

## Difficult Beginnings

Richard Deming

Roberto Tejada

**RD:** Let me begin at the outset with Zukofsky, who is vitally important to us both, and a passage from "A-9" which I know you've revisited recently viz. the generation of some of your own most current work. The poet writes:

We are things say, like a quantum of action

Defined product of energy and time, now

In these words which rhyme now how song's exaction

Forces abstraction to turn from equated

Values to labor we have approximated. (108)

This passage comes back to me because we're already waist deep in another election year. Another year in which mainstream politics gets more and more homogenized, and the possibilities of a progressivist Left seem to get watered down. One of the problems that continually plagues the political Left is that it is made of so many conflicting impulses, all of which make a unified front largely impossible. For the Left to know what the "Right knows," it would have to participate in the downside of democracy--the homogenizing of difference.

I happened to read Dan Featherston's *World News* during the same week that I watched the highlights of the Republican convention. Featherston's book is moving certainly, but it's also exacting. The poems bear witness to various atrocities at large and domestically, but also bear witness to the role that liberal Democratic ideology plays in the atrocities of genocide and cultural imperialism. Each time we turn on the television we become complicit, enmeshed even, in those acts of political torture or genocide. Featherston's book I think shares an impulse evident in your own *Gift & Verdict*: both attempt to say something about the poetics and artifice of politics that can empty out the humanity of events.

But I've only just finished reading a lecture by Rorty about the cultural left. It's a relatively scathing critique in which he writes that "the cultural left offers ideals such as participatory democracy and the end of capitalism. Power will pass to the people, the Sixties Left believed, only when decisions are made by all those who may be affected by their results . . . . When they [are], capitalism as we know it will have ended, and something new will have taken its place." Here's where the problem is, as Rorty sees it:

But what this new thing will be, no one knows. The cultural Left still skips over such questions. Doing so is a consequence of its preference for talking about the system rather than about specific social practices and specific changes in those practices. The rhetoric of this Left remains revolutionary rather than reformist and pragmatic.

Its insouciant use of terms like 'late capitalism' suggests that we can wait for capitalism to collapse, rather than figuring out what, in the absence of markets, will set prices and regulate distribution. The voting public, the public which must be won over if

the left is to emerge from the academy into the public square, sensibly wants to be told the details . . . It wants to be told how participatory democracy is supposed to function.

The cultural left offers no answers to such demands for further information, but until it confronts them it will not be able to be a political Left.

He concludes by saying "we should not let speculation about a totally changed system, and a totally different way of thinking about human life and human affairs, replace step-by-step reform of the system we presently have." We need, in other words, to stop a perpetual cycle of critique ("Jane get me off this crazy thing," as George Jetson would say) and actually implement a mechanism of change.

Now I'm not offering this as something I wholly give consent to, but there is an explanation of why the efforts of the Left may be hitting an impasse. It need not offer a unified, transcendental truth (besides the belief, in terms of classical liberalism, that cruelty is to be avoided at all costs) but it ought to come together in offering a vision of how things can be accomplished--a plan rather than a system.

Rorty positions his argument by saying that cultural Left has tended, since its entrenchment in the academy, towards dizzying degrees of abstraction. It does this since it seems to have given up its commitment to reformist activism for the spectatorial distance of cultural criticism. I put this out mainly because it is an issue that I can't help but wrestle with and feel although it may not be wholly true, there is an element that gets to me. My own (damned) New England Protestant work ethic no doubt. I will say however that a pragmatic aesthetic would be one that in fact confronts not only the conservatism of the Right but as well the cultural Left's "preference for talking about the system rather than about specific social practices and specific changes in those practices." Mired in metaphysics, words sound as if a long way off. It is in their ordinariness (a vexing term but useful because its vagueness), their use value, that words arise from and form community. If we think of community as historical groups of individuals who are bound together by a shared set of complex, language involving practices, we see that these infinite possibilities of life arise out of the possibilities latent within the intricacies of language use.

**RT:** There's an increasing complexity--at the level of participation and exclusion--in the link between communities and languages. Over twenty years ago, Max Frisch anticipated the kinds of questions more and more individuals would be forced to ask themselves as the century started drawing to its close. In a brief essay-cum-questionnaire from his *Sketchbook 1966-1972*, the Swiss writer propounded: "[1] What do you call home?: A) a village? B) a town or district within it? C) places where the same language is spoken? D) a continent? E) a house or apartment?" And likewise: "[2] What makes you a homeless person?: A) unemployment? B) banishment for political reasons? C) a career in a foreign country? D) the fact that you tend to think differently from people who call the same place home and rule over it? E) an oath of allegiance misplaced?"

With widespread collective migrations, political re-mappings and subsequent cultural creolizations having added to the conditions of everyday life for countless societies everywhere (to greater and lesser degrees and in contrasting experiences of modernity), it remains to be seen whether individuals and collectivities--in a resistance to global homogenization--will be able to participate in the multiplicity of cultures that is only now in the process of being made imaginable.

**RD:** Let me throw this out then: "Selfhood," then, is the frame of reference we learn to work within when trained in the language of our community; learning that language means learning the assumptions and practices with which that language is inseparably bound and from which its expressions get their meaning. Poetry and poetics can act as addressing specific social practices by foregrounding the interpretive process of reading. At stake in this process is meaning itself. By working w/ the materials of language both poet and reader see that language is an action and that reading, and hence meaning making is not simply a transference or transaction. In its resistances and transgressions and redressing of "words" as "actions" a progressivist and pragmatic aesthetic would rely on conversation and negotiation. By leading words back to this conversation (out of dogmatic or programmatic stasis), language is restored to the immediacy of a

(participatory) democracy and the community itself thereby regains its ability to mean, as the individuals of the collective are able to reinvest their commitment to the mores that language shapes and makes possible via communication. Since language is woven into the pattern of human activity and character, poetry can be reformist by investigating new possibilities.

**RT:** Let's set aside for a moment the question of lingua franca, language conflict, translation, resistance. One outstanding feature of human events in the modern/colonial world system has been the increasingly visible rift, throughout the globe, between disparate identities and their respective links to communities and environs. This, in turn, has given rise to a questioning of how such constructs, which are anything but stable, can be indiscriminately employed, as indeed they have been by those in power or by the pervasive industries of information and mass culture. Quite simply, and more to the point, "what we are" is more usefully seen now as inseparable from "who it is" that lends authority to the description, or to the geographically-specific, historical "whereabouts" presumed to be voiced.

As such, I'm interested in a poetry that marks a decided shift away from art's long spell in the land of "simulacra" toward a proposal for an aesthetic production that is endemic, for example, to the Americas--though the use of this geopolitical mapping must also be challenged--yet comprised of possibly unsuccessful interventions or purposeless outward relationships whose oppositional nature, however irresolute, may be operative nonetheless in contesting dominant patterns that have shaped the places in which we currently live. Writes Zukofsky:

"The horse bends down"--Paul, '46, May.

A center as it were

From which his hoofs

Spark clusters of stars

That weaving bobble

No one spark the same like another--

But there are families of them

It becomes involved,

Sometimes arbitrary.

The horse sees he is repeating

All known cultures

And suspects repeating

Others unknown to him,

Maybe he had better not

Think of himself

Hunting so to speak

Sowing so to speak  
Composing always,  
The shape of his ground seems to have been  
A constant for all dead horses  
His neigh cultural constant  
Also his sniff--  
It is some such constant when a culture  
Seems to revert a hundred years  
Or some thousands?  
And instances from "different" cultures, surprisingly inwreathed,  
Seem to look back at one another...

("A"-12, 175)

**RD:** Maybe Rorty would still see that as insufficient and/or inadequate. This would be a place, however, to start step by step reforms, by changing perceptual and cultural templates. In that way perhaps, poets are unlegislated acknowledgers.

**RT:** To what degree can we overestimate the political efficacy of a text, in its ethical relationship to an abstract reader? In this open-ended relationship between art and society, the symptoms will always be at once perplexing, circumspect, narcotic and productive. Artworks and writings of course, even despite certain tenets of modernity, are anything but self-evident or autonomous; it's the conditional nature of art as valid inquiry into the public sphere--even in its most pleasure-producing of guises--that allows aesthetic meanings to circulate. David Levi Strauss (in his recent collection of essays *Between Dog & Wolf*) locates the body at the axis of current thinking about art and politics; that is, at the interstice between aesthetics and anaesthetics.

In a variation on a theme by Freud as to those pressures that affect the somatic nature of the human order, Levi Strauss gives flesh to this in-between-ness of seemingly opposing knowledges: "The nervous/social system tries at every point to resist stimulation and change, to avoid pain (or pleasure), to remain in equilibrium. The aesthetic is by definition a threat to this equilibrium."

Levi Strauss evokes how the space between the anaesthetic and the aesthetic is nothing if not the very movement between need and habit, between authority and desire:

Pleasure is redefined as the absence of pain. But pain killers do more than kill pain. They replace pain with their own 'algebra of need,' their own addictive logic and progressive history (...). The anaesthetic is usually discussed in purely utilitarian terms, like propaganda: if it stops the pain, it is successful, no further questions. But the aesthetic is all questions, disequilibrium, and disturbance (...). As with all other parts of the allopathic complex, the anaesthetic only masks symptoms; it does nothing to treat the root causes of

pain, to trace it back to its source, give it meaning, or counter it with pleasure. This requires the older, more radical practice of aesthetics. (12)

**RD:** It's the aesthetic that gives the perspective of no perspective I think. What runs like a thread through Zukofsky's work is the belief that things, ideas, sounds, move associatively but the associations are diverse and divergent, that connections are arrived at not merely by sound, not merely by idea, but by a complex, rhizomatic interlacing of all of these: "I walked on Easter Sunday, / This is my face / This is my form. / Faces and Forms, I would write / you down / In a style of leaves growing." In his magnum opus, Zukofsky uses the fact that "text" is derived from the Latin for "weaving" as he brings together various and disparate voices and modes in order to create a space where self is fluxional and not lapidary. For Zukofsky, the self is a site of cultural citations, and his poetics is a means to strike through the mask, as it were, in order to keep that space dynamic rather than static.

In *Walden*, Thoreau writes: "I fear chiefly lest my expression not be extra-vagant enough." If as Wittgenstein says, "We are everywhere in language," Zukofsky seeks to expand the bounds and possibilities of that "everywhere" by increasing (or rather reminding us of), the means of language, by being inclusively extra-vagant. Freed from limiting conventions of discursivity, the reader becomes a poet by becoming (in a compensatory and complementary way) also extra-vagant.

Language is a variegated relationship of various relations--a dwelling. It may be ultimately contingent, but a community springs from that contingency.

No thought exists

Completely abstracted from action,

Without the solids of bodies

There is no geometry,

Who acknowledge space-moving

Know as many dimensions

As they have muscles (47)

It is in this way that Zukofsky substitutes a diffuse asystematic self for the model of "identity" as a kind of singular composition or (false) explanation which shores up the disparate elements and modalities that the flesh is heir to, "Type of mind faking a thirst for itself," he writes in "A-6". Instead the self is a catechresis of motions and figurations branching forth. The dimensions and directions are multiple, endlessly so because particular, because, as the poet tells us "Poems are only acts upon particulars. Only through such activity do they become particulars themselves--i.e. poems." Despite the tautology in Zukofsky's statement, there is a touching humility and sensitivity in "only." Nonetheless, we see the point(s) where language, action, and materiality might all intersect. Poems, in that they foreground language acts, can be a means by which to practice revising epistemology.

**RT:** The poem may well be an act upon a particular, but is there any guarantee that its reading can actually complicate and make productive the tensions and perils inscribed in the relationship between civilization and nature when terms like "economy," "ecology," "the new technologies" and "politics" awaken the most diverse and conflicting reactions (or diffidence), and discourses (or silence), and a series of irreconcilable and unintelligible attitudes? In short: the lack of a consensus. As in this double rhythm for me of ebullience and skepticism when the political process comes under scrutiny and we're forced to ask whether our various interventions in the form of discourse or assembly may or may not make a difference; this, in what regards

the relationship between those in the political debate at large, the mainstream media, and different constituencies, be they virtual or otherwise. How can poetic discourse be effective, in dissonance with the high-speed, high-volume fiber-optics below us and the atmospheric satellites of global telecom above? Will poetry conform to the democratic illusion of present digital resources, or can it activate a radical decentralizing of the news technology and consumerism they make possible?

A state of confusion: hence the uncertainty of knowing what to do; not knowing exactly against what to act. The experiences of art and of the ideas of the waning century both indicate that one of the viable modern attitudes--ethically questionable, though undoubtedly ethical--is to act first and then to measure the results. When in doubt, we either affirm or dissent—perhaps more as the result of a logical process than out of true conviction. To affirm in order to understand the meaning of dissent; to intervene so as to experience the consequence of apathy. But is there a difference--I think there is--between active and passive affirmation? Between active and automatic dissent? Alphonso Lingis in his recent book *Dangerous Emotions* writes:

Philosophies of history, whether reactionary or radical, see in the end achieved by action a value, a good, which is a predicate constructed in the categorical system of an industry, a society, and a culture. They see in the directive force of an action a meaning that operates only within the vocabulary, grammar, and rhetoric of a semiotic system. They see in the driving force of an action the momentum of accumulated skills and habits. They explain an action out of an evolving environment where everything is already social, significant and historical.

But our action is an interruption of the continuous dialectic of history, an awakening from the drowsy murmur of the semiotics of a culture. Its bound of energy comes from a break in the continuity of skills and habits. Each moment of awakening is a return to youth. In our action there is festivity, license, and puerile pleasure. There is an element of lubricity, of wickedness in the innocence of action. (...)

...I wake up to the intrinsic importance of the reality in front of me, which is in danger, or to the intrinsic importance of what needs me in order to exist. Urgency imposes what has to be done. Immediacy imposes it on me.

(107-9)

**RD:** These are the tensions that Zukofsky shows to be not only creative but procreative. The final paradox is that only humankind's perceptual apparatus accounts for the dichotomies that exist, and as such, is also the only hope of overcoming that polarity. The resolution of that tension may be the disappearance of consciousness. Agency is not necessarily a complicity but it must involve a process of identification. A broadened awareness of the mechanisms of subjectivity (including those that sometimes seemingly go against the grain of sociological matrixes but still acting in a coherence of dialogical processes) allow one to master language games and to attain the acuity to discern differences in contexts that might not otherwise be observable. Because one has a deft and more broadly realized means of reading the world, ideological and cultural templates, once thought to be totalizing and inflexible become fluid, the subject can now move between and choose among conceptual apparatuses. This may not be a complete political freedom as situations of tyranny and oppression would not completely vanish, but the individual (re)gains the ability to respond; such responsibility, in fact, is agency itself. The ratio of difference and affinity being the calculus of its self-consciousness, the subject gains access to the materials of its own existence--a consummation devoutly to be wished. Perhaps this is all to risk again a teleology, but finally I think not. There is an appeal to coherence, to seeing how a community might recognize modes of coherence that do not homogenize difference but find their negotiations as productive and generative. The question of agency persists amidst the conversation and agonism of a liberalism brought forth on principles of ethical responses to political and social conditions.

**RT:** Is it possible to translate art into the field of effective engagement or action? Is art political only when produced in relation to a community whose shared patterns of value and conviction are implicitly affirmed or visibly contradicted; or, better still, when representation discovers those other patterns--invisible, unspeakable--which a society fails to recognize? Is it imperative for artists to reject any situation in which their works are used as a mere symbol? In order to circumvent the limits of social discourse, how will artists and writers successfully question the function of the images used in their own medium? Beyond simply creating an art of indictment, can the artist contribute by effectively restoring a will to action? And how? How successfully can we produce as artists without succumbing to the new totalizations, teleologies and unquestioned utopias championed in the name of democracy, information and art? Can a responsible poetics be a serial site of struggle and satisfaction; contested kingdom--comes of radical opposition and creative incorporations; a place--and a habit--where work and pleasure in their necessary differences might at last come together? Writes Levi Strauss: "...utopian thinking does have real political purposes. For one thing, it makes explicit criticism of existing social and political arrangements from a radical rather than a reformist perspective. And for another, it offers a social imagination of how things might be different. The only undeniable requirement for change is that we can imagine it could be otherwise."

Again, Zukofsky:

An impulse to action sings of a semblance  
Of things related as equated value,  
The measure all use is time congealed labor  
In which abstraction things keep no resemblance  
To goods created; integrated all hues  
Hide their natural use to one or one's neighbor.  
("A"-9, 106)

**RT:** Your own work compels this "impulse to action" and I admire its appetite of intent and mind and the elegance and pace of what it has to say. The initial movement in the poem "Descant" stages a link between the natural world and music--informed as it is by the Zukofsky of "A"-1 where simultaneity of phrasing mirrors the collapse of the temporal conventions we give the world; it also rehearses the space between language and cultural translation, where the vestiges of desire (veils, heels) are pitted against the "geometry of forgetting. Articulate vanishings" so that the "sensuous marries moment with memory" in a remarkably confident and pointed "order of disclosure" (Oppen). Highly cinematic in precision and intent, the poetics here is one of erasures and becomings. Formally this is rhymed by the interlocking of utterance and listening all at once. Its erotics--a body amid the exegesis of silences, of "remembering in right angles." Its politics--historic sightings and meditation where barbarity and beetle are conflated, or philosopher and comic book; or, alternately, as irruptions of the world as ever-always concurrent--its politics is a long division that questions its own implications: "What we cannot speak of / must cover entire villages with ice"; or "What becoming abides / the insistence of doubt?" Like Emerson, the work is as intellectually rich as it is also skeptical of the elegance in ideas, hence the questions posed at the possibly conclusive weight of its own interrogations.

**RD:** We are brought back again and again to a central question, a question that indeed has political, personal, and epistemological underpinning. Largely your work prompts the reader to ask "What am I to make of this?" Whatever answer we provide, we find it is only, as the speaker of one of these poems confesses, "half of what I should have said."

Positioning itself outside of an ethics of accountability, or the poetics of consolation, (a frequent charge directed against lyric poetry), your *Gift and Verdict* sequence (as well as the recent sonnets) is an invocation of sorts, a calling forth of the imagination that thinks in metaphors of a "New World." Such an imagination sees how ironically "cracked paint on the ceiling" can be "an atrocity in the name of some collective self" when we have become inured to slaughter and "the ecstatic cataclysm of the terrifying lull."

Benjamin's minor fragment, "The Destructive Character," offers a description of that imagination. "The destructive character," writes Benjamin, "knows only one watchword: make room; only one activity: clearing away. His need for fresh air and open space is stronger than any hatred." This is to say the destruction that occurs is in no way personally motivated. This is the case when the daemon of a global market economy manifests its destiny in our everyday lives and imaginations. But this is a redefined New World, one already visited by the destructive character who, as Benjamin describes, has "few needs, and the least of them is to know what will replace what has been destroyed. First of all, for a moment at least, empty space, the place where the thing stood or a victim lived." It seems to me, and of course I know how attracted you are to Benjamin's thinking, that this is the space that these poems seek to explore and give voice to.

The various speakers that appear in (or as) your poems--the murderous, the journalistic, the marginalized, the predatory, and the haptic--and their multiple discourses, become as one voice--a voice that makes its way through various ethical and emotional registers, ("what happens / when you inhabit me thinking / here of each disordered instant with everybody / talking at once, all such a difficult web"). It is a voice that instead of using an elegance or eloquence to particularize what we might otherwise be tempted to pass over in silence, stupefied with grief, seeks out that which is "as natural to the body as hunger." Is this a way to confront violence--to face it without trying either to reconcile it or justify it?

**RT:** I see your work addressing these questions, for example, in the figure of the Exterminating Angel, that destructive force surging from its Old Testament apparitions as divine effect, to be embodied by human technologies of annihilation in the twentieth century, or as equated by Luis Buñuel: to a lassitude (of the bourgeoisie, of the Nietzschean herd) that makes possible the *exhaustion* of possibility. The imperative of your work--in this series and throughout *Edges of Even (If)*--is to ask how "the world fronts these effacings." It's a double impetus: it claims, on the one hand, that "All things swim and glitter. / Into irreconcilable composition" and, on the other, that "A splintered branch, gravity, chance / by principle renders (the dead) calcification--into / something, a non-pattern of exteriors--the impossibility of form." It's less a question as to the fact of violence and its various economies, and more a matter of how they function; how these "shatterings" are a displacement, a divestiture, a "sloughing off into elsewhere" that is the passing of the present into the future: "permanence undoes itself, renames / itself over and over. Each *this* a sloughing off into elsewhere. / What is place but contiguity? / All movement's a translation, a shattering..."

**RD:** Again we turn for context to Benjamin's essay which explains that the destructive character is attended by "the realization of how immensely the world is simplified when tested for its worthiness of destruction. This is the great bond embracing and unifying all that exists." To couch the violence, as the speakers of these poems sometimes do, in terms of "God's Will" is somehow to justify it, to make martyrs out of real people--rendering them as icons or tropes, and erasing their humanity. To be murdered is to have lived, but to be erased, *Gift & Verdict* tells us, is to have never lived at all. Is this erasure (forgive the tired trope) the byproduct of what happens when we make metaphors of people--transfiguring them? We transfigure to dissect. It is only in the negotiations of executioner and victim and witness that there's a chance that we might someday, as your work seems to suggest, "reappear in conversation."

**RT:** I believe that to make metaphor is an act of addition and not an effect of subtraction. The real humanity of victims and executioners also "renames itself over and over" in the figures of poetic discourse. Atrocity and joyousness, pain and pleasure, are only as tenable or untenable as the representations we may or may not make of them; that may or may not outlive us. This double world of latency and excess necessitates a productive "distrust of endings," a discontinuous series of what you pointedly call "prayers against closure." Benjamin's destructive character is clearly modeled after the Faustian vision of Marx

when he wrote: "All fixed, fast-frozen relations. . . are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and men at last are forced to face. . . the real conditions of their lives and their relations with their fellow men." Here I think Rorty and the Left he scrutinizes meet at a limit: specific social practices and specific changes in those relations may or may not produce desired outcomes; may or may not have a view to a system in the horizon. This "new thing" that Rorty dismisses as an "unknown" is no more and no less than the unforeseeable: a twofold hazard between the right to wager (to represent) and the right to remain silent (to be mis/represented). How is this movement to be fully rendered in its fugitive *and* potential complexity? How are we, both practically and ethically, to make audible or visible the edges of real relations and events *even if* they entirely fail our intentions?

**RD:** What are the ethics of figuration, one might ask in reading these poems, and what are we to make of this "order and lucible enormity"? Whatever the answer, it is a condition that demands our serious and immediate attention as if "our voices mattered amid this kind of predictable / thinking, institution of secrets civil silenced / or stammered over." How can we not speak in terms of complicity?

**RT:** I don't think we can disclaim our complicity, but I don't believe we're bound to repeat the admission endlessly to ourselves and to others in closed circuit and in single channel. I want a productive form of address to the aporia of thinking what some have christened "the impossible." One plan for the advanced guard, in art and politics, is to produce a series of motives (interventions, histories, poems) that compel the will or provide the imperative to make the present different. It was suggested in the late 1950s in Cuba by José Lezama Lima who preferred to think "the difficult" as opposed to the present loop or metaphysics of the "impossible." Politics as the art of uneasy possibilities--at the level of design and constituent subjects. Lezama began his astounding essays gathered in *La expresión americana* as follows:

Only the difficult is stimulating; only resistance that defies us can incite, maintain and span our potential for knowledge—but what, in fact, constitutes the difficult? Is it plainly that which is submerged in the maternal waters of the obscure? The original conception devoid of causality, antithesis or logos? It is form in its becoming by which a landscape turns to a meaning, an interpretation or a sheer hermeneutic, so as to point to a reconstruction marking its effect or disuse in a definitive way, its ordering force or muffled echo—in a word, its historic vision.

**RD:** In "A-8," Zukofsky writes, "Come we to full points here; and are et ceteras nothing?" (83). The et ceteras are the place to begin. If a vocabulary is in flux then conversation must go on in order to get things straight, which could in fact be a shorthand delineation of "the poetics of poetics." And the result is that the discussion can go on, in all its articulate stammerings and hesitations of inclination and affections, perpetually circling around and out, to begin again.

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## **Roberto Tejada**

□ From: Sleepless Sonnets

The Stranger: We must always make our distinctions so that they cut between the bones.

The Youngster: But Stranger, how can we tell whether we cut between the bones, or not?

—Plato, Statesman

If we recognize the variety and groundlessness  
of grounds, if we speak from perplexity as  
opposed to portrayal, if we are locked into the one  
approach dominant in our time when  
problems appeared at the periphery, “our distinctions  
so that they cut between the bones,” can we  
promise the ethical stand of employing critique  
or such assumption as to give voice and image  
in light of solace or satisfaction? There is the body  
which one and the person for whom.

\_\_\_\_\_ There’s a line  
of security glass against handgun, crowbar and  
baseball bat—is there no bond, none, to what follows

Piano wire of the last words said when it  
once led to ginger-kissing mr son of william  
tell invisible to himself, anfractuons.  
Monologue for which there is no conclusion  
no uproar no new guest amenities  
no smile of the unforeseeable no nurse  
to fill this rachitic prescription. Eroded  
sources for public support, prosthetic

extension of the media, engineer to  
employ me in this real and storied time  
together in single and multiple  
channels for the moving image  
when this is written in the dark when  
simulacra to surveillance as the secret  
cause was to history in duplicate, original  
demesne and mind-cure monument

The intelligentsia of Los Angeles—a clover  
leaf—is anathema to the Industry  
composed of citizens so obsolete as to think  
the elements of consensus and fit  
are an act of translation or the willingness  
to listen that allows for the true resolve  
how many of us on line & in rank  
when it all functions at lower best  
Electronic velocity to deepen capital's  
culture in the digital West an onslaught  
by money demands and scientific compliance  
in metropolises where rape is committed  
every fifty-four minutes and the new moons  
Caliban and Sycorax astronomers allege  
by radiation dark-red into hydrocarbons

of old in the history of the solar system

The memory of genocide or slavery or sexual  
abuse if the former event precludes a claim  
if it threatens to destroy me with lesser  
arms and munitions over land mines  
to blow off the phantom limb of the already  
severed self by degrees of experience. Developed  
nations later this week out of history endure  
in nuclear storming when global theory  
and new shapes insurgent welcome  
the largest diaspora in the world of who said  
can you see by the sequoias of California to  
Niagara Falls? Trace was the term you erased  
in translation. Or was it debt? Was it index?

Field of material contentions and conflicts  
in dreams of radical equality | market  
by the name of liberal assets unleashing  
in patterns uncontrolled so lawless  
and brutal a concentration of wealth  
and surplus such magnitude of deprivation  
ever thriving to be more dissatisfied or

satisfied in a culture at odds internal devoid  
of all patterns in civic life neither tolerant  
democracy nor the promise of a unified  
collective wager will survive its sway  
as the final arbiter of the social good.  
Prepared all told to safeguard the borders  
of external threats to our security  
Lingua franca in which this is written  
embody the moral bind | include us all

**Richard Deming**

□ The Exterminating Angel and a Prayer against Closure

Streetlight chokes the night with magnesium figures and the angel forgets why he's left  
the Lyceum, anyway.

On the stairs, a chair-shaped man offers a comic *apologia, apologia*.

Listen for Distrust endings.  
beetles munching at finality's delicate lattice work. Feel your body crack and disappear  
into the delicate curve of ear, until you become  
the listening, the ache,  
the longing to hear.

What's soul, anyhow, but a turning out of pockets?

Where is it that you said we find *now*? Ah, in the timesomeness of things:

Wine soaked fingers tug at the edges of a beard, each fugitive hair gone an oily  
red and gray.

Worth its weight in hair-shirted ablutions, loss counts for something.

With everything buckety and leaking from rusted seams,  
there's no way to hold

what goes. What stays? Gulls

mutter an empty parking lot.

Okay, the "I" as anthology of what's been

seen--. Experiences crowd

like puckered carp peering through

a frozen sheath of river.

The moon, adjectival, slides across the unconscionable curvature of space,

and as night falls always through each thing we'll ever love, could you expect a  
fabulist's bottom-line to sum it all up? Give us this day

our daily nuance

to which we are delivered. And in the plain meaning of things, empty

hands project shadow tricks against a proscenium arch.

*Desire's cheap* says the angel, reaching for the last cigarette in his pack.

□ *Mise en scene*

It isn't all about desire, about needing what lies

at the edge of the eye's horizon.

Say

it is winter, and through the snow

a dark figure-a man--crosses

a bridge between you and there. Say

he stumbles back,

his pink tongue uncurls like a comma as he calls your name,

any name as he falls, that is if

he does, over

the side, his scarf spread

above him like an upper lip, narrowing

against the winter sky.

How would you begin to describe it with words hollowed out by sound?

And how does this occur to you later, recur as syllables

and each vowel offers seemingly

the place where you'd want to invent a new beginning

but there is no new place that lies fallow, unburdened by appearance.

Instead you repeat to yourself: *The paddock door*

*is unlatched or*

*the burner*

*of the gas stove*

*is wide open*

and anxiety sets the world in motion:

an incantation for

which the universe stretched taut like the brim of a bowler hat into

Houdini pours

a pitcher of bourbon.

Or maybe it'll come back the way it did for Mary Rowlandson, as a series of removes:  
"But now I must turn my back and travel with them into the vast and desolate Wilderness,  
I knew not whither. I can remember the time when I used to sleep quietly without  
workings in my thoughts."

But memory is pixallated,

flickers horizontally and

*(did you try*

*the vertical*

*hold?)* the screen grows hazy

like the cigarette smoke darkening Rod Serling's

Botany 500 suit on a plastic black and white TV set .

.

Indirection as a means of accounting--the scarf was red, his boots untied,

*but yes you see still he did fall--and his fingers*

splayed apart--as if the right details could quarry

the moment before our eyes

but the truth

is you can't really say

what belongs, can you?

So invent a plot by which he is brought

to the edge of the bridge, which gives the authority

for the figure to slip.

*Wait, did you make the whole thing up?*

*(It'd be so much easier if it made*

*sense)*

Telling is how we gather, whatever its worth, the ordinary

and how we are fashioned--bewildered (and it is, as Rowlandson said,  
a wilderness)--

by a language in which nothing appears or

disappears, but draws

closer in--as the hushed crowd

circles Houdini and his empty sleeves.

Think of a mirror would you as a shoring up of trust

as a place to start, a place to agree

sequins

spin and wobble across the bedroom floor

yessing this moment into the next--

(sequence)

*What happened next?* The reflection does not hold.

The facts interrogate the space of a moment

while you

woke and fell over woke and fell over

the terror of partial knowledge

only to begin

to begin again.

Now a quarter whirls and clatters along

a tabletop collage of broken glass and coral.

But don't forget too the snow

and the bridge

and the man

who fell, not falls, and that

never

changed.

...