Toward the end of Happy End (Haep'i endû, Chŏng Chi-u, 1999), Min-gi, the male protagonist, is seen riding on a train. Wearing a black suit and a tie, he is traveling to Taegu, a city about 150 miles away from Seoul, where the funeral of one of his former schoolteachers is being held. He nervously smokes in the moving train, his hands trembling. It is not the death of his teacher that is making him shake, but the death of Po-ra, his wife, whom he has just killed. Before departing Seoul, he had executed the meticulously planned murder, a bloody scene where he stabbed Po-ra repeatedly with a long jagged knife. He has an alibi because he was taken to the train station by his friend, and made sure he was seen on a train that departed earlier that day. He has also left no evidence, having carefully removed his fingerprints, the murder weapon and his bloodstained clothes from the scene. Leaving traces of Po-ra’s blood in another apartment, he has instead framed Il-bôm, Po-ra’s secret lover. Min-gi, after having his cigarette, takes his seat and begins to toy with an elastic band. Across from him sits a young boy who curiously watches Min-gi’s game, the band constantly twisting and evolving into different shapes. The boy’s puzzled and naive expression offers Min-gi a moment of relief, and he smiles for the first time in the sequence.

It is here that any spectator who is knowledgeable of South Korean film history feels an eerie sense of familiarity and intimacy. The train, the funeral, the guilty man, the adulterous affair, the violent murder and, topping it all, the twisting and twirling elastic band evoke the memory of a legendary South Korean film, The Housemaid (Hanyi, Kim Ki-yŏng, 1960), that features a man, Tong-sik, whose affair with his maid ends up killing them both. The pumping engine and the blowing whistle of a train are vivid sights and sounds in The Housemaid when Tong-sik, the guilt-stricken protagonist, departs to attend a funeral to mourn the death of a
woman whose suicide he had indirectly caused. The elastic band also recalls The Housemaid's opening where the two children play "cat's cradle" with a cotton ball, taking turns to string different shapes. The film then turns to a textile factory where the real narrative unfolds.

Happy End's prominent cinematic references to The Housemaid are significant on many grounds. First, they signal the arrival of a new generation of South Korean filmmakers who are profoundly influenced by their national cinema, anchoring a historical continuity between the Golden Age of South Korean cinema of the 1960s to early 1970s, and the present-day renaissance of South Korean cinema. South Korean cinema has only recently come out of its slump, after enduring the embarrassing period of the 1970s and 1980s in which government propaganda, B-grade quota quickies, and quasi-porn flics were quickly churned out. Forgotten by the public at this time was the glorious and glamorous heyday of cinema in the 1960s, when even the most trivial activities of movie stars were closely monitored, national pathos was popularly expressed, and the cinema earned the respect of artists working in other mediums. Happy End amply demonstrates how South Korea's Golden Age has inspired the popular and artistic cinema thriving today. First, in the contemporary period, global impulses have forced the local cinema to compete with Hollywood and art-house films of the West, in part the result of the elimination of import quota restrictions during the 1980s.

Second, the themes that thread through the two films allow us to reflect upon the transformative figurations of gender and family within each distinct historical period. In other words, the tropes of domesticity, masculinity, and motherhood are similarly juxtaposed against the severe financial and social crises that formed the backdrop for each film. The Housemaid was made in 1960, a chaotic year that brought down the corrupt Syngman Rhee [ Yi Sŭng-man] regime only to have the subsequent democratic government overthrown by Park Chung Hee's [ Pak Chŏng-hui] coup d'état a year later. Thirty-nine years later, Happy End was made in the midst of the catastrophic national bankruptcy of the late 1990s that required an IMF bailout of the South Korean economy. In this essay, I pay close attention to the domestic spaces of these two films to closely monitor representations of gender within them. I propose that both films re-conceptualize the question of gender, unconsciously or consciously constructing filmic tensions by tactically reassigning the socioeconomic division of domestic space. The social uncertainties in the public realm inform the films' restructuring of gender, which displaces social anxiety onto the bourgeois family and its fragility. Both films intriguingly envi-

sion masculinity as vulnerable and repressed, thereby (falsely) invoking the need to awaken its violent nature. The intensity of each film's plot derives from the man's inability to maneuver the separate demands of public and private spheres. The pressure to master the new working environment and the familial responsibilities of newborn children leads the male protagonist to destroy his female partner, who is misidentified as the root of the man's problem.

I am most interested in how gender becomes the flashpoint for the staggering social changes that take place in South Korea over the span of the four decades between these two films. Much has changed as the society has moved from a poverty-stricken, postwar economy to a postmodern center of hi-tech industry where 15.3 million people (out of a population of 45 million) have an Internet connection at home. There is no question that South Korea has economically caught up with even the First World, but whether this frenzied drive has significantly changed gender roles is an issue that cannot be answered easily. Although gender relations provide a focal point for the trauma of change in cultural texts, the most remarkable insight that emerges from comparing these two films, released at either end of these transformative decades, is actually not the changes that take place in terms of the gender representation, but their fixity.

South Korean society is one in which the economic structure rests on sexist principles. These are evidenced by statistics that consistently gauge the percentage of women in the upper echelon of public and corporate sectors as among the lowest in any industrialized or industrializing nation. In such a culture, bias dictates that only men can be agents of change. Yet the significant stresses placed on South Korean men by dramatic changes in ideology, ethics, and lifestyle has led to men's demands for more attention at home and a greater surveillance on women's proper domestic role. Thus, the pace of change has exaggerated gender inequities and led to a masculine policing of the home. We can perhaps begin to make sense of the connection between gender conservatism in media and radical social change by looking at other considerations of gender arrangements in the twentieth century in societies undergoing intense modernization. Lynn Spigel, in her book about the role of television in shifting domestic gender relations during 1950s America, writes, "faced with their shrinking authority in the new corporate world of white-collar jobs, the middle-class men of the early 1900s turned inward to the home where their increased participation in and control over the family served to compensate for feelings of powerlessness in the public sphere." A similar
Domestic Space and Gender Trouble in Happy End and The Housemaid

The recent proliferation of non-Western, avant-garde cinema has brought many interesting and provocative films to the attention of global audiences. One of these films is Happy End, directed by Kim So-yong. The film explores themes of gender, class, and family in contemporary South Korea, and it features a complex and nuanced narrative that challenges traditional notions of gender roles and family dynamics.

Happy End tells the story of a middle-class family in South Korea, who are forced to confront the harsh realities of their lives. The film is set in a society where women are expected to be subservient to men, and where social and economic pressures take a toll on families. The main characters are the parents, a son, and a daughter, and they all have their own unique struggles.

The film explores the tension between tradition and modernity, and the ways in which these tensions affect the characters' lives. It also highlights the ways in which gender inequality is perpetuated within the family unit, and how this affects the characters' relationships with each other.

Despite the film's realistic portrayal of the characters' struggles, it is ultimately an optimistic film, as it suggests that there is hope for change. The characters' determination to overcome their difficulties is a testament to the resilience of the human spirit.

In conclusion, Happy End is a powerful and thought-provoking film that offers a unique and insightful perspective on contemporary South Korean society. It is a film that challenges conventional notions of gender and family, and it is a film that is sure to leave a lasting impression on its audience.
downsizing, his middle-class life is well sustained because Po-ra is a successful businesswoman. She runs a popular, modern after-school English institution for little children. South Korea’s struggle against the global tide of recession has not discouraged it from opening up further to the West; on the contrary, the desire to learn from the West is clearly manifested by the crowded classroom at Po-ra’s institution that employs American teachers. Po-ra and Min-gi are able to keep their spacious apartment, drive their sedan, and occasionally dine out because Po-ra provides opportunities for economically privileged children to “learn English as if it’s their first language.”

Po-ra’s success reverses the conventional gender roles and power dynamics such that she, now the breadwinner, does not feel guilty for demanding that Min-gi become much more active in childcare and housework. Moreover, while Min-gi retreats to his sofa at night to watch television soaps and to the park bench during the day to read pulp fiction novels, Po-ra is publicly visible, referred to as the “President” by her clients and staff. These troubled gender arrangements endanger their marriage, a danger both signaled and compounded by Po-ra’s extramarital affair with her former college classmate, Il-bom. The obsessive and mad nature of this lustful relationship cannot be safely contained in Il-bom’s small apartment. Il-bom visits her in the office, takes her out to the beach, and even loiters around Po-ra and Min-gi’s apartment, pressuring Po-ra to move in with him. Po-ra enjoys the pleasures and thrills offered by illicit sex, but she is unwilling to leave the security provided by her marriage and the family. Although she is financially independent, Po-ra, ambitious and driven, cannot risk the stigma that permanently compromises a divorced woman’s reputation.

Min-gi grows suspicious of Po-ra’s late return from work, the excessive mileage on the car, and an unidentified key he finds underneath the car carpet. Suspecting Il-bom, to whom he was once introduced, Min-gi waits for him to leave his home and, using the key, enters his apartment. There, Min-gi finds pictures of his wife, half-naked. Although initially so shaken that he is unable to confront Po-ra, Min-gi finally decides to kill her when he finds out that she has put their daughter’s life at risk by feeding her a sleeping pill and leaving her unattended in order to meet Il-bom. Thus, Po-ra has failed to not only be a “good wife and housewife” but most importantly “a good mother,” and it is the latter failure that drives Min-gi to murder. Significantly, the film visually conveys Po-ra’s failure, her evil, by what she feeds her child. Good mothering is often precisely signified through themes and motifs of eating and food.13 By feeding her child a toxic substance that threatens its life, Po-ra completely transgresses her maternal function in the most fundamental way, thereby committing an unforgivable sin. In this way, the film equates Po-ra’s poisoning her child with her prioritizing sexuality over maternity, thereby utterly condemning the latter. The film condemnation of Po-ra rests in its conviction that “women’s mothering . . . [is] a natural fact.”12

After saving the baby in an emergency room and accidentally witnessing Po-ra in a heated moment with her lover (without them even recognizing him), Min-gi plots to kill Po-ra. Having first established an alibi to leave for the funeral in Taegu, he stays in Seoul and breaks into his own apartment. He holds Po-ra’s body down on the same bed where they sleep together every night. Red blood spots soon become a smudge, and before too long Po-ra’s white shirt is drenched in blood. As Min-gi repeatedly stabs her, her shudders and her muted cries for help cease. The only person in the house who is in a position to help her is unfortunately the very person delivering the fatal blows. If Min-gi had failed to sexually impress Po-ra (as instanced by an earlier sex scene between them where she blankly stared at the ceiling without a blink of her eye), he surely has her attention now by entering their bedroom as a criminal, ready to strike her. Without saying a word, Min-gi dials Il-bom’s cell phone so that he can hear Po-ra’s desperate moans. Il-bom rushes to the apartment where he finds her dead, thus falling into Min-gi’s trap by leaving his fingerprints all over the scene of the crime. Po-ra’s extramarital affair, the cause of the familial tension, is now over, but it required her death to put it to an end. Unlike The Eel (Unagi, Shohei Imamura, 1998) where the murder of the adulterous wife is spontaneously performed in the middle of an actual intercourse between her and her lover, Min-gi’s murder is premeditated and meticulously planned so that Il-bom will be arrested and executed in his place. The unfaithful wife and the jealous lover will both die, leaving only the murderous husband alive. In the last shot of the film, however, Min-gi wakes up from a nap in his living room, leaving us in doubt about whether the murder truly occurred or not.

Thorn Shall Not Cheat on The Housemaid

The same question was posed at the end of the film made thirty-nine years earlier: The Housemaid, as is well known, also frames an extramarital affair and consequent murder in the fantastic structure of a dream. This film, directed by Kim Ki-young, catapulted the director to global art-house stardom when it was rediscovered in the late 1990s.15 After the film was showcased in a retrospective at the 1997 Pusan International Film
Festival, it—along with several other Kim Ki-young films—was immediately screened at the Berlin, London, Belgrade, San Francisco, and Hong Kong film festivals, among others. An elaborate Web site has been created in tribute called “The House of Kim Ki-young.” More retrospectives are being planned, especially since his sudden death in 1998. Kim was an exceptional filmmaker, making hybrid genre films well before they became fashionable not only in South Korea but also in global cinema. If the national cinema aesthetics of South Korea are characterized by the thematic motifs of han (pent-up grief), mise-en-scénes of rural mountainous landscapes and understated emotions evident in the works of Sin Sang-ok and Im Kwon-t’aek, Kim Ki-young is a filmmaker who falls completely outside this framework. Instead of sublimating han, his characters plot revenge; instead of featuring mountainous rural landscapes and thatched roofs, his films display overpopulated asphalt boardwalks, neon lights, and Western mansions; and instead of understated emotions, he prefers stylistic excesses. Freely mixing absurd fantasy with bizarre plots and exaggerated sexuality and violence, his films—including Insect Woman (Ch‘angnyō, 1972) and Killer Butterfly (Sarim nabi ri‘el seonnnan yōjn, 1978)—act out the psychological angst and anxiety behind the nation’s rapid pace of industrialization. Central to this paranoid pathos and grotesque visual style are the unconventional and absurdist props such as dead rats and out-of-control rice-cake poppers that whet the sexual appetites of his characters.

Compared to the cinematic excesses of his films from the 1970s, the earlier The Housemaid shows both stylistic and narrative restraint. Yet Kim’s proclivity to delve narrative expectations and conventions are already well at work in this film. The film presents a crisis—a staple in family melodrama—provoked when a housemaid is employed in a middle-class home. The maid is hired to help manage domestic affairs after the woman of the house falls ill from overwork. Pregnant, she has been taking in sewing to augment the family’s meager income. With her earnings, the family has acquired a new two-story Western-style house that now is simply too big for the ailing patrona to maintain. But, Myōng-ja, the maid, soon turns out to be a wicked nightmare for the family.” Her sexual seduction and nagging of the father, Tong-sik, distract him from his employment: teaching music to young female factory workers.

Despite the casting of a maid as the central character whose psychological complications add depth to the story, The Housemaid is undoubtedly a masculine drama where the film’s crisis revolves around Tong-sik’s failure as a teacher in the public sphere and as a husband in the private one. In the film’s beginning, Tong-sik suffers from a guilt complex after one of his students in his choral class commits suicide. The student was suspended from work after he exposed to his authorities her naive love letter to him. Following the student’s funeral, the maid manipulates Tong-sik’s guilt and seduces him. Already feeling responsible for the death of his student, Tong-sik cannot possibly refuse this other woman’s pass at him.

Their subsequent and bizarre sex transforms the maid from a helping hand to a dangerous threat, who must be eliminated in order for familial stability to be restored. Yet matters are not so easily resolved, especially since Myōng-ja is now pregnant with Tong-sik’s child. Tong-sik is psychologically torn, and his downfall is soon tellingly signaled by a taxicab ride. Attempting to run away, Tong-sik hails a cab and tells the driver to go “anywhere very fast. Let’s run away from the earth or crash into something.” Thus, Tong-sik is like Ch‘ŏr-ho in The Stray Bullet (Obalt‘an, Yu Hyŏn-mok, 1960), the film voted by the critics as the best South Korean film of the last century that ends with the protagonist, half-conscious, riding through Seoul in a taxicab. If Ch‘ŏr-ho in Yu Hyŏn-mok’s film was sedated by anesthetics given to him by a dentist, here Tong-sik drinks a bottle of gin to forget his troubles. The display of fearlessness and dynamism in this scene suggests a potential for masculine rejuvenation, but it also points to that rejuvenation as a “self-deluded state.” A drunk Tong-sik aimlessly swaggering to a taxicab that then lurches through the neon lights in Seoul captures the very contradiction of masculinity that can only be asserted in a delusional or fantasy state.

Unfortunately, Tong-sik cannot hide his domestic troubles, cannot forever remain drunk. He ignores the advice offered to him by a friend and ends up telling his pregnant wife that he has committed adultery with the maid. Surprising her even more, Tong-sik tells her that Myōng-ja, too, is pregnant with his child. The once happy family—instanted by earlier scenes of a meal prepared by the father and the delivery of the television set that prompted the small son, Ch‘ang-sun, to declare that they are the richest family in the neighborhood—now faces total collapse. Tong-sik’s wife will not tolerate the scandalous births of two children in the same house, and persuades the maid to abort her child. Opting for the most primitive and violent method, Myōng-ja reluctantly throws her body down the staircase.

After the doctor’s confirmation of the maid’s abortion and the wife’s safe delivery of her baby, this albeit excessive family melodrama
becomes a horror film where the crazed maid takes revenge upon the family. She literally invades the married couple’s bedroom, and demands that Tong-sik sleep with her in order to make up for the grief she has suffered. She protests, “Why did you kill only my child? Where is justice when one woman can keep her child while the other woman has to get rid of hers? Do you think my body is a toy for others? Since the two babies are fathered by the same man, they either live together or die together.” As Tong-sik and his wife watch in horror, the maid then picks up the newborn and fakes throwing it on the ground.

Although the maid’s rage is not completely comprehensible, the film’s slippage from melodrama to horror plot evidences a decidedly masculinist bias, one that renders the maid a monster while totally excusing Tong-sik of all responsibility for the calamity he has brought on his family. This bias raises interesting questions in terms of audience identification. Soyoung Kim reports that when the film was first released in 1960, female audience members reportedly responded to the seduction scene by screaming, “Kill the bitch!” Suffering economic deprivation at this historical moment and therefore presumably more socially aligned with the maid rather than the bourgeois couple living in a two-story mansion, female spectators nevertheless identified and sympathized with the husband rather than the maid who, rationally speaking, had very good reason to be angry with Tong-sik. But the female spectators’ display of anger locates a certain potential for rupture that transgresses the boundary of normalized identification with the abject subjects (the husband, the wife) onscreen. Confronted by the maid who refuses to remain a victim of circumstances, female audiences perhaps manage an unconscious over-identification with this woman who, acting on her own interests, plays out many of their own desires and fantasies. In other words, the “bitch” that they were so enraged about pointed to none other than their own desires to break out of and freely transgress a masculinist social structure very repressive to women.

As the plot turns, the piano that had previously produced harmonic choral music begins to produce dissonant sounds at night. Myŏng-ja’s untutored fingers randomly strike the piano keys, awakening the family with its unearvably disruptive, yet eerily familiar sound to those audience members accustomed to the cacophonous, modernist soundtracks of horror films. The adorable son, Ch’ang-sun, ultimately is killed by Myŏng-ja; she arranges his fall from the top of the staircase. Despite witnessing this murder of their child, Tong-sik and his wife cannot turn the maid over to the police because the necessary exposure of the affair between Tong-sik and the maid would irreparably damage Tong-sik’s reputation and his job. The maid, who had no authority in the house before the affair, now emerges suddenly as its master, giving orders to her employers and instilling fear in them. The power dynamics between the mother and the maid reverse completely: the maid openly sleeps with Tong-sik and has her meals served to her by his wife.

This subverted familial structure cannot last. One fatal night, Miss Cho, another student of Tong-sik who has a crush on him, visits his home for her piano lessons. Cho initially introduced Myŏng-ja to the family. When she visits, Myŏng-ja cannot conceal her jealousy, and takes out a knife from the kitchen. The maid climbs up the staircase and, in a fit of uncontrollable rage, strikes Cho in the piano room. Once Cho is driven away from the house in pain, blood dripping from her shoulder, Myŏng-ja proposes a double suicide with Tong-sik. He accepts her proposal in the same piano room where she first seduced him, and together they drink rat poison. Significantly, Tong-sik rejects the maid at the moment of death, and crawls down the staircase to share his last breath with his wife.

The film is extraordinary in many regards. The constant movement of the camera and exquisitely composed close-ups evoke both the expressionist cinematic styles of Weimar Germany and of Alfred Hitchcock, while the innovative soundtrack, use of shadows, and special lighting effects all showcase the cinematic talent of Kim Ki-yŏng who had independently produced the film while also serving as the film’s screenwriter, music supervisor, and editor. The film’s structure is particularly noteworthy in that its final scene returns to its opening wherein the family (Tong-sik, his wife, and two kids) discuss a newspaper article about a man who committed suicide with his maid, a woman with whom he was having an affair. Tong-sik defends the man in the newspaper story while his wife complains that all men are no different from “beasts.” Just as the debate between the two heats up, the sliding door opens, and enters the character who has terrorized the family. The maid, not unlike Dr. Caligari in the final scene of the classic film from the Weimar period, is now a changed character. We see nothing of a killer or temptress—her hair is neatly pulled back and her manners are obedient when serving tea to her employers.

Yet, having a young woman in the house, according to the mother, is like “offering raw meat to a beast.” After the maid leaves the room, Tong-sik looks directly into the camera and addresses the audience, say-
ing: "Dear sirs and madams, When men age, they spend more time thinking about younger women. This is why we men become easy prey to women and also end up embarrassing the whole family." Humorously pointing his finger at the camera, Tong-sik continues, "That's right, you are no different . . . and there, shaking your head, Sir, this concerns you too."

Writing on this film, Jinsoo An [An Chin-su] writes that "[Tong-sik's] death signifies the symbolic reunion with the mother/wife and a regression to an infantile stage. The distant and brief sound of a baby's cry after his death affirms this point." The signification of the infantile stage and the desire to return to the mother's womb had also been registered in Happy End when a fantasy sequence involving Po-ra and a balloon was inserted immediately before the last scene where Min-gi wakes up in the living room with his baby by his side. The strong death motif—present in both films—points to male anxieties about the self and their frustrated effort to claim an autonomous male domain. This search for autonomy was doomed to fail since Tong-sik had too many roles to fulfill: as an object of desire to his female student, a perfect husband to his wife, a nurturing father to his daughter, and a sex machine to the promiscuous maid. What finally precipitates stable and ideal manhood for Tong-sik concerns his mastering his interactions with the instability and dysfunction depicted as the feminine condition by the film: the wife is a distressed, overworked woman who must rest in bed; the female students are workers in an urban factory whose ties to their rural homes and families have been severed by economic necessity; the daughter is physically handicapped from the waist down; and, of course, the sexually deprived maid is threatening to kill all of them. Responsible for taking care of these "feminine symptoms"—neurosis, paranoia, and hysteria, all symptoms stemming from the economic malaise that references the demonized, war-stricken nation—Tong-sik is doomed to fail in each category: teacher, husband, father, and lover.

The frame utilized in both narratives serves to assure viewers that the stories of adultery and sex are only fictions and also to hint at the forces that lurk beneath the veneer of the bourgeois family. Tong-sik's last statement is addressed largely to male viewers and is important because it implies that every man—including those in the audience—is susceptible to lust and desire, drives that are incompatible with the paternal function and that lead to death. Here, sex and death become intricately connected as an irrepressible force, eventually thwarting and contradicting the male subject's aspiration to disavow the crisis, to cure the "female" ailments and to reestablish familial sufficiency and authority.

Staircases and Elevators

The Housemaid and Happy End are visually suffocating because the domestic confinement of the male protagonists is meticulously depicted. The filmmakers, visualizing the home as the place where male agency becomes threatened, materialize this psychological issue through their rendering of space and other aspects of the mise-en-scène. From the staircase and the piano in The Housemaid to the special attention paid to everyday machines such as the elevator and the television in Happy End, the films use these modern appliances, instruments, and utilities to trouble gender and power dynamics. Throughout the remainder of this essay, I will discuss the spatializing of these relations and the household appliances used to crucially refigure family ones. For instance, the transformation of the kitchen from a space segregated from the rest of the communal living spaces in The Housemaid to the "open plan" featured in the modern apartment of Happy End renders not only different patterns of domesticity but also a new crisis of gender and familial relations. Perhaps this comes as no surprise since kitchens, televisions, and pianos already signify gender in complex ways. In these two films, they operate as agents of change, often disrupting and threatening the preexisting order of things. The simple placement of men inside the kitchen or in front of televisions or pianos symbolizes deepening gender crises.

The staircase in The Housemaid is where the desire for class mobility is both imagined and thwarted, becoming the ultimate setting for despair and death. The first time we are introduced to the Western-style house, the family has yet to move in. The house is still under construction, with plywood, ladders, and construction materials scattered all over, similar to war-stricken South Korea at the time. The first space the camera captures is the staircase where Ch'ang-sun, the younger child, taunts his handicapped sister on crutches and dares her to walk up the stairs to take a bag of cookies from him. She slowly struggles up the stairs, step by step, before collapsing halfway. The audience is led to wonder: Why would any family move into a two-story house with a long staircase if the daughter is handicapped by polio and her mobility is severely restricted? And, what is the significance of the young, disabled child desperately climbing up the stairs to get a bag of cookies from her brother, while her father observes them from a dark corner?
Kyung Hyun Kim

Her restricted body movements, the sweat dripping from her face, and the bag of cookies waved in front of her as a fetishistic reward for her desperate labor crystallize the ambition and inhumanity such a simple housing structure can elicit. The father’s statement, whispered to Miss Cho who is sympathetic to the child, “Let her go up by herself. Exercise is good for her leg muscles,” further confirms the cruelty and pain that one must face in any desire for physical rehabilitation or national redevelopment to occur. This staircase scene effectively spatializes the film’s central themes: the fetishistic desire for an unattainable object, struggle to succeed against odds, and the cruelty and humiliation one must face before, during, and after the climb. In other words, the handicapped girl climbing up the stairs elicits sympathy from others, who face the difficult choice of leaving her on her own or helping her at the risk of humiliating her. And all hopes of moving up—either the staircase or the social hierarchy—will require discipline, sacrifice, and even the risk of death.

In *Happy End*, however, the story takes place in a modern high-rise apartment. Min-gi and Po-ra’s residential high rise is just one of many mass urbanization projects built over the last thirty years. Its crowded parking lot, tiny mandatory playgrounds, and narrow driveways allude to the overwhelming quality of South Korea’s industrialization. The metallic elevators allegorize ascent and descent somewhat differently than does the staircase in *The Housemaid*. Because elevators, unlike a private domestic staircase, are public and communal, many people randomly enter and exit. In the film, they become a venue where meetings—both cheerful and dangerous—happen. The up-and-down function of the elevator invokes the utility of the staircase that signified both the hope and the failure of class mobility in *The Housemaid*, but its compressed and automated condition removes the struggle involved during the industrialization process. Better suited as a machinery that symbolizes the postmodern condition of South Korea, the elevator dramatizes the society’s unpredictability as it moves quickly up and down and radically shifts from an open public facility that gives people access to their destinations, to suddenly closed, cramped confinement. The openings and closings of the elevator door are dramatic and instantaneous, often demanding two strangers share standing-room-only space. In Seoul, one of the most densely populated cities in the world, elevators are ubiquitous in everyday activities, serving as a crucial mode of transportation at home, at work, and at leisure.

In the elevator featured in *Happy End*, time and space are structured through gender typologies. This particular elevator serves a residential route. Yet even in this residential apartment elevator, work is performed. In the film’s beginning, Min-gi picks up his child from the daycare center and enters his apartment elevator. His body is laden with the baby, his bag, and the baby-care bag, and he fumbles awkwardly to press the elevator button. Accompanying him is a thirty-something woman who runs into the elevator balancing countless grocery bags in her arms. Here, a visual and social affinity is forged between the two, based on the domestic iconography of burden: baby and groceries. The gender of the two adults may be different, but they are affiliated by the accoutrements of what is conventionally conceived as feminine domestic labor. At the narrative level, they recognize each other as friends from college. The woman, Mi-yong, will soon become Min-gi’s buddy, and they will bond as same-sex (“feminine”) friends, shopping together, helping each other with child care, and gossiping on the telephone about television soap programs. The meeting between Mi-yong and Min-gi in the elevator is not coincidental as their days are bound by their gendered routine. It is near sunset, but for the two of them, the workday is far from over; only a couple of hours remain before their spouses, working in the public sphere, return home for dinner.

In *Happy End*, like *The Housemaid*, the waning of male authority is visually captured by infusing the home and its environs with ambiguity. Provident meetings in the elevator are not only pleasant but also dangerous. After the scene where Min-gi finds out that Po-ra risked the life of their child to rendezvous with II-bom, he returns exhausted from the hospital emergency room where the baby was treated. Clutching the baby in his arms, Min-gi enters the elevator he rides every day. It is late and no one else is in sight. The camera follows Min-gi from the parking lot to the elevator and finally to the apartment corridor. Here in the corridor Min-gi witnesses Po-ra—who has rejected the role of “mother”—embracing II-bom. Min-gi already knows that they are seeing each other, but seeing them at this moment is devastating to his self-esteem. The two lovers are both very drunk and indiscreet. The depiction of Po-ra as a lascivious drunk further enhances the gender reversal depicted in the film. Stunned, Min-gi takes a few steps back to the elevator, and hides in a stairwell. When II-bom finally staggers into the elevator, Min-gi comes out of his hideout and checks to confirm the man’s descent before “safely” returning to his own home. It is difficult for the audience not to be sympathetic with Min-gi at this point. Holding his baby in his arms, he has lost not only his wife and the mother of his child but also access to his home. He has also lost all claim to his status as “man” of the house.
Domestic Space and Gender Troubles in *Happy End* and *The Housemaid*

two faucets, and a gas stove, all extremely scarce in South Korea at the
time. The wife tries to organize the kitchen after moving into the new
house, opening up the cupboards and stacking things in them. These are
happy days for her; the sound of a beginning student at the piano indi-
cates that her husband is generating income, and the sound of children
playing signifies successful childrearing. The fruit of her hard labor as a
seamstress in the last ten years has finally paid off. All of a sudden, a rat
appears in front of her. Letting out a sharp scream, she falls, as everyone
in the house runs to her side. The rat is gone, but the shock lingers on,
as she cannot easily recover from her fall. In order to prevent rats from
invading the house, the family sets mousetraps by pouring rat poison over
food. The poison purchased to get rid of the rats ironically ends up killing
the people themselves.

The appearance of the rat destroys the mother's happiness, the
kitchen's sanitation, and eventually the family's lives. Despite the family's
effort to exterminate them, the rats are not easily removed. When the
new maid first visits the house, she walks into the kitchen alone, a space
segregated from the rest of the house. Myong-ja surveys the room, sam-
ping food and opening the cupboards, familiarizing herself with the only
facility that she will now rule. The rat again appears in the cupboard.
Unlike her employer, who had screamed and fainted at the sight of the
rat, Myong-ja curiously picks it up by its tail, and wiggling her tongue,
sets it down on the floor as if it is her pet. However, as soon as she finds
a small wooden bat used for cooking, she strikes and kills it. Surprised by
the sound coming from the kitchen, the family congregates as the maid
holds out the dead rat in front of them. Differences in class, region (rural
versus urban), and delicacy are clearly established in the maid and the
wife's different reactions to the rat. Further, the maid is able to catch and
overcome the rat, and is, in her appearance and demeanor, visually
aligned with it. She soon becomes the one who is dangerous and threat-
ening to the family, her rabid sexuality seemingly invited into the home
by the family's aspirations to social mobility.

Tong-sik, in an indifferent voice, tells her that rats should be
trapped with rat poison and gives her the bottle that will later seal both
of their fates. Both the intimacy and the cruelty she displayed in her rela-
tionship with a rat presage the complicated nature of passion and jealousy
that she will soon exhibit in her relationship with Tong-sik. Her action
installs her as fully in command of the kitchen, a critical space that con-
tains and serves both food and poison, not unlike South Korea's domes-
tic industrialization that will soon bring prosperity but will also simulta-

The function of “work” and the spatialization of the kitchen where
this work is performed are clearly important to the themes of these films.
The kitchen in the 1960 film, *The Housemaid*, is a clean Western-style
one, installed with a bright electric lamp, wooden cupboards, a sink with

Kyung Hyun Kim

Rather than in an elevator, in *The Housemaid*, power struggles are
fought and resolved on the house staircase. The maid vies for authority
there, and murders as well as significant plot reversals are staged on it.
The drama, however, remains within the confines of domestic space. This
contrasts with *Happy End*, in which dramatic reversals take place in the
public/private spaces of the elevator, corridor, and even in the exemplar-
ily liminal space of the doorway.

When the cost is clear, Min-gi lurches across the corridor and
opens the door to his apartment. The camera remains static and does not
reveal exactly what he sees. But from his reaction, we know that he is wit-
nessing his wife having sex with Il-bom, who had rushed up the stairs on
the other side of the building after descending in the elevator only one
floor. Their intercourse is so passionate that even the presence of Min-gi
goes unnoticed. Min-gi’s humiliation is complete when he doesn’t—and
can’t—intervene. The illicit sex between Po-ra and Il-bom drives Min-gi
and his sick baby out onto the dark, damp concrete fire escape.

Rats in the Kitchen

While more pronounced in *Happy End*, the sharp differentiation between
gendered public and private spheres is diminished in both of these films.
Both films emphasize the gender confusion at their core in two ways: by
visualizing that confusion in terms of domestic and public space; and by
means of the work performed by both men and women in these spaces.¹¹

In the earlier film, Tong-sik cooks and teaches piano while his wife sews,
her earnings allowing the family to pay for their new house. Four decades
later, Min-gi cares for the baby, cooks, shops, and watches soap operas
while his wife runs a company from her high-rise office. Thus *The House-
maid* and *Happy End* foreground vivid representations of domestic labor,
especially, though not exclusively, performed by men. In both films, the
kitchen receives critical attention as a space where domesticity is per-
formed and also where social tensions, upward class mobility, and middle-
class conformity are perhaps most effectively expressed. Both films startle
their viewers by frequently placing men inside the kitchen, a spatial
arrangement that is extremely rare elsewhere in South Korean cinema.
Perhaps it is this rarity that makes the family relations in the two films
both exceptional and unstable.

The function of “work” and the spatialization of the kitchen where
this work is performed are clearly important to the themes of these films.
The kitchen in the 1960 film, *The Housemaid*, is a clean Western-style
one, installed with a bright electric lamp, wooden cupboards, a sink with
neously produce environmental pollution and contamination, economic dependence on the West, and class contradiction.

Just as important as the staircase where power is constantly contested, the kitchen, a part of the house where convention locates women and denigrating work, is refigured as the place in which the maid assumes power. The hiring of the maid allows the mother to recover and concentrate on her work with the sewing machine and also releases the father from the kitchen. The father had been cooking for the family just prior to Myong-ja’s arrival. Wearing a checkered shirt with the sleeves rolled up and an apron around his waist in a Western-style kitchen, Tong-sik is a “modern man” who is capable of providing for the family both outside and inside his home. The availability of a stove, cabinets, china, and Western recipes aligns the unconventionality of Tong-sik in the kitchen with the Western influences that now permeate this private domestic space.

Even as Tong-sik and the maid are now installed in this space, so the wife is depicted as alienated from it, her “proper” place. Is it a matter of trivial coincidence or crucial significance that the wife collapses the first time she enters the kitchen, requiring Tong-sik to perform “woman’s work” before he finds a housemaid? The film visually depicts his wife, dressed in traditional South Korean clothing, as out of place in this very Western, modern kitchen. Built to expedite housework, the kitchen instead is the site of the wife’s collapse. Out of necessity, Tong-sik takes over housekeeping duties. Even though he is a “better cook than mom,” this equation of domesticity with masculinity in South Korea in the 1960s simply seems out of place and even threatening to dominant perceptions of gender. Yet the time and its turmoil led precisely to these conflicts: between war-stricken poverty and massive industrialization; between tradition and modernity—these tensions and conflicts infusing gender relations and the domestic sphere. Thus, the film warns its viewers that a destructive element insinuates itself, destroying a family that gets caught in the liminal space between tradition and modernity and between male and female.

The other domestic space highlighted in *The Housemaid* is the piano room that also functions as a family room. In South Korean culture, no other material object is as highly prized or fetishized as the piano, an instrument that for this family signifies not only the character of their class ambitions but also provides the means for attaining them. Although South Korea is now one of the world’s leading manufacturers and exporters of pianos, and they are common there to many middle-class homes, pianos were not easily accessible to the public in 1960.28

Tong-sik’s occupation as a music teacher, with complete command of this elegant instrument, renders him an object of romantic interest and the romantic gaze to all the women around him. To be in control of such a graceful Western machine requires sensitivity, confidence, and cultural sophistication that none of the women working in the factory possess. The moment Tong-sik walks into the baroque-style room where he teaches music to the female factory workers, he is the center of amorous attention. He has the expertise and talent that these women desire and wish to acquire to enhance their social mobility. Women must be able to convey a type of femininity associated with material comfort and (Western bourgeois) taste, which they can really only attain through an auspicious marriage. The image of ideal femininity projected through the famous Dutch or French paintings during the nineteenth century that explicitly identify the keyboard instrument as a site of seduction appealed to many young women in the war-stricken environment of South Korea.27 As if to aid the translation of their dreams into reality, Tong-sik makes an announcement in his class, expressing his intent to recruit piano students.

Critically, Tong-sik’s offer to help these women learn the piano also works in the service of his own dreams. He states, “I purchased a piano in installments, and would like to get some return on my investment,” acknowledging the piano is not only a machine that produces dreams, but also an expensive material investment that makes other dreams possible as well. The act of learning the piano packages the dream of upward mobility for both teacher and student in the cultural logic and aesthetic imagination of the European bourgeoisie. Thus, the piano—like many other props in the film—serves a dual function. It is an object of desire, generating fetishistic impulses by virtue of its rarity and delicacy. But, because it is so expensive, it also fosters the distinctions and class barriers that usher in the tragic plot of the film. When the maid curiously strikes a few keys, he warns her, “Whatever you do, never touch the piano.” Even after they make love, the rules that ban Myong-ja from the piano still apply, signifying that the instrument is more sacred than her body. And, because it is so expensive, the piano ushers in the tragic plot: after the maid becomes hysterical and stabs Miss Cho, Tong-sik regrets having ever purchased the piano and blames it for all his family’s misfortunes. Just as the staircase is a metaphor for the family’s economic ascendancy and demise, the piano, a fetishized symbol of the Western bourgeois and the primary source of income for the family, will turn out to be Tong-sik’s “enemy.”
Domestic Space and Gender Troubles in *Happy End* and *The Housemaid*

loads empty cans and milk cartons into recycling boxes, and flips and pegs laundered sheets along the laundry line out in the balcony. This sequence of static shots—without music—that cuts between each task is sensual and effective, rendering beauty in simple everyday domestic labor without mocking or sentimentalizing it, and thereby defying the conventions of Hollywood comedies on gender-bending.

In the subsequent sequence, Min-gi reclines on the sofa, a glass of beer in his hand, watching a nighttime soap drama where two famous television actors in South Korea, Kim Hye-su and Pae Yong-jun, engage in highly melodramatic dialogue. In tears, Kim Hye-su, the woman, states: “I know it’s wrong for me to do what I have been doing. There’s no time for me to complain about it. I was a fool . . .” Unable to control her emotions, the famous television actress with heavy makeup bursts into tears, smudging her dark mascara. After having captured the television in full frame, the camera then cuts 180 degrees to Min-gi, who is intently watching the soap. Having had a full and tiring day, which we have seen, he is taking a break from work. Yet, he is distracted when Po- ра yells from her room, asking him to lower the television volume. Almost at the same time, the phone rings and the baby starts to cry. Min-gi gets not even a moment of peace when Po-ra—after several pleas to turn the television down go ignored—agitatedly rushes out to the living room. The phone keeps ringing, the baby continues to cry, and the kettle on the stove begins to whistle, intensifying the tension between the husband and the wife whose roles have been reversed.

Only Po-ra’s work brought home from the office counts as “labor,” while the domestic labor performed by Min-gi earlier in the day remains invisible to his wife. She only sees Min-gi watching television and sipping his beer; he is unaware that he, too, had a full day of work. In the ensuing family conference, Min-gi sits in the dining chair closest to the kitchen, symbolizing his closer proximity to the kitchen than his wife. Po-ra, seated on the other side, tells him that he must be responsible for all of the housework unless he is serious about looking for a job. She continues to chastise him: “Do you care to know which store has the cheapest juice price or which store has the best bread, or the time the freshly baked bread comes out? Would you like to care to know? You don’t want to care, do you? Then, you must start ‘work’ (il) again. Why do you simply sit there, ugly, like someone who has just lost a war?” Min-gi feels humiliated not only because he is incapable of finding employment, but also because she is denigrating specific tasks of domestic labor, distinguishing it from the “masculine” work she is engaged in. His labor in the

**Happy End’s Open-Space Plan**

Unlike the partitioned and distinct rooms that make up the domestic space in *The Housemaid*, the residential apartments in *Happy End* make the kitchen, living room, dining room, and hallways into one open area. This apartment’s resulting spaciousness is contrasted with the confined and crammed public spaces such as the elevator, the bookstore, and even Po-ra’s office. Not only is Min-gi associated with domesticity through various housekeeping chores but also through his ties to the television. Leslie Regan Shade writes that the television set is an “electronic hearth that replaced the fireplace and the piano as the center of family attention.” Television may have replaced *The Housemaid’s* piano at the center stage of domestic space, but the family is no longer there to give it much attention. Only Min-gi sits in front of it. Upon entering his apartment, he cannot turn his eyes from the television screen, even though the baby cries profusely, demanding to be fed. Min-gi’s focus shifts between the soccer game on television in the living room, the baby lying on the sofa, and the powdered formula he’s preparing in the kitchen. While he prepares this food for the baby, he realizes that there are small black worms in the powder, making its consumption impossible. The black worms—like the rats in *The Housemaid*—will continue to infest the house, especially the kitchen cabinet, symptomatically rendering once again the anxieties blending sexual promiscuity and financial aspirations and problems for the family.

Min-gi’s relationships with kitchen and television are both conventional and extraordinary, conventional because domesticity has had a special relationship to the kitchen and television during the modern era, but also extraordinary given Min-gi is a “masculine” man with few “feminine” qualities. The actor cast as Min-gi, Ch’oe Min-sik, is a well-known “tough guy” in South Korean cinema, making the character’s association with stereotypical images of femininity even more anomalous.* Happy End’s* disaffiliation of femininity and domesticity departs from contemporaneous Hollywood films such as *Tootsie* (Sydney Pollack, 1982), *Mr. Mom* (Stan Dragoti, 1983), or *Mrs. Doubtfire* (Chris Columbus, 1993) that allow men in the kitchen only by masking their masculinity. In these films, Dustin Hoffman and Robin Williams had to literally dress up as women in order to perform feminine tasks and roles. In *Happy End*, these realigned gender roles constitute a profound threat to the family.

In one particular sequence, Min-gi performs various housework functions. Sequentially structured, Min-gi prepares a meal, organizes and
Kyung Hyun Kim

House does not qualify as il. Her ability to earn money is far more sacred and profound than “saving” it through “best buy” juice and bread.

This is precisely the moment where the terms of domesticity and gender relations shift and become troubled, laying out a foundation for which the merciless killing of Po-ra will be emotionally and subconsciously legitimated by the viewers. In other words, Po-ra has to die because she has all the qualities of a “bad husband” who ignores the difficulty of domestic labor, refuses to share childcare duties, and does not value television viewing as leisure integrated within the rubric of domesticity and communal social activity. (Indeed, as soon as the program is over, Min-gi receives a phone call from Mi-yong who asks him what he thought of the soap’s new development.)

Masculinist/Feminist

The alignment of men with domestic spaces, imperiled masculinity, and an emphasis on illicit sexuality and desire in The Housemaid and Happy End all manifest the complexities of gender trouble in moments of financial crisis in South Korea. The punishments meted out to the women, Myong-ja in The Housemaid and Po-ra in Happy End, can be considered as rupturing instances distinct from the Mulvey-Ian critique of misogynist structures of mainstream cinema. The stylistic excesses in The Housemaid cast not only women as monstrous but also men as hapless and terrible creatures. In addition, the attention paid to domesticity and the placement of Min-gi inside a kitchen allow readings of these films outside of the conventional gendered framework. Yet it is precisely Po-ra’s masculine characteristics that transgress the conventional boundaries of gender that necessitate her punishment at the end of Happy End. And even though the housemaid is an “active sexual agent” (according to Chris Berry) that disassociates her from the conventional roles of femininity assigned by South Korean cinema, she is still only a “whore” or a “bitch” to the film’s spectators in the early 1960s. For them, the film enacts the mother-whore dyad of patriarchal representation of women that South Korean cinema has patented throughout the postwar decades. Further disqualifying these films as “feminist” is their refusal to question the conventional roles of gender, placing gender differentiation as the integral component of filmic tensions that ultimately usher in the respective narrative movements. In other words, the phallic in these films is not used in the Lacanian sense that has its rea...
3. In 2000, there are three film weeklies, four monthlies, innumerable Internet sites, and a handful of entertainment dailies that cover cinema.

4. South Korea is now second only to the United States in the number of domain names registered each year and leads the world in online stock trading. See Mark Magner, ""PC Bang' Helps S. Koreans Embrace Net,"" Los Angeles Times, July 19, 2000, A-12.


6. Along with The Housemaid and The Stray Bullet (Yu Hyón-mok, 1960), Madame Freedom is one of the most popular films programmed in South Korean retrospectives in the film festivals abroad. In the 1990s, when South Korean films were showcased in various retrospectives around the world, Madame Freedom was regularly included. It also remains one of the most highly debated films in South Korean film scholarship.

7. Soyoung Kim, chapter 7 in this volume. Also see chapter 1 in this volume for Kathleen McHugh's discussion of women's economic labor as it functions in this film.

8. Even in South Korean War films, women's promiscuity is highlighted as one of the most prominent cultural phenomena, provoking the male characters to violently react. See my article ""Is This How the War Is Remembered? Deceptive Sex and the Re-Masculinized Nation in The Taebaek Mountains,"" in Im Kwon-Taek: The Makers of a South Korean National Cinema, ed. David E. James and Kyung Hyun Kim (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2001).

9. The economic situation in South Korea was quite dire in 1998, plunging millions of people into poverty. The ""Miracle on the Han"" economy that continued its phenomenal growth rate of close to 10 percent during the 1990s collapsed to negative growth in 1998, virtually stalemating the economy for the first time since the 1980s. ""Middle Class Is Casualty of Asian Crisis,"" Los Angeles Times, December 27, 1998, A-9.

10. A fired bank employee is a recent phenomenon, since employment in a bank is one of the more socially stable and respected jobs in South Korea. That Min-gi is a former bank employee indicates that he is an educated man. Another hit film from the period, The Fool King (Paeksik'ak, Kim Chul-un, 2000), also places the central protagonist in the role of a banker as he tries to find relief from the work pressures in a depression where the bank demands its employees play by old and corrupt rules.

11. Anne Allison asserts that motherhood in Japan is explicitly elaborated by handsome and scrupulous children's lunchboxes that symbolize and fetishize full-time, stay-at-home mothers. See Anne Allison, ""Japanese Mothers and Obento: The Lunch Box as Ideological State Apparatus,"" in Permitted and Prohibited Desires: Mothers, Comics, and Censorship in Japan (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996), 81-104. In one of the best-selling collections of short stories in South Korea during the 1990s, P'unggâm i istôn chari (The Place Where an Organ Used to Be), Sin Kyông-suk creates a narrator—a woman who is having an affair with a married man—who recalls the childhood memory of her father's girlfriend. In this story, the father's lover replaces the mother and tries to defer the initially credulous gaze of her brothers by generously packing their lunchboxes (tovirak) that ""resemble flowerbeds."" This new ""mother"" impresses the narrator with her cooking skills, earning the respect of an ideal mother that the ""real"" mother never garnered. It is not coincidental that Sin Kyông-suk also centrally figures as a woman who is having an affair. Many female writers who emerged in the literary scene during the 1990s such as Un Hui-gyong and Chênh kyông-nin also frequently depict women having extramarital affairs. Sin Kyông-suk, P'unggâm i istôn chari (Seoul: Munhak kwa chiǒôngsa, 1993), 26.

12. Nancy Chodorow, The Reproduction of Mothering (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 14. On the same page, Chodorow critiques this questionable assumption that refuses to take into consideration that human behavior, including mothering, is ""not instinctually determined but culturally mediated."" In addition, Mary Ann Doane writes, ""In Western culture, there is something obvious about the maternal which has no counterpart in the paternal."" Mary Ann Doane, The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940s (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 70.

13. The Housemaid, with its bold representation of sexuality and eroticism, was a huge hit when it first came out in 1960. But, because of the South Korean cinema's slump during the 1970s and 1980s, as well as Kim Ki-yong's fall to relative obscurity during this period, The Housemaid was largely forgotten until its resurgence through retrospective screenings in film festivals during the 1990s.


15. See my article ""South Korean Cinema and Im Kwon-Taek,"" in Im Kwon-Tack: The Makers of a South Korean National Cinema.

16. Controversial when it first came out, The Housemaid continues to irk present-day audiences. After its screening at the 1998 Post-Colonial Classics of South Korean Cinema Festival at Irvine, California, a couple of South Korean American spectators furiously complained to me and one of the festival programmers for showcasing the film. They protested that The Housemaid does not accurately represent South Korean society and should not have been programmed.

17. Kim Ki-young's maid hardly has any of the qualities of Douglas Sirk's Annie Johnson in the contemporaneous Imitation of Life (1959), whose immaculate and sacrificial execution of domestic duties allows her employer, Lora, to concentrate on her public role and become a star.

18. Kim Ch'in-gyu, the actor who plays the father in The Housemaid, also plays Ch'ôr-ho in The Stray Bullet.

19. Heavy drinking, argues Yeejin Wang, ""can be a transgression of decorum, an act of defying convention, a route to visionary intensity for transcendental possibilities and poetic ecstasy, or a way of achieving autonomy."" But it is also an embodiment of ""spiritual degradation, over-indulgence, moral corruption...""

20. Soyoung Kim, chapter 7 in this volume. Also, see “Interview with Kim Ki-young,” in Kim Ki-young: Cinema of Diabolical Desire and Death (Pusan International Film Festival, 1997), 53.

21. The scene that features Myeong-ja’s stabbing of Cho is remarkably constructed, worthy of scrupulous analysis here. Accompanied by a modernist music orchestra soundtrack and the diegetic sound effects of a thunderstorm in the background, the film creates the ambience of a film noir. Shot from a side angle, the camera follows Myeong-ja in her usual dark attire, clenching a knife in the kitchen and walking up the staircase. Even though the staircase has been photographed many times prior to this scene, this is the first time it is shot from this camera position. Rather than the conventional long shot that had the staircase pictured either from the top or from below, the camera is placed on the side, with the handrail obstructing much of the view.

We soon understand why: following Myeong-ja as she moves with the camera in a full shot, “see her shadow reflected on the wall and prominently featured through the banister, visually escalating the drama. The sequence resumes in the piano room where Myeong-ja, in a slightly crouched position, enters and points her knife at Cho. Captured from the outside balcony in a swift tracking movement, the maid enters the room quickly from the right, bypasses Tong-sik who stands in the front of the frame, and threatens Cho. Myeong-ja tells Miss Cho, who is shuddering with fear, to get off the piano. “You are the real bitch,” announces Myeong-ja, and warns her that the next time she calls Tong-sik, sounengnim (“mister”), she will not stand pat. The camera settles briefly to a medium shot, showing Tong-sik pull away Myeong-ja from Cho and framing Tong-sik and Myeong-ja together, separately from Cho. When Cho ignores Myeong-ja’s warning, the camera moves into a close-up of Myeong-ja’s face that transforms from expressing anguish to rage. The next shot cuts to Cho’s upper body in another close-up—neck to waist—with the knife thrusting from the lower part of the frame to the upper part. Once it strikes the target in the shoulder, the camera cuts to Cho’s face. She screams and then slowly fades from the frame. During the crucial moment when the knife strikes, the drama is altura heightened by both Cho’s scream and the sound of thunder. Visually, the shot of the knife piercing through Cho’s shoulder is coordinated by the artificial lighting to heighten the effect of lightning, suddenly turning white followed by several frames of pitch black.

22. Kim Ki-young’s long involvement in theater before his filmmaking career (he was also a dentist and had trained at medical school) gave him access to the conventions of avant-garde theater where the boundary between fiction and reality is deliberately obfuscated through the rejection of the imaginary border between performers and spectators. Such stylistic codes including the actor’s method acting and expressionist mise-en-scene and décor all remind us of Ufa’s The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari (Robert Wiene, 1919). I raise this film as a point of reference for The Housemaid because they similarly insert

Domestic Space and Gender Troubles in Happy End and The Housemaid not only a narrative frame to attain a dreamlike quality but also the projection of madness that cannot be clearly and safely confined to a gated space. Dr. Caligari ends with a statement by the director of the mental asylum: “At last now I can understand the nature of his madness. He thinks I am that mystic Caligari. Now I see how he can be brought back to sanity again.” The ambiguities of truth, the difficulty of determining who is the madman between Francis, the young student, and the director, as well as the subsequent historical emergence of Adolf Hitler in Germany who reminded the world of the evil somnambulist, have rendered the film legendary. Of course, in the South Korean film it may be an overstatement, not unlike the one Siegfried Kracauer made many decades ago, that the film’s projection of ambiguity as to whether or not the father, who appears in the beginning and in the end, actually has an affair with the maid, is symbolic of a real dictactor in South Korea: Park Chung Hee. Nevertheless, the ambiguity between truth and fiction and between madness and reason all symptomize the historical reign of terror and intense modernization pursued by the Park Administration (1961-79).


25. When I was living in South Korea as a child in a middle-class home, not until the late 1970s were we able to move into a house that had a kitchen fully equipped with a sink with two faucets.


27. James Parakalis in his book, Piano Roles (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), states that many of the famous impressionists, such as Paul Cézanne, Edouard Manet, Edgar Degas, Gustave Caillebotte, and Auguste Renoir, used the image of “the woman at the piano” as a theme. He writes, “[These illustrations attest to the centrality of piano lessons in feminine education, as well as to the cultural currency of the ‘woman at the piano’ motif)” (216). During my adolescence in South Korea, one of the images that stuck with me is a Van Gogh painting of a well-proportioned woman seated in front of an upright piano in a rural bourgeois home. Images as such were pervasive in South Korea, and emblematized ideal femininity.


29. Ch’oe Min-sik plays a villainous North Korean terrorist who conspires against his own president in order to force a war between the North and the South
Kyung Hyun Kim

in Shiri (Swiri, Kang Che-gyu, 1999), the most successful film of the decade.


Morae signye: “Social Melodrama” and the Politics of Memory in Contemporary South Korea
KEEHYEUNG LEE

Memory, even and especially in its belatedness, is itself based on representation.
Andreas Huyssen

[Melodrama comes into being] in a world where the traditional imperatives of truth and ethics have been thrown violently into question... [melodrama] becomes the principal mode for uncovering, demonstrating and making operative the essential moral universe in a post-sacred era.
Peter Brooks

Introduction
The SBS (Seoul Broadcasting System) originally aired the prime-time television serial, Morae signye (Hour Glass), in the spring of 1995 for six weeks. Morae signye became one of the most popular South Korean television dramas of all time. According to SBS News, it generated an average viewer rating of 45.3 percent, garnering a phenomenal 61.5 percent rating at its peak (January 14, 1998). As a high-budget t’uechipsak (special drama) and a social melodrama, Morae signye was produced to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of Korea’s independence from Japan. My use of the term “social melodrama” refers to a subgenre that selectively uses actual sociopolitical histories, events, and figures in its narrative and visual economy. In this essay I approach this enormously popular television drama by examining the interconnected workings of key textual and visual codes and the representation of the popular memory in the radically altered sociopolitical terrain of 1990s South Korea. In doing so, I delve into the cultural politics of memory and history in the age of electronically produced historical images, signs, and plural media flows.