

**The Power of Polyvocality: An Intergenerational Dialogue Between Theresa Hak Kyung
Cha and Na Mira**

A thesis submitted to the faculty of California College of the Arts

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by

Zoë Latzer

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CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL

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Lawrence Rinder
Primary Thesis Advisor

____4/19/2023____
DATE



Ann Tartsinis
Thesis Mentor

____4/26/2023____
DATE

Glen Helfand

Glen Helfand
Chair, Curatorial Practice

____5/3/2023____
DATE

Abstract

This thesis explores artist Na Mira's intergenerational dialogue with pioneering artist Theresa Hak Kyung Cha and her unfinished piece *White Dust From Mongolia* (1980). Mira utilizes an iterative performance-based film practice and Korean shamanism to connect to Cha and generations of diasporic Korean women.

To address this intergenerational relationship, this thesis presents three case studies of Mira's video and film installations. *Tesseract (test)* (2020) at The Kitchen, New York, marked the beginning of Mira's dialogue with Cha, *Night Vision (Red as never been)* (2022) at the 2022 Whitney Biennial *Quiet as It's Kept*, explored autobiography and communication based on Korean shamanism, and *TETRAPHOBIA* (2022) at Company Gallery, New York, suggested the multiplicity of diasporic experience. Through an analysis of the case studies, this thesis demonstrates the power of intergenerational and polyvocal dialogue as an artistic and curatorial tactic for expressing the fluid nature of diasporic identity and current social issues, such as the ongoing violence against Asian women still happening today.

Keywords

Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Na Mira, Korean shamanism, performance-based film, Asian American art studies, polyvocality, intergenerational dialogue, diasporic experience

When contemporary artist Na Mira was a teenager, she dropped out of high school and worked at an anarchist bookstore called the Wooden Shoe. One day, she found the zine *external text* by a queer Korean American teenager named Yumi Lee. On the zine's cover was a photocopied image from the deceased writer and artist Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's experimental book *Dictée*. Mira immediately went out and purchased *Dictée* and, flipping through, was inspired by how Cha broke apart language.¹ While Mira did not know it at the time, this first moment of connecting to Cha's practice would have a profound impact on the direction of her artwork. Mira would also come to cite Lee's influence. "I was not taught Cha's work in school," she observed. Lee's zine formed a kind of "undercommons" where "we [Korean women] are the source [of our own history]."²

In 2020, Mira has embarked on an ongoing dialogue with Cha's unfinished piece *White Dust From Mongolia* (1980), returning to it repeatedly in video and film installations at different institutions and times and in different configurations. Na Mira is a Korean American artist and educator, known for her installation and video art based out of Los Angeles, CA.³ Born in 1982 in Lawrence, Kansas, Mira describes this practice as a form of "quantum engagement"⁴ with Cha, a way of questioning how the past is never really finished and how it can be met in changing, fragmented ways. In this way, her films act as a ritual to connect with Cha across time

¹ ICA Philadelphia, "ICA and Stuart Weitzman School of Design Lecture Series: Na Mira," YouTube video, 1:29, December 9, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YJe1gOsPyEY>.

² Ayanna Dozier, "Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's Emotive Multimedia Work Is Influencing a New Generation of Artists," *Artsy*, July 7, 2022, <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-theresa-hak-kyung-chas-emotive-multimedia-work-influencing-new-generation-artists>.

³ Mira received a BFA degree in 2006 in Film, Video, New Media at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago; and a MFA degree in New Genres at the University of California, Los Angeles. She is currently on the faculty at University of California, Riverside (UCR) in the Department of Art.

⁴ Na Mira, unedited transcript from the soon-to-be-published interview by Katie Kirkland for *BOMB*.

and space.

Through a selection of three case studies in which Mira builds fragmented installations incorporating *White Dust*, I will demonstrate how she becomes another voice in the film, communicating with Cha through experimental cinema, writing, and performance. Mira's performance piece *Tesseract (test)* (2020) at The Kitchen, New York, incorporates parts of Cha's *White Dust*, bringing the intergenerational dialogue between these two artists into being. *Night Vision (Red as never been)* (2022), Mira's film at the 2022 Whitney Biennial *Quiet as It's Kept*, was shown concurrently on a different floor with a broad selection of Cha's work and archival materials and explored *White Dust* as a form of nonlinear communication based on Korean shamanism. And Mira's 2022 piece *TETRAPHOBIA* at Company Gallery, New York, suggests the multiplicity of diasporic experience. By engaging with *White Dust* in all three of these examples, Mira emphasizes *White Dust*'s polyvocal qualities and deepens them through an evolving, regenerative performance practice that demonstrates a rich model of intergenerational dialogue between artists. By examining the installations at different institutions, it illustrates the need to examine the curatorial tactics in displaying an artist in conversation with another.

The relationship between Mira and Cha has not been touched upon in academic writing,⁵ and the unfinished *White Dust* is also undertheorized. By studying both Mira and Cha's relationship with *White Dust*, we gain insight into how polyvocality can help express the fluid nature of historic time, diasporic identity, and the loss of language and memory from generations of displacement. Polyvocality is a mode of expression that combines numerous voices, cultures, and experiences within a single creative production. Theories of polyvocality originated within anthropology as an approach to fieldwork that compiled multiple narratives from a cacophony of

⁵ Jane Chin Davidson, "Giving Voice to an Artist Silenced Too Soon," *Hyperallergic*, August 17, 2022, <https://hyperallergic.com/747086/theresa-hak-kyung-cha-whitney-biennial/>.

voices to create a fuller, more complex conception of the topic at hand.⁶ Similarly, within contemporary art, the term often refers to artworks that allow for multiple complementary and conflicting readings. By engaging multiple voices in their practice and works, artists create dialogue between different points of view.

Polyvocality and a Curatorial Relational Approach

Within the field of contemporary art, polyvocality enables what cultural studies scholar Ella Shohat calls a “relational approach.”⁷ Broadly speaking, a relational approach brings work together through a nonlinear historical line, opening up dialogue across geographic boundaries and time periods.⁸ Historically, a relational approach⁹ has been used as a curatorial tactic to cultivate a “non-canonical, ahistorical, atemporal” space that moves away from defining art through the juxtaposition of oversimplified and often power-laden categories such as “Western” and “Eastern,” “fine” and “craft.” This strategy has the potential to backfire. The removal of context and time (i.e. location, people, time period) can deny the context for understanding different artworks, cultures, and identities, such as when curator Jean-Hubert Martin tried to counteract ethnocentric practices by exhibiting 50 percent Western and 50 percent non-Western artists together in what was thought of as “equal footing” in the exhibition *Magiciens De La Terre* (1989). The show sparked massive dialogue and critique, raising questions about whether it

⁶ “4.5: Research Techniques and the Written Ethnography,” Social Sci LibreTexts, *LibreTexts*, July 23, 2021.

⁷ Ella Shohat, “Area Studies, Transnationalism, and the Feminist Production of Knowledge,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 26, no. 4 (2001): 1269-1272, <https://doi.org/10.1086/495659>.

⁸ Maura Reilly and Lucy R. Lippard, “What Is Curatorial Activism?,” in *Curatorial Activism: Towards an Ethics of Curating* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2021), 30.

⁹ Separate from the term “relational aesthetics” in “Relational Aesthetics” (1998), where Nicolas Bourriaud discusses contemporary artistic practice and proposes the function of art as a social interstice. Bourriaud argues that art, under influence from Enlightenment philosophies, is becoming more experimental, perceptive, and critical. He proposes that artwork might thus work as a social interstice, opening up the possibility for social relations (and the connected sociopolitical context) to become the material and focus of the art.

is possible to show artists with no context or “hierarchy” under colonization.¹⁰ However, when undertaken amidst the artists or artworks context, a curatorial relational approach can help facilitate dialogue as a way of reflecting on collective experiences, such as the Korean diasporic experience in the case of Mira and Cha.

In “Women and the Question of Canonicity” (1986), theorist Susan Hardy Aiken describes a “polylogue:”¹¹ an interaction of many voices that would together disrupt the monological, colonizing, centristic drives of “civilization.”¹² Emphasizing the ongoing, evolving nature of such polylogues, Aiken also refers to them as a form of “perpetual regeneration.” Na Mira has carried out this perpetual regeneration with Cha’s *White Dust* by systematically returning to it piece by piece to listen for the “quantum poetics of memory and diaspora between Cha’s archives and her traces.”¹³ Within quantum theory, quantum entanglement is when two particles link together no matter how far apart they are in space. Perhaps by referencing quantum theory, Mira is demonstrating how on an invisible level she is connected to Cha and millions of diasporic women. Through interviews and archival research, I examine how Mira extends and evolves the themes of *White Dust*.

This practice of polyvocal regeneration can also be understood as furthering a tradition of reperformance. Whether in the 1960s and 70s performance art or today in contemporary art, artists have long experimented with reperformance and the reenactment of artworks. Reproduction has most often involved artists reperforming their own work, such as Marina

¹⁰ *Magiciens De La Terre* radically challenged the Western art system and continues to be a main topic of discussion within Curatorial Practice departments such as at California College of the Arts (CCA). At the time curators and writers such as Rasheed Araeen, Jean Fisher and Thomas McEvelley critically engaged with the exhibition.

¹¹ Polylogue is a term originally coined by psychoanalyst and literary theorist Julia Kristeva.

¹² Susan Hardy Aiken, “Women and the Question of Canonicity,” *College English* 48, no. 3 (1986): pp. 298.

¹³ ICA Philadelphia. “ICA Lecture Series: Na Mira.”

Abramović's *Seven Easy Pieces* performance series at the Guggenheim in 2005,¹⁴ or artists reperforming a deceased artist's work, such as Tania Bruguera's *Tribute to Ana Mendieta* (1985-1996). In that series, Bruguera reperformed pioneering artist Ana Mendieta's work to bring her back into the context of Cuba's present-day cultural and political climate.¹⁵ Like Bruguera, Na Mira is in dialogue with another artist; unlike Bruguera, Mira does not only reperform that artist's work. Instead, Mira works to create a unique dialogue with Cha by becoming another performer in Cha's film *White Dust* through a series of video works.¹⁶

The Life and Literature of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha

Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's (Korean: 차학경; March 4, 1951 – November 5, 1982) work has been widely studied due to her powerful explorations of identity, displacement, and cultural assimilation. Often marked as pioneering, Cha's writings and artworks bring attention to the struggles faced by Asian Americans—particularly immigrant women—in the Eurocentric United States. Cha explores new ways of understanding identity and cultural hybridity by examining the fluidity of diasporic experience. Cha emigrated from Korea to the US in 1963, just two years after a military coup in South Korea and a decade after the Korean War.¹⁷¹⁸ From when she began her practice in the San Francisco Bay Area in the 1970s¹⁹ until her tragic rape and murder in New

¹⁴ Abramović's seven consecutive nights of performances examine questions that surround the reperformance and preservation of performance art as well as an artist's rights to reperform another's work.

¹⁵ Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2011), 3.

¹⁶ Na Mira's practice is an unusual art practice in terms of inhabiting another's artwork as it is not the reperformance of Mendieta by Bruguera, for example, but an extraordinary level of engagement.

¹⁷ Dan Saltzstein, "Overlooked No More: Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Artist and Author Who Explored Identity," *The New York Times*, January 7, 2022.

¹⁸ Cha's grandparents were Koreans who were exiled to Manchuria during the Japanese occupation. Their later return to Korea during World War II marked them as Manchurian Koreans of ethnic difference.

¹⁹ Cha's family settled in San Francisco, where she eventually studied at the University of California, Berkeley, receiving four degrees: BA (1973) in comparative literature; BA (1975), MA (1977), and MFA (1978) in Art Practice.

York in 1982, Cha challenged dominant narratives about diasporic experience while providing a unique lens for understanding the rich complexities of Asian American identity. In the late 1980s, *Dictée*²⁰ gained renown, and by 1991, the Association for Asian American Studies had emphasized the importance of her work. In 1994, when Third Woman Press published *Writing Self, Writing Nation*, a collection of essays on *Dictée* by Lisa Lowe, Shelley Wong, Elaine H. Kim, and Laura Hyun Yi Kang, *Dictée* began receiving mass critical attention in diasporic feminist writing circles. Soon after, Cha's visual art rose to prominence due to the writings of Constance Lewallen, Lawrence Rinder, Trinh T. Minh-ha, Susan Best, and Hyun Yi Kang.²²

And yet, for all this attention, Cha's film *White Dust* remains relatively understudied, likely due to the fact that it was never finished and that it is so rarely shown by the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAMPFA) curators.²³²⁴ As curator Constance Lewallen recounts in "Theresa Hak Kyung Cha—Her Time and Place," Cha traveled to Korea with her brother James to work on *White Dust* in 1980.²⁵ Filming *White Dust* was Cha's first return as an adult to Korea. During the trip, she found herself disoriented, a feeling that echoed the

²⁰ The book is a genre-bending poetry collection focused on both real and mythological women: the Korean revolutionary Yu Guan Soon, Demeter and Persephone, Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, Joan of Arc, Cha's mother Hyun Soon Huo, and Cha herself.

²¹ The book was first published in 1982, the year Cha was murdered. The book went out of print, but due in part to the publication of the edited collection *Writing Self, Writing Nation (1994)*, Cha's work began to receive critical attention. In 1997, the book was brought back into print by Norma Alarcón and Third Woman Press. Following this, Berkeley's University of California Press has released two additional editions.

²² Constance Lewallen, Lawrence Rinder, and Trinh T. Minh-ha, *The Dream of the Audience: Theresa Hak Kyung Cha (1951-1982)* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Berkeley Art Museum, 2001).

²³ *Exilée and Temps Morts: Selected Works*, recently published in September, 2022, includes the best-known writings on *White Dust From Mongolia*, with essays by art historian Constance M. Lewallen and novelist Ed Park.

²⁴ Alongside not being shown often it is almost completely unavailable with the exception of the four film stills selected by BAMPFA curators.

²⁵ For the film, Cha received a grant of \$3,000 from the National Endowment for the Arts and a \$15,000 Chancellor's Postdoctoral Fellowship from the University of California.

disorientation her family experienced after returning from exile in Manchuria during the Japanese occupation, a time in which her parents were forced to learn and work in Japanese.²⁶ The return to the site of displacement and loss emphasized Cha's diasporic perspective as belonging neither here nor there but in a third space, a space in-between. It was still a time of political crisis in South Korea due to the recent assassination of President Park Chung Hee, and South Korean officials grew suspicious of Cha and James for their filming.²⁷ As the political intensity increased in 1980, Cha left Korea, leaving the piece unfinished. After moving to New York City, Cha returned to the project, planning to supplement *White Dust's* footage with a historical novel. But soon after, she was killed.

White Dust From Mongolia

White Dust From Mongolia is a grainy 16mm black-and white film composed of shots that layer perspectives and moments in time until they are enmeshed. The collection of the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAMPFA), which houses *White Dust* and Cha's other film and video works, is only partially digitized, and COVID-19 has imposed restrictions on in-person viewing. And so, many visitors, including Na Mira, have only experienced *White Dust* through four still images selected by BAMPFA curators to be representative of the film's major sites and scenes.^{28,29} Though I had access to the film, it is

²⁶ At the end of World War II, Cha's family moved back to Korea only to find it was devastated by the Korean War, divided and ruled by dictatorship. In 1963, Cha with her family moved to Hawai'i and then, later, to California.

²⁷ Constance Lewallen, "Theresa Hak Kyung Cha— Her Time and Place," in *The Dream of the Audience: Theresa Hak Kyung Cha (1951-1982)* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Berkeley Art Museum, 2001), 10.

²⁸ Stephanie Cannizzo, BAMPFA curator, email message to author, February 27, 2023.

²⁹ The film images for *White Dust from Mongolia* were photographed by BAMPFA photographer Benjamin Blackwell in preparation for the exhibition *The Dream of the Audience: Theresa Hak Kyung Cha (1951–1982)*, curated by Constance M. Lewallen in 2001. The retrospective exhibition traveled to venues in the U.S., Korea, and Europe. The unfinished film footage from *White Dust from Mongolia* was not included in the exhibition, but ephemera such as the film images, storyboard, and project description were included. Stephanie Cannizzo, BAMPFA curator, email message to author, February 27, 2023.

important to use the stills as a way to structure the discussion as they are the version Na Mira worked with (in addition to the archival material she later found). Thus, throughout this description of *White Dust*, I will move between talking about the archival images and how they play out in the actual film.

The first image is of a rooftop with large ceramic vessels decorated with etchings almost suggestive of faces and covered with lids shaped like large bowls [fig.1]. The vessels are used for storing fermented foods in Korea, such as red bean or soy sauce, yet they also evoke the shape of an urn holding the white dust of those who are lost. The roof is tiled and looks partially made from metal, and attached to bamboo poles are white sheets hanging on a clothesline, alluding to the daily routine of cleaning a domestic space. The first film sequence repeats this view but moves slightly away, then closer. In a later view, a woman hangs laundry as wind flaps the sheets, suggesting multiple versions of the same scene overlaid. By lingering on traditional women's work, Cha subtly alludes to generations of women's duties and oppression while showcasing women's work and everyday tasks as valuable.

The second image from BAMPFA's digital archive is of a woodland path lined with dried, trod-upon weeds [fig. 2]. In the film, shots of this path alternate between two scenes: the first a close-up shot of tree branches and the second showing the empty path shot from another angle. The perspective of this part of the film makes a viewer feel like they are following in the footsteps of those who came before, reactivating the path. Eventually the film leaves the forest behind, moving to raw footage of city life in Korea, punctuated by the occasional glimpse of a clapperboard.

The third image captures a large train station from afar, with two train tracks running towards the camera's foreground [fig. 3]. In the corresponding scene in the film, people come

and go. Perhaps on morning routes to work or visits to family, while other people stand waiting, creating a suspended, temporal pause that holds until a train arrives, billowing smoke and breaking the tension. The 16mm film glitches, snapping back and forth due to a small technical malfunction of the footage, making it feel as though the footage could have been taken over one day or weeks on end. Though Cha does not film any of the political unrest actively happening in Korea at that time, the train station hints at the lasting effects of imperialism and industrialization. In Korea, rail systems were expanded and formed an important part of the political infrastructure during Japanese occupation; later, the United States operated trains in Korea during World War II. Due to the film's glitching, the footage feels nonlinear, suggesting the way histories of violence repeat themselves.

Overall, the film demonstrates the everyday quality of life in Korea, refusing exoticized Western perspectives and focusing instead on mundane activities such as walking through the city or selling cabbage at the market.³⁰ The fourth image from BAMPFA's archive is of people walking in the rain with black umbrellas on a paved concrete path next to a brick building and trees [fig. 4]. In the film, the shot follows people walking as the rain lets up and begins again, feeling drawn out and atemporal. Here again, the raw footage glitches, creating a feeling of porous time where things repeat, challenging preconceived notions of both time's linearity and Korea's history. As in the rest of *White Dust*, these scenes beg the question: What would it mean to embrace a nonlinear time where we can find new connections across collective experience through revision, reactivation, and revisiting?

Cha's Vision and Na Mira's Regenerative Relationship to *White Dust From Mongolia*

³⁰ As seen in the market scenes of the film.

Cha's archive at BAMPFA helps illuminate the ideas she hoped to explore in *White Dust*. In notes that include a typewritten outline of the film, rough script, statement of plans, and shot descriptions, we see plans for a layering of footage and narrative that would disrupt linear history and create polyvocal dialogue. Cha intended the film to have two narrators speaking across time, one in the past and one in the present. The film was designed to begin inside the mind of Character no. 1, who has lost her memory and exists "within the interior of memory itself."³¹ Cha writes that she is speculative³² and anonymous and can thus represent multiple identities—a part of the "collective," she can be viewed as a young girl, a maid, a memory, a mother, an orphan, or a nation.³³ Character no. 1 thus embodies a polyvocal perspective. For Cha, it is Character no. 2 that gives voice and memory back to Character no. 1. Throughout the film, the narratives of each character begin to superimpose upon each other, and their separate positions in history begin to blend. As Cha writes:

There exists a "Hole" in Time, a break in the linearity of Time and Space, and that empty space, the Absence, becomes the fixation, the marking that is the object of fixation, a constant point of reference, identification, naming, point of convergence for the narratives, the point of rupture, which gives, considers the multiplicity of the narrative, multiplicity of chronology.³⁴

Beyond marking a point where time blends, this "hole" is a form of absence where nothing can be pinned down in history, and it is perhaps this unfixed quality that requires the return, the dialogue, and the layering of voices. For Cha, the point of rupture is the site where polyvocality

³¹ Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, "White Dust From Mongolia, Typewritten Text," Online Archive of California, January 1, 1980, <https://oac.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf3j49n5t2/?order=2&brand=oac4>.

³² Cha, "White Dust From Mongolia, Typewritten Text."

³³ Cha, "White Dust From Mongolia, Typewritten Text."

³⁴ Cha, "White Dust From Mongolia, Typewritten Text."

is instantiated, allowing both Cha and Mira to connect to generations of diasporic Korean women.

Mira first embarked on her regenerative exploration of Cha's *White Dust* through an automatic writing practice³⁵ inspired by the Korean shamanistic ritual kut, which is often referred to as "riding the knives."³⁶ During an automatic writing session, Mira asked, "how do I perform the ritual [kut] of the Korean Shaman?"³⁷ and within her mind received the answer that she was the "second person going."³⁸ As she asked the question, a glass candle holder on her altar shattered and when she walked into the light of a fluorescent bulb, white dust lit up everywhere. The next day, Mira explored Cha's archive online and found the four film images of *White Dust*, which she had never seen before. Finding the full treatment and shot list for the film, Mira discovered the plan for two characters and realized, "Oh, I am Character no. 2, I am the second person going."³⁹ Since then, Mira has returned to *White Dust* in artwork after artwork, stepping into the role of Character no. 2. Importantly, this engagement is not a reenactment or the finishing of *White Dust*, but a form of perpetual regeneration. In an email interview, Mira describes it as follows:

I am not trying to finish *White Dust*. It exists as a fragment and was something that Cha changed and imagined differently over time and I keep with that spirit and embodiment of it as being endless, fecund. Imagining these scenes and showing them in different configurations, times, places, I'm trying to reach another dimension; it's not something

³⁵ Automatic writing, (also known as psychography), is a form of writing that taps into the unconscious to allow a person to write words without consciously thinking about them. The practice is often claimed as a form of psychic ability.

³⁶ ICA Philadelphia. "ICA Lecture Series: Na Mira."

³⁷ Mira, interview by Kirkland.

³⁸ Mira received the message in Korean, and her mom translated it during a phone call after the automatic writing session.

³⁹ Jennifer Teets, "A Kind of Science Friction: Na Mira," *Mousse Magazine*, March 29, 2022, <https://www.moussemagazine.it/magazine/na-mira-jennifer-teets-2022/>.

linear or complete here in the third dimension, but perhaps Cha can experience it as a feature length film from where she is?⁴⁰

For Mira, her regenerative engagement with Cha allows her to look beyond our linear, three-dimensional world and enter an evolving communication with those who have come before.

Korean Shamanism or Mu-ism

Mira's dialogue with Cha has continued to draw on Korean shamanism, and the resulting work explores the larger political histories that shape Korean women's diasporic experience. Korean shamanism (or Mu-ism) is a religion in Korea, with other terms for the tradition called musok (무속신앙) and mugyo (무교).⁴¹ The practice of Korean shamanism channels the dead, deities, and ancestral spirits, making it a powerful tool for Mira to use to channel Cha and examine legacies of trauma, colonization, and displacement due to war.⁴²

Korean shamanism is classified as a folk religion as it predates Buddhism, neo-Confucianism, and Christianity in Korea.⁴³ Before the religious colonization of Korea, shamanism was practiced only by women. That changed during the Joseon dynasty, when men were given prominent place in Korean shamanism, working with deities and ancestors while women shamans were confined to working with the earthly realm.⁴⁴ The Joseon dynasty, guided

⁴⁰ Na Mira, email message with author, January 30th, 2023.

⁴¹ There are not many written archives that have preserved information about Korean shamanism. As at different moments in Korean history it was outlawed or viewed as taboo, it is often a largely oral practice and passed down through oral histories.

⁴² Cha also referenced Korean shamanism in her own work (as well as Korean history, dance, literature, language, and politics), making it an important point of analysis.

⁴³ Shamanism is considered one of the oldest religions in the world, with some scholars asserting that it goes as far back as the Neolithic Period, which began around 6000 or 5000 B.C.E. (Eckert, Lee, Lew, Robinson, & Wagner, 1990; K. B. Lee, 1984; Sohn, Kim, & Hong, 1982), or the Bronze Age, which spanned the ninth to the fourth century B.C.E. (Joe, 1982).

⁴⁴ Lee, "Shamanism and Its Emancipatory Power," 190.

by neo-Confucian ideology, institutionalized the marginalization of women more generally by demanding that they follow a strict hierarchical social system that confined them to a subordinate status.⁴⁵ During this time, economic power and social status was held and passed through the patrilineal line, with women not allowed to own property or receive an inheritance from their families.⁴⁶ Women were also forced into cleaning, household, and family roles as a form of hyperfeminization within Korea. Perhaps here, in this history, we can see why Cha includes the shots of women cleaning and selling food in *White Dust*, both as an acknowledgment of the work Korean women do and as a subtle form of resistance to their oppression under patriarchal value systems.

Contemporary Korean women are still affected by the legacies of neo-Confucianism, subject to economic and occupational stratification with lower higher education rates and fewer job opportunities. According to scholar Jonghyun Lee in “Shamanism and Its Emancipatory Power for Korean Women,” shamanism has historically been a way that Korean women have resisted the patriarchal values of neo-Confucianism and criticized the subordination of their livelihoods. During the kut ritual, the shaman would dance in her spiritual regalia, its sleeves fluttering in the air to the rhythmic sounds of cymbals and Korean double-headed drums. As the shaman sings, chants, and dances, she invokes ancestral spirits and deities to embrace her power and move beyond the profane world.⁴⁷ The spirits speak through her with words that empower women and challenge the oppressive social order.⁴⁸ Contemporary Korean women still exercise this form of refusal by keeping control over the kut ritual, which allows them to not merely be

⁴⁵ Jonghyun Lee, “Shamanism and Its Emancipatory Power for Korean Women,” *Affilia* 24, no. 2 (2009): 189.

⁴⁶ Lee, “Shamanism and Its Emancipatory Power,” 190.

⁴⁷ Lee, “Shamanism and Its Emancipatory Power,” 193.

⁴⁸ Lee, “Shamanism and Its Emancipatory Power,” 193.

associated with their husband's family but instead harness their ancestors' spirits to confront the political and social order.⁴⁹ Jonghyun Lee writes that kut rituals continue to be a “part of the culture of resistance, if not rebellion, through which Korean women can achieve cathartic release.”⁵⁰ Mira's use of Korean shamanism, then, not only connects her to Cha but to generations of women who have faced oppression and had their voices stifled.

Case Study 1: *Tesseract (test)* (2020)

Only a few days prior to Mira's powerful automatic writing experience, the renowned New York City performance space, The Kitchen, had invited her to reflect on her relationship with Cha's work. The experience with *White Dust* left Mira, who had already been exploring Korean shamanism, feeling artistically connected to Cha.⁵¹ In an unedited transcript of a forthcoming interview for *BOMB*, Mira discussed her archival encounter with the description for *White Dust*:

There was also something—I think the texture of this description felt sci-fi to me and...that feels really unexpected for Cha. It seemed like a new chapter of what her work could be and what she wanted and that she had begun to embark upon. This notion of time travel felt like a really rich way to engage with historical trauma and [question], what are our possibilities to transmute that? So I began working with her, working with her notes and trying to collect those memories.⁵²

While Mira had previously featured text from *Dictée* in her video *A Woman is not a Woman* (2014–2015),⁵³ her time at The Kitchen, undertaken at the end of 2020, spurred her first

⁴⁹ Lee, “Shamanism and Its Emancipatory Power,” 193.

⁵⁰ Lee, “Shamanism and Its Emancipatory Power,” 193.

⁵¹ Mira, interview with Kirkland.

⁵² Mira, interview by Kirkland.

⁵³ *A Woman is Not A Woman* traces the mermaid myth from a decapitated mermaid statue in Copenhagen to one of the earliest mermaid sightings in 1653. The first published account by a European in Korea, which reported “mermaids” that were actually Korean women who have been deep sea diving for centuries.

full investigation into Cha's work. The Kitchen explicitly emphasized intergenerational dialogue by inviting Mira to make work building on Cha's screening at The Kitchen's Video Viewing Room in 1982.⁵⁴ The project was facilitated by the 2020-2021 Curatorial Fellow Kathy Cho, who had been introduced to *Dictée* as an undergrad and spent some of her own time researching Cha's work in The Kitchen's archive.⁵⁵ During her fellowship, Cho uncovered details about Cha's video screening, which had been shown as a part of *Women's Work: A National Collection of Video by Women*,⁵⁸ guest-curated by Ann-Sargent Wooster in a series of month-long presentations in 1982.⁵⁶ Sifting through the digital traces of this series in The Kitchen's archive,⁶¹ Cho asked, "How do these gaps leave space for writers and arts practitioners to utilize projection, speculation, and channeling to expand upon a seemingly fixed point?"⁶²

⁵⁴ The same year as Cha's death.

⁵⁵ From 1975 through the early 1990s, The Kitchen's Video Viewing Room was dedicated to video and film screenings.

⁵⁶ Zoom Interview with Kathy Cho, February 6, 2023.

⁵⁷ During research in the archives of the Video Viewing Room programs, Cho found information on Cha's screening of *Passages Paysages* (1978). In a Zoom interview, Cho discussed being impacted by her own experience of learning about Cha and *Dictée* in her undergrad class "Modern Poet: The Imagist Poem."

⁵⁸ One of sixteen independently curated exhibitions, *Women's Work* was sponsored by the Women's Caucus for Art under the larger title *Views by Women Artists*.

⁵⁹ The *Women's Work* exhibitions happened in sixteen spaces throughout New York, including nonprofit spaces, commercial and university galleries, and government buildings. Chosen from an open call, the almost 400 participating women artists were organized by either theme or medium.

⁶⁰ During the film screenings, Cha's *Passages Paysages* (1978). Organized by Wooster, the additional night screening happened on February 14, 1982 and included *Mary Lucier's Denman's Col (Geometry)* and Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Passages/Paysages*.

⁶¹ The Kitchen provided an invaluable platform for Cha and Mira to explore, develop, and present their works. In this way, it acted as a conduit for the two women to express their distinct identities, gain recognition in the larger artistic community, and be in dialogue across time with each other. Furthermore, the Kitchen's commitment to showcasing diverse voices from multiple backgrounds made it possible for Mira to make meaningful connections with Cha's work.

⁶² Kathy Cho, "Na Mira: 'Passages Paysages Passengers,'" *The Kitchen OnScreen* (September 3, 2021), <https://onscreen.thekitchen.org/media/na-mira>.

From the month-long dialogue that grew out of this question, Mira created *Tesseract (test)* (2020), parts of which were later screened online alongside images from Cha's archive. In *Tesseract (test)*, Mira reimagines the final scene of *White Dust* through performance. In the last two pages of her typewritten text outlining the film [fig. 10 & 11], Cha envisions the final scene as taking place in an empty cinema with empty rows of seats as Character no. 2, the “woman-child,” walks into the film projection and disappears into the screen [fig. 12]. This final scene made an impact on Mira, who felt as if it was a portal that used the technology of cinema to reference a different dimensionality, breaking the fourth wall.⁶³ In another automatic writing session, Mira asked what would happen if she reenacted this scene and received the word “tesseract,” which she later learned meant the fourth dimension of a cube. The hard-to-imagine fourth dimension is a mathematical extension of the concept of three-dimensional space. The other three dimensions, which exist in space, are length, width, and height, while the fourth dimension is time. Due to this, it is often described colloquially as something outside the range of ordinary experience or as a portal to another world.⁶⁴ From this moment on, Mira's work has been in continual collaboration with people and histories outside of herself, including Cha.

Within one week of her invitation from The Kitchen, Mira was working to reenact the final film scene of *White Dust* during the COVID-19 lockdown. Mira asked Cha for permission⁶⁵ and her ancestors for protection for the filmed performance.⁶⁶ *Tesseract (test)* is a grainy, hauntingly beautiful black-and-white video of Mira standing in front of the projection of Cha's

⁶³ Mira, interview by Kirkland.

⁶⁴ Mira, interview by Kirkland.

⁶⁵ In the interview for *BOMB*, Na Mira writes that she also pulled tarot asking Cha's permission and the card of the Universe, The World.

⁶⁶ ICA Philadelphia. “ICA Lecture Series: Na Mira.”

railroad film images [fig. 12 & 13]. Projected onto the image is a pair of white gloves with half-moon shapes, filled as if someone's hands were in them, but with nobody attached [fig. 14]. Recorded with an infrared camera, a technology popular with ghost hunters and animal trackers for enhancing vision at night, Mira uses it as a tool to highlight what cannot be seen by the human eye. The gloves glitch, coming in and out of view as the film starts and Mira walks into the camera's view, eyes glowing white like a tiger hunting at night [fig. 15]. She slowly pulls the white gloves up to her elbows as the haunting sounds of jumbled voices arise. The shot alternates between projections of the gloves and Mira, who comes in and out of the scene like a ghost, fragmenting time into a nonlinear narrative [fig. 16].

Here, Mira reactivates *White Dust* and reanimates the life and memory of Cha through the performance as a ritual. Scholarship has often skimmed over the gruesome details of Cha's murder to instead focus on her work, such as in essays by Constance Lewallen and others in *The Dream of the Audience: Theresa Hak Kyung Cha (1951-1982)*. However, the art world's silence about how she died contributes to the oversight of the very real ongoing violence against Asian women still happening today. In 2022, the Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism published a compilation of Asian hate crime data, which revealed that anti-Asian hate crime has increased by 339 percent last year compared to the year before, with New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles and other cities surpassing their record numbers in 2020.⁶⁷ In her book *Minor Feelings*, Cathy Park Hong writes about Cha's death and the need to discuss these details in relation to the current increase in Asian violence. When police found Cha after she was raped, strangled, and beaten to death by security guard Joseph Sanza.⁶⁸ Cha's body was found near the Puck Building

⁶⁷ Kimmy Yam, "Anti-Asian Hate Crimes Increased 339 Percent Nationwide Last Year, Report Says," NBCNews.com (NBCUniversal News Group, February 14, 2022), <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/anti-asian-hate-crimes-increased-339-percent-nationwide-last-year-re-po-rcna14282>.

⁶⁸ She had gone there to meet her husband, the photographer Richard Barnes, who was documenting the renovation of the building. Sanza dumped her body there from a van he borrowed. After he raped her, he beat her

in lower Manhattan just a few blocks from her home. Police could not find her gloves, hat, and one boot.⁶⁹⁷⁰ Hong writes about an eerie moment when Cha's family, spurred by dreams of the number seven as a clue, and her husband, Richard Barnes, went searching for her missing items and found them in a room in the building where Cha was murdered. According to Cha's brother John, when they opened the door, they first saw gloves that seemed alive, puffed up as if Cha's hands were inside gripping the floor. Once the police arrived, the gloves deflated as if her energy had left. Coincidentally, right before her death, Cha had been working on a series of photographs that focused on hands.⁷¹ John later wrote that he considered the gloves her last art piece. By putting on the gloves, Mira evokes Cha's death and, through cinema, creates a tesseract, a portal of transmission to Cha.

During the performance, a cacophony of music, sounds, and indiscernible voices beep and hiss. Prior to the performance, Mira had soaked a latex tube in mugwort (an herb known for its properties in supporting lucid dreaming). When she attached a microphone to the tubing, she noticed it made a few interesting sounds but did not pick up many. Mira began to perform in front of the projection of the railroad film image, and the microphone did not appear to work, so she left the amplifier on and placed the microphone on the floor.⁷² But as she continued, the microphone started emitting subtle sounds, so she went back over and turned it to the maximum value until voices and melodies started pouring out.⁷³ After the performance, Mira tested this

with a nightstick, leaving cuts deep enough to reach her skull and strangled her to death with her belt. For more information on her death see *Minor Feelings*.

⁶⁹ Cathy Park Hong, *Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning* (New York: Profile Books, 2021), 127.

⁷⁰ Sanza has previously committed a series of rapes in Florida before relocating to New York. An initial police report described Cha as an "Oriental Jane Doe."

⁷¹ The series of photographs was shown at the Artist's Space following her death.

⁷² ICA Philadelphia. "ICA Lecture Series: Na Mira."

⁷³ ICA Philadelphia. "ICA Lecture Series: Na Mira."

microphone day after day, but the sound did not come back until a few months later, when a new transmission arrived: 1540 A.M. Radio Korea. Though physically solitary, when the sounds arrived as she performed, she felt she was not alone.⁷⁴ It was as if Cha was communicating with her, telling her that death is not an end. As Mira suggests, “I am working with synchronicity and divination, attuning to entanglements and environments, so there are many voices in the work.”⁷⁵ By performing in *Tesseract (test)*, she found herself wanting to make art again, to be in dialogue with something greater and outside of herself.⁷⁶

Throughout the filmed performance, Mira—with her elbow-length white gloves, long dark hair, and glowing white eyes—moves from side to side, raising her hands in a haunting channeling as she becomes a part of the final scene in Cha’s *White Dust* [fig. 17]. The novelist Ed Park notes that white is a funerary color in Korea and that death flows throughout *White Dust*.⁷⁷ Park suggests that the project lives in the dust of its rubble and that perhaps Cha had this in mind when selecting the name for the film.⁷⁸ What is clear is that *White Dust* is not a project about completion but rather exploring the tension, uncertainty, and ecstasy of the in-between spaces shared by those alive and those who have passed. *Tesseract (test)*’s sound and image are not manipulated, so the viewer experiences Mira’s unedited transmission to Cha as she steps into this intergenerational dimension.

⁷⁴ Mira, interview by Kirkland.

⁷⁵ Na Mira, email message with author, April 12th, 2023.

⁷⁶ Mira, interview by Kirkland.

⁷⁷ Ed Park, “This Is the Writing You Have Been Waiting For,” in *Exilée; Temps Morts: Selected Works* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009), 14.

⁷⁸ Park, “This is the Writing,” 14.

Because the project took place during lockdown, the curators at The Kitchen chose to show it online. The only “installation” space was a one-page website where both Cho and Mira’s essay about the project sat alongside a short clip of *Tesseract (test)*. Yet, by 2022, *Tesseract (test)* was no longer on the site. While Kathy Cho’s curatorial initiative to emphasize the Mira and Cha’s intergenerational dialogue is incredibly valuable, with limited viewer access, the effort falls short. It raises questions for curators about how to archive projects so that they can continue to evolve and be reshaped as the artists and artworks change.

Case Study 2: Non-Linearity in Na Mira *Night Vision (Red as never been)* (2022)

Following Mira’s work at the Kitchen, 2022 Whitney Biennial curators Adrienne Edwards and David Breslin invited her to expand on her practice with Cha. Entitled *Quiet as It’s Kept*⁷⁹ after a Toni Morrison reference about mourning the dead in secret, the Biennial placed the work of five deceased artists in dialogue with a range of contemporary artists.⁸⁰⁸¹ The curator’s objective was “to map, in an intergenerational way, the artists who are questioning identity... who are comfortable with a lack of certainty around questions of representation, questions of belonging.”⁸²

Edwards and Breslin intended to facilitate an intergenerational dialogue by also exhibiting Mira’s *Night Vision (Red as never been)*, (2022). The Biennial exhibited a small

⁷⁹ Toni Morrison’s verse “quiet as it’s kept, there were no marigolds in the fall of 1941” is from her acclaimed book *The Bluest Eye*.

⁸⁰ At the Biennial, Cha was one of five deceased artists whose work was presented, along with Steve Cannon, N.H. Pritchard, Jason Rhoades and Denyse Thomasos.

⁸¹ Previous to the exhibition Cha received her first official posthumous obituary in *The New York Times* suggesting she is “overlooked no more.”

⁸² David Breslin and Adrienne Edwards, “Making the 2022 Biennial: An Interview with the Curators,” Whitney Museum of American Art, accessed February 14, 2023, <https://whitney.org/essays/making-2022-biennial>.

retrospective of fourteen of Cha's film and archival works in a delicate, canvas tent and accompanied it with a live marathon reading of *Dictée*, during which Mira and many others performed.⁸³ The tent recreated the original design for Cha's 1975 performance *A BLE WAIL* at the University of California Berkeley's Worth Ryder Gallery, where she aimed "to be the dream of the audience."⁸⁴ Here, Cha's mention of being a dream for future audiences is implied in the mode of display, suggesting how influential Cha has been, and the works exhibited in the tent give a sense of the themes important to her body of work. The artist's book *Presence/Absence* (1975), made from photographs of Cha, her sister, and her brothers after their exile from Korea, presents an archive of fragmented memory and loss. The display of her artist book *Father/Mother* (1977) connects the intimacy of her family photographs to the broader cultural context of exile. *Father/Mother* is made of photocopies of images of Cha's parents that, over the course of the book, become a more saturated blue, alternating with pages of Korean calligraphy.⁸⁵ Her use of photocopying allowed her an accessible way to distribute images, a tactic which inspired many artists, such as Yumi Lee. Amongst these and other artworks and films of Cha's, the exhibit included a rare showing of *White Dust*, on a small monitor in a plexiglass case filled with other works from Cha's archive.^{86,87}

⁸³ Other readers included Genji Amino, David Breslin, Sam Cha, Joshua Chambers-Letson, Grace M. Cho, Marian Chudnovsky, Jesse Chun, Una Chung, Philo Cohen, Adrienne Edwards, Sunny Iyer, Min Sun Jeon, Ainee Jeong, Juwon Jun, Justin Kim, Katie Kirkland, Diana Seo Hyung Lee, Flo Li, Ming Lin, Dave McKenzie, Na Mira, Criss Moon, Hana Rivers, Teline Trần, Asiya Wadud, Simon Wu, Soyoung Yoon, Kate Zambreno, and more.

⁸⁴ Davidson, "Giving Voice to an Artist Silenced Too Soon."

⁸⁵ Reproductions of Cha's mother from *Father/Mother* (1977) were later used as illustrations in *Dictée*, released two months after Cha's death in 1982.

⁸⁶ Cannizzo, email message to author.

⁸⁷ The film has only been included in a few exhibitions. BAMPFA lends it very rarely because it is not a completed work of art by Cha. It was shown at the Barbara Gladstone Gallery, NY, in 2011, in a group exhibition about unfinished films. <https://www.gladstonegallery.com/exhibition/93/the-unfinished-film/info>.

Mira's video installation *Night Vision (Red as never been)* (2022), which was displayed on a different floor of the Biennial, builds upon many of the themes apparent in Cha's body of work.⁸⁸⁹ While Cha's work focused on language and its limitations during displacement, Mira focuses on generations of women's resistance through spirituality as a response to the trauma of colonization and enforced patriarchy. *Night Vision (Red as never been)* investigates the gender oppression of Korean women under Japanese colonial rule and offers a reading of resistant female shamans. Working in conversation with Cha's archive, the piece invites viewers to critically engage with the complexities of the diasporic experience, from assimilation to resistance. Yet, Mira's intention and the connection between their practices was lacking as visitors could not easily see their work in conversation due to the display on different floors. Presented as a three-channel infrared video installation, *Night Vision (Red as never been)* (2022) utilizes montage, a film editing technique that brings together separate images, moving or still (in Mira's case, moving). The video transitions through clips of two performances from *Night Vision* (2018), recordings from a performance at the site of Cha's death in New York, a portion of *Tesseract (test)* (2020), and new shots of the San Onofre Nuclear Power Plant and a cliff overlooking the ocean.

The *Night Vision (Red as never been)* starts with two channels of performance shots from *Night Vision* (2018), where people are playing on a playground and dancing on a truck bed during the downtime of a shaman's ritual in South Korea [fig. 18]. Mira's infrared camera lends the footage a purple hue as well as its characteristic glitch, suggesting the presence of a

⁸⁸ Ayanna Dozier, "Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's Emotive Multimedia Work Is Influencing a New Generation of Artists," *Artsy*, July 7, 2022, <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-theresa-hak-kyung-chas-emotive-multimedia-work-influencing-new-generation-artists>.

⁸⁹ "Whitney Biennial 2022: Quiet as It's Kept." Whitney Museum of American Art. Accessed October 18, 2022, <https://whitney.org/exhibitions/2022-biennial?section=10#exhibition-feature>.

multiplicity of both past and present histories, past and present artists. Mira also intermixes poetic red text in both English and Korean throughout, a technique of mixing language and visuals that Cha used in her film works as well.⁹⁰ The film's sound comes from the same 1540 A.M. Radio Korea recording used in *Tesseract (test)*. Early on in *Night Vision (Red as never been)*, the sounds of the radio increases in intensity and the bottom channel changes to glitching, black-and-white footage of a woman in a crinkled white shirt dancing slowly. As the shot progresses, the woman is superimposed with footage of herself dancing at a faster speed [fig. 19 & 20]. On the upper-left channel, color footage appears of the leaking San Onofre nuclear generator station wrapped in blue covers, invoking the history of nuclear war [fig. 21], and later, the nuclear generator station changes to a view of the ocean [fig. 22], emphasizing diasporic displacement overseas. Meanwhile, the bottom channel cuts to red footage of Mira ringing bells and performing a ritual at the site of Cha's murder in New York, reactivating her memory and death [fig. 23]. This performance in red continues as footage from *Tesseract (test)* appears on the upper-right channel with red text saying "(if i perform Cha's final scene ?)" and "TESSERACT PULSE SPOOLS TIME MENDABLE NESCENT" [fig. 24].⁹¹ Through her use of montage, Mira juxtaposes shots, compresses time, and interweaves multiple narratives to emphasize the fragmented, nonlinear nature of her dialogue with Cha.

In *Local Invisibility, Postcolonial Feminisms: Asian American Contemporary Artists in California* (2019), Laura Fantone suggests that Cha herself drew on the techniques of cinematography, observing how writings such as *Dictée* and *Temps Mort* feel like an "experimental film script using montage and shifting language to make the usually hidden

⁹⁰ Such as in Cha's film *Passages Paysages* (1978).

⁹¹ The scenes play on as the text changes to "how do the two selves meet ?" and "TAIL SAMBARA" [fig. 28]. In Buddhism, Samsara is the cycle of death, rebirth, and reincarnation.

conventions of style visible.”⁹² *White Dust*’s use of railroad imagery also mirrors the common montage motif that shows shots of trains racing toward the camera.⁹³ Mira’s use of montage, then builds off of Cha’s, layering and compressing a polyvocal narrative that speaks to the experience of generations of women who have faced and continue to face anti-Asian hate, sexual violence, and oppression due to patriarchal value systems.

To understand *Night Vision (Red as never been)*, we have to unpack the importance of the scenes Mira pieces together, which include footage from a Korean shaman’s ritual in South Korea and a performance at a site from Korea’s demilitarized zone (DMZ). The video from both the ritual and the performance was recorded during a trip that Mira took to explore stories from her family history, including her great-grandmother’s experiences as a shaman (mudang) under the Japanese occupation.⁹⁴ During the occupation (1910–1945), shamanism became a target of the Japanese government’s attempt to suppress indigenous Korean culture. During this time, shamanism was outlawed, Koreans were forced to participate in Shinto religious practices, and shamans were often arrested and their religious sites destroyed by Japanese police officers.⁹⁵ While Mira knows her great-grandmother was a shaman at this time, she does not know her name, as women were referred to as *the mother of [insert child’s name]*. At the time, Korea was infused with a neo-Confucian sense of hierarchy that lingers in the present; even today, it is more common to refer to women by their relationship to others as opposed to their individual name. Due to this practice, Mira and many women lost a feeling of connection to their matrilineal line.

⁹² Laura Fantone, *Local Invisibility, Postcolonial Feminisms: Asian American Contemporary Artists in California* (S.I.: Springer Nature, 2021), 74-75.

⁹³ Reisz, Karel, and Gavin Millar, *The Technique of Film Editing* (Waltham, MA: Focal Press), 2010.

⁹⁴ There are both hereditary and charismatic mudang in Korea. Mira comes from a hereditary matrilineal line of Shamans.

⁹⁵ Jonghyun Lee, “Shamanism and Its Emancipatory Power,” 191.

Mira's family moved frequently during her childhood; she was born in the United States and grew up in Hong Kong, Hiroshima, Seoul, and many different places in the U.S. Her 2018 return to Seoul, much like Cha's return for *White Dust*, was an overdue chance to connect to Korea, her diasporic identity, and her matrilineal ancestral line. As Mira began researching her great-grandmother's story, she found that many of the existing documentaries on shamanism were created by white European men, with government and institutional funding. Often, these documentaries focused on the most famous shamans in Korea, ignoring how shamanism is a practice of rituals embedded in the everyday lives of women. Frustrated with narratives that portrayed shamanism as either a possession or a spectacle, leaving the women who practice it no agency, Mira wanted another kind of perspective: that of shamanism as resistance. With no budget and little equipment besides her broken infrared camera, she looked for alternative ways to narrate both shamans' rituals and her own family's history.

Mira carried these goals with her when a journalist took her to a Korean shaman's ritual held at night. Refusing the spectacularizing gaze of the documentaries she had seen, Mira did not film the ceremony. Instead, she filmed during a break as the audience danced and played on top of a truck bed [fig. 25].⁹⁶ A male cameraman leaned over and told her she was wasting her time, suggesting that what they were waiting for was the shaman to return with the pig's head and swords—the real “money shot.”⁹⁷ And yet dance is an important part of Korean kut rituals. By videotaping the audience dancing during a liminal space in the ritual, Mira suggests that the power of shamanism extends far beyond the confines of the official ritual and highlights the persistence of every day forms of resistance. In fact, rituals of shamanism are and often have

⁹⁶ ICA Philadelphia. “ICA Lecture Series: Na Mira.”

⁹⁷ ICA Philadelphia. “ICA Lecture Series: Na Mira.”

been practiced within the homespace. Both the spectacular documentaries and the large-scale shaman rituals miss how embedded the practice is in the lives of Koreans.

After filming during the ritual, Mira's investigation into shamanism continued when she heard a rumor that endangered tigers, a shaman spirit god and the symbol of Korea, had been spotted in the preserved ecosystem of the DMZ.⁹⁸ She asked a female mudang to help her find the tiger, and the shaman gave her a set of instructions: practice their movements, pray every day, and visit a local mountain. For weeks, she put tiger balm on her face, crawled on the earth, and listened until a message arrived: "If you take your camera to the border, you can cross."⁹⁹ This message startled Mira and felt foreign, as though it had come from outside herself. While she previously would have classified the message as a thought, this one felt different. After receiving it, she began to embrace her matrilineal mudang line and to view shamanism as a form of transmission.

Following the message, Mira traveled to the DMZ, a border barrier dividing North and South Korea that is one of the most militarized landscapes in the world.¹⁰⁰¹⁰¹ She brought only her infrared camera, not knowing whether it would work in the daytime, and, once onsite, asked a friend who had come along to film her facing North Korea. The footage captured Mira on her hands and knees, performing as a tiger on the paved ground [fig. 26]. By taking on the role of the tiger (which was eradicated in Korea during Japanese rule) and by facing North (where many

⁹⁸ Though it has suffered significant damage and trauma due to conflict at the border of North and South Korea, the DMZ over the last couple decades has become a large ecological system that has provided refuge for endangered species of animals and plants.

⁹⁹ ICA Philadelphia. "ICA Lecture Series: Na Mira."

¹⁰⁰ ICA Philadelphia. "ICA Lecture Series: Na Mira."

¹⁰¹ Mira could only visit the DMZ on a guided tour because public access had been restricted due to a heightened threat of nuclear conflict at the border.

lost family during the division of Korea), Mira invokes the memory and casualties of war and displacement. Seen through the broken infrared camera, Mira's performance layers on itself, folding the past repeatedly into the present. The timestamp on the footage snaps back and forth in an invisible beat that, like the technology of shamanism, distorts time and connects the dead to the living. When Mira returned from her trip, she learned that Nam June Paik (Korean: 백남준; July 20, 1932 – January 29, 2006), the founder of video art, had identified as a shaman.¹⁰² Paik believed that broadcast technologies communicated with spirits, that everyone could have a channel, and that video art was a form of ritual. Similarly, Mira began thinking of the infrared camera as a tool to communicate with Cha's spirit and create a form of nonlinear shamanistic ritual. In *Night Vision (Red as never been)*, Mira establishes the link between shamanism and video art not only through clips from her trip to Korea, but also her performance in *Tesseract (Test)* and newer performance footage at the site of Cha's death. Further, by performing at the site of Cha's death where she was a victim of a sex crime, Mira highlights the hyperfeminization and sexualization of Asian women that continues to happen today.

Night Vision (Red as never been) displayed Mira's use of montage, nonlinear representation of time, and interest in women's resistance. Mira planned the piece to be projected onto a window, and, while researching how to do so, learned to apply a hologram film to the glass so viewers could still see through it. She found it fascinating that when you cut a photograph, it divides, but when you cut a hologram, it multiplies—suggesting the whole is in every part.¹⁰³ As Mira has observed about her projection technique for *Night Vision (Red as never been)*:

¹⁰² ICA Philadelphia. "ICA Lecture Series: Na Mira."

¹⁰³ ICA Philadelphia. "ICA Lecture Series: Na Mira."

The fugitive frame breaks the seams of representation, opening a dimensionality beyond trauma's image and weaponizing the compression of hyperfemininity of the Asian body explodes. In the glitch, images unravel in her excess threaded across being. The past is already now, transmitting and diffracting through space. We are disoriented, co-constituted in time unfurling.¹⁰⁴

Arranged as double projections on holographic plexiglass, *Night Vision (Red as never been)*'s nonlinear techniques echo the violence of being outside this world (Cha) and the ecstasy of making another (Mira).¹⁰⁵

Case Study 3: Multiplicity in *TETRAPHOBIA* (2022)

Expanding further on her engagements with *White Dust in Tesseract (test)* (2020) and *Night Vision (Red as never been)* (2022), Mira explored multiplicity in her 2022 video and 16mm film piece *TETRAPHOBIA* (2022), installed at Company Gallery, New York. Multiplicity is defined as “the quality or state of being multiple or various.”¹⁰⁶ Complementary to polyvocality as a powerful tool for combining various voices, opinions, and viewpoints, multiplicity is the inward state of being multidimensional. In *TETRAPHOBIA*, Mira cultivates multiplicity through film techniques like montage, the blurring of performer identities, and the sharing of her personal family history to emphasize that she is part of generations of diasporic women and their stories of resistance. Since Mira's first point of contact with Cha in *Tesseract (test)*, the sounds of this transmission have been playing. At first, Mira questioned why she was receiving this

¹⁰⁴ ICA Philadelphia. “ICA Lecture Series: Na Mira.”

¹⁰⁵ ICA Philadelphia. “ICA Lecture Series: Na Mira.”

¹⁰⁶ “Multiplicity Definition & Meaning.” Merriam-Webster. Accessed February 7, 2023. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/multiplicity>.

communication.¹⁰⁷ In *TETRAPHOBIA*, she began to truly trust and experiment with the connection.

When Mira began the process of working on *TETRAPHOBIA*, she was not sure what she was going to film, so she began meditating and practicing automatic writing every day. For some time, nothing much came to her until finally she received an image of a teddy bear. Mira had no idea what its significance was, but she engaged with it as if it was a gift, a message.¹⁰⁸ When she first googled “teddy bear,” an image of a man giving a “sexy” Asian woman a teddy bear came up.¹⁰⁹ The image initially made Mira want to burn the teddy bear, but it also made her ask, “what are the potentials of the hyperfemininity that is projected on our bodies? How can that be weaponized?”¹¹⁰ In this way, the teddy bear prompted Mira to build on the attention she had already paid to the layered modes of violence visited on Asian women as well as how that violence is resisted.

Unlike in her other projects, for *TETRAPHOBIA* Mira began her research process with another collaborator, Korean-Canadian artist Hanna Hur. Together, Hur and Mira approached the archive with this question in mind and its relation to the perceptions surrounding Cha’s life and work. After noticing the frequently reproduced film still of “Cha” from her film *Permutations* (1976) that was actually of her sister Bernadette [fig. 27 and 28], Mira and Hur wanted to interrogate the “all Asians look alike” trope.¹¹¹¹¹² Seeing how this trope was repeated in the

¹⁰⁷ Mira, interview by Kirkland.

¹⁰⁸ Mira, interview by Kirkland.

¹⁰⁹ Mira, interview by Kirkland.

¹¹⁰ Mira, interview by Kirkland.

¹¹¹ Na Mira, description of *TETRAPHOBIA*, <https://www.na-mira.com/mira/tetraphobia/>.

¹¹² Author Cathy Park Hong noted in *Minor Feelings* (similar to Mira) that she thought the photograph of Bernadette was Cha for many years by how articles circulated the image of Bernadette as Cha.

images circulated of Cha, they wanted to weaponize their similarities to emphasize the power in their multiplicity.

While searching through Cha's archive, Mira and Hurr found their desire to highlight the stories of diasporic Korean women more generally was connected to Cha's own aim with *White Dust*. In her "statement of plans" for *White Dust* as a historical novel, Cha writes that she envisioned it as showcasing stories about displaced Koreans—stories that were often erased or ignored in the histories told about Korea [fig. 29]. While filming *White Dust*, Ed Park notes that Cha felt separate and alienated from Korea as it churned through a period of social upheaval seeded by its long history of occupation and foreign intervention. As Park, who describes Character no. 1 as a metaphor for a "nation, a historical condition,"¹¹³ observes, Cha's abstract and dream-like conception of the film ran up against the real, broken history and violence playing out in modern Korea.¹¹⁴ When Cha returned to the U.S. and began to reimagine the project as a historical novel, she reflected on the layered histories that had created that political moment and defined Korea in the world's eyes. In her statement of plans, Cha speaks of the Korean War, which arose from the competing political-economic interests of the U.S., Soviet Union, Japan, and China; the decades of Japanese occupation that preceded the war; and the treaty signed by the United States President Teddy Roosevelt which "legalized" that occupation in Korea while also securing the Philippines for the U.S.¹¹⁵¹¹⁶ When Mira read this description,

¹¹³ Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, film scenario from *White Dust From Mongolia*, 1980, University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive.

¹¹⁴ Park, "This Is the Writing," 15.

¹¹⁵ Cha, film scenario from *White Dust From Mongolia*.

¹¹⁶ Cha writes in *White Dust*'s statement of plans that while the basic historical facts of these historical chapters are known, little attention has been paid to the Korean people's experience of cultural identity and historic exile—for example, to China, Russia, and the U.S.

she recognized another layer of significance in her vision of the teddy bear: “teddy bears” are named after Teddy Roosevelt.¹¹⁷

To explore the mundane experiences of Koreans living through these historical conditions, Cha looked to her own family's exile in Manchuria, China. We learn more about her intent through her statement of plans for *White Dust*. In these documents, Cha envisioned Character no. 1 as an exiled Korean girl living in Manchuria who was banned from speaking Korean and who eventually lost her memory and, after an accident, her ability to speak. Through Character no. 1, Cha points to an everyday diasporic experience of exile, displacement, and lost language. As Mira suggests, “The fragmentation of the histories, narratives, authors, voices is the result of often violent displacement but also signals the piecing together of another world, one that is collective and not yet known.”¹¹⁸ For Mira, finding these plans in the archive solidified her own plans for *TETRAPHOBIA*, affirming a focus on resisting the erasures of Korea's histories generally and women's experiences specifically.

TETRAPHOBIA is a two-channel black-and-white video installation originally shown at the Company Gallery in New York. The piece is made of both 16mm film transfer and infrared video that are fragmented into six clips and looped. The film is split between footage inspired by the final scene of *White Dust* and footage that works to resist several layers of violent tropes about Asians. Though Mira primarily works in video, she chose to learn 16mm film as that is what Cha used for *White Dust*. At the beginning of *TETRAPHOBIA*, each clip shows the spoke holes that hold the 16mm film on its reel, making the footage feel raw and unedited [fig. 30]. By acknowledging the film apparatus, (something Cha does as well), Mira works to remind viewers that the film's raw nature is unfinished, ongoing, and in-process like *White Dust*. Mira is not

¹¹⁷ Mira, interview by Kirkland.

¹¹⁸ Na Mira, email message with author, April 12th, 2023.

interested in conveying a singular, finished meaning but instead a multiplicity, a process and dialogue that is entangled with what has come before and what will continue to be. In Mira's synopsis, she describes how this multiplicity helps counter the historical forces that would erase, reduce, and stereotype Korean diasporic experience:

The non-linear scenes of *TETRAPHOBIA* are arranged in an unfolded cube, every face it's own time, one corner reaching for the next dimension. Opening this black box in a white cube, Cha's *White Dust From Mongolia* continues to unfurl. Dis-oriented, our multiple vanishing points shred the singular perspective of a humanity that would not have us. CHIMERA 같이 가.¹¹⁹

While working on the film, Mira writes that on some mornings in her dreams, she met Cha in a cinema where they took turns showing each other parts of *White Dust*.¹²⁰ Sometimes, Cha left words on a marquee board outside. These dream meetings inspired Mira to imagine her own final scene for *White Dust*, which she presents as spliced film fragments in three rough categories: footage in the cinema, performance with the words Cha leaves for her, and a woman setting a teddy bear on fire [fig. 31]. Two clips show an empty cinema with a woman in white and long dark hair slowly crawling over the seats towards the white blank screen [fig. 32]. In one moment in the same clip, two figures sit together in the seats as if Mira and Cha are whispering over film details and sharing advice [fig. 33].

The other clips follow a series of performances by a woman in a white dress as she sets a teddy bear on fire, holds a flamethrower, smiles with glee, and speaks while snapping a clapperboard [fig. 34].¹²¹ The performance of the woman setting the teddy bear on fire is connected to the history of kut rituals utilizing fire, a history Cha also referenced in her early

¹¹⁹ Description of *TETROPHOBIA*, <https://www.na-mira.com/mira/tetraphobia/>.

¹²⁰ Description of *TETROPHOBIA*, <https://www.na-mira.com/mira/tetraphobia/>.

¹²¹ The color white in Korean shamanism is also extensively used in rituals as a symbol of purity in the kut ritual. By including a white dress, Mira connects more deeply to Korean shamanism.

performance piece, *Barren Cave Mute* (1974). During this performance, Cha transcribed each word from the title in white wax on a ten by four-foot sheet of paper. Only by bringing a candle to the paper were the words briefly legible before it burst into flame and became a pile of white ash on the floor. In kut, the purification of the body is performed by burning white paper.¹²² By drawing on this ritual, Cha and Mira connect to a history of polyvocal resistance to the displacement of Korean people, the outlawing of Korean shamanism, and the oppression of women under patriarchal systems.

Mira films the woman in white in a way that suggests another layer of resistance. In the short clips, the woman in the video is indiscernible at first—is it Mira? Cha? Someone else? Performed by Hur, who also has a relationship with Korean shamanism and here takes on the role of Character no. 2, the woman recites the dictation from Cha with a clapperboard enunciating each word, which is then shown spelled backwards on another screen. Mira noted that throughout the showings of *TETRAPHOBIA*, people thought Hurr was Mira, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, and Hur's twin sister who is also an artist, Laurie Kang.¹²³ Here, Mira weaponizes the idea that all Asians look the same, making them into doppelgangers while also allowing different voices into the story. Through this multiplicity, she opens up a polyvocal dialogue that holds space for many stories, histories, and spirits.

The exhibition, also entitled *TETRAPHOBIA*, displayed red automatic writing on paper, fans, and red light at Company Gallery [fig. 36]. The red paper artworks come from Mira's automatic writing practice with each of the four drawings being a series of four questions, as transcribed in the titles. The four black fans installed on the wall refer to the I Ching hexagram

¹²² Jung Young Lee, *Korean Shamanistic Rituals* (The Hague: Mouton, 1981).

¹²³ Mira, interview by Kirkland.

44 symbol: wind beneath heaven. The red light comes from Mira's intention for the whole space to feel like a sensory threshold leading to the film. According to Mira,

The red light is inspired by the use of red in the interior of cinemas and darkroom development. It's the longest waveform color so it eventually disappears from sight followed on the electromagnetic spectrum by the invisible waves of infrared and radio. I'm considering it a deconstruction of film, a site of disappearance, a threshold that we could potentially attune to and follow to wherever red goes, wherever the cinema goes, where the latent film continues.¹²⁴

The color red, such as in *TETRAPHOBIA* and *Night Vision (Red as never been)*, is used in Mira's installations to emphasize her goal in connecting to what we cannot see in the third dimension.

The title *TETRAPHOBIA* comes from a practice, most common in East Asian nations, of avoiding the number four. As in many languages, such as Korean, the number four sounds similar or identical to the hanja for "death" (사). For instance, in hospitals, funeral halls, and many other public buildings, the floor or room number 4 is always skipped and often labeled something else. By titling the piece *TETRAPHOBIA*, Mira points to the fourth dimension of a cube (tesseract) through which she speaks to Cha and challenges the fear of death as an end. By embracing intergenerational dialogue, nonlinear forms of communication, and multiplicity, Mira connects to other women across the Korean diaspora to find power in their voices together.

Conclusion

Na Mira's performance-based films invite us into a polyvocal, nonlinear dialogue interrogating history and identity—a process with no ends, answers, or conclusions. Surveying generations of displacement and exile for Korean women, Mira engages Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's work to call out to diasporic experiences of lost memory, language, and ancestors. By

¹²⁴ Na Mira, email message with author, April 12th, 2023.

focusing on Mira's contemporary engagement with Cha's work, we gain new insight into the importance of both artist's work. A polyvocal approach is an essential part of the visual, oral, and written lexicon of diaspora. It creates a third space for diasporic experience to be explored, where all voices can listen, speak, and be heard.¹²⁵ Scholar Homi Bhabha is credited with formulating the postcolonial theory of third space that works to explain the uniqueness of each person as a hybrid. Laura Fantone applies third space theory to Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, describing her work as blending historical facts, gender, and nationality towards *thirdness*, a refusal to have a univocal identity. Mira similarly works in this third space and extends it into a fourth through Korean shamanism, transmitting and communicating with the dead and those that have come before. Working in the fourth space, artists such as Mira, Hur, and Cha acknowledge that they are not the first person or artist to work through diasporic themes or experiences of anti-Asian violence. They connect to thousands of women continuing to fight for their rights today, such as in 4B, a radical feminist movement originating in South Korea in 2019.

Polyvocality is a tool that allows artists to resist static, monolithic ideas of cultural identity or the curator's desire to pinpoint it. Curators and art institutions need to be strategic in how they display and give context to the complexities of polyvocal projects. *Tesseract (test)* (2020) at The Kitchen demonstrates the importance of inviting artists into intergenerational dialogue and underlines the need for a living archive to support the projects that result. A generative model for preservation can be seen in the Asia Art Archive, which is constantly updating its archives—not removing past history or writings but layering onto them to show

¹²⁵ The notion of a “third space” arises across disciplines. In art, the critical lineage began in the late 1960s and 1970s in Latin America with the articulations of notions of *Third Cinema*, which sought anticapitalist, anticolonial filmmaking methods. Another key contributor was the publication of *Questions of Third Cinema* by Jim Pines and Paul Willeman. In 1989, the British journal *Framework* asked questions on the “Third Scenario: Theory and the Politics of Location” with Isaac Julien, Stuart Hall, and others. Theorist Homi Bhabha is credited with forming a third space theory that works to explain the uniqueness of each person as a hybrid. From this, artist Trinh T. Minh-ha also conceptualized a “third scenario” in the theory of cinema and filmmaking.

changes in theory and understandings of an artwork or ephemera.¹²⁶ Utilizing platforms that facilitate this kind of continuing archive allows artworks to be ever-evolving.

The showing of *Night Vision (Red as never been)* (2022) at the Whitney Biennial underlined the potential power in intergenerational dialogue, but the layout and design did not encourage viewers' understanding of this goal. In conversations with visitors, many reported that they missed Cha or Mira's installation, or saw both but did not realize their connection as the installations were on different floors.¹²⁷ The exhibition text gave sparse information about the ongoing dialogue between Mira and Cha. Mira's wall label only mentions her footage at the site of Cha's 1982 murder, neglecting the piece's many other connections to Cha. Placing the installations closer to one another and creating more didactic connective tissue would have better supported the Biennial's curatorial agenda while still leaving space for the works to be encountered in open-ended, embodied ways while contributing to a larger dialogue on diasporic cultural identity.

With *TETRAPHOBIA* (2022), presented at Company Gallery, New York, a smaller and less institutional space, Mira was allowed to be more experimental in evolving her relationship with *White Dust*. But the less institutional nature of the setting also had its drawbacks. The gallery provided only limited descriptions to accompany the piece. While this may have created a space to feel Mira's transmission to Cha rather than process it analytically, it may also have limited viewers' understanding of the depth of Mira's engagement with Cha.

These case studies of Mira's work, alongside a deeper analysis of Cha's *White Dust*, demonstrate a regenerative model of intergenerational dialogue that allows viewers to take up

¹²⁶ Hyunjoo Byeon, "Evolving Archive: Asia Art Archive," in *Curating Research*, ed. Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson (London: Open Editions, 2015), 186–94.

¹²⁷ Curators Kathy Cho, Meghan Smith, and Julianna Heller email and in-person communication to author, February 2023.

their own fractured, fluid, and fecund perspectives on the lived experience of history, memory, and loss. For Mira:

[*White Dust*] offers us again and again, a potential for return. And the thing about the return, and each time that you and I have returned to her work, or each time the world returns to her work, or that we return to these sites where we thought we knew what it was... is that it changes. It continues to transform.¹²⁸

Here, Mira suggests the need to continue to evolve and return to *White Dust*, allowing past and present works to bleed into one another. In Mira's latest presentation, *Bad Ground* (2023) at Paul Soto, Los Angeles, she double-projects two small 16mm films of Hanna Hur and Cha inside the cinema, the imagined setting of the final scene of *White Dust* where Characters no. 1 and 2 meet. The films are projected onto the base of two walls surrounded by a rectangle of red paint and fragmented mirrors on the floor [fig. 35]. When crouching down to see the film, the viewer sees themselves reflected and become entangled in the communication between Mira and Cha, the complex histories of war and displacement, and the fleeting nature of memory, diaspora, and performance.

Through the process of returning to *White Dust* and Cha, Na Mira invites us to join voices, memories, and histories together, observing the cyclical nature of time and opening our minds to what we cannot know. Through her discourse with Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Mira highlights the similarities in their work and their shared attention to autobiography. By entering into conversation with Cha, Mira intergenerationally intertwines avant-garde cinema and the experimental writing of diasporic Korean experience, becoming another voice to *White Dust* in the form of perpetual regeneration.

¹²⁸ Mira, interview by Kirkland.

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Figure 1. Film Image of *White Dust From Mongolia*, 1980. Film 16mm. 30 minutes. 24 frames per second. Courtesy the University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive. Gift of the Theresa Hak Kyung Cha Memorial Foundation.



Figure 2. Film Image of *White Dust From Mongolia*, 1980. Film 16mm. 30 minutes. 24 frames per second. Courtesy the University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive. Gift of the Theresa Hak Kyung Cha Memorial Foundation.

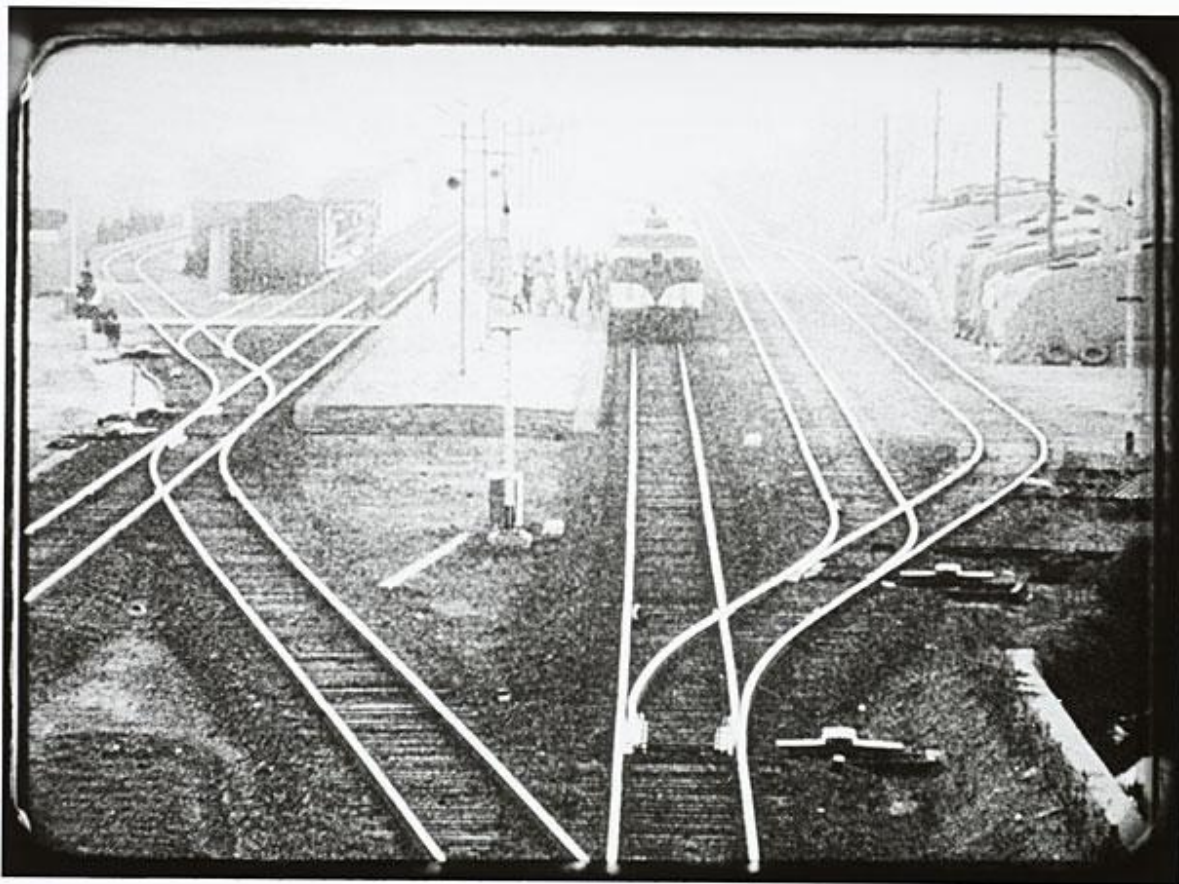


Figure 3. Film Image of *White Dust From Mongolia*, 1980. Film 16mm. 30 minutes. 24 frames per second. Courtesy the University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive. Gift of the Theresa Hak Kyung Cha Memorial Foundation.



Figure 4. Film Image of *White Dust From Mongolia*, 1980. Film 16mm. 30 minutes. 24 frames per second. Courtesy the University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive. Gift of the Theresa Hak Kyung Cha Memorial Foundation.

The film is a simultaneous account of a narrative, beginning at two separate points in Time. The two points function almost as two distinctive narratives, the "Times" overlap during the diagenesis of the film and a final conversion of the two points are achieved to one complete superimposition, to one point in Time.

Narrative 1 begins in the Past, within the interior of memory itself. The memory materializes physically on the screen, (film projected on the screen is the memory projected-the viewer "sees" physically, the memory images) Film/Screen-projection of unconscious images. The film starts within the Interior of the mind of character #1, as she begins to "see" begins to "remember" the latent images/memory just before she is completely "cured" of amnesia.

Her identity is established in a missing person's column with her photo. It is the establishing, marking of an absence, and a search by equally anonymous persons of no specific relation or consequence to the missing person.

She is without a Past, her past is speculative, fictitious, or imagined. The narrative alludes to abandonment, war, orphanage, her absolute anonymity- encompassing her disappearance, her abandonment, and finally her lack of memory, and lack of speech (amnesia, verbal amnesia). Her anonymity gives the character a possibility of multiple identities, she becomes "collective" a metaphor for any possible identities:

- young girl at the cinema
- maid crouching on the ground her back turned
- merchant woman on ferry
- market place
- orphan
- nation, a historical condition, Mother, Memory

Figure 5. *The Typewritten Text*, 1980. Documentation. Typewritten text on typing paper. 6 sheets of paper. w8.5 x h11 inches. Courtesy the University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive. Gift of the Theresa Hak Kyung Cha Memorial Foundation.

She is "given" identity as she is "found," as she enters the process of being "cured" of amnesia. She is given a new set of vocabulary, a new language, and Invented language. She is told her name, many other names, events and locations of her assumed Past, she is literally taught, the alphabet. The introduction of Language, (foreign), the extra-identity, or new identity, qualifies the rupture, displacement, both physical and psychological.

There exists a "Hole" in Time, a break in the linearity of Time and Space, and that empty space, the Absence, becomes the fixation, the marking that is the object of retrieval, a constant point of reference, identification, naming, the point of convergence for the narratives, the point of rupture, which gives, considers the multiplicity of the narrative, multiplicity of chronology.

Narrative II begins in the Present, with the Telling and Relaying process of the "Recit"- It is the process of *Defilement même du récit*. (self-reference-film, narrative structures, language, memory in relation to each.)

Character #2 is at the moment of the return, to retrieve events past (,marked within the chronology of Time, which functions as punctuation, as marked points in Time) The return re-marks the locations, points in memory, re-peat the Past sequences.

The actual physical movement backwards in Time(voyage, Time change, territorial divisions, etc.) is relayed always in the Present Tense. Each meaning, sign of Passage is catalogued accordingly:war immigration, foreign immigration, "trans-migration"of memory, of imagery, of language, of identity)

The narratives begin to superimpose, the seperate Times in chronology converge at the point of "destination," as it is becoming re-defined, (from Memory) the locations, events, as they correspond physically

Figure 6. *The Typewritten Text*, 1980. Documentation. Typewritten text on typing paper. 6 sheets of paper. w8.5 x h11 inches. Courtesy the University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive. Gift of the Theresa Hak Kyung Cha Memorial Foundation.

with these within the Memory.

- It is Character #2 who returns, gives memory to Character #1.
#2 is the retriever(the activator) of the memory of the narrative
by the process of recounting the Recit.
- #2 is the voice for #1
- #2 and #1 are the same, becomes the same
- #1 is the memory For #2
- #1 is the spectre memory, imagination (decaying sense) Of #2
- #2 is one who searches #1

Figure 7. *The Typewritten Text*, 1980. Documentation. Typewritten text on typing paper. 6 sheets of paper. w8.5 x h11 inches. Courtesy the University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive. Gift of the Theresa Hak Kyung Cha Memorial Foundation.

VOICES CHARACTERS

#1. Within the mind of Narrator#1- amnesiac when she begins to remember
(the voice of Memory itself)

#2. In the first person only(?)
In the present tense only.
Voice giving Memory Voice teaching Language

#A. Documentary voice, indifferent voice of announcer, as marking
as punctuation to the film-within the diagesis of film.
a.Korean voice
b.Translator into English
c.Voice giving identity: voice of interrogation
enforcement of identity
repeating same material as the voice that teaches, gives
speech and memory.

Figure 8. *The Typewritten Text*, 1980. Documentation. Typewritten text on typing paper. 6 sheets of paper. w8.5 x h11 inches. Courtesy the University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive. Gift of the Theresa Hak Kyung Cha Memorial Foundation.

1. Within the interior of memory itself, within the mind of woman #1
 The images are physicalized, materialized on screen, film projected
 on screen is the Memory projected. One sees, physically, the memory,
 the "sense", or the decaying sense.
 Speaking to herself under breath, faint images, resemblance of images
 fade in and out, from/to white at different duration at different clarity.
 Very sparse shots, of abandoned quality.

- barren road -still frame
- empty tracks
- cinema billboard
- market place
- plane runway- still frame, or plane barely buoyant, low to the ground.
- room(empty) dreamlike-slow motion if possible.

2. Photo and article in missing person's column
 Date of article
 Name of missing person
 Missing date
 Brief description of circumstances in which she disappears
 (possibly, the conditions- her mental state- amnesia and verbal amnesia)
 Contact-name/address

3. Airplane body parts intercut with "body" of landscape of Korea
 (possible one pan right to left on plane and one pan right left on
 landscapes same slow speed and either cuts or dissolves on panning
 movement.- so, each landscape, shot in panning motion.)
 Dissolve with landscapes and plane shots, mother's hands. (CLS)
 father's hands, folded on the knee with dark background, only hands are
 visible.

4. Position, object match-cut to hands folded, holding a child on on a woman's
 back(CLS) Cut to MS. of woman with child from back
 This shot is highly stylized, choreographed, in sparse room with one
 black line going across the frame and a sign indicating the partitioning
 of space/territory.
 A soldier caucasian, body facing camera, face in profile spraying DD7
 on the woman at the crossing.

5. Dissolve to white

6. From white to CLS. of queue(line) of people waiting- zoom out until the
 borders of the photo/poster on wall of people waiting with canteens for
 rations from the U.S.government.

7. One room, the same room is used throughout the film as a kind of punctuation
 and metaphor,
 Dingnal Shot? (still frame)

8. orphanage/abandon shot
 the same room/photo of orphans on photo poster (ask maria for photo)

9. Crowd scenes (Korea-location/sound)
 -airport
 -market place
 -cinema lines-same movie house as before (sequence #1)
 -merchants on ferry
 -streets
 -cinema lines-same movie house as before -sequence #1
 camera handheld at parts following crowd(identification of eye and camera
 the one behind the camera is the one who looks, in search her/memory.

Figure 9. *The Typewritten Text*, 1980. Documentation. Typewritten text on typing paper. 6 sheets of paper. w8.5 x h11 inches. Courtesy the University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive. Gift of the Theresa Hak Kyung Cha Memorial Foundation.

10. Empty railroad tracks-woman enters frame left (same shot as sequence #1)
 3/4 profile back to camera she waits, she is waiting, possibly looking
 for someone, or is about to leave on a train.
11. Same room. rear projection screen
 same room with the black line going across the wall behind
 there are two chairs, a translucent bulb hanging from the ceiling
 and a gauze curtain in between the chairs that face each other.
 (this is the shot with the interrogation)
12. Same room, without the black line- same layout.
 (shot with the teacher, the one who gives speech/memory.)
 shots
13. Series of partitioning of space to emphasize the dual exchange discourse
 dialectical structure, binary structure of language, trans-movement from
 one to the next
 (memory as action- only language can construct it(memory, action)
 imagination equated to speech is the same...etc.)
 -Close up shots of two faces in shadow projection. from above, having the
 curtain divide the space in half vertically,
 -a straight shot slightly at diagonal where the figures almost overlap
 the curtain divide the space horizontally
 -a complete diagonal shot.
14. As two women continue their exchange, (the partition of gauze curtain
 removed)and the shadow projection is changed; the figures are seen
 without the silhouettes, there is no camouflaging. images begin to
 appear behind the two figures, and gradually the women fade out and
 only the images are left.
 -the image becomes larger(cis to the image projected)
 -larger still until the image takes over the whole room- Memory.
 projection takes over completely the complete transference- trans-
 migration of image and memory.
 -portraits in studio windows-busan
 -airplane
 -railroad tracks
 -inside the train
 -family photo genealogy
 in/out of white of single images until two images simultaneously
 superimpose and becomes one image.
16. Actual marking of places remembered from the Past
 sequence of returning to those locations and points:
 the actual points and the speculated points.
 street where we lived
 roads behind Seoul House
 Busan
 Song-Do (on boat) photographs of dad and kids, at the beach.
 family photo in Busan
 The ferry leaving Busan.
17. The cinema
 empty screen, empty theatre with rows of seats.
18. The woman-child seen inside the theatre standing in the aisle

Figure 10. *The Typewritten Text*, 1980. Documentation. Typewritten text on typing paper. 6 sheets of paper. w8.5 x h11 inches. Courtesy the University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive. Gift of the Theresa Hak Kyung Cha Memorial Foundation.

19. On the screen is projected same shot of railroad tracks.

20. The woman enters live from screen left, stands before the tracks
her back toward camera 3/4

21. She walks into the image slowly (shadow larger because she is standing
farther away from the screen, and becomes increasingly smaller as she
moves closer to the screen)
The image behind dissolves from CLS to MS to LS (Axis)
She physically enters the image.

22. Fade to White.

23. Image of the same room projected on the screen
The camera tracks back revealing the screen periphery
revealing the room in which the image is projected.
(multiple axis of images-echoing physical and meta-physical entrances/
exits memory/image/language.)

Figure 11. *The Typewritten Text*, 1980. Documentation. Typewritten text on typing paper. 6 sheets of paper. w8.5 x h11 inches. Courtesy the University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive. Gift of the Theresa Hak Kyung Cha Memorial Foundation.



Figure 12. Film Still of *Tesseract (test)*, 2020. Infrared HD video, sound. 6:06. 2021. Courtesy the artist.



Figure 13. Film Still of *Tesseract (test)*, 2020. Infrared HD video, sound. 6:06. 2021. Courtesy the artist.

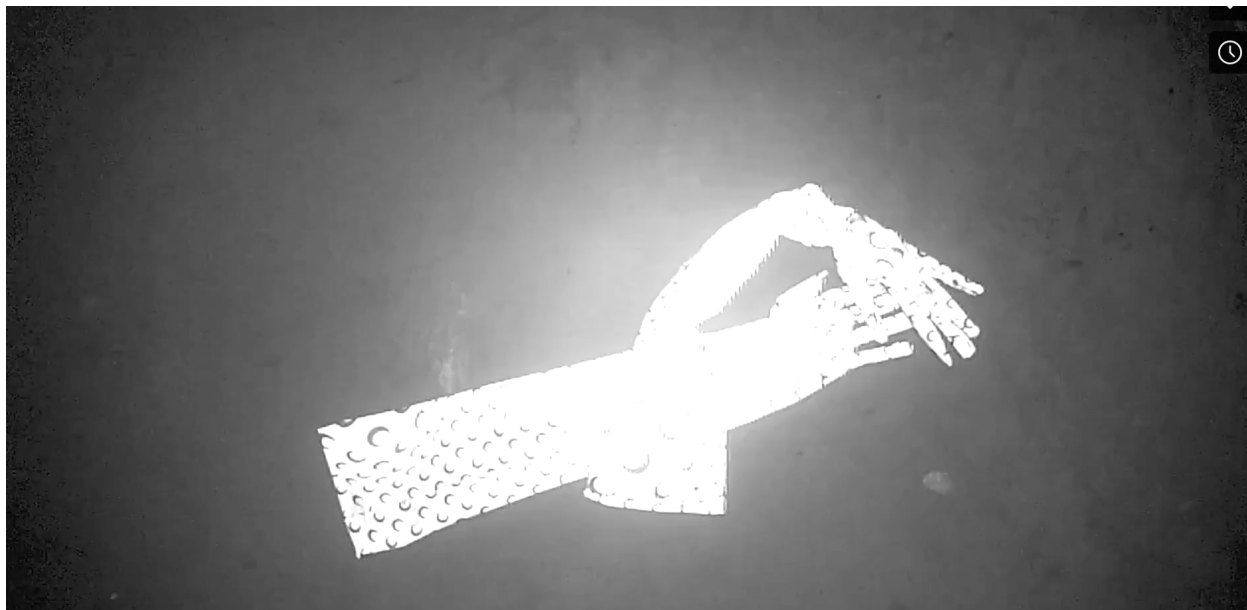


Figure 14. Film Still of *Tesseract (test)*, 2020. Infrared HD video, sound. 6:06. 2021. Courtesy the artist.

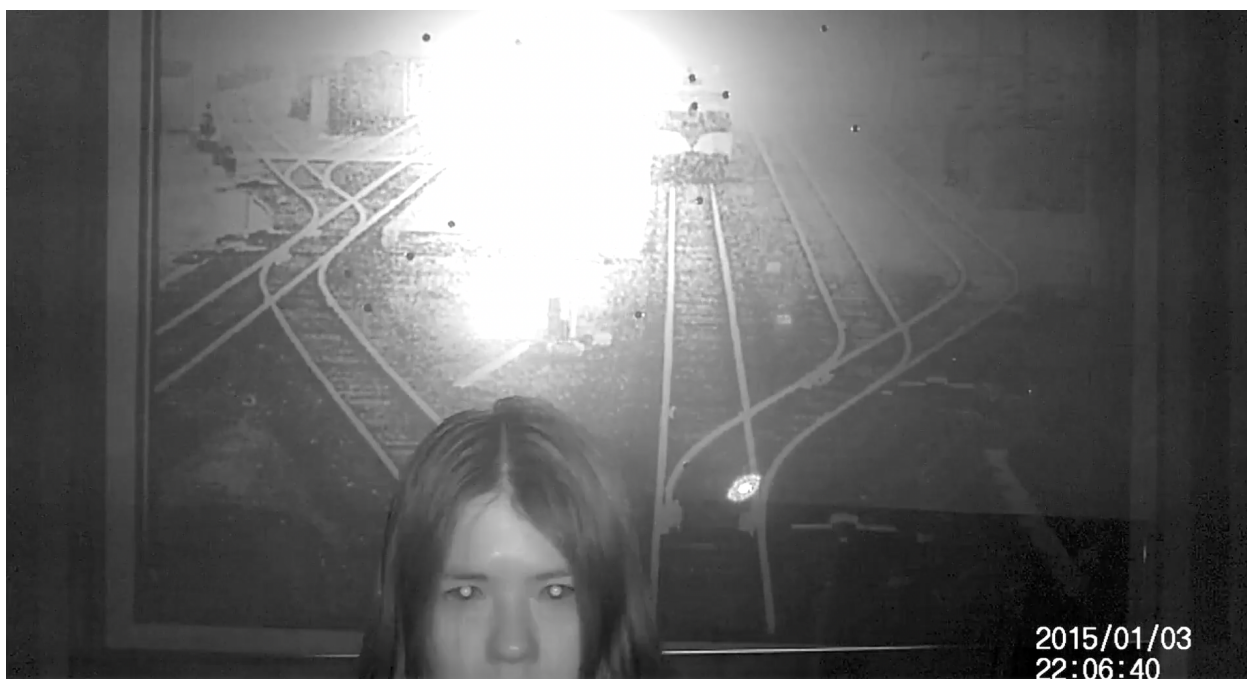


Figure 15. Film Still of *Tesseract (test)*, 2020. Infrared HD video, sound. 6:06. 2021. Courtesy the artist.



Figure 16. Film Still of *Tesseract (test)*, 2020. Infrared HD video, sound. 6:06. 2021. Courtesy the artist.



Figure 17. Film Still of *Tesseract (test)*, 2020. Infrared HD video, sound. 6:06. 2021. Courtesy the artist.



Figure 18. Film Still of *Night Vision (Red as never been)*, 2022.
 Three-channel infrared HD video, color, sound, holographic plexiglass,
 24:44. 2022. Courtesy the artist.



Figure 19. Film Still of *Night Vision (Red as never been)*, 2022.
 Three-channel infrared HD video, color, sound, holographic plexiglass,
 24:44. 2022. Courtesy the artist.



Figure 20. Film Still of *Night Vision (Red as never been)*, 2022.
Three-channel infrared HD video, color, sound, holographic plexiglass,
24:44. 2022. Courtesy the artist.

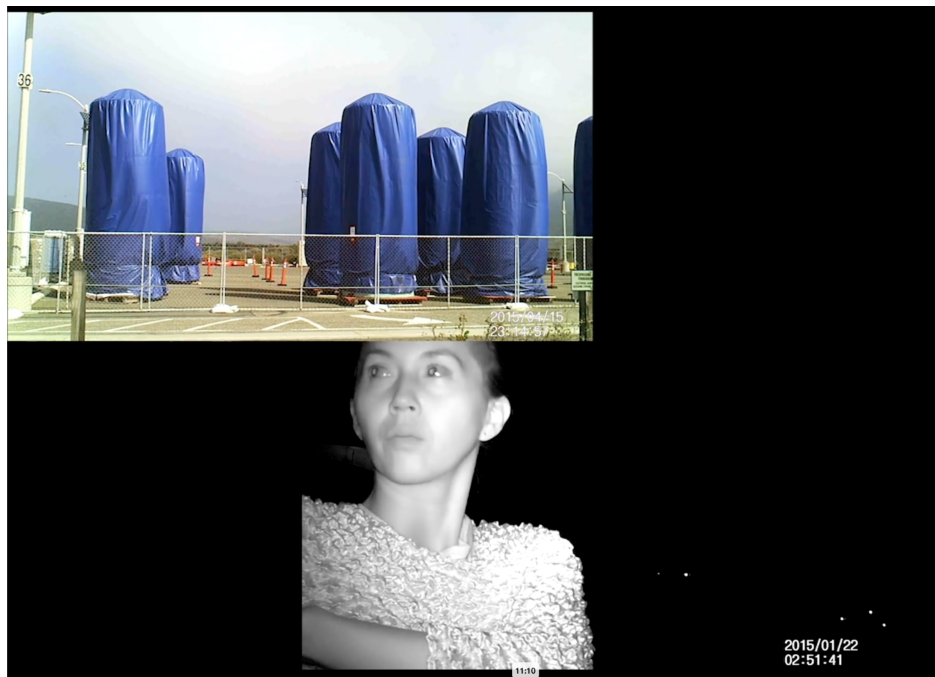


Figure 21. Film Still of *Night Vision (Red as never been)*, 2022.
Three-channel infrared HD video, color, sound, holographic plexiglass,
24:44. 2022. Courtesy the artist.



Figure 22. Film Still of *Night Vision (Red as never been)*, 2022.
Three-channel infrared HD video, color, sound, holographic plexiglass,
24:44. 2022. Courtesy the artist.

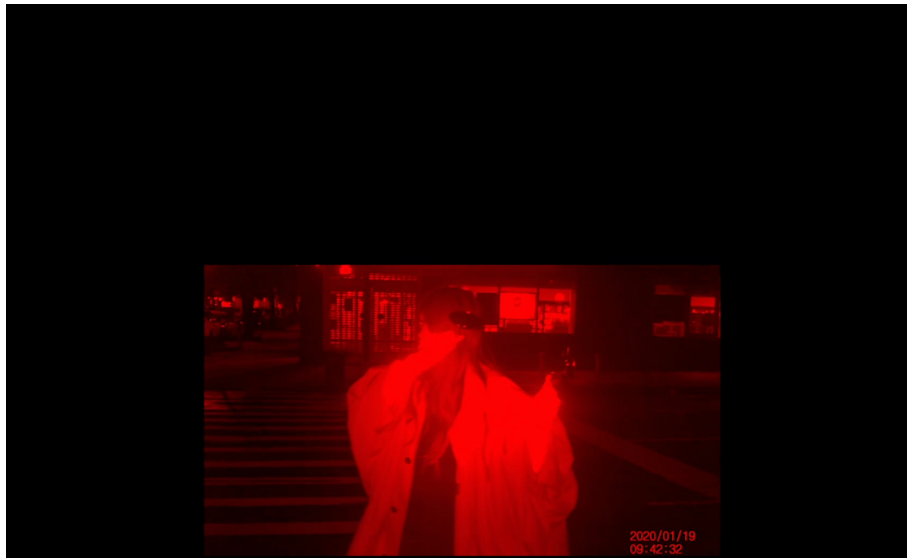


Figure 23. Film Still of *Night Vision (Red as never been)*.
Three-channel infrared HD video, color, sound, holographic plexiglass,
24:44. 2022. Courtesy the artist.



Figure 24. Film Still of *Night Vision (Red as never been)*.
Three-channel infrared HD video, color, sound, holographic plexiglass,
24:44. 2022. Courtesy the artist.



Figure 25. Film Still of 밤시각 *Night Vision*, 2018. Infrared HD video, sound. 14:12. 2018.
Courtesy the artist.



Figure 26. Film Still of 밤시각 *Night Vision*, 2018. Infrared HD video, sound. 14:12. 2018.
Courtesy the artist.



Fig. 27. Photograph of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's sister Bernadette, Film Still from *Permutations*, 1976. 16 mm film, black and white, silent, 10 minutes. Courtesy the University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive. Gift of the Theresa Hak Kyung Cha Memorial Foundation.



Fig. 28. Photograph of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Film Still from *Permutations*, 1976. 16 mm film, black and white, silent, 10 minutes. Courtesy the University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive. Gift of the Theresa Hak Kyung Cha Memorial Foundation.

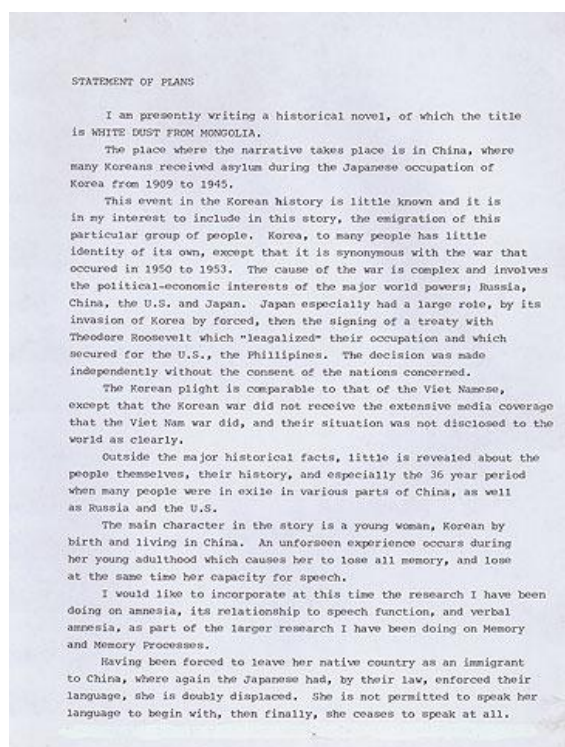


Figure 29. *Statement of Plans*, 1980. Documentation. Typewritten text on typing paper. 2 sheets of paper. w8.5 x h11 inches. Courtesy the University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive. Gift of the Theresa Hak Kyung Cha Memorial Foundation.



Figure 30. Film Still of *TETRAPHOBIA*, 2022. Two-channel 16mm film transfer and infrared HD video, black and white, sound, black mirror. 20:24, looped. 16 x 5.3 x 8' Company Gallery. Courtesy the artist.



Figure 31. Film Still of *TETRAPHOBIA*, 2022. Two-channel 16mm film transfer and infrared HD video, black and white, sound, black mirror. 20:24, looped. 16 x 5.3 x 8' Company Gallery. Courtesy the artist.



Figure 32. Film Still of *TETRAPHOBIA*, 2022. Two-channel 16mm film transfer and infrared HD video, black and white, sound, black mirror. 20:24, looped. 16 x 5.3 x 8' Company Gallery. Courtesy the artist.



Figure 33. Film Still of *TETRAPHOBIA*, 2022. Two-channel 16mm film transfer and infrared HD video, black and white, sound, black mirror. 20:24, looped. 16 x 5.3 x 8' Company Gallery. Courtesy the artist.



Figure 34. Film Still of *TETRAPHOBIA*, 2022. Two-channel 16mm film transfer and infrared HD video, black and white, sound, black mirror. 20:24, looped. 16 x 5.3 x 8' Company Gallery. Courtesy the artist.



Figure 34. Installation shot of *TETRAPHOBIA*, 2022. Company Gallery. Courtesy the artist.



Figure 35. Installation view of *Bad Ground*, 2023. 2 channel 16mm film transfer. Courtesy the artist and Paul Soto, Los Angeles.