What Lineage Extraction:

Image and the Book Object in Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictée*

Aya Gold

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Linda Bierds

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Aya Gold

University of Washington

Abstract

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Aya Gold

Chair of the Supervisory Committee:
Associate Professor Pimone Triplett
English Creative Writing

Just as American ideals of economic modernization were bound up in ideas about China, the movement toward aesthetic modernization also looked toward East Asia. Ezra Pound's study and subsequent reproduction of ancient and medieval Chinese poetry into the modern English-language Cathay is emblematic of this trajectory. This thesis traces the use of image in contemporary American poetry back to its transcontinental past, focusing on Theresa Cha's *Dictée* as a model of avant-garde reflections on objecthood.

Perception of an object costs
Precise the Object's loss —
-Emily Dickinson

Who, feeling a funny desire stirring inside her (to sing, to write, to dare to speak, in short, to bring out something new), hasn't thought that she was sick? Well, her shameful sickness is that she resists death, that she makes trouble.
-Hélène Cixous

Introduction

In his essay on image in *Twentieth Century Pleasures*, Robert Hass opens with the simple declaration: “Images haunt.” To illustrate, he offers an anecdote about “the colleague of Tu Fu who said to him, ‘It is like being alive twice’” (269). Images, in other words, have the power to return from the dead. Like ghosts, images in poetry tend to appear in unexpected ways and dwell in memory beyond the first encounter on the page. Drawn from reality, they undergo a transformation first in the poet’s imagination, and then again in the reader’s. As such, an image exists doubly – the real and physical is followed by a metaphysical conjuring. It enlivens a poem and then remains to haunt as its outline or shadow. Image is liminal.

Hass’s example is notable on two counts. First, it is not Tu Fu himself who proffered these words but an unnamed colleague, thus associating the anonymous idea with the grand figure of Tu Fu. Second, the conversation is transported from its context of Tang Dynasty China to twentieth-century America, filtered again into English through the writing of the Californian poet. The conception, then, of image as life lived twice, is also twice lived: from conversation to writing, from nameless to recognized, via two poets over a millennium apart from two continents divided by an ocean.

This exchange represents, in short, the history of the spatial and temporal travel of “image” in poetry from the global imaginary’s East to West. Just as American ideals of economic modernization were bound up in ideas about China – specifically, Chinese labor – the movement toward aesthetic modernization also looked toward East Asia (“Toward a Prehistory” 132). Ezra Pound’s study and subsequent reproduction of ancient and medieval Chinese poetry into the modern English-language *Cathay*[1] is emblematic of this trajectory. He composed his versions without having studied Chinese, thereby putting into question what had until then been accepted

1The volume was published in 1915 in Britain and in 1917 in the United States.

as a prerequisite for translation: familiarity with the two languages. T.S. Eliot famously remarked that Pound had established himself as "the inventor of Chinese poetry for our time," an ambiguous comment either praising the creative power behind the collection or a criticism of the fabrication involved in its creation (Xie #?). Yet the general reception was laudatory; on the question of Pound's knowledge of Chinese (or lack thereof), an early critic wrote: "for those who, like ourselves, know no Chinese, it does not matter much. The result, however produced, is well worth having, and it seems to us very Chinese" ("Poems from Cathay" 114).

What makes Pound's versions of the poems "very Chinese" to the English-language reader? His earlier critical writing may glean some insight on the conception of "Chineseness" in literature. In "Vorticism," an essay that Pound published a year prior to *Cathay*, he argues for a poetics that shirks rhetorical sophistication in favor of brevity and plain-spokenness, pointing to Japanese and Chinese poets as key practitioners (4). His ars poetica seeks an "exploratory" rather than "learned" or "ornamental" language (4). Image, in this way, operates beyond a philosophical or symbolic level:

> By image I mean […] not an equation of mathematics, not something about *a*, *b*, and *c*, having something to do with form, but about *sea*, *cliffs*, *night*, having something to do with mood.
>
> THE IMAGE IS NOT an idea. It is a radiant node or cluster; it is what I can, and must perforce, call a VORTEX, from which, and through which, and into which, ideas are constantly rushing. (5)

For Pound, too, image carries a haunting quality. "Sea" or "cliff" do not necessarily represent ideas abstracted from the locations (as with metaphor), nor do they solely stand in for the places themselves (as with metonym). Image functions, rather, as constellations of sensory elements which bind together disparate movements in a singular poem. A poem takes flight when ideas work their way through images which serve as landing points.

It comes as no surprise that Pound's conception of image draws heavily from his readings of poetry from Asia. Beginning with Impressionism, "Asian aesthetics" has been viewed in Europe as accessible primarily through art than through literature. The trend continues into contemporary times, such as with the popularity of manga, within and without the academy. When literature from East Asia made its way into English-language presses, then, the supposedly universal visual plane of haiku and the "ideogram" found favor over works deemed too philosophical or abstract (Bush 197).

Yet the introduction of Chinese poetry to broad audiences in Europe and the United States had an impact beyond expanded aesthetic appreciation. The inauguration of Chinese literature as a category "initiated the very discursive possibility in English of individual affective subjectivity among the Chinese" ("Toward a Prehistory" 134). Particularly given Pound's efforts to develop each speaker's subjectivity in his lyric renderings, *Cathay* contributed to the reconceptualization of Chinese people who had until then been largely invisible but for their ability to provide cheap labor (134). This gradually led to the development of an Asian American identity (134).

Part of the process that shaped ideas of "Chineseness" into the more broadly defined "Asian Americanness" has to do with Pound's translation method itself. He based his work on notes by Ernest Fenollosa, also an American with no knowledge of Chinese, who in turn relied on "decipherings" by two Japanese professors (*Translation* 31). As one would imagine, this multi-step journey from one language to another created a wide margin of error. With Japanese as mediator between Chinese and English, the two Asian languages inevitably became intermingled. Notably, Pound uses the Japanese pronunciation for Chinese names, such as Rihaku for Li Po, confounding the two distinct languages (31). The conflation reflects what

would later become a societal tendency of “racial lumping”[2] which looks past ethnic divisions to create a broader racial category of “Asian American” (“Toward a Prehistory” 135).

Regardless of the ethical implications behind this (pre)history of Asian American verse, it is clear that Pound played a foundational role in its establishment. While his ideas on image are central to modernity at large they occupy a particular position in Asian American poetry – aesthetic modernization is linked to the very conception of “Asianness.” Thus, image is not simply a craft concern in Asian American poetry. It is a historically charged element, an intercontinental ghost reawakened in the early twentieth century which continues to hover behind poetry written and published today.

Given this past, Asian American poets who incorporate visual elements in their work through word-and-image hybrid forms are of particular interest. For this study, I offer a reading of *Dictée* by Theresa Hak Kyung Cha. Born in Busan in 1951, Cha immigrated to San Francisco in 1964 and studied at the University of California. Her degrees reflect her investment in both visual art and literature: BAs in Comparative Literature (1973) and Art (1975), an MA in Art (1977), and an MFA in Art (1978) (Lewallen 1). Her seminal text, *Dictée*, was published in 1982.

“Beginning Wherever You Wish”: Reading the Structure (Structure As Image)

In *Racial Things, Racial Forms: Objecthood in Avant-Garde Asian American Poetry*, Joseph Jonghyun Jeon launches his inquiry with a chapter on Theresa Cha, positioning her as a foundational figure in avant-garde Asian American language art.[3] He frames his study with a set of definitions that distinguish objects from things, and places her work within this system of categorization. Borrowing from Frantz Fanon, Michael Fried, and Bill Brown, Jeon

2 Steven Yao quotes this term from sociologist Yen Le Espiritu.
3 Jeon uses the term “language art” rather than poetry to acknowledge the wide range of literary genres, materials, and media in her work (2).

conceptualizes objects as recognizable tools with a function (such as hammers being an object for building) whereas things mark “the point of interruption where action and thought are arrested,” rendering them “momentarily bewildering” (3). Jeon argues that the status of *things* in Cha’s work stem from deliberate constructions which destabilize meaning, rather than from a momentary breakdown of meaning following an accidental failure of the object to function (3).

By using words and objects in unfamiliar ways and making strange the space surrounding them, an author who is a raced and gendered “other” – the object of the dominant gaze – can transform everyday tools into art that defies easy classification. For the purposes of this paper I will refer to *Dictée* as an art object. On the one hand, the calculated disruptions in communicative moments establish its bewildering quality, or its thing-ness. On the other, the book presents itself in the form of an object; its purpose is to house words and images to be read. Throughout Cha’s oeuvre, attention to the physicality of both her human subjects (that is, their embodiment and objectification) and of her materials (such as cloth, ink, and screens) trills between engagement with thing-ness and with objecthood. Thus, I have elected “art object” as a term to define a language art book which gathers and illuminates things, pointing to both the meanings attached to them (as with objectified bodies) and their strangeness when divorced from meaning (as with uncaptioned photographs of things which are not easily identifiable).

An art object elicits careful attention to its organization. Thus, this section of my paper addresses the arrangement of things within the book in an attempt to illuminate the making and unmaking of meaning the reader encounters when viewing the book as a whole as a singular image. As a discussion of *Dictée*’s structure necessitates a close reading of the opening, I will focus on the pages preceding the first section which I refer to as the text’s prelude. Its images, blanks, and sweeping prose passages contribute to the book’s feeling of vertigo as it enters and

exits its various modalities. Each part of the prelude, followed by a blank page, splices into the book, disrupting preceding gestures.

The interruptions contribute to the tensions established by the title *Dictée*, French for dictation. The classroom writing activity involves the creator of the original text, the reader of the text (usually a teacher), and the listeners who reproduce the text (the students). The students then turn in their transcription to be evaluated and corrected by the teacher. In this tripartite exercise, to whom does the text belong? Who is the true writer/speaker? As Eun Kyung Min states, "In blurring the distinction between writer and reader and reversing their roles, dictation indeed critiques the model of reading as mere reception as well as the notion of authorial originality" (310). This critique of subject position builds into the book's extensive critique of order and classification, an argument developed through the book's structure.

Prior to the title page, the book opens to a black page with a wide landscape image at its center. Uncaptioned, the monochrome photograph appears lonely and even potentially dangerous – dry, filled with pebbles and rocks, and seemingly unpopulated. The site could be an abandoned field, a desert, or an incomplete ancient construction site. Jane Wong writes that the image "separated from the archival space of publication dates" stands for "a figure of exile" (25). Indeed, the sense of removal and disjointedness stems from the image's placement outside of nameable spaces within the book, and not simply the unidentifiable image itself.

As barren as it is, it would be misleading to define the photograph solely in terms of its absences. On the right-hand corner sits what resembles a pyramid, a deliberate geometrical structure unlike its neighboring rock formations. The structure becomes a focal point, breaking up the flatness of the land's surface. Given this, two human acts of creation become implicated in this image. First, someone (or more feasibly, a community of people) planned and executed the

architectural project. Second, the photographer framed the photograph to demonstrate both the seeming emptiness of the space and the anonymous monument mysteriously standing amid the rubble. The photograph therefore invites questions, not only about the physical location of the image, but about authorship: Who created the structure and why? Who photographed the structure and why? Who can claim to have made it available to viewers – the builders or the photographer?

Encapsulating these concerns, the book's frontispiece features a photograph of etched handwriting in hang'ul which in English would translate as: "Mother. I miss you. I am hungry. I want to go home" (Phu #?). Attributed to a Korean laborer during the Japanese occupation, the message stands for many readers as testimony to the colonizers' violence (Phu #?). However, some linguists claim that the sentences' grammatical structures were not in common use prior to Korea's liberation and that the writing may have therefore been forged by Korean nationalists (Phu #?). Here authenticity is already in question, even in a historical document.

Centered on the white page facing the title, the photograph is unaccompanied by a caption, credits, or translation. In *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes writes that photography "does not call up the past," as it attests to, rather than reconstruct, a past existence – the medium thus "has something to do with resurrection" (82).[4] Photographs, in other words, present a past reality frozen in time. In the image the viewer recognizes the historical reality of its subject, and in being seen, this sense of past reality returns to life, albeit as a ghost. While a traditional memoirist may seek to include photographs in a book project to bridge the disconnect between past and present, Cha uses photographs to gesture toward a relationship with the past that is free

4 Barthes describes the feeling of viewing photographs in this way as "a brief action whose shock cannot drift into reverie (this is perhaps the definition of *satori*)" (82-84). This Japanese Buddhist term associated with enlightenment designates a highly specialized and particular experience. While the text has no overt ties to Asia, Japan (and a more generalized vision of the continent) still hovers like a specter behind discussions of image. See also Barthes' likening of photographs to haiku (49).

of the institution of History. Thy Phu argues that this "is not to affirm the stereotype that Asian women are inscrutable and unintelligible, but rather to remain profoundly suspicious of reading practices characterized by the desire for intelligibility" (#).

In including an image which is both a photograph and writing, Cha indicates the necessity of both visual and linguistic elements, and their various convergences, to the book's construction. Text does not merely serve as a classification tool for image, and image is not purely illustrative of text. In short, neither form is subordinate to the other. Additionally, the image introduces an authorial I/eye closer to a curator than to a historian, art critic, or professor – she collects images and fragments to exhibit without explicitly imposing a narrative. The sights and voices she pulls into the book thus establish an often dissonant polyphonic fabric. The reader cannot passively receive the book. The experience of *Dictée* is one of participation, in which the reader is implicated in the violence, loss, and silence chronicled by Cha.

Danger, imposition, invisibility, death – these motifs are at once destructive and constructive forces in the book. After the dedication "To my mother to my father"[5] comes the epigraph attributed to Sappho, but consisting of a tercet composed by Cha: "May I write words more naked than flesh, / stronger than bone, more resilient than / sinew, sensitive than nerve" (Spahr 124). The frankness in tone, bodily images, and association of prayer and artistic creation all certainly recall Sappho's verse. The imitation is so convincing that later scholars and poets have cited these lines, mistakenly crediting Sappho.[6] By placing her own words into the corpus of the Greek poet, Cha elevates her own poetry to the status of the classics, both in the sense of the era of Greek antiquity and within the literary canon at large. Yet the gesture is also self-effacing; Cha's language survives while her name is removed and replaced by one of the great

5 Although I do not wish to discuss the dedication at length, I should note that it signals a return to a cultural and linguistic home, or as Cha later writes: "what house clan tribe stock strain" (20).

6 See, for instance, *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets and Their Poetry* by Paula R. Backscheider (pg #?).

figures of “Western” poetry. As with the potential forgery of the frontispiece, the epigraph complicates the authenticity of written text; the author, the moment of composition, and the impetus behind the writing may not be what they seem.

Following the reference to Sappho, the “tenth Muse,” the unlabeled, unpaginated table of contents names each of the nine parts of the book after a Greek Muse. Euterpe, the Muse of lyric poetry, is renamed Elitere (Spahr 124).[7] The invented name merges “elle” (French pronoun for “her”) and “litterae” (Latin for “letter of the alphabet”). “Litterae” in the singular could be in either the genitive (indicating possession or origin) or nominative case (indicating a receiver). In other words, a singular woman is delineated as either the owner or receiver of letters – letters to her, or letters from her. Cha’s substitution of the Muse of Sappho’s domain with a word she coined reverses the erasure of her own name on the dedication page.

Indeed, the Elitere section features three poems, respectively titled “Aller/retour” (To go/return), “Aller,” and “Retour,” indicating the back-and-forth between antiquity and present, claiming and disavowing one’s poetry, forgery and invention (Cha 124-132). The section begins with a call to a “Diseuse” (French for “speaker,” feminine singular): “Let her break open the spell cast upon time / upon time again and again” (123). The incantation asks that the Diseuse emerge out of the silence demanded of women[8] speakers – in both the poetic and social terms of the word. Cha’s Diseuse composes the letters which together make up the text of the book, or Cha dedicates the letters she herself writes to female speakers of the past.

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7 While Spahr’s article has been crucial to my research, I would be remiss to not note the slipppage in her analysis of Cha’s forgeries. Her illumination of the invented Sappho citation and the renamed Muse of lyric poetry is followed by the claim that “Sam Choy, the Honolulu chef, appears in a list of elements representing ‘Heaven, Earth, and Humans’” (124). Cha does indeed list “Sam Choy” beside the phrase “Heaven, Earth, and Humans” as the third item in her list of ten elements, but one need only look one section back to find the same list in Chinese (154). The third element, written as [illegible] [illegible], is transliterated as Sam Choy. It is a Chinese philosophical term associated with the Yi Jing. The chef whose name happens to be spelled in the same way rose to prominence in the 1990s, a decade after Cha’s death. In an otherwise astute and carefully rendered study of *Dictée*, such a mistake demonstrates the extent to which even the most skilled scholars misinterpret Cha’s work, often out of an unwillingness to fully engage with the translingual text.

8 Unless I specify otherwise, by “women” in the American context I mean those who are not racialized as white.

In her discussion of Cha's references to lineage, literary and otherwise, Eun Kyung Min points to Saussure's dictum that language "always appears as a heritage" (314). I would argue that the rest of the semiotician's statement, omitted in Min's essay, is critical to consider as well: language "always appears as a heritage of the preceding period" (Saussure 71). Writing is not simply a matter of finding a metaphorical home; the author must also locate the past and put herself in relation to eras before her own time. Thus, writing involves spatio-temporal travel – an "aller/retour" through and into language.

Language bears no chronology and thus the "aller/retour" through text and speech calls for disruptions and diversions. The table of contents still does not give way to the book's first section, leading instead into a dictation exercise in French and in English. How disorienting, for an English-language reader to first encounter an engraving in hangul, then a table of contents with Greek names (one of which is an invented name), followed by an unlabeled passage in French. The paragraph details a dinner table conversation following "the first day" of school or work for an unnamed "she" who had "come from a far" (1). The French and English texts, stacked vertically with a single-spaced line in between, visually resemble a bolded equal sign. Yet despite the implied equivalence, both in the visual presentation and the conceit of original/translation, the two recitations do not narrate an identical story. This is made most evident in the ending:

> ouvre les guillemets Il n'y a qu'une chose point ferme les guillemets ouvre les guillements Il y a quelqu'une point loin point ferme les guillements[9]
>
> open quotation marks there is but one thing period There is someone period From a far period close quotation marks (1)

Between the first and second variations, two voices collapse into one, as evidenced by the removal of one set of quotation marks in the English version. Additionally, the original separates

9 open quotation marks there is but one thing period close quotation marks open quotation marks There is someone period far period close quotation marks (translation my own)

“loin” (far) into its own sentence, emphasizing the distance between “here” and “there,” while the translation merges the two places by keeping the sentence intact. As the French text does not use the preposition “from,” the “she” is, depending on the version, either currently located far away or has roots far away but is currently near. Thus, depending on the language in which the story is told, speakers can be singular or collective and protagonists can either be here or there.

“Diseuse,” the prose sequence which follows, features a singular woman who speaks in the language of larger institutions – a lone voice speaking in the language of the “many,” the “major” language. The Diseuse “mimicks the speaking [sic],” closely detailing her every bodily movement as the lower lip rises and falls, both lips pout, the breath escapes, her shoulders release tension from the neck, and she swallows (3). As in the epigraph, language production in this sequence is intimately tied to the body, even when the speaker feels a lack of agency in her participation. She mimics the speech of others, as in a recitation: “*She would take on their punctuation. She waits to service this. Theirs. Punctuation*” (4, italics in the original). The slow speech, constantly interrupted, traces back into itself, repeats, and self-corrects. Supposing this scene is narrated in the Diseuse’s spoken language, the starts and stops indicate the violence of the punctuation imposed upon her, and subsequently internalized, as it cuts through her thoughts. Yet her use of the adopted language also demonstrates her inability or unwillingness to participate in a standardized form of speech which operates on ideas of fluency and clarity.

Min observes that “Diseuse” plays on “disuse” and “disease” (316). Certainly, the disconnect between thought and speech indicates both a neglect of the tongue, or a tongue which does not serve its function (the thing-ness of the tongue), and an imposed state of madness as the speaker is only granted access to the language of others. I would also add, however, that “Diseuse” echoes the name Odysseus. This prose passage, along with the frontispiece image,

marks the beginning of a journey. The photograph evokes a yearning for a homeland and this prose passage heightens the tension between a home language and a learned one. Just as in *The Odyssey* the hero has no linear path to return to family, the voices in *Dictée* speak at irregular intervals.

The length and organization of the text's prelude destabilizes the reading. Interruptions and digressions represent speakers confronting obstacles to arrive at speech, or at the least, "semblance of speech" (75, 158). A choral voice follows the introduction of the Diseuse with an incantation: "O Muse, tell me the story / Of all these things, O Goddess, daughter of Zeus / Beginning wherever you wish, tell even us" (7). Shelley Sunn Wong remarks that these lines reprise Hesiod's invocation in *The Theogony*, a genealogy of the gods: "Relate these things to me, Muse whose home is Olympos, from the beginning; tell me which of them first came into being" (qtd. in Wong 50). She adds that in replacing Hesiod's demand for order with the request, "Beginning wherever you wish," the Diseuse places herself at odds with a literary and historical tendency to favor the "orderly patriarchal succession" of ideas, events, and narratives (Wong 50).[10] By inserting the plea of "tell even us" into the Hesiod allusion, the Diseuse's voice becomes uncertain, faced with the possibility that she is using language unintended for her. As Kun Jong Lee argues, "the cosmic misogyny, Olympian patriarchy, and mythological construction of women in the *Theogony* are so overwhelming as to cripple and ultimately dehumanize a woman reader" (83). Cha's addition, however, appropriates the language in the *Theogony* to indicate that the book's project is to subvert the linear structures privileged in his work (Lee 83).

10 Sarah Ahmed terms this "a straightening process." The nuclear family, like race, is a construction of "likeness" which dictates "things" one can or cannot do/have based on whether or not one belongs to a straight(ened) white family tree. Belonging to whiteness and straightness extends what is within reach. The "other" marked by difference is not given this form of currency; rather, the "other" becomes the object that is reached for (#).

In just three lines on an otherwise blank page, the voices multiply threefold. First, a newly translated Hesiod speaks again to his Muse with the same confidence as in the *Theogony*, a confidence founded in a sense of belonging. By belonging I mean Hesiod's positionality as the intended recipient of divine communication and as the mortal transmitter of the origin story; that is, a comfort with both the source of the history and a confidence in an audience willing to trust his transmission of it. Then, at the start of the third line, the Diseuse intercepts Hesiod's voice and transmutes it into her own, unbinding the incantation from its attachment to order. Finally, while the prayer begins with the singular "me," the voice proliferates into "us" at the final word. The Diseuse is uninterested in upholding the idea of a singular actor conveying the complexities of history alone. She speaks as a collaborative voice representing the women of this particular history. The project necessitates a community to both speak and listen to history in all its divergent and convoluted locutions, a version which requires a disruption of traditional order.

This exchange recalls the problems with authorship that arise in dictation: the Diseuse asks the Muse for the story so that she may recite it. In this case, the Muse dictates while the Diseuse repeats. To whom does the history belong, and who is the intended audience? The translation and grammar exercises on the following page also ask how language given by a teacher (or teaching institution) and its subsequent use by the learner make or unmake meaning, and where the giver and recipient stand in relation to these meanings. Interspersed between seemingly plain, decontextualized, and meaningless sentences in the first set of translation exercises such as "5. It will fit you pretty well" and "8. I met him downstairs by chance," declarative phrases interject – for instance: "3. If you did not speak so quickly, they would understand you better," "10. The harder the task, the more honorable the labor" (8). In light of the newly introduced emotional registers ranging from accusatory to zealous, the fragments that

originally sound detached adopt a shade of this affective range. The line which simply states, “2. The general remained only a little while in this place” shifts, then, from mere description to a sentence which belies nationalistic undertones (8). Unlike a standard school worksheet, this set of statements demands that the reader engage with it out of order, as the significance of the sentences changes erratically. To most closely understand what one is being asked to translate on this page, the student would not be able to answer each question chronologically.

Paul Valéry, in his writing on Mallarmé, describes this layered apprehension of text as “le montage de cette figure en qui devaient se composer le simultané de la vision avec le successif de la parole”[11] (625). Visual art and poetry are thought to operate temporally in oppositional ways; while an image can be seen and understood in a glance, poetry is perceived line by line. Valéry argues that Mallarmé’s poetry accomplishes both: “Il introduit une lecture superficielle, qu'il enchaîne à la lecture linéaire; c’était enrichir le domaine littéraire d'une deuxième dimension”[12] (p. 626). Here he suggests an anatomy of the page which breaks from the unidirectional top-down, left-right, one-line-at-a-time reading. The page’s physicality is also part of the reading experience. The form, perceived in the initial glance, becomes embedded into the text’s meaning as the language develops sequentially. In short, text and image function together to form meaning.

In the case of the worksheet in *Dictée*, the page becomes an image as it presents language ordered to resemble a familiar genre. Thus, the primary reading of the passage is visual, asking the reader to engage with the form as an image of itself. Then, the texture of the language alters the reading. The second set of translation questions complicate and multiply the voices represented by the worksheet. The first sentence, “1. I want you to speak” sounds teacherly in its

11“the montage of this figure wherein the instantaneous nature of vision and the successive nature of speech must coexist” (translation my own)

12 “He introduced a superficial reading which he links to linear reading ; it was to enrich the literary domain with a second dimension” (translation my own)

directness and the command held by the “I” over the “you” (8). However, beginning with the following sentence, “2. I wanted him to speak,” the tense and the objects of the verb change, and so too do the scenes contained in each line (8). “5. Were you afraid they would speak?” establishes the speaking first-person (“I” or “we”), a listening second-person (“you”) and the third-person plural being observed and talked about but excluded from the conversation (“they”). A student asked to translate the text would be placed in a subject position complicit in the drama which unfolds, although the actors, actions, consequences, and receivers (or “objects” of the verbs) are never named or defined.

Cha follows this task with a set of French grammar questions, most of which are impossible to answer because more than one verb tense could correspond. For instance, in “3. Elle (essuyer) la table avec une éponge,”[13] “essuyer” could be conjugated in a number of ways, including “essuie” (present), “a essuyé” (perfect), “essuyait” (imperfect), and “essuiera” (future) (9). The sentence leaves unclear the temporal situation of the action, collapsing past / present / future into a single unconjugated verb. Another question is altogether unsolvable because a verb within the provided statement is left unconjugated, but also unmarked as a verb to be conjugated by the student – meaning, the student is asked to ignore this infinitive and not attempt to resolve it: “2. Je (se lever) quand ma mère m’appeler” (9).[14] Because it is uncertain whether the mother’s calls are present continuous or a single occurrence in the past, the student faced with the worksheet cannot say whether the “I” wakes up once in the past or multiple times habitually. The “I” receiving a call from the mother is frozen in time. The mother, too, is still – a conceptual rather than concrete presence. She does not call once or multiple times; she does not call in the past, present, or future; “mother” exists side-by-side with “to call” but the action is never fully

13 “She (to wipe) the table with a sponge” (translation my own)
14 “I (to wake) when my mother to call me” (translation my own)

realized on the page. Through the phone line, yet another line – of thought, of speech, of history – loses connection from one generation to another.

In the subsequent movement Cha reprises the difficulty of lineage. Another blank page yields to what initially resembles a repeated appeal to the Muses: "Tell me the story / Of all these things. / Beginning wherever you wish, tell even us" (11). Similarly to the first prayer, this tercet is placed at the center of the page with text flushed to the left margin, a potential indication of the unification of multiple voices. Yet the words are surrounded by more white space, as the words bookmarking the first and second line of the original have been deleted. The Diseuse no longer speaks to a Muse and thus removes the epithet naming her as a Goddess and daughter of Zeus. She disconnects from the mytho-historical lineage and turns toward an anonymous collective of women to relay the story "of all these things."

These "things" are sayable but unnamable, "the utter" of the Diseuse (5). With the disappearance of proper names, "tell" and "things" take on a new life, no longer subservient to "Muse" (formerly placed beside "tell") and "Goddess" (formerly placed beside "things"). Speech unhinges itself from the official messenger and "things" reclaim their "thing-ness" – their wildness, their subversion of meaning. Utterance simultaneously points to speech act (the verb "to utter") and the idea of totality (the adjective "utter"). For saying, as opposed to naming, merges the speaking subject into the "thing" spoken of – a total identification.[15] Naming, according to Biblical tradition, is the earliest human speech act: "And the LORD God fashioned from the soil each beast of the field and each fowl of the heavens and brought each to the human to see what he would call it" (2:19). God's fashioning of the creatures and Adam's naming occur in the same paratactic sentence, as they represent the beginning and ending stages of the creation

15 I owe credit to Sorrel Dunn for pointing me to this distinction through conversation. Her essay, "'Hier um zu sagen': Saying As a Mode of Human Being" illuminated my understanding of Adam's act of naming in *Genesis*.

process. Origin and name are thus intimately linked: the naming of the animals follows directly their first appearance on earth. Because the things-to-be-named are introduced to the speaking subject as they are introduced to the world, the names are free of external association – each name evokes the very nature of the thing being named. Yet the process also necessitates a hierarchical relationship. Just as God holds the power to create and mold the human, Adam has the power to name, and thus define the essence of, each creature brought to life after him.

Saying, in contrast, relies on a reciprocal relationship between speaker and object. For a writer to create, explains Francis Ponge, consists of placing the object "au centre du monde : c'est-à-dire au centre de mes « préoccupations » : à ouvrir une certaine trappe dans mon esprit, à y penser naïvement et avec ferveur (amour)"[16] (#). That the writer must open a "trappe" (hatch, trap door) demonstrates the vulnerability involved in the process. Not only must the writer pull the object into their soul, but they must reveal a hidden door within their being – and open that up to the object. This total identification can only be called love.

The invocation morphs from a verse of praise for the Muse to a call for speech in all its common, disorderly forms. The saying or "telling" that the Diseuse wishes for is set in opposition to the act of naming in the prelude's final tercet: "IN NOMINE / LE NOM / NOMINE" (21) – a refrain commonly repeated in the phrase "in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit." While the naming of a creature by God or by the father marks the beginning of its formal existence, the capitalized text resembles an epitaph – a funerary text – carved into white stone, rendered concisely at the center of the page. Death looms over these words for, as soon as one enters the world through a name passed down a patrilineal line, one is disconnected from one's thing-ness, becoming instead an object with utility, to be claimed by the father. One is

16 "at the center of the world: in other words, at the center of my "obsessions": to open a certain hatch in my spirit, to think about it naively and with fervor (love)" (translation my own)

no longer strange; the wildness is suppressed under the civility of a name. The French word at the center, "LE NOM" (the name) pushes against this, as "nom" is a homophone to "non": a word of refusal. The verse structure wobbles, with the seemingly authoritative lines at tension with one another.

Naming and saying come to collide in the speaker's return to her homeland in the "MELPOMENE   TRAGEDY" section. What begins as a letter to her mother narrating the unrest in contemporary Seoul breaks off into a memory of departing from Korea eighteen years prior and, upon a return to present-time narration, the text grows increasingly fragmented. Verse melts into prose, the "you" which referred to the mother becomes the soldiers in front of the speaker, and the speaker shifts from the particular "I" to an unnamed and possibly collective "her." The blur between past and present, abandonment of the epistolary form, blending of genres, and confusion between the various subjectivities all contribute to a sense of loss. Even as the speaker returns to what should be familiar land, she finds herself a stranger.

For her, the return cannot be like that of Odysseus, who, over the course of decades, fights his way back to his family and home and reestablishes his position as citizen and patriarch. In the case of Odysseus, the occupation of his home by Penelope's suitors is a final hurdle for the hero to overcome, and being "nobody" is merely an alternate identity to be temporarily gained and then, just as easily, discarded.[17] Cha's speaker, in contrast, carries a name which is not hers to claim and which is for no one to hear: "Her name. First the whole name. Then syllable by

17 When Polyphemus demands his name, Odysseus famously responds "*Outis*" – "Nobody." Later, Polyphemus tells the other Cyclopses that "Nobody" has injured him, to which they reply: "Well, if no one (*me tis*) has harmed you..." (Bloom 53). In Greek, both *Outis* and *Metis* signify "Nobody," but Metis also carries the meaning of "cunning," a quality associated with Odysseus such that the poem's audience also knows him by the name of "polymetis" (the one with many tricks). Odysseus boasts that his heart "laughed at how my name and my perfect metis had tricked him" (9.414), a sentence which modulates on his "I" in three ways: "my name," "my perfect metis" (in both senses of the word), and "trick." Furthermore, when the hero proclaims himself Nobody, he describes the name as "famous" (9.364). Thus, even in the temporary anonymity Odysseus asserts himself and his fame, and emerges from this episode without compromising to his identity or social positioning.

syllable counting each inside the mouth. Make them rise they rise repeatedly without ever making visible lips never open to utter them. / Mere names only names without the image not *hers*" (87-88). "Her" points not only to the speaker but all women who find that history "Repels her rejects her expels her from *her* own" (88), and thus refers to an anonymous crowd rather than an individual hero. As opposed to Odysseus' name which multiplies in variations, "her" name is singular and fragmented, broken up into its constitutive syllables to be counted, both in the sense of measuring numerically and of validating conceptually. While the ways in which Odysseus elects to name (or not name) himself are valuable to him in ensuring his safety and in reaffirming his pride in his cunning abilities, for "her" the name has no inherent value.

She elects not to utter the name imposed upon her because, ultimately, it is "not *hers*." As with the rhyme between "nom" and "non" in the aforementioned tercet, the emphatic line-ending of the italicized *hers* voices a refusal. To be named means to belong as an object to the namer, while not having a clearly defined position of one's own within the social order – an experience of belonging and unbelonging. To describe the name as "without image" may suggest blankness, a name so devoid of meaning that it empties itself like a white screen. Yet the syntax of the phrase suggests that the name is not entirely without image, but that it is lacking in *her* image. In other words, the name was constructed and given to "her" in the image of a being or an institution with the power to identify her essence and name her accordingly, as does Adam to his creatures.