

BEN LERNER

THE CIRCUIT

1.

Suppose that we hit the body
with a tremendous, whether it's ultraviolet
or just very powerful light, supposing you brought the light
inside the body, which you can do either
through the skin or in some other way
Suppose the source of the light is moving
past the body, forming a dark fringe
around the empty center, still place
below the range of human hearing
Whether they were the mating calls of insects
sonic weapons, a pressure was experienced
at the short wavelength, with a tremendous
Let us suppose, then, that we are dreaming
violet you can drink

through the skin. I was at the embassy
without my knowledge, I came forward with my symptoms
Light sensitivity, malaise, checking my phone
A dry coughing sound high up in the trees
and was dismissed until they saw the scans
the shadows, it was as though I had sustained
a secret life in my sleep, the damage was clear

water running over stones, stock imagery where
memory should be. I heard
hail on the roof of the train at 9th
and Smith, but when I emerged at 15th, the sky
there was no evidence, but pellets of white ice
along the curb, in the streetlight, the grass
at the edge of the park, I saw her and

she held a handful toward me, Here
I have been saving this for you since the pandemic began
and I took it, I experienced it as warm
ice she pressed into my hand, warm ice is a thing
I made a note to remember, the press of her
is a thing now, and we sat on the bench
Listening to the rats in the groundcover
music from passing cars, and she asked me
Is there a way we can do something like that by injection
inside, or almost a cleaning, because you see
it gets in the lungs and it does a tremendous
concept of the light, the way it kills
it in one minute, that's pretty
powerful. People should look into it

2

I am trying to remember what it felt like to believe
disjunction, non sequitur, injection

between sentences might constitute
meaningful struggle against the empire
typing away in my dorm, my roommate
freshman year would get stoned and listen
to classical music on his headphones
He had green hair, and one night he came in very late
I was asleep, and then like I'd been hit
these incredible waves of sound, and I shot up
his eyes were closed, he was conducting
but hadn't plugged them in, and I was screaming
waving my arms, but his eyes
and then I kind of relaxed into it

I am trying to pinpoint the moment where I realized
what seems obvious now, that it doesn't
run on prose, the advertisements
speeches at rallies, the lightning fast trades
of bundled debt, among the most beautiful phrases
in American English, that you campaign
in conventional verse, but govern in avant-garde
pieties regarding pulling it apart, that what
I grew up thinking was a kind of
Trojan Horse in the sense of malware
poets uploaded into language, a small
jamming mechanism for the smooth flow of
information over stones, was in fact
I read a transcript of a Sarah Palin speech

at Penn in 2008 instead of from my book
I was asleep, and then like I'd been hit
a white fantasy, classical. The point is not that the work
wasn't good, or that the writer doesn't have
debts and tactics, but that I am still coming
I love this phrase, to terms
with the fact that the fascist reaction and I
was mimetic of what I thought I opposed
with my typing. The search for new commitments
for a new language of commitment
to inhabit but also refuse, insist
on a domain of contingency, chance, to be disorganized
by desire, no pieties in the arts
and beyond. There are people looking into it

3

Warm ice is a thing
being an ambassador without your knowledge
is a thing, the violet hour of empire is too grand, but there is
when residual sunlight takes on a predominantly blue
shade and there are no sharp
shadows on the scan
an hour (which doesn't last an hour) in which the brightness
of the sky matches streetlights, lit windows
and more light is scattered in the body
and the body is redder and softer for

a brief window is among
the most beautiful phrases changing
phase, valence
I still believe in that

capacity to take it in, not to be cleansed
but to be equal to it for a while
as the kids say, to hold it
and I am still the kids at forty
two, I am still relaxing into looking into it
rushes past and through me, to let it go and hold it
in the moment of composition, to be tense
and relaxed, ready to move, be moved by it
whatever it is, an openness
along the curb, in the streetlight
which is social, a small circuit
a small amount of current flowing
from emitter to base
at dusk between the sentences

and the people
it gets in the lungs