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Robert Oppenheim, Kyongju Things: Assembling Places.

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Michael M. J. Fischer

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The title, Kyongju Things, Assembling Places, signals two subjects of interest for *EASTS*: conflicts over the legacies of the ancient capital of Silla versus development (especially the routing of the high-speed train pictured on the cover); and a strategy of narration, the actor network theory (ANT) of Michel Callon and Bruno Latour.

The virtue of ANT is its double focus on (1) the active work that goes into the reproduction of power relations, networks, obligatory points of passage for authoritative information collection, processing, and dissemination; and (2) the ways in which matters of fact (technological calculations for instance) become matters of concern, and the ways "matters of fact" in turn are deconstructed by the contestation of social actors with differential interests into elements that can be reconfigured in new ways.

"Assembling" signals the active work of recruitment or enrolling social actors in a "project," for Latour in Aramis, or The Love of Technology, the efforts to recruit and hold together coalitions of interest in the building of an "intelligent transportation system" in Paris; for Oppenheim in Kyongju, the reconstruction of urban and historical "Places," involving "Things" such as the routing of the high-speed train, and also the building of a stadium, the preservation of South Mountain (Namsan) a heritage site of royal and Buddhist pasts, and the reconstruction of the wanggyon or royal palaces of Silla. Latour is fond of the Icelandic etymology of "thing" from the Islandic Althing (parliament), or also *res publica* (public things), and of proposing a "parliament of things" in which things are themselves given representation as agentive subjects in "matters of concern." He invokes John Dewey's notion of the "public" as composed or called into existence through the unintended consequences of planning and administrative acts. In these formulations, Latour attempts to overcome the flat engineering language of actor network theory.

In a similar effort of overcoming the limitations of actor network theory, Robert Oppenheim, towards the end of his book, draws upon the work of two key science,

M. M. J. Fischer (✉)
Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA, USA
e-mail: mfischer@mit.edu

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technology and society (STS) anthropologists, Timothy Choy and Kim Fortun. Choy provides a comparative model from Hong Kong, much better attuned to Oppenheim's Korean case than say Latour's analysis of the (according to Latour) failed Aramis (he does admit it had productive spin-offs that might be narrated as successes; he does not admit that other intelligent transportation projects were seen to be successful). In the Hong Kong case, dueling experts are recruited by different parties in an environmental dispute with a Greenpeace international expert arguing the case for localism, and local Chinese experts using universalistic standards to impose solutions on unwilling villagers (the story is complicated also by tenancy, lineage, and migration issues). It is precisely the kind of case that Oppenheim wants to argue for Kyongju in contrast to what he criticizes as the more usual accounts of universalistic transnational activism. That is, multiple interests at different scales are brought into play in ways that the simple language of networks and actants (assemblages of humans and non-humans, coalitions and alliances of groups) fail to dramatize (indeed at the time of writing *Aramis*, Latour noted that the novelist Richard Powers was able to do things in *Galatea.2.2* that ANT was unable to achieve).

For such reasons, Oppenheimer draws upon a more dynamic narrative device: Kim Fortun's "double binds." Oppenheim uses it mainly to mean the conflicting demands upon an actor to balance stable but seemingly opposed imperatives (preservation vs. development) or audiences (experts vs. users), or constituencies (national vs. regional). In Advocacy after Bhopal (2001), Fortun uses it instead dynamically for a Dewey-like "calling into existence" and "finding a voice or articulation" amidst numerous contending demands for unstable and temporary political moves. In the Bhopal case, each of the major collective actors (the state, the lawyers for the injured, the association of families of the injured, and so on) is constantly negotiating differential imperatives and contested accounting procedures (medical, restitutional, investment, safety) amidst information that is concealed by government and corporations alike.

If the use of actor network theory is a bit clunky, Oppenheim's story about Kyongju is fascinating as a space of national, local, and citizen self-fashioning. Before 1987, he remarks, citizen activism was oriented towards the struggle for democracy; afterwards, it turned attention to environmental, feminist, human rights, quality of life, and planning issues, including site-specific questions of appropriateness and sustainability. National organizations such as the Citizens Coalition for Economic Justice (CCEJ) shifted from a model of central and local branches to a network created by the local groups, not the center, who called on the center only for educational or training support. Of key STS interest is the development of local capacity to deploy technical expertise and propose alternative solutions rather than just being protest or oppositional to the central government.

Dongguk University seems to have been an important resource in this local capacity. It is the local elite university in Kyongju, a campus of the leading Buddhist university, and situated across a bridge from the old town. The local CCEJ also drew upon the YMCA as a key constituency. (Some of the dynamics of Buddhist organizations is spelled out by Oppenheim, but little is said about Korean Christian organizations in the contest over the construction of national identity.) While Oppenheim gives us some sense of the dispute over the routing of the high speed

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train and the location of its station as a new urban growth pole (*sintosi*), most of his book is an archeology of elements that went into claims of local expert competence, some technical, some socio-cultural. Indeed, after a resolution to the high-speed train routing was achieved, there was a movement against capture of the local CCEJ by "elite" technocrats, and a democratizing move to more lay citizen consensus and leadership.

The archeology of local civil society competence includes most notably the struggles over the city's function in national ideology as the ancient Silla capital to which South Korea (in contrast to North Korea) attaches its roots. An annual cycle of four civic rituals instituted in the 1960s and 1980s enact this struggle. The Silla Cultural Festival originated under President Park Chung Hee's ideology of national reconstruction (*yusin*) and the New Village Movement. President Park attended the opening ceremony with his own retinue facing a pageant of ancient kings, queens, and *hwarang* (young warriors, compare the Greek *ephebes*, or Persian *javanmardi*), and acted as the chief offerant in a Confucian *koyuje* (offering to the ancestors informing them of events among the living). Thereafter, the opening changed to a *kamsaje* (thanksgiving) to artists and scientists of Silla, and then in 1977 to evergreen trees from four mountains enshrined in an "Ur-Korean" (pre-Confucian, pre-Buddhist) ceremony, constructed by folklorists, archeologiests, and art historians. It became a biennial event and management gradually devolved to a mixed government and non-government committee

If the Silla Cultural Festival began as state-organized, the Saebol Feast on the last evening of the festival was organized by a voluntary organization of committed amateurs. In its first year, it ran over budget and was canceled the next year by the city. So the Friends of Silla Culture refused further city money (with its oversight, budget constraints, and politician grandstanding) and declared it an annual "people's event", celebrated in a forest overseen by a plywood white rooster in memory of the bird which saved the ancestor of the royal Kim line of Silla. The two rituals initiated in the 1980s and 1990s, Ch'ungdam in the spring and Wolmyong in the fall, celebrate monks whose lives illustrate that even if one lives in corrupt times, individuals living in a spirit of purity can transform the country.

Oppenheim calls these four rituals and the state plans for cultural preservation of Buddhist shrines and temples "models" which can be leveraged into assemblages (or maybe *pace* Latour "assemblies"). The "levers" are *tapsa* (self-educative activities of "interacting with historical things"), particularly *tapsa* or engaged pilgrimages to temples and shrines of the South Mountain (*Namsan*) by tourists, alpine clubs, and others.

At the time of fieldwork, 1998-1999, Kyongju was a town of some 300,000 and felt it had suffered slower growth because of the concern for cultural preservation on behalf of the nation. Property owners have had to pay for archeological excavation before building new structures. In the debates over the routing of the high-speed train, there were opposed opinions whether the economic effects of the new urban growth around a new station would economically stimulate the old town ("raising all boats"), or would lower land prices in the old town and allow the government to buy even more land for preservation. Novel procedures for adjudication were devised (a public *tapsa* of 11 government and 11 non-government experts), and a synergistic configuration of three constituencies were leveraged together: (a) *santosi* (pro-

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growth new city), (b) *Namsan* (cultural preservation of views of and from the mountain), and (c) archeological (preservation of the royal precinct of Silla). A painting of the Silla *wanggyong* as if seeen from Namsan was an important mediator, allowing people to visualize the mountain with its Buddhist shrines together with the old city. Such visualizations and "rules of thumb" schemas helped people understand how the routing maps articulated with the Namsan, wanggyong, and sintosi.

So it is worth asking what difference it would make if the ANT narrative were replaced by an older language of "symbolic form," "negotiations," and "coalitions", or even the language of social dramas ("imagined traditions," "liminal period," and "new urban status")? Aside from maybe a slight shift of emphasis towards notions of citizenship, perhaps we should ask why an imported train from France rather than a Korean-engineered one? If one thinks of other train projects—Latour's intelligent transportation system involving new information technology; the Beijing-Tibet railway involving difficult engineering challenges of building on softening tundra and in high mountains; the *Indonesian-built* high-speed train from Jakarta to Surabaya–some key STS questions arise that actually have to do with engineering and science. While there is no reason not to read Latour as an epistemologist (how one understands "things"), or as a political analysis of coalitions with things and people co-producing power along with the social, or even as a metaphysician (of Leibnizian monads connecting everything with everything), one ought not to forget the actual scientific knowledge, engineering of technologies, and, in this case, also architectural design techniques.

We hear, for instance, about the fancy new glass and chrome railway station in Seoul (as a symbol of modernity), but nothing about the form of the station in Kyongju. A clever architect could design a see-through glass station or one that visually fades into the landscape, or a sculptural form that adds interest and complements the sacred mountain views. We are only given a photograph of the site with an opaque two-dimensional white box blocking the view. Nor do we hear much about the esthetics, economics, or symbolism of the new stadium that was also a matter of concern (think of the Beijing "Bird's Nest").

In sum, while Oppenheim is best describing civic rituals (a traditional anthropological topic), and good on coalition politics, his book points to a need to develop a language for comparative STS, contrasting domestic civic spaces not just across nation states, or the frictions of globalization. Two of the most fascinating, if under elaborated themes in the book are the contrasts (a) between the relatively prosperous southeastern region of Kyongju from which Park Chung Hee came and which thus is relatively pro-government, and the southwestern Cholla region of peasant uprisings and the 1980 Kwangju Uprising in which a *minjung* (oppositional) historiography of the 1980s was grounded; and (b) among contesting factions within the city of Kyongju over the feelings of being left behind by development because of the burdens of preserving cultural heritage. Thus, while the use of ANT seems merely rhetorical, one of the greatest successes of the book, is illuminating the domestic, regional, and urban politics of South Korea in a way that raises a key set of analytic questions to help understand the rich dynamics of Korean technological and cultural striations. In subsequent work, it is to be hoped that Oppenheim and others will pay more direct attention to the socio-cultural infrastructures and dynamics of the sciences and engineering technologies themselves as they play out amidst the larger socio-political dynamics.

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