

from *The Death of the Beautiful Subject*
by Paula Koneazny

This has been the death of a beautiful subject—
nuclear physicist Mark Oliphant (1945)¹

I intend to return to this theme of anxiety

my subject on the examining table

pinioned

with curio precision
dissect it

in the sense of

even the skin of

undercover

I investigate myself

(“But how are you?”) I ask (“Are you scared? What are you scared of?”)²

¹ “Lise Meitner’s Walking Shoes,” *As Eve Said to the Serpent*, by Rebecca Solnit, p.37. Solnit quotes Mark Oliphant as quoted in C.P. Snow’s *The Physicists*. This is a misquote. In C.P. Snow, the quote is “We couldn’t have done anything else, but we have killed a beautiful subject,” p. 17.

² Excerpt from the project description for an International Open Call For Art: Intersection’s Fall 2006 Exhibition-“Terror?”(Intersection for the Arts, San Francisco).

("I don't doubt I have seen this and can distinguish between murder and love, if it's near me")³

a voice points back to a mouth

(lavish me with backtalk)

³ "Onome," *Vigilance*, by Benjamin Hollander, p.1.

I intend to return to this theme of anxiety
architecture of the entranceway (“terrible
as a photon”)⁴

I pass a starving

child-monk
how perfectly he makes death his subject

(*self* is an oscillating chamber)

then lives to be one hundred

⁴ From Diane Di Prima’s *Revolutionary Letters*, as read by the poet on 5/19/06 in Santa Rosa, CA.

I return to the urban legend (le jazz hot concerto)
straight out of Americana

white as the white of *black and white*⁸

burdened with ornament

he says focus on the sidelight she means get on with the pressure points

(“some lynching trees are very pretty, as trees”)⁵

black as the black of *blanc et noir*⁶

saturated with avoidance

judases with white heads

even the black ones

⁵ “As Toni Morrison once remarked”, “The Camera: Look the Other Way: New Western Landscapes,” *As Eve Said to the Serpent: On Landscape, Gender, and Art*, by Rebecca Solnit, p. 103.

⁶ *Le Petit garçon*, by Philippe Labro, p. 146 (an anxious translation).

I intend to return to the death of the beautiful subject
(grave concern for the nuclear)

but that's not today's

memory ticket without a sense of urgency it's all the same
erased list

in the chase
(“the rule is this: the math needs to stay in the background”)

(“but you never, ever ask how it's done”)⁷

quite a different century invoking

birdsong on the instruments

boys (so lovely I don't chide them) run right over the birds

⁷ “Squeezing a Spiral into a Square Hole: Dürer, Bringham, and Proportion,” by Anik See, *Brick*, Summer 2006, p.49 and p.51.

(the tome is over her) (her tomb is over here)

come hold my hand we're twined

outside (what's inside?) nails rip through

adjust pressure on the needle

here's the toy a child has discarded (one of those twisty figures)

koan is the impossible demand

I am told to do

entering at the back of the line
staying there

"She's a Killer" spins on the record player

I keep both hands on glare off the

sleek silver slippery

(hold that door for me) (it's getting on my nerves)

air strike (“what comes over the wall”)⁸

air struck oxygen to burn

blaspheme

start with a shaky principle dependent on how the relationship goes

(*family name, first name*)

(*domicile*)

(*occupation*)

cover huge swaths of the world with vanishing languages

cut *border* into the gorgeous distance

where honeybees gather

flight paths

unravel

(we still haven't dealt with the money)

⁸ “Burning Towers, Standing Wall,” *Eye Against Eye*, by Forrest Gander, pp.5-17.

bombs are hard

“to take one’s mind off”

pitched among on-lookers

the numb inside *number*

translates into (“What kind of here and now do we have?”)⁹

groves of shattered skin

hard, adj. 5. *difficult to deal with, overcome or understand*¹⁰

(no one’s the wiser)

⁹ Excerpt from the project description for an International Open Call For Art: Intersection’s Fall 2006 Exhibition-“Terror?”(Intersection for the Arts, San Francisco).

¹⁰ The definition of *hard* is from *Webster’s Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language*, 1997.

I return to the urban legend—

blue-ribbon mirage (can I trust my own eyes?)

[whites blacked-up as blacks mocking whites, blacks blacked-up as whites playing blacks
mocking whites]

to complicate wariness
to desecrate the symbols

our mingled incited anxiety bears down

white is pierce as well as be pierced

befall indigo, befall black

(no one here has a pallor)

I intend to return to this theme of anxiety

(my lost) child-monk eating jade

before amnesia ignites

(my) knight-boy gnawing at a loaf

when he jumps off he doesn't fall upward

near-death is a harbinger

oh blessed mother in the button room

I pin bright blue & red kite-tails to the hanging there

(homage to homage, carnage in the love)

I return to the death of the beautiful subject

(beginning of _____ as a foreign place)

oh please, sandbag me

I'm so frayed

patterns deafen me
anti-portraits reading me

ambiguities of photo-grammar (“Statues of Angels Shattered by the Atomic . . .”):¹¹

when I multiply _____ x _____
(*yahinohara*) (*hibakusha*)¹²

bone fascia flesh opens its bud to reveal
inquietude's rusty allure

brand-new teratogens corroding to a midden

new word (“burnt plains”)

between *harrowing* and *quiet*

holds me in the era

I tiptoe down its framework

(thought-
skinned)

¹¹ “Statues of Angels Shattered by the Atomic Bomb at Urakanu Cathedral, Nagasaki” is a photograph by Shomei Tomatsu exhibited at SFMOMA, 8/13/06.

¹² The Japanese word *yahinohara* means “burnt plains” and describes the aftermath of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. *Hibakusha* is the name given to the atomic bomb survivors. Literally translated, it means “explosion-affected people.”

my knight-boy has his condition

(gene from his maw lights up)

white porcelain face soldered on
vestment (shot silk) bolted to

(“turbine with its axle and teeth”)¹³

broyeur du noir black-crusher

burnished newest awful might befall

for all the inquietude I have
beguines with a whorl

since:
his practice funeral is worthless unless perfectly done

afterwards, I sleep *lourdly*

spooky trespass (“taking black out of blanc”)¹⁴

¹³ “Broyer as with Centuries or Meat,” *Touch to Affliction*, by Nathalie Stephens, p.52.

¹⁴ *Mumbo Jumbo*, by Ishmael Reed, p. 136.

first words = forest for the trees

leap

avian return
astride the hanging tree

(des abeilles dans l'air)

I append birds because I wish to. They're winsome.

(arbor)

I plant the hanging tree. *alouette, gentille alouette*. decorate it with canary-wood stars
dangling from red satin ribbons. *alouette, je te plumerai*. no room for a noose. *je te
plumerai la tête . . .* spring foliage buries the stars.

alouette f. zool. *lark, skylark*.

— NB, the lark, a songbird, is not an authorized game bird in England or America¹⁵

(there's always room)

¹⁵ *Modern French Dictionary*, by Marguerite-Marie Dubois, Librairie Larousse, Paris, 1960
(translation by the author).

I intend to return to this theme of anxiety

after I
sleep through the relaxed feeling

“white and dark at the same time”
once titled “Gone,” now “Ghost”

push the comparison between _____ and _____ “outside”

into the
precise millisecond when *right* (i.e., *true*)

becomes (e.g., my own lassitude)

peril

scale grows smaller, emptiness between grows vaster (call that emptiness *somewhere*)

hauled off to *mapped* can't quite pinpoint

since:
dread is part of the we sketch it into

folly marked by the length of

She says, (“Do you know the verb *sombrer*?”)¹⁶

(few are satisfied with facts alone)

¹⁶ “The Scarceness of the Body Architecture’s Scorn,” *Touch to Affliction*, by Nathalie Stephens, p. 72.

I return to the deaths of the beautiful subject

(“call the spaces between them a *desert*”)¹⁷

I pass the starving

child-monk

my lost-link

my crow-boy pecking at a

*

it was a lucky time

there where he'd always been

that one had a name

monumental, i.e., he was *tailleur* of monuments

after his demise (“he lived to be one hundred”)

I poised as one concerned about the fate of

*

if my other themes are a way to view friction (birds can't fly without)

(“where everyone said *we*”)¹⁸ reduced to ash

He says, “He was killed by a little, tiny nuclear bomb.”

She says, “There's no smoking gun.”

¹⁷ *Last Cheater's Waltz*, by Ellen Meloy, p. 223.

¹⁸ *Istanbul: Memories and the City*, by Orhan Pamuk, p. 321.