Korean Shamanic Experience in the Age of Digital Intermediality: Park Chan-kyong's *Manshin*

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Abstract

Despite the recent increased interest in Korean shamanism in Korean film studies, most relevant publications have tended to confine their discussions only to the question of the *legitimacy* of Korean films' representations of Korean shamanism. In doing so, existing Korean film scholarship has not yet substantially explored equally important questions such as: What different aesthetic *techniques* have the Korean films about shamanism employed to represent and/or express the subjective and objective experiences of Korean shamanic rituals? What are the socio-cultural and political *implications* of these cinematic engagements with Korean shamanism? The need for a closer look at these issues has become more obvious as new, more experimental Korean films and other forms of media dealing with shamanism have appeared during the past decade. Park Chan-kyong's experimental documentary *Manshin: Ten Thousand Spirits* (2013) is especially notable in this regard since it employs digitally-enabled intermedial techniques. This paper explores the ways in which *Manshin*'s use of these techniques is able to express the cultural *otherness* of Korean shamanism. I will argue that this film's hypermediated use of several intermedial techniques enables it to express the fantastic quality of trance-like shamanic experiences, rewrite the biography of shaman Kim Keum-hwa and the history of Korean shamanism in the form of materialist historiography, and profane shamanic practices against the recent tendency to spectacularize them. In this regard, *Manshin* can be seen to significantly contribute to a reimagining of the postcolonial nation of Korea as one that is irreducibly heterogeneous and open to new socio-cultural possibilities.

Keywords

Since the 1970s Korean shamanism, hitherto persecuted and marginalized as a superstitious and primitive practice, has increasingly attracted scholarly attention across a wide range of academic disciplines, including Korean history studies, Korean folklore studies, Korean religious studies, and Korean literary studies. There has also been increased interest in this topic in Korean film scholarship over the past two decades, although most of the relevant academic publications have tended to confine their attention to the question of the legitimacy of Korean films' representations of Korean shamanism.[1] However, existing Korean film studies have not yet substantially explored important questions such as: What aesthetic techniques have the South Korean films about shamanism employed to represent and/or express both the subjective and objective experiences of Korean shamanic rituals? What may be the socio-cultural and political implications of these cinematic engagements with Korean shamanism?

The need for dealing with these issues has become clearer as new and more experimental South Korean films about shamanism have come out during the past decade. Park Chan-kyong's experimental documentary *Manshin: Ten Thousand Spirits* (2013) is very prominent in this regard because it not only transgresses the conventions of standard documentaries but, more importantly, it does so in part by employing digitally-enabled intermedial techniques. Therefore, this paper sets out to explore the ways in which *Manshin*'s intermedial techniques serve to express the socio-cultural otherness of Korean shamanism by answering the following questions: How do these intermedial techniques allow this film to present shamanic rituals in a different way from past films about Korean shamanism? In what ways does the film mediate the non-dogmatic polytheism specific to Korean shamanism through its intermedial techniques? On the other hand, how do the socio-cultural alterities of Korean shamanism affect and transform the film's intermedial processes? In what ways do this film's intermedial reconstructions of Korean shamanism allow us to re-imagine the postcolonial nation of South Korea?

The exploration of *Manshin* will also lead us to ask such questions as: How useful are Western media theories (such as theories about remediation, the appropriation of media, and pure mediality) to a discussion of Korean films like *Manshin*, set, as the latter are, within the specific cultural and historical context of South Korea? How might our perception of specific and singular aspects of *Manshin*

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[1] One notable exception is Kim So-young's *Kŭndaesŏngŭi yuryŏngdŭl*, which discusses, in a remarkable way, how various aesthetic techniques of horror films and melodrama have characterized South Korean films dealing with the fantastic, in a way that allows the oppressed, pre-modern to haunt the modern.

prompt us to modify Western media theories and concepts? How can postcolonial film and cultural theories (such as that of a nation's split temporality) help us to alter or supplement Western theories and concepts in a way that may be pertinent to this film's specific context and content?

Korean Shamanism Digitally Remediated

Korean shamanism (*musok*) refers to a Korean folk religion that is geared toward helping people solve human problems through the shaman's (*mudang's*) invocation of the spirits. In its special ritual, called *kut*, the shaman (who is usually a female) invokes various spirits while singing a series of songs, performing dances, offering witty conversation and making some special gestures. Although this traditional form of shamanism was very influential in ancient times, such as during the period of the Gojoseon Dynasty, as Cho Hung-youn points out, Korean shamanism was marginalized and its practitioners sometimes persecuted during the Buddhist Goyreo Dynasty, the Neo-Confucian Joseon Dynasty, and the periods of Japanese colonial rule and postcolonial modernization when Christianity was becoming increasingly influential (*Han'guk* 16-20).

Despite its marginalization, Korean shamanism has continued to be practiced by the common people. In particular, the disenfranchised, that is, women and members of the undereducated lower class, have had to rely on these "unofficial" rituals to solve their problems. This association of Korean shamanism with the common or grassroots Korean people, the *minjung*, as Laurel Kendall notes, was very common especially in the 1970s and 1980s, the heyday of the *minjung* or democratization movement, when the *minjung* fervently participated in socio-political movements—e.g., labor, peasant, and student rebellions—against the military dictatorships and their alliances with the privileged upper class (21). During this period, according to Kendall, there was a widespread belief that socially-oppressed people's *han*, their "unrequited grievances," could be released during shamanic rituals, and "sympathetic shamans or self-styled shamanic performers invoked and comforted the souls of students and workers who had died in the cause of social justice as 'martyrs for democracy'" (22).

Closely aligned with this new interest in Korean shamanism, an increasing number of South Korean fictional films that feature it have appeared beginning from the late 1970s. These include fictional films such as *Divine Bow* (*Shin'gung*, Im Kwon-taek, 1979), *Ascension of Han-ne* (*Hanneŭi sŭngch'ŏn*, Ha Gil-jong, 1977), *The Man with Three Coffins* (*Nagŭnenŭn kiresŏdo shwiji annŭnda*, Lee Chang-ho,

1987), and *The Uninvited* (*Sainyong shikt'ak*, Lee Su-yeon, 2003) to list a few. As Park Yu-hee points out, if the earlier films of the 1950s and 1960s that portrayed shamans had a tendency to describe them as "premodern people who have not been awakened from superstition and delusion" (194), these films depict shamans as deserving our respect inasmuch as they are "proper to our own culture" (206).

Reading some of these films, Lee Chong-seung argues that they play a significant social role in "representing and bringing together social minorities" by "subverting the Confucianist order, and, at times, deconstructing oppressive power structures and ideologies" (32). Despite their contributions, however, these films mostly ended up domesticating the incommensurable otherness of shamanism by representing the female shamans and their rituals in a voyeuristic and/or fetishistic light through their conventional melodramatic plots and styles. Indeed, these films illustrate what Laura Mulvey and Homi Bhabha might have called the Western mainstream cinema's tendency to eroticize and fetishize women and racial and ethnic minorities.

However, more recent South Korean documentaries about shamanism such as *Mudang* (*Yŏngmae*, Park Ki-bok, 2003) and *Between* (*Saiesŏ*, Lee Chang-jae, 2006) challenge this fetishistic tendency by offering more secularized, ethnographic representations of shamans and their rituals. This is especially clear with *Mudang* which, as Jeong Yong-nam points out, provides us with very rich information about all the details and aspects of Korean shamanism (40). To be sure, *Mudang* has greatly contributed to leading Korean people away from any simplified, clichéd or prejudiced notions about shamanism and toward a more precise and concrete understanding of it. But just as Fatimah Tobing Rony has critiqued the assumption of ethnographic documentaries that they are "an unimpeachable scientific index of race" (4), a film like *Mudang* can also be seen as an attempt to master, to colonize Korean shamanism by making it something that is exhaustively visible and knowable through what Michel Foucault might have called modern optical "disciplinary" technologies.

On the other hand, Park's documentary *Manshin*, I would argue, offers us an alternative way of representing—or mediating, to be more precise—Korean shamanism by overcoming the limitations of the earlier films, both fictional and documentary, that focus on this topic. *Manshin* documents the Korean female shaman Kim Keum-hwa's (b. 1931) life against the backdrop of Korea's turbulent postcolonial history, from its liberation from Japanese rule to its early-1950s division into capitalist South and communist North Korea to the Cold War to the current period of neoliberal globalization.

The term *manshin* is a respectful term for *mudang* (shaman) and literally means "ten thousand spirits." Since being designated national shaman and Master of an "Important Intangible Cultural Heritage" in 1985, Kim has become increasingly well-known in South Korea where she has given some of her biggest shamanic performances and caught the attention of the mass media. Although it specifically focuses on the trajectory of her life at different stages, *Manshin* also draws the viewer's attention to Korean shamanism in general as a folk religion and to its social role and significance in the postcolonial history of Korea. Unlike the previous documentaries about shamanism, this film allows the viewer to *feel*, rather than to know, the otherness of shamanism, its incommensurability with Western modernity, in several ways. And this is achieved through, among other things, its digitally-enabled intermedial techniques.

With the expanding influence of new, digitally-based media from the mid-1990s onwards, numerous forms and instances of the interplay between previously distinct media have appeared. In accordance with this trend, a number of writings have attempted to theorize the different forms of interaction between and among media. In this process, film and media scholars have recently proposed and elaborated a series of concepts such as those of intermediality, media hybridity, and remediation.[2] Despite their differences, all of these concepts call into question what Noël Carroll calls the "medium-specificity thesis," the idea that "each art form, in virtue of its medium, has its own exclusive domain of development," and shift the focus to the many ways in which supposedly separate media become mixed, blurring the boundaries between them (25). While a variety of theories have been proposed regarding the aesthetic significance of intermediality, probably one of the most influential theories, and one very pertinent to the discussion of *Manshin,* would be Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin's theory of the double logic of remediation.

According to Bolter and Grusin, remediation, which they define as the refashioning of one medium by another, tends towards *transparent immediacy* by "eras(ing) all traces of mediation" on the one hand and toward *hypermediacy* by "multiply(ing) its media" on the other (5). As can be illustrated via the realistic special effects seamlessly incorporated in a live action film, the logic of immediacy is predicated on "the notion that a medium could erase itself and leave the viewer in the presence of the objects represented, so that he could know the object directly"

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[2] In this essay, following Irina O. Rajewsky's broad definition of it, I will use the term "intermediality" as "a generic term for all [the] phenomena that . . . in some way take place *between* media," namely, an umbrella-term that covers all the other similar concepts (46; emphasis in original).

(70). By contrast, as can be seen in a multimedia encyclopedia CD-ROM or a multimedia World Wide Web page, the logic of hypermediacy supports the notion that the viewer "is in the presence of a medium and learns through acts of mediation or indeed learns about mediation itself" (71).

From Bolter and Grusin's theoretical perspective, it is clear that *Manshin*'s intermedial techniques are predominantly hypermediated insofar as most of these techniques are designed to make the viewer clearly aware of multiple and complex acts of mediation. But how do these hypermediated deployments of intermedial techniques affect this film's representation of shamanism in the context of postcolonial South Korea? Bolter and Grusin's theory alone would not be very useful in answering this question because it is almost entirely devoted to explicating the formal characteristics of remediation without further discussing the socio-political significance of these aesthetic qualities. It would thus be more productive to make reference to Homi Bhabha's theory of the split temporality of the postcolonial nation in order to explore the socio-political implications of this film's hypermediacy.

Bhabha's theory came from his deconstructive reading of Benedict Anderson's well-known notion that the nation is imagined as synchronously homogeneous and univocally moving forward in a way that corresponds to the form of the newspaper or novel. Bhabha alternatively proposes that the postcolonial nation is ineluctably imagined as heterogeneous and equivocal because the time of the postcolonial nation is split from within "between the continuist, accumulative temporality of the pedagogical and the repetitious, recursive strategy of the performative" (145). For him, the latter, performative conception of time is crucial for an alternative imagination of the postcolonial nation since it creates "a supplementary movement of writing" that serves to include oppressed, subaltern subjects or social minorities as members of the nation and thus to deconstruct the homogeneous and univocal imagination of the nation (154).

To be sure, Bhabha's theory has a limitation in that it bases its arguments only on the use of a single medium, that of language. But his emphasis on the crucial role of the medium in a deconstructive engagement with the postcolonial nation could be productively expanded to thinking about intermedial practices of writing. Insofar as the hypermediated use of intermedial techniques intensifies the senses of heterogeneity, discontinuity, and contingency, it has the potential to performatively deconstruct the senses of the nation in more diverse and creative ways. In this context, those earlier films about Korean shamanism may be seen as serving the homogeneous imagination of South Korea by reductively incorporating shamanism into the pedagogical time of the nation by means of the immediate and transparent use of

cinematic techniques. By contrast, *Manshin*, I would argue, can be seen as challenging this tendency by recuperating this performative national time, foregrounding the inherent "split" of the time of South Korea as postcolonial nation, and thus reimagining this nation as being incommensurably heterogeneous. As I will show, several distinctive, hypermediated uses of intermedial techniques serve to reveal this performative potential of Korean shamanism to reimagine the postcolonial nation of South Korea.

This inextricable relationship between intermedial techniques and socio-political concerns that characterizes *Manshin* did not occur by chance. During his career as a media artist, Park Chan-kyong has constantly explored this relationship in his various works. After graduating from Seoul National University as an art major in the 1980s, he did his Masters of Fine Arts in photography at CalArts (California Institute of the Arts) in the early 1990s. Since he started his career in the late 1990s, he has engaged in diverse activities—including creating his own artworks, writing critical essays on the arts and curating a number of exhibits. The socio-political orientation of Park's work is also clear from his affiliation with the Art Space Pool (*Taean'gonggan p'ul*), one of the non-profit art organizations located in Seoul; it has mainly been involved in critically intervening in socio-cultural issues as well as "finding and supporting emerging young artists" (Kim Hong-hee 71) against the growing tendency of Korean art to institutionalize and commercialize.[3] Thus Park's work has mainly been concerned with South Korea's socio-cultural issues stemming from the nation's complex and turbulent postcolonial history. These issues include the Cold War's impact on the postcolonial history of Korea, Korea's colonial and neocolonial modernization processes and their devastation and marginalization of folk religions and rituals, and South Korea's more recent turn to neoliberal globalization and its tendency to package the nation's cultural heritages.

As for the types of media he has used in his work, early in his career, Park mainly worked on photographic projects, but he has gradually become an intermedia artist, working with a wide array of media ranging from language, photography, video, and animation. As a versatile media artist, he has also experimented with a wide range of modes of installation, ranging from photomontage to multi-photo slideshows, from single-channel to multi-channel video, and from single to multi-

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[3] Kim Hong-hee writes about the historical significance of these non-profit art organizations called alternative spaces (*taean'gonggan*): "In the economic crisis driven by the IMF, self-rescue measures were developed for the survival of young artists who were put in a relatively difficult situation, and in view of the crisis in which existing art museums or cultural foundations were shutting down or reducing their budgets, it was a meaningful change which embodied the belief that 'True art is born from difficulty'" (71).

media. Another notable characteristic of his works, especially his more recent ones—including his 2010 film, *Anyang, Paradise City* (*Tashi t'aeŏnago ship'ŏyo anyange*)—is the way he crosses or even blurs the boundary between fiction and documentary, not only by juxtaposing them but also by obscuring the genre or mode of a given image.

It is also noteworthy that Park has often reworked archival footage to produce a collage. [4] For instance, in his two-channel video installation *Power Passage* (*P'awŏt'ongno* (2004)), which interweaves various kinds of archival footage ranging from documentary photographs to American science fiction films and television documentaries, Park, as Moon Young Min puts it, "formulates new meanings from the porosity and interpenetration of politics, ideology, science, fantasy, and mass media" (178). Another, perhaps more interesting, example would be his and Park Chan-wook's 2014 collage *Bitter, Sweet, Seoul* (*Kojin'gamnae*), which was made entirely from their edited version of videos sent from all over the world by (current or former) inhabitants of and visitors to Seoul.

Compared with the works Park has thus far created, *Manshin* may seem quite unusual. Unlike his previous installation works for gallery or museum exhibitions, it is a feature-length documentary intended for theatrical screening. Moreover, it is even more conventional than his previous creations because the artist has hired professional female actors, who reenact supposedly real events, and adopted "a voice-of-God commentary" which Bill Nichols characterizes as the "hallmark" of standard expository documentaries (105). As suggested by Park's recent declaration that he would like to make a feature-length fantasy film like *Harry Potter*, *Manshin* might even be seen as marking the beginning of his commercial filmmaking career.

Nonetheless, we could say that in *Manshin*, Park's interest in South Korea's complex postcolonial history as well as his favorite intermedial techniques and archival-style film have been deepened and expanded. Indeed, in his own words, *Manshin* is "a kind of '*kut* [shamanic ritual]-film' rather than a film 'about' *kut*" (Park Chan-kyong n. pag.). This film's intermedial techniques serve to *pedagogically* represent shamanism in the guise of transparent immediacy, while they contribute to *performatively* remediate it in ways that affectively express the fantastic experience

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[4] According to Jaimie Baron, the term "archival footage" is "associated with documentaries that are believed to convey 'history' through their use of and primary dependence upon appropriated documents," whereas the term "found footage" is "associated with experimental films that, rather than presenting 'reality' or 'history' . . . problematize the construction of 'facts' through a reflexive interrogation of media images" (8). As Park's work, including *Manshin*, appropriates existing footage mainly in the form of documents—although he does not use it for purely evidential purposes—I will use the term "archival footage" throughout this essay.

of the shaman's spirit possession. At the same time, as my paper argues, it critically rewrites the biography of Kim Keum-hwa and the history of Korean shamanism, and subverts the recent consumerist tendency to make shamanism "spectacular" in order to call our attention to its new potentialities.

The Fantastic Digital Remediation of Shamanic Experience

The most obvious intermedial technique *Manshin* employs is one that is used in the three scenes where Kim falls into a trancelike shamanic state, namely, spirit possession (*sinaerim*). These scenes include one in which she goes through an initiation rite (*naerimkut*), one in which she has a dream filled with a sense of foreboding, and one in which she evokes a legend from a painting. These striking scenes are probably what distinguishes this film most sharply from other recent South Korean documentaries about shamanism. Departing from earlier, conventional, "observational" and "expository" documentaries about Korean shamanism such as *Mudang* and *Between*, *Manshin* primarily adopts a "performative" documentary mode, to use Bill Nichols' classification of documentaries.

In this mode, according to Nichols, "[t]he referential quality of documentary"—which is also found in both the observational and the expository documentary modes—"yields to an expressive quality that affirms the highly situated, embodied, and vividly personal perspective of specific subjects" (132). Nichols also observes that "[t]he free combination of the actual and the imagined is a common feature of the performative documentary" (131). This expressive quality is most notable in the scenes which directly show us Kim's shamanic experience. By foregrounding this experience's expressive quality rather than "mastering" it through omniscient and panoptic gazes as do films like *Mudang* and *Between,* these scenes serve to isolate and recover the specific affective power of shamanic experience from our more general, abstract, monolithic experience of modernizing, postcolonial South Korea.

To discuss this further, it will be useful to consider Tzvetan Todorov's very influential study of that literary genre called "the fantastic." The fantastic, according to Todorov, is characterized by "[the] hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, [when] confronting an apparently supernatural event" (25). More precisely, Todorov defines the fantastic as a borderline genre (or experience) that lies between the two adjacent genres (or experiences) of the uncanny and the marvelous. If a reader (or a person) can explain away a seemingly supernatural phenomenon (or experience) by means of the laws of nature (or reason), the work (or

experience) is said to belong to the genre of the uncanny; however, if the reader must introduce a new law of nature to explain this phenomenon (or experience), it is marvelous. Only when the reader (or the person) cannot decide between these two interpretations is the work (or the experience) described as being fantastic.

Thus Todorov says: "The fantastic . . . may evaporate at any moment. It seems to be located on the frontier of two genres, the marvelous and the uncanny, rather than to be an autonomous genre" (41). To be sure, as some critics have pointed out, apart from his limited concern with canonical European literary works due to his structuralist orientation, Todorov makes a problematic assumption: the reader is thought to be already implied by or within the text, and thus the fantastic is purely a textual construct. This autoreferential quality may tend to prevent this approach from focusing on the social and the historical. Nonetheless, despite this drawback, some Asian film scholars have found Todorov's theory capable of elucidating the split temporality of a postcolonial Asian nation implied by Asian horror films.

For instance, Kim So-young and Bliss Cua Lim have drawn on this theory to discuss how South Korean monster and horror films of the 1960s express a sense of "the pre-modern lurking behind the modern" (S. Kim 25) and how more recent Asian ghost films mistranslate "supernaturalism's temporal otherness into the logic of homogeneous time," while at the same time "preserv[ing] a hint of untranslatability" (Lim 32). While these scholars acknowledge the limitations inherent in Todorov's theory, they have somehow revised it in such a way that it can also pertain to these Asian contexts. Lim, for instance, proposes that the fantastic can never be prescribed by given generic conventions but inevitably varies depending on the socio-cultural context (104). I would further like to suggest that a more attentive reading of Todorov's theory reveals that the fantastic cannot be completely set within a structure but inevitably indicates the outside of the structure. The reader's or viewer's hesitation that crucially marks his/her experience of the fantastic implies that the phenomenon in question involves an unruly indeterminacy that resists signifying operations of all kinds, whether naturalist or supernaturalist.

Keeping this proviso in mind, it should be clear that Korean shamanic experience can be regarded as fantastic. In contrast to the established religions where "rituals are well-organized and institutionalized," as Cho has pointed out, "*kut* looks less organized and more distracting" and yet it is affectively more intensive, like "the world of chaos," partly because Korean shamanism has no established scripture and is largely unsystematically polytheistic (*Korean Shamanism* 4). Inasmuch as Korean shamanic experience resists being completely explained by any knowledge system, as Cho has noted, it can be described as fantastic. In other words, its fantastic quality

accounts for its *incommensurable otherness* that eludes both modern Western science and equally systematic non-Western knowledge of any kind. It should also be noted that a charismatic shaman's (*kangshinmu*'s) spirit possession experience can be described as being even more fantastic than that of a hereditary shaman (*sesŭmmu*). Unlike a hereditary shaman, who is rarely believed to be possessed by spirits but is rather seen as simply performing shamanic rituals he/she learned from an earlier generation, a charismatic shaman like Kim is thought to have really experienced possession by unknown spirits, and to be able to become a shaman only after this kind of experience. In this regard, the charismatic shaman's possession by spirits remains much more opaque, and thus more fantastic, than the hereditary shaman's.

Significantly, *Manshin* offers the viewer an opportunity to experience these unruly, fantastic qualities of shamanism in the three scenes portraying Kim's shamanic experience. And it does so through its impressive, hypermediated use of intermedial techniques. In each of these scenes, the depiction of Kim's spirit possession is in no way homogeneous, continuous, or coherent, but is marked by a considerable degree of heterogeneity, distortion, or incoherence. In other words, her trance states cannot be fully explained by any kind of knowledge whether naturalist or supernaturalist but remain indeterminate. These states thus cannot but be seen as fantastic in the Todorovian sense.

Consider, for instance, the scene of Kim's initiation rite, arguably the most impressive of the three. The initiation rite in Korean shamanism refers to the first, and probably the most intensive, form of spirit possession that a promising charismatic shaman has to endure to be officially recognized as a shaman. The film initially offers this scene in a naturalist—or classical realist—manner, but when depicting sub-rites for Kim's spirit possession, this scene suddenly becomes hypermediated. Through digital remediation, the figures of all kinds of spirits, though painted on the same surface in the natural-looking shots, begin to pop up in a nauseatingly dynamic yet distracting and disordered way in a virtual 3D space.

These now virtualized figures of spirits are no longer shown in static shots in a stable way but rather look quite jarring, appearing one after another through computer-generated overlaps, zooming-ins and zooming-outs, travelling camera techniques, or sudden pop-ups, while constantly changing their sizes due to a wide variety of swift camera movements (Fig. 1). Through this hypermediated expression of Kim's shamanic experience, *Manshin* offers the viewer a chance to vividly experience a sense of disorderliness that characterizes her shamanic trance state. To put it another way, by highlighting the untamed otherness of Korean shamanic experience, this hypermediated use of intermedial techniques serves to debunk both

the attempts to discipline and fetishize Korean shamanism made by earlier films, and instead to recover the viewer's capacity to be affected by this experience.

Fig. 1. The digital remediation of Kim's initiation rite. Courtesy of BOL Pictures.

Intermedial Montage and a Materialist Historiography of Korean Shamanism

Another distinctive way in which *Manshin* employs digital remediation can be seen in its reworking of archival footage. Although Bolter and Grusin have mostly confined their discussion of remediation to the medium's visual and spatial aspects, their theory could be productively expanded to explore its role in engaging with the medium's capability to construct and deconstruct history. If remediation's tendency toward transparent immediacy serves to efface the traces of the mediation of time and history by reproducing a homogeneous, linear time, its other, hypermediated tendency foregrounds the processes of multiple mediations of time and history and thus reinforces the senses of multiple, heterogeneous, discontinuous times. In recent new digital media scholarship, remediation's logic of temporal hypermediacy has predominantly been aligned with an ahistoricist appropriation, remix, or mash-up of archival materials.

In the past decade or so, when digital archives have for the most part replaced analog archives, as Jaimie Baron points out, there has been an increasing tendency in archival footage filmmaking toward ahistoricism: "[T]he emphasis on temporal disparity and an awareness of the gap in time that constitutes history seems to have been overtaken by a fascination with intentional disparity and an awareness of the gap in purpose as well as social and rhetorical context" (142). In other words, as William Wees puts it, unlike the realist mode of archival footage film, which "quotes history," this appropriative mode "quotes the media, which have replaced history and virtually abolished historicity" (45).

Moreover, digital media scholars such as Lev Manovich and Marsha Kinder have even attempted to replace the term "archival footage film" with "database narrative cinema," thereby abolishing any sense of history.[5] However, this currently prevailing, ahistorical tendency of archival footage film is hardly pertinent to *Manshin*'s intermedial reworking of archival footage. Rather, as I will argue, its reworking of archival footage greatly contributes to performatively rather than descriptively rewriting Kim's life story as well as, by extension, the history of Korean shamanism in a way that deconstructs the official historiography, one that underpins the concept of national history as a ruling-class-centered, linear and teleological narration. Indeed, *Manshin* allows us to debunk the putative universality of those media theories that blindly take the ahistorical tendency of archival footage filmmaking for granted.

Significantly, throughout *Manshin* there is a marked contrast between the professional actors' fictional reenactments of Kim's life and the reassembled archival footage of her past shamanic practices. These reenactments—except for those portions expressing Kim's trancelike states—are largely constructed according to the conventions of classical narrative cinema. Depicting how Kim, while practicing rituals that help common people deal with unbearable losses and sufferings, has suffered from the disdain and persecution of the military, the police, and the Christian Church, these reenactments employ a classical, seamless style of editing in order to develop a chronological narrative in a way that follows the path of her life successively from childhood to adulthood.

Given that Kim has recently become renowned as a Master of an "Important Intangible Cultural Heritage," these reenactment scenes look something like a *Bildungsroman* narrative that depicts Kim's life along a teleological, progressive trajectory leading to her ultimate, great success. And in fact, *Manshin* was partially adapted from her chronological autobiography entitled *Pidankkot nŏmse*. Despite

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[5] For discussions of database narrative, see, for instance, Manovich (212-43) and Kinder (2-15).

their attempt to restore the memory of hitherto marginalized shamanic practices, these reenactment scenes run the risk of uncritically mythologizing the history of shamanism in the form of linear, homogeneous time, just as the government-sanctioned history textbooks have officially written the history of South Korea's modernization.

However, this mythologizing, linear narrative of Kim's life is occasionally interrupted and disturbed by the reassembled archival footage that documents her past shamanic practices. In contrast to those seamlessly edited reenactment scenes, the latter parts look tremendously heterogeneous and discontinuous. Each of these parts reassemble various film and video clips of Kim's and her disciples'(*shinttal*'s) shamanic practices obtained from various other works that differ from one another in terms of the times, the locations, and the kinds of media they embody. Indeed, this reworking of archival footage via digital remediation serves to make this work appear to be extremely hypermediated. But this intensified hypermediacy in no way entails the abolishment of historicity but rather allows for a different, more performative mode of writing history. To clarify this point, it would be useful to briefly examine Giorgio Agamben's views on cinematic montage. In his short essay entitled "Difference and Repetition: On Guy Debord's Films," Agamben discusses the power of cinema to rewrite history in a way that rescues ignored utopian possibilities from the past.

Elaborating on Walter Benjamin's elliptical writings on what he calls "materialist historiography"—such as "On the Concept of History" and "Convolute N" from his incomplete work *The Arcades Project*—Agamben gives us a more detailed observation of how the cinematic technique of montage allows cinema to offer a materialist historiography that counters the official one predicated on the notion of linear, homogeneous, teleological time. According to him, the two fundamental processes of montage, those of repetition and stoppage, are crucial to this task. On the one hand, Agamben writes, "repetition is not the return of the identical; . . . The force and the grace of repetition, the novelty it brings us, is the return as the possibility of what was. Repetition restores the possibility of what was, renders it possible anew" (315-16). Insofar as montage allows a film clip to blast out of its original context, the clip's reappearance does not involve the repetition of "what was," namely, the original way it *did* happen, but the repetition of "the possibility of what was," namely, the ways in which it *may have* happened.

On the other hand, as for the process of stoppage, comparing it to such poetic techniques as "the caesura and the enjambment," Agamben proposes that just as these techniques "pull [the word] out of the flux of meaning, to exhibit it as such," so

cinematic stoppage "pulls [the image] away from the narrative power to exhibit it as such" (317). To put it another way, if montage restores possibility to what was, this does not simply entail a new yet still linear narrative of the past, but rather involves a suspension of the narrativization process itself so that the cinema can be "a prolonged hesitation between image and meaning" (317). It should be clear from this account how Agamben's theory of montage allows us to understand cinema's potential to rewrite history in the mode of materialist historiography, namely, not in the form of the "continuous succession" but in the form of the "violent expulsion (of the historical object) from the continuum of the historical process" (Benjamin 475). It is not surprising, then, that Agamben's theory of montage is predominantly inspired by archival, footage-based essay-films such as Guy Debord's films, including *The Society of Spectacle* (1974), and Jean-Luc Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1988-98). For these works are arguably among the films that have best harnessed this potential of montage to present history in a materialist, historiographic way.

Agamben's theory of montage clearly allows us to see how those reassembled archival footage scenes serve to rewrite not only Kim's life story but also the history of Korean shamanism against the grain of official historiography. Insofar as the fragmentary clips of shamanic practices are untethered from their original contexts, they no longer serve the linear, teleological narrative of her life story that the other, seamless reenactment scenes as well as her autobiography try to develop, but become charged with the potential to create unactualized links to the plights, sufferings, and hopes of other oppressed people whom she has never met. Furthermore, insofar as Kim's shamanic life can constitute a "national allegory" of postcolonial Korea in Fredric Jameson's sense ("[T]he story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third world culture and society" [69]), these reassembled scenes of her shamanic practices can also be seen to rewrite the history of Korean shamanism in a way that also incorporates its *possible* practices for those oppressed Koreans who have suffered from colonial and postcolonial, devastating modernization processes.

Despite the overall pertinence of Agamben's theory to these archival footage scenes, however, the kind of intermedial montage that characterizes these scenes also exhibits some deviant qualities that exceed what he proposes about montage. Although he stresses the montage's explosive power to disrupt linear, homogeneous time and instead to redeem "the possibility of what was," which he calls, in Benjamin's words, the "messianic time" or "now-time," he describes this power in a very abstract and generic manner. This is because his supposedly universal concepts

are deeply grounded on monotheistic Christianity even if he attempts to "deactivate" the metaphysical tendency of this religion as well as Western civilization in general.[6]

Unlike Agamben's (and Benjamin's) abstract account of montage, however, *Manshin*'s intermedial montage involves an enormous degree of heterogeneity and multiplicity. In every scene using reassembled archival footage, multiple and incommensurably different, yet very concrete, shamanic practices coexist in tension. These qualities of *Manshin*'s intermedial montage can be seen to come not only from the unsystematic polytheism but also from the ephemeral collectivity specific to Korean shamanism. Unlike established religions such as Christianity, Korean shamanism does not have any specified devotees but is open to anyone who happens to participate in a rite. For this reason, the kind of community Korean shamanism invokes is never a homogeneous one but always a heterogeneous and groundless one. Although modernization processes have weakened this shamanic collectivity by proliferating individual shamanic rites, Park's film can be seen as restoring this character through hypermediated forms of intermedial montage that enable Kim's shamanic practices to address a multiplicity of sufferings and losses and to express a multiplicity of hopes and wishes.

Consider, for instance, the archival footage sequence that appears near the end of the film. In the beginning, this sequence seems to document Kim's recently held, village-shamanic rite which asks for a good catch of fish (*paeyŏnshin'gut*), but after a few minutes it becomes mixed, fragmented, and contaminated with other video images of her previous, similar shamanic practices. In doing so, this archival footage sequence becomes detached from the ritual's ostensible purpose—that is, praying that a particular group of fishermen may have a good catch of fish—and instead takes on the potential to respond to anonymous people's other hopes and wishes.

The film in no way determines what these hopes and wishes are, but only seems to suggest some possible examples by superimposing images of the sea—where that shamanic rite seeking a good catch of fish was held—upon a number of images of significant socio-political incidents in the recent history of South Korea, such as the 1980 Gwang-ju Uprising, the 1987 June Minjung Uprising, the 1995 Sampoong Department Store collapse, and the 2008 anti-US beef protest, to list just a few (Fig. 2). It should be noted that these incidents all show how the corrupt coalitions between

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[6] Meticulously reading Agamben's work, Jon Solomon aptly points out how this author, even though overtly acknowledging that his work is particularly focused on the West, still largely pretends that his theory is universally valid, for instance, by "surreptitiously substitut[ing] 'capitalism' and 'modernity' for a term, the 'West,' that harbors too much residual particularity" (137).

the South Korean government and the exploitative conglomerates (*chaebol*) such as Samsung left the great majority of South Koreans living precarious lives, and how the South Korean *minjung* (common people) had consistently protested against these power blocs. In this context, the hypermediated montages of archival images of Kim's private shamanic practices can transform these into potentially collective practices for the benefit of oppressed common South Korean people, expressing their hopes to transform the nation into a more socially and economically democratic one.

Fig. 2. An image of the sea water overlapped with that of the Sampoong Department Store collapse. Courtesy of BOL Pictures.

Intermedial Profanations of Spectacularized Shamanic Performances

It would also be important to compare the reenactment scenes and the scenes recycling archival footage in terms of the visualization of Kim's shamanic performance. When it comes to the reenactment scenes, this film seems to offer her performance as a grand spectacle, one meant for a much national and even a global audience. Three acclaimed female actors—Kim Sae-rom, Ryu Hyun-kyung, and

Moon So-ri—elegantly perform the role of Kim as a child, a young adult, and a mature adult, and these actors are often shown in close-up shots expressing Kim's emotional and spiritual powers. To be sure, this spectacular exhibition of her shamanic life and performances would contribute to revitalizing the previously disdained practice of shamanism in general and Kim's shamanic practices in particular. Nonetheless, rethinking this more carefully in terms of Guy Debord's earlier and Agamben's more recent critique of the role of "spectacle" in consumer society, it will be clear that this spectacular valorization of Kim's practice may threaten to neutralize shamanism's potential to directly engage with the oppressed South Korean people, by glorifying shamanic practices as something inaccessible to them.

Referring to the capitalist-driven, consumer society as a society of the spectacle, Debord, in his *Society of the Spectacle*, writes about the logic of "separation" that characterizes the spectacle: "The images detached from every aspect of life merge into a common stream in which the unity of that life can no longer be recovered. *Fragmented* views of reality regroup themselves into a new unity as a *separate pseudo-world* that can only be looked at" (7; emphasis in original). This separation of the image as spectacle from life, according to Debord, derives from Karl Marx's notion of commodity fetishism. To be more precise, Debord writes, in a more advanced stage of capitalism, exchange-value, which was originally seen simply as a "representative of use value," gradually became autonomous and "ultimately succeeded in *controlling use*" (23) by "replacing the satisfaction of primary human needs (now scarcely met) with an incessant fabrication of pseudo-needs" (25). And this process entails what Marx calls commodity fetishism:

> The satisfaction that no longer comes from *using* the commodities produced in abundance is now sought through recognition of their value as *commodities*. Consumers are filled with religious fervor for the sovereign freedom of commodities whose use has become an end in itself. . . . [T]he fetishism of commodities generates its own moments of fervent exaltation. All this is useful for only one purpose: producing habitual submission. (Debord 33; emphasis in original)

Supplementing Debord's critique of the spectacle with archaeological insights, Agamben observes that the operation of separation Debord sees as the key to the spectacle can be traced back to ancient Christianity's similar operation of transferring something from the sphere of the profane into that of the sacred, that is, of making

something unavailable by transferring it from the common use of men to a sacrifice or gift for God (*Profanations*). And capitalism, according to Agamben, "generalizes in every domain the structure of separation that defines religion" (81) by dividing everything—even including the human body, sexuality, and language—from itself and exhibiting some portion of it as "absolutely unprofanable," that is, unusable (82). This "impossibility of using" (82) that characterizes the spectacle, he further writes, can be best illustrated today in "[t]he museification of the world"—as can be seen in global tourism—insofar as the term "museum" here means "the exhibition of an impossibility of using, of dwelling, of experience" (83-84).

As an alternative act that runs counter to spectacularization, Agamben proposes the act of profanation, namely, that of returning things to men's common or profane use. This act does not simply aim at making them available to all, leaving intact their natural use or "use-value" in Marx's sense, but rather at opening them up to "a new, possible use" (85). This new, profane use, he elaborates, "appears . . . as something that one could never have, that one could never possess as property (*dominium*)" (83). As such, profanation departs from consumption which he would describe as the proper use. In other words, the new, possible use profanation restores to things is "an entirely inappropriate use" that expropriates rather than appropriates them. For instance, profanation, as he illustrates, can be seen in the act of play such as children's: children can turn supposedly serious things into toys (76).

To be sure, the history of Korean shamanism is quite different from that of Christianity on which Agamben bases his argument. As, again, Korean shamanism was considered scriptureless and largely unsystematically polytheistic, it was almost impossible to determine the "proper" way of practicing its rituals, and its practices were mostly open to unpredictable variations and contingencies. But from the 1980s onward, the South Korean government has made increasing efforts to institutionalize shamanic rituals, and the broadcast media have provided numerous programs about them, and so shamanic practices have since become spectacularized, that is, regularized and packaged as if they had some unchanging properties. This change was not limited to shamanism, of course; as Kang Nae-hui has pointed out, the greater part of the Korean cultural movement, strongly associated with the *minjung* movement in the 1980s, has now become mere "spectacles of consumption" in a neoliberal consumer society. In this regard, the government's designation of some shamanic rituals as belonging to Korea's "Important Intangible Cultural Heritage," and of Kim Keum-hwa as Master of these rituals, can be seen as a part of this logic of spectacularizing shamanism. Against filmmaker Park's ostensible intention, then,

those spectacular reenactments of Kim's charisma as shaman run the risk of endorsing this process of petrifying shamanic practices as something unprofanable.

Far from being entirely involved in this process, however, *Manshin* also attempts to profane otherwise spectacularizing shamanic practices by hypermediating a diversity of archival images of shamanism in general and Kim's shamanic practices in particular. This profanation is most salient in the sequence entitled "Highly Prophetic (*yŏnghŏmhan*) TV." The sequence begins by presenting past TV images of shamanism such as a female shaman's brain scan, a female shaman's act of praying to the gods, and a male shaman standing on the blade of a straw-cutter, while the documentary narrator claims that shamanism has been analyzed, mystified, and spectacularized. In this way, this sequence focuses on the tendency of the mass media to package shamanic practices as regularized, consumable cultural commodities.

This practice of interweaving archival images of shamanism with critical comments is clearly a profane use of these images as it serves to call into question the very qualities these images have attributed to shamanism. But the sequence goes on to suggest a more profane use of some archival images—this time, of Kim's shamanic performances in television shows and in theaters. These images are interwoven with those of two folklore scholars offering their comments on Kim's mass media appearances. One scholar says that her media appearances are courageous, and enhance the Korean people's sense of pride in Korean shamanism as a folklore art, whereas the other scholar claims that they debase Korean shamanism's "pure" qualities. In the following shot, Kim defends herself by saying that even a staged or media-driven shamanic performance invokes spirits. Of course, one might think that this remediation of the archival materials is even more profane because, beyond simply blaming the media for spectacularizing shamanic performances, it may spark a debate about what could be the use of mediating shamanic practices. However, despite the stark contrasts between and among these three views of the mediation of shamanic practices, it remains clear that all of them are based on some supposedly natural uses of Korean shamanic practices, and thus run the risk of legitimizing the South Korean government's efforts to spectacularize them.

The following scene can thus be seen as Park's more radical attempt to untether shamanic practices from their supposedly natural uses and properties. This scene begins with the narrator's commentary, in which she says that while it is not certain whether the media are using Kim or she is playing with the media, it is certain that the camera is one of the instruments she uses for shamanic practices. Significantly,

this commentary only highlights the fact that media are somehow being used as a means of practicing a shamanic ritual, without assuming that media are supposed to express any properties inherent in such a ritual. This may suggest what Agamben refers to as the role of the medium as *pure means (or pure mediality) without end.* Challenging the Hegelian model of the medium which "in the end must disappear in the fully realized expression," Agamben proposes the potential of the medium to serve as a pure mediality that "does not disappear in what it makes visible" ("Difference" 318).

It is thus only when revealing pure medialities that the media allow one to profane the world by making its new, inappropriate uses possible. In this regard, the split-screen experimentation that comes right after the narrator's commentary on the relationship between Kim and the media can be seen to show this profane potential of the media in a remarkable way. Here the screen becomes subdivided into multiple sections, and multiple archival images briefly appear and disappear in these sections in very distracting and unpredictable ways. The way the screen divides itself is constantly changing, as is the way images appear and disappear. And in the images that appear on the sections of the screen, the viewer sees archival footage of Kim's past shamanic practices as well as national catastrophes such as the 1995 Sampoong Department Store collapse and the 2003 Daegu subway fire at which she performed (Fig. 3).

However, since these recycled images are quite fragmentary and disconnected from one another, the viewers—not only the South Korean audience but even Kim herself to some extent—could hardly recognize their original contexts. Rather, due to the ever-increasing, ever-new possible connections between these images that this split-screen technique has created—and potentially creates through the viewer's imagination—the viewer could get a sense of other possible uses of her past shamanic practices. In other words, this excessively fragmentary, discontinuous, and heterogeneous way of remediating Kim's (and, by extension, any other shaman's) shamanic practices allows for a pure means or mediality without end that has the profane potential to invoke new possible spirits who might be able to respond to other socially-oppressed people beyond those who have been the shaman's clients. The range of possible clients of this remediated shamanic practice could be extended beyond South Koreans given that, as *Manshin* also shows us, Kim has performed shamanic practices for North Koreans and even for foreigners.

Fig. 3. The multiply divided screen that constantly changes in terms of form and content. Courtesy of BOL Pictures.

Furthermore, the same could be said of all the other scenes that rework archival footage. This is not simply because the fragmentary, disjunctive remediation of the archival images of Kim's past shamanic practices deactivates their older uses and makes way for their newly possible uses, but also because this profane remediation goes so far as to rework footage from *Manshin*'s own fictional scenes that have been reenacted by the professional actors. It would thus be too simple to argue that *Manshin* tries to glorify Kim's life through spectacular, fictional reenactments. Rather, by remediating reenactments in a hypermedial fashion, *Manshin* makes it clear that even those obviously spectacular reenactments of Kim's life can—and have already begun to—undergo similar processes of profanation.

But one should be careful not to attribute *Manshin*'s profane potential solely to the aesthetic qualities of remediation by passing over the question of the agency of this potential. Though useful enough, Agamben's theory of spectacle and profanation may lead one to this technological deterministic conclusion, and again because of his abstract manner of theorizing. To avoid falling into this pitfall, one needs to note how

Korean shamanic practices largely remain profane even despite the recent institutional attempts to spectacularize them. This can be seen in Liora Sarfati's observation:

> The South Korean government also uses new media to raise awareness of *musok* [Korean shamanism] in an attempt to preserve South Korea's unique traditions. However, this does not mean that the government accepts the religious concepts and ideologies that are the basic components of *musok*, such as spirituality, possession, and polytheism. It is clear from the Cultural Properties Preservation Office website that the government wishes to preserve aesthetic forms rather than religious and spiritual practices . . . Unlike government websites, which present information in formal texts with small photographs, . . . [p]rivate *musok* websites depict a living tradition rather than an attempt to petrify it [this tradition] as a museum item to be explained by experts. (200)

In this regard, *Manshin*'s pure medialites do not so much derive from remediation techniques as from Kim Keum-hwa's and other Korean shamans' on-going profanatory practices that engage with these and other media techniques.

Conclusion

Park Chan-kyong's intermedial film *Manshin* departs from previous fiction films and documentaries about Korean shamanism. It does so by recuperating this folk religion's unruly otherness, one that resists the colonial and postcolonial attempts to modernize and domesticate it. *Manshin*'s hypermediated use of several intermedial techniques facilitates this process of recuperation by expressing the fantastic quality of trancelike shamanic experiences, by rewriting the biography of the shaman Kim Keum-hwa and the history of Korean shamanism in the form of materialist historiography, and by "profaning" shamanic practices over against the recent tendency to spectacularize them. In this regard, *Manshin* can be seen as significantly contributing to the reimagining of the postcolonial nation of South Korea as a country that is irreducibly heterogeneous, equivocal, and open to new socio-cultural possibilities.

The essay also shows how existing Western media theories and concepts, though of course useful up to a point, have some limitations when it comes to understanding the specific ways in which *Manshin*'s intermedial techniques work in

the postcolonial context of South Korea, mostly because of the tendency of Western theories to generalize and ahistoricize. Nonetheless, it would be unwise and unproductive to entirely abandon Western media theories because of these limitations, and, in a sense, this essay repeats with a difference the missed encounter between Western theories and a specific, non-Western postcolonial context. In the process of "translating" *Manshin* via the theories of remediation, the fantastic, and pure mediality, the essay has investigated the specifically postcolonial condition of Korean shamanism.

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