



## Post-verité Turns: Mapping Twenty-First-Century Korean Documentary Cinema

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### Abstract

*This article presents a critical overview on how the formal and aesthetic variations of the Korean documentary cinema in the twenty-first century have differed from and simultaneously renewed the activist, cinéma-vérité tradition of Korean independent documentaries of the 1980s and 1990s. These variations encompass personal documentaries and essay films, experimental documentaries on landscapes, documentaries extensively using archival materials, digitally enabled documentaries, and intersections of documentary and contemporary art. Mapping these variations onto five categories, I use the term “post-verité” to theorize these new constellations of aesthetics and politics. By departing from the epistemological and aesthetic assumptions of its predecessor, the Korean documentary in the twenty-first century has formed the most vibrant screenscape for cinematic experimentations. At the same time, I argue that these experimentations have also updated the activist tradition’s political and ethical commitment to history and politics by reinventing the ways of engaging with the traumas of modernization and the new problems of neoliberalized contemporary Korea.*

**Keywords:** Korean documentary cinema, activist documentary, post-verité, personal documentary, essay film, experimental documentary, archival film, digital cinema, art of the moving image, 21st-century Korean society

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### Post-verité Turns

Two critically acclaimed documentary films of the mid-2010s, *Manshin: Ten Thousand Spirits* (*Manshin*, Park Chan-kyong, 2013) and *Factory Complex* (*Wirogongdan*, Im Heung-soon, 2014), signaled a remarkable change in the recent documentary practices in Korean national cinema and their distance from their historical predecessor, the activist tradition of Korean independent documentary (*hanguk dongnip dakyumenteor*), which emerged in the mid-1980s to document and participate in people's struggles for democratization and labor rights against the oppressive power of military dictatorship and the corporate power of unequal labor-management relations. From its emergence, the activist tradition legitimized itself as an alternative form of filmmaking for urgent intervention in social problems and protests (Park 2014, 25–44). Inspired by the *cinéma vérité* and direct cinema of the 1960s, and the activist filmmaking of Japanese documentarian Shinsuke Ogawa, such leading practitioners of the Korean independent documentary as Kim Dong-won, Byun Young-joo, and Hong Hyung-sook, and the several small film production collectives in which they were involved, marked the now-canonical political and aesthetic trend of Korean independent documentary. Their newsreels and feature-length documentaries, produced on 16mm compact video cameras and circulated in communities, labor unions, and universities, established the camera's *on-the-spot* (*hyeonjang*) recording of an ongoing event and the director's immediate conversation with the social actors as fundamental to Korean independent documentary filmmaking's commitment to documenting the real, making truth claims, and engaging in politics. In this sense, the activist aesthetic and ethics of the Korean independent documentary can be viewed as "committed documentary" (Nam 2005) or exemplary of the "socially engaged documentary" (Berry 2003).

In contrast, both *Manshin* and *Factory Complex* employ and mix several textual and rhetorical strategies, such as reenactments, poetic observation, and the use of archival footage or animated sequences, all of which diverge from the participatory mode of documentary that characterizes the activist, *vérité* tradition of Korean independent

documentary. For *Manshin*, a film that documents the life and work of one of the most representative female shamans (*mudang*), Kim Keum-hwa (who has been celebrated as a Master of Important Intangible Heritage since the 1980s), Park Chan-kyong lets three professional actresses play Kim's life and memory through different generations. The three actresses' reenactment as the film's major component demonstrates Park's dependence on the "performative" mode of documentary that engenders "the free combination of the actual and the imagined" in order to underline "the subjective qualities of experience and memory that depart from factual recounting" (Nichols 2001, 131). The performative mode's emphasis on the "subjective qualities" of experience and memory is evident in the coupling of a reenactment sequence and computer-generated imagery. For instance, Kim's account of how she was possessed by the spirits (spirit possession [*sinnaerim*]) in her childhood is comprised of two intersecting sequences, one played by a young actress who plays her in her childhood, and another in which the shamanistic icons recreated by CGI illustrate Kim's fantasy of being possessed (Fig. 1). Here, Park adopts virtual zooming in and out of the CGI icons to deliberately break the boundaries of two-dimensional and three-dimensional spaces and thereby offers "the viewer a chance to vividly experience a sense of disorderliness that characterizes her shamanic trance state" (Jecheol Park 2017, 117). This hybrid use of non-*verité* formal devices is also found in Im Heung-soon's *Factory Complex*. Besides capturing interviews with female workers who engaged in labor struggles in various workplaces since the 1970s, including textile and wig factories, as part of Korea's labor-intensive industry, Im's camera poetically observes the past and present landscapes of workplaces, while occasionally embodying the viewpoint of the workers who show their dilapidated and overpopulated quarters that are now abandoned. Drawing on photographic documents, newspaper photos, and video footage, Im also uses several forms of reenactment, including a theatrical play and a girl with blindfold (Fig. 2), to take an imaginary approach to the pain and trauma of the workers who engaged in protests, and to establish the distance between the past and the present as his principle of constructing an alternative history.



**Figure 1.** Computer-generated Korean shamanistic icons that imaginatively represent Kim Geum-hwa's fantasy of being possessed by the spirits in *Manshin: Ten Thousand Spirits* (Park Chan-kyong, 2013), frame grab.



**Figure 2.** A girl with blindfold serves as a stand-in for the female factory workers in *Factory Complex* (Im Heung-soon, 2014), courtesy by the artist.

Recent scholarship and critical discourses in Korea on documentary films have recently attended to the apparent formal and aesthetic departure of these two recent films from their activist precursor. For example, the authors of *Today's Korean Documentary Cinema: Genre, History, Media* distinguish Korean documentary cinema into three periods: first, the “enlightenment age” (*gyemongjeok sigi*) from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s, marked by activist filmmaking’s aspiration to enlighten the people as the collective participants in the democratization movements and labor struggles; second, the “reflexive age” (*seongchaljeok sigi*) from the late-1990s to the mid-2000s, in which filmmakers became aware of documentary as representation and questioned their status as director; and finally, the “aesthetic age” (*mihakjeok sigi*) from the late 2000s, in which modes of filmmaking other than the participatory mode have rigorously been explored on the basis of “grappling with not only ‘what to film’ but also ‘how to film’” (Nam et al. 2016, 10). This periodization is efficient in identifying the formal and epistemological distinctions of twenty-first-century Korean documentary films. However, it also risks privileging the ruptures of the “reflexive” and “aesthetic” ages from the “enlightenment age,” obscuring how the latter two ages have inherited and refashioned the activist tradition’s thematic, political, and ethical concerns. For it should also be noted that the juxtaposition and contestation of all the non-*verité* components found in *Manshin* and *Factory Complex* also intend to engage the traditional subject matter of the activist documentary: namely, the modern history of Korea throughout the Japanese colonial period, the Korean War, and the post-war modernization governed by the military dictatorship, through the eyes of national shaman Kim Keum-wha (*Manshin*) and the memories and lives of the working class women in different industrial sectors (*Factory Complex*). This suggests that it is necessary to historicize the Korean documentary films and videos of the “reflexive” and the “aesthetic” ages from an evolutionary viewpoint, or, more precisely, from a dialectical standpoint on their continuities and discontinuities vis-à-vis the activist tradition.

This article offers a critical map of the new ramifications of Korean documentary filmmaking over the last two decades, characterizing them by the term *post-verité*, which implies the dialectic of breaks and inheritances.

Despite the notable paucity of scholarly work in Anglophone Korean cinema studies, South Korean documentary cinema in the 21st century has developed to the point of dramatically diversifying its themes and modes of practice. Such developments are indebted to the specific post-1990s contexts in which a number of documentary practitioners have emerged and in which they have produced and distributed their films. While both the established and new production collectives have been active in the production of nonfiction films that intervene in the various social issues of contemporary Korea and convey the bodies and voices of its disenfranchised subjects in their alliance with social movements, the transition from the early 1990s to the one-person production system (*irin jejak siseutem*), by which a documentarist is in charge of pre-production, shooting, and postproduction, has allowed activists not merely to produce their films based on their long-term interaction with social places and actors, but also to cultivate their status as the film director expected to develop his or her subject matter, style, and perspective (Kim et al. 2003, 78–81). Accordingly, either the director's authorial signature or even her directorial presence has been inscribed in the textual fabric and strategies of her films, and the diversification of her backgrounds encompassing independent filmmaker, TV producer, and artist since the early 21st century has expanded the thematic and aesthetic boundaries of Korean documentary cinema. These changes in the mode of production and the subjectivity of documentarians have been in sync with those in the platforms of distribution and exhibition. Whilst the community screening as a key strategy of distributing traditional activist documentary films and videos remains viable for provoking collective awareness of social problems, condensing counterpublics, and promoting solidarity between their members, international and local film festivals since the mid-1990s have played a vital role in showcasing independent documentaries and artists' films and videos built upon or reworking styles of documentary filmmaking, and in offering audiences the open forum for discussing the

films' political and aesthetic issues.<sup>1</sup> Also, the increasing theatrical exhibition of documentary films at independent and arthouse movie theaters (and even at multiplexes) since the early 2000s has enabled them to reach a wider range of audiences than specific community members, while also making possible their second-run distribution on DVDs or via IPTV (Internet Protocol Television) (Nam et al. 2010), as well through streaming or video-sharing platforms.

The term “post-*vérité*” is borrowed from Michael Renov, who used it to describe the dramatic growth of personal documentary filmmaking in the post-1960s era after the dominance of the observational documentary and *cinéma-vérité*. I adopt this term as a signpost to classify the formal and aesthetic experimentations in twenty-first-century Korean documentary cinema because their emergence and evolution can be compared to personal documentary filmmaking in North America since the 1970s. By this term, Renov means not simply the aesthetic and epistemological departure of personal documentary filmmaking from the objectivist assumptions of direct cinema, but also the ways in which this filmmaking responded to the key social and cultural changes of the post-1960s era, including the emphasis on the politics of the everyday and interrogations of identity, subjectivity, and private histories and memories (Renov 2004, 171–181). In a similar

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1. Besides the Busan International Festival's “Wide Angle” section and the Jeonju International Film Festival's competition and non-competition sections dedicated to Korean films, other film festivals less known to international film culture have cultivated the diverse ecosystem of Korean documentary films. These include the Indie Forum (since 1996), a festival organized and run by the committee of independent/activist filmmakers and film critics themselves; the Seoul Independent Documentary Film Festival (SIDOF, since 2001), a festival committed to discovering new documentary films with its catchphrase “Experiment, Progress, Communication”; Seoul International New Media Festival (NEMAF, since 2000), a festival dedicated to the screening and exhibition of politically and formally alternative films and videos; the DMZ International Documentary Film Festival (DMZdocs, since 2009), the only international documentary-oriented film festival in South Korea; and the Seoul Independent Film Festival (SIFF, since 2002), the largest outlet for cataloguing year-round independent films and promoting solidarity among independent filmmakers. These diverse and overlapping platforms, I argue, have formed a kind of *local documentary film festival circuit*, as a number of films that I overview in this essay have been circularly exposed to programmers, critics, and audiences from one festival to another.



vein, I use the term “post-verité” to stress the aesthetic and epistemological ruptures that the new Korean documentaries in the 21st century have made from the traditional independent documentary’s ethos of *cinéma vérité*. The term also describes the ways in which the new documentaries’ emphasis on form, aesthetics, and mediation have been inseparable from several important cultural, economic, and political changes in contemporary Korean society in the 21st century. These changes include environmental crises caused by the construction of economic or military infrastructure, national disasters (such as the sinking of the Sewol ferry), the desire to investigate personal memories and histories, the shift from industrial to neoliberal capitalism, and the political conflict between liberal democracy and neo-conservative ideology, which has accorded with dynamic shifts in the Korean government encompassing the liberal democracy of president Kim Dae-jung’s and Roh Moo-hyun’s governments, the neo-conservative ideology of Lee Myung-bak’s and Park Geun-hye’s, and the reinstatement of liberal democracy by the Candlelight Protests from 2016 to 2017.

At the same time, my concept of “post-verité” differs from Renov’s original use of the term in two senses. First, the formal devices developed by emerging directors and artists who have led the post-verité turns are more than what Renov referred to as self-reflexive exposures of the filmmaker’s or social actor’s subjectivity with autobiographic and essayistic modes and/or the use of reenactment (which I call the ‘personal turn’). The other devices developed in twenty-first-century Korean documentary encompass poetic and observational techniques for highlighting the audiovisual qualities of industrial, urban, or natural landscapes (the audiovisual turn), archival uses of found footage (the archival turn), and various uses of digital cameras and postproduction techniques for questioning the existing document of history or social reality or for seeking an alternative expression of reality (the digital turn). Moreover, it is not merely independent filmmakers but also a number of contemporary Korean artists, such as Park and Im, who have employed all the devices in their films, videos, and installations, thereby signaling the increasing overlap of the theater-based documentary and art of the moving image (the documentary turn). Accordingly, the post-verité practices of filmmakers and artists refer to a broader expansion of documentary



practices than what Renov meant by the term. Second, the new filmmakers and artists' efforts to establish intersections between documentary and avant-garde cinema, and documentary and contemporary art, do not mark a total departure from their activist predecessors. For the filmmakers and artists ultimately aim to extend the traditional Korean independent documentary's subjects, political responsibility, and ethical or epistemological problems through their formal and aesthetic experimentations. Their efforts to renew or update the *verité* tradition of Korean documentary point to a key distinction between my use of the term "post-*verité*," a use that privileges the rupture of the personal documentary from the tradition of direct cinema. What follows is my overview of the five post-*verité* turns and the films that testify to each, although I acknowledge that this approach risks a certain degree of generalizing the films' thematic and aesthetic features and overemphasizing their differences or commonalities.

### *The Personal Turn*

The earliest post-*verité* turn identifiable in Korean documentaries of the last two decades is the growing popularity of the autobiographical or first-person documentary and the essay film, both of which foreground the director's personal, self-reflexive view as an integral component of the documentary's construction of reality or history. In retrospect, this personal turn dates back to the late 1990s and the early 2000s, when directors began to inscribe the *filmmaker-I* (*gamdok-na*) in their works with such devices as their first-person voiceover and their on-screen presence, through which their production process or their interaction with social actors is exposed. There were other aesthetic, political, and ethical conditions that propelled the directors to appropriate such self-reflexive devices. After the period of collective activist engagement with the immediate social movements and resistances from the 1980s to the mid-1990s, documentary practitioners began to perceive their surrounding reality from their first-person perspective, posing questions of it and seeking answers, and pondering their ethical position in relation to the social subjects that they encountered. This

entailed the shift of the practitioners' self-conscious identity from *activist to filmmaker*, which also accorded with the epistemological change in their work from cinema as a tool for revolutionary change to film as personal expression (Lee et al. 2003). This suggests that the growing presence of the filmmaker-I in the turn-of-the-century documentary could be seen less as a radical break from the vérité tradition than its evolution coupled with new aesthetic strategies. Kim Dong-won's critically acclaimed *Repatriation* (Songhwan, 2004) demonstrates how the activist tradition evolved into a self-reflexive documentary charged with political and ethical reflections. Based on Kim's decade-long observation of two North Koreans who had been released from jail after spending thirty years as political prisoners insisting on their communist beliefs, the film combines his critique of South Korea's sustaining anti-communist ideology with his confessional first-person voice-over that acknowledges the impossibility of distancing himself from the two old men and reveals his ethical hesitation in filming them.

This self-reflexive stance evident in *Repatriation* is also linked to the emergence of the personal documentary (*sajeok dakyumenteor*) as a key trend of Korean independent documentary in the early and mid-2000s. Fueled by the popularization of lightweight video cameras, the directors of personal documentaries turn their attention to their father, mother, or friends, exposing themselves as the on-screen agent or confessional first-person narrator who examines their intimate others' everyday lives and memories. Such films as *Making Sun-dried Red Pepper* (*Gochumaligi*, Jang Hee-seon, 1999), *My Father* (*Na-ui abeoji*, Kim Hee-cheol, 2001), *Family Project: House of a Father* (*Gajok peurojekteu: Abeoji-ui jip*, Jo Yun-kyong, 2001), *Life Goes On* (*Eomma*, Ryu Mi-rye, 2004), and *Umma* (*Mother*) (*Eomma-reul chajaseo*, Joung Ho-hyun, 2005, Fig. 3) indicate that the emergence of personal documentaries had to do with their directors' reorientation of interest from the grand narrative or official history to individual microhistories and personal testimonies. Still, it is significant to note that in the personal documentary the filmmaker-I serves as the mediator that connects not simply his/her own self with his/her intimate others, but also the private sphere with the public. For the filmmaker-I's awareness of his/her family members or friends, supplemented by

their testimonies and memory objects (photos, home videos, etc.), results in investigating how their surrounding sociopolitical and national contradictions—such as women’s subjugation in Korea’s persistent patriarchal family system, and the experiences of the Korean War and anti-communist ideology that deeply permeated older generations—have affected their tumultuous lives and traumatic memories. In this sense, it is also true that the filmmaker–I in this documentary establishes herself as the mediating self that transposes personal memories to collective experiences or supplements the blank page of public history with individuals’ microhistories as counter-history (S. Kim 2008).



**Figure 3.** Still from *Umma (Mother)* (Joung Ho-hyun, 2005), frame grab.

This effort to link the private to the public as a way of refashioning the verité tradition’s engagement with society and history has been evident in the consistent production of domestic ethnography since the late 2000s, a variation on the autobiographical non-fiction films that document family members and track down their previously untold memories and lives. Here, the filmmaker–I is on display and his/her quest for the past and present of his/her family members is often under suspicion, with his/her films

operating through the dialectic of the “interpenetration of subject/object identities” (Renov 2004, 218) and his/her irreducible distance from the members. Thematically, the domestic ethnography during the last decade can be divided into two categories. First, there have been an array of films on family members as diasporic subjects, whose fragmented memories and dislocated lives allude to the larger history of Cold War politics and its ideological pressures. Yang Yong-hi’s *Dear Pyongyang* (*Dieo Pyongyang*, 2005) and *Goodbye Pyongyang* (*Gutbai Pyongyang*, 2009) are premised on her negotiation with her Zainichi family who were separated between Japan and North Korea due to the repatriation campaign in the late 1960s and early 1970s; while *My Father’s Emails* (*Abeoji-ui imeil*, Hong Jae-hee, 2012) reconstructs the memories of Hong’s father, who migrated from North to South Korea during the Korean War and worked as an engineer in the Vietnam War and in Saudi Arabia in the 1960s and 1970s, through the emails that he wrote before his death (Jinhee Park 2017). Second, another set of domestic ethnographies reflect the director’s self-identity and the memories of himself/herself and his/her family members in dialogue with the political and economic changes in Korean society since the IMF crisis in 1997. Park Moon-chil’s *My Place* (*Mai peulleiseu*, 2013) chronicles his family’s reverse immigration from Canada to Korea and negotiates with their different views on the two societies. Ma Min-ji’s *Family in the Bubble* (*Beobeul paemilli*, 2017) depicts her family’s economic rise and fall encompassing the real estate boom in the 1980s and the IMF crisis, while also contrasting her parents’ insistence on the myth of its value with her own precarious economic life. What is also notable in these two categories is that the films of the younger generation of directors—*My Father’s Emails*, *My Place*, and *Family in the Bubble*—take on post-verité characteristics more explicitly, as all of them fluidly mix the director’s self-performance, reenactment, CGI effects, home movies, and family photos.

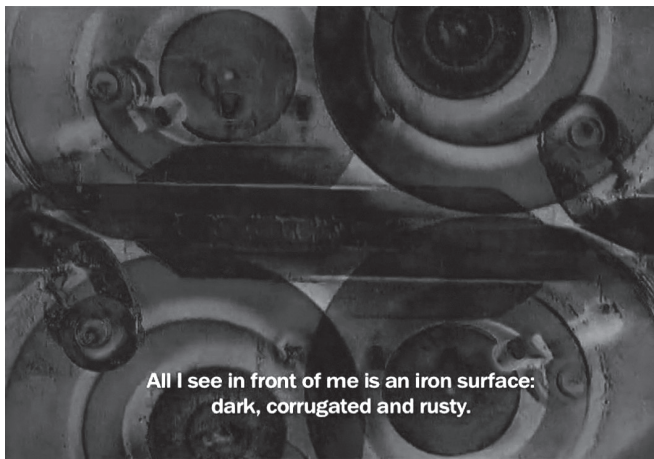
A more recent variation of the personal turn in the Korean documentary has been the increasing interest in the essay film and video. Despite its protean, border-crossing, and transgressive aspect that defies any stable definition as a genre, an array of existing studies on the essay film during the last decade have noted two integral features—its activation of

the filmmaker's thinking subjective agency and its mobilization of his/her personal and critical reflection.<sup>2</sup> Kim Eung-su and Kelvin Kyung Kun Park have sought the essayistic filmmaking of foregrounding their questioning or reflexive self by employing various formal devices or modes of enunciation that express their personal view on the past and present of Korean society. While *Without Father* (*Abeoji eomneun sam*, 2012) shuffles between the transnational life of the Japanese writer Yoko Kawashima Watkinson and Kim's travel with a Japanese woman named Masako through the exchange of the voice-over and correspondence between the three subjects (including the director's self), *The City in the Water* (*Mulsok-ui dosi*, 2014) develops Kim's critical and meditative quest for the trace of a village submerged by the construction of a dam in Chungju through a variety of landscape images encompassing both static and moving cameras, oral interviews with former village residents, excerpts of past radio broadcasts, and old still photographs of the village. Kim's essayistic efforts to link his personal reflection in the present to the forgotten or refracted history of the public event are also demonstrated in his two recent films on the Sewol ferry disaster. *Oh! Love* (*Oh! Sarang*, 2017) and *Surreal* (*Chohyeonsil*, 2017) express Kim's reflexive approach to—and his ethical distance from—the traumatized psyche of either an ordinary man who recalls the disaster, or a father who lost his son. While Kim's films have navigated through different subgenres of the essay film, Park's *Cheonggyecheon Medley* (*Cheonggyecheon medeulli*, 2010) and *The Dream of Iron* (*Cheol-ui kkum*, 2013) experiment with the juncture of heterogeneous images, sonic discordance, and expressive camerawork to realize “the idea of essay film as a cinema centered on disjunction” (Rascaroli 2017, 17). These formal devices create multiple interstices, from which Park's reflection on the now-obsolete or monumental factories and machines (the metal manufacturing factories in *Cheonggyecheon Medley*, and the machines and gigantic ships in the shipyard in *The Dream of Iron*) navigates between his critique of Korea's rapid industrial modernization and his obsessive

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2. The studies that attest to the recent explosion of global scholarly interest in the essay film include the monographs by Timothy Corrigan (2011), Laura Rascaroli (2017), and Nora M. Alter (2018).

return to dreams and nightmares revolving around the sublime images of metals (Fig. 4). More than activating reflectivity, subjectivity, and multiple formal devices, the films of Kim and Park demonstrate that the development of the essay film as a mode of expressing subjective agency and personal expression has been linked to the renewal of their participation in Korea's public events or its forgotten memories and histories, which were the main concerns of Korean activist documentary as well.



**Figure 4.** A kaleidoscopic imagery of metallic machine components that is associated with the director's recurring nightmare since his childhood in the opening sequence of *Cheonggyecheon Medley* (Kelvin Kyung Kun Park, 2010), courtesy of the artist.

### *The Audiovisual Turn*

Several documentary films since the  $\approx$  2010s have inaugurated the second post-verité turn through portrayals of places and landscapes related to Korea's social reality or a personal or collective memory of its past. These films' emphasis on form and aesthetics in ways that treat the place or landscape as their primary object for investigating its present and

its underlying history or memory corresponds to what Bill Nichols has characterized as the “poetic” mode of documentary practice (Nichols 2001, 102–105). The proliferation of this mode is also in line with the recent global popularity of the various crossovers of documentary and experimental cinema, which have been identified by such terms as “experimental documentary” (Hilderbrand 2009) and “avant-doc” (MacDonald 2015). With these in mind, I characterize this tendency in recent Korean documentary filmmaking as the “audiovisual turn” in two senses. First, this term is able to tease out these films’ several aesthetic and technical procedures of isolating and amplifying the visual and auditory qualities of the image portraying a place or landscape, as well as these procedures’ effects of providing a fresh look at the present of the place or landscape, or drawing the viewer’s attention to its connection to a forgotten history or the memory of the people who inhabit it. Second, and more significantly, these documentaries’ framing of a place or landscape as an autonomous entity marks remarkable aesthetic and epistemological breaks from the traditional Korean independent documentary of the 1980s and 1990s. In the *verité*-style activist documentaries, spaces such as the factory and the urban town are marginalized as the social and geographical background against which political actions (such as strikes against unfair labor conditions or mass dismissal, and residents’ protests against enforced redevelopment and eviction) take place and develop. In contrast, the recent Korean nonfiction films that attest to the audiovisual turn use several non-*verité* aesthetic devices, including expressive camerawork and montage, sound-image disjunction, and the avoidance of authoritative voice-over narration or cause-and-effect narrative, to bring to the forefront a place or landscape as the very locus of both present reality and past memory or history.

A couple of local critics have drawn attention to these documentaries’ aesthetic representation of the place and landscape, identifying their attentive observation as the “spatial turn” (*gongganjeok seonhoe*), or singled out these films as “space documentaries” (*gonggan dakyumenteor*) (D. Lee 2013; S. Lee 2017). These critical terms succeed in pointing out the ways in which the emergence of these documentaries has responded to three types of spaces produced by Korea’s modernization as its remnants: first, shantytowns



or old districts subject to the processes of urban redevelopment that have persisted from Korea's rapid urbanization of the 1980s to its embrace of the neoliberal economy since the 2000s; second, natural or artificial landscapes traumatized by the ideological and political conflicts of Korea's postcolonial, authoritarian, and post-authoritarian eras; and finally, monumental spaces that now remain deserted yet are haunted by the modern and contemporary history of Korea. Despite this valuable contribution, these domestic discourses concern themselves only with *what* these films represent (that is, such places or landscapes themselves), but lacking a theorization of *how* they represent them, namely, which technical, aesthetic, and ontological characteristics of these films contribute to producing them as specific cinematic spaces. For these documentaries' emphasis on the audiovisual qualities of the place or landscape through cinematography, montage, and sound-image synthesis ultimately conjures up experimental approaches to documentary that depart from the expository or participatory mode of documentary, which privileges the cause-and-effect narrative. Bearing this divergence in mind, I argue that the effects of these documentaries' poetics and techniques correspond to the transition from the movement-image to the time-image in Gilles Deleuze's sense. That is, the audiovisual images in these documentaries create "optical and sound situations" dissociated from the sensory-motor schema of the classical cinema, present "any-space-whatevers" as the cinematic space disconnected from the organic arrangement of images and charged with autonomous affects, and activate the disjunction of the visual and the audible through which the memory associated with—yet invisible or inaudible in—a place or landscape becomes legible (Deleuze 1989).

The documentaries that pertain to the "audiovisual turn" create a set of time-images in which a social place or natural landscape is reconfigured as the cinematic space liberated from linear time and layered with its virtual past. *The Color of Pain* (Bora, Lee Kang-hyun, 2010) investigates the conditions of labor and the mental and physical subjectivity of laborers in contemporary Korea, focusing on the national healthcare system at various workplaces including steel and mannequin manufacturing factories, a farm, a quarry, and an internet data center. While Lee's careful

accumulation of the details of these workplaces reminds one of Frederick Wiseman's observational documentary, Lee's experimentations with decentralized framing and fragmentary editing draw the viewer's attention to the workplace's visible and sonic conditions, including the harsh noises produced by the various machines and tools, and the factory's old and even dirty environment contaminated by toxic chemical substances. Like Lee's treatment of the factories as isolated entities of investigation, the digital time-lapse cinematography and rhythmic montage in Moon Seung-wook's *Watchtower* (*Mangdae*, 2014) offer viewers a poetic meditation of the dilapidated landscapes of Yaksa-dong, a small town in Chuncheon (capital city of Gangwon-do Province in South Korea) that was marked as a sector of urban redevelopment, while also establishing a watchtower as its landmark, and the town's old houses and surrounding alleys as a space whose present is permeated with its virtual pasts.

Besides the factory and the shantytown, the documentaries of the audiovisual turn also create time-images of artificial and natural landscapes charged with the forgotten traumatic memories of the residents who have occupied them. Employing poetic and observational cinematography and the deliberate discordance of survivors' oral testimonies and their corresponding visual images, Im Heung-soon's *Jeju Prayer* (*Binyeom*, 2012) documents two sides of Jeju Island: its bright side as a tourist attraction marked by the natural beauty of Hallasan mountain, the many trails that open onto the mountain and loved by hikers and trekkers, and the seashore that surrounds the island; and its dark side as the site of the April Third Incident (*sasam sageon*) in 1948, a political event that began with an attack by a few hundred communist guerillas on the local police on the island and eventually led to counter-insurgency operations by the police and the US Army, who were responsible for a bloody mass massacre of 80,000 civilians (nearly one third of the island's entire population), including many who were falsely accused of being communists or rioters. Im's portrayal of a geographical place and its landscape in the present as a space haunted by repressed histories and traumatic memories of the past echoes *Tour of Duty* (*Geomi-ui ttang*, Kim Dong-ryung and Park Kyong-tae, 2012), an experimental documentary built upon optical and sound situations and

sound-image disjunctions (Fig. 5). Here, both formal devices establish the landscapes of the now-outdated former military prostitution camptowns (known as *gijichon*) as ruins that three former military sex workers still live in and wander across, portraying them as the spectral remnants of Cold War ideology (see J. Kim [2017]). While the time-images of the place and landscape in these documentaries diverge from the activist documentary that served to engage and document the site of the social event in its immediate present, they do not completely diverge from the traditional Korean independent documentary in that they renew the ways of representing several social spaces that the latter attended to: the workplace as the space of industrial exploitation and alienation, the shantytown as a remnant of urban redevelopment, and the historical landscape in which traumatic memories of political and ideological violence are buried.



**Figure 5.** An image of the now-deserted former US military base. Still from *Tour of Duty* (Kim Dong-ryung and Park Kyong-tae, 2012), courtesy of Kim Dong-ryung.

### *The Archival Turn*

Another notable tendency in recent Korean documentary filmmaking since the early 2010s is the growing use of found footage as existing moving images gleaned from various media resources. The modes of filmmaking that extensively use found footage, including compilation filmmaking itself, have largely remained marginal in documentary cinema. As Nichols notes, “found footage, already understood as a rapidly accumulating resource, simply did not have the immediacy of freshly recorded material, be it staged, reenacted, or caught on the fly” (Nichols 2014, 146). Nichols’ account of the marginalized status of found footage has a peculiar underpinning in the key tenet of Korean independent documentary since the mid-1980s. While the filmmaker’s participatory engagement with social actors served as a token of documentary film’s authenticity and commitment to social change and politics, the extensive deployment of archival images was not recognized as a notable aesthetic tendency for conceiving the whole fabric of an individual work, much less as a subgenre. That is, in most Korean independent documentary films until the late 2000s, archival images were mainly used to illustrate or supplement verbal statements or arguments delivered by the director’s voiceover or his/her interview with social actors.

In this context, I characterize the recent Korean documentary’s increasing attention to the existing image as the *archival turn* in two senses. First, this term suggests that the extensive use of found footage allows filmmakers to develop other modes of documentary filmmaking than the participatory mode distinguished by the supremacy of the camera’s immediate, on-the-spot witnessing of reality and the director’s immediate contact with social reality or its actors. Kim Kyung-man, arguably the only Korean practitioner who has self-consciously pursued the method of compilation filmmaking, has excavated and shed new light on a vast array of archival images that document the political and cultural pasts of Korea since the 20th century. Based on his careful study of US–Korea-related footage from official government archives and newsreels, his *An Escalator in World Order* (*Miguk-ui baram-gwa bul*, 2011) is a compilation documentary that draws the viewer’s attention to the larger history of Korea’s military,

political, economic, and cultural reliance on the United States in the 20th and 21st centuries. Mun Jeong-hyun's *Yongsan* (*Yongsan*, 2010) and Paik Jong-kwan's *Cyclical Night* (*Sunhwanhaneun bam*, 2016, Fig. 6) encapsulate how the techniques of archival filmmaking, such as associative montage, image manipulation, and sound-image disjunction, activate the essayistic mode of filmmaking that reflects on the public event from the viewpoint of the filmmaker's personal memory. In *Yongsan*, Mun associates the Yongsan Massacre (*Yongsan chamsa*), an incident on January 9, 2009 that led to the death of five protesters who had been fighting against the violent suppression of the Seoul Metropolitan Police Agency in the Redevelopment District of Yongsan County in Seoul, with the larger traumatic history of state violence during the era of military dictatorship. Mun's use of the video footage of the day of the massacre functions as a fulcrum for blending his consciousness of the present tragedy with his personal memories of the student democratization movements in the 1980s and early 1990s, as it is extended into another series of video footage that depicts student rallies in universities and the funeral ceremonies of the students who were killed or had self-immolated. The use of archival footage as the catalyst for establishing the director's subjectivity hovering between past and present is also the case with *Cyclical Night*, for which Paik's recording of the faces who participated in recent mass demonstrations encouraged him to collect and rework film clips and photos documenting people's political resistances since the 1960s. This essayistic mode mobilized by the two directors' extensive refashioning of archival footage coincides with Jung Yoon-suk's *Non-fiction Diary* (*Nonpiksyeon daeori*, 2013), a metahistorical documentary that takes the records of the crimes committed by the Jijon Clan (*Jijonpa*), a group of five serial killers motivated by the goal of "killing the rich," as the raw material for constructing an alternative, multilayered history of capitalism's negative impacts on Korean society of the early 1990s and onwards.



**Figure 6.** Still from *Cyclical Night* (Paik Jong-kwan, 2016), courtesy of Paik Jong-kwan.

Second, and more significantly, the term “archival turn” also indicates that the films’ appropriation, investigation, and rearrangement of found footage is grounded in the concept of the archive, in which the meanings of its documents or objects are open to reinterpretation and reinvention in dialogue with the present or other documents or objects of the past. This suggests that the new filmmakers who appropriate, reassess, and even manipulate found footage are motivated by the desire to unveil and deconstruct its intended meanings and aesthetic effects, as well as by the idea of endowing it with a new historical perspective in relation to their engagement with the politics of the present. In this sense, the driving force of the filmmakers’ “archival turn” can be seen as meeting Walter Benjamin’s demand for a “materialist historiography” that appropriates and reassembles fragments of the past “in a moment of danger” (Benjamin 2003, 391). The films attest to this Benjaminian consciousness in different ways: *An Escalator in World Order* alternates the vast array of propaganda films and newsreels with Kim’s self-shot footage to underline the extent to which the history of the political-economic-religious complex between the US and Korea since

the latter's liberation deeply extended into multiple aspects of Korean society in the early 21st century. Both *Yongsan* and *Cyclical Night* use video-based slow-motion effects or digital manipulations to signify the spectral presence of the people who engaged in Korea's democratization movements and thereby challenge the chronological ordering of past and present. In *Non-fiction Diary*, Jung connects the Jijon Clan's murders with other seemingly unrelated traumatic incidents that occurred during the same period and signaled the structural catastrophe of a capitalism-driven Korean society: the collapse of the Seongsu Bridge (Seongsu daegyo) in Seoul in 1994 (which claimed 32 victims) and that of the Sampoong Department Store (Sampung baekwajeom) in 1995 (which claimed 502 lives). Jung's collage-like accumulation and editing of the archival static and moving images associated with these traumatic events adds up to a new constellation of the different (and seemingly unrelated) pasts, whose meanings are made anew when they are grouped in a new assemblage and are viewed from the present. To sum up, the filmmakers' Benjaminian approach to the audiovisual archive is predicated on the assumption that it "produces an excess of temporalities and an excess of meaning and affect that [they] can harness and explore for new effects of history" (Russell 2018, 18).

### *The Digital Turn*

Digital technology has been used in different ways in Korean nonfiction filmmaking since the early 2000s. Many filmmakers and media activists have embraced digital technology's multifarious capabilities, including the DV camera's portability, its immediate access to reality, its extended recording time, and non-linear editing as innovative and pioneering. This assumption was predicated upon the belief that these capabilities would reenergize the *vérité* tradition's on-the-spot ethos and participatory aesthetics, just as portable 16mm film cameras and analogue videocams functioned as a technological precondition for the activist documentary movement in the late 1980s. Still, it is significant to further remark that many independent filmmakers' growing adoption of digital technology in this era was not



necessarily limited to either the activist mode of documenting social reality or the realistic aesthetic of preserving life and truth. The personal documentary summarized above, including video diaries and domestic ethnography practices, is one instance of how digital video's portability and intimacy triggered a non-activist, post-*verité* mode of documentary practices or its combination with activist filmmaking. For the DV camera in the personal documentary functions as a tool both for establishing its practitioner as filmmaker-I and for questioning his/her authorial subjectivity: that is, the camera can be used for the filmmaker-I's self-expression and his/her reflexive quest for redrawing the boundaries between his/her self and others, and between inside and outside.

This permeability of boundaries in the personal documentary largely went hand in hand with hybrid documentaries as another post-*verité* mode of documentary. Both *Patriot Game* (*Aegukja geim*, Kyung Soon and Choi-ha Dong-ha, 2001) and *Fuckumentary* (*Ppeokkyumenteorì: Baktong jilligyo*, Choi Jin-sung, 2001) examine how the authoritarian ideologies of patriotism, anti-communism, and developmentalism in the Park Chung-hee regime persisted in Korean society and its collective unconsciousness of the early 2000s. These documentaries' hybridity is initially aesthetic, as their filmmakers exploit low-fidelity digital visual effects and reenacted sequences to juxtapose them with the indexical record of participatory interviews with people brainwashed into these ideologies. As Choi Jin-sung writes of *Patriot Game*, "the film's pastiche-like synthesis of images, its mixture of multiple genres, its blending of fiction and nonfiction, and its use of various parodies, all testify to an achievement that the digital brought to Korean independent documentary, while also signaling a new mode of documentary" (Choi 2003, 215). This new mode of documentary, too, was developed in the directors' self-consciousness that digital technologies could be used to render social reality in a way that diverges from the objective premise of the traditional documentary and instead embraces fakery and imagination. This awareness echoed two local scholars' characterization of the non-*verité* style documentaries as "post-documentary," a term that John Corner (2002) originally coined to indicate the growing use of playful and performative elements as new kinds of factual production. Bracketing

personal documentary, video documentary, and hybrid documentary within the umbrella of “post-documentary,” Maeng Soo-jin and Mo Eun-young have argued that these were driven by the filmmakers’ aspiration to “reflect on and challenge the established basic assumptions of representation, reality, and documentary realism” (Maeng and Mo 2008, 43–44).

This early adaptation of digital technologies to question the objective representation of the real or to seek an alternative understanding of social reality has been expanded since the late 2000s to the degree that they have given risen to three formal and aesthetic tendencies. The first tendency is the use of digital cameras and software-based image manipulations to produce works of experimental documentary. In Jung Jae-hoon’s *Hosu-gil* (*Hosugil*, 2009), the DV format’s capacity to record far longer stretches of time than the celluloid camera results not simply in documenting details of an old town in Seoul under urban redevelopment, but also in drawing the viewer’s attention to the temporal process of its decay and demolition. It falls within a kind of experimental documentary that activates the aesthetic of slow cinema, in that it requires the viewer to sustain “perceptual attentiveness through the experience of durational rhythms” (de Luca 2016, 36). Jung’s venture into digital experimental documentary is repeated in *Turbulence at Dodoli Hill* (*Dodoli eondeok-e nangiryu*, 2017). For this film, he employs a low-fidelity digital camera and a cellphone’s built-in camera to push the viewer’s perception of framed reality to its limits, as they create the obscure visible traces of natural and industrial landscapes (a mountain and a shipyard). The second is the rigorous use of graphic and infographic images to engage and represent an ever-widening variety of political agendas. Choi Jin-sung, the director of a digital hybrid documentary *Fuckumentary*, returned with *The Plan* (*Deo peullaen*, 2017), which examines the automatic ballot sorting and counting mechanism in the eighteenth presidential vote in 2012. He often uses a variety of infographic images and combines them with the studio-based reenactment of the ballot-counting processes in a way that reminds one of Errol Morris’ films, to visualize their algorithmic dimension veiled from the general public’s eyes and thereby to develop a conspiracy-theory argument on the hidden power of Korea’s democratic political system. Jung Yoon-suk’s collage aesthetic of the archival footage

in Non-fiction Diary is varied in his recent feature-length documentary *Bamseom Pirates Seoul Inferno* (*Bamseom haejeokdan seoul bulbada*, 2017), which furiously and playfully mixes a flurry of 2D and 3D graphic images to amplify a young punk duo's message of resistance against the established political and economic order in Korea. The third is the VR documentary that transposes a historical and political issue into a personal and concrete experience. While *Bloodless* (*Dongducheon*, Gina Kim, 2017) traces the last moments of a real-life sex worker who was brutally murdered by a US soldier at the camptown in Dongducheon in 1992, *489 Years* (*489-nyeon*, Kwon Ha-yoon, 2016) recounts a former soldier's memory of patrolling the DMZ (dematerialized zone) with a gamer's first-person-shooter perspective and photorealistic CGI. While these two projects offer viewers the experience of presence, and thereby solicit their emphatic witnessing of the traumatic event or memory as in the cases of VR documentary, their use of the VR space and perspective also negotiates the possibility and impossibility of representing and experiencing the liminal space of political borders, therefore updating the "post-documentary" assumption of the early 2000s.

Apart from the three tendencies of digitally enabled documentaries since the late 2000s, the most remarkable achievement of the digital turn is *Two Doors* (*Du gae-ui mun*, Kim Il-rhan and Hong Ji-yoo, 2012, Fig. 7), a controversial documentary that reconstructs what happened on the day of the Yongsan Massacre in the light of a new form of documentary for engaging the public sphere of social struggles and the politics of truth in the digital age. The film emblemizes the extent to which post-verité documentaries' technical and aesthetic strategies are seen more as updating the political and ethical aspirations of activist documentary. It was produced by the filmmakers of *Yeonbunhongchima* (PINKS), a media collective that had made such activist documentaries as *3xFTM* (Kim Il-rhan, 2009) and *The Miracle on Jongno Street* (*Jongno-ui gijeok*, Lee Hyuk-sang, 2010) to promote solidarity for the cultures and human rights of sexual minorities. In this context, the collective's engagement with the Yongsan Massacre validates that the issues of urban redevelopment and enforced eviction, which Kim Dong-won and other veteran activists had concerned themselves with since

the late 1980s, were still urgent social problems of participatory political documentary even after the transition to the neoliberal restructuring of Korean society in the 21st century. What distinguishes *Two Doors* from its activist predecessors, then, is that it does not rely on the on-the-spot record of the struggles in the Yongsan redevelopment area to immediately convey the outrage of the evictees and thereby solicit viewer solidarity with their precarious lives. Built upon an investigative narrative reminiscent of Errol Morris's digital documentaries, the film instead achieves a particular form of transmedia documentary that is derived from, and simultaneously reflects on, the two new types of political pedagogy and agency constructed by the penetration of digital media since the late 2000s in Korea: first, the dramatic rise of participatory online videos and guerilla, grassroots internet broadcasting organizations engendered by the Candlelight protest in 2008; and second, increased access to the resources of mainstream broadcasting and newspapers in the form of the multimedia archive, which is the basis of alternative, critical perspectives on political struggles and issues. By channeling the two types of political pedagogy and agency into its strategies of investigation, reenactment, and database narrative, *Two Doors* not only reveals the massacre's underlying political tension between the evictees and the police catering to the neo-conservative urban redevelopment ideology of the then Korean government, but also establishes the cross-media reading of competing records of the event—footage taken by the guerilla broadcasting media collectives, on one hand, the police's video evidence submitted to the trial that dealt with the Massacre case, on the other— as a way of engaging with the limits of truth about who was responsible for the fire that caused the deaths of the five victims. Along with the three recent tendencies of digitally enabled documentaries, *Two Doors* demonstrates how digital technologies are capable of renewing the traditional Korean documentary's commitment to reality and politics.

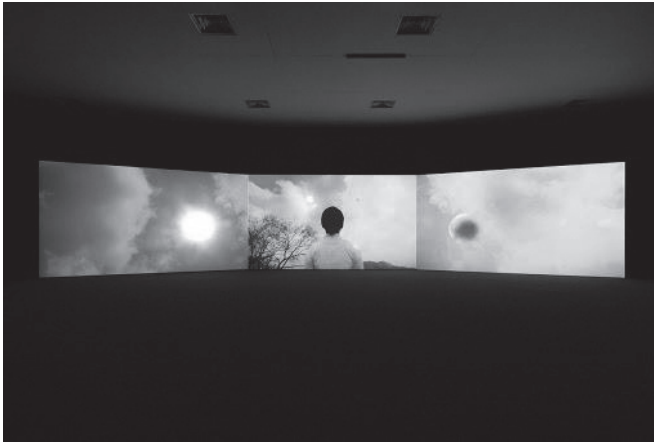


**Figure 7.** Video footage shot before the Yongsan Massacre by a guerilla internet broadcasting collective Sajahoo TV. Still from *Two Doors* (Kim Il-rhan and Hong Ji-yoo, 2012), frame grab.

### *The Documentary Turn*

The fifth and final post-*verité* turn of the twenty-first-century Korean documentary can be called the *documentary turn*, which refers to the burgeoning intersection of documentary filmmaking and the art of the moving image in the domains of contemporary art over the last two decades. What has demonstrated this turn are two phenomena: first, the dramatic increase in the number of local artists who appropriate participatory, poetic, reflexive, and performative modes of documentary practice and juxtapose them with various templates of contemporary art, such as post-minimalism, site-specific art, performance art, archival or research-based art, etc.; and second, the growth of theme-based exhibitions on various scales that host installations and screenings of film and video works by those artists and even documentarians. Park Chan Kyong, Im Heung-soon, Kelvin Kyung Kun Park, and Jung Yoon Suk, all of whom had established themselves as artists, have also testified to this intersection as their films (discussed

above) were theatrically released and garnered critical attention. Yet their moving image artworks before and after their theatrical documentaries can be framed and examined in terms of the documentary's aesthetic, political, and epistemological concerns. Park Chan-kyong's 6-channel video installation *Sindoan* (2008) is indicative of his ongoing preoccupation with the ideological traumas of Korea and the conflicts between its traditional values and its modernization. The work's investigation of the history of a mysterious local town from the development of its cult communities to its transformation into a site for a military headquarters in the early 1980s is linked to Park's portrayal of Kim Keum-hwa in *Manshin*. But the conflict between the spectral presence of shamanistic and Buddhist beliefs and the process of modernization is experienced differently from *Manshin*, as the work's six-screen interface invites viewers to compare and recombine observational footage, reenactments of cult community members, and the digitally manipulated aerial views of the village. Im's *Things That Do Us Part* (*Uri-reul gallanonneun geotdeul*, 3-channel video installation, 2017, Fig. 8) extends his preoccupation with the lives and memories of marginalized female subjects in the troubled history of Korea in *Factory Complex*. Drawing on the testimonies of three deceased or living grandmothers who lived through the ordeals of modern Korean history, encompassing the Japanese occupation, the post-liberation ideological struggle, and the Korean War, the work's three-screen interface offers viewers a rich juxtaposition of reenactments, observational shots of the landscapes occupied by the three female subjects, and textual commentaries on the larger historical context of their lives, including Bruce Cumings' *Origins of the Korean War* (1980/1991). Like Park's works in the exhibition context, *Things That Do Us Part* demonstrates how the formal, material, and spectatorial conditions of moving image installations remediate the post-verité modes of theater-based documentary filmmaking.



**Figure 8.** Installation view of *Things That Do Us Part* (Im Heung-soon, 3-channel video installation, 2017), courtesy of the artist.

Besides these artist-turned-filmmakers, a great number of Korean artists since the late 2000s have produced moving image artworks different in form and format that engage the subject matters of theater-based documentary filmmaking, including Korea's history and memory and its contemporary cultural and political issues, and appropriate its post-*verité* modes. Although I cannot enumerate all the artists and their works in detail, it is possible to situate several artists in terms of how the four turns that I have identified above—namely, the personal, audiovisual, archival, and digital—could be applied to the contemporary Korean art of the moving image. The moving image works of Lim Minouk, Park Byung-rae, and Cha Jaemin can be seen as video documentations of a site-specific performance that intervenes in the social spaces such as the ruin of modernization and replays the memories buried in the spaces with performers' corporeal acts in the present. Song Sang-hee and An Yu-ri have developed poetic or audiovisual reflections on the traumatized or diasporic space. Drawing on a variety of archival images and mixing them with essayistic commentaries or performative elements, Nam Hwa-yeon, Park Min-ha, and Lim Go-woon have created research-based moving image artworks that investigate the



images' multiple meanings, including how the digital network increasingly determines the production and consumption of the images. Kim Sook-hyun and Lee Wan have employed either the director's self-performance or actors' performances to examine the affective conditions of labor in the neoliberal regime or the transnational economy of intensive labor across South Asian farms and animation studios. Even the moving image works by artists' collectives, Okin Collective and Listen to the City, can be seen to refashion the activist tradition in the context of contemporary art, because their participatory amateur production of images is intended to engage such social issues as globalization, urban redevelopment, and gentrification.

Given the rise of these various artists that blend the templates of documentary filmmaking with the formal and thematic tendencies of contemporary art, it could be argued that the documentary turn in global contemporary art since the early 2000s has also occurred in the Korean contemporary art scene over the last decade. Maria Lind and Hito Steyerl's observation about the underlying motivation for the documentary turn applies to the artists' experimentations with the post-verité modes for the sake of exploring documentary film's assumptions about reality, history, and subjectivity and reinventing the bridge between its form and politics: "The documentary's ambivalent nature, hovering between art and non-art, has contributed to creating new zones of entanglement between the aesthetic and the ethics...between fiction and fact...and between art and its social, political, and economic conditions" (Lind and Steyerl 2008, 16). There have been several epistemological and institutional contexts in which these various moving image artworks have appropriated the modes of documentary production since the early 21st century: the rise of the moving image as a common tissue through which to express the artist's idea in ways that go beyond the previously rigid boundaries of medium and platform; the growth of local exhibitions that have showcased various investigations of the history and present of Korean or Asian society as their key curatorial purpose, while also increasingly embracing film and video installations as

a legitimized art form<sup>3</sup>; and the artists' growing attention to the forms of the experimental and essayistic documentary to pursue their ethnographic study and portrayal of reality and history and to question and creatively treat the image of that reality or history.

### *Afterword*

In conclusion, the formal and aesthetic variations of the twenty-first-century Korean documentary have inherited and dynamically renewed the activist, *cinéma-vérité* tradition of Korean independent documentary in the 1980s and 1990s, with the personal, audiovisual, archival, digital, and documentary turns. By departing from the epistemological and aesthetic assumptions of the activist tradition, the post-*vérité* documentaries have formed the most vibrant screenscape for cinematic experimentations during the last two decades that challenge the widespread awareness of Korean national cinema as represented either by the action-melodrama-blockbuster complex or by internationally well-known commercial or arthouse auteurs. In so doing, the films, too, have testified to their dynamic technical, aesthetic, and epistemological resonance with the autobiographical, essayistic, archival, experimental, and digital trends of contemporary global documentary cinema, both in the movie theater and inside the galley walls, as they have pursued the interest in the form, mediation, technology, and platform of nonfiction practices to renew documentary film's sustained engagement with reality, history, and subjectivity. This interest has also aimed to update the activist tradition's political and ethical commitment to Korean society and

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3. For instance, Park Chan-kyong served as curatorial director for the exhibition entitled "Ghost, Spy, Grandmother" (*Gwisin gancheop halmeoni*), the 2014 edition of SEMA Media Art Biennale in Seoul, in which a variety of films and video installations about histories and social issues in Korea and Asia were showcased. Another key exhibition of the year that attested to the institutional legitimacy of the cinema-art intersection of documentary was "Total Recall" (*Total rikol*), an event co-organized by Ilmin Museum of Art and the Korean Film Archive, that featured nine artists and filmmakers to explore the notion of documentary as a genre of film as well as a mode of approaching subjects in artistic production.

history by cultivating an alternative public sphere in which both the traumas of modernization and the new problems of neoliberalized contemporary Korea have been portrayed and discussed.

This is the reason these post-verité documentaries have co-evolved with the recent activist documentaries, rejuvenated by their variation in subject matter and mode of production. Their topics include the everyday life of workers or disenfranchised subjects in the neoliberal economic system, environmental struggles against the construction of state-driven infrastructure such as nuclear power plants and military bases, and feminist and LGBT politics. Also, the collective, guerilla production of newsreels as a key feature of the vérité tradition of Korean independent documentary has been reinvented in an array of omnibus film projects (*Jam Docu Gangjeong* [*Jaem dakyu gangjeong*, 2011], *Gangjeong Interview Project* [*Gangjeong inteobyu peurojekteu*, 2012], *Forgetting and Remembering* [*Manggak-gwa gieok*, 2016], *Forgetting and Remembering 2: Reflection* [*Manggakgwa gieok : Dorabom*, 2017], *Candlelight in the Wave* [*Gwangjang*, 2017], etc.) that have engaged with urgent political issues, such as the struggles against the Gangjeong naval base on Jeju Island, the sinking of the Sewol ferry, and the Candlelight Protests of 2016 and 2017 that resulted in President Park Geun-hye's impeachment. As in the cases of post-verité documentaries, the key components of activist filmmaking, such as spontaneity, on-the-spot spirit, and mobility, have been continually renewed in response to the political, economic, and cultural changes in Korean society in the 21st century.

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