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As if this thing felt its way to me
a horror story from the air
all made of air
the way words are
and they hurt – listen,
you need a detective,
someone to tell you
if your death will be natural,
someone who can peer
over the transom in old hotel rooms
and tell how you were conceived.
Nobody can tell you how you live.

14 March 2009

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Caution. The line's
alive. The current
runs beside you
waiting to penetrate,
wanting to run your machine.
The dreadful island
you inhabit, souls
of all the dead around it
fluttering. Gulls.

14 March 2009

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How strange a story: *to live to tell.*

Organize the workers, or tell them
there is meaning in what they do.

Their battle against capital never has
a natural end. Ever and ever
production must be seized again.

No telos. No argument,
take all the workers as one great man
who stands against the bosses:
a kind of decent radical leviathan
against the state. And would you be
a part of that animal, rising,
his hands the only real power there is?

14 March 2009

MINK FEVER

1.

The crooked numbers
wait for their god.

Only depression keeps a man
from filling his fountain pens—
but shouldn't they fill him?

Aren't we the last-born of creation,
the ewe-lambs, the benjamins?

Shouldn't things take care of us?

2.

And if they did, wouldn't water
come first uphill to greet us, feed us,
water first, famously first, best too
from from it we arose and deep
inside us it persists in flowing
so we do not get too far, River Ocean,
the never-ending *going* in us
that makes us go?

So where water is
we also are?

The depressed man
needs water, his being craves it,
he abstains, he does not like the taste.
Water is alkaline, water
is a desert in itself.

3.

What is it in him that does
this liking business for him,
plusses and minuses the things all round him,
casting a net and throwing
most of creation back,

the depressed man

wants so little, but what is it
that does this wanting,
who wants when he wants?
Who turns away, nauseous, unsatisfied?

4.

Water. But it is “death
for the soul to be wet,” to forget
I guess that means, who it is and who
it was before, death to drink that river.
But isn't every glass of water Lethe?

5.

To be in the senses is to rebuke the mind
he's been taught, doesn't believe a word of it
but practice is harder to erase than faith.
When he thinks, he knows that only in the senses
(pure, accurate, a little overwhelmed
by all the skandhas round about) can the pure
mind breathe. But that's only when he thinks.
The rest of the time he maintains like everybody else
the rigorous practice of his false education
and the flower in front of him is just something to say.

6.

They talk about it as if it were dark,
or darkness closed around the mind.
Would God it were so. The depressed mind
is fluorescent, lit always, almost shadowless,
bleak as an all-night café, nowhere to hide.
The telephone knows when to ring.

7.

He feels as if he's sold his shadow
to some devil in a drunken opera.
But there his face is, just the same,

sullen in the mirror with anxiety,
a patient dread, just the same,
puffy, as if just awake from much sleep.
But he hasn't really slept in days.

8.

The blue dreams come and brush past him
and he has to follow. People he doesn't know,
doesn't like, doesn't want, plenty of them,
all of them with things to say. Why don't you try
to sell me something, he begs. No, no substance
have they to share. No commodity.
But once in dream a teen-aged girl
carries a carton to his car for him
— a dozen boxes of crackers, \$53 —
as if he couldn't do it, it weighed nothing,
she stowed it in his car (that's not my car
he thought) and smiled at him and said
I could be your kitten. He drove away
wondering what anything means,
what it means to be someone in a dream.

9.

Call it a new name. Moon. Mink fever.

Ridiculous desire to pursue

ridiculous objects of desire

that are not good for you.

Soft fur and far to go.

The angry mouth, the sullen hunger.

Call it leprosy, old itch

that wrecks the skin it feels with,

aborts the feeling and leaves the pain,

the thwarted plague-cart, the dead

will not come out.

Reluctant Lazarus. Bartleby entombed.

10.

Not want speak not want be silent

it is a happen in a head

who cares outside

who cares to hear

what one hurt has

or who comes answer

nobody asks

not want say nothing

a word is all he has

doesn't know the word
he has
the word forgets him.

The word forgets him.

11.

Spring, of course. Blackbirds
with red chevrons on their wings
are back, back birds, goose girls
stray in still bare woods, always,
it is always always, it's never
just now, just now has such
thin lips, pounces from shrubbery
at first he thought it was a cat
or dog but now he knows.
A pale animal curiously big.
It comes with spring.

12.

Some wanted to be bleak of it
all the renewals he thought he had
were old already. He remembered
a movie house in Vienna

they showed only sentimental comedies,
'30s musicals. Lehar. Friml. Stolz.

He stood under the marquee
admiring the elsewhere, a city
full of elsewhere, none for him.

The pigeons sadly waltzed alone
he thought. Come home. You deserve
only your native city, not even that.

13.

But seeing their faces
turn into other faces
he began to understand.
All the films he'd ever seen
overlay each other in the mind's
enraptured, captured, eye—
no place to run to clean
those images away. Santa
Lucia pray for me, you
who hold your eyes in your hand,
take mine and wash them
so I can see the ordinary light.

14.

She has the water
or is supposed to have it,
water that cleanses,
water flows all round her,
water of the city,
city of a long time, water
of the ones called wise.
Not some new age eco-solvent
but the real animal
wet, heartblood of harmless
beast, snake saliva, slime
of far-traveled eels.

15.

The artificer at his fish
trying to make myth
nicks each scale with silver paint
as if seeming is the same as swimming—
mirror-maven, how can I make the glass face smile?

15 March 2009

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God's plan is not written in any book
but God's question is,
the one asked of us in all of them.

15.III.09

GALLERIES

What the picture lets us see
is the philosophy of pain.
We lie broken on the banks of it
lower parts laved by that stream.
Highly suspect current
running from low hills of the senses
but it's the only movement there is
for the likes of us. Feel it.
I feel it. The picture looks back at me
the way they do.

Museum
is a hospital. They stand there
hang there, lie there
looking at you,
pictures do, with the terrible eyes of sick patients,
accusing, demanding. Nothing
you can do will ever make a picture happy—
there is no furlough for them
and when we leave we take them with us,
morbid glances they infect us with
admiration beauty puzzlement
until all seeing is a scream in our faces.

No matter how hard you concentrate there is never just a single image. Not
image but images I answer Olson fifty years later, a schoolboy finally
construing that passage from the Odyssey, my own history

at last to get the grammar right,
there is no one behind the many,
and all the many each is singular
and they all scream from the wall
easy insight of a prentice curator
imprisoning artworks in a mere idea.

A theme
offends me

there is no topic
there is only things

no topic
or every is.

There are tulips
till they wither.
It is a woman's face
at a distant table
laughs, I turn away,
I feel like Whitman
coming out and seeing the stars,

here the coarse grass of a winter lawn
be sky enough for me,
a failed contestant, vague up there,
unpainterly, remote.

The clamor of a thing
to bear witness!

And when inside the matter of things
the artist's clamor also screams
there is no dark left to hide.

In one gallery I walked along a wall of masks, many, intricately colored,
faces tricked on them, and each face was of some interest and all of them
looked at me, it made me nauseous, dizzy, they looked at me and had no
eyes,

where can you run
in a museum
except the next gallery
next video mumbling to itself
in a dim corner,
things lost to themselves and trapped in an idea.

16 March 2009

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You read in the paper someone died.
Who are they, the ones especially you knew,
only names now and a clutch of facts
like press-releases from the afterlife.

Did you know him when you knew him?
What you knew is what you know, doesn't
change now that he's dead. He's gone
but you know that already, sooner

or later you will lose everyone, if they
don't lose you first. One goes
and many linger, a list alive
you could never reach the end of

before someone else decides to leave the room.

16 March 2009

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I have no body
only a burden
I've carried all my life

But who is it
who does the carrying
and what is it that's being borne?

16.III.09

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Caught by care
by cunning fingertips
finding lost places on the hand,
Ohio of the palm, Grand
Canyon of infolded thumb
where touch tells.
Touch tells.

To think
we have to pay for this
or learn from a book
what our hands have up their sleeves,
the power, the ability to heal
by nothing more than
pouring this being into that
by touch,

so that the “enlarged and numerous” being
clears all and makes strong.

17 March 2009

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Stick to what you know,
everything. Everything
is easier said than done.
Even easier not said.
The problem approaches.
Sunrise a pain in the chest.

17 March 2009

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The manyness of what is meant
perplexes you. Something missing
in the engine room, a stroke
the other pistons don't reciprocate.
No answer. Hum. Our vessel
does not seem further on the map
since yesterday, Burn the map.
Sky has some traction of its own,
bring us home, north star—
drag the ship along the preordained,
furrow of ocean meant for its mind,
then think the shore in place there.
On the horizon already. A continent
grew on the planet overnight,
Lemuria unveiled, behold the brazen
temple on the new-washed heights,
mountains no postcard yet defiled.
Are you home now? Have you brought
us with you all the way? A jetty
jabs out at us, not a native in sight.
Why, you keep asking me, why,
as if I knew. As if I were some part
of what I mean when I say we.

17 March 2009

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Too many acres for a spit of rain.
Even I can tell the difference
just from watering the office geranium,
meek blasphemy of indoor flowers,
shy intern reading Ruskin in the corner.
Everybody worries about their sex appeal
as they called it back in a simpler day.
We are mostly in business to defraud,
that's what business is, don't take it personal.
Open the window. Don't smoke. Study those
pigeons. They really do know what to do.

17 March 2009

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I don't know what you're talking
but I'm sure I'm as bad as you say.

17.III.09