Queer Times: Aesthetics, Performance, and Social Movements in South Korea

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Yeong Ran Kim was born in Busan and raised in Seoul, South Korea. She graduated from Seoul National University in 2008 with a BA in Anthropology. Their research project, "The Urban Renewal: A Cast Study in Shimokitazawa in Tokyo," was awarded the Monbukagakusho Scholarship, offered by the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, to study at the University of Tokyo during the 2008–2009 academic year. She graduated from the New School in 2013 with a MA in Media Studies, and from New York University in 2014 with a MA in Performance Studies.

Yeong Ran arrived at Brown in 2014 and received her transitional MA degree from the department of Theatre Arts & Performance Studies in 2016. While at Brown, she served as a teaching assistant in courses on performance theory, theatre history, and persuasive communication. They work in the field of performance studies, Asian/American studies, gender and sexuality studies, and film and new media studies. She is a researcher, multimedia artist and educator who bridges art, activism, and scholarly work, and makes connections across differences in communities.

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Introduction

In May 2020, Itaewon, a historically gay neighborhood in Seoul, emerged as a hotbed for cluster infections of COVID-19. This occurred during a critical weekend for determining whether South Korea had flattened the curve or not. Gay men dancing in nightclubs in the midst of the pandemic became easy targets, even though nightclubs had not been officially required to shut down and even though this was not the first time a COVID-19 patient had been to a nightclub.[1] Newspapers reported the names of the gay nightclubs where the first confirmed patient visited, as well as more private information about him, including his residence and workplace. The media continued to put out sensationalist coverage, including a report on gay bathhouse, blaming gay men's sexual interactions for potentially spreading the virus.[2] Queer and trans activists quickly formed an emergency task force called *Queer Action Against COVID-19* to respond to biased news reports, which recalled the way in which queers had been blamed for HIV/AIDS transmission in the 1990s[3] as well as for the spread of the MERS (Middle East Respiratory

1. About a week prior to this, a nineteen-year-old man who was confirmed COVID-19 positive visited a nightclub in Busan. About a month prior to the Itaewon case, multiple cases were reported from a bar in Gangnam, Seoul.

2. Choi Sang-kyung et al. "COVID-19 Spotlight 'the World of Their Own'," *Daily Good News*, May 20, 2020, http://goodnews1.com/m/news_view.asp?seq=98506

3. The first formation of an emergency task force among queer activists in South Korea was in 1998, in order to contest news reports on HIV/AIDS, which named homosexuality as the cause of the virus.

Syndrome) crisis in 2015.[4] As early detection of the virus had been a key element of the Korean Center for Disease Control's (KCDC) strategy for COVID-19, it was crucial that individuals get tested. However, because getting tested could reveal their sexuality, it gay men had to choose between maintaining their privacy or getting testing and being outed. In the comment sections of newspapers and on social media, there were tons of messages that encouraged gay men who had visited nightclubs in Itaewon to get tested; some said this was a chance for gay men to become "good citizens." But what is citizenship for gay men when there is no legal recognition at all?[5]

Queer Action Against COVID-19 issued a statement on May 17th, International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia (IDAHO), that reflects the historical formation of *sosuja chŏngch'i* (minority politics) in queer activism in South Korea, which values *yŏndae* (solidarity). Instead of trying to assimilate into the "good citizen" model, queer and trans activists prioritize connecting with other marginalized groups.[6]

> Now, our activism is not just to encourage gay men to voluntarily get tested, or to promote rights for sexual minorities. We see who gets disadvantaged and who gets more

4. During the MERS crisis, evangelical Christian hate groups spread rumors about a "super virus," which they claimed was a mixture of MERS and AIDS, in order to create political and cultural pressure to cancel Seoul Queer Culture Festival. See chapter four for more details.

5. Aside from the Military Criminal Act Article 92-6, which penalizes anal sex, homosexuality is not illegal in South Korea. But there is no legal protection for LGBTQ people either. The existence of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer individuals goes unnoticed in South Korean law.

6. As broadly critiqued in critical race theory and queer theory, the politics of respectability limits the political potentiality of any civil rights movement, losing its chance to dismantle the system of racism, heteropatriarchy, and capitalism by maintaining the status quo. See Leo Bersani's landmark book *Homos* (Revised edition. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996) for a discussion of the implications of the good citizenship model in queer politics. See also Deborah B. Gould, *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP's Fight Against AIDS* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

> vulnerable and isolated in this situation. Our efforts continue to make connections with undocumented migrants, refugees, people with disabilities, and temporary workers.[7]

In the statement, they address how COVID-19 disproportionally impacted marginalized sectors of society. The first wave of COVID-19 in February hit a psychiatric ward, in which some patients had been incarcerated for several decades. Ninety-nine patients out of 102 tested positive, and seven people died due to complications. In early March, a call center in Seoul became a hotbed, exposing workers to the dangerous virus. In responding to the homophobia of the media and society, the task force team emphasized way in which marginalized populations were disproportionately impacted. This statement epitomizes the ways in which queer activism in South Korea has centered on these acts of "making connections" between marginalized groups, formulating *sosuja chŏngch'i* (minority politics). What does it mean to assert that "it is not just […] to promote rights" when defining one's activism? Why, even during this particular crisis for gay men, did the Queer Action activists point to the injustices faced by undocumented migrants, refugees, people with disabilities, and temporary workers? What is the historical context of the formation of *queer* as a term that brings together a range of forms of social marginality in South Korea?

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My project explores the ways in which *queerness* has been articulated and performed in the upsurge of a new social movement over the last three decades, focusing on queer cultural production and aesthetic practices. It was the early 1990s when the concept of *queer*—a term that

7. Sexual Minority Emergency Task Force for COVID 19, "K'orona19 Wigie Hamkke Taech'ŏhamyŏnsŏ Uriŭi In'gwŏnŭn tŏ Tandanhaejil Kŏshida (Human Rights for Us Will Be Improved as We Collectively Work Against the COVID-19 crisis)." May 17, 2020.

originated in Anglophone culture— was introduced to South Korea. If it was the industrialization and urbanization in the United States that enabled gay and lesbian subjectivity, as John D'Emilio asserts, it was the expansion of global capitalism that mediated the new sexual subjectivities in South Korea.[8] The increased flow of ideas, discourses, people, and cultural products into South Korea offered new language with which to organize communities based on the experiences of non-normative intimacies and sexualities. The first gay and lesbian human rights group *Ch'odonghoe* was established in 1993, and many more LGBTQ activist groups and organizations were formed in the following years.[9] With the growth of activism, queer subjects began to appear in public, formulating queer politics to contest heteronormativity.[10] From the particular location of South Korea, I examine the ways in which activists and artists elaborated on what it means to be critically queer.[11] I focus on the artistic and activist labor of translating and transforming the concept of queerness as it is practiced in the South Korean context.

In considering the South Korean context, I propose thinking historically about the emergence of queerness alongside the radical tradition of the 1987 democracy movement. Led by

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8. See John D'Emilio, S*exual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983.

9. *Cho'donghoe* was formed by Koreans and Korean Americans who met through *Sapho,* a group for lesbian expats living in South Korea (Korean Sexual-Minority Culture & Rights Center, *Dictionary for Sexual Minorities,* "Cho'donghoe," April 11th, 2003, http://kscrc.org/xe/board_yXmx36/4753?ckattempt=1).

10. Heteronormativity is the belief that heterosexuality is the standard for defining normal sexual behavior, based on the gender binary. See Michael Warner, "Introduction: Fear of a Queer Planet," *Social Text 9*, No.4 (1991): 3–17.

11. Judith Butler, in her essay "Critically Queer," examines the ways in which queer subjects have taken over the term *queer*, which used to be derogatory. By focusing on the changing usage of the term in different contexts, Butler proposes us to consider queerness as "a site of contestation (19)."

student activists and labor union leaders, the June Democracy Movement in 1987 put an end to decades of military dictatorship under Park Chung-hee (1963–1979) and Chun Doo-hwan (1980–1988). In attending to the post-1987 regimes, anthropologist Jesook Song critically observes the increased role of civil society movements (*simin sahoe undong*) in democratization, as Kim Dae-jung worked closely with the civil society during his presidency (1998–2003) in order to build the nation anew.[12] While building a new democratic nation, South Korean society quickly turned to neoliberal restructuring, especially due to the impact of the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997.[13] With forceful intervention from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), South Korea implemented thorough structural changes, which entailed massive layoffs to increase labor market flexibility. Song considers the civil society movement activists to be the very actors who promulgated (neo)liberalism by celebrating more individual freedom and less state intervention.[14] During this period, the global discourse of human rights came into the center of civil society.[15] While Song's analysis astutely captures the ways in which liberal regimes of South Korea (represented by the Democratic Party) have been structured, especially in terms of

12. Jesook Song, *South Koreans in the Debt Crisis: The Creation of a Neoliberal Welfare Society.* 9.

13. Neoliberalization began to take place even before the Asian Financial Crisis. At the end of 1996, the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU), one of the biggest national unions, led a general strike to contest the new Labor Standard Act, which made layoffs much easier for employers. See chapter one for more about the strike and queer activists' participation in it.

14. Song, *South Koreans in the Debt Crisis,* 10.

15. This is partly due to Kim Dae-jung's international reputation as an advocate for democracy and human rights. Kim was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize 2000 "for his work for democracy and human rights in South Korea and in East Asia in general, and for peace and reconciliation with North Korea in particular." (The Nobel Peace Prize 2000. NobelPrize.org. Nobel Media AB 2020. Sun. 26 Jul 2020. https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/2000/summary/)

human resources and networks, it misses the radical aspirations and potentialities in the movement. In critically assessing the last three decades of the human rights movement, long-time human rights activist Ryu Eun-sook argues that "[the movement] was still about social revolution (*sahoe pyŏnhyŏk*)."[16] After all, these were heterogeneous and formative years in which activists navigated the contentious arena of the global human rights discourse and the progressive movement at large, while carrying on a revolutionary impulse for a new future, which I found to be at the root of the 1987 democratization movement. Thus, in writing the history of queer activism in South Korea, I carefully attend to the formation of queerness in the confluence of the post-1987 post authoritarian politics and (neo)liberal global capitalism.

Moreover, as global queer activism and cultural production plays a crucial part in organizing activism in South Korea, it is important to engage in the complex dimension of queerness as both "foreign" and local in South Korea. In so doing, I explore the collective sense of the *not-yet* as a theoretical concept in addition to writing queer history. On one hand, not-yet sets up a political stage to demand queer rights, positing South Korea as a belated state that has not implemented the global standard of LGBT rights. On the other hand, not-yet functions as a political expression to articulate a new world that has never existed before. It is a utopian impulse that imagines the impossible, and an active exploration and experimentation of different modes of being. Rather than considering these two understandings to be entirely opposed, I examine the ways in which queer activists and artists in South Korea oscillate between these two senses of not-yet in order to offer a nuanced understanding of queer temporality in South Korea. This project looks closely at the convergence and divergence of liberal progressivism,

16. Ryu Eun-Sook, In'gwŏnundong (Human Rights Movement) 1, Seoul, South Korea: Kyobobook, 2020.

development discourse, and utopianism in queer activism, and ponders alternative modes of coalition and solidarity.

In attending to the historical, discursive, affective, and material conditions of queer activism in South Korea, I pay a special attention to how queer activism has always been about searching for connections and relationalities among social minorities, rather than about assimilating into a global "queer liberalism." Queer liberalism is an assimilatory politics that promotes consumerism and legal protections for the right to privacy and intimacy, which emerged in the United States in the 1990s.[17] If one considers the progress of queer activism in terms of rights, such as the right to marry and the right to serve the military, South Korea certainly falls behind the global LGBTQ timeline. I refuse to evaluate queer activism in terms of the acquisition of legal rights, as it may deprive us of a complex understanding on how queer activism works differently in the particular location of South Korea. The radical impulse of the student and labor movement against the military dictatorship, I argue, is the very ground on which queer activists forged an anti-capitalist critique in envisioning a new future for the nation. At the same time, queer and feminist activists began to form an oppositional politics in the movement by recognizing the movement's negligence regarding who constitutes "the People" (or *Minjung*), in terms of race, gender and sexuality.[18] Queer activism is part of the historical formation of minority politics in South Korea; it is noteworthy that leading activist groups and

17. See David Eng, *The Feeling of Kinship: Queer Liberalism and the Racialization of Intimacy* and Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality?: Neoliberalism, Cultural, Politics, and the Attack on Democracy.*

18. For the history of the *minjung* movement in South Korea, see Namhee Lee, *The Making of Minjung: Democracy and the Politics of Representation in South Korea*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007.

grassroots organizations for social minorities, including women, LGBTQ, people with disabilities, and migrant workers, were established in these politically and economically volatile times of the 1990s in the confluence of democratization and (neo)liberalization.[19]

I draw upon archival research and cultural analysis in order to trace the radical kernel of queer politics in the 1990s, and further examine how this kernel manifests in contemporary social movement. I consider queer cultural production and aesthetic practices as rich archives through which to access non-normative intimacies and sexualities that often escape or are erased from the mainstream historical archive. Queer culture, as Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner assert, develops in mobile sites—"sites whose mobility makes them possible but also renders them hard to recognize […] because they are so fragile and ephemeral."[20] The sites I examine range from print media, such as do-it-yourself (DIY) magazines, protest flyers, activist statements, and newsletters, to films and media installations; live events including protests, queer parades, film festivals and screenings, and performance-based arts; and social media events, such as hashtag movements during heightened times of protests and festivals. Here, I consider aesthetic practices as central to and inextricable from queer activism in South Korea, through which the sense of a "we" emerges to imagine *otherwise*.[21]

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19. The organizations for women and social minorities formed in this period include: *Minwoohoe (Korea Women Link)* (formed in 1987), *Yŏyŏn (Korean Women's Associations United)* (formed in 1987), *Women with Disabilities Empathy* (formed in 1998) and *Joint Committee for Migrant Workers in Korea* (formed in 1995).

20. Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner "Sex in Public," *Critical Inquiry* 24, no.2 (1998): 561.

21. I am indebted to Kandice Chuh's method of subjectless critique that focuses on the historical construction of racialized and gendered bodies in the rubric of the nation-state (in the case of her research, the rubric of the U.S. empire). She considers "Asian America" to be a metaphor for resistance and racism, rather than a citizen-subject, in order to move beyond "the limitations of the liberatory potential of the liberal nation-state from and its corollary citizen-

Queer Times in South Korea

Throughout my project, queerness is by no means a stable concept or category limited to differences in sexual identities and practices. I consider queerness to be "a set of possibilities produced out of temporal and historical difference," as Elizabeth Freeman suggests, in order to attend to the radical potentiality of queerness that creates connections and relationships, touching across different times.[22] Touching across time, in Carolyn Dinshaw's words, is about "using ideas of the past, creating relations with the past, touching in this way the past in our efforts to build selves and communities now and into the future."[23] It is a pursuit of the affective interrelations and transferences between then and now, and ultimately, a gesture toward a new collectivity. In this vein, my dissertation is also a practice of touching across time, which aims to produce a different set of queer relations and ultimately seize upon the horizon of queer futurity. In particular, I look for a radical kernel of queerness in South Korea, with a desire to touch upon other kinds of political and social fantasies and imaginations that are not containable in a rights-based discourse. How do activists and artists translate and transform queerness in the South Korean context as a way to create new experiences for queer subjects to forge a new collectivity? What are the possibilities that emerge out of coming together, at street protests, screening events, art galleries, theatres, and nightclubs?

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subject." (See Kandice Chuh, *Imagine otherwise on Asian Americanist Critique* (NC, Durham: Duke University Press, 2003, 23).

22. Elizabeth Freeman, Introduction, GLQ 13, no.2-3 (2007): 160.

23. Carolyn Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 206.

Queerness's time, José Esteban Muñoz argues, is "a stepping out of the linearity of straight time," which is "a self-naturalized temporality."[24] I examine an array of works that are anchored in the queer (collective) impulse to step outside of the spatio-temporality of homo/queer phobia, heteropatriarchy, nationalism, globalization, and neoliberal capitalism. But what does it take to imagine an "outside" from a location that has been rendered already late, not only in the context of global LGBT politics, but also in the context of a neoliberal progressive paradigm at large? In the postcolonial world, *not-here* and *not-now* are loaded terms that are associated with a colonial form of longing that designates the West as the final destination and the non-West as an always belated entity. Racialized others, David Eng argues, are "forced to play catch-up with an exalted European present and presence invariably constituted as the here and now."[25] In Eng's critique, racialized others, including diaspora and other populations in non-Western locations, are perpetually forced to wait in "an imaginary waiting room," a space of deferral, and to be rendered as the always belated.[26]

The emergence of queer liberalism in global LGBTQ politics makes it even more difficult to read the radical aspirations of queerness in the non-West.[27] Jasbir Puar demonstrates the ways in which queerness has come to symbolize the tolerant West, especially in the post-9/11

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24. José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia* (New York: NYU Press, 2009), 25.

25. David Eng, *The Feeling of Kinship: Queer Liberalism and the Racialization of Intimacy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 67.

26. Ibid., 69.

27. Through an analysis of the politics of the 1990s, Lisa Duggan, in her book *The Twilights of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (2004), observes the rise of gay liberalism in the United States. Gay liberalism, according to Duggan, is a conservative move that reduces the radicalness of queer politics into a mere assimilatory politics, emblemized by same-sex marriage and a constitutional right to serve in the military.

political climate.[28] She writes, "queerness is proffered as a sexually exceptional form of American national sexuality through a rhetoric of sexual modernization that is simultaneously able to castigate the other as homophobic *and* perverse, and construct the imperialist center as 'tolerant' but sexually, racially, and gendered normal."[29] Queerness in this context contributes to maintaining the Western teleology[30] as well as white supremacy, and again, the queer subject in the non-West is "forced to play catch-up with" the Euro-American present. In this light, not-here and not-now for the queer subject in South Korean context could easily point to the West rather than to a utopia that is charged with other kinds of political and social fantasies and imaginations.

In this conception of time, the impulse of not-here/not-now might encounter a classic colonial form of longing that depicts the West as the ideal space-time. Some queer activists strategically depict the exclusion of LGBTQ subjects in the public sphere as an indication of South Korea's backwardness, in order to persuade the (heteronormative) public to accept different sexual practices and identities through a comparison with developed countries in the West. Is this a sign of the rise of gay liberalism in South Korea? Or can it be understood as a kind of negotiation with the public by appealing to their long-term desire to bring the nation up

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28. Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

29. Jasbir K. Puar, "Queer Times, Queer Assemblages," Social Text 23 (3-4 84-85) (2005), 122.

30. Johannes Fabien, in his canonical book *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object*, critically engages in the idea of time in anthropological works. Drawing upon postcolonial studies, he investigates the ways in which anthropology as a discipline contributes to a construction of Western time as universal. Constructing the anthropological other as the past, Fabien argues, the West justifies its domination elsewhere. The construction of time, therefore, is a part of "the colonial enterprise."

to the level of the West? Or, is this just a Korean version of homonationalism?[31] As Petrus Liu argues in *Queer Marxism in Two Chinas* (2015), queer liberalism and homonationalism inherit white supremacy and Asian belatedness and thus have limitations in theorizing queerness elsewhere.[32] Rather than participating in the linear conception of time, which locates queer cultural production in the non-West as "belated copies of the liberal West," in Liu's words, I attend to a complex demonstration of queer temporality in the queer aesthetics in South Korea.[33]

Drawing upon critical theories of queer temporality, my project examines the radical potential in queer activists and artists' aesthetic strategies of creating queer time that dreams of an "outside" without simply idealizing queerness. I examine the ways in which queer aesthetics in South Korea carry a utopian longing as a way to "mount a critique of the space of the present."[34] In *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There* (2009), Muñoz examines 1960s queer art in order to encounter and make a relationship with a utopian impulse in the past that still resonates today. What drives his project is not just an attempt to find traces of queer lives, but a desire to touch upon other kinds of political and social fantasies and imaginations that are neglected by gay pragmatism. For him queer historiography is the act of searching for a radical kernel of a different future. Drawing upon Muñoz's transformative method of reading queer histories and legacies, my project looks for the ways in which utopian gestures of queerness shape new modes

31. Homonationalism is a term coined by Jasbir Puar, in order to criticize the rise of gay liberalism in the United States, and its relationship with U.S. imperialism. It prioritizes a legal recognition of same-sex marriage and a right to serve in the military for queer subjects, in order to fully become a citizen of the empire, instead of resisting the empire itself.

32. Petrus Liu, *Queer Marxism in Two Chinas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015).

33. Ibid., 4.

34. Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 116.

of being-with in the world and aims to decentralize the Euro-American model of queer theory by engaging in the queer aesthetics in South Korea.

Scenes of Dissensus: The Formation of the Minoritarian Subject in Queer Aesthetics

In writing the history of queer activists and artists' labor to create a new future, I mobilize Muñoz's term *minoritarian subject*, inspired by his engagement with the ways in which those who do not fit normative subjecthood (i.e., white, middle class, heterosexual, cisgender, able-bodied, male) navigate the majoritarian world that erases, if not punishes, their mode of being.[35] Through a performance and aesthetic lens, Muñoz offers an analytic tool to examine a formation of counterpublics for minoritarian subjects, which he defines as "communities and relational chains of resistance that contest the dominant public sphere."[36] By utilizing Muñoz's analytic tool, although located in the different context of the United States, I engage in the ways in which queer artists and activists have formed *sosuja chŏngch'i* (minority politics) by attending to how they articulate shared struggles in majoritarian spaces. I argue that the minoritarian subject position is not merely an identitarian category, but an active rendering of an ethical position to reach out to more "we"s, and ultimately to engage in acts of solidarity. Queer art and activist labor, in this light, are constant creations of a new mode of collectivity.

Furthermore, my engagement with this new mode of collectivity in the world draws upon Jacques Ranciére's notion of *dissensus*, through which he emphasizes the role of aesthetics in politics. Dissensus, a term Rancière coined in critiquing Jürgen Habermas's notion of consensus,

35. José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

36. Ibid., 146.

is a scene of disruption that denaturalizes the existing order.[37] He disputes Habermasian universal subjecthood and argues that universality is a private domain that colonizes the particular, "the surplus community" or "the count of the uncounted." Although Rancière does not engage in critical race theory or queer theory, I find his work valuable in thinking how the minoritarian subject is formulated in a particular time and space through a bodily engagement, rather than existing as an identitarian category. Through a scene of dissensus, Rancière demonstrates, bodies of "the surplus" dislocate themselves from times and spaces that are assigned to them by the dominant ideology, and eventually redistributes the senses so that a new dissensual subject appears in the realm of the politics. In this light, politics is about how minoritarian subjects create scenes of interruption, or disruption, against the naturalized, ordinary order of time and space, rather than being included in the realm of consensus.

I find Rancière's work to be extremely generative for performance studies, as he locates the body and the senses at the center of the political subject formation. According to him, "the essential work of politics is the configuration of its own space. It is to make the world of its subjects and its operations seen. The essence of politics is the manifestation of dissensus as the presence of two worlds in one."[38] In other words, his understanding of politics is not about who is given what rights, but rather about redistributing our senses so that we can see and hear things differently through bodily participation in a moment of dispute. By capturing scenes of dissensus in film, performance-based art, protests, pride events, and festivals created by queer artists and activists in South Korea, I analyze the aesthetic strategies of disruption in an attempt to create

37. Jacque Ranciére, Translated by Steven Cocoran, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics* (New York: Bloomsbury Academy, 2010).

38. Ibid., 45.

another world in the world, resisting the heteronormative time and space encoded within neoliberal progressive paradigms.

Methodologies

Queer history, as many critics and historians suggest, is a field of inquiry that requires a different understanding of evidence, since traces of queer lives disappear so easily. In *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures,* Ann Cvetkovich challenges what counts as evidence in history, in order to engage in queer pasts. She notes, "the archive of feelings is both material and immaterial, at once incorporating objects that might not ordinarily be considered archival, and at the same time, resisting documentation because sex and feelings are too personal or ephemeral to leave records."[39] In rendering a new method of the archive of feelings, which consists of ephemera and "feelings," Cvetkovich acknowledges the importance of the materials that will be missed out if we stick to the traditional historical method. In *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, Muñoz also writes, "queerness has an especially vexed relationship to evidence."[40] Instead of committing to finding lost "objects," Muñoz articulates the concept of ephemera in developing a new method. He thinks of ephemera as "trace[s], the remains, the things that are left, hanging in the air like a rumor," which are "often embedded in queer acts, in both stories we tell one another and communicative physical gestures."[41] In order for me to engage in queer pasts in South Korea, which is more often than

39. Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 245.

40. Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia,* 65.

41. Ibid.

not omitted from majoritarian archives, I grasped ephemera, feelings, and gestures as historical materials.

Thus, my project takes an interdisciplinary approach and attends to a range of performances, both textual and embodied, in order to trace the remains of activists and artists' labor to perform queerness across different mediums. Because of the ephemerality of queer culture, it is important to engage in a variety of forms of media, from print, film, and video to social media, as well as engage in participant observation fieldwork. There is no state-funded archive that is dedicated to queer history and just one privately-owned archive run by the Korean Sexual Minority Culture and Rights Center. Other than that, materials with which I could trace the remains of queerness were located in human right organizations and private homes. Therefore, searching for archives was a big part of my field research. In addition, participant observation was another essential part of my research, especially for accessing those scenes of protests, screening events, and shows.[42] By immersing myself in those moments of dissensus, I closely attend to what queerness looks like and how queerness sounds. My documentation of such scenes through a sensory engagement constitutes the core of my method to capture the emergence of queer time. This project centers on the use of *performance*, both as an object of study and as an analytical lens, to interpret aesthetic practice, embodiment, and gestures that function as repositories of history. Overall, the project historicizes moments of intimate contact between queer aesthetic practices and social movements, which set the stage for a new mode of being.

42. Most of the field research I conducted was from December 2016 to August 2017. I conducted some additional research in summer 2018 and 2019.

Queer Elsewhere

> … much of contemporary queer scholarship emerges from U.S. institutions and is largely written in English. This fact indicates a problematic dynamic between U.S. scholars whose work in queer studies is read in numerous sites around the world. Scholars writing in other languages and from other political and cultural perspectives read but are not, in turn, read. These uneven exchanges replicate in uncomfortable ways the rise and consolidation of U.S. empire, as well as the insistent positing of a U.S. nationalist identity and political agenda globally. We propose epistemological humility as one form of knowledge production that recognizes these dangers.[43]

As a bilingual and bicultural queer scholar from South Korea and based at a U.S. institution of higher education, I give serious consideration to what Eng, Halberstam and Muñoz called "epistemological humility" throughout my project. As I depict in the following chapters, the ideas and practices of queerness from the United States have been actively translated and shared among queer activists and artists in South Korea. The intellectual and artist world of South Korea has been greatly influenced by the United States, not only because of its contemporary hegemony but also because of the legacies of the Korean War and its subsequent military occupation in South Korea. However, the circulation of theories and practices do not happen without criticism or new inventions, although those criticisms and new inventions produced in South Korea merely arrive in the United States, as Eng, Halberstam and Muñoz point out. My project alleviates this problematic unevenness in the field of queer studies by introducing queer theory and aesthetics as they emerged in South Korea and how they ultimately "provincialized" U.S. produced queer theory and aesthetics.[44]

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43. David L. Eng, Judith Halberstam and José Esteban Muñoz, "Introduction: What's Queer About Queer Studies Now?," *Social Text* 84-85, Vol. 23: 15 (2005).

44. Here I am gesturing toward Dipesh Chakrabarty's groundbreaking book *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

Aligning my research inquiry with Maya Mikdashi and Jasbir K. Puar's essay in GLQ's special issue on *Area Impossible: The Geopolitics of Queer Studies* (2016), I hold on to their provocative question: "Can queer theory be recognizable as such when it emerges from elsewhere?"[45] While I draw heavily upon the works of queer of color critique, which has flourished mostly in the U.S. academia, I do not consider my project to be a case study that applies a queer of color critique as a universal tool to analyze the empirical in South Korea. Instead, I explore possible coalitions between queer of color critiques and queer theory that "emerges from elsewhere"—in the case of my project, from South Korea.

Chapter Organization

I carefully selected four sites to illustrate the aesthetics of queerness in social movements in South Korea. Each chapter attends to the emergence of queer times in which queer artists and activists created a new mode of collectivity, critiquing the unsatisfying present and imagining a new future. In the particular location of South Korea, queer aesthetics becomes a site to elaborate on what it means to be critically queer in the neoliberal world.

Chapter 1, "Protest! Solidarity and the Formation of Minority Politics," examines the formation of solidarity and *sosuja chŏngch'i* (minority politics) at sites of protest over the last three decades. Historically, one of the first queer assemblies in public was the general strike of 1997, which entailed a series of mass protests against neoliberal restructuring and oppression. Looking this scene as a point of departure for queer activism, I trace the radical kernel of queerness in coalitional practice based on anti-capitalist and feminist critiques, bridging a range of forms of social marginality in South Korea. On the one hand, I explore queer participation in

45. Maya Mikdashi and Jasbir K. Puar, "Queer Theory and Permanent War" (GLQ 22:2, 214)

mass protests, in which queer activists contested heteronormativity and critically intervened in the democratic nation-building process of the liberal regimes of Kim Dae-jung (1998–2003), Rho Moo-hyun (2003–2008) and Moon Jae-in (2017–present) presidencies, as well as the Candlelight Protests (2016–2017) against Park Geun-hye, daughter of dictator Park Chung-hee. Drawing upon a queer sense of urgency, which was epitomized by political slogans of "Najungŭn ŏpta (There is no later)" and "Chigŭm tangjang (RIGHT NOW)," I engage in queer activist labor to imagine a queer futurity, contesting the progressive movement's heteronormative imaginary of nation-building anew. On the other hand, I examine protests organized by queer activists, in which social minorities came together in solidarity. I trace the ways in which the passage of an anti-discrimination bill has become one of the major goals of queer activism in South Korea; the bill is meant to protect a diverse array of minorities, not just LGBTQ individuals, and through the struggle to enact this bill, which continues today, queer activism has built solidarity across differences. In sum, this chapter offers an overview on the history of queer activism in South Korea, paying special attention to the ways in which the formation of affinities and coalitions has been a core element of queer politics since the 1990s.

Chapter 2, "Queer Independent Korean Cinema," explores the rich archive of the queer independent film scene, in order to offer a nuanced understanding of queerness from the particular location of South Korea. The queer independent film scene, I argue, gave birth to the artistic and intellectual genealogy of queerness in South Korea in the confluence of the 1987 democratization and the rise of global capitalism. It is important to recognize the connections between the Korean independent film movement from the 1980s and its relationship to the queer

film scene, as well as the influence of the New Queer Cinema of the 1990s.[46] Drawing upon archival research, I explore the ways in which Korean queer independent cinema contributed to the formation of a queer counterpublics by offering sites for queer subjects to come together and discuss what it means to be critically queer. In order to further engage in the question of queerness in films, I critique two recent queer independent films: Leesong Hee-il's feature film *White Night* (2012) and Lee Dong-ha's documentary film *Weekends* (2016). With these films, I attend to the ways in which Korean queer independent cinema offers alternative visions of building new senses of "we." I explore the films with the following inquiries: What kinds of queer socialities are imagined and performed in the film? How does the notion of queer utopia/dystopia meet their desire to escape? What are the relations between past, present, and future in the cinematography? How does a sense of belatedness operate as a mode of critique to both heteronormative and homonormative temporalities?

Chapter 3, "Queer Pasts: Performance and Queer Historiography," further engages in the queer utopian impulse to imagine *then* and *elsewhere* to survive today. Specifically, I look at the encounter between the pre-identitarian queer world in the 1950s and 1960s and the contemporary, through feminist artist siren eun young jung's project on *yeosung gukgeuk* (national female theatre troupe). This ten-year project, launched in 2009, is constituted of a series of multimedia installations and stage productions.[47] In examining siren's extensive work on *yeosung gukgeuk*, I observe the ways in which a utopian impulse drives this project and

46. Queer film theorist B. Ruby Rich coined a term New Queer Cinema, capturing a new wave of queer-themed independent filmmaking by LGBT directors in North America and Europe in the 1990s. See B. Ruby Rich, *New Queer Cinema: The Director's Cut* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).

47. With respect for the artist's refusal of her patriarchal last name, I refer her as "siren," an artist name she created for herself.

eventually gestures toward a new mode of collectivity for queers in the contemporary art scene. In particular, I am interested in the ways in which siren moves across generations in her project, first through a historiographic work based on oral history interviews with actors in their eighties, which tell stories about non-normative intimacies and non-binary gender practices of the pre-identitarian era, and then later through as a theatrical production to collectively imagine and experience what it means for queer subjects to come together across generations in order to articulate a new future.

I continue to explore the significance of aesthetic practices to build a new collectivity in chapter 4, "The Korean Queer Culture Festival: Dissensus, Queer Counterpublics, and the Emergence of *We*," I engage in the history of Korean Queer Culture Festival (KQCF), exploring the significance of cultural politics in the formation of queer activism in South Korea. As one of the earliest public gatherings of LGBTQ community members and their allies, KQCF has been a critical venue for queer activists and artists to articulate what queerness means and does in South Korean context. While the format of KQCF is heavily influenced by the post-Stonewall Pride events in North America and Europe, this twenty-year-old annual event goes beyond participating in the global pride events, which are often criticized for their promotion of a consumerism and homonormativity. I am interested in the emergence of queer time in KQCF, which allows the participants to experience and imagine the world that they want to live in. In engaging queer world making practices during KQCF, I explore the ways in which the sense of "we" plays a crucial role in the formation of queer politics in South Korea.

In the first half of the chapter, I examine the radical kernel of queerness in KQCF by exploring the pre-KQCF moments on college campuses and in the gay and lesbian nightclubs, in which activists and artists created feminist and queer spaces through a series of events, including

film screenings, drag shows, karaoke nights, dance contests, and roundtable discussions. In the latter half of the chapter, I focus on Seoul Queer Culture Festival (SQCF) 2015, through which I illustrate contested scenes, due to the rise of hate politics as a result of the conservative regimes of Lee Myung-bak (2008–2013) and Park Geun-hye (2013–2017). Since 2014, evangelical Christian organizations have rendered Queer Culture Festivals as even more contested sites for articulating what it means to be queer in public. By theorizing on SQCF 2015 in terms of Jacques Rancière's dissensus, I explore the political significance of gesturing towards more "we"s, with its stark contrast to hate groups.

The conclusion, "#We Make the Road," serves both as a summation of the project and an extension of my research to engage in a radical kernel of queerness. I look into the online queer parade 2020, one of the most recent events for queer subjects to come together, in order to grasp the emergence of queerness in today's world. As the role of the internet as a communication technology has grown even more significantly today, it is close to impossible to theorize on queer worldmaking practices without giving consideration to virtual interactions, particularly on social media. Drawing upon Marcela A. Fuentes's conceptualization of "performance constellations," I engage in the ways in which queer participants claim a queer world in commercially driven online platforms, dispersing a utopian impulse for queer futurity.

It is my queer historical impulse that initiated this project, which I have carried since the early 2000s when I first engaged in queer activism in South Korea. In the early 2000s, most of the first-generation queer activists had disappeared from the scene. I wasn't surprised by their absence, since there was no compensation nor social recognition for queer activist labor. In fact, many of the activists I had worked with in the 2000s also left the scene thereafter in order to make a living. My project is a love letter to all of the cultural workers—activists, artists, and

volunteers—who were eager to make a queer world in the world, regardless of the lack of resources and oppression from a heteronormative and neoliberal society. As famously put by a feminist organization *Minwoohoe* (Women Link), we are stronger when we are connected.

Chapter 1. Protest! Solidarity and the Formation of Minority Politics

Intro

"I am a woman and a tongsŏngaeja (homosexual).[48] How dare you divide my human rights in half?" Kwak Yi-kyung, a member of the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KTCU) and Solidarity for LGBT Human Rights of Korea, stood up from her seat in the audience and directed her words to Moon Jae-in, who was the presidential nominee of the Democratic Party of Korea at the time. Just before this open forum, organized by Moon's think tank to discuss gender equality, Moon had met with the Christian Council of Korea, one of the biggest and most influential alliance of churches, and promised them that he would not pursue the anti-discrimination bill in his presidency and that he did not support homosexuality. The Christian Council of Korea is one of the main opponents to queer rights, and many consider them to be actively spreading homophobia. In response to Kwak's interruption of his speech, Moon told her that he would hear her out later. As Moon said this, his supporters began chanting "Later, later, later!" to drown her out.[49] Instead of giving time and space for Kwak to have a discussion with Moon, his supporters

48. In her remark, Kwak uses the expression "*tongsŏngaeja*," which translates to homosexual. The term *tongsŏngaeja* tends to be used in formal settings, such in public forums about human rights.

49. The incident is available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fV5jfZSE3OA (video created by dotface media)

overwhelmed her voice with their collective voice and applause. Moon paused for a bit and continued his speech, during which he claimed that he was going to be a feminist president.

This incident has become a symbolic moment for queers, as it is the latest manifestation of the constant delay, if not refusal, to locate queer rights in liberal politics in South Korea.[50] Prior to Moon, the Roh Moo-hyun administration (2003–2008) failed to fulfill his campaign pledge to legislate a comprehensive anti-discrimination bill, which includes a prohibition on discrimination based on one's sexual orientation and gender identity. The major backlash to this bill came from evangelical Christian groups, who found the protections for LGBTQ individuals most problematic. Roh's failure to enact the bill convinced other liberal politicians that pursuing queer rights could threaten their political career. But instead of outright refusing to work on queer agendas, liberal politicians kept saying it was *too early* to discuss queer rights in South Korean society.[51] But for queer activists, *now* is already *too late* to pass a bill to protect LGBTQ citizens. The video recording of Kwak's speech and the "later" chant went viral on the internet, as it illustrates how queer issues are always seen as afterthoughts in "progressive" politics. The soundscape of the scene further exemplifies how the queer voice is silenced in the political arena at large. Along with the video, the hashtags "Najungŭn ŏpta (There is no Later)" and "Chigŭm tangjang (RIGHTNOW)" were circulated widely on Twitter, conveying a sense of urgency around discussing queer issues during the presidential election campaign.

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50. Liberal politics in South Korea is one product of the people's movement against the military dictatorship. Song astutely observes how former-activist politicians and civil workers have precipitated the (neo)liberalization of South Korea in the postauthoritarian regimes. Roh Moo-hyun, Kim Dae-jung's successor, continued (neo)liberalization projects in his presidency.

51. Moon, in a subsequent TV debate, said that there was no consensus on queer rights in South Korea yet and that it would take time to reach it, just as how the Obama administration took some time to legalize the same-sex marriage. I'll come back to this later in this chapter.

Moreover, Kwak's remark drew critical attention to the ways in which women's issues are multilayered; in Kwak's case, she is both a woman and a "homosexual" at the same time. And yet not only did Moon meet with the Christian Council of Korea, but he also left no room for queer activists at this forum on gender equality. Kwak's intervention is indicative of the accumulated frustration toward liberal feminists who work for, or are in support of, so-called progressive parties in South Korea. This brief moment of dissensus signifies the long-standing disappointment that the queer community has with not just liberal politics but also feminist politics. Kwak's disruption created a stage for critical engagement with a liberal politician's invocation of *not-yet* regarding the queer agenda and for queer subjects to express their sense of urgency regarding the place of queer rights in envisioning a democratic nation. In other words, the scene revealed a clash of different temporalities regarding South Korea's direction after the impeachment of Park Geun-hye. Kwak's action, I argue, represents *yŏndae chŏngch'i* (solidarity politics), which builds on the multiplicities of struggles for *sosuja* (minority), who cannot be reduced to a single identity like *woman*.

In discussing the history of queer activism in South Korea, many scholars and activists pay special attention to the ways in which the formation of affinities and coalitions has been a core element of queer politics since the 1990s. In setting up an affective genealogy of South Korean queer activism, queer feminist scholar Sunnam Kim attends to the ways in which these connections have emerged in the political arena of solidarity among queer, feminist, disability, and labor organizers.[52] Drawing upon interviews with social movement actors, Kim argues that

52. Sunnam Kim, "Segyemandŭlgirosŏŭi K'wiŏjŏngch'ihak: 'Uri'ŭi iyagidŭl, 'Uri'rŭl Pyŏnhyŏngshik'yŏon Kwajŏngdŭl (Queer Politics as World-Making – 'Our' Stories, the Processes that Have Been Changing 'Us')," Han'gukyŏsŏnghak (Journal of Korean Women's Studies) 34, no.4 (2019): 1-33.

queer politics in South Korea is inherently an intersectional praxis that challenges social normativity, and has been constantly transformed through contact and encounters with other social movements.[53] She examines the ways in which the sense of *we* has been transformed in these moments of making connections based on shared struggles. Tari Young-Jung Na, queer feminist researcher and activist, explores the concept of "queer citizenship" (queer as an adjective), in order grasp the subversive aspect of queer activism in South Korea. In her analysis, queer activism is not just about inclusion, nor about acquiring normative citizenship; if we consider citizenship to be the property of a rights-bearing subject under the legal protection of the state, Na argues, we only keep failing to recognize non-normative subjects at the margins. Finally, Na queers the notion of citizenship, redefining it as "an extended sense of identification [with the marginalized]."[54] In other words, citizenship is a performative and affective terrain that constantly changes over recognitions of shared struggles among the marginalized; it is a shared ethical position among those unfit to normative subjecthood.

Drawing upon Kim and Na's emphasis on the formation of *we* or "an extended sense of identification" in understanding queer activism in South Korea, I juxtapose the radical pasts and present, in which queerness functions as a critical sensibility with which to touch upon other kinds of political and social fantasies and imaginations. I carefully examine extraordinary times of coming together, in which queer subjects experimented to make a world within the world. How does protest become a stage for queer world making? Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner,

53. Ibid., 3.

54. "K'wiŏhan Shimin'gwŏnŭl Hyanghae: Sŏngsosujaŭi Samkwa Chukŭmŭl Chŏngch'ihwahagi (Toward Queer Citizenship: Politicizing Sexual Minorities' Life and Death). *Ch'angjakkwa Pip'yŏng* 44, no.3 (2016): 521.

in their groundbreaking essay "Sex in Public," define *world making* as a queer practice outside of "the official publics of opinion culture and the state" and "the privatized forms normally associated with sexuality," such as domestic spaces, kinship, the couple formation, property, or the nation.[55] How does queer activism align with and/or conflict with an impulse to build a new democratic nation in postauthoritarian South Korea?

To answer those inquiries, this chapter explores how queer activist have built solidarity across marginalized groups at protest sites. I focus on the sustained labor of queer activists who valued solidarity even in the face of homophobic, transphobic, and misogynistic behavior from fellow protesters. I argue that it is at such scenes of dissensus where a new sense of *we* emerges, which is essential to the formation of minority politics. Dissensus, as Jacque Rancière conceptualizes, is a specific type of conflict between *sense as sensory perception* and *sense as intellectual understanding*.[56] In weaving together historical protest scenes, I critically attend to the ways in which queer organizers engage in a new solidarity politics through dissensus, through which they critique patriarchal, heteronormative, and neoliberal nationhood and ultimately envision a new future. My argument centers on how queerness was formed and circulated as a practice, not only as a term to express non-normative modes of being, but also as a resistant politics, participating in social movements based on a shared struggle among minoritarian subjects in a heteropatriarchal, neoliberal world.

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55. Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, "Sex in Public," *Critical Inquiry* 24, no. 2 (1998), 558.

56. Jacque Rancière, Translated by Steven Cocoran, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics.* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academy, 2010), 139.

Methodology

In search of queer radical impulses from the past, I examined both archival materials and ephemera, including protest fliers, newsletters, zines, news articles, essays, oral history collections, videos and documentary films, as well as messages and images circulated on social media platforms. I consider those materials to be repositories for queer protest through which I can access the historical formation of queerness as an inherently solidarity-building act. In addition, I conducted field research in 2016–2017, during the ongoing candlelight protests in which millions of people flooded the streets of Seoul and reclaimed Gwanghwamun Square in order to remove president Park Geun-hye. While I participated in the protests, I also observed and documented them. At times I just walked among the crowd; at other times, I marched with queer and feminist organizations. In so doing, I was able to fully immerse myself in the very scene at that time.

In the following, I examine seven scenes of queer protest in chronological order in order to show the ways in which queerness, as a minoritarian subject position, emerges, disperses, and re-emerges in critical moments. Needless to say, queer activists have organized and participated in more than these seven protests, but I have curated these scenes to demonstrate historical threads of solidarity building in queer activism over the last two decades in South Korea.

Scene #1. The 1997 General Strike

> My heart skipped a beat whenever I saw a rainbow flag at a protest site back in the days, when I was involved in student activism. Now many people know what the rainbow flag means, but back then, it was like a secret sign for me. I wondered if there was anyone

else having noticed the flag like I did (Na Young, SHARE: Center for Sexual Rights and Reproductive Justice).[57]

One of the earliest instances of political queer assembly in public spaces was during the 1997 general strike. The rainbow flag that Na Young saw at a protest may have been the one that queer activists brought to the mass protests at Marronnier Park in Seoul.[58] On the night of December 26, 1996, the ruling Liberty Korea Party passed a new Labor Standards Act and an amendment to the National Security Act, which would increase labor market flexibility and repress political freedoms.[59] In response, the KCTU called a general strike, which was joined by millions of workers and was the biggest mass protest since the June Democratic Uprising of 1987. The general strike took place only a few months before the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis, which resulted in the South Korean government requesting assistance through the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) grant program. Even before IMF intervention, South Korea had been facing international demands to restructure its economy along neoliberal principles. The new Labor Standards Act was only a precursor to the massive neoliberal restructuring that the Korean people would soon experience.

In the midst of this political and economic upheaval, queer activists also joined the 1997 general strike. Members of the College Student Association for Gay and Lesbian Human Rights,

57. Na Young. "[Hwaltongga P'yŏnji] Trssŭkkat'rŭl Nŏmŭn Chintcha Yŏndae ([A Letter from an Activist] The Real Solidarity Beyond 'Trssŭkka'). *Web Zine Solidarity for LGBT Human Rights of Korea*, December 9, 2017. https://lgbtpride.tistory.com/1542

58. Marronnier Park is the former location of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Seoul National University and was one of the most prominent sites of protest during the democratic movement against military dictator Park Chung-hee in the 1970s. Park relocated the campus to Kwanak Mountain in order to isolate student activists. Today, Marronnier Park is still a popular venue for mass protests in Seoul.

59. The New Labor Standards Act included easing restrictions on mass layoffs, allowing for the hiring of temporary workers during the strike, and not paying striking workers.

which had just been established in 1996, headed to the mass protest with a rainbow flag. January 14, 1997 was the first day of their participation, and the first time a rainbow flag appeared in the public sphere.[60] They continued to show up at Marronnier Park in Seoul for a month and disseminated 10,000 flyers with the following political statement:

> For solidarity between workers and homosexuals!
>
> Workers are not responsible for the pain that capital has caused.
> Homosexuals and women are the worst victims of mass layoffs.
> […]
> We homosexuals will strengthen solidarity with workers. We all are oppressed by the capitalists, and we will confront the undemocratic and unfair structures of oppression.
> […]
> The only way that we can break through the crony capitalist framework is solidarity between progressive organizations and individuals. This struggle is to make a better world for future generations.

The statement emphasizes the shared struggle between workers, "homosexuals," and women under capitalism. It states that capitalist oppression in the midst of neoliberal restructuring is the common source of pain. The College Student Association for Gay and Lesbian Human Rights activists positioned themselves as allies with both striking workers and precarious workers. The 1997 general strike was one of the first times that queer activists engaged in an act of solidarity.

Kirikiri, a lesbian organization, joined the protests from the beginning, both as workers and lesbians. Until that point, the group had been focused on developing membership. Their participation in the protests prompted the members of *Kirikiri* to discuss what direction they want to take as an organization: should *Kirikiri* remain focused on community development or participate more deeply in social movements? In 1997, *Kirikiri* renamed itself the Korean Lesbian Human Rights organization to fight for social justice.[61]

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60. College Student Association for Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Newsletter *Dyke* no.1, March 15, 1998, P.9.

In a report of an archival video stored at the Korean Lesbian Counseling Center, a former *Kirikiri* member delivers a vivid description of the 1997 general strike.[62] The video was shot by the College Student Association for Gay and Lesbian Human Rights, capturing scenes of protests and interviews with queer participants about what solidarity with workers meant to them. One participant, according to the report, argued that "without liberating lesbians, there is no liberation for women. And vice versa."[63] She found building relationships with women's organizations to be an important part of her organizing work. She expressed her frustration with progressive social movements in general for the lack of discourse around gender and sexuality and she saw the nuclear family as the common source of oppression both for homosexuals and workers due to its critical role in enforcing normative structures in society. She wasn't there to just support workers; she was there to build solidarity:

> What oppresses homosexuals is the nuclear family. The state wants to maintain the nuclear family as a basic unit of society, because that way, the state doesn't have to pay for the cost of social welfare. Workers and their families are responsible for each individual's well-being. When we had conversations with workers [union members], we talked a lot about that. At first, they met with us out of curiosity, but after talking with us, they began to see common ground between workers and homosexuals.[64]

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61. Lang lang, an oral history interview by the Lesbian Oral History Research Center

62. Chori, "[Yŏngsang] Tongsŏngaejaga Chip'oee Kan Iyu ([Video] The Reason Why Lesbians Went to the Protest)," July 20, 2014. https://lsangdam.org/?p=1456

63. Kim Ji-hye's master's thesis *Study on the Development of the Western Lesbian Theory and its Historical Implications from a Lesbian/Feminist Perspective* (Department of Women's Studies, Ewha Women's University, 1997) is a landmark intellectual work for the early lesbian activism. When I became a member of *Kirikiri* in 2002, Kim's thesis was one of the first required readings during membership training.

64. Chori.

After their participation in the general strike, queer activists continued to build solidarity with labor union activists. By bringing the rainbow flag to protests, a symbol that wasn't popularly known back then, queer activists made queer existence visible to the public. The *Kirikiri* member in the video also testified that during protests, some union members approached the queer activists and told them that they were also queers, which helped to strengthen connections between the movements. During this extraordinary time of coming together, queer activists experienced a whole new realm of being and making connections with one another.

What is especially notable about this period is that the 1990s was the formative time for many queer organizations, and experiences during the general strike of 1997 became thresholds for queer activists to shape their vision for the movement. In 1998, the College Student Association for Gay and Lesbian Human Rights changed their name to Solidarity for Gay and Lesbian Human Rights and has been participating in social justice issues from a queer socialist perspective. *Kirikiri*, as demonstrated in the video interview during the general strike of 1997, considered feminism a key component of their political vision to critique neoliberal capitalism.

Scene #2. The Mujigae (Rainbow) Protest in 2003

The 2000s was another important historical time, especially for the Korean feminist movement; it finally seemed like *hojuje* (the family headship system) was about to be abolished. Under *hojuje*, women cannot enter the family registry without a male member.[65] For example, a single mother is not allowed to register her child(ren) in the family registry, and so she has to find a male family member to adopt her child(ren). Without doing so, the child cannot receive

65. *Hojuje* originated from Japanese colonial law. While Japan abolished the system in 1947, the postwar South Korean state retained this system in its1958 constitution.

state benefits or rights, such as health insurance and the right to go to school. Under this system, women cannot stand as individual citizens; they have to belong to her father, husband, brother, or even her son. Abolishing *hojuje* had been one of the biggest goals for Korean feminists for decades, as it treated women as second-class citizens and cast them as merely property of male citizens. The movement to abolish *hojuje* accelerated alongside the growth of civil society in the 1990s; in 2000, women and feminist groups organized the coalition "Citizen's Solidarity to Abolish *Hojuje*" and brought the issue to the Constitutional Court. In 2005, the Constitutional Court judged *hojuje* unconstitutional and it was finally abolished in 2008.

While the abolishment of *hojuje* was a great achievement, its liberatory potential was constrained by what happened next; as Tari Young-Jung Na asserts, "the foundational logics remain largely unchanged as can be seen through the lives of LGBTI people."[66] Most major feminist groups and organizations decided to support the implementation of a new family registration law—instead of advocating for an individual-based identity registration system—in order to avoid backlash. The Family Relations Register (Kajok Kawn'kye Dŭngnok Chedo) compulsively reproduced the gendered categories of father, mother, son and daughter. Na argues that the Family Relations Register still considers marriage to be the primary method by which to establish a new family and does not recognize other relationship formations as families. The heteronormative family centered around the gender binary was maintained as the basic unit of the nation. The support of major feminist organizations for this law thus epitomizes their lack of care toward minority women, including queer and transgender women, migrant women, and women with disabilities.

66. Tari Young-Jung Na, "The South Korean Gender System: LGBTI in the Contexts of Family, Legal Identity, and the Military," *The Journal of Korea Studies* (2014) 19 (2): 4.

This section looks at a 2004 rainbow protest organized by three feminist organizations, chosen for its demonstration of the early formation of solidarity politics for minority women. As a member of *Kirikiri*, Korea Women's Sexual Minority Group, I was part of organizing an alternative March 8 women's march in 2004, calling it a *mujigae* (rainbow) protest, in order to contest the heteronormativity in the major feminist organizations' political vision, as expressed in the process of the abolishment of *hojuje*. Members of *Kirikiri*, Women Against War (WAW), and Women with Disabilities Empathy (WDE) gathered at Marronnier Park in Seoul to deliver a new political vision for feminism. In the previous year, *Kirikiri*, WAW, and WDE formed a solidarity coalition, emphasizing the importance of minority politics in feminism. Having witnessed the failure of major feminist organizations to profoundly challenge the structure of heteronormative family and gender binarism, these three feminist organizations collected stories of women's lives at the margins, critically revealing how some women are excluded from the category of women, particularly in the state interpellation. The *mujigae* protest was one of the earliest attempts to demonstrate the ways in which minority politics are located in the context of queer/feminism. Although the coalition itself did not last long, it was one of the first moments in which I observed the rise of queer feminism, exploring the ways in which minoritarian subjects are related and affiliated with each other based on a multilayered understanding of gender, sexuality, and disability.

Behind the Scenes: The Introduction of Anti-Discrimination Legislation in 2007

Queer activism in South Korea entered into a new period during the Roh Moo-hyun administration (2003–2008). During his electoral campaign, Roh pledged to enact comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation, promoting his career as a human rights lawyer. In

December 2007, the Roh administration proposed a comprehensive anti-discrimination bill to the Legislation and Judiciary Committee of the National Assembly, which prohibited discrimination in the areas of employment and education on the basis of sex, gender, religion, disability, age, social status, region of origin, state of origin, ethnic origin, physical conditions such as appearance, medical history, marital status, political opinion, and sexual orientation. The Korea Enterprises Federation immediately announced their opposition to the legislation, claiming that it was necessary for them to consider educational history and medical history in employment. Furthermore, evangelical Christian groups organized protests and call-ins to the offices of lawmakers who had added their names to the anti-discrimination bills, demanding the removal of sexual orientation from the bill. In order to pass the legislation, the Roh administration modified the bill and removed seven categories, including sexual orientation, medical history, family status, language, country of origin, and criminal records. The legislation that had been intended to protect the vulnerable would now potentially expose the vulnerable to greater vulnerability, as removing some categories from the anti-discrimination bill could be equated with authorization to discriminate against those groups of people. In the end, despite the modifications, Roh administration failed to enact the bill.

I engage with coalition-building in 2007, when the Roh Moo-hyun administration proposed an enactment of the anti-discrimination bill, which was a historical threshold for queer activists. Although it was not the first time that queer activists experienced state discrimination, it was the first time that queer issues grabbed national political attention.[67] Among others,

67. Student activists and film festival organizers held a series of screening events in 1998 in resistance to state censorship under the Kim Dae-jung administration. I will further examine this in the following chapter.

evangelical Christian groups were quick to organize protests against the bill, acquiring support from the conservative opposition party. As this struggle is ongoing today, this section offers a historical background to coalition-building in the 2010s.

Certainly, it was a disappointing moment, but more importantly, it was a moment when queer activists realized the importance of the political mobilization and solidarity formation. Both the introduction and failure of the anti-discrimination legislation were led by liberal politicians who did not bother to consult the queer community. Thus, amidst the controversies, queer activists founded a coalition group *Mujigae Haengdong*: Rainbow Action Against Sexual Minority Discrimination, inviting not only the members of the queer communities but also activists from various human rights organizations and activist organizations, such as Human Rights *Sarangbang*, The Network for Global Activists and School of Feminism (NGA/SF), Christian Solidarity for a World Without Discrimination, and so on. The formation of this coalition was not only the result of long-term solidarity work that queer activists had engaged in, interacting with activists in various organizations, but also of a renewed relationship that each queer organization built with one another to confront this political upheaval.[68]

Scene #3. Queer Bus: Solidarity Actions

Among the multiple tactics of mobilization that queer activists applied to solidarity building, I am particularly interested in the "queer bus" action in 2011. This happened in the context of organized trips to a shipyard where Kim Jin-Sook, a former Hanjin Heavy worker and

68. Until 2007, the major queer organizations had not collaborated much, due to disagreement on what kind of political movement they wanted to build. For instance, *Kirikiri* considered feminism to be the root of the social change, whereas Solidarity for Gay and Lesbian Human Rights considered labor liberation to be at the core of their politics.

a member of the Korea Confederation of Trade Unions, occupied crane #85. Kim had initiated a *gogong nongsŏng* (high-altitude sit-in) on January 6, 2011 to protest the mass layoffs of Hanjin shipyard workers in Busan.[69] Thirty-five meters (115ft) above a windy shipyard with a bucket for a toilet, Kim staged a sit-in for 309 days. In order to show their support, the KCTU organized a bus trip to the shipyard. Calling it the Hope Bus, KCTU members as well as general participants went to support Kim's struggle. The first trip took place in June with sixteen buses.

After participating in the first Hope Bus and meeting queer activists at the site, Na Young, a prominent queer feminist activist, decided to call for participation from the queer community. The second Hope Bus was scheduled for July 9, a month after the first trip. Among the 10,000 participants, two buses were filled with queer participants who had responded to Na Young's call on Facebook. Calling it the Queer Bus, queer participants stood with Kim, expressing solidarity with the union's struggle. Na Young remembers the event in an essay:

> We have been at various protest sites holding rainbow flags, but this was the first time anyone officially expressed gratitude to sexual minorities for our solidarity. Thus, Kim Jin-Sook's acknowledgement of our presence gave us unforgettable feelings and emotions. Since that day, we have had numerous encounters with the Hanjin union members, which were at times awkward. But our efforts continued and finally, the union members gave a solidarity speech at the Seoul City Council Sit-in in 2011.[70]

69. *Gogong-nongsung* (high-altitude sit-in) is a unique form of protest in South Korea, an extreme measure that workers utilize when all other options have been exhausted. Kim Ju-ik, another Hanjin worker, staged a sit-in protest at the top of crane #85 for 129 days that same year. Kim's protest ended with his suicide at the scene. Since then, *gogong-nongsung* has been considered an extreme measure for protesting workers.

70. Na Young, "Mujigae Pin Yŏndaerŭl Kkumkkunŭn K'wiŏbŏsŭga Tallinda (Queer Bus, Dreaming of Solidarity)." *In'gwŏnorŭm*, December 12, 2016. http://hr-oreum.net/article.php?id=2013

In the essay, she recollects awkward moments that she had with the workers. At times, they used homophobic slurs to verbally insult the CEO of Hanjin. After the Queer Bus and more visits to the site, union members paid more attention to the presence of queer activists and eventually they were able to build relationships. Na Young was finally able to ask the workers to stop using homophobic slurs. This solidarity act, as mentioned in Na Young's essay, continued into queer protests. Queer activists kept showing up at labor union's protests afterwards, such as another *gogong nongsŏng* site for Ssangyong Motor workers at a transmission tower (2012) and a factory chimney (2014), and continued efforts to build solidarity.

Scene #4. Mujigae Sit-in at the Seoul City Hall in 2014

While the National Assembly did not engage with the anti-discrimination bill, some local governments, especially the ones dominated by the Democratic Party, tried enacting local anti-discrimination bills. Seoul Metropolitan City was one of them, and mayor Park Won-soon, who was considered a prospective presidential candidate, pledged to enact a human rights bill, which originally included protection for sexual minorities. However, Park, just like Moon, reneged on his promise shortly after a meeting with evangelical Christians in December 2014. During this meeting Park claimed that he did not support sexual minorities and he wouldn't try to push the bill through without consensus. Infuriated by his hypocrisy, queer activists gathered at Seoul's City Hall and occupied the lobby for six days to protest Park's decision. It was the first sit-in protest to be held in the lobby of Seoul City Hall.

This historical moment is nicely captured in the documentary film *Weekends*, which followed the gay choir group G_Voice of *Chingusai*, Korean Gay Men's Human Rights Group. The occupation began when a couple of queer activists attempted to hang a huge rainbow flag

over a skywalk in city hall that says "Human rights are a matter of life and death for sexual minorities," only to be quickly blocked by police officers. Chanting with fists raised, queer activists stormed into the lobby and did not leave for six days. Holding banners stating, "homosexuality is not an object of 'support' and 'consensus'" and "Mayor Park, apologize to sexual minorities right now," queer activists expressed their accumulated frustrations with liberal politicians. G_Voice appeared at the sit-in five days out of six and sang songs to celebrate being together. One member attested, "At first I was mad about Park's decision but as I joined the sit-in, it was actually fun. I was able to feel that I was not alone."[71] Participants at the site created pickets with their own messages, drew pictures to decorate the venue, and gave speeches. It was like a culture festival where the participants staged a series of performances in the lobby of Seoul City Hall, celebrating a moment of coming together. This scene illuminates the ways in which coming together is a mode of political activism, forging connections and relationalities among those at the site, sharing queer feelings in a moment of the failure; we may still not have legal protections, but we know that we have each other to come together to imagine otherwise, once again, and more again.

Scene #5. "Ain't I a Woman?" Protest in 2015

In August 2015, the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family requested that the Daejeon City government to remove from its gender equality bill the article on the protection and support for sexual minorities, claiming that the article contradicts the Gender Equality Legislation.[72] The

71. *Weekends,* directed by Lee Dong-ha (2016, Seoul, South Korea).

72. Since 2014, evangelical Christian groups have been organizing to stop local governments from passing human rights bills. (See Shiwoo, *K'wiŏ Ap'ok'allipsŭ: Saranggwa*

rationale that the Ministry of Gender Equality gave was that the Gender Equality Legislation is to protect "women," not sexual minorities. In response to the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family's announcement, queer feminist activists organized a protest with the slogan "ain't I a woman?" Led by members of the *Unni* (sister) Network, a feminist cultural activist group founded in 2004, the protesters borrowed the phase from Black feminist Sojourner Truth's infamous speech at the Ohio Women's Rights Convention in 1851. What does it mean to reanimate Truth's speech, given in the nineteenth century in the United States, in contemporary South Korea? Truth's speech addressed the necessity of an intersectional approach to addressing Black women's liberation. While being located at seemingly different historical and geopolitical sites, the participants engaged with Truth's challenge to rethink the category of woman and shared the wide variety of their experiences as women, including a transgender woman, a lesbian in her sixties, a labor union activist, and a disabled woman.[73]

About 150 people gathered in front of Daehanmun in the heart of Seoul, where participants gave speeches to reiterate who is a woman and what feminism should be about:

> I am a sexual minority and a woman. My identity is not one but multiple. Gender discrimination happens within a multi-faceted web of religion, age, social status, and nationality. The article on protection and support for sexual minorities does not contradict the Gender Equality Legislation.[74]

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hyŏmoŭi chŏngch'ihak (Queer Apocalypse: Politics of Love and Hate), (Seoul, South Korea: Hyŏnshilmunhwa, 2018))

73. Patricia Hill Collins's book *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* was translated in 2009, introducing the theory of intersectionality.

74. Kim, Yaeji. "Nanŭn yŏsŏngi anin'ga? yŏsŏnggajokpunŭn ttokparo pwara (Ain't I woman? Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, Look at Us). *Ohmynews*, October 12, 2015. http://www.ohmynews.com/NWS_Web/View/at_pg.aspx?CNTN_CD=A0002150332

All of their speeches ended by asking "ain't I a woman?," calling for an intersectional analysis in thinking about who counts as "woman" in the state. This moment recalls the *mujigae* protest in 2004, when three feminist organizations problematized gender binarism and ableim in the popular conception of gender equality.

In the 2010s, heteronormative gender binarism had become even more enforced in the language of mainstream feminism, especially during the right-wing regimes of Lee Myng-bak (2008–2013) and Park Geun-hye (2013–2017). There was (and still is) a huge debate over whether to use the term *sŏngp'yŏngdŭng* (gender and sexual equity) or *yangsŏngp'yŏngdŭng* (equality of the two sexes). The latter term not only enforces the gender binary but also limits the political imagination on what equality means for members of the society. For the participants of the "ain't I a Woman" protest, feminism offered a language through which to connect with each other outside of the status quo and rights discourse.

Scene #6. The Candlelight Protests of 2016 and 2017

In the following, I attend to queer protests during the candlelight protests of 2016–2017 and after.[75] This section is driven mostly by ethnographic research that I conducted from June

75. The root of candlelight protests goes back to November 2002. Two teenage girls were killed by a U.S. military vehicle in June, but no one took responsibility for the accident. In November, the United States Court of Appeals for the Armed Forces found the military personnel who drove the vehicle not guilty. Due to the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) between South Korea and the U.S., Korean criminal law is not applicable to U.S. military personnel. Korean activists had long been critiquing this agreement, and people's sentiments intensified after the not guilty verdict. On November 29, people gathered in Gwanghwamun neighborhood with candles and held a peaceful memorial. This gathering was suggested on the online bulletin board of the *Hankyoreh* newspaper by Angma (username, available at http://www.ohmynews.com/NWS_Web/View/at_pg.aspx?CNTN_CD=A0000096428). The first gathering was more of a vigil, but it evolved into a series of protests demanding the repeal of SOFA. Candlelight protests have since become a popular form of protest and in 2008 another series of massive protests took place demanding a ban the import of American beef in the midst

2016 to August 2017.[76] By fully immersing myself in protests between November 2016 and March 2017, I grasped the ways in which queerness emerges as a critical force to challenge heteronormativity in moments when people are engaging with the idea of building a new nation.

In October 2016, people gathered in the heart of Seoul to call for the impeachment of President Park Geun-hye, galvanized by the corruption scandal of Choi Soon-shil's political involvement in the Park administration. Although what sparked the mass protest was the Choi scandal, there had been a series of protests against her regime, haunted by her father Park Chung-hee's dictatorship. In September 2016, prior to the candlelight protests, major activist organizations such as the KCTU, the Korean Peasants League, and the National Alliance for the Poor formed the Committee for People's Uprising and organized a series of protests. On October 2, the Committee of People's Uprising led a protest, this time mobilized by news reports of strong evidence of Park and Choi's corruption. Initially, protesters gathered at Cheongye Plaza, but as more people gathered, people marched to the Gwanhawmun Square and made attempts to continue the march to the Blue House. Although the protest was blocked by the police and did not proceed to the Blue House, Gwanghwamun Square became a place of mass gatherings for the people. Even before these most recent protests, there were regular protests by the families of victims of the Sewol Ferry incident (2014), a tragic event that many saw as symbolizing the Park

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of the outbreak of bovine spongiform encephalopathy in the U.S. Eventually, the protesters demanded a refusal of the US-Korea Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and largely blamed the Lee Myung-bak administration. The format of the Candle Light Protest came back again in 2016 against the Park Geun-hye administration.

76. During this time, I was in Seoul to conduct a fieldwork for my dissertation. My original research plan was to find archival materials to trace queer history and participate in queer activist gatherings. The candlelight protests were something that I didn't expect to experience when I initially planned my research. Due to the significance of these events, I changed plans and began participating in the protests as a protester and as a researcher.

administration's failures.[77] The corruption scandal was only a tipping point for the candlelight protests; frustration and despair at the actions of the Park administration had been accumulating and thus, the candlelight protests became a venue to critique worsened labor conditions and living conditions at large for people at the margins.

As more people joined in the protests, more than 1,500 civic organizations formed a coalition called "Emergency Citizen Action for the Resignation of the Park Geun-hye Administration" and organized protests across the country for seventeen consecutive weeks between October 2016 and March 2017, with the participation of millions of people across various cities in the country. On December 9, 2016, the National Assembly voted in favor of the impeachment and suspension of Park's presidency, and on March 10, 2017 the Constitutional Court upheld the impeachment in a unanimous 8-0 decision. During this extraordinary time, the protest sites became venues to articulate what democracy means to each individual, and eventually to imagine a new nation. For many who participated in this series of national events, the impeachment was only the beginning, rather than the end, of critiquing the present and envisioning a new nation.

77. On April 16th, 2014, the Sewol ferry sank and caused 299 deaths. There were almost no rescue attempts made while the ferry was sinking. Many of the deaths were high school students who were on a field trip to Jeju Island. In contrast to people who were watching the incident live with deep concern, Park Geun-hye never appeared in media until the evening. Nothing was done to rescue lives. The scene of the sinking ferry was repetitively broadcast and became one scene of national trauma in contemporary South Korea.

Figure 11. Candlelight Protest. Photo Courtesy of ohmynews

The candlelight protests reminded people of the 1987 Democratic Uprising with its massive size and its rejection of the legacies of military dictatorship. The majority of the organizations and groups in the "Emergency Citizen Action for the Resignation of the Park Geun-hye Administration" coalition were formed in the post-1987 political climate of South Korea and these organizations played leadership roles during the candlelight protests, putting their efforts and resources into making the square accessible for participants. They set up a stage in which protesters gave speeches as well as a broadcast system so that protesters who were not close enough to hear the speeches or see the sign language accompanied to the speeches could

also participate. They installed multiple screens, amplifiers and speaker on an unprecedented scale; having a stage, screen and amplifiers was not a new infrastructure for protests in South Korea, but the scale during the candlelight protests was overwhelmingly huge. Donations from protesters also helped to sustain these infrastructures, which offered an immersive experience for all the participants.

Queers were part of this national event to demand a new democratic nation; Solidarity for LGBT Human Rights of Korea was one of the organizations participating in the "Emergency Citizen Action for the Resignation of the Park Geun-hye Administration" coalition and many more small groups and individuals joined the march. One of the most notable moments was feminist and queer participants' demand to ban a misogynistic song by K-pop group DJ-DOC[78] at the protest, which epitomizes how queer and feminist participants challenged the heteronormative and misogynistic culture deeply embedded in South Korea's protest culture. Just as the Hanjin workers used homophobic slurs to insult the Hanjin CEO, protesters used misogynistic slurs against Park Geun-hye. Social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, was flooded with messages complaining about mansplaining and sexual harassment. The demand to ban the song was raised and delivered to the coalition group, which decided to ban the song as well as any misogynistic chants. Furthermore, queer and feminist participants formed a safe space within the protest space, making an autonomous zone to gather together and stand against the male gaze upon female participants, as well as sharpening their critiques to imagine a new democracy.

78. DJ DOC, "*Such'wiin punmyŏng* (Miss Park)," 2016.

In the evening of March 10, queer feminist activists called a gathering to celebrate this big moment of victory, removing Park from the presidency and putting her in jail. To reach the gathering, you had to walk past tents set up by various civil groups, including one by the victims' families of the Sewol Ferry incident.[79] Queer activists set up a small stage in the Gwanghwamun Square, right in front of the towering statue of Admiral Yi Sunshin, a historical figure celebrated by his successful defense of the Joseon Dynasty from the Japanese invasions (1592–1598). Behind the stage, there were paper dolls of Park Geun-hye and her accomplices in prison uniforms, which had been installed on that spot since the protest. In the midst of these spectacles of the nation, several hundreds of people gathered together, some with rainbow flags and their organizations' flags, to feel the moment of victory.

Recalling the Park administration's political mobilization of hate, the activists emphasized what this political struggle has meant to sexual queers: "We, sexual minorities, have always come out to the square and been together. Thus, new changes will be brought by every each of us. […] We will make changes, right here, this moment in which we are together. We will continue our fight and make another moment of victory."[80] By coming out to the square, queer protestors claimed the public sphere and critically intervened in the collective imagination of what should come after the candlelight protests and the impeachment of Park Geun-hye. In his speech, Lee Jong Geol, secretary general of *Chingusai* and member of Solidarity to Enact Anti-Discrimination Legislation, recalled the past two decades of queer protest:

> "Whenever the state denied our existence or tried excluding us, we fought together. In 2000, when the Commission on Youth Protection banned a gay website *X-Zone*, we came together. Back then, we had only a few people with little experience, but we formed a

79. The Sewol Ferry Incident

80. Na Young, March 10th, 2017.

> solidarity coalition and successfully removed homosexuality from the censorship list. In December 2014, we occupied the Seoul City Hall to demand our right to an equality bill for the citizens of Seoul. We've been demanding for the last ten years to decriminalize homosexuals in the military. We've been fighting to enact Anti-Discrimination Bill. […] We are strong people. We survive today, because we have been voicing ourselves out loud. We are the people who ought to make the future. […] This is our momentum. We must show and tell what equality for all truly means!"[81]

Lee's speech located queer participation in the candlelight protests in the history of queer protest against the state for equality, emphasizing the power of making queer voice sensible during the extraordinary time of protest. Both Na Young and Lee, leading figures in queer activism, highlighted the importance of moments of coming together for sexual minorities. Staging a celebration in Gwanghwamun Square, queer activists declared their presence in imagining a new future, refusing to be relegated to the "later" of liberal politics in South Korea.

Scene #7. Rainbow Flag Against Nationalism

As seen in the beginning of this chapter with Kwak Yi-kyung's interruption of Moon Jae-in, the victories of the candlelight protests did not last long for queers. In a TV debate on April 25, 2017, when asked about his opinion on homosexuality by the opposition party candidate, Moon Jae-in, the presidential nominee of the Democratic Party of Korea, first said he did not like homosexuality and continued, arguing that "even America, an advanced country that advocates human rights, legalized same-sex marriage only last year after having had a long debate. […] Our society has not yet reached a consensus on same-sex marriage." This phrase *not-yet* has haunted queers for too long. As I demonstrated earlier, the rhetoric of *not-yet* had been so prevalently used among liberal politicians and activists when it came to the issue of queerness,

81. Lee Jong Geol, March 10th, 2017.

and this time, queer and feminist activists began more actively confronting this problematic rhetoric. Enough was enough.

The following day, a group of queer activists appeared at a press conference organized by Moon's supporters, including people from the police, military, and the National Intelligence Service (NIS). A thousand supporters, all national security professionals and all in suits, stood in rows behind Moon to show their support. As Moon finished his speech, Chang Seo-yeon, an executive director at Rainbow Action and a human rights lawyer, stepped onto the stage, holding a rainbow flag to her chest. She asked Moon: "I am homosexual. Are you denying my existence?" She didn't have a chance to hear Moon's answer to her question, as security guards immediately removed her the area. Thirteen activists were arrested at the scene.

Figure 12. Chang Seo-yeon Approaches Moon Jae-in. Photo Courtesy of Focus news

As this hit the news, queer activists at the scene, particularly Chang who was holding a rainbow flag and confronted Moon, were labeled as "*mujigae* terrorists" by Moon supporters. Calling queer activists at the scene "terrorists" is somewhat revealing, especially considering the context of the scene in which experts of the national security gathered together to express their support for Moon. In this spectacular scene of nationalism, queer activists were treated as a threat to the national security, by disrupting the support for Moon from the police, military, and the NIS. As predicted on the day of victory of the candlelight protests, replacing Moon with Park would not bring a completely new world for queers; the rhetoric of *later* dominated the web, cyberbullying Chang and queer activists for demanding "too much change" in one day.

Queer Time: *Sosuja Chŏngch'i* (Minority Politics) and the Politics of *Yŏndae* (Solidarity)

Some may argue that queer activism in South Korea has not achieved any success; the Anti-Discrimination Bill has not been enacted, no politician engages with the question of marriage equality, and gay and transgender soldiers are not allowed in the military. In navigating the history of queer protests, what I encountered was a series of attempts to imagine another world, even if we don't know exactly what it looks like and what it feels like. The world that these activists dream of, I would argue, is not just a world that does not discriminate against queers, but a world with justice for all. Revisiting protest scenes is one way to discover how queerness has been formulated through a series of encounters across differences in South Korean context.

In the next chapter, I examine an even earlier formation of queerness in South Korea at sites of cultural production. I trace the ways in which queer theory was first introduced as an aesthetic theory, particularly through film, and how the Korean queer independent film scene has

functioned as one of the most vibrant sites for queers to explore and examine what it means to be "critically queer" in the neoliberal world.

Chapter 2. Queer Independent Korean Cinema

Prelude

Over the last two and a half decades, queer independent Korean cinema has played a significant role in articulating what it means to be "critically queer" in neoliberal Korea. I argue that the queer independent film scene gave birth to the artistic and intellectual genealogy of queerness in South Korea through its dynamic role of translating and transforming the concept of *queer*, rooted in the confluence of the radical tradition of *dongnip yŏnghwa* (independent filmmaking) in South Korea and New Queer Cinema from the West.[82] The queer independent film scene refers to queer film productions outside of commercial venues that are funded either by donations and grants from art organizations (both governmental and non-governmental) or by the filmmakers themselves. It also includes film festivals and screening events, as well as discursive spaces, such as film magazines, newspapers, and roundtable discussions. Cinema, as Karl Schoonover and Rosalind Galt argue in their book *Queer World Cinema*, "persists in queer culture as a site of political ferment, a volatile public stage on which protest can be expressed and ideas disseminated."[83] Cinema in South Korea has a special relationship to the formation of queerness. Watching queer films together, in both public and private venues, was one of the earliest attempts by queer subjects in South Korea to gather and exchange ideas about what queerness meant to them. In particular, the global emergence of New Queer Cinema greatly

82. New Queer Cinema is a genre defined by a film critic B. Ruby Rich to refer to a new wave of queer independent film movement in the early 1990s in North America and Europe. See B. Ruby Rich, *New Queer Cinema: The Director's Cut* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).

83. Karl Schoonover and Rosalind Galt, *Queer World Cinema* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 20.

impacted the discourse of queerness in South Korea; New Queer Cinema and its criticism served to introduce into the public sphere queer theory as a cutting-edge aesthetic theory, rather than as an identity category, which helped queer subjects to shield themselves from the heteronormative gaze while cultivating queer culture. Furthermore, the *dongnip yŏnghwa* (independent film) scene offered a space for queer activists to organize film screening events as well as train new filmmakers. The independent film scene in Korea, "provide[d] spaces in which to nourish more diffuse experiences of affinity, belonging, and intimacy, where spectatorship provokes the formation of unexpected collisions and coalitions."[84] I am interested in the ways in which queer filmmakers and activists formulated scenes of encounter to imagine and practice alternative socialities and collectivities that may not exist in dominant regimes of disciplinary subjecthood. Creating the queer independent film scene is a queer world making project that, in Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner's words, "necessarily includes more people than can be identified, more spaces than can be mapped beyond a few reference points, modes of feeling that can be learned rather than experienced as a birthright."[85] The contributions of New Queer Cinema to the queer Korean film scene were layered. On the one hand, by introducing New Queer Cinema as a cutting-edge aesthetic of the West, queer audiences and critics were able to present themselves as cinephiles, rather than as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender. This framing of queer films as arthouse cinema also helped in getting financial support from art organizations. On the other hand, queer critics and activists carefully curated what films to watch together, in pursuit of a radical politics of queerness to explore what was otherwise possible beyond heteropatriarchal

84. Ibid.

85. Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner. "Sex in Public," in *Critical* Inquiry 24, no.2 (1998): 559.

and (neo)liberal imaginations of kinship. My analysis of the queer independent film scene in South Korea centers on José Esteban Muñoz's theorization of queer utopias and queer futurity.[86] I argue that it is a queer utopian impulse that has driven the emergence of independent queer cinema in South Korea, creating multiple scenes to imagine something beyond the overwhelmingly heteropatriarchal here-and-now. However, readings of a queer utopian impulse in Korea should be done in a careful manner, as the notion of not-here could easily be misinterpreted as pointing to the West as an aspirational destination. While it is certainly true that many individuals in South Korea have been influenced by Euro-American ways of building subjectivities through the use of terms like LGBTQ, there are unique local contexts that shape the experiences and lives of queer subjects. And yet, it is risky to cast cultural uniqueness as the main source of different understandings and practices, because such approaches can easily (re)produce global hierarchies via sexual discourse.[87] Thus, I carefully attend the complexities of studying queerness in a transnational context, as queer desire for another world can both be part of a radical politics that refuses the unbearable here-and-now and of an assimilation into the progressive narrative that simply casts the West as a goal to be reached. Drawing upon archival research and film analysis, I attend to queer thought and political action in film. In so doing, I historicize the global queer film movement from the particular location of South Korea. Most of the materials I refer to in this chapter are ephemera, such as DIY zines, newsletters, and scraps of magazines and papers that could have been simply forgotten and discarded. Thanks to the Korea

86. José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: NYU Press, 2009).

87. See Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times.* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

Queer Archive, also known as Queerarch, these materials have been collected and made available to the public. The archive is run by the Korean Sexual-Minority Culture & Rights Center (KSCRC), an organization established in 2002 with the goal of supporting queer cultural productions and research. The materials, including video archives of the Seoul Queer Film Festival, were initially housed at the KSCRC office; in 2008, Queerarch acquired an office space and was able to open the archives to the public. Navigating piles and piles of papers in the small Queerarch office and reading stories that I've never heard or read elsewhere, I searched for a radical kernel of queer aesthetics in which queer filmmakers, critics, community organizers, and audiences came together to envision a new sense of collectivity. Furthermore, I consider films themselves to be a repository of queer history, whether the genre is fiction or documentary. My efforts to grasp the queer past can never be completed, as queer ephemera reveal only briefly legible moments in which one can feel, touch, and hear queerness. In this light, I consider my sites to be emergent scenes that keep disappearing and re-appearing, through which we can access queerness.

It was August 2017 in the midst of a notorious heatwave in Seoul when I commuted to the Queerarch office, located in a residential area of Sinchon. Sinchon is an area in close proximity to three universities, had a queer pride parade in 2014, and was the location of the historic lesbian club *Lesbos*, which closed in 2009.[88] After greeting Ruin, a renowned transgender activist, archivist and scholar who manages the space, I entered a tiny room filled with stacks of papers, magazines, and VHS tapes. I flipped through one file after another, feeling enchanted by the young energy of the early years of the formation of a queer counterpublic in the 1990s. Except for some magazines, most of the materials were not originals but were

88. *Lesbos* reopened in Itaewon in 2019 by the same owner.

photocopies or printouts. Many of the printouts were of exchanges that occurred on the Bulletin Board Service (BBS), which was a popular medium for LGBTQ-identified people to communicate anonymously. Since BBS is now gone, the traces of queer lives that it held have disappeared into a void, with these printouts as the only remaining traces. Sitting alone in the room with no A/C, I realized how much effort had been given to this archive, not only the efforts of those who maintain and make the space available to researchers, but also the traces of queer attachments to materials that contained anything LGBTQ-related. Many anonymous hands copied and stapled newsletters of gay and lesbian organizations, DIY zines, protest flyers, and scraps of magazines and newspapers. In the archive, the materials were organized chronologically from the early 1990s to today. Most of the materials in the first three folders were about queer cinema. The first half of this chapter engages with a discursive scene that had emerged before and after the very first Seoul Queer Film & Video Festival (SQFVF), one of the earliest public events held by queer activists in South Korea, in order to trace how the English term *queer* was introduced into the South Korean context in the mid- and late-1990s. I explore what queerness meant within the circuitry of uneven global exchanges of commodities, labors, bodies, affects, and discourses. In navigating new discourses and practices of queerness via film, I identify the utopian impulse of queer world-making. The latter half of this chapter examines the recent films of Leesong Hee-il and Lee Dong-ha, which are the very fruits of the development of queer independent film scene. Their films are also part of a queer world-making project, which carry the radical aspiration of queerness, calling upon new affinities and coalitions. In analyzing their films, I examine the ways in which filmmaking has been in a close contact with social movements and ultimately how the films function as both a social critique and an archive. Both of the filmmakers are members of one of the oldest and largest gay human rights group

Chingusai and neither of them attended film school.[89] Leesong Hee-il in particular is a leading figure in the queer independent film scene, not only as a filmmaker but also as an activist. Here my goal is not to set up the genealogy of queer independent films in South Korea, which would be another book-length project, but to discuss how these two particular films offer a venue to explore queer futurity in the particular location of South Korea.

Scene #1: The Introduction of *Queer* and New Queer Cinema

If it was industrialization in the U.S. that enabled gay and lesbian subjectivity as Lisa Duggan asserts, the expansion of global capitalism mediated the emergence of a new sexual subjectivity in South Korea.[90] As film scholar Christ Berry observes, the 1990s was a significant period of transition in South Korean history, marked by the end of authoritarian rule to the new, democratic regime of Kim Dae-Jung, and one that held particular meaning for queer subjects.[91] Queerness, as Berry asserts, was translated as an attribute of globalized capitalism that accompanied the rise of liberal democracy and cosmopolitanism. The first appearance of the English word *queer* in the South Korean public sphere was 1992. A news article reported on a Queer Nation protest in Los Angeles against the homophobic representation of a lesbian killer

89. *Chingusai* is a South Korean gay men's human rights group founded in February 1994.

90. Lisa Duggan, "The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism," in *Materializing Democracy: Towards a Revitalized Cultural Politics*, ed. Dana Nelson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 175-194.

91. Chris Berry, "My Queer Korea: Identity, Space, and the 1998 Seoul Queer Film & Video Festival," *Intersections: Gender, History and Culture in the Asian Context* 2, (1999).

character in the film *Basic Instinct* (1992).[92] This was one year before the establishment of *Cho'donghoe,* the first gay and lesbian activist group in Korea. From 1996 on, there was a significant increase in media coverage of queer subjects with the introduction of New Queer Cinema. *Kino*, a film magazine that engaged in serious film criticism, published a monthly series on New Queer Cinema in 1996, and *Cine 21*, another film magazine, frequently published articles about queer films. Film magazines were one of the most active venues through which to access film critiques that cited the work of queer theorists in North America and Europe such as Richard Dyer, Judith Butler, and Kobena Mercer. It is notable that while there was not a single monograph of these works translated into Korean at the time, New Queer Cinema and its critiques served to introduce into the public sphere concepts of queerness and queer theory as an aesthetic and a practice.[93] The rapid influx of New Queer Cinema ignited a heated debate on what queer cinema meant in the context of South Korea. Along with an increased interest in queer cinema among film critics, the independent Korean film *Broken Branches* (1995) attracted the attention of film critics with its inclusion of gay characters and a coming-out scene. However, queer activists, such as Seo Dong-jin and Lee Jung-woo disagreed with critics who saw *Broken Branches* as a Korean version of New Queer Cinema, as they thought the film merely reproduced stereotypes of gay men as effeminate. In particular, British film critic Tony Rayns's praise of *Broken Branches* (1995) elicited a strong reaction among Korean queer critics and activists. Ryans wrote, "In Europe and North America, we went through the gay liberation

92. "Ch'oesin Yŏnghwa "Malch'o Ponnŭng" Tongsŏng Yŏnae Tanch'e Panpal (A Homosexual organization's complain against a recent movie "Basic Instinct")," *Kyunghyang Shinmun*, March 15, 1992.

93. "Ashiaesŏŭi K'wiŏshinema : Pukkyŏngesŏ Manillakkaji, Uri Kyŏt'ŭi Uŏnghwarŭl Tashi Tullŏbomyŏ (Queer Cinema in Asia: From Beijing to Manila)." *Kino*, July 1996.

two decades ago, and as a result, the existence of gay people has become surprisingly visible. I've witnessed the same thing happened in Japan, Taiwan and Hong Kong, and now I see it's coming to South Korea too."[94] His account reveals a typical interpretation of queer politics elsewhere, casting the Western model of gay identity and visibility as the goal. Without hiding his disdain, Lee Jung-Woo refused Rayns's model of gay liberation and the progressive narrative of LGBT politics that sets the West as the final destination. He wrote, "regardless of Rayns's wishful thinking, most of us *iban*-gay[95] activists in Asia do not consider the white and middle-class centered LGBT activism in the West an example to follow. We believe that it is as evil as heteronormativity."[96] Though there were no critical terms like homonormativity then, Lee and other activists distanced themselves from efforts to assimilate queer politics in South Korea into the "white and middle-class centered" progressive narrative of coming out. Instead, Lee claimed that queer cinema is "inseparable from queer activism," which seeks to "dismantle the law that prohibits homosexuality, deconstruct categories, and escape from the oppressive sexual norms."[97] For Seo Dong-jin, a prominent gay critic, queer film has to deal with "the virtue of homosexuality," which is "a relationship that's based on ethics and emotion, not marriage."[98] For Lee and Seo, the right to marry, whether for heterosexuals or queers, is a capitalist act intended to preserve private property. In a newly emerging community of queer activists, critics and filmmakers, queer cinema was thought to be a radical aesthetic practice that critiqued societal

94. *Cine 21,* July 1996.

95. *Iban* is a vernacular term, indicating non-heterosexual.

96. *Cine 21,* July 1996.

97. Ibid.

98. Ibid., 33.

and cultural norms and imagined other-wise relationalities. The term *queer* became even more widely circulated and acquired currency through controversy over a local government's shutting down of the first Seoul Queer Film & Video Festival (SQFVF) in 1997. In the same year, prior to this happening, there had been a heated debate about the governmental ban on Wong Kar-wai's film *Happy Together* (1997), which had been banned because, according to the Public Performance Ethics Committee, the subject of homosexuality in the film went against "our national sentiment."[99] In the new era, which was supposed to be post-authoritarian after decades of military dictatorship, censorship of homosexuality continued. Even for the "democratic" government, homosexuality was considered something that should be banned from public consumption. The government's disruption of the first SQFVF reaffirmed how queerness was not part of the Kim Dae-jung administration's notion of democratization. This series of events revealed how political freedom was not guaranteed to queer subjects even in a post-authoritarian, democratic nation. However, the organizers did not let this stop them, and they rented spaces like coffee shops and student activists' space in universities to formulate a queer counterpublic. The following year, SQFVF found a venue for the event at a privately-owned space, sponsored by Artsonje Center, an art gallery funded by the Daewoo Foundation. The Daewoo Group, before its decline due to the Asian financial crisis, was a major South Korean *chaebol*, a large, family-controlled conglomerate, and one of the most active promoters of *saegaehwa* (globalization) in the country. For Artsonje, screening queer films was an attempt to keep up with "the liberal,

99. Kwon Taeho, "Taejung Munhwa Chitpamnŭn Kŏmch'al, Kongyunwi Manyŏ Sanyang (Public Performance Ethics Committee's Witch Hunt on the Popular Culture), *Hankyoreh 21,* August 7, 1997, 169.

cutting edge, and cosmopolitan" trend of global capitalism,[100] whereas for the organizers of SQFVF the event was a politically motivated one to forge a new queer counterpublic space and construct a new mode of collectivity for queers. The circumstances of the first SQFVF epitomizes the ways in which queer cultural production in South Korea exists in a complex relationship with global capitalism. While capital offers the resources to mobilize queer scenes, queer cultural productions that use these resources run the risk of being absorbed into the globalized logic of gay liberalism. Within this contested site, the programmers of SQFVF did their best to promote the radical potentiality of queer cinema by carefully selecting what to screen at one of the first publicly open queer events. In explaining why SQFVF had decided to screen the films of New York City–based TTL (Testing The Limits) and DIVA TV (Damned Interfering Video Activist Television), programmer Baek Seung-jo wrote:

> Now, it is a duty for queers in South Korea to watch these films, since we have a very short tradition of queer activism and rarely have a weapon such as an alternative video-making. By watching these films, we have to see ourselves in the AIDS era, ask what "equality" really means, and further our discussion and practice.[101]

It is worth take a look at the choices of film. Instead of choosing commercially successful, gay-themed films, the festival offered a model of an alternative filmmaking by screening films by TTL and DIVA TV, whose works were dedicated to queer community organizing against structural homophobia revealed by the AIDS crisis. Working within but against the gallery's agenda of globalizing their space via queer films, the organizers of SQFVF offered a queered

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100. Chris Berry, "My Queer Korea: Identity, Space, and the 1998 Seoul Queer Film & Video Festival," *Intersections: Gender, History and Culture in the Asian Context* 2, (1999).

101. Baek Seung-jo, "Eijŭ Shidae, K'wiŏ Pidio Aekt'ibijŭmŭi Hyŏnjuso: TTL (Testing the Limits)kwa DIVA TV (Damned Interfering Video Activist Television)ŭi Chakp'umdŭl (2) (Queer Video Activism in the AIDS Era: The Works of TTL (Testing the Limits) and DIVA TV (Damned Interfering Video Activist Television) (2))." *Cinenews* 3, August, 1998.

version of globalization by inviting the audience to "see ourselves in the AIDS era" and formulate a radical activism, rather than simply promoting visibility and celebrating a Western (white) and middle-class LGBT citizenship model. It was an act of infiltration, directed by the organizers, in order to form a queer counterpublic, a site from which to render a radical vision of queer independent filmmaking. Moreover, by watching these films together, SQFVF became a site on which to formulate a *we*—a new collectivity—and eventually queer activism and alternative queer filmmaking by shaping a critical lens via selected films. Kim Yeon-ho, the founder of the arts organization Alternative Visual Culture Factory I-GONG, also emphasized the importance of the organizers' labor in forging an independent queer film scene:

> Thanks to queer filmmakers and community organizers, we were able to watch not only mainstream films like *Velvet Goldmine* (1998)*, Salmonberries* (1991), *Boys Don't Cry* (1999), *Happy Together* (1997), and *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (2001), but also truthfully queer films, including the works of Sadie Benning and Barbara Hammer. It is a historical achievement by the filmmakers and organizers who have persistently worked hard to sustain queer culture. In order to accurately evaluate the last decade history of queer cinema in South Korea, we have to consider not only the queer films, but also the activists' persistent effort in introducing queer films to the audience.[102]

Kim's account not only shows us which queer films were circulated among queer audiences in the 1990s and early 2000s in South Korea, but also illustrates the ways in which curatorial labor was aimed at nurturing "queer culture." For her, queer film is about a radical aesthetics and politics, rather than just a representation of queer people. Thus, she considers the works of Benning and Hammer to be "truthfully queer" films and distinct from mainstream gay and lesbian films. Both Benning and Hammer are famous for their experimental filmmaking, in terms

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102. Kim, Yeon-ho, "Ch'ulsaengŭi Pimil: Tongnib Yŏnghwa'wa K'wiŏ Yŏnghwa" (The Secret of the Birth: Independent Film and Queer Film) in *K'wiŏ Yŏnghwa Shimnyŏnsarŭl Kaksaek'ada: 1993nyŏnbutŏ 2003kkaji* (The Ten-Year History of Queer Film from 1993 to 2003), 2005.

of both form and content, centering on their private lives as lesbians. Kim established the Alternative Visual Culture Factory I-GONG in 2002 in order to support "the diverse visual media culture of minorities."[103] At I-GONG, Kim and her colleagues organize media workshops to train queer and feminist independent filmmakers as well as hold screening events to introduce well-known queer/feminist filmmakers, such as Trinh T. Min-ha and Chantal Akerman as well as emerging independent Korean filmmakers. Kim and other community organizers in the independent queer film scene valued independent filmmaking that maintains a critical distance from the dominant culture. What the participants in the queer independent film scene aimed for, as depicted in Baek and Kim's accounts, was not about making queer culture mainstream; rather, they valued greatly the oppositional politics embedded in a radical strain of queer films abroad and formed a venue in which to circulate the idea and practice of queerness as a radical aesthetic.

Scene #2: The Birth of Korean Independent Queer Film

The rapid emergence of the independent queer film scene in the 1990s is intimately related to the *dongnip yŏnghwa* (independent film) movement. At a round table discussion facilitated by SQFVF 2005 to celebrate the 10-year-history of queer film in South Korea, the speakers mentioned how the infrastructure of *dongnip yŏnghwa* contributed to nurturing a network for queer audiences and filmmakers.[104] *Dongnip yŏnghwa* has been a distinctly political arena in South Korea that challenges the dominant regime. In 1997, a group of video activists established

103. Introduction. Igong.org

104. Leesong Hee-il, "Susukkekki: Tongsŏngaeja'wa Han'guk Yŏnghwaŭi Kimyohan Tonggŏ" (Conundrum: A Weird Cohabitation of Homosexuals and Korean Cinema) in *K'wiŏ Yŏnghwa Shimnyŏnsarŭl Kaksaek'ada: 1993nyŏnbutŏ 2003kkaji* (The Ten-Year History of Queer Film from 1993 to 2003), 2005.

the Korean Independent Filmmakers Association (KIFA) and provocatively declared what *dongnip yŏnghwa* is. In their statement, "What Is Independent Film?" they wrote:

> … It is often taken for granted that "independent" means independent from censorship and big money. But the meaning of "independent" will be complete when what it means to be independent for becomes clearer. We declare that we are independent from hackneyed cinematic formulae: We adopt intense and honest representations—not glossy and sumptuous images—as our cinematic language. We declare that we are independent from power in order to protect a person's human rights and minorities' freedom. (Young-a Park's translation[105])

According to KIFA's statement, *dongnip yŏnghwa* resists both authoritarian censorship and capitalism and demands human rights and freedom for minorities. In the last two decades, filmmakers in the *dongnip yŏnghwa* scene have addressed a variety of political issues including gender, sexuality, race, and class. With this shared understanding, the *dongnip yŏnghwa* scene has offered queer filmmakers a basis upon which they can produce and circulate queer films.

In writing the essay "A 10-year History of Queer Film" Leesong Hee-il shares his fond memories of watching Gregg Araki, Todd Haynes, and Derek Jarman's films on bootleg tapes and described how it inspired him and other to-be-filmmakers. [106] Leesong himself eventually directed *Everyday Is Like Sunday* (1997), the first queer film to be made by an openly gay director in South Korea. He didn't go to film school; instead, he participated in a KIFA filmmaking workshop in 1995 on filmmaking. Thus, the community of *dongnip yŏnghwa* not only sharpened his understanding of queer aesthetics with a series of underground screening events, but also equipped him with skills needed to make a film. Other queer films that came out of this community include *City with No Birds* (1996), a 16-mm film is directed by Kwak Yong-

105. Park, Young-a. *Unexpected Alliances: Independent Filmmakers, the State, and the Film Industry in Postauthoritarian South Korea,* Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2014.

106. Leesong Hee-il, 퀴어영화 10 년사, p. 23.

soo, who was one of the key players in those underground screening events.[107] Although Kwak doesn't identify as queer, Leesong recollects, his film was heavily motivated by a collective desire to forge a thriving queer cinema scene in South Korea.[108] Although the remaining materials in the archive are scarce, I also want to mention that there were multiple attempts to create queer underground films. For example, in 1996, a queer cinema group was launched over *Chollian*, a bulletin board system (BBS), with the intention of making "films about homosexuals by homosexuals."[109] In continuing this group's spirit, gay men's rights group *Chingusai* and lesbian rights' group *Kirikiri* facilitated filmmaking workshops. Although the videos produced in those workshops were not circulated at film festivals or any other public venue, the remains of those attempts can be seen in the newsletters and DIY magazines. There are also archives that are not available to the public for privacy reasons. I learned from a former *Kirikiri* member that the members of *Kirikiri* made music videos and short videos. Although she kept the VHS tapes and stored them in her archival box, she wasn't sure if it was okay to make those materials available for public viewing, as someone could be involuntarily outed. My research on the underground filmmaking thus had to stop there, but I wanted to include this anecdote to acknowledge the important undercurrents that nurtured the queer independent filmmakers in the following section.

Scene# 3. White Night: Other Times, Other Spaces

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107. Leesong Hee-il, "Susukkekki: Tongsŏngaeja'wa Han'guk Yŏnghwaŭi Kimyohan Tonggŏ" (Conundrum: A Weird Cohabitation of Homosexuals and Korean Cinema), 23.

108. Kwak now runs *Indie Story,* one of the biggest film distribution companies specializing in Korean independent films.

109. *Chingusai* Newsletter no. 10, 1996, p.4

Leesong Hee-il is one of a few filmmakers who are committed to producing queer films from queer perspectives; his films are made by, for, or about the LGBTQ community and beyond. In examining his work, I shed light on local practices of queer filmmaking that intersect with activism. Leesong, a member of *Chingusai* who debuted as a filmmaker in 1998, is now one of the leading figures in the queer independent film scene in South Korea. Heavily influenced by New Queer Cinema, and especially by German queer filmmaker Rainer Fassbinder, his works explore queer aesthetics with special attention to class relations.

Among his fourteen films, I focus on *White Night* (2012), part of a trilogy that includes *Suddenly, Last Summer* and *Going South.* The trilogy centers on intimate encounters between two men in the contexts of an Internet hook-up site, a gay bar, school, and the military. In particular, Leesong utilizes the concept of chasing as a mode of movement between characters, which eventually serves to crack open heteronormative time and space and form a special kind of unity between two men. I am particularly interested in *White Night* because it centers around two gay men who have different visions of the (no) future and thus offers a critique of the unique formation of queer temporality in the location of South Korea.

In *White Night*, a young man chases a man he met for a hook-up who is chasing a group of homophobes to enact revenge. Through their brief and intense time together, the protagonists turn presumably heteronormative spaces into queered ones, albeit momentarily. In depicting the two men's intense nighttime cruising in Jongno, a historically gay neighborhood in Seoul, Leesong pays special attention to the role of nighttime in formulating an alternative intimacy and mode of being-with. It is at night, after work, when Won-kyu and Tae-jun find each other on the internet for anonymous sex. Nighttime exists outside of heteronormative time; the two protagonists are overtaken by the night, a time charged with sexual desire, and cannot get away

from each other until they fulfill their desires. Based on this narrative of *White Night,* I attend to the complexity of imagining other spaces and other times in the particular time and space of South Korea.

The film "starts and ends on the street," as depicted in a conversation between the two protagonists. Neither of them have a home to which they can invite another man for a sexual encounter. Won-kyu is a diasporic subject who left South Korea after having experienced a hate crime and its aftermath. What he endured after the incident was, in a way, worse than the incident itself. The police didn't help him, news reporters outed him to the public, and his father turned his back on him after learning that his son was gay. Thus, Won-kyu considers himself "a refugee, drifting alone." Tae-jun lives with his mother who disdains his sexuality. For both of them, home is either a site of rejection or oppression. The street, in contrast to home, has potentiality for the gay male subject to form different relationships with others. It is worth mentioning that before the English word *gay* was popularized, the vernacular term *kilnyŏ* used to be circulated among gay men in Jongno. *Kilnyŏ* literally means "street girl" and reveals how the streets (of Jongno) plays an important role in gay male subject formation in South Korea. However, as demonstrated in Won-kyu's traumatic experience of a hate crime, the street is also charged with the potential danger of exposure and punishment.

Although *White Night* is fiction, the assault is based on an actual assault against gay men in Jongno on November 4th, 2011.[110] Leesong revives the incident through Won-gyu. In the film, Won-gyu calls out the queer community: "When it was happening, you guys were just looking and did nothing!" Won-gyu decides to get revenge on his assailants, even if belated. Because he

110. "Homophobia… "Ireon Gay xx" Mutjima Pokhaeng (Homophobia… "These xx Gays" Assault Incident)," *Dong-a Ilbo*, Nov 8, 2011.

has not been able to move on from the assault, it is not belated for him. The film begins with Won-kyu's reunion with his ex-boyfriend who is now disabled from the same assault. But he has moved on. Noticing that Won-kyu is looking for the perpetrators, he sighs and says: "What can we do now, after everything?" For Won-kyu, the present is not an after-time of everything. He remains caught in the moment of the violence, feeling the same helplessness and anger. His trauma is repeated out of chronological time. Unlike his ex-boyfriend who has tried to forget and move on with his life, Won-kyu refuses to assimilate back into the normative rhythms of life; all he could afford to do is never come back. He has no will to forget and move on. Even when he hooks up Tae-Jun, a random guy from the internet, he cannot stop his belated feelings of trauma from coming at him on the street. At least for Won-Gyu, the past is the very present in his mode of being. Throughout *White Night*, Leesong reclaims the streets of Jongno as a nightlife location for gay men by carefully placing the street corners of Jongno in his cinematic frame. While there are more than 200 gay bars in the neighborhood, this Jongno may not always be visible to the public. As one of conversations that take place in the film reveals, until 2012 gay bars had no windows so that people could not be seen. In contrast to Itaewon, a neighborhood in Seoul filled with clubs mostly for young gay men, Jongno is frequented by middle-aged gay men whose experiences are different from the younger generation and tend to be more careful about revealing their gayness.[111] In 2010, for example, a documentary film about the lives of four gay men came out, entitled *Miracle On Jongno Street*, and one of the criticisms from the gay community is that the film exposes their secrets and makes them uncomfortable to be in the

111. Until mid-1993, there was no organization or group that represented the gay and lesbian population in South Korea. Some gays and lesbians came out to the public for the first time in 1996. I would argue that there is a huge generational difference tn terms of whether one experienced post-1993 identity politics or not.

neighborhood.[112] In this light, for gay male subjects, comfortable and uncomfortable feelings coexist in Jongno: it is comfortable to be in Jongno because it has so many social spaces and amenities for gay men but at the same time, there is a feeling of discomfort, as the neighborhood is still vulnerable to heterosexist gaze. As Sara Ahmed notes: "heteronormativity functions not only as a series of norms and ideals, but also through emotions that shape bodies as well as worlds: (hetero) norms are investments, which are 'taken on' and 'taken in' by subjects."[113] It not only determines the exteriors of gay bars (no windows), but also affects gay male subjects' feelings and perceptions on the neighborhood. Won-kyu cannot stand the fact that his assailants still "comfortably" walk around Jongno street. His discomfort is too strong for him to live in the country where he was born and raised. During his one-night stay in Jongno, this feeling of discomfort is the very force that leads him to explore the neighborhood in search of his assailants as he imagines punishing them and to eject them from this space he wants to reclaim. Discussing the role of queer feelings, Ahmed sheds light on feelings of comfort and discomfort in thinking about affective forces that shape queer subjects' everyday lives. She notes:

> "Discomfort is not simply a choice or decision—"I feel uncomfortable about this or that"—but an effect of bodies inhabiting spaces that do not take or "extend" their shape. So the closer that queer subjects get to the spaces defined by heteronormativity the more *potential* there is for a reworking of the heteronormative, partly as the proximity "shows" how the spaces extend some bodies rather than others.[114]

112. "'chongnoŭi kijŏk' Lee Hyuk-sang kamdong int'ŏbyu (Interview with Dir. Lee Hyuk-sang of 'The Miracle of Jongno,'" *Chingusai Newsletter 13*, June 13, 2011. https://chingusai.net/xe/newsletter/125294

113. Sara Ahmed, "Queer Feelings," *The Routledge Queer Studies Reader*, Edited by Donald E. Hall and Annamarie Jagose, NY: Routledge, 2012: 424.

114. Ahmed, "Queer Feelings," 428.

Won-kyu's his attempt to find his assailants, though risky as Tae-jun warns, is a bold move to "get close to the spaces defined by heteronormativity," in order to increase the potential for queer bodies to inhabit a space that has been secretly populated by queer bodies and desires and yet has always carried a tension with heteronormativity. He looks everywhere in Jongno to find them.

In order to grasp the different futurities that emerge from this feeling of discomfort in the streets of Jongno, I focus on the differences between Won-kyu and Tae-jun. While Tae-jun is sympathetic about what Won-kyu went through after his assault, he does not quite understand why Won-kyu had to leave the country. Tae-jun says that Won-kyu had the privilege to make the choice to leave. For Won-gyu, the situation in South Korea is belated in terms of LGBTQ politics. He blames the community for not saving him or not taking action against his attack, and he leaves, working for a German airline and having a European boyfriend. In the meantime, Tae-jun never imagines elsewhere. He lives paycheck-to-paycheck, and the only dream he carries with him is to save enough money to buy his own house and find "an ugly guy to live happily ever after." In contrast to Won-kyu, Tae-jun cannot afford to explore anywhere else but here: "Fuck it, this is where people live. I will survive here no matter what." He is unapologetic about his way of life. Perhaps he is a filial son, willing to take responsibility for his mother, or perhaps he is a mama's boy, who still lives with his mother even after he has grown up. Whether his position indicates that he is stuck in a "backward" custom or him being queerly (still) attached to the childhood is not important to him. He refuses to think along both narratives. What he cares about is the survival. Whereas Won-kyu sees "no future," Tae-jun dreams about a future in which he could live.

The operation of the sense of belatedness is differently rendered in each character. Perhaps, for Tae-jun, belatedness is not "an index of … arrested development or lack of

responsibility," but "a spatial movement out of the mainstream/into the margins," in queer filmmaker and theorist Tan Hoang Nguyen's words.[115] Nguyen assert that belatedness is an inevitable outcome of the normative structures of today's world, operating along a progressive narrative that is imperialist, racist, and heteronormative. For Nguyen, refusing to feel negative about belatedness is a refutation of assimilation into the normative timeline and into the mainstream. Whereas Won-kyu's relocation to Germany might be an escape from "arrested development," in terms of LGBTQ rights, Tae-jun's rejection on feeling negative about belatedness opens up a potential for a new futurity that does not designate the West as the future. Ultimately, what enables the revenge is the relationship, even if it is only for a night, between Tae-jun and Won-kyu. Queer intimacy becomes the grounds for change, forming a new sociality that might produce a new sense of collectivity that challenges the heteronormative world. For Won-kyu, a night with Tae-jun in Jongno not only protects him from additional violence but also rescues him from erasure. Without Tae-jun's intervention, Won-kyu's challenge against his assailants would have been an act of suicide rather than resistance. Leesong envisions queer politics as being rooted in queer gatherings that "bring us to different ways of living with others," as Ahmed proposes.[116] This affective mode of being-with, even if it is just for a fleeting moment, is where hope and a new political possibility emerge. In the following section, I further engage with the question of what it means to come together for queer subjects, particularly in the context of social movements, through the documentary film *Weekends* (2016).

Scene #4. Weekends: Queer Sociality and Solidarity

We still have so much to say

115. Ahmed, "Queer Feelings."

116. Ibid., 428.

Please say it so that it won't disappear
Walk the cold street, my dear, my pride

One summer night, a tiny bird flew in
He accompanied me and sang songs together whole night
The bird has gone when I opened my eyes
Only to see the cold street the bird was fluttering his wings in the winter night

Oh, I don't hear your voice any more
So I sing for myself louder
Survive this tough world, my dear, my pride[117]

A camera zooms in on Jun Jae-woo on stage. He is a founding member of G_Voice, a gay chorus group based in Seoul. His eyes are tearing up as he and the other members sing "On the Way to Bugayeon-dong," a song he wrote on the night of Choi Young-soo's death in 2009. Choi, a former member of *G_Voice* whose nickname was Spaghettina, died of AIDS related complications at age 36. An interview with Jun plays over the scene:

> We spent so much time in that neighborhood [Bugayeon-dong], drinking until late in the night.[118] The lyrics came out of those times. I chose to move into that neighborhood because there were friends living there already. Lots of friends came and went. And it was the last neighborhood where Spaghettina lived… until before he left this world. […] So whenever I concentrate on singing this song, I cry…

But on stage, he doesn't shed a tear and keeps singing. As the song ends, the lights go out and his eyes are full of tears, but his tears do not spill over until the full darkness comes into the screen.

117. "On the Way to Bugayeon-dong." Original music composed by Jun Jae-woo.

118. Although there is no specific area occupied by LGBTQ residents in South Korea, some neighborhoods with cheaper housing in Seoul, such as Bugayeon-dong, Haebangchon, Silim-dong, Mapo-gu and Eunpyeong-gu have been locations where friendly circles of LGBTQ individuals found their places. This also keeps changing as the real estate market changes.

Figure 13. A Scene in Weekends. Photo Courtesy of Lee Dong-ha.

Weekends, a 98-minute-long awards-winning documentary film, depicts the activities of a gay men's chorus group G_Voice, a subgroup of the Korean gay men's right organization *Chingusai*. The film is directed by Lee Dong-ha, a member of Chingusai and G_Voice, and produced by *Chingusai* and *Bandal.*[119] *G_Voice* gathers together to sing every "weekend."[120] Juxtaposing interviews, documentary footage of the group's shows, and music videos of their songs, *Weekends* illuminates the lives of gay men imbued with joy, love, friendship, comradery, sadness, loneliness, anger, and hope. The narrative of the film begins with personal stories, such as how each member has become involved in the group, what the group means to them as gay

119. *Bandal* is a film production company run by Kim Min-kyung and Im Heung-soon.

120 . The film's title comes from the fact that the group meets every weekend to practice singing. But also, it recalls the term *chumal gei* (weekend gay), which illustrates gay men's lives who try to pass as straight during the weekdays to make a living and then enjoy the weekends as gay men.

men, how hard it is to attend the rehearsals every weekend, and ends with more communal stories. While *Weekends* is a documentary film, stylistically it takes a form of music drama. Lee's artistic strategy resonates with how G_Voice makes songs and performs on stage. Most of songs they sing are original scores. Jun writes lyrics that reference the members' life stories, for example, about trauma of losing their comrade to AIDS, as illustrated above. *Weekends* follows the same route of the song-making: telling each member's life stories, whether via an interview or a conversation between the members, and then playing the song that is related to the stories. G_Voice songs are like a quilt made by the members' personal stories that could easily be shared and emphasized by other members; singing together the song as a collective, the power of being-with, or feeling-with gets amplified. Along with the song "the Memory of Killyŏ," the film illustrates how the members take care of each other and build alternative kinships across generations. In an interview, Jae-kyoung acknowledges how precious his relationships with the other members are: We are not related but if I don't see them for a while, I miss them a lot. It is a strong support. When I listen to them, it's like my younger brother talking to me. If he cries, my heart breaks too. It is a psychological community. Being together, I get a sense of comfort. The energy I receive from this group has been the source of my survival.

The narrative of the film is built around this sense of collectivity. I argue that both the film and the songs of G_Voice are what Ann Cvetkovich calls "an archive of feelings," a repository of "a sense of trauma as connected to the textures of everyday experience" and "the many forms of love, rage, intimacy, grief, shame, and more that are part of the vibrancy of queer cultures."[121] As much as the film archives stories about G_Voice, their songs serve as a

121. Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 3–4 and 7.

repository of queer feelings. As sang in "On the Way to Bugayeon-dong," their music delivers queer histories "so that it won't disappear."[122] *Weekends* is not just a cinematic reiteration of G_Voice's activities, but a documentation of "the vibrancy of queer cultures."[123] At times, director inserted a music video that they made specifically for this documentary film, featuring the members of G_Voice. In the music video, the members dance flamboyantly in the gay bar Friends in Jongno and the nightclub Le Queen in Itaewon. Those locations are particularly notable. Friends is a gay bar with a rainbow decoration on the store front, which is rare.

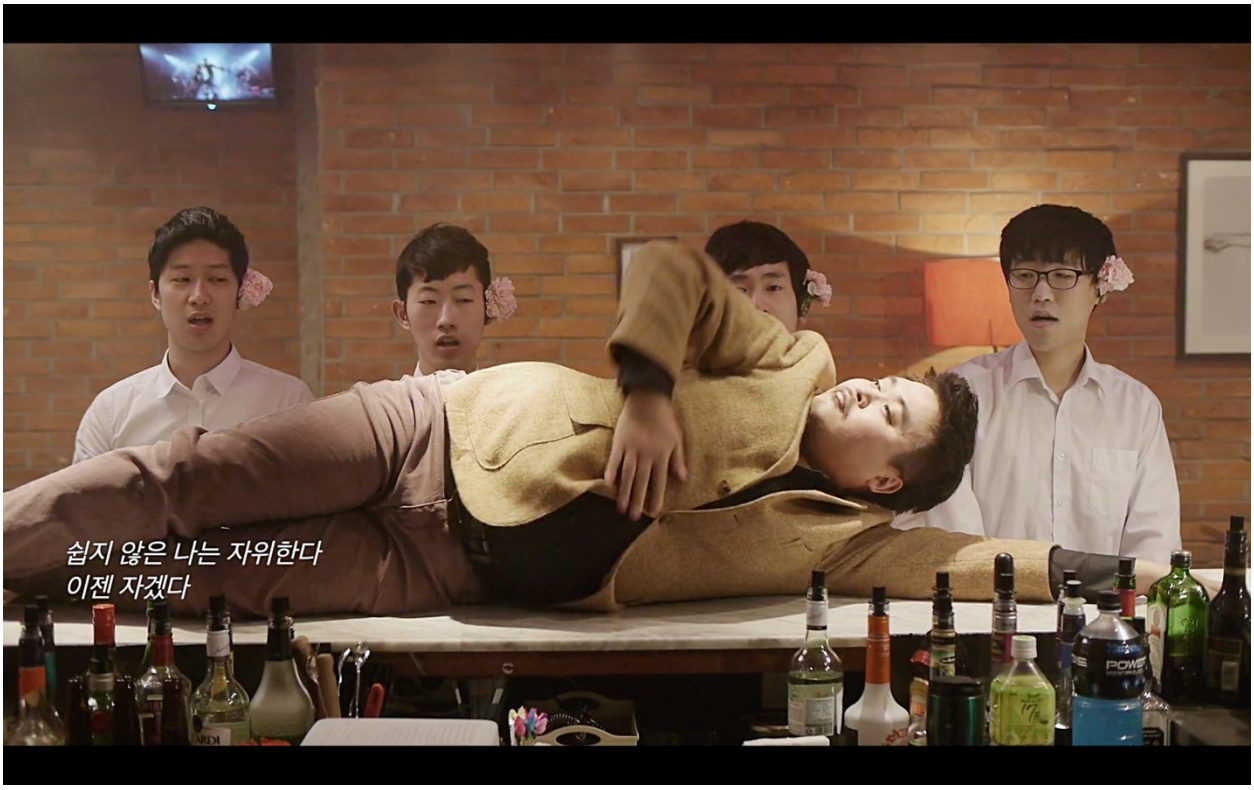

Figure 14. A Scene in Weekends.

Chun Jeong-nam, a former executive director of *Chingusai*, runs the bar and has been a strong supporter of queer activism. Different from other gay bars in Jongno, Friends welcomes all

122. "On the Way to Bugayeon-dong,"

123 . Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings*, 7.

genders, and features flyers and posters made by human rights organizations. Le Queen does not exist today, but it used to be one of a few gay nightclubs that had a close relationship to queer activism, hosting fund raising parties.[124] Queer culture is mobile, as Berlant and Warner discuss, and this is especially so with regard to nightlife venues, such as bars and clubs. Too many bars and clubs have disappeared without leaving any historical records, and thus, whether the director intended to or not, these scenes function as important historical interventions by recording these spaces on film.

The film then transitions into historical moments in queer activism. Moving to a scene from Kim-Jo Kwang-su and Kim Seung-hwan's open wedding ceremony in 2013, the mood of the film significantly changes.[125] In the scene, a man abruptly appears on stage and pours human feces over the members of G_Voice. The assailant was an evangelical Christian. "It was the first experience of a discriminatory act based on my identity ever in my life. That incident gave me a reason to sing in G_Voice," Nakta says. This scene documents a historical juncture in queer activism in which queer subjects encounter organized hate groups with increasing frequency. The film also captures the Pride March of the 2014 Queer Culture Festival, when the march was interrupted by groups of Christians who blocked the street for about four hours.[126] This series of

124. In 2017, Justin Lim, one of the owners of *Le Queen*, passed away. His life had been dedicated to nurturing queer nightlife culture, and he was remembered with numerous fascinating events and performances in his clubs.

125. Kim-Jo and Kim are prominent advocates of same sex marriage. Their open wedding ceremony in Jongno, in addition to being a celebration of their relationship, was meant to be a form of protest demanding the legalization of same-sex marriage.

126. See chapter 3 for more details about the appearance of hate groups and their interruptions of queer public events.

hate attacks popularized G_Voice's song "The World, I Forgive Your Sins," which criticizes evangelical Christian hate groups with a melody that mimics contemporary Christian music.

The film gestures toward even more collectivities by documenting G_Voice's participation in protests, where they have been nicknamed "the Idols of Protest Sites." In so doing, the film demonstrates the radical potentiality of coming together, not only within the community space of G_Voice, but also in their encounters as activist-performers. The film depicts them singing for the families of the victims of the April 2014 Sewol Ferry Disaster and for Ssangyong motor workers protesting on the roof of a factory chimney. Singing "Let's live together" and "We are the hope," G_Voice allies with people who are neglected or oppressed by the state. In response to G_Voice's demonstration of solidarity, SSangyong motor workers sang "Congratulations," an original G_Voice song, on stage at the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia Joint Action in Seoul in 2015. These are the scenes of solidarity across difference, forming a new sense of collectivity. What makes G_Voice special and unique as a gay chorus group are, I argue, the queer alliances that they build through singing.

Weekends builds upon queer relationalities, ranging from love affairs and friendships to political comradeship. While centered on G_Voice, the film also encompasses the broader political landscape of queer activism during this time. *Weekends* archives important historical moments for queer activism in the 2010s, focusing on the role of music and singing together. As cultural workers, G_Voice participates in a queer world making project, gesturing toward more collectivities in the future. The film depicts the radical politics of queerness, exploring what is otherwise possible beyond heteropatriarchal and (neo)liberal imaginations of kinship.

Coda

In this chapter, I engaged with the formation of the queer independent film scene in South Korea through an exploration of archival materials and films in. The impetus for this chapter was to shed light on the political history behind its formation by demonstrating the ways in which queerness has been translated and practiced in South Korea. Through archival research, I examined queer critics and activists' labor in curating films and holding screening events (including underground bootleg video screenings) and roundtable discussions. It was this cultural and political labor that nurtured the queer independent filmmakers working today. What has driven this chapter is also my own utopian impulse to connect with the traces and the remains of recent queer pasts, memories of different socialities and collectivities that enabled an imagination of elsewhere and otherwise. Flipping through the pages of zines, newsletters, and scrapbooks of film magazine articles, I searched for a radical kernel of queerness in the past that persists today, emerging at the sites to imagine a new collectivity, particularly through film. In the next chapter, I will explore feminist artist siren eun young jung's historiographic art project, in order to engage with the contemporary desire to connect with queer pasts, as an entry point to imagine a new mode of collectivity.

Chapter 3. *Yeosung Gukgeuk Project*: Queer Archives, Performance, and Historiography

Introduction

In August 2018, my friend Sunnam, who is also a queer scholar, and I walked through the hot and humid air of Seoul to attend the opening night of siren eun young jung's exhibition.[127] siren had been awarded the Korea Artist Prize 2018 by the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art and this exhibition was the culmination of ten years of work. *Yeosung Gukgeuk Project* is a research-based project that looks at the history of *yeosung gukgeuk*, the genre of all-female Korean opera. Upon entering the exhibition, I encountered a corridor with installations on both walls; on the left were archival materials about yeosung gukgeuk, such as newspaper articles and framed autographs, and on the right was a blue curtain made to resemble a stage curtain. Behind the curtain were old photographs of yeosung gukgeuk performances, dimly lit so that images could be seen through the curtain. Of these, I saw a familiar image: *The Wedding* (2010). This is a photograph of a mock wedding between Cho Geum-Ang, a famous yeosung gukgeuk male role actor of the 1950s and 1960s, and a fan. In the photo, Cho is wearing a man's suit and their fan is wearing a white wedding dress.[128] Some members of their troupe are wearing women's *hanbok*, traditional Korean clothing, while others are wearing men's suits. The

127. The artist intentionally renders her name in lowercase as a feminist practice of refusal to follow patriarchal conventions. Following her intentions, I refer to the artist as siren—her chosen name—in this essay.

128. In the Korean language, gender pronouns are rarely used. When referring the yeosung gukgeuk actors, I use the gender pronouns they/them/their, unless requested to use she/her or he/him pronouns, in order to respect their experiences of being men on stage and being both men and women off stage, as articulated by Cho Young-sook in *(Off)Stage.*

photo points to same-sex intimacies and gender non-normative practices that existed in the past without being claimed as queer history. As Sunnam and I were looking at this photo, siren greeted us. Referring to her work, siren said, "Just like this photo installation, my project deals with a dim past that is hidden and flickers behind the scenes." Sunnam responded, "So it's queer history."

Figure 15. *The Wedding* (2011), Photo courtesy of siren eun young jung

When I first encountered siren's work, I was fascinated by the artist's excavation of unknown queer pasts in South Korea. Due to a scarcity of records and documentation, encountering queer pasts, especially from the pre-identitarian era (before 1990) in South Korea, is not an easy job.[129] Korean historian Park-Cha Min-jeong demonstrates how Korean newspapers and magazines from that era depicted queerness in solely sensational terms, using the language of crime or perversion, and how these representations were the only mode through

129. It was the early 1990s in South Korea when terms like lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer began to earn currency as descriptions for non-normative gender orientations and sexuality. It was during this time when identity-based groups and organizations were established for the first time in Korea's history.

which she could trace the remains of queer lives.[130] Aside from those newspapers and magazines, there are unofficial stories that point to Korea's queer past, such as rumors about cruising spots for men who have sex with men in the 1980s, or anecdotes on how a female taxi driver group in the 1960s functioned as a community for women dating women.[131] I locate *Yeosung Gukgeuk Project* as queer historiography, constituted by a series of attempts to touch across time in order to search for Carolyn Dinshaw's evocation of "connections across time between, on the one hand, lives, texts, and other cultural phenomena left out of sexual categories back then and, on the other, those left out of current sexual categories now."[132] I am interested in the ways in which siren has situated her project within the contemporary desire to unearth past traces of those we now name as lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, and trans persons. However, I wish to avoid framing the yeosung gukgeuk actors' experiences and life trajectories in explicitly LGBT terms, not only because the actors do not use those terms to describe their experiences, but also because I do not want to colonize the queer past with contemporary categories, which are, after all, modern constructs with their own limitations. I am interested in the ways in which *Yeosung Gukgeuk Project* creates a new relationality between the pre-identitarian queer past and the contemporary rendering of queerness. South Korea is currently experiencing what I refer to as "a queer historical turn." As discussed in previous chapters, activists and artists have been engaging in

130. Park-Cha Min-jeong, Chosŏnŭi K'wiŏ: Kŭndaeŭi T'ŭmsaee Sumŭn Pyŏnt'aedŭrŭi Ch'osang (Chosun Queer: The Portrait of Perverts, Hidden in the Cracks of Modernity), (Seoul, Korea: Hyŏnshilmunhwayŏn'gu, 2018).

131. In the pre-identitarian period, colloquial terms such as *killyŏ* (street woman) and *pogal* (slut) were used to refer to men who have sex with men, and *pajissi* (mr. pants) and *ch'imassi* (ms. skirt) to indicate a masculine woman and a feminine woman in an intimate relationship.

1325. Carolyn Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 1.

formulating queer counterpublics to make connections and relationships among ourselves for nearly three decades. Starting in the late 2010s, there have been significant moves toward remembering and recalling queer pasts among groups of archivists, activists, and artists. siren's *Yeosung Gukgeuk Project*, which was launched slightly earlier than these recent efforts, is one of the most well-known and celebrated works not only in the contemporary art scene but also in the queer community in South Korea and beyond. The queer utopianism in siren's work reflects contemporary Korean queer communities' desire to excavate and connect with histories of non-normative gender identities, intimacies, and sexualities. *Yeosung Gukgeuk Project*—comprised of thirty-one pieces in a variety of formats including media installations, performances, and stage productions—does not aim to fully recover the past nor revitalize the yeosung gukgeuk genre. Instead, it choreographs the movements and affects derived from the art form in a new way, particularly focusing on the beauty and pain embedded in the work and lives of male role actors (*namyŏk paeu*). In yeosung gukgeuk, actors rarely performed both male and female roles; male role actors performed male characters exclusively. *Yeosung Gukgeuk Project* sheds light on male role actors' constant efforts to fully wear masculinity on their bodies through long-term training, their experiences of queer intimacy, and their struggle to survive as actors. In her artist's statement, siren describes how she felt "a certain enchantment" from her encounters with older "queer" people who spoke non-heteronormative languages.[133] This enchantment led her to work closely with retired yeosung gukgeuk actors first and then with contemporary actor Nam Eun-Jin, who specializes in techniques of namyŏk paeu. I am particularly interested in siren's practice

133. siren eun young jung, "In Place of a Preface" in *Trans-Theatre* (Seoul: Forum A, 2015), 184.

of "temporal drag," or "the pull of the past on the present," in Elizabeth Freeman's words,[134] in order to create new relationalities across generations. Perhaps what José Esteban Muñoz calls "the queer historical impulse" is what has driven this long-term project. For Muñoz, the queer historical impulse is a utopian one that desperately looks for other possibilities from the remains of the past. Drawing on the work of Ernst Bloch, Muñoz emphasizes the idea of utopias as a form of critique that "fuels a critical and potentially transformative political imagination."[135] Capturing and recreating the fantastic stage of yeosung gukgeuk through video installations and experimental theatre, siren not only critically reevaluates a portion of the forgotten histories of same-sex intimacies and non-binary gender performances, but also explores the transformative potential of bringing forgotten queer pasts into the present. I examine siren's critical optic to perceive the residue of the utopian impulse in yeosung gukgeuk, through which she explores queerness in the pre-identitarian era. In order to articulate the passions and lives of yeosung gukgeuk actors, siren utilizes the stage as an artistic medium for the first time in her career, thereby opening herself up to a collaborative space in which she is now vulnerable to other professionals in the theatre production. Through theatre and performance, she seeks queerness from the past, which reverberates with a desire to create affective interrelations and transferences between then and now.

Searching for Yeosung Gukgeuk

134. Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 62.

135. Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: NYU Press, 2009), 3.

Yeosung gukgeuk is a lost theatre genre that was extremely popular in the 1950s and 1960s, including the period of the Korean War (1950–1953). Yeosung gukgeuk literally translates to female (yeosung) national theatre (gukgeuk). Gukgeuk is another word for *changgeuk,* a theatre genre that combines traditional Korean musical storytelling, dancing, and Western theatre, and which is often described as Korean opera. The genre itself is a result of conscious efforts by artists and intellectuals in the early twentieth century to develop "modern" theatre, transforming *pansori*, a form of traditional musical storytelling in Korea, into a modern (Western) drama.[136]

In 1948, a group of famous female pansori singers founded the Women's Korean Traditional Music Association and staged *Okjungwha* with an all-female cast for the first time in the history of changgeuk. Performance scholar Kim Ji-hye argues that this was an attempt by female singers to create an alternative space against economic and sexual exploitation by male performers and managers. Although this group survived only for about a year and did not achieve commercial success, their experiment was a starting point for the development of yeosung gukgeuk.[137] Under the charismatic leadership and stardom of Im Choon-aeng, one of the most popular stars of the time, yeosung gukgeuk soon acquired enormous popularity in the late 1940s and remained popular until the rise of the Korean cinema in the 1960s.[138] Actors

136. Ryu Min-young. "Changeuk," *Encyclopedia of Korean Culture* (Seoul, Korea: Academy of Korean Studies, 1995).

137. Kim Ji-hye. "A Study on the Troupe Activity and the Declining Process of 1950's Female Gukgeuk," *Journal of Korean Women's Studies,* 27, no.2 (2011).

138. Ibid., 12.

specializing in male roles became top stars during this time.

Figure 16. A scene from a yeosung gukgeuk stage, Photo courtesy of Seoul Newspaper (2008.10.28)

Despite its phenomenal success in the 1950s and the early 1960s, yeosung gukgeuk is not well remembered today. Performance scholar Kim Ji-hye argues that the decline of yeosung gukgeuk was a result of a national project aimed at recovering the patriarchal order in post-war South Korean society.[139] She critically examines public discourse in the late 1950s and early 1960s to observe the ways in which the dominant voices of male changgeuk performers and male theatre critics presented changgeuk as a legitimate traditional art while condemning and ridiculing yeosung gukgeuk as "a poor mockery," or "a deformity of tradition."[140] Since its decline, yeosung gukgeuk had been performed for a limited number of audiences and has not received much attention from critics and theatre historians. Recently, many feminist scholars and artists in Korea, including Kim and siren, have begun to recontextualize the cultural and political

139. Kim, 19-24.

140. Kim, 20.

significance of yeosung gukgeuk in modern Korean history by investigating female fandom culture, professional female artists' life histories, and the aesthetics of the genre.[141]

The Gesture as Found Object: Queer Evidence, Archives, and History

siren utilizes the art form as a rich historical reservoir to imagine and reanimate queerness. *Yeosung Gukgeuk Project* explore the potentialities of the physical gesture to engage in queer pasts. In each piece, the artist captures the genre actors' cross-gender acting, ranging from their "masculine" standing postures to their dancing, to invite the audience to attend to the queer aesthetics of the forgotten genre.[142] I consider this project a queer historiography, which utilizes what José Esteban Muñoz calls "ephemera" as opposed to "evidence." Muñoz articulates the concept of ephemera in order to engage with queerness that has always existed in a precarious state, whether it is to avoid the watchful, violent normative gaze or because heteronormative society does not value queerness. He thinks of ephemera as "trace[s], the remains, the things that are left, hanging in the air like a rumor," which are "often embedded in queer acts, both in stories we tell one another and in communicative physical gestures."[143] In reading siren's engagement with this particular art form, I am particularly interested in the ways in which she mobilizes

141. See Baek Hyun-mee, "1950nyŏndae Yŏsŏnggukkŭgŭi Sŏngjŏngch'isŏng (Gender Politics of Yeosung Gukgeuk in the 1950s)," *Han'gukkŭgyesuryŏn'gu* (The Journal of Korean Drama and Theatre) 12 (2000): 153-182; Joo Sung-hye, "Chŏnt'ongyesullosŏŭi yŏsŏnggukkŭk: Chubyŏnjŏng changnŭrŭl t'onghan chungshimjŏng kach'igwan ikki (Yeosung Gukgeuk as a Korean Traditional Art Form: Reflection on the Dominant Aesthetics through a Marginalized Genre)," *Nangmanŭmak* (Nangman Quaterly) 79 (2008): 157-177; Kim Hye-jung, *The Girl Princes* (2013, Seoul), Film.

142. See Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

143. Ibid.

"communicative physical gestures" in order to tell stories of queer lives in the past that are not readily available to us. Juana Maria Rodríguez further delves into the historical function of physical gesture, defining it as "an archive of received social behaviors and norms that reveal how memory and feeling are enacted and transformed through bodily practices." [144] In *Yeosung Gukgeuk Project,* physical gestures of the genre function like found objects to create new art pieces, within which are inscribed new meanings and aesthetics. siren sheds light on gestures that reveal how gender is embodied through long-term, repetitive practices. Moreover, her fascination with the gestures of the male-role actors throughout the project touches upon contemporary audiences' desire to meet queer representations from the past. Drawing upon Muñoz and Rodríguez, I pay attention to the role of the video camera as not only an inscription machine of gestures, but also as a choreographic machine that reveals "how memory and feeling are enacted and transformed" through gestures. [145] In her media installations *Masterclass* (2010) and *Directing for Gender* (2011), siren choreographs gestures into a new realm in order to shed new light on the subversive aspects of yeosung gukgeuk, particularly surrounding the ways in which masculinity is constructed and embodied by the actors. She isolates gestures and mixes and matches them in the video, particularly focusing on gestures that inscribe masculinity onto the actors' bodies. In her video work, the gestures of the actors manifest differently than they would

144. Juana Maria Rodríguez, *Sexual Futures, Queer Gestures, and Other Latina Longings* (New York: NYU Press, 2014), 4.

145. Rodríguez, 4.

have on the yeosung gukgeuk stage.

Figure 17. *Masterclass* (2010), Photo courtesy of siren eun young jung

Figure 18. *Directing for Gender* (2011), Photo courtesy of siren eun young jung

What siren does with these pieces is not just an act of documentation of a disappearing art form; by presenting a particular set of masculine gestures via camera work and editing, siren creates a new cinematic stage, draping a red curtain behind the actors, in order to engage the subversive potentiality of the genre. The space that exists in the cinematic frame does not belong to the world of yeosung gukgeuk anymore. It is a new choreographic work that magnifies the performative construction of gender, as well as a potentiality to deconstruct social norms with repetitive bodily practices that violate those norms.

In *Masterclass* (2010), siren asks Yi Deung-woo, a first-generation male role actor in her eighties, to teach the audience how to embody male roles. In this scene, Yi appears on a wooden stage in front of a red curtain, in full attire as Yi Mongryong of *Chunhyangga*, one of the most popular characters of the genre. Yi proceeds to repetitively demonstrate certain gestures that confer masculinity. In *Directing for Gender* (2011), Lee So-ja, another first-generation male role actor, appears in non-yeosung gukgeuk attire and speaks more specifically about how to create a male character on stage. This new choreography of gestures offers a contemporary approach to gender-bending practices in the past, amplifying the process of "becoming a man" on stage. In her work, performances in these spaces turn into aesthetic practices, enabling the audience to experience those moments when changes to the actors' bodies take place. The actors' bodies in siren's work are in motion rather than fixed at one point called gender. Through *Yeosung Gukgeuk Project*, she uncovers how gender is materialized onto the body through constant training and therefore deconstructs heteronormative myths about masculinity. I argue that siren's choreography relocates the genre from midcentury South Korea into contemporary space and thereby instigates a discussion on how we perceive gender and sexuality today.

Queer Historiography: How to Do Things with Queer Pasts

In the following sections, I discuss the political and aesthetic implications of interdependency in *Yeosung Gukgeuk Project*. I argue that the interdependence between the artist, the yeosung gukgeuk actors, and an amateur gay choir group in her stage productions reveals an essential dimension of queer historiography—a collective gesture toward a new sense of *we* to create a world in the world. Since launching this queer historiographic work, siren has been dependent on others in a way that she had not been previously. Before *Yeosung Gukgeuk Project*, she had

never worked in theatre; however, in order to pursue her desire to share the subversive power of yeosung gukgeuk, she had to transform herself from a visual artist who works alone to an interdisciplinary artist who must collaborate with actors, set designers, musicians, and theatre producers.

In order to closely attend to the collective nature of her work and its implications for thinking about what queer historiography is and does, I focus on her theatre productions in *Yeosung Gukgeuk Project*, *(Off)Stage* (2013)[146] and *Masterclass* (2013),[147] in order to discuss siren's aesthetic strategies of utilizing what theatre scholar Jill Dolan calls "the utopian performative" in engaging in a collective desire to imagine otherwise. Theatre and performance, as Dolan claims, have the capacity to offer the possibility of imagining a utopia, as "audiences are compelled to gather with others, to see people perform live, hoping, perhaps, for moments of transformation that might led them reconsider and change the world outside the theatre."[148] By utilizing theatre as her artistic medium, her work allows the audience to encounter alternative socialities and collectivities, depicting the time and space of yeosung gukgeuk as a site in which to experience queer time and into which one can step from the unsatisfying present moment.[149]In 2013, siren turned the video installation piece *Masterclass* into a theatre piece by creating a live stage for Yi Deung-woo at Festival Bo:m: Interdisciplinary Arts Festival Seoul. She set up a

146. *(Off)Stage,* dir. siren eun young jung, Festival B:om: Interdisciplinary Arts Festival Seoul, April 6, 2013.

147. *Masterclass,* dir. siren eun young jung, Festival B:om: Interdisciplinary Arts Festival Seoul, April 6, 2013.

148. Jill Dolan, "Performance, Utopia, and the "Utopian Performative," *Theatre Journal* 53, no.3 (2001): 455.

149. See J. Jack Halberstam (2005) and José Esteban Muñoz (2009) for more discussions on queer temporalities.

stage to resemble a masterclass with the audience members as students of Yi Deung-woo, a male role actor in their eighties. On stage, Yi endeavors to instruct a young woman who wants to become a yeosung gukgeuk male role actor in the mechanics of the art form. Yi has already transformed into a male figure, complete with appropriate attire, make-up, posture, and gestures, while the young woman's transformation is not yet complete. They explain various "masculine" acts, from basic physical posture to tone of voice, affirming to the young actor that she can become a perfect man like them through practice. Here, gender is not a "natural" thing but a meticulous set of constructions that formulates a male body through repetitions over time. In yeosung gukgeuk, performing male roles is not a one-time thing, but more of a permanent designation. Actors were required to be trained for a long period of time to fully embody a man on stage.

Frustrated by their student's failure to perform masculine acts, Yi eventually invites an audience member to participate in this process. They select a male-presenting audience member, with the expectation that he will be able to easily perform the masculine gestures that they teach.[150] However, he completely fails to replicate Yi's gestures, which elicits loud laughter from the audience. No matter what he does, he fails to fulfill Yi's expectations. His failure to act masculine completes the piece in a reversed way: a male body does not essentially entail masculinity; male masculinity is also something that is acquired through a repetitive process of materialization.[151] His hot pink, American Apparel t-shirt with "Legalize Gay" printed on the

150. The audience member was Hyuk-sang Lee, a well-known gay documentary filmmaker in the queer Korean community. This scene was most likely a set-up, directed by siren.

151. See Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex.*

chest adds another layer to his failure to perform masculinity.[152] In my interview with her, siren described this scene as one of the most memorable moments of the piece: "there were a bunch of lesbians who were raising their hands so eagerly, wanting to be picked by Yi, with great confidence in their ability to perform masculinity."[153] Through this piece, siren provides a space for Yi to showcase a set of skills, techniques, and rules for performing yeosung gukgeuk masculinity and at the same time, reveals the vulnerability of gender norms on- and off-stage through the failures of a young actor and a gay male audience member. The young actor failed at performing masculinity because she had not spent enough time practicing, repeating the techniques over and over, to embody a certain set of masculine behaviors; the audience member failed at performing masculine gestures because of the gayness that he embodied.

(Off)Stage, which she staged on the same day as *Masterclass,* was the first piece of hers to use theatre as an artistic medium. Through *(Off)Stage*, siren explores and expresses the ways in which the space of yeosung gukgeuk fascinated both the actors and their audience with its unique environment beyond the heteropatriarchal world outside theatre. siren wrote the script for *(Off)Stage* based on an oral history interview with Cho Young-sook, a first-generation yeosung gukgeuk actor whose expertise is in the *sammai* (supporting male character) role.

152. Homosexuality has never been illegal in South Korea aside from within the military context. While "legalize gay" may seem like a political slogan, in the South Korean context it functions more as an indicator of one's sexual orientation.

153. From an interview, August 2013.

Figure 19. *(Off)Stage* (2013), Photo Courtesy of siren eun young jung

A woman sits in the middle of the stage. As she begins to talk, a screen shows pictures from her youth. Her name is Cho Young-sook. She was born in the Japanese colonial period and lived through hard times, including the Korean War and its aftermath. The many ups and downs in her life are circumscribed by her love of stage: "I had no idea about ideology, society, or whatever. All I knew was the stage. Having been immersed in the excitement of the audience, I practiced, practiced, and practiced. My only hope was to become a real man." A black and white picture of her dressing up as a man on stage is projected onto the screen behind her. Many emotions flicker across her face: happiness, sorrow, regret, and nostalgia. She sighs and says: "I just can't fully describe what I experienced."[154]In an interview with me, siren mentioned the difficulties that she experienced in staging the piece, as she had to give up some portion of

154. siren eun young jung, *(Off)Stage.*

control in decision-making and let her collaborator, Cho Young-sook, direct the stage.[155] She said that the show did not go as she had intended; Cho improvised some parts and in other moments simply did not follow the siren's stage directions. As an artist who was used to working alone with control over everything she creates, theatre was an entirely new process that put her in a vulnerable position.[156] One way to view the process is to see it as a necessary compromise. But was it a compromise for the artist, or rather was it a chance for unexpected encounters both for the artist and the audience? The same question could be directed toward Cho as well. Staging herself in *(Off)Stage* might have been a compromise for her in order for the opportunity to work on stage again, as she has few such opportunities today. However, this stage was not exactly the same stage to which she had dedicated her life. Instead, it was a new kind of stage for Cho to share and celebrate her life-long experience as a yeosung gukgeuk actor with a contemporary audience. Her face shined brightly as she described the popularity of the genre in the 1950s with pride; her body shivered with joy when she received loud applause from the audience with her signature sammai performance.[157] In *(Off)Stage*, through her life stories and set of performances, Cho illustrated yeosung gukgeuk as a magical space that held a fascinating power, and which had captivated her for her entire life. *Off(Stage)* evokes a historical imagination of queer lives in the past in which identitarian terms like *lesbian* or *transgender* did not yet exist. And yet, Cho's stories about the actors' lives as (trans) men as well as about same-sex intimate relationships in the group provoked a special kind of affect: the audience laughed, screamed, sighed, and cried in

155. siren eun young jung in discussion with the author, August 2016.

156. Ibid.

157. Sammai is a Japanese term that indicates the supporting character who is in charge of making audiences laugh with comedic behavior and speech.

their encounter with the queer past. In the metropolitan city of Seoul, yeosung gukgeuk found a new audience that appreciates and enjoys queerness in a forgotten history. *Yeosung Gukgeuk Project* is not just about finding traces of queer lives in the past, but also about a desire to touch upon other kinds of political and social fantasies and imaginations. siren actively avoids framing yeosung gukgeuk actors as LGBT subjects, despite the fact that some actors in the troupe were in relationships with one another, and despite the fact that some of them lived as (trans) men. Cho Young-sook describes in *Off(Stage)*:

> "Back in the day, I spent a half of a month as a man while I spent the other half as a woman. No. I think I lived twenty days a month as a man. Not only on stage, but also in everyday space off stage I lived as a man. We, the actors, lived together as a group. Some became couples. Because of the war, we were all separated from our families. For us, it was a totally natural thing to have crushes on each other. [Loud laughter is heard from the audience.] Why laugh? There's nothing to be laughed about. After all, actors playing male roles were still men offstage."[158]

Cho sees intimate relationships between the actors as a "natural thing" that substituted for familial kinship bonds that had been destroyed in the Korean war. At the same time, in the extraordinary environment of a yeosung gukgeuk troupe, male-role actors were conceived of as men at least while they were wearing the male persona both on- and-off stage. Should we consider this past to be a lesbian history or a transgender history? siren does not offer a clear answer. Instead, she lets the story live on stage.

Anomalous Fantasy: Unmastery, Interdependence, and the Emergence of *We*

158. *(Off)Stage,* dir. siren eun young jung. 2013.

Anomalous Fantasy (2016)[159] gestures toward even more connections between then and now by embracing more collaborations. siren invited Nam Eun-jin, a yeosung gukgeuk actor, and G_Voice to articulate scenes of encounter across difference. I am particularly interested in the ways in which interdependency animates the piece, which I understand to be a core element of queer historiography. The stage of *Anomalous Fantasy* becomes a space to share "a fantasy we will be creating together," as Nam recites in the beginning of the piece, and I am drawn to this togetherness in remembering the lives that are forgotten, if not erased, in queer historiography. The legacies of yeosung gukgeuk resonate differently with each artist, and yet by appearing together on the stage and acknowledging each other's life stories, they envision a new futurity together. This futurity was not only a fantasy; while none of them, including siren, would claim mastery in their performance, they managed to create a stage together at Namsan Arts Center. siren had never been trained in theatre production and thus had to depend on other theatre experts in producing her own work. Nam is a yeosung gukgeuk trainee with no mentor and few stage opportunities. G_Voice is an amateur choir that meets every weekend to practice, prioritizing organizing as a politically active gay community through singing together, as I introduced through the documentary film *Weekend* in chapter two. Instead of attempting to conceal the unmastery of the actors, siren chose to address it explicitly: before G_Voice appears on stage, a house manager announces, "Please turn off your cellphones, as the actors are not equipped with strong voices." They make it clear that the actors on this stage are not professionals, at least not in the conventional understanding of the term, before the audience members can make their own determination.

159. *Anomalous Fantasy,* dir. siren eun young jung, Namsan Arts Center, October 7, 2016.

I am particularly interested in the ways in which a sense of failure unfolds in Nam's pursuit in performing male characters on the yeosung gukgeuk stage. If her life is incomplete and not to be remembered, as Nam recites in the piece, it is because her acting career of more than ten years does not look like it will provide any type of economic success or fame. But she still "decided to dive into a diminishing, unpopular genre," no matter the consequences.[160] As the art form has declined in popularity, Nam does not have a master to guide and train her in the particular set of skills needed to perform male characters in the yeosung gukgeuk style, nor does she have any opportunities to perform. Regardless of these precarious circumstances, she continues to work to master the technical skills needed to perform male characters in the tradition of yeosung gukgeuk. If failure is, as J. Jack Halberstam argues in his book *Queer Arts of Failure*, "a connotation of a certain dignity in the pursuit of greatness," Nam's failure is rooted in her ultimate goal of mastering the technique of male character acting.[161] The greatness that she is pursuing is the perfection of her posture, manner of walking, gestures, foot work, and shoulder movements that will turn her into a male character. This set of skills is, according to Nam, "the art of mastery."[162] What makes Nam's acting special is not just the reflexive nature of her performance but also her commitment to this particular art form, despite its seemingly unpromising future. What is it that drives Nam to continue in her efforts, even when failure seems inevitable? No matter how much she suffers in her pursuit of mastery, she continues

160. This line is from *Deferral Theatre* (2018), a media installation piece that features Nam.

161. J. Jack Halberstam, *Queer Arts of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 94.

162. This line is from *Sorry, the Performance Will be Delayed* (2018), a media installation piece that features Nam.

because she is deeply enchanted by the experience of becoming a man on stage. As if that desire could be universally understood, Nam recounts: "Fascinating, isn't it? You could become a man just by mimicking and practicing repeatedly."[163] It is the immense pleasure of performing a male character on stage that Nam shares with the audience.

In *Anomalous Fantasy*, Nam directly refers to her unmastery. Reading aloud from a biography of Cho Young-sook, the first-generation actor who appeared in *(Off)Stage,* Nam proclaims: "To be remembered is an amazing thing." She reads the part of the biography that discusses how popular yeosung gukgeuk actors were in the 1950s and 1960s, to the degree that fans would wait in front of the actors' houses to see the actors. She tells the audience resentfully: "But I don't think I will be remembered. Who would remember this incomplete life, anyway?" At that moment, members of G_Voice enter the stage and read from Nam's diary together. It is a collective act of remembering and celebrating her life, even if Nam's diary entries do not match the glitz of Cho's biography. And yet, while her life may not be as successful, the stage becomes a site to learn about Nam's constant efforts to perfect her skills, regardless of the status of the craft itself in today's world.

I find the role of G_Voice essential for this piece to fully explore what queer historiography is and does. Though they may be unmasterful as a choir, G_Voice appears on stage unapologetically, being masterful in their solidarity actions in various occasions. Prior to this stage, G_Voice has long been experienced in singing at protests; as mentioned in chapter 2. the choir has been nicknamed the "idols of protest sites." With this history of political participation, G_Voice adds a great layer to the piece to experiment with what it means to be-with, particularly for people at the margins. In relating Nam's struggle to their own experiences

163. *Sorry, the Performance Will be Delayed.*

as gay men, G_Voice sings "On the Way to Bugayeon-dong," the song written to commemorate Spaghettina that was mentioned in chapter 2. With this song, they create affinities by juxtaposing Nam's life—her struggles to become an actor without much recognition—with the loss of their friend and others who died of AIDS, who also did not garner much recognition from the world. While the tone of the music is solemn, the lyrics convey a willingness to remember those whom they have lost and to survive the world regardless of the oppression they face as gay men.

Ending with the original song "Congratulations," produced by G_Voice and remixed by transgender electronic musician Kirara, *Anomalous Fantasy* remembers and celebrates queer pasts and presents and depicts a future with hope. Wearing a sparkly jacket (participating in gay subcultural aesthetics), Nam dances to the music of G_Voice, celebrating a fantastic world that they want to live in together. The joyful music and dancing in *Anomalous Fantasy* gestures toward a new mode of being-with, inviting all the artists and audience members at the scene to feel the "anomalous fantasy" that is being offered in this particular time and space of theatre. It is a queer attempt to be-with, other-wise.

Conclusion: Queer Encounters Across Times

Throughout *Yeosung Gukgeuk Project,* queerness is by no means a stable concept or category limited to differences in sexual identities and practices. Rather, the project reimagines queerness as "a set of possibilities produced out of temporal and historical difference," as Elizabeth Freeman suggests.[164] In *(Off)stage,* for example, siren lets Cho Young-sook—who does not interpret her experience in the contemporary language of LGBT identity—speak about her

16436. Elizabeth Freeman, introduction to special edition on queer temporalities in GLQ 13 (2–3), 160.

experiences in her own terms. As a result, her work allows the audience to encounter alternative socialities and collectivities that may not exist in dominant regimes of disciplinary subjecthood. In other words, *Yeosung Gukgeuk Project* depicts the time and space of yeosung gukgeuk as a site in which to imagine queer time, engaging with contemporary queer desires and impulses to step out of an unsatisfying present moment, and to touch other times and other spaces, as a way to seize upon a different futurity. siren seeks queerness from the past, which reverberates with a desire to create affective interrelations and transferences between then and now. Interestingly, since she started this queer historiographic work, her pursuit of affective correlations between the past, present, and future has made it necessary for her to collaborate with others. On the newly created stage of yeosung gukgeuk in siren's work, queerness functions as a collective gesture in search of a space in which we become fully immersed in a world that is charged with non-normative desires across generations. Throughout the project, queerness functions as a collective desire for different socialities, imbued with a political fantasy of being-with. In this light, *Yeosung Gukgeuk Project* is a feminist and queer attempt of remembering otherwise, as siren pays attention to these non-normative desires that animated the forgotten genre. Her queer historiography is a collection of scenes of failure, which would not be remembered if not for her intervention to collaboratively create queer kinships, through interdependent relationships and through the processes of making and performing the pieces.

It has been a great joy for me to follow this project for over ten years, observing the growth of the project into an extremely rich and expansive work that is now so crucial to understanding the contemporary emergence of queer arts in South Korea. It was one of the first queer art projects to garner attention both from queer communities and mainstream art venues. One year after she was awarded the Korea Artist Award, a queer artist collective was

commissioned by the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art to pursue an art project on LGBT history in the city of Seoul, to be shown in August 2020. This development would not have been imaginable without siren's pioneering contributions. Furthermore, the legacy of yeosung gukgeuk continues to grow among queer cultural workers through more expansive re-animations of the genre. A group of drag king artists based in Seoul threw a yeosung gukgeuk–themed party in May 2019 and then staged a yeosung gukgeuk–inspired show, in which the drag artists re-interpreted a classic pansori story *Song of Chunhyang* through a queer and feminist lens in December 2019. These efforts have given new life to yeosung gukgeuk, a genre that used to be mocked by critics. The queer historical impulse has reimagined the genre to make new relationalities between the past, present, and future.

Chapter 4. The Korean Queer Culture Festival: Dissensus, Queer Counterpublics, and the Emergence of *We*

The first Korean Queer Culture Festival, or *Mujigae* (Rainbow) Festival, hit the streets in 2000. According to Han Chae-yoon, a long-time organizer with the Queer Culture Festival, a queer parade had not been part of the initial planning for the festival, which had been envisioned as a series of events including a film festival and roundtable discussions.[165] Because the idea of a queer pride parade was unimaginable at the time, Han remarks, the Mujigae organizers decided to coordinate a queer contingent to participate in the masquerade parade of the Independent Art Festival in Daehak-Ro, which would allow them to blend in somewhat.[166] But due to the unpleasant weather, the other masquerade participants did not show up. Fifty something queers were there despite the weather, and as a result, the masquerade became a queer parade. Three drag queens danced on a truck and others marched with rainbow flags. This serendipitous experience, the very first pride parade in South Korea, Han recalls, was "heart-busting and joyful, more than we could have imagined." Although Mujigae Festival had been planned as a one-time event, after the experience of walking together, visibly queer, the organizers of Mujigae Festival decided to make the festival an annual event. Since 2016 it has been called the Korean

165. Kim Sam-kwon, "Queer Culture Festival, the Heart-busting Experience with Joy: Interview with Han Chae-yoon," *Chamsesang*, June 1, 2005. http://www.newscham.net/news/view.php?board=news&nid=27389

166. Daehak-ro (University Avenue) is a theatre district as well as one of the most popular locations for protests in Seoul and the location of Marronier Park (mentioned in chapter 1), the former location of Seoul National University.

Queer Culture Festival (KQCF).[167] The festival has greatly expanded over the last two decades and now takes place in eight locations in the country under local leadership; in 2019, the Seoul Queer Culture Festival drew over 150,000 attendees. This chapter examines the political significance of being together in public during KQCF. In particular, I am interested in the ways in which *munhwaje* (cultural festival) emerged as a site to explore new identities and collectivities for sexual minorities. Queer culture in South Korea, as discussed in the introduction, cannot be thought of without considering the global circuitry of queer cultural production, and KQCF is no exception; the parade is modeled after the pride parade, a now-global form of festival that has its origins in the Stonewall riots in New York City. While pride, especially in the contemporary US context, has been widely critiqued as capitalistic or neoliberal due to a huge increase in the number of corporations that participate, Pride events in different parts of the world, particularly the non-West, function as political actions. In South Korea, while the growth of hate groups since 2014 has heightened the political nature of the queer parade, I argue that KQCF has long functioned as a crucial venue for nurturing queer activism in South Korea.

As seen in the Mujigae 2002 statement, the festival was meant to epitomize the ways in which queer activists and artists have created queer spaces through parades, film screenings/makings, roundtable discussions, shows, and dance parties:

> The Queer Culture Festival was created by gay and lesbian activists and communities, based on a shared understanding of the significance of 'cultural activism.' Cultural activism expands the horizon of social movements in South Korea. Prior to Mujigae, many grassroots organizations have already been holding culture festivals and film festivals, acknowledging the role of cultural activism in order to build the human rights movement. The Queer Culture Festival plays a significant role, especially for sexual minorities who have difficulties coming out, in forming a sense of solidarity with one

167. KQCF events prior to 2016 are referred to as Mujigae *year.* Thus the 2002 festival is referred to as Mujigae 2002.

> another and having pride in their identities, celebrating our existence openly and freely on the streets.[168]

KQCF is located in broader activist practice of munhwaje. The rise of cultural activism in the 1990s deeply impacted the ways in which queer activism was organized in South Korea. Munhwaje in particular, as a live event, offered opportunities for queers to experiment with and experience a new collectivity. The Mujigae organizers intended the festival as an activist project meant to pave the way for queers to gather together and explore alternative relationships outside of what is sanctioned by heteropatriarchal society.

Drawing upon archival and ethnographic research on KQCF, I look for moments in which new modes of *we* emerged during extraordinary times of the festival through the labor of producing queer *counterpublics.* Counterpublics is a concept developed by feminist and queer scholars as a response to Jürgen Habermas's conceptualization of the public sphere in a liberal democracy. Counterpublics, according to Nancy Fraser who coined the term, "contest the exclusionary norms of the 'official' bourgeois public sphere, elaborating alternative styles of political behavior and alternative norms of public speech."[169] For queers and marginalized groups, the public sphere is a location of exclusion and political disempowerment. In further theorizing counterpublics, José Esteban Muñoz focuses on cultural workers' "intervention in public life that defies the white normativity *and* heteronormativity of the majoritarian public sphere […] as social movements that are contested by and contest the public sphere for the purpose of political efficacy—movements that not only "remap" but also *produce* minoritarian

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168. "Sŏngmyŏngsŏ: Tongsŏngaejain'gwŏnyŏndaeŭi K'wiŏmunhwach'ukchee taehan Kŭn'gŏŏmnŭn Pibangŭl Kyut'anhanda! (Statement: We Condemn the Solidarity for Homosexual Human Rights of Korea for Their Groundless Accusation on Queer Culture Festival)," 2002.

169. Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere," in *The Phantom Public Sphere,* ed. Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 4.

space (emphasis original)."[170] Drawing upon Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge's critique of Habermas, Muñoz considers counterpublics to be performative spaces, which "often emerge out of already-existing industrial and commercial channels of publicity, especially the electronic media."[171,172] In looking at the sites of KQCF, such as bars, nightclubs, college campuses, streets and social media, I trace the labor involved in producing queer counterpublics through the use of already-existing infrastructures. In attending to "alternative styles of political behavior and alternative norms of public speech," I utilize Jacque Rancière's notion of *dissensus*, as it offers an entry point to engage in the role of the body in the production of queer counterpublics. He coined the term to counter Habermas's theorization of consensus in order to envision democracy in a new light. Whereas the Habermasian schema presupposes interlocutors who come to the public sphere to debate based on their interests and eventually to reach a consensus, Rancière conceives of the subject only after an action that disputes the naturalized orders and hierarchies. Whereas consensus is a discursive space, supposedly operated by reason, dissensus is a performative scene that vitalizes a new collectivity that did not previouly exist. What is especially useful about this framework is that Rancière places the body at the center of scenes of dissensus, emphasizing the role of the senses in the emergence of a new political subjectivity.

In dissensus, the political subject emerges through a blurring of the boundary between the universal and the particular. It is important to note that Rancière considers the universal as a private domain that colonizes the particular, which refers to what are considered "surplus"

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170. José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentification*, 148.

171. Oscar Nget and Alexander Kluge, *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

172. Muñoz, *Disidentification*, 147.

communities or the uncounted. Drawing upon Hannah Arendt, Giorgio Agamben, and Michel Foucault, he observes the ways in which state, military, economic, religious, and scholarly powers manage, control, and exploit populations by eradicating the political potentiality of the surplus. The surplus is reduced to *zoe*, which is Greek for "bare life." The technology of biopower partitions time and space and relegates zoe to certain parts. In this regime, subjectivization is meant to make docile bodies with no political power. What Rancière contributes to this discussion of biopower and biopolitics is that he revitalizes the logic of political subjectivization. For him, the surplus is full of potential to become something other than zoe. And it is dissensus that enables this surplus to become a political subject that can challenge the technology of biopower. Through dissensus, the surplus dislocate themselves from the times and spaces to which they have been assigned and eventually reframe the sensory regime as their own. To reiterate, politics for Rancière is inherently about a dispute over the division of the universal and the particular, through which a new subject emerges and creates a new world. He writes, "The essential work of politics is the configuration of its own space. It is to make the world of its subjects and its operations seen. The essence of politics is the manifestation of dissensus as the presence of two worlds in one."[173] Drawing upon the notion of dissensus, I examine the ways in which the political subjectivity of *we* emerged, not as a fixed identity but as a temporal sense of being-with, at the site of KQCF. By locating the concept of dissensus alongside theories of queer temporality, I grasp emerging moments of queerness that seized upon that which is external to heteronormative temporality.[174] Ultimately, the mobilization of

173. Muñoz, *Disidentification*. 45.

174. See José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009) and Judith Halberstam, The *Queer Art of* Failure

dissensus is the creation of a different temporality within the dominant temporality in order to enable the emergence of a new subjectivity. In attending to KQCF as a site in which queers come together and experience *we*, I examine the labor of producing counterpublics through dissensus. In the following I first offer a historical background of KQCF by attending to the nascent periods of its development, in order to examine the impact of cultural activism in queer activism in the 1990s and to discuss the ways in which queer activists produce counterpublics through the festival. In looking at the pre- and early years of KQCF, I argue that queer culture making was an active process with heterogenous needs and desires created in the late 1990s and 2000s with the rise of global capitalism and new social movements in postauthoritarian South Korea. Then I move to KQCF 2015 during the MERS crisis, when the opening event had to be experienced primarily through livestreaming instead of through a physical gathering at the Seoul City Plaza. During this intense time of crisis, virtual activism played a crucial role in creating moments of being together in public. Centering on Tiziana Terranova's notion of *networked multitudes* as well as Marcela Fuentes's conceptualization of *performance constellations*, I attempt to capture the emergence of a new temporality and a new *we*, contesting dominant spaces in physical locations such as Seoul City Plaza and the front yard of a police station, as well as on social network platforms, such as YouTube and Twitter.[175]

Undercurrents: Predecessors of the Korean Queer Culture Festival

(Durham: Duke University Press, 2011) and Carolyn Dinshaw et al, "Theorizing Queer Temporalities," *GLQ 13 no. 2–3* (2007): 177–196.

175. Tiziana Terranova, *Network Culture: Politics for the Information Age* (London: Pluto Press, 2004) and Marcela Fuentes, *Performance Constellations: Networks of Protest and Activism in Latin America* (Ann Abor: University of Michigan Press, 2019).

Prior to the Mujigae in 2000, the first official queer culture festival in Korea, queer activists and community organizers facilitated munhwaje, which entailed a series of film screenings, dance parties, and drag shows in presumably safer spaces, such as college campuses and gay nightclubs. It is no coincidence that early attempts at a queer culture festival took place on college campuses, where there were resources available for activists who worked with student groups. Historically, college campuses in South Korea functioned as what Stefano Harney and Fred Moten call the *undercommons*, offering resources and sanctuary for activists who were running away from the police, especially during the period of military dictatorship. According to Harney and Moten, undercommons are zones in which delegitimized subjects infiltrate public/private realms and lay claim to those spaces in different ways.[176] Because of the radical tradition of student activism in South Korea, college campuses still functioned as undercommons into the 1990s and offered great resources for queer activists, such as lecture rooms and communal spaces. In 1995, the gay and lesbian student group *Come Together* and the sexual politics sector of the Student Council at Yonsei University held a sexual politics culture festival with the slogan of "Rape Me." *Come Together* was the very first gay and lesbian student group in the country, organized by Seo Dong Jin, a graduate student in sociology at Yonsei University in 1995. The sensationalist slogan "Rape Me" was inspired by the Nirvana song of that title that was dedicated to survivors of sexual violence.[177] It was to "reveal how women have to face a battlefield every day due to the commodification of woman as well as to challenge prejudice and

176. Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Studies* (New York, NY:Autonomedia, 2013), 28.

177. Kim Eun-nam, "'Yŏng p'eminisŭt'ŭ'dŭrŭi ilsang hyŏngmyŏng (The Everyday Revolution of the Young Feminists," *Shisa Journal*, March 23, 2000. http://www.sisajournal.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=78010

stereotyping of homosexuality."[178] They installed art pieces representing sex, and a radical Christian group *Catacomb* destroyed the objects and condemned the Student Council for "advocating and glorifying homosexuality" (See Figure 10).[179] They also interrupted Seo Dong-jin's lecture with a megaphone, shouting "brothers, how dare you admire flames of judgment." The Chingusai Newsletter reports, "it was almost a war between the Catacomb and the Student Council."[180] At this scene of dissensus, feminist and queer activists circulated a slogan like "Your Body is a Battleground," borrowed from Barbara Kruger's iconic work, in order to contest misogyny and heteronormativity.[181] Although this event is not directly related to Mujigae or the Queer Culture Festival, it is important to observe the ways in which queer politics and feminist politics exist together in queer counterpublics through solidarity work in venues such as protests (see chapter one) and KQCF 2015, which I will introduce later in this chapter.

Figure 20. Photographs from a culture festival for sexual politics at Yonsei University (http://voice21.com/online/5/5_05.htm)

178. *Chingusai Newsletter*, no. 10, January 1996.

179. Ibid.

180. Ibid.

181. College campuses were one of the most dynamic domains in which to introduce and translate U.S. queer and feminist cultures of the 1990s, as well as experiment with new ways to formulate sexual dissent.

Besides college campuses, queer activists held cultural events in nightlife venues, which were early attempts at creating a queer culture festival. In reporting the first anniversary celebration of Tonginhyŏp (Korean Lesbian and Gay Human Rights Council) in 1996, Jung Hae-deung, a member of *Kirikiri*, writes, "what we really needed […] was the cultural infrastructure in which we share and communicate various ways of our existence."[182,183] According to Jung, this anniversary celebration was a testing ground for a queer culture festival: "It felt like we still didn't have enough to create a festival. It was not because we did not have a serious conversation, or we did not play hard enough. That feeling comes from the fact that we've never formed our identity, nor have we our own culture."[184] Culture, in Jung's understanding, is a crucial component in the formation of a collective identity. After the first anniversary party, Tonginhyŏp decided to postpone a winter culture festival that was originally planned for January 1997. Although they had been planning for a culture festival for a long time, the social difficulty for gays and lesbians of being out to the public and a lack of communication between the organizations involved ultimately led to the postponement. Despite this setback, organizers continued holding conversations and debating what think queer activism is.[185] *Kirikiri* organized a lesbian festival at a gay night club *Paschu 2* in Itaewon, comprised of a music video screening,

182 . Tonginhyŏp (Korean Lesbian and Gay Human Rights Council) is a solidarity group founded by Korea Lesbian Activist Group *Kirikiri*, Gay Men's Human Rights Group *Chingusai*, Maŭm 001 (Queer in Seoul National University) and *Come Together*, founded in 1995 and lasted until 1998.

183. Jung Hae-deung, *Ttodarŭn sesang (Another World)* vol. 2 (1996): 44

184. Ibid.

185. *Ttodarŭn sesang (Another World)*, no.3, 1996. P.55

a fashion show, musical performances, and a dance party. It was 2000 when they were finally able to launch the annual festival.

Mujigae: Dissensus and the Birth of the Queer Culture Festival

Mujigae 2000 took place at Yonsei University in September. As mentioned above, it was planned as a one-time culture festival, with a series of events including film festival and roundtable discussions. The Seoul Queer Film & Video Festival (SQFVF)[186] played a critical role in organizing Mujigae 2000, as the SQFVF committee acquired a grant from the Korea Film Council, which was the first occasion in which a queer group received financial support from the state.[187] As I discussed in chapter two, activists strategically deployed queerness as an Avant Garde artistic trend, and because of their successful acquisition of the grant, Mujigae 2000 was finally able to appear in public. The organizers did not plan a queer parade, as no one imagined that it would be possible to have such visibly queer event. It was a serendipity that brought a queer parade into the public space, as described in the opening.

186 See chapter 2.

187. "Interview with Seo Dong Jin," *The Dong-a Ilbo,* August 17, 2000. https://www.donga.com/news/article/all/20000817/7571608/1

Figure 21. Mujigae 2000. copyright @ KQCF

The following year the organizers decided to go off-campus. The location was the neighborhood of Hongik University in Seoul, a well-known cultural venue for artists and musicians. Lesbos, the only lesbian bar in Korea at the time and which was run by Kirikiri, was within walking distance of the university. Noon-bu-shim, a member of Kirikiri and an organizer of Mujigae 2001, writes vividly about her struggle to actualize the festival, and also about the liberating experience she had in the moment of the queer parade:

> "From the beginning, I was deeply concerned about the financial issue. Luckily, we received more donations than we expected from bars. Without the donations, the parade could have just looked like another street protest. […] It was very difficult to hire musicians (of course the budget was an issue in the first place, but more importantly many musicians refused to perform at a festival for sexual minorities) and to rent a space for us. […] Moreover, it was super frustrating that we had to shorten the parade route from 2.5 km to 800 m. […] I wonder if there's anyone else who remembers those splendid forty minutes. I was running around, soaked in sweat, for those forty minutes of marching. Had I known it was going to be this fun, I wouldn't have had been worried and frustrated in preparation. […] The one-hundred-and-fifty-people who were there trusted me and accepted who I was."[188]

Despite of all the difficulties, she and other activists successfully created a scene of dissensus in the seemingly straight neighborhood of Hongik University, even if it lasted only for eight hundred meters (half a mile) and forty minutes. The experience of being-with and marching with other queers down one of the busiest streets of Seoul was a powerful moment for her.

Noon-bu-shim's remark represents how the KQCF aims for such transformative times, demanding a "redistribution of senses," in Rancière's words, to see things differently (queerly) and feel people differently (queerly). The manifesto of Queer Culture Festival_Mujigae 2004 epitomizes the ways in which the festival functions as a counterpublic space to create dissensus,

188. Noon-bu-shim, *Kirikiri Newsletter* no.17 (2001): 7–8.

particularly the collective presence of bodies. The rhetoric of the body in the manifesto, referring to voice, bodily moves, seeing and singing, reveals the potentialities of what queer bodies can do (together):

> "Queer Culture Festival_Mujigae 2004 is the one and only festival that challenges the heteronormativity and demands for diversity. We've been stopped, lowered our voices, and hidden… It is time for us to express our voice and our bodily moves. […] We invite people who have been trying not to reveal who they are; folks who shut their eyes and refuse to see us; folks who have given up enjoying the freedom we deserve; folks who refuse to open their windows. It is a festival to open up the curtains between us and invite conversations. […] Mujigae 2004 is a site to share laughter, hope, and life. We sing the world onto the street."

KQCF is a scene of dissensus, of "sing[ing] the world onto the street" and demanding everyone to transform the ways we see, hear, move, sing, and talk. It is through a redistribution of "what is visible and what not, of what can be heard and what not" that a new political potentiality comes into play.[189] Building queer counterpublics depends on how we mobilize our bodily capacities in order for them to be sensible, and the political subject is a temporal one, which we perceive as a momentary emergence of *we*.

Dissensus in the Time of Crisis: the Korean Queer Culture Festival 2015 during the MERS Epidemic

KQCF has expanded significantly, but this growth has faced many challenges. In the following, I examine the ways in which queer counterpublics emerged during the KQCF opening ceremony in the context of the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) crisis in 2015. I chose this moment as it demonstrates the significance of virtual activism in queer activism in South Korea. Before, during, and after the opening event, queer counterpublics emerged in both the city square

189. Jacque Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2010), 44.

and online platforms through actions such as lining up in front of a police station for eight days to get a permit, setting up the stage, writing a statement, shooting a video, dancing on stage, watching the event on YouTube, posting on Facebook, tweeting, exchanging messages with friends, and so on. Without this labor, we would not have been able to connect with each other, sharing our collective hope for another world. What underlies the moment of emergence is continuous labor that we do not always recognize or give meaning to. Though I highlight the immediate efforts and exchanges around KQCF, it is also important to note that there always have been and will be mundane, ordinary moments and interactions through which queerness transmits, gesturing towards queer futurity.

How does information technology affect this emergence of a new collectivity? Tiziana Terranova, in her book *Network Culture: Politics for the Information Age*, explores new political potentialities of coming together in the digital age. Drawing upon Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's notion of multitudes,[190] Terranova conceptualizes *networked multitudes* in order to emphasize the role of new media in shaping the terrain of the contemporary politics of communication. Network culture shapes not only the ways in which opinions are exchanged and shared, but also the affective registers of the recipients in which certain types of bodily reactions and emotional responses are contagiously circulated. For her a cultural politics of communication is about "a capacity to synthesize not so much a common position… but a common *passing* giving rise to *a distributed movement* able to displace the limits and terms within which the political constitution of the future is played out."[191] For Terranova, what is

190. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire (London, UK: Penguin Books, 2005).

191. Terranova, *Network Culture*, 156; emphasis added.

common exists on a moving terrain that requires affective engagement with an event rather than with a fixed space. In this space of "passing," a new political subject appears momentarily in the form of Rancière's dissensus. *We* gather and disperse through the collective experience of an affectively charged moment, whether it is prompted by a fear of being denied our personhood or by a rage against a hostile environment. And this sense of collectivity is only available when one is caught up with an event and paying attention to it; the sense of being together comes and goes. Sometimes, some of us make it to the streets; sometimes, we remain online. More importantly, for Terranova, what is required for the formation of a new *we* is for this moment to be accompanied by an intense political effort that is also affectively charged. In order to challenge the biopolitical regime and create a site of emergence, according to Terranova, we need to critically understand our "bodily power" as a way to cultivate "an inventive and emotive political intelligence."[192] In other words, it is the body that has the potentiality of forming a commonality in which we encounter each other, even if only in passing, through affective engagement. And that encounter is not limited to "actual" sites but includes social media platforms. I want to emphasize that what made this event particularly meaningful was the combination of the assembly of people in Seoul Plaza and the online gatherings watching the event simultaneously, sharing their opinions, emotions, and feelings about the event. That moment carried a queer longing for more assemblies that are less geographically bound. Announcing the YouTube broadcast of the event, the KQCF organizers gestured toward global participation: "We will broadcast the opening event of the KQCF 2015 at Seoul Plaza worldwide in real time so that people in different locations in the world can all come together."[193] It is through the combination

192. Terranova, *Network Culture*, 156–57.

193. KQCF official website

of the on-site opening event at Seoul Plaza and the YouTube broadcast that participants in various locations in the world were able to gather and experience a sense of *we* during this extraordinary event.

Performance Constellations: Virtual Activism and the Emergence of a Queer Time

In analyzing KQCF 2015, I draw upon Marcela A. Fuentes's concept of "performance constellations," which engages in the inevitable relationships between on-site and off-site in understanding the extraordinary time of being together. The intermingled acts of "watch, comment, join, share, attend, document, replicate, recycle, comment," according to Fuentes, "enable activists and protesters to scale bodily, expressive actions beyond physical space and thus local and global struggles."[194] The opening event of KQCF created a political time through which the participants performed and experienced the "eventfulness" of a particular social movement, imbued with shared emotions and feelings that may engender a new sociality. From KQCF 2015, I capture the moment when a new collectivity emerged across Seoul Plaza and online platforms. In creating and participating in this scene, the queer subject dislocated themself from quotidian time and experienced a new recognition of one another.

Providence, June 7, 2015. I woke up and brewed a cup of coffee as I waited for the opening ceremony of the 16th KQCF. It was scheduled to begin at 6:30 a.m. Eastern Time, or 7:30 p.m. Korea Standard Time. As usual, I opened Twitter and began reading my feed that had been updating as I slept. According to my Twitter feed, things were already quite messy there. Evangelical Christian groups had already begun shouting homophobic slurs and dancing ballet and a traditional dance with loud drumming at Seoul Plaza. This year, they had been using the

194. Marcela A. Fuentes, *Performance Constellations,* 3-4.

MERS crisis to oppose this queer public gathering, spreading disinformation about the threat the gathering posed to public health. My friends on Telegram[195] sent messages updating everyone about what was going on at Seoul Plaza. They said that evangelical Christian groups had been disrupting the YouTube broadcast. Since 2014, these groups have become increasingly violent, using physical force against the participants at KQCF. I thought back to the KQCF that I had attended in 2014 when evangelical Christians lay down under a truck to block the pride march; they pushed and punched the participants, cursed, said prayers, cried about the future of the nation, and accused us of being national traitors. The collective bodies of the Christians delayed the parade for over four hours. This year, I was not in Seoul. Instead, I sat at a kitchen table in Providence, Rhode Island, almost 7,000 miles away, worrying about my friends and other participants. Though I desperately wished to be there, the only way I was able to connect with the event was through social media. And I assumed the same was true for many online participants, whether they lived far away from Seoul Plaza like myself or close by; we were advised not to appear in the plaza anyway. During this moment I was not in Providence. It felt maybe like I was in YouTube, in Telegram, in Twitter and Facebook. My comrades existed on the internet at that moment and they shared the moment with me, infused as it was with all the anger and frustration of our struggle.

The MERS outbreak in South Korea occurred in the late May and as of June 7, the day of the KQCF opening ceremony, 2,508 people had been quarantined, 87 had been confirmed infectious, and 5 people had died. The South Korean government had failed to control the disease. It took nine days for the Korea Center for Disease Control and Prevention to identify

195. Telegram is a texting app developed by Russian developers based in Berlin and is widely used among activists to avoid government surveillance.

patient zero, and during these nine days, the virus was spread mostly through hospitals that the patient had visited. Even after it was confirmed that hospitals were hubs for the spread of the disease, the South Korean government did not release information on which hospitals had been impacted. Moreover, due to the lack of quarantine facilities, people who may have come into contact with carriers were advised to quarantine themselves at home until they were sure that they did not have any symptoms. It was therefore each individual's responsibility to isolate him or herself from others, including from one's own family members, in order to protect them. Nonetheless, the South Korean government rushed to declare at least a "de facto end" to the virus in an effort to recover the economy, tourism, and daily life. Tourist arrivals into South Korea decreased significantly in June (40%) and in the first half of July (60%).[196] In this climate of crisis, gossip and fear mongering across social media platforms prevailed over accurate information, including the one spread by evangelical Christian groups that said: "When the AIDS virus carried by homosexuals meets MERS, it creates a super virus, which will cause a national disaster."[197] While their logic was unsupported by science, the KQCF organizers had to seriously reconsider the public assembly. The MERS epidemic was accompanied by fear, panic, suspicion, and stigma, intensified by the government's failure to contain the outbreak. The MERS epidemic painfully reminds us that we are all connected whether we desire this connection or not. As Melissa Autumn White notes, viral diseases such as MERS "reveal the fundamental interdependency and vulnerability of all lives and thus illuminate the very conditions upon which

196. Alastair Gale, "South Korea MERS Outbreak Is Over, Government Says," *The Wall Street Journal*, last modified July 27, 2015, http://www.wsj.com/articles/south-korea-mers-outbreak-is-over-government-says-1438052856.

197. Ji Yusŏk, "MERS, AIDSwa Kyŏlhaphae Super Virus Saengsŏng? (When MERS Meets AIDS, Does Super Virus Appear?)," *Kidokkyo Shinmun* (Seoul, South Korea), June 9th, 2015.

(affective) politics unfold today."[198] Whose bodies become the most vulnerable, not only to the virus but also to social prejudice and discrimination? While it could be argued that everyone is equally vulnerable to the virus, the burden of vulnerability is not equally distributed. Poor people with government subsidies[199] and people living with HIV and AIDS were forced to leave public hospitals in order to free up beds for MERS patients.[200] Migrant workers were fired on suspicion of carrying the illness.[201] Queers participating in KQCF 2015 were blamed for transmitting the virus.[202] The value of lives is differently calculated and differently protected. Within the biopolitical regime of the MERS crisis that sought to eradicate queer bodies, the queer subject appeared, breaking away from heteronormative time and space during this specific political time. To be clear, I do not presuppose queer interlocutors to have been already formulated entities

198. Melissa Autumn White, "Viral/Species/Crossing: Border Panics and Zoonotic Vulnerabilities," *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly* 40*,* vol. 1 & 2 (2012): 118.

199. Kang Jae-Hun, "Kung-nip Ŭi-ryo-wŏn MERS Gŏ-jŏm Byŏng-wŏn Ji-jŏng-e Jŏ-so-dŭk-ch'ŭng 'yu-t'an'(Impact on Low-Income People Due to a Designation of the National Medical Center as a Headquarter for MERS Care," *The Hankyureh*, last modified June 8, 2015, http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/society/society_general/694684.html.

200. Yi Hanui, "MERS Hwan-ja Dŭ-rŏ-on-da-myŏ AIDS Hwan-ja-rŭl Tcho-ch'a-naet-ta (They Kicked out AIDS Patients so that They Can Accommodate MERS patients)," *Mediatoday*, last modified June 18, 2015, http://www.mediatoday.co.kr/news/articleView.html?idxno=123661.

201. Act for Migrants, "[Statement] Why Do Migrant Workers Have to Lose Their Jobs When They Are Sick in the MERS Crisis," last modified June 23, 2015, http://migrants.jinbo.net/index.php?mid=statement&page=1&listStyle=webzine&document_srl=513700.

202. The Esther Prayer Group spread disinformation via KakaoTalk messanger about the potential emergence of a super virus due to an encounter between MERS virus and HIV, which was scientifically wrong. The message goes like this: "Shalom! According to a doctor who is an AIDS expert, there is a danger of a virus mutation when MERS virus and AIDS virus meets, which will cause a national disaster. So please pray for the cancellation of the opening event of the homosexual festival." (Lee Eun-hye, "'Super virus,' created by speculation without a scientific ground," *newsnjoy.com*, October 19, 2018.)

before this event. Rather, it is through Rancière's dissensus that the queer subject emerged as a political assemblage. For Rancière, a new political potentiality comes into play through a redistribution of the sensible. It is dissensus that enables the surplus of queer bodies to become a political subject that challenges the technology of biopower. Through dissensus, queer bodies dislocate themselves from the times and spaces to which they have been assigned and eventually reframe the sensory regime as their own. Rancière writes, "The essential work of politics is the configuration of its own space. It is to make the world of its subjects and its operations seen. The essence of politics is the manifestation of dissensus as the presence of two worlds in one."[203] Radical politics is about creating scenes of interruption, or disruption, against the naturalized, ordinary order of time and space. In the case of the KQCF opening event, it was a time of festival/political action in which community members participated in KQCF online via the YouTube broadcast and engaged with and recognized other community members across the globe through social networking services.[204] The emergence of a distinct time is the central point of my analysis. In a networked environment, time matters more than space, as writer Teju Cole famously demonstrated through a Twitter experiment during the World Cup final match in 2010. He invited his Twitter followers to use the hashtag #thetimeofthegame to show the ways in which Twitter users share experiences of viewing the game, regardless of their geographic locations and different time zones. In his experiment, which constitutes the eventfulness of this globally televised soccer game is a shared time (public time) rather than a shared space (public

203. Jacque Rancière, *Dissensus*, 45.

204. The KQCF has become highly politicized due to backlash from evangelical Christians and the MERS crisis. For queer subjects, gathering together in Seoul Plaza, a city square that embodies the history of resistance in the modern Korean history, has become a political act of demonstrating the power of the movement.

space); he eloquently writes, "We live in different time zones, out of sync but aware of each other. Then the game begins, and we enter the same time: the time of the game."[205] In other words, what makes a particular happening eventful is real-time engagement through which people can share their excitements, frustrations, disappointments, and pleasures. In the case of KQCF 2015, what made this event publicly meaningful was not just the assembly of people in Seoul Plaza, but also the online gatherings watching the event in real time, sharing their opinions, emotions, and feelings about the event. That moment carries a queer longing for more assemblies that are not geographically bound. Then what is the relationship between real-time engagement via the internet and social movements like KQCF? Anthropologists Yarimar Bonilla and Jonathan Rosa observe the ways in which hashtag usage on Twitter created a feeling of real-time engagement during a series of protests in Ferguson, Missouri in 2014. They illuminated the ways in which the participation of Twitter users in this particular moment was enmeshed with frustration and rage over long lasting institutionalized racial violence in the United States.[206] Bonilla and Rosa further complicate the understanding of the user experience of the event in "real time," comparing it to participating in a protest:

> [Online participation] offers an experience of "real time" engagement, community, and even collective effervescence. Through this form of participation, users can experience the heightened temporality that characterizes all social movements: the way days marked by protest become "eventful," distinguishing them from quotidian life. The "eventfulness" of protest-filled days cannot be easily summed up in dated news bulletins; indeed, they often challenge calendrical time itself—thus, not coincidentally, social movement actors often develop their own revolutionary calendars, chronicles, timelines, and alternative forms of making political time.[207]

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205. Teju Cole, Twitter posting, July 8, 2014, 11:57 a.m., https://twitter.com/tejucole.

206. Yarimar Bonilla and Jonathan Rosa, "#Ferguson: Digital Protest, Hashtag Ethnography, and the Racial Politics of Social Media in the United States," *American Ethnologist* 42, no. 1 (2015): 4–17.

207. Ibid., 7–8.

For Bonilla and Rosa, joining a hashtag campaign is both an act of witnessing and a form of political participation enabled by a shared time that is different from quotidian time.[208] In other words, the real time experience via Twitter, they claim, is equivalent to the characteristics of how people experience a social movement that rejects the here and now and gestures toward a different futurity. Online participation via Twitter forms a political time through which the users perform and experience the "eventfulness" of social movements, imbued with shared emotions and feelings, which might become a source of a new sociality. The combination of a shared affect and a political temporality becomes the ground upon which a collective sense of *we* emerges, whether the participants engage in the event via the streets or via social media.

Queer Counterpublics: Reclaiming Seoul Plaza

Although the KQCF organizers encouraged participants to remain home and instead view the livestream the opening event via YouTube, the event itself was still held at Seoul Plaza, a symbolic space of the history of democratization in South Korea. In observing the online broadcast, I am not so interested in asking whether social media activism is "real" activism or not. Instead, I am interested in interrogating the ways in which queer subjects come together and experience a series of affectively charged moments in a networked environment through performance constellations. In particular, when faced with the MERS crisis, social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube became alternative spaces for queer subjects to still be together and interact on a real-time basis. Moreover, these platforms provided

208. Yarimar Bonilla and Jonathan Rosa, "#Ferguson: Digital Protest, Hashtag Ethnography, and the Racial Politics of Social Media in the United States," 7.

opportunities for a global audience to participate in this event regardless of location. During the event, the online participants acknowledged each other and shared their intense emotions and feelings about the event and about the context of MERS, which facilitated a form of biopolitical control that erased queer bodies. In facing the MERS crisis as well as threats from evangelical Christian groups, the KQCF organizers utilized YouTube and its live-chatting function in order for participants to join the event in real time. The chat rooms on YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and other social media platforms were also sites in which users experienced the event together with their online interlocutors.

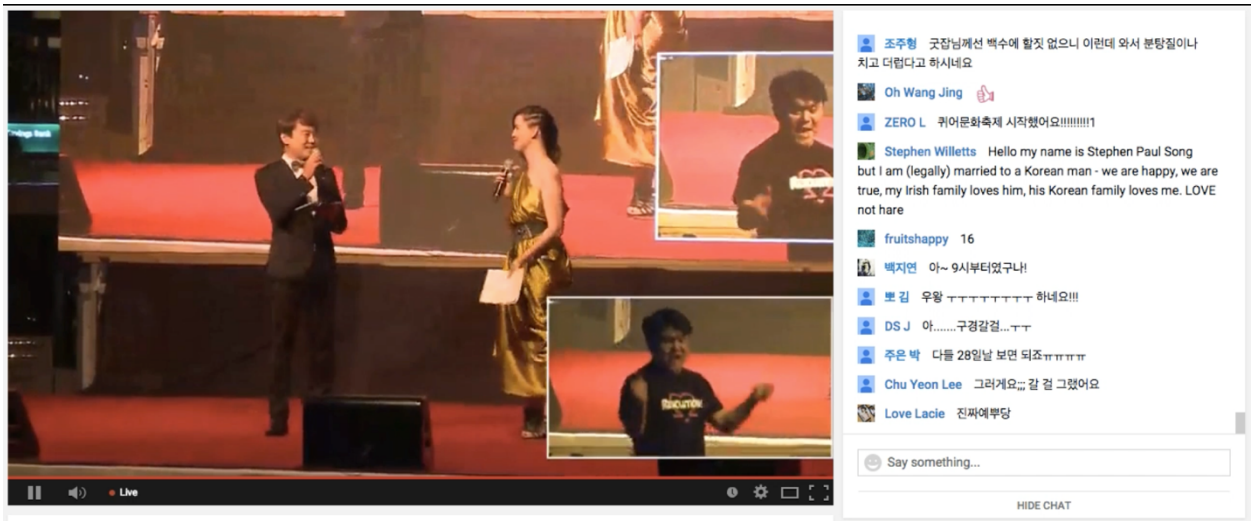

Figure 22. The online broadcast of KQCF 2015 opening ceremony on YouTube.

The opening event finally begins, an hour after it was supposed to. Two emcees, Kang Myung-Jin in a suit and Park Edhi in a golden dress, appear on the red-carpeted stage:

> Park: Where are we standing right now? Isn't it Seoul Plaza?
> Kang: This is Seoul Plaza, the center of Seoul, where there was a 6.10 Democratic Uprising. This is a symbolic place of a civil resistance. How meaningful that we are having an official event for the first time in Seoul Plaza.
> Park: It is such an honorable thing! That's why we are meeting with many people via the online live broadcast.

From the beginning of the event, the emcees acknowledge the online participants, especially because the organizers discouraged on-site participation. At the same time, they recognized the

historicity of the location in terms of resistance and connected it to queer politics. Indeed, it was quite a struggle for the organizers to acquire a permit for KQCF: activists had to line up for 8 days and 7 nights in front of Namdaemun Police Station, where evangelical Christians also lined up for the permit to prevent KQCF from taking place in Seoul Plaza.

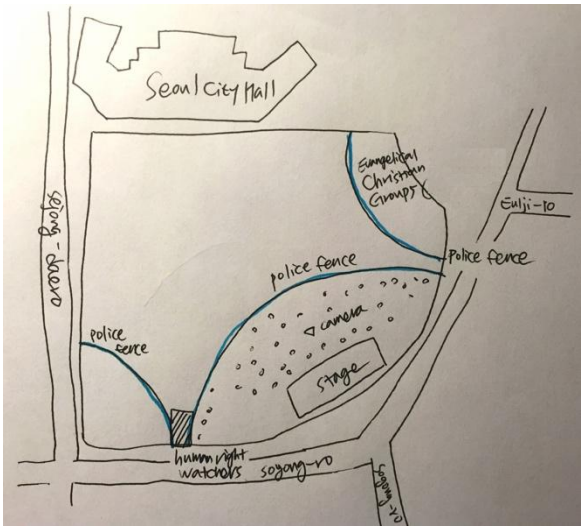

Figure 23. A Scene of Dissensus at KQCF 2015. [209]

Although the Christian groups failed to acquire a permit for a rally, they came anyway, equipped with amplifiers for the purpose of disturbing the event. They play hymns at maximum volume. In the YouTube chat room, people complained about the noise that the Christian groups were making and begin having a conversation regarding the scene.

> MinyŏngPak: I want to be friends with everyone.
> Seonil Kim: I wish I were there to see it directly.
> KimKŏnha: I wanna go. T.T
> YH Choe: If I were there, I would cheer loudly so that I can overpower those hymns.
> […]
> ChoMyŏngsan: Hello, hello, everyone. I am at the site. It's fun. Are there any members of Gender Ocean in this room?
> sungbean lee: I envy people who are actually there.
> Pingvino Kay: What's the noise? Damn Christians using a megaphone?
> Hochun Chu: So many kinds of interrupting sounds.

209. I drew this scene based on a personal communication with Tori Mong (queer activist) and Tari Na (queer activist), November 2015.

Osado: I think those are megaphone sounds.
Shul Kim: That's not even a megaphone. They're using amplifiers. Fucking amplifiers.

In the scene through which the participants aim to make them to be seen and to be heard, the evangelical Christian groups constantly produce loud sounds in order to overwhelm the sound produced by KQCF. It is an interesting moment of "two worlds" existing together, and the online participants who cannot produce more sound from the scene are disturbed by the fact that they are not physically there.

But still, there was a *we* who showed up in the Seoul Plaza regardless of the threats from the evangelical Christian groups and the virus, and at the same time, there was a *we* who watched the event and shared our responses via social media. And these *we*s often overlap, since some of us there in the plaza shared what was happening, invited others to come, or discussed the event on social media, creating an alternative venue to let us know the on-going struggles that are rarely captured by mass media. We becomes *we* only when there is a connection and relationship among the people involved. The sense of collectivity at the opening event was twofold: first, this collectivity has been forged through long-standing political effort—grassroots organizing since 1994—that has established and maintained a community based on an identity position of LGBTQ people, and second, collectivity also emerged from shared experiences in a series of affectively charged moments, whether on social media or on the streets. And yet, these two senses of collectivity are not entirely separate realms, as I have discussed above. The *we* endlessly gestures toward more *we*s.

Figure 24. "We are Stronger When We are Connected to Each Other!" Photo Courtesy of Park-Kim Hyung-Joon

After several individual speeches, members of a feminist group *Minwoohoe* (Women Link) walk onto the stage with a song, "All You Need is Love," holding papers in pink, blue, green, yellow, orange and red. At this very moment, one of the participants with the user name "Damien Cho" types in the YouTube chat: "What is good for women is good for sexual minorities." This is a political statement that *Solidarity for LGBT Human Rights of Korea* promoted while participating a rally on the International Women's Day in Seoul, 2015.[210] Minwoohoe's participation at KQCF is a subsequent act of solidarity, and part of an urge to cultivate more connections between minoritarian subjects. Minwoohoe members came to the stage and made the following statement:

210. Since then, queer activists and feminists have been organizing more coalitions. See chapter 1 for more examples of these coalitions.

> Minwoohoe will continue to fight discrimination and hate against sexual minorities. These days, we see more and more hate against women, against sexual minorities, against social minorities. But we are sure that there are many more people who agree with us and are willing to be with us. So we wish to build more solidarity, which is fun, exciting, strong, and meaningful! Because we get stronger when we are connected!

After announcing this message of solidarity, the members then flip the colorful papers each person is holding, and then a message appears: "we are stronger when we are connected to each other!" Each person holds one syllable; without all of them coming together, the sign does not make any sense. They gesture toward "many more people" who are not visible but who have the potential to come together; it is a utopic gesture toward a not-yet formulated collectivity, and they interpellate not only women and sexual minorities, but also all other oppressed and discriminated people—in Rancière's terms, the surplus.

I further argue that presenting the statement of "we are stronger when we are connected to each other" is an active refusal of the dis/connectivity that accompanies disease. What we witnessed during the MERS crisis were acts of exclusion, isolation, and disconnection against queer bodies. We were blamed as national traitors and sources of disease and anxiety. While there were hundreds of thousands of gatherings in churches, subways, buses, marketplaces, companies, schools, stores, and so on, it was the queer assembly that became a target for blame, as well as the subject of rumors about a "super virus" that evangelical Christians disseminated. People living with AIDS were forced to leave public hospitals in order to make beds for MERS patients. In this moment, we witnessed how, once again, queer bodies are excluded and denied in infrastructures and social and political institutions. Despite these threats, *we* still come together to demand more public hospitals, better health care, and more protection for the vulnerable, and to encourage the desire to build an alternative space wherein we might come together differently and queerly.

What is important to note is that our assembly, which stepped out of the ordinary temporality of the here and now, was only possible because of sustained effort from all the participants and organizers who worked patiently despite delays before the moment of finally coming together. Even when the site of emergence seems spontaneous and un-organized, there are infra-activities going on cultivating material and affective conditions. At the end of the opening event, activists from *Rainbow Solidarity* came up to the stage and began reading a statement:

> Greetings to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer folx and everyone standing with us across the country and from abroad! It's hard to say for how long we've put our efforts in order to have this event in the Seoul City Plaza today. […] We now can speak about what we need in order for us to strive as equal citizens. We can speak about our faces and our lives. And we've assembled here today. So good to see you all! We've assembled in a square. Via live-broadcast, we've assembled in Seoul City Plaza. We remember it so vividly. In December, 2014, we remember us shouting "to sexual minorities, human rights means life" in the lobby of the Seoul Metropolitan Government.[211] […] We can't help but come together. We have to come together. We have to resist. That's how the Stonewall riots happened in June, 1969, in the U.S. That history is not just part of American history but also a history of sexual minorities living in today's Korea. Isn't it?

The statement interpellates *we* across various sites in order to form a political subjectivity that resists the violent erasure of queer bodies, locating this collective moment in the historicity of queer resistance, from the 1969 Stonewall Riots in New York City to a recent protest in the lobby of the Seoul Metropolitan Government. There was a *we* who showed up at the Seoul Plaza regardless of the threats from the evangelical Christian groups and the virus, and at the same time, there was a *we* who watched the event and shared our responses via social media. And these *we*s often overlap: some of us there in the plaza shared what was happening, invited us to

211. Activists occupied the lobby of the Seoul Metropolitan Government for 6 days, from December 6th till December 11th, in protesting against the mayor Park Won-Soon's infinite delay of a human rights charter banning anti-gay discrimination. This moment is captured in chapter 1.

come, or broadcast the event, creating an alternative stage to let us know the on-going struggles that are rarely captured by mass media. The combination of a shared affect and a political temporality became the ground upon which a collective sense of *we* emerges, whether the participants engage in the event via the streets or via social network platforms. Indeed, it is performance constellations that produce queer counterpublics, in which queer subjects envision a new future. In this light, I argue that KQCF is not a mere celebration of queer visibility and pride, but a protest to experience different modes of collectivity, which sets up a new stage for queer subjects to emerge as a collective, contesting the heteronormative and heteropatriarchal public sphere.

Conclusion

This chapter focused on the historical formation of KQCF and their 2015 festival, I aimed to unearth connections between the past, present, and future. KQCF today is even more heterogeneous, carrying diverse worldviews and political goals. On one hand, some critics have pointed to the emergence of homonationalism and homonormativity at KQCF, something that reflects global trends.[212] On the other hand, some local festivals, including Incheon Queer Culture Festival 2018, have experienced violent attacks from right wing and evangelical Christian groups. I do see today as a pivotal moment for KQCF to decide whether it will become more like a festival to enjoy and celebrate queer visibility and inclusion, or whether it will continue to be a form of protest and of producing queer counterpublics. By introducing the nascent years of KQCF, I wanted to bring attention to the radical aspirations of queerness in the

212. See Woori Han, "Proud of Myself as LGBTQ: The Seoul Pride Parade, Homonationalism, and Queer Developmental Citizenship," *Korea Journal 58*, no. 2 (2018): 27–57.

history of the festival and envision what path we could be taking in future through an understanding of past experiences. It is to make connections between the past and now, focusing on queer expressions that dreamed outside of the here and now, a more livable future.

Conclusion: #We Make the Road

> Queerness is not yet here. […] Queerness is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world.
>
> (José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The There and Then of Queer Futurity*)

My understanding of queerness, based on my research into queer activism and aesthetic practices in South Korea, is a utopian gesture toward a new mode of collectivity, a sense of *we*, in order to create another world. I have looked at various cultural and political sites where the invocation of queerness functions as a call to recognize more *we*s in a shared struggle in a neoliberal world. I have theorized the historical formation of queerness in South Korea as a sense of collectivity to bring together a range of forms of social marginality. My project is to accent divergent scenes of queer world making practices, taking up protests, the queer independent film scene, performance-based art, and queer culture festivals. In my efforts to connect scenes in which queer activists and artists forged coalitions and relationalities, I have pointed to how queer subjects actively navigated, if not negotiated with, new cultural and political possibilities at the confluence of globalization and democratization, in order to bring forth the concrete possibility of a new futurity.

#우리는 없던 길도 만들지 (*urinŭn ŏptŏn kilto mandŭlchi*) #온라인퀴퍼 (*ollain k'wip'ŏ)*

Queer world making practices today increasingly take place on social media, creating unique moments of coming together. As Marcela A. Fuentes points out, "social media dissemination is today an integral aspect of our encounter with live event," creating "a feedback loop between on-

and offline networks of communication."[213] Social movements, she astutely observes, "take advantage of our transmedia moment, a moment defined by cross-pollination of multiple systems of communication."[214] As shown in the cases of the Queer Bus action and the candlelight protests in chapter one as well as the online opening event of the Seoul Queer Culture Festival 2015 in chapter four, social media platforms have become crucial tools to organize protest and to extend the experience of coming together. Social media offer vernacular repositories and repertoires of queer world making practices, through which we can assess a mode of collectivity imbued with a utopian impulse to imagine together beyond the unsatisfying here and now. I foresee increasing encounters with what Fuentes calls "performance constellations—'assemblages between physical and digital sites, body-based and digitally mediated action, and synchronous and asynchronous cooperation—'" in researching queer aesthetics and queer world making practices.

A recent online queer pride parade in South Korea is one example of this. On June 23, 2020, a digital media startup Dotface (dotface.kr), launched an online queer pride parade for summer 2020.[215] Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the annual Seoul Queer Culture Festival was postponed to the fall and it remains unclear whether queers will actually be able to gather together in public. Inspired by Nike Korea's #airmaxline campaign on Instagram, which invited users to generate avatars and make them look like they were lining up to purchase Nike shoes on

213. Marcela A. Fuentes. *Performance Constellations: Networks of Protest and Activism in Latin America* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2019), 15.

214. Ibid., 74.

215. Dotface is the company that documented and circulated a video recording of Kwak Yi-kyung's interruption of Moon Jae-in's speech with her provocative question "How dare you divide my human rights in half," which I discussed in the first chapter.

the hashtag page, Dotface created an interface in which the users can create their avatars with banners as well as other types of user-created images under the hashtags *urinŭn ŏptŏn kilto mandŭlchi* (we make the road) and *ollain k'wip'ŏ* (online queer parade). If one clicks the hashtag and scrolls down, it seems like the avatars are walking together down a road together, as the background of the avatars was made to look like a road with lanes. This thirteen-day-long event was successful with 86,225 participants.[216]

216. Watch https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ats6gyBRZlQ&feature=youtu.be to see how the avatars seem like walking together as scrolling down the screen.

Figure 25. Online Queer Parade
https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/%EC%9A%B0%EB%A6%AC%EB%8A%94%EC%97%86%EB%8D%98%EA%B8%B8%EB%8F%84%EB%A7%8C%EB%93%A4%EC%A7%80/?hl=ko (accessed July 29, 2020)

While the event itself was commercially driven, in which Dotface was able to promote their company as well as generate some profit through ad campaigns, I am interested in the ways in which participants have utilized the platforms for collective political interventions toward social justice. Just like the usual queer pride parade, avatars brought rainbow flags, transgender pride flags, banners with organizations' names, and political slogans. Some created one avatar on

a screen, while others created group images with multiple avatars on a screen. This year also, *Minwoohoe* (Women Link) presented their famous banner that says "We are Stronger When We are Connected," and many other feminist organizations, such as Korean Sexual Violence Relief Center and Korean Women Workers Association, shared messages of "We Change the World with 'Undeserving' Women" and "We Dream of a World Where Everyone Can Work Equally and Safely." Presenting a coalition among sexual minorities, women, and workers is now a recurring act at the queer pride parade. Although there are always some risks in utilizing commercial platforms, such as Instagram, as those companies make profits out of queers' labor of love, if not flatten queerness into a neoliberal multicultural pluralism, the online queer parade offered a venue for queers to show ourselves to ourselves. The participants of the online queer parade engaged in a queer world making practice, affirming the historical value of coalitions while enjoying cute and fabulous graphics to express one's queerness with outfits, accessories, props, flags, and banners.

Figure 26 A screen grab from https://www.instagram.com/stories/highlights/17941830871361654/ (accessed July 31, 2020). Minwoohoe (Women Link) generated three images with avatars holding a rainbow banner that says 'we are stronger when we are connected.'

As shown from the case of the online queer parade, queerness in South Korea has appeared, disappeared, and re-emerged across various platforms as a mode of concerted action. In tracing the formation of queerness with special attention to the historical context of South

Korea, I have discussed how the sense of *we* has greatly expanded at the sites of protests, queer independent film scenes, contemporary queer art, and the Korean Queer Culture Festival in the last three decades. At these sites, I have looked at the ways in which queer activists and artists worked hard to create queer counterpublics, often navigating and negotiating with majoritarian spaces, such as Instagram, Seoul Plaza, streets, college campuses, candlelight protests, and art galleries and museums, in order to generate resources for queers to come together and build relationalities across differences. Queerness, in these sites of a world making, is a bold contestation with the world, dissenting from the status quo and imagining new way of living together. By looking into the emergence of queer times imbued with a utopian impulse, I wanted to remember queer history together and carry on the legacy of hard work that has been done by queer activists and artists in order to bring forth the concrete possibility for another world.

Coda

For me, writing the history of queer aesthetic practices and its inextricable relationship to queer activism in South Korea is to set up an intellectual and artistic genealogy of queerness with an emphasis on the transnational. My exploration of the genealogy of queerness is "in" and "beyond" South Korea, because theory always travels and is transculturated. Queer theory, which emerged in the U.S. in the early 1990s along the AIDS crisis and which has since been institutionalized as an academic field, travels to elsewhere, responding to different political aspirations in different contexts. This travel is, more often than not, unidirectional. Whereas academics and activists in the non-West actively translate and converse with queer theory produced in the U.S. academy, little attention is paid to the formation and transformation of queer theory *elsewhere*. My attempt to engage with queer theory in South Korea aligned with Mel Chen's re-historicization of queer theory by "animating" the early works produced by queer

of color scholars. They claim Gloria Anzaldúa's conceptualization of *mestiza queer* in her book, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, published in 1987, as key origin points in the history of queer theory.[217] Their intervention to the genealogy of queerness reorients the field by anchoring its history in queer of color scholarship. With my project, I have intended to broaden the scope of the history of queer theory to beyond U.S. academic institutions, claiming that queer theory *elsewhere* takes an important position in the intellectual and artistic genealogy of queerness. Instead of looking at queer theory and activism in South Korea as a "belated" or "translated" phenomenon and part of an attempt to catch up with the global LGBTQ timeline, I located the emergence of queer theory and activism in South Korea as a crucial site to ponder on what it meant to be critically queer *there* and *then* and what it means to be critically queer *here* and *now.* It is a queer utopian impulse that has driven my project, seizing upon a new world that has not arrived yet. I hope my project carries on the radical aspirations of queerness that has allowed us to experience moments of coming together, to survive, and to flourish, gesturing towards more *we*s.

217. Mel Chen, *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 63–64.

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