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In all our work look for the patterns made

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A sky can be any color
but least likely green
as if the world least loved the middle way

between those indigo those scarletine extremes.

And how many colors
have your hands?

Cooler this morning with a hint of wait
though far down the highway a siren says
all anybody ever says, *listen to me.*

It's ok to talk about taking your turn
but what about absence?

When I was a kid you ordered your meat
from the butcher man who cut and wrapped it
gave you a slip of paper you had to carry
to the butcher's wife at her glassed-in cashbox
like the pope in a wrought iron cage
and give her the money she said you should.
She wrote a sign on the paper you brought
back to the butcher who handed you your meat.
This system is still valid in some bakeries of France.
To keep bloody fingers off our money,
the child thinks, having already a sense of what is holy.

thick cut french fries that tasted of fish

this shop was at the border of the county
across the street there was another name

and it was as far away from our house as anyone
would care to carry hot fish back to along a street called Liberty

it is strange to have memories
smooth-worn stone in your pocket to feel
nobody can ever see your thumb tip rub
yet they're always all together in this same hour
she, and what she says, and you, and the little stone.

Hosts of because
cluster around the simplest thought
the truest wish

shadow of a crow

the different registers of mind
what the crow thinks
as he passes over my head
what my head thinks
flared by his shadow

(all crows are male, did you know that secret?)

Tell me where does thinking think
in the heart or in the head

but I mean it, the EEG spikes
could be traces of results
not causes

hawsers holding a great ship to a dock in a cheesy port

you know what she looks like
stains down her flanks
as if the sun turned into dirt on contact

and there are too many vowels in what she says,
nothing firm,
give me a nice Polish girl with her mouth full of r's and g's and z's,

with long white arms
soft as the consonants are hard

we live by reciprocals
a dinky coastal town in lost America.

24 June 20002

Are there places
where the ocean's boring?
Ask your mother
when she comes home.

24 June 2002

Love sustains us.
But what sustains love?
Love sustains us,
we go from night to week
as long as we can
as far as we can, each
love sustains us
a little further towards
the absent goal.
And then the next
love carries us to the next
way station on the road
and it is always the same
love, this next love, always
the same difference
as before, love
sustains us, we must
give each other everything
while we love, while love
sustains us we
sustain love, we give
love everything, it carries us
to the next station,
that's all you have a right
to ask: I loved
and now I am further
into the life I am.
Take love to take you
far as it can and then

be grateful for every love
carried you forward
from nowhere to this hour,
into the completions you
can hardly even yet imagine
to which love ferries you
island by island, love
by love never and ever
the same, as long as we go it,
going every other everything.

25 June 2002

The character of the place discerns us

The character of the place discerns us

Can I be the one I also was

I used to be me

by little or bedevil the distance till

the shocked audience goes home

with me in their hearts

proof of victory — you dream of me

in the dark every sleep is democrat

now you belong to me

since we belong to it

you hear what I said

the word once spoken

has nowhere but you

to live in

you hear me

in the bottom of your sleep

can't live without me

but this 'me' is you already

and you wake more or less

complete

as much as we do

from summer sleep
always a little damp from wanting

the raucous personnel of need
to bruise your heart with waking.

2.

I used to think I knew the answer
to geography

the real inside the obvious
the jazz of listening, the tao of doing nothing
till the paper was filled up with characters
and for a little while they seemed to make sense

so you could see slender Tyrian workmen
assembling at the dawn shape-up
issued their day's tools and tasks for the Temple
already they were building tone by tone
perfect in Jerusalem

Then to the work
also you could follow them
through the street of the lame musicians
(save alms) and the quarter
of the crucified dove

up the slopes of Horeb to begin

or is it Moriah, Zion, Tamalpais, Overlook?
That mountain was everywhere

and the word knew
secret paths up scree, through tamarack

the Temple at the end of every road.
Butt of every joke. The point
the pointer and the shtick, the obvious
lipgloss smear, the definite
article itself

specifying unlikely uniqueness
to some random noun, o girl
become The woman
o tent my tabernacle

live inside a word
but let enough stick out
so I can come along and stroke your skin

which time after time I took to be the Temple
and went in

so nothing got built except the next day.

25 June 2002

Can I be stuck with silence
of my own words cracking open
and spilling out their essential
hollowness their hollow
essentiality.

And who am I asking.

That is the bitter
pill of prophecy,
shouting from my own rooftop
into my bare backyard.

25 VI 02

Can there be something left in the cup
when the coffee is drunk and the waitress
fills it up again and I drink that too

and who are you? Why do there have to be
so many people in this picture, you and she and me
and the anonymous agony of the coffee pickers

the poor broken smiling children,
the ones our silent arts are made upon?

26 June 2002

DERACINATE

Not uproot. Deprive
the thing of its false root

every root is false

a root is what clings to the passé
the personal the occasion the cause.

Pure flower blossoming midair
I want you

To take the root away
and guess
something with
to go on living

2.

to pull the root
free from its mire
in you
to free the root
from you,
aye, then what would this I we be

3.

to be
without condition
without occasion

occasion is a fall
back into history

all history is personal
that is the horror
I don't want to think about
you any more.

4.

ponder the thing
means weigh it
an absolute value
taken from a sensitive
platinum wire
stretched along the skin

the gorgeous anonymity of ass
strict paranoia of morning
a lily with no Susan

there has to be another way
of being this.

5.

Star fort, the dodger

take by name

a cruciform urban plan

so close

I can feel the coins in your pocket

this Being, this permanent
reality quicksand.

Under the orchid what is coiled?

A father's message to his son.

6.

All those points of light avenging angels are
and against their insolent inspection
your only protection is fantasy and anger and despair

for to be hopeless is to be
snug in the lap of what happens
any anything could be.

RESPONSA

To Jerome Rothenberg's *Three Narratives*

Foreword:

Just as a kiss is the only answer to a kiss, and only your body can solve the riddle of my body, so also a poem is the only answer to a poem, writing to writing, lust to lust.

Writing goes and comes back. This return is the order of what we once called Love, and now call ~~love~~, and are in no hurry to name it anew. Put the names to sleep and kiss me.

1a.

Texas has no heart.

That is the first thing we learned
on Ellis Island.

Who's we?

You and me.

The sunflower shotgunned
we are seeds
of numbers

Fibonacci, ruin,

green sepals, broken
bracts, America.

You and who else?

Me and my book,

all end

& no beginning

like a girl on the subway

you'll never see again.

1b.

Neighbors of vacancy?

Guitar with a blue man
smoking it hard.

The Dutch were among
the first, taught

urban perspective,

Jesus, Aristotle,

the whole plan.

Even Spinoza

a diamond dropped

from a passing train

in winter between

Yonkers and Deventer

on the frozen

pool of devil's spittle

where children skate

and I know better.

And pain.

The diamond cracks

along my axes,

that is how I come

into the story,

why I am a part of what

happens, a part of pain.

Pain is God.

Teaches us

holy. Teaches

us to break.

2a.

Once I was a Jew
they wouldn't let me.

Once I was a girl
they left the room.

Once I hit the piano
so that we hurt
each other, fingers,
horns, wood, sound,
hurt. This was music,
the last
of all our idols.

The strange belief
that someone else
can make us hear.

2b.

Something. Or nothing.

Suspicious beauty —
if you really are so
beautiful why
do I want you?

Shouldn't real beauty
be enough
to leave alone?

The way you leave a red
maple leaf on the wet sidewalk.

But no. You think
it is a book,
you pick it up
reverent to the last

vile scrap of scripture.
But nothing helps you.
Nothing but the one
you left behind.
You call her wife
you call her salt
you call her ex-
and why and call
and call, she'll never
come to you again.
You played it by
the book but the book
was the sky.
She played it by heart.

3.

Old men play
at tables
tric-trac taroc
chess hearts dominoes
pinochle.
Sometimes they eat
drink from dirty glasses
the light also drinks from
the flies the no-see-ems
the spirits of the dead
who knows who hovers
over the card players.
The cards are only excuses
for them to watch
each other's hands.
Old mens' faces

are their hands.

Read these. Once
they were young and spent
their time in bed.

They did not watch
the pine trees on the ridge,
didn't watch the children
play at the edge of the pond,
didn't care if they fell in.

Wanted them to. Falling
is everything.

Falling is the only pleasure
the young can share
with themselves seventy
years later. Falling
sickness, the cards
falling from their hands,
the young men watch
their penises fall
after their spirited bride
settles into sleep.

And the Lord too
fell from heaven
again, time after
time we try
to stand him up,
lean him on a tree,
send him back
where he comes from,
where the words
come from also,
the intolerable language

of sunlight in thick leaves,
evening, even the light
is pain, tells us
too much, skin of our hands.
We start a fire at his feet
and bring out our young poets
to interpret his moans
and write them down
as if pain also
were an alphabet
and he could write it
with his body from the fire.
You just have to copy
what you see,
the pinhole in the ace of hearts
you hold to your eye
and see sharply focused
the empty field you worshipped
all these years, you see the light
come in and scratch your eyes,
incautious, your hands also
bruised from beholding.

26 June 2002

Something happened to his head

Something happened to his head.
How can being empty hurt.
The huge bay across his eyes
with Africa on the other side of it.
Not the real Africa. Something yellow,
hot, new, as the word is used
in the New World, something there
always, never embraced. Bread
without a mouth. Almost a hurt
without a head.

Anxiety,
a full moon. Coarse voices
of the other pilgrims. Where
are they going with me? What saint
animates their hoofing far?
I stare at the murky mirror of the sea
and have no clue how I got here.
Who did I pray to? Who granted my prayer?
In the intercession we are sleep.
Lettuce leaves flutter on café tables,
blue wind, evening. I pray to the boats,
I pray to the piano in the bar.
Silence. Let me lose Africa. Let me loose
from place, let me live
for the next touch, the other one
the one right past my fingertips.

26 June 2002, Rhinebeck

