

historisch und auch aktuell der Grund für die Trennung vom Heimatland häufig Unrecht war oder ist. Vielmehr möchte ich die Diskussion öffnen, indem ich die Aufmerksamkeit auf das weite, breite und vielschichtige Bild der Dispersion richte, die uns umgibt, und darauf, wie Gemeinschaft aufgrund der Bewegungen von Menschen gebildet oder aufgelöst wird. Wenn man solche Phänomene beobachtet, besteht die Tendenz, dass man versucht, in Anbetracht eines Problems nach einer Lösung zu suchen. Das Wort „non-cathartic“ – nicht kathartisch – legt eine weniger lösungsorientierte, weniger problematisierende Perspektive nahe, denn ich möchte eine Zeitlang bei diesen Phänomenen bleiben, um sie ausführlich zu betrachten und sie zu verarbeiten, indem ich bei ihnen verweile. Mit anderen Worten, ich lasse die Phänomene in mir ihre ganze Bedeutung entwickeln. Ich stelle mir den Raum im Haus der Kunst als einen Raum vor, der eine Struktur der Dispersion beherbergt, eine Art dreidimensionaler Karte der Dispersion, und lade andere ein, das alles in angemessener Weise zu betrachten und zu überdenken.

- 1 Anmerkung der Übersetzerin: Der Buchtitel wurde aus dem Koreanischen ins Englische übersetzt. Der Originaltext wurde auf Japanisch herausgegeben.
- 2 Der Friedensvertrag zwischen Japan und einem Teil der Alliierten (der allgemein als Vertrag von San Francisco oder Friedensvertrag von San Francisco bezeichnet wird) wurde offiziell am 8. September 1951 im War Memorial Opera House in San Francisco von 48 Nationen unterzeichnet. Er trat am 28. April 1952 in Kraft. Der Vertrag markierte das offizielle Ende des Zweiten Weltkriegs und das Ende der Kolonialherrschaft Japans und sprach den Zivilisten und ehemaligen Kriegsgefangenen, die unter den Kriegsverbrechen der Japaner gelitten hatten, Entschädigungen zu.
- 3 Chōsen hat zwei Bedeutungen. zum einen umfasst der Begriff die koreanische Diaspora in Japan und China, zum anderen bezeichnet er die Chosun-Dynastie (1392-1897), die letzte Dynastie des koreanischen Königreiches.
- 4 Zum Thema zeitgenössische Kunst und Migration siehe T. J. Demos, *Durham/NC*: Duke University Press 2013.
- 5 Anmerkung der Übersetzerin: Der Buchtitel wurde aus dem Koreanischen ins Englische übersetzt. Der Originaltext wurde auf Japanisch herausgegeben.

- 6 Vgl. Bart van der Heide, „Die Wiedergewinnung des Verlusts: Der Duras'sche Zustand' in der Ethik der Konzeptkunst“, in: Melanie Ohnemus (Hrsg.), *Ausst.-Kat., Portikus, Frankfurt am Main, Berlin und New York: Sternberg Press 2010, S. 58–67, hier S. 63ff.* Van der Heide schreibt: „Das diskursive Subjekt wird durch eine symbolische Interpretation dieses Subjekts ersetzt mittels materieller Abstraktion, der Stummheit der ‚Sinnstifterin‘ und der Darstellung von Abwesenheit. (...) In ästhetischer Hinsicht befindet sich Haegue Yang an der Schwelle zur formalistischen Abstraktion, ihre Arbeiten sind selbstreflexiv. Doch ihr offensichtliches politisches und soziales Engagement als Person verhindert, dass der Diskurs der Konzeptkunst sie tatsächlich über diese Schwelle stößt. In Antwort darauf schlägt Yang eine eher philosophische und ästhetische Interpretation des konzeptuellen Arbeitens vor und eine Form der Ethik, die über einen eindeutigen politischen, sozialen oder kulturellen Bezug hinausgeht.“
- 7 Siehe *Ausst.-Führer, Arnolfini, Bristol, Bristol 2011, S. 7.*
- 8 Felix Gonzalez-Torres, zit. nach Nancy Spector (Hrsg.), *Ausst.-Kat., Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 1995, S. 13.*

Accommodating the Epic Dispersion

HAEGUE YANG IN CONVERSATION WITH T. J. DEMOS

T. J. Demos [TJD] In preparing for your 2012 commission at Haus der Kunst, how did you think about approaching the difficult history represented by the architectural site, given that the neoclassical building was constructed during the 1930s following plans of architect Paul Ludwig Troost, representing the Third Reich's monumental Nazi architecture?

Haegue Yang [HY] I began with my interest in how colonial history affects and transforms us. Even if colonization takes shape differently now than in the past, it's quite present in the stream of power around us, like the air we breathe. Ranging from European fascism at the time of World War II to contemporary colonial phenomena disguised in economic form, it seems to me that the legacy of colonialism has never really ceased to maintain its impact on us. As a result, people migrate and disperse constantly for survival, fleeing from violence or danger, or for a better life, instead of getting settled in a community. Most of the positive ideas associated with settlement or building a community seem either to fail or deceive, while most of what constitutes real politics falls short of paying attention to the counter-narratives in these migrations and exiles. In other words, the non-conformist movements that cross the border and go against the conventional nation-state are only traced in order to be controlled and suppressed, rather than being observed and understood.

I can't stop myself from examining the figures and events that seem significant to comprehend the elusive aspects of the colonial circumstances in which we are living today. For me, the challenge I am facing at Haus der Kunst responds to my desire to overcome the simplicity of dichotomies, to get closer to the as-yet unfolded complexities in the colonial dispersion and migration ranging from physical exodus to mental break-down. In fact, I have two starting points: One is recognizing the difficulty of relating to Haus der Kunst and its traumatic history, and the other is the challenge of confronting the epic volume of the building's physical space.

TJD Your work is often based in extensive historical research, in line with neo-conceptual art with an archival impulse and postcolonial sensitivities. Your recent theatrical project related to the book *The Malady of Death* for DOCUMENTA (13), for instance, comes to mind, with its allusion to the life and writings of Marguerite Duras. Regarding your current project, you've mentioned to me that you've been thinking about it via the writings of the



DOCUMENTA (13): *Approaching: Choreography Engineered in Never-Past Tense* 2012

Korean writer Suh Kyungsik, and specifically his relation to the Italian Holocaust survivor, Primo Levi, whose story offered Suh a way of approaching the oppressive context in South Korea in the 1970s, when Suh's brothers were tortured for their role in the democracy movement. It appears that establishing relations between different geopolitical contexts and histories offers a way for you to make sense of the present, to approach sites marked by traumatic histories, even if it involves a set of ultimately impossible translations.

HY It has been a while since I came across Suh Kyungsik, in fact first by reading *Encounter 1*, a 2007 publication in which he conversed with the Korean philosopher Sang-Bong Kim. I was very impressed by their friendly and polite exchange over their opposing views and precise discussion of topics relating to nation and state, people and folk, diaspora and de- or anti- as well as post-colonialization. With that text, I began my one-sided 'encounter' with Suh Kyungsik by reading his other books.

As I experienced in my research into Marguerite Duras, I not only got to know his thoughts but also his biography. To introduce him briefly: Suh Kyungsik was born in 1951 in Kyoto as the third son of a Korean family. His grandfather had decided to immigrate to Japan in search for a better life – one of approximately one million and a half Koreans who had come to Japan either as a direct or indirect result of Japan's policy of Total War from 1926 to 1945. After Korea had been liberated from Japanese imperial colonialism in 1945, many Koreans, among them Suh Kyungsik's grandfather, returned to their homeland. However, a large number of them remained in Japan for economic

reasons, as Suh Kyungsik's father did, since Korea was not only in political chaos, but also economically devastated by Japan's colonial exploitation.

While former colonial subjects living in Japan were still considered Japanese during the time between Japan's defeat in 1945 and the 1951, according to the San Francisco Peace Treaty² only those former colonial subjects who signed their nationality as South Korean rather than "Chōsen,"³ a word that designated only their ethnicity, could claim Japanese citizenship. This prevented the re-entrance of those who, like Suh Kyungsik's grandfather, had left Japan before the Peace Treaty. Until this day, Korean Japanese in Japan are still considered foreigners suffering from both general discrimination in their daily lives and systematic differentiation by the Japanese government. What's interesting here is Suh's broad interest in comprehending how those Korean Japanese emerged as people in limbo during colonization, which for them never really ceased.

TJD Does Suh Kyungsik describe this complex history of displacement and migration, and the difficult postcolonial circumstances of Koreans left in Japan after World War II in his writings?

HY Yes, particularly the effect on his and many other Korean families caught at the threshold between imperial colonialism and the modern nation-state, illuminating the postcolonial phenomenon of having a "quasi-refugee" status. The notion of the quasi-refugee emerged with the definition of the 'Kukmin' (國民), meaning a citizen of the nation outside of any emergency context, such as war or genocide. The category denies and ignores other understandings of belonging according to residence or ethnicity, leaving those who are not 'Kukmin' to live in a sustained temporary status in Japan as 'Zainichi' (在日), meaning resident in Japan, even though Koreans are the country's second largest ethnic group. This permanent residency status for foreigners is broken down further into three categories: Chōsen, South Korean, and Japanese citizens of Korean descent. Chōsen designates those who immigrated to Japan from undivided Korea, implying a connection to the Chosun dynasty (1392–1897) before Japanese colonialism. These distinctions are one source of difficulty for Korean Japanese today, who have almost no voice in society since they are divided into these unwanted categorizations and therefore can't act as one community in Japan, where they are left without a distinct identity and without any communal presence or feeling.

TJD This situation strikes me as somewhat similar to the postcolonial populations living in Europe and the UK today, some of whom continue to suffer an uncertain status. "Immigrant" isn't the appropriate term for those whose ancestors were once forcibly made part of colonial empires and who

may have voluntarily come “home” to the metropolis. But that’s how they and many of their descendants are regarded today. At the same time, there is a similar dispersion of new migrant legal categories and forms of control in the West as part of new modes of demographic surveillance, answering an emergent neo-nationalist politics and a xenophobic response to supposed aliens and foreigners.⁴ As in Europe, there must also be an extensive visual archive that narrates this difficult history of Koreans in Japan.

HY Indeed, take the film, *Death by Hanging* (1968) [Fig. 1 – p. 53] by Oshima Nagisa. I had known about this film before, but I didn’t comprehend its meaning thoroughly until I read Suh Kyungsik’s books. In the film, the story is based on a real figure, referred to as *R*, who is accused of rape and murder and sentenced to death. The plot takes a dark-humored Brechtian turn when *R*’s execution fails and he loses his memory. Despite the narrative’s caricature-like style, which shows the process with which the authorities attempt to make *R* re-acknowledge his crime, the film mercilessly expresses and captures the widespread racial discrimination against ethnic Koreans, revealing the unjust state violence and a view of ethnic Koreans as criminals. The film is fantastic, not only in its description of the harshness of the discrimination and the way in which it continued in Japan even after the end of the imperial period, but also in its existential and surrealistic depiction of the practice of jailing and executing Koreans.

TJD How does this history relate to your own story, and to the artistic challenge you’ve set for yourself in taking on the Haus der Kunst project?

HY My interest in studying Suh Kyungsik’s work is to gain an understanding of these historical events and their effects through the thoughts and opinions recorded in his books. It is also intriguing to observe and follow someone who is, in turn, observing other people’s lives and work in order to comprehend his own situation. I’ve found this methodology of investigation highly inspirational. For instance, take Suh’s interest in Primo Levi, who died in 1987 after reestablishing a seemingly peaceful life among Italian Jews in Torino after all the pain and suffering he had experienced in Auschwitz during the Holocaust. His death motivated Suh’s journey to Torino and resulted in the book *A Journey to Primo Levi*⁵ (Tokyo, 1999). There is a mysterious yet most natural and logical tie between them. As a writer, Suh migrates from time to time, from place to place. Yet sometimes he would also observe without following his subjects. For instance two of his brothers, Suh Sung and Suh Jun-sik, went to South Korea to study in 1967 and 1969. As emancipated Korean Japanese, they wanted to get over their dislocation from their mother tongue and culture. However, they soon encountered the political situation of life

under a military dictator and decided to join the democratization movement in Korea. They were accused of being North Korean spies and arrested in 1971 for violating the Korean National Security Law through their illegal trip to North Korea (like Suh Kyongsik, they had South Korean passports). Suh Sung was sentenced to death and Suh Jun-sik to fifteen years of prison. Both were severely tortured, and Suh Sung, out of fear of falsely naming someone innocent, attempted suicide by burning himself, but survived.

TJD So what happened then?

HY In the end, Suh Jun-sik was released in 1990, after nineteen years of incarceration, due to his refusal to submit to so-called ideological conversion, even though his acceptance would have significantly reduced his sentence. Respectively, both were regarded criminals by the South Korean government, like the Koreans in Japan by the Japanese government, and physically and politically suppressed and forced into the unwanted position of being refugees



A Journey to Primo Levi, Tokyo 1999

in Japan. This tragedy is densely interwoven with the Cold War period, when their homeland was and is ideologically divided in two. Suh Kyungsik is clearly affected by his brothers' destiny and made efforts to help and support them, but felt he was helpless, as someone both outside of the events, yet deeply involved in them as well.

TJD So this is where the convergence between Suh and Primo Levi becomes relevant and which then suggests a parallel between divergent cultural and historical contexts that you find helpful in your approach both to the site of Haus der Kunst and to the historical circumstances in Germany today?

HY Yes. Given this journey between the countries of South Korea, North Korea and Japan, Suh Kyungsik would appear to have been less affected by it all than his brothers. Yet nevertheless, he remains severely affected and his experience may perhaps be comparable to Primo Levi's as a Holocaust survivor. Both Levi and Suh live away from the homeland of their ancestors, both are highly educated in the language of their country of residence (Italian in Levi's case, Japanese in Suh's), which are their mother tongue, yet not necessarily the language of their ethnic origin. For both, their ethnic identities were the source of pain and suffering, and both faced expulsion from their homelands. For them, the experience of suffering was inevitable, and the retiring nature of their later lives were in each instance unbearably deceptive since in effect, their lives had already been destroyed.

TJD You are clearly moved by Suh Kyungsik's history.

HY I feel Suh Kyungsik's agonizing process in his writings, in which he describes Primo Levi, his brothers, and other figures. I particularly found the passage where he traces Primo Levi's life compelling, perhaps because it has such a confounding dead end, since the circumstances of his death, his mysterious suicide, created a dark cul-de-sac coming as it did after his survival of the Holocaust, then a return to normality during which he struggled to retain a recollection of his experiences. Suh's thoughts wander as he physically journeys to Torino and visits the apartment where Levi committed suicide and then his tomb. In his book, Suh writes that he visits Levi's tomb often. In fact, I have a hard time summarizing his act of journeying to Levi simply as such, because it's so rich yet enigmatic, at the same time quite desperate but calm and modest, presenting so many facets worthy of discovery. He recalls Levi's entire life, his childhood as well as his integrated life as an Italian Jew in Piedmont. He describes Levi's time in the concentration camp, his return to his hometown, where nothing seemed different, except that some people had

disappeared. He examines Levi's writings and works, both in literature and in chemistry, and the question, why he committed suicide after having survived all of this?

The question helps to locate Suh, a person who grew up in the postcolonial diaspora, who is so vivid, complex, and intelligent and yet feels so helpless as a member of an absolute minority, who falls into a black hole between normality and the most insane abnormality of colonialism, fascism, and totalitarian society. He seems to have lived between histories, between the time of his brothers in Seoul and that of his father, as well as between Levi's time and his own. He travels across continents and temporalities, good and bad times, necessity and desire, between life and survival as a loner. I feel I am with him on his journeys across these different times and places. His life and stories possess an epic dimension. In fact, I've found that every colonial figure unfolds at different times, within different cultures and geopolitics, and their narrative inevitably gains an epic dimension. The figures of diaspora always unfold in multiple timelines, as Suh unravels the times of the Chōsen, of South Korea, Imperial Japan, and Germany and as he travels from Primo Levi's birthplace Torino to Auschwitz and also to the exiled Palestinian writer and activist, Edward Said, who was born to a Protestant family and eventually became a US citizen.

TJD How does Palestinian history enter into this? Clearly, Said is a relevant figure here, as he proposed a way of transforming his experience of diaspora and exile into aesthetic principles, and also using that experience to understand, more broadly, modernism's relation to geopolitical and literary and artistic forms of displacement.

HY Suh Kyungsik reveals that he encountered the writings of Ghassan Kanafani (born in 1936) in the late 1970s. Kanafani was a Palestinian refugee and writer, who also worked as a spokesman for the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). In 1972, he was assassinated in Beirut in a car bombing. Suh explored the impact of Kanafani's writing in the South Korean pro-democracy movement during the 1970s, how his writing as well as other works of Arab literature of resistance influenced intellectuals in South Korea, where it was instrumental in defining and conceiving their own struggle as part of a global Third World liberation movement. In fact, I haven't studied Kanafani's works closely yet. It will be my future research, inspired by Suh. Studying one figure often enables me to discover not only historical events, but also other figures. As with Suh, studying such figures also illuminates my perception of the complex connections between them, even if I am neither an immigrant nor a refugee nor an activist.

TJD To return to the Haus der Kunst project, we have a web of historical connections that enter uneasily and non-transparently into your work and its formal operations. Nonetheless one thinks of your interest in tying disparate materials together in your practice of knitting and of macramé – is this an aesthetic approximation of historical and geopolitical connectivity? More broadly, how do you think of the relationship between form and content, material and subject, abstraction and history in regard to your current work?

HY Like other conceptual artists in the history of art, I'm concerned with the possible exploitation of social and historical reality for the sake of art's autonomy. It's too big a subject for me to answer completely now, however, what is important to me, is to continue my struggle and to maintain these various concerns. The relationality that is at stake here – between aesthetics and history – ultimately contains an aporia that is something I think should be maintained rather than being solved. However, for me it's too difficult, even painful, to use this term because it contains and summarizes so much. It's easy to lose its precision. Maintaining an aporia between form and content, material and subject, abstraction and history, is an act of translating the struggle in one's life and therefore could be understood as a sign of willingness to weave and cast not-yet-cultivated notions of passage into relations of proximity. I find the word "proximity" interesting, since it describes a status of getting closer, which is a process rather than a result. I consider my work relatively loyal to a certain conventional notion of the visual arts, involving materials, space, and craft, and also the intention to mediate physical and visual experience. By dealing with urgent matters of reality, I try to challenge as well as reinforce both the precarious and extremely established framework of the exhibition enterprise, where I mostly create my work.

TJD Your art also develops a relation to mobility and dislocation, which become aesthetic expressions and sensibilities, as well as precarious and ephemeral forces that your work introduces into the apparent solidity and stability of the institutional site. How do you see these aspects of your work?

HY During the past two years, my focus has been on movement, both in a physical and non-physical sense. There is social movement, political movement, artistic movement, cultural movement, and so on. Funnily enough, physically, movement can only start by losing balance and re-catching the falling body with an effort of mobilizing some mechanism of that body. In both vectors of losing and regaining balance the body is the origin and starting point. I guess for me the institutional framework has been a material to lose and regain yet also to destroy and rebuild. The same goes for the materials and forms, as well as the content and histories that factor into my work. A non-exploitative engagement

is hard to achieve, and yet we see in the analysis of the dynamics of movement how the mechanism of agency is both destabilizing and stabilizing; balancing the two is necessary to achieve movement. What I meant by maintaining a struggle could be understood as a process – a matter of losing power, control, and coordination as well as regaining each in a new manner. I need to lose the power of and didactic control over content, reality, and history, in order to regain them in a new manner, in a materialized language. The whole process of learning about content seems to be always long and difficult, and losing it seems too simple. At least, it has provided sufficient dynamics in my daily work, even if not always promising and sometimes uncertain, in dealing with various dimensions, such as space, scale, weight, and length, and with values such as history and politics, philosophies and biographies. All of them somehow go through the process of being negated to be reconfigured for the sake of something else. I've had to come up with a different medium, which reminds me of the way Suh began to look into figures in different cultures and circumstances in order to materialize his own political being and to craft a different framework than previous ideological, colonial or nationalistic perspectives.

TJD Can you say more about how Suh factors into your art project for Munich? After discussing his history in such depth, it would be good to connect it more to your work *Accommodating the Epic Dispersion – On Non-cathartic Volume of Dispersion* at Haus der Kunst.

HY I cannot really articulate how my research on Suh is concretely translated into the Munich installation. However, the topics he focuses on and his way of researching resonate with the issues and methodology I was devoting myself to for *Accommodating the Epic Dispersion – On Non-cathartic Volume of Dispersion*. I invited him to give a lecture on the framework of my engagement at Haus der Kunst. There will also be a screening of the film *Death by Hanging*. I understand the series DER ÖFFENTLICHKEIT – VON DEN FREUNDEN HAUS DER KUNST (To the Public – from the Friends of Haus der Kunst) – the new annual art commission, for which I made my work – not only as a visual experience in the exhibition space, but also a platform to share and reveal research informing the installation. So it feels right to invite Suh to speak, and this will enable me to have a personal encounter with him. I also believe that his visit to Munich in this historically scarred space is significant, since he also made a journey to Torino to visit Primo Levi's grave and his home. We, the public, can hear his voice in person; everyone can share my moment of questioning and curiosity as a seeker and someone who does not yet know why historical figures provoke connotations that condense, disclose or enclose historical events and narratives, nor how exactly these narratives are translated into a visual or spatial form.

TJD Your exploration of endless movement and translation, negation and reinvention reminds me of your 2012 project *Dress Vehicles* [Fig. 2] for the Tate Modern. The piece occupied the newly rehabilitated oil tank spaces near the turbine hall and comprised large colorful and mobile constructions made with aluminum frames, blinds, and knotted textile macramé. These dazzling architectonic bodies were wheeled around by performers situated inside of them, moving to the soundtrack of a drum set played freely by members of the audience who had access to a live microphone and were accompanied by a flickering and mobile light display. In relation to this piece, you've mentioned being inspired by the Sacred Dances and Movements of the Russian spiritualist, Georges I. Gurdjieff (1866–1949), who was of Greek and Armenian ancestry, and by the geometric costumes of avant-garde theatre, namely Oskar Schlemmer's *Triadic Ballet*, which premiered in 1922 (as well as the dramatic costumes worn by drag queens). Does your Haus der Kunst project build on these precedents?

HY Honestly, I am not able to make a good connection between my other Venetian blinds pieces and *Dress Vehicles*. The only thing I would mention is how the blinds work in both *Accommodating the Epic Dispersion – On Non-cathartic Volume of Dispersion* and in *Dress Vehicles*. The material functions to cast certain forms, volumes, and shapes, yet not thoroughly enclose or articulate the space as an autonomous section. Blinds only frame space and articulate it half way, providing a way to guide movements around the space without completely blocking one's visual access or other senses. In the case of *Dress Vehicles*, the blinds articulate the inside and the outside, a skin that you can see through to the outer world.

Also the blinds interact indirectly with us by continually changing the nature of their impact, blocking or opening visual access according to our position in relation to them. Even if from one perspective a blind seems completely open, when we move and change our distance and angle, it suddenly appears completely closed. This element of variable perspective and changing spatial location brings a certain permeability to perception, a permeability that viewers have a power to influence, which is common to both projects.

Another similarity is the spatial isolation of both pieces at the Tanks and at Haus der Kunst. It's less about the fabrication of a piece than my approach to the space, defined by a certain isolation from history and politics. I wish to overwrite the site of fascist and totalitarian history with the context of postcolonial diaspora, in other words, to emancipate the space from its historical belonging and let it drift and be exiled to other times and places. The space needs to be in a state of quasi-exile, thereby losing its belongingness to gain a new mode of existence in the here and now. Then it might eventually



Fig 2: *Dress Vehicle – Zig Zag* 2012

be able to accommodate new languages of speaking about the here and now. Detaching it from its totalitarian narrative also means avoiding any sense of a glorious conclusion, a rejection of the master-narrative, this also being a rather feminist effort. It's more of a non-cathartic narrative, not far, but also different from a counter-narrative, which acknowledges something to oppose.

TJD That sounds very compelling. How do you consider the relationship between the stylistic cohesion of your sculptural forms (the fact that your work uses repeated forms, materials, and approaches, and bears your own stylistic signature) and the very different histories that inform them? Is there a potential loss of geopolitical and historical specificity when you transform and translate those stories into your work?

HY Here I can offer some associations and citations from other texts that seem to address these issues: I find that the aesthetic abstraction of an artwork does not preclude the audiences' engagement with the historically specific events and narratives informing that work. In his essay "Recovering loss: the 'Durassian' condition within Conceptual ethics," Bart van der Heide takes issue with how Conceptual Art today is often so abstract that it leaves the artist and subject's discursive position invisible; but at the same time he acknowledges that clear political referencing is not the only form of ethical artistic engagement.⁶

I believe that the artist's aesthetic tools can provide distinctive forms of experience, making historical narratives comprehensible in linguistically

unexplainable ways. Being a “contemporary” artist is about understanding and addressing the politics of language and how these dominant politics address, constitute, and reproduce injustices.⁷ But the aesthetic aspects contain their own vocabulary and language which speaks to and contradicts (also politically) the rules of space and interaction in a different way than any spoken language. The American, Cuban-born artist, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, explained this relationship between aesthetics and politics very well when he said: “I say the best thing about aesthetics is that the politics which permeate it are totally invisible. Because, when we speak about aesthetics we are talking about a whole set of rules that were established by somebody. (...) The most successful of all political moves are ones that don’t appear to be ‘political.’”⁸ This way of maneuvering the “rules” of experience is an important aspect of my blind installations.

The historical and biographical specificity of particular people’s lives provides an important source for me in order to grasp and reflect upon these issues. However, it is what these many different people and groups commonly experience that drives me to repeatedly move from one historically specific biography to another very different one. These specificities help me to discern various perspectives on and aspects of these issues of community and mobility, but my artistic expression of these issues has to come from me as I comprehend them and in the artistic vocabulary that I “speak” with. But this is a “me” that has been inspired and, in a way, changed by this confrontation with this very heterogeneous research.

TJD How did you arrive at the title for your Munich project?

HY It’s quite a long title and as usual I have tried to find a way to reduce its bulkiness. But in this case, I thought that the long title corresponds strangely well to the volume of the air we encounter when we look up at the ceiling of Haus der Kunst through the layers of the Venetian blinds, gazing all the way to the far end of the space. In fact, I expect the volume of the words to obtain impact as well as meaning and resonance with the topics of migration, displacement, postcolonial diaspora, forced exile, and so on.

The word dispersion is repeated twice in the title, which is significant. Dispersion does not necessarily have a positive connotation, compared with “unity” and “consensus,” even though I believe that the word describes a common phenomenon of our time when so many people travel, immigrate, and for varied reasons, many couples and family members live apart from each other. I wanted to treat this phenomenon in a non-judgmental way, despite the fact that historically, as well as currently, the separation from the homeland has been and is frequently caused by injustice. I rather wish to open up the discussion by drawing attention to the wide, broad, and multilayered

picture of dispersion that surrounds us, and to how community is assembled and dissolved according to the movement of people. In observing such phenomena, the tendency is to try and find a resolution, because we see the problems in them. The word “non-cathartic” suggests a less solution-oriented, less problematizing perspective, because I wish to stay with the phenomena for a while to fully contemplate and digest them by dwelling in them. In other words, I let the phenomena develop their full significance in me. I picture the space of Haus der Kunst accommodating a structure of dispersion, a kind of three-dimensional map of dispersion, and invite others to view and contemplate it all properly.

- 1 Translator’s note: The title was translated from Korean into English, while the original text was published in Japanese.
- 2 The Treaty of Peace with Japan (commonly known as the Treaty of San Francisco or the San Francisco Peace Treaty), between Japan and part of the Allied Powers, was officially signed by 48 nations on September 8, 1951, at the War Memorial Opera House in San Francisco, United States. It came into force on April 28, 1952. This treaty served to officially end World War II, to formally end Japan’s status as an imperial power, and to allocate compensation to Allied civilians and former prisoners of war who had suffered Japanese war crimes.
- 3 Chōsen has two meanings: on the one hand, it refers to the Korean diaspora in Japan and China, on the other, it references the Chosun dynasty (1392-1897), the last dynasty in the Korean kingdom.
- 4 For a study on contemporary art and migration, see T. J. Demos, *Migrant Image: The Art and Politics of Documentary During Global Crisis* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2013).
- 5 Translator’s note: The title was translated from Korean into English, while the original text was published in Japanese.

- 6 See Bart van der Heide, “Recovering loss: the ‘Durassian’ condition within Conceptual ethics,” in: Melanie Ohnemus (ed.), *Haegue Yang: Siblings and Twins*, exhib. cat., Portikus, Frankfurt/Main, Sternberg Press, Berlin, New York, 2010, pp. 90f., where he writes: “The discursive subject is replaced by a symbolic interpretation of this subject, by means of material abstraction, muteness of the ‘giver of meaning,’ and the depiction of absence... In terms of aesthetics, Haegue Yang’s works, as self-reflexive works of art, are on the threshold of formalistic abstraction. Yet her obvious political and social engagement as a person prevents the discourse of Conceptual Art from actually pushing her over this threshold. In response, Yang proposes a more philosophical and aesthetic interpretation of Conceptual engagement, and a form of ethics that goes beyond clear-cut political, social, or cultural reference.”
- 7 See *The Sea Wall: Haegue Yang with an Inclusion* by Felix Gonzalez-Torres, exhib. guide, Arnolfini, Bristol, 2011, p. 7.
- 8 Felix Gonzalez-Torres, quoted in Nancy Spector (ed.), *Felix Gonzalez-Torres*, exhib. cat., Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 1995, p. 13.