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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Melos in the World of K-Drama

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Abstract:
This essay elucidates the concept of the "affective interlude," a moment in the K-drama that showcases emotion, typically of a character within the drama, while soliciting viewers to feel something, such as sympathy or outrage, in relation to it. This moment is emblematic of the poetics of the K-drama and exemplary of popular moving image narrative more generally. Part two of this essay considers the affective interlude in the context of its reproducibility. In doing so, we can begin to understand the K-drama as an aesthetic form that functions as an archive of Korean emotion.

Keywords
K-drama, emotion, affect, Korea, affective interlude, television, music

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Introduction.

This essay addresses one of the most discussed but under-theorized issues in the popular and academic discourse surrounding the Korean television drama (K-drama): "feeling." Feeling is intimately linked to the experience of Korean moral sentiment and the serialized form of the K-drama. The following discussion will elaborate what I call the "affective interlude": moments that make a spectacle of sincere emotion while soliciting viewers to respond in kind, to feel sympathy or outrage and cry or cringe, and typically in ways that inspire the consideration of moral sentiment within the Korean cultural context. Later in this essay, I further explore the nature and scope of the affective interlude within the context of streaming television in order to account for its reproducibility. By isolating what I think is aesthetically particular to the K-drama, my aim here will be to try and understand its particular appeal among global viewers.

To cite just one moment, the affective interlude can be identified at the end of the first episode of *World of the Married*, the hit K-drama broadcast on JTBC in 2020. In it, Ji Sun-woo shockingly realizes and that her husband Lee Tae-oh has been having an affair. She is a successful doctor while he is a struggling film producer. Tae-oh has been secretly seeing Da-kyung, the young daughter of a rich businessman who will invest in his production company. Sun-woo discovers her husband's affair while attending an outdoor party celebrating his birthday and where they have gathered with friends and acquaintances. He does not know that she knows. Sun-woo's horrified humiliation is registered through formal means that appear in other K-dramas – slow-motion, close-ups on her face and eyes welling with tears, point-of-view shots of the incriminating photos on his phone, rhythmic music featuring anxiety-inducing string ostinatos, and flashbacks to earlier narrative moments. These means, at once, make a spectacle of her emotion

while soliciting viewers to sympathize with her outrage. By voice-over, Sun-woo remarks, "Everything was perfect. Everyone that surrounds me [narŭl tollŏssan modu] had me fooled perfectly." Meanwhile the pulsating instrumental track, "The World Where Everything is Perfect," comes on the soundtrack. She slowly looks up and sees her friends, from a distance, laughing seemingly at her expense. The music rises in intensity as she acquires a determined look. It grows louder with another close shot of a pair of scissors, retrieved from the first aid kit stored in the trunk of her car and poised to attack as she comes face-to-face with her philandering husband. Sun-woo, brimming with fury, confronts Tae-oh as the image stops on a freeze-frame, ending the episode and leaving the viewer hanging as to what she will do next. From the sixteen episodes that make up this drama, one may conclude that the world of the married is full of long-held resentments, conspiracy, and vengeful one-upmanship, where warfare commands one day and affection the next.

Regardless of genre, moments of heightened emotionality appear regularly throughout all K-dramas, functioning to draw Korean and non-Korean viewers into the unfolding of the narrative. Netflix, as we know, has been instrumental in disseminating Korean dramas to its more than 220 million viewers worldwide, especially with *Squid Game* (2021) and *Crash Landing on You* (2019-2020), and in contributing to their meteoric rise of popularity for Korean and non-Korean viewers. A fascinating article by Min Joo Lee describes the phenomenon of "Hallyu tourism" whereby from women from Europe, Latin America, and the U.S. travel to Korea in search of idealized romance as depicted in the K-dramas they have seen.[1] Lee reminds us that, "Hallyu as a transnational media and tourism phenomenon is possible because technology was able to successfully ferry emotions across geographic and cultural boundaries."[2] The precise meaning of how Korean dramas "ferry emotions" will be the subject of this essay. The scene I described above from *The World of the Married* exemplarily points to a number of key features for how emotion is generated in this series in particular but also to the poetics of the K-drama more generally: the serialized, long-form narrative that creates momentum through the cliffhanger ending, the role of memory and its iterative quality registered through flashbacks, moments of "vision" when a character comes to a watershed realization (typically conveyed through a close-up on the face), and a world constituted not by space but by time and the timing of melodrama. These aspects work with categories developed by Sean O'Sullivan in his essay on serial narrativity, the "discursive connections" that include elements of iteration, multiplicity, and momentum, and the "varieties of scope" that are comprised of world-building, personnel, and design.[3] Contributing to this highly sensationalized moment is the sense that Sun-woo is "surrounded" by affective forces that are embodied by human others, forces that thrust issues of sentiment (chŏngsŏ) and Korean ethics concerning friendship, love, commitment, trust, and seniority decisively into the realm of politics. The visual and auditory elements of the narration are organized around her obsessive point-of-view, enticing the viewer at times to sympathize with her plight and worldly comportment throughout the series, while at others to pity and even scorn her character.

To be sure, many of these aspects that are not limited to the K-drama specifically and are common traits that one may observe in perhaps all moving image narrative, but here I would like to propose that we think of them as exemplary. Moments like these, of which there are many, bring out what is peculiar to its aesthetics and form, in bringing to light surrounding worlds of Koreanness while manifesting the consideration of the ethics and distance that place one

1. See Min Joo Lee, "Touring the Land of Romance: Transnational Korean Television Drama Consumption from Online Desires to Offline Intimacy," *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change* 18:1 (January 2020): 56-80.

2. Lee, "Touring the Land of Romance," 76.

3. Sean O'Sullivan, "Six Elements of Serial Narrative," *Narrative* 27:1 (January 2019): 49-64.

body in relation to another. My hope is that discussion will provide us with the opportunity to analyze Korean television serials both more generally and more specifically at the same time – that is, both in their universality within popular audiovisual narration and in terms of their particular aesthetic form.

A note on methodology

With this mission in mind, a brief discussion of method is perhaps in order.[4] Likely many of us are aware of the various sociological approaches that have seemed to dominate recent scholarly writing about the K-drama. We may be familiar with analyses of the "soft power" clout of hallyu in the world and its capacity to mobilize notions of Koreanness in conjunction with national foreign policy and economic development.[5] Scholars have analyzed individual cultural products, the formation of the culture industry, and the public gestures of idol performers in order to show how they non-coercively persuade others to sympathize with Korean causes.[6] We may be reminded of the small size of the domestic market and the reliance on the export of Korean cultural products for its sustainability.[7] These empirical approaches place K-dramas within the terms of nationhood and globalization, but also of the transnational flows that are concomitant with processes of global capitalism.[8] They compel us to shift our attention away from considerations of (ostensibly Western) cultural imperialism as its driving politics and direct our focus instead on new hierarchies organized in terms of regional and civilizational alliances. The importance of export is emphasized as they remind us of the need for the Korean culture industry to satisfy the demands of foreign investors, particularly when explaining the role of product placement and the importance of casting popular actors and K-pop idols for promotion abroad. Individual articles discuss the popularity of K-dramas in Taiwan and Latin America, while also identifying "key factors for [their] international competitiveness."[9] These analyses often discuss the logic of global capitalism alongside the algorithms of media and streaming platforms, and identify technologies necessary for the distribution and accessibility of K-pop and K-dramas. As we focus more about the success of Korean culture along these lines, on the other hand, we may begin to lose sight of issues around desire and spectatorial pleasure, as well as the textuality of the K-drama and the specific aesthetic problems that it inspires. The K-drama becomes merely a commodity to be traded like cars or handphones. When thinking about how the dissemination of *Descendants of the Sun* (2016) interacted with the crisis which China produced by the installation of THAAD missiles in 2016, the loss of opportunities for its actors in this large market, and the unofficial ban on Korean entertainment in the latter half of that year, we overlook issues that concern the K-drama in particular and which differentiate it from other commodified forms of culture such as film, music, fashion, cosmetics, and food.

On the other hand, analytical focus on a single drama raises another set of considerations. Choosing a single film as an object of analysis typically affords the scholar a delimited set of images, plot points, settings, and characters to read and analyze. In film and literary studies, we have been taught to perform close readings of individual films while taking into account issues of form and content, treating the feature-length film as a relatively enclosed text. But this approach seems daunting for a mini-series drama that can last many hours over a sixteen- or twenty-episode series (not to mention the daily dramas whose seemingly endless narrative details take place over a hundred episodes). It is conceivable that one might take a signifier or representation and show how its trajectory over time

4. Cho Hae-Joang observes that scholarly approaches toward hallyu tend toward one of two basic approaches. "While cultural nationalists emphasize the existence of 'authentic culture,' industrialists and neoliberals highlight the cultural 'industry.'" Although writing on K-dramas have expanded since 2005, the dichotomy does provide a starting point upon which we might reflect. See Cho Hae-Joang, "Reading the 'Korean Wave' as a Sign of Global Shift," *Korea Journal* (January 2005), 159.

5. See Tony Tai-Ting Liu and Phyllis Wei-Lih Yeh, "Riding the Drama Waves: Reconsidering Korean Soft Power and Clashing Nationalisms," in JaeYoon Park and Ann-Gee Lee, eds., *The Rise of K-Dramas: Essays on Korean Television and Its Global Consumption* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2019), 68-92.

6. See Chung Min Lee and Kathryn Botto, "The Case for South Korean Soft Power," https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/12/15/case-for-south-korean-soft-power-pub-83406, accessed May 3, 2021.

7. See Chan-guk Huh and Jie Wu, "Do Hallyu (Korean Wave) Exports Promote Korea's Consumer Goods Exports?," *Emerging Markets Finance & Trade* 53 (2017): 1388-1404.

8. See Dal Young Jin, *New Korean Wave: Transnational Cultural Power in the Age of Social Media* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2016), especially Chapter Three.

9. See Fang-Chih Irene Yang, "The Genrification of 'Korean Drama' in Taiwan," *China Information* 22:2 (2008): 277-304; Benjamin M. Han, "Fantasies of Modernity: Korean TV Dramas in Latin America," *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 47 (2019): 37-47; Jimmyn Parc and Hwy-chang Moon, "Korean Dramas and Films: Key Factors for Their International Competitiveness," *Asian Journal of Social Science* 41:2 (2013): 126-149.

reveals something meaningful about corresponding aspects of Korean culture and ideology. But such choices necessarily limit the scope of the interpretation while, again, the sheer length of the episodic series makes the task of meaning-making unwieldly. Comparing film to the K-drama also invokes long-standing issues around the question of art and the ways in which the discourse of art cinema still informs what and how audiovisual moving image media is to be analyzed. The K-drama is ostensibly not an art precisely because it is a commodity, and is thus commercial in its intent and normative in its politics. The knee-jerk belief that K-dramas are weepy melodramas and generally addressed to female audiences has perhaps shifted a bit in our era of quality television, but the residues of some of the most reactionary attitudes about the drama nevertheless seem to persist, especially when considering what is worthy of scholarly attention and time. Constantly crosscutting between multiple storylines, the K-drama typically features quick editing and a kind of anxious reconstitution of space that is aligned with distractive media rather than the aesthetics of long take realism typically associated with national art cinema. The contemporary K-drama may boast clever writing, masterful acting, and unprecedently high production values, but they are too often still thought to be formulaic, overly sincere, and overly sentimental.

Affective interludes and the sychronizing of emotions

The following discussion attempts to circumvent the difficulties of these approaches while also attending to the aesthetic particularity of the K-drama. In an essay on democracy and popular moving image narrative, I proposed that we approach the K-drama in three ways, specifically in terms of narrational timing, the production of affect, and tertiary retention.[10] Moreover, I also argued that the specific model for thinking the K-drama finds its allegorical form, not in the dialogue and interactions between characters and in the development of the plot that is facilitated by these interactions, but in the affective interludes, which appear typically without dialogue and are accompanied by music, that provide respite from the narrative's forward movement. I am using the word "affect" here to designate the ethical potentiality of any given body and the capacity of one to affect and be affected by another. For this discussion it is important to consider both the relation of bodies within the world of the drama as well as the body of the viewer in relation to the K-drama itself and the technologies that constitute it as moving image and sound. These potentialities are triggered through the use of polite speech and titles, tone of voice, eye contact, bodily gesture, and indicate who a character is as a persona but also their relation to others. I am isolating the affective interlude in this way to show how it is consolidated through these public signs while making the production of affect itself into an issue. During these moments, the image and sound work in consort with the emotions felt by a character, moving fluidly between interiority and expression, while soliciting viewers to feel the same in a relation of sympathy. The affective interlude both produces and prolongs emotion, giving time for viewers to sense and synchronize the rhythm of their feelings to the flow of the drama. It may take place at any moment in a series but often appears at the end of an episode, thus providing the viewer an opportunity to reflect on the narrative developments that just took place. When the interlude appears in later episodes, it gains in narrative and emotional weight by reminding the viewer of key moments in the pasts of both the series and the viewer's own.

We might think here of the interludes that take place, when Jang Geu-rae in *Misaeng* (2014) goes to the top of the One International office building to mull

10. See Steve Choe, "Memories of the Demos and Popular Korean Moving Image Narrative," *Journal of Japanese and Korean Cinema* 14.1 (April 2022): 7-20.

upon the impossibility of him working permanently for the company. Or perhaps IU's character in *Hotel del Luna* (2019) as she ponders the tension between her desire and pride under the Moon Tree that has started to blossom. In episode five of *This is My First Life* (2017), Yoon Ji-ho is getting married to Nam Se-hee for purely financial reasons, but the wedding is unexpectedly moving for her when she reads a letter her mother wrote that expresses her maternal love. Because these characters do not speak during these sequences, but are shown to be simply feeling something, the need for close-ups and shot-reverse shot patterns is lessened and we are given long shots of their bodies, often in deep focus, integrated into scenic backdrops and environments. A panoramic shot of Seoul, tall shelves of books, or a large CGI tree, but also the bedroom, a modern café, a street at night illuminated by a single street lamp, next to the Han River, or while sitting in Chunggyechun park: these locations do not so much gain in meaningful significance within the plot but contribute to the mood of the image while cuing the viewer expressionistically to what the characters may be feeling. The image may be slowed to emphasize and elongate these moments. A shot of character drinking alone at a bar provides the opportunity to reflect on the regrets and losses experienced in life. The viewer in turn is solicited to recognize the love, loneliness, disappointment, heartbreak, resignation, or quiet wonder felt by these characters with a close-up shot slowly moving across their face. Their seemingly impassive countenance indicates that they may also be reminiscing, confirmed when a series of flashbacks replay previous moments from the series. This contention about the affective interlude can perhaps be aligned with the affection-image as described by Deleuze in *Cinema 1* and his approach of isolating types of images that are exemplary of the cinema more broadly. The affective interlude of the K-drama may thus be understood, like the affection-image, to constitute a semiotic unity that both reflects and is reflecting.

I have also asserted that in addition to the visual design of these affective interludes, their emotionality is underscored through the key role that non-diegetic music plays during these sequences. A sparse instrumental melody articulated through piano or guitar notes, strings, or perhaps wordless vocals convey the rise and fall of emotion through crescendos and diminuendos that guide the viewer's response. Brass instruments, ostinatos, and percussion instruments may be utilized for more intense "heart-pounding" moments. The music's function is typically to accompany the visuals such that, as Adorno and Eisler write, "Music must follow visual incidents and illustrate them either by directly imitating them or by using cliches that are associated with the mood and content of the picture."[11] The rhythm and timbre of the soundtrack give time for and choreograph the rhythm of viewer's emotions (which the German philosophers associate with ideological false consciousness). But just as often, these interludes will feature sung songs expressly written for the drama and with lyrics that correspond to the characters' feelings. We might recall a moment from *What's Wrong with Secretary Kim* (2018) when Lee Young-joon tells Kim Mi-so that she was hired "because it was Mi-so," which is followed by a series of shots showing them standing face-to-face while they recognize their growing desire for each other. This moment is created through the visual design of the affective interlude and its emotion is heightened when the song, "It's You," plays on the soundtrack. In episode twelve of *Flower of Evil* (2020), Cha Ji-won tells her husband Do Hyun-soo that, "Do Hyun-soo is not a bad guy," immediately cuing the song, "In My Heart," whose lyrics express familial love. The images meanwhile show Hyun-soo tearfully reuniting with his daughter. In episode twelve of *Be Melodramatic* (2019), Im Jin-joo and Son

11. Theodor Adorno and Hanns Eisler, *Composing for the Films* (London: Athlone Press, 1994), 12.

Beum-soo speak on the phone and discuss meeting "by chance" in the park. We hear the upbeat song, "Your Scent in the Flowers," indicating the excitement that they feel after Jin-joo has decided to date Beum-soo. When they kiss, a slow ballad version of this song, this time sung by a female voice, plays and dominates the soundtrack. The melodies of these songs seem to affect the flow of the visuals. But even when the relationship between sound and image seems arbitrary, like the montage of a noraebang track, the music seems to allow viewer to feel their way through the sequence of images. It is no surprise then that characters in the K-drama often seem to harbor a talent for music, whether as instrumentalists (*Do You Like Brahms?* [2020]), singers (opera in *Penthouse: War in Life* [2020-2021], K-pop in *Dream High* [2011]), or playing in a rock band (*Hospital Playlist* [2020-2021]). Performing characters provide more opportunities for the affective interlude to take place and to anchor the source of music in the on-screen body. This music typically serves both to signify the flow of emotion felt by the characters within the drama but also to guide and even enable the viewer to release their own sympathetic feelings. In this sense, the poetics of the K-drama resembles the heightened emotionality offered by opera and its expression of interiority through music, rather than the word-bound discourse of literature. As melody takes flight with the characters within a series, so do the emotions of the viewer, while their eyes remained glued to their domesticated screens.

Music and sound design are key for understanding the aesthetics of the K-drama in their seeming ubiquity and function as punctuating emotional moments in the narrative action. Music provides color to expressive moments throughout the drama and is not intended to be listened to critically but simply felt. In some series, like the daily or "makjang" dramas, music constantly plays in the background, underneath the dialogue, guiding the viewer's emotional response at every narrative turn. In a moment I would like to expand on its key role and draw our attention to the way it reproduces affect through the production of an archive of emotion. In any event, these interludes exist within narrative contexts and their pathos is inseparable from the operation of the melodramatic mode and its articulation of virtue in the K-drama. In her essay on *The Heirs* (2013) and *My Love from the Star* (2013), Wi Jung Yi describes the key role of melodrama in its capacity to mobilize emotion toward political ends, such that Korean audiences "found the 'melodramatic imagination' engaging not simply because the exaggerated representation of violent modernization was revelatory of their everyday suffering but also because its 'moral occult' promised, in the realm of fantasy, the ultimate victory of the hitherto persecuted."[12] Its Manichean moral typecasting, largely conservative orientation, pursuit of spaces of innocence (the family, one's hometown, first love, or the first time two characters recognized their feelings for each other), and fundamentally syncretic form reflect the social consequences of compressed modernization and the clash between traditional and modern imperatives toward morality. Moreover, the mode underpins the preponderance of character development and underpins the importance of the expressivity of the face to make virtue legible. Instead of the long takes of art cinema, the K-drama typically utilizes quick cuts to encourage rapid moral judgment on the part of the viewer. As K-dramas are typically consumed on small screens, such as flat-screen monitors or the cell phone, the close-up on the face and its aesthetics remains key. We might think of Song Joong-ki's mask-like face and the tension it plays out between desire and duty for the military solider in *Descendants of the Sun*. Cho Seung-woo's emotionless face in *Stranger* (2017, 2020) is significant in this connection, which I would juxtapose with his astonishing skills of close reading,

12. Wi Jung Yi, "Melodramatic Tactics for Survival in the Neoliberal Era: Excess and Justice in *The Heirs and My Love from the Star*," *Journal of Korean Studies* 23:1 (March 2018): 154.

starting already in the second episode, of recorded footage taken of the façade of a house where a murder had taken place.

As Thomas Elsaesser has noted, the popular mode of melodrama typically implicates a form of reading that understands ideological conflicts and social crises as manifest through personalized narratives taking place between private individuals. The melodrama of a narrative plays out cultural values and becomes a site where the "symptoms" of society's ills are reflected and "diagnosed." Along these lines, we might think about how *Beautiful World* (2018) reflects the suffering experienced by victims of school bullying and the traumatic consequences that arise from this suffering. *Mr. Sunshine* (2018) plays out the conflicts between individual desire and the duty to one's nation, particularly when this duty is to a nation that is not one's own. *Misaeng* depicts social hierarchies and exposes the culture of kapchil that takes place among white-collar workers. *SKY Castle* (2018) lays bare the crushing pressures felt by college-bound students to enter into the top universities in Seoul and the extent to which both students and their parents will go to get ahead. *Because This is My First Life* addresses the conflicts between marriage, individual career goals, and the practicalities of capitalist life while *World of the Married* seems to speak to rising rates of divorce in contemporary Korea and the games married couples play, particularly when the woman earns more than the man. *Itaewon Class* (2020) may be read to be about marginalized individuals who pursue justice, or in some cases revenge, against those who dispossessed them of their worth due to their class, sexual, and gender differences. Many dramas that deal with the politics of memory and forgetting can be read against the backdrop of Korea's historical traumas, as allegories of unresolved memory or loss of sovereignty. Statistical, biopolitical knowledge about the life of Korean citizens are personalized through the melodramas of individuals in the K-drama while instantiating stories of real people trying to survive under the discursive constraints set out by neoliberal capitalism. Societal problems are transfigured into mythical terms that point toward seemingly eternal, but also reductive, moral conflicts concomitant with melodrama's syncretic form.

That the contemporary K-drama reflects Korean values may be confirmed through a series of visual and narrative tropes that seem to insist on their Koreanness: the opening of an umbrella for a female love interest, her head resting on his shoulder, the sŏllŏngt'ang served on a cafeteria tray to criminal suspects, the drinking culture, social hierarchies based on age and position and their manifestation through speech and gesture, the piggyback ride, a dramatic first kiss that is shown in multiple perspectives, failed or abusive parenting, amnesia and the logic of trauma, characters who have known each other since childhood but do not know it themselves, but also the tendency toward relationships that may be reduced to either friend or foe and the quest toward the realization of the true self. While these are well-known signifiers and many others quickly signal that we are in the world of K-drama, it ultimately calls for diegetic characters and viewers to constantly interpret the nuances of other people's behavior, words, and the tone of speech in order to ascertain signs of virtue. In *Something in the Rain* (2018), when Jin-ah's father expresses his recognition of Jun-hui's virtue, Jin-ah's young boyfriend, the viewer recognizes his virtue as well, for affirming Jin-ah's love. As we continue to think about the melodrama, we might also consider the extent to which social life more generally is subject to K-dramatization through its tropes and signifiers in the dozens of series that are produced every year. When the K-drama is self-reflective of the Hallyu culture industry, such as in the *Be Melodramatic* and the *Let's Eat* (2013-2014) series, these worlds are

13. See Michelle Cho, "Domestic *Hallyu*: K-Pop Metatexts and the Media's Self-Reflexive Gesture," *International Journal of Communication* 11 (2017): 2308-2331.

also subjected to these aesthetics and tropes, aesthetics that nevertheless reinforce the need for engagement in an age when viewers have become increasingly cosmopolitan and critical.[13]

For the affective interlude that is my principal concern here, the most relevant feature of the melodramatic mode is the issue of timing and temporality, what Linda Williams calls the "too late" of melodrama. This too lateness is the culmination of the dramatic tension felt in the mismatch between how things are and how they, in the realm of fantasy, should be. It operates in dialectical relation to the "on time," which solicits the viewer's sympathy to respond synchronically and is manifest in the moment of recognition. Once more, the close-up on the expressivity of the face marks this moment. Time travel series like *Signal* (2016) and *Tunnel* (2017), among many others, work with this too lateness, evoking a sense of regret in their narration of cold cases while also compelling the demand for justice and the desire to redress failures of the past. The drama *Kairos* (2020) – its title literally refers to the issue of timing – involves a character who lives thirty-one days in the future and the choices that must be made in order to save an older woman from disappearing. This stop and go manipulation of the narrational timing is decisive against the continuous passing of time experienced by the captivated viewer, binging one episode to the next. *Save Me* (2017) revolves precisely around the right time to save Im Sang-mi so that the cult leader who plans to sleep with her is incriminated. The K-drama works with the timing of birth and death such that time is felt as significant because of its contingency but also because it "just happens" to take place during the lifespan. Melodrama above all seeks the recognition of virtue while the virtuous remain living. This seems to be what is at stake in *The Light in Your Eyes* (2019) and its plot revolving around the manipulation of time juxtaposed with the irreversibility of age. The moment of recognition is already moving in itself, but once such an opportunity has passed, once the virtuous are dead and gone, it will be too late. Coincidental encounters between characters also play up the issue of time and timing when a conversation just happens to be overheard by another character while reminding us that the world constituted in the K-drama is typically populated by only a handful of important protagonists. A female lead slips on stairs and she is caught "in the nick of time" by her male love interest. A plot reveal that expands this world proves only to reiterate the coincidence that multiple characters share a forgotten, traumatic history. At the end of episode seven of *Tunnel*, the detective Park-Gwang-ho, who has traveled in time from 1986 to 2016, realizes that his detective partner is the son of a serial murder victim from the past. The leading characters in *What's Wrong with Secretary Kim* realize that they share a childhood memory and because of this are destined to fall in love.

On the one hand, we have moments like those in *Crash Landing on You* when Hyun Bin's North Korean character saves Son Ye-jin in the "nick of time" on her way to the airport, as she is about to be killed by North Korean soldiers. On the other, we can remember a key moment from *Reply 1988* (2015) when Sung Duk-seon waits at a Lee Seung-hwan concert. Choi Taek and Kim Jung-hwan both arrive to meet Duk-seon, but Jung-hwan is too late. Dejected, in voiceover he reflects upon his own lateness and on fate as another word for what he calls "timing" as the image transitions into an affective interlude featuring the American song popular at the time, "Right Here Waiting." Following both of these scenes, the emotions induced by the drama of timing is given time to emerge through a montage of shots and flashbacks led by the swelling music. Tears may flow for the characters on-screen or by the viewer. They attest to

the despair of lost time and the realization that this lost time is the reason why reconciliation, say in the tension between desire and duty, will be impossible. Crying is indeed often tied to a moment of recognition that occurs too late. One is moved to tears when the recognition of the virtues of sincerity, diligence, faith, and sacrifice occurs too late, when they are recognized but after the character has died, fallen into sickness, or experienced amnesia. By this time, their moral nature is known and become crystallized into an icon, what Kracauer calls the person's "actual *history*."[14] It is too late for the titular character of *Vincenzo* (2021) to reconnect with his Korean birth mother and refer to her as such, after she is murdered by his enemies. If the viewer registers Hyun Bin's heroic virtue or Jung-hwan's emotional vulnerability in the interludes I mentioned above, particularly when the image provides a close-up on their faces, they move the viewer in response to the melodramatic narration that led up to them. Their silent expressions, the music, but also the manipulations of the visuals including slight camera movements, rack focus, slow-motion: these elements momentarily suspend the narrative unfolding but enable the emotional flow to flourish. And in doing so, they guide the viewer toward an analysis of the nuanced affects of everyday Korean life and educate the viewer, through point-of-view shots, close-ups, flashbacks, and other formal elements, how to become sensitive to the atmosphere of a situation without the use of dialogue.

Béla Balázs comments on precisely this affective experience of the cinema, comparing its unfolding to the listening of a melody from the first note to the last. Far from simply being constituted by a series of individual notes, music is made through the progression of one note to the next, in the span of time that is lived from the melody's birth and death. "The notes sound one after the other in a time-sequence, hence they have a real duration, but the coherent line of melody has no dimension in time; the relation of the notes to each other is not a phenomenon occurring in time."[15] Sung in one breath, the melody is comprised of a series of notes whereby one already implies the next, taking the listener's consciousness through a progression of key changes. This journey through the harmony of a melody makes possible emotional and affective changes that are to be registered by the listener. The Hungarian film theorist then compares this phenomenology to the elements that comprise the expressivity of the face (the affection-image): "Now facial expression, physiognomy, has a relation to space similar to the relation of melody to time. The single features, of course, appear in space; but the significance of their relation to one another is not a phenomenon pertaining to space, no more than are the emotions, thoughts and ideas which are manifest in the facial expressions we see."[16] Drawing from Bergson's description of listening to a melody, whereby the listener temporarily loses their sense of time in following the unfolding and cadence of a melody, Balázs compares the close-up and physiognomy and their solicitation of emotion that compels the viewer to lose the sense of the face located within Cartesian space. Engaging with both the face and the melody, the affective interlude of the K-drama could be said to function as a crucial element in the world of emotion that delivers the viewer to a timeless and placeless space. Like a melody, a well-made drama enables the viewer's emotions to ebb and flow in a seemingly organic manner, as if key narrative and emotional elements of the first episode were contained in the very last. This experience of flow is made possible precisely by the melos of the melodrama, exemplified by the affective interlude operating in a relation of complementarity to the drama's more discursively-oriented narrational moments.

14. Siegfried Kracauer, "Photography," in *The Mass Ornament*, trans. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 51.

15. Béla Balázs, *Theory of the Film* (London: Dennis Hobson, 1931), 62.

16. Béla Balázs, *Theory of the Film* (London: Dennis Hobson, 1931), 62.

The iterative quality of K-drama and the tertiary memory prosthetic

In order to elaborate these claims further, I would like to consider the iterative quality of the K-drama and the sense that its poetics, some features of which I have described here, may be also characterized through repetition and difference. Towards this I am compelled to introduce a key term: tertiary memory. Tertiary memory, introduced by the media philosopher Bernard Stiegler, is a form of de-individualized prosthetic memory that is made possible through recording technology and is emblematic of our current media ecology characterized by postmemory. It attests to experiences forgotten or not experienced by the one who recalls them, as they are encountered through technical media and in the age of mechanical reproducibility. In *Dr. Brain*, scientist Koh Sewon develops a technology to synchronize this mind with that of others, allowing him to acquire their memories. And by gaining the memories of deceased adults, children, and a cat, he finds out the melodramatic story of what happened to his son and wife. This premise allegorizes the situation for the K-drama viewer as well, who streams episodes to their screen, emotionally and affectively synchronizes with the plight of characters within a narrative, while experiencing events that viewers have not personally experienced themselves. The affective interlude enters into the realm of the refrain, reminding us that the production of affect is already the result of a reproduction – we might remember here the repetition of the song "Stand By Your Man" throughout *Something in the Rain* – while also drawing our attention to fundamental issues surrounding K-drama in general. This helps us to better understand, to cite Min Joo Lee once more, the capacity of technology to "ferry emotions across geographic and cultural boundaries," particularly in the capacity of Korean serial moving image narrative to solicit and instill notions of Koreanness through streaming television platforms such as Netflix to its over 220 million subscribers worldwide.[17]

17. Lee, "Touring the Land of Romance," 76.

In the penultimate moment from *Guardian: The Lonely and Great God* ("*Goblin*") (2016), the Goblin and Grim Reaper, beings who have been reincarnated in contemporary Korea, recall the roles they played in a traumatic incident that took place during the Goryeo period. While the Goblin remembers that he was the courageous commanding general Kim Shin in his past life, the Grim Reaper realizes that he was Wang Yeo, the young king who betrayed the general and his sister and put them to death. The Goblin is enraged now that he has someone to blame for his curse of immortality while the Grim Reaper is horrified by the realization of his culpability, which he had somehow forgotten. Starting with the very first episode of the series, this traumatic memory is depicted in fragments but gradually becomes more fully fleshed out as the series unfolds and as characters remember more. The latter episodes are devoted to recollection of the past lives of the small cast of characters, their relationships with each other, and the coming to terms with the ethics of those decisions made in the past. At the end of episode twelve and the beginning of episode thirteen, an affective interlude and its crosscuts make explicit the parallel between contemporary Korea and the moment Wang Yeo's decides to execute Kim Shin. The Grim Reaper asks himself whether he was that "young face" of the foolish king as shots of his physiognomy in the present moment flashes back to those in the past.

With each recall of this memory, we are presented with a sequence that reiterates these past events through a series of identical shots and music that were first shown in episode one. They reappear throughout the series as if to call out for resolution and closure. The instrumental music, called "Dark Walk" on the original soundtrack, that accompanies this memory features a dirge-like

percussion underlying steadily modulating strings, a wordless chorus, and a pattern of notes played on an organ that moves through minor triads, lending the music a monumental and gothic sound. And while we may be tempted to read these compulsions of memory psychoanalytically (perhaps by making reference to Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*), I would like to withhold discussion of this logic for a moment and consider the aesthetic repetitions of the affective interlude that seem integral to both the seriality of the K-drama and the reproducibility of the moving image. With each iteration of this particular memory in *Goblin*, more about what happened, why, and who may be to blame for the violence is revealed, more footage from the archive of memory is presented to the viewer. The content of the memory is gradually filled out as the series unfolds and is allowed to be made meaningful according to the expectations of the melodramatic mode. The realization of traumatic memory is "too late" for both the Goblin and Grim Reaper. On the other hand, this development of memory attests to past events that have not been experienced by the viewer in the stretch from episodes one to thirteen. If we consider that these aspects of the past arrive, not only via the recovery of the traumatic memory experienced subjectively by the drama's characters but also through the drama's formal means, we might perceive them as arriving seemingly from nowhere. Their source is not only made mysterious because they are unexperienced, but also because they signal the memory, not only of the Goblin, but of a community of characters who reconstruct the past collaboratively, by the Grim Reaper, Kim Shin's reincarnated sister Sunny, and his nephew Yoo Duk-hwa. Memory images gradually unmoor themselves from individuals and attach themselves toward a collectivity, one that implicates the viewer in a shared process of discovery of the past.

Each act of recall is signaled by the repetition of shots and of the music, like a leitmotif, that accompanies them. The flashback that is remembered by the series and is new to the viewer instantiates what Stiegler calls "tertiary retention" or "tertiary memory." It allegorizes a form of recall that has become central in our age of digital culture and its seemingly endless archive of images and sound, what he calls "temporal objects," that attest to the past experiences of others. I hope the reader may permit me this brief detour into Stiegler's phenomenology of tertiary memory for the next several paragraphs. My aim is to propose that we understand the affective interlude as inextricably linked to its iterability and which is played out in the aesthetics of memory in *Goblin*. On the other hand, the unmoored flashback that recalls images of the past not experienced by the viewer helps us understand the K-drama more generally as constituted through archivable sound and images and thus as a kind of prosthetic technology. The world of *Goblin*, set in Canada and in contemporary Korea, is brought closer to the viewer through the reproducible media of cinematic sound and image. This capacity to bring closer things that are far from the viewer is perhaps obvious but Stiegler makes the observation more meaningful by extending this capacity to other forms of "technological media," including material artifacts such as clay pots, arrowheads, and paintings. In its unmooring from individual memory, collective prosthetic memory may be thought to have been deposited in each of these objects as they imply historical worlds and discursive contexts in which these objects were put to use by past human consciousnesses. If technologies such as the bicycle and the automobile extend the capacity of the human body to conquer space, recording technologies like film and video extend the capacity of human consciousness to remember.

As a technics manifest in the merging of technological and human capacities, tertiary retention exists as a supplement to primary and secondary retention. Stiegler draws on Edmund Husserl's phenomenological analysis of a melody unfolding in time and these two forms of retention it compels. As an object of human perception, a melody is perceived in the immediate moment following the act of hearing, when hearing emerges into aesthetic experience, or when immediate perception develops into past reflection.[18] Primary retention takes place at precisely the moment when the now passes into the just-now, eventually becoming a then. It is constituted as a perceptual unity whose leading edge is embodied in the current note perceived by consciousness and which carves out and shapes time from a future that is as yet undifferentiated. This is precisely the act of listening that is idealized by Bergson, referenced in the Balázs quote on the face in the cinema above. Secondary retention names the capacity to recall an event at a much later time, an act of recalling a moment that already took place but is no longer present to perception, precisely as in a flashback. When one sings a melody heard the day before, the act calls on the individual to reconstruct the temporal object seemingly out of thin air, to experience it again through its recalling. The singing of a familiar melody is an act of remembering and a re-embodiment of the past that also takes place in the here and now. Because the phenomenological method disregards all phenomena that cannot be directly experienced by consciousness, Husserl is unable to describe the experience of tertiary retention beyond its primary and secondary forms.

Tertiary retention remains unique in that its very existence depends on recording technologies such as writing, film, and video. By representing past moments that have not been lived personally, these technologies give credence to the existence of histories, cultures, and of times and places that have not been personally seen and heard. Stiegler's most interesting insight into the phenomenon of memory is to show that, in an age of reproducibility, the strict division between primary and secondary retention delineated by Husserl dissolves and is shown to be subsumed in tertiary memory. As a form archi-writing that constitutes the very notion of pastness, the act of recall is informed by mechanical reproduction such that the meaning of pastness and of recall themselves are always already technological. Consciousness, Stiegler writes, "is always in some fashion a montage of overlapping primary, secondary, and tertiary memories."[19] And memory, he goes on to note,

> in all its forms would then always be a sort of rushing montage of frozen images, from the simplest juxtaposition to the greatest art of the scenarist, according to the quality of the consciousness and the nature of the object presented to it, and according to the criteria—the secondary memories, i.e., the experiences – it evokes from the object.[20]

The act of recall in the age of technological media, in other words, shuttles between primary and secondary retention. Yet the sense that both exist in their originary form is only possible due to the fundamental structure constituted by tertiary retention.

To demonstrate how this is the case, Stiegler critically extends Husserl's phenomenology of a melody unfolding in time to include the consideration of technological media. The initial hearing of a melody seems to compel a kind of description proposed by the German philosopher, but the repeated hearing of the same melody recorded on technological media, on what he calls a "phonographic

18. Edmund Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time (1893–1917),* trans. John Barnett Brough (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991).

19. Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 3: Cinematic Time and the Question of Malaise*, trans. Stephen Barker (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 28.

20. Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 3*, 28.

support mechanism," introduces new phenomenological variables in regard to the experience of time and temporality. With the second hearing of the melody, the listening consciousness has already and irreversibly changed. One already knows how the melody will be phrased, when it will culminate, and how it will resolve at its conclusion. Fragments of pastness coalesce and become the remembered past, narrativized in the present moment. Explaining this, Stiegler writes,

> From one hearing to another it is a matter of different ears, precisely because the ear involved in the second hearing has been affected by the first. The same melody, but not the same ears nor, thus, the same consciousness: consciousness has changed ears, having experienced the *event* of the melody's first hearing.[21]

If one claims to have experienced the melody differently on the second hearing, the difference is accounted for by the fact that perception is always and necessarily selective. Yet as the melody is heard again, new details may be discovered and through this it becomes more deeply inscribed in memory, its trajectory from beginning to end becomes more deeply etched into consciousness. Secondary retentions inhabit the primary experience on the second hearing and the experience of listening becomes less of the discovery of a melody never heard and increasingly the expectation of its particular phrasing, culmination, and resolution. The listener knows in advance that it is being heard again, that the listening experience to come will be inspired by its initial hearing. Bergson's phenomenology of listening returns with a vengeance here, in an age entirely suffused by mechanical reproduction.

On the other hand, Stiegler states that this way in which secondary retention always already inhabits primary retention "is also the case when I have never heard it, since then I hear from the position of an expectation formed from everything that has already musically happened to me – I am responding to the Muses guarding the default-of-origin of my desire, within me."[22] The experience of a recorded melody, even on its first hearing, is predetermined by the system of harmony, rhythm, the idea of a melody, and the act of listening itself – themselves all forms of tertiary retention. Consciousness, which already knows what a melody is, itself undergoes critique through this proactive consciousness. As recording technologies increasingly determine the experience of the temporal object, so the concept of consciousness, itself a temporal object, becomes increasingly determined by the technics of recording. Human consciousness itself is not a living entity separate from the presumptively nonliving melody but instead becomes sympathetic with it, synchronized affectively with its rhythm and flow.

In this connection, the affective interlude, constituted as a temporal object and as exemplary of the K-drama in its iterability and explicit production of affect, underpins the genre of the K-dramas as a whole. Functioning as a tertiary memory prosthetic, the K-drama is invested in the melodramatization of the world, of producing modes of remembering and ways of doing historiography, reproducing ethical relations, and enabling ways of feeling that may be coded as Korean. Almost regardless of whether a drama is set in the workplace, the school, a hospital, a prison, a small neighborhood, or revolve around married couples or reincarnated beings, its dramatic arc typically reiterates the ethical and affective underpinnings concomitant with this poetics. The affective interlude, particularly when it refers to the archive of tertiary memory, remains exemplary. In her essay on Hallyu tourism Lee mentions that viewers who did not understand the Korean

21. Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 3*, 17.

22. Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 3*, 19.

23. Lee, "Touring the Land of Romance," 70.

language nevertheless live-streamed their favorite series to register their emotions. "They were unable to understand the details of the plot because of language barriers," she writes, "but it did not hinder their viewing pleasures because what mattered more were their 'emotional' comprehensions of the drama."[23] These emotional comprehensions seem immediate and non-discursive but they cannot be separated from the tertiary memory of emotions that is inextricably linked to the aesthetics of the K-drama. When I listen to "Dark Walk" on the *Goblin* OST ("original soundtrack") I remember not only the look on Grim Reaper's face as he realizes that he was Wang Yeo but also the affective surroundings and the sensation of my experiencing of his realization. The temporal object that is the instrumental track reiterates the temporal object that is the affective interlude within the drama. The reminder that these objects exist as recorded audio and visual materials points to their status as already a reiteration of a past memory from this key dramatic moment in *Goblin*. That this moment itself concerns a memory that was not remembered by the Grim Reaper himself and was not experienced by the viewer until episode thirteen of the series points to the ways in which the affective interlude may be experienced as uncannily familiar, reflecting a kind of knowledge acquired by the many hours one has already spent within the worlds constituted by the K-drama. When I listen to "The World Where Everything is Perfect" while driving my car I recall the moment of dramatic realization in the interlude from episode one of *The World of the Married*. These musical leitmotifs are repeated throughout a series, reminding the viewer of previous moments in the story while the very repetition itself recalls the iterative poetics of the affective refrain as constitutive of the K-drama. When taking public transportation, I hear the song "I Love You" from *Descendants of the Sun* in my earbuds and remember the first kiss that took place between the Song-Song couple. When I arrive at home I can then turn to YouTube and look at fan-made supercuts of images derived from these series, typically overlaid with triggering melodies derived from their soundtracks.

And as I synchronize my faculties of recall with the rhythms of the affective refrain, I sympathize, not only with the language and culture signified in the K-drama but also with affective and ethical modes of being that comprise its community. This sympathy is symptomatic of its power to consolidate a community of drama viewers bound through fantasies of Koreanness and of feeling Korean. At stake, according Stiegler, is the capacity of technological media to enable a sense of belonging to this community and the capacity to say "we." The affective refrain enables one to sympathize and perhaps even to identify with images of Koreanness even when one has never traveled to Korea or cannot remember of ever having been there. This is especially poignant for non-Korean viewers whose experiences of Korea are constituted mostly of fantasies ferried through the K-drama. When one experiences the affective refrain, one recalls the language and culture of Korea while also recalling the ethical possibilities of being evoked by the worlds of the K-drama. In the case of *Goblin*, the historicity of the refrain confirms the existence of Korean national history, that decisions made by Koreans in the past have repercussions to Korea today, and that a continuity can be traced between the pre-modern Goryeo period and the present moment. The Goblin and Grim Reaper reconstruct memories of the distant past in a parallel fashion to the viewer: through the integration of images as prosthetic memory into consciousness. Personal and impersonal memory become intertwined as consciousness moves fluidly between images of pastness experienced by oneself and others, constituting a kind of K-drama *sensus communis*. In acknowledging

24. Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 3,* 93.

this past, the phenomenological flow of the technical object enables the viewer-listener to attune him- or herself toward a shared communal duty, embodied in some civilizational concept of Koreanness, perhaps in a manner reminiscent of Dr. Brain himself. To be able to participate affectively in such a community, to say "we," means then to sympathize with and take responsibility for these tertiary memories and also for the configurations of memory yet to come. "The unification process of a *We,*" Stiegler writes, "is an identification, an organization, and a unification of diverse elements of the community's past as they project its future."[24] One belongs to a community when consciousness begins to think and feel with, and then eventually identifies, with its technics. For non-Korean consumers of the K-drama, this seems to be manner in which they carry out the movement of the dialectic through the incorporation of otherness to themselves, but in doing so they annul the very distinction between the Korean and the non-Korean in this claim, at least in the realm of media. The K-drama seems almost to encourage such an experience, providing viewers the opportunity to claim this ethnic temporality it inaugurates for itself, on behalf of Koreanness and Korean civilization, and in order to inspire a concern for its destiny.

Conclusion

Let me conclude by drawing from one more example of tertiary memory that helps us characterize what I am calling here as the affective refrain in the K-drama. *Do You Like Brahms?* is an understated but straight-forward romance drama featuring classical musicians as its main protagonists. At the end of episode thirteen, the young pianist, Park Joon-young, is sent a YouTube link to a recording of Robert Schumann's well-known piece for piano, "Träumerei." The link was sent to him by Lee Jung-kyung, with whom Joon-young shared a relationship in the past. When he clicks on the video, a caption indicates that it is played by his teacher Yoo Tae-jin. Joon-young brings the phone speaker to his ear. However, a flashback shot of Joon-young at the piano indicates that it was his interpretation of Schumann's music and not his teacher's. When he confronts Tae-jin at the beginning of the next episode, fourteen, the older professor responds smugly and questions whether his student is able to definitively identify the performer at all. A few scenes later we are shown a flashback that was not depicted earlier, when the professor utilized player piano technology to record a moment when Joon-young practiced on his piano while unaware. On a Steinway instrument, this relatively new technology called "Spirio" is depicted briefly in the episode and is retro-fitted on an otherwise normal grand piano.

Joon-young is aware of the potential legal implications for stealing his recorded interpretation but he also knows that it would indeed be difficult to claim that his performance is featured in the recording. "Träumerei" holds sentimental meaning for the characters in the drama, particularly for Joon-young as it serves as a reminder of his previous relationship with Jung-kyung. Throughout the series the feeling of regret or loss embodied by the piece is generated through the melodramatic and the young pianist's difficulty in expressing and asserting his feelings. Schumann's "Träumerei" recalls a coupling between two characters who struggle to find a way of remaining friends after they ceased being a couple long ago, relationships that are modeled after those between Johannes Brahms, and Robert and Clara Schumann. Joon-young wants the video to be taken down from the site as soon as possible as he is concerned that his new love interest, Chae Song-ah, might hear the music and get the impression that he still pursues Jung-kyung.

When "Träumerei" is recorded it becomes a temporal object that exists as tertiary memory, underscored through the unexperienced flashbacks that attest to memories not experienced by Joon-young, but also by the viewer as well. The aesthetic possibilities of tertiary memory may be related to the rise of surveillance technologies in Korea and elsewhere, including the increasing ubiquity of CCTV, the cell phone, and other imaging and audio devices that emphasize the ubiquity of prosthetic memory devices in our world. On the one hand, these flashbacks help explain how conditions in the present came to fruition and provide context for understanding the past decisions of the characters. On the other, the previously unknown recording of "Träumerei" reminds us that technical media archives the past, even when one may be unaware of it doing so, and can be read as an allegory of the recorded sounds that constitute the K-drama as an iterable form. *Do You Like Brahms?*, like the other examples I have discussed so far, compels us to consider how its depiction of memory is intimately connected to the (re-)iterability of the cinematic medium.

These episodes, thirteen and fourteen, are perhaps the most eventful of *Do You Like Brahms?*. Joon-young and Song-ah break up and significant passages recall earlier moments from the series while also recalling their images and the soundtracks that accompanied them. A drama with an almost obsessive attention paid to sentimental detail, it unfolds primarily through the logic of affect and the depiction of elliptical interactions between friends, enemies, and love relationships. When we recall the entirety of the series, we might also recall the seeming ubiquity of the soundtrack and music throughout and remember that the affective refrains are not isolated entirely from the more discursively driven dialogue scenes. Not only the instrumental music of Schumann, Franck, and Brahms, but also that of "Punch" (Bin Jae-young), Hwang Chan-hee, and Lee Seung-joo (who also did the music for *Goblin*) is featured throughout the series almost constantly. During much of the dialogue, this music serves as a continuous backdrop, maintaining a sense of narrative suspension as the exception of the interlude becomes the aesthetic norm. Viewers may identify their experience of this drama (and others that share its aesthetics of quasi-Wagnerian time) as being "slow" or "uninvolving," but such terms indicate the extent to which consciousness is not able or unwilling to synchronize with its affective flow. The episodes of *Do You Like Brahms?* seem to unfold according to the rhythmic flow of the melody, thus foregoing reliance on action while foregrounding the interior logic of affect as the means for moving the narrative forward. Private emotions and secrets are not articulated through the public confession but by the aesthetics and repetitions of the affective refrain.

The OST, but also the movement from episode to episode and, more broadly, the seemingly endless series of available K-dramas, serve as prostheses to human memory, reminding us of the extent to which affect is constituted through the iterations of recorded media. With its sustained reliance on the affective interlude and its concomitant insistence on the melos of melodrama, *Do You Like Brahms?* may be read to reveal how the interlude constitutes the seriality of the K-drama more broadly. Manipulating the dialectic between pathos and action throughout the series, it stretches and concentrates the experience of time, delaying and quickening drama, in obeyance with the rhythm of affect. These key melodramatic features are iterated and gain dramatic weight as episodes continually unfold from one to another. In doing so, they solicit viewers to maintain affective sympathy with the characters and story of the series by drawing from histories of Koreanness while also drawing the viewer into its technics of affect.

Moments like those I describe above, where impersonal memory is depicted as an emotional revelation, exemplify the poetics of the K-drama, inviting us to become critically aware of the politics of prosthetic memory and its instantiation of the "K" in this national, popular form.

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