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(A Brief Organon of the Art)

I want an old word
with new seat covers such
that when I pick up
fascinating hitchhikers
they’ll feel at ease
able to mean with me
along the road I mean
to stretch out forever
till we’re finally home.

*

I want a new word
around my bones
a rock to sit on
and a bird to watch
a chunk of bread
to share with all my me’s.

*

I want an unword
still not breathed in
by any human mouth
let alone out
I want to hear it
makes its way
through flesh and blood
and yammer in me
till I shout.

Instructions: From these texts extract “I” and “me” and “my”, replace them with the space between your ears and your eyes. Then do it again, and see.

26 April 2009
IF ONLY THEY KNEW

Death’s not a hunk or a harlot hustling towards you. Death is a tiny hole in a big bag of flour you’re carrying on your shoulder. Ants follow to see if you ever get home. And what you eat there.

What you are slips away grain by grain

Who knows what will be left to make the fine loaf of bread you’ve been planning all your life?

26 April 2009
Minnesota can get very hot.
Music punishes listening.
Toccata for skin, the thin
ting in the ear is called a drum.
Recreational religion
makes you old.  Slap.  Slap.
At least you know there’s someone there.

26 April 2009
I am a four-legged bird with no wings
I gleam
in the rain
I wake
but never leave
my dream.

27 April 2009
Well, Mr Bone, what new language will you learn today?

—It’s a toss-up between Bloodish and Meat – I’ll probably go for the heat, I always do.

But I expect you’d do better with Meat—big house, comfortable lawn, nice lap, long mornings in bed. . .

—True, but there’s a kind of noise I keep hearing in the blood, a kind of Engels on the march, savvy and well-meaning and hot—I want that music.

27 April 2009
You should never finish a play. Leave before the last act. A play always finishes itself. The mind of the viewer is the best theatrum – solid walls and pretty customers inside. The mind. Who needs actors? You have shadows to do your work, the shadows of words cast on the audience’s mind. Leave them to it, let the words feast on the audience. Hawks, hawks and crows. And vultures after.

27 April 2009
Where are the little wolves?
By the rock where fountains spill
into the pond. Where little fish
called crimson whippers flit
you’d think mindlessly through the shallow
but you’d be wrong, wrong,
nature makes no mistakes,
not even you. Your wrongness too
has something right about it
the way a heap of rocks has snakes.
Near water, little fish, tadpoles,
a robin loud-welcoming the gloaming.
Not wolves, they’re foxes.
On the prowl for chickens
but there are none here. Just fish
and the goats next door. Whose people
make cheese and sit on the verandah
reading about the history of Africa.

27 April 2009
Can a thing have history?
Time has not much traffic with a thing—

but maybe there’s another kind of history that’s outside time,

a sly investigation sideways into the seeming?

So it is time for the mirror, already I can hear the glass sing over the shallow basin.

27 April 2009
Grammar’s all that we have left to break—
but when it’s broken it’s just new grammar,
hydra-happy, it says anything we please.

27.IV.09
Why I am I
and not another—
but am I really?

How do I know
that Otherdom
hasn’t conquered in the night?

Are the sun-dappled leaf shadows
on the lawn coordinates
of accustomed identity?

Who are they kidding?
The rose has little leaves—
simple words familiar

but somehow not like me.
I am many-syllabled
I am hard to read—

can this simple thing be me?

27 April 2009
But it is a kind of caring
flowers falling from a hand
no further than the sky

close, alstroemeria, those pale
pink and white Peruvian lilies
that have no scent—

flowers just for the eye
for an age when we have not yet
even begun to look.

27 April 2009
A blessing should be part of shower—
a car needs a house to live too
the antlers are ventures, the deer
is a female though, and white, and white
the star that blazes vaguely near her head—

he saw and followed through the pre-dawn streets, close
as you’ll ever come to a forest, magic.
Your shadow is the only boat that bears you.

* 

Heed too the hart says
not every angel is your woman.
Leaves, count the leaves.
You heard their voices, follow
you must follow every voice you hear,
it says so in the leaves.

* 

Hear Mass on horseback, half heathen.
Then you’ll get a taste
of what the working angels feel,
always an animal beneath you,
less or more reliable, you can smell her,
o high and fine to be a knight
of such a horse, a hearer
of such a Mass, a man.

The crow said no more,
the knight, faint with understanding, wept.

* 

There is no flat country in this country.
Hills are trying to be people
or people who decided to be rock.
Too long ago to tell. What we know—
where a hill lifts up a voice comes down,
someone walks in the shadows,
strange stone leper chapels hunker in the dell.

* 

Six lepers drank from this well,
six crows watched them doing so.

Numbers have just been born,
nobody knows yet what they’re for.

* 

Knight might. Lady maybe.
Pavilion pyght.
Past tense of woo.
A wooden candlestick,
a tallow candle
but a golden flame.

Wake, she sounded, wake from this dream
you call the real world, she sang,
the young woman sang, her mind
on something else, wake and see.
The witch night comes them soon—
that is the night when more
trees have leaves than not
and spider walk outside to take the air,
the special air that lives in shadow,
the air that feeds.

The witches
have had all winter to be young
and now they gleam. There is something
silky about time, the way it slips past,
there is something winter about summer
the other says, a little fear left in the heart.
And the youngest witch of all said
That fear is my religion — with it
never stilled, I can know everything.
The world itself is fear, and my own
small fear is big enough to make me Lady of it.

At last leaf shadows
skate across the words.
I must be ready.
It must be spring,
the deal is made.

Hermit, eye-lidded,
book heavy, rock quiet—
have I spent so many tears
learning to see so little?

In the subway you’re closer to it,
the roar does it, the roaring dark,
the dark quickness, the dreamlike
substitution of one place for another
they even call them ‘station’ just
as in the tract on mystical ascensions
the imam made you read
and bring back to your rabbi
to show your priest.

Chambers Street
who lives in them, Canal Street
swim the thick air, West Fourteenth,
different religions, all the mistakes
you have chosen, the lies you live to lead.

You are a convert to Love. You need
a lover at every station. Or the lover’s
house in not too far, climb up the street,
find the door, climb the stairs,
don’t stop at the sky.

Every New Yorker knows the Middle Ages
we do it by the nature of social interaction
not by architecture or old masonry, not
by animals or drinking in the street
and lying down to sleep, not by the wolves
that slip across the East River ice from Brooklyn
and feed on hopes and horrors over here.
No. New York is mediaeval just because
the Middle Ages meant: Everything matters. Everything is magic. Everything can kill you but I can love you back to life and spin mild spells by which all of a sudden you understand the tongues of passing cars, pigeon grammar and the long slow song of what the shadows of tall buildings say racing from the unrelenting sun.

* 

This boat you ride a beast
this shadow is your own
that’s what you follow with your beak

the sun always at your back
till you come to the origin of the world,
another boat, this time not a shadow

but something hollow, strangely docked
where no man expected to find water.

* 

So draw your sword
and listen with the tip of it
gently trembling, you will hear
up the highways of your arm
what the forest says:
taxi sloping north on Sixth
an avenue whose name is never said.
We live in mystery
and no way out.
And that teaches the youngest knight
when to be silent. And when to be silent

* 

But they came and fell from the tree when she spoke
those silver apples he tried to hard to catch
and got only one but that one was enough
one is always enough
that’s what the hermit said, the old man he’d seen eating rocks for bread

* 

Are you ready for me now
he cried into the woods
are you the woman that the deer said
would meet me and change me

and all my life would be a golden candlestick
burning a black flame beside her
which only she of all the world could see

* 

Inside her, that’s what the deer meant,
you must be a flame in her
and all your own brightness and desire
no more than a quick taste in her mouth
before she bends down and drinks from the fountain
and just after.

* 

Then he was in the dark
and liked it. The fear was fun. The winds he waited for were messages. A few drops of his own blood on the snow. No snow.

*

Never sure if what he feared was what he thought about all those nights trying to wake out. A mouth with teeth. Teeth without a mouth. Arms around him, bearing him down into what he wanted.

Is that what he wanted? The trees said only what the wind wanted. He wanted to be like that too, accurate in response as a branch broken by the wind falls. *I am obedient, a shadow—but who will be my light?*

*

But with nothing ready the maiden or late the animal he thought

At first he was a horse then she saw he was a priest. Lancelet saying Mass on hands and knees.

Here was the problem. He had come to the center of the world and found it full.

Thronged with the passionate devotions of some other the place was, he was civil, or not civil, just polite, he had no city yet but he was smooth, said May I be an other in your otherness?

No man can say my Mass the other answered, only my own tears can fill this chalice only my body be this bread.

*

That’s what subways are for—to get to the city, and what’s more get to the center and get away again smooth as only dragon engines can who sleep all day while they run the way the sky sleeps around the sun.

But no sun here. The dark was kindly, the dark was old, it had been like a father to him all his life, mother used too many words but this old darkness just said this. This. This.

*

He had been there and come back—he felt like some dumb novel
you leave on the train and never know,
but he knew. The deer had told him clearly—
you will find her and you will find pain,
the pain with the shape of her body
the look of her eyes you won’t stop seeing
even when you imagine other faces,
hers loom at you out of your precious dark.

*

To now someone
is to be seared
in your soul.
Knowledge is a wound
from which you won’t dare die,
she said, he ran from her
into the shadow of her he had imagined.

*

Is the camera ready
do I have the knife
the bread, the silver
artichoke the king’s
artificer made for me
to probe ‘the variable
vulnerability of beauty’
he said, ‘give this vegetable
which alas is a flower
to the one who hurts you best.’

*

And why are my shoes
not on my feet
and why has the road
been rolled up in the night
like the moon behind cloud
and nowhere to go
and no way to get there
and my horse is dead?

*

He never had a house
he had a hole.
He had a house
and crept inside.
From room to room he went
and said This is my pilgrimage.
This kitchen table is Jerusalem
enough, and on it a Sufficient Cup.

*

Did she wake him from satisfaction?
The arrow long ago he shot
at her came back and wounded him.
This knowledge made him bleed,
we can trace his passage through
the house of the story, the quiet
night-time forest of the bedroom,
the meadow, the snow, by marking
where the little drops of blood
marked out his stations.

The problem is to tell.
To find a ship in the core of the woods
and sail away.
To declare yourself an island
against all reason and politesse
become a city on an island
when the ship has turned into the sea.
*
It was a wound he found
in the middle of the world
a mouth that doesn’t speak—
and even if it did, even
with his sword and shield
he could not survive a single
word that mouth might speak.
*
Silently riding home
where the subway leaves the ground
and runs on elevated tracks
over the harbor part of town
he wondered what he would tell
of what he thought he’d seen,

the bright teeth of the silent wound,
it would hurt people if he told
just as it hurt him to see and not understand.

But he must tell.
So he would say: there was this dream
I went into the woods
saw a wild animal
saw a woman and now I’m home.

But he wasn’t home.
And the road had come back.
As it always does. And a deer
far ahead, looking back over her withers at him.

28-29 April 2009
C’est l’heure du loup-garou,
Et le mari dort au coin de son feu;
La lune rit sans bruit dans le beau soir bleu;

— Tristan Klingsor

It is the werewolf hour
and the goodman drowses by his fire
the moon laughs without a sound...

29 April 2009
A different tone now
needed friends
to lift a pleasanter
face to heaven
and join our meanings
in one joy

but what is that,
this joy that sounds like boy
like toy like something small
you carry in your heart
because not far from the hand?

Children are said to show it—
joyful faces of the children
we find written,
they show it but they don’t know it

because to speak of joy
is always to be across the street from it
outside the window from it
hoping down the winter street—

joy is joy because its mind’s on someone else.

30 April 2009
Was she helpful?
Did she fill your eyes with tears?
Did the knacker down the block
tell your old horse?
Is anything natural?

30 April 2009
Who had your face before you did?

*Blaue Augen* don’t mean blue eyes
like you think, mean *Sighing Eyes*
the way you look at me I wish.

30 April 2009
WALPURGISNACHT

my hundred thousandth on this
earth this night this very
I am what I thought last time I was
and now I am

this night we worship
the powers that make us be
and believe and forget and come again
our bodies rammed endless together

heart too is a tusk digs in.

30 April 2009