Transcript for Episode 4 of H.E.U.N.G.: Heu are we?

[Music]

Intro [0:03]: Hello Everyone Under Neoliberal Garbage! Welcome to this new episode of Heung's podcast where we're going to talk about who we are. So four members, Julie, Justin, Hahye and Youngkyun, will discuss the complexities of existence as Koreans from their differing vantage points in diaspora. They'll touch upon how they found their respective ways to Heung and what their experiences have looked like so far. They also talk about how Heung differs from other social and political spaces they've been a part of, as well as their hopes for the collective going forward. Enjoy the episode!

[Music]

Hahye [0:46]: Hi! My name is Hahye and I'll be moderating today's podcast about general stuff in Heung and how people are experiencing the collective and just a general discussion. So, umm, does anyone want to start with introducing themselves and, yeah, just tell us anything about yourself. Julie, wanna go? You're the newest.

Julie [1:14]: Uh, yeah, I think Justin and I joined at around the same time. Umm, so, just a little bit about me. I'm a graduate student at the University of Toronto in the department of Geography and Planning and my research interests sort of focus on informal labor, fringe finance, and information technologies. But I am originally from Vancouver.

Justin [1:41]: I had no idea that Julie and I—well, I know that I was a baby in the group, I didn't know that Julie had recently joined as well. *(Julie laughs)* I'm kind of not really doing anything. I'm pretty much just holed up in my apartment, working. Not really having anything concrete so yeah, I feel like I have no capacity with which to report in, but glad to be here.

Hahye [2:08]: Okay, we appreciate your existence as it is *(Justin and Hahye laugh)*, with as much activity as you would like, so thank you, Justin. What about you, Youngkyun, do you wanna join in?

Youngkyun [2:21]: Yeah, umm. Hi, I'm Youngkyun. I was born and raised in South Korea most of the time, but now I'm in the U.S. in the Midwest writing a PhD dissertation and trying to translate some texts from Spanish into Korean. And in Heung I think what I do is basically like hold some spaces so that the members of Heung can talk with each

other and share their thoughts and checking in. So it's been a while since we are doing that and yeah it was great to have—like, continue that kind of conversation.

Hahye [3:02]: Some things we do like Youngkyun just mentioned is host the reading group that we do internally with our members and recently a writing group—a creative writing group was started, and I know that Justin your piece was shared there recently. Do you want to elaborate on your experience?

Justin [3:20]: Oh yeah, it's pretty much in like a nascent form. It was like the first workshop meeting that we had which are really different from the reading groups so I'm glad that there's a separate space for that. I sent in a piece, Chloe sent in some pieces and it was just a really nice area to share writing in a space that isn't hostile in a way because a lot of times workshops can devolve into a kind of criticality that just eats away at writers instead of supporting them in a sense. And yeah, I appreciate that space for many of the same reasons as the reading group where we can all have these really generous conversations and explore things, but they are really formally different so I'm glad to have that.

I initially joined because Chloe—it's actually like a contingent circumstance that I think is really funny. I was on Instagram complaining about white Marxists in the sense *(Hahye laughs)* like really orthodox Marxists who see race as just like a secondary effect of the circulation of capital. So it's very epiphenomenal and it was just in my story where it was like, "Never trust a white Marxist." or some reductive *(laughs)* rant about it. And Chloe was like, "Here's a group that I think you'd be interested in." And that was my entire introduction. I kind of just dove in from there. So yeah, I feel like I engage with what I can and that's really the reading group and now the writing workshop. One of the things I really appreciate is that you sort of just show up as you are. There have been many times when I have shown up to a reading group meeting being like, "I am totally unprepared. I have no idea what to say." But just being in that space is enough, in a sense? So, yeah. Having these conversations be in the space—there's just something about it that's very generative to me and yeah really meaningful.

Hahye [ ]: Was anyone else there do you want to elaborate on either your experience in the creative writing group or the reading group as well?

Youngkyun [5:31]: Can I add one thing to what Justin said? Because like Justin mentioned that like one of the motivation why he joined Heung was that he was complaining about white orthodox Marxists. *(Justin laughs)* That somewhat reminded me the last—one of the last reading group sessions about mental health, right? *(Justin: Yeaaaah.)* Talking about like therapy and one of the question was is it that the therapy

culture in the U.S. is capitalist—subsumed by capitalist system? And then like— So we shared a kind of article written for Jacobin magazine and yeah like so, Justin you mentioned that after reading that article which mainly the main argument of this article was that, yes, therapy is totally like capitalist so, yeah we need to think beyond this like consumer therapy system so that we can, I don't know, go beyond this capitalist system. It was something like that *(Justin: Right.)* and then Justin criticized it like, "Oh yeah, this exactly represents—reflects how white orthodox Marxists think about everything." So yeah, I just wanted to add that because like that also—this kind of our sentiment against this orthodoxism is somewhat related to the membership or, how say, the character of Heung members in general. So what do we want? What do we share when it comes to like the political stance?

Julie [7:15]: Yeah, I think the only sort of experience I had in sort of community reading groups was with very white Marxists in Vancouver and it was very, umm, pardon the pun, but alienating. *(Justin laughs)* In a more holistic sense in that you know, their concerns were *(laughs)* so isolated and I think inward-looking and I think Heung has been such a great opportunity to be really forward-thinking and holistic about our concerns politically and also one thing that's been really generative of me participating in this group—primarily through the reading group, although I've started to catch up on the podcasts—is just that there is like critical inquiry and we do kind of question each other's responses, but there's always this, like—we're always going it in good faith and we're always doing it with this, maybe not objective but environment of community care, which I think touches on the previous reading group about mental health and how can we move it outside of this very singularly faceted healthcare outlook.

Justin [8:38]: Yeah, when I was in grad school I wasted so much energy arguing with people who were clearly just arguing for the theatrics of debate *(Julie: Mm.)* or just like really deploying these bad faith arguments and so it's refreshing to be in a space where even if I disagree with the finer points of what someone is saying, I don't feel like it's a complete waste of time to be more capacious towards thinking about what they're meaning and what they're engaging with. Yeah, it's just like a huge difference.

Julie [9:15]: I also did kind of want to touch on something that Justin had mentioned earlier about how he got involved in Heung and I love telling anyone who will listen to me the story of how I got involved, which is through Hahye and it *was* through these really specific, serendipitous circumstances *(laughs)* that spans three continents *(Justin: Whoa.)* and four years, I think, 'cause Hahye and I originally met in Amsterdam at the University of Amsterdam where I was an exchange student and Hahye was doing her undergraduate degree, I believe. And I remember I walked in on the first day of class and our eyes just kind of met and we just did this weird glazed look at each other for the

entirety of the class *(Julie and Justin laugh/Justin: Oh my god.)* And I went up to go after the session. I went up to the professor to ask a question and then Hahye was lined up behind me and I thought she was going to ask a question next, then I turned around and she was waiting for me (*Julie and Hahye laugh)* [muffled] the professor and I thought she was going to ask, “Are you Korean?” So I was prepared to say, “Yes, I’m Korean.” But she didn’t ask me. She told me, she said, “You are Korean.” *(Julie and Justin laugh)* And I just remember us connecting and talking very casually over the semester and kind of like on and off on social media and then I think a couple months ago I was in this really terrible relationship where he was really obsessed with— *(Julie laughs)* This guy was so obsessed with whether or not I was just dating him for his view, the view in his apartment, and (*Justin, laughing: What?)* I never really thought about that. In Toronto, I never thought about it. But I was like, “Oh, this is a really nice view!” So one day I just took a picture of the view out of his apartment which included the CN Tower and then Hahye was like, “Are you in Toronto?” *(Hahye: Oh, yes!/laughs)* And I was like, “Oh yeah, I am in Toronto.” And she was like, “I’m in Toronto for like three days.” And I was like, “Oh my gosh. Let’s meet up!” And then we arranged something really quickly and then we talked for a full night and it was weird because we had shown up dressed very similarly which was funny. Iit was like the same idea, but different fonts. Which is funny, we were both wearing big scarves and novelty hats, which is fun. *(laughs)* Completely uncoordinated. And halfway through our hangout, she’s like, “Oh, do you want to join this thing?” And I was like, “I would love to join this thing. This sounds so cool.” *(Justin laughs)* So that’s kind of how I got involved, but again like also very weird serendipitous, precarious little timeline.

Hahye [12:02]: No, but Julie, do you remember when you got me the cup of coffee at the cafe at the university and then you told me I needed to make a podcast? Well, we have officially *(Julie laughs/Hahye coughs)* fulfilled that dream!

Julie [12:16]: That is— It was a long road, but we finally did it, yeah.

Youngkyun [12:19]: And like Justin, Chloe, if I remember correctly, also you met, I don’t know, in some cafeteria and I don’t know what did you say to her, but you said something similar to that, right?

Justin [12:33]: Umm, it was a bit different. The head of the master’s graduate school program, where he was like, “Oh, you should challenge yourself and take this real class about European art.” And so she just felt like very discouraged from pursuing what she wanted to— Sorry, this feels SO weird speaking for Chloe in a sense *(laughs)*, but like *(Youngkyun laughs)*, she was basically complaining about that and I was like— Having that enormous pressure to modify how you want to study often seems like the only way

to go forward so I was just like, “Listen, this guy who’s running everything—don’t fucking listen to him.” And that was kind of how we first bonded. I had never had the like, “You’re Korean” conversation because first of all, my last name is Japanese and so it didn’t really come up and also I personally never initiate that kind of stuff because I’m from the Midwest, I rarely interacted with other Korean Americans and when I did, it was through church and so my first reaction isn’t to say like, “Oh, my people!” It was more a trained adverse reaction to, “Oh, Christian conservative.” That was my initial impression, because that was almost all the Korean people that I grew up around and so yeah. It was more of us bonding over how bullshit *(Youngkyun laughs)* some aspects of grad school are. Good times, bad times.

Youngkyun [14:24]: Yeah, so it’s more about your anti-academia sentiment like you shared *(Justin laughs: Yeah)*. Ok, got it *(Hahye and Justin laugh).* I was *(laughs)* interested in this question because, right, as you, as we know that the majority of Heung are— look like, I don’t know, Koreans right, so like the commonality is somewhat based on that kind of question. *(Justin: Yeah)* Like what we are, what are we, kind of question like identity or whatever. So that’s why I thought that it was interesting that the root or beginning of the relationship, for example, between the Heung members was by confirming the fact that, “Oh, are you Korean? Like, what kind of Korean are you *(Justin laughs)*? What kind of Koreanness are we pursuing?” But I’m saying this not to emphasize the kind of identity or characteristics of Heung members based on some kind of ethnicity because, as we see, we have other members who are not ethnically Korean, right? So yes, I thought it might be interesting to think about, not now, but in the future because we also have some statements on the website which says that we are trying to think critically about the Koreanness, right? But still it’s about Koreanness, which is identity or some kind of, uh, I don’t know. From my perspective, it sounds like something fixed, but we, at least me, I’m against that kind of perception of Koreanness as something fixed because that really limits the possibility to unfold a different type of politics and life, communal life together.

Julie [16:21]: Yeah, I think being part of Heung has opened my eyes, let’s say, to *(Justin and Hahye laugh)* what being Korean and how to be Korean might look like. You know, Koreanness otherwise. *(Justin: Hell yeah./Julie laughs)* And I think up until maybe into the fall of last year, I would’ve always described myself as a reluctant Korean. Like, I’m Korean, but I just happen to be Korean and I’ve never really found deliberate meaning and purpose in it. It was just something that was about me. *(Justin: Wow, yes.)* That didn’t really inform how I looked at the world, and I think now, after I moved to Toronto, I definitely think how it’s impacted me has become a lot clearer, but I actually grew up around a lot of Koreans. Like, a LOT a lot of Koreans because I lived in Coquitlam, which is a very distinctly Korean ethnoburb. Like, if you’re in the city, they

ask, “Oh are you from here?” And I go, “ Yeah, from Coquitlam.” And they go, “Oh you must be Korean.” Like it’s just ubiquitous like it’s just such a common understanding here that if you are from Coquitlam, you’re probably Korean. And I remember you would speak Korean in classrooms to socialize with friends and you know everyone would have all these very Korean lunches and we’d share 반찬 (banchan) at lunch which is a very “in Korea” type thing to do. But I was always, even within that group, pretty isolated and it was more like a generational—generation-based and also I think class-based which is why I felt really isolated from kind of building identity and really feeling claimed by Korean people because I kind of came—my parents came on this wave of immigration actually more associated with the 80’s, right? Of small business owners and my parents owned a Halloween store, which has since closed down on 8th and Main in downtown Eastside called New York Novelties. And they just owned a lot of small businesses, worked in kitchens, la la la la, but I was born later like almost into the 2000s so most of the kids I went to school with were more so, you know, they were kind of living expat lives and they were like parachute kids so they had more than enough money to spend on stuff so it was like that really weird intersection of class and generation. Yeah, so I was like very much a reluctant Korean and especially, I think it’s reflected in my research area which doesn’t really have a lot to do with my Koreanness.

Justin [19:21]: Julie, I love that we’re both reluctant Koreans. *(Julie laughs: Yeah.)* ‘Cause that was definitely me for the longest time where it’s like, “Yeah, I happen to be Korean. So what?” *(Youngkyun laughs)* And it’s interesting to me because that happened to you growing up around a lot of Koreans. Like, you’ve identified a lot of the mechanics as to why, for me, like growing up with basically all white people, I always just chalked it up to me trying to survive white spaces in a sense and so I think it’s really interesting that, like even—there are barriers even in Korean communities where you can feel like you’re not a part of it in some way. And so that’s very interesting ‘cause a lot of times I’d be like, “Well, how would my life be different if I did grow up around more Korean people?” I feel like at this point, maybe not so much. *(Julie: Yeah!)* Yes, I’d still feel isolated *(laughs)*.

Julie [20:20]: Yeah, I mean, I think a lot of my life was actually framed around this tension between like really understanding— of not being claimed by a lot of Koreans in my community, but also wanting to be or questioning do I even want to be, right? And I realized that like, “Okay, they don’t want to associate with me because I don’t have a lot of money, because of what my parents do for money. But they’ll want to associate with me because I get really good grades.” (*laughs/Justin laughing: Oh my god.)* So honestly, I— That was a lot of my motivation behind performing academically as a kid and it was senior year of high school and I remember they finally were like, “Okay, okay, we get it, we get it.” Because I had beaten a lot of them for some major scholarships in

(Justin laughs) and I remember then, as much as I had been a reluctant Korean, they were reluctantly claiming me *(Justin laughing: Oh my god.)*. And I just remember feeling so like, "Well, this is kind of bullshit." Because I had— Because I was finally claimed as finally a Korean, you know? Verified. But I didn't really have much meaning in it, so it just felt like this weird empty space. And I think you know, while I don't think I explicitly started thinking about what— how can my Koreanness inform how I pursue solidarity, how I pursue leftist spaces, I think it really started genuinely in Amsterdam when I met Hahye and I also met this other student who was a Master's student at the time. She was just really cool. And it was this weird evolution, temporal smattering of events. I can't even say it's a clear coherent narrative. But it's just, "Oh, these things have happened."

Justin [22:15]: Julie, I feel like I'm your shadow self *(Julie laughs)* because I did fucking horrible in high school. Because I was always someone, maybe to be against the stereotype, I have no idea, I wasn't thinking complexly about it, but I always hated school because it always felt to me a lot more about discipline than learning anything.

Julie [22:40]: It was a weird contrast to my home life because I was like, "Hah! If I do and say dumb shit and push back here, no one can hit me." which is like *(Justin laughing: Oh my god./Julie laughs)* the worst thing that can happen. But, uh—

Hahye [22:55]: I think that's also a reason why I have felt disconnected from my Koreanness for a very long time in my life. Like just patriarchal violence. *(Julie: Mm.)* I think that's what I associate being Korean with. So, yeah. It's a bit difficult to love yourself and your culture and your community when the closest example of that is not the greatest.

Youngkyun [23:21]: That concept, I really enjoy, I liked—reluctant Korean—because our experience might differ because most of the time I lived in South Korea and I came to the U.S., but still I experienced that kind of feeling of reluctant Korean because the Korean community you can join here is some kind of student association which is based on what is, what is—what was your previous educational institution, you know what I'm saying? So if you are from Seoul National University, if from Yonsei University or there's like three universities—so-called three great universities in South Korea, right? S.K.Y., sky. And then, like, they have their own community and so if you want to find some Koreanness in the U.S. or abroad, the available options might be really limited, right? This kind of— Also related to what Hahye, you, said even though I cannot generalize all these kinds of communities or groups. But it is somewhat—I don't know—it belongs to the kind of patriarchal order because even though it's not that explicit, you can still feel it through the culture or how they enjoy their life, how they study, how they socialize. So in

that sense, I was a little bit reluctant to be Korean here and then I was looking for some different community which addressed my concern, but not just like giving up what I am, what I'm doing, how I feel. So yeah, that explains a little bit why I happened to join Heung.

Hahye [25:26]: I feel like these sentiments have bred a lot of antagonism towards being Korean for a very long time in my life, but it's only I think after joining Heung and being in Korea for a little over a year that I was able to kind of piece together a way of being in my body that was not harmful. *(laughs)* I mean, the effects of white supremacy and colonialism and heteropatriarchy and ableism on so much of the way we've been raised culturally can't be denied. And I feel like that's really glossed over in these conversations and trying to figure out what it means to be a Korean person or a person of Korean heritage. Because a lot of this conversation has been centered around educational institutions. Like if I look at this article that Youngoh, another member, once shared in a reading group session we had about the Korean church experience or Korean church-adjacent experience—Youngoh shared this article, I think it was written by Jang—Jang Wook Huh? 허장욱? *(Youngkyun:* 허장욱*, yeah.*) Yeah, yeah, so he shared this article about how essentially the uplift theory of Booker T. Washington was used to create or shape the Korean education system, especially in missionary-run schools. So when I look at that and how so much of us are obsessed with being in these spaces that were deliberately created to undervalue our humanity, in a sense …

Justin [27:26]: Like, for me, it was—what you're talking about, for me, felt pretty pronounced in the sense that I never learned how to speak Korean. So I apparently spoke it when I was a baby, but I just stopped being immersed in it because pretty early on, I was born in the US but then my parents—my mom went back to Korea for a little bit, and then back to the US—so when we were back in Korea for a little bit, I spoke a little bit of Korean, but then we came back to the US, and so I never had—it was hard for me to communicate with other Korean people in general. And all the church spaces had, for some reason, the youth group at the local Korean church spoke exclusively in English, I guess assimilation or some shit? *(laughs)* So I spoke to people there, but yeah, it's hard because from one angle, people will be like, "Oh, it's such a shame that you never learned Korean," because it's seen as like, well, I didn't really put in the effort. Which is like an oversimplification of how I navigate my life. And, on the other hand, there's a reason why it's so cliche to be like, "An Elegy for a Lost Language," when you're in the diaspora because using the language really signifies this nexus of relations of power and history, like all these different forces. So that's one of the things I've continuously had to navigate, and I will say—this may be a spicy take—but with the emergence of Korean culture being more socially acceptable, I'm glad that Korean food is enjoyed more people and that more people are learning Korean, but I'm kind of salty

for when I was bullied all the time for having quote-unquote “disgusting lunches” full of Korean food. And now there are people on Tik-Tok being like, “Look at this exotic food that I’ve just discovered.” I don’t know. *[Hahye: Ugh.]* That’s the spiciness in me speaking. It’s just infuriating, and it’s hard for me—not that I feel like I have to cater to white people’s feelings on this—but it’s hard for me to not be like, actively discouraging people from learning about things and experiencing new things, so I think that’s important, but at the same time, I’m like, “Please stop bombarding me with this shit.”

Julie [30:03]: Ha, yeah. I find it really funny that the foods that people usually approach me with are the foods I really don’t like eating. Like, one of the most popular ones is 잡채 (japchae). I don’t like 잡채 because it’s like, too greasy. I don’t know what it is about it, but I really don’t like 잡채. And, what is it? 불고기 (bulgogi) is probably like, bottom-barrel stuff for me. Like, I’ll eat it if I can’t think of anything else to make. *[Justin laughs.]* But it’s typically the stuff that people approach you with, which I find really funny. And things like 족발 (jokbal), which I love, people are just not into it, which I find really funny. They’re like, “Oh, I love Korean food!” I’m like, “Oh my god, I’m gonna go get 족발 tonight, do you wanna come?” and they’re like, “Absolutely not. Please feed me greasy food, please.” Because I think there is still—while people are engaging with it, and I think that’s great—it’s more so a way, like a *how* rather than a *what*, that has become much more important to me in engaging with Korean cultural artifacts and practices, and I think that’s abundantly clear still. Like they’re still approaching it in this kind of—as you said, Justin, not to put it crassly, but like a colonizer’s mindset of “Oh! Discovery!”

Youngkyun [31:36]: *(laughs)* Yeah. Discovery. Yeah, just regarding the emergence of Korean culture these days. It’s everywhere, right? In the movies, foods, and beauty, right? Cosmetic products. So I think this is really an important topic we need to deal with, even though Justin, I totally agree with you, I don’t like that suddenly—yeah, I don’t want to be snobby, neither, *(Justin laughs.)* because like—we talked about *Squid Game* in the previous episode and how there are two extreme tendencies in response to the emergence of these K- … I don’t know, K-dramas, K-TV shows, K-movies. One is like, “Wow! Our representation is growing. It’s great for Korean people and Korean Americans and Koreans everywhere.” And there’s another extreme tendency like, “Oh, I don’t like it. This is not what I want to think of Korea. Korea’s more deep, more complicated. I don’t know. We have 한. You cannot understand it.” *(Others laugh.)* All this kind of stuff, right? So I think, Julie, you indicated really importantly, this kind of question—like how to talk about, how to think of these extremes regarding the emergence of Korean representation. Because in many podcasts regarding Asian American culture, Asian Canadian culture, in the English-speaking world—some people just say, “Hey, but at least it’s great that we are represented more! In Disney movies, in

any kind of mainstream North American culture, we are seeing more Asians. So please don't criticize it because we are not there yet. We need to grow—how to say it?—create more pies so that later, maybe we can think of the quality of it, the complicatedness, the textures of it. But now, it's not like that, so don't criticize how bad is *Crazy Rich Asians*, how bad is *Squid Game*, whatever. So I'm really interested in continuing to talk about this topic, the dilemma that we have as Heung members.

Justin [34:19]: Those are some really great points about how Korean culture is processed. And that makes me think about—in addition to everything that you covered, there's this almost like, anthropological review of Korean media or Korean American media, where it's taken as indicative of the essential character of Koreanness. And so, like a piece of media, even if it's just one poem or one TV show or one thing, it comes under so much scrutiny and the stakes of it are so high. And a lot of times, I'm just like, "Can we just let this thing *live* as like, a limited perspective of one multitudinous thing?" So I feel like a lot of times, even just trying to rally around a piece of media is itself a form of engagement that does a disservice to the ways in which culture travels and evolves and affects people and says things about people. So yeah, I—God, there's just so much shit to say about that.

Youngkyun [35:29]: It could be the next reading group session topic.

Justin [35:32]: *(laughs)* Yeah.

Julie [35:34]: Yeah, I think another point in that is that the way a lot of Korean media—I think Justin, you called it like an 'anthropological review'—is, there's this really important gender component that I think Hahye pointed to that doesn't get spoken enough. I feel like for a culture that is so heavily gendered, structured around gender, it gets such minimal mention in the sort of Western consumption of that culture, which I find really interesting. And I don't know, I've been thinking—whenever I think of that, I think a lot about Jasbir Puar's work—I think that's her name? *[Justin: Yes, yes.]* About how some cultures' gendered components are heavily politicized whereas others—for example, Korean culture, Korean peoples—are not when it *is* incredibly violent. And I remember when *The Vegetarian* came out, and I was seeing a lot of reviews from non-Koreans—and when I say non-Koreans, I typically mean like, white, cis readers. *[laughs]* And I was really shocked. These were some people who are like, flaunting their MAs or PhDs in English literature or something like that, and they're like, 'Oh, it's this really abstract question about violence and nature' and blah blah blah, and they go on and on and on, and they don't talk about this very prevalent issue of domestic and gendered violence in Korea and among the Korean diaspora, which I find really interesting. And I think if it's not made—I think there is a really important—obviously, I

can't say because my language skills aren't there yet, but I think there are emerging discussions in Korea and in film and literature and online discourse about gender. But I think oftentimes when you try and engage in questions about queerness and sexuality here—queerness, sexuality, gender, and so on—you get labeled automatically as non-Korean, which I find really interesting. Or like, totally Westernized. And I feel like this would probably lead to a great rant by HyunGu, but unfortunately she's not here. *[laughs]*

Hahye [38:10]: Do your own! *[Everyone laughs.]*

Julie [38:14]: I don't think I have the fire in me!

Hahye [38:18]: Oh, trust me, you have the fire. You are burning.

Julie [38:22]: There's like an Olympic flame that we borrow from.

Hahye [38:24]: No, you're just—you're just *the* flame. Just go. You can do it.

Julie [38:32]: I don't know. I just find it really frustrating, especially with—I think one of the most identifiable alternative Korean groups of makers or whatever, groups of creatives in the US is that weird cohort of like, Bobby Lee the comedian, Dave Choe the artist, Steven Yeun, who often do those podcasts together and put out different things, and they have *such* a gender understanding of what it means to be Korean and failure in being Korean and blah blah blah, but I'm always so pissed off that it doesn't include any consideration of gendered violence. Like God knows, David Choe—just his work and his discourse is rife with that—and I find it really frustrating because it's so difficult to interject those narratives because, again, people are saying, "Oh, well, we don't have a lot of representation, we don't have a lot of representation," and I don't think I'm as well-versed in talking about gender within the context of being Korean and all of these tensions, but something that I find really frustrating in my own work is when people talk about—there's this really popular book called, I think, *Automating the Future*, and it's like a really seminal book within that idea of fully automated luxury communism. And it completely, completely glosses over the role of how capitalism exploits social reproduction and they define exploited work under capitalism solely through waged labor, which is really insane. *[Justin: Ugh.]* Yeah, really insane, and I don't get it at all. They don't think about things like, how and in what ways has exploited work been discursively transformed through the idea of entrepreneurship, especially with gig and platform economies. Through slums especially, in reference to say, Mike Davis's work. It's just really boggling how laughable these giant leaps over gender are in order to

maintain this kind of very heteropatriarchal view of exploitation and especially exploitation in and through Korean communities.

Hahye [41:06]: That's the fire! It's burning!

Julie [41:12]: Yeah, I think when we think about consuming Korean cultural artifacts and whatever—one of those artifacts, unfortunately, are often women! I do know, like especially being young and single and Korean in this wave of Korean media, I've become a cultural artifact that people want to collect. And it's been incredibly frustrating.

Hahye [41:37]: No! *(Everyone laughs.)* No! I refuse to be a collectible!

Julie [41:44]: It's really—I didn't even really understand how explicit and insidious that entitlement was, and I've been thinking about how white people feel so entitled to be desired by Asian people in general, but you know, specifically in this case, Korean people. Like I know a lot of my Korean male friends, they'll be approached by white women and they'll be like—there'll just be this assumption that they're into them? Because there's this presumed sexual hierarchy. And it just ruins my fucking day. Like I don't even know how to explain it. It's just so much to process. Like, *that's* a fucking lot, thanks. *(Everyone laughs)* Goodbye.

Hahye [42:33]: The number of times people have come up to me in like, bars or what have you, and they don't even say hello. They're just like *(nasally)* "Hi, I like Asian women." *(Everyone laughs)* Like, oh, okay, great, great for you! And oh, my goodness, Julie this happened after you left, *(Justin: Oh, no.)* but at the university—so I tried to put in a formal complaint because there was this one white Dutch cishet male, Jewish man on campus. He just kept stalking me and other Asian women. Every time I saw him, he would just be talking to another Asian woman. *(Justin: Oh my god.)* Yeah. So then I tried to lodge a complaint—and he had harassed multiple people, like my friends as well—and I tried to lodge a complaint, I went with my friend, and the confidential advisor or whatever, she was just like *(gruffly)*, "Oh, maybe, maybe he just likes Asian women." Like, okay, white woman, okay. Great, great, thanks. *(scoffs)* Like, I just—I don't have words. I just feel bad.

Julie [43:56]: It just ruins your fuckin' day! Like, what the fuck! I know you guys—I missed it, but there was this reading group on Asian American masculinity. I don't know if maybe there's some connecting threads there.

Youngkyun [44:12]: So, like, we touched a little bit on like, Asian women being kind of artifacts or the object of the sexual gaze from white men specifically, right? And I feel

like in that session, the previous session about Asian masculinity or Asian American, Asian Canadian masculinity in general, we also talked about the other kind of opposite situation, which could be a myth or exaggerated or kind of, yeah, mythical feelings widely shared by Asian, male, heterosexual, cishet people in the US and Canada and wherever, which is—I don't know who are "we" here, but just, these kinds of Asian males feel like we are not even the object of this or any kind of sexual desire, specifically in this kind of racial hierarchy in the US, specifically. So I was also interested because I also share some biological aspects with them. *(laughs)* So I think it's really sad that that kind of feeling still very strongly exists within the consciousness or the mentality among Asian men, specifically those who are in the US or other countries, because they become the minority and that kind of feeling justifies any kind of violence against other types of genders or other types of minorities. So Julie, you said like Bobby Lee or other kinds of celebrities, Asian American celebrities, they talk about how bad being an Asian American male in the US [is], and that justifies everything they are saying. Like, "Hey, hey, you don't understand our situation," something like that. "At least you can date with them, but we are not even *(laughs)* dateable!" or whatever. So I think that was kind of their mentality. Actually, we didn't discuss a lot about this in the previous session, the reading group, but I was interested in this topic.

Justin [46:45]: I mean, what I liked about that session I think kind of epitomizes what I like about Heung and what we were talking about earlier. When we're talking about Asian/Asian American masculinities, there are tons of Asian men who process racism and turn it into violence against women, where they feel how they're being located via systems of oppression and then take it out on women as like, not choosing the proper—I don't know, what are the incel terms, not choosing the "proper mates" or whatever. And I think that the way we approached the conversation wasn't just haranguing on MRAsians and those types of people, which is like—it's always easy to humiliate that kind of perspective. But instead we had a really candid and open-ended conversation about the mechanics behind how Asian men can be located in a sexual hierarchy and the kinds of experiences that one must have to sort of descend into that state of being. So I really appreciated that because it's such a—it can be such a difficult topic. I've been so low-energy today because of the Ukraine thing, and the fucking leftists. I see so many leftists on Twitter—I shouldn't be on Twitter—but I've been seeing them, people who are defending either empire, either sympathizing with Putin or just buying into the whole US empire geopolitical bullshit. So when I was coming here—I'm always like, ugh, I always have really great things to say about Heung, but today I'm like, so fucking low energy.

Hahye [48:53]: Yeah, I just wanted to touch on what Julie said earlier. I can't remember the exact word, but it kind of was expressed through a scream? And I feel that way a lot.

And you know, I don't want to use the word 한 (han) here, but sometimes I just want to scream. People look at me, and they expect: "Oh, you must be a very silent, quiet, docile Korean woman." But you know, like, most of the time, I just want to walk around and slap everyone on the face. *(laughs)* That's all! That's how I feel. So thank you for expressing yourself, Julie.

Julie [49:33]: *(laughs)* Thank you! But I mean, I think that scream is like, equal parts anger and joy, because it is such a pleasure to actually voice those concerns because they go largely unvoiced, as you said. People just make these assumptions about you, so you end up internalizing them in directly conscious and unconscious ways, right? So I think to add to the patting of our own backs and self-congratulations, I do feel like genuinely this is the first space that I could voice these concerns in the presence of other men, especially Korean men, actually. You know, in addition to maybe the dentist, I think one of my biggest fears has been Korean men, actually. *(laughs)* And yeah, it's been a very therapeutic process in that way.

Hahye [50:38]: And I hope it continues to be!

Julie [50:42]: Yeah, yeah! And another thing I wanted to talk about also—I'm not sure if anybody else has anything to say about joy. Like I think this is one of the first times I've been able to feel like expressing joy through, around, and with being Korean because there's this, like, ever-present narrative about Koreanness being about struggle, right? Like, struggle, work, labor—someone was talking about racial uplift, I think, and those kinds of strategies of struggle and exploitation. And honestly, I remember—I think the words that I remember my mom saying the most to me were like, "어, 고생했어," like, "Oh, you struggled a lot." Or "수고했어." "You worked really hard." And I think both in my research and in my life, I've just been really ardently pursuing joy, and I think Heung has been a massive part of that.

Hahye [51:44]: Yay! *(claps)*

Justin [51:46]: I love that. That's awesome.

Hahye [51:48]: Amazing. We love it.

Youngkyun [51:52]: Yeah, I wanted to share a question about how Heung differs from the organizations you have belonged to before now. Because I think—we talked about it a little bit, that Heung doesn't have any physical, I'll say base. So it's basically a digital, virtual space or organization in which people join together to write something or just talk, having conversation and checking in, and also record podcasts like this. So it's a pretty

decentralized body. I was just wondering: How did you feel about this? Because for example, I am a union member, as you might know, and I'm a member of another—like the graduate students' association of my department, which is a little bit different from the union, but it has some commonality. So I felt really a difference because what makes Heung different from my perspective was that—because for the first time in the US probably, I had a conversation, a genuine conversation, I would say, with any kind of topics thanks to people's vulnerability, openness. And even though that conversation happened through these virtual channels like Zoom—most of the time, we use the Zoom platform—what I appreciate was that we consistently had conversations checking in and talking about reading materials, any kind of political situation or personal situation, and it was interesting because this kind of conversation, actually, you expect through your social relationships, you know what I'm saying? So with your friends, your colleagues, who exist close to you, physically. But now I feel like I'm having more in-depth conversation with the members of Heung, more than the friends I have here. No, no, even though I love them—my friends who are here, close to me, if you're listening, I love you *(Everyone laughs.)*—but anyway, I appreciate the conversations we are having. So first we focus on kind of the membership conversation among us. So the podcast is the channel—its intention is to share what we are doing, what we are saying, what we are thinking with the wider public? I don't know, wider people? And well, I think this is really a good balance between the publicity and the kind of internal membership conversation. But yeah, that's just kind of the context or how I felt about Heung conversations as an organizational body. I would love to hear from you if you have any thought…

Hahye [55:19]: No, thank you for that. Does anyone wanna jump in?

Julie [55:21]: Yeah, I can jump in. I don't think I've been part of too many sort of formal organizations. I was heavily involved in my graduate student union for my department last year, and I'm still in touch today quite a bit. But I noticed there was a really deep aversion to making any kind of political statements, I found, which was really odd because it's a student organization and a fairly progressive one at that, especially in the university. I remember, we had to have some kind of response to the Azarova situation at the law school. I'm not sure if you guys are familiar with that? Dr. Azarova was offered a very high position at the law school—some kind of human research committee—and due to the request of a large donor the offer was rescinded due to her work on Palestine. And this was an extremely unusual situation and, of course, she appealed. The Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) imposed a censure on the university, so there were no visitors coming to the university. No university or other community would hold events at our space until they reoffered the position, which they eventually did. She, you know, unsurprisingly, rejected it this time around. And we had

to put out some kind of statement from the Centre because of course the department was handing it in a very…it took me a while to realize that they were effectively trying to do nothing: the other members of the Student Union, especially the executive team. It was just very confusing, especially because we did have a lot of Palestinians students and a lot of researchers doing work on Palestine, and it was…the whole process was just confusing? I don't know. That we weren't even discussing what to do and what to say we were discussing should we do anything at all, which I felt like was a pretty easy question to answer. And before that I unfortunately have to go back to a previous discussion, Hahye and my previous discussion about gender, especially in organizing and leftist spaces, where I have been chased out of a lot of organizing spaces for gender, race, sexuality reasons. Like I've been stalked from so many kinds of leftist organizing spaces. So I mean, it did feel safe. In this kind of disembodied way, weirdly enough, and building trust over the Internet did in a lot of ways feel safer to me on those grounds.

Justin [58:31]: This space has been different from most of the organizations I've been in mostly because they…I've only just been in like student orgs and stuff. And a lot of them are like…Not only are they hierarchical but they're very safely stashed away in places where they can't really do anything effectively. Like an undergrad, I was in student government and a lot of that even though those types of organizations are extensively about advocating for students' needs, a lot of times I felt like I was there to valorize the decisions made by university administrators. And I would get a similar feeling when I was in grad school. We had this grad student organization that was PhD students and MA students and it was hard to get people to advocate for themselves, if that makes sense. Like there are certain situations, I don't really know how much…I don't really know what to say publicly, not that it's squirrely or anything. But there are situations where clearly a decision was made that was whittling away at student access to resources and the building and stuff and I had to argue—pretty vociferously—to get people to say, "No, we should retain access to this or that," which was something that I didn't expect to have to do. In this group, the stakes aren't articulated the same way. We're not in relation to an administrative body—thank fuck—so we're just kind of doing our own thing. Because I've been mostly insulated to the reading group and stuff I haven't really looked too much at…Like I know we've put out statements on political issues, and I think on the podcast stuff gets covered like that, and I saw talk of covering certain aspects of Korean history. I think it's nice to have all those things without a heavy imposition that they have to be done. I kind of like the informality of the group, because people are doing really cool things and they're finding a space to put that content out. But also it's not like there is no one singular mode of engagement where you have to be a part of this and that and do all of that. I'm really invested in the continuing of important things like the podcast, like making political statements, like the

reading group and the writing workshop. But as a point of uncertainty I don't really know how that would best be done in the group because I've never been in a group structured like this.

Hahye [1:01:39]: I mean, I think that's the great thing. We're free to keep adjusting our respective boundaries and go with whatever flow of what's happening, right? Yeah for myself personally, the organizations I've been part of are also very complacent, very passive, I would say. But I feel like through Heung I've been able to stumble upon a group of people who are similarly pissed off, but also, you know, not just wanting to be pissed off. Like Julie said earlier, it's exhausting to be in spaces where nobody else wants to speak up. So I'm glad we're talking.

Youngkyun [1:02:29]: Yeah I think, like Justin said, we did a lot of events and wrote some political statements recently but also especially in the first year, which was the beginning of the pandemic. And then we tried to create other spaces, so that we can talk, focusing more on internal dynamics among membership. And then now we are seeing other types of initiatives like the creative workshop and just more informal conversations, one on one between members. So I think it's interesting how Heung can be translated or transformed into other shapes, like what kind of activities we can invent rather than just fixing it as some kind of organization. In Heung this is what we are supposed to do, instead of having that kind of structure. Even though it sounds corny a little bit, I like the flexibility and then the awkwardness of this organization. The unstructuredness - even though this could be dangerous, not having any structure, because sometimes it has a really deteriorating, bad effect on the members' energy. But until now it has been really great. We are seeing more people, new folks and new events, new activities. So if you're listening, please join. Yeah. We have no structure, so you can just reach out to us.

Hahye [1:04:24]: I think that's the great thing, too. I've personally been able to meet a lot of these wonderful people in person. Oh sorry I was kind of speaking to this imagined audience.

Justin [1:04:40]: I understand now I. I saw you turn to the camera.

Hahye [1:04:46]: Oh my gosh. Ah!

Justin [1:04:49]: Who wrote the "About Us" and stuff?

Youngkyun [1:04:53]: That's a good question. Anybody know? I think that's one of the initial members, or beginning members. There were some folks who were in South

Korea at the time and then maybe Young-oh or other members like Rachel, they might have participated in writing this kind of mission statement and everything. But I think none of us in this room participated in that kind of “About Us” stuff, so that's why another member, Kris, wants to bring it up so we can talk about it, how we feel about that statement. Because it really characterizes what we are doing, even though it's just the website page—the web page—but I think it matters to think about it. But Justin, since you brought it up, how do you feel about that?

Justin [1:06:04]: I mean, I like it. I think that it could be updated in the sense that we could be more specific about the kinds of spaces that we’re making. But, I mean, I thought it was a good statement. That wasn't supposed to be, you know, a derogatory question. I was just generally genuinely wondering.

Hahye [1:06:27]: I also really like it. Like every time I read it, I just feel like it really encapsulates what we have been doing and what we continue to do. It just looks different every time.

Justin [1:06:37]: Yeah, props to unknown.

Hahye [1:06:41]: Rachel? I feel like it was Rachel. Rachel Park. Yeah. So, what are we looking forward to in the future? What do we want to see in the space of Heung? What would it be like to imagine and actualize?

Justin [1:07:02]: To be quite solipsistic, I'm looking forward to continuing the writing workshop just because it's been a really good motivator for my own writing. I think that…One of the things that i've been thinking about - and I don't have any concrete ideas on how this is executed - but, if the different spaces that we had talked to each other more? I don't want to use the word cross promotion, but like. I feel like all these disparate spaces can be improved by looking at their relation to the other spaces. And I know that we don't want a uniform, standardized, top-down view of Heung, but I feel like there must be some overarching way for us to bring everything together. And I think that's sort of what I'm hoping for, in the future: some way for us to connect spaces even more.

Hahye [1:08:04]: I feel like you've kind of been doing that this entire episode. Like you've brought together your experiences in the different spaces. So thank you for being a bee.

Youngkyun [1:08:15]: Oh yeah, I'm also really looking forward to continuing the creative workshops. I already said this in the previous session, that it's really great to

have an audience. With them, you can feel really comfortable. You can share whatever creative stuff like poems, music, any art that you didn't dare to share with anybody for many reasons, right? because you just don't feel politically confident with a certain type of people, or you don't feel prepared enough - like ready enough to share. But I do feel like with the members of the creative workshop, I can do that. I'm seeing that it will really give me some kind of motivation to reactivate my creative energy, which was really dead for more than 10 years. So I'm really looking forward to it. And then, aside from that, with the reading group, the conversation, I just wanted to make sure to hold that space consistently. So yeah, it's been great until now, but I think there are always ups and downs, so we need to expect that any situation can happen. But, I think I do my best to maintain the space, and I also hope that other people can chime in so that we can refresh the vibe of the conversation and the topics with new topics. I think this is great, the podcast episode. This is more informal and we are talking to each other more, even though we try to address the imagined audience—hey you are listening—but I think this kind of format is also great because when you talk to somebody with a camera or some recorder or whatever, that gives you a little weird energy, motivates you to talk a little bit more truthfully, even though it sounds very contradictory. But, for some people, it does give you the moment of truth, just by the fact that you are on air. You are being recorded, and that makes you feel like, “Oh, I need to be truthful,” or something like that. So I hope the podcast episode, even though I appreciate the previous episode which talks about more political, more official voices, I think this format is also great because it might give more opportunities to other members or non members to talk to each other about any Heung-related or non-related stuff.

Hahye [1:11:26]: Amazing! Julie?

Julie [1:11:27]: Yeah, I think I think there's just a lot of overlap between what I'm looking forward to and what's been mentioned. Yeah. Just more laughs, more goofs, more conversations. I think for me it's also given me a lot more confidence in pursuing my own ideas because, quite frankly, a lot of my ideas are really stupid and I'm really motivated by—

Hahye [1:12:00]: No! They are amazing. They are not stupid.

Justin [1:12:01]: No, they are not stupid.

Julie [1:12:02]: No, no, no, no. So, you know that - I think it was two reading groups ago. We were trying to figure out what white people and Korean people have in common. And I said Polo shirts, and it led me into thinking about, for some reason I said, skolf?

Justin [1:12:35]: Yeah, skolf is iconic.

Julie [1:12:25]: And I genuinely have been ideating a zine called “A Beginner's Guide to Skolf.” And because I’m in the geography department, I’ve been, like, holding people hostage workshopping this system. So, you know, the sections are: “What is skolf?”, “Why do we skolf?” I think I've been embarrassed to pursue these ideas, just because, one, it's hard to find and maintain that energy to pursue creative pursuits, but it's also that a lot of my ideas are very silly and experimental and I think it's just like a wonderful space to pursue them. And you can pursue serious ideas, while still maintaining this kind of experimentation, experimental culture, sociality between all of the members of Heung, which is really great. I shouldn't have gone last.

Hahye [1:13:43]: No, that’s okay. I’ll go last!

Youngkyun [1:13:47]: By the way, I think we should put skolf in our mission statement. FYI, skolf means…what does it mean, Julie?

Julie [1:13:56]: It's…this is what I've got so far: skolf is confronting the urban politics of golf with the politics of skateboarding. It's not a marriage. It's a confrontation so—

Justin [1:14:13]: Wow. Damn.

Julie [1:14:15]: So it’s…what skolf looks like is going into either already or rapidly gentrifying neighborhoods and creating as much property damage as possible, almost. So it's a leisurely activity. It's also a political act. It's also a form of exercise.

Hahye [1:14:46]: I love it.

Youngkyun [1:14:47]: Yeah, I love it. Yeah. So I think the one eligibility [requirement] to be a member of Heung is that you should hate golf.

Hahye [1:14:49]: Oh my goodness.

Youngkyun [1:14:53]: Yeah. Sorry for golf players. Yeah, I'm joking.

Hahye [1:14:57]: What about minigolf?

Youngkyun [1:14:59]: Good question. Yeah, we need to discuss about that—

Hahye Sohn [1:15:04]: What about—

Youngkyun [1:15:05]: In a future meeting.

Justin [1:15:06]: I can hear James making a note saying, “Edit all of this out.”

Hahye [1:15:10]: Ahaha. No, no, no! Never! And we congratulate ourselves. I just wanted to say that I think Kris has been really instrumental in continuously encouraging us to be very gracious with ourselves and just have fun. I think Kris really wants us to have fun and I really appreciate that Kris has wanted us to have fun, because I feel like we're having fun. Are we having fun? Are we having fun?!

Justin [1:15:46]: I feel like it'd be so sad if this group became a mirror of purely academic discourse. So yeah. I'm all for pursuing silly ideas and doing all this shit.

Hahye [1:15:59]: Who says we can't have fun and learn things at the same time?

Justin [1:16:05]: Is that - how are we ending this? Is this how we’re ending?

Youngkyun [1:16:10]: Yeah. I feel like we are ending, right?

Hahye [1:16:11]: Wait. So Seungwoo wanted to do this, but can we try a preemptive version? Can we all scream at the same time, and then James will just cut the recording like whenever you want.

Justin [1:16:24]: Oh, I'm physically incapable of screaming.

Hahye [1:16:28]: You can do a baby scream.

Youngkyun [1:16:30]: Yeah, let’s try it.

Hahye [1:16:32]: Yeah. Let’s do it. Okay. 1, 2, 3…

[all screaming]

Julie [1:16:44]: That’s not a scream! That’s a spooky ghost noise!

[Music]

James [1:16:59]: Thank you for listening to Hello Everyone Under Neoliberal Garbage! Music is provided by Hellking with media and cover art by Grayson. You can find him @grimeninja. The podcast is produced by me, James Hillmer. Heung Coalition is a group of writers, translators, scholars and activists committed to generating and sharing critical perspectives on Korea. You can learn more at heungcoalition.com. Or you can reach the podcast team by email at heungcoalitionpodcast@gmail.com. Stay tuned for more episodes.