

Glitched Being

ALEXANDER ANTAI HWANG

I first encountered Na Mira's *Night Vision (Red as never been)* (2022) in the summer of 2022 at the Whitney Museum of American Art, as part of the Whitney Biennial. It was enshrouded in black curtains in the back corner of the sixth floor, and so it was the white noise and grainy voices that first drew me to the piece.

They were familiar but just out of reach, as if they were calling me in closer. Entranced, I entered through the opening in the curtains. I was barraged by a flurry of flashing images and chaotic sounds. Disoriented, I could not grasp the glitched video or the eerie audio. There was a video playing of a person crawling around on all fours with their face hidden behind long black hair. The figure was present but fleeting. The footage kept cutting back and forth in time. I wandered around for a place to ground myself, but multiple channels of video kept cutting in and out, overlapping and slipping away from me. Eventually, I surrendered myself to the corner and took a seat on the ground. Echoes of rupture reverberated into the present. The past refused to remain dormant.

A few days earlier, I had been with my family for my younger brother's graduation in unceded land of the Stockbridge-Munsee Band of Mohican Indians, also known as Poughkeepsie, New York. Traveling across the country from California with my family meant a lot of time in the same space with my dad. Many times, I was the body onto which he projected all of his anger and fear. The only way he could express his own frustrations with the world, which surely dealt him a shitty hand, was to use his violence.

But holding the weight of his trauma and grief as well as my own was too much. The night before the graduation ceremony, we pulled into the parking lot of the local Puerto Rican restaurant where we had made plans for dinner. I can't even remember what set him off, but I do remember the

look on his face while he was yelling at me. It was an all too familiar sight of rage that took me back to my childhood self. So I screamed back, "Maybe we should fight. . . . It looks like you want to hit me, so you should just hit me!" My mother eventually settled us down, and we got on with the night. But I became stuck in that moment. It refused to pass from me. That image of his eyes, hot with anger, replayed over and over in my head. I realized I had no better way of dealing with my own anger and sadness. I was stuck in a cycle of trauma and silence.

A glitch is a sudden irregularity or malfunction of a computer's circuitry sometimes caused by a surge of electricity. The term stems from the Yiddish word *glitsh*, meaning "slippery place," and *glitshn*, which means "to slide or glide." It is an instability. Pixels and frames are moved around, restructured by the rupture within the circuitry. It is aberrant. In the case of *Night Vision (Red as never been)*, the glitch reorders the frames that make up the moving image. Past footage constantly leaks into the future and flashes into the present frame. Is there a connection between this glitch and the experience of the Korean diaspora? Crossing the Pacific Ocean to a new country with a different language, a place with a deep history of racial violence and white supremacy, is a glitched experience. Many Koreans arrived in this country after the Korean War in hopes of escaping their devastated homeland. In the "land of opportunity," perhaps Koreans could move on from the war that took so much from them. Yet the violence of the past ruptures into the present.

Through its nonlinear form, resulting from the glitch in the camera, Mira's work refuses the aesthetics of the Authorized modality of information. It bastardizes the "proper" visual syntax of Authority, thus generating a new counterorder. In his essay "The Right to Look," Nicholas Mirzoeff defines a *complex of visibility* as a system that classifies, separates, and aestheticizes such categorizations as natural or truthful.¹ It is the process through which Authority justifies its position at the top of the knowledge-production hierarchy, appointing itself the most proper and sensible mediator of information. The legitimacy of Authorized visual images stems from their supposedly transcendent capability to represent reality as it "really happens." But time does not happen in a straight line. It constantly loops, re-loops, and intertwines past and present.

Na Mira is a conceptual artist based out of unceded Tongva, Gabrielino, Kizh, and Chumash lands, also known as Los Angeles. As a child, Mira grew up in both America and East Asia, moving from country to country. Motion (and the control of motion) is a common theme in Mira's Korean lineage. She explains that *Night Vision (Red as never been)* was partly inspired by two family stories of "transgression spanning a century: my great-grandmother, who lived as a shaman under the Japanese Occupation," when the practice was outlawed, "and my uncle, who drove his motorcycle across the 38th parallel [the DMZ] to North Korea in the 1990s."² These acts of movement through traumatic ruptures refuse hegemonic boundaries that aim to separate people in space and time. In banning the practice of Korean shamanism during its colonization of Korea, Japan intended to erase Koreans' ties with their ancestral lineage. The DMZ, short for the Demilitarized Zone, is the border between South and North Korea located at thirty-eight degrees above the equator. It also cut ties between people, separating those in North Korea from those in South Korea. Whereas the motions of certain bodies are deemed appropriate and acceptable, as Legacy Russell asserts in her book *Glitch Feminism*, "glitched bodies—those that do not align with the canon of white cisgender heteronormativity—pose a threat to social order. Range-full and vast, they cannot be programmed."³ *Night Vision (Red as never been)* enshrines motion for its possibilities of an alternative understanding of the past and thus of the future. It uses the glitch as an act of transgressive motion to expand our understanding of the self as a multiplicity unbound by national borders, the body, or time.

Scenes flash at a rapid pace. It seems like you can register them only after they disappear from the screen and have been replaced by the following image. The moving image becomes two when it's projected on and through the plexiglass. One image is contained within the plexiglass, while the other beams through and onto the screens behind. The latter projection, however, hits the screens off-center, causing the lower half of the image, which includes Mira's body, to be projected onto the floor. Mira appears on all fours, low to the ground. She moves slowly with intention, like a tiger on the hunt. Her long black hair falls over her face and onto the ground. Two white tourists come over to investigate. One leans down and asks her a question. She does not look up. Are they simply curious about

1 Nicholas Mirzoeff, "The Right to Look," *Critical Inquiry* 37, no. 3 (2011): 476, <https://doi.org/10.1086/659354>.

2 "Night Vision," Na Mira, accessed September 20, 2022, <http://na-mira.com/mira/night-vision/>.

3 Legacy Russell, *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto* (London: Verso Books, 2020), 26.

her performance? Maybe they are more concerned than curious. Their investigation echoes the ways in which bodies, specifically Korean bodies, have been controlled and disciplined. As Russell notes, there is movement that is deemed good and lawful. Other movements are deemed dangerous. The scratchy white-noise audio accompanying the video slowly transitions into a discernible sound: Faith Evans in P. Diddy's "I'll Be Missing You." The lyrics "every breath you take, every move you make, I'll be missing you," combined with footage of the DMZ, an imperialist site of separation and rupture, recall the separated friends, family, and loved ones who have been missing each other for decades on end. Mira confronts the borders that dictate her body by transgressing the borders that govern the movement of her Korean body.

Figure 1. Na Mira, *Night Vision (Red as never been)* (18:59), 2022; three-channel infrared HD video, color, sound, holographic plexiglass; overall duration: 24:44 min. Installed at the 2022 Whitney Biennial, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Courtesy the artist and Park View / Paul Soto, Los Angeles.



However, instead of approaching the DMZ as solely an embodiment of US imperialism and surveillance, Mira uses the space as a place for remembrance. Mira's great-grandmother, a Korean shaman, might have enacted a similar performance in her lifetime. The tiger is one of the gods in Korean shamanism. All the while, the camera's glitch superimposes Mira's body onto the concrete tiled floor of the DMZ lookout and the DMZ itself. Then the two screens unleash a flurry of glitched footage. The projection continues to beam through and onto the holographic plexiglass, creating four channels of video layered onto each other (fig. 1). All the channels are from the same source footage, yet they are offset. Either lagging behind or playing ahead of one another, the images fragment and break the DMZ. The flashing images of Mira and other scenes of the DMZ transpose the relationship between them, placing her body on top of the DMZ footage. She transgresses the imperialist border through the movement of the glitch, as she reenacts the movements of her ancestor.

Mira also uses the glitch to address the memory and presence of another ancestor, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha. During her time in Berkeley, doing research for another project, Mira developed an intimate connection with the Korean American artist archive at the UC Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAMPFA). There she was exposed to the work of Cha, an avant-garde visual artist who grew up in the Bay Area and studied at UC Berkeley. Tragically, in 1982, at the age of thirty-one, Cha was raped and murdered in New York City. Just as her career was beginning to take off and her now famous book *Dictée* (1982) was published, she died. At the time of her death, Cha was still working on other pieces, including a video work by the name of *White Dust from Mongolia* (1980–). At the fifteen-minute mark of *Night Vision (Red as never been)*, the projector plays red-tinted footage filmed on a city block, documenting a performance by Mira outside of the Puck Building, in New York City, the site of Cha's death. Mira appears dressed in a large robe and holding a socket mirror in each hand. Directing the mirrors outward, toward the building, she moves around, orienting herself in different ways in relation to the building. Then the right screen turns on. Mira, donning white gloves, stands in front of a large screen displaying a still of railroad tracks from Cha's unfinished *White Dust from Mongolia*. It is the final scene of the video. The footage is from Mira's *Tesseract*

(*test*) (2021), which was part of experimental art institution The Kitchen's ongoing research project into the Theresa Hak Kyung Cha archive. Mira moves around in front of the screen, while the glitch flashes her body from one position to the next. An up-close image of the white gloves also flashes intermittently. The two scenes combined form Mira's enactment of *White Dust from Mongolia's* final scene. In of Cha's writings about the piece, she "proposes two narrators, one in the past who is trying to remember and a second in the present who is trying to remember. Throughout the piece the two points move towards each other eventually *to one complete superimposition*," writes Mira.⁴ Working in the present, Mira merges with Cha through time and space. Her automatic writing in this scene is structured by this call and response (**fig. 2**). Mira wrote the words in the parentheses with her left hand and answered with her right hand:

(if I perform Cha's final scene?) Tesseract Pulse Spools Time
Mendable Nascent
(how do the two selves meet?) Tail Samsara⁵

The words bring into question the notion of a singular self in a singular time. Glitched time allows Mira's selves—her primary self and herself in relation to Cha—to meet. Our ancestors are still within us.

How can I exist within and through disruptions? Growing up, I was faced with many challenges that always seemed to be so much bigger than me. Indeed, as I uncover my own story and the story of my family, I am connecting the greater forces of US imperialism and racism with my personal experiences. The violence inflicted upon me and so many of my fellow Korean people is not something that can be separated from us. Mira's video shows us that the violence of our present times is inextricably bound with the past. So even though I felt alone in my hurt for so long, as I move through time and space, I am learning that I am not alone. In connecting with my ancestors, Na Mira, and Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, I amplify their energy and strength to create new selves within me and with others that transgress the borders of violence that have held me in for so long.

4 Na Mira, "Na Mira: Passages Paysages Passengers," Video Viewing Room, The Kitchen OnScreen, accessed October 3, 2022, <https://onscreen.thekitchen.org/media/na-mira>.

5 Na Mira, *Night Vision (Red as never been)*, 2022; three-channel infrared HD video, color, sound, and holographic plexiglass; duration: 24:44 min. Courtesy of the artist and Park View / Paul Soto, Los Angeles.



Figure 2. Na Mira, *Night Vision (Red as never been)* (14:33), 2022. Installed at the 2022 Whitney Biennial, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Courtesy the artist and Park View / Paul Soto, Los Angeles.