

# IKON



## CrossRoads

# IKON #14/15 : CrossRoads

## An Anthology of Art for a Time of Transition & Change

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*CrossRoads—different paths/worlds/directions coming together, meeting, converging. In this, the last decade of the century, the Nineties. The transition/link between the old and the new.*

In *The Road to Oz*, Dorothy is caught in the hub of a crazywheel of roads spinning until it lifts her more truly than a hurricane out of the arms of everything she has ever known, catapulting her into something she could never have dreamed. At the crossroads where paths meet, magic is possible. Where meeting takes place, hope is born and remains inviolate. It is the hub of the wheel, the center, that makes revolution/change possible.

It is appropriate that this final issue of IKON be titled "Crossroads." Since 1982, the second series of IKON has been dedicated, as was the first in the Sixties, to a vision of art that challenges established assumptions and disputes antiquated ways of looking at the world—a vision of an art that forces us across barriers, rhetoric, dis-information.

Therefore, it is with great sadness I must announce with this issue IKON magazine will suspend publication. There are no words to adequately express my gratitude for the privilege of working with so many talented and dedicated people, many of whom have become close, and much valued, personal friends. To them, and to the many women and men, who, as readers of IKON, have supported our work over the years, what can I say except very simply, Thank You.

**SUSAN SHERMAN**

Editor/ *IKON* magazine

1965-1969, 1982-1994

*Special thanks to J. D. RAGE & JAN SCHMIDT, D. PINTONELLI & ANJAIL AHMAD for their many hours of hard work helping to put this issue together. Carole Byard: American History 101, 5"hx6"wx14" l. wool, clay, cotton, acrylic paint, glass, beads, mirror, corn husk & embedded medicinal herbs. Brush strokes adapted from originals in IKON #9 by Lily Lee.*

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# IRENA KLEPFISZ

## '67 Remembered

*for Khane*

In '67 you visited with your sister.  
I was in Chicago. Richard Speck had just murdered  
seven nurses. We were scared. The war was only  
a few days over and everyone said  
how well you and Gitl looked. Who would  
have thought you'd just come  
from a war-torn country  
dressed chic in late '60s fashion  
smiling easy relaxed  
confident the worst was over?  
I still have the photographs.

How different that war  
from that other in your life:  
Siberia the Germans at your heels  
your father chopping trees in the forest.  
You learned Russian in the street  
spoke Yiddish at home wrote Polish  
in the segregated schools. You were  
a linguist at eight ready to master  
even more tongues for the sake of survival.

But in '67 you'd already mastered  
it all. You were so relaxed so easy.  
It was a joke this war despite  
the casualties. It was a joke  
how relaxed you were.

And wasn't I too? Weren't we all?  
Didn't we all glow from it  
our sense of power finally achieved?  
The quickness of the action  
the Biblical routes  
and how we laughed over  
Egyptian shoes in the sand  
how we laughed at another people's fear  
as if fear was alien  
as if we had known safety all our lives.



And the Bank?  
I don't remember it mentioned  
by any of us.  
We were in Chicago—it was hard to imagine.  
But twenty years later  
I hear how they picked up what they could  
placed it on their backs  
how they marched through the hills  
sparse coarse grass pink and yellow flowers  
rough rocks defying cultivation  
how they carried clumsy packs  
clothing utensils images of a home  
they might never see again.  
A sabra told me who watched  
their leaving as she sat safe  
in an army jeep: it looked no different  
than the newsreels at school  
of French Belgian roads. It was simple  
she said: people were fleeing and  
*we* egged them on.

Time passes. Everything changes.  
We see things differently.  
In '67 you had not married yet and we all  
wondered why never worrying about  
marriage laws or rabbinic power.  
And now more than 20 years later  
you live in Jerusalem ruling  
from your lacquered kitchen and sit  
in that dream house trapped:  
enough food in your mouth  
in your children's and enough warm things  
for winter (coats shoes woolen stockings  
good for Siberia)  
and there's no way out no one to call  
about a bad marriage. It's simple:  
a woman without bruises  
your lawyer says there's not much hope  
and you accept it:  
I can't say I'm happy but  
I've got a truce.

Things fester. We compromise.  
We wake up take new positions  
to suit new visions failed dreams.  
We change. Power does not so much corrupt  
as blur the edges  
so we no longer feel the raw fear  
that pounds in the hearts  
of those trapped and helpless.  
In '67 in Chicago we thought we'd be safe  
locking the windows till Speck was caught.  
We did not know there was a danger  
in us as well that we must remain vigilant  
and open not to power  
but to peace.

## ANJAIL AHMAD

### reflection

it was her shadow i loved,  
what she created with words,  
the translucent sounds, the  
acrobatics of her antonyms  
reversing their meanings, again.  
instead of finding fault in her, i  
study my creased palms, retrace  
the lead-ins calling me the "beloved"  
and if i chant for more, my words  
collapse around me.  
on her tongue  
she holds a mirror.  
from here i can see  
i am alone  
and speak a language  
she does not understand. she says that  
i have been spinning and  
lifts her spittled finger  
to check the air for my velocity.  
she moves only to confirm  
my dizziness and asks how i  
sustained this trick for so long.





# REGIE CABICO

## Opening Nite

Tonite I'll throw tuna cans  
on the stove and play Tony Bennett  
to the tin of my spoon.  
You're no tramp my love you've got  
my tux and tap shoes. I'm ready to  
*tour-jete* the roof for you!  
My food stamps were Fed-exed last  
week, but I got tickets for tonite's show.  
For dinner, the "Starkist" fish  
is salmon. The candles will set  
the mood for jello that's *tiramasu*  
and your kisses will light the room brighter  
than *papparazzi* stars shooting  
from our loving arms.  
The show is "West Side Story"  
and we'll get our kicks tonight  
as sirens sing minor sevenths  
to the red dramatic blood ambulance  
shadows from the streetlights—  
camera crying for our love.

## An Afternoon in Pangasinan\* with No Electricity

In the yellow of butter  
my mother colors my skin  
In the yellow of sun  
my skin becomes brown  
In the yellow of yolk  
my grandfather finds an egg  
*Balot*, they call it  
In the yellow of noon  
we swallow the baby chick  
"Long life!" he says  
And discards the purple shell

# **gale jackson**

## **passing over going home.**

we all studied this. some old old testament.  
and the witness. every door covered with blood.  
some sacrificial animal. a lamb. a man. a woman.  
a child. much loved. who usta sleep here.  
behind this door. took the door for safety.  
or ran fingers over its ledges dreaming of flight.

we all studied this. these occupations. dispersed.  
in exile. watching the ascent of the hunter's moon.  
our violation hung from the trees. and when the blue  
moon bleeds illuminating the reeds where maybe once  
there was love we find them and it is surely  
murder. murder. the child who usta sleep here.  
trusting the covenant. this child. that door.  
covered with blood.

i know that you can know so much till it catch  
your breath and leave you voiceless silent  
as a mountain suspended by memory a mourner  
hushed by death and witness to just too much  
born down by the spirits whose deaths came  
too soon and unjust. survivor. witness to the war  
engulfing us.

i know that craig and ed and matthew are dead  
that rori and lorriane and angel that donald  
has joined them on the other side that there  
is famine among feasting that idle hands soon  
lose direction that one or another virus eats away  
at young men's eyes that armies steal into women's  
birthings and rob us of immunity and ability to fight.

we all know this. catching our breath on the thinnest air.  
crying blood. crying god. hands covered with blood.  
guilty and torn from beating on that door.  
and then again i just don't know. these borders lie.  
these occupations. this one war everywhere. go ahead god  
change this weather if you dare to. let the young ones  
cut their teeth on these words.



if it rains blood in new york. if it rains blood west or east or  
north or south then we must build a new house from these boulders  
smashed to stones for the promise of shelter again.  
we all studied this. spit the words in the street. go on  
let it be known. let there be no more shame. this we  
can not accept. yes there is blood on the door.

### **eleuthera, bahamas.**

she loved a woman loved her  
to her heart and the absolutely gracious miracle  
of her body beside her day as well as night  
and that was as whorish as it was sacred and ordinary  
though how she loved her "weren't just no pussy eating  
situation" rather it took wing like the ancients lay  
below hathor the mother and fucked her and fucked  
the sky.

she loved a woman  
loved her  
to her heart  
and the absolutely  
gracious miracle  
of her body beside her  
sometimes  
day and sometimes night  
and that  
was as whorish  
as it was sacred and ordinary  
though how she loved her  
"weren't just no pussy eating  
situation"  
rather  
sometimes  
it took wing  
and like the ancients lay  
below hathor  
the mother  
and fucked her  
and fucked the sky.

charles and gale without donald on hudson  
looking for the balm in gilead  
february 29, 1992.

this is how the poets deal with death  
on the corner of hudson and north moore  
in front of kathy and john and ella and justine's  
at the door of friends  
at the mouth of eternity  
bearing each other up  
against the cold wind of a river's continuousness  
looking up and down the long avenue  
"too soon" too soon  
we wished and we wrestled the dark and  
terrible angels just above our heads  
our own your own mortality fragility coming apart  
"fuck this" we wished we smoked we paced we looked  
we looked for your easy well-dressed beauty  
to be lit by the light in your face we wished  
for eternity to see you coming  
to change these abandoned streets  
and make them ours  
again  
but there is only this vast continuousness  
and the cars and the noise  
and the smoke from our cigarettes  
so in the mind's eye we sing "don't explain"  
come on  
come on  
come on  
come back  
come soon  
come home  
baby baby please come on  
when what we really mean is "don don't be dying"  
so soon too soon  
though this time you simply really felt sick  
and gone home felt sick and gone home but this  
is not simple singing this blues line not  
wanting to begin to weave your shroud the words  
we must and will weave to carry you on cause the poets  
got to  
carry you on  
our grief more than words more than all our lives  
your death will leave us in a place without life or words



and then we'll have to take this too and go on  
and maybe venus over the city's upturned skirt  
maybe our crisp duet hudson's lament late nite  
traffic's roar curl of the smoke  
and the very presence of your absence  
is what we don't yet understand  
about how you could die and us remain with each other  
maybe we don't yet understand  
or don't want to standing on the corner  
of hudson and north moore at the door of friends  
at the mouth of eternity maybe i don't want to know  
yet what charles knows too well what makes me afraid  
your easy beauty the specter of aids  
but we will know  
we will  
too soon.



## MIA HANSFORD

### this way toward morning

across the bridge walking  
foot by foot on globes of light  
the buildings! sheathed in glass  
reflecting other buildings, their  
sentry lights illumine  
foreign pediment and facade.  
tower lights stripe, cut-off, reappear.  
the radar flashes black then again its metered pass.  
in a clear expanse the night planes mark their course.  
back and forth in loose darkness I see a  
mouth, blunt eye, breast slip over  
pulse and blink, the silent heaving  
breath the city night.

fragment, live the feet, live the eye, channel  
the heart barely half-across, and the buildings  
as they reach the dark above the city.

## JANICE GOULD

### The Subversive Language of the Tribal Mind

This is the windy season in the country I come from, a season of warm days and cold nights. Or cold days and cold nights. Clouds are chased in from the Gulf of California, dropping their load of moisture over the highest peaks in Arizona. Snow falls above 7,000 feet, but along the lower elevations of the Rio Grande the fruit trees are beginning to blossom. And overhead, the sandhill cranes are in the early stages of their incredible migration back to the arctic. You can hear them crying out as they wing their way above the bosque, the swath of cottonwood, Russian olive, and salt bush that grows for hundreds of miles along the sandy river.

The bosque is an ecological zone that houses great numbers of migrating birds and water fowl, various reptiles, and small animals such as beaver and coyote. It's a fragile environment, and, where I live, under attack by developers and the U.S. Corps of Engineers, who want to build bridges across the Rio Grande in order to speed the flow of traffic to and from the growing west side of the city of Albuquerque. Some of the most beautiful old cottonwoods have fallen to the chainsaws, and their roots have been plowed under by bulldozers. The changes thus made to the bosque are irreparable.

Probably by the time I hear the sandhill cranes over Albuquerque, they have been flying for some time from the Bosque del Apache where they winter. And I wonder as I write this, the introduction to a paper on lesbian poetry, why I fastened on those birds and this place as a way of getting into the material? Is it appropriate? Is that great chevron of birds heading north a symbol for my own desire to fly out of range, out of sight, far away? If so, am I being responsible to my own deeper instincts of ritual and renewal, or am I irresponsibly wishing not to be here before a crowd of people who expect interesting, and possibly important, words about the writing of lesbian poetry? Or is the imagining of the bosque, that narrow strip along the river that has narrowed even more in "historical" times, is that threatened and naturally constituted area a symbol of other kinds of communities that are at peril during these hard economic and politically repressive times? How does the imagination work? Specifically, how does the imagination of a mixed-blood Native American lesbian in her forties work?

In some ways, asking that question is like asking where poetry comes from. What is the source of our imagery, what is the source of our language? People have been asking those questions since long before Plato. But probably in non-Western societies those questions hold a lot less relevance than they do in this culture, because what is assumed about how the world is constructed is based in an entirely different logic about and experience of reality.



Plato could ask these questions because he had already decided that this reality is a mere shadow of the Ideal that exists in the mind of man. He wished to keep poets out of his Republic because of their corrupting influence on the young, and on the gullible (i.e. on women and slaves). That influence came in the form of what Plato considered lies. And these lies had to do, among other things, with representing God and the state in negative and unflattering ways. Indeed, many of the dialogues in the *Republic* have to do with the strict separation of the good from the bad, an obsessive dichotomizing of the world along the lines of logical argumentation. The first step in setting up a well-ordered society is to create infallible standards of excellence and inferiority, each mutually exclusive from the other. Anything, then, that smacked of fancy, blurred distinctions between good and evil, or suggested instability and mutability in the all-powerful divine, was to be considered inferior and exiled from the state. Moreover, the logic of a mind that could separate, label, and categorize orders of lies and truth, fiction and fact, the real and the ideal, was privileged over a mind which did not do that, which had not been trained to work this way.

Indeed, in Plato's *Republic*, the training of the mind had to begin in infancy, and the only way to do that was to constrain the oral tradition, to constrain the first tellers of songs and stories, those "casual persons" who tell the children "casual tales." And who were those "casual persons?" They were, of course, the children's mothers and nurses. And being women, they would be persuaded "to tell their children the authorized [stories] only."

It is important to understand how deeply the excising of the oral tradition is in Western culture, and how that has to do with the privileging of one type of mind over other types of minds. We are carefully taught to distinguish, not only between types of mind, but between different states of mind, as we call them, between thought and emotion, between knowledge and imagination. The dream world, we learn, is a product of our ever-industrious fancy which, like a workaholic, continues to figure out at night those things with which we couldn't deal during the day. The dream, then, is a reflection of our psyches, not an actual world in which we can participate.

Yet, in many tribal cultures, which are oral cultures, the dream is a source of knowledge and power. Among many American Indian tribes, for example, the dream could instigate life changes of enormous magnitude that could reestablish one's entire relationship to the community. Among California tribes, and especially in the desert regions along the old river systems where the tribes farmed for corn and beans, dreaming was a well-cultivated art. A child could dream of becoming a shaman, a ritual healer of the sick, with the help of one or another spirit creature, like buzzard, or tarantula, or homyavre, "the bug who causes the mirage."<sup>1</sup> A girl child could dream of becoming a great warrior and taking a wife. Or a boy child could dream of becoming a woman, and of participating in the cyclical rounds of gathering and production that women practiced as the ground of community and well-being. Such dreams were respected and adhered to, especially if they fit other outward patterns of behavior that parents could observe. And I would guess that in



those cultures that tolerated and even approved of the berdache, as the males who practiced female activities and dress were termed by anthropologists, there were oral roots to the tradition that explained the presence of the person who was considered to be, in some tribes, "two-spirited," or of a third gender. Among the Navajo, for example, Nadle was such a person who was created in time immemorial. When the men and women separated in the long-ago time, Nadle went between each group, satisfying both for a time, and him/herself as well, no doubt. For with the men she was a woman, and with the women he was a man.

Many gay and lesbian American Indian writers have looked to the tradition of the berdache as a source of power and inspiration. And again, to look to this phenomena is to see it in the context of great and complex oral traditions whose stories emerge from time immemorial. These stories tell of a time in which the powers of life were very close to the surface of reality. The purpose of ritual, ceremony, and prayer is to open ourselves to that power, to bring into our everyday existence the knowledge and memory of that time, to reinvoké it and re-participate in it. To do this is to already have an understanding of the cyclical and circular propensity of time and space. And the gate through which we enter the dream world, the world of time immemorial, the place of inception, conception, and perception, is language. For without language there are no stories, there is no speaking and singing the world into existence.

Now, you may be asking yourselves, what has this to do with the language and images in lesbian poetry? I would answer that many of us writing today, especially if we are lesbians of color, have turned consciously or unconsciously to the roots of an older tradition. Consciously or unconsciously we form our speech, which ultimately becomes our writing, along lines that invariably produces a world counter to the world our bodies painfully experience and inhabit. And I can safely assert that the Western mind, through which we have been colonized and by which our land, labor, and lives have been robbed and exploited, is as uncomfortable with us as we are uncomfortable with it. The Western mind has labeled our thinking illogical, random, evil, and superstitious. It has guarded itself against us by outlawing our languages, customs, dress, and sacred practices. And if you don't think that this happens anymore, look at the recent Supreme Court decision about the ritual use of peyote in the case of *Employment Division v. Smith*.<sup>2</sup> The First Amendment does not protect members of the Native American Church in those states in which legislatures have passed general drug laws prohibiting the use of peyote. Think about it: peyote and other sacred plants such as tobacco were given to and used by Indians since the first people emerged into this world, or were breathed into existence by the creators. Their use helped us understand power, and helped us access that power for the good of the people. The use of these plants clearly did not constitute the fetishistic, obsessive, and personal use patterns that we see exhibited with them today, or the first-contact europeans would have found American Indians riddled with lung cancer and drug addiction.



I would suggest that anytime a group of people participates in anti-linear thinking, anytime a group of people practices customs and beliefs contrary to the norm, anytime a group of people begins to speak negatively and unflatteringly of God and the state, anytime a group of people organizes itself into a cohesive whole with a language that tells the truth as it knows it and experiences it—and call that language art, poetry, song, sculpture, work, study, love-making, child-rearing, or what have you—then the powers that be order in the troops. And the troops stand guard, infiltrate, imprison, and in various ways attempt to control all of those who would subvert the “natural” order of things, the construction of the world as we know it today, patriarchal and imperious, bloated on its own self-importance, pompous, cruel and dominating.

Lesbian images and language, especially the images and language of lesbians of color, because we have lost more than many others, may be some of the most subversive texts being written today. It isn't just the challenge to the state's notions of normalcy as represented by someone like Jesse Helms. Our challenge to authority does not come alone in the area of re-imagining and re-constituting our sexuality. For years now we have re-constituted on some level the family, the community, the schools, and perhaps even the military. The meaning and value of these institutions have come under scrutiny and re-evaluation and change by each of us who have functioned in and survived them. We lesbian writers have taken it as our responsibility to articulate our survivals and transformations in this war on our integrity. We represent a challenge to the Western way of thinking at a primal level. The more we tap into those tribal roots and quench ourselves on the milk and honey of our mother tongue, the more we can withstand the shock of living in this deadly and soul-annihilating system. We have to scramble their messages and learn to read the code we devise out of it. We have to go into the place of the great solitary vision of our own being—a being intimately attached to and integrated with the net of all being and beings—and humble ourselves and ask for a song, a vision, a dream, a language that promotes and heals, that nurtures and provides. We have to humble ourselves, perhaps before the little bug that causes the mirage, or before the northern flight of birds on whose shiny backs we may find the words which ensure our survival and the survival of those who come after us. For doubtless those who come after us will rely on our circular conceptions, our language beyond language, and on the shimmering vision of a reality that is always just here, touching our world exquisitely.

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<sup>1</sup>Margolin, Malcolm, *The Way We Lived, California Indian Reminiscences, Stories and Songs*. Heyday Books, Berkeley, California, 1981, p.115.

<sup>2</sup>Warrior, Robert Allen, “Forget 1492. What about 1992?” In *The Progressive*, Volume 56, Number 3, March 1992.



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# ESTHER COHEN

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## The Walk

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Some meetings seem ominous. It could only be the time of day. A stranger spills a drink on your lap, then invites you to dinner. Or it's midnight and raining. You share a doorway on an out of the way street with a stranger, and something happens you don't understand.

My meeting with Dinah was just like that. We were both eighteen. Dinah wore a perfume called *Fleurs de Rocaille*. She told me that later. I wore Balenciaga's *Quadrille*. It's since disappeared. I've written to them in Paris. No response. I wonder what happens to out of date perfumes.

Hers was *Lily of the Valley*. I've always liked that flower. Mine was denser, more spice than flower. We were college freshman living in a mammoth dorm, an old hotel really. Far from home. Our college was in the middle of Washington, D.C.

I remember just how Dinah looked when we met. Could she say the same? It's been years since we've seen one another. Nearly twenty. Then, she was very small. Not skinny, but certainly thin. She was the neatest person bar none that I'd ever seen. The absolute neatest. She wore a pressed blue dress, fitted but softly. The blue was the color of denim but not. A purposefully faded navy. She had placed a round Mexican pin, a silver Aztec calendar, right between her collar bones. She wore a good watch and shoes called pumps though no one else around us used that word. Navy pumps. Her hair was curly but in control. She used tortoise shell clips to keep it down. Her eyes were most important. Big brown eyes, not hyperthyroid. Just big. The rest of her was so small her eyes looked even bigger than they should have.

She was crying when we met. I saw her standing very small, by a pillar in the lobby where we lived. They called it Superdorm, because there were almost 2,000 of us there. All girls. It was eleven o'clock our first Saturday night. I felt like crying too, though I didn't. You wait for years, thinking college will be different, but it's just the same. I looked almost out of control. My hair was wild. I didn't know how to restrain it. Once in a while, I used Do, or tied a scarf over it but it always emerged. And those scarves just succeeded in making me look like I was religious and crazy, so I tried not to wear them ever.

The night I met Dinah, my hair went in all directions. It had been raining. The rain doesn't fall evenly on me, but in clumps, hitting parts of my head or my body. I wore a hand-me-down dress, given to me by Elyse. Elyse is the only first cousin I really know. The others, and there are only a few, live too far to make the effort. Cousin Elyse was always fashionable and I was not. The dress had been when she bought it. It was red plaid, and wrapped. Our bodies are different though, and her red plaid dress hung on me, a little short and crooked. I didn't much care. What I did care about were my earrings, long Turkish coins with red amber beads, and my perfume, which I always wore.



Dinah and I had both been on dates. Our first in college. Those dates were why she was crying and I wanted to. I walked up to her and asked her what had happened. She said we should sit in the lounge and we did. The lounge had four dark couches, a piano, and a vending machine selling Cheetos. I bought two bags. She opened hers carefully. My fingers turned orange just by holding the bag. Hers didn't.

She told her story carefully, so I'd understand. Someone in the room next door to her fixed her up. A girl named Marjorie. Dinah admired Marjorie. Jeremy was Marjorie's boyfriend's friend. He took Dinah to a big house that had a room in the basement like a den. Then he sat down on the couch in front of the TV and watched a game. They watched in silence. When it was over, he brought her home.

I told my story next. A boy with sandals and a beard whose name was David asked me to see Genet's "The Blacks." The director was Czech. David said the production was serious. I'd seen it once before with a boy named Steven who'd lived for a year in France. David and I sat in the top row of a circular theater. He gave me the seat in back of the pole. We were too far to begin with. To see, I'd have to lean into him, or a stranger. At intermission, David began an overlong explanation of Genet, as well as David's theory of decadence. He began by saying, "Decadence is a state of mind." I didn't like him and his way of making me feel that whatever I knew he'd have to tell me. So I left. Said, "Excuse Me" when he paused. Then walked out the door into a taxi. It could have been a movie. The cab driver didn't talk. I didn't either. Until I saw Dinah by the pole.

Why was all this so disappointing? In high school, I'd been so unhappy. Days of imagining how and when my life would change. And here, another place, another circumstance, it all seemed more or less the same. Dinah agreed. We sat in the lounge until morning. We told each other stories, elaborate accountings of relatives' lives. It took us months to get to our own. Early morning, we went to breakfast, not to our dorm cafeteria but to another airier place, the Hayes Bickford. This was red, while ours was a fishtank green, and the selection seemed more lively. More thick white dishes under flood lights, more muffins, more rolls. More kinds of juice for breakfast.

Our first meal together, Dinah had a cup of black coffee and a blueberry muffin, plain. I drank two glasses of V8 and ate a toasted bran muffin with plenty of butter. Very, very slowly we fell in love. As slowly as ants build up their volcanoes. We began to spend days together, then weeks, then finally a summer. Dinah gave me my first gold earrings, long filigreed drops. I bought her a handmade silver bracelet, pounded shining circles. Our love had no real physical side. On weekends, I continued to see men for movies or music in the park. She did not. She wasn't really interested. Often these men, who were mostly college boys, would grab me in familiar ways. I liked it. One night the first spring, somebody I'd been out with a few times — his name was Joseph, and I was in love with his telephone voice — took me for a late night picnic in the field near the Washington Monument. We rolled over the lawn all night, wrapped around one another like children wrestling. One moment in our



rolling, we looked down together into the reflecting pool, and I wondered why the face beside me didn't belong to Dinah.

There were rumors that we were lovers. Why we weren't is still mysterious. It could have been because we were just too young or too inexperienced or frightened or unsure. Dinah was a virgin and I was not. She said she was waiting. And although we examined, in endless detail, every other aspect of our lives, this one we left untouched. Except once.

Dinah liked my breasts. Several times she said I was lucky to have them. Hers were nice too, but much smaller. We were generally modest with one another though, careful not to stare at one another's bodies. In our room, we each wore robes. One night, she asked if I would do her a favor. This alone was unusual. Dinah did not like to ask for things directly. Her request was even stranger: that I walk bare breasted, wearing only my loose pink skirt, arm-in-arm with her on every floor of our dorm.

That walk was the strangest I have ever taken. It was like our wedding march. We even hummed *Pathetique*. I painted my toenails red before we left and went barefoot. Though I can't imagine anyone seeing my feet. Dinah herself wore her blue terry robe and blue scuffs. If there was a bride and a groom between us, then I was her bride. My heart beat wildly, more wildly than on my own wedding day. We walked in unison, first left, then right, slow waltz through all nine floors, descending the fire stairs between them. Nothing could stop our slow rhythm. At last in our room we broke away as though we were in slow motion, each moving to our separate bunks, hers on top. I didn't sleep, but heard her softly snore.

Twenty years have passed. We haven't talked. I would, but she doesn't want to. She's said as much to friends, although she never gives a reason. Her 10-year-old child is named for me, but we've never met. And of course I too have another life. A life with a child of my own. A life with its moments. And strong strange memories here and there. So big they still stop my heart.



# HARRY LEWIS

## SILLY/FIVE

*for Ted Enslin*

the simple joy...

silly

simple

silly

joy

silly

simple

joy

listening to someone

sing

of growing plants:

they grow...

they reach for that

sun (all of it)

growing

—into my head as

an old friend sings

of a plant

growing

going up

going out

going around

to catch

everything

it can...

the roots start in his voice

wind 'round my head up

through

my hair—I think he was singing about

tansy

—but by now my head is full of all kinds of plants

his voice is a gardener my head

buds silly

simple... now

that's

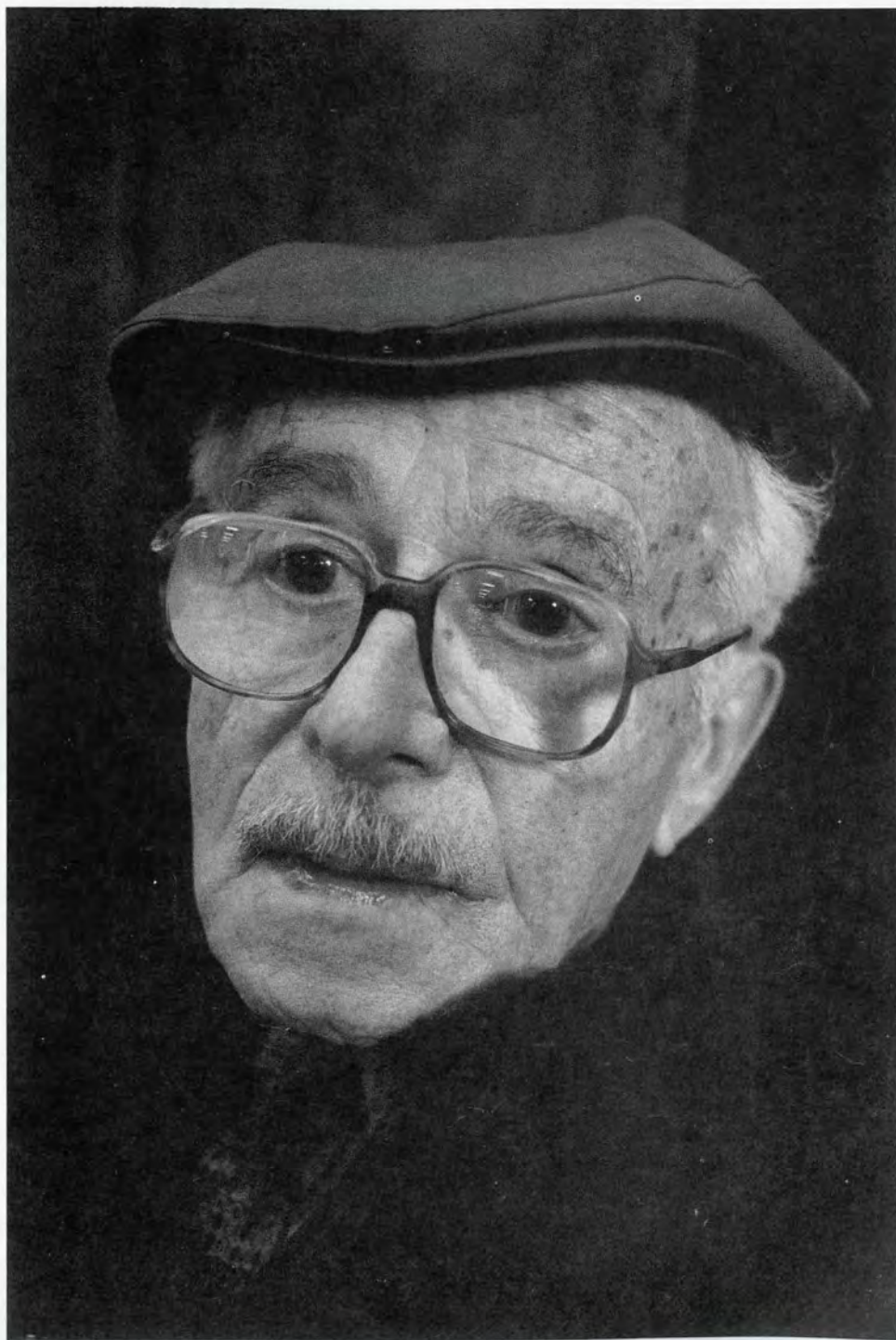
silly

the way my mind grows (the way  
my garden goes.



**LINDA EBER**  
*Portraits*











LUDITH CLARK





# JUDITH CLARK

## PANIC

### I

Papa, driving the family car  
debates politics with Saul  
Mama next to him  
navigates  
in the back seat  
Brother pinches  
me scrunched  
between him and Saul

Papa's voice rises  
hysterical  
as he turns  
red faced and furious  
jabbing his finger at Saul  
his bullet words  
flying

scatter-shot

all the grown-ups are screaming  
no eyes on the road  
no hands on the wheel  
the car speeding  
down the highway  
on its own

### II

Driving  
breakneck speed  
around Mexico City's plazas  
one broken down Volks  
four Mexicanos  
five gringos  
playing chicken with cars  
cabbies  
strollers  
scattering roosters and goats

nine students  
nine kids

on a roller coaster ride  
laughing and screaming  
unaware that

as the days speed by  
two of us will die

demonstrators  
shot down  
by soldiers on rooftops  
in one of these very plazas

### III

Now it's me behind the wheel  
driven by blind panic

adrenaline pumping

lungs constricting

praying this chase to end

to end

to turn back the clock

to be home with my baby

to be home

but I've lost my way

lost my mind

careening down this highway

toward the brick wall

the shot gun blast

the billy club

the accuser's finger

stop me



## womb/tomb

My daughter says,  
    "Draw me a picture of your room  
        Mommy."

What shall it be?

Glaring white enamel sink and toilet  
squat against cement block walls  
    Do I live in a cellar bathroom?

Small, louvered windows  
    constrict the light  
    fracture my view  
        fenced-in yard  
        thin thread of highway on a  
        distant hillside

But then  
    there's the purple paisley bedspread  
apricot pink towel and washcloth  
green state shirts hung on the wall  
my watercolors  
    blue skies  
        rust red deserts  
        endless turquoise seas  
a chaos of color  
rends the claustrophobic order

Shall I draw  
the books and books and books and books  
each a ride over the razor wire fence  
    a friend whispering intimate secrets  
        late into the night's solitary silence

Or my plants  
    green limbed children  
    I water each day  
    till they preen their lushness  
    hum their assurances  
        I'm still a good mother

How do I draw  
my door

clanging open

clanging shut

by an officer's hand and command  
or the bustle and clamor of  
fifty-nine neighbors

I can never escape?

What do I draw for my daughter?  
a tomb

or a womb?

## early Saturday morning

early Saturday morning  
like a child

fleeing a nightmare

I creep to your room

your bed

your arms

We lie

back to front

two spoons

me

tucked snugly

into the soft folds

of your body

your heartbeat

a gentle metronome

slows my breath

takes the tension

of a long sleepless night

days holding tight to

bitterness

rage



Your soft words

"It wasn't fair"

release my

tears

rain

on parched fields

Uncurling our bodies

we rise

make coffee

settle down to knit

leaning on plumped up pillows

at opposite ends of the bed

amiably

facing

each other

I peek at you:

concentrated,

counting stitches

you look up

our eyes

meet

love

swelling my heart

like a dandelion

cracks a city sidewalk

blooms

into a smile

gentle

genuine

for you

# SUSAN SHERMAN

## A POEM THAT STARTS IN WINTER

*I would not try out strange words on you  
or my knowledge of languages (however slight)  
And have you believe it is not war  
That has been the primary motivation of my life*  
—July Poem / 1966

This is a poem for people without a history  
Whatever their color    Whatever their race  
Who can't remember their mother ever holding them  
Talking to them about their past  
Who find themselves in unknown places  
Without instructions    & without a guide

This is a poem for the children of immigrants  
Whose parents wanted so much to forget    to leave behind  
The places they were born    the places they fled  
They never spoke of those days to their children  
Never even told them their grandparents' names  
Who died leaving their children lost    and restless  
Rootless    hungry

This is a poem that starts in winter  
But never ends    A poem about people  
About individuals    With specific features  
Proper names

This is a poem for Sarah whose mother was Jewish    but no one could tell  
She had blond hair blue eyes    It was 1939  
She taught Sarah a lesson about vision  
How to make people see past you    How to hide  
In moments of doubt they would always throw it in your face  
You could count on it  
"Dirty Jew"

This is a poem about words



This is a poem about Sarah's mother  
Who never stepped inside a synagogue after the age of eight  
Who never forgave her own parents for what she was born  
An immigrant poor  
Who lived her contradictions until the day she died  
Who left her lie behind her A legacy drawn  
In her daughter's face

This is a poem for Sarah's mother A poem about words

This is a poem for Barbara 1961 Whose father warned her  
If she was involved with those radicals at Berkeley those "Reds"  
He would be the first to give her name to the FBI To turn her in  
She never doubted he was serious She learned that day never to trust  
& never to speak

This is a poem about trust

This is a poem for Carole who cried out in shame  
Discovering her ancestors had killed & robbed  
To gain a country Carole who had a history  
She no longer wished to claim

This is a poem for a Vietnamese poet Havana, 1969  
Who praised three young Americans for their courage  
Standing against their own country their own people  
For what they felt right  
He had no choice was forced to fight No virtue in that  
They thought him too generous mistaken at best But still it helped  
But still it healed

It was winter then too

This is a poem about digging images from rage when all else fails  
When there is no common past  
An anger embedded so deeply  
It survives

This is a poem about war

This is a poem for Brenda who fell in love with a woman  
Years before it became a political act  
Who decades later still stumbles over words long forbidden  
Jealous of those who proclaim their love nonchalantly  
"Lesbian"

This is a poem for Brenda  
This is a poem about words  
A poem about winter    A poem about war

This is a poem for those caught between worlds  
Squeezed between times    For people without a history  
Who connect with no ancestral past

This is a poem about them    about me

This is a poem about words like dialogue compassion  
which have yet to appear    but people this poem  
About war contradiction rage choice anger  
Trust

This is a poem that starts in winter  
But never ends

This is a poem about people    individuals  
with specific features  
Proper names



## MIGRATION

Birds fly south    chained to the wind    They are wild  
not free    There is a difference    They move  
without reflection    choice    driven by instincts  
they cannot begin to understand    What use are words  
against such need    I thought I could lose my self  
in wings    but I am held by memory    desire  
imagined futures    Citizens of air    of water  
earth and sea    we are sisters and brothers  
bound together by a destination that calls us  
in our blood    But only I can turn around  
fly north    change direction    return again  
Fly south into the wind



## LONG DIVISION

Nothing ever really seems to add up  
My mother aged frail at seventy-eight  
*But I don't feel old don't feel any different  
than I ever did*

No different than sixty long years past  
before her marriage drained sustained her  
with rings and furs A crazed husband's  
unloaded gun pressed against her willing throat

Another piece of meaningless melodrama  
in a world where children starve old people die  
Lacking a few dollars to pay their bills

She used her talent looks to marry  
money tossed her only daughter aside  
a complication An imagined contender for her throne

I could have loved you forever Mom if you had let me  
As it was I left gave you hardly a backward glance  
kept you from becoming my world

Only to find the world becoming you

It's not my childhood that betrays me  
I've digested that spit out what I couldn't use  
It's a world that's taken on your face  
the duplicity of your tongue your style

Alone at night sensation sinks too deep  
In the mind's open cavern language  
disappears Everything is washed away

On the faces of women a fear of endings  
Why is it that most things come so late  
Days or years after you want or need them  
Compassion disappears by then The self becomes  
a wall Pain turns one inward Anger  
is the outward surge

Even knowing what is real How righteous anger  
saves Whether I will it or no  
Her voice remains

## CASUALTIES OF WAR

*Today, we know very well that it is not necessary to be wounded by a bullet in order to suffer from the fact of war in body as well as in mind.*

*—Frantz Fanon: The Wretched of the Earth*

There are some pictures in the mind  
impossible to forget Over the phone  
her words barely perceptible her voice thin  
*Susan, I love you* Both knowing  
these are the last words that will pass between us ever  
As she slips back into a coma to die at thirty-five  
a breast tumor undetected until too late

There are secrets we shared connected in friendship  
struggle that will never be revealed and others  
The night she appeared at my door suitcase in hand  
crying stunned arriving home unexpectedly  
to find her boyfriend activist hero  
with a needle in his arm a packet of white powder  
balanced on the bathroom shelf

*Susan, I love you* I put down the phone  
never pick it up again to say her name  
With all we went through together that night  
for the first time I call myself coward  
Sonia we both knew it was just too much to bear

And now years later I sit and watch the death  
of another friend We don't share the same events  
have lived different lives Only one secret  
passed between us AIDS  
There is no way to hide that name

This time I sit day by day watching him slowly  
die watching the words drift away from his lips  
and then his mind as less and less enters  
through closed and hooded lids This time  
it is already too late to turn away

I see now how struggle can drain you wear you out  
in unexpected ways A war is hardest  
when the enemy is undefined when so few recognize  
there is an enemy a human face beneath inhuman acts  
Make no mistake this is no elegy no lament  
These people are not victims martyrs They are casualties  
of a war they struggled all their life to win



# CHARLES FREDERICK

*from Tridium for Steve*

## HOLY THURSDAY

Feast of the Last Supper—  
Bread and Wine  
set on the table  
of his black hair and brown skin—  
Mi hombre: Chicano, Jewish  
(Pesach and Maundy Thursday)  
*Hoc Est Corpus Meum:*

I was afraid / to touch / the host /  
*Noli me tangere*  
But the mystery you arouse in me  
thins the fat of my hate—

Sooty with sin, my hands hover  
like burning angels  
over the ice of your skin,

this moment,  
trembling, transfiguration—  
*Agony in this garden,*  
smoke from my mouth,

Crying words, words  
to wrestle with our silence, words  
to force roads, reckless betrayals  
(forty years) through the forest  
of our fear,  
—*words accepting / this cup of wine—*

no matter what words,  
always the same shout:  
your name from my name,

*faggot, queer, cocksucker—lover*

Elijah! the sky at last  
has broken  
with water, with rain, with tears  
—there will be no more lies—

*Baby!* at last this desert is broken  
with the flowers of your eyes

\* \* \* \* \*

Baby doll, Bethlehem star:  
you are my first Christmas,  
hell's harrowing  
finally over, finished—  
this radiance everlasting  
quickenning the body, love, the hope  
made flesh, no more will flesh  
be punishment.

Born not in manure and straw,  
but from the first smile  
on your unshaven face  
(on a San Francisco night),  
this Outlaw Eros was swaddled  
in a jockstrap

and I threw dice  
snake eyes / closet eyes of my past  
gambling for the chance,  
criminal and soldier, woman and man  
to tear it away,

ripping you down from the tree,

(Eve was right:  
who cares about everlasting life  
if you've never made love?)

*Ecce Homo*  
stripped naked and free,  
making you mine to fuck, baby,  
mine to love, mine,  
my one and only  
(illegal in twenty-six states)

(frightened  
of the lust  
that threw me  
to the ground,

where once  
I was lost  
now at last  
I am found),

almost too scared  
by your beauty  
to move,  
but giving in  
to you, this baptism,  
I redeem my sin

Gathering  
the glittering skirts  
of desire, I race,  
breakneck and foolish,  
under the full moon Hollywood night,  
after your receding back, daring  
threats of hell and home—  
to want you for my own

(and that you too  
might want me,  
the last two wishes  
of a Judy Garland song)

\*\*\*\*\*

Hair scented with oil  
he, the beloved, lay his head  
on my chest

This is peace, promiscuous,  
obsession, drunkenness:

*Hic est enim calix sanguinis mei*  
this is the Chalice of my Blood  
of the new and everlasting covenant  
this is the meaning of all mystery  
which shall be shed for you  
and for all others  
so that sin might be forgiven

*This is peace, promiscuous,  
obsession, drunkenness:  
This is the Chalice of my Blood*

and if it is incarnate, truly,  
and not just a riddle of God  
then it is the moment after,  
for the both of us,  
jism—spent from love's exertion,

if truly it is the word made flesh  
then it must be cocks erect, balls  
drawn tight, dickhead swollen in my mouth,  
you grab at the back of my head,  
to hold on, hold on  
in this ecstasy, jism,  
the last supper  
is the night before the Passion of our Lord,

if it is incarnate, truly  
then it is my mouth on your mouth, my tongue  
licking your asshole, dripping  
spit in the hair of your scrotum, I smell and I  
touch and I taste, my fingers twisting  
nipples (*Hoc Est Corpus Meum*) no longer  
being afraid to fuck (*Body of Christ*),  
to love

And if it is not truly incarnate,  
I will search no further; there is no God  
(but there is, O lord, there is, Body/ of Christ)  
*Alleluia:*

In this Body  
—his and my own—  
I find love's name:  
we are brought  
back to life.



## GOOD FRIDAY

At first your pain  
had nothing to do with AIDS  
and the oblivion  
was supposed to be  
from love, baby, not death.  
You told me the somebody  
you wanted to be  
and I said, sure, I believe you—  
where you were thirsty,  
I was hungry

and you told me, no one else  
ever had before, not this way,  
not where somebody gave you a name—  
you were so thirsty, honey,  
for a name.

You left me for weeks on end  
and tried to keep me  
in the dark  
Just before you left me  
for good,  
I had to visit you  
downtown, where someone  
was paying your bills.  
Listen, baby,  
it's not hickies  
(although it may be love)  
that leaves you  
that black and blue

One night you came by  
your eyes were swollen  
but not from tears  
your clothes were ripped  
your money gone, your watch,  
your ring, you forgot  
I wasn't supposed to know  
how often this was the way  
you searched for love  
You rode the horse  
it's as good a chance/as any/  
it was the needle  
that made you sick

Sometimes you beat them up,  
but much more often  
they did it to you  
Don't combine your business  
with your pleasure, honey,  
baby doll, it won't ever work  
you just get rolled out on the street  
with a mouth full  
of blood and broken teeth

I took you in,  
(this way you had  
of falling in a woman's arms)  
(But I told you  
with me you always had a home)  
you weren't a good wife,  
not a good hustler,  
not even good low life,  
but maybe, just maybe  
(with my hunger and your thirst)  
we could learn

With my money and some help  
I brought you back  
near the end

four flights were almost more  
than you could do  
you wouldn't take off your cap  
when we lay in bed, your  
hair was gone and  
where once your skin/ had been  
cafe con leche brown  
now it was the ashes  
of a long ago life,  
no warmth but fever  
and where once your eyes  
were obsidian fire  
now at best,  
they were a weak winter's light

*welts from purple cancer,  
like something inside  
was eating you alive*

You were worn out and worn down, afraid  
and marking time, in pain, your mind  
was slipping, you would not be persuaded  
there was anything left to love and  
I wouldn't hurt you by insisting  
on something you had never believed

When I sat  
in that tasteless California house  
the night of your funeral,  
where an old friend

of yours and mine sat nervous  
about the much younger man  
whose bills he was paying and who  
was about to leave him,  
he said your last words were  
that you deserved this

*and the temple ripped in two  
and they said,  
truly this was the son of god*



## LES BRIDGES

### Seven Trees

If conifers had feelings  
perhaps these would have  
pined for Nova Scotia.  
There are no forests for them.  
They live in barrels, and if that were  
not depressing enough, instead of whiling  
away their lives on immaculate  
grounds of a Greenwich estate, they  
were imported to this pavement,  
rolled like drunks onto St. Marks Place  
in front of white building  
where narcotics abusers suck on  
coffee from paper cups,  
shift from foot-to-foot as though  
trying to balance their uneasy lives  
on the edge of razor blades.

Trees have been drenched with  
urine, cut by heroin, methamphetamine  
'ludes. Unfathomable juices  
have loosed a fungus  
that creeps through  
branches like relentless  
snapping turtle cruising through  
pool of trapped ducklings.

Even as death wraps  
brown fingers around their  
moldy bottoms, trees hang tough,  
their crowns remain green beacons  
amid the buzz of pink neon,  
the silent screams of stunted lives.

*Manhattan  
April 8, 1992*



# NADINE MOZON

## SOME DAYS (for New Yorkers)

Some days I say (FRANTICALLY)  
Gotta get outta this city!  
Not another crowded train  
broken down in a tunnel.  
No more stepping over homeless  
as I walk home in the rain.  
Can't find seat on subway platform  
Cuz I'm in somebody's bedroom.  
Always waking up some woman when I need the ATM  
cuz she's sleepin' at the door!  
Still I'm dodging pools of vomit on the subway station floor.  
Yet another white chalk outline of slain body on my street.  
Had enough of woman crying on the F train at my feet.  
Not the legless man again, on his wheel board rolling by,  
Collection can around his waist, which is his whole body's base!  
How do I live in such a place!?!?

BUT THEN...SOME DAYS...(RELAXED AND EASY DOES IT...)  
I ride my bike 'cross Brooklyn Bridge  
...saunter through Botanical Garden  
...sit by lake at Prospect Park.  
Some days...I start from home on Lower East  
and window shop my way uptown.  
Weave in and out a zillion stores  
and then begin to chart my ground.  
Start drifting west on 51; hit Central Park at 59:  
the trees, the leaves, the carousel,  
the zoo, the kids, the air,  
the boats and all the music, musicians everywhere;  
the artists painting what they "see,"  
the show at Met, the bikers/skaters rolling free.  
Above the park: The rhythm of life!  
Shop all along 125,  
a Wilson's meal at Amsterdam & 1-5-8  
On days like these this city's great!  
And then I stop and grin and say...  
...some days I say  
...I think I'll stay.

# MEENA ALEXANDER

## I Dream of Niagara

I want to take you to a place  
where birds lie crammed under stone  
alive still under the lip of stone  
and tons of water, poured over North American boulders.

There goes the Maid of the Mist,  
passengers decked out in blue raincoats  
hoods and all, flesh packed into plastic  
the impenetrable blues  
(sky, air, water) fronting us

As if in a scene from a war  
no one ever witnessed, a blindness magnified —  
the clear light of a native land  
without which exile is inconceivable  
boldly struck into glass, a transparency  
some turn of the century photographer  
cut for pleasure  
the mind suddenly at ease  
in a deception it has willed itself to take for granted

Consider this unreal map, place names  
picked out with a pin, nullities of paper  
ghostly barbed wire, invisible trenches  
rocking ever so slightly on the choppy waves

Or the magazine cover you set before me:  
soldiers squatting under a flag pole,  
lips pressed into gas masks, eye covers bulging,  
everything misting over, in the fine spray.

Will the boat ease into black rock?  
Will the blue burst where feathers flicker?

How poor the light is, how little we can see  
of this prelude to peace  
that sudden end  
conceived in the great mercy of sunlight



When in the middle distance gulls  
let loose from these North American falls  
teeter and keel

                    a spillage of wings  
scoring an impossibly green field  
where mothers stroll past fist sized boulders,  
sibilant waterfalls, white paper boats, whispering:  
'At last, at long, long, last.'

## Sweet Alyssum

'I am grateful' she said to me  
'for the room a bomb makes when it falls'—she said this  
sitting straight under a tree  
what tree, I have forgotten now.

She said she was your sister.

I listened to her, burying my head in my hands.  
She did likewise.

The olive root from your childhood  
its colour spent in dreams,  
an arrowhead from a bronzed  
hillside in Jerusalem  
terrible city of the deity  
where children pound fists against  
rocks coloured like cheap plastic balls,

crimson, phosphorus, ivory  
the ballast of desire you discovered so early,  
casting its gravity against  
the skeletal forms of love we bear within.

'Wen Beitak?' they asked 'Nad Evida?'  
'Where is your home?'

                    the child battling the four-gated wind  
hair blown back, crying into his own eyes  
in the schoolyard rough with golden mustard bloom  
at the edge of no man's land.

\* \* \*

In your dream you came to Ellis Island,  
to a humpbacked apple tree  
right where the boats stop,  
it stoops over, casting its fruit into black water.  
The dream doubled up like a pregnancy  
you saw yourself a child again,  
at the gates of great Jerusalem.

'He has no home now,  
you know that, don't you?'  
She said turning towards me,  
the woman who claims to be your sister  
'As for me, I am grateful  
for what I have.'

As she moved, digging her heels into rock  
I saw the left side of her face  
where skin had fused into bone

so deep the burning went

'Maria Nefeli who loves the cloud gatherer'  
I whispered  
                'or Draupadi born of fire  
                                            surely you are she  
or Demeter even, poised at the bramble pit  
where love drove her  
or Sita clinging to stone

'Look here is flowering mustard he brought me  
from Bethlehem  
from the old schoolyard filled  
with children, before  
it fell.

Take it, please.' Sweet alyssum too.





Photos: Margaret Randall



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# MARGARET RANDALL

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## Gracias A La Vida

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—for Ana and Louis

*Gracias a la vida que me ha dado tanto. . .*

"I give thanks to life for it has given me so much," sang Violeta Para, the great Chilean folksinger who wove her spell from a circus tent in one of Santiago's parks. That was the first *peña*, a place where poets and musicians and young people came to turn their pain and vision into song. Latin America's New Song Movement emerged from that tent and set up residence worldwide.

Violeta Para didn't live to see a people's government voted into power in 1970. She put a gun to her head three years earlier—legend says it was the unreturned love of a younger man. But when Popular Unity arrived—the first democratically-elected socialist government in the Americas—her spirit must have danced. Three years the experiment lasted, three years of people reclaiming their copper and their energies.

Three years, too, in which the United States prepared and supported an elaborate take-back. On September 11, 1973, Chilean General Augusto Pinochet and the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency pulled off a military coup that left a wake of torture, disappearance, and death overwhelming enough so that it has had to be excised from official memory as the years unfold.

Although these events are barely two decades old, there are many who do not remember. As in our country where young people think of Vietnam as a movie location, do not recognize names like Trujillo, Batista or Somoza, and believe that people would have jobs only if they weren't so lazy, memory has been bent to fit the victors' version of history. Neo-liberalism is the new Latin American flag. Its stained cloth wipes the crevices of recall until a woman running a boarding house can smile and say: "But it was a civil war we had here; if some were killed, that's just the way it is." And then, as if to make her point completely: "And anyway, they probably deserved it."

In the center of a street map of Santiago de Chile the General Cemetery is a sprawling unevenly-shaped expanse of green. The Catholic Cemetery, separated by a street or two, is slightly smaller and much more exclusive, "where the truly rich are buried," Gladys tells me later.

My friend Gladys has returned, one of thousands of exiles, under the umbrella of this new "democracy." This painful facelift that has remade the downtown capital and makes walking its upscaled streets seem like walking in Boston or San Francisco—except that *some* of the signs are in Spanish.

Many who did not escape, those with names and those still nameless, are joined in the General Cemetery's unquiet expanse. As we enter through the



broad gate off Recoletta Avenue, I am met by the hot wind of their voices, hoarse sound bytes of memory. Three of us make this pilgrimage: my daughter Ana, who has come to study in this place; her partner Louis who is with her here; and me—a visitor.

I was last in Chile in the Fall of 1972. The Popular Unity government was threatened but still vibrant then. Great murals brightened public walls. You could feel the energy of people working for possibility. The truck owners' strike was in full force and a strict eleven p.m. curfew meant I'd sleep each night wherever the hour found me.

Twenty years. No easy way to describe or cipher the process by which a people can be broken, but silencing memory is a big part of it. The city is modernized almost beyond recognition. The *poblaciones*, those old fighting shanty towns that once rimmed the urban area, have disappeared. Pinochet murdered many of their inhabitants, then built "model" housing for those who were left, disheveled highrises with water and electricity but no soul.

I think of Roque Dalton's poem about another dictator in yet another Latin American country:

They say he was a good President  
because he built cheap housing  
for the Salvadorans who survived...<sup>1</sup>

*La Moneda*, the place where a Comrade President was forced to take his own life, looks as it did before the bombs and cannon blasts drew flames and funnels of black smoke from its classic facade. Two large black dogs now run and jump across a perfect lawn. One soldier in Prussian dress stands guard before the main door.

Throughout the city, soldiers are everywhere: protecting banks and other public buildings: the *milicos* with their instruments of war. The *carabineros*, or police, are more mobile, arriving in a rush of vehicles: small black and white vans with their insignia of crossed rifles like the crossed bones of old pirate flags.

People walk quietly. Numbed. They speak quietly, in that soft lilting Spanish that almost always rises gently at the end of a sentence. "*Claro...*" Meaning both "of course," and "do you understand?" A manifest courtesy, though not as simple as it often sounds. Scarred fields of memory rise and fall behind the eyes. We enter a neighborhood shop to buy a piece of bread. Customers stand quietly in several lines.

Having chosen the loaf we want, we must join a line to receive a small white swatch of paper. *Esos papelitos*, we say, laughing. Another line eventually ends before the person who will verify that what has been entered on this paper is correct—then add another, stapling the two together. After a third line the stapled slips are examined by someone whose single task it is to do so. We pay. And a fourth employee hands us our bread. It is the way things are done. And none of the several workers would consider doing another's job.



Still, there are cracks in the facade. The waiter who follows Ana and Louis out of the restaurant and tells them his father voted for Allende. The beauty parlor attendant who catches Ana's eye for one transparent second as a customer praises the General and says she dreams nightly of Pinochet, her personal Savior. Later the attendant tells Ana she cannot speak here, but wants her to know she does not agree. "We must meet and talk," she insists, "I will tell you about the disappeared in my own family..."

Entering the General Cemetery is like slipping through one of these instantaneous cracks. I reach around myself and remember to keep on breathing. "We'd like to visit Victor Jara's grave," Ana says to an elderly man in dark blue overalls. Gardener or gravedigger, perhaps both. "Can you tell us where it is?"

"You'll never find it," he asserts. "Here, this gentleman will go with you..." And a second blue overalled worker climbs quickly into the car. Waving us past the pay point, he signals to the guard: "It's okay. They're with me."

Brief fragments of conversation cut this overcast morning as we travel along narrow grave-lined streets: "Go on...keep going...turn right here...take a left..." Where the old families are buried, mausoleums rise in varying manifestations of wealth. The names are recognizable, even to a visitor: Montt, O'Higgins, Pratt, Allende...

As class status diminishes, collective walls replace the single monuments. In these the dead are buried in tiers, five or six stories high. Here and there little balconies support vases of flowers or planters hold more permanent gardens. Canvas awnings, tiny grill-work gates, miniature columns, statuettes, religious icons, personal notes: messages from the living to the dead—or from the living to themselves.

It is before one of these shelved walls that we finally stop on the far side of this crowded terrain. Our guide points to Jara's tomb, four levels up. Behind a low stone wall, fresh flowers almost obscure the singer's name, cut awkwardly and painted in black upon the plain cement. Below the name is "September 1973," the date that marks too many of this cemetery's resting places. Above the name and to the right in much smaller letters are the inscriptions "Gigi 91" and "Leno 91." We do not know what they mean.

"Thank you, *Don*," Ana says, using the formal *Sir*. And then, "What is your name?"

He seems taken aback. "My name doesn't matter..."

"I just wanted to be able to address you by it," Ana insists, by way of explanation.

But the man remains adamant.

"Would you like me to take some flowers away, just for a moment so you can read the inscription?" He has seen that I am trying to record this place with my camera.

"Yes." I smile gratefully. And he hops up onto the wall to clear the obscuring display.

Two young trees in front of Jara's tomb bear recent messages to the Communist songwriter and singer. One message records lines from a song: "*Mi*



*canto es de los andamios / para alcanzar las estrellas...* My song is scaffolding / to reach the stars." On a photograph of Jara with an inward gaze and about to extract a cigarette from between his lips, are the dates 20.IX.32 and 16.IX.73. September, month of death and renovation.

Victor Jara was rounded up with thousands in the days following the coup. In the Chile Stadium—one of several detention centers—the story goes, they made him play his guitar and sing, while they tortured and murdered those around him and finally shattered his wrists. Then they shot him.

And he kept on singing.

Later the words of his last song surfaced, smuggled out of the stadium. They sound today, an echoing bridge to the brutality of those days and months—and years:

There are five thousand of us here  
in this small part of the city...  
here alone are ten thousand hands  
that plant seeds  
and make the factories run...  
Let...the world  
cry out against this atrocity!  
We are ten thousand hands  
that can produce nothing...  
How hard it is to sing  
when I must sing of horror...<sup>2</sup>

We turn from the wall. And suddenly find ourselves facing long rows of black metal crosses, hundreds or thousands, most bearing the simple N.N.—*ningún nombre*, no name—of the "disappeared." This is *Patio 29* of a cemetery permanently defaced by fascism. This is where the army brought many of the bodies.

The section was only revealed to the public a few years back, following the plebiscite in which a startling majority of Chilean voters refused to say yes to Pinochet as president for life. It was then that forensic specialists were able to trace some of the bodies' identities, adding names where there had only been questions, waiting.

As we stand there, drained of feeling, trying to absorb the weight of these rows of simple crosses, our unnamed guide begins to speak. Disconnected phrases lurch from his lips. He says he has been working in this cemetery for 31 years, digging graves, sweeping the walkways, cleaning weeds, attending to the dead. He is trying to tell us what it was like in September of 1973, when they began bringing in the caskets. Dozens. Then hundreds. "We stayed late each night," he says. "We worked all night long. Night after night. And all day too. *Estos son los hijos del Pinoccio*—these are Pinocchio's children."<sup>3</sup> With sad irony.

The man's words come in a flat tone, bursts of broken sound. He knows we cannot understand, but feels the need to witness. We know we cannot under-





Photos: Margaret Randall



stand, but need this piece to place among the others in the puzzle heavy in our hands. We stand staring at *Patio 29's* long even rows until I hear my own voice reaching back from some distant place:

"Would you take us to Allende's grave?" I ask.

Our guide nods. We get back in the car and retrace our route, past a slow funeral—mourners following the casket on foot—to the better-tended areas where members of the wealthier families rest. Among ornate chapels, their iron gates locked fast against intrusion, the Comrade President's two white marble spires rise. An etched plaque beneath a scattering of wilted carnations bears Allende's final words: "One day, the great avenues will open and the people will walk through..." The fading tap of that static-burdened radio emission repeats itself inside my skull.

Down a curve of steps is the crypt itself. Only two of the Allende-Bussi burial shelves are occupied as yet: one with Salvador, the other with his daughter Beatriz. I remember her suicide in Cuba, 1977. She was a doctor, had been her father's closest collaborator, was in the palace with him that morning of September 11th, her belly big with the child she would soon give birth to. He ordered her out, along with the others, "to tell the world what happened here." And she did leave and did tell of it, but finally wasn't able to make peace with the separation.

So now they lie together, behind the white marble. "His daughter," our guide reiterates. "As a woman, you should be interested in her." I don't even find the comment strange.

I continue to shoot my camera. He continues to suggest images I might want. And then: "You know, photography is not allowed in this cemetery." I gesture incredulity—then complicity. "It's okay," he assures me, "you came at the right time. The guards are on their morning coffee break..." And then, his voice swelling with thousands of voices:

"We were waiting for your visit."

1993: *Spring in Santiago,  
Late Fall in Albuquerque.*

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<sup>1</sup>"General Martinez" by Roque Dalton, *Taberna y otros lugares*. Casa de las Américas, Havana, Cuba, 1969. Translation by M.R.

<sup>2</sup>Fragment of Victor Jara's last song, written in and smuggled out of the Chile Stadium, September 1973. From *An Unfinished Song: The Life of Victor Jara* by Joan Jara, Ticknor & Fields, New York, 1984.

<sup>3</sup>In guarded voices or in the privacy of their homes, those who despise Pinochet call him Pinocchio, the liar. It is a play on his name and on the internationally popular children's tale.

# MARGARET RANDALL

## SOMETIMES I SLEEP WITH MY ARM AROUND YOUR HUNCHED SHOULDER

*This is not your typical conversation between  
the victimizer and the victim's son...*

—Juan José Dalton\*

The lines etched in my palm are broken  
like an ice field in spring.  
Beginning to force my hand  
they web a map of social destiny  
staring back at me.  
Let me tell you, Roque, it was a shock:  
happening on every evening's screen,  
gorging us with images—  
dissonant chorus of multicolor wings.

First there was the Wall, its pieces  
souvenirs in Iowa now,  
multiplied like a cross in earlier times.  
Three years. Almost nothing remains.  
Romania was the worst.  
Shadows bled shadows  
on the faces of orphans up for western grabs.  
Dictators like Roman coins  
riddled before a wall of perfect window panes.

Easy to speak of the brittle edges,  
States within States, no Monarch butterflies  
lost inside those mazes of stone.  
Mausoleums  
where men in suits walk aimlessly.  
It is that walking  
that chafes our tired skin,  
speaks loud this language  
coating our mouths with tar.

---

\*Juan José Dalton, describing his interview with Joaquin Villalobos, leader of the Salvadoran People's Revolutionary Army (ERP), who had confessed to having murdered the journalist's father eighteen years before. *Claridad*, San Juan, Puerto Rico, June 11-17, 1993.



Eighteen years since that broken May and  
the salt of betrayal lingers on my skin.  
The man from your organization,  
a leader confesses at last  
to false accusations, three months of torture  
and the murders: you and an unnamed comrade  
dead by the hands of those called  
brothers in the fight. Eighteen years  
and I still wait for the comic dream.

*Poets swallow a lot of angel gone bad<sup>1</sup>*  
you wrote: a line from U'Fleku,  
that tavern in Prague  
where European and Latin American  
communists who were also poets  
or also communists  
questioned the existential stone.

*It would all be so simple  
if we didn't insist upon discussing  
this matter of good and evil.  
Potassium chlorate, sulfuric acid,  
and gasoline: grace be with you  
in your fragile bottle . . .  
blessed be the fruit of your flame . . .<sup>2</sup>*

We all applauded the myth  
washing it down with whiskey  
or tropical rum,  
acknowledging here and there  
a reference to women:  
*Lucy,*  
*cover those knees of yours!*<sup>3</sup>

Roque, you who said  
*we can judge the moral underpinnings  
of a political system, a political institution,  
or a political person  
by the degree of danger they ascribe  
to being observed  
through the poet's satiric eye,*<sup>4</sup>

you who pleaded with Poetry: *forgive me*  
for having helped you to understand  
you are not made of words alone.<sup>5</sup>  
Sometimes I sleep  
with my arm around your hunched shoulder,  
stroke an ear redesigned  
to meet the wounded demands of passing.

And I cling to your loving irony  
for those—ourselves—who still believe.  
The great breach widens, a flutter of wings  
burning our heels.  
Comrade, brother:  
how do things look from over there?  
Are you in love? Still searching  
for that *aspirin big as the sun*?<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>From "Taberna," *Taberna y otros lugares*, Casa de las Americas, Havana, Cuba, 1969.  
Excerpts translated by M.R.

<sup>2</sup>From "Taberna."

<sup>3</sup>From "Taberna."

<sup>4</sup>"Poeticus Efficaciae" from *Roque Dalton Poems*. (Excerpt translated by M.R.)

<sup>5</sup>"Ars Poetica 1974" From *Roque Dalton Poems*. (Excerpt translated by M. R.)

<sup>6</sup>From "On Headaches," *Taberna and Other Places*.



# LARRY JONES

vautrin

—after balzac

fleurs mals sans merci  
such exhortation  
rather flammable  
local coloring  
embracing your check  
the metros glimmer  
glint red in your eye  
smoke and ash, and ash  
a votre sainte, lucien  
time in his bottle  
uncorked, submissive  
wealth is versical  
gold, sentimental  
take this silly ring  
you know i love you  
were i to touch you  
across this river  
i would call you charles  
paint with you some days  
become . . . familiar

lowell

your name on copley square  
should long have been expired  
alone of natural causes  
your fierce breathing pauses  
embalms the brackish air

clangour trolley peal all stops  
along a summer's reading  
acquaintances past due  
keeping up with the  
and they answer only to

romans teach the world  
what death has on rhyme  
always the first to know  
just when the pope will show  
one life at a time

Boston, 1979

# EVE PACKER

blu-blu

blue is my  
color, blue  
my shade, blue-indigo-  
violet the fast  
end of the  
spectrum:  
knocks you over,  
so you spit  
salt & sea  
pray for air  
get up, crack  
a wave, then  
fall again,  
kicking, gasping,  
diving til

you hit bottom  
& buried  
treasure, or  
a shark, may-  
be when  
you go that  
far, the shark  
is the treasure,

then what?



# MINROSE GWIN

## Aspens

*for Rebecca Wight*

Part of this story is true    most I made up.  
This much I know:

It is October.

We are two women walking the Sangre de Cristo Mountains.  
Aspen leaves fall in our hands on the path in the pines around us.  
Our dogs find a meadow which is nothing but gold. We lie in the  
sun that marks us copper. The sun spins light from your hair.  
My arms are dappled branches. My shoulders hold bird nests. My  
hands are the nervous sparrows. I think of Rebecca and Claudia  
in camp on the Appalachian Trail the man who saw them lie down  
together and chased them down and shot them like men do deer how  
Claudia had to leave Rebecca to die by herself and ran for help  
help what was it four miles two? with bullets in her body and  
blood trail in old leaves because of what he saw. I think of  
Rebecca gold melted down to ash how we took hands and circled  
the urn in a clearing in green Virginia woods to dance the shape  
of her lost body.

Now right now you meld gold and blood under my hand. I write  
on you the old stories of how we loved in the place between sea  
and land the circle and the edge how joy came and came in  
bright day and made shadows under full moon and you lift your  
light to the sky to the golden golden world and all the fancy  
dogs from the big-time dog show downtown break their leashes and  
come prancing up the mountain to dance the two-step to "Don't Let  
the Stars Get In Your Eyes, Don't Let the Moon Break your Heart"  
and our not-so-fancy dogs do an in-and-out through the crowd and  
then my old crippled dog Pudge rises from the dead and dances in  
the leaves on her two back legs that never worked right from the  
day she was born. A hawk circles in blue blue sky and when your  
cry leans out over meadow and down mountain the aspens lift  
their heads and quiver all in unison and the leaves roll down  
like bronzed ashes weeping for joy.



## Dream of My Mad Mother Dying

Last night I dreamed  
you dying  
your face covered with newspaper  
a lost woman sun scorched  
on a park bench at Fourth  
and Central on the hottest  
afternoon of the year.

I circle  
your face visibly buried  
in words  
hold out armfuls  
of yellow desert flowers  
try to read call you out  
call out your name.

Finding you on dark closet floor licking  
jelly and sweet pickle juice from sticky jars  
I wanted to take you in my arms like a lover  
drizzle sweetness straight to your heart  
rock you into the blooming place  
smear you with my life.

Now I see you in places you never saw.

I see you floating in a pink hot air balloon  
over the Rio Grande this blue blue sky  
bigger than any you ever thought of  
singing like you used to  
what the world needs now is love  
sweet love.

I see you as the cactus that never dies  
but blooms one flower at a time.  
I see how I picked your blossoms  
one by one  
and carried myself home.

## Six O'Clock Fight: New Orleans to Albuquerque/ One Stop Midland

Ash Wednesday and hungover  
we fly home on red neon  
Mardi Gras wings  
across the longest sky you've ever laid eyes on  
and farther out.

Three days ago  
on the redeye trip east  
we flew into pools of sunny side up  
and I thought that was really the miracle  
told those people in New Orleans about it over  
and over until they got bored  
said yeah they'd taken that flight once or twice  
themselves. The sunrise was nice.

(How do I tell you what I  
have seen? I write this  
from a cubicle. I wait my turn  
for the machine in the next room  
to see through this flesh. I wear  
a hospital gown open in front.  
The lead apron is optional.  
I hear through closed door  
so you found a lump  
yes on the left  
here? no there.)

I tell you this sunset  
back was long and lanky and  
hot and pink a sweet  
flowing river *rojo* we glide upon  
fold into when the hand  
strokes the place between  
curve and edge moves in time  
to a time that never ends but is always  
ending. I tell you this

is the way around the turn  
you made without knowing you were  
turning this is the way back  
to the other place. This  
is what you see  
when you say you can see forever.



# DOROTHY FRIEDMAN-AUGUST

## LADY POET

I am growing smaller here and in people's heads;  
some say I can caress the dead,  
others, that I am off writing children's books.  
They can't think of enough ways to punish me:  
one puts strawberries on my seat to stain me publicly,  
one puts ten paces between us whenever we meet,  
one bangs and pokes me in the groin as I lay on  
his broad chest,  
one believes my pulse and whistles on the water,  
one believes I am treeless and acquired my traits  
before my lips,  
one guarantees me an inner road of petals if I maintain space,  
one pushes the answer in my hand and babbles of arcs and folds  
of helices and monasteries.

## POEM TO A LOVER

Let's stop comparing charms.  
Let's stop in that white space  
where stars rush  
and go back home to prepare  
new addresses.  
And if you sense,  
that my blood has stiffened,  
I give you back with my fist and wholesale,  
and whisper I was born to you  
in an untrustworthy year,  
and you proceeded to surround me with fire,  
and I sang for you wet even when my soul was dry,  
and you never asked is the wine good  
but only if it was moist enough.  
No, it was not fine. The dance still  
sways in my blood and my breasts grow taut.  
Quiet without a tongue. And you never asked  
if it was I who was singing or if it was  
only the mountains.

# ENID DAME

## LILITH'S NEW CAREER

*No other she-demon has ever achieved  
as fantastic a career as Lilith.*

—Raphael Patai  
*The Hebrew Goddess*

In the last years of the century  
Lilith became Director of a Freshman Composition Program  
at an engineering college.  
This career advance surprised her.  
She always thought she was an anarchist,  
a Luddite, not an orderer.  
She always thought she was a poet.

Now she learns computer terminology  
sets up a Writing Center  
chooses textbooks    hires tutors  
makes coffee for the whole department.

This story is the same in many cultures.  
In Gilgamesh Sumer    in Kabbalistic Poland:  
the girl starts out at the bottom  
a lowly female demon  
a worker    unskilled    always on the night shift  
doing jobs no one else will touch  
always ends up somehow at the top  
of... something    for an eyeblink  
before they find her out.

It was more exciting in the old days  
when she got to sleep with God.

The computer keeps swallowing her words  
eating up her fantasies  
an image trembles on a screen  
then disappears  
where did it go?    no one here can tell her.  
It's a miracle    the techies treat it casually  
as she once treated Adam  
or her own history.



She makes her inner office  
into a garden  
not unlike the one she left:  
ferns swirl in radiator heat  
primroses change colors  
Wandering Jew shoots off toward the ceiling  
Swedish ivy hunkers down among his roots.  
She brings in yard-sale lamps with maps around their bases  
lights are soft brown moons    cats' eyes stare from bookmark.  
Her owls drop feathers on industrial gray carpet.  
She could take off her clothes here.  
But she never does.

Once she spilled freshbrewed coffee  
into computer's innards.  
It typed a message for her  
backward, on the monitor:  
*Messiah's gotten stuck in traffic.*  
*This pinhead's getting crowded.*  
*The angels aren't dancing.*

Her students  
are mostly earnest boys from other countries.  
They want to make it in America.  
They speak computer language  
but private stories scare them  
especially their own.

They come to office hours  
to protest their grades.  
She fidgets with her hair  
(cut short now, but still red)  
tries to seduce them  
into writing poetry.

## MESSAGES

1.

Mother give me a message:  
give me six words  
I'll weave them into a tapestry  
sestina the poem of sixes  
give me six choices  
give me six chances  
to remake the dangerous world.

2.

I'm driving a car  
off the edge of the blue earth  
the one in your painting mother  
the universe you constructed.  
Inside the frames of your mind,  
you weren't afraid of space.

3.

"Before I have my coffee,  
I'm not really here," you said.  
"So don't talk to me."  
I didn't. You fumbled dreamily at the stove  
in your pink robe,  
here and not here, visible yet unreal.  
If you weren't here, where were you?  
Coffee retrieved you:  
dark social liquid.  
Was coffee magic, then?

4.

You didn't believe in magic.  
Witches, you told me, were dangerous women.  
They lived at the edges of cranberry bogs.  
They didn't need men.  
They brewed bitter teas  
from herbs they collected,  
preferred the comfort of cats  
to a good wife's life.

(In Salem Village, they'd hang you  
for letting your kitten suckle  
the soft spot on your arm,  
you told me once, laughing.)



5.

Mama    what really happened  
in that bright narrow room  
where geraniums flowed in clay pots  
and cats purred in laundry baskets  
and all the clocks stopped  
and the stove turned its back  
on the drama:  
a woman stretched out on the floor?  
They say I was there, I was part of that story.  
(I don't remember a thing.)

Kitchens are dangerous places.  
Ask any failed suicide.  
Ask any woman artist.  
Ask any witch.

6.

Every green morning    mother  
I stand at my stove drinking coffee.  
Cats expand on windowsills  
spiders leave messages  
wildflowers swim in glass bottles.

(Mother, I bought this house  
with your spare change.)

## The Cold War Is Over

(Brighton Beach: Spring, 1990)

1.

The cold war is over.  
The words keep sprouting  
like signs in shop windows:  
the laundromat in my neighborhood  
where the dark-eyed Russian owner  
tells me to vote Republican.  
His son is bored, turns the volume loud on his boom box.  
The building is old, old as a grandmother.  
It smells like the ocean  
a block away, at low tide.  
Soon, the man tells me, soon there'll be new machines here:  
much better ones shiny ones capable of anything.  
Soon I can bring in my coat,  
the suede with the wayward seams, the baggy pockets,  
the memories of old women  
stitched in its lining.  
They'll make it all new, his machines.  
Anything's possible now.  
It won't even cost much.  
He smiles. But I'm not convinced.

2.

The cold war is over.  
I tell this news to the ghost  
of the man who buried his books:  
Lenin, John Reed, and the Paul Robeson records.  
He buried them in the backyard,  
next to the dead cat's bones, the tulip bulbs.  
That year, spring came late  
to the Pennsylvania milltown.  
On Easter Sunday,  
the bells spelled out messages  
we translated into our language.  
Old fears  
sang in our blood.  
I hid in my room  
and counted the thwacks of his shovel  
knocking against steel-ribbed earth  
ungiving at first then it yielded.  
We had another religion.  
One we didn't name.



3.

The cold war is over.  
They say, let's all dance in the streets,  
the streets we once melted through  
with our silken banners    our reds, our blacks    our wild hair  
and all our lovely defiance.  
That's why I can't move now.  
My feet have grown roots,  
my throat is frozen,  
my thoughts silent as bulbs.    Though I want  
to shout out something, or whisper.  
But all of the possible words  
have congealed into slogans,  
scribbles of cardboard,  
unwritten leaflets.

4.

The cold war is over.  
Maybe it's true.  
Two weeks from today  
some poets from Soviet Russia  
will meet some poets from Brooklyn.  
That's what it says  
in this letter, this invitation.  
Maybe they'll sign a treaty  
on the boardwalk at Brighton Beach,  
or have a poetry reading,  
exploding words like fireworks  
over the seagulls' complaints.  
Maybe they'll go out later  
for caviar and blintzes,  
or coffee and doughnuts.

This will be  
a great event  
for history, for the world

and for the family of ghosts  
I carry with me everywhere,  
a sackful of books  
in another alphabet,  
an old coat I can't take off;  
it's too valuable to lose,  
too fragile to trust  
to any shiny machinery.

# MICKI SIEGEL

## BLUE WOMAN

In a blue space  
a woman floats  
her arms held out  
she is falling  
very slowly  
her hands are waiting

She is floating  
she is falling  
she is floating  
she is falling

Her father is dead  
on the bathroom floor  
her mother's perfume  
is gin and tonic

The woman is floating  
her blue dress blends  
with the blue of space

On an afternoon harsh  
with metallic sunlight  
I walk to my garden  
the vegetables wait  
in silent rows  
I kneel on the earth  
cradle a yellow squash  
full and curved  
it splits open and  
crumbles in my arms  
tomatoes fall from  
the vine and disintegrate  
the tendrils of the pea plant  
are choking the corn

The blue woman has  
turned into a cloud  
she can see her lover  
in a 5th floor apartment  
on 8th Avenue  
he is in bed with a woman  
wearing rose perfume



I rise from the garden  
as it sinks into the ground  
all that remains is parched grass  
and a faint unpleasant odor

I walk past a houseplant  
grown to gigantic proportions  
its green leaves edged in purple  
in the distance is a gardenia tree  
with shining leaves  
and sweet smelling white flowers

A hose is coiled in the grass  
I lift it  
it is surprisingly heavy  
as I carry it to water  
the roots of the shining tree

The blue woman floats  
she sees her house in Maine  
her lover has smashed  
all the windows  
her favorite jade plant  
lies broken on the rug  
shattered glass is everywhere

She sees herself standing  
in her flowered silk robe  
her feet covered with dirt  
her lover has torn off her sleeve  
and is slowly twisting it  
into a thin strand

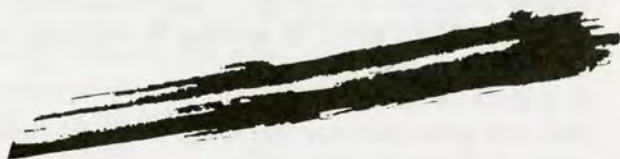
He flees into the night  
throwing money  
it falls like leaves  
on her naked body

I walk away from the gardenia tree  
then turn back to look at it  
one last time  
standing beneath its branches  
is the blue woman  
a shower of white petals  
is falling all around her

Outside my kitchen  
turtle doves coo in the morning  
the open windows inhale and exhale  
lace curtains in a fluid breeze

On the round wooden table  
are two cups of coffee  
I get my jacket from the closet

In the back  
where it has been  
hanging for years  
is my blue dress  
rising from it is  
the faint scent of gardenias



## DONALD LEV

### On the Day of Atonement

Get ready. Your way. Nothing  
in the room. The furniture  
removed. Only the freshest  
spider webs remain to  
challenge the judgment upon  
emptiness.

Sad lives might  
have poured out of you as from  
a shoe box of unsorted  
family photographs, were it  
not for the emptiness.

Oh, but surely something's  
left inside! Even one  
single scrap of passion  
could provide your spiders  
evidence in your defense.

Forgetfulness is your  
defense against everything  
but your apprehensions

which do not trouble you now,  
but join this meditation.



# KIMIKO HAHN

## The River and the Lights

*for my father*

I cannot see the river as I drive along it  
nor the bridge though its sharp lights  
pierce through the humid air.  
The flowering cherry and apple trees  
appear as phantoms wafting in the night  
under the yellow lamps.  
I drive away from the funeral arrangements,  
from the constant smell of mother in every corner  
of every box and basket my father rummages through.  
Even outside buying a newspaper he pauses at the jeweler's  
noting what she would like, would have liked.  
Or weeding the lawn, he expects her to kneel beside him.  
Outside the air distracts me.  
It is thick as the incense  
that will penetrate our clean hair and best clothes  
as we listen to the Lotus Sutra  
an incantation recited for thousands of years.  
I could drive on this parkway for hours  
but I am here under the street lights and restaurant signs  
of Manhattan where I am the mother of two daughters  
as my mother was the mother of two daughters.  
I must park, climb the stairs and turn the key to my floor-through  
where a light is on in every room.

## Even the Pine Has New Growth

Spring really is cruel  
with its blossoms of promise  
weighing down the branch  
with each new bloom.  
It is love for mother that instructs us  
to love other people  
and after she's died we look for an approximation  
in our sorrow.

## The Unbearable Heart

An hour in the train to New Haven, distant from the details of grief  
I look up from my class notes toward the salt marshes along the Sound  
clumped beneath a snow we thought we would not see this year  
a snow that has fallen now twice these past ten days  
since mother died, *instantly*, 10:35 p.m., struck by a southbound vehicle,  
an Arab American kid fleeing a car of white kids with baseball bats;  
a snow only matched by my father's head in his hand as I reach to touch him  
as I have never touched him, hoping to assert comfort.  
He wishes he could see her once more, to say goodbye,  
as Ted and I said goodbye to the body that was my mother's.  
Grief comes in spasms: the smell of banana bread, I think of the rotting fruit  
my sister and I tossed before father came home from Yonkers General.  
A flashlight. The flashlight she bought for my youngest daughter  
who always rummaged beneath their mattress for one.  
The orange day lilies the florist sent to our apartment:  
the lilies from the woods she brought to my wedding seven years ago.  
And after I told my six-year-old, *grandma died in an accident*,  
after tears and questions she suggested, *maybe now is a good time*  
*to explain what the man has to do with the babies*.  
So I chose one perfect lily from the vase.  
With the tip of a paring knife I slit open the pistil  
to trace the passage pollen makes to the egg cell  
the eggs I slipped out and dotted on her fingertip,  
their greenish-white, even as the air in this blizzard  
on the first day of spring that cannot cool the unbearable heart.

*As I write this, I still demand your attention, mother.*

It's true, nothing will ever be the same for anyone  
especially my small daughters who will eventually recall her  
not as a snapshot in the recesses of the brain  
but as the presence of incense in their hair long after the reading of  
the Lotus Sutra.



# JACK HIRSCHMAN

## DAY OF THE DEAD #2

*For Trancila*

The woman, as I walked by,  
who all year long drifting and bundled in dirty  
heavy clothes and carrying a sack of godknowswhat  
on her back, on top of which a beautiful  
cat with a collar and leash—rope sat as she walked,  
which died or got lost a month or so ago,  
and who always never smiled  
and in her passing eyes looked  
enduringly mad and ragpickingly alone,  
now is down on the Portsmouth Square  
grass—ledge above the moon—splashed sidewalk  
wallowing with kisses in the neck of a guy  
she's found on the way  
and going at his skull as if it were made of sugar  
on this Day of the Dead night which is  
home to all homeless lovers.

## ON THE QUESTION OF GERMANY

The East German woman said:

"But we don't want foreign factories  
which exploit Third World countries;  
ours don't exploit Third World countries."

But it was too late,  
it's too late,  
and soon it will be too late  
even for the words I just wrote.

Standing on a soupline  
out in the cold.

The East German man went on:

"We're vehemently opposed to re-unification.  
It'll make us second-class citizens.  
Our revolution is for socialism reformed."

But it was too late,  
it's too late,  
and soon it will be too late  
even for the words I just wrote.

Swastikas are appearing  
like termites.

"Yes, we're poor, we need more goods,"  
the East German weekender said,  
"but not if we have to turn into wood  
when we see workers humiliated."

But it was too late,  
it's too late,  
and soon it will be too late  
even for the words I just wrote.  
Here comes another  
shitment of pot.

"We'll fight for self-determination  
tooth and nail," East German opposition said.  
But capital answered: "You need a dentist,  
and after that, a manicurist."  
It was too late,  
it's simply too late,  
and soon it will be too late  
even for the words I just wrote.  
Obsolete  
to robots.

## NEW ABOLITIONIST POEM

Burned me up outloud  
and it has for as long as I can remember  
backs with cataracts of whip-attacks on them,  
and chained wrists  
and floggings  
and the gogmagog blows  
and the bags thrown overboard  
and the blue bethels  
where we gathered, hands on wood, palms on  
would you? and you do, and the flails then  
and the fists hailing the fight-back  
to get back to take back the liberty  
we were and still are being looted of.

So now you, bloodmoney-blue,  
and you, chumpchanger,  
and you who've bought their "shame-on-you"  
sliding through the cracks they've cut  
out of your mother's face,  
for crying outloud  
get that fire of yours together,  
we got hands and arms and hooks,  
get that righteous tinder going,  
we got to burn down the weather  
that's turned everyday to nada,  
make freedom free, not the same-old  
same-old shuck  
that nails one to the dirty Buck.

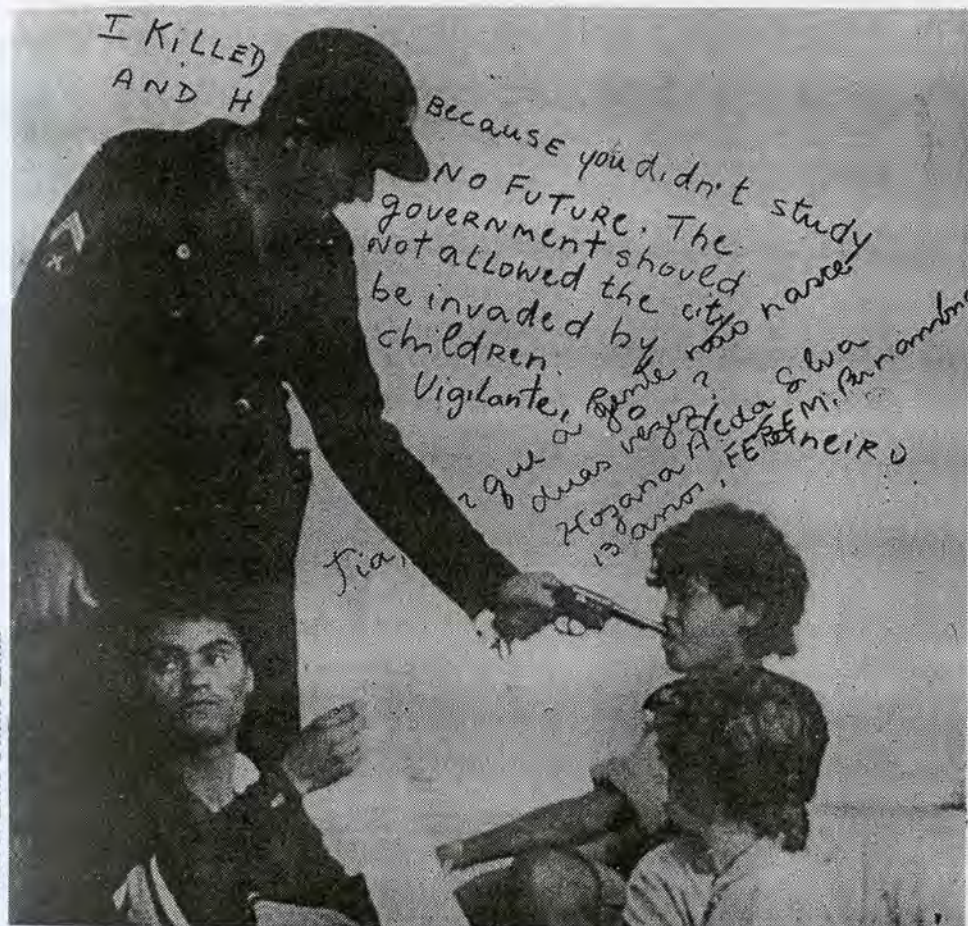


Photos of Installation: T. Charles Erickson



**Diary Of Images: *Cirandas***  
**JOSELY CARVALHO**





Cirandas is an extended project examining violence against children, especially in Brazil and the United States. The title refers to innocent children's games, played by moving and singing in a circle. For several years I have been collecting material on all aspects of children's rights. In February 1993 I went to Brazil, spending two months in Recife, Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro gathering material.

It seemed unfair for a virtual stranger to steal these children's most intimate moments of sadness, loneliness, anger and torture, so I decided to wait until the next, longer visit to begin making new photographs and built this exhibition from my existing photos of children, collected through the years, and added to them images already taken by other photographers, activists and video-makers.

Of tremendous help to me in this project were Ana Vasconcelos, founder of Casa de Passagem, a center for street girls in Recife; Maria Stella Graciani, activist and director of the Nucleo de Trabalhos Comunitarios at the Pontificie Universidade Catolica in Sao Paulo; and Carlos Bezerra, coordinator of Excola, a program focusing on drug abuse among street children.

In some parts of Brazil there are now three generations of children whose home is the streets. Some store owners hire vigilantes to exterminate them. One anonymous killer left this note with his small victim's body: "I killed you because you were not studying and you had no future. The government should not allow the city streets to be invaded by children."

[Between 1988-1990, 4,611 children died as a result of extrajudicial execution. More than four children a day. 75%-80% of those assassinated were Brazilians of African heritage. 58% or Brazil's children or approximately 30 million youngsters live below the poverty line—Brazil Network and the Movimento Nacional de Meninos e Meninas de Rua (MNMNR)]



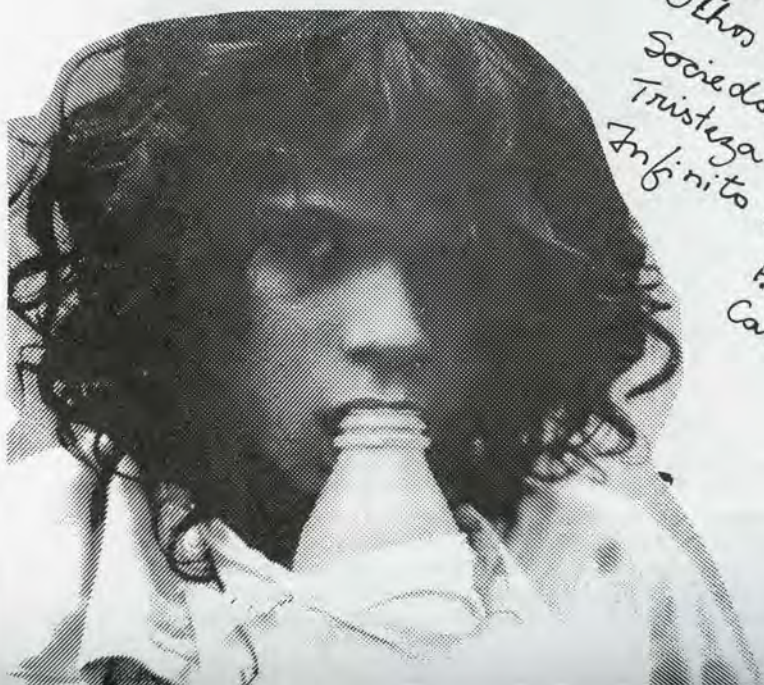


Auntie, I think I am  
rotten inside.  
A. Recife, Brazil

What do you expect of future  
only death, auntie. People like  
don't get to be twenty years old.  
A.M. 13 years. Recife



Fome  
que não me deixa dormir  
nem mesmo sorrir.  
Sorriso calado  
Choro sufocado  
Beijo aguçado  
Olhos inchados.  
Solidade mal humorada  
Tristeza sem fim  
Infinito da fome.  
Fátima Ribeiro  
Casa da Pombagem, Recife, Bra





I'm afraid that the violence and drug abuse are not going to stop. People are going to keep on dying of poverty, homelessness, drug wars and AIDS.

Nancy Torres, 4th grade P.S. 28 Tremont, the Bronx

Tia, já passei por vários lugares e ninguém me quiz! Porque ninguém me quer?

C.F. 8 anos, Recife, Brasil

Duntie, why can't we be

Hoana Alves da Silva, 13 years, F.E.B.M. school



my fears. My fears are a lot of things. My fears are that I'm not going to live to see the future. I say this because there is so much killing going on in high schools.

Francisca Ho Sang, 4th grade, P.S. 28 Tremont, the Bronx



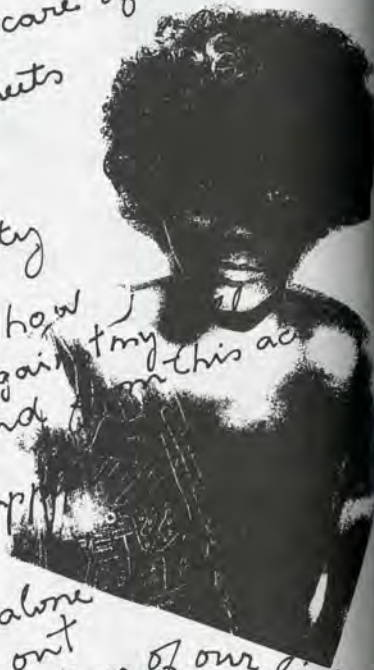




Sons of Bitches  
It all began when I was born  
Torture, discrimination, suffering  
Hunger thirst rejection  
And what I wanted most of all  
I couldn't have - Respect from those around  
I grew up taking care of myself  
Walking the streets  
Delinquent where  
drug addict thief  
That's what society  
thought of me.

Sometimes I think, how  
far I going to be able to go  
being female and black -  
two things against me.  
Ladeeta Smith

Without even knowing how  
I lost my virginity again  
I was beaten raped and  
my son was born.  
I thought this couldn't happen  
I never thought I  
wanted to die.  
Clean city empty land  
I am suffering - I am alone  
Denied! I am out  
This is the story of our lives.



Esther Ribeiro,  
Casa da Pornagem, Recife,  
Brazil







While I am growing up  
 I see a lot of young people  
 die, especially in this year.  
 Now, I have this strange feeling. The world  
 is going to end soon because  
 everyone is dying.  
 Willayle Saybe, 7th grade  
 J.S. 148, Monisoma, The Bronx

Street Children  
 Running quickly never stopping  
 weak shaken legs  
 Hungry, I must steal  
 I must be quite  
 The President shouldn't hear  
 my brother lies in a coffin  
 my mother cries  
 Damned job that didn't let  
 my father stay  
 Rejected sister  
 For money allows to  
 Life without love  
 That doesn't allow us to love  
 Either Riggins, C. Pomacern  
 Riggins, C. Pomacern





# SAFIYA HENDERSON-HOLMES

## sending rapunzel and juliet home

in a rage for sameness  
my daughter screamed herself  
to sleep for doll-like tresses.

too many days of her seven years  
were spun in dreams of rapunzel  
hair and juliet locks around her

neck and heart. in my own rage  
for sameness i threatened to cut her hair,  
attack these dreams where they sleep.

scissors as gun. histories of denied  
beauty the triggers. where to start  
the killing? i sat at the foot of her bed,

hid my face under a veil of reason  
and hurt. her thick braids rallied,  
each with an eye and a stone;

even as prey incapable of laying  
flat, presuming innocence or death.  
were the scissors too small a weapon?

i remember my mama:  
iron comb redhot in her hand,  
redhot in my black woolly hair.

the smoke of dying hair  
a signal of saturday nights and  
sunday mornings. burnt ears and necks,

offerings to gods not loving me,  
or mama. forcing difference from our hair,  
blessing us with pieces of worlds they didn't

want. what god am i, what pieces  
of my daughter do i want. with this s  
shearing what worlds am i giving he

her head turned, the braid above  
her left ear unraveled, fanned out  
in a V. i dropped the scissors,

kissed the spot of truce,  
whispered into her spine—  
rapunzel and juliet, please,

go home.—

# ANYA ACHTENBERG

## PRAYER

Up in the balcony, I wanted to pray. I sat at the edge of the bench  
and hung my arms over the worn wood of the railing. My mother  
kept flinging my arms back into my lap. I watched the skullcaps bob  
up and down, I wanted

to feel the bite of the leather straps of the *tefilin* around my arms, I  
wanted the fringes of the prayer shawl to dance prettily around me,  
I wanted  
to pray, to call upon god to deliver me. I wanted the words to fill my  
mouth, I wanted the first languages, I wanted

to speak to god and to no one else, none to overhear, none to report,  
so I made a small drone into the well of my stomach until I could see

spinning into my sight

the pleasures of my few years on this planet,  
dancing in small rooms, filling with sky,  
singing beneath a shady tree, wild blueberries  
ringing into the metal coffee can, stories  
of flying and of children who escaped  
from law and punishment, rising  
and falling back with the painted horse  
of the carousel, legs wrapped tightly  
around the glowing body

I droned on, my heart strong  
in the darkness, strong

among the women who were not

allowed to pray, who would not  
be counted as voices to reach god

I began to laugh  
and my mother squeezed my thigh with her red hands  
broke the skin with her sharp nails, and when I kept on  
laughing, not exactly  
like a little girl



she slapped my face and my laughter  
left me there in the balcony,  
dizzy over the prayers of men  
and the sour tales of women

who would not be counted  
and could not talk to god



## HERSCHEL SILVERMAN

### I Got A Right To Sing The Blues *FOR LAURA*

Every time the phone rings 'call waiting'  
I think it's you calling one last time

Forty-two years just a drop in a bucket  
I got a right to sing the blues

I don't get along very well without you  
I find myself making one wish too many

This year the weather inside is stormy  
I got a right to sing the blues

The drawers in your dresser are empty  
Hangers in your closet are bare

There's no reflection in your mirror  
I got a right to sing the blues

When it's time to say good-nite  
And I find myself talking to empty space  
And there's only one pillow on a double bed  
I got a right to sing the blues

# HETTIE JONES

from *FOR FOUR HETTIES*

This is for Hettie Slocum, who once  
went halfway around the world and back  
in a sailboat, then gave up the nautical  
life for good and took off to farm  
leaving her husband, Captain Joshua,  
the well-known navigator-storyteller,  
to the heave and swell of his first love,  
that vast and wily mother, the sea.  
(There's more to this story.)

Hettie was a seamstress, pretty,  
twenty-four and fresh from Nova Scotia.  
Slocum, a cousin, forty-two and lonely.

His sea-wife, love of his life, mother  
of his sons, had died. It was 1886.

Hettie was game; she sewed Slocum's sails  
cruised with him and the boys  
to Rio, bought a tall hat, survived  
an epidemic. He wrote a book  
about their adventures, called her  
his wife, called her "brave enough to face  
the worst storms"—but never once mentioned  
her name. Here she is, remember Hettie—

Hettie Slocum!

(There's more to her story. Stay tuned.)

## ellen aug lytle

good for one day only people

*in memory of James Barker*

tom made life in springtime  
simple with the lemonade punch  
he sold afternoons  
on the corner of cinnamon street  
under the shade of a weeping beech  
can we ever get back there  
where three or four apples, say  
in a bowl near the kitchen door,  
radiant as a 'still life' oil,  
even after they rotted  
or were eaten and the bowl filled again,  
resembled art more than life

but countryside is art and  
defying our imagination  
it has its own landscape  
that bursts with meadows  
and frothy trout streams, not people  
no city life anywhere  
no good for one day only folks  
such as the rooming house vagrants  
riding buses

or humming over coffee at twin donut  
sport shirts open necked to the june sun  
reading the 'scratch sheets'  
while their pomaded hair  
beads sweat in the morning heat

and how they smell from old spice  
covering cigarettes and whiskey  
these translucent men  
who won't stay starched  
who wrinkle and fade before 3 pm  
and don't hold much light  
because sun streams in one end  
and exits the other  
leaving them  
good for one day only  
still they keep life  
simple as tom's lemonade  
this thicket of weeds  
poking out of rocks in bald sunlight  
smoldering indefinitely  
ashes from flames long extinguished



# CAROLYN PEYSER

## DIRTY HANDS

Sometimes I forget  
to wash my hands

Licking late Sunday supper  
from fingers and flowered bowl  
I stop when I remember  
it concerns garbage cans

scoured for half-eaten  
lettuce leaves discarded  
oranges left-over sole  
cheeses or dinner rolls

It's about downtown doorways collapsing  
cartons old newsrags sagging to sad  
shoulders of people in torn shoes  
who shook hands with me tonight

Ever-new and all-too-familiar  
hands and faces I race to see  
as they wait for me to sign  
agency pleas to ease the pain  
of a plan meant to dehumanize  
itemize  
obfuscate  
make  
you  
wait  
and  
wait  
and  
wait  
for  
welfare  
shelter  
clothing  
detox  
food  
god

No picnic in this church basement  
food lines that wind around and  
through while upstairs folding  
chairs bed weary bones

while across America  
you could set your clocks  
by people in comfy houses  
who change their clothes  
read their papers  
set their tables  
lock their doors  
and wash their hands

## RISING ABOVE IT

First you notice the yellow light  
beige walls      a low buzz  
and that white is the color that glares

Down the long hall wheelchairs  
everywhere      solitary      silent  
people parked and staring

Then you notice thickening heat  
a repeated shriek      smells of old piss  
disinfectant      vomit      and bleached sheets

You see faded old bodies sitting  
alone      together      watching  
TV in a grim Day Room

But on the 4th floor Mr. Bellido  
has windows opened at the top  
so fresh air and motorcycle fumes  
can float in from Avenue B

And when I read our small group poetry  
they remember startling things  
like Kilmer's "Trees" and Dunbar's "Elias"  
and how "The Raven" sings.



# STEVE CANNON

## ORANGE

This is the story  
I'm tryin' not to remember  
This is the dream  
I don't want to recall  
This is the song  
of a ball in space

This is the poetics  
of nations, religions, and cultures  
and the way we look to us all

This is the individual  
constantly searching for freedom  
in a world  
stumblin' thru anarchy and chaos  
A cosmos that's  
indifferent to human actions  
and the way night turns to day

This is a cacophonous symphony  
of telephonics and photos  
This is the ecstasy of spirits  
transparent shapes like shadows  
dancing around the light

This is a dream  
I don't care to recall

This is the carnage that gave us the orange  
like the evening that brought us the dawn



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# DEBORAH PINTONELLI

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## JESSY

(excerpt from *Some Heart*)

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Jessy looked for nits in his wig. Picked a few out, then put the wig back on his head. A hot sun betrayed this baby's backwards boots, made it hard for him to stand the way his stockings cut into his thighs and to feel quite secure about the lack of substance in his push-up bra. He also was having some difficulty lighting a cigarette.

The sun was like from Mecca. He imagined himself in a long Arab gown, nothing on underneath, strolling the desert in search of young natives, a la Paul Bowles. He hummed Night in Tunisia to himself, then some Joni Mitchell: It all comes down to you. He'd just left his baby's place and he felt good, all worked out. They'd spent hours in the small blue bedroom overlooking the street, the sound of traffic drowning out their moans.

But this man, this man he liked to say, I Love You to Jessy and: You are a beautiful creature. Trying to get to his emotions. Almost worked sometimes. But when he started that shit Jessy always had to tell him (in so many words) to wash it up and put it away. Time to fly, time to get to somewhere else, he'd say, in parting. But didn't it feel good to be tired from loving, when you ached and were more open from it!

Because you know here on this corner, ooh, you are so fucking FREE. Here you could fly right into the sewer and nobody'd be the poorer for it. He said this out loud as he did a little dance and finally managed to light his cigarette.

He looked around. There wasn't a soul there to hear him. It was too early. He shoved his sunglasses onto his face and sipped from a straw stuck into a tallboy. He assessed the traffic situation and suddenly felt very pleased to be out in the air and light, despite the heat. It would be dusk soon, and thus a little cooler.

The last thing he wanted was to be stuck in that man's cage with its leather and expensive everything. Besides, the guy was just a tourist, Eurotrash on holiday looking to defile healthy American manhood and buy a lot of electronic shit to take back across the water. These Eurodudes, man! Thought they were so swift and in-the-know. Half the time they were just overweight no-accounts with some time to kill in between unsuccessful business appointments.

It depressed Jessy to think about how many uninteresting people there were in the world.

But good loving in any form was hard to find these days when there was so little to choose from, when there were so many others looking for exactly the same thing. It just about snatched your dick off. He looked good, though, no



one could deny that. At forty he was still a hot potato with a firm, rippling belly and flawless cocoa-colored skin.

He thought of what he used to have when he partied in Santo Domingo every summer. When he wore white linen suits and sipped white wine with rich dudes from all over the world. Nothing had ever been easier for him than to roll into a clean bed after a day of that and let someone, anyone, do whatever they wanted to him. All friendly and easy and nice. He usually had good luck, even though most men went there for the local boys, who could be bought for cheaper and who were easier to manage. He recalled a friend he'd made there, Earl Smith, who used to go every summer. They'd sit and talk over cocktails and Earl would say, Well, it doesn't hurt to have someone feel grateful towards you. Doesn't hurt one bit.

Jessy could *feel* grateful, but that didn't mean he had to *do* anything about it. It didn't mean he had to do any more than say: Thank You, or: I Had a Lovely Time, or: See You Soon!

Really, whatever did people expect?

What Charles expected, it seemed, was for people to operate within some sort of ancient code of honor, where you had to do right by your friends and give and take and all that shit. Any time Jessy had ever tried to involve himself in such nonsense, it always ended badly. Maybe it was that he was just not cut out for it. To him, it seemed more apropos to get Real, and not worry about whether or not people would come through for you. Sure, if you were in some small town in the middle of nowhere you'd have to be accountable. But not in this kind of world. Not where people could just disappear into the night with your wallet or your *life*.

He'd argue late into the night with Earl about this if there was nothing better to do. Earl amused him. He was one of those queens who fancied themselves a cross between Nat King Cole and Johnny Mathis, with a touch of Al Green sprinkled in for sexy measure. He was a sweet guy—too sweet, really—who always had to come out fighting after he'd been taken advantage of, which was quite often. Then he'd be at the bar downing vodka and cursing up a storm, shouting about losers and cretins and half-wits; people who didn't understand that he was someone to reckon with in New York City.

Earl was sure that he was the softest touch Jessy had ever met in his life. And though he never hesitated to borrow from Earl, this made Jessy speak against him sometimes, in awe that anyone could be so naive and get away with it. But he didn't really get away with it, did he? Well, he did for a time, sipping white wine spritzers and spreading money around like there was no stopping him. Earl would have a broiled lobster every night for dinner, buy full sets of clothes for each of the boys he kept, pay for their families' expenses during his stay, and then fly back to New York with some cash left over. The next year he'd come back and do it all over again.

This went on for a good five years or so. Jessy and he were the same age, yet one year Earl came back looking haggard and depressed. When asked what was wrong, he wouldn't say. He left early that summer, and Jessy never saw him again. Later a mutual friend in New York wrote that Earl had had a

nervous breakdown. Something about family responsibilities. During the time that he was ill, the persons he had caring for him stripped his entire apartment of its valuables; china, silver, clothes. They even took his underwear! the friend wrote. He recovered, but he was in serious debt. He'd finally secured a job, but things just weren't the same.

None of this really surprised Jessy. A person had choices to make in life. Jessy had made these choices, and he lived them. Someone like Earl, on the other hand, seemed to simply stumble through, seeing only what he wanted to see, taking chances that could only land him in trouble.

You had to always be thinking: there could be no room for erratic behavior. And you had to *work* what God had given you. And you had to take good care of your own proper self. And finally, if someone left themselves open, you had no choice but to be there to clean up. Waste not, as the preachers always said.

Some dude was rolling down his window, motioning for Jessy to come close. He put his head into the car, exchanged a few words with the guy, then got in.

I don't like that brand, Jess said of the condom the guy proffered. Tastes like a dirty old doll. Thickness of it gags me. He took out one of his own. New Japanese model, he said, Thin and durable.

He smiled at the guy, who could barely even look at him. He was trying very hard not to touch Jessy, was in fact as far away as he could be while sitting next to him.

Honey, don't take it so hard. *It's only going to be a few minutes, just five minutes and then we'll be done and you'll be so happy!*

He took the man's dick into his mouth, moving his lips and tongue up and down the length of it until he could feel the condom fill with sperm. Jessy noticed that he had his eyes closed, and that his fingers still gripped the steering wheel.

He watched as the car pulled away. The man had handed him a twenty and then raised the window without saying a word.

Well! Jess said out loud to whomever. Some people just have no manners at all!

But, he smiled, this time to himself, the first money of the evening feeling kind of like a good luck charm, an indicator that it would not be a dead night, and that he'd go home with a pocketful of change.



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# JILL RAPAPORT

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## Metal Has Its Emotions:

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Walking with my boyfriend, his arm draped heavily over my shoulder, I'm hard, negative, frightened, out of control. I'm an appendage to his body. His nerve endings suffer in the tissues of my shoulder, bearing up badly under the heavy, blocky weight of his arm. If I didn't have him, I guess probably my body would incline up and outward like a green plant toward the sun, thirsting for love, ready to touch passing cabdrivers through their windows as I waited for green lights.

I've been carrying stuff everywhere I go for years making sure I'm never caught without my "junk," internal concerns manifesting themselves as external attachments. Under the right circumstances I could find myself stranded in a city park with my little "house" on my shoulder. Sitting in chairs or on seating on public transportation, I'll find that I'm holding my right arm in a certain expansive, apparently posed way that stems from the fact that my shoulder is sore from carrying the habitual burden. The result is a stance predicated on the function of ameliorating pain and compensating unconsciously for imbalance and asymmetry. Stances are often born of similar compensatory accommodations, which is why there are so many strangely configured people in the world. Looseness and shakiness are an antidote to the hard, cold, ungiving dependency of what I've adjusted myself to be.

A guy passing me on Fourteenth Street walks up close to say, "I love the way those jeans fit you."

Power dips like Con Ed in a summer storm in the face of potential or actual comments from guys in the street with everything from weak knees to my face collapsing, and then I walk another few feet, unable to stop, and power is restored.

Can see shaving my head, becoming an old woman, and the world opening up just prior to closing.

The cost for one fragment of enlightenment was a whole life, afraid to perform excretory or urinary functions in public bathrooms, afraid to admit to having periods.

Went out in the car with my family to a summer party in the country when I was about eighteen and got myself pissed on Bushmill's and wine thinking they could be drunk in sequence. We got back home late that night and I woke up with a jolt holding some car keys in my hand. They had tried to wake me up and then gotten out of the car to open the front door; somehow the car keys wound up in my hand. I had blacked out, for the first time.

In third grade we were told to draw pictures while the teacher went out of the room. I drew a picture of a woman and so did Connie, my best friend that year. Connie's woman, or girl, as we were calling them then, had an explicit



V where the legs came together, where my girl just had a simple join. I knew the join was an incomplete rendering but had some unconscious sense that it wouldn't be a good idea to draw the V shape, without knowing exactly why it wouldn't be a good idea. A normally quiet, well-mannered kid named Philip, who my mom had told me was going to grow up to be a ladies' man, walked past us and glanced at our drawings, proceeding to launch into a denunciation of Connie for being "dirty" in drawing the V; he pointed out when she tried to defend herself that my drawing was just as good and there was no V in it. I didn't make any move to defend her and felt guilty knowing that I would have drawn my girl with a V between her legs too if I hadn't been aware that it would bring heat down on me. I had always been sought after by other girls for the perfection of the paper dolls I drew, and the machinelike exactitude with which I colored in my lines, and I knew damn well there was a V where Connie had drawn one. I also knew I didn't need the censure of classmates and maybe the teacher too for putting it down on paper. By the time I was having blackouts on a semiregular basis my psychiatrist, the famous Silvano Arieti, who wrote the *History of Psychoanalysis*, was asking me if I might have had lesbian tendencies because I only drew girls and women. He also thought I might have been showing signs of anorexic behavior. When he said that I nearly jumped out of my seat, unable to believe my joy. I would have loved to be anorexic, so I could waste down to a very thin weight. Only recently had I gotten over the desire to have my legs amputated below the thigh join.

Make an auto critique of the body before others do, hating the female body when picturing it as the ultimate in sexuality, in the context of a man seeing it or being there to handle it.

When it comes to misogynist views of the female body I'm going to get there first; my internalization of the culture's view of womankind winds up becoming an exoskeleton that protects me, even if the end result is that rot occurs within.

Seeing a guy in a T shirt with "88" on the back of it, I wondered how people make selections as to what they're going to wear on their backs; it always baffles me. I would rather not have to choose but have choices made for me while reserving the right to retain endless options since I have an inordinate amount of the claustrophobia of the optionless.

Maybe what afflicts people is their craven perceived need for options. The poor appear less ambivalent and indecisive than the privileged: There aren't any options in sight; the noise and dirt of poor neighborhoods informs the inhabitants' behavior, abolishes stillness and contemplation while increasing readiness and agility, maybe even contributing to the muscular definition of their bodies in an evolutionary sense which returns to the theme of Selection, Natural; so without wanting to have choices foisted on me I'd wind up *de facto* choosing something basic and entropic like Bush for President, autocracy, conservative behavior and dress, kneejerk attitudes toward differently presented people with big radios on their shoulders weighing them down, locking them into defensive positions and polluting the sound waves and



common environs, blasting out defective heatpipe backup notes and simulated siren sounds. Have come to an internalized hatred of choice and the way people in the culture prize it and been able to rationalize that choice is anti-progressive and counterrevolutionary.

But balance is a walking cat, or Frank Sinatra singing "Fly Me to the Moon"—"In other words, baby, kiss me," and the freewheeling syncopation of his voice, and maybe revolution can never yield anything but reaction, the way reaction always leads to revolution, even if it takes as long as an ice age to come about.

## MARY JANE SULLIVAN

### THE GUILLEMONT

The clicking whistle is a voice unlike another.  
It carries seed on the wind  
to the cliffs where the sea crests.  
Seed brings green to the stone. I row out  
into the cove, the wind is stilled.  
The moon rises in the water. The boat glides like a silken ripple  
toward the pine ridge, a silhouette in stubborn cold.

In the winged mystery that hides in the crags  
the voice of my waiting takes on the push and pull of muscle to oar—  
the tautness of a body shaped like a woman, a self other than I.  
In the weighing of water to land everything voices  
a smell, a ritual of movement.  
Even the refrains of hunger from ancestors call forth an eerie silence.  
I lean toward their remains and yet away,  
for the stones teach me to hold the blood of the moon  
as the sun rises and guillemont sings.  
I shall wait on its mating call, its song to the sun,  
though it will not wait for me.

## ROCHELLE RATNER

### September's Order, An April View

Because you are Virgo  
and like order  
maybe four times  
in these six months  
I've lived at your place  
I have done the dishes  
piled up in the sink.  
The praise I got each time  
went on for days.

The zeal for work  
we both share  
does not include  
housework.  
You sit hours on end  
organizing numbers into fields  
while I sit behind you  
reading, writing.  
Our life together is,  
in its own way,  
hard-working, spartan.

You have not criticized me yet  
but tonight I'm frightened:  
the Easter plant you bought me  
is already dying  
and you tease  
I didn't take care of it.

Will you always  
laugh things off this way?  
Two women I see tonight  
are divorced from Virgos;  
they warn of the critic,  
the self-esteem, the pride.  
To date I've enjoyed our being  
alone together. Now I fear  
you will want me, too,  
in some place set aside for me.

## EILEEN MYLES

### Animal Sounds

Riding past a green  
sign in a cab  
doing one of those  
I'm not you  
speeches  
in my head.  
Rainy night  
waited for  
a bus till  
2 dead ones  
went by  
& I gave  
up. & took  
you who  
were friendly  
who made  
me write  
not read  
who sat quietly  
with me  
as the lights streaked  
the tires  
sizzled  
& the air  
was better  
than ever  
on a  
bus. We took  
a right at  
the Hotel  
Cavalier  
This is it right here  
Loews.



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# TSAURAH LITZKY

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## FLIES

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There are flies in my apartment even though it is November. They are so bold, they buzz around my shoulders as I sit at my typewriter. I wonder if they are my dead lovers come back to distract me from writing stories about them. They circle around my head, a few daring kamikaze flies peck my nose. Their mouth parts suck and hiss; *you have had your fun already, why make us ridiculous, let us rest.* I tell them to go away, I own my life and while I have it everything in it is mine to examine, there is no tiny bruise or faded fingerprint that will not be analyzed if it might yield even a moment's respite from the nagging suspicion that it's already too late—I've wasted too much time.

There is a man who wants me, he is 45, clean shaven, gainfully employed. He brought me an Italian dinner and I let him kiss me, but as I told my friend Dave, it was hard work, a chore, accepting his kiss, I wanted it to be over. You can teach him how to kiss, Dave said. I said I am not going to teach a 45-year-old man how to kiss. Actually his kiss was proficient, subtly exploring, a little suction, just a hint of tongue, but it was what I sensed inside the kiss, something moist, spongy, a vacuum pulling me down. This is a lonely man with a hole in his life and he wants me to fill it. I am too busy writing, grieving, crying, dancing, shouting, looking in the mirror, mending my clothes.

A mutual friend introduced us and when I asked why he had wanted to meet me he said because I am small, he likes small women, and because I seemed nice; if only he had said because you are the wild, wild wind and a satin, sprouting flower. I think maybe I could go to bed with him for comfort, for simple pleasure, but then I realize that is absurd. I am too far gone to take anything lightly and for me simple pleasure is a contradiction in terms or a mythical beast, a chimera with the head of a lion, the body of a goat and a snake for a tail.

More than once that snake has coiled around my ankle and pulled me down into the bog, the quicksand. Every time so far I have escaped at the last minute, my desperate will to live propelling me out of the mire towards the shore. I crawled away spluttering, shattered, my pride diminished, but still breathing, still alive. The last time Bobby B. penetrated me on the daybed in my brother's recreation room in Crownsville, MD I felt the earth shake just like in a tacky romance novel. The next day when he got into his old Corvette and drove south I knew I would never see him again. He had taken the 80 dollars out of my wallet; he was a bounder, a user, a liar and a cheat. He two-timed me with a nurse from New Jersey and a woman who worked in a copy shop, but when he was inside me I felt so connected to the music of the universe that I was at peace.

Last night I dreamed I was in bed with a man whose face I could not see. We made love, then he rolled over and away, turning his white back to me like a blank page. Then I would put my hand on his shoulder, try to embrace him and curl around him spoon fashion but he would shrug my hand off, pull away, curve further into himself. In the dream this happened again and again.

When I woke up, the sheets were damp and smelled of sex, but there was no man in the bed, my only company was the flies. I could not fall back to sleep and I remembered how at my birthday party last month, an old swain and his girlfriend gave me a huge black coffee cup that said in red letters, "It's the Big Fifty." I thanked them graciously and the next day gave the cup away to my neighbor who is 40. If the cup had flowers or rainbows on it, I might have kept it. Even though I always say there is only the Now, I realize that since my birthday, I have been worried about the future and where I will be in 20 Years.

I refuse to give up on the possibilities of love, I pluck the hair from around my nipples, give myself bikini waxes, shave my legs, oil my body, all the while knowing it is more than physical love that I want. I know also that all the love in the world can not save me but if I had a man in my bed, it might be easier to sleep. As it is, I get up and go into the bathroom and get the Nyquil bottle off the shelf where it sits next to my ginseng antiaging cream. Though I never get colds, I go through three bottles of Nyquil a month. I tell myself I am not an addict because if I was, I would carry the bottle with me at all times.

I down two shots and I am floating in Nyquil never-never land. When the phone rings, the clock says it is 6 am. It is my I.V. drug using would-be lover who I have not heard from in two months. He is calling to tell me he has good news, his AIDS test is negative, and he will be over in 20 minutes, no, make it half an hour. I tell him he needs two AIDS tests to be sure and I will not even let him in the door until he is clean and has been going to N.A. for at least a year. He says I'm cutting off my nose to spite my face, he is a prize. I should grab him and I'm the kind of woman who is never satisfied. Maybe he is right, but I am proud of my inability to compromise, it keeps me going, and when or if I grow too weak to take care of myself, I'll drink 20 bottles of blue green Nyquil and let the flies carry me to Paradise.



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# BONNY FINBERG

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## Pillows of Sand

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What is love anyway? A dry martini, more like two, surrounded by the untouchables you ache to touch. A dream that recurs in infinite variation, aspect and color. The grayness of hunger and disease inside the devotion and adornment of Benares blows on desperation like a trick birthday candle refusing to go out. Here they never think of the oil well temples dotting the American landscape, open spaces, clean air surrounding phallic scaffolds rising like stupas, treasures underneath our mother's skirts. Phosphor women move through the layers of life along the river, bodies burn to smoldering logs pushed off the pyre, float steaming down the river past the boy who jumps into the tide riding a tire downstream, jumps out, runs along the bank upstream, jumps back in again, and again, and again, past the women washing clothes, past holy men, burning goats, exhalted cows.

No need to burn books in order to stem the threat of intellectual subversiveness. The excess of moving colored images impacting our consciousness, leaving no room for the isolation of private thought, the silicon chip's capacity for inventing and reinventing reality, have left the sloth of the printed word in the dust. We are going back to an oral tradition, snapping the chains of written language. Consider proper spelling. It's really unnatural. Slows down thinking. Even if you can spell, there's that nanosecond where you must attend to something other than the wordless nature of your thought. Time self-destructs every time we call its name. Punctuation makes false divisions between the overlapping, the simultaneous. Thoughts interrupt themselves. That's why crossing out was invented. If only we could cross out moments like words, or whole paragraphs. Some days are like pages you wish could be ripped out without a trace. I knew a guy who told a bunch of Indians who were laughing at his oddness, "your mother fucked Sabu." It probably made him feel better about the humiliation of not speaking their language. It's liberating to say, "you fucking asshole," to someone who has no idea what you're talking about. It distracts you from knowing you probably won't ever do great things, eliminate pollution, invent a cure for AIDS, restore the rainforests, feed the starving, house the homeless, or spell correctly, that is, with something that helps you generate correctly spelled words from inside your own deficient brain. So you try to love all the time to keep from hating. But *Whiskey, wimmen and nightlife can wreck your life*,\* if you're not careful. So maybe you spend two nights in a row watching TV and reading *People Magazine* in the reclining chair, drinking cranberry juice, eating crackers and cheese, trying not to think about love, dreams, India, oil, and the pitfalls of correct spelling and punctuation.

The question arises, why do you always stop just when you're getting started? There isn't a thing in this world you wouldn't do if somebody told you it would make you feel alright. You know your limits. You're not Siamese twins or a cold-blooded murderer. But that still leaves a lot of possibilities. You've already figured out that things don't have to make sense. That increases your chances. So now what? Always the challenge of meaningfulness gnaws at you. In a world too fast and fat you try to suspend yourself inside a web of personalized connections, aiming for nonobjective meaning. Substance without purpose. This can be a kind of self-imposed quarantine. Ultimately the emptiness of the desert calls to you. You want to lay your head on dunes and watch the sky turn yellow and pink until there's nothing but black all around you and above you the rest of the universe blinks at the joke about grammar and fine distinctions between meaning and sense. You want to keep going even though you're tired, and the armchair feels so far away because you're surrounded by pillows of sand and the vastness feels so close and warm. This is not an empty place. It's only that it's filled with one great thing that you can't name. It's so big there's no room for anything else. You've been overloaded with the sights and sounds of things. Here there is no need for punctuation or erasers. But the people still want pens because nobody they know can make a good one so they covet the pens that write the checks that pay for oil that someday they will worship too. You smoke cigarettes to dull your senses and wonder whether there'll be something fresh on VoyeurVision tonight, whether you can grind out love between the frustrations of fatigue and uncertainty, knowing that out in the Thar desert is something you could understand if you tried just a little bit.

## ELIOT KATZ

### Congress Cartoons Debate 1/11/91

None are real.

The voices are Daffy Duck meets Elmer Fudd.

Skins made of cardboard.

The wooden dummy's lips are moving.

The tinman has no heart.

A necktie on a real human could never be so tight.

They share the last name of a ketchup company.

They decide the fate of nations yet not one  
can pronounce Saddam's name correctly.

They've studied Orwell enough to calmly know  
that war is peace  
and ignorance is strength.

None ever die in wars.

As the son of a concentration camp survivor, I say  
a congress of historians have all misread Nuremburg.



# PAUL PINES

from *BREATH*

Starting  
at FLATBUSH  
near EBBET'S FIELD  
before  
ELLINGTON  
BASIE  
or KING PLEASURE  
I knew DUKE SNYDER  
FREDDIE FITZSIMMON'S bar  
on EMPIRE BOULEVARD  
upper OCEAN AVENUE  
where it ran into  
BRIGHTON BEACH  
dreaming of hit men  
at the HALF-MOON  
HOTEL  
foot-long hot dogs  
on the BOARDWALK  
kids  
and used rubbers  
riding the sea-foam  
to LUNA PARK  
all  
of BROOKLYN  
my  
Fun  
House  
twisted  
in its crazy mirrors  
the image  
I sent to meet my destiny  
on the other side of the MANHATTAN BRIDGE  
a gum-shoe  
with swollen feet  
hurtling  
on the BMT  
before  
I understood  
what SPHINX riddled me

at the limbic  
crossroad  
of poets  
and junkies  
I read EMERSON  
by the carousel  
in PROSPECT PARK  
and once  
on the parachute jump  
in CONEY ISLAND  
discovered  
myself

as a floating  
eyeball

adrift on  
blinding  
light



What do we know  
that we shall keep?

Does a housefly  
have a heart?  
A dragon fly?  
A flea?

My father as a boy  
sold apples  
on the street  
after his father  
ran off as

later  
in his heart  
he ran from me

As a boy  
I ran away  
hoping he'd find me

(he never did)

and found instead  
my grandfather Marcus

lost  
in my heart  
searching for him



I miss the weeping  
cherry trees  
of Bala Cynwyd  
the stream  
by which I raced  
my little girl  
a fist  
closing in my chest  
as if to say

**"Remember this!"**

What is a memory  
that anticipates  
itself

formed  
seconds before  
the event

a recollection  
that becomes the ground  
on which  
the present  
plays

but a breathless  
middle-aged man  
chasing  
his daughter

through

per-

for-

UNI-

a-

\* \*

tions

in

VERSE

the

The birds of Guadalajara  
pajaros in the Plaza  
de los Mariachis

corvo

tordo

golandrina

are the same birds  
I heard in Menemsha  
and Glens Falls

in Bala Cynwyd  
and outside our bedroom  
on the rue Bievre

the very birds  
that sang to Plato  
and Aristophanes

the Venerable Bede  
Torquemada  
my father in Galicia

crow

thrush

swallow

will sing awake  
our daughter  
after I am gone

listen for me  
Charlotte  
in their song



# EVERT EDEN

## Love Song in Case of Goodbye

I loved you because you were fiction cross-dressed as fact  
your lips a sweet saga from Homer  
your silence a speech from Jane Austen  
your sex a lake—sucked dry by Sappho  
your soul bluer than the bluer—than—blue blued—out blue blue  
with which Matisse fought the sky

but you  
you saw the undertow  
a dark shape swim and turn, shark-silent  
and you asked

will we only know what the rock wants  
when it lifts itself  
to split the skull of reasons we carry in our eyes?

all I ever wanted was to be the tongue  
that learned the whisper of your body like a language  
the hand that played you up and down like scales  
the eye that saw a flush run  
like a herd of buffalo over your chest into your eyes

listen  
if we should split like two wings that break a bird  
because they flap in opposite directions  
remember the hour of greendumb delight  
before a black cloud dropped a pot of spleen on us  
let those broken wings fly to the east and the west  
and tell of the doing we done did—

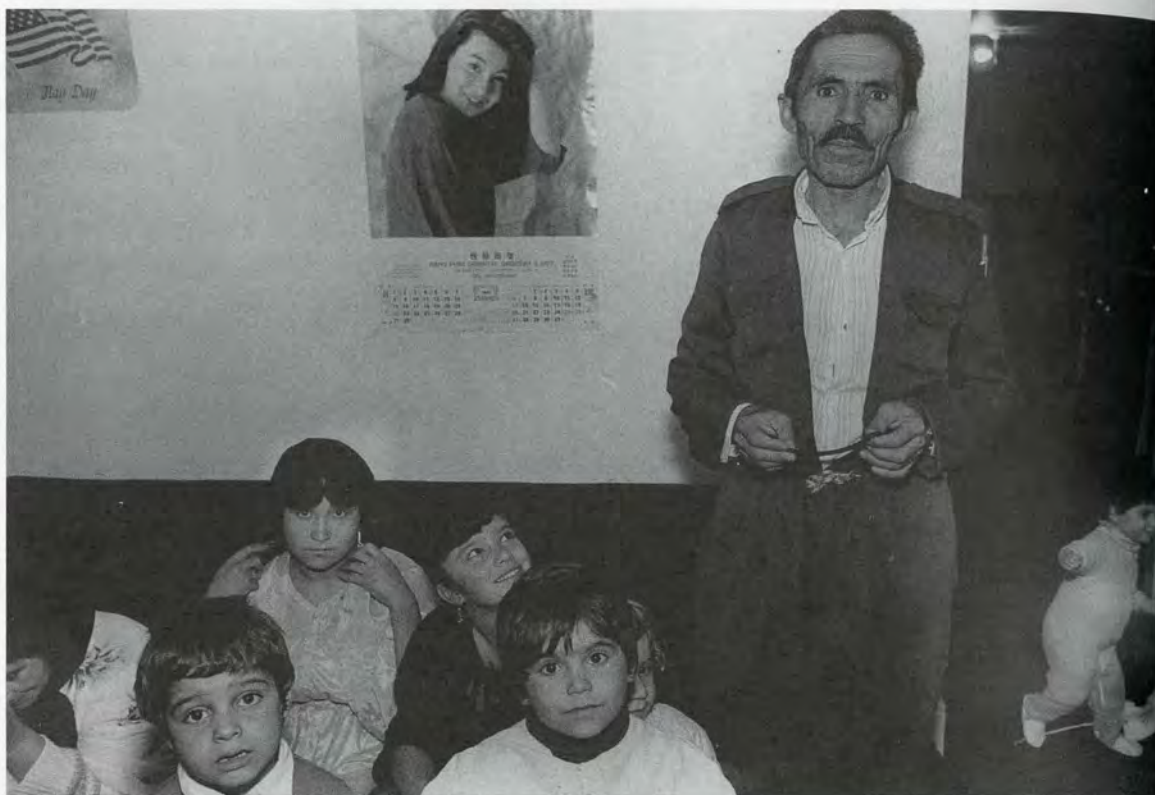
the nows burnt to then  
the thens saying now  
you're gone like a breath  
the never-ending end  
that sleeps inside everything we start  
but  
you'll rain every day  
wet on the page  
like a poem  
through the bone  
of my heart

# *THESE NEW SETTLERS* **MEL ROSENTHAL**



**WOMEN OF HMONG COMMUNITY**





## REFUGEES FROM KURDISTAN

*Within New York State are people from an incredible variety of countries. Many are refugees; many are not. The United Nations defines a refugee as a person who has had to leave his or her country because of political reasons. However, the United States has often denied refugee status to people from countries that are our allies.*

*One day when I was with medical workers doing outreach in some of the worst tenements in the South Bronx, we were surprised to find Cambodian and Vietnamese refugees. The neighborhood health center hadn't been informed they were being placed there. Formerly mostly farmers from tropical countries, they were now facing winter in a very alien place. Many were very ill. Some of the illnesses were physical; some were felt by the medical people to be the result of leaving their land and all they had ever known and loved.*

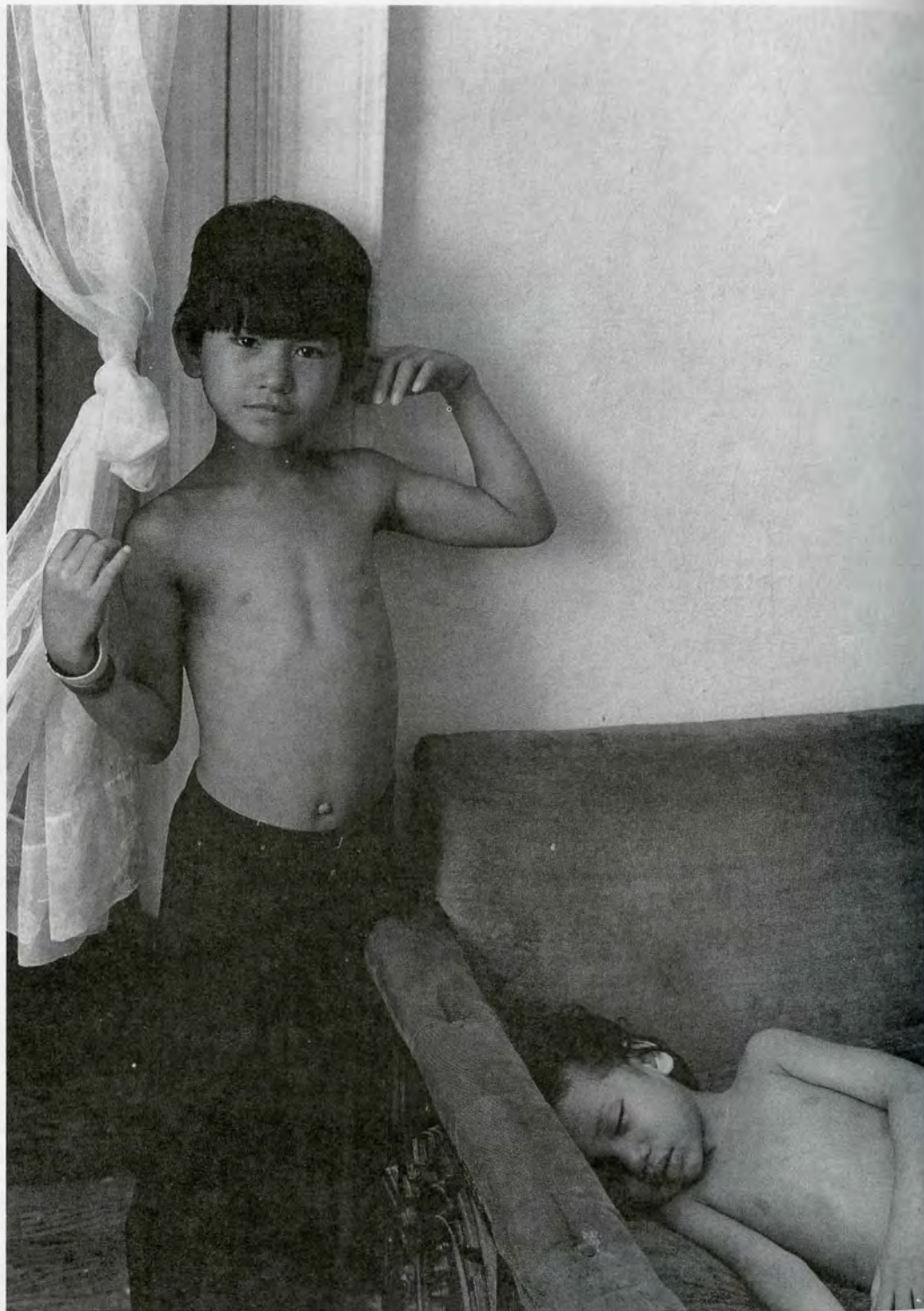
*Their courage and fortitude were astounding.*

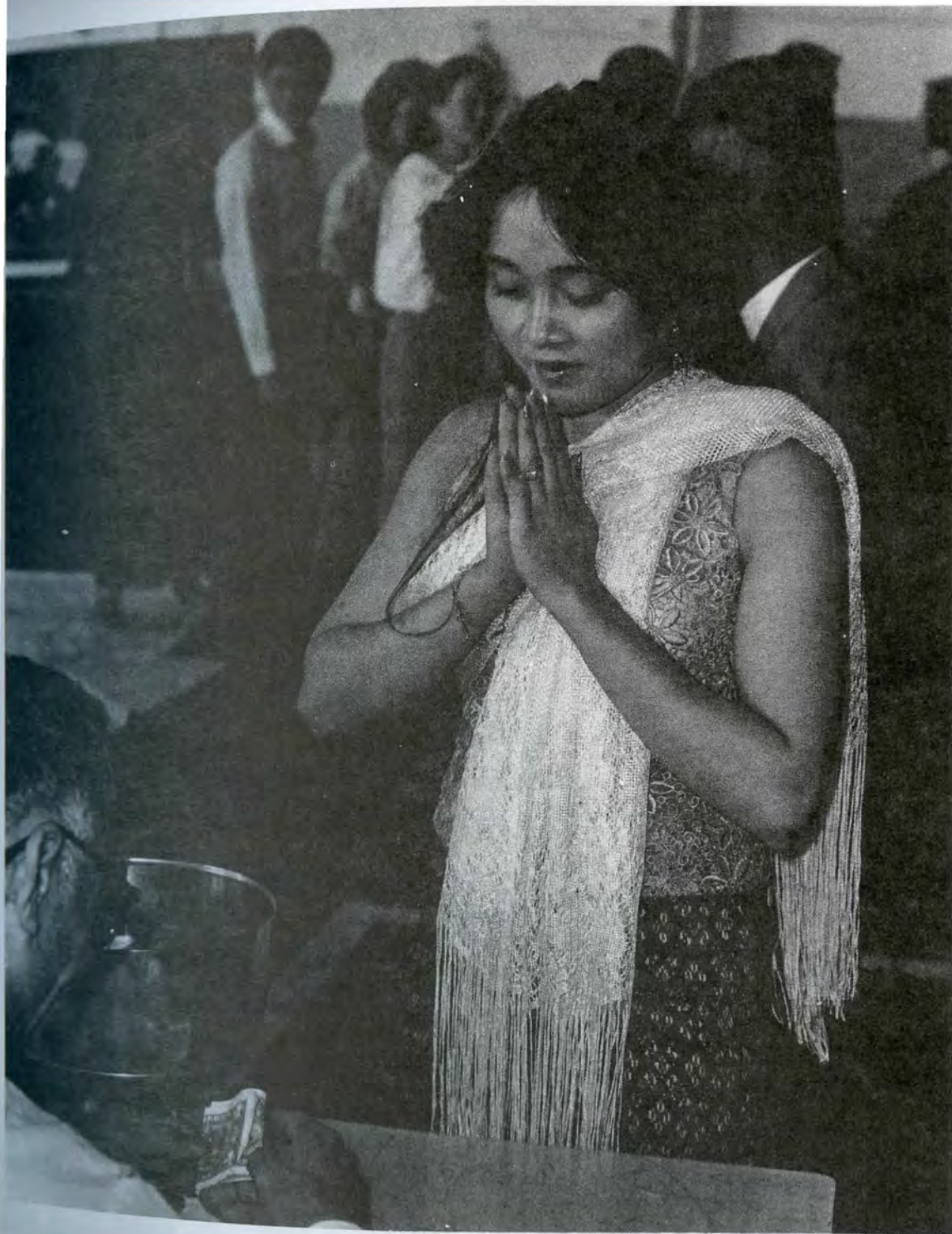


VIETNAMESE GRANDMOTHER

*My family came to this country as immigrants, so the importance of a commitment to cultural pluralism is very clear to me. These new settlers are a continual reminder of what we say we believe and what we should strive to protect.*







CELEBRATING TET IN BROOKLYN



# CHRIS BRANDT

## TROPICAL NIGHT, BLUEFIELDS

The crescent moon lies tipsy on the rooftop,  
spills darkness down to slide off eaves  
and puddle up among the mud and jasmine.

Gnat wings sing.  
Beatles wings drum the air.  
Bird wings whir and stutter.  
And wings too huge to hear  
feather the edges of the night.

I say good night to hear the voices say "good night"  
lingering out the diphthong, lapping at my ears,  
warm as little waves they roll  
off porches where the night collects,  
where people laugh and talk,  
and smiles like shards of moon  
catch at the sleeve of night's nightgown  
in the sweet breeze that enfolds the town.

# HAL SIROWITZ

## KINDNESS

You need children who will take care of you  
when you're old, Mother said, not that  
I expect you to take care of me when  
I get old. If you'd only learn how  
to take care of yourself, & hold a steady job,  
I'll be happy. I don't expect you  
to support me when I'm old, though  
I should hope you'd want to pay me back  
in kindness for bringing you into this world.  
You don't have to give me all the kindness now,  
you can spread it out over the years.  
If it wasn't for me you'd never have had  
a life, but would have been stuck  
inside your father's sperm cell with no way to get out.  
I never charged you for raising you, but  
maybe if I made you pay me everytime  
I taught you some manners, you might have learned some.



# J.D. RAGE

## THE NOUVEAU RICHE

The junkie girl had teeth last week  
but now gaps edged with rotted black  
are exposed as she asks me,  
"Miss, can you give me some money?"

A famous punk rock star huddles in  
ragged clothes, so skinny that his still  
large head insinuates he is a doll  
of himself, a Puma Platinum doll, red  
kerchief tied to cover missing hair,  
but his eyes are almost shining,  
not drugged-out coals glowing in  
his ravaged face entertaining dreams  
of death, but filled with clear blue  
comprehension.

He is a nineteenth century street waif  
transported to the steps of the old  
Electric Circus on St. Mark's Place  
homeless, reading a yellowing paperback,  
missing one electric guitar.  
He's not begging for money but his eyes  
ask for something else.

A woman whispers to me as I walk along  
"Please help me, I'm very hungry."  
The disease shadows me, the decay before  
the fall.

Only Dickens could properly describe  
the pleading throng.

"Spare some change?"

"You don't have to give me money,  
just a little sweet pussy."

The coffee cups gripped by dirty  
hands emerging from tattered coats  
are thrust forward until I am spinning  
in a circle of outstretched arms

"A quarter towards my dinner?"

"Give me a dime!"

"Will you give me a dollar if I guess  
your name?"



"Can you help me out?"  
"God Bless You."  
"God Bless You."  
"You cheap stingy bastid!"  
"Have a nice day, anyway."

We are trained by television to believe  
they are not hungry, merely enterprising  
self-made millionaires growing prosperous  
on bags of quarters, conniving Scrooges  
counting their daily take in condos  
storing their costumes of rags in walk-in closets  
squeezing us in a sympathy con  
getting rich, raking it in, stockpiling dollars  
They are not hungry

I saw it on the nightly news, even the old  
grimy shopping bag lady socked away \$100,000  
dollars beneath her stores of garbage  
100 grand lining flimsy dirt encrusted Macy's  
bags.

She used to sit in front of Korvette's Department  
Store before they tore it down, now she squats  
in front of every store on every block, in every  
park, on every street corner, old bag lady  
clones sleep in every gutter, outside every  
highrise, but TV says, don't worry, she isn't  
hungry.

The bums work grocery stores in shifts so  
regular I wonder if they fill out  
applications for the time slots, submitting  
qualifications:  
an honest face  
a faded military coat with genuine medals  
a missing leg  
a bloody bandaged foot  
cracked and wobbly crutches  
black and blues  
veined and swollen red noses  
a white plastic crucifix.

Other lost souls patrol the garbage cans  
and dumpsters, slitting all the plastic bags  
dumping cat litter and coffee grounds  
pawing and sifting through discarded treasures  
which they will later arrange on Avenue A  
sidewalks to sell, "Just two bucks," "A good deal,"

"Special today- fifty cents."  
But they are not hungry.

The veteran never asks for money from his  
makeshift bed on Fifth Street, his reward  
for defense of homeland.  
Recently he moved from his old corner near  
the Con Ed building to a crumbling patch  
of sidewalk outside a bricked-up derelict  
structure on the Avenue B side of the block.  
The corner got too crowded with homeless  
neighbors on their cardboard mats.  
The veteran has his principles and is a  
solitary soul, he needs space to hold court.  
This will be his fourth winter in the open air.

Others stage small injuries or commit minor crimes,  
sign up for detoxes, check into hospitals to have  
their livers tested or to get that amputation so  
they can spend the cold months indoors.  
The veteran is beyond all that.

I see change thrown into the coffee cups.  
I watch passengers dig out quarters in  
response to homeless soliloquies on the F train.  
Are they really rolling in dough?  
So many eccentric millionaires choosing in  
their wealth to sleep in doorways, in piss  
stench subway tunnels or under wet newspapers  
avoiding government housing to weather  
rainstorms on dripping park benches?

My own experience raises questions. I panhandled  
in the Sixties on the steps of St. Patrick's  
Cathedral and sold peacock feathers in the  
East Village amid crowds of flower-patterned hippies  
and distant memory tells me it was fun  
until I see my young long-haired ghost  
chugging pints of peach brandy to face the public  
and earn my dinner, see the apparition making soup  
from ketchup, look into its hungry eyes.

I want to deny all knowledge of crying stomachs  
of shuffling lines returning cans and bottles  
to the supermarket for nickels.  
Make depression Nights of Living Dead vanish.  
I don't want it to be real



and if they spend their take on wine or heroin  
does it matter? Food, booze or drugs, food,  
booze or drugs, only they know which substance  
staves off hunger longest, it's not for me to  
judge.

There is more than one kind of hunger just as  
there is more than one kind of  
guilt.

There is more than one kind of hunger just as  
there is more than one kind of  
guilt.

I thought the junkie girl had teeth last week,  
but I was wrong.

Mister, can you spare a dime?

## RONNY SWAIN GALICKI

### "Boys Night Out, or Stay at Home"

Local British disco-pub meets New York City cabaret  
meets industrial town pub meets circus freakshow meets  
working class pegged by accents  
church ladys meet grease monkey tattooed beer and cigarette  
soaked motor headed boys  
meets two disgustingly obese men who made me vow to myself  
that I would never overeat again  
meets drag queen with a heart of gold  
and a face looking like she was pickled in formaldehyde  
a big singing voice like Bert Parks'  
HERE SHE IS MISS AMERICA  
She compliments a blonde versace bitch who never accepts  
compliments from a drag queen  
The blonde in a huff leaves her drug-addicted brother  
in a flash, in a haze, in a stupor  
Am I in LONDON, or in are they in Miami?  
Or is this just another den of sexual-emotional desperation  
Meets glancing at myself and your lover  
And asking  
Is this as good as life gets?

# DAVID HUBERMAN

## Slam This

Slam this . . .

When Johnny Thunders, New York City's last guitar hero, dies "so alone" in a New Orleans dive from a hot shot.

Slam this . . .

When a good friend of mine finds his best friend's body with a plastic bag tied over his head with a shoelace (copying the reported suicide of writer, Jerzy Kozinsky) because he had AIDS.

Slam this . . .

On all poetry slams across the country for making the blood of poets into TV game show free-for-all.

Slam this . . .

On having a mother who didn't love me and a father I couldn't possibly know how to love.

Slam this . . .

On MTV and the CD revolution for murdering rock 'n roll and replacing it with a mindless, emotionless, poser-ridden 1984-style corporate waste product that's only fit for pods from Invasion of the Body Snatchers.

Slam this . . .

On Step One of the Twelve-Step program; being powerless over my life and anyone else's, and knowing that concept is true and hating it.

Slam this . . .

On the powers that be; on the police from making Tompkins Square Park the new Berlin Wall, while just around the block the crack houses and shooting galleries are doing a brisk business off sick and suffering addicts.

Slam this . . .

Trying to forget yet always remembering and being haunted by some vision late at night of a black man in the old G.G. Barnum drag club ranting and raving away at all the stunning queens for not feeling man enough because they rejected him, and later adopting that primal scream of hate and agony as my own for feeling unloved, inadequate and rejected. Screaming out in my own living hell because there's nothing else I can do.



Slam this . . .

On the racists who hate rap music and rappers who make millions with racist lyrics.

Slam this . . .

On heavy metal bands who make millions on racist AND sexist lyrics.

Slam this . . .

On poetry, because it just doesn't cut it for me anymore, it has no power to change things, and knowing this makes me insane.

Slam this . . .

On picking up flyers from the street advertising phone sex, when I thought I'd found real money.

Slam this . . .

On loneliness and having no faith; on really believing that I'll always be alone and unloved and die alone and unloved.

Slam this . . .

Until banging my skull repeatedly against the walls of my personal prison until the blood, guts and brain matter seep through, I break on through to the other side.

## LORRAINE SCHEIN

### A Winter's Call

Consulting psychics by telephone  
in this New York, still-winter —  
is like calling ahead for a reassuring  
precognition of spring.

Glass, she says, a trip to Europe,  
Boston, New Orleans;  
An arts contract, low blood pressure,  
A glossy black book with stars:

Afterwards, the wind rattles the windows, wants to be let in;  
It claws wildly, but still can't enter, this cloistered room:  
The rumpled amnesiac bed,  
This ordered dark flame of incense on my desk, smoke  
Spiralling luxuriantly up from its tip,  
Burning like a dream in the mind.

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# MARIE-ELISE WHEATWIND

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## LOS PERDIDOS: "To Dance"

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What else could we do in those preteen, dog days of summer, but dance? We were too dumb for sex, too young to cruise. Linda's brothers teased her new curves and lipstick, renaming her "fishlips" and "jailbait." Kinkie's sisters still called him "rug rat," even though it had been years since they'd had to drag "the little brat" along with them anywhere. And my brother's best friend, Tony, snapped dimes off his index finger at me with his thumb, saying, "Call me in ten years when you've got some boobs, and we'll go out..."

Who else did we have, but each other? What else could we do, but dance? We'd meet at Kinkie's after his sisters had left for work, and he'd play DJ with their albums and 45's. Or we'd go to Linda's in the afternoon and watch "American Bandstand," or crank up the radio in her room and listen to the weekly countdown to the top ten. Then they'd show up at my place after the folks were gone to their night jobs or the bars. We'd blast the stereo, turn off the lights, slide out onto the rugless floor in our bare feet, and bob up and down, dancing our hearts loose: Linda shaking her thin shoulders and new chichi's; Kinkie nodding his fuzzy head, following his own limber steps; me bumping my butt and learning how to move my hips like a snake, kicking my legs out and turning like a corkscrew down into the floor, then springing back up again, a fountain of trembling energy, a volcano of hot fluid lava movement.

We didn't do partners. We didn't do couples. We got out on the floor and we became the music, shedding our imperfections like invisible skins. It didn't matter anymore that Kinkie was short stuff, that Linda had fresh zits, that I was flat as a board. Nothing mattered but the tempo and rhythm and slickness pulsing in each of us. We were rehearsing how to pose, how to lure, how to stay aloof. And the music taught us our own secret code. The first three notes of certain songs would send us shuffling out onto any floor: the cool linoleum of the junior high auditorium, the waxed cement of some party's patio, and later the hard blond wood of the high school gym. In four beats we'd find each other, and Linda would puff her lips and become Diana Ross, mouthing "Baby, baby..." and Kinkie and I would sway and swoon around her like Supremes, echoing soundlessly "...Ooooooooh, please don't leave me all by myself..." But even then we didn't really have each other, we had only the music; we had this smooth way of moving in our newly formed bodies. We were the Temptations, winking at each other across the room; we were smokey miracles, each lost in our own haze of rippling abandon. When we danced we became fugitives in a frenzy, shaking off everything, quickstepping anyone who would stop us, sidewinding through the crowd with slow smiles and con artist moves, shrugging "I got what you want," but always turning,



shaking, turning, till body hair and hot breath and sweat created its own static field around each of us, till we almost sparkled with electricity—eyes closed, grinning wide, throbbing—born to be wild; you can run, but you can't hide; you can look, baby, but you can't hurt me now.

## PAMELA SNEED

### Why Did You Have to Be a Poet?

My mouth jammed full of peanut butter  
I'm stuck  
contemplating my conviction  
to kill you  
stab through your armor of aloofness  
casual composure  
poised disregard of the fact  
my heart does handsprings  
somersaults  
and splits  
for your attention  
sparks my inspiration  
to imagine us  
in my bedroom  
on a beach  
emerald waters  
and white sand slipped  
through the fingers  
you strip off my clothes  
at sundown  
I masturbate  
to a memory  
of your face  
the last time we argued  
and I don't care about your philosophies  
your personal political persuasions  
WHY DID YOU HAVE TO BE A POET?

Couldn't you be a doctor, nurse  
technician, anything  
not to interfere  
in my career  
of professional numbness  
unaware and immune  
to the music  
of your orchestra  
a symphony of sounds strummed  
on broken guitar strings  
an echo of words overturned  
massaged mumbled  
sweetness swallowed  
spit and whispered in my ear  
like a record  
scratched and spinning  
I repeat  
each song you quote  
like scriptures  
poetry is the only gospel  
I know  
there is no dictionary definition  
for a person in love  
with the rhythm  
of every word you speak  
and I crave you  
like a cup of coffee  
and a cigarette  
in the morning.



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# JAN SCHMIDT

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## Mirages

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### 1.

**M**y hands are shoveling potato chips, Entemann's cheese danish and fresh roasted peanuts into my mouth. All at the same time.

I am an eating machine stuck in a dim and endless tunnel of soft mushy grey matter. I don't know what to do. There is a tugging at my leg. I am stuffing things into my mouth while from somewhere far away comes this voice, this child's voice. I peer at her; she is distorted and a thousand times smaller than I remember her. Am I supposed to do something for this child? Impossible that she could be my daughter. I don't even have a real job.

She is laughing, trying to engage me. "Mommy, I've got a monkey inside me." She's five and a half years old and thinks this is funny. I stopped smoking one month ago and I have a cigarette monster inside me. I am nearly thirty-five years old, and there is nothing funny about this cigarette monster.

I am his escaped slave. He bellows and the sound rattles the nerve endings along the entire surface of my body. Screaming exploding synapses urge me onward. I am running and running, but he is inside me. The cells in my own body burn in treachery, begging me to stop running, pleading for fuel. But I am not giving in. I am not heeding that greedy monster. I refuse.

I refuse, I refuse, I refuse. In goes the pizza, the peanut butter, the ice cream. Where is the rest of the world? I used to direct videos, go to movies, have friendships, even boyfriends. No more. Now I can only do this one thing. I don't smoke. "No, I can't go out with you, I can't do two things at once." I can't chew gum and not smoke too. Sorry. I can't. I can't. I can't.

All I can do is battle with this monster inside me. I feel nothing. There is nothing but exhaustion and hunger. Somewhere dimly outside the ring of this arena, there is this child, my child. I want to get her to safety. I wish she had a real father.

But he's at the subway. he's telling passersby at the token booth that he lost his wallet. Nearly every day he loses his wallet and asks for money. Last week, I watched him as some brothers stopped and he told them his story. One said to him, "That means you had money. I don't give money to people who got money." But it didn't faze my daughter's father. He just went on begging; he has a habit to support.

I have a habit to break. Why do I feel so broken?

### 2.

**M**y daughter asks me "why" for the four hundredth billionth time today. I haven't smoked now for two months and I think for a moment that she is the cause of all my problems. My own mother's grim angry



mouth contorts mine, and I wrestle back the automatic desire to grab her little arm, pulling her body along after her to lock her in the closet.

I explain to The Therapist that though this feeling has come over me many times, it is stronger now than ever before. "It's the cigarette monster," I say, "the cigarette monster inside of me."

I can feel myself getting hysterical, and I can't stop. I have this big hungry animal in a pit writhing around, screaming and screaming. That wasn't so bad, at least not for the first few hours, but now I'm worn down, irritable, I want to kill. I see myself on the witness stand for the brutal murder of my daughter, laughing insanely, repeating, "But she was there."

I am holding on to nothing, feeling the monster inside tearing at the lining of my lungs, scratching at my throat. And I just sit and sit, alone, against this monster, feeling it slowly, painfully starving to death inside me. But he does not go quietly. No, he is angry, outraged; he creates a huge racket and an enormous stink.

I am in a filthy dungeon, hanging in chains by my arms stretched above me. The reeking smell is unbearable. It is inside me. I spew vile curses with a sickening breath stench. I must remain tied to this prison, or I will surely be a one woman reign of terror. I cannot be let loose on the world, the rage will come pouring out, no one will be spared.

But I have no control. The monster erupts inside me, splitting open my skin as if it had bad seams. The chains break from its insane frenzy.

See the little old lady with the walker going so slowly in front of me. See how spindly and brittle her legs are—the kind that take forever to heal. I want to break them. Gleefully. In several places.

See the man with the nasal twang at the temp agency, the one who always gives me the rush jobs, as he tap tap taps at his computer. I'll electrocute his ass. I don't care.

You say anything about me and I'll mess you up good, then turn your pockets inside out and pretend it was robbery. Best you stay away from me. Best you pray I don't really get let out of these chains.

### 3.

My daughter says, "The only way grandpa will visit us now is in our dreams." She went on to say that he visited her last night and that grandpa told her to tell me that he was always with me, "here, in here," she said pointing to her heart. The girl is spooky. And she still has a monkey inside her. The cigarette monster is still active inside me, three months from the last feeding. My dad died two years ago from lung cancer. He still visits my daughter.

I still cry, "Enough, enough, enough. There will never be enough." I could smoke one cigarette, but I don't want one, I want one always, I want to always be smoking. There will never be enough smoke to fill me, to make me be enough. I can not be enough.

"Well," The Therapist asks me, "what would be enough? Who can you think of who would be enough?"



I can't think of anyone. Scorsese? Close, but he's too perverse and self-absorbed to actually be enough, and Jodie Foster, but she kind of runs at the mouth sometimes, and Dostoevsky, but then he's a bit too passionate.

And then The Therapist asks, "Well isn't that strange. No one in the world is enough. Does that tell you something?"

And I think about that.

So The Therapist says, "And who says you aren't enough? Enough for what? Enough for who?"

I choke back the urge to correct her. "Enough for whom." I see my father at the end of the kitchen table, correcting me, incredulous at the bitter irony of that old enemy, Life, who gave him a daughter who didn't use the proper form for pronouns following prepositions. Life was so futile to him, terrifying in its constant procession of acrid disappointments. I repeat this thought to The Therapist.

And The Therapist says, "So, isn't that sad. That's the way your father felt, and how sad he must have been. But you don't have to listen to him anymore. You can tell him that you don't believe that about life."

The Therapist goes on, "It's not real hunger, it's emotional hunger. It's not a real monster, it's a gremlin, small and silly, inside your head. Not powerful at all. It is just some old sad thinking internalized from your dad, it is not real at all."

It's just a monkey inside me, an amusing, silly monkey, just like my daughter's. I can't imagine it.

I am lying on the rich dark earth, legs and arms pulled apart, skin cleanly scalped and pulled back exposing my still pumping heart, lungs beating their breath. I want to scream but the only sound is the empty echo of a screech inside my head. There are eyes everywhere staring and staring, at me. I don't know what it is they see, but they are horrified and rapt with disgust. I want to cover myself, to run, to hide, but there is nowhere to do, I can't even move, I can't even scream.

#### 4.

My daughter says, "But, Mommy, I can't do that. I'm just a kid" I want to cry. I haven't smoked a cigarette in four months. I'm expecting too much of my daughter. But I am just a kid too, I cry. Please someone, take care of me, someone help me to be a kid. I don't want a cigarette—but I desperately and totally want SOMETHING.

I want to run to The Therapist. I have to explain what I don't understand. Cigarettes pacified me.

I am in the middle of a limitless desert. I have always been here. Four months ago, I was happy in this desert, eagerly marching forward to the oasis over there. At each oasis, I'd smoke my cigarette, not notice my thirst, and move on. I had direction and purpose.

Then I found out. The oases were nothing more than mirages. The cigarettes I smoked didn't comfort me anymore, thirst took over. I was disappointed, depressed, and afraid. There was no oasis and the cigarette gave no help. I



thought they were my friends, my time markers, my place makers. But they did nothing. I am alone.

I am lost. No oasis. Even the mirage is gone. Nothing but endless expanses of sand dunes after sand dunes, no sense of direction and I just want to lie down.

But I don't. I march in a restless stupor. I dress my daughter, I do the dishes, I am irritated and nasty. All is lost. I know this is absurd.

5.

My daughter says, "Is life really just the Big Emptiness, like in the video? Do you have hope, Mommy?"

Up from the vast desert, five months without cigarettes, I look at her trusting frightened brown eyes, and I know.

We are in the living room, on the futon couch, with sunlight pouring in the window through the lace curtains. Someone said I was "lace curtain Irish." They said it like it was supposed to be an insult. I liked it. I like the curtains. I like the sunlight. Today, anyway, I'm not at work, I'm sitting with my daughter in this room. I want to run from the closeness, but I do not. I remain here. Oxygen flows through the windy caverns of my body. My daughter's chest heaves with her pure child breath. I answer my daughter with enthusiasm, "Yes, I definitely do have hope." I am surprised at the words.

"Me too," she says in response. "I hope that everyone in the world will have some hope." I tell her about my idea of god; the big, big power in the wind and the sea is also in us, in the blood flowing through in our veins, in the big feelings inside our hearts. The wind and the sea are inside us.

My daughter says she likes that. She feels her heart. She smiles up at me, all sunlight and trust. She says, "Yeah, and I have a monkey inside me, too." I pick her up and feel her glowing five-year-old weight on my lap, and I hug her tight. "Yes, me too," I laugh. "I have a monkey inside of me, too."

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# DIANE SPODAREK

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## Mother/Daughter, Father/Son and Other Notions

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### I. HOUSITONIC, MASSACHUSETTS —JULY 4TH, 1993

At *Aberdales*, the only store in this population of 1400 people mill town, I go in to buy a beer. The sign above the six-packs and twelve-packs says: *Singles in the Cooler in the Rear*. I walk in circles around the store three times, passing the cooler three times, not seeing it—of course. I don't mind. I am fascinated by a pair of father/son consumers. Father is buying a four-pack of wine coolers and son follows dressed in a perfectly fit leather jacket. Odd because it's summer. Odd because it's about ninety degrees. Odd because son looks about six or seven years old. He's a miniature rock n' roll guitar player.

What is probably not odd in this liquor/beer/snack/party store is that father is buying son bullets. "No, I want the long ones that come twenty-one in a package," father says to the proprietor. At first I think he's buying cigarettes—long ones! But twenty-one to a pack? He/father moves behind the counter where the cash register sits, to the back room to look at bullets with the proprietor. Son follows. All three men are now in the back room, and I am left alone in the store. I am not a thief, but they don't know that. Father says to son, "You'll have to settle for the short ones," and son says, "Okay."

"Where are the single beers?" I ask the proprietor and, of course, I am standing right in front of the cooler. The bottle is not the kind with a twistoff cap I discover after I pay, but the three men are back in the back room. I wait patiently for the proprietor. I know it's probably against some kind of law—this is not New York—but I figure if he sells bullets to a six-year-old, he just might open my beer.

### 2. LUNCH AT THE LIBRARY

Lunch time. Any day of the work week, and I am at the library. A very dangerous place to be on my lunch hour because when I get there I always forget I have a job, that I have to be back at work. Quite a different way to spend my lunch time from my early working days back in Detroit in the late 60's, when I worked for General Motors as a secretary. I worked for the Chevrolet Division, in the Heavy Duty Truck Department. They called us secretaries "Heavy Duty Cuties." It was the same year that Helen Reddy's "I Am Woman" was popular. It seemed to threaten the General Motors executives: "I bet you like that I Am Woman song," and "Hey, I heard a song on the radio today that fits you perfect." The mini-skirt days. I drove my red convertible Fiat sports car to work with the top down exposing my legs to any truck driver who passed by. Driving a foreign car while working for "the big three" was a "big no, no" in Detroit. The big three were Chrysler, General



Motors and Ford Motor—American Motors was considered inferior, although I worked at one time or another for all four. I would shift gears on the freeway and roll a joint; at lunch I would have two or three drinks, sometimes another joint with the “mail boy”; and then at the 3:15 break have another drink at the bar across the street, sometimes three or four; then back to my desk where I often fell asleep (and where they told me to get rid of the Ralph Nader book *Unsafe At Any Speed* that I liked to display on my desk). And then the drive home: roll another joint with one hand, shift with the other, play Motown music on the radio. I didn’t like my job. Not that I like my job now, I just don’t do drugs to get through the day. Instead I go to the library at Lexington Avenue and 31st Street.

The library is small: it has one shelf on women’s issues; two shelves on self-help for women; two shelves on cook books and three or four shelves on addictions—food, men, drugs, children, shopping, exercise, etc. This branch also has the usual newspapers, magazines and a pretty good paper-back fiction section: from Danielle Steel to Toni Morrison; V.S. Naipaul to Nadine Gordimer; Isabelle Allende to the classics (Virginia Woolf and Sylvia Plath). The library doesn’t open until one p.m. each weekday, my lunch time, and it is usually filled with people: office workers, mothers with children, neighborhood folk and others that are beyond simple categories. Often I can’t find a seat so I just wander around randomly looking at books, sometimes checking out four or five, sometimes leaving empty-handed. On my last visit I checked out the book *Why Males Exist* by Fred Hapgood just because I liked the title. I am presently enjoying men’s (and women’s) reactions to it who come into my apartment where the book is prominently displayed in my kitchen. (Women pick up the book and look at it. Men look at the book and yell at it.)

On this visit to the library, while trying to find that Germaine Greer book on menopause, which is always checked out, I hear a child’s voice: “Mommy, please, please, please.” I’m curious and wander about to see who this desperate voice belongs to—her voice sounds on the verge of hysteria. “Mommy, please get me this book. I must have it.” I see a small girl about four years old. Mommy is saying, no “because I don’t want to carry it.” Mommy’s hands are full: another baby, a stroller, a few bags hanging from the stroller and her arm, some library books in her hand. “Mommy, please, I will carry it. I promise I can, I will, I will. Pleeeeeease, Mommy!” But Mommy is very good with her no’s. “I said, no. And no is no because I said so.” (I’ve heard this before, I’m a mother myself.) But hearing/seeing a mother turn down a book to her small child is a new sight. It’s as if the little girl is asking for something really harmful like a Barbie doll or liquid sugar in an edible plastic bottle. (I tried to protect my daughter from Barbie. I told her that TV advertising is a lie and when you get the Barbie doll box home, it’s empty. I also told her that the children who play with those toys on television never grow up and never get to see their mother again. She bought it until Susan, my transsexual girlfriend, brought my daughter her first Barbie doll for her third birthday.)



I leave the library without a book. At the exit the same little girl is outside the library holding the door, blocking it so that I can't get out. One hand on the door, one arm swinging back and forth, she looks inside the library, making faces. Finally she lets me out. Her mother is talking to another woman with two children at her side. They're discussing how difficult it is to raise two children at the same time. I pass them and hear mother say to daughter, "Get away from that door. When we get home you can watch television." I want to kidnap the kid and smack the mother—and I am not a violent person. Instead I smile at the little girl, but she gives me a furious look, like she hates us all.

### 3. SHOPPING IN 100 DEGREE HEAT

In the second-hand store on Lexington Avenue I find a white 100% cotton shirt mixed in with the dresses. It doesn't have a price tag on it and that seems suspicious. Someone else wanted it, took it out of the men's section, tore the tag off and buried it in the women's dress section. It's the shirt I've been looking for in second-hand stores everywhere. There are no stains, and it's not one of those shirts that need cuff links. I contemplate a strategy in my head to buy the shirt with no price while looking at dresses I don't want. The young woman next to me is dressed in very short cut-off jeans and a tight tank top; her baby daughter is below her in a round bumper-scooter container on coaster wheels, which is propelled by her tiny feet. The baby is contained in her own little vehicle which she can move in any 360 degree direction. The woman's mother—the baby's grandmother—is in the back of the store stuffing clothes in a diaper bag hanging on a baby stroller. It looks like a good scam as the baby scoots around the store causing a commotion and distraction.

I smile at the mother when the baby crashes into me. Grandmother from the rear of the store yells, "Jacki!!!!" and mother yells back, "What!" The baby jumps up and down, her little feet hitting the floor as the vehicle scoots over to grandma giving mom a break. I watch the baby-motorized vehicle with a fond memory of my daughter in an identical one sixteen years ago. Yes, babies are a distraction. At the cash register I rehearse in my head how I can get the 100% cotton shirt. The sign above the cash register says, *No goods sold without a tag—No exception.* I'll offer her \$5—that should do it, I think. Mother and daughter and grandma are now at the front of the store looking at toys. Grandma, who looks too young for the title, is confronted by the proprietor of the store. She wants to look into the bags hanging from the baby stroller. Grandma is hysterical, paranoid and furious. "I ain't stolen nothing—this is my stuff," she says. "These are all my clothes. I was going to the park today. No, this isn't my bathing suit—I want to buy that. I have money—see?" She waves a twenty dollar bill in the woman's face. The proprietor says, "Sorry, but you have to check your bags—it's store policy." Daughter says, "Relax, Ma," as baby crashes into another customer.

I notice for the first time that baby, who appears to be about a year old, is scooting around in her bare feet. Her feet are so black that at first I had



thought she was wearing shoes. I want to get out of the store so I ask the proprietor if I can buy the shirt without a tag and she says, "\$5.99." It's one dollar over my limit and I try to give her a "Can I have it cheaper?" look, and the proprietor says, "It's 100% cotton." I decide to take it. She leaves the cash register to help another customer and grandma and mother are shouting, "How much is this? How much is that?" while picking up various toys and boxes and stuffing merchandise into invisible holes like a mother and daughter magician act. The proprietor runs back and forth from the cash register to the three generations of female family. Each time she looks at a box she says, "It's marked! It's marked! It's marked!" Baby crashes into me again and mother yells, "Christine, stop that." I look at Christine. She seems happy. Her black toes are curled around her fat pads and I imagine her scooting down the streets of Manhattan getting her tiny feet caught in some street-tar or torn up by a gash in sidewalk cement.

The proprietor is back at the cash register dislodging a plastic clothespin from a dress. As the pin grabs her forefinger, she winces in pain and I stare at her, waiting for my turn to pay. As I leave the store a small wooden box in the window catches my eye; it's just what I want for a gift. Mother and daughter and grandmother are now checking out. Grandmother says to daughter, "Her feet are all black." Daughter says to grandmother, "Her feet are on the ground. Whatya want from me?" Grandmother says, "Well, we should get some of those wipes to clean 'em." Get some shoes I want to shout as I stare at all three of them. They look at me as if anyone would be crazy to put shoes on a baby in this 100 degree heat. Mother is wearing clogs and grandmother is wearing flip-flops. Baby pushes her tiny feet and her vehicle careens towards the front door banging into the glass at the same moment a woman on the outside tries to open the door, her mother yelling, "Stop that, stop that," as the proprietor looks at me rolling her eyes. I look at Baby Christine in the scooter with the tiny black feet and think maybe she'll grow up tough and fine—not like her mother, pregnant at seventeen, or her grandmother, paranoid and high at thirty-nine.



# Matthew Courtney

## the essence of time

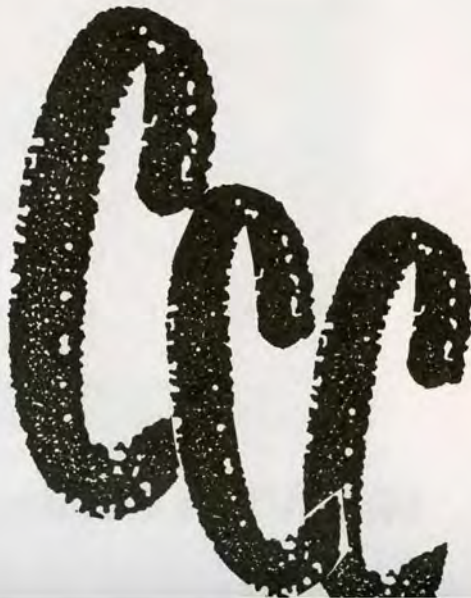
(THE FEW TIMES I'VE ARRIVED ON TIME IN MY LIFE)

I ARRIVE ON TIME  
THIS TIME IT'S THE WRONG APARTMENT  
I ARRIVE ON TIME  
SHIT, THE PARTY'S NEXT WEEK  
I ARRIVE ON TIME  
BUT YOU'RE NOT THERE  
I ARRIVE FIFTEEN MINUTES EARLY,  
AND YOU'RE KISSING HIM GOOD-BYE  
I ARRIVE ON TIME  
FOR THE LAST TIME  
AND THE HOUSE CATCHES FIRE AND BURNS TO THE GROUND  
NOT TEN MINUTES AFTER I'VE ARRIVED.  
MY FUNERAL IS A DAY EARLY -  
AND NO ONE IS TOLD—  
AND MY DEAREST FRIENDS GATHER TO BURY A MRS. RABINOWITZ?

## that hat

(MY ONLY MATERIALISTIC POEM TO DATE)

I LOVED THAT HAT  
THAT GREY FELT STETSON  
MAN I LOVED IT  
I WORE IT  
I WORKED IT  
I STRUTTED IN ITS SHADE  
AND I LOST IT  
IT FELT GOOD TO WEAR THAT HAT  
FELT COMPLETE  
FELT STETSON  
LOST MY HEAD  
WHEN I LOST THAT HAT





# "TAKE THE A TRAIN"

She had to have it! She just had to!

She planned it all out. Put on her jungle dress. Punched holes into her red plaid traveling case and headed Uptown on the A train. She walked down 125th Street. Went straight to Blumberg's Department Store. Downstairs to the Pet Shop. She waited for the school children to leave. Opened the cage. Put her hand inside, around his waist. He held on to the bars with his feet and hands, SCREAMING. Now, she knew why he was called a *Howler*. She yanked him harder, freeing him from the bars. Shoved him into the traveling case. And, quickly, headed for the stairs when someone grabbed her arm. She hit him with the case, until she realized that he, the monkey that is, might get hurt. They brought her upstairs to a small room; questioned her, lectured her, and made her sign something. She promised never to return again. The store detective told her that she needed to see a psychiatrist.

*"Honey" he said, "What you really want is a BABY".*

## Watch The Closing Doors



OLIVIA BEENS



# SHAKING

Shaking! She couldn't stop shaking! I saw her through the mirror of the Chock Full O' Nuts at 34th Street and Herald Square for the first time. She was shaking and I knew that she couldn't stop. Her eyes darted around the room, but she never noticed my stare. She reminded me of someone, an old school friend, perhaps. She was my age, the same size and coloring. *I wondered how she got that way: hair all greasy, ripped clothes, kind of dirty, and always shaking.* Her eyes finally focused on something. It was a half-empty cup of coffee. She maneuvered her sack-like body to it. Gulped it down. She picked a butt out of the ashtray. Had trouble lighting it. Took a drag. I finished my coffee and headed for the F train. Her image remained with me throughout the journey. Did she have children? A family? Friends? I wondered. I knew that she was homeless. She needs help, I thought angrily. Why isn't someone doing something for her? Suddenly, I realized that I missed my stop, and got up promptly to change trains, when I noticed my own reflection. Through the glass of the double doors I could see that I was shaking. And I couldn't stop shaking.

*I wondered how she got that way: hair all greasy, ripped clothes, kind of dirty, and always shaking.*

*Shaking.....I couldn't stop shaking!*





# GOING UNDER

She sat outside the Guggenheim, in the hot sun meditating on *his life, his art, his vision*. She walked down the block. Bought an ice cream. Enjoyed its cool, refreshing flavor, strolling down Fifth Avenue. She felt his presence. 'Can I have a lick?' he asked. 'Buy your own', she responded, emphatically. Still absorbed in *his life, his art, his vision*, she walked. He talked, incessantly. She turned. He followed. He was tall, bearded, wiry, dark. His dog walked next to him, effortlessly. His voice, the rhythmic phrasing, his odd use of language, amused and comforted her. She was going to catch the Lexington Avenue Line at 72nd Street. He said 'Honey, it don't stop here.' She didn't believe him. They argued. At the 77th Street station, they stood outside, talking, saying good-bye. Then he said the magic words.

(They're not important now.)

She had no idea what to expect. When she got to his place, she realized that *he was a most unusual man. And, that he lived in a most unusual house. His skin was tough, leathery, scaly, smooth, and warm*. She touched him, commenting. *He explained that he ate a special diet, and bathed in unusual solutions to maintain it.*

The following week she returned. They sat on the couch, kissing. The phone rang. He got up. Answered it. Sat down, and kissed her again. The phone rang. He got up. Answered it. Hung up. Sat down. The phone rang. This continued for some time. With each ring, he became more disturbed. Then angry. He asked her to leave, offering no explanation, other than, he had a responsible position to maintain, and could take no risks. On the way to the subway, feeling utterly dismayed, she was startled by a pair of silver hooks, swaying toward her, glaring, in the moonlight.

Later, she discovered that all those calls had been for her, to keep her from going under.

*He was Poseidon, up from the deep, shadow elongated, fragmented on the water's surface, breathing the night air, for a moment.*

MUSING





# RACHEL GUIDO deVRIES

## Box Elder, Red, Just August

She embraces with relief, almost with grace.  
She thinks of water, the sea,  
the body's resistance to waves  
she wants to slumber under.

The barking dog. It yelps as though in pain,  
high pitched, so long. The child's cry, a whoop  
of joy alongside sorrow. What craziness  
it is to find a universe inside.

There used to be some laughter from the woods,  
where she had often lain with love. Her mother's  
hand along her cheek, in dreams, her husband's  
silky chest above her breasts, her lovers' tongues

all full of stars. Till now. Blue moon, just August.  
The seriousness of life, how worried she's become.  
*Box elder*, like the tree, already red. Too late  
she knows and way too soon for leaving

## Drinking Coffee

Be in the place of being Head bobbing  
in the space above your neck, smell  
of coffee and grass in the room, trees  
rustle and whistle. The moon's up there  
with her big old self, hanging around  
in the clouds. Others are up. Birds  
started singing an hour ago and she  
and she are up too, roaming the cabin

Still. Hand resting on my stomach, fingers  
looped around a green pencil. Waiting.  
Coffee cup in left hand, knees bent. Bliss  
and sadness always are words. Tap tap tap  
tap. Drinking coffee, I recognize the smoker  
sneaking off into the woods at dawn

## Dance in the Bright Lights

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Mario and Sandra dance in the middle of the room, alone. Four naked bulbs above them light their movements. They take a step to the right, a step to the left, a step to the right again, monotonously, to the tune of the loud merengue music coming from an enormous box on a table pressed against a wall. A young Mexican has both hands possessively on the box. The other people in the room are also pressed up against the walls, some standing, some sitting in chairs that are too small for them. On one side of the room are large dirty windows and beyond, the Empire State Building, its lights white, and in the distance, the World Trade Center, thick clouds obscuring the tops of its two protrusions.

"I can't do this," Sandra shouts in Mario's ear.

"You dance beautifully," Mario shouts back. "Look at me," Mario suggests. He moves his feet in the same way, left, then right, then left, one step for every beat, but his body sways like a tree, like a snake, away from his legs.

"Right, right, of course," yells Sandra, taking a step to the right. Her body follows her to the right.

Mario grabs her close to him and they twirl, the white lights of the Empire State Building moving with them. Sandra's face is stuck in Mario's neck, where she smells his strong perfume. Mario's hand is on the back of Sandra's head, where he feels her soft limp hair.

Mario is wearing a bright red turtleneck and tight white pants. Sandra is wearing a black shirt and black pants, the shirt buttoned to the top, the pants loose. Mario's shoes are thin Italian loafers. Sandra is wearing workmen's boots.

Mario is a twenty-five year old Dominican, a recent immigrant to New York. He lives with his uncle and cousins, just down the street, at the corner of Essex and Rivington, above a little grocery store. Before coming to New York, Mario travelled around the world as a waiter on Portuguese ships. Tahiti, Barbados, Greece, South Africa, the Bahamas, Peru. He lists the places when asked where he has been. "I have seen the world and now I will have a family," he says.

Sandra lives on Fifth Street and First Avenue, ten blocks North and a little West, in a neighborhood where there are more white people. The hallway of her building smells of dead roses and the dryness of radiator heat. She teaches English to Spanish speakers. When she tells her students how to survive in a strange city she becomes more confident that she too can survive in a strange city. She is twenty-two, a recent graduate of the University of Indiana. She says to her friends back home: "I've come to New York to develop my identity as a progressive lesbian in a real setting. New York is real."



One of the students has brought her mother, an eighty-year-old Peruvian woman with deep immobile wrinkles in her face.

"Doesn't the music bother her?" Sandra asks Mario. Mario doesn't understand.

"The music," Sandra says even more loudly than necessary. "The music is loud."

Yes, it is," Mario says. He smiles.

The old Peruvian woman walks across the room with a paper plate. On it is yellow rice and a small piece of chicken. She sits in a tiny chair next to a Nicaraguan woman who is wearing a purple dress and she eats. She doesn't speak to anyone, even her daughter. She is wearing a skirt over her pants and her thick black hair is in a long braid down her back.

\* \* \*

Mario has thought about marrying Sandra since their first class three months earlier. It was a class of introductions. Sandra wrote questions on the board. "What is your name?" "Where do you live?" "What do you do?" "Where are you from?"

There were twenty-five students in the class, seated in four rows. The women sat in the front of the class and the men in the back. Mario sat in the back row taking up a lot of room. His legs were spread open and his arms were far from his body. It was cold in the classroom and most of the students were huddled in on themselves.

"My name is Guadalupe Martinez," said a young woman with a round face.

"Now ask the woman next to you 'What is your name?'" Sandra said.

"My name is Guadalupe Martinez," the woman repeated.

It was Sandra's first day of teaching. "Very good," she said.

Mario was the last person to be asked the question. "What is your name?" his neighbor Luis asked him. Mario looked up at Sandra. "Me?" he asked, pointing to himself. "Yes," Sandra nodded. He looked directly at Sandra, sitting tall in his chair, his head above those of his classmates. "Me?" he asked again. "I am Mario Rodriguez."

"Now ask me," Sandra said.

"Oh," said Mario, adjusting the position of his body in the chair. "It is my pleasure. What is your name?"

When he asked the question, it was as if the two of them were alone in the class. To answer it, Sandra faced the whole class. "My name is Sandra and I am your teacher."

The class laughed.

For each question, Mario looked at Sandra and said, "Me?" The class played a game. A Colombian was Bill Clinton and answered questions about Bill's life. He liked being President, but his family was most important to him. In his real life, this man was a veterinarian and the only person in the class who lived alone. A Puerto Rican woman was Mother Theresa, because she wanted to help poor people. A Honduran was Raquel Welch. She told the

class that having many boyfriends made her very happy. Also, she liked being rich. This woman was a machine operator.

"What's a machine operator?" asked Sandra. The woman worked on an assembly line in a small factory making clothes.

When the game was over, Sandra sat on the large grey metal desk, cross legged, bouncing her left knee. She loved her students already. She had a cool job. There were white chalk marks on her black pants that were her battle scars. Teaching was a noble profession.

A short man with an enormous mustache raised his hand. "What about you? Tell us about you." Sandra was at a point in her life when she wanted to tell people about herself. Her life was still a surprise to her and so sounded like a story. On the subway the previous day she sat next to a woman with purple nail polish. "I just moved to New York," she said. "I'm changing my life." She didn't explain how.

To the smiling mustached man Sandra said, "Ask me whatever you'd like." Sandra told them about her four sisters.

"That's a big family for Americans," the Puerto Rican woman told the class.

"What about your mother?" the Colombian asked. "Do you have a boyfriend?" a quiet young woman asked. Sandra explained that she and her boyfriend were no longer together. He was with another woman. Again, she didn't finish the story.

"Ah," nodded an older Dominican to a younger Argentine. "Then you will have to find another man."

Mario thought of himself. That night, after class, he walked Sandra to the subway. It was a surprisingly cold night for the beginning of fall and she was wearing a light jacket.

"It's cold," he said, "and you should have a warmer coat." "I do, I do," she laughed. "but it's heavy and I don't always like to wear it."

Mario was standing near her, his shoulder falling toward her as they walked through the dark streets.

"If I were your husband," he said, "you would always be warm."

Mario looked at Sandra intently as he said this. They were walking past an old Jewish deli that had been in the neighborhood for over one hundred years. Salami hung in the lit window. A sudden gust of wind blew Chinese newspapers to their legs where they stuck, plastered against their bodies. The streetlight above them was broken but in the light from the deli Sandra saw the shadows of rats moving along the wall of a building. She moved closer to Mario and he put his arm around her.

Sandra knew that Mario was sincere in the same way she knew the hero in an old Hollywood movie meant it when he proposed to the heroine after having known her only a few minutes of screen time. It was a world she did not believe in, and yet the happy ending would bring tears to her eyes. She imagined putting her cheek up against Mario's cheek, looking out with him into the bleak urban landscape.

\* \* \*



Mario did not come to class for a month. Sandra, in the meantime, had met a young woman named Theresa who owned her own bike messenger service. Twenty-two and already she had her own business. Sandra was impressed. It was cold now, but almost every night Theresa rode down to school to meet Sandra after class. "Hey," she said from behind her ski mask.

Mario reappeared in a burst of energy one night minutes before Sandra was going to dismiss the students. He handed her a note on pink paper with a rose at the top, the letters in a large uneven script. Sandra read, "I was miserable because I did not see you. Now I am happiness." There was a large heart above the "i" of his name, Mario, in the center of the page. Sandra was touched by his innocence, but she was also irritated.

It was bright in the empty classroom after the students left.

"You missed a month of classes," Sandra said.

Mario was leaning on Sandra's desk, looking closely at her, as she threw papers into her brown leather bag, quickly, with annoyance. They were not alone. A meek fellow teacher was waiting for Sandra and a friend of Mario's, a large Dominican with kind eyes, was looking down at everyone.

"Will you go dancing with me?" Mario asked.

"No," Sandra said emphatically, in a teacher's voice, as if pushing the question away. And then she wanted to be softer. "I don't want a boyfriend," she said.

"It's because I am black," Mario said.

Mario leaned closer to Sandra and spoke in a loud whisper. "You didn't have to tell me like this, in front of my friend, you didn't have to say no so rudely." His head was thrown back and there were tears in his eyes. "You didn't have to humiliate me."

Sandra's irritation dissipated, replaced by weariness and anxiety.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I'm sorry." She put her hand on Mario's shoulder, they looked at each other questioningly, and then they smiled, for they both knew that Mario's tears were disproportionate to the situation. On the stairs leaving the building they pushed each other's shoulders, while the meek fellow teacher and the kind-eyed Dominican followed.

"It's important to speak English," the meek teacher said.

"Yes, after all, it is the language of this country," agreed the kind-eyed Dominican.

"I love you," Mario said softly in Sandra's ear, and pushed her arm.

Sandra wasn't sure she had heard him correctly. "No, you don't," she said, to be safe.

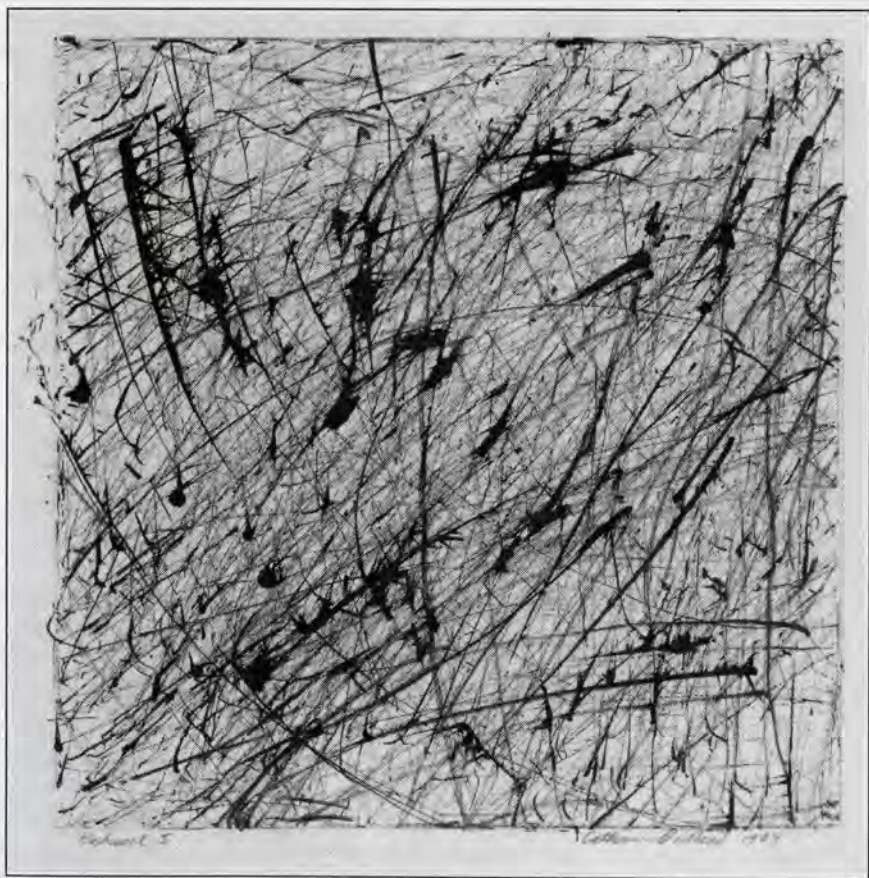
\* \* \*

Now they are dancing. Mario has missed another month of classes, but he has come to the end of term party. "To see you again," he tells Sandra. "You are beautiful," he whispers in her ear. He is holding her tight, his chest pressed up against hers. Their upper bodies are stuck to one another, moving together, but their lower bodies are not, asses sticking out and swaying,

sometimes in the same, sometimes in opposite directions. Mario's chest is pressed up against Sandra's and his eyes are closed. Her hair is soft against his hand where he presses her face into his neck.

The smell of Mario's cologne invades Sandra's body. She stops breathing. Locked in his grip, secure and trapped, Sandra looks at the white shimmering lights of the Empire State Building and dreams of Theresa. She has not danced with a man in over one year. The tightness of his grip reassures and confuses her. She thinks of her mouth and Theresa's melting against one another. She pulls away from Mario and smiles at her students lined up against the walls.

Mario knows that he and Sandra will not marry. It's possible even that after this night they will never see each other again. But Mario is absorbed in the present and does not think of this. Sandra's arms are those of a woman, her breasts are those of a woman, he is holding a woman, he has her now, and with his arms around her, he thinks of his future with another beautiful woman, when he will be as happy as he is now.



Bushwack I

CATHERINE De MARIA



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# ERIK LaPRADE

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## Handmade Visions

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### 1. JUNE LEAF'S "NARRATIVE INSTRUMENTS"

In the fourth book of Milton's epic poem "Paradise Lost," Satan relates his discovery of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden:

*Creatures of other mould, earth-born perhaps,  
Not spirits, yet to heav'nly Spirits bright  
Little inferior; whom my thoughts pursue  
With wonder, and could love, so lively shines  
In them Divine resemblance, and such grace  
The hand that form'd them on their shape hath pour'd.*

June Leaf's sculptures or "instruments" (as she sometimes refers to them) also present us with figures that are no less astonishing than Milton's Adam and Eve, and like Milton's Satan, I find myself drawn to them by the wonder and the meaning of their drama.

While Leaf's instruments are as precise as a sailor's sextant or an astronomer's telescope, her works may perform a more complex function since, not only do they measure distance and space, they also measure spiritual and emotional depths. Thus, if I imagine myself alone in Leaf's studio and sorting through these works, in the same moment that I discover a favorite piece to play with, I am also surprised to find my story being played out right in front of me.

Part of the fascination I have for these works stems from my participation in motivating their action. Thus, my responses are stimulated by an involvement with each piece as I engage it. Leaf allows you to play creator, and for a few seconds, you are the shaping hand in league with her spirit. In fact, Leaf's instruments seem to have a physical and a spiritual dimension, an "inside" and an "outside," so to speak. But if you want to play god, the artist is going to make sure that you play Satan's advocate as well, even if it is only metaphorically.

The inside dimension of a particular piece is its mechanical "heart," the cogs, gears or wire attachments connecting one part to another. These inner mechanics are reminders of the "inside" mechanics of our lives; the divine dreams, secret pleasures or primitive fears, also hidden yet connected.

The outside dimension consists of the figure(s) engaged in some motion or act. Some of these pieces perform different mechanical functions either by themselves or together in pairs. And since these figures are motivated by you, me, or anyone who can pull a wire string, or a trigger, or blow through a hollow tube until a bubble is formed on the other end of a pipe, they serve to remind us of the mechanics of our lives and how we too are always engaged in some physical act either with others or alone.



For example: *Tantrum* depicts a scene of a woman kicking a man. It is initiated by pulling a small cord. The drama repeats itself over and over again until you release the cord. In *Man and Woman Hunting on the Ice*, two figures are propelled forward by placing your forefinger in a ringholder with your thumb in another ring on the end and then pushing the coiled spring forward. They slide across the top edge of a piece of tin. The woman revolves on the tip of the instrument, while the man moves toward her as he holds a long pole in his hands as though attempting to stick her with it.

*Elders* depicts two solitary figures sitting around a fire. Their bent shapes declare them to have a hard-earned wisdom gained from experience. They understand the nature of the flames they stare into, but the divine part of their understanding is just beyond reach, about five inches away, in the shape of an angel leaving the scene. Our part in this scene is to hold the gun-shaped pedestal supporting these figures and with our forefinger pull the trigger. The flame rotates one hundred eighty degrees. Releasing the trigger, the flame moves back into its original position.

While we are participants in a piece's performance, we are also the subject of its commentary, which is part caricature and part explanation of the human condition. By making a piece perform the same act over and over again, we are reminded how mankind is caught in the same kind of repetitious behavior. Thus, the joke is on us, since it is ourselves we are watching enact a sexual drama or commit a seemingly ridiculous and unthinking act.

These sculptures draw me backwards along the timeline of human invention, but I believe it would be a mistake to label them as primitive or toy-like totemic images. A closer equivalent to these sculptures might be found in Leonardo da Vinci's notebooks, particularly the mechanical and engineering drawings that depict universal forces in action.

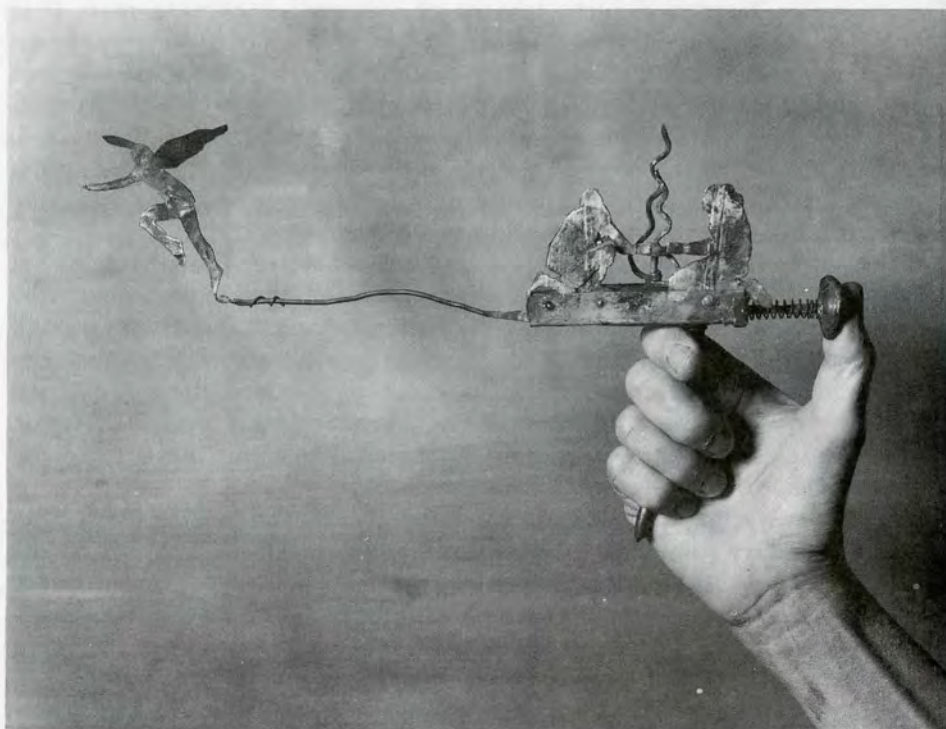
June Leaf's narrative instruments also reveal universal forces in action, the difference is she shows us how we can start or stop these same forces simply by lifting a finger.

## II. PAULA DeLUCCIA: EXPERIENCES AND MEMORIES

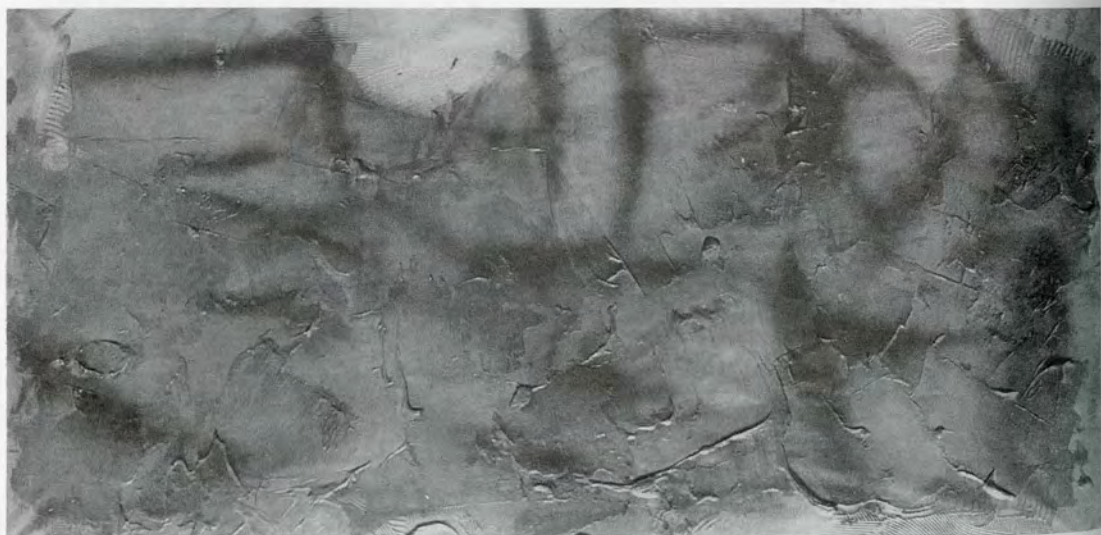
I remember the first time I saw the movie, "Citizen Kane." I was twelve years old and staying up late. It was about twelve-thirty at night. I sat a foot away from the television screen and kept the volume down very low since I did not want to wake my parents. As a result, I could hardly hear what the characters were saying and had no idea what the movie was about. But I remembered two scenes: the glass paperweight containing a snowscene falling out of Kane's hand and shattering on the floor at the bottom of the stairway and Kane's sleigh burning in the rubbish fire at the end of the movie. In T.S. Eliot's words, I "had the experience but missed the meaning."

These images remained in my memory for several years and when I saw the movie a second time and could listen to the dialogue, the sound unlocked the experience of the picture and provided me with the missing piece to a visual puzzle. It enabled me to connect my memory of seeing the film for the first





Elders JUNE LEAF



Steering Clear (acrylic/canvas 45"x92 1/4")

PAULA DeLUCCIA

time with my experience of listening to it the second time around. Yet, the first time provided the strongest impression. It is that memory I return to.

What I like about Paula DeLuccia's abstract paintings is the way she associates color with memory. Her pictures are visual metaphors of emotion that reveal and unlock the powerful forces memory exerts on us whenever we try to reconnect with past experiences. The color in these pictures unlock my memories and connect me to the experience of the picture the way sound connected me to "Citizen Kane."

DeLuccia understands how to position color on the canvas and how the movement of color affects vision. There are no static moments in her paintings. My eye is constantly moving and experiencing the material in front of it. Whether my memories are complete and whole experiences or fragments of an experience, I am constantly forgetting, revising, or searching through those memories and using them as reference points to explain new experiences. And her paintings are physically appealing. As I scan their surfaces, I find colors that match my moods and feelings. The color bridges my memories because the artist has found a pressure point in my emotions. And, as in any encounter, the forces pressing in compel me to move to another position to relieve that pressure.

This is particularly true of "Escaping One Morning," where the colors are grouped and concentrated across the canvas, an effect which creates erupting movements throughout the picture. In "Mountain Beat," the paint is spread across the canvas and then worn down into a very thin haze by a series of broad strokes. A contrasting color is blended into the canvas, and we are left looking at a picture with only two colors. This picture contains the same kind of movement and energy you might find in a lush garden. It is the haze of memory I am facing, looking for an opening where I can recapture the experience before it drifts beyond my grasp.

To connect your experience of looking at De Luccia's paintings with what you're feeling can be as frustrating as reaching for a mirage. The artist's eye is our guide as we explore our own emotional reservoirs, and we have to trust the picture to lead us to that part of our memory before we can define the experience for ourselves. On the other hand, a painting like "Steering Clear" contains memory banks full of traces of experiences, but the surface is so dense that light does not penetrate it. It is a picture that requires us to study it because there is something to be learned from it. It is not an easy lesson.

The source of these experiences exist in us and if what we see is true and real, then Paula DeLuccia has done her job.



# KATHY ENGEL

## PRAYER

*for Charles and Gale  
and for Donald*

Donald Walter Woods  
December 18, 1957—June 25, 1992

Charles sleeps with the light on.  
Gale takes showers.  
I pull the covers up over my head and sweat.

We call,  
fall asleep, the phone  
hunched up in our shoulders.  
Sigh and sing.

Grief  
passes through  
between us  
like a shawl  
in an ancient dance.  
It holds us folded between dusk and dawn.

We stare into it.

Our friend is gone.

Our business is words  
but they don't steer us  
into understanding the voiceless chair.  
They *do* move us.  
That's why we write  
ourselves into healing.  
That's why we put our stories down,  
our complicated love,  
like birds gathering twigs for a nest,  
swift and careful.

Because we need them.  
We need to hear them.  
To tell them.

Words make our nest.

*Donald was a word person*  
someone at the service said.

I call Charles **Donald**,  
his name escaping  
involuntarily  
when my lips part  
like I was sleep talking.  
We're expecting him still.  
To speak at least.

Charles lights candles.  
Gale cooks greens at ten,  
takes more showers.  
I exercise till my legs shake,  
hold my baby—who Donald held—  
cry at the soft pink sleeve over the potato field.  
Unloyal beauty, not holding its breath for death.

How long do we hold our breath?  
How much do we say?

We hold our breaths  
and face injustice  
a little deeper even,  
life's work.

Donald's assistant  
told us at the service:  
*He was human.*

That's ridiculous.  
Given human,  
he was grand.

I hear him talk.  
In my living room.

Our lilies were the gayest thing at the church  
Charles told me.  
That's good, I said.  
I didn't know that.

I really didn't know that.  
The delicacy of learning  
a new language,  
landscape.



I listen for the nuance.  
AIDS turning our love into a grave.  
We plant flowers of words.

Beautiful weapons.

We teach each other  
the fragile terrain  
where to go.

Our skin colors  
and tongues,  
childhood  
and choice of touch  
alphabets apart.  
We tenderly piece them together.

What holds us together  
is passion for justice,  
love,  
joy of imagination.

What holds us together  
is a cup of light.

This time we have to say it all.

I ask Charles if he remembered a handkerchief.  
He was beaten so much as a child  
tears don't come, he told me.

*So I grew into a person who can't bear  
to see another person in pain*  
he explains.  
And holds his pain  
like a flower.

What can we do?

Keep fighting.

Before separate sleepless nights,  
we each turn the lights on.  
In Mississippi B.J. sleeps with a light on too.

We're all afraid of the dark.

Donald.  
Are you there.

ROBERTY FRIEDMAN-AUGUST has written articles and interviews for *Downtown*, *The Village Voice*, *East Village Eye*, and *Homeplanet News*. Author of two books of poetry: *The Liberty Years* and *Family Album* and Poetry Editor of *Downtown* for six years, she is working on a new book of poems.

RONNY SWAIN GALICKI is a singer-songwriter, playwright, actor, published astrologer, psychic, persian cat breeder and advocate of human and animal rights. He lives on Manhattan's Lower East Side.

JANICE GOULD, a mixed-blood of American Indian (koyang-k'auwi) and European descent, has won awards for her writing from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Astraea Foundation. Her first book of poems, *Beneath My Heart*, was published by Firebrand Press (1990).

MINROSE GWIN teaches feminist theory and women's poetry and fiction at the University of New Mexico. She has authored or edited four scholarly books, including *Black and White Women of the Old South: The Peculiar Sisterhood in American Literature*. Her autobiographical book, *Hearing My Mad Mother's Voices*, combines her own narrative and poetry with poetry by her deceased mother, Erin Clayton Pitner.

KIMIKO HAHN: Born to a Japanese American mother and German America father, her influences primarily come from her Asian background. Her most recent poetry collections are *Earshot* (Hanging Loose Press, 1992) and *The Unbearable Heart* (forthcoming Kaya Press, 1994). She currently teaches at Queens College (CUNY).

MIA HANSFORD, a sculptor, painter and poet has published in *A Gathering of the Tribes*, *Sensitive Skin*, *Appearances*, and *The Fuse*. She was Visual Editor of *Tribes #3* and has read her work at The Whitney Downtown, Nuyorican Poets Cafe, BoB, CB's 313 and The Right Bank.

SAFIYA HENDERSON-HOLMES' first collection of poetry, *Madness and a Bit of Hope* (Harlem River Press, 1991) won the Poetry Society of America's William Carlos Williams Award. She is the recipient of CAPS and NYFA fellowships for poetry. Formerly a guest faculty artist at Sarah Lawrence, she is now Assistant Professor of English at Syracuse University.

JACK HIRSCHMAN lives in San Francisco. He is on the Cultural Committee of the National Organizing Committee. Recent are a poetry collection *Endless Threshold* (Curbstone, 1992) and a translation of poems about the Mayan Indians, *The Sea on Its Side* by Ambar Past (Post-Apollo Press). His next poetry book is *Xibalba Arcana* (Azul Editions).

DAVID HUBERMAN is a poet, actor, and book editor for HYPE. He has appeared in productions at La Mama E.T.C., The Public Theater, ABC No Rio, and PS 122. He stars in the feature film *Trail of Blood* directed by Ari Roussimoff to be released in the fall of 1994.

GALE JACKSON is a poet, a writer, a storyteller, a librarian, a student of history and a worker in cultural education. Her publications include the journals *Black American Literature Forum*, *Callalou*, *Frontiers*, *Ploughshares* and *Kenyon Review*, a collaborative anthology, *We Stand Our Ground* (IKON, 1988) and a forthcoming folktale adaptation called *Rattlesnake's Tale*.

HETTIE JONES is author of *How I Became Hettie Jones*, a memoir of the "beat scene" of the fifties and sixties. Her books for children and young adults include a just reissued *ALA Notable*, *The Trees Stand Shining*, and *Big Star Fallin' Mama* (*Five Women in Black Music*).

LARRY JONES has curated the "Cafe Nico" series of poetry, prose and performance one flight up from NYC's infamous Pyramid Club since 1990. *we become a picnic* (selected poems 1971-1983) will be forthcoming from Venom Press in the Spring of 1994.

ELIOT KATZ is a poet and activist from New Brunswick, NJ. *Space and Other Poems for Love, Laughs, and Social Transformation*, (Northern Lights, 1990) has introductions by Allen Ginsburg and Amiri Baraka. *Les voleurs au travail* (Thieves at Work) was published in French translation (Messidor, Paris, 1992). He works as a housing advocate with Middlesex Interfaith Partners with the Homeless.

IRENA KLEPFISZ is an activist in the lesbian/feminist and Jewish communities. Her most recent books, *A Few Words in the Mother Tongue—Poems Selected and New* (1971-1990) and *Dreams of an Insomniac: Jewish Feminist Essays, Speeches and Diatribes* (The Eighth Mountain Press) came out in 1990.

DONALD LEV co-edits *Home Planet News*. His tenth collection of poetry will be put out this year by Catskill Outloud Books. One of his poems appeared in *A New Geography of Poets* (University of Arkansas Press, 1992).

ERIK LA PRADE lives in New York City. His first book of poems, *Things Maps Don't Show* will be published spring, 1994.

JUNE LEAF is a painter and sculptor who lives and works in New York City and Canada. An exhibition of her work, *JUNE LEAF: A Survey of Painting, Sculpture, and Works on Paper 1948-1991*, was organized by the Washington Project for the Arts, Washington D.C. in 1991. Recently her work was shown in *TERRA FIRMA: Five Immigrant Artists* in Nova Scotia, 1993.

HARRY LEWIS is a poet, translator, and fiction writer. He is presently preparing a translation of the major poetical works of Vladimir Mayakovsky. His published volumes of poetry include *The Wellsprings* (Momo's Press) and *Hudson 1-16* (# Press.) He lectures on child development at the New School for Social Research and is in private practice as a psychotherapist.

TSAURAH LITZKY has been writing since she was seven. Her chapbook, *Pushing Out the Envelope* (Apathy Press, Baltimore 1992) is in its second printing. She is a regular columnist for *Downtown*. She believes this is the promised land.

ELLEN AUG LYTLE, Writing Editor for *Downtown*, has a column discussing literary events, books and what it means to live today as an artist/writer. Working on new prose, she is waiting for *Freddy The Fish and Friends* her third student/ workshop book to come out. She also paints and is an ardent "animal activist."

NADINE MOZON, is a native of Washington D.C. She has read/performed her poetry at SKEP, BoB, Nuyorican Poet's Cafe, Fez, Cornelia Street Cafe and Deanna's. She recently completed a poetry chapbook, *SERENDIPITY*, and one of her poems appears in the April 1994 issue of *ESSENCE* magazine.

EILEEN MYLES is a poet who has lived in New York since the mid 70's. Her most recent book of poems *Not Me* was published by Semiotext(e) in 1991. A collection of her stories, *Chelsea Girls* will be published by Black Sparrow in May of 1994.

EVE PACKER, performance artist and poet, has been awarded grants from NYSCA, Jerome Foundation, Puffin Foundation (w/jazz group *the Future*), and the New York Foundation for the Arts. She co-edits *What Happens Next*.

CAROLYN PEYSER is director of public relations at Poets House—a 30,000 volume poetry library in Manhattan, publicizes



Slams at the Nuyorican Poets Cafe, fundraises for a PBS poetry series, and is co-producing a poetry CD.

PAUL PINES spent the 60s in Vietnam, Europe, Mexico, Belize and the Lower East Side. During the 70s, he ran the Tin Palace, a Bowery jazz club. He has published a novel, *The Tin Angel* (William Morrow, 1983) and two poetry books, *Onion* (Mulch Press, 1971) and *Hotel Madden Poems*, (Contact II, 1991.)

DEBORAH PINTONELLI is the co-founder and former editor of *Letter eX*, a poetry newspaper based in Chicago, and the author of *Meat and Memory* and *Ego Monkey*. She is working on a new book, *Some Heart*, of which "Jessy" is an excerpt.

J.D. RAGE is a poet, novelist, photographer, artist and the co-publisher/editor of *Venom Press*. She has curated readings at ABC No Rio. Her books include *Man Trouble*, *Rage*, *Dear Grim Reaper*, *No Flowers* and *The Hat On The Bed*. Her hobbies are computers and tattoos.

MARGARET RANDALL's most recent book is *Sandino's Daughters Revisited: Feminism in Nicaragua* from Rutgers University Press. She lives and writes in Albuquerque, New Mexico and reads and lectures extensively.

JILL RAPAPORT is a poet, prose writer, essayist, playwright and songwriter. She won a 1990 NYFA for non-fiction. She has been published in *Long Shot*, *Red Tape* and the *St. Mark's Poetry Project Newsletter*.

ROCHELLE RATNER wears several hats, including novelist (*The Lion's Share*, Coffee House Press, 1992), poet (*Some-day Songs*, BkMk Press, 1993), and editor of *American Book Review*.

MEL ROSENTHAL, a photographer, directs the photography programs at Empire State College (SUNY). Best known for his photographs of the South Bronx, Cuba, Viet Nam, Nicaragua and Puerto Rico, his latest work is about refugees living in New York State. He is a founder of the Tirage Project collective documenting the New York City health care crisis.

LORRAINE SCHEIN has appeared in *Trivia*, *Heresies*, *Semiotext(e)* SF and in Crossing Press' anthologies including a women's humor collection, *Women's Glib*. Her story, "The Raw Brunettes" will appear in the anthology *Wild Women: Stories for Women Who Run With The Wolves* (Overlook Press).

JAN SCHMIDT is a writer of fiction and essays. She is co-publisher/editor of *Venom Press* and the literary magazine *Curare*. Her book of short stories is called *Everything Depends On It* and she has a novel, *The Great Meltdown*.

SUSAN SHERMAN, the editor of *IKON*, was awarded a NYFA in Poetry (1990) and a Puffin Foundation Grant (1993). Recent books are a collection of essays, poems and short prose, *The Color of the Heart: Writing from Struggle & Change 1959-1990* (Curbstone Press, 1990) and *We Stand Our Ground* with poets Kimiko Hahn and Gale Jackson. She is working on an autobiographical chronicle of the Sixties.

MICKI SIEGEL, a poet, originally from the Midwest, has curated the *Burnt Words* reading series for the last three years at Anseo. She has been published in the *National Poetry Magazine* of the *Lower East Side*, *Bruno* and *On The Edge* from Cambridge and has a poem coming out in *Monster Truck*.

HERSCHEL SILVERMAN has written and published poems for over thirty years. "Although he had a strong desire to accept the invitation from Ginsberg, Corso & Kerouac to join them on the open road, he remained in his candy-store in Bayonne, New Jersey, where he worked seven days a week to support a wife and two children."

HAL SIROWITZ is the author of five books of poems. He has been published in journals, including *Chelsea*, *Hanging Loose*, *New Letters*. His plays have been performed in New York City. He is a recipient of an NEA grant in poetry for 1993.

PAMELA SNEED is a poet, playwright and performance artist who has performed her work at the Nuyorican Poets Cafe and P.S. 122. She is currently living in London.

DIANE SPODAREK is a recipient of NYFA and NEA Fellowships in video. Her prose is published in a regular column in *Downtown*, a bi-weekly cultural newsmagazine. She performs her poetry and publishes her cartoons, "Vulva TV," under the name Dangerous Diane. She lives with her teenage daughter Dana on the Lower East Side.

LISA SPRINGER has an MFA from Warren Wilson College. She has published articles in *COVER*, *California Today*, and *The Pittsburgh Times*. She teaches ESL and writing at NYU and Fordham.

MARY JANE SULLIVAN is a poet, filmmaker, and video artist who is currently working on a video project of a projected pilgrimage from Eastern Europe to Japan documenting post World War II holocausts.

MARIE-ELISE WHEATWIND is a freelance writer, part-time teacher, ex-waitress and cab driver, and mother of a grown son, who dreams of writing a novel. Her work can be found in numerous anthologies and journals.

**Grateful acknowledgement is made to** CAROLE BYARD: *American History 101* was created for the Cost to Coast: National Women Artists of Color exhibit "Gathering Medicine" Art in General, 1994. LES BRIDGES: "Seven Trees" from *Read 'em and Weep*. Lyndawn, copyright © 1993 Les Bridges. Reprint permission by author. JOSELY CARVALHO: *Diary of Images: Cirandas* I exhibited in the U.S. Sept. 20-Oct. 29, 1993 at the Intar Latin American Gallery. JANICE GOULD: "The Subversive Language of the Tribal Mind" appeared in *The Women's Review of Books*. Reprinted by permission of author. IRENA KLEPFISZ: "67 Remembered" from *A Few Words in the Mother Tongue*, The Eighth Mountain Press, © 1974, 1977, 1982, 1985, 1990 Irena Klepfisz. Reprinted by permission of author. TSAURAH LITZKY: "Flies" appeared in *DOWNTOWN*. J.D. RAGE: "The Nouveau Riche" from *Dear Grim Reaper*, *Venom Press*, © 1993 J.D. Rage. Reprinted by permission of author. MEL ROSENTHAL: "New York State's New Settlers" project made possible by support from the New York Council For The Humanities, the Empire State College Foundation & from an Imperatore Grant. JAN SCHMIDT: "Mirages" from *Everything Depends On It*, *Venom Press*, © 1992 Jan Schmidt. Reprinted by permission of author. SUSAN SHERMAN: "A Poem that Starts in Winter," reprinted from *Bridges*, Vol.2 #3, Fall 1991. "Long Division" first appeared in *Long Shot*, Vol. 15. DIANE SPODAREK: "Lunch at the Library" "Shopping in 100 degree Heat" & "toon first appeared in *DOWNTOWN*. MARIE-ELISE WHEATWIND: *Los Perdidos*: "To Dance" first appeared in *Blue Mesa Review*, 1993.



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