

**MÁSTER ERASMUS MUNDUS  
EN ESTUDIOS DE LAS MUJERES Y DEL GÉNERO.**

*Gemma*

**ERASMUS MUNDUS MASTER IN WOMEN'S AND GENDER STUDIES**

**Body Politics in *Poetry*: A Cross-Cultural and Feminist  
Perspective**

Tesis de máster

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Vº Bº:

Oviedo, 22 de junio de 2012



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**M. A. Thesis**

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Oviedo, 22<sup>nd</sup> of June 2012



## TESIS DE MÁSTER

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TÍTULO: Body Politics in *Poetry*: A Cross-Cultural and Feminist Perspective

DESCRIPTORES O PALABRAS CLAVE: Body-lived-by-me, Affect, Confucianism, Becoming, Cinematic Studies, Cross-Cultural Studies, Feminism

DIRECTOR/A: Luz Mar Gonzalez-Arias

### 1. Resumen en español

El cuerpo (-vivido-por-mi) fenomenológico y el cuerpo Spionist divergido del dualismo cartesiano, es considerado una extensión estable, cognoscible y natural en el espacio: el primero hace hincapié en la primacía de la experiencia vivida y en la abertura a experimentar cualquier teorización sobre el cuerpo; el segundo considera el cuerpo un constante devenir que experimenta continuamente modificaciones al interaccionar con otros cuerpos. En la cultura confuciana, la percepción del cuerpo es diferente de la occidental. Se cree que el cuerpo está compuesto de una materia líquida llamada qi, el elemento constituyente de todo el universo. Se considera que la naturaleza humana es parte constituyente de la cultura humana, ya que el cuerpo humano no se define por la estructura anatómica. Por lo tanto, el confucianismo establece diversas funciones sociales para distinguir los distintos organismos, en función de hechos históricos contingentes. En la poesía, el cuerpo desnudo, el cuerpo de la mujer, la edad, se convierten en abyectos non- representables para la cámara porque la cultura confuciana se basa en la representación simbólica y metafísica de la mujer, de la edad y del cuerpo. El cuerpo desnudo, el cuerpo de la mujer predispuesto a envejecer, pone en peligro la seguridad de la identidad cultural. Con respecto al cuerpo del hombre, el cuerpo predispuesto a la impotencia, al envejecimiento, el acto de la penetración se convierte en un deseo corporal mediado por el discurso social de la identidad de género. Además, debido a la caída de la familia confuciana y su desplazamiento del espacio nei es decir, del espacio de la mujer, la penetración se convierte en la única manera de adquirir un sentido inequívoco de la subjetividad. En cuanto al cuerpo afectado por el Alzheimer, convertirse en un non-cuerpo es una etapa actualizada y temporal puesto que las experiencias corporales están interrumpidas de vez en cuando, en un espacio u otro debido a las manifestaciones de la enfermedad. El cuerpo afectado por el Alzheimer pasa por un proceso metafórico de desterritorialización para formar un rizoma con un cuerpo inmaterial en el curso de la escritura esquizofrénica.

## 2. Resumen en ingles

The phenomenological body-lived-by-me and the Spinonist affected body diverge from Cartesian dualism which renders the body the fixed, knowable and natural extension in space: the former emphasizes on the primacy of lived experience and the absolute openness of any theorization on the body; the latter sees the body in terms of becoming instead of being which is in constant modifications as the body encounters other bodies. In Confucian culture, the perception of the body is different from that of the western one. The body is believed composed of a fluid material called *qi*, which also is the constituent material for everything in the universe. The human nature, since the human body not defined by the anatomical structure, is considered to be found in human culture. Therefore, Confucianism assigns various social functions to different bodies to separate one from another, based on contingent historical events. In *Poetry*, the naked, female, aging body becomes the un-representable abject for the camera because Confucian culture is established on the symbolic and metaphysical meaning of the female, aging body whereas the representation of the naked, female, aging body threatens the certainty of cultural identity. With respect to the becoming men of an impotent, aging, male body through penetration, the penetration is the bodily desire mediated by the social discourse of gender identity. Besides, because of the fallen of the Confucian family and his dislocation within the space of *nei* – the traditionally women’s space, penetration becomes the only way to acquire an unambiguous sense of subjectivity. Regarding the Alzheimer’s body, becoming no body is both an actualized, temporal stage as a sense of united bodily experience gets disrupted from time to time and space to space because of the disease; and a metaphoric process as the Alzheimer’s body deterritorializes itself to form a rhizome with an immaterial body in the course of schizophrenic writing.

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## M. A. Thesis

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MAIN SUPERVISOR: Luz Mar Gonzalez-Arias

### 1. Spanish summary

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## 2. English summary

The phenomenological body-lived-by-me and the Spinozist affected body diverge from Cartesian dualism which renders the body the fixed, knowable and natural extension in space: the former emphasizes on the primacy of lived experience and the absolute openness of any theorization on the body; the latter sees the body in terms of becoming instead of being which is in constant modifications as the body encounters other bodies. In Confucian culture, the perception of the body is different from that of the western one. The body is believed composed of a fluid material called *qi*, which also is the constituent material for everything in the universe. The human nature, since the human body not defined by the anatomical structure, is considered to be found in human culture. Therefore, Confucianism assigns various social functions to different bodies to separate one from another, based on contingent historical events. In *Poetry*, the naked, female, aging body becomes the un-representable object for the camera because Confucian culture is established on the symbolic and metaphysical meaning of the female, aging body whereas the representation of the naked, female, aging body threatens the certainty of cultural identity. With respect to the becoming men of an impotent, aging, male body through penetration, the penetration is the bodily desire mediated by the social discourse of gender identity. Besides, because of the fallen of the Confucian family and his dislocation within the space of *nei* – the traditionally women's space, penetration becomes the only way to acquire an unambiguous sense of subjectivity. Regarding the Alzheimer's body, becoming no body is both an actualized, temporal stage as a sense of united bodily experience gets disrupted from time to time and space to space because of the disease; and a metaphoric process as the Alzheimer's body deterritorializes itself to form a rhizome with an immaterial body in the course of schizophrenic writing.

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## Abstract

This thesis is a cross-cultural analysis on situated becomings of bodies in the film *Poetry*. In the chapter of theory, I talk about the phenomenological body-lived-by-me and the Spinozist affected body. The phenomenological body-lived-by-me and the Spinozist affected body diverge from Cartesian dualism which renders the body the fixed, knowable and natural extension in space: the former emphasizes on the primacy of lived experience and the absolute openness of any theorization on the body; the latter sees the body in terms of becoming instead of being which is in constant modifications as the body encounters other bodies. As a way of contextualizing the western theory, I introduce the perception of the body in Confucian culture. In Confucian culture, the perception of the body is different from that of the western one. The body is believed composed of a fluid material called *qi*, which also is the constituent material for everything in the universe. The human nature, since the human body not defined by the anatomical structure, is considered to be found in human culture. Therefore, Confucianism establishes various social functions for different bodies to separate one from another, based on contingent historical events.

In the chapter of cinematic analysis, I talk about three kinds of situated becomings of bodies in terms of their respective social, relational, and individual materialities. In *Poetry*, the naked, female, aging body becomes the un-representable object for the camera because Confucian culture establishes itself on the symbolic and metaphysical meaning of the female, aging body whereas the naked, female aging body threatens the certainty of cultural identity. With respect to the becoming men of an impotent, aging, male body through penetration, the penetration is the bodily desire mediated by the social discourse of gender identity. Besides, because of the fallen of Confucian family and his dislocation within the space of *nei* – the traditionally women's space, penetration becomes the only way to acquire an unambiguous sense of subjectivity. Regarding the Alzheimer's body, becoming no body is both an actualized, temporal stage as a sense of united bodily experience gets disrupted from time to time and space to space because of the disease; and a metaphoric process as the Alzheimer's body deterritorializes itself to form a rhizome with an immaterial body in the course of schizophrenic writing.

*For all those bodies that affect me...*



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## **1. Introduction**

As I am making my way through the GEMMA program, in the process, I have had a lingering sense of being dislocated, in the language as well as by the ideas it carries. I feel like a foreigner, though I am one in the real sense, as I immerse myself in readings which are written within and about a location divergent from mine previous one: a location is marked by Christianity, reason, logocentrism and dualisms; a location has witnessed its philosophical transitions from the linguistic turn to the affect turn. Sometimes as I read an article, suddenly, I hear myself speaking out aloud: “Yes! That is exactly what I think” or “It is written all about me!” For those, I have had quite many in the past two years, in reading Deleuze, Foucault, Kristeva, Irigaray and many more. Whereas other times, I have the feeling of being abandoned, alienated, disembodied, frustrated and confused.

Such bipolar experiences get dramatized in learning theories of the body, because there aren't many subjects as intimate as that: in learning, one doesn't simply deal with something out there, but with reflections and articulations of embodied experiences. The theories of the body are rich in contents as well as in perspectives. Regarding the question of the ontology of the body, my thesis mainly makes use of two concepts: the phenomenological body-lived-by-me and the Spinozist becoming-body or affected body; I choose them not simply because they are more agreeable to me. Most importantly, both of them take an alternative path from Cartesian dualism and reject the essentialist notion of the body as the fixed, stable, ahistorical and trans-contextual entity; they seek to show that the body is fundamentally unknown, which is without an interiority revealed once and for all. I will devote my first chapter to introduce their trajectories of theorization.

From the two-year, cross-cultural studying experiences, I am aware of the fragility of any so-called truth, and the self-claimed, objective knowledge. I sometimes find that western theories about the body don't speak to my individual embodiments, for the fact that I have long perceived my body in a different way, conditioned by my cultural background. Therefore, in the second chapter, I will introduce a particular way of

perceiving the body in Confucian culture. Writing outside my previous cultural context, I am aware of the possibilities of miscommunication in transmitting certain cultural notions if I leave behind their social materialities. My purpose is not to justify their validity but to indicate that however mysterious they may appear to the “outsiders”, they don’t just come out of the blue. I am going to open my second chapter with some discussions on one of the most important social materiality in Confucian culture: the agriculture-family; then I will dive into the Confucian philosophy to explain to ways in which the notion of the body as fluidity and functionality is constructed.

In the third chapter, I will analyze a South Korean film called *Poetry* in the light of the phenomenological and Spinozist concepts of the body, and against the background of Confucian culture. It is inadequate to do such a cross-cultural analysis without bringing out the discussion about the hybrid culture in South Korean society since it has been through colonization, but to do so will take another lengthy paper. I don’t claim the equivalent of Confucianism to South Korean culture. The former will be referred in the cinematic analysis of *Poetry* only as an important cultural discourse among many others, which shapes up the ways in which bodies negotiate their individual becoming as it encounters other bodies.

*Poetry* is a fairly new-released film (2010) which interests me in various ways: it gives a very realist portray to bodies of social outcasts such as the aging body, the Alzheimer’s body, the raped body, the body of poet and so on; it touches upon taboo-like issues – sexuality in the elderly, rape, Alzheimer’s and the exchange of sex. What I seek to understand are the lived materialities – those cultural, relational and individual factors – that influence the ways in which a body becomes who it is from time to time, and from space to space. I am going to speak about the cultural (Confucian) meanings of the naked, female body as the abject; the cultural, relational and bodily factors that construct in an elderly, impotent, male body the desire to become men in penetration; the actualized and the metaphoric becoming no body in

Alzheimer's body through the process of schizophrenic writing.

The purposes of my thesis are, for one thing, to introduce a different perception of the body; for the other, in materializing the process of body becomings, I do hope to re-affirm the heterogeneity among bodies, and the necessity to incorporate the grand narratives with individual circumstances in analyzing various kinds of body phenomena. Moreover, to see the materialities that construct the ways in which a body becomes is the precondition to transcend it and reveal the potentiality for the body in the creative becoming.

## **2. Theorizing the Body: A Cross-Cultural Approach**

## 2.1. The Western Theoretical Framework

As in a burning candle, the permanence of the flame is a permanence, not of substance but of process in which at each moment the “body” with its “structure” of inner and outer layers is reconstituted of materials different from the previous and following ones so the living organism exists as a constant exchange of its own constituents and has its permanence and identity in the continuity of this process.

– Hans Jonas, *Spinoza and the Theory of Organism* (1970: 55)

### 2.1.1. The Body-Mind Dualism

The western philosophical tradition has been established on somatophobia, traceable to Plato (429–347 B.C.E.), according to whom if anyone attempts for pure knowledge he must get rid of his body and contemplates things only with his soul. Descartes (1596–1650) inherited and further developed this dualistic thinking about the body and the mind. He argued that they are composed of two different substances, the former material things (*res extensa*) which have spatial extension whereas the latter immaterial (*res cogitans*). Therefore, cogitation can provide a thinker with genuine access to realities. As for the body, Descartes saw it merely as a machine ruled by principles which are knowable through scientific interrogations. In this framework, the body and the mind repels with each other. “The body cannot determine the mind to thought, neither can the mind determine the body to motion, nor [to] rest, nor to anything else” (Jonas 1966: 6; Carter 1983: 97). Moreover, the body is secondary to the mind since it generates the lesser and invalid knowledge, and dwells in the field of nature.

Due to the profound influence Descartes had on western philosophy, the body has long been a neglected subject for philosophical meditation. Even when its importance has gradually emerged in academia in recent years, it is still largely conceptualized in a reductionist way, as either the product of nature accessible to scientific research or the cultural artifact which is made up of categories such as gender, race, class and



nationality. The biologist and the constructionist approach seek to establish interiority and exteriority for the body while each denies the validity of the other. As Elizabeth Grosz (1994) rightly puts it, at first anatomy is destiny, then culture. In *Volatile Bodies, Toward A Corporeal Feminism*, she criticizes such over-simplified reductionism and argues that physicality is always situated at the interlocking of nature and culture – there is no “pure” nature independent from culture; meanwhile neither nature nor culture is deterministic to nor assimilated into the other.

....this does not imply that the body is in any sense natural or raw, i.e., non- or pre-social. Nor, on the contrary, can the body itself be regarded as purely a social or cultural, and signifying effect lacking its own weighty materiality. (Grosz 1994: 21)

Apart from the dichotomous nature/culture reductionism, she cautions against another kind of reductionism that sees the body itself in separate parts, which is evident in the body sciences including Biology, Neurology and Physiology, for which the body is equated to nerves, hormones and genes or a machine-like entity assembled by brain, viscera and limbs. And for some branches within Constructionism, the body is defined by disparate categories such as gender, race, class and nationality. They believe that by adding up one category to another, the body can be known. The problematic of such a reductionist approach, Grosz argues, is that it disrupts the continuity of the body which experiences itself as an interconnected and interrelated whole (except in the case of illness).

Bodies are always irreducibly sexually specific, necessarily interlocked with racial, cultural, and class particularities. This interlocking, though, cannot occur by way of intersection (the grid like model presumed by structural analysis, in which the axes of class, race and sex are conceived as autonomous structure which then requires external connections with the other structures) but by way of mutual constitution. (Grosz 1994: 19 – 20)

The Biological and the Constructionist approach seems fundamentally incompatible since both hold a belief that the body is of certain essences and each endeavors to discover them. However contradictory their conclusions are, they have a shared assumption about the body – the Cartesian one – that it is a passive extension out there, well-packaged, fixed and can be known once and for all.

### **2.1.2. The Body-lived-by-me**

At the beginning of the last century, a school of philosophy called Phenomenology challenged many of what had been perceived as self-evident postulations about the body dominating western philosophy for centuries. It proposed an alternative way of conceptualizing the body, according to which the body is *Körper* and *Leib* at the same time.

If *Körper* is the abstract body-in-general, one object among others that is simply “there”, *Leib* is my body in particular, my life here and now, what I am as a volitional, sensing person. It is what I see, think, and remember about my own skin and bones, and how I feel about them. (Aho and Aho 2008: 1)

What dissatisfies Phenomenology about the Cartesian concept of the body is that the latter overlooks the lived experience and denies the notion of embodiment altogether. Martin Heidegger argued that that all experience is hermeneutic. According to him, what we know about our bodies is already framed by a pre-given world that we are already within. How I feel, sense, perceive and think is conditioned by a complex web of social relations among which I live my body.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty followed this trajectory of conceptualization, which directs philosophical interrogations of the body to lived experience and privileges pure descriptions to diverse body phenomena. Merleau-Ponty treated the body as

“being-to-the-world” (Grosz 1994:86), a moving being as well as an active experiencer who maps its own territory as it immerses within the world. Given the mutual construction between the body and the world it lives in, there is no and will never be any phenomenological “truths” about the body which can be revealed once and for all. Therefore, the phenomenological inquiry about the body is an open-ended endeavor, always in process and always subjecting to modifications.

As, however, it (Phenomenology) too is in history, it too exploits the world and constituted reason. It must therefore put to itself the question which it puts to all branches of knowledge, and so duplicate itself infinitely, being, as Husserl says, a dialogue or infinite meditation, and, in so far as it remains faithful to its intention, never knowing where it is going. (Merleau-Ponty 2005: preface xxiii)

The world is already out there before any reflections of it; likewise, the corporality as “being-to-the-world” can’t be arbitrarily torn into bits of Psychology, Sociology or Science, neither can it be fully grasped by adding up psychological, sociological and scientific accounts of it. The body as an organic whole which, for Merleau-Ponty, is the source of all those knowledge: it is through my skin that I get in touch with the world, through my senses that I perceive the world, and through my body moving that I reach out to the world and take in whatever I gain living within the world. The body-lived-by-me is the source of my existence and is known only in moments of living it.

I am the absolute source, my existence does not stem from my antecedents, from my physical and social environment; instead it moves out towards them and sustains them, for I alone bring into towards them and sustains them, for I alone bring into being for myself (and therefore into being in the only sense that the word can have for me) the tradition which I elect to carry on, or the horizon whose distance from me would be abolished.

(Merleau-Ponty 2005: preface ix)

In taking the phenomenon of the perception as the starting point for his philosophical inquiry, Merleau-Ponty bridged the demarcation between the extreme subjectivism and objectivism; and the inside and the outside. It is through the perception that the inside channels toward the outside, a process Grosz (1992) terms “the inside out”. With respect to the body, it is of no surprise that Merleau-Ponty divorced from Cartesian dualism, since the split between the body and the mind is not factual but the constructed bedrock above which the transcendental subject and the universal truth can be justified. The body rather than a corporeal jail which imprisons the mind, is the whole of one’s being: there is no being one’s mind for the mind is already embodied. The physicality with weighty materiality is the site where one’s subjectivity comes from, from the lived experience: my body is not what science, psychology or sociology tells me what it is; it is through my body moving toward, perceiving and living in the world that I have knowledge of my body as what it is to me from the scientific, psychological or sociological perspective. In the mean time what I know about my body in living it within the world reconstitutes how I live and know my body. That is why Merleau-Ponty spoke of the unfinished nature of Phenomenology: it starts from the body and seeks to articulate its phenomena, yet those phenomena are not fixed reality out there to be known but rather are known only to the body living it from moment to moment: “My body is not something external to my existence, but is the concrete actualization of it; it is, then, both the ‘expression’ and the ‘expressed’” (Zaner 1964: 194).

Since there are perpetual spillages between the body-lived-by-me and any theorization about it, the ontology of the body is fluid, conditioned by the momentarily, lived experience.

### **2.1.3. The Body-lived-by-me Is the Becoming-Body**

By emphasizing the primacy of the body in one's being and bringing out the lived experience into philosophical inquiry, Phenomenology rejects the essentialist postulation of the body as a knowable. Spinoza reached more or less the same conclusion, though he adopted a different trajectory of argumentations. For him, the body has no fixed state of being but is in constant becoming as it encounters and is affected by other bodies.

Above all, he maintained that the corporeality and the mind are not two substances but two different attributes that express the same substance. His essential hypothesis is the infinite and singular substance whose concrete expressions and modes of specification are found in finite things. And he claimed that the whole state of the body, on the one hand is its "own pattern and inner constitution and on the other, the influence of 'external' factors, such as other bodies" (Grosz 1994: 12). There is no essence and the inherited nature about the body since the substance does not provide it with any individuality. The identity of the body is acquired and constituted as the result of being affected by other bodies.

The body does not have a "truth" or a "true nature" since it is a process and its meaning and capacities will vary according to its context. We do not know the limits of this body or the power that it is capable of attaining. These limits and capacities can only be revealed in the ongoing interactions of the body and its environment. (Gatens 1988: 68-69)

After comparing the Greek and Chinese anatomical paintings (figures 1, 2), Shigehisa Kuriyama is surprised to find out that the perception of something as intimate as one's body could differ so much in two cultures.

In Hua Shou, we miss the muscular detail of the Vesalus's man; and in fact of Chinese physicians lacked even a specific word for 'muscle'. Muscularity was a peculiarly Western preoccupation. On the other hand, the tracts and points of acupuncture entirely escaped the West's anatomical vision of reality. (Kuriyama 1999: 8)

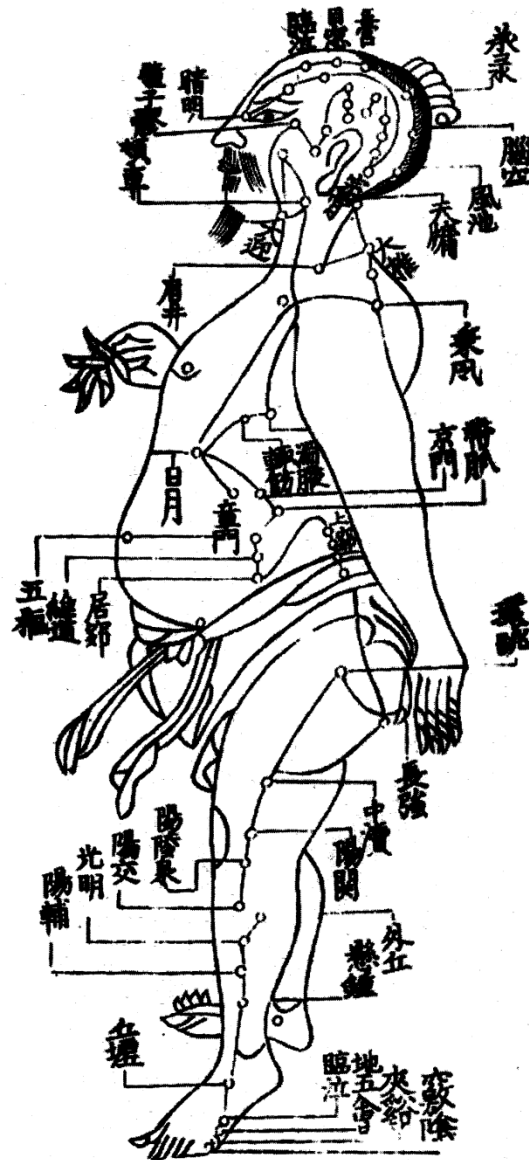


Figure 1. Hua Shou, *Shisijing fahui*, 1341, Fujikawa Collection, Kyoto University Library.



Figure 2. Veslius, *Fabrica*, 1543, Wellcome Institute, London.



Such dissimilar medical representations of the body intrigue her and lead her inquiry into the ways in which the body is differently perceived in the medical discourse in ancient Greece and China. For example, pulsetaking has historically presented in both cultures. Whereas it flourishes in China till these days, pulsetaking was taken over by various types of medical machines such as heart monitor in the West. Impersonal machines resolved the ambivalence among the ancient Greek physicians who had long been troubled by the ambiguity and inaccuracy of pulsetaking since palpating and describing the pulse relying on the subjective experiences from the physician and signs sometimes can be differently detected and read. Therefore, when Europeans first got in contact with the Chinese technique of *qiemo* (pulsetaking), some were astonished by its “mythical”, “phantastical” and “very obscure” way of teaching, others such as John Floyer though incapable of rationalizing what he saw as the mythical, acknowledged that such a mythical technique “does make their art very obscure, and gives occasion to use phantastical notions; but their absurd notions are adjusted to the real phenomena, and their art is grounded upon curious experience, examined and approved for four thousand years” (Kuriyama 1999: 37).

Pulsetaking is not simply a superstitious method detached from the real life since the pulse does change noticeably as we undergo different activities, therefore “The question of how pulsing relates to life concerns not just the beliefs of people in distant eras and lands, but the logic governing our lives, here and now” (Kuriyama 1999: 20). The different destiny of pulsetaking in China and in Greece reflects, she argues the fundamentally demarcated assumptions of what corporeality is thought to be in two cultures: “The divergence was as much a matter of experience as it was of theory. Greek and Chinese doctors know the body differently because they felt it differently...The converse also holds, of course. We could also say: they felt it differently because they knew it differently” (Kuriyama 1999: 55; 60).

The phenomenological body-lived-by-me and the Spinozist affected body are the grounding notions to the ways in which I approach the bodies represented in *Poetry*.

However, it is also worth noting, that the body can only experience itself and make sense of what it experiences within certain pre-existent system of meanings. As Kuriyama discovers, the cultural context influences tremendously the ways in which the body perceives itself. Hence, it is impossible to talk about bodies in *Poetry* without some ideas about what a body is perceived in the context of the film. I by no means attempt to exhaust all aspects of the context where the bodies live while do not claim for the comprehensiveness and authenticity of what I choose to account for. Also I assume that although I will refer exclusively from Chinese philosophy and reflect on the phenomena of Chinese bodies, since Korea has been historically influenced by Confucian culture, the perception about the body in Korean society can be understood accordingly to that under Confucian culture in the Chinese context.

## 2.2. The Eastern Context

### 2.2.1. The Body Location: Agriculture-Family

There is no nature, only the effects of nature: denaturalization or naturalization.

– Jacques Derrida, *Dormer le Temps*

In the western philosophical tradition the *cogito* as the epistemic subject came at the transitional phase when the authority of the king and the church were under drastic challenge. According to Descartes, if one is to archive any universal truth, one has to prove to be a legitimate knower beforehand. Ever since the mind was privileged as a better agent to acquire objective knowledge, the body has begun its profound alienation from the mind and was marginalized in philosophical interrogation. The body-mind dualism is the point of reference to and departure from which later philosophers set up their conceptualizations about the body in the western context.

Given a lack of the epistemic subject as such in Chinese philosophy, along with the total absence of epistemology (Feng, 1948), the body and mind dualism lost its theoretical basis in the Chinese context; hence it is hardly an easy and ready referential framework to explore the perception of the body in Chinese culture.

It is not contingent that a great number of Chinese anthologies (Feng, 1948; Liang, 2005; Fei, 1992; Yang, 2000) take into account the Chinese agricultural system when they are to deal with Chinese mentality or the Chinese philosophical tradition. For those works written in modern China, one reason lies in Marxist influences on China's modernization. Marxist historical materialism argues for the deterministic relation between an economic base (modes of production) and the superstructure (ideology, political organization, culture etc): the former decides the ways in which the latter organizes itself; in turn the later strengthens the former. For example, *A Short History*

*of Chinese Philosophy* is full of such kind of logical theorization. Feng devotes a whole chapter to compare and contrast Greek and Chinese philosophy by correlating them with their respective economic bases. One of his conclusions is:

A great part of Confucianism is the rational justification of this social system, or its theoretical expression. Economic conditions prepared its basis, and Confucianism expressed its ethical significance. Since this social system was the outgrowth of certain economic conditions, and these conditions were again the product of their geographical surroundings, to the Chinese people, both the system and its theoretical expression were very natural. (Feng 1948: 21)

The other explanation why agriculture attracts so many attentions has to do with its incredible sustainability throughout Chinese history. For one thing, capitalism had emerged in ancient China around the period of the Ming dynasty (1368 AD – 1644 AD) but never developed powerfully enough to displace agriculture as in the case of the West. For the other, even during the phase of colonization, western colonizers all failed in their attempts to capitalize Chinese society. Even within Chinese society itself, both reformists belonging to the former feudal government and revolutionists who advocated for the western mode of modernization tried in various ways to introduce capitalism into Chinese society but none succeeded. After communists taking over China in 1949, they merely made several changes to transform the mode of production in agriculture from the family-based one to the community-based one.

From purely an economic perspective, what has held up the sustainability of Chinese agriculture is left unanswered since by economic definition, it is no more than a self-sustaining kind. What economics overlooks is the cultural and historical aspect of this particular agriculture, which blends with other societal organizations to retain its sustainability. In the case of ancient China, the organization closely connects with agriculture is the Confucian family. If the western individualism constructs a society

with frequent immigrations, the Confucian family stabilizes people in their land.

Feng found out that, in *Erh Ya*, the oldest dictionary of Chinese language, familial relations amounts to a hundred types, most of which lack English equivalents. The Confucianism regulates the society by meticulous teachings of proper relationships among five basic relations, including ruler and the ruled, father and son, elder and younger brother, husband and wife, and friend and friend. Out of five, three are familial relations. The other two, according to Confucianism, though not familial ones follow the same principles. Ruler and the ruled interact in accordance with the ways in which father and son do, and friend and friend relation is similar to that between the elder and younger brother. In such a way, family is transformed as a border-crossing entity and functions as the prototype for other social organizations. While agriculture spatially demobilizes people, Confucian familial doctrine is capable of stabilizing any historically created cultural artifacts (such as the gender division of labor that I will talk about later) and preserves them throughout history.

Agriculture and family assemble as an exclusive organism<sup>1</sup>, interdependent and mutually constructed. Unlike the western youth-dominated culture, China had (arguably still keeps) a highly ancestor-worshiped tradition. Living in the agrarian China, for most people land was their only means of livelihood, hence they usually settled down on the land which was successfully reclaimed and cultivated by their ancestors. The first ancestors who established the root for the family were permanently worshiped. For example, in Chinese language, the birth of male heirs in the family is expressed as to “perpetuate burning of incenses and candles in ancestral temple”. Since in antiquity, without any influential religion, nor existed any public organizations which promoted a sense of solidarity among people outside the familial system – any private or informal political assemblies were considered conspiracies against the ruling power, the role of dead ancestors were somewhat identical to God in

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<sup>1</sup> Agriculture and family though are two separate social organizations, in order to understand the social materiality that the Chinese mentality is based on, it is vital to see them as an organic unity which influences and shapes each other in a reciprocal way.

western society. The dead ancestors created the continuous tie among family members, and stabilized them to their land since migration meant to abandon the material presence of the dead ancestors, which is the tomb.

The agriculture-family was influential in ancient China to the extent that some scholars (Liang, 2005; Fei, 1992) argue that there has never existed a western notion of society since social lives were largely conflated with familial lives; and rather than a nation-state, China was more a cultural entity. However justifiable their argumentations are, they reveal the importance of agriculture-family in shaping up the Chinese mentality. I will constantly go back to such a social materiality when talking about the perception of the body in Confucian culture.

Despite a great diversity within Chinese and western philosophy, when we set out to think of them as a pair or examine them in comparison, we assume beforehand that each in their respective way can be held together by some underlining principles. Therefore, we can talk about the Chinese or the western tradition and see them in two threads instead of randomly scattered ideas.

I have mentioned somewhere before that western epistemology hasn't existed in China. For Descartes, the validity of knowledge is conditioned by its level of objectivity. Since the mind as the immaterial substance has supposedly much more genuine access to reality than the body, the kind of knowledge that has been approved of in the West is the disembodied one. Quite the reverse, Chinese philosophy starts from and deals with the immediate comprehension of things. Bearing in mind the social materiality where Chinese philosophy fertilizes, in ancient China most people were farmers whose knowledge was gained from everyday cultivation of the land. Though philosophers did not directly cultivate the land, since most of them were landlords whose lives depended on good harvests, it was in their interests to reflect on topics concerning agriculture. Their reflections might appear overly descriptive, plain and simple to western philosophers who were accustomed to analytical and abstract

thinking. An example of Chinese philosophical writing: “When the cold goes, the warmth comes, and when the warmth comes, the cold goes; when the sun has reached its meridian, it declines, and when the moon has become full, it wanes” (Feng 1948: 19)

Generally speaking, Chinese philosophy deals with two types of knowledge: about nature and about human. Nature is believed knowable since it has a numerical structure:

There are four heavenly bodies: the Sun (Greater Yang), the Moon (Greater Yin), the stars (Lesser Yang) and zodiac space (Lesser Yin). There are also four earthly substances: water, fire, soil and stone. Humans have four sense organs: eye, ear, nose and mouth. Human history has gone through four major periods: the spring (The period of the Three Sovereigns, sanhuang, who founded the cultural institutions), the summer (that of the Five Emperors, wudi, which was a period of growth), the autumn (the Three Dynasties, sandai, Xia, Shang and Zhou, the period of maturity) and the winter (that of Five Despots, wuba, the period of decline). From Four Emblems come Eight Trigrams, which represent eight phenomena fundamental to the universe: heaven, earth, mountain, lake, fire, water, wind and thunder. And from these eight come the sixty-four hexagrams, which cover all things and phenomena as well as events in the universe and human history. (Yao 2000: 101)

For Chinese philosophy, “better” knowers are those who are able to observe natural phenomena and extract ruling patterns behind them. With the absence of epistemology, what justifies the validity of knowledge is not the logical process of reasoning but how well knowledge resonates and is applicable to empirical experience. Nonetheless this does not mean that in acquiring knowledge, Chinese philosophers do not utilize techniques of reason: reasons function no more than tools than evaluative standards to

justify knowledge. If western philosophy starts with a question, proceeds through reasoning and ends with a conclusion, Chinese philosophy starts with a conclusion and ends there, neglecting the explanatory processes. That is why Feng spoke of the inarticulateness of Chinese philosophy which is rife with mythical expressions. Kuriyama also mentions an interesting fact that Chinese physicians never seemed to be troubled as their Greek counterparts did by a lack of clearness in pulse descriptions. Whereas Greek physicians made efforts to standardize and demystify languages used in pulse-taking books, Chinese physicians expressed no need for a clearer language. John Floyer attributed such a difference to demarcated styles of thinking: “Europeans excel in reasoning and judgment, and clearness of expression whereas Asiatics have a gay luxurious imagination” (Kuriyama 1994: 69). But Kuriyama points out that “clearness, in Europe, was less a characteristic trait than a characteristic ideal, less a fact than a desire” (Kuriyama 1994: 64). One possible explanation in my point of view lies in the fact that Chinese physicians did not direct their attention to clear use of language because what justified their diagnosis was not how well their descriptions were received by others but whether or not their patients were cured.

Western philosophy has long craved to reach at a universal truth of any kind, the underlying hypothesis of which is a belief in things with stable essence. This mentality also has impact on the ways in which the body in the West is perceived – intellectuals seek in various ways some essence in the body, in biology, sociology and psychology, in brains, glands and genes, in ideology, language and discourse. Each tears off a part from the body and says they know the whole.

Chinese philosophy deals with human ontology in an entirely different manner. Reversed to the western approach which seeks human ontology as if it is the starting point of humanity, Chinese philosophers treat human ontology as a constructive process: human being is not to be understood in the process of tracking back to certain primitive stage of being untouched by civilization but in becoming what defines he or she as a human being.



Chinese philosophy begins with and ends in man. Unlike Heidegger, Confucius saw “fundamental ontology” as an end in itself in his philosophical analysis rather than a basic means to disclose the hiddenness of Being ( *Sein*). For Confucius, there was no going “beyond humanism.” (Hwa 1969: 191)

Since there is no before or behind human being – no essence that would attach to being human once and for all, one’s humanity needs to be constantly exhibited in living humanly. In the West, living humanly means living in accordance with one’s bodily essence as a gendered or raced body. With such an ontological viewpoint lack in the Chinese context, living humanly is associated with consciously constructed notions of how human beings should be and what the ultimate level of being that each human being should aspire to. For all schools of Chinese philosophy, the highest level of being is to become a sage. A sage is someone who transcends his selfness and becomes one with the universe. Therefore, one lives and expresses his or her humanity in the process of becoming a sage.

### **2.2.2. The Body Fluidity**

Chinese humanism and naturalism are cornerstones to understand how the body is perceived in Chinese culture; Confucian ontological accounts of human being shut down an “archeological” tracking of human nature back to animalism and reject discoveries about human essence from the “rawness” of human physicality. To understand the ways in which Chinese philosophy links nature with human beings, it is vital to briefly speak about Chinese cosmology. Zhang Zai, the founding father of Neo-Confucianism, inspired by the *Book of Changes*<sup>2</sup> systematized the theory of cosmology. He maintained that *qi* – “originally meaning air, vapour, breath and then the vital force of life, translated variously as material force, primary energy, ether or

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<sup>2</sup> Book of Changes is one of five Chinese Classics. It is a divination manual and book of wisdom from which many Chinese thinkers draw inspiration from: its influence has reached for all aspect of Chinese culture.

matter” (Yao 2000: 101) – is the origin of the universe and the “driving force of endless change”.

In the beginning, *qi* exists without form and is called the Great Void. This void *qi* then begins to contract and consolidate with the light part rising to become Heaven (*yang*) and the heavy part descending to become Earth (*yin*). The interaction between the *qi* of Heaven and the *qi* of Earth creates different forms and things. (Yao 2000: 102)

Since all things existent within the universe are composed of *qi*, they are ultimately the same thing and are assimilated to one another. Such a notion of *qi* corresponding to the Spinozist concept of the infinite substance, is the theoretical basis for the Confucian humanity and its proposed approach of being human. That is, to become a sage. To become a sage means the utmost identification with the universe, to develop one’s connection with all existing things within the universe, to lose one’s sense of selfness and to become an organic whole with the universe.

Heaven is my father and Earth is my mother, and even such a small creature as I finds an intimate place in their midst. That which fills the universe I regard as my body and that which directs the universe I consider as my nature. All people are my brothers and sisters, and all things are my companions. (Chan 1963a: 497)

In such a framework of thinking, the body is not considered as encapsulated within the skin and is not thought about in terms of its anatomical structure. Since every body is composed of the same *qi*, every body is connected. It is from the point of view of connected-ness that the body is perceived in Chinese culture.

Then what is the position of the physical body in such a framework of thinking? *Qi* exists in two forms – void and solid, which respectively signifies human nature as

good and bad: the former before one's physicality fully developed is *qi* from Heaven and Earth, the latter is the *qi* from every individual corporality: "physical nature relates to bodily desires, and therefore the reduction of these desires will purify our heart/mind and enable us to return to our original and essential nature (benran zhi xing)" (Yao 2000: 102).

Since one as a human being is not defined according to his or her physical build, what defines as the bodily phenomena such as desire is not considered, in this frame of thinking, important to be further studied; rather it is to be cultivated and controlled if one seeks the higher level of human existence through purifying one's solid *qi* and immersing within the void *qi*. If the western body is open up to the origin of what makes it up sexually, mentally or anatomically, the Chinese body of *qi* shuts down such inquiries and opens to what a body becomes: a sage who does not possess a body since he or she has to be completely assimilated within the *qi* of the universe. In this sense, Chinese physical body is only a living entity toward a becoming of what has been established for it from the outside: becoming a self-less sage.

If we quickly leaf through ancient Chinese paintings, we might find it contradictory that along with a philosophical tradition which overlooks physical bodies, the pictorial art is rich of human figures. Hay expresses his confusion when he finds very few if any nude bodies in Eastern Asian figurative paintings, as the nude "seems to be the neutral starting point for our (Western) bodily perceptions, explicitly in the artist's studio and more confusedly but no less essentially outside it" (Hay 1994: 42).

What a nude body is in the western context? This question is relevant in the western discourse which distinguishes the naked from the nude. Kenneth Clark set up a dichotomous distinction between the naked and the nude. A naked body is an actual entity, existing outside the cultural representations, a signifying-less state of the body unclothed whereas the nude is a represented body inscribed with cultural meanings. The nude, he argues in relation to the naked: "remains the most complete example of

the transformation of matter into form” (Clark 1965: 23). John Berger adopts Clark’s opposition but re-evaluates both terms: the nude is not simply the represented nakedness; it differed from the naked the ways in which it is represented: “whereas the nude is always subjected to pictorial conventions, ‘To be naked’, he writes, ‘is to be oneself’. To be naked is thus to be without disguise, to be free of the patriarchal conventions of western society” (Need 2001:13). He makes a thorough examination of the European art and finds out exceptions of unclothed bodies which do not conflate with “repertoire of conventions that all female nudes are believed to deploy, irrespective of historical or cultural specificity” (Need 2001:13).

They are no longer nudes – they break the norms of the art form; they are paintings of loved women, more or less naked. Among the hundreds of thousands of nudes which make up the tradition there are perhaps a hundred of these exceptions. In each case the painter’s personal vision of the particular woman he is painting is so strong that it makes no allowance for the spectator. . . The spectator can witness their relationship – but he can do no more; he is forced to recognise himself as the outsider he is. He cannot deceive himself into believing that she is naked for him. He cannot turn her into a nude. (Berger 1972: 57)

T.J. Clark further complicates the relation between the naked and the nude by emphasizing the sexual connotations of the nude as “a picture for men to look at, in which Woman is constructed as an object of somebody else’s desire” (Clark 1980: 23)

By nakedness I mean those signs – that broken, interminable circuit – which say that we are nowhere but in a body, constructed by it, by the way it incorporates the signs of other people. (Nudity, on the other hand, is a set of signs for the belief that the body is ours, a great generality which we make our own, or leave in art in the abstract.) (Clark 1985: 146)

If we summarize the above discussions, in art, the naked body is certain type of representations of unclothed bodies that escape certain conventions of the female nude art which pose female body in such a way as to render it object of the male gaze; the nude body transcending the nakedness is “a kind of cultural disguise” (Need 2001: 16). Against such a background, the body, in Hay’s sense that absent in Chinese figurative paintings is both the naked and the nude body.

Hay, in order to understand the causes of such absence, returns to the basic question of what a body is the Chinese context. He ends up discovering the signification of notion of *qi* in constructing the cultural notion of the physicality as a dispersed entity. Inspired by Chinese poems and novels which give long and erotic depictions to female bodies in a subtle and metaphorical way, he believes that figurative paintings of clothed female bodies are also hidden with erotic suggestiveness. Hay’s research is insightful and groundbreaking because of its cultural sensitiveness but problematic in that it is embedded with the presumption that figurative paintings are fundamentally coded with eroticism: the representations of female bodies, though fully clothed are somehow connoted with “to-be-looked-at-ness” (Melvey, 1999). Considering the Confucian ontological account of humanity and the cosmological notion of the physicality as composed of *qi*, it is necessary to take a much drastic, anti-decoding standpoint and to see the representations of clothed female bodies in terms of their physical absence – there is no body beneath clothes. Isn’t it clothes the very suggestion that a body is not to be looked at in its most “primitive” and “natural” state of being? Does not clothing indicate that the human body doesn’t end by the skin but includes the weaved fabrics which encapsulate them? Isn’t it that to clothe a body is meant to disrupt the desire of the physical, and to denounce the desire of the flesh? Isn’t it that a clothed body where Chinese humanism begins for it is the cultured body? Does not clothing express that the body of *qi* is fluid and needs to be closed otherwise it is dispersed; clothes are metaphorical walls as so many other walls visible or invisible in Chinese society that mark boundaries between bodies? Moreover, a clothed body schematically drawn in Chinese paintings reflects the Chinese aesthetic

tradition favoring suggestiveness over articulateness. “Suggestiveness, not articulateness, is the ideal of all Chinese art, whether it be poetry, painting, or anything else” (Feng 1948: 12).

As a concept central to the art of poetry, suggestiveness has a few expressions such as *yanwai zhi yi* (言外之意) – meanings beyond the expressed words, *xianwai zhi yin* (弦外之音) – sound off the string, *xiangwai zhi xiang* (象外之象) – images beyond the image, *weiwai zhi zhi* (味外之旨) – flavors beyond the flavor, and *hanxu* (含蓄) (subtle reserve). (Ming 2003: 491)

If we see the body representations in such a light, as opposed to the Western mimic tradition where “solid” bodies can bear the objectifying gaze, the schematic representation empties out its concreteness, hence the objectifying gaze find no where to locate itself within the void of nonrepresentedness. And from this open space, the gaze fabricates within itself a pleasurable object – the-object-within, and in this way the represented body though catches the gaze slips off it. It is within such a culture which favors the unspoken, the unfinished, the suggestive, the left-out and the openness that the pleasure of imagining, relating, transposing and reconstituting derives; the pleasure is realized through mutual construction from the artistic creation and appreciation. Therefore it is inadequate to see the (female) body in ancient Chinese paintings only in terms of its “to-be-looked-at-ness” for it does not function as the object of gaze – it is the point where the gaze alludes to itself and dwells within an imaginative and imaginary space where object and subject blur.

### 2.2.3. The Body Functionality

When persons of rank are in the *jia* (family, lineage unit) they are *nu* (daughters); when they marry they are *fu* (wives), and when they bear children they are *mu* (mothers). [If you start with] a *xiannu* (virtuous, unmarried girl) then you will end up with a *xianfu* (virtuous wife); if you have virtuous wives, you will end up with *xianmu* (virtuous mothers). With virtuous mothers there will be virtuous descendants

– Chen Hongmou, *Jiaonu yigui (Inherited Guide for Educating Women)*

*Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses* (Mohanty, 1984) is a groundbreaking piece though it in a way discourages the burgeoning trend to promote the international sisterhood for it harshly criticizes a kind of western feminist scholarship which uncritically applies concepts and theories to explain Third country women's issues without bringing up cultural specificities of countries it deals with or localizing theoretical frameworks it adopts. The purpose of those works, Mohanty argues is to testify an ahistorical and universal patriarchy while leaving its concrete and diverse modalities untouched in the hope of enhancing a feminist solidarity cross-culturally. Hence, its diagnosis is more a western appropriation of Third country problems which does little to justify the real causes.

Woman and Man as two terms which constitutes whether of the category of gender or sex seem the direct representation of the reality for after all in all most every culture, each has been assigned with different meanings, roles, functions and identities. Considering the influential Cartesian tradition which sees the body as a passive entity belonging to the realm of nature, it is not surprising that western feminisms constantly initiate efforts to disturb the self-evident conflation between morphology and identity. They seek to either bypass the biological determinism of the female body or positively reinterpret the female morphology and rediscover its potentialities since historically in the West Woman is constructed around and stabilized within a naturalized concept of the female anatomical body.

In the May Fourth Movement (1919), arguably the Chinese Enlightenment, the

terminology for Woman changed from *funu* (妇女) to *nuxing* (女性). Semantically, the new usage resembles the western notion of woman which denotes “both the biological female sex and to convey a sense of universal womanhood” (Rosenlee 2006: 45). Linguistically speaking, in Chinese language the terms such as *mu-pin* (牡牝) and *xiong-ci* (雄雌) which denote the male and the female sex, by and large refer to animals. *Funu* is composed of two parts: *fu* meaning married women, and *nu* unmarried women – the old usage connotes that a woman in the previous feudal system was linked with her societal functions. This is identical to what I have argued earlier that the Confucian notion of human beings is defined less in terms of anatomical structure than by consciously arranged conducts of living humanly. What revolutionists participating in the May Fourth Movement found oppressive about the notion of *funu* is that under Confucian culture women were ultimately subjective-less beings who were deprived of individuality and who had no real being beyond their familial functions. The divergence between the western notion of *nuxing* and the Confucian *funu* is well-expressed by Margery Wolf who, when conducting her ethnographic studies of women in China, was surprised to find out that her Chinese informants had entirely different mentality about what a woman was from their western counterparts:

It is almost impossible to get a Chinese woman to describe for you the attributes of a proper woman. She immediately translates your subject into proper wife or mother or daughter-in-law, and if you object, she tells you about a good daughter”. (Wolf 1985: 112)

Given the substantial influence the Confucian family had on the ancient Chinese society, a woman was defined solely around her functions within the family. Considering also the Confucian five relations, all of them are hierarchical– the ruled obeying ruler, son obeying father, wife obeying husband and so on: there was no subjective and individual being in the first place. That is why Lu Xun, a prominent intellectual in the May Fourth Movement denounced the feudal China as a



human-eaten society. If women were to become fully human beings, addressed by intellectuals of the Movement, they had to be redefined. Tani Barlow indicates in *Theorizing Woman: Funu, Guojia, Jiating* that “(nuxing) symbolizes the beginning of ‘modernization’ in Chinese literary writing where the kinship-neutral term *nuxing* is used as a conceptual equivalent of the Western concept of ‘woman as a discursive category’” (Rosenlee 2006: 45). The term *nuxing* is western-adapted, reflecting more a discontent to the old usage of *funu* which is defined by a culture where a woman’s whole being revolved around her familial functions. And to understand the way *funu* is constructed in Confucian culture, the concept of the body of *qi* is vital here.

Shigehisa Kuriyama in her *The Expressiveness of the Body and the Divergence of Greek and Chinese Medicine* discusses how wind was figured differently between Chinese and Greek medicine. For doctors in China, “wind represented less a distant, exciting cause of disease itself, an alien invader. It swept straight into the body’s interior and harmed by intrusion” (Kuriyama 1994: 250). Wind in ancient China and Greece represented the threat to one’s physical well-being, hence its changes of patterns needed to be observed and predicted. This idea of connectedness between the body and wind, and necessity to separate them, comprised the tension within Chinese medicine.

If the authoritarian vision of the universal order spoke harmony and balance and promoted the seamless unity of self and the world, wariness of chaos inspired an opposing impulse toward timeless isolation, the dream of an autonomous self, impervious to wind's whimsy. (Kuriyama 1994: 250)

Tension as such is also evident in Confucianism: it appeals to the unification among things within the universe. Nonetheless it also stresses the absolute indispensableness to establish boundaries among people for boundaries are signs of human orders, and human nature ultimately lies in human culture. According to Xunzi

[T]he reason why humans are human is not particularly because they have two feet and no hair; it is because they have the ability to make distinctions. Whereas beasts have father and son, they don't have the affection between father and son; and whereas beasts have mu-pin (male and female), they don't have the distinction between man and woman. Hence the way of humanity cannot be without distinctions. (Rosenlee 2006: 46)

In antiquity, women and men were separated by tangible walls and doors. Geographically speaking, the women's space was located at the innermost layer of their houses which is called *nei* (the inside), whereas the men's place was *wai* (the outside). The *nei-wai* distinction is not identical to the western notion of public/private sphere since it is not based on morphological differences between men and women, and in no way does it as western duality function in the noncorrelative and oppositional binary.

The spatial binary of *nei-wai* along with the idea of the differentiation between man and woman (*nannuzhibie*), as Lisa Raphals suggested, is better understood as functional "distinctions between men and women", rather than the strict and inflexible physical, social, and intellectual separation that has so often been assumed. (Rosenlee 2006: 70)

The *nei-wai* distinction also relates to the gender division of labor ideally expressed in the form of *nangeng nuzhi* (男耕女织), that is, man plows and woman weaves. During the Han dynasty (202 – 220 BC), in the imperial annual sacrificial ceremony the emperor ritually plowed in the fields while the empress symbolically tended silkworms, the purpose being "to take the lead in the work of agriculture and sericulture in all under heaven" (Rosenlee 2006: 80). Thereafter, such a contingent historical event has been settled as the prototype of the gender division of labor. The virtue of womanhood in part is expressed through the work of weaving, spinning, and

embroidering, since *fugong* (妇功) – women’s work is one of the four womanly virtues (*side* 四德) as defined in canonical ritual texts and the four didactic books, *Nusishu*, written for and by women.

### **3. A Cinematic Analysis of *Poetry*: From Text to Context**

### 3.1. The Story

#### 3.1.1. The Technical Information

Directed by	Lee Chang-dong
Produced by	Lee Joon-dong
Written by	Lee Chang-dong
Starring	Yoon Jeong-hee
Cinematography	Kim Hyunseok
Editing by	Kim Hyun
Studio	Pine House Film
Distributed by	N.E.W.
Release date(s)	13 May 2010 (2010-05-13)
Running time	139 minutes
Country	South Korea
Language	Korean

### 3.1.2. The Plot

How is it over there?  
How lonely is it?  
Is it still glowing red at sunset?  
Are the birds still singing on the way to the forest?  
Can you receive the letter I dared not send?  
Can I convey  
the confession I dared not make?  
Will time pass and roses fade?  
Now it's time to say goodbye  
Like the wind that lingers and then goes  
just like shadows  
To promises that never came  
to the love sealed till the end.

To the grass kissing my weary ankles  
And to the tiny footsteps following me  
It's time to say goodbye  
Now as darkness falls  
Will a candle be lit again?  
Here I pray  
nobody shall cry  
and for you to know  
how deeply I loved you  
The long wait in the middle of a hot summer day  
An old path resembling my father's face  
Even the lonesome wild flower shyly turning away  
How deeply I loved  
How my heart fluttered at hearing faint song  
I bless you  
Before crossing the black river  
With my soul's last breath  
I am beginning to dream  
a bright sunny morning  
again I awake blinded by the light  
and meet you  
standing by me

– Lee Chang-Dong, *Agnes' Song*, *Poetry*

Mija is a woman in her mid sixties, widowed and impoverished. She looks after her grandson from her only daughter who, after divorce works in another city. The teenager boy is hardly her company for he as all the other average adolescents enjoys more the computer and hanging around with friends. Life is barely sustained, with a small amount of allowance from the government, along with the salary she earns taking care of a stroke-ridden elderly man. Chances are that she would complain about life to her daughter, her most intimate friend, who she always tells “everything” to, such as the raised electricity fee due to her grandson’s excessive use of the computer, trivial things really, bothering-less. In general, she tells good news, for example that she decides to sign up for a poetry-writing class though more or less the same time she is diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease.

Why does she aspire to learn to write poetry? A man once asks. She says that when she saw the poster of the poetry-writing class at the bus station, she was suddenly reminded of something her teacher said when she was in the third grade, almost fifty years away, “Mija, you have a vein for poetry”. She was related to that then. As she admits to her daughter: “I like flowers and to speak of odd things”. The first day in the class, her teacher holds up an apple and talks about seeing: “Up till now, you haven’t seen an apple for real” he tells them. “To really know what an apple is, to be interested in it, to understand it,” he adds, “that is really seeing it.”

But what does mean it to really see? And what is out there, behind all those appearances that are supposed to be revealed by the gaze? Later that day, Mija looks around her house – the sink cluttered up with unwashed dishes, the refrigerator decorated by photos and cartoon pictures, and those dark corners where books and clothes are piled up together. She holds up an apple closer to the dim light, examining, touching and smelling it. She can’t see anything beyond the apple. Frustrated, she peels it up and eats it: “an apple is better for eating”. Inspiration is not easy to find and she is peculiarly eager to compose a single poem before the facility of language get wiped out entirely from her.

Writing poetry offers her an escape from the mundane life, an activity well-suited with her character – every day she leaves home dressed-up in a flora-pattern dress, white hat, and tidily arranged scarves. By appearance, she in no way resembles the typical image of a domestic worker. The elderly man she tends to daily is hardly mobile. During the day, he is left alone in his house, accompanied by her for several hours as she runs among house chores. Cleaning his body is the most intimate contact between them – in fact their relation is by and large developed through four such scenes in the film, each several minutes. The turning point of their ordinary relation emerges when he asks for sex one day .as she cleans his body. That day she first noticed something unusual about him: he began to take some pills but she had not been informed of that before. “They are just vitamins” he said. But when she inquired further he became impatient. She found out later that those pills are for erection. Feeling deeply insulted as she did, and as she was about to leave, he grasped her arms pleading: “I want that only once before I die. Nothing else but that. I want, just for once, to be a man again”.

That is the only one episode within a sequence of revelations in her life. Not long before that, she had learned of an astonishing fact: a female schoolmate of his grandson’s, had been perpetually raped by six boys for more than six months, one of them being his grandson which leads to the girls suicide. She is brought to the secret meeting where the fathers of the other five boys decide to give the dead girl’s mother a large sum of money, to cover up the scandal. Sitting among the men who discuss the “proper number” while pouring each other beers, Mija has been silent through. “Although I feel sorry for the dead girl,” a father says, “now it is the time for us to worry about our own boys”. “I have heard that at first the girl was not against that”, another father says and he goes on, “I do not understand why they did that. The girl is not good-looking at all”. Conversations continue in a “strange” direction: no one seems to be interested in the poor, suicidal girl, neither in the horrifying crime committed by their sons. She refuses to join their talks, absent-minded, looking wandringly into a cluster of flowers blooming outside. Once she asked her grandson



about that girl whom he said not knowing of. That day, she took the first note for her poem: “blood...flowers are blooming like blood”. Thereafter, she begins to see things: teenagers chasing after football, ripe apricots scattering around the tree and the river which buried the body of the suicidal girl rambling slowly. In despair, she sees the beautiful; and in the beautiful she sees the cruelty.

She also sees her body but in the most tragic way – in its monetary value and in death. Without any means to get such a large amount of money for the dead girl’s mother, she goes back to the elderly man and trades her body. Then she decides to report the crime to the police and ends her life thereafter. The night after her grandson has been taken away by the police, she completed her poem, *Agnes’ song* with which I opened this chapter.

## 3.2. The Analysis

### 3.2.1. The overview

To this nakedness people responded neither with curiosity nor with voyeurism, nor with the generalized affection with which the body of a child is greeted. In turning away from this particular portrait, it was as if people were turning away from old age itself.

– Katherine M. Woodward, *Aging and Its Discontents: Freud and Other Fictions* (1991 : 2)

I also turned away, the first time I watched *Poetry*, when Mija undressed, her body facing his, two aging bodies in the bathtub. I was upset, knowing somehow beforehand what it would mean to her, the sexual intercourse, that she was trading her body for what would repay for the suicidal girl, the body sexually abused by her grandson. But there was more than my sympathy, about my turning away. I didn't think of perversion then, neither was the scene displayed in any perverse way. It was so plain and quiet: the faint breath slowly accelerated; her nakedness hidden beneath the camera. But I felt something wrong about the scene as if those bodies were dislocated from the very start.

Laura Mulvey pointed out at the beginning of her *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* that “film reflects, reveals and even plays on the straight, socially established interpretation of sexual difference which controls images, erotic ways of looking and spectacle” (Mulvey 1999: 6). With respect to classic Hollywood movies, she elaborated how pleasurable looking centers around a dualistic mechanism of the gaze – men the active subject, women the image. To exhibit her “to-be-looked-at-ness”, women's bodies are coded in various strong visual and erotic styles, displayed in films as objects of men's erotic pleasure. However, not long before examining those seemingly diversifying representations of women's bodies in classic Hollywood movies she referred to, it is evident that they share a pattern: those bodies represented

embody the ideal and normative form of the object for the heterosexual desire. Considering how many movies or dramas represent for example aging female bodies or obese female bodies, and in what way they are represented.

In Korean Dramas, for instance, which exploit various stereotypical bodies, the female protagonists are often displayed with minor characters, friends or foes, as they encounter the male protagonists. Those less appealing characters serve either to set the female protagonists' attractiveness, or function as the laughable clowns, or as indicators of non-sexual relations subjecting to the main plot. They are bodies which do not fit into certain beauty standards, the visually "unpleasurable".

But the situation gets much complicated when the aging bodies are involved for they have completely disappeared from the sexual discourse. In the opening quote of this section, Katherine M. Woodward described the ways in which people react to a photo of a naked, aging, male body: they do not want to look at it. Their shunning gaze and my uneasy encounter with sexual intercourse scene between two aging bodies imply more than the inability to appreciate aging bodies; in my case, Mija is a pleasant-looking woman despite her age, well-dressed despite her poverty; and bodies are hardly displayed. My sense of their bodies in dislocation resonates with the exclusive nature of the established matrix of heterosexual desire which does not only sustain its hegemony through abnormalizing homosexuality, but also in de-sexualizing certain bodies within its own realm. Now more than ever, the visual dominates the transmission of sexual discourses and what have been inscribed into the collective unconscious about properness of sexuality are without exception circulating around imaginaries – different types of body images. Meantime, it seems that the prevalence of visual messages stabilizes a causal relation between the body images and the sexual desire and as certain bodies prevail in visual representations they become the stimulus. Worth to note is the fact that the cinematographic technique of close-up widely used to connote desire plays with the intrinsic feature of human vision. In order to see, one needs to focus at certain parts of its object, the range depending on how far the object

is away from the eyes, and as the object moving nearer the eyes the unfocused parts blur. The Camera closes up at women's bodies as it moves as if to extract fragments from the whole. Hence what constitutes the erotic other is not a woman, but a compound of her fragmented parts joint together under her name.

In the mainstream films, the camera embodies the gaze of the male protagonist: as he desires a woman's body the camera moves and closes up at her; she seizes up his gaze, knowing how to react; the camera moves again back to him. In the *mise-en-scene* as such, perspective remains unshifted, his desire thus transverses beyond the screen, gets communicated with spectators. This seemingly organic process is fundamentally premised on selective body forms – the able male, and the desirable female.

It is worthwhile taking a look at the ways in which *Poetry* manages close-ups and *mise-en-scene* to represent bodies in the sexual intercourse. Firstly, Mija's body is either off the camera (still 1), or only her face within the camera (still 2), and most of the time her back is facing the camera (still 3). In each case, the wholeness of her body retains because it is unrepresented. Secondly, the camera obscures the male protagonist's desire by disrupting the conventional use of *mise-en-scene*. It stays some distance away framing two bodies within as he gazes at her, hence the camera only catches the act of his looking, yet without rolling it to take a shot at her body and since her back is facing the camera it is unknown what he sees (still 3). Circumstances are when camera takes a side shot, an interesting aspect of his gaze being that it is almost static projecting at her face. The uncertainty about what he gazes at and the circumstances that his gaze does not take her body, together with his impotence, leave space for interpretations of his desire.



Still 1



Still 2



Still 3

Considering that the cinematographic technique is consciously arranged to synchronize with various themes of films, it is justifiable to say that *Poetry* creates a third-person perspective indifferent to his gaze and her nakedness so that sexual connotations wouldn't override its theme of condemning men's abusing women's bodies.

Apart from that, looking at film in terms of its linguistic structure – the ways in which meanings are constructed, a close-up at the nakedness of an aging woman's body will surely connote different meanings from that of any female body, the fetish of the mainstream cinema for her body's presence as the erotic Other is conditioned by the absence of and negation to any possibility of the others bodies to be represented in a way that does not connote the not-be-looked-at-ness. As an aging woman's body is concerned, her whole physicality is already the negation to the visual objectification which is frequently presented through close-ups and certain ways of *mise-en-scene*. Therefore it is one way to say that she does not appear desirable, the other that she should not appear in such a way. Even if the camera chose to represent the nakedness of the female aging body, which part of her body could the camera close up on? Even if it does close up on her body, how could it be portrayed in the light so it does not

simply pass to be an object as the photo of the naked male aging body which people shed away from?

Now coming back to *Poetry*, does the unwillingness of the camera to represent the nakedness of Mija's body also speak to its blindness to her body's presence as the desirable other for a particular male gaze which is also an Other, the aging and impotent male Other? Does the ambiguity of his desire lie in the fact that the way he desires remains unknown for his ageism has silenced him in the discourse of sexuality and left his way of desiring untouched? It will be "strange" to portray Mija's body in terms of her breast, thighs, hips, etc to connote her to-be-looked-at-ness for these are the very representations of her sexiness constructed by the dominant discourse. Thus it is necessary to re-discover and affirm multiple existences other than the one lived by normative bodies as Elizabeth Grosz eloquently puts:

Where one body (in the West, the white, youthful, able, male body) takes on the function of model or ideal, the human body, for all other types of body, its domination may be undermined through a defiant affirmation of a multiplicity, a field of differences, of other kinds of bodies and subjectivities. A number of ideal types of body must be posited to ensure the production, projection, and striving for ideal images and body types to which each individual, in his or her distinct way, may aspire. (Grosz 1994: 19)

Then the imaginary dislocation of Mija's body seen by me points to the symbolism of what her body is supposed to be. Here the question leads discussions beyond the text of *Poetry* to its cultural context where the symbolism of aging female bodies takes shape. Moreover, the ambiguous relation between Mija's body and the male protagonist's desire brings out the symbolism of penetration which also requires a contextualized analysis.

### 3.2.2. Bodies of Situated Becomings

#### 3.2.2.1. Becoming Abject

In that compelling, raw, insolent thing in the morgue's full sunlight, in that thing that no longer matches and therefore no longer signifies anything, I behold the breaking down of a world that has erased its borders: fainting away. The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object. Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us.

– Julia Kristeva, *The Power of Horror* (1982: 4)

The cinema's eye, its gaze immanent and omniscient, the gaze of a machine, is capable of representing anyone, directors, cinematographers, spectators or characters: it sees what they see and don't. Through the camera's capacity to move, adjust focus or to be focus-less, it takes inspiration from human vision yet transcends it. Deleuze spoke of cinema as cine-system, an organism by itself that "functions rather as a human body functions, in that it requires a respiratory system, a circulatory system, and a nervous system – each part of which contributes to the cine-system in singular and collective screen circumstances" (Colman 2011: 22).

The Camera's eyes can see bodies in their full dimensions, yet not always presents the whole of what it sees. It frames bodies, cuts them into pieces, divides them into parts, reveals one part after another or leaves some parts unframed. In this way what it frames in as much as frames out constructs meanings, purposefully or unconsciously. "What is out-of-frame or out-of-field in the shot counts toward the processes of 'differentiation' between images that create thought." (Colman 2011: 41)

*Poetry* arranges several showering scenes within it from the cinematic perspective, framing both the man's and the woman's body but in different manners. In terms of the male protagonist, his body is frequently framed in medium shot, nakedness seen



(Still 4). As with the female protagonist Mija, the camera is held closer to her, position fixed approximately above her breast only making minor adjustments as she moves so that her below-breast parts remain out of the frame (Still 5). Her nakedness is rather conceptual than visual, her body as if clothed again through the camera's framing it out. This clothing is in the middle way between the full-clothing from ancient Chinese figurative paintings and the full-unclothing from Western nude art. Her body is represented in its physicality as opposed to the clothed cultured body, yet it dwells in the realm of visual absence.



Still 4



Still 5

If in Katherine Woodward's description that people's abjection towards the naked aging male body is merely toward aging itself, a female, naked body evokes an abjection from desire: morphologically her body was the body for desire; she possesses breasts, hips and legs but it is not her breast, hips and legs that are desirable, quite the reverse they represent the negation of being desirable. "...what is abject, on the contrary, the jettisoned object, is radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses" (Kristeva 1982: 2).

She as an aging body is not the erotic Other for desire, yet her nakedness is not as sexually signifying-less as a naked child, for her body is within erotic others, not as the erotic Other, but as the constituent of the background against which the erotic Other can be seen: she is the "other of the Other" (Irigary, 1985). To put it differently, her body exists as the invisible contrast against which the erotic Other is seen and has meanings. Once her body has been directly revealed in front of the gaze, the latter confuses and rejects for it does recognize her naked body whose meaning is ambiguous.

It beseeches, worries, and fascinates desire, which, nevertheless, does not let itself be seduced. Apprehensive, desire turns aside; sickened, it rejects. A certainty protects it from the shameful—a certainty of which it is proud holds on to it. (Kristeva 1982: 1)

Therefore, the camera fragments her naked body and rests it on the merging line of the object and the abject where this visual absence creates certain distance away from her physicality, hence being visually fragmented is being the imaginary whole.

Kristeva pointed out that the abject is not something unclean or unhealthy which belongs to a clear-cut realm of negativity from which the ego is capable of making distinction, and is sure of its position. The abject is what puts those established boundaries in jeopardy and pushes the ego to the realm of ambiguity where meaning collapses.

It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite. (Kristeva 1982: 4)

Returning now to the context of *Poetry*: though Korea has been drastically westernized and has constructed a highly sexualized pop culture where female (and male) bodies are represented in the exhibitionist way for the scopophilic gaze, the female, aging body remains clothed. As Hay (1994) argued that the Eastern Asian nude culture is an import, the lack of female, aging, nude images from the source of the import is one explanation. In addition, in terms of the cultural symbolism of the female, aging body, I would argue that the clothed, female aging body is the constituent of Confucian culture itself. Hence to unclothe the female, aging body ultimately means to alter the deeply grounded cultural root and put the cultural identity to dramatic challenge.

In the previous chapter, I have mentioned that Confucianism begins and ends with humanism and the ontology of the human body is the cultured body. Confucian humanism establishes itself on the organization of genealogical seniority supported by filial piety (translations varied, such as family reverence): “It is family reverence (xiao),” said the Master, “that is the root of excellence, and whence education (jiao) itself is born” (Rosemont and Ames, 2009: 106).

In *Classic of Filial Piety* (translations varied, such as *Classic of Family Reverence and Xiaojing*), Confucius delineated a hierarchical society composed of the emperor, the hereditary lords, the lower officials and the common people who accord with respective positions practicing filial piety in different ways. The purpose is to ensure the absolute power of parents over their children by romanticizing their physical lineage, and emphasizing the absolute parental worship.

Your physical person with its hair and skin are received from your parents. Vigilance in not allowing anything to do injury to your person is where family reverence begins; distinguishing yourself and walking the proper way (dao) in the world; raising your name high for posterity and thereby bringing esteem to your father and mother—it is in these things that family reverence finds its consummation. This family reverence, then, begins in service to your parents, continues in service to your lord, and culminates in distinguishing yourself in the world. (Rosemont and Ames, 2009: 106)

Considering the inseparability of one’s identity from one’s familial roles in ancient China, in this moral framework being aging was being powerful. For aging men and women, the well-being of their physicality exemplifies their children’s good service to them. Apart from that, they existed more in the symbolic level, as sources of one’s life, sources for one’s strive, and sources of one’s sense of shame and pride. Moreover there was no separation between parents and children who in their obedience continuously affirmed reunifications with their parents:

Family reverence [*xiao*] means being good at continuing the purposes of one's predecessors and at maintaining their ways. . . Taking up the places of their forebears, carrying out their ritual observances, playing their music, showing respect to those whom they esteemed, extending their affections to those of whom they were fond, serving their dead as though they were living, and serving those who are long departed as though they were still here— this then is family reverence at its utmost. (Rosemont and Ames, 2009: 116)

In this way, with the absence of a God in the ancient Chinese culture, parental figures as the “creators” of one's life are transcended beyond their familial roles of being nurturers and educators and symbolized as the omniscient surveillancer to ensure proper conducts and familial/cultural lineage. Hence, the aging male and female bodies are further alienated from their physicality, existing metaphysically within families.

Specifically speaking about female aging bodies, in the light of body functionality, their past through the phase when they were defined as child-bearing mothers (sons preferably<sup>3</sup>) and as their reproductive function was finished and after they have daughter-in-laws in their supervision, they became the Mothers, a symbolic being within the family who represented the ideal motherhood and warded familial reproduction. It is no wonder why women actively participated in exploiting women's body then. There were no women as a united category, but unmarried girls, child-bearing mothers, child-nurturing mothers and childless Mothers.

Now taking several steps back and examining again the position of (naked), aging bodies as the abject, in the western context, the reasons for such abjection lies in their

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<sup>3</sup> In Chinese culture, the importance of son not only is expressed in the notion that he is the carrier of the bloodline of the family and his responsibility in ancestor-worship rites. Besides, since daughters are someone who will marry out of the family, it is mostly the son's duty to support the parents when they are old.

declined physicality which no longer fits into “paradigms of classical beauty” and symbolizes death. However, in ancient China, bodies were not judged in their physicality, hence there were no visual references rendering aging bodies as the abject. Apart from that, death as the abject is the product of the culture privileging the youth, the opposite from ancient China, which worshiped the old. Representing naked female bodies in the Chinese and Korean context gets especially problematic because of the inferior connotations of female nakedness originated from the western female nude art which has been created for scopophilic consumption: “...the Western nude is...in the Kantian sense, the manifestation of the Beautiful, a finite form that incites aesthetic pleasures and by extension, a product for scopophilic consumption” (Wang 2008: 235).

The image of a naked aging female body contradicts within itself violently at the level of what it means: a metaphysical figure reveals its physicality; a symbolic figure for worship appears with flesh and bones; a formidable figure takes up the inferior connotations. Therefore in *Poetry*, as the camera carefully frames Mija’s naked body out whether in the showering or sexual intercourse scenes, it has already made a compromise to represent her physicality yet clothe it from the scopophilic gaze. The showering scene is especially subtle in its sexual connotation for it ends with a shot where the male protagonist sits against the bathroom door listening to the shower running and probably her cry, fantasizing or sympathizing.

A compromise as such in representing the female naked body indicates the old cultural/social organization in shift. As I have said before that the symbolic existence of the aging women is important in Confucian culture, demonstrated in filial piety. Yet it is only in Confucian family that their symbolic existence can be established and maintained. Meanwhile, before the colonization, the Confucian family was the most important social unity thus the statue of the female, aging body as the powerful figure went beyond the family realm. One example being the tremendous power mothers (senior women in the family) had over their sons then:

The mother, especially if she is widowed, has a tremendous power over the son, even if the son is an emperor. The mother's authority over her son is not limited to childhood; it is fairly common that mothers continue to instruct and admonish their grown sons who might be emperors, military generals, or state ministers regarding familial as well as governmental affairs. (Rosenlee 2006: 90)

*Poetry* illustrates such a family in decomposition: Mija's family is a decentralized one with only three people in total; her grandson is hardly obedient and respectful to her; and her life is primarily outside her family. Within her family, there is no longer any strict filial piety rule to grant her any privilege of being the oldest in the family. Living in a capitalist country as Korea, power revolves around capital rather than genealogical seniority. In a financially vulnerable position, without the support from the family she has to trade her labor for a living. At least a part of her social relation is mediated by the capital and her body is thus objectified.

Cultural alterations diversify representations of female, aging bodies. However much the hegemonic western influence has on the "indigenous" culture, the latter does not die out once for all. Instead, they create new environment for the body to become at the individual level. Being the object is being in-between of two culture expectations.

This is a context against which she lives her body and acquires the notion of what her body is, not in any abstract sense – she knows what her body is for her. Firstly, she knows that her body is a commodity, a precondition for her decision to trade sex for money. Secondly, she knows that her body is for her family, another precondition why she is willing to trade her body so that her grandson could be exempted. Thirdly, she knows that her body was a female body, and she creates a kinship with the suicidal girl who had been sexually abused by her grandson. And this kinship along with her grandson's indifference to the girl he abused are probably why she finally decides to report him to the police. Fourthly, she knows that her body is more than a

scientifically unreliable subject in language because of her Alzheimer's disease. She is earnest in writing poetry though words gradually slipping off her.

### 3.2.2.2. Becoming Men

To inhabit is the fundamental trait of man's being. Even if this trait remains unconscious, unfulfilled, especially in its ethical dimension, man is forever searching for, building, creating homes for himself everywhere: caves, huts, women, cities, language, concepts, theory, and so on.

– Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, (1993:141).

And even as man, consciously or unconsciously, feeds on and exploits the maternal-feminine in order to live, survive, inhabit, work, he forgets the other and his own becoming.

– Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, (1993:142).

In the sex scene, the elderly man begs her for THAT, only for once and becomes men again. What is THAT? Certain bodily “essence” within him? Certain needs he can't live without? His animalism, biology or physiology? His sexual instinct? Instinct, Freud argued, is stimulus originated in the “cells of the body and give rise to the major needs: hunger, respiration and sexuality” (Freud 1915: 144). What distinguishes an instinctual stimulus and a stimulus in general is that the latter is externally originated: hence, the body can get rid of it by muscular movements; whereas the former constituting the body can only be temporarily satisfied. Does that mean in the case of the elderly man of *Poetry* that his plead is merely a call from his instinct, expressing his biological nature as a man? To answer this question, it is vital to know the trajectory of argumentation Freud adopted to establish his theory of instinct.

Let us imagine ourselves in the situation of an almost entirely helpless living organism, as yet unorientated in the world, which is receiving stimuli in its nervous substance. This organism will very soon be in a position to make a first distinction and a first orientation. On the one hand,



it will be aware of stimuli which can be avoided by muscular action (flight); these it ascribes to an external world. On the other hand, it will also be aware of stimuli against which such action is of no avail and whose character of constant pressure persists in spite of it; these stimuli are the signs of an internal world, the evidence of instinctual needs. (Freud 1915: 119)

The critical hypothesis for Freud to differentiate an instinctual stimulus from an external one is the existence of a primitive stage untouched by socialization where the human body is but a stimulus-responding machine. Regardless of, for a moment, any further evaluation to a stage like that, what can be drawn from his argumentation is, instinct in general, as the undeniable bodily reality shared by every single body. With respect to the sexual instinct, it is one absolute constituent of the body. Now coming back to the question of the definite relation between the body and the primitive stage, Lacanian notion of the symbolic order is essential here.

By entering into the symbolic order (with its laws, conventions, and images for perfection), the human subject effectively divorces him/herself from the materiality of his/her bodily drives... It is caught up, rather, in social structures and strictures, in the fantasy version of reality that forever dominated our lives after our entrance into language... In constructing our fantasy-version of reality, we establish coordinates for our desire; we situate both ourselves and our object of desire, as well as the relation between. As Slavoj Žižek puts it, “through fantasy, we learn how to desire.” (Felluga 2001: online resource)

To use a Lacanian term, the primitive stage can roughly be equated to the imaginary order, the inaccessible as soon as the body<sup>4</sup> enters the symbolic order where bodily

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<sup>4</sup> More rigorously termed, Lacan would substitute “the body” with “the subject”.

experience is mediated by language. Thus, there is always a slippage between the primitive body and the individual experience of that, which is why, for Lacan, the sexual desire has little to do with the bodily materiality: it is already a mediated, bodily phenomenon. Since the body of sexual desire is always a linguistic being, its desire for sex is signifying-oriented. Though experienced by the body, the sexual desire doesn't stem from the body of primitivity, neither does that seeks for satisfaction for the body as such; rather sexual drive from the body of language searches, in sex, for a position in language: a signifier, a name, an identity. With regard to *Poetry*, what the elderly man has access to is but the fantasy land where his bodily demand is lived in and for social intelligibility. Therefore, the penetration, what Irigaray would call, the inhabitation in vagina, is a signifying practice: in vagina he acquires a subjective position in one socially intelligible meaning-making matrix called heterosexuality. He becomes a man. Irigaray (1994) argued that men forget about his own becoming in inhabiting the maternal-feminine, the cultural basis of which is the gender dichotomy derived from the male and female morphology: men the mind, women the body. In women's body, western men are materialized and embodied.

But with respect to the body in specific, it is not passively waiting to be programmed. Any individual male body who seeks for penetration is because his concrete relational and individual materialities render him so. Thus a crucial question to be asked in terms of the becoming men of the elderly man in *Poetry* is that why such a becoming for him, is of the utmost primacy and urgency.

Let's first be reminded again what it means to be a man and a Man in Confucian culture. In the conceptual framework of the Confucian humanity, human being fundamentally is the cultured being: gender, detaching from the male and female morphology, is a functional categorization with the spatial differentiation between men and women who are in pursuit of becoming Man. Theoretically speaking, becoming Man is a gender-neutral way of self-cultivation, characterized by the

principle of self-assimilation in human relations, which preconditions the gendered becoming. However, concerning the case of the elderly man, not only does becoming a man override becoming a Man, the latter is completely absent. Cross-culturally speaking, such a situation exemplifies the dynamic interactions between western culture and Confucian culture considering the colonized history of South Korea. On the one hand, the elderly man is within such a cultural reality; on the other, his individual and relational materialities condition the ways in which he negotiates with his cultural background: he does not simply embody the western way of becoming or abandon the Confucian one; rather his particular reality determines his becoming, which is neither a western nor a Confucian one, but a hybrid. I am going to discuss two aspect of his individual reality: his family and his disease.

As in Mija's family, the Confucian familial doctrines are in decomposition in his. Since for Confucianism, becoming Man involves the self-cultivation within familial relations, it establishes meticulous principles of filial piety to re-affirmation a sense of unification among family members, especially the one between parents and children. In *Poetry*, an evident chasm in the relation between the elderly man's and his children is expressed through the capitalized care work taken by a non-familial member, which is unimaginable in Confucian family. As the care work for the parents no longer being considered solely as the duty of the children, neither an indispensable evaluative dimension for their filial piety, a sense of unification that Confucianism seeks to establish between the parents and the children through the latter's physical service to the former gets disrupted. Therefore, the Confucian framework of becoming Man has lost its profound grounds and the gendered becoming can thus be possible.

Living an immobilized body, the elderly man is, for most of his time, staying within his house, the realm of *nei* – the space traditionally belonging to women, where his is on identity crisis. For one thing, the Confucian framework of gender offers no imaginaries for him to acquire an identity within the realm of *nei* where the only socially intelligible identity is a female one, characterized by women's work; for the

other, the western gender dichotomy is even more problematic because the identity of men is founded upon the very negation of the feminine. Consequently, his body is spatially indefinable, his subjectivity ambiguous. Here is an interesting phenomenon, whereas for Mija, as soon as she walks out of her traditional realm, her becoming is diversified. The western gender paradigm, when implanted in the eastern context, is utilized as the ready-applied framework for the liberation of women, from their traditional realm of *nei*; meanwhile the realm of *wai* has never been established on the negation of her “feminine nature”. Concerning the elderly man, the only non-familial body he has, as he has been domesticated within the realm of *nei* because of his disease, is a female body. And as his body in dislocation, his subjectivity lacking certainty, along with his separation from his children, he is an indefinable being. Therefore, as soon as he encounters Mija, out of various possibilities of seeing her otherwise for she is not merely a female body after all, he sees in her only a body of female morphology, a vagina, a hole. In this way, he is able to, in penetration, acquire an identity, in becoming a gendered being, a man. Such is a very tragic situation for him and for her as well, because his very complex, his anxiety, his long unfulfilled desire, his dissatisfaction are conditioned by the fact that he can’t see beyond his and her physicality; that he can’t become in-between-ness: he longs for definition, fixation and certainty. Such a becoming men of an impotent, male, aging body is the opposite of the kind of becoming that I am about to talk: the becoming no body.

### **3.2.2.3. Becoming No Body**

Watch me: affection is the intensity of colour in a sunset on a dry and cold autumn evening. Kiss me: affect is that audible, visual and tactile transformation produced in reaction to a certain situation, event or thing. Run away from me: affected are the bodies of specters when their space is disturbed.

– Felicity F. Colman, “Affect”, *The Deleuze Dictionary* (2005:11)

Bodies are affected by different things, and in different ways, each type of body being characterised by minimum and maximum thresholds for being affected by other bodies: what can and what cannot affect it, and to what degree.

– Bruce, Baugh, “Body”, *The Deleuze Dictionary* (2005: 31)

“How is it over there? How lonely is it?...”, Mija’s voice softly lays open *The Agnes’ Song*, enveloped within a sequence of cuts of her habitual space: her apartment, her neighborhood, and a bus station nearby. “Now it’s time to say goodbye”, she recites, murmuringly, a cut of a bus setting out away from the camera. Then another cut intrudes in, of the playground in her grandson’s school where a schoolgirl is walking across, simultaneously shifted the reciter to Agnes: “To the grass kissing my weary ankles, and to the tiny footsteps following me, it’s time to say goodbye...”. Her narration is accompanied by the camera’s consecutive revelation of her space: her school, her home and the country road leading to the bridge where she commits suicide: “before crossing the black river, with my soul’s last breath, I am beginning to dream, a bright sunny morning; again I awake blinded by the light, and meet you, standing by me”. Then on the bridge, as the movie is toward the end, there is Agnes again; this time, she looks into the camera as if she came back to life.

The poem uttered in the voice of Mija and Agnes, is actually read by Mija’s poetry-writing teacher on behalf of her, for after leaving it to him, she is missing. One possibility is, inferred from the kind of spatial mapping by the camera – first the bus station, then Agnes’ school and home, in the end the bridge – and a touch of farewell tone in her poem, that Mija also commits suicide. In contrast to a strong sense of realism in *Poetry*, the whole poetry-reciting scene is arranged in a way that is surreal: on the one hand, the reciting body (Mija’s teacher) doesn’t cohere with the reciting voices (Mija’s and Agnes’); on the other, the dead (Agnes) speaks and makes her appearance as the alive. As long as the poem is written in a confessional manner, though not by Agnes, as she recites it, she is speaking on her own behalf<sup>5</sup> whereas the

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<sup>5</sup> Though the poem is divided into two as it is recited consecutively by two, I don’t see a division as such in terms of textual analogy that one part is the confession of Mija, the other of Agnes since I am not intended to dive into the literary analysis of the poem. The narrator, be it Mija or Agnes, is the speaking I of the poem, they together composing the single speaking I. In saying that Agnes is speaking on her own behalf, what I indicate is a sense of authorship: her “right” to utter, in contrast to the silence of the actual reciting body, is acquired in the process of schizophrenic writing which, I am about to argue in a moment, is also through her body.

reciting body never allowed a voice throughout the course of recitation for he is not the speaking I of the poem. The dual recitation visualizes the inner dynamics of the poem: it is a flow channeling through two bodies and effacing body borders. The conflation of Mija's narration to Agnes' in a single poem reveals that the writing of such a poem is bodily, trans-bodily and schizophrenic. The material writing body (Mija's), a schizophrenic one which is characterized by Alzheimer's, from moment to moment, is toward becoming no body. Such a becoming-no-body is the reality of the writing body<sup>6</sup> which in deterritorialization and reterritorialization, is becoming a no body (Agnes'). I am going to talk about the becoming no body of Mija in Alzheimer's first.

Mija goes to see the doctor about the problem of her arms, only to be informed of a potentially much worrisome ailment of her brain. Before long, she is diagnosed with Alzheimer's, characterized by her degeneration in physical mobility and language. The later, medically termed dementia, means "being out of one's mind". As long as she is in the early stage of Alzheimer's, as the doctor explains to her sense of being disease-free, at this stage she forgets only occasionally nouns, but her memory will rapidly decline: more frequent is her forgetfulness about to be, of nouns first, then verbs.

Within the sight of Neurology, dementia is factual with traceable deteriorations located in the brain: the patients suffering from "memory loss affects their ability to remember new information and integrate recent and current events with information in long-term memory" (Small and others 1998: 291). Hence, the demented body unambiguously pathologized is considered "drifting towards the threshold of unbeing" (Kitwood and Bredin 1992: 285), and "has no insight into his or her own state of helplessness...he forgets who he is himself" (Souren and Franssen 1994: 20). Those seemingly accurate judgments based on the scientific facts are actually evaluative

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<sup>6</sup> The writing body has two layers of meaning: in a material sense, it is Mija's body who completes the actual writing; in a temporal sense, it is Mija's body after being affected by Agnes'.

since they presume the normality and the exclusive validity of the bounded, unitary and conscious experience of the body, several critical hypotheses behind which are: the reductionist equivalent of one's body to one's brain, one's personhood to one's brain activity; and the Cartesian notion of the body as a closed, fixed and static extension. The Alzheimer's body, a schizophrenic body rendered as an "unbeing", is nevertheless not without a reality, neither is an empty shell Christine Bryden discontenting about:

We all believe the toxic lie of dementia; that the mind is absent and the body is an empty shell. Our sense of self is shattered with this new label of dementia. Who am I, if I can no longer be a valued member of society? What if I don't know who I am and who I was? (Bryden 2005:156)

What the body doesn't possess is the collective reality with the unquestionable arrangement of time and space; what the body can't experience is the uninterrupted and spatial-temporally intelligible sense of being itself: the "unreasonable" nature of the body reveals that the reasonable<sup>7</sup> state of being is established socially to suppress the schizophrenic state of becoming. Emotions and affects are "medicalised", leaving "bodily affects and intensities in an impoverished state" (Braidotti 2005: 238). And the incredible heterogeneity of individual embodiments of Alzheimer's is beyond the explanatory capacity of neurological science. The Taiwanese documentary *The Long Goodbye* provides insights into the individualized reality of bodies of Alzheimer's:

When the camera takes its first shot at Yin Shunzhou, he immediately turns away. The crew, he believes, are communists from the mainland China to assassinate him. Yin perpetually lives back in a piece of memory which is about his escape from communists' torture before settling down in Taiwan: he is aware of his current space – Taipei, the capital of Taiwan, but confuses it with Beijing, the capital of the mainland

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<sup>7</sup> Organized and with certain logic arrangements.

China; he refuses to climb the Yangming Mountain on the outskirts of Taipei for he locates it on the city of Kai Feng, in the mainland China.

Alzheimer's cuts him off from the collective sense of time and space, and besieges him inside one of his lived reality. He lives momentarily with suspicions, paranoia and a strong sense of being insecure, though in this space and time he is free from all those threats and dangers which he thinks he is within. Time and space, in such a circumstance, are not as transparent and universal as for bodies untouched by dementia. In the case of Yin, since a particular piece of memory predominates his life, he is perpetually slipping off from his embodied reality to the collective one as others around him repeatedly reaffirm the collective sense of space and time in him. The slippage, the transitional stage, the phase of in-between-ness, however transient it is, is a state where the body is being nothing, the indefinable one for others as well as for itself. Therefore, the becoming no body in Alzheimer's is the inevitable reality as the body transits from one temporal state of being to another.

Spatially, a subject may seem fragmented and disunited; temporally, however, a subject develops a certain amount of consistency that comes from the continuing power of recollection...The co-occurrence of past and future in a continuous present may appear schizophrenic to those who uphold a vision of the subject as rational and self-contained. (Braidotti 2005: 239)

With respect to *Poetry*, the becoming no body of Mija in Alzheimer's is a critical reality in her transformation to be the writing body. Unlike Yin, for whom Alzheimer's somehow enclosing him within a single piece of memory where he is living as his own reality, in Mija's case, her Alzheimer's, perceived by other as a sign of identity crisis, is embodied by her in such a manner that her old, unitary and rationalized self established by the society, is destabilized; hence, her body acquires more space in constructing her own sense of being herself. In *Poetry*, there is an



interesting portrayal of Mija's fluid becoming as her body travels from one spatial-temporal setting to another, characterized by her strong sense of bodily identification with her surroundings.

Mija is persuaded by the fathers of other five boys' to talk with Agnes' mother about the compensation. On her way to the field where Agnes' mother works, she past through a small path where ripe apricots scatter everywhere; she stops there, picking up one, taking a bite and writing few lines in her notebook. As soon as she meets with Agnes' mother, she seems to forget about her purpose of seeing her in the first place: talking about her new understanding of being a fallen apricot and her love for flowers, and inquiring about this year's crop, she leaves her assigned mission behind. In delight, she finishes the conversation with Agnes' mother and leaves; then all of a sudden her face changed, looking anxious and hesitant as she recalls that she is supposed to talk with her about something else. Her deep immersion into any encounter right there and then, disrupts the lineage of her unitary self, which is less rational and predictive than contingent and affective. She therefore, lives a life very close to the relative and creative kind in the Deleuzian ideal:

Life is connection and relation, but the outcome or event of those relations is not determined in advance by intrinsic properties. Life is not, therefore, the ground or foundation differentiated by a set of terms, such that a dictionary might provide us with one schema of order among others. (Colebrook 2005: 5)

Alzheimer's tears down the boundaries which stabilize the certainty of her unitary self, and intensifies the role of her bodily sensations in constructing her sense of self as spatially fragmented and temporally unitary. In such a schizophrenic bodily state of being, her body is all the time slipping to becoming no body as long as her sense of being herself is closely dependent on external encounters, or affects. This makes possible her a schizophrenic writing body who is affected by an imagined body and

becomes a no body as such. Hence, the becoming no body of Mija in writing is a metaphoric becoming, characterized by her strong identification with Agnes as if she lives and writes through two bodies.

“Affect is part of the Deleuzian project of trying-to-understand, and comprehend, and express all of the incredible, wondrous, tragic, painful and destructive configurations of things and bodies as temporally mediated, continuous events” (Coleman 2005: 11). He borrowed such a notion from Spinoza. For Spinoza, an affection, in the simplistic sense is the effect of a body when another body acts upon it: “it’s a state of a body insofar as it is subject to the action of another body” (Deleuze, Lecture, Transcripts on Spinoza’s Concept of Affect, online resource). *Cogito* is a falsified notion since everything I know derives from what Spinoza termed the affection-idea – a kind of immediate, bodily apprehension of the effects of another body’s action on my body, and the “representations of effects without their causes” (Lecture). Without the mixture of bodies, or the affect-idea – the first level of knowledge – any other advanced levels of knowledge would not be possible since “I only ever know the mixtures of bodies and I only know myself by way of the action of other bodies on me and by way of mixtures” (Lecture).

For example, “I like apple” is an affection-idea for it is the direct apprehension of my body’s pleasurable encounter with an apple; the reason why I like it is another kind of knowledge. But without the idea of “I like apple” in the first place, I can’t move to the next level to articulate the reasons why I like it. To know my body liking the apple and to know its causes, I must have encounters with an apple: that is, my body must mix with the body of an apple.

What does it mean that a body mixes with another one? And how does such a mix represented in *Poetry*? Deleuze noted in *Lecture* that Spinoza had expressed one absolute principle of being affected, since he developed this notion from Physics, Spinoza maintained that being affected is not two bodies at distance, but them in

contact. Moreover, he indicated that the affected body is essentially passive: it is always affected by, and can't not predict when, where, from whom affections can occur. For this point, I would like to discuss the affections represented in the film. Crudely put, my main arguments are: the body can be affected by an imagined body insofar as it is mixed with another body which has mixed with that imagined body; the capitalist principle of monetary exchange mediates the mixture of bodies and to some extent gives certainty to the process of affect.

Mija has never actually met Agnes, their connection starting from the moment when she finds out about the connection between her grandson and Agnes' death. By nature, Mija is an empathetic person, for once before knowing such a connection, she has inquired her grandson about Agnes as she heard about her death – she wants to know what kind of person Agnes was. In this case, she is affected already: being empathetic<sup>8</sup> is a way of surmounting bodily boundary and reaching at a stage of being two. To put it differently, Mija's capacity of being affected by other bodies is rather high. Such a capacity increases as she finds out her connection with Agnes, at first mediated through his grandson's body; then the affection in her from Agnes creates something new: she becomes a writing body. If we can recall from the plot, it is when she hears about his grandson's connection to Agnes' death, that she takes her first notes. This case corresponds to what Spinoza emphasized the necessity of nearness in creating affection in bodies.

But if we look at the relation between the fathers and Agnes, the notion of nearness is problematic – as what Spinoza maintained about nearness is the physical sense of distance. At first sight, it seems “normal” that the fathers come up with the idea to seal the issue with money since monetary exchanges are happening all the time in our society. Their indifference to Agnes' death, is only one consequential expression of monetary mediation between bodies. Unlike Mija, who has been struggling to let her

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<sup>8</sup> Though I am not going to develop this idea further, I see empathy as an active force to increase one's capacity of being affected.

grandson be affected by Agnes' death, and who finally decides to report him as she fails in that, the fathers are trying hard to cut down any possible affection by establishing an impersonal relation with Agnes' body. To tag it with a price, to calculate the value of her death. Therefore, through and through, what they have in contact with is the abstraction of a body, a capitalized body, a capitalist formulation, a no body. Without being affected by Agnes' body, there would be no becoming Agnes in them, the becoming no body.

With respect to the becoming no a body of Mija in writing, before taking the theoretical account of its process – the formation of the rhizome of Mija and Agnes in the movement of deterritorialization, and in the process of reterritorialization, we should take into accounts of Mija's Alzheimer's and her spatial mapping of Agnes' space. The spatial mapping is the "replacement" of actual encounters with Agnes' body: it is not simply about Mija living in Agnes' space; it is about becoming Agnes' body in those places. Considering the perpetual spillages of her bodily experience because of her Alzheimer's, characterized by her intensive immersion into the space her body occupies, living Agnes' space, for Mija there always exists a sense of a lost body wandering through two bodies: she is not Mija anymore, less is Agnes, but the rhizomatic becoming of the two. The becoming a no body (Agnes) of Mija is the metaphor of the trans-bodily experience, a process, a movement, a never actualized becoming since fundamentally what she forms is a rhizome with Agnes which includes two but can't be reduced to either.

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari spoke of the process of rhizomatic formation between the orchid and the wasp. It is a very interesting and revealing example in articulating several of Deleuzian concepts such as rhizome, deterritorialization and reterritorialization, which gives simply explanation of why a rhizome though composed by two is an organism on its own and can't be reduced to either.

In parallel evolution, the orchid evolved to resemble the image of the wasp as a strategy to survive: as a male wasp mistakes the orchid as its female counterpart and mates with it; it transports the pollen of one orchid to another.

The orchid deterritorializes by forming an image, a tracing of a wasp; but the wasp reterritorializes on that image. The wasp is nevertheless deterritorialized, becoming a piece in the orchid's reproductive apparatus. But it reterritorializes the orchid by transporting its pollen. Wasp and orchid, as heterogeneous elements, form a rhizome. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 10)

Within such a rhizome, there is a becoming-wasp of the orchid and a becoming-orchid of the wasp. Deleuze and Guattari detested the concept of mimicry, for the becoming-wasp of the orchid is already a new organism itself. To say that the orchid mimic the wasp is to overlook the actualized integration of the orchid and wasp. Mimicry is such a bad concept in a sense that it rejects to acknowledge the border-crossing becoming and forever splits bodies in their respective domain. The border-crossing becoming is not virtual but actualized, which Deleuze and Guattari indicater in the example of disease: “We evolve and die more from our polymorphous and rhizomatic flus than from hereditary diseases, or diseases that have their own line of descent” (Deleuze and Guatarri 1987: 11).

How does such a process of two species forming into a rhizome identical to the formation of the writing body, a rhizome in *Poetry*? And why is it important to see it in such a manner? The parallel evolution is absent here, replaced by the mechanism of affect. The breakpoint for Mija's poetry-writing occurs when she is affected by the tragic death of Agnes, of the rape leading her suicide and of bodies that have violently modified hers however remains unaffected by her death. The film shows, the 'process of deterritorialization and reterritorialization. In occupying Agnes' space, accompanying by temporal spillages of becoming no body in Alzheimer's, Mija deterritorializes herself in becoming Agnes, a no nody: experiencing her own body in

perpetual affections, in Agnes' school, in the classroom where she is raped, in her home, in conversations with her mother, by the river where she commits suicide. In such a way, Mija is not who she was: she is in every moment anew; she is becoming a writing body, a body of poet who sees things, who sees things through the rhizomatic body she forms with Agnes'. Therefore, the poem is not written by her body: it is a schizophrenic piece of writing through two bodies. It is authored by two, written about two: in the poem, two bodies neglected by other bodies, two bodies eventually become no bodies (they both die in the end) reterritorialize themselves in the poem. Does such a schizophrenic writing process disrupts the vegetal articulation Irigaray so much criticized about?

Language forever close to a vegetal blossoming. Designed and shaped to remain linked to natural rhythms and configurations? A reflexion, whether symmetrical or not, inscribed in the vegetal before any subjective mirror has been imposed, interposed. (Irigaray 1993: 139)

Irigaray is right in pointing out a circulate movement in articulation since what can be said is already actualized and have been said before. But language is not a transcendental system existing in itself, it relates to the speaking body. Language creates the unitary subject, who in utterance re-affirms the existing structure of language. What if the subject is an ill-constituted one in language, the rebellious child from the rationalized and unitary speaking I? What if the utterance is stemmed from the body, the perception, instead of the system of reason? And what if the speaking body is not one, but two? In her account of perception, what Irigaray seemed to detest is a kind of disembodied language:

To perceive – is this usual dimension of the feminine? Of women, who, it seems, remain within perception without need of name or concept. without closure. To remain within perception means staying out in the open, always attuned to the outside, to the world. Senses always alert. Does woman

sometimes cleave to the universe? Without necessarily being shared between two brightness, two nights. To perceive, to remain within the perception of the world without closing it off or closing off the self. amounts to forming or watching over the threshold of the world. Changing in response to the era, to place, to time. And the hardest thing would be to constitute a memory in the space where man at times closes himself off inside a pathos of memory, inside a nostalgia that forgets the threshold, the flesh.

Irigaray didn't simply argue against language in general, but the language which western men have been created in alienation from the body, a neat, rationalized, and unambiguous language – the language that wards the closed self. When the self is in the first place unclosed, embodied and trans-bodily, she or he doesn't speak the collective language, but a kind of private language for the speaking body is achieved a level of privatization:

The body has been increasingly “privatized”, no longer living its forces collectively or intensively. Instead of the phallus being a collective totem, capable of generating the powerful spectacle of a tribal body moving in rhythmic pulsations, ears all responding to the beating tempo, the body has become folded in on itself. (Coleman 2011: 11-12)

In *Poetry*, what has been showed, in the schizophrenic experience of writing, is a creative outcome of utterance and articulation, the privatization of language. Therefore, the process of deterritorialization and reterritorialization in the course of writing, reveals the positive and creative outcome of the affected body, and also brings out the actualized, border-crossing becoming. The Alzheimer's body is not just a body of deficiency, a negatively defined schizophrenic body: the Alzheimer's cracks open the rationalized and unitary subjectivity which is organized by the society, and in a way intensifies bodily experiences in the constitution of one's subjectivity. The

Alzheimer's body is a concrete example of the affective body and the Alzheimer's experience a visualized example of the creative outcome if one let himself or herself be affected by others, if one sees in his or her relations the possibilities of border-crossing becoming instead of subject-object dichotomy.



## **4. Conclusions**

In the first chapter, which is devoted to a theoretical mapping of the concepts of the body in western philosophy, I talk about the phenomenological concept of the body-as-lived-by-me, and the Spinozist notion of the affected body. Both of them move beyond Cartesian dualism and maintain that the body is fundamentally unknown. For phenomenology, the body is a scientifically and culturally irreducible whole, neither a mere organism nor a cultural artifact. A body is what it is insofar as it is lived by me: phenomenology emphasizes on the primacy of lived experience and the absolute openness of any theorizations about the body. Spinoza would agree with phenomenology that any theory of the body is subjected to modification. From the perspective of physics, he sees the body not in block, but in the form of physical energy of motion and rest: the Spinozist body is the affected body, defined by ensemble of its relations. Body knows itself from the constant and contingent encounters with other bodies.

In the second part of the first chapter, I deal with a contextual discussion of what the body is perceived in Confucian culture. I start with a brief introduction of an important social materiality where Confucian culture emerges – the agriculture-family. Its incredible sustainability throughout Chinese history influences the static, consistent and enduring nature of Confucian culture. Within such a culture, the body, on the one hand, is perceived as fluidity which is composed of the fluid material called *qi*. According to Chinese cosmology, *qi* is the constituent material for everything within the universe. Such a cosmological view influences the Confucian notion of human ontology as a process: the ultimate goal of human beings is to transcend their selfness and identify with the universe. Such an ontological viewpoint is expressed in the Chinese figurative paintings which lack representations of female nakedness as well as nude. On the other hand, the notion of body fluidity and the Confucian ontology of human being, conditions the Confucian social ideal of the hierarchical social order established by setting up boundaries among bodies in terms of their functions. I briefly talk about the functional meaning of *funu* in the Confucian kinship system and its difference from the western notion of *nuxing* which is relevant

the female morphology.

In the second chapter, I discuss three kinds of situated becomings of bodies in *Poetry*: the female naked body becoming abject in the camera; an elderly, male, impotent body becoming men in penetration; and an Alzheimer's body becoming no body in disease and in schizophrenic writing. I talk about the social, cultural, relational and individual materialities that condition the ways in which those bodies become, in the temporal sense, who they are. The naked, aging, female body becomes an abject because of the concreteness and inferior connotation of the naked body which contradicts with the symbolic meaning of female, aging body in Confucian culture. Since the symbolic meaning of clothed female body is fundamental in the establishment of Confucian culture, such a becoming of abject reflects the social insecurity about erasing cultural boundaries. The becoming men of the elderly, impotent, male body is conditioned by the falling of becoming one with the universe in Confucian culture, and an ambiguous state of being as his body is dislocated in the traditionally women's space.

The symbolic role of the aging body in Confucian culture makes the nakedness of the aging female body an abject, not visually, but in the symbolic meaning it carries – a sign of the old boundary in decomposition. Regarding the elderly man who seeks for becoming a man again, the becoming men of the elderly man is not to be understood as he returns to the primitive state of his bodily desire, but as the bodily drive as well as strive for a certainty of his body. The becoming no body of Mija in Alzheimer's is the bodily materiality for her schizophrenic writing. Alzheimer's disrupts the continuous and unitary bodily experience and creates perpetual spillages between one temporal state of being to another. Becoming no body is the interiority of the in-between space. With respect to the schizophrenic writing process, becoming no body reveals the rhizomatic formation as Mija deterritorializes herself in living the space of Agnes' to become a writing body. Therefore, the poem is authored by two as well as about two, a piece of schizophrenic and creative writing, which does not only

show the positive aspect of the Alzheimer's experiences but also the creative outcome of living one's body as the affective body.

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