THE BLUE SPLIT COMPARTMENTS

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for

Ayla, Abel, and Marlow

and for

Azaz-ur-Rehman,

Faheem Qureshi,

the four members of Malik Gulistan Khan’s family,

Noor Syed,

the wife and seven children of Masih Ur-Rahman Mubarez,

Nurto Kusow Omar Abukar,

and all the other people, too many to name,

killed and injured by U.S. and U.K. drone attacks

during the Obama and Trump presidencies,

when this poem was written
In the climate of fire and fury which is the climate of poetry, money ceases to have value, tribunals cease to pass judgement, judges cease to condemn and juries to acquit. Only the execution squads still know what their work is. . . . Rockets go up in the sky. It’s my childhood that burns.

- Aimé Césaire
THE

BLUE

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I think they should live our experience, the tarmac an equality mile after boring mile, the same white strip, the same cats’ eyes, the persona fades like early sleep and the hard world goes on hiatus — it’s an eclipse in thought, parentheses, a subject dropped through a hatch, and still the hurtling machine the glass shelter the poisonous fire darts around obstacles, each a little cabin of self-preservation only millimeters from catching death.

You go on like this, on autopilot, for months simultaneously totally present and a grating mass of absence, but able to do that job which is not to die; and then that dumb moment when you catch yourself doing it. Had I been asleep, for hours, my daughter floating in my palm? I was so engaged in the number plates and colors I forgot to recognize myself as a soldier. Hardly breathing I crossed two lanes, put on the hazards. Snapping back exceeded the heart’s strength to tolerate electrochemicals, my head swam with the bright proximity of violence.
Some part of me must have wanted to.
Saying “some part” locates that part as an alien object
tapped into my viscera that can’t really be found.
I sip water, take a cleansing breath, ease
off the pressure. Celebratory gold ribbons
of rain cut the mid-summer sun and anoint us,
but they are wrong to do so, the mountains
grilling like the roots of a tooth.
CLOSED

Confess to yourself whether you would have to die if you were forbidden to write. If not, continue

movement to the bazaar, moving under advice, in heavy cloud. Owning this projection of our power as volume enables us to manipulate the soil and raise it up

in defiance of the tyranny of distance, the highway hissing like a cat.

He said he heard my text in the hall above the consulting rooms my searching of the holes made by American surgical and gross violences in a different light,

as the weaponization of my own past beating on the things I had been called to love, the structures and the people inside them.

We were cocked & loaded to retaliate

when I asked, how many will die. 150 people, sir, was the answer. Bending the azimuth away from justice scorching vile bodies
this invulnerable mechanical soul pulses
on a slow single trochee to engagement.
Put Eid henna on your hands. Lately
come offers of compensation.
Sodenly both the good & the evyl
brake forth & flewe theyr wayes,
the good hovered up to heaven,
the evyll made speede to the hel,

and in ye barel of evyl remayned only hope:
& in the vessell of good was founde suspicion

And so it came to passe,
not unlyke as when men in darke nyghts

walkyng in Arabia do happenlye treade
uppon some piece of yron or other cold thing,
are sodenly affrighted with feare
leaste they have hapsed upon a venemous serpent,

& yet have not: even so the only suspicion
of good and evyll is that,
that perplexeth al mortal creatures,

because al that is good is ascended to heaven,
and al that is evyl, gone down to the infernall sprytes.
Actual space is intrinsically more powerful and specific than a flat surface. Anything in three dimensions can be any shape, and can have any relation or none at all. Just

as the substance of our universal rights is transcended by the idea: when you cut off the legs of a table, the table falls but the form of the table floats forever in the sky.
In space we can pursue any possible form of relation. The people of the Juba region
gather around the sacrificial girl, her apron on fire, her fired face of clay a color trace that was written by the curator and is being read in another room. The jar she holds the length of a thighbone is more rare. She is a box and she opens one. Somewhere an artist starts building new tables, hammering out fan blades and motors.
The box levitates.

Its scarlet metal faces
are edged in orange and powdered
w tungsten, it is breathing, dropping
its steel curtain on fourteen hundred
curios from another age, insects held
beneath clear, untrembling glass.

Copper goes green with error
and is tenderly cleared
by the Djiboutian zero-
hour worker, or that error is held off
with armorized enamel or vacant plexi.

The sides of the box push back
against the void of Fort Russell,
solid, dry, magnetic,
independent of the viewer's scrutiny
but not uninviting. The bottom is stubbed out

just barely reflecting but so capacious
it might include your face, that face you paid
to put there, that floats an inch above
your real face and is made of brownish clay.

The thin composite body feels like dry paper, has overcome
significant technical issues since its humble origins in balsa and ply.
The void is a value made of formica, 
aluminum, cold-rolled steel, red 
and common brass 

forces the artist to occupy 
the site of a decision, part of a trend 
famously to boot out illusion; Donald Judd  
bringing the box into doctrine,  
stack ‘em high and sell them, well  

into the high desert, the colony of souls.