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Apprentice

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Philip Arnold

APPRENTICE

*No workman, no master, no journeyman will tell anyone
who is not of the craft and has never been a mason
how to take an elevation from a plan.*

—1459, Regensburg Document

1.

A board is laid down
and the slow gliding of the plane
will cause the shavings to curl.

Mark the trace of grain, mortal in its coil,
it is cast off, swept away—

an oak spur, a breaking wave.

2.

From a stone's drop into still water
Dante calibrated his circles of hell,

keeping salvation plumb with the dipped line.

3.

The corruption of the horizontal is to forgive the shim.

4.

Perdix found a fish's spine along the beach
from which he fashioned
in iron the first saw. Not to be outdone,
Daedalus, his uncle,
built a tower of hewn wood, from which
he cast Perdix to his death.

5.

For closures maintain the fixed ambivalence of the hinge.

6.

Think of bracings.

The Pantheon's gold pins.

A house of cards.

By generation, do not inherit the sword
or civics, but dwell within the cathedral's pillar,
buttress and vault.

Dwell in the house of the arch.

7.

By measure Virgil mixed it right
and mortar was made of sand and ash
and with his hands and ten,
ten sons of Homer's men,
he laid the foundation out
on which he would fashion Rome.

8.

More discrete than the hammer,
the torque of the ratchet suggests
a compromise of force, a movement lateral
and round:

in the hidden heart of the tool,
in the precise circulation,
the ball-bearings roll within their groove,
the socket swivels on its pin:

and the rushed air is radial.

9.

Regard the dreaming mind of the carpenter—

how the mark is an ideogram of measurement,
the blueprint calligraphy to the nail,
and in the jointed ends of the lodge,

the angle is always square.

10.

What you make of this will not matter—
it will be broken down, re-scaled and assembled.