Barometric Reading

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Barometric Reading

by

Su Jung Chang

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of the requirements for the degree of
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I will attempt to envision a group of cogwheels\(^1\) as the structure of this statement, which I often times have in mind when I work.

This statement is divided into three big chapters, 1, 2, 3, and each chapter is divided into two or three smaller paragraphs, 1/3, 2/3, 3/3, or 1/2, 2/2. Each sub-paragraph in big chapter 2 has a different speaker and the speaker of paragraph 2 (Protagonist) - 3/3, a meteorologist, will be the speaker of the video in my thesis exhibition. In my work, speakers, the protagonists of my videos, are a function of the logical structure of an object, rather than characters.\(^2\)

I had never thought about using myself as the source material for my work before I came to New York. In New York, where I am *no-more-than a foreigner,* I tried to choose between the two strategic survival models of selfhood: the one who exploits exoticness – surprisingly, this image still works – to promote oneself and the one who conceals oneself behind the work. I had to decide between being Yoko Ono or On Kawara.\(^3\) It is a matter of choice, not a matter of compromise. If I fail to decide between the two, will there be a third strategy? If so, what could it be?\(^4\)

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\(^1\) This is the image of a group of cogwheels interlocked together. I want my video itself, as well as this statement, to be a structure made out of sub-structures.

\(^2\) For example, the tangerine in *tangerine video* is not a fruit you eat, rather it is a structure/system that makes you equally share with others.

\(^3\) These two artists represent common survival models of Asian artists in the United States.

\(^4\) These three models, Ono, Kawara, and the potential third model, are like three vertices of a triangle. The survival models cannot be any point that you can draw somewhere on one of the
I was running and running and frantically running. Someone might have thought that I was preparing for an Olympic race. No! I was wearing totally non-exercise clothes, so people might have thought that I was just a crazy person who was afraid of everything behind her. I was running late, and I needed to pick up fifteen high schoolers in Harlem. They were coming from a country located 14 hours away by flight. Since the high schoolers were unfamiliar with the city and the English language, they couldn't go anywhere without me. Moreover, I needed to take them somewhere on time. Although I cursed my job as I ran, I was very thankful for the fact that I could run fast and to any gods who might have bestowed the gift of speed upon me.

What if human beings could not change their speed? Then people could not rely on their physical capacity and would always need to take a car or public transportation, making for more and more traffic. Even worse, everyone would be late for every meeting because public transportation would be overcrowded and thus would also be running late. Then, people would start to make their appointments a little bit late because they would think everyone was running late. In the end, nobody would see each other. Thus, the ability of a person to change speed contributes to the logistics and orderly functioning of their society.

triangle’s lines. It is a fact that so-called ‘culture’ is led by Western people and because of this longtime cultural free fall between the Occident and the others on the globe, it is proved that you have to color your work to succeed in the Western countries as an Asian artist. Kawara’s choice to self-hide was apparently to succeed in the United States because what he was making was “Conceptual Art,” a form that only Westerners were supposedly able to use. He basically removed color from his work and persona, as if Ono colored her work with exoticness and exposed herself.
Old, a.k.a. Time

There is a realistic method to remain young while others are getting old. First, take a plane and fly towards the west, to the place in between the point of departure and the International Date Line. This means that you remain unchanged (for up to 23 hours) while other people who stay in their hometowns get older. To maximize the difference, up to 23 hours, fly from one place to the other to the west within an hour. This means that you have a good amount of money to travel because it is a really busy life to fly every hour.

You might collect enough money to travel every hour if you were a hard worker before commencing this life of travel. Through this method, you can really make your time 24 times slower than that of others and remain young, so you can say it is worthwhile. However, you will look as old as your hometown friends because your time passes at the same speed regardless. This means that you will die at a younger age which means that if your hometown friend dies at the age of 100, you will die at the age of 4.16 (if we can say that people die at the same age). A day is 24 hours, while a day is only 1 hour on your watch. A year is 8,760 hours, while it is 365 hours for you. 100 years is 876,000 hours, while it is 36,500 hours for you. Your watch is 24 times slower than others. Since we need to know when this person dies based on an average person’s time, divide 100 into 24, then, you will die at the age of 4.16. If 4.16 does not make sense to you, just commence this life of travel as late as possible.

2 (Protagonists) – 3/3 Barometric Reading, a.k.a. Distance, or numbers

Barometric Reading is the title of my thesis video. It is not ‘barometer reading.’ I use ‘barometric’ as ‘indicating changes.’ Thus, ‘barometric reading’ is an act of reading that affects
the piece, changing its logic at the moment you recognize the changes. In the first one-third of the video, I repeatedly put a certain signal sound at the moments that are important to understand the video, and thus audiences can be prepared to find subtle changes happening throughout the whole video. The protagonist in Barometric Reading is a meteorologist. The following sentence is what I wrote when I initially developed the idea of this video, and this is the attitude of the meteorologist: I see the future in terms of time and look into the past in terms of location. We, meteorologists, live in the slippage between the future and the past, a fluid moment that is not always the present.

I am interested in the temporal and spatial position of meteorologists. They see the past in terms of space and see the future in terms of time. They are tracking the past trajectory of meteorological phenomena, yet have to tell people about the future. However, this does not mean that they are living in the present because when you say ‘the present’ it includes the present’s time and space. However, meteorologists’ present is a compound of different time and space spectrums, in which I am interested and with which I sympathize as a foreign artist working and living in the United States.5

The video’s structure functions as if different sizes of cogwheels interlock with each other, the biggest – thus, slowest – cogwheel is the base, and the smaller cogwheels are running faster and interlock with each other on the top of the biggest cogwheel.6

5 We all can recognize that the protagonist meteorologist in my video is not an actual meteorologist – she uses a frog as a barometer of weather predictions in 2017, which is when we have an accurate weather forecast. She looks like she is a performance artist in the video.
6 However, there is no direct image of cogwheels in my video - this is a visionary image of the video’s structure/edit. The cogwheels here can be understood as chapters.
3 (Practical Matters) – 1/2 Practical Matters

I use ‘installation’ as a specific viewing situation. Elements such as the design of chairs, flooring, sound systems, light conditions, and room temperature are important because I hope my work creates a certain universe, an ecosystem.⁷ This is different from the conventional ‘video installation,’ which usually shares a similar logic to an object ‘installation.’ Artists working in video installation often handle the video as an object, whether it is a light (projection) or a metal box. The logic behind the conventional video installation is to make a conversation between elements in the space of exhibition. For example, in Matthew Barney’s installation, all elements, video and objects, are treated with equivalency. His video is not always the centerpiece of the whole work. It is managed as an object next to other objects (sculptures). However, my video is always the key, the centerpiece of the installation and the other elements are subsidiary, such as seating for the video.⁸

A digitally-made video, when projected, is one-dimensional because time, the duration of the video, is the only physical dimension of the video itself.⁹ The space in which a video is presented

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⁷ Hito Steyerl seems to be very specific about the ‘seating’ for her video presentations. However, I do not think I want to be like her because her seating system is mostly about style. Her seats are not even comfortable and comfort is important.

⁸ For example, Matthew Barney hung TVs from the ceiling several times for *The Cremaster Cycle*, *Facility of DECLINE*, and *Drawing Restraint*. Audiences had to raise their heads to watch the video. However, in my thesis show, I raise the seats for my video.

⁹ The computer ingests everything into a zero-dimensional, digital space, but when projected, time enters the video file and time is one dimension, thus digital video is one-dimensional. Someone might bring up that if a video is played either on a monitor or through a projector, it is actually a three-dimensional object. However, a screen or projection is just a container that helps the embodiment of the digital video file. This is a matter of installation, so video’s nature with regards to its dimensionality remains the same: one.
is four-dimensional.\textsuperscript{10} It is necessary to recognize the four-dimensional space as an ecosystem because the four-dimensional space is where we live, and thus we understand it as a complete system. Conventional ‘video installations’ do not aim to do this: video installation’s logic is commonly additive, putting things in the space, rather than building the space.

3 (Practical Matters) – 2/2 Real Practical Matters

I often begin with my observation of an object – as a subject – from everyday life. The attitude of my approach is ‘what if?’, which is asking about something that could happen in the future. However, as opposed to the common attitude of ‘what if?’, I focus on the process of arriving in the future. Since the approach of ‘what if?’ entails playfulness and a great amount of abstraction, my work often resides in absurdity.

When working from the attitude of ‘what if?’, I remove styles and symbols from the object and keep only the structure of it, which I call the logical structure of an object. The logical structure of an object is a system, in other words, the representation of the object, the logic that makes the object complete. Since I do not want to represent the image of the object, I attempt to find a visual equivalent of the logical structure of an object, not using the direct images of an object. This approach is evident in the work of Stuart Sherman, an artist whose work relates to mine. Stuart Sherman’s Spectacle Series looks absurd in terms of the unrealistic scales of the objects he uses. For example, in one piece the size of a toy mouse is the same as the size of a toy car. Yet, his work is logical in terms of his pacing and arrangement of sequences – he performed each Spectacle in exactly the same way. The extreme persuasiveness of his ‘logic’ leads his work to

\textsuperscript{10} Meaning it is a one-dimensional video + three-dimensional installation.
the place of the absurd, an approach I emulate. That relation of logic and the absurd is evident in the structure of my pieces, *tangerine video* and *It was further than I thought*. For example, *It was further than I thought* is derived from the misery that a traveler might have as a result of miscalculating time and distance in a place that one has never been. Rather than giving a direct representation of the traveler’s misery, I used a laser printer and a remote toy car. The toy car appears and runs behind the laser printer. As we listen to the sound of the car running and consider the size of the printer, we expect the car to reappear immediately, but it doesn’t appear until about a minute later. The logic behind this work is to find two different objects with inherently different time and distance structures to make a comparison between locals and travelers. Unlike the toy car, the laser printer knows how far it can go, measured by page per minute. The juxtaposition of two unrelated objects in a very reductive situation makes the work absurd.

Growing up in big cities like New York and Seoul with no driver’s license, I learned to calculate physical shortcuts, economizing body energy by, for example, J-walking. My recent video centers on a sequential order of scenes to explore the perception of time, distance and speed. I use chapters in my video because chapters can connote structural movement. Chapters in the form of 1, 2, 3 (…) have the possibility of being reordered because all the chapters are independent of each other. Thus, continuous addition becomes a possibility. Each chapter is

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11 Thus, the logical and the absurd share the same root.
12 I think absurdity should not be a style - I try not to make it one. The absurdity that I want is the byproduct of logic.
13 I think this is important because it is your stamina to survive and my work is somehow derived from the matter of survival.
14 Time, distance, and speed are about movement. Movement is the impulse of time, distance, and speed to be activated.
independent, so there is no hierarchy among chapters. The direction of movement is linear here.\textsuperscript{15} Chaptering in the form of 1/3, 2/3, 3/3 connotes rotational movement, which means that you can start from any chapter but must read in sequence. Since each chapter in the form of 1, 2, 3 (…) are independent, they can be reordered. However, chapters in the form of 1/3, 2/3, 3/3 have sequential connections, and thus they cannot be reordered. Each designation implies where you are; 2/3 means you are watching the second chapter out of a total of three chapters. There is no hierarchy here either.\textsuperscript{17} However, unlike 1, 2, 3 chaptering, there is no possibility of adding more chapters because the 1/3, 2/3, 3/3 designation already defines how many chapters you have. My thesis work \textit{Barometric Reading} uses both ways of chaptering and this choice had been made by each protagonist’s time-structure of movement.

I understand video primarily as a structure, rather than a (narrative) stream.\textsuperscript{18} This is because video changes in time and time is required for the process of its perception. Thus, working in video is dealing with succession, a constant process of definition between a previous scene and a following scene. I have tried to find/build the language of video such that all the elements are interlocked like a group of cogwheels. For me, the conventional – or given – language of video is the array of flexible units that I can reuse. By building the language of video, what I eventually

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{15} Envision the image of toy railroad trains that you played with when you were young. A unit can be attached behind any other units, but it forms a linear shape anyway.
\item \textsuperscript{16} I myself was confused by linearity here because the possibility of reordering and linearity seemed contradictory. However, I use linearity not in terms of narrative, but for the structure/movement of time in video. Thus, ‘linearity’ in this paper must be understood in relation to time. For example, ‘the concept of seasons without the notion of a year’ is rotational movement, whereas ‘the concept of seasons with the notion of a year’ is linear movement.
\item \textsuperscript{17} Envision the image of pizza (pie). You can start from anywhere – you can start from any piece you feel the most delicious - but you may want to eat the next one from the piece you just had. Thus, it is rotational, but linear.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Time and space correlate to create structure; rhythm comes from structure because it is about speed, how fast or slow you experience the time and the space in a video.
\end{itemize}
I want to do is to subvert the order of perception of the viewer. As mentioned above, perception exists in sequence and thus, it requires a sequential structuring of time, in my case with a gradual and slight differentiation. Especially, the use of repetition in my videos in the forms of a unit of movements, of a repetitive language, and of an absurd structure, overturns the order of perception that the viewer expects. I hope my work is methodically meaningful and questions the norms that we learn to habitually believe.

19 Repetition is a key element for overturning expectations about what will happen next.
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Fig. 5 Thesis Install Shot 2, 2017
Fig. 4