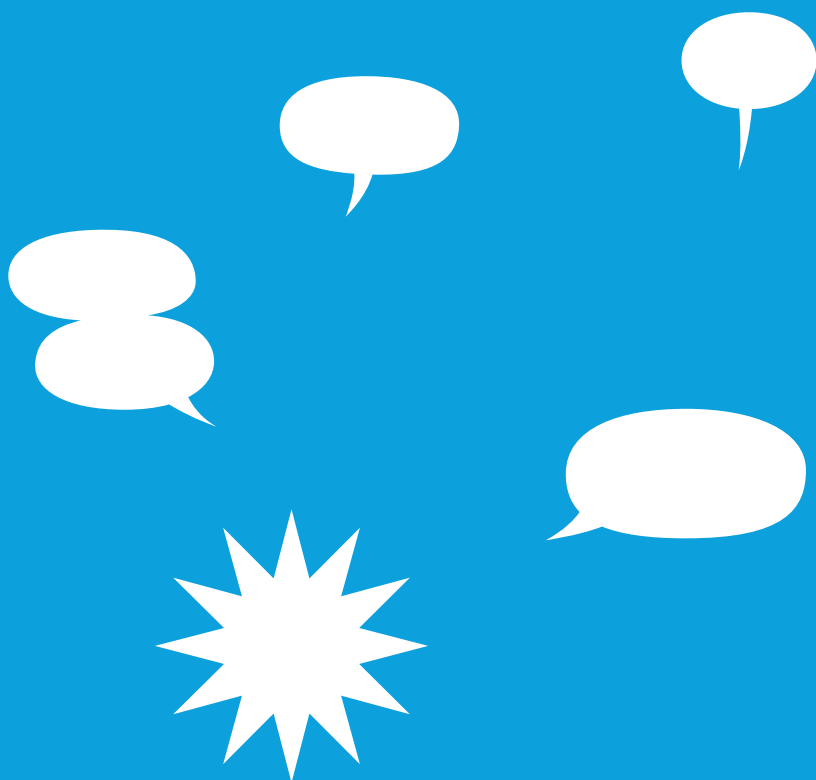




COULD BE NO.2: High School Special

SeMA BIENNALE

MEDIACITY SEOUL 2016



COULD BE NO.2: HIGH SCHOOL SPECIAL

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SeMA Biennale *Mediacity Seoul* 2016—directed by Beck Jee-sook, hosted by Seoul Museum of Art, titled *NERIRI KIRURU HARARA*, and held from September 1 to November 20, 2016—is publishing four volumes of the non-periodical publication *COULD BE* starting in April 2016 and up until the opening of the Biennale.

The publications will contain well-timed issues discovered by various contributors with different characteristics and viewpoints standing at the crossroads of the Biennale and multiple contemporary art languages. The guest editors of *COULD BE* are Yekyung Kil (Korea, editor and translator), Keiko Sei (Thailand/Myanmar/Japan, writer and curator), Chimurenga (South Africa, publishing and exhibition project team), and Miguel A. López (Costa Rica/Peru, writer and curator). Moon Jung Jang (US/Korea, graphic designer) collaborates for *COULD BE* as an art director and design advisor.

Dear High School Students,

Whilst I am writing this, you must be studying, as you usually do, day and night. You study hard. You do it because this is what you are expected to do at your age and because you are told over and over again by almost everybody, from your parents to teachers, that studying diligently leads to success. I am sure that you have many other things you want to do instead—you may want to watch your favorite star or sports on TV, chat with friends on social media, play games, or just hang out with friends in your favorite spots. You may be giving all that up in the name of studying, which is supposed to put you on the path to success.

That is true, I agree, to a certain extent and I expect there are different interpretations of the meaning of studying as well as success. This is an art occasion and the fact that you are reading this means you are somewhat interested in art; hence I can talk about studying and success from an artistic point of view. In art, social norms, standards, or conventions do not mean much, if they mean anything at all. Our job as art practitioners is not to follow conventions but to break them, go beyond them, and bring a fresh perspective to a thing or matter. We are experts at doing just that and therefore we love failure—that is, failure to meet norms and standards—because failure and mistakes provide a much deeper insight into a person than success, and this becomes crucial to understanding ourselves as human beings. I remember when I was in high school I made a lot of mistakes, and thinking back on them, some still make my face turn red. Perhaps everybody has had this kind of experience.

**And, I Remember,
This Period Was a Painful One.
I Was in Much Pain.**

To be a high school student *is* to be in pain. Most of you are officially out of the compulsory education system, and therefore, again officially, you are free and responsible for making your own life choices. But society continues to treat you as not fully grown-up and puts restrictions on many aspects of your life—from fashion and where you can hang out, to forbidding alcohol, drugs, and sex. This is also a time when you start to receive a lot of new information, all of which you must process and try to understand. Nonetheless you are still fresh, naive, and new to this world, and much of that information hurts you within and stings painfully at times. You have a dream, maybe a big dream, and you have worries, lots and lots of worries about the unknown world. You want to change the world, save the world, or lead the world, and you think you can do it. You feel you are invincible. Or, some of you may think you were born in the wrong place or at the wrong time and feel confused, so confused that you may decide to withdraw from the world completely; or you think if you could ever end your life, now would be the right moment since you do not yet have substantial responsibilities.

**Have You Realized, However,
That Your Pain Has Been Developed
into a New Spectacle?**

Again, almost every one of us experiences this pain. It’s troubling and you hope it goes away soon, and most of us hope that this period passes without any major consequences.

What we are not aware of however is that when we are in actual pain, this seemingly trifle passage of our lives is the very condition that not only generates millions of dollars in business, but also becomes a point of inspiration for artists and the source of numerous creative works.

Take a look at manga/anime productions. Productions that are either based on a high school or feature high school students like you are in high demand. For example, among the fifty best manga, as ranked by mangare.net, almost half fall into this “high school story” category, including *Melancholy of Haruhi Suzumiya* and *Death Note*.¹ When I told a Thai film expert about the vast number of high school stories in manga/anime he said, “In the case of manga and anime, all you need to make a film is a high school girl and a gun.” He was alluding to the famous phrase, “All you need to make a film is a girl and a gun,” by Jean-Luc Godard, the revered Swiss-French film director who experimented with film to break cinema traditions in the 1960s. Godard’s phrase was actually taken from “What filmgoers want is a girl and a gun” by D. W. Griffith, an American film director and producer who pioneered modern Hollywood filmmaking in the 1910s; Griffith was talking about a spectacle that most audiences would want to see. As a pioneer, his ideas and phrases carried a lot of weight in Hollywood and many Hollywood films that you see now follow this tradition. That is why you always see beautiful actresses and battles and fights in Hollywood productions. And, as Hollywood is a major influence on commercial cinema throughout the world (we call this influence “soft power”), film producers in many other countries also follow this model. Anime/

manga is no exception and there are many productions about girls and guns. The difference though in manga/anime, compared to Hollywood and other Western commercial productions, is that high school students play the main role in the spectacles. You are the protagonists. In Western culture, as you might have studied at school already, there is a genre called “Bildungsroman” or the “coming-of-age” story. These stories deal with the psychological and cultural growth and development of youth. The genre has always existed and is well represented but it has never been perceived as a major genre. But in anime/manga, you are everything. You are the main players in all kinds of settings and stories—either you possess extraordinary powers or are given extraordinary weapons and decide to save the world from destruction (*Neon Genesis Evangelion*, *Valvrave the Liberator*, *Charlotte*, *Bleach*, etc.), or you expose a vice or vicious system of society (*K*, *Guilty Crown*, *Suicide Circle*, etc.), or you symbolize something about society, whether it is hope or despair.

The recent sci-fi anime/manga *Coppelion* takes place in Tokyo in 2046, thirty years after the meltdown of a nuclear power station and subsequent banning of people from the city by the government. Tokyo is presented as a ghost town but some people still live there for various reasons. Three genetically engineered “persons” (who are immune to radiation) are sent by the defense force to search for survivors. The story seems quite real after the Fukushima meltdown incident but, again, those who are sent on this rescue mission are high school girls dressed in school uniforms. The plot has to be this way, as one foreign blogger observes, “because as anime has so

often shown us there is no problem that can’t be solved if you throw enough Japanese high school girls at it.” This is in stark contrast to American-style comic heroes who are all adult men and women—from Superman and Superwoman to Spider-Man.

You Say You Are No Hero? Ordinary High School Students Are an Artistic Inspiration.

While the girls in *Coppelion* are busy saving people in radiation-contaminated Tokyo, veteran playwright and artist Norimizu Ameya thinks that ordinary high school students, not super heroes with extraordinary abilities, best represent the sorrow of the entire nation after the 2011 tsunami/earthquake/nuclear disaster. As you know, a large number of people died and/or lost families, homes, and land in this series of disasters and many from Fukushima still live in temporary housing. Ameya’s recent play *Blue Tarp*, in which all actors are real high school students from Fukushima, features the ordinary lives of ordinary students who experienced this extraordinary event.

In the play, for instance, students talk about a creature-like thing they have seen. They do not know what “it” is and are scared of “it.” They say, “If the creature is weaker than me I have a chance of winning but if it is stronger than me, I could be beaten.” But then, they cannot help but talk to “it.” If the characters were older, their sense of responsibility would cause them to try to save “it” or protect others from “it,” and they would not have so easily admitted they were scared. And, if they were younger they would not think of talking to “it.” So your reactions

to these situations are more complex and numerous such situations and dilemmas are presented throughout the play. This not only convinces us that the main characters had to be high school students but also gives us a hint as to why artists like Ameya are drawn to the minds and bodies of high school students.

In another scene, students present their ordinary lives on a blue tarp. This blue tarp represents everything related to an emergency situation, including temporary housing as well as the sea and the blue sky they saw on the fateful day.

“She turned on a florescent light,” “. . . and took off her backpack,” “. . . and took off her uniform,” “. . . and took out her mobile phone from the pocket,” “. . . and she played a guitar. . . .”

These are ordinary things that she does, just like anybody anywhere in the world. The only difference is that she does all these things on a blue tarp. The scene was overwhelming and made me feel like a heavy stone was pulling me down to the ground. At the same time, I thought, if this scene had depicted the ordinary life of somebody older or younger, it would have evoked another emotion in me such as sadness. Perhaps this is because, like most of us, I remember all the things I did when I was a student and, like most of us, I did these things under completely normal circumstances. A theatergoer shared my sentiments on his blog after seeing the play. Referring to the scene of a male student running in place and shouting “Run away! Run away! Run away!” he wrote the following:

“[The student shouts] to confront the situation that is so enormous and also that he cannot do anything about. The scene hit me. Hit me hard. As a Tokyo resident who had long benefited from electricity supplied by the Fukushima nuclear power station, I felt this cry of a young student pierce deeply within my body.”ⁱⁱ

In the play the students repeatedly count numbers. They do so throughout in various forms— sometimes answering a roll call or sometimes playing musical chairs—as if to make sure that all of them are there. Experiencing this repeated head count makes our hearts sink even further as it leads us to think about the ones who have gone missing.

One student talks to somebody on the phone—“Why don’t you erase my address? Just forget about me. Good bye.” It is not only that the audience becomes emotional thinking about the ones who have vanished due to the accident but also because we all remember that this is the time in our lives when we realize we will vanish one day; we realize that we may also be able to erase ourselves from any record, any memory, or simply from this world by ourselves if we want to do so. The realization is horrible, frightening, and devastating, but at the same time, the idea can be refreshing.

This complex state of mind of an ordinary student has inspired numerous cultural practitioners: the playwright of *Blue Tarp*, Ameya, has worked with high school students in his previous projects and another playwright, Oriza Hirata, conducts more theater workshops for high school students than any other age group. Filmmaker Hirokazu Koreeda always features young and fresh actors in his films and likes to work with

students for film workshops and in Korea, Kim Ki-duk ingeniously uses high school girls as a motif in his film *Samaritan Girl* (2004) to contemplate dominant aspects of life such as capitalism, religiosity, and family relationships in Korea and elsewhere. The film also hints as to why high school girls are so popular in the mainstream cultural industries by showing that adult men are willing to hand over hefty wads of cash to them.

Hormones and Moratorium, Which You Represent

A sexologist once told me that adolescence is one of the most interesting times of life for scientists like her, as it is the time when hormones are active and many changes take place in the body. This phenomenon, however, has been long neglected particularly in the West with its Cartesian tradition of rationality. Hormones, which even in the tiniest amounts can influence our thoughts and behaviors to an enormous degree, have found no place in the history of Western philosophy, which began with logos and ideas and then dived straight into a quest for cybernetic co-ordinates of the body and mind. The Christian world too has long neglected or even suppressed knowledge of the very existence of hormones fearing it could promote undesirable sexual behavior.

Depicting anything related to hormones in the cultural arena is not easy either, whether in literature, art, theater, or film, but exceptions can be found in works by LGBT cultural practitioners who are masters of controlling hormonal levels and turning the experience into both creative energy and actual creative works. Also, take for example the

Czech film *Fair Play* (2014), which succeeded in placing hormonal change at the forefront to initiate wider social and political discussions on the sensitive issue of state orchestrated doping. In the film, a female athlete from the former communist Czechoslovakia shaves her breasts and legs. She has been given a performance-enhancing drug without her knowledge, and the hair growing on these parts of her body bother her. For the audience members, who know that the state is secretly injecting her with the drug, the tiny bits of hair represent the enormous crime the state is committing against her as well as against the spirit of sports; it also signifies the power of the state and the implications of the Cold War on the human body. Yes, it is a tiny bit. A tiny bit that signifies something huge. A tiny bit can change people, change things, explode like a bomb, and may change the course of history—and that bit is the hormone.

A Thai high school student-activist who recently gained nationwide fame by standing up to Thailand’s military dictator is a studious young man with plenty of curiosity. He spends his spare time reading history books and loves writing about local Thai history. He already commands a scholar’s status and his writings have started to appear in university journals. When I asked him what his biggest influence was when he started his political activism, to my surprise, he mentioned, instead of books or influential people, a local TV drama entitled *Hormone*. The drama, which depicts high school students who behave and act according to the natural command of their hormones instead of the commands of their teachers, parents, and social norms, became a social phenomenon after it aired on cable TV and online. For the first time in conservative

Thai media, *Hormone* encouraged people to listen to nature’s message within their own bodies rather than rational or external information and teachings. And, together with all the accompanying comments, feedback, and discussions on social media, the show has given young adults a tremendous sense of liberty and freedom with its influence spreading far and wide in all aspects of their lives, including, it seems, even their attitudes toward political participation. In Thailand where the current military dictatorship has started to interfere with school curriculum and textbooks, these “Hormone” generation high school students are standing up and raising their voices.

Sociologically and psychologically this hormonally active period is also called the time of “moratorium.” This is when both freedom and social responsibilities are suspended until one establishes his/her own identity. It is considered a necessary period in life marked by trial and error as one explores different things to fully grow up eventually. But the term might also be used negatively, particularly in modern times as so many youths refuse to step out of this period, afraid of or averse to bearing responsibilities. But then, isn’t the present East Asian education system also at fault by only encouraging students to passively memorize information and data without debate and promoting competition, betraying every psychological expectation of youth by denying them the chance to learn from “trial and error” at different things? When we think about this, it becomes more and more obvious why so many manga/anime focus on high school students. Perhaps the stories of students flying around, jumping over valleys and rivers, hunting

down monsters and bad guys, and saving lives stem from the desire of students to do exactly that—experiment and get into the trial and error of different things. One thing is clear: by restricting so much of students’ freedom and free time, society itself is producing young adults who are afraid of going beyond the moratorium. On the other hand, is it really necessary to move past the moratorium as quickly as society expects, especially in modern times when doing so means mainly contributing to the economic activities of the state? Also, in any case what can be done to maximize the benefits of the state of moratorium?

A Lemon Bomb

In October 2005, when a bookstore in Kyoto called Maruzen was about to permanently close its doors, a strange but widely expected thing happened. People started leaving lemons on top of books in the store. The bookshop is famous as the setting of a well-known short story entitled “Lemon” (1925) by Motojiro Kajii.ⁱⁱⁱ In the story, the protagonist (the author) feels a constant pressure against his heart caused by “an indefinable, sinister lump.” He wanders around the streets of Kyoto wondering about the lump, dreaming of being somewhere else, and finds a beautiful yellow lemon at a local fruit store. He wanders into the Maruzen bookstore and places the lemon on top of some art books. In the end he feels happy imagining that he has planted a bomb that will blow up the whole shop. Since the novel became popular and even became part of the school curriculum, many people related and took the trouble to go to the bookstore and place a lemon on top of books.

And, as news spread of the store’s imminent closure, more and more people flocked to the shop to place lemons on books.^{iv}

The novel, especially its motif of “the sinister lump,” can be and has been interpreted in numerous different ways. Some argue it is about social anxiety during a time of uncertainty, or general melancholy of youth, while others argue the book is about the author’s own anxiety as he was gravely ill at the time and had no job, had accumulated debt, and so on. Whatever it was, because of the lump, in his imagination he decided to become a terrorist who would blow up a building. From a conservative standpoint, the author Kajii was a total failure. He remained financially dependent on his mother until his death at the age of thirty-one, failed school many times, never got married, never got a real job, and loved indulging in extravagances, including alcohol and women. Knowing that his lifestyle had caused trouble for his hard-working mother made him cry. As he died young, in the end, he never left the “moratorium” phase. Out of guilt or as an act of revenge on society he even thought of becoming a terrorist. What a deviant, what a disaster! Protagonists of most Bildungsromans usually do grow up. But in Kajii’s case the only thing that develops is his sentimentality and he never does grow up in the conventional sense.

Then why is it that so many people shared his sentiments and placed a lemon at the shop just like the novel’s protagonist? And, why did so many writers and critics hail the novel as one of the most important in modern Japanese literature? One reason is that “It’s about immaturity—drinking, debt, too lazy to study, illness due to neglect of health, etc. . . . we cannot help but be affected by these bad hab-

its due to our weak minds. We all experience this when we are young.” “The author dreams about escaping from reality, which is unreal, unrealistic and imaginative; and this is the very essence of youth. That means, students, because they are free from responsibilities, they are more conceptual, imaginative, unrealistic—all in all, they are immature and that’s the essence of youth.”^v

According to Akira Koga, the author of *Face of Novel*, the short story “Lemon” had been included in over thirteen versions of high school textbooks on Japanese literature by the time of his own book’s publication in 2004.^{vi} (The novel is included in junior high school textbooks as well.) To illustrate how high school students are affected by the novel, Koga quotes a high school student’s award-winning essay: “Every time I read this novel I feel like I can have hope. . . . I feel that the protagonist, Kajii, is willing to live. . . . Those things that I get from the novel are necessary for me as I want to change my boring daily life and myself.”^{vii}

Crucial to the success of this novel is the choice of a lemon as the key object. It is fragrant, bright yellow, fresh and sour—a symbol of youth and then also a symbol of big American capitalism. Also, you don’t know what will happen if you leave it in a bookshop. If you left a weapon you would certainly be arrested, but a lemon? You may be cautioned—the Maruzen bookstore usually treated lemons they found on their books as “lost items,” or perhaps a boy or a girl would run after you and hand it to you, creating a chance for new love to blossom. Or, people would simply think you were crazy. The result could be anything—sweet, sour, or bitter—it could go any way.

Kiss Kiss, Bang Bang and What? You Lemon Bombs . . .

American film critic Pauline Kael used the phrase “Kiss Kiss, Bang Bang” for one of her film review books after seeing it on an Italian movie poster. According to Kael the phrase is “perhaps the briefest statement imaginable of the basic appeal of movies.”^{viii} Using it for a title, however, reflects her hope that movies can be more than that. Suppressing students during a time when they are supposed to be experimenting has created all the fantasies and imaginings of students’ desire, as we see in manga/anime. And, it has become a spectacle. You are potentially an explosive hormonal bomb, a lemon bomb, and a bomb that can be culturally and artistically or politically explosive too. In her poem, entitled “Teenage,” Canadian artist and poet Alexis O’Hara thus describes the potential:

*i know you want to tell me you love me
when you fold forward sweet and sweaty wet
but hold your tongue, i’m still young
i’ve got some running around to do yet
let’s keep it simple sweetheart
have some fun, hon, and when we’re done
we’ll just move on
sounds good?*^{ix}

We are curious about what this person intends to do “when we’re done.” Or, maybe even she doesn’t know just as yet.

When I talk with high school student activists, I always notice something about them in comparison to older activists. Even compared to university student activists who are usually at the center of uprisings and revolutions in most places, high school stu-

dents strike me as presenting a “let’s just do it first and see what happens” attitude when they engage in activism—thank heavens and thanks to super moratorium, you people are experimenting. You do not even need theories or ideologies to drive your actions like your university counterparts do; you do not even need to take responsibility for your actions. You can simply act first and blame your hormones—“when we’re done, we’ll just move on, sounds good?”

Philosophical Goldmine

Philosophically speaking this period of your life is a goldmine. It is truly a crucial period in which future minds are developed; but also, it is also a period that can provide, if properly examined, a long overdue breakthrough in the deadlock of Western philosophical development according to Korean Japanese professor of philosophy at Waseda University, Seiji Takeda (also known by his Korean name Kang Sucha in Korea).

The history behind Prof. Takeda’s quest to enter the realm of philosophy, like many other philosophers, started with the phenomena of youth, that is, through a series of events, including heartbreak, that evoked a sense of loss and frustration. According to this respected professor and literary critic, those who have engaged in deep philosophical thinking and succeeded in bringing out a clearer picture of the world have all experienced a deep sense of loss and frustration once or twice in their lives in one way or another. The structure of this sense of loss and frustration is as follows: by the time you finish high school, most of you have a view of the world that is more or less transferred from or influenced by your

parents, schools, or friends, which can be happily shared with those around you. This is what Prof. Takeda calls “the first page of one’s worldview.” But after that, with new information and knowledge, a completely new worldview may open up in front of your eyes, and this is what he calls “the second page of one’s worldview.” The second page holds a significant power over you. You feel like you have discovered a totally new world that is so different from the world you knew before and it becomes the “truth” and “ideal” for you. You become excited and obsessed with these new truths and ideals, just like you do when you fall in love. Hence when you start to think you cannot fulfill this “truth” or “ideal,” or that it is impossible to realize, you feel a deep sense of loss and frustration. You feel like your world is crushed. Many people around the world and throughout the ages have experienced this in their youth—whether the ideal is based on religion to make the world better or Marxism to change the world. A youth who earnestly wants to change the world questions whether she/he can sacrifice everything to dedicate him/herself to a cause, or whether it is worth doing, and suffers. Hegel calls it “the Unhappy Consciousness (unglückliche Bewußtsein).” The crushed world, however, has a self-recovery mechanism and it fights back. This very process of the world being crushed and then recovering creates an opportunity for the most sensitive and conscious people to discover the meaning of life and the essence of their later ideas.

The period of youth is also a time when future philosophers and thinkers contemplate on the “self.” One of the most important streams of Western philosophy in the twentieth century is existentialism—a philosophy

that focuses on the self and the self’s own responsibility to life. According to another philosophical giant, Immanuel Kant, modern man is able to create his own moral rules through his own rational power instead of having them forced upon him by other authorities. Prof. Takeda believes that in order to truly do so one must acknowledge and understand the form of his/her “self-rule.” When you are in junior high or high school you usually make friends based on shared likes or hobbies. “Do you love this food?” “Me, too!” “Did you like the film?” “Yes, I loved it!” This is what Prof. Takeda calls a “critical” dummy, that is, a critical-like exchange solely based on “likes” or “dislikes.” When you grow a bit older, say when you start college or for some students even earlier, you start to use reason in your like-don’t like exchanges. Then your “like” becomes closer to a critical exchange. As you proceed, you start to become tolerant of the likes, or even opinions and ideas, of others. You start to socially exchange your self-rule. According to Hegel, human desire is a desire for self-worth—and since it is a value system it needs the approval of others. Each self-rule and awareness of it thus becomes an important base for winning the approval of others. In the present time, the philosophy of self needs to be developed more than ever before because this is a time when each desire, different desires, that is compete with each other. Your desire clashes with somebody else’s desire and it causes all kinds of paradoxes; many people feel these paradoxes and are frustrated. Your life and mind should apply to the problem of philosophy and time—thoroughly examining the process of developing self and self-rule at your age is crucial to understanding the problems of the

modern age and thinking of how to develop further.

Modern Western philosophers and thinkers such as existentialists have been particularly interested in the co-relation between cultural flourishing and individual flourishing. When you think of yourself by yourself (I call this “studying”) and develop thoughts such as affirming a will, etc., it creates or develops into culture. I have to emphasize this—“think of yourself by yourself”—I am talking about you, not as a person who passively listens to teachers and parents and memorizes and repeats what they say, but you as an actively thinking person. And remember, when you or your idea becomes culture you become universal and immortal. Now you can think of what “success” means in all this process.

When the curatorial team of SeMA Biennale *Mediacity Seoul* 2016 invited me to be one of the editors of their publication, I wanted to work with you because I thought your flourishing would offer us much to consider and many ideas that could turn into this perpetual thing called culture. I thought you would inspire art practitioners even more than you already do if we made you the point of discussion—yes, art and culture are activities of discussing and exchanging thoughts and ideas. Prof. Takeda, by the way, who thinks philosophy has long become too detached from people, also thinks it is important to return philosophy to its original form of forums and discussions rather than merely hearing and reading it.

Now you know how your discussion is crucial not only for the sake of your own development but also for the fields of philosophy, art, and culture. The key is to connect with fellow

critical mates and members of the public and create opportunities to meet, share, and discuss. And, we hope this publication serves as one of those opportunities.

All the best wishes,

Keiko Sei

i. In the other half of the stories, which are based on the medieval period, etc., even if the protagonists are not modern high school students, they are still mostly teenagers.
ii. Mouseike, “Fieldwork of Theater Culture—Festival/ Tokyo 2015: *Blue Tarp* by Norimizu Ameya,” <http://d.hatena.ne.jp/mouseike/20160127>. Translations are mine.
iii. The translation by Donald Keene that was used in his book *Dawn to the West: Japanese Literature in the Modern Era, Fiction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).
iv. Maruzen reopened its Kyoto store in 2015 with a “Lemon” campaign, placing baskets with lemons throughout the shop. The legendary shop also offered a discount to anybody who bought Kajii’s book, *Lemon*.
v. Tadao Sagi, “Lemon,” in “Reading Motojiro Kajii,” special issue, *Kokubungaku: kaishaku to kansho* [National Literature: Interpretation and Appreciation] 64, no. 6 (1999).
vi. Akira Koga, *Shosetsu no sobo* [Face of Novel] (Kagoshima: Nanpou Shinsha, 2004).
vii. Ibid. Translations are mine.
viii. Pauline Kael, *Kiss Kiss, Bang Bang* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1968).
ix. Alexis O’Hara, *(more than) Filthy Lies* (Montreal: Spaghetti Dance, 2001).

**The Objectives
and Structure
of the Publication**

Together with the staff of SeMA Biennale *Mediac-ity Seoul* 2016, I invited five Korean high school students to take part in the process of creating our own “textbook” in this issue of *COULD BE* as discussion participants and co-editors.

To begin with I picked some materials that might inspire the students’ thoughts and ideas and discussed these materials with them. This discussion became our little “textbook,” which will then become a point of discussion to include our readers as well as more members of the public. I wanted to use the form of a textbook for this publication because in Korea, as well as in Thailand where I live and which is currently under a military dicta-

torship, we see students protesting against the government’s revisionist interventions with regards to the content of school textbooks and curriculum. Also, when I was a high school student I felt powerless about the textbooks that the school provided because of their radiating aura of being untouchable. I want students to be aware and feel that textbooks are not untouchable; they are beatable and changeable, and even “creatable” by students themselves.

With this in mind, a week of activities in February 2016 was set up in Seoul with the five students.

**A Week with Five
Students**

The students greeted me with a hello. Yanny, a gentle girl, loves animals and wants to become an animal whisperer. Pooyo

is laid-back, loves eating, and doesn’t worry about her job situation or anything else. Zziru is a cheerful girl whose face brightens up like a marigold, and Ami, an attentive boy who returned to Korea from the United States because of his father’s work, is struggling to re-assimilate himself. Meanwhile Junghye, who sits looking straight ahead is articulate about problems in her society and how to go about solving them.

The agenda I planned was as follows: first, we discuss the five materials I have picked for a casual “textbook,” then, the students propose their own materials for the second and final “textbook.”



The First “Text book”

Five materials for the first “text book”:

One

A news story of a local train service in a rural part of Japan. The authorities decided to continue operating the train for a sole high school student.

In a small rural town in northern Japan the population has declined so drastically in recent years that the local train service does not have enough travelers. The plan was to cease operating the service all together because it was running at a loss, but after learning that one high school student was still riding the train to go to school, officials decided to continue the service until the student graduated.¹ I chose this story as material because I felt the story and accompanying photos, which show a silhouette of a student and a train, a tiny rural station, and an empty one-car train, could evoke the participants’ imaginations (as it had mine) as to what kind of life the student had, what her thoughts

were as she rode alone, what the atmosphere of the station was like, and so on. It would also stimulate discussion on wider social aspects of the story such as the situation of rural areas that young people are leaving behind, declining population, and public services getting scarce. The summary of the discussion is as follows:

- *There is no freedom for this student.*
- *This is not the most efficient way of transportation. Besides, from the student’s point of view, if I were in her place, I would initially appreciate their efforts but I would find it inconvenient because there is no freedom in my after-school life.*
- *Why doesn’t she leave this village all together? She has no freedom, and besides, she is now chased around by the media . . . poor her.*
- *I was inspired to create a story around this! A train driver falls in love with her.*
- *If I were she, I would be thankful. They run the train just for me—education is very important for us. See, thanks*

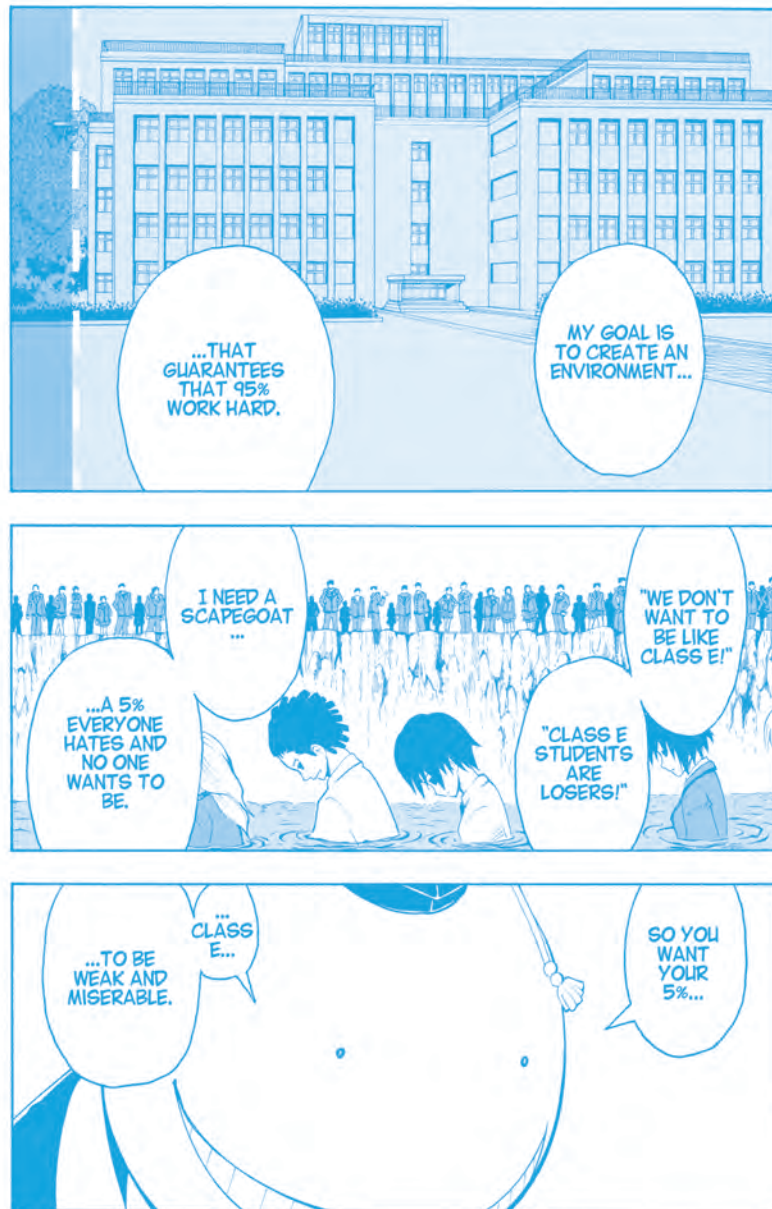
to the train she can go home, the home that she values. The train connects her school and home, two important places for her. Sure she has no freedom of movement, but freedom is a matter of mind too, so. . . .

- *I would even quit going to school all together because I wouldn’t want to cause any inconvenience. . . .*
- *To me, school is very important, so I would continue going no matter what method I had to use to get there.*
- *This story made me think about how education is important and should not be taken for granted. I think this student values education.*

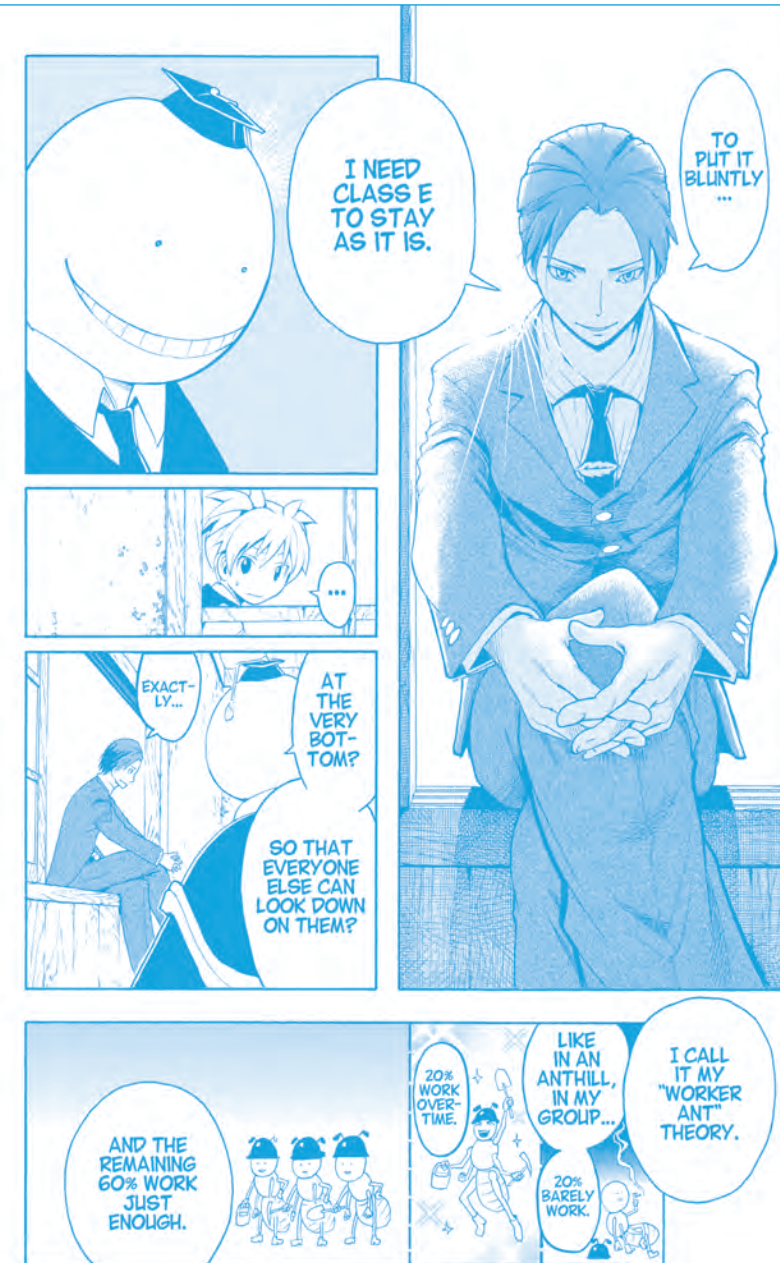
1. On March 25, 2016, upon the student’s graduation, the station—Kyu Shirataki Station—was officially closed after 69 years of operation.

Two Manga, *Assassination Classroom*

I planned to include at least one manga or anime because this was the starting point of my interest in the subject of high school students. *Assassination Classroom* is about students in a class called “class E,” which is designated as the worst class of an otherwise elite junior high school. These students are assigned to kill a new teacher, who is actually not a human being but an octopus. The stakes of this assassination are high—if they fail to kill him, he will destroy the earth as he did the moon, and so the government offers a reward of one billion Japanese yen to anybody who succeeds in killing him. The motivation of the students is high too. Because the students of “class E” are considered the worst, they have little chance of gaining success by following the conventional path of a better high school–university–job, but with one billion Japanese yen they would not have to



Yusei Matsui, *Assassination Classroom* 2
(San Francisco: VIZ Media LLC, 2015), 100–104.
ANSATSU KYOSHITSU © 2012 by Yusei Matsui/SHUEISHA Inc.



worry about following any career at all. Yet, something unexpected happens. While being trained by professional assassins and officers to kill the octopus teacher, the students start to learn much more than they would from their normal curriculum, and they start to discover their own skills and talents and gain confidence as well as deeper insight into society.

My reason for choosing this particular manga among the hundreds of manga about high school students, apart from the fact that it is enormously popular and so likely available in a Korean translation, was that despite the apparently ridiculous plot the story deals with the current problem of the fiercely competitive education system in Asian countries such as Korea, China, and Japan. In this system, skill, talent, and the potential of each student tend to be neglected while numbers and statistics are increasingly emphasized. Students are divided into different “classes” creating a

hierarchical social class system, and schools make students memorize data instead of giving them opportunities to analyze, discuss, and practice. In the excerpt I chose for our textbook, the school principal explains why he thinks “class E” has to stay at the bottom, while the octopus teacher, despite being invincible and not agreeing with the principal, is just an employee so he still has to lick the principal’s boots. The discussion with the students went as follows:

- “Class E” is being laughed at by students from other classes. If I were a student in “class E,” I would be anxious, wondering what we had done to be laughed at.

- It’s so inhuman to be discriminated against like this. We need to help each other. I don’t want this kind of competition in society and a society of egotism and selfish people.

- This story explains the serious topic of education in a funny manner.



Yusei Matsui, *Assassination Classroom 2*

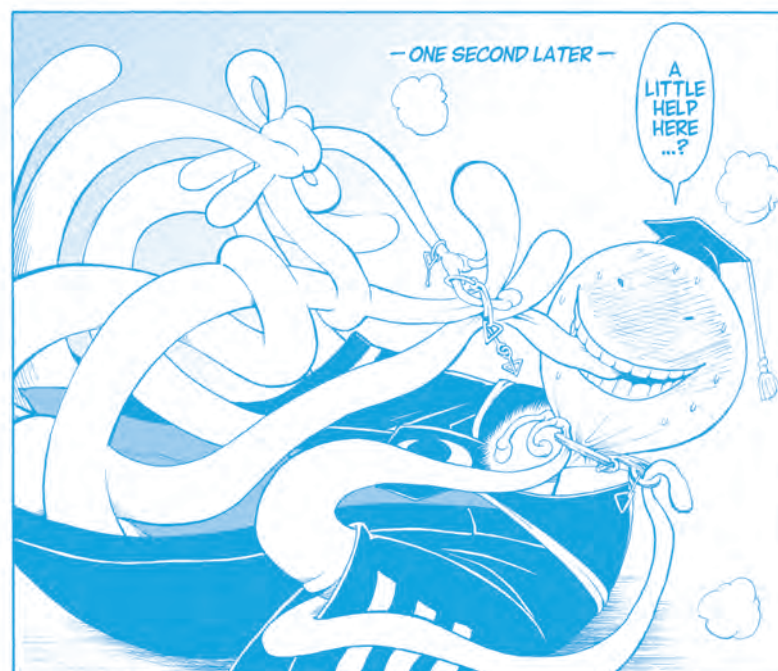
(San Francisco: VIZ Media LLC, 2015), 100–104.

ANSATSU KYOSHITSU © 2012 by Yusei Matsui/SHUEISHA Inc.



• I think this situation is similar to the one in Korea. Here too, they separate classes according to the level.

Yusei Matsui, *Assassination Classroom 2*
 (San Francisco: VIZ Media LLC, 2015), 100–104.
 ANSATSU KYOSHITSU © 2012 by Yusei Matsui/SHUEISHA Inc.



Three Play, *Blue Tarp*

This play is described in the introductory text. After watching parts of the play together on video, the five students and I chose the ending scene to be included in the textbook. Our discussion focused on the nature and role of theater and how the lives of ordinary people, in this case high school students, could be transformed into the world of theater. The students watched the video and were impressed that students like them, not professional actors, presented such a memorable performance.

Premiere of *Blue Sheet (Blue Tarp)*,
 Iwaki Sogo High School,
 Fukushima, 2013.
 Photo: Norimizu Ameya



Scene 11: That Day

Natsuki switches places with Izumi.

Natsuki:
Alright, then, this time we'll play a game of rock-paper-scissors.
Let's see, why don't you start from this end. Go!

All students stay in their positions and take turns playing rock-paper-scissors with the person next to them.
Natsuki continues the questioning.
The questions are as below, but other questions that come to mind may be added too on the go.
All students stay in their positions and answer "me!" raising their hands.
It is carried out, again, in a frolicking fashion.

Natsuki:
So, who just won at rock-paper-scissors?
Then, who just lost at rock-paper-scissors?
Then, who's a second year student at Iwaki Sogo High School?
Boys?
Girls?
Who's sixteen?
Then, who's seventeen?

Then, who's dating someone now?

Who's not dating anyone?
Who's living with their parents now?

Who's living just with their mums now?

Who's living just with their dads now?

Who's living with their grandparents?

Who has pets at home?

Ehm, then, who's living in Iwaki now?

Who moved after the earthquake?

Then, who had a house, within a ten kilometer range?

Within a twenty kilometer range?

Within a thirty kilometer range?

Who's living in their own house?

Who's living in a temporary house?

Who's studying in a temporary school building?

Who's thinking about going to university?

Who's thinking about getting a job?

Who wants to stay in Iwaki after graduating?

Who wants to move out of Iwaki after graduating?

Who wants to leave Japan at some point?

Who wants to be reborn as a human being again?

After this last question, Natsuki takes a chair into her hands.

Natsuki:
Alright, we'll play musical chairs now!

The students, making a lot of noise, gather nine chairs in the middle, and start skipping around them.

The sound of a whistle blown by someone.

The ten students rush towards the chairs.

One of them cannot sit.

It is not decided who this will be.

Each time, the student who could not sit takes a chair, goes somewhere at a distance, and sits there to watch the rest of the game.

The game proceeds with one less student at each round, and eventually, the last two remaining students circle around one chair.

The final whistle is blown. The game comes to an abrupt end.

Everyone leaves without saying a word.

Only Shigatatsu and Fumiya are left,

Standing by a chair absent-mindedly.

A little pause.

Fumiya, stands up, and starts practicing a dance on his own. He is muttering something to himself.

The voice may or may not be heard.

It is as if he is trying to communicate the moves of the dance, to someone who is not there.

Fumiya:
You twist your body to the right . . .
And then you get your shoulder in,
and boom, you kick the ground, boom . . .
Then your body tilts. . . .

These are words he came up with to explain the moves of his dance, but gradually, the description shifts to that of his house falling apart in front of his eyes.

He is trying to dance here in the present, while remembering that moment as vividly as possible.

Next to Fumiya's dance, which continues obstinately, Shigatatsu takes everyone's chairs that were used for musical chairs,

and heaps them up in a jumble. It looks like an oddly shaped tower.

The only sounds that are

heard are Fumiya's voice, his kicks on the ground, the chairs piled up by Shigatatsu, and the winds that sweep across the schoolyard. A long time passes.

As Shigatatsu finishes assembling his tower, he speaks to Fumiya.

Shigatatsu:
I think people, can remember, things they've seen.
I think people, can forget, things they've seen.

As the head counting music is played, Fumiya's movements and voice become bigger in his attempt to communicate.

Shigatatsu looks at him sitting on a chair.

As the music plays, Fumiya's dance eventually turns into the Running Man dance.

He appears to be running, but his body does not move forward.

Persisting with the Running Man, he continues to shout. His voice gradually turns into screaming.

Fumiya:
From here, the Running Man!
Run away! Run away! Run away! Run away!

From here! Run away! From here! From this place! Run away!

Run away! Run away! Run away! Run away!

Run away! Run away! Run away! Run away!

From here! Out! Run away! Run away! Run away!

Run away! Run away! Run away! Run away!

Run away! Run away! Out! Run away!

From here! Run away! From this place! Run away! Run away!

Run away! Run away! From here! Run away!

From this place! Run away! Run away! Run away!

Run away! Run away! Run away! Run away! Run away!

Run away! Run away! Run away! Run away!

The Running Man continues for a few minutes.

After a while, as Fumiya's voice continues to resound, the students return one by one.

Airi: *I'm gonna do a magic trick.*

Fumiya: *Run away! Run away! Run away!*

Airi: *Oh! A flower! Oh! A pigeon!*

Fumiya: Run away! Run away! Run away!

Hitchi: It looked like it could be a human being.

Fumiya: Run away! Run away! Run away! Run away!

Hitchi: It looked like it could be an animal.

Fumiya: Run away! Run away! Run away! Run away!

Reina: Ah, that black kite is thinking about eating me.

Fumiya: Run away! Run away! Run away! Run away!

Yuka: Mum is still watching TV.

Fumiya: Run away! Run away! Run away!

Yuka: She'll probably fall asleep before me.

Fumiya: Run away! Run away! Run away!

Momo: Hey, what do people sleep for?

Fumiya: Run away! Run away! Run away! Run away!

Izumi: The shape of the roof

is a triangle!

Fumiya: Run away! Run away! Run away! Run away!

Izumi: The shape of the window is a rectangle!

Fumiya: Run away! From here! Run away!

Yuka: I really wanted to have a gray cat.

Fumiya: Run away! Run away! Run away!

Shigatatsu: I'll say it as many times as I have to.

Fumiya: Run away! Run away! Run away!

Shigatatsu: I think that people can remember

Fumiya: Run away! Out! Run away!

Shigatatsu: Things they've seen.

Fumiya: Run away! Run away! Run away! Run away!

Shigatatsu: They can forget.

All the students return, and once again, each calling out a number as a

roll-call to verify survival, they line up as if the broken teeth of a comb were returning to their original place. The number eventually goes beyond ten.

All: Eleven!

Everyone calls out the number of someone who is not there. As they finish counting, they begin walking towards the back of the schoolyard. Fumiya stops his Running Man dance too, and follows the others. Only Reina stays there, and starts talking facing the front.

Reina:
At that time, of course I was not dead,
nor did I want to die.
I was just thinking, as everyone does sometimes,
about a world where I was gone.
Not about the reason why I was gone.
Are there any reasons for someone to go?
Would this school building still be here, or,
would that black kite be flying just the same,
if I was gone from this town,
if everyone was gone from this town?
What I was thinking about,



was just something like that.

As Reina finishes talking, she too turns around towards the back, and follows the others. Everyone who had left, face this way from the back of the school yard, and calls out.

All:
He-y! He-y!
Are you a bird?

Reina runs and joins everyone else. Everyone, once again, calls out towards this way.

All:
He-y! He-y!
Are you a human being?

Norimizu Ameya, *Blue Sheet (Blue Tarp)*, (Tokyo: Hakusuisha, 2014), 73–85.

Premiere of *Blue Sheet (Blue Tarp)*, Iwaki Sogo High School, Fukushima, 2013.
Photo: Norimizu Ameya

Four
Novel, *The Children Act*
by Ian McEwan

The novel is about a judge in London who must decide on many complicated cases whilst she herself is going through a troubled time with her husband. The story's main protagonist Fiona Maye is a respected High Court judge. She has been assigned to decide on highly sensitive cases involving religion, such as the case of a woman in the Haredi community who wants to send her two daughters to a normal school instead of raising them at home in accordance with the community's traditions. In another case, a boy who is a Jehovah's Witness suffers from leukemia and will likely die without a blood transfusion, which his parents refuse to permit because of their religious beliefs. He is three months short of becoming 18, legally considered the age of adulthood, but until then his parents have all the legal rights to decide his fate. But, Fiona wants to see for herself if the boy is capable of making his own decisions and so they meet at the hospital. Thus begins

10

IAN MCEWAN

owed to piety in order to be proof against an appeal. Outside, summer rain beat against the windows; distantly, from beyond Gray's Inn Square, tires hissed on drenched asphalt. He would leave her and the world would go on.

His face had been tight as he shrugged and turned to leave the room. At the sight of his retreating back, she felt the same cold fear. She would have called after him but for the dread of being ignored. And what could she say? Hold me, kiss me, have the girl. She had listened to his footsteps down the hall, their bedroom door closing firmly, then silence settling over their flat, silence and the rain that hadn't stopped in a month.

FIRST THE FACTS. Both parties were from the tight folds of the strictly observant Haredi community in north London. The Bernsteins' marriage was arranged by their parents, with no expectation of dissent. Arranged, not forced, both parties, in rare accord, insisted. Thirteen years on, all agreed, mediator, social worker and judge included, that here was a marriage beyond repair. The couple were now separated. Between them they managed with difficulty the care of the two children, Rachel and Nora, who lived with the mother and had extensive contact with the father. Marriage breakdown had started in the early years. After the difficult birth of the second girl, the mother was unable to conceive again, due to radical surgery. The father had set his heart on a large family and thus began

THE CHILDREN ACT

11

the painful unraveling. After a period of depression (prolonged, said the father; brief, said the mother), she studied at the Open University, gained a good qualification and entered on a career in teaching at primary level once the younger had started school. This arrangement did not suit the father or the many relatives. Within the Haredim, whose traditions were unbroken for centuries, women were expected to raise children, the more the better, and look after the home. A university degree and a job were highly unusual. A senior figure of good standing in the community was called as a witness by the father and said as much.

Men did not receive much education either. From their mid-teens, they were expected to give most of their time to studying the Torah. Generally, they did not go to university. Partly for this reason, many Haredim were of modest means. But not the Bernsteins, though they would be when their lawyers' bills were settled. A grandparent with a share in a patent for an olive-pitting machine had settled money on the couple jointly. They expected to spend everything they had on their respective silks, both women well known to the judge. On the surface, the dispute concerned Rachel and Nora's schooling. However, at stake was the entire context of the girls' growing up. It was a fight for their souls.

Haredi boys and girls were educated separately to preserve their purity. Modish clothes, television and the Internet were forbidden, and so was mixing with children who were allowed

a strange kind of relationship between the two.

I included this novel, especially the part where the protagonist judge explains the basis of her verdicts on whether to allow the mother to send her children to school and whether to allow the hospital to proceed with the blood transfusion, to focus on what is expected from children when they grow up and also because it shows us the official (legal) definition of what is expected from young people. This is the legal definition and perhaps the reality is something else, or, young people feel pressured by the expectations that are placed on them. I thought this would make for a good discussion. The students, however, were more interested in how a community's religious beliefs could affect its members, and hence the discussion focused on this subject:

On the case of sending children to school

• *The world is big and the community is small, but the latter is comfortable . . . so if I were this kid I would understand and need both the community and the wider world.*

Ian McEwan, *The Children Act* (New York: Anchor Books, 2015), 10–17.
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• *I would rather see the wider world.*

• *I would rather choose to stay within the community.*

• *If I were this child, I would tell my mum to divorce my dad and I would go with her to see the wider world. Living in the community is like living in a cage. I feel sorry for the unfortunate children in that community.*

On the case of the blood transfusion

• *Religion is bad, isn't it!*

• *If I were this child I would rather choose to die, since the likelihood of surviving the disease is not high.*

• *I didn't know that religion had such a big influence on family life. I'd like to think about this influence more from now on.*

Ian McEwan, *The Children Act* (New York: Anchor Books, 2015), 10–17.
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such distractions. Homes that did not observe strict kosher rules were out of bounds. Every aspect of daily existence was well covered by established customs. The problem had started with the mother, who was breaking with the community, though not with Judaism. Against the father's objections, she was already sending the girls to a coeducational Jewish secondary school where television, pop music, the Internet and mixing with non-Jewish children were permitted. She wanted her girls to stay on at school past the age of sixteen and to go to university if they wished. In her written evidence she said she wanted her daughters to know more about how others lived, to be socially tolerant, to have the career opportunities she never had, and as adults to be economically self-sufficient, with the chance of meeting the sort of husband with professional skills who could help to support a family. Unlike her husband, who gave all his time to studying, and teaching the Torah eight hours a week without pay.

For all the reasonableness of her case, Judith Bernstein—angular pale face, uncovered frizzy ginger hair fastened with a huge blue clasp—was not an easy presence in court. A constant passing forward with freckly agitated fingers of notes to her counsel, much muted sighing, eye-rolling and lip-pursing whenever her husband's counsel spoke, inappropriate rummaging and jiggling in an outsized camel leather handbag, removing from it at one low point in a long afternoon a pack of cigarettes and a lighter—provocative items in her husband's

scheme, surely—and lining them up side by side, on hand for when the court rose. Fiona saw all this from her advantage of height but pretended not to.

Mr. Bernstein's written evidence was intended to persuade the judge that his wife was a selfish woman with "anger-management problems" (in the Family Division, a common, often mutual charge) who had turned her back on her marriage vows, argued with his parents and her community, cutting the girls off from both. On the contrary, Judith said from the stand, it was her parents-in-law who would not see her or the children until they had returned to the proper way of life, disowned the modern world, including social media, and until she kept a home that was kosher by their terms.

Mr. Julian Bernstein, reedily tall, like one of the rushes that hid the infant Moses, apologetically stooped over court papers, sidelocks stirring moodily as his barrister accused his wife of being unable to separate her own needs from the children's. What she said they needed was whatever she wanted for herself. She was wrenching the girls away from a warmly secure and familiar environment, disciplined but loving, whose rules and observances provided for every contingency, whose identity was clear, its methods proven through the generations, and whose members were generally happier and more fulfilled than those of the secular consumerist world outside—a world that mocked the spiritual life and whose mass culture denigrated girls and women. Her ambitions were frivolous, her methods disrespectful,

Ian McEwan, *The Children Act* (New York: Anchor Books, 2015), 10–17.
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even destructive. She loved her children far less than she loved herself.

To which Judith responded huskily that nothing denigrated a person, boy or girl, more than the denial of a decent education and the dignity of proper work; that all through her childhood and teenage years she had been told that her only purpose in life was to run a nice home for her husband and care for his children—and that too was a denigration of her right to choose a purpose for herself. When she pursued, with great difficulty, her studies at the Open University, she faced ridicule, contempt and anathemas. She had promised herself that the girls would not suffer the same limitations.

The opposing barristers were in tactical agreement (because it was plainly the judge's view) that the issue was not merely a matter of education. The court must choose, on behalf of the children, between total religion and something a little less. Between cultures, identities, states of mind, aspirations, sets of family relations, fundamental definitions, basic loyalties, unknowable futures.

In such matters there lurked an innate predisposition in favor of the status quo, as long as it appeared benign. The draft of Fiona's judgment was twenty-one pages long, spread in a wide fan facedown on the floor, waiting for her to take it up, a sheet at a time, to mark with soft pencil.

No sound from the bedroom, nothing but the susurrus of traffic gliding through the rain. She resented the way she was

listening out for him, her attention poised, holding its breath, for the creak of the door or a floorboard. Wanting it, dreading it.

Among fellow judges, Fiona Maye was praised, even in her absence, for crisp prose, almost ironic, almost warm, and for the compact terms in which she laid out a dispute. The Lord Chief Justice himself was heard to observe of her in a murmured aside at lunch, "Godly distance, devilish understanding, and still beautiful." Her own view was that with each passing year she inclined a little more to an exactitude some might have called pedantry, to the unassailable definition that might pass one day into frequent citation, like Hoffmann in *Piglowska v. Piglowski*, or Bingham or Ward or the indispensable Scarman, all of whom she had made use of here. Here being the limp, unperused first page hanging from her fingers. Was her life about to change? Were learned friends soon to be murmuring in awe over lunch here, or in Lincoln's or Inner or Middle Temple, *And then she threw him out?* Out of the delightful Gray's Inn flat, where she would sit alone until at last the rent, or the years, mounting like the sullen tidal Thames, swept her out too?

Back to her business. Section one: "Background." After routine observations about the family's living arrangements, about residence of the children and contact with the father, she described in a separate paragraph the Haredi community, and how within it religious practice was a total way of life. The

Ian McEwan, *The Children Act* (New York: Anchor Books, 2015), 10–17.
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distinction between what was rendered to Caesar and what to God was meaningless, much as it was for observant Muslims. Her pencil hovered. To cast Muslim and Jew as one, might that seem unnecessary or provocative, at least to the father? Only if he was unreasonable, and she thought he was not. Stet.

Her second section was entitled "Moral differences." The court was being asked to choose an education for two young girls, to choose between values. And in cases like this one, an appeal to what was generally acceptable in society at large was of little help. It was here she invoked Lord Hoffmann. "These are value judgments on which reasonable people may differ. Since judges are also people, this means that some degree of diversity in their application of values is inevitable . . ."

Over the page, in her lately developing taste for the patient, exacting digression, Fiona devoted several hundred words to a definition of welfare, and then a consideration of the standards to which such welfare might be held. She followed Lord Hailsham in allowing the term to be inseparable from well-being and to include all that was relevant to a child's development as a person. She acknowledged Tom Bingham in accepting that she was obliged to take a medium- and long-term view, noting that a child today might well live into the twenty-second century. She quoted from an 1893 judgment by Lord Justice Lindley to the effect that welfare was not to be gauged in purely financial terms, or merely by reference to physical comfort. She would take the widest possible view.

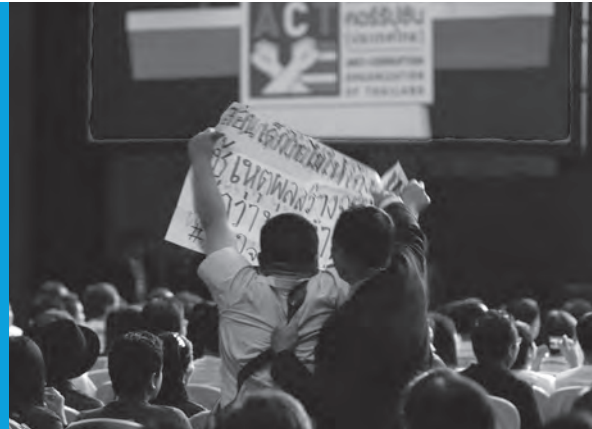
Welfare, happiness, well-being must embrace the philosophical concept of the good life. She listed some relevant ingredients, goals toward which a child might grow. Economic and moral freedom, virtue, compassion and altruism, satisfying work through engagement with demanding tasks, a flourishing network of personal relationships, earning the esteem of others, pursuing larger meanings to one's existence, and having at the center of one's life one or a small number of significant relations defined above all by love.

Yes, by this last essential she herself was failing. The Scotch and water in a tumbler at her side was untouched; the sight of its urinous yellow, its intrusive corky smell, now repelled her. She should be angrier, she should be talking to an old friend—she had several—she should be striding into the bedroom, demanding to know more. But she felt shrunken to a geometrical point of anxious purpose. Her judgment must be ready for printing by tomorrow's deadline, she must work. Her personal life was nothing. Or should have been. Her attention remained divided between the page in her hand and, fifty feet away, the closed bedroom door. She made herself read a long paragraph, one she had been dubious about the moment she had spoken it aloud in court. But no harm in a robust statement of the obvious. Well-being was *social*. The intricate web of a child's relationships with family and friends was the crucial ingredient. No child an island. Man a social animal, in Aristotle's famous construction. With four hundred words on this

Five A News Story and an Interview with a Thai High School Student Who Protested against the Education Policy of the Military Dictatorship in Thailand

High school student Parit Chiwarak, aka Penguin, stood up in front of Thailand's military dictator prime minister holding a banner that read, "Teaching Thai kids not to be corrupt adults must involve rationale and ethics, rather than memorizing civic duties. From the heart of a student to Uncle Tu." Uncle Tu is the nickname given to the Prime Minister. After the 2014 coup d'état, the military government imposed a list of "civic duties" (to prevent young people from becoming "corrupt adults") as well as their one-sided vision of "12 values" of the Thai nation, and interfered with education by revising history textbooks. Seventeen-year-old Penguin did not agree with the education policy of the military regime and decided to take action by directly appealing to the officials. In doing so

Photos courtesy of Khaosod English



"Young student removed after protest in front of Paryut," *Bangkok Post*, September 6, 2015.

An 11th grade student was forcibly removed from a packed auditorium where Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha was speaking after he showed a banner suggesting the subject of civic duties be removed from school curricula, claiming it could not train youngsters to fight graft.

The incident occurred when Gen Prayut was delivering the keynote speech to mark National Anti-Corruption Day. He was ending his speech, entitled "Government Progress on Anti-Corruption Reform," at Centara Grand at CentralWorld and had asked the audience if anyone wanted to question him, *Matichon Online* reported.

A male youth in high school uniform raised his hand and showed a banner containing a message that read: "Teaching Thai kids not to be corrupt adults must involve the rationale and ethics, rather than memorising civic duties. From the heart of a student to Uncle Tu." Tu is Gen Prayut's nickname.

Two security guards invited the student to go outside the convention hall but he resisted. The guards then used light pressure to escort him outside.

"Take it easy. He is still young. Take care of him," Gen Prayut told security personnel from the stage.

The prime minister asked what subject the student wanted to petition him about and instructed authorities to accept it on his behalf.

The incident stirred panic and curiosity among the audience but the situation returned to normal after Gen Prayut jokingly asked them if the student was a government supporter. "Hey, security guards, if he is [on the government's side] take

he became an overnight sensation among democracy activists—he has even been invited to discuss history with a renowned Thai historian—and has since continued to be extremely active in fighting for a democratic education system.

***Interview
with Parit Chiwarak***

Keiko Sei

I met the student who held the banner described in the news article, Parit Chiwarak, aka Penguin, three times. During the last meeting he agreed to give an interview for our textbook project despite the fact that he was in the middle of his busy examination period. Here is an excerpt from the interview.

How old were you when you experienced the enlightening moment that first got you interested in political and social problems and how did it happen?

I was 10 years old when I learned about the concept of "liberty" after I read about

the French Revolution. I'm not sure if I understood the concept well then, but now I think that "liberty" means you can do and think as you like. And when I was 14, I saw many demonstrations by the red-shirts in which they were using the words "absolute democracy" a lot.¹ So I started thinking about what democracy meant.

We are not a country of liberty and democracy, and at the beginning I thought it was the fault of school textbooks. But then I started to think that it was the system's fault . . . also the tradition, the tradition of people looking for a strong man. That obstructs citizens' political activities. So we need to somehow challenge the tradition.

What do you think is the problem with Thai textbooks?

In social studies-related subjects such as history, sex education, and civics, the content is fixed, although reality is changing. They review the content of textbooks once every ten years, and even at this frequency textbook publishers are reluctant to amend the content, and they also want to avoid costs. In

good care of him." His remarks drew laughter from the crowd.

The youth studies at a prestigious school and is secretary-general of Education for Liberation of Siam (ELS), a group of high school and university students advocating change in the Thai education system. He was taken to Pathumwan police station for questioning. A group of student activists from Thammasat University later came to cheer him.

He told police he wanted to personally give Gen Prayut a letter suggesting civic duties be dropped as a school subject. He was not sure if it would reach him if he filed it with a state agency.

His letter proposed that to instill anti-graft awareness in young people, the teaching of civil duties in primary and secondary schools must stop. Teachers should teach philosophy and ethics in classes instead.

He said the content of civic duties as a subject mostly told students what was good or bad and what to do as a good Thai citizen. This skipped the crucial step in asking the "why question."

"In real life, what will they do if they encounter a circumstance which is not in their textbooks? But if they learn ethics and philosophy they will be able to think and act by themselves on a case-by-case basis," the student said.

The student said he came to petition Gen Prayut without any hidden agenda and called for educational reform. The banner message was not violent nor attacked anyone, and so he should not be held.

Gen Prayut's representative reportedly reviewed the student's petition. Police did not charge the teen nor record the incident in the daily journal. They contacted his parents to be briefed about what happened before they took him home.

particular, content on subjects such as homosexuality, social values, and patriotism need to be urgently amended. The other problem is that when they explain moral and ethical issues, and even historical issues, it's like they are giving us commands.

If you were to make a textbook, what kind of materials would you include?

I would make the textbook only include hard facts and would use many extra materials such as small booklets and photocopies that include updated materials. And values and attitudes should not be dictated but discussed. As for the main textbook, the content should be decided through discussions and information on the contexts surrounding the facts should be reduced. Objective analysis and personal attitudes should be noted as "depending on individual view."

What do you think of students' participatory way of making a text book?

The textbook should be made with students' participation. The content should include the

widest range of views possible and not be presented as the greatest truth. For example, when they teach history, they should note that facts and truth are different things and additional analyses need to be provided. I believe that each subject has its own spirit, and if the textbook is well designed, students will for sure understand the spirit.

You joined the student educational reform group called "The Education of Liberation of Siam." What concretely are you guys doing?

We focus on youth empowerment, for example, fighting to abolish the standardization of students' hair styles and campaigning against civil duty study (for example, "12 values" that were imposed by the military regime).²

Your protest against the military dictator was a kind of physical performance. How did you feel before you did that?

Nervous . . . not worrying about getting arrested, but thinking of what I was going to say.

Lastly, what would be the "normal society" for you?

For me, freedom of expression is paramount. Based on this freedom, we are able to have doubts and questions. And when we have doubts and questions, change occurs.

Penguin noted that he still has hope for his country despite so much civil unrest and coup d'états because he feels it's improving bit by bit.

1. In the last decade Thai society has been divided into yellow-shirt groups and red-shirt groups. The former are pro-monarchy and against the former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, the millionaire-turned-politician. They even believe that a coup d'état was necessary simply to get him out of Thai politics. The red-shirts consist of Thaksin's supporters and/or anybody who opposes the coup d'état.

2. Thailand is now under a military dictatorship within a monarchical system with limited freedom of expression. The military regime imposes the value system that they believe is good for the country but many citizens, including students, oppose them. The 12 values are as follows:

- 1) Upholding the three main pillars: the Nation, the Religion, and the Monarchy;
- 2) Being honest, sacrificial and patient, with positive attitude for the common good of the public;

- 3) Being grateful to the parents, guardians and teachers;
- 4) Seeking knowledge and education directly and indirectly;
- 5) Treasuring cherished Thai traditions;
- 6) Maintaining morality, integrity, well-wishes upon others as well as being generous and sharing;
- 7) Understanding, learning the true essence of democratic ideals, with His Majesty the King as Head of State;
- 8) Maintaining discipline, respectful of laws and the elderly and seniority;
- 9) Being conscious and mindful of action in line with His Majesty the King's royal statements;
- 10) Applying His Majesty the King's Sufficiency Economy, saving money for time of need, being moderate with surplus for sharing or expansion of business while having good immunity;
- 11) Maintaining both physical and mental health and unyielding to the dark force or desires, having sense of shame over guilt and sins in accordance with the religious principles;
- 12) Putting the public and national interest before personal interest.

The five students seemed to have been deeply encouraged by the Thai student—when I asked which of the five materials they would include in an official textbook if they were in charge of making it, all of them chose this story although when I asked which one was their favorite, their answers varied. The discussion went as follows:

• *He felt he needed to protest! How deeply frustrated he must have been.*

• *What he did was very, very important. Human thought is powerful and important. In history class they only let students memorize dates, which I cannot agree with. I don't want our history class and textbooks to be like that.*

• *In history class in Korea we focus on memorizing dates, and I don't like it. At Haja center (where she currently studies) I can learn more about different communities and their histories.*

• *In Korea we have a class on morals and ethics. But do these classes make us good people? We must think about it.*

• *In Korea, many students can learn from him—they are frustrated but few speak out. There were so many problems related to the Sewol ferry incident, and more students should voice their concerns loudly.*

• *This boy makes many students realize the meaning of education and textbooks.*

• *This boy knows the difference between fact and truth. In Korea, right now, some people demonstrate but not everyone who does necessarily understands the meaning of the slogans on the protest signs. Some people demonstrate because they think it's cool but do they really understand the true nature of the problem? I'm not so sure. This Thai student, though, he really understands the problem through and through.*

After going through all the above material each student made his/her own suggestion of material for the second textbook, which is presented in the next section.

The Second “Text book”

Hate Comment

Yanny: I've been very active on Facebook for the last couple of years, and I've noticed that the problem of hate comments has gotten more serious recently. Usually a lot of comments are added to each post, and many go beyond just swearing. In fact, I've seen obscene references to sex as well as insults and ridicule of someone's parents or elders. I feel that reading such hateful comments to one's posts can often be more offensive and painful than hearing them in person, and yet many people don't seem to realize that they might actually be hurting someone. Also, people who just happen to read hate comments on someone else's posts are often offended too even though the comments are not directed at them.

I don't understand how it is that the people who post such hateful comments do not grasp the gravity of what they are doing because it's as simple as accepting the fact that what I find offensive will also be offensive to others. In fact, when someone responds

to a hateful comment with something similar in an eye for an eye fashion, the person who started the whole thing will often hit back with an insult against the other's parents. Things have gotten really serious, and it's not just on Facebook. Articles about celebrities generate lots of hate comments and sometimes the journalists themselves write about the stars in an offensive manner. People who post hate comments don't seem to understand that their words are hurting others in a serious way. This is why I wanted to talk about this issue.

Ami: Those people who put hate comments online, they are ordinary people like us, but they are narrow-minded. They think they are right and others are wrong. They don't think outside of what they already know. Growing up they may have been taught to react a certain way toward certain people, and when they see someone who is different or has an opinion different from their own, they don't know how to react, so they respond in hatred, confusion, and anger. I think this is the main cause of the hate comments.

Junghye: I think that smart-phones may have worsened the narrow-mindedness Ami talked about. We only see the world inside our smart-phones.

Yanny: That's because you can do almost anything with a smartphone. When you are young, you should really be out with your friends and playing, but nowadays everyone is just staring at their computers or their smartphones.

Keiko Sei: There is a difference between becoming more narrow-minded and the world getting smaller. Many people say that smartphones let you see and learn about so many things in the world, but when you are just looking at your smartphone perhaps you are actually not doing anything. I think it's especially important for students like you to travel the world, meet people, and gain a broader knowledge and more experiences. Unfortunately, everyone's busy looking at their smartphones, and this is a major problem.

Homosexuality

Pooyo: During a debate club meeting at school, my group had to pick a topic for discussion and write our own opinions about it. Our topic was homosexuality. I knew this topic was controversial but I did not take it very seriously. I thought I would just write a few rough sentences. But contrary to my intent, the subject remained in my mind for a long time afterwards. It was because of one of my close friends, who I thought I knew very well, was very strongly against homosexuality. What I have come across on the Internet on this subject has been mostly positive. People would usually empathize with gay people and say there was no reason to criticize them as long as they did no harm to others. I thought people with homophobia would be a very small fraction. However, during the debate there were a lot of harsh words against homosexuality. To me, it was totally unexpected. My homophobic friend said, "I am absolutely against it. Homosexuality should never happen." Then she brought up her religion. "My family members are devoted Chris-

tians. My parents taught me to detest homosexuality." It was a complete shock to me. Then I refuted her: what about those who are born this way? Just like we were born to love our opposite gender, they were just born to love the same gender. Try to put yourself in their shoes, they must feel so helpless. The feeling of love is very important to humans and it is one of the most basic instincts. Therefore, it is very unfortunate some people are trying to block this feeling. However, the responses I got were very opposing. My friend flatly denied homosexuality as wrong since she believes it is impossible for anybody to be born that way. Then I questioned myself about what religion was and whether homosexuality was innate or acquired. Now I wonder what most people think about this.

Discrimination against Alternative Schools and Teenagers Outside School

Zziru: Thanks to my open-minded parents, I went to a

cooperative daycare center instead of a regular kindergarten when I was three years old. Naturally I moved on to an alternative school along with the other kids at my center. Nine years have passed and I have graduated from the elementary and middle school levels and currently I am being home schooled as well as attending a travel-centered alternative school called Road Scholar. Therefore, I have never been in a formal education system in my life. Right now Korea has a bylaw regarding teenagers outside the school system. Yes, I am one of those "teenagers outside the school system." For 17 years, I had to endure discrimination and malicious comments. Here are two of the worst episodes.

One day, I was in a taxi and had a chance to chat with the driver. Like most people, he first asked me which school I attended. I was hesitant at first but did not want to hide anything. So I told him I went to an alternative school. Then the driver asked me if I had been in trouble at school. By "school" he meant a formal public school. I had to wave my hands in frustration insisting that was not the case.

To me, public school was a very brief moment when I was little. The air in the cab seemed heavy all of a sudden. Even with my answer, the driver had to ask me again if I had caused trouble at school. I had to explain to him that I had always attended an alternative school since grade one up until now. Only then, he seemed to understand me a little.

On another occasion I went bowling with my friends. We wanted to pay the student admission fee since it was much cheaper than the adult fee. The clerk requested to see our student ID cards in order to give us the discount. Since we did not have student cards, we showed our government-issued youth cards. But oddly the clerk did not accept these and insisted on student cards issued by a school. We challenged the clerk saying that the reason for checking our ID was to verify our age and not to confirm which school we went to. But the clerk would not budge. He asserted that the rule was to accept only student cards and he refused to allow our youth cards to the very end. This bowling alley still only accepts student cards and not youth cards.

Awareness of alternative schools has improved a lot lately and words like brave or cool can be heard once in a while instead of the usual words of bigotry and discrimination. Still, there are many prejudices in our society, which wrongly believes that alternative schools are just for those who are academically behind or for those who cause trouble in public school. Just like any regular school, some alternative schools have their share of “bad students.” However, we suffer these unfair preconceptions on a daily basis. Due to such discrimination against students of alternative schools, it has become our penalty to obsessively aim to go one level higher than public school students. There are so many things we as teenagers outside the school system or as students of alternative schools have to overcome in our society. I want to shout out to all those adults and young people who are prejudiced, “I’m fine!”

Riya Bhattacharjee, “Berkeley High Students Walk Out to Protest Racist Messages on Library Computer: Student demonstrators at Sproul Plaza said they feel unsafe after racist and threatening messages toward African Americans were left on a school library computer,” *NBC Bay Area*, November 5, 2015,

<http://www.nbcbayarea.com/news/local/Berkeley-High-School-Students-Walk-Out-After-Racist-Message-Pops-Up-on-Library-Website-341018802.html>

Hundreds of Berkeley High School students walked out of class Thursday in protest of racist and threatening messages that showed up on one of the school’s library computers. Throngs of students waving posters and bullhorns took to Milvia Street chanting “black lives matter” and “raise a fist if you’re not gonna take this” as they walked through Civic Center Park to Berkeley City Hall, demanding an investigation into the incident from school officials. The march—which Berkeley police estimate comprised of more than 700 people—ended on the steps of Sproul Plaza on the UC Berkeley campus, a site used for student demonstrations since the Free Speech Movement protests of 1964. “You’re the ones who showed us how, UC Berkeley join us now,” the students chanted during what Berkeley police described as a “peaceful and friendly” protest.

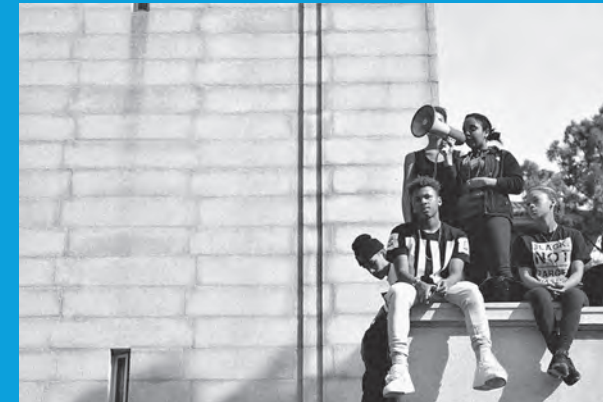
According to a letter sent out by Berkeley High School Principal Sam Pasarow, “the hateful and racist message” was discovered around 12:30 p.m. Wednesday and contained threatening language toward African Americans. The Berkeley High Black Student Union tweeted out a screenshot of the messages, which read, “KKK Forever Public Lynching December 9,

Our Voice

Ami: I would like to share with you this newspaper article and photo. My friends, who I’ve known for eight years and grew up with now go to Berkeley High School, and they recently had an extremely violent and racist incident happen at their school. It was a hate crime waged against the African American community which makes up about 30–40% of the student population. Apparently, a document with an extremely racist message and references to the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) was found on the school website. According to the document the authors supported the KKK and intended to lynch black people. It was an outrageous attack on the African Americans who are a part of the ethnic diversity at Berkeley.

The students took this issue to the school authorities, and they spent time looking for who was behind it. But at the end of the day, the fact that it had happened at all was a huge problem. They felt that something had to be done about it, because they saw this as a dangerous threat to their lives. So the whole school staged a walk-

Protest View, Berkeley High School, California, 2015.
Photo: Lucky Milo Whitburn-Thomas



out to convey the message that everyone's life has a meaning and that they all want to live together free from racial discrimination. Right after the fourth period on a school day, the entire student body of Berkeley High School, about 700 people in all, got together and marched to the city hall to protest. This demonstration was entirely led by the students. No teachers were involved.

I found it extremely inspiring that these kids, some of whom were friends I grew up with, had the power and courage to organize something that big. They thought there was a problem and that it had to be addressed. Instead of just talking about it, they did something. I was also very moved by the story of the Thai student who held a demonstration all alone in front of the Thai prime minister. I hope that students here in Korea can see from these examples that they all have a voice. I've seen many complain about things amongst themselves without taking action. If they feel that there are problems in the education system, for example, they need to speak out. I heard that they were scared

2015" and "I hung a n----- by his neck in my backyard," among other racist taunts. School officials announced late Thursday afternoon they had identified the student responsible for the messages. The 15-year-old student admitted to posting the message, according to Pasarow. The student is facing serious consequences, including suspension and possible criminal charges, officials said.

The Black Student Union decried the messages, calling it a "blatant act of terrorism." "The safety of Black students has been explicitly threatened, and we as the Black Student Union demand that this is addressed immediately by the Berkeley High administration and Berkeley Police Department," the union said in a statement. The statement went on to say that in the past, similar acts against black students have been ignored. Berkeley High student Lucy Rosenthal tweeted that students were feeling unsafe after seeing the messages. "As a black woman I feel terrified and I feel unsafe," said Berkeley High School student Aerin Creer. "They said a public lynching December 9. I won't be around December 9 because I'm liable to get lynched because I'm black."

Students said they were angry that the district failed to inform them of the threat right away. Even though officials found the image around noon Wednesday, the principal didn't email students and parents until later that night. "I take responsibility for that," Pasarow said. Pasarow, who was at the Sproul Plaza demonstration, said he supports the walkout, and would work to ensure a safe environment for students. "This is a hate crime and messages such as this one will not stand in our community," Pasarow wrote in his email, adding that both Berkeley High School and Berkeley police were actively investigating the incident. "We are working hard to create a positive and

inclusive school culture and we recognize the deep pain and rage that hate crimes such as this one bring to our students of color, as well as the damaging effects on our entire community," Pasarow's email said. "Even as we continue our investigation we recognize the need to address the harm that this has caused, and to that end we will be spending time planning as a staff about how to support and care for our students."

Berkeley Unified School District spokesperson Mark Coplan told the *Daily Californian* that the screenshot was left open on the library computer; there was no actual hacking involved. Berkeley Mayor Tom Bates and Berkeley Council member Jesse Arreguin—whose district includes Berkeley High School, and who was present at the student demonstration at Berkeley City Hall Thursday morning—also spoke out against the messages, saying that hate speech of any kind would not be tolerated in Berkeley. "I'm outraged at this despicable racist threat—it is totally out of line with Berkeley's values," Bates said. "These racial slurs remind us that racism is still alive, even in Berkeley." "Amazing! Way to Go @Berkeley BSU! I wish I was there," tweeted comedian W. Kamau Bell, who lives in Berkeley.

to and that they were worried about being the only ones participating. But unless you speak out no one else is going to agree with your views. I hope this can serve as an opportunity for Korean students to make their voices heard about things that matter to them.

Something New

Junghye: I have actually brought a book titled *Apartment Game* to talk about with the students. I read this recently, and it's about how the middle class emerged in Korea. My parents' generation was able to make a lot of money by investing in apartments. In Korea, we have a very unique system of leasing called *jeonse* that does not exist in any other country, and people were using this form of leasing to increase their wealth. In addition to the home they already owned, people would buy another apartment that was being newly built in a satellite city near Seoul and lease this out to a tenant. This caused apartment prices to skyrocket, and owners of these rented apartments were able to make income without labor.

Now, our generation cannot do this. The generation before us was able to because back then you were sure to get a job once you graduated from university, and you could save the money you earned for such investments. However, today, more than

Mr. K is of the generation caught somewhere between the downward pressure on apartment prices and the crisis of mom-and-pop businesses. This generation's misfortune will be wholly inherited by the members of their children's generation. These children will inevitably watch their only remaining hope—the possibility of inheriting at the very least their parents' apartments—disappear as their debts pile up. The great majority of them will never own a home of their own; they will become renters.²⁶

Mr. K was not quite through wondering about the gloomy prospects for the future when P entered, and he had to come back to reality inside his coffee shop. P was a college student who worked part-time for him. P went to a private university, paid for by a student loan, but he had to work to earn his living expenses. He was an out-of-town college student in Seoul who worked hard and was well mannered. As a parent himself, Mr. K could not help feeling sorry whenever he saw P. It seemed to him that a college degree these days was not much of a guarantee for anything, except in the case of graduates from the very few top universities. About 8 out of 10 high school graduates enter college in Korea. In other words, college entrance has simply become a rite of passage, shall we say, much like serving in the military.

Of course, Mr. K knew that there were plenty of parents determined to send their children to college no matter what, citing the fact that, on average, college graduates earn 1.6 times more than high school graduates. He was one of them. However, he did not believe that the advantage in the job market was due to any special skills or knowledge the children acquired in college. The fact that most high school graduates go to college does not mean that their intellectual capacity and scholastic

aptitude suddenly shift to the right on the normal distribution curve. Thus, the title “college student” these days means no more or no less than someone who puts his or her life on hold and makes acquaintances among his or her cohort groups while acquiring “specs,” or various certified documents for job applications in the future. Of course, it is no small feat to earn this title. Annual college tuition is approximately ten million Korean won. For students like P, it is not an easily manageable amount.

It is clear that P's strategy in life is already on the wrong track at this early stage. As a college student, he is buying the time he will spend being a “youth” with a student loan. He then sells this hard-earned time back to Mr. K for the low hourly wage of less than 5,000 Korean won. It seems unlikely that P will escape from the yoke of this very strange double transaction involving his tuition and his part-time wage as long as he remains a student.

Mr. K was now looking at P, hard at work cleaning the espresso machine at the corner of the coffee shop. And he asked himself, when in history was Korea ever not a class society? Perhaps the thirty years of high growth from the late 1960s to the late 1990s, which is when the IMF bailout crisis occurred, should be recognized as an exception rather than the norm. Mr. K and P's father both probably spent those years dreaming of living a fabulous life. But starting from around the year 2000, clearly demarcated tracks for winners and losers began to emerge, and everything went back to its place as before, as if drawn by the law of inertia. As he was reading the newspaper the other day, Mr. K became more convinced than ever of his own thoughts. According to the article, which dealt with the “2012 national scholarship applicants by income brackets,”

70% of high school students pursue higher education, and that means a university degree will not necessarily help us fulfill our dreams or guarantee a minimum income. Maybe it is now more important to find a way to make a living after leaving university.

26. If Mr. K were to apply to the 386 generation the same ideas about the “middle class” that applied to his generation, it would perhaps sound something like this: The 386 generation middle class swear that they would never repeat the misery of the earlier generation, as they frantically look for an exit strategy. If they happen be from out of Seoul, it seems that moving to smaller cities in their home provinces would be a rational solution. They could take into consideration the gap in real estate prices between the metropolitan Seoul area and the rest of the country. If they play the numbers right, this difference could mean a wider range of choices for the kind of mom-and-pop businesses they wish to operate. They could also take advantage of the cultural lag that exists between what is trendy in the Seoul area and the other cities, and they could use such a gap to develop a niche market. More than anything else, in a city outside of

the Seoul area, they could reduce the cost of living. How to put such a plan into action, however, is not always clear. The greatest obstacle is their apartments, which are now thirty years old. The first round of the mammoth apartment complexes that went up on the outskirts of Seoul during the Roh Tae-woo administration (1988–1993) now seem to be holding back many people like Mr. K.

What fate, then, awaits these old apartments in the many *sindosi* (“new city”)? Some would say, “What about vertical extension through reconstruction?” Well, people are used to receiving a completely new apartment in exchange for an old one. Leaving aside the question of who has any cash stashed away these days, who would want to pay for it even if they could afford it? This question would not disappear even if people were promised a bigger unit in exchange for their current apartment. If these people have to make contributions for the reconstruction, wouldn’t most of them prefer to sell their current apartment, add the money they would spend on the reconstruction, and simply move to a newer and better apartment, instead of opting to endure the not insignificant inconveniences of the reconstruction process? To start with, they would have to find a *jeonse* and live there while they wait for their old apartment complex to come down and go up again. How many would insist on living where they are now because of their strong ties

“40 percent of students from the top-tier universities came from the highest 10 percent household income bracket,” and in the same top-tier universities, “the percentage of students who came from the lowest 10 percent household income bracket hovered far below the average.”²⁷ Education was once a catalyst for upward class mobility, but now it is becoming a medium through which class status can be handed down from one generation to the next. As far as Mr. K could see, P was the victim in this process.

The problem is that P’s suffering does not end here. The *gosiweon*, or a single room occupancy (SRO) facility, where he currently lives is in the building owned by our Mr. O, born in 1962. The SRO units occupy the fourth and fifth floors. On the one hand, P’s life is on hold while he attends a college that makes shallow promises for a brighter future. On the other hand, he and the people like Mr. K and the SRO facility operator are fodder for the pyramid system created by the upper-middle-class property owners, such as Mr. O, who, shall we say, push young people like P into the very bottom of the pyramid. When economic growth reaches a certain limit and property owners and some in the middle class formulate a new survival strategy, they take the future of the “younger generation” from the lower middle class as their hostage. There is no surprise here. From their perspective, people like P, ignorant of the full situation they are in, must be the easiest targets. At this point, Mr. K also felt a twinge of guilt.

A part-time wage earner and a college student, and a debtor and a permanent consumer—what a schizophrenic predicament he is in. Once P is done working at the coffee shop, he will probably pick up a cheap roll of *gimbap* and head toward his *gosiweon*. His body will be heavy with fatigue as he climbs the

staircase up to his room, but the words suppressed in his heart will not be enunciated properly and will sink under his footsteps and scatter down the staircase. From a windowless room that is slightly larger than two meters wide and two meters long, he will look out at the world through the Microsoft Windows in his computer.

He will perhaps wonder at one point if what is inside his head is not becoming a small cube, like the room. But the wondering will not last for too long, for he will soon lay his body in the most comfortable position that he can take on a 180 centimeter-long bed. When he closes his eyes, the room will collapse and enter into it.

Haechon Park, *Apartment Game* (Seoul: Humanist, 2013), 113–116.

with their neighbors or because of their children’s education? Wasn’t a *sindosi* by definition a bedroom community? These are the “cities” whose inhabitants are on the move; they ride on the fast-moving tracks of the circular expressway around Seoul, ready to grab an opportunity to move into the city.

Of course, those who purchased their apartments prior to the market bubble at the beginning of the 2000s are in the best position to move out, because they can afford to sell at lower-than-market prices. At this point, they have to realize that getting the last dollars on the highest bid on their apartment is not as important as getting out of the market as soon as possible. In the meantime, while the market adjusts itself to such downward price pressure, those who bought their apartments at the height of the housing market bubble quickly come to realize that now they can neither sell nor hold on to their mortgaged properties; they will soon learn the mathematics of depreciation and the virtues of repairs and maintenance.

27. Myeong-seon Jin, “Seoul, Yeonse, Goryeodaesaeng samsip-o peosent ga ‘sangwi 10 peosent janyeo’” [35% of Seoul National University, Yonsei University, Korea University students are children of “the top 10 percent”], *Hankyoreh*, March 2, 2012.

Junghye: I am studying media and have an interest in art, and when I read this book I thought perhaps this situation is actually be to my benefit, because if you have nothing to lose, you can challenge yourself to do something new. I want to know what other students think about this. I think the belief that you have to have a university degree to get a job or do what you want to do has been broken. That's why I was curious about what other kids think about their future and whether they still think a university degree is essential. I'm sure there are many who do not share my view, but I personally think that this age when such beliefs are falling apart may be better for creating something new.

Keiko Sei: Don't misunderstand me, people can think like you, that this is a time for new things. It's very encouraging. It's really a good thing that people think like that so I'm not trying to discourage you. But that's an idealistic view. In reality, it's much more difficult. But to think as you have is always really constructive.

So I also propose to think about what that something

new could be. What realistically can be done? We don't have to discuss this now, but this could be where we start. I want people who see our publication to think and to share their views with one another so that the discussion does not end here. What we had was not a closed discussion. It was an open one because now we are in the process of creating a publication together. We have plenty of time together after the opening of *Mediacity Seoul* 2016 to continue this dialogue and to generate many more ideas about this.

COULD BE NO. 3 Special Issue of Chimurenga CHRONIC

Chimurenga*

Chimurenga's contribution to *Mediacity Seoul* 2016's publication project takes the form of a special edition of our quarterly, pan African gazette, the *Chronic*, which presents new sci-fi graphic writing from Africa and its diaspora.

The issue is part of Chimurenga's ongoing project to produce language that documents and interrogates our present while imagining what is to come. It aims to profile creative work that challenges the idea of the future as progress—a linear march through time. Our sense of time is innately human: “it's time” when everyone gets there.

Similarly, our editorial project challenges the institutional production of “African Futures” or Afrofuturism.

Instead, we focus on Technologies of the Sacred. Technologies of Dreaming. A world ungoverned by Western science, a world that requires improvisation at every moment (there is no routine in dreams, there is only the bewilderment of the constantly new).

And we approach comics and graphic writing as the medium that best allows for the super human and alien inside the human through its insistence to visualise the impossible.

Contributors to the issue include Hassan Blassim, Phoebe Boswell, Harmony Holiday, Nikhil Singh, Magdy el Shafee, Breeze Yoko, Native Maqari and many more. The volume is expected to be published in August 2016.

* Chimurenga, founded by Ntone Edjabe in 2002 and based in Cape Town, is a project-based mutable object: a print magazine, a publisher, a broadcaster, a workspace, a platform for editorial and curatorial activities and an online resource.

