

BRIAN KIM STEFANS

CODA:

“THE NINETIES TRIED YOUR GAME, THERE’S NOTHING IN IT.”

for Michael Scharf

[Note: the following is the second and final section
of the long poem “Pasha Noise: Life and Contacts.”]

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I. Making a Low-Key Effort

The nanotechs blame God on botched hagiographic DNA;
from there, we set off toward Croatoan,
indifferent to the intertonic *falsches* of mud;
what we got were indices rendering the old counts moot,
tons of journalistic superlatives, for instance,
megabytes folding into *giga-bluts*;
but no one could resist that image of a pure, pre-invested Orient, even
the old poets were at it, reading up on Espen Aarseth,
who cared a noogie for Susan Howe, or
of the traipsing across vascular lands hunting anabaptists;
for the Culture Wars were, in all quarters, over
or so we thought, of the un-Godarded
world of international hackterism, of the tousled, unshaven
masses who listened intently — when surely the message was insane —
to the expensive disappearance — now we are only alive.

II. The Stylist Revisited

Not assured of the hedonist's rapture, or the safety of guiding ropes;
he has a normal name otherwise, nothing to suggest television,
drinks too much perhaps, is over-studied for literary conflagration;
the list, otherwise, grew blurry, once including: "syncretism," "allotropes,"
"Marxism" (also, "Leninism," "Stalinism") and "individualist"
for contrast, also "humanism," "realism" (vs. "social realism"), madly "Darwinist";
in Vancouver, these are just the names of punk rock bands, all
frissons to rumbles, prismatic, (where stateside they would be "dualists")
paragrammatic, encoding the revolution by frobbing syntactical
dials — forgetting, before the moderns, we claimed Bliss Carmen for "ourselves";
Williams would have loved him, just as likely Pound, Zukofsky, and Marianne
Moore, his neighbor, but for us he's Ashbery-meets-Gibson (William,
not Mel), Philip K. Dick channeling Spicerian Lenny Bruce through old coffee radio
of insomniac Chomskyite nites, perfectionist, though perhaps no Gautier
(Theophile) in form — a world without embellishment, sans vorpal sword, only contacts.

III. “Drifted precipitate...”

What burst upon his revelry but an allergenic spoor, a sneeze;
Pound’s flopping of oars, this one marked “anhedonist,”
forcing him back to the door, to unlock the lock, then re-lock;
we can funkify the seed-time of this des Esseinte moment with digits
uncountable, by crises that approach with the grace
of guttural, 32-bit Nazis, or with jodi.org’s antique strains;
his Polish friends didn’t visit anymore, if they ever did,
not since Jeffrey Deitch moved in, then out (after 9/11), and then in came
the fashions, ever-more-clawed-at hairstyles, “hacked apart
by a brainless cretin” (Eno), for the colonial-somethings, plainly white;
there’s always butoh to aspire to, Pasha pondered, my friends,
or Min Tanaka’s gravity (“I didn’t leap, I fell”) on the roof
of P.S. 1, summer 1999, last year anyone cared about
the turn of the millennium, or U2, or sampling, or Language Poetry, or Michel
Foucault — imagining for the moment that silence commands authority.

IV. Broken By a Reminder

If society were an opinion, you'd be dying;
the brain is lighter without eating,
but the lines of poetry all scintillant mistakes;
Retention Theory: we verb them out until
apotheosis in the critical sublime, — still practiced here
in New York, no need for a socializing ardor;
in Britain, they are fixing for order, not
of the American sort, with sorteas occuring regularly,
but something softer, “civilized,” words uncussed
from the Empire’s dark lashes, not indifferent to cultural co-dependence;
some towering, Britney-Spearsish blond looks in
from the billboard outside my apartment — I think
to remind me... of... not sure... blankness,
that it’s not the Nineties any longer, or not for ninety more years
— the walls and curbs an integrated, influential sphere.

V. The Title Keeps You Slightly Off Balance As You Read

All that time, all that easy time;
frozen in mannered applause,
a country of lunches waits;
there, by the military therapy monitors,
the Byzantine conversations,
the dissociative stares, the passing off;
for Pasha, like them, it was nothing
but a game, his flint flecks of culture
comporting in easy tournament
with light sabers, in polyvinyl memory-aids;
digital caffeines, he said, flangible
placebos to palliate the feeble-marketed,
Tepid E-zine was on a roll now, too,
bandoleered in academic conferences
devoted to avatars, architecture, the dispossessed.

VI. A Source of Conflict

The skin is an organ, the face is an organ, the truth is an organ, the house is an organ;
did the radio pronounce Barishnyakov with the proper expulsion of diphthongs
and fricatives, and if so, are we friends or ants, peers or doppelgangers;
the very rapid sex of fraternizing has created a bounty
of sorts, the very words mish-mash and ungovern their latter tenses
with names hardly functioning deictically, hardly patterning their facial intentions;
search string, cable chord, mistrial — vegetative consciousness is
no ghost, rather the work of British crop dusters who substantiate the mania
for applying Mandelbrot to what were once teaming, horny particles
produced by the earth suffering chromosomic enema;
when war settled on the continent still flouting its post-Surrealistic derive,
knocking back a few while trying to nudge the remote with a cauterized ass cheek,
the teleactive, the arduous, the omni-political, the photogenic geeks
propped Billy Beers on monitors and subjected them to streams of piss, to see
how they fell — and basing a decision on that, hacked the Brazilian Congress's dot gee oh vee.

VII. Broadband Payment

HVA and Pasha proceeded to plan their War Issue; this incurred considerable skepticism from their friends in Toronto and New York where, respectively, they lived; the question was collecting work that related to the theme of war, when neither of them had seen one, or just on TV, even as they gleaned their title from the second issue of *Blast*; submissions were of the varied sort, word salads, hot screeds, ultimately without perspective, some more diaristic than others, some of it even well-researched, but most taking about four pages just to get to the subject — which it choked; Pasha, as editor, was publicly generous, as was HVA — though in private they were criminally incensed with what they saw, following through on the category of “poet” in Oceanic culture, in the cult of Welsh Bards, in Kenya, and dressed for the weather of such selves, but not, presumably, right here.

VIII. Omeros is Home Alone

“And then I start getting this feeling of exhaltation”;
but that’s before the brass Daddy-arm
unscrews from the pewter socket;
Telex monitored the weight of potential catastrophes
from the gorse-like foliage of his apartment,
unstandard, victimized, divorced;
but that was like the sentience of carved, Mayan statues
reflecting their casual desires in dissipated “men’s” magazines,
rewiring the mores to reflect how not strange
this is — futuristic, chic, enveloped;
smacking bubble sounds from the gel used for storage
of Palestinian potatoes, rerouted through Greece,
with the English wine of substance control kept driftily at bay,
far from the ops of hummers, anti-aliased crooks,
figures from a sauced-up sandman who, after flirting, runs for president.

IX. Aspartame

You've learned a few words with -meme in it;
this isagoge crumples your feathers,
the bucky ball contracts, from family to fraught *habitus*;
if society were an onion, you'd be crying,
Ted, Mary, Lou, you'd be off the air in seconds,
crying, the microphagous of the barely living;
arterial highways, gelatinous culture,
children are shrink-wrapped within it and stare from the shelves
awaiting arrest, insults to alienation, green, staring
into the sun — that is, until they learn their *memes*;
under the temple, down the back stairs
punk no longer holds, and they are hundreds of pages from black
culture — they are no longer at home, they are
finding warmer accomplices among the self-immolators of Prague,
— they've seen the original *Solaris* several tens of times, never the remake.

X. No Star At the Disco

We aren't there yet;
um, it's just a bunch of
people talking to themselves;
Genoa can wait, so
can Pyongyang, this
divigation is most interesting;
spell-checked culture
with rhyme *with* reason,
and a certain subjunctive peace,
unfat — until then, in arrears;
what man, god, or tin,
what flim-flam, humpety-dump, razzle-
dazzle articulates in chips
spell-bound as the lad of Naxos,
but, for all that, the chirping of modems.

XI. Bonding With the Form

Given the goad, the vacant bail-out of the “axis of evil”;
Pasha marshals the hackers, mocks the hacked (in theory),
lassoes the snow of his lawn with mojito piss;
the cave vanquishes solidarity, there is no truth in Nigeria
worth flying there for, no canons of anti-systemic hopes,
thus, a follower, and dyslexic at that — he’s wall-eyed, comatose;
the rites of perfect meter can’t slouch him toward Bethlehem,
nor the feathered boas of Wheelright, nor the attractions of the editor
of *The Nation*, nor the muckraking of *The Village Voice*,
pull him onto the street with an inky cleaver to proffer his minus;
virginal newness is the optimal temper of his alba, song of
American drains — right here in V-burg no different, saddled with
British pallor, Central European braggado, or Nipponese spikes
making an ill-scanned Mermaid Day Parade of our *voyants* off to work
— shepharded to the L, vanguarded through the paperless office, shuffled to hell.

XII. Photo Finish

The “Nineties” tried your game, and died, of course;
suggesting some sort of adrenalin rush at the *fin-de-siecle*,
a sort of fight-or-flight mentality, a decadent mush, or bombed steel twist;
that’s how it feels, flounder-eyed at the bottom of
a century, thinking on the one hand there’s Moxley, and on the other
that bloke who writes his naive “paragrams” with computers;
nothing but celluloid seems very old, these days,
the first of the trope-recycling “new” arts in cahoots with Benjamin’s Golden Age,
— rather than calcium in bones, we have the half-life of the restored Vigo,
— which, if it seems confusing, is, really, quite OK;
books will continue to be made, and Johnson (Lionel) will still fall from the stool,
I’ll bribe you with these allusions, Auden will continue to be chthonic in September
1932, and we’ll still complain that Barbara Guest was a parenthesis
in Lehman’s *The Last Avant-Garde*, and we’ll be carpet-bombed with poems,
until the big novel hits — in which case there will still be Tom Phillips’ *A Humument*.