Serendipity: Photography, video, experimental film and multimedia installation from Asia

Cover

Where the Invisible Lives
Minato Chihiro

Introduction: Twilight on "Picture Planet"

"Picture planet," the planet of images--that is what I call today's earth, where a myriad of images circulates via Internet and communications satellites,24 hours a day and 365 days a year. Images make up a major portion of the environment of intelligent human life today. Crossing political and economic boundaries, they create a space-time continuum that we might call the icono-sphere of images. In such an age, what is the significance of dealing with a single region like Asia ? To seek out the regional characteristics of an image culture that is essentially global in nature might seem to involve a contradiction.

This is a doubt I have always had with respect to Asian media art. Originally, the many forms of image technology, from photography and film to video and computers, have all been invented by Western civilization. These inventions are all based on modern Western science, so it is difficult to find anything distinctly Asian in the creation of these image media. Therefore, to find a dimension of media art that is, if not Asian, at least non- Western, one must approach these art forms without reference to geography or technology.

I would like to approach this subject in terms of the physiological or ethical implications of the images considered as experience rather than making a logical analysis of the invention and development of image technology as historical facts. Eyes that have been opened by image technology have shifted their gaze from the glittering outside world to contemplate an inner space nurtured by experiential images. They are searching for a way into the formless, invisible world that supports everyday life from the inside.

Images are a form of wisdom derived from light. However, on a journey through the Asian countries of India, China, Korea, Indonesia, Vietnam, the Philippines, and Thailand, I encountered many images that tend to enter the world of shadows, twilight, and darkness. Of course, these encounters were governed by chance and do not necessarily provide a comprehensive picture of Asian images. They are determined largely by chance. I do not pretend to offer the works in this exhibition as generally representative of Asia, and indeed, this would be impossible with a hundred times as many works. As I will discuss later, since "representation" can no longer be considered self- evident, it is necessary to reexamine the concept of "representing" itself in this age of the "picture planet." In any case, I would like to explore, together with the artists, some paths leading into the more shadowy regions of the "picture planet." We will embark on a journey to an invisible world, relying on the faint light of a flickering candle in the gathering twilight.

I. The Territory of Shadows

The Museum Wayang, located in the Kota district, the old section of Jakarta, Indonesia, houses an immense collection of wayang puppets, the puppets used in the well known shadow puppet plays of Indonesia, plus valuable documents and other reference material related to the plays. On entering the building, the visitor hears strains of regularly performed gamelan music and sees a row of large frames that hold a surprise for the traveler

who expects to be immersed in the world of quiet, profound beauty of the Ramayana. The puppets inside the frames include figures of Westerners, politicians giving speeches, and armies on the march. There are soldiers fighting each other with guns and cannons and ordinary citizens in Western clothes riding bi- cycles. And the displays of puppets are surrounded by historical photographs.

This installation, entitled Wayang Revolution (p.27), presents scenes from wayang puppet plays performed all over Indonesia in the days before television. The shadow puppets perform scenes from the history of Indonesia, beginning with independence from Dutch colonialism, and moving on through the occupation by Japanese forces during the Second World War and the emergence of the modern nation-state. This was a first lesson in history that gave the Indonesian people knowledge of the story of their nation. This performed history is juxtaposed with recorded history, and the contrast between the colored puppets and the documentary photographs around them is extremely interesting. Fascinated by this scene encountered in the first room of the museum, I thought about Plato's allegory of the cave. It occurred to me that shadows are a form of media. I imagined the atmosphere of an evening in earlier times when this story was presented with music and verbal narration in flickering lamplight.

There is an extensive and lengthy history of shadow pictures in Asia. Chinese shadow plays using leather figures go back to the Han dynasty. The Turkish shadow plays known as karagoz employed a similar technique, suggesting a wide distribution of shadow picture culture over the entire Eurasian continent, including Southeast Asia. Even today, shadow pictures are known in French as omble chinoise. Asian shadow pictures reached Europe in the seventeenth century. In the eighteenth century the French finance minister Etienne de Silhouette invented a device for making a linear record of the forms of objects. The shadow of a person's profile was projected onto a screen and the outline was traced on the opposite side. This was the origin of the familiar word "silhouette." Johan Kasper Lavater, a specialist in the physiognomic judgment of character, which enjoyed a great vogue in those days, was known to use this device. It was another example of the influence of Asian shadow pictures in Europe in the nineteenth century. This technique separated into phrenology and anthropometry, eventually evolving into the science of morphology.

Here we might recall the legend of Butades, recorded in Pliny's Historia Naturalis. The daughter of Butades, a potter of Sion, was saddened by the thought of separation from her lover who was leaving on a journey and traced the outline of the young man's shadow on a wall. The father then made a clay image on the basis of this outline. This legend, commemorating the "beginning of painting," was the subject of many paintings from the Renaissance on. To me this story of the shadow of the boy about to leave Corinth suggests the influence of the shadow culture of ancient Eurasia more than that of ancient Greece.

A shadow is a phenomenon, not a substance. The tendency of the mind to recognize an alter ego in the phenomenon of the shadow is the ultimate source of the photographic image. This

idea appears in Adelbert von Chamisso's Peter Schlemihl, the story of a man who sold his shadow to the devil, but it can takes a truly striking form in the Vietnamese black and white portraits known as truyen than (literally, pictures that convey spirit).

Truyen than were originally painted as memorial pictures of ancestors to be placed on an altar. They differ from ordinary portraits in being painted from photographs (fig.l). According Nguyen Bao Nguyen, a painter with a studio in Hanoi who specializes in truyen than, the history of these portraits goes back to the nineteenth century. In many cases, the photograph from which the portrait is made very small. When I visited his Studio in Hanoi, I saw him using a magnifying glass, peering with one eye at a two-centimeter-square photograph on an identification card and copying it with pencil on paper. This practice may have emerged as a direct, manual method of enlarging the small photographs on visiting cards that were popular in the nineteenth century. In order to put the spirit of the subject into the picture, the artist must engage in a dialog with the space contained inside it. Nguyen Bao Nguyen writes:

"The pictures we draw are given the most important position on the family altar. Ordinarily, these hand-drawn pictures are considered more sacred than a mechanically produced photograph. That is why we are so strongly attached to this work."

These words suggest that the truyen than have a different function than ordinary photography. The artist has the task of extracting the important features from the photographic image while bringing out the character of the person photographed.

"Eyes, pupil, mouth, forehead, jaw, nose, ears, and hair...

these all reflect the subjects' character and thinking, the sadness and happiness, success and failure, ups and downs of their life. It seems to me that these things gradually emerge as I draw. I feel that I am having an intimate conversation with the person on the canvas."

Of course, the most important thing is the eyes. If the client is an important person, the day for putting in the eyes is determined by a fortune-teller. The truyen than are related to the world of shamanism, but one might also see them as expressing something contained in the Japanese word for photography, shashin (literally reflect on of the truth). This invisible something is brought out through the act of drawing by hand. The truyen than communes with the spirit residing in the shadows produced by photography and conveys it to the person sitting in front of the altar.

II. Séance Time

When did human beings first discover methods for entering an 'invisible world through images? In ancient Eurasia, there were people with a special power to enter the world beyond representation. They used representation, or images, to do this, and they performed a vital function in their communities. These individuals, generally known as shamans, played a similar role in the many different cultures in which they appeared, but their methods varied widely. The Hungarian anthropologist Mihaly Hoppál, in his study of shamanism, identified the role and mission of the shaman as: 1) spiritual leadership of the tribe, 2) presiding over rituals,3) restoring the spirits of the sick and sending spirits of the dead to the spirit realm,4) prophecy and divination,5) healing, and 6) writing poetry and acting in dramas.

These functions and roles are still carried out by shamans on the Eurasian continent today. Of course, there are many variations even in the same region in the color and type of costume the shaman wears, the content of the songs he sings, and the type of medicinal plants he employs. However, as Hoppál points out, most shamans use the drum as the chief object of representation in their rituals. They use the drum as a tool when going into a trance and as a vehicle for spirits. Images are often painted on the drums used in shamanistic rites, and many of these images are symbols of animals that serve as helping spirits or as a conduit between the spirit realm and earth. When the shaman enters into a trance he may perform a séance, communing with the world of spirits. The crack that appears on the surface of the bone or the vibration of the drum at that time can be interpreted as something caused by the movement of a spirit.

Through ritual, which includes drama and music, the sham- an opens a path to an invisible world of divination, healing, or communing with the spirits of the dead. It is a form of media art in a profound, original sense of the word. The media used by the shaman are not just material objects like the drum, a costume, or medicinal plants. There is also nature, considered in a broad sense, including animals who become helping spirits or the shaman's own body. The shaman communicates with the world of spirits at the interface between nature and art, so there is nothing surprising in finding this form of communication in technological art forms like media art or video art. There are many forms of shamanism, which differ greatly in function and method, but they all basically involve media used to expand the functions of the human body and senses, to extend the limits of perception and communication beyond here-and-now reality.

The Korean media artist Kim Hae Min makes works in which the person inside the television monitor holds a dialog with the faces hanging in the space outside it (pp.30, 31). The recorded images are manipulated by signals from a sensor so that they seem to intersect with the light in real space. Although there is a closed circuit here, we have the feeling that an uncanny space is opened between the monitor and lamp. This space is like the space that opens up around the drum in a shaman's ritual for invoking the spirits of the dead. In many of his works, Kim has opened up a path to an invisible world through the gap between image and material substance. Shamanism is an extremely important source of his imagination, so Emitting Light from Emitting Light can be said to be a kind of séance.

The French word séance originally means a meeting or gathering and is used even today to refer to the performance of a film as well as to refer to a gathering to communicate with the dead. There was a time in Europe when film images and spiritual phenomena were described by the same word. The invention of cinematography and the discovery of the X-ray came at the same time as Freud's studies of the unconscious mind, just a hundred years ago, a time when spiritual photographs also

happened to be enjoying a great vogue. I believe that there is something significant about this that cannot simply be dismissed as a superstition of ordinary people dazzled by the new media of the time.

Kim Yun Tae, another Korean filmmaker, has also explored essential features of the séance. His highly sensitive images seem to caress the underside of our skin as we look at the screen. The sensibility of people participating in a séance is heightened with a special focus on the sense of touch. As in the work of Kim Hae Min, a unique rhythm is created by a light bulb going on and off. The rhythm of this light carries us into the time of the séance. As indicated by the title, Video Ritual (fig.2), this work seems to explore the perception of a light different from light caught by the retina. A recent work, Dowsing (p.32), depicts a young girl engrossed in a strange form of play, but the sense of touch also plays an important role here too. A sensation of delicate contact with the skin opens the doors to an invisible world. Dowsing is a technique of searching for underground water or veins of ore using a divining rod. Kim Yu n Tae's works all act to open up pathways and veins that cannot be seen directly through video images.

In Video Ritual, the light of the light bulb slowly caresses the surface of the naked body, pairing itself with the light stimulating the retina. The nature of the physiological afterimage must be considered along with the optical phenomenon of delay in the light reaching the retina. An afterimage is a "spirit that can be felt," in the sense that it is something that can be seen even though it has no real substance. Generally, it is said that children can see an afterimage much longer than adults, and this shows that the phenomenon of the afterimage changes through development and experience. Spirits live.

The existence of "spirits" is shown with fantastic speed in the art of Ito Takashi. In works like Thunder (fig.3) and Ghost, ghosts appear through long exposure. The images per se are optical afterimages, but they are expressions of another phenomenon whose substance and mechanism are not well understood, the physiological afterimage. In Zone (fig.4), the subject is an insubstantial surface but is suffused with an energy that turns it into a rapidly changing game of speed and afterimages. This séance occurs in a bleak, artificial environment surrounded by steel-reinforced concrete walls in contemporary Japan. The sounds that we hear are not knockings from the spirit world but the roaring electronic sound composed by Inagaki. It carries us away physically, taking us to a world of spirits as the afterimages of sound and light pass through the walls and punch through the floor.

III. A Site of Comings and Goings

Media images emerged in an urbanized world. This connection with an urban setting has been a primary condition of media art ever since the invention of photography. It is something we should keep in mind as we explore the time rooted in the eternity of shamanism and its culture of divination. An example of a somewhat ritualistic European custom that emerged in the nineteenth century is taking photographs of dead bodies in the casket before burial. This practice suggests a belief in the image similar to that involved in truyen than, the Vietnamese black and white portraits of the dead. However, the development of this general custom of recording images of death is also related to changes in human relationships in urban society. A material record is required because the memory of the deceased is no longer kept alive by word of mouth.

Death is a mystery integral to media images. Flipping through the television channels shows that images of death are more abundant today than every before, from the evening news to Hollywood movies, but we are still unable to understand the mystery of death's intractable particularity. Why must we die? We may not be able to accept death on an individual level, but it is accepted by the community, and that is the starting point of religion. The fact that there is such an excess of images of death nowadays may have something to do with the growing secularization of life and the crisis of religion.

Death in our time, since Auschwitz, has entered a dimension in which representation is no longer possible. The existence of extermination camps determines the limits of a world in which the modern subject can be expressed. At the same time, the direct representation of death, in corpses or skeletons, must be questioned because of its inherent violence. Also, we should remember that there is no guarantee that the "extermination camps" are a one-time phenomenon. We need to ponder the fact that they can reappear in a different form. Camps for the destruction of human beings have even been permitted in an Asian country, Cambodia.

Violent images such as corpses or skeletons are not the only way to represent death. This is made clear by Yudhi Soerjoatmodjo's documentation of the death of people close to him (fig.5). The gaze of the photographer searches for something that the eye would like to hold onto in the flux of phenomena in front of it. What can be found, for example, in a hospital waiting room that is worth recording? The hands of a clock on the wall? The sheets on a bed? Death may not be imprinted specifically in any of these details but it may reside in all of them. The strange light suffusing the pictorial surface captures the experience of incorporating the moment of death into the formation of one's self. It is only through such experience that we can think about immortality.

Either the shadow of death cannot be found anywhere or else death resides in every landscape. Hearing the word Osorezan, most Japanese think of a mountain inhabited by spirits of the dead. It is a place where female mediums called itako convey the words of the dead to the living, and it has the image in most people's minds of a hell, a way station on the path to the underworld. Suzuki Risaku's vision of Osorezan (fig.6), however, is of a place filled with light. It is a bleak wilderness, and the riverbed where the spirits descend is white as bone. Men wearing suits walk on the glittering white ground under a blue sky; in the precincts of the temple, a priest aims his camera at the sky; and a Self-Defense Forces truck passes by. Although haunted by spirits, this landscape is unexpectedly bright and open. Even the crows, poised for flight, do not look like birds

of ill omen. Wilderness and city come into direct contact here. If these photographs recall a road movie, perhaps it is because they show a road that leads, across the surface of the earth, from the city to the netherworld.

The sacred ground of Osorezan is not on a special horizon cut off from the city. It is openly accessible to city dwellers. This is the form taken by a sacred place in today's totally urbanized Japan. Examining these photographs in detail, we cannot help feeling that the people wandering through the place called Osorezan are like ourselves. We resemble them in not knowing where we are going. The figures wandering in limbo are not the dead. They are us. This uncanny landscape is illumined with a transparent light.

When an artist deftly cuts off old, stereotypical images, the visage that inevitably appears in the cross-section of the cut is our own face. Pimpaka Towira's film Mae Nak (Ghost Story) (fig.7) is based on a popular Thai story that has come down from ancient times but is frequently used in novels, films, and television dramas. It is the story of a woman named who comes back after her death as a bitter and jealous ghost to harry the rival who tried to steal her husband. Like Osorezan, this work contains hardly any of the signs that directly represent death. Without using any of the conventional language of horror movies like corpses, blood, and skeletons, the artist skillfully deconstructs a ghost story known by everyone in the audience. The filmmaker Trinh T. Mirth-Ha has commented:

"...a film that effectively resists (in its non-linear structure, its slowness, its still imagery) the easily-consumed, fast-pacing, action-driven types of narratives standardly produced in Western mainstream cinema. Preserving the mystery and silence necessitated by its subject, the aesthetics of the film successfully conveys the sense of death."

Using a non-linear structure to break up the narrative, Towira suggests that the story of Mae Nak, which transcends time, is based on male chauvinist values. Another aim of this work is to show the relationship between authority and superstition (the collective consciousness composed of complex beliefs) and reveal the power structure operating in a society that "believes" in the existence of ghosts. It is noteworthy that resistance to the power that has constructed the female image, using the figure of the ghost, is expressed with a reticent, languid rhythm in an atmosphere of quiet darkness.

The subject of Ay Juk (fig.8) is taken from Thai folktales. It is given a unique depth through the addition of various materials to animated images. The little adventures of the young boy Ay Juk move along at a quick tempo, but the underlying theme of the story is the unique Asian philosophy of nature, the cyclic movement of matter. The extensive use of Asian shadow pictures is actively incorporated to enhance the visual interest of the work, showing that shadow pictures are esthetically effective even in the field of animation, which seems to be dominated by Hollywood or Japan.

Auraeus Solito's The Short Life of Fire Act 2 Scene 2: Suring andthe Kuk-ok (fig.9) takes a similar approach, employing legends and folktales to reveal the invisible structures of society.

It is based on a legend from the island of Palawan in the southern part of the Philippines. The spirit depicted in this work could be described as a contemporary trickster. The artist is from Palawan, so giving visual form to the unseen spirits of the island is a way of giving form to the history of his people. This history, needless to say, is a series of stories of domination and subjugation. Therefore, the spirit delivers a postcolonial message. As in Mae Nak, the visual atmosphere created in this film provides a sense of place and time without attempting to trace a particular reality. The artist's ultimate aim is to find access to the invisible structure of a society that exists here and now. Solito writes:

"Our presence becomes our history."

Here the representation of the unseen helps to establish the presence of people who have been erased from history.

IV. Serendipity, or Alternative Histories

Is it possible to put oneself in the place of people and phenomena that have been erased from history, to perceive the slight traces that have been left and foreshadowings of the future? This is the aim of this exhibition, as indicated by the key words of the Japanese title, " Yocho'" (foreshadowing, premonition, omen), and the English title, "Serendipity." Serendipity is generally taken to mean the making of a fortunate discovery by accident.

The origin of the word, however, reveals a political connotation and a connection between Asia and Europe. The word serendipity was coined on the basis of a folk tale which originated in Ceylon (today's Sri Lanka) and was later introduced in Europe as "The Three Princes of Serendip." While traveling, the three princes entered the country of Behram where they met a man who had lost a camel. The brothers managed to guess that the camel was white, had only one good eye, and carried two leather bags, one holding wine and the other oil. Because their guesses were correct, the man concluded that they had stolen the camel and prosecuted them for theft. They had to stand trial before the king of Behram but explained how they had guessed the appearance of a camel they had never seen from a series of hints, and they were declared innocent and set free.

This story can be traced back to the fifth century in Ceylon, the Anuradhapura period, which corresponds with Sassanian Persia and the Gupta empire in India. According to the Italian historian Carlo Ginzburg, the story was introduced to Venice in the sixteenth century. Voltaire read it and created a French version of the story, which he used in Zadig. An English version of "The Three Princes of Serendip" was published at the beginning of the eighteenth century. After reading this account, Horace Walpole coined the word serendipity, meaning "unexpected discovery made through sagacity and chance." This is the direct origin of the word used today. Walpole's own definition was "the discovery of something not sought through attentiveness, intelligence, and luck." Thomas Huxley identified this approach as similar to the methods of a nineteenth century science, and he spoke of "serendipity" or the "Zadig method" as "a way of inducing the cause from small hints seen in the results."

Ginzburg sees the lineage of a special type of knowledge in the history of "serendipity." It covers an extremely wide range of intellectual activity, from hunting and divination to sympto- matology and psychoanalysis. What each of these fields has in common is an ability to read causes from slight traces of evidence. The clues for interpretation, presented by nature or by humans and animals, include "footprints, heavenly bodies, excrement, inflammation of membranes, changes in the cornea, the pulse, freshly fallen snow, and tobacco ashes." Hunters detect the presence of animals from tracks. Doctors guess the cause of illness from symptoms. Sherlock Holmes detects the criminal from the tobacco ashes left at the scene of the crime. Freud invented psychoanalysis, a method of reading the con- tents of the subconscious mind through unconsciously produced "signs, handwriting, and speech." And the nineteenth century art of photography also contributed to this "wisdom of reading signs" through efforts to catalog the features of human- kind by extensive photographic documentation.

The idea of making criminal records with photography first appeared in France in the latter half of the nineteenth century, when the art of photography was quickly applied to various scientific studies. Alphonse Bertillon invented the method of measuring the human body known as the Bertillon method. He started his career as an employee of the Paris police office and an authority on graphology. He became aware of the advantages of photography for recording large quantities of visual data in a short period of time. At the same time, he noticed a disadvantage in the fact that the camera records everything that enters the viewfinder. Photography brings out all the details, even those that a person does not wish to see.

Bertillon differentiated similar images by taking accurate measurements of the body of the person being photographed. He also recorded a verbal description of physical characteristics made from a direct observation of the person measured. This information may be enough to determine that a person is not the one being sought, but, as Ginzburg points out, a simple match of measurements and verbal description is not sufficient to make a definite positive identification. Therefore, the Bertillon method was best suited to negative judgments. It did not provide the decisive evidence for identifying individuals.

The laurels for discovering such a method went to Francis Galton of England who adopted the decisive method of finger- print analysis as well as using photographs. Bertillon had been unable to make definite identifications of people even with quite complicated documentation of their physical features, but Galton found success by using the evidence of fingerprints which are unique characteristics of each individual. In addition to analyzing fingerprints, he also attempted to construct categories of human types on the basis of photographs. By juxtaposing large numbers of photographs taken for the purposes of identification, he selected common factors and used them to identify types of occupation, race, and character. He found an inductive paradigm for determining the "cause," the identity of a person, from the evidence of the fingerprint.

Here we encounter a situation in which the popular wisdom of Asia is linked with modern European technology in an interesting

way. Galton found an indication of the possible usefulness of fingerprinting as a method of identifying individuals in order to control the populace of a nation from the records of fingerprints taken in the Indian state of Bengal under the British rule. Sir William Herschel, a colonial administrator, got the idea of taking fingerprints from the common Bengali custom of making thumb prints. He adopted this practice as an official method of ad- ministration, publishing a report on it in the scientific journal Nature. Thus, this method of individual identification was not actually invented by the English but developed by stealing knowledge that had been used in India and China much earlier. Ginzburg says of this:

"The officials of the British Empire stole the inductive know- ledge of the Bengalis and turned it against them."

A form of knowledge that could be traced back to ancient times in Asia unexpectedly became a tool of individual identifi- cation for the purposes of colonial administration. Serendipity, "the wisdom of reading signs," was transformed into a tool for ruling and managing the people who had originally developed this knowledge. Before the recording of fingerprints was introduced in the latter half of the nineteenth century, photographs of "native" indigenous peoples were taken in colonies through-, out the world. Typing of the inhabitants and categorization by "race" was carried out with the methods of photography and anthropometry. Unitary "cultures" were constructed by differentiating them from other cultures through a process of measurement, documentation, and categorization.

Inside, and outside, the modern nation-state, a way of think- ing has been developed that views human beings as accumu- lations of various kinds of numerical data. It goes without saying that this way of thinking has played a critical role in many of the tragedies of the twentieth century. The photographs of prisoners taken in the Nazi death camps are well known. Other examples, like the similar photographs taken in the concentration camps built in Phnom Penh (especially facility called S-21) by the Khmer Rouge in the mid-1970s, have come to light more recently. In either case, the many human beings who appear in the photographs did not survive. The appropriation of serendipitous knowledge that took place in Bengal is not something limited to the past.

Looking for examples of serendipity that have been erased from history, I think of a potential function of photography that can play an extremely important role. Although the "wisdom of reading signs" has been made into a tool of documentation and control, it can be brought back onto the side of artistic creation. One way of doing this is to employ the capacity of photography for accidental discovery that is 'most fully developed in the snapshot.

The documentaries of Indian society made by Ram Rahman are packed with all sorts of signs that become visible through the physical intervention of the photographer (figs.10,11). This is a high-level visual story that cannot be encompassed by verbal explanations, a style of perception that can only be described as "snapshot knowledge." The signs that can be found in the

fragments of everyday life captured by Rahman are greatly affected by the cultural experience of the observer. Japanese and Indians see quite different meanings in them. Which details are significant and what can be inferred from them? Looking at Rahman's photographs, we are forced to use our inductive intelligence.

What a wealth of detail! It may be impossible to read all the signs, but one can get a feeling for the settings of numerous stories that are woven into the these photographic images. The possible stories are multidimensional, involved with politics, economics, media, religion, and culture. Even though there is only a moment of time in each photograph, it would take several days to tell all the stories they contain. That is the secret of the secret of photography.

As illustrated by the story of the princes of Serendip, serendipity is essentially connected to the act of "witnessing." What does witnessing mean? This is a difficult and important question for media art. At the very least, witnessing implies a responsibility to tell the truth. In a situation where signs or symptoms become evidence and the process of reading signs becomes witnessing, a subject must exist to make a judgment of truth or falsehood. This leads to the question of the authority's capacity to judge. Are the authorities entrusted by our society to make these judgments worthy of our trust? This is the serious question posed by the documentaries of Alex Baluyut (figs.12, 13). These documentaries could not have been made by just anyone. Baluyut has reported from the scene of a variety of actual violent events in the past, but he says that he was never more frightened than while getting information on the Manila police. This is because he entered the world of the overwhelming authority of the police and became a witness to all sorts of dishonest practices. Baluyut reveals a realm of violence invisible to the general public within this organization, which is authorized to use violence in public. In order to do this, he put his own personal safety on the line. The "eye of the photographer," which entered the depths of Manila's hidden violence, is the eye of a private individual. Whether the signs he has observed are "witnessed" or not depends on us, on whether we turn the hidden into the "seen" and the "spoken" as we see and discuss what Baluyut's eye has seen. Accepting information that has been "witnessed" in this way requires us to make some sort of social commitment with reference to these images.

The importance of this commitment should not be underestimated. It is clear from the history of photography that recognition of the photographer's private eye as a witness to history is a phenomenon of the twentieth century, the age of media images. In the "society of spectacle" formed by information capitalism, there is enormous trust placed in the capacity of images to act as witnesses of the truth. However, there is always the danger that the witnesses will give false testimony. There are other images besides the images of the mass media (I call them minor images) which are also a part of the "spectacle," defined broadly, that tend to deteriorate and disappear quickly. A major example of such images is the family photograph.

What is a family photograph? It is memory, recollection, and evidence, although the phenomenon of nostalgic attachment to family photographs may be limited to the twentieth century. The memory of a small social unit, it can be a model of the larger society. The archive of studio photographs gathered by Ashim Ghosh is not just a collection of old photographs (pp.50,51). It has value as sociological data, showing the kind of images that have been constructed by Indian society as a whole.

Ghosh's work is explained in more detail elsewhere in the catalog. Here I will just note that I was pleased to see the operation of serendipity in his art when I was shown the studio photographs at his home in New Delhi. The encounter with these portraits, left and forgotten in photography studios in villages all over the Indian subcontinent is truly a form of serendipity. The photographs brought together here contain an immense amount of information as reference material. The attitude of the observer determines which details are noticed and which signs are discovered, but without the data nothing can be found. The pictures taken at photography studios day after day make up a massive quantity of minor images. Once abandoned, they are nothing but refuse. They bear witness, however, to a history that only emerges through the images of the common people whose names never appear in official history.

Thus, the serendipitous approach to knowledge can provide a way of creating an alternative history. The princes of Serendip reveal the alter ego of ordinary history, a history of the innumerable people and events that exist in its shadows.

V. Invisible City

By recognizing innumerable alternatives to official history we can deconstruct the linear conception of time, necessary preparation for writing a non-linear history. The spatial dimension of history is also being broken down. The structure of the city, formerly based on the accumulation and movement of physical objects, is being transformed by the creation of high-level information systems. Information networks, operating at the speed of light, eliminate the meaning of distances that were previously determined by the time required to move physical objects.

The city of today diminishes distance and contains many invisible structures behind its visible facade. This change is especially marked in Asia. Traveling by taxi along the coastal road of Bombay, I was surprised at the sudden vision of a banner that read:

"Geography is history."

An advertising slogan for a mobile telephone company that covers the globe by satellite, this phrase brilliantly expresses the idea that the reorganization of space is the same thing as the reorganization of time. When I first heard about the guerilla tactics applied by Zhang Dali, it seemed to me that his actions arose inevitably as humble attempts to resist extinction in the onslaught of "total reorganization" (fig.14). Like other major cities in Asia, Beijing is presently undergoing large-scale redevelopment. The old buildings are being torn down one after another, and the changes are so dramatic that it is difficult to remember what anything looked like previously. Zhang Dali places the image of his own face on the walls that are going to

be destroyed. His profile, painted with a single line of spray paint, has appeared in locations all over Beijing. In addition to painting his face, he also makes holes in the walls in the form of his face. Zhang's empty silhouette frames scenes of construction and destruction.

Zhang's actions are related to the trend of graffiti art that emerged in the 1980s, but they have a mythical quality that is not found in the graffiti developed in New York, Paris, and Tokyo. As a relevant example, we might recall how the daughter of Butades traced the shadow of her falling lover on a wall, mourning his departure through the picture. This event that occurred in ancient Greece and the event occurring at the end of the twentieth century in China contrast in a fascinating way. Today, the trace of memory disappears along with the person. The artist has made thousands of these silhouettes in the city of Beijing, and most of them have disappeared along with the walls of the demolished buildings. Zhang's photographs record these traces as well as their disappearance.

How can memory be retained in the modern city? If geography is history, what sorts of memories are created for the people living there by the changing map? What is the relation-ship today between "living" physically in a certain place and "living" in terms of inner experiences, including feeling and memory? These are the sorts of questions posed by Rita Hui's Invisible City (Wail) (fig.15). She writes that this film is about the relationship between walls, the city, memory, and history, but this "relationship" cannot be determined simply. It is complex and multi-layered. Hong Kong has always been characterized by a dual reality. Dual citizenship and two official languages were products of the special relationship created by the colonial administration of Hong Kong. However, depicting this special quality is not the purpose of her work. When she speaks of an "invisible city" she is referring to the walls built at various levels of human relationships and the walls of memory, a labyrinth constructed in our consciousness and an alter ego of the city.

One of Abe Kobo's short stories, the strange Beyond the Curve, is the source of the motif used in his masterpiece, Burnt Map. The "l" who is the main character of this story, notices that the town on the plateau somewhere beyond the curve in the road has disappeared, and he stops before reaching the curve "slowly, as if pushed back by a spring in the air." Because of amnesia, he cannot remember the appearance of the town that he knew so well, but his mind moves back and forth between the state it was in before he lost his memory and the present state of anxiety over the loss. This inexpressible anxiety and discomfort resembles the condition of contemporary consciousness (since Kafka), the sense that something exists beyond our reach.

How a particular place is remembered or forgotten is a central theme of the work of Mark Chan. The monologue of the protagonist, who is attempting to go back to a place known by everyone, Happy Valley, moves along with a pleasant rhythm, but as we listen we gradually develop a floating sense of anxiety. We become afraid that "returning" per se, not just arriving at a destination, has become impossible (fig.16). I think that this is a feeling unique to the contemporary city where no place is

fixed, the anxiety produced by the endlessly redrawn map of memory. Mark Chan explores the theme of recollection through films such as Retouch I (p.59), treating the problem of the reediting of memory in a refined manner. This exploration does not follow a straight line. The flow of conscious is "slowly pushed back, as if by a spring in the air" over and over. In the process, we may come to remember a place, but at the same time the relationship of subject and object is reversed so that it is the place that remembers us.

I believe that the art of images fundamentally is based on this sort of reversal. The "subject" is neither in front of the camera lens nor behind it. The "movement" that continually changes the position of the subject and object exists in the center of the photographic image. Like the hero of Abe's novel, the subject and the world go through changes of phase moment by moment. This is the sort of world that appears in Hatakeyama Naoya's Underground (fig.17). He describes its mode of existence as follows:

"Underground it is always pitch black....The things of the underground world continue to exist inside a perfect darkness oblivious to the light and sense of vision of the world above ground. They are completely uninterested in 'Watching-Being Watched.'"

This disinterest horrifies us. It is related to the uncanny fact that size is meaningless in darkness. We cannot tell if these images emerging from the dark are microphotographs of micro-organisms or aerial photographs of the earth's surface. We get the vague feeling that the essence of nature can be found in this horrible indifference. This indifference goes far deeper that the indifference of the thousands of people who walk over the ground every day. The modern subject, watching the scenes of nature from a privileged position, does not exist here. This anthropocentric configuration immediately disappears in the darkness. If something that is "seen" remains, it is us, observed by the scene in artificial light:

"Incidentally, isn't it true that 'Nature' is also one of those things that is absolutely uninterested in 'Humans,' doubly uninterested in 'Humans' and are doubly 'Nature.'"

Therefore, "That place is unimaginably far away from 'Human.'" Even if it is separated by only a few meters from the surface of the ground, the reorganization of relationships that occurs here is far away from us.

Vl. Foreshadowing of Metamorphosis

I visited Manila on my first trip through the image world of Asia. It was Easter season, and the large churches in the city were overflowing with crowds who had gathered for mass. I will never forget the scene I saw at the cathedral in Quiapo, famous for the "Black Nazarene." This church is popular with the common people and, being close to a marketplace, is surrounded by the colors and smells of ordinary life. It being Easter, there were market stalls around the church selling candles and medicinal herbs, and astrologers and palm readers had set out their tables in front of them. A bit overwhelmed by this scene, made cloudy by incense, I entered the adjacent plaza. There I saw a boy

standing in the middle of a circle of people with his hands, which were shaking, placed over the head of an old man. A fortune- teller referred to these boys as "psychics" in English. Translating this word literally, I took it that this was a scene of healing sickness with supernatural power. I stood there a while longer, experiencing the dramatic space with its turbulent colors, sounds, and smells.

This was not the first time I had seen a scene like this. I had seen similar examples of popular healing using medicinal plants and psychic power, taking place in a space shared with the Christian church, in many different places in South America. In lands where these alternative faiths exist openly, media art often takes the form of criticism of religious representations. Where religious representations are ubiquitous, criticism of representation becomes a path to reality. Ting-Ting Calzo's The Preacher (fig.18) is very interesting in this respect. It presents actors who imitate the proselyting style of new religious cults and gather an audience of people who mistake them for true religious leaders. Even though the preaching was completely bogus and per- formed by an actor, the people took it seriously. In one scene, a group of real preachers working on the same street actually tried to stop the filming. Although this film started out as fiction, it ended up being a documentary on the new religions of Manila. Breaking down the boundaries between fiction and documentary by cleverly incorporating chance, the artist questions the relationship between "acting" and "believing." This leads to a critical reading of the theatricality inherent in religion.

The problem of acting versus believing is naturally related to other areas than religion. It is a core issue in any consideration of the relationship between today's politics and the mass media, an issue that is fundamentally related to determining the character of our society, the society that Guy Debord called "the society of spectacle." The growth of today's multimedia has greatly altered the possibilities for acting. With the new technology for manipulating images by computer, it is possible to change images in almost unlimited ways. The acceleration of computing speeds has raised the interactive nature of the technology to a higher level, and it has become possible to create an alter ego on the computer screen and act with it in real time. This can be done in the spirit of a game. The physical foundation of acting is definitely changing.

With this situation in mind, the work of Zhao Shaoruo stands out for its methodological uniqueness (fig.19). Zhao also makes art by manipulating photographs, but his work is "anachronistic" in terms of being done by hand. Some people might think that he should be advised to use graphics software in order to get rid of visible brushmarks. This would be a mistake. The traces he leaves are important. A number of studies have shown that there are many altered "trick" among the "officially recognized historical photographs." Experts on the history of photography see Zhao's practice of replacing the faces in photographs with his own face as a form of criticism of this sort of representation. By intentionally leaving traces of his manipulations, he is obviously dealing with the issue of the truth or falsehood of mass images.

To me, however, the interest of Zhao's work lies in its superficial quality. He is not simply criticizing images through his art. He transforms himself into someone else "in the name of..." that person. He always appears with a borrowed image under a borrowed name. He has carefully studied historical photographs and landscape photographs, discovering that the gaze and philosophical standards that operate in them are different from those of today. He puts himself in photographs by borrowing those philosophical standards and modes of gaze. If everything is borrowed, the utopia proposed by the nation-state cannot achieve the status of a universal value. As the artist states, it can only be relative. This thoroughgoing relativism is based on a power of transformation that is a fundamental capacity of human beings. A profound question is concealed behind his humorous borrowing. That is the question of whether it is possible to redo or change everything that has occurred in history. The artist explains his philosophy, which overturns historical determinism, in the following words:

"Fundamentally, I am a human being with many different sides. If asked, I can become any kind of a person that other people want."

There was a time when all cultures believed these words. Myths from all over the world tell of beings who can metamorphose in all sorts of people, things, and animals. People with this capacity for transformation played an important role, relating stories of the collective past, presiding over rituals, and fore- telling the future. This era occupied the greater part of human history. Naturally, I do not intend to claim that this same role can be performed by contemporary photography, but I see Zhao's "metamorphosis manifesto" as a relic of a more mythical time. One senses the mischievous look of the "trickster" in his magic images, made by inserting his face everywhere.

This work raises the question of memories that have their origin outside of ordinary awareness, memories loosely shared by the collective that are referred to as "social memory" or "collective memory." There is a question of whether the memory that sinks and stays at the bottom of consciousness has actually been socially constructed. Many of these kinds of images appear in the photographs of Wu Xiaojun (fig.20). They are public images and images which are given historical significance. However, the human figures who appear here are all clay figures. Their features are odd and it is impossible to determine their identity. This doll drama takes place in a dim light that could be either twilight or dawn. Looking at these photographs, one has the sense of experiencing deformed memories, an uneasy but also nostalgic feeling, as if in a dream.

This may be because of the clay, a material that can be changed into anything with movements of the hand. It is a primal creative material. The tactile sense of manipulating clay is linked to our own childhood as well as the age of myth. Myths of the world being created from clay or of gods making humans out of clay are well known. Such ancient memories are incorporated into the collective memory of twentieth-century China. Like the work entitled Toy of Young Plato's Style (p.62), Wu's clay work contains memories of a time when the shadows of men and

things were projected on walls in the depths of a cave. This suggests Plato's allegory of the cave, his thoughts on education through images, but at the same time, it shows that our memories have a dynamic quality like plastic clay. This is fundamental to the nature of images.

Images are transformations. They operate through the creativity of our memories. I believe that there is something important to memory even in scenes that we see over and over every day, no matter how banal they seem. Making images, tike using words, is always a creative act. Whether we find meaning in these images or not is determined by our way of living.

Park Hwa Young is an artist who summons the mythical dimension of images from the most banal of everyday traces in her Daily, Kleenex Documentation. She saves the trace of her own face left on Kleenex tissues, the stains left after removing makeup at the end of each day, and presents them as traces of the concept of femininity created by society. These traces belong to a different system of images than the images made of shadows. They differ in both quality and technique from the kind of images found in Vietnamese black and white portraiture, but they reflect the approach of serendipity, the faculty of discovering evidence in the slightest clues. These traces of a face are a kind of mask, a primary source of theatricality. Slightly different each day, they are foreshadowings of transformation.

The face of the woman floating on the fabric of the tissue is reminiscent of the veil of Veronica, one of the many legends and myths throughout the world that recognize sacred qualities in the traces of an image. This seems to prove how much people respect serendipity, a method of understanding the world through accidental traces. In any case, the Daily, Kleenex Documentation touches on the mystery of the human face and appeals to the Veronica residing within us.

Park's new piece, DailySpin (fig.21), is kind of image diary. In this installation, frames of film lined up on a revolving disk are projected onto a wall. The artist has also attached bird feathers to 16mm film and projected it in a similar way. Besides being poetic, this work goes back to memories of the years preceding the birth of film. Daily Spin presents the everyday form of memory even more directly. Revolving like a lottery wheel, it stops at an arbitrary position to show a fragment of ordinary life. There is no system that determines which image will appear after another, so the sequence of images is different every time.

The Chinese character for the Japanese word kizashi (omen, indication, sign), which is also pronounced cho and is the second character in Yocho, the title of this exhibition, has its source in a type of divination performed in ancient China. The ancient Chinese predicted the future according to cracks created by drilling a hole in a tortoise shell and applying heat. The form of the branching crack was used to form the pictograph referring to divination, and this evolved into the character that we use today. The wisdom of serendipity can be seen in this method of divination by interpreting the form of the crack. Signs of the future can only be found by reading images which branch out in a completely open-ended manner that is not programmed beforehand. In this journey of exploration, an encounter with

Park Hwa Young's images that create an open universe suggest one possibility of a non-technical, non-regional approach to the mystery of images.

They turn into beautiful streaks of color as they revolve, leaving traces in the mind like fireworks. They could be the revolving lanterns of yesterday, a spinning wheel of fate, or a fore- shadowing of tomorrow. The disk of Park Hwa Young's memory continues turning as it carries the load of this distant history of images.

(Translated by Stanley N. Anderson)