



## Ellen Berry

Wed., February 18th, 2009

207 (Mylander Room) BTSU

1:30 PM

### “Stray Ejections, Misplaced, Shrouded in Forgetting’: History, Trauma, and the Politics of Absence in Theresa Cha’s *Dictee*”

How do avant-garde texts encode the “sign of the political” in their form?

Theresa Cha’s multimedia, multigenre text, *Dictee* (1982), stages a complex confrontation between historical memory and the modes of its representation. In it, Cha bears witness to Korea’s multiple traumatic disruptions through a century of colonialism and literal division of the country into North and South. But rather than simply narrating this story of the loss of her family and nation, as many postcolonial novels do, Cha problematizes the form of this telling. How does one represent a shattered archive? Tell a history consisting only of “stray ejections...misplaced, shrouded in layers of forgetting”?

Cha suggests that by performing as radically incomplete the account of Korea’s “perpetual exile,” one may evoke and honor the spaces of absence that never can be filled with all the history that’s been lost, all the lives that have been shattered. Saturated with these absences, the text enacts both the unspeakable trauma and the radical incompleteness at the heart of any history. Through its aesthetics of negation, its multiple conflicting discourses, and its shifting modes of address, *Dictee* positions readers to inhabit the interior—the fractured body—of what might be called a traumatized text (and not simply a text about trauma).

Ellen E. Berry is Professor of English and American Culture Studies at BGSU. She is author of *Transcultural Experiments: Russian and American Models of Creative Communication* and *Curved Thought and Textual Wandering: Gertrude Stein’s Postmodernism*. Among her seven edited books are *Sex Positives? The Cultural Politics of Dissident Sexualities*, *Bodies of Writing*, *Bodies in Performance*, and *Postcommunism and the Body Politic*. Since 2000 she has co-edited the academic e-journal *Rhizomes: Cultural Studies in Emerging Knowledge*. Currently a fellow at ICS, she is at work on the book: *The Horrors of Power: Negative Aesthetics and Feminist Critique in Contemporary Women’s Fiction*.