

BLACK BOX:
THE MEMORY OF COLD WAR IMAGES

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NIGHTMARE

One day, I happened to turn on the television and there was an old woman recounting the experience of losing her husband during the war. According to the old woman, her long-deceased husband would suddenly appear in her dreams as the young man she had always remembered. In these dreams, he would lead her to the site of his death and implore her desperately to tell him why he had been abandoned there. Even after so many years, in these dream encounters, he would always be dressed in his bloody military uniform, wailing at the top of his lungs. After having the same dream many times over, the old woman grew more concerned, and finally decided to heed its recurrent call to search for someone, anyone, who might have a clue about the death of her husband, who had been “fatally shot by the North Korean People’s Army amid a heap of firewood near Woraksan Mountain.” Even at the expense of being treated like a psychopath, she scoured the entire vicinity of the mountain to question anyone and everyone who could shed light on his death. After so many trials, she finally found someone, an even older woman, who claimed to have witnessed her husband’s death. Despite her gray and weathered appearance, this village elder was able to recall the circumstances surrounding the husband’s death with remarkably photographic accuracy. She not only remembered hiding the wounded (South Korean) soldier in a pile of firewood and nursing him for the next few days, but was also able to recount the young man’s defining physical trait—a fist-sized bald patch on his head. All of the signals in the dream world

proved to be true. Buried in the ground since 1950, a ghost of war returns in a dream to guide the living back to his grave.

On April 24, 1997, the [progressive South Korean] newspaper *The Hankyoreh* ran a photograph of two men, Hwang Jang-yop and Kim Duk-hong, entering the grounds of the National Cemetery carrying bouquets of flowers for an altar. Appearing on the middle of the second page, the caption for the photograph notes that the image was provided by the Agency for National Security Planning (ANSP).¹ Above the photograph, there is a memo written by the manager of the Hanbo Group's North Korea Project, obtained by the newspaper. Because the handwritten note is smaller than the newspaper font, it would take a magnifying glass and a fair amount of time to read it properly.

Despite the difficult circumstances, even the General was encouraged by the previous support. According to Kim Seong-cheol, this was twice reported, and the potential cooperation by *Hwangcheol* [Hwanghae Steelworks] in resolving the submarine matter was taken into consideration.

We can decode this memo thanks to the accompanying report. It is as follows:

Kim Jong Il is encouraged by of the latest investment by the Hanbo Group to the Hwanghae Steelworks. According to Kim Seong-cheol, this was reported to Kim Jong Il on two occasions, and the scale of Hanbo's investment was taken into consideration when drafting the apology statement regarding the submarine infiltration incident.

¹ Editor's note: The Agency for National Security Planning (ANSP), known colloquially as *angibu*, was established in 1961 as the Korean Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA). In 1988, the organization changed its name to the National Intelligence Service (NIS), and since 1981, it has been called ANSP.

Circumstances notwithstanding, it was mostly speculation on the part of the mainstream media to suggest that Kim Hyun-chul and his clique were involved in this case. According to reports, inter-Korean relations would have been difficult to improve without the advice and efforts of a wide range of people and organizations, including the head of the "G clinic."² With this in mind, we should not give into wild theories that perhaps South Korean Kim [President Kim Dae Jung] tried to achieve unification by bribing Kim in the North [Kim Jong Il] with an exorbitant slush fund. It would be also dangerous to assume that materials for arms production were being bankrolled by Hanbo's investment in the North's steel industry. Even if there were minor attempts of this sort, nobody, including the parties concerned, would recall them. Plus, the circumstances are too uncertain to even entertain such a thought.

OVERACTING: TELEVISION

A striking example is the delusion that the Cold War was a struggle between socialism and capitalism. The Soviet Union, from 1917, has been even more remote from socialism than the US and its allies have been from capitalism, but again, both major propaganda systems have had a longstanding interest in claiming otherwise.³ —Noam Chomsky

² Translator's note: Park Gyeong-sik, the head of the "G Clinic," served as the chief physician for former President Kim Young-sam during the latter's tenure as the nominee for the then-Democratic Liberal Party (now the New Korea Party). Park was summoned as a key witness by the National Assembly to testify against the president's son, Kim Hyun-chul, who was accused of bribery and tax evasion involving the failed Hanbo Steel Company. See Sin Seung-geun, "Kim Hyeon-cheol uihok chongjeongni" [Mounting suspicion against Kim Hyun-chul], *The Hankyoreh*, March 27, 1997; Sheryl Wudunn, "Scandals Mar Last Leg of Korean Leader's Term," *The New York Times*, June 23, 1997.

³ Noam Chomsky, *Year 501: The Conquest Continues* (London: Verso, 1993), 76. Original citation from, Noam Chomsky, "Naengjeongwa segyejabonjuui" [The Cold War and global capitalism], in

Television. The true, ultimate solution to the historicity of all events.⁴ —Jean Baudrillard

In 1996, a group of “monsters” riding in “midget submarines” surfaced from the dark abyss of the sea.⁵ Though these were actual spies, they were vastly different from the kind of spies played by veteran method actors in films like Shin Sang-ok’s 1990 feature, *Mayumi*. Unlike the naturalistic performances of the latter, these actual “spies” were more like actors in a third-rate war film; with conspicuously overdrawn confidence, they seemed to be acting out a kind of “exaggerated melodrama” put on by the leviathans of North and South. Whether as actors or spies, one would think they were obliged to play the roles demanded of them by their respective employers, without any embellishment whatsoever. From the beginning to its very end, however, this incident was brimming over with a kind of awkward and unpleasant “excess.” Perhaps this unease was due to the excess of the Cold War combined with the televised medium. But these two factors do not simply amount to a state of mutual reinforcement, wherein the prolonged suspension of the Cold War and the sensationalism of television feed into one another to create a demand for spies to emerge.

Talnaengjeongwa migugui sinsegyejilseo [The post-Cold War and US’s new world order], trans. Seo Jae-jeong and Jeong Yong-uk (Seoul: Yukbi, 1997), 77.

4 “La télé. Véritable solution finale à l’historicité de tout événement.” In Jean Baudrillard, “Holocauste” [Holocaust] in *Simulacres et simulation* [Simulacra and simulation] (Paris: Galilée, 1981), 77. English translation provided by the translator.

5 Translator’s note: This is a reference to the “1996 Gangneung Submarine Infiltration Incident,” a failed North Korean espionage mission that occurred on September 18, 1996. See Han Seong-hun, “Gangneung jiyook mujang gongbi chimtu sageon” [Gangneung armed guerilla forces infiltration incident], *Encyclopedia of Korean Culture*, last modified 2015, <http://encykorea.aks.ac.kr/Contents/Item/E0075762>.

(1) The Cold War apparatus

The Cold War is always already in a state of excess tension. As is well known, the Cold War is the excessive state of arms, terror, ideology, fiction, and death. We also know that with the unilateral collapse of the Soviet Union pronounced an end to the Cold War, at least in the West. The problem, however, comes from the disconcerting situation in the Korean peninsula, which remains in the grip of the Cold War. As the historian Bruce Cumings explains, in terms of politics and the military, it is clear that the Korean peninsula is still trapped within the temporal framework of the Second World War.⁶ On the other hand, with respect to the economy and culture, it feels much closer to the post-Cold War conditions represented by the US and Europe. For us in the South, the gap between our country and the one known as the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (North Korea) is far more distant than the gulf between the US and the Soviet Union during the Cold War era.

Moreover, the desire to erase the Cold War past has been abetted by a sense of rationalism undergirding the international atmosphere of the post-Cold War era, making it easy to forget the extent to which inter-Korean relations still lag behind the times. For the stifling time capsule of the Cold War that is the Korean peninsula, every “incident” threatens to pull the rug out from under the here-and-now and throw us right back into the past. The persistence of the Cold War lacks any sense of reality. On the other hand, the psychological disconnect with the reality of the Cold War is also a kind of profound doubt. Anyone living on this peninsula can scream at the top of their lungs that “the Cold War is over,” but those who truly need to hear this message, the

6 Buruseu Keomingsu [Bruce Cumings], “Segye Jabonjuui undong sogui naengjeongwa talnaengjeon” [The Cold War and the post-Cold War in the movement of global capitalism] in *The Post Cold War And US’s New World Order*, 49. See also, Bruce Cumings, *Korea’s Place in the Sun: A Modern*, rev. ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005).

protagonists of inter-Korean tension, seem always to be in another room, wearing thick headphones set to different frequencies.

The forgetting of the Cold War depends not only on a paucity of information, but also on its excess: an overabundance of information disseminated by the mass media. Without the indiscriminate bombardment of information by the mass media, we would be less inclined to forget the continued existence of these Cold War conditions. Moreover, despite its quantitative excess, the intelligence regarding the Cold War in the region remains tautological and qualitatively poor. To this day, the North and the South have treated information about each other like pests, a nuisance, and so, unsurprisingly, the belligerent tone of Cold War rhetoric has rarely wavered on either side of the 38th parallel. This situation has paved the way for the far-right to claim exclusive ownership over the memory of the Cold War, which in turn begets a tendency to treat the Cold War as problem concerning only the older generations.

Far from providing any clarity to put toward sustained inquiry or reflection, this information, in all its excess and lack, ultimately impedes the quest to ascertain even the most basic of facts. For this simple reason, the basic premise of inter-Korean relations remains unchanged. But whether by failing to recognize this point, or else by genuinely buying into the media's message, we are incapable of envisaging anything other than what has already been said and done. Instead, we continue to shake our heads and mutter to ourselves, "The same old thing . . ." Like the two poles of a battery, the seemingly incongruent images of "never war" and "inferno of war" can be mutually activated with the mere flip of a switch.

(2) Stimulus in excess

In July of 1997, the major media outlets broadcast graphic video clips of soldiers uncovering decomposed corpses and combing through the mountainsides in search of more communist

guerillas.⁷ These vivid scenes exhumed long forgotten memories of so-called "brutal incidents" and "espionage incidents" of the past, but at the same time, their stark immediacy kept pulling the viewers back into the present tense. Rather than presenting this event as a recording of history, then, the mass media turned the spectacle into something closer to a war movie playing out in real-time. In this sense, it would actually be more accurate to view "the communist guerillas" as "spy-actors" rather than as spies in camouflage. This effect is due, of course, to television's relentless quest for the perpetual present, aided by the narcissism of the "camera-monitor," the simplification of video technology, and the cultivation of our own viewing habits over the years.

In order to probe at the real problem, however, we must turn to the curious relationship between the first two factors. The experience of this event was a rather "phenomenological" one—one that could be immediately linked to the televised submarine incident from the year before. By labeling the corpses "armed communist guerrillas," the knowledge of their death is suddenly thrown into confusion by the televisual impression that such guerillas are still running rampant before our own eyes. As such, the relationship between spies and television opens up a series

7 Translator's note: To be sure, there was no public record of espionage incidents in 1997. However, the image of armed communist guerilla forces that circulated on television was, in fact, from the aforementioned incident from the previous year. Despite the case being officially closed by November 1996, it is not incidental that the resurrection of the images eight months later coincided with the publication of *Nuga ideureul nayakan sinsedaerago bureugenneunga* [Who dare call the new generation feeble?] by the Ministry of National Defense, which offered vivid accounts of the incident from the perspective of the South Korean troops. In turn, its June 25 publication date was a less-than-subtle reminder of the outbreak of the Korean War (June 25, 1950), and the dissemination of the recent threats from the North spoke to the media's complicity in the discourse of national security. See for example, "Gangneung daegancheop jakjeon jangbyeong cheheomjip balgan" [Publication of testimonies from the Gangneung espionage operation], *Yonhap News*, June 26, 1997.

of distortions between the objects of our seeing and our ways of seeing them: between the past and the present, memory and movement, speed and languor, reflection and light, brutality and splendor. And it is precisely in our struggle to keep pace with these nauseating, syncopated rhythms of mediation that we find the experiential truth of this event. In other words, as the whole event transpired before our eyes, the events of the past seemed to be repeating themselves in the present. Certainly, the “spy-actors” were convincing enough to make us think that they were, indeed, spies, stripped of their old age, or perhaps cryogenically frozen human beings travelling on a submarine time machine, lip-syncing lines from an old re-run over the live broadcast.



“That feeling at the fingertips. ‘It’s a Communist guerrilla.’,
Hankook Ilbo, October 1, 1996.

More often than not, an actor who is overacting reveals not only their poor acting skills but also their excessive, zealous will for the role. And because this excess of will is overcompensation

for an inherent lack of talent, it is the actor rather than the role that draws the viewers’ attention. Therefore, the role is nothing more than bait to elicit compassion for the professional actor. The Cold War, in all its excess, has delivered some remarkable performances for the global audience over its fifty to eighty years. But in the Korean peninsula, the final frontier of the Cold War, we begin to see cracks in its iron grip. Indeed, it is impossible to find a sadder example of overacting than the flailing, mechanical limbs of North Korean soldiers marching in a military parade.

The deeper problem, however, is that when we experience the excess of the Cold War through the excess of mass media, we tend to read the excess as a lack, which is to say, overacting as “under-acting.” The logic of the Cold War no longer seems to be following a set course, but instead seems to be moving like an unmanned machine, beyond anyone’s control. We don’t like to think about the Cold War, let alone critique it. But the real problem, I think, is that the Cold War itself has become yet another boring topic, another source of ennui.

DOUBT: FILM

Philosopher: In that case you’d be making them ill, just like Pavlov and the dogs.⁸ —Bertolt Brecht

If someone suffering from a compulsive disorder then discovers the weak point in the structure that safeguards our inner life, the unreliability of memory, he can, with its assistance, extend doubt to encompass everything.⁹
—Sigmund Freud

8 Bertolt Brecht, *The Messingkauf Dialogues*, trans. and ed. John Willett (London: Methuen, 2002), 26.

9 Sigmund Freud, “Some Remarks on a Case of Obsessive-compulsive Neurosis [The ‘Ratman’],” in *The “Wolfman” and Other Cases*, trans. Louise Adey Huish (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 195.

In John Carpenter's sci-fi horror film *The Thing* (1982), the suspense is at its peak when the audience's doubts about the characters and characters' doubts about each other reach a climax. When the alien creatures assimilate into human form, the pilot for the US research team believed to be a true human is unable to distinguish the human crewmembers from the alien doppelganger, and ties them all to chairs. He draws blood from each one of the captives and collects the samples in petri dishes labeled with their names. Then, he prods the blood samples with a burning-hot wire.



John Carpenter, *The Thing*, 1982, film still. Courtesy of Universal Studios Licensing LLC

According to the logic of the plot, even if the blood were physically separated from the body, if it belonged to the alien creature, it would visibly react to the heat by replicating itself,

thereby revealing the true identity of the alien. What pulls the viewer into the scene, then, is not the impending result of the makeshift blood test, but the moment of uncertainty engendered by doubt itself. If determining the true identity of these characters were my only concern, the film would not have had such a deep emotional impact. The particular fascination with this scene lies in the structurally unique contradiction it presents.

It is the certainty of suspicion in the situation coupled with the uncertainty of the object of suspicion that begets this peculiar and pointed tension. In other words, it is self-evident that the mutual suspicion is at its peak, but the content of the suspicion remains only an unconfirmed speculation. With all of their nerves laid out in the open, it seems as if their inner worlds have been completely taken over by something else. This leaves only a relationship of mutual suspicion between the characters: a state of pure suspicion. The issue at hand is doubt—the doubt of one man against another. To revise Thomas Hobbes' famous words, "*bellum omnium contra omnes*," one could call it "doubt of all against all."

Doubt is an inherently negative value in that it is a refusal to accept the identity asserted by the other. For this reason, I must hide the fact that you are being doubted by me. In a state of mutual suspicion, the subject determines that they must successfully hide their suspicion of the others in order to save themselves from others' suspicion. That is to say, the object of your doubt is not myself, but rather my doubts about you. Once set in motion by the alien creature, then, Carpenter's characters begin to doubt their own doubts. Consequently, this state of mutual suspicion is sustained and, indeed, exacerbated by the lack of transparency, which in turn becomes the only transparent thing to anyone.

As we all know, the "replica monster" film genre emerged out of the social psychology of the Cold War during the 1950s. Therefore, we cannot help but read the breathtaking scene of revelation, the precise moment of transformation among

monsters and men from suspicion to identification, as a powerful allegory for ourselves. The self-replicating, extraterrestrial life form refuses to surrender until the very end, when finally it succumbs to scientific methods that reveal its true identity. And despite the risk of contagion, the aliens are quarantined and turned into objects of further research. Until the final verdict, even the true humans are held captive alongside their alien doppelgängers. Because no one knows for certain who is infected by the alien life form, including those infected, even if one were to claim ignorance on this matter, that they didn't recognize the "monsters" in their mist, it would only reinforce the suspicion of non-disclosure.

But it is time for us to approach the problem from a different angle. Notwithstanding the Cold War's pivotal role in the creation of social doubt, the enduring capacity of doubt to function as means of control derives from its deep embeddedness in our lives. While we may not be as captivated as moviegoers were with Alfred Hitchcock films like *Topaz* (1969) or *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1956), our fascination with the genre is not altogether different from theirs.

Since the medium of film is itself a series of scenes of "displacement," it plays with the virtually infinite permutations of doubt formed between the characters themselves as well as the audience. It is a medium best suited for developing a suspended state of doubt into various complex forms. In all "replica monster" films, the plot is an acrobatics of memory, juggling the balls of recollection and amnesia within a given timeframe. As is the case in another 1950s classic, *The Invasion of in Body Snatchers* (1955), the transformation of characters into monsters takes place in a spatiotemporal setting outside of the frame. It is when our attention strays to something else on the screen that a transmutation takes place, be it through cloning or contagion, persuasion or purchase, love or guilt. But the truly surprising effect occurs not within the film, but with the audience. Once the character leaves the frame, even if they return within a matter

of minutes, we suspect that the character is no longer the same person. It is like doubting the authenticity of one's own wife after she returns from an errand.



Photo of torture of Park Jong-cheol, *Weekly Chosun*, vol. 930 (1987)

Of course, this is because certain memories must be suppressed, or simply forgotten during the act of recollecting, for the film's sequence of "displacements" relies on the accumulation of immersive emotions as such. As the capacity for emotional immersion is greater in film than any other media, it is able to skillfully adjust, control, and at times, censor and manipulate time and space, both in and out of the frame. And like a game of peak-a-boo, the audience is constantly mesmerized by what might come next. In that respect, as we yearn to completely extricate ourselves from the Cold War, I wonder if we are in some ways similar to those moviegoers who are waiting for the dreadful sci-fi horror film to end. Moreover, I can't help but wonder if the fervor for mutual suspicion in the Cold War order is due to our inherent desire for suspicion and doubt, or for some thrilling narrative to exploit our affinity for deception.

By comparing epic theatre to a conditioned reflex experiment, Bertolt Brecht radically argued that the audience should be encouraged to doubt the storyline. In *In Praise of*

Doubt, Brecht suggests that those who most doubt the facts are the ones most prone to fallacy:

There are the thoughtless who never doubt.
 Their digestion is splendid, their judgment is infallible.
 They don't believe in the facts, they believe only in
 themselves. When it comes to the point
 The facts must go by the board. Their patience with
 themselves Is boundless. *To arguments*
They listen with the ear of a police spy (emphasis added).¹⁰

MONSTER: POSTER

Pointing the blinding flashlight in her face, he asked her which side she was on. But my mother couldn't offer an answer right away, for it was impossible to tell if the man behind the flashlight was a police officer or a communist guerilla.¹¹ —Lee Cheong-jun

We work in the shadows, and aim for the light. —Slogan of the Korean Agency for National Security Planning

If a certain degree of generalization can be permitted, I would contend that there is a structural similarity between the narrative arc of “replica monster” films and films that center on the theme of “otherness,” in the form of double agents, multiple personalities, or love affairs, for example. As critical as it is for us to probe at fundamental historical issues like the link between regionalism and the red complex, it is also incumbent upon us to expose the myriad and unpredictable ways in which the latent

¹⁰ Bertolt Brecht, “In Praise of Doubt,” in *Poems 1913–1956*, trans. and ed. John Willett and Ralph Manheim (London: Eyre Methuen Ltd., 1976), 335.

¹¹ Lee Cheong-jun, “Somunui byeok” [The wall of rumor], in *Maejabi* [Falcon hunting] (Seoul: Minumsa, 2005), 87.

culture of the Cold War has been sublimated, displaced, and transformed in our psyches, and, indeed, how it has seeped into the very core of our everyday life.

The curtains have long since closed on the cinematic world of the 1980s, and yet, we are still beholden to the Cold War as a potent cinematic motif. To this day, it is not uncommon to encounter powerful directors, actors, posters, fancy commodities, and trailers that continue to capitalize on it. The symbolic and practical power, or rather the system of inertia that continues to recycle the mnemonic landscape of these older films has developed a new mode of technology that not only immerses the audience in these film worlds called the US or the Soviet Union, but also make us forget the fact that we were once the protagonists in them.



Electronic display board at Chungmuro subway station, 1996. Photo by Park Chan-kyong

For instance, there are sensational posters commissioned by the ANSP lining the walls of cafes, inns, and subways. Among them, the most intricately designed and visually and psychologically arresting is the poster of a chameleon. With its eyes and tail accentuated in symbolic red, this lizard in the age of technological reproduction radiates in fluorescent light. He is everywhere. He can be found in every subway station in Seoul including Chungmuro, the epicenter of the city's image production. Red and blue, the two colors joined together at the heart of the military-industrial-academic complex are indeed the strange hues of the Korean pseudo-enlightenment project emanating literally and symbolically from the underground.

In exposing its camouflage, the chameleon becomes a spectacle whose glare is fixed upon the audience and simultaneously directed back upon itself. Like a thief whose stammers and twitches betray his own guilty conscience, the chameleon's fiery red eyes and slithering tail reads like a rent in his disguise. But at the same time, the chameleon can also detect the stammers and twitches of another thief. The all-seeing eyes of the chameleon serve as the surveillance apparatus that monitors every move of a potential suspect. As such, the chameleon is not just a suspect or a criminal. It is at once the criminal and the police, the North Korean spy and the ANSP. The sectarian image of the left enlists the public to act as the eyes and ears of the police. As such, the fiery red eyes of the chameleon represent, on the one hand, the exposed conspiracy of the "radical left," and on the other hand, the bloodshot eyes of men "working the shadows, and aiming for the light." It is precisely this "gestalt" politics that makes this poster stand out from others that depict, for instance, a wolf in a sheep's mask, or a rat sucking the milk from a cat.

In qualitative terms, the offender of the National Security Act may be diametrically opposed to the ANSP, but in quantitative terms, there is an equivalence of fear endemic to both parties. As such, as much as the "left" comes off as a threat to the audience (the citizen), the audience (the citizen) is also threatened by the

state. What the poster visualizes is, then, an economy of fear lifted from a bygone era. Nonetheless, we must go further and attend to the economy of priorities on the part of the ANSP. Which is to say, with "espionage, leftist ideology, drug trafficking, and international terrorism" brought under the same rubric, which of these crimes garners the most attention from the ANSP, and, by extension, the state? As long as the left remains a target of suspicion by the state, the first order of affective response would be to see the left as a threat. This order implies something less obvious than one would assume. This is because the order of affective recognition and response is itself an aspect of a system of dispositions, or what Pierre Bourdieu calls "habitus." In other words, this order reminds us that the "entity" which seems simultaneously near enough to be beckoned yet far enough to be able to survey the minds of the citizens like a floor plan, is not the spy from the North, but in fact the tower atop Namsan, the Southern Mountain.¹²

As a byproduct of the national security apparatus, the images of anxiety and suspicion form the linchpin that has empowered the modern South Korean nation-state and enabled all its dangerous forays since the end of the Korean War. By anticipating a clear and present danger, the chameleon poster is yet another diagram that encapsulates the neurosis of a divided nation that must continually maintain the supply and demand of disaster in careful balance.

Therefore, from the outset it was never necessary for the chameleon on the poster to look real. Its only task is to mimic the overlapping images of our sub-consciousness. The poster chameleon is a hybrid of a real chameleon and a lizard. If you look carefully, even its form is ambiguous. With its head protruding like a swollen gland and its body covered scales, it is ready to pounce on you when you least expect it and slither away right

¹² Editor's note: Namsan Mountain was also the site of ANSP office, infamous for the violent interrogations that occurred there.

before your eyes. It is a hybrid creature, a deformed organism, a monster born out of an experiment gone wrong. Smaller than a leaf, but stranger than a camel, it could aptly be known only as “the thing.”

DÉJÀ-VU: PHOTOGRAPHY

What the photographs by their sheer accumulation attempt to banish is the recollection of death, which is part and parcel of every memory-image.¹³

—Siegfried Kracauer

Death is the *eidos* of that Photograph.¹⁴

—Roland Barthes

Whenever I look at scenes of slaughtered “Communist guerillas,” for some reason, it feels as if I was there at the time of their death. Although these particular scenes were singular events, it seems as if I had experienced them before, like déjà-vu. The structure of déjà-vu, however, seems more akin to the experience of looking at a well-preserved photograph than watching a television. This is because déjà-vu is a force that affixes itself to a particular moment in our past in sudden reemergence, rather than a continuous flow of time. Therefore, as a kind of “repetitive compulsion,” déjà-vu offers no clear indication of the present in the flow of time. Instead, the spatial reality of a fixed time becomes coeval with yet distinct from the present. Moreover, one could also say that the kind of déjà-vu triggered by television is actually caused by the images’ resemblance to the many photographs one has encountered in the past.

Perhaps this is why all of Sigmund Freud’s examples of

13 Siegfried Kracauer, “Photography,” trans. Thomas Y. Levin, *Critical Inquiry* 19, no. 3 (Spring 1993): 433.

14 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 15.

“repetitive compulsion” are based on experiences that return to the same space. For instance, Freud speaks of the fear that arises when, “one [gropes] around in the dark in an unfamiliar room, searching for the door or the light-switch and repeatedly colliding with the same piece of furniture.”¹⁵ This is precisely the same affect that overcame Roland Barthes when he first encountered the Winter Garden photograph of his mother as a young girl for the first time. In other word, it is the return of the “traumatic memory” that has withstood the test of time and continues to haunt us.

Among the countless photographs of “Communist guerilla” massacres, one in particular, in all its deceptive realism, appeared before the South Korean National Assembly. On December 10, 1988, when the National Assembly convened for a special hearing on the findings of the Special Committee on Gwangju, Lee Hae-chan, a member of the assembly, presented this photograph as visual evidence of the atrocity committed by the airborne unit.¹⁶ However, we now know that this was a mistake on Lee’s part. It was actually a photograph that dates back to June of 1969. Captured by Yun Suk-bong, the press photographer for *The Dong-A Ilbo* at the time, the photograph depicts the assassination of North Korean spies on Heuksando Island. Because this

15 Sigmund Freud, “The Uncanny,” in *The Uncanny*, trans. David McLintock (London, Penguin Books: 2003), 144. “The Uncanny” (1919) forms a pair with “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” (1920).

Although it is difficult to agree with Freud’s explanation of castration anxiety as an example of the uncanny, his mediations on the death drive from “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” still resonates to this day.

16 Translator’s note: This is a reference to the “Gwangju Uprising,” alternatively called the “May 18 Democratic Uprising,” a mass protest against the South Korean military government that took place in the southern city of Gwangju between May 18 and 27, 1980. For a comprehensive overview and historical analysis in English, see Shin Gi-wook and Hwang Kyung Moon eds., *Contentious Kwangju: The May 18 Uprising in Korean Past and Present* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003), and Lee Namhee, *The Making of Minjung: Democracy and the Politics of Representation in South Korea* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007).

photograph was deceptively included in the journal *The Monthly Joongang* in its feature on the Gwangju massacre, Lee Hae-chan did not question its provenance, and believed it without a morsel of doubt. In any case, the brilliant realism of this particular photograph is what led to its misidentification.



Murder of North Korean infiltrators on Heuksando Island, 1969, *I hanjangui sajin* [This single photograph], ed. Jeon Min-jo (Seoul: Haenglim Publishing Company, 1994). © Yun Suk-bong

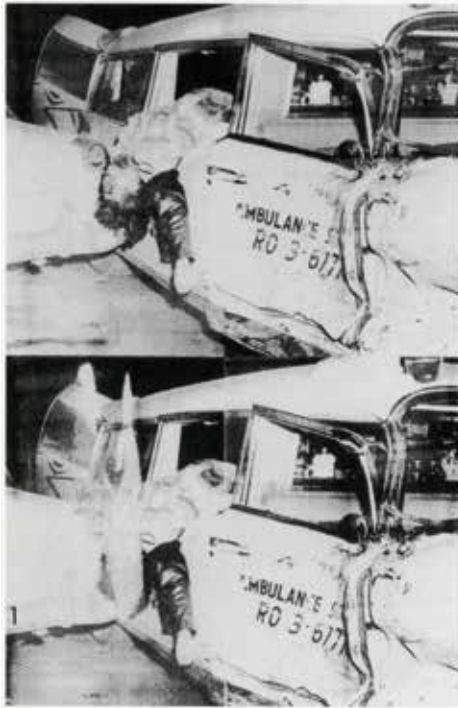
The photograph is lent a sense of naturalism, both from the depth created by the early summer sunlight as well as in the keenly captured excitement of the soldier's expression. This is why it is difficult for us to believe the fact that the event in this photograph took place at the end of the 1960s. We can almost feel their euphoria, smell their sweat, and hear their cheers

and laughter. The expressions on their faces betray hope and excitement for an impending leave or perhaps a promotion, telling us that the time of tension and fear has finally ended.

Just because they are reaching their fifties, is it possible to "see" these soldiers as belonging to our fathers' generation? Their hair may be grey and faces etched in wrinkles, but the young men pictured in the photograph remind me more of my upstanding friends like Gi-hwan, Cheon-seok, and Jun. This initial shock comes from the seamless suturing of the conflict between the continuous flow of time and the fixed time of the photographic-reality, as in a well-preserved photograph. This "mummification" is the ongoing ontological dilemma of photography.

The second shock comes at precisely the same time as the first one. It derives from the repeated entwining of life and death that echo across the photograph as well as this particular photographic subject. In other words, it is the gap between the salubrious soldiers and the lifeless corpses of the spies that triggers this shock. It pains me that this chasm makes it all too difficult to look beyond the 38th parallel and see the North and the South together at once. Perhaps, then, we can borrow the technique of the montage and, like John Heartfield, cut out the images of the dead bodies and reassemble them in our mind.

If we cut out the corpses of fallen "Communist guerillas," there is nothing extraordinary about this photograph. The moment we remove the corpses from the photograph, the soldiers are yet another group of elated young lads who may have just won a football match during their leisure time. Without the dead bodies, the photograph is no more than a commemoration of a fond memory, a nostalgic relic that will be preserved in the albums of Private Man-yong and his friends. As such, when we put the dead spies back into the picture, their corpses become just a generic trophy, rather than the "unique" spoil of war that they once were. This is because we are looking not at the brutality of malicious soldiers, but at young men who, in their kindness and occasional cruelty, cannot conceal the innocence of their youth.



Andy Warhol, *Ambulance Disaster*, 1963, silkscreen, 101.6×76.2 cm. © 2019 The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc. / Licensed by SACK, Seoul

With each removal and replacement, the image of the corpses underscores the young soldiers' innocence and vitality. The viewer is therefore caught in a dualism at the very moment of this encounter; the photograph is no longer an image of division as a specific history, but rather a mark symbolizing life and death, inscribed on the flesh. Meanwhile, the powerful force of the photograph arrests the mind and robs one of speech. On her encounter with photographs of the Holocaust, Susan Sontag contemplates, "it seems plausible to divide my life into two parts, before I saw the photographs and after."¹⁷ Our efforts

17 Susan Sontag, "In Plato's Cave," in *On Photography*, rev. ed. (New

at interpretation are exceeded by the photographic detail in all its myriad realistic information, and thus, any attempt at linguistic interpretation can amount to no more than a whimper. We are unwittingly struck through by the "pure denotation" of the photographic image.¹⁸ If the "replica monster" film is a trickster of memory, then the (traumatic) photograph is a butcher of memory. Even still, everyone knows that the memory of this trauma was caused by the sheer arrogance of the partition.

Regardless of its Cold War setting, however, this photograph constitutes a tension that can change the contours of our fundamental desire for life and death. As our consciousness fails to defend against the photograph's impact, the photograph becomes a kind of a "memory-virus" that breaches the boundaries of consciousness to defile and contaminate the latent memory it houses, while at the same time, reconfiguring other memories into a host. Like a prank call with static and disruptions, the "memory-virus" disrupts the cerebrum, the "central telecommunication center" of memory, with confusion and chaos. Trauma causes a sense of disorder in the memory. In turn, this temporary failure in the circuit of memory is what prompts the repeated production of the same "mental" image, which is precisely the effect of *déjà-vu*. The Korean War, the spy assassinations, and the Gwangju massacre are thus thrown into the same mix. But what makes the resulting misrecognition feel even more real than the realism of the photograph, is none other than the omnipresent anxiety at stake in bolstering this nation-state. For Andy Warhol, if the city was the factory floor that churned out endless "trauma-images" of traffic accidents, then, for me, the partition is the transnational industrial complex where "anxiety-images" are mass produced.¹⁹

York: Picador USA, 2001), 20.

18 Roland Barthes, "The Photographic Message," in *Image, Music Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 30.

19 I owe much to Hal Foster in my interpretation of Surrealism, André Breton, and Andy Warhol. See Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty*

DÉJÀ -VU (ADDENDUM): CRIME SCENE PHOTOGRAPHY



[Top] Students of the Confederation of Student Unions recreate the fatal assault of Lee Seok at the scene of the crime, *JoongAng Ilbo*, June 12, 1997

[Bottom] On their visit to the Namyong-dong security headquarters in Seoul, the members of the assembly reenact the scene of the torture of Park Jong-cheol, *Chosun Ilbo Bodosajinjip* 1986–1989 [The Chosun ilbo news photographs 1986–1989] (Seoul: The Chosun Ilbo Corporation, 1990)

Images from a crime scene investigation may be an object of fascination to “shock seeking types,” but back when artillery attacks and deaths were part of everyday life, images like this would have seemed quite banal. While the photograph makes certain that a crime has taken place, it also makes the incident seem somehow uncertain as well. Although the aim of the investigation is to reenact the past event as vividly as possible, the

(Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), 1–2. See also, Foster, *The Return of the Real* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), 5.

only clear thing is the theatricality of this reenactment.

The investigation of a crime scene is a kind of a “theatre of documents” (*seoryujeok yeongeuk*), or a “documentary as/of bureaucracy” (*seoryuhwadoen dokyumentari*). The victim and the suspect dutifully perform their parts in accordance with their respective depositions. Of course, their reenactment is only a means to fulfill the police report. Therefore, after all the traces of blood and bile have dried up, we are left with only their mechanical gestures. The photographs from the crime scene investigations are more ruthless and cruel than the eyes of the criminal. The photographs demonstrate an uncanny ability to sanitize the site of all the sordid details of the criminal motive and transform it into a dry commentary. If the investigators find evidence of a crime without any perpetrators, then, on this very site, we may also discover the presence of perpetrators but in the absence of any evidence of a crime.

Under investigation, the narrative of the event of the crime is rewritten in prose. With all the omissions, annotations, fragmentations, and clumsy translation of their actions into words, the criminal incident is further reduced to charts and diagrams. And so, a modern criminal is born. It is neither a machine, nor a subject of crime. It is not even a byproduct of structural contradictions. The modern criminal is a sheer “instrument of crime.” Accordingly, the body of a criminal becomes an empty vessel, only a “sign” that points to the time of the crime. At the same time, the crime is reduced to a series of “poses.” In its attempt to preserve life in taxidermic form, the crime scene investigation already resembles the nature of photography. The “pose” is, then, the active internalization of the “camera-gaze,” the three-dimensionalization of photography.

Of course, recent theories on the “gaze” have contended that the “camera-gaze” does not always exercise a unilateral power, nor it is always the case that the photographed subject is reduced to an object. This is because sometimes the pose demonstrates the active agency of the subject, who seeks mastery over their

own image by resisting “imaginary” capture by the camera’s gaze.²⁰ But at the site of the investigation, the victims and suspects must internalize the camera’s gaze, for it is the others—the prosecutors, the police, and the journalists—who dictate their every move and pose for the reenactment. In this sense, the crime scene photograph is not evidence of a crime, but rather, evidence of condemnation.



The War Memorial of Korea, 1996. Photo by Park Chan-kyong

20 In her application of Jacques Lacan’s theory of the gaze to the criticism of film and photography, Kaja Silverman makes such a generalization. See Kaja Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 202–7.

MUSEUM: THE SURREALISM OF NATIONAL DEFENSE

Mankind, which in Homer’s time was an object of contemplation for the Olympian gods, now is one for itself. Its self-alienation has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order.²¹ –Walter Benjamin

And even if a person dies of starvation, you can’t bury them comfortably. We couldn’t make enough caskets all the dead bodies, so we buried the corpses in artillery boxes. When a box is that small, even in death they can’t stretch out their legs comfortably.²² –A testimony on North Korea by an ethnic Korean from Yanbian

The War Memorial of Korea sits on the former site of the South Korean military headquarters, bordering the headquarters of the Eighth US Army to its right and the Ministry of National Defense across the street.²³ Although the Memorial’s construction was conceived and initiated under the Roh Tae Woo administration, the transition to a civilian government in 1993 was met with expectations that the site would be repurposed for a new National Museum. But to the disappointment of many, the incoming civilian government chose instead to carry out the original plans for the War Memorial.

The War Memorial, which cost the treasury close to 120 billion won, was awarded the top prize at the Korean Architecture Culture Awards in 1994, and the gold prize at the Seoul Architecture Awards in 1995. Despite the accolades, the nationalism of its aesthetics succeeds only in conjuring sadness.

21 Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in *Illuminations*, trans. and ed. Harry Zohn and Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 242.

22 Anonymous, *Jeongmariji saranamneun geosi mokpyoimnida* [Truly, survival is the goal] (Seoul: Tongilsaem, 1997), 24.

23 Translator’s note: The headquarters of the Eighth US Army relocated to Camp Humphreys in 2017.

Indeed, there's nothing out of the ordinary about this sadness, since the building is essentially a mausoleum for the war dead. Still, the War Memorial reminds me of the Nuremberg Rally and Nazi architecture in Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* (1935).



The War Memorial of Korea / Chinese People's Volunteer Army figures, 1996. Photo by Park Chan-kyong

It is also true that the construction company that oversaw the landscaping for the Memorial won the coveted prize in landscape architecture by the Ministry of Culture. I suppose the exquisite arrangement of submarines and fountains, missiles and “Parisian style” streetlights have justified their hefty price tag by selling such a thoroughly abysmal atmosphere of sorrow. Meanwhile, the word on the street is that government funding for literature and the arts, worth 100 million won annually, has been stalled for over four years. There is also a depressing article reporting that a considerable number of objects on display are actually Soviet

weapons purchased in Eastern Europe through an arms dealer in Singapore. And ultimately, when I see great works of art by famous artists and sculptors adorning the walls of the Memorial, my eyes well up with tears.

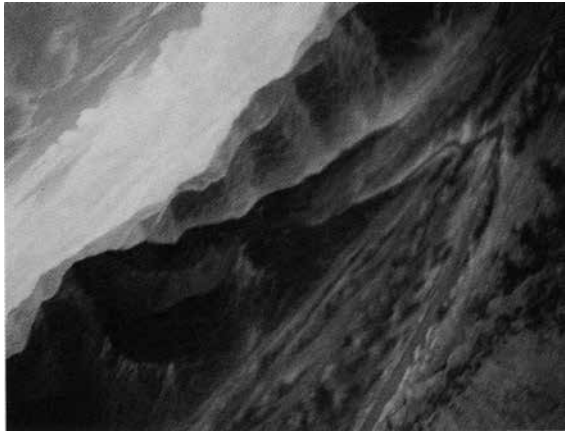
Across a vast expanse that spans a total of 35,300 *pyeong*,²⁴ the War Memorial houses over 6,000 weapons, pieces of equipment, and models, in addition to approximately 110 large scale items on display in the outdoor exhibition space, including military planes, tanks, artillery, and missiles. With the help of a staircase, the visitors can get close enough to touch the metallic flesh of the weapons, to feel their presence and attest to their existence with their own hands. If the visitor is slightly more attentive, they can observe other visitors relaxing in the shade of a B-52 bomber plane's giant wings, or swarms of children weaving through the rockets. And, if the visitor finds just the right vantage point, they can also enjoy a panoramic view that includes the Namsan Tower, the Eighth US Army garrison, and the Ministry of National Defense building, alongside the heavy equipment on display. You rarely see young couples wandering around the Memorial, but it is quite common to encounter a wedding ceremony taking place.

In its didactic efforts to reframe all the wars in Korea into a unifying perspective, the War Memorial in Yongsan reads like a textbook. With full color plates and pithy descriptions on an array of photographs, wax figurines, and artifacts, this gargantuan granite structure embodies the greatest encyclopedia on all things related to war. Of course, unlike the illustration-heavy encyclopedias meant for children, the exhibition space of the Memorial is overwhelmingly composed of artifacts and images. Like a visual map or a diagram of war, it presents the genealogy of the Korean War within an entirely causal trajectory.

Denis Diderot's *Encyclopedia* consists largely of two types

²⁴ Translator's note: *Pyeong* is a common unit of measurement in Korea. One *pyeong* equals 3.954 square yards.

of plates: analytic and comprehensive. If there are plates that show a named object in its paradigmatic essence, there are also syntagmatic plates that describe its demonstrative value by linking it to other objects in a given context. Often referred to as the taxonomy of human knowledge, the system of classification for this enormous archive was, according to Barthes, constructed by a great man's "lone pair of eyes."²⁵ The "enlightenment" of the War Memorial follows the same conceptual logic. Like the plates in the *Encyclopedia*, the weapons, uniforms, equipment, insignias, and souvenirs are named and classified by their "essence," and at the same, the syntagmatic dimension of these objects is articulated anecdotally through their adoption in various scenes of battle. For instance, if all the instruments and weaponry of the Vietnam War were organized and displayed in an orderly and systematic manner in one section, then, elsewhere, their use value would be demonstrated concretely through scenes like that of an "underground search operation."



The backdrop of a diorama in the War Memorial of Korea, 1996. Photo by Park Chan-kyong

25 For a pointed analysis of the *Encyclopedia*, see Roland Barthes, "The Plates of the Encyclopedia," in *New Critical Essays*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1980), 29–30.

As was the case with the *Encyclopedia*, the realization of this colossal project in such a commanding space for the sole purpose of commemorating war, is itself an impressive feat of memory. But if there is a crucial difference between Diderot and the Ministry of National Defense, it is that one offers an exposition of inventions for creation, while the other presents inventions for destruction. However, one could also contend that the structural similarity between Diderot's *Encyclopedia* and the War Memorial simultaneously serves to blur the distinction between the two.

Despite adhering to the same division between systematic classification and anecdotal synthesis found in the *Encyclopedia*, the dichotomy of the War Memorial is also supplemented and exceeded by another fundamental difference. While the system of classification continues to reorganize the photographs, maps, records, and artifacts into mediums of "objective information," the anecdotal synthesis of this "information" is explicated through dioramas that rely on illusions, paintings, and miniatures. If the exhibition of war instruments is an empirical world of science and technology, then the dioramas are closer to the affective world of art as it aims to pull the heartstrings of the visitors. If the former is a repetition of the "seriality" of fixed objects, then the latter condenses the narrative and presents it as a "singular aura." If the former is the *logos* that seeks the intellectual engagement of the elites, then the latter is the *pathos* that beckons the masses. If the former traces the mechanical evolution of a bomb, then the latter shows the aftermath of its destructive impact. If the former is the military-industrial complex, then the latter is a war film. If the weapon is the fetish object of the former, then art is the fetish for the latter.

Following an earlier convention, here, too, paintings provide the main backdrop for the figures in the diorama. Such paintings are typically done in a pseudo-painterly style, emulating the romanticism of Fredric Church's landscape paintings or the photographs of Ansel Adams. In addition to painted backdrops, the dioramas also employ a variety of more recent artistic and

popular devices, from dramatic spotlights and hyper-realistic wax figures, to panoramic views as popularized in Hong Kong noir films. There is an irrefutably juvenile quality to the dioramas in the War Memorial, but this seeming regression is not limited to the biological sense alone. Although the historical moments captured in the dioramas are typically set in the 1950s, this particular mode of image-miniature called diorama harkens all the way back to the 1830s. In fact, Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre, the inventor of the daguerreotype process of photography, was trained in the art of diorama painting under the tutelage of the master himself, Pierre Prévost. According to Walter Benjamin, daguerreotype photography was promulgated the same year that Daguerre's dioramas burned down.²⁶

The dioramas at the War Memorial may bring our attention to the transfiguration of brutality into a spectacle, but they also conceal this fact at the same time. The spectacle of brutality may satisfy the voyeuristic desire of a sadomasochist, but the sadomasochism must be stopped at a permissible point before it goes too deep. In this space, "verisimilar" images of death may abound, but truly traumatic images like the massacre photographs from Heuksando Island cannot be permitted. We should not interpret this restriction as a moral or economic consideration for kindergarten-age children, who make up the majority of visitors to the Memorial. The real reason is simpler than that: graphic images of lacerated flesh, decimated bones, and overflowing pools of blood can inevitably sow doubt in war itself. This blindness is the inherent dilemma captured in the very designation of "War Memorial." "How does one, then, commemorate a war?"

Commemoration, that is, the act of reconstructing memory, is not only constituted by the interests, customs, and circumstances of the individual doing the remembering, but also by the politics and culture of the collective that surrounds them. There are

26 Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Verso, 1973), 162.

certainly other motivations undergirding the enterprise of the War Memorial, but suffice it to say, it is largely a manifestation of *pathos* for war filtered through the lens of patriotism. And yet, as much as we privilege memory as something trustworthy and sacrosanct, the War Memorial must conceal (whether intentionally or not) the fact that it reconstructs war as fiction.

This is the true motivation behind the War Memorial's imitation of the Museum of Natural History. The wax soldier must not only do his best to disguise his artificiality behind verisimilitude, but must also become real. In order to validate the horrors of war, the *pathos* of war must produce the best camouflage, the most convincing mask, the most realistic shelter. Therefore, irrespective of its role in the diorama, the wax figure must look as alive as possible, so that it is not dismissed as a lump of dead beeswax, a defective or ersatz "modernism."

Through the wax figures and mannequins of the War Memorial, the languishing prisoner called the Cold War gets a new lease on life. In the War Memorial, the memory of war forms a perfect equilibrium with its amnesia. Put differently, the new memories of war should be able to supplant those which had been lost. The War Memorial is, indeed, a Memorial to the Oblivion of War. Similar to the way the Independence Hall fetishizes our redemption for "national autonomy," the War Memorial seeks to feed our hunger for the history of war with doses of reality.

If the surrealists of 1930s Paris were to come to the War Memorial of Korea in Yongsan, they would probably be awestruck. They would find the place simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar, welcoming and hostile. It is well known that surrealists had a great affinity for mannequins, machines, archives, and ready-mades, while also holding photography and *objets* in high esteem.²⁷ The manifest tension in these things between the animate and the inanimate, the alive and

27 See chapters one and two in Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty*, and also chapter five in Foster, *The Return of the Real*.

the dead, the original and the copy allowed the surrealists, and André Breton in particular, to explore the “marvelous,” and the “uncanny” through them.²⁸ The animatedly inanimate wax figures in the War Memorial also feel unfamiliar and unnerving for similar reasons. It feels as if the ghosts of war have been reincarnated in new bodies. If the aforementioned photographs and television programs have relied on non-corporeal elements like ethers or pixels to mediate the dead, the ghosts in the War Memorial have taken on three-dimensional form. In their stories and through their medium, they forcibly restore a state of suspended tension between past and present, movement and stasis, life and death, once and for all.

Certainly, unlike in the film *Total Recall* (1990), directed by Paul Verhoeven, there’s no cutting-edge technology that can implant artificial memory into the War Memorial. At this juncture, the task at hand is for us to consider how many years the soul of partition has been held in suspension, and after all these years, how the war is being taught to future generations.

PASSENGERS

The aforementioned examples of Cold War time machines—television, photography, and the War Memorial—remind us that, despite our best efforts, the distinction between the past and the present cannot be so easily made. At the very least, this calls into question the naïve and hackneyed images of the partition and unification. If the two Koreas were unified, it is only natural that we would immediately picture a new map in our mind without the demilitarized zone (DMZ) bifurcating the peninsula. Nevertheless, if this image of a unified peninsula is carved into stone as the backdrop for the concept of unification, then we deny our capacity to speak to heterogeneity of times and spaces that flow through it.

²⁸ Ibid.

By the entrance to the War Memorial, one finds a large map of the Korean peninsula engraved on an aluminum plate placed next to an imposing stone marker dedicated to Gwanggaeto the Great.²⁹ The map also happens to depict the territory of Goguryeo during the Gwanggyaeto’s reign. Of course, the partition has nothing to do with Gwanggyaeto. This is a literal reflection of an outmoded nationalist view of reunification by the state, one that ultimately perceives unification as territorial expansion. If one were to translate these images into temporal terms, it would form a straightforward, linear progression, ending inevitably with the progressive South integrating the stagnant North at some indefinite point in the future.

At this time, however, this thing called the future has already been prefigured by the military, politics, and the economy, and as Henri Bergson would posit, it is “the pure present being the invisible progress of the past gnawing into the future.”³⁰ For many of us, in fact, North Korea is already a distant past, for it has begun to feel like a threat from a bygone era, a “beast” of our sub-consciousness. However, at this juncture, we must recall what the reckless competition between the North and the South wanted us to forget, which is that the Cold War on the Korean peninsula was, above all, an “arms race.”³¹ The temporal distance between the North and the South was in part due to South riding the tailwinds of global circumstance to overtake the North in this race. In this regard, the apparent chasm between the North

²⁹ Translator’s note: Gwanggaeto the Great (374–413) was the 19th monarch of Goguryeo who reigned between 391 and 341. His military conquests led to the consolidation of three kingdoms of Korea, and his reign has since been synonymous with militarism and reunification.

³⁰ Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer (London: Allen & Unwin, 1978), 193. See also, Kim Hyong-hyo, *Bereugeusongui cheolhak* [Philosophy of Bergson] (Seoul: Minumsa, 1991), 115.

³¹ Translator’s note: This term is borrowed from the title of Meredith Woo-Cumings’s first book. See Jung-en Woo, *Race to the Swift: State and Finance in Korean Industrialization* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

and the South is, in fact, based on a concept of time conceived by the Cold War of a bygone era, which privileges only the past or a future expressed through a single, unified “motherland.”

As Edgar Morin poignantly predicts in *Pour sortir du XXe siècle* (1981), no star will guide the future as it had in previous centuries. On the heels of National Socialism and Stalinism, the future now includes both the possibility of humanity’s relentless progress as well as its annihilation. As such, the future will be determined between these two extremes, in all the combinations, mixtures, and juxtapositions of progression and regression.³² What is crucial for us to keep in mind is that the future is delimited by the past and the present. If so, how do we make sense of the present, and indeed, the past in the present from which the future will find its course?

At the risk of being reductive, I read Morin’s impassioned words as a call for an intervention into the politics of memory. Our task, then, is to resist the institutionalization of memory and the teleological systems and conventions that structure this memory. It is therefore incumbent upon us to not only recognize the fact that we are constantly reorganizing the constituents of our memory, but also to excavate the repressed memories that are buried beneath our consciousness. In that sense, the act of “recovering this past” is akin to solving a picture puzzle. Just as a puzzle would require us to suppress our perceptual habits and inclinations to find the image hidden before our eyes, the use of “flashbacks” between cuts and outside of [a film’s] frame

32 Original citation from Edeuga Moraeng [Edgar Morin], *20 segireul beoseonagi wihayeo* [To exit the 20th century], trans. Go Jae-jeong and Sim Jae-sang (Seoul: Moonji Publishing Co., 1996), 17. Morin writes, “Nous entrevoyons qu’aucune étoile ne guide l’avenir, que celui-ci est ouvert comme jamais dans les siècles précédents, puisqu’il comporte désormais à la fois la possibilité d’anéantissement de l’humanité, celle d’un progrès décisif de l’humanité, et, entre ces deux possibilités extrêmes, toutes les combinaisons, tous les mélanges, toutes les juxtapositions de progression et régressions sont possibles.” In Edgar Morin, *Pour sortir du XXe siècle* [To exit the 20th century], (Paris: F. Nathan, 1981), 327.

offer more than just a symbolic analogy for memory. It is not the picture that conceals the image, but rather our habits and conventions that prevent us from seeing the image in the picture.

At the dawn of the twentieth century, many artists from Germany and Russia espoused a “new vision” for the arts abetted by the advent of new technologies in photography and film. In particular, Alexander Rodchenko argued that, since all of the existing photographs are captured from the perspective of the belly button, the technique of stark angles, low and high respectively, was the first step in the aesthetic revolution.

Like the camera, the train played a crucial role in expanding our field of vision. We all know by now that filmmakers like Walter Ruttmann and Dziga Vertov were able to maximize the medium’s potential by exploiting the epistemological and ontological affinity between the camera apparatus and the train. Like the transition from linear to circular motion in filming technique mirroring the mechanics of the train, the visual experience of watching a moving image on the screen has been often compared to seeing a landscape from a moving train. As such, the analogy between the medium of film and the train extends to filmgoers and train passengers.

The greatest example of symbiosis between the train and the film was, indeed, Russia’s agit-prop train right after the Bolshevik revolution.³³ In this instance, films shot at a collective farm (*kolkhoz*) could be developed on the agit-prop train as they made their way to an industrial complex. Upon their arrival, the filmmakers could flip the filmstrip and play the film for the factory workers during their lunch break, to show how the grains they were currently consuming were produced at the collective

33 Translator’s note: The term agit-prop is a contraction of the Russian words “agitatsiia” and “propaganda” in the title of the Department of Agitation and Propaganda set up in 1920 by the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party. Alongside books and libraries, agit-prop trains played a crucial role in the propaganda enterprise. *Tate Art Term*, “Agit-prop,” accessed Nov 8, 2019, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/a/agit-prop>.

farm. As this example makes clear, the capacity for social progress was facilitated by the joint technologies of the train and the film: with one enabling increased production through speed, and the other providing an expanded vision of this new social space through its reverse motion. This is precisely how advancement toward the future and recourse to the past could converge.



Seoul Subway Line 5 / The War Memorial of Korea, 1996. Photo by Park Chan-kyong

It is almost impossible to imagine this kind of an expanded field vision in the subways of Seoul today. The image of a harried crowd during rush hour is more reminiscent of a gargantuan Taylorist factory than the agit-prop train. In the subway, photographs of movie stars and advertisements replace the scenery outside the window. In fact, passengers on the subway remind me of a scene from a film by Chris Marker. In *Sans Soleil* (1982), he cross-edits images of people asleep on a streetcar in Tokyo with stills from a horror film on TV. In doing so, makes it seem as if these passengers are in a nightmare. Despite the editing, however, we are not privy to the dreams of those asleep on the streetcar as it moves ceaselessly ahead. In fact, their slumber does not betray anything about their dream world. All we see is the fatigue of this modern “crowd.” The filmgoers watching these images of streetcar passengers are not all that different from the passengers themselves. Indeed, they may also be stealing glimpses of their fellow passengers growing old inside a streetcar travelling at full speed.

Although the distance between the train and subway stations

in Sinchon is only ten minutes on foot, they exist on vastly different temporal planes. If you take the Gyeongui Line from the train station in Sinchon, you’ll pass through Ilsan before arriving in Munsan. From there, if you follow the railway tracks for two kilometers or so, you will see the famous sign that reads, “The Iron Horse Wants to Run.”³⁴ Once you are at the end of the tracks, there is a military base to your right, and just a bit further north you can see a driving range. Because there’s a dog breeding ground to the left, the dogs will bark if you come too close.

BLACK BOX

1. A flight recorder in an aircraft.
2. A sealed automatic seismometer device (for detecting nuclear bombs underground).
3. A complex system or device whose internal workings are hidden or not readily understood.



Return of the Black Box from the downed KAL 007, *Chosun Ilbo*, November 19, 1992

34 Translator’s note: “Iron horse” is an expression for a steam locomotive or a train.

The black box is a faithful memory device, and as such, it is often referred to as a device with no information at all. In 1993, Russia's President Boris Yeltsin gave South Korean President Roh Tae Woo the black box recovered from Korean Air 007, which was shot down by a former Soviet fighter jet. The black box was only a shell, though no one knew this at the time. The scene of the black box being handed over was photographed and published in newspapers and other news outlets across the country. From the photograph alone, one would never suspect that it was empty. It was only through subsequent articles that its true emptiness was confirmed. In this, the black box brings other devices to mind as well. Camera, television, theater, coffin, dream, prison. . . .

Translated from Korean by Minna Lee

REPRESENTING THE UNREPRESENTABLE, AND
SIMULTANEOUSLY LETTING IT BE:
NOTES ON PARK CHAN-KYONG'S POLITICS OF
ETHICAL INDIFFERENCE

Kim Hang

There is a gap between the artist and the image. There is an irreconcilable abyss between the producer and the final product, even if the execution of the image was well organized and guided by the producer's intention and plan. Of course, not every product reflects the producer's intentions. However, in the case of the visual image, the gap is inevitable. In addition, presenting this kind of archive reflects the relationship between the studio, writing, and other artistic activities.¹ Still, because most of his works are image-based, such judgment should be reserved. Also, if we consider how his works since the 1980s have embedded critiques of modernity that encompass critiques of Minjung art and colonialism, it should not be difficult to understand that images are not merely vessels for containing one's consciousness and intention. But when his critiques of modernity go beyond colonialism and Orientalism to arrive at "filthy tradition," the image exists only as a representation. What he wants to "show" is something that can never be "shown," such as Sindoan, shamanism, ghosts, spies, grandmothers, the Kyoto School, transcending modernity, filthy traditions, and so on. Thus, the image is not a coincidence but a necessity. The image is an impossible attempt to show something that cannot

1 Park Chan-kyong, "Annyeong 安寧 Farewell," in *Annyeong 安寧 Farewell*, exh. cat. (Seoul: Kukje Gallery, 2017), 13. All translations including quoted texts are by the translator, unless noted otherwise.