



External Space

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Ahreum Lee,

Hopping for Hope

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We play games for fun. We play games for pleasure. We play games with first timers who tell us ‘I don’t know what I’m doing.’ We give them instructions, run through the steps of how to play. If they beat us, we call it beginner’s luck. Luck is thought of as an important factor when it comes to games: it suggests outcomes brought on by chance rather than our own actions; it provides an explanation for things we couldn’t see coming. Maybe there’s a higher power pulling the strings—karma, fate, some invisible authority governing success and failure. Are they really invisible, or are we just blindly playing along to protect our sense of control?

Growing up, games teach us how to follow directions. They provide us with a structure in which to play—parameters outside of which we are not meant to step. There are games we play to learn order; games to help us build morals. Games we play at home and games we play at school. In kitchens, in classrooms, on playgrounds with other children. One such common playground game is Hopscotch, a children’s game played all over the world. The foundations of the game are generally the same in every nation: toss a marker into a pre-drawn court of shapes, then hop with one foot through all the spaces

to retrieve it. To trip or fall out of line is to lose. These simple directions come in different variations; rule additions are made depending on who is teaching them and how they learned to play. Ahreum Lee delivers her version of Hopscotch in *Hopping for Hope*, an instructional video that whisks viewers into a fantasy realm of unicorns and butterflies backdropped by floral waterfalls and stars.

The artist appears dressed in all white threads to demonstrate the game: a pebble is cast through serene imagery of bubbles and stars into a rectangular court of uneven, jagged shapes reminiscent of a map. Numbered rules in colourful text tell us that in this version, making one's way through all the spaces without any slip-ups earns a second throw—but this time, it must be made with eyes closed. We play the game of blind luck. If the stone lands in a space, the space becomes ours. We play the game for occupation of drawn-out territories. The process repeats itself until all the mapped spaces are successfully captured.

Playing a solo game as Lee's film suggests means the validation of success becomes ours and ours alone. Others don't have to know if we win or lose. With no one watching, we may play the game and bend the rules. We may play the game with a strategically drawn court; may erase border lines, redraw them to our advantage. While the artist's map may look one way, ours may look another. Interpretations tend to differ; no two hand-drawn maps are the same. We may choose a marker that's easier to handle: a flat stone that won't roll out of place. Lee's Hopscotch court nods to cartography to intimate at the immigrant experience: unsettling and settling into a new space where we may find ourselves surrounded by new lines to be wary of when navigating. If we throw a marker over the border line, we may kick it back into the space we were going for. In-between changing cultural landscapes and hegemonic systems, not all of us get this chance to realign. Even still, we may trip and fall and turn a blind eye—get up and recover as if nothing happened. If we keep quiet, what others don't see, they don't know. The only person we have to answer to is ourselves. The only eyes we have watching are our own.

But forego too many rules, and a game may become unrecognizable. To be able to play with others means we must own up to our own disregard.

When we play with others, the same game asks us to empathize. We must endeavour to see the playing field from another person's perspective. International Hopscotch versions may share a similar foundation, but the game exhibits differences all over the globe: in Iran, it is played with six or more side-by-side square spaces. In France, on a spiral course. The lines we draw may look different to others; they may have their own parameters that look nothing like ours. In Germany, there is a space that can never be touched. In Australia, one must cross their legs as they jump. Other people's rules may have been filtered through someone or something else, making for a different game than what we know and play. Is one way better than the other? Most would claim the 'right' way is their own—what we learn and adopt as ours often dictates our standards.

If we choose not to engage with these different ways, we remain blind to them. Choose to see them, and the different ways to play the game helps us determine how these filters alter our rules and regulations. *Hopping for Hope* shifts in tone two thirds of the way through to interrogate the digitally mediated experience of the contemporary consumer that encounters politically charged propaganda via various technological platforms that alter our perception. Media giants such as Google depict the borders of our world map differently depending on the country it is accessed from. When viewing things through our computers and phones, what we see isn't always the same as what others see. The effort is made to keep us blind to these variations—to have the system play us—but we can learn to game these systems when we play together.

We play games and win. We play games and lose. As we get older, the hope is that we learn how to lose 'gracefully': take it in stride and without question—but Lee's work reminds us of the dangers of sedation when it comes to playing into societal games that seek to keep us in line. If we're playing to win, we can't rely on blind luck.

- Keiko Hart