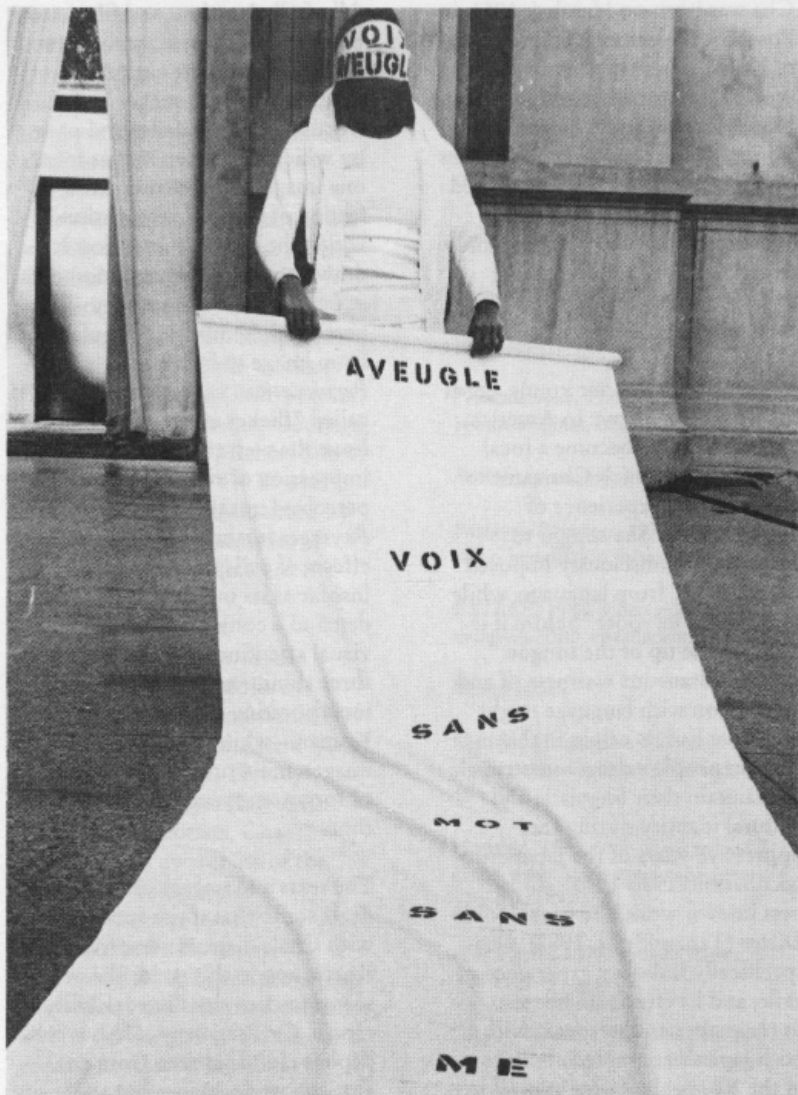


Aveugle voix, 1975, performance



During her brief yet brilliant career, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha explored a variety of media, including handmade books, video, film, sculpture, performance, and sound. Her work is distinctive for its somber, unforgettable beauty, its innovative treatment of texts and images, and its ongoing, rigorous exploration of the phenomena of physical, cultural, and linguistic displacement.

Cha was born on March 4, 1951, in Pusan, at the extreme Southern tip of Korea, where her family was seeking refuge from the advancing North Korean and Chinese armies. To escape the repressive conditions of military rule that were imposed following the anti-government demonstrations of 1961, the family emigrated to America, settling briefly in Hawaii. One year later, they moved to San Francisco.

In part because of her young age at the time of the move to America, language was to become a focal point around which Cha came to articulate her experience of displacement. She sought to maintain a "consciously imposed detachment" from language, while looking for its roots "before it is born on the tip of the tongue." Her simultaneous wariness of and fascination with language might also have had its origin in the Korean people's desperate struggle to maintain their linguistic and cultural identity during the oppressive years of the Japanese occupation (1910-1945). In her best known work, the prose/poem *Dictee* (Tanam Press, 1982), Cha specifically links her experience of exile, and its effects on her struggle to remember and to speak, with both Japan's attempted abolition of the Korean language and with the predicament of the female

subject silenced by a patriarchal culture.

Dictee's densely layered structure echoes the form of Cha's earlier video works. This exhibition features three of her single channel videos, *Mouth to Mouth*, *Vidéoème*, and *Re Dis Appearing*; a 16mm film adapted to video, *Permutations*; the three-channel video *Passages/Paysages*; and the film/video installation *EXILÉE*. All of Cha's videos and films are black and white and, with a few exceptions, consist entirely of sequences of still images and words. The slow fades and pans by which Cha often moves from one image to the next create a feeling of extreme attenuation in which the viewer's attention is drawn to the spaces and moments *in between* what is actually perceived. Similarly, the quick cuts from image to image in *Permutations* exacerbate the so-called "flicker effect" of film and leave the viewer with a composite impression of remembered and perceived images. *Passages/Paysages* further embodies the effects of a displaced consciousness insofar as its multiple monitors demand a constant shifting of visual attention—heightened by three simultaneous soundtracks incorporating French, English, and Korean—while the depicted images and words convey a sense of forgotten speech and passed time.

The texts and images of *EXILÉE* deals somewhat more specifically with Cha's displacement from Korea, and in this work she even seems to consider the possibility of return. One segment of this work depicts clouds as seen from an airplane while an incantatory voiceover counts off the minutes as

the time of arrival draws slowly nearer. Although Cha includes a number of images from the Orient, including shots of drying laundry and shoes outside a temple door, the overall feeling conveyed is one of suspension; we are reminded several times that Cha is traveling with a foreign passport and that she has mastered another tongue. At one point, the voiceover intones, "of previous. souvenirs. remnants. previously recent. recent past. in tenses. in conjugations. in numbers. in chronologies. plural pasts taken place beforehand in articulations tongues taken place beforehand abolition. effacement."

One element linking much of her work is an abiding concern with film and film theory. Cha's aesthetic influences are to be found much less among contemporary artists than among the works of filmmakers such as Chris Marker, Yasujiro Ozu, Jean-Luc Goddard, Marguerite Duras, Michael Snow, and above all, Carl Th. Dreyer. She was especially influenced by their innovative treatments of narrative and their concern for problems of memory, communication, and consciousness. Cha was also influenced by her studies of French film theory, particularly the scholarship of Christian Metz, Jean-Louis Baudry, Thierry Kuntzel, and Bertrand Augst. From these theorists, Cha developed an awareness of the artwork as an extended "apparatus," the meaning of which was inscribed between its psychological origin in the artist, its material and temporal existence, and its destination in the viewer's consciousness. While Cha developed her response to these ideas particularly in her live

performances, they can be seen to have considerably influenced her work in other media as well.

Cha, who died tragically in New York City in 1982, was a student for many years at the University of California at Berkeley, and an employee of the Pacific Film Archive and the University Art Museum.

Lawrence Rinder

Works in MATRIX (all works are in the collection of the Theresa Hak Kyung Memorial Archive in Orange, California, unless otherwise indicated):

Video

Mouth to Mouth, 1975, b/w, 8 min.

Vidéoème, 1976, b/w, 4 min.

Permutations, 1976, video version of 16mm original, b/w, 10 min.

Re Dis Appearing, 1977, b/w, 3 min.

Passages/Paysages, 1978, three-channel video installation, b/w, 26 min.

EXILÉE, 1980, video excerpt from video and film installation, b/w, 50 min.

Mixed media

Untitled (*Repetitive/Pattern*), 1975, cloth, printed letters on thread, 46 x 46".

Untitled, 1976, four pages folded graph paper with press type letters, 12 x 8-1/4".

Mot Cêche, 1978, rubber stamp, 3-3/4 x 4-7/8 x 4-1/8".

Surplus Novel, 1980, porcelain jar, purple thread, paper, typewritten words, 1-3/4 x 2-1/2". Lent by Bernadette Silveus.

Untitled, ca. 1980, glass jar, black thread, paper, typewritten words, 3 x 2 x 2".

La Chambre de Mao à 4 heures, 1981, carved plywood, rice paper, pencil, paint, 35 x 22-1/2".

Faire-Part, 1976, 15 envelopes, ink, press type letters, 5-3/4 x 7" ea.

Untitled, 1976, mixed media collage, 4-3/4 x 4-3/4".

Untitled, 1976, mixed media collage, 4-3/4 x 4-3/4".

Untitled, 1976, mixed media collage, 4-3/4 x 4-3/4".

Untitled, ca. 1976, burlap, ink letters, plastic, thread, 14-3/4 x 14-1/4".

Untitled (Étang), 1978, envelope with paper cards with printed words, six cards 4 x 5" ea.

Audience - Distant Relative, 1978, ink letters on envelopes, six envelopes, 9-1/2 x 6-1/2" ea.

eau, ile, pierre (water, island, stone), n.d., rice paper, metal, leaf, ink, 3 sheets, 5-1/2 x 6-1/4" ea.

Publications

Apparatus: Cinematographic Apparatus (New York: Tanam Press, 1980).

Dictee (New York: Tanam Press, 1982).

One-person exhibitions:

Union Gallery, San Jose, CA '78;
Athol McBean Gallery, San Francisco Art Institute '79; The Queens Museum, NY '81; Mills College Art Gallery, Oakland, CA '89.

Selected group exhibitions:

Stempelpplaats, Amsterdam, Netherlands, *International Rubber Stamp Design Exhibition* '77; University Art Museum, Berkeley '78; Living Museum, Reykjavik, Iceland '81; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, Netherlands '81; The Kitchen, NYC '82; Kijkhuis, The Haag, Holland '82; Artists Space, NYC '83; The New Museum for Contemporary Art, NYC, *Difference: On Representation and Sexuality* '84 (catalog).

Bibliography about the artist:

Richie, Donald. "The Asian Bookshelf: Transcendent Lives," *Japan Times*, July 23 '83.

Stephens, Michael. "Korea: Theresa Hak Kyung Cha," in *The Dramaturgy of Style: Voice in Short Fiction* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press '86).

Wolf, Susan. "Theresa Cha: Recalling Telling Retelling," *Afterimage*, Summer '86.

Trinh T. Minh-ha. "Grandma's Story," in *Blasted Allegories*, ed. Brian Wallis (Cambridge: The MIT Press '87).

Martin, Stephen-Paul. "Theresa Cha: Creating a Feminine Voice," in *Open Form and the Feminine Imagination: The Politics of Reading in Twentieth-Century Innovative Writing* (Washington, DC: Maisonneuve Press '88).

MATRIX is supported in part by grants from the Paul L. and Phyllis Wattis Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, The LEF Foundation, and Art Matters Inc. Additional support for this exhibition has been provided by the Theresa Hak Kyung Cha Memorial Foundation.