When We Cannot Be Angry with One Another: The Cultural Situation of Emerging Globalization in Donald Barthelme's Early Short Fiction

Iori Adachi

Introduction

Donald Barthelme is one of the representative postmodernist writers of the United States, who also had a career concerning visual arts before becoming a writer. His work is highly characterized by various experimental features, often fragmented into vignettes without linear plotline, and parodying various patterns of past trite narrative. In *City of Words: American Fiction 1950-1970* (1971), Tony Tanner aligns Barthelme with his contemporary writers, and places them in a traditional dilemma. According to Tanner, in American literature, there is an abiding dream of unpatterned life in which one can make and choose their movements freely, combined with an abiding obsessional dread that something invisible and ubiquitous is controlling one's life. Social anthropology, behavioral psychology, and structural linguistics, which discovered systems and patterns that precede human consciousness and predetermine it, pushed postmodernist writers deeper into the contemporary form of this dilemma. Writers became keenly conscious especially of their own familiar media—language itself—and dreaded that it already had fixed their writings. This structure or pattern is necessary to give things an order or meaning, while it also limits the way of cognition and thinking. If we abandoned it completely, we would be exposed to an unmediated external world; we would continue defenselessly exposed to malicious influences. When Barthelme likens language to sludge, writing "the question turns from a question of disposing of this 'trash' to a question of appreciating its qualities, because, after all, it's 100 percent" (*Snow White* 97), he clearly shows his aesthetic relish for fragments resisting existing interpretative frameworks.

This dilemma revealed by Tanner has driven critics mainly into two approaches. The first is to focus on the reader's process of interpretation, which eventually results in confirmation of malfunction of past interpretative frameworks. The second approach is to appreciate works as art in themselves, regardless of how they seem to be meaningless in their referential quality.[1]

Barthelme seems to have anticipated both ways. Actually, in a metafictional trope, he seems to describe how these appreciations take place. In the former half of this paper, discussing "The Balloon" (1966), I try to show how a meaningless object rejects interpretational frameworks, and how it inevitably enhances the importance of experience of the work based on the participation of audience. This shift of importance to subjectivity from objectivity, which Barthelme treats with irony in "The Balloon," is regarded as a cause of the disappearance of meaningful ideological conflicts. In another short story, "The Indian Uprising" (1965), the narrator says, "the situation is liquid" (*Sixty Stories* 105). This disorder arises from the fact that the society is saturated with various styles of culture so that the area in which external referents exist can no longer be imagined. Moreover, in this story, cultural conflicts or conflicts between styles become substitute for various actual and ideological tensions, and then the abstract concept of evil is projected onto the category of the scene rather than this or that particular character. In the latter half of this paper, I deal with these characteristics of "The Indian Uprising" as those of a postmodernist romance and try to locate it in its historical background, the Vietnam War as an emerging global war.

An Anxious Object and the Dysfunction of Interpretational Frameworks

"The Balloon" is one of Barthelme's most famous stories. At the beginning the narrator sends up an enormous balloon over the city of New York. The materiality of the balloon is conveyed by references to particular geographic locations in New York. It swells up till it "covered forty-five blocks north-south and an irregular area east-west, as many as six crosstown blocks on either side of the Avenue in some places" (*Sixty Stories* 46). No one in the city can ignore or deal with its largeness, and the balloon does not accord with the gridlike geography and businesslike nature of New York City. For the citizens, the "apparent purposelessness of the balloon was vexing (as was the fact that it was 'there' at all)" (48). The narrator concludes his initial remarks saying, "This was the situation, then," but promptly after that, he remarks:

> But it is wrong to speak of "situations," implying sets of circumstances leading to some resolution, some escape of tension; there were no situations, simply the balloon hanging there—muted heavy grays and browns for the most part, contrasting with the walnut and soft yellows. (46)

In this passage at the beginning of the story, the narrator declares that there is no chronological plot, which might enable a series of facts or actions to carry the situation to a conclusion.

The balloon's meaningless materiality and its power to prompt uneasy reactions are analogous to those of the visual art which was in vogue when Barthelme published this story. Wayne B. Stengel claims that this balloon, "superficially meaningless, self-referential object, which offers a variety of interpretations to its public," imitates environmental and conceptual art in the 1960s and 70's in New York (164). Barthelme sees this self-referentiality as characteristic of a certain kind of literature, in his essay concerning his own creation. He claims that after modernist writers such as Joyce and Mallarmé, "art is not about something but is something" (*Not-Knowing* 3). The literary work "becomes an object in the world rather than a text or commentary upon the world—a crucial change in status which was also taking place in painting" (3-4). Quoting McLuhan's famous expression, "the medium is the message," Barthelme claims that literature and art have ceased to be a medium transparently representing something behind it like a window. Works of art are now objects in themselves. As one of the causes, Barthelme mentions the fact that there had been mutual understanding between authors and readers, but then this imaginary community, social or religious, has ceased to be natural and organic so that the world as the target of reference is also lost (17). In other words, there was once a shared interpretative framework which seemed natural and unitary in the ages before modernism, but it is now pluralized and de-naturalized, and therefore the referential quality of a work is shaken.

This kind of art is named "the anxious object" by the art critic Harold Rosenberg[2]. The answer to the question of whether it is art or junk is blurred by discourses surrounding it. And the confounding of the status of art is related to the pluralities of media in contemporary society. Rosenberg argues:

> It is an objective reflection of the indefiniteness of the function of art in present-day society and the possibility of the displacement of art by newer forms of expression, emotional stimulation and communication. It relates to the awareness that art today survives in the intersections between the popular media, handicraft and the applied sciences; and that the term "art" has become useless as a means for setting apart a certain category of fabrications. Given the speed and sophistication with which the formal

> characteristics of new art modes are appropriated by the artisans of the commercial media and semi-media (architecture, highway design, etc.), the art object, including masterpieces of the past, exists under constant threat of deformation and loss of identity. (16)

Thus, the anxious object is questioned about its identity as art by surrounding media saturated with pluralized discourses. By displaying its materiality which does not yield to interpretive frameworks of various discourses, the anxious object discourages viewers from attempting to naturalize it.

The balloon in the story of that name is one of these anxious objects. "Now we have a flood of original ideas in all media," the narrator says, "works of singular beauty as well as significant milestones in the history of inflation, but at that moment there was only this balloon, concrete particular, hanging there" (46). Following this passage, the narrator states "There were reactions" (46) and begins to quote various reactions that the balloon has caused. Each of the discourses flooding in all media struggles to subsume its meaningless materiality into their interpretational framework, but the balloon keeps on being concrete and particular. If we regard it as an art object, then the narrator should be an artist, but he does not reveal his intention which can be teased out of the object. The balloon apparently has no internal meaning expressing the creator's intention. There is nothing but air inside it, and therefore there is nothing viewers can do except pat the surface layer. The very plurality of the discourses whose fragments the narrator quotes, in itself, questions the naturalness of each discourse.

Of various reactions, this is the first one depicted in the story:

> Some people found the balloon "interesting." As a response, this seemed inadequate to the immensity of the balloon, the suddenness of its appearance over the city; on the other hand, in the absence of hysteria or other societally-induced anxiety, it must be judged a calm, "mature" one. (46-47)

Already in this passage, the attempt to interpret the balloon is judged "inadequate" and mocked by the quotation marks. A variety of discourses try to subsume the materiality of the balloon in order to make a consistent narrative capable of containing the whole society, and in that way, capable of naturalizing themselves. When this endeavor fails, the aimed unified narrative crumbles

into meaningless clichéd fragments—"interesting," for instance. Barthelme utilizes these fragments in creating his fiction in a parodic way. Moreover, the second response is judged "mature," with quotation marks which reveal two more characteristics. The first is that each discourse with which the citizens try to interpret the balloon is already felt to be conventionalized and stylized. The society of the city of New York is saturated with discourses competing with each other, and therefore each one is felt to be a mere fashion already incorporated into the catalog of society. People in the city regard each discourse as a fashion quoted from this catalog and so internalized. These quotation marks reveal that all discourses are segmented across the same hierarchy and recognized as equally "mature." Therefore, when the narrator mentions "a flood of original ideas in all media," he uses the word "original" with irony. Each proliferating discourse claims its originality and naturalness only to fail. In such a chaos, the notion of originality itself is meaningless and clichéd. The second characteristic concerns the fact that the style of the reaction is judged as "mature." As Tanner argues, in order to find meanings in things we cannot help but enter one of those discourses, even though they are now de-naturalized. Discipline is required here. If we wish to find an order out of a chaotic world, we have to internalize the system's naturalizing power and become "mature." With the quotation marks, Barthelme calls attention to this unnatural process[3].

As already announced by the narrator, there is no chain of action in this short story. There are just a huge balloon and the citizen's fragmentarily quoted reactions. Therefore, it seems that there is no political aspect. The balloon with the characteristic of the "anxious object" de-naturalizing the surrounding discourse, however, reveals that the discourses flooding on the media try to turn themselves into a naturalized ideology. As Linda Hutcheon argues, this de-naturalizing function of the balloon serves "to 'de-doxify' our cultural representations and their undeniable political import," in the age of postmodernism which does not "have an effective theory of agency that enables a move into political action" (3). The notion of representational quality in art implies that there are external referents to be represented in the first place. When the representation appears to be natural, external reality also seems a natural foundation. If a discourse can appeal to such reality it will be highly compelling as an ideology. This is the reason why de-naturalizing the flooding "cultural representations" is itself a political act.

Actually, the complete saturation of the media and cultural representations makes it impossible to access such external reality. Fredric Jameson argues

that "postmodernism is what you have when the modernization process is complete and nature is gone for good. It is a more fully human world than the older one, but one in which 'culture' has become a veritable 'second nature'" (*Postmodernism* ix). Because nature is lost for good in the first place, the discourse is driven by the need to naturalize itself. According to McLuhan, this is the "first age in which many thousands of the best-trained individual minds have made it a full-time business to get inside the collective public mind," and the intention of many ads and much entertainment alike is to "manipulate, exploit, control" (*The Mechanical Bride* v). McLuhan continues to suggest that "it seemed fitting to devise a method for reversing the process. Why not use the new commercial education as a means to enlighten its intended prey? Why not assist the public to observe consciously the drama which is intended to operate upon it unconsciously?" (v). In this sense, Barthelme's way of writing parodying various discourses is a method for reversing the process, and for releasing the readers from the power of naturalization exercised by media. When the narrator of "The Balloon" mentions one of the reactions—"the balloon was, in this man's view, an imposture, something inferior to the sky that had formerly been there, something interposed between the people and their 'sky'" (48)—the sky (that had formerly been there in this man's view) has now become a "sky," with quotation marks. What had formerly been there is *nature*, in Jameson's words. This is now something we cannot reach at first hand, and a "sky," and the balloon which is interposed between citizens and nature, are culturalized "second nature." The fact that the balloon completely covers the sky and makes it inaccessible is analogous to the fact that we have access to the world only through discourses in media. Barthelme's parodic way of writing reverses and reveals the process of the naturalizing function of discourses.

In one essay, Barthelme reveals this politics of interpretation in a plainer form. As he states that "some information systems are more enforceable than others" (*Not-Knowing* 18), even an unnatural system of discourse can be made to function as a relatively dominating ideology. Referring to such examples as Fascism and Stalinism and a contemporary problem like the Vietnam War, Barthelme argues that a certain kind of language is "contaminated" by a certain system of discourse, and that there is "the complicity of language in the massive crimes" (16). The interpretation through which a certain composition is allowed to have meaning and represent something, may itself function as a result of naturalization of ideologies, and at the same time as a cause of such a naturalization. Authors and artists who were aware of this process,

consequently became conscious of compositions which appeared as seemingly natural, so that their own work became unnatural, awkward, and conscious of itself. This argument reveals Barthelme's own thoughts concerning a politics generating an anxious object, and also reveals that his writings are themselves made to be anxious objects. In this sense, "The Balloon" can be read as a metafiction.

What should be noted here is that the impossibility of interpreting Barthelme's work is slightly different in its aim from when modernist work was intended to be an autonomously completed language construct. Linda Hutcheon argues that modernist art challenged the realist notion of representation and transparency of the medium in order to emphasize "the opacity of the medium and the self-sufficiency of the signifying system," but what postmodernism did is "to denaturalize both realism's transparency and modernism's reflexive response, while retaining (in its typically complicitously critical way) the historically attested power of both" (33). Just like modernist works of art, Barthelme's postmodernist literary objects focus on their media, and assume materiality which rejects interpretation. Unlike the modernist inclination toward pureness and the concept of art for art's sake, however, postmodernist self-reflexivity remains imperfect. Barthelme uses "contaminated" words to compose his texts, although his way of treating them is fragmental and parodic. As Alan Wilde argues, one feature of postmodernists is their immanence. In other words, a modernist work of art has artistry in its own self-sufficiency of the medium, but postmodernists prefer to use anxious objects staying within external reality. I will discuss this feature of postmodernism further in the next section.

The balloon in Barthelme's story clearly has such a critical effect as the anxious object lacking its inherent meaning. Near the end of the story the narrator mentions a reaction of citizens which "suggested that what was admired about the balloon was finally this: that it was not limited, or defined" (50). The narrator continues:

> This ability on the part of the balloon to shift its shape, to change, was very pleasing, especially to people whose lives were rather rigidly patterned, persons to whom change, although desired, was not available. The balloon, for the twenty-two days of its existence, offered the possibility, in its randomness, of getting lost, of losing oneself, in contradistinction to the grid of precise, rectangular pathways under our

feet. (50)

The description of the citizens suffering from "the amount of specialized training currently needed" (50-51) suggests their discomfort at multiple discourses compelling them to respond. The criticism of the naturalization effect which the balloon has as the "anxious object" gives them a feeling of freedom. Many critics have focused on this part of the story. In fact, this positive effect of the balloon should never be overlooked.

We also have to pay attention, however, to two problems here. The first is the fact that this positive characteristic is given its limitation in the text. After all, the narrator presents this reaction as one of those multiple juxtaposed responses, and therefore it is inevitably relativized. Moreover, when the narrator states that "more and more people will turn, in bewildered inadequacy, to solutions for which the balloon may stand as a prototype, or 'rough draft'" (51), we cannot agree to this statement naively. As mentioned above, the narrator states at the beginning of the story that "it is wrong to speak of 'situations,' implying sets of circumstances leading to some resolution, some escape of tension." If we regard the balloon as something which "may stand as a prototype" for the final solution to the situation, the fact that it is a "concrete particular" becomes subsumed in an abstract plot line. In other words, this kind of reaction effaces the materiality of the balloon in the end. Second, this story has a clearly metafictional nature, and therefore the evaluation of the balloon is directly connected with the interpretation of the work. When he has the narrator state "Critical opinion was divided" (49), Barthelme ridicules critics who offer various interpretations to a work whose definite meaning is undefinable. In fact, the amorphous nature of the balloon is a typical example of the meaningless jelly-like things Tony Tanner discussed. When critics recognize this story as an anxious object, and then exercise the freedom of a variety of interpretations, they admit the story itself to be meaningless, no matter how much they appreciate the function of this work. When we conclude the argument only with appreciating the balloon's critical nature, the argument is trapped in the dilemma of interpretation of postmodernist works of art. Do these have their own values, their meanings waiting for interpretation? Or, only in their parasitic function of criticizing preceding works or systems do their values exist? This sense of freedom is derived from the fact that it is not necessary to interpret the intention of the author and the meaning of the work. Stanley Trachtenberg describes this characteristic:

> What does emerge as the central concern of the story is the suggestive contradictions of art that remain to be experienced rather than interpreted and that point to the variety and excitement that lie not within the depth but ready-to-hand on the surface where art and experience intersect. (64)

Here, the work is not subject to interpretation, but only to experience. In other words, this balloon invalidates any binding conclusion, and provides a process to keep playing freely with various interpretive frames.

The Process of Reading and the Disappearance of the Work

What we feel we are doing when we read Barthelme's work is indeed more like an exciting experience of its surface than an interpretation of meaning hidden in its depth. Also in the story, such a reception is mentioned as one of natural reactions to the balloon:

> There was a certain amount of initial argumentation about the "meaning" of the balloon; this subsided, because we have learned not to insist on meanings, and they are rarely even looked for now, except in cases involving the simplest, safest phenomena. It was agreed that since the meaning of the balloon could never be known absolutely, extended discussion was pointless, or at least less purposeful than the activities of those who, for example, hung green and blue paper lanterns from the warm gray underside, in certain streets, or seized the occasion to write messages on the surface, announcing their availability for the performance of unnatural acts, or the availability of acquaintances. (47)

Thus, since the meaning of the balloon cannot be known absolutely, argumentation about the "meaning"—written with ironical quotation marks—subsides. Since the inner meaning at that depth does not exist in the balloon, and only the air is contained, these activities are exclusively concerned with the surface.

Following this passage, the reaction of "Daring children" (47) is mentioned. They jumped on the surface of the balloon when it hovers close to buildings: the "upper surface was so structured that a 'landscape' was presented, small valleys as well as slight knolls, or mounds; once atop the balloon, a stroll was

possible, or even a trip, from one place to the another" (47). Although this "landscape" is described as "structured," its structure is by no means a rigid one. As the surface of the balloon is flexible, the valleys, knolls, and mounds there keep changing their shapes. And this change of form is also caused by the weight and activities of the children themselves. Therefore, the children do not simply encounter a fixed and immovable situation but participate in experiences occurring completely concurrently. The "landscape" is not simply there, but it is, by definition, established only on the premise of participation of spectators. And each landscape experienced by each participant is freely different. Lois Gordon relates this to the meaninglessness of the balloon:

> In this metafiction, another story about writing stories, he has taken Stephen Dedalus's definition of the dramatic artist who stands totally aloof from his creation "paring his fingernails," and pushed it as far as he can, to focus on the impersonality of the word itself (the "concrete particular"). He has written a story, a "distraction," that really has no need for the reader as "interpreter." He has provided, in the total story, the form of meaning—here, the process of reading and apprehending reality—without a fixed, deniable substance, to illustrate how form is only form, rather than meaning. The "meaning" of the balloon is really that the balloon has no meaning. (90)

Here, facing the absence of fixed and deniable meaning seems to inevitably lead to an emergence of the concept of the process of reception. When the authority of an artist as author becomes diminished and the work of art flaunts its autonomous materiality, the interpretation is changed by the process. At this time, the immanence of the postmodernist work of art to its surrounding environment, opposed to the complete autonomy of the modernist work, shifts the source of its value from inside of the work itself to the "landscape" composed of the work and recipients surrounding it.

"That all these varied motions," the narrator states, "as well as others, were within one's possibilities, in experiencing the 'up' side of the balloon, was extremely exciting for children, accustomed to the city's flat, hard skin. But the purpose of the balloon was not to amuse children" (47). As we saw in the previous section, the experience of the balloon clearly provides its participants with a sense of possibilities, diversity, freedom, and playfulness. At the same time, we cannot overlook that the narrator refers to "the purpose of the balloon"

here. This reference seems ironical. The positive characteristic of the balloon is bluntly denied by the narrator himself, who is the creator, although the narrator does not present any alternative, any authentic purpose of the balloon. In the first place, the value of the intention of the author which cannot be read from the work is clearly dubious. Such an intention is merely extrinsic to the work and has no self-evident superiority to various other reactions the balloon causes in the story, including that of the children. The intention of the author is also relativized by anxious objects whose hidden purpose of creation cannot be deciphered. As long as the work of art places a source of value in how it is experienced, what is outside the experience, including the purpose its artist had when he created it, cannot be a decisive factor.

The emphasis on staying in experience involves a rejection of a linear plot with a clear beginning and conclusion. R. E. Johnson, Jr. discusses this open-ended nature of "The Balloon":

> Like those who thus encounter Barthelme's balloon, his reader is not offered a logical system by means of which he can interpret or escape his own experience. He is offered a process which has life only when he participates in it, at intersections which become such only when he meets something there and which lose their shape once that meeting is over. (80)

Although Johnson highly evaluates these characteristics of the story, we have not yet managed to get out of the dilemma of interpretation between meaningful systems and meaningless fluidity of objects, which Tanner presents in discussing postmodernist works. This is modified here into a dilemma between the tyrannical intention of the artist and the experience which has become free from it and at the same time become completely amorphous and pluralized. When experiencing a work becomes its central function, its value can no longer be drawn from the work itself, since the "landscape" in which the experience is developed will constantly change its appearance through participation of the audience. This does not mean that the audience are free to see whatever they want to see in the work of art. At the very least, however, the value of the work contains, by definition, spectators in it, and it varies depending on individual participants. And there are no longer external criteria which are able to mediate such various different evaluations. Concerning the experience of the balloon, the narrator mentions one of the reactions to it:

> Another man, on the other hand, might view the balloon as if it were part of a system of unanticipated rewards, as when one's employer walks in and says, "Here, Henry, take this package of money I have wrapped for you, because we have been doing so well in the business here, and I admire the way you bruise the tulips, without which bruising your department would not be a success, or at least not the success that it is." For this man the balloon might be a brilliantly heroic "muscle and pluck" experience, even if an experience poorly understood. (48-49)

For this man his experience may be poorly understood, but we can never understand his experience at all, not even extremely poorly. We cannot help but read this sentence about the completely irrelevant tulip as sheer nonsense. Here, Barthelme casts irony on experience, or at least relativizes it. It is not an object of understanding, and definitely lacks an external code by which it is shared with others. This man's experience is not wrong or right compared to other human experiences; it is simply different. We cannot criticize it any more than we can describe a meaningful difference between a certain work and another work as long as works of art are something to be experienced. This is one reason why Barthelme juxtaposes various responses to the balloon.

In his "Art and Objecthood," critic Michael Fried criticizes literalist art (commonly called Minimal Art) which tries to supersede modernism. Minimal Art was in vogue in New York in the early 1960s. The works of Minimal Art often have a geometric shape, so its referential quality is scarce, and artists wanted such a shape to be received as such. They are also strongly conscious of its site-specificity such as museums where the work is exhibited[4]. Fried argues against the experience of Minimalist art:

> Like the shape of the object, the materials do not represent, signify, or allude to anything; they are what they are and nothing more. And what they are is not, strictly speaking, something that is grasped or intuited or recognized or even seen once and for all. Rather, the "obdurate identity" of a specific material, like the wholeness of the shape, is simply stated or given or established at the very outset, if not before the outset; accordingly, the experience of both is one of endlessness, or inexhaustibility, of able to go on and on letting, for example, the material itself confront one in all its literalness, its "objectivity," its absence of anything beyond itself. (165)

Fried continues to argue that “one never feels that one has come to the end of it; it is inexhaustible. It is inexhaustible, however, not because of any fullness—*that* is the inexhaustibility of art—but because there is nothing there to exhaust” (166). Just like Minimal Art, Barthelme’s balloon is literally far from fullness. This explanation is applicable to the experience of citizens who encounter the materiality of the balloon. When Fried argues that “Whereas in previous art ‘what is to be had from the work is located strictly within [it],’ the experience of literalist art is of an object in a *situation*—one that, virtually by definition, *includes the beholder*” (153), this statement is criticizing the experience of “landscape.” Fried recognizes the “theatrical” nature in such a field including an object and its beholder: “the literalist espousal of objecthood amounts nothing other than a plea for a new genre of theater, and theater is now the negation of art” (153).

This theatrical nature is concerned with the problem of the value of art, which is related to the confusion of different art forms with different media, such as painting and music. Modernist arts strongly stuck to their respective medium-specificity, as in “Modernist Painting.” Clement Greenberg argues that each art should be “unique in the nature of its medium” and “its ‘purity’ find the guarantee of its standard of quality as well as of its independence” (86). Modernist art, as well as literalist art, rejects referentiality and shows its materiality. This lies within its medium. As for paintings materiality lies in the flatness of the canvas, and as for music it is in the sound. The *quality* of the work exists in this autonomy. On the other hand, the materiality of the postmodernist work assumes the place where it will be placed and the participation of the audience there. As already discussed with regard to anxious objects, the objecthood of the postmodern work is generated by the process through which it invites the audience to interpret it and then refuses to be fully interpreted. In other words, the materiality of postmodernist art does not have its substance in its medium of expression; rather it exists only as a stumbling block where its audiences fail in interpretation. Therefore Fried argues: if a difference in quality between modernist paintings and theatrical paintings (Robert Rauschenberg’s works, for instance), or that between modernist music and theatrical music (John Cage, for instance) is overlooked, naturally there emerges “the illusion that the barriers between the arts are in the process of crumbling (Cage and Rauschenberg being seen, correctly, as similar) and that the arts themselves are at last sliding towards some kind of final, implosive,

highly desirable synthesis" (164). The arts of theatrical nature, regardless of their medium, appear as objecthood that can only be *experienced* in the same way. Fried points out that literalists avoid the issue of value or quality, and that they show "considerable uncertainty as to whether or not what they are making is art" (164). Thus, postmodernist work and anxious objects inherit the materiality from modernism, but this materiality is made meaningless. The value of the work remains unknown, and the experiences remain beyond all arguments in their privileged position. This overconcentration of value on extremely amorphous experience is concurrent with annihilation of distinction of medium-specificities between arts. In order to escape from the theater of objecthood beyond each concrete object, it is required to keep an eye open for the uniqueness of the medium that remains in postmodernism as a residue of modernism.

Actually, when Barthelme inserts visual elements into the text in some of his later works[5], he is trying to direct the reader's attention to medium-specificities in a way different from that of modernism. In "The Balloon," the visual element is its typographical feature, which is also one of the characteristics of Barthelme's style. As one of the various reactions to the balloon, the narrator refers to the reaction of critics:

> Critical opinion was divided:
>
> "monstrous pourings"
>
> "harp"
>
> XXXXXXX "certain contrasts with darker portions"
>
> "inner joy"
>
> "large, square corners"
>
> "conservative eclecticism that has so far governed modern balloon design"
>
> ::::::: "abnormal vigor"

“warm, soft, lazy passages”

“Has unity been sacrificed for a sprawling quality?”

“*Quelle catastrophe!*”

“munching” (49-50)

Thus, “critical opinion” expressed about the balloon is the most fragmental in this short story. If we are to see this short story as allegorical, this passage satirically anticipates the behavior of critics trying to explain it with various interpretive frames. The discourse with which they try to interpret the balloon is even deprived of its syntax. The reason why we can guess their original context to some extent from these fragments is that here Barthelme shows that these words are *contaminated* by discourses. Because of the way those pieces are arranged on the page, this passage resembles surrealist collage, which, since each piece is a flat visual image, is homogeneous as far as the material is concerned. What is heterogeneous in surrealist collage is the contexts which each piece of image implies. In another sense, the structure of the story resembles that of Cubist collage, papier collé or Rauschenberg’s Neo-Dadaist assemblage. This story is mainly made up of two things which are different in their material: the balloon and discourses around it. Quotations of discourses are made of language, and therefore seem relatively natural and flat on the pages, yet their naturalness is undermined by the balloon with its relatively strong materiality. This resembles the collapse of completeness of the flat canvas in visual art. In papier collé, papers are glued onto the canvas, and in assemblage three-dimensional elements are stuck on the canvas.

In any case, the reader feels strong visuality on the page here. This is due to the arrangement of clichéd fragment, which consists of line breaks and spaces. These are definitely lacking in referential quality, without any natural representational function, or intrinsic information. If we want to give a meaning to this part of the story, we are compelled to pay attention to what the shape made by words signifies, rather than what words represent. Walter Benn Michaels argues that this kind of approach makes text cease to be text and turn into “drawing” (3). In this kind of commitment to the textuality, “[b]ecause the text is disconnected from its meaning, no attempt to identify those features that are crucial to its meaning is possible—there are no such features. Or, to turn

the point around, the fact that no features can be identified as crucial means that every feature is" (4). When the central meaning represented is absent behind the text, everything on the surface of the text is absolutely crucial on its own. This is equivalent to the narrator's following statement about the balloon:

> But it is wrong to speak of "marginal intersections," each intersection was crucial, none could be ignored (as if, walking there, you might not find someone capable of turning your attention, in a flash, from old exercises to new exercises, risks and escalations). Each intersection was crucial, meeting of balloon and building, meeting of balloon and man, meeting of balloon and balloon. (50)

In the literal sense, there is no marginal part in the balloon since it has only air inside, and consistent homogeneous materiality is its nature. At the theoretical level, the balloon is not an object capable of providing a central meaning, but it is an object to meet, for example, while walking. Therefore, the balloon invites all the surrounding environments into its *landscape*, or *theater*. Michaels argues:

> The purely material, in other words, is everything that can be seen by the reader. The question of which part of what the reader sees counts as part of the work of art . . . is not so much answered as it is set aside. After all, the blank pages are part of what the reader sees whether or not they are understood to be part of the work of art. So the question of what's in the work of art (a question about the object) is replaced by the question of what the reader sees (a question about the subject). (6)

Here Michaels moves a step forward from the criticism of objecthood by Fried. He points out that the central problem in experience is no longer an object but a subject, and therefore that the question concerning the work of art not only remains unanswered, but also is invalidated as a question in the first place. The prerequisite of this argument is that the text ceases to be text and becomes drawing; this alteration is equivalent to the elimination of the distinctions between arts caused by the theatrical character of objecthood. The premise is rather to treat the text *neither* as text *nor* as image. Therefore, the procedure to be done against this reduction to materiality would be to endow the work with textual *and* visual quality.

Michaels' argument ultimately raises the question of the nature of the signifier itself. The philosophy of language, which was in vogue when Barthelme published this story, found meaning in autonomous structure even though it is isolated from the intention of the speaker. This is the background of what Tanner found in Barthelme's contemporary American writers, the dread of what preceded the writer's own consciousness and determined the structure of the work. Michaels gives attention to the basis on which a thing can be regarded as a unit of language. According to Michaels, when "theorists like Searle claim that the shape makes the word," their point is that "no narrative of how the marks were made is relevant to the question of whether the marks constitute a word" (58). For example, in the scrabble game, when an adult arranges tiles with the intention of forming the word "rose," or when an infant accidentally aligns tiles and the "rose" appear, this "rose" has the same meaning. In addition, when a wave happens to leave branches that looks like the letter "r" on the sandy beach, or when someone intends to leave branches in the form of "r," for a person who sees it, as long as it seems to be "r," that form is considered "r." Michaels argues that, with this kind of notion, there can be no conflict of opinions on the object:

> We may, in other words, disagree with someone about whether an *r* is really is an *r*, but we don't disagree with him about whether it looks like an *r* to him. Or, to put the point in the opposite direction, we can't really disagree with someone about whether an *r* is an *r* unless we already think that being *r* involves something more than looking like an *r*; without the appeal to something beyond shape, the difference between us is just a difference in our experience, not a difference of opinion. (59)

This "commitment to the primacy of the materiality of the signifier (to shape) is also a commitment to the primacy of experience (to the subject position) . . . to the identity of its interpreter" (60). Here Michaels finds the cause of the continuous shift in postmodernism, from a commitment to materiality of the signifier to a commitment to various kinds of identity politics. Along with this shift, white male writers such as Barthelme were regarded as writers who merely play intellectual games. The political meaning in reading a work based on diverse identity, however, is dubious, since, according to Michaels, as there is no discrepancy in opinion, no true discussion is formed, and authors and critics are each merely showing their own position, their own identity. In this cyclical

situation, the value of their interpretation is based on the premise that there is value already inherent in each identity or diversity. In a sense, it is even possible to reject the initial problem of whether the work has meaning or not.

Here Michaels calls for the restoration of the author's intention, seeking "something more than looking like" meaning in order to restore meaningful discussion. In "The Balloon," however, it will be difficult to restore the author's intention, at least in its usual sense. In the conclusion that has been puzzling the critics ever since the story was published, the narrator as a creator of the balloon talks to "you," who suddenly appears on the text:

> The balloon, I said, is a spontaneous autobiographical disclosure, having to do with the unease I felt at your absence, and with sexual derivation, but now that your visit to Bergen has been terminated, it is no longer necessary or appropriate. Removal of the balloon was easy: trailer trucks carried away the depleted fabric, which is now stored in West Virginia, awaiting some other time of unhappiness, some time, perhaps, when we are angry with one another. (51)

The narrator suddenly gives a meaning to the balloon by a kind of psychoanalytic interpretation. It is hard to believe that this excessively naive statement straightforwardly reveals the hidden unconsciousness of the balloon's creator, or of the author. Even if this obviously psychoanalytic or theory-of-alienation cliché is the author's true intention, there is no reason to believe that this statement negates all the other clichéd interpretations. Critics have considered this part of the story to be another arbitrary ready-made interpretation that mocks the author's authority. That is probably correct. We have already stated that what Barthelme depicts in this story is a process of how the balloon's objecthood inevitably invalidates the author's authority or interpretation in the *theater*. In this process, the materiality of language lacking the author's intention invalidates, in advance, diversified readings by various readers with different identities. When disagreements constitute an argument—"when we are angry with one another"—we battle against each other with different ideologies. Under such circumstances, the balloon's objecthood may exercise critical value as something disabling conflict. On the other hand, when the landscape produced by the balloon is already the premise and the given condition of our culture, we must be more careful as to how we should evaluate this story. We can no longer be content only with freedom of interpretations.

Thus, Barthelme depicts not only this inevitable process in this story, but the premise of the process. As briefly mentioned above, the eye-catching part following "Critical opinion was divided" shows the freshness of the page appealing to the sight, while exposing the malfunction of interpretations. If we just *experience* this part and only feel the "excitement" (Fried), then objecthood eliminates the distinction between text and drawing. On the other hand, typography is defined by the fact that it is a text and at the same time a visual image. If people read this part as text, space and line breaks have no meaning as information and only fragmental clichés are left. If people see this as an image, there is no representative picture, only the abstract composition. One of the strong charms of this story is that this typography, as a text and an image, appeals directly to the reader. Due to this, the rest of the text acquires its relative textural propriety, and subtly stands back, without achieving complete objecthood. This delicate balance indicates Barthelme's subtle attempt to give aesthetic and critical value to this short story. We will see in the latter half of this paper what generates the world where it becomes impossible to get "angry with one another" in "The Indian Uprising," which is more involved with a historical background.

The Ethical Dichotomy in Postmodernist Romance

Just like "The Balloon," the plot of "The Indian Uprising" is minimal. The story consists of fragmental observations, memories, and insights of an unnamed narrator involved in a battle against Comanches. Just as a balloon suddenly appears in the city, Indians suddenly appear there and launch a guerilla war. Their appearance also functions as an "anxious object" on a certain level of the story, but unlike the city of "The Balloon" having "the grid of precise, rectangular pathways under our feet" (50), that of "The Indian Uprising" has no order; when the narrator asks "What is the situation?" the answer to it is "The situation is liquid" (*Sixty Stories* 105). Citizens set up a barricade with a pile of junk. They cannot exclude saturated sewage, or separate it, and therefore sewage floods throughout the city which becomes a vast junkyard, where every system has collapsed. In such a situation, the anxious object has no conflict and therefore has no opportunity to demonstrate its critical value. Concerning the dilemma which Tanner revealed, this is a situation in which jelly-like fluidity is predominant from the onset.

The narrative itself advances from one subject to the next in an abrupt, cinematic manner. Vignettes follow vignettes without explanation or warning;

conversations and descriptions suddenly pop up without context. The narrator claims that "strings of language extend in every direction to bind the world into a rushing, ribald whole" (107), but Miss R., who is a teacher criticizing him, says that "the only form of discourse" she trusts is "the litany," and highly evaluates "the hard, brown, nutlike word" (106). Judging from the fragmental narrative, it seems that Miss R.'s materialized words are more dominant in the text. Trachtenberg points out that "at the end the narrator is made to surrender even those accessories that hold things together, such as his belt and shoelaces" (60). When Miss R. orders the narrator to "remove your belt and shoelaces" (108), she orders him in effect to abandon natural syntax, context, and causal relationships. In fact, the narrator repeatedly states "I decided I knew nothing" after observing a random series of meaningless objects (103). His motives, background, and psychological state are never fully represented. The act of battle where he resists the Indian is not depicted in the story—except that he sometimes apathetically tortures the captured Comanche. For the most part of the story, the narrator is just a bewildered bystander.

In parallel with the resistance to Indian attacks, the narrator's relationships with women are depicted. None of these has been successful. He occasionally, with second-person narrative, calls for and asks questions of absent women including the main heroine, Sylvia[6]. As Lois Gordon points out (Gordon 85), Sylvia's remark, "You gave me heroin first a year ago" (104), a reverberation from T. S. Eliot; in *The Waste Land*, the heroine says this "You gave me hyacinths first a year ago," and in response the narrator thinks "I knew nothing" (Eliot 65) and later says "I can connect Nothing with nothing" (77). With the remark "I decided I knew nothing," the narrator of "The Indian Uprising" shows that he too can connect "nothing with nothing." In "A Shower of Gold," the last piece of Barthelme's first collection of stories ("Indian Uprising" is the first piece of his second collection of stories), the narrator asks of "How can you be alienated without first having been connected?" (*Come Back, Dr. Caligari* 138). If there is no connection in the first place, then there is no alienation. In this story, Barthelme is a successor to the modernist literary work of alienation, and then is trying to go beyond it. The main purpose of this story does not lie in depicting the character's psychological problems with their chain of actions. Instead, the atmosphere of a chaotic world is strongly evoked. In other words, the landscape which the balloon produces is the outset of this story.

Indians appear in this chaotic landscape. Their descriptions are quite

ambiguous. They have no Indian-like physical descriptions such as the color of their skin. To begin with, those who are treated as Indians appear only twice in the story: the tortured Indian and Sylvia, not so obviously an Indian. The Indians' attacks are depicted as continuing throughout the story, but there are no descriptions of those who execute them. The opening passage of the story is: "We defended the city as best we could. The arrows of the Comanches came in clouds. The war clubs of the Comanches clattered on the soft, yellow pavements" (102). Thus, only clichéd gestures without their subjects are depicted, as if they were quoted from banal Western films. When the group including the narrator attacks Indians, it is described, "We killed a great many in the south suddenly with helicopters and rockets but we found that those we had killed were children" (108). "Helicopters and rockets," which obviously come from outside the city, suddenly appear as if to repeat the image of the US Army in the Vietnam War on TV screens. This gesture does not play any military role nor represent any justice. Thus, actions of and against the Indians both lack referents. It seems as if the Indians do not have bodies, and only their gestures autonomously float around the city[7]. Barthelme endows these with Indian-like nature in mainly two ways. First, he calls some characters "Indian" or "Comanches." This may seem to be unsurprising, but the two "Indians" mentioned above have the names quite unnatural for Indians: "Gustave Aschenbach[8]" and "Sylvia." Second, Barthelme attributes to them Indian-like gestures and styles. In the descriptions concerning the Indians' attacks, he uses synecdoche, such as "short, ugly lances with fur at the throat" (104) and "arrowheads" (106). They give the recognizable style to the attacks, which becomes Indian uprisings.

The recognizable *style* is the mark that indicates that the stylized description is contaminated by clichéd elements of worn-out discourses saturated by the media. When a certain form of behavior ceases to be natural and it seems merely something registered in the already-known catalog, it becomes an unnatural *style* and it seems to become a quote from the past. In this story, the description of Indian's gesture has a similarly repetitive nature. For example, Sylvia is provided with an Indian-like style as follows: "She ran off down the Rue Chester Nimitz, uttering shrill cries" (104), and "She ran off down George C. Marshall Allée, uttering shrill cries" (104). The Indian-like gestures are repeated in different backgrounds, just like the images in surrealist collages. They are precisely identical and clichéd; the readers can recognize the context to which they originally belong. Moreover, this unnatural repetition has

to do with the character's lack of referential quality. The readers feel that these repetitions are not mimesis, but reproductions of each other. Consequently, readers become conscious of the surface of the image, of textuality itself.

The absence of the Indian's body becomes clear in the descriptions of Sylvia. In fighting the Indians, the narrator remarks, "But it is you I want now, here in the middle of this Uprising". This introduces Sylvia as an Indian into the text. He wants to repossess her: "It is with you that I am happiest". Then he "held Sylvia by her bear-claw necklace" (104), and Sylvia in person appears on the text. This Sylvia, however, along with her necklace, is merely an image of an Indian. He cannot hold her body, nor interpret her spirit: "Not believing that your body brilliant as it was and your fat, liquid spirit distinguished and angry as it was were stable quantities to which one could return on wires one more than once, twice, or another number of times" (105); and similarly: "And you can never return to felicities in the same way, the brilliant body, the distinguished spirit recapitulating moments that occur once, twice, or another number of times of rebellions, or water" (107-8). Superficial images of Indians without referents are flooding all over the city, but the narrator cannot recapitulate Sylvia's body and spirit, which once lived in harmony with him. This ungraspableness of the Indian is similar to that of the balloon lacking any substance and meaning. Just as in "The Balloon" the place where the meaning is generated shifted to the landscape around the balloon from the inside of it, the subject of autonomous Indian gestures seems to be projected onto the chaotic landscape of the city itself.

In his *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*, Fredric Jameson argues that some works of "the modern fantastic" are "the last unrecognizable avatars of romance as a mode" (122). "*Stimmung*—much stronger than the English 'mood' in its designation of moments when a landscape charged with alien meaning" (122) is the characteristic of romance, where "the category of Scene tends to capture and to appropriate the attributes of Agency and Act, making the 'hero' over into something like a registering apparatus for . . . in short, the whole semic range of transformation scenes whereby, in romance, higher and lower worlds struggle to overcome each other" (99). Deprived of the attributes of Agency and Act, all the hero can do is only to "show a naivete and bewilderment that marks them rather as mortal spectators surprised by supernatural conflict" (99). This category of Scene in romance is a figuration of the worldness itself. The world of realism is the infinite extension where events take place, and therefore it is beyond a panorama and incapable

of symbolic unification; on the other hand, the inner-worldly landscapes of romance somehow, with their atmosphere or mood, function as symbols of the world as a whole. This seems to be what happens in "The Indian Uprising." The landscape of the city is no mere background of the events, but something superior to the characters in it.

In Jameson's view, romance is a genre that has binary confrontational structure. Unlike tragedies and comedy, it is trapped in a conflict of *good* and *evil*. Throughout the history of the romance, Otherness is the same as the concept of evil. The problem here is that this is a positional notion. Jameson argues:

> Yet surely, in the shrinking world of the present day, with its gradual levelling of class and national and racial differences, and its imminent abolition of Nature (as some ultimate term of Otherness or difference), it ought to be less difficult to understand to what degree the concept of good and evil is a positional one that coincides with categories of Otherness. (101)

> what is really meant by "the good" is simply my own position as an unassailable power center, in terms of which the position of the Other, or of the weak, is repudiated and marginalized in practices which are then ultimately themselves formalized in the concept of evil. (104)

Thus, Jameson redefines the problem of good and evil in romance as the problem of self and other. That is, again, the matter of the subject position, as we have seen in the experience of the balloon.

If the problem merely concerns the distinction of good and evil by their position, it is not unique to romance. For example, the *chanson de geste*, from which romance emerged, or the American Western, which is a recent version of it, are also characterized by this duality of good and evil. The positional thinking of these genres has an intimate relationship to those historical periods sometimes designated as the "time of troubles" (104), in which barbarian incursions or Indians ranged geographical immensities. In such a society, people withdrew to citadels or camps and had no choice but to observe the balance of power, based on the real geographical relationship.

In times when society stabilized, however, "this kind of social and spatial isolation" (105) was absorbed into a homogeneous composition, and then

romance emerged. There, the geographical and social marks of the *chanson de geste* that had given a meaning to the world by the distinction between good and evil, or self and other, disappeared. In romance, the foundation of recognition of the enemy as evil becomes disturbed, since what characterizes the hostile knight is "the *identity* of his own conduct with mine, the which—points of honor, challenges, tests of strength—he reflects as in a mirror image" (105). Jameson argues that in this situation, romance seeks a figuration capable of assuming the evil nature:

> For now that the "experience" or the seme of evil can no longer be permanently assigned or attached to this or that human agent, it must find itself expelled from the realm of interpersonal or inner-worldly relations in a kind of Lacanian *forclusion* and thereby be projectively reconstituted into a free-floating and disembodied element, a baleful optical illusion, in its own right: that "realm" of sorcery and magical forces which constitutes the semic organization of the "world" of romance and henceforth determines provisional investment of its anthropomorphic bearers and its landscapes alike. (105-6)

Thus at "a transitional moment" when class and national and racial differences cannot be mapped according to geographical positions, and the basis of representation becomes unstable, Otherness is projected onto an optical illusion. The landscape that symbolizes the world, not the chain of actions of the character, then becomes central to the work of literature.

Thus, the precondition of the absence of the Indian's body and of the anthropomorphic landscape of the city in "The Indian Uprising" is the disappearance of the inner-worldly external space, Otherness, and "Nature (as some ultimate term of Otherness or difference)." The representation requires references to external reality. This disappearance of the external takes multiple forms in "The Indian Uprising." First, it is a matter of disappearance of the frontier concerning the Indians. Just like romance emerged from the c*hanson de geste* with the annihilation of marginal barbarity, the disappearance of the frontier changes the traditional Western to this postmodernist romance. The allegory of the annihilation of frontier in the 1960s was taking place on a global scale. What the Vietnam War revealed was that the imperialism had completely spread over the world, and the ethical foundation for invading the external evil land now became uncertain. As I will argue in the next section, national

differences do not truly form an ideological conflict in such a global saturation, and then, the abstract distinction between good and evil returns.

The second form is complete saturation of the media in society. I have already mentioned Jameson's notion that postmodernism is "a more fully human world than the older one, but one in which 'culture' has become a veritable 'second nature.'" This "second nature" quality in "The Indian Uprising" is generated by cinematic images. Various gestures that appear in this short story lack their referents and look like mere quotations from films and television images. Moreover, near the beginning of the story, without any context, the narrator suddenly mentions a filming: "And when they shot the scene in the bed I wondered how you felt under the eyes of the cameramen, grips, juicers, men in the mixing booth: excited? Stimulated? And when they shot the scene in the shower . . ." (102-3). What is filmed are the scenes in the bed and in the shower. Naturally, what is filmed is the body of "you." There is, however, no description about the body, and in the first place, who this "you" is is not directly named. In this way, the body disappears in the shooting. Francis Gillen argues that saturation by this kind of screen images increases arbitrariness of the boundary between real and unreal and claims that this is the cause of meaninglessness and disordered narrative of this story: "Since one is never sure of the reality of an event, one can only 'say' names of what happens, organize events in a sequential order, never in any meaningful way" (38). Barthelme's narrative frequently contains a mechanical—not organic nor natural—list format. What we must appreciate there is his recognition that once external Nature or reality is lost, it is no longer possible to arrange words that lead to natural representations. For Miss R., the "litany" is the only form she approves:

> " . . . Thus when I hear the words *pewter, snake, tea, Fad #6 sherry, serviette, fenestration, crown, blue* coming from the mouth of some public official, or some raw youth, I am not disappointed. Vertical organization is also possible," Miss R. said, "as in
>
> pewter
> snake
> tea
> Fad #6 sherry
> serviette

> fenestration
> crown
> blue.
>
> I run to liquids and colors," she said . . . (106)

This *verticality* can only be what we *see* on the page in which words are aligned with line breaks. Nobody, including the narrator, *hears* the verticality. It can be said that this part of the story has a typographical nature: it reveals that we are reading words printed on the material surface of the page, rather than watching a completed world like looking through the window. This metafictional reference to the pages of Miss R., of this inner-worldly character of the story, demonstrates that the distinction between the representational culture and Nature to be represented no longer functions in the screen-like landscape of overall "second nature."

Vietnam War without Ideological Conflict

"The Indian Uprising" was first published in the *New Yorker* in 1965, the time of the Vietnam War. Naturally, the battle with the Indians in this story shows a strong relationship with the fighting action in the Vietnam War. For example, it is difficult to overlook the connection with the Vietnam War in the scene of bombing: "We killed a great many in the south suddenly with helicopters and rockets but we found that those we had killed were children" (108). The invisibility of the Indians also reminds us of the guerilla resistance by the Vietnamese soldiers in the jungle. Additionally, the fact that the battle is taking place in the city reminds us of another background. The Vietnam War was the first war that was broadcasted on television and attracted broad public attention, which caused many anti-war activities. Protests against the Vietnam War led to many demonstrations in New York City. The Black Power movement was also flourishing in the 1960s. The student activists were involved in both movements. The rebellious youth culture was formed, including drug use. Trachtenberg refers also to the labor movement in the 1930s:

> The issues that prompt the uprising are difficult to identify with any certainty, and in fact the adherents to each side and the principles for which they stand continue to shift. 'Which side are you on?' characters continue to demand of each other, recalling the slogans that marked the

> labor-management battles of the thirties. (57-58)

Trachtenberg makes clear that in “The Indian Uprising” there is no description about for what principle either side is fighting. Their motivation, ideology or social purpose *may* be one of those of various social activities, yet we cannot definitively identify it.

If it could be said that the Indians were the symbol of the forces opposing the dominant ideology of the United States, the story might be easier to understand. In this story’s chaotic city, the readers cannot see such a clear distinction. For example, the Indians “accumulated against the barricades we had made of window dummies, silk, thoughtfully planned job descriptions . . .” (103). As long as the historical fact is concerned, those who made barricades from this kind of everyday objects in the city (or in the university) were against the Vietnam War. Miss R. condemns the narrator for feeling nothing and being “locked in a most savage and terrible ignorance” (103): here savagery is supposed to reside not in the Indians, but in the narrator. For another instance, the narrator gave heroin—the symbol of the drug culture—to Sylvia and to the inhabitants of the ghetto who—maybe colored and/or poor people—joined the Indians. Stengel argues that this indicates that the subject of the story is the racial conflict (155). In any case, we can recognize that economic disparity, racial discrimination and ideological problems are all interchangeable in this story. These concrete and specific politics are subsumed in the ambiguous description of the Indians. Who embraces what ideology is just a matter of chance or of position. When it is hard to tell what principle each side of the battle espouses, it seems impossible to get “angry with one another.”

I have argued that no meaningful discussion takes place in the landscape where representation does not work effectively, and then, the concept of evil, lacking its external space, is projected on this scene. This situation is similar to what Francis Fukuyama finds after “the end of history.” In *Empire*, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri discuss this concept of globalization:

> History has ended precisely and only to the extent that it is conceived in Hegelian terms—as the movement of a dialectic of contradictions, a play of absolute negations and subsumption. The binaries that defined modern conflict have become blurred. The Other that might delimit a modern sovereign Self has become fractured and indistinct, and there is no longer an outside that can bound the place of sovereignty. The outside is what

> gave the crisis its coherence. Today it is increasingly difficult for the ideologues of the United States to name a single, unified enemy; rather, there seem to be minor and elusive enemies everywhere. The end of the crisis of modernity has given rise to a proliferation of minor and indefinite crises, or, as we prefer, to an omni-crisis. (189)

Thus, in the time of the Vietnam War, the conflict between self and other becomes vague. The absence of bodies or land of Indians indicates that the vanishing of the frontier serves as an allegory of the disappearance of a dialectic of contradictions, of ideological conflicts. The impossibility of identifying the principles each side espouses makes the landscape of the city inundated with indefinite "omni-crisis," where "minor and elusive" enemies flood everywhere. This is the cultural context of the erasure of actual political problems in "The Indian Uprising." It is not important to identify what specific power the description of the Indians indicates; rather, what is important is the fact that the description of the Indians arbitrarily subsumes various social powers, including the guerrilla struggles of Vietnamese soldiers, Black Power movements, the anti-war movements, the student activism, or even the labor movements.

As mentioned above, the narrator asks Sylvia: "'Which side are you on,' I cried, 'after all?'" (106). Samuel P. Huntington argues this very question is a political and ideological one, which loses its importance in the post-Cold War era cultural conflicts:

> Fifth, cultural characteristics and differences are less mutable and hence less easily compromised and resolved than political and economic ones. In the former Soviet Union, communists can become democrats, the rich can become poor and the poor rich, but Russians cannot become Estonians and Azeris cannot become Armenians. In class and ideological conflicts, the key question was "Which side are you on?" and people could and did choose sides and change sides. In conflicts between civilizations, the question is "What are you?" That is a given that cannot be changed. (71)

Even though the narrator tries to define the Indians in terms of class or ideology, he cannot grasp their substance. As I argued in the former section, the Indians have no bodies; instead, they have Indian-like styles and fashions.

Those components are cultural rather than ideological. Thus, in the story, the struggle accompanying the existing ideological conflict, such as the guerilla campaign of the communist soldiers, is depicted as if it were a cultural conflict. The absurdity of the story lies in the fact that Vietnamese communists *can become* American Indians. For Huntington, cultural characteristics are something cannot be changed, just like bodies we are born with. The ambiguous description of the Indians reveals that the differences between individual actual politics are effaced when the body is replaced with mere culture.

Here the war takes place not against a single, unified enemy, but against a cultural landscape. In other words, it is happening in reality, but at the same time it is rhetorical. In *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, Hardt and Negri discuss the genealogy of the war against abstract concepts, not against definite enemies such as specific nation-states and political communities. This genealogy that proceeds "from metaphorical and rhetorical invocations of war to real wars against indefinite, immaterial enemies" (14) begins with the "War on Poverty" launched in 1964 by Lyndon Johnson. This kind of rhetorical discourse is intended to "avoid partisan conflict and rally national forces for a domestic policy goal" (13).

> With the war on drugs, however, which began in the 1980s, and more so with the twenty-first-century war on terrorism, the rhetoric of war begins to develop a more concrete character. As in the case of the war on poverty, here too the enemies are posed not as specific nation-states or political communities or even individuals but rather as abstract concepts or perhaps as sets of practices. (14)

As long as the Indians are symbols of various political powers, they are not a specific ethnic group or even individuals; rather, the Indians' attacks lacking referentiality are abstract concepts or sets of practices. Ideological conflicts could be ended by surrender, victory, or truce between the conflicting states; there were meaningful conflicts moving towards dialectic sublimation or resolution. On the other hand, the war against abstract concepts and sets of practices which are regarded as evil, such as terrorism, is "a war to create and maintain social order," and this war can "have no end" (14). "The Indian Uprising" begins *in medias res* and ends open-ended. The battle against the Indians is, in this sense, to maintain social order, the battle against

the guerillas as a concept or set of practices. As a matter of historical fact, the American troops suffered from the invisibility of the guerilla soldiers in the jungle of Vietnam. In this sense, the American troops could not fight Vietnamese soldiers; rather, they fought the land itself, and the guerrillas as sets of practices—that is why the United States attacked the jungle itself in Operation Ranch Hand. The description of the invisible Indians' attacks is clearly inspired by these characteristics of guerrilla tactics. The battles in "The Indian Uprising" are, just like the "war on terrorism," the "war on guerrillas."

This kind of war against sets of practices is not only the consequence of the disappearance of ideological conflicts, but also the cause of the disappearance. Michaels discusses the war on terrorism:

> Terrorism, after all, is not an ideology, it's a tactic, and to declare war against it rather than against the beliefs that might be understood to motivate it is thus to discount in principle their ideological significance. They are relevant only as causes of the terror they produce . . . the discourse of the war on terrorism not only makes the beliefs of the terrorists irrelevant but also makes it possible to imagine that both they and their victims don't actually have any. (20)

The narrator in "The Indian Uprising" repeatedly states "I decided I knew nothing" (103), but the battles still continue. As long as the enemy is regarded as evil regardless of its ideology, America's ideology is also irrelevant. In comparison with the contemporary global "war on terrorism," the Cold War period, including the Vietnam War era, is usually regarded as a former age when ideological conflicts still functioned: it was possible in the Cold War period to assume that the right belief won against the wrong belief. On the other hand, the United States in the Cold War period claimed that the Soviet Union had a wrong doctrine and therefore was a totalitarian nation that deprived people of freedom, while their own side had no ideology and therefore was neutral and free. Here we can see the distorted form of the binary conflict which Tanner identified. In this rhetoric, the Cold War was represented not as an ideological struggle, but as the conflict between freedom from ideology and the restriction of fixed ideology. In "The Indian Uprising" Barthelme focuses on this characteristic of the rhetoric about the Vietnam War, and then, by describing the war against the Indians after the disappearance of the frontier, he reveals the conditions of the global war which was emerging when

imperialism had completely spread over the world.

This irrelevance of beliefs is what makes possible the arbitrary interchangeability between the Indians, the citizens, and the various social powers. Here the evilness of the Indians is explained in a different way than in the previous section. Michaels argues that, as long as the enemy is no longer ideological or national, it must be understood as a threat to the universal order or "law itself": in the civilization where "conflict between nations has been made irrelevant, the 'enemy' is simultaneously 'banalized (reduced to an object of routine police repression) and absolutized (as the Enemy, an absolute threat to the ethical order')". Thus, when ideological conflicts have become cultural ones, various specific enemies become the "Enemy," or abstract "evildoer". When Michaels claims that "[i]f . . . what we do with our enemies in the old days was defeat them, what we do with them now is bring them to justice" (172), what he claims is that when dialectic discussions are meaningless—as we have seen also in "The Balloon"—all we can do is judge our opponent unilaterally.

On the other hand, the characteristics of the counterpower were also changing in the Vietnam War era. As a matter of historical fact, the guerrilla struggles of the Vietnam War exclusively took place in rural areas, unlike Barthelme's Indians' attacks which take place in the city. According to Hardt and Negri, Metropolitan guerrilla struggles were established at the end of the 1960s and into the 1970s, particularly in Americas and Europe, whose prologue was the "revolts of the African American U.S. ghettos of the 1960s" (*Multitude* 81). It can be said that Barthelme prophetically connected the guerrilla struggles of the Vietnam War with these kinds of counter-movements in the city. Hardt and Negri argue that in this urbanization the focus of guerrilla struggles was changing from "attacking the ruling powers" to "transforming the city itself" (81-82). In other words, the focus of counterpowers is "internal—producing new subjectivities and new expansive forms of life within the organization itself" (83). In the conflicts between cultures or between identities, those who are regarded as evil also fight in order to change directly the set of practices, and redefine the landscape, not to defeat the ideology. In this sense, the struggles have also become immanent and biopolitical. The Indians' attempt to transform the city and subjectivities seems to have succeeded. It has been transformed so much that it seems at the onset like an unfamiliar jungle.

In such a city, the narrator has no meaningful system to order the world with, and just keeps wandering. His narrative has no discourse which naturalizes itself; rather, it is more like a litany. He states "our credit was no

longer what it had been, once," and thus he reveals that he no longer believes in the once-dominant ideology. At the end it is not the Indians, but the narrator himself that is judged unilaterally. Miss R. suddenly holds "the Clemency Committee" (21) and indicts the narrator. We cannot, however, identify in the story any act that points to his specific guilt. This story is not constructed with any meaningful chain of action. Nor can we understand according to what kind of law or ideology Miss R. judges the narrator. Here the law does not exist to maintain this or that kind of social order nor to assert the interest of any specific group; what the narrator faces at the end of the story is the Law itself, which now judges him. The narrator is compelled to remove his belt and shoelace—accessories that bind things—and observes that "rain shattering from a great height the prospects of silence and clear, neat rows of houses in the subdivisions." In this fluid and disordered landscape, he completely gives up attempting to describe the world in an orderly manner. Instead, in the last sentence of the story, he looks into the "savage black eyes, paint, feathers, beads" (108) of the Indians that suddenly appear. Here also, the bodies of the Indians do not have any unified shape; rather, they are an assemblage of clichéd cultural Indian-like styles. When the era of ideological conflicts is over, the "Law itself" appears. Barthelme perceived the emerging global world, and foresaw new situations leading up to today.

Conclusion

As briefly mentioned above, the works of early postmodernist literature written by white male writers like Barthelme was regarded as too abstract and gave way to works more committed to cultural identities. However, investigating his writing closely, it turns out that it to some extent even anticipated such social and critical changes. What made the insight possible for him is a contemporaneity of the rise of globalization and the upheaval of the environment of media. His strict aesthetic concern, with which he explored the relationship between literature and arts of other media, made him relate to both cultural and political problems alike in his work. Later in *The Dead Father* (1975), he elaborated the problem of the Law itself which appears in the conclusion of "The Indian Uprising." One of the reasons that caused him to write seemingly too abstract and archetypal works is his consistently acute awareness of the historical background. Reading his works today provides us with an opportunity for defamiliarization of the globalized cultural situation to which we are too accustomed now.

Notes

[1] Larry McCaffery names the former the "Theory of Meanings Approach" and the latter the "Theory of Non-meaning" or "Art as Object" approach (70).

[2] Barthelme met Rosenberg in 1962, and was hired as managing editor of *Location*, an "art-literary magazine" (*Not-Knowing* 263). Barthelme himself mentions this "anxious object" in an interview in 1975 (218-19).

[3] Education appears repeatedly in Barthelme's work. Wayne B. Stengel classifies Barthelme's work into four types, one of which is the stories in which characters are trapped in some kind of education and compelled to repeat the same actions.

[4] In the 1970s, this focus on site-specificity was stronger in Installation Art, whose work often temporarily appears in the middle of town. This is more similar to Barthelme's balloon.

[5] For example, in "The Explanation" (1970), Barthelme interposes four big black squares into the story. The text is written in the question and answer format, and a character is questioned by the other upon the squares. He is forced to answer, but the black square "offers no clues" (*City Life* 76). For another instance, in "The Photographs" (1974), Barthelme inserts two "photographs of the human soul" (*Guilty Pleasures* 153), which look to the characters like a "corroded frying pan" (155). These visual images which Barthelme puts in the texts function as anxious objects.

[6] Maclin Bocock argues that the war between citizens and Indians should be considered allegorical of the war between men and women. This may be convincing to some extent, but as I discuss below, the problem of this story lies in the fact that the war seems to accept too much arbitrary allegorical interpretations.

[7] Reiichi Miura argues that in "The Balloon" the balloon as a "concrete particular" is an allegory for the unrepresentable body (67-74), and that in *Snow White* (1967) the characters suffer from loss of representable bodies (111-123). According to this distinction, "The Indian Uprising" seems more similar to *Snow White* than "The Balloon."

[8] This is the name of the hero of Thomas Mann's *Der Tod in Venedig* (1912). His testicles are attached to wires, and when torturers "threw the switch he spoke" (107) of his life like a radio or a talking machine.

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