If I have to say . . .

Robert Mahaney
Here is a short series of pieces. The vortex of woman and man can be baffling. And I have been perplexed. So I have turned to words with their reassuring stillness on the page.

Words themselves can cloud the understanding more than enlighten. Why trust them? At their best, in their concreteness they act almost as a mirror, as a proxy for our moments and ourselves. When I say I think or feel or did this or that, then the statement is present here starkly. It may enlighten. It may, in its insincerity, be an accusation.

I don’t know if these pieces, these words, are enlightening or accusing. That will only be apparent with time. But they are. It is their existence that is significant.

So, if I have to say . . .

Robert Mahaney, 2012
Cryptic

Well,
here it is again.
Dark stains creep down the tree trunks as the rain continues.
You join me here, between the first and last moment.
And here it is . . .
again.

2010
in april, rain

to sleep tonight to the sound of rain, to familiar sensation, to memory
rain drops, curved prisms flowing
joining and branching, so many intertwined channels across the windowed glass
flowing refraction, scatter of light, bending rays

how many times have i been here before?
days then nights join, branch, and flow, but always seem to return to this moment
giving the illusion that this moment, this now, was all there was, and could be, and is
to sleep tonight to the sound of rain, to familiar sensation, to memory

spring thunderstorm
from the dark flashes searing intensities
then slow thunder, a sound more felt than heard

so much like you and me, woman
the dark flashes and the searing intensities and the slow thunder
familiar like sleeping to the sound of rain

maybe all there is to sensation, to feeling
to emotion, to moment
are absence and presence

now absense, now presence
now presence, now absense

absence

to sleep tonight to the sound of rain, to familiar sensation, to memory

2010
no title

The night and it would be quiet if . . .
The late night drivers and they would be quiet if . . .
Turmoil long faded and would be quiet if . . .

I lay here. Here.

Words disembodied, my voice silences me.
You did I did a void avoid.
Did we?
Now left, left with finality.
Insurmountable, absolute.

I lay here.

2011
In the forest, in the rain, with my thoughts.
Twilight drains away.
It is distant and as far from me as you are.

Words in memory. And memory isn’t real.
Mechanism just tissue and skull,
electricity shimmering in vibrating cells,
branching like lightning along clouds that are both formed and formless.

The light flashes along the branching of the trees
flows along limbs onto capillary twigs and then spilled out
into twilight darkening to night.

The moment’s light is gone.
Suddenly I don’t know what is out there and what is in here.

There is no refuge in this moment
just as there is none in memory.
Not in the next moment or next.
Why do I still wait for it?

Maybe there was a kinder way to say goodbye.

You say you don’t know me.
That is strange. It isn’t hard.
You look too hard through things.
If you look too hard too long, things disappear.

2012
who would have thought it?

... and out the window I hear fragmented voices, choppy
and disjointed like schizophrenic thoughts.
For just a moment they are here and in a moment they are silent.

Silence.
Are the voices truer than the silence or the silence truer than the voices?

The moonlight tricks you into believing that you can see what is going on out there.
And if believing is seeing, what is blindness?
Blinking out the cold electric streetlights that line the road
and that moon defining what is earth and what is sky
is like my breath extinguishing the candle's flame.

Hot, humid, tight room.
I would pace this narrow place except for the clutter of living,
an entropy of intentions tangled with clothing and meals shuffled among books.
It's like a deck of cards thrown into the air. What hand is dealt?
Nothing to see but that the walls are white, so I look into the night.

Been a lot of rooms.
This one is in such a different place.
But I laugh. What else can I do?
It's the same old room.
They are all the same old room.

Who would have thought it?
It's funny to think. Literally. To think is funny.
Meaning arises in jumbled words like coincidences juxataposed, layered
in the earnest crackpot's contemplation of both profound and mundane conspiracy.
Old man,
he huddles with popes and professors and they point out patterns in the stars.
But if I met this scholar, thinker, learned man
I would have to ask.
I would have to ask,
"Are the voices truer than the silence or the silence truer than the voices?"

cont...
Its like a deck of cards strewn across the floor. What hand is dealt?

I would like to say things straight and channel words into some ordered flow, but then I don’t think they would mean what I think. Who would have thought it?
that unease.

intensity fades
as amplitude ebbs to a calm that
seems like silence.

but its not silent.
the world is not silent,
I can see it move.

this is not silence at all,
is it?
but deafness,
erosion.

the sound has not faded,
I have.

but still that unease.
I wonder if where there was love
there’s hate?
perhaps I can hear the heart beat here
with that rhythm.

in the water you hold onto whatever you can.

you see?
its that unease.

2012
How should this moment in twilight be understood? The sun’s intensity has cooled again, it always does. It is just dark enough for the streetlights to quaver on, dropping strange luminous orange cones into the emerging dark. The night is above the darkening blue and also its there in the trees and also its in there, in the unlit windows. Of course, this slow return to the night does not have to be understood. What would such a knowledge be like? The earth brings us back round to this same moment again and again. It, this moment, doesn’t carry significance until laden with memory, bringing past and present and future together at these same coordinates along the circumference. I have been here before, I’ll be here again.

So this knowledge is a familiarity, knowing this moment is like knowing a friend. Its that kind of knowing, but it is no friend. What is it? Me and it, this familiarity, we watch each other warily, wearily. At the end of another day I am wondering why love has made me so cruel… again. How should this moment in twilight be understood?

Intermittently cicadas are rasping. Then silence.

2012
no title

Names and faces change
but that strange opposition remains –
rigidity and flow,
yielding firmness,
tender aggression.

Two bodies
arching into each other
in the dark.

Rapt, absorbed,
watching her face, her body . . .
The most intense pleasure
comes from watching her happen,
 occur,
take place.

2012
the Word is dead, long live the Word

Here is the irony –
I don’t believe in words,
they seem so real but they aren’t,
but in the end I always turn to words
to mean.
And perhaps it seems I mean
and perhaps it seems they aren't
and maybe this seems and seems not
will here and in this place be enough.

2012
weary

The electric fan hums in the open window
and the hot day slowly unwinds into the hot night.

It is earliest morning.

You want me
and you don’t want me.
How can you have it both ways,
is and is not,
doe and do not?
What vows are these?
Awake,
trying to unwind this tight and knotted contradiction.

As weeks since we parted become months since we parted
I relax
and you grow more frantic.
Your voice is like a shade, a weakened and darkened whisper,
tones hollowed of belief . . . in what?
If I could lead you from your illusions and allusions
and into my arms
I would,
but its hot tonight
and I can’t sleep after speaking with you.

2012
And it happens again.  
The embers grow cold until they disappear into this night.  
Eyes narrow into sleep.

The present is always like a moment of waking.  
You sense the forgotten time that passed;  
it was there, that night did exist.  
There was that gap between some moment of vivid awareness,  
memory,  
and this.  
But there is no clear remembrance of what passed, instead  
the tangled juxtaposition from many dreams  
that like embers grow cold until they disappear into night  
or into waking light,  
into a place between insomnia, amnesia,  
and a searing immediacy of experience. This moment!  
The sun across my face or fingers passing over and running along her skin . . .  
Settling into a contradiction like a drunkeness,  
sensations both so near to me and so far from me,  
disembodied within the body . . .  
eyes narrow to sleep.

And it happens again,  
slip into and away from sleep,  
wake to and from each moment,  
a strange tension and a strange release.

2012
no title

Indiana summer.
On foot I follow the asphalt through the heat.
From a bus stop, an old lady under brass-dyed hair
fixes her eye on me, her voice follows.

Two puddles, one near and one far,
metallic like mercury against the blacktop.
Water poured, shared
because on a day like this the blackbirds must be thirsty.
But they didn't drink. Why?
She is a good person, she says.
“I have a heart. I have a heart” as if it were in doubt.
Again, “I have a heart. I have a heart,”
The repetitions match the cadence of my steps.
It must have been important that someone, that anyone knew.

Like the blackbirds, I don't stop.

What is this insistence rhythmic like breath?
A confession? a challenge? to whom?

On foot I follow the asphalt through the heat.

2012
what did Edward Hubble really see?

It is from the shift to red that we know that everything is further apart than it was yesterday.

That’s the thing about light. By the time you see it, the moment it reflects and refracts had already happened. It’s gone. What has replaced it since?

All you can see are memories, traces, and you live each moment trying to reconstruct the past. Vision is haunted. And the memories reverberating in your head . . . those are just traces of traces.

What was it that happened?

Earlier, the sun faded through these same reds, light bent over the horizon as this day rolled slowly towards another.

Until that other another . . . what until then?

Turn off the lights. Perhaps in the dark, enwrapped in the lover’s touch the distance is a bit less.

But then there is the dawn . . .

It is from the shift to red that we know that everything is further apart than it was yesterday.

2012
no title

the wind through the honey locust
throws the branches into commotion.
but still this summer evening seems calm.

just like this place here in the lowering light of day,
so the intensity of my memories of you dim
until they are dark silhouettes in a twilight.

who are you?
stirs a slight suspense as the question hangs here, in my thoughts.
but still I seem calm.

who are you?
you are the one who could always rob of me of sleep.
but I sleep now.

2012
of now from then

The last time that I remember seeing the moon it had waned almost to extinction. Was the narrowest luminous rim below the a circular darkness within the wider darkness of night.

Now it is waxing towards fullness in the twilight blue. What was far is near and what was gone is present again.

What happened in between? How did I miss this slow turning of now from then? And how did it become such a sudden leap?