

# TELEPHONE PROJECT 1

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*these toys [*

after and with sappho

*The hope gets hold of me that I won't share  
anything that the blessed gods [themselves desire—*

no lending those toys that smell of clay or graphite  
however much apportioning was thrust

into tissue, gray or pink. I'm sick  
of placating them with string or wax—

after all I have to work.

I look toward the beekeeper keeping bees at home  
that she knows damn well will sting and swarm.

—KIMIKO HAHN

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AS IN CINCINNATI

Stung, the beekeeper becomes  
the kept.

Tending to him, his honey-makers  
drone and go,

leaving only their delicate cells, the holes  
in a poem

by Sappho. And after  
the last bees

have gone, the sound is  
of vacant houses,

of vagrants inside, building fires  
in the living room.

—IDRA NOVEY

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## FEVER FRAGMENTS

Can you forget what happened before?  
—Sappho, “Six Fragments for Atthis”

The picture is still so clear to me  
I cannot imagine you cannot see.  
The fire’s marks are red, and burn;  
I turn and turn for your return.

Then I see what I did not see:  
you see a different part in me  
that when the cold and dark return  
the fire in you will burn and burn.

\*

All smoke now, the white stars, the stupid wax  
that crouched too fast under the hooded heat.  
No stub of toe, no crust of tears, no sex  
but dissipating wisp, finished, incomplete.

\*

I would make accusation a form of love  
except it has been done before.

\*

Sundays we watched the Giants fumble  
another play, but somehow stumble  
to a big touchdown.

Your hands were sure, ran down my zipper  
and caught so well I took you for a keeper,  
took you in my mouth.

\*

I suspect the lonely ones who compose long poems  
of hearts unbroken.  
My suspicion is ungenerous, I confess,  
fever of the forsaken.

\*

Sappho, teach me to lay a curse on him that sits:  
when boys eat his ass, give them a mouthful of shit.

—JEE LEONG KOH

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## "TEN KINDS OF MEMORY AND MEMORY ITSELF"

In the middle of the gallery: white string on a cold floor.  
Everywhere else: guards guarding against  
my strategies—

And though the signs said not to touch,  
you could have touched me again,  
they wouldn't have minded,  
no, the guards might have liked something fleeting

to stare at for a while,  
something else to remember.  
As would I—

—CATHERINE BARNETT

[n.b. the title is from Richard Tuttle's installation at the Whitney]

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## BIENVENIDA: SANTO TOMÁS

In the middle of the yard, a goat,  
bound at the hooves,  
wags its grotesque tongue.  
Everywhere else, I am falling in love,  
and today that will change too,

for an old man has heard my uncle  
drag the small beast to the block,  
the music, the laughter  
inside the slaughter.

The old man will come  
the mile by foot  
from the barrio's far edge,  
up the long dirt road,  
unshod, a ratty tank-top,  
with a brand new Vegas cap,  
a cut black strip  
of inner tube draped  
around his neck,  
and he rolls in front of him,  
the whole way, a common  
jug, emptied of all its molasses,  
immense, to his hip in height  
and three times  
the old man's girth.

My uncle is strumming the guts  
out of his ukelele  
when the old man arrives  
and sets the huge jar down,

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pulls the bike tube  
off his nape and stretches it  
across this massive ceramic  
yawn, holding the strip  
of galvanized rubber in place  
with one big muddy toe,  
then finds the first down-  
beat to join my uncle  
in the kind of mooing chorus  
they think has tricked all  
the thousand blossoms  
they never kissed.  
The old man plucks  
from the makeshift bass  
not so much a moan  
but a pulse to range  
a full octave  
into each man's chest,  
the sinews of the old timer's arm,  
straining, the long muscle  
of his back, taut,  
his quadricep, his calves,  
his black foot pumping  
blood into his whole  
miserable body,  
his maw flashing  
every one of his seven  
good teeth to heaven,

and if a man become  
the heart of a giant, the song  
of a giant, each one of us  
laughing like a giant,  
if each one of us fulfill  
the exact measure of a man,  
and if the goat is singing  
as its dying  
among men who are singing  
and dying, the youngest  
cousin among us, butcher,  
slaughterer, sings too,  
reaches into the carcass,  
wholly still now,  
yanking from its belly  
the entrails, like small versions  
of the sky, releasing them  
from his fist onto the block,  
a bloody pile of white string.

—PATRICK ROSAL

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## BIENVENIDA: SANTO TOMÁS (CONTINUED)

Three instruments, then, and still  
 no song, of love, death, uncles, or  
 old men. Or giants. Or goats. Or  
 cousins. Three passages are more  
 difficult than they look, and we  
 keep looking into them for saints  
 & someones & legendary strings  
 as if we knew where all this was  
 going. Were going. We're going.  
 When you wish upon a star, Saint Thomas  
 wonders what you are, where he is too  
 to you and what you hold onto.  
 Like that other time you made the same  
 mistake and killed farm stock  
 for a song. That was bad. The song  
 was not good. And we weren't.  
 But someone has to, uncles  
 simply play and old men show up  
 like John Lee Hooker? We already feel  
 the big "as if" as if we don't belong  
 even though we took it all  
 the way the first time, that last time  
 it sounded good. That's what playing is,  
 Saint Thomas, without looking it up  
 we know it whether confirmed or not,  
 it's a kind of way, of going there.  
 It's where, we hear, you're from,  
 Saint Thomas, your welcome, you're welcome,  
 a tune you can hum before you holler  
 another name somewhat closer to home.

—JOSHUA WEINER

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## SAINT THOMAS: THE OTHER AMELIE

Here she must have stood  
 when she knew it —

Waves rushing in, aborting  
 flotsam, claiming her song,  
 coco heads wobbling on strings  
 invisible, the decapitation already lost  
 in the sibilance of the honing stone.  
*Begin to tell what I am,  
 machete, before you hide back into the sheath—*

Here she must have waited,  
 behind the palm trellis,

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a splinter of island's flesh  
summoned to wean the newborn  
then return, scars dressed in crushed sage,  
milky breasts upping the price,

when she remembered the goat licking  
the tether around its neck with such  
dreadful ease, sounds abrasive and hallow,

before she mounted the taxi scooter  
and noosed her way inland,  
skirting the arboretum boasting  
rare plumeria—she too forced upon  
this land, pliant settler duping the sphinx moth  
with sweet smells, succulent yet nectarless.

*Begin to tell what I am, machete,  
and tell before your spare that crazed goat.  
Show me home.*

—MIHAELA MOSCALIUC

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AMELIE (AN ECHO)

But it was a shipwrecked message—

flotsam

in the sibilance

of the honing stone—

flesh

dressed in crushed sage

with such dreadful ease

sphinx moth

sweet smells

*machete—*

—DANA LEVIN

\*\*\*

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## SO THE FLESH SPOKE

At evensong, one night under the weight  
of rafters in the stone, the monks asleep  
in the inkwells, nodding past the hour  
to gather meaning in the frayed sleeves  
of discontent, not attuned to early vespers...

the bones became aroused,  
undid the connections, let slip  
tendon and thin, other strands...

I could not sleep, I said  
to someone in their dream,  
standing beside their bed  
calling myself the clatter  
of their rebellious bones...

The line picked up again,  
the receiver startled into place...

the switchboard came alive  
like the ghastly google of nerves  
in a bleached whale struggling  
to get back to sea...is anyone  
there?

—anyone

—AFAA MICHAEL WEAVER

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JUNE 9, 2010 10:35 PACIFIC TIME

One night  
one afternoon  
anyone: Blanche Lincoln  
anyone: Bernanke  
anyone: Pau Gasol  
anyone: Lindsay Lohan  
anyone: Stephan Strasburg  
anyone: Meg Whitman  
anyone: Blanche Lincoln  
anyone: Lady Gaga  
anyone: Derek Fisher  
anyone: Rod Blagojevich  
anyone: Marsha Revel  
I could not sleep, I said.  
drifting through deep water in plumes or layers

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one night  
rafters

meaning  
of discontent

let slip  
other strands...

I could not sleep, I said  
someone

myself

the receiver

the switchboard

anyone

—anyone

—JULIANA SPAHR

\*\*\*

OWL MUSIC

Who who

were you yesterday  
in the starless night \* where did you go  
Who who do you hear \* can you come with me

The crickety summer deceives us \* underneath  
so many \* a swath of pollen and haze

So many individuals so many  
stridulations \* so many retrograde eyes

Who who stays hungry \* who will scare

At sundown it seems harder \* to eat the air  
than live the same way every day

so we take flight \* owl music  
pinions and talons \* into the harmless night

Who who will resent my camouflage  
my plumage \* my desire for concealment



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my predatory and nearly inaudible work  
 not wise but able to look down  
 over mammals \* their scurry their scary delay

Only to strangers \* to those who will never see you  
 can you say what you believe

Who who  
 will hear my owl credo

*CREDO*

I have run from and risen from the real and dimly  
 adumbrated shapes of suburban things  
 and then run back to them I believe with ease  
 in things that nobody can see  
 but not in what I cannot hear

I do not believe that art is a form of religion  
 an unforgivable selfishness that takes  
 the time I always owe to other people  
 I do not quite believe it but I have come close

I have seen my own span of attention  
 shrunk to a burnt lightbulb's tungsten wire  
 lit like a pinpoint star on the back of a spoon  
 a spiderweb concatenation  
 a matrix of expiation  
 a mock-up of a better nation \* a trap to catch flies  
 and songs come at naptime or else \* at the end of a day  
 miniscule in endless promises  
 to find a way out of the Klein bottle \* out of the air  
*nachtmusik* \* dignified spotlight

Who who threw  
 these deteriorating clothes  
 into their heap mound on mound  
 by the noble creekbed  
 amid the curious insects wet logs sticks  
 where pine needles scatter \* their scent rises over the common  
 tracing and tracing across the private lawn

The crickets claim subscriber rights  
 their comforting abrasive ring  
 black handle on a rotary phone  
 we could not bring ourselves to throw away

It too lies  
 where horse chestnuts prick the dark  
 shells split like pillowcases \* nothing inside

Who who  
 would keep eyes closed

Who would not want  
 to suck on a thumb \* to become

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an animal that you could sing to sleep  
                   although the mind fades \*           recollections fade  
 sex and death whatever they were \*           fade  
                   as the morning stars regard the moon

and the automobiles out of sight along Route Two

stay asleep in their noise \*           owl music continues too  
                   still underneath the overhead  
 and baffles itself in descent \*           to scan the ground

Who who comes down to see  
                   who gets to know  
 all this raw dirt \*           all this assertive script  
                   of tangled rootlets           small asseverations  
 one oak's new fibers reach down just to make  
                   some shelter for another    seedling seedling  
 seedling seedling seedling seed

Your cover is shallow           you grown-up  
                   you like it that way  
 You get ten minutes to yourself       at dawn  
                   before the creek wakes up again

—STEPHEN BURT