

My father's stories often feel self-perpetuating. Memories of his youth consist mostly of war, fleeing south from the northernmost part of what was at the time just Korea, before the border divided the two halves forever. I never understood why my father would cry when he would sing "Edelweiss" from the famed American 1950's musical, *The Sound of Music*, during our at-least-once-weekly karaoke sessions (on LaserDisc) at home during my childhood. I learned only later it was a song to signify an unfulfilled longing for a lost homeland, the titular family singing it together as they escaped their country for another. Decades later, when he was able to return to North Korea as a US citizen on a heavily guarded American tour, did the actualization of this become clear.

A few days in, he was making to board the bus, then immediately jumped off, running down a side street to duck into a shop and beg a startled shopkeeper to exchange North Korean currency for his crisp \$100 US bill, worth probably a year's wages on the black market. What he held then in his hand, bills and coins he had hoped to recognize and didn't, made clear that every last remaining memory of his birthplace had been erased and was gone. My mother received an early morning phone call from the American embassy in Seoul that my father had been detained by North Korean authorities. He was released a day later on the grounds that he had had an amnesiac episode and thought he had gotten on the wrong bus.

Beyond all this, (even the time he was punched by an orangutan while on safari), the most shocking was when he flew to Seoul, exhumed his parents to have them cremated, and put their ashes into a black garbage bag, smuggling them onto a plane back to the States; too expensive to do it legally, he said, but out of respect put them in my backpack, not my suitcase. Later when detained at the airport for having ash residue, related bomb-making material, on the right-side handle of his bag, he barraged his interrogators with photos and videos of his recent hike into the Bukhansan mountains. Exhausted by the formalities of having to entertain an elder's rambling musings, they let him go without ever checking his backpack.

What is this urge to displace the ashes of my ancestors from their land, divided as it is, to a foreign land simply because my father has now lived in it twice as long. What does the land you're from matter in a time of total dispersal, where the wellness industry loves to tout "groundedness" but encourages a nomadic and freelance lifestyle, grotesquely cheap flights allowing even more mobility, and essentially, more useless travel. As a result, globalization is rampant and everywhere now looks like nowhere. Then, the "right" wants a return to nationalism, in extreme cases a return to "blood and soil". But what they don't understand is that immigrant and refugees' lands will become uninhabitable due to the developed world and so these waves of migration are imminent and will be inevitable. And what does this matter in the face of how the Anthropocene is a Joke¹ where all of

recorded humanity is barely an event let alone a self referential epoch. The ego it takes to think that all our trace pieces of plastic (recycle!) won't eventually be subsumed by nature, slowly creeping and growing over every crappy condo built of drywall and cheap asphalt roads we've created, Earth's geological and psychological layers squeezing out any trace of our over all existence. Though we all fantasize of a future where advanced beings will be curiously wandering and picking through our ruins the same way anthropologists have for the last millennia, as we make our way skyward towards other inhabitable planets, we'd be lucky if even a tiny scrap of these great Pacific Garbage Patches will be left as a reminder we were ever at the top of the food chain.

Last time I was in Los Angeles with Phillip, our lives coincidentally both packed up in boxes, his in my hometown of LA, mine in his of east Germany, we discussed transitions and loss and moving towards new beginnings. It was during this conversation we would experience the second and scariest of three earthquakes in four days, an unprecedented number for even expectant Angelenos; our deep rooted hope for apocalypse, with its inevitable regeneration, rebirth, and actual change, trumping the fear of death.

Growing up in Los Angeles, we were all enamored with the myth of "The Big One", an earthquake guaranteed to flatten the city and bring about, along the fault lines, an apocalypse of sorts. The only preparations we were taught as children was "duck and cover", a remnant of protection methods against atomic bomb attacks in the 50's. If we imagine fault lines as political borders, and humanity's current collective anxiety for the apocalypse as the "The Big One", we have learned and taught nothing since then, beyond a self centered duck and cover mentality. While concentration camps for children comfortably exist in our current and crumbling superpower, and Iceland mourns the death of a 700 year old glacier how can we rally for climate change activism in a genuine way. At its core, isn't it geared towards preservation for future generations; "for the children", as it were.

The Man in the High Castle, a crappy Amazon produced television show based on Phillip K. Dick's dystopian novel of the same title, uses the song "Edelweiss" as its intro tune, chopping and screwing it to infuse sinister, Nazi undertones. It's hard today not to read the lyrics in a *White Ribbon*² way, about the supremacy of white children, I suppose. But in this extreme culture of political correctness, I'd rather allow my aging immigrant Korean father to project his lifelong feelings of disruption, displacement, and death onto a musical made for white people. The lyrics can still loom large over the loss of land, the loss of lives had, and the long, sad farewell to what one knows will never exist in the same way again, all this as the film's seven white siblings illegally cross country borders in hopes of a brighter future, but also even, any future at all.

Edelweiss Edelweiss
Every morning you greet me
Small and white
Clean and bright
You look happy to meet me
Blossom of snow may you bloom and grow Bloom and grow forever
Edelweiss Edelweiss
Bless my homeland forever³

– Lisa Jo

1. Brannen, Peter “The Anthropocene is a Joke.” *The Atlantic*, August 13, 2019, Science.
2. Haneke, Michael, *The White Ribbon*, 2009
3. Rodgers and Hammerstein. “Edelweiss.” *The Sound of Music*, 1959

Phillip Zach (b. 1984, Cottbus, Germany) lives in Los Angeles and Berlin. This is his first solo exhibition in France. His work is included in the 16th Istanbul Biennial, curated by Nicolas Bourriaud. He has had solo exhibitions at such venues as: Freedman Fitzpatrick, Los Angeles; Koppe Astner, Glasgow; New Jerseyy, Basel; Johan Berggren, Malmö; and Frankfurter Kunstverstein, Frankfurt. His work has been shown in group exhibitions at: La Panaceé, Montpellier; M+B, Los Angeles; Kunsthalle Mainz; CAC Vilnius; Depart Foundation, Los Angeles; Luma Foundation.

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