

Myung Mi Kim poses the question, early in *Under Flag*, early in her writing: “Once we leave a place is it there” (14). In my reading of Myung’s work, and having worked with her in her seminar room, this question is for me an early register of what we might call her radical pedagogical practice. “Once we leave a place is it there”—this marks a pedagogy not simply in the thought-exercise it presents, or in its interrogative character, but in its recognition of the constitutive inter-relationship of space and time and plural subject.

Pedagogy: the art or science of teaching. [Gr *paidagogos*, a slave who led a boy to school—*pais*, a boy, child, *agogos*, leading, guiding]

So what’s come to mean “the art or science of teaching” was once an identity conferred—also questioned—by movement through a particular space. That is, on the way from the home to the school, and *only* on the way from where we rest to where we learn and back, the *paidagogos*, slave, becomes the leader: the *paidagogos* is enslaved by leadership, leads through enslavement. It’s important that this jumble of identities occurs in the movement—an ushering of the other—from comfort to concept, and neither comfort nor concept, at least in their familiar forms (“home”; “school”), appear on the road itself. “Once we leave a place is it there”—we could modify this, imagine it

in the mouth of the plural *paidagogos*, and ask: “Once we set out on the way who are we”. . .

To say Myung’s practice is radically pedagogical, then, is to say that it wants to make the primary scene of pedagogy—that dislocation of the plural subject by positioning it in a spatial-temporal interval, rather than at a particular location and time—the very place to which we’re being taken, the very matter of the way we’ve set out upon: “A time of writing as a time of reception. Relativizing” (*Spelt*, n.p.). The epistolary *Spelt*, with Susan Gevirtz, is one example, in more ways than one, of this bringing of the interval to itself. Writing as on the way to *each other*. Writing as the ground upon which each sets out *with the other*. Writing as on the way *to itself*—*Spelt* is bound in transparent endpapers, each side filled with barely legible handwritten notes to the exchange they bind. “This exchange began out of the hope for contact in which the speed of scrawl could be registered. . .” (*Spelt*, n.p.).

In such a gesture as *Spelt* is in its entirety, the writing becomes the *paidagogos*: plural, restive, led and leading, facilitator of later transformations for other subjects. This is to say that the gesture of *Spelt* is to keep clear the way *between* two subjects and the way *before* the single subject, while yet also calling the subject to an interval somewhere between her own self and work. “Once we leave a place is it there”—who leads and who follows at this point is as potently confused as ever.

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In *The Coming Community*, Agamben writes of “the supreme power” of that which “is capable of both power and impotence” (36). This capability to not-be is in fact *the* supreme power: the potentiality that such power reserves for itself—to be able to not-be—is a greater potential than that of the potential to be. Though this might read as a compelling formulation for the lyric poem, or art in general, Agamben, via Aristotle’s comparison to the act of writing, moves directly to thought:

. . . thought, in its essence, is pure potentiality; in other words, it is also the potentiality to not think, and, as such, as possible or material intellect, Aristotle compares it to a writing tablet on which nothing is written. . . (36 – 37)

Perhaps the pedagogical scene I’m trying to evoke shares this rich potentiality: thought reserves itself somewhere on the way between Agamben’s “to think” and “to not think.” Becoming a plural potential only in so far as, like the *paidagogos*, it can remain unarrived at either end, thought refrains from, resists, the ossified concept as much as cognitive dissolution. Like thought that arrives at concept or falls into void, the pluralizing and qualitative alchemy that pedagogy *was* (was *then*) evaporates into rigid positions if we attempt to say who or what we were during our time between.

But what does this look like? We do go to school (some of us). Myung is a poet and teacher, and “This is the study book” (*The Bounty*, 13). All of these are some form of arrival, no matter their resistance to or reservation from precisely such. But as we think of the origi-

nal scene of pedagogy, or Agamben's blank writing tablet—themselves incompletely figuring the potential they as objects can't represent—these arrivals call, through their humility, to the powerful potential of which they now are only a trace. In a practice such as this, writing and thought become indistinguishable from one another: each the back of the other. Agamben again:

Thanks to this potentiality to not-think, thought can turn back to itself (to its pure potentiality) and be, at its apex, the thought of thought. What it thinks here, however, is not an object, a being-in-an-act, but that layer of wax, that *rasum tabulae* that is nothing but its own passivity, its own pure potentiality (to not-think): In the potentiality that thinks itself, action and passion coincide and the writing tablet writes by itself or, rather, writes its own passivity. (37)

Each—writing and thought—moving through the other, each leading and led, *paidagogos*-like, by the other. This is what it means to figure Myung's practice as and at a radical pedagogical scene. And the back of this arrival, in turn, is the seminar room itself, a ready wax impressed upon by action and passion. Thus a thinking-writing in the room, the characters of which are wrought through the process of their own heat. And wiped clean by the very same gesture of impress.

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The *why* of this un-inscribing inscription—heat of action-passion at once inscribing and obliterating the

inscribed to make room for later inscription—is probably clear; or, how I understand this *why* is clear from the way I've moved through this piece. The radical potential in the now-lost original scene of pedagogy was itself only a potential under—only a potential *through*—complete domination. And as the *paidagogos* walked beside the child on the way from home to school, whatever change was wrought among subjects on the way was wrought in and only in the *paidagogos* alone. But it is perhaps the child's voice asking, in *Under Flag*, "Once we leave a place is it there". No longer for the *paidagogos* alone, the plurality of the pedagogical scene is here opened to more than one subject, while power relations among these subjects are disrupted. And the power of this potential, this opening of the scene, is that it might pass unrecognized, that it remain illegible, that it might not-happen.

Pedagogy has today shifted from relationship on the way, to a science of the practice in schools. But as Myung's writing brings its own scene to itself-in-process (and in this is radically pedagogical), her teaching practice is likewise a setting in itself of the practice of the seminar room—a redistribution of responsibility and relationship, and an unsettling of power and production. The practice of her seminar room itself takes into account, counts upon, our individuation from one another prior to both entries to the seminar: as immediate daily event and as periodic, ongoing process. This texture of individuals is complicated and complemented by a deliberate manifold of material, counting again upon difference and the impossibility of mastery, and the inevitable

overlaps and lacunae in a plural experience of a poetic field. This calling to and creation of difference becomes, in conversation, a practice of pedagogically shifting positions—leading, following, creating and un-creating, forgetting, recalling. That we arrive as already differentiated subjects, and that the place of the seminar is a place where those differences might contribute to a collective motion toward (yet never an arrival at) a future destination, a collective building (yet never completion) of an edifice in active thought is the most literalized case I can imagine of *entering into* a conversation. “To mobilize the notion of our responsibility to one another in social space” (*Commons*, 111).

In such a radical practice of it as Myung’s, pedagogy—which was originally, primarily a relationship in and through space, and is here a scene of self-inscribing and -effacing action-passion—becomes a movement of one space, a space of pure potential, into other spaces via the distribution and pluralization of responsibility. And as with the child’s address to the *paidagogos*, plural potentialities on the way trace residues into “home” and “school”: “What is the work of household—the moral and just education of a child” (*Commons*, 108).

Myung’s is a practice of the poem and the classroom that resists arrival and completion in order to reserve for itself transformative potentialities and in order for it to resist oppressive systems of authority and culture: “within a few years it learns to read—if it is a boy—and in this place a catalogue of books may be inserted” (*River Antes*, n.p.). Rather than such a cata-

logue as constitutive of the subject, rather than subject as catalogue as even an enlightened academy sometimes forgets to avoid, instead a writing-thinking as poem as classroom where the heat of creation returns the material to its uncreated potentiality:

The perfect act of writing comes not from a power to write, but from an impotence that turns back on itself and in this way comes to itself as a pure act... (*The Coming Community*, 37)

Contemplate the generative power of the designation “illegible” coming to speech (*Commons*, 110)

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Pedagogy, in text and practice, where in no case is it clear where we are going, only that we *are* going. That we are going. Pedagogy, where it remains clear that we are a we, but who is leading and who is following is thoroughly undone:

Addressed to no one. Globe and a model of the planets. Book of perpetual. Book of boulders. Ascending numbers. After each enunciation. In the first, what kind of education. In the second, crested jay to the front, *wasah*, *wabasah*, to the left. Sound as it comes. Alkali. Snag snag sang. *Usher liberty*.