



EXCERPT FROM  
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The title, taken from artists Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's contribution, pertains to the overall sense of "indeterminacy" and "boundlessness" in the chosen works of 26 female artists, each introduced by personal, inspirational, or abstract quotations. Many works are highly effective, especially in this format, which successfully depicts all media, including photography, painting, and installation. . . .

Race, gender, sexuality, politics, and literature are prominent, best exemplified in Jane Hammond's "Fallen," an ode to soldiers in Iraq. Pearson outlines her own gender philosophies in art, along with the criteria for her self-confessed "surprising selection," omitting "obvious choices," to create an introspective, free-flowing collection that "will incite more questions than answers." Such is the nature of art, and a testament to this fine anthology.

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## BOOKFORUM

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The title of this surprising collection of image/text works by twenty-five female visual artists and writers is a phrase borrowed from a 1977 artwork by Theresa Hak Kyung Cha. As Lisa Pearson writes in her afterword, *It Is Almost That* describes "the humming state of the not-quite this and not quite that," namely, "what familiar taxonomies cannot order." Hak Kyung Cha's piece—composed of faltering phrases projected on black-and-white slides—points to the provisional nature of language and speech. While Pearson's penchant for this open, indeterminate state might seem at first to evoke categories like *écriture féminine*, twentieth-century Language-school poetry, or non-diegetic experimental filmmaking, her selections, works produced over a span of seventy-one years from Charlotte Salomon's 1940 visual novel *Life? Or Theater? A Song Play* to Bhanu & Rohini Kapil's 2011 *India Notebooks*, defy easy classification.

Explaining her decision to select only from works composed by women, Pearson asserts: "There is still deep gender inequality when it comes to the coveted real estate of exhibitions . . . and I preferred to make space . . . for work by women." Her statement seems as dangerously uncool as it is accurate, but Pearson's boldest editorial move is bringing together works by artists and writers who are not normally thought of together. Pearson's genre-defying conflation of formalist language-based work with pieces by confrontationists such as Adrian Piper, Carrie Mae Weems, and Sue Williams suggests new affinities. Pearson's writers and artists use disparate means to probe experience from the outside. While pieces by artists like Hak Kyung Cha and Alison Knowles use text to examine the nature of meaning, perception, and language, others like Adrian Piper's *Political Portraits* and Carrie Mae Weems's haunting *Sea Island Series*, use words as polemic. Still others pursue a poetics of the quotidian, using pictures and words to describe particular places and states of being. For example, the Kapils' stunning chronicle of a trip to New Delhi excerpted from their Nightboat book *Schizophrene* concludes: "Looking down, I saw the red rooftops of the East End stretch out in a crenellate, and then I went home. I documented the corridor and then I went home. What kind of person goes home?" Some of the pieces—most notably, Louise Bourgeois's rarely-seen 1947 artist book *He Disappeared into Complete Silence*, in which drawings of unrealized sculptures are set against disjointed mock-journal entries written in imperfect English, and Unica Zurn's 1958 artist book *The House of Illness*—are deeply disturbing. Others, like Eleanor Antin's 1971 "Domestic Peace," a group of faux social science graphs of "safe" conversational topics with the artist's mother, are laugh-out-loud funny. The dissonance between the work's high-conceptual frame and the chronicle of petty domestic bickering it contains is part of the humor: Richard Kostelanetz meets Joan Rivers. . . .

Designed by Natalie Kraft, *It Is Almost That* is entirely produced in shades of sumptuous gray—"infinite shadows . . . the in-between like twilight and shadows," as Pearson describes it. A labor of love, the book is also an important step towards the amplification of "minor," uneasily categorized experience.

Chris Kraus is a critic, novelist, filmmaker, and professor. Her most recent book is *Where Art Belongs* (Semiotext(e), 2011).

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