Alison Swan

Catalogue

Look at me, standing
flatfooted on library tile
between card catalogue files
and plate-glass windows
turned mirror by night,

reflecting row upon row of
little wooden drawers with
tiny brass pulls and frames,
holding wee paper labels
marked, for instance, Aa-Ab.

Look at the beige linoleum,
so highly polished it reflects
every lettered label and
my shadow self standing,
flatfooted, imagining

I pull /ude the Obscure from
my blue knapsack, tear out
a page then fold it in half,
in quarters, then eighths,
each crease seeded with words.

Look at me looking at
the card catalogue files,
imagining I curl my index
finger under one hook and
pull a drawer open to

scores of thumbed cards,
every single one hole-punched
and slipped onto a brass rod
anchored to a drawer and
joined with a book here,

under this same roof,
because capable hands, with
their capable fingers, once
held each book and typed
an ink record onto paper.

This is how we indexed
records of our knowledge.
This is where we arranged it.
And this is where he was walking
and where I was walking, too,

brimming with unuttered
words and hauling a knapsack
heavy with papers and books
through the corridor between
cards and mirrors,

reflecting us standing there,
where I’m thinking about
flipping a drawer of cards
forward and dropping one
folded page into the space in back.

Look at me stopped, knowing
the concrete planters outside
the windows were growing
shrubs simply from dirt and
fountain water climbed the air.

I’m noticing this from far
in the inscrutable future, because
this is where I was walking
and he was walking and
she was walking and where

we all stopped together on
the polished linoleum in
front of the reflective glass
and rows upon rows of
card catalogue files where my

whole body relaxed into the
same goddamned space he’d
left it in over and over again,
my heart really rather
suddenly feeling like a
peony bud, my chest cavity
too small to hold the blossom
it would become, because they
stopped too, his hands and
fingers on her shoulders.

Look at us, standing next to
the calling cards of countless
books, packed into dark
wooden boxes. The page from
Jude almost left in the one

that happens to be the one
that’s never opened again,
my fingers already preparing
to stop a certain kind of
touching forever alongside

an index of practically
everything important that’s
already been read.
The Ecology of Art

Adina was twelve when we lived in Cambridge. 
I think I saw her riding her bike in Inman Square. 
I think she liked the 1996 winter of so much snow 
and imagined a place with winter nights like ours, 
dark and wide-horizoned like her paintings. 
I found in this magazine mailed from Boston.

I turn to those images now with a start of familiarity 
and think of her turning to the pages of her own copy, 
imagining someone like me in the snowed-under 
flatlands, someone admiring her paintings, 
their horizon lines studded with the silhouettes 
of houses, barns, trees, sliver of mailbox, fence;

someone remembering Cambridge, Mass., where 
the sides of buildings tower and crowd, so 
I learned to turn the edges of all the leaves 
of the Brahmin maples into horizons, 
one single tree an entire world onto itself, 
one black-and-white warbler an orbiting moon.