PART 6: AKATALEPSIA
[NOT GRASPING]

You land in Paris and check into a youth hostel.

Clothes look cleaner than before.

Car doors open and shut.

For the next seventeen years you will revise a poem about a defunct carousel you see on this day. You won’t be able to get it right because you will keep lying about everything, about what it was, about what you wished it were.

The truth is that the carousel sat still, covered with tarps and leaves, in the small park near the Place de la République.
The finitude of experience is real.
Its contingencies and limits
are a kind of pain.

People smoked by it.

This pain, no matter how exquisite,
can not outstrip experience’s finitude.

Tourists stumbling back to the Crowne Plaza
glanced at it, disappointed.

Contemplation of this pain
and its alternatives
can not eclipse pain,
only balance it.

It inspired nothing but an impulse to remark
the empty, to fend off profounder emptiness.

Not infinity or possibility but
boundedness,
the balance between what is real
and what is not,
is the shock of freedom
and the dread of responsibility
for moments, deeds,
pains, and pleasures,
chosen, suffered, appreciated, regretted.

You wrote something about “notenoughness,” which implied an enlightened attitude toward insufficiency and lack.

It is tempting to transform this shock and dread into a personal ecstasy, not a necessary evil tolerated as the wage of being real, but a selfish souffrance, a lacerating crisis of indifference that resembles being alive.

You wrote, “The hotel is the same as the world: à la fin tu es là” [in the end, there you are], which contained a charming reference to Apollinaire’s “Zone” (“à la fin tu es las de ce monde ancien”) that few would be likely to get.

That would be the lie.
You return to your favorite café.

You eat a croque monsieur, stare at the sidewalk of the rue Cambronne, and want to throw up.

You are astounded by the amount of glass around the bar, the comptoir d’étain, the ornate tables, the plastic ashtray holding the tiny reçu in place, the people moving precisely from sitting to standing, silence to speech, gazing to staring.

You immediately forget everything about Benin.

Rather, you remember everything, but not as if it were true.

Even the terror associated with this forgetting vanishes quickly, fades into mere anxiety that there will be no lesson, just fragments, disgorged dreams dissolved into nonsense.

You begin to think about cash, about sex, about a job, about your flight back to Amer-
ica, about your stuff in a closet on the rue de Chevreuse, about what you will say of your experience, about getting a tetanus shot, about ordering another café crème, about your haircut: about one hundred things of no importance.