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The Work of Being Human:
Transnational Labor in Contemporary South Korean Film and Literature

DISSERTATION

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in East Asian Languages and Literatures

by

Jessica Ann Conte

Dissertation Committee:
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2018

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DEDICATION

To

The memory of my grandmother, Kim Ik-myŏng

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Work of Being Human:

Transnational Labor in Contemporary Korean Film and Literature

By

Jessica Ann Conte

Doctor of Philosophy in East Asian Languages and Literatures

University of California, Irvine, 2018

Professor Serk-Bae Suh, Chair

Engaging with texts that center tropes of the nonhuman and monstrous, this dissertation explores representations of the laboring human subject in twenty-first century South Korean literature and film. The project frames South Korea as a transnational state shaped by global circulations of capital and labor that are tied to histories of colonialism, war, national development, and immigration. It analyzes cultural productions, tracing how national and non-national Korean subjects are formed through gender, ethnicity, race, and labor. Arguing that humanism has been the primary mode through which the nation-state manages subjects, the dissertation analyzes literary and cinematic texts through the framework of antihumanism to explore alternate modes of understanding subjectivity.

The introduction uses Kang Kyŏng-ae's proletarian novel, *In'gan munje* to examine how the imperial state deployed humanism to dictate exploitive forms of selfhood and otherness. The analysis reveals a tradition of non-or-antihumanist thought that challenges binaries of subjectivity. From here, the first chapter focuses on selfhood through the lens of sexual difference, masculinity, and labor in P'yŏn Hye-yŏng's short

fiction. P'yŏn's masculine subjects and animal others situate labor as a gendered process that simultaneously humanizes and dehumanizes. This focus on sexual difference and labor is prominent in the second chapter, which examines Han Kang's *Ch'aeshikchuŭija*. Contextualizing the novel's publication and controversial translation within the 2008 movements against the Korea-U.S. Free Trade Agreement, I argue that Han connects histories of state gendered violence to the contemporary position of women as domestic national subjects under global and local circulations of labor and culture. In the final chapter, I examine Park Chan-wook's film *Thirst*. Here, in the context of South Korean neoliberalization, vampirism represents the monstrosity of global capitalism. Spectrality, in the figure of the migrant worker, arises to posit forms of ethical consideration of the other.

Throughout, the dissertation examines how the transnational state—historically shaped through uneven modes of exchange and circulation—carves national human subjects. In each chapter, the monstrous, spectral, or animal emerge as ways in which to explore these uneven formations through articulations of nonhuman subjectivity.

INTRODUCTION

I. Monstrous Circulations

Following months of speculation, North and South Korea finalized plans for joint participation in the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics on January 17, 2018. A few days later, the International Olympic Committee approved the proposal: North and South Korea would open the Olympics together as "Korea" and their women's ice hockey team would boast a roster of thirty-five players, twelve from the North and twenty-three from the South.[1] On one side of the political spectrum, the announcement was seen as a momentous symbolic gesture marking the beginning of a new "sunshine" era under the Moon Jae-in administration. On the other, it was viewed as risking national security for liberal diplomacy.

Every step of the proposal was met with a media frenzy of polls, predictions, and analyses both within and outside South Korea. Several days before the announcement, Gallup Korea polled 1,007 adults over three days to determine whether attitudes towards North Korea had changed. The oft-cited survey found that 90% of South Koreans believed that North Korea would not give up its nuclear weapons.[2] Following the Gallup poll, South Korean analytics firm R&Search found that 42.6% of the 781 adults opposed the joint team, with respondents in their thirties marking the most

[1] VOA News, "Pyeongchang Olympics nambukhan 'hanbandogi' ipchang hwakjŏng." *VOA*, https://www.voakorea.com/a/4216498.html.

[2] Gallup Korea, "Pukhan taedo byŏnhwa, haek p'ogi yŏbu inshik (March 13-15)," in *Gallup Korea Daily Opinion* (South Korea: Gallup Korea, 2018).

sizable opposition at fifty percent. The *Koomin Ilbo* reported on this generational discrepancy and pointed to analysis that perhaps the "candlelight" generation was expressing economic anxieties that took precedent over North-South unification.

Such polls and reports circulated widely, bolstering evidence that despite the new administrative culture of diplomacy towards North Korea, South Korean citizens had become largely opposed to North-South cooperation, due to concerns over national security and economic burden. Follow-up polls refuted some of these conjectures, as responses fluctuated.[3] However, what interests me here is less the accuracy of the polls, but their discourse as an attempt to form a coherent narrative about South Korea and South Koreans and their place in global culture, politics, and economy. Such circulations of media produce representations of how individuals might position themselves in proximity to other nations and nationals through the experience of historical junctures that have formed the South Korean state.

A framework for such representation emerges through media focus on the seeming discrepancy between younger and older generations. The significant focus on generations born in the 1980s and later reveal not just a concern for the future of a nation, but a concern for how these subjects may carry the past. These generations, as many reporters point out, are unlike their parents in that they have no experience of war and national division and very little, if any, memory of democratization. They may, however, carry the mark of the IMF Crisis, two iterations of massive candlelight protests (one against U.S. military impunity, the other against the impunity of the Korea-U.S. Free Trade Agreement, or KORUS FTA, and Lee Myung-bak administration), and most

[3] Gallup Korea, for example, followed up in March to find that only 64% of respondents felt that North Korea would not give up its nuclear weapons program. Ibid.

recently, the impeachment of former president Park Geun-hye. How might such individuals relate to themselves and others through history and memory? The nature of such media emphasis on generational perspectives becomes a question that is as much about how individuals inhabit the present, through their past, as how they may enter the future.

For example, the *Kookmin Ilbo* muses that, “Younger generations that led the candlelight protests think that fairness towards individual athletes is more important than the broader pursuit of peace on the peninsula.”[4] Such reference to the candlelight protests, alongside speculation that younger Koreans favor economic security over unification, indicate that this generation’s opposition to unification stems a general mistrust of local political structures to ensure fairness not just in athletic competition, but also in protecting citizens from bearing the brunt of economic hardship. In other words, the generation who propelled massive mobilization against the KORUS FTA and deregulation of U.S. beef and pharmaceutical imports may be expressing weary attitudes towards state dealings with global relations and economy.

Citing the *Kookmin Ilbo*’s report, a writer for *The Atlantic* proposes a slightly different interpretation, musing that the polling outcomes might be attributed to the growing cosmopolitanism of younger generations who favor economy not over fairness, but ethnicity:

> Although South Korea’s public education system emphasizes that all South Koreans belong to the same *minjok* (“people”), young South Koreans can hardly

[4] Translation mine; original: “촛불집회를 주도했던 젊은 세대는 한반도의 평화라는 거대한 명분보다 선수 개개인에게 공정한 기회를 주는 것이 더 중요하다고 생각한다.” Yi Hyŏngmin, "'Nambuktanilt'im pandaet' chŏlmŭnch'ŭng, chwau ttŏna t'rkongjŏnghan tult' wŏnhanda," *Kookmin Ilbo*, January 18 2018.

> identify with North Koreans. Young South Koreans tend to be wealthy, global-minded and well-traveled; those to the north are destitute and steeped in the Kim regime's propaganda. In a hypothetical, reunified area, the burden of taking care of the North Koreans would fall on the South Koreans, and especially on the younger generation.[5]

Such a global generation, the writer implies, would be hesitant to welcome in impoverished ideological others, unlike their parents' generations who, like President Moon, hold "sentimental aspirations" for a unified people and peninsula.[6] While both claims are speculative—younger generations who describe South Korea as "Hell Chosun" would certainly not describe themselves as wealthy—they both attempt to form coherent narratives of how experience of historical junctures shape a coherent sense of national subjectivity. Each report grapples with questions about how subjects' relation to history—whether it be a relation of lack or excess—mediates their relation to others, themselves, and a transnational state.

Accordingly, both analyses approach the simultaneous sense of nationalism and globalism that occupies present-day South Korean political and cultural economies. A deep attachment to national borders and local economic well-being is placed alongside growing recognition of the state's transnationalism and multiculturalism. Cosmopolitanism and ethno-nationalism are not dichotomous: South Korea as a transnational state functions through celebrating its global position, through spectacles such as the Olympics, and disavowing the local and global political interventions and

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[5] S. Nathan Park, "South Korea's Chilly Response to a Joint Olympic Team," *The Atlantic*, https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/01/olympics-north-korea-moon-kim-jong-un-hockey/551708/.

[6] Ibid.

migrations that have made such cosmopolitan development possible. "Fairness" in economy, politics, and even international athleticism becomes a way to flatten an uneven global playing field in which certain national subjects have been benched or handicapped. Thus, hypothesizing unification through the Olympic event triggers sentiments of national protection and shields from the surface longstanding histories of exploitation of Korean and non-Korean workers, both within and outside of South Korea. Such histories, remnants of exploitation and violence, circulate on the margins of political economy and culture. Like laborers themselves, these representations cross borders, whether it be the geography of the global and local, the infrastructure of the home and factory, and the discursive value of productive and non-productive labor. They approach and circulate through the liminal spaces between the human and non-human, feminine and masculine, national and non-national, and self and other.

National, non-national, gendered, and racialized subjects are tied through their circulatory relations to labor, nation, and state. In this way, my dissertation seeks to address engagements with selfhood and otherness in the context of transnational labor and cultural production in South Korea. Here, I approach South Korea as a transnational state, shaped not just by national borders, but by histories of global circulation of capital and labor that intervene in the local as much as the global. Such circulations are built on histories of colonialism, war, national development, transnational immigration, and financial speculation. These economic circuits trade in concepts and representations of the human and work, and how this exchange shapes notions of ourselves, others, humans, and non-humans. Throughout the dissertation I focus on representations of labor and laborers in cultural productions and how the human is formed by historically inflected notions of works and value. The nonhuman,

monstrosity, and the almost-human become ways in which selfhood and otherness are expressed through relationships to the nation and globe.

In the following sections of this introduction, I explore the framing concepts of my dissertation: the historical connections between humanism, labor, and the state as well as the global implications this these connections have in regards to transnational labor. I use the framework of antihumanism to untangle the relationship between humanism, gender, race, labor, and representation in Korean literature and film. Arguing that the humanism constitutes recognition through gender, race, and labor, I position antihumanism as providing a lens from which we can address the histories of gender and racialized violence that manifest in labor. The posthuman, antihuman, and monstrous, I argue, act as disjunctive discourses within circulations of history and capital. In doing so, they reveal alternative modes of understanding and engaging with the laboring self and other.

Anything Other Than Human: Labor in the Transnational Economy

Above, I've described how cultural productions concerning the question of unification serve as expressions of concern surrounding national history, economy, and subjectivity. Similarly, Hyun Ok Park finds the rhetoric of national unification functions to censor the material reality of laboring others. This obfuscation is propelled by a neoliberal politics of representation that hierarchically categorizes non-citizen others. She writes:

> Neoliberal democratic politics postulates diverse groups of migrant workers as anyone other than laborers: non-Koreans as cosmopolitan beings, Korean Chinese as colonial returnees, and North Koreans as refugees. This fragmented

> representation of migrant workers masks their shared ties with one another and with South Korean workers under conditions of neoliberal capitalist production. It also helps NGOs and the South Korean state to manage them as productive laborers by legalizing their work and yet denying their right to change workplace.[7]

Park points out how naming—of the migrant, the refugee, the defector—is tied to the state's political and social marginalization of diverse classes of individuals whose labor and access to humanity is consistently devalued. Despite South Korean President Moon Jae-in's diplomatic gesture towards North Korea through the multicultural spectacle of the two Koreas competing together in the 2018 Pyeongchang Winter Olympics, migrant workers (North Korean and otherwise) in South Korea continue to face dangerous and abusive conditions that are encouraged by the state's Employee Permit System, which grants employers control over "guest" workers' visas.[8] The rhetoric of multiculturalism and invitation implied by similar spectacles of global cosmopolitanism does little to relieve inequity and much to further it. More precisely, the state rhetoric of multiculturalism and human rights serve to lend the appearance of representation of gendered and racialized others in order to hide the political and economic reality of these others in which their labor and dignity are devalued for the sake of national production.

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[7] Hyun Ok Park, *The Capitalist Unconcious: From Korean Unification to Transnational Korea*(New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), ix.

[8] Ko Han-sol, "Tragic Death of a Nepali Migrant Worker," *Hankyoreh*, August 13 2017. In August 2017, a Nepali migrant worker committed suicide after his petition to change workplaces was rejected. The Act of Employment places heavy restrictions on migrant workers entering South Korea under the Employee Permit System, which rarely allows for changes in workplace.

Jin-kyung Lee argues that this is a process in which "abstract" notions of equality create the conditions for "surrogate labor," in which gendered and racialized others work in the place of national subjects while being denied rights the same rights as their citizen counterparts. Abstraction here is as much about labor extraction as it is about drawing attention away from the violent and abusive conditions labor and citizenship. Lee writes,

> The substitutability and unsubstitutability of surrogate laborers are simultaneously acknowledged and erased by the cheaper wages contracted for the gendered, classed, and racialized population, who take the place of relatively universalized subjects.[9]

In other words, the rhetoric of equality, invitation, and multiculturalism, embodied in events such as the Olympics, erases economic, ethnic, racial, and gender differences in order to exploit it. If, in an abstract sense, one can say that the non-citizen other is, in essence, the same as the national subject, then they can perform the same labor. As a non-national subject, however, they are not entitled to the same rights and resources afforded to those that embody the national subject. This is not just the fantasy of multiculturalism, but that of the free market, which supposes all subjects are, in essence, "free," working of their own volition, without the material and bodily constraints that history has imposed on them.

When Park argues that the politics of neoliberalism calls racial, national, and gendered others "anyone other than laborers," what is ultimately meant is that they are anything other than human. On one side, the migrant, refugee, and diasporic worker are

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[9] Jin-kyung Lee, *Service Economies: Militarism, Sex Work, and Migrant Labor in South Korea*(Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 39.

regarded having the same essence as the national subject: the ability to labor for the nation. On the other, the conditions, lower wages, abuse, and denial of employment and labor protections, reveal that their difference makes them lesser than this subject. For Park, this contradiction is as much one of capital as it is of statehood and the notion of human rights, as the three cannot be separated. "The figure of the refugee," she argues, "reveals a paradox inherent in the modern nation-state system, which inscribes human rights to citizenship and simultaneously endows the nation-state with the power to withhold the rights of citizens."[10] Here, it is critical to identify human rights and, in turn, the human, as a figure of capitalist state ideology. The nation-state does not only seize autonomy through a system of drafting and granting rights, it conceptualizes humanity in order to seize and bestow it. The rhetoric of human rights implies that the category of human is built upon an inalienable and universal essence. However, the practice of nation-states reveal that this essence is granted only by demarcating who or what is human. Labor, in the service of capital accumulation for the nation, and especially that which is deemed productive and valuable labor, is what defines one as eligible for rights, and thus, human.

In this way, the nonhuman, antihuman, and monstrous become central to a discussion of ethics and labor. In cultural representation and imagination, the monstrous has occupied multiple and often contradictory positions, from blood-sucking, vampiric landowners to communist zombies. It's quite indisputable that the monstrous is often used to signify the other and our anxieties surrounding the other, whether this be racial, sexual, gender, or otherwise. However, what I focus on in this dissertation is

[10] Park, *The Capitalist Unconscious*, 20.

not only representations of the other, but more precisely, the relationship between the self and other through the framework of antihumanism. Rather than viewing the nonhuman as a definitive category, expansion, mutation, or devolution in relation to the human, I treat it as a discursive site through which dominant humanist binaries of the mind and body, subject and object, and self and other are deconstructed and rewired in order to gesture towards an ethics of engagement with alterity. Such engagement produces modes of recognition and imagination of the self and other as relational categories that challenge humanist and human-centric modes of representation.

States of Humanism and Antihumanism as Intervention

Park's critique of human rights as a state ideological function that seizes autonomy can be traced to a broader criticism of the function of humanism in both colonial and post-colonial national imagination. For Park, the formation of both South and North Korea may only be understand in the context of postcoloniality. She argues, "The division of Korea after liberation from Japanese rule was not simply the result of intervention by the superpowers. It was also the result of the domestic struggle over social reforms to address the inequalities exacerbated by colonization."[11] State formation in both the North and South, then, took form through competing notions of justice and reparation.[12] Significant here is how colonialism figures as fundamental to formations of national and individual sovereignty.

The theoretical framework of colonial modernity in Korea is thus useful in understanding the contentious role of humanism in the development of both the

[11] Ibid., 8.

[12] Ibid., 9.

colonial and sovereign nation-state. While, as Park points out, the pre-colonial period was marked with inequality and movements in opposition to it, it's generally argued that the contemporary effects of modernism were more significantly developed under Japanese colonialism through a complex, and at times contradictory, navigation of Enlightenment and humanist ideals of the nation-state, citizenship, and human rights. As Gi-Wook Shin and Michael Robinson have written, "Koreans participated directly and indirectly in the construction of a unique colonial modernity—a modernity that produced cosmopolitanism (a sense of shared universals) without political emancipation."[13] It isn't surprising, then, that much colonial resistance, such as the March First Movement, has been characterized through the advocacy for an independent Korean state, and the Korean people as having unalienable human rights to citizenship and liberty. Under such a framework, the Korean subject is figured as a universal human subject, capable of the essential rationality to form democracy.

On one hand, humanism and the humanity and humans that it forms become clearly worthy of criticism as complicit with colonial and state ideology. Critics ranging from Frantz Fanon to Elizabeth Grosz have outlined the material stakes involved in pursuing humanist discourse and the discourse of human rights. Fanon, in *Wretched of the Earth,* views the Western European project of humanism and Enlightenment as inseparable from the colonial one, under which the colonized Third World is pushed into an imitation of exploitive nation-states. Indeed, for Fanon, it was precisely humanist ideology that marked the colonized subject as different, and thus lesser than,

[13] Gi-Wook Shin and Michael Robinson. "Introduction: Rethinking Colonial Korea," in *Colonial Modernity in Korea*, ed. Gi-Wook Shin, *Harvard-Hallym Series on Korean Studies* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Asia Center, 1999), 11.

the universalized conception of the human.[14] Feminist scholar Grosz, in *Volatile Bodies*, views the Cartesian divide of mind and body, which defines the human as capable of rational thought, as the conceptual foundations of an ontological patriarchy in which women are characterized as bodies: objects to be dominated, controlled, and erased.[15] An inherent flaw to humanism and the category of the human is that is necessarily subtractive and has always hinged on the domination of an other non- or not yet-human, whether it be a colonized, racialized, or gendered other.

On the other hand, it becomes similarly perilous to conceive of humanism, especially in the colonial context, as universalizing and uncontested. To do so would not just ignore competing discourses and interventions, but also accept humanism as the primary metric from which to view struggle against and around state, citizenship, and exploitation. In her analysis, Park seeks to pursue a history outside the discourse of colonial modernity, arguing that rather than reading this period as the formation of a nation-state that merely mimics the modernity of Japan and, through this, Western modernity, it is useful to look at areas of contestation, such as Korean migration to Manchuria, which she argues "provides a basis for identification and disidentification with the neoliberal democratic order."[16] In other words, Korean identity, nation, and relations are formed not just by an imposed modernity, but also through contestation of these terms of modernity. It's in this way that I argue that identifying frameworks for antihumanist discourse, as contestation and oppositional imagination, becomes critical in understanding ethics of relation outside the totalism of humanism.

[14] See Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox(New York: Grove Press, 2004).

[15] See Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

[16] Park, *The Capitalist Unconscious*, 9.

One of the first theoretical texts to use the term antihumanism is Louis Althusser's "Marxism and Humanism," which was first circulated in 1964 and then published in the anthology, *Pour Marx* in 1965. The collection, Althusser argues, represents a series of interventions into contemporaneous formations of philosophy, Marxism, and communism, in France and worldwide."[17] In "Marxism and Humanism," Althusser intervenes into "socialist humanism," which he views as arising from a misunderstanding of humanism, ideology, and the state, and having potentially dire consequences in terms of political strategy. To express the evolution of theory in response to this historical juncture, he details the genealogy of what he terms Marx's "theoretical anti-humanism," dividing Marx's work in the three following stages: the First Stage, in which his theory of history was based on enlightenment humanist concepts of reason and natural essence; the Second Stage, from 1842-1845, which was preoccupied with Feuerbachian humanism and, despite recognizing state appropriation of reason, emphasized a universal essence of the human subject; and the Third Stage, after 1845, in which Marx enters into opposition with humanism by rejecting notions of universal essence of the human subject, formulating not just a new concept of the subject and history, but philosophy as well.[18] One of the critical points of this antihumanism, for Althusser, "is the recognition and knowledge of humanism itself: as an *ideology*."[19]

As ideology, humanism becomes defined as a previously transparent philosophy based on the "empiricism of the subject," in which each subject carries a universal

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[17] Louis Althusser, *For Marx* (London,: Allen Lane, 1969), 9-10.

[18] "Marxism and Humanism," in *For Marx* (London: Penguin, 1969), 223-29.

[19] Ibid., 230.

human essence.[20] The rejection of humanism through antihumanism ushers in a new form of identifying the human subject within material history, through new understandings of history, ideology, the subject, and processes of alienation.[21] In other words humanism, while associated with broad schools of thought, is identified as ideology premised on the centrality of a human subject that shares essential characteristics with other human individuals that give shape to society. As such, the individual subject, through natural and universal characteristics, gives shape to social conditions, rather than being formed through a network of social relations that determine the value and substance of the individual. Humanism, then, cannot be disconnected from the material conditions of history: industrialization, imperialism, and modernity and modernization.

In this way, any attempt to deploy humanist concepts of subjectivity, reason, natural essence, and freedom fails as a revolutionary project in that it only re-inscribes repressive and exploitative ideology. This is the pitfall of the socialist and communalist humanisms that Althusser identifies as arising from Marx's second stage, represented most clearly by the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, which assumes that the exploited classes can "reappropriate" their human essence from ideological apparatuses and become whole subjects, freed from alienation.[22] This call for

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[20] Ibid., 228.

[21] Badmington sees Marx's theoretical intervention in *The German Ideology* as one of the most significant contributions to posthumanist criticism. He writes that with Marx, "Hegel (and, indeed Descartes) had been turned upside down: idealism had been replaced by materialism. Subjectivity, in the Marxist account, is not the cause but the effect of an individual's material conditions of existence. The subject is not a given. Eternal Man is no more; 'he' now has a history and a contingency denied by humanism." Neil Badmington, ed. *Posthumanism*, Readers in Cultural Criticism (New York: Palgrave, 2000).

[22] Althusser describes Marx's "Second Stage": "History is the alienation and production of reason in unreason, of the true man in the alienated man. Without knowing it, man realizes the essence of man in the alienated products of his labour (commodities, State, religion). The loss of man that produces history and man must presuppose a definite pre-existing essence. At the end of history, this man, having become

reappropriation of human essence and selfhood from the state, Althusser finds, relies on a fundamental misunderstanding of alienation and ideology. He writes:

> When, during the eighteenth century, the 'rising class', the bourgeoisie, developed a humanist ideology of equality, freedom and reason, it gave its own demands the form of universality, since it hoped thereby to enroll at its side, by their education at this end, the very men it would liberate only for their liberation.[23]

Here, the human subject is granted freedom precisely because it is through freedom that the subject becomes "free" to work. Reappropriation of freedom arises from the ideological construction of free/unfree; human freedom has not been appropriated by state and capital, but formed so that the exploited may be free to labor towards more freedom. Alienation, here, is not the human self divided by exploitation into human and inhuman, but the self divided through the very notion of human selfhood.

Thus, the notion of freeing oneself from the ideological apparatus is a misrecognition of ideology as just an apparatus of domination, rather than also material reality of relation that is not just exercised, but lived, by the ruling classes. Althusser writes, "the bourgeoisie *lives* in the ideology of *freedom* from the relation between it and its conditions of existence: that is, *its* real relation (the law of a liberal capitalist economy) *but invested in an imaginary relation* (all men are free, including free labourers)."[24] The exploited cannot recuperate freedom or selfhood from the exploitative because freedom is a manifestation of an exploitative relation. In other

inhuman objectivity, has merely to re-grasp as subject his own essence alienated in property, religion and the State to become total man, true man." Althusser, "Marxism and Humanism," 226.

[23] Ibid., 234.

[24] Ibid.

words, ideology isn't merely an apparatus that seizes autonomy or freedom, it forms freedom and unfreedom through relation. Humanism-as-ideology is revelatory not just that it historicizes humanism but also recognizes how ideology functions as a form of relationship between self and other and self and world.

If the humanist notion of liberating human essence from unfreedom relies on the misrecognition of the role of selfhood and ideology, this is because humanism and the human constitute the very processes of recognition. The human is a category that is formed by seizing the methods of categorization, to make visible some and invisible others. Humanism, as ideology, directs the politics of recognition, the process by which the self and other are constituted as human and nonhuman, free and unfree, reason and unreason. To be human is to be recognized, to be seen and captured through ideological relations that maintain freedom and equality where neither exist. At the same time, this recognition relies on a fundamental misrecognition of material history. The human is made visible only to obfuscate the material relations of inequality, captivity, and exploitation and relations that are uneven, violent, imperial, racialized, and gendered in their expression. Antihumanism, then, should seek to reveal and refute these processes of (mis)recognition, and assert a form of selfhood that recognizes relationality: that the self is not a simultaneously universal and individual subject, but formed through uneven circulations of value in relation to others.

Throughout the dissertation, I draw from work by antihumanist and posthumanist scholars, as well as those situated within the "affective turn" in critical theory, while situating analysis within the political and ethical framework of antihumanism. The rise of posthumanism and the scope and politics its intervention, is an ongoing debate. In his introduction to *Posthumanism*, Neil Badmington argues that

antihumanism can be differentiated from posthumanism in that the former calls for conceptualizations of human and nonhumans outside of humanist modes of inquiry. Posthumanism, on the other hand, situates itself within a poststructural framework that views resistance as occurring within the totalizing force of humanism and human-centralism. Pointing to Derrida's work, Badmington writes, "There is no outside to which 'we' can leap. To oppose humanism by claiming to have left it behind is to overlook the very way that opposition is articulated."[25] Here, the "post" indicates not temporality but contention, complication, and historicization.

In this sense, Althusser's reading of the significance of Marx's "theoretical anti-humanism" as intervention on understandings of humanism as ideology could be situated within this broader category. Indeed, Badmington, in this same introduction, finds that Marx's *The German Ideology* is a fundamental text for posthumanism. However, to say that all criticism that has been situated within posthumanism criticizes the processes in which labor—and gendered and racialized laborers—are exploited, abused, and disavowed, would be a misreading of what has remained a broad field of inquiry that includes transhumanism, ecocriticism, and forms of new materialism. In this vein, scholars such as Dimitris Papadopulis have made the case for "radical left posthumanism," pointing out that in many cases, posthumanist frameworks of the human and nonhuman tend to be just as universalizing as the humanist ethos they refute.[26]

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[25] Badmington, *Posthumanism*, 9.

[26] Dimitris Papadopoulos, "Insurgent Posthumanism," *Ephemera* 10, no. 2 (2010), http://www.ephemerajournal.org/contribution/insurgent-posthumanism.

In light of this debate, I use the framework of antihumanism in order to think about modes and methods of critique that express strategic methods of intervention that theorize a denial of the humanist politics of representation. Such intervention is found in posthumanist scholarship, but is also present in forms of discourse found in the cultural productions that I analyze in this introduction and throughout the dissertation.

The Circulation of Humanism in the Modern Korean State

Circulation, as the movement and expression of relation, is a defining feature of this dissertation. Circulations, involving both the material and immaterial—emotions, commodities, labor, texts, and ideas—are never completely closed and carry the potential to blur boundaries and possibilities. Notions of humanism, which cannot be detached from the dehumanizing processes of colonialism, citizenship, the formation of the nation-state, and modernity, come to dominate specific paths of discourse, excluding and appropriating difference.

What is clearly present in humanist circulations is a definite category of the self and other, in which both are presumed to be equal on the basis of their shared humanity. Such perceived equality is embedded with notions of symmetry in circuits of exchange, an ideology that functions to maintain the exploitive conditions of labor. In the context of Korea, this ideology is fundamental to the biopolitical power of not only the colonial state, but the post-colonial, post-war state and its contemporary formation as a democratic state. Humanism, as Serk-Bae Suh points out, is a major facet of colonial discourse. He writes:

> Colonial discourse never stops describing pairs placed in lopsided power relations as symmetrically reciprocal. It portrays the colonial relationship as

> reciprocity by insisting that colonial development benefits the colonized and by disregarding the violence and injustice on which economic and social development under colonial rule rests. [. . .] The dignity, justice, and autonomy of the colonized are (de)valued to the point that they can be traded for the colonizers' investment in modern infrastructure and the introduction of capitalism.[27]

In other words, colonial discourse perpetuates the notion of equal human subjects and states, with equal attributes and abilities to participate in a market where their labor and the products of their labor are freely exchanged.

Figuring uneven relations as symmetrical not only serves to erase histories of imperialism, labor exploitation, and resource extraction that position the colonized as inherently subordinate, as Suh argues, but cannot be untied from humanist notions of natural equality. This explains why the Japanese state described its colonial expansion as furthering "the English idea of liberty" while simultaneously denying colonized Koreans equal rights under the Japanese constitution, arguing that Koreans must first learn the significance of law.[28] Colonized Korean subjects here are positioned as both equal and subordinate; while their capacity as humans make them capable of "learning" law and discipline, their perceived inability to progress towards this end justifies imperial violence, exploitation, and repression.

It is the rule of law—characterized by citizenship and human rights—that allows the modern nation-state to seize control of autonomy, labor, and capital. Just as the

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[27] Serk-Bae Suh, *Treacherous Translation*(University of California Press, 2013), 50.

[28] Chulwoo Lee, "Modernity, Legality, and Power in Korea under Japanese Rule," in *Colonial Modernity in Korea*, ed. Gi-Wook Shin and Michael Robinson, *Harvard-Hallym Series on Korean Studies* (Cambridge, Massachusetts Harvard University Asia Center, 1999), 23.

Japanese colonial state formed a rule of law that denied Koreans access to rights, based on their potential human-ness, subsequent post-colonial state formations consolidated and managed power and capital through granting and suspending rights based on the humanist framework. When analyzing the post-war period of military dictatorship and democratic period of South Korea, Hyun Ok Park argues, “Whereas the military state monopolized the means of violence and suspended law in the name of a national emergency, the democratic state has resorted to violence in the name of defending the rule of law.”[29] In other words, while each state formation exercises different tactics in order to seize of autonomy, each deploys same strategy of trade and equivalence. Just as the boss seizes the worker’s labor and autonomy for capital, the state seizes the subject’s autonomy for the nation. Such seizure rests on the state’s continuous epistemological power in defining the human and non-human, worker and non-worker, and citizen and non-citizen, a repetitive practice that controls migrant labor in the contemporary state. Park writes:

> Like money as a general equivalence, human rights establish migrant workers and others in a relationship of equivalence. That is, the notion of universal human rights imagines a multiplicity of social relationships in which difference is a condition of equal exchange. This equivalence places foreign workers on par with other groups—whether other minority or majority groups within and beyond South Korea—whose social status and experience differ.[30]

In this way, the experience of the human, as the human, and of humanism, should be viewed through the historical context of state-formation in Korea, from its colonial past

[29] Park, *The Capitalist Unconscious*, 41.

[30] Ibid., 45.

to a post-war and post-division present. Transnationalism, the circulation of global capital, commodities, and workers across borders, also emerges as a fundamental aspect of both labor and humanistic discourse. The binary of stated and stateless or citizen and non-citizen is one that parallels and intersects the divisions between the human and nonhuman. The lack of clear linearity in divisions of the human and nonhuman express the non-linear and uneven circulation of global capital. In this way, what it means to be human or not human cannot be understood outside such circulations, movements which become opaque and grotesque in their invisibility and unevenness; in other words, monstrous. These monstrous circulations come to contextualize the material conditions under which texts are produced, distributed, consumed, and adapted.

Moving outside, around, in within the terrain of these circulations, then, involves an undoing of notions of equality, the human, as well as the undoing of the self and other relationship, towards the establishment of revolutionary modes of seeing and feeling the other and the environment. Antihumanist criticism means not only a complication of the self-other relationship, but envisioning forms of interaction that recognize the impermanence of boundaries of the human, and the self and other as constituted by humanism. To historicize humanism means to also historicize the human and seek to recognize ways in which notions of the human self have formed through contention. While I focus primarily on twenty-first century texts in this dissertation, I present here an analysis Kang Kyŏng-ae's *In'gan munje*, in order bring attention to how the problem of the human, humanism, and its relation to labor is very much entwined with the imperial formation of the nation state and the national subject. As part of this analysis, I further demonstrate how theories of affect, and embodiment become critical tools in exploring the problem of being human as being tied to labor and gender.

II. Encountering the Laboring Other in Kang Kyŏng-ae's *Ing'an Munje*

For many critics and theorists, humanism has remained the primary framework within which to engage with colonial Korean literature. Indeed, as many writers struggled to create a Korean literary identity within and resistant to institutions of Japanese colonialism, modernity, and colonial capitalism, their texts have often been read as an assertion of Korean autonomy and human rights under larger structures of imperial repression and exploitation. And while proletarian writers have been viewed as divergent from their nationalist counterparts, mostly for their call for revolutionary class-consciousness, they have been characterized as sharing similar, if not identical, calls for human rights under Enlightenment perspectives of liberty and the human subject. In this vein, critic Yoon-shik Kim, in an overview of Korean proletarian literature, predicted that twenty-first century writers would make a temporal and radical shift away from the politics of humanism, writing,

> If twentieth century Korean literature, either knowingly or unknowingly, put forth the proposition "Human beings are not insects or bugs!" will that of the twenty-first century extend the claim to something like "Human beings are salmon, grasshoppers, or migratory birds![31]

Kim references recent turns towards posthumanism in critical discourse and literature in order to predict literary tendencies in the twenty-first century. However, can the claim be made that the question of the human is primarily one of twenty-first century

[31] Kim Yoon-shik. "KAPF Literature in Modern Korean Literary History," translated by Sun Yang Yoon. *positions: east asia cultures critique* 14, no. 2 (2006).

literature? Kim's claim is that twentieth century Korean writers, "knowingly or unknowingly" were mired in modern constructions of the human as exceptional, as universally deserving of rights and dignity, asserting that such a construct of the human was never problematized.

I challenge the notion of such a temporal shift through an analysis of antihumanist or nonhumanist modes of discourse in in Kang Kyŏng-ae's 1934 novel, *In'gan munje* (*Human Problems*). By examining strains of antihumanist thought in her text and criticism, I challenge the notion of the non, post, or antihuman as a feature of late twentieth and twenty-first century Korean literature. In doing so, I hope to show how the antihumanist discourse of labor present in the more contemporary texts I examine throughout the dissertation do not represent a strict discursive or temporal break from colonial literary imagination. By focusing on what is considered not only representative of Korean colonial literature, but also proletarian literature, I show how the theme of the laboring subject in this time period not only resists humanist structures and narratives but show how such resistance is intertwined with colonial modernity, capitalism, and the imperial formation of the nation-state. In this way, I view antihumanist thought as emerging alongside and within humanist literature, as frameworks that question the construction of the human self and other within colonial institutions and structures of political engagement. Such a contextualization of these authors complicates the homogeneity of humanism in Korean literature, even within the structure of humanist texts themselves. Furthermore, this examination highlights divergent strands of discourse that address labor exploitation and the otherness of the worker within dominant circuits of exchange in twentieth and twenty-first century Korea.

Central to this analysis then is the question of how the human relates to calls for economic justice, and how struggle against injustice can be achieved outside the framework of humanism. I venture to argue that Kang's *In'gan munje* provides possibilities towards this end. In this context, I find that her work offers an intervention into the humanist underpinnings of the modern colonial project through an indication of an alternative ethics of encountering and engaging with the laboring self and other. Drawing on work on affect and posthumanist theories by Sara Ahmed, Elizabeth Grosz, and Jacques Derrida, I contend that Kang's encounters with the self and other are revolutionary not only in their call for proletarian solidarity, but in their affective modes of feeling and seeing. Encountering the other, or dispossessed worker, for Kang, directs a shift in the way the individual self and other think, feel, and interact with each other.

First serialized by the *Donga ilbo* in 1934, Kang Kyŏng-ae's *In'gan munje* entered circulation within a body of proletarian literature that emerged in full force with the formation of KAPF,[32] one of Korea's most influential socialist organizations of artists, which sought to forge connections with the Communist International and agitate the class consciousness of colonized Koreans using the aesthetics of socialist realism. Kang was never officially a member of the literary circle, but her texts, as well as involvement in activist circles, have been held as a canon example of the *pŭro munhak*, or proletarian literature, movement of the colonial period.[33] While her work went on to take canonical

[32] Esperanto for *Korea Artista Proletara Federation*, or Korean Federation of Proletarian Art.

[33] While Kang was never officially a member of KAPF, she was known as a "fellow traveler" and member of socialist group *Kŭnuhoe*. See Sim Jin-kyŏng, "Kyegŭp'jŏk sŏng'jang'ŭi riŏlliti," in *In'gan Munje* (Paju, Korea: Ch'angbi, 2012), 353.

position in North Korean literary history, anti-communist and post-liberation censorship in South Korea kept her texts from wide circulation until the 1980s.[34]

In'gan munje has been praised for the consistency of its revolutionary content, particularly in the way it highlights the movement of the rural poor into urban factory work under the Japanese colonial regime. It follows a young woman, Sŏnbi, who is forced to move from her rural hometown to Seoul after experiencing unbearable labor exploitation and sexual violence at the hands of the town's feudal landlord, Tŏkho. Finding work in a factory in Seoul, Sŏnbi's political consciousness is mapped through her gradual understanding of the connections between Tŏkho's exploitation and that of the factory directors. Her movement into class consciousness is marked both by the violence of factory work and the aid of working class activists in the city. The novel thus engages with issues facing working class women, rural and urban labor, property ownership, the intersections of colonialism and capitalism, and class-based revolution. Within this text, I investigate revolutionary modes of resistance through Kang's focus on characters emotional engagement with others and the object worlds around them. Such engagement, I argue, becomes predicated on a new order of seeing the self and other within a network of social relations. Rather than positioning the individual as essentially human, Kang explores the creation of individual selfhood through a circulatory negotiation with the laboring other. It is through this analysis that I also present the framework from which I explore the human, posthuman, and anti-human throughout this dissertation.

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[34] For more on the publication and censorship of Kang's work, please see Samuel Perry's introduction to his translation of *Ing'an munje*, titled *From Wonso Pond*. Samuel Perry, "Translator's Introduction," in *From Wonso Pond*(New York, NY: the Feminist Press, 2009), vii-xvii. For more on postwar censorship of North Korean literature in South Korea, see Theodore E. Hughes, *Literature and Film in Cold War South Korea: Freedom's Frontier* (Columbia University Press, 2014).

Emotional Attachments

The recent "affective turn" in cultural studies has produced a wide array of texts on the meaning of and engagement of affect. In some of these works, affect can be read as emotion; however, in a more general genealogy of scholars like Henri Bergson and Gilles Deleuze, affect has come to mean "forces," or as Brian Massumi would characterize it, intensity, as situated in a constant "feeding in" and "feeding out" between the self—which here means the mind and body—and one's environment.[35] Emotion, for Massumi, is the narrative of affect through the corporeality of the body-mind.[36] Massumi not only posits the body as a site of cognition, but in doing so, highlights the role of others and environments in our engagement of subjects. The human self ceases to be an essential subject, and instead is seen within processes of physical and psychological engagements with a world that can no longer be simply defined as "outside." Beneath emotion, then, is a continual process of affective engagement, the recognition of which entails a deconstruction of the human mind, body, subject, and object. Emotion as narrative, I argue, can then be seen as a form of communication or miscommunication that establishes (or destabilizes) relations between the self and others, human and nonhuman. Feeling becomes a force that is

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[35] Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual : Movement, Affect, Sensation*, Post-Contemporary Interventions (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 23-28.

[36] Ibid., 28. Massumi writes, "Emotion is qualified intensity, the conventional, consensual point of insertion of intensity into semantically and semiotically formed progressions, into narrativizable action-related circuits, into function and meaning. It is intensity owned and recognized." For Massumi, affect differs from emotion in this way; affect is narrativized as emotion through cognition. While I don't necessarily agree with such binary between affect and emotion, what is notable is the uncontainability of affect and the way in which it necessitates engagement or disruption of binaries between inside and outside or subject and object.

constantly signified and resignified in a larger system of meaning the encompasses the other, the self, and the self-as-other.

Within the context of the politics of emotion, the significance of Massumi's work is not merely that it connects emotion to physiological processes, but that these physiological processes of feeling extend past that of the individual. The processes of feeling, reacting, emoting, responding, verbalizing, cognating, and signifying are never unbound from a larger environment of unquantifiable others. Translation of affect and then emotion into a signifying system, as with any form of translation, involves modes of production and reproduction as they are qualified and requalified, adjusted, reported, readjusted, and recreated within larger systems both beyond and within what we call the human. When Massumi writes that emotion "is intensity owned and recognized,"[37] this ownership, as with the ownership of the self, and the object, is fleeting and fraught with contention from its inception. When we cease to view emotion and cognition along terms of pure agency, we open ourselves to a representation of the self not as owner or individual, but as a subject formed through a network of physical and social relations.

By highlighting the bodily conditions under which emotions emerge, we can come to a better understanding of the material and political effects of emotion. Sara Ahmed, for example, sees emotions as creating value for and "sticking" to objects and bodies, in a circulation of goods. She explains, "Feelings can get stuck to certain bodies in the very way we describe spaces, situations, dramas. And bodies can get stuck depending on what feelings they get associated with."[38] For Ahmed, the circulation of

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[37] Ibid.

[38] Sara Ahmed, "Happy Objects," in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (U.S.: Duke University Press, 2010), 39.

feelings, or objects stuck with feelings, reveal how emotive bodies are desired, dismissed, praised, abandoned, or awarded. "Good" feelings often become those associated with progress; "bad," associated with pastness. Ahmed argues "…that it is the very assumption that good feelings are open and bad feelings are closed that allows historical forms of injustice to disappear. The demand that we be affirmative makes those histories disappear by reading them as a form of melancholia (as if you hold onto something that is already gone)."[39] Associating certain feelings and their objects with pastness and melancholia not only forces an erasure of histories of imperialism and labor exploitation, it positions a certain form of emotive response as unproductive and thus disruptive of social structures based on capitalist forms of exchange. The translation of intensity into feeling cannot be separated from the value judgment that accompanies emotion.

The management of labor here also becomes the management of bodies and emotions held within capitalist circuits of exchange. In the factory in *In'gan munje*, for example, the docile factory worker who cooperates with management is juxtaposed to the angry worker who agitates for revolution. Indeed, the disruption of these workers come not only from their assessment of power and exploitation, but also in their disruption of the affective discipline of the factory, of challenging diligence by staying awake during sleeping hours to communicate with one another and resisting docility by sneaking beyond the factory walls. Kang's focus on the emotional processes of workers—particularly in the protagonist Sŏnbi's progression from rural peasant to urban laborer—highlights the importance of emotion in proletarian literature. For if politicization

[39] Ibid., 50.

involves the conscious connection of one's personal history to a larger social history of exploitation, then it also necessarily involves a process of affective resistance in which emotions are signified and qualified along alternate passages of meaning.

Kimberly Chung, in "Proletarian Sensibilities," argues that the focus on the affect of the abject in Korean proletarian literature "reflected, mediated, and affected" the development of mass subjectivity and the emergence of a proletarian community.[40] Such engagement for Chung is located heavily in the body, as such development hinges on the "...political potential of the body, as a site of discursive power and a representation of changing politics."[41] While Chung's work explores the creation of collective identity, I'm interested in the way Kang's representation of emotional processes predicates this community on alternative modes of feeling that resist those which are heavily circulated within the colonial modern's emphasis on progress, production, and commodity exchange. By viewing affective processes, such as emotions, as circulatory and circulative, such processes cease to be definitive of an affecting subject and affected object, but of one in which the subject and object, or self and other, are intertwined. These processes are thus resistant to dominate modes of humanist thought that position the universalized human as a subject able and willing to progress as a stable, modern individual. It's from here that I'd like to draw attention to the emotional attachments characterize Sŏnbi's politicization and the "stickiness" of her emotions as compared to her exploitive counterparts.

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[40] Kimberly Chung, "Proletarian Sensibilities: The Body Politics of New Tendency Literature (1924-27)," *Journal of Korean Studies* 19, no. 2 (Spring 2014), Project MUSE. (p.41)

[41] Ibid., 42.

Amhed's focus on melancholia as a "bad" feeling suggests that there is a temporality to the "good feelings" that underscore the emotional circuit of modern colonial capitalism. Such a circuit positively values future-oriented objects connected to speed, progress, and efficiency. Contrasted to this is Sŏnbi's propulsion into the workforce, not by choice, but through the coercion of circumstances in which she has little choice but to work as a housekeeper for Tŏkho, a rural patriarch and landowner who brings her into his household, mostly because of his sexual interest in her. Once she begins work in the house, Sŏnbi is thrown into intersecting relationships with Tŏkho, his wife, his daughter, Okchŏm, who is the same age as Sŏnbi, and Sinch'ŏl, a young student who is invited to the house by Okchŏm, who has intentions of marrying him. S'inchol, for his part, has fleeting interest in Okchŏm, and is more deeply fascinated with the rural landscape and Sŏnbi as a peasant tied to this landscape. It is in this household, that of a landowner, capitalist, and Japanese collaborator, that Sŏnbi becomes marked by her slowness, particularly in her emotional engagement with objects.

Early on, Sŏnbi expresses a marked fascination with eggs and laying hens, and this fascination is quickly marked by Okchŏm, Tŏkho's daughter, as odd and laughable. Okchŏm, in a cynical move, decides to teach Sŏnbi how to embroider, offering her thread and embroidery patterns. She questions Sŏnbi on what she would like to embroider, letting her know that she could choose from an array of designs:

> So excited was Sŏnbi by Okchŏm's kindness that her heart was racing. Oh, how I want some of that pretty thread! she thought, almost dizzy from her own delight. She put her head down to think about it. Mount Pult'a? Wŏnso Pond? Several images came to mind, before she found the right one. She lifted her head, ready to

say it, but the words weren't coming out. Staring at Sŏnbi's cheeks, Okchŏm thought of what had happened the night before.

"Quick! Out with it."

"Well, I'm not really sure…"

"Oh, come on. I said I'd give you some thread if you told me."

"Well…a chicken laying eggs is what…"

"Oh, how embarrassing! Really, Sŏnbi, how could you!"[42]

Here, Sŏnbi's lengthy contemplation is compared to Okchŏm's pressing insistence, as the text underscores the internal wandering of Sŏnbi's mind by situating it alongside Okchŏm's terse remarks. This passage, although depicting a significant interaction between two characters, has far less dialogue than it has internal thoughts and decisions. The intensity of the situation— Sŏnbi's interaction with someone who is figured as an employer and rival matched with the visual of the luxurious thread—translate into a moment of slowness that irks and confounds Okchŏm. Unable to make up her mind, Sŏnbi's thoughts wander and stutter until she settles on the desired object of the laying hen and egg. Okchŏm's impatience and disdain clarifies that the emotional response she expects from Sŏnbi is one of gratitude, awe, and finally, quick subservience. However, Sŏnbi refuses this emotional narrative and instead chooses to admire the egg and laying hen. For Sŏnbi, the egg as an object is directly tied to the hen, and is paralleled with the valuation labor, as her appreciation of the humble object is juxtaposed with Okchŏm's careless and decadent treatment of goods. Okchŏm's disdainful attitude to the producer of the egg—the laying hens—becomes analogous to

[42] Kang Kyŏng-ae, *From Wonso Pond: A Korean Novel*, trans. Samuel Perry (Feminist Press at CUNY, 2009), 32:74.

her devaluation of workers and their labor. Through her fascination with the hen, Sŏnbi rejects this disdain and insists on respect for the producer of goods.

Okchŏm's insistence on speed rather than imagination and care also parallels her devaluation of labor; she is more concerned with the product as commodity than she is with the process of production. Her indignation at the thought of a hen as being an object of art matches her own refusal to recognize Sŏnbi's labor as a housekeeper. Sŏnbi's internal contemplation, which is in effect a slow process of perceiving the object, creates an emotional attachment resistant to the capitalist object framing that Okchŏm desires from her. If, as Jasbir Puar notes, emotion can be viewed as a commoditized form of affect,[43] then Sŏnbi's internal dialogue becomes a textual recognition the "affective labor" that goes into producing emotion. Furthermore, Sŏnbi's redesignation of the humble object of the egg and the invisible labor of the chicken as objects to be admired and respected not only slows affective circuits between her and Okchŏm, but disrupts these circuits of exchange through the introduction of interconnected emotional objects and values. Feeling here becomes closely attached to seeing objects in a non-capitalist framework.

Sŏnbi's emotional response to eggs is highlighted in a proceeding scene in which she accidentally spills a basket of eggs that Okchŏm has prepared for her love interest, Sinch'ŏl. Furious that her gift has been destroyed, Okchŏm barrages Sŏnbi with insults, and her mother berates Sŏnbi for neglecting her work. However, Sŏnbi's grief becomes more attached to the loss of the treasured object of attachment, the eggs:

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[43] Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Duke University Press, 2007), 207.

> Sŏnbi held onto a shelf in the cabinet and started to sob. She was mortified to have been insulted by the woman and her daughter, and even more upset that every single egg she'd collected that spring had now been taken from her.
>
> As the tears streamed down her cheeks, all she could think about were the eggs—dozens and dozens of those lovely, oval-shaped eggs.[44]

Rather than react to the intensity of this situation through, say, cleaning up the mess and fetching more eggs, Sŏnbi cries and mourns the loss of something she treasures. For Okchŏm, the eggs are a gift that would influence her ability to marry Sinch'ŏl, a marriage predicated on constructs of capitalist and patriarchal forms of exchange, as referenced by the couples' parents' financial and class concerns. However, Sŏnbi attaches a different value to the eggs, again seeing them as valued products of labor, and her emotional resistance irks and confuses Okchŏm. The value of this resistance, of this subversive form of feeling and seeing, is underscored by how Sŏnbi's tears appear to her as the beautiful eggs, positioning her emotional response as having parallel value to the objects themselves. In these scenes, Sŏnbi's emotional attachment, which resignifies the value of the egg, is marked by others as undesirable emotion: slow, unproductive, and overly melancholic.

The Disruptive Worker and Disabled Body

During her employment at the house, Tŏkho begins insisting that Sŏnbi be sent to school in Seoul, where she can become an educated woman. While the notion intrigues her, it becomes clear that this offer is predicated on her sexual availability to

[44] Kang Kyŏng-ae, *From Wonso Pond: A Korean Novel*, 32:76.

Tŏkho, a contract that would give Tŏkho complete ownership over Sŏnbi's body and labor. After Tŏkho rapes her, Sŏnbi runs away to Seoul where her friend, Kannan, helps her find work in a factory in Inch'ŏn, joining ranks of women workers who face not only severe exploitation, but surveillance and sexual violence at the hands of their male employers. Sŏnbi befriends a socialist activist who works in the factory and begins to take small steps towards aiding her in disseminating information and contacting other activists. Though Sŏnbi's political acts are small compared to those of her friends, her final moments in the factory become indicative of her strong affective resistance, and in particular, a resistance to the intensity of her working conditions.

Having felt ill for some time, Sŏnbi realizes that she must go to the hospital. As she worries about her inability to pay any hospital fees—most of her income has been taken back up by factory management as the workers are forced to pay for food, accommodations, and even uniforms—she grows sicker and must pause her work. Here, her brief respite from her work day becomes a last effort at caring for herself, an act of self-empathy that is discouraged and deemed inappropriate by her employers, who leave her with barely enough to survive. She stops and looks at the clock, and seeing the hour, feels a thread of hope. However, these feelings of hope are momentary. As she ducks to avoid being noticed by the floor supervisor, she feels dizzy, and her hand slips, falling into a cauldron of boiling water.[45] In this scene, the temporality of factory work, represented by the wall clock, is positioned as contrary to both Sŏnbi's anxiety for her health and subsequent slowness. Sŏnbi, in her sickness, and in her momentary care for

[45] Ibid., 318:266.

herself, becomes too slow for the speed of factory work, and, like many of the women who work at the factory with her, is injured.

In an analysis of this scene, critic Ch'ŏn Yong'ho observes that Kang references the disciplinary force that capital driven mechanization has over laboring bodies. As the later period of Japanese colonialism relied on the development of machinery, the working class became dependent on their operation of machinery, technology over which they had no ownership. These machines thus dictated their movements, as movements of the machines were in turn dictated by the factory directors. One deviation from this directed movement could result in grievous injury.[46] Such deviation encompasses both voluntary and involuntary movement, related to physical and psychological reaction. Sŏnbi's exhaustion and fever cause her to pause and contemplate her own working conditions, not only disrupting the temporality of factory work, but engaging in a temporality that values emotional attachment to and care for the self. Here, her affective challenging of both her workload, which is measured by speed, is promptly punished as she becomes marked as too slow and thus an unproductive worker in capitalist circuits of exchange. The injured worker, a trope in Kang's work, becomes symbolic of physiological and psychological resistance to an affective circuit of exchange that promotes a mechanized, diligent subject in which emotions like self-pity, self-reflection, and empathy are marked as superfluous, disruptive, and dangerous.

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[46] Drawing from German historian and economist Jurgen Kucynski's *Rise of the Working Class*, Ch'ŏn writes, "노동자는 기계의 움직임에 종속되어 살아가게 되며, 이 기계의 움직임은 노동자를 의해 결정되는 것이 아니라 기계의 소유주에 의해 결정된다." ("Workers' lives became dependent on the movement of machines. The movement of the machine ceases to be decided by the worker, but rather by the owner of the machine."; translation mine.) Yong-ho Ch'ŏn, "In'gan Munje'ŭi Munje Yŏngu," in *Kang Kyŏng'ae, Sidaewa Munhak* (Seoul: Random House, 2006), 124-25.

In “Impairment as Colonial Trope,” Kyung-Hee Choi explores the marked prevalence of disability in Korean colonial literature, focusing primarily on Kang’s short story, “Underground Village.” She identifies in colonial literature a modern way of representing disability: rather than employing disabled characters as merely allegories for the nation, leftist writers tended towards depicting the interiority of disabled persons, which she argues, “. . . recast ill-bodied beings as modern persons, that is, bearers of rights, implicitly positing their disabled nation-state as a bearer of rights as well.”[47] As Choi notes, this notion of disability is a pointedly modern one that cannot be unbound from the material conditions of colonialism.[48] Choi writes that disability can been seen as blockage, and in effect, the blockage of goods and resources from circulation, which prevents individuals from receiving necessities like food and medical care.[49] However, I would further argue that in the context of Kang’s work, disability references the social conditions under which a body is considered disabled. Blockage, here, is not an accident in circulation, but rather a condition necessary to the colonial circulation of labor, which relies on the heavy exploitation of labor as well as an impoverished population of contingent laborers. The construction of disability cannot be separated from these conditions, under which the “normal” body must fall under the conditions of labor. In her work on the social construction of disability, Susan Wendell

[47] Kyeong-Hee Choi, "Impaired Body as Colonial Trope: Kang Kyong'ae's "Underground Village," *Public Culture* 13, no. 3 (2001), Project MUSE., 441.

[48] Choi writes, “As the neo-Confucian family and community suffered dislocation during the large-scale economic and social changes inaugurated by the colonial regime, a good number of these abjected bodies emerged from domestic sequestration to wander, uncared for, before the public gaze.” The disabled thus became the object of discipline to colonial policing under the Hygiene Police System. She goes on to point out that this shift in treatment of disabled persons prompted a modern textual and linguistic shift, represented through writers’ use of the term, *pulguja*, rather than *pyŏng in*, which became attached to colonial policing. Ibid., 436-37.

[49] Ibid., 445-56.

argues that "pace" plays a significant role in disability politics, both materially and socially. For Wendell, an increase in pace of life raises the number of disabled persons, both through increased injury through accident and lack of self-care, and by shifting the expectations of normal performance to one that fewer people are able to meet.[50] Similarly, labor under the colonial capitalist conditions that Kang represents carries with it the implicit and explicit threats of disability, as pressure to meet standards of efficiency both cause workplace injury and reconstruct standards of the speed at which a "normal" laboring body must meet.

Kang's positioning of disability in *In'gan munje* challenges Choi's assertion that the representation of disabled persons in colonial literature functioned to position Koreans as "bearers of rights" under Enlightenment notions of citizenship and statehood. For Kang, all workers, like Sŏnbi, are positioned as disabled or potentially disabled through living conditions created by labor exploitation and poverty. The creation of the human, and thus the normal and abnormal human body, is predicated on the disciplining forces of colonialism, modernity, and capitalist exploitation. Such forces cannot be disconnected from the ideology of humanism, which not only centralizes the human subject, but normalizes a discourse on the human through innate characteristics that grant the subject innate qualities or abilities. The prevalence of physical and mental disability and impairment in Kang's work suggests not that these characters are human and thus deserving of rights, but rather that the category of the human itself is an inherently subtractive one; under the conditions of colonialism and capitalism all

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[50] Susan Wendell, *The Rejected Body : Feminist Philosophical Reflections on Disability*(New York: Routledge, 1996), 37-38. While pace of life for Wendell extends past the workplace, labor plays a particular role, as she elaborates on the way increased pace the workplace causes disability both through accident and in rendering more workers disabled through their inability to keep up with changing demands for productivity.

laboring bodies become marked as disabled through their inability to "keep up." This is why Sŏnbi's individual efforts to reject the speed of the factory are met with swift and violent disciplinary action, revealing that her body, like the bodies of all her fellow workers, has been categorically rendered disabled. However, while individual resistance is marked with punishment, it is in the following scene that Kang demonstrates the revolutionary potential of worker solidarity, a solidarity, which recognizes the worker not as an individual struggling for humanist citizenship, but as a self and other operating within social relations of labor and exchange.

Thus, Sŏnbi's effort to empathize with herself and her condition becomes a way to recognize herself as an other. Chŏn writes that here, a world filled with "countless Tŏkhos," or exploitive patriarchal capitalist collaborators, shifts a to world that is filled with "countless Sŏnbis," exploited workers, who like herself, have lost their hands and lives because, if even for a second, they failed to keep up while operating the factory machinery.[51] Her own anguish, exhaustion, and empathy become not only for her, but for the countless other laborers who have and would continue to lose life and limb. And it is through this extension of herself to the other that the other also extends to her. Her emotional response sparks a disruption in the temporality of the factory that creates space for a social network based on group empathy and care. As she slips and drops her hand into a vat of boiling water, she cries out in pain, and gains the notice of another worker:

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[51]Ch'ŏn, "In'gan munje'ŭi munje yŏngu," 125.

> "Ah!" she cried, and with a jerk pulled out her hand. She hadn't been alert enough to feel the pain at first when it had fallen into the boiling water, but before long her whole arm began to sting so much that she thought she might die.
>
> "Burn yourself badly?"
>
> Sŏnbi looked up. When she realized the person speaking to her was one of the men carrying over a barrel of cocoons, it was the image of Ch'ŏtchae's face that immediately flashed in her mind. With tears streaming down her cheeks, she turned away. The man stood there staring at her for a while, but then turned around to leave. Normally, she would have died of embarrassment from this sort of encounter, but today with her whole body aching and her hand scalded up to her wrist, she wasn't embarrassed in the slightest and instead felt a strong urge to call out to the man.[52]

For a moment, she struggles internally to narrate her emotions as the intensity of the pain separates her from her body. Her scream brings her suffering from that of an individual and is recognized by the other, the worker who disrupts his work shift in empathy. Rejecting shame, an internalization of discipline and speed required by the factory directors, she instead seeks the comfort of an other, allowing her emotion to become the empathy outside her own body. Looking at the worker who, for himself, has stopped his work to engage with her suffering, she wishes to give her exhausted body to his care. The selfhood which emerges from this affective engagement is a liberatory, built on resistant emotions like care, empathy, and pride. Their resistance is highlighted

[52] Kang Kyŏng-ae, *From Wonso Pond: A Korean Novel*, 118:266.

by the apathy of the floor director and the clock, to whom she Sŏnbi looks at for a moment before losing consciousness.

The Problem of Being Human: Seeing the Other

The final scene in the factory demonstrates Sŏnbi's shift into a vision of the subject in which the individual self ceases as an amalgamation of essential human traits but instead exists by and for an other, complicating the binary between the human self and other. Selfhood becomes predicated on circulatory affective processes in which the subject and object or other are constantly constructed and deconstructed through interaction. Sight plays a significant role in this process, as this form of selfhood is predicated on a antihuman mode of seeing the individual. Grosz, in a discussion of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's work on vision, links sight to other processes of perception, like touch, which necessarily involve a blurring of the boundaries between the body and mind and the subject and object. She writes,

> Perception involves neither keeping the self-contained object at a distance nor the purely perceptual functioning of a self-identical subject. Each is implicated in and necessary for the existence of the other as such. [...] Subject and object, mind and body, the visible and the invisible are intercalated; the 'rays,' the lines of force, indelibly etch the one into the other.[53]

[53] Grosz, reading Merleau-Ponty, explains: "To see, then, is also by implication, to be seen. Seeing entails having a body that is itself capable of being seen." Grosz, *Volatile Bodies : Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, 101. She examines Merleau-Ponty's discussion of flesh and seeing, arguing that the reflexivity and reversibility of flesh is closely tied to his claim on the "double sensation" of sight. For Grosz, all perception, including sight, is wrapped up in itself, both inside and outside the body, like flesh that folds inward and outward.

For Grosz, sight, like all other modes of perception, are built on circulatory relationships—she uses the möbius strip as a figure to demonstrate this—in which inside and out, flesh and mind, self and other, are not only interconnected, but merge into each other and depend on each other.[54] Encountering the environment, the other, or the object, reveals the fragility of the boundary of the subject and object, in which the subject becomes the other.

The political implications of sight are far reaching. For Grosz, the necessity of exploring our affective processes, the processes which make, or unmake, us as human, is the necessity of approaching the Cartesian divide between mind and body, a duality that she views as underpinning the oppressive constructions of sexual difference. For Derrida, sight, or the gaze, is central to the ethics of the other, as it is the gaze of the other (in the case of Derrida, the nonhuman other), which brings forward the question of one's position as not only a subject, but as a human subject. Seeing for Derrida is thus a process of ethically engaging with our position as subjects to that of the other who also demands subjecthood. The demand for responsibility that stems from this gaze, links to his concept of spectrality: How can we, as individuals, gazing upon the other as we are aware of the other's gaze, ethically consider what is rendered invisible through our modes of exchange and seeing?[55] How do demands for recognition and representation fall into the pitfalls of relying only on visibility without responsibility?

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[54] Ibid., xii. Influenced by Lacan, Grosz uses the model of the Möbius strip to ground her theory and both the layout of her text. The Möbius strip, which one can make by taking a strip of paper and twisting one side over before taping the ends together, represents the intersectionality of both sides of the mind-body divide. For example, if you run your finger along the Möbius strip in one direction, you will reach the origin after traversing both sides of the strip without any retracing. Here, the interior and exterior are figured as continuums of each other, both inscribed by the same touch, without origin or end point.

[55] See Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, trans. David Willis(New York: Fordham University Press, 2008).

Kang's text explores this question by positing another way of seeing, exemplified by the collapse of the individuality of the face. Gazing into the face of her fellow worker, Sŏnbi sees the face of her childhood friend, Ch'ŏtchae, who has always shown her care and compassion. Her resistance to shame in this moment signals a departure from emotions that are attached to the factory worker, like diligence, pride in efficiency, and humble docility. The face, which cannot be removed from the body of the worker, begins to signify a way of seeing labor and the laboring body. As she gazes at the face of her fellow worker, he gazes back at her, and it is from this dual gaze that emerges a process of seeing what cannot be accounted for in a glance; namely, the social relations that position the individual in a larger network of labor, production, and exchange. The compassionate fellow worker becomes her childhood friend, also a worker and activist, not because they are necessarily the same, but because they share a relations and ethics that are disruptive to the factory's position in colonial and capitalist circuits of exchange. Here, proletarian solidarity is premised as a resistant way of seeing the human, the self, and the laboring body. The face signifies what cannot be contained by seeing; it is and it is not human. Rather, it is precisely problem of being human, of recognizing the other and reorganizing the conditions of sight and emotion.

This divergent way of seeing is underscored in the final passages of the novel. Ch'ŏtchae, who has been living and working in proximity to Sŏnbi for some time, is called in by his comrade, Ch'ŏlsu to care for a fellow worker who's fallen ill. Met by Kannan, a comrade and woman from his and Sŏnbi's village, he is shocked to see his old companion on her deathbed:

> The patient's body was already stone cold and her face was deathly pale. Ch'ŏlsu let out a deep sigh and turned around to look at Ch'ŏtchae. He was standing anxiously to the side of Ch'ŏlsu and then took one step closer. And then he saw her.
>
> "Sŏnbi!" he cried, standing paralyzed at the sight of her.[56]

It is in this moment, gazing on the bluish face and dying body of the worker, that Ch'ŏtchae realizes that he has finally reunited with Sŏnbi. Much of the novel's plot focuses on the desire for this reunion, as the two characters lead parallel and, at times, intersecting lives. However, while the desire for reunion is premised on a romantic bond, it becomes clear that the reunion is finally realized through sight, and furthermore, sight that which accounts for the social relations the bind the two. Ch'ŏtchae rushes to see Sŏnbi not because the worker is his beloved childhood friend, but because she is a fellow worker.

If, as Karatani Kojin argues in *Transcritique*, ethical engagement with the other is analogous to engagement with the dead, this scene is a quite literal manifestation of his ethics. For Karatani, engagement with the other should be that with a subject from whom one cannot gain consent, an engagement which positions others as "relative others who are around one everyday."[57] Karatani contrasts this with Emmanuel Levinas' concept of the "absolute Other," in which the other is encountered as radical alterity. For Karatani, the impossibility of the encounter—figured through the inability to gain consent or response, as with the dead—doesn't end at accepting radical alterity, but rather signals that when one encounters the other, one is encountering a relationship

[56] Kang Kyŏng-ae, *From Wonso Pond: A Korean Novel*, 120:269.

[57] Karatani Kojin, *Transcritique: On Kant and Marx*, trans. Sabu Kohso(MIT Press, 2005), 126.

with others.[58] In Karatani's ethics, then, the self and other don't exist as individual subjects that are absolutely parallel to each other, but as perpendicular subjects that exist because of their social relationship to one another. The self and the other become embedded in a mutual relationship and exist through material interactions. This is what he means when he writes that his positions as teacher and a student, an employee and employer indicate that "The essence of me, namely *what I am* is defined only by the ensemble of those relations."[59] The existence of a human subject depends not on any essential quality of being human, but is rather defined by one's position in relation to others.

Just as Sŏnbi's final moments initiate a gaze that recognizes the interpellation of her selfhood with that of others around her, Ch'ŏtchae's gaze upon her cold, pale face fosters recognition of mutual selfhood and otherness. Here, surrounded by her comrades, friends, and fellow workers, who come to her deathbed not because of filial or romantic bonds, Sŏnbi's position as a social actor, not an individual comes to light. By crying out her name in shock, Ch'ŏtchae is actually renaming Sŏnbi: not just as the girl he once knew, but as someone relative to him in a struggle against injustice. The moment of speaking her name becomes one of naming her death for those who surround her, who exist as subjects for and because of her. In this way, her death, in the company of caring comrades, prompts in him a new field of vision and process of seeing the other. Kang's narrative suggests the possibility of an antihuman or other-than-human encounter in which individual selfhood ceases to be the only framework for engagement. This form of engagement indicates a framework for social justice based not

[58] Ibid., 127.

[59] Ibid., 173.

on the centrality of shared humanity but on the recognition of an individual's material reliance on others.

Who is clearly absent in this scene for Ch'ŏtchae is the young intellectual and activist, Sinch'ŏl, who has decided to go back to his bourgeois lifestyle. It is here that the essence of Sinch'ŏl's betrayal comes to light within the social relations that the scene carves out. At the heart of this betrayal is not his act of exiting the struggle; rather it stems from his mode of feeling and seeing the laboring other, a mode that is distinguished as one of ownership and pity. What Kang emphasizes in these final scenes is not the act of a Judas who has made a fatal mistake, but the limits of Sinch'ŏl's humanist sight, which she links to his bourgeois humanitarianism. Indeed, most of Sinch'ŏl's involvement in the workers' movement stems from his pity for Sŏnbi and the rural poverty she represents. This becomes clear in a scene from Tŏkho's house. Sinch'ŏl, who is preparing to leave the rural home for Seoul, wakes up in the morning and, thinking about his lost opportunities with Sŏnbi, grows despondent. If only he could take her to Seoul so that she could get an education, he thinks. As he imagines this possibility, he notices a hand picking a squash. Realizing it could be Sŏnbi's, he searches for the person behind the hand, and is shocked at the sight of what he imagines to be Sŏnbi's hand:

> That hand! It had thick knuckles and cracked nails…he had no idea whom it could have belonged to. […]

> How could Sonbi's hands look anything like that? No matter how hard she works, she still has her youth…It couldn't have been Sonbi's! It just couldn't have! He shook his head emphatically.[60]

Though the text is unclear as to the owner of the hand, what remains clear is Sinch'ŏl's disgust. His fantasy of Sŏnbi, as a docile and naive rural girl is disrupted by the sight of the work-worn hand, and he must dismiss any possibility of this ugliness as belonging to Sŏnbi. What is really at stake here is his sense of ownership over Sŏnbi. Though he has had little interaction with her, he sees her as a potential companion, or even spouse, and fantasizes about giving her an education and new life in Seoul. The relationship is further complicated by both Okchŏm's interest in Sinch'ŏl and Tŏkho's interest in Sŏnbi. Promising Sŏnbi an education, Tŏkho rapes her; however, Sinch'ŏl remains stubbornly oblivious to this violent relationship, as well as the stressful working conditions that Sŏnbi endures at the home. For Sinch'ŏl, Sŏnbi is much like the rural landscape that he admires; he is a spectator in her life and gains emotional arousal through his ability to hold her in his gaze. The sight of her hand—evidence of her position as a worker—disrupts this fantasy and he is quick to shake it from his mind.

Kang delves into the capitalist gaze that is inherent in this form of spectatorship in her essay, "Kandorŭl dŭng'chimyŏnsŏ, kandoya ch'al ittgŏra" ("Farewell, Kando"). The essay, which is autobiographical, takes place as "Na" leaves her hometown of Kando. At one point on the train, she sees the students and intellectuals, questioning their role in society. She concludes that this elite class, in which she includes herself, has

[60] Kang Kyŏng-ae, *From Wonso Pond: A Korean Novel*, 36:81-82.

learned to live off the “blood and sweat,” or “exploited labor” of others.[61] Kang’s narrator urges a class consciousness that recognizes the vampiric lifestyle of the elite. However, the narrator also implicates herself in this exploitation, asserting that like the intellectuals, she has never lifted a stone or overturned soil.[62] What’s significant here is that she connects the ability to be a spectator and take pleasure in landscape, to the necessary erasure of the labor that occurs over the landscape. In order to enjoy the rural scenery, one must be from a class that has never to face the exploitation of their labor. The leisurely, pleasurable gaze becomes a capitalist and colonial one. Realizing how her feelings of pleasure fit into this circuit of exchange and exploitation, the narrator shifts her emotional engagement to disrupt this circuit, redesignating her experience—and that of the reader—to contemplation, then guilt, and finally anger.

This essay indicates the essence of Sinch’ŏl’s betrayal. His gaze becomes an empty one, devoid of any ethical consideration. He feels disgust at the sight of labor, and rather focus on this negative feeling, he shakes it from his mind. It is no coincidence that it is Sŏnbi’s hand that is injured; Sinch’ŏl’s gaze is the same as the ignorance of the factory supervisor who cannot see the importance of the hand through any other framework but a capitalist one. Sinch’ŏl’s plans to educate her are revealed to be based on a humanist illusion that posits all humans as equivalent and refuses to reckon with the complexity and reality of labor exploitation under modern colonial capitalism. His elevation of education, as something that will save Sŏnbi, and grant him ownership over her through marriage, becomes a hollow fantasy premised on the invisibility of Sŏnbi’s labor. His

[61] Kang Kyŏng-ae, "Kandorŭl Dŭng’ch’imyŏnsŏ, Kandoya Ittgŏra," in *Kang Kyŏng’ae Chŏnjip*, ed. Yi Sang’kyŏng(Seoul: 1999), 722.

[62] Ibid.

betrayal at the end of the novel is precisely outlined in this early encounter with Sŏnbi. Implicated here is not only his bourgeois mentality, but the processes of seeing and feeling that inform it.

Ch'ŏtchae, upon seeing Sŏnbi, recognizes the depths of Sinch'ŏl's betrayal: "Sinch'ŏl always had that luxury of choice! And that's what led him to an ideological conversion. But what about me? What choice do I have? What choice did I ever have? Sinch'ŏl has many paths to follow. That's what makes us different people!"[63] For Ch'ŏtchae, the human problem becomes precisely this issue, and the human problem is one over which he and Sŏnbi, and those gathered with them, can claim ownership. The problem of being human is not just the paths that one does not have access to as a worker, or the difficulties of being one sentenced to disability and death, but also the predicament of discovering a new way of seeing the human, of seeing those who cannot take the same paths, or have the same privileges that Sinch'ŏl does. Workers, like Sŏnbi, are figured as disposable, invisible others who are worked to death and then discarded. And here, Sinch'ŏl's betrayal indicates how much he is implicated in this death as one whose ethics of pity failed to properly see Sŏnbi. Against Sinch'ŏl's bourgeoisie humanism, Ch'ŏtchae and Sŏnbi's narratives reference a form of seeing and feeling that resists a colonial and capitalist framework of vision and emotion. Such ethics are not located outside the human, or after the human, but within the circulation of the human, through a reordering of the relationship between the self and the other.

In *Literature and Film in Cold War South Korea: Freedom's Frontier*, Theodore Hughes argues that modern Korean literature from the early twentieth century

[63] Kang Kyŏng-ae, *From Wonso Pond: A Korean Novel*, 120:269.

embodies what W.J.T. Mitchell calls an "ekphrastic hope," in that words are employed in a new visual order, a way of visualizing colonial modernity.[64] He links KAPF to this project, positioning it within a larger canon of humanist and nativist literature:

> While KAPF can and should be linked to the earlier 'civilization and enlightenment' discourse of the early 1900s and its emphasis on educating the masses, the call for a class-based revolutionary subject signals a break with the Korean enlightenment invocation to step into the version of 'modern' history associated broadly with such notions as nation, sovereignty, and capitalist accumulation. At the same time . . . most KAPF works do follow earlier enlightenment discourse when they seek to render "life-worlds into history' by attempting to dispense with the enchanted, the premodern, in favor of a secular, linear temporality.[65]

Hughes, drawing on work by Rey Chow, argues that KAPF literature, though significantly diverging from Enlightenment literature by writers like Yi Kwangsu and Yŏm Sangsŏp, remains embedded in a modern project of claiming the premodern or primitive through visualization. For Hughes, as with Chow, laying such visual claims implicates texts in imperialist and capitalist modes of temporality and history. While Hughes insight draws valuable attention to the political significance of visual order in proletarian writing, I argue that perhaps Kang diverges from her fellow travelers in this regard. If KAPF writers sought to create a visual order based on rendering visible social reality and modes of production and exchange, Kang carried this aesthetic objective further by shifting her visual framework away from a linear encounter between the self and other and towards a circular one. Kang's work diverges sharply from humanist and

[64] Hughes, *Literature and Film in Cold War South Korea: Freedom's Frontier*, 4-5.
[65] Ibid., 23.

enlightenment visualization by promoting an anti-capitalist form of emotional and visual narrative. Her focus on the production of emotion, object attachment, the laboring body, and modes of seeing offer resistant forms of affective engagement. Such resistant engagement is central to her production of revolutionary consciousness, as they challenge the very ways the other, and in particular, the laboring other, encounters and is encountered.

III. Chapter Outline

Furthering the analysis I present of Kang Kyŏng-ae's work, I orient the next chapters of this dissertation towards twenty-first century literature and film that deploys horror and questions of the human, and in particular, the gendering and racialization of the human. The above analysis of Kang's work, I argue, demonstrates a necessity to contextualize how more contemporary works circulate notions of the human, humanity, and humanism, especially in light of the 2009 publication of her work in English translation its subsequent circulation. Throughout the dissertation, I argue that the discourse presented in these texts cannot be separated from the context of narrative, genre, and the conditions under which circulation arises.

In the first chapter, "Women, Corpses, and Wolves: Gendered Subjects in P'yŏn Hye-yŏng," I examine two short stories published in 2005 and 2006 by P'yŏn, "Dong'mulwon'ŭi tan'saeng (Birth of the Zoo)" and "Shi'chae tul (Corpses)." Again, addressing the assertion that the nonhuman emerges as a twenty-first century literary question, my analysis looks at the role of sexual difference in labor and selfhood in a way that connects it to Kang's work in the previous century. The focus on the nonhuman

here serves to frame the formation of the human and nonhuman as products of labor. Each story features a singular masculine protagonist, a perspectival point that I argue, situates the reader to examine labor as not only a humanizing act, but a gendering one as well.

"Corpses," I argue, traverses the terrain of gendered labor and humanity through its narrative of a male protagonist struggling to identify and remember his missing wife. The most present figure in the story, despite her disappearance, sparks an investigative narrative in which the male protagonist acts as the prosthetic eyes of the state in his efforts to find and visualize his wife as both a human and state subject. The man's inability to visualize the woman thus becomes evidence of the limits of the human gaze, which is positioned as masculine-centric and embedded within state discourses of power.

Here, the homogenization of the human subject that underlies humanist discourse positions women as subordinate to the masculine subject. As Grosz writes, "Our conceptions of reality, knowledge, truth, politics, ethics, and aesthetics are all effects of sexually specific—and thus far in our history, usually male—bodies, and are all thus implicated in the power structures which feminists have regarded as patriarchal, the structures which govern relations between the sexes."[66] Humanist ideology, which relies on a neutralization through the terms of the universal human, is also a patriarchal ideology that perpetuates the subordination of the feminine to the masculine. I argue that the stories narrative of investigation and identification, challenges the humanist

[66] Grosz, *Volatile Bodies : Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, ix.

framework and capitalist state as masculine-centric and complicit in the invisibility of feminine and feminized labor.

"Birth of the Zoo," in which an alienated office worker navigates an increasingly dystopic city in an absurd yet violent hunt for an escaped wolf, reveals the simultaneously humanizing and dehumanizing process of labor. Through this short story, I draw out tensions in Karl Marx's work on alienation in *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, arguing that they gesture towards labor alienating and dehumanizing the subject through a process of humanization. Or, the subject must be humanized in order to be dehumanized; in this regard, humanization shares the violence of dehumanization. Such a process of subject formation, I argue, is inherently gendered and reveals the foundation of the human as a sexually differentiated one. Drawing from Jacques Derrida's *The Animal That Therefore I Am*," and subsequent analysis of sexual difference in his text by Kelly Oliver, I argue that the human, defined through the non-human animal, is epistemologically tied to gender, and specifically, masculinity and masculine violence.

Chapter two, "Global Contagions: The Transnationalization of Han Kang's *Ch'aeshikchuŭija*," explores the circulation of domestic labor, consumption, international trade, and finally, translation. Published in 2007 in Korea, the novel portrays a woman's isolating experience of mental illness. When a "bloody face" begins to haunt her dreams, she begins to refuse to consume animal products, then all food, until, finally, she refuses all consumption, telling others that she wishes to be a tree. Published in 2007, on the cusp of emerging protest over the U.S.-Korea Free Trade Agreement, Han's novel raises questions about the role of women in debates over consumption and labor within late capitalism. Continuing from my previous chapter,

where I argue that P'yŏn uses sight to explore the invisibility of women's labor, I find that Han's work revolves around consumption, connecting historical junctures like Japanese colonization and the Cold War to the formation of a gendered national subject and the position of women within global and local circulations of labor. Consumption, here, becomes a discursive site that both furthers and disrupts the circulation of gendered historical violence of nation-building.

In the second section, then, I analyze how Han's depictions of the violent intersections of marital, family, and state institutions demonstrate these institutions' reliance on and reproduction of constructions of the gendered human. Once again, I draw from Grosz, who finds that the construction of the human body relies on the treatment of women as objects, bodies, and landscapes; sites of production rather than productive themselves.[67] Consumption, here, becomes feminized and passive, while production and inscription become characterized as masculine and active. Through her focus on consumption and the woman's body as canvas, I argue that Han's text challenges the voyeuristic positioning of women's bodies as grotesque sites for the historical inscription of colonialism, imperialism, and misogynist violence, in which women become objects to be socially produced and consumed. Han's work thus furthers discourse on the role of consumption in labor and production, and sheds light on resistance on contemporaneous cultural productions around the KORUS FTA and the import of U.S. beef as well as the novel's subsequent global circulation through its controversial translation by Deborah Smith. It's from here that I argue that instances of mistranslation and misrepresentation—and the subsequent defense of the English-

[67] Ibid., 9.

language text—ultimately values humanist notion of progress and knowledge over engagement with histories of imperialism. Like rhetoric surrounding free trade, the translation cannot be untied from fantasies of capitalist exchange and the free market.

In the third and final chapter, "Economies of Vampirism: Transnational Speculation and Surrogacy in Park Chanwook's *Thirst*," I turn to an analysis of the acclaimed auteur's vampire film. Released both domestically and internationally in 2009, Park Chan-wook's *Thirst* remains one of the few vampire texts in Korean cinema, despite the ebbs of flows of vampires in popular culture in the U.S. and Great Britain. Although Park's work doesn't quite fit the generic elements of many of these texts, it begs the question as to why this singular film has emerged from South Korea to join a transnational discourse on vampirism. I argue that we can look at the singular emergence of this South Korean text in the context of a larger global anxiety in regards to life, reproduction, disease, and labor. *Thirst*, which depicts vampirism as a postcolonial disease that wrecks moral catastrophe within a marginalized community, employs both the local and the global, indicating the increasingly transnational position of South Korean arthouse cinema. This transnationalism translates into a criticism of the nation's place in global circulations of labor, positioning vampirism, disease, and the consumption of life as a metaphor for the circulation of capital in a neoliberal state.

I explore *Thirst* in the context of South Korean neoliberalization, drawing from work by Jeesook Song on the impact of the Asian Debt Crisis on the biopolitical management of the South Korean state and Melinda Cooper's work on speculation and the transformation of biological life into capital. Here, I argue that Park's text reveals how the delirium of capitalist speculation leads to the grotesque, as the gamble of speculation, or medical testing that the film opens with, results not in loss of life, but a

tragic immortality in which the protagonist-turned-vampire must consume to excess in order to survive. Such a presentation of vampirism as capitalist expansion and speculation presents closed circuits of exchange in which the vampire becomes an unwilling figure of antihuman transformation, revealing the potential limits and contradictions within the larger body of posthumanist discourse. In other words, by challenging the ethical potential of the post- or trans- human as a site of resistance, the film opens to alternative modes of monstrous engagement that posits ethical engagement with the material history of the other. This ethical engagement, I argue, can be located in the figure of the gendered migrant worker, a character who in the film is positioned as a ghostly remainder of the Park's vampiric circuits of exchange.

CHAPTER ONE

Women, Corpses, and Wolves: Gendered Subjects in P'yŏn Hye-yŏng

I. Introduction

Recently, P'yŏn Hye-yŏng has piqued critical interest with her work, which, in the vein of other contemporary Korean writers, often uses surreal and dystopian settings to explore the disillusionment, confusion, anxiety, and alienation of late-capitalist society. Her narratives focus on bare life and humans for whom humanity becomes memory. Indeed, when Kim Yoon-shik proposes that twenty-first century Korean literature may exclaim, "Human beings are salmon, grasshoppers, or migratory birds,"[68] it is difficult not to bring P'yŏn to mind. In this chapter, I explore how P'yŏn's work deals with the nonhuman through explorations of encounter with the other, especially in regards to the gendering of the human self and other. If Kang Kyŏng-ae's work, published in 1934, reveals the ways in which the notion of the human was far from homogenous in the twentieth century socio-political literary landscape of colonial Korea, P'yŏn's work, shows how these debates and struggles continue after the turn of the century. Literary representation of the human shows us that being human, or even becoming human, is not a singular discourse. P'yŏn's humans emerge in their narratives as fraught, half-

[68] Kim Yoon-shik, "KAPF Literature in Modern Korean Literary History". 421. In the introduction to the dissertation, I explore the implications of Kim's assessment, finding that it dehistoricizes humanism and the notion of the human, especially in the context of modern Korean literature. Pointing out that the human and humanism were contested even within KAPF literature, I argue that the notion of the human is a frequent source of disjuncture in literature and can rarely be defined through frameworks of Enlightenment humanism.

formed thoughts, as fleeting as their memories and as precarious as their material realities. Gender here, and in particular, the gender of labor and the human subject, arises in a contested space of alienation that, ultimately eschew forms of humanist recognition.

In the first section of this chapter, I explore P'yŏn's 2006 "Corpses (*Shich'e tŭl*)," a short story in which the surreal and grotesque serve to examine the way in which humanism operates on the unevenness of sexual differentiation. The story is told from the perspective of a male protagonist whose wife has disappeared. Called in by police to give a description of the woman and identify her remains, the man finds he is unable to visualize her body or even remember the circumstances of her disappearance. As the police mount pressure against him to identify his wife's body parts in a growing collection of severed limbs, the man attempts various forms of remembering—hallucination, consumption, and visitation—as the disintegration of his own sense of self accelerates.

I argue that unravelling of the masculine human subject in response to the absent feminine subject reveals the ways in which masculinity is formed through the already dismembered condition of the feminine subject. The homogenizing discourse of humanism serves to obscure the terms of sexual differentiation, in which the feminine is rendered as subordinate to the more-human masculine figure. The protagonist's inability to describe or identify his wife to the satisfaction of the police indicates the invisibility of the feminine and feminine labor within the context of the humanist state and economy. At the same time, his abject attempts at remembrance—such as smelling and eating rotting flesh, vomiting, and re-enacting death—usher affective forms of

engagement that allow for an understanding of invisible material relations outside the realm of the human.

In the second section, I turn to P'yŏn's 2005 short story, "Birth of the Zoo (*Tongmulwŏn ŭi t'ansaeng*)," which depicts the simultaneously gradual and accelerated unravelling of a city after the mysterious escape or loss of several zoo animals, the first being a wolf. Told from the perspective of a male office worker, the strangest thing about the apocalyptic in this story is its overwhelming mundanity. Memory has little place in this story as the protagonist grapples with nonhuman others, animals that are seldom seen but often felt. Like the city around him, his sense of self collapses through a process of grotesque alienation that carries him away from his desk job and closer to his notions of masculinity, dominance, and animality. Central to this struggle is the meaning of being, or more precisely, of being human. Apocalyptic collapse is depicted not as institutional collapse as much as a destruction of its facades. Here, the hierarchy of the human, and animal, male and female, hunter and hunted, come to form the foundations of a looming, dark city of corpses and gunfire.

If "Corpses" examines the construction of masculine humanity in relation to the feminine, "Birth of the Zoo" examines this construction through the specter of the nonhuman animal. The protagonists' hunt for the wolf, I argue, may be characterized as the failure of humanization to address or overcome alienation. Here, I view labor as a simultaneously humanizing and dehumanizing process; capitalism grants humanity to the subject in order to dehumanize it. In the protagonist's frustrated attempts, I argue, we can see how knowledge of animal and sexual differentiation constructs and is constructed by the notion of a homogenous human subject.

I find that both stories are haunted by a specter of labor and femininity that inform the imagination, perspective, and movement of their protagonists. In "Corpses," for example, the husband only begins to "see" his wife once he revisits their place of work, imagining her role as both a service and sexual worker. In "Birth of the Zoo," the protagonist's life is overwhelmed by the repetition and mundanity of his low-paying job and pitiful "leisure" conditions. Such focus indicates that labor, productive labor, is the process through which the human becomes visible as such. The almost complete absence of women, female, or feminine subjects in both these stories—a characteristic of many of P'yŏn's short narratives—indicates not only that the default human subject is masculine but that human representation is not just based on a male/female binary but the binary of visible/invisible. Such hauntings, of labor and gender, become attempts to address the invisible outside the work of being human.

II. Corpses Under the Humanist State

"Corpses" opens with a male protagonist as he gets a call from a police station to come and identify the remains of his missing wife, who he suspects drowned in a ravine during a fishing trip the two had taken a month ago. Right away, the text sets up a triangulation of power, where the man, under orders of the state, represented by the police, is asked to identify the body of a third party, his wife. As the police find multiple body parts—all belonging to women—they increase their pressure on the man to identify those which belong to his wife. In the context of the short story, the function of the state becomes one of producing, inscribing, and identifying its subjects, and in particular, human subjects, for the processes of law, investigation, and order. The man's role thus

becomes one in which he is asked to be the eyes of the state: he must identify his wife, not only to aid the investigation, but to categorize the countless other subjects and body parts that are found in the river. The wife—who remains unnamed for the story—occupies more than the role of companion, as the man's narrative indicates her role as an affective, domestic, and service worker.

While the story is undoubtedly about misogynist violence—whether it be the violence that has befallen these countless, unidentifiable women, or the social violence that renders them as invisible subjects whose rotten body parts that wash upon the shores from the unknown depths of the ravine—it is also about the construction of the human and the sexually differentiation within such violence. As Elizabeth Grosz points out, central to the construction of the human body is not only a divide between mind and body, but a divide that creates categories of sexual difference that are socially inscribed and produced.[69] Here, drawing from Grosz's work, I argue that P'yŏn's text explores encounters and recognitions that resist the state's humanist frameworks, a framework that not only centralizes a normalized, universal human body, but relies on subordination and exploitation through sexual differentiation. The wife's role as laborer becomes central to the man's identification of the woman, opening up the question of the visibility of gendered laboring bodies under the humanist and masculine gaze of the state. In this way, like Kang, P'yŏn's work ushers in posthumanist frameworks that not only resist the masculine, human centrism of the state, but posits alternative forms of feeling and visualizing the laboring other.

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[69] See Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington, 1994).

As I argue in the introduction, Kang Kyŏng-ae's work represents alternatives to humanist circuits of exchange under colonial modernism and capitalism and posits revolutionary modes of feeling, seeing, and engagement with the other. Just as humanism is embedded in colonial control, the modern capitalist state can also be viewed as producing human subjects through the reproduction and inscription of humanist ideology on its subjects. Dimitris Papadopoulos, in "Insurgent Posthumanism," argues that the modern capitalist state, in its neoliberal formations, can be seen as appropriating non-humanist revolutionary struggles for freedom into the universalizing and homogenizing form of humanist freedom. He writes,

> The supposed ideological power of the state is considered to be multifarious but at its very core what the state does is to appear as uniting the freedom of labour and the freedom of capital under the banner of humanism. In fact what the state does is to appropriate the freedom of the workers and to make it productive by guaranteeing that the workers can be free and autonomous sellers in the market.[70]

What Papadopoulos argues, similar to Louis Althusser and Karatani Kojin, is that Marxist revolutionary discourse and struggle sought to situate subjects in a non-humanist framework,[71] a framework grounded in the materiality of the lived and living experiences of "*certain* humans" rather than the totalizing category of the human.[72] In other words, the subject in such discourse is defined through embodied relations to the

[70] Papadopoulos, "Insurgent Posthumanism". 137.

[71] Ibid. Papadopoulos uses the term "non-humanist" in reference to past revolutionary struggle that challenged, sought alternatives to, or complicated humanism though not necessarily under the label of post-, non-, or anti- humanist.

[72] Ibid., 148.

other, through recognitions of material conditions and histories, not through the innate characteristic of being human. The capitalist state appropriates struggles for non-humanist autonomy, which challenges the asymmetrical and exploitive nature of labor, by granting subjects the humanist sovereignty to sell their labor. Papadopoulos argues that what is needed for social justice is not more sovereignty in the market, but a framework of autonomy that recognizes the limitations of humanist sovereignty and the inherently exploitive nature and historically unequal terrain of the free market.

The capitalist state then, becomes one that regiments the subject as not only a human subject, but the subject as existing within and for a concept of shared humanity. In doing so, it enacts the violence of colonialism, racism, sexism, and exploitation through co-opting non-humanist struggles for freedom and replacing it with humanist freedom. As Papadopoulos argues, "Out of relative non-humanist freedom, the capitalist state forges a relative humanist freedom."[73] If for Papadopoulos, the homogenization of the human (and nonhuman) subject under humanist ideology underpins the assumptions that build the capitalist state, it is this same homogenizing process that for Grosz renders women subordinate to men through sexual differentiation. An underlying argument in Grosz's *Volatile Bodies* is that Western conceptions of the mind and body are based on an inherently unequal dichotomy in which the mind presides over the body.[74] The body in this dichotomy becomes an object, "typically regarded as passive and reproductive but largely unproductive,"[75] a field over which exploitation may occur.

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[73] Ibid., 140.

[74] "Our conceptions of reality, knowledge, truth, politics, ethics, and aesthetics are all effects of sexually specific—and thus far in our history, usually male—bodies, and are all thus implicated in the power structures which feminists have described as patriarchal, the structures which govern relations between the sexes." Grosz, *Volatile Bodies : Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, ix.

[75] Ibid., 9.

“Patriarchal oppression,” explains Grosz, “justifies itself, at least in part, by connecting women much more closely than men to the body,”[76] making women objects of masculine social, economic, and historical control.

The humanist ideology of the capitalist state, which relies on a neutralization of the subject under the terms of the universal human, is also the patriarchal ideology that perpetuates the subordination of women through their ontological attachment to bodies. It could be argued that the subtractive nature of humanism—in which the human is always defined by an other, non- or not-yet human—is patriarchal, due to its rootedness in a form of sexual differentiation that inevitably denies women full subjectivity. Women, as bodies, become objects to be managed, exploited, and produced, but, as in Grosz’s terms, never productive. Women’s labor is positioned as impossible through the impossibility of their production, and thus invisible in capitalist exchange. Similarly, P’yŏn’s text indicates that seeing the other—the woman and the woman as productive laborer—becomes impossible through the functions of the state. However, it is perhaps impossibility, seeing without seeing, or seeing beyond human labor, that constitutes an ethics of engagement.

In this context, the triangulation of power in “Corpses” takes on particular significance in relation to how humanism functions as ideology for state power, and the state’s investment in managing the gendered and laboring subject. The text forms an apocalyptic reality in which women become a series of body parts, corpses homogenized into a swirling pool of the human. The story opens as the protagonist receives a call from the police, asking him to come to the station to identify a leg that had been recovered

[76] Ibid., 14.

from the ravine where it's believed his wife had drowned. The call prompts him to attempt to visualize his wife's leg, and it becomes clear that this is the purpose of the police investigation: the identification of remains, of the body in relation to a human subject, in order to " . . . seal his wife's fate."[77] In this way, the man is set up to be a proxy of the state. Under the orders of the investigators, he is to help them identify the disparate body parts found and connect them to a citizen, in hopes that this will create a closed history of her death. However, his attempts to visualize his wife's body fail at every effort. This failure marks ethical sight as unattainable under the humanist and statist gaze, and the protagonist's struggle imagines posthumanist ethics of seeing, grounded in a material framework of encountering the other, not as an object, but as a relative other existing in a mutual relationship with a network of subjects and others. In other words, the protagonist's struggle to visualize his wife reveals the limits of humanist sight and indicate a not-so-human form of encounter through alternative visualization.

"A Rough Sketch of a Female Body"

On his way to the police station, the man makes his first attempt at visualizing his wife, starting from the image of the dismembered leg inspired by his phone conversation with the police:

> His mind inched over his wife's body—from her feet to her kneecaps, from her kneecaps to her privates, from her privates to her nipples, and from her nipples

[77] P'yŏn Hye-yŏng, "Corpses," in *Waxen Wings: The Acta Koreana Anthology of Short Fiction from Korea*, ed. Bruce Fulton(St. Paul, Minnesota: Koryo Press, 2011), 185.

to her head—and visualized a rough sketch of a female body. Whether that body belonged to his wife or to the prostitute he had picked up, he could not tell.[78]

The narrative immediately becomes one about visualization, and in particular, the visualization of women's bodies under the masculine gaze of the protagonist. The body in his mind becomes an object in his gaze; however, he is unable to complete this project, the construction of a human subject that can be categorized within the definitions of the state. The body he imagines becomes one belonging to all women and no woman at all; it becomes an image of a sexually differentiated body, punctuated by his own sexual desire as his focus pans from the woman's legs to her breasts. Initially, it would appear that this is what the investigators require of the man, to form "a rough sketch of a female body" that can be easily categorized.

Elisabeth Bronfen, in *Over Her Dead Body*, finds that the image of the dead or dying body is a form of fetishization, ". . . a severing of the body from real materiality and its historical context."[79] For Bronfen, such fetishization is related to aesthetic tropes that tie death to femininity, as well as the positioning of woman as Other.[80] In this way, the protagonist's gaze, an attempt to represent his wife's body becomes a homogenizing process of humanization: categorizing the image of the leg into a total body, and the body of his wife. Separated from the specificity of its historical context, his

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[78] Ibid., 186.

[79] Elisabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body : Death, Femininity, and the Aesthetic*(New York: Routledge, 1992), 45.

[80] See chapters one and two, "Preparation for an Autopsy" and "The Lady Vanishes," in which Bronfen examines Gabriel von Max's painting, *Der Anatom* and Sigmund Freud's memoirs on the death of his daughter, finding that both the artist and the psychoanalyst position femininity as without referent, as lack, and ultimately, align it with death. Othering of the feminine becomes a visual and psychological form of understand self through death. In chapter nine, "Sacrificing extremity," Bronfen argues, "As Other, Woman serves to define the self, and the lack or excess that is located in the Other functions as an exteriorisation of the self, in respect to both gender and death." Ibid., 181.

representation defies identification and remains a masculine and capitalist gaze in which the subject's position in a material network of relationship is denied for an amalgamation of sexually differentiated human traits. Such a gaze, it would seem, is beckoned by the police investigators, who wish for a simple identification of an object among countless objects. However, the man's final thought on the body—in which the image provokes one of "the prostitute he picked up," makes vague steps towards grounding the image in material relations. While on one level, the confusion of the image with a sex worker appears as further sexualization of the body, this comparison brings to light the previous invisibility of labor in his visual imagination. Sex work becomes associated with the labor of being a wife, of the affective and domestic labor that partially define his relationship to his spouse.

It is in this initial inability to fully visualize his wife's body that the man realizes his role as both a proxy and an object of the state. Like the investigators, he feels forced to identify the remains, a pressure that highlights his relationship to the state: as the prosthetic eyes of the state, his gaze must identify the body along the simple and homogenizing lines of the human; however, failure to do so feminizes him and positions him as an object of control. Driving to the station, he tries to visualize his wife, again failing: "He felt like a detective watching a criminal slip through his fingers. It was a shitty feeling."[81] In his attempts to hold the image of the body in his gaze, the man finds himself in a parallel relationship to the state, a detective like the investigators who have called him. Like the police, his role becomes one of law, of finding a criminal. It's significant to note that his wife's position now becomes that of a criminal, as if the mere

[81] P'yŏn Hye-yŏng, "Corpses," 157.

existence of an uncategorizable female body implies a sort of criminality, a site in which the limits of the human and the state are thrown into question. The incomplete act of visualizing the body effectively deconstructs the position of the human in relation to sexual difference, and what the man suffers from is not an inability to recognize, but the burgeoning realization of what recognition or misrecognition could entail: on one hand, recognition "solves the case," and neatly categorizes his wife as an identifiable human subject of the state. On the other hand, such recognition, through the lens of the state, comes with the loss of her specificity, of her material relationship to him and those around him. Hence, this struggle begins to untether his own subject position: "And he was flustered because he was faring no better than his wife. In his ineptness, he felt more dead than alive."[82] The man's inability to effectively hold his wife as a complete object of his gaze feminizes him and challenges his position as a subject. He too, becomes a body among bodies, without specificity or material connection.

The Specter of Labor

Once in the police station, the man sits down to take a nap before meeting with the detectives. Upon awaking, he's approached by a grotesque apparition:

> A shadow was approaching, its footsteps heavy and squelchy, and with it a rampant raw-fish stench, the very same stink that emanated from his fishmongering wife. He stared at the shadow . . . it *was* his wife. She was laboring toward him on one leg, the right one; it resembled a sodden stump of wood. He

[82] Ibid., 187.

> tried to get up but his wife stuck the misshapen stump right in his face, menacing him, warning him to stay put.[83]

While I argue that in *In'gan munje*, the responsibility of the gaze is represented through the collapse of the individuality of face, here, this responsibility lies in both the leg and the specter of the man's wife. Central to Jacques Derrida's ethics of the gaze is also that of the specter: a figure that calls for responsibility to the other through knowledge that in its gaze, the subject is also the other.[84] The leg, once an object of the gaze, becomes a subject as it threatens the man and demands recognition. Once an object that is seen, it becomes a subject that sees, and in this sight, demands response and recognition. The otherness of the leg, attached and detached from the wife, becomes the otherness of the man, and he is forced to recognize himself not as a stable human subject, but a material, relative subject, not defined by his ability to see, but his ability to be seen by others. And it is in this breakdown of the subject-other relationship that the stench becomes significant. The stench of rotten fish, like the vague image of a sex worker, calls for a recognition of the woman's labor alongside the man. Together, they worked in a fish stew restaurant, his wife performing the labor of butcher and cook, so that the smell of fish came to occupy her existence. In order to see his wife, the man must see what is rendered unseen: her relationship to him, and others, as an affective, domestic, and service worker. The scent of fish also serves to implicate her existence in one that crosses the limits of the human. Her dismembered body, reeking of fish, positions her as the nonhuman, an animal that is cut into parts for consumption.

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[83] Ibid., 188.

[84] See "Injunctions of Marx;" Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx : The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994).

Once the police arrive, the man is taken into the morgue where he is shown the leg. The police detective's attitude is marked as indifferent throughout the ordeal, as he casually reveals the leg, and shrugs off the man's discomfort.[85] This indifference is punctuated by the sterility and anonymity of the morgue: the leg, "with the unnamed bodies in the morgue" is pungent with the "confused jumble of odors from the formalin, the chemical solvent, and the detergent was the sterile metallic smell of the body tray. He gagged—overwhelmed not so much by this onslaught of odors as by the putridness of the flesh."[86] The indifference of the detective is enhanced by the morgue's clinical atmosphere and odor, an atmosphere which betrays an absolute indifference to all the body parts, unnamed, and uncategorized. Juxtaposed to this sterility is the rotting flesh of the leg, signifying death and life, and, most importantly, its attachment to the man as both a subject and object. The decaying limb elicits a particular form of horror that disrupts the order of the morgue, and pushes the man into contemplating his own impending decay, the fragility of his mortality, and the materiality of his flesh. The narrator comments, "It was a single solitary body part and yet its unrelenting decay spoke his own mortality."[87] In horror, the man vomits, his half-digested food appearing to him like the "rotten lump of flesh."[88] This uncontrollable eruption of putridness from his mouth, implicates him in the death of the leg; he too, becomes a rotting corpse, crossing the borders of life and death, a subject that is simultaneously the decaying object caught in his own gaze.

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[85] P'yŏn Hye-yŏng, "Corpses," 188-89.

[86] Ibid., 188.

[87]Ibid., 189.

[88]Ibid., 190.

The man's reaction—disgust, fear, and finally, nausea, is one of abjection, a traumatic reaction that reminds the man of his own decay, the overwhelming presence of death in the materiality of his own body. Julia Kristeva writes that the abject is that that destroys symbolic meaning, bridging the self and the other, the subject and the object. She writes,

> A wound with blood and pus, or the sickly, acrid smell of sweat, of decay, does not *signify* death. In the presence of a signified death—a flat encephalograph, for instance—I would understand, react, or accept. No, as in true theater, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being.[89]

Kristeva explains that the horror of this border-crossing, between life and the death, an experience that permeates the bodily functions of existence, from the presence of blood and shit to finally, the corpse, is one that destroys the order of identity and selfhood.[90] It's an experience outside of meaning that cannot be understood in a symbolic or linguistic order, but must be repressed in order to stabilize identity through the binary between the self and other, the subject and object. Thus, the horror experienced is a traumatic breakdown of the self: the man, faced with his own decay, becomes the rotten leg, the corpse, the vile vomit that spews from his mouth, mixing with the decomposing flesh of the leg. For a moment, he exits the sterility of the morgue and police station, the

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[89] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 3.

[90] Ibid.

symbolic order of meaning and identity imposed by the state and detective, whose role is to impassively categorize and identify limb after limb, torso after torso, dozens of corpses into meaning that the state can quantify and qualify along the lines of the living and the human.

For Kristeva, the abject is experienced through a material confrontation with death, through touch, smell, sight, and taste. Primary to the narrator's representation of the abject is sight, the man's gaze upon the leg. For Elizabeth Grosz, the act of seeing breaks down the border between the subject and object, by implicating the seer as an object that can be seen.[91] In both cases, seeing decay, whether in the traumatic eruption of decay into the symbolic order, as with Kristeva, or in the very act of sight, as with Grosz, not only breaks down the separation between the subject and object, but entangles the two, implicating each in the other's position. Such disruption, while occurring within, and, as Kristeva might argue, even central to, the construction of the self, creates space to disrupt the centrality and stability of the human subject. The man's violent, physiological reaction to the sight of decay arises as a disjuncture in the order and rationality of the police station and the state. The apparition of his wife, her fishy stench, and the severed limb becomes specters of materiality, of lived histories and constructions that haunt the universalizing claims of the stable, homogeneous, human subject of the state. The leg, at once detached and attached to the woman's body disrupts the order of the state, the masculine gaze, by entangling the subject and the object.

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[91] Grosz, reading Merleau-Ponty, explains: "To see, then, is also by implication, to be seen. Seeing entails having a body that is itself capable of being seen." Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, 101.

In this way, the reeking apparition of the man's wife and the rotten dismembered leg illicit in the man not only recognition of bodily materiality, but the material and social networks that form his relationship with the leg, and his wife. The man muses,

> The leg, before it decomposed, could have belonged to a college girl on the run, a department store saleswoman who had massaged her cramped calf in between customers, or the high-jumper who had planted her foot on the ground before torqueing herself over the bar. [. . .] Yes, it could have belonged to any of them. And not necessarily his wife.[92]

The leg, here, becomes connected to labor, and in particular, the work of women. Whether belonging to a student, a service worker, like the man's wife, or an athlete, the leg ceases to be that of an anonymous Jane Doe, a human subject under the scrutiny of the state, but the body of a worker, an other connected to the man through the material relationship of their labor. Just as the stench of fish signals an association to the wife's work in the food and service industry, the leg signals a laboring body, not just any body, but a body, like that of a sex worker, connected to the man through shared material conditions. For the man, the leg ceases to be a fetish, devoid of any material history or meaning, and instead becomes implicated within his own subject position. In gazing at the rotting leg, the man's subjecthood is destabilized, as he experiences a form of seeing different from the masculinist and statist gaze demanded by the police station. The leg ceases to be a singular body part to be simply identified as a human body among bodies, but as belonging to a relative other, a worker who is materially related to the man.

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[92] P'yŏn Hye-yŏng, "Corpses," 189.

Death Becomes Him

Papadopoulos argues that the political task of posthumanism is not to reproduce the inclusionary model of humanism, but to form patterns of recognition and symmetry between the material connections between "*certain* humans and *certain* nonhumans." In other words, he eschews the homogenizing claim that the human / nonhuman binary perpetrates and instead calls for a revolutionary mode of recognition in which solidarity is forged through lived, material histories.[93] I argue that P'yŏn's work, through themes of the abject, dismemberment, sight, and recognition, seeks to do just this. While bodily horror, like dismemberment, untethers the stability of the human subject, abjection reveals a breakdown between the subject and object. The human self ceases to be a stable subject, but instead becomes one defined through and alongside relationships with the other and object. Seeing, in this mode, resists simple and homogenizing models of human sight, and instead calls for a recognition of human and nonhuman subjects within a social and material network. Encountering the other, and in particular, the laboring other, goes beyond a limited framework of radical alterity, but is presupposed on the relativeness of the other. In other words, the man's encounter with his wife and the body parts collected by the police forge a posthumanist framework for seeing the

[93] Papadopoulos, "Insurgent Posthumanism". 148. Intervening in certain trends in posthumanist theory, which tend towards an inclusive model structured around a universalizing binary of the human/nonhuman, Papadopoulos writes, "The post-anthropocentric dimension of posthumanist left politics is neither about developing an ecological egalitarianism that considers the value of all nonhuman beings as equal, nor about creating the grounds for the articulation of constantly novel connections and concerns between us and them . . . . Rather, it is about making alliances and engaging in practices that restore justice in the immediate ecologies in which *certain* humans and *certain* nonhumans are inhabiting in deeply asymmetrical ways." Here, Papadopoulos addresses how the false equality of humanism may still permeate posthumanist discourse, namely, in the perception that in essence, human and nonhuman subjects exist and occupy equal terrain. Such imagination of equal terrain erases histories of violence and exploitation, not limited to, but including those which I address in this chapter, namely colonial repression, the exploitation and endangerment of workers, the construction of ability, and gendered violence.

other as a relative other; not an object, but as subjects related to the man through their material connection as workers within a capitalist circuit of exchange.

Unable to identify the body part, the man drives towards home, to the building where his wife and he ran a fish restaurant together. Recently, the building had fallen into disrepair as condo developers erected sites on either side of the building, driving customers away. Finally, the owner sold the building at a fraction of its value, meaning that its tenants, like the man and his wife, were forced out of business.[94] The ramshackle building, ready for demolition, stands abandoned, unused, and irrelevant, much like the man and his wife, who, at the loss of their business, find themselves on the margins of exchange. The man enters the old restaurant, a fading memory of their life's work and relationship. The narrator compares the disappearance of the building to that of the man's wife. Rather than a "gradual decay," the narrator describes the building as collapsing suddenly, "The way that water can sweep you away and swallow you up."[95] The building, once an integral part of the town's economy, has disappeared in a second, erased by new development and skyrocketing real estate values. Like his wife, the building is an object that has been taken for granted, a space for production, but never active in production. Within moments, its value is obliterated, demolished by new development, so that not even a memory remains. His wife becomes like that building, her labor, and role as producer, never recognized, as she too becomes an object to be discarded and forgotten. It's significant that it's in the restaurant that the man finally comes to terms with the disappearance of his wife.

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[94] P'yŏn Hye-yŏng, "Corpses," 194.

[95] Ibid., 192.

Stepping into the restaurant, the man is assaulted by the stench of rotten fish, the same stench that permeated the apparition of his wife in the police station. He opens the freezer doors to find rotting bags of fish, forgotten when the power was cut off from the restaurant. Wading through the mess, he pulls out a bag of fish eyeballs that his wife had saved. Since the beginning of the restaurant, the man's wife had saved the fish eyeballs, plucking them out instead of serving them, and eating them on her own, a peculiar habit that seemed to have given her much pleasure. The man looks at the bag of rotting eyes: "Awash in black juice, the eyeballs looked teary."[96] He rinses them in stale barley tea, and puts one into his mouth:

> A disgusting rancidness filled his oral cavity and with each breath, out came the fishy stink from the recesses of his body—or was it the stench of his own body, dying from the inside out? He took his time sucking on the eyeball. Finally he burst into tears—it dawned on him then that his wife had to be dead.[97]

As he eats the rotting eyeball, his own eyes mirror the fish eyes as they tear up. Consumption here becomes equated with mimicry, a transgression of the limits of the self-as-subject through the visual and oral consumption of the object. For Grosz, animal mimicry, which she aligns with the pathology of psychosis, occurs when one "renounce[s] their right to occupy a perspectival point, abandoning themselves to be spatially located by/as others."[98] In other words, the man's mimicry of the eyeballs is a moment of border-crossing, in which the location of his own body, of selfhood, bridges with that of the beloved object which he is consuming. The objects of consumption are

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[96] Ibid., 195.

[97] Ibid.

[98] Grosz, *Volatile Bodies : Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, 47.

no longer strictly objects, to be simply consumed by a stable subject, but implicated in his very subjectivity. In his act of consuming the eyes, he forges a new sort of sight, one in which he is radically related to the other, and the other to him. Just as his experience of abjection with the leg, his encounter with the putrid object forges a recognition of his own liminal existence. His position as a subject becomes materially tied to his circular experience of and alongside an object, and in this case, an object of both visual and oral consumption.

The primacy of sight in this scene, heightened by the imagery of the eyes, indicates a posthumanist framework of seeing not only the object, but the other connected to the object. It is here that he realizes his wife is dead. Death here is not attached to the physical object of the corpse—her body remains to be found or identified. It's not the presence of a corpse, the quantifiable judgment of the police and the state that would bring a body out of anonymity only to throw it into the homogenous anonymity of a human subject under the state. Death is instead located in the material absence of his wife, which he experiences through a realization of the absence of her labor. He connects to her not through a visualization of her body, but through a visualization of the material conditions her body both endured and produced: butchering fish, cooking, running the restaurant, and offering emotional and sexual care. Seeing and recognizing these material relations are beyond the gaze of the state, and his own masculinist gaze, which sees only objects, bodies and corpses, not the productive and active value of the body within a network of social relations. Through consuming the fish eyes, he forges a posthumanist gaze that resists the body as a fetish object and instead sees it through lived histories and material experiences. His wife is dead, and he experiences this death not as a loss of an object, but as a loss of the stability

of his own subject position, as the death and decay of himself. In recognizing the materiality of his wife's life and death, it becomes clear that his wife is not a radically separate other, but rather a relative other, one related to him through a material history.

It is perhaps this recognition, of his wife's materiality through her death, which propels his final moments. He receives a final phone call from the detective, who announces that they have found a head which they believe is his wife. But rather than go to the police station to make a final identification, the man takes a detour and heads back to the ravine where his wife drowned. It's this decision that marks him as unable to serve as a prosthetic of the state; either incapable or unwilling to settle his gaze on the body part, and to mark it as an object for identification, he instead flees to the site of his final memories of his wife. However, he can't recall the exact location. Driving endlessly along a path following the water, he comes across a group of fishermen. As he approaches, he realizes what the men are catching are not fish, but body parts, as they lift dismembered arms, eyeballs, and pelvic bones, dripping with putrid blood, out of the water.[99] Mesmerized by the sight, he slips and falls into the water, becoming a body among the countless corpses and worms that eat through them. His struggle is brief and ineffective:

> The still water, loath to flow, constricted drawstring-like around him. Desperate to stay afloat, he grabbed at the haphazard network of fishing lines cast around him. Like the roots of black water weeds tossed by the current, his legs kicked frantically beneath the surface. Darkness had obscured the fishermen. He screamed at them to toss him a fishing line.[100]

[99] P'yŏn Hye-yŏng, "Corpses," 204.

[100] Ibid., 205.

In these final moments, his struggle for life becomes one for recognition as he clamors to grab onto the fishing lines and command the attention of the fishers. But he can't get a clear line of vision for them, and if they see him, they remain impassive. He's become a body among bodies, his condition unrecognizable by the living around him. He is seen as pure body, all object, his struggle for life is rendered invisible by others as he drowns. Only the worms and fish seem to take note of his existence, as they swarm him, tearing at his flesh.

The man, who felt his own death and decay through the disappearance of his wife and appearance of women's body parts, becomes aligned with his wife and the countless women in this scene. No longer in command of the gaze, no longer of use to the police department or the state, his body, like the many others, becomes a fetish object to the fishermen while his struggle to live is erased from their sight. He becomes, in death, an object to be seen but not recognized, an object of labor, of the fishing nets, rather than a relative other, a subject within a heterogeneous network of subjects. His fall into the depths of the water marks this feminization, his death, bringing to question the way in which the humanist gaze denies recognition or encounters with the other, and in particular, the gendered other. Here, the state is implicated in the masculinist and humanist gaze, as the fishermen's lack of response mirrors the sterility and impassiveness of the police and the station. His body, like that of his wife, will be torn apart, first strewn across the ravine, and then sorted among the body parts in the morgue. And it's in this moment that his wife haunts him: "The water remained stagnant save for the whirling drone of the eddies. That drone sounded like his wife's

whimpers."[101] In his final moments of life, the man connects his experience of struggle and terror to that of his wife's, her final sensations. The husband and wife, once existing in the narrative binary of the self and other, become embedded in a mutual relationship based on material similarities and experiences, rather than the homogenizing and violent category of the human.

III. The Futility of Becoming: Origins of the Human and Animal in "Birth of The Zoo"[102]

The triangulation of power in "Corpses," which I argued is structured through the relationships between the male protagonist, the investigative police officers, and the missing wife, forms an investigative narrative that is ultimately undermined by apocalyptic and dystopic tropes. The object of investigation—the missing wife—is never recovered, and neither is an explanation of her disappearance. Instead of piecing together the causes of the wife's disappearance, the narrative breaks down into a surreal and grotesque exploration of gender relations, memory, and corporeality. Rather than close the investigation, the husband instead searches for the impossible; the ability to see or encounter the gendered other outside the humanist gaze. Such disruption of the investigative genre is present in P'yŏn's short story, "Birth of the Zoo," in which it is not a human, but an animal who has disappeared. In this section of the chapter, I focus on the disruption of investigation, knowledge, and capture and its relation to masculinity, labor, and the non-human animal. Investigation, detection, and hunting imply a

[101] Ibid., 205-06.

[102] P'yŏn Hye-yŏng, "Tongmurwŏnŭi t'ansaeng," in *Sayukchang tchokŭro* (Seoul: Munhak dongnae, 2007), 65-91. Translation of the title and text of the story are mine. Passages from the 2007 publication are presented in their original Korean in the footnotes.

gathering of clues, traces, and knowledge in order to capture an object. However, as with "Corpses," in "Birth of the Zoo" these attempts to track, detect, and hunt results in a surreal and dystopic breakdown of meaning and relations, questioning both the knowledge categories of human and animal.

Joseph Jeon, in "Memories of Memories: Historicity, Nostalgia, and Archive in Bong Joon Ho's *Memories of Murder*," demonstrates how the use of the investigative genre may be subverted to reveal the impossibility of historical narrative in the context of national crisis under late capitalism. In this analysis of Bong Joon Ho's 2003 film, *Memories of Murder*, Jeon draws on the work of Tzvetan Todorov and Franco Moretti to point out the investigative genre's link to historiography. The detective genre, he argues, is at its heart an attempt to create a linear narrative of meaning, in short, the historical archive. [103] However, as Jeon points out, such historiography is rendered impossible in Bong's film, due to particularities of Korean history that have made inhabiting the present impossible. He explains,

> Typical of the post-International Monetary Fund (IMF) financial crisis moment in Korean cinema, the film thus registers an anxiety of forgetting that is distinct from traumatic repression, driven instead by an inability to record fact in an uninhabited present. The present becomes forgotten, in other words, not because time passes and memory fades, or, alternately, because it is too painful, but rather because of an imagined inability to make memories in the first place.[104]

[103] Joseph Jonghyun Jeon, "Memories of Memories: Historicity, Nostalgia, and Archive in Bong Joon-Ho's "Memories of Murder"," *Cinema Journal* 51, no. 1 (2011), http://www.jstor.org/stable/41342283.

[104] Ibid., 77.

For Jeon, the film's narrative, which spans the years of 1987 to 2003, represents a particular commentary on the impossibility of history in the context of Korea's globalization, press censorship, violent repression, and the Asian Debt Crisis, all of which have made teleological history impossible. According to Jeon, Bong's work thus presents us with an alternative to such historical memory that embraces a Derridian ethos of hauntology, an archival form that is haunted by presence of an absence of a knowable past.[105] "The imperative of spectrality," writes Jeon, "and of spectral historiography, is to bear witness not only to the past but to its estranged strangeness as well."[106] The past here becomes specter of an unknowable other, a strange specter that emerges to demand responsibility from the present.

Such focus on spectrality is clearly present in "Corpses," in which the wife's ghost serves to remind the husband of the ultimate inability of memory, but of knowing itself. His inability to remember his wife is not a fault of memory, or repression, but of the inability to recognize or know the radical alterity of the gendered other. As with Jeon's examination of Bong's work, the deployment of the failed investigatory narrative in "Corpses" presents disjunctures in knowing and seeing that defy categorization and indicate modes of recognition beyond gender binaries. In this way, just as "Corpses" questions categorizations of gender and labor, "Birth of the Zoo" questions the origins of categorization and the institution itself. Similar to "Corpses," "Birth of the Zoo" begins with a mystery to be solved but dissolves into chaos and confusion as a masculine

[105] Jeon writes, "Derrida suggests that what must be remembered in order to have a future worth living is not only the forgotten past but also the forgetting itself. His notions of speciality and hauntology are not efforts to reproduce fully the past in the present - they define themselves against origin and ontobgy ; rather, they imply efforts to reconsider and foreground our relationship to various modes of absence." Ibid., 95.

[106] Ibid.

protagonist attempts to make sense of an event that unravels not only an entire community, but his own sense of being. As with "Corpses," the catalyst is the mysterious disappearance of the other. Unlike "Corpses," it is not a human other that prompts unravelling, but a non-human, animal other. Such focus on animality, a theme that runs throughout much of P'yŏn's work, prompts the question of how the violence of the institution relies on divisions between and within the human and non-human animal.

Capturing the Animal Other

The third-person narrative is broken into four sections. The first begins with the careful description of an absent animal: "What disappeared was the wolf. A Siberian wolf. He was one hundred twenty centimeters long, with a tail length of forty-eight centimeters, and a bodyweight of forty-seven kilograms."[107] Such description creates a clear view of a spatial absence; what was once there is no longer, and there is no explanation for the absence. The narrator, much like the investigator and husband in "Corpses," then goes on to quantify the bodily absence with a knowledge not about this particular wolf, but the category of wolf. The narrator attempts to fill in the absence with knowledge, a biological blueprint of the animal called wolf. She reports that, according to experts, wolves can go for five days without eating. It's what could happen after those five days that worried them: "Actually, wolves aren't the type of animal to just attack humans without cause. That being said, there's no knowing how might one act when

[107] "사라진 것은 늑대였다. 시베리아 산이었다. 몸길이 백이십 센티미터, 꼬리 길이 사십팔 센티미터, 몸무게가 사십칠 킬로그램인 놈이였다." P'yŏn Hye-yŏng, "Tongmurwŏnŭi T'ansaeng," 65.

suffering from the cold and starvation."[108] Here, despite an attempt to explain the biological category of wolf, all the absent wolf reveals is a gap in knowledge, or, more precisely, the limit of knowledge. The wolf, in this situation, must be considered a singularity; no longer captive, perhaps no longer alive, its relation to the human is beyond categorical knowledge. This absent singularity poses the question of what, absent domesticity, is the animal's relation to the human? Is the absence of domesticity possible in the animal? Is the absence of domesticity possible in the human as well?

It is in this way the story uses the detective narrative of the hunt to reconstruct the tenuous scene of the crime: the institutions of knowledge and technology that gave birth to, and sustain, the zoo. In the hunt, the finding of clues, witnesses, shadowing figures, sounds, and alleyways, what is discovered is not a concrete history, but the unfulfilled categories of human, animal, man, and woman. In this way, the strange behavior of the people, who only begin to hunt the wolf, but wear animal costumes, is less about border crossing itself than an obsession with the limits that must be continually reproduced to maintain power. Such borders are based on fantasy, on knowledge produced about the non-human animal, and, in turn, knowledge produced about the human. The absurd and repetitive failure and chaos that permeate the entire narrative reveal the failure of not just masculinity and humanity, but the very categories of man, human, and animal which do not allow for relations outside of material and epistemological exploitation and violence.

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[108] "사실, 늑대는 함부로 인간을 공격하는 동물이 아니었다. 그렇다고는 해도 추위와 굶주림이 닥쳐오면 어떻게 굴지 알 수 없었다." Ibid., 66.

In *The Animal That Therefore I Am,* Derrida approaches the issue of knowing, singularity, and epistemological violence by renaming the animal, *animot*.[109] Marie-Louise Mallet argues that this naming references what is ultimately impossible according to Derrida: an ethical consideration of the other, and in particular, the nonhuman or animal other. Drawing from Derrida's earlier works on the animal, Mallet explains that for Derrida,

> . . . the violence done to the "animal," with the use of this word in the singular, as though all animals from the earthworm to the chimpanzee constituted a homogenous set to which "(the hu)man" would be radically opposed. As a response to that first violence, Derrida invents the word *animot*, which, when spoken, has the plural *animaux*, heard within the singular, recalling the extreme diversity of the animals that "the animal" erases, and which, when written, makes it plain that this word [*mot*] "the animal" is precisely only a word.[110]

The word, and in particular, the name, is rendered both powerful and powerless through this signification; it creates structures of knowing, but yet, when revealed to be only a word, may be undermined. *Animot* points out that the origin of violence against "the animal" is in the word, the signifier, or the categorization of being itself. Animals, or *animot*, have all difference erased except for one: their difference from that of the human. The category of human is thus always dependent on the category of non-human. As Mallet points through her textual naming of "(the hu)man," this homogenization of difference through knowledge extends to the human as well. She explains, "the stakes of

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[109]Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*.

[110]Marie-Louise Mallet, "Foreward," in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, ed. Marie-Louise Mallet, *Perspectives in Continental Philosophy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), x.

a deconstruction of the philosophical tradition that has maltreated animals in this way concerns more than just animals."[111] Questioning of the animal entails a questioning of the human, of what makes the human, and as Mallet implies in her textual intervention, the primacy of the masculine human in such constructions.

In this way, we can read the disruption of the wolf's disappearance as a disjuncture in methods of knowing and being, in practices of encountering the other. Even though, according to official accounts, the wolf was most likely stolen or killed, the narrator continues to describe the wolf as having disappeared. The wolf haunts the narrative, not dead or relocated, but disappeared, a specter through its absence. The significance of this disappearance is magnified by the disappearance of the zoo's birds several days later. As with the wolf, the bird cage was found open, and the birds, gone.[112] While the mysterious disappearance of these animals seems more a result of sabotage than escape, the narrator and the surrounding community are inexplicably damaged by these events. Up until this point, it seems that the narrator, like a detective, has been offering the timeline of events. As with most detective stories, the section ends not with a conclusion, but the introduction of a secondary crime or unsettling event: "It was after the zoo announced its closure that the sound of gunshots began to ring throughout the city."[113]

And, as with the detective genre, we are introduced to a masculine figure in the second section. Rather than an investigator, he is a hunter, referred to as *sanae*, emphasizing his masculinity. However, it is within this protagonist that the investigative

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[111] Ibid.

[112] P'yŏn Hye-yŏng, "Tongmurwŏnŭi T'ansaeng," 67.

[113] "도시에 총소리가 들리기 시작한 것은 동물원에 휴장 결정이 내려진 직후였다." Ibid., 68.

narrative, the hunt for the crime or criminal, begins to unravel. It becomes not a search for knowledge, but a violent and absurd hunt that reveals the inherent masculinity of humanism through the human relation to animal. After the local government reclassifies wolves as vermin, and thus game for hunt, the *sanae* becomes one of many men that begin wandering the city at night, firing their guns at any trace of the wolf. Some media reports that the wolf had never actually escaped, and had instead died of disease in the zoo, but the protagonist, like so many others, refuses to believe the reports.[114] Hunters began wearing furs, dressing as wolves for their hunts. If "Corpses," through the lens of the state and the masculine individual, depicted one man's loss of selfhood in the face of a missing other, "Birth of the Zoo" reveals an entire lost city of men, unable to relate to each other except through the language of hunt and predation. The men stalk a spectral figure that has become overwhelmingly present in its absence. The hunt for the other replaces an encounter with the other; the men hunt not the invisible animal, but their own notion of selfhood and supremacy.

The Gendered Human Animal

The cityscape of the second section becomes increasingly absurd and horrific as the narrator describes the growing packs of armed and determined hunters. Mostly disguised as wolves, some in full hunting gear, they roam the city at night, firing into the darkness at anything that resembles a wolf, including each other. The escaped birds present an even greater threat than the unseen wolf, their cries ringing out in the daylight as they attack the elderly and children. When the birds growing presence shuts

[114] Ibid., 70-71.

the airport down, closing the city to international commerce, officials attempt to cull the birds by putting poisoned food throughout the city. However, the homeless of the city eat the food first, and the birds defecate on their bodies. The animal, it seems, has put the human out of place. Matched with absurd horror is carnivalesque excitement: all around the city, children don wolf masks, and wolf toys and accessories are everywhere. When not wearing wolf masks, the children attach long, mock wings to their arms and jump off ledges, breaking their arms and legs. The scene is a circus of destruction, of colorful, cheap masks, furs, and feathers; and of gunshots, howls, screeches, and corpses.

The *sanae* holds a particular disdain for these carnival games, and in particular views the hunters' desire to play at being animal as pathetic and uncouth. His discomfort at this animal mimicry reveals precious hierarchies of power, of not just the human animal, but of the masculine human, a sense of being that the protagonist is desperate to maintain. Wandering on his own, the *sanae* encounters one of the costumed hunters, who asks him, "Why the gun?" The protagonist responds: "Because of the wolf."

> The man shook his head. "The only wolves in this city are the hunters."
>
> A single gunshot rang out as if in response. The fur-clad man listened and turned his head. "It sounds just like fireworks, doesn't it? That noise."
>
> Rather than agreeing, the *sanae* let out a laugh. Firecrackers never tore into people and killed them. The guns should have only been for the wolf, but what they really killed were stray dogs that roamed the city. At night, when the hunters

drifted through the city, they fired their guns at any animal without a second thought.[115]

Here, the *sanae* regards the hunter, who is referred to as the "fur-clad man," as an object of ridicule with his worn out costume and his likening of gunshots to fireworks. In his costume, he's depicted as a clown, playing at an absurd circus, a boy compared to the fierce *sanae*. The *sanae*, in comparison, firmly believes with his knowledge and power in not only the existence of the wolf, but also in the power of the gun and the right to hunt and kill. His thoughts foreshadow the death of a human, or, more accurately, the human. Guns, after all, are not fireworks, but weapons for killing not just dogs and wolves, but people too.

The protagonist's disgust grows as his new companion continues to joke around, announcing that he himself is the wolf. He crawls on all fours and howls. The *sanae* plays along for a moment, pretending to fire a gun at him. Then, he spits on the ground, scoffing at the costume and this wolf without a tail. He thinks, "The only thing that the

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[115] 웬 총이요?

털가죽을 뒤집어쓴 남자가 물었다. 사내는 총실을 쓰듬고 있었다.

늑대 때문에요.

남자가 고개를 끄덕였다.

도시에 온통 늑대 사냥꾼뿐이군요.

그 말에 회답이라도 하듯 어디선가 총성이 한 발 울렸다. 털가죽옷을 입은 남자가 총성을 듣고 고개를 돌렸다.

꼭 불꽃놀이 하는 소리 같지 않소? 저 소리 말이오.

사내가 맞장구를 치는 대신 피식하고 웃었다. 불꽃이라면 퓽포하게 사람을 쏴 죽일 리 없었다. 충구는 늑대를 겨냥한 것일 태지만 정작 죽어가는 것은 도시를 배회하는 버려진 개들일 거였다. 사냥꾼들은 밤의 도시를 떠도는 짐승이라면 가리지 않고 총구를 겨누었다. Ibid., 72.

man and the wolf had in common was that they were both male."[116] Here, as in "Corpses," mimicry arises as a border crossing between the self and other: if in "Corpses," the protagonist's mimicry of his wife's behavior (by eating the fish eyeball) is an attempt to encounter the gendered other, here, the mimicry of the wolf becomes an attempt at crossing. Such play though, is only done through the eyes of the human. Mimicking both predator and prey, the hunter and hunted, the men play at occupying various perspectival points and relations to each other and themselves. The escape of the wolf and its potential danger has marked a break in the structure of the city: with the supremacy of the human under threat of animal predator, the human must become a predator. In their brief game, the men explore categorical power between the human and the animal, or, more precisely, between the man and the non-man. Such play briefly subverts certain dynamics, especially through its erotic undertones, but ultimately functions to substantiate a power dynamic based on masculinity.

The scene shows how the crossing of categories cannot be removed from the gendering nature of the human and humanism. Each category is defined not just as human or nonhuman, but also as male or female, binaries defined by otherness. The performance of being wolf and being (hu)man propel the men to encounter the otherness their masculinity as much as their humanity. The man dressed as the wolf maintains that there is no wolf, that there are only hunters. For him, the danger of the wolf merges with the danger of men, of the hunters, and their indiscriminate killing. On the other hand, the *sanae* refuses to believe this, revealing how "man" and masculinity

[116] "더러운 털가죽에 꼬리도 없는 늑대리나. 사내가 남자를 비웃듯 바닥에 침을 뱉었다. 늑대와 남자가 닮은 점이라고는 둘다 수컷이라는 것뿐이었다." Ibid., 73.

are coded into the human; for him, the category of hunter and man cannot exist without the category of hunted and animal. His disgust and embarrassment at the wolf play become further determination of human masculinity. He scoffs that the only similarity between the fur-clad man and the wolf are that they are both *suk'ŏt*, the biological signification of a non-human male animal.[117] Here, the *sanae* doesn't anthropomorphize the wolf as much as he animalizes the man, who, in his ridiculous performance as hunted, has relinquished the masculinity of the human for the lower maleness of the animal, maleness that he does not perform particularly well. Masculinity, as opposed to the biological maleness of the wolf, then, ceases to be a natural category that defines the human, but a performative one that is achieved through the violence of hunting. When human subjects play at being animals and attempt to blur the boundary between the human and non-human, subject and object, they cannot help but be confronted by the liminality of their own, masculine selfhood.

Birth of the Human

For Derrida, human supremacy over the animal is fundamental in the human subject's understanding of selfhood—the human is what the animal is not. This supremacy is achieved not just through "techniques of intervention," such as domestication and hunting, but through the structures of knowledge which make such forms of exploitation possible.[118] Border crossing for Derrida becomes an exploration of these structures of knowledge, in other words, the birth of the animal (and, in this way, the birth of the human). Critical to Western philosophical discourse about the animal,

[117] Ibid.

[118] Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 25.

he argues, is the issue of response, and the definition of animal as that which cannot respond, that which lacks, rather than has lost, the ability to respond. This discourse of lack is pervasive in Descartes, Heidegger, and Lacan, and serves to define the animal as that which lacks what the human possesses.[119] In this way, the category of animal serves to define and naturalize that of the human. Derrida contends:

> It is *not just* a matter of asking whether one has the right to refuse the animal such and such a power (speech, reason, experience of death, mourning, culture, institutions, technics, clothing, lying, pretense of pretense, covering of tracks, gift, laughter, crying, respect, etc.—the list is necessarily without limit, and the most powerful philosophical tradition in which we live has refused the "animal" *all of that*). It *also* means asking whether what calls itself human has the right to rigorously attribute to man, which means herefore to attribute to himself, what he refuses the animal, and whether he can ever possess the *pure*, *rigorous*, *indivisible* concept, as such, of that attribution.[120]

In other words, by refusing to acknowledge the possibility of response and awareness in the animal, the human—or more specifically, "man"—reinforces his own ability to respond, to possess knowledge, culture, and institutional facilities. Thus, to question the faculty of what has been defined as animal means to question the faculty of what has

[119] Drawing from Rene Descartes criteria of defining the animal as what reacts and the human as what responds, Derrida writes, "It is a question of these two criteria that we will have to keep well in mind, for they will govern the *whole* tradition of discourses that I would like to outline later, all the way to Heidegger and Lacan: (1) nonresponse, the inability to respond, to respond to our questions, hence to hear our question marks; (2) a lack, defect, or general deficit, a deficiency that is nonspecific except to say that it is a lack that is incommensurable with lack, with all our lacking, all the deficiencies or impoverishments, all the privations that can affect us, even in cases of debility or madness." Ibid., 81-82.

[120] Ibid., 135.

been defined as human. As much as it cannot be certain whether an animal other responds to the question, neither can it be known whether the human other responds.

In this way, sexual difference is fundamental to the category of human. This difference explicitly enters Derrida's work on the human and animal at only key points, but, as Kelly Oliver argues, it is fundamental to his project. Drawing from previous works by Derrida, such as *Choregraphies*, Oliver explains:

> Derrida not only challenges traditional philosophies that negate or erase the feminine, but also points to places where philosophers open up the possibly of thinking sexual difference otherwise. It turns out, however, that their limited attempts to acknowledge sexual difference continues to be based on an absolute limit between human and animal that perpetuates oppositional thinking that either negates or erases animal difference(s). When they do not set up man against women, they set up man against animal. In other words, if woman does not serve as man's other in these myths or origin, then the animal does. [. . .]In terms of sexual difference and animal difference, one is played off against the other such that opening one is premised precisely on closing the other.[121]

Oliver is clear though, that this isn't to be confused with discourse that contends woman and the feminine have been culturally associated with the animal and nature, but rather, that the binary between human and animal and man and women are alike in their erasure of difference.[122] The same interventions that discipline the divides between

[121] Kelly Oliver, "Sexual Difference, Animal Difference: Derrida and Difference 'Worthy of Its Name'," *Hypatia* 24, no. 2 (2009), http://www.jstor.org/stable/20618147.

[122] Oliver argues that rather than suggest that women are like animals, "Derrida intimates that sexual difference is like animal difference, or more precisely that sexual differences are like animal differences. In other words, a menagerie of animals, with sexualities intact, appears on the threshold of sexual

human and non-human, between non-human animals through a categorization of species, disciplines divisions between so-called humans, based on race, gender, and ability. Sexual difference, then, does not arise from the association of women and the feminine with animal or nature, but an epistemological reliance on binary and the lack of the other to define the position of the human, and in particular, the masculine human subject. In other words, the systems of knowledge that make the exploitation of the animal not just possible but natural, then it is the same systems of knowledge that also make gender oppression possible and natural.

What P'yŏn's "T'ongmulwonŭi t'ansaeng" reveals is not only the "birth of the zoo," but how hierarchical, binary systems produce the zoo as an intervention into the animal, in order to further define the human. The story further shows how these interventions function within the category of human, through gender or sexual difference. The category of the human, as I argue throughout this project, is always gendered and always racialized. One way that technical intervention into the gendered and racialized human[123] is expressed is through the exploitive conditions of labor, conditions in which certain categories of human are afforded more value than others.

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difference in order to show that just as there is a multitude of animals, there is a multitude of sexes and sexualities." Ibid., 72.

[123] Although I don't discuss race in P'yŏn's work in this project, it should be noted that racial hierarchy is still very present in the narrative and is quite worthy of further analysis. While the narrator makes no explicit reference to race, race is far from absent from the story. Rather, the lack of explicit racial categorization unnervingly haunts the text. For example, one hunter makes reference to poaching expeditions in Africa (81). Such reference and description allude to a broader history of colonization, property ownership and land rights, and labor, leisure, and trade practices that formed through histories of European colonial subjugation and the racial oppression of African peoples. While the race of the hunter is not known, his behavior and practices, or, "techniques" are intrinsically linked to whiteness and white supremacy. The ease at which the narrative references these practices also indicate the rhetorical ease at which fetishization of the racial other (in this case, represented as, merely, "in Africa" vis a vis colonial practices occurs in fiction.

Just as human domination over the non-human animal is practiced in the zoo, human domination over other humans is practiced in the workplace.

Enduring Freedom

In the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Karl Marx posits an analogous relationship between animal subjugation and labor through his development of the concept of alienation. He explains alienation of labor as an alienation of self; the worker is not only alienated from the product of their labor, but, as a result of the practice of labor, their very selfhood. He explains how in this process,

> . . . the spontaneous activity of the human imagination, of the human brain and the human heart, operates on the individual independently of him—that is, operates as an alien, divine or diabolical entity—so is the worker's activity not his spontaneous activity. It belongs to another; it is the loss of his self.
>
> As a result, therefore, man (the worker) only feels himself freely active in his animal functions—eating, drinking, procreating, or at most in his dwelling and in dressing-up, etc.; and in his human functions he no longer feels himself to be anything but an animal.[124]

While there is much that could be written about Marx's use of the animal, it is clear that, here, the animal represents a subjugated being. Through work, the human is domesticated. Exploitation, in this sense, not only refers to the process of extracting labor, but the undoing of the self that makes the human. He concludes that it is through the act of labor, of subjugating one's imagination and actions to another, that the human

[124] Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, trans. Martin Milligan(Union of Soviet Socialist Republics: Progress Publishers, 1959), 66.

reverts to their most animal practices of survival. “What is animal,” he writes, “becomes human, and what is human becomes animal.”[125] Labor is intrinsically tied to leisure, as leisure becomes the time in which the working human feels free. It is in this time that the worker may enjoy what they feel is a freedom of choice between activities. This feeling of freedom, of being human, is actually anything but freedom or autonomy, as it actually arises from the workers’ coerced dependence on labor.[126]

In this way, it becomes particularly fitting that the *sanae*’s encounter with the wolf occurs through the blurred time of labor and leisure. Just as the disappearance of the wolf disrupts the time and business of the city, its appearance disrupts the clock of an individual laborer. Such disruption is apparent in the form of the text itself, as the first encounter with the wolf is interpolated into descriptions of the man’s work. His first sighting of the wolf comes after *hoeshik*, the protagonist’s regular and mandatory practice of going out drinking with co-workers after work. After seeing his co-workers off, the *sanae* drunkenly wanders onto an empty street and sees the wolf standing across the road. The scene he describes is majestic and unlike any he’s encountered: “The wolf’s body was emanated a brilliant white light. It’s oblique, amber eyes steadily stared at him. In that moment, when the wolf’s eyes met his, something inside him stirred gently.[127] The experience is one of wonder and enchantment: a majestic wolf, the

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[125]Ibid.

[126] Marx’s analysis of *man* as worker, and therefore a dehumanized human, reveals not only the gender bias that defines human as man, but also the significant relationship between subjugation and domestication. If labor renders men subjugated, a domesticated animal, then what of the domestic realm of labor? Feminized labor, such as household maintenance, provides the necessities for “animal practices of survival,” such as “eating, drinking, procreating, and . . . dressing-up.” Feminine workers, then, represent a radically domesticated animal, their selfhood completely subsumed by the task of providing the leisure and care necessary for the masculine worker.

[127] “늑대의 몸이 하얗게 빛났다. 치켜올라간 황갈색 눈이 사내를 부드럽게 쏘아보았다. 늑대와 눈이 마주쳤을 때 무엇인가 사내를 서서히 움직였다.” P’yŏn Hye-yŏng, "Tongmurwŏnŭi t'ansaeng," 77.

brilliance of his fur and eyes stop the *sanae* in his tracks. This enchantment emerges more than just the sighting of a rare animal, or a surreal break in routine, but a moment out of time in which he gazes into the eyes of the truly other. More significantly, he witnesses the other gazing back at him. The man continues to stare after the wolf disappears into the back alley.

If the apparition of an exotic animal within the cityscape is meant to convey reflection on nature and modernity, the passages following the encounter dwell not just on the alienation of the individual from nature, but also on the terrifyingly ordinary alienation of the subject from itself. Alienation here has less to do with the divide between human and animal and nature than the internal division within the human self. Right after describing the wolf, the narrator reports, "The *sanae* was a clerk at an insurance company."[128] She goes on to detail the pitiable existence of a man who sends the majority of his pithy monthly paycheck to his ailing mother in the countryside, who rarely eats breakfast and rushes to work every morning, and who leaves the office late. Despite working weekends and holidays, the *sanae* is always behind in workand can never seem to keep up with his work, let alone any other part of his life. If there is one word to characterize the *sanae*, it would be slow. Too slow for work, too slow to keep up, and always too slow catch the bus, let alone a wolf, the man is simply too slow for the churnings of capital. He is forever behind, his pacing and running get him nowhere. This slowness defines him; he cannot keep up with the worker he is supposed to be, and in this way constitutes a divided selfhood, endlessly trying to catch up with the speed of production that both pushes him forward and leaves him behind.

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[128] Ibid.

The description grows absurdly pathetic as the narrator details the protagonist's leisure, time in which, according to Marx, the worker is deceived into feeling most human. For the *sanae*, this feeling of humanity is defined by a wretched, broken washing machine:

> On holidays and weekends, if he didn't go to work, he'd do the laundry that had piled up. Maybe a hole had sprung up in the hose of his run-down washing machine, because whenever it went onto the spin cycle, it flooded the kitchen floor with water. The drain didn't work that well either. The kitchen floor would be a puddle for at least two days after just one load of laundry. He stepped into the foamy puddle to hang his wash on a clothes line that hung over the kitchen. When he finished his laundry, everything was wet, as if his basement apartment had been weeping. Black and green mold blossomed across the walls and ceiling. The *sanae* passed the rest of his free time following the moldy patterns, trying to conjure in them the wolf he'd seen the night before.[129]

The careful detail of the man's habits, including the pitiful situation of even his laundry, doesn't just affirm the everyday horror of poverty, but a poverty that is directly tied to labor. Leisure becomes labor; it's not just the act of preparing oneself of labor, but survival in conditions that many would call inhumane. Freedom, free time, and holidays are given to repetitive tasks, more time spent in squalor. The protagonist, above all,

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[129] "출근하지 않는 휴일에는 밀린 빨래를 했다. 낡은 세탁기는 호스에 구멍이 났는지 탈수를 할 때면 부엌이 물바다가 됐다. 배수는 신통치 않았다. 한번 빨래를 하면 이틀 넘게 부엌 바닥에 물이 고여 있었다. 거품이 인 물에 발을 담그고 부엌에 걸린 줄에 빨래를 널었다. 빨래를 하고 나면 반지하인 집은 눈물을 흘린 것처럼 축축하게 젖어들었다. 천장과 벽에는 검고 푸른 곰팡이가 잔뜩 피어 있었다. 사내는 곰팡이 무늬를 따라 그전 밤에 본 늑대를 그려 보며 남은 시간을 보냈다." Ibid., 78.

cannot keep up. He cannot keep up with demands for production at work, and he cannot keep up with the physical demands that sustain him to work. If an hour of labor is selling (at quite a bargain) an hour of one's life, then the worker is living on borrowed time, having promised to deliver an incremental future to the buyer. Stuck in yesterday, the protagonist works for the future in attempt to subsist in the present. Like the leaking washing machine, despite ability, he must persist on this clock. He must, above all, endure this "freedom" of time to work, to sell, and to choose between activities to subsist. The wolf, then, becomes something not just out of the ordinary, but outside of the dreadful march of time. The moment of the gaze was a moment out of time, of pure encounter. The wolf becomes a figure that the *sanae* hopes will establish his human selfhood, something he feels he has lost in the mundane and pitiful mold of his existence.

The material reality of being human is that human selfhood is impossible. It is impossible not because of the inhumane conditions of work, but because the notion of the human itself is produced by and dependent on these conditions. It is this impossibility, though, that drives labor and capital. Marx explains the paradox of subjectivity for the worker in a further explanation of self-estrangement:

> . . . the worker becomes a servant of his object, first in that he receives a *object of labour*, i.e., in that he receives *work*; and secondly, in that he receives *means of subsistence*. This enables him to exist first, as a *worker* and, secondly, as a *physical subject*. The height of this servitude is that it is only as a *worker* that he

can maintain himself as a *physical subject*, and that it is only as a *physical subject* that he is a worker.[130]

In his 1844 manuscripts, Marx turns again and again to muse upon the animal, the human, the individual, and the species. Althusser has argued that after 1845, one can read a shift in Marx's work from humanism to antihumanism, and positions these manuscripts as carrying a new form of humanism, but humanism nonetheless. It isn't until his later years that Marx, argues Althusser, identifies humanism and humanity as ideology.[131] However, here, in the 1844 manuscripts, one can identify a struggle with what it means to be human. The political economy of capitalism produces a contradictory state of physical subjectivity. The subject only exists through labor, for labor, and by labor. It is not that social conditions fracture the human subject, but that they produce a human subject in which this fracturing is inherent. There can be no true sense of selfhood established within the boundaries of the human subject, because the human self here, like the animal other, is a category that will always lack. Labor, exploitive by nature, simultaneously humanizes and dehumanizes the subject. It grants subjects humanity in order to dehumanize them.

In this way, establishing human selfhood does not free the worker from their exploitive conditions. It is the very striving for the recognition—whether from oneself or others—as human that propels the cycle of labor and leisure under the capitalist state. If late capitalism is a march into an empty future for the sake of unrealized profit, the worker must join that impossible march, in hopes of becoming human. The impossibility of this task—inherent to the category itself—means that every step towards

[130] Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, 65.

[131] Althusser, "Marxism and Humanism," 219-29.

becoming human is predicated on the subjugation of the other, the establishment of an other that is not quite or not as human. In P'yŏn's work, the hierarchy of sexual difference through humanism is revealed through the almost complete absence of women in the text, suggesting that the default human subject is masculine. Humanist selfhood is equated with masculine subjectivity. In order to garner dignity, the protagonist believes he must become more masculine, and thus, more human. Finding the wolf, becoming a hunter, is something that the protagonist expects will achieve this. Hunting the wolf is an escape from the exploitative conditions of labor and the establishment of a masculine, human self that is no longer the exploited worker but the exploitive boss.

While the protagonist may be insecure about his own reasons for hunting, it seems that everyone around him, like the fur-clad man, understands that his is a quest for masculinity through dominance over the animal other. When the *sanae* tells his boss he is leaving his position to hunt the wolf, his boss, after expressing slight irritation, responds, "Why the need to go out and search? The whole world, it's all wolves."[132] Here, despite the zoological reasoning in the first section that suggests otherwise, the wolf is a predator, an "alpha male" in a cultural sense. As with the fur-clad man, the boss is referring to a world of men who behave as wolves, or at least, how a wolf is thought to behave. Cunning, fearsome, and independent, the wolf, like the bosses and the hunters of the world, disregards the other; he violently attacks and exploits the other, human or non-human, for survival and profit. In this way, to successfully hunt the wolf means to

[132] "멀리서 찾을 거 뭐 있어? 세상천지가 다 늑댄데." P'yŏn Hye-yŏng, "Tongmurwŏnŭi t'ansaeng," 80.

successfully dominate. Here, the protagonist seeks to subjugate the non-human animal, and to become human through this subjugation.

A World of Wolves

The use of animals as analogies for human behavior is far from unique. However, what I draw attention to is how the text ultimately reveals the ways in which being human is a fantasy predicated on the subjugation of not just a non-human animal other, but a racialized or gendered human other as well. The knowledge that produces the hierarchical category of human and animal is tethered to the systems of knowledge that uphold hierarchical and binary categories of gender. As Oliver argues, “When they do not set up man against woman, they set up man against animal. In other words, if woman does not serve as man’s other . . . then the animal does.”[133] This knowledge is what underpins the economies of institutions, whether they be the workplace, the zoo, or the state. These institutions enforce such knowledge, through discipline, exploitation, and repression. The story’s title, “The Birth of the Zoo,” suggests a Foucauldian genealogy; a history of power and institutions that make not just the zoo, but of the human and humanist structures of knowledge the underpin these structures.

The *sanae*’s hunt for the animal and selfhood ends soon after he shoots and kills another man. After stalking the shadow of what he assumes is the wolf, he fires his weapon into the dark. He does so quickly, worried that his hunting companion, an experienced, expert shooter, will get the wolf first. When he goes to see his catch, he finds that what he has shot is not the wolf at all, but a man dressed as a wolf, quite

[133] Oliver, "Sexual Difference, Animal Difference: Derrida and Difference 'Worthy of Its Name'". 64.

possibly the fur-clad man he met before. The *sanae* and the experienced hunter kneel down beside the fallen man and watch as his blood pools on the asphalt of the alley. Hands shaking, they share a drink under the shadows of the skyscrapers, as if taking a break from their hunt. The *sanae* turns his head up, trying to look at the sky.

> No matter how far back he tilted his head, the night sky remained hidden behind the skyscrapers. It felt like being locked up in a tall, round concrete cage. The birds circled the empty space, looking down at them like guards.[134]

The city is revealed as a zoo with the men, like caged animals, observed from above by the shrieking birds. Central though, is the protagonist's sense that his actions have changed nothing. He cannot see past the buildings; the height of commerce and wealth circles him, blinding him from any view of the sky. He has killed another man, but this action is just another in a series of happenings. Killing becomes a human behavior, another sacrifice made for the work of being a man. He walks away from the body, but the blood sticks to his feet. When he tries to wipe it away, there is nothing there, and yet he still feels the stickiness with every step.[135] The invisible yet inerasable bloody tracks serve as a reminder of the deadliness of the human footprint.

The fourth and final section opens in the summer, the cycle of seasons indicating a cycle of labor and capital. In such a cycle though, the worker stays in the same place. The *sanae* is working for a different insurance company now, and is waiting for the bus,

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[134] "높이 솟은 건물 그림자가 술을 마시고 있는 그들의 어깨 위로 찬 그늘을 만들어주었다. 사내는 그림자를 따라 천천히 고개를 들었다. 도시의 건물들이 드높게 뻗어 있었다. 아무리 고개를 뒤로 젖혀도 고층 건물에 가려진 밤하늘이 잘 보이지 않았다. 둥글고 기다란 콘크리트 철창에 갇힌 느낌이었다. 새들이 간수처럼 허공을 돌며 그들을 내려다보고 있었다." P'yŏn Hye-yŏng, "Tongmurwŏnŭi t'ansaeng," 86.

[135] "발을 디딜 때마다 아스팔트에 흐르는 피가 끈적하게 달라 붙었다. 그는 멈춰 서서 바짓자락을 끌어당겨 발바닥을 닦았다. 바짓자락에는 아무것도 묻어나지 않았다." Ibid., 87.

anxious about being late. He stopped hunting after killing the man, and despite his eventful year, things are the same. He tells his mother this whenever she calls.

> Like he told her, there was nothing new. Whenever he did laundry, his house would still be damp, as if it were crying, and mold bloomed. He'd skip breakfast and stare at his watch on his way to work, laden with fear over being late. There was still so much work to do that he'd come in on holidays.[136]

Time has passed, and time is passing, but for the protagonist, the passing of time is about work. Nothing has changed for him because nothing could; hunting the wolf, killing the man, was as futile as skipping breakfast or staring at his watch. No matter his actions, he is stuck in the human economy, forever catching up, never receiving the dignity that he longs for. It is a lack of possibility or change that defines ones work as human; a constant yearning for dignity or selfhood that is never fulfilled. He killed another man, but nothing changed, because the man he killed was like him, someone of very little consequence to the workings of capital.

> It is also in this section the narrator reports on the wolf, still missing, but thought to have been seen around apartments near the zoo: They said that it slowly trotted between the apartment buildings as if it were taking a stroll. It sniffed piles of garbage and went through the bags. It ripped open the bags like a stray

[136] "그는 별일이 있겠어요, 라고만 대꾸했다. 그 말대로 별일이 없었다. 집은 여전히 빨래를 하고 나면 눈물처럼 습기를 품고 곰팡이꽃을 피웠다. 아침을 굶고 출근하면서도 늘 지각을 하지 않을까 노심초사하며 시계를 들였다봤다. 일은 여진히 많았고 휴일근무도 잦았다." Ibid., 90.

> cat, digging out trash and eating it. The people who saw it thought it was a stray dog. They kicked the wolf away, thinking it was a dog.[137]

Here, like the fantasy of the hunter, the fantasy of the wolf dissipates into a mundanity so pathetic that most find it unbelievable. Like the protagonist's leaking washing machine, which he still uses every weekend, like the protagonist himself, and not unlike the man he killed, the wolf is an invisible being, pitied if not ignored. It wanders the city, scavenging for scraps, visible only when it's in the way. The animal, like the human, is nowhere near majestic nor fearful as expected. The animal, like the so-called human, struggles in a domestic cage.

IV. Conclusion: Terrifying Encounters

The broken fantasy of being animal underscores the pitfalls of human selfhood. Asserting oneself as human, especially from the position of the exploited worker, carries little gain in the end. It is neither a lack of humanity or masculinity that has stripped the protagonist of his dignity. Rather, it is the very nature of being human, of being within a category that defines itself through the lack perceived in the other(s), whether it be the animal or gendered human other. Like the wolf, the *sanae* returns to an undignified life of work. The story closes as the man pauses at the entrance of the subway after hearing a bird cry out.

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[137] "동뭘원 인근의 아파트 단지에서였다. 늑대는 산책하는 것처럼 아파트 동 사이를 느릿느릿 걷고 있었다고 했다. 음식물쓰레기더미 앞에서는 코를 킁킁거리며 봉투를 뒤졌다. 도둑고양이처럼 봉투를 헤집어 쓰레기를 파먹기도 했다. 그걸 본 사람들은 버려진 개라고 생각했다. 그들은 발길질로 개라고 생각한 늑대를 쫓아버렸다." Ibid., 89.

> Somebody making their way through the subway entrance shoved past him. He moved out of the way. That's when he stepped on some sort of heavy lump. The sticky mass was firmly stuck to the bottom of his shoe. He couldn't walk. Like a fighting rooster, he lifted up his legs and looked at his sole. Aside from the worn-out heel of his shoe, there was nothing there. He couldn't spare any more time if he wanted to avoid being late. Limping, he quickly hopped to the bottom of the stairs.[138]

The feeling of blood and flesh haunt him just as the dead man's blood stuck to his feet the night of the murder. The *sanae* limps not because of any impairment, but because of this shared flesh; because to be human, as much as to be animal, means to be impaired. Shoved about, hearing the call of the birds that once circled him like prison guards, the protagonist becomes more of a wolf than even the man dressed in wolf's clothing. Like the wolf, he has merely left one cage for another, shuffling through the busy city, shoved about by passerby. Just as the wolf never satisfies the fantasy of the majestic wild animal, the protagonist never achieves the fantasy of the valiant and masculine hunter.

The use of the zoo as an analogy for social and material confinement is reminiscent of another of P'yŏn's stories, "Parade," which follows a group of zoo workers who dress as animals to march in a daily children's parade.[139] Derided by their boss,

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[138] "어디선가 낮고 음울한 울음소리가 들려왔다. 누군가 지하철역 입구를 가로막고 선 사내를 툭 치고 지나갔다. 사내는 길을 터주기 위해 비켜섰다. 그러다가 그만 무엇인가 묵직한 덩어리를 밟고 말았다. 그것은 구두 밑창에 단단하고 끈적하게 달라붙었다. 걸음을 떼어지지 않았다. 그는 닭싸움을 하는 것처럼 다리 한쪽을 들어올리고 구두 밑창을 들여다보았다. 구두는 안쪽으로 굽이 닳아 있을 뿐, 아무것도 묻어 있지 않았다. 지각을 하지 않기 위해서 더이상 시간을 지체할 수 없었다. 그는 절룩거리며 뛰듯이 계단 아래로 걸어 내려갔다." Ibid., 91-92.

[139] P'yŏn Hye-yŏng, "P'ŏreidŭ," in *Sayukch'ang tchokŭro* (Seoul: Munhak dongnae, 2007), 123-48.

wearing cheap and uncomfortable costumes, one day the workers decide to enter the animal cages, to be as the animals they dress up as. Unlike Kafka's Gregor Samsa, who awakes to find himself turned into an insect, P'yŏn's characters only attempt to turn other—animal, or human—but with no success. Her humans are defined by domesticity as much as the others they imitate and hunt. The confines of the zoo, the hunt, and human ecology are what define biological life for the animal. For the human, existence is defined by labor, the city, and the same systems of knowledge that define biological life and manufacture difference between animal and human, masculine and feminine, boss and worker. "Corpses" and "Birth of the Zoo" reveal being human as an impossibility, tied to the impossibilities of gender, human labor, and encounter under the humanistic, capitalist state. In doing so, unearth something even more terrifying than a disintegrated society: that encounter with the self or other through the epistemology of the human may only be met with the repetition loss and unfulfillment.

CHAPTER TWO

Global Contagions: The Transnationalization of Han Kang's *Ch'aeshikchuŭija*

I. Introduction

Originally written as three novellas, Han Kang's novel, *Ch'aeshikchuŭija* (*Vegetarian, The Vegetarian*) has received increasing critical attention since its full publication in 2007. Using a polyphonic narrative told in three parts, the novel focuses on Yŏnghye, a young woman who decides to stop eating meat after having nightmares of a bloody face. Her vegetarianism gradually becomes a refusal to consume anything but sunlight, air, and water, despite pleading and violent interventions from her family. By 2010, Im Woo-Sung had produced a feature-length film adaptation on the novel backed by funding from the Korean Film Institute, and the novel had been translated and published in seven countries including Vietnam, Portugal, and Argentina. The Korean Literature Translation Institute (KLTI) funded an English-language translation from first-time translator Deborah Smith. After its publication in 2015, *The Vegetarian*, became the first translation from Korean to win the Man Booker International Prize in 2016, enjoying a flood of international critical acclaim. By 2017, this acclaim turned to criticism as many Korean scholars, literary critics, and readers took issue with the translation, revealing omissions and revisions of content, and what appeared to be mistranslations of, what many argued, straightforward signifiers in the Korean text.

Perhaps foreshadowing upcoming outrage over the translation, in the same year as the novel's initial publication, South Korea took center stage in international politics, as negotiations for the Korea-U.S. Free Trade Agreement (KORUS-FTA FTA) faced growing opposition from labor unions, activists, and media pundits. By 2008, protest against the FTA grew to a massive scale, as people took the streets to protest what would become one of the most publicly controversial proposition of the agreement: U.S. beef. In April 2008, Korean broadcasting channel MBC released a special program titled "Is American Beef Really Safe from Mad Cow Disease?" which revealed alarming safety concerns with the potential presence of bovine spongiform encephalopathy, or Mad Cow Disease, in U.S. farmed-beef, which had been banned from most European countries throughout the 1990s and faced strict import regulations in other regions.[140] The episode sparked massive controversy among "netizens" across the country, propelling demonstrations from tens of thousands of people in the city center of Seoul. If, for anti-imperial labor activists, the FTA represented ongoing U.S. intervention into the South Korean economy, for consumers, it represented yet another instance in which the Korean state, propelled by the U.S., was willing sacrifice the health and well-being of Koreans for the sake of corporate and state interests. Campaigns against the agreement took diverse positions, opposing damage to the local agricultural industry, diminished workplace protections, changes in national health insurance through pharmaceutics import, and U.S. beef industry practices. However, mainstream media tended to focus most heavily on consumer safety and well-being, primarily among women and their families who would be consuming potentially deadly beef.

[140] Lee Chun-keun, "Is American Beef Really Safe from Mad Cow Disease?," in *PD Notebook*, ed. Park Sang-Il (Seoul: MBC, 2008).

The focus on beef imports was in part due to the Roh Moo Hyun's administration's decision to compromise in negotiations by allowing less-regulated beef imports in exchange for protections in other national agricultural sectors, such as rice.[141] Campaigns against the agreement appeared sharply divided due to this proposed compromise that seemed sacrifice consumer safety to protect local agricultural industries and laborers. What is lost in this narrative is historical differences between organized labor groups and their relationship to nationalism and the state. On one hand, unions such as Korean Federation of Trade Unions, which have been historically anti-imperial, tend to position themselves against so-called "free" trade by any means. On the other, unions such as the AFL-CIO have traditionally tended towards reformism, protesting for union input into free trade agreements.[142] Mi Park characterizes these longstanding divisions through the seemingly contradictory reliance on notions of economic nationalism, a position that prioritizes the economic protection of local or national workers often at the expense of non-national counterparts, whether they be laboring outside or within national borders. Park points out that such nationalist sentiments among labor organizations often serve to benefit the state, as nationalist "worker first" rhetoric is easily implemented in promotion of free trade agreements.[143]

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[141] "S. Korean Man Attempts Self-Immolation against FTA with U.S.," *Hankyoreh* (2007), http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_business/200218.html.

[142] Mi Park, "Trade Liberalization and Organized Labour in the Asia-Pacific Region: Barriers to Labour Internationalism," *Globalizations* 11, no. 1 (2014): 72, 76.

[143] "Trade unions argue that workers' interests are eroded by trade liberalization but they disagree on what strategy would best serve workers' interests. On the whole, economic nationalism is pervasive both in the discourse of trade unions and market-expansionist governments. FTA pursuing governments invoke justification to stop FTAs. Economic nationalism is a double-edged sword. On one hand, the demand for economic sovereignty may empower emerging economies to catch up with capitalist development by subsidizing domestic industries. On the other hand, it pits workers against each other along the national line for their respective national competitiveness in the global economy." Ibid., 72.

The appropriation of protectionist, nationalist sentiment, argues Park, functions to obscure the economic inequalities between nation-states that ground concepts of "free" trade.[144] I would further contend that invocations of nationalist rhetoric also obscure local economic inequality, especially in feminine and migrant worker dominated industries, by positioning all "local" workers as having the same concerns, conditions, and relationships to the national economy.

By depicting protests as purely about U.S. beef, the South Korean government and transnational industry leaders homogenized dissent as a singular issue that could be resolved by through nationalism and derision of consumer-based opposition. Protests, which were as much against the neoliberal South Korean administration and economic imperialism as they were for consumer safety, were characterized as primarily about U.S. beef and the threat of mad cow disease. Just as U.S. trade officials characterized anti-beef protesters as irrational, those who dared resist neoliberal practices of globalization were often portrayed as unrealistic and dogmatically radical. In each case, mass opposition—visually represented by the crowds of tens of thousands who gathered monthly in the street—was regarded as the mass hysteria of a so-called homogenous people, and the difference in tactics, strategies, and political positions between each network, organization, and individual became appropriated into linear narratives about consumer choice and national worker protections. If globalization can be described as an unstoppable virus that demands either mitigation or surrender, the ungovernability of massive mobilization became akin to the threat of viral mutation. State and media

[144] As Park argues, "FTAs are forced upon weak economies by powerful countries working in the interest of TNCs [Transnational Corporations]." Transnationalism here does not mean sacrificing state power for corporate power, but rather the collaborative efforts of states and global corporations. Ibid.

efforts to homogenize dissent into tangible narratives of nationalism, consumerism, and radicalism become efforts to mitigate the contagion of protest. Mired in histories of colonial intervention, the KORUS-FTA FTA was a virus that had been years in the making. Resistance to this virus took on a multitude of forms just as did state repression: strikes, boycotts, self-immolation, candlelight vigils, filibustering, and online information sharing were met with water cannons, pepper spray, batons, backdoor dealings, appeals to nationalism, scientific reasoning, and, finally, compromise and ratification of the agreement.

In 2010, the same year that the KORUS-FTA FTA was finalized, the film adaptation of *Ch'aeshikchuŭija* by the same title (*Vegetarian* in English) made its national theatrical debut after screening at the 2009 Busan International Film Festival. Funded by the Korean Film Council (KOFIC) and directed by Im Woo-Sung, the film enjoyed limited release in South Korea, perhaps in part due to its independent status and the FTA's newly implemented screen quota regulations, which allowed an unprecedented number of non-domestic and mostly U.S. films to screen in Korean theaters. Shortly following its national release, *Vegetarian* screened at the 2010 Sundance Film Festival as part of the World Cinema Narrative Competition. True to the novel, the cinematic adaptation depicts Yŏnghye's gradual descent into a plant-like state. Much of the novel's internal dialogue is lost through the point-of-view narrative that, rather than rely on monologue, visually externalizes the violence and trauma experienced by the protagonist. She suffers physical, emotional, and sexual abuse at the hands of her father, husband, obsessive brother-in-law, and psychiatric doctors. Her refusal to consume is treated as hysterical and irrational, and what seems to irk those around her is her refusal or inability to explain her decisions. She merely refuses to eat;

first meat, then animal products, and then, finally, everything but sunlight, air, and water. Her actions become inarticulate defiance; her self-inflicted bodily harm as emotionally incomprehensible as self-immolation and other forms of physical sacrifice in protest.

The novel itself received little international attention until the its English translation received the Man Booker Prize. Following the award, a first for Korean literature in English translation, the text received quite a bit of critical attention in the UK and U.S. Anglophone reviewers often compare the novel to Kafka's "The Hunger Artist," finding similarity in narratives of vegetarianism, passivity, refusal, and starvation.[145] This critical focus on passivity, perhaps an attempt to position the novel within a global literary canon, reveals textual and contextual areas that require further analysis, especially in its relation to violence. The passivity of the protagonist's refusal to consume, relate, and even to communicate is not nearly as extreme as the violence committed against the protagonist. Unlike Kafka's "Hunger Artist," the violence that Yŏnghye endures as a result of passive resistance renders her more akin to a hunger-striking prisoner. For her refusal, she is derided, beaten, raped, institutionalized, and medically-force fed, until presumably, she dies. In this way, the novel's narrative, which references historically specific forms of gender and state violence such as the experiences of comfort women and South Korea's role in the Vietnam War, creates a framework in which to understand historical forms of gendered oppression and discipline. Such a framework, I argue, finds parallel with protest surrounding the

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[145] Porochista Khakpour, writing for the New York Times Sunday Book review, remarks, "Ultimately, though, how could we not go back to Kafka? More than "The Metamorphosis," Kafka's journals and "A Hunger Artist" haunt this text." Porochista Khakpour, "'The Vegetarian,' by Han Kang," *The New York Times Book Review*, February 2, 2016 2016.

KORUS-FTA, which captured anxieties not only about fear of disease, but moreover, dissatisfaction with neoliberalism, historical resentment of South Korea's colonial relationship with the U.S., and radically gendered and unequal laboring conditions. In other words, Yŏnghye's experience of violence stem from structures built through the historical trauma of colonialism, war, national division, and local and global formations of gendered labor, and finds parallel in many protestors' concerns about consumption, governance, and nation.

In this chapter, I analyze the text from the context of growing anxieties over labor, consumption, and South Korea's position in global capitalism in relation to KORUS-FTA negotiation and opposition. Here, Han's work lends insight into historical gendered violence in South Korea, the violence of invisibility, and in particular, how violence and invisibility relates to women's labor in the national imagination. A significant concern of this chapter thus becomes how gendered labor and subjecthood are articulated, and the possibility—or impossibility—of such articulation. I contend that such articulations, in the context of transnational and local movements of labor and free trade, lends itself to the ethical discourse of relationships with the alterity of the other, especially the gendered human other. Accordingly, the first section of this chapter examines the ways in which the novel explores historicized conditions of domestic labor in South Korea, and in particular, gendered divisions between what is characterized as reproductive, domestic labor, and national, productive labor. Here, I draw from the work of Seungsook Moon and Jin-Kyung Lee to ground the novel's polyphonic narrative and dream sequences to reveal the gendered conditions of alienation and selfhood. Such explorations of selfhood, I argue, question the boundaries in which the self, and in particular, the gendered self, are conditioned and constructed by interconnected notions

of the human and labor. In this way I find that the protagonists' narrative of resistance to work and consumption question systems that not only produce gender binaries but also binaries between the human and nonhuman animal.

In the second section, then, I analyze how Han's depictions of the violent intersections of marital, family, and state institutions demonstrate these institutions' reliance on and reproduction of constructions of the gendered human. Through conversation with the work of Elizabeth Grosz, who finds that the construction of the human body relies on masculinist-centric treatments of women's bodies as passive objects and landscapes, I find that the novel interrogates the violence through which institutions within neoliberal circuits of exchange violently enforce such passivity. Through these depictions of violence and resistance, I argue that the novel questions the possibility of articulation of difference and subjecthood from within such closed circuits of exchange, indicating that perhaps it is in the unimaginable monstrosity of the nonhuman, the animal, and the viral that such articulation becomes possible. If the first section looks at the specificity of labor and gender in South Korea, this section looks at it in the global context of trade, humanism, and anti-humanism.

It's from here that I back to rhetoric surrounding the KORUS-FTA and import of beef, connecting opposition to the KORUS-FTA to criticism of the novel's translation. How do the circulations of protest, resistance, and literary texts fit into transnational circulations of exchange? How do repetition, reiteration, adaptation, and translation both ground and uproot notions of gender and labor within histories of imperial and state violence? Finding parallel in rhetoric both free trade and translation as necessary acts of progress, I argue that each form of trade—whether an agreement between nation-states or through the production of literary commodities—use similar humanistic

notions of symmetry and equality between nations, individuals, and languages in order to justify forms of epistemological and ontological violence and repression. In this way, I address controversy surrounding the publication and circulation of Han's work through Deborah Smith's award-winning, yet arguably flawed, English translation. Through a brief analysis of arguments both against and in defense of Smith's work, I examine the economy of translation and representation. The process of translation, I argue, cannot be separated from transnational exchange, and, like all agreements around exchange, relies on historical inequity between nation-states and individuals. Drawing from the work of Serk-Bae Suh, I find that translation, like other forms of trade, necessitate an ethical engagement with the alterity of the other. Such engagement, I argue, cannot be achieved through humanism and the economy of representation.

II. Producing and Consuming Reproductive Alienation

The Vegetarian opens with the first-person narrative of a man describing his wife: "Before my wife turned vegetarian, I'd always thought of her as completely unremarkable in every way."[146] He goes on to describe a woman he married not because of attraction, respect, or even convenience, but for the sole reason that, to him, she was so unremarkable, that he assessed her as particularly suited to fulfill his desires for dominance without impeding his fragile self-esteem:

> The paunch that started appearing in my mid-twenties, my skinny legs and forearms that steadfastly refused to bulk up in spite of my best efforts, the

[146]Han Kang, *The Vegetarian*, trans. Deborah Smith(U.S.: Hogarth, 2015), 11. Unless otherwise noted, I use Deborah Smith's translation for the purpose of textual analysis and reference.

> inferiority complex I used to have about the size of my penis—I could rest assured that I wouldn't have to fret about such things on her account.[147]

From the very beginning, the man's narrative is pathetic to the point of satire: he emulates the abject hero, self-centered and self-pitying, a caricature of a middle-management patriarch who relies on dominance in the domestic sphere in order to climb up the corporate ladder. As much as he describes his wife as "unremarkable," the most remarkable feature of his own character is its ability to disgust through a clearly articulated misogynist perspective: that his wife exists solely to support him and his own, more valuable, labor.

Vegetarianism, or more precisely, his wife's vegetarianism, is thus presented as a disruption of an implied domestic contract in which her life and labor should be committed to the sole service of his own. He awakes at dawn one morning to find his wife standing in front of the refrigerator, unresponsive to his questioning. He asks himself, "How long might she have been standing there like that--barefoot, in thin summer nightwear, ramrod straight as though perfectly oblivious to my repeated interrogation?" He goes back to sleep and awakes late to find her still in the kitchen, this time, frantically throwing away all the meat in the fridge. Furious he questions her, but all she offers in response is, "I had a dream." Late for work, he rushes out of the house, he realizes, "In the five years we'd been married, this was the first time I'd had to go to work without her handing me my things and seeing me off."[148] These initial passages reveal the root of the domestic conflict: the husband's fury stems not from his wife's sudden strange behavior, but that such behavior has denied him the domestic and

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[147]Ibid., 11-12.

[148]Ibid., 17-18.

affective labor that he has expected, without disruption, for five years. His "interrogation" of her parallels the interrogation that he fears may come from his own workplace due to his tardiness.[149] This parallel reveals marriage as a labor relation in which his wife's domestic work of waking him, setting out his clothes, and cooking is work done to support his own labor outside the household. Previously invisible, her sudden personality shift, equated with her shift to vegetarianism, functions as a work stoppage that demonstrate just how valuable, and undervalued, her work really is.

In this way, the husband's narrative of his "unremarkable" wife's sudden remarkable behavior does more than just elicit disgust at his character, it functions to highlight the contradictions of gendered labor. In the previous chapter, I argued the masculine narration of P'yŏn Hye-yŏng's "Corpses," indicates the impossibility of articulating gender difference and oppression through masculinist and statist narratives. But while for P'yŏn, impossibility is illustrated through the narrator's confusion and inability to access memory, in *The Vegetarian*, the husband's clear and exaggerated narrative in the opening chapter reveals the ways in which feminine labor are exploited, repressed, and rendered invisible through the frameworks of nationalism and gender. In other words, the disruption of the wife's work stoppage here and the husband's reaction, illustrate necessity of domestic labor despite its invisibility within frameworks of nation and productivity.

These frameworks, while not unique to South Korea, are deeply rooted in the state's post-war nation-building projects that heightened gender divisions in labor by

[149] The husband explains his decision to leave his home quickly: "However, as I had thirty minutes in which to concoct an excuse for my client that would justify my lateness, as well as putting together a draft proposal for today's meeting, there was no time for mulling over the strange behavior of my even-stranger wife." Ibid., 19.

marginalizing women workers. Seungsook Moon, in *Militarized Modernity and Gendered Citizenship in South Korea*, argues that South Korea's modernization cannot be separated from its militarization, due to its postcolonial history and global post-war position. This process of modernization produced gendered notions of citizenship in which women's roles were characterized as reproductive, in service of men who were tasked with the productive labor of nation-building and protection. Moon argues,

> [W]omen were mobilized to control their fertility and manage their households 'rationally,' so they could contribute to the building of the modern industrial economy. It is my contention that women's membership in the modern nation being built hinged on their role as reproducers despite their significant contribution to the economy as producers.[150]

Moon finds that discriminatory practices in vocational training, hiring, and wages effectively erased the labor of women in industry and associated the industrial work of building national infrastructure with a masculine workforce.

However, I argue that this marginalization could not have been achieved without the simultaneous marginalization of women in the domestic sphere as well. In other words, gender discrimination in the industrial workplace relies on the construction of productive and reproductive labor, and the subsequent categorization of domestic and affective labor as reproductive, and therefore unproductive, in the national imagination. How this gendered division defines not only how labor is addressed, but also recognized, is prevalent in a quote from a woman worker in 1977 that Moon uses to open her discussion:

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[150] Seungsook Moon, *Militarized Modernity and Gendered Citizenship in South Korea*, Politics, History, and Culture (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 69.

> On the "labor day" I cannot think about my reality as a worker and woman. There are numerous women, ranging from factory workers to college graduates, who cannot find work and therefore cannot contribute to society. I wonder how much "pride" these women feel as workers. Societal perception of women and their treatment in the workplace do not allow them to feel pride. Families, relatives, and the whole society are forcing women to stay within marriage. It is absurd that even family planning campaign centers, promoting the slogan "Let's have two children regardless of their sex," hire only men in "open hiring." . . . We are told that "labor is valuable, labor is life, humans exist through production, and production is done through labor, and human beings ought to work to live meaningful lives." But in this kind of social milieu, these really right words lose their persuasive power for women.[151]

The bank worker's statement draws attention to the ways in which women were marginalized through discriminatory hiring practices that rely on the social perception that women belong in the home, not in industrial economy. However, underlying this statement, made on labor day, are two significant assumptions that ground the ways in which not only labor is differentiated, but how gender itself is differentiated on the basis of labor and economic participation. The first is that labor is inherently valuable, and the second, that labor done outside the household is the only form of productive, or valuable labor. The notion that labor is an inherent value ignores that the extraction of labor under the capitalist state must rely on alienation and the exploitation of life. In

[151] Quoted by Moon, from a "woman working in a reading room of Chohŭng Bank, quoted in Chungang Daily, March 10, 1977." Ibid., 68.

other words, labor in such a system is never dignified nor compensated fairly. To attach such value to labor in such a way cannot avoid creating hierarchical relations in which individual worth is measured by the capacity to produce and contribute to the capitalist state. The notion that some forms of work are unproductive, and thus, not work, is inevitable under capitalism. Reproductive labor here is considered neither productive nor labor; it is seen as a gendered imposition, rather than perhaps one of many processes through which gender difference is constructed. Women are marginalized in national constructions of production not because they are relegated to the home, but because whether in the home, the factory, or the bank, their work is invisible, considered less-than, not-enough, and never-enough. If, as the worker says, "humans exist through production," then there is no room for women under a masculinist and capitalist state to exist as either productive or human.

For the husband in the novel, this conflict—the humanity that labor affords, and the value system that becomes embedded in these notions of the human and work—are embodied by his wife's sudden vegetarianism, which for him, represents her refusal to not only consume and cook meat, but provide for him the domestic and affective support he expects. In excusing herself from this form of labor, her presence becomes demarcated by her absence; it is only in ceasing to function as woman, as wife, and as human, that her previously invisible work is recognized. These contradictions of visibility and recognition are inherent to what Jin-Kyung Lee identifies as service work, a form of labor that is marked by its difference from what is considered productive labor and exerts a radical form of alienation. Lee explains how service work, a term under which she positions domestic and sexual labor, can be distinguished from other forms of labor:

> A worker in a manufacturing industry exerts him- or herself, producing a commodity that represents the externalization of his or her time, effort, and skill into an alien object; in contrast a service worker exerts him- or herself in order to produce him- or herself as a commodity. In this sense, service labor as a particular kind of labor illustrates to us the most severe contradiction: the fact that the producer (the subject of labor) and the produced (the object of labor) are one in the same being. The "externalization" of labor that gets embodied in the very body, behavior, and activities of the worker as an alien object represents the most profound kind of alienation.[152]

In this sense, by refusing to continue her domestic labor, the man's wife has ceased to produce herself. In doing so, a rift occurs that reveals the alienating nature of service work: who or what does a wife become when she is no longer producing herself as such? After five years of "unremarkable" presence, her sudden presence without her production, cannot be accounted for in his framework. Alienated through years of marriage, the individual who was once wife is now alien to the husband.

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[152] Lee, *Service Economies*, 12. While Lee describes service labor as responsible "the most profound kind of alienation," I would argue that this form of alienation is not more severe than that found in other forms of work, but very different. The experience of alienation, or whether one form of alienation is favorable to another, is not an issue I wish to address. Rather, I hope to address how different forms of labor produce different, alienated subjects (and others and objects) who relate to themselves and others according to the material conditions of the labor and their own positions. I venture that service work, primarily a feminine form of work, remains marginalized not because the exact way that commodities are produced, but because of its categorization as feminine and thus lesser.

The Feeling of Being Human

It is no surprise then, that most of the man's conflict with his wife's sudden shift is expressed in terms presence, visibility, and unfamiliarity. As he goes to work late, he reflects on her behavior:

> My wife's unnaturally serene face, her incongruously firm voice surfaced in my mind.
>
> *I had a dream*--she'd said that twice now. Beyond the window, in the dark tunnel, her face flitted by--her face, but unfamiliar, as though I were seeing it for the first time.[153]

Here, her face appears to him as strange and incomprehensible as her words. Her face, once unremarkable, has become strange, a contradiction, and completely disconnected from his own memory. It as if, for a moment, the face of the once-wife forces him to confront the alienation that she had experienced, often violently, often painfully, through five years of marriage.

It is at this point that Yŏnghye, still unnamed, surfaces in the narrative to describe her dream, a scene in which she too is confronted with the unfamiliarity of her own face. The narrative shifts to a first-person inner monologue that recalls a dream in which she runs through a darkened forest and into a building filled with countless rounds of meat, dripping blood onto her face, her clothes, so much that she can taste it. She runs out of the barn and finds herself back in the forest, near a stream, where families are picnicking, eating meat. She describes an immense feeling of guilt and a vision of her own face:

[153] Han Kang, *The Vegetarian*, 19.

> But the fear. My clothes still wet with blood. Hide, hide behind the trees, don't let anybody see. My bloody hands. My bloody mouth. In that barn, what had I done? Pushed that red raw mass into my mouth, felt it squish against my gums, the roof of my mouth, slick with crimson blood.
>
> Chewing on something that felt so real, but couldn't have been, it couldn't. My face, the look in my eyes . . . my face, undoubtedly, but never seen before. Or no, not mine, but So familiar . . . nothing makes sense. Familiar and yet not . . . that vivid, strange, horribly uncanny feeling.[154]

It's significant to note here that unlike the English translation, the Korean text is narrated in past tense, indicating reflection and a struggle to remember.[155] This struggle, punctuated by fragmented descriptions, emotions, and ellipses indicate that the dream is not just forgotten, but that it remains outside the boundaries of articulation. Just as the exaggerated clarity of the husband's narrative articulates a strong, contradictory framework for gender and labor, the inarticulability of Yŏnghye's dream indicates the alienating effects of such frameworks. It is a past that is clearly present but cannot be spoken as such. The impossibility of knowing, of articulation, permeated with guilt and anxiety, becomes something terrible when confronted with the face. The face here elicits horror in its unknowability, the inability to recall, yet the striking certainty that something that must be remembered has been forgotten.

The prevalence that forgetting plays in Han's narrative indicates the way in which forgetting is integral to processes of labor and production, and furthermore the radical

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[154] Ibid., 20.

[155] The Korean text clearly renders the monologue in past tense, reading, "하지만, 난 무서웠어. 아직 내 옷에 피가 묻어 있었어." Han Kang, *Ch'aeshikchuŭija*, 8th ed. (Paju: Ch'angbi, 2010), 19.

forgetting of gendered labor that renders it invisible. The alienation of the self-as-commodity that Lee identifies in service work arises in the temporality of consumption. She writes,

> If human labor is externalized in the product through the manufacturing process, labor is externalized in the form of service is soon internalized by the consumer. The magical disappearance of the labor in the process of absorption or transfer into the consumer also results in loss or damage to the service laborer's subjectivity, that is, in being forgotten.[156]

Lee describes a cannibalistic circuit of exchange in which the service worker continuously witnesses the consumption of their life and self. The division between the time of work and time of leisure collapses, and in order to work, the worker must survive through this forgetting; to remember is too terrible. To remember would mean to face their complete absence of selfhood or subjectivity, an act that would challenge the very notion of their humanness. Here, then, is the true terror of the uncanny face: at once familiar and alien, it reveals to Yŏnghye that the blood on her hands, the blood of labor, of slaughter, is not a stain, but a material manifestation of which has made the face. Behind the blood, its taste, the feeling of meat running over her face, there is nothing recognizable, no subjecthood, not even objecthood; there is no humanity.

This radical experience of alienation, I argue, is not tied just to the conditions of labor, but the labor relations between human, animal, and gender. In *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Karl Marx describes alienation as a process that dehumanizing the human, of turning the human into animal through the loss of self. He

[156] Lee, *Service Economies*, 12-13.

writes, “External labour, labour in which man alienates himself, is a labour of selfsacrifice, of mortification,” as, this labor “belongs to another; it is the loss of his self.”[157] He continues,

> As a result, therefore, man (the worker) only feels himself freely active in his animal functions-eating, drinking, procreating, or at most in his dwelling and in dressing-up, etc.; and in his human functions he no longer feels himself to be anything but an animal. What is animal becomes human and what is human becomes animal.[158]

It is significant to note, then, that the self is not merely given up; it is given to another, to the buyer of labor power. The worker sells his life in order to survive. In the necropolitics of this “mortification,” selling one’s life so that another may live better, the tenuous binary between human and animal is inverted. More importantly, the *feeling* of being human is inverted; the human feels human only when enjoying the basic animal fulfillment of desire that come to constitute leisure. Here, the subjectivity of the human, is formed not by being, but through social relations create a feeling of being, a relation to oneself and others through circuits of exchange.

But, then, what is the feeling of being human? It would appear that the very processes of labor are what create the human, as the feeling of being human can only be realized through the boundary between work and leisure, but also, through the boundary of human and animal. Jacques Derrida, in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, interrogates this boundary as one that has been constructed, historically, to affirm the subject position of the human through the formation of the animal as object. Here, the

[157] Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, 66.
[158] Ibid.

affirmation of human subjectivity relies as much on forgetting as it does on labor. He addresses the fraught boundary between human and non-human animals through the act of the gaze, which destabilizes the subjecthood of the human:

> As with every bottomless gaze, as with the eyes of the other, the gaze called "animal" offers to my sight the abyssal limit of the human: the inhuman or the ahuman, the ends of man, that is to say, the bordercrossing from which vantage man dares toannounce himself to himself, therefore calling himself by the name that he believes he gives himself.[159]

Here, the gaze of the non-human animal upon the human animal ushers a realization, however momentary, that the human subject is also an object that is looked upon, and that the boundary between the human and non human, subject and object, self and other, is a limit point in which the dominance is achieved through categorization. In other words, categorization relies on a naturalization of a boundary, a continual forgetting of the historical violence of categorization and the production of human dominance.

This violence of forgetting is historical, and for Derrida, has accelerated with industrialization, in which he locates developments in of systems of "knowledge" and "technique" which produce the non-human animal not only as object, but as object to be consumed. These techniques, inseparable from knowledge, are those of where the labor of the farm, the laboratory, the zoo, and the slaughterhouse intersect to form the non-human animal as an object of human production, reaffirming the subject position and dominance of the human.[160] The geography of these forms of production become key in

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[159] Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 12.

[160] Ibid., 25. Derrida writes:

understanding the profound invisibility of such techniques, an invisibility that is achieved through massive repression and forgetting. In "Thinking With Cats," David Wood contends that a major thread in Derrida's work is a call for "...a war on 'deception,' on 'self-deception' and ". . . on the ignorance that knows many things but does not connect them."[161] Here, violence committed against the animals of which Derrida speaks—from the violence of naming to that of their "production for consumption"—is made possible only because of a process of radical forgetting, which renders the animal invisible and spectral.[162] This notion of deception figures prominently in Derrida's discussion of the commodity in *Specters of Marx* where "ghosts that are commodities transform their human producers into ghosts."[163] In other words, the alienation of workers from their labor, and the inability to see the human labor power within the commodity, renders the laboring producer a ghost, unrecognizable as human.

> "It is all to evident that in the course of the last two centuries these traditional forms of treatment of the animal have been turned upside down by the joint developments of zoological, ethological, biological, and genetic forms of *knowledge*, which remain inseparable from *techniques* of intervention *into* their object, from the transformation of the actual object, and from the milieu and world of their object, namely, the living animal. This has occurred by means of farming and regimentalization at a demographic level unknown in the past, by means of genetic experimentation, the industrialization of of what can be called the production for consumption of animal meat, artificial insemination on a massive scale, more and more audacious manipulations of the genome, the reduction of the animal not only to production and overactive reproduction (hormones, genetic crossbreeding, cloning, etc.) of meat for consumption, but also of all sorts of other end products, and all of that in service of a certain being and the putative human well-being of man."

Here, industrialization, while not separate from previous forms of labor around animals, work to produce "*unprecedented* proportions of this subjection of the animal" (25). Production here is key, as the animal is made object to technical developments in production, in order to serve dominance of what Derrida blatantly labels not just human, but man.

[161] David Wood, "Thinking with Cats," in *Animal Philosophy: Essential Readings in Continental Thought*, ed. Matthew Calarco and Peter Atterton(New York: Continuum, 2004), 141.W

[162] Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 10, 26.

[163] *Specters of Marx : The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, 156.

It is from this inability to recognize, to see the face of the other, that Han positions the protagonist. The feel of bloody flesh in her mouth, the sight of her face, familiar, yet unrecognizable, ties the production of the animal to the production of her selfhood. Alienation here becomes rooted in the violent upheaval of a selfhood, and, in particular, the undoing of a selfhood attached to gendered service labor. The focus on butchering, the dismemberment of the animal into consumable parts is not an analogy for her own alienation and the death of her selfhood, but tied directly to it, through the violent systems of humanist intervention that construct her gender role. Her dream, we find, follows an incident tense with the underpinnings of domestic violence. Interjected into the scathing narration of the husband, fuming over his frustrations at his wife's sudden change, comes Yŏnghye's recollection of the morning before she had her dream. While chopping frozen meat, her husband criticizes her. Flustered, she cuts herself:

> Quick, quicker. The hand holding the knife was working so quickly. I felt heat prickle the back of my neck. My hand, the chopping board, the meat, and then the knife, slicing cold into my finger.
>
> A drop of red blood already blossoming out of the cut. Rounder than round. Sticking the finger in my mouth calmed me. The scarlet color, and now the taste, sweetness masking something else, left me strangely pacified. [164]

Here, Yŏnghye's work in the kitchen is narrated much like work on a factory line; at the criticism of her boss, she is forced to move faster and faster until she is injured. Separated from her body, her hand works not in service of herself, but of her husband, who menaces her to work faster. Her bodily movements become the sum of parts,

[164] Han Kang, *The Vegetarian*, 27.

separated from herself, each movement a piece of her life, her selfhood. Injury, then, results in a pause. If, as in my discussion of Kang Kyŏngae's work, injury results from a moment of reflection, time taken out of the capitalist workday, here, injury brings upon this reflection, a moment where, sucking her finger, Yŏnghye pauses. In consuming herself, her own life, through sucking her own blood, she begins to understand the violence through which her subjectivity has been formed.

This injury leads to another incident of domestic tension that solidifies Yŏnghye's disassociation in the household. This disassociation, though, is not related to her own life, but her own potential to take away life, and in particular, the life of her husband:

> Later that day, when you sat down to a meal of bulgogi, you spat out the second mouthful and picked out something glittering.
>
> "What the hell is this?" you yelled. "A chip off the knife?"
>
> I gazed vacantly at your distorted face as you raged.
>
> "Just think of what would have happened if I'd swallowed it! I was this close to dying!"
>
> Why didn't this agitate me like it should have done? Instead, I became even calmer. A cool hand on my forehead. Suddenly, everything around me began to slide away, as though pulled back on an ebbing tide. The dining table, you, all the kitchen furniture. I was alone, the only thing remained in all of infinite space.
>
> Dawn of the next day. The pool of blood in the barn . . . I first saw the face reflected there.[165]

[165] Ibid.

If, through her injury, labor was equated with the death of the worker, here, labor opens the possibility of death of the consumer. Her husband's rage at this accident underscores the power of her work; labor, once equated with death of the self, becomes the possibility of killing the other. In this realization, Yŏnghye discovers a form of existence outside the home and outside her husband's demands. As "the only thing" she begins to form an invisible self that exists outside the masculine narrative. Disassociation, madness, or refusal become a way of subtracting her selfhood from her social conditions and relations. Yŏnghye's inner discovery of selfhood becomes one of subtracting her selfhood from social conditions. The disruption of this subtraction is never seen through Yŏnghye's narrative; from here, we only see it as observed through the actions and narratives of those around her: her husband, brother-in-law, sister, parents, and doctors.

The Historical Violence of Gender and Exchange

Starting from the husband's narrative, the novel increasingly revolves around the violence committed by family and state intervention into the protagonist's life and subjecthood. The repetitive nature of such interventions links family institutions to histories of colonial, imperial, and state violence to the patriarchal and neoliberal governance, mapping violent circulations of exchange. Thus, the husband's abject narrative transitions into scenes of continued masculine intervention into Yŏnghye's refusal to consume and participate in recognizable circulations of gender and labor. Such interventions repeat themselves through the narrative as horrific, yet predictable, scenes of rape and force-feeding, with clear ties to historical modes of imperial violence.

The husband is the perpetrator in the narrative's first rape scene, his description tying sexual violence to both to domestic and colonial institutions. For him, access to Yŏnghye, as a body, is inherent to the contract of marriage: He explains,

> I thought I could get by perfectly well just thinking of her as a stranger, or no, as a sister, or even a maid, someone who puts food on the table and keeps the house in good order. But it was no easy thing for a man [. . .] to have his physical needs go unsatisfied for such a long period of time.[166]

Here, it becomes clear that the role of wife is more than the domestic labor of cooking and cleaning, but also that of emotional and sexual labor. Consistent with this abject narrative, he describes raping Yŏnghye, who, for him, becomes a collection of moving parts to be fought, forced, and subdued for the satisfaction of his violent desire to remain a masculine and authoritative subject in the household:

> Pinning down her struggling arms and tugging off her trousers, I became unexpectedly aroused. She put up a surprisingly strong resistance and, spitting out vulgar curses all the while, it took me three attempts before I managed to insert myself successfully. Once that had happened, she lay there in the dark staring up at the ceiling, her face blank, as though she were a "comfort woman"[. . .] [167]

While the Korean leaves the weight of this description to the historical imagination of the reader, the English-language translation adds, perhaps for explanatory effect, "dragged in against her will, and *I was the Japanese soldier*

[166] Ibid., 37-38.

[167] He describes, "Pinning down her struggling arms and tugging of her trousers, I became unexpectedly aroused. She put up a surprisingly strong resistance and, spitting out vulgar curses all the while, it took me three attempts before I managed to insert myself successfully." Ibid., 38.

demanding her services," (italics mine).[168] Here, the English translation interprets the husband's actions as connected to military and colonial history, connecting his imagined dismemberment and violence towards Yŏnghye to the forced dislocation and sexual slavery of comfort women by the Japanese state and military. Just as Yŏnghye becomes hyper-visible through her silence and abstention, so-called "comfort" women occupy a place in history that is as sensationalized as it is politically under-recognized, in part due to the Japanese government's refusal to make reparations. While the term "comfort woman" would certainly resonate with most English-speaking audiences, the inclusion of the Japanese soldier not only frames a clear historical perpetrator, but clearly ties gendered violence, such as rape, to militaristic and state interventions.

Modernization in South Korea has long been tied to militarization, from colonial modernity under Japanese rule, to the "militarized modernity" that Moon ties to the postwar construction of gendered labor forces. In regards to the deployment of South Korean troops to serve under the U.S. military in the Vietnam War, Jin-kyung Lee sees military service as both gendered and racialized through imperialism. She finds that South Korea, both in national rhetoric and global military intervention, established itself as a "subimperial" force under the imperial direction of the U.S. She writes:

> The idea that Korea was "helping" another country, and the sense of "recovery" of ethnonational masculinity, closely bordered the sentiment of South Korea's supremacy and dominance over Vietnam and the Vietnamese. The pride in (sub)militarism in Vietnam was often frankly acknowledged as (sub)imperialist

[168] Han's text, in Korean, reads, "그럴 때 아내는 마치 자신이 끌려온 종군위안부라도 되는 듯 멍한 얼굴로 어둠속에 누워 천장을 올려다보고 있었다." Han Kang, *Ch'aeshikchuŭija*, 40.

> satisfaction, a particular kind of national pride of a subempire, vengefully memetic and reiterative.[169]

Through such deployment, argues Lee, positions South Korean soldiers as surrogate workers whose labor constructs masculine national identity through global expansion, and territory conquest.[170] In her readings of Korean texts about the Vietnam War, from An Chŏng'hyo's 1983 novel, *White Badge* to Cho Sŏng'jak's short story, "Yŏngja's Heyday," Lee finds these texts make connections between various crises of masculinity, sexuality, and sexual labor, from narratives that link killing and torture to sexual pleasure, to those that explore the close ties between sex work and military work.[171] While on one hand, military work satisfies a nationalist desire for economic expansion, on the other, it constructs national masculine subjectivity through "subimperial" desires and violence.

In this way, the militarization of gendered domestic violence in *The Vegetarian* reveals how such masculinity functions within patriarchal institutions and families. As an extension of the mimetically imperial militarized state, Yŏnghye's husband must maintain control over the domestic sphere by mimicking the gendered torture and killing of conquest. By positioning the husband as a Japanese soldier, the English-language text frames the husband's violence alongside that of Yŏnghye's father, whose patriarchal position is indistinguishable from his military service. As her husband describes, Yŏnghye's father was a man who " never tired of boasting about having

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[169] Lee, *Service Economies*, 47. Lee, 47

[170] Lee explains, "In the South Korean state's formulation of overseas labor as a nationalist economic activity, male bodies were conceived as territorializing agents abroad, whether in Vietnam, Saudi Arabia, or Brazil, for the isomorphism posited between masculine bodies and territories of the nation." Ibid., 45.

[171] Ibid., 50-60.

received the Order of Military Merit for serving in Vietnam," killing Vietcong soldiers, and was known for waging strict, corporeal discipline upon his two daughters.[172] It is later revealed in the text, by Yŏnghye's sister that their father had sexually abused and raped Yŏnghye throughout her childhood, implying that it is this traumatic and unresolvable history that underlies the woman's nightmares and refusals to eat meat.

In this way, the father's attempt to force-feed Yŏnghye also must be viewed through a lens that connects the sexualized and gendered violence of patriarchy to a militarized state. After seeing his daughter refuse to eat meat, despite the pleading of other family members, Yŏnghye's father enlists her brother and husband to hold her down while he attempts to shove pork into her mouth. Unable to pry open Yŏnghye's clenched teeth, her father slaps her face so that she screams, and then pushes the meat into her mouth. In this scene, force-feeding functions both as torture and sexual violence in its allusions to the father's military history, and both his and the husband's rape of Yŏnghye. The reiteration of such violence serves to position it within a framework of not just nationalism and masculine dominance, but the very formation of the nation-state through intertwined structures of gender and labor.

The text demonstrates that just as the feminine subject is constructed through a perceived absence of productive labor, the masculine subject is constructed through notions of productive nationalist labor that contributes to state expansion and management. The nationalist desire to mimic U.S. imperialism through military and economic expansion translates into the patriarch's desire for and repetition of such violence in the domestic sphere. In this way, the question of whether or not the trauma

[172] Han Kang, *The Vegetarian*, 37.

of repeated abuse and violation induced disorder inYŏnghye becomes less relevant than how the novel implies that the repetition, reenactment, and reiteration of such violence is central to maintaining a gender binary in which the masculine is defined through dominance over the feminine.[173]

Human Canvases and the Violence of Seeing

Such dominance, I argue, cannot be untangled from notions of human subjectivity and selfhood; more than the self being predicated on the other, I argue that human selfhood is predicated on an inferior, gendered other. Elizabeth Grosz, in *Volatile Bodies* undertakes the theoretically slippery task of laying the groundwork for a feminism grounded in the materialism of the body. Such a task, she finds, involves an examination of bodies and the theoretical frameworks that have defined them within a gender binary. Arguing that Western frameworks around subjectivity are embedded in a Cartesian dualism that presupposes a separation between the body and mind, she finds that the body, then, is viewed as passive and subservient to the mind. Such "patriarchal philosophy" positions the feminine alongside the body and the masculine alongside the mind. So, when "the body is typically regarded as passive and reproductive but largely unproductive, an object over which struggles its 'inhabitant' and others/exploiters may be possible," the feminine subject, too, is rendered an object, a body that is constructed

[173] This is not to contend that the effects of inter-generational trauma and mental illness or neurodivergence are not valuable fields of research, but that the text itself, as a representation of what could be called disorder or pathology, opens itself to readings that question more than the effects of trauma on the individual but the position of trauma and violence as inherent to constructions of gender.

and molded by masculine minds.[174] Undoing the duality between the mind and body, then, becomes a step towards undoing a gender binary (among other binaries) that operate hierarchically on interpersonal and global scales.[175]

Where Grosz falters in such analysis, however, not only reveals evidence of her own humanistic and gendered biases, but also indicates that the task of examining gender and the gendered other cannot be removed from the hierarchies under which gender and sex are produced. In her final chapter, "Sexed Bodies," Grosz attempts frame an ethical task of sex and sexual politics to acknowledge the radical alterity of the other, and in particular, "the (reciprocal) otherness of the other sex(es)."[176] Despite this acknowledgement at the possibility of recognition of a multitude of sexes or genders, she later writes, "Men, contrary to the fantasy of the transsexual, can never, even with surgical intervention, feel or experience what it is like to be, to live, as woman."[177] After contending the political and ethical importance of recognizing radical alterity, Grosz immediately refuses this task by defining, unilaterally, what it is to be woman, affirming an ontologically absolute binary between sexes and the experience of living in gendered bodies. The figurative line she draws in this conclusion is a material one that determines

[174] Grosz, *Volatile Bodies : Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, 9. For a more detailed discussion on the history of Western philosophy, Cartesian dualism, and feminist criticism, see Grosz's introduction to this work, "Refiguring Bodies."

[175] In her discussion of Deleuze and Guattari, Grosz stresses that such theoretical risk taking is a critical, political task: The risks seem to me worth taking: risking rethinking global oppositions and macroscopic hierarchies in order to have more optimistic pro[s]pects for effecting transformations and realignments of these global relations, and moreover, seeing their capacity to infiltrate microscopic recesses which may appear immune to our outside of their influence. Ibid., 173.

[176] "The task, then, is not to establish a neutral or objective perspective on the question of sexual difference but to find a position encompassing enough for a sexually specific perspective to be able to open itself up to, meet with, and be surprised at the (reciprocal) otherness of the other sex(es). Sexual difference entails the existence of a sexual ethics, an ethics of the ongoing negotiations between beings whose differences, whose alterities, are left intact but with whom some kind of exchange is nonetheless possible." Ibid., 192.

[177] Ibid., 207.

the lives—and deaths—of those who are overwhelmingly harmed by patriarchal violence. This turn, or rather, attack, is one that asserts a homogenous and humanistic division of sexes along historically grounded hierarchies. By asserting that those who do not follow her rigid biological guidelines as "not-quite-women," she also renders them as "not-quite-human," demonstrating that theoretical intervention through anti- or post-humanism must be historically grounded, lest it risk reproducing the same flattening violence of homogeneous exchange.[178]

Grosz thus becomes evidence of how attempts to recognize the alterity of the other without first addressing their own position to them reproduce violence towards the other. Such violence, through narrow attempts at encounter and understanding becomes central in *Ch'aeshikchuŭija* through the narrative of Yŏnghye's brother-in-law. Told in third-person in the second part of the novella, his narrative becomes central to the text, functioning as a bridge between the husband's cruelty and the sister's empathy. A melancholy video artist, facing age and a creative block, the brother-in-law becomes fascinated with Yŏnghye, who after being released from the psychiatric ward, goes to live with him and his family. His fascination turns to a sexual obsession over a birthmark

[178] Critics, like reviewer Deborah Linderman, have pointed out this flaw, writing that Grosz's "...bi-polar sexual difference, which consistent with a tendency I have been noting in the book refer to a body *before* discourse, is 'preontological' and 'pre-epistemological' in conditioning beings, identities, and knowledges" (Linderman 144). By arguing that a woman could never experience their gender if her body does not follow rigid genetic guidelines, Grosz implies that there is a static experience of being sexed that transcends the material conditions and processes in which gendering occurs. In other words, rather than complicate the mind-body duality, Grosz, in the end, merely inverts it, using transmisogynistic frameworks. While this criticism may seem tangential to my work, I posit that it is necessarily central for two reasons: Primarily, Grosz's statement, which functions as a deliberate conclusion, upholds and reproduces ideologies that justify the violent, and often deadly, marginalization of transgender and gender noncomforming individuals, particularly in, but not confined to, the Western societies she criticizes. Such violence must be considered when approaching the ethics of gender criticism. Secondly, the reproduction of this ideology is central to the way in which humanism, and the notion of the human, is upheld through the categorization of non-humans or not-quite-humans, a space in which Grosz places transwomen by considering them not-quite-women or never-women.

that she has carried through childhood, and unusual for its type, into adulthood. This obsession becomes an inexplicable source of creative energy:

> In his mind, the fact that his sister-in-law still had a Mongolian mark on her buttocks became inexplicably bound up with the image of men and women having sex, their naked bodies completely covered with painted flowers.[179]

Obsessed with this image, he pursues Yŏnghye, who is now living on her own nearby, until he finally invites her to participate in an art project in which he would paint flowers over his body.

The melancholy narrative of the aging artist, one whose "past ten years' worth of work was quietly turning his back on him,"[180] elicits a certain sympathy. His lyrical inner monologue, punctuated with nostalgia, self-doubt, and aimlessness places him much closer to Kafka's hunger artist, who, misunderstood by his audience, loathes the limitations of his own work and own capacity, than it does to Yŏnghye. For him, though, his fascination with Yŏnghye becomes evidence of his closeness to her and his efforts to recognize her. Indeed, he was the one who helped her to the hospital after she cut her wrists, and the only one who didn't see her vegetarianism as all that strange. Furthermore, his disgust at Yŏnghye's husband, who "seemed to consider it perfectly natural to discard his wife as though she were a broken watch or household appliance," indicates that unlike her husband, his attitude is one of care, understanding, and even admiration.[181]

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[179] Han Kang, *The Vegetarian*, 67.

[180] Ibid., 76.

[181] Ibid., 78.

However, masked with concern, the violence perpetrated by the brother-in-law becomes clearer as the narrative continues. While, on the surface level, the brother-in-law's concern and obsession motion towards a recognition of radical alterity, of accepting the difference of a quite possible neuro-divergent other, his fetishization of Yŏnghye becomes one that replicates the traumatic patriarchal violence of her father and husband. Ethical responsibility to the other comes not merely from recognizing their otherness, but through an understanding of the history of power relations that has shaped one's very position to the other. David Wood, in "Thinking with Cats," suggests that a radical ethics comes not just from "seeing," but through remembering, or historical confrontation. Following Derrida's claim that, rather than face the centuries of violent domination of the non-human animal, "men do all they can in order to dissimulate this cruelty or hide it from themselves," Wood argues that Derrida's work "suggests we need a war on 'deception,' on 'self-deception,' and, yes, on the ignorance that knows many things but does not connect them."[182] Here, ignorance is merely not knowing; it is willful refusal to acknowledge histories of intervention, abuse, and dominance, histories that are not only confined to the subjugation of the animal by the human, but that have created, through dominance, the human. In his own disgust towards Yŏnghye's husband, her brother-in-law deceives himself by thinking that his actions are somehow different, somehow less violent, than that of the other men in Yŏnghye's life. And it is precisely this willingness to ignorance that allows him to justify and continue to enact and re-enact histories of gendered violence upon both Yŏnghye and her sister.

[182] Wood, "Thinking with Cats," 141.

Thus, the brother-in-law's narrative, filled with doubt and indecision, is marked by his own guilty admission that he is both unwilling and unable to allow others to respond to him outside his own framework of desire. After describing the art project to Yŏnghye, the narrator describes, "She gave no sign of assent, but none of refusal either. He held his breath and greedily scanned her impassive features, desperate to fathom the answer that she meant this silence to signify."[183] His struggle is that of capturing meaning in Yŏnghye's face, a face that has become unfamiliar to even her. Rather than recognize an ultimate unknowability of the face, an impossibility in difference, in his desperation, he can only frame its meaning within his own desire, subjugating her look to "assent" or refusal of his own desire. The following scenes indicate the violence of the subjugation, reproducing Yŏnghye's rape by her husband by violating his own wife. The narrative recalls the scene as one of confusion, and fear, but overall, one marked by histories of sexual violence and the ontological violence of erasure through gendering:

> That night a few days ago after he'd gone to see his sister-in-law, he'd reached out in the darkness and pulled his wife to him, without giving himself time to think about what he was doing. Surprised and confused by this apparent show of desire, his wife still had no reason to question that this was what it was. If she'd looked, she would have seen something closer to fear in her husband's eyes. But it was dark.
>
> He'd put his hand over her mouth then, so he wouldn't have to hear that nasal voice. He pushed himself toward the image of *her*, finding it there in his wife's nose and lips, the child-like curve of her neck, all outlined vaguely in the

[183] Han Kang, *The Vegetarian*, 86-87.

darkness. With her nipple standing straight and hard in his mouth, he reached down and pulled off her knickers. Every time he wanted to get the image of the small blue petal to open and close, he shut his eyes and tried to block out his wife's face.

When it was all over, she was crying. He couldn't tell what these tears meant--pain, pleasure, passion, disgust, or some inscrutable loneliness that she would have been no more able to explain than he would have been to understand. He didn't know.

I'm scared, she'd muttered, turning away from him. No, it wasn't that. *You're scaring me*. At that point, he was already slipping into a death-like sleep, so he couldn't be sure if those words really passed his wife's lips. She might have lain there sobbing for hours in the darkness. He didn't know.[184]

The third-person narrator offers brief glimpses into Inhye's emotions and responses, but the perspective remains firmly grounded in that of her husband, his actions, sensations, and desires; the only things recognizable through the darkness. As withYŏnghye's husband's narrative, she becomes only "his wife," replicating the violence of the initial narrative in whichYŏnghye is raped. As "wife," Inhye becomes Yŏnghye, not only through his imagination and efforts to cover her voice and face, but also through an ontological violence in which the categories of wife, sister, sister-in-law, and woman are collapsed into his own desire and dominance. Again, as with his conversation with Yŏnghye, he doesn't "know" what Inhye's tears mean, or her words, or if they are even spoken, but by the end of the passage, what becomes clear is not that he can't

[184] Ibid., 88-89.

understand, but that he doesn't want to know. His melancholia and confusion become a willingness to ignorance, a willingness upon which histories of gender violence are built, connected through repetitions within patriarchal formations of the colonized nation, the subimperial nation-state, and the family. If, here, the husband collapses Yŏnghye and Inhye into the category of wife, the text collapses him in the category of the husband and father. As much as he despises Yŏnghye's husband and father, he becomes like him; instead of treating his wife and her sister like a disposable "house appliance," they are treated as a canvas, a passive body upon which he projects and molds his own desire.

In this way, the face arises again to indicate the violence committed against the gendered other. As Inhye's face becomes clear, he shuts it out to replace it with Yŏnghye's face, a face that he, admittedly, cannot understand, but can reproduce through erasure. This act functions to frame an obsessive Pygmalion-esque narrative in which women's bodies become objects for masculine production and consumption. The video series in which he paints Yŏnghye over with flowers and films her first having sex with another actor, and then himself having sex with her, may be understood in terms of what Mary Russo calls the "female grotesque," in which the feminine body is positioned and constructed through terms of bodily excess of a norm, and in particular, the normative, masculine body.[185] For Russo, the grotesque female body operates through two overlapping discourses: the carnivalesque and the uncanny. While the grotesque as carnivalesque theorizes social and political formations, the grotesque as the uncanny moves into a discourse of the "interiorized space of fantasy and introspection, with the attendant risk of social inertia."[186] Both representations of gender, however, rely on

[185] Mary Russo, *The Female Grotesque: Risk, Excess and Modernity*(New York: Routledge, 1994), 12.
[186] Ibid.

homogenous constructions of masculinity and femininity, with femininity always associated with difference, or divergence, from the dominant normativity of masculinity.[187] Such forms of representation shape the feminine as social transgression, spectacle, and as nature, but always in relation to a socially-coded masculine norm, which, in this case, is represented both through the brother-in-law and through his use of the camera.

In the brother-in-law's narrative, I argue, the feminine body and femininity are constructed at the intersection of both the carnivalesque and grotesque, demonstrating the ways in which patriarchal imaginings violently shape gender through constructions of production and reproduction. The brother-in-law's constant retreat into fantasies of Yŏnghye's body renders her a grotesque externalization of his melancholia, erasing her own affective imagination in service of his distress. This erasure is what allows him to enact his fantasy upon her through the spectacle of painting and filming her body, asking her to engage in what he deems as increasingly transgressive acts.[188] He constructs Yŏnghye as an object of desire in his fantasy, and then asks her to reproduce this fantasy as he films. Here, the feminine subject, constructed as reproductive, functions as a passive surface upon which masculine productivity may not only be performed, but repeated, replicated, and reiterated through the cinematic process. In other words, by rendering Yŏnghye as reproductive of his own fantasies, he simultaneously reaffirms his own subject as productive through recording and repetition.

[187] Ibid., 12-13.

[188] Not, however, to argue, that the act of performing or filming sexuality or sex is in itself transgressive, but that the brother-in-law, recognizes these acts as transgressive of his social relations, and treats them as such.

In this way, the ontological violence of the gender binary is shown to be inseparable from the violence of masculine domination; that it is within from with the process of constructing gender that violence emerges and manifests; the process of categorization is one of domination. Despite the narrative's attention to the brother-in-law's landscape, the violence of his actions becomes clear in the final passage, when he wakes up in Yŏnghye's apartment to find Inhye sitting in a corner holding his camcorder. In this scene, Yŏnghye and Inhye again converge in the narrative, with Inhye articulating the gravity of her husband's harm.

> Just then a rustling sound came from over by the mattress. Both he and his wife held their breath. Yeong-hye pushed the sheet aside and stood up, stark naked. He saw that tears were streaming from his wife's eyes.
>
> "Bastard," she muttered swallowing her sobs. "Just look at her...she clearly isn't well. In her mind. How could you?"
>
> Up until then, Yeong-hye had seemed oblivious to her sister's presence in the apartment; only now did she look over at the two of them, her face a perfect blank. Her gaze was utterly devoid of any expression.
>
> She slowly turned her back on them and walked out onto the veranda. The chill air rushed into the apartment when she opened the sliding door. He fixed his eyes on the pale blue of her Mongolian mark, seeing the traces of his saliva and semen that had dried there like sap . . .[189]

As in the previous passage, when Inhye sobs at her husband's replication of sexual violence against her, as her sister, her tears again become equated with his own

[189] Han Kang, *The Vegetarian*, 125.

violence, forming an analogy with his semen and saliva on Yŏnghye's body. Yŏnghye's face, "a perfect blank" is given articulation through Inhye's pain, her rustling of the blankets becoming Inhye's sobs and mutters. Inhye's accusation articulates his violence, a violence borne from his refusal to see anything but a blank face or canvas in Yŏnghye.

It's notable that the English translation is significantly different from the Korean publication, in which the latter, Inhye describes Yŏnghye as a child, a description that her husband suddenly finds fitting, musing that perhaps Yŏnghye's blank gaze were more than childlike, and quite possibly the look of someone or something otherworldly.[190] Inhye's description of Yŏnghye as a child without full capacity does more than make a plea to innocence; here, it establishes a clear relation of dominance between her and her brother-in-law. Like a child, Yŏnghye is not given the tools or access of response or consent. Furthermore, the description serves to underscore Yŏnghye's traumatic childhood, and the brother-in-law's actions as a replication of her father's sexual violence. The emptiness of her gaze is not pathological; it becomes a reference to the experience of gendered violence, historically reiterated through institutions of nation and family. If the gaze, as Derrida argues and I explain in the

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[190] Han Kang, *Ch'aeshikchuŭija*, 146. In Han's text, it becomes apparent that Inhye is more distressed at the harm her husband has committed against her sister than any apparent infidelity. The Korean text reads as follows:

> "나쁜 새끼."
> 아내는 낮은 소리로, 눈물을 삼키며 중얼거렸다
> "아직 정신도 성치 않은 애를....... 저런 애를."
> 아내의 젖은 입술이 파들거렸다.
> 그제야 아내가 온 것을 안 듯 처제는 멍한 얼굴로 이편을 건너다보았다. 아무것도 담기지 않은 시선이었다. 처음으로 그는 그녀의 눈이 어린아이 같다고 생각했다. 어린아이가 아니면 가질 수 없는, 모든 것이 담긴, 그러나 동시에 모든 것이 비워진 눈이었다. 아니, 어쩌면 어린아이도 되기 이전의 아무것도 눈동자에 담아본 적 없는 것 같은 시선이었다.

previous chapter, demands response, the ethics of such response must consider of relations of dominance, of histories of violence, in order to seek justice. Such justice entails recognition across temporality, consideration for not only the present, but for the past, for the ghosts who haunt the living.[191] Inhye's articulation becomes a demand for recognition and responsibility for both the past and future. The gaze, as I've argued in the previous chapter, demands ethical response; it demands consideration of relations of dominance, it demands that the other be seen in relation to the subject. When finally confronted with this gaze and its implications, with Yŏnghye's body, painted over in flowers and in the sunlight, the brother in law rushes to the veranda to throw himself over.

III. The Untimeliness of Uprising

The last act of the novella, "Flaming Trees," is narrated from the third-person perspective of Inhye, referred to as only as "she" (그녀) by the narrator. She watches her sister, Yŏnghye, now institutionalized, refuse food and gradually waste away. Interspersed with her memories of the sisters' shared childhood, the narrative reveals Yŏnghye's life as one marked by repetitions of violence at the hands of their father.

[191] As Derrida writes in his "Exordium" to *Specters of Marx:* "No justice--let us not say no law and once again we are not speaking here of laws--seems possible or thinkable without the principle of some *responsibility*, beyond all living present, within that which disjoins the living present, before the ghosts of those who are not yet born or who are already dead, be they victims of wars, political or other kinds of violence, nationalist, racist, colonialist, sexists, or other kinds of exterminations, victims of the oppressions of capitalist imperialism or any of the forms of totalitarianism. Without this *non-contemporaneity with itself of the living present*, without that which secretly unhinges it, without this responsibility and this respect for justice concerning those who *are not there*, of those who are no longer or who are not yet *present and living*, what sense would there be to ask the question 'where?' 'where tomorrow?' 'whither?'" Derrida, *Specters of Marx : The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, xix.

Reflecting on her own role as older sister to her youngest sibling, she realizes why it was Yŏnghye who was most targeted by their abusive father: "Only Yeong-hye, docile and naive, had been unable to deflect their father's temper or put up any form of resistance. Instead she had merely absorbed all her suffering inside of her, deep into the marrow of her bones."[192] The melancholic and desperate narrative reads as a family history of pain and abuse by the hands of fathers and husbands in which "she" is both an unnamed victim and witness. "Time passes," repeats the narrator, marking each recollection as moment lost, an event forgotten except in the bodies of the two sisters, until, finally, "...there's no more time left."[193] The doctors and nurses attempt to force feed Yŏnghye by holding her and pushing a tube through her nasal cavity and into her throat. Struggling, Yŏnghye vomits blood through the tube, and Inhye fights the doctors off her sister, even biting one, to end the torture.[194]

The violent scene, reminiscent of the attempt to force-feed Yŏnghye in the first novella, do more than just tie the patriarchal violence of the family to that of the state; they also function as a space in which the narrative, through Inhye's perspective, examines the connections between violence, coercion, and gender. Musing on their childhood, Inhye realizes " . . . the role she had adopted back then of the hard-working, self-sacrificing eldest daughter had been a sign not of maturity but of cowardice. It had been a survival tactic."[195] Like Yŏnghye, Inhye, experiences gender as a particular relation to work and family, mired in histories of structural violence and domination.

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[192] Han Kang, *The Vegetarian*, 163.

[193]Ibid., 129-76.

[194] Ibid., 180-81.

[195] Ibid., 163.

Her realization is one of survivor's guilt and complicity, propelling her decision to intervene in the doctor's attempt to force feed her sister.

However, the recognition of complicity here is also a recognition of possibility and the imagination of resistance. The moment represents a moment of clarity for Inhye in which she recognizes her structural limitation yet, like her sister, pursues action to resist further harm. In her essay, "Up There, Out there," Mary Russo discusses how spectacles of liberation often operate on patriarchal premises of women's roles.[196] The liberatory act made spectacle, in other words, cannot escape the limitations of gender, and forms of resistance, such as biting, anorexia, or even performance, are spectacularized to fit stereotypes of femininity. This, however is not to say that such actions collude with patriarchal violence, but rather that they indicate how possibility is structured and measured through the formation of gender itself. She tackles this conflict between resistance and collusion by drawing on Michel de Certeau's concept of the "tactic" as a practice that " . . .belongs to the improvisational, to the realm of what is possible in the moment."[197] This is contrasted with "strategy," which " . . . depends upon a proper place, a place of one's own, from which a certain 'calculus of force' can be organized and projected outward."[198] In other words, in absence of a proper place, the oppressed often have no recourse to strategy, only tactical engagement given their social position.

If we are to read Yŏnghye's vomiting as a refusal of the penetrative violation of the feeding tube, a violation that has been present in her life since girlhood, then Inhye's

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[196] Russo, *The Female Grotesque: Risk, Excess and Modernity*, 151.

[197] Ibid., 22.

[198] Ibid.

reaction to the scene is more than one of just disgust, but one of mourning the absence of any strategic space. Thus, after witnessing her sister vomit blood through the tube, Inhye laments, "It's your body, you can treat it however you please. The only area where you're free to do just as you like. And that doesn't even turn out how you wanted."[199] This mourning goes beyond discussions of rights and autonomy; what is mourned is not just the lack of women's rights to their own bodies, but a lack of space for women's desire, for action or strategy within structures of domination, even within the articulation of selfhood. The despair captures much theoretical debate over disorders such as hysteria or anorexia, questioning whether they can be interpreted as counterhegemonic resistance due to their apparent collusion with Western notions of appropriate feminine behavior.[200] The broader question that *Vegetarian*, raises, however, is not whether Yŏnghye's refusal to consume and Inhye's response constitute counterhegemonic or collusive protest. Rather, it questions whether there is any space for counterhegemonic protest within a patriarchal structure of gender, and, more significantly within the construction of the human which cannot be separated from gender. Inhye's recognition of her own position as tactical reveals, through her relation

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[199] Han Kang, *The Vegetarian*, 182. For comparison, the Korean text reads: "기껏 해칠 수 있는 건 네 몸이자. 네 뜻대로 할 수 있는 유일한 게 그거지. 그런데 그것도 마음대로 되지 않지." Han Kang, *Ch'aeshikchuŭija*, 214.

[200] Bordo maintains throughout her book that anorexia and bulimia are nothing to be celebrated, and her positioning of anorexic women as parallel to saints functions not to "celebrate" them, but to underscore the genealogy of the body-mind/spirit dichotomy as it has existed in Western culture, and often, in religious discourse. In the same section, Bordo criticizes feminist theorists from Cixous to Susie Orbach who have framed disorders like hysteria and anorexia as counterhegemonic protest, arguing that while "we may talk meaningfully of protest," that ultimately these disorders serve to isolate, weaken, and undermine the sufferers . . . On the symbolic level, too, the protest collapses into its opposite and proclaims the utter capitulation of the subject to the contracted female world." In other words, the refusal to participate in patriarchal hegemony, through starvation or muteness, also functions in collusion with structures of domination that press women to be slender, small, and voiceless. Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*(University of California Press, 2004), 176-77.

to Yŏnghye, a shared imagination towards the impossible, for strategic space outside that of the gendered human subject.

Gendered Disjuncture in the Transnational Economy

Accordingly, what I intend to argue is not whether text is representative of emancipatory politics, nor whether pathology, imagination, and desire function as strictly hegemonic or counterhegemonic. Rather, what I am interested in is examining is the ways in which the text navigates contested terrains in which the gendered human self and other are constructed and imagined, in hopes that such imaginings indicate critical approaches that move beyond humanistic and human-centric hierarchies. The text here cannot be separated from its political context of global capitalism and circulations of exchange and protest. I draw from Arjun Appadurai, who finds that imagination has become one of the most contested spaces of power within the effects of global capitalism. In *Modernity at Large*, Appadurai argues that contemporary global capitalism must be approached "as a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order that cannot any longer be understood in terms of existing center-periphery models."[201] He proposes examining such disjunctures through what he calls "imagined worlds" which are transnational in scope.[202] For Appadurai, disjuncture in the global economy and in

[201] Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, ed. Dilip Gaonkar and Benjamin Lee, Public Worlds (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 32.

[202] Appadurai writes:

> These landscapes are thus the building blocks of what (extending Benedict Anderson) I would like to call *imagined worlds*, that is, the multiple worlds that are constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups spread around the globe. An important fact of the world we live in today is that many persons on the globe live in such imagined worlds (and not just in imagined communities) and are thus able to contest and sometimes even subvert the imagined worlds of the official mind and of the entrepreneurial mentality that surround them. Ibid., 33.

the imagined landscape become gateways for contesting hegemonic structures. In one example of such disjuncture, he describes how the fantasy of the global free market, in states such as Japan, is disjoined by closed or stringent immigration and guest worker policies, which in turn also create diasporic imaginations in terms of production, reproduction, and territory.[203] Late capitalism and its global circulations exist alongside contradictions, disjuncture, difference, and contestation.

Here, Appadurai's approach to disjuncture and imagination bears much similarity to the concept of disjunction that Derrida outlines in *Specters of Marx*, where disjunction erupts as heterogeneity in a forced system of homogenous time. As with Appadurai, Derrida focuses on disjunction as arising from state exclusion and oppression of growing numbers of people within the global economy.[204] Key to this conversation is the emergence of disjunction in what he calls the "New International," a body, so to speak, that is heterogenous, linked through historical suffering;

> . . . an untimely link, without status, without title, and without name, barely public even if it is not clandestine, without contract, 'out of joint,' without coordination, without party, without country, without national community

[203] Ibid., 37. For a more detailed account of the global market, imagination, and deterritorialization, see "Global Ethnoscapes: Notes and Queries for a Transnational Anthropology," in *Modernity at Large*, pp 48-65.

[204] In chapter three, "Wears and Tears," Derrida names and describes the "plagues of the 'new world order,'" from the disenfranchisement and displacement of workers, the houseless, and refugees, to weapons development and industries. He contends that

> . . . no degree of progress allows one to ignore that never before, in absolute figures, never have so many men, women, and children been subjugated, starved, or exterminated on earth. (And provisionally, but with regret, we must leave aside here the nevertheless indissociable question of what is becoming of so-called "animal" life, the life and existence of "animals" into this history. This question has always been a serious one, but it will become massively unavoidable. Derrida,

Specters of Marx : The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International, 79-85.

(International before, across, and beyond any national determination), without co-citizenship, without common belonging to a class.[205]

Such disjunction or contestation of a global order entails an imagination based on shared histories and material conditions. The challenge of disjunction, of being "out of joint," is a challenge to a capitalist imagination of not just the world, but the self, the human and non-human subjects within it.

Bliss Lim, in *Translating Time*, finds Derrida's work on disjunction of particular use in an examination of postcolonial cultural production. In her exploration of ghost films, she argues, "Ghost films that are historical allegories make incongruous use of the vocabulary of the supernatural to articulate historical injustice, referring to 'social reality' by recourse to the undead."[206] Such use of the spectral becomes a manifestation of untimeliness, or rather, a time outside that of homogenous, linear time that controls history and social relations in terms of developmental progress.[207] She writes, "Haunting, or the specter's act of returning from death, is a refusal to complete the sentence, a worrying of historical knowledge that undermines the capacity of death to resolve the undecidability of life in semantic coherence."[208] The specter arises as evidence of a space of temporality that cannot be accounted for in homogenous narrative, and furthermore, in the homogeneity of the capitalist time of labor. If for Lim, the cinematic apparition of the ghost becomes a manifestation of such evidence, such

[205] Ibid., 85.

[206] Bliss Cua Lim, *Translating Time: Cinema, the Fantastic, and Temporal Critique*(Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 151.

[207] Ibid. For a discussion on homogenous time and notions of history and progress, see Lim pages 10-11. In "The Language of Disenchanted Time," Lim discusses the emancipatory value of difference in time in the postcolonial context (pages 18-25).

[208] Ibid., 161.

manifestation occurs in *The Vegetarian* through the hauntings of memory and imagination, that are once bodily and psychological.

In this way, mourning the lack of a space to strategically challenge gender entails recognition of the specter of what cannot be articulated. This articulatable imagination of such a space, and moreover, an imagination that is shared through historical affinity. Inhye recognizes her sister's difference both through addressing her own subject formation (as the caretaker, as the older sister), and the harm both of them suffer within the patriarchal structures of nation, state, and family. The phrases "Time passes," until "there is no time left," signify not the passing of time, but how the narrative challenges linear time itself. Time may pass, but historical wounds linger with no foreseeable closure. Thus, when Yŏnghye asks her sister, "Why is it such a bad thing to die?"[209] the text implies that disjuncture is more than an inversion of values, that perhaps beyond the text, there are hauntings and relations that continue out of and alongside linear time, irrevocably disrupting hegemonic notions of the order of the things.

In is in this vein that the novella itself presents contradictions of time and discourse. On the surface, the story seems to come full circle, moving linearly through history, from the husband's initial observations, to the brother-in-law's obsession, and finally back to a sense of beginning and end through Inhye's caretaking. However, at closer look, this history is punctuated with disjuncture: Yŏnghye's dream sequences interrupt on both the story and discursive level and slips in narrative voice, such as the repeated statement, "Time passes," in the third novel (should we read this as utterance by the same omniscient narrator of the previous novella? Or of one of the novels'

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[209] Han Kang, *The Vegetarian*, 162.

characters?), question the very narrative. The attempted suicides of both Yŏnghye's husbands and brother in laws indicate a homosociality and bodily connection between the characters that disrupt the family structure that story attempts to historicize. Finally, tense and content discrepancies between the Korean text and English translation by Smith, which I've noted throughout this chapter, indicate a disruption past the initial publication that extends to its global circulation. The traumatic histories that have harmed Yŏnghye disrupt both the discursive and story structure of the novella, and this disruption is found even through the translation of the text. Disjuncture doesn't just circulate, it invades and multiplies, infesting and manifesting itself within the text itself and through its adaptations, publications, and reproductions.

Dreaming the Impossible

Such manifestation of disjuncture, like Appadurai's imaginary worlds, relies on shared histories of oppression, relatable yet distinct, histories and imaginations that join through border crossings that confront categorization, whether it be that of the nation state, the citizen, gender, and the human. Unlike the fantasy of transnational capitalism, these disjunctures disrupt timeliness, and, in the case of *The Vegetarian*, the temporality that commands gender and labor. Such disruption, I argue, arise from histories of disruption, of untimeliness, of trauma, and of history itself. Chungmoo Choi, in "The Minjung Movement and Construction of Popular Culture in Korea," finds that such historical imagination was key to Korea's minjung movement throughout the 1960s and into the 1980s. Underscoring the significant influence of Frantz Fanon on post-colonial activism, Choi argues that the minjung movement relied on constructing an empowering history centered on the experience of the oppressed in order to counter

capitalist and nationalist historical discourses.[210] She illustrates the ways in which minjung demonstrations and campaigns centered around emancipatory expressions culture that strove to reclaim and resituate forgotten pasts, from symbolic rituals to the formation of folk theater groups.[211] Above all, the minjung movement sought to do the unimaginable: in describing the movement's diverse goals and struggles, Choi finds tactics to building strategy through a critical imagination of possibility outside of global capitalism and state nationalism. "In other words," she writes, "minjung nationalism resists any form of imperialism."[212]

The impossible task of national identity outside of the discourse of the state and global capitalism becomes the task bringing the past into the present and creating movement that not only disjoins the flow of capital through direct action but also through disjoining the flow of its discourse. This becomes possible through methods of adaption, reiteration, and remembering. Rather than forgetting historical oppression, liberatory demonstrations challenge neoliberal imaginations of the nation-state and global order. Despite the widely diverse tactics and political positions of organizers and participants, the anti-FTA protests of 2007 also bred imagination through transnational

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[210] Choi writes, "Although Franz Fanon is not the only source of inspiration to the movement, his emphasis on the necessity of reconstructing national culture for the postcolonial nations has left a deep impression on the discourse of the minjung culture movement. Accordingly, the minjung movement strove to reclaim indigenous culture from both colonial discourse and state-centric hegemonic, nationalist discourse." Chungmoo Choi, "Nationalism and Construction of Gender in Korea," in *Dangerous Women: Gender and Korean Nationalism*, ed. Elaine H. Kim and Chungmoo Choi (New York: Routledge, 1998), 107.

[211] Ibid., 109-10. Among many demonstrations and campaigns, Choi describes the 1964 Ritual to Invoke Native Land Consciousness, which was performed during a student protest at Seoul National University, memorial and public funeral protests that followed into the late 1980's, and the formation of the folk-theater group Maltuggi Association .These campaigns and demonstrations sought not only to remember and memorialize fallen comrades, bringing them into the present, but also forgotten histories of resistance and their continued relevance to revolutionary practice.

[212] Ibid., 106.

disjuncture. In *Igniting the Internet*, Jiyeon Kang finds that the internet, as a place of transnational imagination, was key in late 20th and 21st century social movements in South Korea in its ability to captivate, building momentum and expanding discourse through the circulation of images, news, and commentary. She argues that the internet is a space in which

> shared yet underarticulated public sentiments can be voiced without translation into the language of established politics. On the Internet, sensational images, news, and even conspiracy theories captivate users and spread faster and more broadly than traditionally researched reports.[213]

For Kang, the viral circulation of the graphic images of Hyo-sun and Mi-so'n, two girls killed by a U.S. transport vehicle in 2002, illustrates the power of such captivation, sparking massive candlelight vigils and protests, aroused by the historical memory of South Korea's politically and economically subservient relation to the U.S.[214] Here, through circulation of the image, imagination causes the manifestation of historical disjuncture and contradiction. Just as with the *minjung* demonstrations, outcry over the unresolved loss of two girls' lives made past historical experiences of military occupation present, countering nationalist historical discourse around the World Cup that presented South Korea as global partner alongside the U.S. and Japan.[215]

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[213] Jiyeon Kang, *Igniting the Internet: Youth and Activism in Postauthoritarian South Korea*(University of Hawai'i Press, 2016), 8.

[214] Ibid., 1-2.

[215] Kang sees these protests as emerging as response not just to the girls' brutal deaths and lack of accountability, but also through the contradiction it posed in conjunction with South Korea's participation in the World Cup the same year. Of the World Cup, she writes: "South Koreans were immersed in a sense of elation at hosting an international spectacle: evidence of the country's transformation from client state to a producer of global culture." However, the circulation of graphic images and commentary around Hyo-sun and Mi-so'n revealed the ideological nature of the spectacle: "On Web sites formerly dedicated to the World Cup, the girls' deaths emerged as a different but equally intense symbol of the country's stature: a client state still suffering from the remnants of the Cold War era." Ibid.

The candlelight vigils that erupted in outcry not only mourned the girls' deaths but also the absence and impossibility of a political structure that would allow for any form of justice or accountability to the people. The candlelight protests re-emerged in demonstration against the KORUS-FTA repeated and referenced this history of anti-imperial demonstrations through not only the use of candles, but the impetus to mourn and remember, to shine light on a past that was and is still very present on the Korean peninsula. Despite the largely millennial make up of many protestors, there remained, through histories of struggle, a sense of historical, or perhaps, counter-historical justice.[216] Demonstration here arises from disjuncture both in the contradictions of capitalist hegemony and in the shared imagination that challenges such a history. While nationalist discourse may have poised the KORUS-FTA FTA as South Korea's political entry as an actor in global capitalism, protesters countered with their own discourse that demonstrated a history of U.S. intervention into not only the economy and political landscape of South Korea, but into their very lives and deaths.

Translation as Transnational Fantasy

If, as I argue, *The Vegetarian* must be viewed from a contextual account of discourse around global capitalism and protest, these issues converge in final passages of the novel and their translation into English. The novel closes with Inhye beside her sister in an ambulance rushing up a steep and winding road. Yŏnghye has stopped responding, not because she can't, but because she won't. Inhye whispers to her sister,

[216] Kang points out that many of the activists against beef imports she encountered were "...born between the mid-1980s and mid-1990s and raised *after* the authoritarian era." These young people, she explains, " . . .were the country's first generation to *live* democracy rather than to fight for it--even if they were not entirely liberated from authoritarian legacies in the educational system, in compulsory military service, and even in the traditions of the democratization movement." Ibid., 23.

> Maybe this is a dream." Then, explains, "When you're dreaming, it seems like the dream is all there is. But when you wake up, you realize that it wasn't everything. . . So, when we wake up...when we wake up, that's when . . . [217]

She looks out the window, the bright summer sun piercing her eyes. The narrator concludes:

> Quietly, she takes a breath. She glares at the blazing trees on the side of the rode, bodies of green flames writhing like thousands of wild animals. Her gaze is dark and insistent. As if waiting for a response—no—as if in protest against something.[218]

Here, dream, animal, spark, and impossibility converge in Inhye's words and gaze. She awaits no response, but instead, expresses yearning for the impossible alongside glaring condemnation. The trees, fiery in the sunlight, writhing like large animals, elicit less terror than they do an appraisal of a world in flames, a world that could be a dream, but a shared dream from which the two sisters may awake into the unimaginable a space of autonomy, beyond histories of violence and trauma. Such a space doesn't erase trauma, response, and experience, but rather recognizes and allows its continued presence. Such presence, in this moment of reflection, indicates a space in which strategy and protest become possible through a disjuncture in circulations of nationalism, history, and the global economy.

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[217] ". . . 어쩌면 꿈인지 몰라. [. . .] 꿈속에선, 꿈이 전부인 것 같잖아. 하지만, 언젠가 우리가 깨어나면, 그때눈. . . Han Kang, *Ch'aeshikchuŭija*, 120. English translation mine.

[218] "조용히, 그녀는 숨을 들이마신다. 활활 타오르는 도로변의 나무들을, 무수한 짐승들처럼 몸을 일으켜 일렁이는 초록빛의 불꽃들을 쏘아본다. 대답을 기다리듯, 아니, 무엇인가에 항의 하듯 그녀의 눈길을 어둡고 끈질기다." Ibid., 221. English translation mine.

The discursive disjuncture presented by the novel, however, cannot be separated from the global circulation of Han's work as translation. As with several other passages throughout this chapter, I chose to introduce my own translations above rather than those of Deborah Smith's text. It should be noted that Smith's translation is strikingly different from my own, and therefore, divergent from my analysis of the text. For example, in Smith's translation, Inhye's last words to her sister are as follows:

> I have dreams, too, you know. Dreams . . . and I could let myself dissolve into them, let them take me over . . . but surely the dream isn't all there is? We have to wake up at some point, don't we? Because . . . because, then?"[219]

Here, Smith's translation underscores the traumatic disruption in Inhye's life, such as the loss of her husband, her sister, and her time away from her son. In this way, Inhye's words become a final plea for her sister to literally awaken from a delusional state. However, by portraying Inhye's sentiment as one of personal loss, the text sacrifices Inhye's deep recognition of her sister through a shared understanding of dream and awakening, and a desire for what is beyond present comprehension or possibility. The discrepancy between the final scene in the Korean and English text make similar sacrifice. In my translation, I chose to maintain the Korean text's image of a multitude of animals (무수한 짐승들처럼), which, unlike Smith's "rippling flanks of a massive animal, wild and savage," indicate consideration of both the unquantifiable and the animal. Like the countless bloodied carcasses that Yŏnghye encounters in the slaughterhouse of her dream, the animals, placed alongside the trees, and Inhye's human imaginings, elicit the liminal divisions between plant, animal, and human; between the gaze, protest, and

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[219]*The Vegetarian*, 187.

response. Such divisions are not within the realm of countability or homogeneity but rather a space of incomprehension and thus an awakening from the dream of knowability, rather than delusion.

Neoliberalism and its continued crises are a dream that cannot escape the haunting of history, that arise through the reemergence of histories of violence, and of the liminal divisions between human and non-human, producer and consumer, and national protest and national protection. Melinda Cooper, in *Life as Surplus* sees the turn to neoliberalism as much an ideological shift in notions of nation-state and capital as in our concepts of biological life. She writes:

> Given the conceptual affinity between theories of biological defense and political immunity, it is surely not incidental that over the same period there has been a profound rethinking of dominant twentieth-century ideas about biological defense and resistance. In recent theories of immunity it is the stability of boundaries between the self and the other, and hence the possibility of recognition that is being put into question.[220]

If, before, the nation-state, the citizen, and non-citizen were seen as figures to be protected and guarded from all contagion, today, with the proliferation of global trade and shortage of biological resources, the figure of the national body finds itself attacked from not without, but from within. Memories of trauma, of imperialism, and gender violence arise against the national self, disrupting not only imaginations of state, progress, and history, but of self and other. In *The Vegetarian* such disjunctures arise in the home, the workplace, and the institution, challenging notions of production and

[220] Melinda Cooper, *Life as Surplus: Biotechnology and Capitalism in the Neoliberal Era*, In Vivo (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008), 62.

reproduction, feminine and masculine, self and other. Such disruption, as I've argued, isn't limited to the text, but spreads through the circulation of the text itself, inviting and multiplying discord. Recently, such discord, a challenge to our ethics of recognition, has arisen in controversy over Deborah Smith's translation of Han Kang's novel.

IV. Conclusion: The Ethics and Economy of Translation

> But one cannot honor the dead, engage with the living, or create dreams of tomorrow in foreign voices: Those rites can be wrought only in the language of loved ones.
>
> —Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o[221]

Since its publication, Smith's translation has aroused criticism from Korean readers and scholars alike due glaring differences or inaccuracies including mistranslated words and phrases, grammatical confusion between subjects, and seemingly arbitrary omissions and additions of content. Kim Bunn, in "채식주의자]와 *The Vegetarian*: 원작과 번역의 경계" (*Ch'aeshikjuuija* and *The Vegetarian*: The Boundary between the Original and its Translation) argues that these mistranslations severely undermine key elements of the Korean text's discourse, not only producing confusion among readers, but, more

[221] Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Something Torn and New: An African Renaissance*(New York: BasicCivitas Books, 2009), 64.

importantly, "limit[ing] possibilities of interpretation of the novel."[222] The accusation of limitation seems particularly significant given the novel's focus on the limitations of gender, the human, violence, and narrative. Kim reveals key passages of dialogue where Smith seems to have confused characters, mainly through misunderstandings of Korean familial terms. He argues that Smith's translation not only creates nonsensical dialogue, but moreover diminishes the very significant relations between the four major characters. In particular, he finds that theses disruptions in dialogue—even when concerning the sisters' husbands—serve to undermine the commonality between the two sisters that is expressed in the Korean text. As Kim points out, Inhye alongside her sister, develops a deep, bodily, understanding of the boundaries between life and death, a development that is integral to the novel's story and discourse.[223]

It is in this mode that Kim also takes issue with the final passage of the book, which Smith translates as follows:

> Quietly, she breathes in. The trees by the side of the road are blazing, green fire undulating like the rippling flanks of a massive animal, wild and savage. As if waiting for an answer. As if protesting against something. The look in her eyes is dark and insistent.[224]

Kim contends that by removing the plurality of the nouns "animal" and "flames," Smith removes the key piece of diction that connects "trees," "animals" and "flames." In particular, he argues, Smith's text indicates that Inhye contemplates only the trees, obscuring her contemplation of the relation between plant and animal that is apparent

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[222] Kim Bunn, "Chaesikjuuija and the Vegetarian: The Boundary between the Original and Its Translation," *Journal of English Studies in Korea* 32, no. 2017 (2017): 33.

[223] Ibid., 15.

[224] Han Kang, *The Vegetarian*, 188.

in the Korean text.[225] Such removal of Inhye's inner narrative diminishes—if not excises—the particularity of the sisters' relationship and their shared questioning of limitations and boundaries.

The focus on translation and the potential of mistranslation raises question about how texts circulate in a global economy of translation, and who or what is privileged in such circuits of exchange. Kim, as he notes in his essay, is one of countless scholars and readers in Korea who have criticized the novel's translation. In contrast, few English-language reviews have remarked on what has become a viral issue among Korean readers. Those who did, including Smith herself, asserting that the act of attempting translation—as a creative attempt—supersedes the impossible objective of purity.[226] For example, scholar and journalist Charse Yun, writing for both the *LA Times*' literary blog, *Jacket Copy*, and *Korea Expose* addresses the severity of the mistranslations, but ultimately finds the translation acceptable, arguing that Smith ". . . successfully introduced a work of literature to people who might otherwise never have had a chance to read it."[227] While Yun reaches this conclusion after dwelling on the nature of translation and notions of betrayal, *Book Riot* author and critic Tara Cheesman remains

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[225] Kim Bunn, "Chaesikjuuija and the Vegetarian: The Boundary between the Original and Its Translation," 28.

[226] In a report on an interview with Smith, Rumy Doo from the Korea Herald paraphrases Smith's response to accusations of an inaccurate and perhaps unqualified translation:

> On the theories and techniques of translation, Smith said that one is not more correct or legitimate than the other. Aware of the controversy here concerning her qualifications as a translator of Korean literature, Smith, a 28-year-old British national who first learned Korean six years ago, spoke of the "danger of excluding or prioritizing certain translators" based solely on qualifications. "Love of literature, patience and dedication are more important," she argued.

Rumy Doo, "'The Vegetarian' Translator Speaks Out," *The Korea Herald*, June 15, 2016 2016.

[227] Charse Yun, "You Say Melon, I Say Lemon: Deborah Smith's Flawed yet Remarkable Translation of 'the Vegetarian'," *Korea Exposé*, July 2, 2017 2017.

more stubborn in her assessment of the controversy surrounding the novel that she had not read. She writes:

> I don't care. Not even a little. Because there's really no point in caring. I (and I imagine most of you) will never read a book written in Korean, Chinese, Arabic, French, Persian, German, Spanish, or any of the thousands of languages spoken around the world unless it's been through the hands of a translator.[228]

Cheesman's argument seems common enough when approaching translation, especially in the English-language world of readers: without translation, many readers would have no access to texts in other languages. Access here becomes more than just access to a story, but to the world of the other. "Translation," she argues, "is a gift to readers—one that allows us to experience a world of stories and perspectives which would otherwise be closed to us."[229] On one hand, she notes an expressed desire to understand that which is foreign and other. But on the other, there is an impetus to deny that otherness. Something too other—too out of reach for even the translator—would not be read, and therefore inaccessible. Access becomes code for consumption, and ease of consumption takes precedent over other concerns. Despite prosaic arguments about translation as a heroically altruistic gesture, neither Han nor Smith's work can be separated from the economic reality of global literature. As long as translation is defined as a humanistic gesture, the production and circulation of translated texts cannot be separated from humanistic notions of assimilation and progress. The value of translation is tied to the perceived value of trade or exchange,

[228] Tara Cheesman to Book Riot, July 28, 2017, 2017, https://bookriot.com/2017/07/28/if-you-love-the-book-do-you-really-care-what-got-lost-in-translation/.

[229] Ibid.

reliant on ideals of equality, and that access to labor and commodities expresses the "freedom" of global participation and economic progress, despite historical differences between the negotiating parties.

The defense of translation, and, in the case of Smith, against the accusation of mistranslation, find justification in the notion of translation as ultimately impossible. If there can be no direct transference of meaning, and if translation always produces something novel, then how can one draw a line between what is accurate and inaccurate, erroneous or intentionally misleading? And who of us are in a position to judge, given that failure of articulation is rooted in language itself? Linguists and language pedagogues often distinguish between error and mistake. Error is made through lack of knowledge of a particular language system and may only be corrected through learning the system. Mistakes, such as slips of tongue, are deviations from accepted structures, despite the speaker's knowledge of such structures. The difference between the two, however, relies on knowledge, and moreover, what the listener presumes is the speaker's position to such knowledge. The written word then presents even further issue when making distinction between error and mistake. If both are based on a presupposed knowledge or lack thereof, then to which knowledge is the circulated text responsible? Potential failure, error, or mistake in a translated text don't just present us with deviation from knowledge, but the disorienting realization that knowledge itself is neither shared nor certain.

In *Treacherous Translations*, Serk-Bae Suh argues that avoidance of exploring such issues of translation is quite possibly grounded in this uncertainty, a "fear of encountering the truly radical difference of the other that resists appropriation." Translation for Suh is more than an issue of language, but an issue of the encounter with

the other and the object. Translation terrifies because it challenges the grounds upon which reality is recognized and represented. He writes:

> . . . the irreparable gap between reality and its representation always poses the question of epistemological violence because, no matter how faithfully that representation corresponds to reality, the two are not identical, and reality is always presented as other than itself through representation.

In in other words, translation, as with all representation, can only be achieved through the appropriation, and can never be identical or equitable to that which it appropriates, whether it be text, reality, or, the other.[230] Perhaps more terrifying then, is how translation presents us not just with the ultimately unknowability of the other or object, but with the unknowability of the self. Translation becomes not only an act of such violence, but an act that confronts us with the everyday violence of our own perception, cognition, and movement through reality. It confronts us with the impossibility of articulation, of knowing the other, and of knowing ourselves.

The defense of Smith's text, based on both the impossibility of translation and the humanistic value of knowledge, progress, and global cosmopolitanism has the unsettling undertone of demanding gratitude from the appropriated other. Faced with viral outcry over the English translation in academic circles, Korean media outlets, and numerous Korean netizen blogs, defense of the translation becomes an implicit accusation of ignorance towards its detractors. In other words, defense here becomes attack in its implication that the other should be grateful for the appropriative gesture and the text's global entry and fame. As with U.S. industry and administrative rhetoric over decrying

[230] Suh, *Treacherous Translation*, 129.

anti-FTA movements as irrational, accepting the circulation of this translation, for consumption by the English-speaking world, becomes a necessity of cultural and economic progress. Not accepting such invitation is not just an attack on the text itself, but on the ways in which language, culture, and labor are circulated within global capitalist frameworks.

In this way, admission of the impossibility of representation does not constitute an ethical absolution from misrepresentation, but rather, given histories of colonial domination, demands an ethical responsibility to the other that recognizes the context of such histories. To represent, to translate, to articulate, means to appropriate the other into the temporal and teleological discourse of history. Suh writes, "History is callous to the invisible sorrow and pain of individuals. However, the invisible that is outside of history manifests itself when those from the past are welcomed as the other, as strangers who summon the self to be ethical."[231] In anti-FTA protests, these histories manifested themselves through symbolic remembrances of imperialism, of suffering at the hands of nations, states, and the seemingly ceaseless train of global economic progress. Remembrance haunts outcry over the asymmetrical industry of global literature.

What then, is the response to such injustices? Suh proposes a Levinasian ethics of encounter through eschatology, which materializes through memory and haunting:

> In remembering what concretely happened in the past, the self is rather being haunted by the memory of the past as a trace, the absolute absence, which establishes the self's relationship with the past as the other and thus enables the

[231] Ibid., 132.

> constitution of the self as the ethical subject. As saying disrupts the said and ethics unsettles politics . . . eschatology thus interrupts and disjoints history . . .[232]

Eschatology then means continual "unsettling," disruption of not just history, but of self, and the self's relation to the other. Impossibility, the impossibility of representation, of translation, of the encounter, then becomes a measure of responsibility to the other and their suffering. Translation, then, offers this encounter, but it can only do so with an ethical engagement of one's responsibility to the other.

Such responsibility disrupts the future-tending logics of capitalism with recognition of the continued presence of the past. The ethics of translation is above all an ethics of disjuncture and engagement with impossibility through remembrance of the past. Inhye's whispers in the ambulance, become a performance of her own rite of remembrance of the impossible future dreamed by the past: "언젠가 우리가 깨어나면, 그때는. . ."[233] It is through such words, the ellipses, and whispers that emerge a time of awakening that welcomes uncertainty beyond knowing. Impossibility becomes a space of possibility, outside circuits of exchange, of consumption, and within liminal sites of remembrance and encounter.

Writing about the tendency of bourgeoisie African intellectuals to "hide" in European languages, separating themselves from the colonial trauma, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o concludes, "But one cannot honor the dead, engage with the living, or create dreams of tomorrow in foreign voices: Those rites can be wrought only in the language

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[232] Ibid., 134.

[233] Han Kang, *Ch'aeshikchuŭija*."When we wake up, that's when . . ."

of loved ones."[234] His assertion points out the ethical responsibility of language and translation to engage with the dead, with trauma, memory, and forgotten lives.

[234] Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Something Torn and New: An African Renaissance*, 64.

CHAPTER THREE

Economies of Vampirism: Transnational Speculation and Labor in Park Chan-wook's *Thirst*

I. Introduction

Released both domestically and internationally in 2009, Park Chan-wook's *Thirst* remains one of the few vampire genre pieces in Korean cinema, despite the ebbs and flows of vampires in popular culture in Japan, the U.S., and Great Britain. Song Kangho, a mainstay of Park's work, plays the role of Sang-hyun, an orphan-turned-priest whose fate shifts dramatically when a medical experiment transforms him into a vampire. His reinvigorated libido draws him to the enigmatic Tae-ju (Kim Ok-bin), also an orphan and the wife of Sang-hyun's childhood friend, Kang-woo (played by Shin Ha-kyun). Their forbidden and unnatural romance drives a melodramatic narrative that dabbles in gothic horror and shifts to a crime thriller as they kill for vengeance, survival, and pleasure. With his signature B-film aesthetic, dark comedy, and graphic representations of blood and violence, Park's film alludes to the vampire trope only to demonstrate the shortcoming of his monsters: without fangs, they resort to tools and medical devices to drink blood, rather than build a fearsome den of bloodthirsty monsters, they live in fear of discovery, until finally, exhausted by their immortality, insatiable desires, and an exponentially rising body count, they expire in coercive suicide pact.

Such generic interventions beg the question as to why this film has emerged from South Korea to join the ranks of arthouse, teen blockbuster, animation, and straight-to-

DVD vampires spanning the first decade of the twenty-first century, from the arthouse sensation *Let the Right One In* (2008) and the seemingly undying *Twilight* franchise (2008-2012), to the adaption of *Blood: The Last Vampire* (2009), and the nostalgia-grab reboot of *The Lost Boys*: *The Tribe* (2008). Despite limited box office success, perhaps due to its restricted distribution, *Thirst* achieved moderate critical acclaim through an extensive international film festival circuit. Just as it joined the ranks of twenty-first century vampirism, the film can also be viewed as joining an ever-increasing field of discourse around transnational cinema.

It is from here I argue that we can look at this film in the context of a larger global anxiety in regards to life, reproduction, and labor. *Thirst*, which depicts vampirism as a postcolonial disease that wreaks moral catastrophe from within a marginalized community, employs both local and global genre, indicating the increasingly transnational position of South Korean arthouse cinema. This transnationalism translates into a criticism of the nation's place in global circulations of labor, positioning vampirism, disease, and the consumption of life as metaphors for the circulation of capital in a neoliberalizing state.

I define transnational cinema as tied to the transnational practices of the neoliberal economy and state. In cinema production, transnational then comes to describe sets of industry and creative practices structured by global flows of capital and labor, and production and consumption. Here, unlike work that addresses the localization of genre tropes and conventions in Korean cinema, I venture an analysis that considers the global and local as mutually constitutive through shared histories of political intervention, patterns of labor migration, and neoliberalism. In this sense, for my work the question is not how generic tropes are localized and adapted, but how the

increasingly transnational flow of capital affects the production and creative landscapes of cinema.

Accordingly, I explore Park's text through the lens of South Korean neoliberalism, structured through biopolitical and transnational flows of labor and speculation. Key to my work, then, is the detailed scholarship of Jeesook Song and Jin-kyung Lee. While the exact period of neoliberalization in South Korea has been debated,[235] I view the process of neoliberalization as a continuum, tied to the postwar capitalist commodification of labor and life that Lee explores in *Service Economies* and establishing itself in the Asian debt crisis of 1997-2001, as Song argues in her book, *South Koreans in the Debt Crisis*. Song views neoliberalization in South Korea as a variation of the liberal economy of 1988-1997 and draws from Foucault's work to position the shift to neoliberalism in the state creation of "deserving" and "undeserving" citizens. This shift occurred through the building of a welfare society that determines which subjects were worthy of employment, education, and aid programs.[236] For Song, such stratification is necessarily based on a biopolitical state. Song writes, "…*governing the population* by promoting 'deserving' subjects concurs with *regulation of the self* through creating a self-governable subject."[237] Such governing, though, is not limited to

[235] Georgy Katsiaficas, for example, has argued that the groundwork for neoliberalism was built during the Park Chung-hee, rather than during the democratization period. This debate draws attention to how governing and policy building functions as a continuum, marked by shifts, contradictions, and crises, rather than distinct breaks and periods. For a lengthier discussion, refer to Katsiaficas' article, "Neoliberalism and the Gwangju Uprising." Katsiaficas, Georgy. Georgy Katsiaficas, "Neoliberalism and the Gwangju Uprising," *Minjujuŭiwa in'gwŏn (Journal of Democracy and Human Rights)* 6, no. 3 (2006).

[236] Song's preface to *South Koreans in the Debt Crisis* offers a cogent analysis of how civilians and the state remodelled the national working subject during the tumult of the debt crisis. See Jesook Song, *South Koreans in the Debt Crisis: The Creation of a Neoliberal Welfare Society*, Asia-Pacific : Culture, Politics, and Society (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), ix-xxii.

[237] Ibid., 12.

Korean subjects, but, as Lee explores in her work, is inherently transnational, as it extends to the lives and labor of migrants, from marriage migrants to sex workers, and those involved in industries from construction to domestic work. Here, the post-debt crisis intensification of the neoliberal welfare society and the self-governing flexible worker gives rise to an increasing dependence on transnational labor.[238]

The effect of financialization on the laboring subject is critical to this discussion. Melinda Cooper, in *Life as Surplus*, connects the capitalist impulse to overcome limits to what she calls the "financialization of life," a process in which living labor is no longer just commodified, but speculated upon in the expectation of future gain.[239] As Song and Lee deal with governance of the working subject under neoliberalism, Cooper offers insight into the global scale in which biological life is defined through speculative processes. Here, the transnational worker is embedded in a process through which their present labor, tied to histories of colonial and postcolonial intervention, is dedicated to a blank, limitless future.

In the first half of this chapter, I discuss how *Thirst* explores themes of speculation and financialization as they relate to the laboring subject under neoliberal governance. At times unwilling, at times voracious and seductive, Park's vampire in this analysis emerges as a figure that navigates the temporality of transnational neoliberalism: irrevocably tied to a colonial past through immortality, the vampire also

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[238] As Lee notes in 2010, "Migrant workers began arriving in South Korea in the late 1980s, and in the past twenty years, except for during the so-called IMF crisis from 1997 to 2000, the number has been steadily increasing." Lee, *Service Economies*, 186. This exponentially increasing dependence on migrant labor, and offshore labor, may be viewed as a result of the transnational neoliberalizing process, which industrial regulation and deregulation, welfare policy, and international trade agreements creates a flexible, cosmopolitan workforce reliant on reproductive immigrant labor.

[239] Cooper, *Life as Surplus*, 10.

has an insatiable thirst for a future without the limitations of biological life. Occupying the temporality of the unhyphenated "post" of "postcolonialism" and "posthumanism," the vampire can only look towards a limitless future that is at once empty and excessive, despite being irrevocably mired in the past conditions that created it.

In *Thirst*, this vampire emerges alongside the marriage migrant worker, a simultaneously mobile and static subject; one, as Lee argues, who is hypervisible through structures of race and gender, and rendered invisible by the state through their exploitation as a source of surplus labor. Lee identifies this invisibility as embedded in what she calls "surrogate labor," a form of labor in which the worker effectively "stands in" for a subject whose labor is more valued or an ideal like masculinity or nation.[240] In this sense, the marriage migrant worker becomes a specter, laboring under the equalizing veil of neoliberal multiculturalism, yet rendered invisible through hierarchical structures of race, gender, and citizenship.[241]

Thus, in the second half of this chapter, I explore the implications of surrogacy and spectrality, examining the slippages that occur through the simultaneous appearance of the spectral migrant worker and the monstrous vampire. Each figure, I venture, occupies different spectrums of the posthuman. On one hand, Park's vampire signals grotesque transformation, the posthuman as a desire to overcome all limits to life and the accumulation of capital. Park's migrant worker, however, reveals the

[240] Ibid., 14.

[241] As I discuss in more detail further in this chapter, Lee, in *Service Economies*, argues that "The state demands that South Korean society embrace multiculturalism for the purpose of managing its diverse laboring population effectively, while disavowing the necessary political and social changes to support the multiethnic population." Lee, *Service Economies*, 189.

limitations of such discourse, demonstrating how posthumanism without a grounding in material history and experience risks furthering oppressive humanistic state structures.

II. Speculation and the Living Dead

In an interview with critic Kevin Canfield, Park Chan-wook says that one of his goals with *Thirst* was to deal with vampirism not in a conventional, "mythical" way, but rather through the "biological."[242] Absent of the usual mythos of garlic, wooden stakes, and silver bullets, vampirism for Park is a biological reality, a disease that profoundly transforms the human body and bends the limits of the biological conception of human life. Such a drive—to expand and transform the biology of the human—opens the narrative of the film, as its protagonist Sang-hyun makes the decision to take part in a medical experiment. An orphan raised in the Catholic church, Sang-hyun is now a priest serving at the church hospital. His ineffectuality at saving lives from both disease and worldly matters drive him to travel to a lab in an unnamed French African country and participate in a study attempting to develop a vaccine for the Emmanuelle Virus, a deadly disease that has already claimed six-hundred lives, all Asian and Caucasian, and mostly missionaries. On a superficial level, his venture has the appearance of an altruistic gesture. However, references to larger political concerns—the postcolonial African state, a fatal disease infecting only white and Asian missionaries—indicate that his decision carries a heavier historical burden of confronting the biology of imperialism. In the context of neoliberal expansion, Sang-hyun's risk-taking rests on a

[242] Kevin Canfield, "A Conversation with Thirst Director Park Chan-Wook," *Village Voice*, July 28 2009.

speculative process in which the possible loss of life is measured against the possibility of not only saving lives through medical advancement but that of transforming the limits of biological life and disease.

The film opens with a medium shot of a white hospital door in the center of a white wall, its shape gradually illuminated by sunlight filtering in through an arched doorway, casting the gray shadows of a tree against the white canvas. The shot encompasses much of the film's gothic aesthetic. The grotesque patterns on the wall, doors, winding corridors, and stairways, their shapes alternately obscured and severely etched through contrasting blue-toned shadows and sunlight imply something dark lurking behind the ornate decor. The mystery of the gothic interior is exposed when Sang-hyun enters through door and walks to a hospital bed to assist a patient. The opening scene establishes the work of this orphan-turned priest as he comforts the ailing man, only to watch him fall into a coma. Next, we find him seated in a dark confessional booth, his face obstructed by the shadows and the patterns of the screen. Here, Sang-hyun instructs a heartbroken nun against suicide, to take cold showers and "forget the bastard" who left her. Indigent, she tells him to stay out of worldly affairs.

Figure 1. The film opens with a medium shot of a hospital door, overlaid the shadow of a tree outside the window.

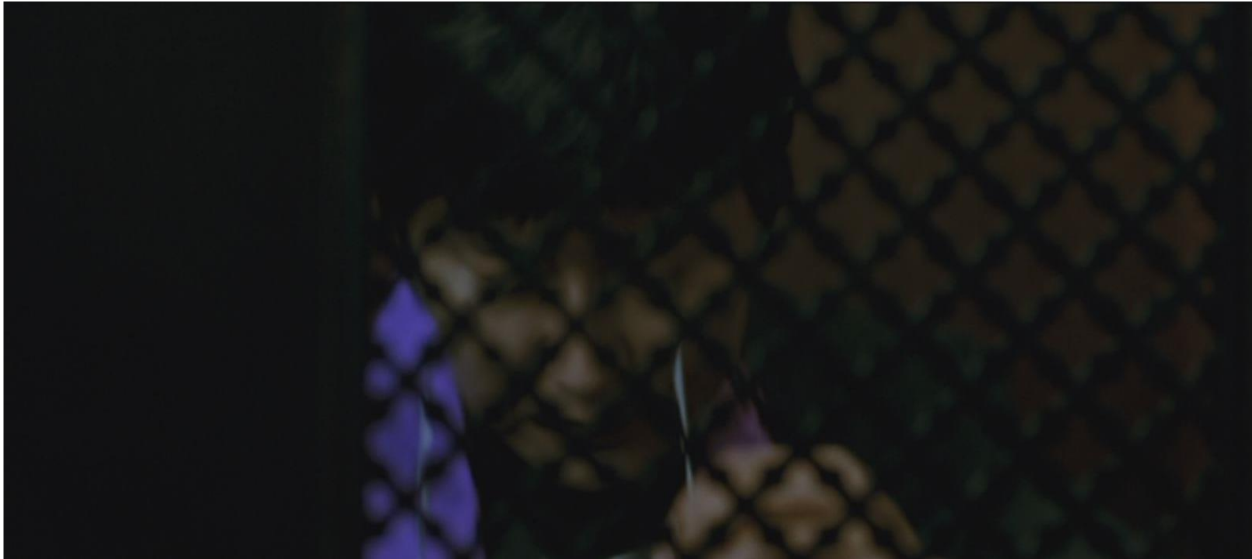

Figure 2. A medium shot of Sang-hyun as he takes confession, his face obscured by the ornate grated window of the confessional. The use of shadow and grotesque and gothic patterning implies entry into a shrouded reality, a reimagining of socialist realist aesthetics in which design becomes ideology, and insight into design is equated with insight into the conditions of labor.

These two interactions lend insight into not only Sang-hyun's motivations, but the nature of his labor in the hospital. The prevalence of shadow, the lack of extra diegetic soundtrack, and the incoherent architecture that makes for a hospital, a church, and living quarters, suggest the invisibility of his work, and the contradictions of his labor as a priest: on one hand, as "Father," he is representative of a symbolic patriarchal order, tasked to supervising the salvation of nuns and parishioners. On the other hand, much of this work tends to be the feminized, affective labor of counseling, performed in the shadows of the confessional booth and behind the closed doors and curtains of the hospital bed. The architecture of the church, as well as the shadows and intricate patterns that the camera must travel through resonate as a narrative of unveiling, a revelation of the reality of labor behind the commodity of salvation. Despite the formality of his priesthood, which positions his work as the productive labor of saving lives and souls, these scenes reveal a material reality in which his labor is affective and

reproductive. His exhaustion from the work stems not only from its repetitiveness, but also the domestic nature of his work, which he devalues as reproductive, and thus lesser than the power granted him by his title as Father. As he tells the head priest: "It kills me to see patients die." Work at the hospital has become exhaustive with no indication of a future. For Sang-hyun, labor is largely a repetitive series of motions, of managing the household that is the church. He yearns for the promise of a future, and the certainty of death that medical experimentation offers him a claim to this future.

After arriving at Emmanuelle laboratories, Sang-hyun is asked to testify on camera that his participation in the experiment is completely voluntary. The scene foregrounds Sang-hyun's image on the camcorder, and then closes onto his face. Turning the camcorder off, the doctor asks him, frankly, what his intentions are, remarking that "Many come here to commit suicide. There is not much difference between martyrdom and suicide." Sang-hyun has no response to this statement, and only reaffirms that his participation is of his own free will. However, the doctor indicates that perhaps "free will" does not belong in the crowded laboratory. Indeed, the colonial references of the location, from the doctor's French accent to the presence of Korean and white missionaries, suggest a circulation of global exchanges that have less to do with free will and more to do with the free market. In other words, despite any aspirations Sang-hyun may have to take on the role of a martyr, his decision to shift positions are ultimately based on the coercive mechanisms of capitalist exchange.

This notion of free will and the free market finds parallel in Ken Kawashima's work in *The Proletarian Gamble* through his discussion of the "will-to-work," and how it functioned in the establishment of capitalism in imperial Japan. Here, Kawashima uses a Marxian and biopolitical framework to explain how capitalism became reliant on

the illusion of the "will-to-work," which he argues developed through the building of a surplus population of proletariat workers whose dependence on wages compelled them to sell their "labor power as commodity in order to live."[243] The "will-to-work," then, veils the coercive structures in which living labor is extracted from workers for the accumulation of capital. Similarly, the notion of free will obscures an ultimate lack of agency within a coercive and compulsory religious structure that promises salvation or damnation,[244] or, as the doctor suggests, the difference between martyrdom and suicide. Sang-hyun's decision demonstrates an internalization of these compulsions, veiled by both capitalist and Catholic rhetoric on agency. His own image on the camcorder thus becomes representative of his living labor, in this case, his biological life, as commodity, alienated from the actual conditions of his work and veiled by the illusion of free will.

The dual images of Sang-hyun also function to ground his actions within global circulations of exchange, the screen image coming to represent not just commodification and alienation, but reliant on what Cooper calls the "transmutation [of biological life] into speculative surplus value."[245] In other words, while Sang-hyun may die during experimentation, the image, recorded for future use, demonstrates that research gathered from the experiment gathers the possibility to produce even after the death of

[243] Ken C. Kawashima, *The Proletarian Gamble: Korean Workers in Interwar Japan*, Asia-Pacific (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 12.

[244] Indeed, the text's focus on missionary work, in addition to Sang-hyun's history as an orphan raised within the church, raises questions about the coercive structures of religion, and, in particular, the historical role of the Catholic church in colonial missionary work.

[245] Cooper's discussion on commodification vs. speculation, and its relation to biological experimentation, through Marx: "Financial capital, Marx points out, may index the singular thing or commodity but is never equivalent to it--trading futures for futures in order to generate surplus, its speculative value can no longer be said to reference any kind of fundamental substance, outside of exchange . . . Marx describes the self-valorizing logic of financial capital as a kind of self-regenerative life, somewhere between the miraculous and monstrous…"Cooper, *Life as Surplus*, 149.

the laboring subject. His labor isn't limited to the experiment itself, but predicated on a hope for future gains that supersede any imagined outcomes. Sang-hyun's contract thus renders his life subject to a form of neoliberal speculation in that it invests in the potential for an unforeseeable yet limitless outcome. As Cooper points out, this form of experimentation, in contrast to organ transplantation, which she analyzes as operating according to Marx's principles of commodity fetishism, " . . . is more interested in capturing life in a state of perpetual *self-transformation*."[246] In this case, the speculation resides not in the potential discovery of vaccination, but in how this discovery lends itself to imaginable and unimaginable gains reliant on the regenerative qualities of a vaccine and subsequent pharmaceutical investments.

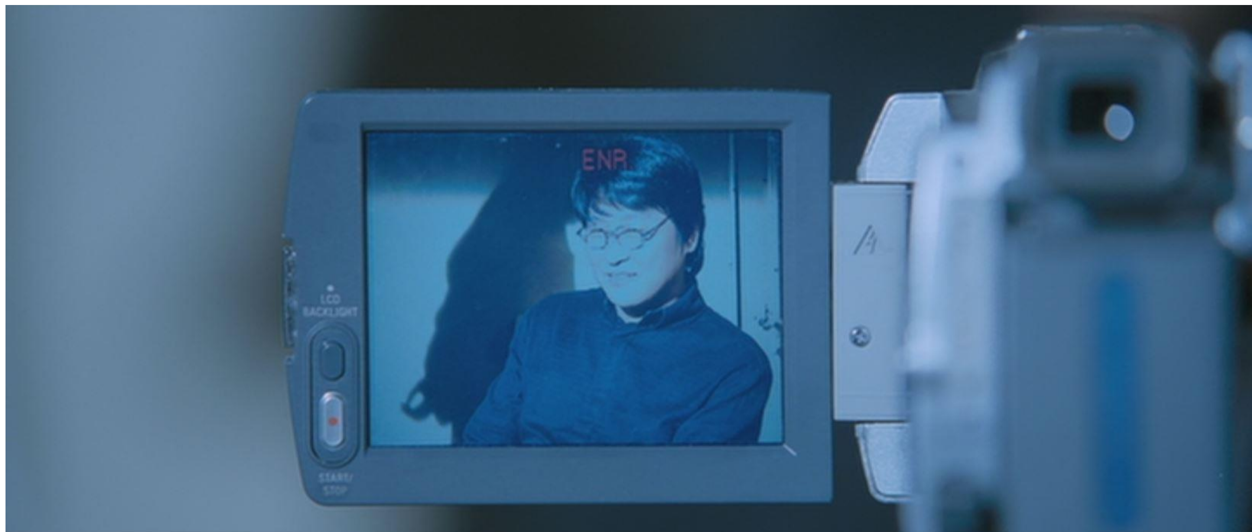

Figure 3. A medium shot of Sang-hyun as he takes confession, his face obscured by the ornate grated window of the confessional. The use of shadow and grotesque and gothic patterning implies entry into a shrouded reality, a reimagining of socialist realist aesthetics in which design becomes ideology, and insight into design is equated with insight into the conditions of labor.

The medical experiment pushes Sang-hyun to the limits and then overcomes them. In a voiceover sequence that is emblematic of Park's sardonic humor, Sang-hyun

[246] Ibid., 126-27.

drafts letters to his parishioners, describing his relaxing vacation at the mission. The camera betrays the reality of the situation, focusing on his bandaged face and blistered skin, his fingernails peeling off as he writes his letters. While his letters indicate promise and futurity, the reality of his situation is a slow death, the complete breakdown of his body. His description of a leisurely holiday only serves to highlight that he has moved from the repetitive labor of the church only to find himself in the labor of the laboratory. Like the intricate shadows of the church, his letters serve only to obscure the physical reality of his labor. He begins coughing up blood, staining his desk, hospital gown, and letters, until we find him surrounded by doctors in a medical bed as they attempt to resuscitate him through a blood transfusion. He flatlines, and the doctors finish their prayers. Then, miraculously, Sang-hyun rises from the dead, gasping for breath.

The Monstrosity of the Miracle

This miraculous recovery, owed to a blood transfusion that has made him a vampire, ties the film's Catholic themes of resurrection and martyrdom to the rhetoric of miraculous capitalist growth and recovery, a narrative which has been applied to the economic growth of postwar South Korea. The "miracle" of South Korea refers to its rapid economic growth after the Cold War, joining the nation with Hong Kong, Singapore, and Taiwan as one of the Four Asian Tigers, and setting it as a role model for economic development. As Seungsook Moon points out, this exponential development was predicated not only through leveraging the Cold War towards nation building, but through a "militarized modernity" which built a gendered workforce in which men served the nation through the productive labor of military, industry, and research, and

women, through the reproductive labor in households or factories.[247] Jin-kyung Lee finds that this development was also reliant on a history of military interventions "in the always already transnational space between the United States, Asia, and South Korea."[248] In other words, the "miracle of the Han River" and South Korean economic development is accounted for by neither national exceptionalism nor the fantasy of an unregulated free market, but by state military intervention both within and outside South Korea. And, just as the narrative of miraculous growth censors the patriarchal and racial violence embedded in military and state intervention, the "miracle" of Sang-hyun's transformation obscures the historical and material reality that has positioned South Korean missionaries alongside whites in the postcolonial African state. Indeed, the anonymity of this nation of suggests a global circulation of humanitarian aid in which "Asians and Caucasian missionaries" are poised to develop racial and economic others. His vampirism is born through an illusion of statelessness, tied to neoliberal, humanist ideology, that has been created through South Korean military and economic interventions, both within the state and abroad.[249]

If Sang-hyun's miracle is premised on histories of state violence, the gendering of this violence and exploitation becomes apparent in Tae-ju's transformation. Now a vampire, Sang-hyun returns to Korea where he gathers a sizable following. His new

[247] Moon, *Militarized Modernity and Gendered Citizenship in South Korea*, 1-14.

[248] Ibid., 2.

[249] In my article, "Framing South Korea and Vietnam's Past and Present in *Muoi: Legend of a Portrait*, I discuss the ways in which South Korean Cold War intervention in Vietnam, on behalf of the U.S., set the foundation for a rhetoric of Vietnam-Korea cooperation, the exploitation of Vietnamese workers, and the Vietnam-Korea Free Trade Agreement. Such interventions are not confined to neither the Cold war nor Asia, and continues today. Jessica Conte, ""Framing South Korea and Vietnam's Past and Present in Muoi: Legend of a Portrait"," in *Korean Screen Cultures: Interrogating Cinema, Tv, Music, and Online Games*, ed. Andrew David Jackson and Colette Balmain(Oxford ; New York: Peter Lang, 2016), 219-38.

fame as a healer and "chosen" one ingratiates him with Madame Ra, the mother of his childhood friend, Kang-woo, as well as Tae-ju, Madame Ra's adopted daughter and Kang-woo's wife.[250] Tae-ju, explains Madame Ra, was abandoned by her parents, who were poor tenants in the Ra house. Madame Ra goes on to describe how she raised the girl like "A puppy, a daughter, and now a daughter-in-law." She says this, seated at the kitchen table with Sang-hyun, her son, and family friends, as Tae-ju serves them liquor and food. Tae-ju's position as domestic laborer, caretaker, and shopkeeper for Ra's business (a *hanbok* shop attached to their home), make clear the family's motivations to take in the orphan. Tae-ju, who cooks, cleans, and is even referred to by Kang-woo as a "hot water bag" to keep him warm when he is sick, interchangeably occupies every position gendered labor for the petit bourgeois family. Here, the theme of incest— Tae-ju's marriage to her adoptive brother— highlights this interchangeability and flexibility: that, as girl and woman, her labor seamlessly transforms from that of household management, to wife, to seamstress and shopkeeper.

The blurred boundaries of feminized labor are manifested in the structure of the home itself. Like the Catholic hospital, the Ra home is a labyrinth of tight corridors and rooms crowded with dizzying patterns and collections of Japanese and Chinese artwork. Interior shots of the home include the ceiling, giving the audience a sense of the house as a structure or institution rather than a home. Since childhood, Tae-ju has been prone to running away at night, and Madame Ra responds by installing an external lock on the door to Tae-ju and Kang-woo's bedroom to lock her daughter in the home at night.

[250] Here, Park adapts from Emile Zola's pyscho-family melodrama, *Therese Raquin*, with Tae-ju as his interpretation as Therese, Madame Ra as Madame Raquin, Kang-woo as Camille, and Sang-hyun as the interloper, Laurent.

Here, the reproductive work of the home for Tae-ju is one of endless surveillance and confinement. She moves from the hanbok shop through the corridors, responding to the calls of her mother and law and husband to fetch, cook, and clean. It is no coincidence, then, that as soon as she gains vampiric powers, Tae-ju demands that the home be painted completely white, and installed with bright fluorescent lights to keep out the darkness, a decision that makes the home terrifyingly stark and otherworldly.

Figure 4. The upper floor of the Ra household.

Figure 5. After taking control of the house, Tae-ju paints the upper floor completely white. A house once filled with suffocating layers of history and labor becomes dehistoricized, no longer a home of humans, but the home of an emptied present and future.

Yet, despite her desire to transform, a desire that seems so connected to her inescapable class and gender position, Sang-hyun refuses to transform Tae-ju, or even aid her. That is, until he sees the scarring on her inner thighs. Although these wounds are self-inflicted, Tae-ju allows Sang-hyun to believe that they are the doing of Kang-woo. And, in a way, aren't the scars covering her legs, a symptom of her imprisonment? The invisibility of Tae-ju's labor and exploitation have become so invisible that physical violence and self-harm becomes the only way for her to draw attention to her situation. Sang-hyun is enraged, and together they plot to kill her husband. The two lovers drown Kang-woo on a midnight fishing trip. Shocked by her son's death, Madame Ra has a stroke and is paralyzed, leaving Sang-hyun and Tae-ju run of the household

However, Tae-ju grows increasingly frustrated by this arrangement, as she finds it's not too different from the previous one. As with her former life, she must keep up the reproductive labor of the household, cooking, cleaning, and, now, caring for her catatonic mother-in-law, all while making herself available to Sang-hyun's sexual desire. One night, Tae-ju criticizes Sang-hyun's new patriarchal attitude, asking "Who made you the boss? Telling me what to do, and even hitting me. Kang-woo never hit me." Sang-hyun flies into a rage, angry that Tae-ju had lied to him about her husband's abuse (however, as Tae-ju points out, it seems that Sang-hyun was all-too ready to kill Kangwoo in order to have her "for himself). In this scene, quite a testament to Kim Ok-bin's skills as an actor, Tae-ju lashes back, giving a schizophrenic rendering of her tropic roles as femme fatale, sensual lover, innocent orphan, and subservient wife and daughter-in-law. She alternates between fury towards her lover, and then, taking on an exaggerated high-pitched and submissive tone, pleads with Madame Ra to save her. This brief "breakdown" indicates that whether victim or perpetrator, Tae-ju's domestic role

has remained the same. Furious, Sang-hyun strangles her, crushing her neck. It is here that the family psychodrama now turns to the domestic horror of misogynist violence. Tae-ju crumples to the floor, blood running from her mouth and down her neck. Sang-hyun rushes to the floor, not to save her, but to drink her blood, and as he does this he begins to comprehend her death. He cuts his wrist, dribbling his own blood into her gaping mouth. Tae-ju is revived, and immediately begins sucking at his wrist, and scene closes with the two vampire lovers entwined, feeding off each other.

Figure 6. Shattered glass, an ominous stairway, overturned plant, and bloodied floor indicate the danger of the domestic sphere and depict the aftermath of domestic violence. Sang-hyun is centered in the shot, preying on Tae-ju's limp body.

The horror genre has often served as a moralizing one in which women are disciplined for sexual desire, vanity, brazen curiosity, or, as we see in *Thirst*, daring to challenge their material conditions and social standing. Similarly, here, Tae-ju's aspirations are met by violence that stems neither from Sang-hyun's thirst for blood nor his heightened senses, but as a response her challenge of his patriarchal control. His rage is that of the jealous husband, the cuckold, even the father, who uses violence and

other disciplinary measures to ensure ownership and exploitation of women's domestic and affective labor. While transformations are often violent, Tae-ju's transformation into vampire references a particular history of violence and discipline against women. Becoming vampire, here, does not mean escaping this history, but rather indicates that such a miraculous transformation is predicated on gender violence and exploitation. The fantasy of miraculous economic growth, as with the miracle of transformation, is revealed as a monstrosity that is dependent on the violent discipline and exploitation of women in service of the late-capitalist state.

Vampires from Within

Park's narrative of the vampire as miracle, monster, and domestic contagion bring to light (or darkness) the significance of his neoliberal revival of the undead. Much like the "Mr. Monster" of *Oldboy* (2003), who arises from the disciplinary mechanisms of a surveillance state, Park's vampires emerge from within the mechanisms of the church, the state, and the heteronormative, patriarchal family. The grotesque renderings of these spaces, from the cavernous hospital housing a self-serving head priest, to the haunted, incestuous Ra family home, suggest a fundamental willingness to host monstrosity. Despite being contagions, vampires are invited, even welcomed into the church and home, promising an unknown future beyond their hosts' limitations.

Mark Driscoll identifies a similar trend in the vampire genre in imperial Japan. Looking at the rise in popularity of vampire fiction, he remarks, " . . . the vampire in Japan is very different from what I've called the 'invader from without' mode popular in Europe and the U.S. [. . .] Totally othered as the Jew, queer, or monstrous infrahuman in Bram Stoker's novel and European films such as *Nosferatu* (1922), the vampire in

Japanese mass culture is a seductive humanoid creature who arises immanently from within metropolitan capitalism."[251] For Driscoll, this vampire represents the biopolitical capitalist state's capturing of living labor and desire, a process which he calls the grotesquing of the erotic. The vampire thus becomes a figure of capitalist ideology, erotically seductive, and totalizing in its capture of biological life.[252] Nina Auerbach, in *Our Vampires, Ourselves*, points to a similar emergence of monstrosity in 1980s and 1990s in Anglo American and British vampire texts, in which vampires emerge from within fatherless households and alleyways as both victims and perpetrators in the wars on drugs, AIDS, and urban crime.[253] In both analyses, vampires arise from, feed on, and spread ideology, whether it be through the seduction of commodity capitalism[254] through state control of subjectivity or the failing social net and disciplinary mechanisms under Reaganomics.[255]

In Park's work, I argue that vampires make their home in the space of neoliberal transnationalism. While they may emerge from the mechanisms of a localized state, these mechanisms have become increasingly transnational in scale. Vampirism traces

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[251] Mark Driscoll, *Absolute Erotic, Absolute Grotesque: The Living, Dead, and Undead in Japan's Imperialism, 1895-1945*(Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 205.

[252] "As the most crystalline version of the neuropolitical invasion of human interiority by the real subsumption of capitalism, the vampire is the most terrifying totalization of the dialectic of erotic and grotesque. With the arrival of the vampire, neuropolitics sprouts fangs." Ibid., 203. Here, Driscoll points out that the monstrosity of vampirism now emerges from within the home, from within the family, and from within the subject position of the proletariat, as a particular response to the imposition of capitalist ideology in imperial Japan.

[253] Nina Auerbach, *Our Vampires, Ourselves*(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 165-68.

[254] In his reading of Sunaga Asahiko, and his reading of the eroticism of the vampire genre, Driscoll finds that "Sunaga locates this eroticism both in the consumer's mascohistic desire to be engorged by this kind of image commodity and in a vampire image that constantly seduces." Driscoll, *Absolute Erotic, Absolute Grotesque*, 203.

[255] See Auerbach's chapter, "Grave and Gay: Reagan's Years," in which she traces themes in vampire texts to the Reagan administration's increasing obsession with and hostility towards gay, lesbian, low-income, and drug-inflicted communities. Auerbach, *Our Vampires, Ourselves*, 167-77

these global flows of capital, a virus that, like those which arise from industrial farming and trade, quickly spreads through circuits of the global and local. Like the miracle of South Korea's postwar economic recovery, the miracle of Sang-hyun's transformation is predicated on global flows of capital and military intervention and the simultaneous exploitation of local, gendered labor. Here, the miracle not becomes monstrous not only in the violence of transformation and growth, but in how the growth of capital occurs at such rapid pace that it becomes incomprehensible through the temporality of labor. The thirst for blood, for resources, and for living labor, becomes insatiable and unsustainable, a thirst that has already exceeded its limits, and yet continues at a catastrophic rate.

It is here that we find parallel to the incredible sense of urgency in Cooper's work, the sense of imminent threat to a present and future that have far exceeded their limits. Cooper writes:

> The promise of capital in its present form—which after all is still irresistibly tied to oil—now so far outweighs the earth's geological reserves that we are already living on borrowed time, beyond the limits. U.S. debt imperialism is currently reproducing itself with an utter obliviousness to the imminent depletion of oil reserves. Fueling this apparently precarious situation is the delirium of the debt form, which in effect enables capital to reproduce itself in a realm of pure promise, in excess of the earth's actual limits, at least for a while. . . In the sense that the debt can never be redeemed once and for all and must be perpetually renewed, it reduces the inhabitable present to a bare minimum, a point of bifurcation, strung

> out between a future that is about to be and a past that will have been. It thus confronts the present as the ultimate limit, to be deflected at all costs.[256]

The decadence and excess of unlimited transformation for Cooper threaten the environment and its biological limits through delirious reliance on a speculative, debt-based economy. However, what is at stake is not only the environment itself, but those who labor in it, as biopolitics shifts from commodifying the lives of workers to financializing them. The debt form for Cooper is not only the "speculative moment" but "deeply materialist" in that it seeks to materialize its promise in the production of matter, forces, and things."[257] The "bare minimum" comes to define the lives of laborers, surplus populations "strung" between temporalities of excess. Labor and biological life, caught in the speculative economy become perverted, transformed by the machinery of production. From this delirium arises Park's vampires, a grotesque creation of biological speculation, built on histories of colonialism and imperialism, "in the always already transnational space between the United States, Asia, and South Korea."[258] These vampires embody Cooper's urgency, a perverse shifting of temporality that twists their immortality into a minimalist present, and anxious site of waiting in a material world that has created them but has not yet appropriated them.

III. Ghosts in an Economy of Vampirism

Above, I've analyzed the ways in which Park's vampires operate within and alongside the

[256] Cooper, *Life as Surplus*, 31.

[257] Ibid.

[258] Lee, *Service Economies*, 2.

expansion of transnational neoliberal governing, a form of global governance that moves beyond the commodification of life towards its financialization. If we are to view neoliberal governing as carrying an implicit ideology that celebrates the overcoming and erasure of limits, the particular gendered violence in *Thirst* reminds us that the erasure of some limits and borders is predicated on the strengthening of others. In the previous section, of this chapter, I addressed how the film's use of vampirism and disease opens up discussion of the speculative economy. In the following section, I analyze how *Thirst* gives shape to the material consequences of a transnational, neoliberal economy, especially in relation to feminized labor. Key to this discussion, then, is how neoliberal governance shapes global and local labor practices, and South Korea's increasing reliance on migrant labor.

Cooper reminds us of the gendered impact of neoliberal governance with a discussion of the feminized labor market, highlighting the material effects of the neoliberal, debt-based economy on the lived reality of workers, and in particular, the feminized labor of surrogacy and embryonic research. Focusing on the expansion of the global egg market, she finds that this form of labor, which tends to cross both national borders and the "boundaries between actual biomedical, reproductive labor on the one hand and sexual and domestic labor on the other," is becoming increasingly transnational in scope. She continues,

> what is increasingly visible in the realm of reproductive spheres is a progressive privatization and denationalization of feminized, maternal labor . . . [I]t could be argued that neoliberal biopolitics abandons the ideal of reproductive labor and the family wage as a national biological reserve—a compulsory 'gift' of life in the service of the nation—and transfers its promise into a speculative future, where the

> technological capabilities of the biotech revolution are credited with overcoming all limits to growth in the present.[259]

For Cooper, the transnationalization of reproductive labor signifies a shift in which the labors of reproduction, household management, and childcare, once seen as compulsorily domestic (both within the home and in the nation), has, under a neoliberal global economic system, been transferred beyond national borders. Implicit here is that the fantasy of neoliberalism—which imagines the overcoming of national borders and increased mobility through a free market—relies on a system the exploits migrant workers as their labor crosses borders. Domestic labor, often positioned as reproductive work in service of nation building, is no longer performed by national subjects, but a surplus population of flexible workers.

The issue that arises in this formation is the invisibility of reproductive labor, and indeed, the very bifurcation of labor as either reproductive or productive. Such categorization relies on the historical marginalization of feminine workers and their labor. Seungsook Moon finds that in South Korea, the domestic labor of modern nation building has produced an economically marginalized feminine labor force. For Moon, such marginalization can be traced to the South Korean state's modernization projects of the 1970s and 1980s. She argues that while men were mobilized towards the building of a militarized, modern, nation-state through compulsory military service and industries serving military development, women were enlisted to serve the masculine nation through domestic labor. Moon finds that this contributed to "women's economic marginalization in manufacturing industries," as they were

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[259] Cooper, *Life as Surplus*, 150.

> mobilized to control their fertility and manage their households 'rationally' so they could contribute to the building of the modern industrial economy . . . women's membership in the modern nation being built hinged on their role as reproducers despite their significant contribution to the economy as producers.[260]

Significant, here, then, is how feminine labor is ultimately considered reproductive, rather than productive, a narrative that has persisted in popular rhetoric of within the South Korean nation. However, as Cooper points out in her analysis of reproductive labor in global egg markets—which she sees as overlapping with domestic and sex work—feminized labor has become increasingly transnational as workers immigrate or sell their labor outside their national boundaries. Jin-kyung Lee draws attention in the trend in South Korea, discussing increasing numbers of marriage migrants, or women who immigrate from other Asian countries, most commonly, China, Vietnam, the Philippines, Mongolia, and Thailand, to marry men in rural areas. Lee argues that in the past decades, marriage migrants have come to occupy a significant place in migrant labor issues, as they face gender and racial discrimination both in the home and their workplaces.[261] If Cooper questions what shifts occur when a historically nationalized body of labor becomes transnational, Lee underscores the particularity of South Korea, finding that nationalist categorization persists through disavowing the experience of women migrant workers.

Critical here is Lee's conceptualization of migrant work through what she calls "surrogate labor," a form of labor in which a worker acts as a "surrogate" for an ideal,

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[260] Moon, *Militarized Modernity and Gendered Citizenship in South Korea*, 69.

[261] Lee, *Service Economies*, 227.

such as the nation, or a national worker. In the case of domestic work, this is exemplified in the use of migrant workers to take on household management, child rearing, and other forms of reproductive labor, such as marriage. She argues that surrogate labor

> operates by the paradox of simultaneous sameness or equivalence and difference or hierarchy of race, class, and gender. If abstract equality renders the substitutability of labor possible, the unfree and unequal conditions of race or nationality, class and gender are articulated as the proletarianization of sexuality and race.[262]

In other words, fundamental to surrogate labor is the historical construction of race, nationality, gender, and class, which devalues the labor of certain groups. For Lee, this devaluation is made possible by not only these historical formations, but a continued disavowal of migrant workers' material reality that forms their institutional and cultural invisibility. She writes, "While the South Korean state is actively involved in bringing in migrant labor, the state's production of migrant workers' political invisibility, economic disposability, and social segregation renders migrant workers and their labor clandestine."[263]

Park explicitly explores issues of migrant work, discrimination, language, and invisibility in "Mitkŏna malgŏna ch'andŭrassiŭi kyŏngu," released under the English title of "Never Ending Peace and Love (NEPAL)," a short film that was included in the 2004 anthology, *Yŏsŏtkaeŭi shisŏn* (*If You Were Me*), and funded by the National

[262] Ibid., 14.

[263] Ibid., 187.

Human Rights Commission.[264] Yet, despite focusing on labor, class, and violence, his feature length work tends to shy from an explicit address of these issues. *Thirst*, however, stands out in among his feature length films his only to include a racialized ethnic minority, at a time when such portrayals have become, if not commonplace, more common in Korean cinema. In *Thirst*, this is done through the portrayal of Evelyn, a Filipina marriage migrant who is positioned on the periphery of the Ra family. Played by the notable Filipina actress, Mercedes Cabral, Evelyn's character plays an innocent and often silent bystander to the Ra family's melodrama and Tae-ju and Sang-hyun's violence.

Here, Park's portrayal of Evelyn, as marriage migrant, expresses itself through a motif of doubling. Like many of his films, *Thirst* is rife with doubles and (un)familiar crossings, grotesque renderings of family structures that hint at incest and perversions of power and authority. For example, Father Noh, an older Priest who has cared for Sang-hyun since he was an orphaned child, acts as both Father of the church and of Sang-hyun. Similarly, Madame Ra serves both as mother and mother-in-law for Tae-ju, while Tae-ju, in her domestic role, is both sister, wife, and maternal figure to Kang-woo. Sang-hyun, for his part, crosses the boundaries of father, son, brother, lover, and finally, household patriarch, through his rise to power in the church and household as healer, confidant, and vampire.

Evelyn, however, doubles in another sense, playing an outsider who requires constant invitation into the vampiric household. Her role is contractual; as marriage migrant, she is contracted as domestic labor to her husband. At the same time, her

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[264] Park Chan-wook, "Mitkŏna malgŏna Ch'andŭrassiŭi kyŏngu (Never Ending Peace and Love),"(Wision, 2004).

inability to speak Korean makes her role one of dependence and liminality. Unlike Park's vampires, who are embedded within the family structure, Evelyn's role is that of a precarious other. She is spectral in her silence, yet hyper-visible through her racial and linguistic difference. The result is a figure who is both essential to internal workings of the household and the plot, yet expendable through the devaluation of her labor, both on and off-screen. Here, using Lee's work on surrogacy, I argue that this character's spectrality lends itself to an ethical questioning of the invisibility of labor, and in particular, labor that has been characterized as reproductive. I suggest that Evelyn's difference, silence, immobility, present on screen through Cabral's own transnational labor, comprise an anxious haunting initiated by transnational circulations of labor and capital. Such haunting gives rise to an ethical potential through the anti-human, the spectral, and the monstrosity of difference.

The Surrogate and the Supplement

The connection between vampirism, capitalism, and spectrality is one that has been focused on by scholars across cultural studies, Marxian criticism, film, and labor. David McNally, in *Monsters of the Market: Zombies, Vampires, and Global Capitalism*, identifies in Karl Marx's *Capital,* a particular strain of horror that arises through the doubling effect of alienation. Of Marx, McNally writes,

> Capitalism, he argues, comprises a society in which commodities announce their value in and through something else (units of money); the particular value of a commodity is thus referred to 'by the name of another'. In this metaphorical structure of substitutions, where one thing (money) stands in for another (a specific commodity), there lies a social universe of alienation and exploitation.

> Indeed, there is an element of Gothic horror in these displacements, involving as they do a doubling process in which the truth of one thing or agent can only be arrived at through another which stands in opposition to it . . .[265]

For McNally, the horror of capital, located in its particular form of alienation, arises in the continued and repetitive cultural production of monsters. McNally finds that such monsters emerge not only through the cultural imaginary, but also through the denial of the material experience of colonial genocide and labor extraction. While for the colonized, the vampire represents those who extract and abstract labor, for the ruling classes, the monstrous becomes a displaced double for the self, a projection of violence and primitivism onto the colonized other.[266] As with Lee's framework, there is a continual erasure of difference through the abstraction of labor. The violence of such abstraction is then displaced onto the laboring subject, and, in the case of the surrogate migrant worker, hyper-visualized as racial and cultural difference.

We are first introduced to Evelyn through her husband Young-du (Oh Dal-soo), who has been invited to the Ra household for one of their regular games of mahjong. This particular session is celebratory due to the presence of Sang-hyun, now famous for his miraculous healing abilities. Upon meeting the famed priest, Young-du introduces himself, and then his wife Evelyn, stating, "She's Filipina, so she's Catholic," then

[265] David McNally, *Monsters of the Market: Zombies, Vampires, and Global Capitalism*, Historical Materialism Book Series (Leiden, The Netherlands ; Boston: Brill, 2011), 120.

[266] For McNally, this displacement is apparent in colonial Europe's obsession with the "primitive" fetish, a particular type of displacement that is discussed by Marx. McNally explains, "Rather than the rationalists they proclaim themselves to be, urged Marx, Europe's rulers in fact idolise things. Worse, in their plundering mania for things, like gold and silver, their fetishism takes on murderous proportions. Much of the critical charge of this argument derives from its strategy of reversal, revealing the 'primitivism' attributed to Africans as a projection of European attitudes and behaviours." Ibid., 127.

instructing her, “Say hello, Evelyn.” Evelyn, upon meeting Sang-hyun, takes his hand and kisses it, fitting with the Catholic tradition of greeting a priest. The others squeal with surprise at the intimate expression of fidelity.

Figure 7. Evelyn’s introduction to Sang-hyun immediately highlights her cultural difference as the party expresses surprise and amusement when she bends to kiss his hand in greeting.

In this scene, the introduction of Evelyn functions to simultaneously highlight her ethnic and racial difference while at the same time erasing it through the historically colonial imposition of religion. “She’s Filipina, so she’s Catholic,” announces both her difference through nationality while attempting the resolve this difference through shared religious practice. Her fidelity to this practice, however, through an act that appears far too intimate to the household, raises surprise and further underscores her racial and cultural difference.

Following this scene, it becomes apparent that Evelyn’s role as a guest is dependent on her domestic work. After greeting Tae-ju with excitement, she begins setting the table for the mahjong game, serving the men and M. Ra glasses of vodka. Her

character is now situated in the background, where she remains for the rest of the scene. The camera turns to the mahjong table, where, after some time of drinking, the players are discussing Kang-woo's recovery at the hands of Sang-hyun. Drunk on vodka, Madame Ra describes her experience of Sang-hyun's miraculous healing abilities. To her left, in the background, on the floor, sits Evelyn, slicing kimbap, her image partially obscured by Kang-woo's back. As Madame Ra speaks, the camera circles the table, and Tae-ju is revealed to be sitting on the ground beside Evelyn, rolling kimbap. Obscured by the figures at the table, where the camera is focused, the two women are never figured in the same shot.

The camera angle elongates the once cramped kitchen, creating a great sense of distance between the two women on the floor and the mahjong players, who are all men except for Madame Ra. Attentive to their work, Tae-ju and Evelyn appear to be on a factory line, one rolling rice and sheets of laver on one end, the other mechanically slicing on the other. As Madame Ra slurs her words describing the grand miracle that cured her son of his multitude of illnesses, it becomes clear that perhaps this cure is predicated on the domestic labor of the two women in the background, who cook, clean, and attend to their husbands.

Figure 8. Evelyn, seated on the floor, in the background, slicing kimbap as Madame Ra dramatically recounts her son's "miraculous" recovery.

As if to underscore this, in the following scene, Madame Ra demands that Tae-ju get up and fetch her son a hot water bag to keep him warm. As Tae-ju prepares the bag, Kang-woo grabs her by the waist and pulls her into his lap, announcing that he prefers her body to a hot water bag. Tae-ju falls down, eliciting laughter from Madame Ra. The concerned look on Sang-hyun's face demonstrates his recognition of the desperation of Tae-ju's domestic life, a life of waiting on Madame Ra and her sickly husband and brother. The two women, while positioned together in the background, are now separated by a close-up that turns from Tae-ju, on the ground, and Sang-hyun's concerned expression as he offers her his hand.

The continued separation of Evelyn and Tae-ju in these sequences elicits a peculiar doubling between the two women. Similar in age, both married in order to serve the domestic and affective needs of their households, they are presented as occupying the same factory line of work, the setting of tables, preparing and fetching food and drink, and attending to their husbands. However, in this sequence, Evelyn is in

effectively left behind by the narrative and camera. The result is an uncanny false equivalence between the two women; while they are positioned as sharing the same laboring conditions, the visual and story narrative indicate a stark divergence in their positions that relegates Evelyn to the shadows, a ghostly figure pushed to the background of the household. The scene ushers a trend in the story in which Evelyn's character intersects at critical moments in the plot, as if to haunt the two vampire protagonists.

Figure 9. Evelyn hovers in the background, shadowing Madame Ra, as the mahjong players, some laughing, peer down at Tae-ju, who has fallen on the floor.

It is in this haunting that Jin-kyung Lee's work on surrogacy resonates strongly with Jacques Derrida's work on the supplement. For Derrida, the supplement doesn't merely replace, but simultaneously adds to and replaces the absence of a presence. In doing so, that which is replaced is revealed in its absence. The process isn't the smooth, homogenous circle of economy, but rather exposes a heterogeneous slippage. In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida explains,

But the supplement supplements. It adds only to replace. It intervenes or

> insinuates itself *in-the-place* of; if it fills, it is as if one fills a void. [. . .] As substitute, it is not simply added to the positivity of a presence, it produces no relief, its place is assigned in the structure by the mark of an emptiness. *Somewhere, something can be filled up of* itself*, can accomplish itself, only by allowing itself to be filled through sign and proxy.* [267]

Like the surrogate laborer, then, the supplement fills the void of the presence of a certain subject. For example, a domestic laborer fills the void of a parent, so that the parent may work outside of the home. The supplement, however, extends past that of the surrogate in that the supplement always initiates the menace of absence. Derrida writes, "The supplement has not only the power of *procuring* an absent presence through its image; procuring it for us through the proxy [*procuration*] of the sign, it holds it at a distance and masters it. For this presence is at the same time desired and feared."[268] In other words, the supplement cannot help but invoke the missing presence of what it is meant to substitute.

In the case of the migrant worker, this invocation is produced through racialization, the effect of which is the racial visibility of the worker that corresponds to her invisibility as a laboring subject. The result is a figure who is simultaneously ignored and acknowledged, a source of anxiety in their invocation not only of racial difference, but also in how such invocation reveals absence. For the migrant domestic worker, this absence is exacerbated through the invisibility of the original referent (wife and

[267] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Corrected ed.(Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 151. Italics my own.

[268] Ibid., 155.

laborer), who, categorized as reproductive, is often seen as ultimately unproductive, their labor erased through misogynist renderings of feminine submissiveness and filial duty. The surrogate laborer becomes spectral through structural categorizations of not only labor, but also gender and race. In this way, Evelyn's presence as a double and potential supplement of Tae-ju harbors the question of how the migrant worker, both seen and unseen, equivalent yet different, is positioned as background to the monstrous miracle of neoliberal growth.

The Language of Looking

The vampirical neoliberal and transnational economy cannot help but open up questions of spectrality. Derrida, in *Specters of Marx*, finds attached to the commodity an inherent spectrality, not only in how the commodity seems to animate itself once it is on the market, but also in how once this happens, the producer becomes a ghost. He writes, "How do you recognize a ghost? By the fact that it does not recognize itself in a mirror. Now that is what happens with the *commerce* of the commodities *among themselves*. These ghosts that are commodities transforms human producers into ghosts."[269] Here, the alienation of workers from their labor, and the inability to see the human labor power within the commodity, renders the producer a ghost. Commodities are thus by necessity haunted; once they enter the circuit of exchange, their producers become specters. In his later work, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, Derrida equates the specter not only with the laborer, but the non-human animal, that which is left

[269] *Specters of Marx : The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, 156.

behind in capitalist circuits of exchange.[270] Never addressed, such the non-human specter nevertheless demands accountability, a responsibility that he traces to the gaze, an ethical demand that forces a subject to recognize the subjecthood of the other. Looking at the other, or meeting the gaze of the other, forces one to consider their relation to the other, and, in particular, the power dynamic underlying this relation.[271] However, as Park's film shows, this responsibility can, and often is, denied. Seeing, and gazing, while opening the subject to the impossibility of engagement, can also close off encounters, artificially smoothing exploitative and uneven circuits of exchange.

In a later scene at the mahjong table, the issue of the gaze is addressed by Young-du in a way which highlights the violent ignorance of looking without recognizing. After a period of mourning the death of Kang-woo, Sang-hyun and Tae-ju invite the others over for a game of mahjong in an effort to normalize their relationship. In this scene, now matriarch of the household, Tae-ju is seated at the mahjong table with the men, and a paralyzed Madame Ra. Young-du is begins describing a theory that he has about the eyes and communication. As they talk and play mahjong, Evelyn is in the background, preparing food and drinks for the table. Young-du explains, "The eyes are everything. They can express everything between yes and no." After the others poke fun at his theory, Young-du furthers his theory, nodding towards Evelyn as evidence, that he's "an expert at eyes after two years of marriage. That's why her Korean hasn't improved."

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[270] *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 25-26. In my first chapter draw the parallel between Derrida's concept of spectrality and the non-human animal. Central to this is discussion is Derrida's work on the relation between industrial capitalism and the acceleration of the consumption of non-human animals in the last two hundred years. Derrida, Jacques.

[271] In the first chapter, I discuss the role of sight in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, explaining that "Seeing for Derrida is thus a process of ethically engaging with our position as subjects to that of the other who also demands subjecthood. The demand for responsibility that stems from this gaze, links to his concepts of spectrality: How can we, as individuals, gazing upon the other as we are aware of the other's gaze, ethically consider what is rendered invisible through our modes of exchange and seeing?"

Figure 10. Young-du, looking towards Evelyn, “I’m an expert at eyes after two years of marriage.

Figure 11. The camera pans around the players’ feet under the table, as they tap, cross, and uncross their feet, indicating unspoken and unreadable anxieties, desires, and knowledge.

As with much of the story, this dialogue is presented with contradictory visuals: the tapping of feet under the table, knowing glances between Sang-hyun and Tae-ju, that indicate that Young-du is playing the fool; that he cannot, in fact, understand the subtext of the relationships around him, that his communication is only at the surface level. Evelyn’s gaze becomes tied to her husband’s gaze, and his arrogant assumption that he can tell what she is thinking merely by looking at her eyes. Tied to her husband’s

gaze, Evelyn becomes the greater fool to his ignorance. Relegated to the background, she can only react to his motions, her invisibility pronounced by her inability to speak Korean. For Young-du, the gaze does not initiate responsibility, but instead functions as a method of displacement in which his own desires are projected into eyes of the laboring other. This displacement and doubling renders the worker an affective vehicle; denied of political or social agency, she is not encountered, but functions as a placeholder to reflect and reaffirm her employer's desires.

Evelyn's inability to understand or speak Korean is highlighted in an earlier scene in which Tae-ju is hospitalized after killing Kang-woo. Standing on the side of Tae-ju's bed, Evelyn implores Sang-hyun, the miracle worker, to pray for her, insisting, in English, "She's my only friend. I know she'll get better if you pray for her. Please." As she pleads, the camera closes in on her teary face, and Sang-hyun bows his head. Adopting the cadence of a prayer, he instructs Tae-ju, in Korean, on what to tell the police, and how they must keep their distance to suppress any suspicion regarding their role in Kang-woo's death. Evelyn bows her head in prayer, oblivious to the communication in front of her.

The scene recalls several others in which Sang-hyun and Tae-ju manage their affair through coded double entendre, expressing their desire secretly while always in the company of others. Kyung Hyun Kim notes that the doubling and displacement of language has become a hallmark of Park's films, creating virtual worlds in which dialogue is more often used to obfuscate rather than communicate. In reading of Park's *Oldboy* (2003), Kim writes:

> One of the most intriguing points of *Oldboy* is that linguistic communication almost always falls outside the sphere of rational dialogue. Verbal miscues,

> infelicitous remarks, and gaps between signifiers and signified not only produce misunderstandings between two individuals but also help create a world that is "beyond knowable."[272]

For Kim, linguistic miscues, layered with performative gestures, renders Park's violent worlds ultimately unknowable, virtual spaces in which meaning and moral resolution are denied. Regarding Park's *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance* (2002), Kim writes that its

> creative use of subtitles and intertitles, which feature characters other than Ryu speaking aloud while using sign language to Ryu, help the audience to understand the narrative. However, such performative use of bodily gestures and linguistic images complicate the communicative channels of language.[273]

In other words, while gesture and performance serve to communicate narrative discursively, this communication is predicated on the confusion that stems from the very apparent limitations of language in the plot.

However, in *Thirst*, this miscommunication is predicated not only on the obfuscating language of the gesture of prayer, such as the sign of the cross, clasping of hands, bowing of the head, and rhythmic utterance, but on the divide between two languages. Unable to understand the words Sang-hyun is speaking, Evelyn is left outside the plot and dialogue. Positioned next to her "only friend," Evelyn becomes a signifier for the unknowable, a ghostly presence that interrupts the two protagonists. Her gaze, directed towards Sang-hyun and the audience through a close up elicits not a call to responsibility, but a radical denial of the encounter.

[272] Kyung Hyun Kim, *Virtual Hallyu: Korean Cinema of the Global Era*(Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 185.

[273] Ibid., 195.

"The Case of Chandra" and the Voice of Language

This form of institutional and interpersonal voicelessness becomes even more sinister when taking into account Park's 2003 short film, "Mitkŏna malgŏna ch'andŭrassiŭi kyŏngu." While the Korean title translates into "Believe it or Not, the Case of Chandra," its English-language title is "Never-Ending Peace and Love (NEPAL)." The film is based on the case of Chandra Kumari Gurung, a Gurung Nepalese woman in her late thirties who immigrated to Korea to work in a factory in 1992. One year later, she was arrested when she was unable to pay for a meal in a local restaurant. Unable to identify her or recognize her language, the police sent her to a psychiatric hospital where doctors and staff assumed she was a mentally disabled Korean woman. After being sent to a women's shelter for several months, she was then returned to the hospital where she was incarcerated for nearly seven years before she was finally recognized as Nepali by a visiting doctor, discharged, and returned to Nepal in 2000.[274]

Before the title, the film opens with a montage of a series of women, identified as Nepalese by their dress and language, who are asked, in Korean, "Are you Chandra?" Each one responds negatively until the camera pauses on the final woman, Chandra Kumari Gurung, who, gazing at the camera, says, "Yes." Aside from this opening scene and a closing scene in which we return to the women, the viewer does not see any representation of Gurung, as Park uses point-of-view shots and a handheld camera to

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[274] This case has been detailed by Jin-kyung Lee in *Service Economies* (208-209) and Eunjung Kim's article, "The Specter of Vulnerability and Disabled Bodies in Protest," as well as in several news sources, including the *Nepali Times* 2002 article, "Chandra Kumari is happy now." See: Lee, *Service Economies*, 208-09.; Eunjung Kim, "The Specter of Vulnerability and Disabled Bodies in Protest," in *Disability, Human Rights, and the Limits of Humanitarianism*, ed. Michael Gill, et al.(Farnham: Taylor and Francis, 2014), 137-54.; Limbu Ramyata, "Chandra Kumari Is Happy Now- Nepali Times," *Nepali Times* 2002.

navigate the audience through—as the anthology title suggests—her perspective. Despite this use of technique usually reserved for the documentary and pseudo-documentary, the film does not sacrifice Park's penchant for heavily stylized mise-en-scene in which blue-tinged monochrome alleyways, institutions, and walls obscure actors, including more recognizable ones like Oh Dal-soo. The effect is one where the genre of the documentary slips in and out of a stylized realist fantasy, a world that is both stunningly believable and unbelievable in its oppressive bureaucracy. The Korean title, "Believe it or Not," alongside the English title, "Never-Ending Peace and Love," suggest the tension between an incomprehensible unjust state and the absurdity of a humanistic call for "Peace and Love" from such a state.

After the title sequence, the audience taken through the alleyways, the restaurant, police car, and police station. Frustrated at her inability to identify herself and her broken Korean, the police officer, played by Oh Dal-soo, sends her to a psychiatric institution. Once in the institution, a doctor (Ku Cha-hong) asks a series of questions in Korean to which Chandra is unable to respond. Here, the camera shifts around the room, from the desk to the walls, as the doctor demands that she look him in the eye. The scene cuts using an ellipsis implying a lengthy psychiatric interview, punctuated by silence. After the ellipsis, the camera tilts downwards towards the doctor's chair as Chandra moves towards him, speaking Nepalese. The nurses pull her away and the doctor diagnoses her as having "mild mental retardation," and "depression," demonstrated by a note he scrawls in English in his records. Later in the film, as if in interview format, the doctor justifies his diagnosis:

> With her dark skin, I thought she was a woman who had come to Seoul from the countryside. When we diagnose, if a patient doesn't speak, it's important to see if

> they meet our eyes or not. This is important, you know. But, she wouldn't look at me, she wouldn't tell me her name, and she attacks me, the doctor. From that, I thought she was mentally retarded and suffered from depression.

The scene cross cuts to a Korean man from the factory, presumably a floor manager, who says, "Ah, she was perfectly clear headed! She was a good worker, listened well. Do you think we would hire a mental patient? When there are so many foreign workers to hire?" Later, a nurse in the hospital, observing Chandra's interaction with another patient, turns to the camera and explains, "You hear that? Nepalese sounds like the mumbling of a crazy perso—a crazy Korean person. Think of it that way and listen." She moves her head to gesture towards Chandra, who is off frame, instructing the viewer not just to "listen," but to look as well.

The sustained focus on looking and listening further serves to illustrate the impossibility of encounters, not only between the individuals that make up the institution and Chandra, but between the viewer and the protagonist. Throughout his interview with Chandra, and in his explanation to the camera, the doctor highlights the importance of the gaze, that the patient should be able to look him in the eye. Looking, for the viewer, however, is disrupted by the camera angles. When in Chandra's perspective, we only see the sides of faces, faces looking away, and faces looking down on her. Even in the city, looking is hindered by the police car and tall buildings. Once inside the buildings, it's inhibited by walls, hallways, and desks. The only clear view of the characters is done in interview format, when the camera leaves Chandra's point of view and turns to one of an outside observer. While English, the written language used to record diagnoses, is subtitled in Korean, Chandra's Nepalese remains without translation, the meaning of her voice illegible to a non-Nepalese speaking audience. The

nurse's suggestion, "Think of it that way and listen," as she motions towards Chandra, becomes a condemnation not only of the institutions and individuals that incarcerated her, but the viewer as well. The film questions the legibility of encounter through the gaze and through language. If the existence of the other is denied institutionally, how can it be accepted through the language of cinema? Park's work indicates a failure of not only institutional narrative, but of visual and linguistic narrative as well. He places the viewer, momentarily in Chandra's place only to show that this is impossible; that one can never recognize, see, or fully encounter the experience of the other. Institutional denial becomes interpersonal, as the viewer is forced to confront the spectrality of the other, through her fleeting motions and voice.

Eunjung Kim, in "The Specter of Vulnerability and Disabled Bodies in Protest," finds that the film, as well as how human and workers' rights groups treated the case, failed to recognize the injustice of the systemic mistreatment and marginalization of disabled people. She writes, "Audiences understand the human rights abuse in Gurung's experiences precisely because she is not disabled. Her vulnerability is created not only by her status as a migrant worker but also by the existing systems that institutionalize disabled individuals and sex workers."[275] However, while this may be the case for rhetoric surrounding the case, I argue that instead, the film focuses on the institutional inability to make such distinctions. In other words, difference regarding disability, race, gender, and labor are depicted as completely illegible. In her brief reading of the case, Jin-kyung Lee points out that Gurung's institutionalization stemmed from a particular form of racialized discrimination that occurs when confronting transnational labor in

[275] Kim, "The Specter of Vulnerability and Disabled Bodies in Protest," 150.

South Korea in which difference is either hyper-realized or completely denied. Once identified as Korean, due to perceived ethnic similarity, Lee explains that rather than recognizing any difference, "they can only see an inferior version of themselves—in this case, a mentally deficient Korean."[276] What both Lee and Kim identify in their work is the failure of categorization, and the violently homogenizing effect of the human, human rights, and humanism. The politics of humanism, which operates on a notion of inclusion of the oppressed, such as disabled individuals, sex workers, and migrant workers, is only achieved through becoming equal despite uneven distributions of power related to national and domestic borders, wages, and access to care.

Such denial through processes of inclusion encompasses much of how Lee characterizes the surrogate laborer's role in the South Korean economy as built upon "the paradox of simultaneous sameness or equivalence and difference."[277] As she argues, "The state demands that South Korean society embrace multiculturalism for the purpose of managing its diverse laboring population effectively, while disavowing the necessary political and social changes to support the multiethnic population."[278] Though migrant workers are promoted as equal under the rhetoric of multiculturalism, marriage migrants are left politically invisible as they face racialized and gendered violence and exploitation.[279] Here, the inclusive and equalizing force of humanism functions to erase all difference between migrants, workers, and women, rendering them politically and socially invisible. The effect is one of spectrality, noted both in Kim and Lee's work, that

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[276] Lee, *Service Economies*, 209.

[277] Ibid., 14.

[278] Ibid., 189.

[279] Ibid., 227.

is produced through embedded notions of race, gender, and ability. In this way, while the visual and narrative inclusion of Evelyn in *Thirst* evokes representation on a cultural level, her exclusion, based on her inability to speak Korean, references a broader social denial of difference and the impossibility, an impossibility that is also articulated in this short film.

Slashing Difference

I also read the apparition of Evelyn's character as operating in order to further not only the plot but also the plotting of the central characters, or vampires. Her major character attributes—piety and an inability to speak or understand much Korean—is critical in elevating the protagonists' motivations, revelations, and schemes. In this way, for much of the film, she interacts through the spectral conditions of her labor, a figure that enables the passage of time in the film as much as she enables and supports the reproductive work that sustains the household. In the third act, however, she takes a central role, as the first to realize the extent of the protagonists' crimes. Seated around the mahjong table, Young-du finishes explaining his theory of communication and discovers that Madame Ra can respond to queries through blinking. He quickly creates a system in which she can give them a quick blink for "yes" and a long blink for "no." Assuming that Madame Ra wishes to play mahjong, they team her up with Evelyn, who, while spoon-feeding the paralyzed woman vodka, notices that she has carved letters into the tablecloth and her chair: "*da, yŏ, chuk*" (다, 여, 죽). At first, Evelyn reads the order of, "*da chuk'yŏ*" ("다 죽여," or "Kill them all"), until Young-du reorders the wording to "*chukyŏtta*" (죽였다, or, "killed"). Madame Ra then indicates that indeed the killed is

her son, Kang-woo, and the killers, Sang-hyun and Tae-ju. Once the party confirms what is implied, Evelyn's face twists as she screams with the realization of what has been taking place in the home. Tae-ju, seeing Evelyn's reaction, mimics her gestures, screaming and clinging onto to Sang-hyun.

Figure 12. Evelyn contorts her face in a shrill scream.

Figure 13. Tae-ju follows, mimicking Evelyn's contorted movements.

Here, Evelyn's role as domestic worker, in the service of feeding for and affectively managing communication between the heads of household, lends her insight

into the true workings of the home. As in common iterations of the horrific gothic household, it is the help, the housemaid, and the servant, through their silent proximity to those they serve, who fully understand the hideous workings of the cruel family. Her revelation brings her to the center of the final plot, this centrality highlighted by the camera which lingers on her gestures and figure. Her scream is one of terror and betrayal, as the men stand dumbfounded by the revelation. Tae-ju, usurped from her position, makes a final attempt to displace Evelyn's countenance onto herself in a melodramatic mimicry of the woman's fear.

The scene ushers in a generic shift in which the film momentarily turns to the tropes of the slasher film. Evelyn's initial reading of Madame Ra's words, "Kill them all," becomes strikingly prescient as Sang-hyun and Tae-ju calmly walk through the house, closing the blinds so that their killings may begin. After crushing the former police investigator's neck with her fist, Tae-ju chases Young-du and Evelyn up the stairs and through the stark white hallway of the third floor. The home becomes what Carol Clover has termed the "terrible place," a trope of B-horror, often a house, that is made terrible by "the terrible families—murderous, incestuous, cannibalistic—that occupy them."[280] She writes: Into such houses unwitting victims wander in film after film, and it is the conventional task of the genre to register in close detail the victim's dawning understanding, as they survey the visible evidence, of the human crimes and perversions that have transpired there. That perception leads directly to the perception of their own immediate peril."[281] Key to Clover's terrible place, "the dawning of understanding,"

[280] Carol J. Clover, *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*, First Princeton classics edition ed., Princeton Classics (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2015), 30.

[281] Ibid., 30-31.

seems to be the striking familiarity of the terrible place. The strangeness of the place is not enough to keep the victims away, as the familiarity of the place invokes a false sense of security. Here, the terrible place finds new meaning in Park's work on violence, in which the violent act is most often committed through familiar, domestic objects: a broken CD used to slash a throat in *Oldboy*, the ice-cream cake box that holds stolen organs in *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance*, or the child's scissors used to deliver the final blow to a killer in *Lady Vengeance*. Domestic spaces and familiar institutions, like schools and hospitals, are some of the most dangerous and terrible places in Park's films.

In *Thirst*, the domesticity of the "terrible place" furthers the gendered violence in the film while highlighting racial difference. The dizzying hallways and patterns in the Ra home no longer just obscure the invisible, feminized labor that sustains it, but have been reworked into a cavernous, murderous lair in which the vampires, overcoming all limitations, kill and feed without repercussion. Tae-ju, no longer locked in her bedroom, runs freely through the halls, with complete ownership over the household, delightedly chasing her victims. If Sang-hyun's murder and reanimation of Tae-ju evokes the horror of misogynist violence in the home and workplace for reproductive labor, the home in these final scenes becomes a hunting ground for clandestine racialized violence. Evelyn, marked by racial difference, is chased by her pale, monstrous double, Tae-ju. Her husband, Young-du, locks himself in the bathroom, not allowing Evelyn in, so that she is forced to come face to face with the woman who she once called her only friend. It is in these scenes that the displacement of doubling comes to the foreground; no longer positioned under the illusion of equivalence through their gendered labor, difference, and the power relation to which it must succumb, arises through the trope of predator

and victim.

Figure 14. Evelyn takes center stage, rushing down the corridor to stab Tae-ju.

To draw once again from Clover, Evelyn in this sense becomes "Final Girl," a mainstay of the horror genre that centers on a female protagonist and survivor. Clover explains, "She alone looks death in the face, but she alone also finds the strength either to stay the killer long enough to be rescued (ending A) or to kill him herself (ending B)."[282] The "Final Girl" carries traits that have become clichés of the genre over time: virginal, insightful, practical, and, "[j]ust as the killer is not fully masculine, she is not fully feminine."[283] In this sense, once relegated to the background as a vehicle for the story, Evelyn now briefly takes a lead role, both through her revelation of the crime, and the subsequent chase that pushes viewers to identify with her and fear the femme-fatale predator embodied by Tae-ju. Evelyn's actions run the gamut of possible terrible

[282] Ibid., 35.

[283] Ibid., 39-40.

endings; she recognizes her mortal danger, is captured, escapes, attempts to hide, attacks the killer, is saved, and survives until she is, ostensibly, rescued.

Central to Evelyn's brief shift to protagonist is her confrontation with Tae-ju. She frees herself from the chair she is tied to in the kitchen, grabs the paring knife that only moments ago she was using to cut fruit, rushes down the hallway and stabs Tae-ju in the chest. Here, Clover's insight into sexual difference within the horror genre illuminates the way in which this scene approaches the gendered nature of surrogate labor. The floral print paring knife connotes domestic, reproductive labor, and feminizes the penetrative, masculine weapon. Evelyn crumbles to the floor, and Tae-ju, the knife lodged in her chest, towers over her victim as she inches towards her. "Evelyn," she begins in a seductive whisper, "How could I have made all those kimbaps without you?" "It's all over now," Tae-ju continues, sliding to the floor to embrace Evelyn before pulling the knife from her own chest.

Figure 15. Tae-ju embraces Evelyn, demonstrating the potential for violence in every intimate gesture.

Clover muses that although horror tends to codify the victim-predator relation of one of feminine-masculine, that these sexual differences are rarely as distinct as one

would think:

> The world of horror is in any case one that knows very well that men and women are profoundly different (and that the former are vastly superior to the latter) but one that at the same time repeatedly contemplates mutations and slidings whereby women begin to look a lot like men (slasher films), men are pressured to become like women (possession films), and some people are impossible to tell apart . . .[284]

In this way, Tae-ju's erotic embrace of Evelyn in this scene can be read from a multitude of angles from a queering of the vampire's seduction, to the masculinization of Tae-ju through her transformation.[285] What I would like to focus on in this scene is again the effect of doubling the two women, not only through the act of stabbing and embrace, which brings them face to face, but also through Tae-ju's recognition of their once shared labor conditions. Here, Tae-ju affirms what has been hidden until Evelyn takes her central role: that their doubling implies a surrogacy in which the national subject's reproductive labor is displaced onto the domesticized migrant worker, the laboring other. The moment of deadly confrontation between the two elicits a momentary recognition of both mutuality and difference. If, as I argue in the first chapter, the moment of death and dismemberment in P'yŏn Hye-yŏng's "Corpses" complicates the binary of husband and wife and masculine and feminine to question the humanist configuration of self and other, here, in *Thirst* as well, feminine and masculine, national and non-national subject, and self and other are questioned through the violent act in

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[284] Ibid., 15.

[285] After contracting Emmanuelle Virus from Sang-hyun, a disease that's only supposed to infect men, Tae-ju muses, "I guess I'm not a woman anymore."

order to bring to the forefront the structural differences that separate the two. In other words, it is in the bloodied, terrifying embrace that the differing dynamics of power between the two women are revealed; they are no longer mirror images of each other or even friends, but both monstrous in their own right. Tae-ju, a monster through her violent transformation, excess, and homicidal desires, and Evelyn, in her spectrality and the absolute denial of her subjecthood by those around her. Difference is no longer flattened through the homogenizing structure of labor and is immediately accounted for through the threat of violence and death.

It is no coincidence, then, that this moment ends abruptly when Sang-hyun steps in to distract Tae-ju and save Evelyn. He instructs Tae-ju to go pack their bags; the massacre at the home has made it so that they can no longer hide their crimes, and they must flee. Tae-ju returns from packing to find Sang-hyun leaning over Evelyn's body, sucking at her wrist. Head turned, eyes closed, she is a corpse, again invisible, a body among bodies, her life and labor used only to sustain others. Bliss Lim, in *Translating Time*, remarks that "One awful effect of serial murder's logic of repetition is a deliberate erasure of differences between women."[286] Here, the final scene in the home, in which our momentary protagonist's body is strewn on the floor, Evelyn, the migrant worker becomes no different from any of the other bodies. Sang-hyun covers her face with a jacket, perhaps out of his respect for the dead, but the effect is one of erasure. If seeing, as Derrida notes, ushers in an imperative towards responsibility, this responsibility is thoroughly rejected. Her face is covered, and the two vampires turn away to leave our "final girl" strewn across the wreckage.

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[286] Lim, *Translating Time*, 213.

Figure 16. Tae-ju lingers, looking at Evelyn's covered body, as Sang-hyun exits.

Once the two embark on their getaway, we find that Sang-hyun has in fact spared Evelyn, only pretending to have drained her in order to save her from Tae-ju's insatiable thirst and disregard for life. Evelyn pulls the jacket from her head and slowly gets up, a quiet look of disgust, terror, and bewilderment as she begins to make her way back through the hallway. The camera cuts again to Tae-ju and Sang-hyun, in their getaway car, and we can only imagine the horror that Evelyn must walk through in order to leave the home. Evelyn has been spared, but it is her very invisibility that has spared her; a complete erasure of her difference. While her survival speaks to a trope-laden characterization of her innocence, a naive piety that is reinforced throughout the narrative, one must question for what world has she been spared? Similarly, when looking at the evolution of the trope of the "Final Girl" in the 2015 republication of *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*, Clover remarks that, rather than hero, a more accurate description of the "Final Girl" may be "tortured survivor," or, "victim-hero," as such terms take into account the violence and fear that both the "Final Girl" and the audience

experience through the horror film's story and narrative.[287] What has the ghostly migrant worker, when confronted with the vampire, actually survived? Here, I argue that survival indicates not salvation, but continued erasure. Always a victim and survivor, never able to speak, Evelyn remains at the end of the film a narrative and cinematic ghost, whose haunting presence leaves more questions than answers for the viewer.

IV. A Haunted Inconclusion

From movement of labor and laboring bodies, to distribution, the commodification of labor, and the creative production and reproduction of generic tropes, circulation is a critical facet of transnational cinema and labor throughout the globalized neoliberal state. As I have argued, these circulations aren't smooth and homogenous, but rather often met with disruption; the disruption of borders, of unrecognized difference, of violence and monstrosity. The neoliberal fantasy of homogenous circulation, of free markets and miracles, can be easily read on the surface of the visual text, a screen that offers us a clear network of narratives. Contrary to the mythic burden of the vampire, the curse of everlasting life, Park's vampires die quickly, self-immolating themselves in a final scene under the gaze of Madame Ra, leaving the matriarch and spectral migrant worker as the only surviving witnesses of their terror. It is in these remainders and their haunting gaze, however, that we can begin to read fissures into the homogenous circuit of the closed narrative, indications that immolation, death, financial recuperations, and free trade agreements do not imply seamless circuits of production and reproduction,

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[287] Clover, *Men, Women, and Chain Saws*, x-xi.

but that, with every reiteration, something is lost and something is added, something is doubled in a monstrous way that questions the nature of our encounters.

For Lim, the ghost is as much a figure as repetition as is the horror genre, presenting a paradoxical encounter that is both familiar and deeply unsettling. She writes,

> We are faced, on the one hand, with the force of singularity: the singularity of the jolt, of the first time one sees a ghost or screams at a terrifying turn in a movie. On the other hand, we encounter formulaic repetition: one sees the same ruse again and again. [. . .] Through singularity and repetition, the ghost figures both the force and depletion of return.[288]

Ghosts here begin to encapsulate the tension of the encounter, of looking, and of seeing, a process in which difference is both glaringly present and strikingly invisible, a process in which we are faced, momentarily, yet moment after moment, with the subjectivity of ourselves, of the other, our humanness, but more importantly, our ultimate unhumanness.

If "the ghost figures both the force and depletion of return," then what of the migrant worker? With the increased dependence on migrant labor, the migrant worker, the border-crosser, the liminal subject both invited and uninvited, has become its own repetitive trope in cinema. In "'Like Family But Not Quite': Emotional Labor and Politics of Intimacy," Tsung-yi Michelle Huang and Chi-she Li identify in contemporary Taiwanese cinematic texts particular trends of inclusion and exclusion in regards to migrant labor. As migrant workers increasingly make up the field of domestic labor in

[288] Lim, *Translating Time*, 219.

Taiwan, they find that the affective labor of caretaking translates into familial tropes in order to draw attention to migrant workers and their exploitation. They identify this trend as "just-like-family rhetoric," or, a form of representation that is "predicated on the concealed lack of reciprocity between employer and domestic laborer and the assumption that filial relations are one-sided and unreciprocated."[289] In other words, while such films may intend to foster empathy for migrant labor, they do so on the politics of inclusion, a politics that Jin-kyung Lee also identifies in the South Korean state's treatment of migrant workers through rhetoric of multiculturalism, or the multicultural family. Through their exploration of cinematic representation, Huang and Li question the possibility of the encounter, and, especially, the cinematic encounter that occurs between the viewer and the represented laborer. In their reading of four contemporary films, they find that

> Each of the films, in different degrees, shows that when migrant workers are recognized, they might not be rid of the possibility of having their life instrumentalized as well. This paradoxical logic of biopolitical governance—being like a family but not quite—forcefully renders those concerned, including the employer, his/her family members, and even film viewers, caught up in an uncertain oscillation between the compassionate treatment of migrant laborers and the non-negotiated demand of their emotional labor.[290]

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[289] Tsung-yi Michelle Huang and Chi-she Li, ""Like a Family, but Not Quite": Emotional Labor and Cinematic Politics of Intimacy"," in *The Global and the Intimate: Feminism in Our Time*, ed. Geraldine Pratt and Victoria Rosner(New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 214.

[290] Ibid., 227.

Here, the migrant worker has her "life instrumentalized" both off- and on- screen, firstly through the narrative of the text, and secondly through their use as representation, as an affective tool to educate or inform audiences.

Like the ghost, the figure of the migrant worker demands encounter, both of the narrative, and of the viewer. This "uncertain oscillation" then becomes the impossibility of the humanist encounter, an encounter that portends to be achieved through inclusion, rather than through a recognition of impossibility, of difference, of degrees and hierarchies of social relations. In this chapter, I have analyzed the various ways in which Park's work navigates the circulation of transnational labor, the repetition of tropes, and the pitfalls of representation and encountering gendered and racialized labor. Key to this navigation is the use of monstrosity, of vampires and ghosts, of feeding and haunting, urging us to look past the human and the presumption of humanity.

POSTCRIPT

From January to May 2018, during the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics, over five hundred displaced Yemeni nationals arrived in Jeju seeking asylum. In response, Yemen was added to a list of nations that are not allowed entry via Jeju's visa-free tourist program, and a travel ban was placed to restrict more Yemeni nationals from entering South Korea and prevent refugees from leaving the island for the mainland. As they navigated South Korea's obscure asylum processes from Jeju, the relatively small group of refugees prompted anti-immigration protests that began attracting international attention.[291] Perhaps one of the most representative photos of South Korea's public anti-immigration sentiment was taken by Ed Jones for the Associated Free Press at a rally on June 30th in Seoul. The photo was sold to Getty Images and went viral, circulating globally through news outlets and blogs reporting on the refugees and South Korean anti-immigration movements.[292]

Centered in the foreground of the photo is what appears to be a young man wearing a white shirt, striped tie, backpack, fedora, black mask, and sunglasses. He holds two signs above his head. The one in his left-hand reads, in English, "FAKE REFUGEES GO HOME NOW." The one in his right, "The abolition of the Jeju Island Visa – Fake refugees gate," in English, and then, in Korean, "Abolish Visa-free entry to

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[291] Huh Ho-joon, Nam Eun-joo, and Jung Hwan-bong, "Prejudice and Lack of Policy Leave Yemeni Refugee Applicants in Stateless Limbo," *Hankyoreh English Edition*, http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_international/850074.html.

[292] Ed Jones, *Anti-immigration activists protest against asylum-seekers from Yemen, in Seoul*, 2018. Getty Images.

Jeju, it's become a gateway for fake refugees."[293] He's surrounded by other protestors, who mostly appear to be women, holding candles and covering their faces with protest signs. A handful of the signs read, in Korean: "I am a Korean citizen. Citizens first. I want safety for citizens."[294] The masked protestor blends in with a particular defiant, neoliberal subject that derives power both from the ability to be anonymous but also from their masculinity and middle-class, educated background. The netizen of previous candlelight vigils has become anonymous and ubiquitous. The centering of the protestor and his upraised arms, with dozens of others beneath his signs, indicates a deeply individualist yet powerfully popular sentiment of nationalism.

The image reveals a network of history and political economy that forms the ideological infrastructure of transnational South Korea. The rhetoric and visual spectacle of the protest demonstrate the ways in which subjects—in this case, the protestors—navigate the complex circulations of (trans)nationalism as a set of simultaneously complementary and contradictory relations to the global and local, state and (ethnic) nation, and the national subject and non-national other. The scene in many ways captures Hyun Ok Park's description of the neoliberal nationalism of South Korea:

> Neoliberal democratic politics postulates diverse groups of migrant workers as anyone other than laborers: non-Koreans as cosmopolitan beings, Korean Chinese as colonial returnees, and North Koreans as refugees. This fragmented representation of migrant workers masks their shared ties with one another and

[293] Translation mine; original: 제주도 무비자 당장 폐지 위장난민 지옥문통로 변질

[294] Translation mine; original: 나는 대한민국 국민입니다. 국민이 먼저다. 국민은 안전을 원합니다.

with South Korean workers under conditions of neoliberal capitalist production.[295]

As such politics demand, the protesting subjects must emphasize their cosmopolitan global ties while disavowing the ways the global nation has been constructed. By deploying English-language slogans and the familiar rhetoric of U.S. and Western European nationalist, anti-immigrant, and ethno-centric discourse of "citizens first," the protesting subjects align themselves with a cosmopolitan and powerful First World. This not only functions to repress their historical relations with those of the laboring or stateless Third or Second Worlds (and, indeed, South Korea's history as part of these worlds) but also to position themselves as active subjects and state decision makers in global debates concerning national belonging and state responsibility.

The objects of this nationalist wrath—immigrants and refugees—are, of course, absent from the image, existing only on the margins of the rhetoric hurled against them. Their relation to the protesting subjects is one of absence, defined only by lack of legitimacy. They are, after all, "fake." If the danger of the refugee or immigrant lies in their perceived desire for national resources and national subjectivity, the fake refugee becomes even more dangerous because this desire is excessive and illegitimate. The fake will always devalue and take from the real. What the fake devalues and consumes is not exactly the realness of the "real" refugee, but that of the real citizen, the real national subject, and the real nation-state. And the "fake" is able to do this by counterfeiting a legitimate relationship to the nation and national subject. By asserting that others are fakes, the protesting subjects thus deny any relation to them. They deny the encounter

[295] Park, *The Capitalist Unconscious*, ix.

and shared global histories to assert a particular, homogenous circuit of transnationalism that maintains their position as decisive subjects of a state and global order.

Throughout this dissertation, I've explored the politics of the encounter as historically rendered through notions of the human subject and its ties to labor, nation, and state. If the human subject, as I argue, is formed through violent histories of state and nation building, then what constitutes a different form of subjectivity? What might we find beyond categories of legitimacy and illegitimacy, citizen and non-citizen, feminine and masculine, human and nonhuman, self and other? Here, once again, the monstrous offers us an ethical framework. What if, rather than deny the monstrous dependence of the other, one was to accept this dependence and the role of the self in it? What if, rather than deny the ghosts and the monstrous, one chooses to witness the histories they insist upon?

In an interview with the *Hankyoreh*, a woman who has been offering aid to some of the Yemeni immigrants said that she is inspired by previous generations of Jeju women: "The awful things they experienced during the Apr. 3rd Incident aren't much different from the situation of these refugees, who have been forced to leave their homes because of their civil war."[296] While on the surface, her statement captures a simple expression of intergenerational empathy, on closer analysis, it becomes a poignant description of how national subject-centered narratives excise their violent origins. On April 3rd, 1948, the Korean military, under U.S. command, began an anti-communist campaign to subdue uprisings on the island. The military campaign lasted until 1954,

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[296] Lim Jae-woo, "Reaching out to Yemen's Dejected and Stateless," *Hankyoreh English Edition*, http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_international/850072.html.

during which perhaps up to 50,000 residents were killed. The massacre is one of a number of such acts of state violence in South Korea under U.S. military occupation, and like many forms of civil war, emerged from postcolonial bids for global power and state control. The massacre wasn't publicly recognized until democratization, and despite the establishment of a National 4.3 Committee in 2000 and a Truth and Reconciliation Committee in 2005, it is difficult to determine whether justice, of any form, is possible. One issue, in this case, is a disavowal of relation or history: the U.S. government, as with its other military actions in South Korea, continues to deny any responsibility of wrongdoing.[297] While it's debatable whether public admissions of accountability would compensate for years of violence and censorship, perhaps a small step could be made in recognizing the violent and unequal relations through which (trans)national subjects and others are formed. By invoking 4.3, the woman invokes a history of transnational state violence that has carved South Korea as a nation, invoking a shared history beyond the national narrative of borders and citizenship.

[297] Eric K. Yamamoto, Sara Lee, and Yea Jin Lee, "The United States' Role in the Korea Jeju April 3rd Tragedy and Its Responsibility for 'Social Healing through Justice'," *World Environment and Island Studies* 2, no. 1 (2012).

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