

Situated in the basement café of the SF Public Library, I'm composing thoughts. A conversation erupts between two unseen speakers:

Woman, (probably staff) authoritative, warning: "I'm not playing with you."

Man, (possibly homeless) rough voiced: "I've got a lawyer."

Woman, confrontational, triumphant: "Well you go get your lawyer!"

The voices emerge from behind a large white pillar, a small fragment of one of many untold dramas played daily on this turf. Acoustic music wafts out from a nearby room, floating melodically over the din of cash register, clinking of metal chairs on the stone floor.

The cessation of the exchange between man and woman does not mark the end of their quarrel. The ongoing contest of official and usurping voices settle into the brick to erupt again in ever-changing constellations. New forms appear and cross my field of vision, some singing. Who figure themselves as belonging? Who can be made to leave?

This enclave underneath literally tons of books is a relatively rare "free" public space. I came here precisely because I could write until the doors close without having

to buy anything. And for the company.

A description like the one I've just rendered sketches a rough scene a reader might conjure, might tentatively locate herself in, if one or more lines resonate in her body/psychic imaginary.

Conundrum: The poetry of Myung Mi Kim does not describe. It doesn't represent, or narrate from the perspective of an eye's I, as I am now in order to evoke these thoughts. A speaker does not ascribe a center. The premise is polyglot thus eye is rover, multiple and recombinant. Permeable and alert. Keenly attuned. Embodied.

So how then do I use this language to talk about the meaning of her work to me—a work in which awareness tunes to the shifting flow of consciousness that constellates human(s) in their environ. Tackling bodily sites of culture and conflict, the rhythms and schisms, omissions and erasure. Costs and unexpected lyric. The sheer beauty of that lyric.

Her practice attends: enters and engages any set of particulars, alert to generative lingual elements set into play between and among subjects and contexts in any such moment—tracking “motions and relations” (*Commons*)—as they emerge and dissolve—trailing historical dross. It does not build a fixed identity, nor turn experience to symbol.

Her work offers rigorous invitation to participate in its making.

I want to say that Myung taught me to read, which is reduction and distortion of what I mean to say.

I wish to speak to how her writing and teaching, both of which are improvisations in listening and translation, taught me to attend to all a text encompasses and is encompassed by: the material object, fact and conditions of its making, its lineage, the hands it has passed through, its own materiality as generative possibility, the page, its white space, pen or keyboard, the agency of listening, notating investigative process, searching out marks to actuate living breathing moments, music arising from collisions with the social.

She taught me to be willing to clear away nets of assumption to actually look at what was in front of me on the page, to consider it on its own terms—to discover and create the terms of my engagement with the unfamiliar. Writing as inquiry. She taught me to make *us* of use, (to let error speak) to enlist the full spectrum of my intelligence and sense-making capabilities: ear, eye, body, mind. She taught me to consider duration, assemblage, constellation. To not succumb to habitual approaches, to challenge received notions of authorship, to resist deadening forces of inertia. To allow silence. To rest. To trust.

In office hours I received permission to graze books for

the pastures that nourished, to read deeply and intuitively, not necessarily front to back. To mine everything.

We read.

We applied close scrutiny to punctuation, pronoun, article, verb-form, the adjectival, the fragment. We hovered in the space of the associative. We leapt.

In my first seminar, we read Hunt's *Local History* and Alcalay's *Cairo Notebooks*; HD's *Trilogy* and Scully's *Line Break*. We read Rukeyser, Vicuña, Palmer, Spicer, Duncan, Mackey, Benjamin. We encountered Celan. In *Line as Lyric and Social Practice* we conversed with Fraser, Howe, Niedecker, Loy, Oppen, Olson. We read and were made guardian of reading, guardian of each other. We were not let off lightly. We experimented. And failed. We made each other gifts. And came to embrace practice. Over fifteen weeks the seminar became living laboratory, community, crucible and home. I never wanted it to end, and of course it didn't. Hasn't. Though it's always endangered.

As we are.

Imaginary inseparable

butterfly plucked whose wings bestir

fathom a snow

upon the hive vacancy updrift

fatigue duty the keepers broken chain

connective tissue sloughed

would lavender sage inoculate

spoons page's bound

coming to as water strikes inquisition

where store gag reflex memory's drown

silence's bell

scores betray—listening

senses' gait spur one day's legibility

bodies pressed-in

Subject to

appearance threaded with nails

a shoe fastened

serial battle reign

operatic heart-pulse

threshold's fleshy moth Braille

pricking sound's ear

necessity's rigor constructs *by hand*

consider the origin of leather

its backside

careening through material

palm open

offering *bundle*

placed

we *at waters*

cap- erasure's fresh trench

snug *under tongue*

scratches air

nerve's lattice nethering

swerve mobilizes

face-off to well's bottom

plunkings uproot rooftops

particles' holographic fan

swallows *birr* onrushing cottage

deraigned of nettles

being grieved my dove

so bitten it doth

betide a cuttle

I am remembering a September afternoon eleven years ago when I read *The Bounty* for the first time. I was on my lunch break from a job as a writer and editor, cobbling sentences together to beg the Federal Government for funds to support “at-risk” students of higher education navigate their degrees. It was a “good job,” though soul-draining as many are, and I lumbered under the tyranny of language at its most utilitarian, suffocating in a gridlock of dead syntax. I didn’t know how thirsty I was.

I was on the lawn and it was sunny and a new force was altering my intellectual terrain, quickening my sense of possible agency in language—after which reading and writing would never be quite the same. It’s not that I hadn’t read experimental work before. Stein and Hannah Weiner had set off similar flares. But that afternoon, my ground shifted. A feeling of recognition:

No word, that, point to wellspring

Breathing blast if often in a short time breathing holes

Repeatable green blade in the act of being grazed
(*Bounty*, 54)

[values of experimentation] *a repeating question*

“Invention where the tomatoes dangling from one end are not the tomatoes hanging from the other end.” (*Dura*, 55)

Our era of counterfeit.

The denaturing of the word propagated by corporate media.

Branding “freedom” as pretext for pre-emptive conquest/ slaughter.

Amy Goodman’s arrest at the republican national convention.

Home-loss.

How we imagine living together as humans.

Especially today. Especially in this moment of this nation. Especially always already now—well after Adorno’s dictum after *Auschwitz*, and *Abu Ghraib*. . .

During *Guantanamo*.

In the height of prison industry. In the reign of torture.

To interrogate mental structures ossified in culture. When words stripped of value, of historicity, are hoisted, flimsy cellophane sheaths covering and serving commercial genocidal sham—are we not called upon to practice, to contemplate the bases of authorial agency coming into language. To cultivate the ambiguity of more than one truth in play—holding a space of dialectic

tension—allowing a third movement—testing the viability of witness—stumbling upon, notating, inventing speech forms—Recuperative language from the vats of the sold.

“Authority at each blow” (*Dura*, 100)

Now and again the practice begins.

To remain human in the face of everything. Meeting in seminar with Myung days following the events of 9/11. Her diligent cultivation of our capacity to recognize one another, no matter how far removed.

My indebtedness.

Her fierce protection of fledgling instincts. Once when I complained to her of some other students’ baffled and dismissive response to my writing, she asked simply “Why did you show it to them?” Returning authorial responsibility home. Reengaging the questions: what’s the project? For whom is the work?

The conscription was personal. Her recognition of me opening a door to *mutual recognition*.

Keeping limber. Dipping into word jars. Raiding technical documents. My practice forged in her tutelage.

Writing towards the impossibility of writing this. Writing like pointing at the moon. Not all of it lands.

Writing this in my girlfriend's kitchen. Smell of olive oil and onion. Afternoon wind shaking the leaves of the lemon tree. Writing into crevices. Tossing a pebble. Listening back.

"Hummingbird happens as a sound first" (*Dura*, 106)