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THE CATEGORIES

1. And this is where we’d put calligraphy between “long pointed things” and “artificial bodies of water” since we share the properties of others as chastely as we can. Without purity or a decent suit of clothes that speaks demurely of our genuine intention towards being pure there are no categories, we need them, courtyards where elegant women chatter and dullards take down what they say and call this Theology. Take down in writing it goes almost without say.

2. That’s what categories are. Blue stars among the long discredited light-bearing æther the bright animal that floats above the weather (τα μεταρσια to you) like a pig on ice. Only the pig is an archangel. Only the angel keeps forgetting her message. Gods gave rain to make coffee trees grow, and vines in Burgundy—the rest is just stuff you eat. Scholarship always misses the essence of human thought reluctant to remember all philosophers live alone.
3.
Kant bent over the green felt, a few
balls roll around, red, white. Damn this weather
be breathes and strokes a massé. No one sees.
But in the watches of the night Nietzsche stares
at his torn underwear, a storm is coming,
a storm is going. In this cartoon we know
nothing but what the moment I am is trying to say.
Philosophy is the servile Girl Friday of a dead boss,
she sobs in her cubicle, his never-drunk coffee
chill on the rim of her glance. We love her.

4.
We love her for her body, though, not her mind.
She knows it and it is her next to greatest sorrow,
the humiliation of Philosophy, to be so adored
for her hips and bosom and that serious smile
drawn on such geometric lips, her Text.
All I have of you is what I touch, trust me,
I am no Bengali metaphysics, I am a boy
of sorts a little worse for wear, my heart
is hot for you and I become your little son
in the hot hour of ravishing your literal page.
5.
For reading is transgression. Know’st thou
the pain of rapture, the prick of the interpreter
stretching the sinews of meaning, the groan
of delivery, the exhausted mild psychosis
in which mothers first breathe their infant’s name?
Thou knowest. Name me. I am your life
finished, mine once I am born, finished till you’re
world again, the windmill and the dragon gorge
your rayon dirndl in the opera house,
every door is closed to you, I faint with ennui.

6.
No wonder Socrates wrote nothing. Aristotle
hardly anything. Would he had made his students
—those sweet kids Whitman called his élèves,
daring to be French, gay, avuncular, divine—
leave their tape recorders home, and break their pencils.
It is the loneliest life a man can lead
and Raphael does his best to cure this grief,
The School of Athens, all full of air and weather
and kindly light (as that other 19th Century
know-it-all intoned), a talking nest of friends.
As if one day they all had stood together
Plato and all the rest in bright clean clothes
fresh from a public bathhouse, each in love
with his neighbor — not necessarily the lad
to his left — all friends, lovers, people
in their bodies who still could talk.
What a fantasy. There is no conversation,
no marriage for those who think. Loneliness
is discourse, all sex is grammar, accurate
commentary on a vanishing testament.

19 December 2002
THE HEGEMONY

let people walk away
into their own sense of order
leave them to the pattern

a people’s Pattern lies under all the phony nationalities
maps boundaries languages

and it is the American Pattern
that is hegemony
not the politics of empire
which follows dumb doggedly behind
trying to rule what it already controls

dr

this pattern made up of cautious industry sly resentment
guarded African centeredness the chosen people
I have no idea what I mean or who I am
because I am and anything I say is part of the pattern
patterned by it, patterning what I say,

we translate everything into our pattern
nuanceless in Disneyland
everything a manual to live by
nothing a thing to cherish to understand

pay no attention to me
my complaint comes with the pattern,
no American ever felt authentic.

20 December 2002
JUST SAY LITTLE

Just say little
things my love
let the listener
decide

Saying
doesn’t say

only the accidental
obvious ever
tells the truth

the little thing
that signs the day.

20 December 2002
POLITICS

Dissolve my anger in
rain puddle sound
car on a wet road
form, form,
the song of things.

20 December 2002
POLITICS (2)

morning mist
my daily paper

you calm me
into seeing

the pen leaves a mark
something dissolved
into form

    a strange
uncertain accuracy

poetry the guesses
of a drowning man

this may save me
whatever I can touch
might be the real

ground beneath my feet.

20 December 2002
POLITICS (3)

Is there a soul and is it sick?
What can a poor man say?
The devil’s working overtime.
I have to pay attention
to whatever he controls least:

the accidental glory of the visible.
sounds of people round me
on their blundering way to love,
a word on the telephone, the mist
walking through wet trees

—whatever focuses the mind
on *it*, not on our ill-educated desires,
whatever brings this mind to focus
on the unknowable, un-me-able, world out there.
The ownerless evident will save us yet.

20 December 2002
POLITICS (4)

working through it
nowhere to go
but here

casing blue mountains
being kind enough to die
kind enough to live

whatever suits the case.

20 December 2002
Beware a man
with something on his mind

the man who thinks
he understands

something he hurries to explain.

20 December 2002
DOWN THERE

To be down there at the bottom of your will
wanting everything and don’t care what happens
just need more one more self-ravishment
at the flesh of another

to scrape the dream

where you began to be you
and called it love

the hunger over there

you found at the bottom, down there
where you scratch through
desperate for more material

to make you feel

and you claw through the bottom of the dream
and find what’s there
drunk with masklessness
the startling new imagery
that shocks you even as you grasp it
amazingly eventful beyond the dream
the power lust that is not you
that drives you, the hard
measure of it thrusting
always one last time one more time
as if it could finally be the end.
This lust that is not you, is you.

21 December 2002
I say the good things
and write the bad things down

try to remember
who you used to think I was

tell me again
that sullen springtime in your face

and let’s see what I say
this time

at the toll booth of truth
and no sense left

but desire
and none of that to spare for you.

21 December 2002
HÖLDERLIN’S ADVICE TO ANGRY POETS

See (said the angel I think) it’s all right
to write angry if you don’t write down the names.
Just move feeling around through syntax,

for grammar is where mythology arises,
x did y to z, that’s all you need to tell,
the grammar of the situation, the sexless
orgasms of great literature, the lyric
the fulfils tragedy, the epic
that fulfils the song. The time for names
is when you write your will.

21 December 2002
MIRACLE

I’m after something but can’t find it
sunrise in the south
some rose broken in two sentences
at the extreme elongation of the real

the same sun rises. The miracle of Christ
is that every fucking thing turns into wine.

We are baptized into strangeness,
there is no neural space, every shadow
is a moral bone. everything is here.

21 December 2002
Inferno

I know what Dante didn’t
the body is the explanation

what you read in your body
spills over into the world —

it is the world,
you bring it with you to the gulag

it sits between you and the papal throne
even your husband doesn’t know the folds on folds of it

when people talk to you
they talk to your stomach your womb your penis

they talk to your hair your shoulders
the tight elbows pressed against your flanks

they talk to the shit in your intestines
they talk to the blood in your liver the fat in your gall

and that’s the only you they’ll ever have
you with your heart in a tree

you with your identity locked in what you call me.

[…21 December 2002]
SEEING

Getting ready for the look inside
though I don’t know why we call it in

all the flowers and snowflakes are out there
where we tell them to rise and fall

Forming mental constructs of the seen
is work maybe for winter but is that the soul

is that the presence you have in mind
to dwell in presence of? Calm the mind

discern the real. An animal in trouble
always. A blind man is a minor kind of god.

22 December 2002
TOWN MEANS FENCE AROUND

Read all my mail

there are no boats

and the water froze

A hill is a subtle animal

half cobra half camel

always dangerous up or down

riding a hill I come to town

and there the wine shop waits

locked up tight on empty streets

so I think about illegal things:

orders of chivalry, absinthe, kings —

democracies have so many little laws

so many things we feel so scared because.

22 December 2002
Everybody votes against
and never for.

What you don’t want
defines my liberty.

In a democracy like ours
we vote our anxieties and fears

not our desires
not our sense of truth.

The prisons overflow with folk who break
all the new laws frightened people make.

22 December 2002
LESSON ONE

Water stays in the system as long as it can,
finds its way down into lake or klong or sea

eventually it comes back, down or up,
we live balanced on its machinery.

Next time I’ll explain the sky
how it gets so strong it can hold up the sun.

22 December 2002
WALL

How can I have enough power
to build a Wall
build something so big
you can’t take it away ever

the Great Wall of China
takes many forms
part of it turned into glass
any glass, we drink from it when we drink,

part of it began to breathe
and came alive, we eat the Wall
whenever we eat beef
but mostly the Wall turned

into a little hill near Santa Fe
I stood on it once and watched the snow
slip down November past the red sunset
and my body knew the Wall below my feet.

22 December 2002