ALL RISE

What does he know? Nothing. What does he see? A million reflections of his self. What's his driving wheel? The flavor of the month – the stricken fancy. Say, what month was he born? February. Because it's a cold month. Where's he buried. Oh, he's alive. Yeah, but where's he buried? No man, he runs the casket company – drives the white truck up the highway, sells caskets on the highway, takes plastic, never decomposes. Who are you kidding? You man. You were pretty stupid not to see it coming. There were miles of caskets, laid end to end, leading to that flashpoint. But what could you do, change? No not you? Change any more than the way your head was cut – out of the question. But still, it didn't come out of thin air. You had all the time in the world – for diagnosis, self-medication, firm those thighs. You just let it all slide. Bit by bit. Impoverishment of the humors, inertia of the fluids, rigidity of the fibres, agitation of the bile. You just let it grow. From a moan, to a wail, to a flat-out convulsive frenzy. I wasn't going to say anything, but somebody around here is to blame. You know who I mean. Playing squash, the sweat files in

slow motion. In the courts, the defendant deposes, then he reposes. Finally he wraps himself up in a rebozo and dozes, stretched on that bench. All rise. Wrapped up like that. All rise. Shhh. On your mission behind enemy lines. Step up to the bench. Your docket number, your pistol, your pocket. Here he comes with that white truck. What did you do now? Now you're buying.

From "Radio Tiranë," *Conjunctions* 10, 1991

C'era una volta un bel linguaggio

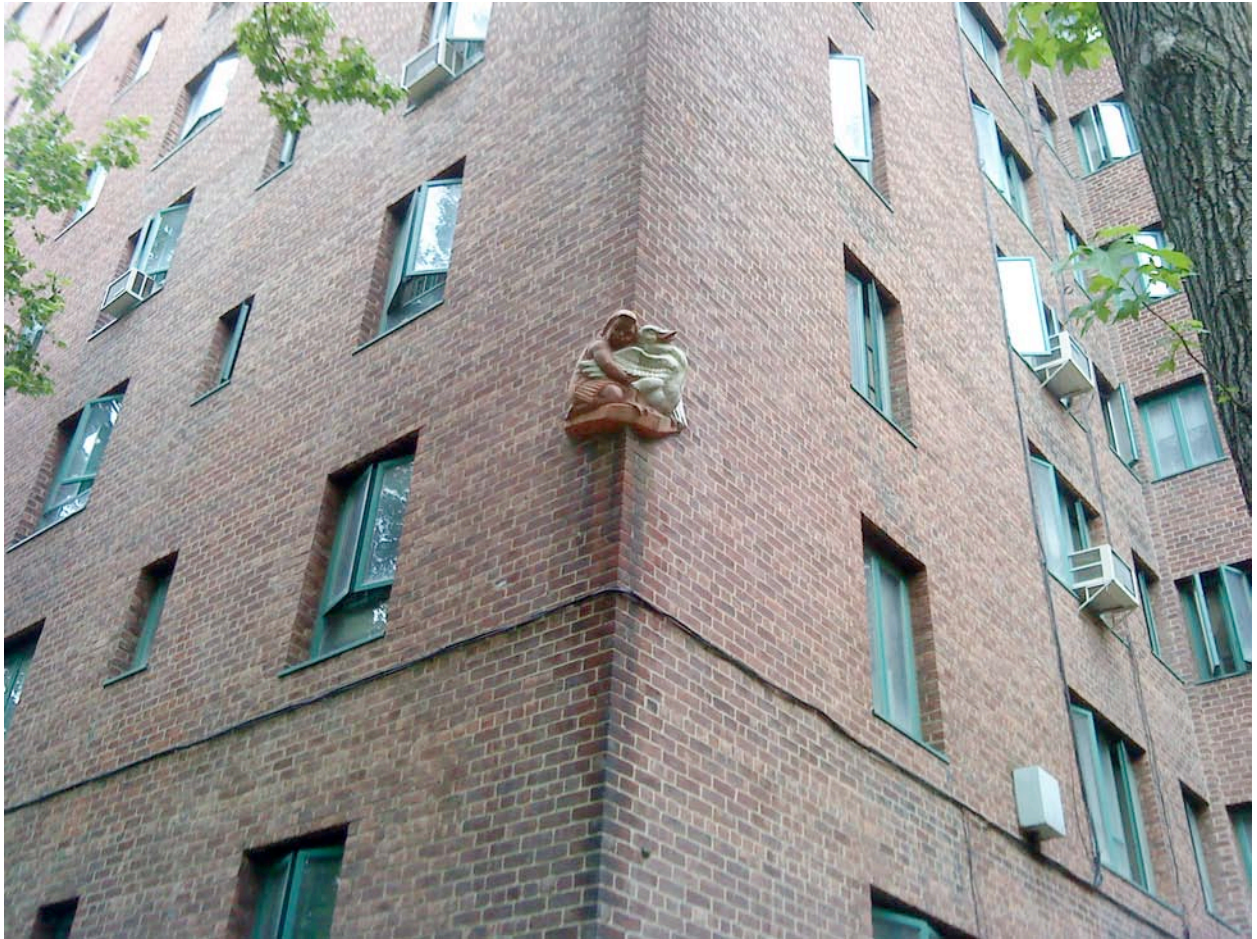   Once upon a time there was a beautiful language

che ma più parlato,

     That I have never spoken again

non ti spiace ricordamelo?

     Would you help me remember it?

     —Paolo Conti, "Gong-oh"

A Parkchester sparrow builds its nest in the lower loop of the ampersand in the AT&T sign above the storefront's door.

A Chelsea sparrow chooses the upper level of a Rite Aid's "e" to make its home.

This feels enough like the moment to be the moment.