

The Screen

1

She writes: I work at a think tank now. I'm an intern.
No pay, but a possible reference and resumé credit.
I have my own badge, I hold it to the scanner,
the gates open of their own accord.

The windows are tinted and the light filtered.
All day down the astro-turf corridors we wheel
carts overflowing with print-outs: drought,
Kiribati overwhelmed, Bangladesh flooded.

There is a screen you may touch, cold as a lover's hip,
and it will tell you the future.

The fatigue of this labor is beyond belief.

We download the model of the Himalayas melting,
the Ganges and Yalu River, that irrigate a billion farmers,
petering out to a scratch in dust.

There are further predictions, but we can't access them.

Sometimes even here you can sense the hum of traffic.

Once I swear I heard a sparrow. Perhaps
it was a digital cue in the background music.

2

When I was a child, I had a recurring dream.
I dressed for school methodically.
I had just learned to button in the grownup mirror
where each of my gestures countered me.

My father had shown me how to wait at the sign
and trust the bus emblazoned on the shield
would actually arrive, loud and full of strangers.
I came to the brass-shod doors just at the bell.
I helped the teacher beat the erasers, the dust
choked me, except it did not, I realized
I was still deep in the dream, I had forgotten to wake,
and I had to go back and find out how, no clue
except suffering, or else my father's gentle hand
that smelled of shallots and Burma Shave.

But now if I go back it is to the simulations
and the wind that moves across the screen
at three miles per minute.

D. NURKSE