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Chorography in the Classroom: Mapping a Post(e) Identity

Allen Meek

Allen Meek received his Ph.D from the University of Florida in 1995. His dissertation, "Mourning and the Televisual," is an inquiry into the poetics and politics of mourning in electronic culture, with particular reference to the writings of Walter Benjamin. He is currently a resident of New Zealand, where he is Lecturer in Media Studies at Massey University and is preparing his first book, "Chorographies," on place, media, and cultural identity.

> Now the environment of America is media. Not the land itself, but the image of the land. The focus is not the people so much as it is on the interplay between people and screens.
> —Michael Ventura

The project of this essay is to outline an approach to cultural and media studies responsive to changing experiences of place and identity in an electronic culture. My undertaking of this project, which should be understood primarily as the search for a writing practice, was prompted by the tasks facing me as a teacher in a multicultural environment and by an experience I shared with many of my students of geographical and social separation mediated by electronic technologies. I will call this shared cultural condition "post(e) identity," intending to evoke both Jurgen Habermas' notion of a "postconventional identity" responding to a crisis of national identity, and Gregory Ulmer's post(e) (*poste*: the French word for TV set) pedagogy designed to transmit the various posts of modernism, structuralism, and colonialism. The other term I have borrowed from Ulmer is "chorography," which names an application of the theories of Jacques Derrida to composition in hypermedia. My discussion of chorography is situated between a consideration of television's and cinema's role in constructing and maintaining a sense of national identity and the project of an experimental interface with new communication technologies in the classroom.

The reflections that I will offer here on pedagogy are the result of several years of teaching undergrad-

uate courses at the University of Florida to an often intensely multicultural mix of students: southern blacks and whites; exiles from Cuba, Panama, and Nicaragua; Jamaicans and Haitians; first-generation Chinese, Indian, Korean, Mexican, and Filipino Americans; and others from many different countries and regions of the US. As a stranger myself in this environment, my time in Florida involved a gradual coming-to-consciousness of the dynamics of cultural difference in the North American context, shaped both by my own experience of displacement (I am a New Zealander) and by the emergence of postcolonialist and multiculturalist discourses in the academy.

An historical function of cinema, TV, and now video and personal computers has been to supply the culturally and geographically displaced urban and suburban masses with a simulation of a missing homeland or community. But anyone who has experienced the transition from a relatively monocultural society into a multicultural or cosmopolitan one will also have noticed the central role that the imagery of electronic media plays in providing spaces of escapist fantasy that can be shared with others of diverse ethnic backgrounds. These fantasies have sometimes to do with a shared emotional experience of bereavement and loss, at other times with a shared hope of self- and social transformation. The screen promises both the return home and the escape from the limitations and problems of home.

The classroom, as a social space where cultural difference must be negotiated and a common discourse established, offers opportunities not only to discuss and critically examine media culture but also to invent new interfaces with it and, in an electronic classroom, on it. In the classroom, if only briefly, we can attempt to create and define together a public sphere and thereby a different mode of social participation than usually presented in mainstream media culture.

In a range of courses based primarily in the study of American literature, film, and popular culture, I attempted to explore with students the question of America's cultural diversity and the increasing embeddedness of its social relations in electronic media. Some of the standard themes of American literature and film — the gothic as a mode of representation, the frontier as a space of self-transformation, the emerging mass cultural forms of the twentieth century — served as the starting point for class discussions about how difference and identity have become such controversial issues on a global level today. For instance, in an introductory class on American literature we read Nathaniel West's *The Day of the Locust* alongside Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's essay "The Culture Industry" and compared these early critiques of American media culture with two postmodern constructions of history, Spalding Gray's *Swimming to Cambodia* and Theresa Hak Cha's *Dictée*. Moving between these journeys in hyperreality (West and Gray) and exilic voices (Adorno and Cha) helped to show how electronic media promise an adventure of becoming (as a profoundly American mythology) but also pose dilemmas of mourning and displacement. Hollywood and TV have served as America's means of remaking history as spectacle or virtual reality, but the mise-en-scène in which this quest takes shape is also inhabited by other histories (it is a haunted space) and navigated with an accompanying sense of fragmentation and loss.

As students face their individual screens in the fully computerized classroom, the question of community and difference can be focused in a more direct way around the social role of technological media. More directly, because now the electronic word and image have become the means of reading and writing, but also more indirectly, because this interface has for the most part replaced oral face-to-face communication. All of the cultural hype and commercial promotion that surround the internet and the ideologies of the "information superhighway" support a certain excitement and enthusiasm that students generally exhibit as users of the new technologies (along with a certain technophobia which in my experience is fairly easily dispelled). But the promise offered by hypermedia needs to be tested, in my view, by posing to the class the problems, and indeed often the social catastrophes, that have accompanied the global expansion of technological modernity. This does not amount to posing a "pessimistic" against an "optimistic" account of the new technologies, as both dystopian and utopian visions become part of a negotiated and experimental engagement that leaves the business of critical evaluation until the closing discussions of the course. The central pedagogical strategy is that ethnic diversity in the classroom be called forth as a kind of collective testimony to the unresolved tensions between technological dream and lived history.

Chorography

Chorography names a process of mapping post(e) identity as it takes shape in the non-sites of electronic spatiality, the mediascapes in which our experience of *communitas* is simulated. The Greek word *chora* means land or place. In *Heuretics: The Logic of Invention*, Ulmer associates the word at various moments with the concepts of nation, motherland, and America (74), proposing that those concepts might be reformulated in the terms in which *chora* is described by Derrida: as pure surface without depth, infinitely containing without imposing limits, open and foreign to itself at the same time (*Heuretics* 65). Unlike our conventional idea of the nation as a territory bestowing or denying the rights of citizenship, *chora* is a transitional space that does not impose borders or demand proof of identity but provides a passage through which identity can be renegotiated. Because of this, *chora* offers a means by which we might rethink our relation to foreignness in an historical situation in which earlier forms of community have been displaced and in which a common language (and market) of electronic images is proliferating on the global scene. Chorography offers a rhetorical mode for a postconventional identity in a televisual culture.

Ulmer has suggested elsewhere that he is inventing a peculiarly American application of deconstruction (*Teletheory* 202-3). Loosely adapting Ulmer's theory of the "mystory" (a collage/montage essay in which the writer juxtaposes different fragments of individual, community, and national histories), I have asked students to construct travelogues and, in hypermedia, homepages that assemble these fragments in ways that emphasize the transitory and nomadic as well as the regional and multicultural dimensions of life in North America. (I will discuss some examples of students' work in later sections.)

Chora closely resembles *choros*, the Greek word for a band of dancers and singers. The emphasis chorography places on the collective determinants of our identities — locality, community, nation — unsettles the priority accorded to the individual consciousness by the European Enlightenment and takes as its point of departure the Freudian, Marxian, and structuralist subversions of the subject as well as the postcolonial critique of Western ethnocentrism and imperialism. The political and historical contexts in which chorography poses a new conceptualization of a self-in-process can be better understood by comparing some of the different forms of social identity presented by contemporary cinema and TV. With reference to my experiences in the classroom, I will discuss some examples of ambitious attempts by German filmmakers to confront the disturbing legacies of their national past, as well as the invention and maintenance through TV of a community of exiled Iranians in California. Finally, I will offer an example of an experimental text, Theresa Hak Cha's *Dictée*, that can serve as a model for doing chorography in the classroom.

Electronic Mourning

The politics of ethnic nationalism confront us with the catastrophic threat that can accompany nostalgia for a native land and people. At the same time that we may choose to engage in or support localized struggles against cultural domination in all of its forms, we must also face the problem that local and ethnic identities increasingly find themselves displaced or fractured not only geographically but in ways mediated by new information technologies and markets. Such a situation invites the production of new cultural forms: hybrid texts that can incorporate and remix ethnic and community traditions with mass cultural styles and images. The politics of the future will have much to do with how we negotiate what Dean MacCannell has called these "empty meeting grounds," or "the realm of possibility for the future of human relationships emerging in and between the diasporas" (7).

I attempted to address these issues in a course I taught recently on the history of film. Studying a series of encounters between American and European star actors, directors, and cinematic styles, we inquired into the role of film in defining national identity and collective memory. From *Casablanca* to *Blue Velvet*, Hollywood has incorporated and reconstructed European history and style in terms of American mythologies while, conversely, European directors such as Roberto Rossellini, Jean-Luc Godard, and Wim Wenders have staged their own ambivalent attraction to Hollywood. One of the texts we read for that course, Eric Santner's *Stranded Objects*, examines how cinema and TV have been used to explore the problematic of national identity in postwar Germany. Although the guilt experienced by the different generations of Germans alive during and born after the Third Reich presents an extreme case, it in some respects offers a model for how national identity in general needs to be reinvented. Such a reinvention, Santner argues, would "work through" (in a psychoanalytic sense) rather than repress collective feelings of guilt and shame about the past. In response to the problem that "coming to terms with the

past," as Adorno perceived, often means refusing to confront the mistakes and catastrophes for which one is ethically responsible, Habermas has noted the emergence of a "postconventional identity" (Santner 50) in which a sense of national coherence or historical continuity has become increasingly fragmented. This recent cultural condition includes the decentering of the nation as an economic and political entity, new patterns of migration and structures of ethnicity, and the development of global information networks and electronic media that locate us in simulated communities and spaces. All of these determinants of cultural identity demand that we learn to mediate foreignness in new ways.

Postwar Germany confronts on one side the legacy of Nazism and the Holocaust and on the other the impact of American "mass culture." As a consequence of this situation, Santner argues, when German artists attempt to stage their national identity in order to perform a kind of healing of the disasters in their collective past — his examples are Edgar Reitz's TV epic, *Heimat* (Homeland), and Hans Jurgen Syberberg's monumental film, *Hitler, a Film from Germany* — they reveal strong tendencies toward reinscribing the insular, xenophobic, and racist world views that supported fascism. In *Heimat*, which nostalgically recreates a small rural community of the war years, Santner perceives the figure of the migrant or foreigner (associated with both the Jews and America) presented as scapegoat for the unresolved ambivalence within the ethnic group. Much of Santner's discussion of *Heimat* (which is now available on video with English subtitles) transfers usefully onto a reading of Wenders' *American Friend*, featuring antihero Dennis Hopper as a "Cowboy in Hamburg." The displacement of German guilt (the main character is a Swiss who murders a French Jew) onto the American presence in postwar Germany becomes readable as a collective repetition compulsion. Drawing on D. W. Winnicott's theory of transitional objects, Santner argues that mourning requires social empathy, allowing a self to develop the capability of identifying not only with his or her immediate group but also with the figure of the victim or outsider — rather than reconstituting, as *American Friend* does, the national self as the real victim.

While making his diagnosis, Santner does not himself propose what the role of televisual media might *become* in this process. He does, however, provide a prehistory of the place electronic media hold with regard to the notion of *chora*:

> The exotic landscapes of the East and the American West (whether colonized in fact or merely visited in the imagination), the psychic terrain as explored and mythologized by Freud, the flickering projections of light on white screens, and the fictions and myths that one creates out of the fragmented materials of one's own life, all become ciphers for a singular, primal yearning. (120-1)

A sense that communal wholeness has been shattered in the age of technological modernity gives rise to a general homesickness that looks for narcissistic satisfaction in the substitute aura of celebrities and charismatic leaders. In my

History of Film class, the figure of Marilyn Monroe served as a counterexample to Germany, suggesting how electronic mourning operates in an American context. Just as Julia Kristeva has explained the *chora* in terms of pre-Oedipal, preverbal semiotic functions (*Revolution* 25-30), S. Paige Baty understands Monroe as an icon who has emerged out of a mass-mediated *matrix* — a kind of collective, archetypal womb (59). Like the presymbolic world of the infant not yet individuated and separated from the mother's body, the electronic screen serves as a *chora* where semiotic fragments of media culture take on a virtual unity or flow. The example of Marilyn reminds us of the primary ideological function of this space, as the image of the celebrity condenses various historical narratives. The iconography of media culture serves as a simulation of a lost wholeness postulated, retroactively, as prior to the narcissistic wounds by which cultural identity is formed. According to such an account of popular culture, Marilyn functions as an all-American girl of the 1950s who through her association with the Kennedys somehow carries the blame for their assassinations and all of the wounds that would subsequently scar America's self-image in the 1960s and 1970s. This scapegoating of the woman as *femme fatale* supports the conservative reactions of the 1980s against the liberal "excesses" of the previous two decades, reactions that led to the reassertion of "family values." In a society such as the United States, global in its ethnic diversity and yet mediated by an (often numbingly) homogeneous media culture, a figure like Marilyn — or for that matter, Madonna — can serve as a guide to collective memory and thereby also to its repressed histories.

What must be given up, or mourned, writes Santner, is "the notion that alterity is something that requires a solution" (151). In place of the paranoid narcissism of regressive nationalism, a post(e) identity would learn to discover the repressed past in reaction to which media cultures have established their symbolic currency and thereby to excavate alternative identifications. What we need are practices of writing and research that can interface with the new media and help us to remake our identities in ways that more adequately acknowledge cultural difference. So one way to understand the *chora* is in its relation to the voices of foreigners, or as Kristeva has put it, to the stranger "who lives within us" (*Strangers* 1). The *chora* is a model for an intersubjective space in which the primary alterity of the self-image is re-encountered. In the classroom such a re-encounter means learning to acknowledge the exclusionary mythologies of national identity. Chorography can thereby be a means by which we can recover a solidarity with the foreigners who reside within us.

Exile on Television

Alongside examples from media culture that reveal the construction of national identity, I believe the teacher has an ethical responsibility to present students with alternative narratives and modes of representation. A case study that provides another counterpoint to the German example is Hamid Naficy's analysis of TV produced by Iranian exiles in Los Angeles. In contrast to the way in which a nation such as Germany seeks to rediscover a lost sense of unity, Iran-

ian collective identity is reasserted through a common experience of political exile and reassembled using the imagery of contemporary popular media. As Naficy explains, exile cultures are always a hybrid of influences from the home and host societies:

> On the one hand, Iranian exiles have created via their media and culture a symbolic and fetishized private hermetically sealed electronic *communitas* infused with home, past, memory, loss, nostalgia, longing for return, and the communal self; on the other hand, they have tried to get on with the process of living by incorporating themselves into the dominant culture of consumer capitalism by means of developing a new sense of the self and what can be called an "exilic economy." This economy is fueled principally by various advertising driven media, which cross fertilize each other and hegemonize the consumer lifestyle as ideal. (xvi)

While New German filmmakers like Reitz and Wenders carry the legacy of Adorno's critique of the American culture industry and use it to justify a certain cultural insularity, the adaptation on the part of Iranians to American-style capitalism and electronic media acts out a different set of possibilities emerging in the spaces between commercial imagery and historical experience. Naficy gives the example of two children of Iranian exiles, displaced in different nations and speaking different languages, communicating through a shared familiarity with a Disney film (1-2). The point of this anecdote for Naficy is that rather than offering another instance of global domination by American media, it dramatizes the emergence of a new kind of transnational encounter mediated by screen language rather than completely determined by it. Without taking this example as another confirmation of the triumph of Western democracy or a realization of McLuhan's "global village," we are nevertheless compelled to explore what possibilities such a mode of communication might make available.

Iranian exile culture is produced in the liminal space that arises only through separation from the original location of one's culture. Exile cultures participate in the deconstruction of ethnic identity, insofar as they become self-conscious about the ways in which culture is "always already" on its way from one elsewhere to another. TV produces this liminal state through its electronic simulation of community. The difference between the German and Iranian examples lies in the perception of place: both media cultures idealize and fetishize the homeland, but the narcissistic attachment to locality becomes in the liminal space of exile a more palpably fragmented, partial, improvised, and intertextual construction. Both kinds of post(e) identity are operative in the North American context.

Certainly the children of immigrants, exiles, refugees, and minorities often engage — once they are invited to — quite openly with the kind of split subjectivity that Naficy theorizes with reference to the Iranian example. Moreover, once one introduces the question of ethnicity in the classroom it becomes clear very quickly that many of the students' cultural identities are composed of a mix of diverse backgrounds and experiences that defy the classification system

demanded of them by state institutions. The university is, after all, itself a non-place (and thereby might be associated with the notion of *chora*) that forcibly unifies through disciplinary and discursive formations a heterogeneous social body, and it is for many the space of their first encounters with cultural difference. Because of this, Ulmer argues in *Teletheory*, scholars and students alike need to mourn the losses undergone in the passage into the symbolic orders of schooling and print literacy. What electronic media introduce into this developmental process is a virtual *chora* by which identity can be renegotiated, although only by acknowledging the gaps and omissions that haunt its simulated wholeness. As in the case of exilic TV, it is between the homogenizing drive of global media culture and the differential economy of localized communities that chorography might be situated.

National Identity

How then can post(e) identity be explored drawing from the global language of televisual imagery and allowing for transcultural exchanges but without denying the strength of residual attachments to national identity? A new kind of *polis*, no longer located in a unified spatio-temporal zone but rather self-consciously in the liminal spaces made available by electronic media, would have something to learn from the cultural traditions that have developed in exile.

In the context of the 500th anniversary of the discovery of the New World, Ulmer takes up the problematic of national identity and electronic media with reference to the voyage of Columbus, which he sees as providing "the chief metaphor of research in Western civilization" (*Heuretics* 24). Comparing the dilemma posed by this Columbian metaphor for research to the blocked mourning experienced by Germans, Ulmer finds American identity bound to the image of Columbus and thereby to the extermination of America's indigenous peoples (94-5). Like Syberberg in *Hitler*, Ulmer proposes a therapeutic staging of libidinal attachments to mythic stereotypes that allows a working through, or mourning, of those attachments: "Columbus, a Method made in America" (95).

Ulmer's project in *Heuretics* implies that compulsive repetition and denial remain in some respects inevitable aspects of national identity without an active staging of those mythic identifications that supersede rational argument or analysis. The experience of self- or subjecthood amongst the contemporary proliferation of information networks will mediate the question of foreignness in new and not so new ways. How can the repetition of racist stereotypes, so visible in mainstream media, be effectively displaced in the classroom? Critical analysis may not be sufficient. It is this question about which Ulmer's post(e) pedagogy compels us to think.

Like the liminal zones of exilic cultures, the *chora* names an intertextual space in which hybrids form and a certain undecidability suspends ethical judgment and allows libidinal energies to be both called forth and disinvested through a playful engagement (like the process Freud observed in his grandson's

game of *fort/da*). The solidarity with the victim that Santner emphasizes is evoked in Ulmer's account of Columbus by the "other scene" of the European arrival as witnessed by Native Americans. It is by opening the ideological identification with Columbus to a restaging that empathy with the victims of that historic encounter becomes possible.

I will mention two examples of student assignments that negotiate this question in different ways. In one a student juxtaposes the story of his family's arrival in the United States as Irish immigrants with his experience as a child on an American military base in Japan. The media icon around which these memories circulate is John Wayne, a culture hero whose status is traumatically subverted when the student encounters a mass ceremony commemorating the victims of Hiroshima. Around these narratives of heroism, displacement, catastrophe, and mourning the student stages a developing empathy with the foreigner, enemy, and victim. Another student, after a series of what she rejects as misrecognitions of her as "colored," discovers the lost history of her Native-American grandmother who has "assimilated" into European culture and surrendered her indigenous identity. In these two examples, the Hollywood imagery of the frontier takes on different inflections.

In the computerized classroom such examples can be viewed by the entire class but on individual screens. In this reconfiguration of private and public selves, foreigner and native, insider and outsider, encounter each other in an electronic space collectively defined by the particular group. While there is not space in this essay to discuss in more detail the many ways in which the introduction of computers transforms the intersubjective experience of the classroom, let me offer at least the following comments: the immediacy of oral group discussion is lost, but it has often been noted that voices more likely to be silenced in mainstream life — especially those of minorities — can emerge strongly when mediated by the new technologies. In fact, the power dynamic of majority and minority can be substantially challenged within the limits of the classroom situation. Such a change, however, does not come without the ever-present threat of a wholesale backlash against "political correctness" by those who see themselves as the victims of the change in climate.

Foreigners in the Classroom

"Which parts of 'Columbus' are *relevant* to America after 1992?" asks Ulmer (*Heuretics* 162), for Columbus has become an American emblem of invention (158) and of scientific discovery in general, at least since Francis Bacon's *Great Instauration*. Columbus survives today as a hero of an ideology of adventure that celebrates risk, exploration, and change (166) and serves as a central mythology of colonization and market capitalism. This invader's ideology affords an interesting comparison with the psychology of the foreigner, of whom Kristeva writes:

> Riveted to an elsewhere as certain as it is inaccessible, the foreigner is ready to flee. No obstacle stops him, and all suffering, all insults, all rejections are

> indifferent to him as he seeks that invisible and promised territory, that country that does not exist but that he bears in his dreams, and that must indeed be called a beyond. (*Strangers* 5)

At a moment when demographic changes and global influences are once again recasting the ethnic identity of America (and many other nations), one might ask whether Columbus should be reimagined in the terms posed by Kristeva rather than those suggested by Bacon. Maria Rosa Menocal has recently emphasized that 1492 was also the year in which the Jews were expelled from Spain. For Menocal the tableau of Columbus departing from Palos in 1492 cannot be recalled apart from the "other scene" in the larger port of Cadiz thronged with Jews facing the final deadline of their expulsion (*Shards* 4). Indeed, 1492 can in hindsight be seen as a primal scene of European identity formation in which both the Jews of Europe and the indigenous people of the Americas are constructed as Other. So Ulmer's notion of chorography can be related to Menocal's evocation of those voices of diaspora, dispersing the Enlightenment master narrative of research and development (or genocide and imperialism) with hybrid cultures and lyric traditions in which the homeland is evoked always in the terms of a lost beloved. It is a legacy of the European Enlightenment that in technologically advanced Western societies today television and cinema screens both call forth and banish the Other as image. (The Gulf War was perhaps the most catastrophic example yet of that representational economy.)

In response to the cultural hegemony of mainstream media, the classroom needs to be reimagined as a space of foreignness. In the multicultural classroom both teacher and student can learn to renegotiate difference. The most common way to respond to diversity is usually by passing over it in silence: foreigners are thus effectively expelled. How can we effectively call forth the multitude of tongues (Naficy cites the figure of 96 languages spoken by students in Los Angeles [5]) inhabiting this common space? My proposition in this essay has been that understanding the classroom as an intersubjective space mediated by the electronic screen (whether it is the available medium of writing or not, whether the class is online or not) can direct us toward a pedagogical practice supporting a multicultural public sphere.

As new foreign cultures establish themselves in America or remake their traditions in hybrids with the images of electronic pop culture, the various traditions and discourses, the interfaces of global and local cultures, out of which our subjecthood emerges can be better understood and critically evaluated through an imaginative staging analogous to a psychoanalytic working through and to a Hollywood remake. Ulmer's term "chorography" names such a practice. Now I want to close my discussion by considering an example of a text that I have used as a model for chorography in the classroom: Theresa Hak Cha's *Dictée*.

Model: *Dictée*

Assignment: Produce a collage/montage essay (or hypertext) modeled on Cha's *Dictée* that presents the formation of your cultural identity in relation to its different languages, institutions, communities, and their *ghosts*.

Cha's *Dictée* is a collage text that assembles disparate fragments of personal memories, family stories, and the history of her nation, Korea. The categories into which these fragments are collected — History, Epic Poetry, Astronomy, Tragedy, Love Poetry, Lyric Poetry, Comedy, Choral Dance, Sacred Poetry — combine traditional mythopoeic modes with a poststructuralist understanding of the subject as an assemblage of images and discourses. The lyric and choral modes of Cha's text recall what Santner refers to as the "elegiac labor of mourning" (151). Like Syberberg's *Hitler*, *Dictée* stages the myths of the national self. But *Dictée* is also a text of exile.

Dictée begins with a presentation of a classroom dictation exercise, the Korean student's first lesson in the language of the colonizer's culture, French. *Dictée* attempts to render the materiality of language as experienced by the body that by learning it must attempt to introject it. The first day at school is the first experience of becoming a foreigner. Just as the entry into language brings about the entry into society's symbolic relations and thereby the separation from the primal relation to the mother, to learn a new language is always also to mourn the mother tongue. At the same time, the urge to speak the unspeakable is figured as a drive to give birth:

It murmurs inside. It murmurs. Inside is the pain of speech the pain to say. Larger still. Greater then is the pain not to say. To not say. Says nothing against the pain to speak. It festers inside. The wound, liquid, dust. Must break. Must void. (3)

The experience of enculturation is traumatic. The pain of first learning to speak and to write becomes a repressed memory that is reawakened by new experiences of separation and exile. In Cha's experience, with French came Christianity and an entire colonial ideology, against or next to which she invokes a national martyr, Yu Guan Soon, who led the Korean resistance against the Japanese. And after Yu, Cha presents another role model and precursor, her mother (a schoolteacher), who suffered exile in China. Catholicism and motherhood can be understood as forces of both repression and resistance. So the problematic of mourning in any postcolonial situation involves acknowledging our sometimes conflicting investments in different discourses and identifications.

I have taught *Dictée* in conjunction with *Swimming to Cambodia*, a text that also mixes personal and collective histories in the context of America's military interventions in Indochina. Gray's monologue dramatizes the rejection but also the repetition of conventional gestures of American heroism. *Swimming to Cambodia* is Gray's "remake" of *The Killing Fields* (a Hollywood film about the Khmer Rouge in which Gray played the American ambassador's aide) and is

thereby implicated in the pattern of exploitation and racist representations analyzed in other classroom discussions.

The problem for America, Ulmer argues in *Heuretics*, is essentially the same as for Germany (the most problematic legacy in recent American history being the intervention in Vietnam). In Santner's analysis the nation must seek "to avoid the two extremes: global disavowal of identification with ancestors on the one hand, revision of the past into a less abhorrent version, on the other" (151). Without simply co-opting the place of the victim one must nevertheless attempt to learn the difficult lessons of "solidarity with the oppressed of history" (162).

Rather than simply asking my students to accept *Dictée* as a "correct" historiographical model and to reject the Hollywood one, I ask them to use *Dictée* as a model by which to set forth the different identifications, discourses, and histories that they perceive as having shaped them. For some of them this will involve histories of oppression and exile; for others it will involve identifications with heroes whom we have identified in class as participating in imperialist or exploitive behavior. From the more controversial space of class discussion and argument, the student is asked to move toward constructing a personal mythology in which s/he may come to recognize those foreigners who reside within.

Cha edited an important anthology of film theory, *Apparatus*, and *Dictée* also includes a meditation on the screen. An image from Carl Dreyer's *Passion of Joan of Arc* brings together the image of Yu Guan Soon with the legacy of Cha's French Catholic education but also invokes the famous sequence from Godard's *Vivre Sa Vie* in which Anna Karina contemplates Dreyer's cinematic image of the medieval martyr. Through this series of images, superimposed to produce a *mise en abyme*, *Dictée* constructs an intertext of cinema, passion play, and martyr drama and pursues a deconstruction of archetypal identifications. So Cha mourns the fragments of her self and constructs a post(e) identity in the hybrid spaces of community traditions and media culture. Yun Ah Hong has made a video based on *Dictée* called *Memory/All Echo* that makes some of the book's connections to electronic media more explicit, as it includes archival materials such as historical footage of the Korean War and filmic representations of Korean domestic life.

While texts such as *Dictée*, which incorporates representational devices from the avant-garde and explores non-European histories, are not enjoyed by most undergraduates in the same way in which *Swimming to Cambodia* or *The Killing Fields* may be, they can be made more accessible through explanation and discussion. However, it may be that their very strangeness can help to open up an unfamiliar but potentially rewarding mode of writing for students to experiment with. Some students will be more sensitive than others to the poetics of Cha's text or will identify more easily with her exilic sensibility. (I was fortunate enough to have in one of my classes two students with Korean mothers who helped make the text more understandable to the other students.)

The complexities of multiculturalism can never be completely resolved. The dynamics of the classroom and writing experiences for African Americans are different than for those with Korean or Cuban backgrounds. The daughter of Cuban exiles attempts to mediate images of the lost homeland with those of

the American frontier; a southern black student explores the place of print literacy in her community around the figure of her culture hero, Zora Neale Hurston. As Santner comments with reference to the German example, the inability to connect with and "work through" our collective pasts leads to a generalized melancholy. Often students find such issues and assignments too threatening to respond to without a sense of victimization: "I blame my loss of cultural identity on the way my parents chose to bring me up"; "I envy those people with strong ties to their cultures." As a teacher one hopes that chorography might offer a sense of renewal to those who are able to engage with the fragments of identity and memory that it puts into circulation. One of the most challenging tasks of a post(e) pedagogy is to create an environment where this process can be made accessible to all. As an example of chorography, *Dictée* constructs interzones, liminal spaces where identifications can be mourned and reinvested in the form of documents: maps to chart a postconventional identity.

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