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Decreation, Art, and a Passage of Diasporic Soul:

Reading Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Pomegranate Offering* with Simone Weil

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It was an irresistible seduction.

Persephone, the Greek goddess of spring, swore she would not partake of food until her release from the Underworld. Yet, the fruit looked too beautiful and sweet, and she was hungry. She reached out her hand and plucked the pomegranate. Thereupon, the goddess was condemned to be held captive in the Underworld for four months every year. She could have come home and been safe, but the story did not end that way.

Hades and Persephone Banqueting
Red-figured Kylix (drinking-cup): Athens c. 440-430 BC. British Museum, London

My essay introduces two women who also do not tell their stories as a happy tale of returning home: one of them is the Korean-American writer and artist Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, and the other is the Jewish-born but Christ-loving philosopher and mystic Simone Weil. The motif of the pomegranate appears in both authors' works. Cha adopts the myth in her artist's book, *Pomegranate Offering,*[1] as well as in her *Dictee*;[2] Weil discusses the Christian intimation of the myth in her essay, "Homeric Hymn to Demeter: Account of Carrying Away of

[1] Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, *Pomegranate Offering* (Berkeley, California: Berkeley Art Museum/Pacific Film Archive, 1975).

[2] Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, *Dictee* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1982).

Persephone."[3] She returns to it occasionally in her personal writings, published posthumously under the title *Cahiers*.[4]

Admittedly, the distance between the two authors' cultural locations is hardly negligible. Cha was born in Korea in 1951 and died in the U.S.A. in 1982; Weil was born into a Jewish family in France in 1909 and died in England in 1943. Cha was Roman Catholic, but her writings and artworks only implicitly deal with spiritual matters; Weil, meanwhile, refused to be baptized in the Church, but her works are explicitly theological.

Despite these differences, the two authors share a commonality: they lived in diaspora physically as well as spiritually.[5] Cha left her home country when she was 11 years old and lived in foreign country until her tragic death[6]; Weil was exiled from France by the Nazis after her

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[3] Simone Weil, *Intuitions pré-chrétiennes,* ed. Pére Jean-Marie Perrin (Paris, new edn, 1985). The English translation of this book is *Intimations of Christianity Among Ancient Greeks* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

[4] Three volumes of Weil's *Cahiers* are translated into English and published under the title of *The Notebooks of Simone Weil* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

[5] The term "Diaspora (*διασπορά,* 'scattering of seeds' in Greek)" describes a "situation of any group of people dispersed, whether forcibly or voluntarily, throughout the world, referring particularly to the Jewish experience" (*Dictionary of Sociology*, 4th ed. [New York: HaperCollins, 2005]). Quoting Richard Marienstras, Steven Vertovec points out that "the term diaspora is used today to describe any community that has emigrated whose numbers make it visible in the host community," including categories such as "immigrants, guest workers, ethnic and racial minorities, refugees, expatriates and travelers" (Steven Vertovec, *Transnationalism* [Abingdon, UK: Taylor and Francis, 2009], 132). Robin Cohen, too, argues that the essential fact for labeling a community as diaspora today is more of sharing memory, history, image, or contact with the homeland, instead of mere physical dispersion or minority status. For more information about the usage and development of the term diaspora, see Richard Marienstras, "On the Notion of Diaspora," in Gérard Chaliand ed., *Minority Peoples in the Age of Nation*-States (London: Pluto Press, 1988); and Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

[6] Cha was murdered at the age of 31 by a stranger in New York City a week after the publication of *Dictee.*

lifelong protest against war and capitalism. They were displaced from their native countries, dominant ideologies, religions, and earthly citizenships. They were "rooted in the absence of a place,"[7] belonging nowhere and yet searching for ways to keep the exilic journey going on in the midst of wilderness. Their writings and artworks reflect both the aching sense of displacement and longing. So their reflections on the Greek myth of the pomegranate may be a juncture at which the two authors' diasporic consciousnesses meet.[8]

Both Cha and Weil read the myth as a story of the soul's fateful journey into exile. Unlike conventional readers who describe the seductive pomegranate as a god's trap by which Persephone "faultily" falls into a state of endless wandering,[9] the two authors do not construe the pomegranate as a means to keep Persephone from returning to her home. For the two diasporic writers, security is only an illusion; the fruit, instead, reminds the goddess of her desire for

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[7] Weil, *The Simone Weil Reader,* ed. George Andrew Panichas (New York: Moyer Bell Ltd, 1977), 356.

[8] William Safran defines "diasporic consciousness" as an "intellectualization of [the] existential condition" of dispersal from the homeland. William Safran, "Diasporas in Modern Societies; Myths of Homeland and Return," *Diaspora* 1.1 (Spring 1991), 6. Cited in Rey Chow, *Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1993), 15.

[9] According to Greek Mythology, Hades, who did not want to send Persephone back to the earth, tricked her into eating pomegranate seeds. Persephone "thoughtlessly" consumed the fruit. For the details of the myth, see *A Handbook of Greek Mythology* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 74-76. While more traditional readers of the myth describe the God Hades as a child kidnapper and Persephone as an innocent victim, more controversial readers, especially some feminist readers, focus on the inscrutable presence of Persephone behind the male gods and her mother Demeter. Those readings present Persephone as a figure who reacts to her own desire, escapes given expectations, and passes beyond all boundaries. For more readings about feminist approaches to the myth, Elizabeth T. Hayes, ed. *Images of Persephone: Feminist Readings in Western Literature* (Jacksonville, Florida: University Press of Florida, 1994); Margot Kathleen Louis, *Persephone Rises, 1860-1927: Mythography, Gender, and the Creation of a New Spirituality* (Ashgate Publishing, 2009).

beauty and thus hastens her on with her own journey. For the two authors, the goddess is not destined to be comforted by any partial redemption. She is, instead, "destined to be fixed in the motion of perpetual search"[10]—for Cha, a search for home; for Weil, a search for God.

I put Cha's artist book *Pomegranate Offering* into a dialogue with Weil's notion of decreation manifested in her interpretation of the myth and other writings. By examining their adaptations of the myth of the pomegranate, I look first at the relationship between memory and desire that occupies the two authors' works. Both Cha and Weil suggest that memory and desire are incentives for the soul's search for home or God. Then, I turn to a discussion of their ways of integrating art as an instrument to hold memory and desire fast.

Interpreting Cha's work within Weil's perspective or "Christianizing" Weil would be an injustice to both of their works. However, juxtaposing Cha's artwork with Weil's writing is a way to apply Weil's theological insights to a reading of Cha's rather non-theological work without reducing the one to the other. I present Cha's work as an instance of Weil's claims about the relationship between art and the beauty of God.[11] The focal point of comparison I want to highlight is the way in which Weil's notion of decreation is exemplified in Cha's artwork. The two authors suggest together that the role of art is not to create, but to annihilate our customary thoughts and expressions by immersing us into moments of attention.

Reading the two authors this way, I mean to show that both theology and art are movements of the soul towards the beauty of God that are fated to bear impossibility. Cha's and

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[10] Cha, *Dictee*, 81.

[11] I adapt this methodology primarily from Weil in her reading of the Greek mythology in *Intimations of Christianity Among Ancient Greeks.*

Weil's works display: how theology and art both perpetually move towards truth even while they can never reach the point of gratification. They must be attentive to the concrete reality of the world and move forward by following desire for a higher truth. While this way of depicting the affinity between art and theology appeals to all human souls, it offers diasporic communities a distinct sensibility for understanding the task of theology—one that makes sense of their daily lives marked by displacement, one that compels them to facilitate their in-between existence to be daily reminders of the fundamental condition of human soul. It also pushes diasporic communities to iterate toward openness and to avoid any form of self-expansion and exclusive system of belief.

The Pomegranate in Cha's Artwork

Pomegranate Offering is composed of a mixture of charcoal, ink, red marking, and typed letters on a twelve-page canvas. The physical elements of the medium—color, shape, and clarity of the letters—combine with Cha's tactical handling of space to generate unpredictable effects. By repeating a set of words and also obscuring them, Cha creates new meaning for them.

Cha provides no commentary on this abstract artwork. Yet, a clue for reading this artwork is found in her *Dictee*, published seven years after she had completed *Pomegranate*. *Dictee* is the story of several women erased by history. Like a collage, the assemblage of the stories mixes with journal entries, photographs, film images, handwritten letters, and calligraphy, to shape a

new whole that delineates the author's own life.[12] The book expresses the conditions of the author's exile from both her native country and from colonial and patriarchal constructions, including Japanese imperialism, Korean nationalism, and linguistic discrimination against immigrants. Over the course of nine chapters titled after the nine Greek muses, Cha weaves those women's narratives and so treats memory, dislocation, and loss of identity.

***Pomegranate Offering* by Cha, Theresa Hak Kyung**
(1975, Berkeley Art Museum/Pacific Film Archive)

[12] It includes the stories of the Korean resistance Yu Guan Soon, Joan of Arc, Cha's mother Hyung Soon Huo, St. Therese of Lisieux, Demeter and Persephone and Cha herself.

While several chapters of the text are reminiscent of Persephone and her mother Demeter,[13] the chapter named after Elitere, the muse of lyric poetry, includes some lines particularly attributed to Persephone.[14] The chapter presents something like a manuscript of a soliloquy for a "*Diseuse*," a female performer of monologue. She mimics and repeats, but cannot speak for herself. Cha adapts Persephone as a metonym for all *Diseuses*, representing women who are displaced and silenced in history. The *Diseuse* Persephone is commended for trying to recall her home.[15] Displaced from the surface of the earth, the goddess has lost her memory. She is not able to reconstitute it. What motivates the goddess to search for home is not the memory of what she has gone through. It is her desire to keep the memory. Home is no longer a physical place in which she was born. It is more like a true self that she might never have found. The goddess is caught by desire and so looks after the vague, recurrent memory that fades in and out like a flickering light. Cha does not expect Persephone to restore the memory of self. Instead, she wants the goddess to be elevated in the moment of recalling the memory— the moment that awakens her, the moment that magnetizes all her senses, the moment in which she heightens her desire towards home, the moment in which she encompasses all her energy to spit out her own words:"[T]he pause. Uttering. Hers Now. Hers bare. The utter."[16]

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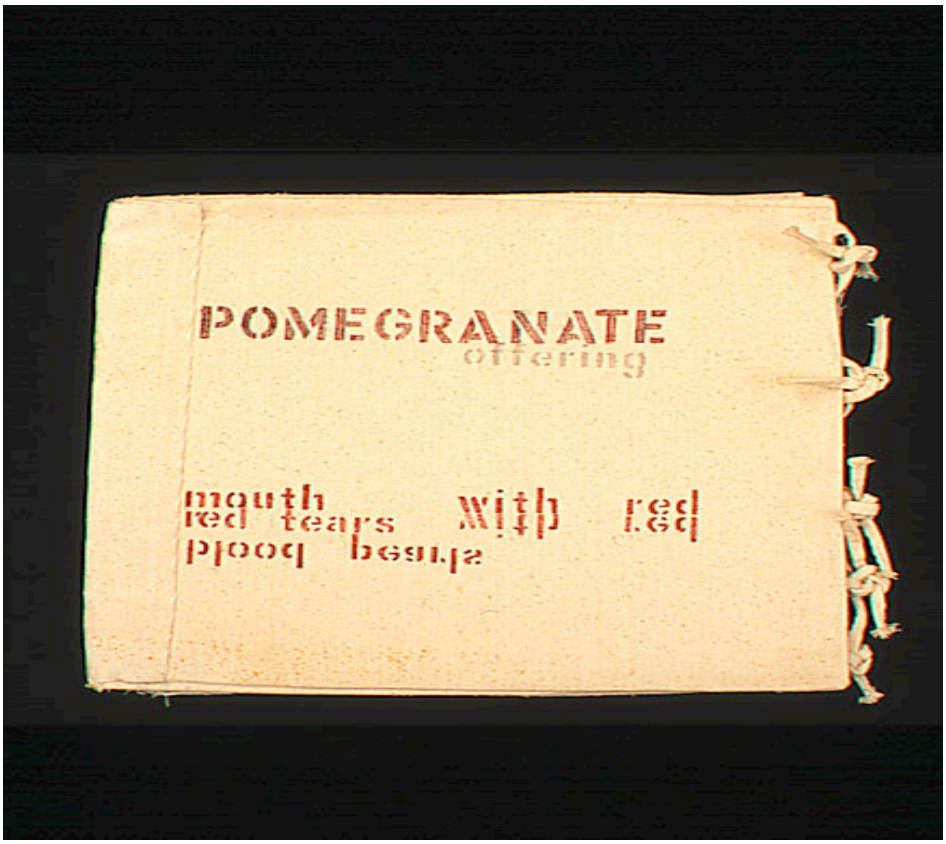
[13] It first appears in the story of Cha's mother, second in Demeter-Sibyl, and last in the final chapter of the text.

[14] Cha, *Dictee*, 121-133.

[15] "Let the one who is Diseuse, one who is daughter restore spring with her each appearance from beneath the earth" (Ibid., 133).

[16] Ibid., 5.

The quivering and stuttering moment of recalling memory in the Elitere chapter resonates with the front cover of *Pomegranate Offering*.

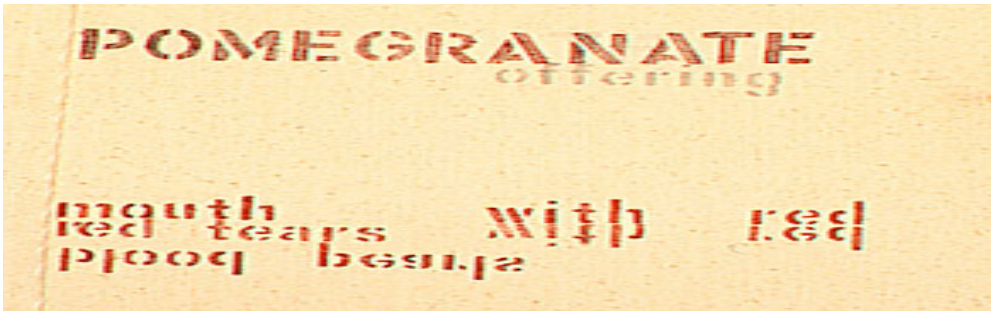


Front Cover, *Pomegranate Offering* by Cha, Theresa Hak Kyung
(1975, Berkeley Art Museum/Pacific Film Archive)

The front cover evokes the goddess in the imminent moment of recalling memory. Through shifts and ruptures in the arrangements of words, Cha wants to represent the halting moment of giving words to the faint memory. While the artist book never narrates what the memory is, it obsessively enumerates the intensive moment of recalling memory before it shapes

a narrative, as if seeking "the roots of [thought] before it is born on the tip of the tongue."[17] The mouth is filled with "red tears" and "blood pearls" like pomegranate seeds. The goddess begins slowly to recollect her memory. She is in transit, *en route* between here and there, the past and the present, erasure and departure.

The process of recollecting memory is not linear. Cha intentionally prints some words in reverse and makes them look as faded as a reflection in a tinted mirror image.



Front Cover, *Pomegranate Offering* by Cha, Theresa Hak Kyung
(1975, Berkeley Art Museum/Pacific Film Archive)

The memory is too blurry to be articulated, and yet too haunting to be forgotten. The process of recollecting the memory, for the goddess and for Cha, is not to reconstitute the past as it was. It is, rather, to pursue a pendulum swing between "lifting" and "lowering," between being "avail" and being "veiled." In the movement, the desire to seize the memory is "revealed," elevated, and "revered."

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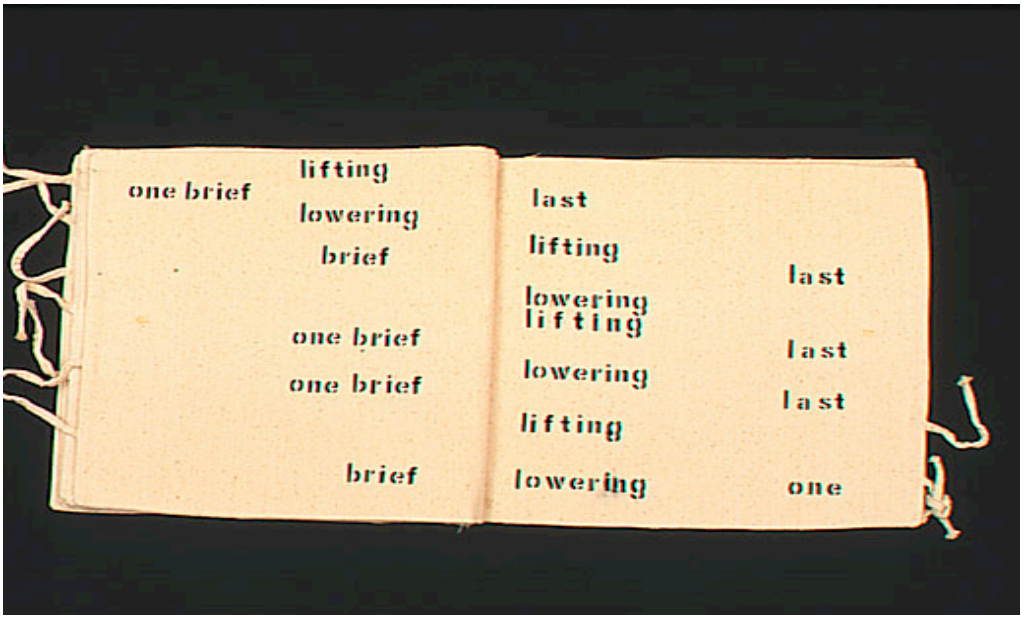
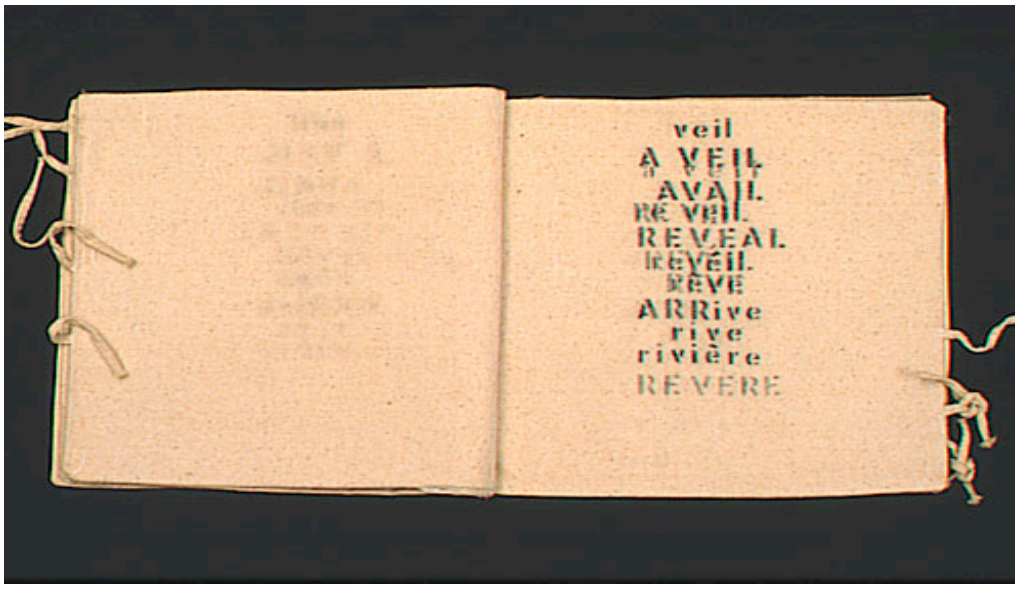
[17] Theresa Hak Kyung Cha in *The Dream of the Audience (Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, 1951-1982)*, ed. Constance M. Lewallen (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2001), 80. See also Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, *Exilée and Temps Morts*, eds. Constance M. Lewallen and Ed Park (Berkeley, Californi: University of California Press, 2009).



"lifting/lowering" page, *Pomegranate Offering* by Cha, Theresa Hak Kyung
(1975, Berkeley Art Museum/Pacific Film Archive)



"veil/avail/arrive/revere" page, *Pomegranate Offering* by Cha, Theresa Hak Kyung
(1975, Berkeley Art Museum/Pacific Film Archive)

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Pomegranate Offering captures the tense and attentive moment of recalling memory. The artwork is not so much about the product of art as about the conditions and process of desire demonstrated through the artist's activity. The only outcome that Cha can expect from creating this artist book is to immerse herself into the moment of creation. The moment enables her to keep "moving," to move "toward the movement itself,"[18] to "extend into the next movement."[19] For Cha, art's purpose is to fasten the desire toward unceasing efforts to pay attention to the vague memory of self.

The Pomegranate in Weil's Writing

Attention, desire, and the perpetual search for memory. These are the themes that penetrate not only Cha's artworks, but also Weil's writings. For Weil, the ultimate goal of the soul is to return to God.[20] The soul's memory of God is the only connection by which she can make that leap. Yet, just as the subject in Cha's book is displaced into a foreign place and has lost her memory of home and self, so the soul in Weil's writing is displaced into the earth and has lost her memory of God. Earthly life has not only caused the loss of the memory, it has abolished the soul's ability to restore that memory. Weil's spiritual writings demonstrate the soul's struggle for returning to God, in spite of loss and corruption. The way of return cannot be accomplished by

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[18] Cha, *Dictee*, 151.

[19] Ibid., 51.

[20] With Plato, Weil thinks that the ultimate goal of the soul is the remembering of forgotten truth and returning to God. See Alexander Nava, *The Mystical and Prophetic Thought of Simone Weil and Gustavo Gutierres* (Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 2001), 17.

the soul's own efforts. Because the soul has already been deprived of her ability to reconstruct the memory, the most the soul can do is to empty herself and so raise up her desire for God. Weil names this act of emptying one's self "decreation."

Decreation is a notion found throughout Weil's spiritual writings. Weil never attempts to define it. Although she briefly describes decreation as an act of making "something created pass into the uncreated,"[21] she is never decisive about its use.[22] However, as Miklós Vetö points out, decreation is the "only term that adequately expresses [Weil's] fundamental intuition" that always attends the "self-annihilating vocation of human beings."[23]

Decreation lets the soul return to God by "becoming nothing." According to Weil, it imitates God's act in creation. While for human beings creation is expansion and proof of God, for God to create is to renounce or to abdicate isolated self. In creation, God "renounces being everything."[24] God emptied Godself of divinity. The only way for us to recognize God and return to God is to strip away the createdness. Decreation takes created things out of the self in order to get close to God, who is uncreated. "We participate in the creation of the world by decreating ourselves."[25] However, decreation is far from doing nothing or only destroying something.[26]

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[21] Weil, *The Simone Weil Reader*, ed. George A. Panichas (New York: Moyer Bell, 1977), 350.

[22] According to Miklós Vetö, Weil hesitated even over its spelling. "Sometimes 'decreation' is a single word, but more often one finds 'de-creation' or the verb 'de-create'" **(**Miklós Vetö, *The Religious Metaphysics of Simone Weil* [Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 1994], 11).

[23] Ibid.

[24] Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, trans. Arthur Wills (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 79.

[25] Ibid., 80.

[26] Weil stresses that decreation is the opposite of destruction.

Decreation requires the soul's intensive activity. It is our active response to God's love for us. God gives us our being, and yet "loves in us the acceptance of not being."[27] God begs from us "that existence which [God] gives."[28] Decreation thus demands the soul's active practice of "undoing" the false, creaturely self in us.[29] This "undoing" is the way that our true self—the self that remembers God—emerges and enables our return to God.

Weil writes that decreation is practiced with our faculty of attention. Attention consists in "suspending our thought, leaving it available, empty and ready to be penetrated by the object." [30] At the moment of attention, we maintain the diverse knowledge we have acquired, but we must not be distracted by the already formed thoughts. As we pay attention to an object and are thoroughly absorbed in it, our thought "must remain empty, awaiting, not seeking anything, but ready to receive in its naked truth the object which is to penetrate it."[31] The attentive gaze renounces illusions, sees the true beauty of the world and finds a path to God. Weil emphasizes that attention is bound up with desire.[32] Attention marks the point at which we resign our purposeful attempt to get something done by ourselves. Instead of bustling with our own will, we wait, at the moment of attention, to receive something more than expected, to be filled with something more than imagined, and finally to restore the memories of God that God implanted in

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[27] Ibid., 78.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid., 81.

[30] Weil, *Waiting for God* (New York: Harper and Row, 1951), 111.

[31] Ibid. 112.

[32] Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, 171.

us. It is our desire for God that opens us to these passive and yet actively receptive moments.[33] It is our desire for the lost memory that makes us want for something to be done in us. We simply desire it. We do not try to accomplish it.[34]

In her reading of "Homeric Hymn to Demeter," Weil suggests Persephone as a prototype of the soul practicing decreation in search for the forgotten memory of God.[35] Persephone makes herself vulnerable to God's seduction and exiled herself from her earthly country. She does not pursue the given path that might lead her to a comfort. She desires something more. She exposes herself to the "threshold of her limit." [36] There, she finds the fruit. Pomegranate seed, Weil writes, is the "consent which the soul gives to God almost without knowing it, and without admitting it to [her]self."[37] Her endless itinerary begins by paying a perfect attention to the beauty of the fruit and responding to it with her desire. In doing so, the goddess attends to the divine beauty and simply follows it. [38] She holds herself back from the illusive comforts with which she could live. She passes all the boundaries to take a journey towards God. Attention, for Persephone, "turns with love toward God."[39]

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[33] William Robert, "Decreation, or Saying Yes," *Epoché: The Univeristy of California Journal for the Study of Religion* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press), 64-65.

[34] Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, 171.

[35] Vladimir Volkoff suggests that, like Plato, Weil understands the Greeks did not believe in many gods, but in one God. God appears with diverse figures and personalities because the Greek describe God from the human perspective. See John M. Dunway and Eric O. Springsted, eds., *The Beauty That Saves: Essays on Aesthetics and Language in Simone Weil* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1996), xiii.

[36] Robert, 65.

[37] Weil, *Intimation of Christianity Among Ancient Greek*, 3.

[38] Ibid., 4.

[39] Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, 171.

Weil's adaptation of the Persephone myth also proposes a connection between decreation and art. Weil's thought about art needs careful interpretation. It is obvious that Weil accepts no artifact of beauty, no capture of pleasurable sensations in the human product. For Weil, human art is "falsehood." The artist's position is "untenable, condemned as he is by art to the imaginative."[40] However, as Bradford Cook points out, Weil's interest in art, or, more strictly speaking, her irresistible attraction towards art, rises from her concern for the faculty of attention. Weil finds art valuable because art draws us into the moment of attention. When we are attentive to a truly great artwork, we find the beauty of the world, which is God's "snare" that God sets out to seduce us.[41] The faculty of attention is the "sole source of perfectly beautiful art."[42] In this respect, artists have a place in the creation:

> Every true artist has had real, direct, and immediate contact with the beauty of the world…God has inspired every first-rate work of art, though its subject may be utterly and entirely secular; he has not inspired any of the others. Indeed the luster of beauty that distinguishes some of those others may quite well be a diabolical luster.[43]

The great artist does not create anything out of her hand. Instead, she decreates her thoughts and perspectives by attending to the beauty of the world. In the same vein, the great artwork that the artist creates is only an instrument, not the focal point of attention. The artist ought not to be caught by narcissistic obsession with her works. She ought to refrain herself from any temptation

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[40] Bradford Cook, "Simone Weil: Art and the Artist under God," *Yale French Studies* 12 (1953), 75.

[41] Weil, *Intimations of Christianity among the Ancient Greeks*, 3.

[42] She also adds that the faculty is the source of truly new and luminous scientific discoveries, of philosophy that truly approaches wisdom. Weil, *Œuvre Complètes, 270, cited in* Miklós Vetö, 44.

[43] Weil, *Waiting for God*, 169.

to find a satisfaction in her own works. So the viewer must also not seek self-satisfaction through the viewing of the art, but seek the beauty of God through attention to it.

Persephone, the goddess with the spirit of artist, exemplifies the way in which the soul reacts to the beauty of God. Before the beautiful object, Persephone suspends her thoughts and listens to the call of God. Then, she loses herself. She is thrown into a path to the endless journey. The path never ends unless she gives up her journey. The path is like a labyrinth, as Weil adduces by analogy to the myth of Minotaur, "where [she], from the moment [she] enters upon it, loses her way and finds herself equally powerless…" [44] Inevitably, the task of the artist relates to *amor fati*. It is her destiny to find the true beauty, even if she knows she will never find it for herself. She never turns away from the beauty because it is the only medium through which she can feel close to the God who is eagerly waiting for her to return.

Theology and Art: Perpetual Search for Truth

Cha's artist book *Pomegranate Offering* captures the tense moment of recalling memory and realizing the moment through art. Weil's reading of the myth of Persephone describes the necessity of art as a spiritual discipline. For Cha and Weil both, art is more than the production of a brilliant artwork. Art has a higher task. It is an aid that awakens our true desire and keeps us from illusion. Art works at the intersection of the mind and the truth, stimulating us to see what is invisible, what has been silenced, what has been disguised by human force.[45] Art is a perpetual

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[44] Weil, *Intimations of Christianity among the Ancient Greeks*, 4.

[45] Weil, *Waiting for God*, 149.

movement that oscillates between revealing the invisible truth and breaking off the things that are already familiar to us.[46] Our ideas of beauty and sometimes even the most magnificent artworks at last ripen of themselves. Cha and Weil insist that our reflection of truth is always inadequate, and that reflection is worthwhile only when we do not cease to expose ourselves to a higher truth.[47] Art is meaningful insofar as it maintains the truth as something desirable and impossible, striven for and yet never attained. Art is "only an intermediary," but an "indispensible one."[48]

What then do the two authors' adaptations of the Persephone myth suggest about the affinity between theology and art? And how might that suggestion appeal to the Christians in diasporic communities?

Neither Cha nor Weil directly treats the affinity between art and theology, but their reflections on the aesthetic dimension of the soul's journey are suggestive. Both Cha and Weil tell us that art is the act that arouses the most intense enthusiasm towards beauty, and thus it approximates the ungraspable memory of homeland or God most closely, while it never allows us to possess it. In art, we estrange our mind from the things with which we have been familiar. In art, we patiently wait until the uncreated reveals itself.

We do the same thing in theology. Theology is the act of turning towards God, following the desire and the vague memory of God. Theology is, like art, a ceaseless effort to create the

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[46] Thomas Nevin, *Simone Weil: Portrait of a Self-Exiled Jew* (Raleigh, North Carolinia: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 417.

[47] Joan Dargan, *Simone Weil: Thinking Poetically* (Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 1999), 138.

[48] Weil's reflection on the language in *Œuvre Complètes*, 6:2:298, Cited in Dargan, 141.

passage towards beauty by decreating our thoughts and expressions that always fall into false convictions about truth. The critical faculty of theology is that which it shapes us to be more piercing, more precise, and more rigorous, in our task to continue negating our own conviction. It can never penetrate the truth. Theology resembles art, not because it produces truth that deserves distant appreciation, but because it too is an act fixed in the "perpetual motion of search." [49] The affinity between theology and art is their ability to keep the movement towards desire going. Both theology and art are movements that we cannot abandon even if we never reach the point of satisfaction. Theology can direct a path to truth only when it annihilates itself. Just like art, theology is an "indispensible one" for us to understand the intangible truth, but it is only an "intermediary."

I suggest Cha's and Weil's reflections on art are compelling particularly to the Christians in diasporic communities. In the history of eastern and western Christianity, the concepts of exile and diaspora were often used to refer to "human life on earth."[50] As displaced from "heaven, their true home or destination," Christians had to live free from worldly temptations "in order to earn their place in paradise."[51] The use of the concepts still prevails metaphorically in all Christian communities, and it takes a literal meaning when adapted by Christians in diasporic communities. Christians in diasporic communities find a sense of home and relief in their church

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[49] Cha, *Dictee*, 81.

[50] Sandro Sticca, "Exile as Salvation in Hrotswitha's Paphnutis," in *Exile in Literature*, ed. María-Inés Lagos-Pope (Bucknell University Press, 1988), 32.

[51] Ibid., 33.

and in their belief in the kingdom of God.[52] The pangs of the communities' nostalgia are replaced with the idea of kingdom of God and often expressed as a congregational expansionism and aggressive evangelical outreach.[53] A curious combination of the communities' aspiration for their homeland and the church's universalizing missionary efforts revolve around each other. While the discussion on the religious and political mechanism of the concept of diaspora within the communities is not the scope of my essay, I propose that Cha's and Weil's presentations of the diasporic soul can help the Christians understand the task of theology with a refreshing insight.

Cha and Weil, the two tragically sensitive souls, never were certain about their earthly place, about what comes next, about which direction to follow. But they were certain about their desire, and they expressed this through writings and artworks. The motivation that strongly pushes them to be attentive to the truth and beauty of God was not an expectation about the glorious kingdom as a reward or utopian dream as an escape from the world. Instead, both Cha and Weil deal with the pain and suffering of concrete life while maintaining a link to the truth and beauty of God. It was their desire to open themselves to the invisible truth hidden in the world of affliction. It was their anticipation that something more truthful always awaits them. It was their belief that the truth and beauty give life meaning and sustain the sufferer with healing power. Cha and Weil willingly give up comforts and resting-places within already established

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[52] For the social functions of immigrant churches, see Pying Gap Min's essay based on the research of Korean immigrant churches in the United States, "The Structure and Social Functions of Korean Immigrant Churches in the United States," *International Migration Review* 26/4 (Winter, 1992): 1370-1394.

[53] For more readings, see Jonathan D. Sarna ed., *Minority Faith and the American Protestant Mainstream* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1998); and Judith W. Meyer, "Theology, and Immigrant Church Expansion," *Geographical Review* 65/2 (Apr. 1975), 180-197.

paths. What we might want to learn from them is not exactly what they achieved. It is rather how they responded to their desire and to the time and place they lived. It is their attentiveness to the desire towards the impossible truth. Through the desire, they sensed their time and space, de/created their own time and space, and kept themselves from mediocrity, self-satisfaction, and illusive security.

Cha and Weil beckon all Christians to be mindful of diasporic consciousness. Their writings and artworks strongly urge all Christians to be "a stranger and an exile in relation to every human circle without exception."[54] All human souls are in exile and must seek the impossible truth by desire through motion. The two authors reveal that the insecure and uncertain condition of life is not merely an ordeal. It is, instead, a demand to a distinct consciousness, a distinct sensibility to discern the task of theology: that in which we are required to cross beyond any given belief system across affirmation and annihilation, that in which we need pay attention to the things that are often uncertain and indefinable.

Although all theology and all we call art are in charge of inciting this search, the drive for this task is more forceful in diasporic communities because they have daily reminders of this fundamental condition of human soul. Diasporic communities must thrive in this newly reminded task of theology—spiritually as well as artistically. They are Persephone in a moment of greater vulnerability and wakefulness. The life in transit and in fluctuation requires them to be attentive to the truth, which they can hardly notice when they are accustomed to stability. Rey Chow may resonate with this claim as she argues that a diasporic consciousness is "not so much

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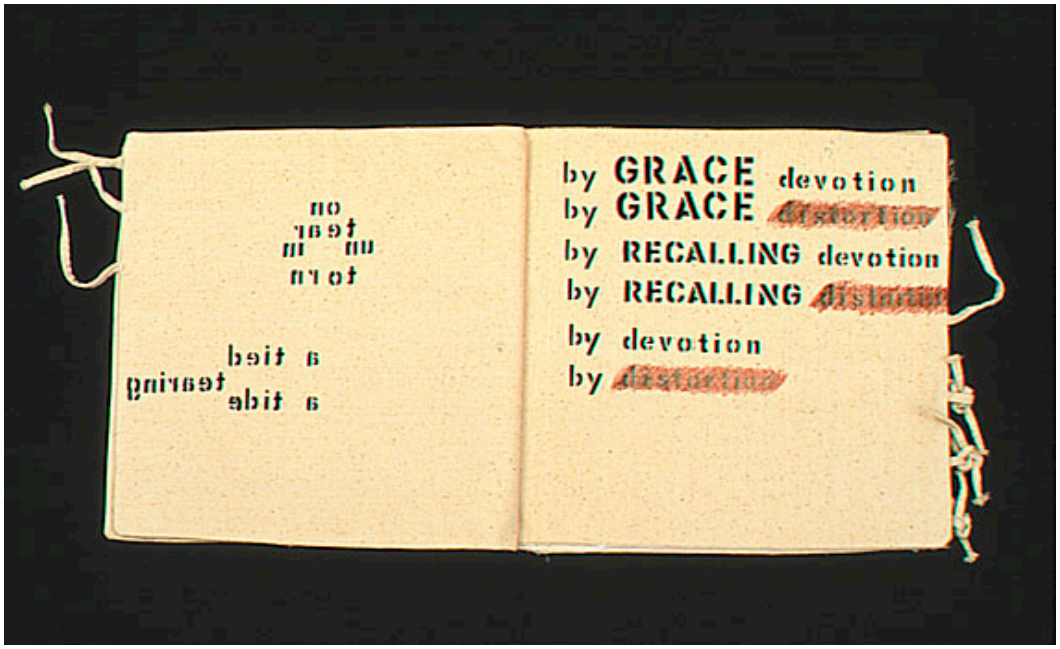
[54] Weil, *Waiting for God*, 54.

about the transient giving way to the permanent as it is about an existential condition of which 'permanence' itself is an ongoing fabrication."[55] If impermanence is the real character of human existence and thus of human faith and practice, the feelings of insecurity and uncertainty can be useful to sharpen the consciousness and sensibility towards the truth. Diaporic communities must respond to Cha and Weil not because their need is greater, but because their awareness of the destiny of human soul is intrinsic to their everyday life, and thus their consciousness of the human condition is more intensive. Their strong motives for attention must not be paid to the material and psychological rewards that come from struggle for power; it must be paid to the spiritual need that redirects the suffering and pain caused by the struggle. Their nostalgic longing must not turn into an attempt to expand themselves or their religious territory; but it must transform into a ceaseless effort to restore to the beauty of God, which has been disguised and distorted by the heartless aggression of empire and desire for power.

The truth, no matter how it is expressed and understood, cannot be perceived in a permanent and perfect form. It is always a starting point of the Christian journey, and not an ending point. It is God's snare that signals a new beginning and that compels us to move forward. As it awakens us, we are condemned to be captivated by God. We are at the point of beginning to which we are destined to return. The journey towards God is made possible when we always turn away from given and established belief systems through which God is used as a way of claiming power for ourselves. The path is constructed with an unending movement that repeats erasure and departure. And, the path is seen clearest as we never stop trying to approach

[55] Rey Chow, *Writing Diaspora*, 15.

to the truth, because, as Cha says, "The ink spills thickest before it runs dry before it stops working at all."[56]



"grace/recalling" page, *Pomegranate Offering* by Cha, Theresa Hak Kyung
(1975, Berkeley Art Museum/Pacific Film Archive)

[56] Cha, *Dictee*, 133.