

Voltage

"The best image to sum up the unconscious is Baltimore in the early morning."
Jacques Lacan

Aaron believes he can send voltage
with lantern batteries hooked in series

through the air to his balsa airplane.
It'll fly across his room, even beyond,

as far as the small harbor where we talk,
bumming around on cobblestones, looking

for cigarette butts with enough tobacco
left for Aaron to smoke. In the middle distance,

a tug pulls a trash barge, gulls squalling
over the heap. Nearer, almost close enough

to touch, the red-painted shark mouth
of the USS Torsk gleams its jagged teeth

toward Broadway Market, its produce stands,
fishmongers, greasy dives. Aaron again explains

his theory of voltage, how #14 bellwire
from Sam and Delbert's Variety is perfect

for the popsicle-stick windings.
The unlit skeleton of the Domino Sugar neon

traces itself against the blue sky across the harbor.
Down the block, pigeons light

on the Angel Tavern's sign, marking
its wooden wings with white dirt.

New Elements

Old Jewish cemetery, Prague—for lack of space, this cemetery has twelve layers of burials; with each successive layer, the gravestones have been moved to the new layer of soil. The synagogue beside the cemetery has been turned into a memorial for Jewish victims of the Holocaust, with tens of thousands of Czech names printed on the interior walls. The site is visited by hundreds of tourists each day.

Why not start with the dead
layers, their stones pushed up
like tongues tasting the air
of two halves of the century?
They are bringing news
to their damp apartments,
they are banging brooms on the ceiling
of loud neighbors arguing late
ideas of new forms of darkness.
The kabbalists are testing relativity
against their charts of an endless alphabet,
they are breathing the faint residue
of new arrivals to the periodic table,
rearranging their circular formulae
accordingly.

In Pinkas synagogue, beside the stones,
the walls of names have been speaking
for years, learning language without bodies.
It takes time for their sounds
to travel the short space
to the tongues leaning on each other
in the soft grass, like stars
gone out centuries ago
whose light makes shadows
during nights of a thin moon.

The dead in their apartments listen.
They murmur among themselves, they exclaim
back and forth various ways
to explain to the names their meaning.
They are no squabbling crowd of pressed bones.
They say, *We will birth the future in your name.*
They say, *We will give you our God in your abandonment.*
They say, *We will continue with our work.*
Each name the name of God.
Each letter the wind of the Lord.
Each bone the balance of the Everlasting.
Each particle of dirt the Almighty.

At a Window, Wide to September

Late sun illuminates benign insects
making slow chaos, a hover, a spin, a brief

flotilla above the lilacs, above the two aspen
we planted, their thin forms without hips,

their leaves rattling like early dry tongues.
In fact, I have no idea if the insects are benign.

Two weeks ago we talked as plainly as the low
sun making the bugs visible, giving them their sultry

glow. We spoke without rancor or our customary
weapons. We spoke knowing we would leave

each other. Now my hands are in my lap, our hearts
dirt and stone and small animals in our chests.