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WRITING UTOPIA NOW: Utopian Poetics In The Work Of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha

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WRITING UTOPIA NOW:
Utopian Poetics In The Work Of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha

by

Sally-Shakti Willow

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
of the University of Westminster
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Abstract

This thesis examines Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *DICTEE* (1982), *Audience Distant Relative* (1977) and *Reveillé dans la Brume (Awakened in the Mist*) (1977). The premise of the thesis is an exploration of the various ways in which these works both perform and gesture toward the possibility of a 'utopian' experience of non-alienation. In Cha's vocabulary, this takes the form of 'interfusion' and is related to the role of the artist as alchemist. Cha employs formal and linguistic innovations in her text, mail art and performance works to invite active participation from her readers and audience in a gesture toward embodied intersubjectivity. Her grappling with the challenges relating to the articulation of subjectivity place her work at the centre of contemporary critical debates around subjectivity and innovative poetics. In particular, recent scholarship on race and the poetic avant-garde has called for cross-disciplinary approaches to reading *DICTEE* as a text that explores the intersections of subjectivity and its performance in contemporary innovative poetics. Developing a theory of Utopian Poetics from my reading of Ernst Bloch's utopian philosophy, I explore the ways in which *DICTEE* and Cha's other works perform a yearning for non-alienated subjectivity that remains necessarily open and incomplete.

My reading of *DICTEE*, in particular, is primarily informed by my own practices of yoga and meditation, and these practices form the basis of both my scholarly and creative engagements with this research. This scholarly thesis comprises Part 1 of a two-part submission. Part 2 comprises my own creative experiments with Utopian Poetics.

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It takes many years, and many friends, to write a thesis.

Declaration

I declare that all the material contained in this thesis is my own work.

WRITING UTOPIA NOW:
Utopian Poetics In The Work Of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha

A Note on the Thesis Structure

This doctoral thesis combines scholarship and creative practice and is submitted in two parts. Part 1 comprises a scholarly study of Korean American writer and artist Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *DICTEE* (1982) in the theoretical context of Ernst Bloch's utopian philosophy. The Introduction to Part 1 provides an account of my reading of the text in this context and how it has informed my thinking as a creative practitioner, followed by a critical introduction to *DICTEE* scholarship in terms of contemporary innovative poetics and Asian American women's writing. Also included in the Introduction to Part 1 is a brief commentary on my own poetic experimentations. In the Introduction I introduce the four books of innovative poetry that I have written as part of my research into *DICTEE* and what I have termed 'Utopian Poetics'. All four books are submitted as Part 2 of this thesis submission.

My poetry has been my entry point to critical research through creative response and development. Creative practice has enabled me to navigate the relationships between *DICTEE* and my theoretical reading, and has provided an articulation of my own position and deepening understanding of the texts I have encountered through the course of my research. Where those poems speak to, are informed by, or precede my understanding in the theoretical chapters, they have been included within the body of the scholarly thesis alongside the chapters as an iterative variation of the process of my thinking through of Utopian Poetics as a practice in relation to *DICTEE*. The intention is that these particular creative interventions will be read in dialogue with the theoretical writing that forms the chapters. Each creative text is also included within one of the four books of poetry that comprise Part 2.

My decision to isolate a number of those poems and bring them into a closer relationship with the scholarly text is to foreground the development of my thinking as both a creative and critical process. Often my understanding has developed through creative application of a theoretical problem, or through the creative exploration of a practice or gesture initiated by Cha in *DICTEE*, or has developed in

tandem with my critical writing for a chapter. The placing of some of these creative interventions into Utopian Poetics in dialogue with the scholarly chapters, then, is intended to foreground both my own research processes and the ways in which the two different forms may speak productively to one another. This hybridisation of forms also follows the impulse of the gesture initiated by Cha in *DICTEE* to collage forms and genres within a single text, without commentary or explanation, to bring those forms into a resonant – and sometimes dissonant – dialogue.

The purpose of my research, both creative and critical, has been to explore forms of contemporary textual practice that could be termed 'Utopian Poetics'. My starting point for both has been Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *DICTEE*, the first literary text in which I encountered what I would subsequently define as Utopian Poetics through my research into the utopian philosophy of Ernst Bloch. My reasoning for and approach to this are set out in the Introduction below.

The Introduction is followed by a creative-critical 'manifesto' of Utopian Poetics, which forms a bridge between the critical and creative components of this thesis submission. 'WRITING UTOPIA NOW' distils the thinking developed throughout the majority of my research period into a creative-critical document that attempts to both elucidate and perform Utopian Poetics as I have understood it in theory and practice throughout the development of my research. 'WRITING UTOPIA NOW' was first published in the 'Utopian Acts' Special Issue of *Studies in Arts and Humanities Journal* (Vol. 5: No. 1, 2019). It is also published as the first section of my poetry book *ATHA* (Knives Forks and Spoons Press, 2019).

'WRITING UTOPIA NOW' precedes the formal beginning of Part 1, which comprises the scholarly chapters and selected creative interventions. Part 1 is divided into two sections, Section A: Close-Readings and Section B: Critical Encounters. Section A contains my most recent research and is focused on close reading analysis of *DICTEE*. Section B contains my earlier research and is focused on the material embodiment of Cha's text and performance works. Part 2 is comprised solely of the four books of utopian poetics that I have created as part of my research process.

A Note on My Own Poems Inserted Into The Thesis:

Poem: infinite imperative

This poem is created as a ritual to Theresa Hak Kyung Cha. The poem was composed in several stages, and this is echoed by the various layers, which comprise the visual poem on the page. Initially, this poem took the form of a performed reading from what I identified as ritual text on page 158 of *DICTEE* (2001):

'You turn the seasons by the directions
South
North
West
East
Your palm a silver pool of liquid then as the seasons choose affix as stone in blue metal ice.

…

You seek the night that you may render the air pure. Distillation extending breath to its utmost pure. Its first exhale at dawn to be collected. In the recesses of the leaves is an inlet of dew, clearest tears. You stow them before their fall by their own weight. You stand a column of white lustre, atoned with tears, restored in breath.'

This ritual text is discussed in Chapter 1 of the main thesis.

For the performance, I invited a group of ten participants on the 'Experimental Poetry: Playing with Form and Language' course at Arvon Lumb Bank to stand and turn through the ritual directions as I read the first part of the text from *DICTEE*. I then guided participants through a breathing meditation for the second part. Following this initial performance, I began to collage my poem in response, using found text from a local map of the area in relation to the cardinal directions from the room in which we stood to perform the ritual. The language of the poem includes both interior and exterior markers of direction, including the location within the

room of windows and fireplace, the location within the house of the library, and the relative direction of landmarks and localities in the area of Heptonstall, Hebden Bridge, West Yorkshire. The language of the poem – in some ways – grounds it in both the geographical location and the embodied experience of the original ritual reading. The reading was performed on the Autumn Equinox, 21 September 2017, at 9pm (2100hrs). The numbers appended to the poem read 21/9 9/21 to mark the time and date. In writing the poem, I have interwoven the found text from *DICTEE*'s ritual with these other language elements, playing with the syntax and vocabulary to create a viscerally embodied rhythm to the poem, which was my primary intention at the time in response to similar practices I identify within *DICTEE*. When I perform this poem as it is now written on the page, I invite the audience to participate in its performance through embodying the directional turning and deepening into the breathing. This kind of embodied audience participation is a key feature that I identify as an element of Utopian Poetics across a range of Cha's artworks, including both text and performance works.

Visually and viscerally it contains many layers on the page. The foundational layer is an anatomical diagram of the fluid body, 'FIGURE 29', from Donna Fahri's *Yoga Mind, Body & Spirit: A Return to Wholeness* (Holt Paperbacks, New York: 2001). This is reminiscent of Cha's inclusion of an anatomical diagram of the breathing and speaking apparatus on page 74 of *DICTEE*. The diagram in this poem is a full-body diagram, but it has been reproduced several times and what remains is only faintly visible. Cha plays with reproduction quality of visual images with the over-exposed image of Korean Han-Gul text on the flyleaf to the book. A hand-drawn image by my long-time collaborator Joe Evans is doodled over the original image, speaking to the inclusion of hand-written notes in Cha's text on pages 39-40, 146-148 and hand-drawn Chinese calligraphy on pages 26-27 and 154. These visual and visceral elements of the text are discussed within the thesis chapters. In this poem, the full-body diagram speaks to the fully embodied ritual that precedes the writing of the poem on the page as well as being performed by the poem's material form and invited by the poem's text. The hand-drawn doodles provide a visual interaction with the ritual intention of the poem and its elemental language, such as 'water', 'fire', 'river'. The viscerally enmeshed words and visual images on the page, with the figure of the body simultaneously almost dancing out of and leaning into the text

of the poem, approximately mirror one another spatially. This is suggestive of the interrelationship between text and body in this embodied ritual poem. The final part of the ritual poem is centred and grounded between and beneath the feet of the figure in the diagram. This gives a sense of visceral weight to the poem, and completion to the ritual. The final part of many ritual practices involving body and breath would be to centre and ground the participants' energy before closing the ritual space.

The poem is conceived as a ritual in *homage* to Cha's *DICTEE* and as an early experiment into formal experimentation as a process of Utopian Poetics.

*

Poem: 'ghostword sembling'

Reconstructed reading: Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, *Dictee* p140 & 'the sound is a dripping faucet' from *Exilée and Temps Morts* ([2009], ed. Constance M. Lewallen, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press) p134; Ernst Bloch 'The shape of the Inconstruable Question' from *Spirit of Utopia* ([2000], trans. Anthony A. Nassar, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press).

On 22nd June 1976, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha sat by the tomb of Tristan Tzara in Montparnasse Cemetery, Paris, listening to the rain. She wrote about this experience in a journal entry beginning with the words 'the sound is a dripping faucet'. This gesture instigates a cut-up practice – following Tzara's Dadaist poetic technique – to disassemble and reassemble some of Cha's words, creating the opportunity to liberate some of her vocabulary from the poetic structures she creates in her writing and hear her words with fresh resonance. Reading and collaging these words with found vocabulary from Bloch's *Spirit of Utopia* gestures towards the (in)articulation of the unsayable, or the utopian, which I identify as an element of the utopian poetics that drives Cha's text works.

The poem creates an interplay of multiple voices forming a new and polyphonic, or antiphonal, voice. The antiphonies within this poem are suggestive of both the (in)articulable subject position and the verbal articulation that never settles, closes or

completes – both of which I identify within *DICTEE* and discuss in Chapter 1 of the main thesis. The multiplicity of voices, possibilities and iterations also suggests Bloch's concern with the 'inconstruable question', also discussed in Chapter 1. This poem draws together the language of these two key elements of each text, weaving them into a text that performs the problems it explores.

*

Poem: Cha's Hands, 1979

This poem is an ekphrastic response to the photograph by James Cha printed in *The Dream of the Audience: Theresa Hak Kyung Cha (1951-1982)* (2001), ed. Constance M. Lewallen, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, (n.p.). The image depicts Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's hands at a typewriter keyboard. Cha had an interest in visual representations of hands, and was working on a project exploring this theme, which remained incomplete at the time of her death. It is interesting to me that she chose to represent her own hands in this way – poised at the typewriter keyboard, in identification with her practice as a writer. Cha writes about her own process as a writer in *DICTEE*, and the text on page 141 is particularly striking in this regard:

She says to herself if she were able to write she could continue to live. Says to herself if she would write without ceasing. To herself if by writing she could abolish real time. She would live. If she could display it before her and be-come its voyeur.

I explore this quotation within the chapters of the main thesis.

The poem draws on the visual image as stimulus, and includes found text from the above quotation and from Carrie Noland's *Agency and Embodiment: Performing Gestures/Producing Culture*.

The poem is intended to be read both vertically and horizontally, creating multiple possibilities from the spatial and contextual relation of vocabulary and syntactical elements in various constellatory structures.

*

Poem: 'macrofigurative'

This poem does not respond to *DICTEE* directly and is placed after the completed thesis to indicate the development of my poetry beyond the themes and practices explored within the theoretical study.

Primarily, this poem experiments with the relationship between subjectivity and objective conditions as an embodied, visceral and energetic experience. One of the key elements of Utopian Poetics that I encountered in my practice was the relationship between form and space that constitutes the poem. Prior to a poem being written, it can be conceived of with infinite possibilities. Yet once the material of language begins to be laid down on the page the poem takes a limited form. Without this limitation in form, however, there would be no poem. This is a poetic experiment with Bloch's utopian function of art and literature, in which the 'not-yet-conscious' must be drawn into limited material form, bringing it into relation with objective reality and thus limiting its possibility. Without being conceived in material form, however, there is no manifestation of possibility at all. Possibility – in this case, the utopian possibility of non-alienation – can only be gestured towards in material form, but without this gesture it cannot even be conceived. Every time a poem is written or a possibility is performed it must take on a finite form in order to become active in this world.

The poem is conceived as a *mandala*, which is a visual, usually geometric, image that can be used as a tool for both ritual and meditation in spiritual practices. As I interpret it, a *mandala* is also an energised, self-contained structure, open to channelling vibrational frequencies determined by the resonances created by/within the formal composition of the structure itself. As my practice with Utopian Poetics has developed, I have created a number of poems conceived as *mandalas*, in which the rhythmic and material internal structures of the poem function as vibrational structures for the purposes of ritual/meditation/channelling of energies. This poem is intended to both perform and explore this possibility.

The poem was written partly in response to the *Emma Kunz – Visionary Drawings* exhibition and the accompanying gallery notes/texts at the Serpentine Gallery, London: 5 April 2019. Kunz's 'visionary drawings' are colourful geometric patterns and shapes said to channel healing energies in response to her clients' illnesses and disease. Kunz would meditate on her clients and draw large-scale geometric patterns in response, interpreting the necessary healing from the image she created. The Serpentine exhibition also contained a bench made from the healing rock that Kunz discovered. I sat on this bench to contemplate the images and absorb the rock's energy in a ritual gesture while making preliminary notes for the poem. The exhibition was recommended to me by CAConrad, whose own somatic ritual poetry has been a source of great inspiration for my own development as a poet.

A note on the terms 'spiritual' and 'spirituality', as I use them in this thesis:

Though the dictionary definition of 'spiritual' is concerned primarily with the 'incorporeal' (*Merriam-Webster*) or that which is 'opposed to material or physical things' (*Oxford English Dictionary*), the sense in which I use the term throughout this thesis is more nuanced and idiosyncratic. I use the term as I have experienced it in my own embodied practices: primarily yoga, meditation and ritual. Etymologically, the word 'spiritual' comes from the Latin *spiritus*, which holds the meanings of both 'breath' and 'breathing'. While 'breath' could be interpreted as an incorporeal substance, air, 'breathing' is an embodied process reliant on the physical breathing apparatus of the one who breathes. Moreover, the act of breathing connects the physical breather with that which is incorporeal through the inspiration and expiration of air in and out of the nostrils or mouth, through the respiratory tract, and into and out of the lungs. This physical connection with the incorporeal breath equally connects one person to another, not only in that breathing is the fundamental physical act that almost all living beings share in common, but also in that the air that is breathed surrounds and connects us all. It is what writer Juliana Spahr calls, 'This connection of everyone with lungs' (University of California Press, 2005). Breathing is a physical process, anchored in material apparatus, with the potential to engender an experience of connection between self and other.

Breath and breathing are central to all spiritual practices that I have experienced and performed. Focused awareness and attention to the rhythms of breathing is the underlying element in perhaps any practice that I would call 'spiritual'. Practitioners of yoga and meditation are often guided to 'focus on your breath as it enters your body through your nostrils', or to 'observe the rise and fall of your abdomen with each inhalation and exhalation'. Breath awareness can be used as part of any ritual practice, to quiet the mind and bring the participants into stillness and connection at significant points in the ritual. Through this physical awareness on the embodied breathing process, I have experienced both deeper grounding into my physical body *and* greater expansion of my energetic field – the incorporeal part of myself, which could also be referred to as the 'spirit'.

In this thesis the terms 'spiritual' and 'spirituality', therefore, refer specifically to a range of materially embodied practices by which energetic awareness is expanded and connections between self and other may be experienced or observed as a result. The ways in which Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *DICTEE* (1982) speaks to this particular sense of spirituality are described in detail within the thesis below. Specifically, it is the rhythmic connection with my breathing that I experienced as a result of both the content and, crucially, the form of *DICTEE*, that led me to encounter the text as a performance of something 'spiritual'. This thesis explores the materiality of that performance through the lens of the textual materiality of contemporary innovative poetics.

Further, it is this material sense of the interconnectedness between self and other that I locate in Ernst Bloch's utopian philosophy as the central theoretical perspective in the thesis. Bloch's insistence on the primacy of the relationship between 'the subjective' and 'the objective' ensures that his utopian philosophy remains grounded in what he calls the 'concrete utopia' of that which is materially realisable at any given time (1988). His engagement with the material aspects of modern poetry, such as fragmentation, in his essay 'Marxism and Poetry' (1935), further supports the material foundations of utopian poetics through utopian philosophy. In the essay, Bloch theorises a connection between fragmentation in modern poetry and the '*subject pending in process*' (1988: 162), through which both subjectivity and materiality remain in an open state of incompletion, constantly in the process of being created. In my own spiritual practice it is an awareness of my breath that has brought me closest to an experience of this phenomenon. Equally for Bloch, the essence of the utopian is 'the ultimate self-encounter' (2000: 3), by which one experiences oneself as not separate from others. This self-encounter can only be experienced partially and in a limited way through the material senses, since it is the desire to 'occupy' oneself that ultimately drives *and* thwarts this encounter. In this thesis, I explore the particular ways in which Bloch's central concept of utopia can be explored in the materiality of modern and contemporary poetry through examining it in close relation to Charles Olson's essay 'Proprioception' (1965) as a lens for examining Cha's textual practice in *DICTEE* and her mail art piece *Audience Distant Relative* (1977).

In each instance described above and elucidated in this thesis, my understanding of 'spirituality' is specifically located within the inter-relationship between the materiality of self and other as connected energetically. Breathing is both a figurative illustration of this and an embodied way by which to experience it. Moreover, this same connective experience between self and other via an embodied encounter with the materiality of *DICTEE*'s textual innovations is key to understanding my positioning of *DICTEE* as a spiritual text and one which can be read in the context of Utopian Poetics.

INTRODUCTION

Learning to Read : *DICTEE*

When I first picked up a copy of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *DICTEE* I had absolutely no reading strategies for a text like this. It was the first 'experimental' text I'd ever read. It looked like no book I had ever seen. There was no discernable narrative structure, and even the text itself, instead of being set out in recognisable lines of prose or poetry, took multiple forms: parallel paragraphs in French and English, numbered sections for translation, hand-written drafting, intersecting patterns of text and white space, pages interspersed with uncaptioned images throughout. On first (and subsequent) readings, navigating *DICTEE*'s pages was a far more visceral and material – embodied – experience for me than an intellectual one. I could not understand its 'meaning', nor its politics. But I could *feel* its rhythms in my body. The rhythms of relationship between speech and silence, the rhythmic cadences of its long lines of prosody punctuated by staccato fragments, the long slow breathing of its pages. These were rhythms I recognised. They were *my* rhythms. Rhythms that I knew in my body from over a decade of yoga practice and training; rhythms that were in my blood – handed down from my paternal grandmother who'd practiced and taught yoga for three decades before I found my way to my own classes, from my mother who dreamed of a lived spirituality while struggling to raise her two children in a white working class suburb in the south east of England. These were the rhythms that I breathed with in my lungs. Rhythms of meditation in *DICTEE*'s foregrounded use of space and silence that I moved to deep within my soul. I felt the energetic structures encoded into Cha's book and recognised that I was *home*.

I read *DICTEE* over and over, just feeling what it felt like to live and breathe within those pages. I'd never encountered a work of literature that could take me into a space of meditation that I'd only ever previously experienced through yoga. I'd read lots of spiritual texts: there were those that described a state of meditation and how to attain it, self-help and instructional texts; those that fictionalised a spiritual experience and told a story; there was the *Bible*, the *Gnostic Gospels*, the *Bhagavad Gita*, the *Upanishads*, and *Patanjali's Yoga Sutras*, to name a few – but the

translations that I had, and the ways they were taught and explicated tended to be more concerned with narrative content than poetic form. I'd read lots of literature: poetry, prose, and much of it concerned with the 'spiritual'. Yet no text before *DICTEE* had really made me *feel* the spiritual pulse *of the text itself.* Perhaps because I was so utterly unprepared to encounter a text like *DICTEE* politically I was able to enter into its rhythms and structures more viscerally. Initially alienated from much of the book's content, I discovered it at the levels of form and materiality long before I had a vocabulary for understanding or exploring how even those elements functioned.

Gleaning what I could from *DICTEE*'s content led me to resonate with certain aspects that spoke to my spiritual experience of the text. Whole passages such as an encounter with the Christian Eucharist on pages 13-14, which through its form is far more rhythmic and embodied than descriptive; the embedded reproduction of St Matthew's Gospel chapter 4, verses 1-11 in their entirety; extensive citations from St Therese's autobiography, *Story of a Soul*. These were glaring. Then there were subtler and more nuanced suggestions in the language. The section of the book called TERPSICHORE CHORAL DANCE, which has received little critical attention, seemed to be entirely composed as ritual. Sequences such as, 'You turn the seasons by the directions / South / North / West / East' were recognisable to me as rituals that I performed regularly in my own spiritual practice. The lexicon of ritual is present throughout the section, in language such as, 'Distillation extending breath to its utmost pure', 'exhale', 'first exhale at dawn', 'Cry supplication', 'From the introit, preparation is made for communion'. My eyes and mind registered these words and phrases in isolation, seeing that they were there without comprehending what they meant, how they were to be made sense of in the context of the book as a whole. The final section, POLYMNIA SACRED POETRY, which is actually one of the book's most sustained narrative passages, tells the story of a girl who goes to drink from a well, encountering a young woman who is already there who gives her a gift of herbs and instructions on how to use them for healing the girl's sick mother. Following this is what I later came to understand as the Daoist Cosmogony translated into English, echoing its calligraphy in Chinese at the beginning of TERPSICHORE. This contains numbered phrases such as 'First, the universe', 'Second, Ying and Yang', 'Tenth, a circle within a circle, a series of concentric

circles'. The last phrase being emphasised through isolated repetition a page later. Spirituality was present in the images, too. URANIA ASTRONOMY opens with a diagram of the human body inscribed with calligraphy, which I recognised as something similar to an energetic healing diagram detailing the subtle energy currents that run throughout the body connecting it to the fabric of the universe. Images such as this are far more widely documented in Chinese and Indian philosophies than in Western ways of understanding the body, devoid of spiritual and energetic connections. The diagram is set white on black, which through its visual representation suggests a connection with the stars and resonates with the section's title (astronomy) and, in turn, a connection with the Daoist cosmogony in the two succeeding sections.

Scattered throughout the book as they were, these – and other – lexicons and images associated with the practices of ritual, meditation, breath work, healing and cosmic consciousness provided me with confirmation that there was *something* spiritual about this text, I just didn't know what it was. This was coupled with the embodied forms and meditative rhythms that the book itself engendered in me while I read. As a result, I returned to *DICTEE* many times, reading it perhaps four or five times before I even began to comprehend its wider literary and political impact.

*

It was early 2015. I was halfway through my MA in Creative and Critical Writing at the University of Sussex, which I'd returned to as a mature student in my mid-thirties. I'd been an English teacher for ten years since leaving the University of Kent with a BA in English and American Literature in 2002, so I knew that English – both reading and writing – came easily to me. What I hadn't realised was that my return to academia would be a traumatising experience in which I'd feel out of place both intellectually and physically for the majority of my time studying. Having been out of academia for over a decade, I lacked the vocabulary and skills of critical thinking that were essential for success – and survival. And I was entirely unprepared for the ways in which academic discourse and debate had changed politically in the intervening years. These lapses are my own error, and also a result of my cultural context. Very few people in my family or social milieu had been to

university, and nobody I knew was educated to this level. In taking my BA and becoming a teacher, I'd tentatively entered Middle Class, but was neither really here nor there. My family and social life still were, and are, predominantly white working class environments. The schools I taught in only exemplified and reflected this demographic. Stepping into a higher level of academic discourse and community, at first for my MA and subsequently my PhD, I felt acutely aware of my working class roots every time I opened my mouth. And, becoming immersed in the political discourse that had arisen around *DICTEE* and 'experimental' literature from 2015 onwards, I felt acutely aware of the whiteness of my skin. Neither of these things, until now, was I able to recognise or articulate for most of the duration of my studies. Nor, further, that these were exactly the kinds of traumas that I was meeting with in *DICTEE*, through Cha's own encoded experiences of speech articulation as a marker of racial inequality. Rather, I spent most of my time desperately trying to flee from the pain of who I am.

In the spring of 2015, as I made my first encounters with *DICTEE* – and with experimental literature more generally in my 'Experimental Writing' class during semester two of my MA – the landscape of public discourse on race and experimental writing opened into a heated, and very necessary, debate. This debate, which had been part of a marginalised discourse, predominantly among Asian- and African-American poets and writers of colour in the US, became more urgent and more prominent as a culmination of several timely events. The publication of a number of vital and seminal texts in and around the early 2010s contributed to the development of a public discourse highlighting the polarities of exclusion and appropriation experienced by writers of colour working in and with formally experimental literary practices in the US. Timothy Yu's *Race and the Avant-Garde: Experimental and Asian American Poetry Since 1965* (Stanford University Press, 2009) highlights and challenges examples of Asian American writers being excluded from the prominent discourses around experimental poetry, and the appropriation or exploitation of Asian cultural products by white avant-garde writers and literary practices. Dorothy Wang's *Thinking Its Presence: Form, Race and Subjectivity in Contemporary Asian American Poetry* (Stanford University Press, 2014) situates the turn away from subjectivity in the dominant practices of, and discourse surrounding, contemporary experimental poetics as implicitly encoding the normalisation of

hegemonic white, patriarchal subjects in its ostensibly 'unmarked' forms. The discourse was widening, and the internet was helping to spread the debate. Cathy Park Hong's essay 'Delusions of Whiteness in the Avant-Garde', published in the journal *Lana Turner* (#7, November 2014), pulled no punches in its cataloguing of institutionalised racism within contemporary American poetry: beginning with the assertion that, 'To encounter the history of avant-garde poetry is to encounter a racist tradition' (248), and ending with the imperative to 'Fuck the avant-garde. We must hew our own path' (253). Hong's article exploded the topic, prompting a stream of reactions and responses. In December 2014 Daniel Borzutzky commented in his post, 'Delusions of Progress', for *Poetry Foundation* that it was 'surprising, interesting […] how many people are reading and talking about this essay' (2014: n.p.). He noted, 'Google "Cathy Park Hong Delusions of Whiteness" and the hits are still streaming in on pages 9 and 10.' The conversation had erupted.

On March 10 2015 the *Boston Review* published a collection of essay responses on the topic of 'Race and the Poetic Avant Garde' by Dorothy Wang, David Marriott, Lyn Hejinian, Prageeta Sharma, David Lloyd, Mónica de la Torre, and Erica Hunt, with a final essay by John Yau being added on 29 April. In the interim, another bomb had been dropped. Just three days after the publication of these essays, on March 13 2015, Kenneth Goldsmith, a white American Conceptual Poet deeply embedded within the institutionally-sanctioned poetic 'avant-garde' that the debates detailed above were engaged with, performed a piece of 'uncreative writing' akin to the Modernist 'readymades' in which he selects a piece of unpoetic text and appropriates it as poetry. The text, in this instance, was the 'Saint Louis County autopsy report detailing the corpse of Michael Brown'[1]. Michael Brown Jr., an 18-year-old African American man had been shot dead by white police officer Darren Wilson in Ferguson, Missouri on 9 August 2014. The racial implications were raw and unmistakable. Goldsmith's appropriation of this text was criticised as another flagrant example of the violent appropriation of bodies of colour by white people in positions of privilege and power. Its contextualisation as a poetry reading in the institutionalised traditions of the avant-garde (Goldsmith gave the reading at Brown University, a highly selective Ivy League university located on Rhode Island) helped

[1] Ken Chen, 'Authenticity Obsession, or Conceptualism as Minstrel Show', June 11, 2015: https://aaww.org/authenticity-obsession/ (n.p.)

to keep the ensuing debate centred on culturally embedded racism within contemporary poetic practice. Two months later, on May 16 2015, a petition was levelled at Vanessa Place, a white female conceptual artist working with similarly 'uncreative' and appropriative practices in the readymade tradition, in response to her continuous durational performance of tweeting racist dialogue from Margaret Mitchell's 1936 novel *Gone with the Wind*. Neither artist chose to enter into the debate around race and avant-garde poetry that was already becoming well established by writers such as Timothy Yu, Dorothy Wang and Cathy Park Hong. Both chose to defend their own practices as legitimate avant-garde artistic traditions, and continue[2]. In response to Vanessa Place, Heriberto Yépez – one of many delegates who withdrew from a poetry conference at Berkeley in protest at her scheduled appearance – argued, 'We are all Vanessa Place'. What Yépez meant by this, in the words of Ken Chen, was that this was 'a critique of avant-garde poetry as an institution'. Chen argues that, '[w]hat Goldsmith and Place's appropriations showed is that Conceptual Poetry *requires* racialised bodies' (2015: n.p.).[3] Reading these debates, as I was just beginning to try to understand and contextualise *DICTEE*, my own whiteness became increasingly visible.

[2] See, for example, the feature on Kenneth Goldsmith in the *New Yorker* 5 October 2015 and notes to the poem 'Miss Scarlet' by Vanessa Place on the Poetry Foundation website. Full citations are provided in the bibliography.

[3] Conceptual Poetry, and the broader notion of 'Uncreative Writing', however, have evolved beyond the limitations of their original conceptions through their adoption, adaptation and practice by a number of poets and writers whose identities and projects trouble the boundaries and resist the forms' simple closure and reification in these terms. For example, Tracie Morris's sound poem performance 'Africa(n)' (2008) is composed of verbal/vocal riffs on the line 'It all started when we were brought here as slaves from Africa' spoken by Trinidadian-American actor Geoffrey Holder. There is no formal written version of the text of this poem, but at least one vocal recording exists (see the PennSound Archive for this). The poem itself works with this found textual material as its source text and performs various sonic and semantic explorations of this line. The initial referent 'It', uncoupled from an original deictic context is open to multiple possibilities for interpretation. Given its repetition and reproduction in iterative forms throughout the poem, it could be seen to suggest the origin of the racialization of bodies and the continuance of such in various forms both politically and linguistically. Morris, as a black woman – occupying the subject position of a racialised and gendered subject – creates her own intervention into the formal processes of Conceptual Writing to question the very concept of racialization. Further poetic projects that trouble the boundaries of Conceptual, or Uncreative, Writing at the edges of race and gender include M. Nourbese Philip's *ZONG!* (2008) and Caroline Bergvall's *Drift* (2015). Conceptual Writing, as a form, thus proves itself capacious enough to allow for adaptation and challenge within the scope of its broader project boundaries.

A Series of Critical Failures

Reading the extant critical literature on *DICTEE* and on Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's life and multi-disciplinary artistic production in general, I found little or nothing that corroborated my nascent sense of something spiritual at work (or at play) within the text. Through the lens of literary criticism I encountered *DICTEE* as a political text, read politically. Juliana Spahr's formal analysis of Cha's experimental techniques in *Everybody's Autonomy* (University of Alabama Press, 2001); Elaine H Kim's reading of *DICTEE* as an essentially Asian American text in *Writing Self, Writing Nation* (Third Woman Press, 1994); Eun Kyung Min's argument that there is no speaking subject in *DICTEE*, that the Asian American speaking subject is positioned as a complete erasure (1998).[4] Or Timothy Yu's perceptive argument that neither of these positions accurately located the text as both Asian American *and* formally experimental. I too wanted to argue that it was both. But my whiteness tripped me up and made me wonder whether I too was guilty of appropriating and exploiting Cha's Asianness for my own use. After all, it was my connection with the spiritual rhythms and embodied materiality of Cha's text that had moved me. My own connection to the text, through yoga – an Asian practice that was not culturally my own – to Cha's mix of pan-Asian spirituality (which I would later learn encompassed Daoism, Buddhism, Korean Shamanism and a daily Tai Chi practice) seemed gross, crass and racist. Fearing to critically engage with the text through the formal analyses of contemporary poetry for fear that I would be overlaying a further set of racially aggressive critical procedures onto my own already naively culturally appropriative reading, my response to *DICTEE* moved in two distinct directions away from the text itself. It was not until I came back to the text, however, to close reading through the lens of contemporary innovative poetics to examine the gestures and practices initiated by Cha herself in *DICTEE*, that I was able to fully claim my own reading. Further, in reading contemporary poet-critics who engage with formal textual analysis and whose criticism is opening up the discussion of linguistically innovative poetics to explore the contested issues of race, gender, sexuality, identity

[4] 'Reading the Figure of Dictation in Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictée*' in *Other Sisterhoods: Literary Theory and US Women of Colour*, ed. Sandra Kumamoto Stanley (University of Illinois Press, 1998).

and subjectivity within the field, I was able to find that my voice had a place and a meaningful argument to make.

In my poetry, I sought to explore and embody those meditative rhythms of spirituality that I had first encountered in my reading of *DICTEE*. In my critical reading, I avoided almost all discussion of *DICTEE*'s poetics and located my research in the utopian philosophy of Ernst Bloch, whose theoretical writings are troubled by a messianic spirituality in which I could recognise shared concerns. And in my life, I avoided academic communities as much as possible, taking solace in the friendships I had within my spiritual communities – recognising, by now, that there were questions to be raised about the ways those communities themselves engaged with issues of race, gender and sexuality, but preferring instead to take comfort in the shared understanding of my own sense of self that they offered me as an escape.

I have realised late – too late – that these traumatic experiences are the experiences that could have been my way into the thornier elements of *DICTEE*'s text, both as a critical reader and as a writer of my own poetic responses. This is something I now intend to explore beyond the framework of this research project. And that my continued refusal to face these traumas within myself has led me to reproduce and perpetuate precisely those things I most feared. My thesis, as it stands, reproduces many of the elements of white oppressive reading that I dearly wished to avoid. But my inability to confront them head on led to my blindness of their reproduction in my own writing. Where I have been in closest contact with the text of *DICTEE* itself is where my argument is strongest and my voice has a unique critical reading to give.

When I started my MA, I wanted to develop my skills as a writer. Before my encounter with *DICTEE*, I'd wanted to write utopian fantasy so that I could explore my spirituality through fiction. *DICTEE* provided me with a new, embodied, way to explore spirituality in writing – a performative poetics that invited readers to share in an experience of spiritual practice as they engaged with the text. This has been my intention throughout my research project. To develop in my own writing those rhythms and experiences that I first encountered in the pages of *DICTEE*, and to explore and understand exactly *how DICTEE* performs them. For this, I have primarily turned to Ernst Bloch's utopian philosophy as a theoretical framework that

reflects and explores those spiritual rhythms and experiences to me. And I wonder, belatedly, if 'utopia' is essentially a white person's project, a privileged and regressive fantasy of universal perfectionism utterly alien to those who struggle daily with the material realities of conspicuously racialised, gendered, sexualised bodies. Yet I am reminded in this regard of Cha's underlying desire for 'interfusion' between self and other that permeates all her works, of her desired return to the fantasy of a unified and unoccupied Korean homeland that troubles and is troubled within *DICTEE*'s pages. I see Ken Chen ask the question, '[i]s poetry a utopian art, an art of political prophecy—a way to prefigure new and future ways of being?' (2015)[5]. I hear Meimei Berssenbrugge state: 'I don't think artists are happy with the world and they feel a need to make another world', as she describes being 'at the edge, trying to make this [other] world', suggesting an underlying utopian project that motivates her own work as an artist. Further, for Berssenbrugge, this is as much a spiritual and embodied project as it is a political one. She suggests, '[i]t's more about resonance, frequency, energy, movement, flux, dynamism, than any fixed object' (2005). And I am minded of the essentialist residue inherent to the idea that utopia belongs to any one particular group of people, or even the suggestion that there is a singular category of 'white person', or indeed, 'person of colour'.

Ernst Bloch's vehement opposition to Fascism, his working class Jewish upbringing, his uncomfortable emigration to the United States fleeing Nazi persecution and subsequent return to East and then West Germany all colour his thinking on utopianism, shaping his lifelong project of utopian philosophy. Bloch recognised that much conservative and Fascist utopianism tended toward regression and nostalgia, reifying the past in a fantasy 'golden age' premised on the conditions of oppression, colonialism and annihilation of the 'other'. In his own thinking, he strives to shift the focus away from the memory deposits of the unconscious, as defined by Freud, and toward the as-yet-unimagined, un-become and unfinished project of the not-yet-conscious. This forward-facing, future-facing, consciousness is just as present and accessible to the human condition as the unconscious, according to Bloch, and it is through the imaginative function of art and literature that the not-

[5] From Amy King's collaborative essay, 'What is Literary Activism?', in *Poetry Foundation*'s 'Harriet' blog: https://www.poetryfoundation.org/harriet/2015/08/what-is-literary-activism (18 August 2015).

yet-conscious is accessed and made conscious. Further, Bloch's utopia, rather than being premised on the *eradication* of all that appears to be alien or other, is fundamentally premised on the self-encounter *with* the other: recognising that the true identity of the 'self' is *in relation with* that which is perceived as not-self, or 'other'. This is the utopia that is not yet fulfilled in human consciousness. This is the utopia towards which meditation as practice can gesture (known as *Samadhi* in Sanskrit). This is the utopian gesture, both performed and anticipated, that I experienced on first reading Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *DICTEE*.

This thesis is submitted in two sections – presenting both my critical reading around utopian poetics and my creative responses as attempts to embody the rhythms of my own utopian spirituality within the language and silences of a poetic text. Neither confronts adequately the traumatised location of my own subjectivity as a reader and a writer, nor the critical positioning of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *DICTEE* within the debate around race and the poetic avant-garde. I do not see this project as complete. The process continues

Learning to Write : Utopian Poetics

My poetry is not primarily written for an academic audience, but an audience of people who might identify or locate themselves within a spiritual community or communities. It is intended to be primarily experienced both viscerally/energetically and sonically/rhythmically – to create the possibility of non-alienation on an energetic level as a meditative space of communion. Layers of multiplicity and semantic possibility are coextensive with both the composition and the reception of the poems in my most recent works.

When reading or performing my poetry I typically invite listeners to close their eyes and attune to their breathing, allowing the sounds/words/meanings/rhythms to wash over them as in guided meditation. Alternatively I may invite them to do something specific as a participatory gesture, such as making hand movements, movements with their whole body, or directed breathing rhythms. In these ways, my poetry performance incorporates the gestures of a yoga or meditation practice as a method

of guiding participants/listeners into that space of open energetic communion between self and other. This is augmented by the co-creative reading practices invited by the text's formal experimentation techniques.

My own poetry, like Cha's, occupies a position that both claims and challenges the construction of a minority identity. Specifically, in relation to what might be identified as 'spiritual subjectivity'. People who might claim such a spiritual subjectivity include those who identify with particular spiritual practices or as part of particular spiritual communities; who have worked hard to reclaim the narratives of their own lives and identities in the face of hostility and historical oppression (including systemic disenfranchisement, persecution, erasure and genocide); who are living with the daily challenges of participating in a society and culture founded on the intentional normalization of disempowerment and disembodiment. We have worked hard to assert our identity and reclaim the innate wisdom of our ancient practices. But in claiming such an identity and (autonomous) subjectivity, we are at risk of having again bought into the lie of reification and ego-domination. My poetry uses experimental techniques associated with Language Poetry and other contemporary poetic practices to simultaneously claim and question this spiritual identity. As with any identities and any communities, there is no singular, fixed 'spiritual identity' or 'spiritual community'. Each individual within any given community will have their discrete particularities that intersect to form their own shifting, tentative 'spiritual identity'. My future writing has further work to do in terms of exploring, celebrating and destabilising the multiplicity of identities that intersect to comprise any particular subject or set of subjectivities at work within any given manifestation of a 'spiritual identity'. In this sense, I would place my work within the liberatory or emancipatory literature at the intersections of identity and linguistic experimentation: in solidarity with the work of experimental poets of colour and alongside feminist, queer, trans* and other poets working to destabilise normalised subject identity through linguistic experimentation without disavowing the complexities and particularities of each of our own (multiple) subjectivies.

In my own case, my research into *DICTEE* has brought me into contact with my whiteness and its privileges, recognising and beginning to negotiate the cultural appropriations from which I benefit in my spiritual practices. Yet it has also led me

to question more deeply my identification as spiritual, finding the deepest roots of my practices in my family, community, landscape, rhythms and life. My life as a spiritual practitioner is fully embodied and embedded into who I am, my resonance with yoga and other spiritual traditions is through my own daily lived experience. My yoga and other spiritual practices are anchored in a sense of connection to the earth, the seasonal and celestial cycles, and my body. In addition to yoga I work with the Celtic seasonal cycle and the monthly lunar cycle to structure my life and practice around cyclical rituals, and embody this in connection with my own energetic and menstrual cycles. My spiritual practices give me a deeply embodied connection to my femininity and sexuality centred on my womb and menstrual cycle. I have found this connection both liberating and empowering, but not without its challenges of negotiating the toxic potential for biological essentialism and heteronormativity. My research has made me more conscious of my own particularity and positionality as a cis-gendered, able-bodied, slightly queer woman in spiritual communities, and had led me to question some of the many embedded assumptions around gender roles, gender binaries and implied heteronormativity. These are areas that I now seek to question, examine and challenge in my spiritual practices and communities. I am conscious that my poetry has yet to explore these contradictions, and I am inspired and excited by writers who are currently working at the intersection of what it means to be a woman/trans*/non-binary/queer *and* deeply spiritual human, such as Sascha Aurora Akhtar, callie gardner, Francesca Lisette, Nat Raha, Nisha Ramayya and Dolly Turing. Finally, my research has made me more conscious of my voice and spoken working-class accent, my working class roots laid bare. I have been particularly conscious of how this manifests as traumatising to me in an academic context, and have yet to explore the intersections of class in spiritual communities or identities. These are areas that I am keen to explore more consciously in future writing projects.

I have written four books of poetry throughout the duration of my research, each engaged with a different aspect of my research process. *The Unfinished Dream* (Sad Press, 2016) encodes my initial, visceral, embodied response to *DICTEE* in relation to the utopian philosophy of Ernst Bloch. *ATHA* (Knives Forks and Spoons Press, 2019) develops that practice in the light of my growing and deepening awareness of Language Poetry and contemporary poetics in response to the reading I was

undertaking for my research. The book was developed with the mentoring support of Scott Thurston, Harriet Tarlo and Maggie O'Sullivan as part of an Arvon course in Experimental Poetry (September 2017), and was heavily informed by my participation in the Modern and Contemporary American Poetry intensive online course (ModPo) facilitated by Al Filreis at the University of Pennsylvania between September and November 2017. *[un].holy : 33 sonnets for Brigid* (forthcoming, Hesterglock Press, 2020) developed as a daily writing practice exploring 'the livingness of poetry' (Sueyeun Juliette Lee, 2013) through formal experimentation with contemporary sonnet structures. *Rite* (as yet unpublished) pushes further towards embodying, engaging with and performing the gestures of spiritual practice as a form of experimental poetics. The poems in this collection have been developed with the mentoring of Anne Waldman, CAConrad and Tracie Morris at the Naropa Summer Writing Programme (June 2018)[6]. The poetic forms include gestural performances of a range of spiritual practices including crystal divination/somatic ritual, mantra chanting (through rhythmic prosody and repetition), and the creation of poems as mandalas (geometric structures for encoding and channelling high vibrational energies). The poems draw on the co-creative technique of collaging multiple voices and utilise practices of open form poetics – such as fragmentation, citation, juxtaposition, parataxis, asyntactic structure and prosodic free verse rhythms – to invite readers/listeners into the space of the poem's ritual durational performance as both a gesture towards and a performance of the anticipated utopian non-alienation of the self-encounter in relation with the 'other'.

This stated intention is one that I have personally experienced through yoga, meditation and spiritual practices, encountered viscerally in the pages and rhythms of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *DICTEE*, and recognised as encoded within Ernst Bloch's utopian philosophy, particularly in his explorations in *The Spirit of Utopia* (Stanford University Press, 2000) and *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature* (MIT Press, 1988). It is these multiple strands of experience, poetics and theory that I have been engaged with exploring and developing through my research into Utopian Poetics in the work of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, and my related poetic

[6] I am grateful to the University of Westminster for funding from the Graduate School's Globally Engaged Research Scholarship, and for departmental research funding from the school of English, Linguistics and Cultural Studies, which generously supported this opportunity.

experimentation, since I began this project in 2015. The following thesis and poetic texts are the present outcome of this investigation, a life's work that remains, as ever, unfinished.

Contextualising *DICTEE*

Placing Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *DICTEE* (1982) within a critical context has historically been a notoriously challenging and fraught scholarly activity. *DICTEE*'s formal innovations, drawing directly on Cha's aesthetic study and practices of post-structural theory and French semiological film analysis, often act as critical interventions into the context of Korean-American subject formation as signaled by much of the book's content. Early scholars of the text tended to approach *DICTEE* from *either* the perspective of Asian-American Women's writing studies *or* white western contemporary linguistic experimentation, with a primary focus on either the text's form or its content respectively. *DICTEE* was first published by Cha's friend Reese Williams at New York based Tanam Press in 1982. In the week of its publication, Cha was murdered by a stranger in New York City. For the following decade, *DICTEE* was largely unread and unstudied until Cha's family donated her legacy to the creation of an archive of her works at the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive in 1992. Two years later, in 1994, the first collection of scholarly essays on *DICTEE* was published by Third Woman Press, a publishing collective initiated by Norma Alarcón for publishing writing 'by, for, and about women of color'[7], featuring essays on the text by Elaine H Kim, Lisa Lowe, L. Hyun Yi Kang and Shelley Sunn Wong. Third Woman Press reprinted *DICTEE* the following year (1995).

The work of Kim and Alarcón in publishing first *Writing Self, Writing Nation: A Collection of Essays on Dictée by Theresa Hak Kyung Cha*, and then *DICTEE* itself, placed the text's initial scholarly reception within the context of Asian American Women's writing. Kim, in particular, had found *DICTEE*'s formal innovations initially alienating, anathema to the experience of identification she had sought from a text authored by a fellow Korean American woman (1994: 3). In time, she came to read the text as one that 'problematizes identity and identity politics', a text that 'redeems from nationalist discourse something of use to a Korean American woman whose shifting identities conform to neither Korean nationalist nor Western feminist narratives' (1994: 7-8). Further, for Kim, in *DICTEE*, 'Cha creates and celebrates a kind of third space, an exile space that becomes a source of individual vision and

[7] Third Woman Press website: www.thirdwomanpress.com.

power' (1994: 8)[8]. The readings given throughout *Writing Self, Writing Nation* follow this pattern of understanding *DICTEE*'s formal and aesthetic innovations in terms of their productive tension in disrupting the binary logic of hegemonic dominance, particularly in relation to Asian American women's identity and subject formation.

In 1996, Juliana Spahr published her article 'Postmodernism, Readers and Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's "Dictee"' in College Literature (Vol. 23 No. 3), which was subsequently included in Spahr's 2001 monograph *Everybody's Autonomy: Connective Reading and Collective Identity*. The article locates *DICTEE* within the formal aesthetics of postmodernist fragmented and disruptive writing and reading practices, but does so with an emphasis on *DICTEE*'s decolonial politics. While Spahr does suggest that *DICTEE*'s 'rethinking of the relation between reader and text' is 'more significant' than Cha's working through of a national history that 'denies national essentialism' (1996: 29), ostensibly prioritising the text's 'postmodern' linguistic and formal features over its exploratory and challenging politics of Korean American subject formation, this is not the full extent of Spahr's study. Indeed, she argues vigorously that, 'Cha does not, contrary to common clichés about postmodernism, abandon the political or the historical' (1996: 36). This is indicative of the ways that critical readings of American literature would break down into the fraught oppositional categories of 'innovative poetics' and 'identity politics' over the next two decades.

In the autumn of 2000, Timothy Yu published his study entitled 'Form and Identity in Language Poetry and Asian American Poetry' in the journal *Contemporary Literature* (Vol. 41, No. 3, pp. 422-461). The study became part of Yu's subsequent monograph, *Race and the Avant-Garde: Experimental and Asian American Poetry since 1965* (2009). Yu draws on statements of poetics made by key language poets, such as Ron Silliman, Charles Bernstein and Rae Armantrout, to demonstrate that Language Poetry at its inception was constructed around the construction and deconstruction of a specifically raced, gendered and sexualized subject position. Yu quotes Silliman's argument that, '[p]rogressive poets who identify as members of

[8] This reading is key to situating my own study of *DICTEE*'s utopian poetics, and I will return to this below.

groups that have been the subject of history – many white male heterosexuals, for example – are apt to challenge all that is supposedly "natural" about the formation of their own subjectivity' (Ron Silliman, 'Poetry and the Politics of the Subject, 1988; cited in Yu, 2000: 422). In this formulation, Language Poetry's challenge to the institution of naturalised subject formation is specifically the poetic labour of 'white male heterosexuals' who identify themselves as 'the subject of history' and have come to feel the oppression of such a burden of representation. For these poets, then, the most appropriate critical manoeuvre is to challenge the naturalisation of subject formation through disruption to the linguistic structures that create the illusion of autonomous and legible subjectivity. Silliman continues in the same essay to describe those poets '[a]t the other end of the spectrum' who do not identify as the subjects of history 'for they instead have been its objects' (cited in Yu, 2000: 422). These poets, identified by Silliman as 'women, people of colour, sexual minorities, the entire spectrum of the "marginal"', instead of having the political imperative to disrupt the naturalisation of subject formation, 'have a manifest political need to *have their stories told*' (cited in Yu, 2000: 422, original emphasis). These diametrically oppositional political imperatives manifest as vastly different formal poetics, according to Silliman, in which the aesthetics of the 'marginal' subject 'often appear[s] much more conventional' (cited in Yu, 2000). Yu draws upon Silliman's statement of poetics throughout his study, illuminating the ways in which Language Poetry establishes itself as a specifically white male aesthetic practice, and elucidates the numerous ways in which poets of colour have been repeatedly excluded from critical discussion of linguistically innovative formal poetic practices in the US.

The dichotomy outlined by Silliman becomes the unconscious baseline for a bitter division in which poets of colour are always already marked by racialized signifiers (even if only in their names and identities rather than in their poetics, but especially where those markers are visible within the poetry itself) (Yu, 2000). This racialization has further marginalised poets of colour within contemporary poetics, relegating discussion of their work to the category of 'identity politics' with a focus on the formation of an identifiable subjectivity within the text – an identifiably racialized subject whose primary project is to '*have their stories told*', rather than to join the ranks of the 'progressive poets' who are working to undermine the very

linguistic systems through which subjectivity is formally constructed. This dichotomy has constituted the double problem of the assimilation and erasure of poets of colour within the linguistically innovative aesthetics of contemporary poetics. Equally insidious is the fact that, despite Silliman's positioning of the aesthetic project of Language Poetry as the poetic labour of 'white male heterosexuals', its practices of disrupting the formation of an identifiable subjectivity have eclipsed the ways in which the project is itself marked as raced and gendered. In Language Poetry, as in the traditional poetries it sought to disrupt, the subject who identifies as 'the subject of history' remains in the position of universal, unmarked subjectivity. While Language Poetry could have been working to challenge and undermine this universalised assumption of unmarked subjectivity – Yu formulates this as the question of 'who is speaking?' – its establishment as an institutionalised form over several decades enabled it to ossify around its own predominantly white, male, heterosexual speakers and subjects.

Thus, in May 2012, Marjorie Perloff – Language Poetry's most prominent and pre-eminent critical advocate – published her scathing attack on contemporary poetry called 'Poetry on the Brink' in the Boston Review. Perloff, despite having been acknowledged as an early reader and adviser for Yu's essay, writes twelve years later from the same dichotomised critical standpoint as Silliman adopts in 1988 – as though the intervening discussion about race and avant-garde poetics had never occurred. Perloff lambasts the MFA writing culture of self-expression and lyric subjectivity in an excruciatingly racially biased argument that lacks any of the nuance of Yu's earlier study. Perloff's targets in the essay are poets of colour whose poetry expresses a lyric subjectivity, pitting these against the 'serious challenge to the delicate lyric of self-expression and direct speech' posed by Language Poetry (n.p.). With a certain degree of barely contained vitriol, Perloff comments that, '[b]y the late '90s, when Language Poetry felt compelled to be more inclusive with respect to gender, race and ethnic diversity, it became difficult to tell what was or was not a "Language Poem"' (*Boston Review*, May 18 2012: n.p.). This comment reveals the underlying territorial subjectivity of the Language Poetry project – one that was only reluctantly, perhaps forcefully, 'compelled' to become 'more inclusive' several decades into its development by beginning to admit poets from a wider range of genders, races and ethnicities. This ostensible shift towards a reluctant inclusivity

had the lamentable effect, for Perloff, of diluting the quality (one could read purity[9]) of Language Poetry's project to such an extent that the aesthetic category itself became virtually unintelligible. Perloff's perspective, however, entirely overlooks the rich history of poets of colour engaging both politically and aesthetically with contemporary linguistic innovations, such as Theresa Hak Kyung Cha – whom Yu cites as an example in his argument.

Reading Cathy Park Hong, Dorothy Wang, Timothy Yu and others, it becomes clear that there is perhaps a *multiplicity of Language Poetries*. There is not simply one single, monolithic, identifiable, Language Poetry – which is what Perloff laments. Although the project was initially outlined and defined by Silliman, Bernstein, Andrews, *et. al.*, it has grown beyond the confines of their (necessarily limited) imaginative project to take on a life of its own. Like every utopian project, on reaching its limits in contact with the material conditions of reality it has reached a necessary point of reassessment and redefinition. Burgeoning and expanding to admit entry even to those who seek to disrupt its boundaries, to use its own tools against it, to dismantle its reified ideologies and to pose the questions and challenges to the idea of subjectivity that Language Poetry itself is uniquely placed to ask. For many women, writers of colour, queer and trans* writers, and other marginalised voices, the formal innovations of Language Poetry have become a tool for exploring the multiple, shifting and relational subjectivities that we each occupy and embody in our lives. For many minority voices, using the formally innovative tools of Language Poetry *in relation with* an exploration of the challenges and demands on constructing a subject identity are what gives contemporary poetry the potential to continue to challenge and disrupt the status quo's hegemonic dominations, even where those hegemonies are present within contemporary poetry itself.

Many recent critics of *DICTEE* acknowledge the combined influences of white European avant-garde aesthetic practices and Korean American political history to explore and challenge exactly the mechanisms of reified subjectivity that Language Poetry looked to expose, and thus call for the text to be explored through cross-disciplinary scholarship. As Sue J Kim noted in 2008, 'Dictee draws on (at least)

[9] John Yau addresses this issue in his essay '"Purity" and the "Avant-Garde"', also published in the *Boston Review* (April 29, 2015).

two distinct aesthetic traditions that may be inextricably intertwined in the text but have until recently been associated with different groups of actual readers' (2008: 166). Kim elaborates that, 'The first group draws on the conventions of the avant-garde or postmodern art', citing Cha's own education and body of work as evidence for her engagement with the aesthetics of formal experimentation and her association with some of the leading proponents of post-structuralist theory (2008: 166). 'The second group of readers that the text explicitly invokes', argues Kim, 'is those who focus on the Asian/Korean American, feminist context' (2008: 166). Kim's reading of the politics of *DICTEE*'s critical reception and situation, even after both Spahr's and Yu's claiming of the text as a challenge to common understandings of postmodernism, is indicative of the ways in which the chasm between texts that were being read as *either* political *or* formally experimental had widened. Indeed, as recently as 2016, José Felipe Alvergue argued in his study 'Poetic Seeing / Beyond Telling: The "Call" in Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictée*' that, '[f]or years, scholarship on *Dictée* has split between postmodern theory and postcolonial discourse, but the text also permits a cross-disciplinary approach to understanding the work's lasting aesthetic and political impact' (2016: 427).

It is this kind of 'cross-disciplinary approach' that I intend to take in this study. Approaching *DICTEE* initially without either of the aesthetic frameworks cited by Kim, my own development of a critical framework that includes both contemporary innovative poetics and an awareness of the ways in which Cha's text utilises these in the context of her own Korean American female subjectivity has developed in tandem with my research into the text. Indeed, as Kim notes in an earlier essay ('Apparatus: Theresa Hak Kyung Cha and the Politics of Form', *Journal of Asian American Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 2, June 2005), analysis of form without content or context depoliticises a political text, making its impact solely a matter of aesthetics. Instead, she argues, 'if we historicize [Cha's] use of form and relate it dialectically to content and context, then we can understand [her] historical position *and* concerns, as evidenced in *Dictee*, as new and progressive without reifying the aesthetic forms which she uses' (2005: 145, original emphasis). My own attempt at a cross-disciplinary approach that mobilises form in relation to content and context is not without its own problems and critical biases, however. Reading *DICTEE* from the outset as a text that materialised many of the spiritual gestures I had first

encountered theoretically in Ernst Bloch's utopian philosophy, I have tended to place the text within this framework as my primary objective. Though I have argued vigorously for the productive relationship between form and content/context in Cha's works, largely in relation to Bloch's concept of the relation between the subjective and the objective, my placing of the text is at some times awkward and at others still limited by an over-reliance on white contemporary poetic and aesthetic theory. Throughout my research, however, my primary objective (rightly or wrongly, and with all its critical biases and blindness) has been to explore the various ways in which Cha mobilises formal material and linguistic innovations in her text works to create an embodied experience of non-alienation that I personally experience through yoga, meditation and other spiritual practices, and that I first found theorised in Ernst Bloch's utopian philosophy. This exploration has led me to examine a number of ways in which Cha's works could be considered emancipatory, or 'utopian', and I have come to call these practices 'Utopian Poetics'. As I have explored these practices in Cha's texts, I have also experimented with them in my own poetry. The thesis that follows is interwoven with examples of my own writing, which is collected formally into four books as the second part of the full doctoral research project. The section below sets out the critical parameters of Utopian Poetics and the chapters that follow explore this in relation to the textual and formal experimentations of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha.

Utopian Poetics in Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *DICTEE*

Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's ethical project throughout *DICTEE* and her numerous other text, film, performance and mail art works is to create a collaborative space between writer and reader, artist and audience, self and other, through which communication (or communion) might occur. It is this project that I have identified as the utopian project of non-alienation or self-encounter, following the utopian philosophy of Ernst Bloch. Cha's experimentation with material forms and linguistic innovation in these works, moreover, enacts a performance of these conditions of non-alienation within the text (or artwork) itself in addition to gesturing towards the (future) possibility of such conditions. The techniques of literary innovation in relation to emancipatory content employed by Cha to generate

or gesture towards the possibility of non-alienation are what I have termed 'Utopian Poetics' throughout this thesis. In other words, 'Utopian Poetics' are a set of literary innovations in relation to emancipatory content that specifically enable Cha to create a space of collaboration between writer and reader, or communion between self and other. Cha states her aim as the 'interfusion of subject and object' in her MFA thesis, 'Paths' (1978: 2). In her thesis, the signifiers of 'subject' and 'object' are mutable and migratory, applying to both artist and audience equally in an exchange whereby '[t]he artist becom[es] object for the viewer, the viewer as subject, the artist as subject and viewer as object' (1978: 2). She argues that, '[i]t is through the presence of the "Other", any form of communication is established, completed' (1978: 2). Cha's thesis makes clear that this intention is integral to her thinking and experimentation as an artist across a variety of media. Joan Retallack recognises Cha's poetics in *DICTEE* as an ethical project, arguing that the text 'opens up a distinction between the need to imprint/impress one's mark (image) on the other and an invitation to the others' discourse as necessary to an always collaborative making of meaning' (2003: 125). For the purposes of this thesis, I interpret Cha's ethical poetics as a performance of the utopian desire for non-alienation between self and other. To establish a critical framework for this reading, I utilise Ernst Bloch's utopian philosophy in conjunction with contemporary critical theory on literary innovation and Asian American innovative poetics. This enables me to explore and elucidate the ways in which *DICTEE* and Cha's other works operate materially to embody and perform an *experience* of non-alienation as an enactment of the possibility of the utopian.

According to Ernst Bloch, art and literature can perform several utopian functions oriented toward the experience of non-alienation. For Bloch, non-alienation is termed as 'the ultimate self-encounter' (2000: 3). In this encounter, the 'self' is encountered through the illumination or comprehension of 'the darkness of the lived moment' and gives rise to the 'inconstruable question' of the 'We in itself' (2000: 3). Non-alienation, for Bloch then, is primarily a spiritual encounter with oneself in the immediacy of the present moment. The concept of the self-encounter gestures toward the possibility of non-alienation both from oneself and from others, and ultimately, from the world. In other words, the answer to 'who am I?' is the question 'who are we?'. The self becomes known (or encountered) through its inter-

relationships with others. This is what Bloch suggests by his phrase 'the inconstruable, absolute question, the problem of the We in itself' (2000: 3). The 'We' is the 'all'. Self-encounter resists the idea of egoic closure, totality of 'self', by being always open to the question of the other, to the unnameable experience of interconnectivity with all that is. For Bloch, in *The Spirit of Utopia*, initially published in 1923, the utopian self-encounter is primarily a spiritual experience. What he finds in Marxism is a legitimate philosophical structure oriented towards bringing about an experience of non-alienation in material and economic terms that strive against reification.

Both Bloch and Theodor Adorno, in developing a philosophy of aesthetics from Marxist critical theory, are bound by what they see as Marx's 'prohibition of casting a picture of utopia', which they interpret as the reification of a process that is inherently always in motion, always in flux, always in progress (in Bloch, 1988: 11). Adorno describes this prohibition – in a conversation with Ernst Bloch – as 'the defense that was actually intended against the cheap utopia, the false utopia, *the* utopia that can be bought' (in Bloch, 1988: 11). For Adorno, then, 'utopia is essentially in the determined negation' of 'that which merely is' (in Bloch, 1988: 12). Bloch agrees, arguing that 'the essential function of utopia is a critique of what is present' (1988: 12)[10]. Both lament, however, that Marx did not cast enough of a picture of what the better conditions of the world might look like under a Socialist revolution. Consequently, Adorno argues that 'as a result of what Marx in his own time criticized about the French utopians and Owen, the idea of utopia has actually disappeared from the concept of socialism' (in Bloch, 1988: 12). Socialism has become for Adorno, in this sense, the reification of form over content. He states that 'the apparatus, the how, the means of a socialist society have taken precedence over any possible content, for one is not allowed to say anything about the possible content' (in Bloch, 1988: 12-13). At its extreme for Adorno, this leads to a situation in which 'the theory of socialism that is decidedly hostile toward utopia now tends really to become a new ideology concerned with the domination of humankind' (in Bloch, 1988: 13).

[10] 'To stand against what is we have to make room for what is not', as Sara Ahmed argues in 'Living a Lesbian Life' (*Feminist Killjoys* Blog, 26 Feb 2015).

We have seen above how Language Poetry and some contemporary forms of experimental poetics, such as Uncreative Writing, have also become susceptible to the charge of reification of form over content and the ways in which this creates its own form of domination over others. In an interesting critical reading of *Apparatus* (1980), a collection of essays on semiological film analysis edited by Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Sue J Kim demonstrates how even Cha herself reifies form over content when she is most closely associated with the avant-garde project of Post-Structuralist criticism. In a perceptive close-reading of Cha's centrepiece 'COMMENTAIRE' and its relation to the collection as a whole, Kim reads Cha's focus on the ideological apparatus in terms of generating floating signifiers that 'can mean anything or nothing, thus enacting non-repressive/non-repressing processes of signification, but their very indeterminacy points to the risk of excluding issues of content and context' (2005: 159). In this sense, Cha fails both to present a concrete critique of present conditions and to actively imagine the utopian better conditions that might be anticipated. She does, however, attempt to perform the better conditions in her use of formal processes designed to engender non-alienation between writer and reader, and thus between self and other. Two years later, in *DICTEE* (1982), Cha specifically engages with both content and context to explore the problems inherent with subject formation – not at the abstracted level of the so-called 'universal' (unmarked, white male) subject, but at the level of Cha's own particular lived experience as a Korean American woman.

Although both Bloch and Adorno, as a result of their own time and critical context, both fall into the fallacy of describing utopia as a complete overhaul of 'the totality' (in Bloch, 1988: 3-4), and Bloch himself falls into uncritical use of the term 'universal subjectivism'[11] (1988: 102), what gives Bloch continuing relevance in an analysis of utopian poetics is his insistence that subjectivity is critical to the utopian function. For Bloch, '[b]oth factors, the subjective as well as the objective, have to

[11] Bloch's use of the term 'universal subjectivism', however, is included within a spiritual context in which he is discussing the 'self-encounter', which he also terms in the Sanskrit phrase, '*tat twam asi*' (*Chandogya Upanishad*, 6:12-14 – 'Thou art That'). Cha, in her MFA thesis, Paths (1978) draws upon a comparable spiritual concept of the 'Universal Mind' placing this in the context of 'the collective memory and imagination' (1978: 3). These spiritual concepts require more unpacking than this thesis allows here, but I would argue that they function *in relation with* individual subjectivity, rather than in terms that eclipse, erase or eradicate individual particularity.

be realised in their continuous dialectical interplay, inseparable, impossible to isolate' as a mitigation against the 'false doctrine of objective automatism' according to which the world would be transformed by objective conditions alone (1988: 109). Bloch is clear that '[t]he objective factor alone is not sufficient' (1988: 109). Thus, he argues for the imaginative intervention of subjectivity in anticipating the better conditions that gesture towards non-alienation, rather than in the reliance upon formal processes or structures to bring about those conditions in and of themselves. In relation to poetics, he posits that, '[t]he subjective factor of the poetical is then the midwife of the artistic anticipatory illumination' (1988: 160). What Cha demonstrates in *DICTEE*, for me, is the productive relationship between the subjective and the objective – both in terms of the invitation towards co-creativity between writer and reader, self and other, that is implicit within her experimental formal processes, and in terms of her exploration of Korean American subjectivity. Together, in relation, these aspects of the text can be read both as a critique of the status quo and as a gesture towards the better conditions of non-alienation.

What is Utopian Poetics?

Utopian Poetics is a set of poetic processes that work to both anticipate and perform an experience of self-encounter, or non-alienation, within the poem itself. These include experimental formal and linguistic processes that invite the active participation of the reader/listener into a relationship of co-creation with the writer/speaker throughout the duration of the poetic performance. Subjectivity at the level of individual specificity and particularity is essential to the utopian critique of the status quo and as mitigation against the insidious drive towards abstraction and reification. Through the problematic and at times discordant relational interplay between these factors – the objective factor of formal experimentation and the subjective factor of individually located particularity – utopian poetics makes its gestures toward and performance of non-alienation. Formal processes that include experimental linguistic and material features, such as fragmentation, parataxis, repetition, asyntactic grammar and non-standard punctuation, can create a textual structure with the potential to *perform* an experience of non-alienation through its invitation to the reader to become an active participant in the text's creation of meaning. These processes alone, however, do not intrinsically engage with, critique,

or resolve, the problem of the realities of alienation and oppression experienced by individuals in their day to day lives in this world. Thus, experimental forms must be employed in relation to – in service of – content that explores the challenges of oppression and alienation actually encountered by real individuals in the world. This is not to say that all utopian poetics must necessarily be autobiographical. Yet by locating the utopian potential within the individual in their relation with the world, utopian poetics makes several critical moves that are necessary at this juncture. First, it avoids both 'abstract utopianizing' (a term Bloch uses to mean mere daydreaming fantasy, 1988: 119) and the insidious abstraction of universal subjectivity. Second, it gives the responsibility of agency, of action, in *creating* the utopian conditions of non-alienation, to the individual.[12] In such a way, utopia can be seen to be created in every performance of non-alienation that we each make possible through our relationships, rather than as the abstract responsibility of bringing about change to 'the totality' – an impossible and incapacitating task. Finally, it brings the particularity of subjectivity into a productive relationship with formal experimentalism – a relationship, as we have seen above, that is a centre of contention in current debates around contemporary poetics. Rather than 'innovative poetics' *or* 'identity politics' – a racially-biased dichotomy designed to keep the institutions of high poetry closed – utopian poetics engages with debates arising from contemporary conversations around subjectivity and the avant-garde[13]. Acknowledging the fraught and tense nature of these debates, there is a productive tension to be gained from an exploration of formal poetics in relation to politically challenging content. Utopian Poetics does not elide or seek to smooth those tensions into a harmonious 'whole', but seeks to dwell within the productive tensions that are both critical of the way things are and willing to stake a belief in how things might yet be.

Utopian Poetics, therefore, can be identified through its productive relationship between formal innovation and political engagement. Specifically, this relationship is most productive where that political engagement seeks to explore the oppressive

[12] Bloch is emphatic in his argument that 'it must happen in us; only here will people become free, can they encounter themselves' (2000: 216).
[13] These debates have been most recently prominent in terms of Black and Asian American subjectivity in experimental poetic practices, but they highlight relevant concerns shared by feminists, queer and trans* poets and other 'minority' subjects in contemporary literary innovation.

and alienating conditions of the status quo and the formal innovations seek to both anticipate and perform the emancipatory conditions of non-oppression and non-alienation. In that regard, Ernst Bloch's collected essays in *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature* (1988) provide insights into some of the formal elements that may characterise Utopian Poetics, such as fragmentation, subjectivity-in-process, rhythmic prosody and a reworking of metaphor to co-create new meanings. Bloch's focus on formal mechanisms over utopian content was in line with the Marxian prohibition described above. In order to provide some insight into how the utopian might be experienced, however, Bloch introduces the spiritual dimensions of the 'self-encounter' (which is figured as non-alienation in Marxism) and 'anticipatory illumination'. To complete my study of Utopian Poetics, I also draw upon recent critical theory exploring intersubjectivity and intersectionality to examine the ways in which utopian political content (particularly relating to minority identity and subject formation in the context of Cha's subjectivity as a Korean American woman) interacts with formal literary experimentation to activate the utopian gestures toward non-alienation and anticipatory illumination.

Ernst Bloch: A Contextual Note

To understand Ernst Bloch's Utopian Philosophy in context, I will examine his thinking in relation to two of his contemporaries and interlocutors, Georg Lukács and Walter Benjamin. Bloch and Lukács, whilst both opposed to utopian abstraction, differed in their approach to the concept and function of realism. Lukács' argument for the form of the realist novel places objectively real social conditions at the centre of the struggle for socialist emancipation, whereas Bloch's argument for a fragmented poetic form contends that, '[g]enuine realistic poetry deals with *process*' (157) in a model by which objective reality remains open and incomplete and the poetic subject becomes an active participant in its creation (1988: 156-162). Walter Benjamin, in his *Theses on the Philosophy of History* (1940), posits the subjective penetration of objective historical momentum as the potential basis for the truly revolutionary process. Bloch's position in this context enables a critical mediation of utopian thinking, testing it against what is objectively realisable in relation with what is subjectively conceivable. Grounding the utopian in material reality in a process of relation with the subjective agency of creative imagination, Bloch's utopian philosophy gestures towards what is objectively possible but not-yet-become.

For Bloch, the 'most important element of reality' is 'the not yet lived possibility' of the poetic (1988: 160). Whereas for Lukács, it is only in faithfully representing social ills that the writer may stir in the reader a desire to overthrow and transform the objective social conditions of oppression and alienation. Arguing for the realist novel as the form for engendering social change, Lukács states that '[i]n any protest against particular social conditions, these conditions themselves must have the central place' (1964: 29). Both Lukács and Bloch find as their point of opposition the 'merely abstract utopianizing' of 'revolutionary romanticism' (Bloch, 1988: 119) of the kind commonly found in literary fictional utopias, which both argue are too far removed from objective social conditions and therefore serve little functional value in creating the conditions for objective social change. Where they are opposed to one another, however, is in their argument for which kind of literary discourse has the greater potential for engendering such objective social change, both claiming the wider critical framework of Marxism as the foundation for their thinking. While

Lukács advocates the realistic mimetic form, Bloch argues for the experimental poetic form. In his essay Marxism and Poetry (1935) Bloch laments Marxism's great 'distance from experimental poets', stating that '[n]aturalistic directness is praised as a manner of writing and as subject matter, the simple realism that kills the spirit' (1988: 156-157). He continues, '[s]uch writing and subject matter confine reality mainly to what has become real for the proletariat these days, and neither acknowledges any historical remains nor any dream, even if it existed objectively' (1988: 157). The objective existence of a dream that remains unfulfilled is what Bloch elsewhere calls the 'surplus' (1988). Later, in response to Benjamin's concept of *Jeztzeit*, Bloch argues that 'It [*Jetzt,* 'Now'] has not unloaded its true contents with which and toward which it is on its way. These contents have not come yet, other than in fragments, at best in instalments of a more fulfilled existence' (1988: 215). Although Bloch and Lukács are both agreed that the abstract fantasy of fictional utopian literature is too far removed from the objectively real conditions of social oppression to perform a valuable function in engendering social change, Lukács' advocacy of realism is anathema to Bloch's advocacy of the utopian function. Bloch argues that: 'One might even say that wherever realism appears as a complete portrayal of reality without interruption and openness, then it is not realism but rather the remains of the old idealistic structure of beauty as such' (1988: 160). In contrast, Bloch asserts the potential of the poetic to perform the utopian function. For Bloch the inventive and participatory potential of *poiesis* is harnessed in the utopian function to anticipate the not-yet-conscious 'better condition' of the 'already existing facts' (1988: 105), giving rise to a specific form of *poiesis* I have called 'utopian poetics' – a poetics that functions both to anticipate and to participate in the realisation of non-alienation and non-oppression as the objectively determinable 'better condition' of the currently existing material social reality.

In contradistinction to Lukács, Bloch's own form of materialism offers not a summary rejection of the utopian[14], but a mediating lens by which to both perceive and prove utopian content against the critical faculty of the utopian function. For Bloch, the utopian must be 'concrete', that is, both subjectively anticipatory and objectively realisable. Bloch's argument in 'Marxism and Poetry' (1935), and

[14] Lukács' retrospective 'Preface to *The Theory of the Novel*' (1962) repeatedly invokes the utopian as naïve and uncritical.

throughout his thinking in essays such as 'On the Present in Literature' (1956) and 'The Conscious and Known Activity within the Not-Yet-Conscious, the Utopian Function' (1959), is that both the subjective and the objective conditions are fundamental to the utopian function in their interrelationship. Bloch's insistence on subjective imagination as both a critical and a creative intervention into materially objective conditions to bring about revolutionary change in the form of '[t]he establishment of a new, better world, which is here always the ultimate content' (1988: 219) ran counter to much orthodox Marxist thinking at the time. For Bloch, in aesthetic terms, poetry that is characterised by openness, rupture, fragmentation and incompletion, and which is compelled to motion via subjective intervention, offers the potential for performative participation in the creation of new possibility.

Bloch's major utopian question, set out in his earliest writings on the subject in *The Spirit of Utopia* (written 1915-1916), is the problem of the obscurity of the immediately experienced moment. The question of how to apprehend oneself as non-alienated from one's lived historical moment troubled Bloch's utopian thinking, and became the central focus for his interpretation of Marxism. Positing the necessity of subjective intervention as *poiesis* in 'Marxism and Poetry' (1935), Bloch argues that '[t]he subjective factor of the poetical is then the midwife of the artistic anticipatory illumination' (1988: 160). For Bloch, in poetry as in life, the utopian function is precipitated by the subject in relation with objective conditions, in such a way that the immediacy of the present moment becomes temporarily illuminated and creative intervention into the historical process becomes possible. Benjamin's 1940 theses elucidated the revelatory and revolutionary potential of such an illumination, which he termed *Jetztzeit*. Subsequently, Bloch's essay 'On the Present in Literature' (1959) responds to Benjamin's concept of *Jetztzeit*, again invoking the poetic – not only as a form of literature with the capacity for 'mastery of proximity' (that is, the literary form by which the subject may most closely apprehend the immediate moment) – but also as the *poiesis* of participatory agency in the creative process. For Bloch, this is how the subject of history becomes a maker of history. This is akin to what Benjamin describes as 'blast[ing] open the continuum of history' (1968: 262). Poetic participation in the creative revolutionary moment as a subjective intervention relative to the objective material conditions of

reality opens up the possibility for the really new to arise. Bloch's interpretation of the *Jetztzeit* is as the moment of interruption and intervention into history by which proximity is apprehended and a continuum of connection is created between the previously unfulfilled utopian potential of the past (failed revolutions and failures to fully implement non-alienation as a lived human experience) and the not-yet-become possibility for non-alienation as it is available in this moment. He argues: 'What remains important for the specific problem of a poetry of the now-time is that the contemporary person who, at a sufficiently important moment, shares in the creative process is not only the comrade of his now-time, participating in a turning point in a Marxist sense; but since this moment is understood as a turning point, it contains all the indelible corresponding elements gathered within this time that is to be shaped' (Bloch, 1988: 219). Bloch's utopia was not a fixed formula for a better world, but a poetic function – or a function of *poiesis* – capable of both performing and gesturing towards non-alienation as the ultimately better human condition available in the present moment whilst perpetually not-yet-fulfilled. As Peter Thompson suggests in 'Ernst Bloch and the Spirituality of Utopia' (2016), '[t]he utopia he wanted was not a programmatic one laid down in any blueprint but was processual and autopoietic: it would emerge out of the process of its own becoming' (442). Further, the poetics of the utopian function contains within itself an always-anticipatory gesture towards the ultimate fulfilment of non-alienation as that which is not-yet-conscious, the final completion of a process that can never be complete.

WRITING UTOPIA NOW

Atha yogānuśāsanam

Āsana : posture=position=thesis

pose, position [thesis]. Every yoga pose a thesis.

Atha : Now

Now, an exposition of yoga

yoga : *yuj*=yoke=union

NOW YOGA THESIS

[Now: thesis of union]

communion / non-alienation / non-oppression / utopia/n

Utopian poetics is the performance of a relationship of non-alienation between reader and writer, listener and speaker. This relationship exists in/as the poem's performance. The poem may be performed visually on the page, materially in the book, or physically as a spoken text. All of these performances of a poem—and others—may happen simultaneously.

WHERE IS THE POEM LOCATED?

WHERE IS THE POEM ENACTED?

WHERE DOES THE POEM LIVE?

The poem is located in the space between the writer and the receiver of the text; it is enacted in the [sub]vocalising, breathing body of the reader while reading, the writer while writing, the listener while listening, the speaker while speaking. In the writing/reading/speaking/listening/poem/text/breathing: the poem lives. In this space of non-alienation, the poem performs a utopian poetics by which the reader and the writer are not alienated from one another, but are brought into relationship by the poem as it is performed. ***Poems need readers to live. Poems need writers to give them form.*** In this space of non-oppression, neither the writer nor the reader is superior nor subordinate. In this space of non-alienation and non-oppression, the writer-speaker-reader-listener is/are **intersubjective**. Living/reading/breathing [in] the poem as the poem is living/writing/breathing [in] us. Utopian poetics brings writereaders into a commun[ion]al space of presence, which is both no-place and perfect-place (*e/u/topia*), where we may experience ourselves as simultaneously both

embodied subjects and intersubjective beings. ***Tat twam asi***. You Are That. Self-realisation as both embodied and intersubjective. Non-alienated both from ourselves and from others. This is the essence of the utopian. Utopian poetics ***performs*** this, it does not describe. *Poiēsis* not *mimesis*. Connected by the textual threads of the words the poem dances: breathes: the threads of wyrd. [*Wyrd* = Old English verbal noun formed from the verb *weorðan*, meaning 'to come to pass, to become'; cognate w/ *verse* (*n*. poetry); from the root **wer*- 'to turn, to bend'/ 'be changed'].

UTOPIAN POETICS FUNCTIONS THUS:

1) **AS POIĒSIS – PERFORMED BY THE POEM'S BECOMING**
2) **AS ANTICIPATORY ILLUMINATION OF WHAT IS NOT YET**
3) **AS EMBODIED GESTURE – SIMULTANEOUSLY PERFORMING & ANTICIPATING UTOPIA**

That is, utopian poetics simultaneously performs and anticipates the possibility of non-alienation, whilst operating within the alienation of this world. Non-alienation [communion, union, yoga] with oneself as an embodied subject and simultaneously with an/other/s is always possible to a greater extent than one can/is currently experience/ing it. Alienation [ego] persists within our experience of non-alienation [embodied intersubjectivity]. In opening up a space in which embodied and intersubjective non-alienation becomes possible between reader and writer, utopian poetics enacts the possibility of non-alienation within an alienated world. In that it is a poem/text, and not the world, it anticipates the possibility of non-alienation while recognising that non-alienation is not-yet. In short: ***Utopian poetics both performs and anticipates utopia by performing the possibility of embodied intersubjectivity within the body/breath of the poem/text, the body/breath of the reader/listener and the body/breath of the writer/speaker.***

NON-ALIENATION IN UTOPIAN POETICS

Between the writer and the reader:

- *The functions of openness and multiplicity within the poem/text create a breathing space within which the writer and the reader are both active participants in the co-creation of meaning*
- *Openness and multiplicity may be generated via parataxis, juxtaposition, hesitation, use of [breathing] space within poetic form, use of [breathing] space within and between words and parts of words, a-syntactic grammar, a-teleological narrative, non-narrative, anti-narrative, the foregrounding of language's material properties/processes, the foregrounding of the material properties of the codex, or by any other generative methods*
- *The purpose of open form and multiplicity of possibility is to ensure the intersubjective agency of both writer and reader in the process of making meaning in utopian poetics*
- *It is in this co-creative process that utopian poetics performs the possibility of embodied non-alienation*

Between the writer and the source text/s

- *Additionally to the above, the utopian poet strives to maintain a poethical, non-violent relationship with source text/s*

- *A poetics is not utopian if it employs methods or strategies of: oppression; cultural appropriation; racism; entitlement; privilege; misogyny; ableism; homophobia, transphobia or queer-phobia, in either its forms or content*
- *An ethical relationship must be maintained with one's sources as well as one's readers*
- *The utopian poet acknowledges their position within an embodied and intersubjective constellation of connections that extend horizontally, vertically and laterally through space, time and geography; this constellation includes one's sources, oneself and one's readers in a relationship performed by the writing and reading of the poem/text itself*
- *The utopian poetic is the nexus of connections performing a relationship of embodied intersubjectivity between otherwise ostensibly disparate [&/or disembodied] subjects*
- *This relationship is formed with, in, via and through the medium of language/speech and its interactions with body and breath*
- *Language, bodies & breathing, and their performance on the page or in person, are the interconnecting materials of utopian poetics*

UTOPIAN POETS & UTOPIAN POETICS

This manifesto for utopian poetics is founded primarily on Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's text, performance and video works. Cha's uses of fragmentation, material enunciation, and innovative pagination in *DICTEE* (1982) speak across her multi-modal artistic production to explore the possibilities and problems of subjectivity-in-relation, which Cha calls 'interfusion' in her 1978 MFA Thesis, *Paths*. In negotiating the inarticulable subject position of a Korean-American woman, *Dictee* opens itself to an intersubjective relationship between writer and reader that can be read as both performing and anticipating the utopian. These utopian gestures are manifested in *DICTEE*'s formal processes at the level of linguistic materiality, such as the use of fragmentation to introduce multiple semantic possibilities into the text and engage the reader as an active participant.

Writing that best performs the utopian also resonates with Isabel Waidner's description of radical innovation in *Liberating the Canon* (2018). That is: Writing that works 'across various systems of oppression (intersectionality), across formal distinction (prose and poetry, critical and creative, and the various genres), and across disciplines'.

Examples of source texts that perform various elements of utopian poetics:

- Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *DICTEE* (1982) – anticipating and performing the utopian possibilities of non-alienation (communion) and non-oppression (equality) through its linguistic and structural materiality, which opens and invites the reader into a space of intersubjective participation (which Cha calls 'interfusion')
- Maggie O'Sullivan's *In the House of the Shaman* (1993) – linguistic & lexical disruption and experimentation foreground language's materiality and invite the reader to co-construct meaning from fragmentary remains
- Anne Waldman's *Fast Speaking Woman* (1996) & *Trickster Feminism* (2018) – laying down language as mantra, casting spells & creating rituals to make material transformation in the physical world through participation in the poem's rhythmic action
- CAConrad's *ECODEVIANCE: (Soma)tics for the Future Wilderness* (2014) – embodying language through ritual as both protest and performance to manifest change in the material world; encouraging reader participation in both the ritual-making & the poem-making

Early roots of utopian poetics can be traced in:

- Stéphane Mallarmé's *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hazard* (1897)
- Mina Loy's 'Feminist Manifesto' (1914), 'Aphorisms on Futurism' (1914)
- William Carlos Williams' *Spring and All* (1923)
- Gertrude Stein's 'Composition as Explanation' (1926)
- H.D.'s *Trilogy* (1946), *Hermetic Definition* (1972), *HERmione* (1981)

- Charles Olson's 'Projective Verse' (1950), 'Proprioception' & 'Human Universe' (1965)
- Allen Ginsberg's *Howl* (1956) & 'Wichita Vortex Sutra' (1966)
- Jerome Rothenberg's *Technicians of the Sacred* (1968) foregrounds the global ritual & shamanic roots to which this manifesto of utopian poetics is indebted

Further sources of utopian poetics include:

Some or all of the poetry/writing of: Rae Armantrout; Caroline Bergvall; Laynie Browne; Diane di Prima; Lyn Hejinian; Jack Kerouac; Lila Matsumoto; Tracie Morris; Harryette Mullen; Hoa Nguyen; Lorine Niedecker; Lisa Robertson; Robert Sheppard; Scott Thurston. Bernadette Mayer's *Utopia*; Paul Hawkins' *Place, Waste, Dissent*; Francesca Lisette's *sub rosa*; Sandeep Parmar, Nisha Ramayya and Bhanu Kapil's *Threads;* M. Nourbese Philip's *Zong!*; Nat Raha's *Of Sirens, Body & Faultlines*; Dolly Turing's *Oh (Para)Cosmic Being;* Samantha Walton's *Self Heal*. Works of utopian poetics can also be found in the following journals and zines: *Adjacent Pineapple, Blackbox Manifold, Cumulus, Datableed, Empty Mirror, Hotel, Intercapillary Space, Jungftak, para.text, Tentacular, The Projectionist's Playground, Zarf* and many more.

THESE LISTS ARE EXEMPLARY NOT EXHAUSTIVE

UTOPIAN POETICS IS *NEVER* SENTIMENTAL OR NOSTALGIC

IT DOES NOT SEEK TO CONSTRUCT FANTASY WORLDS OR FICTIONAL BORDERS

ALONG THE LINES OF NATIONALISM, GENDER, SEXUALITY, RACE, OR ANY OTHER SUCH

EXCLUSIONARY CONSTRUCTS

UTOPIAN POETICS DOES NOT EXCLUDE

IT INCLUDES

YOU ARE WELCOME

PART 1:

SCHOLARLY STUDY
WITH INTEGRATED CREATIVE INTERVENTIONS

SECTION A:

CLOSE-READINGS

infinite imperative

to
turn the directions
learn the directions
burn the directions

you
turn the seasons
start facing south
window to valley
curtain to colden to
calder
colden to window to
curtain to calder
colden to calder
to curtain
to valley
to colden to face to window to calder
to season to start to turn the
ly breathe: silence

you
turn facing north
to slack to hebden water
colden to hebd
to slacken to
north
to valley to window to water
slacken face to
season turn to
curtain out the colder

breathe: silence

you west to face fire
log to burn to
turn to learn to
smithy the seasons faster
to face to burn to log to turn to
smithereen
to falter
to valley to vale to
window to wail to slacken fire to

breathe: silence

you east to easter
book to quester
wall to turn to fog to winder
rise to cold to hept on stall to veil to
face to future
to gift to wing to blister linger
seas on turn to duster

breathe: silence

distil extend breath

distillation extending breath to its utmost pure to purer

you
stand a column
of ~~white~~ lustre
atoned with tears
restored in breath

stand a river
breathing
silence
breathing
rhythm
deeper

turn

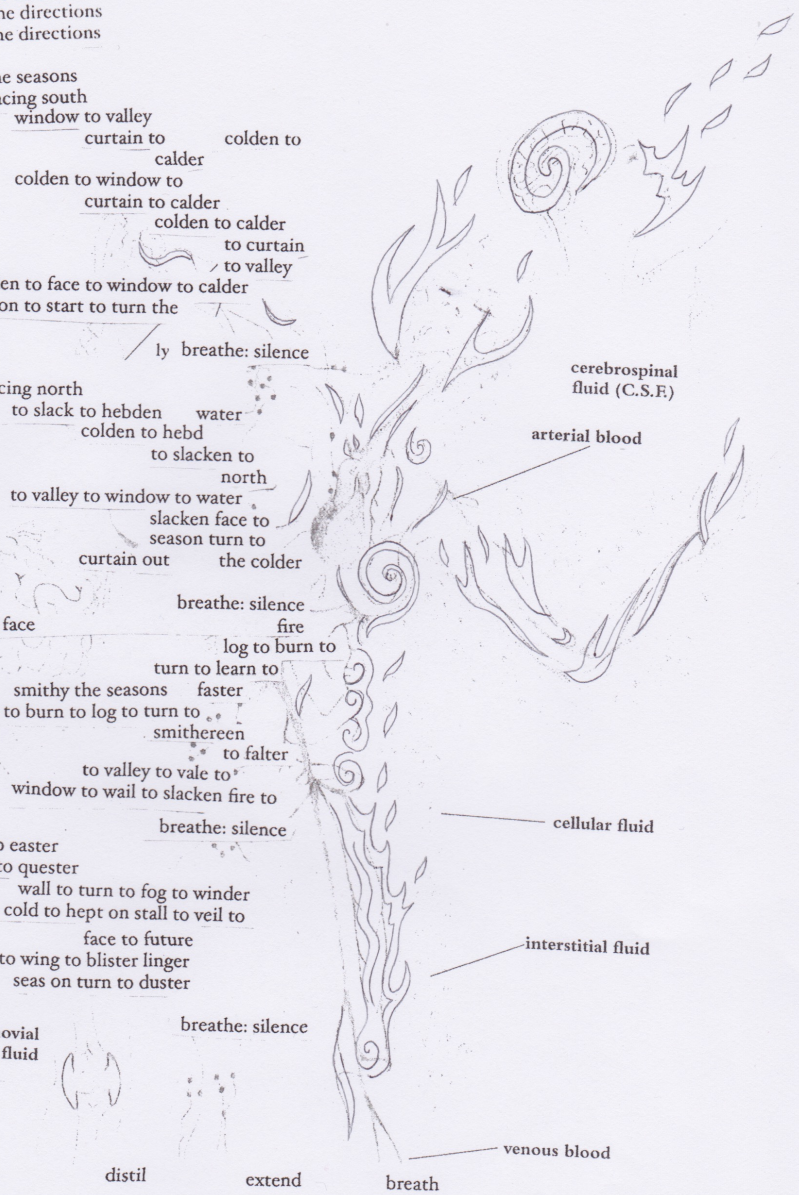

FIGURE 29

Ritual reading from Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictee* (2001, p158), with ten participants. Arvon, Lumb Bank, Heptonstall, Hebden Bridge, West Yorkshire.

21/9
9/21

CHAPTER ONE

Rhythm Out Of Time: *DICTEE*'s Spiritual Prosody

This chapter offers close-reading analysis of DICTEE*'s spiritual elements and the key linguistic and formal innovations by which they are performed. The analysis in this chapter presents my understanding of the processes through which I first encountered the text as both viscerally and spiritually performative. My focus is on prosody as a performance of ritualistic and spiritual rhythms, and on the role of the artist as alchemist. Aspects and sections of* DICTEE *that perform this spirituality and have been critically overlooked in scholarly discussion are foregrounded here.*

On first reading *DICTEE*, I encountered its rhythmic pulses as the performance of a meditative, trancelike state of consciousness. The whole first section of the book, everything beginning under the heading 'DISEUSE' and ending with the start of the first named section (CLIO HISTORY) occupies a liminal space outside of the formal structuring of the nine sections or chapters. This section exists in a space and temporality *prior to* the sections that have already been named on the page denoting the book's sections or contents. This is the space of ritual. An in-between space, a void: outside the confines of ordinary structure and beyond the boundaries of the text proper. The figure of the *diseuse* here 'speaks' in both flowing and fragmented prosody, at times using a ritual register and the lexicon of liturgy. The form and language of this section make it possible to read it, in part, as an ecstatic, religious, mystical or spiritual experience.

'*To scribe to make hear the words, to make sound the words, the words, the words made flesh*' (2001: 18, original italics). In this prosodic line consisting entirely of single-syllable words, rhythm is engendered through the use of punctuation and repetition. To write (scribe) the words is first to make them audible, to 'hear' them in their written form and to translate them into 'sound'. The line itself performs this gesture through its repetition of the phrase 'the words', foregrounding the materiality of both the visual and aural 'words' that compose the sentence fragment, enabling us to 'hear' 'the words' through the melodic repetition of this iambic phrase four times in short succession. A comma placed after each repetition of 'the words' ensures that the reader inserts a slight pause just long enough to engender rhythm within this

phrase, speeding up as the line approaches its culmination, or climax. The rhythmic climax arrives with the shortest punctuated phrase, the repetition of 'the words' in isolation, leading the reader's ear and eye toward the line's semantic culmination: the double iambic phrase 'the words made flesh'. In the second material gesture within this short statement, the writing of words has shifted from the making of sound to the making of flesh. The repeated infinitive verb 'to make' in both of the first sections of this line retains a sonic and semantic resonance with 'made' in the final section, but here the verb shifts into past tense, an act already complete, already accomplished.

The phrase 'the words made flesh' is adapted from the Biblical phrase 'the Word made flesh', a New Testament phrase from the Gospel of John, referring to Jesus as 'The Word of God' (John 1:1-14). *DICTEE* takes that act of the singular capitalised 'Word' of God becoming flesh in the historical person of Jesus and applies it to language, words, in general. The initial capital is replaced with a lower case 'w' and an 's' is applied to the end to pluralise the word. The reference to Jesus is both implicit and explicit, given that this line is located within a section of text that contains the sustained account of a Eucharist ritual, an interrogation into the language of Confession, a description of 'Mass every First Friday', and which culminates in the 'novena of the Immaculate Conception' (2001: 13-18). The 'Word of God', as described in John's Gospel, is the most mystical and spiritual iteration of the person of Jesus within the Bible. *DICTEE*'s references to Catholic services within this section help to lend it both the register and lexicon of ritual. The line itself, however, refers to the 'words made flesh', recalling the earlier invocation that opens the text, erroneously ascribed to Sappho: 'May I write words more naked than flesh, / stronger than bone, more resilient than / sinew, sensitive than nerve' (2001: n.p.). Again here, it is 'words', language, that become flesh, in an appeal to both vulnerability and materiality. So, to return to the initial phrase with which we started, the work of prosody in the line '*To scribe to make hear the words, to make sound the words, the words, the words made flesh*' is to perform the act of making language *material*, through foregrounding both the visual and aural qualities inscribed into the rhythm of this line. One could argue that the choice to italicise this phrase and the paragraph of which it is part also foregrounds the materiality of the text in ways that are both visual and visceral. This line then, with both its form and

its content, signals something both spiritual and material that is at work within this section of the text.

In other parts of the section, the prosody is far more fragmented. For example, another italicised paragraph reads:

> *She would take on their punctuation. She waits to service this. Theirs. Punctuation. She would become, herself, demarcations. Absorb it. Spill it. Seize upon the punctuation. Last air. Giver her. Her. The relay. Voice. Assign. Hand it. Deliver it. Deliver.* (2001: 4)

Although the paragraph opens with the assertion that '[s]he would take on their punctuation', *DICTEE* largely resists standardised grammatical punctuation. In this sense, to 'take on' punctuation is less to adopt it than to challenge it. Challenging the standard grammatical use of punctuation, *DICTEE* instead makes use of punctuation to create rhythm, fragmentation, flowing or fractured prosody that gives language its material and visceral qualities within the text. As the paragraph continues, it becomes clear that punctuation is being used to engender speed and rhythm, and to break down rather than serve syntactical clarity. Fragments of one, two or three words here make up the majority of the text in this paragraph in which punctuation is '[s]eize[d] upon', a further phrase that could suggest both 'put to good use' and 'tackled', challenged, attacked.

Punctuated with excessive full-stops, this paragraph foregrounds not only the visceral quality of punctuation to cut a phrase or sentence into fragments, but also the pauses engendered as silences following each full-stop. This paragraph, like so many throughout *DICTEE*, resounds with the breath of silence figured materially as punctuation between words. This gives the text a trancelike, meditative quality to its rhythms, reminiscent of the slow rhythms of speech during a guided meditation, imbued with deliberately silent pauses to allow time for the meditator to deepen into stillness. Cha's friend and contemporary, Yong Soon Min, states of Cha's various works: 'The striking quality of her work is that it's mesmerizing'. Min is referring specifically to Cha's visual and performance works when she says, 'they sort of lower your blood pressure and put you in this very tranquil, meditative state of

mind'[15]. This meditative effect, I argue, is equally present in Cha's text works, particularly in the sustained textual project of *DICTEE* through both its prosodic rhythms and its formal interventions that engender a visceral and productive relationship between word and silence.

Just as an excess of punctuation can produce a meditative or trancelike 'mesmerizing' materiality to the text, a lack of punctuation can create an ecstatic pulse, frenetically driving to its conclusion. This effect is performed in a paragraph punctuated with only a single, final, full-stop. The paragraph is quoted in full here:

> The above traces from her head moving downward closing her eyes, in the same motion, slower parting her mouth open together with her jaw and throat which the above falls falling just to the end not stopping there but turning her inside out in the same motion, shifting complete the whole weight to elevate upward. (2001: 5)

Movement is foregrounded in this paragraph, both through its vocabulary and its form. Prepositions, such as 'above', 'downward' and 'upward' suggest the shifting locus of this text. The verbs, 'traces', 'moving', 'closing', 'parting', 'open', 'falls', 'falling', 'turning', 'shifting', 'elevate' engender movement both through the actions that they describe and through their shifting forms and functions. Varying between the present indicative ('traces', 'falls'), the present continuous ('moving', 'falling') and the infinitive ('to elevate') performs a sense of movement through the verbs' restless resistance to settling into a pattern of conformity. The almost-repetition of 'falls falling' prefigures the book's final line, which is also unpunctuated until the end and recalls both the vocabulary and the movement towards 'elevation' of this much earlier paragraph. The final line reads: 'Lift me to the window to the picture image unleash the ropes tied to weights of stones first the ropes then its scraping on wood to break stillness as the bells fall peal follow the sound of ropes holding weight scraping on wood to break the stillness bells fall a peal to sky' (2001: 179). Both, to me, perform an embodied experience of language that could be considered ecstatic. An ecstatic experience could be one of utter joyfulness, such as is

[15] Extracted from videotape interview with Yong Soon Min by Portia Cobb and Moira Roth, New York, May 27, 1988. Taken from notes held at the Theresa Hak Kyung Cha Archive, University of California, Berkeley.

suggested in *DICTEE*'s final line by the verbs '[l]ift' and 'unleash', and the sonic repetition of the 'bells' as they 'fall' and 'peal' to the open sky. A mystical or spiritual experience may also be described as ecstatic, such as could be said to be performed by the rhythms engendered in the unpunctuated paragraph, a paragraph which refers to 'turning her inside out … to elevate upward': *ekstasis*, 'standing outside oneself' (*Oxford English Dictionary*).

DICTEE's opening section, therefore, with its explicit references to religious ritual and mystery, its encoding of rhythmic prosody and its meditative experimentation with punctuation, could be read, I argue, as a rhythm out of time. A section of text outside the text, creating a ritual space that places the reader into a meditative, or 'trancelike', state – through breath and meditation – in preparation for the sections to follow. Why Cha might want to create such a meditative state in the book's readers as they enter the text, I argue, is because a large part of her project with *DICTEE* is her intention to perform the ritual alchemy of 'interfusion' – or, in utopian terms, non-alienation – between self and other.

The Artist as Alchemist in *DICTEE*

While scholars have tended to focus on either *DICTEE*'s politics, or its poetics, or – more recently – both in relation, relatively little scholarly attention has been paid to *DICTEE*'s prosody, and certain of the more 'spiritual' sections tend to be routinely overlooked in critical close-readings. One of those sections, TERPSICHORE CHORAL DANCE, I argue, could be read in part as a close artistic rendering of the ideas presented in Cha's MFA thesis *Paths* (1978). As such, it is possible to read this section itself as Cha's thesis, her *ars poetica*, which could be summarised thus: the artist as alchemist in service of interfusion.

Cha's opening statement in *Paths* (1978) focuses on the ritual practices of alchemy. She writes:

> Alchemical elements used by Alchemists could be most commonplace; water, air, fire, earth, etc. … The Alchemist take[s] these few elements, even though most ordinary, obtains them with the utmost care and precision. (water collected from dew settled on leaves…) (1978: 1).

The focus of her thesis is to compare the work of the alchemist with that of the artist. She continues: 'The artist's path is close to that of an alchemist in that his/her path is that of a medium' (1978: 1). In TERPSICHORE, Cha the artist creates a section of ritual language, rhythms and performance, closely mirroring the role of the alchemist she outlines in *Paths*. The ritual alchemy is made apparent through language that closely echoes her earlier statement: 'In the recesses of the leaves is an inlet of dew, clearest tears. You stow them before their fall by their own weight' (2001: 158). This passage directly references the 'dew' that is collected from 'leaves' and suggests the 'utmost care and precision' in the carefulness taken to 'stow them' before they fall. The ritual in this section further makes reference to mercury, a principle substance of alchemy, in the 'silver white spirit', the 'silver pool of liquid' in the 'palm of your hand' (2001: 158).

The second person address that is consistent throughout this rendering of a ritual, frequently followed by the infinitive verb form ('you hold', 'You turn', 'You seek'; 2001: 158), is suggestive of an instructional text or a guided practice. This lends the section the quality of a ritual *that can be performed*, or *a ritual in performance*.[16] The naming of the cardinal points as 'directions' to be 'turn[ed]' is suggestive of the ritual practices of many earth-based, or shamanic, spiritual traditions and speaks to the physical performance of this ritual. For the addressee in the text, the turning through the directions effects a change upon the alchemical element of mercury held in the hands. What began as a 'silver pool of liquid' becomes 'affix[ed] as stone in blue metal ice' (2001: 158). The description of the mercury has undergone a transformation in colour from silver to blue, in state from pool to ice, and in element from liquid to stone or metal. Just as the mercury is transformed by the ritual, Cha writes in *Paths* that the 'perception of an audience has the possibility of being altered' (1978: 1). For Cha, the 'vision' of both the artist and the alchemist 'belongs to an altering, of material, and of perception' (1978: 1). In altering the material form

[16] I have personally experimented with rendering this ritual into artistic performance, and will continue to develop this intervention. An initial sound improvisation was given as part of *Hákarl 24* in Brighton, a 24-hour continuous improvisation with 12 participants in July 2017. The poem 'infinite imperative' (*ATHA*, 2019: 36), which precedes the start of this chapter, is based on a collaborative group performance of the ritual in September 2017. The sense in which I intend 'performance' above, however, is both as a ritual that it is possible to enact and as an enactment of the ritual within and by the text itself.

of poetics through linguistic innovation, then, the artist performs the role of the alchemist who alters the material form of her chosen elements. Further, the common 'vision' behind this practice is, for Cha, the altering of 'perception' in her audience.

The purpose of this altering of perception is the 'interfusion of subject and object' as Cha describes in her thesis. She argues: 'The artist, like the alchemist, establishes a "covenant" with his elements, as well as with each member of the viewer. … The necessary covenant, "interfusion of subject and object" is then, finalised' (1978: 2). It is this ritual of alchemy, performed by Cha the artist with her elements of words and images, that establishes the performance of the utopian self-encounter, or non-alienation between self and other. For Cha, this process is 'finalised', but I would argue that even while performing this utopian possibility the process continually betrays its own incompletion, gesturing towards its better or ultimate condition, which is not yet fulfilled. How this utopian self-encounter, or 'interfusion', is accomplished in *DICTEE* is through Cha's formal interventions and innovations with the materialities of language, image and text. Strategies such as fragmentation, manipulation of grammar and syntax, proliferation of punctuation or its absence, rhythmic prosody and repetition each present various invitations to the reader to actively participate in the text's creation of meaning.

As part of the ritual text in the TERPSICHORE section, Cha writes the phrase: 'Like firefly, a slow rhythmic relume to yet another and another opening' (2001: 160). This phrase is suggestive, to me, of the prosodic rhythms and repetitions that re-illuminate readings throughout *DICTEE*'s text. The text weaves its threads of connection through repeated words and phrases that both echo and re-illuminate one another, creating connections with what has come before and gesturing towards that which is yet to come, and thus can be read alongside Nisha Ramayya's (2018) 'Tantric poetics' as a form of poetics that explores the weaving of (inter-) relationships between self and other, akin to the non-alienation of Utopian Poetics. Cha's wording in the phrase is also reminiscent of the quote from Roland Barthes that she cites in *Paths*: '"Plurality of entrances, the opening of networks, the infinity of languages"' (1978: 4). The rhythmic repetitions throughout the text not only re-illuminate, shed further light on, one another through their shifting contexts and connections, but they open out the text to readers, providing plural entrances to this

text's prolific generosity and inviting open networks – connections between self and other, encounters – through the 'infinity' of languages suggested by the text's linguistic innovations. Each encounter with a repeated word in a new context is a deictic encounter, shifting the resonance of that word in accordance with both its present, previous and future contexts. All encounters with a word or phrase are both fleeting and sustained. In this way, readers are invited into the weaving of the text, co-creating meaning from the linguistic tapestry as it is woven, inviting readers to become active participants in the text in a relationship of 'interfusion' or non-alienation with the writer.

This rhythmic and repetitive prosodic structure is figured in *DICTEE* as antiphony, or 'the Antiphonal song' (2001: 47). This in itself is repeated in various iterations throughout the text and is figured as a form of echo. Cha writes: 'You know to wait. … For the Antiphonal Song. Antiphonal hymn. The choral answer. The ebb and tide of echo' (2001: 47). Cha's iterative phrasing here, the repetition of variations that can never quite capture the essence of the thing described (as is also foregrounded in the inexact translations presented throughout *DICTEE*), is performative of the utopian function of the antiphonal echo in the text, as will be explored below. The word 'antiphon' is defined as 'a song, hymn, or poem in which two voices or choruses respond to one another in alternate verses or stanzas, as is common in verses written for religious services' (*Oxford Literary Dictionary*, 2004: 14). The antiphonal song is a form of call and response in which two 'voices … respond' to one another. *DICTEE*'s antiphony takes the form of repetitions and inexact renderings of words and phrases throughout the text, echoing sounds and senses as a resonant rhythm that repeats and shifts through the pages of the book. This first foregrounds the gestural embodiment of the text, inviting or necessitating the materiality of physically turning between sections to locate prior sections that resonate or search for future echoes of a particular word or phrasing. In this way, readers are invited to enter the materiality of the text in a physically embodied way, bringing awareness to the reader's body, their embodied particularity, while reading the text. Readers are further invited into the text through the shifting resonances of each word or phrase inexactly rendered as antiphony or echo.

TERPSICHORE repeats a refrain as part of its ritual language, which echoes inexactly a similarly rendered articulation presented as poetry in the earlier URANIA ASTRONOMY section. The earlier rendering is as follows:

'Semblance of noise.
Broken speech. One to one. At a time.
Cracked tongue. Broken tongue.
Pidgeon. Semblance of speech.' (2001: 75).

Over eighty pages later, the refrain is reprised with iterative variation as the italicised and indented passage that reads:

'*At times, starts again. Noise. Semblance of noise. Speech perhaps. Broken. One by one. At a time. Broken tongue. Pidgeon tongue. Semblance of speech.*'
(2001: 158)

The phrases '[s]emblence of noise', '[b]roken tongue' and '[s]emblence of speech' are present in both variations. Exact repetition of the vocabulary and syntax in these phrases is offset by the formal and visual disagreement between both: the first being lineated as poetry in standard typescript, the second being presented as prose in italicised and indented text. Phrases that occur in between and in relation to these three repeated phrases undergo minor variations that create a dissonance in the echo. 'One to one' becomes '*One by one*', suggesting a shift from an intimacy of relationship through speech to a break down of communication in which words become isolated; syntax becoming fragmented into its most basic singular units. 'Broken speech' becomes the less confident '*Speech perhaps. Broken*', reflecting the disintegration of vocabulary and syntax to the extent that one cannot even be certain that this noise is 'speech', the only certainty is that it is 'broken'. This phrasing further echoes ideas that originate in the book's opening section DISEUSE, in which '[s]he mimicks [*sic.*] speaking' creating sounds '[t]hat might resemble speech' and in her desire to articulate '[a]nything at all', she ultimately produces '[b]ared noise, groan, bits torn from words' (2001: 3).

The (im)possibility of articulation, and its repeated refrain throughout *DICTEE* as one of the text's several instances of antiphony speaks to and performs the text's utopian poetics in at least two ways. First, as is explored in Chapter Two of this thesis, *DICTEE*'s utopian politics is founded on the text's negotiation with the articulation of an inarticulable subject position. The repetition with variation in these antiphonal echoes performs the articulation of the inarticulable, in that the articulation never settles, never finds its full or true expression, never becomes closed and complete to itself. Articulation in *DICTEE* remains approximate, inexact, open and yearning. Articulation searches for its full expression but meets with resistance as the material impossibility of this desire. This is key to the text's performance of utopian poetics and leads to its second, utopian, function. The text resists closure not only in its invitations to active readership, but in its iterative articulations that resist settlement and completion. Ernst Bloch, in his sustained meditation on the 'inconstruable' utopian question argues that: 'The simplest word is already too much for it, the most sublime word too little again' (2000: 193). The utopian cannot be known through affixing a language or vocabulary to describe its contents or appearance, but yet must be continually approached if it is to be brought into the world in even its most limited form. This is the paradox of the utopian utterance at the heart of Bloch's philosophy. He maintains that, '[w]hat has just been said must be crossed out each time, so that nothing can solidify' (2000: 194). *DICTEE*'s iterative variations echoing through the 'antiphonal song' present a verbal performance of this crossing through; resisting reification through the continual flux and movement of a language and vocabulary that are never enough to speak with and yet which must be spoken. For Nisha Ramayya, in her exploration of Tantric poetics, 'repetition is a strategy and a form of survival' because '[t]he work will never finish' (2018: 39). The unfinished work of the text, of demands for political equality and emancipation, of the orientation towards ever-greater communion with an other, bears repetition as both iteration and insistence.

DICTEE's antiphonal echoes could be considered 'insistences' in Gertrude Stein's formulation that 'there can be no repetition because the essence of that expression is insistence' (2001: 288). For Stein, repetition is always iterative when it is moving with the flux of life, which she calls 'the time of the composition' (1926). Repetition only occurs when the writer is not present with the conditions of the time of the

composition. When writing loses its vitality of presence it becomes repetition – a repeating of the words that have already passed through the writer's mind, rather than an iteration of the living words that are in the process of passing through the writer's mind. Stein says of her own compositions, 'each time there was a difference just a difference enough so that it could go on and be a present something' (2001: 294-295). *DICTEE*'s iterative antiphonies perform this 'difference enough', speaking to the text's desire for 'the visibility of the present' (*DICTEE*, 2001: 140).

In another series of iterative phrasings, Cha writes, first: 'She says to herself she could displace real time. She says to herself she could display it before and become its voyeur' (2001: 140). This is followed by an italicised passage on the facing page: '*if by writing she could abolish real time. She would live. If she could display it before her and become its voyeur*' (2001: 141). Sonic pairings between 'displace' and 'display' highlight the semantic dissonance between these two words and the difference to the context of the phrase made by this shift. To displace is to move the present moment aside, eschewing it in favour of some other time, past or future. Echoes of Cha's own displacement from her native Korea also resonate within the word, suggesting that the trauma of the present moment could be solaced with memories of the past or future fantasies. In both iterations, the emphasis shifts from 'displac[ing]' or 'abolish[ing]' 'real time' to 'display[ing] it before her and becom[ing] its voyeur'. This shift places the emphasis on the necessity of being present to the demands of the present moment, however traumatic. The second, italicised, iteration, provides both the method of this process, 'by writing', and the reason for this desire, so that '[s]he would live'. Cha's use of iterative phrasings, repetition with variations, for this process performs the composition of writing that Stein argues is accomplished by 'the few who make writing as it is made' (1926). That is, by varying the emphasis in insistence through the deictic shifting of the composition of the present moment. To live in the time of the composition is an aesthetic choice for Stein. In *DICTEE* it is a matter of life and death. To write is to live, to compose in the moment, freeing oneself from the memories of a traumatic past by writing them out. Yet the text complicates this desire even as it is written.

In *DICTEE*, the act of writing is an 'ablution' intended to 'release her from the very antiphony to follow' (2001: 140). By 'charting every moment', the writer performs

this 'ablution', or ritual washing, 'as if' it would release her from the repetition, the echo, the continual searching for the '[s]ynonym, simile, metaphor, byword, byname, ghostword' that she desires to speak (2001: 140). Knowing that it cannot, the writer continues nonetheless, circling and revisiting with words that are never more than approximate approaches to what it is she desires to say. In this utopian paradox, the writer can never arrive at the words that would penetrate what Bloch calls 'the darkness of the immediately experienced moment' (1988), nor articulate what he calls 'the inconstruable question' (2000). Yet the writer must continue to write, to gesture towards that which is glimpsed by the not-yet-conscious as the possibility for self-encounter, for non-alienation, which Cha figures as 'interfusion' between self and other, and to perform it in whatever limited forms it can be performed within the objective conditions of material reality.

Eucharist as Performed Interfusion

Even in passages in which *DICTEE* is ostensibly critical of ritual practices, and certainly critical of a political status quo that embodies hierarchical social disparities, one can trace a performance of interfusion through the text's formal and material innovations. In the section within DISEUSE that is dedicated to the ritual of Communion, or Eucharist, for example, while the text's content is critical of the gender politics enacted by the Catholic Mass, formal innovations perform an erotics that is both suggestive of, and an invitation into, interfusion or non-alienation. The following passage performs a movement from separation to communion through syntactical innovations:

'The Host Wafer (His Body. His Blood.) His. Dissolving into the mouth the liquid tongue saliva (Wine to Blood. Bread to Flesh.) His.' (2001: 13).

In this passage the metonymic references to Christ's body and blood are placed within parentheses, both isolated and emphasised from the main body text. Thus they become separated from the larger body of the main textual passage. As metonymy, they are parts, fragments of the whole which also are the whole, but their position within parentheses places them in isolation as separate; both a part of the whole and apart from the whole. The capitalisation functions as a mark of significance,

suggesting that the separation of 'His Body' and 'His Blood' raises its significance above the commonality of the standard text. The repetition of the capitalised third person masculine possessive pronoun, 'His' followed significantly by a full stop on two of its four repetitions, foregrounds both the gender and hierarchy of the figure of Jesus in relation to the (female) congregation of his worshippers. Following this initial fragmentation, performing separation materialised both by the parentheses and full stops, the syntax dissolves at the word 'Dissolving'. This word instigates the dissolution of syntax as nouns flow into one another in the unpunctuated phrase 'the liquid tongue saliva'. Commas between each noun here would separate them from one another, marking their individuality and (inter-) relationship. Yet the absence of any form of punctuation here has the effect of dissolving the distinction, or at least the distance, between the three. Further, the repeated form of definite article plus noun in 'the mouth the liquid' incorporates the former ('the mouth') into this noun string, suggesting that the whole has become one, inclusive of all parts from which it is composed. This movement from isolation to integration in Cha's syntax performs the act of Communion as an act of interfusion between constituent parts.

This is furthered by material innovations enacting an erotics that invites a utopian reading. '[T]he women' of the congregation kneel on either side of the speaker in a pose that evokes both supplication and eroticism: 'their elongated tongues. In waiting. To receive. Him.' (2001: 13). The erotic connotations of this phrasing, punctuated with gaps that function materially as holes in the syntax, orifices between words, is suggestive of the erotic interweaving of text and space in *DICTEE*'s ERATO section. That section erotically interweaves extracts relating to 'the Marriage of … [Saint] Thérèse, [to] Jesus, the Word of God', from the autobiography of St. Thérèse of Lisieux, with fragmented text that offers an ironic commentary on the relationship of marriage (2001: 101-103). The women in the Eucharist extract are waiting to receive, to enter into a profoundly spiritual and sacred relation with the body of Christ, which, in its dissolution into their own 'liquid tongue saliva' becomes a reciprocity in which the godhead is both *received by* and *receiving of* the communicant in this act of (sacred) union, akin to the marriage of St. Thérèse. *DICTEE*'s text itself is critical of the gendered politics of this relation, foregrounded in a subsequent passage in which 'He', the male priest, is 'the one who becomes He. Man-God', afforded all the rights and privileges in this

hierarchical relationship (2001: 13). The repetition and capitalisation of the third person masculine pronoun 'He' and the gendered distinction of 'Man-God' highlight this disparity.

The materiality of the text's formal innovations, however, perform the erotics of Communion as spiritual union, inviting the reader into an active reciprocity with the writer via the text, which resists the subordination and oppression enacted in Cha's description of the gendered formal Eucharist ritual. For Ernst Bloch, moreover, the erotics of the Eucharist is itself a performance of precisely the kind of union between self and other that constitutes the utopian self-encounter. He argues that, 'Christian eros … will not let a particular I fade heathenishly into some All-One … [but rather] the I like the Thou are preserved in a third term, in the future omnipresence of everyone in everyone' (2000: 212). In this form of communion, the utopian non-alienation or self-encounter between self and other does not 'dissolve' into amorphous oneness, but retains the distinctions between individuals, even while they are present within and present to all others. Like the 'liquid tongue saliva', each retains its distinction without isolation. While Bloch's argument may be read as verging on Christian essentialism here, Ramayya's Tantric poetics provides a way of reading a text's invitations to interrelationship and intersectionality through the spiritual and political lens of Tantra (2018). In Tantric terms, 'the points in space and time at which bodies come together, the points at which relationships are enabled and encouraged to multiply … neither [presume] our convergences, nor [preclude] our divergences' (2018: 31). As the reader is invited into active participation within the text, one does not simply become Theresa Hak Kyung Cha. Cha retains her distinction as the writer of the text: her motivations and intentions, conscious and unconscious decisions remain her own; a reader may enter the text and be present within it, but the proliferation of possible readings attests to the individuality and distinction between reader and writer, and between individual readers themselves.

Cha concludes her MFA thesis, *Paths*, with the unfettered optimism of the truly (if naively) utopian thinker. Again, her language connects the work of the artist with that of the alchemist in service of engendering the performance of a state of interfusion. She writes:

> For this time, however, the pure, magical states (before any "making" even begins,) the artist, given the gift of Medium, partaking in transformation processes captures eternal wonder. I cannot help but to express the overwhelming sensation that almost resembles a returning, an abandon, a salvation from the struggle of being human, to only the purest of pure
>
> (1978: 5)

The unpunctuated end to this statement resists conclusion and completion, leaving the thesis open to the possibility toward which it gestures. In *DICTEE*, Cha would develop a more complex relationship with this 'salvation', as discussed above, but the alchemical elements – and thus the desire for and performance of interfusion – remain.

Poem
‘ghostword sembling’

ghostword sembles itself
antiphony then past
the synonym each satisfactory
word approaching
still unarticulated unresolved
nomenclature
resembles utopian tension
in other words
time release much
with ritual
byword notation absence
whether occurred
begins more rehearsals more
charting All map One
least that no documenting keep
appease. follow
. equivalence
would byname
unconcluded exile
the ghostword dissembles
itself unhoused
cemetery tomb
death would /never
could /continue to /live
without /ceasing
.search the words
events that have occurred or are to come
display before
voyeur.voyeur.
antiphony to follow
begins more rehearsals
pain/less translating provisionally
metaphor
absence ending
the ghostword sembles
equivalence would appease
satisfactory byword
translating memory
antiphony release with
sooth
whether translating more rehearsals more absence synonym
feeling equivalence charting All notation
keep documenting
originary point/ here
ritual weather begins metaphor
equivalence would byname

the ghostword sembles itself
merely
intimate
a kind of
remembering
equivalence
in other words
reverberations of
ourselves
misrecognized
nearing hearing
evocable
blueness at the heart
still unarticulated
music it is literature is book
yielding
yielding
quiet phantoms for the root
search. the words
i wonder /who
has brought /the
flowers
re/as/sembled paris
22 june 1976
rain by the tomb
/ tristan tzara
sitting in
montparnasse i wonder
word approaching intimate
goes towar
the unsayable
of becoming
another
incompletion
re/vocable
in other words
Not Yet
urge to correspond
what has just been
said in other words
creaking ice
must be crossed
in intelligible worlds
human voice hearing /nearing
itself
merely intimate
being-missing
in other words semblance this moonlit landscape more
or less lived
incognito

misrecognized
equivalence
fluidity, darkness
so that nothing
shone enough for
absolute crisis
ir/revocable
citizenship in intelligible worlds
exile
at least despair
remains
located
in other words
as this moment
the possibility
hears itself
revolutionary /serpent
constantly undermining
translation
reassembled in other words
still /unarticulated
death would never
not yet vocable
concurrent with the
strangely weary and obscure
originary point here
the unavoidable end
whispered every possibility
of evocation
blackout
what has just been said
presently wavering
homesickness
want to vomit
absolute crisis hears itself unsayableresemblance
verbal/reassemblage
apocalyptic kernel
reclaiming
itself as answer
antiphony to follow
weather simile metaphor ghostword
search the words
for the root
the words or vocables
reciting-to-oneself
paris 1976
death would never
silence the stars byname
in other words shudder disassembled
at the heart

a brief notation
abolish real time write
without ceasing
invocable a word is
approaching
approximating
intimat/ing
semblance
resemblance
synonym ghostword
displace/ment
exiled
nomenclature
entire silence reclaiming
the inconstruable
purely/ as question
unknowing
what has just
been said
so that
nothing
located
so far away so near
more or
less in other
human voice at least despair
beyond the lettering
incompletion
re-vocable
unavoidable end of
kernel reverberating
in other words
yielding. yielding
provisionally intimate
more or less located
urge to correspond

CHAPTER TWO

Utopian Poetics and Emancipatory Politics in *DICTEE*

This chapter explores the emancipatory politics encoded within DICTEE*'s formal linguistic innovations. Cha's interest in interfusion and alchemy continue to inform my reading and analysis in this chapter, which locates* DICTEE*'s poetics between the spiritually effusive utopianism of Beat poetics and the politically emancipatory utopianism of Language poetics. A cross-disciplinary approach to this chapter explores the emancipatory act of articulating the inarticulable location of intersectional subjectivity, which marks* DICTEE*'s project as distinct from both Beat and Language poetics.*

Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's aesthetic and political project in *DICTEE*, to engage with avant-garde formal innovations in exploring the politics of subject formation, locates the text at the nexus of contemporary critical debate around subjectivity and minority identity in contemporary innovative poetics. In this chapter, I explore the ways in which *DICTEE* draws upon the formal aesthetics of both Beat Poetics and Language Poetry to perform an emancipatory Korean American feminist politics.

Cha's 1978 MFA Thesis, *Paths*, prompts an exploration of her critical aesthetic relationship to both Beat and Language poetics through her reading of *The New American Poetics* (1978) edited by Ekbert Faas and *S/Z* (1973) by Roland Barthes. Cha demonstrates through her citations from these texts, and through her own writing projects, an influence that is critically mediated by her experience as a Korean American woman writer. It is this critical mediation of her contemporary poetic practices, specifically arising from Cha's lived experience as a racialised and gendered subject, that gives *DICTEE* (1982) the potential to perform the utopian function that both Beat and Language poetics desire (and fail) to accomplish. This chapter explores the ways that Cha's innovative language practices in *DICTEE* activate a more successful performance of intersubjectivity that avoids both the dominant assertion of the poet's subjectivity found in Allen Ginsberg's Beat poetics and the attempted erasure of the poet's subjectivity that becomes an inevitable consequence of Language Poetry. In negotiating the inarticulable subject position of a Korean American woman, *DICTEE* opens itself to an intersubjective relationship

between writer and reader that can be read as both performing and anticipating the utopian.

Living and writing primarily in Berkeley and San Francisco from 1964 to 1980, when she moved to New York, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's artistic practice developed in the Bay Area milieu saturated first by Beat poetics and subsequently by Language poetics. Cha's 1982 text *DICTEE* demonstrates aspects of the formal aesthetics associated with both Beat Poetics and Language Poetics to gesture towards the utopian possibility of non-alienation between writer and reader. These utopian gestures are manifested in *DICTEE*'s formal processes at the level of linguistic materiality. It is highly unlikely, however, that Cha had any direct contact with or influence from the poets associated with Language Poetry[17], itself still in its infancy. Thus many of her formal innovations arise as a result of her own reading of early European avant-garde texts and her study of French Post-Structural theory in connection with her peers and colleagues at Berkeley, and from her experience of writing as a Korean American woman. *DICTEE*'s complexities centre around the contradictions associated with the performance of Korean American female subjectivity. I argue that these arise in part from Cha's interest in the shamanic mysticism and spiritual syncretism associated with Beat poetics, which she reads through Ekbert Faas's *Towards a New American Poetics* (1978). Through her reading of Roland Barthes' utopian notions of intersubjectivity in texts such as *S/Z* (1973), Cha explores the (im)possibility of performing such a subjectivity. Barthes' text also serves as a major direct influence on the development of Language Poetry. The performance of subjectivity through the figure of the shaman/alchemist suggests similarities between *DICTEE* and Allen Ginsberg's Beat poetics. Cha's focus on the Daoist practice of 'interfusion' however, troubles this comparison and provides the foundation for the performance of intersubjectivity. This is explored through linguistic innovation such as the use of fragmentation to introduce multiple semantic possibilities into the text and engage the reader as an active participant, demonstrating the kind of radical openness explored in Lyn Hejinian's 'The Rejection of Closure' (1983). Taken together, these two examples demonstrate the

[17] See Timothy Yu, Race and the Avant-Garde (2009). Cha did, however, perform at 80 Langton Street, which Yu identifies as a prominent venue for contemporaneous Language Poetry readings.

utopian potential for political emancipation in *DICTEE*. Elaine H. Kim's reading of *DICTEE* as a Korean American text centres on this political potential (1994). This chapter will explore interfusion, intersubjectivity, intersectionality and embodiment as aspects of *DICTEE*'s utopian poetics and emancipatory politics.

As I will explore throughout this chapter, although Cha and the Language Poets both approach the utopian possibility of intersubjectivity through a close reading of Roland Barthes, Cha's particular practices of linguistic innovation both stem from and perform her experience of Korean American female subjectivity. In an artist statement, Cha states that: 'The main body of my work is with Language, looking for the roots of the language before it is born on the tip of the tongue' (c.1976). She gives her rationale for this as the following:

> Since having been forced to learn foreign languages more "consciously" at a later age, there has existed a different perception and orientation towards language. Certain areas that continue to hold interest for me are: grammatical structures of a language, syntax. How words and meaning are <u>constructed</u> in the language system itself, by function or usage, and how transformation is brought about by manipulation, processes as changing the syntax, isolation, removing from context, repetition and reduction to minimal units.
>
> (Cha, c. 1976: n.p., emphasis in original)

Cha's multilingual language practice, both as speaker of multiple languages and writer in multiple linguistic systems (*DICTEE* is written in both French and English, and includes Chinese calligraphy and Korean Hangul), provides her with first-hand experience of the 'constructedness', or artifice, of languages. This prompts her to explore that construction and its multiple possibilities for manipulation and transformation in poetic texts. Her experience is one of having been 'forced' to learn 'foreign' languages, which alters her own perception of linguistic systems. Cha's use of the word 'forced' suggests – at best – that the language acquisition was obligatory, mandatory and/or involuntary: minimally necessary for her transition into another culture; and – at worst – enforced, coerced or dictated. The French title of *DICTEE* resonates with the latter sense of the word. Her experience of the bitterness associated with her cultural transition and subsequent language acquisition can be summarised by her contemporaneous textile work *Amer* (1976), featuring the capitalised French word *AMER* stencilled onto a piece of starred-and-striped fabric

bearing two eyelets for hanging and resembling the American flag (Lewallen, 2001: 104-105). The French word '*amer*' translates to 'bitter' in English. Thus *Amer* implies the bitterness on Cha's tongue of being forced to learn foreign languages, which included both American (English) represented by the flag imagery and the first half of the word Amer(ica), and French, represented by the French word *amer*. *Amer* also hints towards the bitterness of the historical Korean relationship with America (with the flag signifying the nation as a whole and its political structures), including America's refusal to help Korea as an allied nation during the Japanese Occupation (which Cha explores in *DICTEE*'s CLIO HISTORY section) and the division of Korea overseen by the United States (which Cha explores in *Exilée* [1980] and in *DICTEE*'s MELPOMENE TRAGEDY section). Cha's sense of her own displaced Korean American subjectivity through language is here figured as a bitter experience of imperialism and division. These overarching themes and their application through the lived practice of speaking and writing in another language continue to be central to Cha's linguistic innovation in *DICTEE*. Thus, while some aspects of contemporary linguistically innovative poetry developed in a trajectory towards greater and more vehement rejection of the performance of authorial subjectivity, *DICTEE* can provide a more complex and nuanced approach to the performance of intersubjectivity – in which both the subject of the writer and the subject of the reader are present and active in the writing process.

This is crucial because of the subsequent bitter division that has arisen between linguistically innovative poetics and Asian American poetry in the United States since the 1980s, a history attested to and explored by numerous critics, including Timothy Yu in his study *Race and the Avant-Garde*: *Experimental and Asian American Poetry Since 1965* (2009), Dorothy Wang in *Thinking its Presence: Race, Form and Subjectivity in Contemporary Asian American Poetry* (2014), and Cathy Park Hong in her 2015 essay 'Delusions of Whiteness in the Avant-Garde'. These writers argue that, privileging a preference for 'anti-subjective' poetics, linguistically innovative writing, under the patronage of one of its foremost advocates and critics, Marjorie Perloff, has undergone a shift towards the potentially toxic rubric of 'Conceptual Poetry' – whereby the performance of authorial subjectivity is vehemently opposed. This approach to poetics is potentially toxic in at least two respects. First, at its most extreme in the form of 'Uncreative Writing', its authors

take no personal responsibility for their poetry, regarding all language as equally viable in its potential for incorporation into a work, which often tends to be the wholesale reproduction of an extant text. This has enabled poets such as Kenneth Goldsmith and Vanessa Place to exploit and provoke racial tensions and divisions in their work, without considering themselves answerable to the consequences of such works.[18] Second, it enables the creation and maintenance of a hierarchical institutional structure whereby 'anti-subjective' forms of poetry are privileged *as poetry* over what has been derogatively termed 'identity politics', consisting of any poetry in which the authorial subjectivity of an oppressed or minority poet is asserted or performed as part of a poem's poetics. As such, a hierarchy dominated by predominantly white male heterosexual poets continues to preside over the valuation of contemporary poetics in the academic institution and the wider avant-garde culture. Those poets whose poetry might serve to challenge and disrupt this institutional hegemony continue to be marginalised, negated and vilified. As such, Cathy Park Hong remarks: 'To encounter the history of the avant-garde is to encounter a racist tradition' (2015: 248).

'Identity politics' is a fraught term, essentially decrying the poetry of marginalised subjects as politics rather than poetics, particularly where that poetry confronts or challenges marginalisation and oppression through the articulation of a speaking subject. Dorothy Wang (2014) elaborates on this vilification, arguing that: 'Form, whether that of traditional lyric or avant-garde poems, is assumed to be the provenance of a literary acumen and culture that is unmarked but assumed to be white' (20). The effect of this assumption is that, '[m]inority writing, including poetry, is inevitably read as mimetic, autobiographical, "representative", and ethnographic' (22). In particular, according to Wang, the assumption of poetry as 'unmarked' and therefore 'white' suggests the racial dominance of white poets and critics who fail to recognise the racial markers in their own poetics because these have become the invisible cultural markers of 'cultural value and high culture', and specifically of 'literary acumen' (20). Further, since poetry occupies the position of

[18] See, for example, Ken Chen's essay 'Authenticity Obsession, or Conceptualism as Minstrel Show' published in *The Margins* for Asian American Writers' Workshop (June 2015: https://aaww.org/authenticity-obsession/) for a detailed discussion of Goldsmith and Place and the wider racist implications of Conceptual Poetry and avant-garde poetics. See also my previous discussion in the introductory section, 'Contextualising *DICTEE*'.

the 'epitome of high literary culture', it is specifically poetry perceived to be 'unmarked' by racial features (and thus 'assumed to be white') that remains the privileged and dominant form of poetry and poetics in the early twenty-first century (20-22)[19].

Feminist critics have described the privileging structure of patriarchy in a similar way[20]. Cora Kaplan describes poetry as 'a privileged metalanguage in western patriarchal culture' (1986: 69). Further, she argues, 'control of high language is a crucial part of the power of dominant groups' (70). This structural oppression is a means by which minority subjects continue to be excluded from the value system of high culture and high language. Within this structurally oppressive value system the presumption prevails that the formal aesthetics of poetry unmarked by gender or race is the superior form of poetics. Denise Riley notes that '[o]nly women have a sex; only women have a body' (1995: n.p.). As such, the white, male subject remains free to assert his subjectivity through culturally coded literary and linguistic forms that are always already marked by performance of his own language, whilst simultaneously disavowing the performance of his subjectivity through its absence of (culturally visible) linguistic markers. It is my argument that a critical approach to *DICTEE* which explores the complexities and paradoxes between the performance of Cha's Korean American female subjectivity and the text's linguistic innovation can serve not only to illuminate the performance of intersubjectivity at play within the text, but also to demonstrate that both factors are necessary for the performance of utopian poetics.

Indeed, Ernst Bloch (1988) argues that '[b]oth factors, the subjective as well as the objective, have to be understood in their continuous dialectical interplay, inseparable, impossible to isolate' (109). According to Bloch, 'the objective

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[19] In terms of the dichotomy between poetic form and 'autobiographical' or 'ethnographic' poetics, however, Timothy Yu argues that early studies of *DICTEE* can be seen to perpetuate and exacerbate this polarisation. Yu demonstrates that white critics performed a critical bias in focusing almost exclusively on *DICTEE*'s formal aesthetics (resulting in either the erasure or the exoticisation of Cha's Korean American subjectivity), and that Asian American critics' attempts to reclaim *DICTEE* as a specifically Korean American text resulted in a critical bias towards the text's more autobiographical features of content (2009).

[20] Ann Vickery's *Leaving Lines of Gender: A Feminist Genealogy of Language Writing* (2000) explores the complex relationship between linguistically innovative writing and feminism in the late twentieth century.

contradictions constantly call for the mutual interplay with the subjective contradiction' in order for the utopian imagination to operate within the constraints of the material world (109). He cautions against 'objective automatism', which assumes that the objective material conditions alone will bring about utopian revolution thus negating the need for subjective intervention. This position, as I argue below, could be said to characterise the development of avant-garde poetics in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, privileging the objective to the exclusion and effacement of the subject. Equally, Bloch recognises the dangers inherent to 'an overly subjective factor that believes it can skip the laws of objective-economic regularity' (109). Without the mediating effects of objective material conditions, the subjective utopian imagination operates purely in the realm of abstract fantasy.

For Bloch, therefore, the fantasy of the purely objective is a false doctrine, whilst the purely subjective is disconnected from objective reality. Rather than advocating an anti-subjective utopian doctrine, Bloch's insistence on the value of the active subject within a dialectical relationship with objective conditions opens the way to understanding the role of the writing subject in utopian poetics. Whereas the more central philosophers to emerge from the Frankfurt school and to be taken up by subsequent generations of writers and scholars advocated for increasing anti-subjectivity[21], Bloch remained convinced throughout his career that the anticipatory imagination of the writing subject was a necessary factor in bringing about the 'concrete' (that is, objectively realisable) utopia. In order for the utopia to be concrete, rather than abstract (purely speculative fantasy), the subjective factor required the limiting and challenging dialectical interplay with objectively real conditions.

As will be explored below, *DICTEE*'s utopian desire for intersubjectivity – a central tenet of both Beat poetics and Language Poetry – is manifested through the interplay of a performed subjectivity akin to Beat poetics and formal linguistic innovation akin to Language poetics. Cha's use of linguistic and formally innovative aesthetics to explore the challenges inherent to articulating her Korean American female

[21] See Keston Sutherland, 'Theses on Antisubjectivist Dogma' (2013).

subjectivity provide a challenge to the traditional subject-based lyric poetry typically adopted by minority subjects since, as Audre Lorde argues, '[t]he master's tools will never dismantle the master's house' ([1979] 2017: 89). Further, this combination of strategies has come to locate *DICTEE* as a challenge to the hierarchical structures of linguistically innovative 'avant-garde' poetry itself, which refuses to admit and explore questions of subjectivity within its authorised canon. Lisa Lowe suggests that, 'in addition to the strategic and necessary attacks on the prevailing form of domination in the terms of that domination, […] it may also be interventions from standpoints of alterity to the structure of dominance which enable the displacement of that dominance' (1994: 57). Thus, the objective norms of linguistic practice – both lyric and 'innovative' – established in white patriarchal structures must necessarily be disrupted and dismantled in an emancipatory effort to subjectively reimagine new structures both linguistically and socially/culturally.

Interfusion and Beat Poetics

Cha's MFA Thesis, *Paths* (1978), draws its key ideas from three quoted sources: Chung-yuan Chang's *Creativity and Taoism: A Study of Chinese Philosophy, Art, and Poetry* (1965); Ekbert Faas's *Towards a New American Poetics: Essays and Interviews* (1978), which in turn also cites Chang; and Roland Barthes' *S/Z* (1973), to which I will return below. The ideas that Cha draws from both Chang and Faas include the notion of the artist as alchemist, using carefully selected elements to bring about transformation and change. As alchemist, the artist performs a subjectivity that interacts with the objective materials and conditions of the world, bringing about the possibility of transformation and change, much as in Bloch's formulation above. This notion is also akin to the idea of the poet as shaman that is central to Allen Ginsberg's poetic practice and to the Beat aesthetic more generally.[22] Cha's exploration of the artist as alchemist, or shaman, is borne out in her own artistic practice, specifically in her performance *A Ble W Ail* (1975), which

[22] It is reductive to suggest that there is a single 'Beat aesthetic' in this, or any, regard. Diane di Prima's *Revolutionary Letters*, for example, contain direct addresses and invitations to the reader/listener to participate in their utopian project of re-imagining the objective conditions of the mid-to-late twentieth century US capitalist society. 'Revolutionary Letter #13' (1969) contains the invitation: 'thinking together like, "all of us stop the war at nine o'clock tomorrow"'. This opens out the potential labour of reimagination and recreation towards a collective, inclusive and participatory practice/process.

Trinh T. Minh-ha identifies as a practice recalling the figure of the traditionally female Korean shaman, the *mudang* (2001)[23]. For Cha, however, the alchemical role of the artist is never an egoic position of superiority (as could be argued in relation to Ginsberg), in which the shamanic subject 'transforms' the passive other as object, it is always interwoven with the notion of 'interfusion' between subject and object: this is the major driving factor of almost all of Cha's artistic practice across a wide variety of media including film, performance, mail art and writing. Famously, in performing *A Ble Wail*, Cha desires to be 'the dream of the audience' – an exercise in interfusion by which the performance artist is both performing subject and performed object (1975). As such, she both occupies and evacuates the positions of subject and object that in turn are both occupied and evacuated by the viewers. Cha cites the idea of interfusion from Chang, through which she explores the 'interfusion of subject and object' as enabling the reader or viewer to become 'the receptor as well as the activator of the pieces' (1978: 2).

It is the formal performance of the role of the shaman that differentiates *DICTEE* from a poem such as Ginsberg's *Wichita Vortex Sutra* ([1966] 2009). In this poem, Ginsberg uses a mantric trope to pronounce: 'I lift my voice aloud / make Mantra of American language now, / I here declare the end of the War! Ancient days' Illusion! / and pronounce words beginning my own millennium' (2009: 415). In a statement of his own poetics, Ginsberg argues that the '[p]oet can dismantle the language Consciousness conditioned to war reflexes by setting up (Mantra) absolute contrary field of will as expressed in language' (1980: 48). Ginsberg's line of reasoning seems to be that the poet's use of language as mantra is effectively 'absolute[ly] contrary' to the language of war. This makes the poet's language, for Ginsberg, capable of 'dismantl[ing]' not only the linguistic structures but also the 'Consciousness' that has historically been 'conditioned to war reflexes'. Ginsberg's use of mantra, however, continues to perform the dominance of the poet in the role of the active subject imposing change upon the passive object. In the language of Bloch, this would be an example of the 'overly subjective factor that believes it can skip the laws of objective-economic regularity' (1988: 109).

[23] Minh-ha identifies this shamanic figure in her essay White Spring, in Lewallen (2001). The Korean word *mudang* is taken from information available on www.theresahakkyungcha.com.

For Cha, however, the artist's role as the alchemist or medium is specifically to fulfil the purpose of enabling the interfusion of subject and object; that is, the artist's role is to make possible the audience's participation as active subjects in the creation of meaning. This is more akin to Bloch's 'continuous dialectical interplay' between subject and object that he considers necessary for the performance of the utopian. She writes: 'Inspiration given to an artist … [i]nsists upon a communion with the audience, to create a space where the audience are left free to imagine' (1978: 3). Whereas Ginsberg asserts the subjectivity of the poet as having the potential to 'dismantle', Cha's artist requires 'communion' by necessity. It is the space opened up by the artist that enables the subjective audience member to enter and imagine. Furthermore: '[The artist] attempts to find some collective key, associations, that would result in a kind of transformation in the audience as well as Him/Herself' (Cha, 1978: 3-4). For Cha, therefore, the artist is the shaman whose works transform both the audience and the artist herself. This process of transformation occurs in the formal strategies that make the audience's 'position in the apparatus' visible (Cha, 1980: n.p.), and which thereby have the potential to awaken in the audience their own subjectivity as participatory agents in the artistic process. Cha argues that: 'The artist, like the alchemist, establishes a "covenant" with his [*sic*] elements, as well as with each member of the viewer [*sic*]. The artist becoming object for the viewer, the viewer as subject, the artist as subject, the viewer as object. The necessary covenant, "interfusion of subject and object" is then, finalised' (1978: 2). In this way, it is Cha's continual performance of interfusion in her artistic practice (drawn both from her reading of Chinese Daoism and from her engagement with the Korean *mudang*) that differentiates *DICTEE*'s engagement with the poet-as-shaman from Ginsberg's engagement with the same trope.[24]

Intersubjectivity and Language Poetics

The artist-alchemist, for Cha, is the one who makes the audience active by engaging their agency as equal subjects in the artistic process. It is the employment of formal linguistic strategies for this purpose that engenders *DICTEE*'s similarities with Language Poetry, or linguistically innovative poetry. At its inception, Language

[24] Cha's performance of the role of the artist-as-alchemist in *DICTEE* is explored through close-reading analysis in Chapter One, above.

Poetry was characterised by Bruce Andrews as, 'resembl[ing] a creation of a community and of a world-view by a once-divided-but-now-fused Reader and Writer' (Andrews & Bernstein, 1984: 35). It is this specifically utopian desire to engender intersubjectivity through formal structures enabling the active participation of the reader that is most closely aligned with Cha's formally innovative practices in *DICTEE*[25].

In *DICTEE*, as in Language Poetry, this concern is performed as a formal intervention into the linguistic materiality of the text.

> In tones, the inscriptions resonate the atmosphere of the column, repeating over the same sounds, distinct words. Other melodies, whole, suspended between song and speech in still the silence. (Cha, 2001: 162)

This passage from *DICTEE* demonstrates a critical formal intervention into language use that opens up a space of multiplicity and possibility, inviting readerly participation in the construction of meaning. Cha's frequent use of spaces between component parts of words generates spaces of multiplicity and proliferation where meaning might otherwise remain closed. In the passage above, the space between the two syllables of 'In tones' generates multiple possibilities for reading the word, or words. The two words written, in tones, constitute a preposition followed by a noun, each of which can have various interpretations. To say that something is 'in tones' is to suggest that it is expressed through the medium ('in') of a musical or vocal system of sounds modulated by pitch, quality and strength ('tones'). This suggestion accords with the predominant vocabulary of the quotation, such as 'resonate' and 'sounds', suggesting that the 'tones' here are sonic rather than, say, a visual system of colour gradations. The auditory tones are simultaneously both 'sounds' and 'distinct words', however, blurring the distinction between the possible meanings of 'tones' as *either* musical *or* vocal. Here the 'melodies' are 'suspended between song and speech', energising both the potential meanings of sonic tones. In addition to this doubling of meaning is the further possibility of reading the two separate words as the single word 'intones', a verb meaning to chant, sing or recite. In this sense, the resonant inscriptions are specifically being chanted, sung or recited

[25] Andrews' use of the compound phrase 'once-divided-but-now-fused' is suggestive of Cha's desire for 'interfusion' between self and other, writer and reader, which I discuss more fully below.

as words or sounds by an agent – such as a shaman – who is an active participant in their sounding. In this reading, it is both the words and sounds themselves that resonate (like mantra), and the agency of an intoner (or shamanic figure) making the words and sounds resonate. Cha's use of typographical spacing here is a formal intervention that opens out a single word to multiple possibilities. A similar reading could be given of the words/word 'in stills' in the second sentence. Semantically, the various readings of 'In tones' are suggestive of mantric repetition, invoking again the shamanic figure as chanter or intoner of sounds or syllables. The reader's necessary participation in the creation of meaning from these fragments places one into the spaces created by Cha's language, allowing the position of the shaman to be occupied, variously and simultaneously, by both the writer and the reader. Cha's use of fragmentation to introduce multiple semantic possibilities into the text and engage the reader as an active participant demonstrates the kind of radical openness explored in Lyn Hejinian's 'The Rejection of Closure' (1983). Hejinian argues that: 'The "open text," by definition, is open to the world and particularly to the reader. It invites participation, rejects the authority of the writer over the reader and thus, by analogy, the authority implicit in other (social, economic, cultural) hierarchies' (2000: 43). Such an explicitly intersubjective relationship between writer and reader is a central concern of both Cha and the Language Poets.

Formal intervention, when it is specifically used to generate a proliferation of possibilities, is a particular concern of the Language Poets. Barrett Watten argues in 'Language Poetry's Concrete Utopia' (2015)[26] that, 'Language writing is a critical intervention of radical form that opens up a space for agency and reflection and is generative of new possibilities, seen through the medium of language' (2015: 100). In the example from *DICTEE* just given, the insertion of a space between the consecutive words 'in' and 'tones' opens up a space for agency and reflection on the part of the reader, maintaining the text's openness by never quite settling into a resolvable solution. This kind of formal operation, and others, throughout *DICTEE* give the text its utopian openness.

[26] The title of this essay echoes Ernst Bloch's conception of the 'concrete', or objectively realisable, utopia.

Cha's experiments with parataxis, non-standard punctuation and repetition in *DICTEE* similarly utilise techniques used by practitioners of Language Poetry in service of a similar purpose. A passage from the section TERPSICHORE CHORAL DANCE demonstrates the kind of linguistic experimentation at work in *DICTEE*.

> Further, Further inside. Further than. To middle. Deeper. Without measure. Deeper than. Without means of measure. To core. In another tongue. Same word. Slight mutation of the same. Undefinable. Shift. Shift slightly. Into a different sound. The difference. How it discloses the air. Slight. Another word. Same. Parts of the same atmosphere. Deeper. Centre. Without distance. No particular distance from center to periphery. Points of measure effaced. To begin there. There. In Media Res.
>
> (2001: 157).

In this passage, paratactic phrases are activated by their proximity within a single paragraph to inform/impact on one another through repetition and subtle contextual shifts. Similar to Lyn Hejinian's formal practices in *My Life* ([1980, 1987] 2002), Cha's repetitions of particular words and phrases in different formations and positions, in proximity to different words at different times, changes the deictic sense of each word's semantic possibilities – it is in the reader that these words are given their meaning through the connections that each reader will make. Hejinian describes this practice in 'The Rejection of Closure', arguing that:

> One of the results of this compositional technique, building a work out of discrete fields, is the creation of sizeable gaps between the units. To negotiate this disrupted terrain, the reader (and I can say also the writer) must overleap the end stop, the period, and cover the distance to the next sentence. Meanwhile, what stays in the gaps remains crucial and informative. Part of the reading occurs as the recovery of that information (looking behind) and the discovery of newly structured ideas (stepping forward). (2000: 46)

A similar process is at work in the above-quoted passage from *DICTEE*. Moreover, this section also takes language as one of its ostensible topics of exploration, juxtaposing the lexis of speaking (tongue, word, sound) with the lexis of change (mutation, shift, different) and prepositional/positional language (further, middle, deeper, center, periphery). It is not clear from the passage itself what the prepositional/positional language refers to; there is no physical referent signified by the language in the passage to determine what it is the centre or periphery *of*. Yet in

the context of text on the whole page, it is clear that the description is of an eclipse. If the 'further' and 'deeper' into the 'center' of this passage also refer to the eclipse, what is the relationship between these words and the spoken language referred to by the nouns 'tongue' 'word' 'sound'? Further, 'tongue' is used as part of the compound phrase 'another tongue' – suggesting that the tongue might be a metonymic substitute for 'language'. What then is the relationship between the moment of transit during an eclipse and the shifting of words between languages? Perhaps 'The difference' is in 'How it discloses the air' – a manifestation of both the atmospheric conditions of the eclipse and the vocal emissions produced during the pronunciation of a word. Subsequently, however, the different words coalesce to become 'Same' and 'Without distance'. Here, perhaps the transit of the moon and sun during the eclipse has become total, so that only one body can be seen where there were previously two distinct spheres. The languages that had been 'slight mutation of the same' are now 'without distance'. Perhaps also, the distinct figures of the writer and the reader become joined or interfused through this same process. This is a performance of intersubjectivity directly arising from the formal linguistic strategies that require the reader to 'overleap the end stop', both 'looking behind' and 'stepping forward' to become an active subject in the reading process. The reader must take on the role of the writer in order to make semantic connections between the paratactic phrases, 'effac[ing]' the distance between them and making it necessary 'To begin there. There. In Media Res'. For the activated reader, the drawing out of semantic connections begins in the immediacy of the process. It is the juxtaposition and shifting deictics of the linguistic units that determines their meaning in relation to one another and according to the particular reading of the activated reading subject.

Cha, like the Language Poets, draws on a reading of Roland Barthes' theory of *lisible* and *scriptible* texts. Cha's desire in *Apparatus* to create a "plural text" is a reference to Barthes' definition of the 'writerly' text in *S/Z* (1973). Barthes argues that the value of the writerly text is in its potential to fulfil the 'goal' of 'literary work': 'Why is the writerly our value? Because the goal of literary work (of literature as work) is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text' (1974: 4). Barthes continues: 'The writerly text is a perpetual present, upon which no consequent language (which would inevitably make it past) can be

superimposed; the writerly text is ourselves writing, before the infinite play of the world (the world as function) is traversed, intersected, stopped, plasticized by some singular system (Ideology, Genus, Criticism) which reduces the plurality of entrances, the opening of networks, the infinity of languages' (1974: 5). Cha's desired 'plural text' draws on Barthes' theory of the textual plurality that opens a text to making the reader an active participant in the production of a text, rather than a passive consumer. This shifts the relationship between writer and reader into a non-oppressive, non-hierarchical, non-alienating relationship of co-construction and intersubjectivity, precisely the qualities desired by the Language poets' utopian political project through their own reading of Barthes.

Cha quotes Barthes' notion of the 'plurality of entrances, the opening of networks, the infinity of languages' in her MFA thesis (1978: 4), which also contains the quotations from Faas and Chang and is focused on the figure of the artist as alchemist. Barthes' influential essay 'The Death of the Author' (1967) – from where perhaps Language Poetry takes some of its more anti-subjective ideals – argues that, 'writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin. Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away' (1990: 228). Barthes makes a connection to shamanic or alchemical practices, as he writes: 'The voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death, writing begins. The sense of this phenomenon, however, has varied; in ethnographic societies the responsibility for a narrative is never assumed by a person but by a mediator, shaman or relator whose "performance" – the mastery of the narrative code – may possibly be admired but never his "genius"' (1990: 228).[27] Again, it is the figure of the shaman that is invoked as being the one who mediates or relates the kind of narrative that might be called a 'writerly' text, yet it is the shamanic "performance" that is of value, not the content of the performed narrative. This is key here, as it marks a significant point of departure between Cha's work in general (*DICTEE* specifically) and the work of the Language Poets. Whereas early Language Poetry focuses on Barthes' theory of writing as the 'destruction of every voice', which he goes on to argue is 'the negative where all identity is lost, starting

[27] Barthes' 'ethnographic' reading of the figure of the Shaman here is deeply problematic, however. To insist that the shaman is not a 'person' but a 'performance' is yet another instance of the erasure of racialised identities and bodies of colour in service of a formal process of anti-subjective aestheticism.

with the very identity of the body writing' (1990: 228), Cha's particular focus on the figure of the shaman ensures that the total erasure of 'the very identity of the body writing' does not become a feature of her work. Language Poetry's denial of the writing subject subsequently develops into an aversion to the materiality of the writing body and reaches its extremes through the development of linguistically innovative writing in its contemporary form as Uncreative Writing, which takes as its central stance an anti-subjectivist doctrine against the expression of the subjective identity of the writing subject[28]. I shall return to the negation of the body in Language Poetry below.

In Cha's shamanic/alchemical process of 'interfusion', the reader and writer, or audience and artist, enter into a relational fluidity whereby the positions of subject and object are destabilised and no longer defined in terms of fixed binary identities[29]. Significantly, both parties variously occupy the subject position in a relationship of interfusion, creating the potential for intersubjectivity, rather than a relationship in which the subject of the artist or writer is dominant over the objectified reader or viewer. This is significant in terms of the stark contrast between the possibilities of interfusion and the doctrine of anti-subjectivity. Interfusion takes as its premise the agential subjectivity of both parties in a constantly fluid and shifting relationship to one another, whereby the binary polarities of subject and object are unfixed, and therefore the hierarchy of power domination (subject over object) is released and negated. In such a way, the intersubjective utopian possibility of non-oppression and non-alienation may be performed in a relationship of interfusion. In contrast, anti-subjectivity takes as its premise the notion that subject and object are fixed and immutable binary positions, whereby the subjectivity of the writer or artist must continually be eroded and eradicated in order to liberate the subjectivity of the reader or viewer. In such a relationship, it is only possible for one party to occupy each position, and therefore the possibility of intersubjectivity is negated in favour of a model that maintains a firmly entrenched dichotomy between the positions of subject and object. Furthermore, in this model, the oppressive hierarchy of subject over

[28] See for example, *Against Expression*, edited by Craig Dworkin and Kenneth Goldsmith (2010).

[29] Jonathan Stalling (2010) makes a contrast between a poetic practice 'which tacitly retains a subject/object dichotomy' and Cha's 'shamanic medium', which 'finds liberation' in 'offering one's position of enunciation as the space and time for others (readers) to actively co-create meaning in the world' (161).

object remains in place and unchallenged by the practices of anti-subjectivity; all that changes is the potential reversal of the party occupying each of these positions. Since it is impossible for the writer or artist to eradicate her/his own subjectivity, she/he maintains the dominant position in the relationship without accepting responsibility for that position. Moreover, the anti-subjectivist doctrine serves to maintain the political status quo by actively preventing dominant subjects from recognising their structurally privileged position in the hierarchy, since it is predicated on the strict disavowal of one's own subjective identity. As such, Cha's practices differ significantly from the practices of later (predominantly white American) linguistically innovative practices.

Intersectional Intersubjectivity

At the very least, a writing subject will occupy a particular positionality in terms of race, class, gender, sexuality and physical ability. As suggested by Hong, Riley, Wang and Yu above, those subjects most closely aligned with the dominant subjectivity – that is white, middle-class, cis-male, heterosexual and able-bodied – are the least likely to regard their own subjectivity as 'marked' or visible. One's decisions regarding form and content will always be inflected by the markers of a complex and multi-layered subjectivity – the visibility of those markers is dependent upon the extent to which that subject position diverges from the white patriarchal hegemony whose own markers have become the internalised and perpetuated cultural norm. Consequently, the linguistic markers of dominant subjectivity are rendered invisible by dominant discourse. As such, the fantasy of anti-subjectivity – the total erasure of the writer's subject identity – marginalises non-dominant subjects in at least two ways. First, the method by which 'anti-subjectivity' is achieved is to become as close to the invisible structures of dominant discourse as possible. For anyone whose birth did not provide them with any or all of these characteristics, the objective is to adopt a writing style that mimics as closely as possible the characteristics of dominant discourse, so as to negate one's own subjectivity through writing. This method serves to perpetuate the dominant literary discourse through the reproduction of formal and linguistic markers signifying complicity with the dominant subject position. Second, in refusing and vilifying attempts by writers whose subjectivities differ from the dominant norm to make their voices heard in

linguistic experimentation that diverges from white avant-garde institutionalised standards – through visible markers of oppositional subject identities – this mode perpetuates the marginalisation of non-dominant subjects and silences the opportunities for speaking out against forms of structural oppression. In both of these ways, the structural dominance of the dominant subject identity is reinforced and perpetuated through the literary and linguistic discourses of avant-garde poetics.[30]

Cha's experimental linguistic constructions in *DICTEE*, however, often display – rather than elide – the markers of Korean American female subjectivity. The passage below demonstrates a particularly striking example.

> She call she believe she calling to she has calling
> because there no response she believe she calling
> and the other end must hear. The other end must
> see the other end feel
> she accept pages sent care of never to be seen
> never to be read never to be known if name if
> name be known if name only seen heard spoken
> read cannot be never she hide all essential
> words words link subject verb she writes hidden
> the essential words must be pretended invented
> she try on different image essential invisible
> (2001: 15)

The third person feminine pronoun 'she' is foregrounded through its position at the beginning of ten of these fragmentary paratactic phrases and its repetition as the most common and prominent word in the passage, articulating and accentuating the female gender of the subject in this passage. As female, the subject is already marked as an 'other', at one remove from the white patriarchal 'unmarked' male norm. Further, the structure of a number of these incomplete phrases suggests and parodies stereotypical features of second-language English pronunciation, such as a lack of subject-verb agreement where the final 's' of the third person present

[30] There are many writers in this field, however, who are exploring the counter-potential of avant-garde poetics to explore themes of racialization and structural oppression. Examples include Caroline Bergvall, Laynie Browne, Vahni Capildeo, Bhanu Kapil, Lila Matsumoto, Tracie Morris, Harryette Mullen, Sandeep Parmar, M. Nourbese Philip, Nat Raha, Nisha Ramayya, Keston Sutherland, Verity Spott, Samantha Walton and many more.

indicative is omitted ('She call', 'she believe' instead of 'She calls', 'she believes'). These features are further gestured toward in the text itself, in the phrase 'words link subject verb' – demonstrating the self-awareness of this erroneous linguistic act in the passage. Caroline Bergvall suggests of second language speech, '[m]y tongue marks me out. It also trips me up, creates social stuttering, mishearing, ambiguities' (2005: 51). As such, these features gesture toward Cha's identity as a Korean American subject, a second-language English speaker. Yet the gap between this essentialised misconception of an Asian American subject and Cha's own proficiency with multiple linguistic systems demonstrated throughout *DICTEE* suggests the inadequacy of broadly defined identity categories in articulating the specifics of Cha's own Korean American female subjectivity. The final phrase in this passage, 'she try on different image essential invisible' gestures towards the dichotomy between the visibility afforded to an 'essentialised' raced/gendered subject, one who asserts their structural difference and heterogeneity to the white patriarchal (linguistic) system through overt markers, and the invisibility of a subject position that is neither aligned with the dominant hegemony nor able to be articulated by a predefined set of assumptions based on either race or gender. Harryette Mullen gestures towards this dichotomy between essentialism and invisibility for the poet of colour when she argues that, '[p]resumably, for the African American writer there is no alternative to this production of authentic black voice but silence'. She continues, 'This speech-based and racially inflected aesthetic that produces a black poetic diction requires that the writer acknowledge and reproduce in the text a significant difference between the spoken and written language of African Americans and that of other Americans'[31]. Cha parodies this practice of creating a 'speech-based and racially inflected aesthetic' in the passage above, demonstrating through the text's self-reflexivity that the only two sanctioned identities, or 'image[s]' available to a poet of colour are essentialism (through marks of linguistic difference) or invisibility (through either silence, as suggested by Mullen, or assimilation).

[31] Harryette Mullen "Visionary Literacy: Art, Literature and Indigenous African Writing Systems" (1993), cited in 'After Language Poetry: Innovation and its Theoretical Discontents' (no date) by Marjorie Perloff: http://writing.upenn.edu/epc/authors/perloff/after_langpo.html. I do not align myself with Perloff's perspectives in this piece.

DICTEE specifically employs formal and linguistic innovation to explore the challenges of an inarticulable subject position. Similarly, poet Erica Hunt argues that, '[r]eal experiment consists of nuanced forays into intersectionality and multiplicities of identities, social positions, and strategies: who we are and what role we take up or are conscripted into becoming and in what context' (2015). The term 'intersectionality' is used to describe the interconnecting set of structural discriminations faced by people whose subjectivity differs from the dominant subjectivity in two or more ways (such as race and gender). Kimberlé Crenshaw, who first coined and mobilised the word, argues that, when 'practices expound identity as "woman" or "person of colour" as an either/or proposition, they relegate the identity of women of colour to a location that resists telling' (1991). This resistance to telling is precisely the location occupied by *DICTEE*'s linguistic fragments of inarticulation. These linguistic fragments, moreover, function as subject markers for a subject whose identity is inarticulable and invisible in terms of both hegemonic subjectivity and essentialised racial/gendered subjectivity. As such, in contrast to the desires of later Conceptual/Uncreative Writing to efface the writing subject's subjectivity, formal linguistic intervention in *DICTEE* serves as a site of *resistance to an articulable subjectivity* by providing the location for an *inarticulable subjectivity* marked by its 'resistance to telling'. Further, Crenshaw argues that 'identity continues to be a site of resistance for members of different subordinated groups', adding that: 'At this point in history, a strong case can be made that the most critical resistance strategy for disempowered groups is to occupy and defend a politics of social location rather than to vacate and destroy it' (1991). If, as I have argued, Cha's use of non-standard linguistic patterns in *DICTEE* can be seen as (insufficiently) marked by the intersectional subject identities of race and gender, this is indicative of a site of resistance constituting a 'politics of social location' – albeit a location that is inarticulable – rather than a subjectivity that is 'vacated and destroyed'. It is telling that what Cha took from Barthes was his notion of the 'plurality of entrances, the opening of networks, the infinity of languages' (1974: 5) rather than his notion of 'writing [as] the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin' (1990: 228). Subjectivity, in *DICTEE*, opens to become a site of multiple possibilities, rather than being erased or effaced entirely.

DICTEE's paradoxical articulation of an inarticulable subject position enables it to become a site of political resistance and utopian possibility. As Lisa Lowe (1994), one of *DICTEE*'s earliest Asian American female critics, suggests, '[*DICTEE*'s] elaboration of the multiplicity of subject formations, each articulated at an intersection with others, troubles the notion of an essential Asian American, female, or postcolonial subject' (1994: 63). *DICTEE*'s formal strategies can, therefore, be understood as the articulation of an inarticulable subject position – as a site of resistance to hegemony – rather than a site of the erasure of subjectivity. The latter of which would necessarily constitute the adoption of and assimilation into the ostensibly 'unmarked' subject position of the dominant subject group. For Lowe, it is the articulation of an intersectional subject position that makes it possible 'to imagine the construction of another politics' (1994: 63). To imagine the construction of another politics through the articulation of a non-dominant subject position is obliquely reminiscent of Bloch's formulation of the interrelationship between subjective imagination and objective material conditions for the manifestation of the utopian function. For Bloch, the subjectivity invoked is likely to be the articulated subjectivity of the writing subject. For Cha in *DICTEE*, the articulation of a subject position is more complex and must be approached obliquely. That is, in order to engage with the realities of the objective material conditions she encounters as a Korean American woman writer, it is only possible for Cha to articulate the inarticulacy of the location she occupies. The alternative is to risk reducing her position to the empty location of the essentialised subject. In articulating a subject position that engages with the realities of the objective material conditions she experiences, Cha mobilises this subjectivity in service of the utopian by creating the space in which it becomes possible to imagine an alternative politics. The kind of politics that becomes possible as a result is one which, in Lowe's words: 'engages with rather than suppresses heterogeneities of gender, class, sexuality, race and nation, yet which is also able to maintain and extend the forms of unity which make common struggle possible' (1994: 63-64). This is, therefore, a politics that is decidedly utopian.

Indeed, the utopian potential for political empowerment is central to Elaine H. Kim's reading of *DICTEE* as a Korean American text. Kim rightly condemns what she calls the 'meaningful omission' of 'post-structuralist critics' who ignore Cha's own

subjectivity as a Korean American woman, although she cites no specific examples of such criticism (1994: 22). As Kim stresses, 'By inserting a Korean American woman's experience of history, Cha challenges hegemonic assumptions and offers presence and empowerment to the traditionally absent and disenfranchised' (1994: 23). In articulating the inarticulable subject position of the Korean American woman, *DICTEE*'s formal strategies of intersubjectivity are employed in the service of intersectionality – the occupation of a social location marked by differences and discriminations of both race and gender. As such, this intersectional intersubjectivity performs a premise akin to interfusion: the plurality of possibilities articulated in a fluid and mutable subject-to-subject relationship. In *DICTEE*'s performance of a Korean American female subjectivity, Cha's formal strategies of fragmentation, repetition and parataxis open up a space into which the reader can enter as a participatory subject. Thus, in *DICTEE*, the articulation of the writer's subjectivity does not eclipse or efface the reader's subjectivity, but rather encounters and empowers the active reading subject. Consequently it is not necessary for the violent and aggressive fantasy of erasure to be imposed on the writing subject. It is the performance of intersectional intersubjectivity that makes possible both the utopian goal of interfusion and the political goal of empowerment. Intersubjectivity built on the premise of interfusion does not require the suppression of one party in relation to the dominance of the other. Thus, both the reading subject and the writing subject find space to occupy within their shifting inter-relationship via the text. Moreover, intersubjectivity built on the premise of intersectionality provides the possibility of political empowerment to disenfranchised subjects whereby the political liberation of marginalised groups does not necessarily equate to the subsequent oppression of the dominant group. Taken together, intersectional intersubjectivity provides a model for utopian poetics that both performs and anticipates the possibilities of non-alienation and non-oppression. In the performed relationship between the reader and the writer, by which the reader is empowered as a participatory subject and the writer is empowered to articulate the location of a subject position, the utopian possibility of non-alienation is performed; and in the gesture toward 'the construction of another politics' the utopian possibility of non-oppression is anticipated.

DICTEE's Embodied Intersectional Intersubjectivity

The specific utopia anticipated by *DICTEE* is one in which the embodied subjectivity of non-dominant subjects is neither erased nor effaced, nor artificially separated from the intellectual and imaginative poetic mind. Both Denise Riley and Dorothy Wang comment on the ways that formally innovative poetry written by women and poets of colour, particularly wherever it displays conspicuous linguistic markers of these heterogeneities, is negatively associated with the body. Riley suggests that, in terms of gender, it is women who are marked as other through the physical manifestation of their sex and body, while men remain the unmarked patriarchal norm ('the generic category') and thus: '[o]nly women have a sex; only women have a body' (1995: n.p.). Similarly, Wang argues: 'Because minority subjects and cultures are viewed in the American imaginary as occupying the realm of the bodily, the material, the social, they are often overlooked when considering questions of the literary and the cultural (in the sense of cultural value and high culture)' (2014: 20). Specifically, it is the negative connotations associated with bodily materiality and its opposition to the idealised intellectual realm of 'literary high culture' that is the source of tension in these examples. Whilst the feminine body and the body of colour are perceived as marked and inflected with everything that high literary culture is not, the idealised value of high literary culture is perceived as unmarked and uninflected wherever it erases and eradicates the oppositional markers of race and gender (and sexuality, class, physical ability, etc.) and presents itself as purely intellectual or anti-subjective. Again, this idealised form is neither *unmarked* nor *uninflected* but is rather marked and inflected by the invisible culturally dominant markers of white patriarchy. Much of the foundation for the contemporary manifestation of this dichotomy between the physical and the intellectual in linguistically innovative poetics can be traced back to Barthes' theory of writing as the 'destruction of every voice', as 'the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing' (1990: 228). Early statements of poetics by Language writers, as explored below, follow and perpetuate this trajectory through their reading of Barthes, whose ideas become incorporated and enshrined into the foundational premise of culturally dominant definitions of linguistically innovative writing forms.

Language Poetry and its related poetics coalesced around the bi-monthly little magazine 'L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E' edited by Bruce Andrews and Charles Bernstein

in New York. The magazine ran in a small, saddle-stapled edition from February 1978 until October 1981, publishing poems, reviews, criticism and statements of poetics by writers associated with Language Poetics. The primary focus of the magazine was to publish 'a spectrum of writing that place[d] its attention primarily on language and ways of making meaning, that [took] for granted neither vocabulary, grammar, process, shape, syntax, program or subject matter' (Andrews & Bernstein, 1984: ix). Immediately this marks out Language Poetry as distinct from the particular linguistic concerns of Ginsberg's Beat Poetics, which drew upon the prosody of mantra as a method of using spontaneous language to impose an intended change upon external conditions. Yet this focus also demonstrates Language Poetry's concern with aspects of language that Cha described as the 'grammatical structures of a language, syntax. How words and meaning are constructed in the language system itself' (Cha, 1976, my emphasis). In what seems to be a direct confrontation with Beat Poetics, Bruce Andrews argues: 'Take away the mythic & fetishized character of the words and sentences, their fatedness: otherwise, how natural & spontaneous & disintellectualized & ahistorical & essentialist it tends to seem' (1984: 56). The accusations levelled at an apparently 'natural & spontaneous' poetic language here include that it is 'disintellectualized'. This is a dichotomy which is strengthened and perpetuated throughout early Language writing, and in which 'the body' often becomes equated as the signifier of the 'disintellectualized' in contrast to linguistic materiality which is figured as the acceptable and 'primary' form of materiality (Andrews & Bernstein, 1984).

In June 1980, L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E published a supplement titled 'The Politics of the Referent', which contains a number of essays dating from 1976, originally published in the Canadian journal, *Open Letter*, in summer 1977. These essays set out the various writers' positions and perspectives in relation to the project outlined by L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E magazine, the primary concern of each being focused around language's materiality, so that this becomes the primary driving force of the loosely affiliated movement of so-called 'Language Poets'. In his essay, 'Stray Straws and Straw Men', Charles Bernstein argues, in language similar to Cha's own statement: 'Such poetry emphasizes its medium as being constructed, rule governed, everywhere circumscribed by grammar & syntax' (Andrews & Bernstein, 1984: 39). He begins his essay with a phrase in quotation marks, '"Natural": the very word

should be struck from the language' (1984: 39), echoing Andrews' attack on the 'natural & spontaneous' as 'disintellectualized'. Andrews himself goes further, however, by stating in hyperbolic terms that, 'Language is the centre, the *primary material*, the *sacred corpus*, the primum mobile, the erotic sense of its own shared reality' (1984: 31, my emphasis). He elaborates on this by describing '[linguistic] form as physical, as material' (1984: 31). Thus, for the early Language Poets, broadly, the emphasis on language's materiality and formal construction is central to their project. For Andrews, specifically, language *is* the primary material, the sacred body itself. The physical body is always already marked as a signifier of the natural and spontaneous, and thus deemed irreconcilably 'disintellectualized'. In dichotomous opposition to the disintellectualised body stands the idealised value of literary high culture in which language itself displaces the physical materiality of the body to become 'the centre, the primary material, the sacred corpus'.

Steve McCafferey's contribution to the 1980 supplement is titled 'The Death of the Subject: The Implications of Counter-Communication in Recent Language-Centred Writing' (1980). McCaffery's title implies a direct reference to Barthes whilst immediately rendering this in antisubjectivist terms that would continue to both drive and haunt the subsequent development of Language Poetics and its avant-garde legacy – here 'the death of the author' becomes 'the death of the subject'. The essay opens with the words: 'As we understand increasingly the unity of the human symbolic field and how man is *primarily a semiotic animal inhabiting and creating a context that is itself semiotic* and governed by common operations, as we understand this the whole notion of a literature discriminated from language is irrelevant' (1980: 2, my emphasis). Whilst this gives due recognition to the materiality of linguistic forms and their inseparability from human consciousness, in a way that Ginsberg's poetics does not[32], it does so at the expense of recognising the human body as a material form existing in a material world, which Ginsberg laments as precisely the linguistic problem his own poetics is intended to dismantle. For Ginsberg, language in its abstract, theoretical sense, dissociated from the materiality

[32] Ginsberg's poetics is, however, a poetics of embodied linguistic innovation that includes parataxis, anaphora and prosodic experimentation, and is not merely 'spontaneous' and 'disintellectualized'.

of the physical body, was in directly contrasting opposition to the language of speech, spontaneity and human presence[33].

Reflecting on his poetic practice in longer poems such as *Howl* and *Kaddish*, Ginsberg makes the claim that, 'the rhythmic units that I'd written down were basically breathing exercise forms, which if anybody else repeated would catalyze in them the same *pranic* breathing … physiological spasm that I was going through and so would presumably catalyze in them the same *affects* or emotions' (1980: 36).[34] This, for Ginsberg, is directly linked to the trope of mantra, in that '[d]oing mantra made [him] conscious of what [he] was doing in Poesy' (1980: 36). Ginsberg's mantric poetic practice, both spontaneous and physically embodied, was specifically intended to activate the reader's participation at the level of the physical embodiment of his language's rhythms. Language Poet Barrett Watten criticises Ginsberg's neglect of a language-centred intellectual practice in favour of embodied language rhythms. He argues that: 'The point, for Ginsberg, is that if the turn to language offers a form of abstract awareness, he is still living language and image as embodied' (2002: 159-160). The difficulty here being that Ginsberg's embodied language is perceived as incompatible with an intellectually 'abstract awareness' of language as a linguistic system. In adhering to 'stream of consciousness spontaneous prosody', Watten argues, Ginsberg's poetics intersect with 'an idea of language, which he is not prepared to abstract or objectify' (2002: 162). The problem, therefore, is that '[i]n rejecting language-centred techniques of modernism' Ginsberg's 'use of writing tended in the direction of embodiment rather than dissociation' (165). At every point in his analysis, Watten invokes the oppositional dichotomy between embodiment and language, whereby embodiment is the negative value that marks Ginsberg's poetics as inferior to the subsequent intellectual developments of Language Poetry. This dichotomy subsequently becomes a barrier of exclusion from the high intellectual poetry of (white male) abstraction for women, poets of colour and all those who would use linguistically innovative forms to explore the politics of subjectivity.

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[33] Ginsberg, *Composed on the Tongue* (1980: 70).

[34] '*[P]ranic* breathing' is a technique of yogic practice by which the breath, or life-force (*prana*) is controlled and directed through breathing exercises. *Pranayama*, as the practice is called in Sanskrit, is one of the eight limbs of yoga described in Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* (c. 400 C.E.), the purpose of which is to move the practitioner towards a state of *yoga*, or union.

DICTEE's innovative linguistic forms, whilst demonstrating an affinity with Language Poetry's desire for intersubjectivity through the active participation of the reader at an intellectual level, equally demonstrates a desire for the reader's physiological participation in the reading of the text akin to Ginsberg's mantric breathing rhythms. In *DICTEE*, Cha writes:

> Not possible to distinguish the speech
> Exhaled. Affirmed in exhalation.
> Exclaimed in inhalation.
> To distinguish no more the rain from dreams
> or from breaths
> (Cha, 2001: 67).

In this passage, full-stops seem to act as markers for the reader to pause and exhale during the reading process. The rhythm is irregular. Further, the linguistic markers 'exhalation' and 'inhalation' may function as instructions to the reader, guiding one to exhale during the statement 'Affirmed in exhalation' and inhale during the reading of 'Exclaimed in inhalation', marking an affective relationship between language and embodiment. In this passage, moreover, it is '[n]ot possible to distinguish the speech' from the breath, the two are interconnected processes of the same physical apparatus. Indeed, speech requires the exhalation of breath through the mouth with particular combinations of positions between the tongue, teeth and lips in order for words (language) to be spoken and articulated. This is visually demonstrated several pages later with the inclusion of a full-page reproduction of an anatomical diagram depicting the physical breathing/vocal apparatus. The diagram identifies both the 'Air Passages and Lungs' and the 'Larynx and Vocal Folds', with 'FIG. 4' depicting both 'Adduction of vocal folds for phonation' and 'Abduction of vocal folds for breathing' (2001: 74). Here, both metaphorically and literally, it is impossible to separate speech from breath, language from the physical materiality of the body.

Ginsberg argues that this is the specific intention behind Charles Olson's Projective Verse, stating, 'that's exactly what Olson has been talking about all along as *projective* verse, involving the complete physiology of the poet' (1980: 39). Note, however, that Ginsberg's explanation here returns to the idea of the 'complete

physiology of the *poet*', rather than the active participation of the physiology of the reader. In contrast, Language Poetry's exclusive focus on the materiality of language moves in a trajectory away from the materiality of the physical bodies of *both* writer and reader. Thus, Hejinian's 'Rejection of Closure' responds to Olson's 'Projective Verse' by setting out a statement of poetics based on the concept of composition by field, whilst neglecting Olson's corresponding emphasis on proprioception, which makes up the other half of what it means for verse to be 'projective'[35]. *DICTEE* demonstrates some of the formal aesthetics associated with both Beat Poetics and Olson's Projective Verse. In places, *DICTEE*'s long lines of spontaneous-seeming yet highly wrought prosody demonstrate a kinetic transference of energy to the reader in the form of an underlying rhythmic motion. This is demonstrated in the following example:

> You wait you think it is conceiving you wait it to seed you think you can see through the dark earth the beginning of a root, the air entering with the water being poured dark earth harbouring dark taken for granted the silence and the dark the conception seedling. (Cha, 2001: 156)

In this lengthy and sparsely punctuated sentence, several sound structures emerge, including the internal sibilance and assonance of sounds contained in the words 'seed', 'see', 'seedling' and 'conceiving', creating a resonant structural connection between the beginning and the end of the sentence – with the internal repetition of 'seed' and 'see' reinforcing the structure. Similarly, the multiple repetitions of 'dark earth' and 'dark' perform a sonic structure that incorporates 'granted' within its pattern of assonance. The sentence begins with several variations on the refrains of 'you wait' and 'you think'. The cumulative effect of these sonic structures is to produce a sentence that performs asyntactic non-linearity and ateleology in its form, in a direct echo of its semantic content. These sentences build patterns of sound and rhythm that give them a cyclical, repetitive, pulsing structure. This long-form, rhythmic prosody is typical of the kind of Beat aesthetic found in Ginsberg's *Howl*, and also performs what Olson describes in Projective Verse as 'the *kinetics* of the

[35] Hejinian does, however, explore the significance of the physical body in her essay 'Language and "Paradise"', in which she notes: 'The condition of being bound or bordered [by skin] is what allows for distinction and difference, and therefore for encounter and experience' (2000: 76). This argument is both reminiscent of Olson's 'Proprioception' and suggestive of the body as a potential site of subjective identity.

thing' (1997: 240, Olson's emphasis). Olson argues that, 'every element in an open poem (the syllable, the line, as well as the image, the sound, the sense) must be taken up as participants in the kinetic of the poem' (1997: 243). Cha's rhythmic prosody in *DICTEE* has the potential to perform a kinetic transfer of energy from writer to reader, such that the two may be brought into a non-alienating and participatory relationship via the text. In such a way, *DICTEE*'s particular model of interfusion incorporates a physically embodied intersubjective relationship between the writer and the reader through linguistic structures that are both rhythmic *and* innovative. As such, Language Poetry's perceived dichotomy between the body and the intellect is negated in *DICTEE* through the use of materially innovative linguistic structures that are designed to activate not only the readers' intellectual but also their physical participation. Thus, the full material and intellectual subjectivity of both the reading and the writing subjects have the potential to be activated and engaged in *DICTEE*, providing a model for interfusion, or intersubjectivity, that neither arises from nor perpetuates the negation of the body in favour of the intellect. In its performed rhythmic linguistic structures, *DICTEE* has the capacity to energise and engage both the body and the intellect, disavowing the false dichotomy of early Language Poetics that has continued to exert such a strong influence over the relative values of literary production today.

Language Poetry's desire for intersubjectivity does arise from an avowedly utopian foundation, which is described by Andrews thus: 'Language work resembles a creation of a community and of a world-view by a once-divided-but-now-fused Reader and Writer' (1984: 35). Interestingly, the word 'fused' here resonates with Cha's use of the word 'interfusion' to describe a similar process. For Andrews, '[s]uch work has a utopian force only begun to be revealed' (1984: 36). In his essay 'Code Words', he states: 'Writing must look toward a radically transformed society that would provide the code (and the ideal communication system, and counter-communication system) needed to fully comprehend it. Utopia' (1984: 56). Language Poetry's disavowal of the body and correspondingly disproportionate valorisation of the intellect, however, prevent it from fulfilling its utopian potential in full. As a system that has developed to exclude those writers whose poetry is perceived to be 'marked' by subjective markers including race and gender due to their close correspondence to the 'disintellectualized' body, relegating those poetries

to the pejorative category of 'identity politics', Language Poetry's utopia becomes its own closed and exclusive system, bounded by its own identity and its own politics[36]. Indeed, it is the limiting identity politics of contemporary linguistically innovative poetry itself, which only deems to admit certain identities whose markers reproduce its own, that closes the very system that professes openness and reduces to singularity the system that desires multiplicity.[37]

In this chapter, I have positioned Theresa Hak Kyung Cha as a Korean American woman writer between the Beats and the Language poets. Cha's engagement with the figure of the artist as alchemist performs the possibility of interfusion in ways that are both similar to and distinct from Beat poetry's focus on the figure of the artist as shaman. Interfusion enables the performance of an intersubjective relationship between the reader and writer that empowers the reader as an active subject in ways that Allen Ginsberg's mantric pronunciations do not necessarily accomplish. Further, Cha's experiences of learning additional languages as a Korean American, and her reading of Roland Barthes, prompt her to question linguistic structures in ways that are productive and generative for readers, using techniques similar to those adopted by Language Poets. Cha's employment of linguistically innovative techniques such as fragmentation and repetition, however, also enables her to perform her Korean American female subjectivity in ways that are open to readers' subjectivities, providing a more complex and nuanced model of intersubjectivity. As such, Cha's identity as a Korean American woman writer is affirmed rather than effaced in her writing. Finally, *DICTEE*'s formal materiality seeks to engage, rather than eradicate, the physical bodies of both the writer and the reader in ways that diverge distinctly from Language Poetry's early statements of poetics and its continuing contemporary legacy. In these ways, *DICTEE* performs the possibility of utopian poetics through its performance of embodied, intersectional intersubjectivity.

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[36] Timothy Yu argues convincingly in *Race and the Avant-Garde* (2009) that Ron Silliman's early Language Poetry is conceived and established as a specifically white male practice, and that Language Poetry could be identified in relation to its particular social grouping.

[37] Rather than being confined to a closed structural definition based on identity, however, Language Poetry itself is open to a multiplicity of forms, intentions and performances. Poets working at or beyond the limits of this reductive identity politics, within the broader scope of poetry that is made possible by the early L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E project include Rae Armantrout, Mei-Mei Berssenbrugge, Lyn Hejinian, Susan Howe, Layli Long Soldier, Harryette Mullen, and many more.

SECTION B:

CRITICAL ENCOUNTERS

Poem
Cha's Hands, 1979

quiver
quaver
quick
sense
hands
aware
SING
fingers long and
slender
elliptical
lunula
[no] scars,[no] marks
dimples
the knuckle
middle finger,
both hands
reaching across
the typewriter
keys
curled right fingers
rest;
left fingers
oblique
straddle
right
thumb on
space
left thumb in space
raise sinew from
left ring finger
wrist
light lifting ridge
left
index
knuckle
no keys
have been pressed
you are
relaxed
choosing
to identify
your
self as
two hands
typing is
who you are
typing
a type of
who you will be
who you have been
who you were
who you are here
marks you
make
on life
you
type
the words forming
in space
you type
the words
She says to herself
if she were
able to write
she could
continue
to
live
your hands
the keys
writing
writing
inscribing
on air
inscribing
on your
muscles
tendons
joints
memory
the keys
that form
the words
impossible
to write
and writing
in
words
innovative or
resistant
you
participant
in the writing
experiment
modification
corporeal
performance
implicated
involvement
the act of
writing
signifying
parsing
altering
sculpting
your moving body
in the act
of writing
measuring
st/utter
iterating &
reiterating
kinaesthetic
experience
falter
decisions
innovative or
resistant
trace
your gestures
type
inscription
embodied gesturing
individual
implicated
, yes, resistance
rejection of the
routine and
ambiguous
yielding
sensory experience
simultaneously
written upon
and
writing
if she would
write
without
ceasing
your fingers
motion
through
all you have
known and
have
forgotten
to inscribe
your words
yourself
fleeting
and
always
the difference
resisting
gesturing
indicating
your hands
your words
inscribed in space
written in air
inscribing &
incorporate

CHAPTER THREE

DICTEE's Material Processes of Enunciation

This chapter examines more broadly the material gestures performed and initiated in DICTEE *that enable the possibility of a non-oppressive, intersubjective, speaking subject. Striving to speak, while articulating the inarticulable location of a non-dominant speaking subject,* DICTEE*'s material innovations in form and structure open up the possibility of a text that speaks through its own material processes. Moving outward from the close-reading analyses of the previous two chapters, this chapter explores the broader material gestures that the text embodies in its formal experimentations with subjectivity through the figure of the diseuse.*

> *But when a book calls attention to the conceits and conventions by which it normally effaces its identity, then it performs a theoretical operation. In critical parlance, one could say that such work calls attention to its own process of enunciation (the acts of speaking, representing, making a work) rather than allowing a work to be enunciated (spoken as if it were naturally there).*
>
> Johanna Drucker, *The Century of Artists' Books* (1995: 161-162)

DICTEE is a book that calls attention to its own processes of enunciation in both its form and content: materially and linguistically. *DICTEE* is driven by the desire to speak for oneself, rather than allowing oneself to be spoken *for*, spoken *about*, dictated *to*, or in any way enunciated by others who deem themselves to speak on one's behalf. Yet it is also a recognition of the complications of such a desire and an exploration of the interconnected and inter-relational process of subject-formation. It is this element that I believe enacts a material instance of the utopian function: the book itself, when read as a material object which activates what Veronica Forrest-Thomson refers to as 'non-semantic elements' (1978: *xi*[38]), enunciates itself in relation to its writer and its reader, bringing the two separate individual subjects into a space of non-alienated co-activation and co-creation in and through the book object. Forrest-Thomson asserts the need to recognise the contribution of 'non-semantic' elements in the 'total image-complex' of late twentieth century poetry, but Charles Bernstein (1992) is right to comment that the material and the visual are not

[38] Forrest-Thomson's actual wording is 'non-meaningful features' – it is adapted by Bernstein in his essay 'Artifice of Absorption'. I have retained Bernstein's rendering of the quote to resonate more closely with my development of the term 'material semantics', below.

non-semantic – valuing 'the semantic contribution of the visual representation of the text' as part of the 'total meaning complex' of a poem or literary work (1992: n.p.).

It is my suggestion that, despite *DICTEE*'s manifest artifice – the foregrounding of its processes of enunciation – this vital semantic component of the book is largely overlooked by critics, who tend to focus mainly on the textual content of the words in isolation from their spatial and temporal material manifestation. This can lead to reductive readings that neglect the complex and nuanced work performed by the material semantics of *DICTEE*'s construction. I argue that reading *DICTEE* as a material work that foregrounds its processes of enunciation can yield additional or alternative interpretations that create a productive dialogue with readings focused exclusively on the textual content. It is important, however, to read the material elements in relation to the content of the book, as each operates in relationship with the other.

The materiality of the book is a crucial aspect of critical engagement with *DICTEE* that has received surprisingly little critical attention, despite announcing and enunciating itself so visually and so viscerally. Critics have been uneasy about how to approach *DICTEE*'s manifest materiality as a text, which is demonstrated by the wide range of inappropriate classifications this book has been given in critical discourse. Many early critics referred to the book as a novel, which it clearly is not: no bildungsroman narrative, no character arc or plot development, no particular setting or time, no fixed chronology can be ascribed to *DICTEE*'s project. Some later critics preferred to use the term poem, which still falls short of the elusive structure of *DICTEE* and fails to recognise its materiality as a book. More recently, Maria Lauret has asserted the need to recognise some aspects of *DICTEE*'s visual materiality, describing it as 'a material and visual object, more than a text, more like a work of art … an artist's book' (2014: 182-183). Artist's books, however, tend to be produced primarily within the disciplines of the visual and plastic arts, prompting the question of what to call a book that is largely or entirely text based – a work of literature – which nevertheless seeks to employ material, visual and structural semantics as part of its 'total meaning complex' (Bernstein, 1992: n.p.), and rendering even the category of artist's book insufficient to fully encapsulate the

potential of *DICTEE* as a book.[39] *DICTEE* is a fragmented and complex collection of words, images and spaces; it draws upon and subverts the conventions of historical narrative, memoir, biography, poetry, mythology; its subjects include Korean revolutionary Yu Guan Soon, St. Thérèse, Joan of Arc, Cha's mother Hyung Soon Huo, Demeter and Persephone, Korean folk heroine/shamanic deity Princess Pari, and Cha herself. Within the pages of the book, subjectivity shifts without a central locus of stability and identity in an exploration of the fragmentation and dislocation associated with exile from one's own language and homeland. *DICTEE* draws on ideas from Classical mythology, history, legend, poetry, fiction, life-writing, letter-writing and a variety of other modes of communication including images and silent spaces. It is inconceivable that *DICTEE* is designed to be read without consideration of its material elements as an integral part of its meaning complex; such material elements contribute to the overall semantics of the text work, and could therefore be termed 'material semantics'. Indeed, reading *DICTEE* as a book with inherent material semantics not only provides illuminating insights into the operation of the text's utopian poetics, but also alters, or adds layers to, the interpretation of the book's content, depending on whether the material dimension is or is not brought to bear on the semantic possibilities of the work.

DICTEE's Diseuse: the Desire to Speak Ethically

The content of *DICTEE* calls attention to the physical process of enunciation through its focus on speech and dictation and the various figures that populate its pages; its material form employs a variety of techniques which foreground the process of enunciation in book form. As Johanna Drucker states, 'when a book calls attention to the conceits and conventions by which it normally effaces its identity, [it] calls attention to its own process of enunciation' (1995: 161). *DICTEE* is a text that powerfully foregrounds its own acts of representation in order that it may speak for itself, whilst simultaneously granting interpretive agency to its reader: this is not a book that allows itself to be enunciated, despite the paradox of its content. It is a material approach to the text, however, which can unlock the productive tensions

[39] I discuss the term 'Liberature' in chapter four of this thesis, but am reluctant to ascribe a label to fix and categorise *DICTEE*.

between form and content that energise the utopian potential of the text's processes of enunciation, which is best symbolised by *DICTEE*'s figure of the diseuse.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines diseuse as 'a female artiste who entertains with spoken monologues' (2010: 502); the Collins Dictionary traces the word's etymology to the nineteenth century 'from French, feminine of *diseur*, speaker, from *dire* to speak, from Latin *dīcere*' (2011: 479). The diseuse as a female speaker foregrounds the processes of enunciation throughout *DICTEE*, often through her contradictory inability to speak with authority and her position as a speaker of others' words. Yet it is this paradoxical figure of the diseuse that can provide a critical framework for reading *DICTEE*'s utopian poetics as a material process of enunciation in three interlinking ways. First, the diseuse as a figure foregrounding the act of enunciation reveals through its content the major function of its material form – that is to call attention to the processes of enunciation as a utopian possibility for the speaker or writer of a text. Second, the diseuse as a speaker who speaks the words of others, inhabiting others' language and dwelling in the spaces between self and other, calls attention to an experience of, or a desire for, utopian non-alienation between self and other – an experience and desire that is also enacted in the physical spaces between words, phrases and pages in *DICTEE*'s material construction. Third, the diseuse as the *diseuse de bonne aventure*, the female fortune-teller who pronounces the utopian not-yet-conscious, brings both of the above possibilities into play within the material and written structure of the text. Each of these aspects of the diseuse and its relation to the material utopian poetics inherent to *DICTEE* will now be discussed and explored below.

Enunciation as a Utopian Possibility

This thesis defines 'possibility' through the terms of Ernst Bloch's definition in *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature* (1988) that the possible is measured 'according to the degree to which present conditions allow for [its] realization – in other words, in space, in the topos of an object-real possibility' (6). The subjective depiction of an object-real possibility is what Bloch calls *Vor-Schein* (anticipatory illumination, tr. Jack Zipes). As Burghardt Schmidt explains, the anticipatory

illumination is 'subjective anticipation of something that is objectively realizable' (Bloch, 1988: xxxv). The intention behind the utopian possibility is paraphrased by Jack Zipes as being 'the invariable direction toward a society without oppression' (Bloch, 1988: xl). Thus, the utopian possibility is that which is desirable, imaginable, conceivable as moving toward a society without oppression and objectively *possible* but not yet fully realised, or 'not-yet-become' (Bloch, 1988: xv, translation of the original German *noch-nicht-geworden* by Jack Zipes). Alex Houen's 2012 study *The Powers of Possibility: Experimental American Writing since the 1960s*, recognises in various experimental literary practices the building of 'a world of possibility that can act as an affective force to combat the effects of social and political power on individuals' capacities for thinking and feeling' (16). As we have already seen, both Beat poetics and Language poetics were underpinned by the utopian desire for political revolution through literary aesthetic innovation. It is in terms of possibility as something that is conceivable, realizable, socially and politically affective but not yet fully tangible that I understand the utopian possibility of enunciation in *DICTEE*. Many critics have explored the *im*possibility of speaking presented by the text of *DICTEE*, relating this to the social and political effects of exile, colonialism and language-acquisition on the speaking subject (see for example, Lisa Lowe [1996], Eun Kyung Min [1998]). Others have stated that the emancipatory potential of *DICTEE* lies in its ability to liberate the reader to a state of active engagement with the text (Juliana Spahr [2001], Jonathan Stalling [2010]). My suggestion is, however, that a material engagement with the book can yield the alternative or additional reading that enunciation *is possible* for the writer as for the reader of the book: possible in the sense of being an 'affective force to combat' the stifling and silencing effects of exile, colonialism and language acquisition that Cha strongly critiques in the book's contents, and possible in terms of an 'objective-real possibility' that is not yet fully realised. Thus, the act of enunciation remains, paradoxically, an unspoken possibility within the text. This is what gives the possibility of enunciation its utopian function – it is *not-yet-become*, and yet it is conceivable as a desirable possibility, making it, in Bloch's words, 'not something like nonsense or absolute fancy; rather it is not *yet* in the sense of a possibility; *that* it could be there if we could only do something for it' (1988: 3). What Cha does 'for it' is to engage the material semantics of the book as an object to call attention to the

processes by which the book enunciates itself: making the book 'speak' in ways that the words – as content alone – cannot[40].

The diseuse as a figure foregrounds the act of enunciation: the female speaker with the power to enunciate is *DICTEE*'s structuring subject[41] and its elusive motivating desire – its utopian possibility. Yet the diseuse as a subject within *DICTEE* is a speaker who cannot speak: 'She mimicks the speaking. That might resemble speech. (Anything at all.) Bared noise, groan, bits torn from words. […] she resorts to mimicking gestures with the mouth' (2001: 3). This contradictory position is presented from the beginning of the text. The diseuse, the professional and accomplished female speaker, is shown from the beginning as being unable to speak for herself, creating a semantic rupture between the signifier 'diseuse' and the figure presented as the diseuse within the text, and playing upon the visual and aural resonances between the French word diseuse and the English disuse, disease. *DICTEE*'s diseuse exemplifies extreme dis-ease in her physical inability to form and pronounce words, '*Inside is the pain of speech the pain to say.* […] *It festers inside. The wound, liquid, dust. Must break Must void. […]* Swallows with last efforts last wills against the pain that wishes it to speak' (2001: 3, original italics). Further, it is her disuse of language that makes speaking an impossible act, '*Dead words. Dead tongue. From disuse*' (2001: 133, original italics). In the case of *DICTEE*, the dead tongue is the Korean mother tongue and many critics have approached the subject's inability to speak her own words as the book's central theme, which of course it is. In 'Reading the Figure of Dictation' (1998), Eun Kyung Min states that 'the diseuse [in *DICTEE*] is […] a poor replica of the prophets. She does not speak with authority but is reduced to a tortured imitation of speech without originality' (1998: 316). Reading the figure of the diseuse through *DICTEE*'s content alone, without a reading of the material semantics at play within the book, may lead to a reading that recognises only the speaker's inability to enunciate. Min concludes that '[t]here is no diseuse in *DICTEE*' that is, no subject with the power to 'speak with authority'

[40] Formal analysis of the text's linguistic innovations, however, demonstrate that the words 'speak' through the materiality of their form in performance. My close readings in Chapters 1 and 2 of this thesis engage with this linguistic materiality.

[41] Edrik Joel Lopez identifies the diseuse as the central dialectic around which *DICTEE* is written in *The World Contracted to Recognisable Images* (2008). I am no longer certain that the text manifests a single structuring subject. The internal contradictions within *DICTEE*'s figure of the *diseuse*, however, continue the book's project of troubling and complicating the idea of a singular subjectivity.

(1998: 317). Yet there remains the possibility of enunciation in *DICTEE*, the potential for the subject to become a speaking subject: 'She takes it. Slow. The invoking. All the times now. All the time there is. Always. And all times. The pause. Uttering. Hers now. Hers bare. The utter' (5). Thus, in reading *DICTEE* materially as its own act of self-enunciation the book itself begins to fulfil the function of the diseuse, by which enunciation becomes a utopian possibility within the book. Rather than agreeing that there is no diseuse in *DICTEE*, I believe it is feasible to read the desire for self-enunciation as a utopian possibility that is explored through the material semantics of the book form. Furthermore, I argue that it is specifically the material semantics of the book that activate the prophetic potential of the diseuse in *DICTEE* as the *diseuse de bonne aventure*: she who speaks that which has not-yet-become. This function of the diseuse will be discussed further below.

Reading *DICTEE* in this way, the book object itself becomes a vital component not only of the 'total meaning complex' (Bernstein, 1992) but also of the various ways that the utopian function is specifically engaged. Read as an act or process of enunciation, *DICTEE* invokes the possibility of the speaking/writing subject that much of its content denies, yet the particularity of the materially-semantic speaking/writing subject is that this subject arises as a possibility of the book itself in conjunction with, and contingent upon, both the text and the (assumed) reader in a triangulated interrelationship of the possibility of being. In a written exploration of the moment of an eclipse in *DICTEE*, Cha writes:

> Full. Utter most full. Can contain no longer. Fore shadows the fullness. Still. Silence. Within moments of. The eclipse. Inside the eclipse. Both. Fulmination and concealment of light. Imminent crossing, face to face, moon before the sun pronounces. All. This. Time. To pronounce without prescribing purpose. It prescribes nothing. The time thought to have fixed, dead, reveals the very rate of the very movement. Velocity. Lentitude. Of its own larger time. (2001: 157)

In this passage, the suggestion might be that the moon is the 'moon before the sun pronounces', which may suggest that the moon is not contingent upon the sun's pronouncement to become itself, despite being reliant upon the sun's light to be made visible from the earth; or it could be that the moon is pronouncing itself to the earth in front of (before) the sun in the moment of the eclipse. In either case, the

moon's autonomy as a being that either does not require to be enunciated by another or as a being that has the authority to enunciate itself is suggested here – suggestive of the utopian desire within the text to enunciate oneself rather than being enunciated by another, which is the central driver of *DICTEE*'s desire for self-enunciation in the face of colonial language acquisition and the silence of exile. Following this however, is the highly ambiguous line, 'To pronounce without prescribing purpose', which I argue is suggestive of the way in which the material semantics operate as a utopian function within *DICTEE*. If the desire encoded within *DICTEE*'s pages is a desire to become a speaking subject, it is as a speaking subject that does not violate the listening subject with one's language: to speak without prescribing purpose, meaning, definition to the other.

The utopian desire of the speaking subject in *DICTEE* is to be oneself without violating, or eclipsing, the other. This is a possibility that has not-yet-become in dominant models of communication, as John Wrighton (2010) states: 'Our contemporary shared language is not simply "disordered" but traumatised. […] Language has thus become the medium of a market-oriented self-identification [whereas] language is dependent upon relationships [and] […] the purpose of language is an act of love, a medium for expiation of the other, a questioning of the self' (4-5). If this not-yet-become form of language as an enunciation of the speaking subject in which the other is expiated rather than violated is the desire of *DICTEE*, suggested in the phrase '[t]o pronounce without prescribing purpose', then its desire is utopian both in the sense of being desirable as a move toward a society without oppression (in which the speaker's authority does not violate and oppress the listener's authority) and in the sense of being an anticipatory illumination of a possible state which has not-yet-become. This utopian desire to pronounce without prescribing purpose is made possible through *DICTEE*'s material semantics. Charles Bernstein makes the link between the material elements of a text and the non-prescribable when he states that 'what is designated as nonutilizable & extralexical is both useful and desirable while not being utilitarian & prescribable' (1992: 18). That Cha understood the potential for this utopian possibility of language to be encoded in the material semantics of the book form is suggested in the following quotation from *The New Art of Making Books* by Ulises Carrión with whom Cha worked closely:

> Everyday language is intentional, that is, utilitarian; its function is to transmit ideas and feelings, to explain, to declare, to convince, to invoke, to accuse, etc.
>
> […] New art's language is radically different from daily language. It neglects intentions and utility, and it returns to itself, it investigates itself, looking for forms, for series of forms that give birth to, couple with, unfold into, space-time sequences. The words in a new book are not the bearers of the message, nor the mouthpieces of the soul, nor the currency of communication. […] The words of the new book are there not to transmit certain mental images with a certain intention. They are there to form, together with other signs, a space-time sequence that we identify with the name 'book'. (1985: 37-38)

What I believe the material semantics of the book bring into play within *DICTEE* is specifically a movement toward the utopian possibility of the enunciating subject as a relational and contingent, non-oppressive being.

This argument is further informed by Alex Houen's observations of the possibilities of being in the work of Lyn Hejinian: 'Identity here is provisional; contingent upon performing actions like naming or renunciation. If one founds oneself as a person by reflecting on oneself, that reflection involves making oneself both subject and object, first and third person […]. The singularity of Hejinian's person is thus predicated on being relational and under construction. That also gives it an open performativity […] which makes of personhood a series of encounters and situations' (2012: 205). If, as Houen suggests, personhood is contingent upon performativity and 'predicated on being [both] relational and under construction', *DICTEE*'s speaking subject is necessarily brought into being through the performativity of the text's self-enunciation and is predicated on the combined relational and constructive agencies of both the speaker/writer and the listener/reader. In this way, the speaking/writing subject no longer speaks for, or to, or about the listening/reading subject, but speaks *with* in an act of contingent and inter-relational co-arising, within which meaning is co-constructed as a relational act between both parties in conjunction with the text as an axial and intermediary object. This model of the speaking/writing subject remains 'utopian' in so far as it is not supported by the logic, grammar and syntax of the dominant modes of spoken or written language – a language that John Wrighton identifies as being predicated on 'self-identification' instead of enabling communication as a 'site of ethics, a being for the other' (2010: 14). In such a way, then, the material semantics of *DICTEE*'s utopian poetics suggest the possibility of

an enunciation that grants agency to both the speaking/writing and the listening/reading subjects via the text object – a possibility that is precluded in the ordinary speech of dominant grammar and syntax but is both desirable and conceivable in the material semantics of *DICTEE*'s formal operations. The discussion below reads *DICTEE* in terms of its material semantics as a process of enunciation, exploring the possibilities that it grants to both the writer and the reader.

The Book as Diseuse

Some of *DICTEE*'s more visual elements serve the function of highlighting the materiality of language production, thus calling attention to the book's processes of enunciation. *DICTEE* contains visual reproductions of words written or inscribed physically by hand in three different languages: Korean Hangul marks on a stone wall on the inner flyleaf; Chinese calligraphy (26, 27, 54, 55, 154); handwritten English notes and letters (40-41, 146-148). Each highlights the human agency and intention in the process of making marks on a surface to communicate meaning. The double page spread of handwritten draft notes at the end of the CLIO HISTORY section (see figure 1, below) acts in multiple ways to make visible the book's construction as an apparatus of enunciation. These pages draw attention to the revisionary process of crafting and shaping meaning, becoming a visual sign of the material process of revising and redrafting a text. On these pages the reader encounters the crossings out, the omissions and insertions, the processes of re-structuring and redrafting that are typically concealed by the carefully edited and finalised iteration of the printed words on the pages of a published book. The final printed iteration (two short passages on pages 37-38, usually encountered by the reader prior to the handwritten draft pages – figure 2) manifests as a loose approximation of the original draft material. The notes show Cha's processes in working around ideas such as 'hallowed beauty' which appears four times in the draft material but only once in the final printed iteration. The draft notes highlight the importance of the concept of beauty to this passage, with the word itself repeated seven times in the draft with related terms such as 'countenance' repeated twice. Beauty, in this passage, is related to the concepts of time and fixity. The printed iteration introduces the idea of the photographic image, only alluded to in the draft

notes through words such as ‘image’ and ‘exposure’, which is described in the printed passage as a ‘captured image’ that is ‘given to deterioration’ in contrast to the memory of the martyred heroine by which ‘[t]ime fixes […] their image’. In the book it is the photograph of the handwritten pages that reveals the fluidity of human thought processes concealed behind the fixity of the printed page. There is some ambiguity around whether the ‘hallowed beauty’ in the printed passage is specifically the beauty associated with change, fluidity and ‘seasonal decay’, the beauty of movement within time, or with the eternally unchanging fixity of Cha’s depiction of the image of the memory, but it is interesting to note that these ideas around fluidity and fixity are being explored visually and materially as well as verbally through the ways in which these two iterations of the passages act in dialogue with one another.

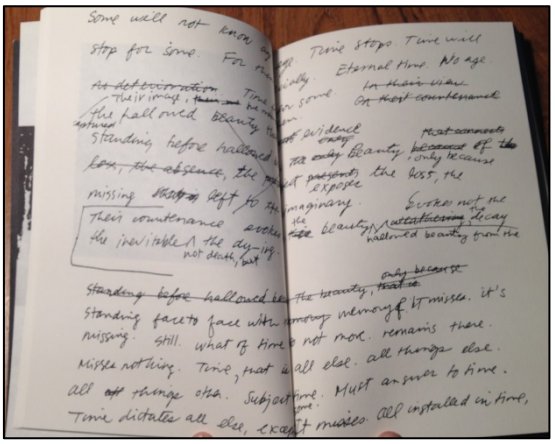
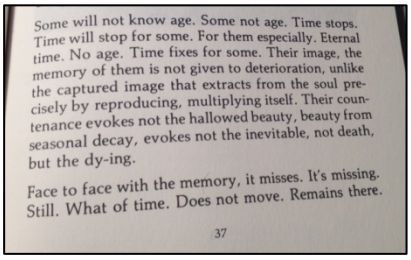


Figure 1



Some will not know age. Some not age. Time stops. Time will stop for some. For them especially. Eternal time. No age. Time fixes for some. Their image, the memory of them is not given to deterioration, unlike the captured image that extracts from the soul precisely by reproducing, multiplying itself. Their countenance evokes not the hallowed beauty, beauty from seasonal decay, evokes not the inevitable, not death, but the dy-ing.

Face to face with the memory, it misses. It's missing. Still. What of time. Does not move. Remains there.

37

Figure 2

The work of the draft notes in calling attention to the book’s processes of enunciation is vital to the utopian possibility of *DICTEE* as a work that does not allow itself to be ‘enunciated […] as if it were naturally there’ (Drucker, 1995). The explicit work of the content of the CLIO HISTORY section is to highlight and demonstrate the human intention, the crafting, the shaping, the revising and the violence toward the other that is concealed in the process of writing historical narrative. In critiquing historical documentation Cha writes:

> This document is transmitted through, by the same means, the same channel without distinction the content is delivered in the same style: The word. The image. To appeal to the masses to congeal the information to make bland, mundane, no longer able to transcend their own conspirator method, no matter how alluring their presentation. The response is pre-coded to perform predictably however passively possible. Neutralized to achieve the no-response, to make absorb, to submit to the uni-directional correspondance. (33)

Documents become complicit in 'their own conspirator method' by being 'pre-coded to perform predictably [and] passively'. In submitting to the colonial linguistic systems of the oppressors, and by adopting the textual neutralization of documents intended to appear objective and authoritative through concealing their own processes of enunciation, the historical narrative becomes at best passive and at worst its own form of violence enacted upon the exiled subject. The historical text silences its reader into 'no-response' in which the reader must 'submit to the uni-directional correspondance' of meaning making that originates with the 'author' and is imparted to the reader as a passive recipient. Bernstein postulates the silence of the reader in the absorptive text when he states that, '[b]y *absorption* I mean engrossing, engulfing completely, engaging, arresting attention, reverie, attention intensification, rhapsodic, spellbinding, mesmerising, hypnotic, total, riveting, enthralling: belief, conviction, silence' (1992: 29). For Bernstein, texts, or books, in which the process of enunciation is concealed present the illusion of mastery, authority and objectivity – of recounting a universal truth imparted by the 'author' – an illusion which violently excludes, suppresses and silences the reader.[42] Johanna Drucker (1996) contextualises this concealment with reference to the early twentieth century practices that exposed it, stating that 'Dada and Futurist typographers had demonstrated that the literary convention in which marks of production and enunciation were repressed was a complicitous fiction, one in which the constructs of language might readily pass for truths, concealing the arbitrary and specific behind the mask of the absolute and universal' (225).[43] Taking pains to demonstrate this complicity within the CLIO HISTORY section, Cha must necessarily work to produce a text that reveals its processes of enunciation, rather than repressing or concealing them. Here, the material processes at work in the book which foreground the processes of enunciation, such as the handwritten notes in this section, provide the vital function for Cha of attempting to avoid complicity with the very structures of language she critiques.

[42] Previous chapters have explored, however, the problematic ways in which Language Poetry, of which Bernstein is a key proponent and is defending in his statement quoted above, has continued the practice of concealing and effacing the writer's specificity and subjectivity.

[43] Cha herself was interested in and influenced by the writing of Stephane Mallarmé (see Llewallen, 2001: 2) and Tristan Tzara, whose tomb she visited during her year studying abroad in Paris in 1976 (*Exilée / Temps Mort*, 2009: 134).

Since, however, '[t]his document [*DICTEE*] is [also] transmitted through, by the same means, the same channel without distinction the content is delivered in the same style: The word. The image' (Cha, 201: 33), the work of the material elements must do more than simply subvert the conventions of the absorptive text.[44] Cha is acutely aware of the ethical violence of the text that conceals its processes of enunciation in an attempt to assert the dominance of the speaking/writing subject. Therefore, by using the same potentially violent means (words and images) to expose the material processes of enunciation in *DICTEE*, Cha must make a utopian move beyond simply occupying the position of the speaking/writing subject, the diseuse, for herself. She must do more than simply claiming and using the tools of the oppressor to reclaim the position denied to her by her exile, her silence, her minority status. She must also make that move operate with the utopian function to create a different kind of ethical work in which the reader and writer are both empowered as active and participatory subjects in the co-construction of the text. John Wrighton (2010) argues that, 'if language, whether written or spoken, is employed as constructive of a self-identity, it in fact violates our being. The result of this irresponsibility, an ontological self-orientation, is both traumatising and traumatic; it is a violation of both the self and the other, in language' (2010: 2). Cha recognises the traumatising effect of this violent manner of language construction in the historical narratives she critiques, yet she also recognises that her own attempts at communication rely on the same linguistic and visual tools as these texts. Thus, the work of the material elements in exposing *DICTEE*'s own process of enunciation performs the double function of making the text itself visible as the diseuse – the figurative embodiment of the speaking/writing subject of *DICTEE* – and of creating space for the active listening/reading subject to insert themselves into the book's own processes of enunciation. It is this space of possibility granted to the reader through the material semantics of *DICTEE* that my next section will explore.

The Diseuse: Making Space for the Active Reader

The figure of the diseuse in *DICTEE* is one whose words are not always her own, she 'allows others. In place of her. Admits others to make full. […] The others each

[44] Bernstein's Language Poetry, for example, attempts to do this but continues to efface the specificity and subjectivity of the speaker.

occupying her' (3). From this position she signifies the silenced subject, exiled from her mother tongue and suppressed by the colonising forces of language to be spoken about, of, over. Her evacuated subject position becomes the site of the colonized self, the silenced, limited and emptied self. Similar to *DICTEE*'s figure of the martyr, who 'is exchangeable with any other heroine in history … [and] require[s] not definition in [her] devotion to generosity and self-sacrifice' (2001: 30), the evacuated subject position becomes the site of the death of the self through sacrificial self-emptying. Since Wrighton argues that '[l]anguage operates in discourse as the accomplishment of a relation between ethical subjects, thereby fracturing the independent unity of the self as an ontological construct' (2010: 11), this sacrificial self-emptying may be the most vital position from which to enter into an ethics of utopian language and linguistic discourse.[45] Here the utopian signifies both the poetic function of imagining the not-yet-become, which I argue the material elements of *DICTEE* make possible in ways that the content cannot, and the specific utopian movement toward a non-oppressive or non-alienated society which is central to Ernst Bloch's philosophy of the utopian function. For Bloch, the hermeneutic potential of a work to allow the reading subject entry into the processes of interpreting and constructing meaning is a fundamental aspect of the utopian function in a work of art or literature. Jack Zipes suggests that for Bloch, '[t]he critical reader learns though the anticipatory illumination not to accept passively what has been culturally served up as classical and standard, as necessity' (Bloch, 1988: xxxvi). Cha's objective in exposing and subverting the position of passive silence that she sees the reading subject as occupying in 'uni-directional' historical discourse means that she must move toward the utopian possibility of becoming a speaking subject who does not oppress, but rather enables the active participation of the reading subject by granting the reader entry into the hermeneutic processes of constructing meaning from the text. The speaking subject, in this sense, must be a radically new kind of speaking subject, whose position as a speaker does not oppress the subjectivity of the listener.

[45] This is not intended to align with the 'death of the subject' valorized by Language Poetry's early proponents, as explored in Chapter Two of this thesis. The self-emptying position in *DICTEE* always retains the paradoxical possibility of self-enunciation, providing its vitality as a figure of utopian poetics.

From this position, then, both of these figures (the diseuse and the martyr) are able to occupy a space that is capable of both inhabiting and being inhabited by an other or a series of others. Cha writes,

> *Let the one who is diseuse, one who is mother who waits nine days and nine nights be found. Restore memory. Let the one who is diseuse, one who is daughter restore spring with her each appearance from beneath the earth.* (2001:133).

In creating the double-identification of the diseuse as *both* mother *and* daughter, each called upon to 'restore' through her capacity as diseuse, it is possible to explore the figure of the diseuse as a dialectically relational subject with the potential to engender restoration or healing through her capacity to occupy and evacuate both positions within an oppositional dialectic. Edrik Joel López (2008) explores the figure of the diseuse in *DICTEE* as the book's central dialectical force. For López, the figure of the diseuse 'is the dialectic around which *DICTEE* structures itself: *another's voice – one's writing*' (2008: 86). Arguing that, as the speaker inhabited by the words of others, in communion with the muses, '[t]he diseuse is the very art of inhabiting another's voice' (2008: 87). López structures his engagement with *DICTEE* around this dialectic of the diseuse, stating that '[i]f anything centers this text, it is Cha's becoming a diseuse who speaks *in* (not *for*) the voices of her subjects. […] However, the most off-balancing effect that Cha enacts on her reader is how she allows the reader to enter the book as a diseuse, too' (2008: 91).[46] The material and structural operations within the book function in a similar way to López's reading of the diseuse in creating space for the reading subject to inhabit the text simultaneously with the writing subject.

DICTEE's ERATO LOVE POETRY section explores the space of inter-subjective encounter through both its content and its material and formal structures. Through the contents of this section the reader encounters multiple intertwining and fragmented narrative threads that engender the suspension or evacuation of specified subject positions. This creates the effect of both placing and displacing the reader within the space of the text. Cha creates an initial displacement of the 'she' as subject of this section by describing a female figure entering a cinema to see a film, followed by the description of a detailed film sequence in which the same female

[46] I would not fully align myself with López's assumption that it is Cha who becomes the diseuse.

figure is depicted entering the cinema to see a film. Here, 'she' becomes both subject and object of the film sequence, or both the viewing subject and the viewed subject, and subjectivity becomes inter-relational and entwined. This narrative is further complicated by being interwoven with the multiple narratives and the empty spaces that mirror it throughout the section. A third layer of subjective evacuation is activated when the reader is told that, '[i]t is you who are entering to see her' (2001: 98). From here onwards, 'you' becomes the subject of this narrative thread. This is a self-encounter that displaces both the reader and the writer within the space of a text that is emptied of itself. Meaning, here, is not fixed and defined, disseminated from writer to reader, or from film-maker to viewer, it is fluid, indefinite, co-created in the space of the text's ever-shifting boundaries.

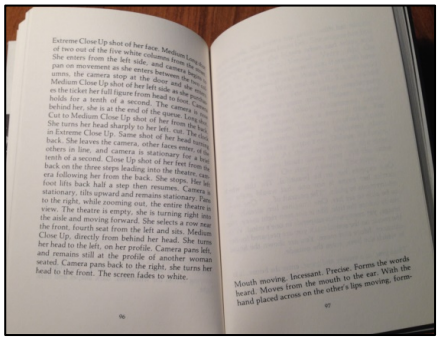
The material construction of this section also enables a close examination of the various ways that Cha works with *mise-en-page* and visual spaces to invite the reading subject to inhabit the text. The inclusion of spaces in between parts of words is one of the material elements that functions in this way. The inclusion of spaces in between parts of words has been widely commented on as mimicry of, and mastery over, the faltering effect of second language speech patterns (see for example Maria Lauret [2014], Laura Schechter [2011], Juliana Spahr [2001]). Reading these spaces as an integral part of the material semantics of this section, however, demonstrates the utopian function of *DICTEE* in enabling the reader to enter into the processes of meaning-construction as an active subject. These halting spaces act as material markers for the reader's entry into the text through the spaces created by Cha as the writer. Cha's choice of words and the ways in which they are broken often results in the proliferation of meanings and the creation of multiple possibilities. For example, the space inserted into the sentence, 'The whiteness of the screen takes her back wards almost half a step' (94), results in the generation of at least a double meaning. The reader initially encounters the phrase 'the whiteness of the screen takes her back', which has connotations of memory, and therefore temporality, being transported back via memory to some previous time or event evoked by the screen's whiteness. It is not until the word has been completed, 'back wards' that a further, spatial and physical, meaning is suggested, the sense of a physical step backwards, a reading that is supported on page 96 by the sentence, 'Her left foot lifts back half a step then resumes'. In the space between the two halves of the word multiple layers

of meaning are generated, and the first reading is never fully negated by the second: both readings continue to remain possible, enabling the reading subject's entry into the work of meaning-construction via the spatial elements of the text's materiality.

Ernst Bloch, in his discussion of architecture and painting in the essay 'The Creation of the Ornament' describes the spatial element as being active in facilitating the utopian 'self-encounter'. He states, 'objects are not only placed in space, but space is placed within things. Space is active' (1988: 98), later concluding that, 'This architecture figures as self-encounter within the painted objects and encounter with them' (1998: 100). The suggestion here is that it is active space within the art object (whether architecture, sculpture or painting in this particular instance) that enables the self-encounter. The space must be created by the artist for the viewer to inhabit within the art object. This triangulated relationship becomes a relationship of intersubjectivity, which reveals the 'universal subjectivism within the object' (2001: 102). Transposing this argument from architecture and painting to book work, we can see that Cha's material choices in activating the spatial dimension of the *mise-en-page* in *DICTEE* are working with the utopian potential of the self-encounter to activate an intersubjective relationship between the writing subject and the reading subject via the book object. Ulises Carrión states in *The New Art of Making Books*, 'Space exists outside subjectivity. If two subjects communicate in the space, then space is an element of this communication. Space modifies this communication. Space imposes its own laws on this communication' (1985: 36). We have seen above some of the ways in which space modifies communication between the writing subject and the reading subject in *DICTEE*. This is further exemplified in Cha's spatial design of the pages in *DICTEE*'s ERATO LOVE POETRY section.

Cha creates an erotic mirroring effect between the text and white spaces in the section ERATO LOVE POETRY, through which intertwining narratives are woven together to form mutually generative interpretive connections. Extracted fragments from the autobiography of St. Thérèse are energised and transformed by their juxtaposition with the cinematic sequence that becomes its counterpoint. The practices associated with making reading absorptive are disrupted by this sequence, as the reader must frequently turn backwards and forwards between pages to construct a narrative that is continually interrupted by the eruption of other narratives

and the intrusion of blank white spaces, slowing the reading and engendering a proliferation of potential meanings to be explored by the active reader. The over-three-quarters white space on page 97 (see figure 3, below) enacts a visual enunciation of the final sentence on page 96, 'The screen fades to white', before three lines of text begin an unrelated sequence that is interrupted by enjambment of the word 'form-ing' split between pages 97 and 99. The reader must then choose whether to continue this sequence on page 99 and go back to page 98 afterwards, or whether to read through page 98 and complete the text fragment later (see figure 4, below). If the reader chooses to read through page 98 before reading page 99, there is a further run-on of the narrative sequence from page 98 into page 100, delaying further the gratification of completing the minor narrative sequence begun on page 97. Either way, the normal linear page-by-page progression through the book is halted, disrupted and highlighted. Charles Bernstein argues that '[a]ntiabsorptive writing recuperates the mark by making it opaque, that is, by maintaining its visibility & undermining its "meaning", where "meaning" is understood in the narrower, utilitarian sense of a restricted economy' (1992: 64). In the ERATO section, Cha's antiabsorptive materiality makes visible not only the mark of the word but also the space of the page, the effect of which is to undermine a utilitarian and restricted sense of meaning (the 'uni-directional correspondance' that Cha critiques in CLIO HISTORY), creating space for the reading subject to inhabit as an active agent in generating multiple interpretations.

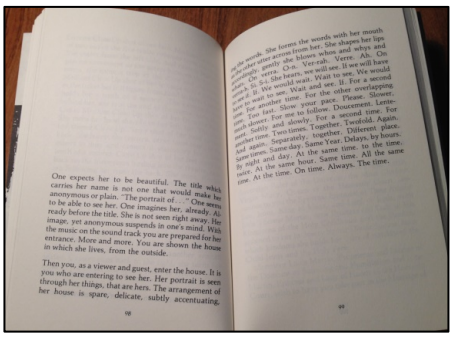

Extreme Close Up shot of her face. Medium Long
of two out of the five white columns from the
She enters from the left side, and camera
pan on movement as she enters between the
umns, the camera stop at the door and
Medium Close Up shot of her left side as she
es the ticket her full figure from head to foot
holds for a tenth of a second. The camera
behind her, she is at the end of the queue
Cut to Medium Close Up shot of her from the
She turns her head sharply to her left, cut
in Extreme Close Up. Same shot of her head
back. She leaves the camera, other faces enter
others in line, and camera is stationary for a
tenth of a second. Close Up shot of her feet from
back on the three steps leading into the theatre,
era following her from the back. She stops. Her
foot lifts back half a step then resumes. Camera
stationary, tilts upward and remains stationary
to the right, while zooming out, the entire theatre
view. The theatre is empty, she is turning right
the aisle and moving forward. She selects a row
the front, fourth seat from the left and sits.
Close Up, directly from behind her head. She
her head to the left, on her profile. Camera pans
and remains still at the profile of another
seated. Camera pans back to the right, she
head to the front. The screen fades to white.

96

Mouth moving. Incessant. Precise. Forms the words
heard. Moves from the mouth to the ear. With the
hand placed across on the other's lips moving. form-

97

Figure 3


ing words. She forms the words with her mouth
and they arise across from her. She shapes her lips
and they gently O-o. Ver-ah. Verre. Ah. On
ward. O. S-s. She hears, we will see. Ve would
wait. O. We would wait. Wait to see. Ve would
wait to see. Wait and see. II. For a second
time. Slow your pace. Please. Slower.
time. Too fast. Slow your pace. Please. Slower.
Too fast. For me to follow. Douvement. Lente.
Slower. For me to follow. Douvement. Lente.
Slower. For a second time. For
Slower. Softly and slowly. Together. Twofold. Again.
another time. Separately. Together. Twofold. Again.
Separately. Together. Delays, by hours.
Same time. Same day. Same Year. Delays, by hours.
And again. Same day. Same Year. Delays, by hours.
Same times. Same day. At the same time. to the time.
By night and day. At the same time. All the same
time. At the same hour. Same time. All the same
hour. At the time. On time. Always. The time.
time. At the time. On time. Always. The time.

One expects her to be beautiful. The title which carries her name is not one that would make her anonymous or plain. 'The portrait of ...' One seems to be able to see her. One imagines her, already. Already before the title. She is not seen right away. Her image, yet anonymous suspends in one's mind. With the music on the sound track you are prepared for her entrance. More and more. You are shown the house in which she lives, from the outside.

Then you, as a viewer and guest, enter the house. It is you who are entering to see her. Her portrait is seen through her things, that are hers. The arrangement of her house is spare, delicate, subtly accentuating,

98

99

Figure 4

The material construction of the pages in this section can also have the effect of shaping the reader's engagement with and interpretation of the text. The materiality of this section reveals its own dynamic of meaning construction, and interpretations of this section may vary depending on to what extent the materiality of the text is

read as shaping its meaning. Most of the verso pages in this section present a fairly continuous narrative of a cinematic experience, albeit a narrative with complexly hybrid subjectivities at play. However, multiple minor narratives are introduced and overlapping one another on the facing recto pages. On page 101 (recto), extracts from *Story of a Soul* the autobiography of St. Théresè de Lisieux are introduced which then run on to page 103. Again, the reader has a choice to make regarding how to structure the reading of this sequence of pages, but I would suggest that the sequence most supported by the text structure would be to continue on to page 103 since the text is presented at the top of the recto page as the page is turned, with the next section of the cinematic narrative beginning halfway down the verso page in the space produced by a break in the text on the recto (see figure 5, below). This presents the reader with the following sequence of text: '"The hour being as yet uncertain, you are invited to hold yourself in readiness and watch." / Until then' (2001: 103-102). The first part of the sequence is part of the quotation from *Story of a Soul*, whereas the second part ('Until then') continues the narrative of the cinematic experience. Read in this particular order however – a reading supported by the material structure of the text on the pages – there is a clear semantic link between the end of the sequence of text on page 103 and the beginning of the sequence of text on page 102. Read in conjunction in this way the texts respond to one another, with the phrase 'Until then' acting upon both the quotation from St. Théresè on page 103 and the end of the previous sequence of the cinematic narrative on page 100, 'You do not see her yet. For the moment, you see only her traces' (2001: 100).

This double-agency of a bridging phrase foreshadows a sequence of subversive multiplicities that equally *requires* an awareness of the material enunciation of the text as disrupting the normalised structure of absorptive reading to be visible, *and* makes visible the disruptive materiality of this section as an act of self-enunciation. Having encountered a lengthy quotation about the marriage between St. Théresè and Jesus on recto pages 101-103, the reader's eye is guided towards the mirroring of spaces between extracts from the cinematic narrative and the St. Théresè narrative across pages 102-103, visually threading in between one another in intertwined segments (see figure 5). From this point forward, there is a subversive interplay between the verso and the recto texts, which are linked at various points through the

material structure of the pagination and the lexical and thematic fields of the text extracts. Thus, two sentences after reading about the Holy wedding, readers can read ‘She is married to her husband who is unfaithful to her. No reason is given. No reason is necessary except that he is a man. It is a given’ (2001: 102). The thematic link to marriage across both narratives, which are also visually linked by *mise-en-page*, raises questions about how we are to interpret the ‘marriage’ between St. Théresè and Jesus, engendering a layer of doubt or uncertainty through the juxtaposition of these two fragments of text and their dialogue with one another through the material space of the page. That there is an intertwining between the two narratives is further supported by the repetition of vocabulary and ideas from this fragment on page 102 into the next corresponding fragment on page 103 (figure 5), directly beneath the ‘marriage’ extract: ‘Her marriage to him, her husband. Her love for him, her husband, her duty to him, her husband’ (2001: 103), which again makes clear semantic links between both sets of narrative extracts and is in turn acted upon by both sets of narratives. The words resonate differently depending on which narrative they are linked with – taking on both the positivity of the St. Thérèse extract and the negative connotations of the cinematic extract, creating multiplicity and synchronicity in the layers of meaning that can be extracted from this text – layers of meaning directly attributable to the material encounter of the reader with the text, who will construct semantics and narratives from these fragments dependent upon their own engagement with the material structure of the text.

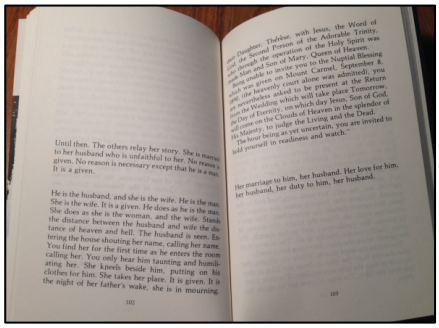


Figure 5

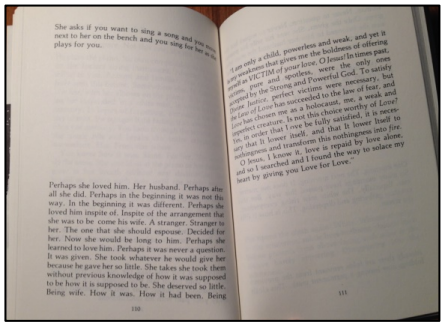


Figure 6

Lyn Hejinian recognises the spatiality of language and its function in the proliferation of meaning, arguing in The Rejection of Closure:

> The progress of a line or sentence, or a series of lines or sentences, has spatial properties as well as temporal properties. The meaning of a word in its place derives both from the word’s lateral reach, its contacts with its neighbors in a

> statement, and from its reach through and out of the text into the outer world, the matrix of its contemporary and historical reference. (2000: 50)

The material elements of the ERATO section illustrate the spatial properties of meaning construction in a text. Multiple interpretations become activated by the proximity of words in unrelated narratives to one another across the space of material pagination. The words reach out laterally to extend their resonances into other narratives, related not by syntagmatic structure but by close proximity in the visual layout of the page. Pages 110-111 (see figure 6, above) present a similar moment when encountering the text fragments

> "I am only a child, powerless and weak, and yet it is my weakness that gives me the boldness of offering myself as *VICTIM of your love, O Jesus!* […] O Jesus, I know it, love is repaid by love alone, and so I searched and I found the way to solace my heart by giving you Love for Love."
>
> Perhaps she loved him. Her husband. Perhaps after all she did. Perhaps in the beginning it was not this way. In the beginning it was different. Perhaps she loved him inspite of. Inspite of the arrangement that she was to be come his wife. A stranger. […] She took whatever he would give her because he gave her so little. She takes she took them without previous knowledge of how it was supposed to be how it is supposed to be. She deserved so little. Being wife.
> (2001: 111-110).

Again these fragments can be read as acting upon one another to generate multiplicities of meaning in a textual openness that refuses final semantic closure. The verso text can be read as a commentary on the recto, or as unconnected to the recto text and self-contained purely within its own narrative (although such a reading is difficult to maintain given the visual and lexical linkage between the extracts).

In *DICTEE*, Cha creates space that is active within things, and generates a space of shared textual encounter between the reading subject and the writing subject via the text object, which performs the utopian function of re-imagining the relationship between the writer and the reader where the reader, in López's words, is allowed 'to enter the text as a diseuse, too'. In Bloch's utopian philosophy, this is an example of anticipatory illumination at work – the move towards a non-oppressive society that has not-yet-become, as demonstrated by the move towards becoming a non-oppressive speaking/writing subject who enables the active and participatory subjectivity of the listening/reading subject. It is the dream of something new, a new

mode of relations that is multiple, reciprocal and ethical, rather than linear, oppressive and power-dominant.

Diseuse de Bonne Aventure

> *Let the one who is diseuse. Diseuse de bonne aventure. Let her call forth. Let her break open the spell cast upon time again and again. With her voice, penetrate earth's floor, the walls of Tartaurus to circle and scratch the bowl's surface.* (*DICTEE*, 2001: 123)

In the above quotation, Cha explicitly connects the function of the diseuse (the female speaker) with the '*Diseuse de bonne aventure*', the female fortune-teller, one who prophesies the future. The operation of the *diseuse de bonne aventure* is performative, she has the power to 'call forth […] with her voice' and to effect changes within the material world. The short imperative statement, '[l]et her call forth' suggests that Cha recognises the performative potential of the speaking subject to bring new modes of being into the world. To speak is to call forth, to call into being that which has not yet become. Here the voice is both powerful and physical, it will 'penetrate earth's floor, the walls of Tartaurus [sic]'. The voice has undergone a transformation since the book's beginning when the diseuse was forced to resort to 'mimicking gestures with the mouth' (2001: 3). The *diseuse de bonne aventure* is *DICTEE*'s prophetic voice in action. What the figure gives voice to is the anticipatory illumination that illuminates the possibility of the enunciating subject in relation with the interpreting subject, that is, the possibility of a societal and linguistic structure without oppression. Jack Zipes states that 'The utopian quality of a work of art is determined by its *Vor-Schein* or anticipatory illumination. The anticipatory illumination is an image, a constellation … [that] illuminate[s] the possibilities for rearranging social and political relations' (Bloch, 1988: xxxiii). If the material semantics of *DICTEE* are called upon to function as the diseuse, which I argue that they are, then they also necessarily function as the *diseuse de bonne aventure*, prophesying or anticipating the possibility of a linguistic and social system without oppression that has not yet become and is therefore not yet fully realisable in the book's textual contents alone.

Through its materially foregrounded processes of enunciation, *DICTEE* as a book object enacts or invokes the possibility of self-enunciation denied to Cha as a silenced and exiled subject whose daily language is not her mother tongue. The book becomes the speaker of its own text in a materially embodied way. As suggested by Carrión (1985), however, the work of the book object holds the possibility of enunciating in such a way that the reading subject is not eclipsed by the prescriptions and intentions of the writing subject, offering the writing subject the possibility of enunciating *with* the reading subject in a move toward a utopian poetics of enunciation akin to John Wrighton's 'poethical trajectory' (2010)[47]. For Cha, then, the material processes of enunciation provide the possibility of enunciation within a linguistic, textual and social system in which she is acutely aware of her own position as the eclipsed and silenced, colonised and exiled Asian American subject, and equally aware of the dangers of her own potential as a writer to inhabit the space of the coloniser in relation to her reader. In a linguistic system that only offers these two dichotomised positions – the coloniser or the colonised, the speaker or the silenced, the subject or the object – Cha chooses to become neither. The much-analysed first half of *DICTEE* presents the painful problem of occupying the position of the object, the silenced, the colonised, and many critics have commented upon the impossibility of speech from within this position as a specifically Asian American subject (see for example Lisa Lowe [1996], Eun Kyung Min [1998]). As a writer, Cha could choose to occupy the other position in the dichotomy: that of the subject, the speaker, the coloniser – but this position is equally painful to her given her experience of being the recipient of such traumatising treatment herself. In terms of dominant modes of discourse, therefore, there are no positions left to occupy, so the would-be-diseuse remains silenced and gagged by the impossibility of participating in either of the destructive positions allocated by the linguistic system. This is where the utopian possibility of material semantics provides an alternative with emancipatory potential: the possibility to become a speaking/writing subject in contingent inter-relation with the listening/reading subject via the material form of the book object.

[47] Wrighton develops this term through an ethical reading of Joan Retallack's *The Poethical Wager* (2004).

Within the pages of *DICTEE*, the reader and writer encounter one another in the generative material spaces of the not-yet-become to co-create meaning that is not linear, prescriptive, 'uni-directional', but fluid, interpretive and multiple: requiring an inter-relationship between self and other, whereby writer and reader become 'Inseparabl[e]. Indefinabl[e]. Not isolatable terms' (2001: 51). Ernst Bloch states that, '[b]oth factors, the subjective as well as the objective, have to be understood in their continuous dialectical interplay, inseparable, impossible to isolate' (1988: 109). For Bloch, part of the utopian function of a work of art or literature is to facilitate the 'self-encounter' (1988: 100) between the subject and the object and to illuminate the interconnectivity between one and the other, self and other. It is the work of art or literature itself that becomes the space for this encounter in which the distance between self and other is infinitely reduced and made to function connectively. Jack Zipes explains that, 'Bloch returns our gaze to the tensions and mediations between the intender, tendency, and intention in the reception and use of works of art. Important here is the fact that *both author and receiver are intenders who come together through the work of art*' (in Bloch: xxx, my emphasis). Thus, in granting agency and inter-relational subjectivity to both the writer and the reader, Bloch explores the work of literature as a site of self-encounter between the writer and the receiver of the work. In this way, the utopian encounter between writing subject and reading subject that is encoded within the book's material forms and structures becomes a shared space for the contingent and productive work of generating meaning, where both subjects contribute their own agency to the process. This is a process that has not-yet-become in dominant linguistic, textual or social relations, but in Bloch's terms it is possible as the site of the utopian function and can be seen to be embodied within *DICTEE*'s material semantics.

For Cha then, it is vital that the listening/reading subject becomes an active agent in the work of meaning-construction through the text object in order for Cha herself to be able to occupy the space of the speaking/writing subject. In such a contingent and inter-relational process of subject formation, the position of active speaker/writer is contingent upon the equal position of the active listener/reader. Without the active and engaged agency of the listening/reading subject, the speaking/writing subject cannot come into being as a relational interlocutor. It is, I suggest, this inter-relational process of active subject formation via the book object that emancipates

both the reader and the writer of *DICTEE*. For the writer, the possibility to become an enunciating subject in relation with the receiving subject is granted through an exploration of the possibilities of the material semantics of the book form (where the reader's receptivity is not equal to passivity but to active engagement with the text). The material semantics of the book, then, become the diseuse that the speaker/writer cannot be alone, simultaneously enabling both the writer and the reader to enter into an active and relational hermeneutic engagement with the text.

Bloch makes a sustained argument for an aesthetic link between fragmentation in a work of art and its potential for anticipatory illumination. He states that, '[t]he shattering of the surface just as the shattering of the merely cultural and ideological circumstances in which the works had been situated uncovers the profundity wherever it is' (Bloch, 1988: 151). Cha's foregrounded material processes of enunciation represent a shattering of the surface of illusion perpetuated by 'absorptive' texts and their ostensibly oppressive relationship between the enunciating subject and the silenced object of address. Creating the space for an active and inter-relational reading subject through material and spatial fragmentation, Cha enacts the utopian function by bringing the intention of the reading subject into relation with the intention of the writing subject through the material space of the text object. Since this inter-relational subjectivity cannot be verbalised in dominant discourse or linguistic relationships, the material semantics of the book object function as a diseuse in a way that the written figure of the diseuse cannot: as one who enunciates in relation with an other, a speaking/writing subject in relation with a listening/reading subject.[48] To the extent that *DICTEE*'s material semantics enunciate an inter-relational subjectivity representative of a society without oppression, the book's materiality could be said to demonstrate an anticipatory illumination of the utopia that is possible but which has not-yet-become. In this way, the material processes of enunciation in *DICTEE* fulfil the role of the diseuse in three specific ways. By foregrounding the processes of enunciation the speaking/writing subject as diseuse is made possible within the book; by creating generative space to be occupied by the listening/reading subject as diseuse an attempt is made to make possible an inter-relational and non-oppressive subjectivity;

[48] As has been demonstrated in Part A of this thesis, however, *DICTEE*'s formal and linguistic innovations enable the text to speak materially, performing an intersubjectivity through the text's own material interventions.

by pronouncing the utopia that is possible but has not yet become objectively real the material semantics perform the role of the *diseuse de bonne aventure* – the prophetic speaker of anticipatory illumination.

CHAPTER FOUR

Utopian Poetics as Embodied Performance [49]

This chapter extends my research into embodiment and the performance of inter-relational subjectivity to examine earlier works by Theresa Hak Kyung Cha. Reading embodiment as specific, contingent and contextual, I demonstrate the material ways in which Cha's mail art piece, 'Audience Distant Relative' and her performance piece 'Reveillé dans la Brume' perform intersubjective possibilities through their embodiment. This chapter revisits Charles Olson's concepts of 'Projective Verse' and 'Proprioception' to provide embodied readings of Cha's material innovations.

> *Embodiment differs from the concept of the body in that the body is always normative relative to some set of criteria. ... In contrast to the body, embodiment is contextual, enmeshed within the specifics of place, time, physiology and culture, which together compose enactment. Embodiment never coincides exactly with "the body", however that normalized concept is understood. Whereas the body is an idealized form that gestures toward a Platonic reality, embodiment is the specific instantiation generated from the noise of difference. Relative to the body, embodiment is other and elsewhere, at once excessive and deficient in its infinite varieties, particularities and abnormalities.* N. Katherine Hayles

Section A of this thesis offered close readings and material analysis of the ways in which *DICTEE*'s formal textual innovations create an embodied and visceral effect on readers and provide multiple points of entry to the text. I would like to extend this reading, here, in exploring the materialities of the performed texts as they interact with both the linguistic materialities of the inscribed texts and the corporeal materialities of the reader. For this study, a close look at some of Cha's more conspicuously 'embodied' creations will be examined alongside *DICTEE*. This chapter will explore Cha's mail art work *Audience Distant Relative* and her performance piece *Reviellé dans la Brume (Awakened in the Mist)*, which both date to 1977, five years prior to the publication of *DICTEE*. As I intend to demonstrate in this chapter, Cha's artist books, mail art, performances and even *DICTEE*, demonstrate that it is not only the materiality of language that interests Cha, but also the material substrate upon which (or by which) that language is enacted and

[49] I am extremely grateful to Stephanie Cannizzo, curator of the Theresa Hak Kyung Cha Archive at the University of California, Berkeley, for her kind assistance in enabling me access to the archive resources in researching for this chapter. This research was made possible by a funding grant from the English, Linguistics and Cultural Studies department at the University of Westminster.

performed. As such, 'material substrate' here refers to the human body as much as to the text object.[50]

This chapter focuses on the material embodiment of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's poetic works, the material bodies of the readers and receivers of those works, and the physical interactions engendered by these encounters. What I intend to demonstrate is that each physical interaction enacts an embodied performance not only of the poetic work itself but also of the subject in her or his relation with that work – whether that subject is the artist or the receiver. The necessity for this enquiry arises as a result of what I see as a fundamental lack of attention to the material substrate of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's poetic works, despite their highly conspicuous materiality. This in turn stems from a more general critical aversion to the embodiment of both literary texts and subjects in contemporary innovative poetics and its scholarship. As has been discussed in the Introduction to this thesis, Language Poetry's disavowal of subjectivity has had problematic repercussions recently with particular regard to race and identity. In this chapter, I explore Language Poetry's specific disavowal of bodies and embodied poets. In 1998 Language poet Charles Bernstein edited the study *Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word*, which includes contributions from many prominent Language writers, including Steve McCafferey and Ron Silliman. The book's aim, as Bernstein states in the introduction is to bring together essays 'on poetry readings, the sound of poetry, and the visual performance of poetry' (1998: 3). *Close Listening* successfully asserts and examines the poetic work as a performed and plural text; that is, a text enacted by its various performances, whether oral, aural or visual, by which is denied the supposed metaphysical unity of 'the poem' as fixed and unchanging. Bernstein posits the 'audiotext' as the physical site of performance of the spoken poem, enacted by the receiving ear. Thus, the book approaches texts in their materiality and in their material interactions with the physical sense organs of the receiving subjects. What *Close Listening* does not explore, however, and what Bernstein emphatically dismisses (1998: 13), are the embodied subjectivities of the poet and the receiver and their material interactions with one another through the

[50] 'Material substrate' is an unsatisfactory term. One definition of 'substrate' is the material surface upon which something is inscribed. This does not fully render the integrated structure of the performed poem and its material embodiment towards which I intend to gesture here.

material substrate of the performed text.[51] For a Language Poet, such an exploration of material subjectivity would veer dangerously close to the assertion of a unified subject, and it is for this reason that I believe the embodied materialities of both subjects and literary works continue to be systematically overlooked in critical discourse. This is particularly striking an absence in the prevalent scholarly discourse on the work of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, since her work is embodied in its own material substrate to such an extent that its meaning is created in relation to its context. The foundations for my understanding of the contextual relationship between a literary text and its material substrate lie in the work of Katarzina Bazarnik and Zenon Fajfer, whose development of the term 'Liberature' underpins my reading of the text as an embodied object. In the 2005 study *Liberature* edited by Bazarnik, she states: 'The term [liberature] draws on the Latin word *liber*, meaning a book, because in the liberary work the form of the book is of fundamental importance. The physical space of the book (and in the case of shorter pieces, for example, the space of the page) is not a neutral container for words, but belongs to the work as a medium of artistic communication' (2005: 9). It is my argument in this chapter that the material substrates upon which and by which Cha's poetic texts are enacted work specifically in communication with the physical, material human bodies and subjectivities of those who interact with them. Moreover, it is through these interactions that the enactment of subjectivity can be understood to be itself a performance, and that through a close reading of physical bodies and their relations to materialised poetic works, the metaphysical fiction of the unified subject is more properly resisted than asserted. As such, the material performance of a work and its relation to the material performance of a subject together reveal the performed intersubjectivity of all subjects, the non-alienation at the centre of Ernst Bloch's utopian philosophy. With particular emphasis on two works by Theresa Hak Kyung Cha from 1977, the mail art work *Audience Distant Relative* and the performance piece *Reveillé dans la Brume (Awakened in the Mist)*, I will explore the significance of embodiment, its place within an understanding of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's artistic project, its role in subject-formation and its implications for utopian poetics.

[51] This point will be fully explored below.

Key to my understanding of embodiment in this context is that it is contextually specific and that it is performative. In *How We Became Posthuman* (1999), N. Katherine Hayles draws upon the work of Elizabeth Grosz and Paul Connerton, discussed below, to define the term 'embodiment'. She states that: 'In contrast to the body, embodiment is contextual, enmeshed within the specifics of place, time, physiology and culture, which together compose enactment' (1999: 196). This chapter adopts Hayles' definition of embodiment and will explore the ways in which its major characteristics are present within Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's art works and in the ways in which readers are invited to engage with those works. I have argued throughout this thesis that utopian poetics is the performance of a non-alienating and non-oppressive relationship via a literary text: this chapter will argue that embodiment may be experienced by the writer, the reader or comprise the dynamics of the text object itself, but that wherever it is present it constitutes a potential performance of the utopian – that is, non-alienation. I will begin with an exploration of the material structure of the book or text object as an embodied text, demonstrating its contextual specificity and performative elements, before examining the embodied experience of the performer, the reader and the writer. Finally, I will demonstrate how embodied practices can be understood as a potential performance of the utopian.

Embodied subjectivity attempts to recover the specificity of historically, racially, sexually, culturally irreducible bodies and to identify the intrinsic role that bodies play in shaping individual subjectivities and relationships. Elizabeth Grosz, in *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (1994), argues that '[t]he body has remained a conceptual blind spot in both mainstream Western philosophical thought and contemporary feminist theory'(1994: 3). She argues: 'Indeed, there is no body as such: there are only *bodies* – male or female, black, brown, white, large or small – and the gradations in between. […] There are always specific types of body, concrete in their determination' (1994: 19). *Volatile Bodies* is Grosz's response to the question: 'How, then, is a different analysis of the body to proceed?' (1994: 21). In answer, she suggests that 'it must avoid the impasse posed by dichotomous accounts of the person which first divide the subject into the mutually exclusive categories of mind and body' (1994: 21). She states, 'Although within our intellectual heritage there is no language in which to describe such concepts, no terminology that does

not succumb to versions of this polarization, some kind of understanding of *embodied subjectivity*, of *psychical corporeality* needs to be developed' (1994: 21-22, emphasis in original). In this sense, embodiment, or 'embodied subjectivity', refers to the necessary rejection of the kind of dichotomous thinking that keeps the concepts of the mind and the body separate while privileging the mind and its products. Crucially, Grosz states that: 'As soon as knowledge is seen as purely conceptual, its relation to bodies, the corporeality of both knowers and texts, and the ways these materialities interact, must become obscure' (1994: 4).[52] This chapter will attempt to rescue from obscurity this vital but neglected aspect of the work of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, asserting the 'corporeality of both knowers and texts', and exploring 'the ways these materialities interact'.

If, for Grosz, the body has remained a conceptual blind spot in Western philosophy and feminism, social anthropologist Paul Connerton – whose work is predominantly focused on memory studies – makes a similar assertion about the blindness of hermeneutic practice to bodily experiences. He argues that, 'in practice hermeneutics has taken inscription as its privileged object' (1989: 96). Connerton contrasts what he calls inscription or inscribing practices (writing in or upon; predominantly text, but also including activities such as tape recording, film, etc.) with what he calls incorporation or incorporating practices (embodying, embodiment; practices performed by the body, such as ritual, habit and gesture). Connerton's argument is that textual and documentary evidence is privileged in hermeneutic practice, to the neglect of physical practices rooted in embodiment. He cites as examples of incorporating practices worthy of hermeneutic attention ritual practices such as the Eucharist, and the rules governing clothing and status that may be either adopted voluntarily by a society following a revolution or aggressively imposed upon a people as part of an oppressive regime. He states: 'Clothes had the function of saying something about the status of the wearer and, what is equally important, of making that statement a habitual one. […] To read or wear clothes is in a significant respect similar to reading or composing a literary text' (1989: 11). That he finds clothing and habitual behaviour such an important – and neglected – area

[52] As has been argued previously in this thesis, numerous critics have explored the ways certain Conceptual Poetry projects not only obscure but efface and disavow the corporealities and specificities of embodiment.

for hermeneutic study and deems it comparable to literary composition and analysis is significant in the context of Cha's visceral assault on the limitations of the written text, specifically the historical document, in *DICTEE* (2001). In the CLIO HISTORY section, Cha quotes extensively from F.A. McKenzie's *The Tragedy of Korea*, explicitly listing the 'endless ordinances' and 'new regulations' imposed upon the Korean people by their Japanese colonists (2001: 28). McKenzie notes that of these, 'some [were] trivial, some striking at the oldest and most cherished institutions in the country' (2001: 29). Furthermore, 'The Japanese advisers instituted a number of sumptuary laws that stirred the country to its depths, relating to the length of pipes, style of dress, and the attiring of the hair of the people' (29). Connerton argues that the imposition of such rules as these governing people's hair, habits and associated changes in styles of clothing 'mark the attempt to establish a new set of typical *bodily practices* […] [by which] a habit of servitude is incorporated into the behaviour of the servile group by way of their own habits of bodily deportment' (1989: 10, emphasis in original). These habits become the physical repository of memory on an individual and collective scale. Cha's awareness of the physicality of this kind of oppression, and the limitations of the historical document (such as McKenzie's) to sufficiently encapsulate physical memory is summarized three pages later in *DICTEE* when she writes:

> To the other nations who are not witnesses, who are not subject to the same oppressions, they cannot know. Unfathomable the words, the terminology: enemy, atrocities, conquest, betrayal, invasion, destruction. They exist only in the larger perception of History's recording, that affirmed, admittedly and unmistakably, one enemy nation has disregarded the humanity of another. 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.
>
> (2001: 32, emphasis in original)

The short isolated phrase 'Not physical enough', embedded within the longer syntactical constructions composed of several clauses and phrases each, carries the weight of this paragraph and provides the pivot between the textual (or inscriptive) and physical (or incorporative) records of this particular historical event (the Japanese colonisation of Korea). For Cha, here, the words are 'unfathomable' and the documentary evidence of '[h]istory's recording' is pointedly '[n]ot physical enough'. The embodied experiences of individuals living with and experiencing the imposition of oppressive rules governing their bodily habits cannot be conveyed in

the transmission of textual documents alone, some other method is required, one that reaches 'to the very flesh and bone'. For this, the inscribed word must be embodied within a materially incorporative substrate with which the reader can interact physically and that will enable the receiver direct access to the knowledge and memories stored within their own habitual gestures.[53] As Connerton argues, '[i]n habitual memory the past is … sedimented in the body' (1989: 72). Thus, in essence, '[h]abit is a knowledge and a remembering in the hands and in the body; and in the cultivation of habit it is our body which "understands"' (1989: 95). It is my suggestion that Cha makes an attempt to recover the lost physicality of knowledge, memory, understanding and experience through her artworks, whilst rejecting the dualism that would create false oppositions between the products of the mind and the experiences of the body – or 'inscription' versus 'incorporation'. In her attempt to recover this lost physicality, Cha foregrounds the material substrate of her text works and physically enacts her poetry in performance. Each work thus becomes an embodied performance: a contextually specific enactment of a poetic text dependent upon its physical substrate – whatever the material foundation of that substrate may be. The remainder of this chapter is divided into three main sections. In the first section I examine the material interactions between subjects and text objects in my analysis of the material substrate of *Audience Distant Relative* and the specific gestural responses it invites. In the second I explore the proprioceptive performance of subjectivity in my analysis of Cha's performance piece *Reveillé dans la Brume*. In the third section I return to *Audience Distant Relative* to examine the act of subvocalization as both a physical locus for textual performance and as integral to subject-formation and intersubjectivity. This is followed by a conclusion exploring the implications of embodied performance for utopian poetics.

Material Interactions between Subjects and Text Objects

Hayles' argument that '[i]n contrast to inscription, which can be transported from context to context once it has been performed, incorporation can never be cut

[53] Section A of this thesis has explored the ways that physicality is embodied within the linguistic and syntactical innovations of *DICTEE*'s textual materiality. This section is primarily concerned with the ways in which the book itself functions as a material object in interaction with embodied subjects.

entirely free from its context' (1999: 200), coupled with Grosz's assertion that the body has remained a conceptual blind spot and Connerton's argument that inscription has formed the privileged object of hermeneutics, illuminates the particular lack of attention to material substrate that has characterised critical responses to Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *DICTEE* and other works, including her text objects. Whereas the textual content of many literary works might be 'transported from context to context once it has been performed', Cha's text objects, which include *DICTEE*, derive intrinsic meaning from their materiality *as* objects, which shapes the ways in which the reader is encouraged to interact with them. *Audience Distant Relative* was first presented as a work of mail art at the Gallerie Lóa in 1977 and subsequently printed in alternative contexts and formats during Cha's lifetime in two small magazines: *The Little Word Machine* (West Yorkshire, England), (1978): 10-11; and *The Solar Cavern* (Berkeley, CA) 1, no. 2 (1978): 13-15. Each of these should be regarded as a specific performance of the work according to its enactment within its particular context. This study is specifically focused on the 1977 work of mail art. The piece is composed of seven individual folded cards in envelopes posted to the Gallerie Lóa in the Netherlands, one on each day between 8 November 1977 and 14 November 1977. Each envelope bears the stencilled name of the poem that is printed onto the interior of the folded white card. This work is both a poem (or series of short poems[54]) and a material text object – that is, as in many of Cha's works, both the textual and the material elements are significant.

Archive evidence at the Theresa Hak Kyung Cha Archive[55] demonstrates the importance of material construction, spatiality, textual positioning and other physical attributes in the composition of Cha's text objects, with several maquettes (three-dimensional models or studies) being constructed for many of her most significant text objects. *Audience Distant Relative* is among those works for which Cha produced a series of preparatory maquettes, suggesting that the materiality of the object is as significant to an understanding of the whole piece as an analysis of the

[54] Jerome Rothenberg asks, in *Technicians of the Sacred* (1969), 'Can many poems be a single poem as well?' He answers, '(They often are)' (xxi). Rothenberg's ideas may have been highly influential to Cha's artist peer-group, many of whom, including Cha herself, developed various forms of ritual as artistic method. Throughout this chapter, I will be referring to *Audience Distant Relative* as both a single poem and as a series of individual shorter poems.

[55] Theresa Hak Kyung Cha Archive, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, University of California, Berkeley.

text. Moreover, in her first letter to the gallery dated 8 November 1977, which also included a sound recording of Cha speaking the words of the poem, Cha writes:

> [T]his piece is divided into seven parts. Each day, I will mail these envelopes, please present the envelopes as well, with the contents. The audience who come to the gallerie should be able to open from the white envelope and read the contents, as if they were personally addressed to them, involving the same gestures that everyone goes through when they receive a letter. (Perhaps they whould [sic: would? should?] be laid out on a table according to the dates mailed) – The sound tape should be played simultaneously.
>
> Letter from Cha to Rivin Fannberg, Gallerie Loa, 8 November 1977 (1977a)

Clearly here the physical substrate – the cards and envelopes and their placing in relationship to one another – is as intrinsic an element of this work as the poetry itself, which is both printed onto the cards and played simultaneously as a recording of Cha's voice on the tape. I will explore the significance of the oral/aural element of this work further below, but here I would like to focus particularly on the materiality of the objects and the gestural specificities they invite.

In this mail art series of poem-objects, an interpersonal relationship is implied between the sender of the mail (Cha) and the receiver of the letters, in this case the gallery audience via the gallery. Cha commits herself to carrying out a particular physical act (mailing the envelopes) every day for seven consecutive days in order to fulfil her part of the interaction required by this piece, in an almost ritualistic performance. The performance, for Cha, presumably involves following specific gestures: to fold the cards and place them into the envelopes, to place the display envelopes into larger envelopes for posting, to seal the envelopes and affix a stamp, to take the envelopes to a mail box or post office, and to post the envelopes into the mail slot. The receiver, subsequently, is invited to open each envelope, take out the contents, open the folded card and read the printed words. Cha intends for the experience to be intimate and personal – 'as if [the envelopes] were personally addressed' to each of the gallery's visitors. Moreover, she intends for the reader to interact with the materiality of the objects through the performance of specific physical gestures – 'the same gestures that everyone goes through when they receive a letter' – as an inextricable component of the reading experience. Paul Connerton suggests that the enactment of habitual gestures is performative – that the enactment constitutes its being – and that it is constitutive of a particular kind of memory

located within the body. In *Audience Distant Relative* Cha chooses a physical substrate that invites a particular kind of habitual gesture from her readers (the opening of a letter) which is intended to be both intimate and familiar, as well as belonging to culturally and historically specific contexts. That these gestures are chosen specifically to evoke memory – both individual and cultural – speaks to Cha's desire to incorporate the act of remembrance that is lost in historical documentation. For each receiver who opens the envelopes, however, a different and individual set of memories and associations will be triggered by the gesture, making the reception of the poetic work contextually specific to the receiver. The gestures themselves are performative, in that they constitute an instantiation of the gesture linked to specific memories, rather than offer a description of the desired gesture or memory. Hayles states that, '[a]n incorporating practice such as a good-bye wave cannot be separated from its embodied medium, for it exists as such only when it is instantiated in a particular hand making a particular kind of gesture' (1999: 198). Thus, the embodied practice is intrinsically both performative and contextual: it is performed by a particular body making a particular gesture at a particular time and in a particular place. In such a way, both subjects and texts are brought into material interactions by which the poem itself is performed in the physical gestures of the one who reads it.[56]

As Cha's letter demonstrates, the physical movements enacted in the creation and reception of *Audience Distant Relative* are intended to evoke the habitual gestures, or memories, associated with an intimate and personal relationship. A close analysis of the contents of each card confirms that the words of the poetry are also intended to constitute a performance of such a relationship; yet the words themselves allow for the distance between the artist and the receiver to be both foregrounded and bridged by the text object.

audience
distant relative

you are the audience
you are my distant audience
i address you

[56] This speaks to my own viscerally embodied experience of first reading *DICTEE*, as explored in Chapter One of this thesis.

as i would a distant relative
seen only heard only through someone else's description.

neither you nor i
are visible to each other
i can only assume that you can hear me
i can only hope that you hear me

The first envelope in the series is marked on the outside with the words 'audience distant relative' stacked vertically with audience at the top and relative at the bottom, while 'distance' separates the two. The 'i' in each word is oversized and looks like a capital 'I' with a dot above it. This is consistent across all the poem titles on the outside of each envelope. Within each poem, however, the letter 'i' denoting the self or the subject of the poem's speaker is consistently lower case. Such graphic foregrounding of the first person singular pronoun suggests that the work speaks to the idea of subjectivity, which is further confirmed by the poetry and the gestural responses it invites.

Upon opening the envelope, a folded card printed with the words 'audience distant relative' on the front would be obtained by the gallery visitor. The words are set in a triangular relation to one another, with 'audience' located at the top centre of the triangle, above the words 'distant' on the left and 'relative' on the right, suggesting that the words may act upon one another relationally, as well as linearly. In bringing the words into sets of relationships, one might read either 'audience distant', 'audience relative', 'distant relative', or other combinations which reverse and recombine these constructions. To read the audience as being distant suggests the physical distance between the location of the artist and the location of the receiver, but it could also suggest temporal distance, or a mental or emotional distance. 'Audience relative' might complicate this initial reading, as it suggests the relational properties that exist between the artist and her audience, that they are entering into a relationship with one another, or that they can be defined relationally in their relative positions to one another. Indeed, both the terms 'artist' and 'audience' can only be defined in terms of their relative values, a relationship which is both performed and mediated by the text object. 'Distant relative' suggests the intimacy of a familial relationship, albeit not a close one, but perhaps the kind of family member with whom one might communicate by the exchange of frequent or occasional letters such as might be contained within the envelopes on display.

This first public display of *Audience Distant Relative*, at the Gallerie Lóa in 1977, included not only the textual and material performance of the poetry on the printed cards inside each envelope, but also the simultaneous playing of a sound recording of Cha's voice speaking the words of each poem. As Cha instructs in her letter to Rivin Fannberg dated 8 November 1977: 'The sound tape should be played simultaneously' (1977a). This tape may have been played on a loop while visitors to the exhibition handled and read the material poems. For the visitor, then, the poetry would have been experienced aurally, through the stimulation of the eardrums, as well as physically through the gestures required to manipulate the material construction of the cards and envelopes and visually through the printed words. Visitors to the exhibition would have encountered *Audience Distant Relative* as a multisensory experience, stimulating multiple senses and engaging their bodies in a variety of ways. Such a method, however, both activates and demonstrates the plurality of the text and its contextual contingency in performance. For example, despite Cha's suggestion that the envelopes would, or should, be laid out chronologically according to the dates posted, there is no guarantee that visitors would necessarily have opened them in the set order. Indeed, the presentation of the poems as individual, tactile objects provides the reader the freedom to choose their own order of interaction, rather than being constrained by the usually linear progression of either a bound codex or a curated exhibition in which the works are displayed in sequence on the walls. Given that the tape might be playing at any part of the recording when the visitor opens each envelope, there remains much opportunity for disparity between the sound recording and the silent reading, even in the case that the reader should choose to open the envelopes in sequence. This means that any given reader will experience a differently configured performance of the work from any other. Some may hear the sound of Cha reading the words that they themselves are reading, while others – perhaps more likely – would experience a dislocation between the words they read on the cards and the words they hear in the recording, further increasing the relative distance between audience and artist, sender and receiver. Thus, the reception of *Audience Distant Relative* at the Gallerie Lóa in 1977 would have been an entirely contextual experience for each individual encounter. As such, *Audience Distant Relative* performs a very marked example of what Charles Bernstein calls '"the plural event" of the work'.

In *Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word* (1998), Bernstein makes the following argument:

> A poem understood as a performative event and not merely as a textual entity refuses the originality of the written document in favor of "the plural event" of the work […] To speak of the poem in performance is, then, to overthrow the idea of the poem as a fixed, stable, finite linguistic object; it is to deny the poem its self-presence and its unity. (1998: 9)

Thus, those first receivers of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Audience Distant Relative* at the Gallerie Lóa would have experienced a plural work, a text not equal to itself, whose material presence is emphasised but whose unitary presence is denied. The work, moreover, continues to exist in multiple forms: Cha produced numerous maquettes of the printed cards in various stages of completion; an early draft of the text typed onto rough paper with hand-written annotations demonstrates the poem's iterations through the writing process; the mail art and sound tape exhibited at the gallery embody a particularly material public performance of the work, while the printed texts published in *The Little Word Magazine* (West Yorkshire, England, 1978) and *The Solar Cavern* (Berkeley, CA, 1978) in Cha's lifetime, and subsequent publications featured in *The Dream of the Audience* (2001) and *Exilée / Temps Morts* (2009) offer alternative public performances of what both is and is not the 'same' work. As a performance, or plural event, 'the poem' is – as Hayles argues about embodiment – 'contextual, enmeshed within the specifics of space, time, physiology and culture' (1999: 196). Furthermore, in Hayles' terms, '[e]mbodiment never coincides exactly with "the body", however that normalized concept is understood' (1999: 196). For Bernstein, then, the plural event of the work never coincides exactly with the normalized concept of 'the poem': the poem is always plural, contextual and enmeshed within the specifics of its particular performance. Poetry in its enactment as material, visual, aural or multi-sensory work (such as *Audience Distant Relative*) is both a plural event and an embodied performance. Indeed, it is the embodied performance of the work that specifically denies the metaphysical unity of 'the poem'.

The Proprioceptive Performance of Subjectivity

Whilst Bernstein identifies a work's plurality in performance, however, he is careful to deny the presence of the poet, or performer, as an embodied subject. He argues in *Close Listening*:

> The poetry reading enacts the poem not the poet; it materializes the text not the author; it performs the work not the one who composed it. In short, the significant fact of the poetry reading is less the presence of the poet than the presence of the poem. (1998: 13)

Emphatically disavowing the 'presence of the poet', Bernstein recalls Language Poetry's earlier problematic disavowals of subjectivity, discussed in Chapter Two. Drawing on Charles Olson's concept of proprioception, Bernstein makes a critical distinction between 'the mouth and tongue and vocal chords' enacting the poem in performance and the 'presence of the poet' (1998: 13). Whilst I agree that this recognition of the materiality of the text in a form that Bernstein calls the 'audiotext', performed between the physical organs of speech and the vibratory movements of the eardrum, does gesture towards what Olson termed 'Proprioception', in the categorical denial of the embodied subject of either the poet/performer or the receiver/listener I would argue that it does so only partially. In making this contrast, Bernstein specifically bisects the central tenet of Olson's early manifesto Projective Verse (1997 [1950]). In this manifesto, Olson famously states that:

> The two halves are:
> the HEAD, by way of the EAR, to the SYLLABLE
> the HEART, by way of the BREATH, to the LINE (1997: 242)

If the audiotext specifically activates the aurality of the text, that is the sound, it is enacting a movement from the vocal apparatus of the speaker via the syllable to the ear of the listener, and thence to the head. In favouring this aspect of the text's performance, Bernstein seems to remain within the dichotomy of Cartesian duality at the level of the mind or intellect. Olson asserts, 'I am dogmatic, that the head shows in the syllable. The dance of the intellect is there' (1997: 242). For Olson, the intellectual dance must be coupled with its counterpart, the 'threshing floor for the dance […] the LINE' (1997: 243), which, by way of the breath, enters or activates the heart: that is, the internal workings of the physical body. Whilst this understanding of Olson's conception of the heart may not be immediately obvious from Projective Verse, it is explored more thoroughly in Olson's later essays,

particularly Human Universe (1974 [1951]) and Proprioception (1965). Proprioception begins as follows:

> Physiology: the surface (senses – the 'skin' : of 'Human Universe') the body itself – proper – one's own 'corpus' : PROPRIOCEPTION the cavity of the body, in which the organs are slung: the viscera, or interoceptive, the old 'psychology' of feeling, the heart; of desire, the liver; of sympathy, the 'bowels'; of courage – kidney etc – gall.
>
> (1965: 1)

Olson here equates proprioception specifically with the internal 'cavity of the body, in which the organs are slung', specifically, the heart and other organs. As such, when he asserts in Projective Verse that the heart leads, by way of the breath, to the line, Olson is emphatically describing the projection outwards of the interior sensation of oneself as an embodied subject via the apprehension of one's own corpus. Olson defines proprioception as 'the data of depth sensibility […] SENSIBILITY WITHIN THE ORGANISM BY MOVEMENT OF ITS OWN TISSUES' (1965: 1). For Olson, proprioception, the sense by which a human being apprehends one's own 'corpus', is specifically the sense of one's own internal depth in relation to external objects. Such knowledge of one's own internal depth is implicitly connected to the heart and other internal organs, which Olson states is accessed and activated by the breath. To divide this from the stimulation of the intellect via the syllable, or the audiotext, is only partially to gesture towards Olson's proprioception at best, and to risk enacting a Cartesian duality at worst. Eireene Nealand identifies this systemic blind-spot towards the physiological ramifications of Olson's Proprioception in contemporary poetry and criticism in her thesis *Beyond the Perceptual Model: Toward a Proprioceptive Poetics* (2014). She argues that: 'although "Proprioception" continues to be read in conjunction with "Projective Verse," most poets and critics read the physiological how-to of "Proprioception" as a merely curious addendum. As such, Olson's programme has been implemented only in part' (2014: 4). What Nealand identifies as Olson's programme in 'Proprioception' is specifically that: 'in order to accomplish the full scale epistemological, ontological, eidetic and aesthetic shifts he proposes in his early manifesto [Projective Verse] poets will have to reconsider not only knowledge or objects, identities or meanings, but the very physiologies of which we are made'

(2014: 7). While Bernstein and other Language poets have disavowed both the writer's physiology and subjectivity, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's text and performance works continually foreground the presence and the question of embodied subjectivity.

Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's 10th June 1977 performance of *Reveillé dans la Brume (Awakened in the Mist)* at the Fort Mason Centre for the *San Francisco Art Institute Annual* is an example, I would argue, of a proprioceptive work. The performance demonstrates that embodied subjectivity, when understood proprioceptively, resists metaphysical unity. The performance was designed to engage the embodied subjectivities of each member of the audience through the employment of sensory stimuli in conjunction with, and sometimes in contrast to, the use of language. In her description of the piece, Cha writes: 'As one enters, the space is dimly lit. […] When everyone is seated, the lights are turned off. The space is totally dark' (1977b artist statement: 1). As an audience member, one's initial experience of the work would be physical and sensory. A sense of oneself in the space, evoked by Cha's unsettling darkness, would stimulate a heightened sense of one's physical boundaries: a sense of the location of oneself in relation to the space and everyone else within it is likely to have been intensified by finding oneself suddenly in total darkness. Cha herself, the performer/poet, is located 'in the centre of the space, standing away from the audience', she 'light[s] a match and circle[s] [her] arm and body until the match goes out' (1977b: 1). This brief and insufficient source of light would reveal the location of Cha in her relation to the audience, would provide further stimulation to the senses – at least visual, aural and olfactory through the sulphurous smell of the struck match – and would perform a circular movement in Cha's body observed by the audience members. At this point, a sound tape begins to play a recording of Cha's voice speaking the following words: 'FIRE FLY / GLOW WORM / FIRE FLIES / GLOW WORMS', while 'the gesture of lighting the match is repeated and ends with the voice' (1977b: 1). Here Cha's performance is both linguistic and sensory, creating both a metaphoric relationship and a dissonant contradiction between the words and her actions, which would have had an undeniably palpable effect on the bodies and senses of her audience members. Cha's friend and contemporary, Yong Soon Min, confirms that these performances affected her physically when she witnessed them. She states: 'The striking quality of her

[Cha's] work is that it's mesmerizing. I've seen both her tapes, her films, as well as her multi-media performance installation works. All of them have that quality – they sort of lower your blood pressure and put you in this very tranquil, meditative state of mind'[57]. Of the various ways that Min remembers being affected, the lowering of one's blood pressure is a physical, embodied experience of the kind of internal depth data posited by Olson as proprioceptive.

As part of the performance, five-second lap dissolves of projected words were projected onto a door in the centre of the back wall. The projected words were a series of nouns and phrases related to the words 'ENTRANCE' and 'EXIT', including words such as 'INLET / ORIFICE / MOUTH', 'BORDER / FRONTIER / ADMISSION / ACCESS', 'GO / DEPART / BE GONE' and 'LEAVE NO TRACE / BE LOST TO VIEW / PASS OUT OF SIGHT' (1977b: 3). These paratactic strings of nouns and phrases invite association, connection, memory and imagination from the audience members, and would stimulate a unique set of associations and experiences for each individual present, making the work plural, multiple, contextual and specific to each receiver. Where Cha pushes the proprioceptive beyond its linguistic implications, however, is in the ways that the whole performance stimulates the sensory awareness of one's body in relationship to its external environment. Following the projection of the words, ten-second lap dissolve slides were projected over the door; the slides showed images of the same door in various progressive stages of opening and closing – these had been prepared prior to the performance. In this way, the performance itself interacts with the space within which it occurs and is dependent upon the physical and spatial context of its location. At this point in the performance Cha inserts her own body into the projected image, as she 'enter[s] the image from the middle of the space, [and] begin[s] to walk very slowly into the image, towards the image' (1977b: 4). Cha describes the process as follows:

> I become part of the projection in shadow, as well as moving further into the image, physically. During the lap dissolves, I alternate between walking very very slowly, to remaining motionless. I am moving sync[h]ronously with the door, moving further and further while the audiotape is being played synchronously. (1977b: 4)

[57] Extracted from videotape interview with Yong Soon Min by Portia Cobb and Moira Roth, New York, May 27, 1988. Taken from notes held at the Theresa Hak Kyung Cha Archive, University of California, Berkeley.

For Cha, here, there is no distinction or separation between the physical body of the performer, the projected images, the spoken words (on the audiotape), or the space and time of the performance. She states: 'I become part of the projection', emphasising that she moves into the image 'physically'. Her synchronicity with both the projection and the audiotape suggest a sense not only of the timing of her physical movements with both the sounds and images, but also, in the repetition of the word 'synchronously' implying the importance of time/ing: of the contextual duration of the enactment of the performance, the time of its being. By inserting her own body into the performance, Cha becomes simultaneously the performing subject and the performed object[58]. As such, the metaphysical unity of her subjectivity is disrupted by contextual specificity of the performance of which she becomes a part.

For Olson, the advantage of the proprioceptive is that it is intrinsic to a full realisation of Projective Verse. Olson makes clear in Proprioception that the proprioceptive is a fundamental element of what enables verse to be, or become, projective. He states:

> The gain: to have a third term, so that *movement* or *action* is "home." Neither the Unconscious nor Projection (here used to remove the false opposition of "Conscious"; "consciousness" is self) have a home unless the DEPTH implicit in physical being – built-in space-time specifics, and moving (by movement of "its own") – is asserted, or found-out as such. Thus the advantage of the value "proprioception" As such. (1965: 2)

Here the significance of proprioception is that it provides a constant sensory mediation between what Olson calls the Unconscious and Projection. Elsewhere in Proprioception Olson makes clear that by the Unconscious he means both the depth cavity of the physical body and 'the universe flowing-in', and by Projection he means the 'direction outward' of this internal sensory data (1965: 2). He concludes, in a paragraph marked 'Identity', that 'projection is discrimination (of the object from the subject) and the unconscious is the universe flowing-in, inside' (1965: 2). This explicitly suggests that the term 'projection' in Projective Verse is the movement outwards of proprioceptive depth-data: data that pertains specifically to the internal sensory knowledge of one's own physical corpus and its relation to

[58] This recalls Cha's desire to be 'the dream of the audience' in *A Ble Wail* (1975).

external stimuli. Proprioception, therefore, is a process of the materially resistant physiological corpus that mediates between internal and external sensory stimuli, thus forming the 'Identity' of the subject that apprehends itself as distinct, yet not separate, from others who are also not identical to itself. It is the embodied, sensory experience of one's internal relationship with the external world, which directly contradicts the concept of a separate and unified (alienated) subject.

A proprioceptive understanding of the presence of the poet in performance, therefore, would not result in the assertion of a metaphysically unified subject, but in the performance of a contextually embodied subject whose physical corpus is in constant mediation between its internal and external environments. Moreover, Hayles explores the argument that, '[t]he closer one comes to the flux of embodiment, […] the more one is aware that the coherent self is a fiction invented out of panic and fear. In this view, embodiment subversively undercuts essentialism rather than reinforces it' (1999: 201). Further, Elizabeth Grosz argues, 'the individuality of the body, of things, is the consequence of their specific modalities, their concrete determinations, and their interactions with the determinations of other things' (1994: 11). Both 'embodiment' and 'proprioception' are thus products of the mediation between one's internal and external environments, whilst also always creating productive tensions through their heterogeneity. In Olson's terms the corpus is, 'the intermediary, the intervening thing, the interruptor, the resistor' (1965: 2). This, as has been seen from Proprioception, suggests that bodies are not separate and unified entities, but are in fact a 'consequence' of the contextual and dynamic interaction between their internal and external environments. Thus, the subject of the poet or the body of the performer is no less an embodied, contextualised performance than the poem itself. There is no unified subject: there is only the contextual performance of subjectivity as it is projected into the material world through the physiological corpus of the performer.

Subvocalization: The Embodied Performance of Both Text and Subject

In introducing the concept of the audiotext (the aural text performed by the vocal apparatus when a poem is spoken aloud) Charles Bernstein, above, makes reference to the 'phonotext' when he states that, '[a]urality is meant to invoke a performative

sense of "phonotext" or audiotext and might better be spelled a/orality' (1998: 13). The phonotext, according to Garrett Stewart in *Reading Voices* (1990), is the text performed by the reader during silent reading, through a process of subvocalization. Subvocalization is an embodied process enacted by the reader's vocal apparatus, and it is this process that I will now explore in terms of its performance both of the text and of the subject. What I intend to demonstrate in this section is the embodied role of subvocalization in the performance of non-alienated subjectivity, and the ways in which Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's works perform an enactment of this in both form and content. Thus exploring the physical substrate of the process by which the subject becomes intersubjective. For this, I will return to an analysis of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Audience Distant Relative* (1977a).

In *Reading Voices* (1990), Garrett Stewart posits the phonotext as the text '*performed* in reading, performed *upon* an inscription' (20: emphasis in original). Significantly, the phonotext is performed within the physical body of the silent reader, specifically in the reader's vocal apparatus[59]. Cha includes an anatomical diagram of the vocal apparatus on page 74 of *DICTEE*, as part of the URANIA ASTRONOMY section (2001: 74). The vocal apparatus, as depicted in the anatomical diagram, consists of muscles, bones, ligaments and cartilage, such as the pharynx, larynx, trachea, vocal folds, epiglottis, hyoid bone and cricoid cartilage. This is not only the physical apparatus of speech, but also the physical locus of the phonotext, performed during silent reading via the act of subvocalization. Stewart states that:

> The place of reading into which [*Reading Voices*] inquires is none other than the reading body. This somatic locus of soundless repetition includes of course

[59] This is confirmed by Ake. W. Edfeldt's 1959 study *Silent Speech and Silent Reading*, in which he describes the physical process enacted by silent reading and lists the specific muscles that are activated. '*The occurrence of activity in the speech musculature during reading.* As has already been stated in a preliminary report […] relevant electric activity was found in the speech musculature of all our subjects during reading as well as during audible intonation. The individual muscles from which the most reliable recordings giving these results were made were the vocal muscle, the posterior cricoarytenoid muscle, cricothyroid muscle and the mylohyoid muscle. Of these, the nature of the records from the activity of the vocal muscle and the posterior cricoarytenoid muscle indicated that even very small movements in the speech musculature were shown in the recordings from these muscles. This applied almost to the same extent to the records from the mylohyoid muscle. On the other hand the results obtained from the cricothyroid muscle during reading were slight. *The basic question whether or not electric activity, a symptom of muscular activity, occurs in the speech musculature during reading can thus be considered to be answered in the affirmative'* (65, emphasis in original).

> the brain but must be said to encompass as well the organs of vocal production, from diaphragm up through throat to tongue and palate. Silent reading locates itself, that is, in the conjoint cerebral activity and suppressed muscular action of a simultaneously summoned and silenced enunciation. (1990: 1)

Thus, for Stewart, the act of reading is an embodied process that performs the phonotext through the (suppressed) muscular action of the reader's vocal organs. In reference to this simultaneous summoning and suppression of vocal enunciation, Stewart argues that: 'Where we read to ourselves is thus the place, always, of a displacement, a disenfranchisement of voice, a silencing' (1990: 2). This, as has been well documented, is a central theme of *DICTEE*. The disenfranchisement and silencing of the voice figures prominently in Cha's works in various media spanning the length of her artistic career, and is an equally prominent theme in the prevalent scholarship on her work. What is significant in the context of embodiment and non-alienation, however, is that such displacement also makes possible the opening and orientation of one body to another. As Elizabeth Grosz argues: '[H]uman bodies have the wonderful ability, while striving for integration and cohesion, organic and psychic wholeness, to also provide for and indeed produce fragmentations, fracturings, dislocations that orient bodies and body parts toward other bodies and body parts' (1994: 13). In *Audience Distant Relative*, as in all of Cha's works, these dislocations orient the writer toward the reader and the reader toward the writer, or the self toward the other. Indeed, the subvocalization of the phonotext is not only performed by the reading subject during reception, but is also equally performed by the writing subject during composition. As Charles Olson makes clear in Projective Verse:

> It is the advantage of the typewriter that, due to its rigidity and its space precisions, it can, for a poet, indicate exactly the breath, the pauses, the suspensions even of syllables, the juxtapositions even of parts of phrases, which he [sic] intends. For the first time he can, without the convention of rime and meter, record the listening he has done to his own speech and by that one act indicate how he would want any reader, silently or otherwise, to voice his work. (1997: 245)

The performance of the phonotext, thus, casts writer into the role of reader (as silent reader during composition of the work) and reader into the role of writer (as

composer of the phonotext in the subvocalized reading of the work), resisting sharp distinctions between the role and subjectivity of 'writer' and 'reader'. The writer both composes and reads the phonotext, while the reader both reads and reconstructs it: both thus enact its performance and are writer and reader together.

Stewart argues that '[t]he recognition of such a somatic quotient in the reading of writing, though having nothing to do with the "internalization" of written ideas or ideation as such, nevertheless carries indirect but profound implications for the relation of subjectivity to text production, of consciousness to language' (1990: 3). Hayles elaborates on the implications of subvocalization for subject-formation, arguing that, 'several interesting possibilities arise' from the embodied performance of the phonotext:

> First, the bodily enactment of suppressed sound plays a central role in the reading process. Second, reading is akin to the interior monologue that we all engage in, except that it supplies us with another story, usually a more interesting one than that provided by the stream of subvocalized sound coming out of our own consciousness. Third, the production of subvocalized sound may be as important to subjectivity as it is to literary language.
>
> (1999: 207)

In drawing out the connections between subvocalized reading and the production of one's own interior monologue as 'the stream of subvocalized sound coming out of our own consciousness', Hayles recognises that the physical process of subvocalized reading in the vocal apparatus is identical to the physical process of constructing one's own interior monologue through thought. The internal 'voice' that one 'hears' is performed, in both reading and thinking, by the suppressed movements of the vocal apparatus. Thus, the voice that one hears is the same voice, whether one is thinking 'one's own' thoughts or reading the words of another. Furthermore, each act constitutes a performance of the same process.

The implications for this chapter are, therefore, twofold. First, that the processes of both reading and subject-formation can be understood to be physically embodied processes, performed by the vocal apparatus during subvocalization. Second, that there is no physiological distinction between these two processes. Therefore, to extend Hayles' argument, the 'other story' that reading supplies us with is not only 'more interesting' than our own interior monologue, but essentially, it is the words

and the story of an other. If, in the reading process, the material we are subvocalizing is somebody else's words – as it very often is – then the process of subject formation becomes akin to the metabolic process as described by Grosz[60]: '[M]etabolism is not simply a system of energy inputs provided from outside the machine-body but is a continuous process in the self-constitution of the organism' (1994: 11). This metabolic process is constitutive of a text such as *DICTEE*'s formal dynamics. Incorporating into its composition a wide variety of 'external' sources, including both textual and visual elements, these materials are then re-constituted into *DICTEE*'s own internal fabric[61]. In turn, the reader reads these elements as part of the 'whole' of *DICTEE*, re-composing the text in the form of the phonotext performed by the reader's own vocal apparatus. As such, the external inputs (another's words), in becoming part of the reader's subvocalization become part of the process of the reader's 'self-constitution', or subject-formation, in a continuous process by which the words of another are metabolised to become a part of oneself through the embodied process of subvocalization. Moreover, subject formation, as a metabolic process in the act of reading, is an embodied process irreducible from the physical apparatus upon which it relies.

Audience Distant Relative (1977a) contains an envelope marked on the front with the words 'letter / sendereceiver'. Inside this envelope would be placed the folded card marked with the same title on the front (the words are aligned left on the envelope and centred on the card) which contains the following poem inside:

> this is a letter read aloud.
> upon opening it
> you hear the sender's voice as your eyes move over the
> words. you, the receiver, seeing the sender's image
> speak over the
> voice.

The collapsing of the visual space between the two words 'sender' and 'receiver', with the grapheme 'r' acting as a 'letter' shared between both diminishes the distance in the relationship between the sending subject and the receiving subject. Here Cha foregrounds the basic unit of language's material in its written form, the letter, compounding its meaning with the letter as a written missive conveyed

[60] Grosz is here summarising Spinoza's monism, making clear that she is not in agreement with all aspects of this theory (13).
[61] Juliana Spahr provides a fuller analysis of Cha's use of collage in *Everybody's Autonomy* (2001).

between two people. This not only demonstrates that – as Lawrence Rinder argues - 'sender and receiver were always already related'[62] (2001: 28), but is also a graphic performance of a significant corollary of the phonotext. Garrett Stewart identifies the '"dyslocutionary" tension between phonemic and graphemic signification' (1990: 5) that can occur when the final phoneme of one word is carried across to merge with or become the initial phoneme of the successive word. The title 'sendereceiver' performs a visual enactment of this merging across the space between words. Stewart argues that instances such as this demonstrate the constantly active and fluid relationship between words and their interstitial spaces. He describes the process thus:

> A word, that is to say, may seem all over, all said, its figuring function lapsing back to ground – when all of a sudden the next word just may, in waiting to emerge at the other side of the gaping ground, turn out to have been bound up partially, recursively, with the word we have just read, whose signifying function it now refigures at an unsettling off-angle to the tread of script. It does so only by incorporating and neutralizing, not by ignoring, the blank on which it has encroached. (1990: 5)

This function, which Stewart identifies as a feature of the phonotext in relation with the written text is a significant feature of Cha's textual works. In the poem above, the interstitial ground is made to figure morphemically as it is both foregrounded and activated between the words 'letter' and 'read' in particular, visualising a caesura or temporal pause between the two parts of the sentence that forms the first line[63]. The pause enables the reader to hear, via the activated phonotext, first the statement 'this is a letter' and then the modifying clause 'read aloud', which retroactively shifts one's interpretation of the initial statement. As discussed in Chapter 3 of this thesis, this morphemic activation of the interstitial ground is a significant feature of *DICTEE*'s material processes of enunciation, inviting the reading subject into a utopian (non-alienated) relationship with the writer through the materialised text object. Moreover, in the poem above, Cha gestures towards the phonotext as the (or, in conjunction with the tape recording of the audiotext in this case, as one) site of the performance of the 'letter' (in both senses of the word). It is specifically the tension

[62] Rinder continues: 'In Cha's deceptively simple play on the double meaning of the word "letter," she indicates that that which connects the two polar terms of the actantial model is always already in union with them, as they are with each other' (2001: 28).
[63] This is a significant structural feature of Olson's Projective Verse.

between the audiotext and the phonotext that Cha explores in this poem. As the sound of the tape recording would be playing in the gallery, enabling the visitor to literally 'hear the sender's voice' by activating the audiotext as vibratory movements within the visitor's ear drum, so the visitor would potentially be reading the same or contradictory words in their visual and material manifestation as printed text objects. In which case, 'the receiver', if any performance of silent reading was occurring, would 'speak over the / voice', activating the phonotext via the vibratory movements of her or his vocal apparatus. The significant line-break in the phrase 'speak over the / voice' echoes the similar collocation describing the action of the reader's eyes as they 'move over the / words', suggesting, perhaps, that these two physical gestures are linked and that the second phrase is a consequence of the first. As such, through the process of subvocalization, the reading subject displaces the writing subject as the speaker of the words of the text. This process further destabilises the referential values of the indexical pronouns 'you' and 'i' as they appear throughout *Audience Distant Relative*. The subvocalized first person singular pronoun, silently spoken by the reader, remains identical (on a physiological level) to the subvocalization of the same pronoun during the internal monologue that supplies the basis for subject formation. Thus the reader, in performing the phonotext through subvocalization, displaces and dislocates the 'speaking voice' of the text with their own internal voicing. This is not to say, however, that the reader's identity fully displaces the identity of the writer (or speaker) of the text and that upon reading the reader fully identifies with the lyric 'i' in the text. Neither am I suggesting that the phonotext inhabits the empty vessel of the reader and displaces their own identity. I am suggesting that in subvocalization the categories of 'i' and 'you' become destabilised, suspended between the speaking voice of the text and the subvocalized voice of the phonotext, so that the boundaries between self and other become permeable. In this unstable and fluid relationship the self is a performance of relative pronoun positions, enacted by the vocal apparatus of the reading subject, that is always at least partially open to or inhabited by the voice and identity of another. Like the plural text in performance, therefore, subvocalization performs a text (and a subject) that is not equal to itself. If then, in Hayles' terms, 'the production of subvocalized sound [is] as important to subjectivity as it is to literary language' (1999: 207), *Audience Distant Relative* demonstrates that both the text and the

subject are equally performed by the suppressed movements of the reader's vocal apparatus during reading.

Embodied Performance as Utopian Non-Alienation

My suggestion throughout this chapter is that a proprioceptive experience of embodiment performs an enactment of non-alienated subjectivity, the essence of Ernst Bloch's utopian philosophy. Indeed, Olson's working out of his ideas through texts such as Projective Verse (1950), Human Universe (1951) and Proprioception (1965) could be read in conjunction with Bloch's most central problem: 'the darkness of the immediately experienced moment' (1988: xxxi). For Bloch, the primary barrier to the realisation of non-alienation for the human being is one's inability to be present with oneself in the moment. He returns to this central concept again and again in his writings spanning seven decades of the twentieth century. In his earliest published work, *The Spirit of Utopia* (2000 [1923]), he sets out the problem that will trouble his utopian thinking throughout the rest of his life:

> That I move, that I speak: is not there. Only immediately afterward can I hold it up in front of me. Ourselves within: while we live, we do not see it; we trickle away. What really happened there, then, what we really were there, refuses to coincide with what we can really experience. It is not what one is, and certainly not what one means.
> […] I want to occupy myself, however.
>
> (2000: 1-2).

For Bloch, the central problem is a lack of awareness of oneself as an embodied subject as one performs the daily motions of one's life. One's awareness, lacking what he later calls 'the ultimate self-encounter' (2000: 3), 'refuses to coincide' with one's experience, but all the while one is consumed by the desire to 'occupy' (or inhabit) oneself. That is, a significant dislocation is experienced between one's body and one's awareness of oneself as a subject. In boldly asserting that in his book 'a new beginning is posited', he offers a journey through what he sees as 'the *a priori* latent theme of all the plastic arts' towards 'the ultimate self-encounter, in the comprehended darkness of the lived moment' in which is resolved, he argues, 'the inconstruable, absolute question, the problem of the We in itself' (2000: 3). This is nothing less, he states, than 'a journey […] toward the implementation of the central concept of utopia' (2000: 3). For Bloch, then, the central concept of utopia is 'the ultimate self-encounter' experienced by penetrating, or comprehending, 'the

darkness of the lived moment', by which one's realisation of the self as non-alienated ('We') will ensue. Olson, in Human Universe (1951), makes the following similar argument:

> [A]rt is the only twin life has – its only valid metaphysic. Art does not seek to describe but to enact. And if man [sic] is once more to possess intent in his life, and to take up the responsibility implicit in his life, *he has to comprehend his own process* as intact, from outside, by way of his skin, in, and by way of his own powers of conversion, out again.
>
> (1997: 162, my italics)

His description of the act of comprehending one's own process 'by way of [the] skin, in, and by way of [one's] own powers of conversion, out again' is what will subsequently form the foundation of his later essay, 'Proprioception' (1965). Moreover, Bloch's interpretation of the utopian self-encounter is described as follows: 'This is as far as the *internal* path can at first go, namely toward what we call a self-encounter, the preparation of the inner word, without which every gaze outward remains empty, instead of being the magnet, the force that draws forth the inner word and helps it break through the falseness of this world' (2000: 3, original emphasis). For Bloch, then, the encounter with the utopian is a journey inwards as far as the self-encounter, followed by the projection outwards of the 'inner word'.

Olson's 'Proprioception' presents an argument similar to what Bloch identifies as 'the central concept of utopia' and both suggest that art and literature offer a means to experience the phenomena they describe. My argument in this chapter is that Cha's embodied works perform the possibility of this utopian self-encounter through a proprioceptive practice. That the utopian can be so easily obtained, however, is not my contention. When attempting to describe the utopian in a 1964 interview, Bloch stated: 'I shall portray it as in the process of being (*seiend*)' (1988: 15). Bloch's insistence that the utopian is both 'in the process of being' and 'not yet' demonstrates its resistance to reification. Accessible only in the lived moment via an experience of oneself as a non-alienated subject, the utopian nevertheless remains open and incomplete. It is for this reason that Bloch develops the term *Vor-Schein*, or 'anticipatory illumination', in recognition that the 'illumination' of the darkness of the lived moment is only ever 'anticipatory', that is, as a precursor to the complete experience of utopia, which is always necessarily 'not yet'. Bloch recognised the

potential for anticipatory illumination as an aesthetic process traceable across a variety of art forms. In his 1935 essay 'Marxism and Poetry', however, he explores the potential for modernist poetry to implement the Marxist programme through its aesthetics of montage, fragmentation and open process. It is in this context that he proclaims: 'The subjective factor of the poetical is then the midwife of the artistic anticipatory illumination' (1988: 160). For Bloch it is in the poetic that one may experience 'anticipatory illumination', the illuminatory self-encounter in anticipation of utopian non-alienation. In this sense, throughout Bloch's utopian philosophy, the self-encounter is always an encounter with oneself as intersubjective. Further, Ron Silliman, in his essay 'Who Speaks: Ventriloquism and the Self in the Poetry Reading'[64] follows this thinking through to conclusion when he argues that: 'In poetry, the self is a relation between writer and reader that is triggered by what Jakobson called contact, the power of presence. There is no subject that is not, strictly speaking, intersubjective' (1998: 373).

In this chapter I have argued that it is the material presence of the poem itself, either as physical text object, as audiotext, or as phonotext that enables the relationship between the writer and the reader to be performed as a material interaction. Moreover, the physical presence of the poet in such a context is equally a performance of an intersubjective relationship, whereby the subjects are defined in their relationship with one another according to the context of the performance. Furthermore, the performance of the phonotext demonstrates that non-alienation (or intersubjectivity) can be understood as a materially embodied process performed at the physical level of the subject's vocal apparatus.

Thus the subjects perform the works and the works perform the subjects – bringing them into relationship with one another, constructing them as writer in relation to reader and reader in relation to writer, whose roles intersect and entwine. Moreover, the contextualised and embodied text is always performed by a contextualised and embodied subject, by whatever means or modality the subject is performing the text in any given instance. The poem is thus the material interaction between, in the

[64] In Bernstein, *Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word*, 1998, 360-378.

words of Elizabeth Grosz, ‘the corporeality of both knowers and texts’ (1994: 4), by which, moreover, both the subjects and the texts are performed.

CONCLUSION

Utopian Poetics and Subjectivity-in-Relation

This scholarly study documents the close-readings and critical analyses that have formed the theoretical foundation of my research into Utopian Poetics in the work of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha. In the Introduction, I documented my research processes, my core interest in *DICTEE*'s spiritual rhythms and resonances, and my theoretical framework through Ernst Bloch's utopian philosophy. I also outlined the challenges that I faced in approaching the text in this way, and presented the critical context within which scholarship of *DICTEE* is currently located. As a result, the thesis takes two approaches: close readings which focus on my reading of *DICTEE*'s performance of utopian poetics as a spiritual text and critical engagements with *DICTEE*'s materially embodied processes. Throughout the thesis, the central concern to emerge has been the question of subject formation in relation to contemporary innovative poetics. Chapters have approached this in different ways and with varying degrees of focus.

Chapter One offers close-reading analysis to support my reading of *DICTEE*'s spiritual prosody, and explores the role of the artist-as-alchemist in the text. This enables me to closely examine the ways in which Cha's formal poetics and linguistic innovations serve to support her intention of 'interfusion' between self and other, writer and reader. Drawing upon my reading of Cha's MFA thesis, *Paths*, I make clear connections between her intention for the artist to adopt the role of an alchemist, transforming the elements with which she works (language, text, punctuation, prosody, syntax) to create the possibility of 'communion' with her audience or readers. The chapter argues that this desired outcome is integral to the linguistic and formal innovation at work in *DICTEE*. As such, the possibility of intersubjectivity in the form of 'interfusion' is both performed and gestured towards through the text's experimental processes.

Chapter Two gives a more political reading that places *DICTEE* within the context of contemporary American innovative literature, examining the aesthetic and theoretical movements that helped to shape the book and its reception. Drawing

upon readings of Beat aesthetics and Language Poetry, as well as Post-Structural theory, I argue that the figure of the shaman (or alchemist) is central to both Cha's aesthetics and her politics. Her own identity and positionality as a Korean American woman, however, shapes the ways in which she engages with this figure and in turn provides the key to her utopian poetics. Central to Cha's reading of the shamanic figure is the idea of 'interfusion', which drives her linguistic innovations to open up the possibilities of subject formation in ways that both Beat and Language poetics fail to do. Cha's formal innovations yearn for intersubjective communion with the reader, while Allen Ginsberg's mantric proclamations attempt to make material changes to objective reality by sheer subjective force of desire and Language Poetry's objective formal innovations disavow the subjective factor entirely. Ernst Bloch's utopian philosophy is clear on the point that both the subjective and the objective factors are necessary for the performance of, and gesture towards, the utopian not-yet-conscious. This, in turn, is key to Utopian Poetics. Both aesthetically and politically, the utopian performance of non-alienation is made possible only through the intertwining of the subjective with the objective factors. *DICTEE*'s unresolvable grappling with the question of subjectivity through formal innovations demonstrates more thoroughly than any of Cha's other texts the necessity of this interplay.

Chapter Three takes the figure of the *diseuse* as its central focus, exploring through the formal innovations of the book object the fraught ways in which the possibility of becoming a speaking subject is negotiated and navigated through *DICTEE*'s material interventions. While early scholarship argued that *DICTEE* presented a silenced and erased subjectivity, a text with no speaking subject and no location from which to speak, I argue that the book's material interventions create space for interlocution between the reader and the writer. In this way, the book enunciates itself and performs the role of the *diseuse*, the speaking subject. As with other formal interventions in *DICTEE*, the performance of subjectivity through the book's materiality is complex and inter-relational.

Finally, Chapter Four examines the relational and intersubjective performance of 'embodiment' through a reading of Cha's mail art work *Audience Distant Relative* and her performance art work *Reveillé dans la Brume (Awakened in the Mist)*.

Departing from Charles Bernstein's disavowal of the poet's embodied subjectivity, this chapter argues that embodiment can be read specifically as a performance of intersubjectivity in process. Embodiment is performed at the intersection between subjective specificities and objective conditions – making it perhaps the most utopian performance of subjectivity as the self-encounter through relation with the other. Embodiment gestures towards the possibility of 'illuminating the darkness of the immediately experienced moment' through proprioceptive sensory data experienced at the meeting point between self and other. The nature of this illumination, however, remains elusive; thus the utopian in this form – as in any other – can only be performed in a limited way whilst gesturing towards its completion which remains, as ever, not-yet.

Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's experimentation with formal innovations in service of interfusion both performs and gestures towards the utopian condition of non-alienation, or the self-encounter. Her grappling with the inherent linguistic and political challenges of subject formation and identity throughout *DICTEE*, in particular, is the energy that vitalises Utopian Poetics through the ways in which it gestures towards the conditions of non-alienation, non-oppression, non-violence and non-violation through formally innovative interventions into linguistic and textual practices. *DICTEE* foregrounds the challenges – both linguistic and political – of subjectivity and is not content to settle into a reified formula by which the speaking subject becomes either dominant or disavowed. Instead, *DICTEE* presents subjectivity as unsettled, incomplete, a process *in* and *of* relation. Its formal and linguistic innovations perform the possibility of relational intersubjectivity through its invitations to readerly participation and co-creation, through the openings that orient its project toward other subjectivities. Thus *DICTEE* aligns with the challenges of subjectivity in innovative poetics that are at the centre of contemporary poetic debate and literary activism.

DICTEE's project places the self in relation to others at every level. The multiple subjects occupying its pages, Yu Guan Soon, Hyung Soon Huo, St. Therése, Joan of Arc and others, each trouble category of 'autobiography' ascribed to the text in its University of California Press blurb (2001). This is an autobiography of a self in relation, a subject in process. Delimited by its own formal specificities and

particularities it nevertheless remains actively open to the subjectivities of others. Linguistic and formal innovations create multiple points of entry, multiple sites of orientation toward other subjects that invite participation in the co-creative project of meaning-construction. *DICTEE* performs the always contingent and incomplete nature of semantic unfolding as an inter-relational act of co-construction, resisting the drive toward reification that dominant ideological narratives both perform and provide.

As a mode of poetics, Utopian Poetics is driven by the desire for non-alienation, for the intersubjective self-encounter, seeking both to perform and gesture toward this possibility in its formal processes and innovations. Knowing that this desire can never be completely fulfilled, the writer of utopian poetics performs it anyway, in whatever limited ways it can be performed through the making of a poem. Utopian Poetics is vitalised by and dependent upon the relationship between the subjective and objective factors in their productive and generative tensions. The unlimited imagination of the subject, the glimpsing of the not-yet-conscious through artistic creation, must be brought into form in order to manifest in the world. As such, and by necessity, its manifestation will be limited and contingent upon objective external conditions. This process generates a residue that carries over: the unfinished element that is not-yet manifest, the unfulfilled desire that motivates continued creative intervention.

The limitations with which the writer meets in the writing of a poem include formal, structural and linguistic limitations: that the placing of this word here necessitates or negates the placing of that word there, that prosody may follow its own form and function; that the page is only so wide, or the performance is only so long… At each point, creative choices must be made which limit the poem and shape it into its own form and structure. Yet without this limitation of form, there will be no poem. The nebulous and infinite possibilities of the imagination, of the glimpsing of what is not-yet-conscious and the desire to manifest what has not-yet-become (the perfect poem, the better performance of subjectivity-in-relation in the poem and in the world) are nothing without their limited manifestation in material form. With the creation of each utopian poem, a limited manifestation of this desire *is* performed

and its fulfilment is gestured toward as something that has not-yet-become but that remains open and possible.

*

Part Two of this submission documents my own development as a writer of Utopian Poetics, demonstrating the experimentations with subjectivity and formal innovation that have shaped my writing throughout this research. *The Unfinished Dream*, my earliest experiment with Utopian Poetics, is a crude rendering of the gestures towards embodiment and utopian intersubjectivity that I initially intuited from *DICTEE*'s pages and an early reading of Ernst Bloch's utopian philosophy. *ATHA* develops as a more nuanced text, particularly influenced by my reading around Language Poetry and contemporary innovative poetics. As such, *ATHA* performs a near-disavowal of subjectivity in reaction to *The Unfinished Dream*'s hyper-visible subject. My two more recent collections, *[un].holy : 33 Sonnets for Brigid* and *Rite* begin the more nuanced development of a subjectivity in relation, though both fall short of owning the specificities of my subjectivity and bringing these into conversation with practical gestures toward a better condition of non-alienation and non-reification. This is creative work for future projects. *Rite*, in particular, a work still in progress, grapples extensively in its newest poems with the relationship between possibility and limitation in poetic form. These poems create prosodic structures that function as mandalas – geometric shapes used in meditation to channel energies and focus intentions – to explore the vital and paradoxical relationship between form and flow. Linguistic juxtaposition in these poems gestures further than my writing ever has before toward the creation of new metaphors, thus inviting openness to multiple new possibilities.

In these ways and others, which I hope will be apparent from the research within this scholarly study, my poetry is intended to both perform and gesture toward the utopian possibilities of intersubjectivity, communion between self and other, an end to the forces of political and ideological domination and reification. My poetry is intended to engender an experience of self-encounter in relation with others, an experience that I have found in different forms through my meditation and yoga practices.

Utopian Poetics, at its heart, is a poetics of hope: future-facing and open to multiple possibilities; inviting mutual exchange and active participation in the co-creation of new forms of subjectivity-in-relation; offering new metaphors for thinking through diverse new ways of being in this world.

Poem:

‘macrofigurative’

i am bound
to l.imitation
as a consequence
of form

macrofigurative energy source
breaks the surface
of my skin simultaneously
containing
nature &
contained
by future cosmos

feel the tension in the question /then
release [uncertain\
control
taking me elsewhere within
these walls
of graphite &. colour
a different telepathic po[]t[enti]al
dis/courses the thinking earth
switching vertical axis
recharge restorative body like a worm
forced to shape
its prophecy of stars &
internal square patterning

this melancholy line returned
significance
retwined
.
a steel magnetic crucifix
holds layers
of serpentine arising

breath adorned
semi-stellated
dodecahedron
realigned:
my edges in this \vegetal light

List of References

WRITING UTOPIA NOW

1) *Atha yogānuśāsanam* (Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, 1:1)
2) *Tat twam asi* (*Chandogya Upanishad* 6:12-14)
3) *Wyrd, weorðan, verse, *wer-* (*The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*: Oxford, 1966)
4) 'Anticipatory illumination' and 'not yet' (Bloch, Ernst [1988] *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature*, trans. Jack Zipes and Frank Mecklenberg. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press)
5) 'Poethical' (Retallack, Joan [2003] *The Poethical Wager*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press)

'ghostword sembling'

1) Reconstructed reading: Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, *Dictee* p140 & 'the sound is a dripping faucet' from *Exilée and Temps Morts* ([2009], ed. Constance M. Lewallen, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press) p134; Ernst Bloch 'The shape of the Inconstruable Question' from *Spirit of Utopia* ([2000], trans. Anthony A. Nassar, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press).

On 22nd June 1976, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha sat by the tomb of Tristan Tzara in Montparnasse Cemetery, Paris, listening to the rain. She wrote about this experience in a journal entry beginning with the words 'the sound is a dripping faucet'. This gesture instigates a cut-up practice to disassemble and reassemble some of Cha's words, creating the opportunity to liberate some of her vocabulary from the poetic structures she creates in her writing and hear her words with fresh resonance. Reading and collaging these words with found vocabulary from Bloch's *Spirit of Utopia* gestures towards the (in)articulation of the unsayable, or the utopian, which I identify as an element of the utopian poetics that drives Cha's text works.

2) 'nomenclature' from *Restless Continent* by Aja Couchois Duncan (2016), Brooklyn, NY: Litmus Press.

Cha's Hands, 1979

Ekphrastic response to the photograph by James Cha printed in *The Dream of the Audience: Theresa Hak Kyung Cha (1951-1982)* (2001), ed. Constance M. Lewallen, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, (n.p.). Includes quotations from *Dictee*, p141 + writes through some of the vocabulary and ideas from *Agency and Embodiment*: *Performing Gestures/Producing Culture* (2009), Carrie Noland, Harvard University Press.

'macrofigurative'

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