

**An Experiment on One's Proximity to Law:
How to Find Your Position as Determined by the State**

Younkyung Lim introduced new projects —*Time-line: State Control Code*²⁰²⁰ and *Finding One's Position*²⁰²⁰— in her recent solo exhibition at The Reference gallery in Seoul. The exhibition questions the individual's position relative to the framework of laws and customs. To articulate this question, she examines state legal provisions contributing to the restraint of individuals' bodies, and the seating arrangements in a high school classroom. She invites audiences to a space in which they can explore their social status and role in accordance with customs, and as legitimated by the law. Rather than simply addressing a grand legal discourse, the artist seeks to create moments in which the audience can find their way to seeing unequal social contexts reproduced in their lives and environments.

Lim continuously conducts research on the social dynamics that account for arbitrary boundaries between private and public arenas. This research is designed to help audiences visualize the psychological distance between themselves and the law, particularly when witnessing how a private space can converge into a public space, or vice versa. *Time-line: State Control Code (My Birth Year)* contrasts the perspectives of participants seen in private places and those aired in the gallery space to demonstrate to the audience their relationship with the laws imposed to restrain their bodies, while *Time-line: State Control Code (Black Ribbon Band)* makes it possible to see one's own psychological proximity to the law by observing the entire process of sewing a black ribbon with statutory codes on a seam of audiences' clothes. This project provokes the question: how do these boundaries govern our individual social identities, and how do we perform them?

Time-line: State Control Code

The work you will encounter first in the exhibition space is *Time-line: State Control Code (My Birth Year)*. As audiences enter the first floor of the window gallery, they may spot the text on the wall announcing that the artist seeks a participant for the exhibition period who was born in 1986, the year corresponding with

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the 1986 amendment of 'Article 14 of The Mother and Child Health Act.' If Lim finds a participant whose birth year corresponds with the enactment, amendment, or abolishment of the listed legal regulations^[1] restraining individual bodies, including the above 1986 act, she then asks that person for permission to allow her to write the state control code in wet paint on the baseboard molding of their private residence. Lim also asks permission to use a live-feed camera to transmit an image of the legal code, painted on the crown molding or skirting boards of the participant's living space, to a monitor installed in the exhibition hall during the exhibition period.

Even though we live within the boundaries of the law and under its influence, we pay little attention to the fact that these laws' provisions are used to control or segregate others' bodies. Lim happily undertook the arduous process to enable the audience's conception of the enforcement of laws here and now. When viewers find their link to the particular laws that were enacted, revised, abolished in the year they were born, they may better sense their own personal connection to the provisions. In this way, participants and audiences may witness their own psychological proximity to the subject while the statutory legal codes are televised from an individual's private space to the exhibition hall. By doing so, the artist takes us to the point where socio-political events could enmesh with and intervene in one's personal matters.

We might think for a few moments the four screens display a still image, but we would soon realize that the image on the monitor is not a screenshot, nor the playback of a video recording, but rather a live-feed moving image in real time. Only the blinking clock at the bottom left of the monitor provides a clue that the image

[1] The Enactment of Korea's Criminal Act in 1953 - Article 269 and 270 on Abortion, The Enactment of Military Criminal Act in 1962 - Article 92, Section 6 "Disgraceful Conduct Crime", The Enforcement Decree of the Resident Registration Act in 1968, Article 14, The Amendment of The Mother and Child Health Act in 1986 - Article 14 "Limited Permission for Induced Abortion Operations", and The Abolition of Maternal and Child Health Act in 1999 - Enforcement Decree Article 15 - Compulsory Infertility

is a live transmission. If an audience member happens to notice someone walking around on screen, they would experience an "aha" moment, realizing that everything seemingly statutory is not always fixed, but rather living and variegated. Meanwhile, the participant at home might experience discomfort in knowing that their private space is in a way violated by the gaze of random spectators from the exhibition hall. This is the moment when the participant's house transforms from a private space into a public space. It is also the moment in which the viewers see how the laws inscribed on a person's baseboards could be likewise transformed into an object of art, conversely allowing them to see themselves as silent participants in the surveillance of the statutory codes.

There is also a window gallery booth with an empty screen, with a request for a participant born in 1986 to voluntarily participate in the exhibition. This installation allows for the work to relate not only to the artist and the four participants who have already permitted the use of their living spaces as part of the artwork, but also to the visitors—or even those who are willing to contact another participant born in 1986. This method of seeking another participant while the exhibition is ongoing emphasizes the contributory contours of the work, and exemplifies its method of composition.

While *Time-line: State Control Code (My Birth Year)* invites a person to open their private space to an exhibition hall, *Time-line: State Control Code (Black Ribbon Band)* invites participants to experience their most personal space—their clothing—as artwork in a public space. Lim impressed the white text of the *time-line* (of the nine enforced laws of the state restrictions on individuals' bodies^[2]) on a black ribbon, and then spooled it on an 8mm film reel installed on the wall. Her

[2] 1953 Korea's Criminal Act's Article 269 on Abortion
1962 Military Criminal Act's Article 92-6 - Homosexual Punishment
1968 Enforcement Decree of the Resident Registration Act
1986 The Mother and Child Health Act's Article 14 - Eugenics and Disability Discrimination
1999 ~~Maternal and Child Health Act Enforcement Decree Article 15 - Compulsory Infertility~~
2008 Hoju System
2016 Sex Work and Prostitution Punishment Act Article 21-1 - Stipulation on the Punishment on Sex Workers
2019 Constitutional Nonconformity to Criminal Abortion
2019 ~~The Disability Rating System~~

collaborators sew black ribbons on the large, semicircular shape of the table that stands against the wall in the exhibition space. The artist and her collaborators sew the ribbons of text, chosen by the participants themselves, onto the seams of their clothes as requested. This activity allows the audience to identify the politics applied to their bodies, as seemingly distant laws are now displayed on their clothes that they ostensibly wear to protect their skin. In this pop-up fashion event, people see their bodies transformed into the site of political and social debates regarding the justifications of the laws. The ribbons might arouse the attention of passers-by, alerting them to statutory codes—and perhaps these viewers share an opinion favoring social change. The work of visualizing the existence of the law through people's clothes does not present an opinion on the statutes themselves, but rather provokes consideration of these laws in order to articulate their injustices that restrain our lives and social environments. It's not the voice of an activist for a cause, but rather an invitation to discussion—and an observation of the state's presence in our daily life.

Interestingly, *Time-line: State Control Code (Black Ribbon Band)* can serve as a souvenir for those who either witness or participate in the work. Its exhibition is not necessarily confined within the gallery, nor does it exist solely during the exhibition period. While in public, others encounter the ribbon *time-line* text of the state's enforced law sewn onto the participants' clothes, allowing them to initiate a conversation about the statutes that restrain their bodies. There is an unpredictable subjectivity in this exchange as it is unmoderated and spontaneous—the methods vary, but the effects ripple outward. In this sense, this artwork succeeds in exponentially increasing its reach beyond the limited space of the art gallery hall. Once the participants leave the hall, the work departs from the artist's hands and its duration is indeterminate. More importantly, Lim's process leads to the work's recontextualization through the process of conversation between the public, the participant, and the artist.

At first glance it might not seem particularly difficult to participate in *Time-line: State Control Code (Please fill out your resident registration number)*, but upon closer inspection it becomes obvious to the viewer why it

would require courage. A participant might feel more at ease allowing their clothes to be sewn and altered than writing their residence registration number (RRN) on the blank boxes drawn on the exhibition wall. Since a series of 13-digit numbers are used for one's identification, it is critical to the protection of privacy that one does not disclose ID numbers. However, writing one's personal ID number in a public space can be seen as an act of resistance to the state itself. A more interesting aspect, perhaps, is that participants soon realize the fact that their privacy protection occurs only when others overwrite their own personal identification number in the same space. When someone else's ID number overlaps with their own, the participant sees their personal ID turn into an anonymous yet collective activity. This clearly shows that the act of writing their ID number over those of others removes their unique identifier and no longer singles them out with 13 digits under the control of the law.

Finding One's Position

Finding One's Position begins the discussion with three high school students sitting around a school desk and chair. There are three seats available on the points of a triangle and a school desk in the center. It is notable that the seats of the three benches are the ones extending from the school chair, which cannot stand alone. They are propped against the two open sides of the chair in the center. Three students are invited to take a seat on the points of the triangle in order to determine which arrangement of the desks and chairs would best suit teamwork in the classroom. The three participants, sitting around the desk, find themselves in a position where they can better collaborate with one another to find an optimal use of the desk and seats, instead of keeping a conventional students' seating arrangement. The four video projections in the gallery record the entire process of the two student groups' debate on the advantages and disadvantages of their arrangements, and the process of helping one another rearrange the desks and chairs in the class in the manner determined via the discussion.

This classroom setting can be viewed as a micro-social setting that describes how individuals can

voice their own opinions of their position and role in relation to the institution. Instead of blindly accepting pre-arranged seating typical of most Korean schools, this work provides an opportunity in which individual participants can publicly consider how and where to position themselves. An interesting observation was the unanimous opinion that the existing classroom setting, centered on the teacher's desk (gyutak), should change. The existing conventional layout of a classroom is a longstanding fixture in the same society that, over the course of decades, has amended and abolished laws. A view towards determining the appropriate position of the individual could in turn serve as a meaningful starting point for a wider societal discussion.

While Lim's previous works (such as *Q&A*) reflect her personal experiences, *Time-line: State Control Code* attempts to explore public issues to find one's place therein. This work suggests that an assessment of one's role in society, and wider social responsibilities, can derive from the act of making relationships with others. The possibility of social change matters not only to the party directly affected by the provisions of the law, but also to others who are not even subject to the law. The artist once said, "It can be burdensome to bring outsiders into my work because this often brings along uncontrollable variables." Nonetheless, she emphasizes the importance of collaboration when it comes to taking audiences to a site at which empathy can occur. Interestingly, this work allows participants to work together, even if they have conflicting views about participating in the project. In placing participants at the relevant point where they can visualize and reflect upon the boundaries between individuals, and the provisions of laws, social institutions and rules, the work proposes deriving "one's position" through dynamic communication, rather than didactic instructions.