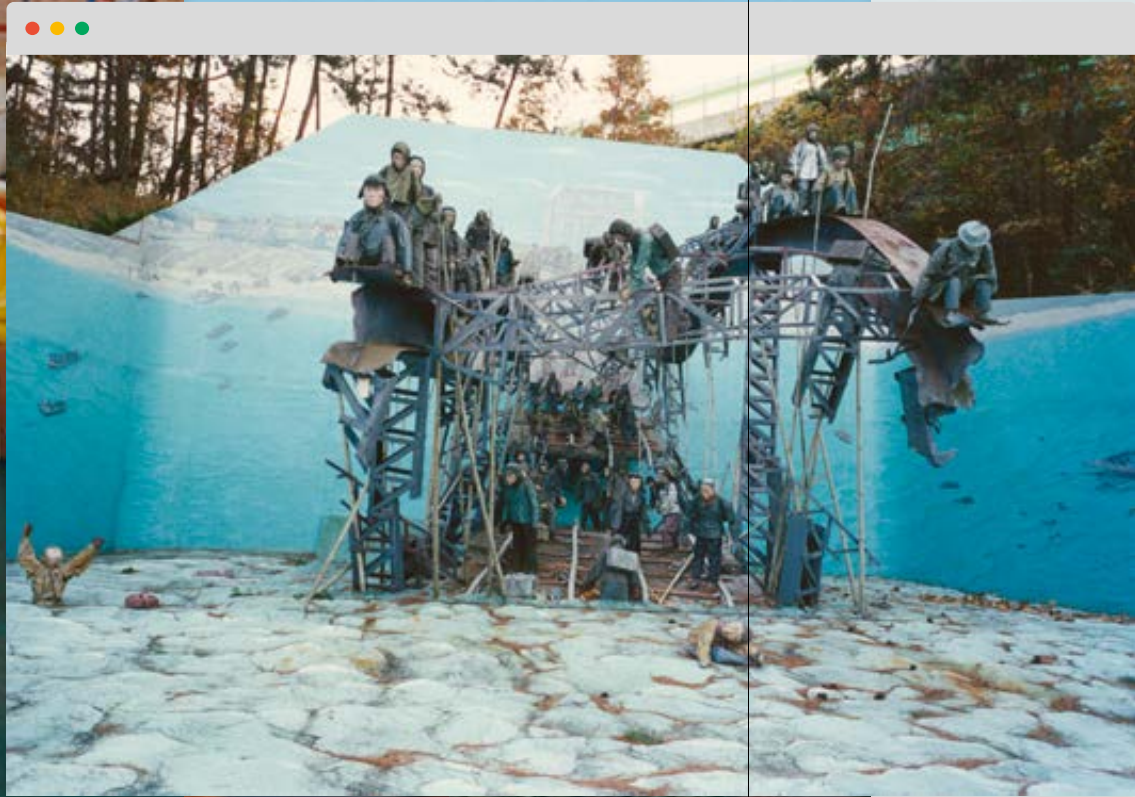


HALLOO ALMOST SOMETHING

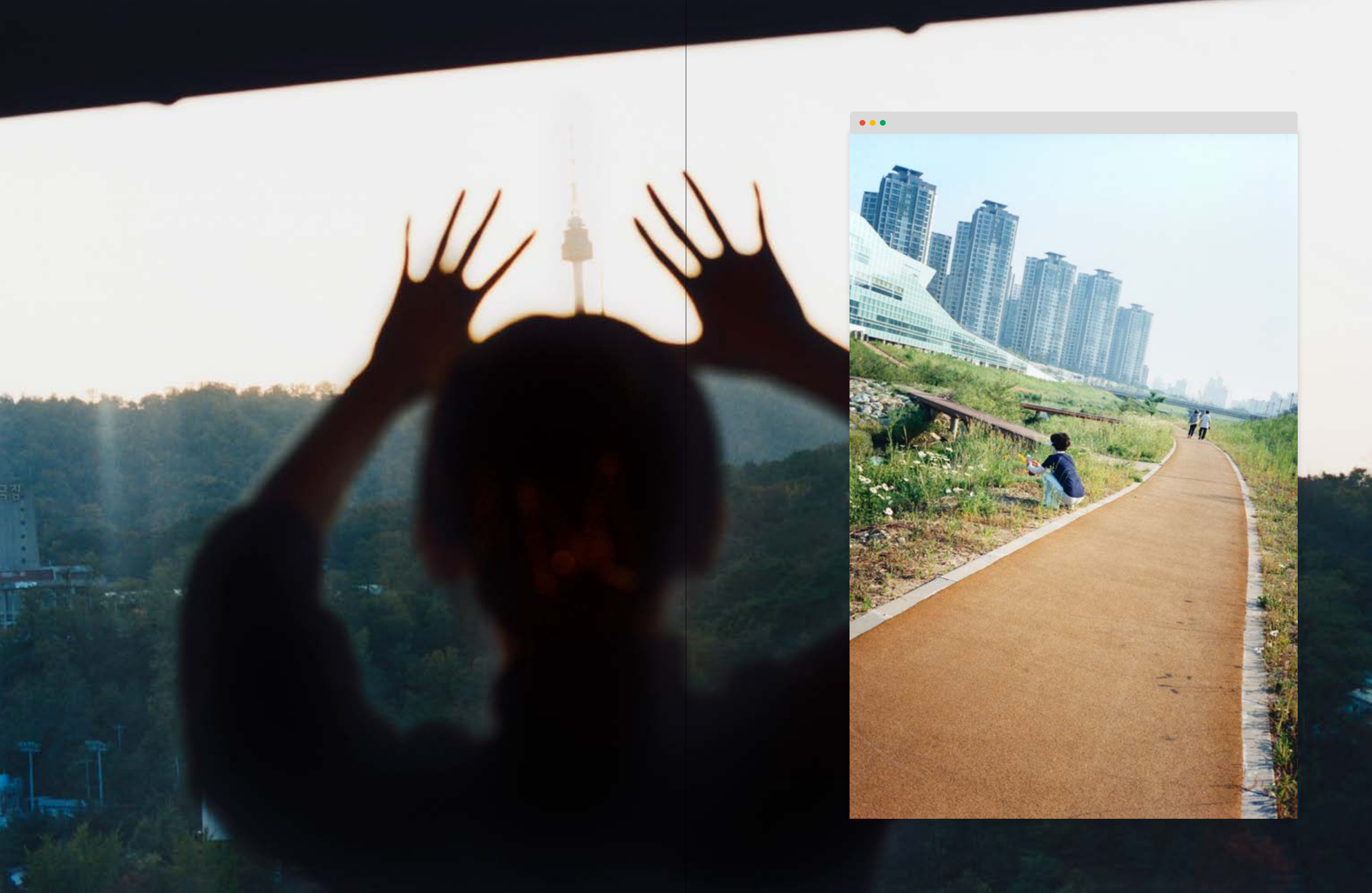
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ALMOST SOMETHING

by MOFFY
GATHORNE-HARDY

In a room fit for business, smart top halves stand elegantly - blazers and shirts - below: trainers and loose fitting trousers. One informs the meaning of the other, the corporate upper dignifying the jeans and relaxed shoes, while the bottom lends some welcome levity. This principle I believe is called "smart casual" - whoever coined the term is surely due their prize for subtlety of thought.

This is *almost* the entirety of the picture -

Separating the jackets and jeans, the shirts and tracksuits, is the cross section of a tabletop, which viewed from the side acts as barrier between what is above and below it, dismembering torsos and legs. This barrier has one other function: it obscures from sight. Its area is small, but there is no telling what it conceals, and what therefore is absent from the image that is present in the reality it claims to represent.

The image is gone, now a 3D space, the room opens out of itself. Spread over the great obscuring table are more images to replace it, photographs of young and old women, mothers, aunts and friends. There are depictions of the streets of Seoul, shopfronts soliciting the kind of intimacy that allows for anonymity. The people in the photographs are eating, laughing, and crucially, being.

Agents of executive discernment, the jacket and jeans wearers come to life, moving their hands over the photographs. Disembodied trainers shuffle about, cut off from their



sleeved counterparts, these two elements saying such different things. What bonds them remains hidden by the tabletop, ensuring that in the world outside of the photographs they're surveying, the world they inhabit, the scene cannot be fully apprehended, its meaning cannot be closed. Their voices are smooth and crisp (this couldn't have been demonstrated by the initial image), words form: "Korean", "Asian", "woman", "lesbian". This is reflected in the room-width mirror on the far-left wall, which oblivious to the meaning of the words spoken and deaf to their sound, only registers diligently the shapes their mouths make, as is its wont.

✓ They've *almost* got it -

What is under consideration is the identity of both the photographer and her subjects. How do these identities inform the work? Are Hanna's subjects relegated to referential objects of aesthetic and symbolic significance, or do they remain photographs of people? If not, when does relegation occur? When the photograph is taken, when it is hung in a gallery, when a text is written to accompany it, or when a person views it with ideas of Asian-ness and femininity in mind?

I've *almost* arrived at the point -

(Marginalia) are the markings made in the margins of a text, often by the author themselves. Not considered part of the canon, they are not intended to inform the meaning of that which they border, or to be read in conjunction with it. Marginalia does not require singularity of meaning, declares itself an endlessly generating synthesis of ideas. It is liberated from the drive toward perfection of the completed article, existing outside of it.

A photograph consists *almost* entirely of marginalia -

The photographs in this book depict the unselfconscious Korean-ness of Hanna's friends and family, engaging in various non-events of relaxation, intimacy, and fun that have as much to do with being Korean as they do with the state of being in relation to one another and the activities they are part-taking of. It is a Korean-ness that simply is, that does not cite itself; its purity of essence is not subverted by self-reflexivity.

What is wonderful about what Hanna has achieved here, and in her work more broadly, is that while it is essential in its uncontrived Korean-ness, it does not overly identify with being Korean, or with any of the wretched and limiting "buzzwords" that are used to describe it. It doesn't make a scene about the photographer's status as Asian, woman, or lesbian, but rather allows for the emergence of other narratives in the interstices of the image, making of the obscuring tabletop a temple to what is not said, to the unplumbable depths of the marginalia surrounding it, refusing to close the meaning. It acknowledges this marginalia as the space in which a plurality of meanings are continuously generated, at the hands of



of the photographer herself, for the in-betweenness that has resulted from splitting her life between Korea and England.

The thematisation of this same in-betweenness can be observed in the photographs she showed for a 2019 Somerset House duo exhibition entitled "English as a Second Language". The photographs were of two of her female friends, one Korean and one English. The online description suggests that the show explores "the artists" feelings of being lost in translation", and looking at Hanna's work, one might easily make an assumption that the relation between these two girls is one entirely of difference, of conflicting identities. What is actually occurring is more complicated: a kind of double-speak is at play that highlights both their difference and similarity, that seems *almost* to point to what they do not have in common but later reveals what is also *almost* shared.

It is not that Hanna is apolitical: among the projects of her work is undoubtedly the amplification of marginalised voices, but never at the exclusion of other ideas, never in a sense that imposes fixed meaning, and never in the absence of humour. So it is not that anti-colonial readings, queer readings, or feminist readings might not lend insight into one aspect of a highly free and subversive work, but ultimately that they would also impoverish it. There is always in Hanna's photographs more than one process of subversion occurring, more than one idea at play, and for the recognition of a multiplicity of meanings one idea cannot be given supremacy over another. Identities also evade taxonomy, and that is why this book is not about being Asian, Korean, female, or gay. Rather it is about the gap in the image created by the tabletop; it defers to the freedom in the marginalia, the uncertainty of potential meanings.



Therefore anything I have to say about it is *almost* meaningless -

Nietzsche was naughty, but he had a few ideas up his sleeve. Much has been made of his Will to Power, but with its colonial and patriarchal suggestion I am more interested in an adjusted, freer principle: the Will to Almost. Rather than straightforwardly attempting to assimilate what is external as part of oneself, the Will to Almost is to blur the boundary between what is and is not external, to render the border at the personal frontier porous, and in doing so make more of oneself too: to expand infinitely with the possibility enabled by a lack of over-identification, of fixed identity, to feel oneself capable of anything as an agent of endless ways of being, until finally the only statement we can make with certainty is that we are *almost* something, we are *almost* -

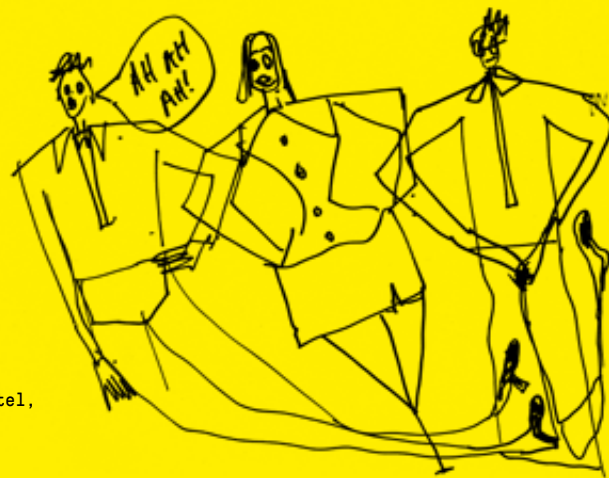


both photographer and viewer, even at different points in time. It recognises identity as perpetually under construction, that both people and things are constantly becoming. It encourages uncurated representations of self and other. Its project is not the communication of squashed, static information, already stale at the moment of reception, but the transmission of a crucial instability; it allows for the flux of *almost*.

✓ Indeed, the photographs in this very book were taken over a period of time spanning more than a decade, and have meant different things at different points. The work itself is a palimpsest alive with innumerable points of view, many of which have belonged to Hanna when she was at times closer and then further removed from her own Korean-ness, less and then more critical of it. It even makes room for the perceived Westernisation



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ALMOST SOMETHING



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I'd like to thank all my friends and family
who allowed me to include them in this book.

Big thanks to Patrick Remy, Anthony Vessot
and Julien Guerrier for their support
and trust in my work.

Also Moffy Gathorne-Hardy, Nikki Stromberg,
Kirsty Wilson, Alizée Cormerais, Holly Cullen,
Heera Gwon, all staff @Output, DoBeDo,
M.A.P for their help with making this book.

Special thanks to mom, dad, Yona, and Anusha.

This book is set in Monaako, a typeface
designed by Raphaël Verona in 2019
and distributed by Altiplano (Switzerland),
and GT Pressura Mono, a typeface designed
by Dominik Huber and Marc Kappeler in 2012
and distributed by Grilli Type (Switzerland).
It is printed on Magno Gloss 170g.

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ISBN: 978-2-9570013-6-1
Printed in Italy / First edition, 2022

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