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Continuing Presence of Discarded Bodies: Occupational Harm, Necro-Activism, and Living Justice

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Abstract

This essay explores the coexistence of struggles against the foreclosure of disabled people's lives and against occupational illness, debilitation, and deaths caused by the manufacturing process of electronics in South Korea. Starting from the two activist campsites set up in Seoul and the historical backgrounds of occupational health movement, I draw on two documentary films, *The Empire of Shame* (2014) and *Factory Complex* (2015), that depict workers who became ill and those who died due to toxic exposure at semiconductor manufacturing plants. Beyond commemoration, necro-activism emerges in the form of persistent involvements of dead bodies, mourning, and objects representing death as important agents for making claims for justice. Taking into account political and historical differences of locations in which disabled people are positioned differently in the global order redirects us from the language of worth toward sociality, collective reframing of suffering and disability, and justice as an ongoing practice of everyday life and afterlife.

Two protest camps were set up at two busy subway stations in Seoul: the first, in 2012, in Gwanghwamun subway station near the City Hall north of the Han River; and the other, in 2015, in Gangnam subway station near the Samsung building south of the river. In these camps, activists and allies took turns staying in the tents, shared food, slept overnight, and gave speeches to educate the public about their causes. Sustained for years by the alliance of over two hundred disability and civic organizations, the first camp demanded the elimination of the disability rating system, a bureaucratic apparatus designed to reduce disability benefits, which led to the deaths of disabled people who were left without care. The second camp was set up by an organization called the Supporters for the Health and Rights of People in the Semiconductor Industry, which demanded worker's safety and accountability for illnesses and deaths in the semiconductor industry, including at Samsung Electronics.

Despite their different agendas, these two camps have supported each other in solidarity. In his conversation with an activist in the Gangnam camp, disability activist Park Kyung-seok (Pak Kyŏng-sŏk), from the other camp, explains that disabled people and the workers who became disabled and ill share the status of "wastes" (*p'yegimul*), as they are deemed worthless and locked away in institutions and disposed of by the government and corporations (Ha, 2015). "Disposable populations" and "wastes" are used to describe individuals whose experiences of suffering and injustice do not provoke social, political, and legal recognition and remedies and are subject to further violations as their presences are seen as transgressing. As Max Liboiron (2012) suggests, the "logics of transgression attendant to waste and dirt" constitute the "ideal society" and "out of placeness" (p. 8) based on the value system that determines worth as a condition of emplacement.¹

These metaphors of detritus convey finality in that bodily presence has reached what Judith Butler (2004) calls "the limits of intelligibility" (p. 58). However, being disposed of or locked away does not mean disappearance, just as garbage never disappears from the earth but is moved and transmuted and continues to interact with the environment.

What if garbage is never moved away and the suffering doesn't stop after death? How do we engage with what happens during and after "disposal"—namely, disablement, debilitation, illness, relegation, displacement, degradation, and death—while working to eliminate the conditions that lead to those outcomes? Or, to pose the question using Butler's (2004) words, "what, given the contemporary order of being, can I be," after harms done to me? (p. 58). How do we communicate, make known, and feel our continued earthly presence with harm, whether alive, debilitated, dying, or dead? Further, what do the material and traveling presence of discarded and toxic wastes of technologies demand from us who live with, near, or at a distance from them, depending on privilege?

Much as material and metaphorical wastes imply finality, so too justice—in demands for reparations and apologies for harms inflicted—is often cast as a universal and final outcome that cannot be revisited. Justice is described as "not done yet" or "done," as if justice were something to be completed at a certain time by a set of actions upon which affected people and society in general agree. Furthermore, justice is conceived as an object of doing; yet the passive voice indicates that it is not always clear who and what does justice. The legal recognition of injustice, apology, and monetary compensation conditioned by irreversibility and followed by the demand to heal almost always do not do justice to those who were harmed or to the systems of violence that continue to do harm. How is justice lived, if not done, and continued by the earthly presence of bodyminds "even in the midst of unbearable pain" (Price, 2015, p. 280), toxic wastes, and ongoing injustice?

In this essay, I explore these questions—invoked by the connection made through the status of the people in the two camps as discarded—to imagine a "crip technoscience" approach to manufacturing technology as illustrated by Aimi Hamraie and Kelly Fritsch (2019) as "a critical project that holds in tension the unjust imperatives of technoscientific innovation with the transformative capacities to shape matter and meaning through praxis" (p.21) to engage with movements against occupational harm and disability oppression in South Korea. These questions are not only concerned with

condemning the corporate-state violence of debilitations and murders of racialized, gendered, disabled and once-enabled people, but are also committed to recognizing how lasting presences of debilitating and disabled bodyminds reconfigure the relationship with justice, technology, and the environment (Kafer, 2013; Clare, 2017). Following Nikki Sullivan's (2014) focus on bodies' and technology's "coresponsibility, coarticulation, movement of (un)becoming with" (p. 189),² this essay aims to encompass different ways of producing, defining, claiming, and representing disability/illness and disabled/ill people in relation to technology. First, I explore technology involved in the manufacturing and disposal of electronic devices and toxic matters through labor processes (Miller, 2017) and their deep reliance on—and constructions of—imperial relations, geopolitical hierarchy, and exploitability. Second, I regard the bureaucratic and medico-judicial apparatus of detecting, rating, and calculating incapacities to assess welfare service eligibility and to determine occupational harms for compensation as the technology of violent management that props up healthy bodies as the default precondition and that demands proof of incapacities conceptualized as stable and measurable. Third, the subjectivity and orientations of dead people appear in activist spaces as the technology of resistance in relation to living people wanting, calling on, acknowledging their material, not to mention their spiritual, presence. I call this necro-activism. Fourth, audio-visual texts and haptic objects, such as documentary films, discourses, images, statues, and symbols, constitute technologies of mediating and materializing lived injustice and justice.

North American discussions on technological devices and disabilities in "disability technoscience," "a field of traditional expert relations and practices concerned with designing *for* disabled people rather than *with* or *by* disabled people," frequently turn to discourses and spectacles of life-enhancing possibilities for disabled individuals (Hamraie & Fritsch, 2019). Another predominant discourse and spectacle appears in occupational health science. The once healthy and enabled young workers manufacturing technological devices and becoming disabled and debilitated due to toxic exposure and injuries are highlighted as the cost of

development. This binary of white individuals with disabilities as consumers versus young Asian and Latin American women as victims of toxic exposures and injuries from manufacturing and global capitalist exploitation is formed in racialized, gendered, classed, and geographically specific hierarchies (Miller, 2017). Thus the “decolonization and racial justice” (Hamraie & Fritsch, 2019, p. 16) that crip technoscience calls for requires us to attend to locational specificities and internal differences within the geopolitically marginalized places and their temporal and spatial complexities. Yet the tendency to turn to the list of representative cases of what illustrates the urgency of material conditions or exemplary practices of resistance in global contexts often ends up reifying the Other whose representations of their own experiences are not recognized.³ The assumed certainty of material conditions elsewhere hinders the imagination of ambivalence, nuances, and multiplicity of experiences.

Disability justice movements in the United States and Canada and transnational disability studies scholars have pointed out the urgent need to pay attention to disablements by global capitalist exploitation, state violence, and wars, which debilitate populations (Berne & Sins Invalid, 2016; Erevelles, 2011; Puar, 2017). Jasbir Puar (2017) argues, “Certain bodies are employed in production processes precisely because they are deemed available for injury—they are, in other words, objects of disposability, bodies whose debilitation is required in order to sustain capitalist narratives of progress” (p. 81). The imperative of challenging US imperialism, militarism, racism, capitalist expansion, settler colonialism, gender regulation, and sexual oppression puts into question the hierarchy between the Global North and the Global South (including the disenfranchised and settler-colonized Others) (Meekosha 2011; Jaffee 2016; Erevelles 2011). The division between North and South reflects colonial history, the Cold War, economic developments, and political and military alliances. In addition to challenging the power of European and North American imperial powers, it is necessary to explore the devastating consequences of Japanese imperialism and colonial rule and the roles that Asian countries play in global capitalism. The narrow conceptualization of

the Global North as Western Europe and North America frequently turns into binary thinking that sees only the white oppressor and the black and brown oppressed others, overlooking global exploitations of and by ethnicized Asians, eastern Europeans, and ethnicized groups in the Middle East, and reinforcing the erasure of Indigenous people in nonwhite settler colonial societies. These binaries of North and South, Western and non-Western, obfuscate the power structures outside of—yet interlocked with—Western Europe and North America, by which South Korean and Japanese corporations exploit their citizen workers, migrant workers, and workers in other Asian countries. Asian exploitation at manufacturing, recycling, and disposal sites of technologies and militarized violence produce disablements and deaths of workers and residents.

Following Kuan-Hsing Chen (2010), I think with “Asia as method,” not an object of analysis or a celebrated origin of difference. Asia as method embraces an orientation toward Asia as a site of producing knowledge, politicizing and challenging its hierarchies, and forging solidarity, placed within the frame of world history (pp. 213-216) and as a site where a “*pulgu-ŭi chŏngch’i*” (crip politics) emerges centering on dependence and discord as major tools for transformation (Changaeyŏsŏng Konggam, 2018). I attend to historical and activist accounts of industrial harms in South Korea and their convergence with—and divergence from—the South Korean disability movement’s goal of eliminating oppression and making life and justice possible, revealing the circuit of harm in which South Korean exploitation of Asian countries occurs. Deconstructing the presupposed position of what Mel Chen (2011) has called “mythic health” (p. 273) in relation to toxicity requires us not to rely on normative bodyminds to determine harm or on citizenship and nation-states to demand redress.

Chemical Exposure and the Corpse Protest

Before the semiconductor workers’ cancer cases emerged in 2007, several landmark cases brought occupational health and industrial damage (*sanŏp chaehae*) to public attention in the 1980s. The history of occupational health

and resistance is inevitably intertwined with the post-division history of capitalism, labor movements, and political shifts in South Korea. In 1980, cases of black lung disease (pneumoconiosis), injuries, and deaths by fire led to a large-scale uprising by coal miners in Sabuk against abysmal working and living conditions and against the violent responses to protests (M. Ch'oe, 2017). Another case involved fifteen-year-old Mun Song-myŏn, who worked and lived in a factory that manufactured thermometers: he died of mercury poisoning in 1988 (Song, 2017). In the same year, it was revealed that Wonjin Rayon had been concealing the cases of workers who died of carbon disulfide (CS₂) poisoning since the 1970s and laying off many workers who became mentally and physically disabled after chronic exposure (An, 1988; "*Wŏnjin reion*," 1988).

The rapid growth of the South Korean economy, heralded as a "success" and "miracle" (Maass, 1989), was made possible by the authoritarian export-driven industrialization and development led by military regimes from 1961 to 1987, which exploited a cheapened workforce in export processing zones that attracted foreign investors (Song, 2011; Lee, 2010). The growth of big conglomerates, including Samsung, was buttressed by "low-interest loans through the regularized bank system that helped light manufacturing in the 1960s and the heavy chemical industry in the 1970s to compete in the international market" (Song, 2011, p. 16).

The achievement of the democracy movement of June 1987 and the subsequent growth of unions provided the rich soil for the public outrage that followed the revelation of industrial disaster cases (Cho, 2010). The "corpse protest" (*sisin nongsŏng*) involving Kim Pong-hwan, the former worker at Wonjin Rayon who died of the effects of CS₂ poisoning in 1991, magnified the activism of workers and the public's support. Holding up his funeral, Kim's family and other workers demanded the company's recognition and compensation. After three months without an acceptable response, his family moved Kim's corpse in a coffin to the company, so that they could hold a funeral at the company building. When they were not allowed entry, they set up a wake in front of the building as a site of protest. Finally, 137 days after Kim's death, his family and the company reached an

agreement, and his family was able to hold his funeral. The material presence of Kim's corpse in the public space as evidence of harm generated a sense of urgency and underscored the moral imperative of justice. This necro-activism constituted the undoing—and the return—of the disposed of “necropolitical labor,” illustrated by Jin-kyung Lee (2010) as “the most disposable labor, that is, the ultimate labor commodity or worker, something or someone to be thrown out, replaced, and/or (both literally and figuratively) killed after or as the labor is performed” (p. 6). This protest by corpse informed the public about the injustice of industrial harms, corporate cover-ups, and governmental complicity. Wonjin Rayon, then under the management of the government-owned Korea Development Bank and run by ex-military officers (An, 1988), continued to deny its accountability, and the Ministry of Labor was complicit in its own actions and inaction. To date, more than nine hundred workers have been diagnosed with CS₂ poisoning (S. S. Kim, 2017). The protests and demands for justice have continued to resurface to stop the exportation of the same toxic machine imported from Japan and the development of the polluted land, as well as to address local residents' health, the employment of disabled workers, and funds for medical treatments, to name a few issues. This history provides the context of the necro-activism to which I return in relation to the cancer activism against Samsung. In the next section, I will address how industrial harm continues as the state-supported capitalism finds newly exploitable necropolitical labor, relying on the enforced ignorance creating the circuits of harm in Asia.

Transnational Circuits of Harm: Moving Machines, Productions, and Workers

The toxicity involved in manufacturing rayon was known long before the diagnosis of CS₂ poisoning in 1981 in South Korea. In Japan, after CS₂ poisoning in the rayon industry was first reported in 1929, it became one of the most common occupational illnesses in the 1930s (S. S. Kim, 2017). Old machines were then exported to South Korea in the mid 1960s when

the postcolonial diplomatic relations between South Korea and Japan resumed. The machines were in use in South Korea until the cases of CS₂ poisoning were established as an industrial disaster in the early 1990s. The harm did not end there. After Wonjin Rayon was shut down, the machines were exported again—this time to Dandong, China—despite the objections of South Korean workers. It is reported that they are now in use in North Korea (S. S. Kim, 2017). Similarly, the occupational and environmental harms caused by asbestos illustrate the importance of tracing and stopping the transnational movements of harmful machinery and manufacturing sites. In the 1970s, asbestos-processing machines were imported from Japan; in the 1990s, the asbestos industry moved to Indonesia and also to Malaysia, China, and Vietnam (Kang, 2017).

As the use of certain toxic chemicals is banned and the access to information about their harmful effects increases in individual countries, market demands lead to the growth of new labor pools in places with few public regulations and little information on chemical toxicity and its dangers. The health consequences to labor of semiconductor manufacturing began surfacing in the 1970s in California and were first reported in the medical literature in 1983 (LaDou, 2006). During a 2003 lawsuit against IBM filed by two workers, epidemiologists who examined IBM's Corporate Mortality File found "excess deaths due to brain, kidney, lymphatic, and hematopoietic cancers and melanoma" and a "significant excess of breast cancer deaths in female manufacturing workers at the San Jose plant" (LaDou, 2006, p. 39). These revelations, however, did not generate international enforcement of bans, monitoring, or changes in industrial standards. This international movement of manufacturing and technology without information about toxicity and with racialized access to bodily protection calls for international monitoring and regulations and for transnational activist coalitions.

During the economic crisis of 1997 and International Monetary Fund-directed neoliberal restructuring, South Korea became "a more flexible, capital-friendly postdevelopmental state" (Song, 2011, p. 6). In this restructuring process, the direct employment of workers has decreased,

replaced with a subcontracting system. Instead of being directly employed by the companies that design and sell products, workers are employed either by a dispatching agencies or by subcontracting companies, leading to further corporate exploitation and ill-health caused by their labor and exposure to toxins.

South Korea's role in global neoliberalism in the new century requires building Asian coalitions to demand occupational and environmental justice. Emerging as a sub-empire, "an intermediate state between a developed country and the Third World" (S. Kim, 2017, p. 155), South Korean industry has relied on "two forms of non-ethnic Korean labor: foreign offshore in various locations and migrant labor in South Korea from more peripheral economies" of Southeast Asia and South Asia (Lee, 2010, p. 18)). Samsung Electronics has established factories in Vietnam, in which half the cell phones sold worldwide are now manufactured.⁴ Corporate injustice and global capitalism that profit off of populations that are deemed disposable situate South Korea at the front line of ethnonational capitalism as a sub-empire that is serving the US economy; it is necessary to trace and challenge harms that travel along the transnational circuits of manufacturing and disposal industries that cause sickness, disablement, and death.

Presence-Other-Than-Human

Semiconductors function as "the heart of all electronic equipment" (Miller & Kraidy, 2016, 92) and Samsung Electronics, along with IBM, has been one of the major semiconductor producers in the world. The semiconductor industry "is one of the most chemical-intensive industries ever developed" (LaDou, 2006, p. 34), and workers are potentially exposed to skin irritants, acids, and many "chemicals that cause cancer, reproductive complications, and debilitating illnesses" (Miller & Kraidy, 2016, p. 92) and deaths. Yet it is known as a "clean" industry because semiconductor chips are manufactured in what are called "clean rooms," in which dust particles are kept at extremely low levels and workers must wear anti-dust suits to keep the chips from being contaminated. Affected South Korean workers were

not informed of the kinds and toxicity of chemicals they were handling in “clean rooms” and later they felt betrayed that “cleanliness” did not mean the same thing for the workers as for the chips (Kongyu, 2017).

Various kinds of cancer and illnesses among South Korean workers caused by their exposure to toxic chemicals and radiation in Samsung Electronics semiconductor plants first became public in 2007, when Hwang Yu-mi died of acute myeloid leukemia at age twenty-three. Rejecting Samsung’s payment offered without an admission of fault, Hwang Yu-mi’s father, Hwang Sang-gi, demanded recognition from the state (via Korea Workers’ Compensation and Welfare Service) that the working conditions and chemical exposure at the plant caused his daughter’s death. This effort led to the formation of the organization Supporters for the Health and Rights of People in the Semiconductor Industry (SHARPS, *panollim*), which started what became a more than a decade-long struggle that led to the protest camp in Gangnam subway station, which closed in July 2018 after 1,023 days when an agreement was reached between SHARPS and the third party mediation committee.

The fight for justice has been not only against a conglomerate that denied any responsibility for toxic work environments that caused illnesses and deaths in its workers, but also against a governmental agency, courts, mainstream science, legal systems, and even the South Korean public, insofar as Samsung has been identified with national economic growth and identity. The company has fostered a sense of techno-nationalism, whereby national identity is deeply rooted in its technological prowess and its global recognition. This techno-nationalism has generated trust in Samsung products’ “superior quality” and “innovation,” as well as the company’s “efficient” management built upon its suppression of unions. To make an accusation against Samsung is to challenge this trust, a trust once shared by affected workers and their families. Gaining the public’s support against Samsung’s labor practices thus requires a significant amount of work in crafting effective rhetoric and compelling narratives to communicate material and embodied injustice beyond the exposés.

Not relying on a narrator or the melodramatic portrayal of illness as

personal loss, Hong Li-Kyung's (2014) documentary film *The Empire of Shame* uses silent, off-focus shots from a hidden camera, taken inside the Samsung semiconductor plant, thereby dis/orienting the audience in experiencing the inaccessibility of the truth. The snapshots of workers all wearing anti-dust suits that cover almost the entire body force the audience to look for glimpses of identity that show through the workers' eyes and bodies as well as to detect their sociality through their interactions. The film weaves raw footage of electronics manufacturing plants, nearby residential housing, industrial shipping docks, gigantic containers, and moving ships in extremely long aerial shots. Against these landscapes and seascapes, human bodies and their movements appear minuscule and hardly noticeable. The overpowering industrial structures visually crush the frail flesh and bodies of those who are rendered powerless. The film's quiet observational mode urges the audience to reflect on the power differential between individuals and the system of nationalist neocolonial capitalism.

In contrast, Im Heungsoon's documentary film *Factory Complex* chooses to zoom in on large numbers of ants crawling on cement, trees in a forest, and swarms of crows and dragonflies in extreme close-up shots. Swarming organisms show the power of mobilization and resistance (Hardt & Negri, 2005; Halberstam 2013), as well as the importance of presence and sociality without specific purposes that are valued in capitalist society. In the opening scene of *Factory Complex*, the bronze statue called the *Lady of Export*—created and erected in Guro Industrial Complex in 1974, and refurbished in 2014—is unveiled. But the scene is played in reverse, and thus the statue is being covered up. It is as if the film attempts to undo the present and reject this symbol and what it represents—namely, workers' devotion to and sacrifices for the national economy by producing exports, a rhetorical device to hide systemic oppression. The statue is thrusting forward holding a globe in one hand and lifting a torch in the other. It embodies the ambition of building an empire, a globally dominating power. By rewinding the sequence, *Factory Complex* also reminds the viewers how the women factory workers have been erased from history and from the public awareness but are still working in many factories, answering phones,

or serving customers in plain sight.

Factory Complex portrays the history of women's labor and resistance in the garment industry and wig manufacturing during the late 1970s, to electronic manufacturing, shipbuilding, and semiconductor manufacturing in the first decade of the new millennium. The film makes connections to contemporary service workers engaging in emotional and physical labor at call centers, airplanes, and in supermarkets who routinely endure harassment by customers as well as the pressure to work quickly and efficiently. This gendered exploitation of labor is also symbolized by a female automaton wearing a miniskirt in front of a gas station, bowing and greeting customers every few seconds and promising good service.

These other-than-human presences are not the simple expression of the dehumanization of workers or the replaceability of labor itself. Rather, the gendered connections between women workers, the statue, and the automaton illustrate how disposable labor exists beyond the divide between human and non-human and the divide between material reality and metaphoricity, maintained by heteropatriarchal notions of care and labor as domains of femininity naturalizing the labor that serves the state. Similarly, replacing workers with robots in semiconductor factories, implemented as a solution to occupational harm, would not protect the workers who need to enter the workshop and maintain the machines. Machines and the humans are indeed inseparable in their proximity and reliance on each other for existence and intelligibility. The fact that the "clean room" confused the workers, as they thought it was meant for their safety as much as it was for the chips, illustrates this inseparability. The two films consider the environment, buildings, heavy machines, non-human lives sharing people's marginalization and powerlessness, while delivering a sense of coresponsibility, affinity, and community formed by people's interactions with those subjects.

The Return after Death

Focusing on the cases of Samsung semiconductor workers, *The Empire of*

Shame records Yi Yun-jöng's progression toward death with brain cancer. For seven years, she worked at Onyang plant inspecting semiconductor chips dipped in high-temperature chemicals. Yi is at home with her husband, who tries to record her testimony about her working environment and the kinds of work she did at the chip-cleaning bay by recalling how it smelled and felt as well as the changes it caused in her menstrual cycle. The reconstruction of work environment through physical and emotional memories becomes an important way to communicate what Rob Nixon (2011) calls "slow violence, a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all" (p. 2).

Later Yi increasingly becomes silent. The shot of her closed eyes and her soft but minimal hand movements on the hospital bed implies that her death is near. After her death, for families and activists, her dead body is an important material reality that Samsung must be forced to acknowledge. As part of the funeral and protest, the hearse carrying Yi's casket makes its way to the Samsung Seocho building followed by several buses full of mourners. Company personnel are positioned in the middle of the road to block the vehicle from approaching. Amid physical altercations, the hearse moves forward and is parked near the building. People pay their respects to the dead on the road. The camera shows her casket positioned behind a photo of her face. This demand of the dead makes a strong claim for the recognition of injustice and for accountability, constituting necro-activism. Like the corpse protest of Kim from Wonjin Rayon, Yi's dead presence isn't merely a loss or a tool of and for the living, but actively enacts interdependent relations to continue resistance. The protest sites become the sites of a wake that does not end.

Similarly, *Factory Complex* features another kind of necro-activism. The deaths caused by toxicity at semiconductor plants are embodied by the living surrogate. The scenes of people in anti-dust suits fallen on the ground show them simultaneously enacting the deaths of workers and acting out their own future. On each person's back is a label printed with the name of a person who died, with the dates of birth and death. Protesters' bodies

become tombstones that mark the lives of the workers who died, illustrating another corporeal interdependency. In this necro-activism the dead bodies' materiality is not the symbolic means of political claims of the living (Verdery 1999), as they enliven and depend on the labor of the living to demand their justice and their interconnected future.

By setting up the camps near the Samsung building and City Hall, as described in the beginning of this article, activists refuse to disappear from public spaces, taking turns to remain overnight and enduring harsh living conditions. Both camps are also marked with the continuing presence of the dead in framed photos on the mourning tables and in banners on which their names are written. At the camp, members of SHARPS displayed the sitting statue of Hwang Yu-mi—whose death led to the formation of SHARPS—wearing a hospital gown. There were small pots of plants and flowers that flourished under the care of the protesters and the spirits of workers who passed away (Personal communication with Han Hye-kyōng in January 2019). Wooden poles with a wooden bird on top represented the area's guardian deity, each simultaneously standing for an individual who passed away. The death, suffering, and life of each are remembered and embodied in these non-human presences alongside the displayed message, "Don't kill us any more." This message reminds us that one can be killed after death—death can be a chronic and repeated process, and each death is connected to the next one. Disablement, illness, and death are entangled; thus, the ableist imaginaries of one as worse than the other are rendered obsolete. As the violence of denial and erasure continues, the fight to expose, remedy, and prevent such violence perseveres in a place where victimization, disablement, death, incapacities, disabilities, and frailty coexist as conditions of life.

The Empire of Shame shows scenes of celebration at a high school graduation filled with the laughter of young women. Because many workers started working at semiconductor and LCD plants straight from high school before they became sick, the audience finds their playfulness eerie, as the graduates are unaware of the harms that will come to them. The film ends with a shot, at an unspecified place and time, of a garbage dump piled with

electronic waste, making visible the geopolitical implications of occupational harms caused by the continuing presence of electronics after their disposal. The scenes capture salvage workers, including Asian and black people from the past and the present, rummaging through the garbage in search of valuable parts. The existence of electronic waste along with racially marked children who survive using the salvaged parts illustrate the continuing life of disposed materials and people. Harm and the violence of disposal must reckon with the ontology that continues beyond the visible spaces of society.

After chronicling the resistance of women workers in South Korea, *Factory Complex* travels across national borders to Canada Industrial Park in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, where garments are made for consumption in China, Japan, and South Korea. The film informs viewers that in 2014, a workers' demonstration in Cambodia demanding higher wages was met with an attack by armed soldiers, resulting in multiple deaths and injuries. The scene of bloody corpse is followed by a room full of the panels displaying black-and-white photos of the faces of those who died in the killing fields of the Khmer Rouge, connecting violence from the past to that of the present (Im Heungsoon, personal communication, August 2018). The work of mourning and remembering is made possible through the spatial dedication of the photos in Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum. The director explains that the women who were killed during the genocide might be mothers and grandmothers of the women workers killed at the protest (Im Heungsoon, personal communication, August 2018). Connecting genocidal violence and the killing of the workers by the military, the film attempts to show that the past and the present coexist. Further scenes taken in Angkor Wat that feature deities in stone statues in ruin invoke lived time, a withering slowly, yet not disappearing presence. Genealogical, temporal, and spatial connections, continuities that are not without disruptions, constitute an important dimension involved in the work of conceptualizing and materializing justice. From factories in South Korea to dump sites overseas and in the past, to LCD plants in China, and to Phnom Penh, the bodies of workers and residents—healthy, ill, disabled, alive, silent, screaming, dying, dead, and substituted—are what Jongyoung Kim and Heeyun Kim (2016)

call “the only and final resort for resistance against the dominating conglomerate of capital, power, and knowledge” (pp. 148-149).

The continuing presences of pain and debilitations, disablements, and bodily alterations after harm issue a call for justice across time and space that does not stop at national borders but continues to mobilize other manufacturing sites. Furthermore, they call for justice in representations and make connections with the environment and non-human beings and objects. These presences require that justice be reconceptualized as something that cannot be irreversibly completed and resolved by institutional actions; instead, it is something that is lived, remembered, and pursued over time and across communities. As disability studies in global contexts challenges the violent impacts of imperialism and capitalism, it invites engagement with historical entanglements among specific geopolitical centers, including those of sub-empires existing in between peripheries—acting as subcontractors managing, exploiting, and disposing workers—in order to form resistance and coalitions throughout the transnational circuits of harms.

The Nexus between the Occupational Health Movement and the Disability Movement

Disability as a basis for claims of human rights and debilitation as injustice and tragedy are both mediated by interdependent “material-discursive practices” (Fritsch, 2015, p. 14) of management in South Korea that rely on the medical, juridical, and administrative licensing of impairments and incapacities based on citizenship. This is not to say that disability and debilitation converge, without any differences and hierarchies. Kim Do Hyun (personal communication, August 2018), a disability studies scholar-activist, explains that, although the disability movement in the 1990s clearly addressed industrial injuries as one of its important agendas, the network built between the two protest camps has not been fully developed enough to engage in an in-depth discussion about the effects of emphasizing tragedy in challenging injustice. Condemning injustice by emphasizing

incapacities and suffering creates tension because this emphasis may reinforce the pitying and othering of disabled/ill bodies, as the ableist view that equates disability with shame and inferiority strongly holds affecting both movements. In a conversation with Kim at the SHARPS's camp outside the Samsung building, Kwŏn Yŏng-ŭn, a SHARPS activist, pointed out the public attitude towards the representations of occupational illnesses and deaths displayed at the camp: "Sometimes, passersby say, 'Poor thing...'. But I don't quite understand. We are here feeling rewarded every day for pursuing our dignity, justice, and righteousness.... But those who don't realize it, say, 'pitiful.'" Stressing the need to reject pity that individualizes and depoliticizes disabled and sick people and deaths, Kim and Kwŏn agree that the issue to tackle is a structural and capitalist problem (SHARPS, 2016). Noting the importance of a multilayered understanding of tragedy, Alison Kafer (2015) insightfully states, "A crip refusal to see disability as tragedy, as traumatic, can be just as restricting on our politics and our theories as the ableist insistence that disability is always and only tragic" (p. 6).

Furthermore, extending the network and coalition between the disability movement and the occupational health movement beyond the boundaries of citizenship and national borders is necessary to challenge the harms experienced by immigrant workers and people overseas inside the factories and living with and near toxic materials. Hwang Sang-gi urges the compensation agreement to include workers in overseas plants and to ensure their rights to form unions (SHARPS, 2018). Any imagination of the enabling possibilities of technology needs to recognize the racialized, classed, crippled, and gendered material labor involved in the making and disposing of it "without equating disability with injustice" (Clare, 2017, p. 56); at the same time, any repudiation of debilitations and deaths needs to reckon with the continuing subjectivity and material presence of "the discarded" in late capitalist society, watching out for the effects of being incorporated into the state management of disability and incapacity. Rather than reifying healthiness as a precondition for health justice claims, crip feminist technoscience lets us recognize different modes of presence in

“animate and inanimate lives and nonlives” (Fritsch, 2017, p. 376; Chen, 2011), continuing after violence and resisting closure. The condemnation of the injustice in debilitating marginalized people should also interrupt the imagination of the just world as that of healthy, able-bodied people.

In a short scene in a hospital room in *The Empire of Shame*, Han Hye-kyōng, who worked at a Samsung LCD plant and had brain cancer that led to several disabilities, is filling out a survey that measures disability identity with the help of her mother.⁵ Although the questionnaire does not capture the complicated experiences of disability and individual negotiations with identities, viewers gain a sense of Han’s outlook on her life. To the statement, “It makes me feel very bad to see all the things nondisabled people can do which I cannot,” Han agrees. Her mother continues to read the questionnaire: “I accept my disability.” Han answers, “Yes.” “I have confidence about my abilities.” “Yes.” “How much?” “A lot.” “Though I am disabled, my life is full.” “Very much so.” Her mother rephrases the last item in the form of a question: “Is your life full?” Han answers, “Very full.” Surprised, her mother asks again, “Really?” Han repeats, “Yes!” This conversation delivers a nuanced and seemingly contradictory picture of her life with disabilities. The wording of the survey indicates an ableist preconception of disability; however, Han’s adamant answers challenge her mother and the audience not to be satisfied with a monolithic judgment about what it means to be victimized and be disabled. Han indeed has framed her incapacitations brought on by corporate crimes and immorality as a tragedy, illustrating what Puar (2017) calls “the biopolitics of debilitation” (p. 72) as evidence of injustice; but they do not negate her fulfilling life. Furthermore her fight for justice to prevent any workers from being harmed coexists with her wish to walk again (personal communication in January 2019), illustrating that her everyday life with disabilities after the camp’s closure involves continuing negotiations with inaccessible environments, memory, isolation, and prognosis.

SHARPS activist Kwōn Yōng-ūn brings up another important nexus between the occupational health movement and the disability movement in her speech at Gangnam camp (SHARPS, 2016). When the compensation

plan drafted by the third-party mediating committee set forth a hierarchy of damage that was based on a medically determined level of impairments, she was reminded of the ongoing fight of disability activists from Gwanghwamun camp to abolish the disability rating system that ties provision of social support to medical assessments of the severity of impairment measured in examination rooms, not based on comprehensive consideration of living environments, desires, needs, plans, and experiences. In this regulatory bureaucratic system, people with disabilities receive medical and administrative assessments of their degree of impairment, and those whose impairments and needs are not rated as serious enough do not qualify for state-funded services, including personal assistance and paratransit. Against the normative body, numeric scores are created based on medical diagnosis and on every function of an individual combined with family income and care needs. These assessments cause physical and mental pain and exhaustion, constituting debilitating process itself.⁶ The denial of care based on new assessments has led to deaths at home of people who were living alone, especially when there were fires or malfunctions of medical equipment. Protestors also demanded the abolition of the legal obligation of family support (*puyang ūimuje*) for their disabled members, because it effectively eliminates the need for social welfare.

Responding to the persistent demands of the disability activists for more than 1,800 days, the new government promised the abolition of the disability rating system and the camp closed in August 2017 (H. Ch'oe, 2017). However, the coalition had to reopen the protest camp in front of the congress in 2018, demanding sufficient budget allocation and a complete eradication of the rating system, condemning the effort to revamp it. (Currently in 2019, the camp is located in Jongno-gu near the Blue House.)

Applying this lesson from disability activism to the SHARPS's demands for reparations for harm in the workplace is crucial, Kwŏn states, to avoid affected workers being compensated according to medically graded classifications. Thus challenges to the state's power to authorize the legal and medical identity "disabled" are intertwined with challenges to the harmful conditions that create debilitations. Occupational health justice and

disability rights are interdependent as individuals travel across these categories and are subject to bureaucratic technology and control.

Addressing the history of occupational harms and affected people's resistance, Chŏn Chu-hŭi (2017) describes how the transformation of workers' identities by toxins and injured body parts functions as a ground for new social rights: "The role of workers who came to have occupational illness wasn't passive....They had to prove the toxicity of materials that was previously unknown, and they had to prove epidemiologically that their illness was caused by labor processes and mechanical systems of the manufacturing sites in order to get treatment. As active participants,...they fought for new social rights by creating musculoskeletal identity, asbestos identity, and mercury identity" (p. 330). These identities, fully charged with negativity but not incompatible with having a full life, form the basis of new sociality created in the process to demand justice, challenge expertise, expose workplace harm, corporate criminality, and demand apology, compensation, and prevention.⁷ Mel Chen (2011) argues that toxicity is "better thought of as conditions with effects, bringing their own affects and animacies to bear on lives and nonlives" as it generates different kinds of sociality (pp. 281-282). Workers' "asbestos identity," "mercury identity," "musculoskeletal identity," and "leukemia identity" suggest that bodies "disposed of" after suffering harms resonate Kathleen Miller's (2018) characterization of life in the dump—"not an end but an experience of continual return" (p. 4). Debilitations and mass disablements of people who are considered "disposable populations" are not an end (even after death) but are marked with continual returns to spaces formed for sociality, familiarity, loss, collective mourning, and justice much as being disposed of does not mean nonexistence. These specific identities may not overlap with a more broad self-identification as a disabled person (*changaein*), but their agendas for making life possible and their efforts to ensure prevention rely on disability policies and social provisions that are in place or need to be created and expanded. Ha Kŭm-ch'ŏl (2015) declares that the alliance between Samsung's "victims" and disabled people is "the most powerful coalition of the powerless."

Justice in South Korean disability communities is inseparable from the ecology of beings and matters outside of the intelligible boundary of human and life. Crip feminist technoscience studies in this context then may seek multiple origins with locational and historical specificities in the geopolitical hierarchy in which each space carries particular positions in maintaining imperial centers and subcenters. Efforts to ask and shape what justice entails in its temporal and spatial in/continuity challenge the finality and irreversibility as terms of justice to redress harms. Together with “intimate activism” articulated by Manuel Tironi (2018) and “the kinds of ethical matters and affective doings it elicits” (p. 452), necro-activism and inhuman presences as important crip politics that are centered on dependence, interdependence, and discord with the system call for careful understanding of justice as lived through everyday recognition (Changaeyösöng Konggam, 2018). Sites of suffering and debilitations are also sites of the histories of resistance where disabilities, illnesses, deaths, and sufferings lead to the power to confront injustice and generate coalitions.

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Notes

¹ In analyzing the use of waste, discard, dirt, and filth by both sides of the Occupy movement in the United States, discard studies scholar Max Liboiron (2012) shows that trash and filth are “the terms over which contests about what counts as tolerable and intolerable conditions, right

and wrong, citizenship and the Other, acceptable and unacceptable behavior and what constitutes ‘out of placeness’ have been waged for centuries, and will continue to be waged” (p. 8).

² Sullivan (2014) explains the history of the development of *somatechnics* by Susan Stryker and her colleagues, and how transgender issues have been integral to the notion addressing how bodies and technologies construct and transform each other materially and discursively.

³ See Kafer’s (2013) careful discussion of the limitations of naming in Haraway’s (1991) “A Cyborg Manifesto,” including the women making chips in Asia and spiral dancing in Santa Rita jail.

⁴ For more on the health issues among workers at Samsung Electronics in Vietnam, see IPEN and Research Centre for Gender, Family and Environment in Development (CGFED), *Stories of Women Workers in Vietnam’s Electronics Industry* (November 2017), a report that documents miscarriages, other undiagnosed illnesses, and the death of a young woman.

⁵ The questionnaire is apparently “Acceptance Management and Social Interaction,” first developed in the United States in 1987 to measure the acceptance of disability and identity as disabled (Kaiser, Wingate, Freeman, & Chandler, 1987).

⁶ For measuring physical disability, pain-inducing electric probes are used to test nerve responses (Chŏng Yŏng-ran, personal communication, September 2018).

⁷ This account also resonates with crip technoscience’s framing disabled people as “experts and designers of everyday life” (Hamraie & Fritsch, 2019).

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Bio

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