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ISLANDERS

Earth is full of such transmissions. Martini time
and no one drinks. The coast almost belongs to the sea.
Who are you, and who needs your dreary mainland,
money? For a minute we are happy in the mist.

Hands in pockets — chill wind — no more explanations.
Rover boy. After my mother and my father died
I could come home — don't expect any memory to last.
Only the least sheen on the waitress's satin uniform,

only the swirl of fog at the window to insinuate
another world is there, the actual one. We do not
triumph but we might outlive. Standing solitary,
almost noble, on the grey cliffs of what we mean.

1 March 1995

The new begins inside the old,
Thoughtlessness our most endearing quality

The old begins inside the new
Enduringness our thoughtless quality

2 March 1995

PRINCIPIA POETICA

1. Always live on an island.

1.1 If no island is at hand, fabricate one with the materials at hand.

1.11 There is always something at hand.

1.12 Or mouth.

3 March 1995

THE END OF MEMORY

Let the idle caliph tie his own shoelaces
for a change. Let twilight turn opaque dark
pour encourager les autres. It *is* a hotel,
Milarepa as usual was right, we check out—
but those ducks we heard quacking every midnight
when the last canalboat disturbed them,
we'll remember them forever, life after life.
Surrounded by ridiculous valises
we perch in crowded European trains.
Memories, not necessarily our own, beset us,
we will never be free of them, whoever
they really belong to. You can stumble
over somebody else's suitcase as well as your own.
They blur and vary, change colors, change cities,
talk in tongues, but always claim me
for their own. Wherever they come from
they're here, snug around the heart, an
incurable disease pretending to be my mind.

4 March 1995

Mahler. Sycamore. In white
a jogger sprints up our hill.
The springs of human action.
High strings, the sound of dying.

5 March 1995

A C T Æ O N

Diana in the far trees.
You wonder sometimes
if it's worth it. Myth
is the price truth pays
for being still alive.
Her haunches gleaming
where she is most
naked, in beech leaves
seen, herself surveyed

or not that he saw
her naked but saw her
bathing, entering other
elements, cold,
her skin a little
blue, saw her shiver
even, her fire at risk,

*our sensations
are our own
she cried out
we have nothing other
and set her dogs on him
to distract him
forever from her feelings.*

6 March 1995

Coffee strong, the morning quiet. Her face
in sleep looks so knowing. Knowing and knowing.
Mild morning, spring at hand. Not my hand
yet, a bird, a raindrop. What is she doing
in that quiet room below all thinking?
Sometimes she says she has bad dreams,
of going, and the miracle is, isn't it,
ever, that one ever wakes, ever stays
again in this garden of such familiar names.

6 March 1995

HYPERION

or loved again, yet again,
the unsearchable extents of her Mondays
a teal blue barn new
painted in pine woods
hurrying as a bird

a myth should be as
small as a postage stamp,
o Greece or Italy or
whoever claims them,
send them to me,

can a word fit in the world,
these tellings
that tell my heart how to know?

6 March 1995

CONEY ISLAND

What the snow insists on doing
as it can, what it only can

given the stances we inhabit, or infest,
the strong subway smell of what I want:

nobody forevering away, and all the citizens
slumberously walking through hot days

smiling to be sentient. Alive. Feltman's
in Coney Island one hundred years

one hot dog a glass of beer. Half of that
I remember it, a pure amber word I can't spell,

the sand itself, or Pieter Saenredam's august interiors
smitten with underpowering Dutch light—

a beadhouse for all peoples, a house of God.
And the merry-go-round brassringless

drays round and round and I reach out
only for one more memory

who holds me in such a way my face
takes sort of refuge in her sea-soaked lap.

6 March 1995

HUNDERTWASSER'S *GREEN SPIRALS AT HOME*

I want it to be instead a diagram of the Heavenly Amsterdam
Amstelodamensis Coelestia, by Spinoza out of Swedenborg

gracht within *gracht* canaling concentrically closer
until we come to the core of things, the great Centraal Station

where the circling waters meet the linear river
or arm of the shapeless sea all scary with forever and there

we have walked as far in the city as the city goes.

2.

Getting rid of books is usually a very bad idea,

a Hitlerish kind of action, and it worries me
when I want to see blank walls instead of these

inherited energies that did no one much good
but never hurt anybody. Unless body wrecks itself

chasing after common airs and mountain ranges
hidden inside her hurriedest expressions, words

exploding rhythmically, dependably dangerous,
always trying to find their way back to the world.

6 March 1995

for Charlotte

Yesterday in woods we
hadn't entered since winter came
we a bluebird. Perched
then slow skittering the way they do
then perched again then going,
pause, then gone, and all through this
his mate was waiting. And the morning
from the shrine room
showed a narrow strip of land
with no more snow.
What am I trying to tell you?
And am I listening?

7 March 1995

And what was I trying to say?
Who was the color?

It was a hillside in Nepal I saw,
the far-away, and the sun went there
when it was through with us.

Do not be tired, little light,
there's words enough for all of us,
footsore and always trying to be cute.

A Moorish arch, a veiled and scented citizen,
who is this fragrance?

With cigarettes they wait on line
for milk and donuts and the Sunday paper,
in tight jeans anxious to get back to bed.

But this is Wednesday
and who is the noise in the attic?

They're all active, all fire signs,
they'll never get enough of it, whatever it is.
And who is the breath that makes

even the birds shudder?

8 March 1995

A fleet of scaups today at Mills bay,
diving, staying, being reborn. They take
off byw alking fast across the water
until it turns into the sky. Half
a hundred birds, they are said
to winter here. I've never seen a single one before.

8 March 1995