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The Mesmer of it, stroke
of a little hand along
a huge carpal of earth where the claw
of mountain reaches to the river
almost and the mist stands
this very morning with rain falling out of it
and a friend talks to a friend the words
sauntering westward, wet
with shiny interruptions when
—between a hand held to wet rock
and an ear warm with the breath of a friend —
you think finally you understand.

Stroke the planet till it speaks.

21 October 1995

The same wind that fills the house with light
slams the door. You're going nowhere,
chum. This air needs you to sing it.
Or whatever you do with it.
And there it is again, like footsteps going away.

21 October 1995

NOVVS ORDO LINGVARVM

This is the new language I propose on us

translatic directly, bizectly,
from the exact part of the body
mapped onto the terrain of Newed Amerca

and from those geographical factustances alone
(rivers, bays, mountains, estuaries,
weary deserts, salt-eyed lakes, o Mono)
we learn to speak.

Rivers are the oldest vowels.
Hills are consonants.
In prairie silence we galgond.

I am this eccentric of whom words speak,
follily their newspapers present.

Begin here,
and each mistake will bring you closer.

Ad finem erravimus.

22 October 1995

Begin with this and so go on.

What Schuldts is doing

Once there were some people. They moved south. They moved because there were too many people, too many pine trees, too many words in their mouth. They moved south until they came to water. Water is always soothing because it keeps talking and says nothing, like somebody else's wife in the kitchen. They came to water and wondered. Water is good for wondering.

Some of them said, Why not, let's go west, everything else seems to go west, we might as well, the sun and everything. So these people took their sheep and axes and words and went west along the water's rim, crossing little bits of it now and then, until they came to a big island and that was good enough for them and they stayed. They're still there. They had a god called Ing and they were his people, and they say his name all the time, the English we call them, because everything they do ends in -ing. They wear cloth raincoats, good tweeds, and for a long time had a thing called a Raj that made them rich as thieves. They're not so rich now, except for their language. They have a lot of words.

The others of these southbound travellers said, No, we'll cross over the water, it's just a ditch, and see what's over there. They always were curious, the people who went south over the Ditch. They didn't have much in the way of gods, so they've always been anxious to find new ones or things like gods, music and numbers and stuff like that. They fight with one another a lot about such things. Their squabbling disposition sometimes makes them rich and sometimes drains all their wealth. Right now they're ok. They wear rubber raincoats, bad tweeds, and own most of the world.

So the English with their big vocabulary and their -ing, -ing, -ing all the time went one way, and the Ditch with their intelligence and orderliness and energy went the other. One was all *-ing* and one was all *-end*, and it shows, doesn't it, one always moving and one always consolidating.

Confronted by this sad divided history of the Northern or Not Much to Hope For Peoples a few flaming Geniuses have tried to do

something about getting the family together. Gertrude Stein was one of them. An American lady of good family and superior education, she found it intolerable that English was always on the move and Ditch so stolid, so she arranged large parties where English words became beaming archipelagoes serene in tropic sunlight, while Ditch words zipped around in frilly dresses and motorboats with mahogany decks and brass fittings. She did this, of course, all the while pretending to be writing exclusively in English, or, occasionally, Finch (a musical patois spoken by some elegant no-accounts settled uneasily on territories between the two populations, their speech containing elements of both). This was very clever of her, and entitles her to be respected as a great English writer, perhaps the greatest of our yearhundred.

Now comes to our aid Mr Schuldt, a poet and performer from the Hanseatic trading town of Hamburg (a city in recent years considered to be a part of Ditchland, and anyhow more or less Ditch-speaking). Everything he does is to pour the grave warm milk of philosophy into the twitching leather bag, smelly and with the hair of the ox still on it, of ordinary language, that we may drink. The language in which he chooses to write to us (to us, so that we may drink) is Ditch, as you'd expect, given the tragic accidents of birth and so on that make us usually go on as we start out, speaking the mother tongue. A recent newspaper account gives a fair image of Mr Schuldt's achievements: I quote (my translation) from the authoritative *Berliner Mitternachtsblatt*: "This Baltic benefactor comes to us with Ditch discourse secretly made tremulous and nubile with English, his words appear to shiver in the golden sun-shot mist of the Lübeck Bight, but the wind that horripilates their blondine skin is puffed from the severe Mancunian worksteads and hot-shot pig-iron mulling mills of Wolverhampton. He has broached the Ditch cordon with English thrill-seeking juvenile delinquencies, his words like Chunnel-hither-burrowing football fans smash the nylon-mesh barriers of linguistic crowd-control."

What of course that Ditch-oriented judgment does not deal with, does not dare to deal with, is the extent to which American (that is, West English) provides this Ditch-speaking (but also English-writing) author (script-seller and screed-stater) with an euphonious and ready-for-anything context in which his exciting versaries veer ever out.

For this is no Odyssey that the man gives us, this is no homecoming into the stalemate peace of familiar words. As America is so confused that it is ready for anything, but so energetic that it can turn most things to good, in just such a manner has this colloquialist come in with his engines and gunboats and colonial pup-tents stretched over the secret places of our own speech, and built his coaxial pyramids atop which, Freest Mason, he has set out in gleaming neo-Ægyptian starlight text after text where language ties itself into the eeliest earnestness of meaning more than we commonly let it. Commonly! Neither one nor other! The both, biding all these centuries, now bound to bite! Both bite! In Schuldt's texts the two languages speak each other. At last.

—RK, 2 Brumaire E.V.1995

23 October 1995

This is the time of year
when I should do nothing
with light but analyze

and enjoy the weather.
Read it, study the feathers
of its palest breezes,

most Indian energies
running from out there right
in here, into my head

that stainless blue. And the moon
my Rorschach in mottled
lawnlight, tree drift yellow

and shadow pilgrimage.
After the panoply of sleep
morning is the same as mind.

24 October 1995

PORTRAIT IN AN AUTUMN WINDOW

Under the cloud and over the tree
Is easy but he wants other,
His gypsy mind will never
Tolerate the evidence

Silver stars instead of eyes
And a harmonica for a mouth
This dummy me he is
Entices alien destinies

In love with dank and drizzle
Cold, amber-witted as old leaves,
He asks for the underside of obvious
He prays to it

He licks along the cool of it
With words for a tongue, and a knot
Tied in the middle of him
Only the wind knows how to loose.

25 October 1995
[revised 9 II 96]

We do. We do or did it.
The universe
was just our middle name.
I call you Lois
because nobody knows it.
You call me Joseph
for a leaf's sake.
Who knows, children
create their parents in
dark sweaty coalbins
down terrible stairs,
splinters and stars,
silverfish running on rough walls,
a name is a little bit like liberty,

here's mine, a swan in traffic,
a girl among red trucks.
In any process
I am the sophomore of it—
and after hours of my skilfullest persuasion
the river consents to run down to the sea.

26 October 1995

EVERY DAY A NEW BAPTISM

Yesterday, suddenly, flags in the road.
I looked up and saw Slovenia, Slovakia,
knew I was at the mercy of the alphabet,

as usual, and colors, I belong to colors,
Latin was my native language,
I forget everything except the colors,

the sacred alphabet, the taste of salt.

26 October 1995

Lambent, secure, brilliant brown
the cool fire of October runs

and almost all the light is gone now
not yet noon. It knows.

But for one minute in the bushes
we know more than the wind does.

27 October 1995

READING NOVELS

Whenever I read a novel, which is not often,
but when I do, Proust or Musil or Vonnegut,
doesn't matter, when I do,
they're so long, so wonderful to be inside
and I don't have to do anything, just stay,
like an aardvark in a cathedral
trying to be at home. All those ceilings!
All those domes and squinches and heaven's
light slicing into the top of my head, so big,
Melville or Twain or Dostoevsky,
James or Perec or RLS, doesn't matter,
blue windows! The eye of God right on me!
Whenever I read a novel I decide
I have to write one too, and then I do,
and when I do it's a stone
lifting a stone, it's a bird pretending to be a bird.
Or just like today, darling, the sky pretending to rain.

28 October 1995

OF THEIR MEETING BY THE ARNO

Then time. Itself will.
Have a meaning. River.
This bridge her dress
white and red. Off
over Tannery Brook
ran through the whole.
Town is to show.
We live together
for the exposition. Theme
of touch. Enters.
Not enough to see not
enough to understand.
Something else. A pair
of colors I understood.
Garment left behind
clutched in the wind
maybe. Everything
has hands.

29 October 1995

I have walked in this meadow till my clothes fell off
till the birds dissolved into the sky till the grass
turned into the ocean and sand swallowed the sun

and still there is a shadow I have to follow,
the bare shape of my eyes sharpened to see
is all I see, seeing follows seeing endlessly and nothing seen.

29 October 1995