

TRANS- HUMANITIES

**Title : Identity, Performative Subjectivity, and the Politics of
Disidentification**

Author(s) : SHIM Bo-Seon

Source : *Trans-Humanities*, Vol. 5 No. 1 (2012), pp. 89-108

Published by : Ewha Womans University Press

URL : <http://eiheng.ewha.ac.kr/page.asp?pageid=book10&pagenum=060600>

Online ISSN : 2383-9899

All articles in *Trans-Humanities* are linked to the Homepage of KCI and
Ewha Institute for the Humanities and can be downloaded:

www.kci.go.kr & <http://www.trans-humanities.org/>



이화여자대학교
EWHHA WOMANS UNIVERSITY

Identity, Performative Subjectivity, and the Politics of Disidentification

Bo-Seon Shim (Kyung Hee Cyber University)

I. The Possibility and Impossibility of Identity Politics

One must be cautious when using the term, identity politics, in a thesis or in academic society presentations in Korea. Above all, this term sounds foreign or, to be accurate, Western. This kind of impression cannot be seen as just a misunderstanding as the term of identity politics in the West was introduced in a historical experience intrinsic to the West called the new social movement of the 1960s-70s. That is, the term identity politics was being used to indicate a new collective action based, not on the class category of the traditional labor movement, but on the categories of race and gender. Ultimately, for the term of identity politics to have effect, the historical fact or a change in the purpose, characteristics, and strategy of collective action as well as the academic and practical interest, which tries to analyze and predict this action through an appropriate concept and terminology, must exist. Then, the problem lies in how much the concept of identity politics is legitimate and appropriate, in light of Korean history and academic and practical interest.

Identity politics is, on the other hand, closely related with the term politics of recognition (Taylor, 1992). Here, politics of recognition indicates the struggle and negotiation surrounding the demand for a certain race or ethnic group's cultural recognition unlike the politics of redistribution, which indicates the struggle and negotiation between groups for their political or economic share (Ibid. 36). Politics of recognition takes issue with the inequality of social dignity accompanying cultural status rather than income inequality. The purpose of the politics of recognition can be said to be the redistribution of income or solving poverty, the restoration of oppressed identity rather than the restructuring of labor division, recognizing diversity, and the readjusting of cultural value, etc. Here, we can assume that it is when the recognition of cultural legitimacy rather than the distribution of income

or power becomes a very central issue in the survival of collective life that identity politics or politics of recognition begins to operate.

The struggle and negotiation that identity politics or politics of recognition performs is closely related with the characteristics of the nation. Omi and Winant comprehends the governmental techniques of the modern nation characterized by racial diversity through the term 'racial state.' Here, the function of the racial state is to produce or reproduce a racial order within a certain historical period (77-91). This is more so in cases where the nation can control the struggles for recognition by racial groups through distribution of resources and legal regulation. Sustaining or changing the existing racial order by interacting with the civil society, the racial state (re)produces social order through racial categories. Here, we can see that identity politics is the outcome of the dynamics between the state and society, that is, the state's response to and the management of the identity categories that are produced and operated by society.

Social constructionism argues that the category of identity is socially constructed through interacting with collective action, cultural structure, and the nation's governmental techniques and schemes. Social constructionism distances itself from so-called primordialism, which defines identity as the continuous sense of belonging that is innately produced without choice. For example, Social Movement Theory, which takes social constructionism as its theoretical source, understands collective identity not as the fixed category that is given a priori or determined by an objective condition, but as an analytical frame that endows an effective legitimacy on collective action. (Taylor and Whittier, 1992; Gamson and Modigliani, 1989). Of course, the frame here cannot be produced by anyone or in any way. The range and limit of this frame depends on the degree of 'resource-ability,' that is, the material, human, and symbolic resources which are given to actors (Edwards and McCarthy 2004, 630). To summarize, identity can be conceptualized as a category which socially constructs and reconstructs given conditions—state, society, and resources—and the interaction between these conditions and the symbolic capacity to influence these conditions.

According to the above definition, whether identity politics is successful or not can generally be based on the concept of 'effect.' That is, by evaluating how much identity is recognized by people as a legitimate and convincing category, how well identity functions as to attract collective action that leads to participation and mobilization, how much influence practice and discourse

based on identity have on social practice and national reign, it is possible to evaluate the success of identity politics. According to such a causal model, which can be called the effective theory, the influence of identity politics in Korea can only be considered very insignificant. This is why certain unfamiliarity is inevitable when discussing identity politics in Korea. The reason is that such effect models focus on the visible movement and effect that identity politics produces within the given political and social body. For example, it is correct to view that, according to the above effect model, the request for recognition by immigrant groups in Korea has actually reaped no particular success. Shim defines Korean multicultural policy as a 'paternalist' policy lead by the state. Based on basic paternalist policies, the state selectively makes partnerships with immigrant groups to exclude radical immigrant labor movements (Shim, 2007). Song also claims that the immigrant laborers' autonomous communities only perform self-help activities within and cannot elicit organized solidarity (Song, 2006). According to them, the state's exclusive mechanism and the low degree of immigrant groups' systemization work to limit the identity politics. Following Brubaker's argument, the Korean immigrant groups' current state is that while groups exist, their 'groupness' is very weak. According to Brubaker, a group cannot achieve groupness through only sharing interests. That is, it cannot have "a sense of belonging of emotional solidarity that is differentiated from those of other groups." Groupness can only be formed and shared by a communality that is powerfully imagined and felt, and this communality is formed through discursive frames, systematic practice, perceptive systems, institutional frames, and political practice that work under the given structural and institutional conditions. (Brubaker 7-28)

Thus, the reason why the possibility of identity politics is limited in Korea is because the legitimacy and effect that the category of identity has within Korean social structures is limited. Ultimately, if we define identity politics as the function of the relationships between the social conditions and the actor's capacity to change social conditions, we can only imagine politics within social structures. By taking such a structural perspective to the extreme, Bourdieu recognizes the state as not simply an authority but a certain symbolic sovereign (1999, 68). That is, the state can assert power by offering, not only rule and control over information and resources, but definitions and solutions to social problems and agendas. Bourdieu calls such power the state's symbolic capital and claims the following:

By framing practice, the state establishes and indoctrinates forms for classifying and common categories and forms for perception, understanding, and memory. By doing so, the state creates conditions that make the harmony of habitus possible. It is also here that habitus forms the central bases for deriving agreement on the factors that constitutes (national) common sense. (Bourdieu 1999, 68)

It is the state, or the hidden sovereign, which produces, distributes, and manages identity, common sense, and perceptual categories. The schemes that we all commonly apply to practice is established and indoctrinated by the state. Sociologists perceive structure as not only constraining but also a condition enabling the actor with power. Class struggle and reproduction of class are two sides of the coin. Political struggles do take place but are shaped by and reproduce social or political bodies. From this perspective, identity politics can only be effective when produced within the structure and operated through the identity category. Actors not only identify themselves with such identity categories, but also resist against ruling structures by using such identities as weapons. Actors are bodies, which are members of a huge body called structure. Bodies are members resisting against the total body, which they are subjugated to; this is the essence and contradiction of politics.

II. The Possibility and Impossibility of Performative Subjectivity

To solve the essential contradiction of politics, which structural approaches expose and to enable actors with more power and autonomy as to increase the possibility of politics, social scientists painstakingly try to discover alternative theories and hidden cases. Such labor leads to efforts to redefine identity. Somers offering the concept of narrative identity, claims that identity is “formed within competitive and patterned relational setting existing between narratives, people, and institutions” (626). Such concepts can be connected to Swidler’s definition of culture as a toolkit. In other words, identity is expressed and asserted through available resources selected from “the tool kit of symbols, stories, rituals, and world views” (Swidler 273). According to Somers and Swidler, identity is not a given category but a narrative available to actors. Of course, this narrative can be an ideology that is formed and legitimated by the dominant social order. However, when this ideology is given to the actor’s stage of life, it no longer controls the actor’s unconsciousness.

Here, on top of the actor's hand, ideology loses its oppressing burden and transfers into makeup tools, props, and lines which can decorate and adorn the actor's life.

Here, I will focus on Butler's concept of performative subjectivity. According to Butler, gender identity, as asserted in identity politics, is not a category that reflects the subject actually but a drama realized by performative acts. That is, what might look coherent and smooth on the surface is in reality an act called gender identity. "As in other conventional social dramas, the practice of gender requires repeated performance. This repetition is the restaging and at the same time, the re-experiencing of a series of meanings established by society. Also, this legitimates such meanings in secular and ritual ways" (Butler 1999, 178). According to Butler, as social identity always depends on the conventional repetition that the actor theatrically performs, the dominating social norm is exposed to the possibility of being subverted anytime in every social relationship. Butler discovers cases of performative subjectivity that overcome the categorical identity of identity politics in the queer movement (Ibid. 122). The queer movement rejects the drama made up of existing categories of identity and stages a new drama that sets a new identity, this is, the queer identity as its protagonist that deconstructs and reconstructs those categories.

By focusing the microscopic basis of the macroscopic social structure on the actor's performative action, the theory of performative subjectivity comprehends social structures as essentially being weak and changeable. Here, we need to focus on the artificiality that the term 'performative' has. According to Durkheim, collective solidarity is reinforced and reproduced through the actor's participation in religious rituals. However, using examples from premodern primitive religions to illustrate, he claims that the reproduction of social structure depends on collective effervescence (Durkheim, 1957). There is a significant difference between Durkheim's and Butler's discussion of the ritual. While subjectivity merges into the collective body in the premodern collective effervescence asserted by Durkheim, in Butler's modern concept of performance, an individual's subjectivity does not merge into the collective body. Contrary to premodern times, the collective body is rather dependent on the body of its members in modern times. In addition, because of this very point, the collective body cannot ever attain stability. This is because the bodies of modern members are essentially aware that they themselves are performers of a drama. Contrary to the cultural dopes of the

premodern society who were subjugated to collective rules and norms that Durkheim had described, modern people are clearly conscious of elaborate and sophisticated performance and do not relinquish from it.

In short, when considering the actor in the perspective of performance, for modern people to become a subject is not the unconscious effect of ideological interpellation. This is not to say that subjectivity becomes established through rational calculation and choice. In reality, performance may not bring tangible profit. In Dostoevsky's *Brothers Karamazov*, there is a description relating that performance had become a trend throughout Russia, and even when the performance brought harm rather than profit to the performer, it was nonetheless maintained.

I knew a young lady of the "romantic" generation before the last who after some years of an enigmatic passion for a gentleman, whom she might quite easily have married at any moment, invented insuperable obstacles to their union, and ended by throwing herself one stormy night into a rather deep and rapid river from a high bank, almost a precipice, and so perished, entirely to satisfy her own caprice, and to be like Shakespeare's Ophelia. Indeed, if this precipice, a chosen and favorite spot of hers, had been less picturesque, if there had been a prosaic flat bank in its place, most likely the suicide would never have taken place. This is a fact, and probably there have been not a few similar instances in the last two or three generations of our Russian life. (*Brothers Karamazov* 2-3)

The term 'romantic suicide' that Dostoevsky presents needs special attention. According to Durkheim, there are two forms of modern suicide. The first is egoistic suicide which occurs when social integration fails and one cannot bear carrying the burden of living one's own life by oneself. The second type is the anomic suicide which occurs when an individual falls into a sense of loss and confusion due to the lack of social norms. In both cases, an individual's falling out from the integration and control of social order will lead to suicide (Durkheim, 1979). However, as 'romantic suicide' is added onto the forms of modern suicide described by Durkheim, it questions the perspective of considering social order as social integration and regulation. In romantic suicide, an individual is outside the integration and regulation of social order but performs one's role according to a drama, in this case the romantic tragedy. Also, this drama is social resource available and accessible to actors. The social order referred to here cannot be restored by integrating

and regulating an individual. Social order must offer a more attractive drama to the individual to demonstrate its influence. Therefore, we can consider that there are many different types of dramas in our society and social order can be seen as the outcome of competitions among these dramas.

The perspective of viewing performativity as the microscopic basis of social order has been sufficiently expressed through the concepts of Goffman's impression management (Goffman, 1959) and Garfinkel's ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1967). Butler does not cease at just settling the contradiction of the "overly socialized" subject, that is the question of how members of the great body called society can possess autonomy. She develops the existing concept of performativity politically. According to the performativity concept, social order depends on the member's act of performance, and, thus, social order is essentially neither stable nor continuous. It is at this point that the performative subject perceives the essential weakness of social order and is reborn as a new political subject imploding social order. However, the perspective of looking upon the modern actor as a performative subject and modern social order as being maintained and transformed dependent on the performative subject's performance includes a tragic outlook of the world itself. According to this tragic view of the world, the development of modern society is a process of destroying the community and individualization. Therefore, the politics of the performative subject do not go against such a process of modern society itself, restoring new social relations or new communities. This only puts forth another drama that criticizes and deconstructs the dominant drama.

In short, the slogan, "Everything is but a drama!" is always hung beside the slogan, "Community is impossible!" Bauman asserts that the stable and continuous social relation of community is impossible in the liquid modernity and if it does exist, it can only exist as a refuge for the social weak or a periodic network for people of similar taste (39-49). In this sense, community is just another social drama or an alternative drama for people who cannot put on a drama. Presenting the concept "symbolic ethnicity," Gans asserts that ethnicity no longer operates as the source of collective life and culture in present day America and only offers a drama that individuals can adopt when they feel the need (1-20). While ethnicity endows a person with pride of one's cultural assets and tradition, it does not control or structure collective life. That is, ethnicity is applicable to only festivals, food culture, or lifestyles. Moreover, not all ethnic groups can afford such symbolic leisure. In contrast

to Italians, Puerto Ricans are ethnically classified by social prejudice as blacks regardless of their intention. Also, it might be advantageous for the Puerto Ricans themselves to belong to the black category than their Puerto Rican ethnic category to face social prejudice. In a situation where community is impossible, all subjects become performers and all identity is a drama, and the only crucial thing that politics can do is to offer an alternative drama to the dominant one, we come to face a similar dilemma as identity-politics. How can people who don't possess the symbolic resources to make a drama, perform politics? Let's suppose that individuals who possess creative ability and resources, for example, narrative, symbols, and world outlook can perform a counter drama to the dominant drama. Then, how can those who lack available and accessible culture resources perform politics?

Bourdieu claims, "The dominant language discredits and destroys the spontaneous political discourse of the dominated. It leaves them only silence or a borrowed language" (Bourdieu 1984, 613). In the worst cases, the subjugated group cannot represent themselves and can only depend on a spokesperson, and in most cases, this spokesperson will be someone who also uses the dominant language (Ibid. 461-62). As a result, the subjugated group lacks the symbolic capital to represent their own drama, and paradoxically can only entrust their body and delegate their voice onto the dominant discourse to represent their identity and interests. We need to recall Benjamin's distinction between "the aestheticizing of politics" and "politicizing of aesthetics" (Benjamin, 2007). The aestheticizing of politics represented by totalitarianism is the typical dominant drama. Through this dominant drama, humankind experiences abuse of and wars of power as a spectacle. The counter-drama that resists against this is the politicizing of aesthetics where the subject of resistance is not the mass but the so-called avant-garde artist who "represent the interest and future of the mass." According to Bourdieu, the avant-garde artists are a subjugated faction within the dominant class and still adhere to elite status (Bourdieu, 1984). Therefore, they do not directly join the mass but just when conforming to the game regulations unique to the art field, they unite their interest with that of the mass. Here, we can perceive that the performative subjectivity which can perform the counter-drama is being unequally distributed. Performative subjectivity is structurally limited to the ability and potential endowed to individuals, which is Bourdieu's habitus, and is only a mechanism that reconfirms and reproduces the absence of the community.

III. In Search of the Possibility of the Politics of Disidentification

The following is a search for the possibility of a politics which the subjugated group lacking symbolic resources can assert. Can a politics be possible in which alienated people can represent themselves and realize a community without depending on identity categories or sophisticated drama? In answer, a famous quote from Marx:

Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living. And just when they seem engaged in revolutionizing themselves and things, in creating something that has never yet existed, precisely in such periods of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their history in this time-honored disguise and this borrowed language. (162)

In the above quote, Marx points out the limits of identity-politics, namely the contradiction of identity-politics which reproduces given categories. That is, men make history only within the circumstances that they have inherited so there is a limit where they cannot make history according to their wishes. However, in the next phrase, he points to the possibility of the performative subjectivity politics. That is, men stage new scenes in world history through “borrowed language” from the past such as “battle cries,” “costumes,” and “disguise.” However, the performative subject that Marx refers to is not the elite but the mass. Therefore, we need not see the ‘borrowed language’ he refers to as ‘contaminated language,’ that are the ideological categories, existing formulas of agreement, dramas that produce heroic performance, and symbolic capital that has become rooted in social order. Here, the borrowed language can be perceived as simple characters, appropriated texts, and scripts that anybody can reprocess. It is only at these times that the borrowed language can become liberated from the existing social weight that it had carried and offer symbols to those who lack symbolic capital, a voice to those who cannot speak, and images to those who are invisible. It is only when this happens that the borrowed language can be transferred into a language for a new community.

According to Rancière, the only power needed for such transferring is “the will to speak,” and it is only when such will is asserted that a “community

of equality” can be inserted into gaps of the unequal social order that divides power and identity (Rancière, 2008). Through the asserting of the will to speak, those who do not have symbolic capital, a voice, or a share continuously transfers the discourse that only the elite possessed and had access to, into a declaration that all can access. In this declaration that repeats itself, those who do not have a voice or a share can create a new drama that is not already regulated and delineated by experts or the elite but they themselves can regulate and delineate. Moreover, the new drama can deconstruct/disidentify the existing identity that was imposed by legal, economical, political order. In this new drama, the mass is not the representing agency of a certain interest or identity, nor an abstract citizen under the rights and duties defined by law, nor an owner of property allotted by the market according to position and ability. This is because according to the identity, interest, rights and duties, and position and ability that existing social order has determined, the mass is unable to speak nor to be seen. It is only when they break away from the given category or ability that their voice can be heard or their share be counted. The borrowed language of ‘share,’ ‘rights,’ or ‘identity’ are unique words in this sense and a unique way of counting. This is the speech of one who cannot speak and the counting of one’s share by one who doesn’t own a share. This process of making an equal community is in this sense a ‘disidentification’ drama created and performed collectively by those who, having no share, assert their “will to speak, the will to seek their share.” Marx discovered from the mass during the French Revolution that such “community of equal people occasionally discover a way to repeatedly imprint their effect upon the social body in the movement of a re-staged event or re-directed script” (Ibid. 184). The following are several specific cases of the politics of disidentification performed by those with no share and the equal community that is projected by it.

1) The Yongsan Demonstration: Seoul, South Korea

In January 2009, on top of the Namildang building situated at Yongsan-Gu, 2nd Hanganro where redevelopment was underway as a part of the Urban Renewal Project, there was a collision between the police, hired service, and the tenants and members of the National Council of Center to Victims of Forced Evictions (NCCV) who had been demonstrating through a sit-in

against forced demolition. During the suppression process by the police and hired service, a fire broke out at the Namildang building, taking the lives of five homeless victims and one special force police officer. Instead of holding the police and hired service responsible, the court and the prosecution sentenced the homeless victims as guilty. The victims' family, the Catholic Priests Association for Justice, artists, the general public, university students, and activists joined together requesting a revealing of truth and went into an extensive sit-in on the premises of the Yongsan tragedy from January 2009 to December 2010.

The most symbolic slogan of the Yongsan Struggle is 'people are here.' This slogan connotes a resistance against the economic and legal gaze of public opinion lead by the conservative press on the situation. That is, against the dominant narrative that defined the situation as a conflict between economic interests or the clash between the illegal and legal, the slogan, 'people are here' defined the space of Yongsan as an arena of a political struggle rendering human rights and democracy as the issue. The perspective of framing the Yongsan Tragedy in the economic and legal view clearly contrasts with the framing of Former South Korean President Noh Muhyun's suicide as a tragic drama. The former president's suicide was represented as the pursuit, adventure, frustration, and death of a heroic human. The reason why many people's, especially those of the 386 generation or those born in the 1960s, psychological identifying was triggered was because of the heroic drama characteristics that his death represented. On the other hand, those who looked upon the death of the Yongsan evicted tenants as the result of an illegal riot to get a share of profits, did not try to find any value, significance, or symbolic meaning from their deaths. Therefore, the 'borrowed slogan' of 'people are here,' functioned to deconstruct/de-identify the given categorical identity of the evicted tenants as an economic and legal subject, transferring it as the assertion of the universal man's universal rights. Through this slogan, the Yongsan Struggle could insert the equal community's space within social order. The purpose for struggle of all those who had participated in the Yongsan sit-in was for the revealing of the truth, the restoration of honor, and the recognition of human rights. What is more, the compensation that the evicted tenants requested did not even follow the calculation restoring their violated economic rights. It did not even follow the calculation for compensating victims of illegal violence. The assertion of compensation followed the

calculation method of ‘justice,’ confirming that the life-staking struggle of the tenants, people without a share, is found to be innocent and legitimate and that the offence actually lies with the state and capital.

2) The Multicultural Festival: South Korea

“The South-Asian New Year’s Day Festival” was held at Nokchon Elementary School situated at Masuk Furniture Complex. According to the Bengal calendar established by the Akbal Emperor of the Mogul Empire, New Year’s Day fell on April 14. The Bangladesh, Indian, Sri-Lankan, Nepalese, Myanmar communities gathered to hold a festival celebrating the New Year’s Day. Under colorful flags of all nations, migrant laborers working in South Korea played games similar to those found at any social outdoor event. On one side, traditional South-Asian food and drinks were made on the spot and offered. After the games, a performance was held. One of the invited singers was a Mongolian laborer who works at a factory producing cup-ramyeon bowls or cup noodles. He had been one of the top finalists at a national migrants singing contest, and a talented singer who had even sang in the “A Great Birth” music program on TV. He told this author that he was very busy writing his own songs, performing at events, and working in the factory but very happy that he was able to lead a life of music, something which he loves. Dancers and singers from other countries continued their dance and singing performances. At first, the audience seemed timid but later on they got the hang of the music and came to the middle and started to dance. When a pretty female dancer came out, Korean men, Bangladesh men, and Nepalese men all cheered without exception. A friend would pull out another, and parents would pull out their children, creating a big party of dance and songs.

In terms of the degree of perfection, this festival was extremely amateurish without any introduction, development, turn, or conclusion. Like a collage, they had made a mishmash of various cultures. The symbols, gestures, costumes, and songs were disorderedly. Without any dominant common language controlling the whole festival, moments of dialog were unsystematically lined up. The immigrants responded to the foreign culture’s repertoires with their own cultural repertoires. In this way, people lacking cultural assets or narrative capacity to have their own identity legally or culturally recognized in Korea created an amazing hybrid community. The emcee hosted the cere-

mony in Korean. Was Korean an effective discourse to deliver the dominant ideology? No, it was not. The Korean language only served as needlework; holding the symbols together. The last performance was of a Korean band's fusion of traditional music. When their performance was over, the audience began shouting, 'encore,' 'one more,' and '한 번 더' (*han-bun-duh* or 'once more' in Korean). Then when someone suddenly cried out 'Arirang!', a traditional Korean folksong, everyone started to chant 'Arirang! Arirang! Arirang!' As the singer started to sing Arirang, the migrant laborers started to sing along, accompanying it with their own country's dance. To them, Arirang is not a song representing Korea but just a song that everyone knows and likes; the perfect song to wrap up the festival. As soon as the festival ended, the Bangladesh migrant laborer in charge of the ceremonies came up to the stage for a brief address and said that the immigrants of the Masuk Furniture Complex were like 'frogs of the valley.' He said that these frogs all had been to the ocean at least once. The immigrant laborers are frogs. They are subjects without any qualifications. However, they had summoned the common memory of the ocean, an empty memory without a substance, and by disidentifying from the migrant laborer identity, one that Korean society had endowed them with, they have made a certain unfamiliar allegorical community.

3) The Example of the Ignorant Poet: South Korea

Poetry written by elderly women who were once illiterate but learned to write in their 70s deserves exploration. These amateur poets did not receive higher education, have lived all their lives in North Chungchung Province, have farmed in Eumsung for a living, and are currently learning to write poetry at the Eumsung Welfare Center for the Elderly.¹ Their poems are dubbed "becoming an ignorant poet." The term "ignorant poet" was borrowed from the following poem.

-
1. I learned about the two elderly women's poetry and life through Haeyoon Jung's 『그런 뒤에야 해피 뉴이어!』 [*After That, Happy New Year!*] <<http://hook.hani.co.kr/archives/19299>>. Haeyoon Jung wrote her essay based on the radio documentary "인생이 시다" ["Life Is Sour"] that she had produced and made interviews for. (31 Dec. 2010. CBS Broadcasting)

Not everyone can write a poem
It is the learned that can recite a poem
Someone who doesn't know one's ABC
Holding a piece of white paper
Just one pencil
Such venturing is absurd
It is like the bee and butterfly in the flower garden
Both do not get the honey
While the bees get a big bundle
The butterfly doesn't get any
Just kisses the flower and flies away with nothing
Even the blue dragon flies up to the sky from the sea
As he cannot rise from the dry sand
To not have learned is a sin
However I try to follow
However I try to write
Later
I write a poem, a poem
Much worse than those by the learned

(Chungja Han "The Ignorant Poet" in *If Bees and Butterflies Fly Over, There Will Be Fruits*, Sikalgol Literary Society 2010 full text)

How does the above poem perform the politics of people without a share? The first line "Not everyone can write a poem/ It is the learned that can recite a poem" confirms a social order of inequality between the body that can speak, that is, those who possess symbolic capital and the body that cannot speak, those lacking symbolic capital. In addition, the last lines "However I try to follow/ However I try to write/ Later/ I write a poem, a poem/ Much worse than those by the learned" affirms that the ignorant cannot in the end escape from ignorance. Then, is this poem no more than the sad confession of an elderly illiterate? If so, who's sensibility has the capacity to imagine the fictional words of "one's ABC" or fictional places such as the "flower garden," "the sea," and "dry sand," or fictional animals such as "the bee," "the butterfly," and "blue dragon," to create a fictional story from all these elements? It is the 'ignorant poet' who appears in the poem. The ignorant poet deconstructs the order of the dominant discourse expressed in the Wittgenstein contract, "say only what you can say, and don't say what you cannot" to settle between 'the writing self (the ignorant self)' and 'the speaking self (the poet),' and is the other who "makes one say

something one cannot say.” This figure of the ignorant poet/ the other also appears in Myungjae Lee who was once illiterate but began to write poems as had Chungja Han.

My life is of the open-eyed blind
To be born into the world and not know how to write
What a funny thing it is
All the corners of my heart, full of words I want to say,
Seem to rise and swell
To live and to reflect
So many joyous things
Also, there had been so many sorrowful things
So
I want to say something
So many words I have overflowing
But an open-eyed blind is who I am
The struggle of things compassionate I cannot express in words
Today I look and inscribe
The traces of yesterday I write down in words
But I still do not know anything to do so
Except that the tip of my pencil is dull

(Myungjae Lee “The Tip of My Pencil is Dull” in *If Bees and Butterflies Fly Over, There Will Be Fruits*, Sikalgol Literary Society 2010 full text)

Myungjae Lee confesses her own pitiable “open-eyed blind” (illiterate) inability as had Chungja Han. However, in this poem also the ignorant poet makes the illiterate speak out the “heart, full of words to say” through “many words overflowing,” what Rancière expressed as “the excess of words,” “talkative words.” The expression “the struggle of things compassionate I cannot express in words” recalls Escher’s etching of “The Drawing Hand.” However, the poem’s expression differs from Escher’s picture in that of the two pencils, one has a dull end and the other has a sharp one. The ignorant poet asserts a will and capacity to write poetry unceasingly rotating between two pencils, the dull pencil of the illiterate and a sharp one, him/herself practicing the unique speaking which is “the struggle of things compassionate.”

Like the examples above, the ignorant poet unifies the body which cannot speak (not learned, the illiterate) and the body that can (poet), creating a new subject which disidentify the identity that social order has imposed, and re-divides the existing dominant dividing line. Therefore, the

ignorant poet is not a positive term that refers to those who go from breaking free of being an illiterate to writing poetry. It is neither a semiotic 'noun' composed of contradiction. Operating critical thoughts about the misery of the world that had bound them and voicing it out, the ignorant poet is a 'verb' of the communal body that is breaking free from the misery. The ignorant poet repeatedly declares through writing poetry not only the prerequisite that whether learned or not, literate or not, everyone has and can assert the will and the sensibility to speak, but also the image of the equal community connected through that prerequisite.

IV. Conclusion

This essay has critically explored identity politics and the politics of performative subjectivity and offered the politics of disidentification as a possible alternative. The fundamental dilemma of identity politics and the politics of performative subjectivity is as the following: A dilemma is brought about when politics cannot but rely on categories rooted in dominant order and when it takes on a dramatic form as a symbolic capital permitted to individuals. Here, as the possibility of politics is endowed though the categories and resources that is offered by social order, ultimately an equal community which goes against existing social order cannot be realized. It is asserted that the limits of identity politics and the politics of performative subjectivity can be overcome through the politics of disidentification proposed by Rancière. The politics of disidentification is the struggle of the subjugated group, which has been classified by dominant categories and accordingly has been stripped of capital, trying to reveal their voice and secure their share. By asserting their will to speak and taking over existing discourse through new ways of speaking and calculating, they ultimately perform the politics of creating a new community. In this sense, the politics of disidentification differs from identity-politics which depends on the identity that social order imposes, and also differs from the politics of performative subjectivity which relies on counter-communal performative ability and drama staging ability.

The examples offered in this essay bear witness to the possibility of the politics of disidentification which creates a voice and a share for the new equal community as the voiceless and share-less people repeat and restage the

existing discourse system of 'human rights' (The Yongsan Demonstration), 'culture' (The Multicultural Festival), and 'literature' (The Ignorant Poet) into a certain character, repertory, text, and declaration. According to Rancière, the politics of disidentification here does not follow the de-centering postmodern logic, which simply deconstructs and negates identity. By resisting existing identity and at the same time, accepting an identity that cannot be categorized nor capitalized, that is, the accepting of the other's situation, the politics of disidentification achieves the figure of the new political subject. "What started to put the political subjectivity of the 'laborer' or 'proletariat' into action was the disjunction of political subjectivity and social group. This disjunction goes through an accommodation of the other's position. By going through an accommodation, the subject such as the 'laborer' or 'proletariat' can separate him/herself from the subjectivity of a social group fighting its interest against other groups and become a figure of citizenship" (Rancière 229). In the case of the Yongsan struggle, it is the evicted tenants who create human rights, in the case of the multicultural festival, it is the migrants that invent a communicative culture, and in the case of the ignorant poet, it is the illiterate who create a literary sensibility. These three represent the positions of the other that we need to accommodate. It is only when we accommodate these positions of the other that we can transfer what we have up to now regarded as the so-called general and legitimate discourses, laws, and symbols into democratic texts in the true sense of the word. It is then that discourses, laws, and symbols can be freed from their bind to social order as forms of dominant categories and symbolic capital, to be transferred into performative language for a new political subjectivity. We can then say "Yes! But that is not all!" to the claims that in Korea, identity politics is impossible considering national and social characteristics, and that the struggle of minorities, migrants, and the socially disadvantaged is impossible without the help of intellectuals and politicians.

Works Cited

- Bauman, Zygmunt. *Community: Seeking Safety in an Insecure World*. Cambridge: Polity, 2001.
- Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*. Trans. Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken, 1969.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Trans. R. Nice. London: Routledge, 1984.
- . “Rethinking the State: Genesis and Structure of the Bureaucratic Field.” *State/Culture: State-Formation after the Cultural Turn*. Ed. George Steinmetz. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999. 53-75.
- Brubaker, Roger. *Ethnicity without Groups*. Boston: Harvard University Press, 2004.
- Butler, Judith. *Bodies that Matter. On the Discursive Limits of Sex*. London: Routledge, 1993.
- . *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1999.
- Dostoevsky, Fyodor. *The Brothers Karamazov*. Trans. Constance Garnett. Ed. Ralph E. Matlaw. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1976.
- Durkheim, Emile. *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. Trans. Joseph Ward Swain. London: Allen & Unwin, 1957.
- . *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*. Trans. John A. Spaulding and George Simpson. New York: Macmillan, 1979.
- Edwards, Bob, and John D. McCarthy. “Strategy Matters: The Contingent Value of Social Capital in the Survival of Local Social Movement Organizations.” *Social Forces* 83.2 (2004): 621-52.
- Gamson, W.A., and A. Modigliani. “Media Discourse and Public Opinion: A Constructionist Approach.” *American Journal of Sociology* 95.1 (1989): 1-37.
- Gans, Herbert J. “Symbolic Ethnicity: The Future of Ethnic Groups and Cultures in America.” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 2 (1979): 1-20.
- Garfinkel, Harold. *Studies in Ethnomethodology*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1967.
- Goffman, Erving. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Garden City: Doubleday, 1959.
- Han, Chungja. 「무식한 시인」[“The Ignorant Poet”]. 『별 나비 날아들면 열매 맺는

- 다』[*If Bees and Butterflies Fly Over, There Will Be Fruits*]. Sikalgol Literary Society, 2010.
- Lee, Myungjae. 「연필 끝이 무디다」[“The Tip of My Pencil is Dull”]. 『벌 나비 날아들면 열매 맺는다』[*If Bees and Butterflies Fly Over, There Will Be Fruits*]. Sikalgol Literary Society, 2010.
- Marx, Karl. *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. New York: International Publishers, 1963.
- Omi, Michael, and Howard Winant. *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Rancière, Jacque. *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*. Trans. Yang Changryul. Seoul: Gungri, 2008.
- Shim, Bo-Seon. “Formation and Transformation of Migrant Worker Policy —Analysis of Multicultural Policy in Korea.” *Discourse 201* 10.2 (2007): 41-76.
- Somers, Margaret R. “The Narrative Constitution of Identity: A Relational and Network Approach.” *Theory and Society* 23.5 (1994): 605-49.
- Song, Jongho. “Foreign Worker Supporting NGO’s Present Circumstances and Activities.” *Korea National Studies* 28 (2006): 29-55.
- Swidler, Ann. “Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies.” *American Sociological Review* 51.2 (1986): 273-86.
- Taylor, Charles. *Multiculturalism and “The Politics of Recognition.”* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.
- Taylor, Verta, and Nancy E. Whittier. “Collective Identity in Social Movement Communities: Lesbian Feminist Mobilization.” *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory*. Eds. Aldon Morris and Carol McClurg Mueller. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992. 104-29.

Abstract

This paper investigates the possibility of the politics of disidentification, which invents the voice and stake of the new community of equality by reinterpreting the notion of performative subjectivity. Reinterpreting the notion of performative subjectivity submitted by Judith Butler and following Jacques Rancière, It is argued that the politics of disidentification transforms the discourses, laws, and symbols treated as universal categories into democratic inscriptions, which will, in turn, operate as practical words for the political performances of the people. This paper demonstrates through three Korean examples; The Yongsan Demonstration, The Multicultural Festival, and The Ignorant Poet that the universal categories, which are in fact symbolic capital distributed according to the given social order, can be disidentified and reconstructed into practical manifestations of new identity and contribute to the creation of the community of equality.

Keywords: performative subjectivity, identity politics, politics of disidentification

Bo-Seon Shim is Professor of the Department of Culture and Arts Management, Kyung Hee Cyber University in Seoul, Korea. He received a Ph.D. degree in Sociology from Columbia University in the City of New York in 2006. His dissertation is entitled “Race and Culture in Nonprofits: The Transformation of the New York Asian American Arts Organizations, 1971-2004.” His research interests include cultural policy, cultural organizations, and cultural politics of ordinary citizens and minority groups. “Formation and Transformation of Migrant Worker Policy—Analysis of Multicultural Policy in Korea” (2007) is one of his research articles.

Submitted December 04, 2011 Reviewed January 16, 2012 Accepted January 30, 2012
