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Signaletics

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Signaletics

Abstract
Signaletics pits the measured against the immeasurable, the body against identity, and the political against the personal. With a defunct nineteenth-century body measurement system of criminal identification as a foundation, the poems move in and out of history, only to arrive at the immediate voice of a speaker, distraught about the death of a child brother, the removal of a father, and the estrangement of the personal with the politics of her country.

Keywords
creative writing, poetry

Disciplines
Creative Writing | English Language and Literature | Poetry

Comments
The attached excerpt includes two poems from the book, "Diaspora," and "The Ear: General Form & Separation of the Internal Windings."
Signaletics

Emilia Phillips

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Contents

Subject in the Position of the Soldier with No Arms 1

I
Teratoma 5
Vanitas (Latent Print) 7
Entra Tutto 8
Latent Print 12
Triptych: Automata 14
Bertillonage Fragment, I: Taille 17
Blues Dream 19

II
Diaspora 23
Cross Section 26
The Study Heads 28
Bertillonage Fragment, II: Buste 37
Sublimation 38
Ghost Sonnet 44

III
In vacuo, Universal Studios 47
The Speech of Monkeys 50
Post 52
The Ear: General Form & Separation of the Internal Windings 54
Bertillonage Fragment, III: Longueur de la tête & Largeur de la tête 61
Latent Print: Interrogation Helix 62
Cuspis 63
Contents
Ars Poetica (Latent Print) 67
Latent Print: Indicia 68
Skin Mags 70
Niedecker’s Iron 72
Reading Joyce on U.S. Flight 2309 73
Bertillonage Fragment, IV: Oreille droite 75
Latent Print: Pale Suits 76
Mourner with Cowl, Hands in His Sleeves 78
Notes 83
Acknowledgments 85
Diaspora

When the world goes pearly

in the helio range with ash and element,
and whatever was

understood in corpus
is suddenly forgotten—

like the reason why I walked

into this room—

when there is no one,
there will be a few,

perhaps, in a sleepy

orbit. And when they finally lose
communication, one will ask

nothing, over and over,

*Do you read?* — *Do you read?*

Except this will not be

the language he speaks in,
though the language will be the same
as it was before.
One will cry. Another, laugh
and slam his brow
against the indestructible
window until he’s bleeding,
forehead split like the mango
he once shook from a tree,
until the sound that lives on
between the panes
becomes him, becomes the elegant
slander of his life he hears
or thinks
he hears, eavesdropping,
in this way, on the future.

If one of you can
point to this and say,

This is untrue,
then it is.
When and If are old friends
who write
but never visit, a withdrawal
of the senses
from a violent land.

I can't remember
why I am
standing on this threshold,
every thing before me
a cloud
beginning to scatter,
while gravity
looks through me,
down my body
and into my shoes.
The Ear: General Form & Separation of the Internal Windings

Even in the lock a spring is quivering
a note stunned by the unfit precision
of my mother’s bobby pin

& it must be
my mother’s for she’s what’s held
& kept in its place
& what isn’t (How many times she’s left
the doors unlocked when she was home…)
She breaks
the pin in the lock— She’s lost
her keys again & the color on her lips…

Once a man came at sunrise into the kitchen
asking
for a cup of coffee with cream
& extra sugar She heaved the cast iron
skillet over her head & the man’s
nose like a walnut cracked—
congealed grease
wobbled & slid from the pan & smacked
the linoleum

& my legs

I was young
a baby My mother stayed
up the whole night… listening
to the police radio
to my father.

This is Badge 490…

54
the hot pursuits he was in

The dispatcher
told my mother to get off the air
when she called  *Kenny, come home.*

•

The morning after my mother breaks into her own home  two joggers find a hen
impaled
on the wrought-iron fence of the cemetery
where her family is  buried
dried blood
at the hen’s throat a fruit knife opened  to silence
its terror  like rust eating
a hole

*Day Is Done.*

*It’s nothing*

my husband says when I wake him thinking  I hear
the floors creak downstairs,
or a flowerpot broken for the hidden key.

•
They were all black
the old police geldings
on the farm my father used
to look after
whenever the owner
took his wife
on trips to unswimmable waters
cold & turbidly beautiful.

I stood on a pine stump
a horse named Robert chewed
& held the salt
lick for him as long
as his tongue would slug
its length. One day
a white truck with silver trailer
arrived while my father
was off at the feed store
& its driver said he had to take
the horses to town
for a funeral.

I watched from the stump
as the man led one
by one the six geldings
muzzled grey
up the ramp & into the trailer.
I watched too
as he shut the gate,
& watched the truck stall
before it hawed away.
She has to crawl
in through the window when the lock jams
& her purse doesn’t jingle
with keys settled
in the bottom  She takes off her navy pumps
& lets them fall
A porch nail catches
her hose
as she lifts her leg  knee
to the ledge  Her hose snaps back

now  limp as a half-sloughed
snakeskin

How could I know this?

My mother—states
away  on her porch in an irreconcilable
dark
the streetlights buzzed out & maybe . . .

no  there’s rain  Ears & ears & ears
clot the catalogs of Bertillon—
  owing to the many hollows
and ridges which furrow it  it’s the most important
means of identification in the human visage

My father wants to buy me an instrument
just one but any one
I want as long
as I promise to play for at least three years

I pick the trumpet because it looks the most
confident in its own sound without
all the extra keys & reeds

just one

mouthpiece to slide in & I could imagine
my breath blowing through it the paths possible

I could see the pistons

shift the puzzle change the tracks
I could taste

the metal of my own blood


There's nothing there,
my husband says
when I say voices
are wailing in
through the amplifier
when he holds
the guitar

like that.

He shifts in his seat
& the voices
focus
to volume
tuning the strings
to a frequency
of a CB signal,
the local news,
or the stars—

Quiet, now.
I can almost hear
what they're saying...

Even the men in the saddles believe their ears
are gold
    as brittle & brilliant & malleable
They don't hear the guns anymore
burning through their powder
They wear their hearts
under Kevlar & the dead

what do they do?
    What do they mean?
They're waiting under the window

flush against the wall
setting off silent alarms
    as they leave

in rafts made of the light
bones of birds

59
My mother in the morning after
wakes to her hand swollen
She wraps herself in gauze

She’s given up the name that is
my father’s

She says *Good morning*

*Who’s there?*

She hears whispers in her ear & the night’s echoes
at the break of day folding their tents like gypsies
& as silently stealing away.