

Working Progress, Working Title

JOHN MATTHIAS was born in 1941 in Columbus, Ohio. He has been a Visiting Fellow in poetry at Clare Hall, Cambridge, and lived for much of the 70s and 80s in East Anglia. He teaches at the University of Notre Dame. Matthias's recent books include *A Gathering of Ways* (1991), *Swimming at Midnight: Selected Shorter Poems* (1995), *Beltane at Aphelion: Longer Poems* (1995), and *Pages: New Poems and Cuttings* (2000). In 1998 Robert Archaibeau edited *Word Play Place: Essays on the Poetry of John Matthias*.

Working Progress, Working Title

JOHN MATTHIAS



PUBLISHED BY SALT PUBLISHING
PO Box 202, Applecross, Western Australia 6153
PO Box 937, Great Wilbraham, Cambridge PDO CB1 5JX United Kingdom

All rights reserved

© John Matthias, 2002

The right of John Matthias to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with Section 77 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

This book is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Salt Publishing.

First published 2002

Printed and bound in the United Kingdom by Lightning Source

Typeset in Swift 9.5 / 13

This book is sold subject to the conditions that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

ISBN 1 876857 41 2 paperback

SP

1 3 5 7 9 8 6 4 2

Contents

| | |
|-------------------------|----|
| Automystifstical Plaice | 1 |
| Pages | 35 |
| Part One | 37 |
| Part Two | 49 |
| Part Three | 61 |
| Part Four | 73 |
| Part Five | 85 |

Acknowledgements

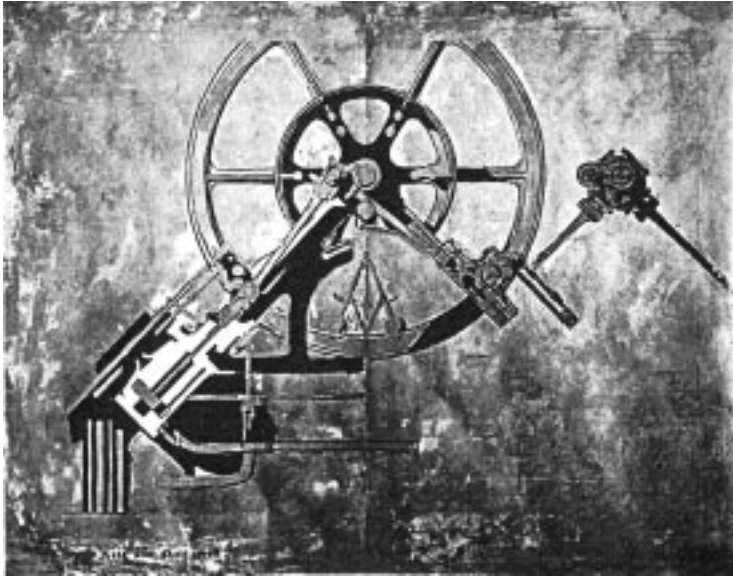
Swallow Press/Ohio University press for “Pages: From a Book of Years” from John Matthias’s American collection, *Pages*, Swallow Press, 2001.

Artists Rights Society for the photograph of Fernand Leger standing in his set design for L’Herbier’s film *L’Inhumaine*, and for Francis Picabia’s “Fille nee sans mere” © 2001 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris.

G. Schirmer Rental and Performance for MIDI keyboard and pianola configurations and click track:
<http://www.schirmer.com/balletmec/06.html>

Roy George and Associates, Studio portrait of Hedy Lamarr.

Automystifstical Plaice



In the beginning
without any mother the girl was born a machine.
In the year of erotic parades.
The Novia poured out the oil the gears were engaged
the études composed and the light bulb
was Américaine. Voilà Picabia sweetheart of first
occupation voilà ballet mécanique.
We'll not eat our bread by the sweat of our brows
in the end: Je viens pour toujours
it is error and grief you'll be known by
the strength of our steel
the number of rivets and not by the river
where fishermen cast or the last
of your towers to build on the strength of our dowry.
Antheil Olga Boski Hedy and Ez, she says:
Or probably better
Olga and Ez, Antheil and Boski [Hedy Keisler Mandl Lamarr.
That's Mandl, Fritz, from Vienna, the armaments man,
the war profiteer. Hedy Keisler, the naked broad in the film.
It won't be a dance, it won't be ballet mécanique.

Ecstasy, rather, a run through the woods and a swim.
The actress saying: sex in this movie is real,
Mandl's lieutenants will buy up & burn any print they can find
so Hedy and Fritz can entertain Hitler and Mus.
Aribert Mog is displaced; the telescope on the lens
enlarges another face
from about a decade before.]



They enter a judgment,
Théâtre des Champs Elysées. Everyone's there. The soloist
doesn't know that he is a she. He doesn't know
he's set up, doesn't yet know they've scripted him in a riot
(those lights are too many, too bright.)
Mere human being he sits there robotic she looks like
a presence out of Bohemia via Berlin's RUR.
He begins with Sonata Sauvage.
A camera's panning the audience, picks out the famous:
Picasso and Joyce, Duchamp, Milhaud and Satie.
We see them there with Leblanc as Lescot in the film
but we don't hear a sound Mr. Pound leaping
right out of his seat and shaking a fist as people begin
to walk out on Antheil himself at his Airplane Sonata
by now and sweating away but we don't hear a thing as we gaze
at the girl without any mother born a machine
who would sing out succès du scandale a clickityclack
of the dactylicanapests jerking the film
through a circle of light the soloist booed from the stage
the piano rolls looping their loops
in twelve pianolas electronic bells and a xylophone siren
another Picabia made from the parts
of a Model-T Ford.

Good Lord, she says, Mon Dieu.

That must have been one nine two three, the year I went
to the races with Hem at Anteuil, the year
young Antheil was going to play Cyclops for Jim.
A working title indeed, she says, a walking tittle or tattle I'd say
to your automystiftistical plaice—
you're fishing again in some pre-Riemannian river
and don't understand the riveters have it all over
the rhetors who can't even master the minor recursions
while minding the algorithmical gaps.
No one could actually *play* that piano roll A wrote into the score,
the digitals moving at speeds and at intervals
nobody's ten carboniferous digits could match.
So down at the hurdle went Manzu, tossing his jock,
and Héros the Twelfth and L'Yser dashed at long odds
for the finish. Seining out in the sea near Le Havre
you wouldn't net any sonnets much less Seigneurs
out of Proust. You understand, she insists,
there *are* no parallel lines in rivers that wind & nothing but
nothing
my love appears to cohere from *inside* the system
trust *me* I'm a truffer I *know* my way around.

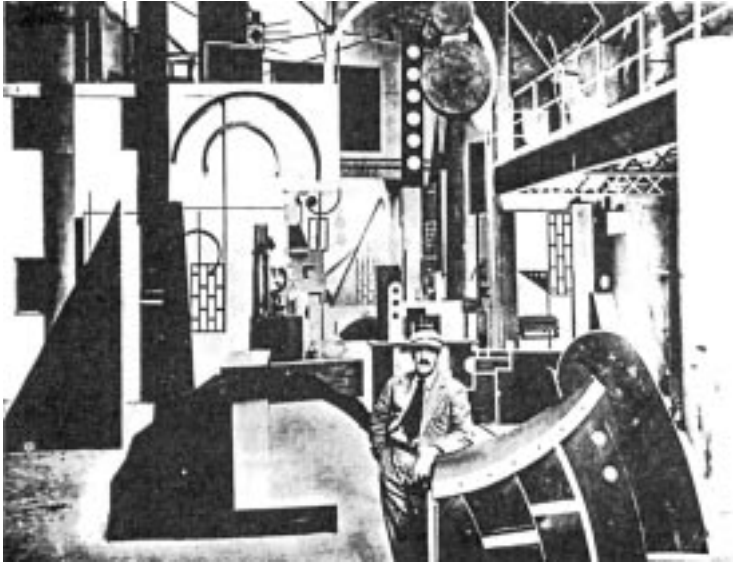
And Pound once again that very same year in his Treatise?
claiming for A's diachronic harmonics
that sounds whatever the pitch combination etcetera
harmonize across time
these series of chords these arpeggios wait to embrace
through an interval

silence

the crux of the thing
the space in the music like space in some canvas
by Lewis his fine demarcations of volume,
cylindrical forms: You do comprehend these recursions are
different
from those you'd expect,
the power plant cycles like no minuet?

& so A, she says,

was the cause of that riot but nowhere was seen
in the film. It's me, it is I, on the screen!
They call me there the austere Mademoiselle Claire Lescot.
I'm some kind of cubist cold fish, the girl
without any mother born a machine who can nonetheless sing
and I stare down those rioting plebs at the Champs Elysées
alive in the interval A absconditus diminished
however you like. [81: chez vous. Demain à sept heures.
82: musique imprévue. 83: odieuse, odieuse. 84: atmosphère
torturante quand elle laisse enfin percer le secret . . .
son immense douleur inhumaine . . .
85, 86, 87: In reel time
we're counting the titles, we number the causes, effects:
Sonata Sauvage, piano, piano roll, siren
and dactyl and drum.
Will George in the war be faithful
to Boski his wife? Will Olga or Ez trumpet Mus?
Will young Fräulein Keisler run naked as Hedy Lamarr?
Fishing or fasting, reprogram, reverse it
and search]



Your working title, she says,
might as well gesture at Czech. The Gödels and Capeks fished
for me in my motherless maze when I thought I was
Daumier's laundress and not Miss Sullarobotess,
some loopy machine in your ghost,
the ganef your ganglia somehow encoded, the chip on your
shoulder,
the quantum mechanic under the hood of your truck.
Before they made me the knee of your curve, the neural pathway
encrypted for good. Was I not to dissolve in *I am*
but as antiparticulate anapest?
And that other, doctor, a dactyl, or a catcall out of the pit.
Anyway the joke was on P: A's pianola replacing
the Sapphics & he himself its antistrophe, turns unrolling
Daphne's thighs from the bark.

So Model-T begat Picabia who as machinist made the shape that named a choreography. And then Antheil's recital drove the riot L'Herbier required for Lescot before she visits Léger's laboratory where her lover there among the angles and the geometric shapes, the silver disks and metal rods and knobs and dials and flashing beams of light, transfigures her. [Hedwig Keisler's in Vienna at that moment and she's eight years old. She's also in the lab. She's in the music and the dance and the machine.] And then when A has finished playing at that theater and gifting us with such an angry crowd in *L'Inhumaine*, he synchronizes those piano rolls whose loops and variants of eighty-eight prefigure microsecond hops between the frequencies of anti-jamming programs in torpedoes or computer links or cordless phones. This is Ballet Mécanique: the draft. This the working title. This the initial location, the automystifical place. We don't hear a thing as we call up Archival Search: Were you, Oh My Baby, meant to walk that washer woman up the stairs with Léger-Daumier? The print went to Vienna and premiered in silence, running credits anyway for Synchronisme Musicale. The ostinati rolled for friends and patrons five days later at the Salle Pleyel.

If first the vertical and then the horizontal penetrations were derivatives of pianist and pianola, neither got it all entirely right, though both had caught a ride on George's rickshaw. Our guest was still a ghost, the cyborg wasn't yet a sibyl on the line. And A himself could never fully realize his 1923 designs. His codes were still dependent on a vacuum force and paper rolls with which he sought to synchronize his twelve or more machines. He hadn't met the Midi, technical cousin of Claire, his digital and instrumental interface. As if you'd teach the retrofitted to respond in synch, but not for sixty years. Still, the lady out of Daumier walks up the stairs and up the stairs and up the stairs once more in *Ballet Mécanique* the film. If Claire Lescot stood in for one piano, these stone steps beside the Seine and these looped thirty frames appear and reappear to summon music no one hears where tie-rods, pistons, wheels and gears and abstract forms reflected in the steel of a prismatic fracturing all gleam and try to sing.



| | | | | |
|----|-------|--|----|-------|
| E | 03:10 | | E | 02:38 |
| F | 04:01 | | F | 03:20 |
| G | 06:11 | | G | 05:09 |
| H | 06:40 | | H | 05:33 |
| I | 07:01 | | I | 05:51 |
| J | 08:05 | | J | 06:54 |
| K | 11:20 | | K | 09:26 |
| L | 11:32 | | L | 09:37 |
| M | 11:59 | | M | 09:59 |
| N | 13:02 | | N | 10:52 |
| O | 13:39 | | O | 11:22 |
| P | 14:40 | | P | 12:14 |
| Q | 16:32 | | Q | 13:47 |
| R | 18:51 | | R | 15:42 |
| S | 21:35 | | S | 17:59 |
| T | 22:05 | | T | 18:24 |
| U | 23:05 | | U | 19:14 |
| V | 23:16 | | V | 19:24 |
| X | 23:47 | | X | 19:49 |
| Y | 24:29 | | Y | 20:24 |
| Z | 24:50 | | Z | 20:42 |
| AA | 26:00 | | AA | 21:40 |
| BB | 30:03 | | BB | 25:02 |

Says Ezra Pound: EP. He plays. All gleam and try to sing. And then Léger: Léger. Says George Antheil: Anteuil. That piece in place. Police will net you rioters at any cybernetic database. Then peace. Or flounder there. All champs, these guys. All champs Champs Elysées. If someone might just reconnect. That wire. That Novia who pours out oil, those gears that re-engage. Say P & A: Machines are musical. Machines are part of life. It's right that one should feel a little warm. One does so feel. Or cold. It's not required of anyone to kneel. When they tried to integrate the music and the film they didn't mesh. They went their separate ways as separate works like two berserks in RUR or Léger's lab. In 1923 the pianolas were all out of synch. You've said. But now the Midi in her Quadra form's all smiles. Disklavier by Yamaha. [As if you'd count out miles of spectrum spreads with Miss Lamarr.] At some café-tabac you'd linger

over a petit vin blanc or modify the track at will and run the thing right back. And was that laundress's one friend a fisherman?

Oh yes. In all the winding rivers and at sea. Says he: