

**Title: “States of Becoming: Narratives of the National Psyche in a Divided Korea”**  
*(A Project Proposal)*

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Fieldwork to be conducted in the Republic of Korea Sept 2009-June 2010

*First draft 03/24/2008*

*Updated 05/2009*

*Connection requires a style of thought that might be called 'empiricist' or 'pragmatist.' It puts experimentation before ontology. 'And' before 'Is.' ...We must always make connections, since they are not already given....What is supposed by such experimental crossing of borders is not so much hope as a kind of trust or confidence - a belief-in-the-world.*

- John Rajchman, *The Deleuze Connections*

*Becoming, and openness to the future, and thus evolution, are unique properties of what is alive. And yet if one is consistent with evolutionary theory, one of the main presumptions is the emergence of life from nonlife.... Not only what man makes - i.e., technology and culture - but also, what makes man - i.e., nature. To think becoming, in the sphere of nature as much as in the sphere of technology, seems to me a crucial project of the future.*

- Elizabeth Grosz, *Architecture from the Outside, Essays on Virtual and Real Space*

I begin my proposal with these passages from Rajchman and Grosz because they contain within them the spirit of my inquiry into the production of performance and new media design as engaged cross-cultural social practices, and how to activate conceptions of history, embodiment, and becoming through these media. These quotations encapsulate the *meta themes* from where my work begins. Through research, fieldwork, and production, I plan to create a live, multi-media installation work exploring the national and cultural psyche of a divided Korea, the embodiment of nation building, cultural memory, and historical narratives, as well as the histories and potentialities of war and interrelationships between the Koreas in the global context. Conceptual and technological experimentations will explore the possibilities of becoming in the context of border crossings and nation-states, and will seek out new ways of articulating and tracing this phenomenology of becoming through new media integration with live and documented performance.

In setting the stage for this project, I begin first with the question of history and its role as a predetermining condition of a people and a society. To reference Gilles Deleuze, who stated:

*Becoming isn't part of history; history amounts only the set of preconditions, however recent, that one leaves behind in order to 'become,' that is, to create something new. This is precisely what Nietzsche calls the Untimely....Men's only hope lies in a revolutionary becoming: the only way of casting off their shame or responding to what is intolerable (Deleuze, 171).*

In what ways does history, or official notions of history, affect our evolution, or becoming, as a people? How can we subvert or cast off the “set of preconditions” that history leaves us, in order to become something new, as Deleuze suggests? Indeed, constructions of historical narratives, the formation of Self and national identity through these narratives, and this Self in relation to an Other will be centrally located themes of this project, and particularly when considering the experience of, for example, the North Korean defector or political refugee finding a new space and identity across the borders of nation - Where are the points for openness and potentialities of becoming, how and in what ways does one *become something new* in this experience?

From here I follow the lead of artist Krzysztof Wodiczko, whose work in site-specific public projections challenges hegemonic power structures and critically seeks out ways to activate public discourse regarding issues of democracy and justice. In his text *Critical Vehicles*, Wodiczko refers to an interpretation of Walter Benjamin's concept of *history of the victors* as that “which operates as a past ‘transmitted to us through a hermeneutical tradition that selects events, preserving some and rejecting others, at times determining their interpretation.’ ...The history of the victors must be confronted and interrupted by the *memory of the nameless* or the *tradition of the vanquished*” (Wodiczko 4). Wodiczko's projection work makes real the metaphor of the projection as something that brings forth the emergent inside out into the space of the public sphere and the collective psyche. These works create a *transitional event* within the public sphere for both the subject/participants and the audience; they are as much about the subjects' process of healing, and becoming, as they are about how we as a people can engage in a process of becoming-together. It is a critical approach to art as social practice, which I will engage within this project through video ethnography, testimony via subject interviews, and projection design.

I argue that the North Korean defector has a narrative that can disrupt the official history of nation-building and identity in the Koreas, and this narrative has yet to make itself visible and heard in the public and psychic-social spaces of South Korea.

Central to developing the theoretical approach of this project is the critical analysis of the notion of nation in Korea in its various and shifting forms, specifically pointing to the populist sentiment of ethnic homogeneity as a defining term for nation and how this position is problematic in the context of unification. The ethnic-nationalist position believes that all Koreans are one based on bloodline regardless of place of birth or residence and assumes the unification of the Koreas to be inevitable, and yet it also holds the potential danger of ignoring very real differences between North and South Koreans, as well as assuming the latter's hegemonic absorption of and domination over the former. Here I ask: How does one point to difference and heterogeneity as positive terms for democracy in the Korean context? How can this project address the complexity and contradictions implied in the ethnic-nationalist model, and also give credence to the efforts for unification and the student pro-democracy movements, all of which have informed the concept of nation in Korea at one point in time or another? Where are the lines of flight and the trajectories for a people-in-the-making that can be traced in Korea today? Where will those trajectories lead?

Here is where *connection* comes into play, and indeed a pragmatist approach to “the crossing of borders” - real and psychological - will be necessary in order to re-think and re-situate these terms.

“To think becoming, in the sphere of nature as much as in the sphere of technology” is equally elemental for this project and its use of new media technologies. For as I explore these broader themes of history and embodiment, new media technologies are understood to be agents that will not only help to manifest and give form to these explorations, but will be wholly integrated into the interpretation, design, and direction of live and mediated bodies. In this regard, they are as much a part of the process of becoming as the human body itself, perhaps even serving at times as extensions of that body: as Marshall McLuhan once stated, “All media are extensions of human faculty - psychic or physical” (McLuhan, 26). In example, potential manifestations of these ideas may include the choreography of North and South Korean dance integrated with the direction of multi-channel video projections, motion capture technologies, and the creation of responsive, interactive environments.

In summary, I wish to create a live, multi-media installation work, incorporating documented and live performance with multi-channel, interactive video and sound, exploring a range of the following themes:

1. The complexities and dualities of the national and cultural psyche of a divided Korea.
- 2.. The embodiment of nation building, cultural memory and national history.
3. The creation of national identity in North and South Korea, and the potentialities of becoming and transformation of these notions with the physical and psychic crossing of national borders.

4. Testimony and memory as modes of narrative that can subvert dominant notions of history and foster positive social and self transformation.
5. Space and embodiment as socio-cultural productions, and the potentials of creating spaces, real and mediated, which act as transitional phenomena for both the participant/audience and the performer.
6. Phenomenology and sensation explored through the design and production of responsive media technologies with live and recorded bodies.

These themes, which address the parameters of this project in both form and content, create the general blueprint from which I will be further shaping and defining my methodologies and praxis. They are points of departure and gateways to more specific questions which will be defined along the way through research and fieldwork in South Korea, cross-cultural media practices, and the practice of new media technologies. I propose at the outset that specific technologies needed will include, but not be limited to: interactive video projection software (i.e. - Isadora or Watchout), Max/MSP/Jitter or other comparable sound design software, motion capture and other sensor-based technologies, Final Cut Pro, and Motion or After Effects.

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