

The only thing that bugged me about *Commons* was the blurb on the back cover, which minimized the scope of this beautiful and moving book. While I am certain that Myung Mi Kim is “haunted” by history and while this work is intensely personal and emotional (for what work isn’t) it is mostly something else. What stands out about *Commons* is the reach of the images therein. If the images each correspond to an actual event they also correspond to hundreds of other events from East Timor to Korea to Auschwitz to Wyoming (cf.: “The heavy chains were taken off and they walked to the place of execution. One boy’s shoe fell off and he reached down to put it back on, taking a long time to do it.”). So much of this is at once history and current event.

*Commons* seems like a compilation of investigations: of survival; of deaths; of botany. They are all intimately related to each other and all equally mysterious. The “scientific” sections of anatomy are just as unclear as the historical records demonstrating the shortcomings of “The central organizing myth of comprehensive knowledge.” In so many ways the body is taken apart and examined and yields nothing.

“All that we have seen could also be otherwise//  
All that we could describe could also be otherwise//  
The thing seen is the thing seen together with the whole space.” There is some kind of foundational solace here.

The images are brutal, painful to read. Famine is weaved through everything, frogs pile up on the roadway, but it is in service of something larger. To determine and identify the cost of nation, of land, of survival, of hope one must lay all the pieces of the world on the table and attempt to name them.