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Master's Thesis of Fine Arts

Beyond The Gaze
Formative Function of “I”

시선 너머에
“I”의 형성을 중심으로

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Abstract

Beyond The Gaze: Formative Function of “I”

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My work pertains to notions of life and self-identification. It plays upon the notion of dreams and deals with issues of self-identification and the social influences that affect how a personality is constructed. I am exploring a range of possibilities, from metamorphosis to transformation to questioning the construction of a self relayed through nature, animal masks, childhood toys and stories as the means to communicate my concerns.

Between the reality of existence and the search for truth the vitality of my art practice is tempered. The purpose of our existence is not to meet the expectations we create of an idealized world, but to destroy the strength and virtue of ideals. The essence of life then is to search and the artistic concerns in my art are the struggles of self. Social goals may continue for generations, but they are initially

expressed through individuals.

This thesis is divided into three parts. First, INTRO part discusses the influences of the study, personal acculturation experience and artists researches relate to politics of self and constructed identity. Second, WORKS part presents ten art works produced during MFA. In order to contemplate formative function of “I” in my art practice; a double ambivalence is involved in narcissism and mirror stage. Constructed identity is the concept of the total from diverse disciplines in all the aspects of this study. Ten art works are divided into three parts; Identity through repeated actions, Politics of identity through symbol and place, and Identity revealed in motion. Lastly, concludes with FINDINGS.

In this thesis **bold** fonts are used to emphasize main points. MFA graduation art works stated <<Title>>, art works by other artists or works during BFA and other works marked <Title>. To facilitate understanding of the works made during graduate school, 2.4 LIST OF WORKS shows the images of works.

Keyword : Politics of Self, Acculturation, Social Influence, Ambivalence, Constructed Identity, Mirror Stage, Narcissism

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I. INTRO

I believe understanding identity is like reading a pattern. East Asian culture educates young children through storytelling to see the two rabbits embedded within the moon, while Western culture sees a man in the moon. Lacan describes this type of cultural process as the mirror stage, where the child takes on the **language and belief systems from the other** and tries to accommodate its fantasy of the other¹. Lacan's theories also test the construct of identity where he regularly visits the concept of hysteria, reality and fantasy. These ideas suggest that social conditioning shapes reality, determines the formation of self and the construction of identity. Identity is predictable because it is a product of **learned responses**. Lacan suggests that the self is imaginary—a construct. As he put it, we only have self in our discourses².

The works that I will be using as reference points in my studio projects are Franz Kafka's story < *The Metamorphosis* > (German : Die Verwandlung), the film < *Being John Malkovich* > directed by Spike

¹ Lacan, Jaques. *Ecrits*. 1996. In B. Fink Ed. And Trans (New York: Norton, 2002) p.76

² Lacan, Jaques. *Ecrits* p. 202

Jonze in 1999, Vito Acconci's seventies videos³ and Matthew Barney's < *Cremaster series* >⁴, all focusing in varying degrees on the **politics of self**. The artists I am looking at align well with the ideas of the self that I would like to explore in my artworks. Thematically I would like to discover an avenue for expressing and identifying the self. Their works are a complex web of the physical and psychological aspects that I believe are similar to the ideas I hold about self-identification.

Franz Kafka's novella < *The Metamorphosis* > explores aspects of perception with identity. It begins the story of *Gregor Samsa*, who wakes up to find himself transformed into a gigantic bug. This is a frightening metamorphosis and would make most people wonder how they might be able to return to their normal bodies, or whether they could survive in this repulsive form. In this scenario, the reader is confronted with a protagonist who is more concerned about the easiest way in which to get used to being an insect. His family, however, could

³ Vito Acconci's 70's monologue video <Undertone>, <Theme Song>, <My Word> presents a parallel and a contrast to human yearnings. Viewers are confronted with this startling baring of his soul. They do not have a two-way communication with him but are bombarded by his thoughts and his words consequently there is no way of reflecting back to him of who the audience deems him to be. His startling gesture confronts the audience as voyeur, and viewers can only accept his desperate plea for what it is.

⁴ Matthew Barney's *Cremaster Cycle* 1995 – 2002 presents the processes of sexual differentiation. He manipulates the idea of the body as a fluid universe of its own and these films reconcile the idea of identification and the preconditioned idealism of sexual differentiation.

not help but change their attitude towards him. He is unable to contribute financially as an insect, therefore he becomes a burden. Even his beloved sister announces her extreme disgust over his transformation but what kills him in the end, ironically, is not the fact that he has become a bug. His death was not directly due to this shift, but because his community was unable to accept him in this new form and rejected his extreme change.

Human existence is predominantly shaped by the events in which society will award approval or sanction. The sad irony is that healthy self-love is also dependent on this fact of social acceptance. This begs the question, **“Are we who we deem ourselves to be, but a reflection of how others see or value us?”**

The film directed by Spike Jonze < *Being John Malkovich* > (Fig. 1) is another example of work that comments on the perpetual question of self. I believe the physical transformation of self causes a catalytic change to the perception of identity. It may be that identity is like a **protective shell**, which more significantly, is a type of narcissistic delusion of how these various personas are perceived by others. In other words, our identity is what we are on the outside, the cover, the mask or the shell. In my opinion once this image is complete the mind begins to absorb the person others perceive us to be. Perhaps this evidences the **frailty** of the human psyche. How vulnerable it can be if

an identity is fractured, created or manipulated by outside influences and the certainty of identity dependent on the agency of others.

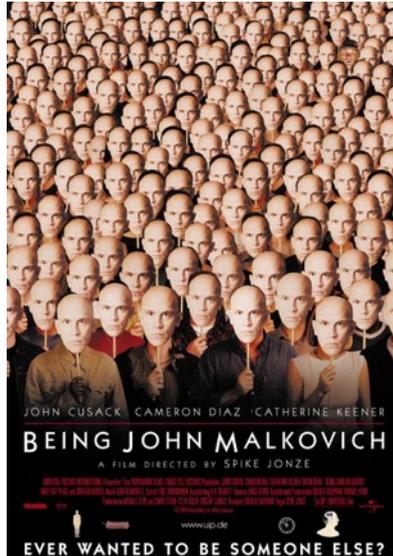


Figure 1. Spike Jonze < Being John Malkovich > movie poster, 1999. Gramercy Pictures, USA.

I come to the conclusion that a ‘whole’ identity is formed only with the solace of acceptance. Their works explore a range of possibilities, from metamorphosis to transformation to questioning the construction of the self. These dilemmas raise many issues including whether individuals can be individuals if they ignore their true voice and pretend to be something other than who they are. These artists have all had different approaches to this question, Acconci baring all and communication through his honesty, whereas Barney creates a fantasy world, to in essence, destroy the cultural construct of how perceptions

of identity are carved out, while Kafka's *Gregor Samsa* succumbed to rejection. These ideas run much in parallel to the theme I would like to present, this journey of self-identification and acceptance of self. This is beyond mere physics. In this thesis I deal with issues of self-identification and the social influences that affect how identity is constructed.

1.1 PREFACE

I intend to explore personal identity or the self through my art practice focusing in varying degrees on the politics of self. When I was young in Korea I was told that there are two rabbits in the moon, pounding away making moon cakes. In teaching children to see rabbits in the moon, I learned or was force to read a certain pattern in the Moon. East Asian culture educates young children through storytelling to see the two rabbits embedded within the moon, while Western culture sees a man in the moon.

I believe **understanding identity is like reading a pattern**. Our own self-identity or the "I" is a social construct and shaped by the society. I see animals as an embodiment of a sense of our own mortality and in my work << Rabbit in the Moon>> (Fig. 2) I literally transform myself into this social construct. I too, was coerced as a child to learn or read certain patterns in the moon. The performance subsequently

allows the audience an insight into another aspect of the rabbit as a being on its own right. It is both a rabbit in the moon and a rabbit that has never been to the moon. This is a form of challenge to society's construct of the myth. In it, I play Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata* and as the title of the music suggests, the rabbit acknowledges its existence within the moon; it does not reject its environment. I had special lessons in which I was taught to play the piece "**the way it should be played**". My intention was to **capture the learned responses** to performing this piece.

When I first visited New Zealand my tour guide told me that *Rangitoto* Island looks the same from any angle. At the same time, it can be dangerous and erupt at any time. This image of a perfectly formed island is the stereotype. The journey to *Rangitoto* Island allowed me to explore **dual self-identity**, but from the point of view of others. Then from a random spot toward the end of the day, the island appeared as a completely different shape and I found an element of bare beauty (Fig. 3). This is another form of self-reflection. Instead of becoming the social construct as in << A Rabbit in the Moon >>, in << Excuse me while I disappear >> the real or actual self-identity (a potentially dangerous volcanic island) was assumed (a perfectly formed mystical island).

In Lacanian terms, identification can be described as an example of **Captation**⁵, a process in which an object in the external world so captivates the subject that it becomes a component in that self-image. The German word **gestalt**⁶ means pattern or figure, *Gestalt* refers to our perception of a form whose meaning exceeds the totality of its components a *gestalt* is always greater than the sum of its parts. But importantly, *gestalt* is a pattern of meaningful forms. I presume the imago with which the infant identifies in the miffed⁷ is a kind of *Gestalt*. Before I began the filming, I sincerely believed and hoped that the island would be the same. I wanted to believe the fantasy of a mythical island, a dominant volcano with a perfect form.

⁵ Captation is a process in which an object in the external world (most frequently another person) so “captivates” the subject that it becomes a component in that self-image. e.g. Identification (Lacan, 2000, *The Mirror Stage*, In P. Gay, J. Evans, and P. Redman. (Eds.). *In Identity: a reader*, pp. 44 - 50)

⁶ Gestalt means “pattern” or “figure” in German. It refers to our perception of a form whose meaning exceeds the totality of its components (Lacan, 2000, *The Mirror stage*. In P. Gay, J. Evans, and P. Redman. (Eds.). *In Identity: a reader*, pp. 44 - 50)

⁷ It appears to him as the contour of his stature that freezes it and in a symmetry that reverses it, in opposition to the turbulent movements with which the subject feels he animates it...This gestalt is also replete with the correspondences that unite the I with the statue onto which man projects himself, the phantoms that dominate him, and the automaton with which the world of his own making tends to achieve fruition in an ambiguous relation. (Lacan, (1996). *Écrits*. In B. Fink (Ed. And Trans.). New York: Norton, 2002. pp.76-77)

Video art is a form of documentation of facts and it is time consuming. But at the same time, it can be very emotional because it is highly **confrontational**. While video art and performance art is free of boundaries, I am open to the possibility of a rejection. This possibility of a rejection for me, though scary, is definitely intriguing.

<<Excuse me while I disappear>> was a documentation of its real physical shape. But because it observes self-identity from the perspective of others, it is a wholly honest and confrontational process of self-identification. For this work, I think video was an honest documentation. But <<A Rabbit in the Moon>> was a completely indulgent process of self-identification. I chose one angle because I wanted the audience to see the rabbit, not myself. I was in complete control of what was revealed to the viewer. For this work, video as a medium was **manipulative and superficial** form of expression.



Figure 2. < A Rabbit in the moon > Digital video projection, 13 min 45 sec, 2009



Figure 3. < Excuse me while I disappear_You look different> Video still 2009

II. WORKS

2.1 Identity through repeated actions

The inherent nature of a pinwheel is manifested only when the material object and the wind meet. Here, I interpret the wind in two senses. I recall the ambiguity of the Korean word *baram*: “wind” and “expectations.” While the pinwheel in reality that we see meets the wind, the pinwheel in my artwork < Pinwheel > (Fig.4) meets hair. Like “following nature and doing nothing” (*wuwei ziran*) (無爲自然) in Daoism⁸ (Taoism, 道家), the wind has no intention⁹. Consequently, the pinwheel functions well.

⁸ While modern scholars, especially those in the West, have been preoccupied with classifying Daoist material as either “philosophical” or “religious,” historically Daoists themselves have been uninterested in such categories and dichotomies. Instead, they have preferred to focus on understanding the nature of reality, increasing their longevity, ordering life morally, practicing ruler ship, and regulating consciousness and diet. Fundamental Daoist ideas and concerns include *wuwei* (“effortless action”) (無爲), *ziran* (“naturalness”) (自然), how to become a *shengren* (“sage”) (圣人) or *zhenren* (“realized person”) (賢者), and the ineffable, mysterious *Dao* (“Way”) itself.

⁹ “Sage. does not intercede; natural law operates spontaneously and without impediments so that order is established harmoniously among human beings as well as between humans and Nature and humans and Heaven. Cosmogonic metaphors, connected with mythological themes-those of Chaos and of the Mother-call for a Return to the heart of primordial undifferentiation, to Childhood, and on a social scale, to the happy and harmonious anarchy of our original condition”. Robinet, Isabelle. (1997). *Taoism Growth of a Religion*, In Phyllis Brooks (Ed. And Trans). California: Stanford University Press, pp. 28 - 52

<Pinwheel> (Fig. 4. A paper weather vane from a childhood toy) the vane moves with the wind, and without wind it loses its function. I like the idea that **a weather vane is not a weather vane without the wind.** “I” too, is an intriguing concept that is both flexible and fragile and refuses to settle as a single concrete image.

Socialization occurs by way of interaction and the learning of language and the individual falls into the particular values and norms of the group. An important part of the Mirror stage¹⁰ is the love of oneself, or primary narcissism. This feeling of admiration for oneself is derived

¹⁰ The idea of the "mirror stage" is an important early component in Lacan's critical reinterpretation of the work of Freud. Drawing on work in physiology and animal psychology, Lacan proposes that human infants pass through a stage in which an external image of the body (reflected in a mirror, or represented to the infant through the mother or primary caregiver) produces a psychic response that gives rise to the mental representation of an "I". The infant identifies with the image, which serves as a gestalt of the infant's emerging perceptions of selfhood, but because the image of a unified body does not correspond with the underdeveloped infant's physical vulnerability and weakness, this imago is established as an Ideal-I toward which the subject will perpetually strive throughout his or her life (Zuern, John David, Lacan: The Mirror Stage, CriticalLink <<http://www.english.hawaii.edu/criticallink/lacan/index.html>>)

from the love a baby receives from its mother during the Real stage¹¹. This is the segment in a person's development that sets the standard upon which the Symbolic stage¹² perpetuates. For me this element of narcissism is not just a one-off incident but one that reoccurs intermittently throughout one's life through acts of self-reflection. It is this initial sense of narcissism that allows a self not only to strive to be that predetermined notion of "I" but also to understand others and be part of society.

¹¹ There are two main stages in the growth of consciousness, which follow an initial and undifferentiated state designated as the Real. These stages are known as the Imaginary and the Symbolic orders. The human baby is recognize itself in a mirror at an early age, even when he may be outdone by a chimpanzee in instrumental intelligence. The monkey will soon lose interest in the images as it is meaningless but the child is captured by the movement and play between his/her reflected image and environment. The identification with its reflection gives the baby pleasure although the infant remains completely dependent. Transformation occurs in the psyche as the infant assumes his/her specular image. According to Lacan, the *I* is triggered in a primordial, pre-lingual form before it is ultimately objectified in identification with the other and before language restores to it its function as subject (Lacan, (1996). *Ecrits*. In B. Fink (Ed. And Trans.). New York: Norton, 2002. p.75 - 81)

¹² The Imaginary phase involves a pre-linguistic stage of consciousness, which focuses on the visual recognition of images, while the Symbolic phase deals with the subject's entry into and formation by language (Harrison & Woods, 2003, p. 620) Each stage co-exists and influences the other in varying degrees throughout the lifetime.

The hair in my work, on the contrary, reflects and represents expectations. This signifies the stereotype that I inserted in the hair objet for << Knot >> (Fig. 5) As a result, the pinwheel loses its function.



Figure 4. < Pinwheel > Video still 2014-2015

Do we look at the same moon? Although two people are looking at the same moon, it looks different for each person. As Bertrand Russell mentions in his book titled *The Problems of Philosophy*¹³, **perspective** is affected by light. When we look at a desk, we may believe at first that the entire specific surface of the desk is “**actually**” of the same brown color. However, because certain parts that reflect

¹³ The painter has to unlearn the habit of thinking that things seem to have the color which common sense says they “really” have, and to learn the habit of seeing things as they appear. Here we have already the beginning of one of the distinctions that cause most trouble in philosophy—the distinction between ‘appearance’ and ‘reality,’ between what things seem to be and what they are (Russell, 1997, *The Problems of Philosophy*, p. 9)

light change, the color distribution of the surface of the desk, too, will clearly change. Russell states that, as a result, even when many people look at the same desk simultaneously, no two individuals can see the precisely same distribution of colors at the same time. It is because no two people can look at the desk from the exactly same perspective, and the ways in which light is reflected invariably changes according to the perspective. Similarly, in my view, even if we think that society gives the same expectations to individuals who belong to it, those expectations are not identical. In my view, the function of a pinwheel is to spin when blown on by the wind.

The environment in which a human is born and raised and the **language** that he/she experiences and learns enables the individual to function in the society to which he or she belongs. To me, a pinwheel that is still is not a pinwheel. The instrument becomes a pinwheel only after it has encountered the wind. The relationship between the wind and a pinwheel can be seen as an analogy for the relationship between the environment and me. It is because I, too, am revealed only after I have encountered the environment. However, this wind is different from the environment as well.

Looking at a pinwheel function as it is blown on by the wind, I am reminded of “following nature and doing nothing,” the Daoist (Taoist) thought of East Asia. Because nature (wind) does not involve any **contrived** or **purposive** action, there accordingly seems to be no problem with the pinwheel, which is affected by the former. What would happen, however, if action instead of non-action were involved? Here, I change the natural “wind” (baram) to its Korean homonym “expectations” (baram), which signifies **anticipation**. It is because the environment with which I have a relationship likewise can be conceived of in terms of both non-action and action. This other baram is linked to the meaning of the hair objet used in my work << Knot >>. Through a pinwheel made of hair, I revealed myself in a relationship with an environment possessing purposive action. This hair pinwheel’s loss of its function is linked to the concept of constraint in << Knot >> (Fig. 5).

I have a memory of my mother, who would sit in front of the mirror and braid my hair in two parts or one. My day as an elementary student, started with my mom’s gentle touch, neatly fixing my hair every busy morning. On entering middle school, my long hair had to be cut according to school regulations, my trademark long hair no longer allowed. Afterwards, I moved to New Zealand and finished my middle and high school education there, where I gradually got to forget the

social regulations which shaped me, such as the hairstyle regulations, while living among a variety of races. As an adult, I have moments when I look at my students and wonder why their hairstyles have changed so little, despite the lifting of the hairstyle regulations.

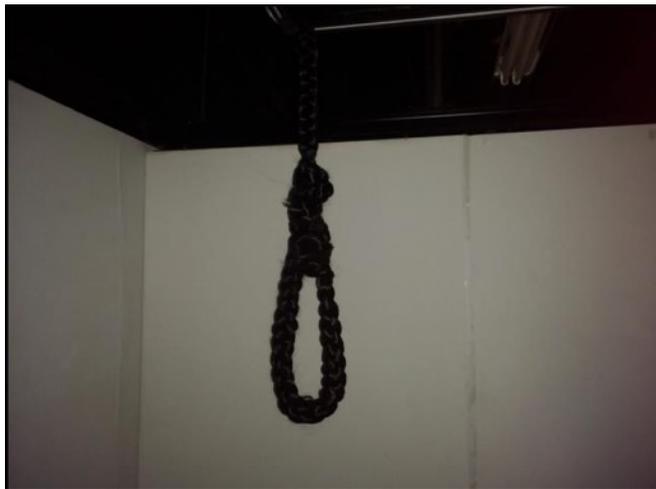


Figure 5. << Knot >> Hair installation 2014

The noose in this installation, << Knot >>, was created by repeatedly braiding hairs to create knots, and to show that even hairstyles, which mirror personal identities, are products of the society. Even after becoming adults, the students who have been free from the hairstyle regulation are not free from the established social and external expectations. The repetition of the act of **knotting** strands of hair is what made this **noose**.

The video work < Lady Onion > (Fig. 17) is me trying to get rid of my layers and masks and being naked. However the mask I have inside me is heavily layered through time and the masks I wear are my second skin. The **struggle** with myself and the relationships between myself and others can never be fully and honestly naked. In this video I am trying to uncloth over and over again but same clothes are underneath. I feel this is me keeping on trying to get rid of myself. I believe identity is like a protective shell, it is a type of narcissistic delusion of how these various personas are perceived by others. The sad irony is that healthy self-love is also dependent on the fact of social acceptance.

*Narcissism*¹⁴ or consuming self-love is a type of egotism that does not appear to need others. An important part of *Mirror stage* is the love of oneself, or primary narcissism. For me this **element of narcissism is not just a one-off incident but one that reoccurs intermittently throughout one's life** through acts of self-reflection. It is this initial sense of narcissism that allows a self not only to strive to be that predetermined notion of "I" but also to understand others and be part of society.

¹⁴ Narcissism or consuming self-absorption does not need approval to exist, because this self-love is a type of egotism that does not appear to need others. Narcissists constantly assess their appearance, desires, feelings, and abilities (Wordsworth, 1994, *Concise English Dictionary*, p. 642). In extreme cases the narcissist may be considered mentally ill and therefore, deviant or socially unacceptable to many.

In my work it is this predetermined notion of the 'I' that I would like to deconstruct. Removing cloth over and over is an act of removing myself from my constructed identity as it has been developed through the Symbolic Order and my experience. This is an action I take as an adult transporting myself back to the Mirror phase, by seeing myself as a child, free from the gaze of others. Additionally, if I am able to remove the idealized or constructed version of myself from the existence developed throughout the Symbolic phase, I am attempting to return to wholeness in a conscious way searching for a real self. This is an exercise of purification and an attempt to black out my current role within the social world, by going back to the near beginning to an entity contained within me. In this sense, through my art, I seek to tangibly convey a reoccurrence of the Mirror Phase in a tangible way through self-reflection and conscious choice. Lacan prescribes the identification of the self from the very beginning of birth to its endeavors to subscribe to the nature of social order around it.



Figure 6. < Lady Onion > Digital video still 2009-2015

2.2 Politics of Identity through Symbol and Place

The < Undertone > (Fig. 6) is disturbingly honest, in which Acconci tries to convince himself that, “There is a girl here, [and] under the table... she has her hand on my thigh...” then he reverts back and tells himself that no, he is all alone. He looks to the camera then and talks to the viewer and says that what he needs is you and that he will only be all right if you are there. Again this startling gesture confronts the audience as voyeur, and you can only accept his desperate plea for what it is. Acconci often attempts to emasculate himself in his art and indulges in illusions of a physical kind where he hides his penis to make it seem as if he is a woman or at least, androgen. I believe that these ideas, the returning of a man to the state of the original, without his sexual identity and differentiation, align well with the Cremaster series.



Figure 7. Vito Acconci <Undertone> 1973 videotape, 34mins, black and white, sound.
Taylor, F & Bloomer, J. (2002). Vito Acconci. New York: Phaeton Press (p. 100).

Matthew Barney's < Cremaster Cycle 1995 – 2002 > presents the processes of sexual differentiation. He manipulates the idea of the body as a fluid universe of its own and these films reconcile the idea of identification and the preconditioned idealism of sexual differentiation. Barney's basic theory is that the points of differentiation between male and female are only social constructs dependent on the existence and non-existence of one type of muscle called the cremaster muscle. This is not about differentiation in the womb through genetic programming, but is more about how males are valued over females, forming a sense of social construct.



Figure 8. Matthew Barney < Drawing Restraint 9> 2005 Production Still. Photo: Chris Winget, Courtesy Gladstone Gallery, New York. Retrieved September 7, 2015, from <http://www.uo-online.at/dateien/2284> i Matthew-Barney 1.jpg

Figure 9. Matthew Barney <The Goodyear Waltz Cremaster 1> 1995-6. Spector, Nancy. (2003). Matthew Barney: *The Cremaster Cycle*. New York: Guggenheim Museum. (p. 31).

I believe in his works he is attempting to go back to the very beginning of creation, before birth and exit from the womb to the moment and conditions of conception. From here, the world he envisages sets no social boundaries as to how one sex should differ from the other. I believe Barney is attempting to destroy the social construct forming the patterns that differentiate a man from a woman at the physiological and cultural centers of accepted and prescribed identities. The mystery, symbolism and fantastical way in which he presents his characters through story-telling, I believe, is to take what is known to be true and real out of the equation and to construct a whole new set of patterns, to see and believe things as they are or can be imagined.

In << Hair on Me >> (Fig. 10) I pluck the mustache and beard of the man sitting in front of me, one by one in a clockwise direction, and move it to my face. The bulb of the tweezed hair is sticky and the hair sticks to my skin. As the video clip plays, the hairs are moved one by one from the man's face and are added to mine. I focused on the action of moving something from a place to another. When moving the hair to my face, I tried to move it to the exact position where I found it, as if I'm planting the hair. After undergoing several trials and errors, I succeeded to complete the act of moving the hair from one face to another at the third try. At the first time, I was able to learn about the

degree of pain and after the second try, both of us felt so awkward that we could not speak to each other. In the third try, I, the actor, became afraid of inflicting pain and suggested the use of anesthetic cream. The man, however, objected, saying that it will make it less authentic and decided to grow his beard again for a week. After repeating the same act for more than three hours, I felt a slight tremor in my hands and legs and the man's pores became red with blood. I became nauseous while attaching the hair to my face, the hair I acquired by repeatedly ripping them off from his flesh.

“Would I have wanted to move the hair from my beard if I had one? Would I be able to move someone's hair from their beard then? What is this person thinking about as he is sitting here and enduring pain? Should I pluck the hair from the other part? Plucking the hair from only this side of the face might hurt him. No, but then it will be too difficult to move his hair... Can I pluck several strands at once? What would your face look like without a beard? Would I feel what you feel with your beard on my face?” Silly questions pop up in my head, in this space in silence interspersed with electric popping sounds.

<< Hair on Me >> presents a phenomenon through the act of moving strands of a man's beard a symbol of masculinity, to a woman's face. I well acknowledge that the physical act of removing something from one and attaching it to another is merely an appearance and that it cannot become real. Differences¹⁵ can only be found between things that have common attributes as well as distinguishable characteristics ¹⁶

Men and women have the commonality of both being human beings but I ponder on how the different qualities between them came about. Did the differences arise by cultural conduct or the different gender roles prescribed by the society and the environment? Or is it because of the innate physical differences between men and women?

¹⁵ "Only that which is alike differs; and only differences are alike." Gilles Deleuze. (1994). *Difference and Repetition* New York: Columbia University Press translated by Paul Patton, p. 116

¹⁶ 'If we may be allowed the expression, it is not the resemblances, but the differences, which resemble each other.' Levi-Strauss shows how this principle develops in the constitution of at least two series, the terms of each series being different amongst themselves (for example, in the case of totemism, the series of distinct species of animals and that of the differential social positions): the resemblance is 'between these two series of differences'. (Levi-Strauss, Claude. 1963, *Le totémisme aujourd'hui*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France. English edition: *Totemism*. Boston: Beacon Press , p. 77)

Lacan's theory¹⁷ could be interpreted as the self being a creation of the circumstances around it and mediated through language. No one is created in a vacuum. It is in the gradual growth of realization that it is a part of a greater social scheme, and that it must become a piece of the social matrix in order to fit in and function. I believe the identity of self is constructed by the significant others around us and that their gaze construes the individual's identity. I believe Lacan strives to communicate that the self is never a self for its own sake. Others¹⁸ define you; you do not define yourself then give them a place around your being. I understand from the Mirror Phase that it can be said that we are conditioned from very early on, from the stages of Infanthood

¹⁷ Jacques Lacan is responsible for the development of the concept of the gendered subject and his idea challenge the notion of uniform unitary beings for example and idea, which began with Descartes's Cogito, I think, therefore I am. The *I* or the self in Lacanian terms equals the subject. He asserts two main stages in the growth of consciousness, which follow an initial and undifferentiated state designated as the Real. These stages are known as the Imaginary and the Symbolic Orders. The Imaginary phase involves a pre-linguistic stage of consciousness, which focuses on the visual recognition of images, while the Symbolic phase deals with the subject's entry into and formation by language (Harrison & Woods, *Art In Theory 1900 - 2000*, 2003, p. 620). Each stage co-exists and influences the other in varying degrees throughout the lifetime.

¹⁸ Throughout his teachings, Lacan regularly utilizes the terms "other" (with a lower-case o) and "Other" (with a capital O). The lower-case-o other designates the Imaginary ego and its accompanying alter-egos. The capital-O Other refers to two additional types of otherness corresponding to the registers of the Symbolic and the Real. The first type of Other is Lacan's "big Other" *qua* symbolic order, namely, the overarching "objective spirit" of trans-individual socio-linguistic structures configuring the fields of inter-subjective interactions. Relatedly, the Symbolic big Other also can refer to (often fantasmatic/fictional) ideas of anonymous authoritative power and/or knowledge (whether that of God, Nature, History, Society, State, Party, Science, or the analyst as the "subject supposed to know" [*sujet supposé savoir*] as per Lacan's distinctive account of analytic transference). (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/lacan/>>)

that we exist to pleasure a certain type of social order, that which we have been born into. As our circles of circumstance change, so our identity shifts still affected by the influence of the world around us. This theory is parallel to the concept of a social individual, formed within a particular culture that molds the biological and mental blueprint of the baby into a particular pattern of thought and behavior, while the culture of that society manipulates its adjustment into such an order. This theory is parallel to the concept of a social individual, formed within a particular culture that molds the biological and mental blueprint of the baby into a particular pattern of thought and behavior, while the culture of that society manipulates its adjustment into such an order.

In the << Hair on Me >> video clip, I find that despite having a beard, the symbol of masculinity, I look more feminine than masculine. Beards as a symbol of masculinity may also be a cultural product. If the beard is a true symbol of masculinity, the masculinity should originate from the beard itself, not vice versa. There is a contrast when men look fragile and women strong. But this contrast does not arise from whether one has a beard or not. The masculinity is a cultural product, and the beard itself is not masculine. **This is an act of emasculating the beard that distinguishes men and women.** Through this work, I intended to expose how masculinity and femininity are not innate attributes but are socially and culturally constructed characteristics.



Figure. 10 << Hair On Me >> Two channel Digital Video projection,
1hour. Woosukhall, 2015

I received mail stating that the district of *Bongcheon-dong* (奉天洞), named to mean “serving heaven and/or pay tribute to the sky ,” would be renamed *Jung’ang-dong* on January 23, 2015. The ceaseless noise from construction sites here and there and the increasingly higher buildings seem to be directed at an even higher sky. Neighborhoods dotted with shantytowns expressed by the stereotype of “moon neighborhoods” (hillside slums) and fortunetelling houses operated by mudang (Korean shamans) coexist with tall apartments whose redevelopment has already begun.

<< Bongcheon >> (봉천,奉天) is a video work consisting of twelve frames of photographs taken at 15-seconds intervals. This maximizes movement in stillness by fast forwarding 180 seconds of time in reality into 1-second-long images. While the video shows and reflects the temporal flow of the repetition of sunrise and sunset, time flows backward in the latter half so that the video ends with the same perspective as at the beginning. In the Bongcheon performance titled << Matador >>, holding a white flag and a red flag, I climb the mountain of buildings in the Bongcheon-dong district, going around every nook and cranny.



Figure. 11 << Bongcheon (봉천, 奉天) >> Photograph Time Lapse Digital Video
Projection, 17 min 12 sec, 2015

When receiving important guests or sending blessings, Mongolians use a piece of cloth called hadag¹⁹. Even today, pieces of cloth are hung from the main gates of homes in Mongolia and Manchuria, which are akin to the flags erected at fortunetelling houses operated by mudang in South Korea. The color red represents the power of the sun and signifies that one is full of the bright energy of the sun. A blue cloth represents the power of the moon and signifies that one is full of the clear energy of the moon. Finally, a white cloth symbolizes the Milky Way in the sky, which in turn changes into a rainbow blind or hanging screen so that the energy of the sun, moon, and stars descends through the bridge of the Milky Way. In terms of color, the flags erected at mudang's fortunetelling houses are mostly red and white. This signifies the wish that the energy of the sun will descend through the rainbow of the Milky Way²⁰.

People believe that mudang are none other than people who receive the energy transmitted through the flags and use it harmoniously²¹. For the performance << Matador >>, I weaved in and out of the mountain of buildings in Bongcheon-dong while holding

¹⁹ Sungjae Jo (2015). *Shamanism* (巫俗) column. Retrieved November, 29, from <<http://blog.naver.com/muam777>>

²⁰ Sungjae Jo (2015). *Shamanism* (巫俗) column.

²¹ Ministry of Culture and Sports Republic of Korea. (1996). *Religious Culture in Korea*, Seoul: Religious Affairs Office

flags. Some asked me whether I was holding a sacrificial rite to the spirits or was a mudang, and children squealed, showing interest. I felt bad for those who, seeing me climb the hill with flags, thought with discomfort that a shaman was holding a sacrificial rite to the spirits. However, I, too, seemed to disappear gradually into the darkness as the sun began to set, which seemed to dispel the heaviness in my heart and the discomfort from the heavy flags as well.



Figure.12 << Matador >> Performance Digital video still, 2015

I hiked up Bongcheon-dong while holding a white flag and a red one, starting at the buildings in the shantytowns dotted with mudang's fortunetelling houses in the lower part of the district, passing through maze-like alleys, and ending at soaring apartments. In addition, I disappeared among the high buildings, which seemed to touch the sky.

When the darkness covered the city, no longer threatening to me were the alleys in the unfamiliar forest of buildings and the uncomfortable gazes of people. While doing the flag performance, I found out that my neighborhood is divided in two with the *Hyundai Market* as the center; the upper neighborhood with its newly built apartment buildings standing tall and well paved roads, and the underdeveloped lower neighborhood. I later found out through a conversation with an acquaintance, that there are biases on the students attending the two different elementary schools, which face each other with single road dividing the upper and lower neighborhood in the middle, and therefore, belong to different school districts.

In the book *Hope for the Flowers*²², caterpillars trample over each other to get to a higher position. The caterpillars which blindly went upwards, without knowing what awaits them, eventually fall and die or hurt each other. In the end, the crawling caterpillars, captives of their own anxiety, continue to look upwards, despite the fact that they could turn into butterflies and fly across the sky.

²² In the tale, the caterpillar heroes, Stripe and Yellow, want something more from life than eating and growing bigger. They get caught up in a **caterpillar pillar**, a squirming mass of bodies, each determined to reach a top so far away it can't be seen. Finally disillusioned, they discover that the way for the caterpillars to find their particular **more**, who they really are, is to enter the cocoon and "...risk for the butterfly." (Paulus, 1973)

This project, titled << Bongcheon >> (奉天: which means serving heaven and/or pay tribute to the sky) began by thinking about where the caterpillars of our society are striving to reach. While performing, I held a flag, similar to flags that are found between the fortunetellers' gathered at the lowest part of Bongcheon-dong, and walk by all the alleys up to the mountain with the apartment buildings. The flag, inconspicuous among the fortune telling houses, attracted attention as I got out of the area. **While I was able to blend into the surroundings in the fortune telling district, I increasingly become an inconvenience as I got out of the district and continued walking.** As I walk up Bongcheon building mountain, I observe every nook and cranny of the city life and its people. At the same time, I came to experience that I myself, when holding a flag, can be a subject of observation. I had the feeling of wanting to surrender while waving my white flag but instead waved the red flag like a matador facing a bull, resolute and unwavering. The closing scene of the performance takes place in front of a shadow created by a lit wall in the alley of the darkened city. Here I stand, in front of a wall, with my shadow portraying a religious figure I am more familiar with (Fig. 14 Matador video ending still).



Figure.13 << Matador >> Performance Digital video still, 2015



Figure.14 << Matador_Ending still >> Performance Digital video still, 2015

<< Black Sea >> is an interactive video installation. $43^{\circ} 22' 19.97'' N$ $28^{\circ} 5' 0.09'' E$ is the address of a satellite over the night sea by *Albena* in Bulgaria, which I have never visited. The paper boat set afloat on this sea moves close or far according to the movement of the viewer. The paper boat that I set afloat sails to an unknown destination different from its proper destination. No, I do not know if the vessel had a proper destination to begin with.

The paper boat that I set afloat does not have a captain. A ship lost in the black sea longs for a lighthouse to appear. By finding a lighthouse, the ship will not disappear to an unknown place, all weak and forgotten, but will sail towards the light, in the consuming darkness.

On April 16, 2014, the South Korean vehicle-passenger ferry *MV Sewol* sank in the sea. At the news report that all passengers from the sunken ship had been rescued, I calmed down my stunned heart. However, the news report that all passengers had been rescued was not true. The passengers failed to be rescued due to repeated misreporting and the imputation of responsibility by the central government and public organs to one another. The families left on land and the entire nation watching the ship sink in the South Sea of the Republic of Korea through the media seemed to be in a state of collective panic. The

entire world seemed to be sunk in a sense of incapacity, the inability to do anything, and deep melancholy.

In << Black Sea >> (Fig. 15), the paper boat that I set afloat sails on the Black Sea, a pitch-dark sea without an address. By using processing codes, I have designed the boat to sail according to the viewer's movement. Although I do not know where my boat, lacking a captain, is headed, I imagine a lighthouse that may stand somewhere afar in the darkness.

*I set a paper boat afloat to a place where something that must be one becomes two. I set a paper boat afloat between the moon and the sea, which I have never visited. Sounds that seem closer as the distance increases
Waves that come closer as the distance increases*

- From Personal Note 2014 -



Figure. 15 << Black Sea >> Processing code Interactive video Installation 2014

2.3 Identity revealed in motion

Vito Acconci's work presents a parallel and a contrast to these human yearnings. I think he is honest and intruding of his want for acceptance; the monologue in his video installation < Theme song > is a seductive conversation he initiates with an invisible audience. He sings and speaks and essentially courts and woos this audience. He announces he is lonely sometimes, but you can fall in love with him and it will be all right. This seems to me to be rather desperate but is also charming in a way, in that he seems so vulnerable. To me he is trying to convince you of who he is, as he is.

The theme here as I see it, is that as an audience these viewers are confronted with this startling baring of his soul. They do not have a two-way communication with him but are bombarded by his thoughts and his words consequently there is no way of reflecting back to him of who the audience deems him to be.



Figure. 16 Vito Acconci < Theme song > 1973 Videotape, 30 mins, black and white, sound. Taylor, F & Bloomer, J. (2002) Vito Acconci. New York: Phaeton Press (p. 114).

*“I think of art as having a kind of instrumental use. The word exists; the category exists, so it does have a place. So when I say ‘make art,’ I don’t mean a kind of-a kind of self-enclosed art, but I mean art as this kind of instrument in the world”*²³.

From time to time, I ask people who interest me about the books they are currently reading. I wonder what kind of books will be filling the bookshelves of my heroes and idols. I, of course, am not bold enough to ask all these questions to them. At times, one needs courage to actually know somebody. The timid and slow first steps of wanting to know about someone and learning about someone makes me nervous and excited at the same time. A person’s voice is a trove of information. Changes in voices, movements, and facial expressions... all go through a process.

The titles of books that come up on the screen (reminiscent of a movie ending credit) one by one, in my work << O.S.T >>, are books that fill up my room, or rather, are **books that filled “me” up**. Through this work, I introduce myself to the viewers. If you have heard my small whispers, I would like to say the message out loud in a stronger voice: I want to know you, too. << O.S.T >> (Fig.17 Original Sound

²³ Crown Point Press. (2008). *Vito Acconci*. Crown Point Press. Retrieved November, 5, 2015, from <http://www.crownpoint.com/artists/acconci>

Track) is a style of movie credits video projection. The project started as record the list of books I have on bookshelves. The subjects ranged from my childhood fairy tales, the books I read much carefully and it became worn out, the books travelled with me rave over sea and land and it ends up here somehow, the books I desire to read but haven't got a chance to read or I simply just gave up, and the traveling guide, academic books and more.



Figure. 17 << O.S.T >> Digital video projection, 20 min 33 sec, 2014

The collations of books represent one person's culture and history. If there is a guest surrounded one persons's life collections of books the guest might easily get a sense of who the person is or at least holds some kind of familiar and friendly feelings, like already saw a movie and listening to the ending sound track. References to who I am

is dotted throughout the moving credits. As the credits play there is a building sense of the cultural and personal references. The longer the viewer remains, O.S.T plays louder.

In a video work << Bouncing Moon >> (Fig. 18) I hold my camera, I adjust the lens to take photographs of the moon. Seen through the camera, the moon bounces and shakes without focus, bounding off like a power ball. Though it always seems to be in the sky under which I stand, together with and close from me, the distance between the moon, which I have never visited, amounts to 383,000 km, and the far-off **moon shakes as if not wishing to be captured** by the camera.

Then, I blow soap bubbles << Bubble >> (Fig. 19). I continuously blow at the soap bubbles from below so that they will not fall to the ground. The soap bubbles look like space shuttles because they reflect the dazzling lights of the dark city. Though it seems as if they will be launched into the unknown outer space, my fragile soap bubbles alight on my face and vanish instead of embarking on space explorations. There are moments that cannot be captured. The duality exists everywhere. The moon's identity is both fragile but strong, deterred yet resilient, moving and spinning like pinwheels, also still and tentative. Spinning pinwheel is a powerful reminder that **endurance come from balancing all of these forces**. It is unique as well as familiar.

Throughout our existence, human beings struggle to define themselves as individuals against the concept self-defined by respective societies. It is this struggle, in my opinion, that forms the very core of existence, perhaps the self can only be identified as it is prescribed to us, only as allowed by the society around us. Essentially for me, the "I" is an intriguing concept that is both flexible and fragile and refuses to settle as a single concrete image. The "I" is an ever-elusive concept, one that we try to take charge of but one that always evolves to keep us striving for the better.



Figure.18 << Bouncing Moon >> Digital video projection, 2 min 16 sec, 2015



Figure. 19 << Bubble >> Digital video projection, 1 min 3 sec, 2015

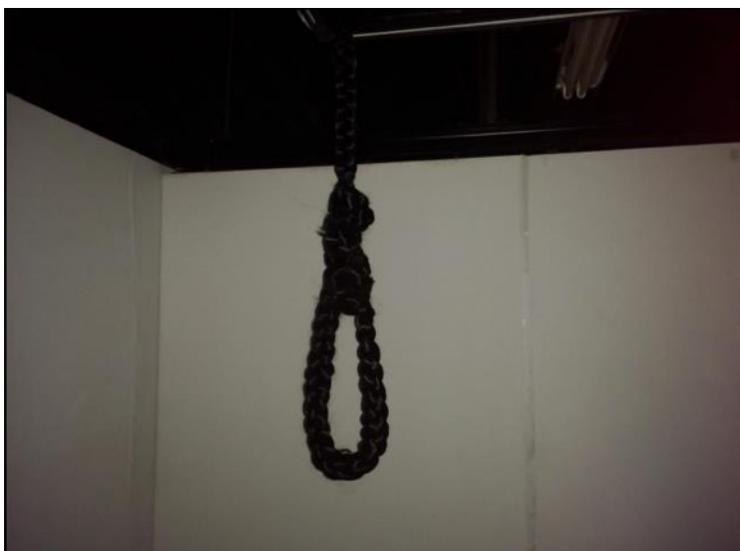
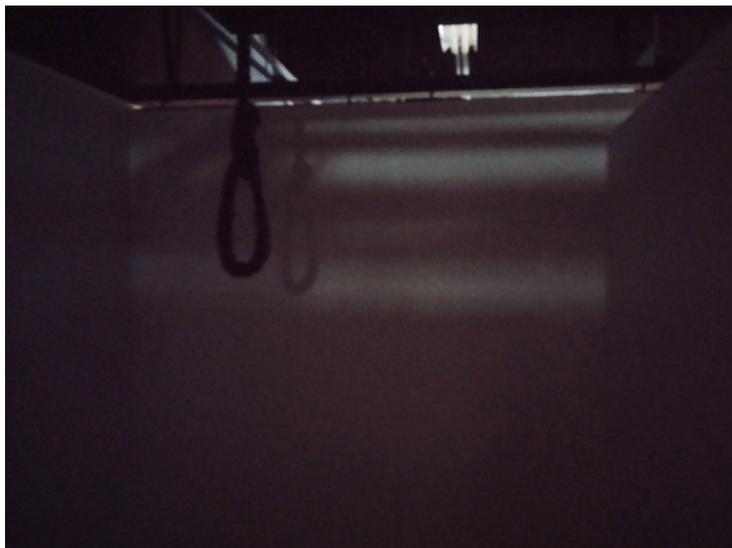
2.4 LIST OF WORKS

PINWHEEL



1. < Pinwheel > Video still 2014-2015

KNOT



2. << Knot >> Hair installation 2014

LADY ONION



3. < Lady Onion > Digital video still 2009-2015

HAIR ON ME



4. << Hair On Me >> Performance 3 hours 30 min 22 sec & Digital video projection
1hour, 2015

BONGCHEON & MATADOR

(봉천, 奉天)



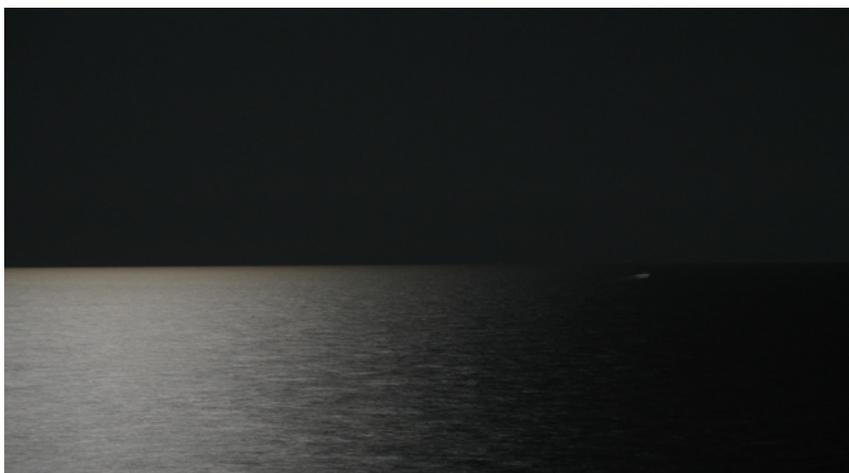
5. << Bongcheon (봉천, 奉天) & Matador >> at MoA Museum Seoul, 2015

MATADOR



6. << Matador >> Performance Digital video still, 2015

BLACK SEA



7. << Black Sea >> Processing code Interactive video Installation ,2014

O.S.T



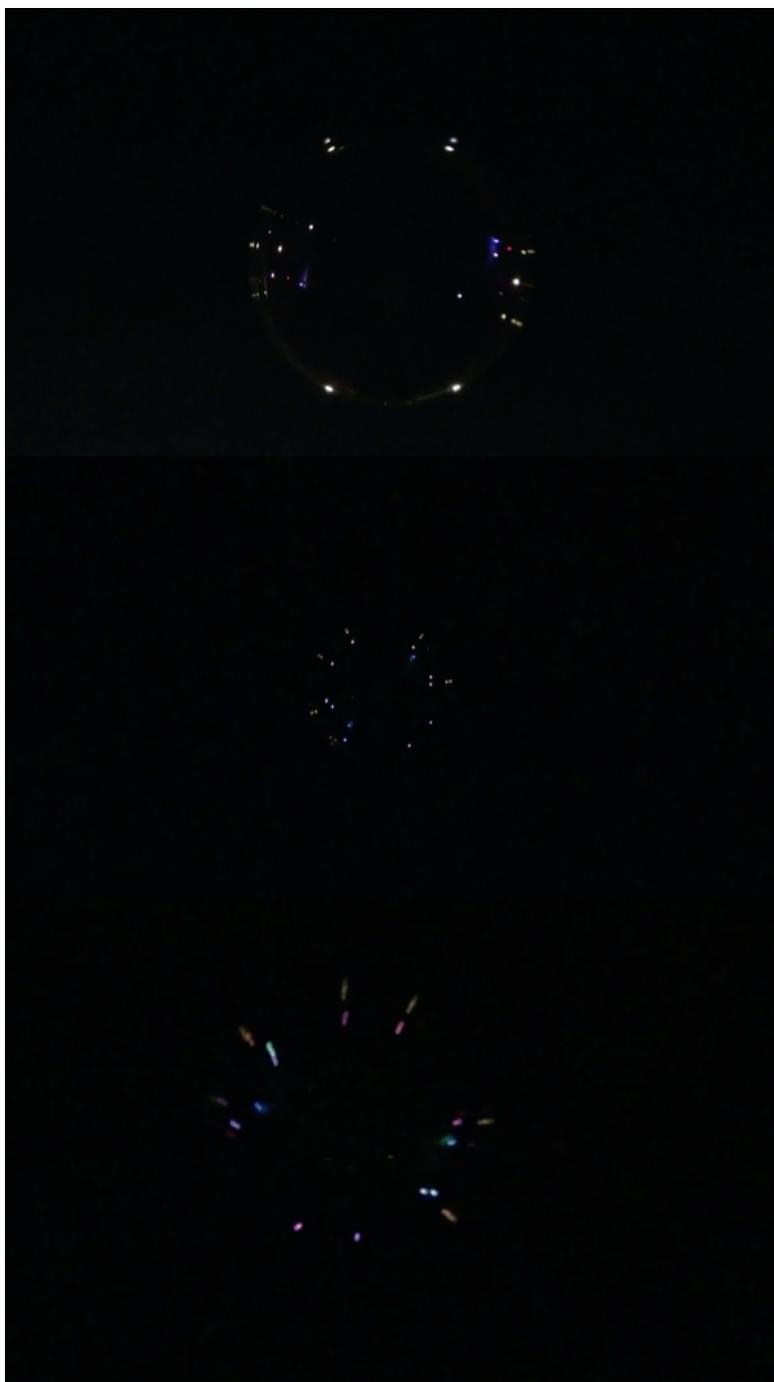
8. << O.S.T >> Digital video projection, 20 min 33 sec, 2014

BOUNCING MOON



9. << Bouncing Moon >> Digital video projection, 2 min 16 sec, 2015

BUBBLE



10. << Bubble >> Digital video projection, 1 min 3 sec, 2015

III. CONCLUSION

FINDINGS

In this study I have dealt with issues of self-identification and the social influences that affect how identity is constructed through my works in three categories; Identity through repeated actions, Politics of Identity through symbol and place, and Identity revealed in motion. The range of possibilities are explored from metamorphosis to transformation to questioning the construction of a self. I have had different approaches to this question, baring all and communication through honesty, creates a fantasy world, to in essence, destroy the cultural construct of how perceptions of identity is carved out, while succumbed to rejection. I believe the world is carried on by imperfect conversations, there is so much lost in translation. My works centers on the theme of the confession booth. I hope that my art practice do mean something to the receiver even if it is only to a partial understanding of what I cannot perfectly express. Art is a derivative of who I am, and who I am is a derivative of the world around me. It is a **toxic cycle** that feed off strict societal codes and cultures. Conversely I have also realized that social acceptance is only temporary and the higher

struggle is to earn self-approval. However these cultural readings force us to see what we may never have really seen.

I believe Identity is constructed by others like those rabbits that East Asian culture teaches to see when looking at the moon. Society teaches how to read each other. The duality of self-identity hinges on the harmony of perception of self by the society and the conscious being within. The moon is as it is, earth's natural satellite shining in the night sky, So for our dear moon, instead of just believing the rabbits or man written in the moon, it is crucial to allow the moon to stand for what it is and be as the individual sees it. It may only be too true that many of us will never really be able to make out the rabbits.

This study is a process of gradual understanding about how identity is constructed in my art practice, and it employs a wide range of discussions referring to a variety of works produced by myself and other artists. It urged me to make effort to deeply understand and appreciate why identity in my works are important, and how ambivalence can be understood intrinsically.

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국문초록

시선 너머에

“T”의 형성을 중심으로

김희수

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본인의 작업은 삶과 자기인식에 대한 고민의 산물이다. 사회적 환경과 교육 안에서 형성되는 정체성에 대한 고민에 대해 소통 하기 위해 자아의 형성, 주체의 구성이라는 인식론적 관점에서 작업을 시작한다. 본인은 꿈의 개념과 관련해 작업으로 표현해 보려고 했으며 주체의 구성이라는 주제를 사회적 영향관계의 측면에서 다룬다. 이러한 작업을 위해 자연, 환경, 동물의 탈, 유아적 장남감과 사회적 기호를 비롯한 이미지 등을 사용한다.

인간 본연의 자아는 자신이 속해있는 환경 그리고 과거 속 자신의 모습들과 밀접하게 관련하여 실현된다. 실존하는 것들과 진실을 향한 탐구 사이에서 본인 작업의 생명력은 단련된다. 사회적 목표라는 것은 여러 세대를 거쳐 이어지지만, 그것을 가장 먼저 표출하는 것은 한 개인이며, 우리가 존재하는 이유는 이상적이라고 여겨지는 세계를 실현하기 위해서가 아니라 오히려 정해진 이상의 힘과 덕목이라 여겨지는 것에 도

전하기 위해서라는 생각을 한다. 그렇다면 삶의 본질은 탐구하는 행위로 귀결되고 본인의 작업 내부의 예술적 고민은 자신과의 투쟁이라고 할 수 있다.

본 논문은 세 부분으로 나뉜다. Intro 에서는 본인 작업에 영향을 미친 이론과 경험한 문화변용에서 시작된 고민, 또한 주체인식과 구축된 주체와 관련된 작업에 대한 연구를 다뤘다. 두 번째 Works에서는 석사 과정 동안 제작한 열 개의 작업들에 대한 설명이다. 시선너머에 “I”를 형성하는 요인에 대하여 고찰하기 위하여 나르시즘과 거울단계의 양가성을 연구한다. 구축된 정체성은 이 논문의 전반에 걸쳐 다양한 작업 영역들 속에서 전체 개념과 조우한다. 열개의 작업은 반복되는 행동을 통한 정체성의 고찰 / 상징을 통한 장소성, 위치의 정치 / 움직임 속에서 드러나는 정체성, 이렇게 세 분야로 나뉜다. 마지막으로 Findings를 통해 논문을 마친다.

본 논문에서 굵은 글씨체는 주요 내용을 강조하기 위해 사용되었다. 대학원 졸업평가 출품작업은 <<제목>>으로, 다른 작가의 작업이나 대학원 졸업평가 외의 작업은 <제목>으로 표기한다. 대학원 재학중의 작업에 대한 이해를 용이하게 하기 위해 목차에 2.4 LIST OF WORKS에서 작업 이미지를 따로 모아 나열한다.

주요어 : 주체인식, 문화변용, 사회적 영향, 양가성, 거울단계, 나르시즘

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