



## INTERVIEW

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*A / B: Min Oh and Haejin Pahng in Conversation*

This written conversation between Min Oh and Haejin Pahng is based on Oh's artist talk held at Seoul Art Space Mullae on July 16th, 2016, during Oh's performance *ABA Performance*.

Pahng: I can't forget how joyfully mesmerized I was by *Marina, Lukas and Myself* when I first saw it at *2014 Korean Young Artists* at the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea. Piano playing and dance as similar but different types of performances are juxtaposed side by side, and you appear suddenly, making stop motions of thin plates of different colors and small hexahedrons. How are the three types of performances related to each other?

Oh: *Marina, Lukas and Myself* was inspired by the expressions of the Belgian choreographer and dancer, Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker during her performance. I found an extreme sense of beauty in the face of De Keersmaeker who performs not with an 'face of expressions', but with an 'face of thoughts'. This blank expressionless face with barely any hints of emotions in it, is different from the expressionless face we often see in contemporary dance. I formulated the hypothesis that making such 'face of thoughts' signifies intense concentration and controlled will. Also, at around this time, I began to realize that the performance is a good subject through which to observe the idea of control in multiple levels. *Marina, Lukas and Myself* discovers moments in performing which require high intensity of concentration and the performers who immerse themselves in such situations. It's also the outcome of the research to capture the facial expressions of control by observing the different 'expressions of thought' as demonstrated through the performances.

In *Marina*, the choreographer Marina Colomina performs her own work *Exquisite Corpse* with four other dancers. It sheds light on the complexity of control and weight of concentration that must be handled by Colomina, who must fulfill the various simultaneous roles and responsibilities as a dancer, choreographer, and stage director.

*Lukas* observes the pianist Lukas Huisman who is playing a piece titled *Piano Phase* by Steve Reich. Not matter how difficult the music is, the body through training is freed from technical bondage and arrives at a moment of pure immersion and pleasure in music. *Piano Phase* was selected because it's an intense work which doesn't allow the performer such a delight full moment during performance in terms that an extremely high level of

concentration is required throughout the entire piece. The video fixates itself on the facial expression and physical gestures of Huisman performing this score.

*And Myself* observes myself, producing stop motion frames in exquisite and repetitive movements. It might have been different if I had specialized technology, but in the way I produce stop motion, I would need to take all the scenes from the beginning again if one movement went wrong. Thus, I had to plan (choreograph), train, accurately perform and shoot fine motions in the production of stop motion frames. I defined this process as a moment which requires the concentration and control that is comparable to a performance.

Pahng: Three performers carry out three different performances also in *Youngwoo Lee, Shinae An, and Elodie Mollet*, another work in which the names of the three performers become the title of the work. It was a beautiful work in which the combination of the different performers — a pianist playing *Chopin's Piano Sonata No. 2*, a vocalist transposing this song into a vocalized melody, and a martial artist who maximizes the subtle physical movements expressed in the performances of the two musicians — forms a beautiful trio as referenced in the title of the exhibition *Trio*.

Oh: If I may add to that, *Youngwoo Lee, Shinae An, and Elodie Mollet* is a performance focusing on aspects that are not evidently exposed in the actual performance but mainly at the rehearsal stage, and each performance responds to the different kinds of rehearsal processes. The monophonic sequences sung by the vocalist composed of not only the main melody but tunes which performers sing in their minds when studying the score through bass or left hand accompaniment respond to the process of musical analysis. On the other hand, the martial arts movements reflect physical training process, in the sense that the gestures of the performance are basically movements functionally designed to create ideal sounds. The gestures observed in performances manifest themselves in very complex forms as they not only project such functional movements, but also strive to capture the immediate emotions and expressions of the performers, as well as to persuade the audience and the performers themselves.

Pahng: The performance in your work draws a clear line with the conventional characteristics of performance which tend to be reduced to the realm of dance, even when it's collaborated with choreographer or dancer. When you think of the performer as a player of a musical instrument, they not only produce music or sound, but move their physical bodies in an extremely controlled manner through training. In this case, this movement, along with the control of it, takes place through or as inner expressions. This is reflected in the look of 'minimalism' or 'expression of thought' as you poignantly coined, in *Lukas* who is playing *Piano Phase* by Steve Reich in *Marina, Lukas and Myself*. In a way, all expressions become a part of performance, from the blank expression as the performer is swept away by the pattern of repetition, to the meditatively immersed facial expressions on Youngwoo Lee's face as he performs

Chopin's emotive and passionate phrases in *Youngwoo Lee, Shinae An, and Elodie Mollet*.

On the other hand, the vocalist Shinae An in *Youngwoo Lee, Shinae An, and Elodie Mollet* and choreographer Ryeong-eun Kwon in *A Sit hum tunes*, frown, and move their hands in similar ways. It's interesting how two bodies, trained in different fields, are captured through similar movements and sounds. In a way, the dance type performances which resemble gestures of everyday life in your work are not just reflective of traits of minimalism, but are extensions of the essence of 'performance' and its accompanying gestures.

Oh: I think that there lies a lot of secrets in things that aren't very visible or are trivial, perhaps because they are so trivial that they are overlooked and thus fail to arrive at a certain form of description. It's fascinating to explore the confrontation and tension between predicted and unpredicted physical movements. I sometimes use the expression that the 'brain makes plans and the body executes it'. However, parts of the body disclose their hidden nature when the brain is too busy making plans, or the body, unable to clearly read the brain's plan, makes its own judgements and renders them into awkward movements. There are also times when the body makes a wrong judgement, leading the body and mind to work together in creating a strange gesture. Of all physical movements, I find the facial expressions the most interesting. I think of it as complex and subtle choreography, composed of organizing and improvising on conduct, betrayal, fabrication, predetermination and projection.

Pahng: Let's talk about your work *ABA Performance* in this exhibition. I think that there are various dimensions to the reason why this work would have seemed uncanny to a lot of people. Frankly speaking, I think it's because while it's supposed to be a performance of *Rachmaninoff Sonata*, the powerful emotions and intense sense of rhythm in the music are eliminated, and the work just boils down to a quiet sequence of specific objects and the body. It begins with music, but it's music that's absent. On the other hand, the strangeness also has to do with the fact that it took place on the stage, without the video and its control, which are elements that produce the exquisite performance unique to your work. Could you first articulate on the 'ABA' form?

Oh: I admit that the performance is removed from the music itself of *Rachmaninoff Sonata* in various ways; thus the audience who might have come expecting to hear Rachmaninoff music might have felt confused. Because Rachmaninoff Sonata is such a beautiful piece, it's easy to forget the beautiful structure of this music, or not even realize the need to think about it. I hope that the work somehow shed a light on its structure by talking about the structure in a tone that may be rather unfamiliar to most. *Piano Sonata No. 2 Op. 36* 1st mov. by Rachmaninoff, which is the source of *ABA Performance*, seems to be in the sonata form from the outside, but it has interesting detailed structures that are hard to be explained through

the sonata form alone. Before I explain the detailed structure, I would like give a short explanation on the sonata structure. The sonata form consists of three large sections: exposition (If this is A), development (I call this B), and recapitulation (very similar to exposition and thus I call this A'.) The exposition (A) exposes the subject; usually 2 themes including a main theme and another theme which contrasts it. In development (B), these themes are developed through a process of deconstruction, transformation and recombination. Recapitulation(A') exposes the themes that are exposed in exposition (A) in a similar but not the same form. Thus, the term ABA is taken from the sonata structure consisting of exposition (A), development (B), and recapitulation (A'), with a little variation added to it.

However, the detailed structure of exposition (A) in Rachmaninoff Piano Sonata No. 2 Op.35 1st mov. seemed to be very intimately organized to say that the exposition (A) simply presents theme 1 and theme 2 and that they only develop in development (B). The two motifs a and b which appear in less than the first measure at the beginning of the piece already go through four stages of development in exposition (A). The first phrase consisted of theme 1 while the forth developed phrase consisted of theme 2. Therefore, rather than opposing each other, it seemed like theme 2 was embracing theme 1. Furthermore, all phrases developed into four emerge in development (B), and motifs a and b gradually become one. To sum up, the short motifs a and b in the exposition were embraced in the theme 1 of exposition (A), and theme 1 was within theme 2, then the development (B) within motifs a and b again, forming a bizarre frame story like a Möbius strip.

Other series *ABA Diagram*, and *ABA Video Score* also maintain the Rachmaninoff Piano Sonata structure as I have interpreted, but *ABA Performance* doesn't precisely follow the structure of the original work. Actually, the work probably seems completely different from the original music because it is an entirely new interpretation and composition built upon the original starting point, after the elimination of the original work. It was a culmination of my thoughts on the sonata form, at the last stage of my experimentations and studies on the sonata form. While it may be hard to assert that *ABA Performance* follows an ordinary sonata form, its basic structure still follows the sonata form (ABA'). It is composed of overall as well as detailed plans that are mixed within it in order to find an equilibrium between what is organized and what isn't. The exposition (A) of *ABA Performance* proposes an 'already organized structure', while development (B) is 'improvisation', and recapitulation (A') 'applies variations to an already organized structure'.

In detail, the exposition (A) proposes the grammar which makes the structure of the performance, while development (B) produces a new and improvised reconstruction upon the already proposed grammar without being tied down to its principle. Lastly, recapitulation (A') returns to exposition but it not only compresses and reorganizes the existing grammar, it also demonstrates flexibility through variations and even errors. I briefly thought that it might be more appropriate to call it ABC

rather than the ordinary sonata form of ABA' at the beginning, but I thought that it still retains the pretext of 'recapitulation' in that it tries to reorganize in the system what has been let loose through improvisation in part B. I just exposed the elemental significance (of having returned but in a different state) of A' in the sonata form ABA' in a bolder manner.

What I considered important in the exposition A was to create a principle which could be applied to different subjects in a similar manner. I made consistency an important value so that the repeated principle on changing subjects would still be somewhat obvious to read. Development (B) in a way questions if the organized structure could be newly reconfigured this moment to something meaningful. The work progressed and produced the final form of 'a course of breaking rules', based on persistent questions as to how much it should deviate from the original principle, and in what manner. In recapitulation (A'), the main issues were concerned with its openness, acceptance of the new, and degree of errors it should allow. It also questioned how the performer or the system should react to such issues, and in what attitude the new elements should adapt to the system. The 'new objects' that appear in recapitulation (A') are not fixed but change with every performance. They are things that are observed or collected around the site the performance takes place. I prepared a few candidates, but it's intentionally planned so that no one, including the main performer nor myself who brings the objects into the stage, knows what the exact objects in each performance will be until the very moment.

Pahng: The disparateness between *ABA Performance* and the *Rachmaninoff Sonata* on which it is based, does not come from using the music itself merely as a background music or as an effect of some sort, but from breaking apart the musical structure and transposing it into elements of form and movement. In other words, there are concrete differences in videos and performances simply using sound, 'expressing' sound, becoming a 'musical' work, and being based on the 'musical structure'. I think that the innovative point of this work lies in the fact that while it uses sound, it oppresses its impulse to become something which 'expresses' music or a 'musical' work itself, and goes on further to betraying it all and finally being transposed into something which deals with the problem of 'structure'.

Oh: I'm so pleased that you mentioned structure. Because music uses abstract sounds as its material, we tend to focus on the sound that's heard rather than to the entire structure. However, it is precisely because it uses such abstract material that I think people who compose music, especially western music composers, have thought deeply about the structure and form of music. Structure largely follows logic rather than being randomly put together. Therefore, listening to music is about discovering and appreciating the structure of this reason. Sometimes it surprises me to see how logical music is. The exquisite reason laid out by composers is truly awe-inspiring, when you consider not only the principle of composition music which is based on the overtone (Note: the note used in

music is not composed of just one note but of many) but also in principles of reproducing, expanding, breaking down, retrogressing, and integrating the measures in which each melody is the subject.

I believe that the emotions and sensibilities that are expressed by the performer and roused up in the listeners are also based on this rationality in music. Even the emotions we feel in daily life have their own origin and context; the emotions we feel through music could never be just produced randomly without a context. As Leonard Bernstein mentioned in his lecture series *Unanswered Question*, it's not difficult to endlessly substitute such rational structures with particular situations in reality, and I think that this is the link which produces the emotions of those who perform and listen to music.

While *Marina, Lukas and Myself* emphasizes the beauty that can be found in the performance of reason in which emotional elements cannot clearly be found, *Youngwoo Lee, Shinae An, and Elodie Mollet* seems to assert that even the expressions and emotions seen in ordinary performances are planned and produced through logical interpretation and practice. Taking a step further in this work, I wanted to arrive at the end of the structures of music and their interpretations, as well as reason, which is the origin of emotion. I also wanted to talk about the beauty of the structure which gives a glimpse of the delicate sense of reason.

Pahng: In the Baroque and Classical era, composition was learned and practiced based on rhetoric. It's interesting to note that this 'structural' method actually came from the belief that the human 'emotional form' can be expressed in music.

As I mentioned at your artist talk after the performance, I think the title 'ABA' is frank yet tricky. This isn't an unusual title for your work because most of the titles of your works so far concisely direct at the subject, gestures or figures in the work. However, the expression 'ABA' is problematic. While 'ABA' signifies the sonata structure, the work of this late Romantic composer, Rachmaninoff, is too deviated from the classic sonata form to say that it's genuinely interested in the sonata form. Also, strictly speaking, the ABA form — in which A is followed by B, then A is repeated — is a Da Capo Aria form. On the other hand, the exposition-development-recapitulation structure, shortened into ABA is a sonata form, but the recapitulation in the end is not the same A as in the exposition. The relationship between exposition and recapitulation is more intimate than that in the Da Capo Aria form. Therefore, by concisely summarizing *Rachmaninoff Sonata No. 2* into an ABA form, and by presuming the two motifs into a and b, it calls forth the audience with the illusion (and thus disappointment) that they would be able to interpret this work as a combination of a chain of conflictual and dualistic elements. What are the elements of a and b which you analyzed in *Rachmaninoff Sonata No. 2*, and in what concrete elements did they convert into in this performance?

Oh: As you said, simplifying sonata into ABA largely reflects my own interpretation of the sonata form. First

of all, it questions if B, the development part which progresses the music based on the subject proposed in A, the exposition, could be viewed as a conflicting concept to A. This question reflects a kind of an optimistic attitude. It comes from the hopeful attitude of believing that even if the core material is the same, it could be seen as something completely different if the core element is mutated and creates a different context and form.

On the other hand, the idea that the recapitulation is A, and not A', reflects the pessimistic attitude that it is nothing new. Studying about sonata, I thought a lot about the meaning of recapitulation, which repeats exposition not in the same but in a similar way. Repeating the exposition means to come back to the beginning. Repetition and return has a sense of security and are intimately related; the two ideas are connected by a sense of stability, as repetition allows for the predictions of returning, and return gives the sense of familiarity of going somewhere new then coming back to where it left off. The stability of return has for a long time been used as a fundamental principle in western composition music, and personally I think of it as one of very powerful human instincts. A project to arrive at the end of structure, ABA also questioned whether the structure could be converted onto the screen. I couldn't help but question what meaning the sonata structure has on actual human life. While a sonata finishes as a return, events in real life cannot be cut on in single incidents; therefore, I thought that such events in real life are in a loop structure where the next step inevitably follows the return. Return is never concluded in a perfect sense of stability, as long as returning to the original place may mean having to take off to somewhere else again. Given the pattern of repetition where returning comes with leaving again, the stability in return might actually mean the anxiety before leaving. And I thought that in the loop structure of reality which sometimes frightens me, the recapitulation A' is not largely different from the exposition A.

In the ABA structure which goes back and forth optimism and pessimism, the motifs a and b become the actual material which composes the bone structure of ABA *Performance*. Originating from the two opposing motifs a and b in Rachmaninoff Sonata, motif a and b are clearly conflicting concepts in terms of musical nature. While a is about movement, line, singular, and indefinite, b is about stillness, dot, multiple, and definite. As opposed to a and b being fixed in the original music, a and b are not specific in ABA *Performance*, varying and expanding continuously throughout the performance. The entire performance structure is created, beginning with sound (a) and human figure (b), and expanding to human figure (a) and pencil (b), gesture of laying down the pencil (a) and erecting it (b), definite rules (a) and indefinite rules (b), pencil (a) and furniture (b), objects including pencils and furniture (a) and movement (b), predetermined structure (a) and improvisation (b), performer (a) and author (b), inside the stage (a) and outside the stage (b), and existing system (a) and completely new and foreign substance (b).

Pahng: I have told you before, half-jokingly, that perhaps this could expand beyond the realm of contemporary art to

a new methodology in contemporary music composition. This means transcending the mere combination of music performance and video, to forming a way of the musical structure itself and creating new movements, visual elements and sounds. Actually, when you used *Chopin's Sonata No. 2* in Youngwoo Lee, Shinae An, and Elodie Mollet, you created a new, more 'contemporary' music by repeatedly practicing a particular part rather than playing it as one entire performance.

This comes back to the question as to why ABA *Performance* is so uncanny and so problematic. First of all, this is probably because we felt that while your video works so far were 'musical,' this work deviates from its actual relationship with music and has more to do with a certain sense of rhythm or pitch which is produced from the temporal flow of the video. On the other hand, in this work, the original precise sense of musicality according to time is not really apparent in the musical structure, because the analyzed elements of musical structure are transposed into other elements and then realized into a performance which is 'impossible to edit.'

However, the more important dimension has more to do with questions this work asks on structure. When the music structure based on the flow of time is not transposed to a different time structure, or in other words, it is converted to each objects, modules and arrangement of movements, the resulting structure becomes entirely different in form from the structure at the starting point. Simply put, even though it began with a particular music, what results is a performance that seems almost completely irrelevant to the original music. I think that this is an outcome of a methodology in which the structure itself is rearranged into formative principles, rather than a result visualizing the auditory.

Oh: I think your expression that the structure itself is rearranged into formative principles is concise and clear. My very primary concern while working on this project was that my work would be misread as a visualization of the auditory before it's even viewed. I'm thankful that you made a clear distinction in this conversation.

Pahng: In ABA *Video Score*, the dance of the 'dry' shapes which aren't even objects was completely sensual. I am very excited for ABA *Video*, which I haven't seen yet. I have the feeling that the relationship between ABA *Video* and ABA *Performance* would be quite different from the relationships between your video/performance series so far. For instance, *Suite 1 Performance* (2012) is a performance which takes place in the backdrop of the projection of *Suite 1*, showing slightly different reproduction of the gestures as seen in the video. Therefore, a video which would be the reproduction of the performance becomes a certain original form, and the performance which re-enacts it again becomes an awkward imitation. I also heard that in the precedent work *A Dialog Performance* (2009-2010), you set up the relationship between video and performance as if it were an interactive performance. If so, what is the relationship between ABA *Video* and ABA *Performance*? What are the impacts of reading the two separate works, in successive



order, and now, in reverse order?

Oh: While *ABA Video* is a close study on the sonata structure, *ABA Performance* captures its own interpretation and questions on the sonata structure following the study of it. It wasn't my original intention to plan these two works in different directions, but the practical considerations on the two different mediums eventually led to fundamental questions and resulted in outcomes of completely different directions.

It's true that I made considerable reflections on the two orders being presented in reverse order, and I was even more worried about how it would affect the process of my work rather than on the audience. Although *ABA Video* conceptually comes before the performance, it's only just been shot on the camera and has not been edited. Therefore, in terms of the point of completion, the video comes later. This was intentional as it compromised practical conditions, but ironically, I think that it was for the better. At first, I worked based on the sonata structure of the Rachmaninoff sonata until the shooting stage of *Diagram*, *Video Score* and *Video*, then in the performance, it involved a process of destroying the original structure and newly reconstructing it. And now, coming back to the structure of the original music and completing the editing in faithful to the original piece, the process of my work has in a way become a form of the ABA' sonata form. It's like I'm experiencing the essence of recapitulation. I hope that the audience is able to experience the meaning of recapitulation in the sonata in a more sensorial way when they return from all the sense of unfamiliarity from the performance and confront the video that is faithful to the original structure.

Pahng: Recently, words like 'score' and 'music note' are being overused here and there. Unlike such metaphorical use, your 'love for score' is realistic and worth quite the contemplation. What's interesting in *ABA Performance* is that music is approached from the dimension of 'score' (rather than of sound). The dimension of the score as iconography traces back to your early works. For instance, in *Play the Stairs* (2006), music is created as the horizontally moving camera reads the holes on the wall and the lights that illuminate them as a type of scores. This has an obvious connection to the two disciplines of Piano and Graphic Design which you majored in your postgraduate studies. In other words, it means that you, as a pianist who reads and performs the score, regard music as something which pertains to beyond the aural, in an abstract and visual dimension. And the flat documentation of the score, and the signs that compose it, such as dots and lines, are all related to graphic design.

Similarly, the cracked lines on the ground in *A Dance* (2007) become a type of dance notation, and *A Walk* (2007) shows movements that change in response to background or matters, becoming a type of movement score.

*A Dialogue Performance* would be a more dramatic and exquisite expression of this. Anyways, it seems that while this movement/performance score was about being 'discovered' in an unstable state in reality

at the beginning, it gradually became more and more formalized and strict, until actually arriving at the analysis of music in *ABA Performance*.

Oh: I officially became interested in musical score last year through the work *Youngwoo Lee, Shinae An, and Elodie Mollet*, which was not a documentation of an already completed performance, but a partial presentation and recording of materials of performance that were collected under a broad conceptualization, then completed into a performance later through a process of video editing. When it was organized into a musical score for a trio after the performance, I found a clashing point between the principles required by the score, and the constructive feeling of vitality competed through the body and the ears. This triggered my curiosity on the score and dance notation. Fortunately, while working on *A Sit* at around the same time, I coincidentally (and necessarily) had the opportunity to strategically study the history of dance notation, and this expanded my interest to the nature and form of the score, and the intrinsic nature to connect the listener and the performer through the score. In addition, I also started to question how much interpretation could be included in the score. I guess what became the concrete starting point of *ABA Diagram* and *ABA Video Score* is the question if the musical score can be constructed solely through interpretation alone.

Pahng: I can't help but talk about the choreographer Akemi Nagao's movements that 'defy dance'. The performing in a fair number of works including *A Walk 2* (2013) eliminated the so-called 'expressionsim' and controlled everyday movements. But this time, mixed with (the absence of) *Rachmaninoff Sonata*, the cold movements were emphasized. I'm curious as to how the choreographer Akemi Nagao interpreted and choreographed the series of units extracted from music structure. I know it involved 'improvisation' part of the choreographer. How was it proposed and actualized?

Oh: The score was created through a conversation with the choreographer rather than being made by me alone and proposed to the choreographer. Because two people from different fields of dance and art came together to work, I realized a wide gap of difference between the words, concepts and ways of expressions we use. Therefore, what was needed was to make new agreements and definitions for such disparities. One of the ways of communication we agreed upon was to use the expression method of the score the way it was.

Traditionally, the score is created in a form of the composer's policy which is delivered to the performer who interprets and performs it. Meanwhile, dance notation is considered to be made with the body first, then reorganized afterwards as a form of documentation. This score can be viewed as an outcome of accumulating the everyday interactions between the artist's policies, performer's interpretations, production of the body, and its documentation. We started to formulate it at first in early May, then gradually updated it to completion with every rehearsal.

In the score, the most exceptional and important parts were marked 'Q,' which is neither a subject, principle of movement, nor detailed guidelines to movement; it was taken from 'Question' which the choreographer and I endlessly proposed in the rehearsal process. Q, which can be referred to as the development section within the entire performance, breaks down the existing grammar and spontaneously reconstructs the grammar that is needed or wanted at this moment.

At first, we began with breaking down the existing system (this part was called Chaos) and made improvisations by focusing on what attitude and method of destruction we should use. Then our questions shifted to asking why we are destroying it, what can be gained from the destruction, and what new meanings could be created from it. Therefore, the marks 'Q' on the score reflected the weight of such questions.

For those who have seen my previous works, it might come as a surprise that I used improvisation in my work. Even I at first was worried and wondered if it would be possible for Akemi Nagao, whose dance centers on improvisation, and I to work together. However, it dawned upon me that I was very fortunate to be working with Nagao who specializes on improvisation upon realizing that improvisation, for Nagao, isn't the common notion of improvisation most people think, which means to express whatever they want at the spur of the moment. For Nagao, improvisation meant movements that can only be attained through sufficient planning, endless rehearsals, and clear understanding of the desired outcome. While *Youngwoo Lee*, *Shinae An*, and *Elodie Mollet* drew in emotions and expressions into the realm of control, *ABA Performance* goes a step further, inviting even improvisation into the realm of control. Interestingly, Nagao, an improvisation specialist, and myself, a control freak, were almost identity in our method of work. Except for the difference in the languages we use, we truly enjoyed working with each other, without major conflicts in the process of planning, experimenting, modifying, developing and rehearsing.

Pahng: Your work is mostly silent even when it features people, except for some humming. I think that your uniquely cynical humor rests in connecting this 'quiet human' with 'noisy objects.' In a fair number of works, music plays an important role even though it lacks conversation, and the narrative is also headed to extinction. On the other hand, there is a narrative of tension between human and objects which is developed out of this obvious absence of narrative. For instance, such 'concealed narrative' can also be found in *ABA Performance*. When Akemi Nagao endlessly moves, piles, arranges and puts together objects, objects in a way seem to be on the same level of importance as human, or even seem like the main characters that are served by human. It's not the human body, but the object-body which suddenly produces beautiful formativeness and elements of the unexpected and unforeseen, so to speak. Actually, the most 'shocking' scene in this work is the unexpected 'disturbance' which is caused when the pencils erected in a line are knocked over.

Oh: Your expressions 'quiet human' and 'noisy objects' are so interesting. I agree with you. In my early works, I used language often, and in quite a reckless manner. However, I think my use of language decreased as I started chasing after secrets 'concealed' in the invisible tension and strange instability. Recently, I think a lot about the 'beauty of anxiety'. The form of anxiety is unknown because it isn't real but is psychological. Even so, people don't stop chasing after the identity of this anxiety, or at least I don't. I think there's power and beauty in the obsessiveness and cruelty in anxiety which makes people chase it endlessly, without revealing itself. Because the source of anxiety is hardly visible or audible, humans as curious beings carefully look for even the slightest clues to their anxiety. On the other hand, objects are dull in senses. There is not a single hint of anxiety in matters. They have no fine muscles so they cannot show minute emotional expressions, nor feel the need to. Simple and frank, they utter anything without reserve, and hover above the storms of life. They sometimes give humans clues, and are often willing to be a companion in our journey to chasing anxiety. The cooperation between the complex and cautious human and simple senseless objects is essential.

Pahng: Let's talk about *Sonatas* (2016). This work is like a prelude to your *ABA* series in the sense that it explores the sonata form. Could you elaborate on the meaning of objects that appear in this work, and the sonata, which was the subject of analysis?

Oh: As you said, *Sonatas* was the first experiment which analyzed the sonata structure and composed it onto the screen. It deals with *Piano Sonata No. 62, HobXVII/52* by Hayden (classical work composed in 1794), *Piano Sonata No. 21, D960* by Schubert (Romantic work composed in 1828) and *Piano Sonata No. 7* by Prokofiev (20th Century work composed in 1939-42). Instead by selecting three different time periods and following the typical form of the sonata, my objective was to select works with unique characteristics in order to carry out an extensive research on the sonata form, not only limited to the fundamental sonata structure, but also its transformation according to time, as well as its expansive possibilities.

In Hayden sonata, theme 1 is very long-winded while theme 2 appears almost like a garnish, charged with strange and bizarre charms. Themes 1 and 2 are each repeated four times in Schubert sonata, but while theme 1 is repeated in a similar and almost passive way, theme 2 changes quite actively and passionately through the repetition, filled with musical aspiration. Sonata by Prokofiev is interesting in that the three short modules construct the work by repetitive process of coming together and separating in a very free emancipated way throughout the piece. Motif 1 is also made of a combination of these three different modules, and these modules change in sequence, speed and personality to change into motif 2.

The objects in the three sonatas appear under generally the same principles, are given the same functions, and the degree of their combination and transformation changes according to the structure of each

music. Important visual materials are: objects (plants, liquid and scarf) corresponding to motif 1 and motif 2, objects (lime) that correspond to the patterns which aren't the core element of the structure but repeatedly appear like garnish, background patterns (solid, stripe and grid) which responds to the partitioning of the overall rhythm, and the brightness (from light grey to dark grey) of the background wall which reflects major and minor keys. Here, stimulation (movement) of slightly different nuance is applied to each sonata. Meanwhile, every time the beat or tonality changes, or every moment there is a special instruction in the performance, sounds of percussive instruments refresh the work. Also, wide-tone scale melody that's completely irrelevant to the original music takes place, and these notes direct at the degree of dynamics (pp, p, mp, mf, f, ff) of each sonata.

I didn't want to capture any specific meaning in the objects and sounds used in *Sonatas*. While *Sonatas* was an experiment of transferring the music structure to the screen, it was also meaningful as an experiment on its possibility as an interpretive music. Therefore, I wanted it to be faithful to the role of signs that clearly and efficiently instruct each material as to in what degree of transformed state to be played, as well as in what tonality, rhythm and dynamics. However, if there was an aspect which I thought about, not in connection to the function of the sign, would be that I intended for the three objects that correspond to the motifs to be able to move organically according to the surrounding environment instead of being fixed in form. Thinking about this condition, I chose plants which changes in form with time, liquid which transforms to the vessel in which it is held, and a scarf which can move unpredictably depending on the force applied to it. The selection was based on the intention to enforce the minimum motion to objects that cannot move on their own.

Pahng: In *ABA Performance*, the audience section surrounds the stage in a rectangular form. Therefore, regardless of where one sits, there are moments when one has no choice but to see just the back of the performer, or not be able to see the lining up of the yellow pencils erected by the performer. Such performance that's repeated and reorganized in the audience's field of vision makes one think about the frame. Let's look back on *Suite 1*. It is related to *ABA Performance* in the sense that it stages an arrangement of chairs and a series of rectangular frames of different sizes. The performer in *Suite 1* stepping on the chair and going through the white rectangular frames in order seems to be about something beyond the simple handling of objects; it seems to question how it should make a contact between the series of small frames (or straight lines of objects which could not become frames) and the body within the video frame. And if so, it alludes to the camera frame which was in charge of dismantling and assembling the body in your video works, and the resulting stage on which the strictly controlled *Mise-en-Scène* composition is absent and impossible. *Suite 1 Performance* demonstrates excessiveness and surplus as one of the ways. In other words, it seems to repeat the movements of *Suite 1* in exactly the same way on the stage, but when the body is framed out and out of

sight from the video work at a certain point, the performer on the stage carries out 'surplus' movements such as changing the rectangular frames.

Oh: *Suite 1* and *Suite 1 Performance* were conceptualized based on the questions on the spatial difference between video and performance. In the completed works, video signifies a space that is ideal but hard to define, while performance involves a space that is comparatively much more realistic and raw. In *Suite 1 Performance*, the video and performance of *Suite 1* are juxtaposed with each other at the same time. The choreography itself, composed of A, B, C and D, is shared identically in the video and performance. But the arrangement changes according to the physical difference between the space of the video and the performance. It takes place in the order of ABBB ACCC ADDD in the video where 'disassembling and assembling of the body' is possible, and in the order ABCD ABCD ABCD, according to the form of the stage, in the performance where the inside of the stage and outside of it are exposed. Therefore, the two movements that follow two different axis construct compositions in which the assembly is completely the same, partially similar, or completely different.

Pahng: In *ABA Performance*, we experience the countless assembly of frames within frames. In other words, on this stage which lacks the camera frame that's usually fixed towards one direction in your video works, what is imagined are frames of different scales that transform organically. It's not only the audience section which surrounds the stage that forms a 3-dimensional frame; the props and furniture on the stage themselves also function as different frames within. In connection to the exhibition title *Moving / Image*, the image captures movement but it's also something that's endlessly generated and dissipated through its own movement. In a sense, *ABA Performance* seems like an experimentation of the stage as a possibility of image, through the absence of it.