Identifying the Genre of *The Journals of Musan* as Ontological Affective Realism

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**ABSTRACT**

This article undertakes an intertextual reading of French film critic André Bazin’s “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” (1945) and the South Korean film *The Journals of Musan* (2010). It identifies the genre of *The Journals of Musan* as ontological affective realism through the film’s symmetrical comparability with Bazin’s theory of cinema. **Ontological affective realism** is a label applied by this article to a typology of art denoting a film-technique of reproducing reality. It comprises an artistic subjectivity that is naturally entailed when a film’s realism objectively represents its subject. The ontology of being is dramatically revealed through this subjective objectivity in the reproduction of reality on film. Viewers can finally acknowledge the object as the subject through the process of reading an object manifested through realistic affective subjectivity and can simultaneously learn the artistic methodology of reading the other.

What, frightened with false fire!

—*Hamlet* Act III Scene II—

1. Introduction: “embalming time”

The French film critic and theorist André Bazin (1918–58) iterates that the human desire for realism emanates from the ancient Egyptian practice of mummification. He infers that human paintings and sculptures originated from a reaction he terms as “resemblance complex” (Bazin, 2005 13). Similarly, the world of cinema reveals...
humans’ psychological desire to mummify in an attempt to counteract the stream of time. However, Bazin distinguishes between the ancient Egyptian art of mummification and the embalming time of cinema because of their fundamentally different goals: the former act expressed a craving for eternity; the latter concerns freezing the present moment for viewership. The Egyptian mummy represents “the reality of death by preserving flesh and bone”; applied to film as embalming time, however, mummification aims at “the preservation of life by a representation of life” (Bazin, 2005 9–10). As a realist cinematic technique, embalming time allows viewers to accrue three documentary benefits from each film scene’s photographic image. First, embalming time induces viewers to focus on the object living in the present time and space, so they finally concentrate on the model (Bazin, 2005 14). Cinematic realism transfers reality as-is, thus centering viewers’ attention on the camera-selected object existing in reality but not easily visible to viewers’ eyes. Spectators finally see the object as subject thanks to cinematic realism. Second, cinematic embalming of time accords a “dramatic expression to the moment” when reality is three-dimensionally re-represented on a film screen and, at the same time, invites observers to “a kind of psychic fourth dimension” (Bazin, 2005 11). Cinematic realism presents an objective scene’s “aesthetic quality,” which is inadvertently overlooked in reality or does not elicit the will of discovery (Bazin, 2005 15). Third, Bazin concludes apropos cinematic embalming time that cinema is also a language. A cinematic reading occurs in the produced image of reality, zeroing in on re-representation of ontology. Exposed to the extraordinary reading of images of reproduced reality, viewers encounter the protagonist living in this likeness and ultimately see the person’s existence. Cinematic resemblance can explain a person’s life to viewers, and when this ontological reading is successful, the protagonist is transformed from an inconspicuous object to the subject of truth. Through the lens of the three notions of Bazinian cinematic realism just presented, this article examines The Journals of Musan (2010), a South Korean film, to posit it as an exemplar of affective ontological art manifested in discrete scenes.1 Thus far, investigations of The Journals of Musan have focused primarily on Korean subjects by comparing it with other Korean films.2 In discussing the intertextual relationship between The Journals of Musan and André Bazin’s “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” (1945), it attempts to identify the film’s genre as ontological affective realism. In this process, the film’s genre can also be suggested as a type of world literature. The article argues that this is achievable when the reader’s comparatively formative hermeneutic reading discovers the worldview inherent to the film and compares it with various other genres of art and theories from different cultures and time zones.

2. The esthetics of ontological affective realism: to make the invisible visible

André Bazin begins his discussion of cinematic realism with the virtual yet realistic re-representation of the reality of the object selected by the photographer’s personality. Thus, his realism is based on ontological esthetics. Bazin describes his notion of ontological realism as follows.
Only a photographic lens can give us the kind of image of the object that is capable of satisfying the deep need man has to substitute for it something more than a mere approximation, a kind of decal or transfer. How fuzzy, distorted, or discolored, no matter how lacking in documentary value the image may be, it shares, by virtue of the very process of its becoming, the being of the model of which it is reproduction, it is the model (14, emphases added).

The above paragraph implies that cinematic realism represents an esthetical method of resolving the resemblance complex: it presents the model to viewers by reproducing the person’s image. The focal aspect of Bazin’s realism is the process of reproducing reality; this process results in the reappearance of the ontology of the model. If so, whom does the model of The Journals of Musan, Jeon Seung-cheol, represent?

Jeon Seung-cheol’s presence in reality (and in the film) is an ontological example of Fredric Jameson’s national allegorical third world text. The Korean peninsula was divided into two after the Korean War in 1950–53. With the intermittent exception of unusual political or sports-related events, the two sides have not officially communicated with each other for over 70 years. The Military Demarcation Line (MDL: Sampalson) divides Korea in half. To its north is located the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (Bukhan), which prohibits free travel and trade under communist regimes. The Republic of Korea (Namhan) lies to the south of this line. This nation has evolved through democratic capitalist liberalism to rank among the top 12 economic powers of the globe after half a century of division. More than 1,000 North Korean defectors have annually entered South Korea over the past decade, using various routes. Of them, more than 30,000 currently continue to reside in South Korea. The North Korean migrants are both “alike and different” from South Koreans and cause “peculiar types of culture-sympathy and culture-clash” as they remain “the part in the whole” and “the outside of the inside” (Bhabha 30). Those who fled the North have recently emerged as objects of interest, especially for the South Korean academia’s “discourse of minorities” (Bhabha 30). South Korea grants a socially friendly identity to those who are successful in crossing the border, according them the new nomenclature of saeteomin, and granting them settlement funds and shelters. Although some differences exist, migrants from North Korea are usually provided rental apartments for five years, eight million won settlement money for one year, and 350,000 won per month for six months, including the monthly apartment fees. Therefore, the saeteomin must find stable jobs within six months of their entry into South Korea. Despite the diverse support measures offered by the South Korean government, it is not easy for people who have lived their entire lives in a communist country to adapt to the developed economic environment of South Korea unless they possess specialist skills. The migrants, especially the men, are mostly employed as restaurant servers or, at best, as construction labor. Those who have lived in communist regimes need time to master the survival strategies of capitalist economies; some eventually make apocalyptic choices if they fail to attain the requisite skills in the limited time allotted to them.

The defectors from North Korea become cultural and ontological “floating signifiers” and embody minority positions in the South after their border crossing (Bhabha 31). They are predominantly scattered around the Gangbuk area of Seoul, where they live as surplus labor. North Korean defectors are granted discrete virtual identities by South Korean society behind their official title of saeteomin: they become allegories of the Korean war and the division, they are seen as symbols of the North Korean Juche
ideology, they are considered traitors to the Confucian concept because they have forsaken their parents and siblings, they are regarded with suspicion as a group of potential criminals or spies. Thus, the social being of North Korean defectors are politically and economically invisible in South Korea even as they are culturally “temporally disjunctive and affectively ambivalent” (Bhabha 32).

Many of the realist scenes in The Journals of Musan select Jeon Seung-cheol as an object representing the surplus labor of Seoul. The focus of the camera often fluctuates, intentionally, or otherwise, as if someone is stalking or chasing after him. The film allows the speculation of its typology of ontological realism in the first scene as the camera gazes for tens of seconds at Jeon Seung-cheol continuously attaching flyers to the roadside wall (Figures 1,2). The first scene of the film is thus the ontological embalming of Jeon Seung-cheol, a man who works. His time of being is continuously embalmed in the photographic images of the film as the camera holds his back for tens of seconds while he attaches lascivious advertisement posters to the roadside wall, silently, and alone. The beginning scenes of The Journals of Musan are significant moments for the film’s “obsession with realism” (Bazin, 2005 12). The film struggles to reproduce the reality of Jeon Seung-cheol’s labor, and the ontological loneliness of the subject emanates from the re-representation of images held by the camera. Standing in-between a construction site behind him and a dangerous road with speeding cars in front, Jeon Seung-cheol works for hours on end as an extension of filthy posters. The realism presented in this scene compels viewers to stare at the back of the man for a while. Jeon Seung-cheol’s ontological identity is vested in this image of his back as the man who stands between bawdy posters and signs proclaiming “Dangerous Area.” (Figures 1,2) In most instances, people face each other when they work; however, most of Jeon Seung-cheol’s work time is spent looking at a wall with his back exposed to danger. The representation of Jeon Seung-cheol’s reality is thus equivalent to the realistic representation of his back, and the camera captures these present moments through its objective conveyance of the scenes of the ontological reproduction of the man’s life. Rather than the attaching of a single poster, Jeon Seung-cheol’s job requires him to repeat the action of adhering multiple copies of the same poster to a surface in succession, as if enacting performance art on the stage of a frame. The spectators witness his humorless situation represented in his corporeal body through the affectively realistic art that presents the conditions of his labor. The focus on his ontology, which is captured by this realistic technique, is sometimes hindered by the obscene posters and by the cars constantly passing between him and the viewers. He is found by us, disappears from us, and reappears to us in a scene that lasts less than a minute. Thus, the ontological affective realism of the film demonstrates its sensitive and precise description of reality by holding the moments of life for a few moments during which the film shows us his labor. The reality of Jeon Seung-cheol’s ontological status of being “temporally disjunctive and affectively ambivalent” is observed through the lens of cinematic estheticism, and its realistically artistic representation is conveyed to the spectators without any frills (Bhabha 32). In the process of transmitting reality as-is, the film embodies the “irrational power of the photograph” in its esthetics of likeness (Bazin, 2005 14). This ontological realistic technique reveals its usefulness again in the depiction of the reality in which Jeon Seung-cheol returns home in shabby clothes carrying a bag filled with rolls of green tape. The documentary value of the ontological realism is denoted in the same way in this scene as a real record of his side
and back as he trudges on the way to his rental apartment and as he looks up at the pole that seems as if it could fall at any time. The ontological realism of The Journals of Musan frequently describes the reality of Jeon Seung-cheol’s being from angles that do not frontally confront. After all, the direction of this gaze of the art of the camera is incredibly realistic in itself.

The resemblance complex of The Journals of Musan invites viewers to Bazin’s ontological estheticism as it brings its object, Jeon Seung-cheol, to the front of their gaze (Figures 1–9). The scenes of Jeon Seung-cheol’s laborious attaching of flyers collectively maximize the irrational power of the realistic artistry of the film through the repetition of a similar pattern. Jeon Seung-cheol’s existence barely receives anyone’s gaze when he works in reality. Standing synchronically at the end of a series of posters, Jeon Seung-cheol looks in some moments as if he is a part of the posters on the wall. The faithful representation of his lonely work environment promotes his being and sublimates it into a form of realist art within the frame of the scene. In other words, Jeon Seung-cheol’s existence is temporarily overwhelmed by art and is transformed into the frame of the scene. However, as soon as the artistry of cinematic realism is conveyed to the viewers, his being eventually re-reveals itself distinctively: his existence becomes “temporally disjunctive” from the spectating gaze but at a certain artistic moment of realism, it becomes affectively distinctive (Bhabha 32). That moment is the moment when he is unified as an object of art but is reborn at the same time as a subject of a scene of artistically affectively reproduced reality. His ontology, ambivalently invisible in reality, is now interrelated with the art of cinematic realism and is rediscovered as the centrality of esthetic value. The ontological affective realism derived from the scenes of labor in The Journals of Musan can hence be presented as an expedient example through which to illustrate Bazin’s notion of cinema as the art of reality. Explained intertextually through The Journals of Musan and Bazin’s “The Ontology,” esthetically ontological realism incorporates the value of being evincing by art as well as the viewer’s awareness of the art. The estheticism of ontological realism encompasses the beauty of being that is both paraded by art and endorsed by the audience. Put differently, this concept is comparable to the artistic sentiment of existence that fills the minds of viewers susceptible to Van Gogh’s affective realist technique. People who eat potatoes are invisible in real life, but the realistic artistry Van Gogh exercised through his

Figure 1. Still from The Journals of Musan, directed by Park Jung-büm, 2010. Photograph © JINJIN Pictures.

Figure 2. Still from The Journals of Musan, directed by Park Jung-büm, 2010. Photograph © JINJIN Pictures.
painting allows the re-representation of the ontology of these otherwise obscure people (Figure 12). Old shoes are generally not seen by anyone in reality; however, spectators begin to think about the life of the owner of the shoes depicted in Figure 13 from the perspective afforded by the objective artistry of reality reproduced by Van Gogh. The realism discovered through many labor scenes in The Journals of Musan is just such artistic ontological realism: a type of “affective aesthetics” (Berlant, 2011 17). In other words, the affective esthetics delivered by ontological realism in The Journals of Musan and “The Ontology” is comparatively allusive and also tremendously artistic. In “The Ontology,” Bazin makes it clear that the photograph has benefited from the efficiency of mechanical objectivity that paintings do not possess. Even though he continues to distinguish the artistry of photography and painting, he also unfolds argument on the esthetics of cinema’s objectivity as extending the continually discussed connection between photography and painting. Indeed, his discussion of cinema includes considerations of Baroque art, Picasso, Cézanne, and French Impressionism. In other words, the rhetoric of his theory on realism presupposes the interrelationship between film art and traditional art. Although Bazin did not directly mention the very names Vincent van Gogh and Jean-François Millet in “The Ontology,” he constantly meditates on the ontological realism of film art within art in general. Bazin’s comparative irony is also witnessed in The Journals of Musan. For example, in the cinematic photographic image Figure 9, the reality reproduced by the artist’s technique is exhibited through artistic objectivity. However, the effect of blurriness, an impressionistic technique representing
light refracted through the glass window, evokes art’s unique subjectivity, that is, affective esthetics in the mind of the viewer, namely, the affective esthetics argued by The Journals of Musan and “The Ontology” is subjective esthetics that the audience discovers, experiences, feels, acknowledges, and interprets in the objectivity produced by the artist’s unique representation of reality. The affective esthetics of the photographic artistry of the Asian film in Figure 9 implies discussion of relative connection with various Western painted masterpieces. In terms of style, it can be compared with Impressionism, and in terms of theme, with Western masterpieces on labor. The Impressionist technique’s effect, created by the foggy glass window in the frame designed by a series of posters, is artistically rich (Figure 9). The audience’s perception of this pastiche of Impressionist style conjures up many other Impressionist masterpieces (Figures 10,11). The connection between Figure 9’s photographic image and Impressionist masterpieces is possible due to the stream of consciousness created by artistic epiphany that occurs in the feelings experienced by the audience. Although the actual appearance of the man at work appears only faintly, the artistic epiphany more clearly imprints the man’s subjectivity in the minds of viewers. The theme of labor in Figure 9 is also comparatively associated with certain masterpieces of Van Gogh and Millet (Figures 12–15). In other words, in the pastiche of the Impressionist perspective of cinematic artistry, the audience successively recalls the affective technique presented by previously viewed paintings of labor and poverty. Such affective esthetics in this ongoing artistic procedure does not exist separately in film and painting, but rather in the imaginative artistic fluidity of the audience’s structure of feeling of the painting and the photographic image. That is, affective esthetics is produced, as in Bazin’s theory, in the process of the viewer’s comparatively formative artistic experience of “thought as felt and feeling as thought” (Williams 132). For instance, Martin Heidegger and Frederick Jameson once discussed the truth of Van Gogh’s paintings of shoes. Heidegger’s prominent philosophical essay on the artworks’ origin explains how Van Gogh’s paintings of a pair of shoes speak to us, and Jameson agreed with his predecessor (Heidegger 19–20; Jameson, 1991 7–8). To go further, I pay more attention to the active progressive psychological linkages of viewers who are considered rather passive in Heidegger and Jameson’s critique of art. Artistry evoked by successive labor scenes in The Journals of Musan eventually sparks the audience’s recognition of imitations of Western painting style. Such awareness leads to artistic experience’s
interrelated continuity across many other labor-related paintings. This East–West link between Asian film and Western masterpieces eventually generates an affective esthetic in the mind of the audience. In the end, ontological affective realism in The Journals of Musan communicates more desperately with the world through the audience’s comparatively esthetic formative experiences and feelings.
The *Journals of Musan* implies the Bazinian “obsession with realism,” but it is difficult to embalm the protagonist’s labor time from his front as he works facing the wall (Bazin, 2005 12). The film once reveals a frontal view of Jeon Seung-cheol’s face blurrily through a glass wall as he adheres the advertising posters. In another instance, the camera illuminates him from the side to represent his being as a black silhouette. Such scenes are conveyed to viewers as artistically realistic and exemplify ontological impressionist cinematic realism disclosed through “mechanically produced images” (Bazin 16). Jeon Seung-cheol’s existence is invisible in many cases or exists merely as an impression in reality. His ontological identity exists as a back figure, a blurriness, a silhouette, or an extension of posters. In everyday reality, North Korean defectors are everywhere in South Korea: as restaurant employees, construction site workers, subway passengers. They pass by South Korean residents all the time, but they are always ontologically “outside of the inside” and “floating signifiers” (Bhabha 34, 31). Jeon Seung-cheol’s real being is eventually reproduced before South Koreans through the personality of a photographer who chose this person’s ontology as the focus of the representation of his realistic art. Jeon Seung-cheol’s humanity is activated through cinematic affective realism in the scene in which he stubbornly and sympathetically pastes his posters over those previously stuck to the wall by others. Cinematic affective realism imprints his personality to us even more clearly in the esthetic expression of the scene that showcases his frustration after confirming that someone has damaged the flyers he posted. The poster scenes of *The Journals of Musan* take viewers to the moments of their encounter during which Jeon Seung-cheol’s ontology continues to merge, disperse, and reappear through the subculture of esthetic realism. At these affective moments of the cinema as an art of reality, viewers finally realize the reason for the camera’s “obsession with the realism”; they apprehend why the photographer’s personality selected Jeon Seung-cheol as an object and why the time of his labor is embalmed (Bazin, 2005 12). The viewers can finally witness his obsession with life, his perseverance, his work ethic, and his humanity through the ontological affective artistry produced by cinematic realism.
3. Ontological affective realism: subjectivity in objective art

André Bazin understands cinema as a genre of art created as a result of an obsession with realism, the reaction of the human resemblance complex to reproduce reality as-is (12–13). This human obsession with realism finally liberates film from the inevitable and “inescapable subjectivity” of painting and through its extreme objectivity, film achieves the delivery of the reality of the object selected by the camera’s personality to the audience (Bazin, 2005 12). Ironically, Bazin emphasizes in “The Ontology” precisely this affective subjectivity pronounced from objectivity. The principal difference between the ancient Egyptian concept of mumifying and the cinematic embalming of time pertains to the former preserving the objectivity of the dead and the latter preserving the objectivity of the living. Thus, the reality reproduced by cinema is the objectivity of the mobility of an object, the psychological desire to hold the man’s life. Bazin asserts:

Since perspective had only solved the problem of form and not of movement realism was forced to continue the search for some way of giving dramatic expression to the moment, a kind of psychic fourth dimension that could suggest life in the tortured immobility of baroque art (11, emphasis mine).

Bazin contends that the objectivity, the embalming of time in cinema, denotes “the preservation of life by a representation of life” (10). When the reality of the life of a living object is transferred as-is to cinematic realism, subjectivity occurs through this objectivity: a dramatic expression is accorded to the moment, and a psychic fourth dimension emanates from the three-dimensional representation of the image (Bazin,
Bazin emphasizes the “likeness of the real” in his essay, but what he actually describes is the subjectivity of the real, which is derived from “the preservation of life” (10). The objectivity of The Journals of Musan commands an irrational yet mysterious power in terms of its photography, which leads the audience to subjectivity. Thus, cinematic objectivity represents an affectively subjective realism that can express the life of an object. Bazin’s conception of this unique characteristic of cinematic realism is discoverable in numerous scenes in The Journals of Musan.

Jeon Seung-cheol sees himself in the puppy rummaging through a pile of garbage (Figures 16,17). The scenes embalming the man’s life through the transference of a moment of his reality unfold the esthetics of objectivity to spectators. Further, the irrational power produced in the minds of viewers through the photography of this objective realism generates subjective esthetics. The cinematic reality of Jeon Seung-cheol’s life eventually conveys a specific subjectivity to the audience. The allegorical doubleness found in the scenes of his dog is conceived not through logical subjective explanation but through an affective subjectivity that is naturally derived from the reproduction of the objective representation of reality (Figures 16–19).

The interface between The Journals of Musan and Bazin’s realism can also be labeled ontologically realistic subjectivity. One of the above scenes may be presented as an appropriate example of the point of contact between them. In one such scene, Jeon Seung-cheol is terrified after being violently threatened by the employees of a competitor who try to intimidate him to not paste posters. He looks down with anxiety and frustration at his residential area, which is supposed to be demolished (Figure 24). The embalming time of the film objectively displays the desperate moments of Joen Seung-cheol’s life captured

Figure 15. Jean-François Millet (French, 1814–1875). The Sower (le semeur), 1850. Oil on canvas, Image: 40 × 32 1/2 in. (101.6 × 82.6 cm). Photograph © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
through this scene of realism. It further implies the subjectivity that manifests the totality of Jeon Seung-cheol’s misery: his life as a subaltern. What meaning of Jeon Seung-cheol’s life does the ontological affective realism of The Journals of Musan intend to preserve through these troubling scenes (Figures 20–23)? What “dramatic expression” does the realism of the film desire to afford to the objectivity of these unfortunately special moments? What “kind of psychic fourth dimension” emanates from the three-dimensional representation of the images of the man’s life? (Bazin, 2005 11) The answers to these questions may be discovered in the paragraph by Bazin presented below. The mystery of Bazin’s rhetoric is vested in the fact that his theory takes the position of underscoring the influence of the objectivity of realism, but it also naturally entails the weight of affective subjectivity. The profundity of Bazin’s realism originates from his complementary interrelation of these two incompatible dimensions of objectivity and subjectivity to achieve a complete logic. André Bazin writes:

Photography affects us like a phenomenon in nature, like a flower or a snowflake whose vegetable or earthly origins are an inseparable part of their beauty. This production by automatic means has radically affected our psychology of the image. The objective nature of photography confers on it a quality of credibility absent from all other picture-making. (13)

Here, Bazin argues that the realistic image unfolded before the eyes of viewers encompasses “the objective nature” and the accompanying creation of “this production by automatic means” results in “a quality of credibility” that fundamentally influences our
attitude toward the image (13). It is difficult to apply Bazin’s romantic realism of the effectiveness of objective images to the despair of Jeon Seung-cheol’s life; however, it is possible to satisfactorily discuss the contextual contact point between the two texts through the above paragraph. In the paragraph reproduced above, Bazin elucidates the subjectivity aroused by objectivity, which can influence the mind-set of the audience and can evoke specific affects in the viewers. Standing on the top of the soon-to-be-demolished staircase, Jeon Seung-cheol looks like a desperate flightless bird at the edge of a cliff, an image that is more poignant because of the feathers protruding from his torn jacket (Figure 25). The scene affects us to feel his emotions of despair by being trapped in the “impassivity” of reality (Berlant, 2011 5). This effect of objectivity is produced from the affective representation of the “crisis ordinariness” of Jeon Seung-cheol’s reality (Berlant, 2011 10). He tries hard to live, but his “survival strategy” only confirms that he is trapped in the reality of “slow death” (Berlant, 2011 4, 95–96). The subjectivity exuded by the objectivity of this scene is the desperate “affective-aesthetic” (Berlant, 2011 17). Standing at the edge of this (metaphorically subjective) cliff, Jeon Seung-cheol may be captivated by the idea that the “good life fantasy” he has pursued after his border crossing is evidence only of his cruel optimism (Berlant, 2011 3). The objective
subjectivity produced by the visually structural representation of the circumstances of Jeon Seung-cheol’s existence explodes the “affect’s saturation of form” and manifests the genre of this film as ontological affective realism (Berlant, 2011 16). The camera faithfully records Jeon Seung-cheol’s life to deliver its objectivity affectively to spectators, who are eventually invited to the ontological subjective reading of his life: a sophisticated inference of the factual esthetics of this man’s reality.

4. Ontological affective realism: the theory of cinematic language

André Bazin’s “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” and The Journals of Musan are connected by the fact that both texts can serve as thoughtful examples of the affective esthetics of ontological realism. The two texts also represent remarkably isomorphic shapes in the structure of their rhetoric. There exists intertextually symmetrical comparability between Bazin’s “The Ontology” and The Journals of Musan. The term intertextual symmetrical comparability signifies that the two texts are not merely targets of comparison; they also evince overlaps with each other, as if their corners are perfectly matched. The existence of each text can maximize the mutual understanding of both. Both texts have a unique ending in common. Both texts end abruptly at the beginning of their transition from an ending to a new level of argument. In the end, Bazin’s “The Ontology” concludes with the sentence that follows in a simple clarification of his linguistic beliefs: “On the other hand, of course, cinema is also a language” (16). Throughout the essay, Bazin continues to discuss the significance of cinematic artistry with a focus on realist representation. This unexpected conclusion drastically dilutes his fanatical support for realism and also functions to obfuscate his dominant emphasis on the representation of objective visibility. Of course, as the present article has persistently argued and attempted to evince, the allusion that realist art generates the necessity of subjectivity is inherent in “The Ontology.” However, Bazin’s concluding statement for his essay appears to assert that the esthetics of cinematic realism shares a common goal with language. Substituting Bazin’s last sentence into the last scene of The Journals of Musan, what is the “language” of the ending of the film? Bazin states as follows: “All are agreed that the image helps us to remember the subject and to preserve him from a second spiritual death” (10, emphasis added). With its “impassive lens,” The Journals of Musan strips “its object of all those ways of seeing it” (Bazin, 2005 15). Through these multi-angles of objectivity, The
Journals of Musan finally achieves its objective of fixing the spectating gaze on Jeon Seung-cheol’s “virginal purity,” the ontological esthetics of the object, and the affective subjectivity of the protagonist (Bazin, 2005 15). Almost like stalking Jeon Seung-cheol, The Journals of Musan follows him to archive him through a series of images of his work, his church life, and his unrequited love (Figures 26–29). In the end, using its most powerful language to speak about him, the last scene of the film certainly imprints this object chosen by the photographer’s personality as a subject of the viewer’s emotions (Figures 30,31, Figures 32,33). After all, the goal of the film’s esthetics of ontological affective realism as preserved in his life is to affirm the language of remembering him. This language finally shepherds the viewer to read him. The more naked the portrayal of his reality, the greater awakening of the purity through which the ontological affective estheticism illuminating him tells the viewer about who he really is. The scene of affective realism of the death of Jeon Seung-cheol’s dog urges its witnesses to learn the universal language of humanism. The language of this scene insists that its viewers should acquire a new social gaze, not just for the sake of North Korean defectors but also for all the frustrations inherent in South Korean society. André Bazin can once again be referenced in this regard: “By the power of photography, the natural image of a world that we neither know nor can know, nature at last does more that imitate art: she imitates the artist” (15). Recalling Oscar Wilde’s “The Decay of Lying,” this passage posits the argument that
realistic esthetics are powerful enough to influence reality. The scene depicting Jeon Seung-cheol watching his dog die carries “the expression of spiritual reality” (Bazin, 2005 11). On the other hand, the cinematic language of the ending of The Journals of Musan exhibits the irrational power of realism that grants the scene the “psychic fourth dimension” that transcends the manifestation of ontology (Bazin, 2005 11). Thus, the final scene of The Journals of Musan arguably exemplifies that the ultimate goal of cinema’s “obsession with realism” according to Bazin’s theory is to attain a truth beyond reality (Bazin, 2005 12). André Bazin’s statement, “The photograph (film) allows us on the one hand to admire in reproduction something that our eyes alone could not have taught us to love” resonates more sincerely in the minds of viewers through the reading of the esthetically ontological realism of The Journals of Musan (16).

5. Ontological affective realism: the filmic language of world literature in intertextuality

The reader’s comparative reading process, that is, discovering commonality between “The Ontology” and The Journals of Musan, generates interdisciplinary hermeneutic values that enable discussion of the relationship with texts of other cultures and time zones. This chapter’s challenging study of world literature grammar in intertextuality might begin with one of the most affective paragraphs from “The Ontology.” Bazin writes:

Only the impassive lens, stripping its object of all those ways of seeing it, those piled up preconceptions that spiritual dust and grime with which my eyes have covered it, are able to present it in all its virginal purity to my attention and consequently to my love (Bazin, 2005 15, emphasis mine).

In the paragraph quoted above, Bazin argues that the impassive lens of a camera makes the object’s virginal purity more clearly apparent than do human eyes. The fundamental premise of understanding an object is to scrutinize it with an objective gaze. If so, why is ontological affective realism important? When we can see an object properly, we can eventually love that object. To love an object is to finally achieve a perfect reading of that object. Bazin’s ontological affective realism explains the act of cinematic reading, and The Journals of Musan is, perhaps, a most suitable example. What kind of reading does the language of ontological affective realism of Bazin’s “The Ontology” and The Journals of
Musan explicate universally? At what moment does the object of a movie ultimately transmogrify into a subject? From where does the power to allow the audience to see the world from a different perspective emanate? Such moments of reading become possible when viewers learn the new language of the “irrational power of photography” (Bazin, 2005:14).

What is the significance of comparatively reading texts of different types? This article interpreted The Journals of Musan through the lens of Bazin’s notion of realism and simultaneously elucidated that the film could contribute to the validity of Bazin’s theory of cinema. Modern literary critics have repeatedly argued the importance of intertextual reading, which the present article labels intertextual symmetry comparability. In the post-modern era, the reader-response theory has appropriated such discussions. The theory of intertextuality posits that the meaning of a text is constructed in association with other texts recognized by a reader. A text is not independent: its production is founded on its interrelationships with numerous extant texts. Julia Kristeva is widely recognized as a representative theorist of intertextuality. However, Virginia Woolf presented the concept of intertextuality vis-à-vis a writer before Kristeva, in A Room of One’s Own (1945):

**Figure 32.** Still from The Journals of Musan, directed by Park Jung-bŭm, 2010. Photograph © JINJIN Pictures.

**Figure 33.** Still from The Journals of Musan, directed by Park Jung-bŭm, 2010. Photograph © JINJIN Pictures.

**Figure 34.** Still from The Journals of Musan, directed by Park Jung-bŭm, 2010. Photograph © JINJIN Pictures.

**Figure 35.** Still from Burning directed by Lee Chang-dong, 2018. Photograph © Fine House Film.
For masterpieces are not single and solitary births; they are the outcome of many years of thinking in common, of thinking by the body of the people, so that the experience of the mass is behind the single voice. Jane Austen should have laid a wreath upon the grave of Fanny Burney, and George Eliot done homage to the robust shade of Eliza Carter. […] all women together ought to let flowers fall upon the tomb of Aphra Behn. (66)

In “Tradition and the Individual Talent” (1919), T.S. Eliot also suggested the concept of intertextuality apropos interpretation:

No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead.13

Virginia Woolf and T.S. Eliot evince a common concept of intertextuality in the examples above, illuminating the importance of discovering the meaning of every literary text in relation to other works when a text is born or interpreted. But by whom is such intertextuality to be discovered and interpreted? Intertextuality desperately needs the reader’s comparative action during the reading process. In other words, exploring each text’s similarity requires the reader – the third link that comprises an intellectual action connecting one text with another. In addition, the two paragraphs above suggest that Woolf and Eliot’s definitions of literature have in common implications for reader-
response theory. Presumably, intertextual readings of Bazin’s “The Ontology” and *The Journals of Musan* correspond to Woolf and Eliot’s understanding of reading. In addition, their view of reading aligns with reader-response criticism as proposed by Wolfgang Iser and Stanley Fish. *Iser* emphasizes reading as a “process” through which readers exercise their “imagination”; the phenomenological analysis aims to read “something beyond what [the text] actually says” (53). Furthermore, Stanley *Fish* highlights reading as an action and explains literature as a “kinetic art” and “a process of extraction of deep meaning” (83–86). My intertextual reading of Bazin’s “The Ontology” and *The Journals of Musan* is congruent with Fish’s view of literature. Fish regards reading as an “analysis in terms of doings and happenings” and the process of “recognizing the fluidity, ‘the movingness’ of the meaning experience.” This process “directs us to where the reading action is the active and activating consciousness of the reader” (83). This discourse of the significance of the reader’s reading process can be extended to the methodology of world literature that values reading across time and culture.14

In reading their ontological affective realism, which forms the contact point between Bazin’s “The Ontology” and *The Journals of Musan*, this article encounters the concept of the language of world literature. *The Journals of Musan* encapsulates a realistic delineation of the shattering of Jeon Seung-cheol and his friend Kyung-cheol’s Korean dream. The two friends share their lodgings, and the wall of Kyung-cheol’s room is adorned with a world map and photographs of exotic landscapes (*Figure 34*). Kyung-cheol visits the pet shop to sell Jeon Seung-cheol’s dog and is told that the shop owner does not buy hybrid dogs because they become an economic burden for the pet shop. Jeon Seung-cheol’s dog is a mixed breed born of the Northern Korean Poongsan and the Southern Korean Jindo. Thus, Kyung-cheol abandons Jeon Seung-cheol’s dog on the street and returns home. He sits under the world map and the exotic photos as if nothing has happened and talks about money over the phone. As Jeon Seung-cheol argues with him and demands to know where he has left his dog, the camera’s gaze fixes on the two friends. The viewers see the two beings with vastly different life principles (*Figure 34*). Their Korean dream has transformed both individuals into surplus labor in South Korea. Jeon Seung-cheol desperately wants to settle in South Korea. Conversely, Kyung-cheol falls for the illusion of the American dream, a fact that is portrayed to the viewer by the visual allegory of the world map behind him. Kyung-cheol will circle the world and commit acts that will cause another person to confront the dire circumstance of becoming surplus labor (*Figures 34, 35*). The world maps shown in *Figures 34 and 35* function as a visual form of discourse on surplus labor in Korean films. *Figure 35* is a world map hung in Hae-mi’s room, the heroine of Lee Chang-dong’s *Burning* (2018). Hae-mi is also surplus labor that flowed from the country to the city, and after she travels to Africa; her experience of the metaphoric diaspora, it is implied in the movie that she is victimized by Ben, an allegorical Kurtz type of evil in the film. What is shown commonly in these two examples is that firstly, these two Korean films are in the relation of intertextual comparability that explains the relationship between the economically underprivileged and global capitalism in a cinematic way with a signifier – the world map. In fact, Lee Chang-dong has been mentioned as the first person to contribute to *The Journals of Musan* in its ending credit. Secondly, it is the correlation between the world map and the genre of the film that is intertextually revealed in these two films. The world maps as Mise-en-scène
contain the pessimistic world view of narrative. The complex contrasting between the narrative’s apocalyptic world view and the protagonists’ recklessly hopeful world view; the complicated schematizations of the Korean cinematic texts become the factors for these two filmic texts to go beyond the level of Korean text. As such world maps function to determine these two texts as a genre of world literature.

Kyung-cheol who had scammed fellow defectors and had hidden the money in Jeon Seung-cheol’s torn jacket, asks Jeon Seung-cheol to bring the money to him. Jeon Seung-cheol boards the bus with his dog to deliver the money to his friend as asked. However, the viewer is introduced to the facet of Jeon Seung-cheol’s personality that is adjusting to capitalist society as he sits on a seat under a poster advertising “how to invest your money to be richer”\(^{15}\) and touches the money (Figure 33). Finally, he chooses not to disembark at the stop where his friend is waiting for him (Figure 32).

Jeon Seung-cheol buys a suit he desires with the money he appropriates after betraying his friend. Perhaps, as he wears this suit, he attempts to also wear the identity of a middle-class South Korean office worker for his unrequited love, Sook-yoong. God punishes him brutally for this adaptation to capitalist values by taking his dog away from him when he betrays his friend and imitates a false identity by wearing the new suit bought with money he has not earned from honest labor (Figure 30). The camera stares at Jeon Seung-cheol for a while as he watches the death of his dog, his everything, and his alter ego in South Korea. Here, the film ends abruptly, just like Bazin’s essay (Figure 30). The viewer is shown a completely black screen after the dog dies (Figure 31). The visual message of the “heart of darkness” is offered to viewers by this scene as they recall the destruction of Jeon Seung-cheol’s existence and bear witness to his metaphorical suicide (Figure 31).

Captured in the vortex of his desire for capital, Jeon Seung-cheol betray his friend and purchases the new suit that will accord him the personality for which he longs; through the portrayal of this sequence of events, The Journals of Musan conveys once again the destruction of his existence, using the language of world literature for its ontological affective realism. When Jeon Seung-cheol wears the suit he desires to assume the fake identity of an office worker, his hollow ontological status – stylish on the outside but empty inside – is linked to the scene of the decapitated mannequin. The headless model stands stripped of attire at a show window of a suit shop. It captures the viewer’s attention because it is reminiscent of the metaphorical hanged man. At the same time, the words of Psalms 18.1 – I WILL love You, O LORD, my strength – are visible behind the mankin (Figure 36).\(^{16}\)

The ontological affective realism expressed through the citation of the Psalms, Jeon Seung-cheol’s abandonment of his only friend for money, and the metaphorical allusion of his suicide through the black screen that appears after the death of his dog connect this film to the well-known event of Judas Iscariot’s betrayal because of thirty pieces of silver and his suicide by hanging (Figure 37). When Judas (physically) sees Jesus being bound by the chief priests and delivered to the governor Pontius Pilate, he is also (psychologically) able to see that he had been condemned. At this moment of witnessing his guilt, he may have seen the image of Jesus Christ’s crucifixion in his mind. The affective realism of the imagined spectacle of Christ’s crucifixion could have caused Judas to feel more remorseful and could have eventually made him hang himself. A similar process perhaps occurs with Jeon Seung-cheol as he sees his terrible reality in the image of his dog’s death. Judas and Jeon Seung-cheol
share the experiencing of a strong psychological awareness that evokes ontological recognition through the action of seeing. André Bazin indicated that such awareness could effect from the objective gaze that profoundly influences “our psychology of the image” (13).

In this way, The Journals of Musan expresses the intertextual language of world literature in a multi-layered manner through ontological affective realism. How, then, does the ontological affective realism affect the determination of the genre of this film? Does the black screen at the end of the film clarify to the viewer that the protagonist’s survival strategy, his struggle for life, is also a cruel optimism that eventually makes him increasingly obsessed with capitalist society? The end of the film is probably a visual argument that the contemporary world is colonized by capital and surplus laborers traverse the globe that has been transformed into a huge third world. The audience may be able to hear Kurtz whispering on his death bed in the total darkness of the last scene, “The horror! The horror!” (Figure 31). Jeon Seung-cheol’s is trapped in the vortex of his growing desire for money in the capitalist society he inhabits. The death of his dog, his everything, his alter ego, his religion, or a phenomenon even more than his spirituality, signifies the beginning of Jeon Seung-cheol’s “apocalypse now.” The causes of wars, colonialism and capitalism can be considered as a kind of side effect of the colonization by capital, the vortex of the heart of darkness humans fall into. Joseph Conrad’s Kurtz has been reborn with different names in various modern films. The tragedy of many victims of the movie Apocalypse Now (1979) and Jeon Seung-cheol’s The Journals of Musan is an example of a metaphorical intertextual relationship between them and the Heart of Darkness. How can the quality of the thematic interface of the film’s last scene with Heart of Darkness influence the identification of the film’s genre? How do the film’s allusive links with powerful Western narratives affect the identification of its genre? The Journals of Musan’s allusions to the Bible and to Heart of Darkness in the process of delivering themes through the technique of cinematic ontological affective realism evince its inheritance of the typical literary skills of Western texts, which also become the elements of world literature woven into the intertextuality of the film that are contained within its cinematic expression.

6. Conclusion: an intertextual reading of the theory of love

How often do readers disremember the lessons of Shakespeare’s reproduction of reality? Is André Bazin’s notion of emblazing time visible in this gem-like passage from a literary masterpiece below? Prince Hamlet states:

> For anything so overdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is, to hold, as ’twere, the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure.  

Claudius did not see himself in the reality of pouring the “juice of cursed hebenon” into his sleeping brother’s ear in the garden. What was discovered in the reproduced theatrical reality that made him repent? How could Hamlet’s The Mouse-trap hold “the mirror up to nature” that would show Claudius’s virtue its features and enable him to scorn his own image? The means to reflect the individual personality onto images via a social mirror constitutes the irrational power of photography, its capacity to move people’s minds to properly see their own selves. The methodology of visual art that triggers such a seeing of the world denotes ontological affective realism; it constitutes the strategy of prince Hamlet whose seemingly reality is equivalent to the interface of André
Bazin’s ideas and *The Journals of Musan*’s cinematic articulation of those ideas; it is the subjectivity of the real derived from “the preservation of life” (Bazin10). The comparability between “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” and *The Journals of Musan* represents an artistic consent to prince Hamlet’s claim that “the play is the image.”

An affectively illiterate era has already begun for the world. The onset of the digital era further favors the consumption of visual materials over literary texts. In this context, cinema denotes the genre of art that can potentially incorporate criticism as well as the means to overcome this affective illiteracy. The present article particularly elucidates the value of intertextual reading through its horizontal examination of the last sentence of André Bazin’s “The Ontology” and the last scene of *The Journals of Musan*. By mutually reading cinema and the film theory in the light of the other’s different dimension, this article appeals to the desperate necessity of reading the other from the perspective of an intertextual reading to discover the *symmetrical comparability*. The recent conflicts around the world also allow the recognition that humanity has entered the era of becoming *illiterate of the other*. In other words, people of different races, cultures, political orientations, and levels of wealth, are increasingly refusing to read each other. This refusal of mutually reading each other triggers much conflict. The interpretation that Bazin’s ontological affective realism may also be posited as the theory of love for the other is more practically explicated through the representation of the dog’s death in *The Journals of Musan*. This linkage also entails the significance of comparative readings that contend the imperative value of *seeing* the existence of “you” rather than “I” to make this compassionately illiterate world affectively fluid so it can *read each other* again.

**Notes**

1. Recent studies related to Bazin’s “The Ontology” in academia show three patterns. First, it is the case that “The Ontology” is regarded as an essay representing Bazin’s view on realism, such as Jonathan Friday’s research and Dudley Andrew’s essay. In particular, Daniel Morgan interprets Bazin’s issue of ontology as a discussion about his style of realism. Second, the discussion on Bazin’s realist objectivity in “The Ontology,” which has been shown in many recent papers, is understood as a kind of interpretation of his esthetic consciousness through the discourse of films. Andy Stafford refers to Bazin’s realism as “a form of poetic realism” (55) or “essayistic understanding of a photographic image” (55). Third, his realist ontology, which Dudley Andrew referred to as “Bazinism,” implies a comparative study of his influence on contemporary or later art theory and philosophy. See also the recent related studies of “The Ontology” of Douglass Smith (2013); Jennifer Stob (2012); Laurent Marie (2013); Burke Hillsabeck (2016); Justin Horton (2013). This paper goes beyond the consent of the above-mentioned studies on Bazin’s ontological realism and emphasizes the affective nature of his realism through intertextual comparability with the South Korean film *The Journals of Musan*. This is a suggestive case study on intertextual symmetrical comparability, in which the study can show the mutual understanding of two different texts more effectively.

2. See the studies of Kim Sunah (in Korean, 2012), Seong (in Korean, 2012), Oh (in Korean, 2013), Chung (in Korean, 2016), Mo & Kim Soo-chul (in Korean, 2016), and Yeo (in Korean, 2019) can be presented as examples.

3. Fredric Jameson, “Political: National Allegory.” *Allegory and Ideology*, 159–215.

4. See “What We Do: Settlement Support for North Korean Defectors.” *Ministry of Unification*, February 22, 2021, https://www.unikorea.go.kr/eng_unikorea/whatwedo/support/.

5. See Cho’s recent study on the English-language autobiographies of North Korean defectors. See also studies of Park Hyun-sik (in Korean, 2006) and Kim Young-man (in Korean, 2004).
6. See “What We Do: Settlement Support for North Korean Defectors.” Ministry of Unification, February 22, 2021, https://www.unikorea.go.kr/eng_unikorea/whatwedo/support/.
7. Yoon, Gi-kwan. “Saetemin Policy needs to be modified.” Talbukjadongziwhea, http://nkدور.or.kr/news/article/view/2615 Accessed January 31, 2021.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Here, Jeon Seung-cheol can be presented as an example of the Korean version of “surplus labor” discussed by Mike Davis. “Surplus labor” is a term that refers to a side effect of excessive urbanization or globalization. It refers to the collective name of a group in which the residue labor force is degraded to the minimum wage or lower labor value due to the overload of labor force inflowed into large cities mainly from rural areas or the third world. They mainly work in unstable labor and belong to city slum dwellers. See Mike Davis’s “Planet of Slums: Urban Involution and the Informal Proletariat,” 27.
11. Ian Jarvy argued against Bazin’s objective view in the review of “The Ontology” published in Film Quarterly in 1960. The discussion of the camera’s objectivity in “The Ontology” is overflowing with esthetic and metaphorical expressions. It contains a complex and esoteric theory of his realism so that even Ian Jarvey has been unable to understand the value of rhetoric that Bazin’s objective view can eventually be linked to the subjectivity of cinematic language.
12. Oscar Wilde’s famous premise on art, “Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life” is suggested in this essay, “The Decay of Lying” (1891).
13. Eliot, “Tradition and the Individual Talent.” (1919) Poetry Foundation, https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/69400/tradition-and-the-individual-talent. Accessed January 31, 2021.
14. The comparison between Woolf and Eliot and the intertextual comparability between Iser and Fish will be discussed in my subsequent studies on colonial-related issues.
15. [H]ow to invest your money to be richer” is my English translation in the scene in Figure 29 in Korean it says Jaetakhbubibub (재테크비법).
16. In the scene in Figure 32, the line from the book of Psalms appears in Korean as follows: Nauhi himi dehshin Yeowhayeoh nega jurul sararanhainaidai Shipyun 18:1 (나의힘이 되신 여호와여 내가 주를 사랑 하니아다 시편 18:1).
17. See the Gospel of Matthew 26.15 in the New Testament.
18. See the Gospel of Matthew 27.1–10 in the New Testament.
19. In Scene II of Act III from Hamlet, 167.
20. In Scene V of Act I from Hamlet, 105.
21. In Scene II of Act III from Hamlet, 167.
22. In Scene II of Act III from Hamlet, 181.

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