

The Ghost in the Machine, or Movements of a Symphony for Various Body Parts

Laura Johanna Braverman

Poetry

[1] *immersed*

in the cylinder's magnetic sea
your body's protons spin
out of equilibrium
in their watery cell-beds –

send out their echoes,
answering the pulse
of radio waves:

some short staccato
some boom andante maestoso,
mallets on a drumhead –

and others still are the long slow
pulls on a double bass in adagio:

time signatures thrumming
through the soft wax
in your ears while an eye mask
shields you from the walls –

white-curved around
the machine's bowels,
where wire coils vibrate
in an electric dance

[2] *today it is the brain*

two weeks ago, your cervical spine,
left shoulder and a twist to lay your wrist
palm-side down –
the machine searching for the source
of oscillations between blunt ache
and needle-prick –
intrusions along the neural pathways
that feed your working hand,
searching for the source of swaying rooms –
it's not the crystals of the aural labyrinth,
so is this vertigo your old friend –
or something else sheltered
in the brain's topographies –

[3] *almost thirty years ago*

you lie there and think, these same currents
were sent pulsing through your head –

and if you remember right, the hospital was east –
1st Avenue, cold tripped towards you
from the tidal estuary

your first time in the magnetic drum
because the city as you knew it then
was always turning, the ground like moving sand –
the doctor said to use a cane
you were 24 with an illness that hid from reason
you named it Ghost –

[4] *pricked and prodded*

imaged, scanned
tests for ears and brain, blood and heart
they said, *No treatment* –
you'll just have to live with it

you chant and pray
join floor-circles and sit on pews
wait for a red-robed lama in a coffee shop
on Broadway and Canal

your Ghost is mercurial:
fills your body with lead, then fire
plays tricks
a gap in the floorboard swallows you

how we still suffer from that French philosopher:
cleaved in two –

and your soul floats somewhere, unmoored
evicted, searching for the door –
some way inside

[5] *Descartes' myth*

an English thinker disagreed:
Ryle said the mind is not a ghost
in a corporeal machine –
the two cannot be split

and your intruder?
perhaps you came to understand
that Ghost and soul
were really one –
unruly, angry at being unhoused

it took years to find the door,
hidden as it was –
but soul moved in,
found forgotten rooms

and here you lie now, submerged
in the sonic rhythms of the machine –
no ghost here
but a home of flesh and blood
and bone, set alight

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Laura Johanna Braverman is a writer and artist. She is the author of *Salt Water* (Cosmographia Books, 2019). Her poems have appeared in *Reliquiae*, *Plume*, *Levure Litteraire*, and *California Quarterly*, among other journals. She is currently a doctoral candidate in poetry at Lancaster University. Austro-American by birth and upbringing, she lives in Lebanon with her family.
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