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Furtive guitar

the pluck of it
soft pervading
public space

imposes loneliness
nothing is lonelier
than a guitar

the whole concourse
sobbing with it
in marble in tile
what are you
bitching about
for Christ's sake
you supposed to be
alone in the bathroom.

9 March 2002

Albany

The amateur of airports
has something nice to say about Delhi,
a snarl for Brussels, a kiss for O'Hare,
Newark's dirty, Vienna's jammed, Dubai
cleaner than a place on earth should be,
but there's nothing like Badogra in the rain.

9 March 2002

CANON

Over Nebraska the silence
of great engines
holds words at bay

the Platte down there
always waiting for its elegy

silence for the one
who once in fancy rings
danced in the Middle Section of the gods,

my Wednesday sweetie my porpentine
the silence
of great words holds the gods

down there where we can touch
here in the heart of the biggest island
it slides up the sunrays
it meets us where we fly

silence over silence spoken
the place the light stops

earth hide, the sleeping panther of her haunches
I press against you
you wear me like your clothes

you, who will be old.

9 March 2002, in flight

OVER STEAMBOAT SPRINGS

100 mile an hour headwind hits us here
bound west as we are, against
the spirit it would seem, we are natural
and it hurts

the sun goes down on us.

2.

This is the wind the sun fights every day.

It holds her back

it makes sunlight

spill over mountain and desert,

making things hot

while the sun drags her shadow to the western ocean.

9 March 2002
over Colorado

how people think of other people shows
I judge by posture how they judge by posture
how the matron's folded arms disdain
the cute teenager's bottom she's made to ponder
while they're both waiting for a place to pee

did I learn this observation from the rock down there
this recency of upsurge? the connoisseur of truth
remembers all his lies, stone-faced, a troll in the sky

I am the calm blue bridge above the stone-featured troll
down there. tell me this story again
someday when I believe where I stand

9 March 2002

in flight

Clothesless, in a pleasant hotel

to walk around until
it becomes clear
what we're doing here,

baggage lost, unmet
at the flight haven
halfway to Japan.

the evidence
all points to a conspiracy
but the minute you think
of evidence already

you're in the throes of a conspiracy

9 March 2002

San Francisco

But what if there were only wind

the hardest coldest wind I ever felt
sliced snow across us in Chicago this afternoon

strange shape of a day
scaffold from the Hancock fell
and smashed cars and women in the street

the same wind that smashed us across the tarmac at O'Hare

and what if there were only wind

and everything that exists at all
rides on it

rides on this breath?

9 March 2002

San Francisco

And there it is, after cloudy morning
my famous San Francisco sunshine
that makes any dirty downtown street
a seascape by Raoul Dufy.

10 March 2002
San Francisco

Why is measure the first word out of my
mouth when I wake,
the way others might wake with the name
of their lost lover,
are my dreams so immoderate?

10 March 2002
San Francisco

The sun again.

Yesterday the mild soft Hudson Valley
antechamber spring
coltSan Francisco out already

then the fierce snow wind in Chicago,
the pale fresh coolness of the coast,

and now the sun.
Just the sun.

10 March 2002
San Francisco

TEAGARDEN

beauty, kitsch,
kitsch among beauty, beauty
itself a kind of kitsch

the trees
are actual at first
but how they got to be here
is something else

and that too is a questionable
sincerity of place

I love it here,
amazing the things we know

coming to the end of the word
is not the start of silence —

I learned that here
standing beneath the big bronze Buddha
and worrying about kitsch
worrying about the words
that find their way through my lips

but his right hand was raised
in a gesture that seemed kindly imparting
and of his lap-reposing left
one finger's raised

what is the meaning of that finger,
what is the meaning of the sun?

Tell me what is silence for.

10 March 2002

San Francisco

POWELL STREET, TAKING PLACE

1.

by the embankment of the light
time slides away

confused hobbyists
putter with green flags

2.

That this body
who was, is.

And being,
brings.

And brought,
we are.

3.

Incline towards eternity
so that now can happen.

10 March 2002
San Francisco

COMPOSITION BY PLACE

Let me take in hand the morning
or where was I when I slept
and woke here, whatever here is,
out of a cracked mosaic sleep
deep grouted with anxiety

strange it was to lie there and not want,
depression must be like that, all fear and no appetite,

maybe the words will tell me where I was.
Or only the words.

*Copper tarnishes,
Language means.*

A contact issue, a property of the thing.
Where am I now. The wedding
of oxygen and anxiety.
Up Fifth Street I see the morning coming,
hoisting colors over the Bay
as if nothing had ever, would ever,
happen to the world

only this gently inexorably growing light
and each one I am would man the time,

and have the time and inclination to work the riddle out
always cast for me in that strange rhymed pair,
words, birds, that they are so voracious,

fugitive, and ever returning,

a word lost across the mind sky,
echo of a bird.

A gull goes by
upside down on my glass table top
headed towards the morning too.
What can we do?

Put on your fashionable dark clothes
angst-togs from Nueva York
but let the body shimmer inside somehow,

a shape or feint of movement or sheer
gravity press against your chair.

Lean this wall.

Do you know how?

I do not think the Bible tells.

I am Jonah come to Nineveh
preaching from an empty scroll.

11 March 2002

San Francisco

The old way of writing was to tell the truth
and hope the images caught up with the heart
beating down the world by music.

The old way made some sense — people
who had been around and had heard
a word or two had more to say (saying
comes from listening). Which struck less
adventurous poets as unfair, this business
of learning from experience. So there had
to be a rule that would make the interestingness
of the poem independent of the sense
or learning of the one who wrote it.

There always has to be a rule that does this —
that is the nature of manifesto, of revolution.
To relieve the world of what little bit it knows
— that is the lovely thievery of poetry,
the ancient and honorable avant-garde
whittling a new trick every lustrum.

11 March 2002

San Francisco

It is not clear how much of me is left
after the elm leaves scatter from the roadside
deep into the woods where some people live
part wolf part hawk part shadow — know them
and only be a little bit afraid.

I am different
but I am not the person who recites these words.
Really, Charity, do you think your observations
are your own? Whatever you perceive is lent you
from on low, the up-welling drift of meaning
that purveys the world, we buy it for this taste:
the thing I see has something to do with me.
That is the glorious fetter of our faith.

Exposé: we fall in love with people or places for that consideration. C'est à moi somehow, thing thing I see alive before me, it is in the world waiting for me, it is part of my life. The himerologist will study the origin and nature of such a self-fulfilling observation, while the lover will content himself with saying, To see you is to know you are already mine.

12 March 2002

San Francisco

A lover and a lawyer is the one we need.
I dreamt I walked along the Graben in Vienna,
there was a fountain and I met you by it,
casually, old friends, but I don't know who you were.
Or who you are now, though I recognize the yellow
pen I'm writing with was bought right there,
yes, I admit it, I am writing this, it isn't something
we both found graven on the wall, so if I recognize
the pen but can't recognize the old friend by the fountain
what kind of love makes free with me?

Exposé: Hence the lawyer to tell my lies. I recite, he persuades. I smile at the Jury of the Ages and breathe hard. He takes the words out of my mouth and makes you think. Makes you think this voice is me, that you are you, and this means this. Whereas the opposite is always true; if only we could discover what the opposite is, we'd know what this is. Then my voice would be yours, and I'd go free.

12 March 2002

San Francisco

STARBUCKS, O'FARRELL STREET

Suppose I was a priest of it
and really did love the guitar,
would that be so fatal, so weird?
Could I still be me if I were someone else?

12 March 2002

San Francisco

ZOO

The nature of nature
is an occasion for the radical
to call into question
the habit of his question.

We are not even ready
yet to look, let alone see,
the sumptuous contradictions
all round us,
even in a little zoo.

All those who are good
and dead are gone
to get retargeted.

Motivation is the most
easily lost of all our
breastplate jacinths,
sardonyxes, beryls,
pearls. Motivation.

To be good to you
always, after the world ends
and before it begins,
faithful and true.

There is something more to be said here
and I dare not leave it to the gulls to say,
my greedy look-alikes, my
phantom high sea-riding soul.

12 March 2002 San Francisco

CALIFORNIA REPUBLIC

The bear on the state flag is necessarily
always walking away from something
— rump meaning, the bulk of history —
towards something — nose sensing
the next, the glorious absence
just past the edges of the flag.

13 March 2002

San Francisco