

“What kind of listening is it,” Myung Mi Kim asks at the outset of *Dura*, a question she provisionally answers halfway through the book: “Listening with your eyes because here / you cannot decipher what is said out of the effort / of mouths.” We might initially turn to Kim at nine years, tracing English mouths with Korean eyes to make something of *value* or *use*, recognizing and made recognizable in turn. But as we proceed, this question addresses its own act of listening, and this image—the mouth struggling against the production of speech, the eyes *listening* to the effort—takes on a greater significance than a first reading suggests. As the opening volume in a long poem including both *Commons* (2002) and *Penury* (2009), *Dura* signals a mode of listening that, most importantly, takes the diaphanous nature of legibility as its premise—that legibility must be *practiced* or *maintained*—that our whole bodies must listen, and, in turn, struggle to respond.

In fact, Kim insists that phenomena *tend toward* illegibility, and, as such, every act of attention, every effort of communication, stages the fact that “Parts agree disagree in single action.” With this in mind, the page morphs into a pixilated field “of particles hooked one to another,” and the effort of writing—“Letters a carving a chipping”—evolves into a physical struggle to interface with the “infinitesimally divisible” moment.

As such, “listening” tracks legibility before it slips into predetermined scales of value in which “net worth,” “progress in learning,” and “signets to authenticity and foremost authority” struggle against the poet’s “provisional translation” of the forms of extension and experience. Rather than serve as an instrument “giving precision to ideas of size, distance, direction, and location,” the book is an instrument of imminence, a wax tablet provisionally registering “The transition from the stability and absoluteness of the world’s contents to their dissolution into motions and relations.” Subsequently, Kim’s poetry rests at the confluence of advent and entropy. Relation and repulsion comport, bonds hold only to register, and writing is the record of its listening as it performs the task of dissolution and critique. Or as Kim has it in “Pollen Fossil Record,” this is “The meaning of becoming a historical subject.”

While the poem listens-to/as/with-becoming, it remains a thing of parts, an “aggregate,” and as such depends on the interplay of its components to release something for the reader, to allow her to participate in the experience of becoming-subject (in terms of becoming-sovereign: both autonomous and *subservient*). Kim has a penchant for isolating the florescence of discrete moments (“white light after breath (circling the mouth)”), drawing our attention to the details of the fold, rehearsing her insistence on “Form as interplay of mobile elements, actuated by the ensemble of movements developed within it.”

With this frame in mind, Kim’s notion of the

“tablet” or “transcript” takes on increased significance. Perhaps, at first glance, we should read the tablet in terms of its historical function: as a tool to record or log. Further, its use might draw to mind Freud’s “Mystic Writing Pad,” where the celluloid sheet of memory acts as a site of becoming, a surface of re-creation; however, I’m more interested in placing Kim’s “tablet” next to Jacques Rancière’s “stage of the text.” Rancière might ask, how does the poem stage its own crisis of listening and responding? How does it stage its commitment to a politic that unfolds in the architecture of the text? In *Dura*, the poem resists the finality of its inscription, challenging the telos of designation, de-emphasizing the value of the axiomatic. It does this especially by undercutting its own subliminal bids for authority and value—the text is “a provisional translation,” a stylus stroke amongst possible stylus strokes, the record of which changes *how* we register and what we do with our datum—how we learn and subsequently how we teach.

As stage, the two-dimensional surface of the page frames the furious activity of thing (physical text) and action (movement of thought), both radiating through a palimpsest of participation, coupled with our own subjective baggage. The result is an amplified act of participation in which our own politics become the subject of interrogation. We *all* become-subject within the geometry of the poem: our prejudices, our values, reading habits and modes of meaning making, the learned behaviors that allow us to process and make use of sound and image—all of this takes on tonal quality in the fugue,

so that our agency reveals both its complacency and hidden autonomy.

For Rancière, politics begins with disagreement, with the *demos*, “the part with no part” staging the fact that “politics is the art of suppressing the political.” In *On the Shores of Politics* he writes, “a choice must be made between being equal in an unequal society and being unequal in an ‘equal’ society, a society which transforms equality into its opposite” (84). The stage is the site of this political dissolution, where the fact of disagreement and inequality take shape as a question to be addressed. Myung Mi Kim’s poetry *is* this stage: the work puts itself on trial, scrutinizes its own participation—its labor begins at the lip of discernibility, and tracks its slip into the “political,” where “equality” and “homogeneity” ameliorate the fissures at the poem’s surface; the effort, however, *maintains* its blemishes, allows for ruptures to release something truly political. In order to remain thoroughly saturated in the poem’s folds, the book must change trajectories as the shape becomes commodity—it must show different facets, different aggregates,

Book of Famine, Book of Attempt, Book of Money  
Book of Labor, Book of Scribes  
Book of Utterance, Book of Hollow Organs,  
Book of Tending, Book of Wars, Book of Household,  
Book of Protection, Book of Grief, Book as Inquiry

As it “emerges through cycles of erosion and accretion,” its surfaces resist the sheen of politics by toggling

between the emergent and the imponderable.

In short, the stage of Kim's poetry is a horizon of potential, where "Levels of aggregation may be extended in principle without limit, multiple nested units between household and world." In her hand, the characteristics of the world attain a new intimacy where even the part without a part retains value.