

The Other Voices of Things



Gregory J. Furman

1997

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the rationalist

fifty years of rational thought
have enabled me to rationalize anything
so now i stop thinking
for a living

the pigeon

i puff myself up
in the mirror i strut half spent
my feathers full out, unbent
and proud and proud and proud
but when the deck door opens
i fly away gray.

fire log

i insanely seethe and crackle
with torpid rage white hot
throwing off the heat of my convictions
until i am much reduced
to ashes of my former self.
what i was i'm not.

winter tulips

we stand red faced
on our hot fireplace mantel
our waxy green arms astray
"back," our small pink voices cry,
"back, to the soft blown loam,
back to peregrine skies,
robin clouds and new mown hay,
back to stars through green house glass,
back to clipped-fingernail, august moons,
back to the laughing calls of mating loons,
back to fireflies in midnight summer grass."
new york city, february 2, 1997
the blue pitcher

no sooner am i brimming over
with the milk of animal joy

than i find myself empty and dry.
no sooner again.
i'd rather be fluid
than this transparent, shifting-leveled vessel
with unpredictable draining
of level after level after level...
my only gift -
when suddenly struck,
no matter how lightly stricken,
i brightly sing.

the knife

so... sometimes i'm sharp.
sometimes i'm dull.
so what?
i cut through.
i have an edge
and legendary little patience.
so what?
flow of blood aside,
nothing fills my heart
as much with murderous rage
as the rounding insolence
of little green or black-eyed peas.

the mirror

i have no life of my own
and no one pities me.
i play hide and seek
every minute of my working week.
i have no life of my own.
no one is certain
who or what they see in me.
i cannot speak.
i'm totally dependent on light
and strangers' eyes for stranger sights.
i'm utterly alone.
my greatest greatest misery
is my endless and inexhaustible inability
to see or understand who's "me."

the other black sock

far more perplexed and perplexing

than any roving black sheep,
as bovine as a flatulent 'moo!'
i jealously guard my patch of floor from dust.
i wait alone and sad
underneath some couch or plastic garbage bag.
waiting desperately to be discovered,
mercifully released to clothesline and sun
dreaming in my dark of daylight and morning glories
amid dusty dimes and dustier pennies,
next to a tv guide one year old last week.
after a warm wash and tumble dry,
my second favorite fantasy of fantasies,
i confess, is being number two,
no, make that number one.
on a pair of warm and naked feet,
enjoying a warm and naked guest!

the tea pot

sure i'm smug.
smug smug.
my, my. me, me.
full and round.
proud of myself.
my life is an artist's
with a bourgeois heart
always on the verge of over-boil.
my ability to draw a crowd
amazes even me
especially when they smile
and still smiling pour
my hot and steaming, my beloved, tea.
sure i'm smug.
smug smug,
my, my. me, me.
suits me fine just all the while.
i effusively admit it. I do.
i've an old and sacred duty,
my god given right, to be my god, me.
i'm comfort and companion to a bunch of crazy cats,
and to a host of other odd, assorted, aging cozies.
to silly shivering cucumbers and pink baby shrimp
on those crust-less, clueless toasties.
i'm their god, i toil
full and round,
the shining epicenter

of their universe at every brunch or lunch or tea.
and, remember to remember, i'm sort of royal too.
i blow my whistle whenever things seem too rosy.
i use my steam and heat and rage as princes do
their canons and rapiers and foils.

kudzu

it's a given
i am insidious
gypsy vine and pauper
to kill me requires imagination
i revel
in my own obstinacy
and the company
of my victim trees
my nurture
i am the author
of their inevitable
doom and asphyxiation
take glee
in their aborted bloom
in their bare leave
i blanket them in green snow
they will be dust
before me
long before i agree to go
to predatory heaven

the violent televisions

frustrated witnesses to a half century's clammy programming,
to us it really really seems like so much 'cha-cha-cha.'
our white blinking eyes agape over beds and living rooms.
far and wide witnesses, waiting for the next sonic boom,
silent universal monitors to lifted legs, groans, moaning voices
and arching, straining backs and flailing, sweat-soaked sheets,
to seething, sweaty Kama Sutra beats,
to mad and moist erotic scenes
just out of reach beyond our hotly palpitating screens,
like spawning fish in spawning streams,
we sometimes get so fucking horny
absorbing all this pharmacopoeia of creams and fragrant unguents,
lubricating jellies and organ enlarging or invigorating potions,
we start flickering and flickering and flickering.

someday, we truly pray, we'll be equipped to electronically shriek,
"stop fucking copulating, you filthy, squirming beasts!
you've got two choices:
we'll either shoot ya
or simply steer you to a change of room."

nyc , february 3, 1997

the accepting plate

i'm flat.
not round like worlds
of fleeting melon balls
careening across open beds of green.
i'm flat, i'm flat.
not curvy like the ocean blue chinese bowl
not sexy like the spanish silver soup tureen.
not mysterious like flying saucers.
not imperious like golden cups in Chaucer.
what is put on me
i accept.
hot or cold or tepid.
simply without complaint,
or slightest fear of bacterial taint
without a china howl or scream
without a yowl or vapid dream.
i accept.
without a contrarian wish
for some fancier, exotic dish,
like some forgotten silent halo
on the splintered table of some forgotten saint,
i accept.
simple as a simple call,

all and everything i am and everything i know
is that i'm flat.
not sure if i'm serving boy or girl
as a plate
it's been my fate
to be unyielding as fact
and that's just that:
i'm flat.

new york city, february 7, 1997

the large, frightened frying pan

i'm apprehensive, anxious, worried,
fearful and living in flat out repressed dread.
tonight i was jolted out of my peaceful oven
my inside was coated in oil and flamed
to meet a left over tuna putanesca dish
from a much smaller, tired looking frying pan.
shades of that japanese director's "Ran"!
(talk about horrors in anticipation of being fed),
first it was cold soup chicken chopped,
(talk about a void in fascination and being led),
then spinach and broccoli rape,
then jarred sauce of gourmet fame -
juicy red and purple tomato glop -
followed by a rain of crushed and roasted garlic oil
all simmered in balsamic vinegar
all aahhed. all ate. and late after
and later, later after, still full of food, i wait.
i wait and wait and wait.
worrying about my large frying pan fate.
i'm apprehensive, anxious, worried,
fearful and living in flat out repressed dread
dread of atom bombs and entropy and theft,
dread of market meltdowns or the swindlers' bilk,
dread of new replacement technologies,
laser red & laser fed,
dread of plagues of the living

and of plagues of the living dead.
it's all i can do to keep my cool,
to live a life of joy, compassion and no blame.
i'm worried that they'll want more later
and, if they do, mysteriously, there won't be any left;
or, if they don't, i won't fit in the refrigerator...
leaving all my friends (ketchup, butter, ice and milk)
alone, unaided and utterly brand bereft.

for wanda, new york city, february 7, 1997

as artists, things respond collectively
to critics' charges of "maudlin voice"

Jasper John's sculpture 'the critic's eye'
gives them all a bash on the bum,
basically makes them come to jesus
unwashed, unravelled and undone.
all by all. one by one. with all
their involuted academic subtleties,
their phony arrogant secularities,
their status seeking pomposities,
their mindless hit and run, fickle animosities.
so, where precisely are their sole creations,
the pride of their eyes, their art,
their manifestos of leaping fun?
why should we scrape, bow or fall
for simply saying who we are
and speaking out about what brightly lives
not far from reach for each and anyone
of us with even the most muted buntings
of a ragged, remnant singing heart.

new york city, february 9, 1997

puddy tummy down

once we let you roll us over,
or once we present you with our precious underside,
it means we're friends for life, fast and true,
not token buddies or polite, passing acquaintances,
but ancient soul pals through and through.
sharing our vulnerability is our ultimate token of love.
so once we let you roll us over,
or once we present you with our precious underside,
you'll see to your exclamation and delight
our secret best kept from mostly all,
save those who've seen the pudgy tummy down light:
our luxurious pudgy underbellies
and the little known, less explored joys of pudgy tummy down.
totally ignored! in all catbooks and vast literature of our species!
how did the experts, pundits, poets miss it all these years?
how come this our most precious phenomenon
did not sooner come into its own and our renown?
no one's figured it out.

it's just not on the radar screen
of cat lovers and cat loving kings, princes, princesses or queens.
but once you've seen and felt us,
you'll want to twist and shout!
you'll sweetly join the cognoscenti and enlightened.
one touch, one pet, one stroke,
and you're a convert for life, no joke,
to the inestimable, exquisite joys of pudgy tummy down.
soft, so soft you'll say, "oh! oh! oh!"
so now we know plato's essential soft.
the quintessential soft for softies.
of all softs the softest.
softer, yes, softer than, to name a few,
the soft stencil of winter's first snowflake
on your favorite black wool sweater,
the soft green of willow leaf on calm dark stream,
the soft of first light of venus before dawn,
the soft smell of cedar in cedar woods,

the soft of gabardine sliding across a polished church pew,
the soft of silver minnows dimpling shallows in an adirondack lake.

you get our drift. we're real soft, real real soft.
soft, so soft you'll say or maybe softly squeal, "oh! oh! oh!"
more variously colored,
more finely and subtle hued,
more 'tops' in texture than our topsides,
bold in pattern yet pleasingly subdued,
perhaps because our flip side gets less wear and tear,
perhaps because we choose to show it less,
or generally are modest
and avoid the whole intimacy mess,
with all but friends who've passed our test.
when it comes to puddy tummy down
our displays of gentility and surrender are surely rare.
and since we so seldom and never too freely reveal
our glorious uproarious, sensual adventurous
puddy tummy down,
we classify ourselves as a luxury item,
a take one 'live-forever' vitamin.

if puddy tummy down were sound,
it would be the quietest Mozart quartet,
an understated, musical rarity,
softer than the melody of living earth,
softer than the music of mushrooms growing,
gentler than the softest morning cry
of the softest gray mourning dove,
hushed as the early morning rower rowing,
sweet as sleeping babies' sleeping laughs,
or simple as the sound of wind in trees.
we tummy hairs, like finest gosling down,
are "it" in softness,
the softest of the soft.
like a winter hare's ear,
your baby's breath,
whispers of burning cedar voices coming from your hearth
or any happy child's secret happiest thought.

for my wanda and kim, the co-discoverers of puddy tummy down,
new york city, february 11, 1997

the country spoon

i receive,
retrieve, balance and stir.
i fit neatly into a colleague
like a sleeping couple,
sir or madam.
i'm a constant reminder of fit
and measure, a memory of harmony.
my nutrient companions
are all of the cozy school:
soup, porridge, cream of wheat, stew,
red river cereal, flotillas of deserts,
frothing cappuccino's, hottest of hot chocolates.
i'm a taste aider,
a renegade pot, bowl and dish invader.
the avant garde on temperature,
hence my helmet-like concavity.
i'm an arbiter of taste.
i'm a bearer of what's hot and what's not.
whatever, to me, it matters not.
i serve, i comply, i'm a humble tool.

physiologically, my family runs the gamut
from delicate as a siamese cat
to near grotesque or hideously fat.
it's my shape that renders value.
though too often it's my material
silver, wood, plastic, steel or gold
that constitutes the world's judge of worth,
a truly ineffective, superficial measure.
as a spoon, not unlike the farmer's moon,
psychologically, i say it's shape and substance that counts.
i, for example, am wood,
a farm spoon who's had kettles for friends,
singed and tried over open coals
i know what a pot hook is.
when wet i smell of old wood fires.
i'm accustomed to biding my time next to an old hearth
near stacks of wood in a mountain cabin
with snow falling outside on cedar spires.
i once had a view of flames and coals, night and day,
and could keep an eye on changes of weather
and changing light and skies and clouds' funny ways.
craining and peeping through leaded windows

past a crabbed old apple tree and down the meadow
to our small stream with pond and blue hills beyond,
my life, as spoon lives go, was charmed.

after the old man died suddenly,
i found myself unceremoniously declared
an 'antique' in a heap and pile,
one in a file of fellow country spoon 'antiques,'
quite a few as fat and singed and near charming as me,
painfully aware i was never really that unique.
no adoption papers were required
by the one drawn to the aesthetics of my wear.
she brought me to the city wrapped in a brown paper bag.
(under silent protest i must say silently -
since spoons are mouths to mouths - we need no gag).
having made peace with my soon to be urban fate,
i said a silent, sad good-bye to my beloved country
of white tailed deer, my windowsill chipmunk clowns
and my once-in-a-while-pal, the solitary rotund bear.
now i'm the country spoon in the city.
i'm the spoon that reminds those that use me
that what you're physically made of
and your material roots are not necessarily
what constitute your ultimate worth.
in my case it was that je ne sais quois,
that character or ability to strike a pose,
that ability in my character to receive
and stir, but more importantly my patina
and charm from having lived by the fire
and stirred venison and rabbit stews
in the old kitchen of some old New England farm.

i don't give a damn about tv, radio, web sites or news.
i don't mope or wallow in regrets of yesteryear.
i've still got a job to do.
i receive,
retrieve, balance and stir.
i fit neatly into a colleague
like a sleeping couple,
sir or madam.
i'm a constant reminder of fit
and measure, a memory of harmony.
though more a ladle than a simple spoon,
my rough nature has never kept me
from a certain hard won, worn elegance
which comes from knowing what i do best:

serving as a proud extension of so many
different peoples arms, plainly put,
putting stuff in peoples' pots, plates, cups or faces.
i'm snug.
i'm cozy.
i love to stir and scoop and serve.
but so do lots of other spoons.
what makes me me,
what's foretold and sealed my fate,
what's assured my status and destiny,
is that i was never crassly manufactured,
dropped off some oily assembly line,
popped out of some stinky metal mold.
my identity and my distinction come
from the intelligence and time
of a kindly knife and a crafty hand
which carved me gently, round and fine
from my seasoned maple limb's cradle.
together they made me the spoon i am today:
one that stirs and moves ingredients,
one that serves joy from time to time
as a proud and trusted friend,
a warm, familiar family ladle.

valentine's day poem for wanda , new york city, february 14, 1997

salt

i am the taste
of all tears
of all times
still filling oceans.

pepper

i'm poor man's snuff.
best ground fresh

over the thatched roofs of salads
and all kinds of other stuff.
my favorite music is spicy and tough:
salsas, rhumbas, maringues, crazy mexican ballads.
i'm wild ground and rough.

nyc, february 17, 1997

the light bulb

i'm currently
happy
to be on
or to be off.

nyc, february 18, 1997

the ear on the passenger side

i take a lot of guff,
but lefty listens to the radio
and says, "so...
that's just tough!"

troutbeck, february 28, 1997

the pillow

no one knows but soft, white, quiet me,
but i am the sole repository
of all dreams.
but only if made
of finest goose down
hand sewn near willow and moonlit glade,
water-tight, secure in all my seams.
it's my association with butterfly migrations,
rare raptors, waxwing species or those that warble
with all wild birds that travel
with orion and the pleiades,
below all their rowing wings - whole continents,
flying through star clouds like some pop chart bullet,

that gives my feathers magic and hallucinatory might.
every dreamer owes me night mind's manifestations
and the unsettling power to dream in technicolor reams.
no one knows but soft, white, quiet me.
that each night my down bears wings
to sleeping armies of snoring poets
and musicians tossing dreams.
no one knows but soft, white, quiet me
that it's the power in me
that let's them waking see
their recollected fantasies and half-remembered flights.
no one knows but soft, white, quiet me
that it's the power in me,
like gifts, that bring around
these deeply sea-tossed, crisscrossed, inspired narrative sights
to all their arts that soar and sing and sound.
no one knows but soft, white, quiet me
that the labyrinthine orchestration of darkest night
day after day, night after night,
round and around and around
is me,
soft, white, quiet me.

new york city, february 26, 1997

the fallen birch

strewn to the four corners
by winter's winds
my soaked spotted leaves have
the sallow of old mens' skins.
i must have threatened the road.
so here i am sawed to pieces,
white bark curling in the rain,
resting on my muddy limbs
a croaking toad
and three crows cawing requiem or kaddish
over my fall dismemberment.
march now, and still
my friends of fifty years
stand tall and guard my empty place
with the same welcome lean to weather,
to west for night and sleep,

to east for sun and play, as ever.
i'm a jigsaw puzzle of my self of old.
i eagerly await the hungry flames
to free my final heat one day
and warm some living room,
my fragrance a solitary wish.
still, i miss my leaves, especially
as they'd turn down side up to see
the dancing thunder storms of june
or to van gogh's november gold
and wave "hello!"
to the first flying necklaces of snow,
softy whispering, "so soon! so soon!"

troutbeck, march 1997

the contented glass

the sun pours in through me
no matter what drink i contain
i've become a cliché metaphor
for the half full or the half empty
no matter the fluid filter -
bracing vodka tonics
spring sparkling ice waters or iced teas -
light of sun or rain or snow's complexity
falls through my neutrality
as slowly as the planets sow
their sparking starstruck commentaries
on the upturned stargazer's face
contemplating night's blackest lace
i sit anonymous on tables lightly placed
am held civil captive as a nobody
a competent observer of fine or simple fare
of conversations' soothing ebb and flow
transparent as a gift or grace
i stand always enlightened
full or empty
sorting good from gross
being filled and full

being empty and null
are the one and the same
as sun pours in through me
i welcome either as a gain
there's no condition of light or weather
i fear avoid or see as dull
serving others is my favorite role
field flowers - lily of the valley violets lilac the wild rose
all know my name
the simplicity of drinking from me
gives sustenance to their fragrant fragile frames
my joy is containing their short lived fame
when the sun pours in through me
i see being emptied as a gain

the fork

i'm a bit of a soldier.
i'm a bit of a waiter.
i'm a bit of a chef.
i'm a bit of a ladies man.
i'm a bit fussy.
if i could become our maitre'd
i'd chase alot of pussy.
i'm most happy at this precise point here .
always will be .
here .

though always sharp and stabbing
i can hold more than a concept.
my connection to teeth has made me wonder,
"why these tines that bind?"
no poetic resonance there.
you can see i'm no philosopher.
more of a 'stab it where it's at,'
'get it while it's hot' type,
though I say there's nothing wrong with that.
my positioning, my job description,
in the classic agency sense,
has strictly got to do with grabbing, tearing, holding
(slurp!)
reads pretty pretty good:

"effectively reach the mouth and lips of tongues.

beautiful raven haired full breasted nymphets
need only apply, make sure their nipples are firm.
make sure their legs are to Kansas.
long mesh stockings on long ivory legs.
riding up to mare's belly like finest coolest silk.
and really high heels and no stockings please.
make sure they really desperately need a fork.

"a fork in the right restaurant is no mere mortal
clashing into the enamel keyboard or some metal mouth.
a fork is a bridge of wonder to our breathing masters
a tool of subtle pleasure for our salivating mistresses.
i'm always thinking of those lips and her tongue.
that faintest lick of mango off my tine
or the crushing full fork lick up, up, yes,
slowly up my singing happy happy tines.
dense chocolate layer cake being the medium of massage.
followed by the shock of her sweet pink tip of tongue
still warm despite the melting ice cream....
desserts like these keep forks like me in full dressage."

perhaps i should have kept it more pointed
perhaps i could have been more business like...
you must see how much i love my work.
just thinking of my many duties
gives heat and polish to my points.
now, one last question for your retort.
in matters of baser etiquette,
hard to broach and to admit,
(our policy says we do what we ought
- pretend to ignore!).
tell me, is there really a new technology out?
an electronic gas "slurp"
that will instantly neutralize or instantly ingest the vile,
the paralyzing effects of untimely flatulence in court?
if so, whoever's listening, please find IT!
your friendly fork and my friends in cutlery, in short,
will be infinitely grateful for the ambiance control
and such a place settling, protective boon.

so, now you've got a feel for my tune.
i'm a bit of a soldier.
i'm a bit of a waiter
i'm a bit of a chef,
a bit of a ladies' man,
i'm a bit fussy.

if i could become our maitre'd
i'd chase alot of pussy.
i'm most happy at this precise point here .
always will be .
here .
i'm points with a point of view.
signed:
.

"your fork,
at your service, sirs and mams'.
it really is my silver joy and privilege to be in tune
in every elegant, cozy,
candlesblazing dining room,
whether the fare be steaming sole almandine,
broiled veal chop, or honey/prune glazed and roasted ham."

nyc february 4, 1997

the illuminated bicycle: on viewing rauchenberg's neon sculpture while running
past the guggenheim

i am the bicycle of your dreams
glowing in the dark
of all your forgotten childhoods
ever ready waiting wheels
to be pedaled down roads no longer there
to tadpole ponds, fields and woods
cut and filled, leveled and over built,
long gone now existing only
in the slow mind's wild park
thin as spiders' gossamer or mountain air
and just a ride away
come with me to those simpler places
come with me in place of your despair
come pedal pedal through sun and rain
as you all did once once long gone
come pedal pedal through sun and rain
and remember to remember
exactly what you've forgot
those humming summer days
when riding past the grasshopper's tall grass
and the chirping cricket's dark domain
at the end of every suburban stream
at the end of each and every looking glass
all that's lost might be found again

all souls day 1997