13 Pacific Rim Digital Modernism: The Electronic Literature of Young-hae Chang Heavy Industries

JESSICA PRESSMAN

Young-hae Chang Heavy Industries (YHCHI) is the name of the collaborative duo responsible for some of the most innovative electronic literature online. Situated in Seoul, South Korea, Young-hae Chang and Marc Voge push the boundaries of their art form and our expectations of it. But why should they be included in a collection on modernism? As previous essays in this volume have shown, modernism is an assemblage of pluralities that spans geographic and temporal boundaries. This fact is made vitally and visually evident by the latest iteration of modernism: the contemporary movement I call 'digital modernism.'[1] In this essay, I introduce digital modernism by way of the example provided by YHCHI, arguing that the work of these Korea-based writers exemplifies digital modernism because it consciously challenges assumptions about electronic literature and promotes reconsideration of how modernism operates in contemporary culture. The result is an opportunity to read both contemporary and canonical literature through a digitally informed lens.

Digital modernism is a strategy shared by writers across literary genres and programming platforms, writers who adopt and allude to literary modernism; they adapt aesthetic techniques and seminal works from the modernist canon to construct immanent critiques about a contemporary culture that privileges images, navigation, and interactivity over narrative, reading, and textuality. The result: works of predominantly textual web-based literature that are aesthetically difficult and ambivalent in their relationship to mass media and popular readership. Digital modernism is not just an example of postmodern pastiche or retro-remixing but, rather, part of a larger cultural project that produces serious literature and promotes critical reading practices both online and in our digital culture at large.
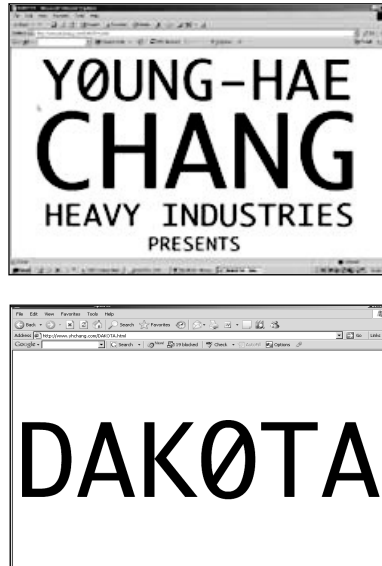
Figure 13.1 The opening screens of *Dakota*. All images in this chapter are by Young-hae Chang Heavy Industries are used with permission from the artists.

To examine how digital modernism operates and the ways in which it has an impact on our understanding of modernism, I turn to YHCHI's *Dakota* (2002) and *The Art of Sleep* (2006). These works in turn return to modernist strategies of crafting, conceptualizing, and presenting literary art as a means of situating literature and critical reading practices at the centre of contemporary culture. Reading YHCHI as digital modernists enables us to see how these Pacific Rim writers uphold the stakes of modernism, pushing it in new ways and into new media, to identify the Internet as a space for reading and thinking about modernism.

The title of the literary partnership, Young-hae Chang Heavy Industries, implies a merger between high art – with its serious, 'heavy,' affect – and the popular culture of mass-produced 'industries.' This convergence, we will see, is central to the aesthetic presented in the individual works. The Flash-based, flashing texts contain narratives that straddle high and low as well as the local and the global: the specificities of life in Korea and the experiences of living in a global network connected by the World Wide Web. YHCHI both revels in and critiques Internet culture. Its works are all accessible free of charge on its website (www. yhchang.com) and are available in a variety of languages: English,

Korean, Spanish, French, German, Dutch, and Japanese. Despite this free and global impulse, however, YHCHI uses English as its primary language. Chang, one half of YHCHI, explains the decision: 'I am very conscious of working on the world wide web. Often, I first make my pieces in English, which is synonymous with globalism.'[2] The result is an oeuvre that both engages and critiques a globally networked, multi-lingual readership as well as its reading practices.

YHCHI pursues this dual agenda by adapting formal techniques from literary modernism and remediating them in Flash. Sleek black text, capitalized and unornamented, in Monaco font flashes against a stark white background. The minimalist aesthetic visually harkens back to the avant-garde experiments in typography from the beginning of the twentieth century, while the large letters scream at the reader in the manifesto tone of the modernist period. Individual words and phrases pulse out from centre-screen to take possession of the white surface before they are replaced by more text. YHCHI's works are pro-grammed in Flash and create a speeding synchronization of text to jazz music, the musical sibling of the modernist era. As the music speeds up, so does the text. There are no control buttons, no options to pause or slow the work. Instead, the animation proceeds by flashing to the music's beat, often at speeds that render the text illegible. The effect is a visual onslaught of text that produces an affect of difficulty through illegibility. This is a conscious choice on the part of the writers; YHCHI explains, 'We present our work the way we do to make it indeed more difficult.'[3]

For a work of online literature to strive for an aesthetic of inaccessibil-ity may seem counter-intuitive, but this paradox is central to YHCHI's project and to their digital modernist status. John Guillory argues that the canonization of modernism by the New Critics depended on the difficulty of these texts, making difficulty an identifiable aspect of mod-ernist literature.[4] As Leonard Diepeveen explains, difficulty became 'a litmus test' not only for modernist works but also for their readers, a test through which 'one could predict both a given reader's response to modernism by his or her reaction to difficulty, and a writer's place in the canon by the difficulty of his or her work.'[5] YHCHI generates aesthetic difficulty couched in visual illegibility to draw upon a form of modernist 'cultural capital' and create a 'litmus test' that identifies serious literature online.

As becomes particularly and painfully obvious to the unblinking and dry-eyed reader, YHCHI employs speed as a technical tool to enhance

the work's difficulty and promote an acute awareness of the material conditions and constraints of reading text onscreen. Craig Dworkin reads the aesthetics of illegibility in postmodern poetics and describes how print poets, such as Charles Bernstein and Susan Howe, strive for illegibility using such practices as overprinting with the goal of 'retarding the automatic process of reading, much less any speed-reading, and frustrating that illusion of the blank page.'[6] YHCHI produces both of the effects that Dworkin describes by digitizing the print practice of layering words on top of one another. Their speeding textual montages are, in effect, palimpsests that promote and destabilize the reading process. The reader must speed-read to keep up with the pace of the flashing text, but even the most diligent and attentive reader soon realizes that one read-through will not yield a thorough understanding of the content. Rereading thus becomes an implicit aspect and agenda of YHCHI's aesthetic.

One effect of this aesthetic resonates with the experimental print poetics Dworkin describes: YHCHI's Flash-ing works 'frustrate' the 'illusion' of a 'blank,' flat screen. All digital works are in fact performances of processed codes enacted across levels of languages within the computer whose end-products appear on the screen. YHCHI employs various methods to make the reader aware that the flat surface on which the text appears is actually, as Katherine Hayles calls it, 'deep.'[7] For example, the artists program into their animated performance the visual appearance of depth onscreen: dynamic text is often swallowed up into a white vortex of the screen.[8] Unlike the print poetry Dworkin examines, however, YHCHI's text evades reader control not only aesthetically but actually. The writers heighten the real-time performativity of electronic literature and refuse reader-controlled interactivity in an effort to remind the reader that the screen shields, and thus makes illegible, the coded processes that enable the text to appear on it. The hidden nature of the programming code reflects the fact that the reader is not alone in engaging with the text, for the computer, too, is reading.

YHCHI's work depends upon the tension between the visible and the obfuscated, the legible and the illegible, at the levels both of the screen and the code. In contrast to HTML, the building block of the World Wide Web, Macromedia Flash is a proprietary platform that hides its source code from the reader. Whereas most Flash files can be downloaded into a Flash player and the code made accessible through the reader's effort, YHCHI disables this option. Not only is some of the onscreen text obfuscated but so too are the central codes of the work:

literally, the programming codes. This foregrounding of the reader's inability to coherently access the work 'frustrates' another 'illusion' associated with the printed page: the critical strategies inherited from the New Critics for analysing modernist literature. YHCHI's digital, speeding text disturbs the New Critical assumption that close reading can illuminate the central operations of the literary work. Simultaneously, however, YHCHI prompts readers to pursue a New Critical approach when reading the Flash-ing texts. In authorial statements, YHCHI claims that *Dakota* is 'based on a close reading of Ezra Pound's *Cantos* part I and part II.'[9] The statement is both a declaration of alignment with modernism and also an invitation to read *Dakota* by close reading it. One look at *Dakota*'s flashing text, however, prompts the question: how do we close read this work? How do we analyse the formal structure and metaphorical content of a work that uses its medial format to consciously evade such investigations? *Dakota*'s poetics may be closer to those of film or performance art than literature, but the authors consciously situate their work in a literary context and encourage readers to read it in relation to Pound's *Cantos*.

The process of reading *Dakota* by close reading and comparing it to Pound's magnum opus illuminates how modernism operates in contemporary, digital literature and also how contemporary, digital literature operates in discussions of Pacific Rim modernisms. *Dakota* begins *in medias res*, in the middle of a road-trip narrative. The narrator and his booze-loving buddies enter the Badlands of South Dakota. *Dakota* opens mid-sentence and mid-action, with the shock of obscenity in large, capitalized letters: 'FUCKING – WALTZED – ØUT – TØ THE CAR – PUT THE KEY IN – THE IGNITIØN – READY TØ HIT THE RØAD.'[10] Although the language, setting, and mode of action have changed, the plot follows the opening of Pound's first canto, which follows a section from Book XI of Homer's *Odyssey*. *The Cantos* begins with Odysseus and his men plunging into the Underworld: 'And then went down to the ship, / Set keel to breakers, forth on the godly sea.'[11] In YHCHI's digital remix, a car replaces the ship, the Badlands supplant the Underworld, and the epic quest is filled with clichés rather than conquests; yet, the parallels are undeniable. I will not go into detail explicating the adaptation of the epic travel narrative here, for I have done that work elsewhere.[12] Instead, I turn to *Dakota*'s enigmatic ending, which is particularly relevant to examining the Pacific Rim aspect of YHCHI's digital modernism.

As *Dakota* speeds toward its end (the work runs 5:56 minutes), the

narrative takes a surprising turn. The story of a teenage road trip frays into fragmentation, and the lyric voice of the modernist narrator shifts abruptly from an internal mindscape to a geographical location that is not only external to the narrator's individual consciousness but also to the national boundaries circumscribed by the American road trip. The narrator is no longer listening to the recording of Art Blakey's drum solo on a car radio while driving across South Dakota but is instead listening 'RIGHT – HERE! – I – MEAN – HØNESTLY, – IN PALPAN-/ DØNG!' Palpan-Dong is a street in Seoul, the home of YHCHI, and the sequence opens up *Dakota* to new interpretative options: is the narrator located in Seoul and fantasizing about an American road trip? This shift in location is particularly surprising and substantive because it reconfigures the significance of the ubiquitous stereotypical allusions to American culture that populate the narrative. For example, the characters eat 'HAM – AND – CHEESE – SANDWICHES' while dreaming about Elvis and Marilyn Monroe ('MARILYN, – YØU ØWNED/ THE – SILVER / SCREEN, – CLØTHED/ ØR NAKED, – WEARING/ JUST/ CHANNEL – NØ. 5'). With the shift of 'here-ness' from South Dakota to South Korea, Korean imagery – 'GINSING,' 'SAMSUNG' – proliferates and turns the focus from a clichéd American culture to a stereotypical Korean one: 'KØREAN GEISHAS' appear with 'STØCKINGED THIGHS,' and 'SØUSED EXECUTIVES – FRØM KANGNAM' / 'PAY A LØT for them 'TØ LAUGH' at 'EVERY LAME JØKE.'

What is the effect of this shift? Is it an expression of the racial ventriloquism that, as Michael North argues, is central to modernism?[13] Or is it a critique of the contemporary concept that the Internet enables identity 'passing'?[14] Perhaps *Dakota*'s deployment of cultural stereotypes comments on its source material, modernist persona Ezra Pound and his *Cantos*, whose poetics depend, particularly, upon the appropriation of cultural references from the Asian East. This shift in perspective and location near *Dakota*'s ending prompts the reader to reconsider the narrative and her interpretations of it. In other words, it demands rereading – an effect echoed in *Dakota*'s final act of programming as the work loops back to the beginning, reloads, and begins again. *Dakota*'s ending situates the Pacific Rim as central to its adaptation of Pound's *Cantos* and, thus, identifies the region as central to contemporary efforts to reread and rethink modernism.

Digital modernism seeks to challenge the status quo of electronic literature, and for YHCHI this confrontation is expressed by challenging the status quo of contemporary Korean culture. In an interview YHCHI

states, 'Korea isn't very interested in literature.'[15] To rectify this situation, the writers seek to redefine what literature is by attracting a particular readership. YHCHI's eye-popping, energetic works appeal to both a popular audience that responds to its heavy beat and retro style and to those whose keen interest in literature propels comparative close readings between *Dakota* and *The Cantos*. This dual approach to attracting attention to its literature enables YHCHI to inhabit a position both inside and outside the literary establishment. The authors' relationship to Korea's art institutions is one of self-proclaimed outsiders, a position that propels their modernist challenge to the status quo. In an interview with one half of YHCHI, Young-hae Chang, the artist expresses strong views about Korean culture and the art it produces: 'The Korean education system, whether it be art education or another, is at the root of most of the prejudice, conceit and intellectual laziness in Korea. A Korean diploma usually signals the end and not the beginning of thinking. The same goes for a Korean art diploma.'[16] Chang revels in the fact that she has no formal artistic training: 'And now that I make web art, I'm an outsider. Phew.'[17]

It is from this position outside the system that Chang receives a commission from a leading institution in the art world to produce a work of web-art. The result of this commission is *The Art of Sleep*. Modernism teaches us about this paradoxical situation: rebellious art demands the dedicated attention of the reader and, in particular, the professional reader or critic. Through the work of these particular readers, the experimental work becomes part of the canon. YHCHI expresses awareness of and complicity with this process. The writers claim (or feign) disinterest in lofty cultural ambitions for their work: 'I take the attitude that art has no important place in society,' Chang has stated, 'Or rather, professional art is less essential to our lives than the personal esthetics of day to day living. That's why I like being an artist. Because it's unimportant.'[18] Such a statement might seem to express an anti-modernist stance, but the opposite is true. Chang inhabits the position of her modernist persona, Ezra Pound, when she claims that art should not be didactic but, rather, essential to culture (or, in Pound-speak, 'Kulchur'). Even as the writers of YHCHI denounce 'professional art,' they express a desire to have their amateur works taken seriously by professional readers. In an interview, they state, 'We're not inclined to do the work of the literary or art critic. We stick to our job, which is to create something that otherwise wouldn't have existed, then marvel at what we've done and *hope* others do, too' (emphasis added).[19] YHCHI thus strives

to attract serious attention from serious readers, readers who will carefully read, close read, and reread the entire 18:30 minutes of *The Art of Sleep*.

As such a reader, I can tell you that *The Art of Sleep* presents a commentary on the role of art in digital culture. The work reflects upon the relationship between avant-garde modernism and the modern artistic moment. It does so in two ways. First, *The Art of Sleep* engages in a discussion of the value of art in modern society, an issue at the heart of modernism. Second, the context in which the work was created and distributed reflects and illuminates the complicated relationships between high culture and mass culture, art and capital, creators and critics, which remain central to discussions of modernism. *The Art of Sleep* was commissioned by the Tate Gallery and is available on its web-portal (www.tate.org.uk/netart/artofsleep). The link that opens the work is framed by a curatorial essay written by new-media critic Mark Tribe. Tribe introduces YHCHI by describing its retro-aesthetic as a source of controversy in the digital arts community, as seen in the response to YHCHI's nomination for (and winning of) a Webby award for digital art in 2001. Some members of the jury, Tribe writes, 'argued that selecting Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries would send the wrong message to the art world, since their work does not embody such distinctive features of the net art medium as interactivity or algorithmic computation.'[20] Yet, as I contend, it is precisely YHCHI's conscious rejection of the 'distinctive features of the net art medium' that renders its work modernist and makes it relevant to any discussion of contemporary digital art and literature. Pertinent to my argument, Tribe elaborates on the jury's debate by describing the critique of YHCHI in modernist terms:

> This argument derives from Clement Greenberg's view that 'the essence of Modernism lies ... in the use of characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline itself, not in order to subvert it but in order to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence.' Although Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries' work fails the Greenberg test, it exemplifies many of the historical and relational dynamics of new media art: an experimental engagement with emerging media technologies; the use of new media to reach audiences directly, without art-world intermediaries; collaborative production; and a global perspective.

Tribe is right to situate YHCHI in relation to Greenberg's defining

thesis on visual modernism, but he too quickly dismisses YHCHI's Flash-ing, non-interactive aesthetic as 'fail[ing] the Greenberg test.' The opposite is true: YHCHI uses and abuses the 'characteristic methods' of its discipline 'to criticize the discipline itself,' but it does so by consciously *not* employing those methods. In the seminal essay that Tribe quotes, 'Modernist Painting,' Greenberg writes, 'Modernism criticizes from the inside, through the procedures themselves of that which is being criticized.' YHCHI does not use the 'procedures' of hyperlinks, mouse-overs, and so on, in its work, but it does use Flash, the program that is ubiquitous online and in electronic literature. Flash invites and enables vast opportunities for artistic interactivity, which many, if not most, digital artists choose to utilize. In contrast, YHCHI's decisive restraint in employing the possibilities of the program functions as a form of immanent critique and, thus, according to Greenberg's definition, as a form of modernism.

In fact, YHCHI uses Flash against the grain of the platform. Macromedia Flash is marketed as 'the industry's most advanced authoring environment for creating interactive websites, digital experiences and mobile content.'[23] YHCHI builds all its digital works in Flash but creates an aesthetic of non-interactive difficulty through the very authoring tool extolled for its 'mobile' capacities, that is, facility in accessing, adapting for, and interacting with various media forms and technologies. Specifically, YHCHI resists the platform's trademark functions: seamless animation of multimedia images and interactive effects. Instead, the artists employ Flash to pursue a retro-aesthetic that focuses on typography and timing to gesture toward the analogue medium of celluloid film. This is made immediately evident in the fact that all of their pieces begin with a cinematic countdown. YHCHI's retro-aesthetic presents the screen as a large, white backdrop upon which images appear in a series of replacements. The visual effect both highlights the rectangular frame of the screen and alludes to the serial replacement of the photogram in analog cinema. Flash is part of a family of animation software or 3D modelling programs that uses a timeline-and-scene cinematic paradigm, and film is an operating metaphor for the program. Products created in Flash are called 'movies' and are generically recognized as 'animations.' Yet, YHCHI resists the associations attached to Flash-based works, expressing unease at such medium-based categorizations: 'At first, we didn't realize we were creating an animation. But it seems that by a certain new-media-art definition of things, when you use Flash you're doing animation.'[24] YHCHI uses Flash as a means

of challenging the expectations associated with mainstream electronic literature, Korean art culture, and the end products of specific software. In many ways, then, its work is fashioned as an act of critique.

The Art of Sleep is one such work that offers a critical contemplation not only on the state of art in digital culture but also on the state of criticism. It indicts the narrow views shared by critics such as those dissenting Webby jurors, as well as those who expect certain outcomes from a specific authoring tool. The writers respond by showing that such efforts to circle the wagons and promote a particular kind of digital art limit the definitions and possibilities of what literary art can be. Paradoxically, considering the criticism launched against its aesthetic, YHCHI has done more to promote the cause of digital art and literature than any artists, it could be argued, since the first-generation writers of such classic electronic hypertexts as Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl* (1995) and Michael Joyce's *afternoon: a story* (1987).[25] As the commission by the Tate attests, YHCHI's work is being taken seriously, and the seriousness of digital art is precisely what *The Art of Sleep* is all about.

The Art of Sleep presents a contemplation on the state of the arts by an insomniac narrator. The work begins:

A few seconds later, the following screen appears, expanding on the work's first word-sentence:
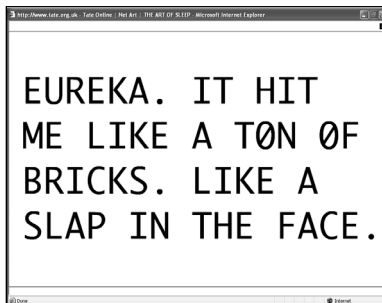
This late-night epiphany is enabled by the 'UNENDING, UNNECES-
SARY, / UNFATHØMABLE WHINING / ØF THE DØG NEXT DØØR.'
The undesired intrusion by the annoying neighbour provides a stimu-
lus for a long visual soliloquy about what art is, where it is located, and
what it does in the contemporary world. The text blares, 'TRUTH IS,
– 'MØST PEØPLE / CØULD GIVE / A DAMN ABØUT / ART.' How-
ever, this statement neither impedes the narrator's monologue nor the
reader's viewing of it, a fact that identifies the narrator and the read-
er as sharing in a small minority of people who *do* 'GIVE / A DAMN
ABØUT / ART.' Speaker and reader are bonded by virtue of the cir-
cumscribed boundary separating them, the minority, from the majority
of 'MØST PEØPLE,' based upon the value each places on art. The text
continues, 'ASK SØME GUY / IN THE STREET / IF ART IS / WØRTH
A DAMN, – HE'LL GIVE YØU / A SMACK UPSIDE / THE HEAD
JUST / FØR ASKING.' The reader, like the speaker, is not just 'SØME
GUY' off the street, but, rather, an enlightened individual who cares
about art. The text thus produces a division between the reader and
the average person, which reproduces the distinction between elite
and mass culture that remains so central to modernism and its critical
discourse.

The Art of Sleep then segues into an exercise in logic that attempts to
lay out a foundation for an aesthetic theory. The text develops by gliding
between similes and metaphors: 'NØT, ART IS / *LIKE* A DØG, / BUT,
ART *IS* / A DØG' (emphasis in original). The narrator recognizes that
'I HAD, IN MY SLEEPLESSNESS, / MØVED FRØM / METAPHØR
TØ / MATERIALITY.' The sleep-deprived speaker comes to the conclu-
sion that everything is futile, and, if that is the case, 'THEN ART IS / FU-
TILE, TØØ.' Rather than see this as a bad thing, however, the narrator
repeats that '*ART IS / FUTILE*' until the phrase becomes a platform
for building more extensive and extenuating conclusions: 'IN FACT,
ART / IS NECESSARILY / FUTILE.' The necessary futility of art goes
back to Kant's disinterestedness, wherein a certain amount of futility
is a requisite for beauty and aesthetics. Following the logic displayed
in YHCHI's Flash-ing work, if art is futile, and '*EVERYTHING / IS FU-
TILE*,' then '*EVERYTHING IS ART*.' With this realization, the narrator
continues, 'THE REST / WAS A PIECE / ØF CAKE. – ART WAS / A
PIECE / ØF CAKE. – NØT, ART IS / *LIKE* A PIECE / ØF CAKE, BUT,
– ART *IS* A SLAB / ØF BELGIAN / CHØCØLATE CAKE.' For, if art
is a piece of cake or a whining dog, then, of course, art is also a urinal:
'FØR ART IS / EVERYTHING. – *NØT,* ART CAN BE ANYTHING. –

THE IDEA IS / AS ØLD AS THE / URINAL – (WHICH, / IS ART).' The invocation of Duchamp and the modernist avant-garde identifies YH-CHI's rebellious ideas about art as having become canonical; the contentious claim that a urinal is art is now 'SØ ØLD I FØRGET / WHØ SAID IT.' However, as the work continues, it becomes evident that YH-CHI has forgotten neither who presented the idea that 'ART CAN BE ANYTHING' nor its importance.

The Art of Sleep depicts the question of what art is and why it matters. Further into the nearly nineteen-minute animation, the narrator addresses the reader directly as if responding to a silent challenge or rebuke: 'WHAT'S / THAT? – *IF IT'S SØ / CLEAR THAT EVERYTHING / IS ART,* – WHY *ISN'T / ANYØNE SAYING / IT BUT YØU?* – THAT'S AN / EASY ØNE.' The narrator's answer posits the importance of this discussion as being of crucial concern to the power structures of contemporary culture: 'IF SØMEØNE DID / TELL THE TRUTH, / THE PØWERS THAT / BE WOULD FALL.' The truth about art is thus tied to the truth about cultural power and politics. In a rebellious voice laden with manifesto-like aplomb, the narrator calls for a revolution: 'GØØD-BYE ART / WØRLD, HELLØ / ART.' Given that the role of art is so central to the cultural 'PØWERS THAT / BE,' such a revolution would be transformative. Such was the goal of the revolution sparked by Duchamp's urinal, a rebellion that 'ØPENED THE / FLØØDGATES.' The narrator continues, 'BUT THE / FLØØDGATES / DIDN'T ØPEN. – AND WHY / NØT? – BECAUSE THE / PØWERS THAT BE / DIDN'T WANT / THEM TØ ØPEN!' The failure of the flood to purge the art world and bring about its rebirth cannot simply be blamed on intangible 'PØWERS,' for, as the narrator states, 'DUCHAMP / HIMSELF DIDN'T WANT THEM TØ / ØPEN.' The artist exemplar of the avant-garde, whose frontal attack on the institution of art redefined it for the twentieth century, is here implicated in conspiring to maintain the status quo. Why? Because 'MR. D. / WAS DEALING / BRANCUSI'S!' and 'WHY WØULD A / GUY MAKING / GØØD DØUGH – ØFF ØF MØDERNIST / ART WANT TØ RUIN / A GØØD THING?'

The depiction of Duchamp as creator and dealer, rebel and member of the old guard, marks a shift in *The Art of Sleep* and a reflexive move on the part of the authors. These recipients of the Tate commission may work in a medium that seems to be beyond the pale of the art world – and, as they claim, outside of the Korean art world – but the Internet is, in fact, a central facet of this cultural system. When YHCHI receives a commission from the Tate Museum, a leading institution in the art

world, they thus find themselves in the standard modernist bind: the modernist rebel/outsider is adopted by the institution and incorporated into the system. From within this paradoxical position, the authors present an appropriate ending to their contemplation and condemnation of contemporary art. *The Art of Sleep* ends with the following reflexive reminder in the form of a personal, playful prayer: 'PLEASE, LØRD, LET / ME SLEEP A MØMENT. – I'VE GØT TØ GET / UP EARLY AND / START THIS DAMN / TATE CØMMISSIØN.'

In both *The Art of Sleep* and *Dakota*, YHCHI pursues a connection to modernism but in different ways: while *Dakota* claims to adapt Pound's *Cantos*, *The Art of Sleep* adopts a key concern of modernism – the role of art in modern culture. Both works pursue a return to modernism as a means of ascribing the cultural capital of this now-canonical heritage to contemporary, literary art. But how does YHCHI's digital remediation influence our readings of modernism? What does YHCHI offer to our efforts to reconsider modernism and, in particular, Pacific Rim modernisms? YHCHI challenges simple definitions that distinguish between modernism and the avant-garde, postmodernism, or post-postmodern literature; they complicate delineations of modernism that are limited by geography or nationality, genre or medium; they obfuscate central concepts about literary invention and reception that the modernists helped to standardize. For example, the fact that YHCHI is a partnership between two individuals, each of whom refuses to describe the specifics of his or her labour process, promotes awareness of the collaborative aspect of literature, which can inform our readings of other modernist works beyond Ezra Pound's famous influence on T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. Further, the fact that YHCHI comprises a Korean and an American disturbs categorizations based on nationality: is this Korean literature, American literature, or are these terms outdated? The question of nationality among modernist writers has always been a thorny issue (e.g., is T.S. Eliot American or British?), and YHCHI's digital modernism foregrounds the politics at stake in such categorizations because its works appear on the World Wide Web, a vehicle that enables new levels of global connection and communication. From its position online, YHCHI's digital modernism encourages reflection both on the state of contemporary literature and also on discourse about modernism.

Mark Tribe's essay introducing *The Art of Sleep* on the Tate website is titled 'The Ornithology of Net Art,' and Tribe explains his enigmatic reference in the essay's compelling last line: 'Maybe the real point of *The Art of Sleep* is, to paraphrase Barnett Newman, that art critics are

to artists as ornithologists are to birds, that art should not be taken too seriously, and that critics should find something better to do with their time.' Reading the artists of YHCHI as digital modernists exposes the error of this conclusion. Rather than viewing with distant disregard the critics they critique in *The Art of Sleep*, YHCHI steadfastly depend upon them. *Importantly, their critique of art and the art world* appears on the Tate Museum website. From this location, with the cultural capital imbued by the Tate Museum and its tutelage, the ideas and aesthetics they present are bound to receive careful, and indeed critical, consideration. In true modernist fashion, YHCHI attack the cultural institution in order to strengthen it. In 'Canto LIII,' Pound writes, 'Day by day make it new/ cut the underbrush, / pile the logs / keep it growing.'[27] YHCHI 'keeps it growing' by critiquing, deconstructing, and rebuilding the position and appearance of literary art in our contemporary, digital culture.

NOTES

 1 For more on digital modernism, see Jessica Pressman, 'Digital Modernism.'
 2 Molly Hankwitz, 'An Interview with Young-hae Chang.'
 3 Young-hae Chang Heavy Industries, email to the author, 28 February 2004.
 4 Guillory, *Cultural Capital*, 168.
 5 Diepeveen, *The Difficulties of Modernism*, xi.
 6 Dworkin, *Reading the Illegible*, 54.
 7 See Hayles, 'Print Is Flat, Code Is Deep.'
 8 I use the language of 'vortex' consciously to create a parallel between the dynamic centre of the white screen, through which YHCHI's words emerge, and Pound's concept of the image as vortex: 'The image is not an idea. It is a radiant node or cluster; it is what I can, and must perforce, call a VORTEX, from which, and through which, and into which, ideas are constantly rushing' in (*Gaudier-Bzreska*, 106).
 9 Thom Swiss, '"Distance, Homelessness, Anonymity, and Insignificance."'
10 Of course it is impossible to describe and transcribe *Dakota* into print. For the sake of differentiating between consecutively flashing screens and line-breaks contained on a single screen, I use the conventional forward slash (/) to denote a line break, and en dashes (−) to designate movement, in this case the flashing replacement of text on screen. Also, throughout *Dakota*, YHCHI uses Monaco font and substitutes the zero sign for the capital 'O'; I follow them on the latter.

11 Pound, *The Cantos,* 3.
12 For a detailed reading of YHCHI's adaptation of *The Cantos*, see Jessica Pressman, 'Close Reading *Dakota* Close Reading *The Cantos*.'
13 See North, *The Dialect of Modernism*.
14 For more on the issue of 'passing' in cyberspace, see Lisa Nakamura, 'Race In/For Cyberspace.'
15 Hyun-Joo Yoo, 'Intercultural Medium Literature Digital.'
16 Molly Hankwitz, 'An Interview with Young-hae Chang.'
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
19 Hyun-Joo Yoo, 'Intercultural Medium Literature Digital.'
20 Tribe, 'An Ornithology of Net Art' (2006). This argument seeps beyond the Webby jury; I was also personally accused by a colleague of faltering as an advocate of electronic literature because I elected to include *Dakota* in my research.
21 Tribe, 'An Ornithology of Net Art.'
22 Greenberg, 'Modernist Painting.'
23 Macromedia Flash, website.
24 Young-hae Chang Heavy Industries, artists' statement for the P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center.
25 Both works are published by Eastgate Systems (www.eastgate.com).
26 For more on the topic, see Wai Chee Dimock's 'Planet and America, Set and Subset.'
27 Pound, *The Cantos*, 264–5.

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