

Virtual Mothering: A Cultural Critique of the
Emergent Figure of Korean Birthmothers in Popular
Media

by

Hosu Kim

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
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Patricia Clough

Date

Chair of Examining Committee

Paul Attewell

Date

Executive Officer

Barbara Katz Rothman

Hester Eistenstein

Alexandra SeungHye Suh

Supervisory Committee

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Abstract

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Advisor: Professor Patricia T. Clough

Transnational Adoption is becoming an important form of global family formation in the U.S. and European societies. It creates relationships between sending and adoptive parties that cross national, racial, and cultural boundaries. While there is global recognition of this practice, little attention has been given to the sending parties, i.e., birthparents and the sending countries. Noting a long history of South Korea's involvement in the practice of transnational adoption as a key sending country, my dissertation examines the recent social phenomenon of the emergence of Korean birthmothers in Korean popular media, specifically television and the Internet. Central to my dissertation is an analysis of the intricate processes through which the figure of the birthmother is mediated and performed as a mother, which I call virtual mothering. Virtual mothering, which I am employing as an analytical as well as a methodological framework, illuminates the discursive and affective domain in which Korean birthmothers' motherhood is rendered intelligible. This analysis offers a critical understanding of Korea's adoption discourse with the further aim of facilitating mourning for the losses involved in this fifty-year-long practice of transnational adoption.

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	iv
Acknowledgement.....	v
Table of Contents	vi
List of Illustrations	viii
Chapter 1. Birth/Virtual Mothers	1
I. Background of Study.....	1
II. Historical Overview	4
The First Stage (1950s –1960s) : Cold War and Adoption.....	5
The Second Stage (1970s – Late 1980s): Development and Adoption.....	7
The Third Stage (1988 – the Present): Globalization and Adoption	9
III. Three Cohorts of Birthmothers.....	12
IV. The Inclusion of the Birthmother in Adoption Discourse	15
V. Emerging Figure of the Korean Birthmother	18
(1) Television Search Shows.....	21
(2) Internet Community of Birthmothers.....	22
VI. Methodology	23
Breathing One	31
Chapter 2. Television Mothers:.....	34
Lost & Found in Search and Reunion Narratives	34
I. Ach'im madang – I want to meet this person	38
II. Studio A: Naturalized Motherhood.....	39
III. Studio B: Affective Motherhood	47
IV. Studio C: Motherhood in Development.....	54
V. Melancholic Logic of Search and Reunion Narratives	61
Breathing Two.....	65
Chapter 3: The Skin of the Virtual Mother.....	69
I. Overview of ‘On The Way To Meet’	71
II. Reverberating Skin of the Virtual Mother in Ghost Child’s Scream.....	79
III. Fossilized Skin of Virtual Mother	86
IV. Crying: The Opening of Virtual Mother’s Skin	92
V. Conclusion.....	99
Breathing Three.....	102
Chapter 4. A Flickering Motherhood:	104
Korean Birthmothers’ Internet Community.....	104
I. Overview.....	107
II. Internet Community as a Theater.....	113
III. Virtual Mother’s Performing Loss.....	116
IV. Distributed Unconscious of the Virtual Mother	124
V. Conclusion.....	128
Breathing Four	130
Chapter 5. Tactile Love	131
I. Bodily Memory	134
II. Child Photographs.....	140
III. A mother’s Artwork.....	145

IV. Conclusion	151
Chapter 6: Afterwards	154
I. The implication of virtual mothering	156
II. A Shift in the Transnational Adoption Framework	161
III. Future Research	163
Appendix I.....	166
Appendix II	173
Appendix III.....	174
Bibliography	175

List of Illustrations

Figure 2.1	-----	49
Figure 3.1	-----	82
Figure 3.2	-----	88
Figure 3.3	-----	98
Figure 4.1	-----	144
Figure 5.1	-----	149

Chapter 1. Birth/Virtual Mothers

I. Background of Study

Transnational adoption is a fast-growing social phenomenon in post-industrial countries. This global practice is treated as a site where boundaries of race, family, citizenship, and motherhood are negotiated through relationships between adoptive parents, birth parents, and adoptees. However, adoption discourse is often dominated by the perspectives of adoption professionals and adoptive parents on the receiving end of transnational adoption. While there is a rapidly growing recognition of the experiences of transnational adoptees who are coming of age today, my dissertation research focuses on the figure of the birthmother in Korean popular media, e.g. television and Internet, and the long-term ramifications of transnational adoption on one of the major sending countries, South Korea.

It may be surprising that South Korea, which is no longer considered ‘third world’ or the ‘global south,’ is a major sending country for transnational adoption. South Korea currently has the world’s eleventh largest economy and holds prestigious Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) country status. In addition, the national birthrate has been so low, reaching 1.08 according to Korean national statistics in 2005, that the government has even implemented various policies to promote birthrates and encourage domestic adoption. And despite this, almost two thousand Korean babies every year are sent to new homes in the West. South Korea’s involvement in transnational adoption has been an enigma in a transnational adoption discourse that attributes the motivation to give up a baby solely to economic hardship. This enigma

begs for a careful analysis of the long history of Korea's involvement in transnational adoption practice.

Korea has been known as a key supplier of children for transnational adoptions since the Korean War (1950 – 1953). There was an absence of social welfare programs to deal with the extreme poverty that swept the country in the aftermath the Korean War. Foreign adoption practice, once considered a relief effort for war orphans, became established as a permanent social welfare program for children in need of homes. Since this period, the number of Korean children involved in transnational adoption has increased every year until the late 1980s, constituting, at its peak, almost thirty percent of all children involved in transnational adoption (Kane, 1993).

Over the past fifty years, approximately 250,000 - the largest number from a single country - Korean children have been adopted by foreign families. Three-quarters of these have come to the U.S. (*In-depth 60 minutes*, KBS, May 25, 2005; Hubinette, 2005, Hwang & Yoon, 1996; Kane 1993). The rest have been sent to homes in France, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Belgium, the Netherlands, Canada, Australia, Luxemburg, West Germany, Italy, Switzerland, England, New Zealand, Ireland, Spain and Finland. Of all adoption placements during the past fifty years in Korea, the number of children placed in foreign adoption, reaching more than 70 percent of all, far exceed the number in domestic adoption. Thus, the word 'adoption' in Korea often refers to 'foreign adoption' (해외입양)¹.

¹ It literally means 'overseas adoption'. There are several terms denoting a child's adoption from one country to another. Those are 'international adoption,' 'intercountry adoption,' 'transnational adoption,' and 'foreign adoption'. In my dissertation, I use the term, 'foreign adoption,' particularly when I am emphasizing Korea's perspective, and the term, 'transnational adoption,' when I refer to the adoption practice in general.

This long-standing and unceasing flow of children from Korea received international notoriety in 1988, as Korea was preparing for the Seoul Olympics, when U.S. and European media accused the Korean government of exporting their babies for foreign currency (Rothschild, 1988). In response, the Korean government promptly decreased the number of Korean children placed in foreign adoption. Over the past two decades, the drop in the number of Korean children placed in foreign adoption has continued and hit a low of 1,899 last year in 2006 (Ministry of Health and Welfare 2007).

This demographic shift in adoption history was followed by another critical turning point in Korea's adoption history. Since the late 1980s, when the first cohort of Korean children adopted in the 1950s and 1960s came of age, increasing numbers of adult adoptees have been visiting Korea. The Korean adoptees' 'returns' to Korea, never anticipated by the Korean government, adoption agencies, or birth parents, have brought this shadowy affair back into the realm of public controversy and revealed the once erased figure of the birthmother. Their timely visits after the international 'adoption scandal' became increasingly visible in Korea's mass media, playing a major role in shaping Korea's adoption practice over the past fifteen years.

Upon their visits, many express an interest in searching for their Korean families and use mass media to facilitate their search. Consequently, numerous television search shows have been produced over the past fifteen years to feature the stories of adoptees who search for and reunite with their birth families. Thus, the figure of the birthmother, who had never been part of either official Korean history or adoption discourse, now appears as the central, ultimate figure of this media spectacle. My dissertation aims to

examine the emergent figure of the Korean birthmother through the performance of mothering in popular media such as television shows and internet websites. Before turning my focus onto the emergent figure of the Korean birthmother, I will further draw out Korea's adoption history in an international context.

II. Historical Overview

Transnational adoption almost always involves two countries located in the global north and global south, in opposition to each other in terms of economic resources. In other words, in the discourse of transnational adoption, it is understood that children in need of homes are to be transferred from countries in the global south to homes in the global north. This requires collaborated efforts from the legislatures of two governments to deal with immigration and citizenship, partner adoption agencies, as well as two immediate parties – the birthmother and the adoptive parents. Considering the leading role that the U.S. has played in adopting Korean children for over fifty years, it is crucial to note the ways in which the U.S. has informed Korea's adoption history and practice.

I divide the history of Korea's adoption into three stages organized in terms of changing demographics and characteristics of Korean adoptees. Each stage is understood to be informed by Korea's geopolitical and socioeconomic accounts, which were heavily affected by U.S.-led hegemony. Although the demarcations I chose may be arguable, this approach allows me to situate Korea's adoption practice, which is often considered to be a private matter, in the political and socioeconomic relationship between two major sending and receiving countries.

The history of intercountry adoption is best understood in relation to the Korean War (1950 – 1953). Prior to the war, Korea was colonized by Japan for thirty-six years

(1909 - 1945); then, it was “liberated” by the U.S. and its allies at the end of World War II. Following its liberation from Japan, Korea was divided along the 38th Parallel by the U.S. and U.S.S.R. Each nation installed an occupation government in the region it controlled. This division set the stage for a Cold War face-off on the Korean peninsula, and resulted in a devastating war that still goes on today.

The First Stage (1950s –1960s) : Cold War and Adoption

The Korean War left indelible scars in the tissues of Korean society. It has left a country divided into two, north and south, for over fifty years. Three million civilians were killed. Five million were missing or wounded. Ten million people are separated from their loved ones. In addition, the Korean War created about one hundred thousand war orphans. According to the International Union for Child Welfare (1954), two million children under the age of eighteen out of five million war refugees, were displaced from their homes, and an estimated 10,000 orphans lived on the streets (Ressler, Boothby & Steinbock, 1988).

The Korean War marked the beginning of Korea’s adoption history. In response to the devastating war, many U.N. soldiers and other private citizens from the U.S. and western countries have adopted Korean children as humanitarian endeavors. In the absence of a legal framework during the war, those singular adoption activities often occurred with special permission from Presidents Harry Truman and Syngman Rhee, which required overruling the then racially based immigration law (Hubinette, 2005). In 1954, the South Korean government established the Child Placement Service (*Adongyanghohoe*) to place biracial children in foreign adoption, particularly to their father’s country, the U.S. (Chun 1989; Hurh, 1967; Mani, 1999). Several adoption

agencies, particularly Holt International Inc., founded by Harry Holt, a central figure in the history of Korean foreign adoption, developed and institutionalized the transnational adoption process.

From the cessation of the war to the 1960s, approximately 8,000 children were placed in mostly Christian families in the U.S. (Hurh, 1967; Weil, 1984; Sarri, Baek & Bombyk, 1998). Particularly until the late 1950s, the majority of children adopted were biracial children born to Korean women and U.S. GI fathers. According to official documents, biracial children at that time were categorized as disabled, suggesting a strong social stigma against 'mixed blood' in Korea. This initial stage of Korea's adoption history spanned the 1950s and 1960s, which raises the question of whether to call the children adopted during this time war orphans. Yet, many children adopted during the 1960s were still considered war orphans by adopters.

The move to place war orphans and biracial children into foreign adoption was done not only to save them from poverty, parentless-ness and social stigmatization. Ever since the war, the South Korean government has continued to emphasize the importance of national (military) security and to hold to the tenet of anti-communism. According to the prevailing "Cold War" ideology, the U.S. was portrayed as the savior of Korea, as well as its children, from the threat of communism (Briggs, 2003). Klein (2003) argues that the adoption of Asian babies after WWII was promoted by Christian missionaries and private agencies who were aligned with the foreign policy interests of the U.S. It is critical to acknowledge that, from the start, the discourse/rhetoric of humanitarian aid and a political agenda were embedded into the concept and practice of intercountry adoption.

The Second Stage (1970s – Late 1980s): Development and Adoption

By the 1970s, four major adoption agencies for Korean children's placement in overseas adoption had been established, including Holt International Inc in 1958; Korea Social Service in 1964; Social Welfare Society in 1971; Eastern Child Welfare Society in 1972.² The number of children in adoption increased substantially from the mid-1970s to the 1980s, reaching over 8,000 children every year at its apex (Chun 1989; Kane, 1993; Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, 1995; Sarri, Baik & Bombyk, 1998). Since the 1970s, full-blooded Korean children, mostly born into extreme poverty, comprised the supply of adoptees. At its peak, in the mid-1980s, Korean babies involved in foreign adoption represented 0.1% of all live births in Korea and twenty to thirty percent of all children involved in intercountry adoptions worldwide (Kane, 1993).

Reflecting a trope of development policy during the 1970s, the Korean government implemented an aggressive population control policy that achieved exemplary success in the following decades. As part of long-term economic development plans implemented since 1961, Korea further regulated the population by encouraging the emigration and foreign adoption of financially burdensome children (Chun 1989; Hurh & Reid 2000; I. Park, 1994; S. Park, 1994; Sarri, Baik & Bombyk, 1998). Thus, the slogan for the Family Planning Program, “Raise only two children well (둘만 낳아 잘 기르자),” turned adoption into an activity for population control thus promoting modernization. In addition, the high-speed industrialization that Korea had achieved during the 1970s and 1980s was based on highly controlled labor practices. Working-class people, despite their long hours of work, suffered from a crippling poverty

² These four adoption agencies are the only agencies for Korean children's international adoption placement. Yet, at the beginning of 1970s, there were three more agencies, such as the Seventh Day Adventists, the Catholic Relief Service, Welcome House.

that resulted in the disintegration of their families. This story is often depicted in the family search shows in Korea.

The Korean government has attempted to stop transnational adoption from Korea on many occasions since the 1960s. For example, according to Kim (2002) and Yun (1993), The Five Year Plan for Adoption and Foster Care (1976 – 1981) aimed at reducing the number of children put up for international adoption by 1,000 annually while simultaneously increasing domestic adoptions by 500 through the introduction of a system of quotas based on the number of domestic adoptions placed at each adoption agency in previous year. However, such attempts have ceased due to subsequent political and social upheavals in Korea in the early 1980s. The following administration, Chun's administration (1980 – 1987), discontinued the 1976 policy and outlined its new approach to international adoption under the heading of 'non-governmental foreign policy (min'gan oegyoo)' to expand the emigration program and further develop diplomatic relationships with Western allies (Sarri, Baik & Bombyk, 1998, Hubinette 2005). As a result, the adoption economy thrived and in the 1980s, Korea ended up placing more children into international adoption than any other country.

Since the 1970s, due to the scarcity of healthy, white babies available for adoption in the U.S., the number of children in intercountry adoption has been increasing from Asia. Although still understood to be motivated by humanitarian impulses, transnational adoption is also viewed as an option for infertile middle class citizens in post-industrial countries. Of all Asian children adopted in U.S. homes since the 1970s, two-thirds were born in Korea (Evans B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, 2001). France, Denmark, the Netherlands, Belgium and Australia all joined the list of receiving countries.

The Third Stage (1988 – the Present): Globalization and Adoption

Korea's adoption history was dramatically re-signified as a site of national trauma in the late 1980s when Korea's 'unscrupulous' activity became a source of national embarrassment. Until the 1980s, Korea's par-excellence activity in transnational adoption had never been officially included in Korean history. The international criticism changed it from a practice shrouded in public silence to a controversial, public issue. While transnational adoption continues to be a fast-growing social phenomenon in the west, South Korea's participation has diminished to be replaced by China, Russia and Guatemala (E.B. Donaldson, 2002).

In response to the embarrassing charge, the South Korean government put forth a national campaign promoting domestic adoptions ³ (Kim, 2003; Sarri, Baik & Bombyk, 1998). Over the past two decades, the number of children in foreign adoption has decreased to approximately 2,000 children each year down from eight thousand a year at its peak.

The diminishing number of Korean adoptees departing from Korea contrasts with the increasing number of Korean-born adult adoptees who have 'returned' to Korea since the late 1980s. Approximately 2,000 to 3,000 Korean-born adult adoptees visit Korea each year (Overseas Koreans Foundation, 2004). Of those, as many as 300 to 500 Korean adoptees are estimated to reside in Korea (Kim, 2005). Many, if not all, of these returning Korean adoptees come to Korea in search of their birth families, particularly

³ The South Korean government's attempt to terminate foreign adoption has been repetitively revoked since its initial plan in 1960 mostly in response to North Korea's accusation that South Korea sells babies to foreign countries. It is clearly illustrated in a recent interview with Kim, Geun Tae, a minister of health and welfare in Korea, "Foreign adoption is not the best, nor the second best solution (even for children in need of homes). Maybe it is a fire exit. It will be stopped. But *not right now*. I am *not* considering proposing a bill or making a legislature stop foreign adoption from Korea" (aired on *KBS*; May 25th, 2005; Italics are mine).

their birth mothers. For the first time in history, the figure of the birthmother is emerging as a missing but important figure to be searched for and found.

The disclosure of Korea's adoption activity folds into a new market mandate for globalization. Under the rhetoric of globalization (*se-gye-wha*) deployed since the mid-1990s, the Korean government has begun acknowledging the overseas adoptee community as part of the Korean diaspora. Adoptees reared in western countries were seen as potentially useful for enhancing Korea's economic development and competition in a world market. In 1998, President Kim Dae Jung issued a historical public apology to all adoptees, asserting that they were overseas Koreans who would carry on the significant role of bridging "East" and "West", and of advancing Korea's global interests (Hubinette, 2002; Kim, 2003).

So far, we have examined the fifty-year-long history of Korea's involvement in transnational adoption in terms of Korea's changing nationalistic account. This history is informed by the central role that the U.S. has been playing as a leading adoptive country of South Korean children over the past fifty years. Since the inception of intercountry adoption, more than 150,000 children, representing more than 75% of all adoptees from Korea, have been placed in U.S. families; thus, Korean adoptees form the majority of all foreign-born children adopted by U.S. citizens (Kane, 1993; E. B. Donaldson, 2001; Hubinette, 2005). Korean adoptees make up about ten percent of the entire Korean-American population, though their presence was rarely acknowledged until recently (Hubinette, 2004). Due to the high proportion of children adopted by U.S. families, adoption in Korea has become synonymous with foreign adoption, particularly to the U.S.

The U.S.'s primary role as an adopter of South Korean children has also reaffirmed Korea's official discourse of the U.S. as a symbol of wealth, democracy, and philanthropy, as well as a big brother. In addition, its strong military presence in postwar Korea fans a cultural phenomenon, American fever, defined in Ji Yeon Yuh's phrase as, "the desire to escape crowded, tiny, repressive Korea for expansive, freedom-filled America, to escape the ordinariness and the poverty and seek one's fortune in a land of opportunity" (p. 66). The prevalent notion of the American dream reinforces transnational adoption practice over time.

After the cessation of the Korean War, instead of establishing domestic social services to deal with orphaned children, the South Korean government, driven by a national agenda of military security and economic development, relied upon foreign resources and private humanitarian initiatives (Choi, 1996). In addition, the country's massive poverty, and the traditional, cultural importance of one's familial blood lineage further discouraged the creation of homes in Korea for orphaned children. The fifty-year-long dependency of South Korea's welfare system on U.S. private citizens allowed for "American intervention into South Korean affairs and firmly situated the nation at the edges of the American empire" (Choi, 1995 p. 242). The fifty-year institutional arrangement that cemented Korea's role as a sender of adoptees to the U.S. has served to implicate these two countries in a moral hierarchy, with South Korea positioned as the morally inferior nation. This geopolitical and cultural background provides a critical context for understanding a new development of Korea's adoption discourse framed around national trauma and loss.

III. Three Cohorts of Birthmothers

There are no official statistics or documents available on Korean birthmothers. The term ‘birthmother’ denotes any woman, regardless of her marital status, whose baby or babies were placed into adoption. However, before the adoption scandal in 1988, Korea’s social work literature had been discussing adoption as an unwed mother’s problem since the 1970s. Numerous studies show a high correlation between unwed mothers and birthmothers who give up their children for adoption (Kim, J.; 1974; Chun, 1989; Park, Cho, & Chae; 1993; Kim, S. 1997; Hwang & Yoon, 1996). Consequently, people often confuse the terms ‘unwed mother’ and ‘birthmother’ and use them interchangeably. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that not all unwed mothers are birthmothers in Korea; nor are all birth mothers unmarried. Ignoring this fact inevitably leads to the conclusion that the source of foreign adoption is the illegitimate sexual conduct of women. The emphasis on single unwed mothers also neglects the significant number of women in common-law or legal marriages who became birthmothers due to extreme poverty; this has been true since the beginning of transnational adoptions and continues to this day.

Besides a high correlation between unwed mothers⁴ and birthmothers, the literature has identified certain occupational and demographic characteristics of women whose babies were sent abroad for adoption. Using this information and I delineate three figures of birthmothers that have arisen over time in Korea, but this is not to claim that they represent the experiences of actual birthmothers. The figure of the birthmother and the actual birthmother are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but it is important to avoid conflating them. The purpose of studying the *figure* of the birthmother is to reveal how

⁴ Unwed mother usually refers to young women who have not married but have a child. The child is out-of-wedlock.

knowledge-production about birthmothers over time has consistently obscured their motherhood in history, a practice which has been altered by the recent production of virtual mothering.

Over the years, despite the lack of information regarding birthmothers, women employed in the sex industry, or in low-paying factory jobs, and troubled teenaged girls in the 1980s and 90s, were all considered to be at risk of becoming birthmothers (Kim, 1974; Hurh, 1967; Hwang & Yoon, 1996). Single-parent households, with their suggestions of immoral sexual behavior, were not considered desirable environments for raising children. Let me briefly point out how the figure of the birthmother has been configured as an undeserving mother even as the stigmatized women at hand have contributed to Korea's national development through their re/productive labor, particularly as military prostitutes and factory workers.

Reflecting a considerable number of biracial children placed in transnational adoption during the 1950s and 1960s, the first cohort of birthmothers were said to have “undesirable occupational statuses” as “*yang sakshi*” – military prostitutes (Hurh, 1967, p. 11). They performed sexual labor for US servicemen stationed in Korea. The bodies of military prostitutes are often missing in the official foreign relations discourse between Korea and the U.S. that continues today⁵ (Hurh, 1967; Moon, 1997; Takagi & Park, 1996; Yuh, 2002, Cho 2005). Yet, these bodies were all too well-known as “unofficial ambassadors,” responsible for taking care of the emotional and personal needs of U.S. soldiers in their mission to keep the Korean peninsula safe (Enloe, 1990; Moon, 1997; Yuh, 2002, Mitchell, 2005). Thus, the first birthmothers, which is how military

⁵ K.H. Moon (1997) and Yuh (2002) argue that approximately 1 million women in Korea have engaged in military prostitution as institutionalized industry around the U.S. foreign bases in South Korea from 1945.

prostitutes were defined, served as indirect agents for national security, while the South Korean government and adoption agencies encouraged them to place their “*twi-gi*” (biracial) children into adoption (Hurh, 1967; Meier 1999; Higginson, 2003).

During the 1970s and 1980s, young, female factory workers formed the largest pool of birthmothers (Chun 1989; Koh, Hong, & Kim, 1989; Hwang & Yoon, 1996; Kim, 1997; Kim, 1974). Jiyeol Kim (1974) argued in her seminal study on Korean unwed mothers that the factory workers’ independent, residential settings increased the high likelihood of engaging in premarital sexual activity and of resulting in a child out of wedlock; these babies were considered a primary source for foreign adoptions.

Yet, the very same bodies of female factory workers have also played a major role in “the miracle of the Han”, – i.e., South Korea’s rapid industrialization, and corresponding explosion in GNP in 70s and 80s (Kim, 1997, Moon, 2005). The state-led industrialization sector recruited young women to work in factories set up in free trade zones. In the process, abrupt displacement for numerous people from rural village to cities and urbanization was taking place. These factories predominantly manufactured textiles and shoes, and sought to exploit the “Asian women’s nimble fingers” (Mohanty, 1991; Ong, 1987). The bodies of these women resuscitated and secured Korea’s economic future by enduring unbearable working conditions and harassment (Kim, 1997). Yet, their motherhood has never been part of the discussion. The female workers’ bodies, I argue, have been employed to produce commodities, from famous designer, athletic footwear, to babies, all for export.

Birthmothers since the 1980s have been characterized as troubled teenaged girls – high school dropouts or runaways from dysfunctional families, who are saddled with

poverty, domestic and sexual abuse from stepfamilies or single parents. Let me unpack the description of high school dropouts first. The Korean education system does not usually allow pregnant girls to stay in school. In most cases, students get pregnant first and then ‘choose’ to drop out voluntarily before school authorities kick them out. Often described as a troubled teenager who is not at all ready to be a mother, the figure of the contemporary birthmother is undeserving of public assistance to rear her child.

In light of such studies, policy analysts often argue for a strong need for preventive programs, focusing on sex education for vulnerable, young women. This analytical trend reflects a social prejudice against poor, unmarried, women, and thus, reinforces heterosexual, patriarchal family formations in Korea through the regulation of women’s sexuality. While Korean unwed women, who are automatically seen as undeserving mothers, are accused of being “a source of foreign adoption,” there is no discussion of their male counterparts – unwed fathers, thus reflecting the sexual double standards that rule men’s and women’s lives (Chun 1989; Kim, 1974; Park, Cho, & Chae; 1993). Korea’s adoption history is grounded in double standards and a lack of a sense of social responsibility for motherhood and children born outside the realm of traditional family.

IV. The Inclusion of the Birthmother in Adoption Discourse

Adoption literature indicates that the presence of birthmothers is a source of unease for many adoptive parents, particularly adoptive mothers (Brodzinsky 1998; Rush 2000; Wegar 1997; Yngvesson 1997). Their desire for complete separation from the baby’s past is one of the most prevalent reasons why adoptive parents choose foreign-born babies (Berry, M., Barth, R.P., & Needell, B., 1996). The practice of adoption is

usually based on secrecy and confidentiality, which requires burying the adoptee's past before adoption with institutional support (Wegar, 1997). For example, when a child is adopted by a family, the adoptive parents' names, ages and places of birth are inserted onto a new birth certificate (Bartholet, 1999; Wegar 1997; Yngvesson 1997). Therefore, a child is officially *born* to adoptive parents. However, since transnational adoption often involves obvious physical differences between the parents and child, a constant and deliberate effort on the part of adoptees and their adoptive parents is required to construct a middle-class, white American family.

Such an assimilation-driven model has been slowly brought into question since the 1970s when organizations such as Concerned United Birthparents (CUB) in the U.S., advocated on behalf of adoptees and birthparents. They fought for adoptees to gain access to their birth records, and to seek reunions with their birth families (Wegar, 1997). In 1972, the National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) expressed concerns about transracial adoptions, arguing that white parents were not equipped to help black children to deal with racism. Both of these heated debates generated a considerable interest in the racial and cultural identities of transnational adoptees who cross the boundaries of race and culture in their formation of family. This development enabled a new recognition of birthmothers that is reflected in the growth of open adoption practices (Anagnost, 2000; Wegar, 1997; Yngvesson, 1997).

The figure of the birthmother has become visible in recent cultural productions of transnational adoptees, the majority of whom are Korean, as well as in new adoption studies (Anagnost, 2000; Eng, 2003; Klein 2003; Ortiz & Briggs 2003; Rush 2000; Shiao, J., Tuan, M. & Rienzi, E. 2005; Yngvesson, 2002; Kim, 2003; Hubinette; 2004). Today

rich bodies of cultural works can be found in film, literature, artwork, and numerous listservs actively leading a new kind of discussion from the perspective of transnational adoptees. The recent scholarship has made invaluable contributions by introducing the perspectives of transnational adoptees and by suggesting a framework that allows for the inclusion of birthmothers' stories and recognition of their re/productive labor in a transnational circuit of human capital.

There has been a shift in adoption discourse from complete erasure to selective recognition of the figure of the birthmother. Michael Hardt (1999) describes the contemporary service economy as a system in which "information, communication, knowledge, and affect come to play a foundational role in the production process" (p.92). The adoption economy can be understood as such because of the labor that goes into maintaining the children's wellbeing. Prior to a baby's adoption, there is a division of affective labor conducted by various participants, including foster mothers, orphanage workers, social workers at adoption agencies, and birthmothers; these components construct a global system of stratified reproduction that underlies transnational adoption. The current practices of adoption, I might argue, foreground the birthmother by privileging her originary reproductive and caring labor in order to make adoptive parents invest new productive forces of affectivity in the potential that the birthmother instilled in the child.

The presence of other (birth)mothers, and their losses at one end of adoption, as Anagnost (2000) stated, offers the reassurance that "there was a bond, affect, at the origin, that the child will be capable of delivering fully on its promise of love" (p. 400). As a result, birthmothers serve as significant figures who provide 'affectively necessary labor'

that ensures a successful adoption (Hardt & Negri, 1999). They are also treated as the links to a primal bond to the adoptees' racial/cultural identity in the growing, post-adoption, service economy, e.g. annual cultural festivals, culture camps, and trips to the motherland.

V. Emerging Figure of the Korean Birthmother

The first cohort of Korean adoptees began attaining adulthood around the 1980s. Since then, Korean adoptees have become more visible in the adoptive countries, e.g., Sweden, the U.S., Denmark, etc., through adoptee organizations as well as various cultural formats - e.g. films, videos, artworks, and literature. Simultaneously, the number of Korean adoptees from the U.S. and Europe who visit Korea has been rising; it is approximated that 2,000 to 3,000 come each year. Korean adoptees visit Korea in order to learn about the Korean culture and society that could have been their own as well as to find out about their own histories in Korea, which means finding out about their Korean parents, particularly mothers. Their unanticipated but increasing rate of 'visits' has disturbed the amnesia of the Korean government and its people. Adoptees' stories force the nation to remember its traumatic past - two hundred thousand Korean adoptees and the hollowed figure of the Korean mother - once erased from the official national history and to return through numerous television works in the following decades.

Since the adoption scandal stirred by western media, Korean television has increasingly engaged the issue of foreign adoption, thereby shaping adoption discourse in Korea over the past fifteen years. There are two major approaches to foreign adoption in Korean television. Reflecting a specific historical context, the one more prevalent at the beginning was to identify "foreign adoption" as a social problem, a national

embarrassment. Borrowing the format of investigative journalism, such television magazine shows, like *20/20*'s, functioned as social commentary. Echoing the early literature on Korea's adoption, they attribute the cause of adoption to an amalgam of factors including abrupt urbanization, anomie, the disintegration of the traditional family, and working-class women's changing attitudes toward sexuality, not mentioning their male partners' lack of responsibility. Thus, the figures of the women on those shows were the ones ultimately responsible for the shameful activity of disowning the child; the birthmother was a figure of moral bankruptcy. For example, the seminal television documentary on foreign adoption, entitled "Where are we?" in 1989 classified birthmothers as women who were immature, uneducated, sexually promiscuous, and working-class. At best, they were portrayed as victims of sexual violence.

The other television shows, also corresponding with the rise in returning adoptees, have covered the personal dramas of adoptees' successes and/or search and reunion narratives, the latter of which has become by far the most dominant narrative of adoption discourse today⁶. Such shows facilitate the adoptees' searches for birth families and air their reunions with their birthmothers. A Korean adoptee makes a return trip to Korea in order to search for his or her Korean roots by finding a Korean mother. Using all viable channels, a Korean adoptee tries to find and eventually reunites with his or her Korean mother. In this narrative, the figure of the birthmother becomes a central figure whom a Korean adoptee wants to find in order to resolve the pains and losses of his or her experience. At the reunion, the figure of the birthmother is portrayed as a ready-made

⁶ Originally the adoptee's search and reunion narrative was shown in *Susanne Brink's Arirang* on MBC. Susanne Brink is one of the most notable Korean adoptees whose story has been made into a feature film, *Susanne Brink's Arirang* in 1991. Her story has drawn so much media attention that there was a follow-up documentary on her in 2002 (MBC).

mother who has been waiting all her life for her child to return, as if the return restores the mother-child relationship that had been lost.

These two discrete figures of birthmothers have emerged on television over the past fifteen years. I argue that they by no means demarcate distinct historical periods, but rather that their very coexistence suggests an irony in Korea's practice of transnational adoption. At the beginning, most television shows presented foreign adoption as a social problem and intended to promote domestic adoption as an alternative. Thus, the figure of the birthmother in these shows is often portrayed as an unwed woman, a source of social problems, who is young and unstable and thus not ready to take on the role of mother. This trend of investigative journalism has yielded into the more personalized and melodramatic search-and-reunion shows. Here, the birthmother is a middle-aged woman who was married or widowed at the time of adoption, is not afraid of disclosing her face and any identifiable traits. She is depicted as a victim who, by sacrificing herself as a mother in order to give her child a better opportunity, actually becomes the ultimate mother. The emerging figure of the Korean birthmother who *is instantly made to mother on television search shows* leaves its shadow on the figure's non-mediatized counterpart whose *motherhood has never been acknowledged*.

This television figure of a married birthmother driven to a painful choice because of poverty, is inconsistent with the 1960s and 70s journalistic characterization of the birthmother as an unwed factory worker. It is television's deviation from the earlier finding that creates the condition of possibility for birthmothers' visibility in contemporary Korea. In television's schizophrenic treatment of two figures (young and old) of birthmothers, one will never be ready to be a mother while the other has never

stopped being a mother. The stark difference between these two figures of the birthmother begs a creative analysis. Since my project is to examine the ways in which the figure of the birthmother in its interface with information technology performs a maternal practice, I am looking at two sites: one is television search shows featuring an older generation of birthmothers realizing their motherhood; the other is an internet community of contemporary Korean birthmothers.

(1) Television Search Shows

In Korea, television search shows have a particular cultural and historical significance⁷. The narrative of search and reunion with family is such a powerful and unyielding fascination for Korean people who have suffered through the Korean War, which resulted in ten million separated families. This cultural history made it possible for the number of search-type television shows to increase and maintain popularity. In 2005, the search shows included SBS network's more recent *Ke Saramee Bokgo Shipda*, MBC network's *Kko Hahn Beon Mahn Nah Go Ship Dah* and KBS network's *Happy Sunday's 'On The Way to Meet [지금만나러 갑니다]*," as well as now famous, *'Achim Madang's 'I wish to meet that person' [그 사람이 보고싶다]*.

I gained an opportunity to be part of an episode of *Achim Madang*, known as the most popular search show. I participated in the show as a translator for an adoptee named *Nina de Bruisin* in August of 2005. During May 2005 and January 2006, I also

⁷ Such sentiments were manifested in the people's response to the historic search show, entitled *누가 이사람을 모르시나요?* [Does anyone know this person?] in 1983, Korea. It was originally produced to air for two hours in one live show. However, there were explosive responses and unceasing inquiries from those who were separated from their loved ones during the War. As a result, this show had continued for 148 days, recorded 453 hours of airtime, and ended on November 14th (Kim, 1988). It was the first historic incident showing how television played an active role in consolidating the ruptures inflicted by the War as well as in acknowledging the pains and the losses of the separated families in Korea.

noticed that this reunion show has been embedded in a weekly entertainment show entitled Happy Sunday. The melodramatic narrative of the search show is now turned into an 'enjoyable' part of Sunday evening.

(2) Internet Community of Birthmothers

The other dominant figure of the birthmother on television, although she is never viewed as a mother but only as the source of a problem, is a unmarried teenager or young adult who gave a birth to a child destined for foreign adoption. In other words, television does not offer a maternal image of these contemporary birthmothers, so I explore other venues where I can detect their mothering despite the fact that their babies are not with them anymore. In 2004 and 2005, I made two research trips to Seoul, Korea. As part of preliminary research for my dissertation, I visited an unwed mother's shelter and garnered some background information regarding contemporary birthmothers. Contemporary birthmothers grew up in the 1980s and 1990s with Korea's newly made adoption discourse in a popular narrative of adoptees' search and reunion as well as the emergence of Internet technology. Residents at an unwed mother's shelter whom I met in 2005 reported that they found out information regarding adoption and housing for unwed mothers through the Internet.

According to eTForecast's finding (2000), Korea is one of the most wired countries in the world (<http://www.etforecast.com>). This study indicates that Koreans spend the most time surfing the web. Since the late 1990s, increasing uses of the Internet brought on a new social phenomenon, rapidly growing internet communities often organized in terms of shared characteristics or similar interests such as hobbies, hometown, school alumni and etc, (Suh, 2003). The growing popularity of the Internet as

a social space in Korea prompted me to surf Korean websites for a Korean birthmothers' community. As a result, I have found two Internet communities of birthmothers.⁸ One is for women who were former residents at an unwed mother's home, called Esther's home run by an adoption agency (Eastern Social Welfare Society).⁹ The other entitled, "The Sad Love Stories of Mothers Who Sent Their Babies Away for Adoption", is independent of any social service agency and was established by a birthmother in 2001.

VI. Methodology

I take two television search shows – Ach'im Madang and 'On the Way to Meet' in Happy Sunday as well as an Internet community of contemporary birthmothers as the primary data for my dissertation. Central to my dissertation is an interrogation of the processes involved in the configuration of motherhood on both sites. Attending to the spatio-temporal and technological apparatuses inhabited by this emergent figure of the birthmother, I call this figure a "virtual mother." Virtual mother is a woman who engages maternal practice or qualities through her performance on television or Internet.

I employ the term 'virtual' in relation to 'actual' or 'actualized' birthmother because there are numerous Korean women who have given their children up for adoption, but who not know themselves as 'birthmothers' for various reasons. First of all, until the mid 1980s, a considerable number of Korean children at orphanages, who were placed out of the parent's economic devastation or a mere accident of getting lost, had been placed into foreign adoption. In other words, the parents of those children do not necessarily know their children's fate in adoption. Secondly, as many cases on television

⁸ Its web address is <http://café.daum.net/dbesther>; <http://café.daum.net/adopteemam>

⁹ All four adoption agencies for foreign adoption today: Holt Children's Service, Korea Social Service, Eastern Social Welfare Society, Social Welfare Society run several unwed mothers' home each. Most residents give up their babies for adoption.

search show suggest, numerous incidents were reported in which a birthfather or a family member alone made a decision for adoption for a child without obtaining consent from the birthmother. Thirdly, an enormous social stigma against unmarried women's motherhood forced the birthmother into a virtual existence that could not be claimed and actualized. Thus, the notion of virtual mother reflects the inexhaustibility, unknowability of the population of Korean birthmothers. Birthmothers and virtual mothers are caught in a differential relationship. Birthmothers and virtual mothers are in-formed by each other.

My framework for virtual mothering draws on Gilles Deleuze's term 'machinic assemblage'. John Johnston (1999) explains "[T]he assemblage is not opposed to either mechanical machines or organic bodies but encompasses both. Where bodies and machines enter into machinic relationships, that is, become parts of an assemblage" (p. 28). I argue that the organic bodies of birthmothers join information technologies to produce the virtual mother. The virtual mother is thus a machinic assemblage of the organic matter of mothering and media/info. technologies.

However, this machinic assemblage of the virtual mother is not just employed to grasp new a social phenomenon – the emergent figure of the birthmother on television and internet as a representation. Considering the endless circulation of information technology as a material, ontological ground for virtual mothering, I pause to look at Karen Barad's (2003) understanding of apparatus. In her words, "apparatuses are not mere static arrangements *in* the world, but rather apparatuses are dynamic (re)configurings of the world, specific agential practices/ intra-actions/ performances through which specific exclusionary boundaries are enacted" (816). My treatment of 'virtual mother' as an apparatus is the methodological ground of my dissertation.

Treating it as an apparatus allows me to prioritize the processes configuring virtual mothering over the virtual mother as a fixed identity. This way its dynamics and movements precede its position.

Barad's notion of apparatus also provides the concept of virtual mother with a capacity for flexible measurement. The virtual mother is always becoming and my dissertation attempts to capture the processes involved in this becoming. The dynamic and ever-changing quality of the virtual mother constantly shapes and informs the ways that we look at such figure; there is an interaction between the ontology and the epistemology of the virtual mother, a mutual shaping. The virtual mother renders itself intelligible by its performative act – virtual mothering. The conceptual tool of the virtual mother operates as a methodology because its dynamism shapes the ways we know it. It allows me to shift from implementing a ready-made methodology to explorations and experiments with various devices that can induce a virtual mothering that is always in process.

My dissertation begins with traditional sociological methods such as participant observation, compilation of data, thematic categorization, and critical interpretation, and then expands to employ more innovative methodology that allows me to be part of the machinic assemblage as a translator and an informant. According to Barad (2003), "...the "knower" does not stand in a relation of absolute externality to the natural world being investigated – there is no such exterior observational point. ... "We" are not outside observers of the world. Nor are we simply located at particular places in the world; rather, we are part of the world in its ongoing intra-activity" (828).

The notion of virtual mothering which I take as my analytical framework and methodological apparatus, has emerged from a history of trauma and loss in the fifty-year-long practice of Korea's foreign adoption. Cathy Caruth (1996) argues that the traumatic event involves an experience that the subject witnesses, but cannot easily remember, and that thus repeats itself, compelling the subject to keep re-experiencing the event. Through the Korean media's engagement with the adoption matter during the last fifteen years, the traumatic figures of the adoptee and the birthmother have returned and begun repeating their stories of loss. This repetition is causing a reverberation of traumatic effect across the fabric of Korean society.

However, when technology engages trauma, there is a disruption and a modulation of the temporality of traumatic repetition, and such modulated repetition can no longer be explained merely by unconscious trauma (Clough, 2007). The new visibility of adoptees and birthmothers in Korea illustrates how the trauma of transnational adoption works beyond the unconscious as a source of production and circulation in the entertainment industry, which is aligned with Michael Hardt's (1999) characterization of the contemporary service economy.

The global circuitry of information technology radically disrupts the classic binary discourse of scholarship based on representation: presence and absence describing the dispossessed. I argue the appearance of Korean birthmothers on television shows and Internet communities may not necessarily suggest any tangible ground for birthmother's being present. Virtual mothering is not operating in the binary logic of presence/absence. It should not be understood merely as a bringing of the figure of the birthmother, formerly excluded from adoption discourse and Korea's history, into a light. But rather,

this virtual mothering is working at a varying degree of exposure in the global circuitry of teletechnology, which requires a new framework, a framework that accounts for affect.

The notion of affect traces its intellectual genealogy back to Spinoza who defines affect in terms of the power to act and be acted upon. This broad definition has been developed and narrowed down so that it can serve as framework of new thought in various disciplines, especially art, media studies, and literary criticism, but increasingly in social science literature over the past five years (Hardt, 1999; Massumi, 2002; Bennett 2005; Clough, 2007, Hansen, 2004). In some of this recent work, affect is used to describe trauma and its bodily residues, often registered in intensity and felt quality. In addition, affect, according to Massumi, is incipient, never-fully realized, and therefore always potential “embodied in purely automatic reactions most directly manifested in the skin – at the surface of the body, at its interface with things ...” (25). His notion of affect treats the body not in terms of a pre-determined subjectivity upon its location, but rather as an emergent quality of incipience that is future-oriented. Clough (2007) incorporates the technoscientific modulation of affect and thus explains affect in relation to the technologies, that in her words, “...are allowing us both to ‘see’ affect and to produce the bodily capacities beyond the body’s organic-physiological constraints” (p. 2).

Both theorists lead me to pay attention to the virtual mother’s maternal qualities, which often include emotional qualities and bodily intensities occurring below the normal range of our perception. Such emotional and bodily qualities interlaced with the production and circulation logic of television and Internet determines the affect and effectivity of this assemblage. This narrows the scope of the analysis to the felt quality of

motherhood which is always in a process of becoming that engages technological apparatuses inside and outside the discursive framework.

In order to detect virtual mothering, I privilege the skin as the ontological and epistemological ground of the virtual mother. Here the term skin is not confined to the human skin in a narrow definition, but rather includes the surfaces of television and Internet. The surfaces of television or Internet communities where virtual mothering is transpired, resonated, and felt as affective texture, constitutes a material ground for the virtual mother. Nevertheless, the skin carries its own history of wounds and scars and lays them bare.

Understanding skin as an ontological ground, in other words, bestows a particular significance to the point of contact. This shifts the epistemological order from its conventional reliance on that which is 'seeable and sayable' to a new engagement with 'sense knowledge'. The skin is one of the body's main sensory portals. It affects and is affected by the sense of touch. According to Massumi, skin turns stimulation inward and folds it into the body, absorbing impulses quicker than the brain perceives (25, 2002). This leaves vibrant events always already outside of consciousness, rendering the skin a minefield of vitality. By incorporating a sense of touch into our other organs of perception (vision and hearing), the skin becomes the site of exploration and manifestation for vital energies of loss where the virtual mother is felt and produced in an excess of affectivity.

Drawing upon Johnston's astute observation of perception in contemporary human-machine society, organs of perception are freed from human bodies and distributed across "a heterogeneous assembly of brains, bodies, artifacts, and other

external structures” (p. 43). I perceive the virtual mother occurring as “not the result of a single or isolated agency (here agency is not human-centered agency) but of several working in concert or parallel” (43, 1999). The ways in which the virtual mother is rendered visible and palpable is intertwined with joined forces of perception operating underneath and across the skin of various bodies. In other words, a virtual mother emerges as it becomes intelligible by orchestrated efforts of distributed perceptions in information technologies.

Distributed perceptions operating in contemporary telecommunication technologies become part of the machinic assemblage of virtual mothering so that it renders itself intelligible. Thus, the social phenomenon of virtual mothering works as its own apparatus. Barad (2003) argues that “apparatuses do not have any inherent “outside” boundary. This indeterminacy of the “outside” boundary represents the impossibility of closure. ... Apparatuses are open-ended practices” (816). In other words, virtual mothering is only made to augment itself by its life condition of incessant circulation and distributed perception. As you perceive, you are always entering into this configuration of virtual mothering.

My dissertation is composed of two folds of media and methodological approach. Chapter Two: *Television Mother* and Chapter Three: *The Skin of Virtual Mother*, each discuss a virtual mother on one of the television shows, Achim Madang and ‘On the Way to Meet’ in Happy Sunday. Chapter Four, *A Flickering Motherhood* and Chapter Five, *A Tactile Love*, both focus on a virtual mother appeared on Internet Community of Birthmothers. Chapters Two and Four focus on the discursive framework in which virtual mothering is realized in narrative-based and performance –based analyses.

Chapters Three and Five highlight the ways in which the virtual mother materializes as felt qualities via various experiential and explorative lenses.

Breathing One

A foreign student's lack of command in English awakens her to unclaimed experiences and to the bodies of Koreans and diasporic subjects at different temporalities. The broken tongue not only denotes the political economy of language in English, of the dominant society, but also makes claims to many different, unrecognized tongues, bodies, and memories. This experience transmits the awakening to the other. My awakening: a Korean foreign student's loss of verbal capacity in words reverberates a mother's loss of memory about the baby she left behind. At the very time of choosing a dissertation topic, *International Adoption from Korea*, a birthmother's unclaimed grief for her lost child is heard in the form of an incomprehensible sobbing sound on a Korean foreign student's parched tongue.

For a long time, I have lived with the fear what if I become moo-dahng, a shaman in Korea. Moo-dahng is believed to live between the two worlds: one of human and the other of spiritual. Moo-dahng is mostly women, performing rituals to heal the injuries on body and mind, to console the unresolved grief of dead bodies by rendering her own body as a point of contact between the past and the future to join and reconcile. Through the shaman's embodiment, someone else's trauma is voiced and a silenced history regains its legitimacy. Despite the state's repression, these shamanistic rituals have been part of Korean people's daily lives, helping them cope with the challenges and struggles of working-class people. However, for a long time, Moo-dahng had been condemned and associated with backwardness, ignorance, superstition, bad luck, and difficult personal fate, all of which made me abhor the fear. I could not share this fear with anyone else.

What if people consider me a crazy person? So this fear has become my secret, so unwanted to look at, sediment in my body. Before my knowledge, the spirit of moodahng comes and settles in my body.

1953

**Respectful American citizens,
Go to Asia on a mission and get your babies
Before communists get to these miserable souls
and brainwash them
You, Americans, have to save them, 10 dollars per month**

As patriotic voices from a philanthropic agency's advertisement encourage foreign adoption from Asia, a Korean adoptee was conceived in her white mother's belly with all these memories entangled.

... at the American GI camp, they eat great hamburger, sausage, ham, pancakes, you know... they throw all leftovers in garbage and Koreans buy that garbage ... [I remember] hundreds of people lined up¹⁰.

Look at me. The little one. That's me. I was born in 1953. Growing up with five siblings, eonnis and oppas (sisters and brothers). We were quite poor but it was all right. At that time, everybody was poor. After I finished junior-high school, I went to a city to work at the factory. And I found myself pregnant. I was not married. Everybody told me I should give up the baby for adoption. For a better life. So I did. For my baby. For myself. But ever since, I have always felt that I have lost something. I tried to fill it in with something else, but I couldn't. Even if I smile, my heart is still in pain. The pain will be forever with me day and night. You know what the contemporary version of I-SHAN-GAH-JOK [separate families] is? We, [birthmothers] mi-hon-mo deul and the children we sent away¹¹.

2007

My next plane just arrives
More than joy and happiness for the destination
All the babies came to me
The stories that I have buried

¹⁰ Chang, So Am (Oral History Project Participant – Still Present Past)

¹¹ The Taste of 6.25 (Performance piece; Hosu Kim, 2005)

Sweeping over me, drowning me, choking me

I opened my eyes in the middle of the night

Thinking of babies

Whom I have sent away

Out of embarrassment

Out of desperation

Out of necessity

Every, each time I thought to myself

They are gone

It will be fine

It's better for them

Better for me

Better for future

Chapter 2. Television Mothers: Lost & Found in Search and Reunion Narratives

July 20, 2005, 8:30AM

Another summer visit. Back home in Korea. I turned on the television and my mother's favorite morning show—Ach'im madang [Morning Forum] was about to start. Everything looked the same as a year ago. The show had the same host and hostess, the studio setting and the format of the show were still the same. People with stories of separation, identifiable physical traits and any traceable information come to the podium one after another looking for their loved ones. Two Korean adoptees were included. Nothing special! I could fall asleep to unrelenting stories of separation and loss—these monotonous tones of people's voices and expected interventions, with the host saying everything that had already been said again and again. Watching yet another reality search program, I had no clue about the role that I would soon play for the show and for the reunion of Nina de Bruijin, a. k. a. Lee, Jung Soon and her birthmother, Cho, Soon Ok¹².

Ach'im madang's *I Want to Meet This Person* is the longest weekly search show embedded in a morning program since 1996. This morning show is estimated to be the most watched of the several family-search type programs aired on Korean television¹³. Based on the show's website information regarding Korean adoptees, more than 130 Korean adoptees have appeared, leading to thirty-seven reunions since 1999.¹⁴ An average number of five or six people, including one or two Korean adoptees, come to a live studio and, in hope of a reunion, share their stories of loss every Wednesday.

¹² I use four names – the Korean adoptee's Korean and Dutch names, and her Korean father and Korean mother's names as pseudonyms.

¹³ In Korea, television search shows have a particular cultural and historical significance. The theme of "search and reunion with family" is of powerful and unyielding interest for Korean people who have suffered through the Korean War, which alone resulted in ten million separated families. According to Yi, Jae Oh, a KBS producer, "... Adoption, separation because of war, it doesn't matter. The idea of reuniting families has universal appeal in Korea. The reunion of a family is very important" (Vickery, 2004).

¹⁴ In comparison, the number of Korean national participants is 1,976, resulting in 590 reunions. However, Korean adoptees are sometimes listed only by their Korean names, which suggests that there may be a margin of error in these figures. (See www.kbs.co.kr/1tv/amplaza)

The appearance of Korean adoptees on Korean television is a recent phenomenon. Korea's outlandish involvement in transnational adoption practice was hidden from its own people until 1988 when the western media's moral accusation brought the world's negative attention to South Korea. Ever since, the subject of Korean transnational adoption and stories of Korean adoptees have been among the most popular subjects of television broadcast, whether in the form of social commentary or family search programming. Over the past decade, this international practice that lacks national memory, has been memorialized as a shameful but inevitable fact in Korea's *past* despite its unceasing engagement in the present.

At the cusp of the new millennium in South Korea, the rhetoric of 'eradicating past vices' (과거 청산) has been appropriated to frame social emerging from a series of traumatic events in Korea's past. For instance, Japanese colonialism, South Korean state repression, and the violation of citizens' rights have been called forth by a newly vocal civil society as well as by the recent civilian presidential administrations, which push forward a politics for reconciliation that echoes similar processes taking place in other international political contexts. As acclaimed Korean adoptee scholar Tobias Hübinette (2005) argues, Korea's fifty-year history of transnational adoption, interlaced with Korea's modern nation-building project, has been folded into this discourse of reconciliation. In addition, under a slogan of globalization (세계화), the new global economic imperative, the Korean government has recognized Korean adoptees as belonging to a group of "overseas Koreans" who are potentially important in terms of their role as bridges between the West and the East (E. Kim, 2005).

Given this political and socioeconomic re-signification of Korean adoption and adoptees, this chapter examines the most popular narrative in Korean television search shows, the narrative of search and reunion, which has established and shaped a national social memory of adoption. In *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, Neal Smith (2004) defines a cultural trauma as “a memory [that] must be made culturally relevant, that is represented as obliterating, damaging for an essential value of society [and] therefore, associated with a strong negative affect, usually, disgust, *shame*, or *guilt*” (p. 36). Characterized by shame and guilt, this newly available social memory of Korea’s transnational adoption is incorporated into Korea’s history of cultural trauma. Paul Connerton (1989), in *How Societies Remember*, emphasizes the role of a particular narrative in the formation of social memory. He argues, “In the name of a particular narrative commitment, an attempt is being made to integrate isolated or alien phenomena into a single unified process” (p. 26). And, making an event, particularly a traumatic event, socially available, Jeffrey Alexander (2004) states, requires attention to the crucial role mass media plays in making cultural trauma affectively available by attributing a certain perspective to the event.

Noting that a suspiciously uniform narrative of transnational Korean adoption has repeatedly shown up in television shows affectively enriched with a sense of shame and guilt, I argue that Korean television search shows have produced a cultural trauma of Korea’s fifty-year-long involvement in transnational adoption. The search and reunion narrative brings Korean adoptees as well as their Korean mothers, who were once erased from Korea’s official history, forward as the individual subjects of national trauma. Therefore, the story of Korean adoptees’ *search for their birthmothers* and their eventual

reunion are seen as reconciliations both with personal trauma and with Korea's cultural trauma. By forging broken family ties, Korean adoptees and their Korean mothers become nationally-recognized citizens who push forward Korea's reconciliation with its past as well as carry out Korea's global agenda.

This chapter looks at the ways in which the figure of the birthmother, who has been utterly erased from Korea's official history and adoption discourse, becomes a central and newly significant figure who is appropriated as an allegory for Korea in a redemptive search and reunion narrative, a narrative which is contingent upon television technology. By focusing on the very processes involved in mothering within the radical and fragmented temporality of a television show, I engage with the performative aspect of mothering in virtual mothering. In this chapter, I attend to how the maternal qualities of the virtual mother have been produced in the redemptive logic of trauma, and to how the virtual mother is mobilized in Korea's nationalist development agenda.

In the following section, I interrogate the ways in which a woman whose motherhood, once revoked, turns into a virtual mother whose motherhood is instantiated and claimed in terms of three tropes: naturalized, affective, and developmental motherhood. The focus of the analysis is how such birthmothers' maternal citizenship juxtaposes with Korea as the imaginary "homeland" and thus becomes a symbolic receptacle for the loss involved in transnational adoption practice. With awareness of my particular involvement as a translator (both on- and off-stage) for a televised search and reunion show, I organize this chapter around a critical reflection on my participation both in the production of the show and in the personal interaction between the birthmother and

the adoptee. I also offer a close reading of the search and reunion narrative as it is presented in *Ach'im madang*.

*I. Ach'im madang – I want to meet this person*¹⁵

On my research trip to Korea in 2005, I visited G.O.A.L. (Global Overseas Adoptees' Link), an adoptee self-advocacy organization. One of its primary functions is to help Korean adoptees reunite with their Korean families. I introduced myself as a researcher working on a project about Korean birthmothers. Not a week had passed after my visit to G.O.A.L. when I received a phone call from a staff member. She asked me whether I was available and interested in working on an upcoming reunion show production. I agreed. This is how I came to be a translator between a Korean adoptee, Nina de Bruijin, and her birthmother Cho, Soon Ok.

My involvement in the show's production leaves me with a methodological dilemma. The rich backstage information is impossible to discuss through the method of discourse analysis alone because it was not officially part of the show's narrative. However, if I organize my storyline in terms of my participant observation, then I risk diluting the processes by which the figure of the birthmother is virtually recognized. In an attempt to overcome this dilemma, based on three sequences which aired on July 20, August 3, and August 17, 2005,¹⁶ I combine my auto/ethnography with discourse analysis in order to highlight the ways in which the particular story of Cho, Soon Ok and Nina de Bruijin folds into a clichéd media story of search and reunion that employs nationalist discourse of adoption.

¹⁵ Since the show was conducted in Korean—with the exceptions of Nina's introduction which was in English and my translations for Nina—this description is the author's own translation.

¹⁶ I translated for Nina on two programs, which aired on August 3 and 17, 2005. The first segment on July 20 had a different translator.

II. Studio A: Naturalized Motherhood

In order for a Korean adoptee to search for his or her Korean family, Korean adoptees are instantly reterritorialized into Korean subjects by reasserting their Korean names. Nina de Bruijin was no exception. During her first appearance on this television show, Nina de Bruijin, a Korea born Dutch adoptee, presented herself, 안녕하세요. 제 이름은 이 정순입니다 (Hi, my name is Lee, Jung Soon) in her fresh, a bit too fresh to be a convincing, Korean. As she translated herself back into English, also a foreign language to her, a more elaborate version of the introduction followed.

Hello, My name is Nina, I was born in Seoul, on September 4th, 1978. I was born in Kang Nam Gu, Taepyung Midwife's Clinic. I was brought to Korea Social Service on September 5, 1978, sent to the Netherlands when I was three months old.

This Korean adoptee performs her greetings in Korean before switching back to her Dutch identity—Nina de Bruijin—which, along with her adoptive family, was not mentioned throughout the rest of the show. Throughout the entire show, she is referred to by her Korean name, Lee, Jungsoon.

The show's hostess mentions that this adoptee's name, Jungsoon, was allegedly given by a third party, presumably a social worker at an adoption agency, who might have made her name by taking one syllable from each her biological parents' names.¹⁷ In other words, "Lee, Jungsoon" was an utterly fabricated identity, one created in order to find a home for the child outside Korea; but this time, the reverse happens and her Korean name admits Nina de Bruijin back into Korea. This Korean name, Lee, Jungsoon,

¹⁷ A Korean name usually consists of two syllables, so "Jungsoon" is supposedly a combination of her Korean father's "Jung" and her Korean mother's "Soon."

suggests that Nina de Bruijin must have a connection in Korea and thus opens a possibility for suturing the broken family ties between this Korean adoptee and her Korean family, even though most members of the family had no knowledge of Nina's birth and adoption until the show's production.

Shortly after Jungsoon's profile and pictures air, there is a phone call allegedly from her birth mother. While watching the first segment of Nina and Cho's search and reunion as a regular viewer, I assumed that Nina's birthmother had been watching the show when the pictures aired and immediately recognized her long-lost child's face. "Maybe Nina is extremely lucky," I thought. The hostess unexpectedly interrupts herself and urgently informs Jungsoon. "Jungsoon-ssi,¹⁸ There is a phone call. M-o-t-h-e-r? From a mother." A translator's indistinct voice follows. The camera rests for a speechless moment on Nina's face. The hostess asks Jungsoon to take the call from her mother. Nina's face registers bewilderment. A sense of uncertainty fills the entire studio. The translator says something to Nina. Nina imitates the translator's "Um-ma"—mother, in Korean—a word whose meaning she might not even understand. A woman on the phone says, "그래, 정순아. 미안하다." ["Hello, okay, Jungsoon-ah; I am sorry."] The show's hostess interrupts and verifies the information by confirming the caller's name, Cho, Soon Ok, her husband's name, and the fact that she has five daughters. This alleged birthmother affirms everything that the hostess asks. A round of applause follows. Their reunion, after DNA tests have been arranged and a further cross-examination of background information has been made, is aired two weeks later.

¹⁸ Suffix for adult, similar to Ma'am for women and Sir for men.

Later, I learn from Nina's birthmother that she hadn't called in. The show's producers called her. Cho, Soon Ok's close friend, apparently having no knowledge of the adoption, had watched the preview of *Ach'im madang* and told Cho, Soon Ok, "There is someone called Lee, Jungsoon, looking for you and your husband." At first, the mother replied, "I don't know what you are talking about." But soon Cho, Soon Ok began to remember a baby she left behind, unnamed, a few hours after a delivery. She was too nervous to call the television network, so her friend called for her. Then, around 9 o'clock on the day that Nina's search aired live, a television crew called Cho, Soon Ok and told her to wait on the line.

It was in this manner that Cho, Soon Ok joined the television narrative of search and reunion, which is inextricable from television technology, and became a virtual mother who greeted her just-returned daughter over the phone. Television technology and its particular storytelling techniques cannot be disentangled from the televised figure of the birthmother, for it is television technology that searches and finds a birthmother—in this case, Cho, Soon Ok—who voluntarily or involuntarily, agrees to respond to a child's call via television. Her virtual mothering is thereby activated.

In the show's narrative, the birthmother, Cho, Soon Ok, instantly recognizes her daughter after tens of thousands of days of separation; this is supposed to indicate the irrevocable tie between a mother and a daughter. Cho, Soon Ok's call to the studio is made to appear as though it is spontaneous, thus suggesting that this alleged birthmother has been waiting all along for her daughter's impending return. She utters her daughter's virtual Korean name, Jungsoon, as if it is a name that she remembers, and apologizes to the alleged daughter, thus following the script of virtual mothering. As soon as the basic

information from Nina's adoption file is acknowledged and the caller's familial information is put forth, a sense of the firm belief that they are related is forged by the show. The scripted acts that Cho, Soon Ok performs establish the necessary conditions for this alleged birthmother to be perceived as a credible mother.

* * * * *

Today is a day of reunion between Nina de Bruijin and her Korean mother. I am nervous about appearing on a national television show as an interpreter, although it should only take five to ten minutes. At 6 o'clock sharp in the morning, I arrive at KBS and see three women sitting in the studio. One young Korean lady is smoking nervously. Instantly, I realize that person must be the Dutch adoptee for whom I am going to translate. I introduce myself to Nina de Bruijin and her childhood friend, Imca, who accompanied Nina from the Netherlands to this foreign country. Nina already seems to have been informed that she is going to meet her birth mother today.

Around 6:30, a woman, one of the writers for the show, walks out of the building and ushers us into the waiting room where today's participants are practicing their presentations and waiting for the show to begin. Of today's participants, there is one other Korean adoptee from Norway. A scripter sits down with each participant in turn and helps him or her to memorize the storylines. They form a story of separation together. This scripter tells me, "You can speak English in a full voice; these days many audience members speak English in Korea. They prefer it that way." This only makes me more nervous. We enter the studio ten minutes before the 8:30 a.m. show time.

“Wow! The studio looks much smaller than it appears on television,” I think to myself. “Quite intimate. Hmm. Oh, these guys are the famous hosts.” Across from me sits a familiar looking actress, who often plays a grandmother in Korean films or television shows. She is wearing a glamorous hairdo and makeup. She looks very young in reality. I am trying not to get too fascinated and distracted by this new and cool experience. I turn to look at Nina. She looks very nervous. Her anxiety seeps into my body and doubles my anxiety level. I learn that the ladies sitting next to us are paid audience members. Some of them have handkerchiefs on their laps, ready to start crying at any moment. Today, in addition to Nina’s reunion, there are five people scheduled to introduce themselves in hopes of reunions of their own.

After two participants present their stories of separation, Nina and I rise from our seats and walk to the center of the small studio, which will shortly turn into a crucial site where Nina and Cho, Soon Ok can meet as family. One turns into a daughter and the other into a mother whose ties are instantaneously woven through a narrative of DNA and its subsequent accounts of physical resemblance. The show’s host repeats that one can recognize her mother or her daughter just from glancing at the other’s face. According to the hosts, “We don’t need to go on with the DNA test. I can automatically tell they are related, but just in case....” As soon as Nina and her mother hug each other and shed tears, a ritual of reunion has ended, and a male professor of forensic science at a prestigious university informs them of the DNA test results over the phone: “I examined seventeen non-sex chromosomes as well as five sex chromosomes. A daughter inherits everything from her mother, so that I can confirm that they are mother and daughter. Congratulations!” This male stranger, an invisible figure, but the voice of authority and

science, confirms the terms of relation between Nina and Cho, Soon Ok as that of mother and daughter. Another round of applause follows from the audience.

Through the DNA-testing ritual, Nina de Bruijin is reborn as a Korean national, without any margin of error. This moment of connection, backed by scientific authority, epitomizes the patriarchal order that ultimately dictates the terms of kinship in the realm of the traditional family while maintaining the patriarch's absence. One of the hosts nicely asks Nina, "I heard you are the one who really wanted to do the DNA test. Why did you ask for that? Can't you just believe that you have found your (birth)mother?" In my translation of this question, which I later found to be very offensive, I unconsciously mimicked the host's soothing voice. How can anyone identify a mother of whom she has no memory, merely by looking at her? How can any woman identify a child from whom she was separated after its birth?

An inviolable bond between a mother and a daughter, corroborated by a scientific narrative of DNA, develops into a reconstruction of family in terms of 'a compulsive narrative of identification,' what Eleana Kim (2005) characterizes as the process of integration of Korean adoptees into a homogeneous model of Korean citizenship. During the show, a well-known Korean actress, in the role of a commentator, asks whether the birthmother's other five daughters also have curly hair, and Cho, Soon Ok responds that she and everyone in her family has curly hair. Curly hair, a common feature, shared amongst all family members manifests their ties, symbolizing an irrevocable identity mapped out in blood. The Korean birthmother signifies not only the biological origin of this Korean adoptee but also the biological hub of the rest of her family members.

The final sequence of Nina's search and reunion show starts with the female host's narration—"This is the way home"—driven by a visual narrative of Jungsoon's homecoming, as we see Nina making her way to the home of her Korean family, a place where she has never been and which she has never called home. A close-up shot of two hands (Nina's and her mother's) holding each other is narrated by the host's commentary: "Although there is no shared language, it must be really great to be with a mother. It must be really good." Witnessing Nina's devastating level of frustration with the absence of language, I found the host's comment to be a futile effort to make the experience of the reunion as it appears, by suggesting that a mother signifies "home." Home, in other words, refers to a place where one can find an ultimate sense of peace and comfort.

The final image of Nina's story depicts the family along with Nina's friend, Imca, and me, her translator, as we all gather together to share some fruit. What is not captured on camera is one of the television cameramen suggesting that the mother hand a piece of fruit to her daughter. Cho, Soon Ok gives Nina a piece of watermelon, and Nina responds by giving a tangerine to her mother. The host once more congratulates Lee, Jung Soon and her Korean family, and the scene concludes with Nina smiling as the host says, "Now, the whole family has come full circle with their found daughter filling her own empty spot."

Many feminist accounts illustrate that women acquire their own citizenships via their identities as wives and mothers in the process of nation building (Moon, 2005; Yuval-Davis, 1997; McClintock, 1993; Hubinette, 2005; Cho, 2001). According to Moon Seung Sook (1998), official Korean nationalist discourse is based on the patrilineal family—a male-headed family structure is the basic unit of the nation. In her words,

“...the Korean nation is essentially a familial community in which members have collective orientation” (54). In this light, I argue that the ways in which Cho, Soon Ok becomes a virtual mother as a legitimate married woman suggests how her citizenship is gendered in the support of a patriarchal family structure, the basis of the nation.

Women’s gendered citizenship is often discussed in terms of their reproductive function. Yuval-Davis argues in her book, *Gender and Nation* (1997), that blood and a sense of belonging constitute national identity. Soon after Cho appears on television, positive DNA results corroborate this virtual mother’s maternal citizenship. This strong assumption about blood and belonging reinforces the myth that “blood is thicker than water,” underlying the fantasy of Korean adoptees’ inviolable ties to Korea and their irrevocable identity as Koreans, and thereby explaining their ultimate journey to Korea as the motherland. The figure of the birthmother as a repository of shared blood functions as an affective pull toward the homeland.

The motherhood of this virtual mother is contingent upon an adoptee’s arrival and search and is premised on a narrative of redemption. I argue that Cho, Soon Ok as a site of origin *and* destination through the myth of home/land suggests the conditions of possibility for the maternal citizenship of Korean birthmothers. Cho, Soon Ok becomes visible and recognizable as a mother of this newly-made Korean subject only within the national sphere. She is realized as a virtual mother who embodies the adoptee’s lost origin, roots, and home, which Nina is able to claim upon her reunion, sited within the television studio and its particular temporality. This show’s narrative freezes and linearizes the loss of time experienced by both parties, e.g., the birthmother and her child.

It flattens the complexities of loss, and instead spatializes the loss to be cast onto the body of this virtual mother, which is actualized in each scene.

A critique of the trope of naturalized motherhood is found in Hübinette's (2005) analysis of cultural representations of Korean adoptees and birthmothers, where he poignantly discusses a blurred merging of the birthmother with Korea and the political implications of that merging. Korea becomes a motherland when a birthmother's maternal citizenship is claimed through symbols of origin, roots, and home. Upon reunion, a Korean adoptee claims her Korean-ness. The slippage between mother as nation and nation as mother fosters naturalized and nationalized maternal images of birthmothers whose loss is also recuperated through Korean adoptees' homecoming. I argue that the naturalized discourse of motherhood in "roots," "origin," and "home" forecloses an analysis of systematic social constraints encouraging transnational adoption. Instead, the discourse tends to appropriate the body of the birthmother, once more in the service of national reconciliation in the process of Korea's nation-building project in the global era.

III. Studio B: Affective Motherhood

While watching the first part of Nina's search show, a Korean woman calls into the studio three minutes after Nina's appearance. Her first words, over the phone, are "Jungsoon-ah, I am sorry." I find this apology directed to her alleged daughter to be disturbing rather than heartbreaking. Her voice is too dry, too calm, too lacking in emotion, shattering my own expectation of a mother who was separated from her baby for twenty-eight years. I think to myself, "She is a mother who should have more feelings." Yet, this act of apology, despite its lack of emotion, is integral to the forward

progression of the narrative of search and reunion. By apologizing, she admits her own guilt in not raising her child. It is through this apology that Cho, Soon Ok is re-territorialized into a virtual mother who performs the role of a legitimate birth mother.

For the following two weeks after Nina's initial appearance on *Ach'im madang*, Cho, Soon Ok cried in public and in private. Once unleashed, tears, belatedly but unceasingly, took over this woman. In the meantime, she tried hard to find where Nina was staying in Seoul so that she could arrange a meeting as early as she could, even earlier than the television show schedule. But the crew and producers would not give her any detailed information about Nina's whereabouts. Nina was travelling in Korea, they said. She had to wait for the television production schedule. Two weeks passed. The two women were only permitted to meet during the production of the show.

* * * * * *

I find myself worrying about whether I will cry in the middle of Nina's reunion as I rise from my seat and walk toward the center of the television studio. Nina is facing a gate in the back of the studio set. The moment of the meeting between Nina and her alleged Korean mother after twenty-eight years of separation closes in. The host urges Nina to call out for "Umma." *Umma*. Her Korean umma does not show up immediately. "Umma," Nina calls out again, and I, as Nina's translator, whisper to her to call "a bit louder." *Umma*. This calling enacts Nina's search for her mother. Nina's repetition of the word builds a moment of suspense and shakes up the scripted scenario of the meeting by allowing some doubt about whether or not she will come forward. After Nina calls

out a third time, a woman neatly dressed in a blue striped shirt and a navy blue pair of pants walks towards the stage, entering through a separate entrance in the back of studio.

As Cho, Soon Ok walks through the studio, she pauses briefly to greet the audience. She does not take any time to look at her daughter's face, a face that she has not seen in more than twenty-eight years. Instead, this Korean *umma* immediately proceeds towards Nina and embraces her. Nina hugs her back. I have no memory of what I was feeling or seeing. But the television screen tells me that there are a few seconds of indistinct voices and sobs from Nina's Korean mother. The scene is accompanied by melodramatic background music, which cannot be heard from inside studio. The camera zooms in to get a close-up shot on the birthmother's sobbing face, which is already covered in Nina's shoulder. Instead, Nina's face is pictured. She is smiling but not crying.



Fig 2.1 (A photo taken at reunion between Cho and her daughter-- A courtesy of Danielle Von Oostrom)

Cho, Soon Ok emerges out of secrecy and shadow. She is instantly made to become a mother to her adopted daughter when this Korean adoptee utters ‘umma.’ The reunion scene is aligned with the belief that this birthmother has been waiting all along for her daughter to call her ‘umma’ so that she can come out of the shadows and mother her long-lost daughter.

In her murmuring, the birthmother says, “I am so sorry” once more. Cho, Soon Ok sobs and sheds tears although I, as both a translator inside and a viewer outside of studio, cannot see tears in her aging eyes. Her crying indicates the suffering and pain Cho, Soon Ok, as a mother, herself must have lived with all these years. Furthermore, Cho’s emotional display echoes the Korean nation’s emotions toward Korean adoptees. The national emotional stance is articulated in the following presidential speech:

(...) Looking at you, I am *proud* of such accomplished adults, but I am also overwhelmed with an enormous *sense of regret* and all *the pain* you must have been subjected to. Some 200,000 Korean children have been adopted to the United States, Canada, and many European countries over the years. I am *pained* to think that we could not raise you ourselves, and had to give you away for foreign adoption. The reason for the adoption was primarily economic difficulty. But there were other reasons. Koreans traditionally have a habit-of-the-heart that placed too much importance on blood-ties. And when you don’t have that, people rarely adopt children. So, we sent you away. Imagining all the *pain* and psychological conflicts that you must have gone through, we are *shamed*. We are *grateful* to your adopted parents, who have loved you and raised you, but we are also filled with *shame* (Kim Dae Jung, a former president of Korea).¹⁹

¹⁹ Translated from Korean into English, “President Kim Dae Jung’s Speech: October 23, 1998 at the Blue House.” *Chosen Child* 1, no 5 (1999): 15 – 16.; emphasis added.

In 1998, then president Kim, Dae Jung invited a group of adult Korean adoptees from the U.S. and Western European countries to his presidential residence. Kim acknowledged the pains and the losses of Korean adoptees. This unprecedented official apology is indicative of the way that adoption discourse in Korea is often deeply associated with negative affects such as shame and guilt.

Given this as a backdrop, I posit that the affective narrative of shame in which the birthmother engages with the configuration of a virtual mother, as in Nina's search and reunion, grounds the maternal citizenship of the birthmother, Cho, Soon Ok. The rhetoric of mother-as-nation vis-à-vis nation-as-mother once again juxtaposes a mother's shame and guilt about giving up her child with Korea's shame and guilt about the fifty-year-long practice of transnational adoption, and, further, develops into a politics of reconciliation.

Sarah Ahmed (2004) discusses the politics of shame and reconciliation in her book, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. She argues that shame involves a double play of "exposure and concealment." In her words, "...shame exposes that which has been covered...shame covers that which is exposed (we turn away, we lower our face, we avert our gaze)..." (104). In the process of Cho, Soon Ok's involvement in virtual mothering, these dual qualities of shame clearly emerge. Cho, Soon Ok, despite her flat delivery, engages the affective narrative by acknowledging her guilt as soon as she becomes a virtual mother on the phone. The sense of shame and guilt becomes more poignantly palpable when she enters the studio for the reunion. As she walks out of secrecy and shadow, she immediately covers herself by averting eyes and looking down, her physical mask throughout the show. The birthmother's downcast gaze exposes that she is in shame. Her motion of hurriedly burying herself in Nina's shoulder further

suggests this shame. These attempts to cover herself indicate her state of being saddled with shame. Cho, Soon Ok becomes a virtual mother by displaying the shame of not having fulfilled her motherhood.

Shame reconstitutes a social ideal and thus makes the ashamed aligned with affective citizenship.

Shame can reintegrate subjects in their moment of failure to live up to a social ideal. Such an argument suggests that the failure to live up to an ideal is a way of taking up that ideal and confirming its necessity; despite the negation of shame experiences, my shame confirms my love, and my commitment to such ideals in the first place (Ibid., 106).

The exposure of her shame is a moment for the birthmother, Cho Soon Ok, to show her failure to live up to the ideal of motherhood. On the other hand, through her very shame, she once again is recognized as a mother who *aspires* to live up to that ideal. She is now acknowledged as a birthmother virtually. It is because her enactment of shame was coordinated and expressed through media technology. Her motherhood is fleshed out in terms of her exposure and display of shame, an integral part of virtual mothering in the search and reunion narrative. For a birthmother whose motherhood had not been acknowledged in the national sphere, her maternal citizenship is revoked, and then restored through the performance of shame. The figure of the birthmother is once again made to reassert a source of national disgrace in a ritual of media slaughter, thus the unrelenting practice of transnational adoption from Korea turns into a personal misfortune. In return, the birthmother acquires her maternal citizenship to Korea.

Aside from symbolic qualities—home, origin, and roots of motherhood—feminist accounts point out that affective qualities of motherhood play a crucial part in the

production of citizenship and a nation-state (Ahmed, 2004; Yuval-Davis, 1997; Enloe, 1990; Anagnost, 2000; Cho, 2001; Hubinette, 2005). Affective qualities are no less important than “blood” in the construction of the nation-state. For example, Tobias Hübinette (2005) explains how Korean nationalism is not just based on a biological genealogy of family but also a particular emotional state, such as *han*. The term *han*, according to Hübinette, is generally defined “as a long accumulated, suppressed pent-up mixture of sorrow and anger caused by the injustices and hardships of Korean history” (118). In other words, Cho, Soon Ok’s affective quality of shame suggests a uniquely Korean cultural aspect of suffering shared by Korean people throughout their long history.

The shame does not just apply to Cho, Soon Ok’s maternal citizenship but also pushes Korea’s reconciliation process. As Ahmed points out, “shame becomes crucial to the process of reconciliation or the healing of past wounds” (101). Applying her insights on shame and reconciliation and feminist accounts of gendered citizenship to a configuration of the virtual mother, I recognize parallels with Korea’s emotional position toward transnational adoption and also its movement toward reconciliation. The shame renders not only the birthmother recognizable as a virtual mother but also Korea as a nation that deplores the practice of transnational adoption and by doing so becomes ready to enter the process of reconciliation. Through affective deployment of the figure of the birthmother, who is symbolized as a figure of shame and guilt in the search and reunion narrative, Korea brackets loss and re-covers from its shameful past.

As the narrative of search and reunion progresses, the affective qualities of the show make a transition from a sense of shame and guilt to a sense of reconciliation and pride. By diffracting shame onto the virtual mother, the show paves the way for Korea’s

move from shame about its past to pride in the era of globalization. This progression in the narrative might be characterized in terms of Ahmed's idea regarding "the work of re-covering" shame in order to achieve reconciliation. The ways in which adoption narratives and re-cover from shame are built into the following discourse of motherhood in development.

IV. Studio C: Motherhood in Development

As soon as I entered the waiting room with Nina and Imca, following the female scripter, I found a dozen Korean national participants getting ready for the search show. The majority of those people are working-class and were separated from their family members primarily due to economic reasons, predominantly during the 1960s and 1970s. Under Korea's national development slogan, "First, Growth; Second, Distribution," a low-wage and long-hour working environment was believed to be a legitimate labor practice imposed on many working-class Koreans who were thus made to participate in Korea's belated modern economic development. Needless to say, little public assistance was available for working-class families in dire economic situations. In extreme cases, these difficult circumstances led to family disintegration. After separation from their families, many of the show's participants grew up in orphanages. I can only guess at the struggles and hardships of their lives through their stories. Nina, through her attentive gaze, seemed to be trying to figure out what kind of life she might have led if she had remained in Korea.

On Ach'im madang, Korean adoptees' search for family is presented as part of a larger landscape of family separation among Korean people that is mostly induced by poverty. This creates a very specific context for the coordination of the adoption narrative

of search and reunion. It flattens the potentially complex reasons for putting a child up for adoption into one monolithic story of absolute poverty, always prefacing Korea's adoption discourse with the following: "Poverty leads to adoption from Korea." The poverty which once took away Cho's motherhood is now integral to the narrative of search and reunion through which Cho is being re-territorialized into a virtual mother.

During the initial contact over the phone, Cho, Soon Ok, the then alleged birthmother, is asked to confirm family information, including the names of her husband and daughters as well as to rationalize the circumstances surrounding Nina's adoption. "You were economically devastated at that time, weren't you?" The host prompts her to site poverty as the primary motivation for choosing adoption by telling the alleged birthmother and the audience, "At that time, [the economic] situation [was bad], right?" Cho answers: "...the [economic] situation was pretty bleak and *my leg was in pain*." Cho's answer folds nicely into a scenario in which she could not raise her own child due to bad health and poverty. No comments or further questions are provided regarding her simple explanation for why Nina had to be given away to live her life without knowing that her Korean family existed.

No one dared to ask why Cho, Soon Ok, like so many others, had such extreme economic hardship that she would be forced to choose adoption for her newborn baby. The answer tacitly can be found in Nina's birthfather's total absence from the show. While Cho, Soon Ok's sexuality has been brought into the public's purview and is tightly confirmed within the domain of the family imaginary, the figure of the birthfather is never brought to light. However, as soon as the adopted child is resituated in a legitimate family, the figure of the birthfather is slipped out into the background of the search and

reunion show. Regardless of Cho Soon Ok's current marital status (married), the figure of the birthfather is the constitutive outside to the search and reunion narrative, made into a present-absence so that Nina's adoption story can fall neatly into a generic origin narrative, one of absolute poverty. Thus, Cho Soon Ok could just as well be portrayed as a single mother in extreme poverty, who, at the time of the birth, was considered incapable of parenting a child without a husband.

The absence of the birthfather along with a patriarchal belief that the father should be the primary provider, leads naturally to the narrative of poverty as a driving force for adoption which is considered to be an individual birthmother's misfortune rather than the responsibility of anyone in particular or of the Korean government. Poverty is not only the viscerally painful backdrop of adoption, but also a familiar reality for many working-class people in the past. This shared history of poverty renders a poverty-induced family separation a traumatic event rather than an irresponsible parental act, which leaves the figure of the birthmother a victim of poverty.

On the day of reunion, as soon as their precarious mother-daughter relationship is confirmed, the show's host starts to weave a narrative of adoption circumstances for Nina's case. The hostess insinuates the possible reasons for adoption: poverty and too many daughters. Cho, Soon Ok, in turn, reaffirms the circumstances of Jungsoon's adoption to be economic difficulties and five daughters as if repeating after the host. Cho goes on: “그때 당시에는 좋은부모 만나서 잘 살으라고 그래서 보낸 것 ...” (“*I wished she [Nina] could find good parents and live well. That was my hope for her at that time*”).

This narrative of dire economic conditions coordinates with Cho's good intentions, and is translated into a conscious and motherly choice in the common storyline of adoption. Cho, Soon Ok becomes a virtual mother who reunites with her daughter, a newly-made Korean subject, by articulating her well-meaning intention of continuing to be good mother, the notion having been somewhat radically redefined. Therefore, this virtual mother is not just passively located as a victim but, rather, in the narrative of progress and development, is rendered a heroic figure who demonstrates courage and sacrifice in her actions.

In the logic of the show's narrative, in order for a poor mother to give up her beloved child for adoption, there must be a firm belief that adoption offers a better life opportunity than the one she herself could provide. A sense of affirmation in Cho's assumptions follows in the form of silence. The sequence of those scenes, interwoven in the show's narrative, suggests that there is a shared consensus about the "better future" in a child's foreign adoption. What could explain this shared cultural belief that transnational adoption offers a better life?

Many Korean diasporic cultural theorists, such as Choi, Chung Moo (1995), Park, Kye Young (1997), and Yuh, Ji Yun (2002) point out the enduring popular cultural belief, from postwar Korea and continuing to the present day, in the "American dream" among South Koreans, who hold up the U.S. as an expressway to modernity and prosperity²⁰. Given the history of the United States' strong, almost exclusive, foreign cultural and

²⁰ The American dream is a key motivation for many Korean immigrants seeking a better life in the U.S., and reflects the cultural reality of "American fever" (miguk byong) that prevails in Korea. American fever, according to Yuh (2002), is "the desire to escape crowded, tiny, repressive Korea for expansive, freedom-filled America, to escape the ordinariness and the poverty and seek one's fortune in a land of opportunity. (p. 66, 2002).

military presence in South Korea as well as its having the longest and largest international adoption practice, I extend the notion of the American dream to birthmothers' idealization of life and adoptive parents in the West. Although Cho, Soon Ok's daughter, Lee, Jungsoon was adopted to a country other than America, I speculate that a mother's wish upon choosing adoption dwells in her belief that her child will be sent to *a place like America* where the child's modern development will be provisioned.

The show's host asks me to ask Nina what she does in the Netherlands. Nina, with her usual bright smile, answers, "I am still in school but almost graduating. I am writing my thesis in social science." After my translation of Nina's answer into Korean, the host adds, "Like the mother wished, her daughter turned out great. She is almost graduated from school, so she will be able to be a successful career woman in the near future." A commentator sitting at the edge of the stage intervenes: "I sort of knew that Lee, Jungsoon would turn out really well due to her absolutely positive attitude." Cho, Soon Ok becomes a virtual mother with the proof of her successful investment in adoption delivered in the form of Nina's resilient personality and her prospective life as a young professional, and, perhaps most importantly, by her (inevitable) return to her mother/land.

The figure of the birthmother, so far disclosed only as an emblem of shame and guilt, is re-territorialized into a figure who privileges the child's development by giving up her own mothering. Through her choice of adoption, Cho, Soon Ok sacrifices her own mothering, and performs the ultimate act of motherly love, an act grounded in the American dream, promising a better opportunity for her beloved baby. Upon the reunion, which suggests a resolution of the separation, the pains and the losses associated with the

adoption are turned into part and parcel of ‘development’. Hence, the adoption narrative of search and reunion makes an affective turn from a deep sense of sadness, shame, and guilt, to a story of glory and success.

A close examination of the process by which the virtual mother is articulated in terms of developmental discourse reveals a nationalist appropriation of motherhood through adoption. The constant juxtaposition of Korea as a nation-state with the figure of the birthmother unfurls a story of adoption that goes like this: Due solely to poverty, Korea had to send numerous children away, but with the well-meaning intent to provide Korean children with better life opportunities in more prosperous countries. As Korean adoptees return to their homeland, Korea acknowledges the sad and shameful part of such an event, and then steps forward to claim national pride about individual adoptees’ life-transforming stories of glory and success²¹. However, this is not the first time Korea’s adoption activity has been rendered fruitful in the framework of development.

From the 1960s to the 1980s, while the Korean national government was actively involved in fertility control as part of an economic development plan, adoption scholars, for instance, Tahk, Kane, and Hubinette point out that Korea’s involvement in foreign adoption served its economic development. In other words, twenty-eight years earlier, a Korean birthmother, Cho, Soon Ok, by disowning her child, was participating in the Korean government’s modern nation-building project. Now, in the very same logic of ‘Korea’s development’ in the age of globalization, Cho’s disavowal of motherhood, translated into a mother’s sacrifice of her own mothering on behalf of the beloved child,

²¹ The personal success stories of Korean adoptees are one of main features in Korean adoption discourse. For instance, Paull Shin, currently Washington State Senator, is one of the most famous Korean adoptees in Korea for his social and political recognition.

reinforces the traditional ideology of motherhood. Cho enacts a woman's duty as a patriotic citizen who once gave up and now claims her motherhood, all of which depends on Korea's nationalist agenda, reflecting Korea's particular socio-economic and geopolitical status as a fringe of the "post-industrial countries" and its submissive relationship to the U.S. Korea overcomes its own shame by re-covering the adoption story with this narrative of development, all of which is based on the fantasy of an adoptee's return, success, and willingness to participate in Korea's familialized national sphere, which is also undergoing a re-territorialization into 'global Korea.'

* * * * *

My official role as a translator for the reunion was over as I walked out of the television studio. Yet the real job of translating had just begun and would span from several hours to whole days of conversation that tried to fill the time lost by this family. Contrary to the congratulatory messages the television show ended with and my mother's excitement about me appearing in her favorite morning show, the reunion that I witnessed was accompanied by more tears than laughter. The stories were confusing, frustrating, and unsatisfying, after days of limited and disrupted conversations riddled with holes in memory, language, and broken narratives of family.

After the reunion, I was able to meet Nina's sisters and her biological father, all of whom are deeply affected by Nina's appearance in their lives. No one knew there was another member of the family. Nina's concern about her life with this Korean family did not dissipate but became more volatile after the meeting. She kept asking questions regarding the circumstances of her adoption as if she could recapture her life from her

birth to the hundred days of her first life in Korea by arranging such accounts back into order. But her Korean mother barely remembers anything. Her Korean father claims that he did not know of her existence.

My invasive journey into this family's past drowned me. I felt like I had been caught up with the personal drama and dilemma of a stranger who found my role vital. However, my involvement in Nina's meeting with her Korean family thinned over time. They constantly needed a translator day and night in order to communicate with each other, a need which I found to be beyond my capacity. At the same time, leaving them also left me with a sense of guilt and uneasiness. Before coming back to the States, I had several conversations with a frustrated and tearful Nina. I also received a few angry phone calls from her birthfather and many more calls from her elder sister. Nina left for Amsterdam on the fifteenth of August, the day of commemoration for Korea's liberation from Japan after the WWII. I wondered whether Nina also felt liberated upon her departure.

V. Melancholic Logic of Search and Reunion Narratives

The story of Nina de Bruijin follows a formulaic narrative of a Korean adoptee's search and reunion with a birthmother. Troubling the narrative circumscription of the motherhood of birthmothers, this chapter has examined the processes involved in the configuration of a virtual mother who is uniformly, repetitively, and compulsively actualized in a particular storytelling technique of search and reunion. Cho, Soon Ok is articulated into a virtual mother who deploys selective nodal features of motherhood—motherly qualities such as 'naturalized' ones (origin, roots, and homeland), affective

qualities (failure and reclamation of ideal motherhood), and nurturing qualities related to the child's development (disavowal and restitution of motherhood).

Attending to Korea's seemingly forthright adoption discourse, which centers on a narrative of search and reunion, I have offered a deconstructionist approach to the narrative; the way the narrative of search and reunion operates, that I argue, in terms of an "elaborate structure of loss-but-not-loss" what Anne Anlin Cheng (2001) characterizes as the intricate process for the development of melancholic subjectivity.

... the melancholic must exercise [the fantasy and exclusion] in order to maintain this elaborate structure of loss-but-not-loss. First, the melancholic must deny loss as loss in order to sustain the fiction of possession. Second, the melancholic would have to make sure that the "object" never returns, for such a return would surely jeopardize ... a form of possession more intimate than any material relationship could produce (Cheng, 2001, p. 9).

The sequential narrative of search and reunion relies on a succession of fantasized events: a Korean adoptee's inevitable return, successful reunion with a birthmother, and rebuilding a family. Meanwhile, this fantasized narrative is produced by the methodical, deliberate exclusion of a disproportionately large number of children born out of wedlock, unwed birthmothers across generations, and most importantly the figure of the birthfather from the storyline, all of which constantly disrupt the male-centered, heterosexual, middle-class family imaginary. Thus, Korea's adoption discourse based on fantasy and exclusion suggests Korea's melancholic state vis-à-vis its fifty-year-long engagement with transnational adoption.

Highlighting the processes involved in the configuration of birthmothers' maternal qualities inversely indicates that birthmothers' motherhood is neither of "nature" nor of "nurture" but of the "machinic assemblage" between birthmothers'

organic bodies and technological apparatuses. Furthermore, the radical finitude of virtual mothering disrupts a tendency to assume the motherhood of a birthmother outside of the television studio and beyond television time. In other words, virtual mothering does not grant an immediate building of a maternal relationship to the adopted person who just met his or her Korean mother after their one-time “reunion.” Instead, as Anagnost (2000) noted in her discussion of technological mediation and production of kinship, virtual mothering suggests how birthmothers’ reclamation of motherhood is interlaced with their performance of maternal citizenship and its implications for the politics of national reconciliation within a redemptive narrative of loss.

Virtual mothering is acknowledged and activated within the framework of family. Anne McClintock (1993) argues that “Since children ‘naturally’ progress into adults, projecting the family image on to national ‘Progress’ enabled what was often murderously violent change to be legitimized as the progressive unfolding of natural decree” (63). Her insightful analysis of family as a metaphor for nation shed light on how a virtual mother realized in the framework of family reunion serves to normalize a fifty-year-long practice of inter-country adoption as a shameful but inevitable side effect of Korea’s rapid economic development.

Over the past fifteen years, these television shows for search and reunion perform “important cultural work in constituting and consolidating group identities” by remembering the Korean adoptees and their Korean birthmothers against the backdrop of national trauma (Hirsch & Smith, 2002, p. 8). However, Korean television’s ongoing engagement in the subject of foreign adoption suggests that a sentimental economy of adoption is always, then and now, the subject of media attention. Deep sadness,

unresolved grief and painful stories involved in adoption and its aftermath for both Korean adoptees' and Korean birthmothers' lives has been under the purview of media spectacle and made to circulate on various television programs. In the following chapter, I examine how a virtual mother on another television search show is affectively produced, modulated and transmitted in the global circuitry of telecommunication. Here the virtual mothering is no longer just contingent upon the trauma narrative but also can be read as a site of the 'collectivization of affectivity'.

Breathing Two

During my childhood, I used to watch television attentively, sitting close. Then my mother would say, ‘You better go into a television,’ literally. Later her chides for my television watching turned into her fantasy of me being on television. My mother, to her, being famous or successful, means being shown on television. Being entered into this virtual world. It doesn’t matter how many times I correct her by saying that having a ‘Ph.D. from the U.S.’ does not mean that I will be invited to talk on television. Those are two separate things’. But she chooses to stay in her fantasy. She continues to hope that her daughter soon to have a Ph.D. from the United States will be on the television.

* * * * *

In 2005, even though I did not have a Ph.D., I had a chance to be seen on television. And I met with my mother’s favorite show host and hostess. As my mother wished, I walk into a television and lived a virtual life as a flimsy creature on the other side of the screen. Her excitement about me being on national network television is palpable. As soon as I walked out of the television studio, my mother kept calling me to hear my first account of my experience and observations in the virtual world that she is always mesmerized with. Her calls created such a nuisance in my work translating for Nina and her family. So I told her that ‘I can’t take a phone call from you’. She, then, respectfully apologized for doing that. She stopped. When I returned from my research trip to Seoul, my mother so proudly said, ‘Son, Bum Soo, - the famous show host – thanked you [my daughter] for translation.’ I gave her the honorarium – a hundred-dollar gift certificate - that I received after my translation. Her happiness and pleasure are so poignant that I wonder whether she would rather place me in the virtual all the time.

It has been almost two years since I have met Nina and her entire Korean family. In the meantime, I also had a chance to meet her Dutch parents and Dutch brother whom her Korean family has not met. Nina made one more trip to Korea a year and a half after the 'reunion'. From her email correspondences and phone calls, I collected a sense that she has serious doubts that her Korean family would be willing to take the initiative in building a relationship with her. She felt that she couldn't be the one who always reaches out for them and makes plans to visit. The three older sisters in her Korean family were married and had their own families to take care of. Her oldest sister seemed overwhelmed by the fact that she had another sister whom she never known. She did not think she could push herself to learn another language to communicate with her Dutch sister. Her Korean father and Korean mother who had a different story of origin in regards to Nina also separately suffer and realize how difficult and impossible to bridge the time apart - twenty-eight years – would be without a common language.

* * * * *

My love for television does not end in my childhood. What has kept me accompanied during my prolonged study-abroad life style is my somewhat secret habit of watching Korean television. And yet, until recently I could not stop to think of my indulgence in Korean television as a waste of time. Watching Korean television shows, to me, entails a sense of shame and guilt. It is something clandestine or at least something not to be proud of. Television is often considered as not intelligent enough for you, a supposed intellectual, to dispense your too-much and too-often time with it. Watching

Korean television reveals as well as deepens a sense of alienation from mainstream U.S. culture and my homesickness.

Over the course of my time in the U.S., the medium delivered Korean television shows have varied from only a VHS tape viewed on a television set to DVDs on television and computer. The duration of time required to transfer the information has quickened from weeks to nothing, real-time on air. Since 2000, many Korean television shows are directly accessible through the Internet so that I could watch at any time with no or little costs as it airs. I do not remember when I started watching Happy Sunday, a weekly entertainment show, one of the top rated television shows at the time. It soon became my favorite show. When it started incorporating *지금 만나러 갑니다* (“On the way to meet”), a segment of birthmothers’ journeys to reunion with Korean adoptees in western Europe and the U.S., I joined millions of others waiting to see another heart-breaking story of a Korean birthmother and her child week after week.

From the first episode, I have been glued to the show and continued to watch it even before I knew that I was going to use this as part of my dissertation materials. Each week, as a different mother comes forward to discharge her bodily and psychological state of loss, her agony is exactly what pulls me back for the next week. It was disturbing to realize that someone else’s trauma and loss was being staged and consumed at its entertainment value. On the other hand, I also felt for the show’s own rationale, which ultimately facilitated a physical reunion between a mother and her long lost child(ren) who often cannot make a meeting even after they locate each other due to various dilemmas constraining their lives. For example, a birthmother in the third reunion

episode articulates that she could not come to see her children because she had been denied a U.S. entry visa.

Chapter 3: The Skin of the Virtual Mother²²

Korean adoption stories have surfaced in various television genres, including as serious affairs on prime time news, on social commentary shows, and even on a prime time television entertainment show.²³ The previous chapter explored how the virtual mother has been configured in relation to Korea's nationalist accounts of development and motherhood by analyzing the popular narrative of search and reunion. This chapter departs from a narrative-based analysis and engages an exploratory methodology, drawn from scholarship on technology and affect, to perform a different type of analysis of the virtual mother.

The show, 'On the Way to Meet,' was embedded in a weekly entertainment show and aired every Sunday evening from May 2005 through January 2006 on Korean Broadcasting System, Inc., one of Korea's major television networks²⁴. In contrast to an adoptee initiated search for birthparents that is the convention of search and reunion shows, 'On the Way to Meet' stages the figure of the birthmother initiating the search and portrays her journey to reunion in the country where the child has been adopted. The unique characteristic of this search show is not its storyline but its augmentation and escalation of affective qualities in a fractured narrative interspersed with a complex of images, texts and sounds. This feature reflects the logic of television production and circulation in contemporary teletechnology.

²² The title of this chapter is a play on the title of Laura Marks's book, *The Skin of the Film* (2000)

²³ 사랑의 위탁모 (Dearly Foster Mom) in which Korean female celebrities take the role of foster mother for the children waiting for adoption. This is the first entertainment show incorporating the subject of adoption into an entertainment show.

²⁴ After eight months of 'On the Way to Meet,' the show was canceled in January 2006. Many viewers commented on the show's homepage that they wished the show had continued.

Cultural theorists on television argue that television in late capitalist society is no longer based on a narrative or story, but has rather become image-based media (Beller, 1998; Clough 2000; Dienst, 1995). This flight from a narrative also resonates with the critical scholarship on loss and trauma, which I argue cannot be separated from the subject of transnational adoption. Judith Butler (2003) in *Loss* points out that narrative functions to contain loss, which is inherently uncontainable and irretrievable. Thus she moves to release loss from ‘a sequential temporality’ of narrative in order to understand loss as a creative force. In the same vein, David Eng and David Kazanjian (2003) contend that “... loss is inseparable from what remains, for what is lost is known only by what remains of it, by how these remains are produced, read and sustained” (p. 2).

I consider the excess of affective qualities in the show, ‘On The Way To Meet’, suggesting the remains of birthmothers’ loss involved in transnational adoption. But I am also aware of an inextricable relationship between the circulation of affective qualities embodying the residues of loss and a unit of value – attention – in information technology, particularly television. As Clough succinctly puts it, “Television aims primarily to capture attention and modulate affect through a logic of exposure, over – and underexposure [of images]” (99, 2000). In other words, the residues of birthmothers’ loss constitute a felt quality of virtual mother at a varying degree of exposure through the interface with television technology. In this chapter I am exploring the virtual mother in terms of its affective qualities. My analytical framework of a virtual mother neither precedes nor follows a certain, coherent and unified subject or subjectivity. Instead it faithfully interrogates the ways in which affectivity described by Clough “as a substrate of potential bodily responses, often autonomic responses, which are in-excess of

consciousness” is produced, modulated, and reverberated through television’s deployment of image, sound, and text (2, 2007). This process configures the felt quality of virtual mother.

I. Overview of ‘On The Way To Meet’

During May 2005 and January 2006, the period of the show’s production, fifteen reunions were made into a full-length episode²⁵. All reunions took place in adoptive countries listed here in descending order of frequency , the U.S., France, Belgium, Germany, and Norway, between birthmothers and their children except a few reunions between grandmothers and grandsons in Korea²⁶. The third episode between a birthmother and her three children, Yeonsook, Yeonsong, Yeonbaek was rerun as a Korean holiday special edition of ‘On the Way to Meet’. The last two episodes, aired in January 2006, were about ‘reunion and afterwards,’ portraying Korean adoptees’ subsequent visits with their Korean families.

‘On the way to meet’ divides each reunion into two thirty-minute episodes and airs consecutively in the following week with a few exceptions²⁷. Against the famous landmarks or landscapes of foreign countries, almost appearing as a travelogue, the show portrays a birthmother, accompanied by show hosts, on her journey to the adoptive country as if she follows the silent and solitary itinerary that her child took much earlier. In the first sequence of the show, the narrative unfolds the adoption circumstances with a focus on the birthmother’s emotional qualities of unspeakable loss saturated with sadness,

²⁵ A reunion between Chun Sung Hoon, a Korean adoptee stationed in Korea as a U.S. serviceman, and his birthmother, was made into five minute-long clips and aired on June 30th, right before Byun Jin Seung’s reunion. In order to maintain the birthmother’s privacy, the birthmother’s voice was muted and shown in a longshot so that the figure of the birthmother is by no means identifiable.

²⁶ Three reunions were taken place in Korea due to the health issue of Korean family members.

²⁷ The following episodes are made and aired once: Byun, Jin Seung; Moon Hoon; Um Jin Yong; Eunhy and Jee Hee.

grief, and anxiety. In parallel, an adoptee's life experience after adoption, often described in terms of his or her struggles or dilemmas relating to loss, are presented. Added to this, the adoptee's feelings toward or reflections about Korea and/or his or her Korean mother are always examined, showing Korea's uneasy relationship to transnational adoption.

What is added to this television show is a birthmother's visual letter encountered by an adoptee prior to the 'reunion' meeting with his or her Korean mother (Please find a full translation of fifteen visual letters from birthmothers in Appendix I). This is the first time when the adoptee sees the Korean mother after their separation. The Korean mother expresses her state of mind over after the years of separation. Often their messages are asking for forgiveness and their apologies for not being able to take care of their children. They acknowledge difficulties and pains to which many Korean adoptees must have been subjected via a series of displacements. The regrets and pains that they were subject to are delivered affectively. The visual letter spatializes the virtual mother by interchanges of various gazes onto the birthmother's body. She is being looked at by a camera, and by an adoptee, and by a female guest and by viewers. The cascade of gaze spatializes her place 'deep inside' of television screen thus putting her into a place of dark, shadow and shame (See Appendix II). The first part of the show ends right before or after the scene of reunion between a birthmother and her child.

The second part of the show begins with a recapitulation of the previous highlights of a birthmother's monologue about adoption circumstances, her life, an adoptee's accounts of his or her experience of growing up, and a birthmother's visual letter. A full delivery of the scene of reunion, often identical with the reunion image of

the previous week, opens this new chapter of the episode. Soon after this crucial moment of meeting, the show turns its narrative with the upbeat mode of action shots. After their initial meeting, the adoptee and Korean mother, hand-in-hand go either to the adoptee's own residence or to the adoptive parents' house where the rest of show takes place²⁸.

As soon as a birthmother sees the adoptive parents, white, middle-class couples in the U.S. and European countries, she greets them, especially the adoptive mother, in the fullness of her indebtedness and gratitude. Considering the narrative of search and reunion and the better life opportunity discussed in terms of the American dream in the previous chapter, her act of gratitude reasserts a moral hierarchy between a sender and a receiver of children in transnational adoption. In the landscape of the house where the adoptee had lived or currently resides, the adoptee, Korean mother, and the adoptee's family including adoptive parents or a spouse, appear in Korean traditional custom, Han-Bok. It, in turn, resignifies an expanded global status and global territory of Korea. Korean birthmother offers a Korean meal that she herself prepared and brought all the way to the reunion in this foreign country. Literally she feeds her son or daughter. It is followed by the gift exchange between a mother and a child and a family photo where the Korean mother is posed with the adoptive family, visually realizing Korea's global kinship. This is a usual ending of the story of reunion. However, it is noteworthy that five episodes are ended with the scene of another separation between a Korean mother and her birth child after their reunion. After each episode is over, the advertisement from

²⁸ If the adoptee is not married, then the show usually features the adoptive parents' house. If the adoptee is married, the show is shot at his or her own house. It reveals the intertwined relationship between an individual's full citizenship and his or her status in relation to a family. This in other words reflects the trace of orphan status imposed on Korean adoptee which has to be revoked in the realm of family.

four or five Korean adoptees in search of their [Korean] parents is delivered through a juxtaposition of their current moving images with childhood photographs.

‘On the Way to Meet’ disrupts a popular narrative of search and reunion. In the first place, picturesque details of birthmothers’ personal accounts reveal that poverty is often interlaced with domestic violence and/or a biological father’s irresponsible acts, including affairs, all of which lead to family disintegration²⁹. Although the account of domestic abuse is part of the story, it never develops into a meaningful sequence.

Secondly, the show follows the reunion narrative and yet also reveals the scene of separation after the reunion in order to provoke more feelings and sadness in viewers.

The scene of separation might suggest the reunion as a punctuation of the separated paths of a birthmother and her child’s life. This particular deviation from a narrative of search and reunion accidentally disrupts the fantasy of instant bonding and rebuilding of family between a Korean birthmother and her child. It also further suggests that the logic of affective provocation precedes the narrative in this show production.

Despite its generic search and reunion narrative and production of the figure of the birthmother³⁰, what makes Happy Sunday’s ‘On the Way to Meet’ distinct from any

²⁹ Especially domestic violence threatens a mother’s life and pushes her to run away from family to survive [miyoung’s mother; yoon-il’s mother; Hooni’s]. While she was not present, the birthfather put the child up for adoption. Five birthfathers directly put their children up for adoption. One birthfather left his child at a busy street unattended.

³⁰ Thirteen birthmothers whose ages range between 49 and 68 have appeared. The majority of birthmothers are identified as legitimate mothers at the time of the child(ren)’s adoption in 1970s and 1980s. They separated from their babies in their twenties and early thirties. Many of them are portrayed as a single woman or widow at the time of adoption. However, there is no information regarding the birthmother’s current marital status. No single unmarried mother comes forward. Regarding motivations circumscribing adoption, poverty subsequent to a traumatic event, i.e. a husband’s death is articulated repetitively as a prevalent reason for the adoption. The premature death of a husband left women economically devastated [Yeon’s; Byun’s, Sunwon & Jiwon’s].

Two thirds of the women chose adoption while the rest did not know that the child(ren) had been adopted until their faces were on air. Six out of thirteen mothers did not decide on or even know about their

other television's adoption search program is its excessive transmission of a birthmother's emotional response which is extracted on the way to meet her lost child. The virtual mother's affective qualities are not bound to the storyline but, are fleshed out of the assemblage of an image, sound and a text, which punctuates the linearity of the show. I am going to refer to this particular temporality as fractured temporality. In order to attend to the process involved in the configuration of affective qualities constituting the felt quality of the virtual mother, I examine the ways in which images, sounds and text maintain a fractured temporality of this television show. Television narrative is formed in a loosely coherent way that foregrounds an affect-driven analysis of each constituent.

In the bodily constitution of 'On The Way To Meet', the emotional tonalities are modulated by the duration of images, camera work and editing techniques. The action images with a neutral tone are played at normal speed. The fast moving images portray the birthmother's adventurous journey, which is well contrasted with the slowness of images that capture the emotions of birthmothers and/or adoptees. The spinning imagery³¹ of reunion also suggests the emotional turmoil of both parties just reunited after hundreds of thousands of days of separation. Another way of producing the affective qualities in images is by myriads of close-up shots as if camera eyes touch the surface of objects, such as the birthmother's crying face.

children's adoption. The child's biological father or in-laws made the decision and took the children away without informing the birthmother. One mother lost her child while she was working outside by accident. The mother of a biracial woman indicated that a social prejudice against biracial kids was too strong for her to raise the child in Korea. That's why she decided on adoption for her. For birthmothers, regardless of their voluntary choices, the separation from her child(ren) via adoption becomes trauma.

³¹ There are at least two cameras filming the reunion scene. The camera person always walks around the Korean adoptee and Korean mother who just met in order to capture and produce a visceral response to the reunion. This image produces the sensation of vertigo, which makes you feel nauseated.

Sound effect employed in the show can be divided into background music and a voiceover narration. The background music texturizes the emotional qualities of the narrative. For instance, minor tuned music accompanies the stories of grief and sadness, affectively filling the unspeakable wounds of the figure of the birthmother. A female narrator's emotional voiceover weaves the story of separation and loss together with the birthmother's first accounts. According to Massumi's analysis of an emotional version of a voiceover that was added to a silent film, "the emotional version added a few phrases that punctuated the narrative line with qualifications of the emotional content..." which "enhanced the images' effect, as if they resonated with the level of intensity..." (25, 2002). The voiceover resonates with the images in 'On the way to meet,' enhancing the show's affective intensity.

In addition to the images and sound effects, Happy Sunday's 'On the Way to Meet' uses subtitled texts on screen. Besides its emotional quality, the text offers translation from the adoptee's foreign language into Korean. Our eyes listen to the adoptee words that appear in the form of text as if she or he speaks Korean³². The text unceasingly ruptures the flow of images, creating a porous quality to the narrative, which in turn invites an instant recognition of the story. Throughout the show, texts modulate the affective qualities of images and sounds through selective enunciation and emphasis. Such an emotional version of text not only augments the intensity of information but also directs viewer's information processing (See Appendix III).

³² This dubious quality that text generates is clearly shown in the section showing the birthmother's visual letter. We also read her words toward her child in Korean while her child reads a subtitle of the adoptive country's language. A birthmother's visual letter is delivered in her Korean while the image of the adoptee's letter has its own subtitle. The Korean subtitle with the image constantly creates a slippage between the two images and two languages that functions to create a façade of Korean adoptees reading Korean text.

My observations of the fractured temporality and affect-driven logic embedded in Happy Sunday's 'On the Way to Meet' have allowed me to attend to the discrete yet orchestrated functions of image, sound and text, not as parts of narrative but as events in themselves, heavily invested with affectivity and sensuous qualities. These disjointed images, texts and sounds may well indicate the pain of loss that Jill Bennett astutely observes is, "...not as easily or instantly apprehended ... but is, rather, *a more diffuse and extended process*" (my italics, p.343). Thus the non-linear visual and aural imagings on which this chapter focuses become what Judith Butler might call 'enigmatic traces of loss' that constitute the affective register of loss.

This affective quality cannot be disentangled from the loss that is repetitively identified in Korea's adoption discourse. The dramatic, affective quality of the show reflects a salient aspect of the contemporary telecommunications assemblage, what John Johnston (1999) describes in terms of a distributed system of sentience, memory, and communication based on calculation (and transformation) of information. In other words, the production and circulation of affective quality grounding the emergence of a virtual mothering is based on the calculation of loss.

In order to flesh out a felt quality of a virtual mothering, I explore the skin of "the technologies that are allowing us both to 'see' affect and to produce bodily capacities" in order to address how "the technical [turns itself] into felt quality" of virtual mother (Clough, 2007, p. 2). Attending to the distributed perception as well as the significance of bodily sensation and cognition in the global circuitry of images and information, I propose to release image, text, and sound from narrative. Doing so allows us to engage

with contemporary television's logic of circuitry, which operates outside the subject-system.

As I take a flight from narrative, I also depart from subject-based analysis. Heath argues that television "negotiates the breakdown of the subject-system unity through the assembling of meanings, voices, sights, viewer-moments into the continuum of its functioning. Television especially makes visible a certain movement in and of images that belong to the machine's functioning where the subject is neither origin nor end" (Clough, 99). In the machinic assemblage of virtual mothering, the technology produces more than just a subject in an interpretable narrative. Rather, the virtual mother's technological embodiment reverberates as a felt quality in the bodies of the viewers.

In departing from narrative and subjectivity, I am rethinking how loss functions in affective circuits. In terms of loss and its embodiment as sense knowledge, Laura Marks (2000), in her book, *The Skin of the Film*, applies the notion of fetishes and fossils to reading intercultural cinematic images. As Marks describes, "Both the fetishes and fossils are like nodes, or knots, in which historical, cultural, and spiritual forces gather with a particular intensity" (224, 1999). So both the fetishes and fossils condense cryptic histories within them. For Marks, the fetishes and fossils gain their significance through contact with objects. As I glide through various skins of visual and aural imagery, I contemplate the imagery's saturation with the unsettling qualities of fetishes and fossils. In other words, the displaced and/or radioactive imagery of an adoptee's photograph at the time of adoption and the close up imagery of the birthmother's face are under scrutiny. I also note the peculiar and volatile quality of the birthmother's crying sounds orchestrated with background music, saturating the membrane of the virtual mother with

an affective quality. Furthermore, Marks' insight on fetish and fossil image is not limited to visual analysis but can be extended to understand [cinematic] images, "not as a representation ...but an emissary, which is volatile to the degree that the viewer/receiver has access to the materiality of its original scene" (p.92).

Attending to felt qualities of a virtual mother means getting actively involved in the configuration of virtual mother instead of excavating the burials of a ready-made virtual mother. Mark Hansen's keen analysis of time, being and affect, which I later describe at length, inspires me to think a virtual mother arising from a shift in temporal apparatus and a generation of affect. I creatively modulate the affect of loss produced by this television reunion show by crafting a temporality that is other than linear, in order to venture a new politics of affect. Therefore, the examples that I am analyzing, -- children's adoption pictures, birthmother's tears and virtual mother's crying sounds -- are attuned to different temporalities in order to trace but furthermore to produce the affective register of loss.

II. Reverberating Skin of the Virtual Mother in Ghost Child's Scream

Television is image-based information technology. Patricia Clough (2000) emphasizes that images, not stories, are the primary axis of affective bonds between the viewer and television. The most salient image grabbing my attention over the eight-month production of Happy Sunday's "On the Way to Meet" is the old photographic image of the Korean adoptee as a child right before he or she was sent away for adoption. Such photographs appear on the show in two different ways. In each episode, there is a photograph of the adoptee starring in the week's reunion narrative. This photograph represents the birthmother's memory of the adoptee's past childhood in Korea, as well as

the adoptee's authentic identity as a Korean. Secondly, the same kind of photographs appearing at the end of the show are used to publicize adoptees' childhood faces in order to assist or facilitate the search for their Korean families³³. In the meantime, more than one hundred Korean adoptees' photographic images have interwoven in the loose fabric of television skin.

The inclusion of a photograph of an adopted child in a search show is not unfamiliar. I argue that the photograph functions here as a fetish object that renders itself significant through a series of displacements combined with incessant repetition. The association of photography with fetish is widely discussed in relation to loss (Barthes, 1981; Metz 1985; Hirsch 1997; Marks 2000). In Freud's conception of fetishism (1915), "When the fetish is instituted some process occurs which reminds one of the stopping of memory in traumatic amnesia. ...it is as though the last impression before the uncanny and traumatic one is retained as fetish" (Freud, 155, 1961). The photograph's temporal proximity to the lost object of the referent within the frame makes the photograph a fetish. Often taken just before the placement of the child into adoption as 'the last impression' of the child, the photographic portrait becomes a fetish whose fate is destined to circulate. Such photographs now embedded in television technology instantly create a closed circuit of loss and reclamation thereby accelerating its fetishistic tendency.

Photography cannot bring the referent back from the past. What it brings us is the form of a ghostly revenant of the referent (Hirsch, 1997). In other words, the referent of and in the photograph has a dual existence across two temporal points. As one looks at the photograph, one sees the presence and absence of the referent – what was once there

³³ Six Korean adoptees made their reunion through this ending section entitled: 'I am looking for Korean family' (Yosup, Byun Jin Seung; Cholgi; Moon Hoon; Song MeeYoung, ChaeWoon)

no longer exists - at the same time. In photography, the referent is both present (implied in the photograph) and absent (it has been there but is not here now). The referent haunts the picture like a ghost: it is a revenant, a return of the lost and dead other (Hirsch, 1997).

Such a ghostly quality of the photograph inadvertently and compulsively saturates the television texture of ‘On the Way to Meet’, haunting it with the countenances of returning children. The repeated photographic image of the child’s face fractures a flow of moving images as well as enriching the television skin with the cultural, historical and political information of the photograph. Such mediation brings a reminiscence of the past; of the childhood; of anyone’s irretrievable past. But at the same time, the very same photograph erupts the surface and makes it volatile.

According to Barthes, the *punctum* is a “sting, speck, cut, little hole – and also a cast of the dice. A photograph’s *punctum* is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)” (27, Barthes, 1981). Photographs of Korean adoptees overlaid by moving images in ‘On the Way to Meet’ play as a *punctum*, which pricks and wounds me. “Whether or not it is triggered, it is an addition. It is what I add to the photograph and what is nonetheless already there” (55, Barthes). For Barthes, the *punctum* is the detail that arouses the still images from their flat immobility and from which the moving world beyond the four corners of the image emerges for us. Guided by the punctum, I participate in the photograph.

The following photograph of two children appeared in a September 2005 episode on Song Mee Young and Song Chae Woon adopted by French family in 1982. Now they had grown up and appeared to have their own itinerary for the search and reunion.



(Figure 3.1: Still Image from Happy Sunday aired in September 2005)

Looking closely, there is the logo of the show, in upper right corner, authorizing this photograph. The background of the photo is a blown up image of the same photo, too enlarged to hold the integrity of the human figure or boundaries separating the two children. It is as if this faded background illustrates Mee-young and Chae woon's mutilated history. Mee young and Chae Woon, siblings to each other, were adopted together at the ages of two and five, respectively, by a French family after their biological father gave up his parental custody. Their Korean birthmother, who had run away because of life-threatening domestic violence, at the time of adoption only believed that the two children she had left behind lived with their father somewhere in Korea³⁴. After being adopted, Chae Woon, in particular, could not adjust well to his displacement and a new environment. As a result, he was kicked out of the adoptive parents' house at the

³⁴ The birthmother saw the face of Song Mee Young, her daughter, looking for her in 'On the way to meet'.

age of twelve and became an orphan again. Since then, he lived on and off the street with aid from the French government's institutional facilities.

The child's portrait, taking the full screen, in the upper left corner shows little stapled holes suggesting the troubling and traveling history of this picture, not to mention the fate of the subject in the photograph. The merging of two separate pictures of Mee Young and Chae Woon into one photographic image ironically illuminates their separate upbringings and life journeys although they were adopted by the same family. Against the eerie background, what takes my eyes out of their sockets are the white cards pinned to their chests. Each card shows the child's Korean name, reference number, and date of birth, all written in English, which discloses their immediate audience – prospective adoptive parents, mostly middle-class white citizens from the U.S. or U.S.-like European countries. Thus, this photograph captures the adoption itinerary before it takes place.

The photograph of Mee Young with a crease presents Mee Young's two-year-old appearance – her scratched and scrawny face, gender-unattended hairstyle and her shoulders hunched forward. At a quick glimpse, Chae woon appears as a dead child because of his half-closed eyes. The physical quality of these photographs suggests the negligence, and lack of care and attention to the children who are unprotected within the domain of family, are waiting for adoption. The contrast of eyes between Mee young and Chae Woon characterizes the bifurcating moment of departure from Korea. Whereas her wide open, dead-serious eyes and pursed lips grab my attention and my participation as a witness to the event about to unfold, his almost closed eyes, which one might think of as an accident, allows me to feel in him or the camera or both, an unconscious unwillingness to be in the adoption journey, or even further his desire for death.

Reflecting the trauma involved in adoption, the child's photograph haunts the virtual space as a ghost, beckoning the viewers to engage in a particular way of knowing in terms of what Avery Gordon describe as a haunting "by being there and not there at the same time" (Gordon, 1997). Metz articulates, "Photography is a cut inside the referent, it cuts a piece of it, a fragment, a part object, for an immobile travel of no return" (84, 1985). This wounded child's adoption photograph neither proceeds with its own journey nor returns to the place and time of the photograph; the time and the being in the photograph just disappears from the world. In this light, the photograph memorializes the children who no longer exist.

The unceasing circulation of this photographic image moves us beyond a frame of traumatic haunting. In Christian Metz's (1985) discussion of the off-frame in photography, he helps to shift to focus onto the investment of imagination.

The character who is off-frame in a photograph, however, will never come into the frame, will never be heard- again a death; another form of death. The spectator has no empirical knowledge of the contents of the off-frame, but at the same time cannot help imagining some off-frame, hallucinating it, dreaming the shape of this emptiness (87).

The photograph of the child's portrait insistently offers to show its outer frame –the harsh economic reality and neglectful circumstances to which these children were subjected. But it keeps painfully pricking the emptiness of a mother, more than anything. Barthes points out in his philosophy on photography, "The photograph is in no way animated ... but it animates us and others" (20, 1981). By her absent contours, we feel a mother off-frame.

This off – frame quality of photography is incorporated into the show. An average of four or five children’s adoption portraits appear at the end of the show under the subheading, “I am looking for my [Korean] parents”. Each child’s photograph is coordinated with moving images of a Korean adult adoptee delivering his or her message in search of Korean parents in a foreign language. While the adult adoptees deliver their messages in search of birth parents, the text on the screen constantly translates their words and renders information in their hand-written adoption file legible. Thus, the subjects of the photographs return with their tongues displaced.

Fred Moten (2003) extends Barthes’ notion of *punctum* by freeing his analysis from the order of semiotics and visual analysis into an exploration of the phonic substance in the photograph. He claims that “the meaning of a photograph is cut and augmented by a sound or noise that surrounds it and pierces the frame ... [but] sound disturbs it in the interest of a resurrection [of the dead]” (69, 2003, my addition). By paying attention to “the complex, dissonant, polyphonic affectivity of the ghost”, the ghost in and around the photographic brings itself into a life. This is the moment when the child framed releases its voices.

Moten’s phonic insight inspired me to listen to the haunted image of adopted children together with disembodied sounds from adoptees pierced throughout the show. Here I overlay a time of disembodied words into a time of the photograph in order to listen or maybe to have voices released from photographs. Appearing muted at first glance, those photographs demand desperately to be seen but with their own voices although they are disembodied and scattered throughout the show in order to reassert their Korean-ness and their Korean past. Here I would like to lock those disembodied

Korean voices and fragmented words from Korean adoptees into their photograph. The words include 밥 (Rice), 배고파 (I am hungry), 엄마 (Mom), 아빠 (Dad), 사랑해 (I love you), 김치 (Kim Chee), 엄마, 보고싶어요 (I miss you, mother). Attending those utterances, the photographs are being hollowed by disembodied voices suggesting the time of rupture and the timelessness of the photograph.

The hallucinatory noises of children's crying in their resistance against impending displacement, or merely their irritation at being photographed, create the condition of possibility for rendering the hollowed figure of the birthmother palpable. Their shrieks, "I am here, mother. Please find me here," reverberate across the television screen. That in turn creates a friction against the skin of numerous eyes, activating the virtual realm of motherhood. Incorporating the phonics in the photograph allows us to engage its affective qualities beyond ocular-centric and semiotic interpretations of photography. The striking eyes, shrill noises and disembodied, crying Korean words all brush against the skin of birthmothers who are not yet activated. The photographs are tentacles of the dead yet are made into live bodies by the television. Enlivened, they emit numerous points of contact with the skin of a birthmother who comes from the future.

III. Fossilized Skin of Virtual Mother

Maternal grief and sadness are crystallized into a felt quality in the affective imagery of 'On the Way to Meet'. The close-up shot of birthmothers' faces smeared in tears fills the television screen in slow motion when they are about to answer the question, "How have you lived your life after your child was sent away for adoption?" and/or "Have you ever regretted your decision?". To such provocative questions, many birthmothers appearing on the show responded in a non-verbal form of communication

such as a face engraved with deep sadness and flowing tears. As a birthmother, Park, Myung Soon expresses excruciating pains and an intolerable life of sorrow: “There is no word describing what I have been through.” The inability of words to express the pain of loss was also recognized in Jill Bennett’s work (2002, 2005). Bennett (2005) claims that, “Sense memory operates through the body...registering the pain of memory as it is directly experienced, and communicating a level of bodily affect” (26). Noting the fluidity of affect and porosity of bodies, she suggests the condition of possibility for a new perception.

By extracting affect from narrative, or by isolating the embodied sensation from character, affective imagery promotes a form of thought that arises from the body, that explores the nature of our affective investment and that ultimately has the potential to take us outside the confines of our character and habitual modes of perception (44, 2005).

‘On the Way to Meet’ plays such images in excess of birthmothers’ emotions in slow motion. In other words, television technology has utilized the technical expansion of time and augmentation of affect. Mark Hansen (2004) argues that technical manipulation of temporality modulates the sense of affect in his analysis of Bill Viola’s media art³⁵. This acute insight helps me redirect my attention to television’s expansion of time already employed on *Happy Sunday*. In order to analyze the affectivity of the virtual mother, I look at a still image of birthmothers in tears extracted from moving scenes.

³⁵ Bill Viola shot one minute of work showing four different emotions including joy, sorrow, fear, and anger, and replayed it at sixteen minutes, thus overloading the stimuli of the now by slowing the speed of the moving image, to the extent to which our normal perception (i.e. vision) cannot see the movement of images. It appears almost as a still image.



(Figure 3.2: Still Image from Happy Sunday aired on May 29th, 2005)

In order to bring affect to perception here, I am showing the technical expansion of time in the form of a still image. Strictly speaking, this captured image represents a cut the duration of one-thirtieth of a second, although it may appear as a still image. According to Hansen (2004), the slowness of an image as an act of the technical expansion of time allows us to learn about how affectivity and our feeling work beneath perception in its normal function.

We use technology to extend our own subjectivities simply by attending to the subtle, supersaturated affective shifts on the faces of the represented figures and responding to them in the only way we can – via the richly nuanced resonances they trigger in our bodies (613, 2004).

Hansen's account engages with the common technique of television and suggests how affect often mediated by technology is perceived unintentionally at the bodily level that constitutes our beings.

Both Bennett and Hansen focus on affective images and their corresponding, embodied perception below and through the skin, which lays the groundwork for a new body politics in media technology. Bennett (2005) notes that "affect is not organized in terms of emotion or the expressions of individual characters. But the characters are caught in the flows of affect" (34). In other words, a virtual mother does not exist before affect is produced; affect produces a virtual mother. I apply this to understand the affective quality of the virtual mother. But such a felt quality of the virtual mother always already occurs at our affective being via distributed perceptions.

This image captures a line of handwritten text from a letter an adoptee wrote to her mother eighteen years ago, not long after she was adopted, overlaying the mouth of the birthmother's close-up face winced in tears. This time-image bears her daughter's handwriting in Korean, which reads, "My, my beloved mother, I miss you". The text-image can be explained in terms of Marks's description of fossil image. The fossil is a physical trace that the original leaves on the object with which it shares its skin. A fossil has a disjunctive, volatile memory that Marks has termed a 'radioactive quality.' This "radioactive quality of fossil image arouses other memories, causing inert presences on the most recent layer of history themselves to set off chains of associations that had been forgotten" (227, 1999). The letter, or more accurately, the paper which was originally brushed against her Korean writing, lays bare the memory of a daughter's past feelings of Korea and her Korean mother, the lost object. It suggests simultaneously what was once

there and what had been lost. It thus surfaces as a witness to the forgotten history of loss and displacement of mother/tongue over time.

The imagery purposefully delivers a hand-written text, rather than a mechanized subtitled text, because the image of the handwriting instigates the affective transmission of the radioactive quality of the fossil image. The meaning of the letter is not necessarily acquired via its representation (of the content), but the fact that this handwriting embodies a daughter's memories of her Korean mother and a past Korea that any viewer on the other side of the television screen is ready to share.

This image explicitly exemplifies the point that watching television requires more than just vision. The image of handwritten text invites a particular kind of vision, haptic visuality, which makes a sense of touch part of vision. The tactile embodiment of the handwritten image brings forth the touch of eyes in perception. The haptic visuality, in fact, is conditioned by a technical limitation of television imagery. Park Geun Seo (1999) discusses the idea that television requires active sensorial participation from the viewers due to its poor pixels and mosaic-unit images, compared to movies (97,1999). It thus requires eyes' support to touch and fill in the loss of irregular fragmented lines and to brighten the colors³⁶.

The porosity of television skin foregrounds sensorial and affective investment from the viewers, although such investment often occurs below the level of normal perception, completes the transmission of affect from each image. So now we start understanding that television is no longer just a medium of representation but more so of emissary. Bennett proposes, "If the skin of (traumatic) memory is permeable, then it

³⁶ Because of the introduction of high-definition television, this argument may not apply to today's viewers.

cannot serve to encase the past self as other. It is precisely through the breached boundaries of skin in such imagery that memory continues to be felt as a wound rather than seen as a contained other” (41-2, 2005). Therefore, the contour of a virtual mother, who is not seen as a coherent and unified body, but is rather affectively sensible, to be felt as a virtual mother in the passage of transmission.

Let's return to the facial image of a birthmother, 이정옥 (Lee Jung Ok). The downcast, wincing and almost paralyzed face of a birthmother holds her pain, which later she describes with the words, 'my heart has been slashed with knife.' This facial image reverberates in Deleuze's discussion of faciality in cinema. Faciality attends to the surface of a thing closely, maybe too closely so that boundaries or parameters of objects are ruptured. This close range vision offers the intensification of affect in an image whose motor extension is limited: "It is this combination of a reflecting, immobile unity and of intensive expressive movements which constitutes the affect..." (1986, 87). It is resonated in Mark Hansen's technical expansion and its relation to affect modulation. A close range shot of a slow, almost still image uses technical devices to produce a felt vitality of the virtual mother, which can be described in terms of a "supersaturated, temporally distended presentation of the rich, affective tonalities" (Hansen, 613).

Her mouth in this blown-out facial image is covered with a handwritten text of her daughter's Korean letter. Now, the figure of the birthmother is made seeable yet not sayable. Instead she sheds tears. According to Tom Lutz (1999) in his book entitled, *Crying: The Natural and Cultural History of Tears*, tears are "a kind of language, a primary, and often primal, form of communication" (24). As one of the most common bodily responses to loss, tears substantialize the wounds never cared for in a way that is

felt as bleeding. As she cries, her wounds are bleeding. Thus, her trauma and unresolved grief is rendered sensible through tears and in the form of bodily sensation, pulsating the television screen. According to Lutz, “Tears of mourning signal our desire to turn back time and magically redeem our loss, as well as the bitter knowledge of the impossibility of that desire” (22).

Her closed eyes saturated with tears may indicate her inability to face what the letter delivers to her, the loss of time – eighteen years -- that she and her daughter can never go back to. Her grimacing expression revives the moment of pain, which is being seeped into the body, rendering her trauma palpable. Bennett (2005) argues that suffering can be conveyed through imagery when an image has the capacity to address the spectator’s bodily memory. The birthmother’s suffering transgresses the permeable boundaries of skin, of a birthmother, of television, and of a spectator, which allows the traumatic memory to be felt as a wound rather than to be seen as a representation. In addition to the skin of a birthmother, there is also the skin of television which is always already opened to make a passageway for that visceral and affective quality of image to be transmitted to the viewers’ sensation. This affective quality of machinic assemblage constitutes the virtual mother’s skin that is “a ground of inscription, ... experienced as sustaining sensation” (Bennett, 38, 2005).

IV. Crying: The Opening of Virtual Mother’s Skin

The felt quality of the virtual mother is not limited to the realm of vision. Although the unit of value in television is primarily the image, television’s desire to transmit is also accomplished by its sound because sound calls for attention to look. Therefore, television barely stops talking. Of all the murmuring, non-linguistic sounds

incorporated in the show, what resonates in me almost two years after being involved in the show initially as a viewer and later as a researcher is the bellowing, anguish-filled sound of crying, its phonographic quality of grief and deep sadness. Of all the various sounds composing aural texture of the show, the birthmother's crying is mediated and media-tized, as the most powerful aural index of her motherhood, at the scene of reunion.

The howling and wailing of birthmothers has continuously vibrated the tissue of Korean society ever since Korea's adoption history began, although it rings in the rest of the world as noise, unwanted sound. In the absence of social recognition of the massive trauma to which numerous birthmothers have been subjected during the fifty-year practice of transnational adoption in Korea, the virtual mother's crying is worth listening to carefully. (Please listen to track 1 on the CD enclosed.)

I compiled four different birthmothers' crying sounds sampled from 'On the Way to Meet' in order to discuss the affective texture of loss and a virtual mother's felt quality. This crying is often taking place at the physical reunion between a birthmother and a child who is no longer a child. When the figure of the birthmother starts crying, background music immediately joins her voice so that crying is no longer just a human voice. The sound of crying bellows pain out, turns what has been unspeakable into uproar, makes her sorrow drip. Simultaneously, a chorus of high-pitched boy soprano vocals soothes her wounds while a background string instrument such as a harp suggests the solemnity of church and ultimate peace³⁷. Thus this sound of two instruments – one of human body and the other of technology – simultaneously portrays the scene of reunion

³⁷ Four different types of music composed in the genre of New Age from the 1980s and 90s plays in the background throughout the mother's crying. They include Secret Garden's 'Last Present'; 'Andalu' by Chris Sphæris; Joe Hisaishi's 'Path to a Valley'; Isao Sasaki's 'One Fine Spring Day'.

between a mother and a child as an ultimate, heavenly, ethereal journey from earthly pains and sorrows to universal resolution. The prosthetic and auxiliary relationship between a birthmother's crying and background music orchestrated in a way that dramatizes emotions including grief, sadness, and a feeling of being absolved, diffuses the aural boundaries between body and world. As a result, this acoustic arrangement escalates the affective qualities of loss. I found it to be the sound of a virtual mother. Thus, a virtual mother's aural texture is a machinic assemblage of both the sounds.

The virtual mother's crying reverberates across the skin of the television screen. The insistent and intense quality of her crying, rendered the utmost important maternal act, is transmitted by repeated short clips of birthmothers crying as a highlight in the show's preview. It is no longer a noise, but rather the 'sound of mother' that is incorporated into show production. Furthermore, the sound of wailing is the aurality of the affective quality of mother.

In his conceptualization of sound and its properties, Douglas Kahn (1992) argues that sound vibrates, inscribes and transmits. The wailing of the Korean birthmother vibrates the world, inscribes indescribable pain, and transmits sorrow with its own peculiar sound³⁸. It is not just weeping. Rather it approximates a loud high-pitched piercing cry. The wailing hollows one's body and turns its traumatic self inside out to be

³⁸ Korean mothers' crying was noted in the documentary film, *Women Outside* (J.T. Takagi & Hyejung Park). Chong Soon France was accused of murdering her two-year old son who crashed to death by accident while Chong Soon was working at the bar. G. Dewey Hudson, one of her prosecutors, describes her crying at the trial: "She was very emotional during the trial. I will never forget shrill noise that came from her, were more animal like. It is so foreign to me, [it is] so frightening to me in the courtroom, and other observers in the courtroom, which is something you have to hear to believe." For example, Moose (1911) describes the sound of Korean wailing, "[B]ut will never be forgotten if once heard. It can be easily heard for a half mile, and nothing more weird in the way of a noise can be imagined". The intensity of wailing is so strong.

felt. The acoustic features of wailing, according to Greg Urban (1988), bear powerful indexical connections to the emotions associated with mourning. Her sound of howling texturizes her grief and gives a contour to her loss.

Given the cultural aspect of Korea's long-lasting involvement in transnational adoption, which is often explained as a result of Korean War catastrophe and the subsequent extreme poverty of the 1960s and 1970s, Korean birthmothers' wailing can be compared to 'keening,' a practice specifically related to mourning for the dead, associated with the cultural trauma of the Irish Famine. David Llyod (2003) pays attention to the politics of wailing subsequent to a catastrophe.

...the wail is the almost animal wail of despair and passivity before a catastrophe that seems to exceed comprehension. Wordless, the wail is also anonymous, without any distinct agency to utter it; as a recurrent motif in representation of the Famine ... (206).

When the scale of trauma is beyond the normal level of comprehension and perception, wordless wailing replaces verbal efforts to articulate the loss. Frequently encountered as a 'recurrent motif' in Korea's adoption history, Korean birthmothers' wailing is another vestige of the unspeakable pain and loss involved in Korea's unceasing engagement in adoption.

A mother's crying insinuates the sound of mourning for the dead. The mournful quality of a mother's crying touches the onlooker as the embodied sense memory of grief, which Bennett (2005) uses for a politics of trauma and affective imagery. The loss animated in aural texture, as the mother wails, leaves her body and touches your ear drum. Your ears bleed as her trauma leaves its affective register onto you. The membrane of

your ears, before your consciousness, opens and renders a virtual mother's voice, inscribed with her pain of loss, intelligible.

The dynamic and affective qualities of the machinic assemblage constituting the body of the virtual mother begs a creative arrangement of wailing that transmits the affective quality of the virtual mother. I release the affective power of wailing from individual birthmothers by dissolving linearity. Put differently, I play wailings of five birthmothers simultaneously to feature the social bodies of the virtual mother and their mourning sounds. (Please listen to track 2 of the enclosed CD.)

Now one can hear almost a cacophony of various wailings, which I argue features the corporeality of a virtual mother. The cacophony swells with the background music and brushes wailing bodies against one another. Barad's (2005) discussion of bodies helps explain this reading: "All bodies, not merely 'human' bodies, come to matter through ...its performativity. Bodies are not objects with inherent boundaries and properties; they are material-discursive phenomena" (823, 2005). The skin of a virtual mother is realized through its performative wailing, which lays the groundwork for a new configuration of bodies by collapsing and rearranging corporeal boundaries.

This new configuration of the virtual mother is established in order to engage with the affectivity of wailing bodies that take departure from individual bodies of birthmothers. Charles L. Briggs (1993), in his analysis of Warao women's ritual wailing, points out that agency becomes highly diffuse and can no longer be attributed to a single individual wailing. In other words, he relates ritual wailing to "a special form of subjectivity in which ordinary spatiotemporal and interactional orientations are displaced by a calculation of time, space, and person in relation to the death space/time" (946). He

suggests the conditions of possibility for a political agency of wailing outside the individual body in the process of mourning.

Given this, I argue that the wailing carries the affective and social power of laments over the long history of adoption in Korea. The dissolution of the timeline demarcating individual wailing bodies allows us to participate in a mourning ritual of virtual mothering. Briggs proposes that, “Just as the *obohona* (volition, or consciousness) of the wailer is turned inside-out, the social body is similarly turned inside out by revealing secrets and voicing knowledge that is shared but never spoken openly” (947, 1993). This public display of unspeakable knowledge, not through a collectivity of individuals, but through the condensation of affective bodies felt below the normal range of perception, describes the politics of affect in virtual mothering. This somewhat experimental configuration of sounds – wailing -- released from traumatized bodies illustrates how affective intensity becomes social without falling into a representation. It renders the shared experience of numerous birthmother’s pains and losses visible and sensible without incurring further epistemic violence.

Via a particular affective channel created through wailing, the time and place of the wailing meets the time-place of the dead. This guides to me to explore possible levels of [kinds of] signification in the reunion between a Korean birthmother and a child, other than the compulsive narrative that views the reunion as the ultimate endpoint of a long-lost separation. But once released from the compulsive narrative of search and reunion, the reunion is just one bracketed meeting in a prolonged separation. It is an aberration in their otherwise separated paths and displaced kinship.

First of all, the reunion for both parties demarcates the termination of their own fantasy. Many mothers' accounts suggest that a mother's clock was frozen at the moment of her separation from the child. Thus the child a birthmother remembers has remained at the age he or she was right before adoption. For example, for a mother of twin daughters, now in their mid twenties, who were adopted by French couple at the time of birth, she recalls them as newborn, bloodied babies.

Not only had her clock been arrested in relation to her trauma, but the loss of the baby recreated the mother as a melancholic subject who is constituted by her inability to let go of the lost object. More explicitly, Cholgi's mother articulates that "you (cholgi) were not with me, but you were inside of me" (Happy Sunday, Oct. 2005). She grows old while the child in her heart has not. The following imagery on television interestingly suggests a condition of impossibility for a reunion between a mother and her child.



(Figure 3.3: A Still from Happy Sunday aired on August 6, 2005)

The reunion suggests an infliction of the wound, once more, rather than a resolution of the overwhelming sense of displacement and loss. Upon reuniting, a birthmother finds an adult Korean adoptee who is no longer the child that she remembers. Some mothers exhibit their sorrows of the loss in verbal and physical forms of communication. But more often a mother's sense of loss is expressed in tears. Tears replace the emptiness of a common language with which two ruptured bodies can be connected. In birthmother's cryings, I find the tears to be ironic in a way that is suggested in Lutz's account: "the impossible desire to go *and* remain, to celebrate *and* mourn, to embrace the new *and* hold on to the old" (214, Italics are mine). Tears might be able to imply the paradox of the birthmother's desire to keep the memory of the child alive as well as to embrace her adult child whom she finds so foreign.

V. Conclusion

So far, this chapter fills and feels the affective texture of the virtual mother by privileging the realm of visual and aural qualities of the television show – outside the discursive framework. I focus on how the processes involved in fleshing out the skin of virtual mother engages the loss in each site of affect consolidation: the phantasmatic photographic imagery of the child's portrait, the tactile imagery of the text-image interacting with the birthmother's tears, and the hybrid voice of trauma featuring the acoustic aspect of the virtual mother.

Contemplating fragmented television temporality and the technological substrate of the unconscious, I attend to the affective quality of the virtual mother by engaging a creative way of looking at disjunctive temporalities. The lost object – the child – returns

as a ghost and beckons the unactualized birthmothers. The absent contour illuminates the virtual mother's loss. Once the figure of the birthmother is under the purview of television, I discuss the felt quality of a virtual mother in terms of auditory and visual sense; neither can be understood without trauma, affect, body and technology. Through my experiment with the temporality of affect, I also participate in the production of a virtual mother.

As a circuit of affect creation and manipulation in the entertainment industry, such television shows produce 'collective subjectivities and sociality' around foreign adoption in Korea (Hardt, 1999, p.92). Laden with strong emotions, these television shows package the pains and losses of adoptees and birthmothers as temporally and spatially contained and provoke television viewers to redeem the trauma through "feelings of ease, well-being, satisfaction, excitement, and passion; [there is] even a sense of connectedness or community as a result of affect creation and manipulation by the entertainment industry"(Hardt, 1999, p. 96). Added to Hardt's political economy of affect, I acknowledge that the impossibility of retrieving the loss does not foreclose but foregrounds a new politics of loss once we open ourselves to affect or being affected by a power. Affective qualities of the virtual mother, entangle with the way we, most often below a normal level of perception, engage our own being by consuming such affectivity. Thus, I argue that the affective qualities of the virtual mother has always already been part of our being.

Summing up, we have examined how birthmothers in Korea emerged as visible and sensible through an analytical and methodological framework of a virtual mother both in terms of narrative as well as affect-driven analysis. As mentioned at the

beginning of my dissertation, such figures on television reflect a generation of women who are now in their late forties to sixties. As of today, six babies depart from Korea in search of homes in the west. In other words, there are six women who are becoming birthmothers today. On television, they never appear as motherly figures. In the following two chapters, I am going to look at the contemporary birthmothers who are separated from the child in the past five years or so. Since this project looks at a virtual mother who is always configured by a performance of mothering, I take a close look at an Internet website community where birthmothers deposit their love and thus perform their motherhood.

Breathing Three

She sent her babies away for adoption
 Well quite frankly, her husband did it. But her babies are gone for adoption
 So she sent her babies for adoption

Less than a week after she gave birth to her baby
 Her husband took his fishing rod and went finishing with his friends before dawn
 This time her labor was long and she bled a lot
 The recovery seemed slow
 Anyway she could not make a lunchbox for him
 She was a bit worried but did her daily routine.

He came back with no fish in his basket instead full of rage
 He was very drunk
 She fixed the late meal while the newborn baby was crying for attention
 As soon as she set the meal on the table in front of her drunken husband
 He threw it over
 Kimchee, Bean-stew, Egg Custurd, his favorite all spread over the room
 Some of them splashed onto the forehead of the baby
 She quickly went over and tried to wipe it away

She grumbled inside she thought
 He immediately slapped her face and start kicking her
 She asked, 'Why are you doing this to me?'
 He told her to shut up and he ran to get a steel pipe originally a part of outside faucet
 She was slapped and beaten
 He told her not to scream, otherwise she would be dead with her two children

She tried not to but couldn't help
 More whips punches blows
 Her skin starts to unfold
 She starts to see her inside of skin
 Deeper and deeper

Another night passed like this
 As soon as she opened her eyes,
 she found her husband half-naked sleep in the middle of the room
 her toddler and her baby still asleep
 she wonders how they could manage to sleep over such a nightmare

No accounts of the event
 No memories but pains seeped through
 Her ripped forehead, swollen lips, bruised face
 Her achy limbs
 Two thick blankets soaked with her blood overnight

Her face became stern
She looked at her two babies
Saying good bye to them
She could not take them
Because then her husband would follow her to the end and kill her

She chose her survival over her motherhood
She thought her two babies would do okay with her husband who even the glimpse of
him disgusted her

One fine Sunday afternoon
Watching a famous show
Her heart sank below and could not stop throbbing
She found her two children behind, inside the television

The names and places were somewhere near to her old neighborhood
She could identify
As soon as she tells they might be the babies that I have left for life
She could not see them any more
Unbearable punishment for her life

Chapter 4. A Flickering Motherhood: Korean Birthmothers' Internet Community

Title: I am worried ID: 재원 Date: 2001.09.12 12:07

The Twin Towers in New York were completely destroyed by terrorists. It was unbelievable. Some thousands of people lost their lives. I heard a few Koreans were killed. What if one of the numerous victims was related to my baby... What if he was my baby's father? I shouldn't think this way. My dream of my baby last night might tell me something, though. I wish I had contact information for her. I know my baby went to Minnesota but do not know where exactly. This worries me a lot. Maybe I should just think positively.

This is an e-posting by a Korean birthmother immediately after the Twin Towers fell to the ground on September 11th, 2001. It was posted on the website of a Korean internet community called, “The sad love stories of mothers who sent their babies away for adoption (아이를 입양보낸 엄마들의 슬픈 사랑이야기)”. Who could imagine that 9-11 would immediately affect women’s lives in Korea, and furthermore, that the worries and speculations of birthmothers would be instantly available on the Internet? This chapter will explore the ways in which contemporary Korean birthmothers whose babies were sent away for adoption perform their unclaimed motherhood by interfacing with Internet technology.

According to recent television production on contemporary birthmothers as well as social work literature in Korea, contemporary birthmothers are women in their late teens and early twenties who are often younger, never married, and more educated than the birthmothers in the past decades. They are often portrayed as troubled young women

who are the source of social problems such as the prevalence of international adoption. According to their reputation, such figures are never ready to become mothers and therefore their children should be placed in adoption.

Contemporary birthmothers in Korea grew up in 1980s and 1990s when Korea's adoption discourse turned to search and reunion narratives. This is a generation of birthmothers who have been provided with a discursive framework of adoption through which their own experience of loss is not rendered visible. The adoption circumstances of contemporary birthmothers, most of whom are unmarried young adults, provide evidence that gendered violence rather than poverty interlaces contemporary adoption practice in Korea. Since its availability to the general Korean public in the late 1990s, Internet technology has provided contemporary birthmothers with the capacity to create social forums to discuss their circumstances and acknowledge their losses.

The café for a woman who sent her babies away for adoption, cafe.daum.net/adopteemam (아이를 입양보낸 엄마들의 슬픈 사랑이야기), was created on August 20, 2001. This Internet community is a significant and unprecedented virtual space where many birthmothers can unload their emotional responses during unmarried pregnancy and after adoption, their unarticulated pain and unacknowledged grief. Many birthmothers were active for a time, and then left and were replaced by newly made birthmothers. Therefore, this Internet café captures the passing of birthmothers through the “ordinary” life passages (dating, marriages, births, childrearing) in a woman's life. It offers an ephemeral moment for acknowledging unclaimed experience, performing motherhood, and feeling a sense of belonging. The technology is

able to provide this by archiving and distributing incalculable pains and losses in words, images, and their bodies of global circuitry of teletechnology.

A close examination of birthmothers on the Internet not only involves how birthmothers produce, mediate and circulate information of loss but also theorizes the ways in which contemporary birthmothers reassemble as virtual mothers on the Internet in which a shift toward a new conception of body and subjectivity is taking place (Haraway, 1991; Hayles, 1993; Massumi, 2002; Johnston, 1999). Thus this chapter on the Internet will offer an in-depth understanding of the ways in which the trauma related to a baby's adoption resonates in the bodies of birthmothers surfacing through the interface with information technologies. Not only is virtual mothering the focus of analysis, but also the babies toward whom the mothering is directed. Specifically, this chapter details how virtual mothering is activated through the creation and nurturing of the baby lost to adoption who is being formed again at the interface of the mother's fingertips with the computer. This human-machine assemblage figures dis/articulated motherhood by maneuvering flickering moments of contact between the mother and the baby, but also between the mother and her loss.

This virtual mothering is fraught with the women's entangled relationships to their losses. The anxiety and ambivalence about a birthmother's connection with her baby resounds in the performance of virtual mothering, suggesting the complex and contradictory nature of the birthmother's subjectivity. I examine not only a birthmother's conscious efforts to interact with her baby and her fellow imaginary birthmothers, but also the unconscious forms of incorporation, imagined reunions, and dreams. Through orchestrated and shared acts of listening and telling on the website, birthmothers

materialize the performing bodies of virtual mothering, which I define as always partial, discontinued, never finished, and open to emergent qualities of bodies, always ready to be engaged with bodies and information in the future.

I. Overview

When you enter the birthmother's online community at <http://café.daum.net/adopteesmam>, a baby picture inscribed with a birthmother's note welcome you with the strings of ballad songs. A note reads, *hyacinth, isn't it beautiful? The flower signifies memory and sadness. A sad memory. My baby is my sad memory. [my baby] would not know [what had happened?]... She would live her life happily. I am sorry, my dear baby. And I love you.*

This Internet café for birthmothers was created in August 2001 by a birthmother, a.k.a., Jaewon. Once a member of an Internet community for single mothers in Korea, Jaewon realized that there are different needs for women who couldn't raise their children but chose adoption. So she launched this Internet homepage for the birthmothers. During its first year (2001 – 2002), over 100 birthmothers signed up for membership and actively participated in the message boards, more than 10 postings a day, a variety of on- and off-line activities, e.g. regular chattings and off-line community meetings. The number of members has been incrementally increased over time and reached to 570 by November whereas the frequency of e-postings has decreased to a range between 5 and 10 a month. Yet, this number does not mean the number of birthmothers. About half registered as members in order to browse the Internet community and never visited again. Hence, excluding the one-time visitors from among the 570 members, there are 300 members ranging in age from 11 to 55 by the end of November 2005.

Based on voluntary identity claims, this listserv currently has an estimated constituency of 100 birthmothers, 3 birthfathers³⁹, 70 (prospective) adoptive parents, and 13 adoptees. The rest (117) are categorized as others. Members include the women who lost their babies via in/voluntary termination of pregnancies, adoption professionals, members of adoption triads, (e.g. domestic adoptees, domestic adoptive parents, and birthmothers), daughters of foster mothers, foster mothers, researchers, documentary filmmakers, university students, and a junior high school student who wants to write a novel about a birthmother and her child. The members login from cities to countrysides all around the world, for example, New Zealand, Costa Rica, the Philippines, and the U.S. Although this Internet community is constituted by various parties i.e. adoptive parents, researchers, social workers and the general public, many participants tacitly agree to yield priority to women whose babies have been sent away for adoption. In order to have full access to archival data including postings and the pictures, I also signed up for a membership by introducing myself as a researcher, ID: lake71ny, categorized as “other” in June 2005.

The birthmothers in this Internet community are mostly young and unmarried women in their late teens and early 20s at the reference point when the baby was sent for adoption. However, according to the profile among women on the Internet, there are some women in their 30s and/or women who were once married or involved in common-

³⁹ Since 2001, there were only three birthfathers signed in and participating in the section of unsent letters. A member with the username Arang Appa (father in Korean) signed in 2002 and stayed about a month and withdrew his membership. The other person, a.k.a. Binni Appa left a message in message board. KAINÉ. Two birthfathers signed in via their partners' ID and left messages to their children.

law marriage also became birthmothers⁴⁰. Two women identified as in their 40s reported that they relinquished their babies for adoption about 15 years ago. About 10 women were pregnant at the time of their entry into this Internet community.

The majority reported that they got pregnant when they were in a relationship, which ended up a separation before or right after a baby's birth. A small number of women stayed in a relationship with the same partner, who is the birthfather of the adopted baby. From their accounts, a few women suggested the pregnancy was a result of sexual assaults by boyfriends, male friends, or strangers (ID., ILMARE; ID: 닉네임). This reflects 10 percent of residents at unwed mother's home reported that their pregnancies resulted from sexual violence (Han, 2004; Dorow, 1999).

Since 2001, at least 200 birthmothers have been involved in this website in which approximately 100 birthmothers have been members since November 2005. Around twenty women identified as birthmothers but do not hold a full membership⁴¹. Based on a two-way classification system⁴², I examined the contents and nicknames from the "self-introduction" and "counseling" thoroughly in order to conclude whether a writer, which

⁴⁰ The age range of birthmothers falls between 16 and 35 at the time of their babies being adopted. There are two or three women, once married but now single, who placed their 'legitimate' babies in adoption. According to the profiles of birthmothers in this Internet community, the age range of birthmothers who are members was between 19 and 44 as of November 2005.

⁴¹ In order to acquire a full membership, he/she is supposed to, with the help of a moderator, share a personal narrative relating to adoption and unwed mothers. A registered member does not have full authority automatically, to read or write anything other than introductions and counseling. Some women showed reluctance to share their personal stories on the web. As a result, they remain identified as 'registered, birthmother member'. This is a somewhat discretionary process. According to a café moderator, this space is primarily for birthmothers who are already in pain. Therefore, she set up the system to screen any unnecessary obstructive remarks (personal communication on October 2005).

⁴² I looked into each member's account to see his/her relationship to adoption. I can determine their status as birthmothers according to their answers to the following question: (1) Are you identified with the following a) a baby's mother; b) adoptive parents; c) others. Secondly, I use a moderator's classification. If a woman decides not to disclose her identity as a birthmother but claim as 'other' and instead holds a "registered membership", she is only allowed to read and write the following section, i.e. 'counseling' and 'self-introduction'. Unless she claims birthmother status through her e-posting, there is no way to find out whether that person is a birthmother.

is identified with a username, is a birthmother. However, considering the anonymity allowed on this community from November 2001 to May 2002 and flexibility of nicknames, the number is always an estimate of the number of birthmothers on this community.

During 2001 and 2005, at least another 100 birthmothers appeared actively involved, and then interacted less and less until they eventually disappeared.⁴³ Only ten people have maintained their membership since the beginning of this Internet community. Most current members replace the birthmothers who drift away after a certain period of time. This high turnover rate may explain the social stigma attached to a birthmother and its incompatibility with an ordinary woman's life in her 20s, including dating, marriage and family. This may also suggest a birthmother's desire to go back to the normal state of mind and everyday life after a certain period of time and the limitations of the Internet community for birthmothers' needs. The number of birthmothers becoming virtual mothers has been decreased. However, the issues and contents of e-postings do not show noticeable changes over the past five years.

Faced with an unplanned pregnancy in a relationship, many young women have no socially acceptable option other than marriage. Yet, sometimes, due to the couple's lack of maturity or economic and social stability, marriage may not be a viable option. In addition, women unequivocally reported that their male partners acted irresponsibly and were generally unsupportive toward the pregnancies, often leading to a separation. Thus, women often were solely responsible for non-conjugal sexual acts, a practice that is still

⁴³ If the last visit of a given member is more than a year ago, I would consider this member as inactive although they still maintain their nominal membership.

socially censored but increasingly prevalent in contemporary Korea. Many young women in/voluntarily choose adoption for a baby and for themselves.

Corresponding to literature on contemporary birthmothers, most women in this community also reported that they decided to give up babies for adoption so that the baby could have a better life. Many believe two parents with economic and social resources are better for her baby than a single mother in poverty. Due to their young age, lack of social establishment and stability, these young women cannot raise children alone without social support. The shame and the guilt associated with unwed pregnancy prevents many women from seeking support from usual sources e.g. family or friends.

As Yoon's (2001) finding addresses, a considerable number of women state that no one in their families knows about the pregnancy, birth, and adoption. Even if anyone in the family knows, everyone, particularly parents, often mothers, facilitate the adoption process with/out tacit or explicit agreement from their own daughters. The double standards and the social stigma of single motherhood pressure these young women to give up their babies for adoption not always on behalf of either the babies or the women themselves, but many times for the families.

This website consists of various sections: (1) an introduction; (2) counseling; (3) let's talk; (4) unsent letters; (5) stories at your heart; (6) 'your thoughts about adoption'; (7) 'adoption is a pleasure'; and (8) a picture display room. However, the following analysis is primarily based on the e-posts found in the following sections:

(1) 'Counseling'; (2) 'Stories at your heart'; (3) 'Unsent letters'; and (4) 'Let's talk'. The counseling webpage provides an opportunity for birthmothers to discuss issues related to their pregnancy and their reasons for deciding upon adoption. "Stories at your heart" is a

place to tell the untold stories buried within the birthmother. “Unsent letters” is a space where birthmothers can write to their babies. “Let’s talk” allows communication among members.

The entrée to the café varied according to each individual. Some women entered this space during pregnancy out of desperation.⁴⁴ Most others joined not long after giving birth, when they are still in the period of post-partum, but a few waited up to more than a decade after the baby’s adoption. As soon as they log on, reflecting the radical openness of the space-time of Internet technology, the women immediately engage with numerous imaginary birthmothers in the various sections; from the self-introduction to the most intimate, stories at my heart. The majority expressed their surprise to find many other women who had traveled a similar path – from single pregnancy to adoption without any support. This discovery that their personal issues were shared by many women, to a certain extent, helped to release the women’s sense of loneliness and abandonment from society. The following post captures a birthmother’s response after learning and being part of this listserv.

ID: 슬픈맘으로 (With Sad heart) Date: 2004.06.26 22:24

Subject: I feel like I have a secret friend here
It has taken me a while to introduce myself... I got pregnant, went through pregnancy, gave birth and put my baby up for adoption all alone. All the way through I did not have anyone to turn to and get counseling. Since I started to write here, I have felt much better... I feel like I have found a friendship.

Thus, the Internet café for birthmothers serves as an “intimate confessional” site where women can deposit their unspeakable experiences, i.e., their pregnancy and the baby’s

⁴⁴ Of women who can be categorized as ‘birthmothers’, there included about 10 pregnant women and several women who had either just delivered a baby or had lived with a baby.

adoption (Anagnost, 2004). Beyond publishing personal journals, the Internet allows women to connect with anonymous birthmothers, who are geographically dispersed and temporally displaced.

Ann Anagnost (2004) argues that the “Internet listserv, embodies new forms of sociality and community as technologies of the intimate public sphere” (p. 145). This observation applies to the birthmothers’ website. Grappling with the loss which cannot be articulated, the young birthmothers not only find a venue to express their feelings and wishes for their babies, but they also build a sense of belonging to this listserv and create a motherhood that performs on the Web by interacting with other women’s postings and responses. In the following section, I would like to delineate a theoretical framework that grounds the performance of virtual mothering in their creative engagement in information technology as a theatrical space for staging their trauma and loss.

II. Internet Community as a Theater

The social stigma attached to unwed mothers silences them. Contrary to the public’s belief that time heals everything, birthmothers are not fine after some time passes. The fact and their wish that the baby – the lost object – is living somewhere, hampers their processing of the loss. Instead, the relinquishment of a child becomes a traumatic event for many birthmothers who are never given the opportunity to mourn properly but affected for the rest of their lives (Reyman, 2001; Baik, 1997; Fessler, 2006).

Within the framework of the traditional, heterosexual, male-centered family imaginary, an unmarried woman’s motherhood is never legitimized, which was the major reason contemporary birthmothers engaged in the Internet community. Strictly speaking,

she did not lose anything. Her lost child and her act of mothering are incompatible. The child is an embodiment of the woman's transgression, which in turn suggests her failure in achieving the ideal of motherhood. The birthmother's losses of the child and of the ideal motherhood, both deeply associated with feelings of shame and guilt, are never properly mourned; instead, they become melancholic. According to Sigmund Freud (1917), melancholia results in ambivalent relationships to the lost loved object. Virtual mothering is often felt and registered in terms of its flickering movement around the women's ambivalence toward the baby and the ideal of motherhood.

Mothering is an embodied practice from the very physical aspect of labor e.g. pregnancy, birth, breastfeeding, and changing diapers to emotional labor e.g. writing journals and talking to a baby during pregnancy and after the birth. As a result, mothering creates a physical and social relationship to a child (Rothman, 1989). Birthmothers whose motherhood is realized in their interface with Internet technology perform their mothering in this virtual space. In the framework of virtual mothering, the bodies and subjectivities of birthmothers are not manifest, but configured through their performances of mothering.

Birthmothers on the Internet are active producers and distributors of their stories and emotions. Their stories are sometimes conscious and deliberate efforts to be heard. At many other times, the e-postings are characterized as "*involuntary, repetitious, obsessive*" as Hirsch and Smith (2002) delineate the relationship between trauma and memory (p. 5, italics are mine). And yet the women's Internet postings are read beyond compulsive repetition. Instead, the omnipresence of the audience 'here and now' in this virtual space contextualizes birthmothers' personal narratives "...in conversation with

empirically present listeners; and, ... in dialogue with absent or “ghostly audience” (Langellier, 1999, p. 127). Furthermore, attending to a blurring of verbal and written languages brought by Internet technology, I argue birthmothers’ postings are embodied practices of telling and writing loss.

In her analysis of adoptive motherhood and performance, Stacy Jones (2005) emphasizes the role of telling as a crucial site of mothering, “the telling [is] not only of maternal fantasies or the constant replay of separation and loss, but also of your own will ...to create [a baby] ...” (p.126). For birthmothers whose babies are already placed in adoption, the performance of motherhood starts with the mother’s narrative of loss. She creates and relates to her own virtual baby by communicating this narrative to the Internet community.

On the other hand, the radically open space of the Internet turns unidentified birthmothers into virtual mothers who engage in writing the text of trauma. I consider the birthmothers’ writing on the internet as an autoethnographic writing. The ontological ground of a virtual mothering, that is always contingent upon a distributed perception, obscures a subject/object distinction. Such mediation of Internet technology renders her writing as autoethnographic text, which challenges the objectivity of knowledge production. In addition, numerous accounts feature the everyday traumas of life and death as a birthmother and the insights born of the experience of gendered violence (Clough, 2000). Thus, the birthmother’s text not only transmits her trauma but also gives birth to a virtual mothering. Here her trauma is a source of energy to be transmitted. “The words are passed on as an act that ... pass[es] the awakening on to others” (107,

Ramadanovic). By staging her words in the performance of virtual mothering, the birthmother enact her trauma on the Internet.

The performance of virtual mothering bears witness to the trauma of two incompatible lost objects – the baby and the act of mothering, which are created as objects through a live process on the Internet. The Internet community, which is characterized as “the shared and participatory act of telling and listening...”; therefore functions as a venue for “the transmission of traumatic memory” (Taylor, 2004, p. 167). Her instantiation of virtual mothering is always involved in enacting her trauma by creating her virtual baby in front of a virtual audience embedded in the theater of the Internet. Her virtual motherhood modulates and highlights the ambivalence and tension between a feeling of connection and disconnection to the baby, reflected as her melancholia.

III. Virtual Mother's Performing Loss

On the Internet, the fingers of a birthmother become carnal embodiments of vision, moving beyond the usual orbit of her body, and connecting her with the figure of her child who is being formed on the other side of her skin through the sense of touch and the computer as she strokes the computer keyboard. During gestation, the woman's body cannot sever from the computer, just as the body of a birthmother cannot sever from her baby during pregnancy. A woman becomes a mother through the Internet. The Internet space serves as the umbilical cord and womb in which the baby is created and connected to a mother; through this connection, a birthmother who is now a virtual mother, as well

as others, can feel, touch, see, and call for her baby. She gives birth to her lost child once again. The child emerges not from her vagina, but instead from her fingertips.

When a birthmother enters this community, she is asked to make up her own screen name. She cries out for her baby by introducing herself as a mother who has given up her child for adoption. The nicknames are often associated with the baby, such as the baby's date of birth (DOB) or the baby's name, although often no one else except the mother knows the name, including the baby. Most screen names⁴⁵ embody a woman's sadness, guilt, shame and love towards her baby. Some examples of this are 나쁜 엄마 (bad mother); 슬픈엄마 (sad mother); 슬픈 나 (sad self) ; 민영엄마 (minyong's mommy); 부끄러운 엄마 (shameful mommy); 해솔아 미안해, (I am sorry, Haesol); 호석사랑 (love for hosuk); 진성사랑 (love for Jinsung); 보이지 않는 사랑 (unseen love). A few nicknames show a feeling explicitly such as 너무 늦어버렸어 (it is too late); 가슴에 풀리지 않는 명울 (A smoldering knot in my chest). The women succinctly encapsulate their emotional states toward their babies and their unfulfilled motherhood through their ID.

When these women utter their babies' names, or when they call themselves mothers, their babies are virtually created and resurrected before them. Women perform as mothers; thus, virtual mothering gets activated. The utterance of the baby's name

⁴⁵ Some adopt random nouns e.g. 닉네임 (id) or a gibberish English, a string of English character, which does not have any concrete meaning in English. Often those jumbled strings of English characters are decoded into a Korean name or another significant word when the computer keyboard shifts to Korean character sets. For example, gywjd goes to (hyojung; 효정) in Korean character sets. This is a site of deterritorializing English character from its own signification; it creates a Korean name with an easy shift-key of a different language set, while maintaining facile anonymity of the participant.

plays a key role in establishing a virtual relationship between a child and a mother that reverberates in the returning adoptee's utterance of 'umma' on television's search show.

ID: 바다사랑 (love for sea) Date: 2002.02.15 20:06

Subject: My dear son, Moon Hyunook

Hyunook Ah⁴⁶, How have you been doing?

"I, a mother, whenever I miss my child, ooki or want to see him, I come here. Because this is where you are. I just finished work and here I am. ... I have to work overtime for the next three days. But I will come and see you here. I love you. You are more precious than my life.

In unsent letters, women ask their babies about their health; they tell them not to cry too hard, or to eat and sleep well. In other accounts, birthmothers show their playfulness by performing a baby talk for instance 까꿍, as a regular mother does. Little knowledge about the baby's everyday life after adoption leads interactions with the baby to be somewhat mundane and banal accounts often limited to inquiries into physical well-being. In place of factual knowledge about the babies, the birthmothers' accounts are often, but not exclusively, flooded with undiluted, excessive feelings of guilt, shame, regret, sadness, pain, loss, anxiety, ambivalence, and restlessness. Expressions of unworthiness and loneliness described in terms of traumatic effects, are obsessively, if involuntarily repeated. In addition, the messages also contain explosive anger toward: (1) the society; (2) the unplanned pregnancy; (3) the birthfather, (4) themselves; and (5) her baby.

Women write simultaneously to remember and to forget their babies. By engaging in writing to and about her baby on the Net, a woman always tiptoes around the tension between connection and disconnection with her baby. Drawing upon Freud's theory of melancholia, one sees how traumatic experiences in connection with the lost

⁴⁶ Hyunook is name; 'Ah' is a way of calling someone to get his or her attention.

object prevent birthmothers from processing the loss. Instead, women fall into the melancholic state, which impoverishes the ego through self-denigration and resentment, as displayed in the following accounts:

Subject: My dearest son ID: BYORI 2002.07.27 02:45

I miss you so much. No one would know how much I miss you. I would like to die, but because of you, my son, I can't even contain the thought. I know it is stupid. But I don't think people outside the world welcome me. So... I am living with a heavy sense of guilt. Even if I smile, it is not a real smile. No one understands. (SIGH). I wish the wind would blow me away and take me to my son, Byori... Then, I could kneel down in front of him and apologize for my wrongdoing. Can we go back in time? ...

Her unfulfilled mothering threatens to take her own life. Yet, the very fact that she is a mother arrests the thoughts of suicide and keeps her alive. The sense of desertion, loneliness, and self-denigration exhaust her living spirit. She described herself as a living ghost, saying 'Even if I smile, it is not a real smile'. The birthmother suggests that she would like to go back to the time of pregnancy when she and her baby were still together, or maybe even before the pregnancy. Thus, she performs her ambiguity [ambivalence about] at the tension of life and death.

The fact that her baby is somewhere alive but unattended by her own mothering is devastating for many birthmothers who are experiencing pregnancy – after period.

Subject: My baby ID: 12월09일 (December 9th) 2005. 07.19 23:26

My lovely baby
 I miss you so much that I might go crazy
 My heart feels like exploding
 I would rather go crazy; then I wouldn't have any memory of you
 I wish I had no thought of you
 Tears come along whenever I think of you several times a day
 My heart aches

Her emotional devastation cannot afford to retain a memory of her baby. In response, she offers her sanity. Her pains are so incisive that she could not witness the feelings passing through her body.

Both accounts suggest that the emotional cost of giving up a baby for adoption is tremendously detrimental to birthmothers. The remorse and suffering drive some women to conceive extreme wishes, such as for suicide or for amnesia of the baby. Birthmothers yearn to be free from the baby as much as they want to keep the baby, as if the women and their babies are competing for survival against each other. Birthmothers become virtual mothers on the Net, enacting the ambivalence and tension between the women's desire for motherhood by remembering the baby, and women's desire for normalcy by forgetting the baby.

The birthmother's ambivalence toward the loss is full of tension and paradox, but clearly illustrates the intricate power dynamics between a birthmother and adoptive parent although they are often present in absent form. This happens particularly when the women reflect on their decision about whether to keep the baby in Korea or to send him or her overseas. Foreign adoption is often understood to guarantee the ongoing exchange of gifts, letters, and photographs between a birthmother and adoptive parents. In contrast, domestic adoption⁴⁷ brings an immediate termination and foreclosure to any possible connection to the baby. Most birthmothers, having grown up in the 1980s and 1990s when the travails of Korean adoptees started to become a media spectacle, were well aware of the predicaments of transnational adoptees due to cultural displacement and

⁴⁷ Domestic adoption often requires a "spotless baby" by highly selective standards, e.g. matching biological features with adoptive parents. For example, if a baby has a rare blood-type or a birth defect including premature births, not unusual among unwed pregnant women due to inadequate prenatal care, a chance for a domestic adoption is slim. In order to ensure adoption for the baby, women sometimes choose a foreign adoption.

racism. Hence, a decision between a domestic and a foreign adoption is not a simple, easy decision. In any case, many birthmothers expressed regret about their decisions and conveyed a sense of being trapped in a no-win situation.

ID :하늘바라기 Date: 2003. 08.19 01:26

Two seasons have passed already. You must have grown a lot. I only know you from that (last) day. That makes me really sad. If I sent you farther, I might have been able to see you grow. But at the same time, I worried that you would have a hard time (because of your difference). (I also worried that) as you grew older, you would forget your homeland, your mother tongue. Then, there would be no language between you and me even if we see each other again.

This virtual mother gave up the possibility of ongoing communication and a later reunion with her baby by choosing a domestic adoption for her baby. In order to protect her baby from being discriminated against because of “racial and cultural difference” in a foreign country, she chose a domestic adoption, which grants to a certain extent, cultural and linguistic connections with her baby. Thus, she made a choice likely to lead to a permanent disconnection for connection. In other words, she sacrificed her desire for a future reunion by performing as a good mother, protecting her baby from racial taunts and cultural displacement.

Birthmothers who favored foreign adoption for their babies articulated the possibility of a reunion and ongoing communication with their children as primary motives for their decisions. However, birthmothers are clearly aware of the power structures embedded in this ongoing communication, always already mediated through agency workers and the willingness and permission of foreign adoptive parents. Numerous accounts express anxieties about writing letters and sending “appropriate” gifts, as much as joy and pleasure over receiving the baby’s pictures. “How

(in)frequently am I supposed to send something to them?” “What if adoptive parents do not like my letters or gifts?” “What if this is the last letter from my baby?” The possibility to connect with her baby is always on the brink of disconnection.

ID: 벚리 (Byori)

Date: 2002.07.16 19:07

I was supposed to send something. I am going to send something to you. The pillow embroidered with Bear Pooh, your favorite, I made with a cross-stitch. (Do you like it?) 한복 will fit you? Isn't it too tight for you? I am a little concerned. Will your adoptive parents like these gifts? ... everything I wonder, therefore I am worried. Maybe that's the reason why I am hesitant (to send this)...

The ongoing communication is often limited to an exchange of gifts, pictures, and letters between adoptive parents who are imagined as “the baby,” and birthmothers. Birthmothers originally write the letter in Korean and then deliver it to the adoption agency where it is translated by a social worker. Often social workers coach birthmothers with unofficial protocols of what to say and what not to say. Yet, a few birthmothers offer the letters of exchange to share their concern and their joy before and after the delivery. Regular communication with the baby's adoptive parents gives a certain degree of comfort or relief to the birthmothers, yet it by no means helps them to completely heal their ravaged hearts.

Despite the women's efforts to forget the baby and to numb their pains, there is one day on which they cannot stop themselves from thinking of the baby. The birthday is a day that marks a baby's inclusion (into the family) and yet its severance from a mother's body. For many birthmothers, a baby's birthday is often a reminder of how her baby became an orphan (out of wedlock), and then departed from her. Yet, the following deliver a great example of how her enactment of trauma once in circulation turns into affect, awakening the incipient bodies of birthmothers to produce a virtual mothering.

ID: 진짜푸우Real Pooh Date: 2002.01.29 13:03

Today is the third birthday of my son, Se Hoon. Please let's celebrate!
Until last year, I was devastated and drank a lot. I have decided not to do that again. My Sehoon, born to a difficult situation. However, I believe, he is living happily with adoptive parents now. ... Please congratulate!

Reply 1. ID: 재원 Date: 2002.01.30 00:46

I am happy for your son's third birthday.
My baby is almost three too. I can't even imagine how much she must have grown by now. I hope to see you at some point in person. Congratulations again!

Reply 2. ID: 벚리 Date 2002.01.29 18:22

CONGRATULATIONS!
I am sure he is growing bright and happy like snow outside
I hope you are doing well
Cheers, someday you will be able to see your son, SeHoon

Reply 3. ID: 바다사랑 Date: 2002. 01.30 20:37

Sorry for a belated congratulation
It's been already three years?
Dear Se Hoon, Happy birthday to you ☺ ☺ ☺
I hope you grow healthy and brave

Had these women married, and therefore, kept their babies, these birthdays might have been just another significant, but mundane ritual. However, participating in virtual birthday parties for these absent babies, the women recognize each others' losses, console the grieving mothers, and build a collective sense of mothering: they belong to a virtual motherhood that is characterized by the performing bodies of birthmothers always under construction in the Internet community. Not only are the bodies of birthmothers and babies distributed, but so are the weights of shame, guilt and love toward their babies.

These affects, recognized by and distributed among the members, create a sense of belonging to “the machinic assemblage of birthmother” in this virtual community.

IV. Distributed Unconscious of the Virtual Mother

The virtual mothering of birthmothers is embedded in the trauma of adoption. The ‘repetitive, involuntary, obsessive’ accounts of virtual mothers are characteristic of what Marianne Hirsch and Valerie Smith (2002) have described as the convoluted relationship between trauma and memory. Attending to the unconscious topography of virtual mothering reveals the birthmothers’ entangled relationship with loss – loss of the baby, as well as the ideal of motherhood – and, thus constitutes a complex, contradictory subjectivity.

Central to the nature of trauma, according to Caruth, is its unknown, emergent nature: “trauma repeats itself and demands a belated experience ...” (7, 1996). The woman’s unspeakable losses -- the loss of the child and of the ideal motherhood – haunts the birthmothers through various processes, including dreams, incorporation, and fantasy of reunion. They stage the unconscious aspect of a virtual mothering in Internet theater.

Numerous accounts indicate involuntary and repeated appearances of the babies in dreams despite the birthmothers’ struggles to go on with their daily lives. According to Caruth (1996), trauma is characterized as “...an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena” (p. 91). The trauma of adoption is a series of violent events – a pregnancy, separation from the baby at birth, a second separation at adoption. These events are never fully experienced, and thus return in the form of dreams and beg for witness.

ID: 혀니

Date: 2002.05.18 23:31.

I saw you in my dream not long ago. You are really sick. I woke up and couldn't go back to sleep thinking what if my baby is really sick.

ID: 보이지 않는 사랑

Date: 2005. 06.10 06:13

“I was holding my Haemin and feeling so happy in my dream a few days ago, you know my baby called me ‘UMMA’ there (to attend her). ... I wish I stayed in my dream. I woke up. I saw myself trying to fall asleep once more to stay with my baby, which made me really sad”

The women would like to suspend the reality and pains of separation by staying asleep and arresting the dream. The fact that she couldn't tend to her baby's sickness nor reply to her baby's calling inflicts a sense of guilt and anguish once more again by awakening. One trauma begets another. And yet, the sense of absence experienced upon awakening, the realization of the separation from her illegitimate child, I might argue, ironically constitutes the very conditions for the birthmother's survival – that is a norm for a good woman. Her sense of responsibility, even in the form of regret about not being able to actualize it, constitutes her as a potentially good mother.

This impossibility of unmarried woman's motherhood finds its solace in a particular psychic state of virtual mothering.

ID: 정환맘

Date: 2001.11.11 23:54

How are you all doing? Today, I bought a rainbow rice cake (which a baby is supposed to eat on the 100th day). As I ate it in order to celebrate, instead of my baby, tears came along ...

This birthmother offers her body dissolved into the one of the baby. Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok (1994) argue that incorporation occurs when there is “no other choice but to perpetuate a clandestine pleasure by transforming it, after it has been lost, into an intrapsychic secret” (131).

...everything will be swallowed along with the trauma that led to the loss. Swallowed and preserved. Inexpressible mourning erects a secret tomb inside the subject. ... the loss is buried alive in the crypt as a full-fledged person ... (130, Abraham and Torok, 1994)

By swallowing a rainbow rice cake, the birthmother buries her living baby in her body, turning herself into a crypt. This act of incorporation makes the two incompatible lost love objects – the baby and the ideal of motherhood –coexist within her body. Her baby is something that she does not want to acknowledge because it is an embodiment of her illegitimate sexual conduct, an expression of her failed, ideal motherhood. Her subsequent placement of her baby up for adoption does not cause, but actually *reasserts* the loss of her mothering. By incorporation, the birthmother keeps her baby inside so that she can live up to the ideal of mothering *within* her body.

Anne Anlin Cheng (2001) focuses on the consequences of ‘swallowing’ upon the development of a melancholic subjectivity. She emphasizes that the melancholic subject’s ambivalence is generated and continues after the swallowing of the object. The melancholic subject holds not just love, but also profound resentment. This profound resentment toward the object swallowed leads to “the multiple layers of denial and exclusion that the melancholic must exercise in order to maintain this elaborate structure of loss but-not-the-loss” (p. 9, 2001).

Inculcated by a compulsive narrative of search and reunion on television, numerous contemporary birthmothers manage to survive this life-death crisis by entertaining the fantasy of return and reunion. This popular narrative of search and reunion, which I argue in a previous chapter is aligned with the fantasy and exclusion which Cheng (2001) described in terms of the melancholic subject’s development via

‘this elaborate structure of loss but-not-the-loss’. There are several e-postings regarding the birthmothers’ losses, sometimes disguised not as loss but as a fiction of possession. In other words, the fantasy borrows a fictionalized narrative of adoption as ‘study abroad at a little bit younger age compared to others’, or as ‘my baby is traveling right now’. Both accounts illustrate the denial of loss by suggesting an inevitable ‘homecoming’, and reunion between a mother and a child.

The most prevalent fantasy of reunion denotes the birthmothers’ deferred motherhood until later in her life. Now, they are too young, too poor, and too unmarried to raise their children. Women deferred their mothering until later in their life by voicing resolutions aloud as if the baby were listening.

“I am becoming a mother whom my baby will not feel ashamed of”. So I should not drink. Until the time we meet again, I will live earnestly. 아이를 만나는 그날 까지 열심히 살아야 해. “I am going to study hard and enter college.”

For this young, unmarried woman still in school, becoming a mother whom her baby would not feel ashamed of, demands studying hard and going to college. She expresses her determination to live up to these ideals of womanhood and motherhood in the posting above. Once disavowed, the ideal of motherhood is what keeps this young birthmother alive and keeps her in line with the traditional gender role which she once trespassed. The birthmother does not actually mother the child, yet never disowns mothering; instead she defers it to the future. The vast majority of e-posts that express the hope for a future reunion, suggest that the birthmothers’ subjectivity is built on ‘this elaborate structure of loss but-not-the-loss’ through a deferral of their motherhood.

The accounts of the repetitive sightings of the lost baby in the birthmothers’ dreams, a maternal act of swallowing, and the fantasies of reunion delineate the ways in

which the birthmother's unconscious performs virtual mothering over the Net. While posting the anecdotes revealing their melancholic feelings subsequent to the departure of the baby, the unconscious of the virtual mother are fired and distributed, set off to interact with one another. The possibility of bringing the lost objects – the baby as well as the act of mothering – together in this virtual space, is actualized.

V. Conclusion

So far, we have discovered and participated in a virtual mothering in an Internet community of birthmothers. Although their children are no longer physically present in their lives, these birthmothers perform as virtual mothers by creating and nurturing their babies in virtual space. Thus, birthmothers, as unmarried mothers, involved in Internet communities manage to make two incompatible lost objects – the baby and the act of mothering – compatible. In order to understand how this paradox is resolved, I looked at trauma theory in light of the stigmatized figure of the birthmother in the cultural imaginary. The interface between the women's bodies and the Internet materialized new conditions for dealing with trauma, and thus required a different understanding of loss. Their unspeakable losses are rendered intelligible and available to be witnessed by numerous bodies engaged in Internet technologies. However, this chapter does not suggest that birthmother's loss or trauma has been resolved or diminished by the interface with technology. Instead, I focus on the processes by which contemporary birthmothers, despite the excruciating pains of their loss and the unbearable weight of their sadness, creatively engage with information technologies. A careful observation and sociological

analysis is required when notions of ‘the human’ and ‘the body’ are contested by the mediation of technology in our daily lives.

Utterly aware of the social stigma against unmarried mothers in Korea, this virtual birthmother, along with scores of cyberspace women at the site, display their resilience and disrupt the seamless circulation of family, citizenship, and motherhood in the trans/nationalistic discourse of re/production. The birthmothers may have a sense of guilt and ambivalence about leaving the Internet community. This is reflected in the following posting by a birthmother who identifies herself as “I love you, Jaewhan”

ID: 재환아사랑한다

date: 2005.09.20 04:41

I used to visit here and left my message to you everyday
I am thinking of you less and less these days.
I did not forget about you. You are always deep inside of me. But if I start thinking of you again, it gives you a hard time so I am afraid. Am I not a decent person?

One birthmother after another leaves the virtual community. However, their traces of mothering become archived bodies of performing birthmothers, ready to join bodies in the future, marking an embodied (web) site of resistance. The focus of this chapter is on the ways in which birthmothers’ words are staged as enactment of their own trauma in the Internet space thereby bringing two incompatible objects forward to be acknowledged. The very same dilemma is now a condition of possibility for virtual mother’s felt quality in the Internet community. In the following chapter, I examine how the virtual mother’s material traces saturate the Internet community.

Breathing Four

Under-Cover

People might think I don't like babies or children
 Because I hardly hug or speak with them
 People might think I don't like babies
 Because it is quite difficult to even look at them

Yes like they think I might not like babies
 In fact, I am so afraid of them

As time passes by
 I have this habit of thinking
 If I kept mine, the child must be
 When I see someone about that age
 I thought I left the one
 But in fact, the one that I thought I left follows me all along
 Since the baby was a baby
 I then was afraid of babies
 It grows to preteen
 Then I am afraid of preteens
 To teenaged child
 And teenaged
 To adult
 And adult
 Forever
 It may follow me after life

My fear of babies grows from a baby to a full adult
 As time passes
 I worry, I might be afraid of everyone
 Because that's life she or he would pass at some point
 Everyone would follow after me then

So I hide
 Hide myself

Into the virtual
 Into the place that my and self cannot be so disparate
 Into the place where I become virtualized
 So that I can see and show my baby around
 Into the place where my body becomes eternal womb of machine
 So that I can house my baby forever somewhat undercover

Chapter 5. Tactile Love

Contemporary birthmothers in South Korea have creatively engaged the virtual space of the Internet where they stage their losses and perform a virtual mothering. A virtual mothering found in this unprecedented community of contemporary birthmothers is characterized by their complex and ambivalent relationships to two incompatible lost objects – the baby and the act of mothering. Exploring numerous e-postings and following a virtual mother's life cycle in the Internet community has led me to a fundamental tension between the virtual mother's connection to and disconnection from the lost baby.

Most birthmothers who participate in the Internet community conceived the child they put up for adoption when they were unmarried young adults or teenagers. The babies signify their mothers' transgressions of 'good sexual behavior,' an important measurement of a good mother. As unmarried women in a patriarchal culture, they never became legitimate mothers. Given that unmarried women's mothering is an untenable condition, the women were forced to confirm the impossibility of their motherhood by separating from their children. In turn, without a marriage, a baby automatically becomes an orphan child. From a traditional perspective, the baby has never belonged to her. There is no term describing the loss of a birthmother's baby.

Contemporary Korean birthmothers who grew up watching search and reunion shows and engaging with information technology as part of their daily activity, experience the loss of their babies differently from their post-war counterparts who lost their babies during a period of Korean history that was fraught with devastating poverty. The young birthmothers' regular engagements in trauma, from my observations of their

community activity, particularly during 2001 – 2003, allows them to discharge pieces of their deep sorrow and unspeakable wounds onto the Internet space.

Patricia Clough argues that trauma once engaged in the logic of global circuitry of teletechnology requires a new framework beyond compulsive repetition. In other words, the indefinite circulation of performative motherhood over the Net cannot be fully explained by the unconscious repetition of trauma. So I turn to affect. Affects include emotions, trauma and its bodily residues, but also unrealized, unactivated energy spilling out of porous skin, and distributed and permeating into discrete bodies, matters, and artifacts in different times and places. Massumi (2002) argues that the accumulation of repetition produces its own potential in the form of the unrealized future in each repetition. Thus, the infinite circulation of loss and trauma, whether contained in words or illustrations, can be viewed as an affective movement of vitality and creativity. This accumulation of repetition demands a shift in analytical focus from the narrative content of birthmothers' accounts to the affective quality that is not confined to a discursive framework.

Digitized howls and pains traverse high-speed Internet connections. As Argyle and Shields (1996) eloquently put it, "Memory traces, called up by the body, parts of the body themselves, allow us to experience with our physical selves ... [in the meantime, we] deposit our physical bits along the pathways of the BBS [Bulletin Board System] ..." (69). Thus, the bodies of birthmothers are perceived in terms of their deposits and activations either outside or beneath the skin sediment in this virtual community. Or alternatively, the bodies of birthmothers never get realized onto their flesh but around it.

In order to engage the potential that virtual mothers are becoming via their mediation and negotiation of trauma and loss, I examine birthmothers' accounts of bodily memory before and after the delivery of the baby by looking at their careful engagements with child photographs in the site's "photo-room" and their artwork. Those affective sites of virtual mothering show how two incompatible lost objects – the baby and the act of mothering –coexist harmoniously for birthmothers while simultaneously maintaining the tension between connection and disconnection with a baby. This suggests that the trauma of adoption leaves its imprints not only on the birthmother's psychological and emotional state but also on the skin of the bodies by birthmothers' 'imaginative investment and creation' involved in the process of virtual mothering (Hirsch, 1997).

My scrutiny of topographical and subdermal features resonating in this Internet community marks a transition from previous chapter's focus on staging trauma to affect-driven analysis. Jill Bennett (2002) argues that when words are not available for describing pain, the pain seeps into the fabrics of the body as a sense memory. Employing a notion of affect as a search engine, I carefully observe bodily or sensuous knowledge, shifting my attention toward "an assemblage of body memories and pre-individual affective capacities," what Clough characterizes as affectivity (p. 17, 2007).

Virtual mothering operates as part of a machinic assemblage. It requires the active participation of others (although they are scattered and distributed in terms of time and space) in order to render itself intelligible, and beyond this, in order to affect bodies on the level of sensation and affect. In other words, the variation in respective virtual mothers' degrees of exposure is contingent upon an orchestration of distributed perceptions in contemporary telecommunication society. The ways in which the virtual

mother is rendered visible and palpable are intertwined with joined forces of perception that operate and are operated underneath and across the boundary of various bodies. A virtual mother is registered as a felt maternal quality by orchestrated efforts of distributed perceptions on the Net.

In the following section, I examine the ways in which virtual mothering is made to flicker on this site through the technological materialization of bodily memory in child-photography and mothers' artwork. This chapter focuses on how such examples maintain the spasmodic and yet affective ties of a virtual mother to her own baby at the site of her interface with the Internet. Of the various sensory contacts, I privilege vision and touch, the basic membranes of perception in Internet technology, in order to articulate how performing bodies are saturated and grafted as a felt quality onto the skin of the Internet community.

I. Bodily Memory

Surprisingly, many birthmothers did not see their babies after delivery, sometimes by choice, and other times, not. If adoption is decided before delivery, it takes anywhere from a few hours to a couple of days after delivery for an adoption professional to come and pick up the baby⁴⁸. According to the anecdotes of birthmothers whom I met in the summer of 2005, birthmothers are often advised not to see the baby because this would make it harder to separate. A birthmother, often much younger and more vulnerable than an adoption caseworker and usually unmarried, in/voluntarily agrees to relinquish the

⁴⁸ The baby is taken a care of at the private home of a foster mother, who works for an adoption agency. Before the baby is sent away for adoption, birthmothers can go to the agency where the baby is regularly brought in for check-ups. Some agencies set the maximum number of birthmother's visits. Others don't have that particular regulation.

baby without a glance, which becomes a source of pain for the rest of her life. This pain in turn engenders a different way of knowing and feeling the baby although it is quite belated.

The absolute unknowability of one's own baby by sight is a prevalent theme in the birthmothers' Internet. Therefore, their accounts, or in other words, their efforts to remember their babies, often linger around the temporal site of pregnancy when a woman and baby are not yet differentiated and thus cannot be separated from each other.

Another site that birthmothers' accounts tend to punctuate is their own body after delivery, which becomes her most tangible record of the incident that she was unable to witness. Thus, the body during pregnancy and after labor becomes a crucial site for a birthmother to carve out the body-text of her own baby without an image. As she writes, she visualizes her baby in her touch on the keyboard.

Such memory without an actual image is often kept in the form of visceral or sense memory. Massumi (2002) theorizes that "the body doesn't just absorb pulses or discrete stimulations; it infolds contexts, it infolds volitions and cognitions that are nothing if not situated" (30). Birthmothers' bodily memories of their own babies also need to be contextualized in terms of their immediate circumstances which I may describe as social isolation and ostracism during and after pregnancy. Birthmothers, as unmarried pregnant women then experience shame and guilt about their own bodies and their own babies.

On this community⁴⁹, slightly over ten women identified as pregnant share their feelings about pregnancy, which often involve self-hatred and anxiety about the future

⁴⁹ From August 2001 to October 2005, almost two hundred women pass through this community as birthmothers.

after delivery. The social stigma against an unmarried woman's pregnancy, if it is not protected by sanctity of family, isolates a pregnant woman, often a young adult, from society and puts her in a dire situation. Such social environments inflict injuries rather than provide support for pregnant women who are already not protected by the privilege of family. As a result, the sense of disgust and self-hatred is often observed in the postings⁵⁰.

ID: No name Date: 2002, 02.14 10:52

I hate the baby inside of me. I don't know why. Maybe it's because I wasn't ready or because I might have been too immature. I hate the baby so much that I punched my stomach whenever it moved. I can't even describe in words. I wish I liked my baby.

In response to this posting, another woman replied under a subject, titled as 'I felt the same way at first'.

ID: No name Date: 2002, 05.02 10:07

I read your message. I am also only eighteen years old. You hate your baby? So you punched your stomach whenever it moved. I did the same thing. Because I really hated my baby, so I did not eat on purpose and made my body really tired, that caused my baby pain. I gave birth not so long ago. As soon as I heard my baby crying, I shed my tears because I felt so grateful to my baby who was born healthy (despite the given circumstance). After my baby was placed in adoption, I looked back and cried because I did not take a good care of my baby when it was inside. Now the tears of regret are filled. Once after you deliver a baby, everything will be different. Then you might as well regret a lot (like me). Dear my lovely baby, Ji Woo, I love you most of all in the world.

Over the past four years, numerous accounts indicate the sense of emptiness and regret after the delivery. Many birthmothers, showed their regrets particularly around their pregnancy, the only time that she could exercise her maternal act for her own baby, without any discretion as a birthmother involved in adoption. However, the e-postings filled with a sense of belatedness and regret show that many women failed to appreciate

⁵⁰ About ten women identified as pregnant women participated in the community.

their first and last opportunity of mothering during pregnancy, which left birthmothers more devastated after the baby was adopted.

As illustrated in the posting, many women confessed that they abused themselves by abstaining from food. Others punished their bodies with alcohol, prescribed drugs, and/or cigarette smoking. The majority of women hid their swelling stomachs under layers of clothing, or tight belts from neighbors, teachers, or often people from their own family. All of which is starkly different from the ‘normal’ pregnancy. As a mother, she, belatedly, regrets that she did not take a good care of her baby. Yet, she, herself, as a pregnant woman, must have been deeply in pain. Although birthmothers apologize to their babies for their lack of care and mothering during the pregnancy, they were actually attempting to punish themselves in the most visceral sense.

Such regret renders the pregnancy a sacred and precious time that birthmothers always want to go back to. After babies disappear into adoption, birthmothers reflect on the time of pregnancy and start to cherish it as a time to which they wish to return.

ID: 은비엄마 Date: 2002.04.01 05:39

When I had you inside, I wanted you to be out quickly. ... my happiest moment was when you kicked in my stomach as if you are saying “mommy, I am here”. When you moved inside me, you always tried to inform me of your presence. (But from now on) I would not have the sense of movement from you any more. ... When I heard that you left the agency because you were placed in adoption, I felt like a stranger took the candy that I was licking. I think when you were inside me was a good time. You were my first and secret one so I could not take good care of you, I could not talk to you much either. That made me really sad...

Nina Jablonski (2006) notes that “touch involves stimulation of the skin by mechanical, thermal, chemical, or electrical means and the resulting sensations of pressure, vibration, temperature, or pain” (97-98). The birthmother who does not have a

visual memory of her own baby still vividly remembers a muscular memory of touch from the infant that once thrived inside her. The abrupt separation immediately after delivery does not allow a birthmother to unfold the bodily memory into a memory of her baby⁵¹. Instead her bodily sensation authorizes the memory of her baby. In fact, the very absence of her baby invokes a belated appreciation for her baby's movement.

Traces of the baby are found not only in her belated memory of the pregnancy but bared on her very own body. After the baby leaves her body through delivery and is taken from her side through adoption, her own body reminds her of what was once inside. No mother's body is just an emptied shell after a baby is delivered; it is rather a volatile site for the conception of her baby and her mothering.

ID: 벚리

Date: 2001.10.05 23:25

what if I could have nursed you even once,
I wish I could have hugged you even once ...
After delivery, my breast was filled with flowing milk, they looked swollen.
What if I held your hand you stretched to me while I cut the umbilical cord ...I
would have not been as devastated as I am right now. ...

The pregnancy and delivery of a baby changes a woman's body into a mother's. After a baby is born, a woman's body changes into that of a nurse. In the absence of her baby, many of the women on the net report suffering from inflammation of the breasts due to a lack of nursing. The mother's milk flowing out of her body spills like a birthmother's tears, well after the baby is gone for adoption; it seeps into the Internet.

ID: 벚리

Date: 2003.03.18 03:16

Every year, around your birthday, I feel the pain in my stomach.
Always in March, the pain all over in my body and heart

⁵¹ Their pain is well articulated in a birthmother's extreme wish: I would like to put the baby inside of me once I know I have to send her away. Someone forcibly chose adoption for her baby.

Someday, it will be fine. Someday, I will be okay.

On each of her baby's birthdays, this birthmother experiences the pain of separation from her baby. Her memory of loss is embodied in her changed body as a rupture in flesh and heart. During pregnancy, the skin is stretched suddenly as a result of rapid growth. With time, stretch marks fade and become less obvious, but they never go away. Rather, the stretch marks in her changed body inscribe the fossil memory of her baby. The pain of loss overflowing the birthmothers' bodies constitutes the skin of the virtual mother.

The sense of touch is integral to perception for people who have lost their eyesight. As indicated in Jablonski (2006), "[T]heir hands become expert "observational instruments", which can discern even tiny details of a surface or protuberance (99, 2006). For birthmothers, who don't have the sight of their own babies, a sense of touch embodying a partial memory of the baby produces a sense of visuality when the tactile information encounters other distributed perceptions. Thus, the absent baby's body is formed through orchestrated efforts coordinating touch and vision into a machinic assemblage of a virtual baby. A woman starts to see her own baby for the first time over the Internet in the form of a reflection onto the retina of the distributed eyes of birthmother and others. A woman's partial, embodied knowledge of her baby resonated in her body gets acknowledged through a meticulous combination of fingertips on a keyboard and eyes. So does her virtual motherhood. Thus, a baby and an act of mothering, once two incompatible objects of loss for birthmothers, are made to cohabitate peacefully in this virtual world through a sensuous bodily circulation.

II. Child Photographs

For the birthmother, who has lost sight of her own baby and simultaneously lost the opportunity to mother, the baby's photograph means far more than just a photograph. However, an ongoing exchange of photographs, at least once or twice a year if not more frequent, is only available for birthmothers whose babies were placed in transnational adoption. For mothers whose babies were placed in domestic adoption, such exchange is always a source of envy⁵². For a birthmother these photographs are evidence of the baby's wellbeing and healthy adjustment to a new environment. They are also documents of the lost time when she could not be with her baby. But more than anything, it is a constant reminder of the fact that there is a baby to whom she gave birth but does not mother.

While the feeling of deep sorrow is saturated in this website, there are occasional expressions of joy and pleasure in the e-postings. That is when the birthmothers receive their babies' pictures from adoption agencies, or more accurately, adoptive parents. For instance, several birthmothers write posts saying that they are about to go and pick up their baby's picture at the adoption agency, told as if they are about to greet the actual child. The loss of the experience of sighting the baby is replaced with a photographic image, which for many birthmothers, is an embodiment of the baby. So they decorate the online room with pictures of their virtual babies.

At the website, there are more than eighty photographs of seventeen adopted children displayed in the "photo room". Birthmothers post their babies' pictures as though they are mothers showing their children's pictures to their neighbors, friends, and

⁵² According to e-postings regarding domestic vs. transnational adoption, it is understood that in domestic adoption there will be an immediate closure of communication upon a baby's departure from the birthmother. For a detailed discussion, please see chapter 3: A Flickering Motherhood.

sometimes even to strangers. By uploading pictures to the Internet, birthmothers perform a virtual motherhood.

The collection of the photographs can be divided into two categories: (1) pre-adoption and (2) post-adoption. Pre-adoption photographs are mostly of infants and are presumably taken by the birthmother herself with her mobile phone or her digital camera, at the hospital after the delivery or at the foster care facility of the adoption agency during a visit. Post-adoption photographs include a six-month-old baby, toddlers, and a pre-teen adopted child from American and Swedish families⁵³. The backgrounds of those pictures are often in domestic spheres, such as a kitchen, a living room, or a playground, places that contextualize a child in relation to the family. The starkly different background of the photograph between pre- and post-adoption discloses the secrecy and isolation circumscribing such births, suggesting a social stigma against unmarried women and their illegitimate children. Put differently, the birthmother always remains outside the realm of family.

Quite interestingly, both the majority of photographs before and after adoption appear to be portraits of the baby. If it is not a portrait, a baby and his or her siblings may have their picture taken together. The birthmother or adoptive parents are not included in any part of the baby's photograph⁵⁴. I do not know for sure whether this is the editing choice of birthmothers or adoptive parents, or an orchestrated effort by both. However, the absence of both parents, i.e. birth and adoptive parents from the baby's photographs

⁵³ Since it is rare to find an exchange of a baby's photograph in domestic adoption, post-adoption photographs are almost always of the babies who are placed in foreign families.

⁵⁴ Of those, there are two photos showing a young woman's face and arms without any caption but I can't help but remain haunted by the figure of a birthmother, identified a.k.a., 마장가 Z, despite a lack of evidence. In addition, there is a single picture showing an adoptive father present at a baby's baptism. There are pictures with siblings who also appeared as transnational adoptees.

renders visible the underlying condition in which a birthmother performs a virtual mothering via their engagement with Internet technology. The absence of a birthmother's face from a baby's picture is a manifestation of self-regulated behavior reflecting social stigma, although the birthmother's face always already lurks behind a baby's face. In addition, the absence of adoptive parents allows the baby to be imagined as if he or she were living as a free floating being, therefore, always ready to be connected with a birthmother once she becomes virtual.

The disrupted temporality always embodied in the photograph illuminates the simultaneous presence of life and death in the photograph (Barthes, 1981; Sontag, 1989). The baby is both present (implied in the photograph) and absent (it was there but is not here now) in a photograph. This dis/connection to the 'photographic referent' on the part of the spectator parallels a birthmother's flickering tie with her own baby. This flickering tie with her baby not only captures the spatio-temporality of virtual mothering but also her ambivalence toward her baby and her mothering. To sum up, a baby's photograph always signifies the connection between a birthmother and her baby through its physicality, yet it simultaneously affirms the distance and the separation from the baby.

It is noteworthy that baby photographs may not appear traumatic in and of themselves. The rupture and loss between a birthmother and a baby is produced by a particular mediation of such photographs on a birthmother's online community. Therefore, those photographs transmit the trembling vestiges of the shock of unwed pregnancy, or the painful decision to give up the child for adoption. The background of the photograph is not limited to the inside of frame. The photograph is situated in the

birthmother's Internet community where birthmother's grief and sadness is saturated and contextualized.

I draw on Barthes's passage on the photograph and sense of touch in order to carefully attend to the mediation of photography via Internet technology, which is the ground for virtual mothering.

The photograph is literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here ... A sort of umbilical cord links the body of the photographed thing to my gaze: light, though impalpable, is here a carnal medium, a skin I share with anyone who has been photographed (Barthes, 80-81).

Viewing a photograph connects eyes with the sense of touch, as the eyes share their boundary with the surface of the subject being photographed. Marianne Hirsch (1997) brilliantly points out that “[W]ith the image of the umbilical cord, Barthes connects photography not just to life but to life-giving, to maternity” (p. 20). Extending this life-giving quality of the photograph to the sphere of Internet technology allows me to envision numerous entangled global circuits of perception in vision and touch.

The birthmother's severed ties from her baby are regenerated in the form of an umbilical cord which connects the baby's body to the eyes of the mother; she becomes a virtual mother as the photo is seen and touched; there is a transmission between the skin of the photographed (the baby) and the skin of the onlooker (the birthmother as well as all other viewers). If photography is realized and mediated through light, I argue its distribution and circulation over the Internet is mediated through a machinic assemblage that distributes perceptions. In the process, the sense of touch is as equally important as, if not more so, the sense of vision. Barthes (1981) wrote, “the photographer's organ is not his eye but his finger: what is linked to the trigger of the lens.” Similarly, central

organs of perception to virtual mothering are the fingers and eyes joining in haptic
visuality. Thus, the sense of vision and touch are active and reactive organs of perception
that work together as a “machinic vision” to inform and circulate a virtual mothering and
the creation of her virtual child on the web (Johnston, 1999).

While browsing the narratives of e-postings, I was almost paralyzed by the
combination of sadness and creative investment of the message in relation to the
photograph.

ID: 희범맘 (HeeBum’s mom) Hit: 33 Date: 2001. 09. 16 12:59

Dear Hee Bum,

It is me. Your mother.

... I just looked up to the sky for a few days after you left. I thought it was a
dream. I have never seen you, not to mention carried you. I wanted to dream of
you but I couldn’t because I guess I never saw your figure. The other day, (when
I was reading a magazine,) I saw a child’s picture who, according to my friend,
looks like [you or me]. So I cut the photo out and carry it with me in my wallet.
You look much cuter and prettier than I imagine...

This e-posting directs me to look for her ID and find her baby picture. So I found a
photograph with the following caption:

ID: 희범맘 (Heebum’s mom) Date: 2003.06.11 19:00



This is a photograph of a child who **looks like** my son, Hee Bum.
The other day I saw this picture in a magazine in a waiting room
of hospital. My friend told me the child in this picture look
exactly like my child, Heebum. I took it without telling a nurse
at the hospital. The only picture that I have had is a sonogram
and this. Isn’t my son cute?
(figure 4.1)

Due to multiple reproductions, the quality of the photograph is hampered. The
light brown hair color makes the child look more like a Caucasian than a Korean child.
To her, it didn’t matter whether the child in the photograph was her real son or not. The

baby photo is the site of an accumulation and absorption of affects where she plays a virtual mothering so that she can bring an umbilical cord back to her virtual child. As long as this picture stirs a memory that there *was* a son and maintains the tension between connecting and disconnecting to the baby, this photograph offers what affective mothering needs.

In the process of Hee Bum's mom's becoming a virtual mother, her active imagination deserves a careful analysis. Hirsch (1997) points out that a photograph is a visual space for postmemory, that is in her definition, "a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation" (22). As she interweaves her mothering with a photograph of a child who is in fact not her son, Heebum's mom appreciates how well her child grows through her 'creative imagination and investment' in the photograph. Heebum's mom's creative imagination and investment allow her to perform a virtual mothering with the virtual quality of a photograph that has nothing to do with the real of the referent.

III. A mother's Artwork

The Internet e-postings suggest that many women in the community do cross-stitching. Jaewon, a moderator of this listserv, articulated that cross-stitching soothed her pain right after her daughter was sent away for adoption (phone interview with Jaewon, November 2005). Cross-stitching is also found in Layne's work (2000) as an embodied practice of remembering and recovering the loss among women who lost their babies during or right after pregnancy in the U.S. For Korean birthmothers who send their

babies for adoption, women always preferred to give something in which their hearts and love were embodied, so they made pillows, baby shoes and baby pictures, stitch after stitch, upon the baby's departure. As a result, there were occasional e-postings regarding patterns for cross-stitching and a possible idea for the collective purchase of threads and needles appearing on the discussion board in the initial stage of this virtual community.

The off-line activity of women's cross-stitching, at times, I argue, resonates as a form of Internet artwork in this website. The following Internet artwork by A-Rang's Umma animates the loss and love toward her child in this Internet community so that this virtual space is rendered sensible.

Dear my baby who is born to be loved

ID: A-RANG's UMMA

Hit: 26

Date:2001.12.04 21:53

아가야 벌써니가 떠난지두 1년 2개월이란 시간이 흘렀구나.
오늘처럼 이렇게 니가 보고싶을땐 어떻게 하니..
엄마의 무책임한 실수로 인해 너의따큰상처를 주었구나.
우리야기 좋은 부모님에게 많은 사랑을 받고 있겠지?
한번 안아보지도 못하고 널 보내야했던 그날..
엄마 죽고싶을만큼 슬펐단다..
아가야 엄마는 항상 이렇게 우리야기 생각해
그 따고 고왔던 눈망울을 어떻게 잊을 수 있겠니..
아가 부디 행복하길 바란단다..
우리 씩씩한 아랑이 잘 자랄수 있찌?
엄마는 우리 아랑이 돌아오는날만 기다릴꺼야..
아가야 사랑한다 ... 엄마가...

When I first opened this message, I saw nothing but an empty white skin. As my eyes reached the bottom of the page, there was something I couldn't read because of its small font size and yellow color⁵⁵. As I grabbed my mouse and scrolled down, I started to see this rose shape composed of countless characters spelling “사랑해 (I love you)” and symbols from computer keyboards. Thus, there were two different significations; one looks like an empty sheet, the other is patterned in a rose-like shape on its negative.

⁵⁵ Dear baby,

It has been more than a year and two months after you have been sent away
 What shall I do when I miss you so much like today?
 I hurt you because I (mother) made irresponsible mistake.
 I am sure that you are given so much love by your good parents
 (I remember) the day that I had to let go of you without even hugging you once
 I was so devastatingly sad to an extent that I would rather die
 My baby. I always think of you
 How can I forget your beautiful and serene eyes?
 I wish with my heart you lead your life happily
 My strong A-Rang, can you do that?
 I am only waiting for the day that you return
 My love
 From your mother.

♡ ~ 우리아기 아랑아 사랑해 ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

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(Figure 5.1: Arang Umma’s artwork)

The double-ness of this Internet art parallels the present absence of birthmothers in the adoption discourse. The birthmother is always there and not there at the same time. On the one hand, this image-text, which appears as a blank sheet at first glance, reflects the under-exposure of birthmothers often characterized in terms of their silence and the absence. However, the presence of birthmothers if not seeable is already there just less exposed. On the other hand, the painstakingly delicate image of a rose visible only in the form of its negative texturizes the pain of loss and emerges like the mother's blood from the pale white skin of the computer when the mouse is dragged across it.

A-Rang's Umma's artwork illustrates the trauma but more accurately, the space of trauma and its particular modes of transmission through sense memory, that is in and around the image. Reflection on sense memory is, according to Jill Bennett (2005), "...not to move into the domain of representation ... but to move into contact with it" (44). A-Rang's Umma's trauma and unspeakable pain still can neither be subsumed nor represented by words. However, her artwork renders her harrowing wound inside out and thus a point of contact erupts between trauma and representation, carving out the condition for a virtual mothering.

While maintaining the present absence, A-Rang's Umma is virtually cross-stitching her rose with the numerous incantation of "I"; "I" "o" "v" "e"; "y" "o" "u" onto the skin of the computer, delivering a visceral sensibility to our eyes through an intricate web of communications. Such transmission innervates the bodily impression of cross-stitching characters across different bodies on the Net. A-Rang's Umma's rose makes your eyes sever from your body to touch the skin of the screen. As a result, your body folds the texture of loss embodied in the rose as a thorny flower into your skin. She

bleeds as she gives birth to her rose, that is her love – her virtual baby. You bleed as you touch.

The Internet transmits not only words but also parts of bodies. Shields (1996) argues that the “[...] simple technology of text on a computer screen has allowed the Internet to become a medium in which users may develop a palpable sense of others’ bodies ... over the computer wires” (Shields, 1996, p. 5). A sense of touch along with vision is saturated viscerally and physically in the birthmother’s Internet community, not only via their texts full of emotions but also through artworks bringing forth a texture of loss to this virtual community.

A-Rang’s Umma’s Internet artwork exemplifies how a new technology creates a shift in signification which leads to a new experience of embodiment and a new subjectivity. Kathryn Hayles (1993) argues that “different technologies of text production,” suggest “different models of signification.” She further argues “the different models of signification [...] initiate new experience of embodiment” (p. 69). As birthmothers engage in ‘different technologies of text production’ via Internet technology, they illustrate new models of signification, which initiate a new way of creating and informing the body. Thus, the birthmothers’ off-line activity of cross-stitching is transformed via their engagement in Internet technology into a virtual mother’s bodily manifestation of her virtual baby and her virtual mothering.

IV. Conclusion

So far, we have examined the processes involved in the configuration of a virtual mother’s affective quality by exploring the sites where birthmothers’ bodily

remembrance is invested and saturated. In this chapter, we have felt a virtual mothering in her attendance to her virtual baby. A birthmother materializes her virtual baby not only by sharing her baby's photograph, her artwork, but also by surfacing her own bodily residues. The women's bodily discharges, such as breast milk and phlegm from inflammation, as well as her Internet artwork, surface on the Internet once again to constitute the exteriorization of loss, which forms the virtual mother's felt quality. Whereas the women's narratives of emotions perform unfulfilled motherhood by telling, the women's innovative engagement with Internet technology helps the virtual space to gain a maternal physicality, a virtual womb that optimizes it as a space for a baby to inhabit.

As examined in the previous chapter, a birthmother's ambivalent relationship toward the incompatible lost objects – the baby and the act of mothering – is also manifested as a tension between a desire to connect with and to disconnect from the baby at the same time. Such ambivalence harnessed as creative energy is illustrated by the way they remove themselves from the baby photographs but then attempt to connect with their babies through artwork. Thus, such tension facilitates rather than limits a virtual mother's creative engagement and imaginative investment in each bodily register of loss.

In this Internet community, virtual mothering through the creation and nurture of a virtual baby, is not an isolated act by a birthmother. As Johnston (1999) points out, “[W]ithin the social space of these assemblages, the viewing or absorption of images constitutes a general form of machinic vision” (46). The birthmothers' umbilical cord, once severed from the baby, becomes virtually reassembled and connected with the baby's body through the contacts of numerous gazes, serving as machinic tentacles.

Being affected by a virtual mothering, numerous incipient bodies orchestrate their organs of perception and participate in machinic vision, thereby helping to perpetuate the survival of virtual mothering.

Over the past four years, birthmother's e-postings and illustrations within the Internet community reflect the voices of contemporary birthmothers and thus disrupt the adoption discourse which often glances over this unceasing and ongoing practice of transnational adoption from South Korea.

Chapter 6: Afterwards

In the face of certain of life's upheavals, in the face of certain acts of devastation, there must be silence. There must be space, for healing, for the damaged tissue of life to regenerate itself. There must be time, for insight, for contemplation. There must be room for a grief that makes us more human, and a humility and a forgiveness taught by suffering ... (Peter Sellars, "Bodies of Light", 158-9).

In the late 1980s the first adult generation of Korean adoptees became organized and started to speak up about their own experiences. Since then, Korean popular media has brought forward Korea's adoption discourse in the form of search and reunion narratives. Over the past decade, not only has Korea's public discourse of foreign adoption been established in Korean cultural texts, but there is also noticeable growth in scholarly literature and independent cultural productions of and by Korean adoptees in western Europe and the U.S. This growing visibility of Korean adoptees has caused a shift in transnational adoption discourse, resulting in two Korean international adoption conferences that were organized by a group of Korean adoptees and took place in Seoul, Korea in 2004 and 2007.

My dissertation emerges in this intersection of rapidly growing scholarship on transnational adoption and Korea's recent reframing of adoption as a national trauma. I argue that the popular versions of adoption discourse in Korean media have not incorporated the scholarly and social development of transnational adoption discourse. In the absence of critical, nuanced examinations of Korean cultural phenomena, English-based scholarship, often representing the experience or voice of Korean adoptees, blames the Korean government while it glosses over a larger socioeconomic and geopolitical background. It fails to look at the ways in which Korea's involvement in transnational

adoption has been initiated and sustained in its submissive relationship with the U.S.-led world hegemony. It thus unintentionally perpetuates a moralistic indictment of birthmothers, or victimizes them at best, and does the same to sending countries by reducing the major cause of adoption to a patriarchal cultural practice. On the other hand, a lot of Korea's cultural production on adoption over the past fifteen years has not surpassed a nationalistic rendering of the practice, attributing economic poverty as the sole cause. Lack of synthesis between two branches of works around Korea's transnational adoption activity does not provide any explanation for why Korea, despite its public acknowledgement of shame and guilt and its understanding of the trauma involved, not to mention its far-advanced economic situation, still remains a sending country.

My dissertation offers a re-reading of this rich and new cultural text in which Korean birthmothers have been contextualized and mediated by information technologies in Korean. This makes it possible for perspectives of birthmothers in a long-standing sending country, South Korea, to be taken into a consideration in transnational adoption discourse. Although recent adoption scholarship and cultural texts lay the groundwork for birthmothers to be recognized in adoption discourse, there is little or no scholarly inquiry in the English-speaking world that deals with birthmothers involved in transnational adoption. This reflects a power dynamic between the two involved parties in adoption discourse that has so far been dominated by the adopter's perspective. However, given the possibilities offered by contemporary teletechnology, Korean birthmothers have been under-exposed, rather than erased entirely, from the media of adoption discourse, and this begs a new analysis.

I. The implication of virtual mothering

This project starts with Korean birthmothers' loss and trauma at the interface with media technology, which I approach with an analytical framework that can engage with affect. So far, I have examined Korean birthmothers' emergence in popular media, e.g. television and an Internet community via a conceptual as well as a methodological framework of 'virtual mother'. The virtual mother is configured through the processes in which organic bodies of birthmothers engage with information technologies. Based on a careful observation of television as well as Internet technologies with which Korean birthmothers interface and engage a particular mothering, my research characterizes their emergence and immersion into Korean society as virtual mothering.

The notion of a virtual mother indicates that birthmothers' motherhood is neither biological nor socially constructed but of the "machinic assemblage" between birthmothers' organic bodies and technological apparatuses. This assemblage is based on a performance of virtual mothering, the central notion in my analysis. The virtual mother realized in the production and circulation of media technology accompanies with an epistemological and ontological shift from a human-centered paradigm and grounds a new body politics in the age of global teletechnology. Drawing upon Johnston's concept of distributed perceptions, a virtual mother is not social phenomenon that a discrete and detached observer renders intelligible. Instead, through orchestrated efforts of distributed perception not necessarily bounded by human organs of perception, a virtual mother is configured, albeit it in the partial and fragmented sense that its immediate potentiality is always virtual. In other words, to know virtual mother requires an active investment from any bodies (human and non-human) taking part in the process, although such an investment may not register at the normal range of perception.

This machinic assemblage of virtual mother presupposes movement prior to position. In other words, not only does virtual mother serve as a conceptual framework, but also as its own form of measurement, one that requires a flexible understanding to look at the media-event. The instantaneous and incessant processes involved in information technology configure virtual mothering through dynamic enactments of mothering rather than framing an identity that virtual mothering should reach. Operating with the affective logic of information technology, virtual mother as a methodology suggests a new mode of media analysis that focuses on the production, circulation, and modulation of affect rather than the representation and reproduction of discursive meanings. It is not that there is no more representation and reproduction of meaning, but that this activity generates an affectivity that exceeds discursive boundaries. It also shifts the purpose of inquiry from authenticating the described to attending to the juncture where the described makes contact with information technology.

Reflecting the dynamism of machinic assemblages, the virtual mothering that I have examined in my dissertation research has transformed itself at every ground it has treaded upon, from narrative-focused to affect-driven analysis across television and from staging the trauma in words to embroidery of bodily loss onto the skin of the Internet. I started from television's search and reunion narratives in which the virtual mother embodies a homeland for Korean adoptees as a physical, symbolic and emotional site for Korea's nationalist account of development and maternal citizenship. Departing from a narrative-based analysis, I have actively participated in producing a virtual mothering through an explorative and creative interpretation of discrete but orchestrated efforts of image, text, and sound incorporated in television and its exteriority. The loss and trauma

of birthmothers is rendered sensible via the production and circulation of virtual mothering always imbricated with our participation.

Contemporary Korean birthmothers who are never made into motherly figures on television find their own space in an Internet community for mothers whose babies were sent away for adoption. Engaging birthmothers' archives of loss, I theorize a virtual mothering in terms of a staged enactment of trauma in words. The incompatible two lost objects for unmarried mothers – one of the baby; the other of mothering – have in virtual space come into mutual existence in front of numerous audiences 'here and now' at/in the time-space of Internet technology. Virtual mothering appearing on the Internet is characterized by its tension between connection to and disconnection from the baby. This tension in its virtual resolution becomes a creative force for pushing a new way of thinking about loss and trauma.

The machinic assemblage of virtual mothering is not governed by patriarchal terms of motherhood, but rather operated through the processes and logic of an affect economy in information technology. Once featuring motherhood outside the domain of traditional family, virtual mothering provides a critical perspective toward Korea's adoption discourse. The virtual mother is not granted motherhood simply because she gave birth to a child who is now an adoptee. Nor does it suppose that a meeting with a long-lost adopted child instantly rebuilds a mother and a child relationship.

As regards the older generation of birthmothers appearing only as motherly figures in television's search narratives, I disassemble virtual mothering from its containment in loss and the logic of redemption with a deconstructionist approach. Severed from the assemblage of the search and reunion story, the virtual mother in this

study highlights the affective qualities of lost motherhood embodied in television's materiality and logic of circulation. In other words, acknowledgement of the fact that loss is not retrievable enacts a virtual mothering. A virtual mothering thereby entails a performance of mourning for the loss involved in transnational adoption. As a result, it ruptures a dominant narrative of search and reunion and an immediate congealing of family and instead fosters a critical reflection on the politics of reconciliation.

Virtual mother is a concept that prioritizes a performance of mothering over a given identity of birthmother, which allows for contemporary birthmothers' engagement in information technology to be understood as a virtual mothering. Involving mostly unmarried women whose motherhood has never been socially recognized, the framework of virtual mothering renders two incompatible lost objects – the loss of a baby and the act of mothering – to be recognizable. The conceptual tool of a virtual mother therefore lays a ground for such loss to be mourned. By attending to how virtual mother is staged and felt within and beyond birthmother's words and bodies, I offer my dissertation in order to facilitate the mourning of loss involved in the fifty years of Korea's transnational adoption practice. My work transmits the affective register of loss, thus facilitating mourning for the loss.

Today, the 'reclaimed' motherhood of birthmothers is juxtaposed with the Korean government's efforts to reconcile this shameful history. Meanwhile, about 2,000 Korean women are newly becoming birthmothers each year. In order for Korea to reconcile its shame and guilt, I believe it is crucial for women who want to keep their babies to be socially and materially allowed to raise their children on their own. However, social services and government support for unmarried women's mothering has fallen far short.

Even if the contemporary birthmother, despite social isolation from stigma against single motherhood, wants to keep her baby, there are very little resources available to her. Over the past fifty years, one thing that has remained the same is that a social bias against single motherhood continues to negate the motherhood of birthmothers because they transgress the patriarchal, middle-class, male-centered family imaginary, a basic unit of Korea's nationhood.

My work reveals that many contemporary birthmothers would like to keep their babies but repetitively borrow from the discursive framework of adoption, which attributes their decision to economic circumstances. The birthmothers' accounts identified immediate adoption circumstances as social stigma and a lack of financial stability. I argue the poverty contemporary birthmothers encounter is qualitatively different from the poverty identified as the major cause for adoption during 1960s and 1970s. This I must say is a socially induced poverty imposed on birthmothers, attributed to social stigma against single motherhood. The traces of their loss and their virtual mothering indicate a lack of social responsibility for their motherhood and for their children born outside the traditional family. In fact, Korea's adoption activity has served to regulate illegitimacy.

This finding is supported by frequent anecdotes from adoptees⁵⁶—illegitimacy, besides a classical motivation from poverty, is the most salient motivation shaping Korea's adoption history. As mentioned at the beginning of my dissertation, Korean social work literature constantly positions a vulnerable population of young unmarried women and their illegitimate children as the sources of problematic foreign adoption

⁵⁶ Illegitimacy as a reason for giving a child up for adoption has been found in numerous adoptees' memoirs and artworks.

from Korea. Those findings have never been proved by the adoption discourse pushed forward by television works.

As a resolution to Korea's ensuing activity in transnational adoption, the Korean government has been actively promoting domestic adoption since the late 1980s. As a result, the number of children placed in domestic adoption every year has been on the rise, yet it has not reached the point where domestic adoption is available to all children in need of homes. I propose that possible alternatives to transnational adoption should include not only a domestic adoption but also the improvement of social conditions for single mothers.

II. A Shift in the Transnational Adoption Framework

My dissertation research on transnational adoption practices, which takes Korea as an example of a major sending country, disrupts the adoption discourse which often involves two countries unequal in resources that are located in the global north and south. As the findings of my dissertation suggest, transnational adoption involves a much more complicated amalgam of nationalistic motivations for economic development and a long history of social practices, e.g. gendered violence, illegitimacy, or even the mere hope for 'a better life', than the blanket analysis of poverty.

As exemplified in virtual mothers' encounters with adoptive families over different technologies, transnational adoption has always been constituted as an affective relationship between sending and adoptive parents, as well as between sending and adoptive countries (Choi, 1998; Rush, 2002; Yngvesson, 2002). In other words, senders are obliged to feel ashamed of sending off children, and in turn, indebted to adopters who

will give care and nurturance to their offspring. Given Korea's tenacious and vigorous activities in intercountry adoption over the past fifty years, the adoption narrative, particularly with its emphasis on a 'better life' through adoption, has functioned to reassert the U.S.'s benevolence and moral superiority over an irresponsible Korea, signified as an irresponsible birthmother.

The machinic assemblage of virtual mothering offers a new direction in which to imagine a maternal body and motherhood, extending beyond the binary logic of the social constructivism of sex/gender. 'Virtual mothering', therefore, provides a discursive framework in which the motherhood of birthmothers and of adoptive mothers is understood not in terms of lack but rather in terms of a continuum of mothering.

Particularly, contemporary birthmothers' virtual community demands a critical examination of the practice of transnational adoption and women's sexuality in a transnational feminist framework. As birthmothers' accounts indicate, there is a high correlation between 'illegitimate' babies and the decision to give up a child for adoption. In other words, Korean women relinquish their babies to maintain the middle class, heterosexual norms of the family in their society. Meanwhile, adoptive mothers in the U.S. and Western Europe desire to rescue these "social orphans" from illegitimacy in order to fulfill *their* fantasy of the heterosexual family. Due to the discrepancy in their accessibility of resources, birthmothers and adoptive mothers involved in transnational adoption at opposite ends have situated themselves differently and yet both are part of this middle-class family imaginary.

This stark divide in biological, cultural, and political resources pits these two groups of women in opposition to one another, creating a political vacuum, rather than a

critical dialogue on women's reproductive rights that crosses the boundaries of race, class, sexuality and nationality. The struggles of contemporary Korean birthmothers documented on an Internet website uncovers a crisis in the feminist politics surrounding women's reproductive rights and reveals a practice stratified by the logic of transnational capitalism and the racial restructuring of family formation in the "first world". How might we imagine a feminist framework in which birthmothers and adoptive mothers recognize the complex dynamics of obstacles and privileges that bind them, and yet push forward to build a non-exclusionary feminist activism for women's re/productive rights?

III. Future Research

The process of conducting research carves out its own parameters and suggests its own limitations at the same time. I can neither describe nor explain the vast areas of future scholarly inquiry I hope to trigger by my small work. Instead I show a few examples which by no means exhaust this minefield of scholarly interrogation on sending parties involved in transnational adoption. They include the emerging discussion of birthfathers, a political economy of transnational adoption focused on birthmothers' labor, and a historical study on the U.S.'s military involvement in transnational adoption.

There is no public discourse of birthfathers in transnational adoption discourse. While the absence of fathers is a pivotal factor in a pregnant woman's motivation to give up a child, the figure of the birthfather has never been a significant part of adoption discourse. A few birthfathers appeared on television show, 'On the Way To Meet' and several other search shows, during my research process I did encounter a couple of birthfathers' accounts on the Internet community. But aside from these rare exceptions,

there is no place for birthfathers in the current discursive framework of adoption. Instead, they are always backstage information. However, in 2002, a television documentary aired about an unsuccessful search and reunion between a Korean birthfather on death row and a Korean adoptee who was stationed as a U.S. serviceman in Korea. This dramatic story, originally based on Aaron Bates, has since been made into a feature film entitled 'My father' (마이 파더) which cast famous celebrities. It will be shown in September 2007 in Korea. The figure of the Korean birthfather who has never been a focus of Korea's transnational adoption stories is currently being shaped and is likely to shift adoption discourse.

Once vilified as 'selling babies for foreign currency,' transnational adoption has been a rapidly growing social phenomenon in global family formation over the past two decades. Given the increasing prominence of transnational adoption discourse, the figure of the birthmother is made visible through the acknowledgement of her affective, caring labor. This caring affect imagined to be instilled in the baby by the bereft birthmother is a necessary condition in the imaginary of adoption for the adoptee to be able to respond the love and attention of adoptive parents. The traumatic losses of birthmothers, in other words, indicate a birthmother's love invested in her child, in whose body it takes the form of a potential to love more "fit" parents. In light of this economy of caring involved in transnational adoption, birthmothers' grief and loss, which denotes a melancholy of maternal love, is actually socially necessary labor, which secures or even produces adoptive parents' desire. For further research, I would like to investigate the political economy involved in transnational adoption with its focus on birthmothers' immaterial labor. In my future research, I would like to examine the discourse around three famous

Korean American adult adoptees and how their success stories are blended into a narrative of Korea – U.S. relations over time.

My original intention for this project started with my curiosity of how the U.S. as the biggest receiving country and South Korea, as the biggest sending country involved in transnational adoption for the past half century have been implicated in a moral hierarchy. This hierarchy is based on notions of an intimate kinship between the two countries that crosses multiple borders of race, class, culture, citizenship etc. The current dissertation has begun to flesh out the processes involved in this intimate hierarchy.

Appendix I.

#1

Ji-yong, it's your mother. Did you miss me? I miss you too.

You must resent me a lot. I can imagine. How can I ask for your forgiveness for all that I've done wrong. Can't even take responsibility after giving birth.

If you forgive me... I don't expect you to. I don't even ask you to.

I'm really sorry. I've always loved you. I've always thought about you and I have so much regret.

You probably know now the heavy heart a mother carries when she hasn't fulfilled all her duties as a mother.

Even though I want to die, the reason why I can't die is you. Let's meet. I have a lot to say.

Let's meet and talk, ok? I love you, Ji-yong.

#2 Choi Man-ki's mother

Man-ki must have grown a lot. When I think of you when you were young, I really want to see how you look grown-up.

When I think about seeing you, I get so excited I can't sleep.

I'm so grateful that you grew up so well and I'm thankful to your adoptive parents.

Please tell them how thankful I am.

And to you, I'm really sorry...

After sending you away, I've never slept well.

I believed you will be well and prayed every night, Man-ki. Let's meet. I love you deep in my heart.

#3. Yon-suk, Yon-song, and Yon-baek's mother

Yon-suk,

It has been 23 years since you all left your mother's side. Seeing your photo, I see that you've grown up wonderfully – our Yon-suk.

When I think about how we parted when you were young, I only have endless regret.

Yon-suk, I'm sorry. You were born the oldest, and I'm sorry that I gave you such a heavy burden to shoulder by leaving you with two younger siblings. To hear that you met a nice husband and are living happily, there's nothing more I wish for and I am truly truly happy. I'm so happy to hear that your husband is good to you, and Yon-suk, I love you. Be healthy until we can meet.

Letter to Yon-song and Yon-baek

Yon-song, I love you.

I've missed you so much.

Yon-song, I imagine you must regret your mother a lot.

You were always so weak and sick.
But I'm happy to hear that you are now healthy and well.

Yon-baek, our beloved Yon-baek, the youngest,
I'm so sorry I sent you there when you were so young.
I'm sure you must have resented your mother a lot, but there was never a moment when I didn't think about you after I sent you away.
Time has passed and you are now married and a father of a child and with a family. The thought of seeing you feels like a dream and on my way to work, if I think about you, I become filled with tears and even with strangers around me, I start to cry.
No matter how much you tell me that you're ok, I know how much you all suffered...
So be healthy and wait patiently until we meet.
My dream is to go and hold you all in my arms.
See you then.

#4. Kan Suk-nyo – mother of twins Jong-un and Jong-hye

My beloved daughter Jong-hye,
I'm the mother who gave you away when you were just a ball of blood.
I'm so ashamed to now say that I'm your mother and show myself to you this way.
Baby, forgive your mother. You must have resented your mother a lot, but for 24 years, I've never stopped thinking about you. Even in my dreams, I never stopped thinking about you and I've waited for the day that I can see you.
When we meet, let me hold you in my arms just once.
You were covered in a quilt when you left
Were you ever ill? Are you healthy now?
How have you changed...
What if you don't recognize your mother
Jong-hye, I'll wait for you.
Baby, I love you. Baby
You're still a bloody little baby. Baby, I love you.

Jong-un,
My beloved daughter Jong-un,
I want to beg for your forgiveness.
I'm so sorry and I've done so wrong.
I wanted to look for you, I should have looked for you, but I couldn't. I couldn't look for you until you all grew up and looked for me.
I can't ever let you go.
Until the day I die, you will always be in my heart.
Jong-un, baby,
Let's meet once. Hold me once in your arms.
I really want to hold you in my arms and beg for your forgiveness.
I beg you. Let's meet once and hold me in your arms.
Jong-un, I love you. Jong-un, I love you.

#5. Byon Jin-song's grandmother

Jin-song. You don't know how happy I am to hear news of you.

You told me to live to be a hundred, but I'm so grateful to hear from you and see you again before I turn 100.

Jin-song, you will be surprised too when you see me. I'm healthy. I'm not deaf and I'm not bent over. I ride the subway. Remember going on the picnic and to the beach, and the sports tournament when you held my hand and ran? I keep thinking about those memories.

You don't know how sorrowful I was after you left, and how painful it was to not be able to hold you again.

Thinking about you, separated from your family, and not even in Korea but in a different country and not being able to communicate, and how you must have struggled and wondering how you overcame those things, my heart was always in pain. But how grateful I am to hear that you overcame all those things and studied and grew up well. But my heart is still...

I miss you. Everyone is waiting for you to come – as soon as possible. We all wait for you to come. Come as soon as you can.

#6. Kim Jong-tae's mother – Kwon Kyong-ja (66)

Jong-tae, I'm sorry.

If I had carried you on my back more, I wouldn't have lost you. It's because I didn't carry you on my back.

The first thing when I see you again, I'm going to look at your hand.

How did you do with your poor hand. I kept your hand always in my heart.

Jong-tae, I'm really very very sorry.

How can I even spill tears and cry in front of you.

Jong-tae, I won't cry. I won't cry and I'll be in a healthy state when I see you. Jong-tae.

I really won't cry when you see me. Sorry.

(Wiping away tears I can't control) Whew, what can I do.

Jong-tae, sorry. I really didn't want to cry when I see you but tears just keep flowing.

Jong-tae, I'm really sorry.

If I can see you just once in my life, I can die now and have no regrets.

If I see you, I'll carry you on my back. I'll definitely carry you on my back. Jong-tae.

Really, I'll carry you on my back.

#7. Wu Yo-sop's mother

My beloved son Yo-sop

Thank you.

I gave you away but you came looking for your pitiful mother.

After I heard that you came all the way from another country so far away and then just returned, my image of you keep flickering before my eyes and I can't fall asleep.

Thank you so much. And I'm sorry.

Please forgive your mother. How can I explain why I couldn't live with you, why I couldn't raise you, and why I had to send you away.

All I can say as a mother is that I'm sorry.

Yo-sop. It feels like a dream to be able to call out your name again.

I'm so happy and grateful that even away from your mother's breast, you grew up so remarkably...

Son, I really want to see you soon.

Until the day I go to see you, wait for your pitiful mother.

Son, I love you.

#8. Mun Hun's grandmother

Hun, after your mom and dad neglected you...and I sent you away, you don't know how sorry I am.

How you must have suffered so much in a place where you can't even speak your own language.

I should have looked for you first, but I'm so thankful that you looked for me. And I'm so sorry. To you.

After sending you away, I couldn't do anything...

I spent every night with tears in my eyes. I sent away such a little thing.

But you're already so grown up, I'm so grateful.

I still live in the same place where you and I lived together. So that I can see you when you return...

Do you remember the black door in front of my house?

When you come, you will remember. When you see this photo...

Remember when you were little and slept with your grandma, I gave you my arm as a pillow and we slept in each other's arms? If you come this time, I'll do the same for you.

Now, even if I die now, I have no regrets.

Even if I die now, I can die with my eyes closed. Because I'll die having seen you.

It feels like a dream to see you again. Come soon so we can see each other.

#9. Letter to Song Mi-yong, Che-un

Mi-yong, I'm grateful to see you and I'm thankful that you looked for me. When I saw you on TV, I was so happy and also sad.

I had no idea that you had gone so far away and I learned that for the first time when I saw the broadcast.

I too never stopped thinking about you, and I prayed that you are well and healthy.

You always remained in one corner of my heart.

Mi-yong, I'm sorry.

I never imagined that I would see you again like this.

Let's see each other and forgive and be forgiven.
 If you want me to go down on my knees, I'll go down on my knees.
 Let's meet and talk.

Please forgive your mother, Che-un.
 I'm sure you must have regretted your mother a lot, but I never stopped thinking about you. I should have been good to you but I wasn't where I should have been as a mother. Now, I'm so sorry to even call your name.
 You don't have to see your mother. I'm happy just knowing that you're living your life to the fullest.
 Che-un. If you come with Mi-yong next time, I'll make you whatever you want to eat. I'm sorry. I should have looked for you long ago, but I had no way of knowing where you were...
 I'm grateful that you looked for me first.
 Che-un, I miss you.
 I'm curious to see how you've grown.
 Che-un...

#10. Kim Yun-il and Ha-na's mother

Yun-il, it's mom.
 Yun-il, I'm really sorry.
 It's been 21 years...I'm calling out your name after 21 years.
 Yun-il. I heard that it was really difficult for you growing up.
 I never stopped thinking about you. I'm really sorry.
 I did all I could to find you, but there was no way.
 Even now, I applied at the adoption agency to look for you and I've been waiting, and then you contacted me.
 Thank you so much for finding me. Yun-il.
 Even after struggling so much, you've grown up well.
 You look really good.
 Did I give birth to such a handsome son?
 Yun-il. My poor son Yun-il. Why were you born to this mother and have to struggle so hard...
 Yun-il, I'll beg for your forgiveness. For not raising you and being irresponsible.
 Seeing your photo makes me think about your older brother. Yun-il.
 Need to find your older brother and see how he is...
 Don't be lonely anymore. Yun-il.
 I'll make sure you're not lonely. Come to me on holidays and when you get married.
 Whenever you want to see me and whenever you're tired, come to me. Now you have a family to come back to. Now you don't have to be lonely. Yun-il, thank you.
 Thank you so much for finding me. Yun-il.
 Let's see each other soon.

#11. Kim Chol-gi's mother

I'm sorry I was not able to raise you.
 Although you were not here, I always kept you in my heart.
 After seeing you on TV, my heart was torn apart.
 As soon as I saw you, I could see you still have the same face as when you were little.
 I won't ask you to forgive me.
 I'd like to see you at least once but if you don't, I won't impose.
 I'm happy just hearing about you and hope you're happy.

#12. Lee Son-won and Jin-won's mother

To my daughter Son-won,
 Son-won, I'm your mother.
 I feel ashamed to even say to you that I am your mother...
 You even said in your letter that I should no longer feel sorry, and from your letters, I can feel your heart, but even if you're able to forgive me, I still feel like an unforgivable sinner..
 I have nothing to say but that I'm sorry.
 Son-won. How you must have suffered and how difficult it must have been for you taking care of your younger sibling Ji-won.
 No matter how much I thought about you, how could it compare to what you've been through.
 Son-won, I'm sorry.
 I'm sorry that I couldn't protect you and I'm sorry that I couldn't raise you and I don't know what to say having left you a scar on your young hearts.
 Please forgive your mother.
 Son-won, let's meet soon. I miss you. Son-won.

My beloved Ji-won. I'm your mother.
 How did we become so distanced between mother and child, and how did I come to leave you such a painful scar on your heart...
 Ji-won.
 You went to a foreign land at such a young age and how you must have suffered and how difficult it must have been for you.
 I've never even written you a letter asking for your forgiveness as a mother, and my heart is in so much pain.
 I received your sister's letter saying that you're now all grown up and married, and I became so sad I cried and cried.
 You were only three, so young, when I sent you away.
 Please forgive your mother. Please forgive your pitiful mother. My son Ji-won. I love you. Ji-won.
 Be healthy until we can meet.

#13. Kang Jong-son's mother

Jong-son, it's mom.

I didn't even fulfill my duties as a mother, so I feel ashamed to suddenly appear and say I'm your mother. I'm sorry that I gave you a scar.

When you were young, every time I would walk down the street with you and people would look at you and say "American! American!" I was so hurt.

But you always hid your feelings.

You were so valuable to me and a daughter I couldn't exchange for anything in the world.

Jong-son, I'm sorry. After sending you away, I regretted it a lot. There was never a day that I stopped thinking about you and whenever I missed you, I would look at your photo.

Each day, I imagined how you must be growing, and now, so much time has passed.

Thank you for not forgetting and remembering your pitiful mother.

I have nothing to say except sorry and thank you. Jong-son, really thank you.

For growing up so beautifully. Jong-son, I miss you.

My beloved daughter Jong-son. I really miss you.

#14. [Om Sang-yong], Om Jin-yong's mother

Jin-yong, it's mom.

I don't know if I have the right to say to you like this that I'm your mother, but I am so thankful that you have grown up and looked for your mother.

My situation was so harsh then that I had no other choice.

If I hadn't been so sick...

I never imagined that Sang-yong would die like this...

It would have been great if the twins were alive together...

Jin-yong, I'm sorry. And thank you for growing up so well. Please forgive me. When I see you I want to hold you in my arms just once.

Jin-yong, I'll come find you. I'll come see you.

I miss you. I want to see you soon.

#15. Un-hi and Ji-hi's mother

Un-hi, Ji-hi,

I really really missed you. I'm not sure that I can say to you that I'm your mother...

I really shouldn't have sent you away and I'm really sorry and I have nothing to say.

Now that I'll be seeing you again, I've thought a lot about whether I have the right to be a mother.

Now that you're all grown up, I want to hold you in my arms and say that I'm sorry.

I love you, Ji-hi, Un-hi. I want to see you soon.

I love you, Un-ji, Ji-hi.

Appendix II.



(Still Image from Happy Sunday's 'On The Way To Meet' aired on August 7, 2005)

Appendix III.

(Chaewoon's umma text)



This is the scene of ChaeWoon who saw his birthmother's visual letter. The Korean text on the screen says, "this is how he met his umma, mother".

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