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PALPABLE IRRITANTS

1.

dream consorts
playing their violins

what kind, what
number, made by whom
in what Italian city or
who wrote this music?

who remembered it?

2.

we poor waking mortals
have to spell each sound right

otherwise the feeling doesn't come
the inverse orgasm of silence

deep in the black rose.

3.

but godly in dream
we oceanly arrive
everywhere at once

(Patricia No's coinage)

4.

no need to count or spell
or hold my breath with rapture

it all happens under you
blue as rain

a minute later the whole city's wet.

26 September 2002

THE REPRIEVE

the let go
is sweeter
than the clutch

this motor me
running landscape down
chipmunks scurry in my drive

fleabane is a pretty flower
pale blue daisy
under the brown locust

I have packed your bonsai
in the back of my mind
so when the heart gets angry

at all love's failures
there'll be a weatherless place
calm as golden carp dozing

deep ponded thinking
I mean the tree of your identity
grows only in me.

26 September 2002

IN THE OLD COUNTRY

Deep woods of this music
and a bare white plastered room

a man hears the cello playing
it feels like a glass of water
under his long fingers, he presses down,
the water breaks, the glass is whole

he hears some music and knows it's him
a footstep outside the old door sill
someone has come to get the music

and he still hasn't reached the silence yet.
Steel rimmed spectacles. Snow
hangs from a pine branch,

shadows read each blade of grass.
We all bend down before light.
Love, are you ready yet? he hears the voice

and knows now he has to become a door
he opens and lets himself out.

26 September 2002

LIFE

By now I should know what I have done.
I should look in every direction
and survey my works and deeds and measure them.

But this is a knowledge I resist, rightly
I think, but will I ever know?
And what is there to know, out there,

where the measures dance and we drink shadows?
How long the future is
where every word finally gets heard.

How long my ignorance
shot through with golden ore
I try to follow through the opaque mines;

the future is the body of the actual earth.

26 September 2002

THE CASTAWAY

Eighteen hundred miles in an open boat
with nothing but your name to drink

and all the summer stars instructed me
and great white seabirds conducted me

straight to the middle of the sea.
For everything has its center.

26 September 2002

ALL VOWS

old loves
old worshippers
you hear
beneath geschrei,
the clamor of simple evidence
to be believed.

The world is good.
But no one knows it.
No one knows the wood
from which the walls are made,
the rafters
that always seem to be on fire
but the house stands.

At the end of class
she came up and said
“I wanted to tell you
that I believe in God,”
it moved me, to hear her,
I thought, she has been in Africa
and knows,

as this cello does
right now,

reciting what it knows, like any beast,
the lost name of God.

I want to know the wood the world is made from.
I want to hold it in my hand
and stroke it, shape it till we both become.

26 September 2002

(During the performance by Ulrich Schmid of the Schnittke second cello sonata)

MUSIC LATE

Measure again, the thing I hear
that no one wants to, an exile
for the sake of music.

Old Biber knew.

only an island will do, island with nothing but birds,
only a landlocked country in South America
only a book that won't let go of your hand.

The sound I hear
is the last door opening.

26 September 2002

PLUVIAL

Creationist agendas occur in rain
when grand as-ifs explain themselves almost
as if I didn't have to think them. If rain makes me think
then there must be someone in the rain.
In the sky. There must be someone in me
is another inference, one I leave to you
upon whom I work my several wet effects
sweat and orange juice and fluency
all run together to tie a certain knot
and untie another until we're utterly free
and meaningfully bound together. Note I say we.
How can there be a knot of water?
That is the mystery of the lyre, crazed
poetry, a stone made purely out of air,
busy children who dissolve in light.

27 September 2002

EUCCHARIST

Not going to Mass
the older man and the younger
woman wait by the fountain

inside the church
a magic is transacted
where something half-alive wakes up

and becomes a person
inside another person
an identity

soft and strong as the dark wine
they are allowed nowadays
to sip from the cup.

But by the fountain they wait
to see the churchgoers coming out,
they wait in the spray

of the fountain, another kind
of magic is touching them,
their hips touch as they sit on the rim

between the water leaping up
the sun careening down
slow old people stumble from church

see them, wonder
at these atheists of water
whose only bread

is one another.

27 September 2002

How many times
do you have to chase
a squirrel from the feeder
before he stops
coming back for more seed?
I don't know,
I don't read
poems about squirrels.

27 September 2002

The “indoor
philosophy”

of Mr Emerson

indicts no
high

Answer the Scotsman, Ralph,
tell him: our nature is nature enough,

tell him our outdoors is kept inside
for analysis and ecstasy

tell him you don't store wine in a puddle
but chaste-sheltered in oaken casks

to keep the spirit in, the unsayable fragrance,

What you see out the window, Mr Muir,
is just the mind evaporating

gorgeous in autumn, tedious in summer
when hosts of gnat-borne diseases

sicken local peasantry.

28 September 2002

OXEN

About the time Aquinas died
I lost a lot of weight.
That's one way to distinguish us —
he was very fat and then he died.
He was very smart, and I survived.

He wrote everything, and I said "Write
everything." He was systematic,
I felt my way along, the thigh, mostly,
while he kept at the hidden why.

He is the glory of the church,
I hope to be a church of glory —
passing by at night you'll hear the chant
relentlessly lifting and falling on its way
to a sound that is the heart of knowing.
Aquinas already knew.

28 September 2002

THE SYNCHRONY

Of course everybody
lives at the same time

all lives are simultaneous
on this cool Saturday
Judge Schreber is sobbing in his room
and Lincoln is shaving

Montaigne is staring
uneasily at the sea and
Lord Buddha is walking alone
up a little path through the wet forest
watching last night's moth stir
on the sunlight that bathes my hand.

28 September 2002

BARON SAMEDI

A dapper little man
in his little hat his little coat
the politeness
of natural function

death is a member
of the middle classes
a little down at heel
his little cane

he tips his hat
when he farts
or when he comes by
to take you away.

28 September 2002

THINGS WE NEED IN THE WEST

a piece of the moon
missing last night
the color of it at midnight
it lost along the way
from the sandarac horizon
dragon's blood, a cave
a store sensations in,
where he can safeguard
the feeling of her skin,
just skin against his skin,
no violence, no gospel, no control.

29 September 2002

PYRAMID SHOW, LIVE

to Normandi Ellis

What did you think
when they rolled away the stone
and found a stone?

Did the emptiness
of our alchemy reveal
a real mystery

deeper than money
the blatant
truthfulness

of ordinary things
against which they strive
to keep us amused,

the entertainers?
I thought of you
and of another tomb we know

bright with alien witness
where an absence
meant more than any

golden body could
and those who did not
understand the sign

are left behind
to sell
the wordless rock.

29 September 2002

Some things content to measure me
she dropped a marbled afterthought
it rolled down the blue hallway
where dawn finds it and calls it by my name
saying Wake up little man and hide

where can I hide, where can it ripen

everything, everything is seed
everything needs planting

this little plastic pen has Dantes in it.

29 September 2002

MEANING

Love's notorious instrument
when all the juice begin to flow
I am wary of things that seem to make sense

meaning is a con
mostly and keeps us from thinking

meaning is no coat
until you find a man to try it on

so stand before me dressed in leaves
your new wife beside you

already in charge of the colors
those words of the light

and then I'll believe the philosopher
he knows it doesn't mean anything really

just a mouth needs something to say
something to declare on the way to Give me all your love

not leaves not colors I have enough of those
not even the garment of sexual identity

it is someone like an angel
a lone thought outlined against the hard glare.

29 September 2002

ANTI-BELLUM

Old officers
chewing a war word

false teeth
trying to remember
the pain of toothache

they sit in their offices so long
they long for the actual

somebody dying,
blaming the world.

Blame no one
said Epictetus,
not the gods and not humans
not even yourself

blame is an easy shadow,
a failed analysis
a dream of hate

just wake and you'll forgive her
just wake and no war.

30 September 2002

VISTAS

Kept catching glimpses of Susan when I wanted
to stare for reasons of my own up a long empty
avenue lined with opulent rundown apartment houses
as it might be back of the Marais or in the Bronx,
emblem no doubt of the long, long futility of love,
irritating, I didn't want to think about her
or all her palpable resemblances. What I think is
people should even look like themselves
let alone other people. So she would hurry past
doing sensible career things and leave a shadow behind
on the micaceous I think they call it sidewalk
glistening in vacant sunlight, shadow of a girl.
It turns out we leave results behind us even
when we move into the unfathomed territory
beyond the subway maps, where crows take over
and there you are, a shadow feeling up a shade.

30 September 2002

ABULAFIA

first image:

old man with broken body
young girl with broken heart

permute

old man with broken god
young god with broken girl

old heart with broken man

second image:

Arbor Vitae

old wood new glass
old window new woods
out there

I planted the Tree of Life
where everyone could find it

just come to my door
and it will touch you

the long glossy legal needles
caress your elbows
coming in and going out

blessing both sides of you

the scurf of letters sift down from your skin.
And these I read

forever
I will never leave you alone.

30 September 2002