

Room Tone

Each body's presence alters the room tone
so no one may leave. For twenty seconds
the soundman wants nothing of us.
Only that we not be the action, the breath, the story,
not stir the particular air of this particular room.
Painful, such necessary stillness.
How our restless histories rise up, batter
the throat's confessional.
The whole business takes forever.
Someone always coughs or cracks a knuckle,
shifts weight heel to toe, a sleeve inside a jacket
rustles and we must begin again
until our smallest human gestures,
tilt of head, finger held to lips, fall away.
We try to be only body, only mass,
unplayed piano, unstruck bow, rectangle
of amber rosin gleaming in a bamboo box.
What frauds we are, how ridiculous our lies,
how deep and wide our neediness,
bellows the din inside our heads.
Our ears fill with hum. Headphones on,
eyes closed, the soundman looks skyward.
We become armchair, bowtie, floorboard, cello, shoe.
Become only what the air plays through.