

Ecstatic Space
NEO-KUT and Shamanic Technologies

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
by
Haein Song

Department of Arts and Humanities
College of Business, Arts and Social Sciences
Brunel University, London
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Abstract

The present thesis formulates an approach towards *ecstatic space* in the context of a combined performance of *kut*, a Korean shamanic performance ritual, and digital practices. Here, the coined term, ecstatic space, is not confined to the mental state or spiritual sphere of shamans in a trance but indicates an alternative and metaphoric environment mediated by ecstatic technology – a vehicle for conjuring the mythical worlds of *kut* via shamanic media including divine objects, dancing and singing rituals. This research also adopts digital technology, a modern approach for accessing imaginary virtual space through digital media, especially technical images – the technologically produced and programmed/computational images.

Ecstatic space enables the creation of interstitial and fecund space situated between performer/audience reality and imaginary spheres, representing the technological aesthetics in-between *kut* and digital performance. This enabling is theoretically and historically grounded in media and performance/ritual frameworks that are explored in the early chapters of the thesis. Ecstatic space contextualises through the careful exposition of Korean scholarship on *kut*, and shamanic performance rituals read and interpreted alongside international performance/cultural studies and media theories including Vilém Flusser, Marshall McLuhan, Guy Debord, Roy Ascott and others.

My methodologies of creating ecstatic space are formulated by investigating the artistic potential of an interpenetrative relationship between these two technologies. The five core SUI (Shamanic User Interface) designs of *kut* are identified to outline an embodied understanding of the ecstatic technology. The techniques of digital performances are then examined in relation to SUI design, using as a case study of *metakimospheres*, a series of immersive performance installations exploring wearable architectures and kinetic atmospheres, and other digital practices.

My methodologies are applied to and examined through my own series of ecstatic spaces, created with a *shimbang* (a master shaman of Korea) and five *kut* performers. Each of the proposed principles is explored and demonstrated through the production processes and presentations of four performances: the solo piece, *Twelve Doors*, discovers a wearable installations adopting Korean funeral *kut*; the theatrical piece, *Leodo: The Paradise*, describes a girl's journey to *Leodo*, delivering the key emotional conception of *kut* and exploring technical images; the projection mapping performance, *Miyeoji-baegdui*, produces its liminal spheres through the projection lights and interactive mapping technology; the participatory installation performance, *Seocheon Flower Garden* creates a divine garden by metaphoric mapping design and immersive performance rituals. The final production for this research, *NEO-KUT*, is the culminating event, generated by a comprehensive assemblage based on all four performances.

The outcome of the research is the generation of alternative performance frameworks for the field of *kut* and digital performance. As a consequence, *Ecstatic Space: NEO-KUT and Shamanic Technologies* contributes to the field of *kut* by adopting a technical medium that can enhance the potentiality and accessibility of rituals for people today. In addition, unlike the digital virtual space that tends to pursue ocular-centred, realistic and individual interfaces, this research proposes a more collectivist shamanic and ritual way of perceiving digital *dispositifs* and digital performance atmospheres through highlighting multi-sensorial, symbolic and communal environments of ecstatic space.

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Introduction

With my background in performing both Korean indigenous shamanic rituals, *kut*,¹ and digital performance, this practice-led research asks three questions, the answers to which will deepen understanding of the artistic potential of an interpenetrative relationship between *kut* and digital performance. These questions are the following: How can shamanic technology be reflected in digital technology? How can *kut* and shamans be changed or developed in this digital era? What is the potential influence that *kut* will have on digital performances?

The ancient technology of Korean shamans would appear, at first glance, seemingly irreconcilable with today's digital technology. However, understanding ecstatic technology as a vehicle for conjuring the mythical worlds of *kut* via their shamanic media, I have found that the ecstatic technology of *kut* is akin to the digital technology of virtual space in that they are both designed to connect with alternative space created by human imaginations.

The ability to imagine leads people to create *media*² as a way to understand the elusive world. Perhaps the first attempt with which ancient Koreans represented their mythical imaginary world through assemblages of sound, visual and choreographic images was *kut*, a 5,000-year-old Korean shamanic performance ritual that has exerted significant influence on the culture, art, and psyche of Korea.³ With the development of Shamanism studies, *kut* has generally been known as the practice directed by a *shimbang* (or *mudang*), a Korean shaman who performs a professional role by linking a variety of invisible beings and the human.⁴ As early humans believed that the world they painted on cave walls would affect their reality (Clottes 2002: 106-

¹ *Kut* (KOR. 굿) is also written as *gut* within the Romanisation Korean writing system. Although many Korean scholars use *gut*, this research will use *kut* following the McCune-Reischauer system, taking into account that the pronunciation of *kut* is more similar to Korean pronunciation of ‘굿’.

² Media is the pluralised word for medium, borrowed from Latin that refers to ‘the middle one, located in the middle’ (Hagen 2008: 1). By extending the concept from its origins to Marshall McLuhan’s conception of media as ‘any extension of ourselves’, or ‘any new technology’ (McLuhan 1964: 7), the term media here indicates any tools, material and technology used by humans to communicate. For more detailed explanations of the notion of media, please see Chapter 2.1.

³ The roots of *kut* can be found in the figures of dancing *mudang* in Bangudae petroglyph, National Treasure No. 285. Geologists estimate that the petroglyph dates back at least 5,000 to 6,000 years (Namgung 2001: 127-128).

⁴ Korean shamans are referred to by different names according to regions, such as *shimbangs* in Cheju Province, *mudang* in Gyeongsang Provinces and *tangol* in Jeolla Provinces (Yang 1988: 21). Although the term, *mudang*, is used most often in Korean shamanism to refer to shamans, I will use the term *shimbangs* in the introduction because this research is mainly done in Cheju area with Cheju shamans.

107), I would like to point out that many Koreans still hold the inherent belief that the world of *kut* created by *shimbangs*' mythical songs, crafts, dances and music can affect their lives, especially for a healing purpose. When Koreans experience difficult challenges concomitant with life such as bad fortune, deep sadness, persistent problems, frustration or illness, they have traditionally sought *kut* to experience an alternative world extending beyond everyday practice and knowledge, offering comfort, healing, and entertainment.⁵

The space where *kut* is enacted is a liminal space,⁶ an arena located between the virtual and the actual or the unreal and real. It is the space which suggests the built-in shamanic belief that not only living beings but also inert objects such as trees, rocks, wind, mountains and houses have a spirit (Baker 2008: 19). In *kut*, people often believe that life is actually influenced by these various invisible beings (Walraven 2008: 242). Therefore, invisible elements such as souls, spirits, gods and *ki*⁷ are as essential as, or even more crucial, than visible elements. This makes *kut* fundamentally entwined with a matter of life and death. *Shimbangs* believe that their arts have the power to comfort and rejuvenate people and spirits. Straddling the spiritual and the material realm, *shimbangs* are able to sense the unseen and communicate with the intangible reality of unknowable beings, whose physical time flows into one's reality. Consequently, the arts presented in *kut* are perceived as metaphysical.

To link themselves to the space of *kut*, *shimbangs* have developed their own technology, which I refer to here as *ecstatic technology*. Unlike most shamanism studies so far, which have confined their definition to a 'spiritual journey' and 'trance abilities' of shamans, the ecstatic technology in this research indicates all sorts of techniques to engage with 'spatial ecstasy'. Inspired by the meaning of the Greek term *ekstasis* – to be or stand outside oneself – spatial ecstasy is bidding for access to alternative environments. Accordingly, the ecstatic technology of *kut* includes various *shimbangs*' technologies that increase the intensity of the mediated space, including improvisation techniques for synesthetic performance as well as the careful

⁵ The influence of *kut* on the Korean's life and belief system will be explained in Chapter 1.1. History of *Kut*, and the historical record of medical role of *kut* will be mentioned in Chapter 3.1. Redefining the Techniques of Ecstasy.

⁶ The term 'liminal' means 'threshold,' from the Latin word *limen*. Applying British cultural anthropologist Victor Turner's conception of 'liminal', liminal space indicates a 'betwixt and between' space or 'crossing over' space. It is the space where part of people's perception is in one place and part of it is in the other. Cf. Turner 1964.

⁷ *Ki* (Kor. 기) is a vital force forming part of living things, which is also expressed as *qi* or *ch'i*.

design of both ritual objects and ritual structures, and in combination with the *shimbangs*' unique spiritual knowledge.

If the ecstatic techniques of *kut* serve as a vehicle for conjuring the mythical worlds of *kut* via shamanic media, current digital technologies appear to offer a modern approach for accessing the so-called immaterial/virtual world through digital media. Czech-born philosopher and media theorist Vilém Flusser addresses the utopian view of digital technology with respect to the art of the digital age. He predicts a future where everyone becomes an artist reflecting his or her imagination to the world by creating a virtual environment, through 'technical images',⁸ which can interact with people as if it were real. Flusser claims that 'we are no longer the objects of a given objective world but project the alternate world' (Flusser 1996: 244), and he identifies humans as a projection, arising from the submissive position of subjection. For him, a computer is a medium that begins to make this change because it is not merely a machine but the device that can analyse, synthesise and thus create artificial spaces and beings (Flusser 1996: 242-243). Relating to Flusser's consideration of the artistic life of the future, where people project their world through combining technologies and imagination, Roy Ascott, one of the most outstanding British artists in the field of cybernetics and telematics, claims that artists today could challenge and reform the concept of reality through up-to-date digital technology. According to Ascott, digital technology currently performs a similar role to that fulfilled by shamans. For example, people can explore 'double consciousness' standing between virtual and material space, aided by computation technologies, just as shamans enter the 'trance' state through their shamanic rituals (Ascott 2003: 357-358).

The world of *kut*, conjured by ecstatic technology, and virtual reality, produced by digital technology, seem conceptually analogous to each other since they present a mediated world. While *shimbangs* create their liminal world by projecting their mythical imagination and applying ecstatic technology, today's digital practitioners build an alternative reality by drawing their imagination into the real world through digital technology. In addition, there is something in both virtual space and *kut*'s space that forms a sense of 'in-betweenness'. While the digitally mediated world produces a liminal sense, generated between the technical imagery

⁸ Technical image is 'an image produced by apparatuses' (Flusser 2000: 14), thus technologically produced and programmed/computational images, such as photography, film, video, computer graphics, holography and virtual reality, all fall within the category of technical images (Flusser 2002: xxvi).

and live users (Dixon 2007: 337), *kut* also continues to explore the boundaries between consciousness and unconsciousness, or the visible and invisible worlds. Furthermore, *kut*'s ecstatic technology parallels digital technology in that they both seek to develop a *presence* for accessing the mediated world – a heightened sense of being in the mediated world, which is temporary or spatially remote from the real world. As the development of digital technologies contributes to the sensorial richness of virtual realm by increasing the vividness and interactivity of environments, ecstatic technologies allow *shimbangs* and *kut* performers to offer a more detailed and sophisticated way of perceiving the mythical world.

These interesting parallels have inspired me to research *ecstatic space*, encompassing not only the mythical space of *kut* but also the virtual space of digital practice. Therefore, this research aims to discover 'ecstatic space', understood as the mediated space generated by an effective combination of ecstatic technology of *kut* and digital technology of virtual space. Here, ecstatic space does not indicate the mental state of shamans in a trance but refers to the metaphoric space figuratively manifesting the mythical and imaginary world of *kut*. It is the interstitial and fecund space situated between one's reality and imaginary sphere, representing the aesthetic and technologies between *kut* and digital performance. The reason why I apply the term ecstatic space is to stress my intention of researching and creating *kut* in the digital age. Interrogating and linking ecstatic and digital technology, the research will examine how shamanic philosophy and practice of *kut* can be reflected through digital practices, and vice versa.

So far, very little has been done in this area. As a *kut* performer,⁹ making use of digital technology in *kut* is both complex and challenging since most *shimbangs* and *kut* performers assume *kut* to be simply incongruous with digital practices. Therefore, they tend to eschew the use of digital technologies believing they damage *kut* by diminishing its tradition. There is a historical perspective to this suspicion, connected to the recent history of cultural conflict and subsequent evolution of South Korea. Koreans experienced a drastic change through internal and external forces in the late 19th and the early 20th centuries: the policy to obliterate Korean

⁹ *Kut* is performed not only by a *shimbang* but also by expert professional performers who performing *kut* using their artistic abilities. There is no specific term for these performers, but they are called differently called depending on the type of *kut*, for example, *somu* in Cheju *mudang-kut*, *ch'ipae* in *p'ungmul-kut*, and *yŏnhŭicha* in *talnori-kut*. For convenience, I refer to these performers who are not officially recognised as *shimbangs* but have professionally performed *kut* as 'kut performers'. I also trained in *kut* in Cheju Island from 2009-2011 and am still working as a *kut* performer.

culture during the period of Japanese colonisation hindered Korea's own path toward development. Furthermore, since independence in 1945, South Korea was still officially ruled by the United States Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK) for three years, in the name of modernisation, democratisation and national advancement. The U.S. American culture had a profound influence on all sectors of Korean society, which led South Korea to become rapidly and extensively westernised.

Hence, it was natural for Koreans to question their cultural identity when confronted with the process of assimilating western culture. Moreover, this is where my interest in *kut* started, from a place of confusion about my own cultural identity – and from considering what it might mean for myself to be Korean. Although I had trained and majored in Korean traditional dance since my teenage years, what I learned was a kind of modernised Korean dance, absorbing the style of the Western picture-frame stage and teaching methods.¹⁰ Thus, dance classes were focused on training the exact shape or patterns of diverse Korean dance repertoires, similar to ballet vocabulary. In addition, even though I had theoretically been taught that Korean traditional dance has its origin in *kut*, the dance of *kut* was never observed or taught in my regular classes because many Koreans regard it as a superstitious or religious ritual. This kept me wondering about Korean notions of aesthetics and rituals, which inspire me to train in *kut* for three years in Cheju Island after graduating from university. The *kut* I learned in Cheju Island was different from the old and immutable tradition I had been familiar with: it was not a fixed legacy of learning, which presented and transmitted the same practices repeatedly, but was a part of living culture, offering comfort and changes to the ongoing life of guests (or audiences). This guest-centred thinking created the living, improvised and mutable features of *kut*, and all genres of the arts were mixed together to allow a better conversation between them. The *kut* was worn traditional outfits, and yet was a contemporary ritual that moved with the passage of time.

Having made this particular choice, I could not help asking myself whether the exploration of fusing *kut* and digital practices might repeat colonial history by making it difficult for a Korean

¹⁰ Arts education in South Korea has been significantly influenced by the 'progressive education' of the US, introduced during the US military occupation after independence. Major changes occurred in the application of the curriculum system and specialised education, which avoided traditional arts education that had let students learn dance, singing and art in combination. This US-led education is centred on western philosophy and aesthetics; for instance, I learned that Korean dance was influenced by the aesthetic of the proscenium stage and ballet techniques. For more information on post-war education, see Kim (2014).

to understand the nature of the tradition. However, further research has suggested that one of the main reasons why *kut* is still trivialised as superstitious or old-fashioned is because Koreans no longer have the time to develop *kut* on its own path. The problem of Korean modernisation is not the modernisation itself; rather, it is due to its underlying purpose of westernisation. Because this modernisation could not begin internally, but through the external force of Japan and the USA, this gave Koreans a negative view that tradition is old-fashioned culture. As I have mentioned earlier, many *shimbangs* and *kut* performers have believed that tradition should be protected and preserved in this rapidly changing Korea; this has made them unwilling to accept changes and new exploration. However, my experiences of *kut* in Cheju reminded me that *kut* is not only a tradition with a long history related to the past but also a contemporary culture which has been integrated with the present. Therefore, as they value the preservation of tradition, performers should also understand the current changes and develop a *kut* in their own manner. This will enable *kut* to actively communicate with society, keeping it as a living tradition. This idea has been strengthened since I began researching how *shimbangs* (or *mudangs*) have been protecting the survival of *kut* from outside influxes in history:¹¹ *shimbangs* were early adapters in the history of ‘mediation’, as they had attempted to acclimatise to new media such as mirrors, paper and colour codes, in order to enhance communication with guests at their performances. They were also experimentalists who interwove the rituals of other religions into that of *kut*; this allowed indigenous tradition to survive the impact of other religions such as Buddhism, Confucianism and Christianity.

In the politically and religiously liberated society of today’s South Korea, one of the reasons why *kut* may still be clouded with prejudice and superstition is perhaps the wall of digital technology and scientific thinking, as this advances a rationalistic techno-scientific perspective in lieu of the tradition. However, the innovative path of Korean shamans throughout history has suggested that one effective way to break this wall and become more engaged with society is understanding and wisely utilising today’s digital media in *kut*. The conception of the media¹² from world-renowned media theorists Marshall McLuhan and Flusser also offers theoretical support for this idea. It points out that media are an a priori condition for communication, with the ability to shape and rearrange the patterns of communities, culture and the arts.

¹¹ This will be discussed in detail in Chapter 1.1.

¹² In Marshall McLuhan’s *Understanding Media*, in which he introduces his renowned phrase ‘The medium is the message’, he defines ‘media’ as ‘communication devices’ or ‘extensions of humans’ which can determine or reshape one’s consciousness, knowledge and culture.

Understanding today's communication codes and technical images seems necessary for *kut* performers and *shimbangs*; not only for exploring new possibilities in art creation, but also to avoid the unexpected risks and threats of digital domination.

As a *kut* performer, I am genuinely interested in the organic and analogue side of creating mediated environments as in traditional *kut*. Yet I am also very drawn to discover how digital computation technologies can enhance what I can do with my own hands. Consequently, this practice-led research explores to use interactive technical images within *kut*, with the aim of evoking the *kut* performers' mythical world of imagination, which hitherto has relied on more ancient tools of paper, bamboo, natural lights, colour coding and fabric. Based on the thought that *kut* is a living tradition which is already contemporaneous, the research focuses on a particular *kut*, and reflects its relationship with not only *kut*'s pastness but also its presentness. Therefore, within the aim of creating ecstatic space, the necessary elements will be selected and explored, while avoiding any temporal (traditional/modern) or cultural exclusions or distinctions. In my view, this practice might also be revelatory. On the one hand, it can be a way for me to find and reveal my identity as a ritual practitioner of orthodox *kut*; and on the other, as a director who is absorbed in digital performance.

However, this research is not an attempt to reinterpret *kut* through the lens of digital performance, with the intention of modernising it. Rather, this research will carefully open up a space for interactivity between *kut* performers, *shimbangs* and digital technology. To achieve this, the research has been conducted through theoretical and physical dialogues with collaborative research partners— a master *shimbang*, Soon Sil Seo, and a *kut* performers' group, MARO, who have been performing *kut* in Cheju for more than 20 years. My role has been to work as an interpreter or a shaman-mediator by applying the shamanic technique; and as one who understands the languages of both *kut* and digital practices, I can thereby assist *shimbangs* to communicate with the world of digital performance. Just as *shimbangs* and *kut* performers represent their aesthetics through ecstatic technology by using old mediums, my aim is to utilise technical images as tools to emphasise and extend the aesthetics of *kut*, allowing *shimbangs* and *kut* performers to communicate equally. This is to very intentionally avoid pitfalls of the history, mentioned above, of indiscriminately applying western culture or technological concepts to Korean traditional arts. I also suggest that some technical concepts applied should no longer be considered 'western' since South Korea, as is well known, has in recent decades

become one of the most advanced high-tech countries, with a constant growth high-tech industrial economy and burgeoning investment in higher education including access to networked technology for all citizens.

Digital technology has spawned a whole new variety of entertainment and communication products and is generally regarded as a medium more connected to today's audience than ancient technologies used in *kut*. Nonetheless, the way of discovering the virtual world seems to accelerate the erosion of embodied and communal experiences provided by the collective experiences of *kut*. As *kut* has provided a needed antidote to loneliness and depression, as well as many other increasingly common social ills, I believe that utilising today's digital technology in the ecstatic space might provide people with healing, communal, and embodied experiences which may not be found in trendy commercial entertainment, games and other virtual environments. I believe this is so because, unlike those environments, the ecstatic space is profoundly connected to the human psyche's need for an understanding of the unseen, glimpses of which have significant healing ramifications through the power of the elative faculty.

As a result, my practice-led research has aimed to explore ecstatic space by the artistic potential of an interpenetrative relationship between digital and ecstatic technologies. The methodologies of creating ecstatic space are grounded in theoretical framework formulated by careful historical research on *kut*, media theories and digital performances, my experiences and reflections of performing *kut*, as well as digital practices, the field research of *kut* in Cheju Island, and interviews with *kut* researchers, *shimbangs* and *kut* performers. Accordingly, I formulate five core SUI (Shamanic User Interface) Design of *kut* in order to define my understanding of ecstatic technology, including: 'portability', the design methods of creating *kutp'an* (a temporary-built shrine of *kut*); 'metaphoric mapping', fundamental spatial design to transform everyday space into symbolic and metaphysical environments; 'mobility', animistic design making elements to be moved, touched or animated; 'liminality', the essential attribute of SUI, producing a sense of in-betweenness and immanence; 'promotability', the design methods to promote invisible elements such as energy and emotions in rituals. The techniques of digital performances are examined in relation to these five SUI Design in the context of virtual space, connecting animistic-spheres with 'kinect technology', spiritual spheres with 'wearable technology', a liminal sphere with 'media façade', and metaphoric mapping with 'immersive installation'. Several digital practices have also been examined, centred on the DAP-Lab's

metakimospheres, a series of immersive performance installations that creates kinetic, wearable atmospheres. Other practices have been briefly introduced including a wearable digital practice, *Eunoia & Eunoia II*, directed by Lisa Park, and a media façade performance, *Hakanai*, by Adrien M. and Claire B.

Given this, my own series of practices have been created as a way of practically testing and examining the suggested methodologies. This practical exploration has been conducted through an intensive physical and theoretical communication with my collaborative research partners, a master *shimbang*, Soon Sil Seo, and five *kut* performers from MARO. I was able to meet them at least twice a year to consistently conduct collaborative research and performances. It was physically challenging to handle the process of inviting them to the UK and travelling, myself, to Korea. However, thankfully, I managed it with the support of the performance/research fund of Korea and the sincere contributions of MARO and *shimbang* Seo. During this intense four years of research, five practical works have been researched and created as a concrete way to explore and demonstrate each of the proposed methodologies. These works have been presented in London and Korea with the titles *Twelve Doors*, *Leodo: The Paradise*, *Miyeoji-baegdui*, *Seocheon Flower Garden* and *NEO-KUT*. The final production for this research, *NEO-KUT*, was the culminating event produced by a comprehensive colligation of all the previous practices.

The thesis is structured in the following way: the first chapter will introduce theoretically and historically grounded frameworks of *kut*. Beginning with examining its history, I will demonstrate how the status of *kut* has changed throughout history, the reasons *kut* has survived persistent persecution, and the influence of this historical review on my practical research. Subsequently, I will clarify the need for research of *kut* on the field of performance by discussing the contingent definition of *kut* that has been researched, without ontological and intrinsic investigation of *kut* as a performance. After that, the main features of *kut* are examined within both performance and shamanic ritual perspectives, to aid understanding of *kut* as a *shamanic performance ritual*.

The second chapter will read and interpret *kut* through the lens of media theories by Vilém Flusser, Marshall McLuhan, Guy Debord and others. Understanding media as a communication code and delineating the influence of media on *kut*, based on Flusser's writings, this chapter will constitute the theoretical base of my practical research. After that, the technical image, the

communication media of the post-historical era, will be examined through two major concepts. First, the concept of post-historical magic driven by Flusser's utopian view of technical images will be scrutinised regarding the potentiality and the matter of *liveness* of the mediated art. Then, the concept of separation will be discovered as it is explicated in Debord's notion of Spectacles. This is to clarify how these concepts inspired and supported me in formulating my research subject, *ecstatic space*.

The third chapter will contextualise the concept of *ecstatic space* through the careful exposition of Korean/international scholarship on *kut* and shamanism. It will begin by offering an alternative perspective to understanding techniques of ecstasy, which is generally focused on the spiritual ability of shamans. Within the process of understanding ecstatic technology, based on 'spatial ecstasy' of *kut* rather than 'ecstatic trance' of shamans, I will newly identify ecstatic space as alternative environments or atmospheres mediated by ecstatic technology. Subsequently, I will elucidate my own way of adapting digital technology to ecstatic space by examining how the relationship between ecstatic space of *kut* and ecstatic technology is conceptually connected to that of virtual space and digital technology, and by demonstrating similarities and differences between them.

In the fourth chapter, the methodological strands of my research will identify the principal five design features of *mugu*, which I refer to as Shamanic User Interface (SUI) Design, to outline an embodied understanding of the ecstatic technology. The techniques of digital performances are then examined in relation to SUI Design. Subsequently, my ideas of how to apply technical images as a new ecstatic medium will be presented by applying a case study of the DAP-Lab's *metakimospheres*, a series of immersive, kinetic installation performances, along with several other digital practices.

The fifth chapter will deal with my own series of production practices, explaining the processes and methods by which the practices employ the aforementioned methodologies to create ecstatic space. Each of the proposed principles is explored and demonstrated through the production processes and presentations of four performances: the solo piece, *Twelve Doors*, reveals a wearable installation adopting Korean funeral *kut*; the theatrical piece, *Leodo: The Paradise*, describes a girl's journey to *Leodo*, delivering the key emotional conception of *kut* and exploring two-dimensional media façade; the projection mapping performance, *Miyeoji-*

baegdui, produces liminal-spheres through liminal lights and 3D interactive mapping technology; the participatory installation performance, *Seocheon Flower Garden* creates a divine garden by metaphoric mapping design and immersive performance rituals.

In the sixth and final chapter, I will illustrate my culminating research practice, *NEO-KUT*, which has been generated by a comprehensive assemblage of all four performances. It begins with the particular process of exploring, creating and presenting the piece. This chapter will then illustrate how the methodologies are applied in *NEO-KUT* in the following contexts: ‘spatial script’, a basic text whose information essentially supports collective imaginations; ‘transitional installation’, an assemblage of SUIs formed by the movements of guests and performer during the rituals; ‘liminal face’, the design of technical images manifesting liminality in *kut* and media façade and ‘technology toward harmony’, methods of combining seemingly contrary elements. This thesis will conclude with a summary of my findings and the position that I have tried to establish as a digital performance director working with *kut*.

Chapter 1. *Kut*

Kut is an indigenous shamanic performance ritual that employs a set of shamanic, artistic and nature-centred techniques. Since ancient days, *kut* has assisted Koreans in surviving challenges of the everyday world, and moreover, has influenced the Korean way of life (Cho 2012, Hogarth Kim 1998, Kister 1997, Lee and Yoon 2004, Lim 2006, Moon and Moon 2011, Park 2005). In many modernised cities across the world, shamanistic customs have been rapidly disappearing—even in Siberia, where the term *tungus*, or shaman, was first coined by Russians in the late 17th century (Hogarth 1998: 1). Nevertheless, the practices of Korean shamans are still persistently performed in almost all parts of South Korea, as a response to the needs of the people (Walraven 2000). In the current modernised and urbanised Korean society, there are still countless *mudangs* working in the country. Even in Seoul, which is one of the world's most relentlessly high-tech cities, with high-speed Internet and a world-leading eighty-eight percent of people owning smartphones (Marshall 2016, Rodgers 2017), there are an estimated 300 shamanistic shrines nestling in the city, where *kut* is performed as a daily routine (Dongcheol 2014: np).

Such a phenomenon might suggest that *mudangs*¹³ and *kut* are always welcomed by Korean society, enjoying the national support and a positive reputation. However, *kut* is a paradoxical custom which has been marginalised and politically rejected throughout Korean history, despite being deeply embedded in the culture, art and thoughts of Koreans. *Kut* was considered as the superstition that should be prohibited whenever new religions such as Confucianism and Christianity were introduced into Korea (Lim 2006: 101). In addition, the shamanism culture was very nearly physically eradicated by a policy to obliterate Korean culture during the Japanese colonial occupation era (1910-1945) and the radical modernisation policy of Korea followed after the independence: large numbers of shrines were destroyed, *mudangs* were cast out, eliminated and forced into hiding (Cho 1990: 187). Even today, it is not difficult to see that many Koreans disparage *mudangs* and *kut* through prejudice. This discrimination is one of the reasons *kut* performers avoid becoming a *mudang*. *Mudangs* are mostly forced to begin their shamanic profession due to continuous misfortune, which is manifesting as the spiritual illness,

¹³ As I have mentioned in the introduction, *mudangs* are called by different names according to regions such as *shim bang* (神房) in Cheju Island and *tangol* in Jeolla Provinces (Yang 1988: 21). I will use the term *mudang* when I am indicating general Korean shamans or explaining notions of other scholars, and will apply the term *shim bang* in my theoretical and practical exploration of Cheju shamans.

called *shinbyŏng*,¹⁴ rather than of their own will.

Although the status of *mudangs* has diminished throughout history, along with poor working conditions, interestingly, a *mudang* still implicitly acts as a spiritual leader or artist in Korean society (Sim 2011: 215). *Kut* is still in effective use as a type of communal gathering, providing a necessary antidote to loneliness and depression as well as many other increasingly common social ills in modernised Korea. Especially in Cheju Island, where I trained in *kut*, shamanistic customs influence a relatively large number of Islanders. *Shimbangs* (Cheju *mudangs*) intimately intercede with the life of communities: they cure mental pain by sacred artistic rituals, singing, drumming, chanting and dancing; they act as a bridge between the living and the dead; they connect with spirits to obtain the knowledge and teachings of nature.

Regarding this ambivalent socio-cultural attitude toward *kut*, I have decided to initiate this chapter, examining the history of *kut*, before offering a definition and identification of *kut*. It is because of my intention to emphasise that the definition of *kut* is historically contingent, and the value of *kut* has often been interpreted through the lens of different cultures and religions and thereby has been mostly disparaged. In addition, as a *kut* performer, this historical background has motivated me to undertake this research, which seems appropriate to share at the start of this thesis. Clarifying how the status of *kut* has changed throughout history, and how *mudangs* and their rituals could survive in the history of persecution, I will explain why Koreans have disparate recognitions of *kut* and elucidate how the history of *kut* has influenced me to conduct this research.

1.1. History of *Kut*

The roots of *kut* can be found in the petroglyph sites of Korea such as *Bangudae* and *Cheonjeonri*. The figures of dancing *mudang* are engraved in the *Bangudae* Petroglyphs¹⁵ which are estimated to trace back 5,000 years (see Fig.1). Accordingly, the area nestled at the base of this petroglyph is regarded as a sacred place for *kut* (Shin 2006: 164). The several

¹⁴ Prior to becoming *mudangs*, Koreans often suffer *shinbyŏng*, a physical and mental pain that resists biomedicine or herbal medicine. After *Nerym-Kut*, the descent of god rituals, they can heal *shinbyŏng* and be empowered to control the supernatural beings (Lee, 2008: 178-180).

¹⁵ National Treasure No. 285, the *Bangudae* Petroglyph (or rock art) is located on the bank of the Daegokcheon stream at Ulsan. Although historians estimate the age of the *Bangudae* rock art as ranging from 300 BCE to 100CE, geologists date it from 5,000 to 6,000 years ago (Namgung 2001: 127-128).

shamanic features of the *Cheonjeonri* Petroglyphs, such as ritual trees, birds and instruments (see Fig.2), reveal that *mudangs* existed in the middle of the Neolithic Age (or the Bronze Age).¹⁶ The status of *mudangs* in prehistoric times appears to have been as powerful as kingship, assuming that the government of the prehistoric age was a theocracy, in which a leader of rituals ruled in the name of the gods. This assumption is buttressed by many Korean scholars who argue that the origin of *mudang* is *Tangun*, the legendary founder of *Gojoseon* (the first Korean kingdom) in 2333 BC (Lee 1927: 466). Associating with the role of *Tangun*, ancient *mudangs* seem to function as a spiritual professional or as a ruler who fulfilled religious, political, ritual and medical functions, exerting significant influence on individuals, culture and the communities of ancient Korea.



Fig.1. Images of a dancing *mudang* in Bangudae Petroglyph. (Namgung 2001: 133)

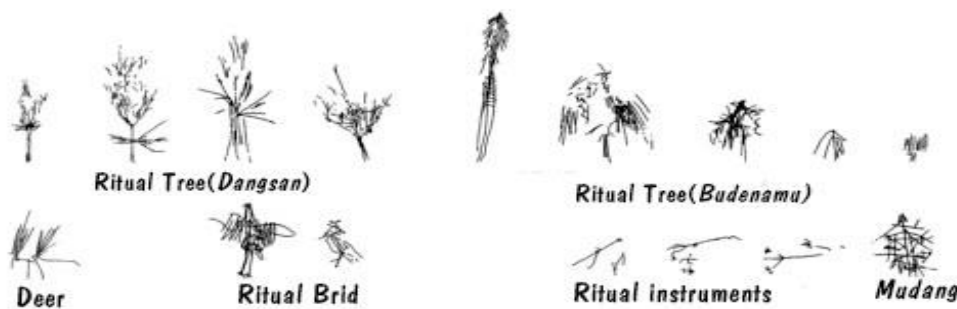


Fig.2. Images of a *mudang* and ritual elements of *kut* in Cheonjeonri Petroglyphs. (Chang 2014: 16)

However, little is recorded of the origin of *kut* in literature. The oldest historical document that gives information on ancient *kut* is the Chinese *San Kuo-Chih* (Records of the Three Kingdoms).¹⁷ The records deal with the *kut* of four nations in Korea's protohistoric period (2 BCE–494 CE). The *kut* is held with different titles by these nations, such as *yǒnggo-je* (the

¹⁶ National Treasure No. 147, the *Cheonjeonri* Petroglyphs (rock art), are located on the bank of the Daegokcheon stream at Ulsan. There is debate among palaeographers as to the age of the rock art: opinions range from the early Neolithic Age to the late Iron Age, with many favouring the middle Neolithic Age to the Bronze Age (Chang 2014: 61-62).

¹⁷ *San Kuo-Chih* (Records of the Three Kingdoms) exists in the chapter entitled *Tungi-Chuan* (Eastern Boundaries) within *Wei-Chih* (The Book of Wei), written by *Chen Shou* (233–297 CE).

spirit-invoking drumming ritual), *tongmaeng-je* (the Chumong founder-worship) and *muchon-je* (the dance to heaven). However, all *kut* are held for a similar purpose, to please the heavenly gods, to observe thanksgiving, and pray for a rich harvest (Lee 1982, Ryu 2012). Thus, this *kut* is generally referred to as *hanŭl-kut* (the *kut* for heaven) by Korean scholars.¹⁸ The main features of *hanŭl-kut* are summarised in four Chinese descriptions in *San Kuo-Chih*: 男女老少 (all people, including men, women, and children without class distinctions, are gathered together), 晝夜無休 (enjoying the festival day and night without rest, continuing for several days), 群聚歌舞 (dancing and singing in a group) and 連日飲酒歌舞 (food, drink, song and dance is continued for several days). These features indicate that that *kut* is a sort of ‘worship of heaven’ for ancient Koreans, which is integral to their entertainment, religions and life.

The status of *mudangs* and *kut* has been weakened under persecution by other religions such as Buddhism, Confucianism or Christianity. One interesting point of this process of oppressing shamanic customs and belief is the way that *mudangs* have maintained their activities. The shamanic culture and beliefs have been sustained by incorporating customs of *kut* with those of other religions. In particular, since Buddhism was introduced into Korea by the Chinese, in 372 CE, the status of *kut* began to decline as Buddhism absorbed the social, religious and political roles performed by Korean shamanism. However, the activities of *mudangs* continued relatively peacefully until the late *Koryŏ* period (935-1392), by interweaving *kut* with the culture of Buddhism (Lee 2010, Sim 2011). For example, according to the *Koryŏ* Sutras, the most significant national festival, *p'algwan-hoe* (a Buddhist ritual, known to have lasted for almost 800 years since 551 CE) is virtually identical with *hanŭl-kut* (Ryu 2012: 194-196). In addition, the ritual for rain, *kiu-je*, is regularly enacted by a number of *mudangs*; and as many as three hundred *mudangs* performed for a *kut* in the reign of King Injong (Jo 1997: 56). We can see that even today’s Korean Buddhism remains infiltrated with shamanic customs. One of the typical examples is *samseonggak*, a shamanic shrine usually located behind the temple.¹⁹

During the influence of Confucianism, the state religion in the Yi Dynasty (also called Choson)

¹⁸ *Hanŭl* is a pure Korean word meaning ‘the heaven’. In the Chinese *San Kuo-Chih* (Records of the Three Kingdoms), this fourth *kut* is mentioned as *chech’ŏnŭiryŏ*, which directly expresses the sounds of the Chinese characters 祭天儀禮. The term *hanŭl-kut* is from Jo’s translation, indicating the meaning of these Chinese characters (Jo 1997: 33-34).

¹⁹ *Samsunggak* enshrines *sanshin* (the gods of mountain) and *chilsungshin* (the gods of seven stars) who are the gods corresponding to that of shamanic belief (Chio 2005: 47).

(1392–1897), *kut* was vehemently condemned and restrained by rulers. Regarding *kut* as an evil custom, *mudangs* were cast out, and their shrines were forbidden to be built in the capital (Ryu 2012: 246). The rulers of the Choson Dynasty placed a ban on performing, not only *mudang*'s activities but also other communal *kut* such as *sangyŏ-kut*, a funeral rite of Korea accompanied by the combination of song, drums, chanting and dance. Many people in Choson were arrested for breaking this ban; they did so because performing *sangyŏ-kut* was considered to be a virtue and a filial duty (Lee 2010: 215-219). Although the conflict between the Confucian ruling ideology and the culture of *kut* never resolved itself, *kut* continued to be performed in private by commoners, as well as by the upper classes and the royal family (Jo 1997: 79). According to Junsick Choi, a professor of Korean Studies at Ewha Womans' University, one of the crucial reasons that Korean *kut* customs were maintained in the Confucian society of Choson was their complementary relationship (Choi 2005: 40). While Confucianism engenders a hierarchical, normative and male-centred culture, *kut* represents an egalitarian, liberal and female-centred culture (37). Accordingly, *kut* culture played a vital role as a way for people, especially women and lower classes in the Choson era, to express their emotions, depressions and presence (44). For example, the rituals of death in Confucianism are limited to the death of the male adult with children. Therefore, in Confucianism, when a son or daughter dies young, the parents have no way to comfort themselves (41-42), so *mudangs* and *kut* act as a consolation to these spirits, standing on the side of parents (43). Accordingly, even though Confucianism is prevalent in society, the custom of *kut* has been continuously conducted in the private and family realm to address people's needs.

In the 19th century, western Christian missionaries began to research *kut*. Most of them seem to not completely understand *kut*, due to their belief or interpretation that *kut* was a 'superstition' and 'anti-Christian' practice that must be suppressed. Nonetheless, their studies demonstrate the popularity of *kut* in the 19th century along with Koreans' strong belief in a variety of deities (Griffis 1895, Hulbert 1906, Jones 1901, Moose 1911, Rockhill 1891, Saunderson 1895).²⁰ For example, Rockhill defines *kut* as a ceremony for exorcising 'sorceresses (*mudangs*)' from the rampant and innumerable devil spirits (Rockhill 1891: 183), while Saunderson considers it as a 'fetishistic' and 'demoniac' custom of Korea. He also mentions the excessive dependence on

²⁰ Koreans have believed that human life is influenced by a variety of invisible beings, ranging from gods to spirits, who are often anthropomorphically conceived; however, numerous Koreans today ignore this belief, due to the normative influence of the belief in the one god of Christianity.

kut (‘a shamanic practice’) and the deep-seated belief in spirits (what he called ‘the malign spirits’) residing in ‘hills, water, air, trees, tigers, leopards, and so on ad infinitum’ (Saunderson 1895: 310-311). Meanwhile, Jones shows a more positive view of Korean spirits and investigates seventeen pantheons of *mudang* (Jones 1901: 40-58). He considers Korean shamanism as a religion in Korea along with Buddhism and Confucianism (37) and illustrates *kut* as ‘spirit worship’ of the ‘grand ceremony of *mudang*’ (47). Underwood also presents a different perspective on Korean shamanistic beliefs and the practice of *kut*. Linking it with the Japanese national religion Shinto, he regards Korean shamanism as an ‘ancient religion’ or ‘the national Korean faith’, which has maintained its influence for a long time (Underwood 1910: 134-135).

Whether Christians regard *kut* as superstition or ancient Korean religion, Koreans have easily accepted the Christian God without resistance since ‘God’ has been translated as ‘하나님 (*hananim*)’ in Korean, which is the same name as the heavenly god of Korean shamanism (Tucker 2011: 255). In addition, some elements of shamanism have permeated into the Korean church: examples of the impact of Korean Shamanism on Korean Christianity include the phenomenon of *kibok-sinang* (seeking blessing),²¹ a fanaticism that overemphasises mysterious personal experiences, and considers disease to be the act of ghosts or spirits (Kim 1994, Seo 2010).

In the late 19th and the early 20th centuries, Koreans experienced drastic change through the influx of other cultures: these included a policy to obliterate Korean culture during the Japanese colonial period in Korea (1910-1945), and the United States Army Military Government period (1945-1948). In Japanese rule, the Japanese government regarded *kut* as being at the root of Koreans’ belief system and culture and therefore selected *kut* as the first custom to be eliminated. Accordingly, *mudangs* were held in great contempt, *kut* was strongly restricted (Chun 2012: 18-19). However, the policy could not continue, because the Japanese realised that Korean shamanism was too deep-rooted to eliminate. Thus, instead, performing *kut* was permitted when *mudangs* enshrined the national god of Japan, *Cheonjodaesin* (Jo 1997: 106-109).

Since independence (1945) and the Korean War (1950-53), South Korea was enormously influenced by policy driven by the United States Army Military Government. The economics

²¹ *Kibok-sinang* is originated from Korean shamanism, indicating temporal faith with the aim of wishing for fortune such as the fulfilment of one's desires and long life, rather than seeking God and his will.

of Capitalism, especially, along with the Protestant ethic and scientific technology, affected the ideology of Korean culture in the 20th century (Lee 2010: 18-19). It has changed the patterns of life and thoughts of Korea in a direction opposite to the lifestyle carried by *kut*. As we briefly have seen the characteristics of *kut* by looking at *hanŭl-kut* (the *kut* for heaven) and *kut* in Choson era, *kut* provides a nature-centred, playful and liberal lifestyle. However, Koreans have drastically cultivated an abstemious lifestyle and rational thinking through engaging in mechanical labour dominated by engineering instead of natural rhythms (Lee 2010: 18). Accordingly, more and more Koreans began to consider their indigenous performance, *kut*, as an old-fashioned culture, superfluous entertainment or superstition that should be excluded, and the interconnection between *kut* and peoples' lives became severely diminished (19).

In addition, since the rapid modernisation of Korea began by Japan and the US, the initial stage of its modernisation has resembled Japanisation and Westernisation; as a result, colonial traces still remain in South Korea. The westernised art education that I mentioned in the Introduction is one such example that I have experienced. The taxonomy of Korean dance – i.e. designating the term according to whether or not it has been modernised by ‘Westernized theatre performance’ – also reveals the phenomenon of referring to westernisation as Korea’s modernisation.²² This reminds me of the post-colonial ideas of distinction and exclusion in Korean dance, which has a risk of offering the negative view that non-westernised Korean performing arts are outdated.

Of course, Korea has achieved remarkable economic growth through modernisation. In less than seventy-three years after gaining independence, South Korea has dramatically changed. However, the problem is that this change has been too fast and involuntary for it to incorporate and communicate with traditional *kut* customs. This is certainly different from Buddhist and

²² Korean dance is usually categorised on the basis of modernisation, with a pre-modernisation dance called ‘Traditional Korean Dance’, and a post-modernisation being ‘Korean Dance’ or ‘Shin Dance’ (new dance). However, the modernization in Korean dance is commonly related to ‘Westernized theatre performance’ (Kong 2003: 225), which means that Korean dance is classified by whether it adopts the Western theatre style or not. Furthermore, the term ‘contemporary dance’ only refers to a dance that applies Euro-American dance techniques. A dance choreographed according to the Korean dance context, such as one that mainly utilises Korean dance skills and wearing a *hanbok* (Korean traditional clothing)-based costume is called ‘*Changjack Dance*’ (Korean creative dance). The taxonomy seems based on the temporal designation, but it rather relies on Western based-stylistic identification, which reveals the postcolonial ideas. For further information, see Kong (2003), who explains the issues raised regarding these terms (especially ‘Korean new dance’ and ‘contemporary dance’), and Kwan (2017), who discusses the complex and multivalent meaning of contemporary dance.

Confucian cultures, which became established over a relatively long period of time. Furthermore, as the modernisation of Korea did not begin in a way it had chosen, this seems to have had the effect of allowing Koreans to maintain traces of colonial rule by encouraging a biased view of Korean tradition. Therefore, I argue that these two problematic events for Korea, namely its colonisation and modernisation, are crucial factors that have hindered Korea's own path towards improving its cultural health, and they continue to exert negative influences on the development of Korea's cultural identity.

The recent government made an effort to protect traditional culture, but this has made Korean tradition become a more rigid, fixed, old-fashioned culture. To counteract the fear that modernisation would make Korea lose its national identity, South Korea's Cultural Heritage Administration (CHA) instituted *the Act for Cultural Heritage Preservation* in 1962 (Jo 2016: 150). The Act is centred on identifying and safeguarding important Korean cultural patrimony, including tangible as well as intangible cultural heritage (ICH) that is defined as 'dramatic, musical, dance, craftsmanship, and other intangible objects that have a significant historical and artistic value for the country'.²³ The unique framework of the act designates 'holders' or 'Living National Treasures' of ICH; these are masters who possess the ability to make or perform ICH.²⁴ The ICH holders have a right to perpetuate ICH by presenting continuous performance and by training successors. In the case of *kut*, several types of *kut*, from *mudang-kut* to *p'ungmul-kut*, are designated as ICH, and thereby receive recognition and financial support from the government.²⁵ This has influenced people's view of *kut* and *mudangs*: for instance, even many Koreans who denigrate *kut* as superstitious have come to acknowledge it as a significant repository of Korean culture.

However, the Act also plays a role in conceptualising ICH as being immutable tradition focused on the past, thus denying its mutable features centred on the present. To illustrate, the central focus of the Act for Cultural Heritage Preservation is identifying the 'archetype or original form (*wonhyeong*)' of ICH, and trying to transmit it in a fixed form, as intangible cultural heritage.

²³ In subsection (2) of section 2 of the Cultural Heritage Protection Laws, 1962.

²⁴ The term 'Living National Treasures' has been commonly used to indicate the 'holders' of the intangible cultural heritage of Korea. It was not formally mentioned in the law, but ratified in March 2016 due to its considerable popularity (Hwang 2017: 44).

²⁵ In Cheju, there is only one *kut* is designated as the National ICH, which is Cheju *Chilmeoridang Yeongdeungkut* (the 31st National ICH). The *kut* I have worked with is *Cheju-k'ün-kut*, referred to as the biggest *kut* of Cheju Island, designated as not national, but the 13th Cheju ICH in 2001.

As it seemed impossible to find the exact original form of mutable ICH, CHA identified the archetype as ‘the oldest form to be inferred’, or ‘the form at the time of designation’ (Han 2006: 568). In this manner, the act included the standard for recognition of the holders as those ‘who can exactly preserve and realize the archetype of ICH’ (Jo 2015: 158).²⁶ However, the concept of the archetype has made ICH increasingly divergent from its original form by reviving it as ‘a certain remembered form’, transmitting ‘this form unchangeably’ (Dronjić 2017: 22). Accordingly, numerous scholars have addressed the risk posed by the concept of archetype,²⁷ which dissipates the liveness and spontaneity of ICH by making holders perform and teach a static tradition, and requires ICH to be preserved and inherited through formalized frameworks (Dronjić 2017, Han 2006, Hwang 2017, Lee 2004, Song 2008).

Given that a total of 268 intangible cultural heritages have been protected by CHA so far (CHA 2018: 1), its influence on traditional Korean performing arts and *kut* cannot be regarded as negligible. I have also felt its impact during the process of learning Korean traditional dance, which had a relatively larger number of holders and successors than *kut*: most students who major in traditional Korean dance work hard to learn and perfectly represent the holder’s performance, in order to become a successor of ICH. For this reason, the process of being certificated as a successor is becoming increasingly competitive, despite the fact that more than 45 Korean traditional performing arts are designated as ICH.²⁸ The more ICH has been preserved in national archives and museums, the more dislocation between ICH and the communities of origin has occurred. ICH tends to lose the locality and sustainability that allows it to live in the communities as a living culture, and the holders and ICH itself are increasingly dependent on government subsidies.²⁹ To make matters worse, it was recently reported that

²⁶ This law lasted for 45 years since 1970 and was amended by the enactment of the Act for Cultural Heritage Preservation in March 2015.

²⁷ CHA advocated the term ‘quintessence (*jeonhyeong*)’ as an alternative to the archetype in 2017, since more serious problems had occurred, such as fabricating the original form of ICH (Han 2006: 569-573). Research on the concept of quintessence is still in its early stage, but there remains a constant debate regarding ICH preservation and finding an alternative system to safeguard ICH (Seo 2016, Hong 2016, Hwang 2017).

²⁸ According to the National Intangible Cultural Heritage Statistics survey conducted by the Cultural Heritage Administration in April 2018, a total of 66 holders and 46 Korean traditional performing arts are designated as ICH.

²⁹ According to the Basic Plan for Conservation and Promotion of Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2017, CHA addressed that the act needs to convert ICH from the holder-centred tradition that has ‘a concept of aid’ for the protection of its original form; instead, aid and protection should be focused on ‘a creative transmission’ in order to achieve sustainability as the ‘entire nation-centred resources’ (CHA 2017: 6).

financial support has become insufficient due to the increasing number of ICH, and some successors are beginning to give up their role due to the difficulty of living (newspim 2018: np). Regarding this crisis, I argue that it is time to move beyond preservation and find an alternative way to ensure that tradition remains mutable and sustainable in communities. Safeguarding should reflect a mutable, living tradition rather than a fossilised one, within a continuous effort to explore its value for the communities over time.

In summary, we have seen how the status of *kut* has changed throughout history: in ancient Korea, *kut* was regarded as an essential ritual of the country, with high prestige. Progressively, through the Samguk era (57 BCE-676 CE), the Koryŏ era (918-1392), and the early Choson era (1392-1800), respect for *kut* gradually diminished under the influence of Buddhism and Confucianism, as well as Christian missionaries. In addition, the impact of Japanese colonial rule and the rapid adoption of western ideologies and political economies led to the dramatic decline of *kut*, as *mudangs* were driven underground. However, *kut* has survived by fusing with other religions and cultures. *Kut* does not reject foreign cultures or beliefs, but rather accepts them without resistance; it survives by indigenising them, permeating them from within. At the same time, *kut* keeps its main essence – the egalitarian, liberal and communal structure, which allows *kut* to continue to serve as a way of consoling and encouraging joy in the life of Koreans beyond their social and gender status. This essential aspect emerges as a reason why Koreans need *kut*.

In the present politically and religiously liberated society of South Korea, one of the main reasons why *kut* is still trivialised as superstitious or old-fashioned is because Koreans have lost time to develop *kut* on its own path. Modernisation, which arrived relatively quickly and arbitrarily from Japanese and US American-led policy, prevents Koreans from gradually digesting it within Korean culture. In addition, the rapid transformation instils the fear of losing Korea's national identity; this has prompted the government to focus on the preservation of the 'archetype' of cultural heritage, based on the Act for Cultural Heritage Preservation. This act provides rescue for venerable ICH that is under the threat of extinction; yet at the same time, this causes ICH to become fossilized as a static tradition centred on the past, which cannot communicate with the present as a living culture. Regarding this, I argue that the safeguarding of *kut* should not solely be achieved through preservation and protection, but also with efforts to enhance its locality and globality by linking it with the changes in its surroundings.

Thus, I will pursue *neo kut* in this research. *Neo kut* is a living *kut*, which reflects its relationship with not only the past but also the present. It would be neither a traditional *kut* nor a contemporary *kut*, but would instead be both a traditional *kut* and contemporary *kut* – because it exists between the two. This *kut* will keep the mutability and liveness of tradition through continuous interactions with the present; this means that *kut* will be alive, mutable and sustainable in society.

With the aim of creating *neo kut*, this research will attempt to decode digital technologies' relationship with Korean shamanism; such technologies are one of the most influential communication codes in the contemporary culture of South Korea, and their use in the performing arts has developed new areas of the performance field. In addition, it will find a way to fuse the digital technologies with the technologies of *kut* – this being the cherished tradition retained by *mudangs* over a long history. One might consider that this ancient technology of *kut* is incompatible with a digital technology that is seemingly grounded in the scientific and logical thinking of western civilisation. However, I believe that the effective combination of *kut* with modern media could be a key factor in accommodating *kut* within the present. This is because, as we have seen in the history of *kut*, a nexus between *kut* and newly adopted cultures was one of the key ways in which *mudangs* and *kut* have survived the impact of other religions throughout history: a *mudang* was always an early adapter who was sufficiently astute in adopting new mediums to *kut* without losing the value of their tradition. In this world where everything is now rapidly changing by evolving digital technology and globalisation, no less important than preserving the traditional values of *kut* would be supporting *kut* performers and *mudangs* to communicate with and apply technical images in *kut*.

Furthermore, the research will avoid reinterpreting *kut* through the lens of digital performance with regard to the past cultural identity issues, with which most Koreans have struggled due to the history of indiscriminately applying western culture to Korean culture. Consequently, my use of the term 'neo' does not mean to a new, modernised *kut* through digital and cultural fusion. Rather, *neo kut* entails the notion that *kut* is already contemporaneous, exploring the necessary elements it must contain for ecstatic space, without any temporal or cultural distinctions.

To achieve this, all practices of this research will be conducted through a collaboration between a *shimjang* and five *kut* performers. By opening up the space for *kut* and digital performance,

we will explore both practices to generate an ecstatic space through strong and intense physical and theoretical dialogues. As a *kut* performer and digital practitioner who use the languages of both *kut* and digital technology, I will assist as an interpreter to enable the performers to communicate with the world of digital performance. Just as *mudangs* represent their aesthetics through their technology of using traditional media such as paper art, natural lights and rituals, my aim is to lead the *shimbang* and *kut* performers to exploit a digital medium as a useful tool to emphasise and extend the aesthetics of *kut*; this will thereby offer an exploration of how *kut* can communicate and integrate with society as a living culture in this digital era.

1.2. Identification of *Kut*

Having discussed the history of *kut* to explain the contrasting views on *kut* and its influence on my research, it seems necessary to identify more clearly what *kut* is. According to the history of *kut* and my experiences of living and working as a Korean artist, it seems obvious that *kut* is deeply embedded in Korean culture and art. However, relatively little theoretical research has studied *kut* in the performance context. Therefore, it is difficult to find a proper or even general definition of *kut* in the performance discipline. To explain why it is difficult to identify *kut* and why it is necessary to explore in the performance context, the following will examine several core definitions of *kut* that have emerged to date, before delving into *kut*'s key features.

Since the late 19th century *kut* has received attention from researchers. Despite the missionaries' recognition of *kut* as superstition, several Korean scholars re-identified *kut* as a worship or practice of *shingyo* (the native and national religion of Korea), which adopted the nationalism of *Tangun* (the legendary founder of *Gochoson*, the first ever Korean kingdom) or 'Tangun culture' (Kim 1914, Nan 1885, Park 1915, Choi 1925, Shin 2014). They have asserted that *shingyo* is an indigenous religion, founded by *Tangun* in 2333 BCE, which is inherent in Korean society. Reviving the custom of *shingyo* aimed to recover sovereignty from Japan, as well as inheriting and preserving the national spirit of Korea (Kim 2012: 13-14). Although Korean scholars' efforts made people rethink *kut* as being a valuable part of the culture of Korea, they only investigated *kut* as confined to religious discipline. Especially, Choi Nam-Seon (1890-1957) tended to clarify the origin of Korean shamanism from a philological and a religio-anthropological perspective, in his *Bulhammonhwaron* (a study of *Bulham* culture); he proposed that Asian culture centred on the *Tangun* culture of Korea (quoted in Kim 2012: 20-21). He also described *mudangs* as shamans and referred to their customs as *Shalmangyo* (the

religion of shamans) (Choi 1927: 2-4). Despite the rise of religious studies on the interpretation of Korean shamanism, considerable doubt remains. Even if *kut* played a religious role for ancient Koreans and represents Koreans' belief system, it seems difficult to define *kut* as the practice of Korea's religion since a *kut* does not meet the standard institutionalised system of religions today. For example, *kut* has no single god, no dogma, no organisation, no sacred book, and no recognised leader (Kim 2009, Choi 2005).

On the other hand, some have defined *kut* as 'the activities of *mudangs*' or 'the rituals of *mudangs*', since a Korean folklorist, Lee Neung Hwa (1869-1943) initially applied the term *musok* (or *mu*-culture), highlighting 'mu' of *mudang*, to Korean shamanism (quoted in Chun 2012: 20). The boom of Asian shamanism, which emerged as a result of Japanese Asianism following World War I (Saasler 2008: 135), supported the cultural universality of pan-Asianism. Thus, several scholars attempted to highlight 'mudang and their activity' as Korean shamanism and sought to explore the correlation between the shamanism of Korea and that of Northeast Asia (Kim 2012: 18). Consequently, *kut* has been explored in terms of the shamanic culture or *mu*-culture, rather than the *shingyo* of Korea. For example, Lee named 'mudang and their activities' and 'musok (*mu* custom)' in his *Chosonmusokgo* (the study of *musok* of Choson), revealing his idea that Korean shamanism stands for a 'deep-faith' rather than *shingyo* (Chun 2012: 16). Lee points out the importance of *musok* as a root of Korean identity regarding the *Tangun* myth, asserting that, 'There is almost no way to wholly understand the belief, ideology, social history, and origin of the religion of Korea without researching *musok*' (Lee 1927: 72). Indeed, 'musok' has been used by many Korean scholars as an official term to indicate Korean shamanism in English (Chang 2002: 11). Accordingly, the majority of studies on *mu*-culture have defined *kut* as the activities of *musok* performed by *mudangs*.

Nevertheless, this definition seems insufficient to describe *kut*, as it does not take into account diverse types of *kut*: *musok* literally means *mudangs*' activities, which would not cover other various types of *kut* in Korea that are performed without *mudang*. The *kut* performed by *mudangs*, briefly speaking *mudang-kut*, is only one type of *kut*, but innumerable *kut* are performed by *kut* performers and villagers. For instance, there are diverse types of *p'ungmul-kut* – the ritual musical *kut* performed by *p'ungmul-pe*, a group of people who specialise in percussion, dance and singing (see Fig.3). They are usually held by the village community or an assembly of *p'ungmul* performers for the purpose of wishing for good luck and strengthening

ties among villagers (Baek et al. 1987: 132). *xc* includes the set of four main Korean traditional percussion instruments, diverse dancing and drumming rituals and *mugu* such as ritual flags (huge portable flags), which are also the main elements of *mudang-kut* (Park and Moon 2011: 247). This *kut* is performed in almost all areas of Korea, with various names such as *nogak*, *pankut* and *dure-kut* (Baek et al. 1987: 139).



Fig.3. *P'ungmul-kut* (or *pan-kut*) that I performed with *kut* performance group, MARO at Cheju Culture and Art Centre in 2011(left); Cheju Folklore Museum in 2009 (right). © MARO.

Another significant type of *kut* in Korea is *talnori-kut*, a theatrical *kut* performed by *talnori-pe*, a group of masked performers. This *kut* is held at the request of village people around every one to five years. It features several ludic performances, including dance-drama, mask-drama, ribaldry and musical performance (see Fig.4) (Lim 2006: 107-108). As in *mudang-kut*, the aim of *talnori-kut* is to provide a humorous ceremony to please the village gods and to lessen social tension or conflicts by satirising and ridiculing particular characters, such as the nobility and apostate monks (Kim 1994, Lim 2006).



Fig.4. *Hahoe byeolsingut talnori*, one of *talnori-kut* in Hahoe, North Gyeongsang Province of Korea designated as an important intangible cultural asset No. 69. © hahoe.or.kr.

Regardless of these diverse types of *kut*, the *kut* which is generally known as the Korean *kut* would be the *mudang-kut* that mainly has two types depending on the characteristics of individual *mudangs*. One is *kangshin-mu kut*, led by charismatic *mudangs* who become socially authorised *mudangs* after having *shinnaerim-kut*, a ceremony of rebirth as the mediator of gods by removing *shinbyŏng* (the illness caused by gods) and empowering them to control the supernatural beings (Lee 2008: 179-180); another is *Sesup-mu kut* is directed by hereditary *mudangs* who have inherited their *kut* authority through family bloodlines, and is conducted by hereditary artistic practices without the spiritual abilities of *kangshin-mu kut* (Howard 1998, Yang 1988).

The spiritual abilities of charismatic *mudangs* can be identified as a sort of possession, sharing their body with spirits or gods.³⁰ During the possession, *mudangs* are not to be reluctantly overpowered by spirits or gods, but to willingly take a role as a mediator and communicate with the guests in control for the sake of the reconciliation between spiritual beings and guests (Sorgenfrei 2010: 48-50). These special abilities are used during *kut* to heal deep sorrows, wish for good luck, and to console the dead and bereaved (Hogarth 1998b: 48). One of the possession-induced ceremonies might be *Jackdu-kut*, a ritual of riding razor-sharp blades called *jackdu* (see Fig.5). A *mudang* stands up and walks on, or sometimes performs a dance on *jackdu* blades. As with shamans in Asian shamanism, where spirit management is the vital ability for shamans, *kangshin-mu kut* would be a *kut* that identifies with the definition of *mu-culture* and shamanism studies. This type of *kut* is mostly found in Seoul, the northern area, and Cheju Island (Yang 1988: 22).³¹

Another major type of *mudang-kut* is *sesup-mu kut*, prevalent in the southern part of Korea. Interestingly, the *mudangs* of *sesup-mu kut* do not correspond to the identification of shamans

³⁰ One of crucial differences between Korean *mudangs* and proto-typical Siberian shaman is that they are not supposed to do a trance – the soul has a spiritual journey, dissociated from the body. They are rather possessed by an invisible being at certain moment (Son 2016, Walraven 2008). Their possession is intermittent; invisible beings speak through their mouth for one moment and *mudangs* speak for the next moment. It repeats a constant coming and going rather than maintains a stable possession condition.

³¹ *Shimbangs*, or *mudangs* of Cheju Island have the mixture of *Sesep-mu* (heredity *kut*) and *Kanshin-mu* (charismatic *kut*): As *sesep-mu*, *shimbangs* have transmitted their shamanic professions by handing down divine *mugu* called *myŏngdu*. As *kangshin-mu*, they suffer *shinbyung* (a physical and mental pain that is not subject to medical treatments) prior to becoming *shimbangs*. They can able to heal *shinbyung* and be empowered to control supernatural beings through *shin-kut*, the descent of god rituals (Moon and Moon 2011: 6-14).

in shamanism since they have no specific spiritual power such as a trance. Hereditary *mudangs* do not perform spirit possession, but they are extremely proficient in artistic performances of *kut*, having carried on the family *mudang* profession since childhood. Accordingly, *sesup-mu kut* is more artful, playful and splendid, and performed for beneficial changes. And *sesup-mu mudangs* play a crucial role in Korean society, not only as spiritual leaders but also as professional artists with their artistic skills (Sim 2011: 215). Consequently, the definition of *kut* in Korean shamanism and *musok* can only be applied to *kangshin-mu kut*, and does not cover other types of *kut*. Given *sesep-mu kut* and the varieties of *kut* practised by people who are not *mudangs* in Korea, it seems inadequate to interpret a *kut* solely as *mudangs*' rituals or activities.



Fig.5. Charismatic *mudang* Sunbi Lee performs *Jakdu-kut*, a dancing ritual of entering trance (left); riding *jackdo* blades (right) in *p'yöngsan sonorüm kut*. © Yungkyu Park.

Considering different types of *kut* in Korea, recent studies have advocated comprehensive and unbiased research into *kut*. *Ethnic and Kut* (1987), published by cultural activists of the Society of *Minjok-kut*, is perhaps one of the noticeable attempts to spark off a more ontological and comprehensive understanding of *kut*. It raises the question: ‘What does *kut* mean to us?’ They argue that previous *kut* studies tend towards a religious and shamanistic approach, as a result of nationalism. Instead, they try to investigate and introduce *kut* by focusing on ‘*kut*-self’³² in a theoretical as well as a practical way (quoted in Kim 2003: 117-118). Since 1990, the activities of the Society of *minjok-kut* have been continued by the Korean Historical Folklore Institution,

³² The idea of viewing the *kut*-self indicates ontologically and intrinsically defining *kut*, avoiding any variable and contingent way of interpreting *kut* throughout history based on the perspective of shamanistic, religious and *musock* studies.

with the aim of expanding the research boundary from *kut* to the customs and life-history of the *minjŏng*, which means ‘common people’. This movement has led to academic publications regarding diverse styles of Korean *kut*, especially the *p'ungmul-kut* and *maül-kut* (a *kut* performed by villagers) (118-119).

Even with studies concerning the *kut*-self in the late 20th century, defining *kut* has still remained a complex and unresolved issue. Although there are alternative perspectives for defining *kut*, emphasising its linguistic, socio-anthropological or cultural functions, they seem not to offer a convincing answer. In the field of etymology, tracing the root of the term ‘*kut*’ remains highly controversial as *kut* does not have an equivalent Chinese character, unlike many Korean words. For instance, *kut* is defined in different ways: ‘an act [for] solving the problems of misfortune’ by taking the meaning of *kut* out of a pure Korean *kujun nal* (unfortunate days) (Lee 1927: 47); ‘a performance [to] bring happiness and good fortune’ by tracing the origin of *kut* from the Tungusian ‘*Kutu*’, the Mongolian ‘*qutug*’ and the Turkish ‘*qut*’, all of which mean ‘happiness’ or ‘good fortune’ (Hogarth Kim 1998, Ramstedt 1949); ‘a ritual [to] bring ‘good’ through ‘god’ by combining two English words, ‘good’ and ‘god’ (Jo 2005b: np); ‘a spectacle or something to enjoy’, brought the meaning from a pure Korean word, *kukyunggeori* (Yim 1990: 274).

From the socio-anthropological and cultural viewpoint, a director of the *Kut* Research Institute, Heung-Ju Park, asserts that ‘*kut* is life’ because *kut* coincides with all single as well as various notable milestones in a Korean’s life (Park 2011: 88). A professor of folklore study, Jae-hae Lim, describes all activities concerning *kut* with the term ‘*kut* culture’ to highlight the cultural aspect of *kut*, reporting the fact that the term *musok* is only made for scholars’ academic research (Lim 2006: 70-71). He also asserts that understanding *kut* in the light of ‘*kut* culture’ provides us with insight to interpret both ancient culture and modern culture, as well as predicting the future culture of Korea (Lim 2006: 67). *Kut* is also referred to as ‘*kut nori*’, which literally means *kut* play, with respect to its ludic functions (Lee and Yoon 2004: 289).

Research on *kut* has also been undertaken by a small group of western scholars, with regard to its cultural, aesthetic features. The books *Shamans, Housewives, and Other Restless Spirits* by Laurel Kendall and *Ancestor Worship and Korean Society* by Roger Janelli and Downee Yim identify *kut* in the ethnographical approach. Notably, they focus on *kut* as a female-centred culture, revealing how *kut* is mainly performed by females in the male-centred society of Korea

in the 1970s. Kendall explores the relationships between the woman and *kut* in Enduring Pine Village of South Korea in 1976. Describing the social functions of Korean shamanism by comparing the women's and men's role in *kut*, she stresses woman's power and status in *kut*, addressing that Korean shamans and housewives perform practically equivalent tasks, managing the same spirits (Kendall 1987: 166-169). Janelli and Yim explain *kut* as representative ancestor rituals of South Korea. They also point out *kut* as the Mother lined and female-centred practices (149), showing opposed ideas to Korean society that strictly adhered to agnatic principles (Janelli and Yim 1982: 54). In terms of how female-centred rituals of Korea stem from handling conflicts within a male-centred culture, their investigations reveal the life and hardship of women and their need of *kut*.

To date, there has been minimal research that defines *kut* in the performance context. I have found one such definition from a Korean scholar, Ae-Hyun Lee: She proposes to identify *kut* as 'natural performance' due to its quality of being spontaneous and natural, in contrast with western stylised performances, which are often generated on the proscenium stage (Lee 2008: 169). In addition, Daniel A. Kister emphasises *kut* as a shamanistic ritual drama, based on extensive field studies of *kut* in diverse areas. In his publication *Korean Shamanist Ritual: Symbols and Dramas of Transformation*, he identifies 'comedy', 'chaos', 'harmony' and 'dramatic structure' as the key aesthetics of *kut* drama (Kister 1997: 135-151).

In brief, since the late 19th century, *kut* has been defined in different ways according to the diverse perspectives of researchers. For example, *kut* has been studied in terms of 'the practice of worship of Korean religion' by Korean ethnic and nationalistic scholars, and 'the practice of Korean *mudangs*' or '*musok (mu-custom)*' by Korean anthropologists with an increasing interest in Asian shamanism. These studies have focused on researching *kut* as being in the field of religion or *musok (mu-customs)*. However, a problem with this approach is that it fails to meet the standard definitions of religion today or to cover a number of *kut* that are performed without *mudangs*. With the increasing interest in '*kut* itself', several new definitions of *kut* have been proposed in relation to the cultural, linguistic and socio-anthropological views, which seem more plausible for understanding *kut*, but are still too broad, symbolic or diverse. More importantly, research on *kut* in the field of performance studies seems relatively young and, as such, is still establishing its basic tenets.

As a researcher in the performing arts, the present stage of the study of *kut* makes me feel a need for a more diverse and intensive attempt to define *kut* within the framework of performance studies. It is obviously necessary to research *kut* as ‘*kut*-self’ beyond the religious perspective, but it seems difficult to understand *kut* in isolation from Korean shamanism or *musok*, since there are numerous types of *kut* performed by *mudangs* and most *kut* form part of a similar shamanistic belief system. Having performed *kut* for six years, I am aware that most *kut* has a philosophy akin to that of Korean shamanism. This thought has become clearer after interviewing Korean researchers who have explored *kut* via a number of field studies. A Korean folklorist and *kut* practitioner, Moo-Byung Moon, mentions that, broadly speaking, variations of *kut* can be regarded as shamanic rituals. According to him, in general, all *kut* practitioners share the shamanic and artistic beliefs of Korean shamanism. The only difference is that a *kut* performed by hereditary *mudangs* or performers is more focused on artistic performance, while charismatic *mudangs* place a greater emphasis on spiritual rituals (Moon 2015: np). In addition, a cultural anthropologist, Hŭng-yun Cho, asserts that all *kut* have the same roots, stating that ‘the root of Korean *kut* is the *kut* of charismatic *mudangs* who can connect between the human and spiritual world, and in the old days there were maybe charismatic *mudangs* in *p’ungmul-kut* or other *kut*’ (Cho 2015: np).

Their interviews lead me to consider that all types of *kut* are a Korean shamanistic ritual since they originate from the same root and still contain an equivalent shamanic philosophy. And the reason why there are many types of *kut* performed without *mudangs* may be that many gave up *mudangs*’ works, or started to work as artists, in order to hide that they were *mudangs*, who had historically been persecuted. The problem with Korean shamanist studies begins with confining the definition of *mudangs* only to charismatic *mudangs* who have spiritual abilities, which leads to a definition of *kut* as the ritual of spiritual *mudangs*. This problem will be discussed further in Chapter 3, regarding ecstatic technologies, which are widely understood as the key technologies of a shaman, within the concept of *ecstatic space* in my research.

1.3. Understanding *Kut*

In the performance context, several Korean folklorists address *kut* as an artistic performance, emphasising its theatrical aspect (Kister 1997, Lee 2008, Sim 2011). However, as I have mentioned above, it is insufficient to understand *kut* only in the scope of artistic practices beyond its shamanic ritual aspect. *Kut* is a style of performance entangled with various

shamanic, ritualistic, and artistic elements, unable to be understood solely by either a ritual or performance perspective due to its hybridised and indeterminate features.

To explain, Richard Schechner, one of the founders of Performance Studies, suggests the basic polarity is between 'efficacy' and 'entertainments' (Schechner 2003: 130). In his view, efficacy and entertainment are not total opposites but lie at the ends of a continuum. Although there is no pure efficacy or pure entertainment, a performance can be called either ritual or theatre depending on the degree to which it tends towards efficacy or entertainment. According to Schechner's continuum, the characteristics of an efficacy (ritual) and entertainment (theatre) are as follows: the former tends to aim for results; connect the audience to an absent other; operates with a sense of timelessness; perform with a performer in possession or trance; make audiences participate and believe; discourage criticism and demonstrate collective creativity. Whereas, the latter tends to seek fun; perform only for those present; emphasises now; perform with the performer is aware of themselves or in control; let audience observe and appreciate the performance; encourages criticism and highlight individual creativity (130-131).

However, in the case of *kut*, the above distinctions are mostly blurred, as *kut* provides entertainment during the performance, but also aims for efficacy. The broad range of *kut* shows the combined features of *kut*: embodying both ritual and theatrical elements and both efficacious and entertaining functions (Park 2011, Lee 1981), *kut* has a strong rituality which is intimately connected with the life of communities, and it is usually performed for desired results (Kim *et al.* 2010: 99). During happy life-events (births, weddings, etc.), people hold a *kut* to celebrate them, to share the joy with others and wish for good luck. For sad events (conflict, funerals, etc.) or difficulties (sickness, intense labour, community works, etc.) that cannot be faced alone, a *kut* is performed for beneficial change and therapeutic effects (Park 2004, 2011). At the same time, *kut* is usually accompanied by diverse genres of performing arts: theatrical elements, songs, dances, ritual activities, drumming, acrobatics and chants (Kister 1997, Lee 2008, Sim 2011).

As *kut* features of entertainment and efficacy are intertwined with each other, it seems untenable to understand or define the aesthetic of *kut* in the ritual or the theatre context. In performance filed today, most aesthetic analyses and reviews are based on the western classification of the arts, a *kut*, within its dynamic and mixed nature, often wanders around the dominant aesthetic

standards. This is based on my experiences of participating in international festivals such as the Edinburgh Fringe Festival and with the Association of Performing Arts Professionals (APAP) with my practice. I have noticed that most festivals select and evaluate works using established aesthetics and critical notions based on the western classification of genres, such as dance, music, theatre and art. However, *kut* cannot be understood solely as one of these genres of art; my works based on *kut* are inappropriately viewed from an established notion of dance, theatre, ritual or music. Different reviewers come to see the performance according to their chosen genre, and my works have been divergently reviewed depending on whether a reviewer was dance, theatre or music related. This indicates the absence of an appropriate aesthetic to use in criticising work like *kut* which challenges an audience to cross boundaries and can make people easily marginalise or misinterpret its hybrid aesthetic.

The problem was the fact that the western classification of arts often shows a lacuna in defining *kut*. Thus, I would argue that it is crucial to understand its hybridised aesthetics to identify *kut*. *Kut* performers and *shimbangs* have always had comprehensive art training, and do not practically distinguish rituals from arts. It was the influence of the western culture of Korea in the 19th century to classify the genre for the specialisation of arts. However, before that, *kut* had developed well within its hybrid characteristics, exerting a significant influence on the development of Korean traditional performing arts and culture.

Just as *kut* does, my works will be practically presented here as either an ‘artistic ritual’ or a ‘ritualistic art’, highlighting not only the shamanic ritualistic but also artistic features of *kut*. Given this, the following section examines the core features and aesthetics of *kut* to offer a better understanding. Based on theoretical research and my experiences of performing *kut*, Korean shamanic notion of spirits and artistry will be discussed. It will help to identify a shamanistic philosophy and aesthetic of *kut* and an understanding of the interrelationship between performativity and rituality in *kut*.

1.3.1. The Shamanic Nature of *Kut*

In order to grasp its embedded shamanistic philosophy, I will now explain the spirituality of *kut*. Korean shamanism is strongly intertwined with animism, Taoism and Buddhism. Since ancient times, Koreans have believed that all creatures have spirits, souls or *anima* (in Latin), with which humans may interact for good or ill. Since this belief has always been prevalent in

Korea, most scholars would say that Korean shamanism is the primitive or archaic religion of Korea (Cho 2008, Kim 2008, Lim 2008, Ryu 2008, Walraven 2008). Koreans believe that not only living things but also inert objects such as trees, rocks, wind, mountains and houses have spirits (Baker 2008: 19). In this animistic perspective, it can be concluded that spirits are a part of the human world, and it is unwise to ignore them. Korean shamanism can be distinguished from animism in the way that it pursues a mutual interaction with spirits, aiming to create harmony between nature and people, with respect for the spiritual world (Baker 2008: 20). According to Korean shamanism, human beings are an integral part of nature, living with the rhythm of nature (Hahm 1998: 61).

Notwithstanding that this belief has been on the wane with the influence of monotheism and the modernisation of Korea since the 19th century, it still endures within the practices of *kut*. Within respect for spirituality, the concept of harmony between nature and humans is taken for granted in *kut*. For example, one of the most crucial parts of *Cheju-kut* is *ponp'uri*, a shamanic epic regarded as the archetype of *kut* (Cho 2014: 310), usually recited by *shimbangs* (*Cheju mudangs*). This shamanic epic explains the origin and history of gods, revealing the philosophy of *kut* that humans are a part of nature, living with gods and spirits (Moon 1998: 15). *Cheju* people mythically accept that there are 1,800 gods, such as gods of winds, mountains, harvest, and so on. It is *shimbangs*' central role to recite a great many lines of this epic, normally taking one to two hours for just one of more than five hundred epics. In *ponp'uri*, respect for the spirits of nature is revealed and delivered over a long period through *kut* (Chang 1998, Moon and Moon 2011).

The symbolic ritual objects of *kut*, which are referred to as *mugu*, are another example of the concept of the harmony between humans and the spirits of nature. According to the Korean shamanic belief system, people can communicate with invisible beings if there is a physical medium for them to utilise as their bodies (Lee 2015: 116). Just as a *shimbang*'s body becomes a medium for gods to interact with, numerous types of *mugu* are applied in a *kut* as a spiritual window or the body of gods and spirits, to let these invisible beings participate in the *kut* and to communicate with them. Thus, *mugu* plays a role in guiding metaphysical elements as well as audiences from the secular space to the sacred space. For example, ritual banners, *gi*, utilised in almost all *kut*, are regarded as essential symbolic objects that connect humans and heaven. These ritual banners represent gods and nature and are used as a medium to connect with the

heavenly world (Park and Moon 2011: 247-248). The colours are displayed according to Obang-sak, the five colours that represent nature (Kim et al. 2007: 360). *Kime*, shamanic paper crafts embodying the symbolic systems of *kut* and respect for the gods, also supports the creation of the imaginary and symbolic world of spirits, playing the role of the divinity's body in *kut*. As *kime* sway in the wind during *kut*, the stage seems to turn into an imaginary space where gods, nature and people can meet together (Moon 2008, 2011). *Mugu* and its design features will be discussed further in Chapter 4.

As the root of *kut* is a shamanic ritual directed by *mudangs*, liminal beings who connect humans to gods, *kut* is a ritual the philosophy of which seeks understanding of the connection between the spiritual and the mundane world. If a shamanic epic, *ponp'uri*, reveals the shamanic belief system with regard to spirituality, creating and presenting *mugu* in *kut* would be an essential process used practically to connect with the spiritual world. The reason that Koreans try to communicate with the invisible world through *kut* is to create a change in their lives. In Korean shamanism, one of the biggest causes of misfortunes in life is people's deep grudge and pent-up sorrow, as well as spirits', such as gods of nature, ancestor gods, and souls of the dead. To allow a release of such resentment, a *shimbang* opens the space where invisible beings are invited to play, eat, talk, dance and sing together through various rituals.

This may lead to the question of how *shimbang* and *kut* performers can connect with these invisible beings. To understand this, it seems worthwhile to examine what 'spirits' are in the view of Korean shamanism or the understanding of *shimbangs*. In Korea, spirits are referred to using specific Korean words appropriate to the individual case such as *nŏk*, *yŏnghon*, *yŏng*, or *honback*; but, the most inclusive and frequently used term in *kut* is *nŏk*. In Encyclopedia of Korean Folk Culture, *nŏk* is defined as a 'the aura, force or substance dwelling in one's body to sustain his or her life' (Chun 2016: np). Although this definition seems to correspond to the western concept of spirits, soul, ghosts or apparitions, *shimbangs* carry a clearer and more complex explanation of *nŏk*. In *kut*, it is believed that *nŏk* does not disappear after death, and it is also not always confined to the body even when a person is alive.³³ Therefore, though *nŏk* is not visible, it is expressed in *kut* as a tangible and concrete object using *kime* and other shamanic materials and treated like a person, being invited to play, eat and talk.

³³ In Korean shamanism, it is regarded that a person becomes sick or stunned when a soul escapes, and death occurs when a soul that has escaped does not return (Chun 2016: np).

Borrowing the perspective of Asian medicine and philosophy, some interpret the concept of spirits in Korean shamanism as a cluster of *ki* (energy, mental vigour) (Jensen et al. 2003: 53) and a collective *shin-ki* in Korean shamanism (Lee 2015: 116). The universe contains spirits whose function is represented by *ki*,³⁴ which is described as flowing and circulating energy, whether in human bodies, artworks, natural environments or space (Jensen et al. 2003: 42-43). According to Han-gi Choi, an important 19th century Korean philosopher addressing *ki* based on western philosophy and science, the universe is full of *ki*, which has the following ethical system: vitality or liveliness(活) – activity(動) – circulation(運) – transformation(化) (Lee 2010: 499).³⁵ The agent of the movement of *ki* is *shin-ki*, ‘numinous *ki*’ (494). *Shin-ki* produces ‘a visceral feeling’, and also functions to embrace all kinds of human sensory perceptions, such as visual, haptic, verbal, aural, olfactory and kinaesthetic senses (495). Lee asserts that *shin-ki* is a crucial ability that human beings have achieved to a greater extent than other animals (494).

Interpreting the artistic aspect, the manifestation of *shin-ki* via the highest joy of the arts is often referred to as *shinmyǒng*. Thus, the interconnection between *kut* and spirits can be more precisely described by an explanation of *shinmyǒng* (Chae 2010: 57). Over the years, *shinmyǒng* has received much attention from scholars as one of the essential elements of *kut*. Indeed, some Korean scholars have defined *kut* as the *shinmyǒng* performance (Lee 2010, Lim 2006, Park 2011). In *kut*, *shinmyǒng* is mainly categorised into two types, according to the ways of interpreting the Sino-Korean *shin* (神) of *shinmyǒng* (神明). By understanding *shin* as a phantom, god or divinity, *shinmyǒng* is referred to as interactions with supernatural beings such as during a trance of *mudangs* (Kim 1994: 102). On the other hand, when interpreting *shin* as mind, based on neo-Confucian notions, *shinmyǒng* means ‘the state of the dynamic operation of the lucid and awakened mind’ (Joo 2006: 473). This latter *shinmyǒng* can be interpreted as being a liminal state of mind generated by the highest joy of the arts, which is often shown to *kut* performers or *sesup-mu mudang* during their artistic performance. Thus, both the spiritual communication with gods at the liminal state and the manifestation of *shin-ki* during the dance

³⁴ Given that *ki* appears in common Korean words, including *kam-ki* (cold), *dae-ki* (the energy or air of sky), *ki-boon* (emotions), and *ki-woon* (the energy of body), *ki* can be defined as a sort of invisible energy associated with our mental states, diseases, emotions and personalities (Jensen et al. 2003: 50).

³⁵ According to Choi's well-known book *The Study of Ki*, *ki* is defined as *Hwal-Dong-Woon-Hwa* (活動運貨); *Hwal* means *Saeng Ki* (生氣): life, *Dong* is *Jinjak* (振作): activity, *Woon* is *Juseon* (周旋): circulation, and *Hwa* is *Byuntong* (變通): transformation.

or music of *kut* is related to *shinmyǒng*. Based on these two interpretations, *shinmyǒng* can be identified as a certain embodied state achieved through *shin-ki*.

An interview with a master *shimbang*, Soon Sil Seo – a president of the Society for the Preservation of *Cheju-k'ŭn-kut*³⁶ and one of my practice research collaborators – made me realise the importance of *shinmyǒng* in relation to the spirituality of *kut*. She mentioned that living with the rhythm of spirits is the main duty of the shaman's life, as well as the major purpose of *kut*. According to her, *kut*'s way of curing a mental problem is to let a patient feel *shinmyǒng* through shamanic dance and music: by dancing in a sweat to shamanic music for many days, sick people drive out bad spirits and enter into a deep state of immersion, which leads them to their unconscious realm or sometimes to interact with their deceased ancestors or family members. After this vigorous activity, a deep physical and mental relaxation follows, allowing the patients to feel comfortable. Soon Sil Seo also underlined the importance of *shinmyǒng* in the case of highly dynamic and turbulent *p'ungmul-kut*, or a *kut* performed for several days by hereditary *mudangs*: she said that if *kut* performers or hereditary *mudangs* do not feel *shinmyǒng*, it is physically almost impossible for them to carry out the *kut* for a long time, as it involves dynamic ritual movements (Seo 2014: np). *Kut*'s way of curing people based on *shinmyung* is also theoretically demonstrated by a Korean shamanism researcher Yeoung Guem Lee. He argues that *shin-ki* is spiritual energy, which is uncovered as one of two types, 'saeng-ki (vigorous ki)' and 'sal-ki (malignant ki)' (Lee 2015: 118). *Shinmyǒng* ritual is a method of restoring and renewing *saeng-ki* to remove *sal-ki* that makes people ill, depressed or exhausted (120).

Essentially, from the perspective of Korean shamanism, all creatures, whether animate or inanimate, are assumed to have spirits. These spirits are understood to be not only divinities (or supernatural beings) but also collective energy, force or *shin-ki*. By listening and talking to the invisible elements, Korean shamans aim to unite the entangled threads between people's internal and external elements, as well as among people, society, the natural environment and the universe. One of the best examples to describe the connection between *kut* and spirits would be *shinmyǒng*, the liminal state of embodying a certain spirit or *shin-ki*. By associating spirits

³⁶ *Cheju-k'ŭn-kut*, which literally means the biggest *kut* of Cheju Island, is directed by master *shimbangs* based on the inherited custom of Cheju shamanism. This *kut* was designated as the 13th Cheju Intangible Cultural Heritage on 16 August 2001 (Moon and Moon 2011: 5-7)

with *shinmyǒng*, reviving the vitality of *shin-ki* and extirpating deleterious *ki*, a *kut* heals people's illness and interacts with souls. Since the shamanic ritual music and dances of *kut* are an agent of *shinmyǒng*, it seems necessary to carefully examine the artistry of *kut*.

1.3.2. The Artistry of *Kut*

Kut is always accompanied by artistic practices such as music, dance and theatrical elements. Especially in the case of *sesup-mu*'s *kut*, *p'ungmul-kut* and *talnori-kut*, which are not performed with a charismatic *mudang*, theatrical elements are more dominant. *Kut* performers deem that their shamanic abilities, including *shinmyǒng*, are closely related to their artistic ability. Therefore, most *shimbangs* and *kut* performers have trained in their artistic practices for a long time, even devoting their life to the arts in order to achieve a respectable level of artistry and performance skills.³⁷ There are some examples in *kut* that demonstrate a strong tie with the arts: *Chogong-ponp'uri*, a mythical epic illustrating the story of the ancestor *shimbangs*, indicates a deep association between *kut* and artistic practices (Moon 2005: 32). According to *Jetbugi Three Brothers* in *Chogong-ponp'uri*, it is said that the god of *shimbang* and the god of music became sworn brothers through the ritual ceremony of passing through both sides of their mother god's underwear. This myth implies the Cheju people's belief that *kut* should be performed by the embodiment of *shimbangs* and music (Moon 2005: 33). Additionally, the Sino-Korean *mu* (巫) of *mudang* (巫堂) represents an intimate connection between a ritual dance and Korean shamans. In the pictograph of *mu* (巫), the two horizontal lines at the top and bottom symbolise heaven and earth, with a central vertical line uniting them, and on either side are human beings (Sorgenfrei 2010: 42): this implies a shaman dancing in the air (Hogarth 1999, Moon 2005) to mediate between the mundane and spiritual worlds (Kim 1981, Walraven 2000). In this vein, it seems crucial that the Korean *mudang* is one whose dance links the material and spiritual worlds (Sorgenfrei 2010: 46).

This intimate connection between arts and *mudangs* prompts the following questions: What is the artistry of *kut*? How does a Korean shaman define it? Does *kut* have culturally specific

³⁷ As I had an intensive training process to perform *kut* in Cheju, several documents show that *mudangs* in other regions also undertake a strong training: Lee addresses that it requires at least three years of training to become a professional *mudangs* in general (Lee 2008: 178-181), while Yang mentions that hereditary *mudangs* learn their craft from an early age and spend a considerable length of time to train the imperative things a *mudang* does including, singing, playing music, preparing ritual food and stage settings (Yang 1988: 22).

principles of artistry? Based on my field study and experiences of performing *kut* for about six years, *kut* has its own peculiar artistry that aims to evoke *harmony*. It is the harmony between a *kut* performer's internal movements (e.g. *ki*, energy, feelings, breathing) and their external movements (physical, material movements); also, between *kut* performers and guests of the rituals; and between *kut* and natural environments.

To understand this, it seems worth explaining my experiences of training and performing *kut*, including *p'ungmul-kut* and *Cheju-k'ŷn-kut*. Judging from the discipline of *kut* practice, one of the required skills for professional *kut* performers is having better communication with their surroundings, including guests at the rituals (Lee 2008: 181). I understand a *kut* as a dialog rather than a monologue. *Kut* performers need to spontaneously communicate with guests' reactions, taking the changing situation into account: this is because most *kut* is performed at the request of diverse guests and performed in an irregular and variable outdoor space, unlike an indoor stage (Park 2011: 93). This allows *kut* performers to keep focusing on the environments, and to learn the skills of spontaneously sensing and communicating with the surroundings (Park 2011: 93-94). This spontaneity of *kut* initially confused me when I started to learn the *kut* in a *kut* performance group, MARO, in Cheju.

Significantly, there are no rehearsals or training classes for *kut*. Instead of undergoing training in the studio, *kut* performers learn the artistic skills of the rituals through active participation in public performances of *kut*. Thus, in my case, I performed a *kut* more than ninety times per month as a group member of MARO, without any pre-practice. I did learn, of course, from a senior *kut* performer, the principles such as the meaning of a particular movement or choreography, the *cheasang* (a white paper ribbon attached to a hat) spinning techniques and basic alignment of the body. However, there is no exact shape or patterns of movement as in ballet vocabulary since movements are different in different individuals. *Kut* performers' ritual dancing and singing appear to keep changing as they do not have a clear order of dance yet have a basic frame-structure in *kut*. Thus, giving complete attention to one's co-performers is required, allowing them to express musical and physical movements as part of their own body language, rather than memorising each movement-phrase. This environment taught me how to understand other *kut* performers' movements; to focus on and react to guests; and to express my status through ritual movements. The tension and anxiety created on stage in front of guests compelled me to learn the techniques of *kut* within a short period. By actively sensing and

feeling the variable surroundings, *kut* performers develop their own way of harmonising among performers, audience and environments during *kut*.

Another skill required of *kut* performers is finding harmony between internal body movements (breath, energy, gravity, *ki* etc.) and external body movements. In contrast to the well-coordinated and arranged ballet and court dance, *kut* performers find natural and honest movements by focusing on inner movements. Consequently, external movements are changed spontaneously and show different qualities depending on the performer's own character but are still in consonance with their inner motions. It is also crucial for *kut* performers to understand the way of not only creating harmony with others but also keeping their freedom through an independent sense of movement and responding extemporarily. I have been told several times by *kut* performers that *shinmyōng* is coming from the right combination of breath, body movements and rhythm of the music. *Kut* performers set the tone of their natural sounds or movements by resonating with the rhythm of their breath, focusing on internal movements while dancing and singing, instead of aligning with the extremal shape of the dance by dancers.

This feature is apparent when we examine the application of techniques of harmony in the dance and music of *kut*. Even though a dancer of *kut* often plays with various props and instruments while dancing, all movements retain a single rhythmic pulse, grounded by fluid and repetitive joint movements. Thus, *kut* dances are earth-centred: *kut* performers repetitively return to the earth by bouncing their whole-body using gravity and with their steps connected to the rhythmic



Fig.6. *Kut* performers wearing *cheosang*, move playing musical instruments, *Leodo: The Paradise*, 2014 Edinburgh Fringe Festival. © Haein Song.

pulses evoked by percussion music. For instance, a dance of *p'ungmul-kut* employs *cheasang*, a white paper ribbon attached to the hat (see Fig.6). *Kut* performers move and make the shapes with *cheasang* by bouncing the body through knee-joint movements while avoiding moving their neck or head. These bouncing actions, associated with continuous knee-bending movements, trigger the reverberating circular movements of *cheasang*. As whole movements are generated by continuous bouncing steps, a *kut* performer is able to dance while not only spinning a *cheasang* but playing the drum at the same time, accompanied by his or her rhythmic pulses.

In addition, for *shimbangs* and *kut* performers, the best combination of music and dance is that which touches and evokes guests' feelings. Allowing guests to feel *shinmyŏng* through their dance and music is their way of communicating with the guests to create harmony among people. This explains the very high value they place on the execution of their artistic skills. In regard to the music, singers or musicians of *kut* strive to find *sŏngŭm*, a right tone or quality of the sound of a voice or instruments, rather than exploring various rhythms or melodies. *Sŏngŭm* was heavily emphasised when I was practising drumming or singing: when *kut* performers pointed out the flaw in my musical practice, they often said 'your sound is wrong for *sŏngŭm*', which clearly indicates that finding *sŏngŭm* is the prerequisite to playing music or singing. The interesting point is that good *sŏngŭm* is not a beautiful or clear voice. Given that even a hoarse voice is recognised as a good *sŏngŭm* while singing, the standard of *sŏngŭm* relies on how well the singer's tone of voice delivers their emotions. *Sŏngŭm* is also used to describe the drumming of *kut*. It is said that the sound of drumming, which is called *dung*, should be cheerful and resilient, leading people to dance. The sounds of drums are indeed an important factor in encouraging guests and *kut* performers to move their shoulders and feet up and down. To achieve *sŏngŭm* when drumming, *kut* performers must practise intensively for a long time; this will allow them to find the best attack point on the drumhead, as well as the best grip on the stick and stroke of the beat, in order to influence the guests' emotions.

In light of the principles of *kut*'s artistic practices, it can be noticed that the nature of a chaotic-harmony is incorporated into *kut*: although *kut* seems to be anarchic, chaotic and disordered, it nevertheless seeks an internal and broader harmony. *Kut* is unlike ancient Greek drama, which evolved into two distinct genres, comedy and tragedy: the former sought catharsis through the spirit of laughter, and the latter through the spirit of the sublime. Instead, *kut* embodies a deft

fusion of the two (Kister 1997: 135). These apparently opposite or contradictory elements, including sorrow and joy, death and life, the spiritual and material worlds, laughter and grief, meet together and find their complementary, interconnected harmony in *kut* (Chang 2002: 19). Thus, *kut* has a common theme whereby *han* (deep sorrow, grief, tragedy) is taken away by *hŭng* (laughter, joy, comedy), through the mixture of *han* and *hung*. The combination of releasing accumulated *han* and induce *hŭng* is essential in evoking *shinmyŏng* (Lee 2015: 122).

Kut is performed without any discrimination or distinctions: because one of *kut*'s main purposes is to comfort and entertain everyone; *shimbangs* treat all beings equally, even gods and evil spirits. This lets people break their social tensions and creates a space for reconciliation (Kim et al. 2007: 351-352). Since *kut* creates its aesthetic creativity through anarchic harmony, an analogy can be drawn between the aesthetics of *kut* and those of 'the theatre of cruelty', as proposed by French theatre director, Antonin Artaud. Artaud suggests that the model for all dramatic creativity is the state in which an aesthetic is alive with 'laughter's power of physical and anarchic dissociation', along with 'the spirit of profound anarchy which is at the root of all poetry' (Artaud 1958: 42). *Kut* is also the place able to absorb everything that is 'dark, deadly, absurd, sceptical, and almost senseless in human life, and still finds trust, stability and multi-levelled harmony' (Kister 1997: 140), through the anarchic fusion of comedy and tragedy.

As seen in the above examples, the artistry of *kut* is based on *technologies of harmony* as follows: achieving an intimate connection between *kut* performers and their surroundings through full attention and spontaneity; finding natural movements of dances and sounds through the embodiment of internal movements (i.e. the invisible: breath, gravity, weight, energy and *ki*) and external movements (i.e. the visible: physical, material); pursuing artistic skills that evoke people's feelings to communicate with them; and following the aesthetics of chaotic-harmony through a marriage between the two contradictory elements of *han* and *hŭng*.

1.4. Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to provide an overview of Korean indigenous performance, known as *kut*, based on my literature reviews, field work, experiences of performing *kut*, and interviews with *shimbangs* and *kut* researchers. Due to its long history and diverse perspectives, the definition of *kut* has changed over time. Although ways of describing *kut* have varied according to the perspectives of different disciplines, today the most common and widely used definition of *kut* is 'mudang's rituals.' However, given the fact that nearly half of *kut* in Korea is enacted

without a charismatic *mudang* (i.e. a classic shaman who has an empowered spiritual ability to connect to gods or spirits), there is a need for a more inclusive term to embrace diverse types of *kut* in the light of its performance aspects.

It is obviously necessary to research *kut* in the context of performance studies beyond strictly religious and cultural-anthropological studies perspectives. Nevertheless, it seems difficult to analyse and interpret *kut* within a well-organised western classification and traditional aesthetics of performance, as *kut* cannot be understood solely by either a ritual or performance perspective. Highlighting *kut*'s hybrid and indeterminate features, this research, therefore, offers a way to understand its aesthetics by exploring both shamanic ritualistic and artistic features, as well as their inter-relationships. All types of *kut* can be regarded as shamanic rituals because of their shared spiritual belief that all creatures, living and inert, have spirits with which humans may interact for good or ill. Thus, *kut* always has a ritualistic aim to create a change of life by harmonising and interacting with the spiritual world. From the perspective of *kut*, spirits can be referred to not only as divinities (or supernatural beings) but also *ki* (energy, mental vigour). Thus, a charismatic *mudang* has the ability to connect with spirits during the *kut*, while *kut* performers are able to manage *shin-ki* through *shinmyǒng*, the manifestation of numinous *ki* within the highest joy of the arts. By listening and talking to these invisible elements, all *kut* attempt to achieve a connection between the human and spiritual worlds. Moreover, *kut* also has artistic features. As we can see from the letter *mu* (巫) and *ponp'uri*, it is impossible for Korean *shimbangs* to hold *kut* without music and dance. This artistic practice is their vital tool to connect with the spiritual world. Thus, *shimbangs* and *kut* performers must learn their artistic practices over a long time; they may even devote their lives to the arts in order to achieve respectable artistry. The artistry of *kut* is based on their individual standards, such as pursuing the aesthetics of chaotic-harmony.

Coupled with my examination of *kut* and its principles, I argue that *kut* should be considered as an artistic ritual or ritualistic art, emphasising the complementary relations between the artistry and spirituality of *kut*. As far as I understand, *kut* is a performance in which the *kut* performers' artistic skills and aesthetic values are aimed towards generating a certain mythical environment imbued with spiritual resonance. In addition, the environment presented by *kut* always aims to create a change via a process of releasing anything tangled, clustered or accumulated in the process of our life. Thus, it is more like a ritualistic sphere opened for communicating with

others, not an artistic stage to express the thoughts and aesthetics of artists. This artistic ritual, therefore, tends to be intertwined with issues of life and death. *Shimbangs* try, humorously and creatively, to release the tensions of these issues by sharing their mythical imagination through their dance, music and chant.

Such features of *kut* have inspired me in determining my own attitude as a director and researcher whilst conducting the practice-led research. I engage as a mediator, as would a *shimbang*, in this research exploring ecstatic space. I attempt to open the ritualistic space where digital technology and the ecstatic technology of *shimbangs* can meet and interact, rather than directing *kut* performers to express my ideas of shamanic art and ritual aesthetics in digital images. I will also pursue a digital space embracing shamanic imagination and aesthetics by translating the vocabulary of technical media to my co-researchers, a *shimbang* Seo and six *kut* performers and guiding them to utilise these contemporary tools as shamanic media. Delivering mythical imagination through digital images, which are a more familiar medium for people today, I believe that my works help audiences to break down unfamiliarity and bias against *kut*. The changes that have occurred in this process have become the framework of my research, and ways of sharing these changes – through artistic convergence of dance, music, and visuals – have become my techniques for shaping ecstatic space. Having offered initial support in understanding *kut* and the background to my research, the next chapter will explore the aesthetic of digital technologies in digital performance by examining technological media in relation to *kut*.

Chapter 2. Technological Media and *Kut*

Over the latter half of the twentieth century, computer media has played a dynamic and increasingly significant role not only in our lives but also in art and performance. The rapid and ongoing development of digital technology, e.g., diverse and multi-faceted practical skills, automatic synthesis programming, virtual/simulation environments and global connectivity within information and communication networks, has become capable of transforming individuals and provides novel forms of art, theatre and dance (Ascott 2005, Auslander 2008, Dixon 2007). We have experienced how electronic/technical media, including photography, television and film, has transformed the way of seeing the arts and, by extension, the form of the arts. For example, nowadays, a painting can be bought cheaply and easily as a poster or copy of a photograph. This is distinctively different from the traditional way of experiencing a painting, staring at an original work of art in a museum or visiting a unique historic building.

Indeed, the impact of media was foreseen by media theorists like McLuhan and Flusser. They propose media as ‘the extensions of man’ or ‘a sort of irreplaceable prosthesis’ that can form or reshape the ways we think and live (Flusser 2002, McLuhan 1994). In addition, the transformation of art by mechanical media is directly prefigured by Walter Benjamin’s seminal essay, ‘The work of art in the age of technical reproducibility’. He asserts that mechanical media have metamorphosed the traditional way of perceiving art and experiencing its ‘aura’ (or authenticity) and finding its unique value from its magical and ritual functions. Thus, a new form of art has been created by photographic and screen-based visual images, or ‘art designed for reproducibility’, dissipating the sense of the original (Benjamin 1999: 219-220).

Although South Korea is relatively slow to adopt technical media, the country is no exception in experiencing its massive impact. According to Korean cultural scholar, Young-bae Lee, the proliferation of mechanical media since 1960 has influenced the way of perceiving art in Korea, exerting a massive impact on traditional culture, especially the *kut* culture (Lee 2010: 136). In the past, *kut* was integral to one’s life because it would accompany major community activities, such as farming, fishing, and life events. Performing or participating in *kut* was the primary way to perceive art. People conducted this artistic ritual before, during and after their work and each year involved performing dozens of *kut* (Park 2011: 88). However, since the modernisation of Korea in the early 20th century, the interconnection between *kut* and life has been severely

compromised. With rapid industrialisation, people became surrounded by machines and reproducing media. Following the cycle of the manufacturer, individuals became focused on diligence, spending less time on *kut* or the ludic rituals. As television propagated throughout Korea in 1966, professional itinerant *kut* performances quickly declined due to lack of demand. Watching TV at home became the primary form of leisure entertainment instead of gathering in the yard to enact *kut*. Since *kut* has been regarded as old-fashioned, becoming disparaged by modern people, the status of *kut* and its professional practitioners has dramatically shrunk, along with the connection between *kut* and Korean life (Lee 2010: 122-137).

Today, South Korea has become an IT powerhouse with the highest internet access rate and being the leading technology users. It is reported that a world-leading eighty-eight percent of people are using smartphones, seventy-two percent of children own their smart device when they turn twelve, and ninety-two percent of people access the internet (Marshall 2016, Rodgers 2017). It cannot be doubted that the technology industry has brought incredible economic growth to South Korea over the last decade. However, interestingly, one of the upcoming issues for Korean society today is the penetration by, or obsession with, technology-led entertainments. It is not difficult to see South Koreans spending significant time online: almost everyone utilises a smartphone when travelling on a bus or in the subway.

The consideration of technical media by media theorists, including McLuhan, Flusser and Benjamin, and the drastic changes of people's need of *kut* in Korea may indicate that digital media (or technical artefacts) have thoroughly penetrated into not only the heart of our modern life but also the field of the arts. It is also not difficult to see that more and more people in art today apply digital media to almost every process of art from painting to performance, e.g., planning, creating, designing, documenting, marketing, printing and distributing. The influence of technological media on arts seems unlikely to ever stop growing alongside progress in scientific development, as long as people continuously respond to and connect technical media with their lifestyles. More importantly, increasing use of digital media tells us that its impact is driven not just by the IT technology itself, but more by a firmly and extensively built communication structure between digital devices and tech users. I believe this is one of the reasons why digital media needs to be understood as a communication medium.

In this so-called 'digital age', my main consideration as a *kut* performer is how to understand

digital media and manage its influences. There might be two ways to cope with this issue: either I carry this new medium into the world of *kut* to apply, shape and develop it, or I avoid changes in order to protect the tradition of *kut*. However, I want to assert that it should be dealt with in a combined and sensitive way to develop *kut* slowly over time, existing *contemporaneously* with digital developments and maintaining the essence of its tradition. As we have seen above, digital media is not just a technological device, but a communication code. Accordingly, it is necessary for *kut* and digital media to meet on some common ground where they can create a new language in order to interact with each other, avoiding unexpected risks and threats of one-sided domination. The ultimate reason for this interaction would not be to impose innovative and fresh digital effects onto a *kut*, but to engage people with the *kut*, as in the past. Namely, it is for *kut* and *kut* performers to communicate with not only people who are familiar with traditional and shamanic communication but also the new generation of the digital era who have formed a communication structure with digital artefacts.

Consequently, with the specific aim of exploring the dialogues between technological media and Korean shamanism, the chapter will examine digital media as the communication medium rather than understand them as digital machines generating advanced and fascinating virtual effects. To achieve this, it begins by investigating media and the mediatic turn in a historical and philosophical context. Subsequent sections of the chapter provide a comprehensive survey, analysis and history of media, centring around Flusser's discourse on the genealogy of communication codes. Although McLuhan also distinguishes a noticeable transformation in communication methods, based on the three great ages of human history, e.g., oral language, the alphabet and electronic media (McLuhan 1994: 14-16), this research mainly examines Flusser's concept of media. I intend to emphasise Flusser's idea of considering the human ability to imagine being a central cause that has created alternative media throughout history. I believe that his concept makes us realise how technical media is not just about high-tech tools but a gateway with the potential to connect our society and the future via imagination just as *kut* has pursued to create the bridge to mythical imaginations through shamanic media. Subsequently, the chapter will examine two crucial, but contradictory features of today's media, i.e. 'post-historical magic' and 'the matter of separation'. These concepts provide vital reasons for me to explore a ritual way of using digital technologies to enhance the beauty of collective gathering.

2.1. Moving through Media

The term ‘media’ may well be one of the most important concepts in Korean shamanism as well as in western philosophy. Media is the pluralised word for *medium*, borrowed from Latin that refers to ‘the middle one, located in the middle’ (Hagen 2008: 1). As mentioned in the previous chapter, a *mudang* (巫堂) is highlighted in Korean shamanism as a ‘medium’ who stands in-between the spirits and the human world (Moon 2005, Sorgenfrei 2010). Given this, *kut* is regarded as a mediating ritual that aims to comfort, entertain and heal people through connecting between the material and the spiritual world, our consciousness and unconsciousness, and *han* and *hung*. Interestingly, the term ‘medium’ has been subjected to fundamental philosophical questions throughout the history of western thought. It can be traced back to ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle’s integrated perspectives of perception in *de anima* (On the Soul): ‘The in-between: there must be some intermediary. Otherwise, perception is impossible’ (quoted in Hagen 2008: 7). Aristotle believed that something can be perceived by the *metaxy* (or medium)³⁸ rather than through immediate contact with sensory organs. Thus, the medium is necessary to sense, perceive and comprehend the world (6-7).

The concept of the medium has been theoretically articulated by several philosophical paradigm shifts in the modern period, including what has been called the epistemological turn, linguistic turn and mediatic turn. Expanding our view of the ontological to epistemological, empirical, linguistic and cultural realms, today’s term ‘media’ has a broader meaning than Aristotle’s interpretation of ‘medium’, and it becomes a code through which to interpret our consciousness and society. If Koreans once tried to understand nature, gods and the world through a mediated being or liminal existence based on Korean shamanism, people today seem to identify and understand their life, society and other different cultural communities utilising the worldwide communication network aided by computation media. Given this, the following will briefly explain western philosophical shifts towards understanding the underlying and accumulated considerations of today’s term ‘media’.

The epistemological turn was initiated by Descartes (1596-1650). It was the major philosophical shift from the matter of ontology (the prior philosophical tradition guided by

³⁸ Although it is known that the notion of a *medium* is used in Aristotle’s work, the original Aristotelian text does not use the term directly. It was Thomas Aquinas interpolating the term *medium* into his works to translate his concept of the in-between or *metaxy* (Greek: τό μεταξύ) (Hagen 2008: 14).

metaphysics or laws of nature or God) to matters of epistemology; from the enquiry into existence to the examination of knowledge. It proposed the idea that questions of being, becoming or reality should be set aside until questions of how we come to know have been resolved satisfactorily. Subsequently, Kant (1724-1804) developed this epistemological perspective by proposing that all knowledge is empirical; the structure of consciousness is determined by experience. He proposed that the world is derived not only from *a priori* knowledge (or the ‘innate idea’ as per Descartes), but also from *a posteriori* knowledge, which emanates from experience. With the growing trend toward empiricism, the next philosophical shift occurred during the early 20th century (Friesen and Hug 2009: 6). It is called the ‘linguistic turn’ (inspired by the important language studies of de Saussure) and is influenced by the later psychoanalytic view that one’s consciousness or knowledge is defined by a language that we learn from society rather than being inherited. To illustrate, the endless process of learning language illustrates how a human being cannot be a master of language. However, language structures one’s knowledge and one’s way of communication. Thus, language, as a highly organised semiotic system, can be a tool to understand the world (7).

Thenceforth, the linguistic turn led to the mediatic turn, which means that discourse analysis begot media theory because linguistic theorists finally perceived that the practices of learning language are reliant on media (6-7). A number of modern media theorists, including Marshall McLuhan (1911-1980) and Vilém Flusser (1920-1991) consider media – including languages and other symbolic systems – as possessing general structures that determine one’s consciousness, knowledge and culture. Accepting McLuhan’s proposals, the meaning of media, here, is expanded upon by accepting the significance of media as a synonym of communication devices or technological extensions. With technological development, media theory is rapidly becoming a fresh paradigm through which to comprehend the world. McLuhan summarises the impact of media on society in his famous aphorism, ‘the medium is the message’ (McLuhan 1994: 7). For McLuhan, technologies ‘are media of communication [...] in the sense that they shape and rearrange the patterns of human association and community’ (127). Meanwhile, Flusser asserts that human communications are mediated by artificial techniques, or codes (Flusser 2002: 3). For Flusser, the world, in which people conceive is structured through codes such as text, images, and human gestures. Accordingly, ‘our “being-in-the-world” can be changed if the structure of our codes is changed’ (16).

Interestingly, Flusser distinguishes three great ages of human history based on remarkable transformations in the communication medium in his book, *Into the Universe of Technical Images*. He proposes the traditional image, text and the technical image as the three predominant codes of each stage of human history, respectively, being pre-history, history and post-history. According to him, each of these communication codes is created by humans for the purpose of presenting the world (Flusser 2011: 7-10), which indicates that media can reform and change the world. Given that today's *kut* still reveals some features of the prehistoric *kut* in *Cheonjeonri* and *Bangudae* Petroglyphs,³⁹ *kut* has communicated with the mythical world through traditional images since the prehistoric era, while is continuously performed in the modern, urbanised city of Seoul. Given this, the following observations will disclose Flusser's consideration of the transition of communication media in understanding what *kut* might mean today, and how this transformation of media has inspired *kut*.

2.2. Traditional Images to Technical Images

The focal point of Flusser's media theory examines the stages of human culture in the light of three key communication media throughout history – traditional image, texts, and technical images. According to Flusser, traditional images (or handmade images) originate through the human ability to imagine. Grasping the immediate and moving world and conveying it to stationary images, the world splits into two areas – the object and subject – the human being as a subject facing the object world (Flusser 2011: 8). Consequently, a human is not immersed in an animated world like an animal, not immediately accessible to the world; to use Flusser's word, a human does not 'in-sist', but 'ex-ist'. In doing so, images become mediations between the world and human beings, which make the world imaginable and comprehensible (Flusser 2000: 9). Grasping the world and shaping it, humans create the two-dimensional imaginary images that signify the four-dimensional surrounding world.

The impact of these traditional images on peoples' thinking would come from the way they perceive them; these images are perceived in a circle formation, not following a predetermined order. In detail, instead of reading images in turn, the gaze can return to an element of the image it has already seen, so that the impression of 'before' can become 'after'. With the process of people reading these images by wandering their eyes over the surface of an image, their

³⁹ See page 23, the shamanic features of *Cheonjeonri* and *Bangudae* Petroglyphs

meaning gazes from the relationship between one element of the image to another. Hence, a human's perception does not follow linear time and space but creates the experience of an 'eternal recurrence' (8-9). As the traditional image used a dominant medium to represent the world, the circular way of perceiving images would have a considerable influence on people's conception of time and space. Thus, we can assume that pre-historical people might think of time and space as a non-linear formation, as in the mythological view, and believe the eternal recurrence of all things.

Flusser describes this exchangeable, mythical time and space of the traditional image as the world of magic, where images themselves become a 'symbol' or 'model' of the real world (Flusser 2011: 11-12). His illustrations of the world in the pre-historical era are fully imaginative, implicative, sacred and mythical; everything signifies something, and everything should be 'appeased' (13). Flusser thinks of pre-historical humans as mythical beings, 'being in a world full of 'spirits' and 'gods,' which is to say, a world full of values': the space is 'valuable' and time has a moral and ethical function (Flusser 2002: 117). Regarding this, it can be supposed that pre-historical people believed in the magical power of images and that their imaginary paintings were able to connect them with the moving world. The magic of traditional images was their technique of preventing natural punishment, which was one of the most significant ways of communing with their surrounding world.

One example of this magical content of traditional images would be the earliest cave paintings, e.g. the figures of *mudang* engraved in *Bangudae* and *Cheonjeonri* petroglyphs, and the European Upper Paleolithic cave art such as the Chauvet, Niaux, and Lascaux. According to eminent French prehistorian and archaeologist Jean Clottes, the magical and religious beliefs about cave art are the crucial reason that ancient people were deliberately venturing into engraving on the surfaces of a dangerous and dark cave. He hypothesises that, as traditional people regard 'the sacred world and secure world are one', their drawings 'simultaneously refer to the most prosaic reality and to what we would call the supernatural and mythical world' (Clottes 2002:106-107). According to him, cave paintings are 'fit more and better with shamanism rather than other religion' (Clottes 2013: 13), since the trances of connecting with the spirits of animals is vital for ancient people to draw animals on the cave, receiving a natural relief and catch animal's power (12).

Kut seems heavily influenced by and still related to the magical and circular way of thinking triggered by the traditional image. One of the reasons that *kut* deals with the nature of a chaotic-harmony – appearing with anarchic, chaotic and disordered features, yet bringing an internal and broader harmony – would be the circular way of perception. *Kut* consists of, and transmits through, various sensorial and figurative images created by a music play, dance, chant, ritual food, incense and visual objects (Lee 2015: 122). *Shimangs* and *kut* performers still believe the magical power of symbolic and ritual images is the medium being able to create connections between the world of *kut* and the moving world (Kang 2006: 108). In *kut*, people are immersed in a variety of symbolic images representing the shamanic world and assume and understand their meaning through a synesthetic perception. For instance, *shimangs* perform a *kut* based on the myths of Cheju, but their rituals do not aim to convey the mythical stories lucidly; rather, they generate a certain atmosphere through various intertwined images to present the power of gods and nature. Thus, *kut* is more sensorial, magical and mythical than narrative, well-ordered and rational.

The creation of traditional imagery reaches a turning point when it constitutes ‘idolatry’, where the images no longer represent the world but ‘obscure[d] it’ to make people’s lives become ‘a function of their own images’ (Flusser 2000: 10). This idolatry seems to act as the reversal of the function of traditional images, for instance, certain images adopt a religious affiliation and thereby people might be subject to hallucination and collective insanity. According to Flusser, a new media, i.e. texts, has emerged as people become unable to see the world through traditional images. He understands ‘texts’ as ‘metacode’ images: unlike the traditional images signifying the world with ‘imaginative thought’, texts transcode the images with ‘conceptual thought’, while the intention of concepts is to make ideas comprehensible (Flusser 2000: 11). Discovering the world behind the image through decoding texts, people may be able to take a step back from their imagination into images.

With the invention of linear writing, the universe of circular and magical time and space is transformed to that of linear and conceptual time and space. Henceforth, ‘historical thinking’ or history, in the narrow sense, arose. Unlike the universe of traditional images crossing the world with one’s imagination, the universe of linear writing permitted people to have conceptual thoughts, understanding reality through explanation (Flusser 2000: 10). Therefore, people in the historical era rationally observed and discovered the relationship between nature

and humans and thereby documented the law of nature via written words. Furthermore, texts are concepts strung together with a numeric code. According to Flusser, the relationship between texts and images creates scientific discourse, generating numeric code. With the development of numeric code through the contribution of Descartes, Newton and Leibniz, people hoped to describe and handle the laws of nature by a numeric code in the structure of texts and differential equations (Flusser 2002: 113).

Although the texts have immense appeal for people in the historical era, *kut* seems to have received relatively little influence from such texts. *Kut* has still always engaged the oral tradition and the circular and scenic way of thinking rather than the historical. For instance, *ponp'uri*, the mythical epic of Cheju providing the foundation structure of Cheju *kut*, is still handed down orally or as symbolic imagery rather than written documents. Historical thinking may have made small but perceivable strides toward discussing *kut* in folkloristic, anthropological and religious research since the 1900s. However, the linear formation is seldom observed in the practices of *kut*: *shimbangs* are inclined to present and explore the world of *kut* with emblematic and mythical images within the rituals rather than observing and revealing it rationally. The practices of *kut*, consequently, progress within an iterative and recurrent formation⁴⁰ rather than keeping a particular order or taking a storytelling structure.

Back to Flusser's discourse on the genealogy of communication codes, the second transformation of media occurred from the world of texts to the world of technical images that we are currently experiencing. Flusser insists that the worship of texts arise, as the images once occur.⁴¹ People came to recognise that the texts are not always the correct order in which to grasp and handle the world. As texts become no longer an efficient way to read and explain the world, *technical images* emerged. For Flusser, a technical image is 'an image produced by apparatuses' (Flusser 2000: 14) – the technologically produced and programmed computer images, such as photography, film, video, computer graphics, holography, and virtual reality (Flusser 2002: xxvi). Technical images are reliant on the laws of technology and the natural sciences. Since the numeric code has been breaking out of the structure of the linear code and

⁴⁰ Due to the repetitive and rotating patterns, Korean scholar Jung Hyun Cho identifies the structure of *kut* as the combination of the replicating fractal layers and deconstruct layers (Cho 2014: 323-325).

⁴¹ According to Flusser, noticeable examples of 'textolatry' (the worship of texts) were Christianity and Marxism, which strongly rely on the historical concept, struggling against magical and symbolic images that are still employed (Flusser 2002: 12-13).

switching over from the numeric to digital, we are now experiencing the power of artificial techniques. For instance, it is possible to swiftly and automatically count by tapping the keyboard with fingers, whereas previous calculation techniques, e.g. differential calculus, becomes less necessary to learn (Flusser 2002: 113). Consequently, the entire situation drastically changed from the transition of the universe of linear writings to technical images. For instance, the term ‘digital’ has already become an obsolete word because almost every image is produced, preserved, and distributed by digital apparatus. Furthermore, even though we felt amazement at the speed and ability digital media initially introduced to us, nowadays, we are simply used to and expect digital time and space.

Flusser proposes that the universe of technical images is a world of ‘post-historical magic’. Some might assume that we are now in the process of turning back into an ancient mythical and magical world because it seems similar to the pre-historical magic of traditional images. However, Flusser strongly insists that it has a significant disparity from traditional ones. If traditional images are generated by an incantatory imagination based on myths, technical ones are created by technical imagination, or in his words, ‘a new imagination’, by software programs. We can see it is a different state by Flusser’s illustration of the process of generating a new imagination:

First, man took a step back from his life-world, to imagine it. Then, man stepped back from the imagination, to describe it. Then, man took a step back from the linear, written critique, to analyze it. And finally, owing to a new imagination, man projected synthetic images out of analysis. (Flusser 2002: 116)

Technological images are produced by new imagination, a combination of the magical, conceptual and scientific consciousness. Now, technical images do not represent the world itself but creates an artificial world. For example, a synthetic picture of an airplane does not convey a real airplane, but reveals ‘a possible airplane’, the representation of a thought plane (Flusser 2002: 131). Thanks to the new imagination, people no longer face the world as as subjects but now possess the ability to imagine and create the alternative world, compute virtualities into simulations of realities based on their own program. This is the new magic, so to speak, and to apply a Flusser’s word, it can be considered ‘post-historic’ magic (Flusser 2000: 16).

Since a *kut* is still imbued with a mythical, sensorial and metaphysical aspect, technical images nurtured within digital technologies can be a medium to provide a potential reanimation of *kut*

in terms of Flusser's conception of post-historical magic. If the old imagination, with pre-historical magic, offers people the ability to represent their immediate and moving world, the post-historical magic with its new imagination is comprised of projecting individual thoughts onto reality. In this sense, it can be assumed that the mythical world of *shimbangs* and *kut* performers can also be presented in reality embodying the mythical imagination of the *shimbang* and the conceptual and scientific thinking induced by the new imagination together with a more and more advanced technical image.

2.3. Post-historical Magic to Ecstatic Space

As mentioned above, post-historical magic involves both sets of characteristics: the mythical, magical, ritual features as well as rational, scientific, technological features. Unlike the pre-historical magic of traditional images, which was trying to seize and handle the world in order to change the given world, post-historical magic created by technical images realises the human imagination in virtual reality.

The illustration of the old Chinese legend of arts, by Korean media researcher Jung-gwon Chin, suggests how magical thoughts of the pre-historical age can be carried in alternative reality today in terms of post-historical magic. He describes how old magical ideas of Chinese art legends become materialised by today's advanced technology. The three legends are introduced to illustrate old magical consciousness in Chinese arts. The first legend is in *Su-hyöng-gi* (水衡記) (1628-1639) about *Hwa-ryong-jöm-jöng* (畫龍點睛: means 'drawing dragon dot eyes'). The story tells of a talented painter, Sŭngyo Chang, who had a unique ability to make paintings come alive. With this, Chang painted four dragons on a wall at the King's request. The dragons on the wall looked so real that they could jump off it, but he left out their eyes. The King asked him to draw in the eyes, and when Chang did so, the dragons flew away. The second legend was of a waterfall painting. Long ago, the King asked the famous painter to draw a magnificent waterfall for his bedroom. When he showed the painting to the King, he greatly admired it because it looked so real though. However, after one night, the King told him to remove the painting because he could not sleep with the cascade sound. The last Chinese legend is about a painter who walked into his paintings. A gifted Chinese painter had finally completed his masterpiece. He became so immersed in his painting that he went right inside it and never came back. Chin proposes that this can be considered magic akin to letting a human walk into virtual reality (Chin 2014: 63).

According to Chin, these legends reveal the three types of magical consciousness of old Chinese art: respectively, the magic of letting virtual and imaginary elements appear in the real world, the magic of making virtual things be alive and moving, and the magic of letting people walk into their virtual and imaginary world. Chin contends that these days, pre-historical magical thoughts become realised by advanced digital technology. For example, the first magic has appeared with Augmented Reality (AR). AR is a technology integrating virtual elements and the real world by matching the coordinates of virtual elements to those of real environments through computer-generated sensors, such as graphic and GPS data. It becomes easier to invoke the imaginary images, e.g. allow a live dragon into the real world through AR techniques. The second legend is produced by Artificial Intelligence (AI). Presently, an image can grow, reproduce and recreate all by itself through an evolutionary algorithm or evolutionary computation. The image acts like us – it feels, makes sound, moves and interacts with environments. This last type of magic is realised by Virtual Reality (VR). VR is the conceptual model for gamification and interactive digital work that articulates the body travelling between the imaginary and real world at will (64-65). Following this analogy, post-historical magic might come to us as familiar scenes rather than startling illusions because we have already become acquainted with them. One of the essential features of the world produced by this post-historical magic is the fact that it produces highly probable alternative environments combined with scientific knowledge, which are not simply presented as trickery or religion.

With its dynamic history, *kut* has long been regarded as superstition regardless of its value and aesthetics. The potential of post-historical magic suggests that applying the technical medium to *kut* could be a way of developing and reinvigorating this shamanic tradition in the contemporary milieu. This could open up novel, spiritual ways of using digital technology as well as forging new understandings of *kut* as opposed to built-in assumptions that it is a superstitious and old-fashioned ritual. However, little has been done to approach the performance of *kut* within the understanding of post-historical magic – *shimbangs* have seldom attempted to apply their imagination to conceptual and scientific technology, i.e. technical images, because most *shimbangs* consider that the combination of technical images and *kut* would eliminate the *liveness* of the ritual and thus ruin the tradition of *kut*.

In fact, there have always been conflicting debates relating to the lack of liveness of digital mediated art, not only among *kut* performers but also western cultural and performance

scholars. This phenomenon is ostensibly illustrated by Steve Dixon's book *Digital Performance*. He argues that there have always been divided opinions about digital mediated arts, questioning the ontology of liveness. While Benjamin put forth a somewhat positive view on technological media, like photography and cinema, as the beginning of new forms of art with *different aura* (Dixon 2007: 117), several performance scholars have not considered technical media to be a valid art form due to its artificial quality. They insist that photographic or mediated art is not art because it is not 'real': it is the artificial reproduction of the real and therefore there is no liveness, presence or authenticity which traditional forms of art, especially performance and theatre, fundamentally possess. For example, French literary theorist Roland Barthes stubbornly contends that the photograph is "an emanation of past reality: magic, not an art" (quoted in Dixon 2007: 121). In the performance field, American performance scholar Peggy Phelan claims the ontology of performance is such that it 'cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations. Once it does so, it becomes something other than performance' (Phelan 1993: 41).

However, the idea of judging art by the matter of the real raises even more fundamental questions: does a piece of art need to be real? If traditional images such as handmade images are real, why are technical images such as graphics, holograms and synthetic sounds not considered real for us? All art is human-made, created by human imagination and skill, which means it ontologically embodies an artificial attribute. It seems, therefore, unreasonable to argue that only digitally mediated art is unreal. In addition, when we start to distinguish between the true and false, or the real and the illusion, it becomes more complicated to identify *kut* as an art. *Kut* is easily considered magical and unrealistic due to its mythical and spiritual attributes. When people insist on lifting the mythical veil and ferreting out the truth of the world of *kut*, they tend to judge *kut* by questions of faith. Those who do not believe in the world of *kut* will easily consider it to be superstition, whereas those who believe will often accept it as a religious convention.

However, it seems inappropriate to question whether the world of *kut* is true or not, since it is derived from human imagination. As I mentioned before, the world of *kut* and digital mediated environments are both originated from peoples' fantasy extending beyond the normal world. We cannot say that this imaginary alternative world is not real because imagination is

psychologically interpreted as the primary source of the human psyche.⁴² It is also absurd to assert that one's imagination is inauthentic since it is from the unconscious mind and distinguishes one from anyone else. Accordingly, it is somewhat pointless to argue that mediatised arts including *kut* and digital arts are spurious or unreal as long as they manifest one's imagination.

Given this, it seems necessary to understand 'liveness' in a different perspective. Philip Auslander's notion of 'liveness' may support this consideration. In his well-known book, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*, he argues that the 'liveness' of a mediatised form cannot be identified by its intrinsic, ontological properties as it is a 'historically contingent term' – whose meaning has culturally and conceptually changed over time (Auslander 2008: 60). More interestingly, he claims that liveness is not determined by a technological artefact itself or its operation; instead, it results from *audiences*.

In order for liveness to occur, we, the audience, must accept the claim as binding upon us, take it seriously, and hold onto the object in our consciousness of it in such a way that it becomes live for us. In this analysis, liveness is neither a characteristic of the object nor an effect caused by some aspect of the object such as its medium, ability to respond in real time, or anthropomorphism. Rather, liveness is an interaction produced through our engagement with the object and our willingness to accept its claim. (Auslander 2008: 60)

The passage illustrates the interactive relationship of technological objects and audiences: while technical objects claim to be considered as live on their audiences, the audience performs a role of concretising this claim by their acceptance. This points out that the liveness of mediatised art cannot be achieved with passive audiences; the active engagement of audiences is necessary for perceiving liveness.

Regarding this, it can be concluded that it is pointless to find out whether mediatised art (or the art of post-historical magic) is real or unreal since all arts are originally driven by human imaginations. McLuhan said that media is 'any extension of ourselves' (McLuhan 1964: 7), media is an outgrowth of our imaginations which functions to connect people with their world

⁴² According to Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, the psyche consists of a threefold set of conscious, preconscious, and unconscious. The unconscious mind is powerfully related to our feelings and decisions; it is the most important part of the mind yet invisible like an iceberg, with 90% of it beneath the water (preconscious and unconscious) (Freud 1957: 159-204).

of fantasy. Rather, the more important fact would be that the concept of liveness has been differently identified by culture and history, and people's willingness and engagement with technological artefacts are crucial to generate the full presence of mediated arts.

This implies that the liveness and presence of the mediated world can be manipulated and concretised by ourselves; in reverse, if people remain passive, forgetting that liveness is the by-product of their imagination and stopping their imagining activities, they could be unintentionally immersed by the mediated world. This can be clarified by looking at the ecstatic technology of *shimbang*. The most commonly known examples of ecstatic technology would be the trance ability of *shimbangs*, when acting as mediators of the spiritual world. If a *shimbang* were unable to control the trance according to their will, they would easily become insane. Thus, a *shimbang* attempts to stand in-between as a liminal being, moving into their unconscious or spiritual realm, yet never becoming completely immersed. Thus, a *shimbang's* ecstasy does not merely use techniques of being outside themselves or their surroundings, but the techniques of being in the middle of a crossroads, being aware of the otherness within.

For me, ecstasy is a state that triggers a human ability to imagine, and the ecstatic technology of *kut* embraces techniques of developing and manifesting our imagination. Flusser underlines that the human ability to imagine is what makes human beings 'ex-ist' from the world, which leads people to regard the world as an object, preventing them from being absorbed in the world like animals (Flusser 2011: 8-9). In my view, we could interpret conversely that the ecstatic nature of being apart from the world has made us more imaginative. This idea can be supported by a German philosopher Martin Heidegger's notion of *ecstasis*. In *Being and Time*, a renowned book of Heidegger analysing the concept of being, ecstatic temporality is suggested which is a way in which *Dasein*, human *being-in-the-world*, exists outside itself (302). According to him, human existence has a propensity for being related to and focusing toward 'projection' (future possibilities) 'thrownness' (past fact), even one's body is in present. This is an ecstatic tendency. Imagining past, future and others is an inherited attribute of human-existence.

As the concept of the post-historical magic proposes, we are living not only in normal reality but also in an alternative reality created by the combination of human imagination and digital technologies. Since digital technology tends to pursue the realistic presence of the mediated world, the distinction between the virtual (or imagined) and physical world is becoming blurred.

However, unlike a lifelike and vivid virtual space, my practical research aims to explore ‘ecstatic space’ by applying the concept of ecstasy in *kut* and how it boosts our ecstatic and imaginative spirit. Accordingly, ecstatic space offers an immersive, yet symbolic and unrealistic environment, where people feel the sense of in-betweenness by a process of perceiving and interpreting this world through their senses, feelings and imaginations. The concept of ecstatic space will be examined in more detail in the next chapter.

2.4. The Matter of Separation

The matter of ‘separation’ is a key premise used by many performance scholars and media theorists to articulate a pessimistic opinion on the future of technologies. Even Flusser, who offers the utopian view on the world of technological images, paradoxically predicts that the future of society ‘would be split into two classes: those programming and those being programmed’ (Flusser 1999: 93). Guy Debord (1932-1994), a member of the Situationist movement in France, introduces the idea of mass media being a cause of social problems in a late capitalist society, stating that ‘separation is the alpha and omega of the spectacle’ (Debord 2002: 9). Debord proposes that the world is divided into two parts: spectators and the spectacle – one of which is held up as a self-representation of the world, and one as superior to the world (9–10). The spectacle, according to Debord, is not just a collection of images but he sees the spectacle as an accumulation of ‘the flip side of money’ (Debord 2002: 10) or gathered ‘images of capital’ (13). People are turned into a ‘crowd’ or ‘spectators’, whose attitude leads to a degradation of humanity (8). For Debord, the universe of the spectacle is the world where the commodity completes its colonisation of people together with their time and space (12).

Furthermore, illustrating the analogy between the role of spectacle marketing in a capitalist society and that of religions fetishism in the past, Debord addresses a ‘fervent exaltation’ brought about by the spectacle (18). Alongside having a hallucination with the spectacle, spectators also suffer a feeling of alienation from others. People become the ‘lonely crowd’ and lose their power of unity (10). His view is poignantly expressed in the cover image of his book, *The Society of the Spectacle* (see Fig.7), with cinema audiences homogenously wearing 3D glasses, sitting closely together but all absorbedly looking at the movie screen without any connection, touch or conversation with the person next to them. People may become estranged from their life and their own true selves when they continuously act as spectators who intently focus on only their visual sense to identify with dominant images.

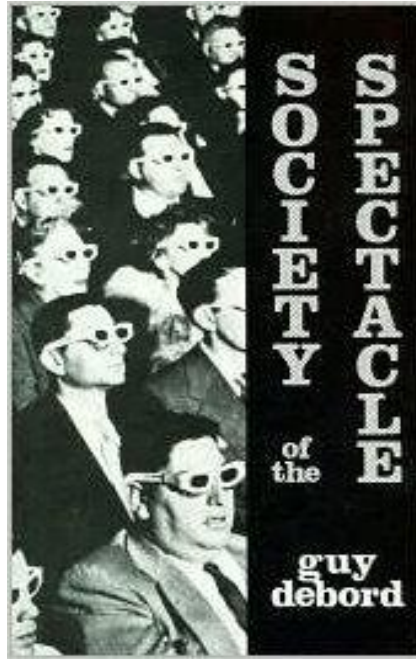


Fig.7. The cover image of Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle*.

In *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, which works as a companion piece to *The Society of the Spectacle*, Raoul Vaneigem also clearly resists the attitude of spectators which makes people isolated, alienated and weary from their life. Thus, he insists on revitalising subjectivity by proposing that 'we do not want a world in which the guarantee that we will not die of starvation is bought by accepting the risk of dying of boredom' (Vaneigem 2009: 6). Vaneigem suggests that, in the earliest societies, people were associated with each other during daily work towards the process of being. However, with the development of machines and automation, people have become separated and diminished in their humanity. This makes people live in lonesome bondage, which can be seen in the illustration of a mechanical and repetitive life:

What spark of humanity, of a possible creativity, can remain alive in a being dragged out of sleep at six every morning, jolted about in suburban trains, deafened by the racket of machinery, bleached and steamed by meaningless sounds and gestures, spun dry by statistical controls, and tossed out at the end of the day into the entrance halls of railway stations, ...where the crowd communes in weariness and boredom? (25)

Regarding the spectacle containing the feature of degrading humanity by separation, Debord and Vaneigem both make artistic and theoretical attempts to instil a cultural revolution with

their group, the Situationist International (SI).⁴³ Interestingly, being an artist is considered to be the key means of living against the spectacle, developing new anthropology of one's ideal future, just as had been pointed out by Flusser. Specifically, the manifesto of SI states that at 'a higher stage, everyone will become an artist, i.e., inseparably a producer-consumer of total culture creation, which will help the rapid dissolution of the linear criteria of novelty' (Internationale-Situationniste 1960: np). Of particular significance in this regard is that, despite Flusser and SI standing in sharp opposition to the mainstream views on digital media, the future for which they hope is in some way similar. Flusser figures the dissolution of the object and subject relationship by being a 'project' with a new imagination, while SI plans to black out the spectacle-spectator, or producer-consumer association by ludic and poetic creations. As Flusser proposes, it is up to us to find our magical consciousness with our own programming; SI suggests that in order to validate one's own life, it is necessary to achieve it by 'doing' rather than just watching. Both Flusser and SI indicate a desirable image of humanity as future artists when it comes to digital era.

Kut is a ritual that cultivates a sense of community consciousness to people by facilitating the collective imagination and ecstasy. This ritual communal gathering offers a necessary antidote to loneliness and depression and numerous other increasingly common social ills in modernised Korea. Accordingly, I believe that a ritual way of utilising technical images will be sufficient to mitigate the matter of separation in this digital world. In addition, as Flusser and Debord envisage a similar future, of human beings who are living as artists in order to reach a new level of humanity, I hope that this research provides a stepping stone for *shimbangs* and *kut* performers to live as artists who present *kut's* humanity in this contemporary milieu, locally as well as internationally.

43. The Situationist International (SI) was founded in 1957 and published a journal called, *Internationale Situationniste*, until 1969. The SI developed a critique of capitalism based on a mixture of ideas drawn from Marxism and surrealism. Guy Debord was one of the protagonists of the SI who analysed consumer society as the society of the spectacle. Situationist urban strategies of intervention, such as *dérive* and *détournement*, began to play an important role in revolutionary Paris during the 1968 uprisings, but also became influential for later punk and graffiti movements that subverted spectacular domination through forms of (non-art) agitation or, as Debord had suggested, the 'construction of situations' or collective ambiances. The SI was dissolved in 1972, and although Situationists' ideas (especially on psychogeography and what de Certeau and others would later describe as practices of everyday life) were inspirational, they never arranged their revolutionary devices into a coherent programme. See, for example, Plant (1992) and Sadler (1998).

Chapter 3. Ecstatic Space

So far, the background and intentions of this research have been examined by discovering the history and characteristics of *kut* on the one hand, and their relationship to media theory (especially in relation to Flusser's concepts) on the other. Although there might be numerous ways of combining *kut* and today's communication code or technical images, this research will carry out all further explorations under the theme of *ecstatic space*. Ecstatic space is coined term by myself, inspired by the space of *kut*; it is the immersive and transitional space that harbours the potential of atmospheric change by the *kut* performer's imagination and ecstatic technologies. I will argue that this is conceptually akin to the virtual or immaterial space created within digital technology. To introduce the concept of ecstatic space, I initially offer an alternative perspective for understanding the techniques of ecstasy by highlighting the 'spatial ecstasy' of *kut* rather than the 'ecstatic trance' of shamans. Subsequently, the chapter examines how the ecstatic space of *kut* is conceptually connected to the virtual space of digital practices, discovering similarities and differences between them.

3.1. Redefining the Techniques of Ecstasy

One of the most significant purposes of *kut* is healing. *Shimbang* Seo emphasises the therapeutic role of *kut* in her interview by saying that '*kut* had been in charge of what a mental hospital is doing today. If there is an illness which is difficult to be cured by Korean medicine, people in the old days usually sought *shimbangs* and held *kut* as the alternative healing methods' (Seo 2016: np). A historical record of Korean shamanism, *choson musokko*, gives evidence of the medical role of *kut* in which *mudangs* (or *shimbangs*) worked institutionally as doctors in *Hwarinseo*, a national hospital of the Choson period (1466-1709) (Lee 2008: 13).

The fundamental aim of *kut* is to solve unfathomable personal, family or social problems. It can be seen from *cheonsin-kut*, a basic style of *kut* inherited from the tradition of the ancient heavenly rituals, *hanŭl-kut*. This *kut* serves the foundation format on which myriad types of *kut* are established by adding specific elements and features. *Cheonsin-kut* is performed to release discord from the community and restore the confidence and health of society, which tends to be regularly enacted by village, nation, and rich families every spring and autumn (Cho 2012: 96). The cure provided by this *kut* takes an integrated and embodied approach to mind, spirits and body, embracing the belief that imbalance of the mind and body or disharmony with spirits

causes the problems of life. This therapeutic approach is based on the Korean notion of *ch'ŏn-ji-in*, finding the peace and blessing of community through the harmony of the gods of heaven, earth and humans. *Cheonsin-kut* functions to release the accumulation of bad tension such as misunderstandings, conflicts, and stresses among people, ancestors and gods of nature over the course of the year, and it recovers and highlights unity between heaven-earth-human (98-99). Along with *cheonsin-kut*, different variations of *kut* are enacted to cure personal psychological problems. For example, *nalim-kut* heals the sick person suffering from *shinbyong*, the illness of 'self-loss' due to being possessed by spirits or gods. *Pyŏng-kut* tries to cure patients' diseases by mending their state of mind, and *chinogwi-kut* psychologically stabilises those who have experienced the process of death (Kim and Ji 2016: 11-12). Furthermore, Koreans occasionally, as an extreme measure, hold a *chaesu-kut*, a *kut* held to pray for good fortune when a family has suffered continuous misfortunes (Choi 2012: 99).

If *kut* fundamentally aims to cure both physical and mental problems of individuals, society and nation, what is the main *kut* technique that causes this healing effect? In shamanism studies, 'techniques of ecstasy' have been raised by numerous shamanism scholars as one of the most significant elements for therapeutic efficacy (Chae 2010, Cho 2012, Eliade 1972, Kim and Choi 2013, Pratt 2007, Sorgenfrei 2010). Ecstasy has been mainly expounded in shamanism studies, in the context of the ability of the shaman (or *shimbang*), rather than that of the *kut* (or shamanic rituals), since Eliade defined a shaman as a great master of ecstasy (Eliade 1972: 4). Eliade's *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* is regarded as the classic book of shamanism studies (Pratt 2007: xi). It opened up different understandings on shamanism for European scholars who had read about shamanic techniques as *Hexerei* (witchcraft) or idolatry and a shaman as a mentally sick, nervous and hysterical person (Cho 2012: 452-453). According to a Korean scholar, Son, *kut* has been widely reported and researched as the rituals of Korean shamans in shamanism studies since an American missionary, Homer Benzaleel Hulbert, claimed in 1903 that a *mudang* is of the same strain as a Siberian shaman, due to his interpretation of the *mudang*'s spiritual power as ecstasy (Son 2016: 112). Furthermore, as Eliade has enormously influenced Korean *kut* scholars, ecstatic techniques are mainly studied within the scope of the *shimbang*'s power rather than *kut* rituals.

However, continuing controversies between Korean scholars show that it is not reasonable to explain the ecstasy of *kut* within the confines of the shaman's spiritual power. This debate is

initially caused by Eliade's definition of ecstasy techniques. According to Eliade, ecstasy is the main feature of identifying a shaman, who has an 'ecstatic journey' during an altered state of consciousness (Eliade 1972: 509). He indicates that ecstasy always contains a trance, 'a temporary abandonment of the body by the soul of the shaman' (153), which can be also defined as 'losing consciousness' or 'losing one's soul', which travels through the sky and land when leaving his or her body (154). This type of ecstasy barely corresponds to *mudang* in terms of soul journey. The soul of a Korean *mudang* does not undergo a journey, but their body is possessed by, or cohabited with, other spirits or supernatural beings at will in order to communicate with them (Lim 2006: 76-77). Instead of losing consciousness, the *mudang* becomes a placatory counsellor or translator who delivers the words of spirits in order to help them communicate with people or vice versa (Walraven 2008: 243). More importantly, the trance or possession is not a prerequisite for every *mudang*. In fact, a majority of Korean *mudang* are *Sesup-mu* (hereditary *mudang*), who do not appear to have the spiritual ability but comfort spirits and people through their highly-trained dances, songs and drums.

Furthermore, being possessed by spirits is not an exclusive phenomenon of a *mudang*. It often happens to ordinary people during *kut*. I too have observed an old lady possessed by her daughter (who had taken her own life) during a *chaesu-kut* enacted at the request of a family who constantly suffered misfortunes. The *shimbang*, a Cheju *mudang* who performed *chaesu-kut*, identified one of the causes of the continuous bad luck as the sorrow of the family's suicidal daughter. During the ritual, the old lady danced like crazy for over an hour because the soul of the dead daughter inhabited her mother's body and danced to release her sorrow. Hence, a very unusual and strange scene was generated; on one side, the old lady was dancing maniacally according to the sounds of the *shimbang*'s drums and cymbals, and on the other side, family members were lamenting bitterly, recognising that the old lady's movements were similar to those of the dead daughter. The *shimbang* confided that these things happen often, and sometimes *shimbangs* have to play continuously for a whole day at the dancing rituals because they usually wait for the souls to stop their dancing instinctively for the purpose of healing.

Accordingly, confusion arises among Korean scholars over different forms of ecstasy of *kut* and the *mudangs* without spiritual powers. As I have mentioned earlier, one of the most important functions of *kut* is healing, and many scholars point out that the most crucial methods to provide a therapeutic efficacy are *the techniques of ecstasy*. However, as in Eliade, if the

spiritual ability of the shaman – ‘spiritual journey’ – is the essence of the techniques of ecstasy, we can deductively assume that a *mudang* without spiritual ability would no longer be a shaman, and the *kut* not controlled by spiritual power is no longer a *kut*. In fact, the means of judging a *mudang* and *kut* by spiritual abilities have already created bitter controversy among scholars over whether *kut* is shamanism or not. In this manner, Kilsong Ch’oe argues that the only shamans are *Kangshin-mu mudangs* (charismatic *mudangs*) of a proven trance ability, mainly found in the central and northern part of Korea, and *sesup-mu mudangs* (hereditary *mudangs*) of southern Korea are not shamans due to an absence of spiritual power (Ch’oe 1969: 53). Several Korean scholars suggest the term *muism* to distinguish the ideology of Korean shamanism, which is along the same lines as a *wuism* for Chinese shamanism (Lim 2008, Kim 1981, Ch’oe 1969). However, as *muism* of *mu* is driven by *mudang*, it is focused on the ideology of *mudang* and *mudnag-kut*, which cannot embrace all other *kut*. Given this, I argue that Eliade’s interpretation of the techniques of ecstasy has failed to supply a clear ontological unit by which to define Korean shamans and *kut*. And the shaman-centred definition of ecstasy is the main cause of sowing confusion, as it lacks the theoretical dimensions to interpret either *kut* or a *shimbang*.

Probably the most effective solution for this issue is to form an alternative perspective through which to understand the ecstatic techniques of a *mudang*. For this, let us go back to the root of the word ‘ecstasy’. The word comes from the Greek *ekstasis*, meaning standing outside yourself’ (Cresswell 2009: np). Eliade describes the shaman’s soul journey as the ecstatic technique because the shaman’s soul is actually travelling outside of themselves; though using a broadened sense, it can be compared to the mental state in which people feel they are standing to one side of their world. Specifically, the starting point for reaching an ecstatic state is the sensation when people feel as if they are stepping into an alternative reality, escaping from their ordinary routine. Given this, the ecstasy technique can be defined as a sort of technology letting people physically or subjectively stand in another form of surroundings, different from the ordinary everyday life to which they are accustomed.

From this point of view, it can be deduced that *kut* is all about the ecstasy – experiencing a different mental or physical state through ‘spatial transition’. Indeed, one of the particular terms of *kut*, *kutp’an*, supports this concept. When *kut* is held, Koreans often say ‘*kutp’an* is opened’. *P’an* is normally translated as a ‘field’ which refers not to a fixed space, but to a dynamic sphere

in which activity or interactions take place (Cho 2014: 309). Due to this colloquial but unique term, *p'an*, Korean scholar Jung-Hyun Cho even identifies *kut* as the '*p'an*-culture' (328). By setting up and decorating with various shamanic objects, plus enacting a variety of rituals, ordinary space is transformed into a temporary field of *kut*, *kutp'an* (325-326).

Indeed, *kutp'an* stands outside any institutionalised routine, liberating participants from the doctrines, social status, and conventions of society. *Kut* throws light on the animistic belief that all natural objects, including the universe itself, are living, and human life is influenced by these diverse invisible beings. Therefore, *kut* serves an egalitarian structure, which determines that all souls are equally important regardless of their taxonomic classification or social status in real life. Even in pre-modern Korean society, where the idea of elders first and androcentrism was predominant, *kut* maintained equal rights and opportunities for everyone to enjoy rituals. A traditional Korean proverb, 'Even if I want to participate in *kut*, I won't because I do not want to see a dancing daughter-in-law', is one of the examples representing the fact that *kut* offers an environment that is outside Korean social customs. This proverb shows that no one can keep a person from dancing and playing in *kut*, not even the daughter-in-law who had no freedom to have fun or enjoy herself, due to her low social status, at the time when Korea had a stratified social system. Another example of the classless structure would be *Talnori-kut* (mask-*kut*), one of the popular theatrical rituals in the Choson Dynasty (1392-1910). People had the freedom to express criticism of the upper class during *talnori-kut*, hiding their identity through masks. They could also remove their pent-up frustrations and build a sense of community and fellowship through making fun of noblemen, ridiculing apostate Buddhist monk, and exposing social conflicts, from behind the mask.

While *kutp'an* provides *kut* performers with a temporary space where they can focus on ecstatic rituals, creating an effective connection between *kutp'an* and rituals is one of the ways to generate therapeutic efficacy. Shamanic *mise-en-scène*, made up of a variety of symbolic objects, offers a shrine-like environment that helps *kut* performers to cross the threshold between consciousness and unconsciousness via a deep immersion. When *kut* performers sincerely expose what they feel and imagine during this liminal state of full immersion, the ritual exerts a more powerful impact on the tone, energy or ambience of the space, which enables people to focus, be excited and sometimes to see illusions of space. For example, when people are watching a *shimjang* whirling around the space faster and faster with a reverberating

sound of gongs, they often experience a kind of hallucination that she seems to be floating in the air and the stage appears to be revolving around her. Consequently, together with the *shimbang*'s rituals, *kutp'an* becomes the space which can influence people to feel ecstatic experiences.

With the support of *kutp'an* and shamanic dancing and singing rituals, *mudangs* (or *shimbangs*) become spiritual performers who can reach a high level of the ecstatic state. Not only *mudangs* but also guests sometimes experience *chöpsin*, which is the state in which their bodies are possessed or inhabited by the gods and spirits (Lim 2006: 116). During the state of *chöpsin*, people are often able to talk with spirits, and *mudangs* perform some mysterious rituals challenging their spiritual abilities like standing and dancing on a sharp blade known as *jackdu* (Park 2005: 342-343). *Kut* performers or hereditary *mudangs*, who are not charismatic *mudangs*, are now pursuing a more controlled and artistic way to achieve ecstasy – called *shinmyöng* – a unique feeling among Koreans indicating a certain embodied state with *shin-ki*.⁴⁴ In this state, *kut* performers often experience the strange feeling that they are aware of themselves, yet they feel as if they are in a different self, time or space: sometimes they act out their latent abilities in this state such as playing the drum faster, inventing new sounds and dance movements that they previously they did not imagine, feeling as if time has stopped or flows extremely slowly, dancing ethereally, as if they were on air; or being overly excited and forgetting their physical tiredness, although they have performed the *kut* for many hours. The prerequisite of this ecstatic experience is, therefore, undeniably the connection of *kutp'an* and *kut*-rituals, which make *kut* performers enter into deep mediational immersion. Standing on the threshold between consciousness and unconsciousness, or between spirituality and materiality, *kut* performers can go beyond their physical and physiological limitations.

Kutp'an, accompanying *kut*-rituals, offers time and space for *shimbangs* and guests to evoke a collective ecstasy with the purpose of healing. The dance and music ceremonies of *shimbangs* are intended to allow people to enter the unconscious realm: people often appear to lose their minds or become over-excited during rituals. In order to remove frustrations, conflicts, stress, the sorrow of everyday life and to boost happiness, confidence and harmony of the community, *kut* provides a certain ecstatic atmosphere for people, where they can escape from their ordinary

⁴⁴ *Shinmyöng* was introduced in relation to *shin-ki* in Chapter 1 as one of the important concepts by which to identify the spirit or the spirituality of *kut*.

life, allowing them to gather together singing and dancing. Because of these features, from antiquity to the present day, the place where the *kut* is held has been regarded as a place of festival, carnival and counselling; a sacred shelter for Koreans. These spatial ecstatic features would be one of the essential elements of *kut*, encapsulating the *shinmyǒng* culture that *shimbang* are devoted to developing for their healing rituals.

Further evidence to support the efficacy of *kut*'s space can be found in Victor Turner's notion of *communitas* in ritual studies. *Communitas* indicates the community, where people stand together 'outside' society, sharing an intense communal feeling during rituals. It is an anti-structured, or rudimentary and undifferentiated society, opposite to their usual structured, differentiated, and hierarchical lifestyle (Turner 1969: 96). In *communitas*, people may feel more freedom to remove their social bridle while they are experiencing another type of community. This allows people to let go of their ego and negative capability, and come up with new thoughts, perspectives, and creativity (Turner 2012: 3). It also generates a strong togetherness and a sense of belonging (4). In relation to *communitas* of ritual practice, it appears likely that the shamanic ritual, *kut*, is a more intense 'spiritual *communitas*' which attempts to help people reach an ecstatic state – a state of being so immersed in a different reality that they forget not only their physical state but also sometimes their consciousness. *Kut* generates more concentrated, chaotic, opened and sensorial form of rituals with the guidance of *shimbangs*. The extent of the ecstatic experiences differs depending on how closely guests engage in the rituals. As I have observed, some people will feel a kind of excitement and high-spirited mood, whereas some will experience a trance or spirit possession. It is the *shimbang*'s role to impart that certain mood that lets people willingly suspend disbelief and experience embodied communication with the community and spirits.

Summing up, the research on techniques of ecstasy to date has tended to focus on shamans' spiritual abilities. However, the shaman-centred approach fails to fully explain *kut* and *shimbang* and causes considerable controversy among scholars. Thus, I propose that an alternative understanding of the techniques of ecstasy is needed focusing on 'spatial ecstasy' of *kut* rather than 'ecstatic trance' of the shaman. The importance of spatial ecstasy's effect on the performance of *kut* is explained through describing features of the temporary built space of *kutp'an* in *kut*, the relationship between *kutp'an*, rituals and *shimbangs* and its effect on ecstatic experiences and the healing efficacy exerted by the ecstatic environments.

Regarding this, my research suggests the definition of ecstatic technology as a group of techniques for creating ‘ecstatic space’. Thus, ecstatic technology contains not only the spiritual powers of *shimbangs* but also other various technologies of *kut*, including dancing, singing rituals, spatial design etc, that aims to build a temporary ecstatic environment. As ecstatic space is the liminal and transitional space, which is not intangible, ecstatic technology is the spatial design technology not for constructing a certain architecture or visual-centred scenography, but for enabling atmospheric changes.⁴⁵ An ethereal ambience imparted by a blending of ecstatic technologies make guests and *shimbangs* more immersed into the elusive world of *kut*, delivering them a sense of ecstasy.

This different understanding of ecstatic technology carries the significant overtones that the *mudang*’s ability is dependent not only on what strong spiritual powers they have but also on how well they guide people to be engaged with and enjoy the world of *kut* through other ritualistic and artistic technologies. This might be the reason why there are two types of *kut* performers in Korea, those who have remarkable artistic skills and those who possess divine power. The key to understanding the technological ecstasy of *kut*, therefore, is nurturing a broader perspective from ‘standing outside yourself’ to ‘standing to the side of your ordinary world’. This will offer a more acceptable notion that can embrace the different forms of ecstasy and provide a conceptual framework for people to understand *kut*’s process and efficacy.

3.2. Ecstatic Technologies and Digital Technologies

As we have seen above, *kut* is the ritual of experiencing the ecstatic space that allows people to drift into the spiritual realm of *kut*, and to temporarily exist there, separate from the material world. When *kut* is enacted, everyday space becomes *kutp’an*, a locus for where the spiritual world meets the material world. It is clear that the world of *kut* is not well understood by a modern Korean society, which is dominated by reason and science. Nonetheless, ecstatic technology has become a medium for rendering this unconvincing world a trustworthy and

⁴⁵ In the context of scenographic design and architectural studies, the notion of ‘atmospheres’ has recently gained some prominence, yet the theoretical discourse on atmospheres itself is a fairly recent one, derived from philosophy, Gernot Böhme, cultural geography, spatial studies and architecture such as Pallasmaa (2014) and Zumthor (2006). Interestingly, Böhme provides his ideas on the relation between atmospheres and ecstasies (Böhme 2017: 32). He defines atmosphere as ‘the creation of ‘tuned’ spaces’, and ecstasies as ‘the things contributing to the formation of an atmosphere’. He asserts the consideration shift on the art of design stating that ‘whereas in the traditional theory of design one was talking about the shape and the properties of things, it is now about ‘ecstasies’ (5).

existing environment, and to establish spiritual *communitas*, allowing people to feel that they can access an alternative world and experience different levels of consciousness. When experiencing this other world, people are able to open their minds, allowing them to access new thoughts, perspectives, orders and creativity.

If the ecstatic techniques of *kut* serve as a vehicle for accessing ecstatic space for therapeutic efficacy, current digital technologies, as we have discovered, appear to offer a modern approach for accessing the digital world. As Flusser's utopian view of digital technology points at generating post-historical magic with which people can artificially project their imaginary world with a new imagination (Flusser 1996: 242-243), I want to argue how we can access the digitally mediated world, or virtual space, created by numerous computation technologies. And this computer-aided imaginary sphere, too, is often interactive and immersive, constructing a relationship with its users. Indeed, the potentials of alternative environments offered by computing power have already been detected by digital scholars and artists. According to media and telecommunication scholars Matthew Lombard and Theresa Ditton, different types of digital and simulational environments including Virtual Reality, simulation rides, 3-D IMAX films and state-of-the-art video conferencing, offer users a 'mediated experience' that has never before existed (Lombard and Ditton 2006: np). They insist that this mediated experience embodies a sense of *presence* that makes users feel the illusion that this mediated space is not mediated, but 'natural', 'direct' and 'real'; and this presence is growing stronger and stronger as digital technologies advance. (Lombard and Ditton 2006: np). Virtual reality imbues an exciting development of 'telepresence' – the mediated perception of digital mediated surroundings,⁴⁶ aiming at a more realistic and visually pleasing environment.

In addition, Roy Ascott, one of the leading artist-theorist in the field of cybernetics and telematics, asserts that people today can experience not one reality, but 'three VRs (three virtual realities)': *validated reality*, 'the orthodox universe of causal common sense' that is familiar with our daily experiences; *virtual reality* conjured by interactive digital technology, utterly 'liberated from the constraints of mundane physics'; and *vegetal reality* the third axis of

⁴⁶ According to Jonathan Steuer, the experience of presence in a mediated world is called 'telepresence'. While 'presence' indicates 'the natural perception' of the immediate physical environment, the term 'telepresence' represents 'the mediated perception' of digitally mediated surroundings. Telepresence is a sense of being in the virtual world, which is temporary or spatially-remote from our real world (Steuer 1992: 76-77).

visionary and therapeutic reality, related to his concept of *technoetics*⁴⁷ (Ascott 2011: np). According to him, these three VRs are constructed through *moistmedia*— a media formed by the convergence of cyberspace virtuality and nano-engineered biological systems (Ascott 2011: np).⁴⁸ Consequently, he envisages ‘the art of our new century’ as ‘a transformative art concerned with the construction of a fluid reality’ aided by moistmedia (Ascott 2003a: 363). In addition, analogous with Flusser’s analysis, he considers that all technology is a substrate of art, encouraging artists to challenge, create and re-form their own concept of alternative visions and reality; thereby he claims that artists have a responsibility to understand those technologies in letting ‘art shape life’ (Ascott 2003b: 98).

One of the interesting points that I want to emphasise regarding Ascott’s consideration of technoetic and moistmedia is its connection to shamanism: he holds the view that digital technology currently performs a similar role to that fulfilled by shamans. The vegetal reality of the three VRs is one of the cases that supports his idea. Conjured by psychoactive plant technology, it evokes the psychic, entheogenic and spiritual sense of awareness, which has been principally managed by shamans (Ascott 2011: np). Furthermore, his article ‘Weaving the Shamantic Web’ clearly describes the shamanic phenomenon of people in telematic space: they experience ‘double consciousness’ standing between virtual and material space, similar to shamans who enter ‘trance’ through their shamanic rituals (Ascott 2003: 357-358).

Given this, it is not unreasonable to assert that there is a striking parallelism between virtual or immaterial space projected by digital technologies and ecstatic space created by ecstatic technologies; they are conceptually analogous to each other since they both present a mediated world. While *shimbangs* create their liminal world by projecting their mythical imagination and applying ecstatic technologies, today’s digital practitioners build the alternative reality by drawing their imagination into reality through digital technologies, and in the case of VR design tools such as *Google Tiltbrush* – literally drawing this reality. In addition, there is something in both virtual space and ecstatic space that forms a sense of in-betweenness. While a digitally

⁴⁷ The term ‘technoetic’ is coined by Ascott from ‘technology’ and the Greek *noeitikos* (mind, consciousness), meaning ‘consciousness accessed, augmented, distributed, transformed (depending on the user’s world view) by technology’ (Ascott 2006: 69).

⁴⁸ Moistmedia is the new media comprising a combination of Bits, Atoms, Neurons and Genes, which Ascott abbreviates as the Big B.A.N.G., implicitly using the metaphor of Big Bang at the origin of the universe (Ascott 2003, 2011).

mediated world produces a liminal sense, generated between digital imagery and live users (Dixon 2007: 337), *kut* continues to explore the boundaries between consciousness and unconsciousness, or visible and invisible worlds. In this manner, *kut*'s ecstatic technology is parallel to digital technology. Both attribute to develop the presence of accessing the mediated world – a sense of being in the mediated world which is temporary or spatially remote from our real world.

However, there are also differences between the virtual and ecstatic space in how the mediatised world is perceived. One of the main differences is that the virtual space attempts to offer a presence within a realistically modelled environment, while ecstatic space produces the presence using metaphoric environments. For instance, as virtual reality suggests telepresence, it is designed to provide a more vivid and truthful environment by displaying seemingly accurate representations of surroundings that look, sound and feel like the real thing. In this way, the development of digital technologies contributes to the sensorial richness of the virtual world by increasing vividness⁴⁹ and interactivity⁵⁰ of the virtual environment (Steuer 1992: 82-86). This may produce a strong illusion of perceiving the mediated experience as the real, yet it lessens the sense of in-betweenness. On the other hand, the ecstatic space of *kut* is produced by semiotic and metaphysical images, dance and music that can sometimes only be fully interpreted by *shimbangs* themselves. What *shimbangs* designed and produce through *kut* is not the realistic but a surreal, imaginary and dream-like world. The unfixed and contingent nature of the visual, corporeal and acoustic language of *kut* provides more flexibility in exploring guests' imaginations, and it is a combination of the *shimbang*'s rituals, semiotic surroundings and guest's imaginations that create the transient illusion of gods or invisible beings present with them. Thus, as ecstatic space represents the space in-between, it pursues and emphasises an interstitial sense of presence.

This difference is further accentuated by VR spaces providing visual-centred perception, while ecstatic space offers kinetic, movement-oriented perception. In particular, most virtual realities offer visually-centred environments perceived via visual (or auditory) messages. In my view, it

⁴⁹ Vividness refer to 'the representational richness of a mediated environment'(Steuer 1992: 81). For example, to borrow McLuhan's notion of hot/cold media, the hot medium produces a highly vivid representation with high definition produce (McLuhan 1964: 36).

⁵⁰ Interactivity is depending on the extent of direct engagement between the user and technical beings or environments in real time (Steuer 1992: 84-85).

is the result of efforts to pursue a vividness of perception in digital environments that triggers the high-tech enhancement of visual medium from high definition TV to 4D hologram systems. These spectacular and realistic audio-visual images capture the user's attention; our cognition tends to read these audio-visual messages of virtual space and direct our consciousness to experience virtual reality. This process of perception seems overly centred on the formal and visual experience. It may be the case that a participant who wears goggles to enter virtual reality easily loses his or her kinaesthetic control while wandering around the space relying solely on ocular information (on screens inside the goggles). In addition, the virtual facility we enjoy to watch, listen, communicate and control is based on an individual platform, one-to-one connection between the computer-generated message and a participant. The individual interactivity of VR environments is likely to assist the breakdown of the perceived need for direct human experience. Lack of communal interactivity is perhaps one of the fundamental reasons why digital mediatised environments induce the matter of separation, as Flusser and Debord observed. This individual platform appears to hinder sufficient provision of the multisensory experience of humans, ignoring the fact humans accept and gather an exceedingly wide range of stimuli for embodied perceptions.

In contrast, the ecstatic space is usually experienced by the connection between all *kut* performers (or *mudang*) and all guests (or participants). As the ritual dance of bees informs other bees of the distance, direction and amount of food, the collective movement of rituals becomes a message exploring the internal domain of ecstatic space. In my view, the performers are the ones who have the gift of kinaesthetic sensitivity to explore the unknown and unconscious realm by immersing themselves in the ecstatic space through embodied experiences. As their ritual movements guide people to enter the journey of *kut*, the movements become the message or messenger of the ecstatic space. In this manner, digital or analogue audio-visual images act as a poetic or totemic element to support the exploration of the movements, which does not play as much of a subjective role as it does in virtual reality. Therefore, one's cognition is not applied to direct experiences. Instead, people are aware of the space and time of *kut* through spontaneous consciousness (or unconsciousness) and have more visceral experiences. This movement-centred perception offers a more natural pathway of perceiving the environment, helping us engage with direct human experiences. Regarding these differences, I propose the term 'ecstatic presence' to identify 'the mediated perception' of ecstatic space, distinguishing it from telepresence. The ecstatic presence is centred on *kut*'s way

of perception, sensing the mediated environment through the message of the collective movement.

To sum up, given these interesting resemblances and differences, the ecstatic space of my research particularly aims to explore the marriage of ecstatic technology and digital technology. Regarding Flusser's, Ascott's and other media theorists' conceptions of the potential of digital technologies, the marriage between ecstatic technology and digital technology will provide new potential to conjure the ecstatic space in reality. In addition, as a *kut* performer, I am genuinely interested in the organic and analogue side of mediating imaginary environments as in *kut*. Yet I am also intrigued to discover how digital computation technologies can enhance what I can do with my own hands. Thus, my practice-led research strives towards the use of interactive technical images within *kut* to evoke the same mythical world of imagination which, until now, has relied on more ancient tools – paper, bamboo, natural lights, colour coding and fabric.

One of the most crucial challenges of this marriage would be creating *ecstatic presence* whilst applying technical images. This is because, although digital technology is a more accessible medium for people today than *kut*'s ancient tools, most virtual spaces tend to rely heavily on visual experience and one-to-one communication, which interferes with people's embodied multisensorial perceptions and communal experiences. As *kut* continues to provide a vital prescription to loneliness and depression, as well as many other increasingly common social ills, I believe that seeking to produce ecstatic presence within technical images will offer a neo-ecstatic space for people to feel healing, communal, and embodied experiences.

Chapter 4. Shamanic User Interface

In the previous chapter, emphasising ‘spatial ecstasy’ rather than the shaman's ‘ecstatic trance’. I define ecstasy technologies as a group of techniques for creating the ecstatic space. Additionally, exploring the resemblance and distinction between the ecstatic technologies of *kut* and the digital technologies of virtual space, I clarify one of the major aims of my practice-led research, investigating the artistic potential of an interpenetrative relationship between these two technologies and formulating a performative approach towards the ecstatic space. For this, the research will initially identify *kut*'s ecstasy technologies according to the principal design features of *mugu*, which I propose to call Shamanic User Interface (SUI). The five SUI Designs will be explored, which is the main technologies of *shimbangs* producing ecstatic presence. Subsequently, I will examine several digital technologies in the connection of the design of SUI to comprehend them as a new shamanic medium to conjure the ecstatic space.

4.1. *Mugu* as Shamanic User Interface

Mugu indicates everything designed into a shamanic device functioning as shamanic media through which a *shimbang* can interact with the metaphysical space (Choi 2005: 314).⁵¹ *Mugu* is an inclusive term encompassing various shamanic devices used in *kut*, from a small object to a large installation including scenographic sets, costumes, props, musical instruments, ornaments, and food (317). *Mugu* is integral to creating ecstatic space since it offers symbolic meaning as a semiotic object. Every *mugu* signifies elements of the mythical world of *kut*. For instance, it symbolises the body of gods and goddesses, represents the worldview of *kut* (314-315), and some principal transmitted *mugu* such as *Tangsan-tree* (divine tree) and *myōngdu* (divine bronze mirrors) verify the sanctity of the place (Lim 2006: 112) and the capacity of *shimbangs* (Kim 1986: 15). Accordingly, creating and manipulating *mugu* is a hermeneutic technology of *shimbangs* to evoke their mythical world of *kut*.

Mugu has been translated in various terms by scholars such as *shamanic props*, *shamanic instruments* and *shamanic implements*. Nonetheless, the term that has extensively used in an

⁵¹ The term *mugu* was first used by 朝鮮巫俗の研究 (A Study of Korean Shamanism) to indicate a wide range of objects used in *kut*, for research purposes (Akiba and Akamatzu 1937). Since then, this term has generally been used by scholars, but not by *kut* practitioners. In general, *shimbangs* name each object according to its shape, function, or substance.

academic discipline would be *shamanic materials* (Kang 2006, Choi 2005, Jeon 2011, Cho 1999). This address that *mugu* has so far been studied mainly within its materiality, investigating its physical types and functions as an object. Relatively little attention has been devoted to the performativity of *mugu*, inquiring how *mugu* participates in an interplay with the ritual actions of *kut*. Jin-A Choi, a member of the Academy of Korean Studies, also points out that the studies on *mugu* in connection with *kut*-rituals often investigate *mugu* adjunctively, just as part of the research on *kut*, rather than focusing on *mugu* in terms of performance studies (Choi 2005: 335). Although *mugu* has been given attention in the context of museological studies, little has been studied regarding the nature of *mugu* as a performative object. Regarding that a translation is one of the major factors to identify an object, redefining *mugu* seems necessary to embrace it as a performative agent.

In this manner, my research suggests ‘Shamanic User Interface (SUI)’ as the alternative term by which to define *mugu*. The definition of SUI is inspired by one of the principal attributes of *mugu* and its interesting resemblance with ‘User Interface’ (UI),⁵² a widely used term in computer science and interaction design expression. To illustrate, one of the fundamental aims of *mugu* is to function as an effective medium for *shimbangs* to connect with the world of *kut* (or the ecstatic space) during rituals. If UI indicates literally the interface for a user to communicate with the world of computer technology (Butterfield and Ngondi 2016: np), *mugu* can be identified as Shamanic User Interface that supports *shimbangs* in linking with ecstatic space. As the term UI denotes the functional and relational sense of the interface, I believe that the term SUI expresses a sense of performativity by highlighting the *mugu*’s essential action in *kut*: connecting a *shimbang*’s rituals and the world of *kut* as a middle agent. Consequently, the main functions of *mugu* as SUI would be not only arousing the ability of *shimbangs* to navigate the spiritual and immaterial realm but also leading guests (or audiences) to experience ecstatic presence by revealing its metaphoric and semiotic information.

Regarding SUI as a central axis of my research, the following will discover SUI Design, namely various design elements that can maximise the functions of *mugu*. I believe that the key design

⁵² User Interface (UI) indicates the means designed for people to communicate with computers, e.g. the computer mouse, keyboard, remote control, and display screens. Recent years have witnessed the appearance of diverse terms relating to ‘UI’ – Graphic UI(GUI), Web UI(WUI), or UI design – which have received much attention from scholars and technicians in developing the usability and affectivity of connecting and interplaying with the computational world (Butterfield and Ngondi 2016).

features of SUI offer insight for interpreting and developing the ecstatic technologies of *shimbangs*. The investigation combines my field research, literature review, and experiences as a *kut* performer. This approach aims to examine and clarify the performativity of *mugu*. Subsequently, SUI Design will be essentially applied as the ground for ecstatic technologies merging with digital technologies in my practice works.

4.2. Five Major Elements of Shamanic User Interface Design

4.2.1. Portability

Mugu is basal elements forming the spiritual sphere believed in by *shimbangs*, where the human and spiritual worlds are connected (Kang 2006, Moon 2008, Hyeon 2011). Though it might be assumed that a *kut* can only be staged in a sacred shrine, it can take place almost anywhere – in the midst of the city, on the waterfront, shipboard, on a mountain or in private houses. However, a *kut* should have a certain temporal architectural interior; Which is *Kutp'an* that is designed to transform everyday space into the world of *kut*, generating a mythical and holistic atmosphere for *shimbangs* and their visible and invisible guests (Moon 2014: np). As humans build their own world to complement their particular way of life, *shimbangs* possess the essential capability to build a temporary stage, *kutp'an*, for a *kut*, on a particular site, using *mugu*.

Mugu is designed to enhance portability in establishing the temporary architecture of a *kutp'an* in any environment. This nature of portability allows *mugu* to be used in a very flexible manner. In detail, *mugu* is made up of easily available materials such as bamboo, flower, paper and



Fig.8. *Kime* (or *kimejŏnji*), a shamanic paper-cutting art, exhibited in Cheju Healing Arts Festival 2017 directed by Haein Song (left) © MARO; the image of a *shimbang* creating a *kime* (right). © Voice of Cheju.

fabric, and *shimbangs* devise their own designing methods by which to create and decorate *mugu* in a short time. For example, one of the most important and frequently used *mugu* for designing the *kutp'an* is *kime* (or *kimejŏnji*), a shamanic paper-cutting art. Various symbolic shapes of gods, spirits, humans, flowers and animals are simply made by cutting paper; time-consuming and complicated works including pasting and assembling are omitted (see Fig.8). *Shimbangs* create dozens of *kime* at lightning speed and cover the site with them, which are visually appealing and technically impressive.

K'ŭndae, a divine pole acting as a passage for the gods, is another example of a portable design, which consists of a six or seven-metre-long pole and a huge variety of symbolic flagpoles made of fabric, paper, bamboo sticks and leaves. Based on the pattern and structure of *k'ŭndae*, a Korean scholar, Young, states that *k'ŭndae* is the representation of a *Tangsan-tree*, generally planted in the yard of a *shimbang's* shrine and regarded as the home of gods and goddesses (Hyeon 1969: 91-94). Based on his idea, it can be inferred that *shimbangs* set up the *k'ŭndae* in place of *Tangsan-tree* when they perform a *kut* in a place other than a shrine (see Fig.9). When *k'ŭndae* is erected on *kutp'an*, it obtains a similar meaning to the *Tangsan-tree*, the medium that connects spiritual and material worlds (Moon and Moon 2011: 21-22). *K'ŭndae* reveals clever design by *shimbangs* that solves the issues of the sacred treeless *kutp'an*.

The way *shimbangs* deal with *mugu* also presents portable qualities: when we look into the process of *kut*, most *mugu* is formed by *shimbangs* using an assemblage of natural or daily materials such as bamboo, flowers, paper, fabric, food and drink. During the rituals, *mugu* is



Fig.9. The image of *Tangsan-tree* (right) © Cheju Tourism Organization; the image of *k'ŭndae* (left) in *Cheju kŭn kut* performed in 2011. ©KBS.

used, played and performed by guests, *kut* performers and *shimbagns*; when a *kut* is finished, *mugu* should be consumed by guests or framed – or cremated. Of course, there are exceptions by which the antique *mugu* inherited by *shimbagns* or treasured *mugu* such as musical instruments are not destroyed in a fire. However, precious and old *mugu* loses its sacred meaning when not being used, just as if it had been burned; it plays a vital role in a *kut*, but not in real life, which means the value and function of *mugu* disappears after a *kut*.

Summing up, portability is the key factor for creating a temporary *kutp'an*, which is *shimbagns'* way of maintaining the sanctity of shrine, while performing a *kut* in different areas, being engaged with various changes in the surrounding natural environment. Portability, more importantly, allows *shimbagns* to hold a *kut* almost anywhere, which means it increases the usability of the *kut* among communities. In light of this consideration, I propose portability as one of the major features of SIU design.

4.2.2. Metaphoric Mapping

The *mise-en-scène* of *kutp'an*, in other words, the technology of creating the world of *kut* through a collage of *mugu*, is the primary competence of *shimbagns*, which has been handed down amongst them (Choi 2005, Kang 2006). The scenography of *kutp'an* differs according to the purpose of the individual *kut*. However, it follows a specific design approach, which I refer to as 'metaphoric mapping': the method of creating images of space by displaying various *mugu*, combining symbolic and semiotic meanings that each *mugu* contains. To illustrate, each *mugu* is a metaphorical and iconographic object that *shimbagns* use to represent their understanding of the world, death and birth, life and afterlife, gods and spirits, and the realms of the universe (Yang 2011: 239). The type of *kut* – e.g. communal or private – and its purpose – e.g. to comfort the dying, to heal pains, or to pray for blessings – decide which *mugu* will be used. *shimbagns* offer a particular shamanic world for their guests by selecting and displaying these symbolic *mugu* on the site (Moon 2014: np). A *kutp'an* is formed when an orchestration of metaphoric *mugu* maps in the space of *kut*, in other words, when the space is metaphorically mapped.

To understand how this formula works in *kut*, we shall take a closer look at some examples of its mapping methods. *Mugu* is displayed facing *obang*, the five directions that create the symbolic meaning of the space. *Obang* is the central notion in *kut*, representing the gods of East, West, South, North, and Centre – also denoting natural elements of tree, metal, fire, water, and

soil using the colour code of blue (or green), white, red, black, and yellow based on a five-fold conceptual scheme. In the Central North, *kutsang* (a ritual table with sacred foods) and *pyǒngp'ung* (a folding art screen) are used (see Fig.10). The make-up of this ritual table and the style of the art screen vary according to the deity or ancestral spirits being invited and by the region in which the ritual is performed. The amount of food reveals the hierarchy of deity. The ritual table is prepared by common patterns of colour arrangement yet marked by regional specialities. Consequently, *kutsang* and *pyǒngp'ung* may offer clues about the characteristics of the ritual and the spirits invoked.

Tangk'ül is set up facing four directions. It is referred to as the symbol of ‘the palace of gods’ because it is composed of various paper-cut arts, including *saljang*, *chungsa-chorong*, and *obang-gi*, representing the architecture and ornaments of the palace of the gods (Moon 2008: 137). Mainly, four types of *tangk'ül* are used in *kut*, dividing the universe of gods into four realms: the *tangk'ül* (temporary palace) for celestial gods who inhabit the highest realm of the universe; for the gods of death in the second realm; for the gods who govern villages and houses in the third realm; and for gods taking care of the souls of those who have been dead less than three years, or who entered the burial village in the fourth realm. As different gods live in the four different realms, the numbers and shapes of *tangk'ül* vary depending on which god the *shimbangs* will interact with (137-140). Thus, people notice the status of the invited gods through the splendour of *tangk'ül*. Along with *kutsang* and *tangk'ül*, various types of *mugu* including *kime*, *k'ündae*, and *dari* (a long cotton drape symbolising the bridge to the spiritual world) are placed or suspended to create *kutp'an* based on the purpose of *kut*.



Fig.10. The images of *kutsang* and *pyǒngp'ung* of *cheju-k'ün kut*, performed in October 2015, in Cheju-si, Korea. © MARO.

Ponp'uri is the set of myths or mythical chants sung by *shimbangs* in Cheju-*kut* that inspire *shimbangs* to have a collective symbolic meaning of *mugu* and *kutp'an*. As 'pon' refers to the root of gods and the principle of *kut*, and 'puri' refers to 'release, narrate and explain', *ponp'uri* is a fundamental script or textbook of the *kut*, which unfolds its principles. *Ponp'uri* contains the story of the creation of the world, the realms of the universe and the life of 18,000 gods and goddess of Cheju – from birth to the time when they left. These voluminous and diverse stories of *ponp'uri* represent the world of *kut* (Moon 1986, Hyeon 2006). Each *mugu* is a symbolic representation of the elements of *ponp'uri*. Thus, the world generated by mapping *mugu* can be perceived as a symbolic replica of the mythological universe of the *kut*. Moon depicts the relationship of the *kut* and *kutp'an* as follows: '*kutp'an* is the sketch of the symbolic world of *kut*, and rituals in *kutp'an* draw or accomplish the universe of *kut*' (Moon 2014: np). In this sense, metaphoric mapping can be considered the most basic technique used by *shimbangs* for drawing a spatial-frame on the site to express the mythical stories of *ponp'uri*.

The assemblage of these diverse *mugu* displayed in 3D space looks like one large piece of work, creating an immersive environment of the *kut* (see Fig.11). The visual impact of *mugu* is strong enough to attract people's attention. Thus, when a *kut* starts off in a Korean city, people become aware of it by the extremely splendid and colourfully decorated *mugu*. However, *mugu* functions not merely as the beautiful and elaborate visual works through which they express their



Fig.11. Metaphoric mapping design of *mugu* in *kutp'an*, 2013, at the *kut* for the god of winds, *yŏngdŭng*.

© Jeminilbo.

understanding of the *kut*'s universe, but also as a tool by which to invite spirits and connect them with humans. The metaphorically mapped *mugu* is a stage device helping shamans, together with their visible and invisible guests, grasp and feel the supernatural world of the *kut* within the natural world. It provides a relevant map for the gods, inviting them into the right space (Kang 2006: 136-137). In addition, it produces an immersive space that allows guests to entirely devote their body as one of the components of *kutp'an* (Moon 2008: 133-134). Therefore, metaphoric mapping is one of spatial design methods offering an iconographical and sensual environment to increase the involvement of guests and *shimbangs*.

The idea of involvement is an underlying concept of the design of *kutp'an* because *kut* is ontologically a very relational performance. For example, if the performance on a western proscenium stage is meant for expression of one's own aesthetic identity (for example in the aesthetic realisation by a director), the *kut* is a performance that seeks a communal or personal identity through conversation. This relational approach of the *kut* can be interpreted by the Korean perspective *ki-irwönnon* (氣一元論). *Ki-irwönnon* is a relational concept that contrasts with 'substantialism', and which regards everything as a movement of *ki* and finds its ontology in the relationship of things (Kim *et al.* 2004: 79-80). The world of *kut* cannot be fully represented by individual *mugu*, or a ritual, but can be read through the relationships among *mugu*, *mugu* and *shimbangs*, *shimbangs* and audiences. It means that the spatiotemporal movements of these relationships are necessary to decode the world of the *kut*. Accordingly, metaphorical mapping reveals the relational perspective of the *kut* where the creation of an environment through the relationship of *mugu* can lead to an effective physical and spiritual conversation between metaphysical guests, human guests and *shimbangs*. Regarding these fundamental and magical spatial design attributes, it is natural for me to claim metaphoric mapping as the second key element of SUI Design.

4.2.3. Mobility

Mugu are meant to be moved and touched through the time and space of the *kutp'an* rather than being settled on the surface as the scenery. It is because *kutp'an*, as it refers to a temporarily built shrine, is designed to accommodate various venues such as the mountainside, coast, rice paddies and fields, as well as a lengthy ritual (a *kut* lasts for at least half a day and a maximum of fifteen days). Indeed, the transient and moving nature of *mugu* supports *shimbangs* and viewers to boost their multi-sensory experiences. When *mugu* is animated by the movements

of any participant of a *kut*, including humans or natural elements, such as winds or light, during the rituals, that animation provides an impetus for a new visual experience. For instance, viewers do not merely watch, but also begin to sensibly feel the presence of moving *mugu*. When the motion of the *mugu* interweaves with shamanic ritual, viewers are likely to see a holistic mirage as if they are surrounded by spiritual atmospheres.

Thus, *mugu* is designed with motion in mind; namely, the intention of *mugu* is to create ‘mobility’. The mobility of *mugu* allows it to intimately harmonise with the space and time of the surroundings while highlighting its presence, and to arouse an illusionary resonance. Accordingly, people do not merely appreciate the splendid visuals of *mugu* but also feel and viscerally experience the *mugu* and *kutp’an*. For a more precise comprehension, let us examine *kime*, one of the most widely used *mugu* in *kut*, as an example of applied mobility. If *kime* – paper-cut art – were displayed in the gallery, stable and firmly fixed in space, it would be visual art that lets us read and discover the mythical and symbolic images based on our visual senses. However, if *kime* interacts with the wind, it evokes another aesthetic sensitivity in the people.

Moon asserts that *kime* is designed to deliver the aesthetic of the wind. Since Cheju is a windy island, the strong winds have made a strong impression on Cheju residents, making them endorse the belief that gods are riding on the wind (Moon 2003: 77-78). According to Moon, *kime* is the art which uses the wind as a symbol of gods, considering the fear of the blustery wind and the beauty of the breeze, both of which are characteristics of gods (Moon 2008: np). Because of this, *kime* often functions as a window through which gods (or invisible beings) enter and leave a *kut*. Furthermore, there are dozens of *kime*, not just one item of *kime* in a *kutp’an*. When people are enclosed in the space where numerous variations of *kime* are dancing together in the wind, other imaginary forms may be produced through a multi-sensual impression, as if the *kime* were moved by the invited spirits or gods within the wind. People might feel entirely different, even somewhat animistic, when they are covered by moving *kime*, compared to when they are surrounded by static and fixed *kime*.

This animistic ambience of the mobile design seems to be derived from Korean animism which is strongly intertwined with the *kut*. Since ancient times, Koreans have believed that not only alive things but also inert objects, such as trees, rocks, wind, mountains and houses, have spirits (Baker 2008: 19). Understanding what a spirit is in *kut*, or from the point of view of Eastern

philosophy, may help you interpret Korean animism. As we have seen in Chapter 1, invisible beings are referred to using specific Korean words appropriate to the individual case such as *nŏk*, *yŏnghon*, *yŏng*, or *honback*,⁵³ and this terminology carries a clearer and more complex explanation than the western concept of spirits such as ghosts, apparitions, pneumas, or the spiritual or immaterial part of a human being. During an interview with a *shimbang*, Soon Sil Seo, said that sensing *nŏk*, the aura of invisible beings, in other words, sensing their *ki*, is one of her ways of feeling spirits or gods.

Indeed, several Asian theories address that sensorial experiences and the sensitivity of our senses are important factors in one's awareness of spirits or *ki*. The canonical foundation of the nature of *ki* lies in Korean or Chinese Confucianism. In the Confucian Theory of the Soul, the nature of soul consists of two components, *hon* and *back*. *Hon* is a *yang* entity animating human cognitive activity, gathering memory, acquisition, and experiences. And *back* is a *yin* entity, which is the corporeal soul charging the area of recognising the world through the five senses (Choi 2006: 222). As everything has *yin* and *yang* entity as complementary force, according to Chinese pre-eminent Confucian master, Zhu Xi (1126-1271), everything that exists is created by *ki*, a vital force that is constantly rotating and interacting. Likewise, a spirit is nothing but condensing and dispersing *ki* (quoted in Choi 2006: 221). This conception of *ki* is also identical with the relational concept of *ki-irwŏnnon* that has been noted earlier. Hence, the spirits in Korean animism and *kut* might best be construed as 'seminal *ki*' or 'vital force'. In Korean animism, all creations have a spirit, namely, *ki* – a vital activity or energy. That means there is nothing static in a universe where *ki* is active. Therefore, the nature of an object can be seen by investigating its dynamic changes, not by immutable substances. In *ki-ch'ŭk-ch'e-ŭi* (氣測體義) (1836), Korean *ki* researcher and philosopher Han-gi Choi's theoretical treatise on how to research the universe of *ki*, Chio profoundly highlights the importance of one's experiences with the activation of nine sensory organs including the faucal, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, and generative organs, torso, and limbs, and he admonishes humans for being too submerged in their own ideology and delusion (quoted in Lee 2010: 494-496). To be specific, the *ki*, or the spirits, are elements which are perceived better when our multi-sensory experiences are emphasised. This animistic, vital, sensorial concept of *ki* is the base of Korean animism, which is again the root of the mobility design in *kut*.

⁵³ See Chapter 1, page 43.

Mobility, therefore, seems to be the essential design method to boost our multi-sensorial and animistic experiences alongside the metaphorically mapped environment of the *kutp'an* and the *shimbangs*' sensorial chant, dances and drum-play. One would feel the presence of the *kime* at moments when, during *kut* rituals, the *kime* move with environmental interaction, e.g. swaying by a touch of the wind triggered by a *shimbang*'s spinning, as well as the movement of air. This movement of the *kime* becomes a dance, performed together on the stage of *kut*. Consequently, the *kime* becomes a sensorial mobile – a moving, dancing and acting object that completely reacts to its universe, maintaining harmony with the transitional surroundings. Thus, *kime* is primarily not visual but a resonating form, enhancing the liveness, *ki*, and Korean animism.

To sum up, mobility is one of the key features of SUI design, which is deliberately intended to be moved, touched and animated, throughout the existence of *kutp'an*, to represent the spirits or *ki*. Thus, mobility is related to a fluid design that can be accommodated with the changing surroundings. It pursues not a visual but a reverberating design that can touch audiences with multi-sensorial experiences. In relation to Korean animism, a strong presence or liveness of SUI is generated by the utmost experience of mobility, which guides people to being immersed in the animistic atmosphere of *kutp'an*, which can, in turn, offer a spiritual and mythical illusion.

4.2.4. Liminality

I suggest 'liminality' as another significant feature attached to SUI Design in terms of *myöngdu*, a liminal or spiritual *mugu* that is extremely treasured by shamans, and absolutely necessary to perform *kut*. It verifies the *shimbangs* as being authentic (Kim 1986: 15). *Myöngdu* is a primary shamanic tool widely found in various regions of Korea. The *myöngdu* of Cheju Island can be explained using two different *mugu*. One is *ulsoe*, a classic type of Cheju *myöngdu* (see Fig. 12) (Si 2012: 163), and the other is *sam-myöngdu* (three *myöngdu*), which is modelled on *myöngdu* in different forms and also on *sanp'an* (three divine vessels) (Jang and Choi 2001: np). It is a *shimbang*'s custom to worship *myöngdu* and bequeath it to posterity. As I mentioned in the beginning of the chapter, it is because *sam-myöngdu* represents the first ancestral gods of *shimbangs* according to *chogong-ponp'uri*. Accordingly, much scholarly work has been done on *myöngdu* when uncovering the roots of *shimbangs* and finding the fundamental meaning of shamanic rituals (Choi 2005, Jeon 2011, Kim 1986). This tells us that exploring *myöngdu* is a vital way of identifying the primary nature of SUI.

Myǒngdu are brass ‘mirrors’ which are believed by *shimbangs* to be the face of gods. The word *myǒngdu* means a ‘light tool’ or a ‘bright and illuminating seal’, borrowed from Chinese characters 明斗 or 明圖 (Jang and Choi 2001: np). Each *myǒngdu* has a unique pattern including images of sun, moon and stars on the surface, alluding to heavenly gods (see Fig.12) (Si 2012: 161-162).⁵⁴ The function of *myǒngdu* is to initiate a spiritual conversation with the gods. *Myǒngdu* act as antennae that accept the light (or gods) of the sun, moon, and stars and assist the shaman in feeling the *ki* (a cluster of energy) of heaven and earth. It is also the symbol of authority and dignity. When a mirror reflects sunlight, no one dare look straight at the glare. When it reflects the light of the moon and stars at night, one can feel the mercy, grace and warmth of nature (Jo 2005a, Si 2012). Consequently, *myǒngdu* functions as a medium for revealing a spiritual message by interacting with invisible beings who project themselves into the light of nature. Taken together, *myǒngdu* can be defined as a brass shamanic mirror reflecting lights which are regarded as the face of gods.



Fig.12. The classical design of *myǒngdu* (left); Cheju *myǒngdu*, named *ulsoe* (right). © Cheju Folk Museum.

The features of *myǒngdu* are encapsulated in the term ‘liminality’. The word liminal means ‘on the threshold,’ from the Latin word *limen*, and I apply Victor Turner’s notion of ‘liminal *persona*’ to indicate the state of ‘betwixt and between’ of transitional beings who are in an unstable state, passing from one realm to another (Turner 1964: 47).⁵⁵ The shaman is known

⁵⁴ *Ulsoe* consists of five different shapes of mirrors including *haegeoul* (Sun mirror), *dalgeoul* (Moon mirror), *momgeoul* (the mirror of ten traditional symbolic animals of longevity), *awangsoe* (rectangular mirror with lotus) and *ppolongsoe* (a bell shape mirror symbolising stars).

⁵⁵ Turner’s anthropological concept of ‘liminal’ exerts influence on the performance studies field. One of the founders of performance studies, Richard Schechner, analysed rituals and performance by adopting the notion of ‘liminal’ in *Performance Studies* (2003); Susan Broadhurst’s *Liminal Acts* (1999) suggests the term ‘liminal performance’ to identify a range of hybridised, experimental and indeterminate performance types, e.g. *tanztheater*, digitised performance and music.

as a ‘liminal *persona*’ because he/she is in an altered state of consciousness during rituals, meaning the nature of *myōngdu* seems virtually identical with that of the shamans. The identity of *myōngdu* is mutable and can be shifted by whoever might be reflected by their surface (or body). It is always in a state of ‘between’ because the value of the character is transitional while a *kut* is being performed.

Since *myōngdu* is the origin of *mugu* that ushers in *shimbang* and *kut*, all variations of *mugu* deeply dwell in the in-between nature of *myōngdu*. The *shimbang* is the one who is fully aware of the liminality of *mugu* and cleverly applies *mugu* in the rituals. Thus, liminal features of *mugu* are utilised to not only read and represent the message of the spirits in divination rituals but also to form a type of dramatic structure within the *mugu*’s transitional and mutable character. It has frequently been observed that *shimbangs* build a dramatic structure using *mugu* through which they perform the role of diverse characters, using their transitional identities. For instance, *dari* (a long cotton drape) is naturally regarded as a symbolic ornament when it is suspended on the wall at the beginning of the *kut*. However, it is re-identified as another being in relation to a *shimbang*’s actions: *dari* becomes ‘the cleansing entryway’, purifying a person, when used for greeting or guiding them inside the *kutp’an* (Moon 2011: 71) (see Fig. 13 above): it turns into ‘the sorrow and illness’ to be resolved, when that person wraps it around their body in *pangulp’um* (purification ritual) (119) (see Fig. 13 middle). It is also transformed into ‘the dragon’ who brings good luck, for as long as a *shimbang* plays with *dari* in *Yongnori-kut* (the dragon-drama ritual) (104-106) (see Fig. 13 below). Looking at these transitional images of *mugu* through three of these rituals, we can see the simple dramatic structure that a *shimbang* composes: passing through the cleansing entryway – removing sorrow and illness – being blessed with good luck.

Summing up, the liminality is another key feature of SUIs. *Myōngdu* is the cardinal and indispensable *mugu* of shamans and their ritual, *kut*. It is a shamanic mirror which is in the state of *in-betweenness* reflecting the light of the sun, moon and stars which are regarded as heavenly gods. As in *myōngdu*, liminality is incorporated in SUI, designed to be a liminal or transitional interface that can play a variable role in *kut*. The identity of SUI is determined by interactions with various agents – *shimbangs*, participants, invisible spirits and, in a broad sense, ritual actions. Therefore, liminality is the design concept of SUI which proves efficient for presenting a liminal, holistic message as well as a narrative structure in *kut* rituals.



Fig.13. Diverse ways of using *dari* in *Cheju-k'ün-kut*. *dari* playing the role of 'a cleansing way' (above); 'sorrow and illness' (middle); 'the dragon of good luck' (below). © KBS.

4.2.5. Promotability

We have seen that the value and identity of SUI can be fully revealed when they are being touched, animated or possessed by the energy of the ritual actions. Regarding this, one might assume that SUI only plays a passive role that is continuously influenced by others. However, SUI also subliminally works as a catalyst of uplifting invisible motions of the ritual actions,

such as the emotions of participants, the energy of *shimbangs*, and hope attached to the rituals during *kut*. Thus, SUI tends to be designed for ‘promotability’, namely, to promote the internal motions of the participants, *shimbang* and rituals.

To deeply understand this, it is necessary to illustrate how *mugu* shed light on the invisible motions of others during *kut*. Accelerating the emotions of participants through *mugu* is a common technique used by the *shimbang*. In *yŏnggye-ullim* – the crying ritual for the spirit of the dead – a *shimbang* must be accompanied by *nunmul-sugŏn* (a handkerchief for wiping away tears). The participants of this ritual are mainly friends, relatives, and survivors. The *shimbang* goes into a trance and the dead soul temporarily inhabits the *shimbang*’s body in order to converse with the participants. The voice of the soul, carried by the *shimbang*, makes the audiences shed tears. However, their crying, mourning and wailing are more intensified by repetitive movements of *nunmul-sugŏn* that seems like the soul expressing its grief. Hence, the more the movements of *nunmul-sugŏn* match with the *shimbang*’s voice, the greater the grief expressed amongst participants (Moon 2003, Hyeon 2011).

Another typical *mugu* that underlines the extension of internal energy of the *shimbang* would be *halmang-dari*, a 15-meter-long ritual scarf representing the bridge between heaven and earth (see Fig.14). When dancing with the scarf, a *shimbang* is continuously hopping while spinning it at the same time. Then, the scarf gradually makes a spiral shape and energetically moves on the ground. This is a moment of incredulity for audiences to see such a long scarf being



Fig.14. The dance of *shimbang* Seo with *halmang-dari*, a divine long fabric. © KBS.

dynamically whirled for so long. By this time, the scarf looks like a dancing serpent, either catalysing the dance or emphasising the vitality of the dance of the *shimbang* (Moon and Moon 2011: 62-63).

Nangsoe, an ox sculpture, consists of a collage of twigs and branches and is one of the typical symbolic *mugu* of gathering, encouraging, and representing people's hope from the *kut*. It is a mythical sculpture believed by Cheju inhabitants to make wishes come true (see Fig.15). In *Ipch'un-kut* (the *kut* held on the lunar Spring Day), the value of *nangsoe* culminates in participants hanging wishing papers on and around it. The *nangsoe* with hundreds of wishing papers becomes the symbolic sculpture representing the hope of Cheju. Thus, *nangsoe*, as it were, is the *mugu* that helps the participants accumulate and express their wishes through ritual actions of hanging wishing papers.

This illustrates that *mugu* functions as a catalyst in ritual actions. In other words, *mugu* is designed to partake in 'promotability', accelerating and amplifying the inner movements, including emotions, energy, wishes and other people's ritual actions. Thus, promotability is the last feature that I would like to suggest as a key element of SUI Design. It enhances the collective energy of the surroundings and makes SUI interact with people as active agents rather than as passive objects of *kut*. It is obvious that SUI needs a connection with *kut*'s intrinsic action for it to behave, perform and exist; equally, it is impossible to perform *kut* without SUI, as long as SUI is working as a useful device to promote invisible, spiritual, and internal movements, it makes shamanic rituals more effective and improves the quality of *kut*.



Fig.15. Hanging a wishing paper around the *nangsoe* in *Ipch'un-kut* (the *kut* for the lunar Spring Day). Photo: Haerin Song.

To conclude, *mugu* is often defined as ‘shamanic materials’ by scholars, and studies on *mugu* have tended to explore their physical attributes and functions as material objects in the context of museology. Therefore, my research proposes the use of Shamanic User Interface as an alternative definition of *mugu* to emphasise not the materiality but performativity of *mugu*. SUI indicates everything that is incorporated and designed into a shamanic device with which a shaman may interact with the world of *kut*, and this research on SUI aims to investigate *mugu* in the context of performance studies, inquiring how *mugu* participate in and interact with *kut*’s ritual actions. Consequently, the key design elements, which enhance the function of *mugu* as SUIs, have been investigated in light of theoretical explorations and field research on *mugu*. The five major features of the SUI Design, namely the five ecstatic technologies enhancing connection with the shamanic world of *kut*, are as follows:

- 1) **Portability**: the SUI design generating the temporarily-built stage, *kutp’an*, which allows *kut* to be performed in different environments and enhances its usability.
- 2) **Metaphoric mapping**: the fundamental spatial design, transforming an everyday space into the mythological universe of *kut*; it aims to create a space where *shimbangs*, spirits and guests can be prepared for the intense conversations of shamanic rituals.
- 3) **Mobility**: this design is intended to be moved, touched, animated and accommodated within its transitional surroundings, it highlights liveness or *ki* (vital force), and the sense of Korean animism.
- 4) **Liminality**: the cardinal attribute of SUIs which is designed to create a state of in-betweenness that reflect the message and face of gods or spirits in shamanic rituals, producing a sense of immanence and providing *kut*’s narrative structure.
- 5) **Promotability**: this element of SUIs promotes invisible energy or movements by others in *kut*, allowing SUIs to partake as an active agent, enhancing the emotion, energy and desire of the ritual actions.

4.3. Shamanic User Interface Design in the Digital Age

Having outlined the ecstatic technologies via the five core features of SUI Designs in *kut*, I will now explain some ideas and possibilities of further extending the SUI Designs through digital technology. In this digital era, we are witnessing the marriage of live performance and computation technology offers artists an expanded interdisciplinary range of aesthetics and concepts to apply to body, consciousness, space and the role of the audience. And my research

on both SUI Design and recent user-centred and immersive digital practices finds an interesting resemblance in their design techniques and methods.

One of the most inspiring digital practices that make me find a potential fusion between digital performance and *kut* is *metakimosphere no. 3* – an immersive environment merging kinetics, wearables, choreography, digital projections and sounds – directed by Johannes Birringer and Michèle Danjoux, along with their team DAP-Lab (Design and Performance Lab). It was staged at Artaud Performance Centre, Brunel University, in April 2016, and was associated with research for the European METABODY project.⁵⁶ As a DAP-Lab team member, I was working as a lighting and projection technician for *metakimosphere no. 3*, which enabled me to carefully observe the process and outcomes of the work. This choreographic installation was very interesting because the performance reminded me of the ritual and shamanistic sphere, even though it has no specific connection with *kut*. I questioned which concept of this new spatial art led me to interpret it in relation to the sphere of *kut*, and curiosity drove me to find those factors through a comparative analysis of SUI Design and *metakimospheres*.

Before delving into the main analysis of *metakimosphere no.3*, the preliminary manifestations of the METABODY project need to be sketched to provide a proper setting for understanding the underlying notions of *metakimospheres*. The term METABODY is an acronym for ‘Media Embodiment Techné And Bridges Of Diversity’ (METABODY 2013: 2-3). The METABODY project, initiated in Madrid (July 2013) by a collaborative network of European arts organizations, research labs and performance companies, aims to promote diversity through different embodied experiments of technology directed against ‘cultural homogenization and social control and global surveillance’ which are seen to be caused by the regulated and structured information and technologies of today (5). Thus, it intends to produce interactive an unprecedented architecture that can reconfigure all its physical and digital features, known as ‘METATOPIA – a dynamic, participatory, and performative environment for outdoors and indoors, an emergent and indeterminate space’ (metabody.eu: np).

The series of *metakimosphere* performances emerged for the experimental research collocations in this conceptual space of METABODY. According to co-directors, Johannes Birringer and

⁵⁶ DAP-Lab has created a series of them, beginning in 2015; the last instalment, *kimosphere no. 5*, was performed at Queen Mary Drama and Film Theatre, London, in December 2017

Michèle Danjoux, the primary design-direction of *metakimospheres* can be summed up as follows:

metakimospheres are kinetic atmospheres – immersive installations that highlight audience participation and sensorial experience. They behave like active living architectural organisms that have an auditory, visual, and tactile sensory quality, with subtly changing states and affordances. Architectural fabrics create a large ‘stage costume’ – which can be worn and breathed, felt and imagined, transported and taken off; it moves and can be moved and manipulated by dancers and the visitors. (Birringer and Danjoux 2016: np)

The underlying features of METATOPIA and *metakimospheres* such as wearables, kinetics, animistic sphere, participatory performance, and immersive installation – reveal a flavour of recent digital performance. More interestingly, these elements also conceptually correspond with the five features of SUI Design. Therefore, the following will uncover the five SUI Design elements in relation to the concepts of *metakimospheres* including ‘kinetics’, ‘wearables’, ‘audio-visual mapping’, and ‘immersive installation’. It will also examine other digital practices that contain the above-mentioned concepts, such as a wearable digital practice, *Eunoia & Eunoia II* by Lisa Park, and a media façade performance, *Hakanai*, by Adrien M. and Claire B. Understanding these concepts of digital practices will find clues to the question of why *metakimosphere no. 3* led me to feel a shamanic and ritualistic atmosphere like *kut*. Furthermore, it will offer an insight into producing a new, emergent *kut*, applying not only indigenous shamanic technologies but also recent digital computational technologies.

4.3.1. Mobility and Kinetic Performance toward Animistic Sphere

Mobility is a vital feature of SUI, designed to be moved, touched and animated by the time of *kutp’an*. It pursues not a visual but a reverberating design which can touch the audience with multi-sensorial experiences. The utmost aim of mobility is to produce the strong presence or liveness of SUI, and leading people to becoming immersed in the animistic atmosphere of the *kutp’an*, which offers a sense of Korean animism – the belief that all creatures have the spirits, specifically *shin-ki* (vital force). Interestingly, this magical consciousness of animism – the feeling as if everything comes to life – seems to be being resurrected with the power of technology.

In my view, kinetic art is one that artistically crystallises the concept of animism. It is also connected with the SUI design, mobility, since the term ‘kinetic’ comes from the Greek word

kinesis, which means *movement*. Kinetic art is reflected in various attempts made by artists whose works have incorporated art with motions and motion technologies since the early 20th century (Chilvers 2014: np). SUI's mobility has been simply moved and touched by the power of a human, nature and shaman, but recent kinetic art expansively extended the potential of mobility by absorbing up-to-date digital technology, engineering and science. According to George W. Rickey, the works of kinetic art mainly pertain to six areas: work with optical phenomena that creates illusions or intense sensations; transformative work with dematerialisation or profound variations of appearance; diverse machinery or devices utilising electronic motors; transitional works, continuously rearranged and altered by observers; luminaire work, utilising light play; and the work of movement itself (Rickey 2017: 222-224). Following Rickey's observation, kinetic art can be defined as the art of a mobile object, animated in connection with a machine, ostensible transformation, visual illusion and additional possibilities of time and movement, and thereby generate liveness in work.

Metakimospheres are examples of artworks that are conceived as kinetic performance choreographies through various sensual installation elements. The environment is embodied with heterogeneous scenarios that are designed to stimulate viewers to walk, move, touch, observe, hear, and feel them. For instance, the dress-like gauze installation becomes a metamorphic creature, transfigured and transmuted by the movement of the surroundings during the performance. The installation creates an interior space, yet is connected with its external environments, such as lights, sounds and scent owing to its penetrable and porous skin. The performers are embedded inside the installation and quietly animate it through their presence, breath, and movements (see Fig.16). The viewers pass through, swirl around, touch, and transfigure the gauze dress and, at the same time, their actions are influenced by the dress, physically and immanently. Within the space-time of the *metakimospheres*, the gauze installation comes across as the heart of the entire space, activated by interaction with the surroundings. There are several other tactile, sonic, visual, and totemic interfaces that produce subtle sounds or animations when touched or moved. Consequently, a variety of 'intra-active' installations made up of a mixture of auditory, kinaesthetic, and visual perception systems promote an intimate connection with the surroundings, thereby generating 'kinetic atmospherics' (Birringer 2016: 25).



Fig. 16. Performers inside the gauze installation, *metakimosphere no.1* (above); no.3 (below) DAP-Lab, Artaud Performance Center, 2015. © DAP-Lab.

Of particular importance is that, ontologically, the matter of kinetic art is being rendered by new materiality – the process of a punctuating and ever-changing nature – which is akin to the notion of *ki*, or spirits, in Korean animism. The concept of new materiality in kinetic art was introduced by artists in the mid-20th century who were affected by a new understanding of matter, energy and cosmology (Rycroft 2012: 459). According to Birringer, ‘the liveness of objects (and object-oriented programming)’ appears as a highly suggestive subject owing to the impact of the new materialism; the formerly passive, inanimate, inert installations become ‘agential, vibrant, and mobilizing’ (Birringer 2016: 25). As Choi’s theory of *ki-ch’ŭk-ch’e-ŭi*,⁵⁷ emphasising the importance of sensorial and experimental exploration to research the

⁵⁷ *ki-ch’ŭk-ch’e-ŭi* is the theory of Korean *ki* researcher and philosopher Han-gi Choi’s, which was discussed in Chapter 4.2.3.

universe of *ki*, Birringer underscores the need for exploring how an object engages with, mobilises, embraces and supports the viewers, performers and its environment, to theorise new materialism (Biringner 2016: 21). Therefore, a new understanding of matter extracted from kinetic art today seems correspondent to the concept of *ki* (or spirits) in *kut*. Perhaps, this is the reason why *metakimosphere* evokes the animistic and spiritual atmosphere of *kut* for me.

Kinetic art can be defined as the art that explores new materiality anchored in movements. These material movements endow particular liveness to the object's interaction with the surroundings. In addition, the mobility of SUI Design can perform a more interactive, sensorial and sophisticated movement with the support of kinetic design embodied with miscellaneous interactive sensorial technologies. With the development of artificial intelligence, the synthetic power of computers and other ubiquitous techniques, it seems that artists in the future may perform and interact with their imagined creatures and environments that move by self-generative systems. Applying the mobility of SUI Design and kinetic art, my practical research aims to convey the ecstatic space within animistic atmospheres. Expressing the fluid, animistic, animated, poetic, imaginative, liquid substrates, this techno-animistic sphere will highlight one of the crucial philosophies of *kut*; that of creating harmony between human and the other entities, surroundings. As the technical images including stage objects or the stage itself become another performer which actively interacts with the *kut* practitioners, the practice will generate the mythical and magical universe of *kut* through a combination of digital interactive technologies and the imaginations of Korean shamans.

4.3.2. Wearable Technologies toward Spiritual Sphere

The philosophy of spirituality is one of the fundamental and vital concepts of Korean shamans. Korean shamans believe that the universe has spirits and the function of spirits is represented by *shin-ki*, which is understood as flowing and circulating energy, either in human bodies, artworks, natural environments, or space (Jensen et al. 2003: 42-43). Since the historical era, spiritual beliefs have been regarded as absurdity because they seem bizarre from the perspective of classical physics. However, these beliefs have been proven by the development of modern scientific technology such as biology, neuroscience, nanotechnology and quantum physics. People now pay attention to the influence of invisible and immaterial elements, which become a new substrate for artists to apply in their artworks.

Wearable performance, in my view, practically utilises invisible elements to create a sense of spiritual sphere. Wearables are based on ‘close-to-the-skin technology’, connecting digitally programmed environments with the skin of humans (Birringer and Danjoux 2006: 43). In *metakimospheres*, intelligent garments, namely, wearables, are actively used. What the performers of *metakimospheres* wear are not just costumes but smart devices which connect them to their digital, audio-visual environment. These garments allude to the features of SUI Designs: Wearables are basically mobile devices which interact with the performers’ bodies and environment as in the mobility of SUI Designs and they are smart portable instruments or prostheses that connect the body, surroundings, and even a remote environment as in the portability of SUI Designs. Along with them, an essential feature inspiring me to bring wearable technology as one of the digital technologies of my research is its potential to enhance the promotability of SUI Designs: Wearables are interfaces that go beyond sensing and actuation, stimulating invisible and sensorial qualities of the body.

To illustrate, the promotability – the design that intends to articulate, perceive and expand invisible motions (such as energy, *ki*, perception and emotions) appears to have been materialised and extended by the wearable technology. According to Birringer and Danjoux, wearables performatively manipulate two different realms: ‘intelligent accoutrements’ and ‘interfacial sensory garments.’ This once again reminds me of Korean animism, as if the *hon* and *back* areas of the soul theory, explained the previous chapter, have been extended to this



Fig.17. The image of *Eunoia II*, emotions read by the smart headset generate the wave of water. © Lisa Park.

wearable apparatus. The realm of awareness and consciousness, controlled by the ‘*hon*’ area of the soul, seems farther enriched by ‘intelligent accoutrements.’ For instance, in *Eunoia & Eunoia II*, directed by Lisa Park, one’s consciousness or emotions, including frustration, calm, excitement, and engagement, were read and materialised by the neural feedback received through a commercial EEG (brainwave sensor) or the *Emotiv EPOC* headset. Then, the EEG data was translated into sound waves that created vibrations on the surface of the water (Park 2017: np) (see Fig.17).



Fig.18. *Memory Reaching Clothing*, the skirt illuminates when it is touched (left) © Joanna Berzowska; Wallace’s *thermochromic shirt*, responding to body heat (right). © Popular Science.

The soul of ‘*back*’, activating one’s sense, torso and limbs, seems explored by ‘interfacial garments’, the garments integrate aural, tactile, visual and olfactory capability which enable sensing and actuating of the virtual environment (Birringer and Danjoux 2009: 98). For instance, physical memory can be recorded and communicated through Joanna Berzowska's work, *Memory Rich Clothing*, and an individual’s body temperature is expressed through colour mutation by means of thermochromic inks in Kerri Wallace's thermochromic shirt (see Fig.18) (quoted in Birringer and Danjoux 2009: 97).

These devices worn by performers are not just a prosthesis but their bodily instruments underlining their perception, emotion and energy and thereby revealing spiritual ambience on the stage. Birringer and Danjoux particularly emphasise the aesthetic potential of the ‘interfacial garment’ in the performance and dance field. To borrow their term, the interfacial wearable is

the action of, ‘wearing the space’ opening up a new area for performers to control the audio-visual environments in real time and also for the audience to engage with the environment through reactive functions (98). In addition, these sensorial wearables, subliminally act as catalysts for the performers’ movements. Birringer describes the process of how the garments engaged with the choreography in *metakimospheres*:

At times they were just beautiful or extravagant; they seemed to grow into instruments that could be played or constraining encumbrances that needed to be negotiated, learnt to move in, and grasped as ‘characters’ that in-formed the movement and became a movement. Costumes thus also compose, as they embed or envelop us and animate corporeal movement. (Birringer 2016: 8)

Consequently, the garments generate ‘the expanded choreographic’ by interacting with performers (8-9). When the elements of *metakimosphere no. 3* are all connected by the expanded choreography, they become the alive sensory architectural organism with ‘subtly changing states and affordances’ (16). Thus, wearable technology makes not only a performer’s kinaesthetic space wider, and but also the inner and invisible motions such as energy, biophysical sensations, emotions and consciousness are more heightened.⁵⁸

Furthermore, an upgraded, almost different level of portability emerges with the use of wearable computing – converging microchips (nanotechnology), wireless devices, and ubiquitous computing. Powerful, ubiquitous information technology links the world into an invisible net, enabling remote control. What we should have done using our own bodies in the past is now controlled by our invisible and extended wearables in real time. These hidden wearables behave as if they are the expanded souls, giving the impression that we are living in an animistic atmosphere. We have already experienced this techno-animistic environment indirectly or directly in our lives. For instance, it is now easy to see the things, such as vehicles, homewares, books, and other electronic equipment that can talk, feel, move and interact with human

⁵⁸ The concept of wearables as an extended and embodied body that navigates and widens our being in the world are also discussed by Maurice Merleau-Ponty in *Phenomenology of Perception* [1962] (2002). According to him, the objects, such as hat, stick and instrument are closely connected to our habit, perceptual experiences brought together with our sense. He explains, ‘the blind man’s is no longer an object ‘perceived for itself’ but a part of himself, ‘providing a parallel to sight’ (Merleau-Ponty 2002: 256). To become familiar with an object is the process of embodying them: in Merleau-Ponty’s words, ‘it is a bodily auxiliary, an extension of the bodily synthesis’ (286). Accordingly, the boundaries of selves can be expanded via the bodily wearables, as he states: ‘Habit expresses our power of dilating our being-in-the-world or changing our existence by appropriating fresh instruments.’ (256).

environments through sensory systems. Additionally, artificial eyes, like CCTV, keep us under constant surveillance almost anywhere. Furthermore, radio-frequency identification (RFID) can automatically identify or track tagged objects, transforming modern society into a vast living organism connected by radio networks. In this digitally wired and programmed environment, we now wear not merely a smart device, but the environment which is watching, perceiving, detecting, and living with us.

As suggested above, wearable technology reveals the potential of further exploration of mobility, promotability, and portability of SUI Design. Wearables play as a part of performers highlighting and connecting their inner and unseen energy or perceptions to their surroundings and produce a certain spiritual ambience on the stage. As Flusser argues, the magic of the pre-historical era is reappearing as post-historical magic by digital codes, where artists today are freely creating and sharing the animistic and spiritual world of their imaginations with digital wearables. If the ancient people saw the work that responds to consciousness and emotions, they probably would regard it as mysterious or scary magic; but in the contemporary digital world, it would be art and science. This is quite an interesting phenomenon for me because the world of *kut* has been easily regarded as a superstition because it is specifically dealt with invisible entities; however, within the digital advancement, the unseen energy, emotions, *ki*, which are also called as spirits or souls in a *kut*, can now be detected and read as a data to produce visible movements in digital practices. Artists can now meet the potential of creating their own magical and elusive entities by intelligent programming interfaces. Therefore, I hope that digital codes can one day be a universal language for *shimbangs* to build and share the world of *kut*. Given this, my research will embrace wearables as technologies to create ecstatic space, which would be my initial steps to underline the spirituality of *kut* to produce to the *kut*'s world.

4.3.3. Media Façade toward Liminal Sphere

For the liminality of SUI, we investigated the *myōngdu*, the shamanic mirror designed to give a spiritual experience through natural light being vividly and wholly reflected from the surface of the mirrors. In the *metakimospheres*, there are the elements corresponding to the relationship between natural lights and the *myōngdu* in *kut*, in the form of stage lighting technology, including digital projection lights and designed stage lighting. Changing lights spread throughout the interior spaces like the moon and quietly transform the mode of the ambience

through merged colours and brightness. The play of the projection of lights onto installations reveals different images of nature on their skins according to the scenes. Gradually, shifting colours, illuminations, and images of light bestows life or lively characteristics onto the figures of the installations and space. As *myōngdu* turns into the face of the divine when it meets natural lights, the surface of this space becomes the face of *metakimospheres* using projected lights which externalise the identity of the piece (see Fig.19).



Fig.19. Digital lights spread out to the surface of installations in *metakimosphere no. 3*, 2016. © DAP-Lab.

If natural lights unveil the sense of divine utilising the *myōngdu*, the advancement of stage lighting technology unleashes the imaginary, liminal and virtual world of artists today. Since Thomas Edison invented the incandescent electric lamp that lasted forty hours, in 1879, stage lighting has rapidly developed over about 140 years, from gaslights to incredibly high-tech intelligent digital lights. Nowadays, a projection almost reaches a point that produces another characteristic or reality of space, like a creator by using optical illusions; the best example of

this might be media façade. Interestingly, the word ‘façade’ has a semantic affinity with the word ‘face’. In the etymological context, ‘façade’ means ‘the face of a building’, related to the Italian word *facciata*, and also ‘activity and making fact’ from the Latin word *facere* (Kalaga 2010: 120). Therefore, media façade, or also called projection mapping technology, is the modern illuminated face of a building (or any other object) which makes a building animated.

This illuminated mask is considered to play a metaphorical role in digital performance. For example, *Levitation* – a dance performance designed by Sila Sveta Studio – transforms a white studio to a seemingly gravity-free fantasy world through media façade technology that integrates projection mapping, 3D graphics and a tracking system based on unity development. Imaginary scenes are reflected onto the white surface of the studio through light projection: dancers levitate in the air, the floor suddenly sinks down, the whale flies and spherical and triangular objects float around during the choreography (Sila Sveta 2016: np). As projection lights illuminate the space, the white space reveals its imaginary world or face (see Fig.20).

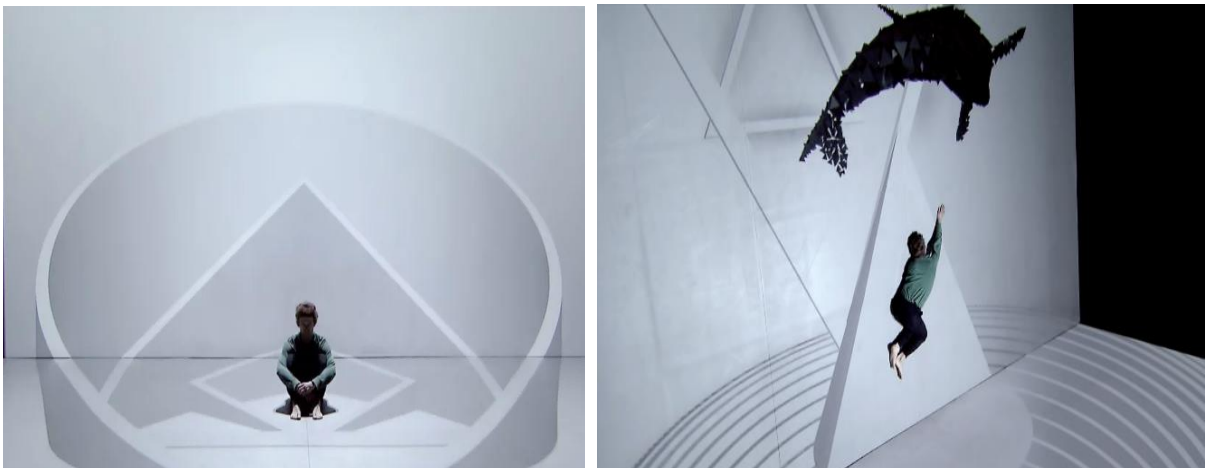


Fig.20. *Levitation* by Sila Sveta, producing 3D virtual environments by Media Façade. © Sila Sveta.

Currently, projection light technology enables precise projection, not merely onto static flat surfaces but also onto moving 3D surfaces like human faces, in real time. In the dance performance *INORI*, a collaboration work between Nobumich Asai (WOW), dancing duo AyaBambi and the University of Tokyo, dancers’ faces change at a rapid speed by real-time facial projection mapping technology. *INORI* is a new mask dance using digital lights, which demonstrates the potential of media façade choreography. While they dance for about a minute, their illuminated masks continuously shift with the speed of the light to create a variety of characters from dolls with black tears, to skulls, Noh masks of agony, the Heart Sutra, and

shadows (see Fig.21). Alongside the development of the tracking system, digital lights have become wearable; the mutable light-mask can precisely follow complex choreography thanks to a state-of-the-art 1000 fps projector and ultra-high-speed sensor tracking (WOW 2017: np).



Fig.21. *INORY* by Nobumich Asai, creating virtual facial masks by interactive face mapping. © Nobumich Asai

Furthermore, diverse graphical programming tools facilitate real-time sound and the visual interaction of digital lights. Instead of projecting pre-rendered videos, images are produced live and interact in response to the performers in real time. *Hakanai* by Adrien M. and Claire B. is one such example that illustrates this interactive visual performance. Applying their own software, named *Emotions*, and extra connecting tools such as cameras, motion tracking sensors, and OSC captors, the images are created by carefully detecting the dancer's movements. Moreover, it generates the illusion of 3D moving creatures by means of the projection system fences the dancers into the four-sided transparent holo-screens. The energy of the performer animates the image or, sometimes, the image itself acts as a spiritual performer and the dancer dances with virtual images which appear to be alive (see Fig.22). As *Hakanai* means by saying 'between dream and reality', the visual agent is emerged in an evanescent reality and plays with the dancer who is in actual reality (quoted in Visnjic 2013: np).

Kut is a ritual that generates the 'between and betwixt' of the spiritual and real world to communicate with spirits to remove people's accumulated sorrows and anxiety to bring about change. Accordingly, *liminality* would be the most fundamental attribute of the SUIs, *shimbang* and *kut*. Today, the marriage of live performances and digital imagery also gives rise to 'the sense of in-betweenness', and in Elizabeth Grosz's words, the stage is 'always in the process of becoming but never realises... the space of the in between' (quoted in Dixon 2007: 337). I

was captivated by the up-to-date lighting technology, notably in use of *media façade*, because of its potential to become the best medium for producing a liminal agent that can evoke an evanescent, fragile, elusive, impermanent and untouchable materiality. As *shimbangs* attempt to deliver the power of immanence through a combination of natural lights and the *myōngdu*, the moment when the image of virtual light is imbued into the real world would convey the power of evocation. Thus, my practical research will create ecstatic space through the application of digital lights and media façade technologies. This is intended to produce a liminal sphere revealing the most fundamental spatial concept of *kut*, namely its *in-betweenness*.

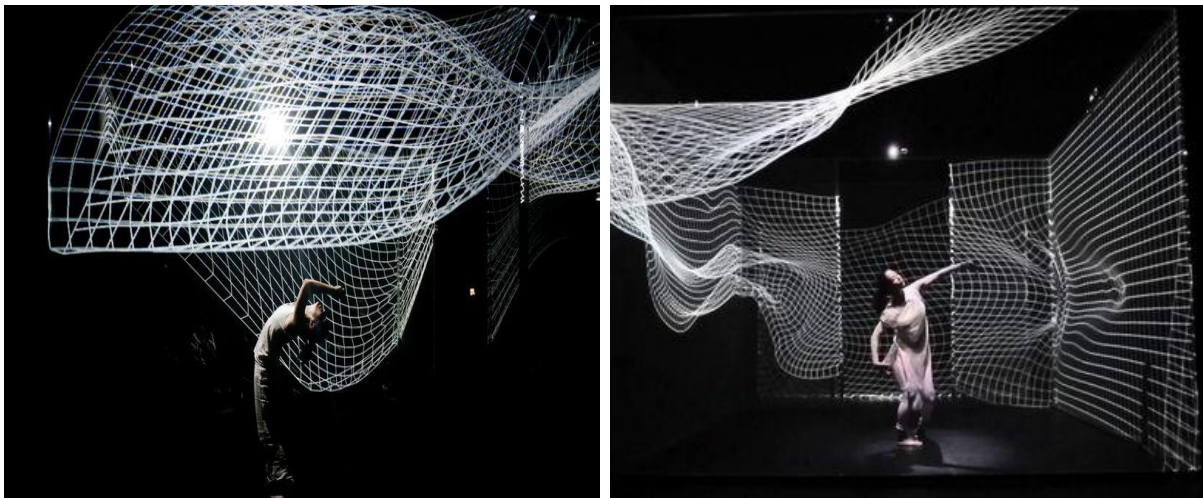


Fig.22. *Hakanai* by Adrien M. and Claire B., generated an interactive image by emotion software and 3D Media Façade technology combined with the transparent screen. © Adrien M. and Claire B.

4.3.4. Metaphoric Mapping toward Immersive Performance Ritual

As seen earlier, metaphoric mapping is one of the pivotal SUI Design approaches that transforms everyday spaces to the *kutp'an* by selecting and displaying a variety of semiotic SUI on the site. When the SUI is properly mapped onto a 3D space, the space itself becomes a temporarily-built 3D map, symbolically representing the world of *kut*.

One of the reasons why mysterious and shamanic ambience is engendered in *metakimospheres*, as in the *kutp'an*, is their structural and functional similitude to spatial design – associated with metaphoric mapping. *Metakimosphere no. 3* has a purpose-built environment where the space becomes structured or de-structured through the distribution of several rhetorical installations in the environment. The large area is occupied by elastic dress-like gauze draperies suspended from the ceiling down to the floor. Because it is a central installation, it reminds me of the *k'ündae* in *kut* representing the world's centre and connecting heaven and earth. Other

installations are arranged in four directions around this large gauze dress. In front of the space is a black igloo made of black velvet, a lightless, dark, soundproof space. It looks like a black hole in the cosmos as if it were a universe, representing *yin* and *yang*. An artificial weaverbird net hangs from the ceiling to one side, creating a comfortable and relaxing ambience in that area. At the back of the space, hangs a very high white origami wall with zigzagged surfaces; it is illuminated and reflects the lights, floating like a moon (see Fig.23).



Fig.23. The spatial design of *metakimosphere no. 3*, the installations and performers are displayed around the space, DAP-Lab, Artaud Performance Center, 2016. © DAP-Lab.

The performer acts as the expanded installation, adding breadth, motions, and living narratives to the environments. For example, just below the origami wall, a performer dressed in an origami skin dances under the lights as if they were an attachment to the origami wall or the moon. On the other hand, a dancer with a beak hand becomes a moving sound installation, responding to the voice from the beak hand. Although the space was initially simply a black

box, it turned into a different environment by the spatial design of *metakimospheres no.3*, mapping rhetorical materials and human installations, which are reminiscent of collective imaginary rituals.

The functional aspects of metaphoric mapping in *kut* are also exposed in *metakimosphere no. 3*. The arrangement of SUI is not merely visual work of the *shimbang* in order to express their understanding of the universe of *kut* but is a tool that invites and connects humans and spirits. *Metakimosphere no. 3* also deeply engages visitors through its spatial design. The assemblage of installations creates environments ‘for visitors that pass through them, listen to them and feel them’ (Birringer 2016: 8). By harnessing the energy of each symbolic art installation and bringing them together on stage, the aim of *metakimosphere no. 3* is to provide an environment which can make a direct bodily connection with the visitors. Thus, instead of objectifying the environment, visitors are immersed in the surroundings. When visitors participate as a component of the environment, the map of *metakimosphere no. 3* is accomplished.

In contemporary art, a work like *metakimosphere no. 3* is known as ‘immersive installation’: an artwork which leads to a more intense and close relationship between viewers and installations (or environment). As the term, ‘immersive’, derived from the Latin word *immērgere*, means to plunge into or go deep inside (Oxford Dictionary 2017: np), a work which produces this kind of ‘deep involvement’ can be seen as an immersive performance. The concept of ‘immersive’ is becoming more and more prevalent in contemporary art, even in theatre. There is a boom in immersive theatre by London-based theatre companies such as Shunt and Punchdrunk (White 2012: 221). Recently, a variety of works of art have been called immersive art, such as expansive environments that involve installations and digital mediations; or a mobile spectator who has an intensely intimate or advanced relationship with performers; and exploratory, multi-sensory or dream-like experiences (221–222). However, in my view, the immersiveness essentially comes from the relation-centred concept, rather than exterior factors such as having a visually immersive fictional or imaginative environment.

This idea can be supported by the underlying conceptions of immersive installations. According to cultural geographer Simon Rycroft, immersive installations began with the phenomenological, deconstructive and intersubjective perspectives of artists in the 20th century. Against the background of historical materialism, some artists attempt to produce works that

can go beyond the conventional rendering of the world. Instead of representing the unchangeable nature of the world, their work captures the fluid and processual nature of the world by increasing embodiment and subjectivity, thus embedding the audience in the network of their work (Rycroft 2012: 448-449). In addition, given the implications of the decentred and deconstructive aesthetics of the post-war period, artists attempt to find the meaning of a work of art not on the surface of a canvas or a sculpture, but ‘in the space’ between the viewers and art. This aspect allows them to produce an immersive environment as landscape art that interacts with audiences by endowing them with embodied and multi-sensory experiences (449). Consequently, the style of immersive installations is formed by the shifting notions of artists who understand the nature of the world through a phenomenological view and find the meaning of a work of art through spatial connections with their audiences.

Interestingly, a processual and fluid conception of immersive installation is ontologically parallel with the relational conception of *kut*, based on *ki-irwōnnon* (氣一元論); both tend to understand the world of art through closer relationships with the surroundings. A *kut* locates its ontology not in *kut*-self, but in its relationship with others. Similarly, an immersive installation (or performance) finds its realisation in the relationship with unanticipated interventions from another entity that spontaneously enters, rather than expressing fixed and accomplished art created by artists. In this manner, it also carries echoes of the circular formations present in *kut*. Flusser describes these formations as the way of perceiving images in a pre-historical age – for instance, with our gaze wandering over the surface of images, and absorbing meaning from the relationships between their different elements. Consequently, the immersive art reveals a paradoxical feature: it seemingly pushes back the frontiers of performance by merging the realms of digital with analogue, biological with non-biological, and visual art with performance art, in order to generate a contemporary experience. Nevertheless, intrinsically, this practice also revolves around ancient shamanic and ritualistic philosophies and ideas.

Given these similarities, I would like to present my practice as *immersive performance ritual*, which is a performance centred upon the principle of rituals, while pursuing the contemporary aesthetic of immersive art with the help of rapidly advancing digital technology to extend its potential. Immersive performance ritual is rendered by the triangular correlation of *shimbangs*, SUIs and guests. Explicitly, guests would be able to aid and influence SUIs or *shimbang*’s rituals rather than watch it passively as an object. In an interconnected way, the *shimbang*’s

rituals would affect SUIs and the guests, and SUIs would impact *shimbangs* and guests.

In addition, the concept of immersive performance ritual can offer an alternative understanding of *kut* in performative and contemporary perspectives. So far, several ways of interpreting *kut* as a modern performing genre have been proposed by Korean researchers: *kut* is defined as ‘installations + performance’ (Park 2010: 106), ‘natural performance art’ (Lee 2008: 169) or ‘Korean theatre’ (Yang 2013: 5). As *kut* intertwines with various genres of arts, these scholars have categorically defined *kut* depending on their view of its most fundamental genres. However, my proposal of ‘immersive performance ritual’ by no means classifies the genre of *kut*; instead, it provides an insight to see *kut*’s relational and functional aspects, which I consider as one of the most important points in understanding *kut*’s performativity.

Chapter 5. Practices

5.1. Toward Ecstatic Space

In Chapter 3, I have defined *ecstatic space* as the transitional space created by *kut*'s shamanic performance rituals, essential for providing the potential for atmospheric change. In the previous, Chapter 4, the methodologies of creating ecstatic space have been explored by identifying *kut*'s ecstasy technology according to the principal design features of *mugu* (Shamanic User Interface). The main technologies of digital practices have also been examined in relation to SUI Design: namely, kinetic, wearable, media façade and immersive technologies. These digital technologies support some possibility of further extending SUI Design, by promoting the creation of the ecstatic space, and providing animistic, spiritual, liminal, immersive atmospheres. I will now explain my own series of practices, examining how they employ the above-mentioned methodologies in creating this ecstatic space.

I shall start by offering a brief introduction to my collaboration partners and the research process. The main collaborator was a master *shimbang*, Soon Sil Seo (see Fig.24), a president of the *Cheju-k'ŭn-kut* Preservation Society Corps, who inherited her shamanic ability from her mother. She has been instructed in *Cheju-k'ŭn-kut* (the 13th intangible cultural asset of Cheju) by the late master *shimbangs* Sa in Ahn and Jung Choon Lee, and now works as a master *shimbang* in Cheju Island. She is one of the most renowned *shimbangs*, participating in *Cheju-k'ŭn-kut* documentaries produced by KBS, conducting seminars and lectures in Seogang, Kyunggi and Cheju University in Korea, and performing *kut* not only domestically but also internationally.



Fig.24. The image of a master *shimbang*, Soon Seil Seo, performing a signing-ritual at the Cheju coastline. © MARO.



Fig.25. The image of MARO, performing *pan-kut* in Cheju. © MARO.

Secondly, I have worked with the *kut* performance group MARO over a number of years now. MARO is founded by Cheju *kut* performers who have more than ten years of professional experiences. The members of MARO live as a community and are dedicated to fostering national artistic traditions and local folk culture through dance and movement, song and percussion, interwoven with *kut*. Five *kut* performers of MARO have participated as collaboration researchers, including Yoo Jeong Oh, Ho Sung Yang, Jeonghyeon Yun, Hanol Ko and Jong Suk Ki. Other members such as Ki Won Yang and Min Kyung Ha also supported my research in Cheju (See Fig.25).

All practices were conducted with my collaborating partners, with the intention of creating the *kut* of today – in other words, a *kut* that can communicate with people contemporaneously. Accordingly, this research deals with four years of communication processes inside and outside of London. I have continuously reported on and discussed the process with these *kut* performers and *shimbang* from in London, and we have met to present at least one performance every year in Korea or the UK. The public presentation was an essential process for the research, as the presence of an audience has a strong association with creating an authentic *kut* for the performers and *shimbangs*. Indeed, constant performances actually helped us to continue the research, as these received financial support from the grant of the Koran Culture and Art Foundation and the box-office profit.

During the intensive four years of co-research, five practices are explored and presented in public venues. With the aim of creating the ecstatic space, all of my practices have a particular

theme associated with the spatial transition. They intend to generate the atmosphere existing in-between the real world and the metaphysical, mythical or spiritual world inspired by *kut*. For example, the solo piece, *Twelve Doors*, navigates my own spiritual realm based on memories of Korean funerals. By rendering the twelve doors as the mythical bridge that exists in Korean belief that a soul passes through to reach heaven, the piece commemorates the victims of the Sewol Ferry Disaster⁵⁹ in Korea. The second work, *Leodo: The Paradise* portrays a journey to *Leodo*, a legendary island considered by Cheju Islanders as an artistic nirvana where souls lost at sea dwell in paradise. It represents a girl's journey to *Leodo* through a series of rituals, delivering the key emotional conception of *kut*, *shinmyǒng* – deep sorrows being taken away by the joy of the arts. The third work, *Miyeoji-Baengdi*, depicts the world situated in-between the spiritual and material realms, which the shaman inhabits for healing purposes. This piece is inspired by the interesting resemblance between spirits and lights. *Miyeoji-Baengdi* is a mythical space, existing but untouchable like the digital projection light that bathes us but is elusive to the grasp. The fourth work, *Seocheon Flower Garden*, reveals the mythical flower garden of *kut*. This is the garden transmitted by the song of the *shimbang*, where the soul and mind of humans bloom as holy flowers. The piece intends to generate an interactive, virtual *Seocheon Flower Garden* for audiences to offer immersive and participatory experiences. The final work of my doctoral research, *NEO-KUT*, represents a combined version of all of these practices, delivering the nine ecstatic spaces of *kut*.

In terms of the practical approach, all mentioned methodologies have been applied and investigated to some extent in each of the artworks. However, the exploration and methodologies that I have mainly researched in each piece can be summarised as follows (Table 1). As shown in the table, the earlier four works primarily explore the suggested methodologies, while the last production, *NEO-KUT*, is the culminating event produced by a comprehensive colligation of all the previous practices. In order to add more weight to my culminating and comprehensive piece, *NEO-KUT*, I will limit myself to examining a few of the major configurations for each of the earlier works. Consequently, the focus of this chapter is to provide an overview of each artwork, describing how they have influenced and formed the final work.

59 The Sewol Ferry Disaster occurred on 16th April 2014 a heart-breaking accident that many Koreans experience deep depression. More than 300 people, mostly schoolchildren, died and the process of the ferry sinking down to the sea was broadcast live. The government's late response was a major factor, and later became one of the decisive reasons that brought about the impeachment of former President Park Geun-hye (Current Affairs Dictionary 2017).

Table 1. The Practical Research Process

Practice	Methodologies	Exploration	Presentation
<i>Leodo: the paradise</i> (이어도: 더 파라다이스)	Mobility of SUI Designs + kinetic and Projection Mapping Technologies	Techno-Animistic Performance	30th Jul-24th Aug/2014 Edinburgh Fringe Festival, C venue 16th Jan/2015 Korean Cultural Service, Flushing Town Hall, New York, USA – Awarded Best prize for OPEN STAGE 31st Jul/2015 Korean Cultural Centre UK, Showcase 5th-31st Aug/2015 Edinburgh Fringe Festival, UK– Nominated for 3 parts of Darkchat Award, Selected as one of the top 5 Korean performances 13th-18th Jun/2016 Benaroya Hall, and others, Seattle, USA – produced by Min Moon with Kickstarter (crowdfunding)
<i>Twelve Doors</i> (열두거리)	Mobility, Promotability and Portability of SUI Designs + Wearable technologies	Digital Wearables Designed for Spiritual Rituals	Performance and Paper presentation 13th Jun/2014 The 2nd Joint Researching the Arts/Social Sciences Conference (Antonin Artaud 101, Brunel University, London)
<i>Miyeoji-bangdui</i> (미여지뱅뒤)	Liminality of SUI Designs + Media Façade	Light Technologies Illuminating Liminal Sphere	24th Oct/2015 Initially performed with the title, Neo-puri, Seogwipo Art Center, Korea – funded by Cheju Culture & Art Foundation Dec/2015 Selected as G19, the multidisciplinary content competition by the Creative Center for Convergence Culture/ Broadcasted O Creative Seoul, Korea 24th Oct/2016 ARKO Grande Theatre, Seoul, Korea – Selected as PAMSChoice 2016 31st Oct/2016 Cheju MICE conference, hologram performance
<i>Seocheon Flower Garden</i> (서천꽃밭)	Metaphoric Mapping of SUI Designs + Immersive Performance	Immersive Performance Ritual	3rd Aug/2016 (5pm & 7:30pm) Cheju Culture and Art Centre, Korea
<i>NEO-KUT</i> (네오-궂)	A comprehensive collaboration of previous practices utilising all explored methodologies		16th Nov/2016 at the Artaud Performance Theatre, at Brunel University London, UK

5.2. Techno-Animistic Performance: *Leodo: The Paradise*

Leodo: The Paradise is the first collaboration practice performed with the *kut* performers and *shimbang*. It explores a techno-animistic performance, a fusion of digital and ritual practices aiming to highlight a sense of Korean animism – the belief that all creatures have the spirits, specifically *shin-ki* (vital force or energy). The piece attempts to convey animistic, spiritual and fluid atmospheres of the ecstatic space by marrying the mobility of SUI Design with a kinetic design of digital practices. It was also selected to present in Edinburgh Fringe Festival for a month as one of the five performances of Assembly Korean Season 2014-15. This opportunity encouraged us by securing research time and venue where can share research outcomes with international audiences. However, at the same time, we needed to meet a significant challenge of performing on a proscenium stage with time constraints. As discussed in Chapter 4.3.1, the mobility of *kut* and the liveness of a kinetic art come from the open stage of *kutp'an* that allows *kut* performers to interact constantly with guests and surroundings. Conversely, a proscenium stage breaks down the intimate communication between performers and audiences by dividing the stage from the audience seat, disrupting their participatory and impromptu experiences.

Thus, my focal attention in *Leodo: The Paradise* was enhancing interactions between performers and other entities, including technical images, audiences, stories and ritual objects. The first attempt for this was creating a *bonju* character in the stage to reduce an emotional gap between audiences and performances. *Bonju* refers to the person who has requested a *kut*. To illustrate, if a person has suffered from deep sorrow and requests *kut* to solve it, this person becomes *bonju*, the owner of the *kut*. Thus, *bonju* is a kind of producer, funder, or a host who pays for the expenses of conducting *kut*. *Bonju* can be either an individual or several people. *Bonju* is a vital entity of the *kut*, so that actively participates in its rituals. However, in *Leodo: The Paradise*, implanting *bonju* in a traditional way seemed practically impossible in proscenium-arch stage performances, as audience members sit and watch the rituals from an auditorium. Because of this, the piece featured a girl character wearing a white neutral dress, playing the role of a *bonju* and representing the audience. The contents of the performance also revolved around the girl. This character actually played an essential role for the *kut* performers in finding a reason to carry out *kut* as well as for audiences in feeling the presence of *kut* rituals even on a proscenium-arch stage. Thus, after *Leodo*, my later three practices included the *bonju* character whether it was performed in a proscenium stage or an opened stage.

The particular emotional connection was another important element to impart a multi-sensorial and reverberating ambience. *Leodo: The Paradise* is a synesthetic performance through the convergence of diverse genres of arts, integrated and harmonised improvisation, and the repetitive pattern of rhythms, movements, and ritual structures. Along with visual and auditory images of *kut* supplied by traditional mediums such as paper, fabric and live music play, technical images were also added to boost sensorial experiences including projection lights, interactive sounds, digital film, computer graphics and visual installations. In this complicatedly mixed performance, one medium that bound various elements together was the emotional connection during the rituals. *Leodo: The Paradise* presented a girl's journey to *Leodo*, a legendary island treasured as an artistic nirvana by Islanders, through a series of rituals, delivering *han* – deep sorrows being taken away by the joy. This emotional flow of *han* facilitated the intra-communications of *kut* performers. While various images were transformed and delivered by the ritual movements of the performers and *bonju*, it created a reverberating and linked emotional flow in the stage. The experiences of the emotional connection at this time inspired me to develop my own technology, *the emotional thread – han*, in my final performance *NEO-KUT*, which will be explained in more detail in chapter 6.5.1.

As for the digital interactivity, the aim of technical images was to offer expansive and imaginary environments responding to a performer's movements and build the narrative structure of the journey of the rituals. Thus, the piece provided the virtual scenography interacting or connecting with a girl's movements. To illustrate, the projection images usually followed and expressed the journey of a girl, using interactively moving images of the sea such as being engulfed by waves, looking out at the sea's horizon, travelling to paradise across the sea, etc. Furthermore, the virtual images played a significant role in the soul of the girl, dancing to cut the bond with the real world and cleanse her of her sorrows before she enters *Leodo*. The delay effect of video programming produced double, triple, and multiple images of the dancing girl captured by a live camera. As a result, the layers of a virtual dancer followed the real dancer, giving the impression of the girl dancing with her multiple souls (see Fig.26). The interactions between a live performer and virtual images allowed them to be more connected in the stage. It also proposed the potential of techno-animistic rituals that can deliver the invisible emotional or spiritual movements of *shimbangs* and the girl through virtual metaphors.



Fig.26. Dancing with multiple-soul-images, using a real-time camera and delay effect in *Leodo: The Paradise*. © Haein Song.

Leodo: The Paradise was the piece reinventing *kut* in a theatre style by adopting the contemporary and digital performance context. The piece attempted to maximise the potential of techno-animistic rituals as the stage performance by attaching the theatrical story to shamanic rituals based on the Cheju folk tale, *leodo*; shedding lights on interactions by forming the *bonju* character and the emotional connections; making invisible spirits and surroundings visible through virtual images of a projection. Indeed, it was a huge challenge for me and *kut* performers to present a long-run international performance. We modified the piece every day after the performance regarding the feedback and reactions of audiences. Thus, each performance was slightly different each time while we performed it for a month. In retrospect, this intensive and long-term discussion is the opportunity for me and my collaborators to understand more concisely about *kut* and contemporary or Western styles of performance. In addition, the experiences to meet diverse international audiences at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival has become a driving force in continuing this research. Watching foreign audiences crying and laughing at our performance, *kut* performers and I have had a dream of introducing *kut* to a wider variety of worlds, which make us more focused on the research on how the shamanic technologies can be reflected in contemporary digital art.

5.3. A Digital Wearable Designed for Spiritual Rituals: *Twelve Doors*

Twelve Doors is a solo ritual, directed and performed by myself. The piece begins with questioning how to reflect a spiritual ambience in digital installation. The title is borrowed from one of the most important rituals of *kut*, *twelve doors*, originating from people's belief that the

spirit of the deceased needs to pass through twelve doors to reach heaven. This ceremony is held for the deceased and facilitates their journey to heaven. Therefore, it also can be regarded as a traditional Korean funeral centred on shamanic rituals. The piece adopts wearable technology that has a tendency to highlight the features of SUI Design, especially mobility, promotability and portability. Blending this *close-to-the-skin technology* with the structures, narratives and forms of the traditional shamanic funeral, *Twelve Doors* is designed to present a digital wearable spiritual ritual.



Fig.27. *Dari* lies on the ground, in the ritual of twelve doors of Cheju *kut*. © the Cheju-k'ün-kut Preservation Society Corps.

To put it concretely, the practice intended to produce a wearable installation continuously transfigured and modified by the ritual movements of a performer. The design of the installation was inspired by one of the most vital SUIs, *dari*, a long cotton drape representing the bridge between the spiritual and material realms in *kut* (see Fig.27). The fabrics were suspended from the ceiling, lying across the space. The human-shaped paper *kime*, symbolising souls, is located in the middle of the floor, forming a mandala pattern (see Fig.28). This fabric installation played the role of a screen, as it was connected with digital input from the interactive computer software, *Isadora*.⁶⁰ Video and sound images, containing a certain atmosphere, reminiscent of funeral rituals, were annexed on the fabric during the performance by the combination of a projector and *Isadora*. The performer wore this audio-visual mourning wearable, symbolising

⁶⁰ A real-time interactive digital performance software designed by Troika Ranch including a composer and software engineer, Mark Coniglio and director, Dawn Stoppiello. *Isadora* can read physical movements of performers as data to manipulate the accompanying audio and visual ambience in a variety of ways. See further information at *Isadora* website: <https://troikatronix.com>.



Fig.28. The installation of my practice Twelve Doors inspired by Dari, staged at Artaud Performance Centre Brunel University, 2014. Photo: Haein Song.

the funeral rituals of *kut*. Donned by myself as the performer, this installation became a wearable visual accoutrement, continuously moved and transformed by the performer's rituals. The various scenes of audio-visual images were played and manipulated by *Isadora* in time bases, and sometimes images were changed by the live voice of the performers. Understanding and recognising the movements of sounds and images, the performer smoothly dances with them as if they are her extended skin or company. Thus, all the elements of the piece were linked in relation to wearability: the images of mourning were transformed by the ritual movements of the performer, influenced by the media and music, which were manipulated by the *Isadora* software (see Fig.29).

Technically, the unique feature of this wearable shamanic ritual was the fact that it is performed by only one performer, without any technical operators. It was a twenty-minute-long performance composed of more than fifteen scenes including nine video files and seven sound files. Utilising the time tracking and programming patch of *Isadora*, all audio and visual files were automatically played using the scene timebase operation. In addition, the position, size, and colour of the projected images and the volume, speed, and pitch of the sounds were carefully edited and manipulated by *Isadora* during the performance. Hence, an unusual scene was produced in the operational area: unlike ordinary performances, there were no media, lighting or sound technicians in the operation seats, only a laptop is placed on the operation desk.

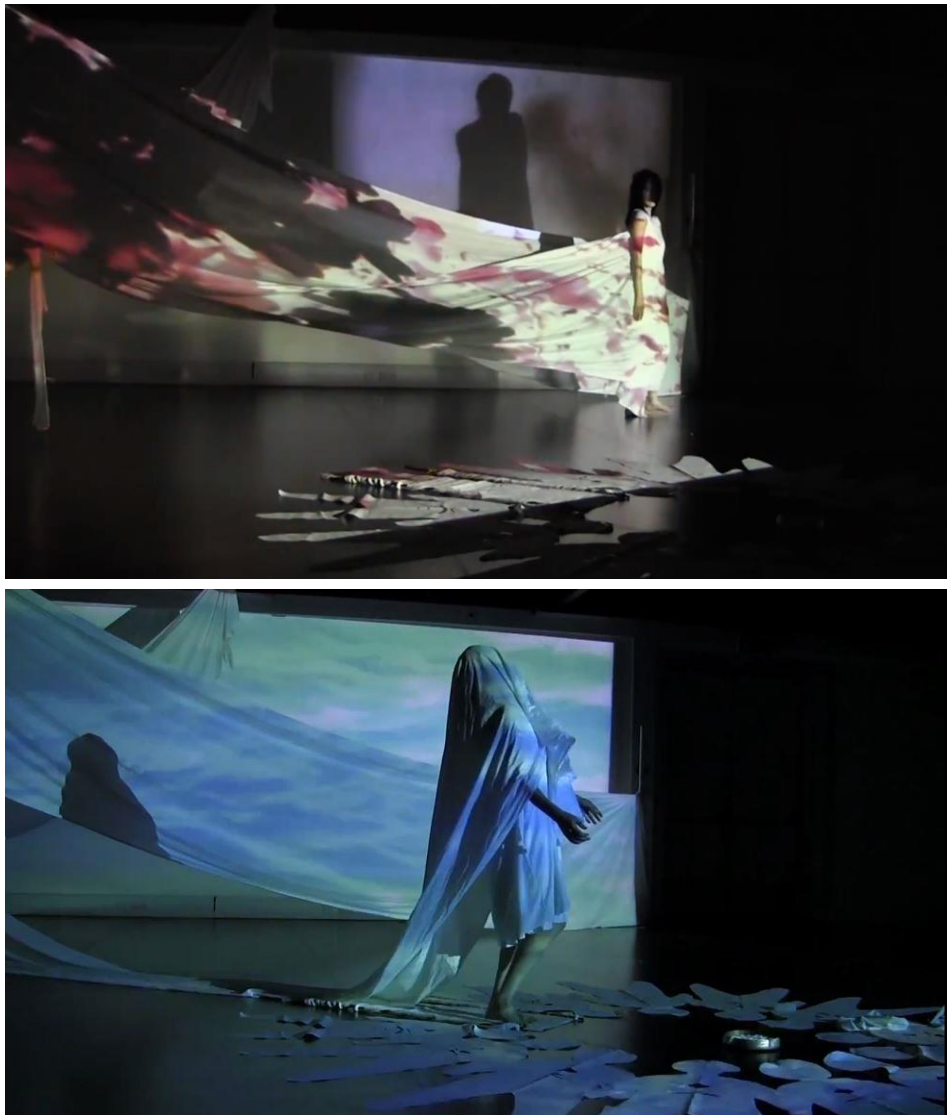


Fig.29. A wearable audio-visual installation worn by the performer in *Twelve Doors* at Artaud Performance Centre Brunel University, 2014. © Haein Song.

Twelve Doors was a significant step for me to take, to gain a technical understanding of *Isadora* software and wearable technology. The most fascinating aspect of digital wearables for me, in association with performativity, is their potential as intellectual interfacial devices. As Birringer and Danjoux have argued, interfacial wearables empower the performers and audience to manipulate or interact with audio-visual digital environments (Birringer and Danjoux 2009: 98). If all things – e.g. dances, songs, sounds, visual images, installations, lighting – are combined with wearable technology, the performance may transform into one huge animate creature; the distinction of genres will disappear, and the piece will become one expanded choreography, composition, ritual and artwork. I believe that this unifying tendency of the wearables offers a harmonious way to combine *kut* rituals and digital performance.

5.3.1. The Exploration of Wearable Lights

The application of wearable technology in digital lighting technology, which I abbreviate to ‘wearable lights’, is one of my main explorations during the research. Exploring wearable lights considers lights that might be worn by the performer, which will move as an extension of the performer's body or movements. The light that I have examined is not the natural one but artificial light, including stage lights and projection lights. For convenience, I refer to these technically-produced lights that are designed to be worn by a performer as wearable light.

Light is the medium that makes all visual images visible. However, wearable lights allow performers to decide and control the visibility, which used to be a gift unique to nature or gods. Linking the lights directly with *shimbang* and *kut* performers’ ritual sounds, voice, instruments and body movements, wearable lights offer performers the power to reveal the mythical world that has only existed in their imagination. Thus, technical lights worn by a performer can extend her movements, in a comparable way to how dancing *mugu*, such as shamanic costume and props, become an extension of a *kut* performer’s movements. Accordingly, wearable light is not simply a light, but a light that can exist one’s body’s extension, responsive to the movements of the performers.⁶¹ Thus, the wearable lights of my practices are designed as a body extension that can interact with a performer and SUIs.

The process of working with the *shimbang* and other *kut* performers make me consider wearable lights as absolutely essential as it is unreasonable to ask the *shimbang* to memorise detailed choreography according to designed projection images. In general, *kut* is by no means performed without training but is enacted with little or no rehearsal. In addition, *kut* performers prefer sharing only the basic outline of their rituals and spontaneously modulate the length, speed, movements and lyrics of their dance and song according to the mood of the guests and

⁶¹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty's notion of ‘flesh’ discussed in his book, *The Visible and the Invisible* [1968](2000) helps us in understanding the invisible wearables as an extended embodiment. Sue Broadhurst points out that his conspicuous departure as denying dualism, breaking down subject/object antinomy: as Merleau-Ponty has mentioned, the ‘perceiving mind is an incarnated mind’ (quoted in Broadhurst 2012: 227), Merleau-Ponty used the phrase ‘flesh of the world’ (Merleau-Ponty 2000: 248), highlights the plasticity of a body, as a word flesh revealing its features as soft, flexible, breathing and seeping and ‘reversible’(149) And according to Broadhurst, this fleshly embodiment has boundless horizons: ‘the flesh of the visible’ entails its correlate in our invisible (to ourselves), yet apprehended carnal presence’(quoted in Broadhurst 2012: 228). This characteristic of flesh reveals a borderless embodiment of body, which conversely means that the invisible world, such as air, lights, sounds can also be grafted our flesh and extend our inner selves as well as bodily-selves.

situations. They need the environments in which their motion is the mainspring to manipulate visual scenes, sounds and lighting rather than expecting performers to move according to visuals created by projected lights. Thus, integrated wearable technology is necessary for the *shimbang* and *kut* performers to maintain their active and spontaneous nature.

Consequently, I have carried out several experiments regarding movement detection before engendering the wearable lights in my later practices. Thanks to the *Isadora* software which contains a handy sound-tracking tool, interactive projection images that react to the live voice of *kut* performers can be achieved. In *Miyeoji-Baengdi*, the volume and speed of a drum influenced the size and shape of the projected images. It gave guests a feeling that the sound of the drum was drawing a picture on the white stage. Furthermore, flying lanterns and fireflies produced by the projection lights became brighter when the performers' voices were raised to a certain level. This interaction added verisimilitude to the artificial images. In *Seocheon Flower Garden*, soundtracking was used for highlighting the energy of the rituals. When the pitch and beat of the *shimbang*'s voice increased, the pattern projected on the floor became brighter and bigger to accentuate the power of the *shimbang*'s chant.

Unlike soundtracking, it was extremely complicated to produce wearable light using camera-based motion tracking. Motion tracking is a computer vision technique of motion detection, mathematically tracking physical changes in the position of humans with respect to their background (Shiffman 2015: np). The concept of motion tracking is simple: a camera is plugged to a laptop containing the software; the software reads the motion through data, and the motion of technical images is influenced by data obtained from the software. The software I used such as *Isadora* and *Processing*⁶² contain *OpenCV*⁶³, also helped me to easily retrieve data of the motions. However, when it came to live media performance, it produced many difficulties.

Although I spent much time exploring diverse motion-tracking programmes during my research, including position, brightness, colour, depth and skeleton detection, a reliable motion-tracking

⁶² *Processing* is a Java-based open-source programming code software created by Casey Reas and Benjamin Fry. Since the processing foundation started with Daniel Shiffman in 2012, it offers over 100 libraries and tutorials along with the software.

⁶³ *OpenCV* (the open-source computer-vision library) is the tool that helps to easily access computer-vision programming. It contains simple to high-level algorithms such as face detection, pedestrian detection, feature matching, and tracking. The library has been downloaded more than 3 million times since it was produced by Intel in 1998 (Tiryakian and Goffman 1968: 3).

system seems difficult to produce, especially in the condition of performing with many performers in low-cost detecting apparatuses. Therefore, in the following section, I would like to share a number of problems and limitations that I have been faced with as well as my thoughts on motion tracking. The first issue I encountered was ‘video feedback’, which usually happened when the projectors and cameras were pointing in the same direction. For example, for position tracking, i.e. detecting the changes in the position of the object, the software tracked all motions including performers as well as the projected images. This was because the software only recognises the pixel, which means it is unable to differentiate humans from images. When the floor and screen were white, the brightness tracking system, i.e. detecting the brightness of an object, produced a more serious problem. The software read the bright white surface of the screen and floor illuminated by projection lights rather than the performers’ movements. These are of course fascinating realisations, regarding the inherent differences between mathematics (computational logic and machine vision) and human perception and imagination. On the other hand, concrete problems had now arisen.

To avoid video feedback, colour tracking and *Kinect* systems were explored. Alternative methods were acceptable as long as the limitations they produced could be resolved. In the case of colour tracking, it could only detect certain colours, such as red, yellow and blue. So, the pieces needed to include costumes and graphics of limited colours. In addition, it seemed difficult to perform participatory work that required audiences to dress in specific colours. Using a *Kinect* camera was considered the best solution to eliminate video feedback. This was because a *Kinect* camera has a depth detection function and can thus detect, measure and read the human skeletal structure. However, the *Kinect* camera itself had a range of limitations: for instance, Xbox 360 was unable to perform in the huge space owing to short USB connection cables (required length was 5 m). The range of the space available for the performer to move in was restricted because of its narrow distance tracking range (the practical limit was from 1.2 – 3.5 m). Moreover, it could not reliably track more than one performer although its manual stated that it could track up to six people simultaneously.

Although my exploration was carried out with a low-cost motion tracking system, within the budget, there seem to be alternative ways of providing motion tracking, which eliminates the above-mentioned problems. An infrared tracking system with IR lighting and IR cameras are one such possibility, as they are unaffected by the projection light. The *Thermitrack*, a thermal

imaging technology (which senses body heat), seems to be a more convenient device than IR lights, as it completely ignores the lighting conditions. It works without ‘illumination’ which is the necessary process for IR light detection and reliably operates in both darkness and daylight.

I expected, through my practices, to generate a performer-controlled system of lights that could read the performer’s motion and be manipulated according to the performer’s movements. However, because of many difficulties in using the motion-tracking system, I ended up simultaneously controlling the motion of lights through a mouse or *TuioPad* (a multitooth remote control based on the TUIO protocol), according to the motions of the *kut* performers instead of using tracking devices. Developing a reliable and low-cost motion tracking system is a vital task that I will continue to work on in producing a wearable lighting system for *kut*.

5.4. Light Technologies Illuminating Liminal Sphere: *Miyeoji Baengdi*

Miyeoji-Baengdi is designed to create a liminal sphere, adopting the ancient concept of the space in-between as well as the poetic power of digital lights. *Miyeoji-baengdi* is the term used in *kut*, indicating the world in-between the material and spiritual realm that shamans inhabit for healing purposes. It is a vital spatial concept transmitted by a shamanic song, *ponp’uri*, deeply set in the mind of *shimbangs* (Seo 2016: np). It is the space that is untouchable, like the digital light that bathes us but is elusive to touch. This interesting resemblance inspires me to combine this mythical world of *kut* with the virtual world of digital lights.

The piece took place inside an imaginary scene of *Miyeoji-Baengdi*. Regarding the liminality of SUI Design, a white floor and white real screen became *myŏngdu*-like surfaces reflecting the *shimbangs*’ mythical imagination of *miyeoji-baengdi*. The imaginary world was projected by digital lights, and media scenography was carefully mapped and changed by the rituals utilising the interactive projection mapping and manipulation software *Isadora*. The inspiration for the media was mainly the *shimbang*’s comments about the images of *miyeoji-baengdi* that come to her mind when performing the rituals. The media were rendered as video files in order to be projected by *Isadora*. During the performance, the projection lights were manipulated by *Isadora* – played, controlled, and customised in real time.

The aim of my media façade was to highlight the liminal sense, producing illusionary images inhabiting, moving and interacting with the live *kut* performers in immersive 3D environments.

A series of experiments was conducted focusing on a stereoscopic vision to produce a more sensorial and illusionistic liminal interface. Initially, I made an effort to create 3D animations by 3D graphics tools, *Blender* and creative coding software, *Processing* and *Openframeworks*. However, owing to lack of experience (I only had experience of recording and editing video files with *Adobe Premiere* at that time), it seemed almost impossible to create satisfying 3D motion graphics. Consequently, I converted 2D to 3D graphics by optical illusion utilising *AfterEffects* and *Motion*, rather than creating real 3D animations. For example, the *kime* floating as if in a 3D space was created by the vanishing point effect, the floating sun and the rotating cylinder-flag, by the displacement effect, and the endless blue particle forest and cave, by the camera movements of *AfterEffects* (see Fig.30). Several illusionary animations such as moving particles, artificial lights and water waves were created by *Motion*.

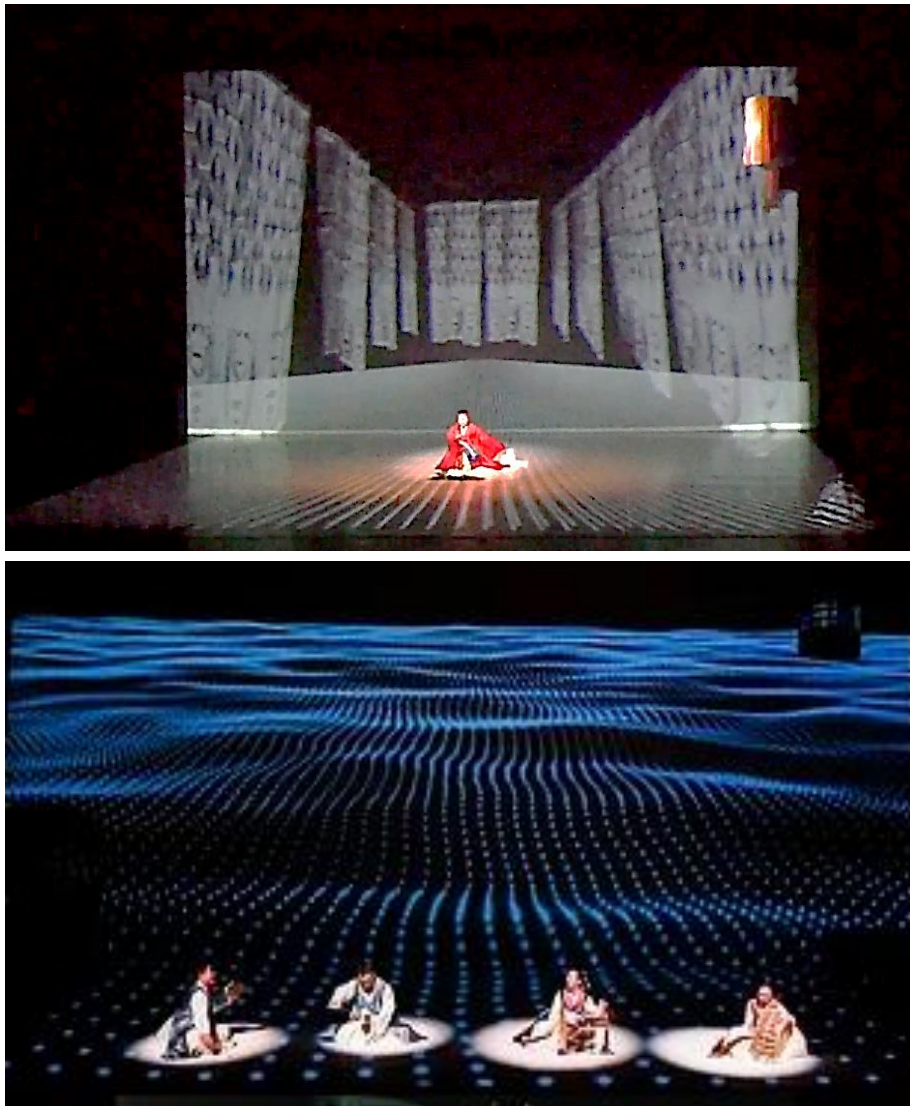


Fig.30. The first attempt of *Miyeoji-Baengdi* converting 2D images to 3D by video effects: creating floating *kime* using the vanishing point effect (above); the endless blue particle forest using the camera movements of *After Effects* (below). © Haerin Song.



Fig.31. The second attempt of *Miyeoji-Baengdi* mapping on the 75-degree-angled screen to produce a stereoscopic environment. © Haein Song.

Following this, the experiments aimed at creating not only graphics but also stereoscopic surfaces. *Miyeoji-Baengdi* was, therefore, performed three times according to different designs of the screen: in the first performance, the stage had two side surfaces, a floor and a real screen; in the second one, it had a cubic design with three side surfaces; and in the third one, the stage was a hologram screen. The second attempt with the cubic design stage led me to understand and utilise more detailed 3D mapping techniques (see Fig.31). Although different types of

specialised video-mapping software are available such as *Madmapper*, *Resolume*, *Arena 4*, I mainly utilised *Isadora 2.0*. It is because *Isadora 2.0* has attached an easy handling and highly responsive mapping tool named *IzzyMap* since 2014. The most useful function of *IzzyMap* was the composite mapping method which enables one to handle non-rectilinear input images. This way one can combine multiple-slices made by four types of masks, such as a rectangle, triangle, and complex bezier curves, into a single, highly complex input slice. All slices can change their intensity, size, angles and perspectives. In addition, by utilising the 3D projector tool in *Isadora*, the images were able to interactively change their colour, intensity, and positions within the X, Y, and Z axis directions. Mapping felt like drawing pictures on space through the display of diverse image-slices. I discovered that depending on the pattern, composition, colour and brightness of a slice drawing, it is possible to make a 2D screen looks stereoscopic and a 3D screen looks flat. Also, a space can be animated by choreographing the position, colours, and intensities of the slices over time.

The third performance used a holoscreen, a transparent screen for holographic display. This experiment was conducted as a fifteen-minute hologram performance, in *Miyeoji-Baengdi*, at the International Convention Center Cheju. The holoscreen was the rigid-fronted one named *Poly Net* created by HOLOTIVE Global, which can present clear images with a special material that has higher transparency than the general mesh screen. It was an interesting experience for me and other *kut* performers, since we could distinctly feel the reality and illusion separated by the holoscreen.

To illustrate, from the view of the audience sitting in front of the screen, a magical scenery was presented, with *kut* performers dancing with the 3D hologram images floating in the air. The actual stage behind the holoscreen was just darkness. In order to generate clear technical images, the piece used only a narrow spotlight that fell straight on the performers without any other lighting. The intense light falling in front of the eyes onto the narrow stage, which is only about 4-m deep, made the image projected on the front screen invisible. Hence, the performers themselves were performing in the dark, without experiencing the magical 3D environment that the audience was seeing. For example, the image of a soul flying above the performer's head was a digital ghost seen by the audience but not the performers (See Fig.32). In fact, similar experiences had been noted in previous performances with a white screen and floor. What performers saw on the stage during the performance was just the trace of the digital lights

moving dimly and vaguely; to obtain the best view of the technical images, one had to move away from the stage and look at the images from a distance. It was unfortunate that the performers could not see these moving virtual images which the audience experienced, but this reminds us of the nature of digital illusion of media façade – a reflection of lights on a surface.

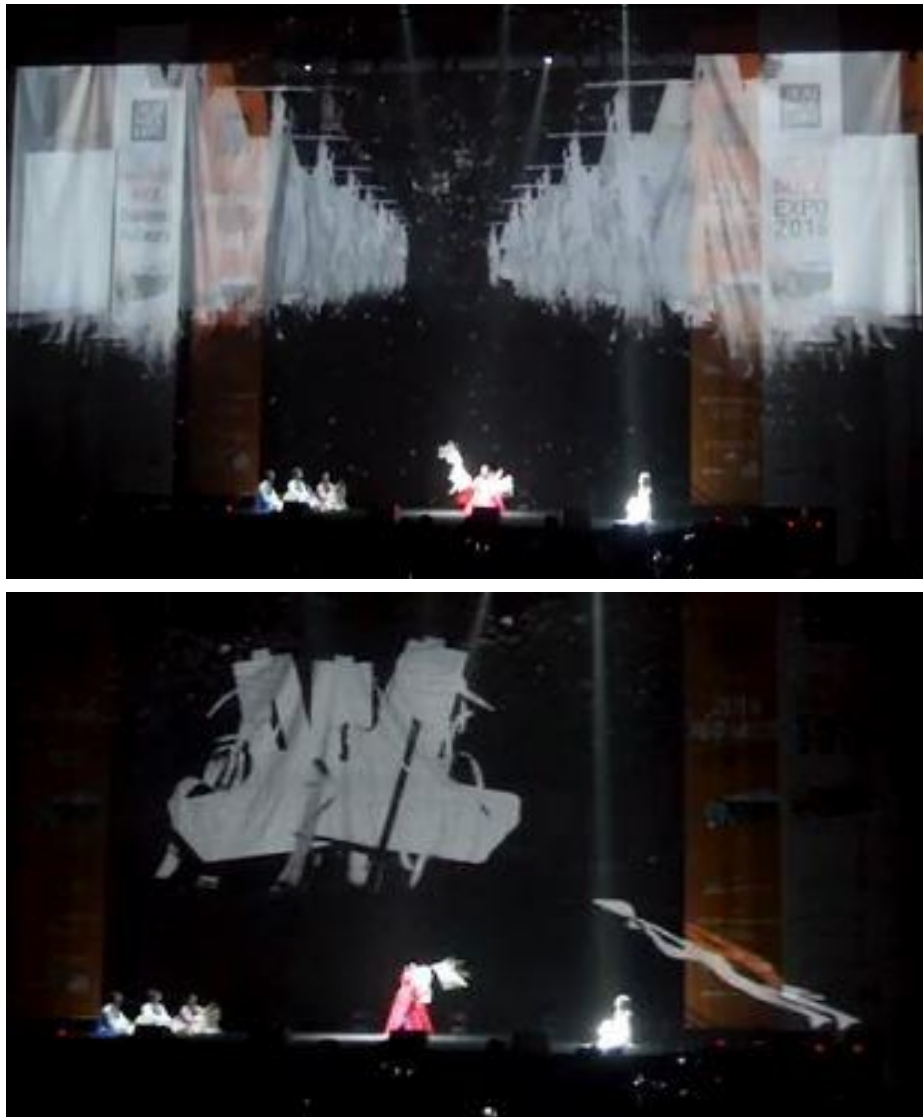


Fig.32. *Miyeoji-Baengdi* utilising a holo-screen named Polynet. © Haein Song.

Summing up, *Miyeoji-Baengdi* was a new way of *kut* rendering the mythical imaginations of *shimbangs* in media facade technologies. Many of the images used in the rituals were replaced by virtual images, while the images transmitted from the divine songs of *shimbangs* were spread out as three-dimensional images on the stage. The *kut* performers and *shimbang* were enveloped by colour-rich images in a projection mapped *kutp'an*. As media charged a significant portion in the performance, the piece faced a significant challenge in harmonising them with *kut*-rituals.

However, I can overcome it by considering it as another shamanic medium: the mapping process gave me a feeling like drawing pictures in a stage, which reminded me of the metaphoric mapping of SUI Designs, displaying *kutp'an* with symbolic *mugu*.

The media façade also played an effective role in delivering the stories of rituals, mythical flowing images and the emotional impact, and thereby supported audiences and performers emotionally engaging with the rituals. The transitional and responsive media facade encapsulated the liminal sense of *miyeoji-baengdi* and intensively represented it in one hour. It would be the power of digital lights that can convey the imagination of *shimbang* faster and clearer than the old medium. Although this power would be the curate's egg, it is very encouraging regarding that the image of *miyeoji-baengdi* is typically difficult for ordinary people to grasp even if it is illustrated by shamanic songs of *kut* for a long time. The outcomes of *Miyeoji-Baengdi* demonstrate the potential of utilising digital lights as an alternative shamanic medium in *kut*; This experience leads me to actively utilised the digital light technology in *NEO-KUT* to present the transitional atmospheres of the nine ecstatic spaces.

5.5. Immersive Performance Ritual: *Seocheon Flower Garden*

Seocheon Flower Garden is the practice enacted just before my final performance, *NEO-KUT*. It is an immersive performance ritual, exploring audience-participatory and immersive experiences, and owing its inspiration to the immersive mise-en-scène of *metakimosphere no. 3*. The term “Seocheon flower garden” indicates a *kut* concerning a mythical flower garden in Cheju, which has been passed down from *ponp'uri*. This garden is where souls and minds of humans bloom as holy flowers. As with the flower of birth and death, it embraces the latent mythical universe of the eternal cycle in *kut*. Embodying digital installations and the myth of the garden, the piece alludes to the imaginary flower garden in the contemporary context.

Seocheon Flower Garden was designed to create an immersive space where the viewers were physically activated and imaginatively stimulated within a theme-based ritual experience. Utilising the metaphoric mapping of SUI Designs, the space was covered with symbolic installations, representing divine flowers. The mythical story and images of *seocheon flower garden* were disclosed by a combination of digital media and installations, along with live shamanic ritual chants, dances, and music plays. For instance, the white mesh fabric installation hanging from the ceiling created a pathway from the entrance to the far-left corner of the stage,

symbolising the labyrinth to the garden. The installation turned into a virtual flower or the skin of flora, when touched by the movements of a *kut* performer dancing as the goddess, reflecting transitional flower patterns by the digital projection lights during the rituals (See Fig. 33, above). The interactive flowers were placed in the far-right corner. The colour temperature of these flowers was controlled by a performer or a guest who manipulated the small camera operating as the brightness-tracking sensor attached to the flower. When the performers or guests shaded the light of the flower with their palms or bodies, the flower turned into a cool colour, such as blue or green, and when the flower was again lighted, it turned back into a warm colour, such as red or yellow. The interactive flower installation represented the capability of the divine flower taking care of life and death (see Fig.33, below).



Fig.33. The metaphorically mapped space of *Seocheon Flower Garden* (above); interactive flowers and the pathway to the flower garden (below) at Cheju Culture and Arts Centre, 2016. © Haein Song.



Fig.34. The interactive floor, generating images according to the sound of the instruments played by *kut* performers at Cheju Culture and Arts Centre, 2016. © Haein Song.

The white floor which covered the centre of the stage was an interactive audio-visual floor-installation built by the combination of sound-generated images and with live drum and string instruments playing. The volume of sound created the movements of the virtual flower-like images on the surface and the floor, symbolising the power and narrative of the flora (see Fig.34). There was also a tree installation representing the divine *tangsan-tree*, at the centre of the stage, designed to act as a collector of the guests' wishes as in *nangsoe*. The tree was completed by guests hanging a lotus of the wish on the branches, during the performance, symbolising reincarnation, *samsara* and life (see Fig.35).



Fig.35. The tree installation with the lotus of the wish hanging by guests at the Culture and Arts centre, 2016. © Haein Song.

The installations and mise-en-scène of this piece were a more complex and mutable, unlike my previous artworks using a flat and fixed screen made of mesh and cotton. Thus, the work was

challenging, requiring more complicated mapping techniques and the interaction system which should be manipulated by a live controller, such as *TuioPad*. However, mapping lights onto the 3D installation produced a more impressive illusion as if the static installation around performers and guests became animated and magically reworked. For example, the piece expressed the life of the mythical flowers through an interactive 3D mapped-installation. In the scene where guests held the drape together, the virtual flowers magically inscribed on themselves and moved across to the surface of a long drape suspended from the installation. The installation then turned into a ludic pond at one point. When a performer went under the drape on the floor, the façade of the installation revealed fish swimming in the direction of the performer; then, the fish followed her and flew up and down as she moved up and down. When the motion graphic images of the flowers and fish matched directly with the moving fabrics, the illusions of the fish and flowers appeared life-like (see Fig.36).



Fig.36. The virtual fish following a dancer, manipulated by *TuioPad* in *Seocheon Flower Garden*. © Haein Song.

With the aims to offer immersiveness by creating deep involvement, participatory experiences were enhanced: the audiences were no longer settled back and watching, but became collaborators in the work of art; they could move, experience and feel during the performance, activating their sensorial impressions. In fact, audience participation is common in *kut*, as it has long been a practice centred on *bonju* and guests. However, the piece needed special guidance and direction, because, unlike a *kut* that has no time constraints, it was a black-box theatre performance that had to finish on time. The public presentation of the *Seocheon Flower Garden*, therefore, provided me with valuable experiences for considering what can provide effective and smooth guidance for audiences in a participatory theatre performance.

Seocheon Flower Garden was performed twice in a black box theatre of Cheju. It blocked off the audience seats in order to let people freely travel and experience the space. While it was enacted twice, people showed remarkably different reactions depending on how the performer guided them. The part revealing the most obvious disparity was the beginning, which let guests freely walk around and experience the space before the *kut* performer starts the dancing rituals. In the first performance, one *kut* performer said to the guests who entered the stage, ‘You can look around the stage freely, passing this gauze installation, as in the conventional *kut*.’ Then, the unexpected happened: the guest that came to the stage first suddenly became the leader, and the rest of the guests followed them almost in line and waited for our guide. They showed a tendency to mill around the stage as a group. I expected this part to last for about twenty minutes, but the audience moved so orderly and quickly that they only spent five minutes looking around. This meant that we had to perform more rituals with them instead.

In the second performance, performers guided the guests with a gesture without speaking. Then, the guests reacted differently, one asked what to do, one was puzzled, one sat comfortably reading the brochure while another was freely enjoying the environment. After a short time, most guests began to seem uncomfortable, wondering where they should position themselves. Even the guests, who had shown the autonomous attitude in *kut*, behaved gingerly, being very careful. Once the shaman’s dancing ritual started, they become typical theatre guests, politely watching it. Some guests forced their way to sit on the audience seats, although I had blocked them off. After a while, the performers guided the audiences to write a wishing paper. The audiences began to gather together and write, and only then could I feel the audience being assimilated into one atmosphere.

These extreme reactions may have occurred because of Cheju people’s lack of experiences with participatory performance in the black box studio. However, it made me consider more about effective ways of getting people involved when *kut* is performed as a stage performance. If audiences are over-instructed, it tends to offer them formally-centred experiences. In contrast, if they are given total freedom with no guide, audiences sometimes feel more uncomfortable and are thereby unable to concentrate so that ritual moves in a different direction without producing a communal sense. Thus, guiding people in a middle way between instruction and freedom seems an important element of participatory performance. In addition, using ritual movements seems an efficient way to manage this balance rather than text or oral instructions.

This idea is based on wishing paper rituals experience that, even if audiences are free to move around having different experiences, they can feel a communal sense if their movements are collected together at any one point, in the form of a ritual. This means that doing some physical and mental act together brings about a more unified atmosphere than just watching or walking around independently.

What I clearly realised so far regarding immersiveness and deep involvement is the significance of the environmental condition on the ambience of performance. All of my previous works before *Seocheon Flower Garden* were performed on a proscenium stage and could not be designed for such a participatory stage. I feel that this is the major factor not allowing for an intimate atmosphere that would comfort guests by a sense of solidarity and affection; the result of *Seocheon Flower Garden* confirmed that my assumption was right. Having an open space where guests can physically communicate with performers is vital to create ritual and immersive ambience of the practice. A more positive and therapeutic stimulation occurs in the experiential process of having a more intimate connection with performers.

As have mentioned earlier, originally, *kut* is not performed in the form of a proscenium stage. It is usually enacted in a place where there are no audience seats, freeing people to walk around and choose to see what they want, rather than forcing them to keep watching the stage from audience seats. When people enter *kutp'an*, in which is marked by the metaphoric *mugu*, they become immersed in the space of the *kut* within various shamanic rituals. During the rituals, guests usually let themselves go with a variety of behaviours such as chatting with others, hovering around the *kutp'an*, tasting the ritual foods, and sometimes sleeping next to the performance space. This would be because the *kut* gives people freedom of action, unlike audiences of the proscenium stage who are expected to act with proper decorum. In addition, since the *kut* usually takes all day to perform and sometimes last up to fourteen days, people tend to move around to avoid the physical demanding posture of having to focus their attention on the *shimbang* rituals for a long time. Regarding this, it seems vital to break the proscenium structure when the *kut* is performed as a stage performance.

More importantly, I believe that participatory experiences offer similar egalitarian perspectives to those in *kut*. As the *kut* ritual is philosophically attached to *ki-irwōnnon*, the Korean animistic ideology which stresses anti-authoritarian values through the lens of the *ki*, the concept of

participatory performance adds weight to a democratic interpretation of the audience, thus avoiding its status as an oligarchic, elitist art setting. Moreover, this equal and unrestricted quality is the basis of creating the collective ecstasy of *kut*. Regarding this, my final performance, *NEO-KUT* explores the application of ritual movement as providing the vital guidance for audience participation, utilising the method of ‘transitional installation’, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 6. NEO-KUT

6.1. Preface



Fig.37. The traditional image of *kut* in Choson Dynasty – Munyoshinmu (shaman's dance) by Yun-bok Shin (1758-1813), who painted the *kut* in the daily life in his time (left) © Kansong Art and Culture Foundation; the image of *NEO-KUT*, the revived form of *kut* for 'now', presenting shaman's dance connected with digital and virtual environments, directed by Haein Song (right). © Haein Song.

From the day that I devised my PhD research proposal and received agreement for the collaboration from a *kut* performance group, MARO, and a master *shimbang*, Seo, I had been wondering what the title of my last performance of this practice-led research project would be. I decided to entitle it *NEO-KUT*, which is something I would never have imagined four years ago. All my practices before the final performance including *Leodo*, *Twelve Doors*, *Miyeoji-Bangdui*, and *Seocheon Flower Garden* draw on the themed spaces of *kut* with a specific title. It might be because of my unwitting thought that I should theatrically, choreographically or visually reinvent *kut* in a new way to express my particularity as a director. However, pursuing a series of practices as a *kut* performer and digital practitioner, it seemed pointless to distinguish between what is old and new, the traditional and the contemporary. I became more focused on *kut*'s natural and essential role – *kut* as a conversational ritual, and a *shimbang* as a mediator. This led me to put higher consideration on creating the moment of emergence that is generated by the ritual journey amongst *shimbangs*, *kut* performers, audience-participants and myself, rather than expressing my interpretation of *kut* with pre-composed scenarios or choreography. Consequently, I came up with the thought: why not try a *kut* by itself without any specific theme? What about just having a *kut* on the day of the performance?

Thus, I chose the title *NEO-KUT* for my final PhD performance. The word 'NEO' refers to 'new' from Greek 'neos'. It is not about a newly invented form of *kut*, but about the revived

form of *kut*, reorganised for ‘now’. *NEO-KUT* does not contain a specific myth or mythical space like the previous pieces. Instead, it contains the technical methods that I have explored for my practices in creating ecstatic spaces. Therefore, *NEO-KUT* is the piece where I have applied all my most updated digital technologies, accumulated over three years of collaboration experiences with *kut* performers, while endeavouring to highlight the primal nature of *kut*-rituals.

Consequently, an immersive performance ritual, *NEO-KUT*, was held for the people gathered on 16th November 2016 at the Artaud Performance Theatre, at Brunel University London. Following one of the prime aims of *kut* – communal healing – the purpose of *NEO-KUT* was to open an ecstatic space for the people of London, to wish for good luck and remove bad fortune. All collaborative artists who participated in my research, including the master shaman, Soon Sil Seo, and five *kut* performers, visited London to carry out the rituals for *NEO-KUT*. Brunel staff members provided technical support, and about forty visitors participated.

In what follows, I will proceed to illustrate *NEO-KUT*'s process, features and outcomes. *NEO-KUT* explores atmospheric changes of the nine spaces inspired by *Cheju-k'ŷn-kut* in creating ecstatic environments. How *NEO-KUT* generates an ecstatic space will be explained using four main subjects: Spatial Script, Transitional Installation, Liminal Face and Technology toward Harmony. Spatial Script is a text frame designed to build a collective imagination for ecstatic space. The Spatial Script will be illustrated by showing its process of creation, role and effects on the piece, providing an essential understanding of the framework for creating ecstatic space. Transitional Installation establishes how metaphoric mapping techniques have evolved in *NEO-KUT*. Symbolic meanings will be shown by the emblematic movements of choreographic, acoustic and visual images created for the nine ecstatic spaces. The third subject, Liminal Face, will examine technical images produced by projection and stage light technology that enhance one of the shamanic user interface Design; liminality. Compared to conventional *kut*, the most modern and innovative medium applied in *NEO-KUT* would be the technical images. I will look closely at how spatial images projected by the lights represent, support and signify the rituals in *NEO-KUT*. Finally, Technology toward Harmony will be discussed as the method of combining seemingly contradictory elements. This method will be outlined by addressing ‘the emotional thread’ and ‘wearable lights’. The emotional thread is a ritual way of producing syncretic amalgamation via matching internal flows. In this section, I will also examine the

attitude and role I have had in *NEO-KUT* as a ‘media shaman’, mediator or interpreter. In addition, ‘Wearable images’ of *NEO-KUT* pursues interactivity by achieving unified mobility directly linked with *kut* performers’ rituals. The chapter will conclude with a summary of my findings. It will also briefly explain the psychological changes and influences that this research has exerted on the *kut* performers and *shimbang*.

6.2. Spatial Script

Space 1. Entrance

Before entering the space, guests write their deepest wish on the wishing paper in the lobby. Then, they treat themselves to a cup of tea, wine and sweets from Cheju Island in Korea. It is a comfortable, yet awkward, space where guests who gather for NEO-KUT chat with each other. After a while, the guests take off their shoes according to a guide’s instructions and go into a darker studio, the ecstatic space.

The ecstatic space is a transitional space which is influenced by the *kut* performers’ rituals for the sake of exerting the potential of atmospheric change. The ecstatic space is manifested by the relationship between *kutp’an*, *kut* performers (*shimbang*), and guests (audience). As I understand, one of the essential elements shaping the ecstatic space is a collective imagination. And the prerequisite of collective imagination is creating an environment where *kut* performers are willing to immerse themselves to feel the ecstatic presence. Thus, a ‘spatial script’ is explored, triggering the *kut* performers to envision a certain space together while they are carrying out their rituals. The spatial script is a sort of basic text whose information essentially supports the user’s imagination. It is more like a script in computer science, rather than a theatre script, in that it has the flexibility to interact with the user’s actions without substantially changing its original primary structure. A computer script, for example, is a language defining website behaviours in response to a user’s input. Within its automated process system, it presents more usable and flexible environments in the web-space these days (Rouse, 2005: np).

In the same manner, the spatial script of my practice has the flexibility to interact with performers without substantially changing its primary original structure. Thus, instead of serving as a vivid model of the space, this spatial script is designed to build its appearance together to generate the resultant space. Namely, the spatial script is a sort of basic-text, inspiring and collecting the performer’s imagination whose representation materialises the ecstatic space. A variation of ecstatic spaces in my practice is produced by the performers’

collective imaginations based on the spatial script.

The spatial script of *NEO-KUT* (see Table 2) draws an ongoing and experimental journey through nine ritual spaces. Unlike the previous works, which depicted a particular mythical space of *kut* via a combination of digital and ritual visualisation, *NEO-KUT* does not express a specific mythical landscape. However, it aims to travel the atmospheres of nine imaginary spaces according to the rituals. In the spatial script, these nine spaces are categorised by their atmospheric changes, created by the collective images of the performers. The ‘image’ here is not limited to a visible representation but covers all manifestations of the external form including sound images, moving images, virtual images, technical images and invisible images such as presence. From my perspective, the feature of the images relies on the expression of mind (feeling, emotions, imagination) via a body in a specific moment. In this manner, the quality of space depends on a manifestation of how images are represented through collective movements. Thus, the trigger for the spatial movements would be the action of the collective images when performers have collectively shifted their focus from their mind. The spatial script of *NEO-KUT* is designed to direct the performers’ attention towards the nine spaces and to integrate their real-time expressions into one spatial image. It attempts to assemble spontaneous and reflexive images of the performers and guests through an interconnected three-fold structure.

Table 2. The spatial script

Space	The First Layer The Ground	The Second Layer The Framework	The Third Layer Potential Results
Space 1 The Preparation Space	Condition: (time) is 7 pm, on November 16, 2017. Spatial Event: Space 1 lasts for 25min. Direction: Lobby, the zone for the preface, the space of the encounter inspired by <i>Kimegosa</i> , the ritual of setting of <i>kime</i> .	Guides: Soung-U Kim, Andrew Smith Ritual: Refreshment, writing wishing paper. Guided Imagery: The preparation space for removing frustration, fear, awkwardness, looking inwards to oneself and others.	If: Guests arrive in the lobby. Then: Let the guests treat themselves to the sweets, tea, and wine from Cheju Island. Guide them to write their wishes etc. worries, desires, or aspirations on the wishing paper. Distribute program.
Space 2 The Entrance	Condition: (time) is 7:25pm. Spatial Event: Space 2 lasts for 5–10 min.	Guide: Media Operator (Haein Song) Ritual: The ritual of the lights. Guided Imagery:	If: (time) is 7:25pm Then: Projection – Sound – Lighting in/ guide guests to take

	<p>Direction: The entrance/the expectation of a beginning, the collective anticipation of events. Inspired by <i>Chogamje</i>, the ceremony to inform people and gods that <i>kut</i> begins.</p>	<p>Darkness – shaking luminance, The light gathered by people. <i>Shimbang</i>'s chant in the rainy lights. The first movement of soul that became light.</p>	<p>off their shoes and enter the space of <i>NEO-KUT</i> (studio). If: Guests enter the studio. Then: Escort the guests to sit around the white drape. If: Guests have sat down and become quiet. Then: The <i>shimbang</i>'s chant will inform the beginning of the <i>kut</i>.</p>
Space 3 The Threshold	<p>Condition: When the virtual screen disappears into the screen. Spatial Event: Space 3 lasts for 3–7min. Direction: The threshold, The transitional elements between here and there, familiar and unfamiliar, visible and invisible. Inspired by <i>Cheongshin</i>, a welcome the gods ritual, to open the liminal space between the spiritual and material world.</p>	<p>Guide: <i>Bonju</i> (host-girl: Jeonghyeon Yun) Ritual: Set a spiritual boat afloat. Guided Imagery: the threshold rituals, making a voyage to a place of the sublime. (Stillness – anxiety – tension – inbetweenness – rotation) The white bridge distancing self from here, and the liminality enters the presence.</p>	<p>If: <i>Bonju</i> begins to walk into the white path. Then: Guide people to hold the drape to create <i>bonju</i>'s pathway together. If: <i>Bonju</i> had passed through the fabric. Then: <i>Samul</i> come into the stage and rotate the space Guide the guests to sit on the back of a split cloth.</p>
Space 4 Opened Gate	<p>Condition: When the rotation of the space stops. Spatial Event: Space 4 lasts for 5–7min. Direction: Inspired by <i>gunmun yeollim</i>, opening the <i>gunmun</i> (the gate of heaven) rituals. The place that is uniting the gods and people.</p>	<p>Guide: <i>Shimbang</i> Soon Sil Seo Ritual: a dancing ritual for opening <i>gunmun</i>. Guided Imagery: (attention – immersive evenness – the beat from the earth's surface – divination – reversibility – suspended rotations – releasing) The vast field, the white reed forest, the spirits coming in the wind.</p>	
Space 5 Wishing Zone	<p>Condition: When the <i>shimbang</i> finishes her chant after the dance. Spatial Event: Space 5 lasts for 4-15min. Direction: Wishing Zone: space to gather people's</p>	<p>Guide: Yoo Jeong Oh Ritual: A purification – singing and drumming rituals. Guided Imagery: (Purification – cumulation) Clear text, hanging the wishing paper to reflect one's mind on</p>	<p>If: Performers put all the <i>dari</i> from every side into the centre. Then: Guide people to hang their wishes on <i>dari</i>.</p>

	wishes inspired by <i>Sedorim</i> , purification of the ritual space.	the space.	
Space 6 The Space for Reflection	Condition: When people hang all their wishes. Spatial Event: Space 6 lasts for 5–10min. Direction: Space of prayer and reflection, for self-retrospection.	Guide: Jeonghyeon Yun Ritual Event: <i>Chijön</i> dance Guided Imagery: <i>Chijön</i> Dance a dance for one’s soul (tension, anxiety – transcendent mind – calmness – rising of divinity – prayer). Feeling like meditation or chaotic, calm or pure joy comes up. Expansion of the narrow, inner mind-space.	
Space 7 The Heavenly Space	Condition: When <i>dari</i> with wishing paper ascends to the ceiling. Spatial Event: Space 7 lasts for 3–7min. Direction: As if dancing in the sky, the ceremony to entertain gods, peoples, and spirits.	Guide: Yoo Jeong Oh Ritual: Drum ritual Guided Imagery: Ecstatic joy, feeling as if flying in the sky, the song of joy of the invisible sky drops down to the earth. Vibration of the ground and suspension to the sky. Heaven and earth become one.	
Space 8 The Resting Place	Condition When <i>shimbang</i> begins her singing. Spatial Event Space 8 lasts for 5–15min. Direction Inspired by <i>pudasi</i> healing ritual, performed by master <i>shimbang</i> , carried out for removing bad fortune of people.	Guide: Soon Sil Seo, <i>shimbang</i> Ritual: Healing ritual Guided Imagery: (Energy circulation-focus-climax-relaxation) Space where our perception, mind and emotions intersect each other, and rotating. A deep and immersive prayer especially for a sick baby and new life.	If: Seo starts the rituals. Then: Have people sit in a circle.
Space 9 The Space of Joy	Condition: When <i>shimbang</i> ’s healing ritual has finished. Spatial Event: Space 9 lasts for 5–15min. Direction: the space of <i>shinmyöng</i> . Stepping and jumping from the ground, the space of dance.	Guide: Ho Sung Yang Ritual: <i>Samul-pankut</i> Guided Imagery: The party for everyone. Chaotic concert with joyful drumming dance, shaking the earth by the steps of the guests.	If: After space rotated by spinning <i>Samul</i> . Then: Escort the people to dance and play together.

The first layer forms a foundation text, conceptual ideas for the *kut* performers as in *ponp’uri* of *kut*. It consists of three structures: the ‘Condition’, ‘Spatial Event’ and ‘Direction’. The relationship between ‘condition’ and ‘spatial event’ informs performers about when they move

into the next space. ‘Direction’ is the initial conceptual input for the space, drawing inspiration from nine typical rituals of *Cheju-k’ŭn-kut*. It aims to serve the fundamental attributions of the nine spaces of *NEO-KUT* and offer inspiration to the performer who will act as ‘guide’ of the second layer.

The second layer can be regarded as the framework of the space linked to the first layer. It is also composed of three structures: the ‘guide’, the ‘Ritual’, and ‘Guided Imagery’. There is a different guide for each space, and the ritual to be conducted for the space is decided based on negotiations between the director and guide. Subsequently, the Guided Imagery is filled by the guide according to the spatial images (such as pictures, tones, and feeling of the space) which enter his or her mind whilst performing the defined ritual. A guide is responsible for leading the ritual of that space, and other performers spontaneously become assistants to the ritual.⁶⁴

If the first and second layers are the inspiration layers, the third layer is the resultant layer that only can be accomplished the actual performance. In this layer, I also bring guests (audiences) into the field of performance so that they experience themselves more as a part of rituals. To explore the third layer, performing with guests is more essential than merely practising the ritual structures. Thus, *NEO-KUT* was conducted as a rehearsal for a month at the outdoor stage of the Cheju Folk Village Museum with live audiences. Although it was impossible to manage visual projections, lighting and stage sets at this venue, it tried out the ritual of the nine spaces with the *shimbang*, *kut* performers and guests. More importantly, I deliberately exchanged the roles of the performers, i.e. the guide became the assistant, and the music assistant became the dance assistant. I also managed the multiple roles during the rehearsals including the guide, director, assistant performer and technician (or techno-shaman). This flipping of roles was worthwhile as it allowed everyone to understand each of the roles and expand their peripheral awareness of the space.

The *NEO-KUT* rehearsals with guests allowed the *kut* performers to develop dexterity in efficiently articulating their directions and readiness to manage diverse inputs from the surroundings in the role of guide. Based on guests’ reactions during rehearsal, the If-Then

⁶⁴ The relationship between a guide and assistants is corresponding to that between a master *shimbang* and *somu* in *kut*. In Cheju *kut*, *shimbangs* decide who will guide and who will assist according to a ritual. The guide of the ritual is called a *su-shimbang* and the assistant is called *somu*.

structure was set in the third layer for smooth guest participation. Unlike ‘Condition and Event’, which addresses defined conceptual sources, If-Then indicates necessary minimum actions for performers to guide guests in a time-restricted *NEO-KUT*. The rehearsal greatly helped the performers cultivate a bodily communicating skill, following their internal responses as well as the ritual direction of the guide. Consequently, the third layer opens us up to create more responsive and flexible spaces of *NEO-KUT*.

In the piece *NEO-KUT*, the spatial script had played three vital roles: Firstly, Since *NEO-KUT* is a hybrid performance ritual where music, voice, dance, ritual movements, video projections and light images merge together in the improvisation, the spatial script was essential to maintain a harmonious integration of collective images and thus create a particular atmosphere. Secondly, as it is complicated to be aware of the flow of the ritual that has no regular order and length, the spatial script offered a substantial blueprint, depicting a clearer picture, for managing unforeseen inputs in *NEO-KUT*. Lastly, it did help to overcome unexpected difficulties and happenings in *NEO-KUT*, which was conducted under very challenging pre-conditions.

To illustrate, the hybrid and chaotic way of creating a work opens up the potential of creations. However, at the same time, it can also be a source of conflict and confusion. The spatial script helped in handling this issue as it kept two important ritualistic features of *kut*. The first one was the ritualistic belief that there is no right and wrong in rituals; even if it goes in a different direction from the initial plan, it can be a better or more exciting ritual, as long as we all travel together in the big picture, without forgetting its purpose. And one picture of *NEO-KUT* was the spatial script which represents our collective imagination and purpose. The second is the fact that *kut* performers always prioritise the delivery of the ritual over their artistic self-expression. Thus, the aim of the script was not to design show unique, beautiful and skilful shamanic dance and music but to deliver sincere imaginary blessing for the guests and gods in nine ecstatic spaces. To bestow good luck and remove the bad fortune of the guests with nine rituals, the *kut* performers can keep their alive, immersed and reflexive spatial journey, handling a variety of confrontations during the rituals. Seeking out these two features, I felt the images the *kut* performers expressed through their rituals is also strongly linked to my imagination, providing a sense that we were heading communally toward the same spatial journey of *NEO-KUT*. These experiences make me trust that this collective belief or imagination system is the power of the ritual to kindle creative exploration as well as promote a communal sense.

Furthermore, our experiences of rehearsing with the spatial script in Cheju let us manage many unexpected difficulties in rehearsal and performance in London. There was inadequate time to rehearse because the stage was not empty until the night before the performance. The performers were extremely tired, having arrived in London only two days before the performance and made *kime* as soon as they arrived, with insufficient rest. To make matters worse, roles had to be changed on the day of the performance because of the lack of rehearsal time. Our technical operator, Graeme Shaw, suffered from a lack of rehearsal time because he could not join our *NEO-KUT* rehearsals in Cheju, and it seemed impossible for him to deal with the improvised movements of the *kut* performers and to understand all the ritual structures with just one rehearsal. Thus, I decided to work as a media operator, changing my role from a *bonju*⁶⁵ who mediated between Korea and London, tradition and modernity, guests and performers. The role that I meant to play was carried out by the youngest female performer, Jeonghyeon Yun, and a 6-year-old boy, Ki-won Yang, as I thought young performers would enjoy this role, naturally and freely facing the people of London.

Even though roles were changed at the last moment of rehearsal, all performers could manage it due to their understanding of other members' roles developed by the role-flipping experiences. Furthermore, Jeonghyeon and Ki-won approached their own creative exploration by carrying out my role in their own way, instead of mimicking my movements. Jeonghyeon expressed an in-between feature of *bonju* through clean and pure dance that emanates from her natural character. Therefore, I could see not only her ritual movements but also her substance and ongoing presence. Ki-won also played an essential role in *NEO-KUT*. In fact, he did not participate in *NEO-KUT* as a performer in Cheju, despite continuously watching as a guest. He came to London accompanying his parents who are *kut* performers. Knowing that he likes dancing, I asked him to guide guests along with the other performers and to do a drumming dance in the last part if he wanted. I felt able to put him on stage because of my belief that even if he made a mistake, it would be covered by the professional performers. However, he surprised me because he carried out his role much better than I expected; he naturally, playfully, and sometimes professionally conducted the ritual based on an innate understanding of the process of *NEO-KUT*.

⁶⁵ As I explained in Chapter 5.1, *bonju* is the person requesting a *kut*. In my practice, having *bonju* is essential and necessary to provide *shimbangs* and *kut* performers with the reason for performing *kut*.

Managing the time of the ritual was another big concern, since I was unable to exert control as the *bonju* in *NEO-KUT*. As can be seen from the spatial script, the length of time per space was set to be flexible; some spaces have an upper spare time allocation of ten minutes. This was because it was impossible to predict how many guests would come and how long their participatory ritual would take. Some of the rituals were shorter or longer than our expectations, but the performers were able to complete *NEO-KUT* on time by spontaneously reducing and extending the length of other rituals. Suddenly changed roles and performance conditions did not deter the *kut* performers from freely expressing their images and presence at the moment. In my view, the reason that they could embody the ritual without disturbing the flow was their attitude of *being in a process*, rather than trying to think and carry out a prescribed process. This attitude was the result of their instinctive sensitivity to how their images relate to the overall flow of the ritual, gained through the experience of exploring *NEO-KUT* in Cheju.

In retrospect, exploring the spatial script was the process of finding a ritual way of creating the performance. In the early stage of my research – perhaps until my second work, *Leodo* – some of my direction tended to control performers in carrying out our initial design. However, I had found that the more I instruct the performers to do something new, the more they were hindered in focusing on their rituals. In order to keep their focus on ritual, it seemed more important to find their own movements coming from their mind and imagination rather than make them do what I designed. Thus, I began to focus a more mediated form of creation, seeking out an active exchange with my team to lead them to provide more input into the creation. And the spatial script was the result of my will to create the images together with performers and guests through a process of listening to and believing them. I think that the spatial script is a useful exploration for me as it has offered the insight to find an alternative or ritual way of creating the artworks.

6.3. Transitional Installation

Enter into the liminal space:

Entering into the space NEO-KUT, the blue light fades in to illuminate the left and right side of the dark space alternately, according to the sound of the wind. A long white fabric spreads out in the centre of the space, and one girl and one boy and one male adult sit at the edge of the drape. The guests sit around the fabric as guided by the performers, and the more people are gathered, more and more blue lights shine on the fabric. This long white fabric is the symbol of the pathway between both worlds, and the object glittering in the particle-lights above the fabric is representing paebangsŏn, a spiritual boat to carry the lights (or soul) across the pathway.

With the shaman's chant, the lights are falling like rain; the shaman walks into the lights and touches the girl who is sitting at the end of the fabric. Then, as the lights spread from the girl, the virtual soul is shown crossing the fabric. The gongs ring as the performers are singing together. The lights flash in time with the frequency of the sounds. The guests rise as the girl stands up. The girl enters through the middle of a sheet of fabric that people are holding. She pulls the paebangsŏn through the fabric, by separating it into two halves. Then, the people sit behind the split fabric as the boat ascends into the air, while the performers are spinning around the girl. This is a ceremony to open the way across the threshold.

As we have seen in Chapter 4, metaphoric mapping is the symbolic spatial design displayed by SUIs to transform an everyday space into the mythological universe of *kut*. It is a shamanic technology used by *shimbangs* to create *kutp'an*, the temporary place where the *shimbang*, spirits and guests prepare for the intense conversations of shamanic rituals. Today, this kind of performance, held in the space displayed with the figurative installations to form a spatial immersiveness, is characterised as an immersive installation or immersive performance. Unlike conventional styles, such as a proscenium stage performance or exhibition, where guests are separate from the stage or stand at a respectful distance from the exhibited works, an immersive performance is intended to let guests immerse themselves in the space by wandering around, feeling, and experiencing it synesthetically.

Inspired by the metaphoric mapping of *kut* and an immersive installation of contemporary performances, *NEO-KUT* is designed to offer a metaphorically mapped environment where *kut* performers and guests interact with each other to achieve an ecstatic immersion that, in turn, brings about the creation of ecstatic space. For this, a 'transitional installation' is designed – an assemblage of SUIs formed by the movements of the guests and performers during the rituals. This form of installation aims to increase participation and a shared communal sense among audience members. The transitional installation comprises the following features: the portability and metaphoric mapping, which deliver the mythical imagination of the *kut* performers through diverse SUIs, and a kinetic and fluid design which subliminally influences and enhances physical as well as invisible movements of the ritual, such as people's wishes, energy and emotions.

To illustrate, the transitional installation is the foundation of forming *mise-en-scène* in *NEO-KUT*, which is composed of portable SUIs that are metaphorically mapped within the space. As

most SUIs had to be transported to London, the installation design needed to be simplified using the minimum number of SUIs deemed indispensable for the performers to connect to the world of *kut*. Some tangible *mugu* that we used in Cheju were replaced by technical images or recreated with other materials in London. All SUIs have their own signification: when displayed in the space of the performers' mythical imagination and intertwined with ritual movements of both performers and guests, they become particular signifying images representing the spaces of *NEO-KUT*. For instance, to generate the atmosphere of journeying to ecstatic space, the screen-shape was designed based on *paebangsŏn*, a sailboat sent to the spiritual world in *Cheju-kut*. A white floor represented the boat, while two elastic pieces of fabric were suspended and stretched from the ceiling behind it, representing sails (see Fig.38).



Fig.38. The image of *paebangsŏn*, a sailboat sent to the spiritual world in *Cheju-kut* (above); the designed floor and fabric representing *paebangsŏn* (below). Photo: Haein Song.

Diverse patterns of *kime* were created the day before the performance by the *shimjang* and *kut* performers, representing a liminal body of gods or a divine window that connects the holy words and *kutp'an*. The *kime* were suspended on a narrow strip of fabric representing *dari* (a divine bridge) tied to the four poles (see Fig.39). The combination of *kime* and *dari*,



Fig.39. Many different types of *kime* made by *kut* performers and displayed on the *dari* on either side of the studio. Photo: Haein Song.

conveniently called *kime-dari*, signifies *tangk'ül*, the palace of the gods located in the four directions of *kutp'an* (Moon 2008: 137). There is a small object hanging on a transparent line from the centre of the ceiling; a person can raise or lower this object using a pulley. The object represents a movable *paebangsön*, which later becomes the central axis for opening the threshold, collecting people's wishes and sending them to heaven (see Fig.40). Beneath the object, another *dari* is placed on the floor representing the pathway to the threshold. *Kime-dari*, the movable divine boat and *dari* are placed in the centre and in each of the four directions, performing the symbolic role of the five cardinal points of the spiritual world from the beginning of time.

Different combinations of musical and choreographical SUIs are selected and added to these visual SUIs. For instance, in the second space, 'the threshold', *samul* instruments are introduced, increasing the space's tension by adding the resonance of metal and leather instruments. *Samul* are the four instruments mainly used in a *pungmul-kut*, consisting of a *janggu* (two-handed

drum), *jing* (gong), *kkwaenggwari* (small gong) and *buk* (drum); these represent, respectively, *Yin* (Mother Heaven): the god of east-tree-green-rain, *Yang* (Father Earth): the god of north-water-black-wind, the god of south-fire-red-lighting, and the god of west-bronze-white-cloud (Moon 2006: 210-212).



Fig.40. An object symbolizing moving *paebangsŏn* suspended from the centre of the ceiling. Photo: Haein Song.

In the third space, ‘Opened Gate’, *sam-myŏngdu* (a set of divine knives, rattle and vessels) is introduced to trigger choreographic images. The sounds are generated by *yeonmul*, an ensemble containing four instruments: the *janggwi* (smaller two-handed drum), *gudeokbuk* (*Cheju* drum), *seolsoe* (metal instrument) and *daeyeong* (cymbal). *Sam-myŏngdu* is a symbol of the *Jesbugi Three Brothers*, the fathers of the *Cheju-kut* (Kang 2006: 118-119), while *yeonmul* is that of *Nŏsamunŏdoryŏng*, the god of music (Moon 1999: 95-96). With the mythical belief that *kut* is organised by harmony between the gods of ritual and music, these SUIs are primarily applied in the *shimbang*’s rituals, making audible the will and words of the gods.

In the sixth space, ‘the reflection’, *chijŏn* (the bouquet of divine papers used for cleansing rituals) and *ajaeng* (a stringed instrument frequently used in Korean improvised music called *sinawi*) are displayed to lead the reflective and spontaneous images of the dancing rituals. Then, a solo *jangu* is played to enhance the energy of *Yin*, while *samul* and *t’aep’yŏngso* (a wind instrument symbolising peace and comfort) are played in the direction of the *kkwaenggwari* to emphasise the energy of *Yang*. The technology of projection lights and stage lights are also added to provide a spatial input to the installation. When these diverse SUIs are displayed in the space according to the signification and features of the nine spaces, and thereby are assembled by the performers and guests, they become a unified spatial installation expressing the collective

significations of the SUIs.

Another central focus of this transitional installation is its *kinetic and fluid design*, which is intended to be moved, touched and animated through the ritual movements of people, and whose shape is transformed by external influences as it adapts to changes in the surroundings. I would like to explain this feature as the sequential process through which the installation is transformed in response to its surroundings. ‘The transitional installation design plan’ in the appendices will help you understand this process in further detail (see Appendix 2.).

In ‘the preparation space’, the guests become the symbols of wishes in *NEO-KUT*, through their initial ritual action of writing their wishes on the wishing papers and wearing them on their wrists (see Fig.41). When guests enter the studio as the symbols of wishes, there are no audience seats in the studio, which helps guests to move around it during the rituals, as guided and influenced by the performers. The guests sit in the centre of the space, together holding the *dari* on the floor. After a while, the guests rip the *dari*, to make a path to the threshold for the *bonju* (girl) who passes through the *dari* sailing the small suspended *paebangsön*. Accordingly, the inside of this torn and divided *dari* represents the liminal path or space between the two worlds, where all rituals of *NEO-KUT* are conducted. As the guests sit behind the divided *dari*, the summoning ceremony invites gods to position themselves on the *kime* on both sides of the

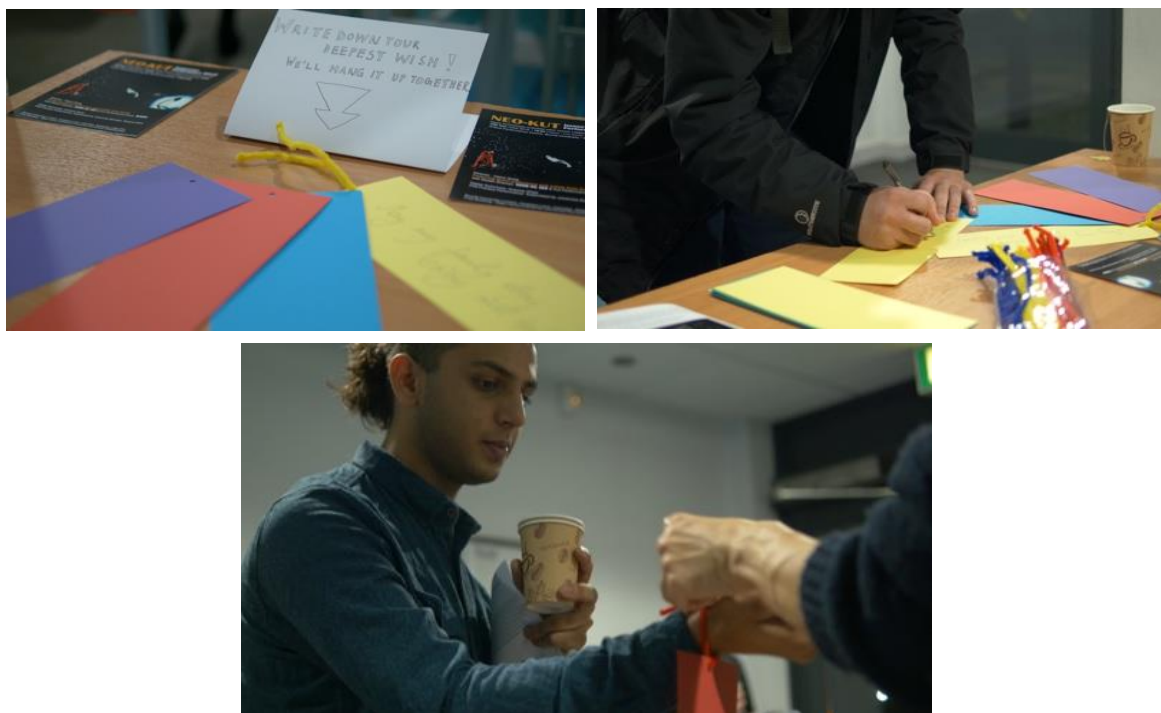


Fig.41. Writing and wearing a wishing paper on a guests' wrist. Photo: Seong-U Kim.

studio; this positions the gods and guests to sit together, facing each other on opposite sides. Spatially, this makes them see the liminal realm between the *dari*.

Next, the four *kime-dari* attached to the four poles are gathered into the centre and tied to the *paebangsŏn* that is hanging mid- ceiling in the ritual. The assemblage of these SUIs allows the *kime-dari* to naturally spread in four directions from the central axis, which forms an installation symbolising *k'ŭndae*, one of the most important *mugu* of *kut* for connecting the spiritual and material worlds. Subsequently, the guests untie the wishing papers from their wrists and hang them on the *k'ŭndae*-installation to offer their collective wishes. When the wishes are all collected, the performer ascends the *k'ŭndae*-installation to the ceiling, using the pulley system for the *paebangsŏn*. The movement of the *k'ŭndae*-installation, which rises to the upper space of the studio with the wishing papers, indicates that their wishes have been delivered to heaven.

Subsequently, the guests enter the threshold area under the *k'ŭndae*-installation to participate in a cleansing ritual of removing bad fortune, illness and sorrow, guided by the *shimbang*. During this ritual, the guests are sitting around the circle-shaped image created by the projection light. Any bad energy gathered in this circle is released by pleasure. For example, the long spinning white ribbons of the hat, and the continuous clockwise rotation of the drumming-dance, trigger the spinning and merry winds to blow away bad energy. Finally, the last dance, in which guests form a circle and sometimes hold each other's hands as they rotate together, represents the prevention of future sorrow by enhancing a joyful mood of dance. Consequently, by imprinting the collected wishes, presence and movements of all who have participated in *NEO-KUT*, the installation becomes a symbolic creature that embodies the presence of the people; it becomes a kinetic and fluid installation whose form and significations are transitionally designed by the surroundings.

This kinetic and fluid installation supports the guests to shed any awkwardness or discomfort of experiencing the space by revealing the influence and meaning of their actions through the installations. It creates not just a visual but a reverberating impression for the guests via multi-sensorial experiences. Consequently, the ideal outcome of this installation would be to gather, encourage and represent people's visible and invisible movements such as ritual trances, wishes and energy in order to generate a sense of presence or aliveness for the installation. I believe that this presence could immerse guests in the more animistic atmosphere of the space.

To sum up, the assemblage of various SUIs creates a transitional installation whose forms and meanings are modified by the movements of the participants. The visual, musical and spatial presence of the installation generates a spatial image in connection with the ritual movements of *NEO-KUT*. Because the installation is composed and choreographed by the movements of the people, the movements of the installation become a medium that poetically delivers a certain narrative to the space, such as gathering the wishes, releasing *han* (sorrow or bad fortune) and boosting *hǔng* (the highest joy). In the beginning, I illustrated how the immersive performance ritual can function through interaction between the guests, the SUIs and the *kut* performers' rituals. The method by which the transitional installation of *NEO-KUT* has been designed and activated proves that it is the people who assemble and influence the installation in *NEO-KUT*. During moments such as when the guests are hanging their wishes on the *kime-dari*, and the *kut* performers are playing their musical instruments, the SUIs function as an extension of the participants, resulting in a reverberant and reflective installation. At the same time, this installation is another factor that influences people, just as the SUIs are an interface for the *shimbang* to create the symbolic images of their mythical world. Therefore, connections among the guests, SUIs, and *kut* performers' rituals become the impetus to cultivate spatial images. In addition, giving guests a key role in creating this installation helps them to more actively, comfortably and positively explore the space, offering them a clearer sense of the meaning of their actions. As this installation is continuously changing according to external influences, the united spatial installation emits a sense of being alive, like a performer or a creature; and I think this spontaneous aliveness is the primary factor that generates the immersiveness of the space.

6.4. Liminal Face

The Space of Refraction

The sound of an ajang resonates in the space. A girl moves slowly, sitting under a kime-dari with the wishing papers of the guests. The wishes of the guests and the girl's movements are captured by the real-time camera and reflected in the space, which is illuminated by the projection lights. Over time, the traces of her movements begin to appear together in the projection image, one by one. Just as we can read our thoughts in the traces of our movements, the traces of these virtual images might represent the figures of our souls. In this transparent, reflective space, the girl starts to raise the wishes to the ceiling, delivering them to heaven. Then, the sky opens. The joy of heaven falls in time to the beats of the drum, like the dancing of rain

There is something in both digital performance and *kut* that forms a sense of in-betweenness.

While digital performance produces a liminal sense, generated between the technical imagery and live performance (Dixon 2007: 337), *kut* continues to explore the boundaries between consciousness and unconsciousness, or the visible and invisible worlds. In Chapter 4, *myōngdu* is mentioned as one of the SUIs that manifest the liminality in *kut*, while the media façade is described as the tool for presenting the illuminated face of a building in digital performance. Just as *myōngdu*, a brass shamanic mirror, utilises the techniques of reflecting and highlighting natural light to conjure the faces of gods, the media façade applies the computation technologies of digital illumination to reflect one's imagination in reality. From the ancient to the present, light has been one of the most efficient mediums to express *liminality* – our invisible imagination. The mythical world of *kut* is a reality that is present but untouchable, like a light that bathes us but eludes our grasp. This analogous substance of light makes it a useful tool for describing the spiritual and imaginary world.

Consequently, *NEO-KUT* strives towards the use of 'technical lights' to evoke the liminal world of imagination, whereas until now *kut* has relied on the ancient medium of *myōngdu*. *Technical lights*, here, indicate technically produced lights such as the projection lights and stage lights aided by computer software to create the technical images. As *myōngdu* represents the face of the gods, and media façade, the face of architecture, the digital scenography of *NEO-KUT* is conceived in order to create a liminal face which acts as a reflector of technical lights, which expresses the imaginations of *kut* performers. In detail, the studio became a mirror space covered by a white floor and screen reflecting the lights projected by two projectors and stage lights. The technical images embedded in this space via digital lights were based on Guided Imagery of spatial script, the imagery that arose in the guide's mind during the ritual. They are mythical images that have never been seen before, as they have only been transmitted through songs of a *shimbang* or lived in *kut* performers' minds. However, they were made visible here by technical lights in this mirrored space. All technical images projected by digital lights are created by myself, utilising visual production and editing software, including *After Effects*, *Motion*, *Premiere*, *Isadora*, and *Processing*.

There are two key aspects that I have kept in mind when creating the technical images of *NEO-KUT*. The first one is prioritising the expression of the spatial or atmospheric images over how the ritual is explained through the images. In other words, I intend to use images to achieve spatial elaboration by strengthening the atmosphere of the ritual, avoiding narrative

explanations. My previous works attempted to offer narrative animations that played a textual role in explaining the rituals. This can indeed help the understanding of the guests, presenting the mythical story of *kut* as images. However, when the narrative images were shown along with live rituals, guests tended to rely on the images rather than making an effort to interpret the rituals for themselves; this undermined their concentration on the rituals. Therefore, my attention became directed to creating spatial and atmospheric images that would transform the stage into a more mythical space. As with the visual decorations of *mugu* used in the *kutp'an*, the aim of technical images is not to provide a kind of explanation of the ritual to the guests, but to support the *kut* performers in improving their concentration on the mythical world as well as enabling guests to watch and interpret both rituals and images together.

The second aspect is balancing the technical images and rituals: specifically, finding elements of visual impact, speed, colour, and quality of technical images that are appropriate to the ritual, not too spectacular or too weak. Seeking such a balance would seem a simple process but, in fact, it was the most complex task. For example, the aspect of 'spectacularity' – creating a visually striking performance – might be the most effective impact of using media façade technologies. However, if visual impacts are too strong or frequent, they sometimes dominate the live performance. Thus, the contents of the images must be firm enough to support the *kut* performers' rituals, but not too spectacular or strong to prevent achieving a full balance.

Accordingly, I had to train myself to listen to and converse with all aspects of the rituals in a live performance and adjust the level of the spectacles step by step. In addition, the technical images should be balanced with a temporal reference to the ritual movements. To allow relaxed concentration, it was effective to match the speed of the movements of the images with that of the ritual. Thus, to change an atmosphere by increasing tension, I let the technical image move faster or slower than the motions of the dance or the beats of the music. It was also imperative to manipulate the speed in real time via the speed control function of the *Isadora* software, given that the rhythm of the ritual changes spontaneously. Having a harmonious colour tone was also crucial. Just as the *shimbang* induces *kutp'an* through various colours of costume, flags, and *kime* in *kut*, the overall colour of the image was one of the main factors determining the tone of the ecstatic space. In *NEO-KUT*, the images were changed in terms of the specific tone of colour, according to the mood of each space.

The quality of the images was the hardest area in which to achieve a balance. This was because the resolution and brightness of an image depended on the specifications of the projector. Furthermore, the projector that I could afford for *NEO-KUT* had a lower resolution and brightness than that of the stage lights. Thus, when the stage lighting was bright, the projected image was invisible; when the stage lighting was lowered to preserve the image, the performers could not be seen clearly. Thus, in scenes where the projected images were to be highlighted, I used limited top lighting, and side lighting that did not reach the floor and the wall. Sometimes, the top lighting effects were created by the neon colour projector light, instead of the stage top-light. For the scenes where people had to be emphasised, such as group dancing and participatory rituals, I only applied the effects of the stage lighting, such as interactive colour and brightness changes and stencil effects, instead of the projector light. To balance the projector and stage light illumination, a more detailed and finely tuned technique was applied by computational manipulation of the projector, as well as stage lighting via *Isadora* software.

In retrospect, these two aspects, creating the spatial images and finding the balancing, were achieved in the process of dialogue between the technical images and rituals; this dialogue strongly relied on experiments with the spatial script among the *kut* performers, guests and myself. With a continuous conversational exploration, fifteen technical images were created for *NEO-KUT*. The following presents brief descriptions of the technical images of each of the nine spaces of *NEO-KUT*. I begin by illustrating the second space: *the entrance*. This space delivers the mood of entering the spiritual realm: it is based on light rituals, due to my idea that light is the symbol of people's soul. The tension and anticipation of the entrance are expressed by the two blue lights that shine from both sides of the top, upstage, creating a smooth flashing pattern through the wave generation provided by the *Isadora* software. The long white fabric in the centre of the floor symbolises *dari*, the holy bridge connecting two worlds. When the guests sit around the fabric, the blue lights gradually spread onto it with the text message 'Please hold the fabric', which means that the souls of the guests are gathered in the lights (see Fig.42).

At the fabric's centre is a representation of the spiritual boat, *paebangsŏn*, covered by a porous transparent fabric, suspended from the ceiling and illuminated by the particle lights (see Fig.43). Projection mapping techniques enable the digital lights to be precisely applied to the fabric and the object. When all guests have sat down and are holding the fabric together, the lights brighten to create a blue neon boundary on the fabric. Subsequently, the lights on the fabric are broken

down into particle-rain as the *shimbang* walks onto the stage chanting about the beginning of *NEO-KUT*, explaining why, where and for whom we are performing rituals to the gods. This particle-rain provides a deeper perspective and depth, using 3D graphics in order to trigger a sense of the stereoscopic and infinite space of the threshold.



Fig.42. Blue neon boundary created on the fabric and the object via projection mapping technique. Artaud Performance Theatre 2016. © Haein Song.

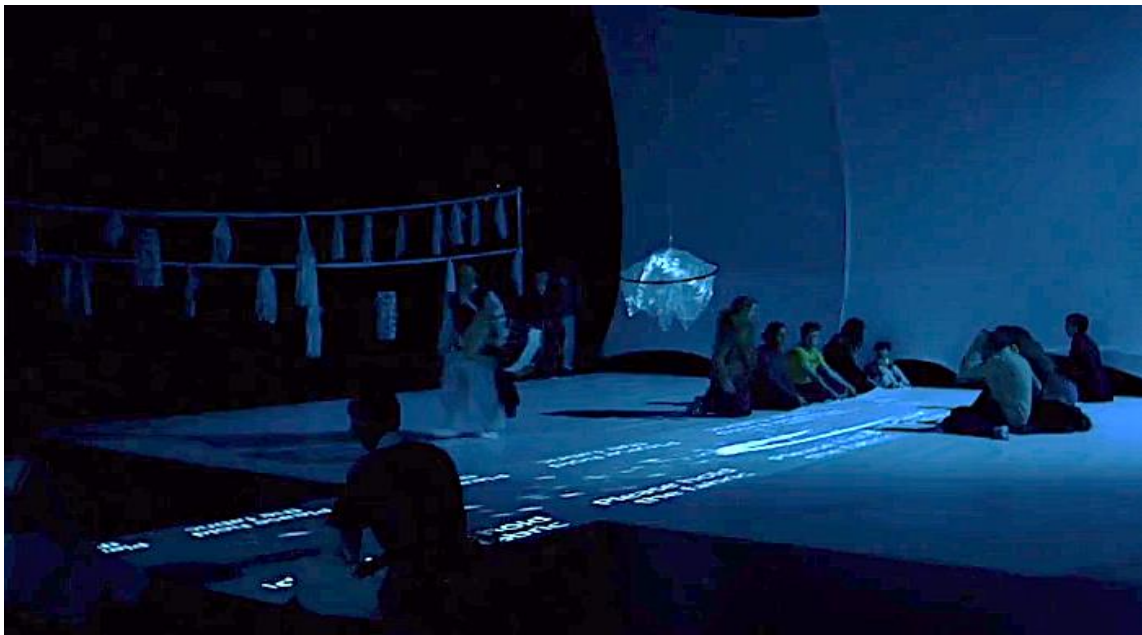


Fig.43. *Dari* with the text placed in the centre of the stage and *paebangsŏn* with particles suspended from the ceiling. Artaud Performance Theatre 2016. © Haein Song.



Fig.44. The movements of the virtual soul are controlled by that of the *shimbang*'s chant. © Haein Song.

The third space, *the threshold*, is guided by the *bonju*, who did the ritual of crossing the liminal path, holding the spiritual boat, *paebangsŏn*. When the *shimbang* touches the *bonju*, light spreads outwards from the *bonju* and the virtual soul appears. In order to create natural movements of the virtual soul, I had filmed the *honryung-ki* (a soul *kime* made of paper) blowing in the wind, edited it and added smoke effects. The speed of the virtual soul is controlled by the speed of the *shimbang*'s chant (see Fig.44). When the *bonju* walks through the separated fabric grasped by the guests, together with the holy boat, I produce a river-like environment that illuminates a large area, including the guests. Therefore, stage lighting,



Fig.45. The water-like stage lighting when *bonju* walks through the separated fabric that guests grasp. Artaud Performance Theatre 2016. © Haein Song.

including cool-tone lights and wave gobo, is applied to generate water-wave images; in addition, the atmosphere is highlighted by real-time interactions, in that the brightness of the stage lighting is changed according to the volume of the drums (see Fig.45).

Next, the fourth space, *the opening gate*, is guided by the *shimbang*'s imaginary dancing ritual. The vast and endless field that spreads out before her, a white reed forest, and spirits moving on the wing of the wind, are the spatial images seen by the *shimbang* in this dancing ritual. The immersed field image is created with an illusion of depth, using the vanishing-point and camera-moving functions of *After Effects*. The white reed forest is conjured by white lights (particles), and a pathway of spirits connecting the spiritual world with our own is expressed by the movements of the lined symbolic *kime* on either side (see Fig.46).

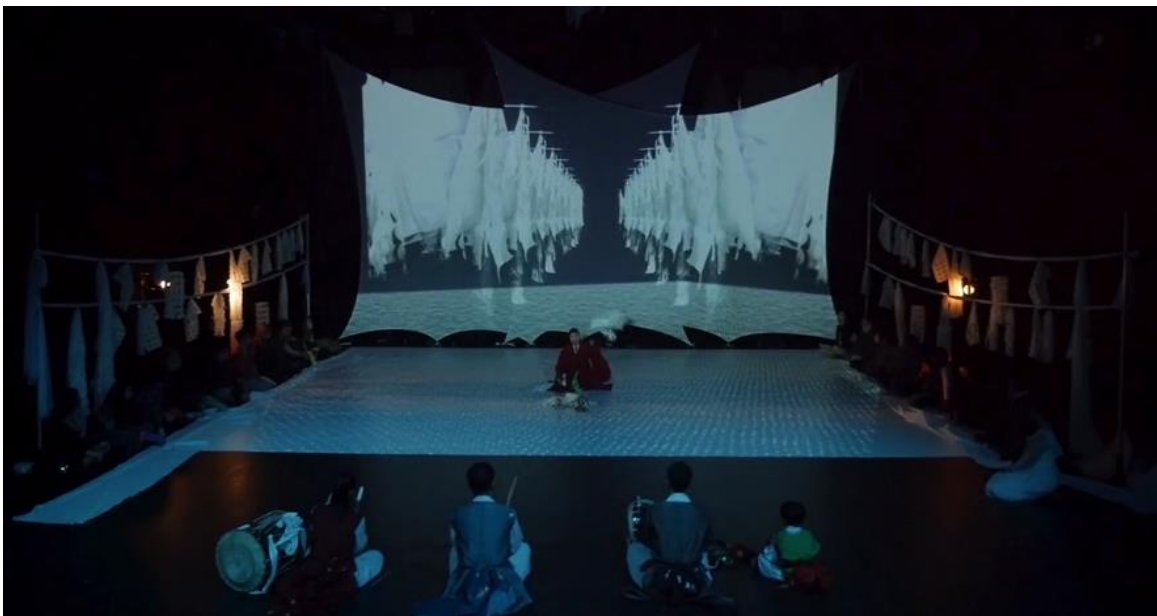


Fig.46. The fourth space, the opening gate, the immersed field with the lined *kime* created with the illusion of depth, using the vanishing-point. Artaud Performance Theatre 2016. © Haein Song.

Here, I chose to use *kime* to evoke the infinite pathway in order to avoid using strange technical images and creating an unfamiliar environment for the *shimbang*. The virtual *kime* may be one of the most familiar digital contents for a *shimbang* who has usually danced surrounded by *kime* in *kut*, and *kime* also has the symbolic meaning of a liminal body or spiritual window that lets the spirits enter the *kutp'an* and *shimbang*. In order to cover the floor and the back-screen area with the projection lights to create the vast virtual field, the images projected by two projectors are visually combined through the Edge blending technique. The most important concern when presenting technical images for this space is reading the flow of a dance that has no fixed

choreography. Parentheses in the spatial script indicate the flow or pattern of her dance, as identified in rehearsal. I created the five scenes according to the movements of this flow, and spontaneously played those scenes in live performance. For example, the speed of the movements of the technical images is controlled by that of the *shimbang*. In some parts, such as the scene where the *shimbang* performs with wider movements and the tension reaches a climax, I delete the digital lights and only use circle-shaped stage lights to emphasise her movement. In the scene in which the *shimbang* performs divination with her pairs of divine knives, the colour of the lights is transformed according to the movements of the knives.

The fifth space, *wishing zone*, is designed to represent the people's wishes in the space by hanging the wishing papers on the *dari*, a long fabric tied to a pole on four sides that becomes bound together on the *paebangsŏn* and is suspended from the centre of the ceiling during the ritual. A *kut* performer, Yoo Jeong Oh, guides the wishing ritual through her songs and drums. Yoo Jeong said the wishing ritual often provides her not with images but with a feeling of clarity: the wishing rituals help her to empty her mind of thoughts, and sincerely pray to heaven for the wishes of all people. Thus, sometimes, she might feel that there is nothing in an immense space, only that her prayer has been placed. I attempt to illustrate the clarity and transparency of this meditation-like feeling through the text images in *NEO-KUT* (See Fig.47). The applied text is the lyrics of *sadorim*, which, for me, can most effectively express her thoughts – descriptively but indirectly – using symbolic Korean letters. The song is written in the archaic dialect of Cheju,

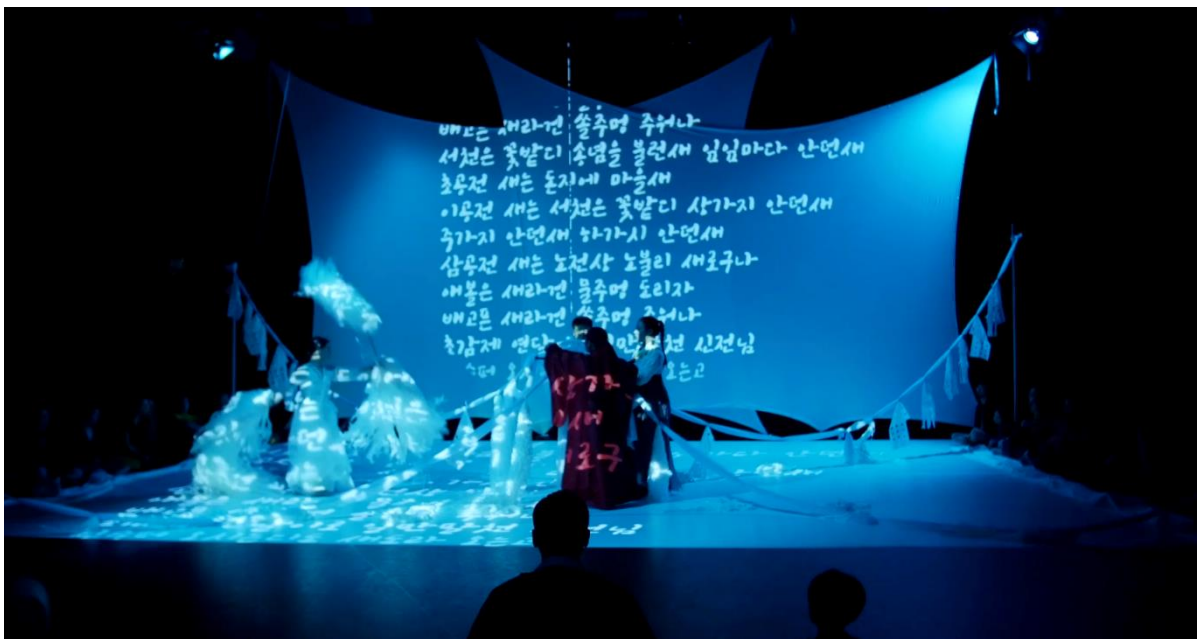


Fig.47. The text images of the fifth space, wishing zone. Artaud Performance Theatre 2016. © Haein Song.

making it difficult not only for foreigners to understand its meaning, but also Koreans. Thus, my intention is not for text images to articulate the words of the song, but to express her feeling of clarity; how she becomes emptied and only focuses on wishes. Linear texts are drawn in the space in response to her voice, as if she inscribes them by the prayer (in her mind) during the ritual.

The sixth space is *the space of reflection*, where we discover ourselves consciously and unconsciously. It was driven by the improvisation of *a-jeng* (Korean traditional string instrument) and *chijŏn* dancing by *kut* performers Jeonghyeon Yun and Hanol Ko. Allowing their unconscious to flow by consciously listening to the unknowing birth of their own movements, they have felt pure joy. It might be impossible to see our spirituality or unconsciousness, but they feel it, as its pattern emerges from the unfolding process of movements. Thus, I attempt to express this pure joy, conjured by the continuum of the physical and spiritual mind, through mirror-like images, utilising the live camera and delay effects of *Isadora*. The real-time movements are captured by a live camera and revealed directly on the white screen (see Fig.48). This captured image is shown with a delay-effect to leave a trace of movements. The trace images gradually increase, so that their original shape becomes hard to identify. I aim to reflect the shadow of our spiritual mind or unconsciousness through this indistinct shape of traces of the live movements, as *kut* performers explore their souls by discovering the patterns of their movement process. This echoed image might directly reveal the characteristics of a mirror space that reflects imaginations of performers by digital lights.



Fig.48. Reflecting images like a mirror. Artaud Performance Theatre 2016. © Haein Song.



Fig.49. Sky images for the seventh space, the heaven. Artaud Performance Theatre 2016. © Haein Song.

The seventh space, *the heaven*, is inspired by *Chumulnori*, a play-ritual for pleasing the spirits. For this space, the guide Yoo Jung Oh and I decided to perform the rituals of the *janggu*, one of the leading instruments for creating the rhythms of *kut*, and whose beats represent the sound of rain (water) and Yin (Mother Earth). When she played the *janggu*, full of feminine energy, she could imagine that the beats of sound were falling like invisible raindrops from an opened and expansive sky, which made the earth wet with joy. I initially attempted to create a spectacular transformation of the sky, along with the rapid and dynamic *janggu* playing. However, I eventually chose a simple sky image that moved slightly slower than the *janggu*, to make people concentrate on the movements of the sound rather than the visuals (see Fig.49). Some guests, including my second supervisor Royona Mitra, commented that they felt a transition of the atmosphere as if they were moving outdoors in this space, which might be the result of the minimal sky being in harmony with the image of the sound.

The digital lights for the eighth space, *the resting space*, establish a circular light on the centre of the floor, to gather the guests to sit around it. Because the resting space illustrates *pudasi*, an intensive and guest-centred healing ritual, this circle represents the symbolic realm which both divides the guests from reality and integrates them into the ritual. These circular lights transform itself into the circular sky, which symbolises the open-air realm in which people's illness and bad fortune can disappear into the air (see Fig.50).



Fig.50. The circular sky of the eighth space, the resting space. Artaud Performance Theatre 2016. © Haerin Song.

The last space, *the space of joy*, is conducted with the *samul-pankut*, a drumming dance played by the four main instruments of *kut*, called *samul*. The guide is a *kut* performer, Ho sung Yang, playing the gong whose sound represents the sun and Yang (Father Earth). If the seventh space expresses the joy of the sky, the space of joy delivers the collective joy of people of the earth. As the *samul-pankut* needs a bright and large area for dancing as a group, I utilise the stage lights instead of digital projection lights. The stage lights illuminate the whole stage, providing a sunny atmosphere with a mixture of warm-tone colour lights (see Fig.51).



Fig.51. The stage lighting for the last space, the space of joy. Artaud Performance Theatre 2016. © Haerin Song.

To sum up, these nine spaces were drawn by aligning the internal imaginations of *kut* performers with the external expressions of the stage and projection lights on the mirror-like stage and installations. For me, the lights were the essential medium for expressing the world of *kut*. It is through lights that we receive visual information and become aware of our world. It might be difficult to recognise our world without lights; this might be similar to the way we cannot believe in the world of *kut* if we lack any visual information about it. Today, the lighting technology let us project our imagination in reality, as in natural light reveals the beauty of our world. Consequently, the invisible mythical world, which is not easily understood, can become more stimulating to people by visualising mythical imaginations through the lighting technology.

6.5. Technologies toward Harmony

The Opening Gate:

The loud roaring sounds of the yeonmul resonate through all areas of the space. In time with the beat of the gong and wearing a red mubok (a divine costume), the shimbang walks with a slight bounce in her step. She is treading the floor to deliver the vibrations of the sounds to the gods of the earth. Then, she makes a deep bow to the gods. Soon, the beat becomes faster, and she is whirling, representing the gods and spirits entering the kutp'an through kime-dari. The projection lights present the virtual environments with the virtual soul passing through the endlessly extended field, lined by kime and disappearing into the kime. Subsequently, the shimbang holds her divination ritual. After seeing the heavenly will through a pair of divine knives and expressing her gratitude to the gods, she begins to turn, as if she is flying. This is the ritual to invite spirits and let them sit among the people in the space.

In *NEO-KUT*, the process of fusing *kut* and digital practices intensifies the intermingling of diverse and even seemingly contradictory elements, ranging from ritual to digital, the traditional to the modern, and from eastern to western images. Hence, my attention became directed towards creating 'harmony' to integrate these divergent elements. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, harmony is the key element needed to allow the somewhat chaotic and numerous rituals of *kut* to convey a unified message. Thus, the way to produce a clearer alignment has been explored through continuous dialogue among diverse images, rituals and the *shimbang* and *kut* performers. In this process, I have found that a harmonious fusion is generated by understanding the relationships of all different images. A relationship arises from the state of being related, connected or interactive. It plays a vital role to generate an aligned pattern since it affects how all the elements consider and behave towards each other. As *shimbangs* and *kut* performers seek

out harmony with nature by following its patterns that can be seen to understand how all things relate to the whole picture, harmony can be accomplished through understanding relationships.

Thus, for me, the technology of harmony is about the way of producing relationships. And in this research, invisible connectivity takes precedence over the visible in creating relationships. Based on the explorations of *kut* and practices, I have realised that the invisible connectivity is organically attained not only in *kut* via a certain emotional bond shared by *kut* performers, but also in digital performance by wearable technologies that use the electrical force connecting the technical being and performers. This invisible connectivity is a form of linked energy, revealing the circular pattern by which the energy of an element becomes a factor that moves other elements; and this movement produces energy that facilitates further movements of elements. I believe that this invisible connectivity holds the key to creating a more integrated form of performance. Therefore, the last two concluding sections of this chapter briefly illuminate the technology of harmony by explaining how the piece *NEO-KUT* generate the invisible connectivity, which can be summarised as two: the emotional thread of *han*, inspired by traditional *kut*, and wearable images, influenced by wearable technologies of digital performance.

6.5.1. The Emotional Thread – *Han*

The emotional thread is my own technology inspired by the concept of harmony in *kut*. People often describe *kut* as *nanjang*, a mixed-up event, offering a hodgepodge of shamanic rituals such as playing music, singing, dancing, chanting, reciting mythical stories, consuming ritual wine and food, and performing spirit-possession rituals (Kim 1994: 107). However, according to the Korean scholar Young-bae Lee, who used the term ‘synchronism’⁶⁶ to describe the main features of *kut*, a *kut* pursues harmony through the state of chaotic hybridity. This harmony is generated by the technique of preserving the essence of each element as they merge together.

Based on my theoretical research and experiences of performing *kut*, I have noticed that it is an emotional thread that binds these mixed elements into a singular art. To understand this, it is

⁶⁶ Synchronism indicates the tendency to have an apparently related occurrence of events among the different elements. Although it is the action for amalgamation, synchronism is different from hybridization, because it maintains each of the unique presences and features of different entities and even contradictions that emerge from the marriage process (Lee 2010: 144-145).

helpful to offer some preliminary observations regarding the technologies of *han*. Although *kut* conveys a combination of ritual art, numerous mythical stories, and spontaneous and unexpected ritual actions, they are all related to the entanglement of humans' and spirits' emotions, and one of the recurring and strongly imprinted emotional states is *han*. *Han* is the fundamental emotional concept of *kut*, and is frequently translated as sorrow, spite, rancour, regret, resentment or grief, but has no English equivalent (Son 2000: 16-17). *Han* is a complex feeling implying personal suffering, such as the loss of loved ones, the unfulfilled wishes and accumulated collective grief caused by the historical pain of events, or several political upheavals that have caused fatalities (14-15). The important idea of *han* in *kut* is not just indicating a deep pain or sadness that still lingers: rather, it is always felt along with hope or *hǔng* (a pure joy). It is thus a collective sense, embracing sadness through joy and hope.

This *han* is deeply embedded in Korean culture, as are the arts of *kut*. The divine dances and *shimbang*'s chant convey mythical stories, informing us that emotions drive not only the human world but also that of gods and spirits, who experience sadness and joy in their life. In *kut*, the process of sharing one another's feelings seems a way to heal people's pain. Consequently, what they imbibe through their eyes and other senses, experiencing numerous impressions of music, dance, drama and visuals of *kut*, forms a kind of emotional thread of *han*. This is the mutual feeling of grief or sorrow relieved by communal hoping, which is patient and joyful without being aggressive. The image of *han* appears to find its fullest and finest expression in *salpuri*, one of the typical Korean shamanic dances. The *salpuri* dance never expresses a lingering pain or sorrow of the soul with an agitated, aggressive or fierce mood; instead, it reveals the encapsulated grief through slow movements and breathing, like a kind of mindfulness, and there is always a pattern that sublimates this grief with joy in the end. The emotional structure of *kut* is paralleled in *salpuri*, yet the former presents it over a longer time: *kut* releases a deep sorrow through a series of dialogic, laughing, dancing and singing rituals, culminating in *hǔng* and hope.

Kut performers lend the feeling of *han* to rituals through their artistic practice techniques, which I briefly called the 'technologies of *han*'. They attempt to achieve these technologies via understanding two rudiments: the ability to express and deliver *han*, and the ability to recognise and sympathise with *han* in others. Thus, an expert *kut* performer is regarded as one who is able to sensitively feel others' emotions and atmosphere, as well as to express what they feel through

their ritual movements. Accordingly, *kut* performers have devoted their shamanic arts to healing guests through a strong visceral encounter, rather than through the various stories, information and values of the world of *kut*. These visceral encounters reveal *han* to be imprinted in all the different elements of *kut*, providing performers and guests with a connecting emotional thread.

Consequently, *NEO-KUT* exploits several technologies of *han* as media to create an emotional thread to link all digital and ritual elements. Firstly, *sōngŭm*, an essential notion for expressing *han*, is applied as a technology of *han*. As mentioned in Chapter 1, *sōngŭm* is one of the requirements that the artistry of *kut* must satisfy, defined as the tone or quality of a particular sound that can touch a person's feelings. Just as the hoarse voice is one of key qualities of *sōngŭm*, the standard of *sōngŭm* is not a beautiful or fine sound; instead, it is a sound that emanates from deep minds, and is able to resonate with the listener's heart. Thus, *kut* performers concentrate more on *sōngŭm* than on the creation of various rhythms and melodies during their practice. This practical method of *sōngŭm* has been applied in *NEO-KUT*. For instance, generating a particular tone and quality takes priority over exploring new or interesting expressions of sounds, movements and visuals. The spatial script offers information about this tone and quality of the space. Exploring the spatial script during one month's continuous performances of *NEO-KUT* in Cheju, the ways of expressing the emotional flow were studied by observing how these tones and qualities of emotions, ambience and moods were presented in the space. What kinds of movements we made was not especially important for us. Thus, the choreography kept changing day by day; but, we explore a singular, collective mood each time.

Another technology of *han* applied in *NEO-KUT* is a *shimbang*'s way of understanding and creating *mugu*. *Shimbangs* regard *mugu* as being a part of them; it is a container of their spirits and catalyst of their emotions. Therefore, almost all *mugu* are created by the *shimbang* themselves as a part of the sacred rituals, to produce a more intimate connection with them (Kang 2006: 107-109). The *mugu* used in *kut*, including musical instruments, stage decorations and ritual food and wine, is a kind of divine offspring, which are given meaning by the *shimbang*. Accordingly, all *mugu* or SUIs used in *NEO-KUT* were created and designed by the performers, including myself: diverse patterns of *kime* were made and decorated on the stage by the performers a day before the performance. All technical images were produced by the performer's imaginations and my own graphics creation, even though a more capable graphic designer would have been able to make better images than me, due to my limited experience. I

created the technical images because this process enabled a more meaningful connection between those images and myself, resembling the relationship between the *shimbang* and *mugu*; moreover, this also supports a more linked atmosphere, which could well enhance the emotions of the *kut* performers and *shimbang*.

Lastly, in the technologies of *han*, the skill of empathy is as important as that of expressing one's own heartfelt emotions. As *kut* is performed by a group of *kut* performers on an improvised basis, the subtle art of listening and identifying one other's mood is crucial; indeed, performers often say that they should be able to recognise each other's feelings even by seeing other performers from behind. Thus, in order to understand each other, *kut* performers spend a lot of time together, not only in performances but also in daily life. I lived with other *kut* performers in a boarding house for three years when training for *kut*. This experience has made me recognise that a sense of belonging, intimacy, affection and empathy for one other can reveal itself as a mutual aura in the *kut* rituals. The time we spent together created an unknown power: I was able to roughly understand what the performers felt and wanted by a single gesture or look from them. Remembering this, I tried to spend as intensive time as possible with the performers while preparing *NEO-KUT* in order to get to know better each other. During a month of rehearsals for *NEO-KUT* in Cheju Island, all the *kut* performers were living together except a *shimbang* and a *kut* performer who had to take care of their family. In addition, the process of performing with audiences once a day offers the insight of reading each other's artistic language during the rituals.

The procedure of researching and practising the technologies of *han* releases certain mutual emotions or energies among the performers, which become part of the blood and breath of a ritual. In *NEO-KUT*, the technologies used to deal with these emotions played a vital role in bringing a particular ambience to the space. This might suggest that an invisible connection, including an emotional thread or energy, can be a more powerful factor than visible unity in making multiple elements exist in a single flow.

6.5.2. Wearable Images

After having discussed the technology of *han*, I conclude my evocations of ecstatic spaces with a brief analysis of how wearable images were used as the digital means of creating connectivity in *NEO-KUT*. As mentioned in Chapter 4, wearable technology is 'close-to-the-skin

technology', connecting digitally programmed environments with the skin of humans (Birringer and Danjoux 2006: 43). Wearable technology caught my eye because it creates a more responsive environment through an intimate relationship between machines and humans; this has been achieved with the rapid development of wearable devices, including state-of-the-art sensors and ubiquitous systems. The investigation of wearable technologies for *NEO-KUT* was undertaken based on the previous practical experiences of producing wearable lights, which intimately linked the projection lights with *kut* performers' and the ritual's sounds, movements and installations. This offered the fascinating potential for integrating the body with the technical images, closing the gap between the *shimbang* and the projection light-based environment of *NEO-KUT*. I propose that wearable technology can make digital and ritual agencies appear unified, enhancing the fluidity of the space.

In *NEO-KUT*, the interactive technical images are produced by wearable-lights technologies. Unlike previous research practices that were limited to exploring the technical images produced by projector lights, one of the challenges of *NEO-KUT* was discovering the images of stage lights, such as colour, shadow and brightness, within wearable technologies. To illustrate, the stage light inputs were connected by the *Enttec DMX USB Pro Interface*, and the serial port setting of *Isadora* received the signals to manipulate the stage lightings via *Isadora* patches. Unlike *DMX Consoles* (lighting boards), this lighting software system offers intelligent lighting images that interact with performers or operators in live performance; it can deliver more exquisite and complex lighting sequences in a short time; and furthermore, it allows manipulation of both the stage lights and projection lights simultaneously.

In the case of creating interactive images on the installations via projection lights, the piece intends to avoid the way that the performer's body becomes a means of creating the shape of the technical images, for instance, a performer moving their body to produce the sound images or draw the shape of the images made by the projection lights. Although this might be one of the most familiar ways of creating interactive projection images in digital practices, it often motivates the performers' movements to create the projection images. However, in *NEO-KUT*, the *kut* performers should maintain their focus on rituals to generate a certain atmospheric transformation; requesting additional actions for creating technical images could easily interfere with their focus on the ritual, disrupting their concentration or their emotional flow. Therefore, I set a rule that the performers should never move solely to operate these lights.

Instead, these technical images produced by wearable lights pursue the identical relationship with the performers as that between the *shimbang* and SUIs: the movements of technical images and that of *shimbangs* interact each other, yet the purpose of *shimbangs*' movements is directed toward the rituals rather than triggering the movements of technical images.

Given this, several ways of using wearable lights are explored in *NEO-KUT* to produce intra-active images, which can be summarised as follows: the lights responding to sounds; lights being linked to the movements of the live camera and mutation actors of *Isadora*; lights being worn as the various faces of the installation space; and lights being created by live drawings. In particular, according to *sōngŭm* – a key term describing how the *shimbang* communicates the emotional flow to other performers –, the research attempted to discover how wearable lights could respond to motions of the sounds made by the performers. Thanks to the *Isadora* software, the levels of voices and sounds can be read as data through the *Isadora* actor called 'sound watcher'. At the same time, this real-time data was being connected to the level of colour, brightness and speed of the lights, which produced responsive images of the environment. For example, the sounds of the *kut* performers' drumming were read through the microphone linked to the 'sound level watcher', and rendered as data that changed the brightness or colour of the stage lights. A particular pitch of the *shimbang*'s voice was also detected by 'sound frequency watcher', and acted as a trigger by to move the images created by the projection lights.

One of the challenges was to create smoother and more precise reactions of these lights to the sounds. The reactions of the lights initially involved a mechanical and linear way of moving, because the *Isadora* sound-tracking system made it quite difficult to achieve precise detection, as it illustrates the sound through numeric data. For instance, when a live sound exceeded a certain pitch value that I had set for triggering movements, it produced unnatural movements, due to causing a direct and sudden change to the projected images. Unlike machines, people do not react with an even and linear speed but have a changing rate of response. For instance, a natural object governed by the force of gravity also has a curved shape of movement, with acceleration. In order to make the light movements more realistic, programming that mimics natural reactions seemed necessary.

With the advice of Graeme Shaw, a digital practitioner who assisted in the lighting operation of *NEO-KUT*, several actors were interpolated in the 'sound level/frequency watcher'.

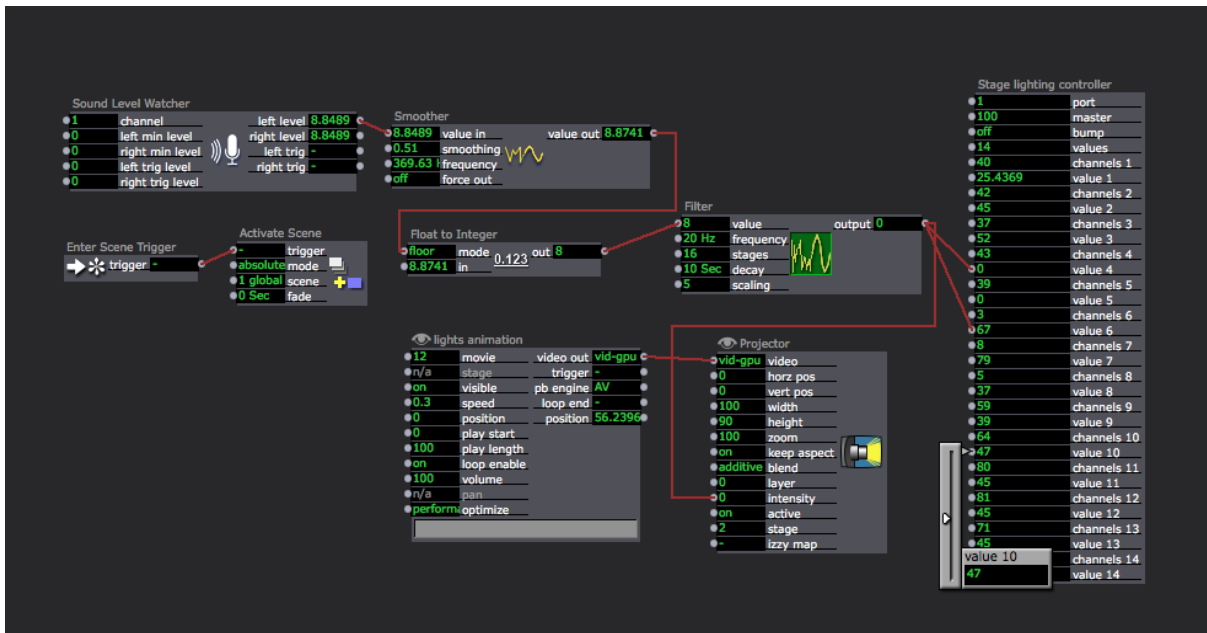


Fig.52. Stage lighting output channels whose value can be manipulated by scrolling up/down the slider. The channels 43 and 6 create the water effect gobo lights that are designed to change the value (brightness) according to the volume of drum sounds. © Photo: Haemin Song.

Specifically, once the voices and sounds were translated into a signal, this signal passed through three actors to create contrast in the speed and motion, before reaching the input for the projection and stage lights. As illustrated in Fig.52, ‘Smoother’ is the actor that smooths out the value; ‘Float to Integer’ rounds up the value to the next integer; ‘Filter’ is the actor that prevents the numbers fluctuating, creating a weighted averaging of past values in order to provide a softer version. Additionally, as explained in Fig.53, ‘HSK Adjust’ is the actor that manipulates the hue, saturation and luminance of the connected lights input. This actor-interpolation simply governs the curve of the movements of lights, which means controlling the speed of the value change and how the value is expressed as colour and luminance over time. This curved movement of lights allowed *NEO-KUT* to offer more natural and smooth lighting animations.

In addition, a live camera was used for motion detection, to capture the performers’ movements. One of the most significant uses of this live camera was to create images of the space of reflection. These mirror-like images were created by the response to the movements of a performer. Once a camera captured the surroundings, including the performer, the captured image was filtered by the alpha mask and video watcher in order to seemingly remove the rectangular screen frame generated by the camera and focus on the performer’s movements, excluding any obstructive surroundings. This captured image was simultaneously projected onto the back-screen at an interval of time governed by the trigger delay actor; thus, the

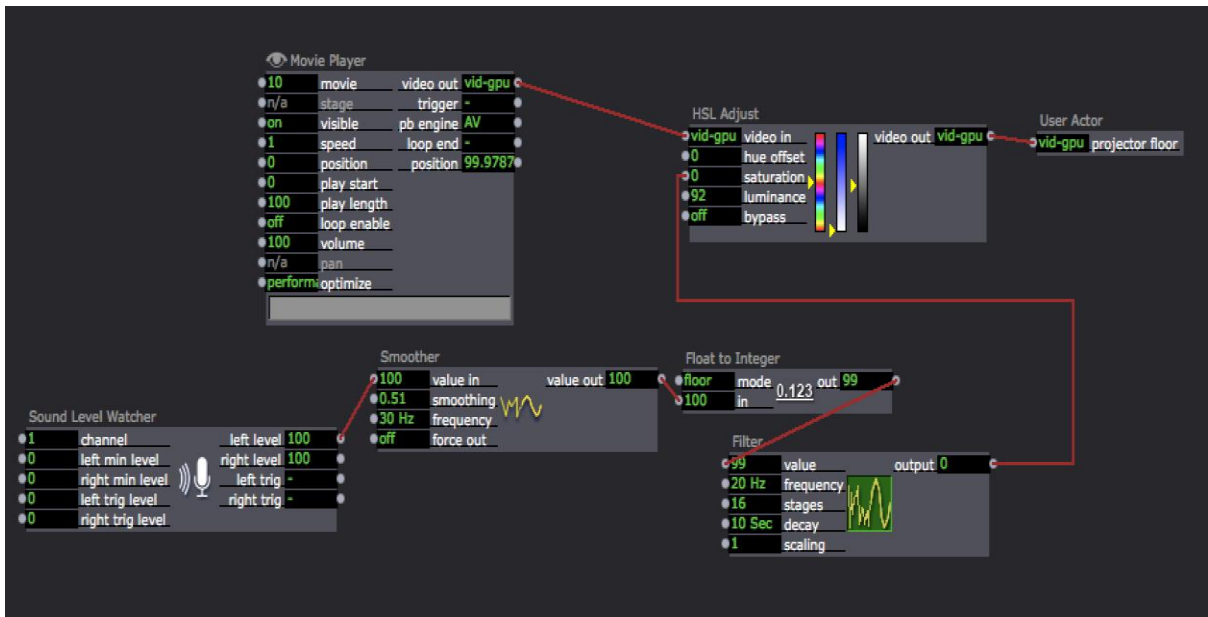


Fig.53. The patch for the saturation of the moving images created by projection-lights responding to the volume level of the sounds. Photo: Haemin Song.

movement of the performer as reflected in the image appeared to move along with their movement-traces. These trace images could move or be awakened by the physical motion of the live performer, as they stopped moving until they were replaced with a new movement from the performers. The temporal and musical relationship between live performers and trace-images from projection lights helped to enrich the meaning and connectivity of the wearable lights, thereby producing a more responsive environment for the performers (see Fig.54).

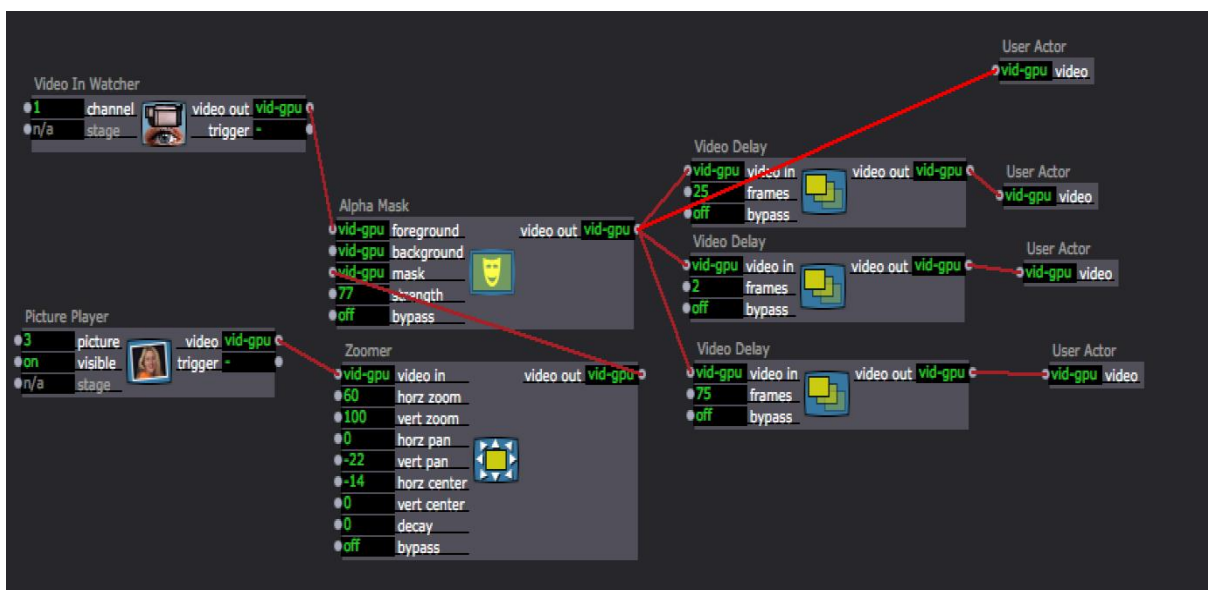


Fig.54. The patch to generate the lights link to the movements of the performer by capturing it through the video in watcher actor, the images created by the lights are mapped via Alpha mask and being influenced by the delay effect. Photo: Haemin Song.

NEO-KUT comprises countless projected animations produced by the projector lights. Although trying to utilise a computer vision through connecting cameras for a motion-tracking system to animate these projection images, this seemed unreliable due to video feedback and a wired system, as mentioned in Chapter 4. Therefore, I simultaneously control the detailed motion of images through the *Isadora* control panel according to the motions of the *kut* performers, acting as the lighting operator. For example, several mutable actors, such as HSL Adjust, shimmer, and colouriser actors, were applied to manipulate the hue, saturation and luminance interactively, as well as controlling the density of particles and colours during live performance. The set of control panels, including sliders and buttons, was used to achieve finer manipulation. In addition, all lighting and projection lighting images were stored as scenes, and the speed of transition of each scene was triggered by pressing the space bar, which allowed all the lighting images to be moved with just one click. During *NEO-KUT*, this setting helped me to efficiently transform the images of wearable lights in accordance with the emotional flow of the *kut* performers and the atmospheres of the space.

Furthermore, projection mapping techniques are explored for the ecstatic space transformations. This was conducted by projecting different images produced by the lights onto the surface of the installation, depicting the mythical imaginations of the nine spaces of *NEO-KUT*. It is based on media façade, a technique of creating a face or a mask on architecture through lights, though my belief is that more precise mapping would have provided a more reliable image for the installation. One of the challenges was a short set-up and rehearsal time; only half a day was provided for *NEO-KUT*. Nonetheless, the mapping can be managed with the user actor functions of *Isadora*: the user actor allows users to create new actors composed of several other *Isadora* actors, editing multiple scenes in a short time. Once they were saved, user actors given the same name in all scenes are stored automatically, saving time by cutting and pasting actors and moving them to each scene. In order to scan the various figures of the *NEO-KUT* installation, several mapping frames were created and operated using the user actor. In addition, the size and position of the mapped lighting images could be adjusted in real time, so that the location of the installation changed slightly during the performance.

A live drawing method was also explored, to match the lights with the emotional flow of the live performance. I mainly worked on creating graphic images in advance with *After Effects*, and then transforming the images in real time with the mutation effects in *Isadora*. However,

when researching interactive graphics tools, I found that creative coding software such as *Processing* and *OpenFrameworks* offered various live parameters suitable for interactive pieces, and a shorter rendering time than *After Effects*. Accordingly, several ways of manipulating this coding in the *Isadora* patch were explored in order to provide an active and advanced live feedback process. Unfortunately, this method could not be employed in the actual performance due to an unexpected bug slowing down the laptop while moving from *Isadora* to the processing coding software, and I was unable to debug it due to my limited experience.

However, investigating the live drawing method provided a fruitful time that allowed me to understand the coding, and the potential of combining coding with *Isadora*. A ‘live drawing’ is a real-time drawing of the natural stream of particles created by the combination of processing and the *Isadora* patch: it is designed to make the particles appear to be dancing to the live music being played. Therefore, I initially designed *Processing* sketch by drawing particle-lines according to the movements of a computer mouse. This sketch was transferred to the *Isadora* patch by *Syphon* applications, allowing me to mix and edit *Isadora* patches with other creative image applications. Through this combined process, I could draw a line of particles in the processing patch, and the *Isadora* stage simultaneously added the visual effects and played generative particle images during the performance. This drawing process helped in creating images while watching the performance, thereby letting me feel as if I was dancing and as an operator, a more intimate connection according to the performers’ emotions, energy and rhythm.

As above, these wearable lights based on wearable technologies supported an intimate connection between digital and ritual images: by responding to the sound, the lights visually enhanced the feelings of the *shimbang*. Furthermore, via the live camera and the mutation actor, images transformed according to the *shimbang*’s movements gave the impression that they were effected by the *shimbang*’s rituals. Moreover, precise mapping helped to harmonise the ritual installation with the technical images, by making the illuminated faces and masks more realistic; and generative drawing images allowed the operator to be more assimilated into the ritual, opening up the possibility of a mutual connection. A *shimbang*’s movements, ritual installations and the digital lights did not interact with each other as independent objects, but rather, their presence was constructed and highlighted through their connections. Consequently, their relationship brought *kut* to life, expressing the unified emotional flow inherent in the rituals.

To sum up, the time and effort spent exploring the technologies of *han* undoubtedly helped the

kut performers to share a mutual emotional thread during *NEO-KUT*; and the application of wearable lights offered more intimate relationships between *kut* performers and technical images that were previously an unfamiliar medium to the *kut* performers. Consequently, despite my particular concern that the technical images might overwhelm the rituals, or that this radical fusion could disturb the viewer's concentration, comments from several guests after the performance showed that technical images had a positive effect on the rituals, such as helping the audience to understand them or opening them up to the rituals on a deeply visceral and emotional level.

Within the aim of exploring ecstatic space, the primary direction of this research has been opening the space for a *shimbang* and *kut* performers to understand the way to steer the control of technical images as contemporary SUIs. As a *kut* performer and digital practitioner, I have participated as a bridge or interpreter who associates the ritual images of *kut* with technical images. Therefore, it was crucial for me to see changes and listen to the opinions and experiences of the *shimbang* and *kut* performers after this culminating work, *NEO-KUT*, had been performed. One significant change derived from their responses was that their outlook toward the research. In the beginning, they hesitated and felt awkward while performing with technical images; even *shimbang* Seo participated more as an artistic advisor rather than a performer in the first practice, *Leodo: The Paradise*, due to her discomfort. It was challenging for her to integrate this new medium since most *shimbangs* are critical and full of scepticism about the use of digital technology in *kut*. However, continuous communication and exploration allowed Seo and the other performers to become familiarised with this new medium and, more importantly, the guests' positive reactions and comments encouraged them to enjoy and actively participate in this research.

One reason that influenced *shimbang* Seo to change her mind about performing with technical images, and to later attach importance to using them, was the very positive reactions of young audiences who usually feel scared or a little bored by *kut*. As it turned out, they came to see *kut* as fun and interesting performance with this new medium. It may need more time and support to make *kut* performers and *shimbangs* use digital technologies of their own accord in *kut*. However, it is not an overstatement to say that this research offered a very useful starting point for them to develop a positive tendency towards embracing and using technical images and to consider it beneficial to further explore and understand this contemporary medium.

Conclusion

This practice-led research has formulated *ecstatic space* in the context of combined performances of *kut* and digital practices. Ecstatic space has been defined by investigating the artistic potential of an interpenetrative relationship between the ecstatic technology of *kut* and digital technology of present-day mediatised performance. The main features of ecstatic space to emerge from this research can be summarised as follows:

Embracing the Greek definition of the term, *ekstasis*, ecstatic space can be regarded as a space mediatised by a combination of *media* and the human ability to imagine beyond the present space or immediate time. This temporal space is inspired by the interesting parallelism between the world of *kut* and virtual and material reality today. The world of *kut* is where a *shimbang*'s imagination is conjured through various shamanic media such as *mugu* (or Shamanic User Interfaces), dancing and drumming rituals and *shimbangs* acting as the middle agents. In the same manner, virtual reality is where people's fantasies are projected by technical images, technologically produced and programmed or computational images such as photography, film, video, computer graphics, holography and VR (Flusser 2002: xxvi). No matter how different technologies are used, both of the mediatised worlds are infused with a sense of in-betweenness, accepting and navigating the beauty of imaginary and metaphysical realms, and at the same time, accommodating in the material world.

This ecstatic space particularly pursues *ecstatic presence* rather than *telepresence* of the virtual space. Unlike telepresence, a sense of being in the mediatised world which tends to be offered by a more accurate representation of surroundings and sensorial experiences (Steuer 1992: 76-77), ecstatic presence is perceived by indirect, semiotic and metaphoric information of the surroundings. As the world itself cannot be immediately presented, it gives more flexibility for people to understand and interpret the mediatised world. Accordingly, ecstatic space prevents *shimbangs* and guests from being fully absorbed in a given environment, yet supports them to stand intermediately, evoking their own play of imagination.

Ecstatic space opens up a ritual way of perceiving an environment. It offers a movement-centred perception carrying out non-linguistic, synesthetic and communal experiences, which let us avoid the ocular-centred perception often generated by virtual space. Therefore, ecstatic space

is designed to offer transient and interdisciplinary attributes, combining ritual movements with an assemblage of acoustic, visual, tangible, haptic and kinaesthetic images. The ritual movements of guests and performers provide a guide or a message by which to construct and re-shape these images. In this way, the images are contingent; not settled in advance but possess the potential to change according to changing movement. These multi-sensorial and moving atmospheres let people interpret the environment through a more complex, integrated and collective process, instead of relying on a single sense.

Finally, ecstatic space is a transitional space aiming to produce a change. This is inspired by *kutp'an* of *kut*, a temporarily opened place in which even seemingly irreconcilable entities join together, persuading them to meet, communicate, dance and play to create a certain beneficial or necessary change. Thus, it is not a place for individual artistic expression, but a place for dialogues to obtain unpredictable changes. However, this is different from hybridisation that converges different elements to bring about a new hybrid. As Korean scholar Lee illustrates about the nature of *kutp'an* with syncretism, *kutp'an* aims to open up the space for amalgamation whilst, at the same time, maintaining each unique presence and feature of the individual entities and even any contradictions that emerge from the marriage process. This concept not only applied to my practices but also influenced my attitude as a director and researcher during the research. I have worked as a mediator, guiding a *shimbang* and *kut* performers to meet and communicate with technical images, rather than forcibly directing them to be subsumed in a new creation. The process of observing changes, as I explored physical and physiological communication among the troupe, became the foundation on which my research methodologies were built.

To achieve ecstatic space, I have methodologically identified the five SUI Design, uncovering the ecstatic technology of *kut*. Subsequently, the technologies of digital practices that are related to the SUI Design have been explored and utilised in my practices. Five practical works have been presented with my collaborators *shimbang* and *kut* performers in South Korea and the UK. The immersive performance ritual, *NEO-KUT*, is the culmination of my research involving theoretical and practical explorations of all the previous practices. In relation to the theme of ecstatic space, *NEO-KUT* attempts to conjure the nine imaginary and mythical spaces inspired by the collective imagination of the *shimbang* and *kut* performers.

Regarding the outcomes of *NEO-KUT*, the five methodologies for creating an ecstatic space can be summarised as follows: The first is the spatial script. In order to create immersed and imaginary environments, a designed framework needed to facilitate the process of *kut* performers envisioning a particular space together. Thus, the practice has explored a ‘spatial script’, a form of basic text whose information essentially supports the performers’ imagination. The three-connected layers of the spatial script have explained how performers’ and guests’ spontaneous and reflexive expressions have been integrated to create one holistic spatial image. In my view, exploring the spatial script has been a process of listening to and believing the performers. This precious experience has let me to understand there is no right and wrong in rituals as long as we all travel together in the one picture, continuously bearing its unique purpose in mind. This collective belief or imagination system has promoted a communal sense while experiencing a creative and spontaneous journey that may kindle chaotic harmony, one of the essential features of *kut*-rituals.

Secondly, in relation to the design concept of metaphoric mapping and immersive installation, the assemblage of various SUIs has created a ‘transitional installation’ whose forms and meanings are modified by the movements of the participants. The concept of this installation design has evolved throughout my previous four practices within my consideration of more fully engaging the guests; and was practically examined in *NEO-KUT*. Just as the SUI is an interface for the *shimbang* to conjure their mythical world, this installation design of *NEO-KUT* has influenced and led guests and performers to connect with the nine spaces of the piece. It has allowed guests to more actively, comfortably and positively explore the space by the action of ‘building’ this installation. Thus, the transitional installation is designed to be composed and choreographed by the movements of the guests and performers. And more importantly, the movements of this installation have become a medium that poetically delivers a certain narrative to the space for *shimbangs* and guests, as when gathering the wishes, releasing *han* (sorrow or bad fortune) and boosting *hǔng* (the highest joy). Consequently, the continuous transformation has been made by the movement, presence and mingling of guests and performers, which offers a vivid aliveness to the installation, creating the immersiveness of the space.

Thirdly, the practice has uncovered liminality through merging the concept of *myǒngdu* and digital lighting technology to produce a more spiritual atmosphere. The digital lighting

technology that this research has particularly explored is the automobile system of the projection lights and stage lights, aided by computer software to create technical images. From *myōngdu* to media façade, light is a useful tool for describing the spiritual and imaginary world since both lights and the spiritual sphere produce a sense of in-betweenness: the spiritual world of *kut* is present but untouchable, like a light that bathes us but eludes our grasp. The nine variations of ecstatic spaces of *NEO-KUT* have been generated by aligning the internal imaginations of *kut* performers with the external expressions of digital lights through the mirror-like stage setting, which I have called ‘Liminal Face’. I have researched the alignment of imagination and digital lights through a continuous dialogue between the images and rituals. The focal point in this dialogue has been creating the spatial images that can maintain a balance between rituals and technical images. This process has supported *kut* performers to understand and use digital lights as a ritual medium, as they would use *mugu*. A series of explorations have shown the potential of digital lighting technology as one of the most effective contemporary mediums through which to manifest the mythical reality of the *shimbang*.

Finally, the technologies of harmony have been examined; the techniques of exploring invisible connections among various sound, voice and movement images. My research practices integrate somewhat contradictory elements – ranging from ritual to digital, traditional to modern, and eastern to western images. Hence, creating harmony among these different elements has become one of the challenging points of my practical research. For this, the two elements ‘*han*’ and ‘wearable lights’ have been examined. *Han* is a certain emotional bond shared by *kut* performers, which can be regarded as the organic way of being sensitive to invisible connections. Wearable technologies, or what this research particularly discovers as *wearable lights*, are a digital way of marrying invisible associations as with the application of electrical force to connect technical images and performers. The technologies of *han* have dealt with expressing and sharing emotions and thereby played a vital role in bringing a particular ambience not only to performers but also to the space. Meanwhile, even though previously unfamiliar to the *kut* performers, the wearable lights have underlined the mythical atmospheres of *kut* by visually presenting them along with technical images. This suggests that an invisible connection, including an emotional thread and electrical energy, can be a powerful factor to intertwine elements in a single flow.

Proceeding from what has been described above, I contend that my explorations to combine

ecstatic technology and digital technology offer a formidable stepping stone to allow shamanic technologies of *kut* log into the digital world and contemporary digital practice. The technologies and conceptions analysed and explored through this research have provided *kut* performers with an effective way of utilising digital media, which may support *kut* to be performed in and smoothly permeate the contemporary milieu. This attempt may go further to generate a fresh potential of this ritual form of art that can breathe new life into marrying it with digital technology. In addition, this research contributes to the present potential in using computational and mechanical apparatus as a shamanic medium, linking the design methods of *mugu* with digital technology.

In retrospect, as a *kut* performer, the research is both complex and challenging because most *kut* performers and *shimbangs* assume that the use of digital technology would induce *kut* to be lost its identity. This may be because of the attention to the preservation of the tradition has been increased in South Korea along with the cultural impact of modernisation and recent globalization. However, I can now clearly say that the process of understanding and utilising today's efficient communication code, digital technologies, is an active way to safeguard *kut* as a living culture. As we have found from the problems of Korean legal system on Intangible Cultural Heritage, *kut* is not a static inheritance, but a dynamic and mutable ritual, which cannot be transmitted as the fixed tradition. *Kut* can only be alive with the connection of the present, engaging emotions, memories and changes of the communities.

This five years of my practice-led research has also let me realise that the old way is becoming a pathway to the future: looking back to the ancient shamanic traditions of Korea is no longer historical, it instead offers me a glimpse into the humane future of the digital era. Reminding that *shimbangs* were a *kut* expert as well as an early adapter in history who rode the wave of culture by exploring new media to enhance communication with guests, we should remember that *kut* is a tradition that has a long history, and yet a contemporary ritual that has been performed together in time. Following the innovative path of *shimbangs* in history, I began my own innovation journey as a *kut* performer and digital practitioner through this research. I hope this contemporary shamanic access would enhance the sustainability of *kut* by offering alternative ways of safeguarding, reviving and sharing the aesthetic of *kut* and also contribute to the digital world by conveying the aesthetics and values of Korean *kut* to people of the digital age, offering a more human-centric, imaginative, synesthetic and spiritual atmosphere.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Video Documentations (USB Drive)

Folder1. *Twelve Doors* (열두거리) 20min

- Presented at Antonin Artaud 101, Brunel University, London 13th Jun/ 2014, participating in the 2nd Joint Researching the Arts and Social Sciences Conference
- 1) Edited video (6 min)
- 2) Full Video (20 min)

Folder 2. *Leodo: the paradise* (이어도: 더 파라다이스) 60min

- Presented at Assembly George Square, Edinburgh, 5th-31st Aug/2015, participating 2015 Assembly Korean Season, Edinburgh Fringe Festival, UK
- 1) Edited video (6min)
- 2) Full video (55min)
- 3) Audience Feedbacks and Comments

Folder 3. *Miyeoji-bangdui* (미여지뱅뒤) 60min

- 24th Oct/2015 Initially performed with the title, *Neo-puri*, Seogwipo Art Center, Korea funded by Cheju Culture & Art Foundation
- 1) Edited Video (7 min)
- 2) Full Video (50min)
- Hologram Version, Presented at Cheju MICE conference, Korea, 31st Oct/2016
- 3) Holo_Edited Video (6 min)

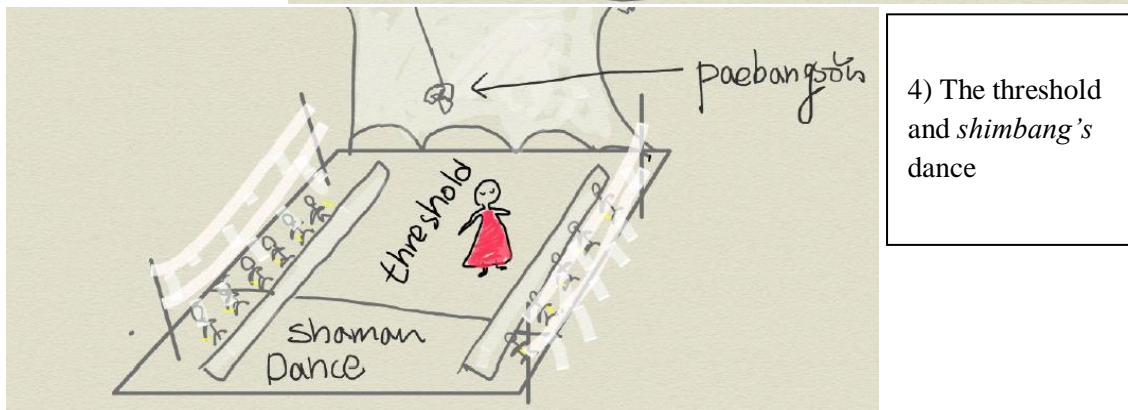
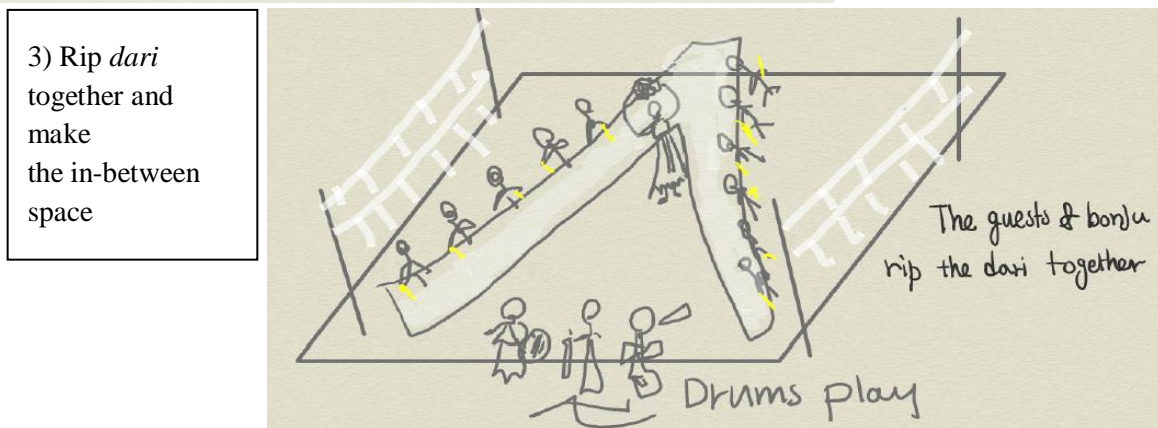
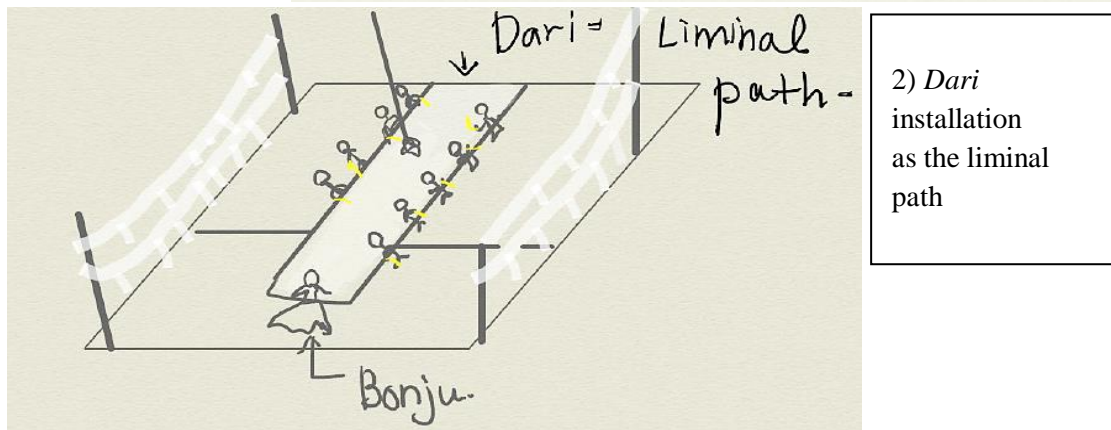
Folder 4. Seocheon Flower Garden (서천꽃밭)

- Presented at Cheju Culture & Art Centre, Korea, 3rd Aug/2016 (5pm & 7:30pm)
- 1) Edited Video (6 min)
- 2) Video sketch (35min)

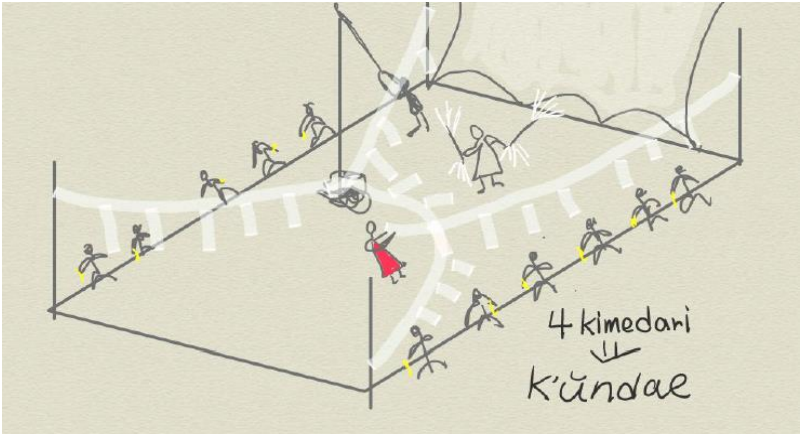
Folder 5. *NEO-KUT* (네오컷)

- Presented at the Artaud Performance Theatre, Brunel University London.UK, 16th Nov/2016
- 1) Edited Video (11min)
- 2) Full Video (45 min)

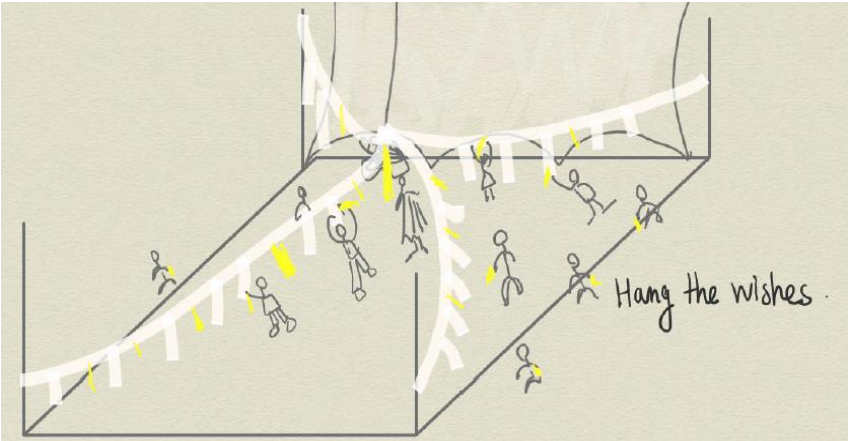
Appendix 2. The sketch of transitional installation design of *NEO-KUT*



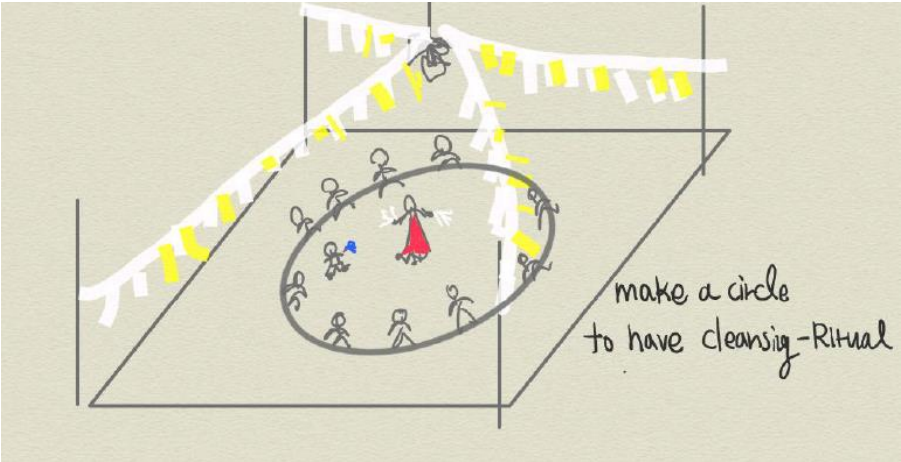
5) Four kimedari to K'ündae installation



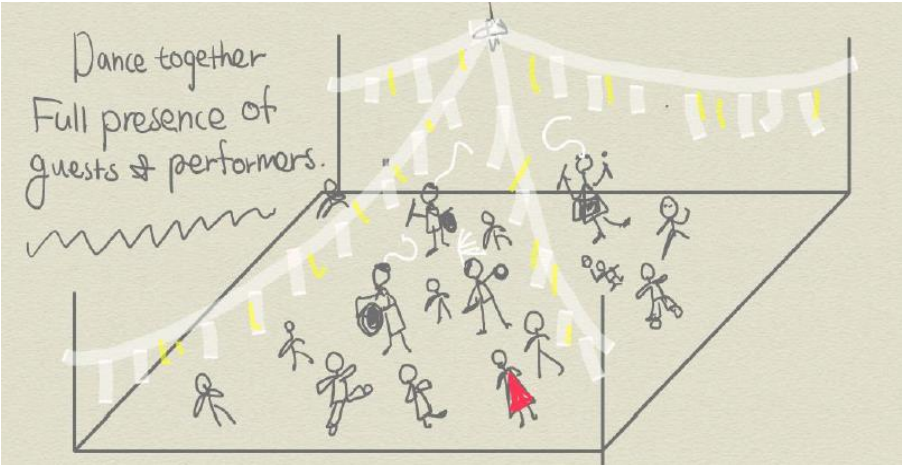
6) Collective wishes installation



7) Sky+Circle Cleansing Chants



8) Dance together with the wishes Full presence of guests and performers



Appendix 3. Glossary

<i>Ajaeng</i>	아쟁	A stringed instrument frequently used in Korean improvised music called <i>sinawi</i>
<i>Bonju</i>	본주	A person or people who request <i>shimbangs</i> to perform <i>kut</i> , an owner, host, or producer of <i>kut</i>
<i>Cheasang</i>	채상	A white long paper ribbon attached to a hat in <i>p'ungmul-kut</i>
<i>Cheju-k'ün-kut</i>	제주큰굿	The biggest <i>kut</i> of Cheju Island, directed by master <i>shimbangs</i> , designated as the 13th Cheju Intangible Cultural Heritage
<i>Cheonsin-kut</i>	천신굿	The basic styles of <i>kut</i> inherited from the tradition of the ancient heavenly rituals, <i>hanül-kut</i>
<i>Chijön</i>	지전	The bouquet of divine papers used for cleansing rituals
<i>Chogong-ponp'uri</i>	초공본풀이	A mythical epic illustrating the story of the ancestor <i>shimbangs</i>
<i>Ch'ön-ji-in</i>	천지인	The Korean notion of finding the peace and blessing of community through the harmony of the gods of heaven, earth and humans
<i>Chöpsin</i>	접신	The state in which one's body is possessed or inhabited by the gods and spirits
<i>Dari</i>	다리	A long cotton drape symbolising the bridge to the spiritual world
<i>Gi</i>	기	Ritual banners utilised in almost all <i>kut</i> , regarded as the essential symbolic object that connects humans and heaven
<i>Halmang-dari</i>	할망다리	A 15-meter-long ritual scarf, used in <i>Cheju-kut</i>
<i>Han/ Hüng</i>	한/ 흥	Unique Korean emotion relating to pent-up sorrow, grief, tragedy / laughter, pure joy, comedy
<i>Hanül-kut</i> <i>Chech'önüiry</i>	하늘굿 (제천의례)	The <i>kut</i> for the heaven, <i>Hanül</i> in traditional Korean meaning 'the heaven', which also refers to as <i>chec'h'önüiry</i> directly expressing the sounds of the Chinese characters 祭天儀禮
<i>Hon/ back</i>	혼/ 백	<i>Hon</i> is a <i>yang</i> entity animating human cognitive activity, and 'back' is a <i>yin</i> entity, which is the corporeal soul charging the area of recognising the world through the five senses
<i>Honryung-ki</i>	혼령기	A soul <i>kime</i> made of paper
<i>Hwal-Dong-Woon-Hwa</i>	활동운화 (活動運貨)	The illustration of the movements of <i>ki</i> : <i>Hwal</i> means life, <i>Dong</i> is activity, <i>Woon</i> circulation, and <i>Hwa</i> transformation
<i>Jackdu-kut</i>	작두굿	A ritual of riding razor-sharp blades called <i>jackdu</i>
<i>K'ündae</i>	큰대	A long symbolic flagpole made of fabric, paper, and bamboo pole and leaves, representing a passage for gods
<i>Kangshin-mu</i>	강신무	<i>Kut</i> led by charismatic <i>mudangs</i> , a socially authorised <i>mudang</i> who has spiritual ability
<i>Ki (qi or ch'i.)</i>	기	A vital force forming part of living things
<i>Kibok-sinang</i>	기복신앙	Temporal faith with the aim of wishing fortunes such as the fulfilment of one's desires and the long life, rather than seeking God's will

<i>Ki-ch'ük-ch'e-üi</i>	기측제의	Han-gi Choi's theoretical treatise on how to research the universe of <i>ki</i> , highlighting the importance of one's experiences with the activation of nine sensory organs, including the faucal, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, and generative organs, torso, and limbs
<i>Ki-irwǎnnon</i>	기일원론 (氣一元論)	The relational conception that contrasts with 'substantialism', which regards everything as a movement of <i>ki</i> and finds its ontology in the relationship of things
<i>Kime</i>	기메	Shamanic paper crafts, representing the gods' body or divine window to connect with the spiritual world
<i>Kut</i> (or <i>gut</i>)	굿	Korean indigenous shamanic performance rituals
<i>Kutp'an</i>	굿판	The <i>p'an</i> of <i>kut</i> . <i>P'an</i> is normally translated as a 'field' which refers not to a fixed space, but a dynamic sphere in which activity or interactions take place
<i>Kutsang</i>	굿상	A ritual table with the sacred foods
<i>Minjok-kut</i>	민족굿	The <i>kut</i> -customs for the life-history of the <i>minjǎng</i> (common people)
<i>Mubok</i>	무복	A divine costume
<i>Mudang</i>	무당	Korean shaman, a specialist whose artistic rituals links a variety of invisible beings and the human. Korean shamans are referred to by different names in the regions such as <i>shimbang</i> in Cheju Province, <i>Mudang</i> in Kyeongsang Provinces and <i>Tangol</i> in Jeolla Provinces
<i>Mugu</i>	무구	Everything designed into a shamanic device functioning as a shamanic media for a <i>shimbang</i> to interact with the metaphysical space
<i>Musok</i> (or <i>mu</i> -culture)	무속	The alternative term for Korean shamanism used to define the specific ideology of <i>mudangs</i> and their activities
<i>Myǎngdu</i>	명두 (明斗, 明圖)	Brass 'mirrors' which are believed to be the face of gods
<i>Nangsoe</i>	낭쇠	<i>Nangsoe</i> , an ox sculpture for the hope, consists of a collage of twigs and branches, often used in <i>Ipch'un-kut</i> (the <i>kut</i> held on the lunar Spring Day)
<i>Nunmul-sugǎn</i>	눈물수건	A handkerchief for wiping one's tears
<i>Obang</i>	오방	Five directions to create the symbolic meaning of the space, representing the gods of East, West, South, North, and Centre
<i>P'ungmul-kut</i>	풍물굿	The ritual musical <i>kut</i> performed by <i>p'ungmul-pe</i> , a group of people who specialise in percussion, dance and singing, which is also called <i>nogak</i> , <i>pankut</i> and <i>dure-kut</i>
<i>Paebangsǎn</i>	배방선	A sailboat sent to the spiritual world in Cheju <i>kut</i>
<i>Ponp'uri</i>	본풀이	A shamanic epic regarded as the archetype of <i>kut</i> , usually recited by <i>shimbangs</i> (Cheju <i>mudangs</i>)
<i>Pyǎngp'ung</i>	병풍	A traditional folding art screen of Korea
<i>Sam-myǎngdu</i>	삼명두	A set of divine knives, rattle and vessels

Samul	사물	A set of four instruments – <i>janggu</i> (two-handed drum), <i>jing</i> (gong), <i>kkwaenggwari</i> (small gong) and <i>buk</i> (drum); these represent respectively ‘ <i>Yin</i> (Mother Heaven): the god of east-tree-green-rain’, ‘ <i>Yang</i> (Father Earth): the god of north-water-black-wind’, ‘the god of south-fire-red-lighting’, and ‘the god of west-bronze-white-cloud’
<i>Samul-pankut</i> ,	사물판굿	a drumming dance played by the four main instruments (<i>samul</i>) of <i>kut</i>
<i>Sesup-mu</i>	세습무	<i>Sesup-mu</i> is directed by hereditary <i>mudangs</i> who have inherited their authority of <i>kut</i> through family bloodlines, conducted by hereditary artistic practices, but without the spiritual abilities as <i>kangshin-mu kut</i>
<i>Shimbang</i>	심방	<i>Mudang</i> , Korean shaman, in Cheju area
<i>Shinbyung</i>	신병	Prior to becoming <i>mudangs</i> , Koreans often suffer <i>shinbyung</i> , a physical and mental pain that is not subject to medical treatments; after <i>Nerym-Kut</i> , the descent of god rituals, they can heal <i>shinbyung</i> and be empowered to control the supernatural beings
<i>Shin-ki</i>	신기	‘Numinous <i>ki</i> ’ produces ‘a visceral feeling’; there are two types of <i>shin-ki</i> : <i>saeng-ki</i> (vigorous <i>ki</i>) and <i>sal-ki</i> (malignant <i>ki</i>)
<i>Shinmyǒng</i>	신명	A certain embodied state achieved by <i>shin-ki</i>
<i>Shinmyǒng-puri</i> (or <i>shinmyǒng</i> ritual)	신명풀이	The method of restoring and renewing <i>saeng-ki</i> (vigorous <i>ki</i>) to remove the <i>sal-ki</i> (malignant <i>ki</i>) that cause people to be ill, depressed, and exhausted
<i>Somu</i>	소무	The person who assists a master <i>shymbang</i> in Cheju <i>kut</i>
<i>Sǒngŭm</i>	성음	A right tone or quality of the sound of a voice or instruments
<i>T’aep’yǒngso</i>	태평소	A wind instrument symbolising peace and comfort
<i>Talnori-kut</i>	탈놀이굿	A theatrical <i>kut</i> performed by <i>talnori-pe</i> , a group of masked performers
<i>Tangk’ŭl</i>	당클	The symbol of ‘the palace of gods’ in Cheju <i>kut</i> , composed of various paper-cut arts, representing the architecture and ornaments of the palace of gods
<i>Tangsan-tree</i>	당산나무	The sacred tree, planted in the yard of a <i>shimbang</i> ’s shrine regarded as the home of gods and goddesses
<i>Tangun</i>	단군	The legendary founder of <i>Gochoson</i> , the first ever Korean kingdom
<i>Ulsoe</i>	울쇠	<i>Ulsoe</i> is <i>myǒngdu</i> in Cheju <i>kut</i> , which consists of five different shapes of mirrors
<i>Yeonmul</i>	연물	An ensemble containing four instruments: the <i>janggwi</i> (smaller two-handed drum), <i>gudeokbuk</i> (Cheju drum), <i>seolsoe</i> (metal instrument) and <i>daeyeong</i> (cymbal)
<i>Yǒnggye-ullim</i>	영계울림	The crying ritual for the spirit of the dead
<i>Yǒnghon</i>	영혼	The word indicating spirits in Korean, <i>yǒnghon</i> is also referred to as <i>nŏk</i> , <i>yǒng</i> , or <i>honback</i> , <i>honryung</i>