IKON

creativity and change

we can and must create a new world with new forms, techniques and ideas

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SECOND SERIES, #1 **FALL/WINTER 1982-83**

February, 1967, the first issue of IKON appeared. IKON was intended to be a magazine where information would serve as an impetus to action. Founded on the premise that form and content are inseparable, it was our contention that there was no longer a place for the "professional" critic, the professional "middle-man," the professional observer. There was no longer a place for the uninvolved.

Change is contingent on continual re-examination, re-evaluation, awareness. So now, almost ten years later, focusing on work by women, IKON is being reborn. It is our hope that IKON will help contribute to that growth which is so necessary to comprehend and experience ever more fully the dialogue/dialectic/meeting/struggle/act of love by which we gather in and alter our world.

IKON: an image combining separate symbolic elements into a unity in which all are perceived simultaneously, thereby eliminating the separation of body and mind, spirit and intellect, feeling and thought.

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IKON welcomes manuscripts as long as they are accompanied by a self-addressed stamped envelope.
We ask that contributors wait to send submissions until after January since we are changing our address.

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susan sherman

FREEING THE BALANCE: activism and art

In contemporary times, there has been a radical shift of emphasis from things, objects, people to the background, "field," the context that makes things possible —the silences that shape words, the relationships that define people, the needs that focus our attention on each other, on our world. Consequently, there has been a shift from description and analysis of "things" to an attempt to understand activity, function, process, "work." The background becomes, not the static painted flats of the theatre, but a set of relationships, of inter-relationships, of needs. The line of contact is not unidirectional, radiating out from one isolated center. It is a dialogue. We become, in a literal sense, not actors on an empty stage, but activities in silence, formed and focused, brought into speech, by our interaction with each other.

The danger is, with this shift in emphasis, the individual (whether person or thing) can be misplaced. It is all too easy when making a generalization about relationship to exclude those making the relationship possible. And with this removal of structure from content, the fullness, richness, the uniqueness of each individual and each relationship is lost. By subsuming everything under the abstract activity, the mathematical or logical relationship, we have the tendency to lose the tangibleness, the substantiality, and sometimes even the *fact* of existence. This is particularly important to recognize now in view of our increasing dependence on electronic technology and computers, graphs and statistics. Even though pointed in a different direction, we are still imprisoned by old prejudices, old habits of thinking, old methods, old speech patterns, old rules. We are still bound by a system of logic that abstracts form from content whether that content be person, object or action, that refuses to recognize the multi-leveled nature of reality, that condemns us to choosing between partial truths. That keeps us powerless.

What is needed are not new words or new definitions, but a radical shift in our way of looking at our world. Any resolution to a problem brought about in the first place by the oppressiveness of the society in which we move is not going to be found using that society's logic. In fact, it is precisely this conditioning—a conditioning that denies any system as "unreal" that does not fit within the traditional intellectual framework—that holds us back. It is not really true that "seeing is believing." We can see things and still not believe them if they do not fit into our preconceived notion of how things should be.

As social beings, our primary commitment is defined as being to the group; as artists, to the vision, the work. At its two extremes this dichotomy is seen as the conflict between art as "propaganda" and "art for art's sake." The former is a totally utilitarian view of art; the latter (the most accepted and *acceptable* critical

view in the United States today) is that the purpose of art, if it has any, is found in its own self-identity, in a self-contained realm cut off from the rest of experience.

But the aesthetic experience is *not* something separate from the rest of our lives. The poem, if allowed to sing freely through us, can teach us how to reach beyond imposed limitations—as can any free action or thought which manages somehow to escape the rigid self-censorship we impose on each other and on our world. This, however, is not to suggest that technique is not necessary or that we have no social responsibility. It is only through skill (an entirely different concept than manipulation) and responsibility (not to be confused with control) that this type of freedom is possible. In order to sing you must have a voice, and it is precisely through discipline and a consciousness of our relationship to others that we find our voice.

Usually when we think of the word "balance," we think of equalization, of symmetry—if one side of the scale is too heavy, you move the weighting mechanism until the two "balance." The artist is seen as walking a tightrope between vision and necessity, art and life. But there is another way of looking at this word.

In the earliest Tarot decks the first card, "The Juggler," balances the four elements which represent the universe. In the same way I, as an artist, hold in suspension different and *seemingly contradictory* elements of the outside world and my own life, thoughts, objects, actions. Through the creative process, I focus these elements and discover their relationships. This is done through that central unifying experience which is the work of art.

The model of the scale is a mechanical model—the human being is needed only to place and move. The model of the juggler, however, is an organic model. The elements are not "two," but as many as skill allows. The human being is central, a *living* element who "balances" the rest. And with this shifting of understanding, our sense of time shifts. We no longer think in terms of a series of points in logical sequence, but of association, relationship, context, change.

Art embraces contradiction. It is not possible to talk about a poem or a painting, sculpture, musical composition as if it were an object. Neither is it a process. Poetry is as much a multiplicity and a single unit, a completed moment (an object) and an action (a process) as the poet, the human being behind the poem. The individual poem might alter relative to place and time, but there always remains that thread which weaves through individual works and sings the poem as name.

The work of art is, as a person is, both memory (a past) and activity (the present). It is, as each human being is, at each moment *simultaneously* complete and in the process of completion. However, unlike the poet, whose existence as a living being is constant, the poem is actualized only upon being written or read. As the poet finishes the poem, readers seize and interpret it, live it, according to their own individual experiences and needs. At its best, the poem, any art work, is multi-leveled, holds many levels of meaning without sacrificing any—the most mundane or the most profound.

The concepts *balance* and *completion* must be understood not as the median between two extremes, as the "end" of a logical process, but as the organic suspension and assimilation of elements of experience. The way I wrote and what I

wrote when I was twenty differ from the subject matter and style I write in now. With years come changes; yet, at twenty, I wrote poems that continue to grow in meaning for me.

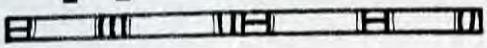
Because of the prejudices of our modern world, we are forced literally to live "by the clock." One moment follows the next. One heartbeat succeeds another. We are imprisoned in an endless one-directional sequence of action. The question, "Why?" (the basis of all meaning) is labeled "nonsense" and replaced by the question, "How?" An examination of sequential process, cause and effect, takes the place of a quest for understanding until everything is reduced to an analysis of method, and we find ourselves walking backward, measuring our lives by our footsteps.

The question is not "art for art's sake" versus "political art." In fact, the discoveries of the work of art cannot exist without the understanding of relationship that is an integral part of social interaction. However, at the same time every work of art expresses a set of social relationships and gives information about our social position and biases, there is also a part of the work that exists apart from us, from our personal or social needs, demands, control. It is precisely this most precious part of the work, the part that we "let be," that reveals what is new to us, makes our world ever new to us.

Whatever new contradictions, whatever new theories evolve, the essential questions can never be asked, much less resolved, unless they risk real pain, unless they bring something new into being. Unless they have the capacity to transmute, to transform, to change.

If there is one thing poetry, both others and my own, has shown me, it is the error of approaching the world as an "expert" declaring, "I know what you are. My search is how to make you work for me." But, rather, to approach the world in ever renewed wonder, with a request. "I thought I knew you, but you are more than I ever thought possible. Teach me how to be."

clippings



History repeats itself
they declare
wanting us to believe
the present only a duplication
(slightly altered)
of the past

I sit sorting clippings
scraps of history
a collage
torn from newspapers books
fragments of memory
the corners
of my brain

Who said it first?
How long can you negate what your ears
have heard? How long can you deny
what your eyes have seen?

CLIPPING ONE : a portrait
a woman and a man
their lips drawn tight
You notice first her eyes
so open
light seems drawn to them
His hand rests against her shoulder
They balance each other
Sean Sands
brother of dead Irish
hunger striker Bobby
Elizabeth O'Hara Derry born
and raised

"*The violence leaves a mark on all of us,*"
she says

A breeze blows gently
outside my window
stirs the single tree
In summer
when its leaves are full
the street is hidden
People enter only as sound
Sound is faceless like these words
invisible
but it also conveys an image
has dimension of its own

Sands describes a plastic bullet
4" long 1" in diameter
designed to be fired at the ground
describes 11 year old Carol Ann Kelly
killed by British soldiers
firing point blank
at her face

The cylinder tore her head to bits
It was porcelain hard The color of cream

The past is a multiplicity of facts
if anything more obtuse
than the future
more liable to alteration
less visible in its meaning

but images remain

CLIPPING TWO : an afternoon dispatch
Plastic bullets as well as water cannon
tear gas armored cars
have now been authorized to control
Britian's own riot-torn streets

At ten Sean Sands is interrogated
his family put out on the street
Bobby Sands at gunpoint is forced
from his job

"That's when he joined the IRA"

My eyes travel across the desk top
CLIPPING THREE : protective raids
(the breaking and entering of private homes)
are now taking place in certain sections
of England
"to insure the peace"

It all turns back on them on us
as it always does
the violence
the waste

History belongs to those
who claim it The past is silent
has only the dimension
we place on it
the words we call it
the voice we give it
the power we endow it with
In itself
it has no name

A lesson forgotten
is a lesson
never learned

Only those who can see the moments
act on them
hold them
can alter the past
create history

determine whose future it is
that will be gained

Susan Sherman

definitions

1
I think it's coming close to death
that does it
both others
& your own
that magnifies the values
begins the definitions

This morning
mild at last
after weeks of chill
Streets heavy with water
People stepping
cautiously
hardly knowing where
to place their feet
so accustomed to barriers
of salt & ice

My mind resembles those winter streets
grey
with sludge
The snow cover melted
The sidewalks washed of unfamiliar
glare

2
After all she said
What difference does it make?
That's the reason I never write
hardly speak of what is me

I begin to answer glibly stop
Held myself in identical fear
My own touch tentative
almost an excuse
like making love to someone
for the first time
or the third (which is always harder)
once you begin to know experience
another

the tension of your hair brown
streaked with grey
                the lines of
your face like wires rushing through
my hands the pressures of your past
your forehead your knees

3
Warm outside the steam
continues forced by habit
I open the window throw the
oracle trace the heat
The heart thinks constantly it says
One constant then the heart another
the drawing back
                Four o'clock
Two hours till dawn Nightmare
image your face
surrounded by strangers
Beloved you turn
                away
Sweat mixes with flowered sheets
The constant fear
                To push out
finally cautiously tentatively
and find

        an empty place

4
Death brings us close to it
Death itself
            forgetting
And we the living
wanting to remember
not wishing to be forgotten
                separated
from what we hold most near

I hold you for a moment lose you
watch you disappear
                I hold you
for a lifetime lose you

the next year the next morning
the next minute the next breath

5
You tell me
What can I say to that
young woman 18 years
of age?

That I at 38 must once more lay aside
all sense of definition order
Must once more carefully measure
the accumulation of my years

Or should I say
her question can be answered
in specific needs others
and her own
                But she's asking
more than that We both know
what she means

The only real difference being death
The one who stops the heart

Susan Sherman

JENNY HECHT

Jenny said evacuate the continent
Jenny and I laughed and cried alot
Jenny took a deep inbreath whenever she heard bad news
Jenny was superstitious
Jenny was religious
Jenny told me to burn all my pieces of paper
Jenny was aware of her place on the planet
Jenny was aware of her position in life
Jenny read the tarot
Jenny wanted to be tall
Jenny gave vent to her passion
Jenny sewed a red dress
Jenny lived in many countries and climates
Jenny and her father tried to make opium out of poppies
Jenny suffered from being a famous man's daughter
Jenny brought boxes of clothes and food to the striking miners
Jenny travelled in my bus
Jenny was a real pacifist with a temper
Jenny took too many drugs
Jenny was intending to be one of the survivors
Jenny was conscious of her conscience
Jenny had no regrets
Jenny ate the bread of affliction
Jenny was intimate with everyone she met
Jenny answered: as much as I dare
Jenny was a child of the century
Jenny kept a coded diary
Jenny went to Africa with John Harriman
Jenny struggled with and yet loved her mother
Jenny was a famous child star
Jenny was proud in jail and irked the guards
Jenny bit a policeman's foot
Jenny made Isha Manna a dress out of an embroidered diaper
Jenny ate very very hot curry
Jenny was the original Bride of Frankenstein
Jenny pretended to believe in re-incarnation
Jenny sat on the edge of the stage of the Akademie der Künste
Jenny had hair like the sun
Jenny smoked her stash up in two days
Jenny was never ashamed of her body
Jenny travelled into the void and was afraid
Jenny asked for the essential reality
Jenny frightened the Sicilian children

Jenny fell from the stage in a blackout
Jenny the beloved daughter was a waif
Jenny tasted the fruits and dregs of life
Jenny slept on the floor in Ferlinghetti's office
Jenny could draw dance act sing and tumble
Jenny was loved by many men
Jenny had a wry smile and a bitter smile
Jenny travelled on the face of the waters
Jenny loved the sea

Jenny is often remembered
Jenny seems to appear on celluloid
Jenny warned us.

—judith malina

photos: karl bissinger

MABEL BECK: WINTER 1980

In the dead of winter,
Her children and grandchildren
Gathered around the mechanized bed,
She lay dying in the House of Israel.

Straining to speak, under the mask,
The sunken mouth
Forms the names of the children.
An oriental nurse
Sits staring at her,
From the foot of the bed,
Caring intensively,
Observing the flickering double line
Of the heartbeat measured
On a small screen.
And the irregular numbers:
34: 100 . . . . . 34: 104,
That code some meaning
To the trained eye,
Only confound the mystery
To the despairing children.

When her younger son speaks
Her eyes flicker and the straw wisp
Of her exhausted old body
Trembles and spasms
Under the hospital sheet.

She wants to pronounce
Her last words.
But the intensive care
Has muted her with its
Life-support, and no one knows
What syllables her face is forming
Under the mask.

The kindly doctor, who bears the name
Of a Polish city,
Speaks somberly to the family.
"We are doing everything,"
"An extraordinary constitution."
"If we operated she would die . . ."
"As long as she remains alert."

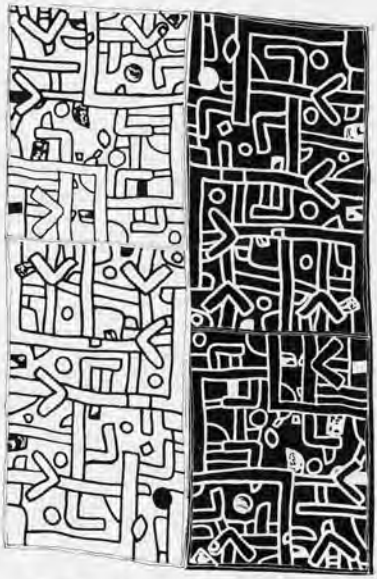
Her younger son reads her a love note
From her granddaughter
Who stayed behind in Rome.
They thought that at thirteen
She isn't prepared to see
The mountain of life-support
Flowing into the black bruised arm
Of the exhausted old body
Which she loves with a child's faith.

Her sons, at her bedside,
Look, at last, like two brothers,
Her daughters-in-law, estranged
By their various life-styles,
Chat about how hard life is—
Or, as my mother was wont to say,
"Living is hard, but dying is harder."

Mabel died in the last days of 1980,
Surrounded by her children and grandchildren
In the House of Israel
In a cataclysm of physical agony.

Nothing prepares us for what we are to be.

—judith malina



"IF I COULD WRITE THIS IN FIRE I WOULD WRITE THIS IN FIRE"

MICHELLE CLIFF

I

We were standing under the waterfall at the top of Orange River. Our chests were just beginning to mound—slight hills on either side. In the center of each were our nipples, which were losing their sideways look and rounding into perceptible buttons of dark flesh. Too fast it seemed. We touched each other, then, quickly and almost simultaneously, raised our arms to examine the hairs growing underneath. Another sign. Mine was wispy and light-brown. My friend Zoe had dark hair curled up tight. In each little patch the riverwater caught the sun so we glistened.

The waterfall had come about when my uncles dammed up the river to bring power to the sugar mill. Usually, when I say "sugar mill" to anyone not familiar with the Jamaican countryside or for that matter my family, I can tell their minds cast an image of tall smokestacks, enormous copper cauldrons, a man in a broad-brimmed hat with a whip, and several dozens of slaves—that is, if they have any idea of how large sugar mills once operated. It's a grandiose expression—like plantation, verandah, outbuilding. (Try substituting farm, porch, outside toilet.) To some people it even sounds romantic.

Our sugar mill was little more than a round-roofed shed, which contained a wheel and woodfire. We paid an old man to run it, tend the fire, and then either bartered or gave the sugar away, after my grandmother had taken what she needed. Our canefield was about two acres of flat land next to the river. My grandmother had six acres in all, one donkey, a mule, two cows, some chickens, a few pigs, and stray dogs and cats who had taken up residence in the yard.

Her house had four rooms, no electricity, no running water. The kitchen was a shed in the back with a small pot-bellied stove. Across from the stove was a mahogany counter, which had a white enamel basin set into it. The only light source was a window, a small space covered partly by a wooden shutter. We washed our faces and hands in enamel bowls with cold water carried in kerosene tins from the river and poured from enamel pitchers. Our chamber pots were enamel also, and in the morning we carefully placed them on the steps at the side of the house where my grandmother collected them and disposed of their contents. The outhouse was about thirty yards from the back door—a "closet" as we called it—infested with lizards capable of changing color. When the door was shut it was totally dark, and the lizards made their presence known by the noise of their scurrying through the torn newspaper, or the soft shudder when they dropped from the walls. I remember most clearly the stench of the toilet, which seemed to hang in the air in that climate.

But because every little piece of reality exists in relation to another little piece, our situation was not that simple. It was to our yard that people came with news first. It was in my grandmother's parlor that the Disciples of Christ held their meetings.

Zoe lived with her mother and sister on borrowed ground in a place called Breezy Hill. She and I saw each other almost every day on our school vacations over a period of three years. Each morning early—as I sat on the cement porch with my coffee cut with condensed milk—she appeared: in her straw hat, school tunic faded from blue to gray, white blouse, sneakers hanging around her neck. We had coffee together, and a piece of hard-dough bread with butter and cheese, waited a bit and headed for the river. At first we were shy with each other. We did not start from the same place.

There was land. And there was color. (My family was called "red." A term which signified a degree of whiteness. "We's just a flock of red people," a cousin of mine said once.) In the hierarchy of shades I was considered among the lightest. The countrywomen who visited my grandmother commented on my "tall" hair—meaning long. Wavy, not curly.

I had spent the years from three to ten in New York and spoke—at first—like an American. I wore American clothes: shorts, slacks, bathing suit. Because of my American past I was looked upon as the creator of games. Cowboys and Indians. Cops and Robbers. Peter Pan.

(While the primary colonial identification for Jamaicans was English, American colonialism was a strong force in my childhood—and of course continues today. We were sent American movies and American music. American aluminum companies had already discovered bauxite on the island and were shipping the ore to their mainland. United Fruit bought our bananas. White Americans came to Montego Bay, Ocho Rios, and Kingston for their vacations and their cruise ships docked in Port Antonio and other places. In some ways America was seen as a better place than England by many Jamaicans. The farm laborers sent to work in American agribusiness came home with dollars and gifts and new clothes; there were few who mentioned American racism. Many of the middle class who emigrated to Brooklyn or Staten Island or Manhattan were able to pass into the white American world—saving their blackness for other Jamaicans or for trips home; in some cases, forgetting it altogether. Those middle-class Jamaicans who could not pass for white managed differently—not unlike the Bajans in *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, saving, working, investing, buying property. Completely separate in most cases from Black Americans.)

I was someone who had experience with the place that sent us triple features of B-grade westerns and gangster movies. And I had tall hair and light skin. And I was the grandaughter of my grandmother. So I had power. I was the cowboy, Zoe was my sidekick, the boys we knew were Indians. I was the detective, Zoe was my "girl," the boys were the robbers. I was Peter Pan, Zoe was Wendy Darling, the boys were the lost boys. And the terrain around the river—jungled and dark green—was Tombstone, or Chicago, or Never-Never Land.

This place and my friendship with Zoe never touched my life in Kingston. We did not correspond with each other when I left my grandmother's home.

I never visited Zoe's home the entire time I knew her. It was a given: never suggested, never raised.

Zoe went to a state school held in a country church in Red Hills. It had been my mother's school. I went to a private all-girls school where I was taught by white Englishwomen and pale Jamaicans. In her school the students were caned as punishment. In mine the harshest punishment I remember was being sent to sit under the *lignum vitae* to "commune with nature." Some of the girls were out-and-out white (English and American), the rest of us were colored—only a few were dark. Our uniforms were blood-red gabardine, heavy and hot. Classes were held in buildings meant to recreate England: damp with stone floors, facing onto a cloister, or quad as they called it. We began each day with the headmistress leading us in English hymns. The entire school stood for an hour in the zinc-roofed gymnasium.

Occasionally a girl fainted, or threw up. Once, a girl had a grand mal seizure. To any such disturbance the response was always "keep singing." While she flailed on the stone floor, I wondered what the mistresses would do. We sang "Faith of Our Fathers," and watched our classmate as her eyes rolled back in her head. I thought of people swallowing their tongues. This student was dark—here on a scholarship—and the only woman who came forward to help her was the gamesmistress, the only dark teacher. She kneeled beside the girl and slide the white web belt from her tennis shorts, clamping it between the girl's teeth. When the seizure was over, she carried the girl to a tumbling mat in a corner of the gym and covered her so she wouldn't get chilled.

Were the other women unable to touch this girl because of her darkness? I think that now. Her darkness and her scholarship. She lived on Windward Road with her grandmother; her mother was a maid. But darkness is usually enough for women like those to hold back. Then, we usually excused that kind of behavior by saying they were "ladies." (We were constantly being told we should be ladies also. One teacher went so far as to tell us many people thought Jamaicans lived in trees and we had to show these people they were mistaken.) In short, we felt insufficient to judge the behavior of these women. The English ones (who had the corner on power in the school) had come all this way to teach us. Shouldn't we treat them as the missionaries they were certain they were? The creole Jamaicans had a different role: they were passing on to those of us who were light-skinned the creole heritage of collaboration, assimilation, loyalty to our betters. We were expected to be willing subjects in this outpost of civilization.

The girl left school that day and never returned.

After prayers we filed into our classrooms. After classes we had games: tennis, field hockey, rounders (what the English call baseball), netball (what the English call basketball). For games we were divided into "houses"—groups named for Joan of Arc, Edith Cavell, Florence Nightingale, Jane Austen. Four white heroines. Two martyrs. One saint. Two nurses. (None of us knew then that there were Black women with Nightingale at Scutari.) One novelist. Three involved in white men's wars. Two dead in white men's wars. *Pride and Prejudice.*

Those of us in Cavell wore red badges and recited her last words before a firing squad in W.W.I: "Patriotism is not enough. I must have no hatred or bitterness toward anyone."

Sorry to say I grew up to have exactly that.

Looking back: To try and see when the background changed places with the foreground. To try and locate the vanishing point: where the lines of perspective converge and disappear. Lines of color and class. Lines of history and social context. Lines of denial and rejection. When did *we* (the light-skinned middle-class Jamaicans) take over for *them* as oppressors? I need to see when and how this happened. When what should have been reality was overtaken by what was surely unreality. When the house nigger became master.

"What's the matter with you? You think you're white or something?"
"Child, what you want to know 'bout Garvey for? The man was nothing but a damn fool."
"They not our kind of people."

Why did we wear wide-brimmed hats and try to get into Oxford? Why did we not return?

Great Expectations: a novel about origins and denial, about the futility and tragedy of that denial, about attempting assimilation. We learned this novel from a light-skinned Jamaican woman—she concentrated on what she called the "love affair" between Pip and Estella.

Looking back: Through the last page of *Sula*. It was Zoe, and Zoe alone, I thought of. She snapped into my mind and I remembered no one else. Through the greens and blues of the riverbank. The flame of red hibiscus in front of my grandmother's house. The cracked grave of a former landowner. The fruit of the ackee which poisons those who don't know how to prepare it.

"What is to become of us?"
We borrowed a baby from a woman and used her as our dolly. Dressed and undressed her. Dipped her in the riverwater. Fed her with the milk her mother had left with us: and giggled because we knew where the milk had come from.

A letter: "I am desperate. I need to get away. I beg you one fifty-dollar."

I send the money because this is what she asks for. I visit her on a trip back home. Her front teeth are gone. Her husband beats her and she suffers blackouts. I sit on her chair. She is given birth-control pills which aggravate her "condition." We boil up sorrel and ginger. She is being taught by Peace Corps volunteers to embroider linen mats with little lambs on them and gives me one as a keepsake. We cool off the sorrel with a block of ice brought from the shop nearby. The shopkeeper

immediately recognizes me as my grandmother's grandaughter and refuses to sell me cigarettes. (I am twenty-seven.) We sit in the doorway of her house, pushing back the colored plastic strands which form a curtain, and talk about Babylon and Dred. About Manley and what he's doing for Jamaica. About how hard it is. We walk along the railway tracks—no longer used—to Crooked River and the post office. Her little daughter walks beside us and we recite a poem for her: "Mornin' buddy/Me no buddy fe wunna/Who den', den' I saw?" and on and on.

I can come and go. And I leave. To complete my education in London.

II

Their goddam kings and their goddam queens. Grandmotherly Victoria spreading herself thin across the globe. Elizabeth II on our t.v. screens. We stop what we are doing. We quiet down. We pay our respects.

1981: In Massachusetts I get up at 5 a.m. to watch the royal wedding. I tell myself maybe the IRA will intervene. It's got to be better than starving themselves to death. Better to be a kamikaze in St. Paul's Cathedral than a hostage in Ulster. And last week Black and white people smashed storefronts all over the United Kingdom. But I really don't believe we'll see royal blood on t.v. I watch because they once ruled us. In the back of the cathedral a Maori woman sings an aria from Handel and I notice that she is surrounded by the colored subjects.

To those of us in the commonwealth the royal family was the perfect symbol of hegemony. To those of us who were dark in the dark nations the prime minister, the parliament barely existed. We believed in royalty—we were convinced in this belief. Maybe it played on some ancestral memories of West Africa—where other kings and queens had been. Altars and castles and magic.

The faces of our new rulers were everywhere in my childhood. Calendars, newsreels, magazines. Their presences were often among us. Attending test matches between the West Indians and South Africans. They were our landlords. Not always absentee. And no matter what Black leader we might elect—were we to choose independence—we would be losing something almost holy in our impudence.

WE ARE HERE BECAUSE YOU WERE THERE
BLACK PEOPLE AGAINST STATE BRUTALITY
BLACK WOMEN WILL NOT BE INTIMIDATED
WELCOME TO BRITAIN . . . WELCOME TO SECOND-CLASS CITIZENSHIP
(slogans of the Black movement in Britain)

Indian women cleaning the toilets in Heathrow airport. This is the first thing I notice. Dark women in saris trudging buckets back and forth as other dark women in saris—some covered by loose-fitting winter coats—form a line to have their passports stamped.

The triangle trade: molasses/rum/slaves. Robinson Crusoe was on a slave-trading journey. Robert Browning was a mulatto. Holding pens. Jamaica was a seasoning station. Split tongues. Sliced ears. Whipped bodies. The constant pretense of civility against rape. Still. Iron collars. Tinplate masks. The latter a precaution: to stop the slaves from eating the sugar cane.

A pregnant woman is to be whipped—they dig a hole to accomodate her belly and place her face down on the ground. Many of us became light-skinned very fast. Traced ourselves through bastard lines to reach the duke of Devonshire. The earl of Cornwall. The lord of this and the lord of that. Our mothers' rapes were the thing unspoken.

You say: But Britain freed her slaves in 1835. Yes.

Tea plantations in India and Ceylon. Mines in Africa. The Cape-to-Cairo Railroad. Rhodes scholars. Suez Crisis. The white man's bloody burden. Boer War. Bantustans. Sitting in a theatre in London in the seventies. A play called *West of Suez*. A lousy play about British colonials. The finale comes when several well-known white actors are machine-gunned by several lesser-known Black actors. (As Nina Simone says: This is a show tune but the show hasn't been written for it yet.)

The red empire of geography classes. "The sun never sets on the British empire and you can't trust it in the dark." Or with the dark peoples. "Because of the Industrial Revolution European countries went in search of markets and raw materials." Another geography (or was it a history) lesson.

Their bloody kings and their bloody queens. Their bloody peers. Their bloody generals. admirals. explorers. Livingstone. Hillary. Kitchener. All the bwanas. And all their beaters, porters, sherpas. Who found the source of the Nile. Victoria Falls. The tops of mountains. Their so-called discoveries reek of untruth. How many dark people died so they could misname the physical features in their blasted gazetteer. A statistic we shall never know. Dr. Livingstone, I presume you are here to rape our land and enslave our people.

There are statues of these dead white men all over London.

An interesting fact: The swearword "bloody" is a contraction of "by my lady"—a reference to the Virgin Mary. They do tend to use their ladies. Name ages for them. Places for them. Use them as screens, inspirations, symbols. And many of the ladies comply.

While the national martyr Edith Cavell was being executed by the Germans in Belgium in 1915 (Belgium was called "poor little Belgium" by the allies in the war), the Belgians were engaged in the exploitation of the land and peoples of the Congo.

And will we ever know how many dark peoples were "imported" to fight in white men's wars. Probably not. Just as we will never know how many hearts were cut from African people so that the Christian doctor might be a success—i.e., extend a white man's life. Our Sister Killjoy observes this from her black-eyed squint.

Dr. Schweitzer—humanitarian, authority on Bach, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize—on the people of Africa: "The Negro is a child, and with children nothing

can be done without the use of authority. We must, therefore, so arrange the circumstances of our daily life that my authority can find expression. With regard to Negroes, then, I have coined the formula: 'I am your brother, it is true, but your elder brother.'" (*On the Edge of the Primeval Forest*, 1961)

They like to pretend we didn't fight back. We did: with obeah, poison, revolution. It simply was not enough.

"Colonies . . . these places where 'niggers' are cheap and the earth is rich."—W.E.B. DuBois, "The Souls of White Folk"

A cousin is visiting me from M.I.T. where he is getting a degree in engineering. I am learning about the Italian Renaissance. My cousin is recognizably Black and speaks with an accent. I am not and I do not—unless I am back home, where the "twang' comes upon me. We sit for some time in a bar in his hotel and are not served. A light-skinned Jamaican comes over to our table. He is an older man—a professor at the University of London. "Don't bother with it, you hear. They don't serve us in this bar." A run-of-the-mill incident for all recognizably Black people in this city. But for me it is not.

Henry's eyes fill up, but he refuses to believe our informant. "No, man, the girl is just busy." (The girl is a fifty-year-old white woman, who may just be following orders. But I do not mention this. I have chosen sides.) All I can manage to say is, "Jesus Christ, I hate the fucking English." Henry looks at me. (In the family I am known as the "lady cousin." It has to do with how I look. And the fact that I am twenty-seven and unmarried—and for all they know, unattached. They do not know that I am really the lesbian cousin.) Our informant says—gently, but with a distinct tone of disappointment—"My dear, is that what you're studying at the university?"

You see—the whole business is very complicated.

Henry and I leave without drinks and go to meet some of his white colleagues at a restaurant I know near Covent Garden Opera House. The restaurant caters to theatre types and so I hope there won't be a repeat of the bar scene—at least they know how to pretend. Besides, I tell myself, the owners are Italian *and* gay; they *must* be halfway decent. Henry and his colleagues work for an American company which is paying their way through M.I.T. They mine bauxite from the hills in the middle of the island and send it to the United States. A turnaround occurs at dinner: Henry joins the white men in a sustained mockery of the waiters: their accents and the way they walk. He whispers to me: "Why you want to bring us to a battyman's den, lady?" (Battyman—faggot in Jamaican.) I keep quiet.

We put the white men in a taxi and Henry walks me to the underground station. He asks me to sleep with him. (It wouldn't be incest. His mother was a maid in the house of an uncle and Henry has not seen her since his birth. He was taken into the family. She was let go.) I say that I can't. I plead exams. I can't say that I don't want to. Because I remember what happened in the bar. But I can't say that I'm a lesbian

either—even though I want to believe his alliance with the white men at dinner was forced: not really him. He doesn't buy my excuse. "Come on, lady, let's do it. What's the matter, you 'fraid?" I pretend I am back home and start patois to show him somehow I am not afraid, not English, not white. I tell him he's a married man and he tells me he's a ram goat. I take the train to where I am staying and try to forget the whole thing. But I don't. I remember our different skins and our different experiences within them. And I have a hard time realizing that I am angry with Henry. That to him—no use in pretending—a queer is a queer.

1981: I hear on the radio that Bob Marley is dead and I drive over the Mohawk Trail listening to a program of his music and I cry and cry and cry. Someone says: "It wasn't the ganja that killed him, it was poverty and working in a steel foundry when he was young."

I flashback to my childhood and a young man who worked for an aunt I lived with once. He taught me to smoke ganja behind the house. And to peel an orange with the tip of a machete without cutting through the skin—"Love" it was called: a necklace of orange rind the result. I think about him because I heard he had become a Rastaman. And then I think about Rastas.

We are sitting on the porch of an uncle's house in Kingston—the family and I—and a Rastaman comes to the gate. We have guns but they are locked behind a false closet. We have dogs but they are tied up. We are Jamaicans and know that Rastas mean no harm. We let him in and he sits on the side of the porch and shows us his brooms and brushes. We buy some to take back to New York. "Peace, missis."

There were many Rastas in my childhood. Walking the roadside with their goods. Sitting outside their shacks in the mountains. The outsides painted bright—sometimes with words. Gathering at Palisadoes Airport to greet the Conquering Lion of Judah. They were considered figures of fun by most middle-class Jamaicans. Harmless: like Marcus Garvey.

Later: white American hippies trying to create the effect of dred in their straight white hair. The ganja joint held between their straight white teeth. "Man, the grass is good." Hanging out by the Sheraton pool. Light-skinned Jamaicans also dred-locked, also assuming the ganja. Both groups moving to the music but not the words. Harmless "Peace, brother."

III

My grandmother: "Let us thank God for a fruitful place."
My grandfather: "Let us rescue the perishing world."

This evening on the road in western Massachusetts there are pockets of fog. Then clear spaces. Across from a pond a dog staggers in front of my headlights. I look

closer and see that his mouth is foaming. He stumbles to the side of the road—I go to call the police.

I drive back to the house, radio playing "difficult" piano pieces. And I think about how I need to say all this. This is who I am. I am not what you allow me to be. Whatever you decide me to be. In a bookstore in London I show the woman at the counter my book and she stares at me for a minute, then says: "You're a Jamaican." "Yes." "You're not at all like our Jamaicans."

Encountering the void is nothing more nor less than understanding invisibility. Of being fogbound.

It is up to me to sort out these connections—to employ anger and take the consequences. To choose not to be harmless. To make it impossible for them to think me harmless.

Then: It was never a question of passing. It was a question of hiding.
Later: It was not a question of relinquishing privilege. It was a question of grasping more of myself.

Sometimes I used to think we were like the Marranos—the Sephardic Jews forced to pretend they were Christians. The name was given to them by the Christians, and meant "pigs." But once out of Spain and Portugal, they became Jews openly again. Some settled in Jamaica. They knew who the enemy was and acted for their own survival. But they remained Jews always.

We also knew who the enemy was—I remember jokes about the English. Saying they stank. saying they were stingy. that they drank too much and couldn't hold their liquor. that they had bad teeth. were dirty and dishonest. were limey bastards. and horse-faced bitches. We said the men only wanted to sleep with Jamaican women. And that the women made pigs of themselves with Jamaican men.

But of course this was seen by us—the light-skinned middle class—with a double vision. We learned to cherish that part of us that was them—and to deny the part that was not. Believing in some cases that the latter part had ceased to exist.

None of this is as simple as it may sound. We were colorists and we aspired to oppressor status. (Of course, almost any aspiration instilled by western civilization is to oppressor status: success, for example.) Color was the symbol of our potential: color taking in hair "quality," skin tone, freckles, nose-width, eyes. We did not see that color symbolism was a method of keeping us apart: in the society, in the family, between friends. Those of us who were light-skinned, straight-haired, etc., were given to believe that we could actually attain whiteness—or at least those qualities of the colonizer which made him superior. We were convinced of white supremacy. If we failed we were not really responsible for our failures: we had all the advantages—but it was that one persistent drop of blood, that single rogue gene that made us unable to conceptualize abstract ideas, made us love darkness rather than despise it, which was to be blamed for our failure. Our dark part had taken over: an inherited imbalance in which the doom of the creole was sealed.

I am trying to write this as clearly as possible, but as I write I realize that what I say may sound fabulous, or even mythic. It is. It is insane.

Under this system of colorism—the system which prevailed in my childhood in Jamaica, and which has carried over to the present—rarely will dark and light people co-mingle. Rarely will they achieve between themselves an intimacy informed with identity. (I should say here that I am using the categories light and dark both literally and symbolically. There are dark Jamaicans who have achieved lightness and the "advantages" which go with it by their successful pursuit of oppressor status.)

Under this system light and dark people will meet in those ways in which the light-skinned person imitates the oppressor. But imitation goes only so far: the light-skinned person becomes an oppressor in fact. He/she will have a dark chauffeur, a dark nanny, a dark maid, and a dark gardener. These employees will be paid badly. Because of the slave past, because of their dark skin, the servants of the middle class have been used according to the traditions of the slavocracy. They are not seen as workers for their own sake, but for the sake of the family who has employed them. It was not until Michael Manley became prime minister that a minimum wage for houseworkers was enacted—and the indignation of the middle class was profound.

During Manley's leadership the middle class began to abandon the island in droves. Toronto. Miami. New York. Leaving their houses and businesses behind and sewing cash into the tops of suitcases. Today—with a new regime—they are returning: "Come back to the way things used to be" the tourist advertisement on American t.v. says. "Make it Jamaica again." "Make it your own."

But let me return to the situation of houseservants as I remember it: They will be paid badly, but they will be "given" room and board. However, the key to the larder will be kept by the mistress in her dresser drawer. They will spend Christmas with the family of their employers and be given a length of English wool for trousers or a few yards of cotton for dresses. They will see their children on their days off: their extended family will care for the children the rest of the time. When the employers visit their relations in the country, the servants may be asked along—oftentimes the servants of the middle class come from the same part of the countryside their employers have come from. But they will be expected to work while they are there. Back in town, there are parts of the house they are allowed to move freely around; other parts they are not allowed to enter. When the family watches the t.v. the servant is allowed to watch also, but only while standing in a doorway. The servant may have a radio in his/her room, also a dresser and a cot. Perhaps a mirror. There will usually be one ceiling light. And one small square louvered window.

A true story: One middle-class Jamaican woman ordered a Persian rug from Harrod's in London. The day it arrived so did her new maid. She was going downtown to have her hair touched up, and told the maid to vacuum the rug. She told the maid she would find the vacuum cleaner in the same shed as the power mower. And when she returned she found that the fine nap of her new rug had been removed.

The reaction of the mistress was to tell her friends that the "girl" was backward. She

did not fire her until she found that the maid had scrubbed the teflon from her new set of pots, saying she thought they were coated with "nastiness."

The houseworker/mistress relationship in which one Black woman is the oppressor of another Black woman is a cornerstone of the experience of many Jamaican women.

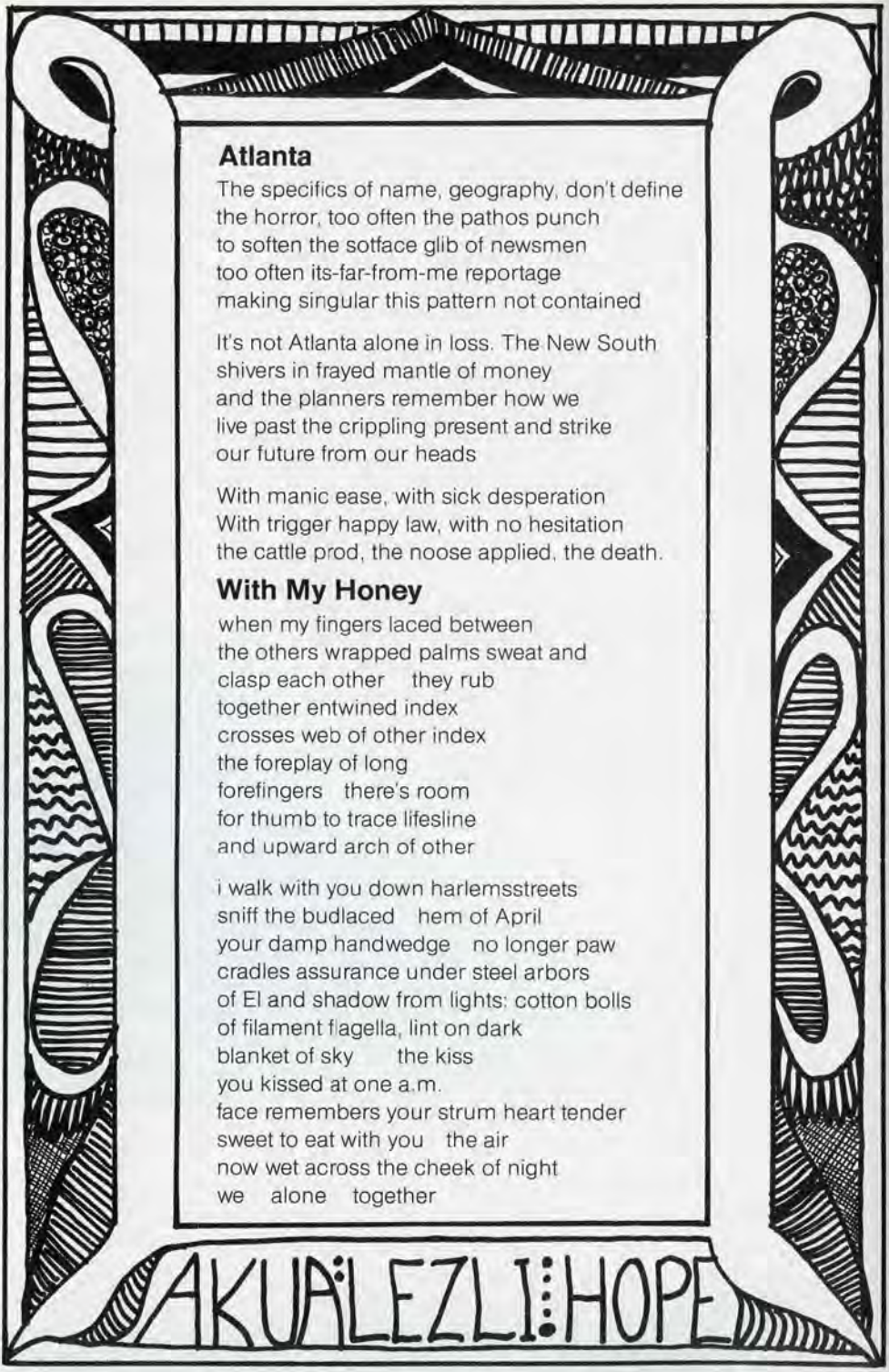
I remember another true story: In a middle-class family's home one Christmas, a relation was visiting from New York. This woman had brought gifts for everybody, including the housemaid. The maid had been released from a mental institution recently, where they had "treated" her for depression. This visiting light-skinned woman had brought the dark woman a bright red rayon blouse, and presented it to her in the garden one afternoon, while the family was having tea. The maid thanked her softly, and the other woman moved toward her as if to embrace her. Then she stopped, her face suddenly covered with tears, and ran into the house, saying, "My God, I can't, I can't."

We are women who come from a place almost incredible in its beauty. It is a beauty which can mask a great deal, and which has been used in that way. But that the beauty is there is a fact. I remember what I thought the freedom of my childhood, in which the fruitful place was something I took for granted. Just as I took for granted Zoe's appearance every morning on my school vacations—in the sense that I knew she would be there. That she would always be the one to visit me. The perishing world of my grandfather's graces at the table, if I ever seriously thought about it, was somewhere else.

Our souls were affected by the beauty of Jamaica, as much as they were affected by our fears of darkness.

There is no ending to this piece of writing. There is no way to end it. As I read back over it, I see that we/they/I may become confused in the mind of the reader: but these pronouns have always co-existed in my mind. The Rastas talk of the "I and I"—a pronoun in which they combine themselves with Jah. Jah is a contraction of Jahweh and Jehovah but to me always sounds like the beginning of Jamaica. I and Jamaica is who I am. No matter how far I travel—how deep the ambivalence I feel about ever returning. And Jamaica is a place in which we/they/I connect and disconnect—change place.

Note: In writing this piece I owe a debt to Ama Ata Aidoo and her brilliant book, *Our Sister Killjoy or Reflections from a Black-Eyed Squint.* (Nok Publishers, Lagos and New York, 1979)



Atlanta

The specifics of name, geography, don't define
the horror, too often the pathos punch
to soften the sotface glib of newsmen
too often its-far-from-me reportage
making singular this pattern not contained

It's not Atlanta alone in loss. The New South
shivers in frayed mantle of money
and the planners remember how we
live past the crippling present and strike
our future from our heads

With manic ease, with sick desperation
With trigger happy law, with no hesitation
the cattle prod, the noose applied, the death.

With My Honey

when my fingers laced between
the others wrapped palms sweat and
clasp each other they rub
together entwined index
crosses web of other index
the foreplay of long
forefingers there's room
for thumb to trace lifesline
and upward arch of other

i walk with you down harlemsstreets
sniff the budlaced hem of April
your damp handwedge no longer paw
cradles assurance under steel arbors
of El and shadow from lights: cotton bolls
of filament flagella, lint on dark
blanket of sky the kiss
you kissed at one a.m.
face remembers your strum heart tender
sweet to eat with you the air
now wet across the cheek of night
we alone together

Disarm myself and you besides

A bore—you call this velvet paw
affection's viand-bearing grace. poet self
a better being : making two heads play
at once, mastering these human demons,
slay medusan writhehaired stare; melt
my concrete heart for access; still
shrill whistles, weeping sirens; create space.

Besides, could you so early in this knowing
morning, caress the tiger with hippo hide
this fanged (toothsome) armored woman
sinuous tongued with gila glide,
gilled, to swim time's strong armed tide

From choice do not infer the range.
Baby.

Womenfolk

Sweet bright magics in the family way
we greet. souls' kindred in bond
of memory's flesh and childhood's need

mommy's back familiar
sister's growing womanwise
aunt has bent her hair
to a new flattery. add my surprise

They are myth. They are flame
They are plain in their glory

Feed each other stories
over coffee and apologize for cake
Fights with disrespecting merchants
Sales and struggles in each market place.

i am continued in their embrace.

FOUR:POEMS

MOTHER'S LEGACY

DAVINE

I pride myself on not being a moody person. I certainly never wake up in a bad mood and can always tell you just what has me feeling whatever way. So this morning when I woke up with a lurking spiritual discomfort I did not understand what was happening to me. As I tried to gather myself to get ready for work, I attempted to match a solution to my puzzlement. Frightened, (but excited by the possibility) I asked myself, could this feeling be a premonition? (I've always felt slighted for not having ongoing psychic abilities.)

Just then the phone rang.

Now, I expected the phone to ring, because Lynette rings twice every morning as a wake-up signal. But the phone rang a third time, and clearly intended to persist as I caught it in the middle of the fourth ring. I wanted to spare the late sleepers and wondered (with some degree of irritation, as by now my "mood" tried to lay claim to an identity between depression and irritability) what nervy person calls anybody's house at such an early hour. Well, of course, my mother's raspy voice presented itself. I tell you, bad news first thing in the morning can help to pinpoint and get you settled into a bad mood. My brother Gerald had gotten four years in Sing-Sing.

After making the initial announcement, my mother went on to elaborately embellish fact with feeling. She gave details of my little sister Donna's hysterics, her own hysterics, in addition to her own very strong belief that the single most influencial factor in the pronouncement of such a severe sentence, the responsibility for Gerald's going to Sing-Sing lay in *her* hands for not having put in an earlier appearance in court. No matter what I said, her conviction stood firm. "I know it," she said, "just three minutes earlier and I could've changed that judge's mind." Mothers. In mothers, guilt and responsibility find a passionate and possessive mate. How long will she blame herself for the dread three minutes? If I had hurried . . . If I hadn't gone back in the house for tissues . . . If I had waited to put my lipstick on in the car . . . She doesn't say any of these things, but I know how guilt can back you into a *cul-de-sac* crowded with "if onlys."

Mama said, "I really believe God wanted that boy to do this time, but I think he'll kill somebody in there, or get killed . . . you should see him though, Marci, he looks so good . . . well, Janet didn't show up, and he didn't even mention her . . . he should get that marriage annulled in jail, after all, he married her since he's been in jail, so they didn't do nothin' for these past few months anyway . . . I heard she looks about the size of this room . . . she's no good for him . . . he always got hisself

cleaned up before he met her . . . now she just keeps pullin' him further down . . . I told his probation officer that Janet is no good for him . . . I know she didn't expect to hear it from me about a white girl, but I told her how I really feel."

From Mama's racy speech I know her hyperactive thyroid had swung into action from hello. I want to slow her down. "Mama," I say, hoping she doesn't tell me I don't care because of what I say next. "Mama, I can't be late for work—we may go on strike . . . I'll call you later." "Okay," she gives in easily this time, "okay." Kissing sounds—always two of them . . . "Mama loves you." "Okay, Mama, I'll talk to you later when I get in." I don't permit myself an immediate response, but something eventually starts a metronome inside me, and I repeat in measured time . . . Sing-Sing . . . head shaking from side to side . . . Sing-Sing . . . furrowed brows . . . Sing-Sing . . . biting my bottom lip . . . Sing-Sing. I comfort myself with, "at least he won't get sent to Attica" (what does that mean?) and "now he'll get off Riker's." Sing-Sing.

I continue preparing to go to work with an overbaked stomach, and think, Gerald—my big brother—the proud possessor of a criminal record so long that I don't know why the rest of us still get upset by each new conviction. Mostly I just want to haul off and knock the shit out of him. STUPID!! I want to shout. But I know Gerald. Gerald the innocent. Surprised . . . victimized . . . charismatic . . . sometimes pitiable . . . Yes. You do feel sorry for him. Why have they done this to this poor man? But *They* say, Gerald—in the street—a junkie and so a thief.

I don't even remember what crime he committed this time around, but I do know that surprise should not enter the picture . . . Oh yes. The sawed-off shotgun they found him carrying around, loaded, in a shopping bag. People just don't walk around like that. Well some people don't. When I went to court with his lawyer for that offense before, Gerald looked like he just simply couldn't understand why anyone made such a big deal over such an insignificant thing. He's effective. For me, he's effective. So I felt like that too. He didn't shoot anyone with it. Gerald said he had been looking to sell it.

Actually the fact that he "lives on," braving all the wild shit that confronts somebody with his lifestyle provides surprise enough. My mother says she just fears the time when she'll get a call telling her to come down to identify his body. She says she couldn't take it. She couldn't bear to see one of Her Children die. My mother—the only child, somewhat an orphan herself, made Her Own Family—her most prized possession . . . Yes, it would surely kill her. Sing-Sing.

Now I don't want to spare the late sleepers. I want to tell somebody . . . But, nobody here will understand. So I go to work. I tell Lynette on the way. Lynette—sensitive and all-positive (I call her my fairy godmother, always there in a pinch.) Lynette just shakes her head sadly from side to side in time to my metronome. We arrive at work. October 1st. September 30th ended our contract. No contract. No work. The negotiating committee is still deliberating. Don't go in we're told. I didn't believe we would really go on strike so soon. Everybody must report to a meeting to hear an update. Not even fully aware of by what mechanics I'm propelled, I move along to the meeting missing my Self who seems to have run out.

In the auditorium we workers all make light nervous conversation, and compare notes on how we can't afford a strike. We hear management's final proposal. It sucks. We settle. No strike. The membership votes—no strike. Everyone too scared to take a stand. My Self returns angrily as we return to work, and I discuss, actually

lecture, about the supposed financial crisis in the city, worker-slave mentality, the boss making $40,000 getting a 10% increase, and the worker making $10,000 and getting 8%, and making excuses for the bosses all the while: "You know the city can't afford more." Don't give me that shit about the city and what it can't afford. "The city" just makes sure we the ones who don't get it!!!

I know, just as I knew during the 60's political uprisings, that my brother going to Sing-Sing and our shitty labor contract and poverty and crime and frustration and violence curl together like barbed wire we rip *ourselves* apart on trying to get free.

Demoralized, I sit in my office and cuss out the bosses with my co-workers. The ringing phone nags me. My public-tape-recording-voice answers, "Communications, Good Afternoon." On the other end James asks about the happenin's. Actually he calls to tell me some happenin's I can't use. Someone broke into the car last night. They stole the radio, and fucked up the car doing it. Furious and hurt, I don't want to see the car. I feel like killing. My moon in Scorpio says put a curse on those people . . . I wish them blinding incurable syphillis.

James, (whose timing for the presentation of gory detail remains questionable,) gives me gory details. I don't want to see the car, but I say I need the car tonight. I go to my writing workshop on Wednesdays. I think of L'il Chug (my name for the car with her loud diesel engine.) I think about how relieved I feel that the responsibility for what happened to her doesn't belong to me because James drove last night. Yes, if I had driven last night, I believe he would understand what had happened as somehow my fault. I understand why mothers cannot get a divorce from guilt and responsibility. I tell a girlfriend about the car. She says, "Girl, it's a good thing for you that James drove last night." You see. Well-founded, sensible paranoia. James, who pays for the car, but makes it mine as his best friend, would personalize and make it my fault. I tell him so. He defends himself and says, "That's not true Marci, that's not true."

Morbid fantasies try to engulf me. I look for something positive: Good thing James didn't walk up on them as they were doing it—Humph, that nigger would follow Gerald to Sing-Sing behind that shit. Or get killed trying . . . at least the car, not James, needs repairs. Gerald Sing-Sing. Gerald. What kind of things does Gerald do that gets him classified as criminal? Does he break into cars people bust their asses to pay for and to take care of?

I see him one way. I justify, rationalize, explain, analyze and excuse away his behavior. Gerald and I belong to each other. We belong to each other and three more brothers and a sister and my Mother. My Mother's law. She makes sure we don't forget it. No other law transcends hers. No law separates us in spirit. By Mama we are bound, and we will remain bound.

Gerald fondled my breasts in my sleep in 1969. *That* separated us. We never spoke about it. He doesn't know I know. He *must* know I know. (?) That *separated* us. It seems like yesterday. Maybe he doesn't know about the separation because he stays in the jail or in the street. I never told him about the separation.I just feel it.

Meanwhile, I worry about hereditary crazies. I brought Kwame to the planet. My baby—potentially criminal, potentially crazy? All my brothers exhibit peculiar behavior. "Socially unacceptable" behavior. I tell myself—"products of the environment." I suppose people outside of a small circle of friends might classify me that way too. I tell myself that society's classification of me does not make Me.

Secure and comfortable at last in my Self, I don't care about who considers me deviant. I don't care who considers Gerald deviant. Gerald—why don't you stop???!! We love you! I remember your sweet person. I remember your taking care of your little sister person.

Singing songs.

Something inside me blocking tears. I think about why. Why should I cry? The trouble I take with crying never gets me more than a headache. No tears. But a day like today would make anyone cry.

As a child I learned to hold back expression. Because holding back meant conquest. Strength. Power. People beat you. People told you what to do. People controlled you. You could not suck your teeth. You could not roll your eyes. You could not slam doors. "Chile, you don't have no feelings yet." "Girl, ain't nothin' gettin' on your nerves, you ain't got no nerves." Children—not privileged enough for nerves, anger, feelings, tired backs. So you develop a counter attack. You say, you can do these things to me, but I'm not going to show you that it matters. I will not let you feel good about your power. No tears. As a child I also learned to hold back personality.

Girl child. Reward for mama's secret childhood prayers. Second child, but a very special lady. According to mama. First and almost only girlchild before three more boys. Girl child—source of pleasure and promise. Something to fall back on. When boys go bad. Support. A best friend. When boys disappoint. You know they do. But everyone says, "well, you know boys." Mama says, "not my Marci, shegetsgood-marksinschool, shenevergivesmetrouble, shehelpsmeraisethesechildren." Girl child—prepared for responsibility and guilt . . .

At 14, Gerald killed our step-father for beating Mama. I will at least answer her dreams. NO NO NO . . . all the dreams turn out the wrong way. Nightmares. Marci not married. Marci dropped out of college. Marci trying to express Marci but turning Mama's dreams inside out . . . just when she thinks one might end happily, she gets jarred to reality. Marci growing into womanhood—guilty. Shouldering responsibility—helping mama— trying on goodgirlness to protect her mama as the boys one by one show no promise. Marci prepared for mamahood says poor mama, I wonder what she feels with all her misfit children. Marci doesn't let mama really see her. Marci comforts. Marci provides. Marci holds back tears. Holds back anger. Holds back frustration. Holds back. For a long time, Marci got so confused in her holding back, she couldn't let go of her shit!

Marci at 27 exhibits a saving grace. She reproduces. She redeems herself. Mama says, "Now you're a woman." Marci wants to change her mind because she doesn't want a baby to provide verification of her womanhood. Baby here. Too late to change her mind. Sneaky mama. Insulting mama. Bitch. She never said before that a woman without a child gets invalidated. Because she knew Marci might never bring forth a grandchild for her, and would still call *herself* a woman.

Marci keeps protecting mama, providing a source of solace. Disappointed mama, a mama in need of some reassurance that some of this is Right. Mama keeps trying to absorb her. La Lucha Continua. Mama calls all hours. Talk to your little brother. Say something to your sister. Tell your brother to go see a doctor. Write to Gerald. Visit your grandfather. Visit Gerald. Sing-Sing. I don't *want* to go to Sing-Sing. I went to the Brooklyn House of Detention. Depression. Looking at Gerald in

shadows behind thick glass. Talking to him through a telephone. Surreal. Comstock. I went to Comstock. Or Dannemora. Or both. Anger. Violence swelled my breast. My fingerprints taken just for a visit. Not my fault—my burden. Not my plans—my guilt. Not my crime—my fingerprints. And now—Sing-Sing.

Mournful Mama.

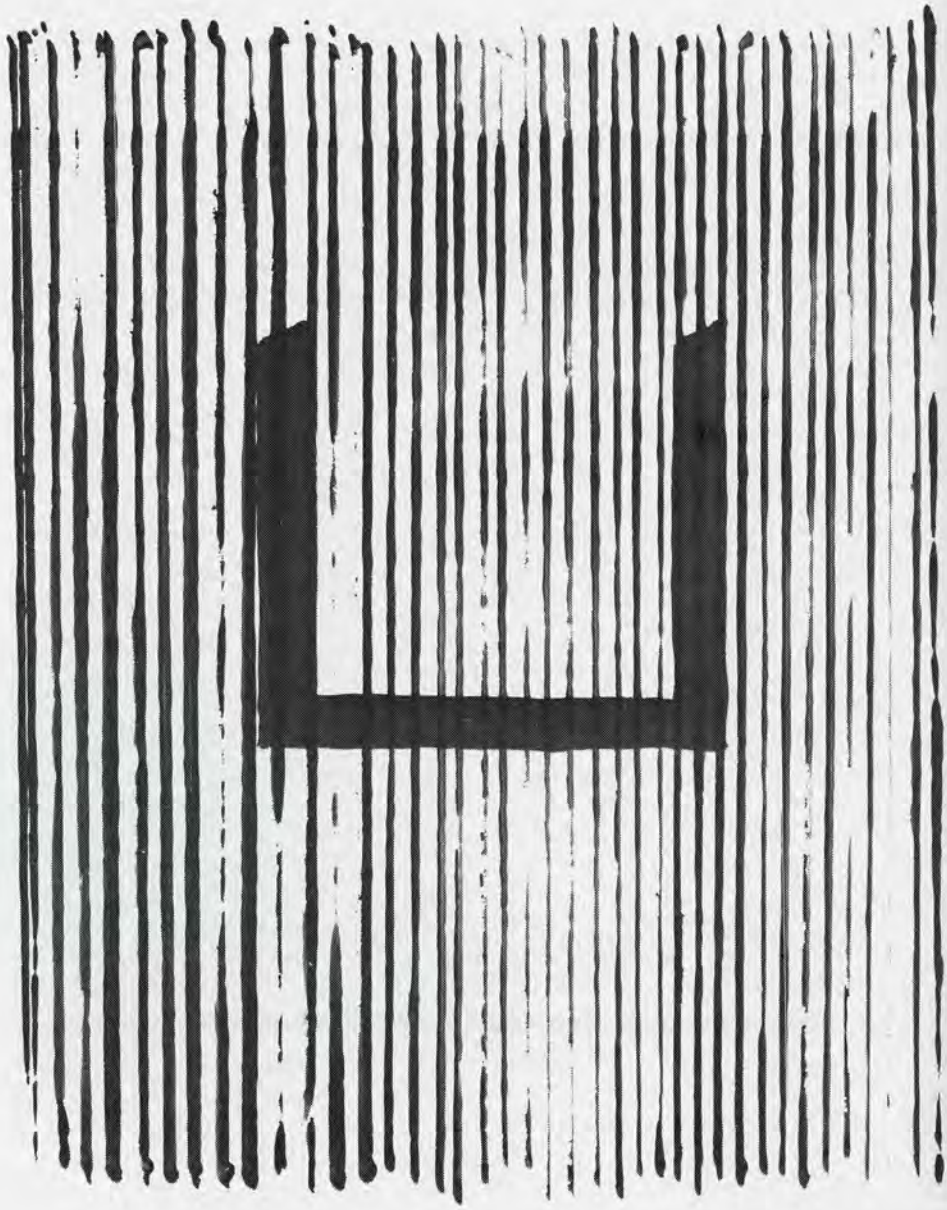
Goddamnit Gerald. Why can't you do something right so I can get comfortably lost in wrong??? Sometimes?

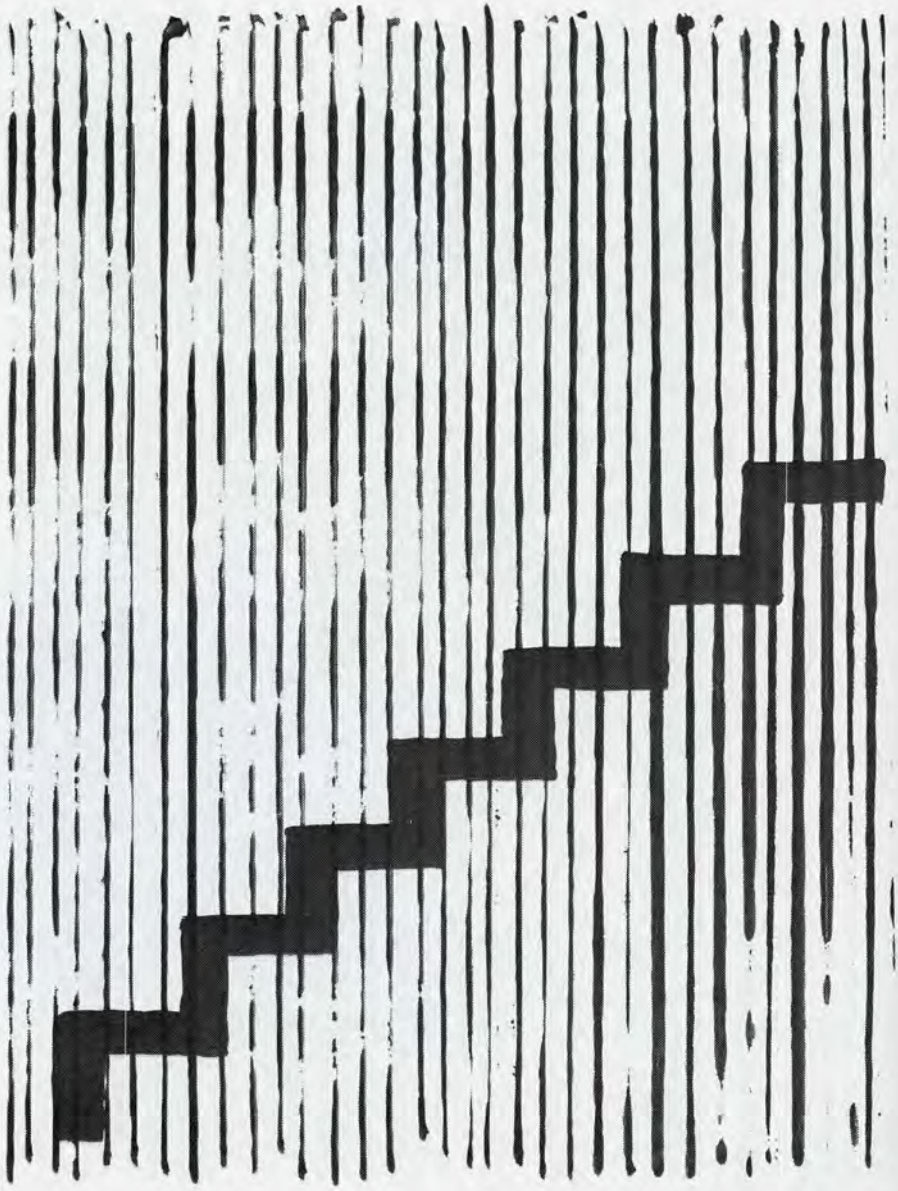
Besieged by racing reminiscences and frantic feelings all day, I rush to responsibility . . . pick up a few things from the grocer's . . . go home to cook dinner . . . bathe Kwame.

I drank coffee today. I don't drink coffee. Why did I drink coffee? Because upset people smoke cigarettes, have a drink, drink coffee . . . none of which I do. So I drank coffee thinking it might do something for me. I got disoriented. Jittery and late, I know that with Sing-Sing on my mind, my crumbling chariot awaiting me, and my body racing on coffee, I must go to the workshop to feel better. I don't want to go late. I call first. Sharon says come. I do. I feel good here, and I fill up on it.

DOROTHY HELLER

drawings





AUDRE LORDE

POETRY IS

The quality of light by which we scrutinize our lives has direct bearing upon the product which we live, and upon the changes which we hope to bring about through those lives. It is within this light that we form those ideas by which we pursue our magic and make it realized. This is poetry as illumination, for it is through poetry that we give name to those ideas which are, until the poem, nameless and formless—about to be birthed, but already felt. That distillation of experience from which true poetry springs births thought as dream births concept, as feeling births idea, as knowledge births (precedes) understanding.

As we learn to bear the intimacy of scrutiny, and to flourish within it, as we learn to use the products of that scrutiny for power within our living, those fears which rule our lives and form our silences begin to lose their control over us.

For each of us as women, there is a dark place within where hidden and growing our true spirit rises. "Beautiful and tough as chestnut/stanchions against our nightmare of weakness" and of impotence.

These places of possibility within ourselves are dark because they are ancient and hidden: they have survived and grown strong through darkness. Within these deep places, each one of us holds an incredible reserve of creativity and power, of unexamined and unrecorded emotion and feeling. The woman's place of power within each of us is neither white nor surface; it is dark, it is ancient, and it is deep.

When we view living, in the european mode, only as a problem to be solved, we then rely solely upon our ideas to make us free, for these were what the white fathers told us were precious.

But as we become more in touch with our own ancient, Black, non-european view of living as a situation to be experienced and interacted with, we learn more and more to cherish our feelings, and to respect those hidden sources of our power from where true knowledge and therefore lasting action comes.

At this point in time, I believe that women carry within ourselves the possibility for fusion of these two approaches as keystones for survival, and we come closest to this combination in our poetry. I speak here of poetry as the revelation or distillation of experience, not the sterile word play that, too often, the white fathers distorted the word poetry to mean—in order to cover their desperate wish for imagination without insight.

For women, then, poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action. Poetry is the way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought. The farthest external horizons of our hopes and fears are cobbled by our poems, carved from the rock experiences of our daily lives.

NOT A LUXURY

As they become known and accepted to ourselves, our feelings, and the honest exploration of them, become sanctuaries and fortresses and spawning grounds for the most radical and daring of ideas, the house of difference so necessary to change and the conceptualization of any meaningful action. Right now, I could name at least ten ideas I would have once found intolerable or incomprehensible and frightening, except as they came after dreams and poems. This is not idle fantasy, but the true meaning of "it feels right to me." We can train ourselves to respect our feelings, and to discipline (transpose) them into language that matches those feelings so they can be shared. And where that language does not yet exist, it is our poetry which helps to fashion it. Poetry is not only dream or vision, it is the skeleton architecture of our lives.

Possibility is neither forever nor instant. It is also not easy to sustain belief in its efficacy. We can sometimes work long and hard to establish one beachhead of real resistance to the deaths we are expected to live, only to have that beachhead assaulted or threatened by canards we have been socialized to fear, or by the withdrawal of those approvals that we have been warned to seek for safety. We see ourselves diminished or softened by the falsely benign accusations of childishness, of non-universality, of self-centeredness, of sensuality. And who asks the question: am I altering your aura, your ideas, your dreams, or am I merely moving you to temporary and reactive action? (Even the latter is no mean task, but one that must be rather seen within the context of a true alteration of the texture of our lives.)

The white fathers told us, I think therefore I am; and the Black mothers in each of us—the poet—whispers in our dreams, I feel therefore I can be free. Poetry coins the language to express and charter this revolutionary awareness and demand, the implementation of that freedom. However, experience has taught us that the action in the now is also always necessary. Our children cannot dream unless they live, they cannot live unless they are nourished, and who else will feed them the real food without which their dreams will be no different from ours?

Sometimes we drug ourselves with dreams of new ideas. The head will save us. The brain alone will set us free. But there are no new ideas still waiting in the wings to save us as women, as human. There are only old and forgotten ones, new combinations, extrapolations and recognitions from within ourselves, along with the renewed courage to try them out. And we must constantly encourage ourselves and each other to attempt the heretical actions our dreams imply and some of our old ideas disparage. In the forefront of our move toward change, there is only our poetry to hint at possibility made real. Our poems formulate the implications of ourselves, what we feel within and dare make real (or bring action into accordance with), our fears, our hopes, our most cherished terrors.

For within structures defined by profit, by linear power, by institutional dehumanization, our feelings were not meant to survive. Kept around as unavoidable adjuncts or pleasant pastimes, feelings were meant to kneel to thought as we were meant to kneel to men. But women have survived. As poets. And there are no new pains. We have felt them all already. We have hidden that fact in the same place where we have hidden our power. They lie in our dreams, and it is our dreams that point the way to freedom. They are made realizable through our poems that give us the strength and courage to see, to feel, to speak, and to dare.

If what we need to dream, to move our spirits most deeply and directly toward and through promise, is a luxury, then we have given up the core—the fountain—of our power, our womanness; we have given up the future of our worlds.

For there are no new ideas. There are only new ways of making them felt, of examining what our ideas really mean (feel like) on Sunday morning at 7 AM, after brunch, during wild love, making war, giving birth; while we suffer the old longings, battle the old warnings and fears of being silent and impotent and alone, while tasting our new possibilities and strength.

OCTOBER

Spirits
of the abnormally born
live on in water
of the heroically dead
in the entrails of snake.
Now I span my days like a wild bridge
swaying in place
caught between poems like a vise
I am finishing my piece of this bargain
and how shall I return?

Seboulisa, mother of power
keeper of birds
fat and beautiful
give me the strength of your eyes
to remember
what I have learned
help me to attend with passion
these tasks at my hand for doing.

Carry my heart to some shore
that my feet will not shatter
do not let me pass away
before I have a name
for this tree
under which I am lying.
Do not let me die
still
needing to be stranger.

Audre Lorde

FOR MIRACLES

for BG

A core of the conversations we never had
lies in the distance
between your wants and mine
a piece of each
buried beneath the wall that separates
our sameness
a talisman of birth
hidden at the root of your mother's spirit
my mother's furies.

Now reaching for you with my sad words
between sleeping and waking
a runic stone speaks
what is asked for is often destroyed
by the very words that seek it
like dew in the early morning
dissolving the tongue of salt as well as its thirst
and I call you secret names of praise and fire
that sound like your birthright
but are not the names of a friend
while you hide from me under 100 excuses
lying like tombstones along the road
between your house and mine.

I could accept any blame I understood
but picking over the fresh and possible loneliness
of this too-early morning
I find the relics of my history
fossilized into a prison
where I learn to make love forever
better than how to make friends
where you are encased like a half-stoned peach
in the rigid art of your healing
and in case you have ever tried to reach me
and I couldn't hear you
these words are in place of the dead air
still between us:

A memorial to conversations we won't be having
to laughter shared and important
as the selves we helped make real
but also to the dead
revelations we buried still-born
in the refuse of fear and silence
and your remembered eyes
which don't meet mine anymore.

(I never intended to let you slip through my fingers
nor to purchase your interest ever again
like the desire of a whore
who yawns behind her upturned hand
pretending a sigh of pleasure
and I have had that, too, already.)

Once I thought when I opened my eyes we would move
into a freer and more open country
where the sun could illuminate our different desires
and the fresh air do us honor for who we were
yet I have awakened at 4 A.M. with a ribald joke to tell you
and found I had lost the name of the street
where you hid under an assumed name
and I knew I would have to bleed again
in order to find you
but just once
in the possibilities of this too-early morning
I wanted you
to talk
not as a healer
but as a lonely woman
talking to a friend.

Audre Lorde

VIEWING THE BIOGRAPHY
PATRICIA JONES: FOR KATHY

Life like a quilt (predetermined patterns) created within the frame
modified by the fabric's confusion, its wild color, its luxury.
Letters, diaries, wills, the torn curtains in the attic, the collection
of shells in the bathroom, the photographic albums clumsily fading (the
structure of the remains).

Genius or nuisance, the voyeur has a choice.

This *life* is a craft. Flesh moved through dull rooms, dark
portals. Hands carried candles or lamps. Eyes blinked back the shadows.
Lips touched other lips.

In the place of craft is conjecture. The construction of conversation
(did she talk like that?); the tattered lists kept beyond usefulness.
The lovers, friends, dear ones no longer so dear, not worthy of memory
(Was it trauma?)

In the photographs, rooms remain uncluttered by people. When they enter
through the stories, the diaries, the letters, the wills, a war rages as
bloody as edited memory. The laughter, meditation, despair and lovemaking
riot out of control. But the *stills* are so quiet. No faces. No hands.
Kitchens starve the mouths of those hungry for fruit or fowl. Stair-
cases remain suspended between dance and dream. Beds are made up to
look as if no person, no woman, no man, no child ever really slept there.
The emptiness of documents is unfathomable. The evidence ephemeral.

The innocent bystanders staring at the accident victim make fine biographers.
They transcend the bloody mess of life with a gaze as distinctive as a de-
tective bent on discovering the dutiful truth.

But the *life* on the frame, in the kitchen surrounded by food and worry
gets patched together by women with flat American voices. From those
voices emerges a music as intricate as the quilts they fashion.

The *life* listens just outside the room in the light of the open door,
crushing the music into whispers, making a romance. Later she tells
half of her story, sad because her memory is only as strong as scent
and her sense is limited to perfume, sweat, sex. It is dangerous.
She is a new territory for the creators of theories. They take her
story apart and put it back together, but for her it would be unrecog-
nizable. The small details—the way she made her bed, the number of
strokes for her hair, the shy way she looked at the man she married
after years of loving—are not there. The important events are ob-
scured in the urge to find her greatness or the triviality she zealously
fought.

They tell these stories without malice. There is no desire to reduce
to fiction the facts of her life, the lives they find full of merit.
They put quilts on the walls, framed by nonreflecting glass, to observe,
to never really use.

black
black, a job well done
Jessica Hagedorn

She's gonna do this pure Egyptian/Ethiopian dance:
the one with five parallel meanings and thirteen costume changes.
Taught by a woman claiming priesthood in the Temple of the Daughters of Isis, she learned slowly, carefully the difficult steps towards yearning, the expansive sweep of graceful acceptance, the lift of the body as if in flight towards or away from the one who is to be named her lover.

She's gonna do this pure Egyptian/Ethiopian dance:
the one with fine metallic filaments emanating from a center composed of cartilage and synapses. Too priceless for the modern spiritual world, the dance is seen at moments crouching lynx like on a disco floor. Drunken. Off balance. Shifting from A to B. Speeding. Coked up. Stiff in a motion, not known to itself. Improvising off odd American music. Mutantlike. Funk bent. Inward looking towards a continent lost to us. Lost in the dark holes where limbs lay rigid, imprisoned. Released now. Its power almost too much for her. But she knows the ways of self-mastery. She can move at the right moment with the right intent. A pure swoop, a keen turn. A lift of the body like a dove perhaps or a bird of paradise. A wing in transformation before the critical position of the Southern Cross. She is prayer then. A dream then. Her dance then metamorphosized steady in flight improvising off odd American music.

She's gonna do this pure Egyptian/Ethiopian/African dance:
the one that curves like the sand upon the banks of a former ocean
She covers her body with perfume distilled from a thousand blossoms of the flowers of Zimbabwe
She shimmers her stories, the ones the chorines at the Cotton Club told
She tempts men with a dream of love made in a bed of incomparable flora where nocturnal beasts roar pleasingly outside their window

at the endless gossip of the waxing moon (forever increasing and diminishing her story)
She will shower her lover with songs, bells, incense created by the women who learned lovingly the knowledge of the Temple of the Daughters of Isis

She's gonna do this pure Egyptian/Ethiopian/quick change—
This quick step towards that dance that is pure American
The one where sage and fool trade fours, fast becoming friends and turn, weakkneed, silly before the Sun, urging rapid dramas and useless solutions. She will carry her shoulders expressively
A be bop beat enhances her motions, as funk covers the waves she ripples through. As reggae consumes forever the danger of the uncharted waters of the New World. The dance livens up. Falls over. Finds its dignity between the wonder and the wary minded. Even touches the silver screen.

She's gonna do this pure American dance:
the one praised by the Mothers of Waters. Stilled now. Their gray hair devoured. Their dreams numbered. Her praises sung for her fellow dancers. The women whose hips and shoulders whose smiles and head-thrown-back laughs recalled religion and love in a continent lost to us. The women who sewed and cooked and fucked and dreamed a place for her in America where her face is imagined always, but never given honor. Except by herself.

GLIMPSES OF THE OUTSIDE

in memory of
Marcia Tillotson (1940-1981)

A place
1.

Cherry Plain was once called South Berlin before
the war and then they probably became self-conscious.
Many here go back before the Revolution are of
Hessian descent fought with the British. They are
wary of strangers defined as anyone who has not lived
here since birth. Still they chat politely wave
as I drive by. The children are more open stare
shamelessly at the new woman in town. It is a quiet
place. One post office. One small general store.
It could have grown and developed when they expanded
old route 22. But it would have meant cutting into
the cemetery and of course that was out of the question.
Like disgruntled children they protest over their parents'
limitations for they see they could have gotten something
off the week-enders rushing back and forth on Friday
and Sunday nights. But ancestors will have their way.
So 22 looped around it leaving the town intact except
for the occasional stranger who is looking for a way out.

2.

I have decided not to plant a garden only to scavenge.
Already last year's furrows (the result of others'
labor) are vague and the borders almost completely
obscured by the undisciplined self-absorbed growth
It is what we know of weeds: no delicate sense of
intrusion of transgressing bounds. They move in
take over and that's that. It doesn't bother me
this unreflecting rudeness. I am satisfied to witness
the few carrot sprigs onions tiny lettuce heads
and without commitment to clear weedless islands
around them. The asparagus reaches its full growth
merges with the stalk and goes to seed. The delicate
dill follows suit achieves its natural toughness.
I do not intercede in these events.

3.

This house was once a meeting hall then a dance
hall a polling place. More recently a garage.
I want to plant flowers around its edges bring
to life an image I have had about it. But the
earth is naturally tough with rocks and more it
is clogged with rusted screws and washers sparkplugs
colored chips of glass all conspiring against my
trowel. Then too there is the heavy oil already
congealed fixed and unyielding like ancient geological
strata. The inner image long forgotten I tense
against this human resistance push harder towards
an earlier time towards less polluted soil.

4.

I have started transplanting wild flowers whose
names I do not know. Small blue ones from a lake
in a state park. They are modest with pale yellow
centers used to the moisture of the water's edge.
I douse them every morning to make them feel at home.
From a roadside I dig out bright yellow ones plant
them by the unpainted barn so I can see them from my
window as I work. These thrive as if their sole pur-
pose was my pleasure. But exotic tall purple flowers
with bulb-type roots strong like twine in their tie
to the earth and to their particular spot these shrivel
up a few hours after being placed by the barn. I consider
the possibilities: individual will personality simple
biochemical make-up. Whatever. These do not adapt.
They stand tall and elegant dried by the sun next to
the brilliant yellow flowers for whom a place by the barn
is as good as a roadbank.

5.

Midnight: the meadow is sparkling with fireflies
I had always thought that at night they folded their
wings over their iridescent bodies and darkened
that light. Yet here they are in constant motion
lighting against the shadow of the mountain. The
memory suddenly comes alive like the underside of
a non-living stone. I am eight years old and it is
almost dusk. The fireflies rush through arid city
air. I trap them in a milk bottle hoping to create
a lantern to light my way home. I do not understand
that not even the dusty grass hurriedly pressed through
the narrow bottleneck will keep them alive that
inevitably in such confinement (is it a lack of air
or simply a lack of space for flight?) their light will
dim and die.

6.

What could go wrong in such a setting? I ask
myself thinking of that arid air left behind
of the wino sleeping in my doorway every night.
This valley is so quiet so clear and sharp-
edged in the summer daylight. The old houses
meticulously painted and the lawns carefully mowed
declare only: order and plain living. What could
go wrong in such a setting? I ask myself again.
The mountains look permanent eternal in fact
though all I read about human life about natural
evolution tells me everything is in constant
motion that this landscape was once of a different
sort that these people who distrust strangers
were once strangers themselves that the sign
"Indian Massacre Road" a sign indistinguishable
from any other in lettering and color posted modestly
at an obscure crossing is but a barely noticeable
vestige of one history forgotten and unattended.

7.

The pump is old its age reflected in its weight
iron shaped and welded more than a half a century ago.
It draws the water noisily slowly sounding like
a failing heart pounding against itself. The plumbers
cluck their tongues in masculine admiration. "She's
a goddam antique" the young one says. He is tall
and handsome with clear blue eyes. "Don't make those
anymore" he continues with a voice of experience
his age denies. I suspect he's only an apprentice for
he descends into the well while the older man sits
casually on the ledge occasionally offering advice.
They're in agreement or in cahoots. Get a new pump.
This one's definitely shot. Not worth fixing the parts
too difficult to find and when found too expensive.
I decide against it at least for now and tell them
to see if anything can be done. Later I return and
ask if they can patch it up. "Sure" the young one
answers. "I'll take anything on as long as it's white."

A visit

1.

The woman who is coming to visit is my mother.
Her life has been bracketed by historical events
over which she's had no control. During World War II
she developed a canniness for detecting Jews did
not care how many documents they had to prove who
they were not. She knew. She could tell by a special
look in their eyes a gesture of the hand a confidence
too casual. This acquired ability so finely tuned
during the war years remains alive so that today
decades later she cannot wander far from her Jewish
neighborhood before she begins assessing who are
the safe ones and who are not.

2.

Her survival (and as a result mine) was partly
dependent on: her small nose her grey eyes. And
most critical: her impeccable Polish (with no trace
of a Yiddish accent) because an older sister had
insisted she attend Polish schools to gain greater
mobility. It was one perspective on the Jewish condition
in Poland. At critical moments these elements heredity
and environment combined in the right proportions to
create luck. But there was also another character
or in this case guts. When the Germans came for her
she begged: *Ich habe ein kleines kind.* And when she
saw the sliver of hesitation in their eyes she ran
and took her chances. They did not chase or shoot
just let her go. For months she convinced the peasants
she was a Pole playing a part ad libbing the dialogue
without a flaw pretending to be the human being they
assumed she was. During this time she learned survival
depends on complete distrust. Even today she is still
fierce in her refusal to rely on others. Some would call
it alienation. Others pride. I think it's only
the necessary stance of any survivor.

3.

History she says with irony has a way of repeating
itself. *Then* she outwitted two German soldiers probably
young men taught from childhood the hideousness of
Jews. Faced with a woman fair and ordinary pleading
for her sickly child who would be orphaned they must have
thought: No this cannot be that Jewish monster. And
she escaped. At least momentarily. *Now* she is trapped
again. But no walls or barbed wire around her this time.
No plans for uprisings or secret meetings. Each evening
she returns hurrying through the orderly streets ominous
in their emptiness and steps into the elevator. I want
to offer her advice strategy a philosophy but know their
utter uselessness in this age. For *now* is a vastly
different time and place. The country is not occupied
by strangers. Those she fears most are not an enemy.
And neglect and hunger cannot be outwitted.

4.

We visit the Hancock Shaker Village walking through
the restored buildings recreated workrooms and living
quarters. I note the quietness the simplicity of
the line and wonder about the eye that fashioned it
the aesthetic vision the philosophy of light air
or raising the struggle for survival above humiliation.
We pass through the herb garden. My mother stops
looks in amazement at the round stone barn and marvels
how all this could have come to a dead stop without
catastrophe without disaster. She scrutinizes the
photographs of children adopted and nurtured. How
could they not have wanted children of their own?
she asks having always believed that one's own blood is
the sole source of all security. And I see her shift
as she tells me again of the children hidden in convents
baptised and converted then claimed by relatives after
the war. Many were finally kidnapped or their protectors
bribed and bought off. Some could never be reclaimed.
For those who were it was hard. painful but my mother
adds they were our only hope.

5.

But it is not simply a question of reproduction
I tell myself that night thinking of my own child-
lessness. They lacked something which would have
pushed them on which would have given them a hook
in time. But it was time itself that they ignored
thinking the farm land and woods around the village
the seasons emerging predictably in full character
the day and the night . all these they assumed were
heaven eternal. At the end of each day after baking
and laundry welding and weaving tending the children
and the fields they would meet and reaffirm their faith.
First they shook out the sins from their bodies then
danced holding their palms up to gather in the blessings.
There was no time there was no death. And so they
lived and so they died.

6.

My mother boards the train and sits behind the
tinted glass. She mouths words and gestures nothing
I can understand. I raise my arms in frustration
motion her to try again. She does but the barriers
remain. She writes a note on a piece of paper holds
it against the glass. the European script is clear:
"It is empty here. It is cool." I smile and give
the okay sign. She will be comfortable on her trip back
to the city. Still I am all anxiety. Departures
swell old undefined fears in me the fear of permanent
separations. Old long-forgotten departures which
remain active in me like instinct. The fear of being
lost and never found of losing all trace all connections
severed the thread broken. (When after two years she
came to get me from the orphanage I cried when I caught
sight of her and raised my arms to her. I was barely
three but I had not forgotten.) Of endless futile
searches for relatives long vanished or even worse
alive but not traceable.

The train begins to move. My mother sits behind the
tinted glass and waves. Her face becomes an angle and
then disappears. Her words were: "Find a place where
you are happy." But the sound of those words had
the mourning of separation.

A place in time

1.

The postmistress is insecure in her calculations.
She checks and rechecks all her figures never having
the ease of certainty. Still I trust her view
of this place for she has that tutored eye able to
detect the changes nuances and variations whose
implications remain obscure to my alien reasoning.
She is chatty inquisitive. Sometimes I think she must
be lonely sitting all day by herself behind the old-
fashioned post office boxes decorated with elaborate
brass eagles. Perhaps the grocery will be sold (and then
we'll be stuck with whoever buys it). Perhaps the mail
truck will be traded in (and then we'll have regular
delivery). Perhaps the church will be painted by early
fall (and we can begin having services again). Perhaps
the rumors about the metal barrels buried in the nearby
camping grounds are true (and we should stop swimming
in that lake).

2.

At first the cats were cautious flattening
themselves along the ground slinking close to
the edges of the house. No vestigial recollections
springing from the unconscious depth of the species.
Or so I thought. But now and I can hardly measure
the time elapsed they act as if it's all they've
ever known routinely bringing in mice from the meadow
or bodies of birds necks snapped heads hanging
like colored limp sacks. I glimpse my favorite
the tortoise shell eating a rabbit whose belly seems
expertly slashed and exposed. She hunches over it
calmly chewing the juicy red meat patiently breaking
through the sinewy flesh.

3.

At the Burr & Grille in Averill Park only men
are at the bar. They look like mechanics: oil
streaked pants workgloves stuffed in pockets.
They swap army stories their glimpses of the
outside. In Haiti I overhear there are only
the rich and the poor. "Nothing in the middle"
a man in his twenties says. The rich live on top
of the mountain the poor by the sea. They earn
about $35 a year. "Imagine the kind of life *that*
is. They're starving. Imagine! In this day and age!"
Burr behind the bar clucks his tongue. "In China"
he says "they fight over candybars. Imagine what
that must be like." The young one begins again:
"You know you get off and they have all those
bands and colorful costumes and everything is all
welcome. And then you take five steps away from
the pier and *wham*! [he bangs his hand down on the bar]
they're ready to slit your throat to get that wallet!"

4.

Saturday: The Baptist Church flea market and auction
offers the predictable merchandise. Old clothes
battered pots and pans chipped glassware rusted lawn
furniture. "It's all for a good cause" a woman tells
me and mentions interior renovations. I wonder if I'm
the only Jew in the crowd. An older man aproaches.
"Smile!" he orders. "The Lord loves you! Certainly
the Lord loves you!" I nod feel uncomfortable move
towards another table. A woman about seven months
pregnant is having her purchases priced. She is no
more than twenty with a small pale face faintly freckled
deeply worn. Dressed in colorless bermudas and a gray
blouse she holds a carton of baby clothes. On the ground
by her feet are cheap games of plastic a round container
with broken wooden logs the debris of an old erector set.
This too is her collection the necessary response
to life's gnawing insistence on itself on not being
ignored. She looks wearied almost emptied by her vigilance.
I watch as she hands over the ten dollar bill and waits
for the change watch as she smiles and turns away.

5.

I ride the backroads far from any village or town
far from the blacktops carefully numbered. Woods
along both sides. Suddenly I am startled by an
unexpected home a trailer on a small patch of cleared
land. Logic would say that it had no stability
the cinderblocks at its corners appearing flimsy unable
to keep it firmly rooted to the ground. Yet the faded
paint the obvious rust creeping along its outer shell
reveal a hard-won permanence. Barefoot children stop
playing in front of a torn screendoor stand anxious
tentative waiting for the unfamiliar car to pass.
A woman's eyes keep guard at a kitchen window. Plastic
deer and clay ducks line the worn path. Junked cars
spill out of the collapsed garage. Gray overalls and
bright sheets with sunsets dry between two shade trees.
In a carved out tractor tire painted red and white grow
yellow marigolds blue petunias. An orderly vegetable
garden on one side loose piles of freshly split logs
on the other testify to the implacable needs of winter.
All is urgency asymmetry in this territory resistant
to maps and philosophy. Only the seasons and birth
and death remain stark. I know I see I learn again
from the anxiety in that woman's eyes in the caution
of the children's stance that there is no escape.

Mourning

1.

I reread his letter He writes about your struggle
Marcia your will to survive I read the letter again
and stare at the mountain's outline behind the house.
It is will against the dark shadowy mountain that I
keep thinking about How you refused up to the last
moment refused to say it is over but stretched out
your time how you were willing to endure the pain how
you would not be separated from it because it alone
held the possibility of life A few days before you died
a friend said: *Everything's collapsing but she simply*
refuses I think about that refusal to cooperate to give
yourself an easeful death It is your will Marcia
I am trying to understand.

2.

Why so hard to absorb after all the waiting?
The daily calls and reports turned your body
into a machine The nurses were polite precise.
Respiratory arrest Cardiac failure She's
breathing on her own now Somewhat better.

"How is her spirit?" I ask stupidly as if
the answer could make a bond between us One
time they said: She is angry Another: She is
somewhat anxious.

3.

Death asserts itself as everywhere pulls me out
of the eternal roots me in this time in this place.
Your death Marcia After thirteen years of struggles
who would have thought this was the final one who
would have thought this one was different from all
the others? It is something I must plant I keep saying
as if I could contain the loss by finding the right
piece of ground by the barn perhaps or by the gigantic
ash that hovers over the house a tree planted by
a neighbor's father more than sixty years ago I
need a place for your death Marcia for it feels like
an emptiness that can erode all the mountains
that protect this valley.

4.

But there is no possibility of containing it All
the days merge and only hindsight reveals the subtle
but discreet changes: the shortened daylight
the slowly yellowing grass I place seeds in the bird
feeder write letters home check the final stages of
the garden's undisciplined growth Everything is
shrivelling emptying itself of body and substance
huddling closer and closer to the earth I plant bulbs
like a skeptic never fully believing these drab
lifeless lumps will bloom next year in full exotic color.
Nothing I think staring at the sixty-year old ash
should be taken for granted I push my trowel deeper
sift out the slivers of glass the heavy nails place
the bulbs in their designated places then cover them
with soil flattening the surface with my hand.

IRENA KLEPFISZ

photo: Colleen McKay

BLANCHE WIESEN COOK
interviewed by CANDACE LYLE HOGAN

Blanche Wiesen Cook, whose latest book is *The Declassified Eisenhower: A Divided Legacy of Peace and Political Warfare* (Doubleday, 1981), is a history professor at John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York City. As visiting professor at U.C.L.A. this year, she is teaching courses on the Freedom of Information Act and access to public documents. She produces her own bi-weekly radio program, "Women and the World in the 1980's" on WBAI in New York and KPFK in Los Angeles, and she is co-chair of the Organization of American Historians' Freedom of Information Committee.

Candace Lyle Hogan: *What does it mean to you to be a feminist historian?*
Blanche Wiesen Cook: It means to see the world from a woman's perspective. And it also means to take as our own the issues that relate to women and that, of course, is *all* issues. Everything is connected. If one is a feminist, one should be concerned with ecology and the future of the planet and with the fact that everybody is entitled to the human right to security and education and peace. I like to think of myself as a feminist and a historian and a journalist. I write about international politics, I write about Eisenhower, and I write about women; so I wouldn't want to say I am a historian of women's issues exclusively, that's not all I do.

I want to deal with all kinds of political issues very directly from a feminist point of view; and there are many traps in what are the 'professional standards of history' set up by so-called professionals—not footnote traps, which I approve of as you can see if you look at my books, they've got lots of footnotes—but, you know, this notion that one should not reveal one's political ideas. I think that's bizarre. My work is about my political ideas and I want them right up front.

CLH: *Your own history seems to parallel the shifting emphasis within the history profession itself—the move from the traditional study of "great men" only, to the inclusion of "ordinary people" (social history), capped finally by feminist history. How did you experience these transitions in your own career?*
BWC: I was trained in a very traditional way by very traditional men at a very traditional university, (Johns Hopkins in Baltimore, Maryland,) where one could study, indeed did study, American history without ever really learning about slavery—except in terms of reading a book with a chapter about how Sambo and Sally were quite happy on the big plantation. Before I went to graduate school there in 1962, I was student government president of Hunter College in New York and involved in the civil rights movement.

The president of Hunter at that time was Mary Latimer Gambrell. In 1960 when I came back after being arrested at a sit-in, she called me into her office and said that it wasn't that she was a bigot, when she was a little girl she went into the kitchen at her daddy's plantation and she *talked* to those people and she knew that they even had ideas! But, she continued, the law said this and this, and we were *breakin'* the law and that was quite unacceptable. When I was awarded the Roosevelt Memorial Scholarship at graduation in recognition of my leadership and scholarship, Gambrell had to shake my hand and smile as she handed me the award, which she did, saying between clenched teeth, "You know how this hurts me . . ."

All of these immediate life experiences built into what became a very conscious commitment to merge all of my political interests into the work that I do. I mean it was clear to me what it was all about was ideas and power and influence. At Johns Hopkins we were trained to savage each other's seminar papers.

Unfortunately the whole competitive ethic in America is so pernicious—and Johns Hopkins was a particularly vicious place academically—that it took me years to overcome that so I could work with other people cooperatively. I worked very hard at overcoming what is the worst in American education—that really ungiving, unsupportive, destructive competitive attitude.

And then there is that whole fraud of objectivity. We were trained both at Hopkins and at Hunter that history is "objective," that there are these facts that are hung out in the airy fairy blue, and our job as really good scholars was to unearth, through primary research in the archives, some new facts, but never to have any ideas or judgments about them. Mary Latimer Gambrell had a great influence on me because I've spent much of my life fighting her—she's been dead all these years, but I fight her everyday. When students would start answering a question by saying, "I feel . . ." she would *bang* her fist on the desk and say, "Think! Don't feel!" And that was like a motto. A really good scholar didn't feel, a really good scholar had very limited thoughts about very specific facts out of which one would never have an emotion. Feeling was what you did if you were in music or something.

CLH: *What finally made you feel free as a historian to write from your political convictions?*
BWC: The war in Viet Nam. It changed my life the way the civil rights movement did. The war in Viet Nam was an outrageous thing that just didn't make any sense, so together with a group of historians, we founded the Conference on Peace Research in History. Out of that came the Garland Library of War and Peace published in 1971, and the first bibliography on peace research published in 1968. A whole lot of my ideas focused then and my dissertation, "Woodrow Wilson and the Anti-Militarists," became a peace movement dissertation. From that point on there was no question in my mind that there *were* alternatives to international violence, to war, to racism and poverty, and I was going to do my damndest to promote those alternatives in my work and in my teaching.

CLH: *If you were involved in the civil rights and peace movements before you became a feminist, how did you ultimately translate feminism into your work?*
BWC: By 1969 feminism was a real movement but my own connection to it was very limited. I was in a consciousness-raising group in 1969 and in a Marxist-Feminist study group by 1973, but still I think I was very slow. I mean I knew I was a Lesbian—I'd been a Lesbian since I was two I think—although I always thought I would get married, and I did get married. Being a Lesbian before feminism, I had some sexist ideas actually, so feminism didn't translate into my work until later. I identified myself as a professional woman, but I didn't think I should write about women—I wasn't trained to write about women. I was trained to be a kind of military historian, an analyst of international business.

CLH: *How did you come to realize you wanted to write about women?*
BWC: *Crystal Eastman: On Women and Revolution* (Oxford University Press, 1978) was the first specifically feminist thing I wrote. She was part of my dissertation started in 1964 about the peace movement in World War I, about the tension of power groups. That's how I first came across Crystal Eastman and interviewed her brother Max Eastman. In 1966, about two years before he died, he was very old, still

a wonderfully dashing looking man and he said, did I want to see Crystal Eastman's papers—boxes and boxes of her letters to him and their mother and her first husband and so on. And I said, no. Well, that's the worst mistake I ever made in my life. It wasn't until at least three or four years later that the full impact of the feminist movement began to hit me personally in my work life. And I wrote the book the way I wrote it, making the connections, realizing things were not separate, at least not for me anymore. Feminism really enabled me to connect all the separated aspects of my vision.

Crystal Eastman became very important to me because she combined her involvement with the international peace movement with socialism, with feminism, with sexual freedom; and she was a very free spirit. And then I got very involved with Crystal Eastman and I began to see myself as the mirror image of her. And in fact I got so identified with Crystal—she had died of nephritis and my favorite uncle had died of nephritis—that the whole time I was writing this book I had kidney pains and I thought I was dying of nephritis.

So the big transition was this consciousness-raising group and the fact of the feminist movement, that women were important and here I was sitting on one of the most exciting women in history and not dealing with her great contributions from a feminist point of view.

CLH: *And so began your work as a feminist historian, but after that was yet another transition leading to your writing "Women Alone Stir My Imagination: Lesbianism and the Cultural Tradition" and "Women and Support Networks" in which you examine not only in what ways the personal is political but also how the love of women made political commitment possible for women like Eastman, Lillian Wald, Jane Addams.*

BWC: Yes. In ten years of work on women in historical peace movements, I had focused exclusively on their political contributions and whenever I came across their love letters, I put them aside. After the impact of yet more intense feminism on my own life, I went back and read the love letters they'd written to each other, and then I wrote that female support network article and gave it as a paper at the Third Berkshire Conference at Bryn Mawr in 1976. I'd given many papers about these women, but this one was the first about how their personal lives fueled their energies and enabled them to do work, and I would not have been able to give that paper if sitting in the very front row were not members of my own support network—women, many of them heterosexual women, who were my dear friends, sitting right there in front, encouraging me all the way to come out as a Lesbian to a roomful of 300 historians and others. I couldn't have done it without them; it was an extraordinary moment in my life.

CLH: *Didn't you conclude that the fact that these women loved each other and chose to live their lives with each other, that they devoted their primary attentions to women and derived their primary inspiration from women, meant they were Lesbians?*

BWC: Right. And this has become very controversial because there are women who say I'm fudging the issue—that this is not Lesbianism. This insistence on whether they 'did it' and how they did it and how *often*, I think that's all a veil for homophobia because it is still so unacceptable in our culture to acknowledge the fact that celebrated and respected and admired women loved each other.

CLH: *So you're not in the closet at all?*
BWC: No. People in closets spend a lot of time and energy keeping the door shut. In a climate as violent and hateful as ours, everything we do, every idea, is a risk. The only way we will ever transcend this mean-spirited time is to stand up as much as we can, but not everybody can stand up the same way, you know. If I didn't have a job, if I were starving on the street, if I had seven kids to support, I don't know what I would be able to do. We all have primary concerns, so I'm not saying that nobody should be in the closet; in fact I resent the untoward pressure that is sometimes put on people.

CLH: *Are you a maverick even among feminist historians?*
BWC: I guess I am. Some feminist historians are opposed to writing about women's culture. They say because the point of conflict is between women and men that to deal just with women is reactionary. Now I think that is not only narrow-minded, but stupid. Women I write about received energy and vision from within their own community, which enabled them to go out into the world and do what they wanted to do. It's not a separatist culture I'm writing about—we all live on this planet. I'm saying that one can be fueled by women's culture.

One of the things I emphasize is that I am empowered to do the work I do by the support I get from my loving friends. In fact, I couldn't do some of the things I do, I don't know how I would survive, if I didn't know I have a real political support network. I think it is important to men as well as women because we all really need to be backed up in an organized political way as well as in an intimate personal way; but I think it's even more important for women at this moment in history in the United States because women are not meant to survive here as political creatures. So we really need each other quite a lot.

CLH: *How do you consider your political vision distinct?*
BWC: I see everything as connected. I don't think you can have freedom unless you have economic security, just as I think you can't have economic security unless you have peace. There's never going to be a completely successful socialist government or country unless there is international peace and unless there is a serious effort to negotiate the resources of the planet in a fair way. All the fundamental questions are connected.

Crystal Eastman and Alexandra Kollontai (in the early years) were able to put it all together and to say, we believe in socialism and freedom and in peace and sexual freedom. I believe we've lost that ability to see things as connected, and now everybody tells you to choose. Well I refuse to choose, you know, which limb will I rip off?! I refuse to choose; we cannot choose, we must put it all back together again. Every aspect of it is falling apart and we have to rebuild it all.

CLH: *How are your two books about Eisenhower connected to feminism?*
BWC: I am a feminist, which means to me that everything I do is touched by my sensibility. When I write about Ike and race, women are there in the culture of my mind. I'm writing for women and for men—I think it's so important that we have a universal vision.

I'm writing about racism because I think racism is a fundamental issue and one of the most cruel and divisive and costly issues in our culture today. I think that the

U.S. and South Africa being the only two countries in the industrial world without socialized medicine has a lot to do with the fact that we're saying to poor people: you don't have money, you can die. Well, we say that in a racist context, do you see, for who are most of the poor people in the U.S. and South Africa?

If poor people are not free, if Blacks are not free, then I'm not free; I am no more secure as I walk down the street than the least secure person. My whole life is involved with international politics.

Now, if you think of the military budget in the last ten years as equalling every single piece of real estate that exists in this country, you know that we have spent money that could have rebuilt every single building, hospital, home, even the subways. We spent 180 billion dollars on the war in Viet Nam every year for so many years, a figure we cannot grasp, an unimaginable number. But it's $56,000 a second. We can imagine what $56,000 a second is as it ticks away every minute of every hour of every day. Now what could we do with that money, this richest country in the world with one of the lowest per capita literacy rates?

It's in that context that I write as a feminist—as somebody concerned with international relations, domestic violence, racism. Those are the issues of our time and I don't parcel it off and say now I'm this and now I'm that. I am always all of those things because I always live on this planet and it's all connected. See, we are all connected; and that's how I write, that's how I feel.

IN MOURNING AND IN RAGE

(With Analysis Aforethought)

Performance by Leslie Labowitz and Suzanne Lacy
Article by Suzanne Lacy

Activist political art is not a simple product of inspiration or a well meaning and fortunate arrangement of images. It is composed, as well, of social analysis and a strategy for audience involvement. In this article I would like to offer some brief observations toward an analysis of news reporting on rape murders, using the example of the Hillside Strangler Case to describe how the reporting of sex crimes serves to intimidate women and perpetuate mythologies about violence against them. This analysis, developed by Leslie Labowitz and myself, with the inspiration of Women Against Violence Against Women (WAVAW) activists, is the core of the art performance, "In Mourning and In Rage . . ." we created for Los Angeles media on December 13, 1977.

I. Fact and Fantasy

In early November, 1977, the second of what was to become a string of sex murders broke into the Los Angeles media. Two weeks earlier the discovery of the nude and strangled body of Yolanda Washington passed essentially unnoticed by the press—violence was commonplace in the lives of prostitutes. But when Judith Miller, a fifteen year old who frequented Hollywood Boulevard was found strangled the day after Halloween, newsmen began to question the relationship between the incidents. As one after another lifeless body was uncovered during that month (a total of ten by December 1), the "Hillside Strangler Case" was born. No one knew who invented the phrase, police or press, but its graphic description of the crime scenes made it a crucial element in the media coverage.

During the winter months in Los Angeles, the Hillside Strangler Case was created as a literal entity in the minds of mass audiences through the exchange between police and reporters and the communication of that interaction to the public. The murders, of course, *did* actually occur, as tangible as the abandoned bodies of women found scattered around the city, as real as the grief expressed by their loved ones; and they were linked to the same killer or killers through painstakingly gathered evidence. But the public's *awareness* of the Hillside Strangler Case was the providence of the local news industry, and as soon as rudiments of a story were in, reporters set out hot on the trail of what would eventually become the biggest story to hit the city in years. "I was living this television fantasy," admitted one columnist. "I'd known guys to get calls from criminals who were afraid of the police and wanted to turn themselves in to a reporter . . . I got to admit, I got so caught up in my own fantasies that I even left numbers where I could be reached 24 hours a day . . ."[1] The fantasy involvement of reporters, mostly male, in the drama of the Hillside Strangler murders was transmitted to their audience.

Throughout the city, men's jokes, innuendos, and veiled threats (I might be the Strangler, you know) revealed an identification that was at the very least fueled by reporters' enthusiasm, if not generated by it.

In one incident after another, reporters' zeal, public pressure on the police, and the antagonisms between police and newspeople accounted for an elaborate series of reporting inaccuracies. One reporter formulated a theory of bizarre ritual torture based on the placement of the victim's bodies; he withheld the details of this theory at police request, although the police knew all along that the body position was a reflection only of how it had been carried. "We tried to help the press as little as possible," said a Sheriff's department investigator ". . . an erroneous conclusion on a reporter's part was encouraged . . . (for) if the real killer ever confessed, he or she would mention details that had not been read,"[2] thus verifying the authenticity of the confession. At least twice confessions known to both police and reporters to be false were released or allowed to remain uncorrected in the media to heighten suspense.

Within this complicated panorama of fact, fictionalization, and deliberate falsehood, one has to ask, what is the purpose of reporting such crimes? How do they serve their chroniclers and affect their audiences? Reporters maintained that each detail gave women more information to protect themselves. The effect, however, of explicit descriptions of locations where bodies were discovered, veiled hints of ritualistic sexual murder, and similar elaborations fed women's hysteria. Their responses, spurred by fear, were then duly reported. Women carried kitchen knives and police whistles, bought out lock supplies in hardware stores and began to severely curtail their movement throughout the city.

If the end result of such "media events" is the intimidation and terrorizing of a mass of women, then news reporting might profitably be subjected to a feminist analysis along the lines of that applied to entertainment and pornographic media. This analysis is complicated by a rationale used by entertainment barons but perhaps more applicable here: the public has a right to know what is happening in their environment, and it is the role of media to (objectively) represent that information. Of course, the lie here is that real objectivity is, or can be, maintained in symbolic representations. But, believing that it can, viewers often confuse the account of an incident with the incident itself.

To state the obvious, news reporting in a large urban environment is actually the interface between the real event and the public's perception of it. What is not so obvious is *how* so called "facts" are selected and construed to reinforce or shape audience belief systems. Hand in hand with police working on a case, the media creates a crime-series from isolated incidents, fabricating a construct the public will recognize over and over. That construct, in the case of violent sex crimes, is often as close to a murder mystery fiction as any T.V. detective program or film could ever hope to get. Facts, framed according to the myths about rape and sexual violence that are preserved in much of our fiction, create a reality contextualized not by the social forces and conditions that are casual to such violence, but, curiously, by the entertainment industry. Hence, in unraveling just how news reporting might serve the hidden social purpose of intimidating and containing women (in the manner of pornography, for example), we must look at the forms and themes it chooses for its information.

2. Constructing a News Story

What are the makings of a good story, a thriller that will keep newspaper readers buying papers, television audiences coming back for news updates? Reporters, competing with Hollywood for viewers, and influenced as members of audiences themselves, arrange their stories to reflect the elements of drama: a recognizable theme, coherent plot, antagonists you can hate and protagonists with whom you can identify. Throughout fiction certain themes recur, their appeal rising and falling with variables in the social climate. Consider this scenario: a maniacal killer stalks young, beautiful and helpless women. He is caught in the end, but not before a good deal of graphic violence has been accomplished for the satisfaction of the audience. Given the current appeal of such themes in popular entertainment, it should not surprise us to see the Hillside Strangler news coverage following this paradigm.

The first necessary ingredient to selling a newstory over a period of time is to reinforce a familiar theme with a recognizable image. The coining of the phrase "Hillside Strangler" fixed the series of crimes in the public imagination. It had all the makings of a good title. It was evocative of sexual violence and it dramatized one of the peculiarities of the case that seemed most horrible in the absense of other specifics: the encountering of nude corpses on populated hillsides by local residents. Discretion on the part of major newspapers and T.V. channels prohibited actual portrayal of these bodies in the fields where they were found (although other

sources, not so delicate, revealed obscenely objective photographs of the dead women in situ); but photographs of officers bending over a concealed body served the same purpose, as viewers completed the picture in their own minds with images borrowed from entertainment and art. Variations on a constantly repeated verbal description, "the nude, spread-eagled body of a woman was found strangled today on the side of a hill" became the icon, the major image, around which the drama progressed.

The plotline, which revealed itself sporadically in police news releases, false confessions, and continuing murders, could not advance toward a conclusion faster than actual events would allow. So to expand the narrative, reporters constructed a past tense by investigating the lives of each victim. Visuals established who the victim's family and friends were, what their homes looked like, where their bodies were discovered, and, of course, the appearances of the victims themselves.

Overlooking the obvious connection—each victim was a female in a sex-violent culture—reporters ransacked the pasts of the dead women, searching with the police for clues as to why *these* particular women had been singled out. Mistaking causation for the similarities in each killing, reporters inadvertently upheld the common myth that victims of sex violence are somehow culpable,if only in their choices of action. If they could just uncover some commonly held fatal mistakes, readers would be able to protect themselves! Thus, when it was discovered that the first two women were frequenters of Hollywood Boulevard, reporters fell eagerly on

the information. Here was a possible cause: the women were either prostitutes or had been mistaken for prostitutes by the killer. This clue neatly satisfied the notion that assault victims are promiscuous (until recently a victim's sexual history could be used against her in California courts) and coincided with speculations that the killer was motivated by rage against a seductive mother. Though the prostitution theory was soon proven unfounded the taint of it remained. Undaunted, reporters continued to create, soap opera fashion, such stories as "She Looked For Love, Found Strangler."[3]

The fear-motivated actions of women through the city (all of them potential victims!) heightened the suspense and embellished the basic storyline. Self defense was put forward in several feature articles, although the visual message frequently demonstrated the most ineffectual, rather than powerful, moments—a woman crying from the mace sprayed in her face by an instructor, another revealing a small paring knife hidden in her purse as she stood in front of a Safeway market. In one television special for women, the lead segment featured a woman's feet walking alone at night with anonymous male feet stalking her. Following the sensationalist style of crime fiction, many images reinforced the idea of women's helplessness.

In the absence of real information, the killers possible motivations were largely culled from popular mythology. Psychologists in the media speculated that his mother was dominating, perhaps erratically cruel and seductive; that she may have been a woman of easy virtue (especially popular during the time of the prostitution theory); and that his father was absent. A sex killer is assumed to be driven by rage toward women, but his hatred is explained by hateful women. After the confessed killer was caught, one author again adhered to this version of reality, describing Kenneth Bianchi's vascillating and neurotically aggressive mother, his dead father, and his deceitful first wife. (Interestingly, while the author noted Bianchi's intense interest in pornography from the early teens onward, he makes no attempt to ascribe this particular detail to a motivational construct.)[4]

While the similarities in the history of some sex killers, where these are in fact found, may be part of a picture of personal distress, they do not explain *why* this distress is enacted in sexual violence, or how such incidents are upheld by our entire social fabric. Unfortunately, the analysis and contextualization needed to understand how sex violent crimes occur and what we can do about them is rarely part of hard news coverage. The Hillside Strangler case, as detective story par excellance, galvanized an entire city, gluing its citizens each night to thousands of television sets. It sold newspapers, locks, guns and dogs; became the subject matter of jokes and nightmares; was responsible for destroying marriages and careers. But in the telling of this story the news media perpetuated the same images and attitudes, ironically appealed to the same prurient interests, that created the social climate for the crime itself.

3. What Was To Be Done?

Early one morning in December, Leslie Labowitz and I sat over coffee and the morning newspaper, sickened by the headlines. The Strangler had killed another woman, his tenth, and the body had just been discovered. In sharing our own pain and feelings of powerlessness, we decided to throw our energy into a performance,

a personal expression but one which would also fulfill, as well, two important goals: to create a public ritual for women in Los Angeles to express their grief, their rage, and their demands for concrete action, and to present, within the media, a feminist perspective of the case. We would use the media's own language of high drama and intriguing visuals to create a newsworthy event from our performance. We would design it to fit the form of a news broadcast. For the next thirteen days we worked with Bia Lowe and other members of the Woman's Building to produce "In Mourning and in Rage . . ."

On December 13, 1977, seventy women gathered at the Woman's Building in Los Angeles. The women received instructions for the event which began when ten actresses dressed in mourning emerged from the Building and entered a hearse. The hearse and two motorcycle escorts departed from the Building, followed by twenty-two cars filled with women. Each car had its lights on and displayed two stickers: "Funeral" and "Stop Violence Against Women." The motorcade circled City Hall twice and stopped in front of the assembled members of the news media.

One at a time, nine seven-foot-tall veiled women mourners emerged from the hearse and stood in a line on the sidewalk. The final figure emerged, an active woman clothed in scarlet. The ten women faced the street as the hearse departed while women from the motorcade procession drove slowly past in silent homage to the mourners. Forming a procession three abreast, the mourners walked toward the steps in front of City Hall.

Women from the motorcade positioned themselves on either side of the steps forming a chorus from a modern tragedy. They unfurled a banner which read "In Memory of Our Sisters, Women Fight Back."

As soon as the media had positioned itself to record this second part of the event, the first mourner walked toward the microphone and in a loud, clear voice said "I am here for the ten women who have been raped and strangled between October 18 and November 29!" The chorus echoed her with "In memory of our sisters, we fight back!" as she was wrapped with a brilliant red scarf by the woman clothed in red. She took her place on the steps, followed by the second mourner. Each of the nine women made her statement which connected this seemingly random incident of violence in Los Angeles with the greater picture of nationwide violence toward women; each received her red cloak; and each was greeted by the chorus, "We fight back." Finally the woman in red approached the microphone. Unveiled, speaking directly and powerfully, she declared "I am here for the *rage* of all women. I am here for women fighting back!"

The ten women on the steps, the chorus and their banner, served as a background of unified womanstrength against which the remainder of the piece unfolded. A short statement, directed at the press, was read explaining the artists' rationale for the piece. A member of the Los Angeles Commission on Assaults Against Women read a prepared list of three demands for women's self-defense. These were presented to three members of City Council. The final image consisted of a song, written especially for the event, sung by Holly Near. The audience joined in this and a spontaneous circle dance as the artists and political organizers met with and answered questions from the press.

Political art can have many functions, many of them overlapping. The artist can use her understanding of the power of images primarily to communicate information, emotion, and/or ideology. She may, additionally, provide us with a critique of popular culture and its images or of current or past social situations. Sometimes her work can inspire her audience toward action in the service of a cause. Or the artworks might function best as a model for other artists or activists. These varied possibilities lend themselves to several ways to assess a political artwork's success.

4. Direct Results and Conclusion

As to direct results of "In Mourning and In Rage," how it affected immediate action, those we know of can be listed simply. Following the event, one reporter confronted a telephone company representative in his office. Although they had been stalling on the emergency listing of hotline numbers, promoted by feminist activists for over a year, he assured the reporter that favorable action was pending. Shortly after, the phone company did indeed list rape hotlines in the front of the phone book, although they were removed the subsequent year.

The $100,000 reward money that had been offered by the county for the arrest of the Strangler was converted into funding for free self defense workshops throughout the city, an action that was started prior to our event by the County Commission on the Status of Women, but one which received a favorable boost as a result of our publicity. Two self defense workshops for city employees, offered by Councilwoman Picus, and a Saturday session sponsored at our instigation by the rape hotlines, were filled with participants.

In terms of audience attitude changes, a much more difficult area to assess, we can only report that the media coverage of the performance was, for the most part, consistent with our design and our strategy. The performance was featured that evening on most major television newscasts in the area and received some national airplay. Leslie supervised a PBS follow-up program—students at the Woman's Building discussing sensationalist news coverage—and appeared on talk shows and at meetings with reporters to discuss issues raised by the performance. Within the general television audience we had very little feedback as to the effectiveness of the newsclip in changing anyone's perspective about the Strangler case or its coverage, but we received a lot of warm response from the Los Angeles feminist community at large (in sharp contrast to the suspicion and disinterest with which artists were previously greeted.) It's fair to suggest that this performance, its coverage, and the word of mouth report of it considerably enhanced future interaction between artists and feminist activists in the city.

Although the empowerment we felt by successfully realizing our intentions is not to be underrated, it is important not to count heavily on a single three to four minute interruption to change a steady flow of counter information. The victory may ultimately be most important in demonstrating one strategy for people to air opposition attitudes—one way artists can contribute valuable skills to social change. And perhaps the latter is most important of all: for the past three decades the path of visual art in this country has diverged from that of social reform and political protest. A generation of feminists and leftists have grown up distrusting the elitism and esotericism of visual art. Although throughout these years a few

committed leftist artists in this country continued with political critique in their art, the rise of feminism during the seventies gave a significant boost to the visibility and potential in activist political art. As we enter the eighties and increasing repression demonstrates the necessity of coalition building, it is imperative that activists embrace the models developed by artists over the past ten years, exploring as they do so how artists can play an active role in the politics of social change.

Photo: SUSAN MOGUL

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1. *The Hillside Strangler*, Ted Schwartz, Doubleday, 1981, pg. 83
2. *The Hillside Strangler*, Ted Schwartz, Doubleday, 1981, pg. 61
3. *Los Angeles Times*, Sunday, December 18, 1977, pg. 30, pt. I
4. *The Hillside Strangler*, Ted Schwartz, Doubleday, 1981, pg. 147

POEMS

RACHEL DEVRIES

An Impulse to Dawn

1. MOTION

Hard, this fine edge.
Hard and pure. Clean.
A dream before awareness alters its shape.
A tremor, slight as the hand's
aging: always the sense of beginning.
Something unfurls, purples the air.
Violets like to be root bound; still
the flowers press the window. I
smell distress, the urge to feel
the sun, pure clean the hard
edge of moving Morning, the dawn
marbles home.

2. TAKING COVER

This day my
pine room brown and orange,and soft.
The colors here, inside, alone. I
lean into the window feel the winter
the slate sky the snow white or
gray and falling again. The lawn
chairs stay the winter They
recline in the yard, visible from
this window: two mounds in the shape
of bodies in the place where we
once They take cover in snow
this hard winter.

3. WAKING/BLUR/MOTION

Colors blur, motion
blends: purple
gray A haze I can
see through I turn slowly,
catch the green rising
at the window; the violet
blooms, I turn like a parasol
twirling some lost spring.
In this dream. Where
the room is orange safe
predictable. But I am
here, urging the edge: I
strop it in the moon's
light. When dawn begins
its arc up the sky some-
thing makes me wonder
and I rise to catch it.
Not quite the *dawn;* its
motion, how it marbles
the sky's surface

In Us This River is Moving

I
The smallest light seeps
through in places the
rock is damp with it This
brings hope rumbling like
many small drums comes
from underneath a sound
of vision

II
For many days we waited,
clusters of mushrooms
in a forest. The fading
green was not yet obvious. The heart's
ache so familiar we relied
on it for memory straining
Blood moved under it around
it only a little filtered
through a throb or
a pang of light

III
Something is wider than
even the ocean And it is fluid,
fluent sometimes an eddy, roiling,
or a country pond a waterfall the
creek out back moving swelling now
rushing rushing

IV (How I See)
In mid-flight legs flexed
the deer swooped to my
windshield I heard
a shatter though no glass
changed the deer's eyes
fixed in the night
it floated toward
the stars, it moved
that way and I
intact still driving
The moon's oblique light
a slant of vision

V
light, a core of gold
vision it moves

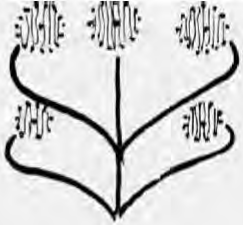
VI
In this cave the drawings
of latticework Patterns of
speech not yet spoken and
the river rushing now its language
unlearned and only the familiar
speak it a language
urgent with light

VII
In us this river is moving
toward something we have only
named ocean it is moving
all at once each river
moving toward the source
remembering in a fury of light

Houseworks

It rumbles up from the basement
long after my bath has
drained. A memory, its
well plumbed, finds a path
amid those depths. Grooved,
the cement or the brick wall,
grooved like the brain's
surface. A trickle, small
laughter, a rune traced
in sand. Tremors are
memories. Or itches.
Stroke a memory. Like
yesterday. The houseworks
rumble. I want to say
displeasure but I mean
something else: thunder
rumbles. Stomachs when
hungry. The house has
a mind. Its own works. The
key is a slant of sun, or
perfect thunder. Water
in the well. Memory.

Jewelle Gomez
MARIGOLDS



Theresa hung on to the receiver for a minute after slipping it back into its cradle, unmindful of the timid stranger waiting behind her to use the phone booth. As she'd spoken into the answering machine she knew that Letty was listening at the other end while she set up her paints and rearranged the room she used as her studio. Theresa's anger at being late for the sitting left a terrible taste in her mouth. She was never late to the studio for a recording session, or even to a movie. Her obsession with promptness came from the hours she'd waited for her mother. Holidays had often found Theresa sitting by the window in her foster mother's small Roxbury apartment, waiting for a visit from her mother. She'd usually show up from three hours to three days late, so that the arrival itself became anti-climactic. By the time Theresa was fifteen her mother's drug addiction had progressed so far she was barely able to participate in the visits at all. Sometimes she stayed for hours talking incessantly while Theresa and her foster mother pretended there was nothing wrong. Other times she fell into a nod on the couch, and Theresa talked. After her mother finally left, Theresa's foster mother always had a little treat to give her, a new book or some of her old jewelry, but nothing dispelled the disappointment of waiting all of that time for nothing at all.

Theresa's mother had died on her eighteenth birthday, and her foster mother two years later. Theresa buried both of her mothers and moved to New York City. She made the rounds as an actress, taking classes and scuffling for money until one day, while standing eating a hot dog on the corner of 49th street and Third Avenue trying to read *Back Stage*, she realized she did not have whatever it was to make it as an actress in The City. She didn't have the teeth or the fight or the style. She was serviceable but that was not enough. There were too many Black actresses for too few roles in New York. They weren't even writing in maids these days, so when a friend suggested doing voice-over announcing for commercials, Theresa found a new career.

Her first day out she'd gotten a job and an agent who'd said nothing mattered as long as she showed up on time and did the job. After five years of talking about processed chicken, fake fruit drinks and household cleaners the residual check still looked good; but none of it meant as much to her as modelling for Letty.

As she settled into the big rattling taxi she tried to shed the tension of working with hyperactive advertising executives. Her taping session had run overtime because one of the copy writers kept changing the lines. After fifteen minutes of takes and re-takes their thank you to her had been a comment on how natural she sounded. The words were a slap in her face. "What the fuck did he mean, 'natural!'" She knew what he'd meant. "White." "What the fuck is natural about sounding white!" Theresa thought about the extra cash the overtime would mean, then pushed the session out of her head.

Letty might finish the picture today. Theresa tried to calm the rush of excitement she felt as the cab turned on West 23rd street.

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Letty had paused to listen to Theresa's voice on her machine while she finished washing her hands, the ritual that marked putting away one segment of her life and starting the most important part fresh. She felt a flash of anger that the girl would be late. Everything was ready now. The few pieces of furniture, a couch and dining table had been pushed back out of the way. The table was in its place just under the skylight and the antique dress that Theresa would wear was hanging in the bathroom almost as anxious to begin as Letty.

The time didn't really matter. There was plenty of light, and she didn't think she would do that much more. She could even have done it without Theresa there, but she didn't want to.

Letty arranged the marigolds in the crystal vase and set them on the mahogany table. She didn't really need them either, but they looked so lovely next to Theresa's brownness. She'd gotten used to the enjoyment of seeing them there.

She massaged her own hand, which was a shade or two darker than Theresa's and slightly swollen with arthritis. She wondered how many years she had left before she'd have to hold her brushes with her teeth! She laughed out loud. That thought always made her laugh. Not because it was impossible, but just because she knew she would always paint, no matter what happened. It was a comfort to know that.

As a girl, growing up in Brooklyn with her stolid Dominican mother and volatile Jamaican father, it had never occurred to her she would be a painter. But the Saturday afternoons she'd spent in the Brooklyn Museum twenty years ago had a stronger pull on her than any of the practical lessons of life her mother, a cook, and her father, a tailor, had taught her. Even the reality of teaching art in the public school system had not dissuaded her. She'd taken all she could from all of the lessons and continued to paint anyway.

She'd had several major exhibits over the last ten years and occasionally did lectures. The exhibit she was preparing for now was the one that would do it for her, she was sure. Her vision of the past, present and future combined in the Black experience was being talked about in the art world already and the show wasn't due to open for two months.

"Damn that girl!" she thought and smiled, showing just a glint from a gold capped tooth. Theresa had sounded agitated on the telephone, and Letty wondered why. She'd know soon enough. Although she rarely spoke, Letty could tell when something was bothering Theresa. She never asked any questions, but sometimes Theresa had trouble finding her pose. The little niche she'd fallen into easily the day before would elude her and Letty would work around it on details of the background or on the beadwork of the dress. She was creating the picture of a Black woman at the turn of the century and had almost done it. All except to finish the features. She wanted the face to be that of her mother. She still saw those eyes that stared back unblinking from under her sweating forehead. But she wanted to see a look in Theresa's eyes that she could use. A look that would make it a picture of the past and the present at the same time.

It had been a long time since she'd seen her mother's face, yet she had no trouble remembering that stern and placid look her mother would give her when she'd done something wrong as a child. "God I'm old," Letty thought. Still the look came to her mind's eye easily.

The doorbell startled Letty. She looked around the room quickly then rang the buzzer. As Theresa started up the last of the four flights of stairs, Letty lit a cigarette. It would be the last one for four hours. She poured a glass of wine then looked at the clock. It was twelve twenty-five. She poured one for Theresa.

Letty was surprised to see the warm smile on Theresa's face. She accepted the wine glass gratefully. She no longer needed to scream.

Theresa changed quickly in the bathroom as Letty chattered outside the door about some show she'd seen and a play she'd attended. She was always wound up when she was about to finish a piece. Theresa glanced at herself in the mirror and knew she felt sad that this might be the last sitting for a while.

Often Theresa had wanted to just talk while she was posing. She knew that Letty would not answer questions while she worked, but Theresa wanted to tell her about her life. Her two mothers and living in New York alone and jerk-off producers and funny stories from productions she'd been in. But she'd kept it all inside in order not to intrude. Standing for hours in the stiff Victorian dress with her hand poised softly beside the golden flowers, she thought only how good if felt to be standing in front of this powerful, warm woman.

She stood now listening to the quieting sound of the brush making short strokes first on the palette then on the canvas. She looked down for a moment and saw the soft, golden light of the marigolds reflecting on her skin. She regained her pose but felt her heart beating under the stiff bodice of the dress. The beauty of her hand and the gold light washed over her and she blinked to hold the tears she felt. She did not want to distract Letty now, she could feel her working quickly.

The last time Letty had finished a painting with Theresa she'd opened a bottle of champagne and they'd sipped slowly while Theresa looked at the still glistening paint in amazement. Letty had not looked for awhile. She'd walked away and around the painting watching Theresa's reaction then said she liked it too. Then she'd walked over and wiped at something then backed away again. Letty had looked so vulnerable as she looked at Theresa and the painting trying to hide her own excitement, Theresa had suppressed the desire to throw her arms around her neck and hold her close.

Now Theresa stood still at the table and let her eyes wander again, this time around the room. Letty had thrown down her brush but had not given her the signal that she could move. She disappeared into the back room. Theresa assumed that was the bedroom, but she'd never been behind the sliding doors. She looked at the large spare room, painted white from floor to ceiling. The ancient skylight, perilously old and battered, let in a glorious amount of light. The kitchen area was just behind Letty's easel. It was neat and stocked full with spices and mysterious jars. Theresa could not be sure if they had to do with cooking or painting. On the right wall, opposite the kitchen, was a tall bookcase that held more jars and brushes and rags and a few books. Behind all of this was the sliding louvered door and Letty, who stood in the bedroom massaging her pained fingers, happy that she'd been able to finish this one.

She came out and went to the small refrigerator announcing, "Now it is time for champagne, I think. You tell me."

That was the signal. Theresa looked down at the flowers that glowed in the failing light. The last burst of gold was brilliant and Theresa thought as long as she could have this moment here, none of the others mattered.

Letty carefully did not look at the easel. The canvas was large, at one point today Letty had stood on a small kitchen step stool to work. She replaced the stool now carefully and fiddled with the assortment of jars on the kitchen counter as Theresa walked toward her to finally see what the painting had become.

Theresa stood before the image that was and was not her, while Letty stood off to the side. Theresa stared, unable to speak. It was her mother, somehow! If she could have remembered her mother in another time, this would be her, without the swollen, junkie hands, the dimmed eyes, the mottled skin. It was her mother standing tall and imperious with just a hint of tiredness in her eyes. It was as she'd wished her mother had been. Theresa looked more closely, the look was not tiredness really. She stood with just a shadow of concern in her eye for whatever cares a Black woman always carries, but her primary concern was for the sensuous feel of the marigold petals on her hand. The gold light from the flowers illuminated the room and the image bespoke a casual richness that was both material and spiritual.

Letty was shocked to see the tears as they flowed down Theresa's cheeks. She'd not expected such a reaction, but was pleased too. She came to Theresa's side and put her arm around the girl and looked at the canvas. She saw exactly the sensual glow she'd hoped for. The face was perfect.

"What is it, girl?" Letty's voice was slightly accented and soft.

Theresa looked only at the painting, unable to speak.

"What's the matter, please tell me." Letty was surprised at the urgency in her own voice. She wanted to help, but was afraid. Still she said again, "Please tell me?"

She tightened her arm around Theresa, who clung to her, still unwilling to open up with her sorrow.

Finally she said, "It's my mother."

Letty held her in her arms. She looked at the painting and listened to Theresa sobbing and felt the heaving of her shoulders against her own breasts.

She murmured softly, her mouth against Theresa's soft hair, which was pulled back and tied in a scarf at her neck. "It's alright baby," she said over and over again. The feel of her there in her arms was like the completion of the painting. It was done and it was right.

She held her for a moment. The shadow of the afternoon slipped past the skylight as the sun moved toward the west. The white room fell under the soft focus of late afternoon. The marigolds still glistened in their short vase.

"I'm sorry," Theresa said and pulled away. She backed into the small bathroom. She hung the dress carefully on the back of the door and slipped into her slacks and sweater. She re-did her make up and looked at her date book automatically to see where her next appointment was. These things she did by rote to put her back on the track and push away thoughts of the picture. She took several deep breaths before she opened the bathroom door. When she came out Letty had moved the easel back toward the windows and turned it toward the wall.

"Here, have another sip of wine before you run away. We've done good today.

Maybe later you'll feel the same way."

"I'm happy you're pleased. It really is lovely." But she could say no more. She looked at Letty quizzically, wondering how she'd seen inside of her so easily.

"I couldn't have done it without you," Letty said.

Theresa took the last sip from her glass and looked down at her watch.

"I mustn't keep you," Letty said as she opened the door. "Thank you again."

Theresa slipped the check Letty had given her into her shoulder bag between the pages of her date book and wondered why she couldn't think of anything to say. She stepped out into the hall then turned back. "Please let me know about the opening."

"Theresa," Letty said tentatively.

"Yes." Theresa stopped on the first step.

"Theresa, I was thinking, do you have time to pose for one more?"

"Another painting, before the opening?" Theresa was surprised. Letty rarely worked this close to the time. She tried to finish the work early so she could attend to the details. She liked to hover over the shoulders of the gallery people as they decided what to hang and how to hang and where to hang. She loved that part of it almost as much as the painting itself. She'd said once that her work became something else, fresh and new, once she saw it outside of her studio.

"Yes, I'd like to see something else. I mean, I see another piece, not so big, something intimate, a nude maybe." There the words stood, in the air, before Letty could draw them back. Letty had a quick vision of her mother's face, that stolid disapproving look.

"If you're sure you have time," Theresa said.

"Who can be sure of what?" Letty said, using the phrase her father had used whenever a customer tried to make him pledge to have a pair of pants back by Saturday night.

"I can come back this week, Thursday or Friday."

"Thursday and Friday, then," Letty said. "You'd better get going or you'll be late and some hamburger empire will crumble and then what'll happen to the economy!"

They both laughed, the first real laughter between them since Letty had started this last painting. Theresa ran lightly down the stairs and found a taxi easily.The next studio was another one but just the same. She stood with the headset on, listening to a song that would be forgotten before the cereal it advertised was digested. With her eyes closed she could still see the marigolds.

***

On Thursday, Theresa finished at the studio early. The session had gone well and her five lines were recorded so easily she was worried that things were going too well. She'd have plenty of time to get downtown to Letty's. The producer came out of the control booth and said, "Thanks, Theresa, great job, as usual," and gave her a peck on the cheek. "How about some lunch? I'm interested in feeding a starving artist!" he said with a wink.

"Sorry, not this time. I've got a job downtown and I hate getting there late."

"That's why we love you!" He pinched her cheek as if she were his adolescent niece. Theresa was not sure why she'd lied. She just wanted to get to Letty's and she needed to relax.

She walked out of the studio and crosstown on 43rd street to Fifth Avenue. She took the downtown bus. As the streets flashed past her, she thought about crying in Letty's arms and the comfort she'd felt.

She walked across 23rd street to Sixth Avenue and rang Letty's doorbell. Two short, one long. It was the same way she'd rung every doorbell since she was a child. Letty buzzed her in.

Letty was excited as she always was before starting a new work. She'd been sketching all morning. As she heard Theresa on the stairs, she went back to the refrigerator and took out a bottle of white wine and took down two glasses. This time she thought they'd toast to the beginning of the work.

When she came in Theresa took the glass that was offered and sipped the cool light wine. She looked around the room. The sofa was sitting under the skylight, this time with a white cloth draped over it. The antique table was gone.

"Is the portrait here?"

"No, I've sent it to be framed."

"I'd been looking forward to seeing it today," Theresa said.

Letty was a little surprised. She'd sent it out deliberately so that Theresa would not be upset by it again.

The starkness of the white room did not look so barren today. The light was rich and the emptiness was promising.

"I'll change," Theresa said and they both laughed.

While Theresa was in the bathroom, Letty set down her glass and adjusted the easel a bit. She stood looking at the couch where Theresa would sit.

Theresa came out of the bathroom feeling slightly chilled. Letty looked at her body, not thin, not tall but full, richly brown. The warmth she felt was as bright as the sunrays that fell through the skylight.

Theresa took a sip from her glass of wine then walked toward the couch. As she passed the kitchen counter, she saw the vase with fresh marigolds sitting among the spices.

"How about this?" She said and picked it up. She set the flowers on the floor beside the couch and lay on her stomach looking down at the familiar glowing colors. The flowers belonged there with her. She heard Letty's brush dabbing on her palette and then on the canvas, long strokes that signaled her beginning.

She belonged here too with the flowers. She touched the soft gold petals watching the light play off their light and the darkness of her hand against the painted white floor. And with Letty.

She looked up at her. She already had a smudge of brown on her cheek and gold on her thumb.

"This is right, isn't it?" Theresa asked.

"Yes, keep looking at me," Letty said softly. She could say no more. She was immersed in the image before her. It was right and as she'd always wanted it to be. Theresa here with her; her body luminous in the light of the flowers.

Valentina

There is a crystal window somewhere inside her head. She can see things clearly through this opening. She cannot describe in words what she sees. Does the spirit have a look apart from the body. There are no words for it. She thinks that prayer is something that rises like smoke. It has light weight. She knows she was not made to be so lovely a thing and take to the air. She prays in feeling. There is a language of desire about which the tongue cannot speak. There is smoke escaping from the crystal window somewhere inside her head.

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"Dominicana. La puta oscura es grande." The old man turns his hands palms up and spreads his fingers.

"Viejo, I used to know a Dulce," says the young one. "But I think this Valentina is Haitian." This young trigueño is seriously beige on beige, three piece suited up and wanting to get on in the world. He understands he has to speak the language of the help and talk of whores with old men.

"Oscura misma. Toda morena." El Viejo wants to make a point. "La boca oscura es grande." He laughs without front teeth.

She cleans spilled coffee off the counter and listens to this conversation she has heard in other languages, read off other lips.

The old man who takes the dirty dishes away to be washed tells the young manager about this new one. This new peasant who has not spoken to him, has not begged him for the keys to the fresh meat refrigerator. Who is she? Who does she think she is, not speaking to him with her big black ass all stuck up, moving back and forth behind the counter?

She must be polite and sweet to customers. She ignores this old Puerto Rican whose major duty in life is to bring the clean dishes and glasses from the kitchen to the dining area, and take away the dirty ones. She knows she is a morena with no style, but America is difficult and expensive.

This is a morena of the country streets. Worse than a hick. Worse than a jibara. Not even trigueña. Not at all what one would call a pretty negress. He cannot take his eyes off her big black ass as she walks back and forth behind the counter. El Viejo remembers 40 years ago his uncle in Mayagüez had a flushing toilet. She probably didn't know what a bathroom was until she came to the States.

Lois Elaine Griffith

She does not speak to this old man who reaches around her knees for the tray of dirty dishes as she tries to take an order for the hamburger deluxe special.

"Medium, well-done, rare . . . . . baked, fried, mashed . . . . . gravy or butter . . . . . cola." She understands the looks he gives her. She cannot help her buttocks from rolling the way they do when she walks. She feels him watching her. She has heard the young manager speak to the cashier about him, laughing because the only thing he can read in the newspaper are the numbers on the racing page in the back.

His skin is the creamy white of inbred mulattos. "Mi abuelo era de España. Yes, yes castellano puro. Toda mi familia. No bastards among us. Ojos azules, mi hija tiene ojos azules y pelo rubio." Many times he has shown the young manager a picture of a girl with a crooked smile, blue eyes and blondish hair.

"She lives with her mother. She's a good girl. I don't see her much. She's at school in New Jersey . . . I don't see her much. Yes, a very good school."

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Her name is Valentina, born on Valentine's Day, a day of love. Her mother told her she was a love child, begat out of passion not sin. She never knew her father, or maybe she did. Her mother never gave him a name, only referring to him as one who was noble but misunderstood by his wife and relations.

"He's a delicate, sensitive being. He sold his soul to the goddess of the moon and forever must complete her desires, be victim of her moods."

Like Psyche in the night, the mother had been claimed by this lover, this prince of passion, never knowing him well enough to walk hand in hand through the sunlit streets—Toujour Rêvant. That life remains in the dream time. She passed it on to her daughter, keeping it in the prism glass time creates for memories too precious to be exposed to air.

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Valentina has a talent for dreaming on her feet. Ring the bell and she moves quickly to the signal that her order is ready. El Viejo would disturb her looking through the crystal in her mind just to watch her walking away from him. He has rung the bell but the order is not ready. He peeks through the shelf of meringue topped desserts that no one ever orders. Dust settles there. As the dust has settled on the heart of El Viejo. This is the dust, the fallout that comes on things for lack of motion.

He has no vocabulary in Spanish or English to describe this ennui of carrying dirty glasses to be washed. He sells time to buy cerveza and talk shit with whoever will listen in the neighborhood bar. It used to be strictly Borinqueños till so many Dominicanos moved in. Sometimes he just sits alone with the beer and the T.V. in this ground floor railroad flat. He doesn't know Brooklyn anymore. All the Jews have moved away and sold their houses to foreigners. He could speak to Jews about Argentina. He had been there once as a young man. "Money changes hands quickly in Buenos Aires," was an insight he'd offered many times. Dust has settled on his apartment. When he is alone there is no crystal in his head through which he can look and see time accomplish change through him—except for La Rubia. The picture he keeps in his wallet is cracked and fading, but there is an even better one

he has in a gold and mirrored shadow-boxed frame. This daughter would not know him if she saw him on the street. The mother of La Rubia never permits her to talk with strangers, but she is safe. Her father has her surrounded with the Blessed Virgin and the Sacred Heart, aglow in the light of the three tall white candles he keeps constantly burning in the corner table close to the bed. He never speaks of this altar that he tends. Otherwise the power would be lost.

"Un sentimiento de soledad camina en la sombra conmigo," was as close as he could come to giving reason for nights soaked in beer.

At the restaurant he gazes longingly at the ponderous ass of Valentina, La Negrita, who bears no resemblance to any image of beauty he had formed in his youth. Such images too were now covered over with dust; the dust of a history that taught him love was a thing immaculately conceived in the flesh of a white virgin. But the scent of this flesh was musky and dark, being newly pulled up from the earth and transplanted here amidst the grease of fried potatoes and old meat to reek havoc on an aspect of his manhood he now only shares with whores. The scent of her flesh stirs the memory of his youth in tropic hills.

***

She has had experience with these old ones, this Valentina with the crystal in her head. Outside the village where she grew up, always dreaming, the old men would accost her at dusk.She knew there would be no issue of love with these sun wasted ones. She had seen their faces in the market place and through the beaded curtains of the rum shops. She knew that somewhere in the world there was an unknown lover, a prince of passion to claim her listless nights and create with her a love seed that would be a gift to the dawn.

Yes she knew this one, this Viejo, who peered at her over the dusty meringues. In a strange way he made her homesick for the dreams of her childhood left outside of Port-of-Prince. And since coming to this island New York, she had learned the meaning of forgotten dreams.

After work there is the room where she goes. She rents it from her aunt and shares it with the fabric remnants Auntie brings home from the factory that turns out sportswear. Valentina likes to bathe at night when she comes home to the room where she lives.

Before saying her prayers she watches T.V. The White Rock soda commercials pledge their purity, connecting their product with the goddess Psyche, dancing in gossamer silk through the sparkling waterfalls. Valentina mambos to the urban cowgirl jingle, advertising straight legged jeans and how they should fit.

"You come here, you learn new ways. That's progress. You got to let go all that backwardness." Auntie is a modern woman, having been in the new place going on 30 years now. Her children speak the new language well. Her husband is a New Orleans man, still enchanted by how fast his wife in anger can put together all the swear words in the 4 languages she speaks. Auntie has great understanding of life in the new place. She has become a woman of property. Keeping the house on Union Street near Brooklyn's Eastern Parkway is the focus of her survival. Hers was the first Black family to move on the block. She knew how to take things and hold on to them.

Auntie is the oldest sister of Valentina's mother. It was she who suggested the girl buy her own television for the room to help improve her English and acquaint her with the ways of the new world. Since she works the 5 to midnight shift in the restaurant, she's free in the afternoons to observe first hand the complexities of inter-relationships on All My Children. Valentina does not see herself in the image on the screen. She wonders if progress means exchanging herself for a dream that would connect her with the freedom to be dancing in gossamer silks through sparkling waterfalls.

Valentina prays:

There is a picture of clear water that turns blue as it moves to touch the horizon. There is no hurry to meet the jump off point. I understand time as a free flowing agent added to life and coconuts talk only when they fall from the tree . . . . . Amen.

***

The Wednesday special is meatloaf, mashed potatoes, peas and carrots. Valentina gets a dinner break around 9 after the rush. She counts her tips, only $9.75. It's been a slow night. She doesn't recognize herself in the employees' bathroom mirror. The face is dark and shiny. It shows how bloated and swollen the legs are around the ankles. There is a heaviness under the eyes. They are dull with the regularity of the pace, day in, day out. Standing behind the counter, she looks blankly through the dessert shelves at the old man who smiles at her body.

"What do you want," she says.

El Viejo smiles through gums where there are just a few back teeth left. There is a fire kindling in his body that's not strong enough to reach up into the eyes.

"Vente, vente." He motions with his head to that area beyond the kitchen, the closet office where cleaning stuffs and soiled uniforms are kept.

She understands what he means. This old white one who wants to touch her, touch the promise of her youth, devour her psyche, spend her daydreaming that he connects with her ass. He wants to taste the living memory of the dark earth from which she has newly come. He desires to release himself in her without tenderness or promise of exchange. There will be no recriminations. He has made sure of his daughter's safety.

"I have work now," she says wearily.

Midnight finds her undressing in the back room. She puts the soiled uniform of the day in the hamper and makes no resistance to the wrinkled white hands that seek to make love to her dark flesh. She is thinking of Auntie's admonitions, that there is benefit in acquisition and that progress is made by leaving the backward ways behind.

There is no mystery about where she finds herself. She does not protest. She is not coy. The old man puts his hands where his eyes have lusted. He wants her ass. He wants to use it and feel it all up in the using. He grabs it and roughly starts to make it walk in his hands. This is not enough. He wants her breasts. His wrinkled hands reach into her bra and give his mouth this pleasure. There is fire slowly coming up between his legs now. Sensation comes to her without emotion. She has space to move inside her dreams, outside the reality of the withered white hands on her black flesh. Who if not Psyche understands the reason for the colors of the earth? Valentina knows the dark earth is part of what makes up her soul.

"Quieres mi alma?" She could give it up and there would be something left over. Dreams, after all, are possibilities existing without our consent.

Sensation overcomes her. It is the rhythm of the moment, not like an orgasm all at once intense, but a slow beat, a regular grinding that gives her more space inside. She is an object of desire. He clutches the excess of his imagination in his arms. He holds the flesh of all his time fixed on her ass, moving back and forth in front of the dusty shelf of meringue topped desserts. Having no words to describe touching base with the elements, he signals satisfaction by sending spit gurgling through the space in his mouth where there are no teeth.

Valentina prays:

Tell me how to make my bed, neatly so the sheets are a net over the pit my body has hollowed out. A hunter's net. The beasts are dreams that walk underground. Teach me how to tame these beasts so there is no danger of their biting the hand that feeds them. Freedom is the four cornered course I mark for them to run— across the pit my body hollowed out. Small wonders are the lessons we learn in spite of ourselves. After years of nights and days dreaming in watercolored shadows, dawn is a necessary experience. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost . . . . . Amen.

Cherríe Moraga

THE VOICES OF THE FALLERS

for M.

You were born queer with the dream
of flying
from an attic with a trap
door opening
to a girl who could
handle a white horse
with wings riding her
away opening
to a girl who could
save a woman
on a white horse
riding her
away.

I was born queer with the dream
of falling
the small sack of my body
dropping
off a ledge
suddenly.

Listen.
Can you hear my mouth crack
open the sound
of my lips bending
back against the force
of the fall?

Listen.
Put your ear deep
down
through the opening
of my throat and
listen.

The nun said
"Young lady
you have a chip
on your shoulder
that's going to get you
in plenty of trouble
some day."

The queer
flicks off
the chip
with the nonchalance
with the grace
with the cool
brush of lint
from a 200-dollar
three-piece

the chip tumbling
off
her shoulder

her shoulder first
tumbling
off
the cliff the legs

following
over
her head the chip

spinning onto the classroom
floor (silently imagined)

her body's

dead

silent

collision
with the sand.

I'm falling
can't you see
I'm
falling

DARE ME
DARE ME
DARE ME
to push this kid off
the cliff DARE
ME
Some queer
mother I am
who would kill her kid
to save her own neck
from cracking
on the way down

You bet your ass
I am
if push comes to shove
the kid goes

queer.

I'm falling
can't you see
I'm
falling

It was not an accident

I knew then sitting in the row next to her she would not survive
she could not survive this way this unprotected defiance
her shoulders pushing up against me grabbing me by the collar
up against the locker "motherfucker you mess with my girl?"

her pale face twitching
cover it up
cover it up
I wished she would
cover it up
for both our sakes
she would not
survive this way
pushing
people
around.

When I fell
from the cliff she tells me
it was the purest move
I ever made she tells me
she thought of me
as a kind of consolation
surviving
just as she made
the move
to fall
just as her shoulders split
the air.

Do you know what it feels like finally
to be up
against nothing?
Oh it's like flying Cherrie
I'm flying

I'm falling
can't you see
I'm
falling

She confesses to me—

I held the boy's body between my hands
for a moment it was like
making love
the bones of my fingers resting
between the bones of his ribcage
I held him there
I guess we both felt safe
for a split second
but then he grew
stiff and then he resisted
so I pushed
up against him
I pushed until the wall
of his body vanished
into an air so thick
it was due to eat both of us up
sooner or later.

I'm falling
can't you see
I'm
falling
momma I tell you
I'm falling
right
now

In this child
killer
I could have
buried the dead
memory of Charlotte
falling once
and for all
I could have
ended there holding
the silence

but it is
this end
I fear.

Waking
to the danger
of falling
again falling

in love the dream.

This poem was written

Because Jay Freeman was imprisoned at the age of nineteen for murdering the son of her Lesbian lover by throwing him off a cliff. Over twenty years later, she is still in prison.

Because Charlotte, a high school friend and Lesbian fell from a cliff and died at the age of nineteen.

And, because I want all political people to consider the physical and psychological survival issues that daily confront the Lesbian without means—the Lesbian life that feminism and socialism doesn't seem to want to touch.

MINOR SURGERY

HETTIE JONES

Mrs. Thompson had hold of her middle daughter's feet, which were cold. She moved closer, hugging them to her side, and managed to tuck one under her left arm. But when she put her two warm hands around the other it felt so familiar she was momentarily surprised, as though having unexpectedly come upon another, naked limb of her own. Even the texture of the skin was so like. She turned and stared as if to corroborate what touch had told her, but looking at it then, encountered his foot, saw once more the shape and arch of the father of the child.

Briefly but as always she gave in to memory, and her mind leapt with images that would put him at this event. Mrs. Thompson saw them all in an instant and made them fade just as fast. She went back to rubbing the feet she loved—which became once again themselves, as the child was inevitably not either parent but her own self—and turned her attention once more to Mrs. Weinberg, the pleasant-faced, fiftyish nurse at the front of the room.

"Look, we're all human," Mrs. Weinberg was saying matter-of-factly, in the middle of her lecture on birth control. "But we're also all different, and it's up to you to find the method you can live with, and stick to that."

The girl in the next bed was staring in a bored way at the ceiling. Her boyfriend reclined beside her, caressing her thigh. She raised a hand.

"Yes?" said Mrs. Weinberg.

"How long before I can get another IUD?"

Mrs. Thompson resisted the sympathetic, bitter laugh that rose in her throat. If the one the girl already had hadn't prevented her pregnancy, perhaps a different one might. It had happened before. But clearly she was sticking to the one method she could live with, even if it hadn't worked.

"How many other people here got pregnant through birth control?" Mrs. Weinberg asked without preamble.

Mrs. Thompson's daughter raised her hand. "Diaphragm," she said with a rueful little smile, then lay back, looking tired and only half avoiding her mother's worried frown. Several weeks before, when they had first discussed the problem, and Mrs. Thompson's company had been requested for this trip, she had said, offhandedly, "When people get pregnant with a diaphragm it's usually from not using it." But her middle daughter's eyes had turned angry and she had scoffed, "Are you kidding? I'm not *like* that." And Mrs. Thompson had dropped the subject with another offhand response, a shrug, because she knew that she herself had been, at one time, like that, incautious, hating it so.

Another of her daughters had admitted to it. Said, self-deprecating and disgusted, "But I only fucked up *once*."

"Once is all it takes." But she had been reminded not accused, and thinking of it Mrs. Thompson bit her lip in rage and sorrow now, recalling that one collapsed asleep in a public park, waiting, waiting for it to be over and done with.

But this one was to be fast. Except the doctor—who else?—was late. Mrs. Weinberg was using the time to run a group, Mrs. Thompson could see, and she was good at it. Exuding good humor and reassurance, she had produced a cup of coffee for Mrs. Thompson, and had her patients undressed and in bed in a matter of minutes. They were all now drinking orange juice, and on a first-name basis.

"Yuriko, were you using any birth control when you got pregnant?" Mrs. Weinberg asked, speaking slowly and raising her voice a bit in the hope of making herself understood. The Japanese woman to whom the question had been addressed sat up in bed saying "Pardon? Pardon? I don't understand," but smiling pleasantly. A mother of two, in her thirties, she was apparently unworried. After a few more tries Mrs. Weinberg gave up the question, as she had several others, and made a note to ask this also of Yuriko's husband, who spoke English but had declined to sit in the hospital room where now four patients lay, in a row in their snap-at-the-back gowns, awaiting, on this bright May Thursday, that which was called, in what Mrs. Thompson saw as a typically ironic euphemism, "Minor Surgery."

Mrs. Thompson's middle daughter's feet were, she knew, too cold for comfort. At last it occurred to her that she could remove her own socks and place them on the feet of her daughter. She bent to untie her sneaker, disgusted with herself for not having thought of this sooner, and thinking again, "Minor Surgery."

Her daughter had used the term earlier when Mrs. Weinberg approached them in the waiting room, where they sat huddled together sleepily, the first arrivals. The patient was supposed to have a light breakfast, so after rising at dawn and driving to the hospital they had gone to a local store and then eaten in the car, and then, not quite sure of where they were supposed to be, had come up ahead of time. Mrs. Weinberg had looked from one to the other and Mrs. Thompson's daughter had spoken first. "Thompson, for minor surgery," she had said.

But the authority in the young woman's tone (which was all Mrs. Thompson really heard as it gave her such pleasure), did not take away the remaining question from Mrs. Weinberg's gaze, which returned to Mrs. Thompson and rested there. "And this is my mother," her daughter said, seeing, and on top of, the problem.

Mrs. Weinberg's welcoming smile broadened. "Oh I was wondering, I didn't—"

Mrs. Thompson interrupted her with a patient cold smile that she had learned how to use to deal with other people's confusion when confronted with herself plus child or children, who were all different shades.

But Mrs. Weinberg, to Mrs. Thompson's interest and relief, didn't, like some, succumb to embarrassment and fumble around to cover it up. "I can't tell you how much it means to me to see a mother here with her daughter," she said, showing them into the then empty room.

Now her words, as she repeated this sentiment, caught Mrs. Thompson with a sock in her hand. "It's still uncommon, even though everything's legal, to see a mother with her child. Here anyway," Mrs. Weinberg said, this time for the benefit

of the other three patients and to extend the range of the discussion, which was floundering.

Mrs. Thompson looked up to find all eyes on her, expectantly. But she thought seeming unusual or heroic might divert too much attention to herself, and she suspected this might embarrass her middle daughter, of whom she was exceedingly fond. So she said, with a smile, "Well, thank goodness things are different than they used to be, we're at least *here*," and turned to her daughter's bare foot.

There was then a sudden and prolonged rapping at the door and Mrs. Thompson watched the patients all relax into their pillows, relieved to be resting silently and ignored for a moment, as plump and efficient Mrs. Weinberg bustled to deal with the interruption. Which proved to be a young couple for whom there was no bed. But again Mrs. Thompson had a chance to admire not only Mrs. Weinberg's intelligent and calm cheerfulness, but her resourcefulness as well, for she soon had the new arrival gowned and ensconced in a large overstuffed chair. Crowded in with this girl was her lover. They snuggled down, making an easy adjustment, wriggling and giggling until they had it all right, whence they appeared, to Mrs. Thompson's concern, like a pair of pretty doll babies put out for display. "I know that girl," her daughter said sotto voce, and as she raised her other foot to be clad she wiggled her toes at her mother. Well misery loves company, Mrs. Thompson thought, and then chastised herself mentally for the sarcasm when after all that was nothing but true. And in this instance particularly, the usual words of comfort consisted in naming who else it had happened to. True confession time for real.

Mrs. Weinberg obviously had similar thoughts and still intended to discourse on them after the arrival of the new couple, whom she was now introducing. "And this is Mrs. Thompson," she said beaming, and then not quite repeating herself, said: "It's a wonderful thing to see a mother here with her daughter. That's hardly ever so, and I hope it's a trend."

Mrs. Thompson looked up. "I like seeing the men," she said, and then half regretted the remark because she wasn't sure she actually did. This hadn't anything to do with her daughter's friend, who though not with them was aware and concerned. But she had wanted in some way to include the two present, who seemed at once loving and attentive as well as embarrassed and uncomfortable and guilty and still vaguely extraneous despite everything, which of course made each one defensively sexy. She felt unexpected pity for them, and generosity, and pleasure when both smiled at her remark.

Still the presence or absence of a man among all those here increased some ambivalence Mrs. Thompson could not help feeling. She looked at the lone young woman in the bed near the window, who had a book she read in from time to time. At the foot of her bed was the chair with the beautiful children entwined in it. Mrs. Thompson saw the set of the lone girl's face, and thought of herself. Had she too appeared that way once, that first time, so quietly unwavering, so outwardly unaffected and calm. But no, that couldn't have been, for though it was only the sight of his face she could remember, the pull and taste of tears came back to her, as still in her mind he sat, young, thin and forlorn, his familiar cropped head bent, in the bus terminal, occasionally lifting his eyes to the window, as if hoping that at the last minute she'd get off.

Mrs. Thompson rested her cheek against her daughter's feet, dispelling the image. Mrs. Weinberg was looking at her. "It's a question of choice and timing," the nurse said, and by thus hovering on the edge of rhetoric brought Mrs. Thompson squarely to the present. "Too often we don't see the long run," she said. "The decision to *have* a baby will also probably come up." She nodded toward Yuriko, to Mrs. Thompson, and then informed them in a satisfied—though not smug—way, that although she firmly believed in abortion she'd had four children herself. One was a nurse at this very hospital, she revealed, adding happily. "And I expect my ninth grandchild next week."

There was a murmur of appreciation round the room—nine!—as if this albeit casual association with such fecundity alleviated the negativism in the air. Mrs. Thompson, who was not thinking of grandchildren, grinned.

"This is not to say you're not making an important decision," Mrs. Weinberg cautioned. "Or that you may not experience certain feelings of loss. But of course part of that is physical. . . ." She went on, explaining.

Mrs. Thompson stared at the floor between her now bare ankles and tried to focus on a square of linoleum tile. But only he was there again, outside the dirty bus, and they were twenty-two years old. And then with great tenderness, as though touching the petal of a rose long pressed, she remembered how he had taken her home, to his family doctor, for the swollen, leaking breasts, the bloated belly had taken her by surprise.

And then she had gone to Pennsylvania, because the freedom so recently gained she could not relinquish, though he thought only that she would not have his child. She glanced across at the lone girl, who lay reserved and patient, her fingers holding her place in the book. In Pennsylvania, Mrs. Thompson remembered, there had been shock and concern on the part of whoever had asked the questions. "No one with you? You've come alone?" Some part of the willfulness that others took for courage now rose up in her and flew across the room. She wanted to seize the lone girl by the sholders, hold her in her arms. But others have done that, Mrs. Thompson thought, lapsing into her own rhetoric, think of all the women who marched, and testified, and died. The Pennsylvania doctor's daughter had died, she remembered. Or so the story went. Suddenly every event of that time came flooding like a river from her memory: the night-before pills, the hotel with its Gideon Bible, a phone call—what had they said?—panic before the needle, gutfire, drugged sleep, grief.

"Marmie!" Mrs. Thompson's middle daughter suddenly whispered. "Mami! Dame jugo! Ah mant chuice!" It was a joke between them.

Mrs. Thompson patted her daughter's leg and reached for the container on the formica bed table. Mrs. Weinberg had gone to the doorway and was conferring there with someone unseen in the corridor.

"Did you ever have an abortion?" the girl in the next bed demanded suddenly, addressing Mrs. Thompson in an accusing petulant way. Her boyfriend stared interested and hostile. Demanding acknowledgement of the sins of the fathers, Mrs. Thompson thought briefly and inaccurately, with a quick, hesitant glance at her middle daughter, as if for permission to speak. But that one's eyes were also amused and waiting. I *know* you didn't abort *me*, she seemed to be saying.

"Well yes," said Mrs. Thompson, and then searched her mind for some story they could appreciate. "I went once to this famous doctor," she said. "He was kind and charged very little, $25 I think, but he had to practice way out in rural Pennsylvania where the authorities wouldn't find him. Or maybe that was the only place where he could afford to pay them off sometimes," she added, speculating, "because he spent a lot of time in jail."

"But anyway, it was a small town, with only one main street, and right behind that the mountains, sharp and sudden and dark." Mrs. Thompson, gesturing, drew the mountains in the air. A lonely forbidding place, she thought. Why was I not frightened? "But as I was waiting for the bus to go home," she continued the story, "a car drove toward me, and slowed down, and it was full of guys—" Mrs. Thompson flashed an amused glance at the young man. "—and one of them leaned out the window and yelled at me, he yelled, "Oh you must have been a BAAAADDDDDDD GIRL!"

So when Mrs. Weinberg rejoined them they were all laughing. As though she had told them a tale of the Gold Rush, Mrs. Thompson thought. As though it had been that long ago. And why should they not think those times distant, she reflected, as Mrs. Weinberg repeated a few points about the "procedure" they would soon undergo. Why should they not think barbaric and untenable such moral hypocrisy and the danger in it. To say nothing of the pain, of course, she reminded herself, that void surrounded by circumstance. The core of it somehow, yet also, and mercifully, unrecollectible.

She was still thinking of this when a few moments later Mrs. Weinberg's daughter poked her head in the door, and after graciously acknowledging her mother's introductions, informed them that the doctor had at last arrived. He would be with them shortly, she said, so the first patient could now come in and get ready.

"Your companion may come with you, if you wish," Mrs. Weinberg announced to the room, while looking straight at the Thompsons.

Mrs. Thompson, unprepared, turned to her middle daughter with the question. For answer she got a wrinkled nose and an almost apologetic, negative shake of the head. And so it was settled. Mrs. Thompson preferred to let children lead their lives. She would go down to check the car, she told her daughter, since the meter where they'd parked was broken, and get the rest of the breakfast they had left. So she watched as Mrs. Weinberg and Mrs. Weinberg's daughter led away her daughter, the red and green striped socks jaunty and incongruous below the hospital gown. And then after some difficulty finding the elevator, she got to the street.

The sun had warmed the car and the food in its paper bag looked soggy, but Mrs. Thompson took it anyway and was about to go back inside when she noticed a traffic cop and went to explain about the meter. They had a friendly conversation, though not a long one, and so she was taken aback when she reached the hospital room and found her daughter already returned to bed. Mrs. Thompson threw down the paper bag and bent to embrace her, and only then, stepping back, saw the pain.

"Oh it wasn't bad," her daughter said mildly from the middle of a bloodless, disillusioned face. "It was over quicker than I expected and I thought it would hurt much worse." Then she closed her eyes.

Mrs. Thompson's heart contracted and she tried to put what she felt into the squeeze she gave her middle daughter's hand. But though the pressure was returned she knew her sympathy wouldn't lessen anything.

Meanwhile the next girl had had her turn and was carefully helped back to bed. Her boyfriend had been with her, but now he too went to see about his car. "You said it didn't hurt you?" the girl asked of Mrs. Thompson's daughter. "It hurt me a lot."

Her voice was small, as though all the arrogance had been sucked out of her. Along with her uterine lining, Mrs. Thompson thought, and her IUD. Sitting amid all this pain she tried not to move much, and spoke quietly to the girl of home remedies, herbal teas and the like, that might relax her when she got home.

"It was worse than I expected," the girl said reproachfully, with some of the tense anger that seemed to be part of her nature. "It really hurt," she said, and turned away.

"Well yes," said Mrs. Thompson, who heard the hollow sound of her own voice accepting another generation's blame. She too looked away, but only to see Yuriko being brought in, accompanied by her cheerful, apple-cheeked husband, who stayed to see her in bed and then left again. Yuriko's arms lay like long pale columns outside the covering sheet, and she was staring at the wall.

The lone girl was out in surgery, the couple in their chair were silently and fearfully embraced. Mrs. Thompson couldn't bear to look at any of them, and not knowing where to put her eyes, could not prevent their turning inward to the comparisons. How much better that they are lying here, even if they have to be in pain, she thought, and then could not keep from thinking of the subway platform.

Her friend had taken her to Brooklyn, to the nurse. They had with them one of the children, perhaps the middle daughter now lying here. In the dark, low-ceilinged apartment the procedure was done on a large double bed, its dust ruffle and satin coverlet not quite hidden underneath the rubber sheet. There was no anesthetic, just true grit, a metal probe, and a rubber tube. But there was also the warm, silent room and a sympathetic woman, risking her freedom and her future for $50. Pain was beside the point, yet to be expected. They did not speak of it, or the trembling of her elevated legs. But on the subway platform, when the cramping began in earnest, as the still-inserted tube leaked air to bring about miscarriage, Mrs. Thompson had leaned against her friend. "You okay?" her friend said in a low, worried voice, with an answering pressure of her arm. "I'll be okay," said Mrs. Thompson, who was not thinking, amid the dirt and noise of the old elevated station, under the pale spring sun, that this time she might be one of the ones to die.

Because she had had her children and there was no choice. Yet she could not die either, could only do what she had done. Mrs. Thompson looked once more at Yuriko and imagined the children for whom she was lying there. Yuriko still had not moved.

By now the girl in the next bed had directed her hurt and angry gaze out the window. Her own daughter lay silent and limp. Overriding the sunny room, images of pain crowded Mrs. Thompson's mind. Images of fear. Of hemorrhaging on street corners, of the time the nurse's tube had taken two weeks to do its job.

And before the Supreme Court decision, the doctor's mill in the suburbs of the legal state, where the waiting and recovery room had only a few beds, so most of those recovering had to lie on the floor, while those waiting who could not find space to sit, stood. Their clothing had been taken except for dresses or blouses, and so those who had worn pants were naked below the waist. There must have been twenty-five of them at least, but the one Mrs. Thompson remembered was a southern girl, a young belle as hairless as a ten-year-old, and exhibitionistic about it. She had stood naked but for a skimpy sweater, displaying her shockingly virginal pubes, to everyone's astonishment and no doubt for the benefit of some. But she had been far along, too far for this procedure perhaps, though not too far for the doctor's money, at $100 a pull. Mrs. Thompson, after the familiar unbearable pain complicated by the new, terrifying noise and vibration of the machine, had recovered quickly. But on her way out had encountered la belle, on a toilet. A nurse stood nearby but still the child seemed alone, mascara streaking her cheeks and a pool of terrible memory in her eyes. Mrs. Thompson had stopped to stroke the pretty blond head. "You'll be all right soon," she had murmured, but as the girl nodded, and two large tears welled out of her eyes, Mrs. Thompson could see that the source remained, that memory would hold it, dark and unfathomed amid circumstance, like her own. And she had left the place angry and bitter that even legality could assume the price was pain.

And who is responsible, she thought now, angry again and tired of being always indignant about foams that didn't work and were despicable (like diving into a bowl of whipped cream he had said) and the tasty jelly and rubber baby buggy bumpers that for some women spoiled all pleasure, every ability to work that thing. She went on, raving in her mind, at the pill with its fake pregnancy followed hard by embolism, the IUD of babies and untreatable infection. And still—*still*—two of the five in this room, she thought furiously, and no one even knew about Yuriko.

But Yuriko was married, maybe she made three. Or maybe she and her handsome husband had seized each other one morning between the kitchen and the bathroom, after the children had left for school. And of the others—the remaining two—it had been known, even back then, that there were some who could not deal. "You'll be back," the Pennsylvania doctor's nurse had said to a friend of Mrs. Thompson's some twenty years before. "You'll come back, because there are some who do, and I know them, I know who."

But of what use is sagacity if only to condemn and condemn? Mrs. Thompson remembered the Fox woman, who had told her story to the anthropologists around 1910. She was married young to an older man. We didn't want children, so a woman gave me something to drink, she had said. Some years later, after this husband's death, she married another, drank a different potion, and bore five children before she drank something else. It was all written in plain Indian, opposite the English translation, and it had seemed to Mrs. Thompson that there could have been no reason on earth for her to lie.

But now the arrival of the lone girl interrupted her thoughts again and she watched the nurses put the girl in bed. A ruddy, freckled brunette, her face now was drawn; she seemed older, and dazed. In shock of course, Mrs. Thompson thought, they're all in shock. The girl sat unmoving at first on the edge of the bed, until Mrs. Weinberg's daughter helped her to lie down.

And here came Mrs. Weinberg herself, puffing a little and with her curly gray hair frizzed some, to check whether Mrs. Thompson's daughter felt well enough to get up, since in the large, world renowned medical center they had given over only this small room and this one good woman, and this busy morning were even minus a bed that the doll children would soon need.

"I'm okay really," said Mrs. Thompson's daughter, and disappeared swiftly into the bathroom with her clothes. After one worried glance at the closed door, Mrs. Thompson began getting herself together. Until suddenly Mrs. Weinberg was there, leaning close across the bed table.

"I wanted to ask you—" and she leaned even closer—"your daughter's—isn't she—black?"

Mrs. Thompson reared back, jolted from the broader direction of her thoughts. "Why yes," she said, with her customary vague hostility, for liking Mrs. Weinberg's work didn't mean she had to accept all her opinions.

But Mrs. Weinberg seemed relieved. "Well, I thought maybe—" She hesitated, then stammered, "I—I just wanted to say"—and then it came out: "My ninth grandchild will be black," she said.

The first thing that came to Mrs. Thompson's mind was "Well I expect all of mine will be honey." And in most instances would have been followed by "Well what of that you wanna fight?" But right in front of her was Mrs. Weinberg's round, kindly face, and there was her good work, and at least she had not said "half-black."

"My son has married a Haitian girl," Mrs. Weinberg explained, before Mrs. Thompson had quite come up with an answer.

"Well then, give them all your love," Mrs. Thompson replied.

"Oh well *that* goes without saying!" Mrs. Weinberg said a little louder, as if tired at last of Mrs. Thompson's suspicions.

So that Mrs. Thompson herself felt, finally, ashamed, having again underestimated this woman, all the while entrusting her middle daughter to her anyway. "Look, the world—" she said by way of apology, with a dismissive gesture, and then laying her hand on Mrs. Weinberg's warm, competent arm, "Let's hope the world will catch up, somehow, eventually . . . ." Yet she wanted to add, harshly, would you have aborted this one, for that reason, would you? She saw once more his face at the bus station, thought of him thinking that. And then, a vision she had long forgotten, the contorted face of her father, weeping, begging her to abort, not what as a woman she had not been ready to have, which was long gone, but the first real baby, the child made, carried, birthed, loved. "Just love them," she said again to Mrs. Weinberg, "there is nothing else you need do."

Unconvinced, with a half-smile, Mrs. Weinberg shook her head, but Mrs. Thompson knew that she would learn the lesson easily and soon. And at that moment the bathroom door opened, and out marched her middle daughter, sophisticated, bemused, and still quite gray beneath her brown. She held the brightly striped socks on high.

"Don't forget to call me if you need me," Mrs. Weinberg said, giving her a hug. "Don't forget your instructions, don't forget your pills."

Then smiling they said their goodbyes, and Mrs. Thompson and her middle daughter spied another elevator down the hall. There they stood, waiting, as the pretty children came from surgery to claim the bed.

Outside, in the brilliant nearly summer morning, someone down the block was cutting grass. They didn't speak but walked slowly, arms around each other's waists. Just that way Mrs. Thompson had also walked with another daughter: silent, supportive, and relieved. But now she was wearier than ever of the problem, warier of failed preventives, and angrily, endlessly aware that their lives, like the lives of all women, still depended on a house of cards that could any day come tumbling, tumbling down.

How long must we wait for what must be done for us! Mrs. Thompson cried in her mind, and though unspoken the words seemed broadcast into the pleasant, warming air.

And whatever her middle daughter picked up of them, her reply, the statement she made, was in any case a testament for those with the only right to life, those already born. She said, in a language they had now perfected, "Thank you for being my mom."

MARGARET RANDALL
NICARAGUAN PORTFOLIO

letter from managua

Managua, September 28th, 1981

Dearest Susan:

I send this prose piece, " Rubble" one of the very few pieces of any kind of writing I've managed aside from my search for and offering of people's testimony—oral history— since being here. It was a couple of months after Anna and I came to Managua . . . From my work place, and others, streams of men and women marched on the small Revolutionary Square in the middle of the battered city, in the area known as the ruins—what's left of the 1972 earthquake destruction. Daisy Zamora, our Vice Minister, marched at the head of our column. I often caught myself looking towards her apparently delicate figure, and thinking of her history as a combatant during the war. Suddenly she motioned me close to her, and—as we walked—told me about the old graveyard we were passing. Shared with me her having played among its tombstones as a child. And the poem was born/reborn . . .

And I send photos: the media in which—more and more— I find myself working, speaking . . . How I wish I had discovered the camera's eye earlier, when I was 10 . . . or 20 . . . and not in my mid forties! So much to learn . . . so much lost time to make up for!

When, shortly after the Nicaraguan people's victory I was invited to come and research the book on women here, the idea was born to come and live. It wasn't a "leaving Cuba" (as not a few have suggested) for I carry Cuba and its Revolution deep within me . . . and the three oldest kids remain there, living and studying. It was like "coming home," in a sense. So many years of closeness to the vanguard FSLN forces on and off in Havana. The experience of having written *Inside the Nicaraguan Revolution* with Doris Tijerino. Watching a movement grow and triumph faced with the obstacles of increased U.S. aggression and not a few setbacks among the revolutionary movements in Latin America.

I have become something of a hybrid, I guess, given having left the States more than 20 years ago now . . . inside I feel deeply my North American roots, but they have been changed, enriched, by the Mexican years, the Cuban years . . . What I have felt could be my tiny offering in recent years didn't *need* Cuba any longer as a base from which to grow. I felt strongly that this new revolutionary process, so scant on cadre (so many died!) needed whatever I could give. And so I "left home" once more . . . leaving the three older kids (they're now 17, 18, 20) at a time when they, in any case, would be thinking of leaving the family circle in its concrete, physical sense . . . Anna, being 12, was the only one to whom I didn't feel I could give the option . . . of accompanying me, or staying.

Work here is intense. I usually arrive at my office around 6:30 or 7 a.m. After "working hours" I work with my sisters at the Women's Association. And a new book is being born: on the struggle within the Catholic Church here (thousands, in the Christian base communities, were part and parcel of the political and

military struggle for people's power here, and continue to see their "option for the poor" as deeply rooted in the task of consolidating and defending this process; while the Church's hierarchy, agonizing in its lack of control, nurtures anti-communist campaigns and attempts to systematically remove every revolutionary priest or nun from service).

I am learning. We are learning. Against incredible odds (economic destabilization, military aggression, the most amazing and anti-human propaganda campaigns) the Revolution is moving ahead. A country of little more than 2 million gave 50,000 lives to defeat one of the sickest—as well as most criminal—dictatorships on this continent. A new educational system, health care which for the first time takes the human being into consideration, a new and vital situation for women . . . it's all an uphill struggle, but there's no going back. That's clear!

And Cuba continues to nurture me . . . as in Fidel's recent and extraordinary speech before the world parliamentarians, a reiteration of his United Nations plea that we save humanity from obliteration . . .

Thank you, Susan, for the connections . . . for creating this new space . . . for loving . . . for speaking . . . and for allowing me to be a part of this energy that flows . . .

rubble

for daisy zamora

Escombros means rubble. What was once the center of a busy city, known—simply—as rubble since that precise minute, midnight forever of December 23rd, 1972. A city gone to pieces on its men and women, on its children, on its buildings and houses. A city collapsed upon itself burying, defying,bursting, aching into its future, an image never to be removed.

As our groups of marching, singing, chanting workers wind through the narrow broken asphalt overgrown by long weeds and grasses, you motion me closer and tell me the wistful cemetery to our right was called *San Pedro's,* that you played among its tombstones as a child. I strain to look over its broken walls as our group merges with other groups and our shouts join other shouts and hundreds and then thousands reach the space claimed by Revolution, between the gutted shell of a cathedral and a National Palace entered forever one August 22nd. And banners and flavored ice vendors, people's uniforms and declarations of the refusal to be chained carry us on to the Square.

Other days the emptiness is overwhelming. A cat whines beside a broken water main. A womanchild of ten scrubs ragged wash on a flat slab by a tilted fire hydrant. The putrid shell of an old third rate hotel screams larger than life-size lewd chalk scrawlings on its pale green inner walls and child news hawkers jump and shout in the stagnant waters of its sad pool.

Families subsist in half a house rising grotesque from this scarred ground. Families cook and wash and live in what was once a gas station, what was once a movie theatre, what was once the coming together of two brick walls. COCA COLA huge on a lonely structure, standing somehow, somehow still claiming its right to sun and air.

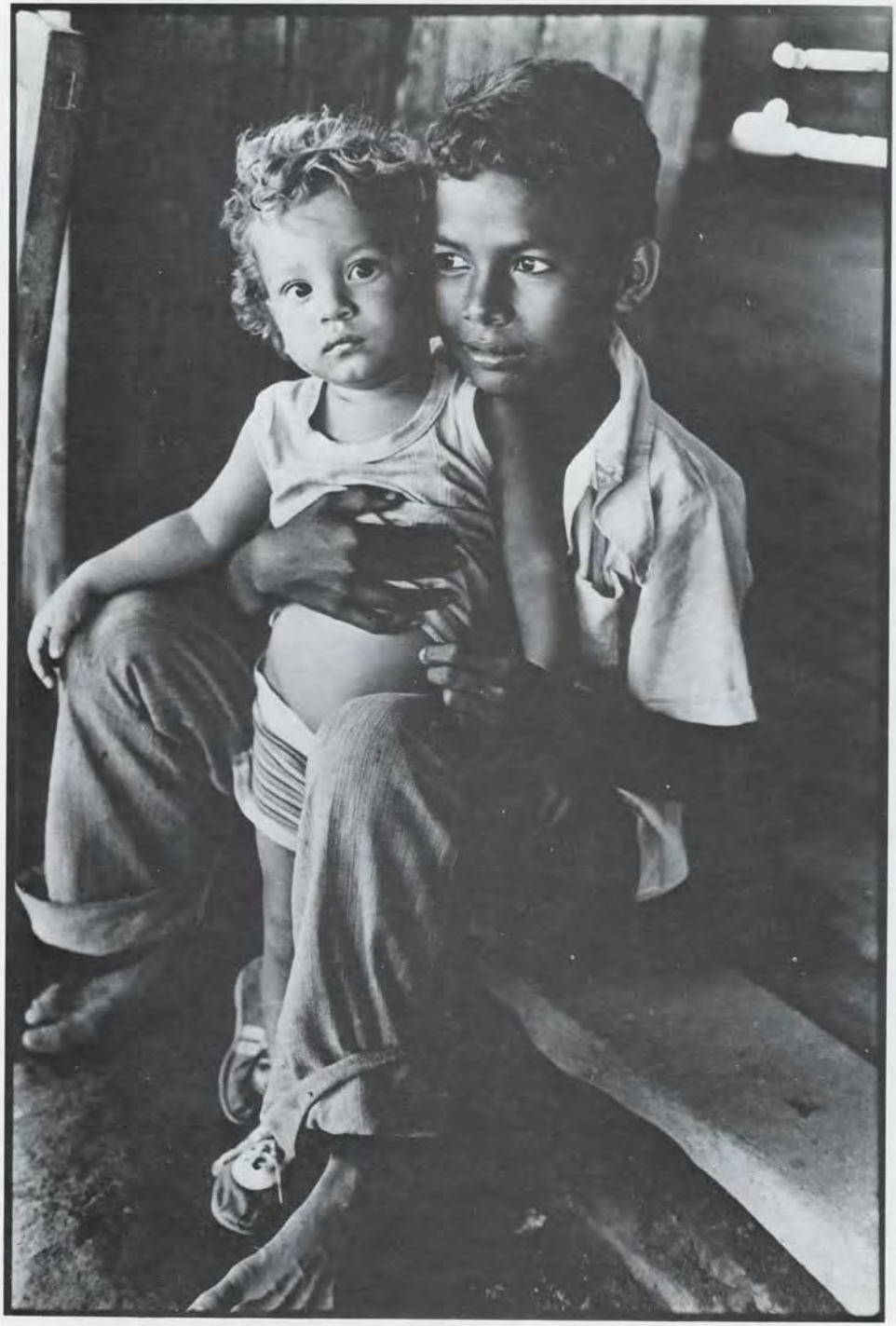
This is where the world fell apart December 23rd, 1972.

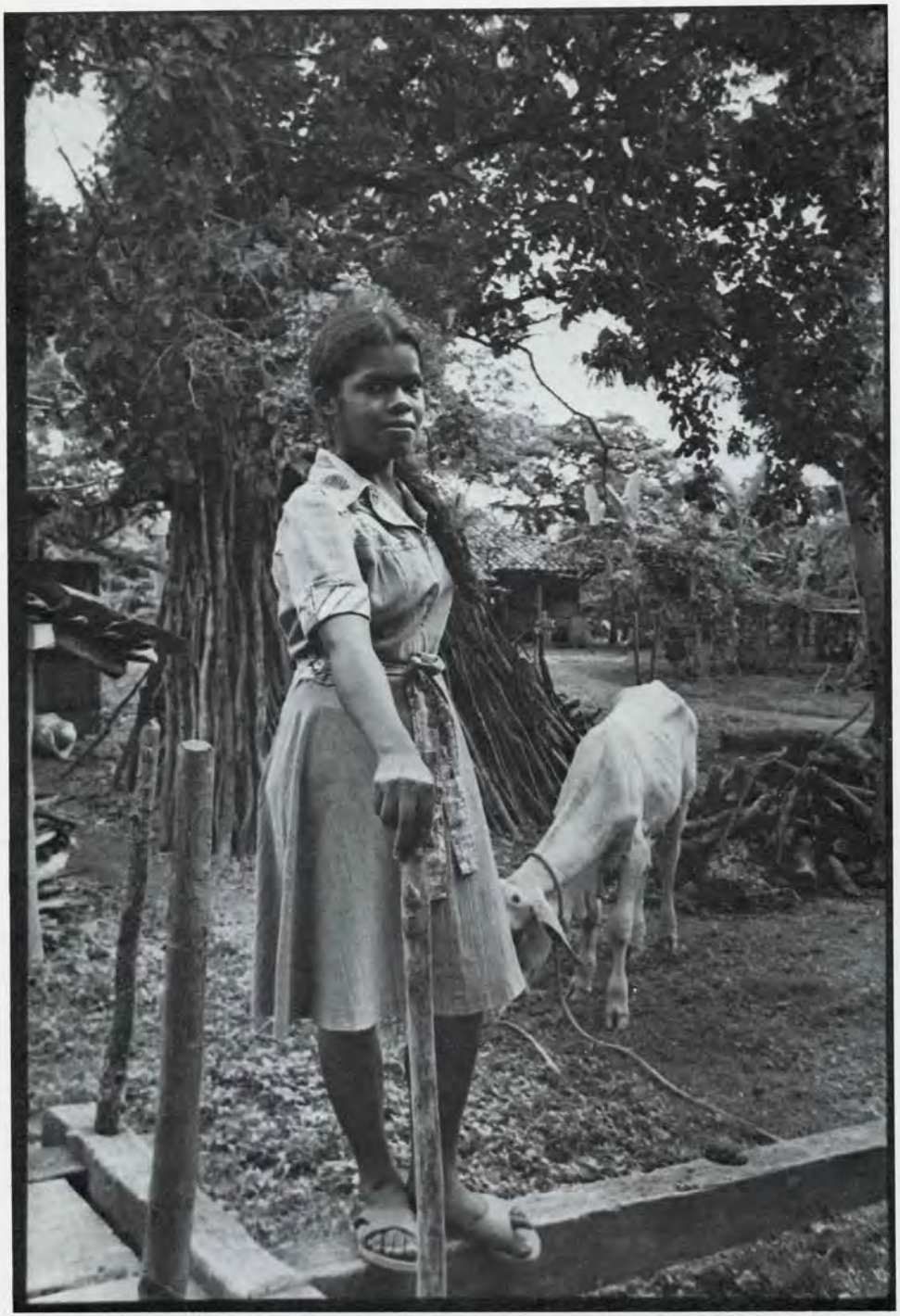
This is where lives and hopes and dreams burst and settled into their own dust, crawled on hands and knees, knew total nothing and total everything. This is where Somoza sealed his pact with future defeat, gluttonously lining his wretched pockets with the world's offerings for reconstruction. This is where bodies disappeared beneath the tonnage of geology's blueprint, extremities protruding, challenging, hunting.

This is where memory swelled, deformed. Where Somoza said: "No more city: no urban guerrilla." And the people answered: "No city: an invisible guerrilla." Hurry up, it's late, there's so much to be done!

This is where Carlos Fonseca's great visionary body has come to rest, from the mountains of Waslala where peasant hands kept and cared for his bones. This is where a torch flames alive and red-hot, where thousands and hundreds of thousands come, winding their way from new schools—and new factories, new people's structures and need become promise. This is where a hundred thousand throats open and a single voice proclaims: PATRIA LIBRE . . . O MORIR!

In July 1981, 800 women, mothers of martyrs, marched to Managua to demand a stronger hand with Somoza's ex-guards. She, like many others, has only this tiny picture of her son....






BLUE BIRD


LOS Her
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"Algún lugar de Nicaragua" 1981 Margaret Randall

Nazaya 1981 — Margaret Randall

Dora María Telléz, "Commander Two" of the attack on the National Palace (August, 1978) and "Commander Patricia" of the takeover and liberation of León, during the last few weeks of the war. She is now head of the FSLN in Managua and Vice President of the Council of State.


19-7-79
NICARAGUA
LIBRE

GUATEMALA

Guatemala is preparing to die.

We wait—sullen—as helicopters fly over our head, rattling the dishes and vibrating the floor. Do they make them in the capital? I would tear it apart with my hands and my teeth if they would give me a chance.

But I'm not worried—our leaders write and tell us that we are not giving military aid to Guatemala.

My friend Manuel doesn't want to be a martyr—he wants to be a living lover and a father.

Today I decided that when a death squad marched in to school to take someone away, that I would throw myself on them, shrieking and pulling their hair. Perhaps they would shoot me instead. You say that you can't bleed for the Third World, Lucy. Do you mind if I do? But don't worry, I probably won't get a chance, or if I do, I'll decide it's more important to go on living so that I can speak about what I've seen.

Last night a new death list was made. Mamie was on it—so now he'll leave for Mexico. His wife just had a baby last week.

We say we aren't involved—but why are they dropping napalm in the hills—do they manufacture that in the capital?

And my friend Anival—he doesn't want to be a martyr—he wants to study economics and read poetry on the radio and take care of his garden.

We've decided that on All Souls Day, we will take flowers to the graves of the unrecognizable corpses that have been found on the roads around Xela. We will mourn them, for their families won't know where they are.

There was a very young woman who visited our house. She had been travelling for a month, looking at corpses—trying to find her husband. They had been married a month when he disappeared. Maybe it will be his grave that we honor.

But we say we're not involved—then why do the tear gas canisters say "USA"? Is that a company in the capital?

And my friend Mario, he especially doesn't want to be a martyr – he wants to be a rock musician and learn English.

You know, there was this Christian family in Xela, and one night they were all sitting around eating pears when soldiers burst into their house and took the 3 sons away. (There was a fourth who had gone into the kitchen to get a knife.) They were all found the next morinig without eyes. The brother they were searching for wasn't there; he was already in Mexico, so they took the other 3 instead.

Federico Adolfo Matul García :PRESENTE
Carlos Abel Matul García :PRESENTE
Cornelio Enrique Matul García :PRESENTE

Guatemala is preparing to die and my thoughts are gray and I have rocks in my guts.

Who will answer my letters when I write to find out where everyone has gone?

The jets scream over our heads, but we ignore them. Muscles tighten and talking stops, but we refuse to acknowledge that they exist. Where do they find people to fly those planes? What do you pay someone to murder people he doesn't know by opening those doors and dropping death on our heads?

But we say we're not involved – then why are the instructions for all the military equipment on parade written in English?

Last week an old lady was assassinated here in Xela. She was the principal of a girl's school, and she definitely had a sharp tongue on her. She was an old liberal and a supporter of Arbenz in the 40's. They bungled the first attack and only wounded her and killed her chauffeur. They had to finish her off in her hospital bed at dawn the next day. They only filled her with bullets and didn't torture her – which was probably out of respect for her old ladyness.

LUCILA RODAS VIUDA DE VILLAGRAN :PRESENTE!!!

And my friend María Julia, she doesn't want to be a martyr. She wants to read history and psychology and make her mother proud.

María Julia is preparing to die too. She looks at me and past me and says, "Soon we will have to fight." When will you fight, María Julia? Will I have to watch? Or will I have to listen from my other home, wondering who is alive and who is now a name, a memory to which I have to answer, "PRESENTE!"

THE RADICALISM OF UNBELIEF Henry Flynt

If we are going to talk about enlightenment and deliverance, I do not see that enlightenment and deliverance can come from anything as straightforward as an individualistic search for happiness, or a mental hygiene of happiness. To me, the life I have now, which unfolds through ongoing interaction with other people—and within this definite culture—is the arena that matters. In other words, I am located in a *shared* basis of life. To me this circumstance is of outstanding importance. While the medium of thought, the capabilities, the skills which are possible for me are interior to me, at the same time they engage me with other people in consciousness—and I must regard other people as their source in most cases. (In other words, I do not invent the English language, etc.) My consciousness and my capabilities are, by and large, a fragment of a culture. The most worthy capabilities in the culture become possible capabilities of mine. The most profound dilemmas or failures in the culture, in the interpersonal arena, become my personal dilemmas.

What I have just said is not the same as the idolatry of "society." I do not accept the sociologists' notion of reality, or conformism as a goal, or the obligation to pay homage to societal abstractions like The Nation. Indeed, one of our culture's extreme dilemmas and failures is its idolatry of society, an idolatry which aggressively underestimates and devalues both the scope of the self and also the interpersonal arena. One of the most far-reaching questions posed by our contemporary era is whether inter-subjectivity (community) will evolve beyond "society" as it is defined by sociology (a sort of statistical mechanics applied to bodies). Here is an outstanding reason why I do not see how enlightenment and deliverance can come from an individualistic hygiene of happiness. The modalities necessary for enlightenment are novel and uncommon; and they are outside the scope of the ordinary person's struggle for happiness in everyday existence. The necessary modalities have to be achieved by dealing with dilemmas which arise from the culture as a totality: enlightenment requires a "rotation" (transformation) of the entire culture. Life is worthless unless I can inject whatever personal vision I have into the ostensible, interpersonal arena, and seek to influence that arena so that it becomes conducive to my sincerity and concern.

In order to express whatever sincerity and concern I have in the ostensible, interpersonal arena, I must engage with the ostensible world; I must incur the risk of realized choices; and I must "grant other people's right to exist."

*****

What I seek is a transformation of the ostensible world and of the shared basis of life. This is to be accomplished on the basis of two enterprises which will eventually be fused: a theory of palpable interrelations of the entirety of immediate constituents of "my world" called "the personhood theory"; and a new instrumental modality called "meta-technology." In this introduction, I will focus on meta-technology without bringing in the dimensions added to it by the personhood theory – largely because the latter is as yet tentative. But I have another reason as well for underlining the contribution of meta-technology. *There can be no genuine transformation of the shared basis of life as long as the community's technological means is restricted to the material technology we know today. The instrumental modality must come to embody the takeover of technology by the psyche, by personhood. There is no genuine transformation of the shared basis of life unless instrumental efficacy is at stake in that transformation, unless the challenge to the prevailing basis of life is carried into the domain of material technology.*

As of now, I have assembled many meta-technological elements or procedures. These elements, however, are isolated and limited. What I have accomplished is analogous to Becquerel's discovery that uranium fogs photographic film. My procedures are effective as curiosities. But they will not be any more than curiosities until they are subjected to an entire phase of extension and interconnection – an undertaking which requires collaborative effort on a wide scale.

On the other hand, the analogy to Becquerel is misleading in that a meta-technological procedure is of an entirely different species from Becquerel's discovery. Radioactivity occurs in the exterior realm of things (objectivities): it is an effect of a thing on another thing. But generally speaking, a meta-technological procedure is based not on a relation between things, but on an interdependency between subjectivity and things.

Because I am located in a shared basis of life, a culture, that culture is of overwhelming importance both as a source of possible capabilities and as a source of dilemmas and limitations. To respond to this state of affairs, the meta-technology must accumulate information which is of more than personal significance. It must address dilemmas which are shared and which are culture-wide. That is why I investigate mathematics, "real-world" logic, etc. It is also why my interest in dreamed experience relates to a proposal to modify the shared basis of life – rather than to the familiar purposes of divination and psychiatry.

I disregard all claims of sorcery or miraculous feats which inherently come as reports by a second person about what a third person did (tall tales, fish stories, legends). I am not interested in miracles which are always performed by somebody else somewhere else. Indeed, my objections to occultism go much further than this. But the principle which I want to emphasize now is that every meta-technological procedure is required to be formulated as an instruction to be carried out first-hand.

Below I will explain that a starting-point of meta-technology is an adversary attitude towards credulity. One aspect of this phased unravelling of credulity is a critical examination of claims of meaningfulness for reportage which intrinsically precludes first-hand testing.

*****

What then is my attitude to the immediate, overt, ostensible world? I have little use for the doctrine that the ostensible world is a sham which conceals another, perfect world behind it—a perfect world which can only be known by hypothesis. In other words, I do not treat the ostensible world as a facade for something lying behind it, as a front for another world which is unperceivable. And I have little use for the notion of a perfect world which is hypothetical and imaginary. *This present life, which unfolds through ongoing interaction with other people, and within this definite culture, is my arena of concern. Imaginary lives and gratification in fantasy are unimportant to me. I accept the ostensible world as the arena of my concern, and as one of the raw materials of enlightenment and deliverance.*

The attitude I have just expressed does not imply that I admire whatever ostensible world we inherit. Quite the opposite. *Precisely because the ostensible world matters to me, the arrival of enlightenment or deliverance has to be demonstrated by a transformation of the ostensible world and by a transformation of the shared basis of life.* Further, while I do not view the ostensible world as an *illusion* standing between me and some perfect world which must be known by hypothesis, there is a sense in which I view the ostensible world as a *delusion*. It is a delusion in that the very perceptions which characterize it are palpably affected and sustained by emotions of anticipation, by emotional dependence on other people, by morale, by esteem, by knowing self-deception, etc. etc. *Everyday existence is the hallucination produced by the so-called socialization process. Morale, esteem, etc. are co-determinate with "perception."*

Thus, again,the arrival of enlightenment or deliverance has to be demonstrated by a transformation of the ostensible world and of the shared basis of life. But what I propose is not to strip off the ostensible world to reveal a unique perfect world behind it. Rather, I want the ability to consciously "mutate" or plasticize the ostensible world itself.

*****

Inasmuch as I demand that enlightenment and deliverance should be evinced by transformation of the ostensible world, I am a kind of secular revolutionary.

To me, the means of enlightenment and deliverance must begin with an adversary attitude toward credulity and toward phenomena whose existence is solely a product of credulity. In the Seventies, there was a rash of novels in the U.S. about demonic possession. The protagonists in these novels were always Catholics. The novelists knew that Catholics were protagonists who could plausibly be liable to visitations by demons. If you do not want to see demons in your living room, all you have to do to escape them is to stay outside the subculture that believes in them.

The lesson of this example, properly understood, is the starting point of enlightenment and deliverance for me. If it is obvious that a phenomenon can be abolished by unbelief, then the "reality" of that phenomenon is of a very low order. The phenomenon has only the reality of chimera or fantasy. (On the other hand, it is obvious that a lot of people enjoy their chimeras, and *do not want* to escape everything that can be abolished by unbelief.) I make it a principle to disregard phenomena whose existence depends so obviously on credulity. The attitude

which is encouraged by all kinds of superstition and propaganda is "How many lies can I (manage to) believe?" The question which I always ask is "How much of what I am expected to believe is a lie?"

On the other hand, the issue of whether the existence of a phenomenon is a product of credulity *is not necessarily straightforward.* In the first place, *we have to distinguish between getting rid of phenomena by unbelief and getting rid of them by suppression or censorship.* I often encounter situations in which scientists refuse the opportunity to experience an anomalous phenomenon. Nobody denies that the phenomenon is "real," that is, accessible at first hand. The phenomenon is disregarded or suppressed because it is a nuisance, because it conflicts with the scientist's ideology.

In the same vein, I am not asking anybody to deny his or her own experience just because it is abnormal, anomalous, or singular. But I am asking that such experiences not be misrepresented and inflated through knowing self-deception—especially in reporting them to others. I have long speculated that reports of so-called astral projection etc. might have an experiential basis in hypnagogic hallucinations etc. Unfortunately, the sort of person who relishes reporting such episodes is also prone to inflate them via culturally supplied hyperbole. Reports of abnormal experiences could have serious uses if the reportage did not surround the experiences with chimerical objectivities, and if it took a painstakingly critical attitude toward the "ontological" assumptions built into descriptive language.

Another consideration is that *a thorough and ruthless effort to repudiate all phenomena whose existence depends on credulity will begin to undermine phenomena which our culture defines as legitimate and plausible. Unbelief does not just dissolve superstitions and chimeras; it begins to affect phenomena which rational authority defines as valid.* At this point rational authority has to step in and disparage unbelief as a social blunder. Here the role of community intimidation in sustaining the ostensible world comes to the surface. But I do not shrink from this consequence of unbelief. *Indeed, the radicalism of unbelief is a basis of my ability to obtain results which are novel and astonishing relative to the established culture.*

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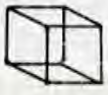
Let me give some examples of meta-technological investigations:

A *priori neurocybernetics*[1] deals most directly with interdependencies between awareness and objectivity. As one example, it uses perceptually multistable figures[2] as logical notations. The result is to establish awareness-objectivity interdependencies in language which are tangible and inescapable and can be analyzed and potentiated. The technique can be applied to break the framework of scientific objectivism in many ways. As another example, I note that our "perception of objects" is actually a mental collation of visual and tactile apparitions. There are many cases in which the normal intersensory correlations are disrupted (the per-

1. *Neurocybernetics* is an existing branch of neurophysiology which seeks to explain thought by investigating the brain as a "bionic computer."

2. e.g. the Necker Cube.



ceptual illusions).[3] If we take the illusions as a paradigm and reinterpret "normal" phenomena in accord with that paradigm we are in a different reality, disjoined along the sight-touch frontier. Bode's Law that two material bodies cannot occupy the same position in space at the same time ceases to be usable, because the determination of what is a material body is seen to involve a vicious circle.

The evaluational processing of experience studies, as one example, the circumstance that different levels of reality are attributed to waking experience and dreamed experience even though both are equally vivid, equally palpable. What is at issue here is the fabrication of an "impersonal order of nature"; the inter-subjective character of reality; and the choice of rules for testing the objectivity of phenomena. Again, once these elements are understood consciously, they can be consciously altered.

The *logic of contradictions* is a wide-ranging, umbrella discipline. The unifying theme of the discipline is the recognition that inconsistent conceptualizations, so far from being vacuous mistakes which can be eliminated from thought, are pervasive and inescapable in thought as we know it. Conscious control of this state of affairs is an extremely powerful achievement. The investigation begins with the interdependency between traditional logic and perceptual habits in the real-world logic of consistency. It then considers perceptions or events which are faithfully described by inconsistent descriptions, such as illusions and dreams. I characterize these apparitions as contradictory because that is the characterization given them by shared language and paradigmatic real-world logic—as all the perceptual psychology textbooks agree. Then, I study contradictions which are cognitively implicit in our most authoritative or obligatory propositional thought. (Paradoxes of common sense; the meta-theoretic inconsistency of arithmetic and set theory.) Finally, I study how the communal milieu and its influence on esteem enables people to assent to openly inconsistent doctrine. (Mathematics' co-optation of its own inconsistencies; etc.) This research yields a very wide-ranging capacity to produce anomalies or uncanny world-states.

My recent investigations into personhood have shown that meta-technology can be significantly widened and deepened by studying not only linkages of perception and descriptive language, but their co-determination by morale, esteem, etc. Studying the entire "vertical" organization of self or self-image could result in the realm of perception being transformed.

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Our civilization has long been characterized by the way it molds human faculties to produce a cleavage between scientific functioning, on the one hand, and poetic, emotional "human" functioning on the other. Meta-technology is beyond this cleavage of faculties. Also, it is worth repeating that meta-technology does not

3. An example of an intersensory discorrelation is Aristotle's tactile illusion: touch the tips of crossed forefinger and middle finger of the left hand to a projecting dowel while also looking at the dowel. You see one dowel and feel two. The perceptions of the two fingers are not only disjoined, they are inverted. The subject attributes to the index finger what is touched by the middle finger and *vice versa*, as can be shown by applying two distinct stimuli to the finger—a point and a ball, for example.

Even better: try the experiment first with eyes closed, and then open the eyes. Sight captures touch, and the fingers are switched without any motion taking place. (Adapted from Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, pg. 205.)

consist of the sort of magic tricks attributed to pre-scientific religious figures. What is a religious miracle like changing water into wine? It is – purportedly – an objectively consequential manipulation of the thing-world, a type of cause-and-effect technology. It takes place "out there," replacing a thing with another thing.

Meta-technology does not appear as hearsay; and it does not make any special appeal to credulity. Rather the contrary. Its primitive procedures are given as instructions to be carried out at first-hand. Presupposing a conventionally indoctrinated individual, it achieves anomalies by a decrease of the conventional level of credulity. It is not centered on thing-to-thing relationships or causation "out there." It is centered on the interdependencies between subjectivity (awareness, self-image) and things.

In addition, there is a third constituent important enough to be mentioned separately: *the communal milieu, and especially its influence on esteem* – as when intimidation by community authorities maintains the legitimacy of ridiculous beliefs. It is at the juncture I have just sketched that "the world" is synthesized, that the determination of reality occurs. *Meta-technology attacks the credulities which are elements of this juncture. It works with the linkages among "perception," descriptive language, and abstract cognition (logic, mathematics.)* Currently I am extending the research to include linkages to *personhood* – the high integrative level, the "vertical" organization of self or self-image.

There is a big gap between the primitive meta-technological procedures which I have already formulated, and the communally implemented, culturally implemented meta-technology which I envision. The primitive procedures can be carried out by an isolated individual (and yield a sort of insight of sensibility); but at that level they are, in a sense, only curiosities. *The whole point is that meta-technology acts on the cultural determination of reality as such. Unlike a miracle or magic trick, which wants to remain a one-shot event in an otherwise lawful everyday world, meta-technology must be extended through a community and a culture to realize its promise.* It is not a one-shot event but a "rotation" of an entire culture.

What is more, to reach its full potential, meta-technology will probably have to be tied into existing natural science. But meta-technology would give a shock to natural science which must not be underestimated. Natural science would be conceptually shattered, and reorganized so drastically as to become unrecognizable.

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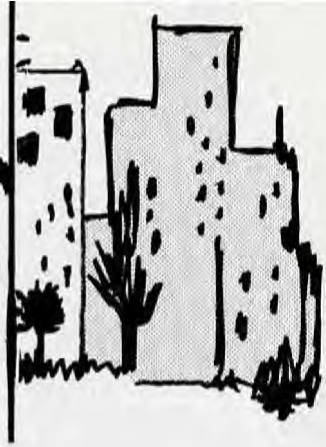
If meta-technology were implemented at the level of an entire community, that community would have the power to consciously modulate what is now thought of as the objective world. To speak of walking through walls would not be a mere joke. Both the physical universe and mental acts as its antithesis would disappear, in the sense of becoming inapplicable concepts. It would be possible to achieve sustained, composed uncanniness, to live in a state of consciously modulated enchantment. In this regard, the impulse underlying meta-technolgy is an impulse toward an ecstatic form of life. (It must be understood, however, that the rational mentality produced by modern Western civilization might experience the enchanted community as a nightmare.)

When meta-technology shifts the focus from the thing-world to the interdependencies between subjectivity and things, it leads us to our whole humanness. It carries out a takeover of technology by the psyche or by personhood. For a community to attain a consciously modulated uncanniness would tend toward an ecstatic form of life—an achievement which the prevailing culture would classify as esthetic or spiritual, not scientific. That is what must be conveyed: acceding to one's whole humanness is neither science nor poetry because it is beyond both.

Postscript: The foregoing is not meant to promise a salvation which is blind to economics and politics. The present article is limited to giving a few rudiments of the meta-technology: my proposed extension or replacement for the physical and exact sciences. My views on the social context are at least as unusual as my views on science and form an entire line of argument in their own right. The transformation I speak of would clearly be in conflict with the capitalist formation. On the other hand, I hold that historical experience has obsolesced Marx's original timetable and game plan for the supersession of capitalism.

Readers seeking more information or exchange of ideas are invited to write the author care of Ikon Magazine.

Jan Clausen
PLACES TO BE: a cycle for two coasts



"all things are dear
that disappear"

—June Jordan
"On a New Year's Eve"

leaf shapes
toss on the wall
in the white light
and are still

tossed eager branches
scrape the window screen
even here in Brooklyn
here on the fourth floor

the willow-root
tunnels on and on
past midnight
strengthens
the deep defenses
of the tree

nor can i sleep

the continent
opens
opens
opens
opens

relentless
as cervix, flower

it is here
the heat
the hot
sweet meat
of May

City of Roses

if i came back
i could have this
damp bare room
its peeling paint
and cartoned paperbacks

if i came back
i could wake
in this simple room
with windows
on two sides

if i came back
i could buy
this garden view
i could grow
this garden

of sorrel, thyme,
rhubarb, oregano,
mint, and
nasturtium

if i came back,
learn patience
in the rain

oh Portland
rape and roses
and ragged neighborhoods
shading off
to storied 1970

of lethal jobs
nights topless
at the Bellroom
and bagging popcorn
in the old Blue Mouse
where dead or vanished Vera
stood her watch
on shabby-carpeted stairs

tired Carol, sardonic,
hummed old rock 'n roll
as she wheeled half-dead
stroke patients to P.T.
or tied the alcoholics
to their beds

and Linda
reigned sweetheart
of the donut shop

Vera, Carol, Linda!
the safety
of the past!
almost, it seems,
if i found an untouched street,
no landscaped yards,
no Swinging Single Arms,
i could step
through the mirror
catch myself making change
with waist-length hair
and all my ignorance
and frosting
on my apron
in the dawn

Portland, you're easy,
you do it for anyone;
your public fountains
spew water all day long;
there's parking downtown,
you're home
to the world's best thrift stores

Portland, you're hard
and full
of old white men
on furlough
from the VA
on the hill
clean as babies
in wheelchairs
spitting gobs of snoose
or lolling on park blocks
crazy and sick with wine
lulling alcoholic ulcers
with pints of milk
that sour on peeling hotel windowsills
crawling up that hill again
in time to die

but Burnside's
a syphilitic
penicillined

the women i loved
have all gone back
to men

there's a surfeit
of babies
and dollars

they have cut the grass
in front of sagging houses
where our hippie passions
blazed up in idle summers
they have painted
those houses

and only Reed College
stands outside of time
those heavy buildings
with their heavy doors
grounds tastefully groomed
as a ruling-class cemetery
that finishing school
where i learned the word *politics*
and we survived Kent State
and forgot
to tear the walls down

Portland, a working-
class town they all
say and mean: city
of roses, bridges and
bars down on Burnside
now Old Town of
stained glass and
California money

Portland, a poor
white people's town
putting on airs
slicking back your hair
sprucing up downtown

and white boys
in the gas station
change the tire

the Blacks
stay cool
in Albina

and the Indians
won't mind
won't mind

and the raspberries
disappear,
and the roses

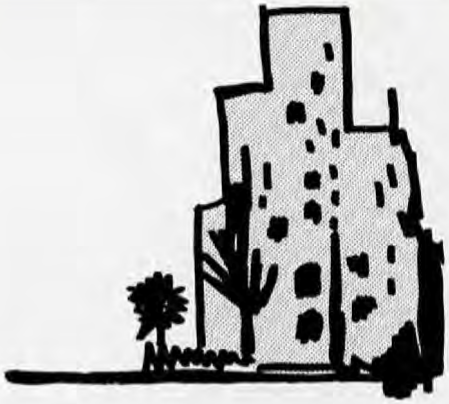
and the houses
are plunked
slapdash
in the middle of orchards

as suburbs
fling out, centrifugal
toward illusory hills

and the mountain
stands off, half-real
like dream
or myth

and does not approach
as it used to
in my youth

but i
am the lover who left
with no say
in the matter



industry
charges the world

babies
are forecast and born

promising books
are remaindered

this is not my work
nor concern

but every shifting of light
every glint of the river

and every curve
of the ribboned superhighway

i have seen (north of Fairbanks)
the permafrost gouged and scarred

the bridges of Manhattan
falling down

useless, i would be
useless

plough me under

Trout Lake, Washington

year after year
to return
to everything the same

here
under the mountain:
alfalfa, beans

and bees ahum
in their ramshackle
bee-village

white-cowled beargrass
massed under the old growth
in earliest July light

the river
goes down
goes down

and the groundcover
changes: lupine, milkweed,
sweet pea, dogbane, clover

attachments
are formed
to objects

and cowbones bleach
to mysterious
artifacts

and the mean sins
of dirt-poor farmers
petrify into legend

the people who named
and knew the mountain are gone
there is only the mountain

the new moon's
bright tooth stuck
behind a hill

once again
i do an ancient thing:
sleep out

on the warm ground,
above me the satellite-
laced milky way

but there comes at last
a year when
everything changes

flies attend
the garbage cans
in Caribbean Brooklyn

where, idle, a poet,
i sit on my stoop
with coffee

though the block
hurries
to market

though the world turns
and turns, triumphant,
into the clean light

(but August's
carbon monoxides
will dull us
like hunger)

the people who named and knew the mountain are gone: true only in a limited local and historical sense—many Native Americans continue to live in the area.

1-5 Strip: Vancouver to Tacoma

everywhere a wrongness
in the color of this sky

everywhere a
dull flat weight of
brown-blue air
where Trojan blinks its
cautionary light
and cows graze
beside the superhighway
lost in the world

i know all this,
that pulp mills
"smell like money,"
that, in the drab duplexes
of Fort Lewis,
the army wives
curse endless pregnancies
and cute tow-headed kids
who romp through sprinklers
on fading lawns
forever

that every action
is a holding action
and machines
keep us alive

i am unsurprised by
crewcuts, clearcuts,
the new nuclear plant
slated for Satsop

for i am at home
in these shoddy
northern houses:
plywood, three bedrooms,
rot around the edges
of fraying suburbs
never built to last,
the patios, slovenly
carports, laurel hedges

oh carry me back
to marijuana dreams
when nervous school-
boys fucked me
in the mornings
in Seattle, Vancouver
Island, and the Mission
and
we were not responsible

the city seen
is not the city lived
Manhattan a single object
viewed from Jersey
but critical habitat
for the urban beast

a wilderness of
tunnels, rooms
and trains, each life
finely articulated
under unnatural light

self-exiled, i dwell
in the desert
that is Brooklyn,
beautiful with death,
with small life

i try to explain
the passage into darkness
from the inside

Trojan: nuclear plant closest to Portland

Notes from a Northern Progress

fly low under cloud
Denali cloud-
shrouded, socked in

to bluffs, black spruce,
mudflats
of Anchorage

raw town, low down,
started up, really,
since the war

courting earthquake,
brown bear
roaming suburban hills

where Visquine
thaws permafrost
for shopping centers,

mobile home slums
dumped on a
northern junkpile

***

beauty, perhaps,
but that is not the point.

this north
is the edge of something,
the possible?

how possibilities
rest on the physical:
roads, for instance.

here, two roads only
let you out of town

to where, under
odd, flat midnight,
range on range
of mountains
stretch a new geography

taiga,
marginal trees

the days
July-attenuated
folding
into days

like years
of a lifetime
long-seeming
on acid
at twenty

***

outside
on the coast
is heard
rumor of
oilglut

while in Valdez
the pipeline installation
gloats
from its shimmering compound
north to the future

it's—after all—
a free country

bullet-pocked roadsigns
last-frontier fantasies

cars that break down on the highway
snowmobiles stalled on the tundra

people who freeze

***

twilight at noon.
she sits
on the livingroom couch,

blinds drawn
against cow-parsnip
rife in the yard:

something i want
is it only Omaha
the dead, flat rightness
of it
Colonel Sanders
for Sunday dinner

he kills things sometimes
puts them on the table
tells me i knew
what i was getting into

Denali: Native Alaskan name for Mount McKinley

but who could know
there'd be this
flaky sun
rattling
loose in the cage
of the horizon
unable to come up,
go down?

who could have imagined
a three-month
winter night?

and once toward breakup,
i held his own knife
to his throat,
screaming
pay, pay, pay
not sure myself
what i meant

or the one with skill
to sew two softened skins
using length of sinew
using chip of bone:

when the hewing
of stone
for a lamp-bowl
was work for
two seasons

could we have chosen,

never having seen
light bleeding
from the quonset huts
of Barrow?

***

and shall we become, then,
like the spawning salmon,
terribly changed,
that turns scarlet,
feeds on its own flesh,
develops a hook-
mouthed grimace?

shall we perish
unconscious?

***

let the bastards
freeze their nuts
in the dark

old man sits
under shade of Sabbrett umbrella
in shadow of
House of D
smiling
feeling free

the weary hookers
work Pacific Street

inappropriate gestures
haunt the neighborhood
of SRO hotels

i know how a century clings
as ancient dirt
worked into crevices
of lives not designed
for happiness, anyway

my own eyes are fixed
in the usual urban squint
supposed to be proof against
wind, pollution, rain,
unwelcome conversation,
crime, raw light

and above us,
like a neon constellation
the flickering legend:
THIS WAY
TO THE FINAL SETBACK

Night Flight, Direct

moonset
over Seattle

stormflash
recoil and
impact, artillery-
like over the
oblivious
Midwest

this
is the bridge
the famous destruction
of space

like drowning
so much
flickers
into sight

we flee
the sun
no fixed
nor constant
thing

hectic
relentless
history
flogging us
on

leave then
you
who are able
go
and live

shift up the valley
past miles
of rusted metal
and the river

only let us not forget
that what we do
even in these days
is irrevocable

My girlfriends laughed a lot when Miquel left me. A mania seized him for seeing the world. He said he'd come back, and they still say he will, but while they say it they're thinking I'll never see him again. And that's what I think too. Because Miquel . . . right away he wanted to sleep with me, and I really wasn't in the mood. I just wanted to go out together. I didn't know how to say no, because he told me if I didn't let him he'd really go astray. Maybe he'll come back someday, and if he does I wouldn't take him as a gift. Not even if they gold-plated him.

What my girlfriends all want to know is why I'm so happy when I have a cold. Let them wonder. They're surprised how I sing when I'm coughing like a dog and my nose is running like a drainpipe. I never told them how much I like soldiers, and how I fall in love when I see one. It hurts me to see them with those heavy shoes and those jackets. They wear such heavy clothes. They even do their exercises in them, out in the heat. But some of them, when they cock their helmets a little over one eye . . . When they go around in threes and walk by and say things to the girls they pass, because they're homesick. They're like uprooted plants. The ones from the villages are so homesick when they get here! They're homesick for their mother, their way of life, their normal food. They're homesick for the girls who go to the fountain and they long for everything. And with those heavy clothes to top it all off.

The three of them passed me when I was out for a walk. I was wearing a pink frock with a little shawl tied at the neck in that same pink, because I'd had some fabric left over. And a tortoise-shell barrette with an imitation gold ring, that caught my hair in a wave. The three of them stopped in front of me and blocked my way. One who had a very round face asked me if I had a streetcar ticket and if I'd sell it to him. I told him I didn't have any streetcar tickets, and the other soldier said, "Not even an old one?" And they looked at each other and laughed, but the one who'd stayed off to one side didn't say a thing. He had a freckle at the top of his cheek, and another little one on his neck, near the ear. They were both the same color: dark earth.

The two who'd wanted a streetcar ticket asked me what my name was, and I told them straight out, since I had nothing to hide . . . I said "Crisantema," and they said I was an autumn flower, and how strange it was—that I, so young, could be an autumn flower. The soldier who hadn't spoken yet said "Come on, let's go," and the others said wait a minute, so Crisantema can tell us what she does on weekends. And finally, just when I was feeling comfortable, they walked away laughing, and the one who hadn't said anything came up beside me. He'd left his buddies. He said he'd like very much to see me again, because I reminded him of a girl from his village named Jacinta . . . "What's a good day?" he asked me. And I

said "Friday, at sundown." That's when the masters were going to Tarragona to meet their grandson, and I was going to watch the house and wait for Senyora Carlota, who was coming from Valencia . . . I told him where I was working and said he should write it down, but he didn't bother since he had a good memory.

When Friday came he was already there, waiting for me in the street. And some strange indescribable thing came over me, I don't know where, maybe in my veins, maybe in my skin, I don't know, but it was something very strange, since I thought if he wanted to see me it was because he was homesick. I brought along two rolls, with a slice of roast meat inside them. After we'd been walking a while I asked him if he was hungry. I unwrapped the rolls and gave him one. We sat down to eat on a garden wall, with branches from trees and a rosebush falling over it. I ate mine in bites, pulling on it, but he had a different way of doing it. He pinched off a bit of bread and a piece of meat with his hand, and put them in his mouth. Country people are sometimes very delicate. He ate slowly, and as I watched him eat I stopped being hungry. I couldn't finish my roll, so I gave it to him, and he ate that one too.

His name was Angel. I've always liked that name. We hardly said a word to each other that day, but we got to know each other well. And when we were coming back, a gang of boys thumbed their noses at us and yelled out: "They're going to get married, they're going to get married!" The littlest boy threw a dirt bomb at us and Angel chased him, because when he saw Angel coming after him he started to run. Angel grabbed his ear and pulled it, just a little bit, gently, to give him a scare. And said he was going to shut him up in the dungeon, and afterwards put him in the soldiers' mess and make him peel potatoes for two straight years. That's all for the first day.

The second day we walked along that street again and stopped to talk on the wall, which had one side all caked. On the other side there was a row of little houses, with a barred gate that had windows with grills on both sides of it. And the little houses were always shut, because the people who lived in them spent most of their time around back, which is where the front door and the garden are supposed to be. One time, when we were standing at the foot of the wall, and the sky was that dusky blue that still doesn't blur things, they lit the streetlamps. I saw that the tree we'd seen up above was a mimosa. It was coming into bloom, and it was just lovely the whole time it had flowers. It was a good mimosa, the kind with a few ash-colored leaves and lots of little flowers. The branches were all like yellow clouds. Because some of them have dark leaves, and flowers as long as a worm, and more leaves than flowers. In the light from the streetlamp, it seemed like the mimosa's branches were coming from heaven.

We got used to eating before they lit the streetlamps. I always brought along two rolls with a little meat inside, and while he was eating his slowly in little pinches I'd be dying to kiss that freckle on his neck. One of those nights I caught a chill, because out of joy I'd put on a pear-colored silk blouse. When I got home my eyes were running and my head felt like it was about to split. The next day I went to the drugstore. My mistress made me go, because she said that was no cold I had but the flu. The clerk at the counter had very pale eyes, almost grey. I've never seen a snake's eyes, but I'm sure that clerk's eyes were the kind snakes have. He said I had a spring cold. I told him how I'd spent two hours in a silk blouse under a mimosa.

And he said "It's the pollen. Don't ever stand under a mimosa again."

One afternoon when I was on the wall with Angel, I saw a head on the street-corner nearest us. It couldn't have been a vision, and it wasn't a chopped-off head either. It was a young man's head. That night, thinking about the head on the corner, staring at us till it realized I'd seen it, I felt like I knew it. I could almost have sworn it was one of those soldiers who were with Angel the first time I'd seen him and who'd asked me for a streetcar ticket. I told Angel about it. He said it couldn't be, because they'd already finished their time and gone back to their villages.

That was the last time I saw him. I never saw him again. Lots of times I'd go back to the wall and wait for him, and finally I stopped going. But sometimes it would really hurt just to think maybe he was there . . . He never even kissed me. All he did was take my hand, and hold it for a long time under the mimosa. One day, after we'd eaten, he stared at me so long and so hard that I asked him what he was looking at. He shrugged his shoulders, as if to say "If I only knew!" I gave him a piece of my bread, and he went on looking at me for a while. My cold hung on like it was planning to stay forever. Just when it seemed better, it'd break out again. Itchy nose and sneezing, and coughing fits at night. And I was happy. Afterwards when I went to the drugstore, even if it was only to buy boric acid, the clerk would say "Watch out for that mimosa . . ." And when I get a cold now, it's like I just caught it on the wall, like I was still there.

By this time Miquel's turned my head of course, and I've promised myself to him, because a good girl has to get married. But sometimes when I was with Miquel, I'd close my hand because I felt like Angel's hand was inside it. And then open it, so he could take it out if he wanted . . . so as not to force him. And when my girl friends think I'm only living for Miquel, who's gone off to see the world, I think of Angel, who disappeared like a puff of smoke. But I don't really mind. When I think of him he's mine. There's one thing that's kind of sad though . . . they have a new clerk at the drugstore. And if I ask for a package of aspirin, the new clerk, who doesn't know me, says "Here, two and a half *pessetes*." And clack!, the cash register opens. And if I ask for some citronella he looks at me and says "Two *rals*." And clack!, the cash register opens. Then I leave, but before opening the door I stand quietly for a moment. I don't really know why. As if I'd forgotten something.

(translated by David H. Rosenthal)

contributors

KARL BISSINGER was formerly a photographer for both *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar*. His life "was turned around" by the war in Vietnam and he has been an organizer for the War Resister's League for the past eight years. He was staff photographer on the original IKON.

JAN CLAUSEN is the author of two poetry collections, *After Touch* and *Waking at the Bottom of the Dark*, both available from Long Haul Press; and of *Mother, Sister, Daughter, Lover* (stories; The Crossing Press; 1980). Her essay *A Movement of Poets: Thoughts on Poetry and Feminism*, originally serialized in the *New Women's Times/Feminist Review*, may now be ordered from Long Haul Press, P.O. Box 592, Van Brunt Station, Bklyn., N.Y. 11215.

MICHELLE CLIFF is the author of *Claiming an Identity They Taught Me to Despise* (Persephone Press) and the co-editor (with Adrienne Rich) of *Sinister Wisdom*, Box 660, Amherst, MA 01004.

DAVINE: A while back I realized that "Revolution" is more than armed struggle, and so I stopped expecting "it" to "come", but understood that Revolution is an ongoing struggle/process that I must participate in everyday. My writing—which is relegated to the realm of Real Life—is reflective of struggle, awakenings, triumphs and isolation-breaking . . . through drawing composites from my own life as well as the lives of people around me and approaching all our experiences from a political perspective that allows no space for victim-blaming.

I attempt to shatter myths, expose "personal" tragedies that are political in basis, to remind ourselves that whatever "it" is, it is not just happening to us as individuals, and because it is happening to US, we'd better examine who is responsible and why, so we can join each other in the elimination of OUR oppression, instead of being embarrassed, ashamed, and so-vulnerable. As a Black person, and as a woman, I refuse to be silenced by my "condition."

RACHEL deVRIES: co-director of The Women's Writer's Center through 1981. Resident faculty, *Freehand*, Provincetown, Massachusetts. Her book of poems, *An Arc of Light*, was published in 1978 by The Wild Goose Press. Her work has appeared in magazines and journals, including *Sinister Wisdom*, *The Greenfield Review*, *Conditions*, *Feminary* and *Cedar Rock*.

HENRY FLYNT lives in New York and mostly writes unpublished work on foundations of science. In the Seventies, he wrote a Ph.D. dissertation on socialist economic administration. His published book, *Blueprint for a Higher Civilization* (1975), is outdated as an exposition of his views. He is also a composer specializing in music for electric violin.

JEWELLE GOMEZ. Born 1948, Boston, Ma. Poet, novelist, teacher, critic, publisher. MS Columbia University School of Journalism. BA Northeastern University, Boston. Author of "*The Lipstick Papers*," and a forthcoming collection of vampire stories.

LOIS ELAINE GRIFFITH is a writer living and working in Brooklyn, New York. Her plays have been produced by the New York Shakespeare Festival Public Theater and by El Puerto Rican Playwrights'/Actor's Workshop. Currently she is preparing a collection of short stories, *Pull Back the Night*. A volume of her poetry *Barbarian Fantasies* is soon to be published.

DOROTHY HELLER studied with Hans Hofmann. She has had many exhibitions internationally including solo exhibitions at Betty Parsons Gallery, Poindexter Gallery in New York and Galerie Facchetti, Paris. She has appeared in the Whitney Museum Annual and in the New York Cultural Center Exhibit, "Women Choose Women." Articles on her work have appeared in Art News, Arts Magazine and La Presse. Her work is part of the collections of the University of California Art Museum, the Greenville County Museum of Art, the Allen Memorial Art Museum

CANDACE LYLE HOGAN is a free-lance writer who lives in New York and Baja California.

AKUA LEZLI HOPE: I am the third generation of my families in America, New York, am working on NEW HEAT, a Black literary magazine; M.B.A. and M.S.J. from Columbia University, presently studying the tenor sax, mailing my manuscript; previous publications include *Black Scholar, Ordinary Women, Conditions 3, Sunbury 9, HOODOO, Heresies* . . .; working all ways to write more, better, to protect, create, perpetuate and nurture positive power.

HETTIE JONES has been living, working, writing, and raising children in New York for over two decades. She is the author of six books for children and young adults, including *Big Star Fallin Mama: Five Women In Black Music* and a novel entitled *I Hate To Talk About Your Mother*. A collection of poems and short fiction from Number Press, *Having Been Her*, was published in 1981. She is a regular reader in the Newfoundland Theater poetry series and is currently completing a second novel.

PATRICIA JONES is a poet, performance artist and arts reviewer. Her poems have appeared in numerous little mags and national journals such as *Essence* and in the following anthologies: *Black Sister; Poems: New York* and *Ordinary Women*. Her first book, *Mythologizing (Always?)* was published by Telephone Books in 1981. Her reviews on music, theatre and performance have appeared in *The Village Voice, Soho News, Live: A Magazine of Performance Art* and *Essence*. She is currently working on her first play.

IRENA KLEPFISZ is the author of *Periods of Stress*, a collection of poetry available from Crossing Press. A new book of her poetry will be published by Persephone Press in spring, '83. She is a member of DI VILDE CHAYES, a Jewish Lesbian Feminist group and is a contributor to *Nice Jewish Girls: A Lesbian Anthology* published by Persephone Press.

LESLIE LABOWITZ, feminist activist and performance artist, is best known for "Record Companies Drag Their Feet," a media performance with *Women Against Violence Against Women* to announce a nationwide record boycott. Her work heralds a new relationship between the artist and mass culture using media as a primary communication form. In the past two years she has developed "Sproutime," a conceptual performance about global survival, which also functions as an artist-run sprout-growing business.

SUZANNE LACY is a feminist artist who has worked for ten years to develop an art form which could integrate her political feminism with a performance structure. Her first successful mass performance project was "Three Weeks in May" which created a framework for the collaborative participation of women's organizations, women artists, and city politicians to focus on rape in Los Angeles. She is currently writing a book about activist strategies in feminist performance art.

AUDRE LORDE's recent books are *Chosen Poems: Old & New*, W.W. Norton & Co., and *ZAMI: A New Spelling of My Name*, a Biomythography—a work of fiction published by Persephone Press.

COLLEEN McKAY is a free-lance photographer who lives and works in New York City.

JUDITH MALINA is co-founder of the Living Theatre with Julian Beck. She is an actress, a director (she directed "The Connection" and "The Brig") and a poet. She and the Living Theatre (a company of 35) are presently living in Rome and are negotiating with the French government to spend a year in residence outside Paris.

CHERRIE MORAGA is a Chicano poet and co-editor of *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings of Radical Women of Color* (published by Persephone Press). She is a co-founder of Kitchen Table Press.

MARGARET RANDALL was born in the United States, lived in Mexico for several years, has been a resident of Cuba since October 1969 and is now living in Nicaragua. She was co-founder and co-editor of *El Corno Emplumado* (1961-69). Her many books include *Cuban Women Now* (Women's Press), *Part of the Solution* (New Directions) a collection of her poems and narratives, and *Doris Tijerino: Inside the Nicaraguan Revolution* (New Star).

MERCÉ RODOREDA is thought by many to be the best contemporary Catalan prose writer. Born in 1909, she published prolifically during the 1930's. The Spanish Civil War and its aftermath temporarily halted her production, but in 1957 she began publishing again and since then she has established herself as one of her nation's outstanding authors.

DAVID H. ROSENTHAL, a poet, has published several anthologies of contemporary Catalan verse in translation, as well as his version of Ms. Rodoreda's best known novel, *The Time of the Doves*.

SUSAN SHERMAN edited the first series of IKON from 1966-69. Two books of her poetry, *With Anger/With Love* and *Women Poems Love Poems*, are available. She has just completed a manuscript of poems, *Freeing the Balance: Moving Ahead*, and is working on a non-fiction book.