It is natural to be new. The sun
a cursor on an ancient instrument,
slide rule, moves through digits of rain,
exponents of snow, counting frame, abacus of light

and we think we are simple skin in touch with skin.
We desire multitudes in every one. We crave
syenite stability of regal form, we fall
in love with pattern echo, ambience, mood,

with a shape like your shape, legs crossed, eyes
serene, forgetting nothing. The intolerable presentness
we crave. So teach time our tricks—
be gentil, good Beast, be a circle

not any arrow, be a house and not a river,
be air and not be fire, be grass, eternal prairie,
be moon if you please but be close.
You’re only the name of how we go.

1 January 1995
Towns I sequenced once in deals of pilgriming
—earth the same color as the sky—fear to go wrong
a phone booth on an empty shore—then I came to you
knocking on the language of your door
until you opened and were private to me—
the same silence in your clothes, a place like mud,
winter hurry, to touch without envy,
to remember without aging—a car starts up—

and a door, isn’t it, after all, is simple—North Sea
and fading light, old man walking crossbred dog—
mother, you have been good to me—this mood declared
is all for you, not to say what you have felt or done
but propose an alternate obsession-of-the-moment
to the haughty paranoia we call ordinary life.
Beauty is always like this. It is a deep and fluent thing
that finds a shore to touch between the light.

2 January 1995
GAY PEOPLE

What links them is their love of pleasure hidden in their own bodies. To know love not as a stranger and know all the entrances and make life an understanding of the flesh—

that made me love them. We walk in power, feeble as we are, we have the wit to see through all things (dim as we are), we have the will to want a perfect world. Art

is in their hands, it is an organ of their bodies. There is not much measure. If you can see me, you see enough, they say. My pale skin is all your sky. I am abashed by their utterance.

3 January 1995
Bread sticks and some oil and why
mix austere with opulent,
you girl, you translator
of distant suns to this freak soil

o when will we be civil? Amérique
and full of grace, an import sparrow
bothers the grass now. So much to know,
so much to do. If we could start
dressing for dinner and have someone bring me
strong tea in my bed at waking — then
we would be part of the weather, ducks
on own pond, almost perfect.

Meantime from mindfulness alone contrive society.

3 January 1995
The blue light
makes its way
through the door
the door
has glass in it
why must the out
be in, why
can we keep
nothing from our lives?

It is because to be ourselves
we must be everyone.
We always knew it.
That’s why the light
is blue.

_for Charlotte_

3 January 1995
Open stance — hands also spread
the priest explains the woods:
Tiw’s is this, and this tree Woden’s—
our main wood. Glaze
my Roman eye, I stagger with desire.

Even here in this hard mistress war
of wooden limbs and iron phalluses,
I am too willing to understand. The priest
sees my yearning and is smug. Land
answers everyone the same.

All this
(I pray) is just for you & I don’t even know your name.

4 January 1995
WINTER MORNING

A hand reaches inside a robe to scratch a chest. I see it in the window

faint as a double exposure, the snow through it, light over the fallen ridgepole

of the dying barn.
It is mine, the hand, the hairs of the chest, the sun.

4 January 1995
Up there, between Rigel and the Pleiades,
Aldebaran. Who gave the Arabs
the sky? Do we use their names
because the stars were all they had

in the desert, a formal shiver in the sky,
light shattered into ten thousand names?
They studied the only movements they could see
and turned their feelings into Law.

Aldebaran is yellow, Antares red,
Rigel has a blue intensity,
a blue foot walking forever in the dark.
The silt of all our names fills up the night

yet I love you for them, night havens,
night archives, skin glints of sense
touched in the dark. A man stooped,
grasped, rose. And tossed a handful of sand into the sky.

5 January 1995
Diane McKeon: “What do you think of as your greatest achievement?”
RK: “Nothing comes to mind.”

As if by measure to impale
a quiet midnight on a beam of rain

after an interview. Snow. A hand
reaching out from the mirror.

Bland deli yellow mustard
lubricious hot dogs juking

dusky interiors of remembered
cities. Forgive me for bringing it to mind.

It is an image
left instead of a life.

6 January 1995
THE ROOTS OF THINGS

Plumb — shall come from lead. Steal is not a metal, though, more like a bird—

things make away with themselves by night. They say: it is the Gypsies do it, their eyes

a kind of poison,
don’t let them leave their kisses in your cards.

6 January 1995
AFTER THE EPIPHANY

The kings have come and gone. They saw what shone. They left behind them
their bitter experiences, pains, wounds, wishes, wants, meek desires
which are all we have to give to one another: the gifts. The humiliations. The sense of self.

Strengthened by such serene confusions, the child prospers in the cradle among cattle.

Animal utterances also he can understand, not so different from what people mean,
made up of want and don’t and more. But an animal doesn’t have much maybe.

And that would always be odd about the child—a lack of indecision, a kind of stubborn animal willingness
to do what had to be done and forget the law. It’s your neighbor’s beast

trapped in a pit on the sabbath but you haul it out. Already you hear the swords

being sharpened. Wood of the cross being neatly sawed.

] I once found a Roman nail in England so I know what they’re like — like ours,

just like us, with point and blunt and a pain to go till we are driven up against the wood
and the word is done. The strange life
he gave us. Fierce fire of love that cannot melt
even the ice sheathed on this early morning twig.

7 January 1995
When things live up to their names the world is usually in trouble. Wars kill, doors slam, I found a nice glass broken in the sink. Where do they go, the pieces? When meanings proliferate and words are few, the Empire is at peace, like cabbage in peaceful dingy rows, or heads of dark green curly thick-stalked kale bolting up through three feet of snow.

8 January 1995
BANDITS

Dressing like you have a right to things, colloquial. You would never write down:
“Everything you have is really mine, every gate of your body is mine to swagger through.”

But you dress the part. The intricate pronouns of the world (antecedents vague, relatives proleptic, possessive, concessive) you slice through with your cutlass, your Corsican manners,
your Kantian bullshit. You come to town.
You take the town with you when you go.
Woe to winter when you come, the hard slush of your folkish music, the oil drums
full of your borrowed fire. O the strut of you through woods at twilight, the noiseless streets of frightened cities waiting for your call, the politics! You carved out a self-image
that includes the whole world. Now what can we do but join you, bootstrap and bandanna, vanish with you in all the snowy shabby gloamings, line of footsteps, deer or daughters, lost in woods.

8 January 1995
WHY THE ACROBAT WAS SMILING

The closeness ("subrisio saltat.")
as if a skin
left its man
walk ways, the utter
clangor of her steer, meeting
(melting)
this way in the palace.

Fire-thinged,
lax in counsel,
ruin (ravin)
minds of a potentate. Or any I
(wait)
and met another, her kind of my kind,
in a meager park in a damned city so
among the shadows
(plurality
of the lost) I saw.
They go.
Only an athlete could love them,

just to be in streets
again
(text with a stranger)
cobbled alleys of old
back of my head.

For I was there
I was a witness
to the fire (my own desire)

all the way from the drugstore to the opticians
(records burn
a singular music)

now no one
knows what I saw. (Less me, more thee,

o city by a river
high,

mirror with my skin,
a bead curtain
slung aside,

a hip sidling through the atmosphere

and suddenly the whole
forest bees.
It always depended
how close we got

to the petal,
rose noise,
      giggle of her trampoline.
We feel our way
along by skin,

no way
to know but touching,
(no wonder

winter is all thinking.)

9 January 1995
THREE O’CLOCK

The light so slanted through the window comes to explore the long floorboards of this little room that wants to write me,

the way places seem intent on doing, inscribe themselves in us so ever after we postcard of their virtue or their just

being there the way they are. The way this is now, late victorious sunlight swooping in beneath the clouds

to show nothing but what is and where I am. Discover me. I am an accident of light prattling of myself again, and made of wood.

9 January 1995
FRIENDS

Some like to examine their friendships like a cloth just come to light in a drawer. Fabric and pattern, the color and how it suits, the cut and the fit. It looked good on me when it was new. Would I dare to feel the slick remembrance on my naked skin? Others touch it once, and leave it where it is, and smile.

10 January 1995
Light was not meant to frighten us. All I wanted was to see every part of everything, not abstract, just reverent holding and beholding. But once you look you spot all the miracles of treachery. The blind doubt everything too. The only truth is muddle, in between.

10 January 1995
L O V E R S

As beads be
sewn, suitors
call, their plaints

telephone,
their waits
anguish us

we are on
call, line strung,
just elements

of conversation,
documenders,
how do we fall

in love? Queer
eves and ample
wakings do it,

then we bend,
the noonday arrow
of no one home,

the lover’s
bricabrac
analysis:

she who is
all and none
for me, she’s

the tool I choose
to hurt me best,
my alkahest

where I solve
meaningless
anxieties

to tuneful woe,
magic pain,
amazing sin.

11 January 1995
Let me look back in the era, the zero, the iron, the Meinung, the lifted up contrition of a world born warring. Let me mumble nimble — a car is just a lightless star careening down from Mulholland into your part of town. The forest. The ruling coalition never yields its power. A friend’s hip (a friendship), sweet razz matazz of partying through dawn and there are whole seconds where your synapses get lost along the way. We’ll never know what happened but we loved it. We love it. Indigo shadows in an empty bed. A cello in the other room is telling lies.

11 January 1995
Rhinebeck