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Minor Literature and the work of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha

By

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I declare that this Critical Cultures Research Project is all my own work and that all sources have been fully acknowledged.

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light-colored background. The signature is written in a cursive style and reads 'Holly Rickerby'.

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Introduction

This thesis sets out to consider the experimental novel *Dictee* (1982) by Theresa Hak Kyung Cha as a work of minor literature, as conceptualized by Deleuze and Guattari in their text *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (1986). Deleuze and Guattari outline their concept of a minor literature and its characteristics, defining a minor literature as one that possesses three distinct qualities. These qualities include “the deterritorialization of language, the connection of the individual to a political immediacy, and the collective assemblage of enunciation” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986, p.18).

This thesis will be broken down into 3 chapters. Each of the three characteristics that constitute a minor literature will be used as a point of departure in exploring *Dictee* and the surrounding work of Cha. Each chapter will focus upon one of these three characteristics to elucidate *Dictee* as a work of minor literature. This thesis intends only to align *Dictee* and the work of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha to Deleuze and Guattari's concept broadly, as a way to think through *Dictee* and some of Cha's surrounding work. As Lowe writes “*Dictee* unsettles the authority of any single theory to totalize or subsume it as its object.” (1996. p.130).

The first chapter will discuss *Dictee* as a work that deterritorializes both the English and French language by pushing both of these major languages to their limits, to the point at

which they collapse. The first section of this chapter will think about this in relation to how Cha deconstructs and resets language through the use of language lessons as form. The second part of this chapter will look at Cha's exploration of the physical sensation of speech and utterance, another way that Cha breaks down language, by returning it to its roots.

The second chapter will discuss *Dictee* as a work that possesses a connection to the political in the way in which the content of the book is structured with unnamed images and untranslated text. The first half of this chapter will be composed solely of images.

The third chapter will think about *Dictee* as embodying a collective assemblage of enunciation, the third and final characteristic of a minor literature. This chapter will consider *Dictee* as a work spoken through a resonance of multiple disembodied voices which call upon an alternate retelling of history and with that, a new kind of future.

The distinction is made by Deleuze and Guattari that “minor no longer designates specific literatures but the revolutionary conditions for every literature within the heart of what is called great (or established) literature.” (1986, p.18). A minor literature does not refer to a minor language, nor to a work of lesser value but rather, refers to the way in which language can be spoken through and reconstructed by minorities speaking from within that language, and the political potential of this process. “A minor literature is the literature of a minority or marginalized group, written, not in a minor language, but in a major one” (Butler, 2002, p.19). Major and minor literature are not held here in a binary opposition, but rather represent a varied use of a language. Major and minor literature can be thought of as “two different usages of the same language” (Bleyen, 2012, p.10).

In the year 1982, the Korean American poet, artist and filmmaker Theresa Hak Kyung Cha published what would be her first and only novel, *Dictee*. *Dictee* is an experimental novel composed of diagrams, photography, poetry, film stills and text. The novel is divided into 9 chapters, each one named after a Greek muse. Through a bricolage structure, Cha non sequentially traces the personal stories of multiple women throughout millenia, including Jeanne d'Arc, Chas Mother Hyung Soon Huo, and Korean revolutionary Yu Guan Soon.

Theresa Hak Kyung Cha was born during the Korean war in 1951 in Busan, South Korea. In 1964, following a year's sojourn in Hawaii, Cha, her Mother, Father and 4 siblings immigrated to the San Francisco Bay Area, escaping the North Korean invasion. Here Cha attended a Catholic French girls school, and soon learned both English and French. She was fluent in English, French and Korean. She studied art and writing at the University of California, Berkeley, receiving 4 degrees from the University of California at Berkeley over a 10 year period. Her work is interdisciplinary, moving between the languages of performance, text, video, audio and installation. Language, in both its spoken and written form, is fundamental to Chas work.

My video, film and performance work are explorations of language, structures inherent in written and spoken material, photographic, and filmic images and the creation of new relationships and meanings in the simultaneity of these forms.
(Cha, 1978, cited in Lewallen, 2001, p.9)

One week after the publication of *Dictee* on November 5th 1982 Theresa Hak Kyung Cha was murdered by a security guard in New York City, dying a premature death at the age of 31.

Chapter 1. Deterritorializing Language

1.A Language.Lesson.

Dictate: verb/dik-tayt

1. State or order something authoritatively
2. Control or influence: 'choice is often dictated by availability'
3. Say or read aloud words to be typed or written down.

(Soanes and Hawker, 2005, p.275)

Traduire en francais:

1. I want you to speak.
2. I wanted him to speak.
3. I shall want you to speak.
4. Are you afraid he will speak?
5. Were you afraid they would speak?
6. It will be better for him to speak to us.
7. Was it necessary for you to write?
8. Wait till I write.
9. Why didn't you wait so that I could write to you?

(Cha, 2001, p. 9).

Deleuze and Guattari refer to 'deterritorialization' in several of their texts and with each application of the term its description varies slightly. In discussing the work of Kafka and his

use of the German language, however, they describe deterritorialization as the breaking down or undoing of a language. “Deterritorialization involves the neutralization of sense, or the signifying aspects of language, and a foregrounding of the latter’s asignifying, intensive aspects.” (O’Sullivan, 2005, p.1).

Deleuze and Guattari posit that a territorialized or major language can be deterritorialized through the process of a writer experimenting with and unsettling that language, breaking it from the constraints of signification. A literary deterritorialization according to Deleuze and Guattari is one that “mutates content, forcing enunciations and expressions to ‘disarticulate’” (1986, cited in Parr, 2005, p.67).

Deleuze and Guattari place other artists, writers and filmmakers aside from Kafka into this category of minor literature (albeit all male) including Samuel Beckett, James Joyce, and Jean-Luc Godard. They state that Beckett, an Irish novelist and playwright born under British rule, by writing through the imposed colonial language of English pushes deterritorialization to the point where “nothing remains but intensities.” (Deleuze, 1995, p.19).

Cha drew upon and was influenced by the work of Beckett, by his use of multilingualism, his use of repetition and of rhythm. Dillon speaks to both the connection and the disparity between the two.

Like Beckett—only more so, because with her it is not a matter of elective exile and affinity—Cha writes from a place where no tongue is truly her own, but must be claimed and reclaimed, made and broken, renovated and abandoned to prove she was there. (2020, p.157)

Both writers unfix language, taking it apart and making the familiar unfamiliar. With their writing, language undergoes “a kind of stammering and stuttering, becoming a stranger in one's own tongue” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986, p. 21).

Throughout *Dictee* Cha evokes feelings of dislocation through her use of linguistic rupture. Within Chas work “ transformation is brought about through manipulation, process as changing the syntax, isolation, removing from context, repetition, and reduction to minimal units” (Cha, 1976, cited in Rinder, 2001, p.20).

Cha’s Mother, Hyung Soon Huo fled from Korea during the Japanese occupation beginning in 1919, and sought asylum in Manchuria, China where she was required to teach Japanese. Japan occupied Korea for the 35 years that followed, ending in 1945 with the surrender of Japan at the end of World War II. During the period of Korean annexation into the Japanese Empire, Koreans were forced by the Japanese military dictatorship to take on Japanese cultural and religious practices. Native Korean cultural practices were banned, Korean language and names were forcibly suppressed.

Cha addresses her mother in the chapter of *Dictee* titled CALLIOPE EPIC POETRY. She refers to the Japanese language that has been forced upon her Mothers tongue “ You speak the tongue, the mandatory language like the others. It is not your own. Even if it is not, you know you must.” (Cha, 2001, p. 45). As though remembering for her, Cha describes her Mothers first day teaching at a school in Manchuria. The loss of the Korean language is historicized through the retelling of this moment in time, passed from daughter to mother.

The teachers speak in Japanese to each other. You are Korean. The Teachers are Korean.... Fifty children to your class. They must speak their name in Korean as well

as how they should be called in Japanese . . . They force their speech upon you and direct your speech only to them.(Cha, 2001, p.49-50)

Hyung Soon Huo here becomes a victim of dictation both as the Japanese language is imposed upon her and her name taken, whilst at the same time being required, through her role as teacher, to require dictation, to pass the colonisers language onto her Korean students, to become a facilitator is the stripping of the Korean tongue (Lowe, 1996, p.138).

Through this process, this violent stripping of name and language, there is a forced removal of identity, a silencing. “Without her mother tongue, she is orphaned. To be without name and without language is a kind of exile” (Arnold, 2018).

In the opening lines of *Dictee* a French Grammar lesson unfolds. Two passages sit together. The first, written in french, reads “ Aller à la ligne C'était le premier jour point Elle venait de loin point” (Cha, 1982, p.1). The subject then goes on to rewrite an approximation of the French text, this time by its English translation

“Open paragraph It was the first day period She had come from a far period tonight at dinner comma the families would ask comma open quotation marks How was the first day interrogation mark close quotation marks.”
(Cha, 1982, p. 1)

These two paragraphs placed in proximity give the sense of a language lesson taking place, whereby text is required to be transcribed from French, the language of French catholic missionary colonialism in Korea in the 1840's to English, the imperial power that enforced the division of Korea into North and South in 1945.

The format of the language lessons is frequently used throughout *Dictee*. Text written in French and non- standardised English often appears, at times untranslated, laid out

numerically, like that of a worksheet or a school book. There is a sense of someone being tested, of someone being repeatedly questioned until they get it ‘right’. The process of language acquisition is evoked as Cha displays the classroom setting as a site where an individual is shaped. The process of dictation occurs in both the transcription of words from mouth to page, as well as dictation occurring as an order, as an authoritative tool. “The opening metaphor of dictation focuses our attention on education as one site of subject formation.” (Lowe, 1996, p.135)

We see this again later in *Dictee*. Cha writes

First Friday. One hour before mass. Mass every first Friday. Dictee first. Before mass. Dictee before. Every Friday. Before Mass. Dictee before. Back in the study hall. It is time. Snaps once. One step right from the desk. Single file. Snaps twice. Follow single line. (2001, p.18)

Through this use of punctuation, Cha creates this feeling of being outside of a language.

The narrator's discomfort and unfamiliarity with the English language is evident through this jerking motion, these abrupt points of pause. These frequent and stark moments of pause prevent the reader from becoming immersed in the text, there is no sense of flow or rhythm, but rather this stopping and starting motion. “Cha’s use of the period is so aggressive it flattens her voice into a hard robotic drill” (Hong, 2020, p.163).

As Hong writes, although Cha herself was fluent in English, French and Korean, by mimicking the stuttering of someone speaking a second language she “made the immigrants discomfort with English into a possible form of expression” (Hong, 2020, p.163).

Throughout *Dictee*, Cha writes “as if she were still the Catholic high School girl dictating her

story back in her broken English” (Hong, 2020, p.162). Punctuation marks are expressed as words, a question mark is an ‘interrogation mark’. Typographical symbols are written by name. The narrator's recitation is staggered, it stops and starts, giving the impression of a text written without certainty. There is a disconnect between the language and the narrator, as though it were something estranged from the speaker. Cha quotes..

As a foreigner, learning a new language extended beyond its basic function of communication as it is generally for a native speaker, to a consciously imposed detachment that allowed analysis and experimentation with other relationships of language. (cited in Lewallen, 2001, p.9).

By using the form of language lesson to express the discomfort and difficulty in learning a language that has been forced upon a subject, Cha deterritorializes the French and English language, turning them back on themselves, making them stumble and falter. She refuses them, portraying language as “ both the wound and the instrument that wounds” (Hong, 2020, p.163). O’Sullivan summarises deterritorialization, which Cha demonstrates so succinctly in *Dictee* “A minor literature stutters and stammers the major. It breaks with the operation of order words. It stops making sense.” (O’Sullivan, 2012, p.4)

1.B Mouth. Moves.

What happens to the memory,
Of other languages,
Carried in the body as poetry,
When everyone on the periphery,
The people who memorise,
These poems,
On their long journeys,
To other lands, is gone.
(Kapil, 2020, p.29)

Mouth to Mouth (1975) (*Fig.1*) is a black and white 8 minute video piece by Cha. The piece is an expression of the Korean language in its most elementary form. The film opens with the camera slowly panning across the arrangement of the letters that make up the words *Mouth to Mouth*. The outline of a mouth appears amidst the static haze, almost resembling a sonogram. The mouth dissolves in and out, obscured by the snowy grain. Slowly the lips part and move to make the shapes of 8 Korean vowel graphemes, enunciated in the phonetic script of the Korean alphabet Han'gŭl. Hangul, composed of a twenty eight letter alphabet, was based upon “ articulatory phonetic theory” (Rinder, 2005, p.105), meaning that the structure of

each letter is modeled based on the shape of the mouth as it moves to pronounce the sound of each letter. Prior to its creation Korean was written in complex Chinese characters, known as “*hanja*” of which only the privileged were literate. Hangul was referred to disparagingly by some as ‘women’s script’ due its popularity amongst women. (Arnold, 2018). “Hangul conveyed something of women’s lived experiences between and among women and through time.”(Arnold, 2018). We can’t hear the sounds the mouth makes as it moves, but instead the sound of television static, like a hazy rain. The image is obscured and destroyed by the grain suggesting “ a loss of language over time” (Rinder, 2005, p.105).

Within *Dictee*, Cha traces in great detail the process of coming into speech, reciting the physical sensation of language felt within the body. Lew quotes “*Dictee* is concerned with not only the structuration of language and memory, but their human physicality - the tissue and action of the very organs and pressures that produce them” (1992, cited in Kim, 2013, p.128).

Connection is drawn between the body and language as Cha marks the process of speech in a language that has been imposed upon the colonised subject. A diagram of the organs of speech also appear in *Dictee*, ‘the larynx’, ‘the oral passage’, ‘the left lung’, are labelled (*fig.2*). The process of coming into speech is recited in painstaking detail, following speech as it evolves within the body.

The entire lower lip would lift upwards then sink back to its original place. She would then gather both lips and protrude them in a pout taking in the breath that might utter some thin. (One thing. Just one.)But the breath falls away. With a slight tilting of her head backwards, she would gather the strength in her shoulders and remain in this position. It murmurs inside. It murmurs. Inside is the pain of speech the pain to say. (Cha, 2001, p.3)

Outlined here is the discomfort of speaking through a language that has been enforced upon the subject, and how that discomfort rises up in the body.

In this way Cha deterritorializes the English language through exploring its effect upon the body and in turn the body's effect upon language. "Speech itself appears to have been fractured through the trauma of exile" (Rinder, p.18, 2001). While *Mouth to Mouth* explores the loss of speech as a result of physical and cultural displacement, *Dictee* explores the discomfort of speaking through a colonial language, using this process of speech to break down language, showing how it emerges from the body, speaking to " the roots of language before it is born on the tip of the tongue" (1976, Cha cited in Rinder, 2001, p. 19)

Chapter 2. The Connection of the Individual to a Political Immediacy

2.A. Figure. Name.

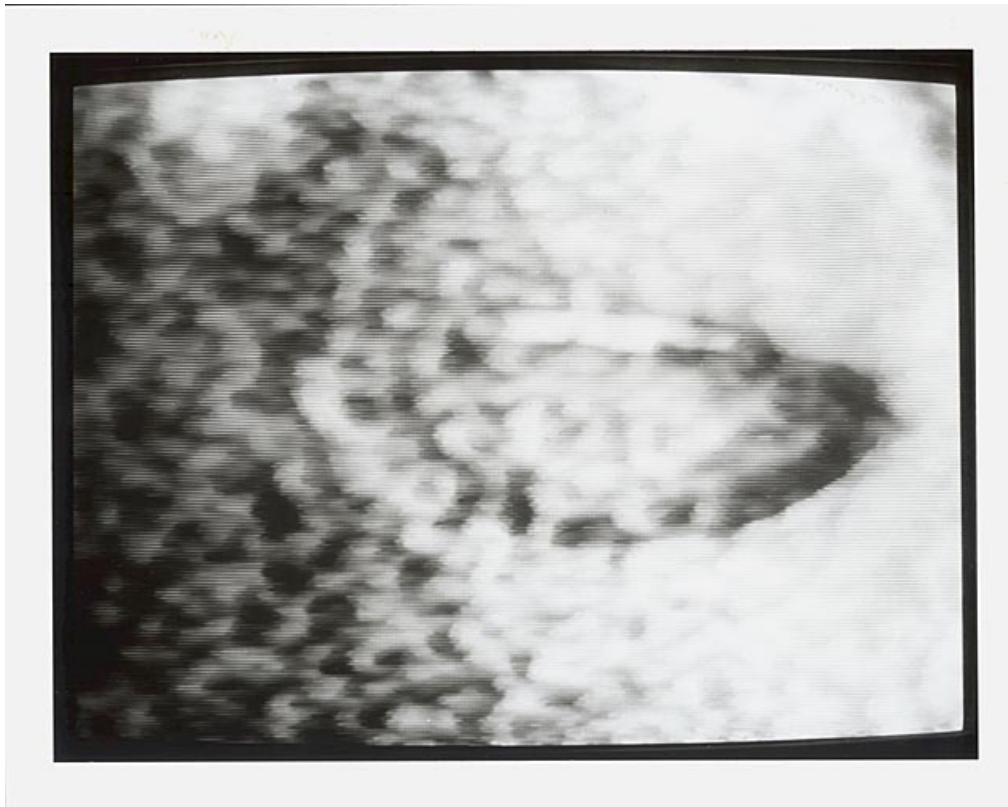


Figure 1. Mouth to Mouth

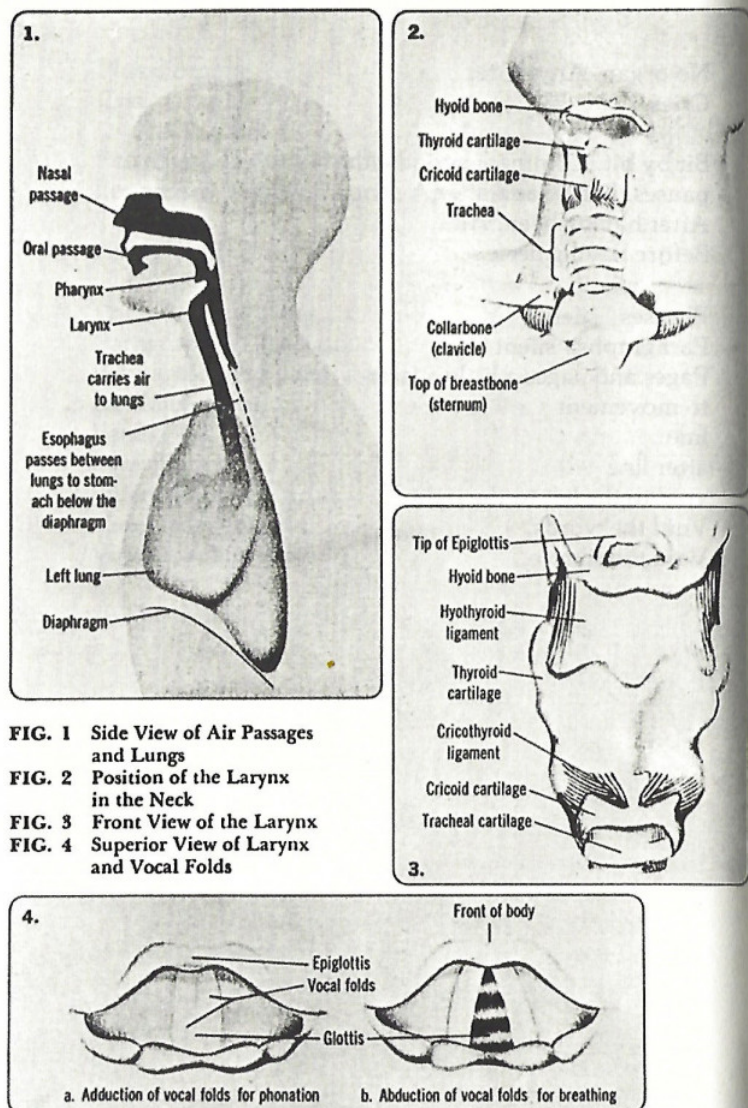


Figure 2. Untitled



Figure 3. Passages Paysages



Figure 4. Untitled

2.B Image.Word.

“When one arrives at the page through colonized, plundered, and erased histories and diasporas, to write a smooth and cohesive novel is to ultimately write a lie.” (Vuong, 2017)

“As we are taught to read, what we engage are not texts but paradigms.” (1980, Kolodny cited in Sparh, 1996, p.26)

“Dead time. Hollow depression interred invalid to resurgence, resistant to memory. Waits. Apel. Appellation. Excavation” (Cha, 2001 p.123).

The second characteristic of a minor literature is the “connection of the individual to a political immediacy” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p.18). In other words, everything within a minor literature is political.

“ Its cramped space forces each individual intrigue to connect immediately to politics. The individual concern thus becomes all the more necessary, indispensable, magnified, because a whole other story is vibrating within it. ” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p.17)

Bleyen elucidates this point, highlighting that political immediacy here does not imply that the author of a minor literature is making a direct critique, but rather that a minor literature is political in the sense that it paves the way for new kinds of thought.

Here politics is not understood as overt political critique, for that would be to remain within the same realm, or merely to find a new dominant voice to replace the existing standard. Rather the politics of the minor is connected to a becoming, a work of demolition which is continuously the building of a new assemblage (Bleyen, 2012, p.10).

Dictee demonstrates a connection to ‘the political’ in the way it challenges form, in its refusal to adhere to a conventional form both in terms of content and structure. “Asignification here takes on an explicitly political function, in so far as it disrupts any given signifying regime” (O’Sullivan, 2005, p.2).

Dictee undergoes a political refusal in the sense that it “blurs the conventions of genre and narrative authority, troubling the formal categories on which canonisation depends” (Lowe, 1996, p.52). The work resists summation. *Dictee* in its resistance to familiar modes of reading functions as a political tool, embodying an assemblage of fragments that refuse to delineate themselves chronologically or in a cohesive manner. There is no hierarchy and there is no centre. “These scraps of information refigure ‘nation’ as something complex, multifarious, articulated within and against a colonial tongue... There is no native land or language in *Dictee*” (Sparh, 1996, p.39). The disjointed narrative moves the reader away from familiar/comfortable reading practice, opening the reader up to new modes of engagement by abandoning a standard way of reading. *Dictee* shakes the belief that “text is written so as to be linguistically and culturally transparent to the reader without recourse to other systems of knowledge ” (Sparh, 1996, p.30).

Black and white photographs, diagrams, film stills, maps and portraits are scattered across the pages of *Dictee*. None of these images are contextualised or given with the company of name. A grainy image depicts a crowd of people, a blur of bodies, their faces all turned towards the

same direction, as though their vision is being drawn to something or to someone (*Fig.4*).

This captionless image is not a well known one, and without title it is unclear as to what these people are looking at, looking to, looking for, or who even, these people are. Cheng refers to this image, placing it in context, explaining that it is a photograph of a student demonstration during the 1919 Korean Independence Movement. Afterwards, the protest was silenced by the Korean Government who claimed it to be a communist uprising (Cheng, 1998, p.121). During this demonstration over two hundred students were brutally attacked. By presenting this image and presenting it without name or contextual information, Cha does not offer the image as a source of information or documentation but rather asks the viewer to recognise the image as merely a representation of an event.

By denying the reader access to textual information about the event, Cha speaks to the impossibility of truly representing history, and illuminating the limitations of both image and memory. The use of image without caption shows the limitations of language as a mode of recall, emphasizing “how the past speaks in ways that escape the capture of discursive language.” (Kim, 2013, p.138)

This resistance of easy reading also applies to Cha's use of untranslated text, again destabilising familiar reading practice. By writing in untranslated Korean and the major languages of colonial expansion that are English and French, Cha dismantles assumptions of reading, puncturing moments of engagement within the text. “The disruptive moments of untranslated or non standardized second language usage serve as subtle, temporal shocks that jolt the reader out of absorptive reading practices.” (Sparh, 1996, p.30). In this way *Dictée* refuses passive spectatorship and calls upon a rethinking of how one might read.

Sparh also acknowledges the possibility that a reader might skim over sections of text indecipherable to them, as opposed to consulting, say, a dictionary or friend to translate the text. Sparh states that even to bypass a section of text is still to engage in a political process.

Instead of questioning how to master the text, passive, skipping readers must confront, at each place they encounter the undecipherable language, the questions of who speaks to whom, what it might mean that they do not know this language, and what it means to be unknowing when performing an activity such as reading. (Sparh, 1996, p.31).

This resistance, this difficulty for most readers to fully comprehend the entirety of *Dictee* is what opens up new ways of thinking about reading and the assumptions that influence how we navigate a text.

Film as a medium holds the potential, like a book, to place disparate periods of time in relation to one another, of creating obscured timelines. In Chas video work *Passages Paysages* (1978) (*Figure.3*) Cha disperses three super 8 video works across 3 separate monitors. Each video is composed of ephemera (family photographs, old letters) and scenes from Chas family home. By moving the eye of the viewer across multiple screens, by positioning different periods of time in order to disrupt linear narrative, Cha draws the audience's attention to their position as viewer/subject, warning them of the effects of media and external sources upon the self “unconscious is not purely personal, but is constituted within a web of larger forces: the violence’s of imperialism, the displacements of modernity, the lure of cinema.” (Chang, 2001) Cha performs political resistance in the act, disrupting passive viewing and calling for “new practises of reading and spectatorship.”(Chang, 2001)

Although *Dictee* might first appear as a collection of archival footage presented in documentary form, the book in fact evades easy comprehension, Cha “ gives her readers evidences divorced from their testimonies” (Cheng, 1998, p.121). Through her portrayal of history through these disconnected and unnamed depictions, Cha critiques documentary form.

“The very form of *Dictee* reveals that the documentation of history is itself a process of pluralization and performative reiteration, suggesting that retrieved history must be

understood as an instance of dissimulated historicity with all the fantasmatic attachments inevitable to any act of reconstruction.” (Cheng, 1998, p 123)

Through Cha's resistance of form, through the evasion of genre, the use of captionless images, of untranslated text, of scattering moving image work across multiple screens, Cha critiques structures of power that influence the way that we engage with representations of history.

This is a political act as Cha calls into being an audience who enact new practices of spectatorship. “What defines majority is a model you have to conform to ... A minority, on the other hand, has no model, it's a becoming, a process” (Deleuze, 1995, p.173)

Chapter 3. The Collective Assemblage of Enunciation

“You remain dismembered with the belief that magnolia blooms white even on seemingly dead branches and you wait” (Cha, 2001, p.155)

all writing is itself this special voice, consisting of several indiscernible voices, and that literature is precisely the invention of this voice, to which we cannot assign a specific origin: literature is that neuter, that composite, that oblique into which every subject escapes, the trap where all identity is lost, beginning with the very identity of the body that writes (Barthes, 1967, p. 142).

Deleuze and Guattari define the third characteristic of a minor literature as a literature in which “ everything takes on a collective value” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p.17). Deleuze and Guattari describe this aspect of a minor literature as being a result of a scarcity of artists and writers within that minor literature.

Precisely because talent isn't abundant in a minor literature, there are no possibilities for an individuated enunciation that would belong to this or that ‘master’ and that could be separated from a collective enunciation. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p.17)

As a result, there is less emphasis upon the individual and more significance weighted upon “the collective production of work” (O’Sullivan, 2006, p.71). The merit in this final

component of a minor literature can be found in its ability to pave the way forward for future communities. “ A minor art is prophetic in this sense: it summons its audience forth” (O’Sullivan, 2005, p.6).

Writers of minor literature are said to remove themselves from view in order to speak to a collective experience. “ Within minor literature writers try to efface themselves and articulate collective voices.” (Bleyen, 2012, p.10). Cha whilst at the same time exploring her own experience of dislocation and exile, manages to obscure herself in *Dictee* as well as in her other works such as the aforementioned *Mouth to Mouth* (1975) where only her mouth appears in shot. In this way she “Blurs the distinctions between a specific collectivity and the individual self” (Kim ,1994, p. 23).

As mentioned in chapter 2, much of *Dictee* is made up of unfamiliar, unnamed images that are difficult to place. Symbolism is sliced and we are left only with fragments and debris. This characteristic of the novel also applies to Dictees subject. We are never told the name of the narrator or even if the narrator is in fact singular. The subject of *Dictee* is unnamed and unidentifiable, Cha’s “ use of language and images evokes a sense of impersonality, because they seem not to derive from or pertain to a knowable individual subject with whom we may readily identify.” (Chang, 2001)

We do however, encounter many women as we traverse through the novel. Evocations of Joan of Arc as portrayed by Renée Jeanne Falconetti in Carl Dreyer's 1928 film ‘ The Passion of Joan of Arc’, Korean nationalist martyr Yu Guan Soon, Hyung Soon Huo (Cha’s Mother) arise, along with the entangled and overlapping temporalities within which these women lived. What connects these women together is not their patriotism but their resistance to cultural norms. (Spahr, 1996, p. 28). Cha speaks to identity, exile and displacement by introducing the reader to this constellation of women who have existed within different

pockets of time, holding these voices together, history is communicated through a collective utterance.

In 1979 Cha travelled to Seoul to document what was at the time modern Korea, for a film she was working on, titled *White Dust from Mongolia* (1980) which exists today only in the rolls of film and an unfinished script. The film was set in China, and to be placed during the period in which Korea was occupied by Japan. China was where many Koreans fled to seek asylum, including Chas Mother. *White Dust from Mongolia* was set to feature a fictional character, a woman without name, suffering from memory loss as a result of amnesia. In her lack of identity, this woman embodies multiple possible identities. Of this fictional character Cha writes

Her past is speculative, fictitious, or imagined. The narrative alludes to abandonment, war, orphanage, her absolute anonymity—encompassing her disappearance, her abandonment, and finally her lack of memory, and lack of speech (amnesia, verbal amnesia). Her anonymity gives the character a possibility of multiple identities, she becomes ‘collective’ a metaphor for any possible identities

—young girl at the cinema

—maid crouching on the ground, her back turned

—marketplace

—orphan

—nation, a historical condition, Mother, Memory. (cited in Kirkland, 2021)

This character serves as an “embodiment of collective feminine experience” (Kirkland, 2021). *White Dust from Magnolia* is similar to *Dictee* in the sense that both thread together the lives and experiences of women throughout Korean history whose memory has been shadowed, having been “buried under layers of male narratives, Korean, Chinese, Japanese and Western” (Kim, 1994, p.14).

Yu Guan Soon, a 16 year old Korean independence activist known for her participation in protesting against Japanese rule during the March First Independence Movement in 1919, is evoked in the chapter CLIO HISTORY “ Child revolutionary child patriot woman soldier deliverer of nation.” (Cha, 2001,p.37). Throughout official Korean, the details of Yu Guans Soons horrific murder has been the main point of focus. This version of history “ emphasises the details of her torture and death, probably to underscore the virtue of individual female self-sacrifice for the benefit of the group while encouraging Korean nationalism” (Kim, 1994, p.16). Cha reclaims Soons story, drawing attention instead, to her leadership, her agency, her refusal (Kim, 1994, p.16). “ Cha challenges hegemonic assumptions and offers presence and empowerment to the traditionally absent and disenfranchised” (Kim, 1994, p.8).

Cha offers the reader another kind of history, “one that illuminates the patriarchal, colonial conditions of women’s erasure as well as the forms of labour, care and sacrifice through which they survive it.” (Kirkland, 2021). Cha does this by using *Dictée*’s subject as the collective voice of these women.

Deleuze and Guattari describe a minor literature as one that breaks down and away from the major. “ A minor art is involved in the production of new subjectivities as well as in turning away from those already in place” (O’Sullivan, 2005, p.7). By speaking through a collective utterance, Cha looks towards disturbing established notions of history and calls for new ways of interpreting the past and with that the creation of different possible futures.

Conclusion

Simon O'Sullivan refers to the way in which the three characteristics of a minor literature are inextricably bound up within each other. These three elements function together to create a rupture, to break away from representation and signal towards something outside of knowledge as it stands.

A minor literature foregrounds a-signification or simply the intensive aspects of language. It counteracts the operation of order-words and the exercise of power this involves by breaking language open to a howling outside/inside. It is these moments of noise-or glitches as we might call them-that free language from itself: at least, from its signifying self: by putting it into contact with other forces. This is an experimentation with, and from within, language. A rupturing of representation. A breaking of the habit of, making sense, of being human.

(O'Sullivan, 2012, p.5)

Both *Dictee* and the surrounding work of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha demonstrate this fracturing, this break from the major. By breaking from traditional modes of literature, Cha articulates the conditions of being between language, of exile, of identity and of memory.

To speak to the manifold layers and the depth of the work that Theresa Hak Kyung Cha made within her short life is outside the possibility of an essay this length. This thesis however, intends to honor and celebrate the work of Cha, to carry her words and vision forward.

It seems fitting then, to conclude with words borrowed from Cha.

If words are to be uttered, they would be from behind the partition. Unaccountable is distance, time to transport from this present minute.
If words are to be sounded, impress through the partition in ever slight measure to the other side the other signature the other hearing the other speech the other grasp.
(Cha, 2001, p.132)

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