

2018 IRIS Graduate Student Summer Fieldwork Report
Kyungso Min | Ph.D. Candidate, Department of Art History

Thanks to the generous support from the Institute for Regional and International Studies (IRIS) Graduate Student Summer Fieldwork Award, I spent 10 weeks (May 21 - July 30, 2018) in Seoul, Gwacheon, Yongin, and Gwangju, South Korea, for my dissertation research on East Asian new media art and its technological engagement with post-translational communication. My project, “After Translation: Performing Transnational Belonging Through the Languages of the Future in South Korean and Japanese New Media Art,” offers a trans-Asian account that frames the conceptual and practical linkages among new media art movements in Korea and Japan since the mid-1990s. In order to explore locally inflected ways of conceiving collective spectatorship not reliant on shared language, I investigate how the practices of Korean (Moon Kyungwon & Jeon Joonho and Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries, YHCHI) and Japanese (Fujihata Masaki, Dumb Type, and Manabe Daito of the Rhizomatiks Research) artists shape political foundations for a new media-enabled, East Asian re-conception of global community. In Fall 2017, I conducted a part of my research about Korean new media art institutions and events as a Junior Fellow at Seoul National University Kyujanggak Institute’s International Center for Korean Studies. However, due to time constraints and commitment to the fellowship activities, I could not visit archival collections outside Seoul, or interview the core artists of my study during this period. The IRIS Graduate Student Summer Fieldwork Award provided me with sufficient time and funds to take advantage of the resources and opportunities to complete my onsite research, which significantly filled the gaps in the findings from my previous fieldwork in Seoul.

One of my primary goals of this follow-up research travel was to see original artworks of Moon & Jeon in the gallery context, because they screen their two-channel videos only through an exhibition platform. At the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art (MMCA), Gwacheon’s *Special Exhibition for Donated Artworks of MMCA 2010-2018*, I was able to see the full version of *News from Nowhere* (2012), the main piece for my investigation of Moon & Jeon’s project that I only knew through partial video clips, still images, and written descriptions before. By observing the original edition of *News from Nowhere* for the first time, I was able to revise and deepen my description of the work’s detail and flow in my chapter three, “The Languages of the Future: Technologizing Post-translational Belonging.” The opportunity to interview Moon & Jeon in person at the end of July made this trip further productive. During our

two-hours of conversation, these artists not only answered my questions mainly about the process of their trans-professional collaboration with other creators, but also shared their artistic experiences and vision about art after digital globalization in general. I had also earned Moon & Jeon's provisional permission to do follow-up interviews and to use their works' images for my dissertation that I might not have received without this interview opportunity.

In order to collect archival records and visual resources about Moon & Jeon's *News from Nowhere* project and YHCHI's Internet-based text animations, alongside Korean new media art institutions and event sites in general, I centered on consulting five art archives and libraries — both Gwacheon and Seoul branches of the MMCA, the Art Council Korea Archive, Seoul, the Seoul Museum of Art Library, Seoul, the Art Center Nabi, Seoul, and the Nam June Paik Art Center Archive, Youngin. Although some of these institutions manage a digital database, a majority of their archive collection is only accessible onsite. Such onsite-only materials embrace exhibition catalogues, festival guidebooks, conference brochures, press coverages, artist statements, and work notes. Among them, "The Artist File" of the MMCA's research archive was most helpful for me to access the photographs, videos, and other types of notes recording Moon & Jeon's collaborative projects that they donated to the museum collection in 2012. At the MMCA archive, I was also able to find five out-of-print exhibition catalogues of YHCHI from their earlier period and the documents regarding their activities at the initial exhibition of the MMCA's Seoul branch in 2012. These materials allowed me to examine the historical context with regard to the conceptual elaboration of new media art in Korea since the mid-1990s, within which YHCHI has pointed toward reformulating the technologies of reading through sensorial intervention. In order to historicize the institutionalization of contemporary Korean new media art, I researched unpublished information booklets and reports of the international conferences and workshop programs organized by two of the most vital contemporary art events in Korea — the Mediacity Seoul and the Gwangju Biennale— at the Art Council Korea Archive and the Seoul Museum of Art Library. My research at the Art Center Nabi, a private art institution dedicated to the production and promotion of digital art, focused on its past exhibitions and education programs that feature the artists in my case studies. In addition, the Nam June Paik Art Center Archive enabled me to see three full-length films of the satellite project created by Nam June Paik —one of the most prominent figures in the history of Korean new media art— in the mid-1980s and a number of VHS sources used for the series, which serves as a central example

to clarify my research question in the introduction. The American avant-garde artist and musician Laurie Anderson's *the Language of the Future* (1984) performance, as a part of Paik's project, was especially valuable to review, since it presents me with an idea of how to propose and define one of the key terms of my dissertation, "the languages of the future." Through the research at these five major art institutions, I was able to make a personal connection with many Korean archivists, who kindly assisted me to obtain otherwise inaccessible research materials.

In June 15-17, I traveled to Gwangju, another vital site for the contemporary Korean art scene, in order to consult the Asia Culture Center's archive collections of Exhibition History, Asian Video Art, and Asian Experimental Film. This trip allowed me not only to collect unpublished, out-of-print video and film materials about Moon & Jeon and YHCHI at these archives, but also to observe how this regional art institution proposes alternative avenues for global communication through digital technology. The Japan section of the Exhibition History Archive offered particularly useful materials. I found the catalog of the 2002 exhibition, entitled *A Second Talk: Contemporary Art from Korea and Japan*, which introduces YHCHI as the main artist who contributed to enlarge the platform for transnational art practice between the two countries. During my stay in Gwangju, I had the additional benefit of seeing a number of public art projects created by renowned contemporary Asian artists, such as Raqs Media Collective and Do-ho Suh, as a part of the premier event for the upcoming 2018 Gwangju Biennale. These installations were only a part of countless original artworks and exhibitions I saw this summer, which critically broadened my knowledge of up-to-date art and cultural discourse formed in Korea and other parts of Asia.

The IRIS Graduate Student Summer Fieldwork Award made it possible for me to conduct the crucial last on-site research in Korea before my research stay in Tokyo for 2018-19, supported by the Japan Foundation, and writing chapters. The research materials I consulted and the connections I was able to develop with the artists and archivists this summer substantiated my analysis of the shaping importance of East Asian new media art in offering sites of collective, transnational encounter on altered political grounds that do not depend on shared language.