Restrictive Movements, Released Moments

A Thesis

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Graduate School of the Ohio State University

By

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2003
This thesis describes the various moments of my art making and includes thoughts behind my artwork during the two-year period of my Master's of Fine Arts program. *Four Caskets Project*, as a MFA Thesis Exhibition is the central component of this thesis. The process of completing this project was an invaluable learning experience that I shared with people as a director, and the moments of release that I had with them as a performer.
Dedicated to my father and my mother
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Major Field: Art
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vita</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Tables</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapters:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Performance art</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performances with Sculptural Elements</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live-telepresence Performance</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative Performance</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Relationship between performance and technology</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Four Caskets Project</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gallery Exhibition</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Oval (The Burial Site)</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objects</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number 4</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caskets</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Color White</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Center Pole Installation .......................................................... 25
Flowerbed ..................................................................................... 26
Flower body .................................................................................. 26
Making Four Caskets .................................................................... 27
Outdoor Performance ..................................................................... 28
Choreography ................................................................................. 29
Organization/Communication ....................................................... 31
Costume: A Single Muslin Suit ...................................................... 33
Music ............................................................................................... 34
Poster/Press release ...................................................................... 35
The Day of the Performance .......................................................... 38
Dual Role a Director as well as a Performer .................................. 39

4. Conclusion .................................................................................. 41

Bibliography ................................................................................... 44
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>The Storyboard of prototype website for Four Caskets Project</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figures</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>The poster of Four Caskets Project</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Press Release of the <em>Four Caskets Project</em></td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

My concerns as an artist started during my childhood. Most of my early memories of art have to do with my parents. My father was a seer; however, he was unusually reticent about telling me what he saw in my future and preferred to keep quiet. He kept an empty room beside his bedroom. The only thing in this empty room was the warm sunlight streaming through a carved wooden overlaid window covered with white translucent paper. Looking back, I see that my father's contemplative and minimalist lifestyle strongly influenced my artwork. I seem to have acquired my father's absolute quietness and elegant simplicity which shows up in my art.

To this day, my mother prepares the food for more than ten traditional Korean ceremonies for various ancestors in our family and other spirits every year, while I do not recall having had one birthday party as a child. My mother sincerely prepares rituals according to the date of each of our ancestor's death. These rituals are traditionally carried out by the men in the family, since Korea is a strictly male-dominant society and such rituals are only allowed to males. However, following each ceremony, my mother insists that my sisters and I sit with her in front of a ceremonial altar to help her perform her own ritual after the men have left, which is very unusual. My mother's belief in these
ceremonies and her ritual practice come from Korean traditional beliefs that not only promote lofty goals, but also include secular hopes: pray for good fortune, ask to cure diseases, and wish for speedy advancement. If she misses even one ceremony, she believes that our ancestors’ spiritual powers will refuse to protect our family from bad luck such as sickness, failure, and weak mentality, discord, or car accidents. Therefore, my mother takes on the responsibility of showing her respect for the dead spirits, and religiously prepares the traditional ceremonial Korean food for them.

The ceremonies and beliefs in which my mother engaged all her life have become the tradition that I inherited, although my version of ritual practice manifests itself in art making. I treat each material with thoughtful concern like my mother does each ritual. I allow myself enough time not only to feel the physicality of a material, but also to try to connect with the “nature spirit” that embodies the essence of an elemental natural force. The more thoughtful time I spend with the materials that I have chosen to work with, the better I am able to treat them respectfully with my deep understanding of each of their characteristics while I am making my artwork.

In 1998, I came to the United States to continue my studies in fine arts, specifically to study sculpture. Two years later, I began doing performance work, when my movements while installing my sculptures led me to movements which formed the center of my performance. In 2001, when I started the Master of Fine Arts program at The Ohio State University I was still attached to the idea of concentrating on finding my movements during my own intimate moments with materials in my studio such as sand and string.
In addition, I used a video camera that was connected to a television monitor to observe my movements. The video camera allowed me to find my own gestures and to articulate them. Sand Walker¹ (2001 and 2002) shows how my process evolved from my intimate moments, where I mainly practiced my movements while I was working with sand in the studio. When preparing for this work, I touched and thoroughly “listened to” countless handfuls of sand for a month in order to discover the characteristics of the sand. Thus, I focused on the characteristics of the sand, such as its weight, how it pours, how its surface changes with my touch, how it piles, and meditative sounds that it makes when I poured it on different surfaces. I explored the characteristics of the sand that I discovered as a metaphor for what I wanted to express: the release of emotion from the restrictive circumstances.

Along with making Sand Walker, I began to incorporate multimedia technology and to collaborate with interdisciplinary artists, including musicians, computer programmers, and dancers. In particular, I learned Live-Telepresence and collaborative performance through using the Internet technology with other artists and learning various computer software such as MAX/MSP, JITTER and KEYSTROKE.

Live-Telepresence² challenged me to combine my performance with the Internet technology. Through the process of figuring out Live-Telepresence, I learned what was

¹ Further discussion in Chapter 2: Subchapter-- Performance with Sculptural Elements. (p15)

the functions of interactivity in the performance and how could I achieve the spontaneous interactivity among performers.

My interdisciplinary collaborative performance, *Visual Sound System*¹ (2002), was an important learning experience of collaboration, which brought issues such as how to deal with various kinds of computer technologies, how to communicate with collaborators, how to build the performance set for video projection and performers, how to build a consensus as a group, how to direct the collaborative work and how to share the work load properly.

These experiences, such as interactivity among performers and interdisciplinary collaboration, became a touchstone for the extended production process of the *Four Caskets Project*⁴ (2003), which is a central component of my MFA thesis.

I began to visualize the *Four Caskets Project* for my personal therapeutic needs following my father’s death. The whole process of creating and writing the *Four Caskets Project* moved my attention to psychological healing through creating art. To add an element of the healing process, I chose a ceremonial process for the *Four Caskets Project*, which included three stages: Preparing, Transforming, and Releasing. The preparing process was executed as a gallery exhibition⁵. The transforming process was

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¹ Further discussion in Chapter 2: Subchapter--Collaborative Performance with Artists. (p20)

⁴ Further details in Chapter 3: Four Caskets Project.

⁵ See Chapter 3: Subchapter--Gallery Exhibition. (p29)
performed by volunteer performers and viewers in an outdoor performance. My intended releasing process of healing was shown by the audience’s spontaneous reaction to the funeral site.

Through the *Four Caskets Project*, my art making became a channel for connecting to people and sharing something personal with them. When I build my artwork with other people, my own language enlarges and becomes a more meaningful pluralistic language, which I am beginning to learn, word by word.
CHAPTER 2

PERFORMANCE ART

PERFORMANCES WITH SCULPTURAL ELEMENTS

At the beginning of the MFA program, I was still attached to the idea that the actions of making sculpture became the main movements of my performance work, transforming the materiality of sculpting into the trace of the performance.

My first performance was Sand Walker⁶ (2001 and 2002), which contained three video images projected onto the walls of the space: an abstract image of pouring sand on the bright orange-colored background on the center wall, the close-up shot of sand dripping from a pocket that I attached behind both of my ankles on the right wall, and a live image of the sand drawing generated by my movements on the floor projected on the left wall. In addition to the three projected images involved with sand dripping, the space was occupied by the lyrical sound of sand pouring, which contributed to creating an overall meditative atmosphere.

A restrictive physical condition was generated by a simulated amputation achieved by tying my arms to my upper torso with a white cotton cord, and restricting my legs by attaching a heavy sand pocket behind each ankle. Since my arms were disabled, I

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⁶ The name was adopted from a song title by the Dutch band “Frit,” which was mentioned by Mary Jo Bole in my first review of Sand Walker.
had to use my legs in order to draw the spiral sand trail. The pocket full of sand became not only the tool of the sand drawing, but also the main cause of my restricted walking, because I had to figure out the right dragging motion with my feet to drip the sand though a hole in the pocket that was placed behind each ankle. Because my restricted walking showed how I overcame my restrictive physical conditions, the spiral sand drawing I created captured the emotionally released moments.

I mounted a live video camera on the ceiling in order to stream the live images of my restricted walking and the sand drawing on the left wall, so that viewers could witness the long process of the spiral sand drawing from two different perspectives. This live video projection of the sand drawing supplied the reflection of my actions at the center of the space that enhanced the audience’s perception of what they were seeing in real time. As time progressed, the residue of my actions became sculptural features.

While creating the three images for Sand Walker in my studio, I developed an intimate relationship with the video camera because I had to see myself and my objects through its perspective. The process of making video work involved capturing moments of the objects I was working with at the time in my studio, when an orange chair may have such an unusual reflection and shadow that it did not look like a chair at a particular moment. I mainly used extreme close-up shots in order to conceive poetic and painterly images from the orange chair, such as sunlight, negative light, shadows, colors, and white sand. Through the camera’s eye, I was able to discover different visual phenomena about the objects compared to what my eyes could see.
These short videos, such as *Sex with an Orange Chair* (2001) and *It is Mine* (2001) represented images not only showing a transition from the object to the video, but also served as the background of my performances.

I had the opportunity to make another short video called *SORI* (2002) while I was installing a setting for the performance, *Human Relation*. I used a different filming method called a “continuous unedited shot”. “This contemplative short video (SORI) displays the abstract beauty of a moving string and its shadow”.

*Human Relation* (2002) was an installation-performance made up of hundreds of layers of cotton strings that spanned the opposite wall. The spanned strings inclined from the front of the space to the end to create the voluminous inclination in which I confined myself. After intensive 13 hours of installation, I was cutting spanned strings to release myself in less than 10 minutes from the restrictive surroundings that I had built. While I was installing the surroundings for the performance, I opened myself up to absorb all of the possible movements with a bundle of string. While I was experimenting with movements with the string, the camera which I had set up for the purpose of documentation captured two minutes of the swing movement of the string with my spontaneous humming sound. The whole process of the performance-installation led me to conceive the video piece *SORI*, which was the surprising outcome of the process of making this performance. In fact, *SORI* changed my whole perspective of making

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7 Nonstop shooting as well as no editing processed filmmaking.

8 Quoted in the pamphlet of Ohio Short Film and Video Showcase at the Wexner Center for the Arts.
performance because I was able to take away the burden of creating a large-scale sculptural setting for the environment. I began to be concerned more about a series unedited images accomplished by non-choreographic movements.

**"LIVE-TELEPRESENCE" PERFORMANCE**

I was exposed to "Live-Telepresence" Performance in the "Environments" class. The class covered the beginning stage of the live interactive performance in which performers were simply synchronized with multiple receiving images by other performers' feedback in a remote location through the internet.

The first piece, *Blacking, Stringing and Backing* (2002), was my improvisational Live-Telepresence performance, which aimed at achieving a deeper emotional interactivity among the performers beyond the visual excitement of projecting images through the Internet. I started with the basic strategies of Live-Telepresence. The two performers only communicated through the projected screen provided by the Internet, since each performer was physically in a different (remote) place (site). We faced the camera connected to the Internet, which sent the images of the performers to each other in real time. Each performer had one object (a string or a piece of fabric) and sat on a chair in a remote place. The camera framed precisely the upper body/torso or middle body. Our hands were placed in front of our middle bodies. The performers wore simple

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9 Internet-based multi-sites live performance.

10 The interdisciplinary multi-media performance class was offered by Johannes Birringer in the college of dance at The Ohio State University.
clothing within a distinguishing color such as black or red in order to contrast the object (the white string) with the background (the black clothing).

In the process of the rehearsal, Internet transmission caused several seconds of delay to transmit the live images of the performers. I made use of this shortcoming of technology as a reaction time for each performer. Therefore, I asked the cameraperson to create a 6-second blackout in order to not only ensure enough time to transmit the live images but also have enough time for each performer to respond to each other. I initiated the event with a restrictive movement such as tying the part of my body and covering my eyes with a string or a piece of white fabric. Since I was one of the performers, I was able to witness the subconscious expressions of the other performer, because the process of impromptu gestured responses required intense concentration in the limited time and were only metaverbal\textsuperscript{11} communication through the huge screen in the dark studio. The performers influenced and manipulated each other’s responding actions to achieve the purpose of deeper interactivity in the live-telepresence performance. “It was clear, structured, simple, precise, and unencumbered but also oriented entirely towards an action in real time, with nothing before and nothing left”\textsuperscript{12}.

The second piece, \textit{Stitching and Attaching} (2002), was based on the simple movement, “Sewing by Hand,” which was the method of altering the clothing to make it uncomfortable or dysfunctional. In \textit{Stitching and Attaching}, I wanted to express the absurdity of human contact or inadequate interaction with others and the feeling of restriction that results from socialization. Through sewing the ends of both sleeves

\textsuperscript{11} Beyond words.

\textsuperscript{12}
together, and later on the inseams of the pants, I confined parts of my body, thus creating restrictive movements that showed my discomfort and frantic tension that results from socialization. Even though I tried to perform in my distorted clothing, I could not even move easily in front of people.

Another idea that evolved out of sewing the clothing as a single bodysuit, which I intentionally wide enough to hold two persons in it at the same time. The claustrophobic space demonstrated the restrictive feeling of socialization. Later on, this experimental single suit became the basis of the costume design of the Four Caskets Project. The two persons wearing the bodysuit coordinated each movement to move around properly in this suit. I also used a few stitches to connect two body suits together which four persons would have to share. Thus, I could observe how these stitches caused the complicated behaviors among these persons in the enhanced restrictive circumstance. Another function of sewing was its role as a forceful binder of human socialization in my performance.

COLLABORATIVE PERFORMANCE WITH ARTISTS

While I was taking the “Environments” class, I had the opportunity to experience my first collaborative piece, Visual Sound System (2002), as a concept developer and as a visual artist working with a video artist, a computer programmer, and a dancer.

Visual Sound System (VSS) was a digital signal system (structure) interconnecting human performers with multi-user programs. The original concept was the visualization of sound and language without any reference to the sound in the environment. Only performers could physically hear the sound through earphones they wore.

VSS was structured by three stations in which an artist or a group took responsibility for each station to create the composition of movements or sounds in real time. The movements visualized or energized what each dancer imagined the sound from each station would be like, in the space. The sound lay in the continuously evolving, appearing and disappearing textures – Visualizations of sound on three screens placed next to each other with slight gaps/distances between them to create a stage which can open and close like a curtain by the performers. Behind the center curtain, two cameras were set up for the center station and the right station to capture the live images of the performers. Thus, the performers were adapted into the system and artists saw and interacted with performers’ appearances, which projected on the center and right curtains. The center station operated by me had the enlarged images of a live performer’s hand movements in which I adopted the gestures of sign language from an interpreter as well as the vowel sounds from English speakers as a second language by live performance. Another image on this station was differently sized color bars operated by MAX/MSP/JITTER and I controlled the movements of the bars through Jitter Patch, which made it possible to remove the bars, to change the bars’ colors, and transformed the form of the bars by switching their colors according to the live sounds and performers’ movements.
The right station was operated by David Tinapple, who used his creative Jitter patch to generate the vertically chopped moving image. The right station received the live image input from the live performers in the center station. Therefore, the center and right stations had cohesiveness in the performance. The left station by Ran Berdichesky had pre-recorded video images with sound, which were generated by the multi-user KEystroke and d MAX/MSP.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERFORMANCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Through the process of VSS, the piece itself left a question: What is the function of technology in my work? Certainly, it provides infinite visual possibilities to enhance my ideas by projecting them into a virtual reality. However, I must be aware of the negative or restrictive aspects of technology, which for me is the danger of obscuring the essence of a piece by making a fetish of its visually-aesthetic elements to the point that it becomes nothing but a visual aesthetic based on what I saw in many other technology shows. In other words, technology is simply a medium or means for communicating and rendering my intent and vision, and not an end in itself. I attempt to achieve a balance, between my idea and how an idea that emerges from or is inspired by a specific kind of technology; I grapple with representing the mutual relationship between performance and technology. It is this relationship, and not one element or the other, which I highlight.

The piece Stringing (2001) was an example of this. Dual images, arranged vertically one above the other, were projected on a rectangular string screen. The top image was a live image of a performer strumming the backside of a string screen.
This image resulted from the manipulation of back lighting; depending on the dimmer level, it revealed either the performer's whole movements by a shadow or close shots of the hand movements on the backside. The bottom image, consisting of three pre-recorded movies, was faded in and out through music (midi file) composed by Igor Karaca.

In the first movie, *Hand Fight 1*, two hands were bound by a single black string above a black background and twisting, curling, and rolling in stop and non-stop gestures. In the second movie, *String on the Gray*, hands and arms were reeling the white string with a strong shadow in a long, pulling gesture. In the last movie, *String Drawing 1*, a white string was falling onto the black background in a dripping motion to create a drawing that was in parts both curved and linear. These three movies showed different human emotional states in one space by the pulse of music. Therefore, this technological use of music not only supported the sublime atmosphere, but also allowed the piece to be more complex in form.
CHAPTER 3

FOUR CASKETS PROJECT

The Four Caskets Project was an outdoor performance-oriented exhibition in which the audience could experience the release of human emotions through a funerary process. The process of a funeral is generally difficult because it brings reminders of loss and fears about the future. Funerals provide an opportunity to show appreciation for the deceased, to grieve together, and to make a new beginning. At funerals, attendees will encounter families as well as religious and patriotic symbols, music, ritual, and ceremony, the personal effects and the history of the deceased, and will hear about the deceased’s place in the family, community, organization, and nation. Funerals bring powerful reminders of the humanity of the deceased. Sadness, tearfulness, and anxiety are common feelings expressed at funerals.

The Four Caskets Project was adopted from a traditional Korean funeral practices which have the characteristics of both emotional relief and physically restrictive experience for the mourners.
The ceremonial performance of the *Four Caskets Project* also reflects on the released moments of regaining hope after the drama of death and the process of the funeral that offers the chance to rethink the uncertainty of the human condition.

**BACKGROUND**

The idea of this project grew from my experience of my father's traditional Korean funeral into others' experience of my ceremonial performance.

Since I was familiar with Korean ceremonies through my mother's ritual practices, I naturally became a part of my father's funeral and played a role in it. However, I felt uneasy to complete my ceremonial duties as his daughter because there were unbearably restrictive funeral customs to follow during the three days of my father's funeral. During Sam Il Jang, I barely ate and slept. I mostly wore a thin white Korean traditional outfit called Sang Bok and Jip Shin even though the three days of the mourning period were continuously rainy and muddy. These restrictive costumes are the metaphor of punishments for the deceased's family members who failed to prevent or protect the deceased from death.

Enduring these very uncomfortable living conditions also was meant to be an expression of filial piety. In contrast with my restrictive physical and mental condition, the scenery of my father's funeral was overwhelmingly magnificent.

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13 Korean funerals lasted odd-numbered days: three (Sam Il Jang), five (O Il Jang) or seven (Chil Il Jang) days including the day of the burial.

14 Immediate family members dress in traditional outfits, which resemble the Korean outfit called "haembok."

15 The Straw shoes.
I remember the landscape where I buried my father. It was raining on and off all day. There was a cloud capped green summer mountain in the background. We brought his Sang Yuh\(^\text{16}\) up the trail to a mountain pass. His four children followed behind the colorful and sadly beautiful Sang Yuh.

The rain was following us. The earth was muddy. Our faces were watery. This is a scene in my mind which I will never forget. Thankfully, I can find his grave over the mountain whenever I want to.

The only difference is that he vanished. (Fall 2006, by So Yeon Park)

After I went through the three days of not eating or sleeping well, which was overwhelming, I felt so relieved that I was absolutely prepared to let my father depart from this world to which he had once belonged. I was surrounding it from the restrictive experience of his death and the rituals.

One year later, when I went back to Korea to participate in my father’s one-year-memorial ceremony, it was on September 10\(^\text{th}\), 2001. On the next day occurred the tragedies in New Your City and Washington. As I went to participate in the first-year anniversary of my father’s funeral\(^\text{17}\) in Korea, the coincidence with the 9/11 tragedy not only connected my sense of grief about my father with what happened in New York City and Washington, but also created a sense of longing in me to go to see the crater where the two towers had stood.

When I entered Wall Street a year later, I saw a black plastic bag floating down

\(^\text{16}\) A traditional Korean covering structure for a casket

\(^\text{17}\) On the first anniversary of the funeral in Korea, family members hold a memorial service called “sosang.” On this day, family mourners dress in the same cleaned sangbok which they had worn one year ago during the funeral. On the second anniversary a similar memorial service called “tæsang” is performed. Several more services follow in subsequent months. Only after all these services have been observed can the family return to normal life.
toward the earth. It reminded me of a body falling to the ground as people released
themselves from the desperate moments of 9/11. I thought of the similarities between the
forceful released moment my father had at the moment of his death and the last moments
of the people trapped in the Twin Towers. This image connected my personal grieving
for my father with our collective grieving on 9/11 and became to basis for developing a
project for public grieving.

I created the Four Caskets Project to share a part of recovery such as relieving
and healing by the performative process of a funeral.

STRUCTURE

The Four Caskets Project adopts the basic structural procedure from the
traditional Korean funeral, composed of three parts.

Traditionally, the first part of a Korean funeral used to take place where the
deceased lived, whereas in modern-day Korea, it takes place in the hospital, which
functions like a Funeral Home here in the United States. Hospitals in Korea provide not
only a small room for setting up an altar called a mortuary service, but also a shrouding
service.

The second part is a funeral procession on the last day of the funeral. The
distinguishing aspect of the second part has the performative actions of carrying the
traditional Korean bier (Sang Yuh) by the pallbearers (Sang Yuh Kkun) before the casket
makes its way to the grave site. The route of the procession moves from the entrance of
the deceased’s hometown to the deceased’s house or building in which he or she lived or
worked for his or her lifetime. From shamanic belief of sprits, even though the deceased
is lost physicality through death, his or her soul does not leave its body before it sees the place to which he or she belonged.

The pallbearers express grief for the deceased by moving the casket around the house, moving toward the entrance of the deceased’s room, and pausing in front of the deceased’s personal belongings or the people he loved and singing a deep and mournful song. Pallbearers who carry the bier out of the house have to stop before the gate and lower the casket three times as a form of ritual bowing to signal the deceased’s final departure from the household premises. These actions express the deceased’s unwillingness to depart from the physical world and leave that which s/he has known. After this procedure, the funeral procession is led by the leader of the pallbearers who continue to sing a mournful song at the back of the bier, family members, relatives, and friends follow, until the procession arrives at the burial site.

The third part of the funeral is an actual burial procedure at the grave site, typically a mountain. A shaman who was called upon for the occasion performs a special ritual to exorcise any evil spirits from the grave. At a predetermined time, the casket is then lowered and the eldest male mourner\(^\text{18}\) takes a deep bow. Then, taking some earth, he casts it upon the casket. He does this twice. Other family members then follow, in turn, this same ritual proceedings, referred to as chwit'o. After the chwit'o is complete, hired workers finish covering the grave with earth.

The Korean funeral is made up of three parts, while the *Four Caskets Project* compressed and reorganized these into two parts: a gallery exhibition and an outdoor

\(^{18}\) Sang Ju: Usually the eldest son.
performance.

The gallery exhibition is equated to the first part of a Korean funeral. Therefore, it functions as a space for the deceased spirits before they are buried under the ground. It is also a place to prepare for the funeral.

The outdoor performance of the *Four Caskets* combined two Korean funeral structures: the second and third parts, the procession and the burial ceremony. However, I had more practical reasons for choosing to have two parts in the *Four Caskets Project*.

GALLERY EXHIBITION

The Hopkins Gallery presentation at The Ohio State University exhibited my work from May 5th to May 16th of 2003 prior to my outdoor performance.

The gallery exhibition was structured similar to the first part of a Korean funeral. A major consideration that I had during this two-week period was how I could invite viewers’ participation in the process of making the *Four Caskets Project*, because I was not sure of the possibility of getting enough participants to accomplish the second part of this project, the outdoor performance.

Therefore, I held the gallery exhibition prior to the performance used its common space to introduce the *Four Caskets Project* to the public to see the public’s reactions to it. I consider the gallery space to be an extension of the open studio, thus affording me an opportunity to meet with the community. I displayed the sculptural aspects of the project – four caskets, a flowerbed installation as an altar, a life-size flower body made up of 300 colorful flowers, and a display of costumes to introduce the visual aspects of the performance, which would be an important part of the outdoor performance.
Specifically, the flowerbed installation\textsuperscript{19} in front of the four caskets functioning as a funeral altar offered the audience a part in the preparation of the ceremonial performance, which was making white paper\textsuperscript{20} flowers as a ritual activity in the gallery. In fact, this activity also functioned as an initiating tool, allowing me to encourage people to participate in the performance as they were making white paper flowers. As a result, they continually added white paper flowers to the flowerbed, which created an unexpected subtle shadow on the flowerbed and on the floor in the gallery. The number of flowers made by the audience was enough to complete the second part of the project, the outdoor performance.

Along with a growing number of paper flowers, the pallbearer's garments\textsuperscript{21} displayed and grew in number in the corridor of Hopkins Gallery during the exhibition, because I wanted viewers to see the physical development of the funeral performance preparation and thus encouraged them to anticipate the coming event. Therefore, in the beginning of the gallery exhibition, I intended to display all sixteen of the pallbearers' garments, gradually adding one garments each day until all were completed during the gallery exhibition. The challenge of utilizing the gallery exhibition as an extended studio in public was to create a situation to communicate with the audience and to encourage the audience to take part in the project. I spent the full duration of the show working and

\textsuperscript{19} Further details in Chapter3: Subchapter- Flowerbed (p.34)

\textsuperscript{20} Tissue paper

\textsuperscript{21} Farther details in the Chapter 3 : Subchapter - on Costume (p.41)
being in the gallery space. I also contacted the Graduate Teaching Associates in art and art education who were seeking an art project that allowed their students to meet and to talk to an artist as their class activity and to have an opportunity to participate in an art project. Thus I attained 40 volunteer participants for the project, and support from The Ohio State University community.

THE OVAL (THE BURIAL SITE)

I selected the Oval located at the center of the Ohio State University’s campus as a site for the *Four Caskets Project*, because it has a uniquely structured open area within the center of the central campus. I saw the Oval as a burial site with as passages for the procession for the *Four Caskets Project*. The structure of the Oval has walkways that are laid out in a geometric pattern radiating from the center. It resembles the routes to get to the burial site (the mountain’s route that my father’s funeral procession had to take). Since the central campus get arranged and built around the Oval for decades, I regard the Oval as a house or a building that the deceased built or lived in before he or she passed away.

There was a practical motivation to choose the Oval as an outdoor performance site, as well. That is, that the oval has a main focal point that draws the OSU community inward. Therefore, the Oval has a better chance of having people join the performance in a site spontaneously.
OBJECTS

NUMBER 4 (FOUR)

The title of the Four Caskets Project starts with the word “Four.” The pronunciation of number 4 in Korean (Han Geul) is “Sa”. Under the same sound “Sa,” there are a couple of different meanings because the Korean language uses different Chinese characters for the homophony of “Sa.” Among these meanings, one directly means “the number 4” and the other means “Death.” For instance, when you take an elevator in Korea, you find the letter of “F” in place of the number 4 because the pronunciation of the number 4 simply indicates death. It is almost the same as the number 13 in the United States. Therefore, the title “Four Caskets” literally represents the fundamental cause of death.

CASKETS

A traditional Korean casket is simply a life-sized wooden box. In contrast, the Korean bier is decorated with dragons and Chinese phoenix paintings. Around the bier, colorfully decorated dolls are placed to guard the deceased. In terms of Four Caskets in the project, while I simplified the part of the bier, I combined the frame structure of a casket with the function of a bier. I decided to have a metaphorical object for each casket to emphasize the metaphor of the object – hundreds of bells, delicate handmade paper flowers, one hundred incense sticks and linear cotton strings. Each casket shares the characteristic essence of the selected object, such as a bell, paper flower, string, and incense. When I designed the caskets, I focused on harmonizing each casket’s shape with each object that I assigned to it. In terms of the forms of the Four Caskets, I tried not to
reference any other shape of caskets traditionally and culturally, but used the basic shapes of different containers because a casket is a container for a dead body.

The *Bell Casket* had an angled box shape on the bottom and the form of a pyramid on top, which shows respect for a dead person. The shape symbolizes the sound, which calls the souls of the deceased into the caskets. Thus, the souls stay inside the caskets until they are buried with the body. I think the actual sound of ringing bells infuse spiritual power for souls and ritual energy for the funeral.

The *Flower Casket* has the form of a tombstone,\(^{22}\) on which is recorded the name and dates of the deceased. This casket was decorated by colorful handmade paper flowers that represented the celebration of the life of the deceased. I used string to capture the flowers to make it look like the flowers were flying away even though they were restricted by the tension of spanned strings.

The *Incense Casket* has the form of a spaceship capsule. I tried to make this a futuristic form of a casket, because I made it my size and I wanted to project into the future and into my own death. I thought burning incense represents ascending spirits. Therefore, I placed 100 incense sticks on top of the caskets and burned them during the procession.

The *String Casket* resembled the shape of a house in which human beings live in. The house is a huge container for the body whether we are alive or dead. Linear strings symbolize not only the connection between the living and the dead but also serve the function of leading the spirit to the afterworld.

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\(^{22}\) It was mentioned by Mary Jo Bole.
THE COLOR WHITE

The color white has been the traditional color for funerals in Korea. It stands for the virtue of mourners rather than death. Therefore, the color white in the *Four Caskets Project* was used to create visual unity in the outdoor performance and to the ritual activity in the gallery space.

Atmospherically, I achieved visual unity through the application of a serene and tight palette of white tone. I see the making of the white paper flowers as an important ritual and as a healing activity. The color white psychologically engages the audience members in the ceremonial environment which is created by dropping the outcome of their making (white paper flowers) on the flowerbed in the gallery and on the entire grass area in the Oval by volunteer performers.

THE CENTER POLE INSTALLATION

The center pole, which is the focal point of the burial site of the performance, was installed for the burial procedure of the performance. The 12-foot pole had 8 long and white fluttering pieces of fabric that stretched to the ground at the center of the Oval. Eight pieces of fabric were used to create the grave for the four caskets.

The burial process was shown by the two sets of pallbearers who tied a piece of fabric from the top of the pole to each casket placed around the pole on the ground. In addition, the pole functioned as the place where two undertakers were waiting for the arrival of four caskets.
THE FLOWERBED

Within the *Four Caskets Project*, the flowerbed takes on two forms. In the gallery exhibition, one long fluid sheer fabric spans the length of the exhibition space, providing a ceremonial altar and a forever-deepening concavity for the white paper flowers to fall. During the ceremonial performance, the flowerbed was a rectangular sheer fabric, which was carried at its four corners, with hundreds of white paper flowers in it. Sixteen flowerbed carriers scattered and passed out flowers out of four flowerbeds at the oval. This was a vehicle to carry white flowers and to transform the oval into a ceremonial environment.

After the pallbearers completed the center pole installation, the empty flowerbed became a coversheet for each casket. Finally, the flowerbed carriers tied the last flower within each flowerbed to the fabrics that connected the central pole to each casket.

The flowerbed carriers showed the audience how to react or participate in the ritual performance by tying the flower onto the fabric.

It was surely the part of the performance that emotionally unified the audience because the audience took a chance to respond to the results of the performance. Therefore, the burial site was completed by the audience.

THE FLOWER BODY

The flower body showed the whole process of wrapping the dead body that was made of hundreds of handmade colorful paper flowers covered by a sheer white fabric. I placed the flower body on the clean and dried floor between caskets. Through different perspectives in the gallery, the flower body seemed to be inside the caskets.
MAKING FOUR CASKETS

Before I started making the four caskets in my studio, I proposed the project in hopes of obtaining a grant for materials from The Ohio State University. Writing the proposal for this art project allowed me to visualize and plan the finished project in a considerably concrete manner before I made any actual objects. Although I benefited from the visualization of the *Four Caskets Project* while writing the grant proposal, the activity of writing that proposal also locked the project into a formula which I had created in my mind without the benefit of the process of making the artwork.

According to the written grant proposal, the four caskets were supposed to be covered by ritually chosen materials like other traditional caskets. However, I felt there was immense resistance between the written proposal for art and the process of making art, because the process of making caskets was no longer what I had once written on paper. It had evolved into a deeper relationship with the whole process of expressing what I thought and felt through planning this project. I could not hold onto the plan I had written. I had started to pay attention to the caskets’ own characteristics rather than my assumption.

Upon completion of the third wooden skeleton structure, the decision to uncover the caskets was so demanding that it paralyzed me and I was unable to continue covering the caskets as I had originally planned. The sophisticated frame of the caskets unexpectedly opened my eyes to the enormous possibilities of the layers within the framework versus covering them. It stated more visual complexity than a functional role of a casket in a ceremonial performance.
Consequently, I stopped covering the caskets and started to reexamine the visual language of each casket. Thereafter, I focused on my physical movements around the frame of each casket while I tried to cover and uncover them with ritual objects.

Making four caskets was an extended performance in the process of making objects. Every day I discovered related movements in my studio. The movements I found became sculptural parts of the four caskets. The object “string” with reeling became an aesthetically and conceptually combined element of making caskets. The possibility of string was an evocative inspiration for me all the way throughout the project.

Transparency is an appropriate word for another level of statement I found during the paralyzing period. Various thin strings were the key materials that enhanced the transparency of the caskets. String itself became a material that was the inner and outer structure of the caskets. In addition, it showed the fragility of human life exposed by uncertainty.

OUTDOOR PERFORMANCE

On May 30th in 2003, two weeks after the Hopkins Gallery exhibition, the outdoor performance was held for approximately 45 minutes with 48 volunteer performers on the Oval. The performance had two parts: the procession which started from the courtyard of Hopkins Hall via the central campus to the routes of the Oval; and the burial ceremony which was held at the center of the Oval. The performance required at least 73 volunteers – 32 pallbearers, 16 flowerbed carriers, 2 undertakers, 15 flower makers, 6
videographers, 2 photographers and 2 staff and two artists – a musician and a costume designer. I was both the director of the whole project and participated as an undertaker.

The gallery exhibition allowed me to come in contact with 40 volunteers who mainly became pallbearers and flowerbed carriers. The rest of the volunteers’ parts were filled by students from the beginning-level drawing classes and colleagues from the Art Department.

CHOREOGRAPHY

Although the outdoor performance took most of its structural elements from the second and third parts of a traditional Korean funeral, these main two parts of the performance were visualized by my interpretation of the procession and the burial process.

As a procession, each casket took a different route around the campus area (including High Street). All caskets departed from the same starting point (the courtyard of Hopkins Hall) and moved around campus, and finally arrived at the north, south, east and west ends of the oval’s perimeter. At the perimeter of the oval, the four caskets and four flowerbeds waited for the transformation of music from the simple low tone sound of a drum to the crying out sobbing sound of a traditional Korean stringed instrument. Led by the Korean stringed instrument, each casket and flowerbed started its journey toward the center of the oval.

Each casket was carried by four sets of pallbearers. Along the journey, two undertakers crawled and sat upon the casket to obstruct the pallbearers’ advancement. This obstructive behavior symbolized the family and friends’ unwillingness to let go of
the deceased. To create the funerary environment, while the flowerbeds were in motion, the flower carriers handed out white paper flowers to the audience and tossed some on the grass.

As the burial part of the funeral, after 32 pallbearers placed each casket on the East, West, South, North side of the pole, a pair of pallbearers from each casket grasped the end of the fabrics from the top of the pole and tied it to their respective casket. After these ceremonial movements, the pallbearers and flowerbed carriers walked in a clockwise direction encircling the burial site and stopped only after arriving at the point from which they had started (one full circle). This walking around the burial site right after burial resembled the process of stomping on the grave: the Korean pallbearers piled earth on top of the grave and then stomped on the earth in a ritual manner for both spiritual and practical reasons. At the end, the pallbearers left behind the four caskets and dispersed from the ceremony as if they were the rays of light from a powerful sun.

The flower carriers tied the last flower from a flowerbed on the fabrics which were tied from the top of the pole to the outside of the frames of the caskets and they melted into the crowd. I intended for the audience to carry out the same actions as the flower carriers did. Most of the audience indeed tied paper flowers to the fabric, and some did other things like putting the paper flower in their own hair. Finally, the two undertakers walked away from the burial site.
ORGANIZATION/COMMUNICATION

Organizing the outdoor performance part of the *Four Caskets Project* was more difficult than planning the gallery exhibition part of it, because the size of the performance was closer to a production than an individual artist performance. As I sought advice on how to organize the project, I met and spoke with Angeles Romero, an MFA graduate student who had production experience in the theater department at The Ohio State University.

After I realized I had to be more concrete about the effective organization, I assigned the pallbearer positions for the performers who were sorted by the fitter of the costume according to their height and chest size.

Since most volunteers were college students in the middle of the quarter, it was impossible for everyone to have the same schedule to have a dress rehearsal. Therefore, I chose two leaders for each casket and one leader for each flowerbed with whom I conducted a more manageable dress rehearsal at the Oval. During this rehearsal with the leaders, I established the timeline and other related information for the performers and production crews.

The most difficult part of this process was figuring out how to communicate with over 73 people at a time. Depending on communication through personal email was not as effective a tool as I thought. I realized I should have had a web site to provide faster, more accurate and guaranteed communication with the volunteers.

Even though I did not have time to create the website as a communication tool at that time, I created a website right after the *Four Caskets Project* was finished.
The website mainly focused on how to utilize websites as a communication-organization tool for a multi-task performance. This allowed me to be better prepared with communication tools for future public performances.

Table 3.1: The storyboard of prototype website for the *Four Caskets Project*. 
COSTUME: A SINGLE MUSLIN SUIT

Two pallbearers wearing a single muslin suit like one smock, which was tied around both of their waists by a rough cord, and each casket was carried by four sets of these pallbearers. Each person had only one arm covered by a sleeve. The arms between the carrier pair were hidden from the spectators’ view. I wanted to signify the joining together of people in times of distress. It also forced the performers to be partially immobile. They were subject to their partner’s ability to work as a vital part of a collaborative team. This two-person smock evoked the idea that people come together in death. They were bound to each other, even stuck together, sometimes against their will. The silhouette of the smocks echoed the architectural appearance of the caskets. Clean, straight lines were emphasized in the seams, hems and ties. A rough, thin cord was repeatedly wound around the waists of both carriers. This forced the blocky, smooth shape of the garment into curves and soft folds. The length of the two sleeves was exaggerated, thus hiding the hands to symbolize emotional paralysis and an inability to act when coping with death. Muslin and cheesecloth were the main fabrics that were used to make the costumes. These fabrics mimicked the use of natural materials in the project’s objects. Headscarves were composed of a single layer of bleached cheesecloth. The rough, homespun texture of the cheesecloth and the unruly strands of cord showed that the pallbearers were also carrying humbleness. The sleeves of the smocks flowed into a wide hem of sheer fabric. The translucent sheer contrasted the rigid hand and opaqueness of the muslin. The sheer sleeve hems also visually enhanced the carriers’ arm movements. The visual repetition of sixteen costumes identical in color and form
created unity and enhanced the feeling of a procession and sense of belonging and equality. Sixteen pairs of pallbearers in these costumes became a sculptural body in an outdoors performance and they emphasized the awkward and restrained action of the pallbearers.

MUSIC

Except for the sound in the introduction of the performance, the sound samples I selected with the musician, Young Mi Lee, are from traditional Korean music by contemporary Korean musicians. Young Mi Lee modified and edited most sounds by Q-base\textsuperscript{23}.

The use of song during the Korean funeral procession is for an expression of the nihilistic view of life – that humans must accept death as the end of human life. The soundtrack that we adopted as a mourning song carried the essence of Koreans’ somber and serious funeral ritual. The sound track was divided into five sections according to the choreography of the \textit{Four Caskets Project}.

Introductory sound was based on the sound of percussion, which gave a powerful authority to the beginning of the performance. Because the modified low frequency sound is felt through the whole body, it sets a calm atmosphere which signals the beginning of the performance.

The secondary sound was adopted from a high-pitched Korean traditional stringed instrument (\textit{Hae Guen}) that gives rhythm to the marching movement for the progression

\textsuperscript{23} A Computer Sound Program
in the second part of the performance. The wailing of the instrument gives the
impression of human crying which expresses the sorrowful moment of the funeral.

The third sound was modified with Korean funeral singing (Sang Yuh So Ri)
combined with a low-pitched Korean traditional woodwind instrument (Dae Guem). It
was a rhythmic signal used to slow down the performers and signaled them proceed in
the circle to express their emotion.

The last sound was the same sound as in the introduction of the sound track to
indicate the end of the performance. I thought the deep drum sound indicated the
beginning and the end of human life.

POSTER/PRESS RELEASE

The main concern in designing the poster was how to present the names of the
performers and the credits for participants and artists in an artistic way. The background
Image was of my hand dropping a white paper flower and was shot through the underside
of the flowerbed on the gallery. It indicated the whole participation process started with
making paper flowers in front of the flowerbed.

Participants’ names became a powerful and intriguing image for the poster in this
project.
Master of Fine Arts Thesis performance

Four Caskets Project

A performance Installation by So Yeon Park
and the 50 participants

Sara Matthiesen
Carolina Moraes
Shanna Wodomann
Alexei Tschuker
Vitalia Borshtov-Blackburn
Joo Yeon Shin
Kara Nestor
Carolyn Pedraza
Libby Rosenwater
Marla Vasilek
Siu-Ling Cheung
Juliette Rossi
Kara Kusman
Chelsea Larsson
Alex De Leon
Sung Whai Black
Liam O'Brien
Scott Swearingen
Dawson Li
Bea Jones
Young Jun Chung
Jared Tolia
Jason Cho
Roxane G. Guy
Ben Isar
Nasir Al-Mutawa
Sean Derry
Ken Benderschel
David Yang
Cathy Ellis
Katherine Grandey
Mary Ryan
Samara Jordan
Kara Depauli
Molly Nicola
Amy Santoferraro
Hudeth Saito
Chesney Russeily
Tyler Joder
Amy Yulis
Hannah Cummings
Yoojin Cho
Lynn Warren
Bonne Falco
Linaya Ellick
Jun Hyung Park
Taeyoung Kang
Jeff Flage

Date: Friday, May 30th
3:30 pm: Ritual activity (Making flowers)
in front of Hopkins Hall
5:00 pm: The performance
at the Oval

Contact: sogirapark@hotmail.com

Music Composer
Young McLeer
Costume Designer and Stylist
Tatjana Longaret

Special Thanks to
Peter Arantes, Amy Youngs, Who Jisong Lee,
Elizabeth Coleman, and her 240 class, Unkie Whittaker, and
her 170 beginning drawing class, LeAnn Buhokich-Gossom and
her 170 class, John Krick, Angelica Horno, Paul Simon,
David Tizayno, My Flower ladies: Kara Kusman and Chelsea Larsson,
Julie Weiss, art education instructors and their students,
So Yeon Park's 170 Class
and all the ceramic people in my performance.

Thank you

my committee: Mary Jo Dolle, Ann Hamilton, Johanna Durney,
Michael Meare, Chris Gottle, Rebecca Hawker,
John Empson, Soo-Jae Loo, Dan Bournd, Cathy Ellis, Donna Bregby,
Martin Grahmay, Dan Shellerbaader, Susan Dallas-Swain, Pamela Prater

Figure 3.1: The Poster of the Four Caskets Project

36
Press release of the *Four Caskets Project* chose a more poetic description and
gave a brief biography of me as an artist. It was released to the OSU community through
emailing.

**Four**
**Caskets Project**

A Performance oriented exhibition by **So Yeon Park**

And

50 participants from The Ohio State University Departments of
Arts, Art Education, Theater, Music and Art foundation classes and many others.

From four directions sixteen pairs of bounded pallbearers walk slowly to meet in
the central pole. Each casket carries within it suspended objects: colorful paper flowers,
mourning bells, white strings, and burning incenses. A caravan of flower carriers also
comes from the periphery to join them. They hand you a white flower.

The Strings keep the spirit from going astray. The scented path shows it the way.

So Yeon Park is a female South Korean artist. The contemplative and meditative
aspects of her work are ultimately associated with her background as a Korean. She
started as a potter and progressed in making mixed media sculpture. Currently, her work
has evolved into performance installation art utilizing many different media. She earned
the first BFA in art in Korea and the second BFA in art from California College of Arts
and Craft in USA. This performance is a part of her MFA show at The Ohio State
University.

**Date:** Friday, May 30th 5:00 p.m.
Ritual activity (Making flowers) starts at 3:30pm
In front of Hopkins Hall
Location: At the Oval

*Figure 3.2: Press Release of the Four Caskets Project*
THE DAY OF THE PERFORMANCE

The day of the performance was May 30th, 2003. It was a clear but windy day, which created unexpected situations during the performance. First, the pallbearers looked out of control in terms of the garments they wore. Each garment opened in the back with one closure at the neckline and one slit on either side. This type of garment construction, aided by the wind, revealed the performers' underclothing. Since I did not predict this condition prior to the performance, it destroyed the unity of the costumes by causing them to look messy. Another major distraction of the costumes was caused by the length of the garments. Originally the garment design covered the performer's entire body. However, the garments were shortened due to budget restrictions. In hindsight, I should have asked the performers to wear a similar color underclothing, thus preventing this visual distraction. However, the long sleeves of the garments were enhanced naturally by the wind, which contributed to the animation of the performers' arms as they carried the caskets. Another beneficial aspect of the weather conditions was the blowing white paper flowers on the green grass of the Oval. While flower carriers dropped the flowers, the wind gave a spontaneous movement to the flowers, making them roll and float over the grass.

The pole installation was not stable enough to withstand the wind. In fact, right after the performance ended, the twelve-foot metal pole fell to the ground. It was fortunate that nobody was around at the moment it happened. I should have been more aware of this potentially dangerous element of the outdoor installation.

Along with the weather condition, there also were some technical problems. First, a communication tool such as a walky-talky would have helped to minimize
unnecessary running around and miscommunication, therefore enabling the performance to run more smoothly. As a result, I learned how difficult it was to control an outdoor multi-task performance without appropriate equipment.

I sincerely appreciated the help of all of the performers and the two staff members who assisted me in the project. Overall, I gained an invaluable experience that will enable me to move forward into public performance work. I will never forget the excitement generated during the two hours prior to the start of the performance. I experienced a sense of fulfillment that I never felt before, and still cannot explain in words.

DUAL ROLES: A DIRECTOR AS WELL AS A PERFORMER

I took multiple roles in the *Four Caskets Project*: I was a casket maker, a performer, an installer for the center pole installation, a director, a coordinator, a promoter, a poster designer, and proposal writer. In particular, my dual role of director and performer was not a good idea to pursue because I was distracted by other responsibilities as a director when I should have focused on carrying out my duty as a performer. I took two performing roles: one as an undertaker who led the whole process of the funeral and the second as a representative mourner of the deceased’s family (*Sang Ju*) who performed obstructive behaviors demonstrating their unwillingness to let go of the deceased.

Due to the overwhelming task of directing the performance, I should have passed my performing role to another performer. That way, I could have given my overall attention to the performance as a whole. However, it was also important to be among the
volunteers as a performer in the role of an undertaker, because it allowed me direct contact with the other performers. I realized it was almost impossible to fulfill my two different roles at once. As a result, I found many parts of the *Four Caskets Project* lacking in professionalism. However, in spite of the many shortcomings I have found in this project, I learned how to organize and multi-task a public project effectively, how to share tasks with other professionals, how to define my role(s), how to operate effectively within a budget, and how to direct the performers.
CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

The more performance work I accomplish, the more I realize the importance of
the sculptural aspects within my work. *Sand Walker* was the foundation piece. It was the
first in a series of performances with sculptural features that I defined as my visualization
of restrictive movements and moments of release. *Sand Walker* was a mirror image of
my restricted emotions. I felt mental discomfort as though I had lost the mobility of my
arms as an artist. Through artful visualization, I tried to release myself from my sense of
disability as an artist. I chose restrictive movements as metaphor for the reaction of my
mental discomfort caused by distorted morality, materialistic society, superficial
socialization, overloaded customs, tragic accidents, and prejudices. However, I found my
restrictive movements were directly related to my moments of release, because I thought
of my life as a repetitive cycle of these two realms. I believe many people, including
myself, are not even conscious of their restrictive conditions and do not know how to be
emotionally released from them.

In my performances, restrictive movements function as a tension builder of
complicated emotions. They help the audience become aware of their restrictive
surroundings. In my earlier performances, I showed moments of release through the
visual residue of my restrictive movements.
As my performances progressed, they showed the audience’s physical reaction to their emotional response to my performance, and these reactions usually became a part of the performance. For example, the audience could respond, because they witnessed the performers’ symbolic release from their restrictive movements.

In terms of using multi-media technology in my performance, although I think computer technology offers a lot of new visual possibilities in my artwork, the same nature of the technology also caused a lot of problems, and restrained my visual language. In addition, the performance environment with multi-media technology could only be shown through the video projector or the television monitor, both of which could only be processed through a computer program. Therefore, I felt technology limited the space in which I could make my performance work and it offered a somewhat rigid format. At the same time, technology allowed me to investigate live Tele-Presence and interdisciplinary collaborative performance. The notion of interactivity changed my idea of making performances, and made me think about interaction among the performers as well as between the audience and the performers. After gaining these various as a component in my performance, I revisited sculpture to create my performance with people.

My first step in this approach was the Four Caskets Project, which was an invaluable learning experience. It was my first attempt at a public outdoor performance, which evolved from my personal experience of my father’s death. It brought the private religious experience into secular and larger audience. I believe that the healing nature of art making brings diverse individuals into a larger community-wide communication and reconciles them with society as I have experienced it.
The next direction of my art making will focus on two concerns: human spirituality and healing. I think human spiritual energy is an unknown resource, which we mostly do not utilize as much as we think we do. I think it has unlimited possibilities for healing people and for creating art. The process of releasing human emotions became an important theme of my work because the releasing emotion is one of the healing processes I have felt in my personal experience. Therefore, I have chosen to work with it, in order to help others realize the value of moments of release.
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