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LA THÈSE A ÉTÉ MICROFILMÉE TELLE QUE NOUS L'AVONS RECEU
Tuning Inner Radio

Thomas P. Convey

A Thesis
in
The Department
of
English

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts at
Concordia University
Montréal, Québec, Canada

November 1983

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ABSTRACT

Tuning Inner Radio

Thomas P. Convey

Taken as a whole, this manuscript is quite diverse; one could easily demonstrate how a variety of personal changes and poetic influences reflect shifts in approach and technique. But that remains extraneous to the poetry itself.

Some earlier poems use speech patterns in different ways; in later work this approach is reduced to occasional usages of common figures of speech. Then the words become charged particles in a transmission from a mind to a steady state on the page. Other poems are directed to the causalities that led to this particular poem in this time and place. The paradigm of history becomes a method of discovery, as well as a source of material. Sources include personal and family history, obscure legends and other material considered ahistorical. These poems document the forgotten, in some oblique or non-linear way.

The poems are arranged (loosely) in chronological order. This serves a dual purpose: developmental sequence becomes fairly evident, and the poems fall into formal and stylistical categories which correspond to when they were written.
DEDICATIONS

To my parents, without whom I wouldn't be here.

To the memory of my uncle Bruce Beatty, whose steady supply of cast-off library books made an avid reader of me by the age of ten.

To Richard Sommer, who helped me out of self-made holes, and pointed his sharp finger.

To all the friends who gave me both spiritual and material sustenance, especially in the final weeks of revision.

Thomas P. Convey
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HOT AND COLD RUNNING NEWS

Pale phallic mushrooms bloom
fullcolour Life-sized photo,
an embryotic cranium crusher.
on the TV news, palliative
shifts among the committed,
an entropy of opposites,
highway death and the Sunshine girl.
A blunt encombrance on the mute
taxonomy of a standing
bureaucracy.
In future, avoid the global village.

Suspended animation, The
Hanged Man, prophecy.
Tribal fashion and the changing
faces of group dissent;
speeding locomotives precede
the birth of nations.
Whatever happened to the "masses"?
People brood in rooms at dusk
without a light, now
apathy rhymes with anarchy.
But unemployment figures
are still very high.
You cannot turn off
that dripping tap.
WEATHER REPORT

Chinook time in the West again,

when tiny grit blows a warm
false spring through February.
You were trying to remember the name of it
and couldn’t let it go, so
you wandered alone as a crowd through the day.

Could have been

a special day, too -- started clear and blue

and stuck with it till dusk.

Back in your room,
the open pages of a book on the desk

flap the breeze, you
think of someone and your mood lifts

for a moment
twilight drains the air,

you can feel the snow melting
under your skin as you breathe.
DREAMING TAUTOLOGIES

R.D. Laing was laying on my couch speaking in short, fast bursts while I sat poised behind his head with pen and paper.

The statement... he said and paused.

"All forms point to the formless" and here he struggled to put it into words, is in and of itself a formless proposition!

Long pause, some heavy breathing:

The statement is pointless:

the finger is speechless!

And waving it in the air, breathed

a truly transcendent sigh of relief.

But don't you see,

(I said)

we need everything even and especially what isn't there;

nothing to claim and no one to blame,

a somewhere even a single finger makes its point.
INTERIM MUSIC

Waiting tables in restaurants
for others waiting for lovers
or taking lunches on expense accounts
with endless cups of coffee,
shredded matches and balled-up napkins.

Waiting for the check
if you please;
a tacky tip on a sticky table.

Waiting for the train
to leave the station, late to start
as you are early to worry.

Waiting for calamity the way
some would for the muse,
lying in wait and/or

Waiting to be Discovered.
THE QUESTION OF SCIENCE

Several Wide-eyed Hogs Grazing in a Field:

How light becomes a catalyst
when you're poised upon a sneeze

How you always know the next thing
some people are going to say

How pigeons do it/how fish don't

How aging is ... accomplished

How yawns become contagious

But especially how are poems delivered

And how does this one end

(why will wait).
AN HOUR OF MEDITATION

Silence.
Endless billowing silence
cloaked in a shroud

Immense dim cavity,
heavy with centuries
of ritual and stoic grandeur.

Walk up the center aisle.
Is it scale that distorts this distance?
Walk forever, no closer;
then suddenly the alter looms up,
you are under a dome.

Beams of light from overhang windows
thirty feet up around its base. Watch
notes drift for however long.

Is the bright emptiness
dissolving thought already, or
is this the beginning of blessedness—
contemplating slivers of light
with your mouth hanging open?
Pointed towers of Gothic romance;

perspective leading in a point.

The old iron cross hung over your standard castle,
elongated and stretched with a certain
attention to delusion.

Allusion to ascension.

Protection—

spikes set around the inner
sanctum of a chosen people.

Quite the glory days for architecture.
They don't build these anymore:
grandeur, statua, the challenge of ideals.
Thousands devoted their lives; jobs
passed down through generations.
The pilgrims still overawed; see them
whispering and tiptoeing around
their antsized dignity,
clutching slick black cameras
for talismans.

All the flash and glory
of a people trained to humility
concentrated in one grand structure; encrusted
in the four-foot thick walls,
in the rows of spires and vaulted arches
swallowing corners everywhere.

Darkness falling but no moonlight here;
just the dim imprint of angels on the ceiling.

Quick image of yourself in photographic
negative from some Forties' movie--
soldier takes refuge in church,
leaves gun at door, finds
strength in prayer. Quick meeting
with priest on way out
for confession and absolution.
Then back to front

with renewed vigour.

Your's only ghostly encounters
in this hallowed hole.

Still less a hole
than a hollow hall where history hangs;
 few such monuments left, and the rest
of history drops into holes
outside in the churchyard.
Then again

there are holes in history.
Been floating in the dust of ages
    for perhaps too long;
what weight presses on you, my witness,
and makes your feet hurt?
The gods all seem quiet,
nothing here but icons and whispering
ghosts in the hollow hall.
Icons:

    Christ on cross/bleeding wounds
    crown of thorns/stigmata/shepherd robes
    hands extended/embrace flock
    Virgin Mary same pose/crowned Queen
    of Heaven/St. Francis with sparrows
    assorted cherubim/seraphim

Whispers:

    rustling cloth/congregation rising
    from knees/bowed heads/murmurs
    of response/let us pray/look ashamed

Tired of walking
    through the holy relic,
you wonder about the whisperers, the living
    wind of humbler histories:
metal staircases/recessed windows/narrow
hallways/coatracks/hands rummaging in closets
pulling away curtains/face in the window
people turning away/climbing steps
turning from windows/turning into their homes
The domestic story is more her story,
An inside story.

But as the family grows, the story
folds into the homes;
slides quiet into place the way
a book looks good on the shelf.

History needs its artifacts—
only the eyes that see it
change
the axis of the past
to a source of wonder
turned to stone
so long ago and far away.

Now you can send a postcard;
maybe you'll wish you were there.
REFLECTIONS IN THE NIGHT

This has gone too far for a good time
and quickly too, you can’t help wonder
in bed later picking at your scab.

The receding hairline would look distingué
on anyone else, the belly
empty without the flattening ripples

you loved to see reflected.
Becoming victims of our appetites;
these days gesture hardens into pose

and sex with friends a quiet little joke

to cry over you go home

to sleep with your mythology.

Who needs the cold flash of gunfire
punctuating darkness

to know real life fears wider

and less direct. Smaller tragedies;
even vomiting is catharsis

but it does end quickly.
People say what
do you really crave; I mean
sure we're all getting older now
you ask yourself what comes after.
THE CITY RADIO-ACTIVE

1. The city was delivered
   (as the story goes) from the wilderness
to twins, who balanced
civilization on a set of hills
with great stone temples—
an so the jaws of law
loosed on empire on the world.

Now concrete is harder
   and harder
to defend and/or avoid,
building on the past.
   obsolescence.

Building a grid from the air
to flo-form concrete rectangles,
metal Lego and glass until the eyes
tire of reflections.
This is no walk along the Appian Way
   in your sandals, but
you can keep your history,
black boots riding up my heel.
A standing army is still
better than troops on the march.
The city today is so large:
people are lost
frequently; some permanently.
Lights flash on corners, traffic pours
in a distant river
you can't hear anymore
than a moving background of grey (or so).

Detonation of the mental grid factor.

Demolition regurgitates waste
(history is bunk, right
Henry?).

we need a new/nomenclature of space/
need to look/again at the plans/if they/
exist/find out/remember/how the body was/
supposed/to fit/in it/
2. Caught in your manic concreteeat and the dance of slanted grace;
I turn inside
a regimental poise
towering over swirling grit
blowing sheets of newspaper
funnel down long empty streets.
Heads sometimes appear
in a random window on the grid—
vertical
cuneiforms
of humanity,
white mice in a maze
where I stand waiting
for another face,
looking up
I have no words
you've heard them all anyway.
3. Spinning the dial on the way out of town:
collage of billboards and neon lights bag ladies postcards in bookstores waiting for the word pool halls bakeries buses demonstrations disorientation ice cream cones watching pretty faces passing stray cats mental walk-up steps to balconies people hang out of on hot nights the car washes and gas stations fire trucks roaring by with rubber figures affixed and garbage trucks those big trucks backfiring in the street make me jump bicycles drugstores windowdressers situating mannequins in display cases bars and restaurants galore foreign films (most are) live performance cheap sex peep shows strip shows men looking hard with shiny eyes
need loving man it shows
in muscle cars with heavy metal
music trying to beat resistance
down the gritty streets
the slippery streets
in sleet ing winter weather
forget walking
but the street vendors flower sellers
bums and artists all keep moving anywhere
but out to the suburban bungalows
in rows invisible overspills
of ennui now: what am I missing?
4. Tiny insect whine --
   a frenzy of forest violins
   follow my arm-waving
   conducting madly as I go in
   monotonous accompaniment
   to animal sweat and blood
   attraction of mosquitoes
   and gnats -- not reciprocal.
   Run inside to escape
the strains of desire so pure
you can't stand it.

Raising hand and foot these days
to spiders on the countertop,
beetles on the floor; only
moths flying at the light
stop me, shadows
flicker the sad obsession
of their grace; I cup
the dusty wingbeats in my hands
and toss them out the door, gently
as if performing a ritual.
Sounds collide and subside
on the other side of eyelids —
floating in the red and yellow spots.
the sun put in my head
while flies fuck in the bright heat
of day, and dragonflies rustle and dart.

Later in the city, living details
fuse with twilight; I flick a switch
and roaches scatter to the corners
of vision; distant sounds
register like bugbites on the skin,
an odd click in the phoneline,
muffled shouts and slamming doors
enter my awareness
like the sudden discovery
of yet another species.
5. Summer sun setting
light
compressed and leaking colour
on the edge of cloudless sky
filters down through buzz
def a long hot day settling
in red glow smeared across
a wide horizon.

By the time you turn
to look
over there that beam
shimmering out over the lake
shrinks
into the sun
set another evening
in a life you know.
it will set the same
way another day
though you won't see it
so.
6. Clear night broadcasts
from a distant city
come kiss your tender solitude
with tainted lips,
those lewd old rhythms
of rock'n roll; you dance
alone around the room
in firelight.
ADVENTURE STORIES: Part 3

All bears are black
in the dark they melt
away like shadows slipping into dusk.
You poke the flashlight
beam into the bush,
as if to catch this way
a noise you heard (a fear you herd).
when you need to see around
the corners of your eyes;
bears will all follow
their noses back again.

Curious creatures, bears;
just the sight of one
is an event, a true-life story
to push domestic bliss
from wonder, put
the primal teeth back into fear—
bears inspire raptures no longer
familiar to the daily world
of auto accidents, illnesses; anxieties
surround the banality of death.
Even the scavenger bears that gather
around the rural dumps show
the mystique of a threat,
show their appetite for human
garbage, don't care.
about the many ways of dying,
don't climb trees often
a's fear is far away
and ritual beneath them --
so "red, in tooth and claw"
they follow their own
runny nose and open mouth
until the day of falling over
dead for no apparent reason.
THE LEGEND OF THE LOON

Common loon, Great Northern Diver, Gavia immer.

(from Birds of Western Canada)

Most frequenters of our waterways and lakes are familiar with the long, loud laugh of the Loon. The loon has many other strange, wild notes; among them one beginning low, rising high, and then dropping suddenly. It is often noisy at night or just before a storm and birds frequently call to and answer one another across the water.

The full moon, reflecting luminosity at the surface of things; people in cities enact tiny helpless passions and dramas of tenderness, oblivious to the cold pull, but fighting it desperately.

The moon would sound just like a Loon if the moon expired full and bright on a lonely lake at night.

The Loon will dive at a boat's approach to surface minutes later at a greater distance; from the boat they can watch the bird that never misses a catch.
And the Loon laughs long and loud,
Penetrating to a deeper sense of solitude.
The Loon is a loner,
and lets the whole world know it.

But it is also said
each Loon is always the only Loon,
the black shadow of a full moon
shining onto a dark lake,
At night she cries
to join her bright double in the sky,
at morning when alone once again.
The calls echo and bounce
out over that sheer surface of dawn,
echo through the mind long after.

And the Loon laughs, exulting in her secret,
twin-faced as any moon.
TRAIN ON PLAIN

The dot at the vanishing
point becomes a line
growing smoothly into train
which carries its perspective
the speed of arrival
moving thunder in a
huge sudden metal weather
where you are standing in the rain
the train in passing carries
memories of journeys
joys of destinations
riding inside a passing
train of thought now fixed
to coupled metal car wheels
lipped on rails nailed tight
to greased black ties
imbedded in the solid mound
of oily earth and stone
passing trains in the past
roadbeds anointed in oil
over blood for the dead they keep
the sacrificial bones
of unknown Chinese Slavic Irish
under iron railway wheels
a stink of diesel
mixed with spray and steam
from a dream where you are standing
in the rain
with metal purpose pounding by
the moment stretching past the memories
an old one-armed switchman swinging
a lantern at a crossing
so many men with the train in their veins
retire and die
suddenly the train is past
and you come back
before the waning line discovers
the vanishing point and disappears
again you are here (standing).
Alone in the rain.
FUNEREA L WEATHER

I feel this is how the earth forgets,
   even as I stand here
in the middle of winter to remember,
in this white land of vague borders;
   even with my eyes shut tight
I see the drifted snow
against the fences by the road;
fences that mark property, solidly
square interests and esteem of families.

Even with the wedding ring
upon her finger, neck circled once with pearls,
it looks like nothing will ever move again
but wind in the trees and shadows
of shifting light,
even her body on a field of white
satin puffed around the head
and bolstered in the narrow box
we guided to the plot, a stark hole
pushed through snow and frozen crust
to deeper, steaming earth;
   even with such careful
ceremony and solemnity interred,
her memories slip back into the ground
from where they came, back
to the shifting ground of endless seasons;
I hope her bones won't be too cold.
DREAM SONG

What can the matter be, oh

What did your mama see in that
   moon grown fat,
What did I smell in the tropical night,
What did I hear out there in the darkness,
What did I feel in the gun-metal morning,
What did I fear where colour is useless,
What do we want from impossible darkness
we hope for our hope to come back
   within reach of

a night within moonlight so bright
and so twisted, silver and shifting,
so upside-down laughing;
What do we do when the forest ignores us
in our armour of metaphors, myths of deliverance,
When dragons fly treetops we murmur and shift
   where a jungle of faces
surrounds us in laughter;
you wake up clammy, and wrapped in a dream
elusive to remembering, lost in confusions.
   you fear to forget.
A CRUEL TANGO.

Moonlight throws a strange glow
on limbs entwined with shadowy flowers
rustling in the bed; softer than petals,
your mouth becomes a wish we cannot voice
and all your tears and laughter disappear
into the expanse of a moment unfolding.

Bodies abandoned to each other—
clasping creatures in a rootless garden,
in dreams where we are no longer alone,
no longer together: running from danger:
lost and naked, seeking cover,
far from the perfect landscape of bodies;
the smooth weather of tenderness has turned
into weaknesses; we stalk the night angles.
ELEGIAIC HYMN (WITHOUT MUSIC)

in memory of Sean Madden

suddenly one of us was gone
belonged to memory
to earth
to pain refusing to admit
belief when seeing his shadow
reflected only in each other's eyes
hard to look
and look away
sharing in this way what we thought
was tragedy
we spent too much time
clinging to each other
to pity/drugs/alcohol
staring at the wall
and determined alone
to suffer our way to purity
as if the idea of fate could save us
we were younger then

now too much time has passed
forgetting
yet I could go on again
describe his face his hair
what we did then
  how we laughed together
his resemblance to another,
hero of youth  more memories
but we can't go back
  why bother
death is often large as life
why make it larger

this bouquet of words
these flowers gathered
are cut to fit my elegy
in the shape of an arch
over the years to mark one(ness)
the heart will remember
POTATO POEM

They were first called staples because they stuck to the insides, slow riders on gravity and peristalsis.
By now I've eaten more potatoes in my life than I could possibly carry.
And learned little more of them over the years of meals—habits take root in taste acquired.
They become what the stomach requires.
   The stomach is never fooled.

Great-great-grandfather shipborn on route to Canada among early boat people,
a refugee from Ireland of plagued potatoes.
Later reports of his gypsy/logger mystique of high black booté and gold earring,
running logs downriver from the Kazabazua to the Gatineau;
his wife bore eleven children of which six lived more than a year.
My great-aunt says her name is unknown, supposing with a sad smile the woman must have been Metis.

Grandfather on my father's side born in Liverpool of a Belfast shipwright and an English woman; took off for Canada at fifteen married a Rooney one of the Ottawa Valley Rooney's where in Bells Corners a Gaelic lilt still sings in their speech today.

A

My ninety-three year-old great-aunt passed on some of the stories to me; though bent like an old root herself she keeps more than she can ever tell and she's told plenty; enough for silence to rise and fill in other mysteries.

Now she reads the paperback kind at the rate of about three a week, All her friends are dead now, have been for years.
But still the question of origins
hangs in the air like kitchen smells
coaxing a hunger from curiosity.

In my family hungry mouths
were always filled
with, yes potatoes
(always lots for a second
helping, yes please)
axis for meals
since I could swallow mashed,
and though the stories of ancestors
have trailed off
lost among the many memories
of stories from so many pasts—
most now buried
or forgotten in the chinks of busy lives,
I am still eating the only past I know.

In a hash brown or french fry,
even in a crisp salty chip
the taste of that tuber persists.
Mashed with butter or baked browns
do the trick,
or split or stuffed;
I now salute them all before I eat.
Cooked and served or sold at market
fine
but a root is still a root
a knobby node never quite round
it lays covered
with earth and studded with eyes
looking into the darkness,
growing downward
in a way
we never quite understand.
Perhaps someday I will convey my own.
STATION DRIFT

Prowling among my thoughts all day
and hanging in the air between
my body and the shadow
of your embrace; there is nothing
more substantial.

Since you are gone,
I mine the memory;
beneath the grand plans and gestures
a vein of feeling, a shining
liquid ore running between us.
I know it's there
under all the laughter
and the steady flow of talk
I don't remember.

I wasn't thinking of you
all day today,
don't want to fall into that sediment
of feeling and I hate
drinking alone.
Maybe you're out there wondering
what is material between us.
Or perhaps you thought you got away,
now caught in my mind
so loathe to maethe the heart;
    I can't even land a kiss
since you are gone now, and
you left behind this poem.
MAN OUTSIDE WINDOW

From beyond the edge of light
I watch you
From the darkness, standing
Silently to watch you
Sitting alone
As if you were there forever
For me you'll stay
With the lamplight your perfect halo
And a book on your lap.

You yawn and you stretch
Your animal pleasure
I shiver you moved.
For me I know
You move in me
You grow clearer to the eye
I can't turn away now . . . wait.

No wait
Come back.

You were mine. My picture.
My perfect
Living joy.
STAGE WHISPERS

(Love in three acts)

1.
Love happens, no one knows
why love just happens by on its own
while they are out walking
the dog or something
then they are alone together
naked as lightbulbs
to syncopate the skin
with movements like sonatas
fierce embrace and poetry
trailing from the fingertips
scar to scar across once-blank flesh.
Then dancing perhaps
some flawless dream pas de deux
among the puffy clouds of course
embalmed in bliss they sleep
the sleep of angels
side by side

one inside the other.

2.
But lovers always seem to wonder
about losing self in others;
the touch blunts a bit
and kisses start to cloy.
Love gets desperate
for room to breathe, so
love takes a stroll.
Then both ghosts escape
one night to groan about
the good old times in the summer
of marzipan kisses interspersed
with words—sweet nothings
you understand all gone now
meanwhile the other two:
are arguing ad nauseam
trying to shut out the meddling
phantoms of themselves;
so much depends on so little now,
the next few minutes will tell.

3
I forget how it ends.

But it does end;
ghosts don’t play so well anymore
except in reworkings of Macbeth.
One thing is sure,
when you hear the tears and whiney voices
pleading for god
then it’s denouement,
love waves goodbye with wings on.
OR: Love waving from the wings.

Exit. Curtain. The End.

Thunderous applause, standing ovation.

House lights go up. Applause continues until the actors refuse to come back.
IT HURTS SO GOOD

There he was in my doorway
wearing his cool
cartoon shark's sneer,
private eyes
upon my disarray--
looking for a quick conviction,
no doubt; the weather report
came over our faces.

Then black clouds rolled up
to the bed like boulders,
where the quarry lay revealed
in the jerky, armour-clad moves
that soon wound to a stop;
later, shattered glass on the floor,
a brick-bound note with all your love.
I walked barefoot across the shards
for a view without reflections.
LIVE MASKS

The mask comes off
in darkness
there are no reflections
and no one saw you
dancing with your shadow in the pale,
moonlit street.

The mask comes off
in pieces;
when you couldn't breathe, you
had to break it, claw it
off, if only
to save face.

The mask comes off
when the face turns to stone,
and all that can change it
is weather—slow aging.

The mask comes off
but still talks back;
what can you do but accept
the dilemma, and wonder
if someday you will remember
when love first (con)fused identities
as it always seems to do.
TRIBUTE

It shakes
It quivers and quakes
Dominates
It runs around in circles
Stands up on its hind legs
to sink its teeth in moonlit flesh
It whispers and it roars
Acts like a total bore
It always leaves too soon
or comes too late--
no not always
But it's not a party
And it's not a wake
Somewhere between us
It eats and sleeps.

You can be in it
And not know it
No one knows it
No it doesn't make the world
go around
It stops it.
Undervalued, overrated, base,
Sophisticated,
This dormant virus
We carry within us
Flares up and fills us;
Some are sick with it,
at this moment.
Others would deny it—go ahead,
Say it doesn't exist.

Then it follows you may
require:
to stay pretty
stay witty
die young or
at least quickly.
THE PLACE BETWEEN (IN PACE)

Think
of a wide, white expanse
without signs or places of rest,
lacking also
punctuation and sensible speech.
Now you are approaching the bridge,
which offers one choice.

When you begin to cross,
the bridge will speak
this way:
You make me real
in the passage
you may or may not remember
more than a feeling of
an image, or a vague
sense of loss at the end.

Bridges sometimes seem
to babble, or what runs
beneath and what surrounds
them does; steps
on the bridge beat
a soft, regular rhythm
like the here in the (heartbeat) now.
Bridges have impact, are targets in warfare, link the past to a specific future with the length of a span; the span of a hand writing 'a bridge'
is one small part of someone's plan, but it's not marked on all the maps -- this bridge is also a map.

I am (we are) still crossing the bridge, but it could end something like this (for me) some day:
We start across together not in lockstep, but casually we step out from the bank onto the structured, linear mass suspended in the air over water and over time; we are crossing it together, but I linger in the middle to look down, and you pass me by. You look back from the other side, the bridge is empty -- I had stayed too long looking down, or
maybe I was never there,
never started across, so
didn't fall or jump (would I
really leave the poem
unfinished, or might that
make a better ending?),
like a dream forgotten
on waking up—
but the bridge still stands,
solemn as any epitaph.

Finally,
since you alone arrived
or were delivered, you
would be obliged
to make the appropriate ending.
Or you could decide
to forget it—
pretend it never happened,
no one would ever know.
THE RADIO TRANSMITTER

1. Telephone is radio in reverse:
a one-on broadcast
with no audience
only obedience to the ring
the phone rings the hand
answers you say hello
you do not begin to salivate
you do begin to communicate
trading impulses from the verbal-specific
regions of the brain
electrochemical stimulus/response
translated into language, then back
to teledata impulses
then into words again, that's all
mere words of all kinds:
petitions, pleas, complaints
seductions, obscenities and business
propositions—
the verbal topography seems endless,
amongous
as numbers and lethal
as words can ever be—
are you receiving?
2. Cities wired with rubber-coated voices coming from synthetic webs, whole nations are talking, to themselves and others are listening when wires are not crossed when time fills the gap between mouth and ear it makes the spark that keeps the motors humming and the satellites in orbit speak up here reach out and touch someone with a real live wire you are charged by the minute no matter what you say you pay to play this numbers game

and that echo on the line: sometimes remnants of another conversation returning from some digital delay drift past, transforming the past to posterity

(monthly statements)
nothing is ever lost
   just fades away
to come back one day perhaps
voices on a giant tape loop
on slow rewind, stretching out
to the far end of an orbit
around the sun, radio waves
on a cycle of eternal return
and the arrival of these signals some day
distorted into some new language
may convince the scientists to decide
it's messages from aliens.

So there is no reason to miss
   your calls
answering is more than a service to others
it's your contribution to the future course
of history
but keep in mind
a busy signal is not a symbol or a sign
    and silence is no more
than whenever you happen to pull the plug.
3. Sunday service(phone-in show):
With receiver firmly in hand,
listening to attendant humming

of the dial tone

awaiting the offering of a call,

point finger extended to dial

the numbers seven of them

in fervent hopes of celebrating

the mystery of speech

long pause as you wait to speak

between the lines

cast over still waters

before telecommunications

before conversation

the blind navigation of mute bodies,

ugly grunts and hand signals....

But lo, the ringing in your ears

breaks with a click

you voice leaps into your throat

but before you can utter

a single redeeming phrase

you are hanging on

indefinite hold

in telephone pergatory

with Muzak for cherubs on the line.
4. Greetings and bon mots.

A bit of business, arrangements.
Write from a large place,
said Richard then out of the blue
sky today, uh-huh it's sunny here too
-- so you can still see the tiny but --
expand your scope, I finished,
he wasn't using one though
sitting he said watching
the lawn out of view
of the ruined grain elevator
out the window of the receiver
(a two-way glass)
I can see his words quite clearly now,
the line that finally got through
itself: keep in touch.
THE SHUT-IN PROGRAM

Yesterday's People

(in memory of Patricia Melvin)

In good weather you can see them almost anywhere; their strange hats and baggy clothes mark them, pale wrinkled refugees from another age; they walk slowly by themselves, in pairs arm in arm or on a cane through parks and public gardens, libraries and galleries (making the best of the Golden Age); you might see them shopping, or sitting propped on benches as if waiting for something you can't see.

These are the old you look past or through coming slow and wide along a sidewalk, plodding obstacles to the busy day you're moving to meet, so step around
this witness, this living
proof of where life leads;
you have no time for stories
told slowly in faltering speech,
with wheezy breathing and a high,
    cracked voice.

You heard all the stories already
from your own grandmother,
a heavy-hipped old woman always
shuffling around the kitchen,
always whistling, an empty sound
to a tuneless song she knew
helped pass the time
    and blow hurry away.

With her you visited.
your kinship: a family
tied in names and lives through each
generation of birth and death,
tied through callers and letter-writers,
the shelves of faded photographs
and the stories you had heard
    so many times
you half-listened to humour
an old woman whose stories
became much more real only
after she was gone.

Does anyone ever find the time
to look so far ahead;
to see yourself standing
in an open doorway watching
the busy street and living
in a dream of memories, alone.
and living it all again
so slow and clear you would want
would have to tell
someone, and you would sit there
waiting for someone to tell
before it all slipped away....
THE PRIVATE EYE
ON TRANSUBSTANTIATION

(Today's speaker: Philip Marlowe)

7:45 AM  Leaned in on glass but first
checked lock; leaving nothing

to chance. Ran keen eye up trunk
line from base-- no visible tip,
just sway in the upper branches,
Maybe trunk takes root in sky.
Seamless web of events going on
here everything looks totally natural.
Wind playing light on limbs
as gusts shift leaves up there.
Nice effect.
Limbs seem random
decisions on the stiff trunk
fringed with leaves
and shimmying a little
like a grass skirt on some
boreal hula' girl.

8:02 AM  Sat down stiff-necked; mouth dry
from hanging open looking for treetops
per debris on desk by the window --
how many sheets complete a tree?
How much loose leaf. Could rake them all into one neat pile for burning, but killing poems such a private thing, unlike forest fires and/or chain saws. You'd think they could comprehend the beauty of the thing. Beauty puts the poets under arrest for illegally stopping the mind. Even for just a minute; I don't care if it makes you feel better, buddy. Next time use a Kleenex. Trees sprout them too.

10:20 PM Several whiskies into the evening:
Recalled some old saw about poems never as lovely trees, et cetera. Invariably written on a slice of varnished wood and hung over the toilet. You can scan a tree, but you can't read it. The poet drawn to reflection, to perfection, to the tree outside the window,
shivering in the wind and --

alright, that's enough

mooning all over the page;

next I'll be cutting one down
to drag inside

for hanging blinking lights

and shiny garlands on.

No respect.
ONE SPRING PLANTING

Two poets on an evening stroll
in a city park.

One says
to the other ---
Listen. That tree is trying to speak.
I can hear its leaves whispering
and the low groan as it clears its trunk.

The other replies -- Trees can't
speak to us, but the wind relays
messages in the semaphore of the branches'
sway, and the ever-expanding spasms
of growth from tip to root
joins us to their mystery
right here at trunk level.
Yes, the sap is rising. I can feel it.

Back and forth they argued
for the longest time, calling
each other all kinds of names, and
each seemed to really know the innermost
feelings of this tree, any tree.
But neither convinced the other,
so they remained
rooted to the spot and unable to shut up.
When morning came they were gone,
in their place
two large weeping willows
which remain to this day.
¡VIVA RADIO LIBRÉ!

Landlords are a breed apart;
   a curious cross
between city seagulls
and rapacious climbing vines.

They never quite emerged
   from the primordial slime;
landlords are ciphers for payment.

Landlords are fences
and overflowing toilets;
landlords are anal retentive;
   their assholes are keyholes.
they look through at you.

To be a landlord is most people's aspiration.

We're moving out at the end of the month;
   but sooner or later,
everyone does.

We check the writing on the wall;
   they say home is where the heart is
but under lock and key.