

PARADIGM APARTMENTS

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TOWARDS A RESEARCHABLE QUESTION. . . .

1. It Must Contribute to Theory

*The more abstract the truth you wish to teach, the more
thoroughly you must seduce the senses to accept it.*
Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*

Baptism is a drop of water
against the black hair of a baby.
Confirmation classes are nascent girls in organdy,
a red bishop in a red aisle,
and, in the hand, a psalter.
The metronome of ritual counts arabesques.

A virus raps upon the chromosomal door.
To reform theory, must one visit its cells?

Power coils in each fiction of approach.
Which narrative DNA shall code the itinerary
of a question? Knowledge arcs between motion and rest.
In the intensity and meaning of knowledge,
who then shall declare what's best?

Induction, that rapacious concubine,
waits and wades, sorts her wash and watches.

Sociable deduction observes a selection of contracts.
Ethical, he parts what hair remains.

Critical theory, the Pharisee,
wears her conviction on her sleeve.

Gossips in black, grannies from round the Mediterranean,
save as grounded theory that which fits and works.

A hermeneutic flickers hermaphroditically
in the forest of many meanings.

Positivistic bees have hived the walls,
waxed vast hexagonal nests
and eaten joists. They hum the hymn
we hear where leaking honey slows our feet.

Does research reduce to mere
conversation among conventions?
A motley parade prowls our inner and outer concourse.
Should we raze or reconsecrate
our temples of theory?

Paradigms strike calculated bargains
and set up shop as agents, whores, money-lenders.
Minds of researchers are made-up
in magazine styles. I fear typecasts
as I fear religion.

*Genius, like a rabbit, while alive, can only be shot at.
It cannot be eaten until dead.*
Schopenhheimer

Genius. In science--the general rules an army;
each atypical conforms or falls away;
the denominator is common;
every force invests in fields.
In art--a little metaphor can poison a lot of wells;
outriders, life outriggers, are glorified:
not lopped-off, they bear freight.

I mistrust much dedicated syntax.
We attempt a language of science,
but we speak as artists. The angels
at our elbow are of metal or of stone.
Is it blessed to wrestle a name from texts
within this stronghold? Where might we shout
a healthy prophesy?

The few gods I've met seem bored by understanding,
prediction, control. Evenhandedly,
they pass out knowledge as emblem, experience, joke.
Their distant cosmic laughter rumbles
like the purr of a cat, warm belly by my ear.

We snooze.

Pattern holds until it overflows.

When is a model a house in which to shelter?
I enter the workshop on tip-toe,
reach for a monkey-wrench, force one nut,
then hook the tool back upon the wall.
I don't want to drive through Alabama
and see Nataraja dance in his circle of fire
within each twinkling eye.
Not that the universal dance is out of place
in Alabama. Nor that I am uncharmed
by the beauty or the concept of Nataraja--it's this:
when a carpenter carries a box of tools on a journey,
she fixes broken chairs while listening
to stories, and the stories told
are inspired by the fact she arrived, kit in hand.

2. It Must be Manageable

I dream I am naked and seated
on a wooden floor, surrounded
by babies and toddlers.
I dream I attempt to dress myself
and, simultaneously, prepare a meal.
I dream a man with a chain saw who jumps
from the bleachers to the gym floor.
I dream he taps my chest, then rests
his chain of steel thorns across my breast.
Dreaming he means to pull the cord,
start the roar, slice me.
I twist. The bar of his saw strikes my spine,
its line nicks my hip as I fluster away
to hurry preparation
of this crazy meal that refuses to realize.
People arrive and collect unfed babies.
I give up hope of clothing.
The teeth of his deadline avulse
thighs, waist and trunk as I work faster.

3. It Must be Parsimonious

*Westron wind, when wilt thou blow?
The small rain down can rain.
Christ, that my love were in my arms,
And I in my bed again.*
Anon

From the middle ages: a seafarer
becalmed in a downpour,
swore
simply
beseeching cause or force for an effect.
Not mentioning any facts on board,
he repeated:
rain
and said what he wanted.

I can see him
as if on t.v.,
shoulders soaked,
hands chapped,
wet cloth struck to his ankles.

*Law of parsimony: the logical principle that no more
causes or forces should be assumed than are necessary
to account for the facts.*
O.E.D.

Economy permits reiteration.
The charm of parsimony:
a nugget lingers,
despite
the slop
of memory. I hear
from 1963, a young professor's voice:
This is the most beautiful poem in the English language.

Every theory deserves
sparing expression.

My poem
is not enough
silent.

4. It Must be Significant: Fanny Bay Bill

Audrey wrote a fiction about living on the islands. Bill, who used to have a ponytail and prefers books about fungus or bathhouses, read Audrey's novel. "It's the best description of island hippy life ever written. I know six of her characters," he allowed. I think there is a difference between relevance and significance, but it's sometimes hard to tell.

When you share a conceptual framework, detail fascinates and vehicles need only go. Odd trucks run along local roads.

There are several stories about how Fanny Bay got its name. Carol, who lives with Bill, claims the reference is to one of Thomas Hardy's characters, but when I looked the book up, the woman was called Fanny Day. Others say a sailor admired a girl squatting on the sand shucking clams and, laughing, signed the place in his log for her memorable ass. Others outline the peninsula on a map and suggest it resembles a gluteal grin. How significance is found tells first about the mind doing the finding. Second, it suggests context or precedent. Third, but only obliquely, it reflects upon the object named.

Fanny Bay Bill has a rule: leave things better than you found them. He left two fridges full of labelled microcondia; his dissertation is on molds. So, who is to say, what is funny or important, quirky, relevant or significant?

5. It Must be Testable

A fence rotted at its foot:
severed boards flop in a sleeve of vines.

A man is held up by veins.

My death is held up by veins.

Weeping over the onion
in which nest perceptions within concepts
within beliefs within attitudes within values.
Slicing intellectual history across its root.

Do you not believe
a man is held up by veins?
Can you see
a shuddering fence
coated with Virginia Creeper?

WANTING

Talking to the ghost of desire
whose left hand conducted a symphony
far from my neck this winter, I ask him
why he moved his rehearsal hall,
his stirring of the air before his orchestra,

his exuberant timing, his encouragements,
his whole precinct far, far away--
why he vacated his former premises near my throat.
Talking to him as I walk is like praying,
like attending to interference behind an announcer's voice.
I complain in this silent way, and listen
in case he might reply with a phrase,
a throw-away cadence I must be quick to catch.

Partly, I'm behind my ear, finger across my lips,
and partly I'm yelling at myself: numbskull!
Trudging across campus through snow,
angry at myself for wanting romance,
angry at the ghost for not coming to woo me,
spitting damn angry at this fucking trap of wanting,
kicking my loneliness so it remembers
what hurt feels like--I don't need that again--
marking the past in a neat diagonal
of feet pointing in the direction of maturity,
listening to such a clamour, such fierce warnings,
the dominant signal on this radio: woman, smarten up.
Pounding in silence through the sparkling afternoon.

I dream of my aunt, who died five years ago,
upstairs holding court after breakfast in an English hotel.
Her body--respirited--recognizes me.
She crumples, saying my name.

Which part of me is this five-year old corpse
who recognizes me, even though I look different,
and she wasn't expecting me to turn up?

Can't I just stay in your arms where it's cozy
and I know the smell?

I don't want to want this much.
I don't need to want like this.
Can't I be satisfied
with a cranky, busy, sick and tired man
whom I've known for five years?

THINKING #1

Like two deer
our minds graze.

Knowing is a grazing.
It is mealy salal berries.

It is the blue stain on her two cheeks.

She sat on the sod over the septic tank,
age two, to look out
across the street curved
like the scar where an eyelid used to close.

Knowing is a crescent of uncurtained houses
with vinyl siding, each centred
in a cleared lot below her.

Deer startle when the child stands
to touch our hides. Mind steps out of view

Two does wade uphill.
Our toes skid on granite, sink
one after the other, in moss
where eyelashes of forest
were not cut away.
We graze as an onshore breeze grazes.

Thinking is the eight feet
of the two of us parting,
wading a waterfall of salal
above the duroid roofs of western suburb.

Did it occur that the thought
of us grazing is only one's dreaming?
Does knowing thought move,
sift through dozing.
Thinking is the blue-eyed gaze
in a new daughter, mid -morning,
her fists full. She picks
a rhythm for grazing uphill.

THINKING #2

This concept of dog:
at arm's length, the sun
tunes in one station of rainbow
from the invisible tree of prism.
The sun-dog warns of snow
and worries a farmer.

This concept of farm:
domed turrets of a castle,
all aluminum, cement, limestone.
Its causal trickle of Holsteins
frozen in a contour of the hill.
Wheels of cheddar roll from its cellar.
The farm a fortress in a country criss-crossed
with the inroads of concessions.
The cows monitored by computers.

This concept of a cemetery:
congregation of chalky monuments
bleached more pale than corn husks
in mid-November fields. Patrons,
leaving the stadium, game over.
A new headstone of pink granite is smaller,
as if its body were gone, sunk into the soil.
The old slabs stand, tilted, the height
of puberty. If they walked to town they'd look
fire-eyed and thin.

The dog, for Diogenes, was swift
empirical thought, carrying all things with him.
Dogs of the spirit world grin
at the gate of Tibetan temples.
Fire dogs guard a burning log.
The dog star is fixed and bright.
Dogs of war hunt without knowing mercy.
Dogma has lost the mobility in Diogenes symbol.

Where I come from, a dog is a grey shark,
the fish without scales who measures lines
and snaps them. Time is the hunger
that folds things neatly in its chest of fog.
Death rides on the branches of cedar in boxes of cedar
crested with frogs or bears. The land
streams through a farm like thoughts through
one mind. I am fascinated by the strata of concepts,
each layer distinct, for all purposes of speaking.
A prismatic arrangement of earth-dogs
pads through the landscape, warning
of ice-age, warning of those nearly unimaginable
flows of lave, rock, glacier, ocean
into whose contours we crowd now, this winter morning.