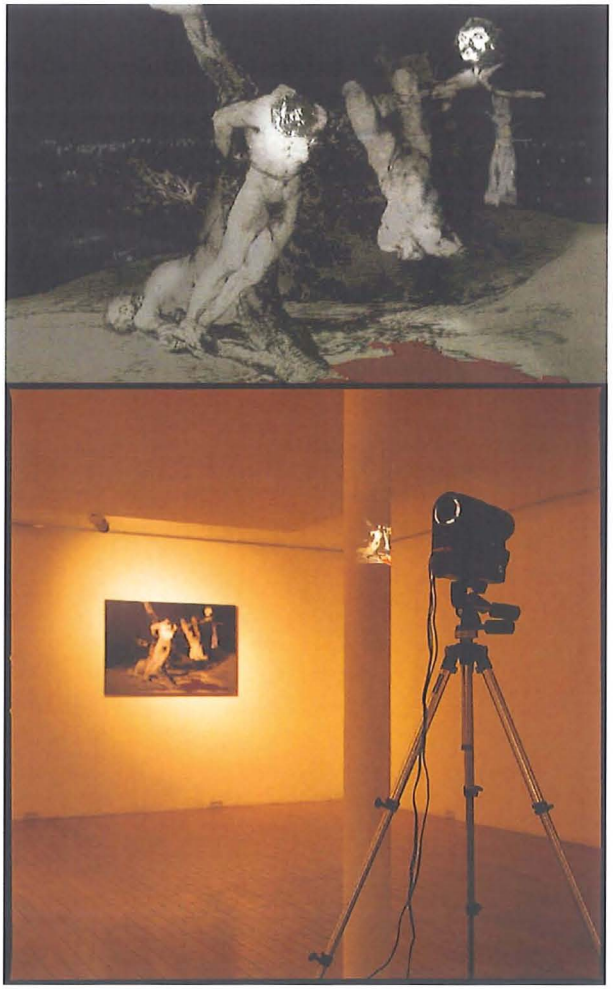


Image77.RyuBiHo,'Hello!MrGo',2000,4-channelvideoprojection.

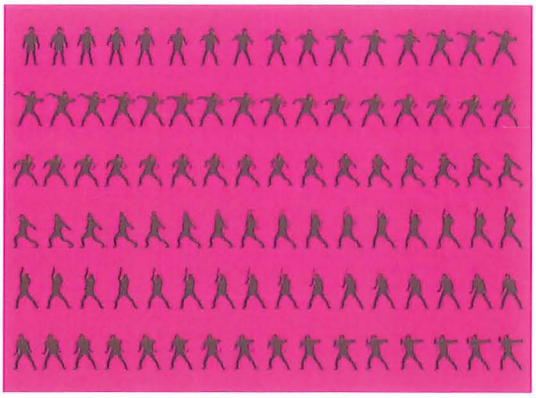


Image 78. Ryu Bi Ho, 'Morph', 2000, digital mdia, video installation.

In *Morph*, he further uses various ways of projecting his messages regardless of media and form, adding his own imagination and witty sentiments into the work and producing complicated, persuasive effects. By composing four monitors, each in different colours, this work displays the movement of a creature that continuously changes, giving the feeling of difference and consistent order at the same time. Ryu uses a magical, constantly mutating image by the Dutch artist M. C. Esher (1898–1972), to which his work gives temporality by projecting on to it active forms of transformation and metamorphosis.

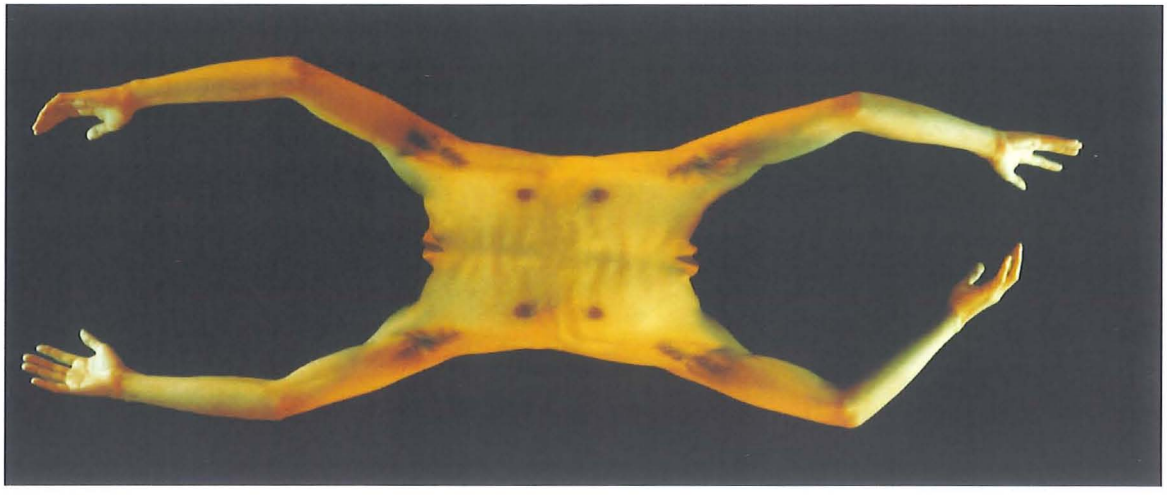


Image 79. Ryu Bi Ho, 'Genom Project', 2000, digital media, video projection.

Another work (*Genom Project*, 2000) (Image 79) consists are seven monitors showing people chanting spells toward the shining sun, together with sections of the human body as if they are each individual life forms. The subtle, but intense, repeating movements of hair and faces emphasize the trance-like nature. In the centre of the monitors the increasingly rapid movements of puppets are shown with numerous other life forms that ultimately get pulled out and disappear from the life field just like computer parts, which reminds us that our everyday life has to constantly move as if chased.

Throughout his works Ryu questions contemporary society's control that increasingly removes individuality. The artist spent his childhood in the remote town of Goon San, which he describes as a place without much social constraints. Upon moving to Seoul, he attended a school where he was shocked by how hard people tried to fit into society by repressing their own personalities and living up to the prevailing social standards and requirements. This experience has led Ryu to examine the boundaries between the harsh reality and his world of imagination. He juxtaposes two contradictory components such as emotion and rationality, the society's system and individuality of human beings, non-language and language.

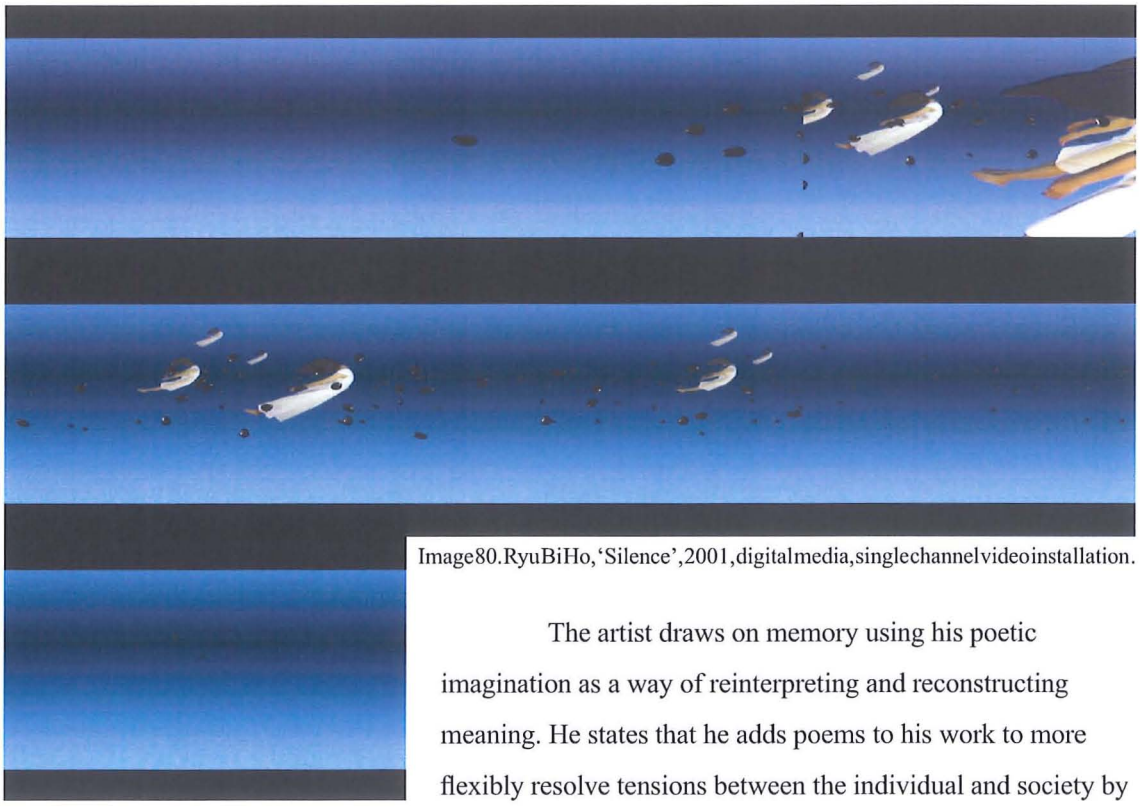


Image80.RyuBiHo,'Silence',2001,digitalmedia,singlechannelvideoinstallation.

The artist draws on memory using his poetic imagination as a way of reinterpreting and reconstructing meaning. He states that he adds poems to his work to more flexibly resolve tensions between the individual and society by creating a personal story out of life's harsh reality. In *Silence* (2001) (Image 80) the artist resolves the conflict between oppositional elements in a more delicate way, using emotional and feminine perspectives more appropriate for a harmonizing solution. The ambiguous, non-verbal, subconscious world of dreams - as if in zero-gravity - demonstrate his interpretation of reality, together with his hope for a better world and reconciliation.

Furthermore, Ryu believes that the digital operation of computer technology shows limitless potential for developing numerous visual languages. He creatively combines a certain incident with emotion by making it virtual through the digital media technology as a means to reconcile their differences. He maintains that such procedures allow him to ridge the void between the uncomfortable situations of the real world and the virtual reality of his dreams.

Ryu is from the 1970s generation, allowing him to approach new media with a degree of flexibility. He does not prefer new media to old, although he uses new technology more frequently and dexterously. He still sketches out his ideas using pencil and paper, but states that new media such as films and video have come to dominate visual consumption as an extension of painting. He tries to emphasize the balance and combination of old and new media in order to unfold his ideas and imagination more effectively.

Ryu observes that reality is no longer composed of an ordered and fixed structure, but of a mixture of interconnected, multifarious relationships. For him digital media is the perfect tool for investigating the relationships within infinitely complex, everyday spaces. And for his generation cyber space is another form of reality. In this world of simulacra, of zero-gravity, everything flows in endless circulation without borders or a real existence. For example, in *Yellow Ground* (2001) (Image 81) and In *Silence* (2001) viewers experience absorption by navigating his magical new simulated worlds By constructing simulated figures and dreamlike visions within the concrete landscape of his simulated worlds, he aims to produce not a representation of the existing world and experience, but a new pattern of experience, and ultimately create a new rule of temporality and spatiality.

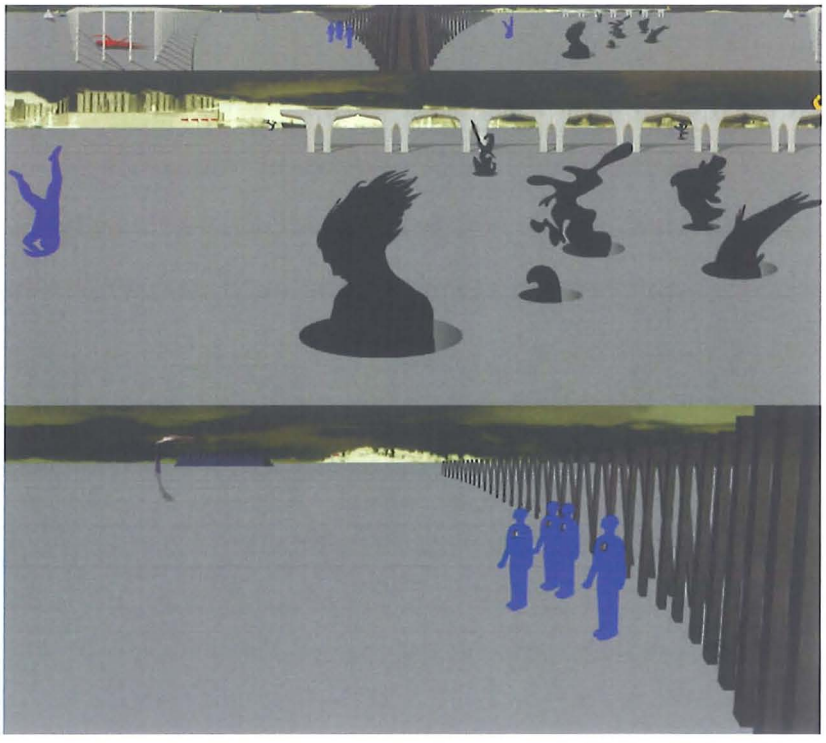


Image 81. Ryu Bi Ho, 'Yellow Ground', 2001, digital media, Quick Time VR installation.

In *Yellow Ground*, the artist composes a wide square like the agora in ancient Greece, where the space was organized, where a historical temporality first emerged and human social life started. The wide square is composed of familiar-looking pier bridges contrasted with the diverse shapes of small human figures, producing an effect of monumental scale. He also creates a surrealistic mood by using many symbolic elements, such as the absence of a moon in a moonlit landscape and men with empty chests representing contemplative human beings, which ultimately describes the desolateness, loneliness and emptiness of an industrialized city. In this work there are ambiguous landscapes and bizarre relationships out of context, where the cold, unstable scene contrasts with the affluent feelings of the colour yellow in the work's title. For example, the emptiness of a square and suddenly appearing and disappearing of columns, as well as the weird illumination thrown over human figures and objects. Their obscure relations within the landscape, also create a mystic, dreamlike surreal atmosphere. This destruction of a chain of meaning and the work's chaotic, sinister atmosphere symbolize the disconnectedness of people in contemporary society. And this aspect is underpinned by the drastic perspective of the contrasting square and bridge with the repeating columns, which reminds us of the infinite, ultimate possibility of reality. The juxtaposition of the opposed verticals and horizontals represents the opposition between the dynamic and the still, time and space, and movement and non-movement, and the artist's efforts to explore the possibility of creating balance through contrast.

More importantly, Ryu uses a panoramic structure, which for him is the most comfortable format for the human eye. Its horizontal structure makes it easy to concentrate on the content and allows for the unfolding of emotion and imagination. The surrealistic juxtaposition of different objects and persons, breaking the logical, linear order in this wide-screen format, goes beyond the uniformity of actuality, creating confusion and a new relationship of non-actuality in the gap between reality and poetic reality. Ultimately Ryu attempts to break the preconception and rigidity of visual cognition, and create an infinite, multi-lingual structure.

In conclusion, this surrealistic landscape leads viewers to the world of imagination where all the linear temporality of the real world is replaced with an enigmatic reality. The work reveals the combination of reality and virtuality, and of consciousness and sub-consciousness, through which the audience can travel to a surrealistic, poetic place beyond historical meanings. Nonetheless, there remain familiar elements of contemporary society, such as bridges and chimneys, that constantly remind us of reality. Ultimately, the work enables the moment of synchronicity in which the boundaries between time and space disappear. At the same time their existence is infinitely and

eternally extend beyond any comprehensible limit, which I argue is what Perniola defines as 'the completion of time'.

In Ryu's works, the reality of human consciousness is extended through the construction of virtuality, and it is the artist's memory, not the actuality that creates harmony between contradictory notions and different categories and ultimately proposes new cultural meanings by developing new ways to use information selectively and creatively. And this represents a character of 'Post-Surface Culture' that goes beyond the 'surface culture' paradigm of 'de-contextualized hybridity' (Chapter III, p.96) and constructively invents a new cultural syntax (see Chapter III, p.97-98 & Chapter IV, p.116-117 for more information.).

Yang-ah-chi (born 1970)

Yang is an artist who investigates the meaning of the media's power in contemporary society and tests the boundary of its role as an influential medium of social impact. He searches for the ways to use media tactically as a means of balancing the paradoxical tensions in society. In his works operating in the digital environment and the internet Yang examines issues such as techno-capitalism, and the relationship between surveillance systems and the end-users in virtual space. He has developed several website projects such as 'Chinarobot', 1996, and 'Blog-art.org', 2006, to provide the active platform for digital media art. He also makes diverse offline projects - workshops, seminars and archive exhibitions - in collaboration with other artists, theorists, curators and media activists.

Yang uses the pseudonym Yangachi, which means a young scoundrel and carries connotations of alternative culture. He projects this identity by looking at society and its reality from an unconventional point of view. He points out that there exists in this society numerous Yangachi's who pursue a lifestyle of vanity, even if they don't have high social backgrounds or aristocratic roots. The artist states: 'I am Yangachi, you are also Yangachi and our society is Yangachi's. So let's play together.' Therefore, instead of just seeing and appreciating works when they are in the gallery, Yang encourages viewers to actively participate in the web-artworks. Through this work he mocks the ironical situation in Korean society where materialism and Hantang-ju-eui (get-rich-quick fever) spread and people focus on values such as appearances, wealth and celebrity – a phenomenon largely caused by the rapid development of capitalism in Korean society.

In his first solo exhibition Yang presented the work *Yangachi Guild* (2006) (Image 82) in which political, social and economic issues are sold via an online shopping mall (actually a fake website

simulating popular e-shopping malls). The site is composed of pages devoted to politics, society, culture and economics, etc., that are deceptively close to actual sites, although the images and contents of them are all false. The site also offers diverse information such as foreign exchange rates and a real-time currency index, which helps it look real. Viewers of this site are guided to take up guild membership and to purchase virtual 'Yangachi' products. However, these products only exist virtually as they mockingly refer to the social and political issues in Korea such as 3*Kim*,[5] *Kumgangsan*[6] and *one shot*.[7] The most expensively priced items include *You* and *Yangachi*, which symbolize the importance of the individual's ideas and opinions. The users who purchase these products can confirm the delivery status by e-mail.

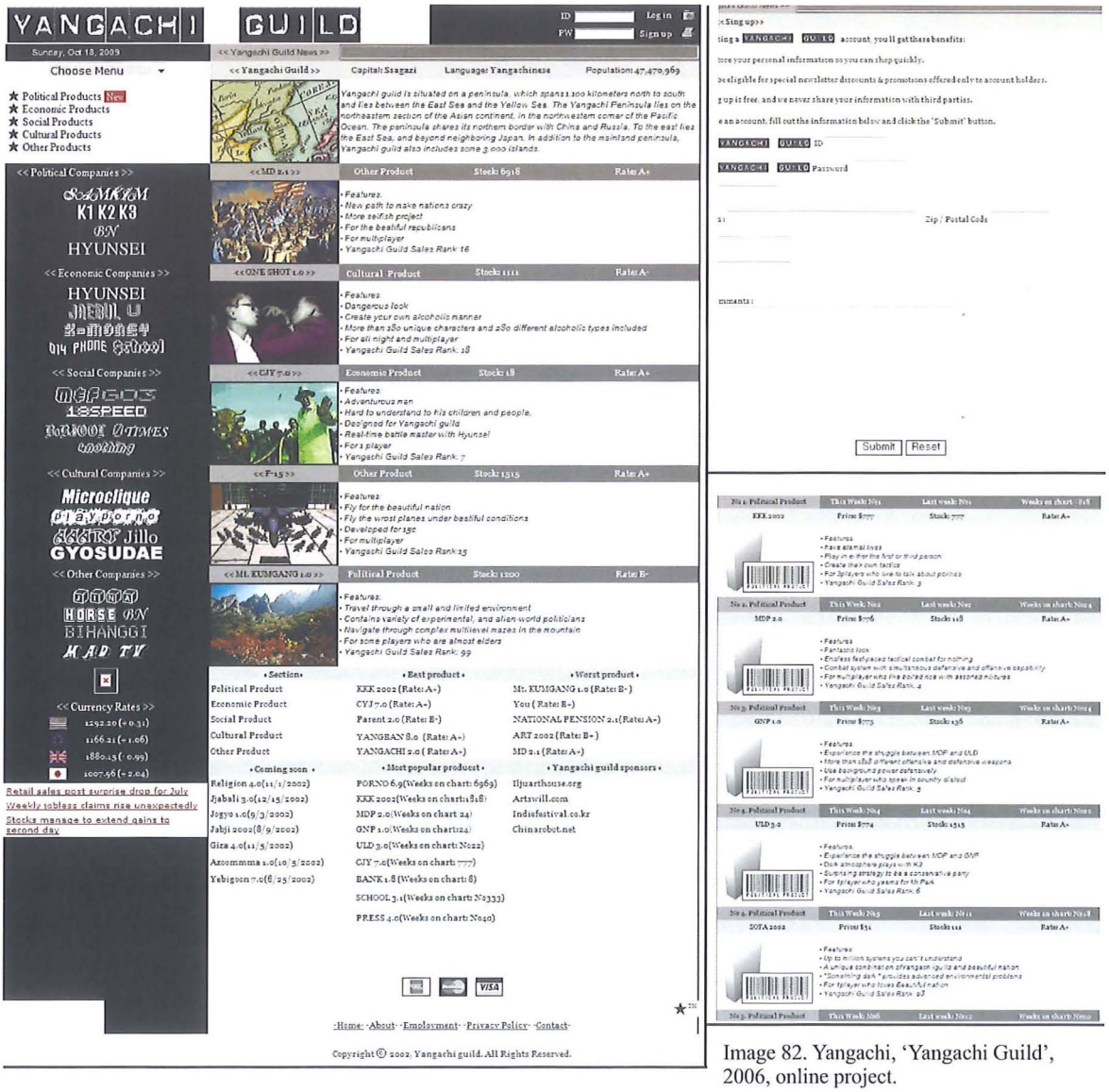


Image 82. Yangachi, 'Yangachi Guild', 2006, online project.

Below is the manual for the 'Yangachi Guild' <www.yangachiguild.com>.

1. First of all, become a member by clicking the 'sign-up button'.
2. Choose a 'Yangach' product you like the most. There are 30 products to select from in categories such as politics, society, economics, culture, etc.
3. Please refer to the list of the best and worst products at the bottom of the main page if you cannot decide.
4. Please click the product you choose, push the 'buy' button and fill out the form, and your product purchase will be successfully completed.
5. You can check the delivery status by e-mail after your purchase.

Yang utilizes the basic structure of the internet instead of using new techniques or making impressive decorations. In his works, Yang employs simple ways to handle the media content, such as searches, product purchases and e-mails, which are familiar to Internet users. In this aspect, his works are differentiated from the popular trends of web art that utilize the Internet as a virtual platform for experimenting with new media technologies, variously presenting images, video footage and animation. Most importantly, the artist is not concerned about the appearance of his work. His offline projects such as 'Parasite Services 1.0'[8] and 'Hacktivism',[9] on which he collaborated with other theorists, do not include eye-catching video footage or flash works, but simply display the accumulated record of the process and the outcome of the seminars and related events. The artist takes account of the fact that communication on the Internet takes place by using the search function and advertising through e-mails. For example, in Korea since the turn of the century numerous online shopping malls were established as a part of the digital culture, the structure of which Yang applies in this work. Through this work the artist questions the current situation where real products are

[5] *3Kim* refers to three famous politicians in Korea – Kim Dae Jung, Kim Jong Pil and Kim Young Sam who have had a tremendous influence on Korean society and politics.

[6] *Kumkangsan* is the mountain in North Korea that is famous for its breath-taking views and beautiful nature.

[7] *One* Shot refers to the term, also used in Korean, of downing a drink in one.

[8] 'Parasite Services 1.0' (2003–06) was a sub-title of the offline project 'Tactical Media' that investigated diverse possibilities of tactical media, and was constructed in collaboration with many other artists. The artist explains: '"Parasite Services" is the name of a social program to be plugged into the South Korean OS (social system). The art form and discourse in DOS have to function as a limited service. Parasite services, however, are appropriate for art as an open source and discourse. As a user, you will create algorisms for it. You are going to propose the service program that looks upon the possibility of intervention within the South Korean system and that will patch or plug in/out of the software of social interface.'

[9] 'Hacktivism' is another on-going offline project, which examines art practices through the activities of hacking.

vigorously advertised and sold in virtual spaces on the Internet, and virtual values are constantly sought after through his 'Yangachi' society. Since 1996 he has also been running the Internet community, 'China Robot', which is composed of young people related to art and which investigates the meaning of reality on the web as a media artist.

Yang continues to examine the same societal paradox through his work *Hypermarket* (2004) (Image 83) by questioning the capitalist system that connects everything in life to consumption. A study of the history of products indicates that human life always relates to products, the capitalist system producing goods ranging from the material to the abstract, which ultimately encourages human relations via the market system. Even in this era of digital media, the history of products continues, especially through 'connections' generated by the net. People affirm their lives by connecting to the net and extending reality, and finally the connected environment creates a community that shares time. Accordingly, capital rules the lives of connected people more efficiently as shared time can be calculated.

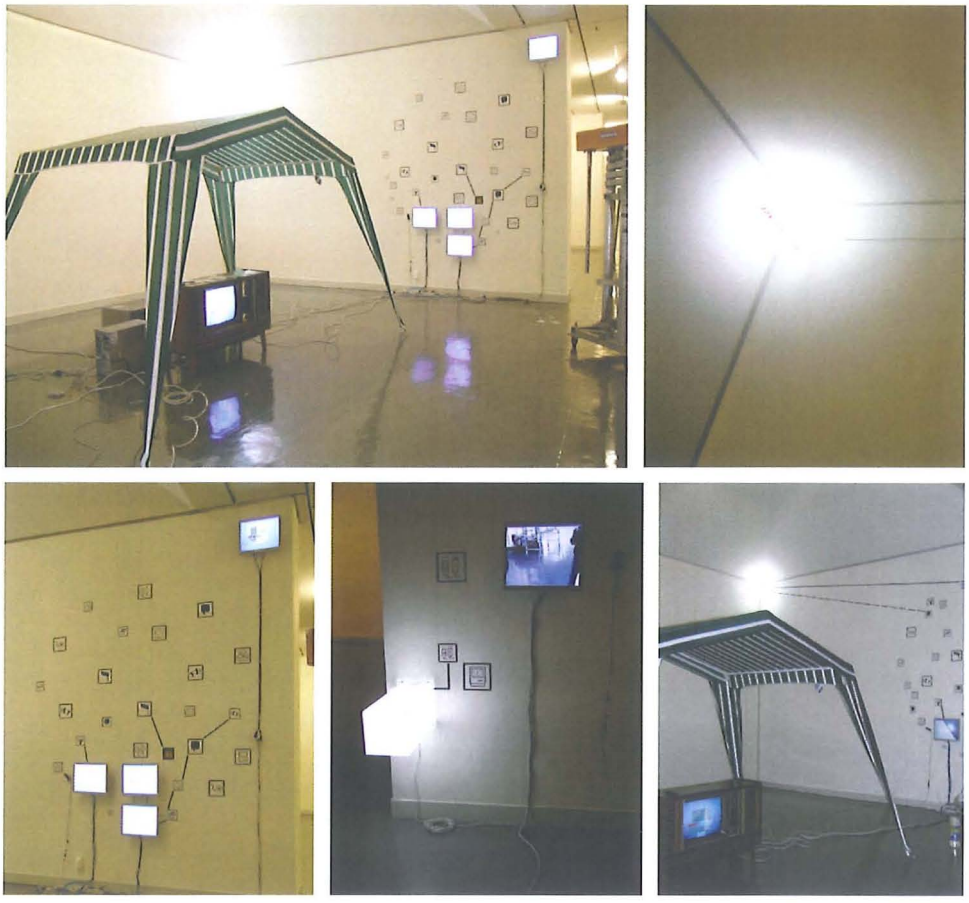


Image 83. Yangachi, 'Hypermarket', 2004, media installation, wall drawing.

Whether his work comprises an internet site or installation, is a solo work or collaboration, it invariably eschews the spectacle or cutting-edge technical manipulation which would subordinate his viewers to the media's control.

Yang does not limit himself to online communication but also includes various offline media in his works. In his exhibitions, he presents the works online, but also exhibits offline, exploring the flexible use of media. In *Hypermarket*, by using diverse forms of presentation such as installation, video projection and diagrammatic wall drawings, Yang composes a virtual supermarket in a gallery where a visitor can look around brands and product images shown by computer and get the impression of virtual shopping. Lee Jienne, Curator at the National Museum of Contemporary Art in Korea, describes *Hypermarket* in these terms:

> *As electronic media develops in our time, the image and brand name of products become all the more important, though they do not necessarily show the characteristics of actual products. The convenience of online shopping starts to dominate everyday lives, and transform products on the shelves of a supermarket into their images. Hypermarket is not a physical market in the traditional sense, but a montage in the form of a massive factory or industrial enterprise. In the near future, shoppers at supermarkets may buy the virtual value of products, not the actual products. Yangachi intends to call our attention to the reality that mass-media promotes commercialism, toppling the democratic ideals of electronic media to control our daily lives.(Lee, 2004)*

Despite the highly web-based appearance of his work, the artist emphasizes that his focus is on the stories of our society and our time. As in his projects *Yangachi Guild* and *Hypermarket*, Yang experiments with various societal codes and explores the in-between meanings inherent in the system by his tactical use of the usual systems of media technology. In his second solo exhibition, 'e-government' (2003) (Image 84), he questions the surveillance policies of the government through various social systems like identity cards and surveillance cameras – c.f. Foucault's concept of Panopticism[10]

[10] Michel Foucault (1926-1984) discusses 'Panopticism' in *Discipline and Punish* (1975) giving the example of a controlling system in a town that is sealed such that anyone arriving or leaving can be managed. He maintains that space must be divided strictly, and guards should be appointed to patrol the designated areas. As a functional representation of this system, Foucault refers to Jeremy Bentham's 'Panopticon', a prison designed in the round that enables the observation of prisoners without them realizing they are being watched. Bentham himself described the Panopticon as 'a new mode of obtaining power of mind over mind, in a quantity hitherto without example'. The main point of this notion is that by individualizing the subjects and putting them in a position of constant visibility, the efficiency and power of institutions are maximized, even without asserting it. (See Foucault. *Discipline and Punish*: *The Birth of the Prison*, 1975.)

– through which power permeates and regulates society. By creating the 'e-government' (digitally managed) system on a website, Yang offers the possibility of reversing the normal function of surveillance. On this site viewers are asked to provide information and fill out the questionnaire supplied by his 'virtual government'. The website includes a wide range of images that show scenes of cities, reminding viewers of the present reality in which people are watched and regulated by the government via the advancement of information communication technology (ICT). Furthermore, in the process the work also helps viewers to think about how much power the media exerts on our society. The artist states:

Image 84. Yangachi, 'e-government', 2003, online project.

The round-shaped prison or 'Panopticon' suggested by the English philosopher and social theorist Jeremy Bentham in 1785... has already penetrated society through electronic citizen cards, smart cards, CCTV, tapping, electronic fingerprinting, electronic health cards, internet ID verification and so on under the name of electronic surveillance systems or information surveillance systems administered by the governments of numerous countries. The fact that people do not even notice the surveillance systems that exists in our everyday lives can be seen as a bigger problem. Therefore, I intend to search for a reverse-surveillance system after critically reviewing the mechanism of the 'Panopticon' and 'Panopticism'. (Yang,2003)

Image 84-1. Installation view of 'e-government'.

In his recent series *Surveillance Camera* (2006) (Image 85), he examines the two-faceted function of CCTV in contemporary society by reproducing familiar scenes from movies such as *Kill Bill* and *Purpose of Love*, which are projected through the surveillance cameras via hacking. The work is open to different possible interpretations. While the incident can be seen as a performance that reproduces the movie scenes, the supervisors of these cameras might view the scene as an ironical occurrence (as if it were actually happening). Finally for hackers viewing the work, these two different readings overlap and can be enjoyed humorously.

Through this work, Yang attempts to promote the active intervention with digital media and examine the meaning of information and communication technology in contemporary society. In the process 'enigmatic synchronicity' that Perniola delineated (see Chapter IV, p.117-118.) emerges that audiences cannot distinguish real-time events from those that are recorded, thus blurring the boundaries between present and past. And ultimately this process shows that the existing culture can be traversed and interpreted by a new syntax, which I define as a crucial characteristic of the 'post-surface culture' paradigm (see Chapter IV, p.118-119.).

Image 85. 'Surveillance Camera (Kill Bill)', 2006, media installation.

Moreover, Yang questions the changing meaning of an artist in this time of digital media in which originality or authenticity of artworks no longer takes priority, in contradistinction to the traditional notion of artistic autonomy based on individual sentiment and intuition. He states that if you become interested in the principle of networks, an artist in contemporary society is a mere node, user or networker within the community. He changes the locations and forms of an artist in order to prove that art can survive in this time of networks. Yang suggests tactical approaches for making art by using the media aggressively and constructively instead of denying the fact that we are facing a one-sided penetration and domination by the media in the online environment.

He investigates terms like 'hacktivism'[11] and 'tactical media',[12] which necessitate an active and strategic use of the media instead of a naïve acceptance of the media's dominance of society. I assert that this attitude encourages two-way communication between media and the users, as well as varied standpoints from which to re-interpret society and its culture through the close examination of contemporary society's complex codes. Therefore, Yang's works show the creative opportunities to make 'data inventories', select appropriate information and to create new meaning with this material according to the artist's own system. And I maintain this leads to the effect of 'the completion of time', which Perniola proposes as a new paradigm of contemporary art,

that presents new possibilities for the understanding of contemporary culture via flexible, transversal perspectives of infinite classifications (see Chapter IV, p.118-119.).

[11] 'Hackitivism' is the combination of hacking and activism or hacking for a political cause by using illegal or legal digital media.

[12] 'Tactical media' is a new form of activism where people oppose or criticize the wider culture through the mass media, made possible by the revolution in consumer electronics and wider distribution of digital technology through public access to the internet. It attempts to reverse the one-way flow of media communication by encouraging public reaction and participation.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I investigate recent paradigmatic shifts in Korean contemporary art which I claim were consequent upon social and cultural changes that occurred during the last twenty years. My observation as a curator is that a number of key artists have developed a new paradigm which I term as 'Post-Surface Culture', that each one of these artists uses information which is re-contextualized by an individual syntax which is created for each work. The result is art that has new depths, which it was deprived of in the 'schizophrenic' culture of postmodern society. And this was enabled by flexible and innovative ways of managing existing information via virtuality and the interactive communication of digital database system. These overcame the 'Surface Culture' paradigm that dominated the work of a previous generation of artists who understood culture through surface information bereft of original contexts. Their raw material was a deluge of media images. My observations about the emergence of 'post-surface culture were realized in an exhibition 'Beyond 'Surface Culture': A New Grammar in Korean Contemporary Art' at Space Can in Seoul from January 29th, 2010 to February 11th, 2010, which forms a practical component of my thesis.

I have described in overview the changes and trends in Korean society and contemporary art in the last decades of the 20th century in Chapter I and II. I claim that Korea has experienced unprecedented cultural hybridity in the last two decades (1987-2007) induced by foreign cultural influences. This was encouraged by a political openness towards internationalization and globalization as well as the deluge of mass-media information increasingly available during the 1990s. A premise of my research has been to see the close connection between the social climate prevalent in Korea and characteristics of its contemporary art.

Most of all, I have sought to emphasis the effect of that digital technology, promoted by the rapid expansion of highly advanced internet system and availability of digital software products via the web and mobile phones in Korea since the late 1990s (Chapter I, p. 29-36). I maintain that

via this vibrant network culture Korean people became accustomed to the instant and constant availability of images which were assimilated in superficial ways. As a result, Korean artists developed a way of understanding culture based on images and used information as the raw material for their personal inventories, regardless of the images' original time and space, a phenomenon which I term 'Surface Culture' (Chapter II, p. 68-72). I contend that the 'Surface Culture' generation show the characteristic of 'de-contextualized hybridity' which mixes different kinds of cultural information regardless its original context and historicity.

In counter distinction to this I have highlighted that the re-contextualization of cultural contents via virtuality and two-way communication of digital technology system is the key aspect of 'Post-Surface Culture' art practices. I have argued that the digital technology has enabled these artists to save unlimited amount of data, selecting information from their databases and coordinate it according to their purposes. Furthermore it has extended the scope of reality from actuality to virtuality by removing the boundary between the present and the past, and what is displayed and what is in memory database. And this has promoted the enhanced categorization of human experience and allowed the development of new perspectives on the organization of cultural artefacts and histories. Moreover, they have developed as an integral element of their art a two-way communication system via the interactive media culture of the internet, which I argue gives them more versatility in managing their data inventories. As a result, these artists have investigated an extended notion of historicity and its re-gained depth through which they compose a new syntax and re-contextualize the contents of their works.

In the process, Korean artists were able to attain the flexibility in thinking and attitude to traverse oppositional concepts, masterfully connect seemingly unrelated information from their own perspectives and hence create a new cultural models of 'completed time' via digital technology (see Chapter V, p.120-122 for more description.). as a central characteristic of the 'Post-Surface Culture' paradigm.

I have examined seven artists' works which I find to be the most representative examples of 'Post-Surface Culture'. They demonstrate the range of new syntaxes that this generation of

artists have developed. Most of all, their works exhibit new ways of inventorying and re-interpreting culture as well as choosing and allocating information according to their own syntaxes, which undo oppositional notions such as time and space, analogue and digital as well as emotion and rationality (See Chapter V for more description.).

Lastly I want to briefly make a distinction between postmodern art and the art of 'Post-Surface Culture'. I see 'Post-Surface Culture as moving beyond the conditions of postmodern art, via Perniola's assessment of 'the Egyptian effect'. I identify Korean 'Surface Culture' as a form of postmodern art. Postmodern 'bricolage'/pastiche focuses on assembling and juxtaposing different kinds of cultural images and artefacts in a 'syntagmatic' and 'depthless' way as described by Fredric Jameson (Chapter III, p.88-92), without adopting or understanding their historical meanings, hence creating an ambiguous space of temporal paradox. Similarly the process of 'de-contextualized hybridization' in 'Surface Culture' is superficial and occurs without resolving internal conflicts, which results in a chaotic stream of information. In distinction to this, the 'Post-Surface Culture' paradigm implies the investigation of the possibilities of creating a new order by the more skillfully and flexibly fabrication of data from available inventories according to each artist's criteria. Enabled by new freedom of postmodern appropriation, as well as the digital technology's data management and interactive communication process, they have overcome the limits of the one-way communication that characterizes media society and its 'schizophrenic' temporality via new temporal order of 'completed time' as argued for by Mario Perniola (Chapter IV, p.112-116). As a result, the 'Post-Surface Culture' generation of artists are able to create a new syntax though which selected cultural information is re-contextualized. The consequences of this are that their work attains new depth, overcoming the 'depthlessness' of postmodern culture.

I emphasize that the process of selection is crucial in creating this new paradigm as it was not possible in the one-way communication process of conventional mass-media. Most of all, digital communications gave Korean artists the flexibility and criticality to manage the data to fit their own purposes. In the process they produce 'the Egyptian effect of enigmatic synchronicity'

(See Chapter V, p.120-122.) as theorized by Perniola.

Finally it is important to emphasis that this is, at heart, a curatorial thesis, and that my exhibition is the practical element of the thesis. It is designed to exemplify the characteristics of 'Post-Surface Culture' as described through my arguments and observations. It features the work of seven Korean artists whose works most richly exemplify the characteristics of 'Post-Surface Culture'. Their works show the most imaginative and effective ways of interpreting pre-existing information and composing it into new syntaxes. It was obviously an important part of my thesis that my critique of recent Korean visual culture was seen as the viable pretext for a major exhibition. I would like to thank the staff of MUSEUM.beyondmuseum for their support in realizing the exhibition, and particularly the president of MUSEUM.beyondmuseum Hyun Jin Yup, curator Lee Jung Ah, curator Kim Mi Keum and all other staff members. MUSEUM.beyondmuseum, Seoul is a one-year long exhibition project (August, 2009 – July 2010) that has been established to create a cultural space of new dimensions, i.e., [MUSEUM.], which combines art and living. One of its main themes is 'interactivity' which investigates the interrelation between individual cultural tastes, the information deluge of culture and the arts in the digital age. Accordingly a range of interpretive tools such as a digital kiosk system and interactive educational programs has been organized to encourage this interactivity. In this context the exhibition 'Beyond 'Surface Culture': A New Grammar of Korean Contemporary Art' has been accepted by the museum as it epitomizes the paradigm of 'interactivity' via digital culture in Korean art.

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