

Unsettling Bodies: Re-Figuring Life and Spaces in Global Asia

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“Your Body Is a Battleground,” coined as a slogan by Barbara Kruger in the context of the women’s reproductive freedom movement in 1989, invites us to consider the corporeal as a socially constructed field of engagement for body politics. Beyond the ongoing (or reignited) issue of women’s reproductive rights worldwide, we are witnessing a broad spectrum of phenomena and discussions pivoting around the question of bodies that unsettle the societal status quo. Under the title “Unsettling Bodies: Re-Figuring Life and Spaces in Global Asia,” we present two guest lectures focusing on recent developments in Asia.

Flexible Masculinities: Negotiating Gender, Sexuality, and Ethnicity in Embodied Ethnography

Prof. Dr. Minwoo Jung (Loyola University, Chicago)

How do individuals navigate various forms of hegemonic masculinity as they traverse different geographic and cultural boundaries? This talk introduces the concept of flexible masculinities to examine the increasing cultural demand and individual practice of flexibility in gendered interactions in a globalized world. Taking a transnational approach, this talk contextualizes flexible masculinities under the advanced regime of flexible accumulation, where ordinary individuals must navigate varied culturally-specific gender and sexuality regimes due to changing conditions of transnational mobility, communication, and interactions. Drawing on multi-sited and embodied ethnography from global queer Asia, this talk explores the flexible negotiation of masculinities in multiple geographic and cultural contexts amid global and regional social changes. The concept of flexible masculinities highlights how distinct configurations of masculinity arise in different geographies, prompted by shifts in global capitalism, social movements, and cultural flows, and how transnational subjects mobilize flexible embodiments of their gender, sexuality, and ethnicity to achieve a sense of respectability, belonging, and desirability. By doing so, this talk advances a transnational, intersectional, and queer intervention to our understandings of masculinities.

Minwoo Jung is an assistant professor of Sociology and Women’s Studies and Gender Studies at Loyola University Chicago. He is a sociologist whose work centers on gender, sexuality, race, and empire, with an emphasis on political activism and knowledge production.

Re-Figuration of Bodies, the Life-World, and Worth in Seoul

Prof. Dr. Mihye Cho (Sungkonghoe University, Seoul), Sohyeon Peik (Sungkonghoe University, Seoul)

This lecture is based on collaborative research with Sohyeon Peik. This lecture examines the concept of "ungrievability" as it pertains to the living, focusing on the interview content gathered from individuals who self-identify as "survivors" of the crowd crush that occurred on October 29, 2022, in Itaewon, Seoul, South Korea. The lecture employs Butler's concept of grievability to examine the ways in which survivors express their sense of "ungrievability". Thereby, it discusses the re-figuration of bodies, subjectivities, and worth. The interviewees, who are predominantly in their twenties, indicate that they could have been among the victims and express concern that the loss of the victims' lives has not been adequately mourned. Furthermore, the interviewees indicate that the recreational activities of young people in Itaewon, which are often perceived as deviant, are stigmatized, and that the bodies of the victims and survivors are treated with disregard. The fear that our existence is devalued may prompt individuals to resort to hatred as a means of seeking recognition of our existence, rather than inquiring into the origins of our fear. The hatred would subsequently become internalized, leading to individuals becoming both the object and subject of hatred. Could fear be transformed into a driving force for mutual benefit, rather than a catalyst for hatred and violence? The objective of the lecture is to provide an opportunity for reflection on the potential for positive re-figuration of bodies, the life-world, and self-worth.

Mihye Cho is an associate professor in the Department of Sociology at Sungkonghoe University. Her research areas include urban studies, cultural studies, work, value, and citizenship.

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