

Crawling Across Borders:
Transnational Nationalisms and the Asian Canadian Body
in the Video Works of Jin-me Yoon

Victoria Nolte

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By: Victoria Nolte

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Signed by the final Examining Committee:

_____ Chair

_____ Examiner
Dr. Anne Whitelaw

_____ Examiner
Dr. Cynthia Hammond

_____ Supervisor
Dr. Alice Ming Wai Jim

Approved By

Dr. Alice Ming Wai Jim
Graduate Program Director

_____ 2015

Catherine Wild
Dean of Faculty of Fine Arts

Abstract

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Victoria Nolte

This thesis is a critical analysis of two multi-site video performances: *The dreaming collective knows no history* (2008) and *As it Is Becoming* (2008) by Vancouver-based artist Jin-me Yoon. In both works the artist crawls through or between politically-charged sites in Seoul, South Korea and Beppu, Japan, referencing histories of colonization, civil war, and Cold War politics. Analyzing Yoon's video performances in conversation with the works of other Korean and Asian North American artists who also centralize the Asian body in their varied practices, my research aims to fill a gap in scholarship on Asian Canadian performance art from a diasporic and critical race lens. This thesis begins by situating these works within interrelated concepts of border crossings and the "diasporic turn" to argue that Yoon's performing of Korean Canadian is an instance of "debordered" citizenship, a concept that looks to feelings of cultural belonging (within multiple cultural contexts) rather than fixed territorial borders, to form a transnational national identity. From there, I analyze the space of the video screen and present a framework through which to understand how Yoon relates the histories of the Japanese colonial occupation of Korea (1910-45), the Korean War (1950-53), and the traumatic history of the comfort women to a multi-layered narrative of embodiment. The final section brings these arguments together to discuss how negotiations of the cultural, racial, and civil histories of Korean Canadian contribute to struggles for social justice and equal citizenship. By regarding these narratives of history, embodiment, and border crossings through the body, this thesis ultimately concludes that the artist's act of crawling is an embodied performance of "debordered" citizenship, one that resists racist and essentialist conceptions of the artist's Korean Canadian identity.

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Introduction

In questions of citizenship and cultural belonging, culture and representation are a battleground.¹

This thesis is a critical analysis of an ongoing, multi-site series of video performances that Vancouver-based, Korean Canadian artist Jin-me Yoon (b. 1960, Seoul, Korea) has been producing since 2008.² It focuses specifically on two works from this series: *The dreaming collective knows no history* (2008), filmed in Seoul, South Korea, and *As It is Becoming* (2008), filmed in Seoul and Beppu, Japan (figs.1 and 2). In both works, the artist crawls through or between politically-charged sites in these cities. In *The dreaming collective* this action unfolds between the American and Japanese embassies in Seoul; while in *As It is Becoming* Yoon's crawl connects three sites in Beppu: the city's Kannawa district, a former atomic treatment centre, and a former U.S. Army base, with multiple public sites in Seoul. Referencing site-specific cultural histories and social politics related to the Japanese occupation of Korea (1910-45), the Korean War (1950-53), and the continuing presence of American intervention in each setting, these works are connected through the artist's impetus to negotiate these histories with a bodily performance of the Korean Canadian self.³ Unraveling within the space of the video screen, the

¹ Monika Kin Gagnon and Richard Fung, editors, "(Can) Asian Trajectories," in *13 Conversations About Art and Cultural Race Politics* (Montreal: Artex Editions, 2002), 101.

² Since 2008, Jin-me Yoon has produced this video performance series in Seoul, Beppu, Mexico City, Vancouver, Nagoya, and Vienna. An active member of the local Vancouver and national Canadian art scene, Yoon completed her MFA at Concordia University in 1992. While her earlier works investigated important issues of racialization, sexual difference, and belonging within nationalist contexts, her newer video works are concerned with the relation between bodies, cities, and histories. She has exhibited her works extensively nationally and internationally and is currently Professor of Visual Art at the School for Contemporary Arts at Simon Fraser University.

³ Throughout this thesis I use a space rather than a hyphen in terms such as "Korean Canadian" and "Asian Canadian." The use, or disuse, of the hyphen to describe Asian identities in the North American context is often debated by scholars. However, it is understood that the term "Korean Canadian" is used by members of the community to define their own subjectivities, while "Korean-Canadian" is used by the dominant (white) majority. The hyphen implies a racializing of one's national identity, affirming one's otherness. In employing the hyphen-less term in my thesis I seek to use the terminology that many Korean Canadians use to describe their own subjectivities, which rarely actually escape processes of hyphenation. For recent discourse on the use of the hyphen, see: Alice Ming Wai Jim

significations of Yoon's act of crawling are many. A critical analysis of this act, and the sites in which the artist performs it, is central to this thesis. Regarding the topographies of land and the visual codes that produce racialized and gendered readings of her body, I propose to consider Yoon's act of crawling as a performative gesture that tests and challenges the boundaries produced by social hierarchies of the body imposed through racist subjugations, colonial oppressions, and denials of citizenship within, or in excess of, nationalist borders. I argue that Yoon's act of crawling is an embodied performance of "debordered" citizenship, one that resists essentialist conceptions of national/racial subjecthood through phenomenological performance and movement.⁴ Crawling is not an act typically associated with becoming citizen; its topographical measuring of contested terrain evokes a sense of mobility that is related to the forming of transnational nationalisms. This movement at ground level further works towards reshaping geopolitical stakes between nations and former empires. Yet Yoon's measured crawling in her video performances ties determinants of citizenship back to the body in an attempt to trace and alter the complex histories associated with the transnational movements of racialized bodies within local site-specific and broader global contexts.

Both of the video performances explored in this thesis evoke notions of national and personal memory. Analyzing these works, Vancouver-based curator Liz Park argues that the collective cultural memories associated with the sites Yoon crawls through are deeply embedded within the architecture of the cities of Seoul and Beppu.⁵ She approaches Yoon's video

and Alexandra Chang, editors, "Asian/Americas: Converging Movements" *Asian Diasporic Visual Cultures and the Americas* 1:1-2 (March 2015): 1-14.

⁴ Saskia Sassen, *Territory, Authority, Rights: From Medieval to Global Assemblages* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 286: I have borrowed Sassen's term "debordering" from a chapter of her book that examines the new directions that definitions of citizenships have taken at the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first centuries. Sassen notes that new discourse on transnationalism has ultimately altered definitions, ceasing to tie "citizenship" solely to the bounds of the nation-state. Her discussion considers a place for cultural and identity-based forms of citizenship to reshape implied state-sanctioned borders.

⁵ Liz Park, "Crawl and Trace: Invisible Histories and the Project of Remembering," *Filip* 11 (Spring 2010): 107.

performances by measuring the artist's purposeful points of origin and arrival in each place, suggesting that "the interlinked sites in the videos provide a basis for understanding affinities and exchanges that have marked the experiences of these two places in the past and present."⁶

Emphasizing the central role that movement plays in this series, Park's analysis posits Yoon's crawling as a practice of spatial mapping that traces culturally embedded memories related to the sites in both works. This thesis departs from Park's analysis to explore the bodily implications of Yoon's video performances, the transnational links between the sites she films in, and her status as a member of the Korean diaspora. It further connects Yoon's video performances to the works of other Korean and Asian diasporic artists living and working in North America. Through comparative studies with the works of artists David Khang, Yong Soon Min, Kimsooja, Insoon Ha, and Alvis Parsley, I contextualize Yoon's act of crawling within the interrelated frameworks of transnational border theory, Asian Canadian Studies, and theories on video, race, and body art to note how each artist has employed the Asian body and the concept of border crossings as central concerns to their varied practices. This analysis therefore locates the Korean Canadian body in performance as a site for extended, transnationally-oriented definitions of citizenship and national/racial identity.

Born in Seoul in 1960, Yoon and her family relocated to Vancouver in 1968. As Yoon attests in a recent interview for *BlackFlash* magazine, the cultural shift she experienced in this move was tremendously influential to her later development as an artist with a primarily image-based practice.⁷ According to historian Jinwung Kim, South Korea in the early 1960s was still recovering from the aftermath of the Korean War, a violent conflict intensified by international interventions that effectively solidified the division of North and South Korea along the

⁶ Ibid., 112.

⁷ Seilah Wilson and Jin-me Yoon, "An interview with Jin-me Yoon," *BlackFlash* 31:3 (September 2014): 56.

geographic line of the 38th parallel (fig. 3).⁸ In the aftermath of the war, South Korea struggled to form a permanent system of government distinct from the communist leanings of North Korea's own state policies.⁹ The turmoil caused by this precarious period initially led to economic instability, rendering much of the population of South Korea poor and unemployed.¹⁰ In my discussion with the artist about her video performance works, Yoon recalls that the memory of this unstable period of Korean history drove her to explore Seoul from her crawling position because she remembered the city as a more lateral topography, a far cry from its contemporary landscape of massive skyscrapers. As Yoon explains, the concept for her video performances was shaped from an interest in negotiating her own bodily connections to the postcolonial and postwar history of Korea.¹¹

The history that Yoon references in her works is rooted in various nationalist struggles that predate the events of the Korean War and postwar efforts to rebuild South Korea's economy and national identity. From 1910 to 1945, during Japan's colonial rule of Korea, Japanese assimilation policies attempted to define Koreans as distinctly inferior subjects.¹² However "the insistence on the unique racial origins of the Korean people and the promotion of the Korea-centred view of East Asia became particularly important in the nationalist response to Japan's colonial racism and assimilation policy."¹³ Pushing back against outsider imperialism, many

⁸ Jinwung Kim, *A History of Korea: From "Land of the Morning Calm" to States in Conflict* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 368: The division of Korea was initiated in 1945 as a temporary method to accept the surrender of Japanese forces in the Second World War. With Cold War antagonisms mounting between the Soviet Union and the US, this division became permanent. The Soviet Union's sponsoring of the establishment of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) caused the US to initiate its own military-led government system in South Korea. In 1948, the US established the Republic of Korea (South Korea) in response to failed negotiations with the Soviet Union to reunite the two Korean states. For a map of the Korean peninsula showing the line of partition, see Figure 3.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., 430.

¹¹ Jin-me Yoon, interview with author, October 8, 2014, Montreal, QC.

¹² Gi-Wook Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea: Genealogy, Politics, and Legacy* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), 45.

¹³ Ibid.

Korean nationalists have continually looked to their own cultural heritage, locating their “Koreanness” as an innate and shared ethnic quality and one that constitutes an “immutable and unchangeable” collective nation.¹⁴ While the Korean War effectively aggravated the partition between North Korea and South Korea, supporters of reunification focus on this strong sense of a shared racial and ethnic homogeneity.¹⁵ Ethnic forms of a collective Korean identity were moreover brought to the fore in the 1990s when discourses on what constitutes one’s “Koreanness” were produced through movements to assert a distinctly Korean presence within globalized and decolonized contexts.¹⁶ In Yoon’s video performances her body traces the ground in both Japan and Korea as a means to “embody [an] experience of corporeality that doesn’t negate a kind of cultural reading.”¹⁷ Her emigration from Korea in 1968 and later return to Seoul to produce her video performances underscores this embodied experience and complicates corporeal associations to the city as a site for historical and nationalist convergences. In this regard, Yoon’s gesture of crawling is part of a movement towards acknowledging Korean identity and nationalism from an international perspective.¹⁸ The artist’s connection to Seoul and her removal signified by her “Canadianness” complicates the stereotypes associated with her performance of her “Koreanness” and thus questions the fundamental phenomenological

¹⁴ Ibid., 48: This looking inward to its own cultural heritage as something inherently immutable enabled Korea to resist further subjugation and cultural assimilation during this period of Japanese imperialism. The tracing of an ethnic historiography of Koreans helped develop the vernacular through which Korean nationalism has been used in subsequent historical moments and within different political ideological schemes. While Korean culture was deeply affected by its brief colonization, historian Jun Uchida argues that a more complex settler-colonial relation between the two nations was produced, with a deep-rooted delineation of Korean culture and national identity affecting cultural exchanges with Japanese settlers on the peninsula, Jun Uchida, *Brokers of Empire: Japanese Settler Colonialism in Korea, 1876-1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 224.

¹⁵ Ibid., 186: Shin determines that the “ethnic homogeneity-national unification thesis” argues for Korean reunification on the basis that Koreans have been ethnically homogeneous for thousands of years.

¹⁶ Cho Hae-Joang, “Constructing and Deconstructing ‘Koreanness,’” in *Making Majorities: Constituting the Nation in Japan, Korea, China, Malaysia, Fiji, Turkey, and the United States*, ed. Dru C. Gladney (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 74.

¹⁷ Yoon, Interview.

¹⁸ Cho, 85.

associations that are evoked through embodied modes of being “female,” being “Korean,” and being “Canadian.”

South Korea’s attempts to define itself through a connected and ethnically articulated sense of nationalism influenced industrializing and modernizing efforts to rebuild the nation in the aftermath of the Korean War. While this period of reconstitution was notably unstable,¹⁹ the South Korean government nonetheless became intent on securing foreign exchange and building relationships that they believed would help both increase economic development within the country and bolster its international reputation. The government therefore saw the instilling of a far-reaching Korean diaspora as a means to facilitate this growth and, simultaneously, relieve the country of its mounting population concerns.²⁰ In the process, the South Korean government initiated diplomatic relations with Canada in 1963 and these fostered connections positioned Canada as a desirable destination for South Koreans to emigrate to.²¹

However, the history of Koreans in Canada is significantly underreported.²² While Korean immigration increased considerably in the mid-1960s, due to Canada’s implementation of

¹⁹ J. Kim, 424-426: Kim notes that while Syngman Rhee led South Korea through the Korean War and became the first president of the Republic of Korea in the war’s aftermath, his government immediately following the war was continually under scrutiny. Increasingly regarded as an authoritarian government rather than democratic, his support started to dwindle and disfavour for the president threatened his government’s standing. Sensing an eventual defeat, Rhee’s government committed election fraud, engaged in corrupt activities, and implemented repressive policies to quell dissenters. Rhee’s government was officially overthrown in 1960. However, Rhee’s departure and the democratically elected government of Yun Po Sun was short-lived, disrupted by the 1961 coup-d’état led by Park Chung-hee, South Korea’s president who led an authoritarian regime from 1961-79.

²⁰ Samuel Noh et. al., editors, “Introduction,” in *Korean Immigrants in Canada: Perspectives on Migration, Integration, and the Family* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 6-7: In the 1950s and early 60s South Korea experienced incredible shifts in the size of its population due to lower mortality rates, a post-war baby boom, and the arrival of an increasing number of North Korean escapees. The country was not yet ready to handle this sizeable growth. This emigration policy and subsequent forging of international relations perhaps helped initiate South Korea’s economic revitalization throughout the mid-60s to late-70s, when Park Chung-hee’s sweeping industrial and modernizing reforms drastically altered South Korea’s mostly agrarian state.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Marc Song, “Towards a History of Koreans in Canada,” in *East Asian Cultural and Historical Perspectives*, ed. Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek and Jennifer W. Jay (Research Institute for Comparative Literature and Cross-Cultural Studies, 1997), 174: Song argues that, while the history of Canadians in Korea dates back to the activities of Canadian missionaries in Korea in the nineteenth century, the history of Koreans in Canada can only be partially

its 1962 and 1967 immigration policies, Koreans still faced cultural restrictions and assimilative pressures upon their arrival to Canada.²³ Further, Canada's history of discrimination against Asian immigrants through racist government policies, such as the Chinese Head Tax, implemented between 1885 and 1923, the Chinese Exclusion Act, enforced from 1923 to 1947, the outright refusal of the *Komagata Maru* steamship (which had crossed the Pacific Ocean in 1914 carrying South Asian passengers from Punjab to Canada), and the internment of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War,²⁴ proved to extend racist attitudes towards Korean Canadians who were regarded as part of the anti-Asian social and cultural hysteria known as "Yellow Peril."²⁵ As members of an upwardly mobile diaspora, Koreans in Canada posed an apparent threat to the jobs they would take away from white Canadians. Pressures of assimilation have therefore been produced by these racist attitudes and are continually felt on a whole by Asian Canadians, who often negotiate their historically marginalized position as an effect of stereotypical notions of Canadian citizenship. Questioning colonial terms of citizenship, feminist theory scholar Hijin Park therefore argues that an analysis of the racialized violence done to Asian Canadians must go beyond an examination of Asian migration in order to focus on how "dominant narratives of Canadian citizenship were written over the violence done to [Asian]

traced back to the years following the end of the Korean War, when many of the first Korean immigrants in Canada were war brides or war orphans.

²³ Noh et. al., 6: Canada's 1962 immigration policy removed nationality as a criterion for permanent immigration, making it easier for people outside of Europe to immigrate to Canada. Changes to the *Immigration Act* in 1967 brought about the further entrenchment of Canada's "colour blind" point system.

²⁴ Paul Wong, editor, "Yellow Peril Reconsidered," in *Yellow Peril Reconsidered: Photo, Film, Video* (Vancouver: On Edge, 1990), 6: These governmental policies prevented early generations of immigrants from Asia from gaining equal civic rights in Canada and prohibited new waves of immigration from Asia, especially the immigration of women and children – those who would ensure the growth of Canada's ethnically-Asian population.

²⁵ Ibid: Wong reports that these exclusionary tactics helped to legitimize wide-spread racism against Asians in North America, sparking racist hysteria and effectively shaping Asian immigrants as "inferior" to white European Canadians.

bodies.”²⁶ These “dominant narratives,” as Park explains, have ultimately been constructed and maintained through a hostile differentiation between the Canadian “Self” and racialized “Other.”²⁷

Resisting racist attitudes and exclusionary tactics, the arrival of Asian immigrants to Canada has in part influenced more globally-focused terms of defining “Canadian” citizenship and nationality. Asian Canadian literary scholar Roy Miki suggests the voices of historically-marginalized citizens advocate a more global understanding of Canadian citizenship that “expose[s] its interior as an articulation linked to the colonial moment of invasion and the subsequent forging of a national unity.”²⁸ The narratives of Asian Canadians within this globalized nation-state recall experiences of assimilation, racism, and everyday hostility where bodily markers of difference illicit unwanted attention and probing questions such as, “where are you *really* from?”²⁹ Identifying these struggles, feminist theorist Sunera Thobani defines the notion of “citizenship” in part as an ideology that seeks to classify the exaltation process of certain subjects.³⁰ Thobani’s definition insists that citizenship produces racial hierarchies that categorize non-white bodies as “suspicious” or “unwanted.” While she focuses her attention on how this process is systemic to Canada’s European-centric settler narrative, her discussion can also be applied to a variety of other nationalist contexts in which a form of colonization or outside political and military intervention has occurred. The racial/civic hierarchization of bodies

²⁶ Hijin Park, “Incorporating Ji-Won Park into the Canadian Nation: the Good Girl, the Monster, and the Noble Savage,” in *Han Kut: Critical Art and Writing by Korean Canadian Women*, ed. The Korean Canadian Women’s Anthology Collective (Toronto: Inanna Publications and Education Inc., 2007), 77.

²⁷ Sunera Thobani, *Exalted Subjects: Studies in the Making of Race and Nation in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 5.

²⁸ Roy Miki, *In Flux: Transnational Shifts in Asian Canadian Writing* (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 2011), 35-36.

²⁹ Suzy Yim, “Identities,” in *Han Kut: Critical Art and Writing by Korean Canadian Women*, ed. The Korean Canadian Women’s Anthology Collective (Toronto: Inanna Publications and Education Inc., 2007), 126-127: Yim states, “I often find myself tokenized as a member of some sort of ridiculous pan-Asian, taste-of-the-orient group that consists of little bits of distinct cultures that people seem to think are all the same. Then there are those who are too smart to pool all the cultures together, so they ask ‘where are you from?’” (ibid).

³⁰ Thobani, 69.

ultimately goes against broad definitions of citizenship as a status that equalizes members of a political community.³¹ The status of “citizen,” in the North American context, is therefore a marker of inclusion that heightens the effects of marked bodily difference and the social performance of one’s racial identity.³² The bodies of racialized citizens, within this discourse, symbolize the “global” and they have generally been regarded as embodied disruptions to normative determinants of citizenship, their presence within the nation symbolizing an undoing of its borders.³³

In this regard, the experience of transnational migration and citizenship is effectively linked to the corporeality of the body through delineations of a racial/civic hierarchy that produce terms of exaltation and difference. These definitions of citizenship based on a preferred racial/civic identity attempt to measure repeated behaviours, acts, and other terms that deem the subject a “citizen,” issuing the means through which the subject must participate in a performance of citizenship in order to feel as though he or she is part of the nation. Often, these terms of citizenship are set in place by exclusionary laws defined by internal nationalist politics and politically marked domestic borders. By conflating a bordered sense of national identity with race, I argue that the terms of one’s racial identity also impact performances of citizenship. Yoon’s video performances allude to this process in a specifically transnational Asian context in which historic performances of Japanese citizenship by subjugated Koreans were mediated through racist discourse about the character and culture of Korea’s peoples.

³¹ Simon McMahon, editor, “Introduction: Developments in the Theory and Practice of Citizenship,” in *Developments in the Theory and Practice of Citizenship* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012), 1-2.

³² Jonathan Inda, “Performativity, Materiality, and the Racial Body,” *Latino Studies Journal* 11:3 (Fall 2000): 77: Inda argues that naturalizing the difference of raced bodies heightens and makes “natural” the “hierarchical relationships between different racialized subjects” and in relation to whiteness.

³³ Miki, 55.

Further, with the United States' direct role and persistent influence in the managing of South Korean political and cultural affairs, these terms of performing a "Westernized" Korean citizenship deepen discussions of racial and ethnic performance and the bolstering of Korean ethnic nationalism, especially among members of the Korean diaspora. As Cultural Studies scholar Nadine Ehlers argues, race, like gender, is socially demarcated and performed; regulated through law and discipline. Ehlers maintains that through societal influences, subjects participate in their own racialization and subjugation.³⁴ Colonial laws that delineate citizenship have a hand in also establishing an ideal "racial profile" of the national community. To this extent, Ehlers insists that all racially-articulated subjects perform a sort of "racial passing" by unconsciously modeling their own identities through regulatory signs of race.³⁵ Taking these theories into consideration, I argue that, in a similar vein, through the social effects of how bodies are witnessed within different political and cultural borders, citizenship is also a marker of identity that is inherently performed through a sort of "passing" that conflates with race. Enacted through the space of the video screen, Yoon's crawl is a performative documentation: an act staged for the camera's gaze that recounts and complicates notions of citizenship and racial/national identity from a different bodily perspective. How the histories of racialization and nationalism have been written thus far is of critical concern in order to undo the effects of colonial exclusion policies and to reshape the experiences of Asians in North America through narrative modes of embodiment and resistance. This thesis demonstrates, in this regard, that performances of the Korean Canadian body which challenge subjugations and racial hierarchies begin to problematize histories of racialization, oppression, and civil surveillance.

³⁴ Nadine Ehlers, *Racial Imperatives: Discipline, Performativity, and Struggles Against Subjection* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 37.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 61-62.

In reading Yoon's crawling in her video performances as a performative gesture of "debordered" citizenship, this thesis follows the critical race methodological scholarship of Asian Canadian studies. Scholars such as Roy Miki, Richard Fung, and Monika Kin Gagnon have determined that citizenship is a central concern to the study of Asian Canadian communities. They understand "Asian Canadian" as a double-edged politic, one that simultaneously points to the historic marginalization and racialization of Asians in Canada while also maintaining the capacity to position itself as a probe to normative notions of Canadian citizenship.³⁶ Asian Canadian artists and cultural activists have responded to this conundrum produced by the politics of a hyphenated civic identity by reading Asian Canadian art as an important site of "knowledge production" and testimony.³⁷ Long overlooked by art historians, the histories and trajectories of Asian Canadian art are just now being written. To this extent, Cultural Studies scholar Xiaoping Li traces the history of discussions surrounding Asian Canadian cultural production in her groundbreaking book, *Voices Rising: Asian Canadian Cultural Activism* (2007). Spurred on by the momentum created by the Civil Rights movement in the US (1954-1968) and by subsequent other local movements fighting against Anglophone colonialism in Canada, Li maintains that the Asian Canadian cultural activism movement produced a politically-charged mandate that sought to enhance community through cultural and artistic development, to foster a collective Asian Canadian identity, and to intervene in nation-building by pushing for both structural and discursive changes in the cultural sphere in order to realize the ultimate goal of racial equality and social justice.³⁸

By mobilizing creative community initiatives, Asian Canadians have been able to produce more complex narratives about their own experiences in Canada and North America from beyond discourses on immigration. Li therefore stresses the importance of cultural production as a means

³⁶ Miki, xii; Gagnon and Fung, 100.

³⁷ Alice Ming Wai Jim, "Asian Canadian Art Matters," Asia Art Archive, accessed November 21, 2014, <http://www.aaa.org.hk/Diaaalogue/Details/863>.

³⁸ Xiaoping Li, *Voices Rising: Asian Canadian Cultural Activism* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007), 11.

through which Asian Canadians may take on the role of “creative subjects” whose works of art act to further undo the erasures of their bodies and their various social narratives within the landscape of Canadian culture.³⁹ This thesis positions performances of the Korean Canadian body (in a transnational context) within this scholarship that negotiates the nuances of their hyphenated identities.

This thesis is divided into three sections that provide an in-depth discussion on the significance of Yoon’s crawling in her video performances. In Section One, I look to the interrelated concepts of border crossings and the “diasporic turn” to argue for Yoon’s performing of Korean Canadian as an instance of “debordered” citizenship. This section will also put Yoon’s works in conversation with the works of Alvis Parsley, David Khang, and Yong Soon Min, artists who evoke the concept of the border in their works. In Section Two, I analyze the space of the screen that the video medium produces. Taking into consideration how Yoon’s movements are mediated through this space, I present a framework through which to read how Yoon ties the histories of the sites she crawls through to a multi-layered narrative of embodiment. Yoon’s works expose the hierarchization of Korean Canadian as a racialized body/identity and challenge discriminatory representations of Korean Canadians. Finally, Section Three brings these arguments together to account for the ground gained through movement and embodied negotiations and tracings of the cultural, racial, and civil histories of Korean Canadian. In this final section, I position Yoon’s works in conversation with the works of artist Insoon Ha, who also takes up the task of tracing a racialized and gendered event in Korean history, however on Canadian soil.

³⁹ Ibid., 14.

**Section One: Contested Terrains:
Border Crossings and the Korean Canadian Body**

Topographical Histories in Japan and Korea

Filmed at the site of a former atomic treatment centre in Beppu, Japan, one of the videos in *As It is Becoming* (2008) presents Yoon crawling in a circular path from the top of an inclined street and moving down, turning around off screen and crawling back up the hill (fig. 4). The camera capturing her movement remains fixed to one particular shot of the scene and captures the artist at specific junctures throughout the video's loop. The street through which she crawls is blocked off to oncoming traffic, a fact the viewer witnesses through the presence of cars stopping and turning around as they approach the road's physical barrier. This blockade separates Yoon from the movement of the street and focuses her uninterrupted maneuvers to this site. Tracing the district's hilly topography, Yoon forms bodily connections to the horrific aftermaths of nuclear war that are entrenched within the architecture of this Japanese town (fig. 5).⁴⁰ A multi-site video performance that traverses the national borders of Japan and South Korea, *As It is Becoming* also incorporates Yoon's bodily connections to two other significant places in Beppu: the city's Kannawa district (the site of many of its hot springs), and a former U.S. Army base (figs. 2 and 6). In our discussion about *As It is Becoming*, Yoon states that she was interested in producing this work in Beppu because it has played a significant role in the process of healing radiation sickness. She was, moreover, interested in further evoking the body conscious culture surrounding Beppu's hot springs and different modes of holistic healing through her act of crawling.⁴¹ Meanwhile, across the Sea of Japan in Seoul, *As It is Becoming* continues to chronicle

⁴⁰ Beppu is situated within the Ōita Prefecture on the island of Kyushu, Japan. It is located in close proximity to both Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the sites where the US dropped the atomic bomb at the end of the Second World War. For a map showing where Beppu is situated, see Figure 5.

⁴¹ Yoon, Interview.

Yoon's crawls through public spaces, such as markets, shopping malls, and crowded streets, and notably up a site known as "Hooker Hill" (fig. 7). Located in the city's Itaewon district, Hooker Hill is a significant site in Seoul because it was once a place frequented by Korean women who were coerced into imperial Japan's comfort women system, a scheme that forced hundreds of thousands of unmarried women and girls into sexual slavery to service Japanese military men.⁴² Today it is known as the city's red light district and is stereotypically frequented by American servicemen who retain a strong presence in the area due to the nearby Yongsan Garrison of the U.S. Eighth Army (fig. 8).⁴³ Yoon's multi-site video performance is often exhibited with the videos filmed in both cities projected or played on television screens in a gallery setting, allowing the histories and social politics of both cities to converge in one critical space (fig. 9). Producing a cross-border conversation, the cities of Beppu and Seoul are connected by Yoon's visually-mirrored sets of movements and the "multiple layers of spatiotemporal reality" that are produced through the video medium.⁴⁴ Yoon's horizontal, embodied movements through the spaces of the video in each location therefore maintain the artist's conception of these works as part of a series of "lateral explorations."⁴⁵

As Yoon selects and researches sites around the world that are often loaded with touristic and heavy historical narratives, her enactment of crawling comes to trace and problematize these histories from the perspective of being coded as "Other." In this regard, Yoon's crawling through these urban landmarks in Seoul and Beppu, as a self-identified ethnic Korean Canadian woman,

⁴² C. Sarah Soh, *The Comfort Women: Sexual Violence and Postcolonial Memory in Korea and Japan* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 8-10: The Comfort Women system persisted through the Second World War and was later adopted into a *kijich'on* or "camp town" system throughout the Korean War (and in the war's aftermath), wherein establishments for prostitution were set up around U.S. Army bases as a means to "cater to the needs of American GIs" (211).

⁴³ Chan-hee Kim, "The Cultural Identity of Itaewon," *Situations* 5 (Winter 2011): 112-114: For a map showing where Itaewon is situated, see Figure 8.

⁴⁴ Liz Park, "What Moves Us: Moving Images, Bodies, Territories," in *What Moves Us* (Vancouver: Western Front Gallery, 2009), 9.

⁴⁵ Yoon, Interview.

not only seeks to recall the histories associated with each site, but also re-examines and tries to understand the effects of Japan's former imperialist control of Korea. The crossing of borders is therefore an important gesture that re-defines Yoon's identity as Korean Canadian within a transnational Asian context. However, while her body is presumably read as "Korean" rather than "Canadian" (due to the fact that she is actually in Korea), what are the implications of crossing the borders between Japanese and Korean nationalisms as a racialized Canadian woman in a globalized, postmodern world? Turning back to the history of the representation of Korean comfort women as symbols of systematic nationalist and patriarchal oppressions, a gendered understanding of Yoon's "Koreanness" is realized between borders and between different moments in history. As anthropologist C. Sarah Soh explains, under the Japanese occupation of Korea, comfort women were routinely regarded as the empire's "gifts" to Japanese soldiers. However, in the Korean War *kijich'on* system, these women were often euphemistically referred to as *yang-gongju* (Western princess) to emphasize the disparate nature of their relations with American military men.⁴⁶ The violence perpetuated towards Korean women under these different systems has proved to be deeply damaging, with the American military having continued to be "served" by a system of state-supported prostitution throughout its involvement in South Korea's postwar period of industrialization.⁴⁷ This history of racial and sexual subjugation underscores the borders between an ethnic understanding of "Koreanness" and civic negotiations of "Canadianness," subjective framings that are displaced and renegotiated through Yoon's crawling in Seoul and Beppu. Simultaneously connected and removed from this history of racialization

⁴⁶ Soh, 212.

⁴⁷ Ibid.: Soh reports that the South Korean government during the Park regime became involved in this system after reported incidents of American GIs complaining about "unhygienic *kijich'on* women" curtailed (but did not result in) the removal of 20,000 US troops from Korea at the end of 1971. To cater to the "needs" of the American military, the government started a "clean up campaign" that included regular medical checkups and the removal of "unclean" women, establishing efforts to heavily regulate the *kijich'on*.

and gendered oppression, the artist's "difference" is "debordered."⁴⁸ Here, her crawling seeks to understand and undermine the historical, subjective, and territorial boundaries between the sites she moves through. Within this discourse, the lingering presence of various North American interjections and the continued damages done by North American military colonialism are witnessed as a subjugated grounding of Yoon's own associations to this history as a member of the Korean diaspora in North America.

Crossings, Borderlands, and Diaspora

Yoon's physical crossing of the borders between Japan and South Korea is enforced through the mirrored tracings of site-specific histories and topographies in both locational video sets of *As It is Becoming*. By crawling, she enacts border crossing as a ground-centric movement. Actively aware of the boundaries established between and within nations, I argue that Yoon's gesture of crawling in part embodies this movement across political and national boundaries, ultimately challenging and performing the hierarchization of different types of bodies-on-the-move in transnational national contexts. It is therefore critical to examine how Yoon connects the histories and social politics of distinct sites and cities through the context of the border and the act of border crossings. Specifically, Yoon's references to the complex settler-colonial relations between Korea and Japan in her works produce another type of border that the artist must traverse through her performed actions in this space. These uneven relations, as historian Jun Uchida writes, were produced through claims that Koreans could easily be absorbed by Japanese

⁴⁸ Miki, 112-113: Seeking to develop a critical framework through which to read and analyze cultural works by Asian Canadians, Miki examines the distance created by perceived "difference" through the issue of hyphenation. He refers to the hyphen as a "performance of the in-between" and insists that critical readings of difference need to recognize the boundaries created by hyphenated, subjective framings of identity.

culture because they did not have their own cultural identity.⁴⁹ While a sizeable number of the Korean diaspora maintain residence in Japan today, their presence is described as paradoxically invisible (literally erased from census surveys, atomic bomb victim ledgers, and public service, for example) and visible due to remaining ethnic tensions between Japanese and Korean citizens that constantly fluctuate with the influence of internal and external politics.⁵⁰ Navigating these tensions in Beppu with a focus on the city's own ties to a traumatic event in Japanese and global history, Yoon skirts this paradoxical line, her appearance within the space of the video screen a mediation of the possible dangers of moving within historical diasporic and settler-colonial contexts. In this regard, Yoon states that her video performances are “on a metaphoric and geopolitical level [about] mobility and the inability to be mobile.”⁵¹

In a more global sense, Yoon's description of her video performances references the fact that free mobility across borders has historically been associated with tourism, a privilege generally afforded to the elite (predominantly white) leisure class.⁵² At odds with the privileged ability to freely and leisurely cross borders, the transnational movements of marginalized subjects are stereotypically regarded as a form of refuge, escape, or even espionage – framings that seek to establish the status of “immigrant” or “diaspora” as a racialized monolith. Asian immigrants in North American and various other global contexts, in particular, have experienced distinct instances of racism. At the border, these experiences have been compounded through the

⁴⁹ Uchida, 205.

⁵⁰ Sonia Ryang, “Visible and Vulnerable: The Predicament of Koreans in Japan,” in *Diaspora Without Homeland: Being Korean in Japan*, ed. Sonia Ryang and John Lie (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009), 64: One instance of fluctuating attitudes towards Koreans in Japan that Ryang indicates is an incident that surfaced in the Japanese media on September 17, 2002. When word was spread about North Korean abductions of Japanese citizens during the 1970s and 80s, racism towards Koreans in Japan exacerbated, with people reporting to have received death threats and to have been verbally abused and harassed in public. As Ryang argues, the postwar rebuilding of Japan notably erased the presence of Koreans and other former colonial subjects from its national sense of identity, however, this incident made them hypervisible and a vulnerable population.

⁵¹ Yoon, Interview.

⁵² John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze* (London: Sage Publications, 2002), 5.

influence of exclusion laws, restrictive assimilative policies, and anti-Asian racist paranoia that have at various times limited or heavily moderated the cross-border movements of Asian migrants. One artist who engages with the difficult issues of border crossings as a racialized and self-identified Asian migrant is Alvis Parsley (b. 1985, Hong Kong), a Toronto-based artist who chronicles the hostility that many non-European immigrants experience at the Canadian border in their recent performance work *Never Left Canada (Excerpt)* (2014) (fig. 10).⁵³ Performing a narrative involving an invasive search by a customs official, Parsley recounts a personal experience they had on an attempted trip to the US through Windsor, Ontario. The artist embodies this experience through bodily actions and dialogue, performing various physical acts such as crawling underneath a chair, scurrying across the stage, and propping themselves up against a wall. Pinned against the wall, arms outstretched with their back to the audience, the artist momentarily embodies the character of the “customs officer,” as they disdainfully ask the nervous “Alvis” persona, “Where are you from?” – a question to which Parsley hesitates to answer. As Parsley explains to the audience,

I was taught to give the “right” answer, not the true answer. I was taught to lie because nobody in power wants to hear the truth. My brain split into two at the customs. “What’s your citizenship?” I wanted to say Canada instead of Hong Kong. What the fuck. I’m not even 1% Canadian. They said: “You are a visitor.” Remove your jackets, put your hands there, spread your legs, wider, look here, look up.⁵⁴

In this instance of interrogation the term “visitor” is yielded like a knife - a violent, visceral denial of the rights of citizenship. Throughout this live performance, the artist questions the terms that underscore their status as an international student in Canada. Probing convergences between displaced national borders, identities, and the exchanges that occur as a result of fluid states of

⁵³ Alvis Parsley (aka Alvis Choi) employs the third person pronoun “they” in reference to themselves.

⁵⁴ Alvis Parsley, “Never Left Canada (Excerpt),” accessed November 25, 2014, <https://alvischoi.wordpress.com/2014/04/25/never-left-canada-working-title/>: The version of the performance discussed here was performed at *Cultural Convergences II: Alliances*, an academic conference hosted by the Ethnocultural Art Histories Research group (EAHR) at Concordia University on September 26, 2014.

globalized citizenship, Parsley's performance exemplifies a state of liminality, a performative enactment of contested racial citizenship that compares to Yoon's own contemplations within this deeply hierarchical space. A performative monologue that mediates the subjects of "presence," "home," and "citizenship" within "Canadian" national contexts is interwoven throughout *Never Left Canada (Excerpt)*, as Parsley recounts that they were ultimately denied the privilege of crossing the border.

While these works trace hostile bordered experiences and geopolitical mobility, they exemplify the between states that call into question the constructed and canonical nationalisms that borders represent. Consequently, borders, while often experienced as sites of tension, may also be conceived as spaces of "internal diversity" because "borderlands" come to contain the simultaneously connected and divergent histories and narratives of different groups of immigrants.⁵⁵ Borderlands essentially highlight various links between territories and their assorted populations, inciting transnational shifts within the narratives and identities of those who cross.⁵⁶ Considering these understandings of the diversity contained by borderlands, Yoon's crawling across nationalist borders is read as a reflexive gesture - one that navigates a juncture between multiple sets of geographic, temporal, subjective, and artistic borders. Yoon's act of crawling is therefore located within a pluralistic borderland that configures and produces sites for new cultural readings that reshape a global understanding of contemporary Asian diasporic art and culture in North America.⁵⁷ Border theory scholarship looks to the concepts of the border and related borderlands to expand discourse on different types of spaces – be they psychic or

⁵⁵ Claudia Sadowski-Smith, *Border Fictions: Globalization, Empire, and Writing the Boundaries of the United States* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2008), 17.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵⁷ Ming Tiampo, "Ken Lum, Paul Wong, and the Aesthetics of Pluralism," in *Asian Canadian Writing Beyond Autoethnography*, ed. Eleanor Ty and Christl Verduyn (Waterloo, ON: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2008), 180: Tiampo argues that artworks and literature by Asian Canadians (and to an extent, all racialized cultural producers) should be examined through a framework of cultural pluralism, one that seeks to alter the face of cultural hegemony in Canada, rather than simply identifying the works of these artists as moments of rupture or intervention.

geographic – in order to problematize issues of boundaries and limits.⁵⁸ The border is a concept that has been increasingly investigated through the lens of American imperialism, with the patrol, surveillance, and demarcation of borders being an inherent part of the US's attempts to build and expand its cultural empire. This has been so pervasive in border theory that studies of other North American nations have, too, been marked through their relations to the American border and the country's influence over trade and hemispheric and global politics.⁵⁹ While borders serve as political limits, the study of border nationalisms also positions the border as a space for re-evaluating state-sanctioned discourses by locating narratives of exclusion, terms of inclusion, and the hierarchies that exist between citizens, migrants, and other types of border crossers. In this regard, border theory “[begins] with an understanding that for all border studies’ attempts to produce a cultural politics of diversity and inclusion, this work literally can be produced only by means of ... exclusions” and many studies of culture in the borderlands seek to map these exclusions in order to fill in the gaps found in work on the border.⁶⁰ It is critical, therefore, to undermine the privileging of the nation/state (and the civil hierarchies that are thus associated with it) by understanding how it has been transformed by globalization and modes of denationalization and de-territorialization.⁶¹

In contemporary art, the border has often been conceived as a symbol for cross-cultural exchange, mobility, and subjective dualities. Recent exhibitions of contemporary art in Canada have examined the border, conceptualizing it as a site for new cultural convergences. *Crossings*, curated by Diana Nemiroff at the National Gallery of Canada in 1998, is perhaps the most

⁵⁸ David E. Johnson and Scott Michaelsen, editors, “Border Secrets: An Introduction,” in *Border Theory: the Limits of Cultural Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 1-2.

⁵⁹ Sadowski-Smith, 3.

⁶⁰ Johnson and Michaelson, 3.

⁶¹ Alejandro Lugo, “Reflections on Border Theory, Culture, and the Nation,” in *Border Theory: the Limits of Cultural Politics*, ed. David E. Johnson and Scott Michaelsen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 45.

significant exhibition in Canada that evokes the concept of border crossings to explore various cross-cultural exchanges in contemporary art at the end of the twentieth century. Bringing together fifteen artists whose works comment on their diasporic status, the exhibition explored intersections of place and identity, examining them through various social issues related to globalization and global migration, namely through mediations on exile, displacement, and diaspora.⁶² More recently, curator Srimoyee Mitra at the Windsor Art Gallery coordinated a three-part series of exhibitions entitled *Border Cultures*, which examined different issues related to cultural exchanges within the context of border cities. Using the cross-national proximity of Windsor, Ontario and Detroit, Michigan as a case study, the exhibition brought together regional, national, and international artists to “examine the complex and shifting notions of national boundaries.”⁶³ While the first two parts of the exhibition, *Border Cultures: Part One (homes, land)* and *Border Cultures: Part Two (work, labour)* were mounted in 2013 and 2014 respectively, the final part of the series, *Border Cultures: Part Three (security, surveillance)* is set to run from January 31 to May 10, 2015.⁶⁴ In a similar vein, the theme of the 2014 – 2016 Vancouver Biennale is *Open Borders/Crossroads Vancouver*, a premise that has guided artists and curators involved in the mounting of the biennale to promote Vancouver as a global border city and an inherent site for cultural interconnections.⁶⁵

⁶² Diana Nemiroff, “Crossings,” in *Crossings* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1998), 15; Jin-me Yoon’s photo series *Souvenirs of the Self* (1996) and *A Group of Sixty-Seven* (1997) were featured alongside her installations *between departure and arrival* (1996-97) and *body a thread dis ease a mountain* (1994) in this exhibition.

⁶³ “Upcoming Exhibitions: Border Cultures: Part Three (security, surveillance),” Windsor Art Gallery, accessed January 15, 2015, <http://www.agw.ca/exhibitions/upcoming/404>: Situated directly on opposite sides of the Detroit river, Detroit-Windsor is a transborder conurbation of the cities of Detroit, MI and Windsor, ON. Though not officially considered a single metropolitan centre, the Detroit-Windsor area makes for a unique case study on border relations because the two cities are so closely tied to each other through a variety of economic and infrastructural endeavors, such as the Detroit and Windsor Tunnel Corporation, which is maintained by both cities.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ “Open Borders/Crossroads Vancouver,” Vancouver Biennale, accessed January 15, 2015, <http://www.vancouverbiennale.com/explore-art/exhibition-theme/>.

These theories and artistic examinations of the border demonstrate the subjective turn that takes place in the borderlands. At this critical juncture, “diaspora” is explored as a “condition of subjectivity,” rather than as a means of classification.⁶⁶ By tracing the site-specific histories of the places in which she crawls, Yoon not only insists on the way that cultural memories are embedded within nationalist narratives, but also how they are altered through the forming of diaspora. This mingling of the individual, the multitude, the symbolic order of the nation, and the forming of diasporic identity and community creates conditions for new subjectivities which, according to literary scholar Lily Cho, are linked to the effects of globalization, transnationalism and the histories of colonialism and imperialism that “[emerge] from deeply subjective processes of racial memory.”⁶⁷ The artist’s crawling brings these subjective turns into representation as bodily experiences: traversing borders and re-examining culture through a diasporic lens. As “an ongoing and contested process of subject formation,” diasporas “are sustained simultaneously with the ‘homeland’ (real or imagined), [the] place of residence, and compatriots or coethnics dispersed elsewhere.”⁶⁸ Borders are extended and essentially transformed through high-traffic movement over and through various terrains. It is from this perspective of crossing borders that scholars of Asian diasporas such as Rhacel Salazar Parreñas and Lok C.D. Siu have recognized the various flows and influxes of Asian immigrants to North America and have attempted to map the histories behind, and the trajectories of, diasporic “conflicts, negotiations, and solidarities that form in different locations,” noting “how they shift and reconfigure when examined through the

⁶⁶ Lily Cho, “The Turn to Diaspora,” *TOPIA 17* Diasporic Pasts and Futures: Transnational Cultural Studies in Canada (Spring 2007): 14.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Rhacel Salazar Parreñas and Lok C.D. Siu, editors, “Introduction: Asian Diasporas – New Conceptions, New Frameworks,” in *Asian Diasporas: New Formations, New Conceptions* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 1.

transnational frame.”⁶⁹ Transnationalism therefore disrupts the order of nations and the historic delineations of borders, allowing bodies to actively seek to traverse these boundaries and negotiate their places as “flexible citizens.”⁷⁰

Yoon’s performances of crawling therefore belong to a wider discourse of diasporic Asian artists who evoke the crossing of borders as an inherent part of their experiences of cultural duality and split civic/national identity. These artists, who illustrate the realities of their hybrid identities by performing their bodies in their works, ultimately work to position critical readings of their artistic practices *beyond autoethnography*, enacting and inciting embodied understandings of their place at a pluralistic crossroads.⁷¹ Actively resisting colonial and patriarchal oppressions and essentialist readings of their bodies, identities, and experiences, Asian North American artists are writing and shaping their histories from the inside, filling in the gaps produced by entrenched nationalisms and empowering other cultural makers to create works that reflect their own unique histories and narratives.⁷² These perspectives ultimately work towards de-centering dominant cultural constructions in North America, extending the boundaries of nations and related borderlands, and expanding the political and cultural borders that have long perpetuated a dichotomous relationship between the North American “West” and the monolithic Asian “East.”

⁶⁹ Ibid., 3: Asian diasporas have been studied profusely for the sheer volume of their movements and the variety of reasons behind their dispersals around the globe.

⁷⁰ Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 4 – 6.

⁷¹ Eleanor Ty and Christl Verduyn, editors, “Introduction,” in *Asian Canadian Writing Beyond Autoethnography* (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2007), 3-4: Ty and Verduyn theorize “beyond autoethnography” as an examination into new directions in Asian Canadian cultural production that explore interconnections between the author’s cultural heritage and ethnic or racial background and such influences as the effects of globalization, gender and sexual identity, and transnational networks. These influences, Ty and Verduyn suggest, have significantly altered the direction of cultural production among Asian Canadian authors. Analyzing, critiquing, and writing about these works “beyond autoethnography” implies an extension beyond positioning the author as a “native informant” of his or her cultural community in order to demonstrate the ever-changing nature of the cultural landscape of Asian Canada and its effects upon Canadian culture and nationalism as a whole.

⁷² Li, 38.

Transnational Histories, Resistance, and the Body

The concept of the border is central to Yoon's video performances because it illustrates an integral and contested part of diasporic experiences of movement, settlement, and negotiations of personal and collective cultural identity. Diasporas are continually in flux and members of diasporic communities irretrievably alter national dialogues through their transnational movements. In this sense, the body is central to the experience of border crossings, as different bodily codes and markers of racial and ethnic difference attach dichotomous readings of privilege to the movements of bodies across national lines. The Asian diasporic body, in particular, continues to signify a site of bodily difference, crossed borders, and various historical engagements with the West as a colonial "Other." Read in conversation with the performative strategies of other Korean diasporic artists who view their own identities as hybrid and intersectional, Yoon's video performances work towards counteracting the damaging colonial representations of her personhood by exploring and exposing the implicit truths that arise at the cross sections of multiple identity articulations. These articulations often merge the politics of the body with the politics of social and cultural histories and conflicts across different nationalist borders.

Los Angeles-based artist Yong Soon Min (b. 1953, Bukuk, Korea) converges national histories of conflict with her own political and bodily awakenings and experiences of racialization and gendered oppression in her performative photo series *Defining Moments* (1992) (fig. 11). This challenging of dominant cultural narratives is central to her multidisciplinary artistic practice, as Min explores her identity as a Korean American woman as intersectional, multifaceted, and closely connected to the cultural histories and politics of Korea and the US. Born near Seoul in 1953, Min and her family immigrated to the US when she was seven years old. Though Min identifies with her "Americanized" upbringing, careful references to the Korean

War and other social and political strife in South Korea permeate many of her works. For Min, the partition of Korea serves as a metaphor for her personal sense of self: an identity divided between dual American and Korean cultural influences.⁷³ *Defining Moments* is a six part photographic project that traces the artist's personal and political awakening alongside poignant moments in the social histories of Korean Americans. Five of the images in the series are portraits of Min photographed from the chest up. In each of these photos the word "DMZ" – referencing the demilitarized zone that separates North and South Korea – is written across her forehead, while the word "Heartland" is written over her chest.⁷⁴ Min poses for the camera with a look of quiet resistance as each photograph in the series is overlaid with archival photographs of different historic events. In chronological order, the photographs reference the 1953 end of the Korean War, which corresponds with the artist's birth; the uprising of April 19, 1960 that overthrew the government of South Korean president Syngman Rhee, an event the artist witnessed as a child; the 1980 Gwangju Uprising in Seoul, a significant moment in history that marked Min's own political awakening as a young adult; and the 1992 riots in Los Angeles, the date of which corresponded with the artist's birthday.⁷⁵ The fifth image in the series follows the same composition as the first four portraits, however, instead of archival photographs of historic events, the overlaid photographs depict the Paektu mountain that borders North Korea and China

⁷³ Margo Machida, "Seeing 'Yellow': Asians and the American Mirror," in *The Decade Show: Frameworks of Identity in the 1980s* (New York: Museum of Contemporary Hispanic Art, The New Museum of Contemporary Art, and the Studio Museum in Harlem, 1990), 124.

⁷⁴ "Cold War, Hot Peace," Slought.org, accessed February 24, 2015, https://slought.org/resources/cold_war_hot_peace: Artists have evoked the Korean DMZ in their works as a site for complex borderlands contestations and lingering political tensions. Symbolizing an over sixty-year ceasefire between North and South Korea, the DMZ remains one of the most heavily militarized borders in the world. One recent artistic and curatorial project, the *REAL DMZ PROJECT*, imagines the DMZ through the lens of Cold War politics, positioning the DMZ paradoxically as a "relic" of the Cold War and as an ongoing site of "hot" militarization. The project is recently installed as a part of the exhibition, *Cold War, Hot Peace*, at Slought Gallery in Philadelphia, PA.

⁷⁵ Hwa Young Choi Caruso, "Art as Political Act: Expression of Cultural Identity, Self-Identity, and Gender in the Work of two Korean/Korean American Women Artists." PhD. Dissertation, Columbia University, 2004, 199.

and is often evoked by supporters as a symbol of North and South Korean reunification.⁷⁶ The final image in the series is a rendering of the artist's torso, cropped from the neck down, with the referenced dates and histories inscribed upon her flesh. Resting at her sides, her arms are etched with the phrase "occupied territory," a reference that relates these social and political histories of war, activism, and the overthrowing of authoritarian regimes to experiences of racial and gendered oppression and emancipation. Her feminized body carries these narratives through her own understandings of self and place. At a temporal and transnational moment between Korea and the US, Min recounts the politicization of the female Korean American body to the constant transition, transformation, and geopolitical politics associated with diasporic experiences.⁷⁷

Min's focus on multiple sites of history and their relations to personal and bodily reconciliations of an interstitial subjectivity as "Korean American" illustrates what Asian American studies scholar Elaine H. Kim refers to as a "culture of resistance," a centralizing of the image of the Asian American body within discourses of self, representation, and nationhood.⁷⁸ It further recalls Yoon's "performance" of her own body in her works. While Min's body is stationary within the photo frame and Yoon's video focuses on movement and gesture, the works are connected through this impetus to reference and relate to nationalist histories and experiences of transnationality to construct a sense of self. Yoon's mediation of the histories and politics between two places, one of which is notable as the city of her birth, echoes the transnational politicized narratives explored in Min's photo series. In *The dreaming collective knows no history* (fig. 1), Yoon takes up politics and history by physically tracing the path between the American and Japanese embassies in Seoul in an act that can be read as "remembering combined with

⁷⁶ Ibid., 200: A contested site in its own right, Mount Paektu (also Romanized as "Baekdu" and referred to as Changbai Mountain) is said to be the location of the Korean nation's legendary origins. Due to its situation on the border between North Korea and China, it is split between the two nations.

⁷⁷ Machida, "Seeing 'Yellow,'" 125.

⁷⁸ Elaine H. Kim, "Bad Women: Asian American Visual Artists Hanh Thi Pham, Hung Liu, and Yong Soon Min," *Feminist Studies* 22:3 (Autumn 1996): 595.

productive forgetting.”⁷⁹ While Yoon was not directly involved in the histories of war, colonial and sexual subjugation, and military occupation that these contemporary embassy sites symbolize, her actions seek to understand how cultural memories of various nationalist interventions continue to “haunt” the Korean diaspora. Often referred to as the “Forgotten War,” the Korean War is acknowledged through the presence of the American embassy on the screen and “the memories of [the war’s] survivors, the bodies of its dead, and the charred remains of the American scorched-earth policy” live on in the territorial and architectural layers of the city of Seoul.⁸⁰ Yoon connects these two distinct sites of memory through an urban topographical tracing of former traumas and lingering political tensions, exemplifying how the ground gained through these conflicts remains located at a spatio-temporal juncture between the cultural and political divisions between Japan, the US, and North and South Korea. As Yoon states, her return to Seoul to produce this work was important for myriad reasons, namely as a means to enact a repetitive gesture that links her own body and sense of self to these histories.⁸¹ Her gendered body, in contemporary Seoul, remains displaced through the continuance of time and the artist’s return as a Canadian citizen seeking to remember and understand these various traumas. Therefore, in their works, both Yoon and Min explore Korean Canadian and Korean American subjectivities through the experience of being transnational, “flexible” citizens, referencing or enacting the crossing of borders to produce such subjective experiences.

As a site for transnational disturbances and extended cultural conversations on the nature of performative bodily resistance, the concept of a militarized and highly contested border is more literally evoked in *A Wrong Place (Greening the DMZ)* (2007) (fig. 12), a site-specific

⁷⁹ L. Park, “Crawl and Trace,” 112.

⁸⁰ Grace M. Cho, *Haunting the Korean Diaspora: Shame, Secrecy, and the Forgotten War* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 51.

⁸¹ Yoon, Interview.

performance by Vancouver-based artist David Khang (b. 1963, Seoul, Korea). Situated at the “green line” border of the divided city of Nicosia, Cyprus, Khang’s performance makes connections to the politics associated with the Korean DMZ. Dressed in army fatigues and holding the flags of both North Korea and South Korea on either side of the dividing line in Cyprus, Khang recites reunification poetry by Moon Ik-Hwan in Korean and creates a “lost-in-translation” connection between these histories of strife and border clashes.⁸² Khang’s performance of social history, personal identity, and Korean War politics conflate and come together within the borderlands of Nicosia’s partition between Greek and Turkish territories.⁸³ Reproducing the tensions and politics between North Korea and South Korea in a transnational milieu, Khang’s intentional geographic displacement of this referenced conflict questions the divided border between the Korean states and produces a more nuanced mediation on the significance of borders. This mediation is ultimately framed by the active delineation and safeguarding of borders that took place during the Cold War, a framing that situates the Korean War as a deeply permeated subject within the works of contemporary Korean diasporic artists. Khang’s performance and reference to international border conflicts moreover positions this act of displacement as an effective performative strategy involved in producing and embodying transnational nationalisms. Through these references and historical/geographic convergences, *A Wrong Place (Greening the DMZ)* additionally questions Khang’s own racial/civic identity as Korean Canadian, doubly displacing this added subjective layer through the suggestion of the hyphen of Korean Canadian as a marker of a bordered, place-bound identity.

⁸² David Khang, “*A Wrong Place (Greening the DMZ)*,” accessed January 5, 2015, <http://www.davidkhang.com/?pg=sprj&pid=63>.

⁸³ Nicosia was split between the northern Turkish Quarters and the southern Greek Quarters following internal conflict and violence between the two sides in 1963.

The works of Min, Khang, and Yoon explored in this section compellingly link the body to discourses of history, displacement, and resistance. Yoon’s own questioning of her body as a site for undermining dominant forms of nation building and notions of citizenship locates her within this context of resilience. Actively looking to produce more “associational” responses to the history of border clashes, and nationalist identity narratives, Yoon employs video to continue to question the terms of how her body has come to be read.⁸⁴ Evoking the spaces of the borderlands, the Korean Canadian body in performance enacts the affinities of exchange, hybridity, and transnationality that are examined against the influence of the entrenched nationalisms of the border. In this regard, Yoon’s works are read as “a mixture or partial fusion of different visual languages” that can “be thought of as a site of creation, contradiction, and conflict emerging from the continual collisions and transformations that comprise [Asian North American] cultural experiences.”⁸⁵ The transnational spaces of the borderlands, incited in these works, open studies of visual culture and art to constant re-significations, reconstructions, and re-framings – practices that suggest performative readings of interstitial subjectivities, border crossings, territorial tracings, and new cultural constructions as a means to challenge racial hierarchies and subjugations of the Korean Canadian body in contemporary art.

⁸⁴ Yoon, Interview.

⁸⁵ Elaine H. Kim, “Interstitial Subjects: Asian American Visual Art as a Site for New Cultural Conversations,” in *Fresh Talk, Daring Gazes: Conversations on Asian American Visual Art*, ed. Elaine H. Kim, Margo Machida, and Sharon Mizota (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004), 36.

Section Two: The Korean Canadian Body in Screen Space

The Moving Body on Screen

In performance studies, critical discourse on photo and video documentation has altered traditional notions of the inherent ephemerality of live, site-specific performance art. According to Performance Studies scholar Philip Auslander, performance documentation can take two forms: the *documentary*, a state that involves the recording of the performance for the purpose of archiving or restaging it; and the *theatrical*, a form of documentation that records an act staged solely for the camera's gaze.⁸⁶ Insisting that these two categories are not mutually exclusive, Auslander explains that each type of documentation serves as both a production and re-production of the work itself, rather than as a captured, ephemeral event.⁸⁷ This distinction enables performance works to be performed for wider audiences and re-interpreted in different institutional or non-institutional settings. In these cases, the narrative that unfolds within the video or photo frame is by definition the performance and "its authority is phenomenological, rather than ontological."⁸⁸ Even an "open field," performance documentation "[offers] the artistic means for site-specific, socially aware and process-based art that [has] found its expression not just in live action, but also in text, video, photography, and film."⁸⁹ Regarding performance documentation as performative in itself *within* the photographic or video frame, I distinguish Yoon's works as video performances because the bodily acts she performs are enacted *on screen*

⁸⁶ Phillip Auslander, "The Performativity of Performance Documentation," *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 28:3 (September 2006): 2.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁸⁹ Barbara Clausen, "Performing Histories: Why the Point Is Not to Make a Point..." *Afterall: a Journal of Art, Context, and Enquiry* 23 (Spring 2010): 38.

and the work as a whole may be restaged for different curatorial settings.⁹⁰ Yoon's video performances are played on loop within the gallery space and are usually installed as projections on the walls or played on television sets. The video medium used to produce and exhibit these works is therefore equally as important as the narrative that unfolds within the space of the screen. Yoon, in fact, refers to these works as performative because her actions are produced for the camera in order to create a more associational experience of the body. Yoon's emphasis on the position of the camera in her work is influenced by, as she states, "how the camera changes our subjectivity in terms of how we see ourselves, and others, and also how our entire subjectivities have been shaped by those technologies."⁹¹ Regarding Yoon's works as video performances ultimately positions the camera as witness: to her body, to her surroundings, and to the histories and cultural memories she evokes and locates through her movements on screen.

As I argued in the first section of this thesis, Yoon's works are situated within a broader practice of globally articulating the Korean Canadian body through narratives of Korean history and the associated border crossings that the Korean Canadian identity evokes. In Yoon's works, these issues are reconciled through the reflexive qualities of the video medium that transform on-screen narratives into flexible pictorial forms.⁹² While video has historically and symbolically located the image of the body/self at a technological crossroads, its origins as a marginal and experimental artistic medium were overcome by the groundbreaking works of Korean artist Nam

⁹⁰ *The dreaming collective* has been exhibited as part of *Project 35 Vol. 2*, a traveling screening program of video works facilitated by Independent Curators International that features works by 35 artists from around the world. The series has been screened thus far in Shanghai, China; Windsor, Ontario; Stuttgart, Germany; Barbados; Kingston, Jamaica; Trinidad and Tobago; Ethiopia; Uruguay; Suriname; Indonesia; Sri Lanka; Thailand; Singapore; Hong Kong; and various places in the US. In addition, both works have been exhibited extensively in group shows and solo exhibitions in Canada, the US, and Asia.

⁹¹ Yoon, Interview.

⁹² Yvonne Spielmann, *Video: the Reflexive Medium*, trans. Anja Welle and Stan Jones (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), 4: Spielmann examines video as a medium and technology that possesses the ability to not only reflect, but also to transform the image on screen, making "figurative forms of expression from preceding pictorial media." (ibid).

June Paik, the legendary “father of video art.”⁹³ Paik’s interest in combining the physical television set with the narrative of video itself is a critical moment in the history of new media art and the artist is responsible for “making video visible as a moving image in time” and producing it through negotiations with physical space.⁹⁴ Yoon’s video performances likewise expose how the experimental and performative nature of video produces “territories of moving images” and “offers a wide range of articulations for understanding movement.”⁹⁵ Theorist Johannes Birringer additionally understands video as a “continual crossing of all kinds of cultural and political boundaries” and he evokes the concept of the border in order to comment on video’s ability to traverse or extend cultural and artistic practices.⁹⁶ A multilayered, debordered concept of video is taken up in both *The dreaming collective* and *As It is Becoming*, which not only present narratives that mark and cross geographical and historical territories, but are also situated between the performative lines of video. Cinema Studies scholar Vivian Sobchack demonstrates that the converging of these layered readings of video works, within the space of the screen, is part of a dual process of perception and representation that has radically re-informed social, personal, and bodily existences.⁹⁷ The screen space therefore “objectively [alters] our subjectivity while [inviting] our complicity in formulating space, time, and bodily investment as significant personal and social experience,”⁹⁸ and, further, according to media art historian Christine Ross, the screen space “is transformed into a perceptual field,” one that plays into the viewer’s sense of

⁹³ Toni Stooss, “Video Time – Video Space: Notes on an Exhibition: Zurich and Basel, Düsseldorf and Vienna,” in *Nam June Paik: Video Time – Video Space*, ed. Toni Stooss and Thomas Kellein (New York: Henry N. Abrams Inc. Publishers, 1993), 9.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁹⁵ Liz Park, “What Moves Us,” 9.

⁹⁶ Johannes Birringer, “Video Art/Performance: a Border Theory,” *Performing Arts Journal* 13:3 (September 1991): 56.

⁹⁷ Vivian Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004), 135.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 136-137.

the narrative as it unfolds on screen.⁹⁹ In this section, I will situate the importance of the space of the screen through a reading of the movements of Yoon's body in her works. With this regard for screen space, I present a framework through which to critically analyze bodily performative works by Korean Canadian and Korean diasporic artists, taking into account a more material reading of the body and the implications of embodying a hyphenated subjectivity (as another bordered conception).

The theory of video as both a perceptive and expressive medium informs this reading of Yoon's works because these dual properties of video have had a major impact on the "sense" the viewer makes of the temporal and spatial fields produced by the projected screen.¹⁰⁰ As Sobchack explains, encounters with screen space produce embodied subjects that extend bodily senses and capacities to "see and make sense of [the self]."¹⁰¹ It is through embodiment and fluid "being" that one is able to produce a performance of the body, and of the self, in order to challenge limits to the subject's experience that have been historically accrued through stereotyped readings and processes of marginalization.¹⁰² This reading of Yoon's video performances as "embodied" understands that her racialized and gendered body in screen space is performed and represented as something "as is": a lived experience of cultural and bodily histories shaped through territorial and globalized movements. The video medium enables the artist to embody and project her own artistic explorations of her body/self, mediating these performances through sets of conscious

⁹⁹ Christine Ross, "The Projective Shift between Installation art and New Media art: from Distantiation to Connectivity," in *Screen/Space: The Projected Image in Contemporary Art*, ed. Tamara Todd (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), 185.

¹⁰⁰ Sobchack, 136.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 138.

¹⁰² Karen Shimakawa, "The Things We Share: Ethnic Performativity and 'Whatever Being,'" *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 18:2 Identity and Ethnicity (2004): 150.

perceptions and representations that “inform and share in the spatiotemporal structures and history of a wide range of interrelated cultural phenomena.”¹⁰³

In regards to material readings of the artist’s body in screen space, Yoon’s video performances come to doubly situate the artist’s projected, embodied “self” in an unbound territory. Her racialized and gendered body is performed in response to the video’s urban setting and the projections of her crawl are produced - and reproduced - on loop as she labours through the shifted horizontal screen space. This framing of her body/self helps to distort the urban and topographic space projected through the screen. While the viewer is made aware of the urban setting of each performance, these sites are fundamentally altered by this shift in focus to the ground. Yoon’s works enable the viewer to think about the spatial politics of both the city and the screen space as she challenges the notion of verticality and the “mastery” associated with viewing spaces through an upright position.¹⁰⁴ Her works further fit within a lineage of performance art works that activate crawling as a significant, performative form of pushing bodily and territorial limits in order to contest the hierarchies associated with racial, gendered, and classist forms of subjugation.¹⁰⁵

In her curatorial essay for *What Moves Us*, an exhibition mounted at Vancouver’s Western Front Gallery in 2009, Liz Park examines the relationship between the moving image,

¹⁰³ Sobchack, 140.

¹⁰⁴ Yoon, Interview.

¹⁰⁵ Two significant examples of works of performance that employ the act of crawling to negotiate the experience of the gendered and racialized body include a series by African American artist William Pope.L and a set of works by Vancouver-based artist David Khang. In the 1990s, Pope.L produced a series of “crawls” throughout New York City. Donning a suit and carrying with him a small potted plant, Pope.L’s performances comment on the experience of being homeless and situating oneself in a lower position to the ground. He further critiques the racialized, social status of the African American body. Comparatively, David Khang’s live performances from 2004 and 2005 are connected through the artist’s own impetus to crawl. These works feature Khang dressed in only a pair of khaki trousers, crawling over a long, unrolled sheet of paper with a cow tongue (dipped in motor oil) in his mouth, attempting to paint a straight calligraphy line for as long as he is physically able to. Both series comment on the vulnerabilities of the artists as racialized and gendered subjects in North American cultural milieus. The dual processes of gendered subjugation and racialization are pertinent in these examples, wherein the artists physically illustrate struggles against the idealization of white Western heteronormativity and masculinity.

the moving body, and geopolitical mobility. Tracing “the multiple trajectories that moving bodies create in time-space,” Park analyzes the performative video strategies of artists whose own personal diasporic experiences have been shaped by performed border crossings.¹⁰⁶ I reference Park’s exhibition here because, not only does it seek to define terms for investigating convergences of the moving image and the moving racialized body, but the exhibition also features works from an earlier photo and video performance series by Yoon that serves as a critical moment in her artistic practice.¹⁰⁷ The central narrative of her series *Unbidden* (2004) (fig. 13) involves Yoon enacting the part of a Korean War “fugitive” in the backwoods of British Columbia.¹⁰⁸ Tactically maneuvering through the woods dressed head to toe in black, Yoon creates a fictionalized narrative of Korean history displaced within this setting of the Canadian landscape. Performing a state of liminality, the artist “[conveys] physical duress as well as the psychic instability that haunts the migrant imaginary.”¹⁰⁹ This state of liminality is evoked both through Yoon’s racialized body and through its position in screen space as she slowly moves closer and closer to the ground; crawling and stalking through forests, marshes, and fields. This image of Yoon moving purposefully through the underbrush moreover recalls militarized forms of movement and the anxieties surrounding border security.¹¹⁰ By creating a historical fiction through these bodily references to Korean cultural and social history in a displaced nationalist context, *Unbidden*, like *The dreaming collective* and *As It is Becoming*, illustrates how repetitive performance enables the artist to apply more material negotiations in her exploring of socio-

¹⁰⁶ L. Park, “What Moves Us,” 10.

¹⁰⁷ *What Moves Us* also featured video works by artists Aleesa Cohene, Terrance Houle and Trevor Freeman, Richard Ibhgy and Marilou Lemmens, and Jayce Salloum.

¹⁰⁸ Joni Low, “Embodied Collisions of Space and Time: the Evolving Works of Jin-me Yoon, Canadian Visual Artist,” *Ricepaper Magazine*, September 22, 2009, accessed December 11, 2014, <http://ricepapermagazine.ca/2009/09/feature-embodied-collisions-of-space-and-time-the-evolving-work-of-jin-me-yoon-14-3/>.

¹⁰⁹ L. Park, “What Moves Us,” 13.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.

historical definitions of her body. Actively engaging with psychological, cultural, physical, and technological boundaries and barriers, Yoon's crawling body functions as a performed "historical cipher" seeking to achieve an embodied consciousness.¹¹¹ *Unbidden* further serves as a precursor to Yoon's more recent transnational crawling series and begins to locate the performative strategies that question racial subjugations and crossed borders as discursively liminal states. The video medium therefore enables Yoon to enact an embodied performance of her body/self along the intersecting borders of "time-space-movement-image" that emphasize the importance of the narrative content of the video performances and the viewer's engagement with these works.¹¹²

Embodiment of Korean Canadian

In both *The dreaming collective knows no history* and *As It is Becoming*, Yoon's crawling body is placed in a precarious state, one that reflects the subjective dangers of the hyphen in Korean Canadian. Vulnerable to oncoming street traffic and bystanders, Yoon produces a "radical" material performance of her body as she crawls through the streets of Seoul and Beppu on a personal and politically charged mission, pushing her body to its limits. Her efforts are measured by her heavy breath and physical fatigue. These aural and visual signs of physical struggle demonstrate the monumental skill involved with moving at this angle, rendering it an impressive feat of endurance that symbolizes constant combative struggles – struggles against the dangers of the city and against subjected essentialist readings of the artist's body and experiences. This hazardous positioning of her body in the urban space projected on screen imagines the hyphen of "Asian Canadian" as another precarious and subversive boundary located in screen space.¹¹³ In

¹¹¹ Susan Edelstein, "A Transfer of Power," in *Unbidden* (Kamloops, BC: Kamloops Art Gallery, 2004), 20.

¹¹² Birringer, 64.

¹¹³ Elaine Chang, editor, "Introduction: Hype-Nation; or, Screening 'Asian Canada'," in *Reel Asian: Asian Canada on Screen* (Toronto: Coach House Books and the Toronto Real Asian International Film Festival, 2007), 13.

her introduction to the essay anthology *Reel Asian: Asian Canada on Screen* (2007), Film Studies scholar Elaine Chang expounds on the evocative nature of the hyphen, stating that

For the challenges of becoming it encodes, the hyphen offers a suggestive metaphor for the Asian Canadian screen, the slash perhaps an image in miniature of a “slanted screen”: an in-between or off-centre representational space devised and projected onto by many.¹¹⁴

Chang’s conception of the hyphen positions it as a site for performing Asian Canadian as a state in flux, but compounded by complex intersubjective conditions. In both *The dreaming collective* and *As It is Becoming*, Yoon’s crawling through the screen space that projects sites found within two Asian cities is an altered performance and rendering of her “Korean Canadianness,” one that questions its hyphenated construction and the terms through which this subjective identity is represented and embodied. The removal of the hyphen in “Korean Canadian” enables her to challenge the ethnic and racial terms that produce Korean Canadian as a historically subjugated identity, with one’s “Koreanness” placed lower than both the status of Japanese citizens (in the perspective of colonial Korea) and the status of European settler Canadians (in settler colonial Canada). Further, Yoon’s horizontal orientation of her body in the screen space appears almost hyphen-like itself, affixing itself to multiple terrains and embedded histories. By crossing the borders between these territories, Yoon’s appearance and her bodily struggle to move at such a difficult angle impose the effects that hyphenation has on the body, effects that manifest in the many issues of violence the body is subjected to: the recollection of traumatic histories, the dangers of the street, and the systems of racism and sexism that hyphenation often enforces.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 14.

¹¹⁵ In our discussion of her works, Yoon referred to an incident that happened to her while recording *As It is Becoming* in Seoul’s Itaewon district. While crawling up a hill, she could hear three men speaking about her in English, stating that they should jump out and “beat the shit out of him,” initially misreading her as male. She states that as she got closer to them they realized that she was a woman and said something derogatory about her. The danger of being harassed on the street is perhaps more extreme in this situation because Yoon has placed herself in such a vulnerable spatial position.

Normative “signs” of Korean Canadian are recalled through the hyphen as a pervasive site of “abject” subjectivity and marginal citizenship.¹¹⁶ According to Hijin Park, the myth of Asians as a “model minority” in Canada has typically seen Koreans as embodying sets of either detrimental or redeeming stereotypes. The “redeeming” stereotypes of the model minority myth locate Korean Canadians as the “domesticated Other consuming western education, language, and cultures as she mimics the western liberal subject.”¹¹⁷ Korean Canadian is thus a body-subject conscious category produced through signs of bodily difference and the multicultural myths that apply it to Canadian nationalist constructions. Korean Canadians have been regarded in this sense as both outsider and precarious insider: celebrated as a symbol of the “Canadian Dream” of assimilative multiculturalism while being continually defined by the hyphen.¹¹⁸ I discuss Park’s assessment of the signs of a model myth of Korean Canadian subjectivity here because it illustrates how race has constructed Canadian civic hierarchies through signs of bodily difference. Like other “non-white” Canadians, Korean Canadians are bound and defined by the policing of bodies that produce regulatory classifications in order to substantiate their appearances and status within a larger national collective. This process of racializing citizens illustrates what Nadine Ehlers articulates when she claims that “race does not exist ontologically, rather, it is a [disciplinary] system of meanings and practices.”¹¹⁹ Arguing that a sort of “racial passing” occurs in all performances of the racialized self, Ehlers’s call to locate the performative measures of one’s racial identity illustrates an understanding of how Korean Canadian is a “performed” state.¹²⁰ With no ontological constant, Korean Canadian is dependent upon the

¹¹⁶ Shimakawa, 150: Shimakawa’s notion of Asian American as national and civil abject understands that this subject identity plays a role in defining “Americanness” as *other than* Asian American – she determines that it does not begin to fully constitute Asian American, just as a difference or in excess of American.

¹¹⁷ H. Park, 84.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ehlers, 31.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

presence (or implied presence) of the hyphen and the notion of racial difference to produce a “civil passing” or performance. This shaky basis of race that exposes it as a performance renders the marking of Korean Canadian , as a raced and nationally subjugated identity, an open signification, and one that carries the possibility of being extended by new bodily interpretations.¹²¹ Rejecting the combined processes of colonialist racialization and patriarchal oppression that have compounded the “lower class” articulations of Asian migrants¹²² and have produced and perpetuated stereotypes of Asian femininity (that ultimately seek to further racialize, subjugate, and “discipline” Korean and Korean Canadian women),¹²³ Yoon subverts readings of her gendered and racialized body in her video works by appearing ambiguous in a completely black outfit and short haircut. She states that this choice of attire was intended to appear more as a uniform that would subvert these expectations of her body.¹²⁴ This reference to uniformity subverts the stereotype of Korean women as apolitical and docile. Here, Yoon’s militarized and uniformed appearance is a politicized symbol that challenges not only Western perceptions of her Asian femininity, but also the notion of Korean nationalism as distinctively and politically male-centric.¹²⁵

Yoon’s undermining of stereotypical codes of Asian femininity and their exoticizing effects further recalls the video performance works of New York-based Kimssooja (b. 1957,

¹²¹ Inda, 93.

¹²² Li, 15: Li notes that Asian migrants in North America have been historically perceived as labourers or “lower class” citizens excluded from intellectual and cultural exchanges and were initially subjected to extreme working conditions and paid extremely low wages.

¹²³ Jo-Anne Lee, “Issues in Constituting Asian Canadian Feminisms,” in *Asian Women: Interconnections*, ed. Tineke Hellwig and Sunera Thobani (Toronto: Women’s Press, 2006), 25: Lee maintains that the “fevered yearnings” of white hetero-normative masculinities have commonly hypersexualized Asian women, rendering them variably dangerous and overtly sexual as “China Dolls, Suzie Wongs, Miss Saigons, Dragon Ladies, Madame Butterflies” or, alternatively, as quiet, submissive, passive, and subservient. These representations, Lee argues, have been used to justify the exclusion and exploitation of Asians in Western contexts.

¹²⁴ Yoon, Interview.

¹²⁵ Margo Machida, *Unsettled Visions: Contemporary Asian American Artists and the Social Imaginary* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 158.

Daegu, Korea),¹²⁶ an artist who likewise works towards breaking down Western conceptions of Asian bodies. Her works are moreover transnational gestures that illustrate the social realities faced by many subjects in the so-called “Third World.”¹²⁷ In three separate but thematically linked video performances filmed in different cities around the world, the artist poses herself either by sitting, standing, or lying motionless on the ground in an open public space. Continually filmed in a simple, grey outfit with her long black hair tied back in a ponytail and with her back facing the viewer, Kimsooja’s video works *A Need Woman* (1999-2009) (fig. 14), *A Beggar Woman* (2000-2001, 2005) (fig. 15), and *A Homeless Woman* (2000-2001) (fig. 16) feature the artist embodying the statuses of women from different, abject, social classes. In the process, Kimsooja illustrates how sociopolitical and socioeconomic issues intersect with discourses on race and gender. Undermining the narrative of hypersexuality associated with Asian women, the artist embodies the immobile and voiceless subjects of colonial oppression, exposing extreme social situations that are hidden by exoticized and eroticized stereotypes of racialized persons. Like in Yoon’s video performances, Kimsooja’s placing of her body in screen space goes beyond dichotomous borders to enact significant social realities that intersect with the hierarchical positions of bodies in transnational contexts. In this vein, both Yoon and Kimsooja expose the ground as a central site for embodied and spatial negotiations with race, gender, and class. Affected by the swirling of dirt and the impressions left behind by cars, animals, and human bystanders, the ground is altered by the presence of both artists’ bodies in this material space.

¹²⁶ In this preferred spelling, the artist rejects the gendered and cultural expectations that her hyphenated name carries.

¹²⁷ Trinh T. Minh-ha, “Difference: ‘A Special Third World Women Issue,’” in *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Amelia Jones (New York: Routledge, 2003), 196; Minh-ha draws attention to the hierarchy imposed through classifications between the “Third World” and the “First World,” determining that the increase in socioeconomic power by former “Third World” countries jeopardizes the hegemony of Western cultures, or the so-called “First World.” This term used here refers to the precariousness of these hierarchies between nations and heightens the narrative of gendered, racial, and class difference Kimsooja explores in her video performances.

These video performances by Kimsooja and Yoon further reflect the continued interest in the body in works of art. Locating their bodies in lateral positions in screen space, both artists continually alter coded readings of their body/self. Noting how historical artistic explorations of the body's materiality have positioned it to counter systems of normative representation, artist and theorist Helen Spackman argues for the body as a site for potential cultural interventions and "radical performance."¹²⁸ Her definition of the body as a site for "radical performance" and material enactment provides a basis for understanding how Yoon's own body is performed and represented through its visceral actions and through its projection on gallery walls. This material performance of her gendered and racialized body affords Yoon the freedom to project it as a site for subjective convergences and position her performance of her Korean Canadian body/self as a political form of artistic production.¹²⁹

Yoon's crawling is a "radical," yet subtle and calculated gesture that reflects militaristic politics and history – an important undertone that permeates through her video performance series. It is a gesture that centralizes her body in her work and recalls further theory of the effects of the body in performance. Arguing for the body's subversive abilities to produce performances that de-center the Modernist subject, contemporary art theorist Amelia Jones maintains that the body witnessed in performance "[engages] with and [is] contingent on others in the world, and [is] multiply identified rather than reducible to a single 'universal' image of the self."¹³⁰ Jones's argument here recalls her suggestion that the subversive body enables the artist to perform the realities of the body's sexual, racial, gendered, and classed identity as an embodied resistance to

¹²⁸ Helen Spackman, "Minding the Matter of Representation: Staging the Body (Politic)," *Contemporary Theatre Review* 10:3 The Body in Performance (2000): 6.

¹²⁹ Johanna Householder, "Apologia," in *Caught in the Act: an Anthology of Performance Art by Canadian Women*, ed. Johanna Householder and Tanya Mars (Toronto: YYZ Books, 2004), 13.

¹³⁰ Amelia Jones, *Body Art: Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 197.

idealist associations of his or her body and its place in visual culture and social history.¹³¹ One strategy of performance that she argues for is the exaggeration of the body and the universal stereotypes that have produced its renderings as gendered and racialized.¹³² However, this strategy is not effectively suited to an analysis of the works by Asian diasporic performance artists, whose playing into stereotyped, “Modernist,” and Western conceptions of their own bodies and forms of visual culture risks a process of self-orientalizing.¹³³ Jones, in fact, unwittingly illustrates this risk in her brief discussion of the photographic works of Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama (b. 1929, Matsumoto, Japan), who, posing herself nude in her performative photo *Sex Obsession Food Obsession Macaroni Infinity Nets and Kusama* (1962), plays up her “exotic” otherness (fig.17). While Jones maintains that this strategy confronts viewers and makes them aware of Kusama’s racial and gendered “difference” as a means to combat the universal rendering of the Modernist artist as white, male, and straight,¹³⁴ I argue, alternatively, that performances of the Asian body should be explored through a sensitive consideration of the (historical and ongoing) experiences of racism and colonialism that Asian subjects have experienced through engagements with Western assimilative and cultural imperialist policies. Jones’s discussion of Kusama’s photographic works problematically places a white, male, heterosexual viewer as the central audience of Kusama’s works, suggesting that her performance

¹³¹ Ibid., 5.

¹³² Ibid..

¹³³ E. Kim, “Interstitial Subjects,” 4: Kim argues that discrimination against Asian American artists has historically been based on the assumption that, by the fact of their racial “difference,” Asian American artists had no “claim” to Eurocentric American forms of cultural expression. Critics and collectors are more often interested in works that maintain the stereotypical visual tropes (such as rice paper, calligraphic techniques, and dragon motifs, to name a few) accorded to what Euro-American audiences believed to be “traditional” Asian art. Artists who attempt to resist this form of orientalism (rather than perpetuating it) in order to produce works that reflect or bolster modernist or postmodernist ideas have traditionally faced criticisms that their works are “derivative” of Western art forms. These tropes as outlined by Kim reflect how Asian culture is typically regarded as “historic,” “timeless,” or “unchanging” – stereotypes that effectively pit Asian art against artworks by American and European artists. The pervasiveness of such visual cultural tropes makes it difficult to navigate this orientalist system of art evaluation.

¹³⁴ Jones, 7: Curiously, Kusama is the only self-identified Asian artist included in Jones’s study, a fact that calls into question the effects of this type of exaggerated bodily performance.

of her body is perpetually produced for this exoticizing gaze. While Jones's study considers an earlier generation of performance artists who sought to effectively shift canonical readings of performance and the body in Western art history, it is now more than ever imperative to take a more global consideration of the body into account when evaluating performance. It should be stated that with this critique of Jones's study of performance, which has in its own right effectively been canonized, I argue that a reading of the racialized and gendered body in performance should be negotiated through materiality and experience.

Asian American Studies scholar Karen Shimakawa offers a theory that counters Jones's positioning of this strategy as embodied performance. Taking into consideration the particularities of race, gender, and class represented by the presence of the Asian body in different transnational contexts, Shimakawa analyzes performance works by Asian American theatre artists and suggests that the concept of "Asian American" is regarded as a "national abjection." She states:

What characterizes Asian [Americanness] as it comes into visibility, I would argue, is its constantly-shifting relation to U.S. Americanness, a movement between visibility and invisibility, foreignness and domestication/assimilation: it is that *movement between* enacted by and upon Asian [Americans] that marks the boundaries of Asian American cultural (and sometimes legal) citizenship.¹³⁵

This precarious state of the in-between, Shimakawa argues, relies on relational formulations with and against a constructed sense of "Americanness" based on a normative notion of ethnic whiteness. A sense of otherness is therefore defined as oppositional. Seeking to find a way to discuss "performances of ethnicity" without playing up these artists' ethnic "difference," Shimakawa looks to the philosopher Giorgio Agamben's concept of "whatever being" in order "to conceive of (communal) subjectivity that does not depend on stable political identity

¹³⁵ Shimakawa, 150.

categories for its integrity.”¹³⁶ While Shimakawa’s essay exclusively looks at live performances of Asian American through the lens of “whatever being,” I argue this framework for negotiating the particularities of an experience of hyphenated citizenship, within the context of North American cultural race politics, can likewise be applied as an important strategy for understanding the nuances associated with Asian Canadianness (or, more specifically, Korean Canadianness). Whatever being essentially negates the existence of a sole, immutable idea of what Asian Canadian actually *is*: allowing its implied “in-between” politics to understand it as whatever and however the artist wishes it to be. The notion of undermining stability is central to an effective theory through which to analyze Asian diasporic performance works because it resists classifying works by Asian artists as part of a myriad of orientalist tropes that insist that Asian diasporic artists must occupy a static temporal bridge between “East” and “West.”¹³⁷ In regarding a reading of these works as “whatever being,” the performative strategies employed by artists are open to phenomenological interpretations of the work and the artist’s body as witnessed live or within the space of the screen/frame. Whatever being is a strategy of discursive re-interpretation; one that art historian Margo Machida likewise locates, arguing that:

Strategies of critiquing and naming that attempt to expose, disempower, and ultimately co-opt the mainstream’s representing process become antidotes to the myriad homogenized depictions, endlessly repeated clichés, externally imposed conventions, and smothering expectations that have served to circumscribe and deny [a] unique sense of identity.¹³⁸

By positioning her body, in its non-conforming state, as central to her video performances, Yoon undermines normative grounds of ethnic/national identity (“Canadianness”), conceiving Asian diaspora as a fluid state, one open to constant re-significations and globally articulated subjective

¹³⁶ Ibid., 151: Shimkawa defines Agamben’s theory as “being such as it always matters,” mentioning that he does not relate the concept of “being” to a flippant mode of “not mattering.” Whatever being reveals flexible terms of inclusion that are not predicated on existing terms of Self/Other or included/excluded.

¹³⁷ E. Kim, “Interstitial Subjects,” 4.

¹³⁸ Machida, “Seeing ‘Yellow,’” 112.

framings.¹³⁹ The fluidity of Yoon's movements in her video performances reinterprets her "Korean Canadianness" as a material bodily experience formed through subjective and transnational negotiations of the borders of this racial/civic identity. Yoon's works productively challenge body essentialisms and territorial borders by evoking history, memory, and politics rather than assimilative and racial/gendered stereotypes. Her identity as Korean Canadian is performed for the camera as whatever being: it is embodied, inter-subjective, and produced through narratives of "being."

¹³⁹ Shimakawa, 151.

Section Three: Gaining Ground: Debordered Citizenship and Cultural Belonging

Social Justice and Negotiations of Citizenship

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Asian American Studies movement mobilized around the need to promote the discourse and institutionalization of studies of Asian diasporic cultures and communities in America. As Parreñas and Siu recall, the movement signaled “an effort toward self-determination that rejected both American colonialism in Asia and internal colonialism of Asian Americans in the United States.”¹⁴⁰ Likewise, the Asian Canadian cultural activism movement, which started gaining momentum in the 1970s in Canada, “[confronted] the power structure and power relations built on the colonial order” as an effort to resist Canada’s own colonial history.¹⁴¹ Settler colonial structures in Canada and the US continue to enable classist social systems that maintain influences of racism and sexism as a means to discourage cultural and intellectual production within marginalized communities.¹⁴² Attempting to resist essentialist barriers, the Asian American and Asian Canadian movements echo the wider influence of postcolonial and decolonizing movements around the world. Asian Canadian especially grew as a response to the politics being negotiated by Asian American activists. “Invigorated by critical discourses ... [the Asian Canadian] search for history, community, and identity as well as social justice gave rise to the articulation of Asian Canadian experiences.”¹⁴³ Gaining ground within cultural discourse in Canada, the precarious state of Asian Canadian defined by negotiations of race through geographically bound distinctions (the concept of “Asia” as both continent and race) must be re-imagined through global encounters and the tracing of the experiences of Asian

¹⁴⁰ Parreñas and Siu, 7.

¹⁴¹ Li, 13.

¹⁴² Ibid., 15.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 16.

Canadians beyond territorial and cultural borders.¹⁴⁴ Transnational politics are therefore at the heart of Asian North American cultural and social mobilization through this initiative to deborder definitions of “North American” culture.

As both these cultural activist movements demonstrate, territorial negotiations and transnational engagements with hemispheric and global politics are central to cultural and social mobilization. It is through a desire to traverse multiple subjective boundaries that artists and other cultural and social actors look to the historical-local nature of politicized terrains to re-frame experiences of movement and settlement and to shift interconnected notions of “citizenship,” “identity,” and cultural belonging. Various Asian Canadian and Asian American artists have, in fact, situated their works within the borders of national politics and geographical space in order to question formerly bounded terrains. David Khang’s 2010 performance, *A Measure of War (je me souviens)*, in which the artist performed a “remixed” version of events that transpired in Montreal during the 1970 October Crisis, is one example of the converging of politics, geography, and questions of civil and multicultural sovereignty (fig. 18).¹⁴⁵ Dressed in military garb, Khang rode a bicycle-powered “war tank” through the streets of Montreal, tracing a path from Articule artist run centre in the Mile End district to City Hall. Upon reaching his destination, the artist stood on the steps of City Hall and recited a parsed speech in three different languages. His reading comprised of parts of former Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau’s famous speech from October 16, 1970 interspersed with sections from the FLQ (Front de libération du Québec)’s manifesto. As Khang asserts, this performance, along with many of his other *Wrong Place* performances,

¹⁴⁴ Gagnon and Fung, 104.

¹⁴⁵ In October 1970, members of the FLQ, a militant group that supported Quebec sovereignty, kidnapped two government officials in Montreal. The “October Crisis” refers to a series of events following this kidnapping in which the Canadian Parliament invoked the War Measures Act, the only time this legislation has been invoked in peacetime. The invocation of this act was to support authorities in Quebec, however many believed it was more akin to a deployment of martial law. For media coverage on the October Crisis, see CBC Digital Archives, accessed February 15, 2015, <http://www.cbc.ca/archives/categories/politics/civil-unrest/the-october-crisis-civil-liberties-suspended/topic---the-october-crisis-civil-liberties-suspended.html>.

was intended to “[beckon] our collective amnesia into remembering things as they never were” and to situate politicized events within a territorial landscape of contested histories and the “ambivalence” of the culture of multiculturalism.¹⁴⁶ Khang’s own place within this altered narrative of Anglophone and Québécois tensions is called into question as he attempts to “remember” and redress this event from his perspective as Korean Canadian. His enactment and recall of these events negotiates his own place in Canadian social history: as a “racialized” citizen, where does his own body, cultural identity, and experience fit into Quebec and Anglo-Canadian nationalism? In this case, negotiations of territorial and cultural sovereignty converge with the tracing of social history. As identities become shaped by the places in which subjects reside, so too do territorial geographies figure readings of cultural politics, histories, and experiences of movement. Margo Machida echoes this understanding of place identity, stating that

Geography is so intimately tied to collective conceptions of history, place, and belonging, and to definitions of (and dichotomies drawn between) self and other, that it could easily be regarded as an “epistemic category” on par with race and gender. Indeed, the most fundamental story of humanity – a “traveling species” from its inception – is its extraordinary mobility.¹⁴⁷

Her argument aptly illustrates how the spaces produced by territorial borders become contested through new cultural convergences and related politics of mobility and migration. Engraining rigidly bordered experiences and the canonization of culture within the nation’s social and cultural imaginary, these borders, according to Machida, “engender a larger positional claim to citizenship in, and a sense of belonging to, the nation.”¹⁴⁸ Ongoing histories of systemic racism and exclusion from accounts of canonized history have therefore incited many Asian diasporic

¹⁴⁶ David Khang, “*A Measure of War (je me souviens)*,” accessed February 14, 2015, <http://www.davidkhang.com/?pg=sprj&pid=124>.

¹⁴⁷ Machida, *Unsettled Visions*, 194.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 198.

artists to complicate national geographies and stake a claim for a transnational, “debordered” understanding of citizenship as cultural belonging through their art.

At a basic level, citizens typically acquire their status by being born within a country’s borders or through their familial lineage.¹⁴⁹ While the condition of birth relates terms of citizenship to the body’s place in geopolitical space, theories of birthright citizenship are rooted to nationalist theories of the “nation” as an imagined community that maintains its sovereignty through conceivable, physical boundaries.¹⁵⁰ As Benedict Anderson suggests, the nation imagined as a community produces and maintains within its borders a sense of comradeship between its members, and this connection influences nationalist displays of civic pride.¹⁵¹ Anderson’s theory of the nation as an “imagined community” understands that citizenship is more than just a legal status: it is a feeling or sense of belonging. Sociologist Lloyd L. Wong likewise argues that the terms of citizenship are not solely based on legalities. However, in theorizing a place for transnationalism to articulate what it means to maintain Canadian citizenship and cultural belonging, Wong undermines Anderson’s understanding of a civically bound, communal kinship, suggesting that transnationalism transforms these bordered definitions by producing citizens with ties to two or more nation states.¹⁵² Cautious of arguments that suggest that transnationalism damages this precarious social fabric of “active citizenship,” Wong argues that a deborderd (i.e.: transnational) citizenship may “facilitate the cultural and political incorporation of new immigrants who would otherwise ... remain politically and culturally

¹⁴⁹ Costica Dumbrava, *Nationality, Citizenship, and Ethno-cultural Belonging: Preferential Membership Policies in Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 17: Most often these designations of birthright citizenship are simultaneous if the subject’s parents are also citizens of the country in which he or she was born.

¹⁵⁰ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 2006), 6-7.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁵² Lloyd L. Wong, “Transnationalism, Active Citizenship, and Belonging in Canada,” *International Journal* 63:1 *Diasporas: What It Now Means to be Canadian* (Winter 2007/2008): 87.

isolated.”¹⁵³ With familial and cultural ties to more than one nation, the art works of Asian Canadian and Asian diasporic artists redefine central issues of citizenship as social and cultural embodiments. This strategy demonstrates the cultural and social turn of debordered citizenship as not only a method for rethinking canonical forms of belonging, but also as a means to understand how citizenship is performed and continually restaged through the effects of transnationalism and geopolitical mobility.

Situated along a myriad of temporal and geographical borders, Yoon’s actions in her video performances converge these issues of territory and the body to challenge her own body’s historically racialized and marginalized position within a bordered sense of Canadian citizenship and national identity. Her Korean Canadian body in her works calculates the forming of transnational nationalisms in its repeated and methodical movements, understanding the tracing that is inherent to negotiating dual sets of cultural belonging. Since the mid-twentieth century, a trajectory of ground gained for increased civil rights has been traced and, while these parameters are still not completely equal or just in many respects, the pushing of boundaries through issues of debordered citizenship has helped to “destabilize the existing political hierarchies of legitimate power and allegiance.”¹⁵⁴

Revisiting History Beyond the Border

According to Sassen, debordering stems from the “spaces and practices of daily life” that connect peoples historically displaced and excluded from modern ideologies of nationhood through shared cultural, gendered, and socioeconomic solidarities.¹⁵⁵ Tying the debordering of state-sanctioned citizenship to a sense of global belonging, these solidarities are formed through the

¹⁵³ Ibid., 95.

¹⁵⁴ Sassen, 291.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 318.

tracing of histories and of social and racial identities. With this notion of debordering connected to historical and cultural solidarities in mind, I will conclude this section with a final analysis of Yoon's works based in Seoul along with a live performance work by Korean diasporic artist Insoon Ha (b. 1968, Seoul, Korea). Through the idea of tracing and how it relates to the "gaining of ground" I will position Ha and Yoon's works as efforts to deborder the histories that have shaped their subjections as Korean and Korean Canadian women.

Born in Seoul, Insoon Ha currently lives and works in Toronto. Like Yoon, Ha's works are deeply embedded in the act of recalling cultural histories and negotiating issues of racialization, gender, and migration. In *Face* (2011), Ha produces a silent testimony to the history and legacy of the comfort women in Korea and Japan (fig. 19). An act of tracing a past of patriarchal wrongdoing, Ha, dressed plainly in a black shirt and grey dress, redresses this traumatic history in a window-front gallery space in Hamilton, Ontario. Fixed to the gallery floor are ninety copies of the artist's self-portrait, which she proceeds to methodically wash. As Alice Ming Wai Jim suggests in an exhibition essay of this work, "it is precisely the fear and pain of shame that Ha's performance, using water as a purgative metaphor, attempts to rid as a crucial step towards post-traumatic restoration."¹⁵⁶ This symbolic scrubbing of history recalls not only the shame of public sex and scrutiny carried by comfort women survivors, but also the complacency of the South Korean and American governments in carrying on this colonial system of violence. C. Sarah Soh asserts that the comfort women system is not just a war crime, but is also a failing on the part of Korean nationalism to recognize how women's oppression increased the comfort women's pain. Soh therefore suggests that "to come to terms with their dark history, Koreans must acknowledge their share in the suffering of compatriot women by their silent

¹⁵⁶ Alice Ming Wai Jim, "Faciality, Trauma, and Ambivalence in Performance Art: Insoon Ha's *Monology*," in *Re: Print: a Series of Exhibitions Exploring (Mis) representation and Identity*, ed. Sally Frater (Hamilton, ON: Centre3 for Print and Media Arts, 2012), 47.

collaboration in wartime recruitment and social stigmatization of survivors in liberated Korea.”¹⁵⁷ Ha’s performance is an acknowledgment of this call for Koreans, of all generations, to confront their complacency in this history. Her gesture of washing therefore becomes a performative mode through which to trace the legacy of trauma that haunts the Korean social imaginary: it is an act of attempting to overcome women’s oppressive suffering to gain new ground. Likewise, Yoon’s crawling in *The dreaming collective knows no history* evokes a ground gained through the tracing of the struggles of colonial oppression and subjugation faced by Koreans throughout history. By subjecting her body through physical pain, Yoon memorializes Korean contests against the colonizing powers of the US and Japan, tying herself to these struggles to formulate a separate and united Korean ethnic nationalism against the interloping influences of these former imperial and military colonizers. As Liz Park suggests, in looking at Yoon’s works through converging site-specific historical and political narratives, there is a “wonder if [Yoon] is inscribing invisible stories of her generation – of global migration and transnational subjectivity – onto the loaded sites she covers”¹⁵⁸ – infusing her own sense of her Korean origins to these sites and articulating their histories as part of a wider global discourse.

Ha and Yoon’s works are therefore connected on a deeper level beyond the redressing of Korean history. As both artists are territorially and generationally displaced from these traumas, their performances mediate a level of cultural belonging and of understanding a “place” beyond the borders of Canada, Korea, Japan, and the US. While Ha displaces history by acknowledging it in a Canadian context, Yoon herself is displaced from Korean history through her debordered status as Korean Canadian. In this cultural and national milieu Yoon, able to “pass” as Korean, takes on the status of an interloper – a transnational “outsider:” familiar yet unfamiliar at the

¹⁵⁷ Soh, 236.

¹⁵⁸ L. Park, “Crawl and Trace,” 113.

same time. As Ehlers argues, this understanding that racialized subjects may be able to pass in order to gain a higher civic and social status demonstrates the parameters through which one's racial identity is performed.¹⁵⁹ While Yoon is not participating in a performance of racial passing (due to her being already racially coded as "Korean"), her performance constitutes a civil passing and demonstrates further how hyphenated subjects perform their citizenship by enacting civic duties and affirming daily their rightful place within the nation. No longer tracing the spaces of Canadian territory, Yoon resists interrogations of her "true" citizenship and place of birth and her only ties to Canada in *The dreaming collective* are her subjective status as a Canadian citizen. This negotiation ultimately reveals the shaky grounds upon which the hyphenated status of Korean Canadian is built. Therefore, to perform her Korean Canadian identity in Seoul, Yoon embodies a distinctive spatial position in comparison to bystanders (Korean nationals) in order to evoke her subjective "difference." These works demonstrate how cultural memories of trauma permeate through spatial and temporal borders – inciting new generations of diaspora to investigate and recall history in the tracing of their own debordering of citizenship and sense of a cultural belonging.

¹⁵⁹ Ehlers, 61-62: Ehlers understands passing as anti-discipline, a defying of racial demarcations by assuming qualities – visual and physical – of another race. It is a "leaving behind" of one's prior raced identity to formulate a new one to gain temporary status. It moreover relies on the reader, rather than the actor, to successfully instigate the act. It cannot be performed if the reader does not "read" the passer as the race she may pass for.

Conclusion

The critical task at hand is to open up the discourse by allowing for multiple framings of art by Asians in America. Such an approach would allow for comparative insights into contemporary individual and group trajectories that extend well beyond ... borders.¹⁶⁰

By crawling through sites loaded with the social histories and cultural memories of the Korean War and military and colonial occupation, Jin-me Yoon's video performances call into question the boundaries that produce normative associations of national and civic identity and their various confluences with race. Evoking the spaces of the borderlands, the artist's Korean Canadian body in performance enacts the affinities of exchange, hybridity, and transnationality that are examined against the influence of the entrenched nationalisms of the border. Mediating the effects and discourses of border crossings, racial/civic bodily hierarchies, and the subjective "turn" of diaspora in these works, Yoon's act of crawling is a whatever being performance of "debordered" citizenship, a resistance to essentialist constructs of racial and national citizenship and a shaping of social and cultural belonging as grounds for negotiating one's place within the nation's "imagined community."

I have argued in this thesis that Shimakawa's application of whatever being is a productive framework for critically engaging with performance works by Asian diasporic artists. While Shimakawa privileges live performance for its ability to stage a fleeting, ephemeral moment,¹⁶¹ I argue that video performance can also aptly stage the body as a state of "whatever being" because the video's loop is never experienced by the same sets of viewers in subsequent projections. By the very fact that this performance of whatever being is documented as an

¹⁶⁰ Margo Machida, "New Critical Directions: Transnationalism and Diaspora in Asian American Art," *Notes in the History of Art* 31:3 Special Issue: Cross-Cultural Issues in Art from the Nineteenth Century to the Present (Spring 2012): 24.

¹⁶¹ Shimakawa, 158.

artwork rather than as an ethnographic event, Yoon's embodied state persists.¹⁶² As I read it, when applied to Yoon's works, whatever being produces embodied narratives of subversive resistance to the boundaries of a hyphenated identity and citizenship. Addressing her Korean Canadianness from a material position on the video or projected screen, Yoon carefully and mindfully fashions her body in an attempt to control how it is read, producing, as Judith Butler determines, new cultural and societal conversations rather than maintaining restrictive cultural constraints.¹⁶³ This fashioning of her body subverts a racially articulated civil performance of Korean Canadian that is produced through repeated processes of colonial racial subjugation and societal discipline.¹⁶⁴ Further altering her body's reading through her low-to-the-ground crawling stance, Yoon alludes to notions of abjection that seek to expel and differentiate between certain subjects.¹⁶⁵ Her simultaneously subversive, infantile, and vulnerable position thus exposes the dangers that are associated with colonial systems and bodily hierarchies between citizens. Challenging this system that places her "Koreanness" against her "Canadianness" and forces continual dichotomous negotiations between the two, Yoon's crawling performance does not require her to choose between these sets of selves as if they were separate entities.

Yoon's contest to normative subjugations and racial/civic performance therefore presents itself as a strategy of critique and self-performance, one that enables the artist to trace the boundaries of her hyphenated identity and project a phenomenological experience of bodily movement, her "self" in movement, for the camera/viewer. Taking into consideration the politics of the hyphen, I wish to incite further critical negotiations of performances of Korean Canadian (and to an extent Asian Canadian) as instances of debordered citizenship. While I do not refute

¹⁶² Auslander, 5-6.

¹⁶³ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 127.

¹⁶⁴ Ehlers, 51.

¹⁶⁵ Shimakawa, 150.

the colonial histories the hyphen represents, or its possibility to carry on its marginal effects, I argue that its marker of hierarchal difference against a dominant civil identity that privileges whiteness can alternatively be subverted. My thesis has argued, in this manner, that performances of the Korean Canadian body that challenge racial stereotyping, the histories of anti-Asian discrimination, and the lines of distinction drawn between individual citizens, expose the transnational position of Korean Canadian. By focusing on the experiences and traced cultural memories of Korean Canadians (and other Asian diaspora), this inherent transnationality is shaped by, as Margo Machida suggests, a “historical consciousness,” or a cultural transmission of recollections and experiences of trauma, war, and geopolitical movement; recalled, re-traced, and applied to feelings of cultural belonging and understandings of the self.¹⁶⁶ My analysis of Yoon’s works therefore suggests that citizenship is not a hierarchical legality, but is experienced through social and cultural belonging and subjective connections to social histories that transcend geographical borders.

¹⁶⁶ Machida, *Unsettled Visions*, 126.

Figures



Fig. 1: Jin-me Yoon. Video stills from *The dreaming collective knows no history (U.S. Embassy to Japanese Embassy, Seoul)*, 2008. Single-channel HD video, 18:07, exhibited on loop.



Fig. 2: Jin-me Yoon. Video stills from *As It is Becoming (Beppu, Japan): Kannawa District*, 2008. Single-channel HD video, 22:26, exhibited on loop.

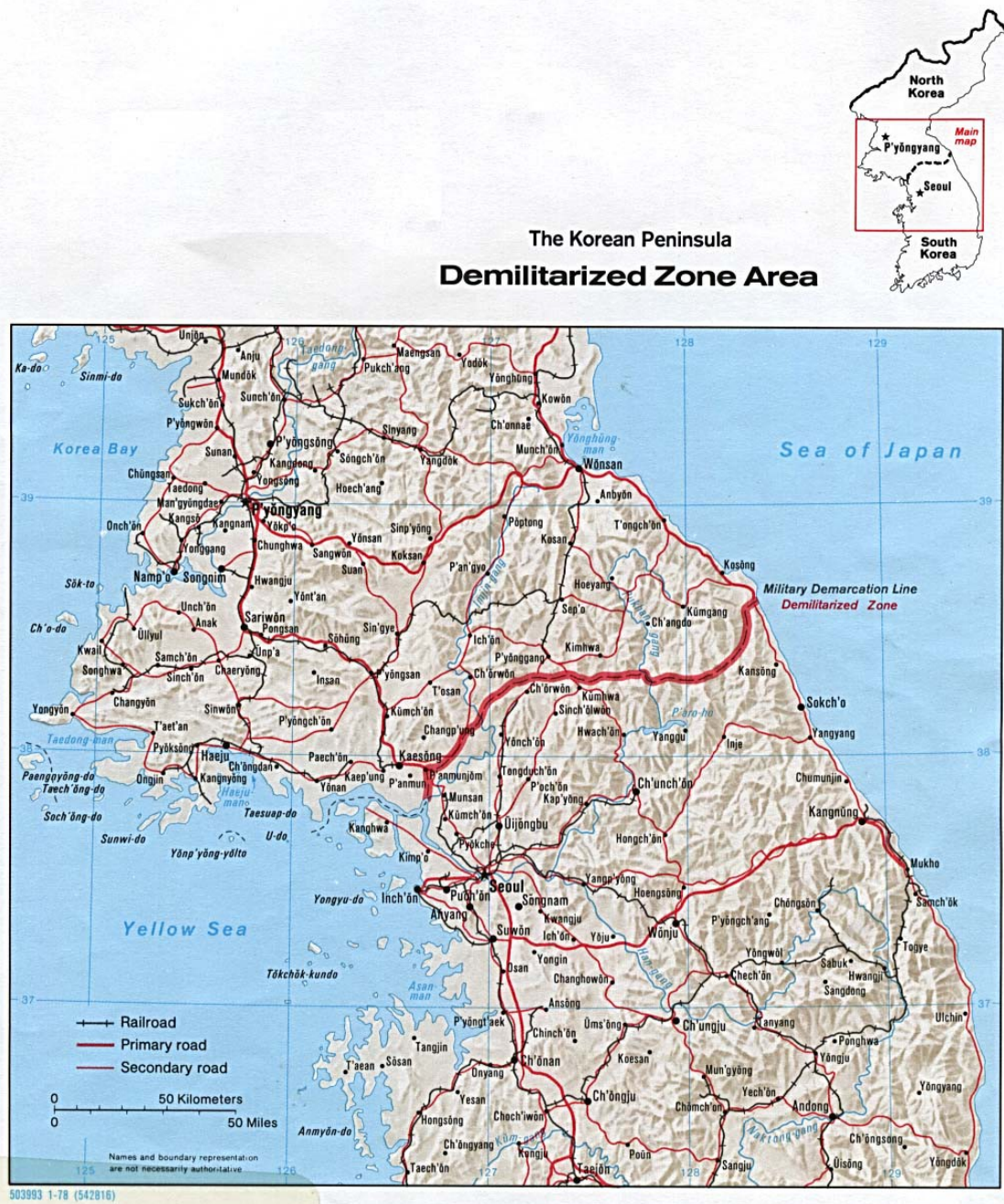


Fig. 3: Map of the Korean Peninsula. “Demilitarized Zone Area,” Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection, The University of Texas at Austin.



Fig. 4: Jin-me Yoon. Video stills from *As It is Becoming* (Beppu, Japan): *Atomic Treatment Centre, Onsen*, 2008. Single-channel HD video, 10:34, exhibited on loop.



Fig. 5: Map of the Ōita Prefecture, Japan, showing the location of the city of Beppu. Google Maps.



Fig. 6: Jin-me Yoon. Video still from *As It is Becoming (Beppu, Japan): Park, former U.S. Army Base*, 2008. Single-channel HD video, 43:18, exhibited on loop.



Fig. 7: Jin-me Yoon. Video stills from *As It is Becoming* (Seoul, Korea): *Teum/Passages Through*, 2008. Single-channel HD video, 18:54, exhibited on loop.



Fig. 8: Map of Seoul, Korea, showing the location of the Itaewon district. Google Maps.



Fig. 9: Jin-me Yoon. Installation shot of *As it is Becoming (Seoul, Korea): Teum/Passages Through*, 2008. 12 HD single-channel videos; video projection and 11 television monitors. Catriona Jeffries Gallery.



Fig. 10: Alvis Parsley. Photo documentation stills from performance *Never Left Canada (Excerpt)*, 2014. Live performance at Concordia University, Montreal, QC, September 26, 2014.

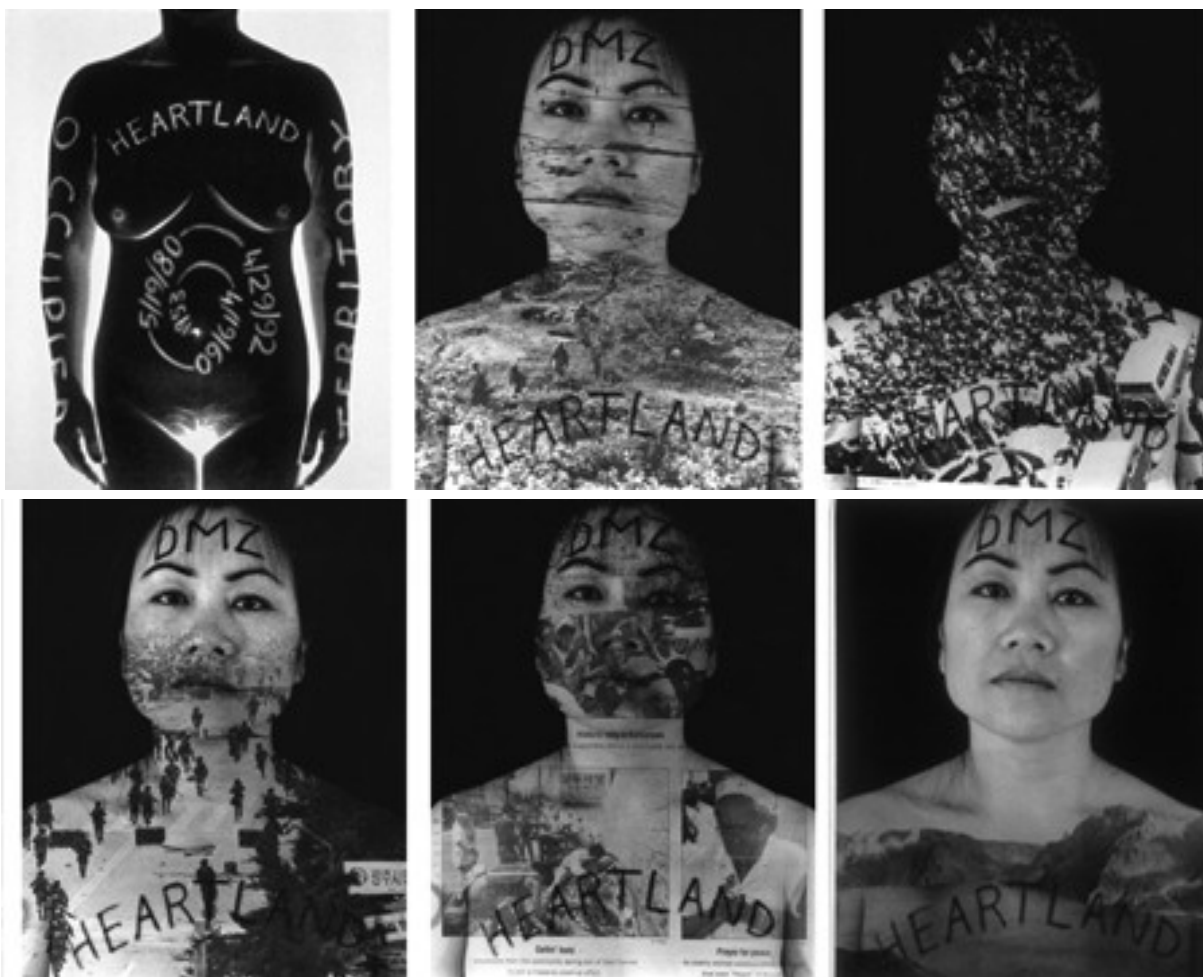


Fig. 11: Yong Soon Min. Six-part photographic installation *Defining Moments*, 1992. First row from left to right: Body image (1/6), Korean War image (2/6), Sa-il-gu uprising image (3/6); Second row from left to right: Gwangju image (4/6), L.A. riots image (5/6), and Mount Paektu image (6/6), all images 20 x 16 inches.

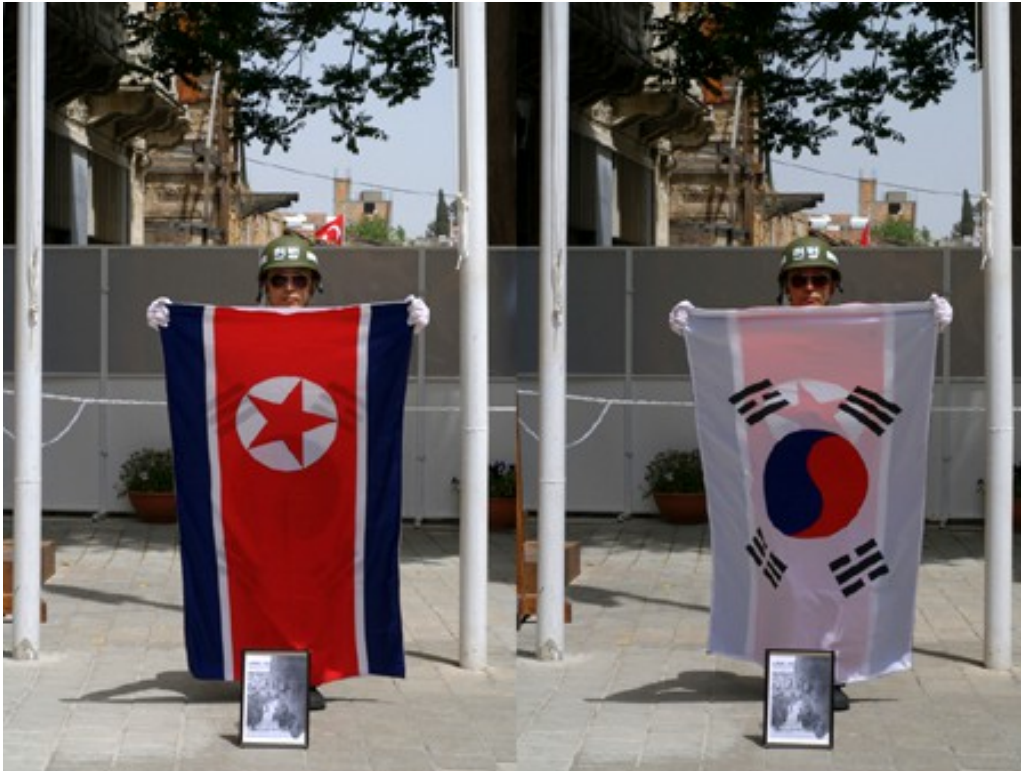


Fig. 12: David Khang. Photo documentation stills from performance *A Wrong Place (Greening the DMZ)*, 2007.



Fig. 13: Jin-me Yoon. *Fugitive (Unbidden) #6*, 2004, colour photograph, 95 x 95 cm.



Fig. 14: Kimsooja. Video stills from *A Needle Woman*, 1999-2009. multi-channel video loop, 6:33, documented in Tokyo, Shanghai, Mexico City, London, Delhi, New York City, Cairo, Lagos, Paris, Patan, Jerusalem, Sana', Havana, Rio de Janeiro, and N'Djamena.



Fig. 15: Kimsooja. Video stills from *A Beggar Woman*, 2000-2001, single-channel video loop, 6:33, documented in Lagos, Cairo, and Mexico City.



Fig. 16: Kimsooja. Video still from *A Homeless Woman*, 2000-2001, single-channel video loop, 6:33, documented in Cairo and Delhi.



Fig. 17: Yayoi Kusama. *Sex Obsession Food Obsession Macaroni Infinity Nets and Kusama*, 1962. Photographed by Hal Reiff.



Fig. 18: David Khang. Photo documentation still from performance *A Measure of War (je me souviens)*, 2010.



Fig. 19: Insoon Ha. Photo documentation from performance *Face*, 2011.

Appendix A

The following is an excerpt from a transcript of an interview with Jin-me Yoon on October 8, 2014.

[...]

Jin-me Yoon (JY): For your thesis, tell me a little bit more about what you are doing.

Victoria Nolte (VN): Of course. My thesis is looking at your video works (*The dreaming collective knows no history (Seoul)*, *As It is Becoming (Beppu)* [...]) and specifically I am interested in the reason behind why you have chosen to crawl in the works. What various meanings can a viewer get from this action? I've been [thinking] about it as some sort of metaphor for transnationality and border crossings.

JY: I like that very much. That's very interesting because one of my methodologies for starting to do this work was because my earlier work was originally thinking about the body as a sign, as a code, and then I started to think about the body as a code but in a different way. How could I actually embody that? My other works, like *Souvenirs of the Self*, are also very much about a subversion through generating questions about what it means to be a national subject, not in a transnational or globalized context. But this new work that I've started to do was also a way that I could undo a certain way of polemically articulating the work beforehand. I also wanted a kind of pre-frontal cortex to be switched for the amygdala. It sounds very strange but it was a kind of experiment and a challenge to myself to see if I could actually embody that experience of corporeality that doesn't negate a kind of cultural reading, but at the same time I wanted to have a more phenomenological tradition, which was a semiotic phenomenology. You know what I mean? I wasn't trying to put one against the other, like an analytic semiotic mode versus an intuitive phenomenological mode. I think in a way my work has always tried to have both of those things side-by-side together. But I wanted to then move it over to a more associational field if you like, which would be what I like to call "lateral explorations/crawling works." I kind of take a long time to get to the ground in my work. This goes off from my work from 2003 where I start using very minimal gestures, a lot of which are in the lexicon of thinking about war and trauma: squatting, jumping – anything that is kind of lower to the ground, etc. This was in my work, "Unbidden." In both the photographs and the video. I guess the long way of answering this question is that, one of the things I think about transnationalism and crossing borders is that I was thinking about those things, but I didn't want to be thinking about them too directly. I didn't want these new video works to be about this, you know? I wanted it to pass through a kind of loose association, almost like going in multiple directions at once so that it would have the ability to also affect somebody's nervous system at the same time.

JY: I was thinking about those problems about crossing borders, especially about people who have a problem with mobility, I don't mean literally because some people thought that the work was about disability and of course, it can depend on who's viewing it, and also the fact that I was born 7 years after the Korean War and many people moved around on those moving platforms when they were injured make you think about those issues of disability and mobility. I'm not denying that. But, part of the work on a metaphoric and geopolitical level was about

mobility and the inability to be mobile. So I'm thrilled for you to say that you are looking at this from a transnational perspective because if I had said something like that directly then the work would get narrowed down to just one register of reading. Do you know what I mean?

VN: I agree.

JY: So that's why I feel very thrilled when you say that your [research] has come to this kind of possibility through looking at the work. That really makes me happy.

VN: I'm glad that I've kind of hit something that you were thinking about, too.

JY: Oh yes, I was thinking about it. And definitely, like I said, in my earlier works there are of course multiple meanings and really they generate more questions that sometimes, like *Souvenirs of the Self* and *A Group of Sixty-Seven*, get taken down to a really base level of "we want to belong too," but my work was always about the terms of inclusion rather than blind inclusion or demanding inclusion. It was also about a lot of other things, but that work got reduced and I thought, okay, I don't want this new body of work that I'm going to start to be directly in relation to that work. Almost in opposition to, but definitely when you make something that generates more thinking and you start thinking about other things. So in reaction to, or perhaps because of it, I thought I want this work to be much more associational and that is also a part of the reason why that one line of inquiry was also about that kind of fixity of the idea of the monument. I've wanted to make myself an alternative kind of memorialization or a process of ephemeral memorialization to embody the ephemeral rather than this kind of fixity of the monument. So that's also really important to me, another kind of associational line of inquiry rather than being "about this or that."

VN: That's really interesting because in talking about the video works as sort of lateral explorations, I'm curious to know if this is the way that you personally classify these works or if you can possibly classify them in another manner. I've noticed a few reviewers like Liz Park, who wrote about the works, have called them "performances" or "video performances". How far off the mark would that be to describe the works as such?

JY: I think that's a really apt description because from the beginning my work was always for the camera. It was staged for the camera. I mean, this work not have been done unless it was for the camera. I'm not a performance artist, but I've been asked to do performances at performance festivals and things like that, but I don't perform like that. It's not about that. It's about the camera and also, you know, about how the camera changes our subjectivity in terms of how we see ourselves, and others, and also how our entire subjectivities have been shaped by those technologies. I'm also interested in how we survey with t.v. cameras, how we identify and how we mark, you know, different kinds of bodies, racialized bodies, racial profiling – to name one example. So for me, the definition of video performances emphasizes the idea of the camera and even traces it back to my interests, earlier, in the photographic works, this idea of performative aspects in front of the camera. Whether it is standing; for me, this is performative. So I think video performances are apt because this definition emphasizes the idea of the medium and the camera itself.

VN: And on that note, about performing for the camera and the aspects of performativity, I was also really curious about any bystander responses to the works as you were doing them on the site. Did you experience anyone interrupting you or looking at you funny, or anything like that? I thought about this because you are moving in a very public space so I thought there could be some sort of reaction to it.

JY: Yes, and that's a really good question that brings us back to exactly what we were talking about before. It's the presence of the camera in our culture that allows us to do certain things. And because the camera is visible, most of the time when I'm doing this work people seem to kind of have a doubled or a perception of it being sanctioned. Somehow what I'm doing is okay because I'm shooting it with the camera. Simultaneously, people think, "this is really strange, why is this person doing this?" So I like this kind of relationship to something that is so ubiquitous in our culture, which gives us a kind of legitimacy to do something because it's been for consumption, viewing, whatever. In a culture that is so used to cameras and how we take images and how we replay them back on the screen – that seems to be a kind of way that people seem to be okay about it. And other people, at the same time rather, are the "incidental viewer" is what I call them, I've kind of coined that term. I never react to what other people are going to do unless they're going to standing in front of me or something like that. I'm just doing it for the camera, I'm also doing it for the experience because when I narrow my field of vision to what is directly in front of me I have a different kind of relationship to site. When we stand up we can see a much greater field and I surmise that that gives us a greater sense of mastery. When you're down there you're really limiting that line of vision you're more vulnerable, but at the same time you're really opened up to a new way of experiencing movement or that particular spatial situation, you know, where you are. So I think that viewer responses are very different because it depends on that relation to the camera and how intense it is, as one factor, and also culturally, historically, where I am that determines people's expectations and how they react to me.

JY: One thing I did notice in Seoul, Korea is that when I didn't have the camera, or when it wasn't visible, people would think I was mentally ill or they would be more afraid of me. So it was because of that assurity of the camera legitimizing the spectacle, the event, or whatever's happening that makes people more vulnerable, to think immediately that I must have something wrong with me. It calls up more fear in them.

VN: I'm also kind of wondering, too, if some of these reactions are cultural specific? I'm wondering if you noticed any differences between reactions in each of the sites you were in.

JY: Yes, definitely. And it's definitely because of my body too. I read as "Asian" so if I'm in Korea they think that I'm Korean. Of course, they're having all sorts of other associations because there is so much paranoia about North Korean spies crawling. I don't think it's really rational, but it's definitely there. Also, I'm not racialized in the same way, right? I mean, these are just generalizations so I wouldn't want you to make a tight and fast comment about these kinds of things because you have to be careful. But I think that in Japan people definitely don't want to talk about it too much. And it's all not uniform either. For example, in Korea I was moving up a place called "Hooker Hill" – a lot of the sites I choose are very historically loaded you know, in terms of meaning.

VN: Oh yes, I know. I'm still going through the process of unpacking a lot of those meanings.

JY: Exactly. So Hooker Hill was a place where Korean women had to work with their bodies as sex trade workers and it was near a U.S. Army base and so when I was crawling up the hill it was very difficult. I couldn't see them, all I could hear was their English, but I heard three men talking about me coming up towards them. They were talking about jumping and "beating the shit out of him" and things like this. And this was scary. But I knew that the camera person would intervene and I usually have one or two people with me looking out for traffic so I thought, "okay, I'm covered." But as I got closer they figured out that I was a woman and they said "holy beep beep it's a girl, it's a girl" and then they said something sort of derogatory about me and left. So there are times when it got quite intense like that, when people are threatened and what have you. Now in that case I have no idea who these men were or what they looked like because they were kind of back a little further. I just heard them as I was going by and they were too far back for the camera to pick up. So you see, I mean, they were obviously English speaking and they may have been army personnel because that is an area where there has been historically and to this day a U.S. army presence. Who knows!

JY: In Japan, of course, I don't look different, I look perhaps Japanese, but Korea and Japan have had such complex relations so there is that factor. But people tend to be much more polite. They don't want to say too much so they just look and then quickly look away. And then in Mexico City, people were energetically engaging with me. The whole crowd would come around me if I stopped and I was not prepared for that – I was actually quite overwhelmed with that. I tried to not focus on that too much, on that reaction. And then in Vienna people would look at me but, at that time, there was an election going on and there were Neo-fascists wanting to return Austria to the "Motherland" and were hostile to immigration. I remember – my friends were translating some of the signs – I had my daughter and my niece with me while I was working there and I remember my daughter being upset because as they were cycling around they observed one of these Neo-fascist rallies. So in that context, being Asian, what meanings do I generate with my body? People would often laugh or sometimes they would talk about it. So it varies from place depending on the cultural differences, depending on how my body reads in that context, etc. etc. Right?

VN: Definitely. And I think it's also interesting that, going back to the incident you described that happened in Korea, that those men at first didn't read you as a female body. Is it maybe because of how you dress yourself for the videos? Because you are usually dressed all in black and it's kind of non-descript so I think that is also a very interesting layer to the videos as well.

JY: Yes, and I did want something that was neutral, but something that could be contemporary so that I could stand up and you could see me just walking around in that outfit. I wanted something that was kind of like a uniform as well. But also, I just wanted to be read as gender ambiguous. So those things, like my other works, I plan very carefully in terms of how I can control how I am read but also keep it very loose and ambiguous so that people can project more onto it.

VN: I just wanted to also clarify, for my own notes, [where have you recorded these works?]

JY: So far, where I have done this work, is Seoul. And I think it had to be Seoul because that's where I was having a residency and I began thinking about going down to the ground and start thinking about gesture. The idea of repetition is very important to me and I was thinking about video more actively in terms of a durational medium. Seoul was a good fit because it is so hyper-technological. There are screens connected to skyscrapers. And of course I was born there like I said 7 years after the war so I saw it when it was rubble, lateral. It wasn't vertical. So that's where I got this idea of questioning verticality and I decided to challenge myself by actually getting lateral, or horizontal. This whole idea that upwards is better, you know from an evolutionary narrative, looks at how the body transitions from crawling to standing and this demonstrates more mastery over the body. So Seoul was where I started for many of these reasons.

JY: The next place I went to was Beppu because I was invited to do some work there. I was interested in Beppu because of the intense relationship between Korea and Japan, but also because Beppu is near Hiroshima and played a big role in terms of healing radiation sickness. It has geothermal activity and an incredible hot springs culture, like a really deep, body-centric culture. And the next place I did this work was I believe Mexico City. There I actually wanted to play with extending my body and I wanted to use something kind of synthetic, something that I could get my hands on easily and move around. So I used black plastic, which of course in Mexico City holds a specific meaning that I kind of didn't want to acknowledge. I knew in the back of my head, but it's one of those things I willfully want to repress so I can actually do it without over thinking it. And then I think I did one in Vancouver during the Winter Olympics and that was actually interesting because that was kind of the scariest situation for me because I was so afraid of being shot, if you can believe it. I know it sounds very irrational, but they had all these snipers apparently and they were worried about terrorists. They spent so much money on security so in Vancouver it felt very much like a military town and very surveillance heavy. Because I did it around the Vancouver Art Gallery right downtown I was nervous about doing that particular piece. I worried, "oh god, I hope they don't think I'm trying to do something weird."

JY: And then I think the last place I did it in was Nagoya. The Japanese really like my work and they invite me to do residencies and help produce the work. So in Nagoya I wanted to, again, reflect a culture that is very synthetic and also, paradoxically, really values nature. I think I have done it in 6 places. I'm also working on a project right now and have been working on it for a few years in Jeju, where that terrible ferry accident happened, and I'm not sure exactly whether I'm going to do some sort of lateral exploration or what I've been doing here with the crawling.

JY: I've actually recently returned to photography because, after all that movement, I wanted to make a series that takes the focus off of myself because there is just too much of that phenomenon going on now with, you know, the idea of the "selfie." I did a photographic series recently with pieces of black rubber.

VN: Oh yes! I saw those works recently in a magazine.

JY: Oh that's good! Where was that published?

VN: In *BlackFlash* magazine. It was an interview. It just came out in their September issue.

JY: Okay, perfect. So yes. 6 places I've done the video works in.

VN: That's great. So the next thing I've been thinking about to get your perspective on, is that I am looking at your works through a framework of Asian Canadian Studies, which I'm sure as you know is a field that is continuing to establish methodologies for examining the experiences of Asians in Canada. Do you see yourself, or your artistic practice, as part of an Asian Canadian art history, and, if, so, how do envision what that sort of thing would entail?

JY: That's a really big question.

VN: Yes, I know! I'm sorry!

JY: Yes, it is a really big question. Well, I guess for me, I hope to have made a contribution to an experience of being an immigrant and of being physically from another place, especially in terms of a transnational subjectivity and other complex relationships to nationalism. You know, obviously transnationalism is a peculiar, complex position, even now given the good and bad aspects of globalization. I feel both affirmative and ambivalent at the same time. That's kind of a general condition. I think that my earlier work really tried to look at unpacking the terms of inclusion and then this work tries to look at mobility and movement with a geopolitical or historically specific relationship to the places where I've done the work. And I don't mean history as a kind of documentary. I'm kind of a natural abstractor so I've done a lot of research, but I don't want the work to be about that, I want it to be kind of about a capacity to channel all of those things into a different kind of experience for the viewer. So on one hand I think this experience is from a diasporic transnational experience, but I'm not sure, just like I believe that there is no such a thing as feminist art, but I think that there are artists who are feminist. I'm not sure I would want my work to be categorized as "Asian Canadian art." It is art made by an Asian Canadian. It is hard to escape that subjectivity of course because, even when people are not specified as a specific identity, like Rodney Graham, he can encounter everything, he can be anything because his work is supposedly neutral, whereas I'm codified and marked. So for me I resist that idea that I am an Asian Canadian artist. I'm an artist who is Asian Canadian. That's a very big distinction for me and I have no problems with the affirmative dimensions of articulating my work in relation to Asian Canadian studies, but on the other hand, I don't want to be limited as an artist by using the labels which then hinder the possibility of me becoming a "full subject." You know what I mean? In terms of my being an artist, I don't think that I will be a neutral artist, that is unmarked, because I don't believe any artist is, but there is the way that certain people can circulate in that vein because of these obvious historical reasons in terms of Canada and our racist immigration histories and racialization in the process. Like I said, I think I have both affirmative and ambivalence.

VN: And I think that is the sentiment that a lot of Asian Canadian scholars have, or scholars of Asian Canadian Studies have, that there is this real fear of further marginalization and further racialization in creating this category because that is almost how this identity has been formed because we've kind of posited Canadian identity as a "white settler" identity and anything that goes against that has to be defined in relation to that.

JY: And I think that has a real impact on your ability to be taken seriously by a greater number of curators and viewers when that is continually happening to you – you’re a special category. You don’t ever get to be “an artist.” And that has hurt me, for sure. And I see how other people have completely avoided it to their benefit, and most of them have been men.

VN: Yes, there are many layers to it.

JY: But on the other hand, I am also affirmative because I feel, especially because of my historical formation of when I came to Canada and when I emerged as an artist, those actions needed to be performed. This was quite affirming too. Although, it was always quite doubled for me. But I also don’t think I want to dis-identify with that nomenclature either because I know what that comes out of and historically, I think that was an important intervention.

VN: Yes, I have been reading a lot on early Asian Canadian cultural activism, especially in the 60s and 70s and I think that at the time it was definitely necessary for that intervention. But now we have to kind of rethink how to frame it and I think that is a lot of what Asian Canadian Studies is doing. It’s not one of those things that is completely institutionalized as much as Asian American Studies is. This is what I’ve noticed in my research, just the brevity of literature on Asian American art and Asian American literature and cultural production is just so much greater than Asian Canadian and I’ve been thinking about how to start framing these things. Of course I’m coming from outsider perspective as well so I always have to be kind of grounded in this “Canadian” aspect and I have a very different relationship to these issues.

JY: But I also think now in terms of different configurations, that is why, in a way, I had to change my strategy. Because I noticed a huge change after I made *A Group of Sixty Seven*, which was in 1996. So I noticed that, even before that, there was a greater focus on global perspectives due to the accessibility of travel, the Internet, and in terms of how people and goods are moved around the globe. It just became a totally different relationship to my concern for national identity because when I came I was definitely the “outsider” and it wasn’t like you come to Canada, or Vancouver, now in terms of the Pacific Rim. It is a totally different culture people immigrated to and that does not necessarily make it any easier or harder, but it’s very much a different cultural framework in terms of what is expected of you. It was much more assimilationist then, when I first came here. I think there’s still racism but I think a lot of it has to do with how much access you have to capital. It’s all about class or wealth; whether you have or have not. And it always was but it wasn’t articulated in the same way.

[...]

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