

The double negative within Yangbin Park's installation title *I Wasn't Doing Nothing*, at AIRSPACE Gallery, offers an early indication of the show's preoccupation with time. Broken down, the title reveals the notion of doing *something* within a period of time set specifically in the past; in this case, that period is not only Park's art residency period at 40th Street A.I.R. but his personal residency within the United States. Having moved and traveled across the country since his arrival from Seoul, South Korea, in March 2008, Park presents, though the work on display in this, his final US produced exhibition before his return to Seoul, a nostalgically critical investigation of the social meaning of "home."

The exhibition immediately references a studio apartment; a paper futon lies in the corner, mounted photographs capture views of a Philadelphia city street, curtains hang before a print of emoji in echo of a window full of nosy neighbors, and ramen noodle wrappers lie encased in plastic. Taken together, the installation functions as a record of a life in unconcretized time and space that embraces Svetlana Boym's concept of reflective nostalgia: a "dwell(ing) on the ambivalences of human longing and belonging (that) does not shy away from the contradictions of modernity."<sup>1</sup>

Modern globalization and technology offer contemporary society the mythos of the global village; within social networking and instant exchanges of information across timelines and borders, we long to believe in concepts of international community and the Family of Man. However, problems within nationalism and politics, as demonstrated most recently between Russia and Ukraine, belie this perceived collapse between local and universal ideas of home. The contemporary world is, indeed, still fragmented, though we long for it not to be. Park's use of nostalgia in *I Wasn't Doing Nothing* engages contemporary notions of time and space, exposing a conception of both arenas as not measured by history's clock but in a "grasping (of) the fleeting present" which, combined with the past, "reveal(s) a multitude of potentialities."<sup>2</sup>

The initial work that one encounters in the gallery space is a wall triptych, partnered with a larger floor work. Transparent plastic, roughly equivalent in size to small trash bags and a kitchen bag, respectively, encloses food packaging. Sewn into place, the ramen packets and fruit labels appear to float within the works, giving the impression of both daily and weekly collections of aesthetic trash; the remnants of everyday life are not randomly ejected but particularly organized into a record of time. When viewed alongside a creased 8.5x11" drawing of outlined potted plants, a video game controller, and clock - hung upon the gallery wall with pink painter's tape - the immediate visual reference is to a familiar family kitchen wherein the trash is ready to be taken out to the street, the groceries are still in bags waiting to be put away, and the youthful drawing on the fridge is securely in place.

The spatial nature of these impressions, those that make the viewer feel immediately at home, permits the question – *where* is this home? Ramen, as marked in the anthropological study *The Noodle Narratives*, is a global phenomenon with over 100 billion servings purchased in 2012, or roughly 14 servings per person on the planet. It

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<sup>1</sup> Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001).

<sup>2</sup> Boym, "Nostalgia and Its Discontents." *Hedgehog Review* 9:2 (2007): 7-18.

is an urban and rural commodity, enjoyed by the affluent and impoverished alike.<sup>3</sup> The empty wrapper, then, belongs across the globe, as does, to a certain extent, the game controller. Clocks and plants are common to kitchens worldwide, blending Modernism's artificial marking of time with ahistoric solar time. The installation, then, crosses into universals; though marked by objects emerging from Park's Philadelphia residency, this space is "home" across the globe.

The monthly calendar hanging on the installation's adjacent wall furthers this questioning of space and time. The calendar begins on the fourth of the month, with each day's number printed individually in black ink and the week's end date printed in red. The font chosen is clear but, through the printing process, it is manipulated so that it bleeds and blurs, creating an effect that combines with the manipulated rice paper backing to again offer the impression of refuse and time past. Set upon the floor before the calendar are small plastic bowls arranged in a matching configuration to the calendar. Within each bowl is uncooked rice, with the week's end rice colored a brilliant and matching red. The amount of rice in each bowl varies - some days are nearly overflowing, while others are barely covered at the bottom of the bowl.

The daily nature of the calendar aligns itself with T.S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," with time measured out in rice bowls rather than coffee spoons. The nostalgia here, like the frustration of the poem, is melancholic and not necessarily pleasant; the variations of rice quantities function as a visual memory of lean times and days of plenty. Confirming this fluctuation, the early calendar day prints feature light impressions of grocery coupons, while the mid-month rice bowls tend to be the most abundant; together, the changes in daily circumstance reminds one to check on the ebb and flow of time – what month is this? It hangs unidentified by name, year or language - whether last month in Philadelphia, months ago in another state or South Korea, or a month next year in Seoul (or elsewhere) is unknown.

And it need not be known. Reflective nostalgia simultaneously inhabits the past and present, multiple time zones, and social memory. This simultaneity is overwhelmingly present in the "bedroom" area of the installation. A two-dimensional futon of manipulated rice paper lies in an alcove. Gently wrinkled, the paper sheet and pillow appear as crumpled but clean sheets. Installed next to the pillow is a television featuring a looped video work. The view is familiar as the rear seat of the Market-Frankford SEPTA line. Through a trick in the viewpoint from the train's rear seat, the viewer sees the train arriving into empty stations then departing, leaving completely desolated stations behind.

The mournfulness of this seeming isolation is contrasted with the joyful longing created through other visuals within the work. At certain points, the perspective created by the train rails prompts an optical illusion; the train appears to move backwards, only to surge forward once again. As directions blend and blur, so does location; while the video documents Park's morning commute from 52<sup>nd</sup> Street to 69<sup>th</sup> Street, it features a landscape transition from ramshackle housing to wildly overgrowing railside greenery. The journey from city to pastoral – recognizable urbanity to unspecified Arcadia - removes the film from its documentary aspect and

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<sup>3</sup> Errington, Frederick, Deborah Gewertz and Tatsuro Fujikura. *The Noodle Narratives* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2013).

places the viewer on a journey to the universal utopian home of which we all dream – a dream that, being located next to a paper pillow and futon, Park presents as accessible through motions both backwards and forwards, past and present, and a stone’s throw from where we are now.

The nostalgic longing for “home” within *I Wasn’t Doing Nothing* is fully in tune with the exacerbated speed of today’s 24/7 world. Broadly defined by history and individually recorded in social media posts with enabled location services, the contemporary past is more immediately accessible than the present, which serves as a blip on the screen that is quickly clicked into the past. Yet, within nostalgia’s mixing of space and time, the past combines with the present in a manner that redefines both; a continuity is created through the crossroads of experience. It is in this continuity that Park finds his time spent, allowing past and present, local and global to intermix and mingle, resulting in an environment for his viewers in which we all feel familiar, relaxed, and at home.