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These are the impertinent animals
who sign my name on large checks
and send them to corporations greedy as Montparnasse hussies
misbehaving in books written before I was born

but the life is still in them, they still swagger a little
in the sunlight of middle American cities, the zoo
outside Columbus, Ohio, for instance,
where it would really be nice to meet a Symboliste painter

with his belle maudite on his shabby arm,
but you understand I'm thinking about the phone company
the waste management consultants the utility
and I'm talking about myself, all of my selfs,

who shiver in summer and saunter naked in December
and gibber advice when asked for the silences of love.
Once I saw antelope grazing there off the rain-whacked freeway
and I suddenly wanted to be only who I was at that moment,

nobody else, no coming and going, no money, no name.

22 June 1994, Cuttyhunk

It's not our fault, it's in our nature

—we *made* nature

what kind of arrogance is that?

—We who are talking now made it
the mind of us
made

22 June 1994, Cuttyhunk

Almost full moon rising in pale cloudbank flushed
with mauve, into turquoise sky over the Vineyard—
mark of the merchant. The maker's mark.

22 June 1994, Cuttyhunk

THE HOUR

People who summer by the sea
like to read biographies.
It's like a taste for martinis,
always almost obsolete
but still dependably there.

They settle down in glassy verandahs
faint with mildew and take down
Somebody on Somebody Else, book
club edition, vaguely always there,
where do books come from,

and read about Edison or Palmerston
with almost interest, looking up from time
to time at the sea, to check
if it's the hour for something else yet.
The hour we're all waiting for.

22 June 1994, Cuttyhunk

MEASURING THE FIRM BY WHAT IS FEEBLE

As if to know the mind from brittle memory
or have left of all the cities I have ever seen
only this chunk of reddish stucco
gouged from some wall. Suburbs of some vanished
center, from them all to come here,
the silent crowded parish of the sea
where bright-eyed blackbirds primp in shade
—shadows of broken houses— and look at you.

All I have is this stone. We decode what we can.
We use bloodhounds, trigonometry, the ancient tongues
priests taught us, all the while we try to forget
all night what they drilled us in by day,
Penelope's unraveling web, vocabulary.

Intermezzo 1—

This stucco's from an indoor wall, put on wet,
plum-painted dining room of long ago, bold
employment of old colors when they trusted
the pleasure that the eye could bring, a wall
it was inside, but now the house has fallen
and the wall stands in the street, fall of many
houses, a piece from a fallen wall, that's all.

Intermezzo 2—

Vivid memory from school, waiting in a crowd
of baffled thirteen-year olds outside the closet
where the old priest inside peered and chose
like an oracle the Latin Word List for each one,
I took the dingy yellow pamphlet from his hand,

old skin and mine, old words how do we dare to love,
to know at last the language that chose me,
column after column of what I would have to be.

Dictionary, actor's script for all our mortal days!
Now we need all those tragic aorists,
ablatives of lunacy, subjunctives of despair,
squawking vocatives of a dead language,
how to talk to ghosts, to the ancestors,
the gods exhausted from our wishful syntax.

We need, but now we have nothing but the street.
And a street casts a long shadow, always and always
longer than itself, like a stranger dancing
or a town of prairie dogs in burning wasteland.

But somewhere one knows what's right.
The yogis squatting around the holy forest told us
by the things they laughed at. We guessed
there might be meaning there, the way you guess
with your toes in wet sand for where the clam
might be. But leave it to its life, the life
of things is really their own, don't hunt, don't kill.
And the yogis are laughing at that too.

But they tell us and tell us and Marcus
Aurelius certainly told us — read him,
he really knows most of what's to know—
all these things too are language lessons,
dim audio-visual contrivances, obsolete
already, ridiculous like words and lovers and
mothers, moons. I'm trying to use this stone

or plaster —imaginary for that matter—
like all matter— not even rough in my fingers,
just the thinking red, rough, full moon tonight
I have to share with everyone.
Even dogs and astronomers, roadmaps spread
open in desperate twilight, cars lost,

climbing maybe low mountains, oppressive
pine trees, thick grammar book of silences.
Instead of which I yield this Roman stone.

23 June 1994, Cuttyhunk

As much a measure as
how much it is possible to say:

not even language makes it close
and saying is not made up of words

any more than language is a flag
on one trim ship staggering on open seas

it tells a little
and it is very holy

it is the face that people learn to wear
it is the skin

soft skin on the small of your back
a dormitory

where they sleep the world under their control.

25 June 1994, Lindenwood

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Time, as in a markable sequence,
a name nailed to an event

‘a nail’ the grain of wood
Artificial Intelligence

a girl named Alice Ingersoll

who knows all the answers because
they make the questions up from her

her shadow as she strolls among the apple trees
shadows and blossoms and she goes and she knows

what her favorite color is and how we bear
to wear our faces like our clothes,

how we bear.

Soft guesswork of actual sensing
living-presence-thinking
to-be-in-respect-to-something-else

A.I. has no something else, no other.

The machine has no Other.

No duality but binary.
Everything we make is mirror,

every word’s a keyhole to her heart.

26 June 1994 KTC

S U D D E N L Y D E A F

The strike of the pen
high sounds
suddenly silenced

only the surf sob I hear
two hundred miles from shore

do I have to make my own music
at last? Be Brahms too
with all my other chores?

O be light about it,
this black separation,

“busy writing what no one reads
a venture into hardiness
no rude though to distract from the play of cleverness”

is that what language is or lets,
a work of saying
skin-thin, but still skin.

Lama, let me recover or rejoice in the loss.
Either better.

“I lost the birds this morning...”
did I say that?
ordinary politics—

I will take the earlier train
and meet you in the florid station
groovy with bagels and cappuccino,

I will stand holding a dixie cup
licking interior sherbets obvious

until you show yourself by flower

and there we are
a little scratch of meaning
in so much weather

I am disarmed by sequences
here I thought the stars
had nothing to fear from me

and then this music happens
to rearrange their entering light—
and where is our tree now?

27 June 1994

some hearing came back
and I never thought I'd be so glad to hear traffic

the birds I know
dim, the bottom of their call notes only,
the top I lose

and understand
deaf people have lost the silence with the sound.

28 June 1994

Anything could argue with me
until a star froze over and let
all the dark philosophy inside
come out and speak

as language,

as a sea of possible things
left over from the beginning

and we know
only the least of it, the food, we argue
still about what is good to eat
after ten thousand years of eating it, what
can we learn of the mind

and who is history?

28 June 1994

[little essay on composed on my first poetry typewriter, the Remington Noiseless, that my father brought home from Burlington Mills in the mid-1950s for me. This day I can't hear anything.]

Looking around for something to say me I see Singapore
and it asks Why anything need? Why me say?
Why not say say? OK? OK. I know when I'm licked.

29 June 1994

Call this piece The Anxiety
—the trouble with deafness is you
can't hear the silence—

a city (that grey thing)
to be the definiendum of the heart.
A mountain in the middle

the thing I think is me.

29 June 1994

Now where am I? Answer me in radians,
parsecs, star treks, narnias,
sweet babble of our fallen planet
that tells us what we really are,

the hoof of craving paws only the surface earth
while quiet marmots endure the clarity below.

We are magic and we are mind.
The only enemy of Logres is private lives.

30 June 1994

CERUMEN

for Brian Stefans

Ears
wax
to the likes of us

pure moons of hearing

back in bees knees
here like the man
in clover

flatfoot in Eden.
The leaf we
cover our parts with

is palm not fig,
inscribed not blank,

we shield our guts
with testimony.

2,
A week's deafness
to guard
the purity of
silence from
the accidents of speech.

So loud now
recovering
crow caw

whole world full of joyous traffic.

30 June 1994

Getting mad at a bad map
like a man looking for a metaphor.
The diseased wood of the aquilaria
turns hard and fills
with a fragrant resin,

this is the aloes wood
of commerce and the Bible,
old eaglewood

it wakes the air
inside the body up.

30 June 1994