

I had no choice but to cancel my flight to Seoul in March. Now that I couldn't fly there, meetings for our exhibition and accompanying statements proceeded online, high resolution images flying into my inbox. What you can see in images, though, are extremely limited. Due to this circumstance, at times I would be viewing exhibitions via video calls, camera swinging from right to left, and at other times asking the other party to describe in words the textures and the tactility that cannot be conveyed in videos. For me, at least, these ways of communication “substituted” flying to the actual place – all of this has “come to be” my narrative. Then, what would “alternative narratives” look like?

Whenever the word “alternative” is used, a set of existing options is applied to determine the parameters of what the subject can be. Similarly to how remorse and misjudgments are framed, what we call “countless narratives” are bound by certain conditions. This includes the very expression of “narratives”, which takes the form of a certain type of scenario, wherein the pathways are fixated and individual elements are linked accordingly. Hence a narrative is born, as a kind of condensation. However, the things that are excluded and disregarded from the final narrative continue to follow us about. The expression “countless narratives”, which is mentioned in the conceptual framework of Alter-narratives, therefore contains a conflictive relationship between the words “countless” and “narrative”. The countless possibilities that will not and can not ever become narratives – fragments, things that are not scripted or verbalized, as

well as “impossible” events that occur outside of our predictions— are excluded not only from becoming specific narratives, but also from the very format that constructs them. Consequently, the “countless narratives” are positioned within a relationship of disconnection: countless/narratives. If so, will this relationship be always fixated within its inherent disconnection?

Alter-narratives is not the first or the only exhibition to be presented online. Importing reality into virtual space is neither new nor limited to art exhibitions. Depending on how reality is imported, though, “an alternative exhibition” can often turn into one that is “feasible for execution.” A set up where artists’ statements and artwork images are uploaded online and made viewable down to the tiniest details does nothing to shine light on the countless/narratives that have receded to the background. Instead, it simply transfers real life possibilities to the online arena. In this exhibition, the artworks that were planned to debut at the physical exhibition venue successfully did so online. But how did it come to be “successful”? The exhibition could have been called off, the artists could have refused to exhibit online, and the artworks could have been presented in a variety of different ways. Behind the resulting outcome, there are countless/narratives that “could have been”, but disappeared as certain other possibilities became “possible”.

To begin with, something that is online is hardly a copy of reality. Online initiatives taken up by a number of museums attempt to

reflect reality without depicting the thickness of paints or the multiple angles of viewing a sculptural piece, let alone the crowd of visitors or the possibility of being infected by viruses. Technically speaking, though, online exhibitions are not intended to offer the same viewing experience as in real life. If anything, the resulting experience is more sharpened than in reality, without the various sensations and events surrounding the viewer, a case in point being Alter-narratives’ successful online presentation. Having said that, we should not forget that the exhibition could well have been held on printed media; boycotted by artists and/or organizers; or inaccessible for viewing depending on each viewer’s Internet connection. So rather than saying that the exhibition opened “successfully” (無事, without trouble) it is more accurate to say that the exhibition opened in this way simply as a distillation of the “countless” (無数, without limit) elements leading up to it. Identifying the narratives that are possible from those that are not, and the ability to picture what gets left out from these narratives, give us a point at which to reflect (= a turning point), as what is online manifests itself as its own field separate from reality – what we are viewing are not artworks per se, but artworks as seen through the screen.

Once we pass this turning point, however, turning back and reflecting is hardly easy, since we become content with picturing what the exhibition would look like in a physical space. Moreover, the narratives we see in an exhibition are illustrated by the various elements that are linked to it. With an online

exhibition, there are things which will never be linked to the viewing experience: seeing a turtle crawling on the street; checking the weather forecast for the next day; or forgetting to collect the change at a vending machine. That being said, I would like to conclude this with a suggestion that depending on how the online exhibition is set up, the countless elements that are not part of the narratives can perhaps become integrated. This is one way that the definition of “reorganization”, which was mentioned in the conceptual framework for this exhibition, can be interpreted. It can be achieved through an approach which, rather than spelling out a narrative in relation to countless elements, instead reveals what has not become a narrative, in order to dissect existing narratives from the outside in while also incorporating external elements. I believe that key to building on the “countless/narratives” is the possibility of forming a narrative which is constantly “shifting (utsuro-うつろ)”, instead of “copying (utsu-shi 写し)” or merely “reflecting (utsu-ru 映る)” a pre-existing narrative. This possibility also shows the potentials not just within art but also the online environment itself. It invites an attitude to integrate countless elements and to “move backwards” in order to form (and reorganize) narratives. By doing so, we can start to break down the disconnection (/) between the countless and the narratives.