

A group of us took a course with Myung three years ago, mislabeled “creative writing” owing to the typological constraints of the English Department. Myung’s seminars are difficult to label, and I don’t know that any of us could accurately describe them. Probably the word *practice* is a shade closer than *poetics*, despite the fact that Myung is the current director of the Poetics Program at Buffalo. Poetics conventionally explores what it means “to make” a work of quality craftsmanship, but the Greek *praxis* opens onto a wider set of connotations, both bodily and historical, associated with the verb “to do” and “to act.” The word comes from the verb “to cross” and suggests “*passing through*, a passage that goes up to the limit.”<sup>1</sup>

Myung offered her own metaphor on that first day of class: what if we modeled our meetings in terms of the studio rather than the workshop? This shift in metaphors, relinquishing the implicitly masculine associations of the workshop in favor of the semi-domestic realm of the studio, might shed some light on Myung’s pedagogy. Whereas only one activity takes place in a workshop, devoted strictly to production, a studio is a space where an artist works, studies, eats, sleeps, and idles. It’s also a place where one welcomes friends and visitors eve-

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<sup>1</sup> Giorgio Agamben. *The Man Without Content*. Trans. Georgia Albert. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999, p. 73.

ry so often for a studio visit. Entering into that space, one often finds the margins to be just as interesting and informative as whatever's being framed as "the work." Every fragment, every clipping, every piece of kindling speaks of a world of material potential, a practice very much in progress. Writer's offices and studies are fascinating on their own terms, but they typically withhold more, are less conducive to social meetings and the types of conversations the studio affords.

How then might the members of our class begin to make the margins of our own work visible to each other? Often we find our most vulnerable, inchoate, and innovative thinking done in the margins anyway, in the predawn of the full risen work. The frame of the "finished" page suppresses all too frequently the raw urgencies and undramatized errancies of the mind and body in the thick of thinking. What if we could make those frames appear for each other as *infra thin* as possible, by bringing to the classroom evidence of the work-in-progress that composes our creative lives? The studio as a frame of mind. . .

. . .it must have recesses. There is a great charm in a room broken up in plan, where that slight feeling of mystery is given to it which arises when you cannot see the whole room from any one place. . .when there is always something around the corner. . .<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Robert Duncan. "The Architecture / Passages 9," *Bending the Bow*. New Directions: NY, 1963, p. 26.

I think Myung takes the task of a writing community to be just this: the breaking up of plan. By bringing our unfinished notes, sketches, poems, and running thoughts to class every week (this assignment is consistent through all of Myung's classes, whether "creative writing," "literature," or "poetics"), her students are asked to subject their most imminent impressions (revealing, inevitably, their deepest *idée fixes*) to group consideration. A possible definition here: a community is that which interrupts an individual's ostensible freedom.

Robert Duncan always seemed to preside in the background of Myung's classes. This was not because she had come to Buffalo directly from the Bay Area, where poetic communities still seem (at least to me) conscious of the particular legacies and provisions made by Duncan, who opened his house much as Myung opens her home to her students in Buffalo. But Duncan's second home, his textual residence of personal notebooks, came to sponsor some of our most memorable discussions. As part of his archive, the notebooks had arrived at Buffalo's Poetry and Rare Books Library only recently, and we made some of our most outstanding discoveries by traveling through them at our own pace outside of class. I suppose Myung included them as a central component of her syllabus because they stand as an example of the open-ended, polymath, criss-cross paths of a studio practice—that long background in the run-up to whatever "book" might be bound out of it.

The idea of the book, like the figment of all ter-

mini, is one that Myung moves us to think against. Myung's own work is certainly exemplary of this. Her long poem, now visible across three or four recent books of poetry, runs in excess of the authoritative / authorizing constraints of the grail of the book. The *fragment* speaks more immediately to the incompleteness of truth, history and the vicissitudes of lived time. At times Myung's poem seems to consist almost largely of enjambments and caesuras—"Bit, part, scattered phoneme"—as if the page permits an audible extroversion of its unseen margins, since that is where we do most of our living. How to negotiate this condition with the social demand that our lives should be made present-able in a world expressly partial to wholes: that is the challenge we have been assigned by Myung's poetry, which is also her pedagogy.

If anything, "Pollen Fossil Record," which forms the final moments of her book *Commons*, gives all Myung's readers a palpable sense of Myung's own wall space, and is her own embodiment of Convolute N in Walter Benjamin's *Das Passagen-Werk*: "On the Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress." The notion of the passage—which Myung travels as well as Duncan and Benjamin—is one of pure transitivity, between persons, texts, periods of time and place. "To mobilize the notion of our responsibility to one another in social space," Myung's "Record" tracks this critical aspect of her writing:

And in that process, inside the procedures of work and of work proceeding: node and pressure point, song making and song gesture. Track: descant, sedimentations, tributaries in any several directions. . . The duration of the now,

the now occurring, that manifests a time before.<sup>3</sup>

Most of her students know the sense of dizziness that can descend in Myung's classroom, especially on the infamous first day, when a Byzantine syllabus is put forward. That the texts and tasks listed "are only suggestions" only makes the superabundance of "several directions" all the more dizzying. This is not vertigo, but dizziness. For we are not looking down on anything from a planner's aerial perspective, but are grounded within something larger, a place whose passages are more interconnected than we can possibly travel in one circuit or semester. So all students learn to travel different ones, and there is no center to the labyrinth, no Minotaur except our own. The plan will have become, in retrospect, all the passages we've hazarded, plus those we've written in response as concourse between one another. This is why participant writing becomes the most primary text in Myung's classes, and why every course, regardless of topic, becomes a study in the poetics and practice of writing itself. We are each crossing through a different series of passages that run up to the limit. The only limit, as I reflect on it now, is time—every hour ended too soon.

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<sup>3</sup> Myung Mi Kim. *Commons*. Berkeley, CA: University of CA Press, 2002, p. 111.