

Versuche: 21

Furniture Music
[c. 1995-96]



The Platform

The girls with those Djuna Barnes hats
barely notice the Czech accordion player,
and I don't notice them, either
we're all so enraptured with our redirects,
self regards, personal exertions
on the subway platform that is like a mental gymnasium,
(we got those cards to prove our membership,
lifetime renewable, in fact, so you can't
complain – this is “compassionate” modernism
just coming in to save the day when you'd lost
all hope,
withering like a bean pod on the vine)
– it's like that when it's winter in the city,
the cabs and streets steam, like the
Clydesdales in the beer commercials, making
a funky pastoral in this ne'er-do-wellness setting.

Someone will complain of the bombs
perched in the national commonplaces about marriage,
taxes, the environment, even the First Dog
who craps on command just off the *mise-en-scène*
of Diane Sawyer's shrink-wrapped visage,
the soybean substitute of the family Christmas
in which sleeping pills, the old-fashioned, Fifties kind
are the only dream of escape
on a lumpy mattress, in a hovel in Shanghai
draping the company jacket over the spare, naked light bulb,
praying for sleep,
the rusty buckets of coughing and laughter invading
like a “dull tom-tom” only this time, it's real parody.

The stunt doubles never arrive on time, nor are
the bagels ever as fresh as in “the city,”
they pop in the microwave, for instance, and generally
make fools of themselves, as only bagels can.
But “compassionate modernism” promises more than this,
and does, pleads like the innocent snowflake
braving winter winds to land on your tongue,
which is in fact sentimental, but indeed is all you've got.

Mon Triste Coeur

after Rimbaud

My sad heart bathes in the poop,
their jeerings (poems) have remade it.
Now it's no more. Loop de loop,
having spelled it, they denude it.
Their jeerings (poems) have remade it.
into something of chicken soup,
into something hotly debated.

My sad heart bathes in the poop.
Their jeerings (poems) have remade it.
Now it's no more. "Loop de loop,"
having spelled it, they denude it.
Their jeerings (poems) have remade it
into something of Wednesday's soup,
into something not hotly debated.

The Chord

The chord barely reaches; the telephone's a prick,
searching for the rhythm of this night, foul with impatience,
grand with discomfort; isolated, so alone; a barometer,

no, but a bowel; shatter therapeutic glasses and five irons;
bled, histrionics, blasphemy, delightful catalogue,
insensate in America, a barn door opens onto the night;

angels of Ginsberg, angels of Blake, none other;
shivering, it is cold (orphanage), escaping the tropes,
it is cold, speechless, leaps the fence into the neighbor's yard

and pisses, no leaps again, finds that image of her (can't remember
her name); all the way outside of New Jersey, all the way;
the margins, the coal mine, the strip mine, it comes

regularly into speech, conversation is excitable;
illegal, the Puritan dawn creates its substitutes for
penance, work in the office; no form, only juggling

incisors snarl like the "ancestors.. clumsy with their firsts,"
ha, so were mine, bleeding through their country in
sneakers; takes a five iron to the Nissan, takes

another moment to recover and rediscover poetry, not the words
nor the letters, not the verbs and nouns, not the misprints, no;
running, another fence, spillt diamonds on the ground

he falls; that's satisfactory fiction, unblemished recollection;
narcissist, beat off those angels, those Catholic nuns,
the Huns at the border, the ones with the credit cards, the nuns;

block, hush, kick, snarl, rasp, hungry, towel off!
abatement nothing for solace in the mire of heavenly predecessors
who were, in fact, needy, mundane, lived in tight quarters, noting

to recommend them; but they're ours, so the anthem
goes, and forget about the whole rotten country it's a skitterbug,
in June, it's a June bug, in July no different, wait

for the next month; the next mong is Christmas apathetic tastes,
packaged with the family and the ubu roi and the girl from Mystic.

Another Day

Another day in the city
drowning yourself in Diet Pepsie
(how's that, Dan Quayle?)
being the pom-pom of your age,
a tall lie in a sea of stalks
(the grunions are molting),
with memories of the Paleolithic
(indeed, they make bad sleep).

The plaid masks the coax,
the rude insistence hides the shy,
as the Catherine wheel grows old
and dark beneath punitive skies.

Partly sunny, southwest winds
at 20 miles per hour, tomorrow
to drag the satchel of books
down the dirt highway to the school,
– nothing tremendously Italian about it.

Largesse, it talks to you
with mouthfuls of vices.

Flight of the Yangban

Erupted from 70 counties
with half a glass of champagne
still teething
with no myth of exactitude
to get my Heidegger right
I am the yangban
cook-a-cooka-choo
a Brooklyn paramour
with an external diaphragm
I picked up at Walmart
they're making them cheap
in Pullman, Illinois
bed of progressives
where the purebred live on souls
of cheats, daisies
for yangban who
cares, in a yangban hat
on TV, mother's video collection
that I had to return
every Sunday, NJ, circ. 1995
most likely late,
she'd watched all 70
78 times
(I think the Koreans are
doing much better
now, not so many
tapes, a little more relaxed
into the soil,
even the lawnmowers seem an
exotic music)
who could be busy
complaining, 2002, economy
worse than Lindsay's
when he started
worse than the homily
that raised the twin towers'
a "boondoggle," though
we miss them now, how
ironic, and we miss
Kenneth Koch, John Wieners

Larry Rivers, etc.
New American Original Species
they thought, we bought
 into it, feeling
part of it, America
 not a yangban, but
a cowboy, not an alien
but a president, presiding
 over an apartment
we could hardly afford
 only paying attention.

Two Beasts

1. Uakari

Princely vegetarian, though crimson
as if vodka-flushed, suggesting a bypass
operation's in order, the Uakari is
(with principle agility, toes never hitting
the forest floor) solitary in the topmost
foliage of trees. Pink in captivity,
as if determined to sit straight, fly right, conform,
it deteriorates, intensifying
any zoo's struggle to strap its load.

2. Oxpecker

Mellow in profit, this deft neck-dangler
pecks at vermin, "hence its name"
(my 'card says, though one
wonders, indeed, how pestilent is the
ox!), is propitiously decked with clauses,
that double as arms, and eyes
blind to danger. They lick nights' spew
(secretions from the antelopes' and buffaloes'
lids) for drink, and harbor hosts
as favorites, returning each day, like vengeance
to a carcass. Its nest has "big hair,"
(wig-like, briefly stomached from mammalian
interludes, o intoxicating strength!)
stitched together to form the hearth's heart,
dreamily. It "obviously feeds on
ticks" – like rictal spasmodics? or like
reticence? Does it paralyze one's defenses?

Countering the Luddite Itch with a Tin Switch

with lines from Thomas Carlyle

Countering the luddite itch with a tin switch.
Finessing the first kiss. Burning crosses.
Did Kore earn the pinstripes? Did gyre and gamble in the wabe?
Countering the techno fix with the thin stitch
of a thimble prick. Let me tell you. Let me warn you:
Lust never troubled me.

Happy men are full of the present,
for its bounty suffices them;
and wise men also,
for its duties engage them.

Add a hyperlink. Bluntly. Bullock? Bollocks.
But don't, don't blink. Blow it through the bull.
Protection. Dissimulation. Footfalls.
Green mayo in the soma. Red sores on the licks.

Even the horse is stripped of his harness,
and finds a fleet fire-horse yoked in his stead.

Heckling.
Hello hello.
Hello. Honesty.
I'm anemic. I'm anemic.
I'm delinquent. I'm delinquent.
I'm prostrate. I'm prostrate.
I'm too fat. I'm too fat.
It is a cavity. It opens.
Words coming and going.
Words loving and strolling.
Writing like a cavity.

It was the boundless Invisible world
that was laid bare in the imaginations
of those men; and in its burning light,
the visible shrunk as a scroll.

So few, and the chalk echoes and elides.

So many, didn't think that'd happen.

So what, countered the pop star in Lenin linens.
She returns every evening. She returns. Shouting.

Maybe tomorrow.
Maybe yesterday.
Mercy.
My lazy glands will never support me.
My lazy glands will never support me.
My lazy hands will never stop me.
My lazy hands will never stop me.

Nay, we have an artist that hatches chickens by steam;
the very brood-hen is to be superseded!

Did the flounder flounder, the bass bass?
Don't fink, don't stink!
Balance it on coins.
Plummet it for Bill.
Being out of necessity. Being unnecessary.
Bettering this banter with news from Santa,
buttering it up with puns from Butterick.
Stamping.
Surprise!
Send it on the Steve.
Blandly bunting. Blankets suggesting the progress of history.
Blasé clowns. Blue spangled sneakers. Cancerous.
(Cited cows. Coughing.)
Besting, but not the best; and of the best: worst.
Efficacious. Politesse with the finger bent. Professionals.

Accordingly, the Millenarians have come forth
on the right hand, and the
Millites on the left.

Reading silently to oneself.
Reading silently to oneself.
Reading silently to oneself.

And and.
And, and? And, yes.

And.
Send it to Gillot.
Or hell you.
Pliés.
Wanking prevaricators.
We wait for the door to open.
Weeping consolations.

The French were the first to desert Metaphysics;
and though they have lately affected
to revive their school,
it has yet no signs of vitality.

The Fifth-monarchy men prophesy from the Bible,
and the Utilitarians from Bentham.

The Crusades took their rise in Religion;
their visible object was, commercially-
speaking, worth nothing.

The great Napster.
The green napper.
The Napstermeister.
These words arm. These wounds am.
Think and don't think.
Turning up to claim to claim the prize.

Poetry professors professing the proofs of their own history.
(What do you do? What I do.
What do you do? What I do.
What do I do? Very fine, thank you.
What do I do? Very fine, thank you.)
Chancrous.
Professors of history.
Professors of their own history.
Purchase it for marquee.
Purple bandages on sore arms.
Perforations in the fabric suggesting the pogroms of history.

“Take the Black Eye...”

Take the black eye: winter's nerve
twitches, all style and grace
blanches, otherwise, fails to fist
blowing from the horizon, or grasping
bodies to it. The strength stark
bounty, pricks plashing in redolence,
puddles of imagery: so a cat
dreams soundly in this burrow but
not I. I tag this “sprocketed I” as
strumming loudly inward, pieces
piecemeal crowd, arguing several gifts
against it; the puzzle barely fits
the illustration: a crooning boy
naked, knees buckling in the leg: high.

“The parents take their tips...”

The parents take their tips, but sleep with ires;
a paper sailing ship sets out, then turns back
its clock, and sinks; nothing in the battery
prepared it for its dwarfish role. The time that
is wasted is thrown into the fire, where it grows
a face, with a harelip. Believing in such fires
only stokes the energy, the choke, that holds
the memory to its anchor, the forehead to destinies
that are always unfulfilled, because so old.
The body simply plummets, it is cramped and fares
poorly in a basement, or pantry, when it's locked
in patterns of the army, or television roles.
Sleep can provide the issues, those one can tear
easily from its staples; in wavering one is rocked.

Jaw

The little heavy jaw, but
I'm by the window, so
it seems quite healthy, here
to be writing, just
one step from playing tennis,
 but true
 to myself,
I light up a cigarette, try
for second wind
attainment, sacrifice air
where words would be, which
I fear, more than, more than health
 itself, what
 could I
have to gain from consciousness, from
window and wind, from sound,
but the call to sacrifice,
finally, this attachment to body
like in some Jackie Chan flick,
 falling
 but fighting.

Scansion

I would respect your pygmy scansion, were it
not all rain and weather: the drop down
into atmospheric lows, skirting the city:
blankets of mist over the cars and
speech, nobody groins a howitzer: fabrications
of myth in potato chips, lucky charms, the
battle of the bulge:

and we are
sailing
on circuits
of rime: cordons

keep the players off the grass, where the punks
practice their inane dances of lethargy,
the cops are unwilling, in this period of ethics, to
stake their claims, which is to say the
division of ratios protects the tangential queries
from overrunning the boundaries: high fly-
ing efforts at circumference are not welcome here:

strolling, it
is the manner
of the walk, turns
the eye from its

deliverance.: the children run at hiccough pace:
blah blah lover the runways from which they
must propel their economies: oh, all unwilling!
(O'Hara): but there should be a devil that is deeper than
this, in the Dantescan universe: which we don't
want: scrawling on the sundays our graffiti of commerce
and magic, leisure is a syllabus: method is

controlled by
interests of
the state: don't
know to much, don't verify

discord: so that the streets remain green all day, and
no paradox comes unclean, no grumbling persists, in
parks of balked odor: bringing the matter back to grass and
properties: on them, we piss and shit: honor them
and the rifle of the mind is loaded with its teeming pos-
sibility (which makes for fecundity) so that, alas, one
revels in the lack of transcendence: pornography of the trapped

Imagination:
nation that waits
politely: how
true that deliverance.

Thanatos and Eros

Thanatos and eros –

 bungee jumping from one to the other
 or a dyslexic combine that throws in troves
unequal but spirited poems;
 these trysts of banging heads that smother
 deliberations in the senates of hope
 the flecks of eros
vengeful of the thrones.

Elopement

It was the sea that was lucky
and not your mama.

I've thought of invisible loves.
Now I will confuse myself with regrets.

Furniture Music [1996/2016]

1.

Weekends, I'm entrusted
to myself, which is convenient;
no other pasty faces
lathering the windows, no.

My hips are scarred, as are
my hopes. A curl
in the centuries-long eyelash:
broken down Swedish fop.

Make of this toiletry what
you will, heroine, I'm game
for that – for the others I won't
speak, rather nod

off, as I'm doing now.
Fax me images of mittens, I
command, but my credit –
what's with all these possessives?

Alas, Starbuck's is open.
Did I mention Toulouse Lautrec?
Of course (gingham asper
flunk shlepp), not, not in my poem.

My electronic equipment
dies, I can barely
type any longer – used to be
quite easy, flipping a lid
and turning her
on,
noticing a rhythm
ego as it spills forth –
lady with cocktails
who has just published a book
on the Postmodern Lyric.

All with a will

to hide –
poem of crisis
we'd ask you sluriously
do we have
to die?

And the crisis
responds –
with jackhammer
grinding,
with rubbled intent
– that we read.

Rather than retire the question,
perspire in the continued insurrection.

The doilies become custard.
At last, Tonto, to begin again.

2.

How to wake, how to wake one
with the specificity, and the damage
controlling outside
playing upon the unspecificity
of being in “Plato’s Cave,” thoroughly convinced
of the Immortals.
Waiting for the poem to crack and Eternal Light
rather than the emissions of amoebas –

He once said painting was “putting decorations, on a white rectangle.”
My tense
is to believe him, conversing
somewhere outside of the rubber band
with “gift economy”
and a pressed red shirt
suitable substitutions for authority
with their red caps and black sashes.

Insense.

The primacy of Garamond type in the “thick journals,”
one’s personal grammar becoming grids and other city plans.

3.

Is this what it's like to sleep
in a pile of corpses?
(Poetry is an afterthought.)
I woke up because my dentures were dirty
and all the thinking was like 1975.
She was there. So was she.
And she was there. We called her Gullible Madness.

The pose of the pulse in Soho
makes my hair bristles breathe
but that's before I was largely disabused
of the inevitability
(houses made of Saran Wrap)
of the inevitability of death.
I can't say I feel much better now.

When they had that hinge joint in the putter
I was the star of a TV series
secretly filmed in Toronto but claiming to be
from Cleveland – why'd they do that?
As the days grow longer, I become an emphatic 7.
Civilization can go fuck me.
I want to be a part of that outer fringe,

hiring a dog
to chase linen.

4.

Some little pimple of hope
on the expanse –
green and pink advertising logos
with names like “Jeffrey” or “Pam”
consuming concentration.
Where the bump ends, and the skin begins
is academic.

Everything relies on the digital fix,
mollusks speed across the surface –
rubber trees spray their guerdon to the stars –
when the
trial commences –
oh! then the seance around the bonfire!
Can the cannibal never know the neighbor’s death throes?

One struggles for distinction – amidst the blowing turnstiles
foot placed, one after the other, ahead
into the continuing controversy
of how we stay late, what sources provide the juice
of the most jejune of our talentless cousins, our stoic, uninspired aunts,
our teachers. Button one another up, that’s what we do.

So the children extend past our beseeching, anyway, starry-eyed with bare feet
of the coals of winter’s stock exchanges, the
obfuscating this-or-that of the talk show hosts with winking eyes (hey,
that’s you with the crinoline bagpipes! captured on digital disk
and never to be forgotten until the late-nineteenth century quest
for closure corrodes) –
I think that’s what she said. But in Lausanne, it was Gutenberg
who framed the psychosis that, since, we’ve been swimming and losing
our balance about. With our own standard companies driving the oral traditions
to their graves,
belas, there are the other phenomena to aspire to, the majors and minors
of a day in the subway – the tracks and the laughs – all that is never considered.

The winding of the sentence used to be the pastime of aristocrats;
now, in the violent earth, the sentence is total
and so it must be short, sleek, inelastic, workman-like;
or so they seem to suggest: it must be feminine,

despite the acres of piss and penises it contains,
and must be somewhat approachable, like a building, though it's wet.
The birth of tragedy out of song: what forms will surface from *our* Dionysian
rituals?

5.

If I couldn't hear this sound, but yes
I hear it. Every ass is a bouncing Savannah,
but the beauty of this urban avenue
is the necessity one feels to have to make a home
in oneself: flags in the nostrils.

The skull of the couch placates my loneliness,
you see. Fidgeting the Star Trek hymnal:
there're seven pianos in the warp,
twelve fingers dance gayly along their keys,
post-op, life-off. Tourniquets are salutary.

That way one slumbers in hypertext
burritos, lathers up in fumigous Christian
foam, dial X on the telephone
thirty-seven times in no particular order,
the flowers arrive with their careerist bartender,
so piss. Williamsburg, Athens, gone
so plastic and suspicious in an apartment.

Things you've never seen
in dreams or on TV...
a man being helped out of an elevator,
or waiting...
just "waiting."
What colorless green is that?

6.

As I said
to my friend, John, this
tired poem of mine
will never stop, I
must compose it in Braille
in order to achieve
a wider audience.

I will take this all in, he says
to arrange is to arrange
to arrange is not to derange,
and so, I will try
to take it all in.

*Unbeautiful, visceral
black spot surrounded by silver
on the retina,
calmly as stars block the night.*

He reflects:
why couldn't I have been smarter
all those years,
 and English,
and in the *mainstream* of life.

If I could sleep, I'd be happy.
It's *something I want to do*.

What is this thing called swing?

In the vividness, I try
your eyelashes. Dis-
cover a plateau of flesh
has betrayed my location.

Let's hope he's dead in heaven.

7.

I don't think much of this
will make sense. I know
indeed, the street wends further
than knobby knees carry thee.
You took me here, thinking
I'm a lover, a ghost of
previous cinematic composites
but, alas, I am an egg.
What's that asking for our bravery
in occupation? Do you
partake in the fancy rituals
of posing amidst specializations
of soul, hand, eye, all?
I'm respectful of your vocabulary
but my syllables are the art.

This is where I start spraying.

8.

These are the nice guys,
Master.

Yours is the elf
and everything else in it.

The ringing glass.
They're dusting the distance.

Scrooge

Starring Roger Daltrey as Scrooge

The purveyors of:
"My nerves are bad. Yes, bad.
Speak to me. Why doesn't anyone ever
speak to me. Speak"
are ridiculous.

Seventy-five Santified capitalists later...

I'm really
just dangling above the prostate.

9.

"It makes us pray again,"
ordinarily I'd just pass Go,
but he was different, cute
in that Andre Serrano sort of way,
in profile, metaphysically Indian.

If you collect the debts
of another man's debts,
but I had play stations to do
and minded my own business.

The choired strings of the Brookiyn
Bridge loomed in the mist
above legions of dancing gringos
I'd read about, on the island
from which I'd escaped for a refreshing furlong
which I had deserved for some time.

As papers go,
this one is good.

But now my breezy moustaches
sense danger, my tie leaps westward
to the porn shops by the playground
where they drink diamonds by the tea,
all radiant in the glow of a Tuesday afternoon.
"I'd gladly pay you Tuesday
for a hamburger today," I hum
in jodhpurs, spandex, and other glam slacks.

How sensational
to feel Nietzschean!
My mother would say it's just a ruse.
So I settled for some André Breton,
a Corona Light, a guilty package of Gitanes
Katz's famous reuben, and an Ikea port-a-john.

10.

He'd managed to remain in the news:
all these people, dimpled copycats –
let's jack into the logarithm, placate
that demand for the exterior
that is flesh, is soft and supple.

The moon rose behind the mesh
of the Ancients, shadows on the sands
of Tranquility Phase Court:

where earlier had been the demonstration
against the Academy no one demeaned,
reviewed, or noticed.

A sonnet's worth of noise now would be fantastic,
fandango and elastic, pretty and cheap,
smart yet solipsistic, spoke the soothing Elaborator
in the Mark Seventeen Headset.

The Fostex Capital Five perimeter was eroding,
soon, it would be time to hasten far hence, distances
measured in hype-years, googol-miles,
to the arboretum they fashioned in the catalogue.

She approaches from the video with a slight groan.

"Hazards are in the palm of my history,"
leaks the vibrator, stammering with junk
the last loafer left to be considered
as art, or the decorative arts, at least,
presaging a deterrence. Tulips:
vis-a-vis, tulips, heh,
marvel at them as if stranded on a wind-swept promontory
coke-addled, struck by kindnesses that
finally, were black globs of gel
swarming up to the parking lots of the tenements.

"This freedom corrodes," she intrudes, I think
to my benefit, as it was a tight fit here, all by
myself. She of the damask eyes. A Burt
I'd never known. So the collectibles continue.

One, two, I've said this several
times. It was recognizable as Ming
again, the Ming Family Christmas
boiling all the toaster ovens, flicking the switch.

11.

Like Sharaku's Japanese
I like to make funny faces,
is that protest?
It's not, famn damily,
the earnestness of my waist
in Hoboken light,
red patent leather,
checked shirt, tan, sunglasses –
this leisure is diplomacy.

But what to make of Jacques Debrot?
they ask. Tyro sniggers, coughs
blood into his monogrammed handkerchief
and blunders some phrase
lifted from T. J. Snow,
all in some Bergsonian moment
that the bystanders don't catch on, no
5:14 on a Saturday, at the Ear
that didn't exist when we meant it to, and now
is still known
as the only place to meet.

Some from fear of depression
learning love of good paper...
some going out,
 drinking too much,
making friends.
And when he pretends
to have none of the information
 we are smarter
about history, but
duller about the present day,
some wanting to write home about
the price of batteries in Afghanistan.

“Bomb them with jobs, food
and education!” They were listening!
And abrasive cleaners and Limp Bizkit
and telethons
and the books of Guy Debord –

and then some pretentious accents
to deflect the pious ones,
or street accents
to make up new songs.”

Anudda one ride's the bus-a.

The intestines can choke on wheat:
Celia Sprue.

Piano music: strong as pills.
Blocked moments persist
in this blue, late light
that wants to suffocate the rules.

Pineal, corrective of
immediate activity in the fingers,
slivers of this excess
balance pressured figurines.

Turn an eyelash
toward the door
recognizing a person late
arriving for your retrieval
who had disembarked six days ago, and
rained on and impatient,
unskilled as you are, listens
not. So that the lock on
the door is ripped from its screws.
So that the lock on
the door has been ripped from its wood.

12.

Something smokes beside the clock's loneliness:
the speaking rabbit queries, its nods and suggestions
a proactive applause in these winter preparations,
while nothing thrums my heart in this flattering holiness.

No reason to attend to sense, is this
some sort of failure? A test, that time
truly be a ribbon in which the midden
of experience finds itself housed?

To chart the drift and currents of
as poetry, some American mission
imagining a frontier in the trivial?
A body on crests of the very seconds?

Eventually, to see colors
go on from there
not having any topics.
So smart, these jokes:

I could almost write a poem about it.
Pray, eventually,
for the experience: a bustling wheat field.

My brand of lethargy can't withstand it.
Eventually, going slower,
with no high-kicks and somersaults.

You might call it
two separate islands,
how to love,
how to beseech,
and when
 she's gone
the two islands
were strange fiction.
You should have been here
ten second ago
because, most likely,
you'd still be here now.