

4 Recording the Soundscape of K-Pop

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Timbre

EJAE (Kim Eun-jae), a rising singer-songwriter and producer, was in her car driving from Virginia to New York in December 2019 when she suddenly received an onslaught of direct messages from her Instagram account. Fans of the girl group Red Velvet were texting that her demo version of “Psycho” had been uploaded to YouTube. It was two days before SM Entertainment (hereafter SM), one of South Korea’s largest entertainment conglomerates, was to release Red Velvet’s song “Psycho,” the title song of their next album, and the demo version, sung by EJAE and Cazzi Opeia, a singer-songwriter who cowrote the song, had been leaked. It immediately circulated as avid fans tracked down EJAE’s SoundBetter account after Andrew Scott, the song’s producer and other cowriter, had tagged her to promote the record before its worldwide release.

EJAE had accidentally uploaded the demo for “Psycho” a few years before on SoundBetter, a music production marketplace, to connect with other musicians when she arrived in New York. In the SoundBetter portfolio, musicians post the SoundCloud link to their demo playlist, automatically loading all their songs onto the platform. She had uploaded several of her demos to promote her account and also had posted another demo identically titled “Psycho.” Unaware that Red Velvet’s version of “Psycho” had been uploaded to her song list, she had forgotten about the account. But the fans tracked her down. She immediately deleted her account and notified SM’s A&R agent and EKKO Korea Music Rights publishing, to which she is signed. They advised her to report the unofficial uploads, so for the next two days, EJAE would report all leaks that came into her purview: “I’ve been reporting the leaked version all day long for the past two days. It was wildfire from then. There was nothing I could do other than to report endlessly.”¹

“Psycho,” the title song for *The ReVe Festival: Finale* (2019) studio album, was met with extraordinary commercial and critical acclaim. It topped Korean and international music charts and won numerous accolades, including the prestigious Golden Disc Award’s “Digital Single Award” in 2021. Ironically, it was EJAE’s demo leak that sparked interest for me, apart from the fact that she is one of the few Asian and Asian

American women K-pop producers in the industry who has worked with women artists such as EXID's Hani, Suzy (former member of Miss A), and Taeyeon (Girls' Generation member). I was browsing the internet and clicked on the leaked demo, thinking it was the English version of "Psycho." I was surprised to find a well-polished, extremely well-sung song with catchy lyrics that would play in my ear for several days:

You got me feeling like a psycho, psycho
 Got me chasing shots of Nyquil, Nyquil
 Without you got me dizzy and upset
 Got me so obsessed with you
 Look what you started, I'm psycho you're heartless.²

I was intrigued that EJAE was excluded from *The Korea Herald's* article, which covered the production of Red Velvet's "Psycho." In-depth interviews were conducted with Scott and Cazzi Opeia, but not with EJAE. "Someone said something like being heartbroken is almost like feeling psycho. We then decided we wanted to write a song with beautiful chords that tells a story about this. And that's how 'Psycho' was born," Cazzi Opeia notes. But who was this *someone*? The article mentions that the song's inception took place at SM's songwriting camp in Seoul and that EJAE wrote the top line (melody) with Cazzi Opeia. Yet EJAE's name is unmentioned when the article recounts how the melody was developed, and only Cazzi Opeia is credited.³ What happened during the production of the record or inside the recording studio?

Because many scholars contend that K-pop is driven by visual imperatives, such as Irene from Red Velvet, who seems to prove their point by singing that she is "original, visual" in "Psycho," academic analysis has been dominated by ocular-centric discussions while questions pertaining to K-pop as a sonic phenomenon have largely been neglected. Drawing on R. Murray Schafer's definition of "soundscape" – which treats sound as the combination of layers of culture, place, acoustic space, and technology – this chapter provides an overview of K-pop's soundscape with a particular emphasis on an aural turn in the discipline of K-pop studies. The industry's sonic practice has responded to new recording technologies and media, which are linked to particular temporal and spatial configurations. For instance, the technological mediation of sound in studio recording booths, where K-pop singers give literal voice to their self-expression, has become an integral component of the sonic form.

K-pop artists' recording methods drastically altered over the past decade with the advent of technologies such as smartphones, digital plug-ins, and music streaming platforms (Melon, Genie, and Spotify, to name a few), which facilitate portable music and make digital sound files

effortlessly fungible. The soundscape of K-pop has expanded further into cyberspace as record production, vocal directing, and sound mixing are controlled remotely and synchronized with digital platforms, situating cyberspace as a form of recording studio produced by multiple participants and sound practices. Spaces of sonic performance are no longer confined to the recording studio but form part of the confluence of time and space in cyberspace. Once the demo for “Psycho” was cut for the album, Scott, who was based in Los Angeles, communicated with Yoo Young-jin, SM’s in-house executive record producer in Seoul, to alter sound sources, instrumental stems, and chords, and to restructure sections to fit SM’s sound design; Scott also worked with EJAE in New York and Cazzi Opeia in Sweden remotely to produce the bridge of the song, which was sent to Yoo for SM’s approval. Technology has taken record production one step further, so that records are produced synchronously with digital platforms such as Audiomovers, where sound can be streamed, and mixed remotely in real time; the compressed time and space has accelerated and amplified K-pop’s soundscape in ways that even COVID-19 cannot hinder.

From demo production to recording sessions, I address in this chapter a broad network of sonic practices in contemporary Korean music production, including through interviews with recording artists ranging from balladeers, singer-songwriters, rock stars, rappers, and idols to K-pop boy bands and girl groups. To contextualize their discursive practices, I also address the interventions of record producers, songwriters, sound engineers, A&R teams, and the CEOs of entertainment companies. With the aim of broadening the discourse of sound studies, I try to eavesdrop on how the soundscape of K-pop is recorded and how artists register their voices, both literally and figuratively, in music-making processes.

When I invoke “K-pop,” a nebulous expression for Korean popular music, I refrain from limiting the term to boy bands and girl groups and expand it to encapsulate the spectrum of Korean popular music. In so doing, I focus on the intimate space of the recording studio and the performances of seminal figures who have built the platform for K-pop’s global consumption. It is impossible to fully address the diverse sounds, genres, and presence of many celebrated personalities, but I have carefully selected recording artists and producers whose influences have most notably fashioned the K-pop industry. Finally, while listeners’ multivalent reception (which one might call listener response) forms an integral part of K-pop’s soundscape, for the purpose of this chapter I focus on the production of what Pierre Schaeffer has called “sound objects,” or recorded sound.

Pulse

Sound studies in academia have gained traction in the past decade under the auspices of scholars such as Rey Chow, James A. Steintrager, Philip Auslander, Brian Kane, Jonathan Sterne, and Fred Moten, and the digital revolution has helped the discipline expand culturally, spatially, and theoretically.⁴ Yet the fledging discipline of sound studies has produced a paucity of literature on Asia and none on K-pop. While Suk-Young Kim, Dal Young Jin, John Lie, and Youna Kim, to name a few, recently have published valuable research on K-pop, no scholar has focused on the production of sonic practices in the industry.⁵ In this chapter, I situate the soundscape of K-pop, as a case study, from the perspective of sound studies.⁶ I utilize sound theory to approach K-pop and elucidate its interplay between technological mediation and production, and attempt to intervene in the discourse of loss that treats sound as ephemeral, ineffable, and elusive. By rethinking K-pop and sound as categories of analysis, I aim to materialize a dimension that largely has been omitted in sound studies and the K-pop canon and offer new perspectives on the production and perception of sound.

In the physical world sound was captured and burned into objects such as CDs; in the digital world sound is archived in the data cloud, from which music is streamed. In sound studies, sound is conceived as an ephemeral and ineffable effect and is associated with loss, but that sense of capture and loss is interrupted by digital technology. Capture, in the age of digitized sound, as Chow and Steintrager explain, no longer involves loss; file formats such as the MP3 and MP4 positively connote plenitude, compactness, and pristine-ness that does not erode through repeated copying.⁷ The grain of the voice is captured through sonic objectification (the objectified form of sound) in recordings whose copies all retain high-definition quality and clarity, so Chow and Steintrager postulate the need to revise the paradigm of sonic capture as mere loss and consider “sonic loss as gain.”⁸ I build on this stance but argue that sound is not ephemeral; sound capture does not primarily implicate the retention of what is lost. Instead, the ephemera of sound are always marked on the record and are distinctly material, even as they emanate from either the sonorous body (the larynx, vocal folds, palate) or the digital interface, where sound is activated through software with the touch of a human finger – sound remains.

Focusing on sound as what Chow and Steintrager termed an “object of sound” – or what Pierre Schaeffer coined as a “sound object” (*l'objet sonore*) – I highlight how these terms refer to the invisibility of what causes sound.⁹ They situate sound no longer as the Other of vision and subvert the Western ideology of equating vision to rationality, science, and

writing and sound to unscientific realms of affect and emotion.¹⁰ Technological reproduction severs sound from source and audio from visual dimensions, and leaves us to perceive them on separated tracks. In so doing, recordings capture K-pop's tactility as an independent entity as sound waves touch and vibrate our bodies and the music becomes an object of sound. Yet most studies of musical recordings as objects of sound have centered on sound technology by underscoring technical mechanisms.¹¹ I instead examine the connection between human and nonhuman actors that generate the sound object by focusing equally on human interplay and recording technologies. As Brian Kane elaborates, "sounds and notes do not simply constitute a realm of essence detachable from their moment, sites of production, or reception. Rather, they need to be recognized as a sedimentation of historical and social forces."¹² For sound to become an object, the singers' voices, the musicians, and the producers' and engineers' mediation, inside and outside recording studios, form part of a complex and arduous collaboration that gives meaning to the sedimentation of sound. Within this trajectory, I utilize Schafer's concept of soundscape and introduce the soundscape of K-pop as a sound object tied to its geographical environment in its inception.¹³

I argue that sound objects are political statements embedded with multiple subjectivities; accordingly, K-pop is inextricably entangled with its temporal and spatial nature and is emblematic of the social, historical, political, and technological soundscape of the industry. The object of sound performs the "sedimented acts" of multiple agencies connected in the recording process. Chow brilliantly elucidates how a sound object can be translated as an embodied materiality via Mikhail Bakhtin's notions of double-voicedness and polyphony; "a word" appears in the form of "a singular vocal emission," but is consistently "underwritten (and under-spoken) by other voices; even when silent."¹⁴ However inaudible the other voices are, they exert power in the emission and reception of the voice. For instance, with digital technology, the breathing of K-pop singers in between notes easily could be eliminated. Yet the silence is never an absence: the erasure of a K-pop singer's breath is a political act in itself in that power relations have been involved in the decision-making process. The creative choices of each actor in the network of songwriters, singers, musicians, producers, A&R people, sound engineers, and CEOs who participate in this process shape K-pop by burning themselves into the memory of a CD or writing data in binary numbers. Tracing the labor of multiple agencies in the manufacture of a sound object can disclose a web of power relations, and the sound object represents an imprint of the recording studio as a site of power relations.

Track 1. “Geunyeoui useumsorippun” 06:27, Written by Lee Young-hun and Kim Myung-gon

Prior to the rise of digital technology and the ensuing global consumption of K-pop, sound was produced in an analog recording system, by the interplay of human subjectivities in the recording studios in Seoul. In the 1980s, Lee Moon-sae, a multiplatinum solo recording artist who is regarded as the pioneer of K-pop ballads and pop aesthetics, recorded his songs with analog multitrack consoles. Lee debuted in 1978; released sixteen studio albums; was the recipient of numerous awards, ranging from the Golden Disc Award to the Presidential Commendation Award; and his ballads – such as “Yetsarang” (Old love), “Sarangi Jinagamyeon” (When love passes by), Gwanghwamun yeonga” (Gwanghwamun love song), “Geudaewa yeongwonhi” (Forever with you), and “Bulgeunnoeul” (Sunset glow) – are still popular and covered by contemporary artists. Lee is famous not only for his songs but also for his talent as an entertainer; he was the host of Munhwa Broadcasting Corporation (MBC)’s most popular radio show, *Byeori binnaneun bame* (On a starry night), from 1985 to 1996 and had several major TV music shows of his own. Lee’s popularity gathered momentum with his third studio album, which was released by Seorabeol Records in November 1985 and sold 1.5 million copies. This marked the beginning of the vast popularity of *gayo*, which means Korean popular music, and the “ballad” genre. American popular music, trot music, and folk dominated Korea’s music industry until M. Lee’s third and fourth studio album in the mid-1980s. Lee’s first single, “Nan ajik moreujanayo” (I still don’t know), from his third album, peaked at number one on Korean Broadcasting System (KBS) TV’s *Gayo Top 10* chart in June 1986, after seven months of promotion and gaining significant radio airplay. It also marked the beginning of his collaboration with Lee Young-hun, a songwriter who had just launched his professional career. K-pop balladeer M. Lee’s subsequent albums also went platinum: His fourth studio album sold more than 2.85 million copies in 1987, making it the biggest seller in K-pop history (in the 1980s and 1990s, albums that sold more than 1 million copies were considered platinum); it also was the first studio album that entirely centered on M. Lee and Y. Lee’s teamwork.

Recognizing their potential as a team, the duo developed a collaborative relationship for four consecutive albums. “While the singles from my fourth album reached number one on music charts, Y. Lee was already starting to write music for my next album,” says M. Lee. He continues: “I was busy promoting the album, but all the while, my mind was occupied with my next album.” During preproduction, the duo had long talks where they envisioned the direction of their highly anticipated album. Y. Lee preferred working on the piano and was far from spontaneous in writing his music

and, in particular, his lyrics; he worked steadily and meticulously, selecting each word as he worked out his ideas for the characters, the narrative, and the sound design tailored to M. Lee's voice. He then presented the songs to M. Lee, who would select those that would best fit the concept of the album. "Mr. Young-hun Lee already had the lyrics naturally fused with the music; he was more than a lyricist – he was a poet," he explains.

Once songs were confirmed, another six months was spent to practice and memorize the melody with the lyrics, and after extensive discussions on the exact kind of arrangement that reflected the precise mood of each song, it was during this time that we would record the demo on a reel-to-reel tape recorder to be delivered to the song arranger Kim Myung-gon.¹⁵

With only Y. Lee's piano and M. Lee's voice, the duo layered the polyphony of voices on the demo they desired to iterate on the master, and Kim, a renowned and prolific songwriter and arranger, would come in on the day of recording to capture their narrative into sound.

The production started with the recordings of instrumental sessions executed under Kim's guidance and was followed by vocal recording sessions: "I was always fully prepared, and my lyrics fully memorized by heart when I recorded my songs in the studio," recalls M. Lee. He adds, "I never brought in the lyrics with me when recording; it was a time when artists recorded songs with their eyes closed." During the 1980s, recording studios were equipped with analog multitrack consoles, the standard for Korea's music industry. Music was recorded to a master disc, reel-to-reel magnetic tapes referred to as "reel tapes" in the Korean vernacular. That decade was the era of the vinyl long-playing record (LP), the definitive analog sound storage format. Under those material and technical conditions, music was fully rehearsed and memorized before the artists entered the studio, because it was difficult to fix mistakes with the recording technology available. When collaborating on their fourth studio album in 1986, M. Lee as always was fully prepared to record "Geunyeoui useumsorippun" (Only her laughter), another hit song written as a gift to his loyal fans. The 6:27 duration was inappropriate for radio airplay, whose time limit was generally three to four minutes per song. "We didn't have Auto-Tune back then and couldn't alter a single note, so if you made a mistake, you had to sing it all over again," M. Lee recalled. By his own account, "To sing over six minutes straight, I could not even practice the song because my voice would go hoarse. So, to sing in the best condition possible, I had dinner, and after two hours of digestion in complete silence, I entered the studio, sang the whole song once, and the first take ended up in the album." (M. Lee did sing three backup versions.) In postproduction, the multitrack was delivered to the mixing engineer, who optimized the audio levels, and then pressed into LPs.

By 1992, recording studios had transitioned from using analog to digital multitrack recording consoles, and sound was manifested through visual displays of sound waves on the computer screen. M. Lee had started exploring other genres such as jazz, and collaborated with various musicians to expand his musical range, but the duo legend continued to work on pop ballads until Y. Lee's death in 2008. By 1992, the music industry had been transformed: three-member group Seo Taiji and Boys' debut in 1992 with "Nan Arayo," which utilized MIDI technology, popularized the incorporation of rap into K-pop, contributing to the K-pop idol songwriting formula, and galvanized the proliferation of dance music (electronic dance music, EDM) into mainstream popular culture. Dance music groups (including gender-mixed groups) and solo artists performing powerful choreography to dance music enjoyed immense popularity. With the exception of singer-songwriters and the rare dance music groups such as Seo Taiji and Boys and the two-member dance group Deux, where Taiji Seo and Lee Hyun-do were, respectively, songwriter and producer themselves, the efficient system of the compartmentalization of composers, lyricists, song arrangers, and producers took shape: Lyrics were rarely written before the melody; in extreme cases, they were written during recording sessions. Kim Hyun-chul, a producer and singer-songwriter, produced M. Lee's eighth studio album in 1993, and the modes of collaboration were very different from that with Y. Lee: Kim wrote the lyrics to the title single, "Jongwonege," in the recording studio, as M. Lee was in the booth recording the first phrase of the song, waiting for the lyrics to be handed to him. Demos were given to Lee in the form of cassette tapes with "dummy lyrics." The dummy lyrics were terrible, although they were fun to listen to. This compartmentalization of what used to be a holistic music production process was effective in a fast-paced neoliberal society such as Korea, and the collaborative format expanded drastically in the mid-1990s with the introduction of boy band and girl group idols such as H.O.T., S.E.S., Fin.K.L, and Sechs Kies, whose soundscape was buoyed by the advent of Auto-Tune. By the late 1990s, K-pop idols and music dance groups and solos depended heavily on Auto-Tune, software that corrects singers' pitch and added to the stereotype of K-pop automation.

Track 2. "Sangeo" 05:29, Written by Cho Kyu Chan

"이 앨범의 모든 수록곡은 **AUTO TUNE** 기능을 사용하지 않은 목소리로 녹음 되었습니다."
 "All songs on this album were recorded with a voice that did not use the function of **AUTO TUNE**."
 (bold letter emphasis in original)

Hip-hop artist Jay-Z released his single “D.O.A. (Death of Auto-Tune)” in 2009 to bash the overuse of voice-correction technology, but in Korea, already at the turn of the millennium, Cho Kyu Chan, a Korean Music Award winner, singer, songwriter, and producer, imprinted his anti-Auto-Tune statement at the end of the credits on his fifth studio album cover. Cho’s position reflected the industry’s overweening promotion of pop idols, boy bands and girl groups, and solo and dance group singers who were incapable of singing live on pitch and always lip-synched on TV due to their focus on presenting vigorous choreography.¹⁶ Their voices were hypermediated in recording studios, and idol and dance groups were heavily criticized for their inability to sing live, except for their lead singers (such groups usually featured one capable singer). Most singers no longer needed to sing well, and it was no longer considered taboo to place a sheet of lyrics on a music stand when recording; the digitized manipulation of voices in recording studios manufactured timbre, tone, and pitch in an unprecedented fashion. Cho explains, “Nowadays, I do use Auto-Tune when necessary. It depends on the concept of the song, but back then, the tool was perceived negatively – it was a transitional period.”¹⁷

This transitional period proceeded in tandem with rapid technological innovation – such as the invention of the MP3, a file-compression technology, and its free distribution on the internet – which affected the object of sound and the Korean music industry in multifarious ways. If the free distribution of the MP3 encoder impelled the inception of Napster in June 1999 in the United States, in Korea, there was Soribada, a Korean version of the free peer-to-peer MP3 file-sharing service that involved copyright infringement in May 2000. Free MP3 downloading had detrimental effects on the industry, with CD sales dropping drastically because players such as MPMan (the world’s first MP3 player), Yepp, and Iriver made MP3s portable. It instigated a sharp decrease in sales of analog formats, such as compact discs (CDs), tapes, and vinyl, but also contributed to K-pop’s stark shift from audio to visual culture. The shift was a survival strategy but also symbolized the resilience of the industry, since musicians had to provide listeners more than the sound component and needed to secure an alternative and innovative platform to CD sales. Still, the detrimental effects on singer-songwriters and balladeers were severe. By 2001, million-seller albums had disappeared, and technology also modified studio practices. When in 2001 Cho recorded his sixth studio album, on which he collaborated with R&B artist Brian McKnight on “Thank You for Saving My Life,” the conversion to full-digitized recording, along with Pro Tools, an alternative editing software, allowed sound to be cut, pasted, and mended with simple mouse clicks. Even with advanced sound engineering,

however, producers knew that consumers were listening to compressed MP3 files. After hours of mixing the tracks with the sound engineer, producers such as Cho and David Kang (Kang Hwa-seong) – a prominent record producer and songwriter who produced popular pop ballad albums for artists such as Sung Si-kyung, Naul, Brown Eyed Soul, and Fly to the Sky – would burn the final sound-mixed song to a CD and listen to it in their car on an average set of speakers, just as the casual listener would. Kang noted how sound mixing had changed: “sound was hypercompressed, and for idol albums, in particular, the low end was amplified where the bass sound was aggressively compressed for the MP3 listeners. At the time, there were rumors that SM Entertainment started to aggressively compress the low end during sound mixing to cater to listeners of the sound on MP3.”¹⁸ Today, Kang’s statement attests to SM’s standard sound-mixing practices, as producers use sources and mixing attuned to the industry’s technological advances, such as the use of smartphones as music players.¹⁹

Cho is considered among the most important artists of Korea’s popular music industry and epitomizes the era of K-pop’s singer-songwriters of the 1990s and 2000s, which featured Kim Kwang-jin, Yoon Sang, Kim Hyun-chul, Yoo Hee-yeol, Lee Juck, Kim Dong-yul, Kim Yoon-Ah, and Paul Kim.²⁰ He is renowned as a “genius singer-songwriter,” “a master vocalist,” and “the king of chorus (backing vocals)”; Nam Tae-jung, an MBC radio producer and music critic, describes Cho as having a “microfiber voice” that captures “even the subtlest nuances, while musicians describe him as a true musician who is “the vocal producer for vocalists.”²¹ In 1989, Cho won the first Yoo Jae-ha Music Competition and made his solo debut with *Since 1993*; his first single, “Chueok #1,” became a big hit. (The competition also produced popular singer-songwriters such as Sweet Sorrow, Yoo Hee-yeol, and Bang Si-hyuk, the founder of Big Hit Entertainment) In the 1990s, a plethora of dance music and pop ballads dominated mainstream Korean charts; however, Cho’s nine studio albums explored diverse genres such as pop, rock, R&B, and jazz, and experimented with innovative sounds and vocal techniques that met with both commercial and critical acclaim. He plunged into R&B with his third studio album, *The Third Season*, which is regarded as having pioneered the most authentic yet Koreanized form of the R&B genre with songs such as “Baby You’re the Lite,” for which he used overdubs to enhance his R&B phrasing, turns, and falsettos. In 2010, Cho’s ninth studio album received the Best Pop Album of the Year at the Korean Music Awards. Since receiving his MA in jazz studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Cho has been teaching, performing, hosting his own radio show, producing records, and recently releasing one digital single each month for his tenth studio album.

Unlike artists and idols who do not write their own music, singer-songwriters such as Cho usually work alone, and Cho produces, writes, and arranges all his songs, although he occasionally collaborates with friends and colleagues. A multi-instrumentalist, he works with the piano or guitar to compose, depending on the concept and texture of the sound he needs. Cho begins with the chord progression, melody, and rhythmic idea, and transcribes them onto a lead sheet with rehearsal marks during preproduction. The initial creative process occurs in random places: his personal studio, his room, or the public bench in front of his house, where he wrote *K-Pop Star*'s season 3 winner Bernard Park's title song "Before the Rain" in one hour. Sometimes the lyrics come with the concept of the song, as he plays around with chords and melody, but for his records, the lyrics are fixed when he inscribes the concept on a lead sheet. If the arrangement requires additional programming, he works with a computer programmer, with the music score in hand. Cho sets the pulse (beats per minute, bpm) and plays all sound sources, including the groove (straight or swing), four rhythm (keyboards, drums, bass, and guitar), and synth source (a software interface called Virtual Studio Technology). He dubs when needed and makes selections on the tone, dynamics, and voicing of each digital instrument. Otherwise, he lays out the basic arrangement in his own studio with real-time or digital instruments and sound sources on his own iMac. For his own albums, he does not need demos, as he is his own client, but when he needs to send out demos for session musicians who will add real-time instruments, he sings the melody without words, providing just enough for the musicians to grasp the flow and atmosphere so that they have more freedom to develop their artistry.²²

Track 3. "Byul" 02:40, Written by Sweetpea and Lee So-ra

The intimate space of the recording studio is a construction of the various agencies that are involved and registered in the sound objects of K-pop, and oftentimes, unplanned creative ideas take shape unrehearsed in the studio. Critics and musicians refer to Cho as the producer who has "influenced Lee So-ra to become the vocalist she is now."²³ Celebrated for her delicate musicianship, Lee is one of the most prominent female singer-songwriters of K-pop. In 2019 she collaborated with BTS member Suga on the hit single "Song Request," and she has worked with Cho on numerous albums since her solo debut in 1995. If Kim Hyun-chul helped her find her unique voice in the initial years of her career, Cho played the pivotal role in shaping her identity as a musician in later years. Since Lee's sixth studio album in 2004, Cho has served as the vocal producer. One fall night, they

met at Booming studio in Daechi-dong, in the southern part of Seoul's Gangnam district, to discuss her forthcoming sixth studio album, *Nunsseupdal*. Lee writes only the lyrics to her songs and at the time had already selected potential songs written by other artists to accompany her lyrics. In the course of preproduction, the two sat side by side behind the control booth console, where Lee explained the overall concept to Cho. She played each demo with her handwritten lyrics in front of them, and Cho would listen carefully while Lee continued delineating the images and stories behind her lyrics. Since a different composer had written each song, Cho envisioned the need to develop an underlying narrative or dramatic arc in sound design and vocalization. Under Cho's direction, vocal technique, vocal chord progressions and patterns, sounds, ambience, melodic and harmonic ideas, delay, and reverb were all accurately planned, and on top of that instruments were dubbed with identical ambience; the musical concept also was applied to sound mixing.

The final recorded productions changed significantly because the demos contained only the skeletons of the songs; depending on the concept, the skeleton is often just the piano, guitar, and drum loop and at times added synthesizers. One song, "Byul" (Star), was written as a simple folk tune without any kind of ambience or vocal harmony. Before recording, the two sat in the control booth, where Lee sang the song with lyrics to Cho. Cho realized she sang with a lot of "scooping," a technique where the vocalist starts singing below the desired pitch and slides up to the intended pitch. The technique was her specialty, as it was a common vocalizing tactic in pop. Cho advised her to discard it and sing all notes straight, like Enya. They listened to Enya together, and following a long discussion, Cho's decision to alter Lee's vocalization elevated the spatialization (positioning a sound source, such as the vocals, in three-dimensional space) and mood of "Byul." That set the album's unequivocal narrative tone, which expanded into "Barami Bunda," for which a similar timbre, ambience, and spatialization were achieved by manipulating sound in the production and postproduction of sound mixing. Before entering the booth to record "Byul," Lee studied Cho's instructions and began to jot down musical notation in symbols, a method similar to Labanotation, a concept Rudolf von Laban developed in 1928 that now is used primarily to record dance movement in symbols. Lee documented all Cho's suggestions regarding the movement, crescendo, diminuendo, and vibrato wavelength of her voice, as well as the movement's duration, by means of symbols placed on each word or line of the freshly printed lyric sheet. Then she went into the booth, turned off all lights except for the thin pin light on the music stand, and started recording under Cho's direction.

The collaborative process was built on mutual respect and loyalty; Cho was the only vocal producer whom Lee trusted, in that she did not allow anyone in the studio other than the recording engineer – not even the songwriters or her manager. “Sisikolkolhan Iyagi” (Miscellaneous stories) was designed as a folk acoustic tune with a dry ambience, and Lee had written the lyrics as a monologue, which was a predictable concept. Most significantly, it wasn’t pertinent to the narrative arc of the album Cho designed. Once again, Cho altered the concept and presented an additional persona, represented by an audible voice, in order to form part of the narrator’s inner conversation. Lee adored this, and Cho wrote the additional melody and lyrics for the persona on the spot. While Lee was taking a break after recording the vocals, Cho jumped right into postproduction and manipulated the secondary voice by cutting off the lows and the high sound with the equalizer to open up the midsection and display the persona’s voice, to make it sound as if they were on the phone and to separate the two personas. One “pro” (equivalent to a recording session in the United States) lasts three and a half to four hours, but would vary depending on Lee’s condition and mood on the day of recording. They once recorded from four in the afternoon until eight the next morning. There was also an incident when they were recording at 2 a.m., and Lee was resting inside the booth; as Cho was editing the melodic phrase that Lee had just vocalized, he asked her via intercom to continue the next line and was met with silence. Lee had vanished into thin air. After an hour of waiting, Cho realized that she had gone home without telling him.

Track 4. “Psycho” 03:31, Written by Andrew Scott, EJAE, Cazzi Opeia, Druski, Yoo Young-jin, and Kensie

Rewinding to the intro da capo, I note that the leaked demo for “Psycho” was written at SM’s songwriting camp in 2018, with EJAE, Scott, and Cazzi Opeia in SM’s recording studio. “The melody was done in like thirty minutes,” recalls EJAE as she starts to unravel the story of “Psycho.”²⁴ At songwriting camp, musicians work with a number of producers; track makers, who construct the instrumental track, which includes the beat, chord progressions, loops, and sound samples; and topliners, who create the melody on top of the premade track with a set of English or Korean lyrics. For EJAE’s session, Scott, the track producer, brought a list of full production tracks from which to choose. Cazzi Opeia chose a track, but one of SM’s A&R people who managed the camp and with whom EJAE was acquainted through Andrew Choi, a singer-songwriter and prolific hit producer who won third place in *K-Pop Star* season 2, came in knowing

that EJAE was in the session, and selected the “Psycho” track because she knew EJAE’s preference for R&B and pop. On top of Scott’s track, EJAE and Cazzi Opeia began to form melodic verses. EJAE’s relationship with her boyfriend was tumultuous at the time and she was left with conflicting emotions of love, hatred, and despair that made her want to focus on relationships and mental health. The concept and chorus started to flow naturally. “Psycho” was a common English word in the Korean vernacular and easy to pronounce. Scott and Cazzi Opeia liked the concept, and Cazzi Opeia came up with the strong pre-chorus. Scott then sang a melody for the verse, which was later replaced with EJAE’s, and EJAE wrote the hook (chorus) in a minute. EJAE observed, “For some reason I kept on saying ‘Nyquil,’ how I feel like a patient, and how your love makes me feel like I’m a sick person to your love and addicted to it.” When the main hook was fixed, Scott selected additional melodic lines EJAE had composed and “Frankensteined” it together to form the chorus. EJAE also wrote the second hook at the end, “Hey now I’ll be okay,” and they inserted a rap section, which is mandatory for a K-pop idol group. A lot of the topline melodies selected were EJAE’s ideas, such as the chorus, the post hook, and most of the second verse, and the process was a collaboration of the artists’ creative choices. Interestingly, the demo was produced without Red Velvet in mind; during the listening session, the team thought about sending the demo to a pop artist such as Ariana Grande, and EJAE honestly did not think it would get cut for SM.

The concept and English lyrics for “Psycho” stem from personal experience. EJAE started as an SM trainee when she was eleven. She depicts the K-pop industry as “toxic” and reveals that the cultivation process was so traumatic that she still undergoes therapy for it. Each week, before she went on camera to show her progress in singing, dancing, and speaking Chinese, EJAE had to weigh herself in front of everyone. The staff would call out her weight in front of staff members and trainees. She was never good enough for SM’s standards; they always gave her negative evaluations and told her that she was overweight. EJAE weighed 123 pounds at the time; SM asked her to lose 13 pounds – she stood 5’7” in middle school. A hardworking trainee who came to work before everyone else and was last to leave, she starved herself by eating only two sweet potatoes a day to maintain a 110-pound weight. “Honestly, the English lyrics have something to do with mental health,” EJAE explains. “I wished the song could express that it’s okay to be mentally ill. I hoped the Korean lyricist could express that. Everyone is at some point a psycho; being a psycho is part of being human.” EJAE was set to debut her freshman year in college, but she chose to study at New York University’s Clive Davis Institute of Recorded Music, and most of all she wanted to be a solo artist. EJAE still participated

in training every summer at SM, but by the time she returned to Korea after graduation, she was twenty-three, which was considered too old by SM standards. Even so, artists such as Andrew Choi believed in her work and inspired EJAE to become who she is.

Because the recording process requires the performance of real-time physical instruments and sessions in expensive recording studios, nonidol artists, such as K-pop balladeers and singer-songwriters, usually have advance demos produced only once tracks are confirmed for placement on albums. K-pop idol groups follow a different trajectory. First-generation demo production from the 1990s to mid-2000s for idol groups such as S.E.S. and TTma was similar to that of nonidol singers, and live guitar sessions and orchestration proceeded once the demo was selected. But with the advent of electroacoustic music and digital instruments that had become more accessible and cost-efficient by the late 2000s, full-production demos became possible. Producers and songwriters could easily purchase a plenitude of reasonably priced analog emulation plug-ins and manipulate the sounds on their personal computers without having to learn how to play the instruments. Nowadays, the electroacoustic sound sources are of such high quality that the demos don't necessarily need full orchestration or real-time instruments such as guitars. For both demos and final recordings, technology enables producers freely to replace all digital sound passages, but altering real-time song arrangements requires re-recording acoustic instruments and string orchestration in recording studios, a process most record companies eschew to save money. In multiple contexts, digital instruments can replace acoustic instruments for dance music; but for balladeers and singer-songwriters, digital assemblage can never produce the ambience of real-time orchestration. I would have thought that the demo version of "Psycho" was the final English version if I hadn't known it was a leak. Yet EJAE notes that the "Psycho" demo is considered rough in the industry. To help me understand, she played the demo versions of her recent hits on Audiomovers from Virginia – Suzy's "SObeR" and Taeyeon's "Sorrow," both of which EJAE coproduced and sang in English. After listening to the two versions in Seoul, I could grasp what she meant – the demos for "SObeR" were immaculate; they sounded like official releases.

Track 5. GOT7 "Not by the Moon" 03:23, Written by Park Jin-young, Isaac Han, Aaron Kim, Jay & Rudy, Lee Seu-ran, and OKIRO

Isaac Han, a Los Angeles native who studied at Berklee College of Music, majoring in music business, is a preeminent record producer and

songwriter, and cofounder and chief producer of 8PEX Company and Tech Arts Group; he has worked extensively in the K-pop industry, producing title records and hits for GOT7, Suzy, Super Junior, Nine Muses, Myteen, Day6, and many more. He started in 2012 with SM, where he wrote and produced acts for Super Junior, Super Junior-D&E, and Henry. At the time, Han was the main songwriter and idea maker in his teamwork with Neil Nallas, a Filipino American songwriter and rapper. When developing demos, Han always would start with a melodic idea: “I focus on the melody, melodic ideas, and conceptual ideas first and then I expand the idea with chords using a guitar, or the piano. That’s how I build the skeleton of the song.” The team would decide whether to move forward with the skeleton and proceed with the lyrics and the “concept,” or theme of the song, to finalize the demo. But demo production for idol groups has undergone a radical transformation since 2012.

The process of recording studio demos for boy bands and girl groups is embedded in a network of power relations. When pitching records to A&R people and record executives, Han always chooses the lyrics and concepts, and produces full production demos to convey the concept of the song, meaning he executes a complete arrangement that includes sound mixing to get pristine quality. Even more than recording techniques, the contemporary production process resembles a factory line, where each role is compartmentalized. The record emerges within a scrupulously efficient system: the track maker constructs the track, usually on the standard pop song form: verse 1; pre-chorus; chorus (or hook); verse 2; pre-chorus; chorus; bridge; and back to chorus. The track is outsourced to topliners who create the melody and English lyrics (in rare cases Korean), and at times contribute to the vocal idea and concept. The track maker and/or the producer receives the topline and alters the production to fit the melody or vice versa; the producer then pitches the finalized demo to the record company A&R department; and, last, the demo is evaluated by the A&R board, in-house producers, and the owner of the company, who usually have the last say regardless of whether they are business-centric or musically inclined. Rarely is the demo cut if the company’s CEO disapproves, unless it is for a high-profile celebrity such as Suzy. When she received the “SObeR” demo, Park Jin-young rejected it, but Suzy strongly advocated for the song and included the record in her second EP, *Faces of Love*. A cut demo selected as the title song rarely is approved as is, and the in-house A&R executives, producers, and executive producers or CEOs make subtle to extensive alterations to “domesticate” the track, tailoring it to the singer or group and adhering to the company’s distinct style. Yet it can be inapt to compare K-pop production to that of a factory; a person must activate even digitized sound sources and physical devices (such as the interface),

and the creative and personal choices of a network of competing agencies produce the sound object.

Although he works in diverse genres, Han's songwriting philosophy is similar to that of Kang, songwriter and producer for K-pop ballads: They both allow the melody to be the focal point, which is supported by the song arrangement; however, to keep pace with the music trends that rapidly change within K-pop's eclectic soundscape, Han converted to its compartmentalized music production system in 2015. With K-pop's global reach, innumerable musicians with newer and fresher sounds are continually pitching thousands of songs. The demo process for Super Junior-M's 2013 song "Go" was similar to that of a K-pop ballad or a new song by a singer-songwriter: Han would start with the track idea and then conceptualize melodic ideas. However, he explains, it has become impossible to do all the work himself: "I wouldn't say that I'm old, but in music years, especially in K-pop, trends change within months. Even this year, our team went through like multiple changes in trend from girl crush to dark trap, and at a certain point, we switched almost instantly to a city pop retro vibe."²⁵ For instance, when he worked in 2019 on the demo of the title hit single "Not by the Moon" by the boy band GOT7, of JYP Entertainment (hereafter JYP), for their eleventh EP, *Dye*, Han and Aaron Kim, cofounder and producer of 8PEX, outsourced their track to the Danish duo topliners Jay & Rudy, whom Han met during SM's songwriting camp in 2016. Similar to the way Cho used rough vocalization on demos for session musicians to embellish during live studio recordings, Han and Kim intentionally disbursed an unfinished preliminary track to give the topliners space to explore their melodic ideas. Afterward, the team would exchange comments by sending voice notes on Jay & Rudy's topline, and once Han received all their vocal stems and ideas, they expanded the track to fit the melody more engagingly. Han attests that Jay & Rudy's topline was perfect and explains how the postproduction of the mix and the process of infusing the track with the melody came after he picked up ideas from the topliners. With full sound mixing and quality sound, they pitched their complete demo, which was produced in three days, to JYP's A&R department. After JYP's distinct blind review process, where the board of A&R, producers, and Park Jin-young himself vote for potential demos with all song credits concealed, Han received an acceptance within two weeks.

Facilitating alterations to the demo has become standard practice for title songs at K-pop's major entertainment and record companies, such as SM, JYP, YG Entertainment, and Big Hit Music (Big Hit Entertainment in 2021 was restructured into HYBE Corporation, which manages many music labels including Big Hit Music). While productions such as "Psycho" and "Go" retained most of their found tracks, toplines, and

concepts, including their English title, many songs, such as “Not by the Moon” by GOT7, were transposed substantially, allocating royalties to a long list of songwriters. That song’s demo, originally titled “Paranoid,” conceptualized a push-pull romance. However, because it was the title song for their EP, Park Jin-young (singer-songwriter, record producer, and founder of JYP) was heavily involved in the production, and the demo was revamped to “Not by the Moon.” When Han received a call back from A&R, JYP saw the potential and requested numerous alterations that Han’s team had to track out; they made twenty production changes to the demo. Once the track was finalized, Park Jin-young modified chords and bass lines, and thoroughly altered the concept. Han candidly remarks:

I’m gonna say this in a way that’s not negative at all, but ultimately, as Mr. JYP [Park Jin-young] came in and made changes to the song, I felt like the song was no longer ours anymore. The way he infused his color felt like I was being robbed, not in a bad way, though; it was more out of appreciation. He didn’t even take that long, and [the changes] at first didn’t feel like a big change, but over time, it came to the point where I was like, *I don’t think this song is ours anymore*. He really laced the song together to make it come to life, and I have a lot of respect for that. He is one of the greatest K-pop producers of all time, and I could see why.

Best understanding each GOT7 member’s vocal skills and talent, Park Jin-young presented an alternate narrative for Han, Kim, and Jay & Rudy’s demo and applied a theatrical, Shakespearean approach to the song’s storytelling. Moreover, Park Jin-young was involved in the sound-mixing process and outsourced the track to Manny Maroquin, an eight-time Grammy Award-winning mixing engineer based in Los Angeles.

Nonetheless, collaboration in K-pop’s song production still occurs in a contested space of encounter. Most songwriters are comfortable with slight alterations to their work, but the intervention of revamping demos might be perceived as disrespectful. Yet, as is the case with SM, JYP, YG Entertainment, and Big Hit Music, in-house producers, group members, and owners “domesticate” all demos selected as title songs to fit the company’s distinct timbre. Because the melody of a song is divided among the multiple members of a group, in-house producers and A&R agents find alterations essential, as their recording artists are trainees under their auspices. Although such instances are rare, the A&R agent and Park Jin-young can refrain from intervening in the recording process. In the production of “Before the Rain,” Bernard Park’s debut title song, written, produced, and vocal directed by Cho Kyu Chan, JYP was flexible and remitted full control to Cho as a gesture of respect, but also to imbue Park with Cho’s aesthetic and songwriting artistry.

Although controversial, the domestication of the demos is comprehensible when we glimpse the recording process of idol groups who have numerous members in the studio. For Super Junior-M's "Go," the A&R executives scheduled each member's recording session and isolated different phrases, words, and lines of the lyrics, allocating some to each member. When Han and Kim orchestrated the vocals of GOT7's "Not by the Moon," the session went smoothly because each member's sessions had been scheduled beforehand. During the 1990s and early 2000s, all members of the first-generation idol groups, such as S.E.S. and TTma, had to stay in the recording studios. Eugene, a member of the first K-pop girl group, S.E.S., who is now a celebrated actor, recalled the recording process of her debut album: "Shoo, Bada, and I stayed in the recording studio even during other members' recording sessions for our debut album and its title, 'I'm Your Girl.'" Soy Kim, an actor, director, and singer-songwriter from the disbanded girl group TTMa, affirmed Eugene's statement: "It was mandatory and a way of showing each other support as a team."²⁶ Today, each member comes into the studio during their allotted time frame, and the vocal recording of the song takes about three "pros"; each singer is well prepared and professional but remains independent. Han tries to give each a two-hour slot to avoid wasting the company's and member's time. An extra session is mandatory for editing the vocal stems, and Han takes an extra session to Frankenstein and premix parts before delivering the multitrack to the mixing engineer.

Mastering

Mastering is the final edit in the postproduction process for a final mixed recording, from which the "master" (data storage device) is created to replicate manufactured copies for sales. The process involves devices such as an equalizer, dynamic range compressor, and amplifier to optimize the final sound. New forms of technology have contributed to and shaped K-pop's evolution, leaving distinctive marks on its soundscape. The complex layering and networking that occurs in the recording studios, where recording artists, musicians, producers, songwriters, A&R agents, and owners of record companies translate their creative choices into binary numbers or "bits," produce K-pop's sound object after a long process of production. The sedimentation of the arduous labor and multiple personal but creative choices by a network of agencies in record production is attached to a specific time and space in creating K-pop's sound objects as material forms. When I listened to Red Velvet's "Psycho" before I had access to the English demo, the Korean lyrics, written by SM's in-house

producer and songwriter Kensie, emphasized a couple's relationship, which diverged from EJAE's initial concept; but I could hear what had been left unsaid in the final Korean lyrics. That is, I somehow traced the collective or "underwritten" remains of EJAE's English lyrics in the newly translated Korean lyrics. For instance, Kensie retained the word "psycho" in the English lyrics for the hook – "You got me feeling like a psycho, psycho," "I don't play the game" – and "I'm original visual," and modified "Hey now I'll be OK" to "Hey now we'll be OK." The initial concept was lost in translation, yet remained audible to me in the final Korean record. I could hear the unsaid words in the way the "Psycho" demo focused on mental illness.

K-pop's transformation of time and space altered the soundscape in a myriad of ways. Advances in technology and the conversion to full-digitized recording studios facilitated a method of collaboration that extends into cyberspace, allowing up to seven songwriters to collaborate on GOT7's "Not by the Moon." However, collaboration over the internet is nothing new: Cho met McKnight when he visited Korea after the recording of their duet "Thank You for Saving My Life"; they sang their parts separately and exchanged sound files via email. Even when M. Lee collaborated with Zion-T on "Snow" in 2017, they communicated through Kakaotalk messages and email and met in person only after the single was released.

I confront the presumption of the ideological construct of ocular-centrism associated with Western culture in K-pop's extreme emphasis on visual aesthetics, where the choreography and performance of boy bands and girl groups are the dominant narrative. This emphasis on the visual is closely associated with the marginalization of K-pop's soundscape. The devisualization of sound demonstrates the epistemology of K-pop's changing soundscape and presents opportunities to analyze the attending sounds in themselves as sonic phenomena. Technology has allowed us to capture nature's waves and make music mobile/portable, but K-pop as an object of sound cannot be ahistorical as it encapsulates multiple agencies involved in its production, where the distinctiveness of the temporal and spatial nature of sound is acknowledged. Rather than aiming to present fixed answers, I hope to have revealed a dimension of the process of recording this soundscape to broaden the discourse on K-pop within sound studies.

Notes

- 1 EJAE, interview with author, Seoul, Korea, December 29, 2020.
- 2 EJAE provided the demo lyrics.
- 3 Hyun-su Yim, "Why You Can't Stop Listening to Red Velvet's 'Psycho': The Masterminds behind the Track Explain How the Catchy Earworm Came to Be," *Korea Herald*, February 10, 2020, www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20200210000280.

- 4 For an introduction to sound studies, see Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); Rey Chow and James A. Steintrager (eds.), *Sound Objects* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019).
- 5 For books addressing the K-pop industry, see Suk-Young Kim, *K-Pop Live: Fans, Idols, and Multimedia Performance* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018); Dal Yong Jin and Hark Joon Lee (eds.), *K-Pop Idols: Popular Culture and the Emergence of the Korean Music Industry* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2019); JungBong Choi and Roald Maliangkay (eds.), *K-Pop: The International Rise of the Korean Music Industry* (New York: Routledge, 2015); John Lie, *K-Pop: Popular Music, Cultural Amnesia, and Economic Innovation in South Korea* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014); Gooyong Kim, *From Factory Girls to K-Pop Idol Girls: Cultural Politics of Developmentalism, Patriarchy, and Neoliberalism in South Korea's Popular Music Industry* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2019).
- 6 I utilize “music” and “sound” interchangeably, as they both emit sound waves, and I treat music as one domain of sound. But I do not limit the term to discrete pitches or rhythms. For a discussion of whether music is part of sound studies, see Leigh Landy, “But Is It (also) Music?,” in M. Cobussen, V. Meelberg, and B. Truax (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Sounding Art* (New York: Routledge), 17–26.
- 7 Rey Chow and James A. Steintrager, “In Pursuit of the Object of Sound: An Introduction,” *Differences* 22 (2011): 5.
- 8 Chow and Steintrager, “In Pursuit of the Object of Sound,” 6.
- 9 For the genealogy of the term “sound object,” see Chow and Steintrager (eds.), *Sound Objects*, 1–19.
- 10 Sterne and Gavin Steingo and Jim Sykes explain how the audiovisual litany is prominent in the West and describe how the ideology is deeply inflected in Judeo-Christian theology. See Sterne, *The Audible Past*, 14–16; Gavin Steingo and Jim Sykes (eds.), *Remapping Sound Studies in the Global South* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019), 2–3.
- 11 Steven Feld, “I Hate ‘Sound Studies,’” <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/545aad98e4b0f1f9150ad5c3/t/55ef81ffe4b0e4ff182017bf/1441759743397/I+Hate.pdf> (accessed August 1, 2020).
- 12 Brian Kane, *Sound Unseen: Acousmatic Sound in Theory and Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 38.
- 13 However, I disagree with Schafer’s description of “schizophonia,” a term that connotes the anxiety engendered when sound is severed from its source through electroacoustic reproduction, as well as his interpretation of the industrialized soundscape as sonic pollution. See Murray Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (Rochester, VT: Destiny Books, 1994), 90–91; for an overview of Schafer’s coined term of soundscape, see Michael Bull, “Introduction: Sound Studies and the Art of Listening,” in Michael Bull (ed.), *The Routledge Companion to Sound Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2018), xvii–xxxii.
- 14 Rey Chow, “Listening after ‘Acousmaticity’: Notes on a Transdisciplinary Problematic,” in Chow and Steintrager (eds.), *Sound Objects*, 124.
- 15 All quotations from this section are from my interview with Lee Moon-sae, Seoul, Korea, December 14, 2020.
- 16 In 1997, KBS imposed a ban on lip-synching, requiring all singers to sing live until the early 2000s. Lip-synching was proof that you were not a “real” singer.
- 17 All quotations from this section are from my interview with Cho Kyu Chan, Seoul, Korea, January 5, 2021.
- 18 David Kang, interview with author, Seoul, Korea, December 8, 2020.
- 19 A recent text by Lee Soo-man to Red Velvet’s Yeri confirms the rumor: S. Lee delineates how “Psycho,” the lead single from *The ReVe Festival: Finale* studio album in 2019, was rearranged and remixed for smartphone listeners in ways that emphasized the gliding bass line. See Si-yun Jeon, “Redvelvet Yeri,” *Star News*, January 13, 2020, <https://entertain.naver.com/read?oid=108&aid=0002836065>.
- 20 Bae Chul-soo, member of the band Songolmae and DJ of “Bae Chul-soo’s Music Camp,” compared Cho to Bob Dylan. See Rigveda Wiki, <https://rigvedawiki.net/w/%EC%A1%B0%EA%B7%9C%EC%B0%AC#rfn8> (accessed January 6, 2021).
- 21 Woo Geun-hyang, “Jogyuchane geuksesa boiseu,” *Korea Economic Daily*, October 9, 2011, <https://entertain.naver.com/read?oid=015&aid=0002555292>; “Maеumeul Umjigineun norae . . . Jogyuchan,” *YTN News*, January 19, 2012, www.ytn.co.kr/_ln/0106_201201191531009273.
- 22 Cho Kyuchan, interview with author, Seoul, Korea, January 5, 2021.

23 Woo Geun-hyan, “Jogyuchane geuksesa boiseu’.”

24 All quotations from this section are from my interview with EJAE, Seoul, Korea, December 29, 2020.

25 All quotations from this section are from my interviews with Isaac Han, Seoul, Korea, December 16 and 19, 2020.

26 Eugene, interview with author, Seoul, Korea, January 26, 2021; Soy Kim, interview with author, Seoul, Korea, January 21, 2021.