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DERIVE THE DAY

dérive all day

my shoulders are cold

derobe,

count all the famous dyings day by day

through the year

see the astrology of death,

the other star.

23 March 2003

And now spring the birds
have their own places
do they know the artifice
that feeds them and do we?

23 March 2003

ARA

Ark in heaven Ara
(altar) cracking, Faust?

Faust is polder,
Gerritsen Beach Floyd
Bennett Field Canarsie
land fill. Rake
the dead leaves
all the dead leaves
together, all men
all women rake
leaves back to paradise.
Key change. Snowfall.
All the leaves go
back to the tree, we
are left with diamonds
in our hands
but what kind?

24 March 2003

THE TABLES OF THE LAW

Task the ten,
chisel them
from the bedrock
where Moses found them
and read them,
o fierce act
of reading
to make of signs
in rock discerned
eternal Law—

take the ten
back from
the rabbis, from the priests,
leave them their gaudy breastplates,
take back the Law!

When the teacher frowns at the class
the words written on the blackboard
are behind his back, they come towards us
armored with his scowl, his smile, all
the empathies of information
that silence our protest, that refuse our demand.

The Law looks at us,
but the Law's true law
is behind its back,
backwards Exodus
tells us

the hidden
backparts of God,
Mirrorland
you bright permission
to understand,
you America
beyond the sky,

every law
is stricken
with believing,
every law
that once
was liberty,

every law
is a stick or a stone
in your hand
to do with
to use,
 a law
like gravity
is how you use
yourself in the open,

break a law
as it is
and find a word

but a true law
can't be broken,

a law is only
how a thing
actually is
in a world of things,
a law is desire in a night of hunger.

Take the ten
one by one
before I was
another is,

the unself wanderer
who means to be

you curled up in me
welessly differently one

and you keep being my mother.

Two thou
shalt not say you
when you mean me

shalt not
assert ipseity
in the tender pastures

or think a whole city
answers to one will

thou shalt not call me on the telephone

when flesh would do,
do not imagine me an aspect of the instrument
when I am you,

my name is empty
your mouth is full.

*How lonely a thou
looks when the law's on fire!*

24 March 2003

WINDOW PIECE

I too like light
you're not the only

and the curtains
spread-armed in the morning

to take hold of
this person

who always walks right in
and is completely here

no matter
how little I earn

all this free information
instantly.

25 March 2003

SELF HELP

is the opposite of Help Yourself
which is all response
to what is there

whereas Self Help is a quibbling anxiety
about what is not there:
taut abs, caring friends, mature relationships

whereas when I see that woman standing there
me with my head in the clouds a thousand miles away
suddenly I want to be with her

that is love or the beginning of it
whereas Self Help is an empty room with me worrying
I need a woman or I should have a woman, all

my friends have women and I want one too
because I can't be a man without one and
then what would I call myself

and who would I talk to instead of thinking?
These are the differences I guess along the road:
when it's there you help yourself

when it's not, then you welcome what is there,
the other thing, the thronged world
you have no names for yet.

Self Help is the nasty word for looking at your (imaginary) self and perceiving it as lacking something, because you are imposing the universal free-floating anxiety onto an object, usually one's body or social life, and declaring it to be the offending imperfection. Don't you understand that you are perfect? Self Help means blaming yourself, declaring yourself imperfect, choosing to improve. This is probably the root American malaise. You have to understand: you are perfect. And as a perfect being you will move with absolute accuracy through the world your whole life till now has chosen, and provided you with all the materials and tools to handle.

25 March 2003

MATTER OF BRITAIN

There are only so many
questions left to answer
so I eke them out

the ones that have you in them
I like best, dawn over Bretagne
and you barefoot on the beach

too cold to swim but not to think
the long thought the ocean's thinking

and you translate it for me
into ordinary French.

25 March 2003

COBBLESTONE

streets

must be hidden

down under asphalt

to this day,

bones of the road,

I miss them, slippery juddering tripping though they were

they gleamed in rainlight

and the moon copied itself all over the street

thousands of moons later

when we crept through midnight Leipzig

on our way to the lost sea.

25 March 2003

ANNUNCIATION

Quick endings go on forever.

Mind that. Christ

conceived today. You in my arms

on the telephone.

25 March 2003

TA'WIL

Go for the little one
the one that explains,
all the corroded intellect
—no rock oil heals—
trembles with war.

All signs are bad —
did you know that then
when love began

that runs your life,
that every name degrades

and every symbol is
a profanation of its sacrament?

Semiotics made the war.
We kill for love.

26 March 2003

HOMMAGE A VANEIGEM

I'm on the deck writing
first morning in this
week old spring I can

what a long winter
what a sweet bird, robin,
repeating

the iterative pleasures
love and weather
and music and then again.

26 March 2003

In the background a man sells cigarettes
Rothmans and Gauloises, in
the foreground a man sells
bananas in Baghdad, everybody
is worried. The bananas look so ordinary,
how can there be killing
while bunches of yellow bananas
lie on a low table in the flat sunlight
delicately browning here and there,
no fruit lasts forever, don't the flowers
know there's a war, nothing worried
except the men. No women
in the picture. It is a terrible
trap, the tree explodes.
Sometimes it's enough to say
your prayers, the liturgy
of saying one by one
all the things in the world,
hold them in mind, say their
names. But sometimes
people are dead and the sun flies away.

26 March 2003

PERFUME

But the shoulders of the girl
in the Bulgari ad,
one bare one soon about to be

she makes a chalice of her body
from which no one can drink.
Beyond all our sense of

touch or smell, beyond all sense of beyond
this little skin.

26 March 2003

MAGGIO'S SONGBOOK

(for the Colorado Quartet)

I.

How can a folk have a tune
or a fork have some corn

or two nights surround one day?
Or simple talk

tell a human way?

The way a familiar tune
appears suddenly
automatically poignant
among random musics:
it is what a bird does to the sky.

O Shenandoah o she
and Noah drunk again
o all your daughters
beget a whole new folk
the People of Naked
Drunkenness, o shed
your principles and know her,
you can taste
the wine right through the water,

o true quiver

from which Love plucks
quick his arrows,
Eros walking.

II.

Four robes of cinnabar
the Chinese alchemists
step on the stage
their delicate instruments
four strings each one,
sixteen syllables at once
like a line of Homer, no,
a stanza of Tu Fu,
each string speaks,
four alchemists
in crimson robes
with big clown buttons
make women silly
and men are tender
watching the hair
of their beloved
toss in no wind
except the laughter
knows them
string by string,
be silly with me.
The woman
I used to see
sitting in that chair,
with that hair,

is dead, another
woman there now
with other hair,
be silly with me,
nothing lasts,
this naked life
is all we have,
be silly with me
please, the categories
men set up
wink at us
with both eyes
and not even the
music sees.

III.

I have seen all I had to see
and still tomorrow's sun walks
towards me, dawn in Baghdad now,

out of the sand she comes and
out of spilled blood, wiry
as a violin, walking steadily

where there are no trees, never
and trees, and she makes the only shadow
and she screams over the whole sky

and I will see again what I thought I'd never see.

IV.

Would you give me
and would it adequate?

In English all nouns can verb
but some things are verby in themselves,

you cello me.

If I could only stop hearing
I could see your actual form

discovered in music
but not made by it,

the shape of a person
is the shape of the word they're meant to speak

in the ancient sign for Pisces
we see two fish in one swim

swimming in opposite directions
yet linked to one another
by a long attractive ribbon

that must be ectoplasm, gluten,
moonbeam, protein, love
or just a tune
neither one of us can ever forget.

26 March 2003