

PRIMER

BOB PERELMAN

Originally published by THIS press in 1981.

MY ONE VOICE

At the sound of my voice
I spoke and, egged on
By the discrepancy, wrote
The rest out as poetry.

Read the books, duets
From nowhere say they speak;
Why not let them. Habitual stares
Leave trees in rearview mirrors.

I came from a neutral point
In space, far from the inside
Of any one head. O say can I
Still see the tabula rasa outshining

That rosy dawn on the near side
Of the genetic code. Doubt,
Thy name is certainty. Generations
Of recordings of the sunrise

Picture the light until the page
Is white and I predict
The present, hearing a future
In the syllables' erasing fade.

BOOK YEARS

A religious virgin of unspecific sex
Opens the book again. Great trees
Mass into a risen gloom. Green
Valleys bathed in blue light lull
A scattered population. The world ends;

A person is born, no sense
Thinking about it forever. I'm writing
While time stands still. It certainly
Doesn't lead to the future. First
In a series of willing abstractions,

The body makes history and leaves
No one to clean up after
It's gone. Flesh mirrors its absence
In solid colors; generations absorb finite

Amounts of light. Identity is abbreviation.

A religious frenzied realism leaves no
Place to go, no stone unturned.
An aesthetic pharmacopia of diseases projects
Fuzzy slides of a beautiful woman
Living forever in perfect health, dancing

On rocks, acres, dark green world.
She's only a figure of speech,
But the books, the modem library
Giants, fall beneath her feet. Lives
Accumulate sound like clouds hold water.

PRIMER

for Alan Bernheimer

The surface of the earth displays
A grain of sand. The pace it keeps
Creates bonds of love that stretch
Past the breaking point. Matter
Resents nothing. Plants try.
Animals can barely think. Speaking

Their minds, people load the air
With noise so thoroughly meant
That a would-be heaven
Falls from the sky and is
Where we follow our wills
To lead our lives, chasing

Bent actions along the curve
Of a finite door. The equations
Produce curbed or unleashed powers,
Barking into a dark garage

Or surviving the face of the deep.
For the earth to revolve
Continuously requires constant
Vigilance, endless sleep.

TRAINEE

The language has us by the throat,
Scorched utensils in a grid. Trained
Tracks, right of way, light
Of day. Enraged bodies whistle by
Cold soot, skipping space entirely.

Letters are so dense it's convenient
To stop listening. Religious
Seduction scenarios replace
The melancholy human voice,
Its perfected products, trick photos.

Say I say sky, say the city
Of San Francisco sits beneath that.
Have you ever seen a school fence?
A sun set? Fields of speech
The anatomizing phonemes bark at.

A machine shop? In the light
Of the correct time, steel buildings
Lift a low stone fog. Tires sing
On freeways that guard the views
From distressed housing.

Convinced condensed devices are at home
In our words. Not to be confused
With us or use. Remove
The caressed blossom, the rug's
Still brand new, a vacuum.

DAYS

One word is next
To another, an excess
Of localism, solidarity, and
Vive la difference shouted
Down crowded column inches.
Each voice singled out
By ages of technique.

In fact you don't
Live a life one
Day at a time.
Some days you skip,
Come back to them

Later, others never occur.
These occasions are not
Even up for grabs,
Cause no comment.

BONDING

Speech makes a show of force,
A self proclaimed surplus
Wandering outwards. We listen
Blindly, devoted to the incoming

Likeness. Rhyme charms,
But the charm fades. The units
Make a clicking noise
Impossible to mask.

Some stick together
In after the fact
Probability, but the film
Can break anywhere. Any face

Registers the odds.
Matter animates
The great song, weeping
At the bottom of the well.

Feeling one's place
Shift, feet support
A random weight. The planet
Is coated with rock,

Machines, candy. The tongue
Is in the mouth.
The moon in the sky
Is more than a coincidence.

HYMN TO INTELLECTUAL BEAUTY

after Shelley

Each world
Floats through us.
Piney mountains on memory clouds

Visit in starlight, inconstant.

It's beautiful, art-thought,
But hymns die away, dim
Humming fears cast gloomy
Human rainbows, and why not.

Ghost the records, frail charms
We might not get to see.
Stringed instruments
Drive mist over the remains.

And in the glorious train of Self:
Self-esteem, like wax
In the messenger's ears.
Don't be your shadow.

See shadow, think thought!
While yet a boy, I sought it out
Through many a listening chamber
Where hands held books.

The birds and bees have poison pens,
But whatever's alive eventually
Wakes up. I shrieked and clapped;
The dead departed.

I called the phonemes
A thousand names. Speechless
Thoughts answered each.
But I kept my vow, in dark bondage

To whatever these words
Now say. The day is perfect
When over. There is a lustre
In the sky which cannot be.

RAILROAD EARTH

Sunlight on skylights, human
Labor. Design details, numbers
By the thousand, orders
Spoken into stubby phones,

Painted putty cracking. Codes

Wizen from the outside
In. The captive is
Led away speaking gibberish.

There's bright red flat
Sun on Jack Kerouac's
Now famous bricks. "He's

Gone, those white eyes
Staring the last thing
You see—Next bull!"

TO BAUDELAIRE

The head is the body's lair.
It may be slightly in front.
Milking these separations,
Words answer the immortal need

For intoxicating monotony. The body
is the mind's sieve.
Beloved grief, water drips
From a block of red ice

Onto a perfumed paradise
Lost in the obsessive embrace
Of reader and writer. Superb haloes
Hang from the heads

Of naked slaves whipping themselves.
A new world is required
To stomach the images
Floating on the headless

Torso of the old.
"I was surprised to find myself
Staring at an empty hole.
I ordered flowers."

WISHES

I'll twist sunlight into
Words for the walk over

To the blank. Thoughts
Are things. Thoughtless streets

Pass nights outdoors. Syllables
Aim to spread out,
But hardly do. Wet,
Washed, shined tracks set

In city mud. Tunes
In mind sound, hassled,
Filagrees honoring live seconds.
Who wove those ropes

You're climbing back
To the minute you
Set the sky up
As an equal.

YOU

Can you just sit down
And write, all by
Yourselves, lines
Like those up there, alive
And both places
At once? And then
Question yourself
As if you learned speech
From yourself? Lines
Emerge from a dot.
No I that you can
Ever be can hear
Well enough to say
These words before they
Line up to say
What they say. Lost
In thought in a room
I know with a pen
In my hand, Francie
Asleep and Max
So tiny, fat,
Delighted, hours back,
First sun in days,
By the numbers
In the arboretum.

3 NOISES

HERO

Difficulties involved
With the title
Push past a
Self continually
Abandoned in the rushes
Picked up
By a supporting cast
And nurtured
Into a starring role.

NATURE

Hollers for more
Attention, floats
On water on
Oiled feather
Base, turns
White in the sun
With spots
Of green algae.

INTIMATE

A soft unwashed
Star,
A busted play, a
Leggo,
At home.

MIND & BODY

Bodies of water,
States of mind.

Alternates state
The case

With equal force
On either hand.

Schools of thought,
Buckets of blood,
Muddy roads.

BABY

A so-called dream
Runs in the road in shadow
Shown where he's been.
The Infanta is presumably
Still smiling in the glass.

The chemicals will be there
All day. Second thoughts
Trigger further spasms.
"Is this my life I
See before me?" Syllables

In plain sight move under
A thread transcribed back
Across the transparent voice.
Vibrating, I towered above my feet.

GEARS

The desire to open my eyes
Arrives from the dark.
The film itself is blank. Senses

Surround my will to be
Where I am. I see my head
Present to the depth of centuries,

Altitudes where I couldn't breathe.
The fourth wall is missing, crowd noise
Makes me want to talk.

An enraged optimism
Rises from these tapes. The tone

Is at the machine's mercy.

Plaid curtains hang thoughtlessly
Against reports of darkness. Birth
Reopens the parenthesis.

The oracle enters, dreams
intentionally. She hugs herself
In his sleep. A fixed idea

In a room of prior synonyms.
Plain patterns while waiting.
Cacophony onstage occupies

The autobiography. There is also
Nothing. My former future
Blows sideways without obstruction.

A shade under an assumed name
Reflects a touchy crystal universe,
All beginning, middle, and end.

SELF PORTRAIT

An enraged optimism
Surrounds my will to be
Without beginning or end.

At night the oracle enters
A room of prior synonyms.
Plaid curtains hang thoughtlessly.

Nothing. My former future.
Plain patterns while waiting.
The mirror reflects the dark.

The forms assume a name. They see
Where I am. My head arrives
Missing the fourth wall. Crowd noise

Rises from the tapes. The tone
Reports. Sleep darkens dreams. Birth
Is on purpose. She hugs herself.

Blows struck offstage occupy

A touchy crystal universe.
Years later, the autobiography.

The film itself is blank.
The senses present the centuries,
Are at the machine's mercy.

A fixed idea wants to talk
Without obstruction. There are also
Attitudes where I couldn't breathe.

The visible order reopens
The parenthesis, underlies
The desire to open my eyes.

ABSTRACT

The film senses the machine.
A name assumes. The mirror reflects.
Attitudes want to talk.

Optimism desires to be
The autobiography.
The universe: offstage.

A prior century
Enrages the synonyms.
The idea is missing.

The dark. Darkness.
Sleep, dreams, tape.
The oracle enters. Nothing.

Crowd noise
Is the fourth wall.
Touchy heads hug crystal tones.

A parenthesis
Without beginning or end
Breathes on purpose.

Birth underlies
The will. The visible order
Forms eyes.

OUTLINES

I

silent
in here scatters
as its own definition
found ahead of time
in and out of what
beats against

light
and off
spilling the
place showing
some
to here

obstacle
promotes the thing opposed
through deliberation
and landscape
not willed
escapes
watching it
move in the very
direction it never

II

the I leans in
on board
beside the
other words
a
displacement
where it thought
I was only
ground to displayed
thoughts tag
the enemy the
end stays
to say

III

as if
already said
spoken shadow
placed on itself
disappears or still
there listening
to finally see the thing
moving
toned away
to the person
could be
with words

it means the sky
shifts to take on
what the ear
says is system
sleep so anterior
letters vaunting
wind pulls cloud
cover as light
spoke a future
behind the sound
meaning no homage
itself or elsewhere
sits
as stated
grammar from the view
and sense on its own side
single crowding
visibility
gone on ahead

IV

the constituency in a
tabled generality
applying to all for the duration
across
and in
not nouns as such
sore feet

tired wizened occasionally
placing lips and teeth
so as to form
some sort of landscape
did it
and here we are
thought of later
by our own
aside
forced into memorizing
addressed
slants onto
what's left behind

V

a swerve a
gleam and
now it's solid
always me there
moving inside
a detachable space
some leftovers declaring
independence
or worried

stares
down through
rummaged
sense
a novel
level
headed fall of
rained on
senile
trees the sum
seen gets inside
days plunging across the
circular version

VI

put it where you want
all things
resting in the
outlines command

a stop
nowhere else

reaching around behind
time of day
what arrives
out of its
walled in
terms
self appointed vocabulary
weighing a
resume
without name
always facing

VII

and is
a sentence everything
ever told
out from what was
believed
said back there
though things get
through anyhow

grammar gets it
right
where it
isn't there
a different place
a person up
in a sky
air

all displaced
as in
the past part of the
finished
noise
called back

VIII

at ease

in the head
out down there
beyond the margin
a correction
applied from without
shadows flown by
one shown to
remember itself

tense expires
kept aloft
organs didactic
scratching it out
in chorus
a living from the dead
interst flashes of light
powers of ten
fingers in the mouth

IX

too close to see
much resemblance
the same
or reasonable
regulated authority
saying so
a changed mind predictably
hearing itself out
doubled over
halved
at large
available at each word
adding on or changing to
claimed identity
signed away
during the fact
meanwhile
calling on
itself to be
where the border is

X

yelling in all seriousness to the

space that opens behind the eyes
taking what I can see
and dropping it
in a hole I can hear
phrases spoken
short edges
cut being called
or simply not there

condition from which
something for nothing
with the speaker in the same
category held there
by vegetation or other
visible abstract
streams wetting grey
boulders blacken them by unseen
words entered here

spelling the
performance of a record as the experience
of a dream circular day
sinks into
black rim lit
to live in

TECHNIQUE

How
Pointless the
Triangular apex of
Parnassus —

Views
Available from
Generous numbers of
Angles

While
Time passes
Forcefully and separated
Voices

Go
Out of

Their way to
Say

What
Cannot be
Said any other
Way.

GOD

Ay chinga!
Bright sun shines.
God appears.
Down in front!

I want to put
This word here.
The mind at
Its shuffle.

I want to
Hear this word.
Dull person,
Fish fish, water.

THE SQUIRE'S TALE

Here's noise, a (hero) sandwich
Said (sounds). Sad (happy)
Tale (memories of squirrels).

Room at Land's End
For a (complete) statement,
In whatever form. Plenty (more)

Where that came from
Though, at the moment, nothing.
(Gorgeously) colored light strikes

The (observer). You
May be (have) a body
You (make) act out at parties,

But what's (reading) (writing)
This is something else. Not
To back down from the

(Physical) threshold for
One minute. (I) keep thinking
Of (new) breaths to take.

INSIDE

An unpronounceable pun
Pins word
To sound.
Huge groans.

EVOLUTION

What about animals? We dream them, we eat them. Dancing to the
meaning of the music, it's the Pony who goes and answers the phone.
Animal narrative, in cans, cases, and hundred pound bags. Eagles get sore,
cats have fleas. A fly is killed because of what he does. Tigers make
decisions, worms turn corners. Stuck, struck dumb in the next room
watching tv. In one scrape after another. The myth of the eternal returns,
disguised, polished horns, jail. The machinery ruined, Mickey Mouse dusts
the parlor. He whistles and speaks English.

ROOM

The words mention themselves.
They are literally true.
Every minute another circle
Meets them halfway.

The locker locks
From the inside. I
Is an extensive pun
Born of this confinement,

The echoes crossing
North America, the room.
The ear hears in no time.

On the street, machines

Reveal the thought
Of non-machines. These
Objects have the right
To remain silent.

The pen wrestles with
The hand by the light
Of an open door. Things
Are their real size.

MEASURE
for Lyn Hejinian

I've been six feet
All my life. Now
I can barely see
Over my coffee cup.
He sits by the giant phone,

Depressed. Weigh me again.
There is no ideal
Surface. He leaps across
Cracks between words. Writing
His book provides a little confidence,

Wielding the club-sized pencil.
Beyond, the stairs lead
Down to the cellar
In a bruising series
Of crashes. One language speaks another

Out of need, imperfectly.
My platinum yardstick, your
Platinum yardstick. Sentences measure
The door; the sound
Goes out. From his doll house

The dictator shouts up
At the sequoia he
Once kidded over breakfast.
Buoyant syllables rise from
The damage done by insecticide, radiation.

When she accidentally leaves
The door open, in
Comes the killer cat.
The sentence will force
The author down to study syntax

In the basement. Intuition
Nags her, but logic
Requires that she abandon
The shivering, half-drowned homunculus
Who's now draped across a pencil

Caught in the dripping
Drain grate. There is
A price to pay
For making these statements.
An inner light pushes him out

Through the window screen
To the grass where
He contemplates moonlit clouds
As he vanishes completely.
We're left with the disembodied voice.

THE CLASSICS

In the beginning, the hand
Writes on water. A river
Swallows its author,
Alive but mostly
Lost to consciousness.

Where's the milk. The infant
Gradually becomes interested
In these resistances.

Success is an ideal method.
For itself the sun
Is a prodigy of splendor.
It did not evolve. Naturally,
A person had to intervene.

Children in stage C succeed.
Emotion is rampant. We blush
At cases 1 and 2.

The rules are sacred,
But can be changed.
The moon got bigger
Because we were alive.
The circle rotates carefully.

The speaker is instructed
To listen to the correct
Measurement of words.

Hidden quantities
In what he already knows
Eventually liberate a child
From the immediate present.
The name of Hannibal
Was glorious throughout the world.

All men have hearts of gold.
A particular man has
A particular heart of gold.

Wearing white clothes,
Eating apples and oranges,
26 million men and women
Talk intimately about sex.

Iron nails complete the statue,
But fail in case 3.

Finally, the hand reaches the mouth.
99% egocentric speech,
By, to, and for itself.
God and the novel
Approximate each other.

The listener thinks he understands
What the speaker is saying
Even when it is very obscure.

Reversible thinking can explain
Anything but the mundane
Features of the words
Already pronounced.

If the box is too heavy,
Tell it to move.

MATURE EJACULATION

Monsters and metaphors arose
From human necessity. The period
Ends the sentence by force.
"When the lightning hit the house,
It gave the apparatus a boost,
And gave me the power,
To turn the page of a book!"

Elaine went a little too near the lake
And her geiger counter went crazy.
Monsters spent the next five minutes
Lumbering out of their element. The brush
Feels its way through the light.

Jellyfish attacks manikin,
Loses hand. The trees are old,
The teens possibly older.
Flaming tissue under strobelight.

They can be killed with sodium
And their radioactive organs give them away.
But drunks staggering through the woods
Never know what hit them. Children
Born of prostitutes in the classics
Were thrown into the Tiber.

"What's that sound?" Cars
Race through falling dusk. An attractive
Surface wound dangles tantalizingly
Down at Fingle's Quarry. Hank Green
Flashes past the Guggenheim
In his MG, looking for sodium.

It's dead on the beach all summer.
Smoke blows across bare alders.

"You remember your highschool chemistry?"
Thoughts and limbs move uncertainly.
Clues of dreadful happenings
Under the sea by Western Island
Surface and flood the will.

Social life bogs down completely.
A pajama party is an orgy
Of inefficient appetite. We look
In the book, but get let off
With a slap on the wrist. A dot
In the center of the map
Speaks for us and hangs useless signs
On trees, rocks, and water.

The clock radio interrupts vicarious dreams
To announce our names. Hank and Elaine
Begin to screw. Dr. Garvin will remain
In the hospital a few weeks.

"We have paid our tuition
And have suffered a little,
But what counts is we are
Accumulating knowledge and results."

CHINA

We live on the third world from the sun. Number three. Nobody tells us
what to do.

The people who taught us to count were being very kind.

It's always time to leave.

If it rains, you either have your umbrella or you don't.

The wind blows your hat off.

The sun rises also.

I'd rather the stars didn't describe us to each other; I'd rather we do it for
ourselves.

Run in front of your shadow.

A sister who points to the sky at least once a decade is a good sister.

The landscape is motorized.

The train takes you where it goes.

Bridges among water.

Folks straggling along vast stretches of concrete, heading into the plane.

Don't forget what your hat and shoes will look like when you are nowhere
to be found.

Coats in the window hung up on hooks; question marks where the heads
would normally be.

Even the words floating in air make blue shadows.

If it tastes good we eat it.

The leaves are falling. Point things out.

Pick up the right things.

Hey guess what? What? I've learned how to talk. Great.

The person whose head was incomplete burst into tears.

As it fell, what could the doll do? Nothing.

Go to sleep.

You look great in shorts. And the flag looks great too.

Everyone enjoyed the explosions.

Time to wake up.

But better get used to dreams too.

BIRTHDAY PRESENT

for Carla Harryman

Dear———,

The name They dropped on my face would intoxicate me,
perfumes, buzzed whispers, crotch and vine, smoke with water, I dissect
the Play.

And They can put words with my Dolls, threading my inspiration
and respiration, green leaves and dry leaves, hay in the barn, half
unconscious, water the country church is finished using.

But This time, consciously, it is in my mouth, I see, dance, sing,
stout as a horse, repeated layers, full noon trill exactly the contents of one,
exactly the contents of two.

O I perceive after all a boundless space, minor streams beat time,
the blab of the ear, redfaced, ravished fathomless condition with one small
Diadem.

I guess it must be the flag of my disposition, earth bearing the
owner's name brushed into the corners, I behold the picturesque giant, the
four horses, the beach.

But this time, with Will to choose, to own the ear, to stun the
privilege and the same old law, walk five friendly matrons, crowned,
crowing.

The pure contralto sings in the organ loft.

Love,———

SOCIALIST REALISM

for Bruce Andrews

An open question: solid I.
The profession of a voice
Is dotted with hard objects. You
Get to wear fine weapons,
Thongs. The front page look,
As denatured as possible,
Is strewn all over
The storied horizon.

You are obliged
By the invention of
Iron to trudge in sunken
Ramps, snailish, calm,
An art in itself.

Waves are from stars, good
And bad. The ends
Determine the colors.
Deluxe generations of mental
Dependents, stooges, senators,
Slaves of the El Condor theme,
Grasp a few simple positions.

The alarmed past is still around.
Dishes, wings, and REM's
Are passed from mind

To mind with no obvious
Cuts or commas to separate
Thought from the tricky to read
Walls. Hard to avoid

Being outside or inside.
Dreams are dimmer,
But there's the same demand
To get in and out.

HISTORY

The sun shines center stage,
Lights up a material sentence which,
Though visibly complex, is obviously
Not complete. The damage is literal,
One thing no one can argue with.

An endless chain of bodies
Wants to call it home, walking
Along the bases of the buildings.
Having survived the history of ideas
For x number of days does not

Make us ideal readers. Nor
Are we mentioned in the text.
The dead should have known better.
Shrines cry out for affection,
The wounds of Freud competing

With Newton's perfect corpse.
Their thought makes total sense
Until we open our mouths.
Private tongues multiply barely
Audible pleasures. On the books

The sun stands still, a thing
Of beauty. The stopped shadows
Develop moral overtones and these
Are what gets put into circulation.
Gargoyles and church music are one

Of many false doors. Words
Blame objects for lack of effect.
Dreams echo food and housing. The air

Turns dark to bright and back,
Sped up in the brain.

PHYSICS

The weight of a higher realm
Forms a blank the size of the sky,
Seen from the center of any
Perfect personal sphere.

A long sedimentary journey
Leads from there to here, requiring
Strict separation of the body
From past messages. Land masses

On tv are now wreathed in spirals
Of cloud. These give us our
Rainy nights in Georgia, white
Christmases. The dreams of nomenclature

Survive the senses' declarations
To populate thin air.
Tuning in China on your fillings
Means another screw tightens

In the pale, persuasive regime
Of appearances. The sun is hot,
But the god of our brains
Is still a jealous god.

Physically impeccable, the world
Is missing from these equations.
We are the equal signs
Idealizing the remains.

TREES

A melody composed of solid obstacles
Dictates itself onto paper. The sky adjusts
Automatically. The most popular prison
For sight is imagery. Light separated

From matter shines on a parking space,

A lane change. I think
That I shall never see without
Nameless grasses whispering generalities

Inside the object code which colors
Once removed at various distances
Spray onto my retinas. The proper
Study of trees is trees. A live-oak leaf
Lands upside down on a madrone branch.

Inside the curve of an ear
Each point contains all lines
Drawn through it by the insistence
Of a complete world of days. Any word

Flowers in the face of the climate's
Ornamental attacks. Moving parts
Produce the voice, the airplane,
The frenchfry. The baby on film
Wants to play with the camera.

PASTORAL

One person each, out
Into one world, back into many.
The collection, the alphabet. He imitates
Its power, sentiments, antiquity. Scenery
In the form of a dramatic monolog.

She trails out of the present
Both ways, but is sitting
At the table with him. Sprays
Of bay, laurel, and their natural
Interpretations are tacked above them.
Hearts beating. A storm at sea.

Gossip at length, hours
Yoked together, sun shines,
Air presses on their capillaries,
Actions. Desire pronounced and
Punctuated, their minds end
In their senses. Pleasures
Lag across solid bridges.

Time to eat. Light is suffused, revised

Among the letters. Their ears fill
With sounds of the visible world.
Minutes surround them, trees
In the foreground by voice vote.
Their eyes close. It is night.

MUSIK

after Rilke

What are you saying, Bob? Thoroughly
Urban greenery, wired, giving
Reliable directions? Where? Your head
is tangled in her dispersing cloud body.

To her, speech is a penal system.
She'll turn blue and vanish rather than
Keep listening. You're strong, talk a lot,
But it will be raining any minute.

Maybe just sit on a green bench
And watch clouds pass in and out
Of shapes you can see. She
Likes not being recognized.

That wing is now a grey square.
The wind cuts a new picture in half.
She's in tatters up there
And you're reading words on walls.
Shouts mimic the shreds of light.