

DEEP IN THE CITY - STANDING ON THE HINGES

“If only we could all be so lucky as to have a savvy artist design our lofts, our homes, our messaging packs! If only we all had the map sense to navigate in the troubled times and places!”

Donna Haraway¹



Excavation of the Jeju mok-office site. Jeju National Museum

Diving and stargazing are two essential actions to do in the Islands. Both have a connection with the unknown, with the mystery that always surrounds the abyss. Who knows if the absolute tension between extreme freedom and fear is the energy that fixes the feet on the ground. In the remote islands, the horizon is always a very thin imaginary boundary between two imposing forces: the infinity of the universe and the depth of the sea, both impregnable in its totality. It is a very difficult line for humans to explore, since it is there where they must deal with strong hinges, such as those between the visible and the unseeable, the sacred and the profane, sleep and wakefulness, the different layers of the unconscious, or between life and death.

Diving

For Centuries, in Jeju Island brave women continue to challenge the depths of the sea. They are the *Haenyeo* (meaning sea women), the freediving fisherwomen who turned the Patriarchy into Matriarchy undertaking the role of men when they began to collect the precious abalone from the depth of the sea.

¹ Haraway, Donna j.: *Staying with the Trouble. Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Duke University Press Books, 2016. Pg. 29.

It was during the Seventeenth Century, when a king of the Joseon Dynasty sent hundreds of men to fight at war while he kept reclaiming large amounts of abalone as a tribute.

From generation to generation, the *Haenyeo* have developed very sophisticated techniques to control their bodies underwater, as well as for breathing, such as the *Sumbisori*, the whistling they make in emerging to expel the carbon dioxide they have kept in the lungs after being into the sea for up to two minutes. On the other hand, they have accumulated a high level of knowledge about the ecosystem in which they are co-existing and where they catch conches, seaweed, octopus and slugs as well as abalones, harvesting while taking care of their seafarms. This is exactly their approach to the sea: as an environment to be respected, cultivating and preserving its fruits, since it is a treasured garden with a complex balance to maintain.

Haenyeo configure as well a strong and highly organized intergenerational community (some of them are in their 80's-90's, while they usually begin their practice in their teens). The *Eochongye* is the cooperative of this women society and it is organized through three groups, according the different levels of experience and skills, *Sang-gun*, *Jung-gun* and *Ha-gun*, with the leadership of the *Dae-Sanggun*. They all are aware of their condition of intrepid survivors. "When we measure the depth of the ocean and dive down one or two body lengths, we pass between life and death²". Always connected to nature, *Haenyeo* sing to calm the fury of the waters:



Map of the Jeju Island. Joseon Dynasty. National Museum of Korea

² Hilty, Anne: Jeju Island. Reaching to the Core of Beauty. Seoul: Korea Foundation, 2011. Pg. 64.

“As I enter the sea, the afterlife comes and goes...I eat wind instead of rice...take the waves as my home³”. Every February, Haenyeo across Jeju hold a ceremony in honor of Yeongdeung Halmang, the goddess of the winds, when all Jeju residents suspend all regular activities to celebrate.

Stargazing

Natural phenomena in Korea are traditionally interrelated with Astronomy, and for this reason stargazing is so important in Korean History. The oldest surviving astronomical observatory in Asia, and possibly even the world, is located in South-East Korea, at the ancient Kingdom of Silla. *Cheomseongdae* (literally means “tower for stargazing”) was built 1400 years ago during the reign of Queen Seondeok, the second queen of oriental Asia in History, first daughter of King Jinpyeong (princess Deokman). It was under her kingdom when Science, Arts and knowledge were situated in first place. *Cheomseongdae* is a tower without doors or windows, but with a big surface on the top, a sort of huge overture to the sky when the stargazers lie on their backs. The tower, which has a cylinder shape, is instead of a building, a device. It was designed in such a way that it did not receive the light of the Sun at the Summer Solstice, so it was used as a calendar, accurately indicating the passage of the four seasons; in addition, this structure functioned also as an observatory of the weather, a place from which predict natural and even political phenomena. And it has as well a strong symbolic charge: It was built over a surface composed by 12 stones representing the months of the year, while 362 stones were used to erect the tower, representing the 362 days in a lunar year. The stones are organized in 27 levels, representing Queen Seondeok, the 27th. monarch of the Kingdom.

Facing this inland observatory, is the remote island of Jeju, where it is historically believed that the longevity of its residents is so remarkable because they can see the second brightest star in the sky, as seen from Earth. It is Canopus, the symbol of longevity on the island. Connected with the infinite and the unknown cosmos, contemplating this star from the island is a kind of challenge to the secrecy and inscrutability of the Universe. Thus, the famous longevity of the Jeju inhabitants, is a victory.

³ Mundy, Simon: The sea women of Jeju. Financial Times, September 4, 2015. <https://www.ft.com/content/e1ec5434-50f8-11e5-b029-b9d50a74fd14> (consulted the July 24 th. 2018)



Medieval map of the stars. Jeju National University Museum

Inhabiting the hinges of the unknown

Both, diving and stargazing have a strong connection with shamanism: while the kings and queens of the Three Kingdoms period -as Queen Seondeok was-, could be seen actually as shamans, Haenyeo have their own songs, dances and shamanistic rituals. *Dongkimnyongri* is one of the most important rituals of the sea women, as is *Yowangmaji*, a ritual to call the Dragon King to pray for abundance and safety, and also *Sidream*, a homeopathic magical ritual to plant seeds into the sea to harvest an abundance of abalone, conches, agar-agar and hijiki⁴. Mainly women, *mudangs* are the masters of shamanism, the ones who mediates between the human beings and Gods assuming the identity of the spirits, personified in themselves. Because in Korea tradition it is believed that “spirits tend to inhabit heavenly bodies and geographic entities such as rocks, rivers, and mountains (...) and these spirits are, by and large, given human form”⁵.

In Jeju Island, due to the importance that the wind play in the lives of the residents since they traditionally earn their living at sea, the Shamanist rituals offered to the wind spririts are the most important. The Jeju Chilmeoridang Yeongdeunggut is a celebration through different rites held in the second lunar month to pray for calm seas, an abundant harvest and a plentiful sea catch⁶. In Jeju City, it is so important that, because it is distinguished as a preeminent example of a ritual to promote the welfare of the community, the ceremony was designated an important Intangible Cultural Property by the government of Korea in 1980, and an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO in 2009. The celebration takes place at Chilmeori Shrine, a sacred place that was originally located near the docks of the port, although today its remains (three spirit stones) are located side by side at the Sarabong Park. The transfer of the stones was due to the construction of a new road, while most of the accessories were lost in the process.

⁴ “The Haenyeo Community”. Jeju Provincial Self-governing Haenheo Museum. <https://artsandculture.google.com/exhibit/QQjXKL5n> (consulted July 25th. 2018)

⁵ Koehler, Robert: *Religion In Korea. Harmony and Coexistence*. Seoul: Korea Foundation, 2012. Pg. 19.

⁶ <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/jeju-chilmeoridang-yeongdeunggut-00187> (consulted July 27th. 2018)

Thinking-with from Jeju Island



Big phenomena like globalization and its effects, such as mass production, climate change, massive tourism and gentrification, are changing landscapes and societies through rapid processes without return. There are new hinges on the horizon to explore: those between globalization and identity, heritage and the future, memory and modernity and at the time, construction and destruction.

Namsung and Jeju Old Downtown are Jeju neighborhoods that are perfect places from which to observe and to analyze these phenomena. Standing on the hinges of the transformation processes that are changing the Island very fast, will be the core of the Global Culture Youth Forum Jeju, taking art, culture and youth as forces of change.

Namsung neighborhood, Jeju

As philosopher Donna Haraway has pointed out in her highly lucid last book, it is essential “to think-with”, promiscuously with other critters, “as microbes, plants, animals, humans, and nonhumans, and sometimes even to machines⁷”. And she vividly recommends tangling us (as if being spiders), as she is, in SF: entwining our thinking and action “in the poieseis -the making- of speculative fabulation, science fiction, science fact, speculative feminism, *soin de ficelle*, so far (...) SF is storytelling and fact telling; it is the patterning of possible worlds and possible times, material-semiotic worlds, gone, here, and yet to come⁸”.

Transferring attitudes of wise women as Haenyeo or Queen Seondeok to the future could be a good point to start imagining the cities and the societies to come. Let’s do it from Jeju through diving and stargazing as methodologies to approach reality, to deep in the city, rooting a community with art and knowledge, through the subterranean rivers, the volcanic cones and with comets through the sky.



⁷ Haraway, Donna (op.cit), pg. 169

⁸ Haraway, Donna (op. cit), pg. 31



Artist Kim Kidai studio in Jeju. Detail