Memo on the Sublime: To Longinus from San Francisco

Oblivion: Cold storage for high hopes.

About you we know next to nothing,
your name, for instance. A wind blows through my window.
It scatters the papers on my desk while in the kitchen
I’m making salad with anchovies, which would disgust
my wife, but she’s not here, and so—Maestro, Please—
a little song, if you will, for this much maligned species:
If I were a dog, I would roll in you,
and rock the dog world.

—your name, which anchors you against the general scattering
was, of course, a monk’s guess, some anonymous someone’s
inspired moment—in a darkened room, tallow burning in a corner.
He was out all day, fishing, when a storm blew in,
his skin feeling tight from sun and salt air,
and now he’s alone and happy with, I like to think,
a plate of grilled anchovies, beside which lies
the unpromising moth-eaten treatise in rhetoric
for ambitious young Romans—
    which says, oddly for a primer,
    what I want to tell you can’t be taught.

After lunch I pedal into the Marina, the Presidio,
climbing the switchback where the breakers
hit the rocks, the traffic roaring above,
then I’m on the bridge, passing the southern tower
then the span and you’re so high you’ve simply left
the sound of the waters below.
Gone are the sounds of the world also
    of bells and distant trains
    the clinking of silverware

Up here it’s just you
and the rust-colored vaulted into blue
colossi of the gods, if they’re real,
and you don’t know they’re not,
not here, anyway, where they make a pretty hard case for themselves, though it’s we of course who ascended mightily once and here’s a bridge

as proof—
and it’s we,

who strangely drive our cars above the clouds as if it were the commonest thing in the world.

Dear World: I am getting along okay. Today I will have a snack in Sausalito, then bicycle back downtown, where I am staying in a little boutique hotel I don’t have to pay for. I will jump off the street car like a pro and go upstairs for a hot bath, so, you know, to answer Camus’ question, which comes to mind now, & which I read as an undergrad, deeply impressed, but also wondering if Camus weren’t just a wee bit of a light-weight, compared to, say, Sartre, but look how time has dealt with Sartre—eh, Camus?!——whether to kill oneself or to go on living was, in fact, the one philosophical question, as Camus says. Well, I can’t complain, which means, like these commuters motoring on their asses through the empyrean, most of the time, alas, I suppose I’m neither dead nor alive.

Others, in numbers enough to make this a bridge into the hereafter, have paused, then leapt over the rails, notes folded, placed in ziplock bags, or attached to clothing, perhaps with safety pins—

_How shall I kill myself?_ Camus

_Survival of the fittest, Adios—Unfit._

_Absolutely no reason except I have a toothache._

As for me, I would have gone on a bit, I tend to go on, I do go on, so it seems, across a bridge that blows me sideways though one wonders, at times, where to, as if there were some doubt in the matter,
the afternoon light glorious, O gods,
and of course one’s fate is to be less than misremembered.