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The Measure of *Han*

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A thesis exhibition presented to OCAD University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in Interdisciplinary Master's in Art, Media and Design (IAMD)

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ABSTRACT

Han is an untranslatable Korean affect associated with historical unresolved grief, separated families, and loss of collective identity. *Han* is an accumulation of intergenerational trauma, which in the North American context has been sustained by suspended assimilation and dislocation/migration. Through relational methodology, the in/visible limits of its translatability are revealed/concealed. *The Measure of Han*, exhibited at Ignite Gallery, Toronto, brought inherited and copied objects, ritual in repetition, sound/video, and daily artist activations together in a temporal installation as the outcomes of the MFA research-creation.

Key words: untranslatable affect, Korean *han*, intergenerational, installation, performance

Acknowledgments

Ritual of Bows



Figure 1. mihyun maria kim. (Still) Degrees of relations, 20mins. Site-situational live performance with documentations. 2022.

“As early as in ancient Egypt, bowing was a symbol of respect and an important religious gesture. European cultures have had a tradition of bowing as well. In Western cultures, only nobility or the aristocracy received a bow, but the tradition is no longer commonplace in modern times.

Traditional Korean culture emphasized the importance of an intricate greeting system. As early as in the Three Kingdoms period (57 B.C. until A.D.669), Koreans used more than 100 gestures when greeting, each appropriate for a specific situation with respect to one’s gender, location, degree of respect and seniority” (Hwang, 2009).¹ “Both Buddhism and Christianity had profound impacts on the behavior of Koreans but Confucianism, with its teachings on the position of the individual in society, greatly influenced Korean etiquette. Confucianism is a system of ethics and behavio[u]r that emphasizes the obligations of people towards one another. It stresses duty, loyalty, hono[u]r, filial piety, respect for age and seniority and sincerity” (MacGregor, 2008).²

During a month-long artist residency at La Napoule,³ France, in November 2022, I documented a performance of myself bowing various degrees of respect and duty towards the Mediterranean Sea and opposite-facing hill. Wearing a kimono robe, patterned by hand using a wooden block-print method in France, I recalled the kimono my *halmeoni* had gifted me long ago, now forever lost. I braided my hair and tied a ribbon that is associated with young women, and considered the act of turning back/forward time in the space of an emptied cement pond. To process what and whom I might mourn and pay respects to, I thought about the distance of

¹ Hwang Joon-hyun. *Discover Korea: Why do Koreans bow*. Article, uploaded by U.S.Army, 12 June 2009.

² MacGregor, Tony. *Tips on Korean Custom of Bowing*. In *The Korea Times*, 29 April 2008.

³ La Napoule Art Foundation (LNAF) hosts 2 cohorts of 10 Canadian artists/writers/creatives annually with the support of Fondation David R. Graham to strengthen the intercultural connection between Canada and France.

waters and mountains Korean songs narrate when relating to the expression of *han*. Tears welled up in the intention to honour my family members un/known to me in far places and in death.

When I was sharing the documented video during the colloquium, a peer asked if I was doing yoga, as the sequence of my bows looked like yoga postures. Although I had very different intentions, I re-read *The Body Keeps the Score*, by Bessel Van Der Kolk (2014), where a chapter is dedicated to Yoga as a tool to learning how to inhabit one's body after events of trauma or PTSD. "All yoga programs consist of a combination of breath practices (*pranayama*), stretches or postures (*asanas*), and meditation. Different schools of yoga emphasize variations in intensity and focus within these core components. For example, variations in the speed and depth of breathing and use of the mouth, nostrils, and throat all produce different results, and some techniques have powerful effects on energy.... Many of [the] patients are barely aware of their breath, so learning to focus on the in and out breath, to notice whether the breath was fast or slow, and to count breaths in some poses can be a significant accomplishment" (272).⁴

Engaging the body and breath, restoring the rhythm of breathing, can be a source of healing from embedded experiences and transmissions of trauma. For the full duration of this research-creation, Julian Jason Haladyn reminded me to breathe and coached me on how to find rhythm, as my primary advisor, mentor, and endless source of encouragement. Natalie Majaba Waldburger shared the space of breath by visualizing it, lightening it, and teaching me how to be flexible in working with it, as my secondary advisor. To both I bow 90 degrees of highest respect and gratitude.

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Thank you. 고마워. 감사합니다.

⁴ Van der Kolk, Bessel. *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*. 2014.

to all my un/known family.

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INTRODUCTION



Figure 2. mihyun maria kim, *Capped, Tae series*, 6 x 8", family photograph ink print transfer on canvas paper, charcoal, Indian ink, acrylic, oil pastel, stamps, sealed in beeswax with rubbings, all on wood panel, 2021.

***Han* as Plural Fragments of a History**

This journey revealing *han* started with actively remembering hearing the lived experiences of my grandparents who directly survived and witnessed the Korean War.⁵ Born in the 1930s, deep into the Imperial Japanese occupation (1910-1945),⁶ they were denied the use of their own language and were subjected to mandatory assimilation. In the early '90s, the first cries of *comfort women*⁷ from this period came to light as they wanted their truths to be known before it was too late.

As *halmeoni* (my grandmother) taught Japanese for most of her adult life, even making it a priority with me when we could not understand each other neither in Korean nor English, only now through this re/search I started piecing together what teaching it might have meant for her. "The end of the occupation and *Naisen ittai* [literally, 'Japan and Korea, One Body'] left behind many Koreans who had never been

⁵ Stack, Liam. *Korean War, a "Forgotten" Conflict That Shaped the Modern World*. Asia Pacific, The New York Times, 1 January 2018.

⁶ *The Fall of Joseon: Imperial Japan's Annexation of Korea*. Korea Information, Korean Culture Center NY.
<https://www.koreanculture.org/korea-information-history>

⁷ Blakemore, Erin. *The Brutal History of Japan's "Comfort Women"*. History Stories, 21 July 2019.

taught Korean, at a loss for knowing only Japanese. When some tried to make their own Korean flags to wave in celebration they could not remember the exact way to render it; others had their flags, kept hidden for many years. Publishing houses even lacked for Korean language typesets. The country undertook a vast educational project to undo the one it had suffered through” (Chee, 2020).⁸ It also dawned on me that she had her first child during the Korean War (1950-1953)⁹ while my grandfather served as a military dentist. They had been born into good honourable families situated in the north, before the divide. My grandfather grew up in the city of Kaesong¹⁰ where our last name Kim is rooted in (there are lineages of Kim’s rooted in various places¹¹ and our family is a smaller bloodline of the “Kaesong-Kim”). *Halmeoni* was born in the now northern capital city of Pyongyang to the Park family. Through the civil conflict turned into a proxy war, both were separated from family members and pushed down south, of which finer details are lost with me.

There is a random piece I recall: *halmeoni* laughed through a memory of herself being so frightened, from the sound of gunshots, that she hid under heavy covers of winter blankets filled with cotton balls in the heat of one summer. She giggled telling the part when the youngest of five older brothers came in and joined her in the hiding spot for what seemed like hours, and they sweated through that blanket together. Memories of violence were never verbalized, but from time-to-time she reminded me of my duty as the eldest grandchild,¹² to not forget that we had land, large homes, and family, left in the north. Through hours I spent plucking her grey hair for some coins, she told me what I should do if Korea were to ever reunify.

That hope of reunification¹³ died when she did, the last of my known grandparents, in the spring of 2007. Out of some unusual happenings that summer, I landed in Kaesong, translating for a group of Korean-Canadian and Korean-American university students. There, I made a gesture of a *return-home* by burying one passport photo of each of my grandparents under a handful of dirt. Doing this brought no particular emotion, except one of which I felt a small relief that I had completed a portion of my duties.

Their eldest son, *appa* (my father), was born in the spring of 1954, less than a year after the divide. Again, I realized how *halmeoni* would have been pregnant through the end of a war, that was also the breeding ground of the Cold War between America and the Soviet-Union, now Russia.¹⁴ *Appa* repeatedly spoke of the wealth he was born into with housemaids and having the luxury of playing the violin. During a time when South Korea was suffering widespread poverty¹⁵ and a lack of a national Korean-identity, I wondered where this wealth came from since no one else in the family reminisces about it.

With the armistice signed and U.S.-supported dictatorship begun “[i]n the 1960s, South Korea was in the throes of massive transformation: postwar reconstruction, urbanization and rapid industrialization. Rural people moved to the cities in search of work in the burgeoning factories. In 1963, when Park Chung-hee seized power, he implemented a series of economic plans that would put industry first and social welfare last. He would tell the people that their job was to rebuild the nation by working more and earning less. Misery would become the measure of good citizenship” (Cho 35).¹⁶ This led to the 새 마을 운동 Saemaeful Undong (New Community/Village Movement) of the ‘70s that focused on building a strong labour force, creating national seed money, and enforcing basic principles of self-reliance and collaboration. Although the movement improved overall infrastructure, living conditions, industrialization, and reduced poverty, the authoritarian leadership and corrupt government created harsh fear-based conditions.

⁸ Chee, Alexander. *My Family’s Shrouded History Is Also a National One for Korea*. The New York Times Magazine, 27 August 2020.

⁹ Bicker, Laura. *South Korea: End to Korean War agreed to in principle*. BBC News, 13 November 2021.

¹⁰ Bicker, Laura. *North Korea blows up joint liaison office with South in Kaesong*. BBC News, 16 June 2020.

¹¹ *An Introduction to Korean Names: Are All Kims the Same?* Korea, Asia Society.

¹² Lee, Yu-jin. *From Breadwinner to Whistleblower of Patriarchy, Eldest Daughters in Korea Enter the Narrative*. The Kyunghyang Shinmun, 4 June 2020.

¹³ Yoon, Dasl. *2 Generations, 2 Different Perspectives On Korean Reunification*. Parallels: Many Stories, One World, npr, 16 May 2018.

¹⁴ Editors of History.com. *Korean War*. History, A&E Television Networks, 9 November 2009.

¹⁵ Oh, Kongdan. *Korea’s Path from Poverty to Philanthropy*. Brookings, 14 June 2010.

¹⁶ Cho, Grace M. *Tastes Like War*. New York, Feminist Press, 2021.

There are large gaps in what I think I know, but I have heard that through the decades of military dictatorship from the 1960s to the '80s¹⁷ *appa* pursued working for the military to follow in the footsteps of his own father. Unfortunately, when he went for the final exams to become a fighter-pilot, he failed the physical, and that moment forever changed the course of his life. Then, when he had gone to serve in the army, as all men still mandatorily do, my grandfather lost his position due to some physical illness. The near bankruptcy got *halmeoni* teaching Japanese and *gomo* (my auntie) supporting by teaching English.

Gomo—being the younger sister of *appa*, and the only surviving daughter of *halmeoni*, as the first child had died in her pre-teen years—had to adjust to the sudden shift from *having* to *not-having* while completing her education. Living with an Italian roommate near camptown, where American soldiers lived and hung out, remain as good memories to her. The friendships and unique experiences were useful when she emigrated to Canada in the '80s.

“Because the Korean War was never resolved, American bases and the service industry catering to them flourished, and public sentiment toward the American presence in Korea remained ambivalent. The emerging South Korean nation depended on the United States for both national and economic security, and the bases provided much of the currency that the average person needed to get by. Koreans were grateful for the opportunities to work, but resentments still ran high because Americans enjoyed privileges that most Koreans had never imagined—spacious accommodations, an endless supply of food, and the guaranteed company of women. There were two places of employment designated for young women who weren't from elite families: the factory or the army base” (Cho 35-36).¹⁸ Women working in the bases as forms of entertainment, or descendants of comfort women, were some of the first to be brought over to America after the war by their new American husbands.

A mother put together her two daughters and a niece, forming a group of three girls, who performed in camptown to survive. They sang and danced for the foreign soldiers by listening to American records and learning to play instruments, up to thirteen kinds. Through word of mouth, they were picked up by a Las Vegas producer, Tom Ball, who had four Asian “entertainment groups” travel to America and compete for a month to land a permanent contract. The competition was to make it big and sell out shows at the Thunderbird Hotel or be sent back home with nothing. This group of three, formed by a mother, a well-known singer, survived the competition and became the *Kim Sisters*.¹⁹

It amazed me to discover their story during the first lockdown of the pandemic, in 2020, when I was back in Toronto. Suddenly having to sort through all my belongings after a move, going through old family photos, I was on a search to know more about how Koreans landed here in North America. The Kim Sisters were presented as one of the first Koreans to have achieved the “American dream.”²⁰ Yet, in an interview with one of the members, Sue (Sook-ja) Kim²¹ mentioned how she spoke no English and understood very little for all the decades of her career. She sang to survive, to support her family back home, and now that she had stopped singing, in 1995, she was taking lessons to improve her English. This tiny fact has forever altered the way I watch the recordings of their performances. I can't stop looking at the way their mouths shape out the foreign words. It almost has the same hypnotizing qualities of the mouth that performs in the 1973 play *Not I*, written by Samuel Beckett.²²

Appa's mouth looks crooked when he forces out harsh sounding English words. He gets frustrated when he is misunderstood. He reacts and speaks in a broken rapid fire, and his face squeezes out a nasty

¹⁷ Im, Hyug-Baeg, and Young Ick Lew. *History of South Korea*. Eds. of Encyclopedia Britannica, Britannica.

¹⁸ Cho, *Tastes Like War*, 35-36.

¹⁹ Ryu, Audrey. *Before K-pop Hit U.S. Shores, The Kim Sisters Were An American Musical Sensation*. Asian Americans in Entertainment, Charter Media, 16 June 2014.

²⁰ Prois, Jessica. *For the Original K-Pop Stars, Survival Depended on Making it in America: the Kim's Sisters' success in Las Vegas allowed their family in war-torn Korea to eat*. In History Stories, 03 June 2019. Updated 18 March 2021.

²¹ *Hungarian Interview with Mia Kim of The Kim Sisters 김시스터즈 김민자 for "TRY TO REMEMBER" (Nov. 2017)*. YouTube, uploaded by Musc fo the Few, 17 March 2018.

²² [1973] *"Not I" (Samuel Beckett)*. YouTube, uploaded by marinchr, 17 October 2010.

tone. He married my biological mother in his senior year of university and had me in 1981, a little more than a year after the Gwangju Uprising against the military dictatorship led by General Chun Doo-hwan. Most of the protests were led by university students, close in age to my parents, which started with various *coup d'états* after President Park Chung-hee (1963-1979) was assassinated in 1979. The student body of protesters grew across 55 universities, but ultimately, Gwangju was the last standing ground, boarded up, isolated, and crushed by the army firing weapons at those they were meant to protect.²³

Dictatorships continued until 1992, and at the peak of internal tensions,²⁴ after the Gwangju Uprising, strict laws were eased: national curfews were dropped, bringing all night cafés, bars and clubs to the scene; relaxed laws on what one could wear opened up more shops for clothing and hair; late-night movies and theatre brought entertainment and new opportunities. Working longer hours, building a culture of consumption, feeling ownership over one's wealth, were ways to control by keeping the population busy. "*Ppalli-ppalli!*"²⁵ stems from this period (1960s-'90s).

Former President Chun Doo-hwan, a politician and army general nicknamed the "most vilified military dictator,"²⁶ who "ruled his country with an iron fist" from 1980 to '88, recently died at the age of 90, on November 23, 2021. In 1996, "he had been sentenced to death for his role in the 1979 *coup* and the massacre of demonstrators at the southwestern city of Gwangju the following year but was pardoned in 1997."²⁷ He was unapologetic to his death. Rather, his wife made a statement of apology on his behalf, but it was not well received as it didn't bring any justice to the suffering he had inflicted.

Since the '80s, South Koreans have tasted economic growth. The '86 Asian Games and '88 summer Olympic Games²⁸ brought international attention to Seoul with more opportunities for businesses to strengthen foreign relations. Unfortunately, it also meant that the country had to showcase how well it was doing, which led to razed shantytowns once lining the Han River, dislocating populations that were barely surviving the move to the city in search for jobs. An increased number of abandoned children under guardians who faced poverty, or mixed-race "war-orphans", were put out for adoption. The majority were sent to the United States, Australia, and Western European nations, during a five-year plan for Adoption and Foster Care placed in 1976. As records show by the KAS (Korean Adoption Services),²⁹ the largest adoption rates lasted longer than projected between 1980 and 1990. These were a few reasons for the student riots³⁰ before the Games began.

Writer Jane Jeong Trenka and her sister were adopted into a small Minnesota town by a White family who kept silent about their Korean births, causing Trenka to notice and question her identity. She writes in the *Language of Blood* (2003), "I think I absorbed things from you while in your womb, Umma. How else can I explain it?... But even without language, through the amniotic fluid and the faint light coming through the walls of your belly, I understood the brute emotions of fear and hunger. I absorbed them, made them part of my body, made them part of my life's fabric" (187- 188).³¹

²³ Seymour, Tom. *South Korea confronts legacy of 1980 massacre at this year's Gwangju Biennale*. The Art Newspaper, 29 March 2021, <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2021/03/29/south-korea-confronts-legacy-of-1980-massacre-at-this-years-gwangju-biennale>

²⁴ *South Korea- Timeline*. Asia News, BBC, 1 May 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-15292674>

²⁵ *Ppalli-ppalli! Hurry-hurry! Faster! Quickly!* Is a mentality, a socio-cultural expectation that one conforms to the speed of collective activity.

²⁶ Choe, Sang-Hun. *Chun Doo-hwan, Ex-Military Dictator in South Korea, Dies at 90*. New York Times, 22 November 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/23/world/asia/chun-doo-hwan-dead.html>

²⁷ Choe, Sang-Hun. *Chun Doo-hwan, Ex-Military Dictator in South Korea, Dies at 90*, November 2021,

²⁸ Little, Becky. *The Terrorist Attack That Failed to Derail the 1988 Seoul Olympics*. History Stories, History, 9 February 2018, <https://www.history.com/news/1988-seoul-olympics-north-korea-terrorist-attack>

²⁹ *History of Adoption in Korea*. Korea Adoption Services, https://www.kadoption.or.kr/en/info/info_history.jsp

³⁰ Maass, Peter. *Students Clash with Riot Police at Seoul Campus*. The Washington Post, 10 June 1988, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1988/06/10/students-clash-with-riot-police-at-seoul-campus/4ce4aa10-47c0-4fb9-ae1c-9d48b01f388a/>

³¹ Trenka, Jane Jeong. *The Language of Blood: A Memoir*. Minnesota, Gray Wolf Press, 2003.

It's undeniable that through blood memory, or DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid), *han* is passed down. DNA is made up of molecules that contain the instructions and genetic information an organism needs to develop, live, and reproduce. It is a "key part of reproduction in which genetic heredity occurs through the passing down of DNA from parent(s) to offspring" (Britannica).³² What we look like and how our body functions are determined by a combination of genes, our lifestyles, and our environments. In more recent research, studies show "how events in someone's lifetime can change the way their DNA is expressed and how that change can be passed on to the next generation" through the process of epigenetics—in which "readability or expression of genes is modified without changing the DNA code itself, but rather through tiny chemical tags, which are added to or removed from DNA in response to changes in the environment in which we are living in. These tags turn genes on or off, offering a way of adapting to changing conditions without inflicting a more permanent shift in our genomes" (Henriques, 2019).³³ A growing number of studies support the idea that the effects of trauma can reverberate down the generations, including experiences of hardship or violence that leave their marks. "The more we learn about biological memory through the study of epigenetics, the more we realize how profoundly our past experiences, and even those of our parents and grandparents (and maybe beyond), can influence our lives. Our present-day environment also affects our epigenome, and we are thus influenced by a complex interweaving of our current circumstances and choices, our past experiences, and those of the generations who came before us."³⁴

The Los Angeles Times published that "[a]s a Korean, [*han* is] embedded in your DNA," and "[i]t goes far beyond everyday emotions like happiness or anger. It's a blockage, something that's tangled up and cannot be untied. ...The idea, many insist, is far more easily experienced than explained. ...South Korean poets, novelists and filmmakers have sought to capture the concept for which there is no English equivalent. The word '*han*' has a number of meanings in Korean: it's a common surname and the name of a major river that passes through Seoul. But it's the cultural use of the word, developed through ancient folklore, that has long had many here reeling. Scholars have called it an all-encompassing sense of bitterness, a mixture of angst, endurance and a yearning for revenge that tests a person's soul, a condition marked by deep sorrow and a sense of incompleteness that have fatal consequences. To die because of *han*, experts say, is to die of *hwabyeong*, or anger. ...But *han* has also been described as a sense of hope, an ability to silently endure hardship and suffering in a relatively small nation with a long history of being invaded by more powerful neighbo[u]rs. ...Although there is little agreement among them on a precise definition, scholars acknowledge that *han* is central to the Korean character" (Glionna, 2011).³⁵

This particular description of *han*—how it is felt, the testing of a person's soul and silent endurance, possibly leading to an illness- *hwabyeong* (HB)³⁶- caused by deep anger—fits in to the lived experiences of intergenerational trauma, war, constant change in oppressive leadership, forced assimilation, learning new languages and systems within Korea, on land known to be home, once safe and familiar that changed with its people, both noticeably scarred and divided. But, to think that *han* before these events—*han* during Japanese occupation; *han* during the war and divide; *han* for all the separated families; *han* for the dead without proper burials; *han* for all those adoptees; *han* of those missing and lost; *han* under U.S.-supported military dictatorship; *han* for those exiled and displaced; *han* for the land and water—would be the same

³² Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. *DNA, chemical compound*. <https://www.britannica.com/science/DNA>

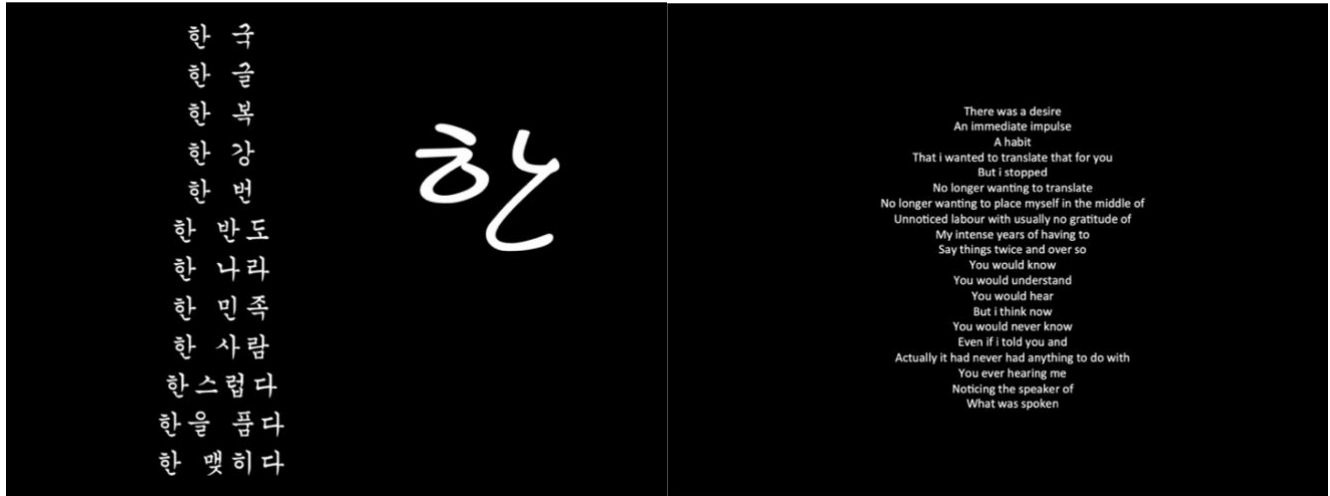
³³ Henriques, Martha. *Can the legacy of trauma be passed down the generations?* BBC, 26 March 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20190326-what-is-ticstics>

³⁴ Schulte, Patricia M. and Judith G. Hall. *Echoes Across Generations*. Edited by Philippe Tortell, Mark Turin and Margot Young. Memory, Peter Wall Institute for Advanced Studies, 2018. JSTOR, https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvbtzpfm.9#metadata_info_tab_contents. Accessed 22 September 2020.

³⁵ Glionna, John M. *A complex feeling tugs at Koreans*. Los Angeles Times, 05 January 2011. <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2011-jan-05-la-fg-south-korea-han-20110105-story.html>. Accessed 20 September 2022.

³⁶ Min, Sung Kil, Shin-Young Suh, and Ki-Jun Song. *Symptoms to Use for Diagnostic Criteria of Hwa-Byung, an Anger Syndrome*. *Psychiatry Investigation*, Vol. 6, No. 1, March 2009, pp.7-12. DOI: 10.4306/pi.2009.6.1.7. Epub 2009 March 31. PMID: 20046367; PMCID: PMC2796033. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2796033/>.

han, easily definable, describable, simplified, translated, communicated, understood... is part of the problem of *han*. One thing is clear, in reading this article. The *han* of Korean folklore and use of the expression before the 20th Century is not the cause of many “reeling”, nor is the Han of Korean bloodlines (used as the surname) or the Han of the named river feeding the capital city the same *han* in their origins. The lack in English as a translating tool becomes visible in such writings, and incorrect translations mirror the divide of our land and our families in the use of the word, *han*—as it continues to be fragmented, isolated, mis/read, and mis/interpreted multiple times in its re/telling.



- 한 Han alone in the Korean form can mean ‘one’, in counting numbers.
- 한국 Hanguk is Korea.
- 한글 Hangeul is the Korean alphabetic system.
- 한복 Hanbok is the traditional Korean clothing.
- 한강 Hangang is the Han River that flows through the capital city of Seoul.
- 한번 Hanbeon is one time, once.
- 한반도 Hanbando refers to the Korean peninsula that is half an island.
- 한나라 Hannara stands for one country, one nation, which also was a political party in South Korea.
- 한민족 Hanminjok is one people, one ethnic group, that of Korea, people of Han, Koreans.
- 한 사람 Han-saram is one person.
- 한스럽다 Hanseureobda is an emotional expression, a combination of resentfulness, regret and sorrow.
- 한을 품다 Haneul-pumda is to bear resentment, to carry *han*.
- 한 맺히다 Han-maejhida is the forming, hardening, blockage of *han* in the body-soul.

I had gone back to Seoul with my father for two years after living in Canada and America amongst golden locks and Barbie dolls, where I played with G.I. Joe action figures and BB guns. While not speaking much Korean, adjusting to the abrupt shift in school—sitting amongst 50 to 70 look-alike kids and being subjected to daily physical punishment for not being able to correctly spell Korean words read out to me—I moved through lines of squatting soldiers in riot gear on the streets, holding the hand of *halmeoni* or aunties, looking straight into the lowered eyes through the slits in the helmets they wore. At home, being passed around available family members to be taken care of, while my father planned his second marriage, I watched the Olympic Games and sang along to *Hand-in-Hand We Stand*.³⁷

³⁷ *Koreana- Hand in Hand (1988 Seoul Olympics Official Song)*. YouTube, uploaded by samsungyepp, 9 August 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cEeH5MiDK8I>

Those two years are the last of my memories of living in Korea. Like every other kid in elementary school, I went to school, then straight to calligraphy *hagwon* (private institute)³⁸ or to piano lessons and computer *hagwon*. The life of a Korean child was full of schools, lessons, and books. I had the benefit of not knowing the language enough, and being labelled the *dumb-child*, as I was left to my own devices with very little expectation on my performance. Repeated strokes of Chinese characters used as *hanja* in a square formation, and painting grass in shades of grey, differed from practicing handwriting in English between three lines from left-to-right with a pencil, and messily painting a scene of yellow sun, blue sky, a pretty home with green grass, in the days of kindergarten. Piano lessons meant I sat in a room by the window in front of a piano with music sheets that were explained to me but not understood, so I would hit the keys with my hands through observation and imagination. Eventually connecting the notes on the page to the keys, I thought I became quite good at it. Piano helped with typing on the keyboard, and without understanding the lessons, both only had to do with my fingers figuring out patterns and rhythms.

Im/migrating to Toronto with broken-English, broken-Korean, and a broken-identity, but with some mathematic and music skills, I was selected by the *cool kids* to join them entering grade 5. While taking ESL (English as a Second Language) for six months, relearning something I thought I once knew; teaching math to my peers as an enriched learner; and applying my music ability to the clarinet, I *blended in*. “I recognized myself differently... I wasn’t supposed to stand out.”³⁹ By middle school, I could speak a little Korean, English, French (mandatory lessons in Ontario, Canada, from grade 4 to 9) and Mandarin (picked up from a Chinese girlfriend my father had between two mothers). Through im/migration I became multilingual, multifaceted, complex and resourceful—as “[w]e employ all kinds of strategies to avoid certain reactions that make us feel ‘out of place’” (Choi xvii).⁴⁰ Yet, it also meant that I was seen as a shy, quiet, introverted type, when these traits were outcomes of constantly learning the language, being unable to speak full expressions.

Here, my own history gets dis/placed in Canada—with *appa’s* two siblings (his younger sister and the youngest brother) having moved here at different times; *halmeoni* joining us after my grandfather’s passing in 1995, only to be buried later in 2007; and the loss of stories about my biological mother— my entire family as I know them have all re/located to parts of Canada and the U.S. Resonating with lines Grace M. Cho (2008) wrote, “I am not interested in merely telling a story about my family history, nor do I claim to even know that history, but rather I experiment with forms of autoethnography that reconceptualize the self as necessarily entangled with other bodies and unconscious experiences” (45-46).⁴¹

³⁸ Kim, Yujin. *Hagwons And Korea’s Obsession With Education*. Creatrip, 2020, <https://www.creatrip.com/en/blog/9064>

³⁹ Choi, Julie. *Prelude: What’s in a Name?* In *Creating A Multivocal Self: Autoethnography as Method*. New York, Routledge, 2017.

⁴⁰ Choi, *Prelude: What’s in a Name?* In *Creating A Multivocal Self: Autoethnography as Method*, xvii.

⁴¹ Cho, Grace M. *Haunting the Korean Diaspora: Shame, Secrecy, and the Forgotten War*. Minneapolis, The University of Minnesota Press, 2008.

THE MEASURE OF HAN

As briefly mentioned in the fragments of my history, I chose methodologies and approaches related to the word and how my body remembered to work with it, in the hopes to better understand *han* and analyse it further. Professor of Korean History at Cambridge University, Michael D. Shin⁴² narrows down three aspects of *han* that are useful here:

1. *han* is ghostly and haunting
2. it can be felt by all Koreans
3. *han* can be inherited, moving from generation to generation

He highlights *han* as a term associated with 이산가족 *separated families* and to traumatic loss of identity, both individual and collective.



Figure 3. mihyun maria kim, with your tongue goes your memory, varying sizes, triptych cushions with braided cotton jersey, satin backing, old clothing as filling, hydrocol cast of Asian face coloured with Canadian soil, ochre and charcoal powder all installed on linen, 2021.

Relational Methodology

In the use of the Korean language, personal pronouns of ‘I’ shift to the collective ‘we’ even if one is speaking about the ‘self’. For instance, pronouns change to ‘our’ when one speaks about certain family members and the country. Instead of saying “my mother” or “my country”, one says, “our mother” and “our country”, which feeds the collective efforts in sustaining the respect and duty embedded in those relationships. The nature of the language is based on hierarchies of relations, and so a relational methodology extends the respect, duty, and honour *han* comes from, directing the ethics and responsibilities in my research-creation processes. Additionally, *han* in text form is in itself a site of a *power-takeover*⁴³ between languages and the history it contains between South Korea-China-Japan-North Korea-USA. I am mindful that “[I]anguages are not strangers to one another, but are, a priori and apart from all historical relationships, interrelated in what they want to express” (Benjamin 14).⁴⁴

Similar to the ways Latin was used in Europe, Chinese characters, 漢字 (simplified 汉字) Hànzì (in Mandarin) was used for written communication and diplomacy, read as hanja 한자 (Korean) or kanji

⁴² A Brief History of Han with Prof. Michael D. Shin. YouTube, uploaded by The Korea Society, 7 May 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zXIZ5O6SBTA>. Accessed 17 June 2022.

⁴³ Choi, Don Mee. *Translation is a Mode= Translation is an Anti-neocolonial Mode*. New York, Ugly Duckling Presse, 2020.

⁴⁴ Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*. Edited by Hannah Arendt. Frankfurt, Suhrkamp Verlag, 1955.

かんじ (Japanese). Hanja is still embedded in formal documents, archives and newspapers. It reflects how my grandparent's generation had to learn and use Japanese, and *appa's* generation mandatorily learned over 2000 characters. Hànzì 恨 hèn⁴⁵ is comprised of 9 strokes and contains the character formations of xīn (heart; mind; soul) with gǎn (blunt; tough, chewy). Hèn is translated as: to blame; to hate; to grumble; to harbour a complaint; to feel dissatisfied; to hold a grudge against; to be bitter; and the desire for revenge and grievance. In comparison, hanja 한 *han* relates to other meanings, but it is important to note how this word written in another form entangled and also used in Korean is perceived by the neighbouring societies, particularly China and Japan, as the associations of 恨 han in hanja, influence how 한 *han* in Korean vernacular script is translated and understood. This further complicates translations.

In/visible *power-takeovers* within the Korean language is better explained in *Translation is a Mode= Translation is an Anti-neocolonial Mode* by Don Mee Choi (2020), who writes:

"The Korean vernacular script hangul was invented in the 15th century by King Sejong and his team of linguists to match the spoken Korean language, and it was intended for women and commoners who did not have access to formal education. What is not well-known about hangul is that it also had another function for the upper class; it was meant 'as an aid to correct pronunciation of Chinese characters' and for producing translated annotations of Chinese texts. In other words, the vernacular script was invented to maintain the class division by having two separate writing systems, keeping women and commoners outside of privileged knowledge, and therefore, outside of power. To put it more bluntly, a power-takeover was part of the vernacular script's necessity, its invention. Therefore, even within my so-called mother-tongue, I was already born with a tongue with a task to translate, but motherless and expelled from power" (6-7).⁴⁶

Walter Benjamin (1955) argued that "any translation which intends to perform a transmitting function cannot transmit anything but information—hence, something inessential." He further theorises by saying, "[t]ranslation is a mode. To comprehend it as mode one must go back to the original, for that contains the law governing the translation: its translatability" and "[t]ranslatability is an essential quality of certain works, which is not to say that it is essential that they be translated; it means rather that a specific significance inherent in the original manifests itself in its translatability" (11-13).⁴⁷

Considering *han's* translatability in English, I turn to Alan Rosen (cited in Park 2011),⁴⁸ who examined "the use of English in [Marianne Hirsch's] *Maus* as he symbolically relates the chosen language to the impossibility of the Holocaust representation... Rosen first makes a distinction between the use of English before the liberation and after the liberation. In Auschwitz, where English is foreign, it functions as a language of romance (his first encounter with Anja) and survival... After the liberation, however, living where English is the native language, Vladek strives to retell his Holocaust trauma through broken and unfitting English" (163). This is again reflected in Choi's (2020) words, "I want to make impossible connections between the Korean and the English, for they are misaligned by neocolonial war, militarism, and neoliberal economy. The two languages have very little in common linguistically, yet they are of one

⁴⁵ Purple Culture. *Meaning of 恨*. <https://www.purpleculture.net/dictionary-details?word=%E6%81%A8>

⁴⁶ Choi, *Translation is a Mode= Translation is an Anti-neocolonial Mode*, 6-7.

⁴⁷ Benjamin, Walter. *The Task of the Translator*. Illuminations: Essays and Reflections. Edited by Hannah Arendt. Frankfurt, Suhrkamp Verlag, 1955, pp.11-25. Translation is a mode and "Translatability is an essential quality of certain works, which is not to say that it is essential that they be translated; it means rather that a specific significance inherent in the original manifests itself in its translatability."

⁴⁸ Park, Hye Su. *Art Spiegelman's Maus: A Survivor's Tale: A Bibliographic Essay*. Published by Ohio State University, An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies, Vol. 29, No. 2, 2011, pp. 146- 165.

tongue, almost. Because in a neocolonial zone, as Deleuze and Guattari [1987, 1923]⁴⁹ have already noted, there is no mother tongue, only a power takeover by a dominant language” (4-5).⁵⁰

For the purpose of utilizing English in this research-creation, the italicized *han* refers to my unpacking of the distinct Korean 한 *han*, and as a translator transmitting its translatability, I perform the role of a rebellious⁵¹ method-maker through multiple non-/translations, operating in an anti-neocolonial mode. A “[r]ebellious methodological moment” is exemplified when Katherine McKittrick (2021)⁵² cites Sylvia Wynter (2006)⁵³ noticing “when globally subordinated peoples move[-] out of their Western assigned places and call[-] into question the structures of a global world system”, and rephrases this by saying, “Wynter *methodologizes* the unfinished possibilities of collective struggle” (41). So, my use of a rebellious method is to be aware of the power-relations of the word and its attachments to race and the collective struggle. And, as David L. Eng & Shinhee Han (2018)⁵⁴ explore “(racial) history through the idea of ‘race as relation,’” I, too, alongside them, “start with the premise that race is not a ‘thing’ as it is commonly understood—an unchanging biological trait, a bodily attribute, a difference of blood quantum or colo[u]r, a static identity, a reflection of a natural order. Rather, we argue that race is a relation: a continuous, modulating historical relationship among subjects mediated by socio-legal processes of social inclusion and exclusion. Race is much about skin colo[u]r and physiological markings as it is about a wide range of disparate social and psychic experiences of segregation and assimilation, absence and belonging, integration and dissociation, inclusion and exclusion.” They further redefine “**race as a relation**, as a process rather than a thing, [they] treat it more as a verb than a noun. For [them], race is a performance rather than an essence” (11-12).

In describing the relationship between writing and performance, I connected with how bell hooks writes about it in *Remembered Rapture: Dancing with Words* (2000) in the following:

“Seduced by the magic of written and spoken words in childhood, I am still transported, carried away by writing and reading. Writing longhand the first drafts of all my work, I read aloud to myself. Performing the words to both hear and feel them, I want to be certain I am grappling with language in a manner where my words live and breathe, where they surface from a passionate place inside me.... I began writing poems. Standing in our living room, during dark southern nights when the earth was shaken by fierce thunderstorms and all electrical power was down, I performed, reciting poems, either those I had written or the works of favorite poets. During those strange and unpredictable nights I practiced the art of making words matter.” hooks continues to emphasise that “writing and performing should deepen the meaning of words, should illuminate, transfix, and transform” (1-2)⁵⁵ which is the very hope of my labour in writing and performing *han*.

In assessing the criticality of the forms my writing takes, both within this thesis paper and performed in my thesis exhibition and its presentations, I look to hooks who quotes Nancy Mairs:

“I believe in the reality of work. Period. I do not distinguish between creative and critical writing because all writing is creative. ...And all writing is critical, requiring the same shifting, selection, scrutiny and judgement of the material at hand. The distinctions are not useful except to people who want to engender an other with whom they can struggle and over whom they can gain power. And because they are useful in

⁴⁹ Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated by Brian Massumi. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2020, pp.75-110. Original 1987.

⁵⁰ Choi, *Translation is a Mode= Translation is an Anti-neocolonial Mode*, 4-5.

⁵¹ McKittrick, Katherine. *Dear Science and Other Stories*. Durham, Duke University Press, 2021.

⁵² McKittrick, *Dear Science and Other Stories*, 41.

⁵³ Wynter, Sylvia. *On How We Mistook the Map for the Territory, and Re-imprisoned Ourselves in Our Unbearable Wrongness of Being, of Désêtre*. In *Not Only the Master's Tools: African American Studies in Theory and Practice*. Edited by Lewis R. Gordon and Jane Anna Gordon. London, Paradigm, 2006, pp.108, 112.

⁵⁴ Eng, David L. and Shinhee Han. *Racial Melancholia, Racial Dissociation: On the Social and Psychic Lives of Asian Americans*. Durham, Duke University Press, 2019.

⁵⁵ hooks, bell. *Remembered Rapture: Dancing with Words*. JAC, Vol. 20, No. 1, Winter 2000, pp.1-8. JAC <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20866297>.

that way, they are dangerous....” hooks comments, “refusing to accept these distinctions was and remains a rebellious act, one that can challenge and disrupt hierarchical structures rooted in a politics of domination both within the academy and in the world outside” (2), which are words that reverberate deep within my mind, body and soul.

While working as a teaching assistant in a course titled: *Language and the Land*, for Professor Susan Blight (an Anishinaabe interdisciplinary artist from Couchiching First Nation), I learned to reflect on how I carry the land. It made me understand that I carry the divided land as I continue to un/learn about the land on which I live on: the “ancestral and traditional territories of the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Haudenosaunee, the Anishinaabe and the Huron-Wendat, who are the original owners and custodians of the land.”⁵⁶

Relational Methodology is informed by Indigenous worldviews and recognizes that “‘we are broken in relationship; we are also healed through relationship’ (Nadjiwan, 2008). Relational theory is both old and relatively recent, drawing on such theorists as Buber, Bakhtin, Dewey, Freire, Gadamer, Gilligan, Heidegger, hooks, Miller, and Noddings (Bingham & Sidorkin, 2004; Llewellyn & Llewellyn, 2015; Schwartz, 2019). To put forward a cohesive frame of reference ‘based on the assumption that relations have primacy over isolated self’; (Bingham & Sidorkin, 2004, 2) Schwartz (2019) articulates instead the necessity to view relationships as central to human development, since in relationship, ‘we expand each other’s world’” (all qtd. in Vaandering 2021, 6). Furthermore, “[r]estorative justice [Vaandering 2015] is fundamentally about the nurturing, sustaining, and repairing of relationships (Hendry, 2009). ... [with research that is] relational, respectful, responsive, ethical, and in support of human flourishing (Reimer, 2021, 3)” (all qtd. in Vaandering, 2021, 6),⁵⁷ which is the type of research-creation this paper and its performed translations attempts to embody.

Interdisciplinary Methods

*Rehearsals for Living*⁵⁸ and its reference, *Dear Science and Other Stories* challenged my ways of understanding and applying rebellious method-making as an everyday practice. McKittrick (2021)⁵⁹ states that “method-making is relation” (46) and it “offer[s] rebellious and disobedient and promising ways of undoing discipline” (41) which I apply through interdisciplinary methods. “The process of seeking is one of inquiry and curiosity... [and s]eeking liberation is rebellious” (48). I seek liberation of *han* and its “unfinished possibilities of collective struggle” (41).

Han has been described to be an “emotional condition that is specific to Korean” (Hong, 2020, 54)⁶⁰ “embedded in your DNA” (Gionna, 2011),⁶¹ “a real but negative core of identity” (Freda, 1999, 5),⁶² and as the “Korean sensibility. [It is] the critical wound of the heart generated by unjust psychosomatic repression,

⁵⁶ Van Heuvelen, Couzyn. *Change to the Indigenous Land Acknowledgement*. Toronto, OCAD University, 12 February 2019. <https://www2.ocadu.ca/internal-update/change-to-the-indigenous-land-acknowledgement>.

⁵⁷ Vaandering, Dorothy and Kristin E. Reimer. Relational Critical Discourse Analysis: A Methodology to Challenge Researcher Assumptions. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, University of Alberta, 01 June 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069211020903>.

⁵⁸ Maynard, Robyn and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson. *Rehearsals for Living*. Toronto, Alfred A. Knopf Canada, 2022.

⁵⁹ McKittrick, *Dear Science and Other Stories*, 37. McKittrick references Sylvia Wynter by noting that “Wynter addresses the tensions between liberatory thought and generic institutionalized politics.”
Wynter, Sylvia. *On How We Mistook the Map for the Territory, and Re-imprisoned Ourselves in Our Unbearable Wrongness of Being, of Désêtre*. In *Not Only the Master’s Tools: African American Studies in Theory and Practice*. Edited by Lewis R. Gordon and Jane Anna Gordon. London, Paradigm, 2006, pp. 108, 112.

⁶⁰ Hong, Cathy Park. *Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning*. New York, One World, 2020.

⁶¹ Gionna, *A complex feeling tugs at Koreans*, 2011.

⁶² Freda, James K. *Discourse on Han in Postcolonial Korea: Absent Suffering and Industrialist Dreams*. Los Angeles, University of California, 1999. <https://legacy.chass.ncsu.edu/jouvert/v3i12/freda.htm>. Accessed on 06 June 2021.

as well as by social, political, economic, and cultural oppression” (Park, 1993, 10 qtd. in Chung & Oh, 2022, 245-246).⁶³

Studies on trauma, (post)memory, (post)history, generational transmission, and ethics of representation are themes of the Holocaust that alone “dominate and even restrict discussion,”⁶⁴ which scholar Marianne Hirsch dismantles in the writing of *Maus* (1992)⁶⁵ by “attempt[ing] innovations through the intersections of more than one theme” to “shed deeper light on the thematic hybridity and complexities of *Maus*” (Park, 2011).⁶⁶ As in this example, “Interdisciplinary Methodologies [is applied in my research-creation] to explain, explore, and story the world, because thinking and writing and imagining across a range of texts, disciplines, histories, and genres unsettles suffocating and dismal and insular racial logics” (McKittrick, 2021, 4).⁶⁷ *Research-Creation* as method is “*curiosity-driven*” and breaks down any barriers or hierarchies between the “artist” and the “researcher” (Loveless, 2019, 1-18)⁶⁸ by using interdisciplinary methods (or as Loveless theorises, *polydisciplinamory*) which “allow[s] for disciplinary acts while rejecting the imperative of monodisciplinary as the only site of rigorous legitimacy” (63-64).

In my *curious-driven* mode, I recognize the limitations and challenges I face in exploring *han* apart from my own attachments to it. bell hooks writes that “[i]t becomes ruthlessly apparent that unless we are able to speak and write in many different voices, using a variety of styles and forms, allowing the work to change and be changed by specific settings, there is no way to converse across borders, to speak to and with diverse communities” and warns that it is “too easy to end up writing in an ethnographic self-serving manner about topics that do not engage [the audience] in a sustained dialogue” (hooks, 2000, 5-6).⁶⁹ In response to this warning, I looked towards how to use autoethnography as a critical method.

Autoethnography as Method

“Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze [graphy] personal experience [auto] in order to understand cultural experience [ethno]. This approach challenges canonical ways of doing research and representing others and treats research as a political, socially-just and socially-conscious act. ...[A]s a method, autoethnography is both process and product” (273)⁷⁰ and “attempts to disrupt the binary of science and art” through research that is “rigorous, theoretical, analytical, emotional, therapeutic, and inclusive of personal and social phenomena. Autoethnographers also value the need to write and represent research in evocative, aesthetic ways,” questioning: “who reads our work, how are they affected by it, and how does it keep a conversation going?” (Ellis, 1995, 2004; Pelias, 2000, cited in Ellis, Adams & Bochner 283-284).⁷¹

In this paper, “[p]articularly useful are Alisa Lebow’s notion of ‘indirect memory’ and ‘transitive autobiography,’ in which imprints of the past can be found everywhere, while the autobiographical subject herself is unlocatable. Ann Cheng’s idea of ‘anti-documentary autobiography,’ which presents the kind of ‘evidence that register loss, even as it recognizes the unrecognizability of the content of loss’” (Cho 45-

⁶³ Edited by Chung, Edward Y.J. and Jea Sophia Oh. *Emotions in Korean Philosophy and Religion: Confucian, Comparative, and Contemporary Perspectives*. Camden, Palgrave Macmillan, 2022.

⁶⁴ Park, *Art Spiegelman’s Maus: A Survivor’s Tale: A Bibliographic Essay*, 146- 165.

⁶⁵ Hirsch, Marianne. *Family Pictures: Maus, Mourning, and Post-Memory*. *Discourse*, vol. 15, no. 2, 1992-93, pp. 3-29.

⁶⁶ Park, *Art Spiegelman’s Maus: A Survivor’s Tale: A Bibliographic Essay*, 146- 165.

⁶⁷ McKittrick, *Dear Science and Other Stories*, 4.

⁶⁸ Loveless, Natalie. *How to Make Art at the End of the World: A Manifesto for Research-Creation*. Durham & London, Duke University Press, 2019.

⁶⁹ hooks, *Remembered Rapture: Dancing with Words*, 1-8.

⁷⁰ Ellis, Carolyn, Tony E. Adams and Arthur P. Bochner. *Autoethnography: An Overview. Historical Social Research/ Historische Sozialforschung*. *Conventions and Institutions from a Historical Perspective/ Konventionen und Institutionen in historischer Perspektive*, vol. 36, no. 4, 2011, pp. 273-290. JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23032294>.

⁷¹ Ellis, Adams and Bochner, *Autoethnography: An Overview*, 283-284.

46)⁷² also supports the ways of storying *han*. As gestures within the exhibition, I looked toward Performative Autoethnography (PA) that describe performative as “movement, motion, fluidity, fluctuation, all those restless energies that transgress boundaries and trouble closure and more specifically to the experiencing body situated in time, place, and history.” PA research “is in the qualitative tradition which focuses on human intentions, motivations, emotions, and actions, rather than generating demographic information and general description of interaction” (Sughrua 602-603).⁷³

Forms of storying and storytelling can be autoethnographic. Donna Haraway states that “[s]tories are much bigger than ideologies,⁷⁴ which aligns with how Natalie Loveless (2019) says:

“Stories are powerful. The stories that we believe, the stories that we live into shape our daily practices, from moment to moment. They have the power to promise some futures and conceal others. They encourage us to see some things and not others.... Judith Butler (1988, 1990), among others, has taught us in the context of gender- and sexuality-based violence, require telling and retelling. The work of telling new stories, or new versions of stories that need retelling/recrafting, is propositional; it requires ongoing engagement and a willingness to denaturalize the social, disciplinary, ideological structures within which we are embedded.... [Thomas] King[’s *The Truth about Stories* 2003] invites us to think about stories as material-semiotic events that impact—indeed, configure—worlds,” and “to attend carefully to which stories stick; which stories, by performing themselves as compelling objects of belief—being convincingly retold—have the sticky staying power to change how one sees the world, and thus how one acts within it. Through repetition and direct address, King invites us to be attentive to which stories we are crafted out of as well as which we participate in crafting; which stories we teach, and which stories we are taught by” (King cited in Loveless 19-21).⁷⁵

In the sticky mess of re/telling a story about *han*, I am empowered by Katherine McKittrick (2021) in that “[t]his story hopes to face harm without harming while also recognizing that challenging biocentric logics is a painful and incomplete process. This story seeks to hono[u]r [IBPOC] ways of knowing by observing and critiquing the injustices of racism without revering and repeating and describing racial violence (description is not liberation)” (128).⁷⁶ Autoethnographies developed from colonized or economically subordinated people are “used to address and disrupt power in research, particularly a[n] (outside) researcher’s right and authority to study (exotic) others... Reflexive ethnographies document ways a researcher changes as a result of doing fieldwork” (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011, 278).⁷⁷

Natalie Loveless (2019) cites Judith Butler, stating that “the intersection of theory and everyday language is crucial to telling and re-imagining not only what we can say, but also who we can be”, and continues to cite “literary theorist Jane Gallop’s 2002 *Anecdotal Theory*” which “powerfully refigures the feminist adage ‘the personal is political,’ asking what taking psychoanalysis seriously (and deconstruction) does to our understanding of the political work of the personal *within* academic spaces. Specifically, Gallop asks how a theory of the unconscious (Freud) and the Real (Lacan) reorients the meaning of the personal *within* the political. In order to do this, she proposes that we look to the structure of ‘anecdote,’ as a specific storytelling form... [and] first to anchor one’s theory within the unpredictable affective terrain of daily life” (Gallop cited in Loveless, 2019, 65-66).⁷⁸

“Stories speak. Stories imagine. Stories bring worlds into being, making up the fabric that is stitched together by the symbolic and the material, colo[u]ring possibilities with our desires, and inviting us as participants in the work of co-creating futures... As a storied form of voicing knowledge claims that works through/on the location of the scholar, autoethnography offers possibilities for making visible the contours

⁷² Cho, *Haunting the Korean Diaspora: Shame, Secrecy, and the Forgotten War*, 45-46.

⁷³ Sughrua, William M. *The Core of Critical Performative Autoethnography*. *Qualitative Inquiry*, vol. 26(6), 2020, pp. 602-632.

⁷⁴ Haraway cited in Loveless, *How to Make Art at the End of the World: A Manifesto for Research-Creation*, 19.

⁷⁵ Loveless, *How to Make Art at the End of the World: A Manifesto for Research-Creation*, 19-21.

⁷⁶ McKittrick, *Dear Science and Other Stories*, 128.

⁷⁷ Ellis, Adams and Bochner, *Autoethnography: An Overview*, 273- 290.

⁷⁸ Loveless, *How to Make Art at the End of the World: A Manifesto for Research-Creation*, 65-66.

of the personal, the political, and the professional, inviting us as participants to critically examine the terrains of power that disenfranchise the postcolonial voice, and the many possibilities of resistance that are opened up through our participation in the telling of stories... On one hand, the ongoing work of autoethnography in challenging White/Western/Eurocentric imperialism as the naturalized site of knowledge production opens up sites of knowledge productions to claims made from subaltern sites in the global South, interrogating contemporary forms of White settler colonialism (U.S. and Canadian occupation of native land; Israeli occupation of Palestine). On the other hand, autoethnography offers a critically reflexive tool for decolonizing the new colonialisms that are propped up by postcolonial articulations, by the hegemony of culturalist discourses (such as ‘Asian values’ in Singapore and other parts of East Asia) that reproduce authoritarian power, especially amid new forms of colonialisms in postcolonial contexts... and the ongoing oppressions across postcolonial sites... decolonizing autoethnography creates invitational spaces for co-creating possibilities for a socially just world” (Dutta, 94-96).⁷⁹ But, in the telling, “[t]here are some things we can just keep for ourselves. Somethings they cannot have and know. We don’t need to measure [IBPOC] life and its possibilities. What it feels like is good enough. Maybe we are not an impossibility. Maybe we are, in the words of Aimé Césaire, ‘poetically beautiful’ and therefore possible outside the terms of what they think we are” (McKittrick 74).⁸⁰

“The question of stories and storytelling illuminate the method of collaboration... sharing stories engenders creative rigorous radical theory... sharing stories is creative rigorous radical theory. The act of sharing stories is the theory and the methodology. The process is difficult to make sense of in terms of the process and praxis of collaboration as affective possibility” (McKittrick 73).⁸¹

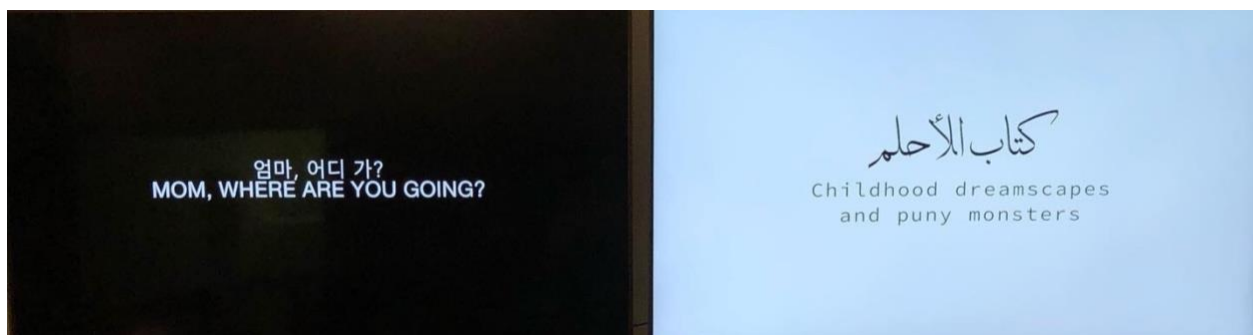


Figure 4. mihyun maria kim and Youssef El Helou. *i dream in my language*, 3mins. 05sec., 2-channel diptych video installation, 2022.

Collaborating and sharing stories of our lived experiences in response to Shirin Neshat’s first major exhibition in Canada—titled *Land of Dreams* at MOCA (Museum of Contemporary Art), Toronto, which ran between 10 March and 31 July 2022—artist Youssef El Helou and I had re/considered the space of our dreams. Neshat had travelled across New Mexico in 2019 “visiting towns and communities to photograph subjects ask[ing] them to each share a recent dream. The result [was] an installation of 111 portraits, many of which include illustrations and Farsi texts with the sitter’s name, date, and place of birth. The accompanying two-channel video installation, also filmed in New Mexico, [was] a narrative diptych that follow[ed] an Iranian woman, Simin—Neshat’s alter ego—as she visit[ed] a small American community to photograph the local residents and record their dreams.”⁸² Simin meets with a final dreamer who is on the

⁷⁹ Dutta, Mohan J. *Autoethnography as Decolonization, Decolonizing Autoethnography: Resisting to Build Our Homes*. Cultural Studies <-> Critical Methodologies, vol. 18(1), 2018, pp. 94-96.

⁸⁰ McKittrick, *Dear Science and Other Stories*, 74.

⁸¹ McKittrick, *Dear Science and Other Stories*, 73.

⁸² Paynter, November. *Shirin Neshat: Land of Dreams*. Toronto, Museum Of Contemporary Art, 10 March-31 July 2022. <https://moca.ca/exhibitions/shirin-neshat-2022/>.

bed, seemingly between sleep and death. A portrait photograph is taken of the dreamer, but unlike the others who were awake to tell their stories, this dreamer remains resting. This particular moment collapses the desires and fears of those interviewed—hardly different from Simin’s own—causing cultural and political divisions to crumble. Simin finds herself lost and invisible in the space where the dream disappears or is destroyed. A secret note, found hidden between directions on how to interpret dreams in *The Colony*, warns that “the dream catcher may never enter the dreamer’s dream” and yet Simin finds herself in the dream of one dreaming, or in the blur between a dream and her own reality. She is told to get out and leave *The Colony*, and so, she drives off into the desert’s dusty landscape.

Youssef El Helou and I worked on a 3-minute diptych, two-channel video installation titled, “*i dream in my language*”, with subtitles: “*Childhood dreamscapes and puny monsters*” and “*mom, where are you going?*” Although our lived experiences and the places we come from are vastly different, we both found ourselves here in Toronto questioning the ways in which our past experiences impacted the ways we related to our present situations. The affective remains of past traumas and inherited perspectives made clear that the temporal space of our dreams could possibly be the space for collaboration as an invitation towards each other to share in the storytelling. Our collaboration was strengthened in finding commonality in the remaining affects, of one who felt loss(es) from the past, and through the visual representation of these affects our stories could merge to mirror each other’s modes of suspended grief.

During a memoir writing workshop with Grace M. Cho,⁸³ memoirs were explained to be the commercial equivalent of autoethnography, and the reading of them took a large portion of this re/search: Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Kim Hyesoon, Don Mee Choi, Cathy Park Hong, Grace M. Cho, E.J. Koh, Jane Jeong Trenka, Julie Choi, Myung Mi Kim, Elizabeth Rosner, bell hooks, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson with Robyn Maynard, Franz Fanon, Toni Morrison, Audre Lorde, Dionne Brand, Ann Cvetkovich, Clarice Lispector and Maggie Nelson, to name a few.

⁸³ Grace M. Cho is the author of *Tastes Like War* (Feminist Press, 2021), a finalist for the 2021 National Book Award in nonfiction and the winner of the 2022 Asian Pacific American Literature Award in adult nonfiction. She is Professor of Sociology and Anthropology at the College of Staten Island, CUNY. The *Conversation with Grace M. Cho, the Author of Tastes Like War* was organized by the Centre for the Study of Korea and co-sponsored by the Dr. David Chu Program in Asia-Pacific Studies at the Asian Institute, the Department of Sociology, the Women and Gender Studies Institute, the Department of English, and the Centre for the Study of the United States at the Munk School, University of Toronto, 30 September 2022.
<https://www.humanities.utoronto.ca/events/conversation-grace-m-cho-author-tastes-war>.

Theresa Hak Kyung Cha



Figure 5. Theresa Hak Kyung Cha. (3 Stills) *Permutations*. 10min, b&w, silent, 16mm film on video.1976.

Interdisciplinary artist, writer, and filmmaker, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictée* (1981)⁸⁴ is classified as an autobiography, but is "more a bricolage of memoir, poetry, essay, diagrams, and photography" (Hong, 2020, 154).⁸⁵ The book is "about mothers and martyrs, revolutionaries and uprisings. Divided into nine chapters named after the Greek muses, *Dictée* documents the violence of Korean history through the personal stories of Cha's mother and the seventeen-year-old martyr Yu Guan Soon, who led the protest against the Japanese occupation of Korea and then died from being tortured by Japanese soldiers in prison...Cha avoids traditional storytelling in favour of a structure that [Hong] can only describe as a script for a structuralist film. Scenes are described as stage directions. Poems are laid out like intertitles. Film stills are interspersed with blank pages that are meant to look like a refulgent white film screen...The reader is a detective, puzzling out her own connections." In the use of language, Hong expresses that "English turned an experience that should be in the minor key to a major key; there was an intimacy and melancholy in Korean that were lost when [she] wrote in English... Cha spoke [her] language by indicating that English was not her language, that English could never be a true reflection of her consciousness, that it was as much an imposition on her consciousness as it was a form of express. And because of that, *Dictée* felt true" (Cha, 1982, 2001 cited in Hong, 2020, 154-155).⁸⁶

Anne Anlin Cheng (2000) adds that "*Dictée* is generally accepted as Cha's autobiography, although it is hard to pinpoint what it is exactly that makes this text an autobiography, since we are not offered a name or a consistent narrating voice. If anything, this text exhibits a great deal of resistance toward autobiography as a traditional genre where an author might appear to be retrieving or chronicling her life. *Dictée* does not feature a central narrating voice, nor does it offer chronological events. Instead it speaks through multiple, disembodied voices; borrowed citations that range from film scripts to epistolary exchanges; pieces of uncaptioned photographs scattered throughout the text. Pressed to describe its tonal quality, one would have to depict it as a cross between Samuel Beckett and Marguerite Duras: concision laced with lyricism."⁸⁷

Writers, like Cha, aroused and activated a place of connectivity and honest expression of lived experiences within a multivocal language, and such stories stuck with me, as much as those within the family. Cathy Park Hong in *Minor Feelings* tells vivid details of Cha's mysterious murder, in 1981. Haunting details—of Cha sending an image collection of hands for an exhibition on that particular day, and how her family in search for her body found her pair of gloves on the floor, still filled with the shape of her hands—have marked me, in a way, forever, unconsciously, as most intergenerational transmissions of trauma do,

⁸⁴ Cha, Theresa Hak Kyung. *Dictée*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, University of California Press, 2001. Original 1982.

⁸⁵ Hong, *Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning*, 154.

⁸⁶ Hong, *Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning*, 154-155.

⁸⁷ Cheng, Anne Anlin. *History In/Against the Fragment: Theresa Hak Kyung Cha*. In *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Grief*. New York, Oxford University Press, 2001, pp.139-168.

like the image of the lips of the Kim Sisters, the gloves of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha will forever shape my memories and telling of *han*. Theresa. My grandmother had been named Teresa, as a Catholic, at some point, and used it as her English name once she came to Canada. 1981, the year 1981, when Cha was murdered, the year I was born. Set of coincidences that make me feel great responsibility to continue re/telling.

Francis Bacon



Figure 6. L: Francis Bacon. (Detail) *Study after Velazquez's Portrait of Pope Innocent X*. 153 x 118 cm. Oil on canvas. 1953. C: Sergei Eisenstein. (Still) *Battleship Potemkin*. 75mins. Film. 1925. C-R: Francis Bacon. (Detail) *Two Figures*. 152.5 x 116.5 cm. Oil on canvas. 1953. R: Muybridge. Reproductions found in Francis Bacon's studio.

Locating *han* as breath in the body (practiced widely as method of body mapping):⁸⁸ as repressed set of feelings forming a stone in the heart; anger and sorrow in the lungs; suffocating; silence; the self-talk, I consider the mouth and tongue as a site for *han*. In an interview with David Sylvester,⁸⁹ Francis Bacon talks about his fascination of the “movements of the mouth, the shape of the mouth, and the teeth.” And the “glitter and colour that comes from the mouth”. His obsession with Sergei Eisenstein’s 1925 film, *Battleship Potemkin*, and the Odessa sequence of the nurse screaming, added to the unsuccessful attempts to capture the mouth screaming, as much as it smiling. Luigi Ficacci (2003)⁹⁰ provides a background narrative of the life of Francis Bacon and organizes his paintings in categories titled: “the expression of horror”, “the sensation of transport of the human body” and “the scene of the tragedy”. Although the text has interpretations of the painted images, I was interested in the choice of materiality, sequencing, storying of the figures, and the depicted gestures. Bacon’s use of source materials, such as film, photography and live models, in creating his diptychs and triptychs hold powerful expressive qualities that inform parts of the methods I use in creating imagery, narrative and sequences.

⁸⁸ Gastaldo, Denise, Lilian Magalhães, Christine Carrasco and Charity Davy. *Body-Map Storytelling as Research: Methodological considerations for telling the stories of undocumented workers through body mapping*. Toronto, Creative Commons, 2012. <http://www.migrationhealth.ca/undocumented-workers-ontario/body-mapping>.

⁸⁹ *Francis Bacon Fragments Of A Portrait- interview by David Sylvester*. YouTube, uploaded by Janus Zeewier, 18 April 2013. Original Interview 18 September 1966. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xoFMH_D6xLk.

⁹⁰ Ficacci, Luigi. *Francis Bacon*. Cologne, Taschen, 2003.

STICKY STORIES

Tracing *han*

Tracing the cause of *han* and its association with a loss of identity, both individual and collective, Minsoo Kang reminds us that “[t]he idea of a Korean character shaped by foreign invasions is another modern myth, one still circulating today. The Korean peninsula was indeed subject to a series of terrible calamities through the 20th century, starting with colonisation by Japan in 1910. But in the previous period of the Joseon dynasty (1392-1910), during its more than 500-year span, it experienced just two major foreign invasions—by the Japanese in 1592-98, and by the Manchus in 1627 and 1636. While those events were no doubt terrible and traumatic, two such events in 500 years hardly constitute ‘constant invasions’. By comparison, one could look at how many times the Italian peninsula was invaded since the 14th century, or Poland or India, for that matter” (Kang, 2022, 7).⁹¹

Then, we can begin with civil rights activist Ham Sok-hon (1901-1989) who “sought to affirm the identity of Koreans at a time when Korea had fallen prey to Japanese imperialism. Ham believed that discovering one’s identity, especially as a colonized nation, was extremely important as it also determined one’s destiny Ham [Sok-hon]’s *Queen of Suffering* [A Spiritual History of Korea 1985] demonstrates much of the historical ethos felt by anti-colonial nationalists in Korea and is an early effort to write Korea’s history ‘in a language of suffering’. In it Ham’s emphasis is on the pathos of Korea’s subjections: ‘All Korea has is poverty and suffering.... For Ham the misery he encounters at the acme of Korea’s historical failures demonstrates that there is a shared and inviolable Korean essence, one that is confirmed in the collective experience of suffering—a real but negative core of identity’. Ham’s language of suffering shaped the “colonial origins of the modern aesthetic of *han*” (Ham cited in Freda, 1999, 5).⁹²

It is argued that a Japanese artist and art theorist Yanagi Muneyoshi (1889-1961), “[w]hile he was a vociferous anti-imperialist who opposed the domination of Korea, inadvertently contributed to the imperial project by buying into the historical myth of *naisen ittai* and elaborating on the essential sorrow of the Korean people from their sorry conditions. Because Korea was such a backward and primitive place, its common people produced works (mainly pottery) of unrefined but authentic beauty that were filled with profound sadness... creating a sublime effect he called the ‘beauty of sorrow’ (*hiai no bi*)” (Kang, 2022, 5).⁹³

Here, in the attempt at locating *han*’s beginnings, there is already a split: the *han* of the people responding to the conditions of colonialism and loss of collective identity versus *han* described by the colonizer as an essential profound sadness. These perspectives are not apart from each other, but rather shape the narration of *han* inside-and-out.

The first significant expression of collective loss was in the spring of 1926 upon the death of the last Emperor of Korea, Sunjong (Emperor Yunghui 용희제, King Yi, ruling from 1907-1910), second son of Emperor Gojong (king of Joseon Dynasty between 1864-1907). Masses poured out towards the Deoksugung Palace to mourn⁹⁴ not only the loss of their king, but the belief of an end to the 5000 years of Korean history.⁹⁵ Conditions of collective suffering continued through the Korean War, displacing people. “When the armistice was signed in 1953, it spelled out a contract between the United States and North Korea that the war would be resolved with a peace treaty, and the divided country would be put back together within six months. Over a third of the surviving population had been separated from their loved ones because they ended up on opposite sides of the border, and the armistice gave them a promise that

⁹¹ Kang, Minsoo. *The problem with ‘han’ 한恨*. Edited by Pam Weintraub. Aeons, 18 March 2022. <https://aeon.co/essays/against-han-or-why-koreans-are-not-defined-by-sadness>. Accessed 17 June 2022.

⁹² Freda, *Discourse on Han in Postcolonial Korea: Absent Suffering and Industrialist Dreams*, 5.

⁹³ Kang, *The problem with ‘han’ 한恨*, 2022.

⁹⁴ *(Rare) Funeral of Emperor Sunjong of Korean Empire (1926)*. YouTube, uploaded by transformingArt, 15 March 2008. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k7xGg5GOfWU>. Accessed 17 June 2022.

⁹⁵ *A Brief History of Han with Prof. Michael D. Shin*. YouTube, 7 May 2019.

they would soon be reunited” (Cho, 2021, 27).⁹⁶ False hopes of being “put back together” only intensified the affect of *han* in suspended grief.

⁹⁶ Cho, *Tastes Like War*, 27.



Figure 7. mihyun maria kim. (Installation view) Activation of garments of mourning 13 April 2023.

Time Dis/placed

d = rt distance equals rate times time;

s = d/t speed equals distance divided by time;

t = d/s time equals distance divided by speed

When I am anywhere else in the world, I am now 41. In Korea, 42.

Koreans turn 1 year old, on the 3rd month after birth,

once they are safe and healthy, counting the start of life, 9 months in the mother's womb.

Koreans will follow the rest of the world, for convenience, and to lessen confusion.

Starting June of this year, 2023, Koreans too will neglect counting the time being formed.

*it is 9:33pm here in Toronto
it is next day, tomorrow morning, 11:33am there in Seoul
a nonstop flight from here to there is 14h 55min afar
of a distance Google Maps somehow calculates to 10,594km
that my heart-mind tells me is more like the distance of at least 70 years from the 38th parallel
or the speed of 113 years since the loss of the Korean language having to be relearnt by its people
divided by 3 generations, 92 years since my halmeoni's birth, since I can't remember my grandfather's
there is no formula, no calculation that brings me closer in the gap
only the speed of circling in this space changes from time to time*

"You come back into the room
where you've been living
all along. You say:
What's been going on
while I was away? Who
got those sheets dirty, and why
are there no more grapefruit?
Setting foot on the middle ground
between body and word, which contains,
or is supposed to, other
people. You know it was you
who slept, who ate here, though you don't
believe it. I must have taken time off, you think, for the buttered
toast and the love and maybe both
at once, which would account for the
grease on the bedspread, but no,
now you're certain, someone else
has been here wearing
your clothes and saying
words for you, because there was no time off."⁹⁷

"XXX

J'ignore quelle vérité peut contenir

⁹⁷ Atwood, Margaret. *YOU COME BACK*. In *Morning in the burned house*. New York, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, 1995.

*La fausse non-vérité du triste sens du monde vu,
 Ou si cette plante fleurie portera aussi un fruit
 Capable d'atteindre la réalité véritable et inconnue.
 Mais pareil à l'arc-en-ciel qui n'occupe ni terre ni ciel
 Dans le frais ruissellement de la pluie apaisée
 Un Espoir, qui n'est ni réel ni illusoire, traverse
 Le moment où notre douleur cesse.
 Comme la douleur est éprouvée – et éprouvée comme un mal
 L'espoir a une meilleure garantie que d'être simplement espéré;
 Comme la douleur est éprouvée comme une chose à bannir du sentir
 C'est la nature qui a poussé l'homme à rechercher,
 Le temps étant le temps et sa mesure l'âge et la
 peine
 Un abri plus sûr que les hasards de la durée.^{98 99}*

Alan Lightman considers time in *Einstein's Dreams* (1993)¹⁰⁰ asking us to:

Suppose time is a circle, bending back on itself. The world repeats itself, precisely, endlessly; Time is like a flow of water, occasionally displaced by a bit of debris, a passing breeze; For in this world, time has three dimensions, like space. Just as an object may move in three perpendicular directions, corresponding to horizontal, vertical, and longitudinal, so an object may participate in three perpendicular futures. Each time is true, but the truths are not the same; Time flows more slowly the farther from the cent[re] of earth; Time is visible in all places; Consider a world in which cause and effect are erratic. Sometimes the first precedes the second, sometimes the second the first. Or perhaps cause lies forever in the past while effect in the future, but future and past are entwined; Contemplate the texture of time. Hypothetically, time might be smooth or rough, prickly or silky, hard or soft. But in this world, the texture of time happens to be sticky.

*It is the year 2023 for everyone here
 To be more exact, 13 February 2023, at the time of writing this
 It is still 2023 in South Korea now
 But 1st month on the 23rd day on the South Korean Lunar Calendar, different from any other*

⁹⁸ Pessoa, Fernando. XXX. In *Poèmes Anflais*. Édition Bilingue. Paris, Édition Points, 2011. Original 2007. pp.121.

⁹⁹ XXX

I do not know what truth the shown untruth
 Of this sad sense of the seen world may own,
 Or if this flowered plant bears also a fruit
 Unto the true reality unknown.
 But as the rainbow, neither earth's nor sky's,
 Stands in the dripping freshness of lulled rain,
 A hope, not real yet not fancy's, lies
 Athwart the moment of our ceasing pain.
 Somehow, since pain is felt, yet felt as ill,
 Hope hath a better warrant than being hoped;
 Since pain is felt as aught we should not feel,
 Man hath a Nature's reason for having groped,
 Since Time was time and age and grief his
 measures,

¹⁰⁰ Lightman, Alan. *Einstein's Dreams*. New York, Vintage Contemporaries, 1993.

Yet again, I can say
It is the 113th year, there, in North Korea, on the Juche Calendar
Of days and months I have no counts to
As my beliefs and beginnings are different from there
The North and South, the South and North are
1910 years apart on this day
Distanced 250km wide, 4km apart
I walked 17-28km each day of the Camino de Santiago
At a rate of a slower pace than many others
At about 3-4km an hour
With a pack over 18kg with water and all my belongings to survive
At the speed of my own two legs, and the hardness of each step
The South and North are just over an hour apart
Yet, there is no getting there with my two feet
I am lands, waters, generations far
far away

섬 Seom (Island)

사람들 사이에 섬이 있다. There is an island between people.

그 섬에 가고 싶다. I want to visit that island.

[Jung 1978, 2009, translation mine]¹⁰¹

Island was first published in a collection of poems written by Jung in 1978. It moves away from the nihilistic trends of the postwar period and explores a place that transcends the pain of reality of individuals and of Koreans as a whole. The poem can be interpreted with two readings: first, the island as a place of connection between people, or the self and one's dreams, creating hope and possibilities for connectedness, belonging, and a celebration of being; second, it can read as the opposing place of isolation, of one being removed from the realities of pain and suffering, conflicts and tensions of the external world, which focuses on the challenges of connecting with the self or with others.

¹⁰¹ Jung, Hyon-Jong. *Island*. Seoul, Yul-Lim Won Press, 2009.



Figure 8. mihyun maria kim. (Installation view) Activation of cast Onggi being taken to the Fondu cement 38th parallel interpretation.

Waters

“In 1923, Shinjuku, my grandmother Kumiko was born Japanese. She was born the year of the Great Kantō Earth-quake that reduced Tokyo to ashes. False rumors of Koreans poisoning wells, looting, and mobilizing emerged that afternoon in Yokohama and Kawasaki and spread to the northernmost island of Hokkaido. She was born the year of the ensuing Kantō Massacre. Japanese mobs armed with swords and bamboo spears murdered six thousand Koreans. Children’s necks sliced open. Parents nailed down, tortured. Bodies like fish stacked onshore. To pass as Japanese, they asked survivors to say what the Korean tongue betrayed—a price: ‘15 yen, 50 sen.’ Jugo en, goju ssen” (Koh, 2020, 103).¹⁰²

The Little Mermaid¹⁰³
03 July 2019
Halle Bailey

When they tell
the Black girl
she can’t play mermaid

ask them,
what their people know
about holding their breath
underwater.

Tuesday, 28 September, 2021

¹⁰² Koh, E.J. *The Magical Language of Others: a memoir*. Portland, Tin House, 2020.

¹⁰³ *The Little Mermaid*. Livestreamed on Instagram, @sharonnorwoodartist, 15 September 2022.

Bodies¹⁰⁴

Woven bodies

Performative bodies

Trapped bodies

Invisible bodies

Activated bodies

Dismissed bodies

Marked bodies

Buried bodies

Pushed bodies

Pulled bodies

Dug bodies

Thrown out bodies

Inside bodies

Interior bodies

Outside bodies

Outlier bodies

Formed bodies

Empty bodies

Cured bodies

Prepared bodies

Sung bodies

Sunken bodies

Sinking bodies

Bodies of waters

¹⁰⁴ Written and printed as part of an 8-page-zine for a collective project, *In Relation*, walking along the traces of invisible Russell Creek, buried under streets of Toronto, with peers Naomi Daryn Boyd and Josephine Norman.



Figure 9. mihyun maria kim. (Installation view) Activation of gathering fragments of purposefully broken Onggi in the liminal/institutional space.

Exhaustion as Method

To place *han* in relation to *saudade* I walked the Camino de Santiago Portugués Coastal Route for a consecutive 15 days, in August 2022, from Porto (Portugal) to Santiago de Compostela (Spain).¹⁰⁵ Walking on foot with my research notes and books, I covered an average of 17 to 28 km per day. Starting each day with the intention to keep *han* and *saudade* in mind, I felt alone with my thoughts half the time. The other half, I was joined by other pilgrims enroute, sharing the life events that brought them there, most with a hard decision to make or a life changing event to return back to. The route provided time and space to process. The land released the weight of my thoughts, while reaching physical limits built my self-trust in knowing how to gage the strength of my body and when to push or take a break. I considered bodies that travelled distances without the option of rest. I looked out to the waters and imagined bodies transported.

Like *han*, *saudade* is an untranslatable word, of Galician-Portuguese origin. It is “presented as the key feeling of the Portuguese soul. The word comes from the Latin plural *solitates*, ‘solitudes,’ but its derivation was influenced by the idea and sonority of the Latin *salvus*, ‘in good health’, ‘safe.’... Drawn from a genuine suffering of the soul, *saudade* became, for philosophical speculation, particularly suitable for expressing the relationship of the human condition to temporality, finitude, and the infinite. ... Endowed with a structural ambiguity, this feeling is located at the intersection of two affections that present absence: the memory of a

¹⁰⁵ refer to Appendix A

cherished past that is no more and the desire for this happiness, which is lacking. Pleasure and anxiety: the result is a displaced, melancholic state that aspires to move beyond the finitude of the moment and the errancy of distance.... *Saudade* is not something that is merely melancholy and solitary, felt at a distance from the beloved, but is also felt on meeting the beloved, as if all the accumulated pain were cathartically released in an instant of ecstasy, the instant of salvation” (Santoro, 2013).¹⁰⁶

Saudade operates differently in Brazil vs. Portugal, ports of Lisbon vs. the students of Coimbra. The difference of histories and meanings, in relation to *han*, collapsed when I listened to *fado* musicians in Lisbon and Coimbra presented as musical narration/voice performance. *Fado* derived from the Latin *fatum* (fate or destiny, literally “what has been spoken”) is a musical cultural expression sung by a single person—the *fadista* (only men in Coimbra, either woman or man in Lisbon)—generally along with a Portuguese guitar that is distinguished by the designed shell (Lisboa) or tear-shape (Coimbra) on the end. *Saudade* is one of the most popular themes of *fado* alongside nostalgia, jealousy, and short stories. I thought of Korean *Arirang* and *Pansori*¹⁰⁷ in relation to *fado* in the ways of storytelling that talked about journeys, displacement, farewells, and returns. The longing of people and places and the soul revealed. The presence of an instrument and position of the standing singer sets the stage in similar arrangements, and it brought questions around the pace of breath/voice and bodily gestures expressing these untranslatable feelings. Both can refer to a sense of loneliness and incompleteness, but the greatest difference is that *saudade* can be felt for something that might never have happened and can be further expressed as “*matar saudade*” (“to kill *saudades*”)—used when one doesn’t want to miss something or someone anymore.

In order to track the harbouring or release of *han* in my own body, I charted various numbers of days to train self-awareness. The first two sets were of 21-days, the minimum number of days required to build new habits, in which I made note of named feelings, their cause(s), the locations, the triggers and colours or images that came to mind. Then, for another 21-days I casted a Korean *onggi* (fermentation clay pot), that was purchased and shipped from Seoul to Los Angeles to Toronto re/tracing the migration of my family members. The *onggi* was a huggable size that covered the torso, and the weight of the mold with casting materials in it was the maximum weight my two arms could possibly work with at the speed of the hardening materials. It was hard to say I felt *han* but the repetition of intentional performance and exhausting parts of my body caused various release of feelings accumulated during the research.

¹⁰⁶ Santoro, Fernando. *SAUDADE (Portuguese)*. Edited by Barbara Cassin, Emily Apter, and Jacques. In *Dictionary of untranslatables: a philosophical lexicon*. New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 2013. JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt5hhntn>.

¹⁰⁷ Mecorio, F., F. Santangelo, A.G. Gucciardo. *The Korean “Han” in Voice Performance: Preliminary Findings of a Pilot Study*. Presented at XXVII *Pacific Voice Conference*. Kraków, 24-26 October 2019. Printed in *ePhonoscope*. Vol. 3, March 2020.



Figure 10. miyun maria kim. *Measure of han*, various sizes. 21 Hydrocal casts, coloured with ochre, graphite, and charcoal powder, of original Korean clay Onggi, 2022. Installation view, Exhibition: *Chante Waste (good heart): we just want to be together*, at the Great Hall, OCAD U, 3-6 May 2022.

Dis/located *han*

Artist Lee Kun-yong's *Body Drawing 76-01* (1976) used the extent of his arm's reach to fill the space of plywood with a permanent marker from behind. The full height of the plywood is in ratio to his own height and is a direct response to the period of martial law of restoration, Yushin (1972- 1979), when the concerns of the state were 'effectiveness and performance', and national 'policies were intended to mould individual behaviour to better serve the economic goals it set'" (Kee, 2015).¹⁰⁸



Figure 11. Lee Kun-yong. Standing beside *Body Drawing 76-01*. Black marker on wood. 1976.

Central to the explosive political activism of the 1970s-'90s, in Korea, was the emergence of Korean liberation, or 민정 *minjung* theology movement, during a time when "misery [was used] as measure of good citizenship" (Cho, 2021, 35).¹⁰⁹ Fueled by the awareness of the suffering of the poor, a reaction to the oppressive policies of Park Chung Hee and his Yusin ("revitalizing") reforms, liberation theologies operated at the intersection of "theology and liturgical social practices with a sociological form of critique" (2-5).¹¹⁰ Minjung roughly translates as "masses" or "people". Two of the movement's main theologians, Sô Nam-dong and An Pyông-mu relied heavily on the notion of *han*, emphasizing the need to "think through the silent presence (the agonized absence) of social pain in culture and in cultural theory". The "Minjungseorim Korean-English dictionary simply translates *han* as 'grudge, resentment, rancour,' but *han* typically not translated of this robs it of its culturally embedded meaning" (cited in Freda 3).¹¹¹ "Modernity's promise of progress and unlimited abundance carri[ed] with it the demand for not only historical amnesia with regard to past exploitation, but ongoing and expanding insensitivity to contemporary injustices. Korea's discourse on *han* [sought] to retrieve the cultural forms through which the experience of suffering [could] be recognized and dealt with. It was in a way a modern innovation that rehabilitates pre-modern sensibility but does so

¹⁰⁸ Kee, Joan. *Why Performance in Authoritarian Korea?* Tate, Tate Papers, no. 23, Spring 2015, <https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/23/why-performance-in-authoritarian-korea>, accessed 25 November 2021.

¹⁰⁹ Cho, *Tastes Like War*, 35.

¹¹⁰ Freda, *Discourse on Han in Postcolonial Korea: Absent Suffering and Industrialist Dreams*, 2-5.

¹¹¹ Freda, *Discourse on Han in Postcolonial Korea: Absent Suffering and Industrialist Dreams*, 3.

with an aggressively critical edge provided by Marxism—specifically here in the form of Korean liberation theology. The consequence is not a return to a romanticized folk culture but a recuperation, a strategic reclamation of an epistemological mode which at the popular level served to recognize and resolve suffering” (Freda, 1999, 12).¹¹²

With this, in South Korea “*han* has undergone a significant decline in cultural importance... since the late 1990s, now to the point of irrelevance. With the achievement of prosperity and democracy, the notion of an essential character defined by a profound sorrow from trauma and unrealized potential no longer seems appropriate... They are cognizant of the endless crisis situation with North Korea, along with quality-of-life issues stemming from the competitive, workaholic culture (sometimes referred to as ‘Hell Joseon’). But given the astounding economic, political and social achievements of the recent past, South Korean people no longer feel that they are perennially condemned as the passive victims of history. The word *han* is still mentioned occasionally in popular culture and used in colloquial language, notably in reference to the so-called ‘comfort women’, victims of sexual slavery by the Japanese military during the Second World War. For most contemporary South Koreans, however, the larger idea of *han* as a defining characteristic feels increasingly like a retrograde notion from the past. So they are likely to be taken aback that Korean Americans are still using the term to explain contemporary Korean culture to Americans” (Kang, 2022, 4).¹¹³

Another split: *han* of Koreans inside Korea and those outside.

Korean-American poet, E.J. Koh’s *American Han* (2021) expresses the distinction, that “the word wasn’t cancelled... but [Korean natives] lost interest in the idea they felt no longer described their life experiences.... ‘As for your conception of *han* as a universal idea that is a recognition of hardship and sorrow... I just do not know if that can be called *han* in the traditional sense... I don’t know if it’s appropriate to use the same word... with little connection to the original *han*.’ Again.. wrong... define in contexts... century.... Vagueness of *han*... malleable... out of style... Korean... dropped.... Language... Truth is I want a world where the word does not exist. The trouble is the way it shrugs off anything.”

She continues: “I can see for the first time a troubling of the word born of the thirty-five-year-long Japanese occupation of Korea, the division of the country by US and Soviet forces after WWII, the ongoing war at one of the most militarized borders in the world. I can see, too, an era further away. The word names the feeling that arises as you are buried alive with your dead husband. It’s harder to weigh a word with a history that permanently exiles its victims. So on one side I write the word *han* while on the other a historian on a panel erases it. He says, ‘Koreans outside of Korea can’t know *han*.’ The historian confesses a discrimination between us. ‘My *han* is the original *han*.’ I am not Korean as I thought but a perpetual outsider. It’s not a word but a war. The word I thought belongs to me only belongs to the Korean border. But if I am not uncanny, melancholy, or nostalgia, then as I see the word now and, because I can’t unsee myself in it and must continue to live within and outside of this world nevertheless, I am the word.”¹¹⁴

Minsoo Kang suggests that “[w]hen a cultural idea is transmitted from a country (South Korea) to emigrants from that place to another land (Korean Americans), there is an inevitable lag as well as a translation process that sometimes results in distortions. This often occurs across generations, when a notion is passed down to those who are not fluent in the language of their ancestry. The case of *han* provides a good example of this process” (Kang, 2022, 3).¹¹⁵ By loss of land, culture and community, cultural dislocation requires individuals to resettle, rebuild their lives and support networks in the new

¹¹² Freda, *Discourse on Han in Postcolonial Korea: Absent Suffering and Industrialist Dreams*, 12.

¹¹³ Kang, *The problem with ‘han’ 한恨*, 4.

¹¹⁴ Koh, E.J. *American Han*. Poetry Foundation, October 2021,

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/156413/american-han>. Accessed 17 February 2022.

¹¹⁵ Kang, *The problem with ‘han’ 한恨*, 3.

environment. “Studying the residents of Cape Town, South Africa, Henry Trotter (2009)¹¹⁶ assumed that the trauma of forced displacement was not resolved and transmitted intergenerationally. Experience of loss, humiliation, social and cultural dislocation, sometimes paired with violence, accompanied trauma of displacement transmitted through the mechanisms of socialization and social learning, including family and gender roles” (Rosenthal 1985; Warehan et al. 2009 cited in Hoosain 2013).¹¹⁷ “In *Stranger Encounter: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (2000), [Sarah Ahmed] reflects on how migration involves reinhabiting the skin: the different ‘impressions’ of a new landscape, the air, the smells, the sounds, which accumulate like points, to create lines, or which accumulate like lines, to create new textures on the surface of the skin. Such spaces ‘impress’ on the body, involving the mark of unfamiliar impressions, which in turn reshapes the body surface” (Ahmed 9).¹¹⁸ Experience of displacement is not easily forgotten and links to *disconnectedness trauma*, as well as *social/structural trauma* that is felt by individuals within a family, and collectively within a community, also known as *collective trauma*. Social networks are how one gains the sense of social belonging and meaning in life, by being emotionally, socially and materially supported. Physiologically and emotionally one feels grounded in safety, security and community.

han dis/orients even the oriented

Displacement comes with layers of losses. Susette Min suggests that “desire is grounded in loss.” To borrow Sarah Ahmed’s words, desire turns us towards objects. “Phenomenology is often characterized as a ‘turn toward’ objects, which appear in their perceptual ‘thereness’ as objects given to consciousness” (25).¹¹⁹ There are hierarchies of bodies that can turn toward, reach, and desire. Ahmed (2006) points towards the different meanings of the word “orient”: “The word refers us not just to space or to directionality, but also takes us in a specific direction. The word can mean: to place so as to face the east; to place in any definite position with reference to the points of the compass or other points; to adjust in relation to new circumstances or surroundings; to turn a map so that the direction on the map is parallel [to] the direction on the ground; to turn toward the east or in specified direction. The range of these meanings is instructive. It shows us how the concept of orientation ‘points’ toward some directions more than others, even as it evokes the general logic of ‘directionality’: ‘toward the east or a specified direction.’ We could even say that the east becomes the direction that does not need to be specified... the concept ‘points’ us in one direction more than others: it ‘points’ toward ‘the east.’ It is time for us to consider the significance of ‘the orient’ in orientation, or even ‘the oriental’: what relates to, or is characteristic of the Orient or East, including ‘natives’ or inhabitants of the East” (Ahmed, 112- 113).¹²⁰

Migrating from Korea to Japan, to Canada and America, back to Korea, and then to finally landing in Canada, made me understand that stories relate to where they are located. Standing in Korea, America could be seen as an East, and from America the reverse. Yet, as I grew through my teens and young adulthood, through the 1990s and 2000s, I started to assimilate and position myself as one who is of the West and looking towards the foreign East. This gravitation to place myself in the Occident perhaps is aligned to how Edward Said in *Orientalism* (1979; 1994)¹²¹, talks about how a way of “not-being” is a way of locating a distinction between self and other, and how making of “the other” is an exercise of power.

My short experience during the return to Korea furthered me from a sense of belonging, and the physical punishment for not knowing the language had made me avoid identifying as a Korean for several years, until I started getting to share similar experiences with other second-generation (born and raised

¹¹⁶ Trotter, Henry. *Trauma and memory: The Impact of Apartheid-Era Forced Removals on Coloured Identity in Cape Town*. In *Burdened by Race: Coloured Identities in Southern Africa*. Cape Town, UCT Press, 2009, pp. 49- 78.

¹¹⁷ Hoosain, Shanaaz. *The Transmission of Intergenerational Trauma in Displaced Families*. Western Cape, University of the Western Cape, 15 November 2013, pp. 29- 37.

¹¹⁸ Ahmed, Sara. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. New York, Routledge, 2004.

¹¹⁹ Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 25.

¹²⁰ Ahmed, Sara. *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2006.

¹²¹ Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. New York, Vintage Books, 1994. Original 1979.

outside of Korea) or 1.5 gen (born in Korea but raised somewhere else) Korean-Canadians in highschool and university. We formed ways to position ourselves between languages, cultures and narratives, by speaking Konglish (a mix of Korean and English) and making fun of non-Koreans as much as Korean-Koreans. Positioning ourselves in-between, or towards two or more positions. Even to this day, when I meet a fellow Korean-English speaker, I get asked what percent I am, and I identify as being somewhere between 1.85 and 1.9 gen. This position allows me to say I am not Korean and I am not White, to “other” both sides, to feel control over that lack of identifying with any roots, but in reality, the power never was with me, as wherever I was, I was the *chink*, *gook*, or *dumb-child*. With this fractured percentile, linked only to other fractured persons, with no certain ties to land or history, or rather not a long enough tie to history and land, I started to wonder how the compass was being directed, how one orients themselves from multiple positionalities.

As I learn to reconstellate the space of history, as Walter Benjamin¹²² would put it, I need to look further into how the body that I position myself through, that “reaches towards”¹²³ and desires, situates itself amongst other bodies. Judith Butler (2004; 2020) asks, “Who counts as human? Whose lives count as lives? And finally, What makes for a grievable life?” (20)¹²⁴ Reviewing Foucault’s hierarchies of power, Byung Chul Han’s psychopolitics, and Mbembe’s theories on necropolitics, I question the living dead, the groups of people lacking access to space for expression and freedom of every kind. Also, thoughts about death of community has made me consider what is left of collective experience, and collective grief, that of *han*. “[T]he appearance of the ‘industrialized races,’ we essentially chose to delegate out death to others, to make a great sacrificial repast of existence itself via a kind of ontological vicariate. Soon, it will no longer be possible to delegate one’s death to others...” (Mbembe, 2021, p33-36).¹²⁵

The first Koreans who landed in Canada had come in different forms, at different times, with permissions, by laws, and controlled numbers of annual immigration percentiles¹²⁶ that were in smaller numbers compared to the United States. The first im/migrants recorded landed in “1890 through Canadian missionaries working in Korea”.¹²⁷ In the late-1940s the number of im/migrants grew, through seminary students and those in search of employment opportunities. Only after 1965, numbers grew to the hundreds, and after 1970 to the thousands. These numbers reflect the years of the Chinese Immigration Act (excluded Chinese immigrants 1923-1947) and Immigration Act (quota-based regulations opened 1976), that mirror those of America (Chinese Exclusion Act 1882-1943, Immigration Act 1965, Oriental Exclusion Act 1924- The McCarran and Walter Act of 1952 which nullified the Asian immigration ban and made Asian immigrants eligible for citizenship).¹²⁸ Also relate to the situations in Korea under Japanese occupation (1910-1945), Korean War (1950-1953), and the economic and sociopolitical conditions described at the start of this re/telling.

The use of the term “landed” is used, in place of “arrived” in these considerations of im/migrant bodies, having to resettle and make a home, and how Haegue Yang speaks about the landed body and the later arrival of the whole being. “After all, homes are effects of the histories of arrival. Avtar Brah in her

¹²² Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, 1955.

¹²³ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, 2.

¹²⁴ Butler, Judith. *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Justice*. London, Verso, 2020. Original 2004.

¹²⁵ Mbembe, Achille. *The Universal Right to Breathe*. Toronto, The Power Plant, 2021. pp. 33-36.

¹²⁶ Sanders, Richard. *A Layered Look at Canadian and U.S. Immigration*. In *On the Northern Frontier*. Wilson Centre, Canada Institute, 21 July 2020, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/layered-look-canadian-and-us-immigration>. Accessed 16 January 2023.

¹²⁷ Bai, David. *Korean Canadians*. In *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, 21 October 21, 2019. Updated by Donald Baker, Jon Tattrie, Celine Cooper. 17 June, 2010, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/koreans>. Accessed 16 January 2023.

¹²⁸ Chung, Soojin. *History of Korean Immigration to America, from 1903 to Present*. Boston University School of Theology: Boston Korean Diaspora Project, <https://sites.bu.edu/koreandiaspora/issues/history-of-korean-immigration-to-america-from-1903-to-present/#:~:text=The%20first%20significant%20wave%20of,turbulent%20political%20climate%20of%20Korea>.

reflections on diasporic space discusses the 'entanglement of genealogies of dispersion with those of 'staying put.' (1996, 16) Diasporic spaces do not simply begin to take shape with the arrival of migrant bodies; it is more that we only notice the arrival of those who appear 'out of place.' Those who are 'in place' also must arrive; they must get 'here,' but their arrival is more easily forgotten, or is not even noticed. The disorientation of the sense of home, as the 'out of place' or 'out of line' effect of unsettling arrivals, involves what we could call a migrant orientation. This orientation might be described as the lived experience of facing at least two directions: toward a home that has been lost and to place that is not yet home. And yet a migrant orientation does not necessarily reside within the migrant body, as the 'double point' of its view. In a way, reflecting on migration helps us to explore how bodies arrive and how they get directed in this way or that way as a condition of arrival, which in turn is about how the 'in place' gets placed" (Ahmed 9-10).¹²⁹ Artists responding to im/migrant narratives in North America or transitional spaces are: Jin-Me Yoon, Hague Yang, Jihee Min, Jin Young Kim, Ivetta Kang, Dean Sameshima, Tehching Hsieh, and Dahn Vo.

In comparison, the U.S. saw the first shipload of Korean im/migrants land in Hawaii, 13 January 1903, as workers for pineapple and sugar plantations. By 1905, more than 7226 had landed, escaping famines and harsh conditions. Labourers were brought in from Korea or China based on cost and regulations, while Korean intellectuals and elites enrolled in American universities during the Japanese occupation. A second wave of Korean im/migrants flooded in as "war brides", "war orphans", and students, businessmen, and intellectuals, between 1950 and 1964. The War Bride Act of 1946 allowed American Servicemen to move their Korean wives, and "war orphans" or "GI babies" were adopted, as mixed-race babies were considered "impure" by Koreans.¹³⁰ Grace M. Cho (2008) writes about the haunting figure of the warbride, as she makes the "Yanggongju. Yankee whore. Western princess. GI bride. Yanggalbo. Yangssaekshi. GI's plaything. UN lady. Bar girl. Entertainment hostess. Wianbu. Fallen woman. Formerly a comfort woman. Formerly called a comfort woman. Daughter of a comfort woman. Camptown prostitute. Military bride... both central and subjugated in the story that [she] want[s] to tell" (3)¹³¹ in *Haunting the Korean Diaspora: Shame, Secrecy, and the Forgotten War*. As the Korean War got renamed "The Forgotten War"¹³² by Americans, overshadowed by WWII and the Vietnam war, questions of the war and the suffering of the people as forgettable arise. How are they remembered?

¹²⁹ Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 9-10.

¹³⁰ Chung, *History of Korean Immigration to America, from 1903 to Present*. Online.

¹³¹ Cho, *Haunting the Korean Diaspora: Shame, Secrecy, and the Forgotten War*, 3.

¹³² Pierpaoli JR., Paul G. *Beyond Collective Amnesia: A Korean War Retrospective*. In *International Social Science Review*. Pi Gamma Mu, International Honor Society in Social Sciences, Vol. 76, No. ¾, 2001, pp. 92-102. JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41887070>.

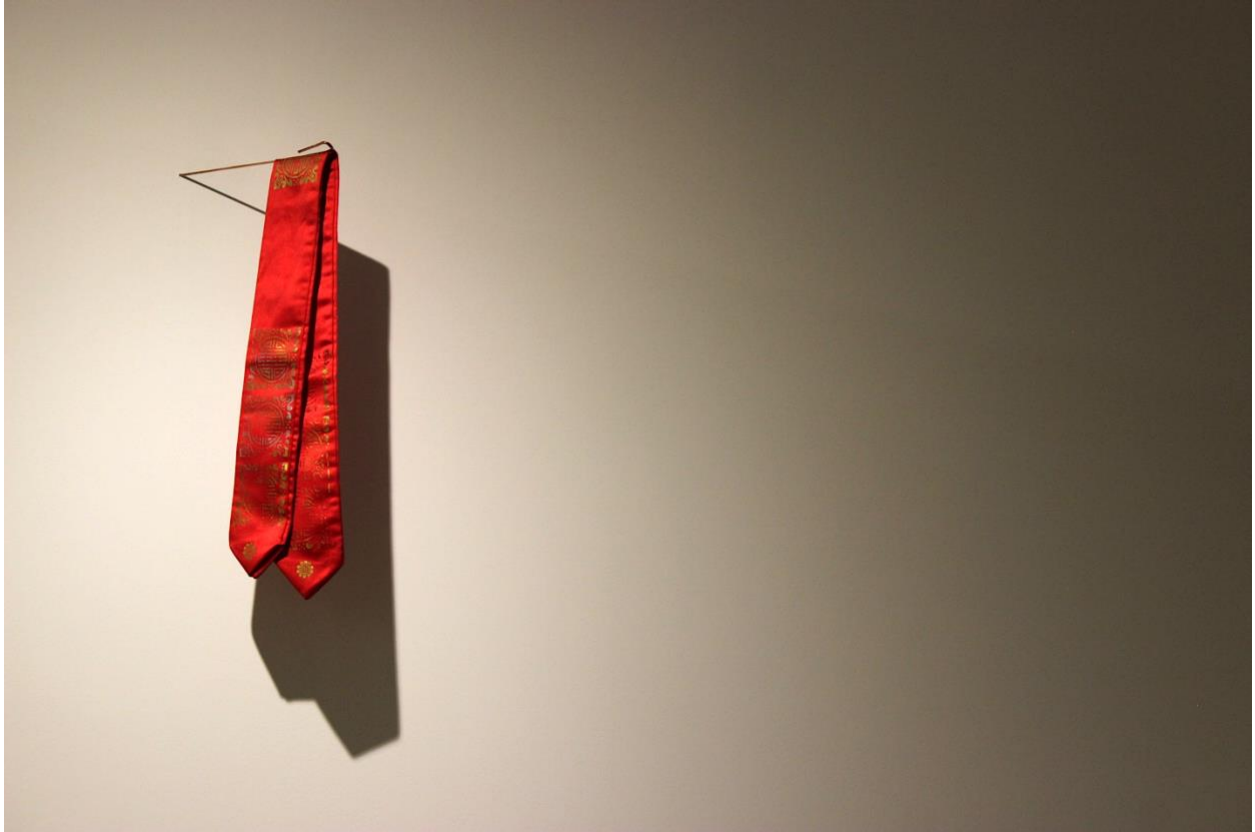


Figure 12. Red Daenggi gifted by the Hong family. 2023. (installation detail) hung on copper rod. Traditional Korean ribbon to tie and decorate braided hair signifying a single unmarried girl/woman worn as male warriors would during activations by the artist.

Figure 13.

Sitting with. Research by sitting with
“The Statue of the Girl of Peace”
by Kim Seo-Kyung and Kim Eun-Sung,
160x 180x 125 cm, oil on fiberglass-reinforced polyester (FRP)
and stone powder, 2017. Original bronze statue 2011.
Temporarily installed in the main lobby of OCAD U at 100 McCaul
Street, Toronto, 5 January- 28 April, 2023.¹³³



Wednesday 11 January 2023



Friday 13 January



Wednesday 18 January



Thursday 19 January



Wednesday 25 January



Wednesday 1 February



Wednesday 15 February



Thursday 23 February



Wednesday 1 March



Wednesday 8 March



Wednesday 15 March



Wednesday 29 March.



Tuesday 18 April



Thursday 27 April

¹³³ *Documentary Screening-COMFORT* by Emmanuel Moonchil Park. OCAD University, Events,
<https://www.ocadu.ca/event/documentary-screening-comfort-emmanuel-moonchil-park>.

COMFORT

The documentary *보드랍게 COMFORT* (2020)¹³⁴ has won praise for its portrayal of KIM Soonak, a survivor of the comfort women system who passed away in 2010. Director Emmanuel Moonchil Park reflects on the human cost of violence of all kinds and the lingering effects, obscured, distorted by the neo-colonial militarized relationship of Korea and America, suspended assimilation, misremembering, and our past as painful as another process of the present. His work examines individuals in a society, as well as how social issues penetrate the lives of individuals.

Utilizing animation, illustration, archival images, voice of activists, raw footage, and narration, Park brings multiple voices together to tell the story of one. In return, the individual story resonates as the collective story, not flattened but as a complex layer of lived experiences. The focus on the ordinary everyday events become the anti-spectacle of the act of violence.¹³⁵ Many have told this story from the point of view of one who is the victim or one who becomes the activist. In this storytelling we witness how Park redirects our attention to the duration of time endured between being that victim and later becoming that activist. Park gives breath and voice to a time that has been perpetually silenced and erased by societies. [The] director asks us to stay curious about the time in-between violence and voice, relating to past experiences from a shift in perspective, from not only the abuse of sexual slavery but also of the abuse of silencing, shaming and secrecy of those who are marginalized.

As this year marks the 32nd year since the first testimony by Kim Hak-soon, that led to a human rights movement for the dignity of all survivors, it is also marking the fight for justice lasting over 70 years. Many of the survivors are passing away. What do we do with the inheritance of these stories? The Korean title of COMFORT is *보드랍게*, expressed in the local dialect, translating as “softly” or “gently”. Who is asked to comfort whom? Why? And How?¹³⁶

When asked what she desired through the telling of her story, Kim Soonak asked for those who heard it to simply remember, while a podcast conversation between Eunice Kim and her grandmother records her *halmeoni*'s wishes for “regret, resentment [of *han to*] end with her generation” (Kim, 2019).¹³⁷ “Toni Morrison’s *Sethe* meets her own mother only once. As she tells her two daughters, one day, when she was still a little girl, raised primarily by Nan who spoke to her in a language she has since forgotten, her mother took her behind the smokehouse, opened her dress, and showed her the mark under her breast: ‘Right on her rib was a circle and cross burnt right in the skin. She said, ‘This is your ma’am. This,’ and she pointed. ‘I am the only one got this mark now. The rest dead. If something happens to me and you can’t tell me by my face, you can know me by this mark’ (61). *Sethe*’s answer expresses her own vulnerability and desire for mutuality and maternal recognition: ‘Yes Ma’am,’ I said. ‘But how will you know me? How will you know me? Mark me too,’ I said. ‘Mark the mark on me too.’ *Sethe* chuckled. ‘Did she?’ asked Denver. ‘She slapped my face.’ ‘What for?’ ‘I didn’t understand it then. Not till I had a mark of my own” (Hirsch, 2002, 71).¹³⁸

¹³⁴ Chu, David. *Documentary screening of “Comfort” and Conversation with the Director Emmanuel Moonchil Park*. Toronto, Munk school, Asian Institute, Centre for the Study of Korea, 13 January 2023, <https://munkschool.utoronto.ca/event/documentary-screening-comfort-and-conversation-director-emmanuel-moonchil-park>.

¹³⁵ Notion taken from Ndebele, Njabulo S. *The Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Some New Writings in South Africa*. Journal of Southern African Studies, Taylor & Francis Ltd., vol. 12, no. 2, April 1986, pp. 143- 157.

¹³⁶ My own words spoken as an Introduction for the Screening of COMFORT at OCAD University, 13 January 2023, <https://www.ocadu.ca/event/documentary-screening-comfort-emmanuel-moonchil-park>.

¹³⁷ Kim, Eunice. *There’s a uniquely Korean word for rage and regret. So why had I never heard of it?* The Doc Project, cbc, 20 May 2019. Last Updated 20 July 2022, <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/docproject/there-s-a-uniquely-korean-word-for-rage-and-regret-so-why-had-i-never-heard-of-it-1.5118989#:~:text=Han%20in%20Korean%20popular%20culture&text=‘Han’%20is%20often%20described%20as,is%20felt%20by%20all%20Koreans>. Accessed 20 May 2019.

¹³⁸ Hirsch, Marianne. *Marked by Memory: Feminist Reflections on Trauma and Transmission*. In *Extremities: Trauma, Testimony, Community*. Edited by Nancy K. Miller and Jason Daniel Tougaw. Illinois, Illinois University Press, 2002, pp. 71-91.

La Moretta o Muta

Traditional Korean masks have been used since prehistoric times and were work during royal court ceremonies, folk festivals and entertainment in open-air theater. The Korean word for mask is *tal*, which “refers to a mask that is crafted by shaping wood or sheets of paper into a representation of a human or animal face and which is worn to cover the entire face. The word also includes a second meaning of misfortune, illness and difficulty. For example, when someone becomes sick or runs into trouble, you can use the word *tal*, as in the phrase, ‘*talinatda*,’ meaning, ‘I am sick,’ or, ‘I am in trouble.’ The word for masks represents something that people hope is only a passing event.”¹³⁹ In search of a mask that can express the pains of *han*, I was drawn to the Venetian Muta, also known as La Moretta, as it is held by the wearer biting a button on the inside. This act of covering the face by silencing the self can reflect the way *han* is carried by the breath. To learn more about the Muta, I found a Venetian mask-maker who showed me his workshop, *Ca’Macana*, in Venice, Italy. There, he made hand-made masks using traditional methods.



Figure 14. L: Muta mask. Photo taken by mihyun maria kim at Ca’Macana, Venice, Italy.

R: Gabriel Bella. (Detail) Sala del Ridotto (assembly room) in Venice. Oil on canvas.

Photo taken by mihyun maria kim, Fondazione ‘Querini Stampalia’ (Picture Gallery room) Venice, Italy.

The description of the Muta on the tag at Maschere a Venezia, where these masks are sold, states the following:

“To make themselves really captivating, the women wanted to create mystery by concealing everything that gives feelings and emotions away most, i.e. the eyes and mouth. This was the aim of the ‘Moretta’. Small, oval shaped, and covered with black velvet, (‘moretta’ means ‘small and dark’), it covered only the part of the face with the mouth and eyes. But there was another, disconcerting detail: the Moretta was held to the face by a button on the inside which was gripped between the teeth. The lady was therefore

¹³⁹ *Masks & the Mask Dance*. Article, uploaded by Korea.net, 19 August 2014.
<https://www.korea.net/NewsFocus/Culture/view?articleId=121249>.

completely mute (hence the alternative name 'muta') and inexpressive at least until she decided to respond to the advances of a man, offering him, aside from her words, the sight of her face, too. This is the very reason for the button, rather than using laces which take time to tie and untie" (Ca'Macana).¹⁴⁰

Captivated by the cover-up/absence of emotional signifiers as a site of seduction, I thought about trauma and demands for silencing/erasure from a depathologizing perspective "that has animated queer understandings of sexuality [which] opens up possibilities for understanding traumatic feelings not as a medical problem in search of a cure but as felt experiences that can be mobilized in a range of directions, including the construction of cultures and publics. ...For example, Eve Sedgwick links sexuality and emotion in using the category of shame to suggest that traumatic experiences of rejection and humiliation are connected to identity formations that are more than just reaction formations. ... tracking intersections of affective experience and social and cultural formations... affect is a way of charting cultural contents that might otherwise remain ephemeral because they haven't solidified into a visible public culture. Affects that serve as an index of how social life is felt become the raw material for cultural formations that are unpredictable and varied" (Cvetkovich 46-48).¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ Ca'Macana, *La Moretta o Muta (The mask as erotic enticement)*. Maschere a Venezia, Venezia. www.maskvenice.com.

¹⁴¹ Cvetkovich, Ann. *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*. Durham, Duke University Press, 2003.

REMAINS OF LOSS

(post)memory *han*



Figure 15. Teresa Park: Loving Memories Last Forever. Image of flowers offered with halmeoni's favourite red roses separated atop artist's grandmother's gravestone, 2022. Photo taken by artist during a visit.¹⁴²

In tracing transmissions of *han*, I made several trips to my grandmother's grave. On one winter day, I stood there, transfixed on my moving reflection upon the stone with *halmeoni's* name above the names of her three children and their birth dates. It was curious to me that those who were still living were engraved there with her on that stone, while my grandfather lay in Korea alone with *halmeoni's* name beside his. Even in death the family is separated and distanced, and for the first time I stood contemplating the overlap of three generations on that stone. I started to question whom I was mourning. Time past and future were all present, right in front of me. Present, the past-present hopes that "*Loving Memories Last Forever*" and over-power intergenerational unpleasant memories embedded and entangled, that continue to mis/shape the narrative of the present-future.¹⁴³ The reality of this hope is that there is no power-takeover. Only a

¹⁴² refer to Appendix B

¹⁴³ Altanian, Melanie. *Archives against Genocide Denialism? Memory as Social Construct*. Bern, Swisspeace, 2017, pp. 13-17. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.com/stable/resrep11066.6>. Accessed 22 September- 03 November 2020.

"[In] the ethics of what good memory, or successful memory, without the distortions of reconstructing it, memory- whether it is individual or collective memory- is dynamic because it involves both actual experiences and events as well as considerations about what meaning and significance they should have for our present and future lives. It is especially the selective nature of what to remember and the determination of its significance that allows the process of memory construction to be adaptive and open to

surrender to the residue of unresolved memories carried and inherited. The gravestone becomes a site of inter/active engagement with remembering and forgetting, de/constructing of individual and collective memory.¹⁴⁴ A site of performativity.

At home, sorting through a handful of family photographs, outside the small number of those I recognized, all were strangers to me. Their stories were never told. No names given. The occasion for taking the photographs were a mystery. Photographs can be seen as *memento mori* as Susan Sontag¹⁴⁵ calls them, while Marianne Hirsch's *Family Frames* (2002) "seeks to understand the place of photography, and, specifically, images of family, within personal and collective memory. Hirsch captures the way memories are transmitted generationally by focusing on *postmemory* [coined 1997],¹⁴⁶ which she defines as memories of someone else's experience" (Miller, 2001, 285).¹⁴⁷ "The work of *postmemory* defines the familial inheritance and transmission of *cultural trauma*. Still, [Hirsch] believe[d] that this form of remembrance need not be restricted to the family, or even to a group that shares an ethnic or national identity marking: through particular forms of identification, adoption, and projection, it can be more broadly available. Thus, *postmemory* need not be strictly an identity position. But if identifications learned and practiced within the family can be expanded to cross the boundaries of gender, family, race, and generation, then the identification between mothers and daughters forms a clear example of how a shared intersubjective transgenerational space of remembrance, based in bodily connection, can be imagined" (Hirsch, 77).¹⁴⁸

"Memorization of collective traumatic occurrence by generation which was born after the occurrence [i]s post-memory. Such 'memories', not experienced in person, but based mood, behaviour, images and stories told by generation witnessing those events, may be influential and strong emotional binding, that are internalized by younger generation as if those would be inheritance (Hirsch, 2001). The idea here is not collective memory, but some history which becomes a narration, important is to emphasize identity and emotional subjective dimensions, which accompany and occur in narration. Post-memory term is a

change. However, acknowledging memory as subjectively (or socially) reconstructive does not mean that it is per definition unreliable and that the notion of truth is inapplicable. Functional memory is highlighted as being in the foreground, unlike storage memory, and is considered 'inhabited memory' that is acquired, group-based, selective, normative and future-oriented. Cultural memory is further used for distinctions, such as 'symbolic expressions that serve to profile a collective identity.' Within secular, nationalist movements, it is the reconstruction or invention of shared traditions that creates identity for the nation as a new political agent."

¹⁴⁴ Apaydin, Veysel. *Critical Perspectives on Cultural Memory and Heritage*. The interlinkage of cultural memory, heritage and discourses of construction transformation and destruction. London, UCL Press, 2020, pp. 13-29. JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv13xpsfp.7>. Accessed 22 September- 30 November 2020.

"There may be no 'one way' of defining or marking the boundaries of the concept of memory. As a concept, memory is active. It interacts with the everyday life of individuals, groups and communities, who in turn engage with a wide range of activities. These actions are related to the individual lives, and help to shape individual memory. Group membership and the life of a community form and contribute to the construction of collective memory, which then creates collective identity and a sense of belonging... cultural memory is an ongoing process of remembrance and forgetting in which individuals and groups continue to reconfigure their relationship to the past and hence reposition themselves in relation to established and emergent memory sites. As the word suggests, remembering is better seen as an active engagement with the past, as performative rather than reproductive... In most cases memory is considered to be an agent that is closely related to events and the material culture of the past... However, heritage and memory are not only related to the past; they also have direct associations with the present and future. Though both are accumulated through time, they are also shaped and developed in the present, which in turn gives direction to the future. There is surely an obvious distinction between memory and history, as Pierre Nora clearly points out: 'memory is living', but history is always reconstructed from the past and very problematic to deal with" (Apaydin, 2020). Memory is more than a mere act of remembering."

¹⁴⁵ Sontag, Susan. *On Photography*. New York, Rosetta Books LLC, 2005. Original 1973.

¹⁴⁶ Hirsch, Marianne. *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust*. New York, Columbia University Press, 2012.

¹⁴⁷ Miller, Nancy K. *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory by Marianne Hirsch: Bequest and Betrayal: Memoirs of a Parent's Death*. Chicago Journals, Vol. 27, No. 1, Autumn 2001, pp. 283-286.

¹⁴⁸ Hirsch, *Marked by Memory: Feminist Reflections on Trauma and Transmission*, 77.

narration of one generation by another, heroes or ones affected in this story. It is a memorization, narration based on parent's memories being told to children. Memory, is able to transform information not based on personal experience, however being told by secondary source into secondary narration. Those are generation after memories, traumatic experiences of *historical trauma* left in the family memory. Prefix 'post', points on the subject which occurring after the experience itself, next generations" (Simsek, 2017).¹⁴⁹

Seo-Young Chu (2008)¹⁵⁰ further amplifies that "while members of the postwar generation- Hirsch among them- mourn what their parents lost, that mourning is inevitably complicated by feelings of doubt, curiosity, and guilt. In Hirsch's words: 'What relationship can one have to the traumatic event of one's parents' lives- horror? ambivalence? envy? a negative nostalgia? What right does one have to feel traumatized by a catastrophe from which one was spared? In addressing such questions, Hirsch likens the Holocaust to 'a foreign country' that she and others of her generation 'can never hope to visit' yet for which they often feel mysteriously homesick (Hirsch, 1997, 244) ... To designate this condition of spatial and temporal exile, Hirsch offers the term '*postmemory*.'"

"By crossing *postmemory* with the experience of *han*, Chu coins a new concept, *postmemory han*, that sheds light not only on the traumas endured and inherited by Korean American women, but also on the specific characteristics of these traumas. As a result, understanding those specificities may lead us to a fuller awareness of both the strategies Korean American women writers deploy in their texts to represent the unspeakable portion of their heritage, and of the ways American identity formation is built on complex intersections of racialized and gendered violence derived from imperialism" (Thomas-Cambonie, 2018, 63).¹⁵¹ Chu writes, "[a] second-generation Korean American might be haunted by her parents' anguish, but she would be equally haunted by the knowledge that she herself was not directly victimized by the circumstances that led to such pain... How, then, does she 'remember' the pain caused by such experiences? To some extent, the answer lies in the power of the imagination to respond to historical narratives" (Chu, 2008).¹⁵² Hirsch "turned to the study of memory out of the conviction that, like feminist art, writing, and scholarship, it offered a means to uncover and to restore experiences and life stories that might otherwise remain absent from the historical archive. As a form of counter-history, 'memory' offered a means to account for the power structures animating forgetting, oblivion, and erasure and thus to engage in acts of repair and redress" (Hirsch, 2012, 15- 16).¹⁵³

¹⁴⁹ Simsek, Anjelika Huseyinzade. *Post-Memory: Family As A Space of Historical Trauma Transmission*. Edited by Bora Erdagi. In *Current Deabetes in Philisophy & Psychology*, vol. 11, no. 2017/25, December 2017, <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/322117693>

¹⁵⁰ Chu, Seo-Young. *Science Fiction and Postmemory Han in Contemporary Korean American Literature*. Oxford Journals: MELUS, vol. 33, no. 4, winter, 2008, pp. 97- 121. JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20343509>. Accessed 04 June 2021.

¹⁵¹ Thomas-Cambonie, Héloïse. *Han and Trauma: the Inheritance of Violence in Korean American Literature*. Leaves #6, 2018. pp. 63-80. Academia, https://www.academia.edu/37619721/Han_and_Trauma_the_Inheritance_of_Violence_in_Korean_American_Literature. Accessed 08 June 2021.

¹⁵² Chu, *Science Fiction and Postmemory Han in Contemporary Korean American Literature*, 97- 121.

¹⁵³ Hirsh, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust*, 15-16.



Figure 16. mihyun maria kim, Invisible Words, 4 x 6 " Rubbed ink jet photo print transfer on lined paper preserved on cotton paper, 2021

Himek lists 4 working models of mechanisms of transmission (Himek in Ancharoff et al. qtd in Simsek):

1. Silence: powerful in traumatic message transmission as vocalized words. Silence in family happens when family members don't want to disturb or annoy, and avoid repetition of symptoms of trauma, due to avoidance behaviour (noted in PTSD) of parents who resist talking about sensitive subjects.
2. Over disclosure: parents may disclose details about trauma, traumatic stories, images, graphics, in order to prepare their children and teach them how to survive traumatic situations and danger in an insecure world, but hearing details about traumatic experiences without accompanying impacts may be disturbing.
3. Identification: parents may showcase post traumatic reactions that become terrifying for the children living with them, causing them to feel guilty for the parents' hardship. This leads to the child(ren) thinking that if they are good children, their parent(s) wouldn't be so angry or sad.
4. Re-enactment (based on Freud 1918): a traumatic form of memory; repetition of traumatic experience in behaviour by trauma victims cause children to behave and feel like they experienced the trauma themselves leading to self-traumatization.

The theory of *transgenerational phantom* (coined by psychoanalysts Nicolas Abraham & Maria Torok, 1970)¹⁵⁴ is relevant to the mechanisms of silence and erasure of *han*. The phantom "whatever its form, is nothing but an invention of the living. ... To be sure, all the departed may return, but some are destined to haunt: the dead who were shamed during their lifetime or those who took unspeakable secrets to the grave... the theme of the dead—who, having suffered repression by their family or society, cannot enjoy, even in death, a state of authenticity... A metapsychological fact: what haunts are not the dead, but the gaps left within us by the secrets of others... the phantom is sustained by secreted words" Additionally, "the phantom is a formation of the unconscious that has never been conscious—for good reason. It passes—in

¹⁵⁴ Abraham, Nicolas and Maria Torok. *The Shell and the Kernel*, volume 1. Edited, Translated by Nicholas T. Rand. New York, One World, 2020.

a way yet to be determined—from the parent’s unconscious into the child’s. Clearly, the phantom has a function different from dynamic repression. The phantom’s periodic and compulsive return lies beyond the scope of symptom-formation in the sense of a return of the repressed; it works like a ventriloquist, like a stranger within the subject’s own mental topography” (Abraham & Torok, 171- 176).¹⁵⁵ Linking to the writings of Eve Tuck and C. Ree, in *A Glossary of Haunting* (2013),¹⁵⁶ I consider that I am haunted and will become a haunting, and am somewhere in the middle as the interruption. Exemplified by how poet Kim Hyesoon describes “autobiography as autotestimony: she is narrating her historical death. So on one side is how she has died while on the other is how she remains living. If I am the word, saying the word is to narrate my death. I meet the consequences here. This might be an answer to why *han* is trouble. The word brings up the question of how one has died and how one could remain alive” (Kim cited in Koh, 2021).¹⁵⁷

“My mother would try to take her life (with a kitchen knife) in the name of *han*. Then what does that do for me, with the word so deeply tied to my own throat?” (Koh, 2021)¹⁵⁸

wounded heart

Larkin (2004)¹⁵⁹ defines *intergenerational* as a wide range of patterns of interactions among different generations or age categories of individuals who may or may not be related. Under this category lies *intergenerational transmission* (2003), which refers to the exchange of interactions or some goods or services between one generation and another. The intangible, such as beliefs, norms, values, attitudes and behaviours specific to the family, or the socio-cultural, religious and ethnically relevant practices and beliefs can all be transmitted. *Transgenerational transmission of trauma* (coined by Volkan, 1996, using Freudian principles) is *intergenerational trauma* (unresolved effects of trauma which is transmitted to the next generations) that has potential to fuel future conflicts, and occurs mostly unconsciously (Kogan, 2012).¹⁶⁰

“*Trauma* occurs when individuals lose their safe place to where they can retreat and process their emotions” (Van de Kolk, 1987¹⁶¹, cited in Hoosain 30).¹⁶² Dr. Bruce D. Perry¹⁶³ suggests that trauma has two forms: capital ‘T’ Trauma indicating past event(s) or happening, and small ‘t’ trauma relating to acute daily oppressive situations and circumstances. Applied, collective Trauma of the Korean people occurred during the Japanese occupation, and acute trauma is ongoing at the 38th parallel, keeping land and families divided, sustaining tensions of the two Koreas at war. Both Trauma and trauma have the same neurobiological outcomes.

For individuals and families, trauma can take shape in different forms. In 1980, after diagnosing U.S. military veterans of the Vietnam War, the terms “psychological trauma” and “post-traumatic stress disorder” (PTSD) were included in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM).¹⁶⁴ “Those

¹⁵⁵ Abraham, and Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel*, 171-176.

¹⁵⁶ Tuck, Eve and C. Ree. *A Glossary of Haunting*. Handbook of Autoethnography, edited by Stacy Holman Jones, Tony E. Adams and Carolyn Ellis. Walnut Creek, Left Coast Press, 2013, pp. 639- 658.

¹⁵⁷ Koh, *American Han*, 2021.

¹⁵⁸ Koh, *American Han*, 2021.

¹⁵⁹ Larkin, E. *Intergenerational Relationships: Conversations on Practice and Research Across Cultures*. Eds. D. Fiedlander, S. Newman & R. Goff. New York, Haworth Press, 2004, pp. 1-19.

¹⁶⁰ Kogan, I. *The second generation in the shadow of terror*. Fromm, M.G. Lost in transmission, Studies of Trauma across Generations, London, Karmac, 2012, pp. 5-20.

¹⁶¹ Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*, 1887.

¹⁶² Hoosain, *The Transmission of Intergenerational Trauma in Displaced Families*, 30.

¹⁶³ Brown, Brené. *Brené with Oprah Winfrey and Dr. Bruce D. Perry on Trauma, Resilience, and Healing*. Unlocking Us, Spotify, 5 May 2021, https://open.spotify.com/episode/7GgvaJ3DUL4oQyxtyr86H3?go=1&sp_cid=8fef303927be57e18b2b1653a093661f&utm_source=embed_player_p&utm_medium=desktop&nd=1.

¹⁶⁴ *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5)*. American Psychiatric Association (APA), <https://www.psychiatry.org/psychiatrists/practice/dsm>

affected [with PTSD] often have gaps in their memories of the traumatic event, while a depressive mood sets in, accompanied by feelings of guilt and self-reproach. The affected person tries to avoid stimuli that remind them of the trauma, even leading to a reliving of the trauma on an emotional, mental, and physical level. Avoidance behaviour creates feelings of isolation and general numbness, while further psychological stress arises from increased excitability, fearfulness, and excessive vigilance” (Bottler, 2021, 5, translations mine).¹⁶⁵ Haunted further by its collective silencing, James K. Freda (1999) in the *discourse on han* comments on the “general absence of discourse treating suffering in modern culture intent on progress,” as “[s]uffering is not only without voice in dominant scientific discourse on the social, it is without substance or consequence: it is distasteful, a horror and threat to reason and development” (Freda 1).¹⁶⁶

Research of *traumatology* and *trauma* theories have taken a significant shift from interpersonal trauma towards political and social aspects that are more complex, being embedded in the fabric of families and communities. Theories of *intergenerational trauma* began with research on Holocaust survivors, differing from the historical legacy of *colonial trauma* that indigenous peoples have experienced around the world. Shanaaz Hoosain (2013)¹⁶⁷ details two distinct schools of thought where direct experiences of trauma from one generation is transmitted to the next generation(s): first, the *traditional medical model* based on psychodynamic and psychoanalytic theory focused on the individual, parenting and family dynamics (Danieli 1998; Weingarten 2004; Fromm 2012 cited in Hoosain 30); the second, an *aboriginal conceptualisation of intergenerational theory*, based on *historical trauma* as a result of colonialism, accounting for the historical events that occur over several generations and decades, as well as the systemic issues that continue to oppress certain communities.

Poet Ko Eun¹⁶⁸ writes, “we Koreans were born in the womb of *han* and grew up in the womb of *han*.” Sandra So Hee Chi Kim suggests that “[*han*]’s contemporary biologicistic-oriented meaning emerged first during the Japanese colonial period as a colonial stereotype, and that tracing the afterlife of *han* gives us a postcolonial understanding of its deployment in culture. [She] examine[s] how *han* originated under the contradictions of coloniality, how it evolved from a colonial construct to its adoption into Korean ethnonationalism, and how it travels into a completely new context through the Korean diaspora. Rather than dismissing *han* as nothing more than a social construct, [she] instead define[s] *han* as an affect that encapsulates the grief of historical memory—the memory of past collective trauma—and that renders itself racialized/ethnicized and attached to nation” (Kim, 2017).¹⁶⁹

Historical trauma (Duran and Duran¹⁷⁰ 1995; Brave Heart and DeBruyn¹⁷¹ 1998 cited in Hoosain 33) refers to the historical legacy of *chronic trauma*, massive loss of lives, land and culture that indigenous peoples have experienced over generations through colonization—defined as the subjugation of one group by another, “a brutal process through which two thirds of the world experienced invasion and loss of territory accompanied by the destruction of political, social, and economic systems, leading to external political control and economic dependence on the West”(Chillisa cited in Hoosain 33).¹⁷² It additionally involves the loss of control and ownership of knowledge systems, beliefs, behaviours and subjection to overt racism, resulting in the captive or colonized mind. Some of the responses to *historical trauma* include elevated suicide rates, self-destructive behaviour, substance abuse, identification with pain that ancestors endured, fixation of trauma, somatic symptoms that have no medical reason, anxiety, guilt and chronic grief

¹⁶⁵ Bottler, Ulrich. *Yoga als begleitende Interventionsmaßnahme bei PTBS*. Graz, Karl-Franzens-Universität Graz, 2021.

¹⁶⁶ Freda, *Discourse on Han in Postcolonial Korea: Absent Suffering and Industrialist Dreams*, 1.

¹⁶⁷ Hoosain, *The Transmission of Intergenerational Trauma in Displaced Families*, 30.

¹⁶⁸ Ko Eun cited in Darcy Paquet, *New Korean Cinema: Breaking the Waves*. London, Wallflower Press, 2009, pp.32.

¹⁶⁹ Kim, Sandra So Hee Chi. *Korean “Han” and the Postcolonial Afterlives of “The Beauty of Sorrow”*. Korean Studies, Vol. 41, 2017, University of Hawai’i Press, pp. 253- 279. JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44508447>. Accessed on 17 June 2022.

¹⁷⁰ Duran, E. and B. Duran. *Native American Post Colonial Psychology*. Albany, University of New York Press, 1995.

¹⁷¹ Brave Heart, Y. and L. DeBruyn. *The American Holocaust: Healing Historical Unresolved Grief*. American Indian and Alaska Native Mental Health Research, vol. 8, no. 2, 1998, pp. 56- 78.

¹⁷² Hoosain, *The Transmission of Intergenerational Trauma in Displaced Families*, 33.

(Wesley-Esquimaux & Smolewski 2004, 54 cited in Hoosain 33). *Historic trauma* is collective and complex in nature, as it is inflicted on a group of people who share the same group identity, affiliation or ethnicity (Evans-Campbell 2008, 321 cited in Hoosain 33).

“The concept of *han* has been invoked as crucial to understanding of the Korean character, as well as its culture and art. A supposedly untranslatable term, it denotes a uniquely Korean sense of profound sorrow, regret, resentment, rage and other negative emotions that are all bound up inside an individual as well as the people as a whole. It has been claimed that modern Koreans inherited it from deep tradition, as a collective emotional memory of their ancestors’ experiences of historical traumas, including many foreign invasions throughout the centuries. ... *Han* not only pointed to all the sorrow and rage from the traumas inflicted on the people by the historic events, but also described the unique ways in which they carried and dealt with the experiences. Ultimately, *han* came to signify a kind of Korean exceptionalism defined by strength and resilience in the face of inherent sadness and pain” (Kang, 2022, 2-3).¹⁷³

“‘한’은 극한 슬픔과 답답함이 오랫동안 쌓여서 마음에 맺혀 있는 상태를 이르는 감정으로서, 흔히 ‘한이 맺힌다’라고 하고, 오랜 소원이 달성된 상태는 ‘한을 풀었다’라고 한다” (나, 2012).¹⁷⁴ “The word *han* is combined with a passive verb 맺히다 (*maechida*, being formed [and hardened over time]), for example, in my heart-mind *han* has been formed... *han* occurs in one’s heart-mind by external causes such as violence, oppression, exploitation, invasion, coercion, and colonization without a right reciprocity. A Korean American constructive theologian, Andrew Sund Park, defined *han* as the critical wound of the heart formed by unjust psychosomatic repression, as well as by socio-political, economic, and cultural oppressions such as Holocaust, racial discriminations, child-molestation, exploitation of labo[u]rs, and patriarchy (Park, 1993,10). Park describes *han* from victims’ perspectives as not only the abysmal experience of pain but also as being dominated by feelings of abandonment and helplessness (15). He names *han* ‘the wounded heart’: ‘When the aching heart is wounded again by external violence, the victim suffers a yet deeper pain. The wound produced by such repeated abuse and injustice is *han* in the heart’ (20). Park has highlighted the link between women’s experiences of *han* and patriarchal violence” (Chung & Oh, 2022, 318).¹⁷⁵

“According to Yehuda (1998), children and grandchildren of Holocaust survivors had high rate of mental disorders. Those observations were described as concentration camp syndrome. Depression, anxiety and maladaptive behaviour were very common among those children. Behavioural disorder, personality disorder, immaturity, excessive dependence and very low coping ability. It has been stated that children and grandchildren of Holocaust survivors had excessive physical disorders and those were too incapable to stress. Herein, symptoms revealed, looked like they experienced Holocaust in person. In this context Prager (2003) described trauma as continued unhealed wound. Wound which passes from generation to generation. ...Baranowsky (1998) has described *transgenerational trauma transmission* as ‘generation after, carrying a wound without getting one’ (Yehuda and Prager cited in Simsek, 2017).¹⁷⁶

This deep dive into understanding how *intergenerational trauma transmission* operates in individuals, families and collectives is in the hopes to end or interrupt transmissions of unresolved pasts. Paulo Freire (1994)¹⁷⁷ believed that human beings cannot exist without hope, even in the most limited situations and conditions, and the hope is that the wound can be healed. It is said that “the act of living requires that we are engaged in the mediation of dominant stories and alternative stories of our lives. We are therefore always negotiating and interpreting our experiences... Alternative stories as the ‘anti-problem’ and such stories bring forth skills, abilities, and competencies which are often hidden because of the power of the dominant story” (Morgan 2000, 9, 59, qtd. in Hoosain 77).¹⁷⁸

¹⁷³ Kang, *The problem with ‘han’ 한恨*, 18 March 2022. .

¹⁷⁴ 나채운. 한국인의 슬픔과 한. 성주신문, Seongjuro, 17 April 2012. <http://m.seongjuro.co.kr/view.php?idx=23701>.

¹⁷⁵ Chung, and Oh, *Emotions in Korean Philosophy and Religion: Confucian, Comparative, and Contemporary Perspectives*, 318.

¹⁷⁶ Simsek, *Post-Memory: Family As A Space of Historical Trauma Transmission*, 2017.

¹⁷⁷ Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Translated by Robert R. Barr. London, Bloomsbury Academic, 2021. Original 1994.

¹⁷⁸ Hoosain, *The Transmission of Intergenerational Trauma in Displaced Families*, 29- 37.

The alternative is that “*han* is not just trauma, vague in western circles for colonization and war, historical defeat and inhumanity. *Han*, not as an illness, but a way of thinking about our lives. *Han* specific to Korea, but not limited to Korea. *Han* as exile by native Koreans. *Han* as crossing the Pacific. This brings me closer to the truth of living as a perpetual outsider and against the definition of *han* as nationhood. The earth’s *han*, face pockmarked over a hundred years of bombing. It is not only a suffering but a suffering that is *avoidable* and is *not avoided*, a suffering that breaks us and need not break us” (Koh, 2021).¹⁷⁹

historical unresolved grief

Related to *historical trauma*, Brave Heart and DeBruyn (1998) coined the term *historical unresolved grief*. Grief after traumatic events such as genocide, massacres and displacement, can result in shame besides being denied the right to mourn. *Disenfranchised grief* can be discussed as a mechanism of trauma transmission relating to a “story that could not be told because no one could suffer the empathy needed to hear it” (Stein 2012, 178 cited in Hoosain 2013).¹⁸⁰ The notion of *internalised oppression* as a result of historical unresolved grief also includes rage being denied a means of legitimate expression (Poupart 2003 cited in Hoosain 2013).¹⁸¹

“[H]an is a potent form of Korean rage—a type of anger so severe and all-consuming that some believe you can die from it... *han* is not just a word, but an inherent part of being Korean. Some say it runs in our blood and is embedded in our DNA. In fact, it’s so Korean that there’s no equivalent for it in the English language. Although *han* is considered indefinable, it is often described as an internalized feeling of deep sorrow, resentment, grief, regret and anger. Scholars say it’s a uniquely Korean characteristic borne out of the country’s long history of invasion, oppression and suffering” (Kim, 2020).¹⁸² Frantz Fanon (1952) believed that the inferiority complex that the colonized experienced was a result of the colonizer’s projection of superiority (93).¹⁸³

Through the aesthetics of negative emotions and range of *ugly feelings*, a spectrum of anger and rage can be considered. “Though thinkers from Aristotle to Audre Lorde have highlighted anger’s centrality to the pursuit of social justice, Larsen’s novel prefers the ‘superficial’ affect of irritation—a conspicuously weak or inadequate form of anger, as well an affect that bears an unusually close relationship to the body’s surfaces or skin... the exploration of the ideologically fraught relationship between emotion, race, and aesthetics as it comes to a head...” (Ngai 35)¹⁸⁴

No place for “black rage”, bell hooks (1995, 137)¹⁸⁵ writes that the “collective failure of black people to deal with the psychic wounds brought on by aggressive racism is the breeding ground for a psychology of victimhood where learned helplessness, uncontrollable rage and feelings of overwhelming powerlessness and despair abound in the psyches of black people, yet it is not attended to in ways that promote wholeness and states of well-being”. This appears again in the writings of Ndebele (2016)¹⁸⁶ contextualizing post-Apartheid South African manifestations of victimhood and the on-going lack of agency in the relief of “black pain” while questioning notions of “black wellbeing”. In the *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology* (2016),¹⁸⁷ Cyril Kenneth Adonis explores the salience of intergenerational trauma among

¹⁷⁹ Koh, *American Han*, 2021.

¹⁸⁰ Hoosain, *The Transmission of Intergenerational Trauma in Displaced Families*, 29- 37.

¹⁸¹ Hoosain, *The Transmission of Intergenerational Trauma in Displaced Families*, 29- 37.

¹⁸² Kim, *There’s a uniquely Korean word for rage and regret. So why had I never heard of it?* Podcast, 20 May 2019.

¹⁸³ Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Translated by Richard Philcox, New York, Grove Press, 2008.

¹⁸⁴ Ngai, Sianne. *Ugly Feelings*. Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2005.

¹⁸⁵ hooks, bell. *Killing rage: Ending racism*. New York, Henry Holt and Company, 1995.

¹⁸⁶ Ndebele, Njabulo S. *They Are Burning Memory*. In *Reflections*. Njabulo S. Ndebele, 17 September 2016. Personal webpage, <https://www.njabulondebele.co.za/2016/09/they-are-burning-memory/>.

¹⁸⁷ Adonis, Cyril Kenneth. *Exploring the Salience of Intergenerational Trauma among Children and Grandchildren of Victims of Apartheid-Era Gross Human Rights Violations*. The Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology, vol. 16, eds. 1 & 2, October 2016, pp. 1-17, ISSN (online): 1445-7377.

children and grandchildren of victims of apartheid-era gross human rights violations. In the deeply traumatized society, “many feel that this collective trauma has not been sufficiently addressed and that this has rendered the peace achieved after Apartheid’s demise increasingly fragile... traumatic memories affect not only those who have personally experienced conflict and violence, but also future generations”. As a result, “it has been said that collective shame and guilt are transmitted across generations”.

The impact of *internalized oppression* and *transgenerational transmission of trauma* has been made visible in the research of family violence. Studies show how children growing up in a violent family learn violent roles and may play out the roles of victim or victimizer in their own adult family. Tracing *historical trauma transmission* through five generations of victims of trauma in South America, Anjelika Huseynzade Simsek¹⁸⁸ describes that:

1. the first-generation experience direct trauma;
2. the second-generation is indirectly impacted, through the first who have lost a sense of self-worth and cultural identity, falling into substance abuse to cope;
3. the third experience the transmission as domestic violence, exploitation, and dissolution of families;
4. the fourth are impacted in the description of the family unit, social norms and accepted behavioural changes, and individuals causing psycho-social change in response;
5. in the fifth, this violence loop repeats itself, as violence causes violence, increasing violence augmented traumatization.

In this scenario, the repetition of the cycle of violence increases the impact of trauma and social disaster continues. Rage operating through *han* of those in South Korea, “Kim Yôl-kyo observe[d] the ready potential for *han* to degenerate into a vicious cycle of revenge and retribution, and through this process the negativity of *wônhan* (deeper *han*) is perpetuated. Thus the larger social form of the *minjung* movement and the historical resources it had available to it in Korean folk culture are crucial in providing direction for the analysis and manipulation of individual and collective *han*. In this sense, shamanism has been a central source of context from within which *han* could be understood, manipulated, and resolved (Kim cited in Freda 9). ...Jae Hoon Lee states that ‘shamans, the living symbol of *han* in Korea, become themselves through the experience of *han*, while the main pursuit of their rituals is to resolve the *han* of the people’... Mircea Eliade has it that the Shaman initiation ritual typically involves a journey, often to death and back, through which the shaman masters her or his affliction and in doing so gains mastery over the very spirits of affliction. This is a source of social empowerment but also grants the shaman collectively acknowledged authority and ability to liberate others from affliction, or in the Korean idiom, their *han*. A common form of affliction derives from spirits, often ancestors, who harbo[u]r *han* due to some unfulfilled wish in life and thus in death have been unable to pass cleanly on. Such spirits bring misfortune and sickness upon their descendants, yielding further misery.... The hard work of liberation, as shamans well know, involves a real exercise of this authority that transcends the sorrows of death: an effective *kut* (liberating dance) is not only, or primarily, a scene of easy jouissance but is one of confrontation, accusation, commiseration, and final release in tears, a working-through of hardened troubles” (Freda, 1999, 10).¹⁸⁹

Similarly, a journey to death and back is performed in the work of Brazilian artist Lygia Clark. Reflecting on the “relationships between art and pathology in the mid-1970s”, Clark had students from Sorbonne, Paris, use threads as a ‘transitional object’ in a collective act. “A person lies down on the floor. Around him young people who are kneeling down put different colo[u]red reels of thread in their mouths... The thread comes out full of saliva. This thread falls on the body of the person lying down and the group disperses to break up the drool-covered thread, in a dialectic between the inside and the outside, the self-space and the collective body.... while Fédida, in his piece ‘Le Cannibale mélancolique’ (The melancholy cannibal), analyzed the fantasy of incorporation from Klein’s theories. There is an undeniable correspondence between those texts and Clark’s act *Canibalismo*, in which ‘a group eats, blindfolded, from the belly of a

¹⁸⁸ Simsek, *Post-Memory: Family As A Space of Historical Trauma Transmission*, 2017.

¹⁸⁹ Freda, *Discourse on Han in Postcolonial Korea: Absent Suffering and Industrialist Dreams*, 10.

young person lying down.’ Clark took notes on Abraham and Torok’s essay *Introjecter-incorporer. Deuil ou mélancolie* (*Introjection-incorporation: Mourning or melancholy*), which captured her interest” (Macel, 2017).¹⁹⁰

Multi-disciplinary conceptual artist, Kimsooja initially worked with textiles and created a methodology of her own body as the needle, sitting in the fabric of life and penetrating the depth of surfaces. Her *bottari* series of wrapping cloths were displayed both as flat and sculptural objects, speaking to the conditions of migration and domestic labour. A series of video works documenting her body in the middle of crowds of various cities, titled *A Needle Women* (1999-2001), directly related to this methodology, embedded her still body within the movement of the people around her. Her works have since moved into creating experiential moments for the viewer, but in relating the ties between thread and body, breath, life and death, there is a common thread and needle acting as the ‘transitional object’.

¹⁹⁰ Macel, Christine. *Part 2: Lygia Clark: At the Border of Art*. In *post: notes on art in a global context*. MoMA, 29 June, 2017, <https://post.moma.org/part-2-lygia-clark-at-the-border-of-art/>.



Figure 17. mihyun maria kim. (Installation view) Garments of mourning, constantly moving by daily activations, 2023.

An accumulation of gestures towards *han*, garments of mourning on sienna pressure treated wooden resting structure, 12-19 April 2023:

1. *Jeogori with missing trims and tie, too large for the artist*, used as a protective covering of the lungs where *han* is carried and as a garment of suspended mourning. 79 x 17 " Brown organza hand-stitched to be too large for the artist's own body, 2021
2. Hanbok dress gifted by the Hong family too small for the artist's body, decorated with 49 hand-stitched metal bells to represent the number of days of the last breath between death and spirit release believed by the Tibet Buddhist traditions, 2023.
3. *Muta-l*, sized when casted directly on artist's face for 5hr durational drying time. Repurposed Hanji from a charcoal drawing of the Gibson family (Toronto's first land surveyor), paper maché with rice and wheat paste, hand-stitched decomposable straw and wooden button mouthpiece. 2023.
4. Fan with calligraphy painting gifted by the Hong family, used as a pace of breath during activations, rested on bamboo cushion shipped from Japan.
5. White under dress for child's hanbok gifted by the Yoon family folded and wrapped in red ribbon gifted by the Park family.
6. A set of remaining thrown-off beoseon unable to distinguish from a causal undressing, a run-away or a suicidal decision , 11.5 x 10" Pink organza hand-stitched to be too tight for the artist's own feet placed on compressed wool and bamboo cushion shipped from Japan, 2021.

the shape of loss

	displaced	
	distanced	
	divided	
	detached	
	deep sorrow	
han	resentment	estrangement
	grief	
	regret	
	anger	
	hatred	
	endure	
	suffering	
	longing	
	isolated	

“And perhaps the most difficult, the loss of loss itself: somewhere sometime, something was lost, but no story can be told about it; no memory can retrieve it” (Butler, 2003, 467).¹⁹¹

“mom, where are you going?”

That night, I waited on the one sofa we owned, sitting quietly in the middle of the living room, while all were busy in their rooms. Finally, she came, and we spoke. She softly whispered that we would be moving out, out of this home, not yet really a home, not our home, to go to a home, we would make ours. Secretly, we quickly packed the little we owned into two *imingabangs* and set them by the bedroom door. Lying down, excitedly dreaming of what our home would look like, where we would go, I noticed in the dim grey of our darkened room, things still hanging on the hangers in the half-opened half-closed wall closet. I asked her why they weren’t yet packed, and after a pause, she said they were old and needed to be thrown out.

I awoke to three older cousins slapping me on my thighs, one jumping on the bed, waking me in a hurry. It was sunny. Sun streamed through the window over the bed, and I walked down to adults on the phone: one reading a note on a page ripped from a notebook, another taking over the seat of our sofa with no hesitation like mine. They didn’t notice me standing at the carpeted edge of the living room, unwantedly listening, hearing things I wasn’t supposed to hear.

“Why is he not picking up?!”

“... when her legs fall asleep, please massage them, one-by-one, a hundred times each, until they stop hurting. This happens to her often...”

“... You have to come take her now! We don’t know where she is, but she has left.”

She, the one I trusted most, who made secret promises the night before, the one I called *umma* was gone; had gone; had left. Took the clothing; her clothing; hers, not to be thrown out, but to be taken with her, to somewhere, a place the others and I could not know where.

To this day, I do not know her name, although I certainly heard a quick mention of it once. My ears and my head didn’t keep it, as if it were something I should not ever know. To this day, there is only this memory and a faint memory of soft bangs covering a forehead with no face, only a movement of them side-to-side, half-permed, wavy, over eyebrow and eyes, that I can’t see the face under, not even the shape of the eyes, her eyes, the memory, my memory of her eyes. No stories were told, no questions were asked.

Years of calling others mom, mother, *umma*, *umeoni*, had given me no time to miss her, to think of her, to try and piece the memory of her. She took no form; no space; no moment. But a few years back, on my

¹⁹¹ Butler, Judith. *Arterword: After Loss, What Then?* In *Loss: The Politics of Mourning*. Edited by Eng, David L. and David Kazanjian. Los Angeles, London, University of California Press, Berkely, 2003, pp. 467-473.

38th birthday, I was asked in front of the lit cake waiting to be blown out why I never asked of her. A storm of emotions rose from deep within me, too quick, too fast. Tears were the only thing that came out as a sound. Then, one reminded me; reminded me of a memory; a memory I didn't recall, that I didn't have, didn't keep, that I had asked about her once.

Some days after she was gone, and I had been picked up, my father drove us away, around-and-around, lost as to where to go. When we reached a beach, facing the blue ocean, I cried. Cried for *umma*; mommy; my mother. A hard slap across the cheek shut me up. Then, and now, and perhaps forever, but certainly until now. It explained why I never asked, and my body shook even thinking about mentioning her on my lips.

How could I miss someone I have no memory of? How could I piece her together when there were no stories told? David Johnson asks, "is it possible to mourn something[/someone] that you want back?"¹⁹² In my early 20s, when I made my father angry, a handful of times he mentioned that I behaved like her; like someone I shouldn't resemble.

"What does it feel like to not know your real mom?" (Trenka, 2003, 38)¹⁹³

There are parts imagined to fill in gaps between fragments in my own story, to cover up my own unknowing, that have become truths in my memory. Knowing what I don't know brought shame and fear in telling the story at all. The inability to remember the contours of her face, her body, her voice, made it less painful to recall, yet I felt as if, and still do feel, that I have lost a piece of myself in losing her, as I question how I might resemble her. For all those who came after, taking her place, I called them by the name of the lost, but they never quite replaced her being out of my life. This lack, this void, led to moments when I realized I had idealized a figure of a mother for myself, and this imaged mother was all about the qualities of a mother-figure than a shape of a physical figure, that might stand-in as one whom I supposedly missed. So then, who have I lost? And, as Judith Butler (2004, 2006, 2020)¹⁹⁴ asks, "[w]ho 'am' I, without [her]?"

I kept this story hidden deep within me for all these years. It was hard to replay the memory, but this story relates to the ways I have come to understand the operations of mourning, melancholia and loss. "When we lose certain people, or when we are dispossessed from a place, or a community, we may simply feel that we are undergoing something temporary, that mourning will be over and some restoration of prior order will be achieved. But maybe when we undergo what we do, something about who we are is revealed, something that delineates the ties we have to others, that shows us that these ties constitute what we are, ties or bonds that compose us. It is not as if an 'I' exists independently over here and then simply loses a 'you' over there, especially if the attachment to 'you' is part of what composes who 'I' am. If I lose you, under these conditions, then I not only mourn the loss, but I become inscrutable to myself. Who 'am' I, without you? When we lose some of these ties by which we are constituted, we do not know who we are or what to do. On one level, I think I have lost 'you' only to discover that 'I' have gone missing as well. At another level, perhaps what I have lost 'in' you, that for which I have no ready vocabulary, is a relationality that is composed neither exclusively of myself nor you, but is to be conceived as *the tie* by which those terms are differentiated and related" (Butler 22).¹⁹⁵

In the voice of the narrator, "I [too] find that my very formation implicates the other in me, that my own foreignness to myself is, paradoxically, the source of my ethical connection with others. I am not fully known to myself, because part of what I am is the enigmatic traces of others. In this sense, I cannot know

¹⁹² Johnson, David. *Theorizing the Loss of Land*. Cited in Edited by Eng, David L. and David Kazanjian. *Loss: The Politics of Mourning*. Los Angeles, London, University of California Press, Berkely, 2003, pp.22.

¹⁹³ Trenka, *The Language of Blood*, 38.

¹⁹⁴ Butler, Judith. *Violence, Mourning, Politics*. In *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Justice*. London, Verso, 2020. Original 2004. p. 19-49.

¹⁹⁵ Butler, *Violence, Mourning, Politics*. In *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Justice*, 22.

myself perfectly or know my 'difference' from others in an irreducible way. This unknowingness may seem, from a given perspective, a problem for ethics and politics. Don't I need to know myself in order to act responsibly in social relations? Surely, to a certain extent, yes. But is there an ethical valence to my unknowingness? I am wounded... I cannot think the question of responsibility alone, in isolation from the Other; if I do, I have taken myself out of the relational bind that frames the problem of responsibility from the start" (Butler 46).¹⁹⁶ Butler further explains that this tie that is between the 'you' and the 'I' is revealed in grief. "What grief displays is the thrall in which our relations with others hold us, in ways that we cannot always recount or explain, in ways that often interrupt the self-conscious account of ourselves we might try to provide, in ways that challenge the very notion of ourselves as autonomous and in control" (Butler 23). It is also true that then "we're undone by each other. ... Many people think that grief is privatizing, that it returns us to a solitary situation and is, in that sense, depoliticizing. But I think it furnishes a sense of political community of a complex order, and it does this first of all by bringing to the fore the relational ties that have implications for theorizing fundamental dependency and ethical responsibility" (Butler 22).

In the expression of grief, my moment to mourn the loss of my mother was abruptly ended with the slap to the face, and as a child I was unable to put all of these bits together in understanding the consequences of the events, to know *how* or *when* to mourn. In *The Outsider*,¹⁹⁷ Albert Camus describes the events after the death of the protagonist's mother, and how his behaviours of mourning were outside the expectations of the other mourners and the community, that they questioned his grief, his position, as the son of one who just died. Alike, even if there was certain loss, I wouldn't know how to mourn *accordingly* like those who had a mother all along. "Perhaps, rather, one mourns when one accepts that by the loss one undergoes one will be changed, possibly for ever. Perhaps mourning has to do with agreeing to undergo a transformation (perhaps one should say *submitting* to a transformation) the full result of which one cannot know in advance. There is losing, as we know, but there is also the transformative effect of loss, and this latter cannot be charted or planned. One can try to choose it, but it may be that this experience of transformation deconstitutes choice at some level" (Butler 21).¹⁹⁸ Whether known or unknown, a transformation took place in my relationship with the loss of my mother, yet, "one is hit by waves" (21) of grief and unexpectedly triggered in moments of the every day.

In *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917),¹⁹⁹ Freud writes that "[m]ourning is regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as [one's country], liberty, an ideal, and so on" (164). To grieve "may be understood as the slow process by which we develop a point of identification with suffering itself. [Whereas, t]he disorientation of grief— 'Who have I become?' or, indeed, 'What is left of me?' 'What is it in the Other that I have lost?'—posits the 'I' in the mode of unknowingness" (Butler 30).²⁰⁰

Examples of how disorientation of grief operates are seen in the documentary, *Tiger Spirit* (2008),²⁰¹ by filmmaker Min Sook Lee.²⁰² The film traces modern day Korea and the impact of the divide through an autoethnographic lens. Lee carefully weaves the stories of a tiger (Korean Spirit) hunter, North Korean defectors, the nationally broadcasted 2018 이산가족 separated family reunion, and herself during a pregnancy, questioning "Who is Korean?"—with those in search for "a country that disappeared long ago".

¹⁹⁶ Butler, *Violence, Mourning, Politics*. In *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Justice*, 46.

¹⁹⁷ Camus, Albert. *The Outsider*. Translated by Joseph Laredo. New York, Penguin Books, 1982. Original 1942.

¹⁹⁸ Butler, *Violence, Mourning, Politics*, 21.

¹⁹⁹ Freud, Sigmund. *Mourning and Melancholia*. General Psychological Theory: Papers on Metapsychology. New York, Simon & Schuster, 1991, pp. 164- 179. Original 1917.

²⁰⁰ Butler, *Violence, Mourning, Politics*, 30.

²⁰¹ Lee, Min Sook. *Tiger Spirit*. 73mins. YouTube, uploaded by NFB, 21 August 2019.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rwA8kz4z9VQ>. Accessed 10 October 2020.

²⁰² Min Sook Lee is a Canadian documentary filmmaker, screenwriter, political activist, an Assistant Professor at OCAD University teaching and researching in the critical intersections of art+social change, border politics, migration and social justice movements.

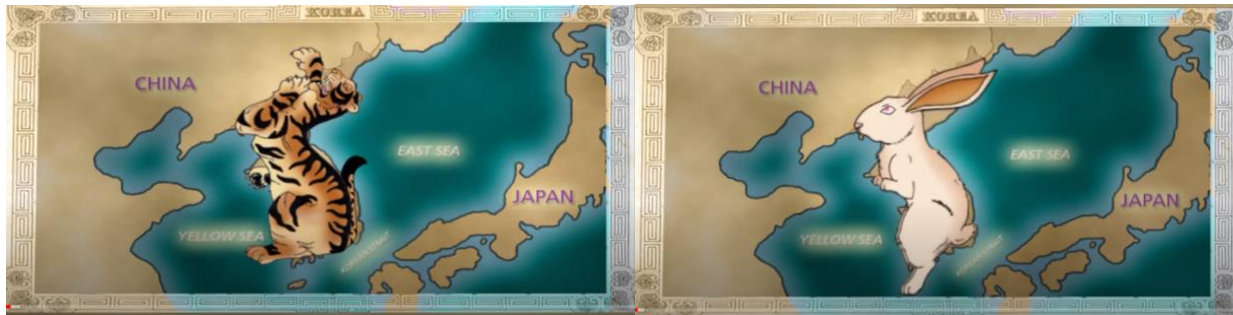


Figure 18. Min Sook Lee. (Stills) *Tiger Spirit*. 52mins., Documentary film, 2008.

Reflecting on Japan's reframing of the Korean tiger spirit into the image of a rabbit, for fear of the tiger presenting itself as fearless and powerful, Lee captures different modes of loss and unknowingness through the exhaustive nostalgic efforts of restoring something past. These stories could also be a sign of interminable grief, which is "the result of the melancholic's inability to resolve the various conflicts and ambivalences that the loss of the love object effects. In other words, the melancholic cannot 'get over' this loss—cannot work out this loss in order to invest in new objects and ideals" (Eng & Han 36).²⁰³

During the months of filming, an elder, registered to reunite with his family in the North, was notified that all his siblings were deceased. He ends his search by concluding that "there [was] no more point in a family reunion". Once death was certain, mourning (the process of letting go) could take place. Melancholia transformed to mourning. "This would suggest that melancholia is in some way related to an unconscious loss of a love-object, in contradistinction to mourning, in which there is nothing unconscious about the loss... The unknown loss in melancholia would also result in an inner labour of the same kind and hence would be responsible for the melancholic inhibition... and extraordinary fall in his self-esteem" (Freud, 1963; 1991: 164- 167).²⁰⁴ Michael Roth said that "the person in melancholy is lost to himself or herself; the work of melancholy is to preserve oneself as lost, as not worthy of being found." Cited by Michael D. Shin, who makes the connection of melancholia to be understood as the lack of identity.²⁰⁵

From personal experience and these examples, "I do not think that successful grieving implies that one has forgotten another person or that something else has come along to take its place, as if full substitutability were something for which we might strive" (Butler 21).²⁰⁶ Rather, "Freud's observations on the overlapping qualities of the lost object—a person or an abstraction"—allows "us to understand the lost object as continually shifting both spatially and temporally, adopting new perspectives and meaning, new social and political consequences, along the way. The 'and so on' of Freud's passage gestures toward such an interpretation" (Eng & Kazanjian 5).²⁰⁷

"In contrast with mourning, Freud describes melancholia as an enduring devotion on the part of the ego to the lost object. A mourning without end ['temporally extended into an indefinite future'],²⁰⁸ melancholia results from the inability to resolve the grief and ambivalence precipitated by the loss of the loved object, place, or ideal" (Eng & Kazanjian 3). "Freud attempts to draw a clear distinction between these two mental states", in a way that melancholia opposes "normal mourning". "Yet, Freud also casts doubt on the inevitability of this distinction when he writes, 'It is really only because we know so well how to explain [mourning] that this attitude does not seem to us pathological.' Were one to understand melancholia better, Freud implies, one would no longer insist on its pathological nature. In this spirit, [Eng & Kazanjian] suggest

²⁰³ Eng, and Han, *Racial Melancholia, Racial Dissociation: On the Social and Psychic Lives of Asian Americans*, 36.

²⁰⁴ Freud, *Mourning and Melancholia*, 164-167.

²⁰⁵ *A Brief History of Han with Prof. Michael D. Shin*. YouTube, 7 May 2019.

²⁰⁶ Butler, *Violence, Mourning, Politics*, 21.

²⁰⁷ Edited by Eng, David L. and David Kazanjian. *Introduction: Mourning Remains*. In *Loss: The Politics of Mourning*. Los Angeles, London, University of California Press, Berkely, 2003, pp.1-25.

²⁰⁸ Eng, and Han, *Racial Melancholia, Racial Dissociation: On the Social and Psychic Lives of Asian Americans*, 25.

that a better understanding of melancholic attachments to loss might depathologize those attachments, making visible not only their social bases but also their creative, unpredictable, political aspects” (3).²⁰⁹ David L. Eng with Shinee Han (2018) advise to “not slot racial melancholia under the sign of pathology, permanence, or damage. Instead, [they] reconceptualize it as a normative psychic state involving everyday conflicts and negotiations between mourning *and* melancholia, rather than, in Freud’s estimation, mourning *or* melancholia” (Eng & Han 25).²¹⁰

“[H]an, as a specifically Korean melancholy or grief, with no equivalent in the English language, is directly linked to the conception of Korean national sovereignty, or the denial thereof by bigger foreign imperial powers, such as Japan, Russia, and the United States.”²¹¹ For Koreans, in the aftermath of historical trauma, melancholia was extended by the physical situation of the suspended end of war, continued divide of land and families, demands of assimilation, discriminations and displacement. The framing of the Korean War as a “Forgotten War” in the voice of the victor, reducing the size of the losses to enforce collective psychic amnesia, an approach to process loss could be in “‘radical melancholic’ sensibility [that] reburdens the sleek futurism of structural knowledge with the troubling detritus of the past, and in this redistribution of epistemic weight it becomes possible to liberate the frozen function of myth into a more workable one of meaning” (Freda 6).²¹²

Jennifer Cho (2020) coined “mel-*han*-choly”—as a “hybridized form of melancholy and Korean *han* (a culturally specific grief)” to explain how Theresa Hak Kyung Cha used it “as a subversive political tool to defer historical closure and to refuse her quiet assimilation... because Korean history cannot be discussed without implicating the U.S. and calling into question its exceptional values, such recollection might be willfully avoided.” She claims that “Cha’s mel-*han*-cholic plays generate productive disruptions on two levels. First, it challenges dominant understandings of the U.S. as a liberator of South Korea and the U.S.’s discursive power in narrating its history. Second, mel-*han*-choly serves a connective, transnational function within the diasporic Korean community. As depicted by the fractured relationship between Cha’s narrator and her mother, a sense of shared loss and cultural grief can become the basis around which collective identity might be organized” (Cho 410-434).²¹³ There is vulnerability and responsibility in organizing a collective identity around loss, but “if I am confounded by you, then you are already of me, and I am nowhere without you. I cannot muster the ‘we’ except by finding the way in which I am tied to ‘you,’ ... You are what I gain through this disorientation and loss” (Butler 49).²¹⁴

Unresolved grief experienced in historical trauma is passed down to the next generation(s). Another layer for Korean diaspora is the *trauma of displacement* or im/migration “based on a structure of mourning. When one leaves one’s country of origin—voluntarily or involuntarily—one must mourn a host of losses both concrete and abstract. These include homeland, family, language, identity, property, status in community—the list goes on. In Freud’s theory of mourning, one works through and finds closure to these losses by investing in new objects—in the America dream, for example” (Eng & Han 48). But “[i]f the losses suffered by first-generation immigrants are not resolved and mourned in the process of assimilation, then the melancholia that ensues can be traumatically passed down to the second generation. At the same time, can the hope of assimilation and pursuit of the American dream also be transferred? If so, we might say that mourning and melancholia are reenacted and lived out by second-generation children in their own attempts to assimilate and to negotiate the American dream. Here, immigration and assimilation

²⁰⁹ Eng, and Kazanjian, *Introduction: Mourning Remains*. In *Loss: The Politics of Mourning*, 3.

²¹⁰ Eng, and Han, *Racial Melancholia, Racial Dissociation: On the Social and Psychic Lives of Asian Americans*, 25.

²¹¹ Chu, *Science Fiction and Postmemory Han in Contemporary Korean American Literature*, 97- 121.

²¹² Freda, *Discourse on Han in Postcolonial Korea: Absent Suffering and Industrialist Dreams*, 6.

²¹³ Cho, Jennifer. *Mel-han-cholia as Political Practice in Theresa Hak Kyung Cha’s Dictée*. *Meridians: feminism, race, transnationalism*, vol. 19, issue S1, 2020, pp. 410-434, <https://read.dukeupress.edu/meridians/article-abstract/19/S1/410/167565/Mel-han-cholia-as-Political-Practice-in-Theresa>.

²¹⁴ Butler, *Violence, Mourning, Politics*, 49.

characterize a process involving not just mourning or melancholia but the intergenerational negotiation between mourning and melancholia. Configured as such, this notion begins to depathologize melancholia by situating it as the intersubjective unfolding and outcome of the mourning process that underwrites the various psychic investments and losses connected to the immigration experience” (Eng & Han 28-29).²¹⁵

If there is any “counterintuitive perspective” to approaching loss, David L. Eng and David Kazanjian (2003) propose “imput[ing] to loss a creative instead of a negative quality”, which looks toward the inseparable question of “what is lost?” with the following question of ‘what remains?’...for what is lost is known only by what remains of it, by how these remains are produced, read, and sustained. ...This attention to remains generates a politics of mourning that might be active rather than reactive, prescient rather than nostalgic, abundant rather than lacking, social rather than solipsistic, militant rather than reactionary” (Eng & Kazanjian 2).²¹⁶ “According to [Walter] Benjamin [*Theses on the Philosophy of History* (1940, 1968)]²¹⁷ to mourn the remains of the past hopefully is to establish an active and open relationship with history. This practice—what Benjamin calls ‘historical materialism’—is a creative process, animating history for future significations as well as alternate empathies. For the historical materialist, to relive an era is not to ‘blot out everything’ one knows ‘about the later course of history’—simply to bring memory to the past. On the contrary, reliving an era is to bring the past to memory. It is to induce actively a tension between the past and the present, between the dead and the living. In this manner, Benjamin’s historical materialist establishes a continuing dialogue with loss and its remains—a flash of emergence, an instant of emergency, and most important a moment of productions. ...In advocating historical materialism’s approach to mourning remains, Benjamin also warns of political and ethical misappropriations of loss. He thus contrasts historical materialism with historicism, describing the latter process as an encrypting of the past from a singular, empathetic point of view: that of the victor” (Eng & Kazanjian 1).

“In this regard, [Eng & Kazanjian] find in Freud’s conception of melancholia’s persistent struggle with its lost objects not simply a ‘grasping’ and ‘holding’ on to a fixed notion of the past but rather a continuous engagement with loss and its remains. Engagement generates sites for memory and history, for the rewriting of the past as well as the reimagining of the future. While mourning abandons lost objects by laying their histories to rest, melancholia’s continued and open relation to the past finally allows us to gain new perspectives on and new understandings of lost objects. Sustained forms of mourning such as melancholia can be said to figure what Fred Moten theorizes ‘an insight that is manifest as a kind of magnification or intensification of the object.’ In this sense, melancholia raises the question of what makes a world of new objects, places, and ideals possible. At the same time, what are the psychic mechanisms—the modes of being and the affective registers—that make investment in that new world imaginable and thinkable?” Eng & Kazanjian continue to conclude that “the work of mourning is not possible without melancholia”, that “the work of mourning remains becomes possible through melancholia’s continued engagement with the various and ongoing forms of loss”. It is “[t]he ability of the melancholic object to express multiple losses at once [which] speaks to its flexibility as a signifier” (3-5).²¹⁸

Both Butler and Douglas Crimp isolate the call of melancholia in the age of AIDS, as one in which the loss of a public language to mourn a seemingly endless series of young male deaths triggers the absolute need to think about melancholia and political activism. Muñoz²¹⁹ highlights the communal nature of this activist project—the community-oriented aspect of collective rather than individual losses, of collective rather than individual identifications, and of collective rather than individual revolt: ‘Communal mourning, by its very nature, is an immensely complicated text to read, for we do not mourn just one lost object or other,

²¹⁵ Eng, and Han, *Racial Melancholia, Racial Dissociation: On the Social and Psychic Lives of Asian Americans*, 28-29.

²¹⁶ Eng, and Kazanjian, *Introduction: Mourning Remains*. In *Loss: The Politics of Mourning*, 2.

²¹⁷ Benjamin, *Theses on the philosophy of History*. In *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, 196-209.

²¹⁸ Eng, and Kazanjian, *Introduction: Mourning Remains*, 3-5.

²¹⁹ Muñoz, *Disidentifications*, 73.

but we also mourn as a 'whole'—or, put another way, as a contingent and temporary collection of fragments that is experiencing a loss of its parts.' A series of unresolved fragments, we come together as a contingent whole. We gain social recognition as a racial collective in the face of this communal loss" (Muñoz qtd. in Eng & Han 63-64).²²⁰



Figure 19. (Installation detail) Redza Piyadasa and Sulaiman Esa. *Mystic Reality*, 1974.²²¹

Included the following dialectic:

1. Empty bird cage after release of bird at 2.46 pm on Monday 10th June 1974.
2. Potted plant watered and looked after by the two artists over a period of seven month.
3. Empty chair on which many persons have sat on.
4. Two half drank Coca Cola bottles.
5. An outlined area occupied by the shadow of the poet Usman Awang made at 4.05 pm on Saturday 8th December 1973. 36" X 36"
6. Empty canvas on which many shadows have already fallen. 1974. 36" X 36"
7. Discarded silk-screen which was used to make many beautiful prints.
8. Burnt out mosquito coils used to keep away mosquitoes on the night of 25th March 1974.

²²⁰ Eng, and Han, *Racial Melancholia, Racial Dissociation: On the Social and Psychic Lives of Asian Americans*, 63-64.

²²¹ Abdullah, Sarena in conversation with Dr. Nora Taylor. *Props, Performing, Performance: Tracing Early Performance Art in 1990s Malaysia*. Asia Art Archive in America, Online via ZOOM, 19 January 2021, <https://vimeo.com/504851054>

9. Discarded raincoat found at a Klang rubbish dump at 4.23 pm on Sunday 13th January 1974 that must have belonged to someone
10. Randomly collected sample of human hair collected from a barber shop in Petaling Jaya

PRACTICE OF FEELING *HAN*



Figure 20. mihyun maria kim. (Installation) *Reach of Han*. Various sizes fitted to artist's hand gestures. Ceramic casts of artist's performative grasps, acrylic string, metallic sheets. 2022. Photo taken during exhibition: *Process*. Toronto, Grad Gallery, 7-16 October 2022.²²²

grasping *han*²²³

“In advocating historical materialism’s approach to mourning remains, Benjamin also warns of political and ethical misappropriations of loss. He thus contrasts historical materialism with historicism, describing the latter process as an encrypting of the past from a singular, empathetic point of view: that of the victor. Benjamin isolates the historicist propensity to relive the past as inexorable fixity, a tendency he names *acedia*, whose origin is the ‘indolence of the heart.’ This indolence not only insists upon a hegemonic identification with the victor’s perspective but also pre-empts history’s other possible accounts. Historicism’s desire to ‘grasp’ and to ‘hold’ on to the fleeting images of the past—to create fixed and totalizing narratives from those fleeting images—precipitates despair, because such narratives are finally not only illusive but also elusive. As the ‘root cause of sadness,’ historicism’s fixing of the remains of the past is hopeless.” (Benjamin cited in Eng & Kazanjian 1-2)²²⁴

Loss, unresolved historic grief, denied right to mourn, depathologized melancholic states engaging with the conditions of suspended mourning, trauma transmission of the past and of displacement, all lead to the ways *han* is shaped in the bodies of Koreans in North America. The “original *han*” experienced by the grandparent’s generation have transmitted in different ways for those remaining in Korea as a collective

²²² Curated by Avalon Mott. *Process*. Toronto, Grad Gallery, 7-16 October 2022. <https://www.avalonmott.com/process>.

Appendices include full documentation.

²²³ refer to Appendix C

²²⁴ Eng, and Kazanjian, *Loss: The Politics of Mourning*, 1-2.

body, and for those dispersed to other lands. The feeling of *han* stems from collective trauma affecting the “whole”, but I already know that the *han* of those in North Korea, China, Japan, to those in the U.S. and Canada all look and feel different, based on the language power-takeover, intrasubjective relations, and present-day situations one finds themselves in. The lag of translation, access to knowledge, demands of assimilation and the modes of systemic silencing shape the relevance of *han* in different societies. In this sense, ***han* exists in relation.**

Karen Barad, in *What Is the Measure of Nothingness: Infinity, Virtuality, Justice* (2012),²²⁵ describes how the “void is a spectral realm with ghostly existence. Not even nothing can be free of ghosts... They do not exist in space and time. They are ghostly non/existences that teeter on the edge of the infinitely thin blade between being and nonbeing... no determinate words are spoken by the vacuum, only a speaking silence that is neither silence nor speech, but the conditions of im/possibility for non/existence. There are an infinite number of im/possibilities, but not everything is possible. The vacuum isn't empty, but neither is there any/thing in it.” What stood out for me is that there is a set boundary, even to nothingness, but it is also a space of im/possibilities dependent on the apparatus one brings to measure it with. The act of measuring and coming closer is a performative gesture and shapes that which is being measured.

I mention this because *han* has said to be no longer relevant to the lived experiences of Koreans in Korea, while the discourse has seen more relevance in North America. The phantoms created by the living sustain *han* while the everyday life, practices, and experiences perpetually shape it. In the ways I have researched *han*, I cannot remove my self from its description and understanding. The limits of my language, historical knowledge, attachments to family, and distance to Korea, as well as my socio-cultural, geo-political positionality influence this analysis. The following lays out the ways I have gathered language around the feeling of *han*.

“*Han* is generally considered a complex and involves at the very minimum the opposing operations of 품다 *pumtta* and 풀다 *pultta*— much like the English usages of harbouring and releasing a grudge” (Kim 206-9 qtd. in Freda 3).²²⁶ Quoting various Korean scholars and authors, Seo-Young Chu (2008) explains that *han* can range from bittersweet yearning to utter and destructive ‘despair’; *han* is never expressed, but rather compressed and repressed within the self: Ishle Yi Park calls it ‘a pent-up historical and personal anguish’ (qtd in Chu 97).²²⁷ In an interview with Eunice Kim on *The Doc Project*, Michael D. Shin says that “[e]very Korean can feel [*han*]. If it is shown to them they can eventually understand it. *Han* is used in everyday conversation, in mundane ways, and is constantly around, especially in pop culture, TV dramas, films, songs, musical storytelling. Until the country is reunited, we will feel *han* through the perpetual division. You don't feel it all the time, but you can access it and relate to it once you see it” (Kim, 2022, italics added).²²⁸

Exploring gestures of grasping and holding, I found it difficult to visualize *han* as a solid form separate and outside the body. Rather, it seemed deeply embedded inside and was released in the gestures activated. Michael D. Shin cautioned against the tendency to define *han* with emotions, the “surface phenomenon”, since “it gets you nowhere”. Being attentive, I started with the “causes of those emotions... like the cause of pain from experiences that remove you from collective identity” (Kim, 2020).²²⁹ And, now that I have explored the cause of collective grief, the language of suffering, and accumulated layers of trauma transmissions, I want to understand what remains of *han* and what triggers its feeling(s).

“[W]atching Pryor reminded me of an emotional condition that is specific to Koreans: *han*, a combination of bitterness, wistfulness, shame, melancholy, and vengefulness, accumulated from years of brutal

²²⁵ Barad, Karen. *What Is the Measure of Nothingness? Infinity, Virtuality, Justice*. DOCUMENTA (13), no. 099, Kassel, Erschienen im Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2012.

²²⁶ Freda, *Discourse on Han in Postcolonial Korea: Absent Suffering and Industrialist Dreams*, 3.

²²⁷ Chu, *Science Fiction and Postmemory Han in Contemporary Korean American Literature*, 97- 121.

²²⁸ Kim, *There's a uniquely Korean word for rage and regret. So why had I never heard of it?* Podcast, 20 May 2019.

²²⁹ Kim, *There's a uniquely Korean word for rage and regret*, 20 May 2019.

colonialism, war, and U.S.-supported dictatorships that have never been politically redressed. *Han* is so ongoing that it can even be passed down: to be Korean is to feel *han*. ...I saw someone channel what I call minor feelings: the racialized range of emotions that are negative, dysphoric, and therefore untelegenic, built from the sediments of everyday racial experience and the irritant of having one's perception of reality constantly questioned or dismissed... Such disfiguring of senses engenders the minor feelings of paranoia, shame, irritation, and melancholy... Minor feelings are not often featured in contemporary American literature because these emotions do not conform to the archetypal narrative that highlights survival and self-determination. ...[Hong's] term 'minor feelings' is deeply indebted to theorist Sianne Ngai, who wrote extensively on the affective qualities of ugly feelings, negative emotions—like envy, irritation, and boredom—symptomatic of today's late-capitalist gig economy. Like ugly feelings, minor feelings are 'non cathartic states of emotion' with 'a remarkable capacity for duration.' (Hong 54-56).²³⁰ Hong writes frankly about present-day American lived experiences as a minority, as a Korean-American. *Minor Feelings* (2020) gathers fragments of histories and a personalized account of becoming an artist and writer, moments of anger and negative emotions rarely shared, in an accessible read. Another of her books, *Dance, Dance, Revolution*²³¹ is a collection of poetry in Creole and these types of language mixtures, expression fragments, and direct spoken word are methods I am inspired by in the expressions of an untranslatable word.

Han is described as "a word with no equivalent in English" (Chu 2008; Kim 2020; Kang 2022), which "refers to a Korean form of grief" (Chu, 2008, 97-99; Kim, 2020); an "emotional condition that is specific to Korean"; "a combination of bitterness, wistfulness, shame, melancholy, and vengefulness" (Hong, 2020, 54),²³² a "grudge", "rancour" (Freda, 1999, 3),²³³ a "uniquely Korean sense of profound sorrow, regret, resentment, rage and other negative emotions that are all bound up inside an individual as well as the people as a whole" (Kang, 2022, 2-3²³⁴; Kim 2020) that "goes far beyond everyday emotions like happiness or anger. It's a blockage, something that's tangled up and cannot be untied" (Gilonna, 2011).²³⁵ The character that Steven Yeun plays in the movie, *Burning*,²³⁶ calls it a "stone in your heart". It "ranges from bitter-sweet longing to despair that wracks your insides like fire" (Freda; I. Park, 2020²³⁷). Yet *han* never explodes. Writers repeatedly portray *han* as something shaped by repressiveness: "'han is the unexpressed anger felt inside' (Luke Kim, qtd. in Somers) and 'a pent-up historical and personal anguish' (I. Park), 'a compressed feeling of suffering caused by injustice '(A. Park)" (all qtd. in Chu 2008). "*Han* is a potent form of Korean rage—a type of anger so severe and all-consuming that some believe you can die from it" (Kim, 2020);²³⁸ a "critical wound of the heart" (Chung & Oh, 2022).²³⁹ "The word names the feeling that arises as you are buried alive with your dead husband" (Koh, 2021);²⁴⁰ "Scholars have called it an all-encompassing sense of bitterness, a mixture of angst, endurance and a yearning for revenge that tests a person's soul, a condition marked by deep sorrow and a sense of incompleteness that have fatal consequences. To die because of *han*, experts say, is to die of hwabyeong [HB], or anger" (Gilonna,

²³⁰ Hong, *Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning*, 54-56.

²³¹ Hong, Cathy Park. *Dance Dance Revolution: poems*. New York, W.W. Norton & Company, 2008.

²³² Hong, *Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning*, 54.

²³³ Freda, *Discourse on Han in Postcolonial Korea: Absent Suffering and Industrialist Dreams*, 3.

²³⁴ Kang, *The problem with 'han' 한恨*, 2-3.

²³⁵ Gilonna, *A complex feeling tugs at Koreans*, 2011.

²³⁶ Lee Chang-dong. *버닝 Burning*. 148m, Pinhouse Film, 2018. A postmodernist South Korean-Japanese psychological thriller film about the oppression of capitalist Korean society through class and gender.

²³⁷ Park, Iljoon. *Korean Social Emotions: han, heung, and Jeong*. In *Emotions in Korean Philosophy and Religion: Confucian, Comparative, and Contemporary Perspectives*. Edited by Chung, Edward Y.J. and Jea Sophia Oh. Camden, Palgrave Macmillan, 2022.

²³⁸ Kim, *There's a uniquely Korean word for rage and regret. So why had I never heard of it?* 20 May 2019.

²³⁹ Chung, and Oh, *Emotions in Korean Philosophy and Religion: Confucian, Comparative, and Contemporary Perspectives*, 245.

²⁴⁰ Koh, *American Han*, 2021.

2011).²⁴¹ There is “potential for *han* to degenerate into a vicious cycle of revenge and retribution, and through this process the negativity of *wôghan* is perpetuated” (Kim Yôl-kyo, qtd. in Freda 1999, 9)²⁴² caused by “unjust psychosomatic repression” (Chung & Oh).²⁴³ *Han* is “not uncanny, melancholy, or nostalgia” (Koh, 2021).²⁴⁴ *Han* “from victims’ perspectives as not only the abysmal experience of pain but also as being dominated by feelings of abandonment and helplessness” (Park, 1993, 15, qtd. in Chung & Oh, 2022, 318).²⁴⁵

And the difficulty with “each new revelation” is reflected in Grace M. Cho who writes, “my *han* became more tangled up in hers, collected more emotional residue, and gave more force to my life’s decisions. As I worked to untangle our *han*, the loosened threads led me back to 1986, when at age fifteen I first saw my mother through the lens of disposability, when I first got the notion that she had been cheated out of her own life and left to wander the earth as a ghost. Thirty-two years later I would still be trying to untie the knot” (Cho, 2021, 150).²⁴⁶

Her mother would at times “close her eyes and sigh the words, ‘Aigu! Dap-dap-eu-rah.’ ‘Dap-dap-eu-rah’—I’m suffocating—an expression of stifling sadness” (27).

As someone born Korean, living outside, there were moments I felt something pull at my heart: sitting in the cold Siberian winter outdoor market with a Korean descendent woman surviving by repairing clothing, stitching buttons in a particular way of threading and looping with the numbness of her scarred fingers; standing peering through a hole in the cement wall onto a bit of field, and across to the other wall at the *Gedenkstätte Berliner Mauer* during my first visit on one bright fall afternoon; reading about hard life situations in the writings of Charles Bukowski and Fyodor Dostoyevsky, or poems about loss and longing by Leonard Cohen, Margaret Atwood, Gloria Fuertes, and the imaginative journeys of Italo Calvino; listening to Cartola, Johnny Cash, Ximena Sariñana, Avro Pärt, and Kim Kwang-seok shift my energy in the studio; watching flamenco singers and dancers in Granada and Sevilla, clapping their hands, raising their arms, sweating to keep the rhythm on their feet; or, returning to the film *Bodas de Sangre* (1933)²⁴⁷ the tragic dance of lovers; the rare moments standing in front of Francis Bacon or Marlene Dumas paintings; visiting either my grandfather’s grave in Korea or my *halmeoni*’s in Canada; moments in conversation with friends and family; and the many hours I spend in a lifetime on the shores of waters watching the sky turn colours to dark during a sunset. Can the unnamed feeling be *han*?

Acts of re/membering, re/telling, and repeating the experience of the collective, families, and individuals work as counter-history, rebellious against dissociations and erasure, dismissal of *han*’s relevance, the demands of collective amnesia and discriminations towards the “perpetual outsider” (Koh, 2021).²⁴⁸ It is just as important to practice feeling *han* to recognize it, open space for expression, engage in conversation and active repair.

Although there is still a sense of reading emotions as good/bad or pleasant/unpleasant outcomes, “contemporary philosophers have started to pay more attention to the philosophical, psychological, or cognitive nature and role of emotions in personal cultivation, ethics, socio-political development, and so on”

²⁴¹ Glionna, *A complex feeling tugs at Koreans*, 2011.

²⁴² Freda, *Discourse on Han in Postcolonial Korea: Absent Suffering and Industrialist Dreams*, 9.

²⁴³ Chung, and Oh, *Emotions in Korean Philosophy and Religion: Confucian, Comparative, and Contemporary Perspectives*, 318.

²⁴⁴ Koh, *American Han*, 2021.

²⁴⁵ Chung, and Oh, *Emotions in Korean Philosophy and Religion: Confucian, Comparative, and Contemporary Perspectives*, 318.

²⁴⁶ Cho, *Tastes Like War*, 150.

²⁴⁷ *Bodas de sangre*. 90mins. Flamenco Dance. YouTube, uploaded by Castilla y León, 15 July 2013. Taller de Interpretación, ESACCYL, 2012/13. Escuela Superior de Arte Dramático de Castilla y León. Original *Bodas de sangre* (*Blood Wedding*), tragedy written by Spanish dramatist Federico Garcia Lorca. First performed in 1932.

²⁴⁸ Koh, *American Han*, 2021.

(Chung & Oh, 2022, 2).²⁴⁹ These shifts are influenced by philosophical and spiritual traditions of Asia, which initially emphasized the suppression of or detachment from the emotional side of the self. “For about twenty-five centuries, the Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist traditions variously taught against the precarious, disturbing, afflicting, self-damaging, or poisonous nature/potential/danger of most (ordinary) emotions, feelings, sensations, desires, or inclinations.” The need for a detachment of emotions from the self may look similar, but Asian traditions strongly relate emotions to ethics, morals, philosophy and religion. If “Western scholarship has focused on ‘what’ emotion is, the East considered ‘why’ an emotion is aroused; why emotions are diverse; why some nourish and others suppress; and ‘how’ different groups/types of emotions relate to the heart-mind, the self, and the world” (Chung & Oh, 2022, 1-3).²⁵⁰

The emotions grouped with *han* are considered “social emotions”: “feelings [that] result from engaging emotions that release not just to the isolated individual but to the individual in the context of others” (246). Social emotions include: 한 *han*, 흥 *heung*, 무심 *musim*, 정 *jeong*. Although these four exist together, *musim* (heart-less) is paired with *jeong* (accumulated feelings for someone/something/some place), and *heung* (outward expression of full energy) is coupled with *han*—further expressed as “the critical wound of the heart generated by unjust psychosomatic repression, as well as by social, political, economic, and cultural oppression” (Park 1993, 10 qtd. in Chung & Oh 2022, 245).²⁵¹ This pairing of *heung-han* might explain why *han* is expressed with the opposing operations of 품다 *pumtta* (harbour) and 풀다 *pultta* (release).²⁵²

What is apparent is that emotions don’t exist alone, but amongst many. In the West there are opposing emotions and a scale from one end to the other. In the East the group of emotions focus on harmony. The problems associated with *han* is that in most cases *han* has been presented as a stand-alone emotion, with a range of feelings to describe it or showcase its untranslatability. In its imbalance it becomes vulnerable to damaging ways of languaging—in the case of *han* in North America, to identity and race.

The problem with “han” by Minsoo Kang (2022) gives “[a]n early example [of] a 2003 episode of the TV show *The West Wing* that is titled ‘*Han*’, involving a visiting North Korean pianist who seeks to defect to the U.S. When thwarted from the course, the show explains, he’s filled with *han*, ‘a sadness so deep that no tears can come’. The late Anthony Bourdain, in his cooking and travel show *Parts Unknown* (2013-18), said that ‘To take a peek into the dark heart of the Korean psyche... it helps to get familiar with *han*... [it’s a] concept that for non-Koreans can be difficult to fully grasp.’ The concept was also invoked in magazine reviews of *Parasite* [2019] and *Squid Game* [2021], though the word was never used directly” (2).²⁵³

In its North American context, *han* has been mostly isolated and “othered”, as a persistent complicated Korean complex/essence/sense of profound negative emotions and researched as a “constellation of multiple negative affects”, similar to Friedrich Nietzsche’s concept of *ressentiment* (as defined in *On the Genealogy of Morals*). *Han* shaped by its expression/repression, perception and erasure by individuals and collectives based on location, history, society, and the questions of its relevance, is in line with the core questions of *ugly feelings* (Ngai, 2005)²⁵⁴ which studies the aesthetics of negative emotions. These include the range of animateness (a racialized affect), envy, irritation, anxiety, *stuplimity* (“a strange amalgamation of shock and boredom”), and tone (attitude).

Cathy Park Hong, in *Minor Feelings* (2020), writes: “For as long as I could remember, I have struggled to prove myself into existence... Asian Americans inhabit a vague purgatorial status: not white enough nor black enough; distrusted by African Americans, ignored by whites, unless we’re being used by whites to keep the black man down... We have a content problem. They think we have no inner resources. But while I may look impassive, I am frantically paddling my feet underwater, always overcompensating to hide my

²⁴⁹ Chung, and Oh, *Emotions in Korean Philosophy and Religion: Confucian, Comparative, and Contemporary Perspectives*, 2.

²⁵⁰ Chung, and Oh, *Emotions in Korean Philosophy and Religion: Confucian, Comparative, and Contemporary Perspectives*, 245.

²⁵¹ Park, *Korean Social Emotions: han, heung, and Jeong*, 245.

²⁵² Freda, *Discourse on Han in Postcolonial Korea: Absent Suffering and Industrialist Dreams*, no. 11.

²⁵³ Kang, *The problem with ‘han’ 한恨*, 2.

²⁵⁴ Ngai, *ugly feelings*, 1-37.

devouring feelings of inadequacy... Racial self-hatred is seeing yourself the way the whites see you, which turns you into your own worst enemy. Your only defense is to be hard on yourself, which becomes compulsive, and therefore a comfort, to peck yourself to death... You need to talk! Or they'll walk all over you!" (9-10).²⁵⁵

Are minor/ugly feelings attached to *han*? The ways marginalized and racialized emotions/feelings are denied their expression can be a familiar experience to the perpetuated operation of *han*. According to Ulla D. Berg and Ana Y. Ramos-Zayas, in *Current Anthropology* (2015), theorizing at the intersection of *affective turn*²⁵⁶ (social sciences- Clough and Halley 2007; Leys 2011; McElhinny 2010 cited in Berg and Ramos-Zayas) and *racialization* processes have shown that studies of affect have developed independently outside the scholarship on race and racialization, when "racializing processes have been integral to, and at times constitutive of, the very conceptions of 'emotion,' 'feeling,' or 'sentiment' that have historically produced, highlighted, and explained racial difference and served to uphold dominant racial ideologies." Theorizing around the concept of "racial affect", these scholars analyzed "scholarship on affect and political economy within the discipline of anthropology but also to the scholarship on race, critical race theory, migration, and Latino and Latin American studies, by proposing a more nuanced examination of 'racialization' that foregrounds political economy and historical context as inseparable from the subjective complexity of racialized populations and national and international projects."²⁵⁷

According to Brian Massumi,²⁵⁸ emotions require a subject and one designates feelings to give it "function and meaning", while affect has no particular subject and is unformed and unstructured. Following the thoughts of Massumi, Deleuze and Spinoza,²⁵⁹ affect has no beginning or end and is an in-between-state rather than some form of divide (Gunew 2007 cited in McKim).²⁶⁰ Following this thought, *An Inventory of Shimmers*, by Gregg and Seigworth (2010) describe the "originary state for affect" in the following way:

"Affect arises in the midst of in-between-ness: in the capacities to act and be acted upon. Affect is an impingement or extrusion of a momentary or sometimes more sustained state of relation as well as the passage (and the duration of passage) of forces or intensities. That is, affect is found in those intensities that pass body to body (human, nonhuman, part-body, and otherwise), in those resonances that circulate about, between, and sometimes stick to bodies and worlds, and in the very passages or variations between these intensities and resonances themselves. Affect, at its most anthropomorphic, is the name we give to those forces—visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally other than conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion—that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension, that can likewise suspend us (as if in neutral) across a barely registering accretion of force-relations, or that can even leave us overwhelmed by the world's apparent intractability. Indeed, affect is persistent proof of a body's never less than ongoing immersion in and among the world's obstinacies and rhythms, its refusals as much as its invitations. Affect is in many ways synonymous with force or forces of encounter.... Affect is born in in-between-ness and resides as accumulative beside-ness. Affect can be understood then as a gradient of bodily capacity that rises and falls.... At once intimate and impersonal, affect accumulates across both relatedness and interruptions in relatedness.... Affect marks a body's belonging to a world of encounters or; a world's belonging to a body of encounters but also, in non-belonging... affect as potential: a body's capacity to affect and to be affected... 'affect does not so much reflect or think; affect acts' (Freud,

²⁵⁵ Hong, *Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning*, 9-10.

²⁵⁶ Edited by Gregg, Melissa and Gregory J. Seigworth. *The Affect Theory Reader*. Durham & London, Duke University Press, 2010.

²⁵⁷ Berg, Ulla D. and Ana Y. Ramos-Zayas. *Racializing Affect: A Theoretical Proposition*. The Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 56, No. 5, October 2015. DOI:10.1086/683-53.

²⁵⁸ McKim, Joel. *Of Microperception and Micropolitics: An Interview with Brian Massumi, 15 August 2008*. *INFLexions: A journal for research creation*, no. 3, October 2009.

²⁵⁹ Cited in McKim, *Of Microperception and Micropolitics: An Interview with Brian Massumi, 15 August 2008*.

²⁶⁰ Cited in McKim, *Of Microperception and Micropolitics: An Interview with Brian Massumi, 15 August 2008*.

1966, 357-59)... affect is integral to a body's perpetual becoming (always becoming otherwise, however subtly, than what it already is)" (1-3).²⁶¹

Berg and Ramos-Zayas "depart from dominant conceptions of affect as solely intensity, flow, and movement and attend specifically to the ways in which affect is embedded in larger politicoeconomic projects. [They] are inspired by Ruth Leys, who masterfully criticizes Massumi and other leading cultural theorists for assuming that affect functions as a layer of preconscious 'priming to act,' such that embodied action is a matter of being attuned to and coping with the world without the input of rational content and intentionality (Leys, 2011, 442, n.22)." Instead, they subscribe "to an 'economies-of-affect' perspective that considers affect as relational and intersubjective, in contradistinction to the psychologically individualistic conception of 'emotion' and as a mediator of economic transformations in particular materialist and historical contexts (Richard and Rudnychyj 2009)... and "privilege how affect operates in the production of 'race' and in processes of racialization that accompany global capitalist transformations and local neoliberal aspirations." In the context of "US imperial and colonial involvement in Latin America and the politics of tractable 'illegality' among Latin American migrant and Latinos in the United States, race is arguably a dominant lens for understanding other forms of inequality. [They] see migration as a key social process and site for the production of racial affect" alongside other racialized processes produced "at the intersections of other systems of power" (all cited in and qtd. from Berg and Ramos-Zayas 2015).²⁶²

Sara Ahmed (2010) approaches "thinking through affect as 'sticky.' Affect is what sticks, or what sustains or preserves the connection between ideas, values, and objects" (29).²⁶³ **Han is sticky.** The difference of *han's* transmission and perpetuation in North America is located in how we have carried it through the intergenerational experience of im/migration, alongside the trauma of dislocation. In this, **han is a reminder of injustices** the collective has and continues to experience. *Han* is an anti-colonial affect that has relevance as a present-day anti-neocolonial affect. **Han is an anti-neocolonial affect. Han is the affect/emotions/feelings that arise with the struggle of liberation from imbalanced relations.**

²⁶¹ Gregg, and Seigworth, *An Inventory of Shimmers*, 1-3.

²⁶² Berg, and Ramos-Zayas, *Racializing Affect: A Theoretical Proposition*, 2015.

²⁶³ Ahmed, Sara. *Happy Objects*. In *The Affect Theory Reader*. Edited by Gregg, Melissa and Gregory J. Seigworth. Durham & London, Duke University Press, 2010, pp. 29-51.

REFLECTIONS

한 *Han* as Breath

With one breath in we come into life, and with one breath out we pass away. What exists between is the repetition of a rhythm, sometimes noticed and at other times hidden. Through the specific lens of Korean *han*, I reflect on the breath held, the uncontrollable gasp and the sigh of longing. The pains of a generation passed on as a silenced breath, to know when not to speak, expressed as *hansoom*, the “one breath”, one takes that is both an inhale to hold words in and an exhale to let the desires of expression out. In this, the breath is closely connected to voice, the sound of a change in the breathing brought on by intergenerational experiences of violence and separation.

What happens when that silence becomes tangible, distasteful, sticky to the descendants of the generations who lived and experienced the choke of oppression and demands of assimilation? The throat and tongue suddenly unable to form words to speak, while the body resists and reacts to something held back and hidden through transmissions of truth never told.²⁶⁴

In a previously unpublished poem, “Cheju Do,” Yong Yuk writes:

“silence children—
never utter another word
your fathers and mothers are no longer with us
and they will not come back
such is the lot of many of us here
it’s a secret
lock it deep in your hearts....
remember that these things didn’t happen....
dry your tears and learn to forget
we are alone and frightened
from the terrors we witnessed....
Who will speak for us
Silence children—silence.” (qtd. in Cho 54-55)²⁶⁵

In this, the breath is closely connected to voice, as Mladen Dolar writes, “another dividing line separates voice from silence. The absence of voices and sounds is hard to endure; complete silence is immediately uncanny, it is like death, while the voice is the first sign of life. And that division as well, the one between the voice and silence, is perhaps more elusive than it seems—not all voices are heard, and perhaps the most intrusive and compelling are the unheard voices, and the most deafening thing can be silence” (Dolar 13).²⁶⁶ So, as the stand-in for the words, in-between voice and complete silence, the sound of a change in the breathing brought on by historical control, oppression, and violence, whether one feels present panic, anxiety, pressure or sudden surprise, the pace of the rhythm noticeably changes, creating meaning through the one breath, the *hansoom*.

²⁶⁴ A first iteration of this section was presented as part of the in-person Graduate Symposium called *Breath: Concerning Air & Atmosphere*, presented by The Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery, OCAD University and Master of Visual Studies at the University of Toronto, through a joint program led by Ala Roushan and Charles Stankievec. John H. Daniels Faculty of Architecture, Landscape and Design, University of Toronto, 22 April 2022, <https://www.thepowerplant.org/whats-on/calendar/breath-concerning-air-and-atmosphere>.

²⁶⁵ Cho, *Haunting the Korean Diaspora: Shame, Secrecy, and the Forgotten War*, 54-55.

²⁶⁶ Dolar, Mladen. *A Voice and Nothing More*. Short Circuits series, edited by Slavoj žižek. Cambridge, The MIT Press, 2006.



One by one.
 The sounds. The sounds that move at a time
 stops. Starts again. Exceptions
 stops and starts again
 all but exceptions.
 Stop. Start. Starts.
 Contractions. Noise. Semblance of noise.
 Broken speech. One to one. At a time.
 Pidgeon. Semblance of speech.
 Swallows. Inhales. Stutter. Starts. Stops before
 starts.
 About to. Then stops. Exhale
 swallowed to a sudden arrest.
 Rest. Without. Can do without rests. Improper
 to rest before begun even. Probation of rest.
 Without them all.
 Stop start.
 Where proper pauses were expected.
 But no more.

Figure 21. Scanned photograph of miyun maria kim's hand flipping through the pages. Cha, Theresa Hak Kyung. *Dictée*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London University of California Press, Berkeley, 2001, Original 1982, pp. 74-75.

“Swallows. Inhales. Stutter. Starts. Stops before
 starts.
 About to. Then stops. Exhale
 swallowed to a sudden rest.
 Rest. Without. Can do without rests. Improper
 to rest before begun even. Probation of rest.
 Without them all.
 Stop start.
 Where proper pauses were expected.
 But no more.”
 (Cha 75)²⁶⁷

Han pumtta. Han pultta. To carry *han*. To release *han*. This is how the Korean language refers to the body holding or releasing *han*. If the internalized air is released in some form, there seems to be a

²⁶⁷ Cha, *Dictée*, 75.

reciprocal change in the external air as well. It feels heavy, dense, thick and sticky. Slow to move around. The meaning brought to the release of air witnessed by another who recognizes what is said stiffens the listener's body, sharing the weight of what was silenced. In the same way, the exhibition space was filled with the pace of my breath at every 10 seconds, playing a recording of a minute continually on loop. During activations where I held cast Onggis in my arms to breathe into them, hearing the timed rhythmic huff and sigh brought me back to a relaxed pace to focus on the gestures.

Barriers to language, once demanded to erase all things Korean- one's name, all words, their meanings- into Japanese, then into the words of others through im/migration, such as into English where there is not a direct translation of *han*, furthers descendants from the freedom to express oneself fully. Yet, I see hope, through such examples of the writings of artist Clarice Lispector, who writes, "Listen to me, listen to the silence. What I say to you is never what I say to you but something else instead. It captures the thing that escapes me and yet I live from it and am above a shining darkness" (Lispector 8).²⁶⁸

An installation on the wall of black on gold or silver scratchpad included fragments of thoughts, meanings, artist statements, and stories, prompting guests to take part in putting words and expanding the vocabulary of *han*. My family members wrote a teaching, a correction to the initial definition of *han* I had written; an anonymous guest drew the South Korean flag; another drew the shape of Korea as one; others added stories in their own script which I used Google Translate to read. All the added fragments of words created a space of fullness and erasure, later to be fully scratched into glitter.

"I know you believe you understand what you think I said. But I am not sure you realize that what you heard is not what I meant" (Anonymous qtd. in Lurie 81).²⁶⁹ On two occasions, I activated the *Muta-I* by wearing it, biting the button between my teeth, and then reading *the book of han*²⁷⁰ in a muffled voice. At what point does the mis/interpretation occur? When is the transmission broken?

A daily activation appeared in which cast hydrocal Onggis were taken to be broken and then gathered and put back as fragments of the happening. On and around the Fondu cement interpretation of the 38th parallel, more specifically, the cement divide between the North and South Korean guards at Panmunjom where the signed Armistice is protected, the Onggi lifted above my head dropped to the ground and shattered in front of witnesses grounding the space. Debris from the shattering accumulated on the cement and subtle cracks deepened each day. Some asked if the act was cathartic. Some cried or yelled during the activation. Many recorded and shared this particular action while other activations were dis/misssed. Through word of mouth, some came with the expectation to see it in person. Those who repeatedly visited asked if my intention was to eventually break all 13 pots. I responded to who was with me. The energy of the moment and how safe I felt in doing the act allowed for 10 Onggis in the 8 days of exhibition to be broken and gathered. None were announced, scheduled, or named as a performance. Only once, a fellow performance artist picked up broken pieces of the Onggi and placed a handful in my hanbok to take back. I felt deep gratitude in the gentle collaboration. The 3 remaining whole left room for the possibility of a completion. A completion of breaking and gathering. Yet, would 13 piled fragments of pots without a relation to any whole read the same?

"... the universal right to breath is unquantifiable and cannot be appropriated. From a universal perspective, not only is it the right of every member of humankind, but of all life. It must therefore be understood as a fundamental right to existence. Consequently, it cannot be confiscated and thereby eludes all sovereignty, symbolizing the sovereign principle par excellence. Moreover, it is an originary right to living on Earth, a right that belongs to the universal community of earthly inhabitants, human and other" (Mbembe

²⁶⁸ Lispector, Clarice. *Água Viva*. Translation by Stefan Tobler. New York, Penguin Books Canada Limited, 2012. Original 1973.

²⁶⁹ Lurie, Joe. *Perception and Deception: A Mind-Opening Journey Across Cultures*. Cultural Detective, Leawood, 2015, second edition 2018, pp. 76-113.

²⁷⁰ A collection of all the definitions and descriptions I had found during this research on *han*, put together as an artist book. Design collaboration with Aydan Hasanova, 2023.

2021).²⁷¹

During the defence, I was asked if I was the shaman. I immediately said no. The burden of taking other's *han* to release it was too much when I had struggled to deal with my own. Yet, the objects embedded with my gestures, acting as an agent of release, somehow only needed the body to complete the cycle and release. There is every right of individuals and collectives to break and/or gather their *han* to breathe at the pace that they find themselves in.

Perhaps all of this still feels out of place, coming from a perpetual outsider in faraway lands. Yet, as the divide continues there, an erasure of history continues here. The Korean War, the "Forgotten War", further silenced. The American Dream, dreamt and lived, and forever dreaming, another silence. Near or far I was born into this. The ways of survival, moving with a quickness and an observing eye. Before I pass on to another, I dream a collective mourning, a cry of healing, a breath long and hard that reaches the depth of the years of the things held back: the cry, the scream, the name, the story, a memory, a tale, a truth never told. For now, until that day comes, in the words of Lispector, "I'm not transmitting to you a story but just words that live from sound" (Lispector 20).²⁷²

²⁷¹ Mbembe, *The Universal Right to Breathe*, 33-36.

²⁷² Lispector, *Água Viva*, 20.

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Appendices

Appendix A: *Saudade and han*. Research documentation, walking the coastal route of the Camino Portugués and Variante Espiritual, August 2022.

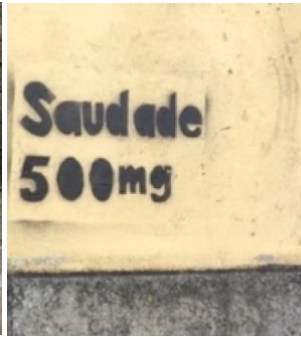
Walking and exhausting the body, listening to fado music, sitting by the waves of the North Atlantic Ocean, crossing borders, allowing the pace of my breath, feet and day guide me, while walking alone or with others for 15 consecutive days.



Wednesday 3 August 2022 Porto



3 Aug Fado



4 Aug Saudade street mural



4 Aug Fado



5 Aug Start Camino da Costa, Português



5 Aug to Labruge 25.4 km.



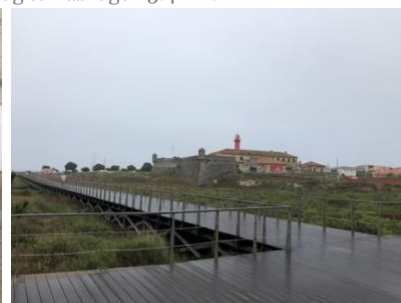
6 Aug to Aguçadoura 20.5 km



7 Aug to Apulia Praia 6.7 km



8 Aug to Fao 3.7 km



9 Aug to Anha 23.1 km



10 Aug to Vila Praia de Âncora 26.2 km



11 Aug to Caminha 13.7 km



11 Aug break- train to Valença 29.9 km



11 Aug to Tui, España and back 8 km



12 Aug Caminha (PT) to Oia (ES) 24.5 km 13 Aug to Baiona 19.7 km 14 Aug to Vigo 27 km 15 Aug to Cesantes 19.8 km



16 Aug to Pontevedra 20.9 km 17 Aug to Alenteira and a bit back 26.4 km 18 Aug to Vilanova de Arousa 29.6 km



19 Aug boat to Padron 36.7 km 19 Aug to Ponte rio Tinto 14.2 km 20 Aug to Santiago de Compostela, España



21 Aug Day of rest and reflection 22 Aug Bus back through route to Porto, Portugal 22 Aug Bus to Coimbra, walk into centre



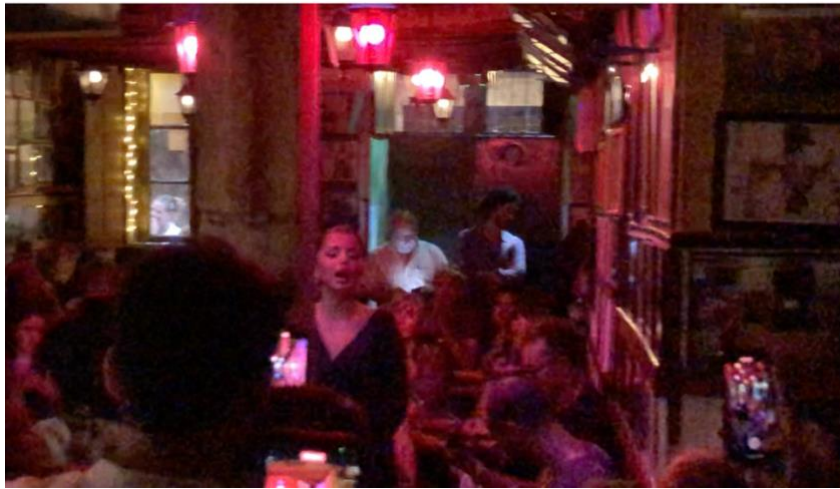
22 Aug À Capella



23 Aug Fado ao Centro, only men are allowed to sing in Coimbra.



The tear shape of Coimbra



24 Aug
A Tasca do Chico, Lisboa
Shell shaped end of guitar differs.
Women and men can sing.
The emotions shifting through lyrics on a broad spectrum



23 Aug
Mosteiro de Santa Clara-a-Nova, Coimbra,
wax cast of various objects for rituals

Appendix B: (Post)memory han. Research through multiple visits to *halmeoni's* grave. 2022-2023.



19 September 2022



28 December 2022



29 January 2023



21 February 2023



30 March 2023



Appendix C: Details of group exhibition, *Process*.

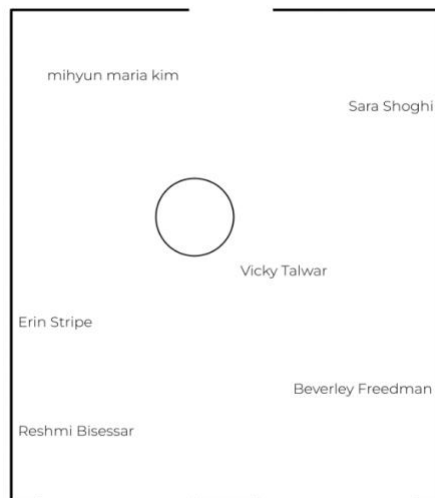


October 7 – 16, 2022
Grad Gallery – 205 Richmond Street, Toronto, Ontario

Process features new works by Beverley Freedman, Erin Stripe, mihyun maria kim, Reshmi Bisessar, Sara Shoghi, and Vicky Talwar, that were created as part of an ArtScape residency collaboration with OCAD U in Summer 2022. The artist's works are representative of current themes and investigations occurring in their individual practices, but all respond to the idea of process. This notion of process speaks to the work of the artist in creating an artwork; conception, experimentation, revision, articulation, finalization. This work is generally confined to the studio and not welcomed into the gallery.

PROCESS aims to explore the potential for engagement that occurs when these elements are allowed to exist in an exhibited work and be presented in a gallery space. The works on view ask for viewer activation, and encourage play, rather than rely on passive viewing in their display.

Curated by Avalon Mott.²⁷³



²⁷³ Curated by Avalon Mott. *Process*. Toronto, Grad Gallery, 7-16

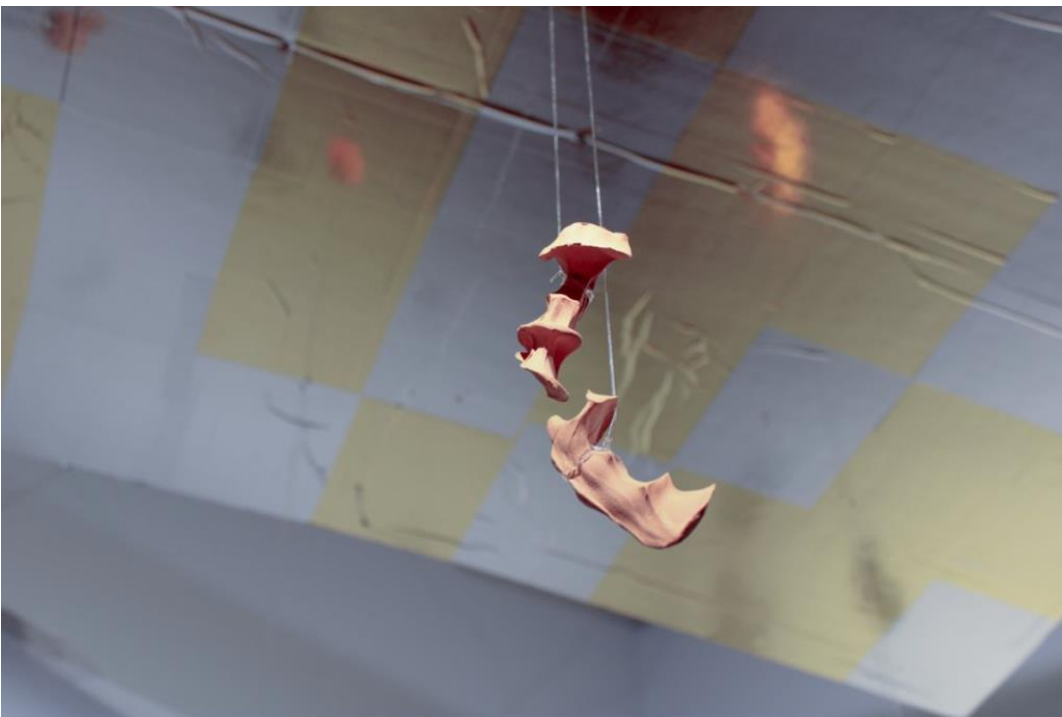
Textures of Han

Hydrocal casts of artist's hand gestures with graphite, soil, raw silk, handstitched, stuffed with cut-up old family garments, tulle, hanji (Korean mulberry paper), calligraphy ink, metallic sheets, on ply and oak wood, installation size varies. 2021-2022. Installation view.



Reach of Han

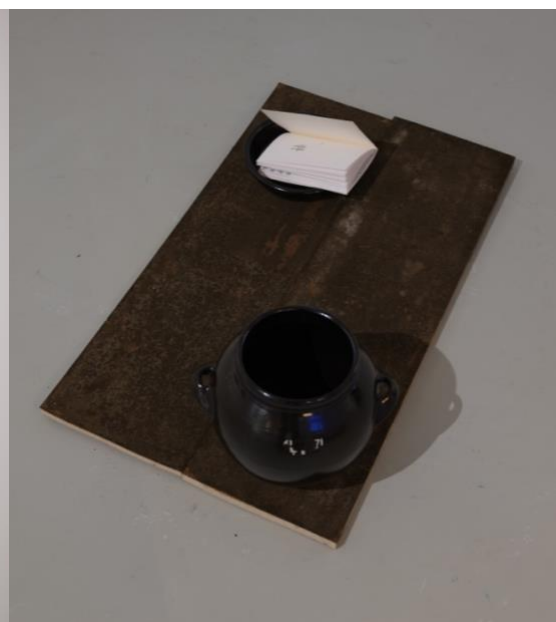
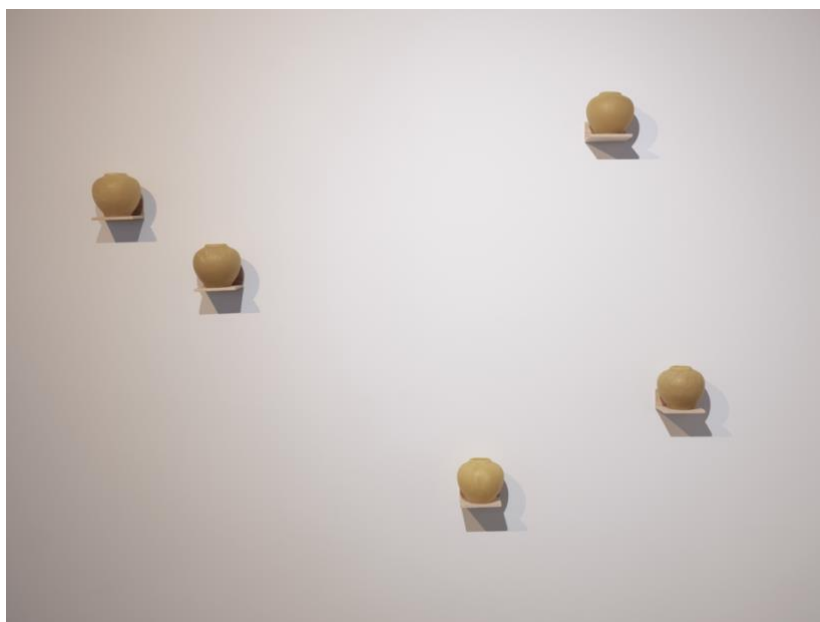
Ceramic casts of artist's performative grasps, acrylic string, metallic sheets, on Styrofoam board, wooden beams and metal wire, installation size varies. 2021-2022. Installation view.

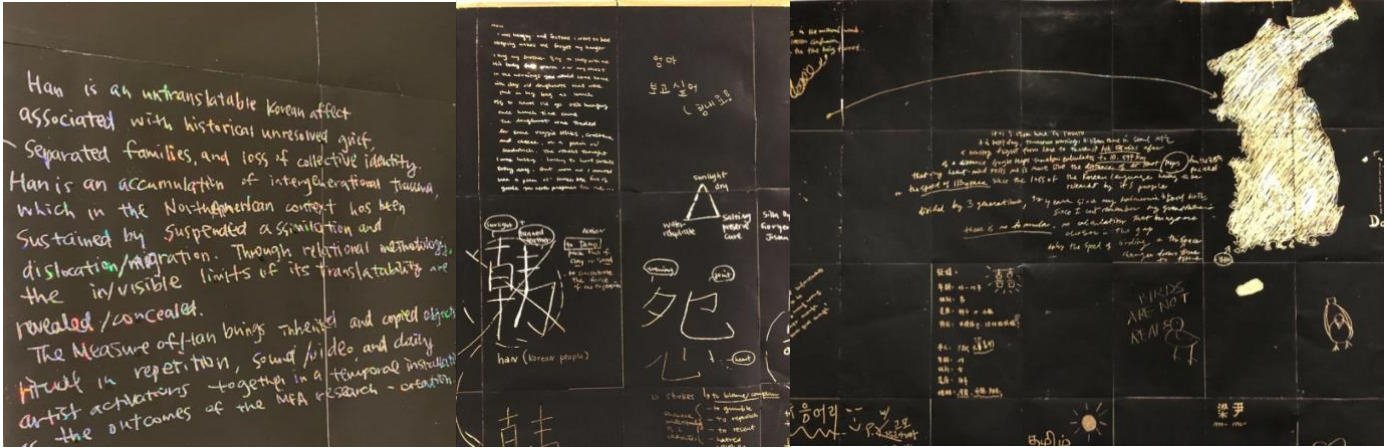


"*Han pumtta pultta* (*Han* harboured and released)" is an autoethnographic reflexive and diffractive shaping of an untranslatable Korean psychosomatic affect, *han*—a "combination of bitterness, wistfulness, shame, melancholy, and vengefulness, accumulated from years of brutal colonialism, war, and U.S.-supported dictatorships that have never been politically redressed. *Han* is so ongoing that it can even be passed down: to be Korean is to feel *han*." (Hong, 2020).²⁷⁴ Through a practice of feeling, the gestures of *pumtta*, an *dpultta* of *han* are ritualized in the process of making and solidified into objects that are installed with mirrors, positioning the viewer into the space of translation between the layers of meaning-making.

²⁷⁴ Hong, *Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning*, 54.

Appendix D: Exhibition documentation











HAN IS A POTENT FORM OF KOREAN RAGE—A TYPE OF ANGER SO SEVERE AND ALL-CONSUMING THAT SOME BELIEVE YOU CAN DIE FROM IT.

HAN IS NOT JUST A WORD, BUT AN INHERENT PART OF BEING KOREAN. SOME SAY IT RUNS IN OUR BLOOD AND IS EMBEDDED IN OUR DNA. IN FACT, IT'S SO KOREAN THAT THERE'S NO EQUIVALENT FOR IT IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE.

ALTHOUGH HAN IS CONSIDERED INDEFINABLE, IT IS OFTEN DESCRIBED AS AN INTERNALIZED FEELING OF DEEP SORROW, RESENTMENT, GRIEF, REGRET AND ANGER. SCHOLARS SAY IT'S A UNIQUELY KOREAN CHARACTERISTIC BORN OUT OF THE COUNTRY'S LONG HISTORY OF INVASION, OPPRESSION AND SUFFERING.

HAN IS A SYMBOL OF DIVISION IN KOREA, A PAINFUL REMINDER OF THE BORDER BETWEEN THE NORTH AND SOUTH THAT HAS SEPARATED FAMILIES FOR OVER SIX DECADES.

I TEND TO DEFINE IT AS A SITUATION WHERE YOU HAVE THIS OVERWHELMING TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCE THAT CAUSES YOU TO LOSE YOUR COLLECTIVE IDENTITY.

HAN IS INTERGENERATIONAL AS LONG AS THE PENINSULA REMAINS DIVIDED.

KOREANS WILL BE ABLE TO FEEL IT BECAUSE THEY DON'T FEEL QUITE WHOLE IN THIS DIVIDED COUNTRY.



IAMD, MFA Thesis Exhibition
mihyun maria kim



Ignite Gallery, OCAD U, 100 McCaul St, 2nd Floor

Opening Reception: Thursday April 13, 5 pm - 8pm

April 12 - 19, Gallery hours 8 am - 8 pm

Artist Present: Tuesday - Sunday, 1 pm - 6pm

Han is an untranslatable Korean affect associated with historical unresolved grief, separated families, and loss of identity. *The Measure of Han* brings inherited and copied objects, ritual in repetition, sound/video, and daily artist activations together in a temporal installation.

for prearranged appointments email: maria.kim@ocadu.ca mihyunmariakim.com [@singmariamaria](https://www.instagram.com/singmariamaria)

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