How We Might Relate Anew with History:
The Quivering Affects of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictee*

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I. Introduction: The Difficulties and Challenges of *Dictee*

Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictee* is a notoriously difficult text. In *Writing Self, Writing Nation,* the first collection of essays devoted to *Dictee* after over a decade of critical silence, Elaine H. Kim writes that Cha's work refuses an easy entry: "The first time I glanced at *Dictée*, I was put off by the book. . . . What *Dictée* suggested . . . seemed far afield from the identity I was after: a congealed essence defined by exclusionary attributes, closed, ready-made, and easy to quantify" (3-4).[1] Not only does

1) There has been some variance among critics concerning the title of Cha's work: in *Writing Self, Writing Nation, Dictée* is written with the acute accent (*accent aigu*), conforming to French grammar that marks the word as either a noun meaning "dictation," or a feminine past participle of the verb, *dicter*, to dictate. Yet on both the cover and title pages Cha omits the accent. Following Cha's own transcription, this paper refers to her work as *Dictee,* except when quoting sources where the title is written otherwise. Marie-Agnès Gay suggests that Cha's decision highlights the suffix *-ee,* which would make the title refer to a person who receives dictation, "as in *addressee* or *narratee*" (par. 2). I would further suggest that the title exemplifies Cha's playful shuttling between English and French linguistic structures, settling on neither, and it invites us to sound out the title as a fragment—[dıkti] or [dikte]—rather than to fix as a legitimate

Dictee step away from such consolidated identities, but it also refrains from presenting a coherent narrative. Divided into nine sections roughly based upon the names of the Greek muses, *Dictee* presents a collage of uncaptioned images and broken phrases that appear unconnected with each other. Such difficulties challenge and thwart the reader's desire to extract a developmental plot, a desire perhaps instilled by the too-familiar modes of understanding history as a smooth, linear narrative, and the idea of a "ready-made" Asian(-American) subject who excavates and restores one's origins. *Dictee's* difficulty, then, arises due to its effort to intervene in dominant historiographies that hastily cover up scars of history, leaving them behind in a linear narrative of progress. *Dictee* performs the work of bringing histories of colonization, war, and division to the present, and investigating new modes of relating to history that do not neglect nor reify such wounds.

Cha's work invites us to ask: how *do* we relate with the past? How can cold, black letters on the white page of a history book convince us that something is at stake in remembering what has happened and what has been lost? For the privileged form of accessing the past has been through language. The notions of history as writing, as text, and as discursive formation have preoccupied critics of *Dictee,* beginning with questions of what is represented in the text (Korean history) and who represents it (a Korean-American woman). *Dictee*'s fragmented form has especially attracted (post)structuralist readings concentrating on the figure of the "diseuse," or speaker, who becomes an echo-chamber for disjointed voices of the past. Lisa Lowe, for instance, sees *Dictee* as experimenting with multiple subject positions that resist "a single dictated formation of the subject" (58), while Timothy Yu goes further, suggesting that Cha rethinks historical formations such as that of the colonizer-colonized

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grammatical unit pertaining to any one language.

"as abstract positions within language" (136). Such readings that focus heavily on the discursive formation or deconstruction of identity, however, neglect that the diseuse is not simply a figure of subject-formation through writing, but a figure who brings together fragmented voices of history through labored speech. This paper turns attention to the desire that propels the diseuse to speak in the first place, reading *Dictee* as a project of relationality rather than as a study in subjectivity. By reinvesting moments of historical trauma with melancholic affect, Cha shapes connective tissues with a fragmented past. As a refusal to terminate or smooth over losses, melancholia disrupts the linear figuration of time, allowing the diseuse to throw open an enunciative "now" through the act of speaking to or mediating the voices of lost others. In *Dictee,* this melancholic temporality is fueled by a longing to find an alternative mode of "doing" history—as opposed to "reading" or "excavating"—that brings erased and absent beings to co-inhabit the present.

This mode of relating to the past is physical as well as psychic. As an embodied figure filled with melancholic longing, the diseuse struggles physically to produce labored speech—or rather, an "utter" that does not quite fit into the mold of proper English utterance. Animated by voices lost in history, the diseuse's body resonates with sounds and echoes. This bodily effort of the diseuse presents a new model of history as sensuous, affective knowledge. *Dictee*'s affective investment in the past is best understood through the notion of affect as straddling both the psychological and the physical; more than just structures of feeling, affect is registered foremost as physical sensation. *Dictee* literalizes Brian Massumi's seminal definition of affect as the reverberating motion of the body that has been struck or touched. The psychic strain of the melancholic, who tries to keep the past affectively alive in the present, is here converted to a bodily exertion by which words on a page come to have a felt relation.

Yet *Dictee* also recognizes that the moment of original touch cannot be restored, nor a euphoric reunion possible. This attests to the ethical stakes of Cha's history project: Cha does not purport to recuperate a lost origin or motherland, but lingers upon the (im)possibility of doing so. Such hesitance counters historical narratives of redemption that too easily call upon "historical atrocity as containable," even redeemable, "events" (Cheng 145). This is why *Dictee* centralizes sound as the medium through which we may reconnect with the past: the articulatory labor of the body in producing sound approximates touch, but the far-reaching properties of sound also acknowledge—and yearn to reach through—barriers of time and space that cannot be naively surpassed. The fragments of *Dictee* are interlaced with what I call a quivering affect that oscillates between such hesitance and longing. Merging the erotic yearning for physical touch, and the ethical reserve of hesitation, this quivering affect connects with residues and traces of history in sensory forms such as echoes, as well as stains and heat that reverberate, flow, and radiate through temporal and material borders to open a new mode of affective relation with history.

II. How to Relive the Past: Forging a Melancholic Temporality through Enunciation

The elusive speaking subject of *Dictee* has been a central issue for critics. Elaine Kim ultimately asserts that *Dictee* is narrated by a female "Korean American narrator," emphasizing the text's rootedness in Korean history and the female narrator's intervention in a male-dominated national identity (22). L. Hyun Yi Kang similarly notes that *Dictee* creates a "very fluid and heterogenous," yet markedly "Korean feminist subjectivity" (98). Yet if Kim and Kang tend to confuse Cha herself with the text's "narrator" or central voice, other critics note that

Dictee is more concerned with the process of subject formation rather than staging a certain subject. Lowe, for instance, notes that *Dictee* presents "refusals of the demand for uniform subjectivity dictated by several languages" (43). Drawing from the Althusserian notion of interpellation, Lowe reads the scenes of dictation repeated in *Dictee* as revealing the voices of ideology that mold subjectivities. For Lowe, dictation also makes visible the resistant tensions created by "unfaithful" subjects, who elude such interpellations and refuse to be named: "*Dictee* unsettles the authority of any single theory to totalize or subsume it as its object" (37).

If Lowe identifies Japanese colonialist forces, U. S. imperial interests, and the Catholic Church as the voices discursively mold the speaking subject, Anne Anlin Cheng discovers that race is also one of such ideologies that operate in *Dictee*. Yet Cheng's more crucial insight is that *Dictee* is concerned with the desire involved in the process of such discursive identity formations. According to Cheng, racial identity is formed through an identification that is at once coercive and enjoyable. The racial subject is constructed when it mimetically echoes a culturally dictating voice, but the source of this voice remains "significantly, mournfully, *and* strategically unlocatable" (162). This void is the center of what Cheng calls racial melancholia, predicated on "the impossibility of origin as an empty sign that is always set up as something devoutly to be wished for" (168). Cheng therefore locates racial identity in a collective fantasy that "fails . . . to recognize . . . its own fantasmatic beginnings" (168). *Dictee* is a project that restages and, more importantly, critiques the desire to recuperate this lost origin. If the void found in place of the lost origin fuels a documentary desire to "bear witness as some kind of 'redemptive' act" (143), Cheng notes that Cha refuses to resolve such desire, leaving fragmented images unexplained and un-located within a coherent narrative. The images become "melancholic evidences" that

"register[] loss, even as [they] recognize[] the unrecognizability of the content of loss" (147). Such a "collage of stranded objects" throws open the gap between the actual event and a posteriori representation, highlighting the impossibility of restoring original presence. (145). *Dictee* deconstructs the melancholic formation of identity by staging such melancholic desire without fulfilling it.

Cheng's reading insightfully reintroduces desire and longing in the formation of *Dictee*'s speaking subject(s), questioning identity as purely the effect of language or structure. Yet in *Dictee,* I would note that melancholic longing also works as the basis for *intervening* in dominant ideologies of identity and historiography. As Cheng briefly acknowledges, Cha does not propose "the sanctification/silencing of traumatic history" (145). What Cheng calls "a relation to the world that is melancholic" does not simply relegate history to the realm of the inaccessible (147); it rather reactivates an affective relation between the past and present that reconnects without purporting to restore or redeem what has been lost. The "melancholic evidences" of *Dictee* challenge narrative historiography, proposing a new way of doing history that does not reappropriate the past.

Dictee's issue with written history is that it no longer has a living relation with the present; instead, it has been "[n]eutralized to achieve the no-response" (33). In "Clio/History," Cha grapples with official accounts of history which have been "congeal[ed]" and polished over the lived experience of violence:

> Unfathomable the words, the terminology: enemy, atrocities, conquest, betrayal, invasion, destruction. They exist only in the larger perception of History's recording, . . . Not physical enough. Not to the very flesh and bone, to the core, to the mark, to the point where it is necessary to intervene, even if to invent anew, expressions, for *this* experience, for this *outcome,* that does not cease to continue. (33)

In official history, national heroes such as Yu Guan Soon remain fixed in time, labeled with a series of cliches running over each other: "Child revolutionary child patriot woman soldier deliverer of nation" (37). Such records "[m]iss[ ] nothing" in the sense that they have been tamed into mechanically repeated phrases. Against such "bland, mundane" phrases (33), Cha alternatively "decapacitated forms" of memory that "[m]aintain[ ] the missing" by "reveal[ing] the missing, the absent" (38). Heavily punctuated phrases lay bare the loss concealed by such records: "Still born. Aborted. Barely. Infant. Seed, germ, sprout, less even. Dormant. Stagnant. Missing" (38). In the jarring, disconnected strokes of mono- or bi-syllabic phrases, Cha "invents anew" a fragmented language that re-enacts the stabs which pierced Yu Guan Soon's body. The absence of a stringing syntax between the stark words bares her bodily wounds, "reveal[ing] the missing, the absent" (38).

Yet while such fragments provide a starting point for an alternative historiography, they are not enough, since the mere re-play of disconnected moments risks subordinating the present to moments of original loss. While Cheng argues that *Dictee* proposes history as fragment, *Dictee* also searches for new modes of stringing and assembling such fragments without enclosing them in a contained narrative or fixating upon a single moment. Melancholia works as the central affect which arouses and answers this need to "invent anew" other modes of relation to history. In "Mourning and Melancholia," Freud considers melancholia as a psychic structure that entails the ego's unceasing investment in the lost object. Refusing to withdraw libidinal investment, the melancholic incorporates the lost object in the ego, undergoing a psychic struggle to keep it alive in the present. Freud suggests that this leads to paralysis, as the ego is numbed with a narcissistic identification with the lost object. Yet this incorporation of the lost object in the ego also registers a labored relationality between them that creates a new sense of time. As

the empty space of the lost object is arduously invested with longing, this becomes a way of contending with the flow of sequential temporality by continually bringing the past into the present. Melancholia establishes a continuing relationship with the past that resists the smoothing over of loss. In *Dictee,* this melancholic temporality disrupts the linear temporality that creates binary formations —past and present, lost and found, represented image and representing subject—and allows us to reimagine a psychic entanglement with the traces of history.

Dictee's melancholic temporality is created through the diseuse, whose speech opens an enunciative "now" that becomes real and ongoing through the act of speaking itself. The diseuse draws from strategies of the lyric that bring persons and events into what Culler calls the "lyric present" (*Lyric* 294). The simple present tense of action verbs—usually replaced with present progressive in ordinary speech (i.e., "I am walking," rather than "I walk")—creates a unique temporality, "an iterable *now* of lyric enunciation, rather than [the] now of linear time" (*Lyric* 289). As Susan Stewart also notes, lyric enunciation transforms language from a medium of expression to an event that "occurs" and "can be continually called on, called to mind, in the unfolding present" (*Senses* 104). The simple present that pervades *Dictee* transforms the diseuse's enunciation into a performative speech that enacts, rather than representation of events. *Dictee* therefore reformulates the question of historical representation—who represents whom—into enunciative enactment.

In "Calliope/Epic Poetry," the diseuse speaks in the voice of a daughter who calls to her mother and brings her childhood in Manchuria during the Japanese annexation into this enunciative now: "Mother, you are eighteen years old" (45). This apostrophic address "displace[s] a time of narrative, of past events reported, and place[s] us in the continuing present . . ., the 'now' in which . . . a poetic event can repeatedly occur" (Culler, *Lyric* 226). In linear narrative time, the present becomes lost

forever in the irreversibility of temporal sequence; in contrast, the apostrophe, convoking persons and objects as presences in the lyric "now," "displace[s] this irreversible structure by removing it from linear time and locating it in a discursive time" (*Lyric* 227). Yet if this lyric now tends to stand outside history, *Dictee*'s melancholic now arises from a longing to reconnect with the lost figures of history. The apostrophic address in *Dictee,* moreover, is more than the one-sided call of a speaking, writing subject bringing the spoken, written object into being—rather, the diseuse's address is a response to prior voices that have already called to and animated her: "*She waits to service this* . . . She relays the others" (4). The unidirectional apostrophe becomes a form of reciprocation across time, since the diseuse's address is a response to the mother's earlier wish for an "Antiphonal song" or "choral answer" that would return an "ebb and tide of echo" to her own song (47).

Through this apostrophic address/response, the diseuse revives and shares the mother's "MAH-UHM" (45). "MAH-UHM" is not simply a memory but an immediate sensation that "burns" in the present as "[f]ire alight aflame" (45). As Hyo K. Kim insightfully notes, "MAH-UHM" is "a certain way of feeling-thinking or thinking-feeling and a way of holding on to a memory that exceeds the linear spacing of time" (132).[2)]

2) Hyo Kim is one of the few critics who note that the embodied speaking subject is central to *Dictee*. Kim reads *Dictee* with an eye to the phenomenological notion of the body as a horizon that becomes "constitutively open and made vulnerable to his or her individual and collective Others" (129). According to Kim, the transliteration of "MAH-UHM" in *Dictee* highlights that "one's ties to a culture, a history, and a people survive in unexpected ways precisely because they have been imbued with affect" (134). While this focus on an embodied, affective poetics provides crucial insight for this paper, Kim pays less attention to the specific valences of this "affect" and how it connects the body to a history. Following from Kim's reading, the next sections of this paper addresses the question: how exactly does *Dictee* stage "a phenomenological sense of being oriented toward . . . absent objects produced by History" (141) and how might

This warm, bright image of fire becomes a continuing sensory motif of re-alighting the past in the present. Yet while Kim argues that "MAH-UHM" is here "a mode of being-in-relation to . . . the memory of Korea as homeland" (132), the "homeland" that "MAH-UHM" longs for remains unfixed in a single geographical space. "Calliope," in fact, shows how the exiled mother is cast out by both Korean and American state powers—both American *and* Korean nationalist authorities, ambiguously merged as "they," regard her with suspicion: "when did you leave the country why did you leave this country why are you returning to the country" (57). As Yu points out, *Dictee* refuses to identify home in terms of national discourse, rather deferring "Korea" by "a series of provisional homes . . . so that to identify Korea as the ultimate source, or destination, of this text becomes increasingly difficult" (128). When the mother "take[s] the train home," her destination is not Korea, but the provisional homestead in Manchuria, which becomes "home now your mother your home" (49). What *Dictee* centralizes is not a fixed object of longing, but rather the sheer affective relation, "MAH-UHM"—cast in the form of familial kinship—that fuels longing. This becomes more evident in the latter parts of "Calliope," where the mother, moving to an unspecified location, is tempted by three women who hand her food with unidentifiable origins. The mythic episode stages assimilatory pressures bearing down upon the diasporic figure, since accepting the food would extinguish the mother's "MAH-UHM." What counters such pressures is "the warm tears from [her] mother and father" (53). While the beginning of "Calliope" seemingly stages nostalgia *for* Korea—a formation that divides the longing subject and the longed-for object—the section rather stages longing itself in the form of familial affection, an affective tie that ties the diseuse and the mother, "you" and an unfixed "homeland" together.

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this affect be conceptualized?

Such longing sustains the melancholic temporality of *Dictee,* urging the diseuse to find an alternative mode of relation to history that does not return to a fixed myth of nationhood and race.

III. A Body Formed Through Affective Resonance: The Diseuse as Embodied Echo-Chamber

Dictee's melancholic temporality, however, is not achieved smoothly; the effort to bring lost voices into the enunciative present involves a continuous strain against time. A later section named "Thalia/Comedy" begins with the diseuse as a woman taking a call, who hopes that her reply is enough to revive the absent caller. Her response has been rehearsed down to the "physical impact" of each phrase in the hope that it would "metamorphose the other" by "some inexplicable power" (139). Finding that such "magical shifting" does not occur, the diseuse wishes to abolish "the formula, the ritual" of her premediated response, yearning instead for an "appeas[ing]," "sooth[ing]" ending (140). Yet even as she wishes for painless closure, the diseuse cannot abandon "the search the words of equivalence to that of her feeling . . . Synonym, simile, metaphor, byword, byname, ghostword, phantomnation" (140). The search for similar words ("synonym") extends to poetic creation ("simile, metaphor"), to imagining a language that could recapture what is considered bygone ("byword, byname"), and finally to an alternative vision of history oriented toward specters that elude proper names ("ghostword, phantomnation"). However, even such ghostwords are subsumed within documents that record a "horizontal" journey through time (140). Language is too easily swept up in the linear, "real time" of history as the "[u]naccountable, vacuous, amorphous" movement of time urges her to move "[f]orward" and "[a]head," even "bypassing the present" in its unrelenting flow (140).

Only through her body can the diseuse finally anchor herself amidst the surging progress of time. In a movie theater, the diseuse finds herself in front of a screen that creates a liminal space "between seances," a space of "that which has passed in shadow and darkness" (149). Placed in this space, the diseuse's body is opened to the influence of onscreen images, alternating between stillness and motion: "She hovers . . . as a flame that gives itself stillness and equally to wind as it rises" (149). This screen captivates her not for any story or narrative progression, but because of the effect of "timelessness created in her body" (149-50). The diseuse's body is filled with affective resonances aroused by "the already faded image"—an image which with its "decay and dismemberment render[s] more provocative the absence" of those it captures (150). And from this sensation the diseuse finds a renewed desire to "re-vive" what has been left behind, sedimented, and congealed by the forward surge of time: "From stone. Layers. Of stone upon stone her self stone between the layers, dormant" (150). The flame-like responsiveness of her body allows the diseuse to turn away from methods of documentation and "to refigure the "now" as a space teeming with sensations and affects.

The embodiment of the diseuse is central to how *Dictee* reworks the lyric "now" into a melancholic "now," which is not the discursive space of lyric enunciation but an affective, embodied space. The opening section of *Dictee* pointedly lingers on the diseuse's bodily labor in her effort to speak: she "mimicks the speaking. That might resemble speech," beginning with raw bodily sounds, "[b]ared noise, groan, bits torn from words" (3). To mold noise into recognizable speech, the diseuse must lift and lower her lower lip, "gather[ing] both lips" in the effort to "utter" something, while the unarticulated substance "*murmurs*" and "*festers*" inside as yet-unformed "*wound, liquid, dust*" (3). From the beginning of *Dictee*, the psychic strain of melancholia is thus recast into the physical

effort to give birth to a voice. Yet this emphasis on the bodily exertion of speech does not mean that *Dictee* turns to a pre-formed "materiality of the body as the site of resistance" (Yu 132). The diseuse's body is not a material or maternal vessel that exists prior to speech; rather, the diseuse *emerges* as a speaking body through her laborious engagement with other voices. The diseuse "[a]dmits others" to make herself "full," "swarm," and "swollen," and by filling her body with such others, she is made flesh: "The others each occupying her. Tumorous layers, expel all excess until in all cavities she is flesh" (3-4). Instead of being formed by the "'mark' of writing," as Yu suggests (132), the opening sections show that the diseuse's body is filled by something that eludes language; the resonating voices of others' body put forth the diseuse as an echo-chamber.

This idea of the diseuse's body as constituted by echoing voices strikes up an interesting conversation with Brian Massumi's definition of affect as a reverberating motion that shapes the body. Massumi suggests that affective experience is registered through bodily sensation as a "resonation" which involves both the original feeling and "the feeling of having a feeling" (13-14). To show how resonation amplifies affect, he turns to the metaphor of an echo. As residues of sound, echoes occur only when there exists a "distance . . . between surfaces for the sounds to bounce from" (14). The bouncing back-and-forth of waves against surfaces intensifies the original sound, filling empty space with the "complex patterning" of interrelation between the original waves and reproduced echoes (14). Massumi suggests that such self-related movement be called "intensity," and notes that the echo thus produced fills emptiness with dynamic movement; resonation converts blank space into intensity (14). Affect, or intensity, is therefore best defined as vibration: "[intensity] is filled with motion, vibratory motion, resonation. And it is not yet activity, because the motion is not of the kind that can be directed

(if only symbolically) toward practical ends" (26). This conversion of distance into intensity marks the transformation of "the materiality of the body into an *event*" (14).

Massumi's theory of affect is consonant with how the diseuse's body works in *Dictee*. Rather than existing as Korean(-American) body prior to its relationship with history, the diseuse's body begins as a hollow space that *becomes* an embodied amplifier of other voices. Intensity does not rely on a pre-existing subject: Massumi stresses that the "incipient subjectivity" arising from intensity is not a "self" but a "self-," where the hyphen is retained "as a reminder that 'self' is not a substantive but rather a relation" (14). Unlike emotion, which is "a subjective content, the sociolinguistic fixing of the quality of an experience" that becomes personal psychic property, the yet-unqualified dimension of affect allows it to be a conduit of felt experience, rather than mold of fixed meaning (28). As such an embodied echo-chamber, the diseuse channels other voices and a familial longing for them while refusing to affix such desire to an individual subject. Not yet symbolized nor subjectivized, the affectively embodied diseuse remains a remove away from discursive prescriptions of identity, opening new ways of rethinking fixed inscriptions of nationality and history.

A problem in Massumi's theory of affect would be that he risks giving affect a transcendental priority, as a pre-linguistic, irreducible origin that lurks mysteriously behind language.[3] Yet rather than think of

3) Drawing from Freud, David L. Eng notes that in psychoanalysis, "language is said to bind affect, while affect is thought to exceed symbolic interpretation beyond the occasion of its discursive deployment and decathexis" (190). Affect theorists such as Massumi tend to oppose affect and textuality, affect and discursive language, risking the reification of affect as self-evident experience. Eng urges us to rethink such divides, considering affect as complementary, rather than in opposition to the identities formed through discourse. Taking this cue from Eng, I would point out that *Dictee* acknowledges the inevitability

affect as anterior to language, and language as *re*presenting it, *Dictee* rethinks affective experience and writing together as a "doing" or event, since in Cha's work, the vibratory motion and resonances of affect arise *from* the very effort to speak, to write, to put into words. In *Dictee,* language is no longer a mold that contains and represents historical events, but a performative happening. In fact, the struggle to reach forgotten voices of history *re*figures language itself, as the diseuse's effort to speak dismantles the grammar and creates unpredictable speech rhythms. As Shelley Sunn Wong notes, the "multiple subjectivities" that pass through the diseuse contradict traditional modes of literary production centered around a "single, unified, autonomous consciousness or identity—that of the lyric 'I.'" (117). The diseuse departs from the concept of a singular, coherent speaking subject, resisting identification with a single national identity through an excess that cracks the discourse of wholeness or assimilation. Such excess is presented in "Urania/Astronomy" through broken speech, where the diseuse struggles to capture an elusive memory of the past. If Baudelaire's "Le cygne," which *Dictee* references in this section, presents a speaker who eloquently recounts scenes of exile, the diseuse in contrast stutters and halts in her struggle to access the past. While the diseuse recalls that she "heard the swans / in the rain," further along in her reminiscence the swansong becomes indistinguishable from the rain: "Later, uncertain, if it was / the rain, the speech, memory" (69). Remaining only as "mute signs," the inaudible voices of the past prompt the diseuse to "[b]ite" and "[s]wallow" her own organs of speech (69). As Josephine Park points out, the struggle itself "marks a destabilization of [the modern] lyric self," since *Dictee*'s "I" cannot fully individuate itself by standing apart from a remembered—and silenced—"object" (137).

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of negotiating with language, beginning with its emphasis on dictation and writing.

Yet at the end of the section, the diseuse "stops and starts again" in a broken tongue, producing "[s]emblance of speech" that does not adhere to proper English nor French, but hybridizes the two languages in the word "Pidgeon," a cross between "pigeon" and "pidgin" (75). Stopping and starting the flow of language at irregular levels "[w]here proper pauses were expected," the jarred punctuation cuts through proper meter of either English or French, propelling sound where there would be a pause, and jerking back with "a sudden arrest" (75). The difficulty of speech becomes more than a hindrance, a mode of creating recalcitrant speech rhythms that expose the conditions imposed on the "broken tongue" (75). This fragmented articulation resists smoothness, allowing the diseuse to become a conduit for lost voices without restoring them in a linear form of narration, rather "void[ing] the / words the silences" (69). The diseuse's broken speech privileges bare "utter" over coherence, showing how language becomes an extension of the speaking, laboring body, yet a body that is not assimilable to one culture.

The difficulty of retrieving memory in "Urania" arises because loss or absence in *Dictee* cannot be traced to a single origin. Like Massumi, who does not consider affect as rising from a decisive moment but rather sees intensity permeating through all experience, Cha refuses to locate a singular moment of historical violence or damage. Yet this is not simply because *Dictee*, as Yu would suggest, "leave[s] history behind in favor of increasingly ungrounded and abstract scenarios" (136). While *Dictee* questions the formulation of a stable Korean-American or Korean identity, it does not reject historical discourse altogether "in favor of a focus on language itself" (Yu 136). Rather, *Dictee* presents a plurality of specific historical wounds that arise from Japanese colonialism, American imperialism, and Korean nationalism yet without localizing a particular site of trauma. History becomes a cluster of wounds consisting of en-

forced displacements and divisions.[4] The diseuse's body becomes a field of affective orientation that investigates new modes of relation with this history, beginning not from notions of national affiliation but from sensuous knowledge.[5]

4) This recalls Frederic Jameson's oft-cited definition of history as "what hurts," an "absent cause." In the first chapter of *The Political Unconscious,* Jameson argues that while we approach history mediated by textuality, it is erroneous to assume that history is text, or that there is no referent behind textualization: "history is *not* a text, not a narrative, master or otherwise, but that, as an absent cause, it is inaccessible to us except in textual form, and that our approach to it and to the Real itself necessarily passes through its prior textualization, its narrativization in the political unconscious" (20). For Jameson, history is inevitably *mediated* by text, but remains irreducible to textual construction nor fully representable in its totality. In the sense that history is "what hurts . . .[,] apprehended only through its effects, and never directly as some reified force" (88), the affective residues that remain behind from experience can be thought of as a non-textual form of history.

Yet if Jameson argues that we touch upon this "absent cause" through the process of narrativization—a process that occurs in the "political unconscious"—the affective resonances in *Dictee* rather point to how the unfolding of desire can be cast in non-narrative forms. The diseuse's voice as affective resonance calls for a rethinking of narrative historiography, since such affect "suspend[s] the linear progress of the narrative present from past to future," acting as a "temporal and narrative noise" (Massumi 26).

5) I draw from Anne Cvetkovitch's claim that sensational stories can become "an alternative form of knowledge to the abstractions of systematic analysis" (44). In the first chapter of *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*, Cvetkovich examines the tradition of sensational Marxism, which translates the abstract influence of capitalism "into something that can be felt" (42). This emphasis on sensational knowledge is part of her search "for innovative ways of mapping global histories in terms of lived experiences" (44). Cvetkovich explores how a personal traumatic memory can be more than individual experience, indicating a larger context of historical traumas. One example is the Cuban American artist Carmelita Tropicana's performance piece *Milk of Amnesia,* where Carmelita "channels" the memories of others that traces her lineage "back to a transnational history of colonization and genocide" (40). The recovery of cultural, rather than personal memories reveals that the trauma

In this sense, the diseuse's body is not an object that moves through the linear progress of time; it is rather a space through which scattered fragments pass and are reassembled as a loosely connected whole. One form of such bodily entanglement materializes as stains of blood and ink. At the beginning of "Urania," the diseuse gives blood, instructed by an unnamed woman. The needle, initially an "empty body," touches her skin at first as a cold, clinical instrument that elicits "[n]o sign of flow," making a "[s]ample extract" to be sorted into "[s]pecimen type[s]" (64). Yet suddenly liquid begins "*to flow*," "*to collect*," "*to spill over flow flood*" (64). The flowing liquid is not simply a "specimen type" of blood, but filled with memories remembered by the body, the "[c]ontents housed in membranes" that "dispel in drops in spills" (64). The empty body of the needle, serving as a conduit, spills "*the near-black liquid ink"* taken from the body onto the table. Ink and the writing that it accomplishes literally become an extension of the body as they become indistinguishable from bodily fluids. As the "*stain begins to absorb the material spilled on*," rather than the material absorbing the spilled liquid, the fixed quality of "the stain" gains absorptive energy (65). If the "congealed," "neutralized" records in "Clio" fix history in clotted ink, this physical flow of blood liquefies ink and makes it run.

The images of stains and bodily fluids continue in "Melpomene/Tragedy," where the diseuse recounts the April 19th protest against a U. S.-backed dictatorship. As do the neutralized and neutralizing qualities of historical records, the "whiteness . . . greyness" of the tear gas "reduce[s]" the crowd to its separate parts and engulfs each struggling limb, as a lifted arm "disappears into the thick white" (82). The gas elicits a flow of tears from the diseuse's body, which is solidified in the form of blood

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of her departure from Cuba is "part of a transnational trauma of long historical duration" (41). Sensational knowledge thus becomes a way of rewriting global histories through affective experience.

on the pavement: "Remain dark the stains not wash away" (82). Yet by re-playing the memory of her brother's death in the demonstration, the diseuse transforms the fixed stain into flowing liquid. Addressing a second-person "you," the diseuse's enunciation pulls the event back into the immediacy of the "now":

> You who are hidden you who move in the crowds as you would in the trees you who move inside them you close your eyes to the piercing the breaking the flooding pools bath their shadow memory as they fade from you your own blood your own flesh as tides ebb, through you through and through. (88)

The passage reenacts the spilling of blood/ink at the level of semantics and syntax. For one, the second-person pronoun spills over various referents, blending her demonstrator brother with the opposing soldiers. The stealthy movement of this hidden "you" among crowds and trees also overlays the image of camouflaged soldiers in the Korean war onto the scene. The very demonstration is, in fact, imagined as a continuation of the Korean war, when the diseuse realizes that the crowd, mobilized toward "the other movement," "fight[s] the same war": "We are severed in Two by an abstract enemy an invisible enemy under the title of liberators who have conveniently named the severance, Civil War. Cold War. Stalemate" (81). As the passage layers traumatic historical events on top of each other—events which are alike occasioned by an "abstract . . . invisible enemy under the title of liberators"—the unspecified "you" slides through different semantic referents and historical moments, intermixing events that are separated in chronology (81). The run-on phrasal units, moreover, create an echoing, circular movement as the syntax, instead of progressing forward, continuously turns back on itself through the repetitions of "you who" and "you would." The ebbing

rhythm of the end of the passage, created by the reprises of "you" and "your own," converts the immobile stain of blood to tides of sound that reverberates "through and through," rescuing the intensities created by lived experience of history from the neutralized language of historical narrative.

IV. Between Hesitation and Longing: *Dictee*'s Quivering Affects in Sound and Heat

Dictee, however, steps back from actually touching the restored historical moment even as the diseuse reaches out to it. In "Melpomene," the memory of the protest is framed by the screen, in front of which the diseuse "stretche[s] out as far as the seat allows her until her neck rests on the back of the seat" (79). The diseuse becomes "enveloped in one mass" with the screen, where "moving shades" and "flickering light" beckon her to be immersed in the "illusion that the act of viewing is to make alteration of the visible" (79). Yet when the diseuse is "*this / close to this much / close to* [*the memory*]," the screen hinders her contact with the memory itself (86). Only able to repeat, "[s]uffice Melpomene," the hard, physical barrier keeps the diseuse from intervening in history. Animated by voices of the past, the diseuse quivers with a longing to reach for and revive them, yet remains in this act of reaching out.

Dictee withholds the moment of actual contact with the past. This somewhat deflates our expectations; yet it is this suspension that marks the ethical stakes of *Dictee*'s history project. Instead of demanding an erotic fulfillment of melancholic desire, *Dictee* withdraws from the moment of touch. Cha is aware that the immediacy of touch can easily become a ploy "to make sequences move" in linear time and "fabricate" response (106). To claim that the past has become touchable, accessible presence nullifies the nuances, or the "reticence" and "inner residence"

created by distance and "space" (108). This is why the cinematic screen in "Erato/Love Poetry," for instance, refuses to fully display the image of the central female figure, refraining from making her full portrait touchable onscreen and prompting the viewer to see "only [the] traces" she leaves (100). Likewise, the diseuse never claims the authority of restoring lost voices or fully reclaiming a lost origin. Acknowledging the impossibility of redeeming what has been lost is *Dictee's* way of refusing a facile transcendence of existing or enforced divisions. As Park points out, the difficult project of re-living, instead of repeating history can be achieved only through the diseuse's suspension at the threshold. Park imagines this threshold itself as a third space (the "Tertium Quid" [Cha 20]) which "make[s] . . . visible" rather than "heal[s] the rupture" (146). *Dictee*'s very beginning highlights this threshold position, where voices fade to echoes and presence slips into absence. In the opening section, the diseuse waits for a "pause" even when she is "caught" in the "thick motion in the weight of [others'] utterance": "When the amplification stops there might be an echo. She might make the attempt then. The echo part" (4). If Massumi imagines echoing resonance as a trope for the immediacy of affect, resonance in *Dictee* has a quality of belatedness. The diseuse's echoing voice appears at the pause following the overwhelming flood of voices. While Flore Chevaillier sees the diseuse's coming-to-speech as a moment of "erotic experience" that dissolves the boundaries between "she" and "other" (88), the diseuse's utter becomes possible *after* the moment of fulfillment and spillage, at the gap where such voices subside into echoes.[6] Only after she waits for the traces of

6) Chevaillier presents a unique reading of *Dictee* that focuses on how the structural and formal "openness" of the text "produces an erotic language at the origin of Cha's feminist project" (85). Delving into the erotics of *Dictee,* Chevaillier notes that "the openness and fluidity" of the diseuse's body "allow[s] a fusion of subject and object, which invites an erotic relationship with language" (161). Yet in claiming that the diseuse freely weaves in and out of different

sound left behind can the diseuse be filled and flooded with echoes that "turn[] her inside out" (5). In this sense, *Dictee* refrains from creating another fantasy of resurrecting lost origins.

Still, we might ask, does not *Dictee*'s sobering reserve push history back to the realm of the unreachable, reinforcing the myth of a lost origin? What creates a break in this suspension is the diseuse's powerful longing for closeness with the "flickering hue from behind" the screen (88), especially when this motif of the flickering light shifts from visual illusion into a source of felt warmth at the end of *Dictee*. I would like to call this affective orientation a quivering affect, in that *Dictee* stages it through reverberating sonic echoes and radiating warmth/light that emanate through screens. In "Elitere/Lyric Poetry," the diseuse reveals her desire to reach out and move from one to the other side of the boundary rather than remaining in static suspension. By drawing upon a melancholic voice that can "*break open the spell cast upon time upon time again and again. . . . penetrate the earth's floor,*" Cha searches for a way to reach beyond the screen (123). The diseuse begins by reimaging the screen as an object that reminds her of the other side existing beyond it: "[m]ust have been a side. Aside from / What has one seen / This view what has one viewed" (125). The screen gradually changes from a barrier to a mediating presence: "Stands the partition absorbing the light illuminating it then filtering it through" (131). The visual substance of "light" changes to a more tactile "stain" that absorbs the partition itself: the memory stain "attaches itself and darkens on the pale formless sheet," becoming larger "until it assimilates the boundaries" and "[o]ccupies the entire" (131). The stain makes the diseuse imagine the possibility of voices from behind the screen:

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subjectivities, Chevaillier's reading neglects that *Dictee* works as both an erotic *and* ethical project of doing history. *Dictee*'s engagement with histories of loss and division conditions and sobers the euphoric openness of erotic encounter.

> 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. (132)

The screen is reimagined as a passage or conduit that would be "impress[ed]" by sounds from the other side. Suspension in *Dictee* is not a static state, but saturated with longing and anticipation for a voice, delivered through the "partition" in the form of sounds that apply gentle pressure onto the screen (131).

The quivering dynamics of the diseuse's position turn upon the properties of sound that are amplified by—and move across—borders. As Stewart notes in her study of the senses in poetry, such "reception of sound might be framed as a *feeling*," since sound waves are also a form of "touch, a pressure" that affect not only the ear "but also the entire outer surface of the skin" (*Senses* 100). The intensities of sound become a "middle" sense that combines "the partiality of the immediacy of touch and the objectified "'all at onceness' of vision" (*Senses* 101). In *Dictee,* the echoes of sound are the central trope for "doing" history as both an intimate and far-reaching project. If the bloodstain of "Melpomene," for instance, remains as a lasting yet stagnant memorial, the "singing" voices of the "crying crowd" continue as resonant and "unceasing" movement (82). In "Terpsichore/Choral Dance," the penultimate section, the acoustic reverberations of sound transform the diseuse's silent impasse to a powerful "weight of voices" which "meet[s]" and counters "the weight of stone" (162). Beginning with the image of a magnolia which "blooms white even on seemingly dead branches" (155), the diseuse calls to an unspecified "you" that "wait[s]" for dandelion seeds to break forth from

the earth. The "[c]haste," "dark silence" of gestation gives way to "sound far and near at the same time" as the dandelion finally "burst[s] and scatter[s]" its seeds in sudden fulfillment (156). This opening image of "Terpsichore" foreshadows how the diseuse—or "you," the reader that is implicitly called upon—releases a chorus of voices by turning the body of a stone memorial into an organic, speaking body. If the diseuse becomes a vessel for the voices of others, she is not a stationary receptacle but a figure lying in wait to "utter[] again" (151). In this space of aural resonances, "[n]o access is given to sight" (156), and the diseuse performs a shamanistic ritual where her body is hollowed out for "the inhabitation . . . by the other body, the larger body" (161). By sounding a "supplication wail resound song" to the gods (159), the diseuse receives the pressure of voices from the other side of the screen that transforms an immobile "column of white lustre" into a live "column of artery, of vein" (161). If this yet remains hollow and without warmth, the flow of water, a variation of the blood/ink from earlier sections, "inhabits" this "congealed" stone, turning it into an organic, speaking body (162). The emphasis here, however, is less on the water itself than on the sound of its movement that ultimately animates the column: "the inscriptions resonate the atmosphere of the column, repeating over the same sound, distinct words" (162). The voice gained through this labor now expands across material and historical divisions: "Rise voices shifting upwards circling the bowl's hollow. In deep metal voice spiraling up wards to pools . . . to raise all else where all memory all echo" (162).

Dictee's motifs of reverberating sound and light belatedly yet potently activate an affiliative connection with the past, figured as familial kinship. In "Terpsichore," the "weight of voices" pressure and extract red stains upon the silenced body of stone, turning it into "a flame caught in air" (162). This image of the flame extends to the shadow of a candle that stands at the threshold in "Polymnia/Sacred Poetry." The flicker-

ing candle emanates light and warmth through "the paper screen door" that both divides and connects mother and child—the latter who arrives home with medicine for her ailing mother. (170). As Yu points out, the section draws from the Korean myth of Princess Pali (or "Bari"), who serves at a well of healing water for nine years to return with medicine for her sick mother (135). The story also resonates with the Greek myth of Demeter and Persephone, which Cha alludes to in "Elitere": "*Let the one who is diseuse, one who is mother who waits nine days and nine nights be found . . . Let the one who is diseuse, one who is daughter restore spring with her each appearance from beneath the earth*" (133). Here, the diseuse alternates between mother and daughter. Likewise in "Polymnia," the third-person pronoun "she" slides between the child who comes to the well, and the well-keeper who gives her medicine. The diseuse becomes an unfixed body that expresses the connection of kinship between mother and child, translating the child's affective connection with her mother into the sound of her labor at the well, where the bucket "hitting the sides echoes inside the well" (167).

Yet if the figure of the mother has too often been used within nationalistic discourse to signify a "natural" extension of national origins, *Dictee* refrains from such myths by refusing to reify the mother's body and leaving the fantasy of familial union unfulfilled: "Polymnia" ends before the reunion of mother and daughter, leaving the child at the threshold of the mother's bedroom. Yet the "flickering" candle radiates heat and light, keeping alive and mediating the affective connection of mother and child without necessitating an intrusion into the mother's space. The pressure and heat from the girl's movement home—the "weight" of the girl's medicine bundles, along with the "warmth in her palms"—link her body to the warmth of her mother's room (170). Through the image of shared heat shared from afar, the moment attests to the tentative but quivering dynamics of *Dictee* that goes beyond a mere suspension

at the border. The flickering light, of course, remains slippery in that it both anticipates the warm touch of reunion yet also leaves the possibility of an encounter with illness and even death. To reactivate affective links with the past, one must face losses that would otherwise remain concealed. Yet the affective thickness of this moment shows that such a risk is not simply debilitating; rather, it is this dynamic tension between longing and fear that brings the suspended moment into the lived present, keeping it affectively alive.

This intense longing for sound out of silence, for warmth through the screen, and for connection with those lost in history is perhaps the reason why *Dictee* closes not with stillness but with aural resonance. In the final pages, a child calls her mother to "lift [her] up . . . to the window," a variation of the screen that permeates *Dictee* (179). While there is "no one inside the pane and glass between," the child struggles to see the window "too high above her view"—much like the diseuse laboring to speak (179). This struggle to lift herself is tied to the "vigilance of lifting the immobile silence," a labor that leads to a final wave of sound:

> Lift me to the window to the picture image unleash the rope tied to weights of stones first the ropes then its scraping on wood to break stillness as the bells fall peal follow the sound the ropes holding weight scraping on wood to break stillness bells fall a peal to sky (179).

These last lines of *Dictee* literalize Massumi's notion of affect, as the passage converts "immobile silence" into movement through its aural resonance. The flowing liquid consonants condensed in "bells fall peal follow" echo throughout the passage, beginning with the first two verbs "lift" and "unleash." Through the echoing liquids, the neutralized image of ropes "*tied* to" stones shift to that of ropes "*holding* weight": the

dull objects become life-like, imbued with the strain to "break stillness." Through the reprise of "ropes . . . scraping on wood to break stillness," the bells gain momentum and release "a peal" of sound that also becomes an appeal to the sky. The bodily struggle of the child finally breaks the silence of written history through the harsh, grating labor of "scraping" the "stillness." *Dictee* ends by returning to the yearning to reach beyond boundaries of past and present, an appeal that Cha answers within her work by turning to the vibrancy and far-traveling reverberations of sound.

V. Conclusion: Imagining an Emergent Subjectivity and Communal Affect through *Dictee*

Dictee investigates the possibility of relating with history through feelings of familial affiliation and melancholic yearning—a history knotted with wounds, beginning with colonial displacement and exile. *Dictee*'s melancholic temporality brings lost voices into an enunciative now, creating ties between past and present in the form of kinship between child and parent, sister and brother, mother and daughter. This feeling of kinship incites the diseuse's longing to engage with history, a longing which is created and amplified through a quivering resonance that *Dictee* literalizes through recurring motifs of echoing sound and flickering light. Such resonances not only mark scars, but become the pathways through which the diseuse reimagines a connection with the past.

The quivering affect resonating throughout Cha's work suggests that *Dictee*'s collage-like form does more than re-enact fragmentation and trauma; it reassembles separate moments together. In this sense, *Dictee*'s quivering affect acts as what Eng calls "affective correspondences," which are emotional analogies that arise through the juxtaposition of "unexpected events, spaces, and objects from past and present," (185).

If dislodged images "'blast open the continuum of history,' disturbing the pageant of historicism, of cause and effect, written and endorsed by the victors," affective correspondences reconnect such fragments in an alternative mode of doing history that enlivens what had hitherto been smoothed over (186). Drawing from Freud's brief discussion of affect in "The Unconscious," Eng notes that affect becomes a "psychic glue" that restores relationships between words and things, re-connecting the severed link between linguistic signifiers and the event that occasioned the original affect (192).[7] *Dictee,* however, refuses to locate and privilege a single origin of trauma, nor entirely glues fragments together; rather, Cha chooses to linger more tentatively—yet with quivering desire—on the threshold of such restorative possibilities, exploring affective orientation or relationality more than a specific moment of Korean history. *Dictee*'s quivering affect, then works more as a stringing-together of fragments that, unlike the tightness of glue, leaves gaps open and reveals them.

While *Dictee* refuses to locate a stable, political subject that does such historical work, I would suggest that Cha's project of a quivering, affective mode of relation to history can also be the basis of an emergent subjectivity. Language has been privileged as the primary form through which the individual experience is made available to others, and thus "the forum through which the speaking subject emerges" (Stewart, *Senses* 14-15). Considering lyric enunciation as the event through which the person "spoken by sound . . . becomes the person speaking," Stewart notes that language is both "repetition of an ontological moment" and an

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7) Eng discusses Rea Tajiri's documentary, *History and Memory: For Akiko and Takashige*, where a Japanese American woman dreams her mother's memories of the internment camp during WWII. According to Eng, the documentary's focus on psychic ties between mother and daughter entangles erotics and ethics, fiction and reality, affect and language in a project of keeping the past alive.

"ongoing process or work" (15). Yet as Massumi suggests, lived sensory experience and its resonance also shape the material body into an "incipient" self. The figure of diseuse shows how language and affect might work together in the making of an emergent, yet-unfixed subjectivity. *Dictee* reconfigures the historicizing subject, not through an essentialized notion of nation or race, nor wholly through discursive formations enforced by neocolonial division and strife, but through a felt relationality of longing and laboring to reconnect with forgotten moments of history. If Kandice Chuh, proposing a deconstructive account of Asian American studies as "subjectless discourse" (9), suggests that we ultimately reconstruct the category "Asian American" as "a mediating presence that links bodies to knowledge regimes . . ." (27), Cha's work shows that an affective mode of relation to history challenges and complements such discursive mediation.

Moreover, as Eng notes, affective correspondences open the possibility of "a collective relationship with forgetting and loss" (188), especially since affects do not pertain to an individual, but has an apersonal quality that can be circulated among bodies. *Dictee*'s destabilization of a singular speaking subject indicates how its quivering affect pertains not to an individual subject but engages several bodies. As a circulated artwork in itself, *Dictee* seeks to invite readers through its conundrums and direct addresses. Juliana Sphar and Sue J. Kim note that *Dictee,* despite its difficulties, investigates new relations between reader and text. According to Sphar, *Dictee'*s various allusions guide readers away from an easy identification with recognizable characters, making them "unable to "read smoothly and easily" and engaging them in a struggle similar to that of the laboring diseuse (34). Yet if Sphar ultimately views *Dictee* as an "anti-absorptive text" (34), Kim comments that *Dictee's* shifting pronouns pull the text away from questions of the reader's (non)identification: "the text's equivocation is part of its project of troubling the

discrete boundaries between the individual and communal, past and present, narrative and history, and various generic conventions" (176). As Hayoung Choi notes, the second-person address of "you" in *Dictee* is Cha's way of enlisting the reader in unstable, fluctuating positions between the object of address and a more distant observer (106). In fact, I would say that *Dictee's* difficulty—both the "unreadability" of the text itself and the difficulties of its project of history—is what engages the reader in its struggle. *Dictee*'s straining, quivering tone—following from Sianne Ngai's definition of tone as "a literary text's affective bearing, orientation, or 'set toward' its audience and world" (43)—arises from its efforts to communicate with the past and the reader, staged through a struggle of pushing and pulling against words, jarred punctuations that turn to a sudden dispelling of voices, and silences that are finally broken by resonant sounds. The reader is invited to share such a struggle, especially by reading aloud; *Dictee's* interest in the way language is refigured through affective experience comes fully into play when a reader enacts with the diseuse's struggle through one's own voice.

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ABSTRACT

How We Might Relate Anew with History:
The Quivering Affects of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictee*

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This paper aims to read Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictee* as a project of affective relationality with traumatic history. The notion of history as writing, as text, and as discursive formation has preoccupied critics of *Dictee,* beginning with 'what' is represented in the text (Korean history) and 'who' represents it (a Korean-American woman). *Dictee*'s fragmented form has especially attracted poststructuralist readings that concentrate on identifying the figure of the "diseuse," the speaker and echo-chamber for disjointed voices of the past. However, less attention has been given to the very desire that propels the diseuse to speak. This paper reads *Dictee* as a project of relationality, rather than a study in subjectivity. By reinvesting moments of historical trauma with melancholic affect, *Dictee* explores how we shape connective tissues with a fragmented past, beginning from colonial displacement and exile to neocolonial division and strife. First, I examine how *Dictee*'s melancholic temporality, disrupts the linear figuration of time and brings lost voices into an enunciative now by the very act of speaking. Second, I note that this mode of relating to the past is physical as well as psychic. The diseuse's bodily effort to produce speech presents a model of history as sensuous, affective knowledge. In this sense, *Dictee* literalizes Brian Massumi's seminal definition of affect as the reverberating motion of the body that has been

struck or touched, yet also shows how the body is not given beforehand, but itself is materialized through this effort for relationality. Finally, I examine how the fragments of *Dictee* are interlaced with what I term a quivering affect that oscillates between hesitance and longing. *Dictee* recognizes that the moment of original touch cannot be restored, nor a euphoric reunion possible. This attests to the ethical stakes of Cha's history project: not to easily recuperate or represent a lost origin, but to linger upon the (im)possibility of touching the past. Merging the erotic yearning for physical touch and the ethical reserve of hesitation, quivering resonance is literalized through recurring motifs of echoes, stains, and heat. These sensory forms reverberate, flow, and radiate through temporal and material borders without purporting to break them down easily, stringing together fragmented traces of history and opening a mode of affective relation with them. I end with the suggestion that Cha's project of a quivering, affective mode of relation to history can also be the basis of an emergent subjectivity. *Dictee* reconfigures the historicizing subject, not through an essentialized notion of nation or race, nor wholly through discursive formation, but as an embodied figure that longs and labors to reconnect with forgotten moments of history.

Key Words history; affect; melancholia; sound; body; echo; relationality; Theresa Hak Kyung Cha; *Dictee*