

Park, Chang-Seo

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A Line is Ephemeral, Faint Life Flows over Boundaries

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That each visual image is in and of itself 'presence' came increasingly to be considered under the viewpoint that image is secondary to metaphysical ideologies, epistemological reality or practical consciousness, or at best complementary to these. Images were therefore recognized to purport accurate or justified re-presentation as its aim, and faced the task of heightened accuracy to conserve/guarantee what they indicate, i.e. generalized existences, immediate reality or objects. The inherently deceiving attributes and inexactitude of image helped defend the ideas of some philosophers and men of religion to stipulate its censorship and ban. However, image's role proved firm upon the realization that the whole of daily experience of life hinged on it. The downfall of Christianity and metaphysics was an evidence, whereby visual images no longer went under intellectual, conscious framing, and even found themselves free of representational obligations, hence becoming a 'spectacle', signs of 'obscenity' and 'visual system' and encompassing all aspects of our lives, while also constituting our limits. These are images without referent, without access for intellect, closer to numbing than rendering sensible. The mechanically and unconsciously driven 'belief' that these images each have an indubitable reference to an existence, world or object dissimulates their drift and fragmentation. That the 'beyond' of the visible where truth lies in and of itself is consigned to backwater is responsible for the human concerns and suffering in the epoch of floating, unfixed images. This is of the feeble-mindedness that makes us believe too easily, as a result of being unable to draw satisfaction from what one sees, as a result of the inclination to hasten judgment on what is visible, or as a result of the willingness to affix what one already knows to what one sees. It is also of the inertia that leads one to find the original in images whose originals are already lost and to attribute certain meanings to the serial continuity of infinitely reproducible images, which moralizes and 'modernizes' our age of simulacra. It is regression, compulsion and uncritical reaction.

Still, images float between those who believe their core function lies in faithful reference, while neither concealing nor designating its object. The artists who are conscious of the problems of visual images operate within the spectrum of the mode of daily experience and the (non-)ontology of image. The inertia/attitude, mechanical or conscious, that seeks to discern the self-evidence of the world in what holds images in place or in the world as it appears restricts the autonomy of images. If this were to be the case, the excess staged by images, or images that deceive us but doesn't embrace anything would curb the life's senses. It is such particularity of the times we live in that certain artists ask crucial question on what images really ought to be, what seeing or being seen really means. Their artistic and quotidian practices seek to detach images from stiffened concepts as well as to liaise insignificant images back to the life's senses.

Leading up to this personal exhibition, the trajectory of the artist Park Chang-Seo since his 20s, having recently taken a fresh turn as he returned to home soil after 10-odd years of studies abroad in 2014, is kaleidoscopic and even fascinating. He was a social-science student, loosely connected himself to the protesting groups both on and off campus since his enrollment in the early 1990s. Until graduation and moving overseas, he encountered "Dansaekhwa" which, led by the artists from Daegu regions, inquired into the materiality of expression under the influence of Mono-Ha. Figuring in his cultural backdrop were the attitude soaked up from student movements under civilian government and the narrative images of "Minjoong-Misool" (people's arts), political by nature. Along with this, he seems to have been confronted with a sense of urgency in regards to revamping the relationship between politics and art, which is subsequent to his learning of the grammar in a more established, liberal and self-referential part of the world. Moving to Paris provided an opportunity for Park to re-consider these contemporary matters in question revolving around political art and the politics of art. There, he encountered conceptual artworks, the kind that criticized the institutionalism of art and visualized non-visible presuppositions that differentiate (liberal) art and politics, while sharpening and elaborating the art-politics relationship. Park devoted his 30s to studying, organizing and 'producing' works in the context posterior to the era of (Modernist) painting and contemporary art. Now entering his early 40s, he is embarking upon a new path in his home country after completing his Ph.D. His latest personal exhibition condenses his 10 years of learnings, reflections and questions; in Daegu, the city that fostered the thriving scenes of "Dansaekhwa" as well as contemporary "Korean" art, relatively far from Seoul. One can construe the decision to hold his first personal show in Daegu rather than in Seoul as a candid effort to retrace the 'origin' of the 20-year span before he finally became an 'artist'. It represents this earnestness, privileged over the hasty and canny attitude towards the external allure of the ravishing art scenes of Seoul and the prospect of (successful) entrance into those scenes, as well as remembering his long-delayed introduction to painting during his university years.

The exhibition's title <Ephemeral Lines in Life> is intended to cover the purview of his Paris works as well as more recent endeavors, and is also taken directly from his latest projects. The title of this text, relating to short-lived, ephemeral lines traced in the thick of life, testifies for the (conceptual) artists who devote significant labor to artistic causes and spend

the majority of their time in their studios, that is, who contemplate, doubt, distort and raise questions. In experiencing the presented works, we encounter straight, uneven, non-visible lines. Any superficial 'appreciation' would strain against the question of 'what' the lines are or their 'aboutness'. One ought to put between parentheses the attitude of perambulation around the works of art and also that of searching for concealed meanings 'inside' these works, in order to retrace the recent tracks that Park has been following in detouring, distancing, letting himself out, standing beside and shuttling between Seoul and Daegu.

If we remain faithful to Park's own phrases, his works might well be understood as being about "limits and gaps". He 'chooses' his place where heterogeneous worlds meet and reveal their differences. This place is where the internally consistent self becomes curtailed to its bare minimum and its presence almost fully reduced, where alterities flood in towards the standing point, where political tensions and abrasive encounters occur incessantly, where production and difference isolate the conceptualization that guarantees continuity of the sensible, creating a gap where a new third entity emerges: where any sense of autonomy, identity and uniformity that depends on non-visible limits is no longer possible, where these non-visible limits become visible whereby difference and heteronomy, passiveness and verb override respectively identity, autonomy, activeness and noun, where the lucid, configured demarcation melts away, entangled or become attenuated to the point of disappearing. As determined lines of demarcation are in fact "ephemeral", so are lines that are also non-lines, which Park points out, reveals and defends.

His performance series such as *Intervalle irrégulier* and *Disparaître*, kept in the form of photographic record, attempts to visualize the above "limits", lines supposedly eternal in presence but harboring more and more ambiguousness and irregular as concepts before they disappear. Park marks and breaks down his own linear traces along the shoreline, each of which is understood as a 'concept', which is a sign deep-seated in our conscience, inviting a notion that does not exist in any empirical terms. This practice follows the foam created by waves, crashing in and sliding out on the shore, which in turn creates uneven edges and brings ashore offscum that settles along them, with a mere stick. Lexically, the lines indicated on the shore can be understood as borders on which a body of seawater and the fringe of land come in contact: indicated by signs entering the conscience, these objective, generally accepted lines do not actually exist. What does exist is discontinuous, frothy, an infinite number of fragments that are non-lines, lines of difference and multiplicity. The shorelines are signs devoid of any referentiality, signifiants, thereby dead. The artist leaves as his record various traces or residues of his attempt to mark the indented lines, or signs predicating upon "shoreline" as a concept: an attempt that is slow, serene, disinterested action. Perhaps it is that life itself is lodged in what is left of the process of conceptualization. That is, in search of the right predicate, supposedly extractable from reality corresponding to a concept, but also leaving the residue that cannot be fully translated into a concept, the artist's primal inscription leaves faint, ephemeral material traces that evade the inanimate language.

The work's scope is extended towards other "irregular gaps" opened up by seabirds disinterestedly 'treading on' the shorelines-signs. The whole process is captured in photographs and brought into the scope, the purpose of which lies in indicating the 'outside' taken on by the violence of language that unilaterally and recklessly determines life. The 'hackneyed' image of the birds' momentary dwelling/resting is reappropriated, or bestowed a new 'signification', which is a transgressional metaphor in the context of Park's frame of performativity. 'Kitsch' would be one of the words with which to describe the photographs, but only until the artist re-uses it for the aim of contextualizing afresh, of a foreign signification, an ambiguity. *Disparaître* is a work consisting of three photographs in which the French verb, meaning 'disappear', is written on a sidewalk with hair-styling foam. The work itself is a supplement to the written word, while the process shown within the work is accompanied by a man walking away into the distance. What slips into the gap between the disappearing letters and the disappearing man is a subtle signification that operates between the commonplace title and the image. The title itself is an integral part of photographic evidence of disappearance, which offsets the hierarchical relationship between inside and outside, between dominant meaning and supplementary image. This performance, this situation passes into a more unstable, ambiguous stage as the letters themselves become involved in the dynamics precisely by its disappearance. The coincidence of action and language then meets the volatile reaction of the remaining foam. As the man who is the agent of the interpretation of the concept of disappearance retire along with the letters, our eyes are drawn onto the moose residue. 'Disparaître' qua verb does not simply disappear due to the fading of the pale chunk of foam that visualizes it, but remains in reference to the image and the simultaneity of appearing and disappearing, which is always already comprised in the verb. Concept would suggest that what disappears is nullified, but Park points towards what disappearance leaves behind and capacitates, and the 'there-is' posterior to the 'there-is-not'. This 'there-is' is mere lather, indecipherable 'evidence' - allegory(!) - , a content devoid of any meaning. This endeavor is the way in which to communicate the idea of the indeterminable that cannot be visualized or represented via language, the idea of the murky and ambiguous. It therefore alludes to the constantly floating 'life', an irreducible heterogeneity: 'life' that is taken hostage by the function of complementarity, warrant and exemplification, subject to the senses and left scantily. Because the word chosen and deconstructed by the artist is 'disappear', as opposed to 'appear', that is, points towards the non-visibility that is inherent in the act of seeing the visible, these staged scenes are not only for the contemplation of conceptual art but also for the captivation of the senses. It is of the unconscious realization that what brings about pain and uneasiness and captivates us is disappearance rather than appearance. The more ambiguous and murky our life is found to be, the more it becomes remote and 'deepened'.....

Park's latest work, *Ephemeral Lines in Life*, uses as its central motif images of geographical locations marked around the 38th parallel, taken from Google Earth. He works with selected and printed out color-images of land features of the Korean Peninsula - shorelines, mountains and rivers, barely distinguishable - along the Military Demarcation Line. The results were photographs that capture the views of mountain contours and edges of rivers; which resemble paintings, depicting them 'like' a landscape representation or 'like' an abstract stint. The ontological particularity of photograph, a medium that conveys what has been captured in a moment of the emergence of a concret, well-formed object's 'there-is(was)', is replaced by or re-formed into a subtle temporal sense appropriated from Google-generated pictures, each of which was taken at a certain point in time. The printed images are designed in such a way to resemble painting, by mere mouse-clicks on the computer to uninhibitedly manipulate the focal length, giving painterly impres

sions, as if bound to the sort of temporality typically characteristic of painting. Shown on these images are blurred contours of the object of observation, with the visual aspects partially replaced by a sense of tactility, the image's concept minimized, and its touchability elevated. The level of accuracy that photography enjoyed allowed it to replace representational paintings. Here, photographs are re-appropriated in such a way to be staged as a different technique of painting, rendering the images hauntologic (Derrida), phantasmagoric, non-ontologic. Park 'chose' these images by virtue of the painting-like quality. They communicate what is seen as reality in a specific visual setting, computer-generated, painting-like images that are readily available without requiring any action of painting, photographically acquired showing places that cannot be visited from either side of the divided peninsula but that nonetheless exist. These places are existent but cannot be subject to no real-life experience, still governed in the 21st Century by rigid, Cold War-related concepts such as "38th Parallel" or "MDL", on which the computer's zooming can draw the focal length only to a certain extent, and which is 'blurred (water-brushed!))' due to the government's security restrictions concerning the disclosure of geographical information to Google Earth; but nevertheless accompanied by dimly marked demarcation lines belonging neither to the North nor to the South, ambiguous in and of itself: limits or lines that determine limits. Park's choice comprises all these connotations. The reflection of the artist does not comply with reductive identification. It is capable of mobilizing more irreducible things, more deviation, more fragments and more connotations. Owing to his lethargic, unhurried thinking, numerous lines are drawn between photography, painting, politics and art.

A clear liquid material was applied repeatedly on the prints. The material is a kind of finishing material, typically applied with brush on oil or acrylic paintings. This, in order to make them look even more like paintings, to trick our eyes, to mesmerize. The reproducibility of photograph is subsumed into the originality and authenticity adhering to the painter's act of brushing. The laying of this material, applied 'like' painting but the effect of which cannot be 'painterly', raises questions about the understanding of this 'work of art'. The nature of this equivocal outcome is neither photographic nor painterly, but rather that of mutation, tricks, questing and play.

The likes of Gerhard Richter and Marlene Dumas, for whom uncertainty and ambiguity are something to be embraced, used the technique of blurring in furtherance of staging the paradox or ambivalence of life that resists all conceptual definitions. Richter strategically obscured the boundaries between photography and painting by blurring his representations; Dumas used her own technique of blurring to obscure the representationality - carrying in itself certain political messages - of news photos via which she draws ideas. Both artists used painting as their medium to reflect the implausibility of conceptual definitions and cognitive determination inherent in life. Park's process of blurring nevertheless finds its most fundamental ground in his 'conceptual' practice: the process is not meant to impose a definitive rupture in the representationality through the act of painting, but should be understood as a strategy consisting of elements of performance, photographic procedure and painting, which allows him to continue and carry forward his reflections. This is of course Park's own way of remaining true to his beliefs about life. He says: "Never be read." His resistance to external determinations is a 'political' strategy aimed towards our own time that is governed by accurate awareness and conceptualization. The critical stance, adopted after the era of modernism, which sees a seed of violence in accurate and clear 'reading', underlies his œuvre.

His painting-like photographs, or photographs on which he worked with painting-related means, constantly attended with fragments of the demarcation line. This latter suspends any attempt to see the work as a painting: be it through the scenes or situations external or through those internal to the spectator, the experience of the image is disturbed by traversing, artificial lines. It is an intervention of analyses on the overall experience and a strategy that involves geometric fragmentation: the images are 'rendered strange'. Put differently, it is art, and at the same time not art. The dimly traced lines disturb the experience of the work and dismantle its wholeness. These lines, which inform the spectator of the territorial division, suggests that they seem so evidently existent on Google Earth, traversing the naturalistic settings, artificial and at the same time historic, and are used as agents of intervention and subversion of painting. Thus, in *Ephemeral Lines in Life and Disparaître*, more focus is given to expansion than acceptance, analysis than synthesis, and emancipation than reduction. The lines are in effect symbols of the Cold-War ideologies that still loom over the Peninsula, political symbols that intercept any infiltrating gaze towards the landscape. We see that the artist propounds a self-conscious critique of the kind of strategy that is institutionally inclined towards unhindered, simplified appreciation and the institutionalist notion of art. The critique also alludes to the absence of the artist's definitive root in his home country after so many years spent abroad, along with the non-visible lines that he encounters whilst still remaining a stranger who floats 'outside the borders'. He lives the inside from the outside, tries to read diligently and relentlessly and lives the "limits and gaps", and minute senses (or sensing).

Ephemeral lines are never truly straight. They stretch in an uneven, rugged fashion: almost indistinctively, as one would imagine lines traced by someone who just drifted another place: lines that are discontinued into rivers and large waters and form an area which seagulls just landed on. Ephemeral lines do not divide but infiltrate, raise questions rather than comply. They are not symbolic signs but images open to the senses, and are perfectly visible but cannot be fully experienced. They are images of life that Park envisages by maintaining irregular intervals, continuing to disappear but without ever quite fully doing so, fugitively. To quote Park's remarks from our last phone conversation, these lines are "ridges of my old country house that I stood on", the very ridges on which his father stood all his life. His works prevail over the limitations via memory and reconstitution channeled towards the concret senses that an eternal life subsumes: his farmer father, his 20s which gave him the dream of becoming an artist, the limits that he is trying to infiltrate having earned the title, the conflict with the notion of straight line that incessantly haunts his mind encroached by concepts, his destiny to saturate life with the faint and the indistinct, the affirmations of life that will be demanded and sustained by negations...