

TELEPHONE PROJECT 1

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

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]

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

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

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

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

SALT WATER

Confessor. Mother. Father. Ghost. This who
 you talk to when you're talking to yourself.

The ocean is one version. Gray green
 in sawtooth blossoms
 all it meets it swallows.

Such sheer abandon: it must be what flows
 beneath those little mercies when the nerves
 give in to sleep, orgasm, even pissing.

Or the phatic stream of "Jesus Jesus Jesus"
 swims free for moments
 and it feels like full
 release, full trust: as if some listener

absorbed the whole rip-tide of consciousness.
 As if the vacuum pull
 beneath the blue
 slide to the eel-grass ledges and drop offs

were sentient. Were more than emptiness.

--PETER CAMPION

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LISTEN

them salt-water negroes

come drownin your little bit of garden

in ocean

ain't no peace with them

they got haints spillin

from they

done seen too much eyes

no mercy

can pull they heads above sea-level

you been here your whole life girl

you

planted

in this soil

for better or worse

they won't

never

sweat all that salt outta him

you

join up with that man

them eyes will forever

be pullin you towards the things he

remember

mother father

ghosts

you won't sleep free

with his heart always

draggin

at your roots

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and you dig in hard

you rip that poor negro

right in two

--EVIE SHOCKLEY

May 27, 2011

MOTHER FATHER GHOSTS

Warming her milk on the stove,
mother then sits to sip her coffee as Iranian radio
crackles out the battery-operated receiver,
the ghost of a noose
whiskering around her downturned head.

My parents were for years
next. *We protected you too much,*
mother says, the sound of the gallows' trapdoor

as the kitchen cabinets open and close.
I paint my toenails red

as the screen at Cinema Rex
curls aflame then drifts
into a pile of black,

the aisles lit with bodies

throwing themselves into the locked doors,
in the city that showed me my first
mega-caliber weapon

and my mother her first café glace.
We protected you too much, she says.
They tried, they did,

but a mobile of nooses turned above my crib.
On the wood-paneled TV, Mr. Rogers
changes his loafers or a friend,

who you can't bear to see cry,
confesses to the tribunal: *Today,*
I don't know why I became political.
He is wishing instead
for the coffee we are having
or the Texan light through the windshield

as he sits between my parents
on the bench seat. Ghosts

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or Delkash singing out the warped tape
like a chained elephant lumbering into the big tent
would quiet my parents
as the Buick's turn signal clicked
next

next

next

next

--SOLMAZ SHARIF

POEM FOR DELKASH

when I held the envelope
I knew the time
a little harmless
loneliness would guide
my hand holding
the circular
polycarbonate plastic
disc with the blue
letters spelling her name
into the machine
had come
and I heard
her voice in Persian
inside me make
deep ancient canyons
only sunlight
has ever known
some time passes
I suddenly notice
it is afternoon
I am standing
in the kitchen
holding a broom
she stops singing
alone for a while
the music wanders
then her voice returns
she says a word
it sounds like glacier
I'm pretty sure
the song describes
how it feels when
something important
does not happen
most of the afternoon
still listening

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I think
beautiful old stove
many people
we will never know
placed their hands
on your dials
hoping things
would never change
I cannot imagine
what it is like
for those who know
they must stand together
thinking for too long
we have waited
for fear which is not
a guest to leave
they might shoot us
but we will stay
here in the street
until we are all
at last older sisters
to each other

--MATTHEW ZAPRUDER

OF MORAINES

The sky some denim. The mountain some denim.
Your *Hauptbahnhof*, your glaciers of omission.
They omit everything: night train to Berlin,

the Ackerstrasse summer, and lucid white arm
of the marriage certificate drowsing in its cool
orange folder. Names writ wet, twinned Balearic

blue. With their pour of pale, their luminous
monitor, moon field, summit, the glaciers pull closer,
further. Someone was watching, measuring—who?

The Alpen yawn open, click closed.
Your heart, smallest chalet, alights on their form.
Then the valley. How to describe the desire you feel

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for the dark house, careful triangle, in their long
wintering shadow? Animals traverse their steep,
their corridors, coursing past pines—

lithe, perfumed pedestals—that describe you
in their verticality, darkly. How like fathers they appear
then, like sisters. Like the evenings, which take

on the aspect of loveliest strangers, one who will
come to love you as days and months—yes, years—
pass and shed in the form of mountains, of moraines.

--QUINN LATIMER