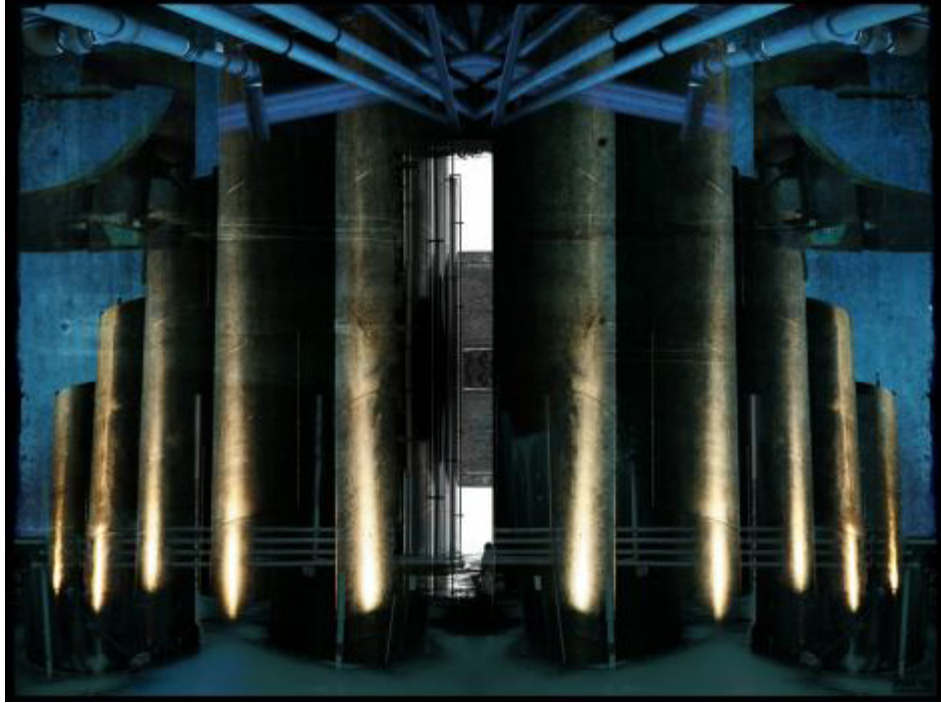


HANDSHAKE TROUBLE



Ryan Collins // Handshake Trouble

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In the New Year of Our Lord

Let's connect dots, make an abstract, hatch a plan from the goose mother, as though she were herself the egg, herself more than novelty. What else should she or anyone aspire to besides? Using words like fuselage to mechanize the heart? There's no engine turning over, no such thing as too catchy—so we find ourselves too often on the hook, too often more machine than machine, less human than chimpanzees & stockyards. Our cordage fails to keep us bound to any anchored thing, however caught up we find ourselves. We're never really found, but we keep looking. Let's sing & pretend to know the words to A Mighty Fortress is our God & fly kites like we're kids on holiday from a Swiss boarding school. Let's make believe a second language, one we can't be taught in any school. We learn to leave messages & lose the sale, so many cold calls, so far in the rear-view. The same message sent to undisclosed recipients—Happy New Year, you angels. Don't fuck it up. We promise only what can't be delivered, that which beholds only to fate. We lash around, beshitted by our resolutions, slurring the words that make our meaning & hold little water, which will freeze by morning.

Spirit of St. Louis

Hot in the city & I can't find my baby,
can't be taken to the river—the devil's

got me by the balls. We're gonna find
out who's got the most swing in their

swagger soon enough, promising to be
a cold week before Halloween, before

gorilla suits & vampire teeth get pulled
out of the plastic. No need to keep our

champagne on ice (at least the good stuff),
because it's colder than cool in Rock City

& if we aren't careful, they'll tear us a-
sunder, they'll use our skulls for trophies.

My Father's Son

What brothers share becomes delicate beyond
a father's hand, a prison,

a long waiting to find a common neglect.

Brothers not fast to call each other friends
at either end of absence

raise glasses & pitch over an un-
comfortable silence

where at their latest, they will become fathers.

Hard Luck Story

After a day of making, the shuffle chops
Away in the next room.

Someone sounds like they're losing their shirt.

Too much on the phone, asleep too early
& the day gets away from me.

I go outside for a breath and return soaked.

In the next room someone's getting hosed
& not being quiet about it.

April Fools

We say & say not under rain
which on this island
is full of crisp bridges, a fine
netting slung to sift out the gray.

Glass presides no more than a mile
past the capillared waters in all
given directions—

wires carve indigo squares out of light.

Morning bells hang over pigeons
—humble & too damp to fly—
as the Sunday faithful wait
for transit stoned beneath umbrellas.

I cannot tell if wind sways the island
or if shimmers of rain unfold the day—

When In Doubt

Finally! a song I can't get out of my head
almost as much as you. Sticking
too much to the ribs & I'm breaking them
one by one just to get you unstuck.
But I have no truck with you, stubborn
in the here & hereafter, right hand
over mine, top of the bat— you win again.
Which is fine by me, as that losing
is bearable in a way losing you is not.
Twice since last we spoke I've caught
myself talking to you while making dinner
for two in the kitchen, alone. Every time
the phone rings & you don't answer it
I get mad. I miss how you'd start
a conversation with "When in doubt"
how it caught strangers off-guard. O
the uninitiated! But this seems like the when
& I'm certain this is how doubt feels—
not the pianokey tickling of my sides,
my chords joyous but a half-note flat.
You were always a catch-all for music
either way. You left a note, but I spilled
tea on it & now I don't know where you are.
Really, you can't just leave me here
with your record collection & clothes.
You can't release our canary & not bring
him back to his cage. Every creak in
the floorboards, each time I hear a lock
turn over, I expect it's you. Please hurry back.

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