

# IKON

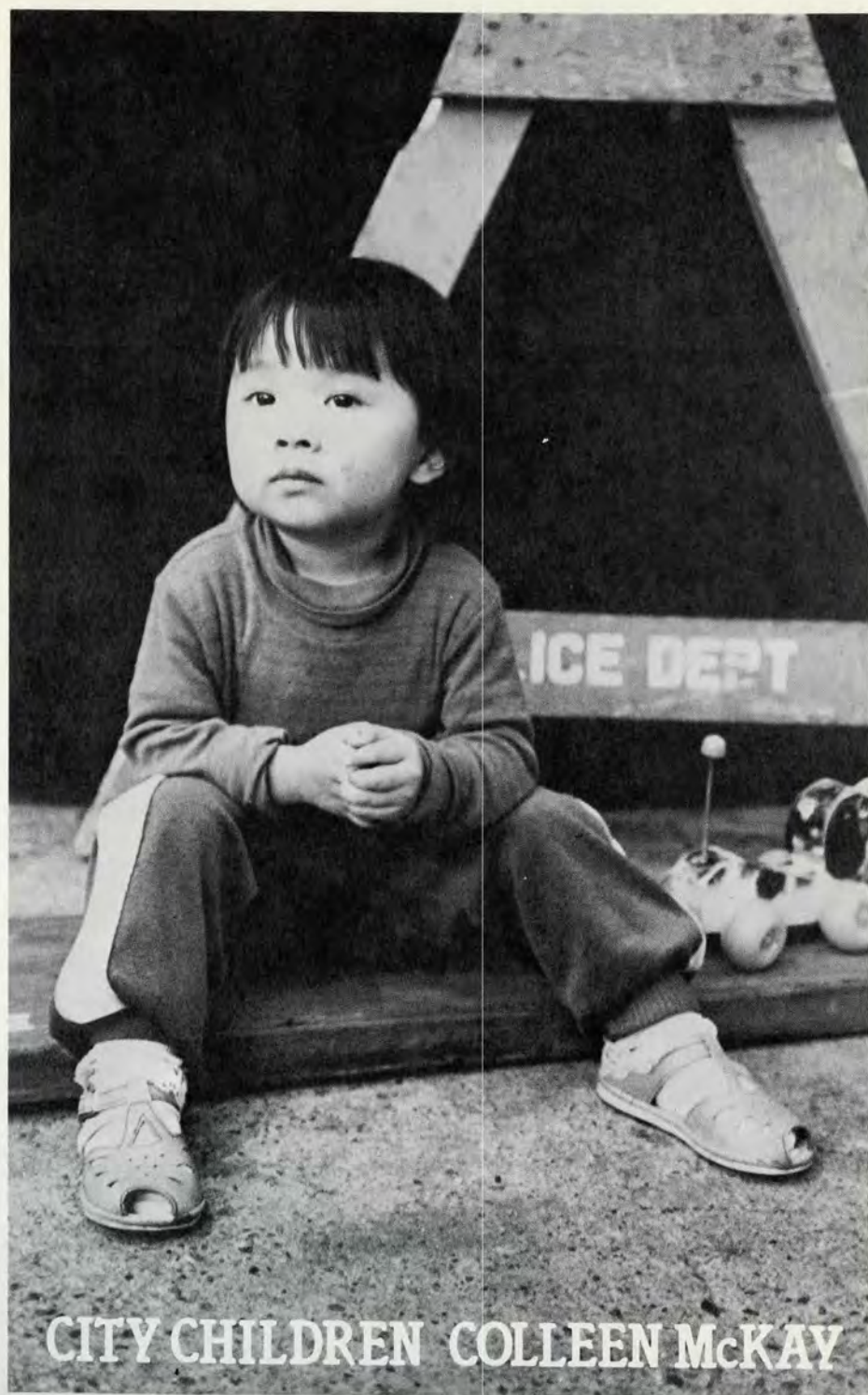
creativity  
and  
change

## WOMEN AND THE COMPUTER

a special section



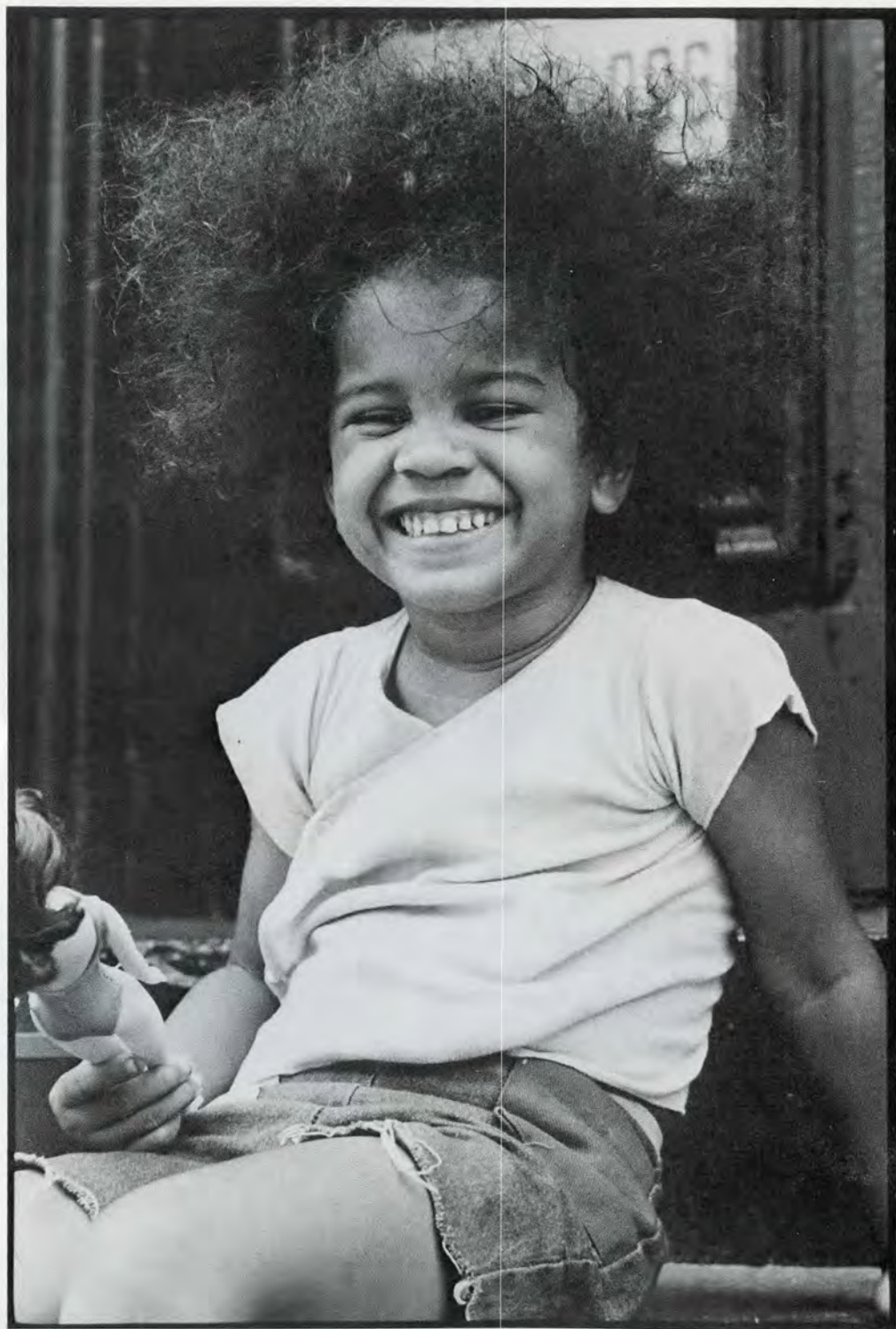
WE ARE  
MORE  
THAN  
WE  
KNOW  
~H.D.



CITY CHILDREN COLLEEN MCKAY





















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# PATTI GAYLE JACKSON

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cleaning my floors i search for a clarity in wood  
a real see my self in it shine and continuity  
(like digging thru to china)  
in the news from zimbabwe. i am on my knees before t.v.  
was invented, holy rollin to the radio, but the newscaster  
ignores me. blood soaks the bread blesses the wine bends  
the torn heads of roses. north america is the battlefield  
in the closing distance of my dreams it marches forward  
in concrete. oh where is news from zimbabwe, hidden  
in section b on page sixty eight? when will i hear  
from my people keeping one's home is one's nation  
colorful as calypso. i'm sure news awaits me making delicate  
arrangements of state.  
rebel rebel up to my knees in detergent.

my longing for you is a quiet wish between  
filthy refrigerator shelves and this case of  
a bachelor apartment: a frog waiting to become cinderella  
a kiss waiting for me to dig her out of soot and romance  
thaws as if it were once a castle of ice inside it  
how many lives frozen where dreams slip away  
leaving lakes of glass slippers and roaches  
run between my poems a fecund existence...  
so what if i'm just defrostin my fridge?  
i do think of love, so what is the proper stance anyway  
for a woman alone, i wish the chance to be or not to be  
a bitch in love a woman the pain in my head  
threatens to rip me apart and expose that you can see yourself  
in it shine is deep i say, i sit, i miss you here  
undisturbed.





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# HOUSEWORK

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hanging from the window at 180 housewife's habitat  
i can see that maria marquesa desotta has been burned out  
(there are many forms of death and eviction)  
and cars roll by the graveyard unaware that another person  
has joined the list of casualties and every harsh word  
reaching up toward my fire escape is a tongue of flame  
leaving me nowhere to run/ spick/ no where to run/ nigga/ no where  
to run maria marquesa desotta whose husband and whose child  
sit, on the stoop another blockade no where to run and  
i'm tryin to make sense out of all this waiting for the calm breeze  
but storm after storm after everyone has taken a drink  
i return to my bathroom, take a shit, gain courage.

where is the end of this poem, the economy in a diary  
and housework: an obsession a preoccupation like in occupied  
territory, like in "someone's livin in this body the end  
is in the beginning." i'm talkin bout basic changes in technology  
my mop and my pail out into the streets my love off the ice  
(this ain't no vertical thing)

i mean i envision hundreds of rejuvenated domestics marching thru the park  
reclaiming the land under our adidas one's home is one's nation  
even invisible behind dark apartments or hung from scatwalks like burglars  
i got my head out the window and i'm hollering i know you're there  
to meet me downstairs and move on the world city borough prospect park  
west, an army of busily unemployed as the sun takes it down.



PAULA  
GUNN  
ALLEN

The  
WOMAN  
who  
owned the  
SHADOWS



## Chanting, She Knew Them

She began her calming chant in her mind, shouting within herself to be heard over the panic and raging din, the flood. I am Ephanie Atencio. Ephanie Kawiemie Atencio. I am myself. This is Teresa who walks beside me. The sun is shining and I am on my way back to California. I know who I am. I will not give in. This is my hand. These are my eyes. My mouth belongs to me. I am Ephanie Atencio. Ephanie Kawiemie Atencio. No one else can possess me. No one else can control me. No one else can speak for me. Through me. This is my hand. My sturdy, strong, brown hand. These are my eyes. I know what I see. I am no one else. I am myself. These are my eyes. Ephanie's huge dark eyes. This is my hair. Ephanie's curly thick hair. This is my body. My small square round stubby body. I am on my way to California. I don't live in the apple tree spring any more.

But she knew that others owned such bodies, such eyes, such hair, such hands. That her own had come to her from another time and from people who were not her, who invaded her so long ago, before she was born. She looked like many others and she knew that even her flesh was not hers to own.

If my own dear mind, the words, the memories, the beliefs, the understandings, if the mesas I see in memory, the water my skin recalls, the food my tongue thinks it tasted, the painful, tearing, ugly, beautiful, loving, tender words my ears think they heard, my mouth thinks it ever spoke are not true, not mine. If I cannot believe that one single thing in me, in my mind, in my body, my brain, is of me, is mine, is me, then how will I know which is me and which is the other, others, the not-me.

Which is I. Which them. And wondered how she had come to believe herself possessed, how she had known, decided the possession was final. I must be psychotic, she thought. I must be mad. They don't burn witches anymore. Possession does not, cannot exist. That's what the shrink says and I must believe her. Or I'm lost. I'll never be able to live.

## Shaking She Speaks This Time

They had gone to visit some friends of Teresa's on their way to Guadalupe. That was in Colorado. The women were political types. Wilderness buffs. They believed in a lot of things. They raised food. They wore natural fiber clothes. They organized things. Ideas that they put people in. Within. They sneered a lot. At people who lived in suburbs. At people who watched television. At people who worked the land and raised livestock and talked with a drawl. At women who wore pantyhose and aprons. At universities and students and professors. At doctors, lawyers and Indian chiefs. No, they drew the line at Indian chiefs. Maybe out of deference to her. They winked at her conspiratorially. Like she knew what they knew. And agreed. They talked a lot about Indians. About massacres and victims and Sand Creek and Wounded Knee. They snorted and shrugged, railed and analyzed. They treated her like she was a wooden Indian outside the trader's store. When she spoke, they waited, hanging on her every word. They laughed hugely at her jokes. They twinkled at every grin in her eyes, on her mouth.



After three days there she had begun to lose any sense of who she was. Of what she thought about anything. She wanted to like them, these friends of her friend. Who viewed her as an artifact, quaint, curious, fragile, wronged. She began to feel wronged. Fragile. Innocent and helpless. She wanted to be understood. They winked and nodded as though they understood, and she believed them. She talked more than she should. She said things they hadn't the remotest idea how to understand. She thought they understood. She didn't remember that they couldn't. Not from the point of view they occupied. Not from the snorting and sneering and analyzing space they inhabited with familiar grace and ease.

One night, late, they were sitting around the kitchen, talking, drinking herbal tea sweet with honey from their own precious bees. They were talking about old Indian ways. Medicine men. Power. Black Elk. The centuries-long war. That was never over. About the tribal ways. About peace. About the mining companies. The uranium tailings piled up on nearby hills, that seeped radioactive water down into the creeks during runoff time. That radiated everything. About the people of Guadalupe who lived with the mines just beneath their feet. About the work that could be gotten because of it. About the money that had poured in. About the affluence and what it cost.

They spoke glowingly about the famous medicine man who had spoken so powerfully, so movingly at the survival gathering they had attended, spoken about the sacredness of mother earth, how the whiteman had desecrated it.

She told them about how this same medicine man had lashed out at some women she knew. He was angry and contemptuous because they were lesbians. How he had told them he ought to rape them. How they had put him out of their car. How hurt, puzzled they had been. How afraid.

They told her about the Navajo woman they had spoken to who had been so eloquent about being moved from her homelands to the other side of the reservation because the whiteman wanted her land to drill on.

She told them that the disputed land was Hopi land, and that the relocation of the Navajos was a result of a decision made by the U.S. Government at the request of the Hopis who did not get along with Navajos since time immemorial.

They told her about the rising incidence of cancer among the Guadalupe Indians and some others that they had read about in some recently published book.

She told them that the stories weren't true, that there was no higher incidence of cancer among the Guadalupes since the mines than before them, and that the cancers they did get were more likely caused by excessive sugar and refined carbohydrate consumption than yellowcake from the mines.

Through it all she found herself getting angrier and angrier, her face burning and the muscles tight as she tried to speak quietly; simply, convincingly.

They told her about how Indians were dying of booze and lousy working conditions and ignorance and squalor.

She told them about the Vista worker who had come to Guadalupe and wanted to teach her mother how to keep house properly. About the government people who wanted to make sure everyone had indoor plumbing, so they got them all toilets installed. But some people had to put the toilets in the kitchen, and it



disgusted them. "They refused to use them, of course," she said, laughing. "One old man said he'd die before he'd do his business in his own house!"

They didn't crack a smile.

She finally gathered herself together enough to ask, "where are you all from?" And grinned, gleaming, triumphant, sly and sick when they replied, "Back east."

"Of course you are," she said. "Of course."

They told her about the traders who, they had read, stole jewelry from Indians, taking it in trade for merchandise that they sold at inflated prices, trading against the jewelry at far less than it was worth.

"Worth to who?" she asked.

"To somebody else. Like this belt," one of them said, pulling at the bright silver concho belt she wore around her slim waist so Ephanie could see it. "Do you know that I had to pay over seven hundred dollars for it? It's Indian pawn."

"Where'd you get it?" Ephanie asked.

"Oh, at a pawn shop that handles a lot of Indian stuff in Denver."

"Oh," Ephanie said. "It's very nice. You got it for a good price, too," she said.

"But I heard that a belt like this, some Indian might only get two hundred dollars for from the trader—if that. Then he'll sell it to a broker and make a bundle off it."

"Sure," Ephanie said. "That's business." And didn't say that the trader and the broker made money because people like the concho-belt woman would pay seven hundred dollars to show off their awareness of Indians. Or that the two or three hundred dollars the Indian got was a lot of groceries. Or that the trader charged a lot for his goods because he had to pay a lot for them. That independent grocers and merchants didn't own the subsidiary companies that huge supermarket chains did. And that the local trader often carried people "on credit" for years, without repayment, without hope of repayment, and without once asking for money on that account. Because they knew the people. Knew they would pay when, if, they could. Something that huge grocery chains, or pawn shops in big cities didn't do. Or that the traders she knew cared about the people they lived off of, putting up bail when someone was thrown in jail, paying for lawyers for them, giving them counsel. She knew that wasn't the official line about traders, and that there were plenty of traders who used the people badly. And that there were plenty of the other kind too. She didn't mention the losses that some of the traders took from theft of their stock over the year either. She knew she would just sound contentious, wrong-headed. That these fine people didn't want to hear that everything worked two ways, at least. That Indians were people too. Strong, capricious, willful, gentle, malicious, kind, vicious. People. Human beings. Not noble denizens of a longlost wilderness. Not romantic leftovers of some past age. Not downtrodden savages with boots on. But real live human beings, full of piss and vinegar, as the saying goes.

Instead she cleared her throat and her brain. Began to talk of other, safer things. Of the white housewives who were dying of booze. And the college kids. And the squalor the radical fringe lived in. And the lousy working conditions at the restaurant where she sometimes worked. And realized she had fallen into some sort of trap. Knew she was run-through on the tip of her own sharp tongue.



## The Place Where The Four Sides Meet

The katsina had appeared near the meadow where they had been standing. She saw him and walked to his side. He was very tall and wore a mask. It was carved out of soft wood and painted. It was snouted with a long snout, the lip edges painted black. Or was it a mask. Or was it just how he looked. There was one horn that curved upward from the right side of the mask's crown. The eyes were ringed black. He wore spruce branches in a ruff around his neck. His body was painted white, with black stripes at elbow, forearm and wrist. She could see that his skin hung loosely from his arms. He showed her the convergence of four rivers. He indicated that the rivers were associated, identified, with the convergence of four books, and that the rivers and the books each flowed from one of the four directions, coming together as a cross. But they became one river, one book in a place they all met. She watched this, the coming together place that seemed eternal, infinite, still, trying to understand. He said that when the four waters had merged she would marry.

Long after that dream she understood. In her small quiet alone room, hunched within her books and papers, she read something and understood something that made it clear. The katsina was showing her the origin. The place of the mother. Shipap. The place of memory, the place of dream. The place where all rain and all connection comes from. The place that first and finally is home.

Stephen had been nearby in the dream. He had stood to one side, near a rise. The others stood on the rise and beyond it. He wore wedding clothes. White pants, a red shirt belted with the green, red and white woven belt of the people. He wore turquoise and silver jewelry and tall, soft mocassins. Maybe he was her guide to that place. Maybe he was the witness. Maybe he was the cheaní, the priest.

Years before the time of her alonebeing, she had that dream. She had looked in shops and books in the years since then, searching for that katsina, his representation, but she had only seen a picture of one mask that resembled the one he wore. She had never seen a kachina doll made up to look like he appeared in that dream. After awhile she had given up thinking about it. Dreams don't mean much, she had thought then, even when they were about the messengers of the gods.

But the sound and smell of the water. The image of the old spirit man's arm, halfway between elbow and shoulder, stayed clear in her mind over the years. In heaven, the Christians said, there is no time. The sagging, crépy skin told her that the katsina was very old.

In her childhood she had heard the talk of spirits and ghosts. The koko man, as she and her sisters called the katsina who initiated everyone into being one of the people. They had tortured her with his name. She had wakened at night crying in fright because she thought the koko man had gotten into their house and was coming for her.

She had listened to the older ones talking about those who had loved too much to ever leave, of lakes that dried up when the lake katsinas left for other places. Lost, beyond recall. Had seen that happen, the lake vanished in the dirty air of what at Guadalupe they called bad thoughts. They said the angry, jealous people did that. The disobedient ones. The ones who mocked the holy ones. And that because of them the katsinas had to leave. She thought it was the suicide that had



finally made them go away. The lake had dried up after the war, when so many came home, uncleansed, changed. Angry and twisted up inside. Wanting things they'd never had. Wanting to be done with the old ways, the holy things. She thought it was also because of the land, which allowed too much mockery, abuse, and did not demur. She thought it was the heavy presence of the new fundamentalist churches there, the missions they called them, sent from the easterners to spread death.

And pondered these things in the night watching the shadows move along the walls, dark on dark, questing in her mind the course of these things, not comprehending what it was she understood, seeing in the light of remembered fires that flickered on midnight mysterious hills around the longago village some necessary counterpart of home and daylight, of comfort unseen but not less known.

And in the place and time, misbegotten, oh the moan of her body rocking her to sleep, comfort-laden words whispering themselves in her ears, the blind groping that followed her in sleep, a wanting to see again the bright, the golden fires and the taste of coffee, the elusive whisper of chocolate, of sweet darkness, that almost but never quite gave itself to her, a deep longing on the hills, lying upon them like the rainclouds, lying within her belly unspoken, a song, perhaps, a grief. She never could tell which and tried singing. Moaning. Crying. But they, like chocolate, like the whispers, denied entry, were denied. The bright flames. The flames of midnight. The sun turning flame to almost invisible, to gold.

And together these tore at each other within her, darkness soft and comforting, light-bright, sweet and dazzling, and she racing between them off into blue distance. Following the traces of mystery, for she had seen that the god blesses in the open places. She had felt the gentle touch of an unremembered star.

And that was far different from what she had been taught all those years inside a dark box on her knees trying to find comfort in heavy velveteen curtain and knowing joy on mesa, on treetop perch, where she sang to the sun and the clouds, the very sky singing with her, a counterpart to her joyous pealing. Or from the confessional to run behind the convent where she lived as a little girl, to run behind it to the alfalfa field and throw herself down among the sweet blooming stems to hide and watch the sky, the clouds, wheeling. To weep. How foolish I have been, she whispered as she realized what had been done. To her. To all of them. They made me be like this. The sisters at the school. The priests in the box. And clenched her fingers tight against her palm. Helpless with grief. With rage.

As a child there in that alien place, she had learned to believe that the god of the boxes would sing, would bless her when she knelt down within their musty velvet to confess and to pray, crossing herself with the sign of disease: "Bless me father for I have sinned." Shrinking inward. Closing off body like spoiled fruit, trying to feel the sinning, herself in the act of sinning, the accompanying thrill of hot intense shame, of guilt, of release, that she would ever after experience in the arms of her lovers, hoping then that in that progression of emotion, of sensation, would come blessing which later she recognized to be what it was. The terrible infestation that had taken place in her only beloved body's soul.

Kurena, sunrise. Fingers touching thumb. Spreading. Blessing another. Saying, "the sun." Shiwanna, the people who live in Shipap. The rain.



"Bless me, Naiya Iyatiku, for I have been wronged. Make me remember to understand. To send the evil away."

Yet she was unwilling to let it go. To let herself go. To stand up on any somewhere table, to be naked and shrinking seen. An infinity of holes. Of broken. Of unground bits unassimilated. Never ground fine and kneaded into fresh clay dug from the arroyo banks so far away and carried, straining back home. Never fired anew. Of shadows flickering in clouded light of old moon, occluded pregnancy that had gone on for all of her lifetimes.

The noose drew tighter around her neck each morning born in twisted gut and shallow speeded breath, jaw clenched almost all of the time. Frantic and crazy with shame she awoke to morning tide, the course of her dissolution proceeding paced by entropy, timed by inertia. Winding down like the clock winds down. Slowly, slowly, toward the final click. The direction of her spin altered in turn by all of her sins, committed, confessed, omitted, unblest. Hunger of soul and mind became a body prayer, a dervish in intensity. Even as her thought, her body slowed, it grew. Beyond her ability to control or deny.

She remembered the fires at sheepcamp. The beanpot. The coffee in huge smoke-blackened enamelware, strong and heavy, perched on a rock just beyond the fire's reach, and the flames in daylight, orange and somehow bright, not quite lost in all the surrounding brightness of sun. And how she stared at them, wondering. Comparing them to flames at night, to themselves in a different setting.

She would sit for hours, comparing memories. Making in clear and exact detail pictures of the places she had been, the people in them, the words. What she had thought. What she had understood.

She grew to understand that there was no meeting between the several sets of memories, experiences, she carried in her mind. The sheepcamp meals. Sandy, gritty beans. Flavored sweet with small chewy bits of salt pork or rendered pork rind. The bread hot from the beehive ovens of her grandmother's yard. The chili, hot and biting, laced with tender bits of fat and meat. The coffee, almost creamy it was so thick. The calm voices. The laughter. That was one set. The other was something quite different.

Long, empty, polished corridors. Silent white faces of women whose whole heads and bodies were encased in black heavy fabric. Whose rosaries that hung dark and heavy down their legs clinked with every quiet step they took. Of those white faces, almost always unsmiling. Of those white hands that never touched a child. Of those white faces smiling, tight and stiff, like the simple expression caused great pain. Who said she must pray. Must ask to be forgiven. Must remember to walk quietly. Never to run. Never to climb a tree. Never to have messy hair. Or a dirty dress. Must sit quietly at the table. And never ask for more. Who must eat when told, sleep when told, wake when told, play when told, work when told,



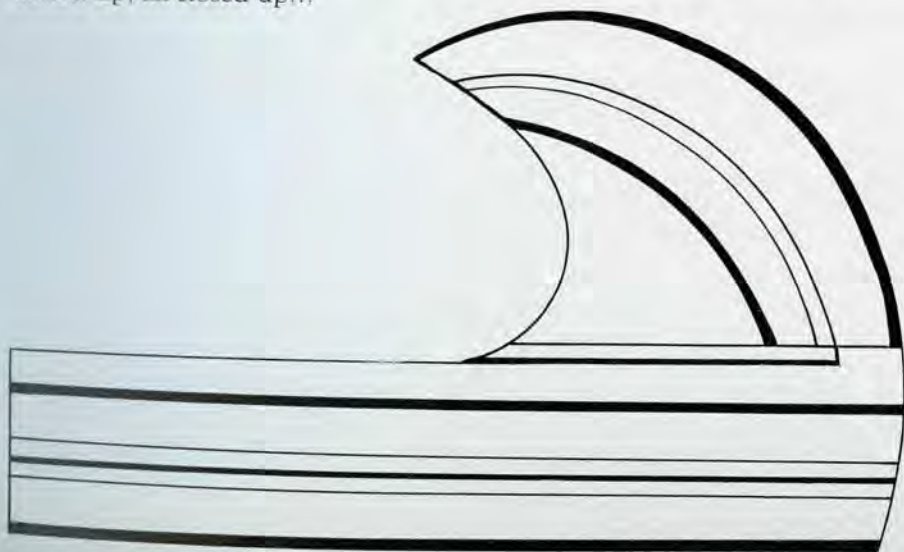

study when told, piss when told, shit when told, and must never never use too much paper to wipe her butt. Her tiny child's butt.

She thought about the first poor people she had ever seen. Poor scarecrow people. White people who came to live in an abandoned house on the far outskirts of Guadalupe. The children, a boy and a girl, were so pale. She thought they must be very sick. She thought they might not have enough to eat. They wore flour-sacking. She wanted to get to know them. She must have been four or five at the time, but she wished for a way to make friends with those two who looked so slack, so vacant, so white. Her mother felt sorry for them. Sent a little food, as a welcoming present, she said. To let them know they were welcome there, she said. But really, Ephanie knew, so they would have something to eat. So they wouldn't feel ashamed.

The next white people she knew, the stranger kind, were the sisters who owned the convent school. They did not go without food, though the mission sisters near Guadalupe often did. These sisters were rich. They had good sheets for the beds and plenty of meat at supper. The girls who attended the convent school never went hungry, though the food they got was tasteless. Boiled for long hours. Never seasoned. In all her years there she never tasted sweet beans or hot chili stew or fresh from the oven good bread.

And as the hours and days went by, piece by puzzling, painful piece, she began to understand, to find a way to forgive.

She finally understood that it wasn't money that they lacked, it was living, breathing food. Sweet, fresh corn, in soup or stew, or mixed with green chilis and summer squash. Something vital, loving. They couldn't know that. What they gave her to eat was what they themselves lived on: meat boiled until it was almost grey in death. Vegetables boiled until peas, squash, yellow wax beans, potatoes, and even spinach all looked alike. Cheap white bread from the cheapest store. No fresh milk, ever... No rare beef. No pork. No mutton. No lamb. No fry bread. Nothing that could make the heart and eyes dance. Nothing fresh, ever. Nothing, really, she thought, to eat. No wonder they were pale and tired and mean and closed up, all closed up...



## Promise Her Anything

Dumb Indian.

Stupid Indian.

Flesh slashing Indian.

Savagebrutaldrunken Indian.

Dirty Indian.

Dirty savage Indian.

Dirty vicious hostile savage drunken stupid Indian.

That was what they said. Those were the words. Some of them. The others were nice words. Said with friendly, warm, sympathetic smiles. They worked as well. Perhaps better.

Noble Indian.

Earthloving Indian.

Nature loving Indian.

Wise old Indian.

Ugh. Indian.

Who guarded the earth.

Who watered it with blood.

Good Indian.

The First Americans.

The Vanishing Americans.

She got the words into her bones. Into her blood. Was born that way. Lived, grew, that way. Found the words within her whispering and snickering when she was grown. They had been in her ears and in her veins so long she hadn't known, remembered, they were there. Only that they were voices in the shadows just beyond her sight. Hidden. Sinister.

She had spent her life in service to them. One way or another. Reacting to them in every possible way. Acting them in every possible way. And still did not hear them for what they were. Did not know about them. Because nobody ever told her.

She thought that if she now heard them, knew them, she would have to rage against them. Which, she knew, was the timebomb implanted in them. That she would rage and kill. To fight the words. Kill herself, to end them. Either way, she'd be dead. Like the millions millions before her. Like all the good Indians, now raging, now dead.

She didn't want to rage and tear, rip at what she couldn't help. If she raged at the whispers that were, after all, in her own ears, she would have to slice her own ears off. Dig into their shell petal openings. Carve out their caves. Tear the tunneling canals out of her own head. The words were calcified into her bones. She could not erase them.

So, somehow knowing that, in all of these years understood without acknowledging, she let them be, had let them be. As if the old woman had said to, when she had pinched and hissed, "don't let them know. Don't let it show." And in obedience she had gone through her days, not hearing the words, not acknowledging them, that they were ever ever about her, about anyone she knew. And she didn't know what they did, all the same, to her hands, her mind, her flesh, her mind.



Vicious.

Hostile.

Bloodthirsty.

Savage.

Yes. Her blood was thirsty. She was dying of thirst.

"Well," she said to the spider in the corner by the stereo, "one thing's for sure. When that old woman C'yo' kapi cursed, she didn't fool around."

The spider sat, still.

### She's Always Cleaning

The words rose then in her ears. Clear and articulate, they rose. They became loud and precise. And she heard. And found herself cringing. Blushing. Skin hot and tight. Smile fixed against her teeth. Must not let them know. I must tighten every inch of flesh to avoid touching anyone, anything. Every bit of flesh, every organ, every heartbeat every breath. So I won't get anything dirty. So they won't know. She finally saw it. Finally heard, loud and clear. What they had done.

Stephen, fair Indian brother, had tried to tell her about it, in the goldlight of fields, trees turning in the light, earth turning beneath her feet, which she had heard then but not understood. When eyes are shut against the infection of dusty blight, what is registered, what is of body born, is not to be accepted or understood. Now she realized. Now she thought: when traveling wilderness, it's wise not to miss the pass.

She had almost missed it. Had missed it. Had wandered long in the forests, among the tall whispering achingmoaning trees. The stones. The cliffs. And had stood also once in the open fields of memory, singing. And had turned inside instead. To the emptiness of dust, the flow of almost invisible silt, grainy and fine, almost too tiny for sight. To snow, earth, flakes of thought, residue of resistance, of terror, of what there was to push against, the angels and their opposing strengths. That had never been anywhere but in the boxes of her dusty mind. The dusty velveteen-hung boxes of her mind. To fly as she had and to not have known.

She saw herself driving the vast distances between here and there, between familiar and estranged, silent or engaged in simple things she noticed from small lamplit pool of her mind, her hands always in movement, in arcs not touching her face but aching to reach and their motion stopped, focus cut off, so softly she couldn't notice when it happened. The words swallowed, roads in the dark, tunneled into stars, moon half buried in the massing clouds. She would wonder then about how the wind always whistled, how it always went on, burying itself in her brain. Recalling whimpers and wails she had forgotten to utter, uttering them for her, to her, howling for her heart. A wind that answered her silence, gave her silence voice. A guide who would teach her how to speak, how to complete the curving line described by those hands she couldn't catch, stopping.

And from that space of blue seconds she remembered mainly dust, bare wooden floors unvarnished, left to die. She could never quite grasp the moment, she didn't really know what had happened. But that something had somewhere she was sure, and was sure to be on it closing in.

She spent all of her days seeking it, that crucial event, knowing it was somewhere on that plain floor, within those almost remembered adobemud walls of so long ago maybe they were only dreamed, but no, she knew they had once stood, on the edge of Guadalupe, or somewhere. She sought it with patient persistence, hands covering eyes or limp beside her circling unaware, recreating the smell of dust, the unfinished boards, but it was no use. She could only remember like an almost forgotten echo or a shadow is remembered, reconstructing fragments of memory from a pitiful few shards of longtimeago dreams and a certain remembered fear.

It was important to reveal that part. To clearly recall the meaning, for without that the hole in her belly would never heal. She would go on, hands open and empty, undreamed.

#### PART IV: PROLOGUE

It is said that one who is uninitiated, who walks a certain path might come upon the Spider. She will be sitting near Her shrine, which is a cavern or a small opening in the ground. Often the path is guarded by Her grandsons, the Little War Twins. But whether one is caught by the boys, or comes upon the Grandmother unprepared, one will be forfeit to Her.

For without the special protection that only knowledge can give, the song She sings will draw you, take you in. And in the supernal gleam of Her midnight eyes, you will sink, you will drown. You will forget that you have walked on earth, in the haunts of humankind. You will follow Her into Her cavern, into the deep, dark, shimmering hole of Her nest, and you will want to stay. You will never leave. For Her beauty is like that between the stars. It is heavy and sweet. It is crystal and night. It is a blinding light that will enable you to see.

She will call you when She sees you coming down the path. She will say, "Are you here? You have come at the proper time. Come, come, grandchild with me. Come into my home with me. For now that you have come, you belong to me."

And singing thus She will stand. She will take hold of your hand, as She has already taken hold of your heart. She will lead you within the cave. She will never set you free. Thus it is said.

And her twin grandsons, the Little War Twin grandsons will enter behind you, barring the way. And they will take you by the hands and lead you forward into the dark that will seem as bright as day. They will take you to the heart of midnight, the heart of the sun. They will charm your heart away.



Slated for June publication, the complete novel, *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows* will be available from Spinsters, Ink., 233 Dolores #8, San Francisco, Calif. 94103.



# SKATING ON THE WIND

JUDITH MCDANIEL

Fran lay in the bed, both knees swollen now to grotesqueness by the disease, her face swollen by the ravages of treatment. In her mind—in that private place she had created as a child for times like these—she rose and fell with the waves of pain and drugs. She was a blackbird playing in a cool fall wind, thrusting hard against the breeze, then tucking her wings tight into the smoothly feathered body, bobbing like a fish, using the wind as if she had been created for it. And then the startling flash of red as she spread her wings, fought to thrust upward on the ridge of air. She was neither conscious nor unconscious, caught in a twilight between waking and sleeping. From within this drowsiness she longed occasionally for clarity, wished even for the pain that came with clarity, wanted to experience herself again as she had been before the drugs, able to reason, direct her thoughts and moods. But if she left off the drugs for a day the pain took her back into unconsciousness and there was no way she could climb out. So she settled for this, settled—as she always had—for what was possible and tried to understand where this possible had brought her.

Fran lay in the bed, half dreaming, half awake remembering how it had been, those weeks when they had worked their maintenance job days, then found a new surge of energy to go down to their store all evening, falling into bed at night like they'd been hit on the head. And the cancer—it was like she'd been too busy to be sick, Fran mused. Was that possible? Or was it just another remission? And now, were the remissions over or would there be another few days, maybe weeks, that would make this pain she was having now worth living through. "I'm dying, Ceel," floated through her consciousness. Could she say it to Ceel? Did she have to? She knew what Ceel would say, could hear the way Ceel would lower her voice an octave to show she was serious. "We're all dying, girl," she would say, "some of us know how close our time is and some of us don't. That's all." Fran pushed the voice away from her, not ready to consider, not ready to accept. She wanted to be remembering how it was when they got the store. She shifted uncomfortably in the bed. It was good then. It could be good again. That was what she still needed to believe.

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Shelves. That was the first thing. They talked shelves, dreamed shelves, drew shelf plans and finally were ready to build shelves. Both long walls of the store were to be lined with shelves that would display things neatly. But they couldn't afford shelves. The boards were too expensive. No matter how they figured it, they couldn't do both walls at the same time. They were ready to start building, had



torn out and taken down. The partition that had divided the space into a shop and an apartment was gone and the long empty length was ready to be built. "If we put in all the shelves," Jo reckoned, "we won't have any money left to stock them with. We can't have an opening with nothing but empty shelves." Fran couldn't disagree, but kept thinking. All night long she thought and thought.

"It's illegal," was Jo's first response.

"But everybody does it. I've seen people walking away from those old buildings with all sorts of things," Fran insisted. "Jo, they throw perfectly good boards right out in the street for junk. At least we can go see what's there."

And the boards were there. They walked the block of old brownstone apartments across the wide street from the church that had bought the property and was tearing them down to make way for more church. The building facades were lovely, Fran thought, even with the doors gone, the windows torn out. The buildings had been slums, of a sort, that was how the church had gotten permission to tear them down. But it was a shame. There was so much beauty and use left in them. At the end of the row, demolition had started. A wrecker had knocked down several of the buildings and a bulldozer was pushing bricks into a pile. The smell of plaster and squalor hung in the air. In the center of the block workmen were removing doors and windows and the frames that held them. That was where the boards were coming from, Fran could see, from the door frames. And they were just the right width. They leaned on a gas company truck parked in front of one building and watched for awhile.

"Hate to see them go," Jo said. "Used to walk past here every day to go to school. Sure isn't going to be the same."

"Did you see the end apartment? The one where the paint was showing on the walls and part of the floor still hung on, sticking out over the bulldozer?"

Jo nodded, silent.

"It's like a life that wasn't finished yet." Then Fran was silent, too.

"You can see there's still some furniture in places," Jo mused. "I wonder what they do with it. Suppose they just bulldoze it?"

"Probably." Fran thought Jo was convinced. "Let's come back after five, O.K.? After the workmen leave."

And that was where Lindsey found them as she came from the downtown subway. She had seen right away that—whatever they wanted the boards for—they weren't going to get many of them home that way. They were too heavy and Fran was starting to limp again.

"You need a truck," was Lindsey's first, less than helpful, remark.

Jo tried to hide her irritation, be a little polite. "We don't have a truck." She heaved another board out from under the plaster. "We don't even know anybody with a car. We'll manage. We'll just take a few at a time. Carry them."

"What's it for?" Lindsey wanted to know and Fran explained about the store and the shelves and pretty soon their problem was becoming Lindsey's problem, too, Fran could see. "Wow. You're going to open your very own store." She was excited about it.

"You keep pulling out boards and stacking them up," Lindsey commanded, as though she were in charge now or had thought it all up herself. "I'll go over to school and see if David's there. He's got an old wreck of a car and we can



pile just about anything in it. Maybe we can even talk him into physical labor," she paused, reconsidering. "But I doubt it. It'll be enough if I can just get him to drive over here." And she was off.

Just after six a car horn beeping startled them away from the curb. It was Lindsey. "Jees," Jo leaned on the car door, "keep it down, will you, we don't want to call any more attention to this than we have to." Fran could see she was nervous but trying to look cool.

"Is it illegal?" asked a deep voice from the other side of the car. Fran couldn't see the speaker, but Jo was staring in at him like she was at the zoo and just saw a new specimen. Oh, god, Fran thought. You might know Lindsey'd find one like that. Just as dumb as she is.

"It's called stealing," Jo said shortly. "Everything here belongs to somebody, even though they may not want it. If we're cool about what we're doing, nobody should bother us." She paused. Fran could see she wanted the car, wanted this boy to help them. She looked in at the back seat, then consulted David in a polite way. "How should we do this? Back seat or trunk?"

"Let's see what you've got," said the voice and the car door opened and a tall skinny boy climbed out. The first thing Fran could see was that he was losing his hair at the top of his forehead. Going bald already and he couldn't be more than twenty-five or -six. He walked around the car, his whole body awkward and gangly, as though he hadn't lived in it very long, like it was still a surprise to him.

"Fran, Jo, this is David," Lindsey was doing introductions, but David was wandering off up the sidewalk, just nodding at Fran and Jo, taken up by what was around him.

"Wow, are they really just tearing them down? Look at this, Lindsey, how you can see the apartment walls, just like you were at the theatre and it was a set design."

"Yeah, David, it's neat." Lindsey had the keys in her hand and was motioning Fran and Jo around to the back of the car. "Let's see what we can get in here," she suggested. "The boards can stick out and we can just take it real slow back home, don't you think?"

Jo nodded and started bringing her stack of boards over. Fran was eyeing David warily. He had walked up the front walk of one of the brownstones and was peering into the darkness behind the empty front door. "He'd better not go in," Fran suggested to Lindsey. "Not after dark. It's not safe."

She nodded. "Hey David, we need your advice." And then in an undertone to Fran, "Why not safe?"

"It's right next to the building they're working on, so it might fall down. But I think winos sleep in places like this and I wouldn't want to meet one of them in the dark." She half shuddered inside herself as she thought this, but could see that Lindsey only looked interested, not scared.

"Maybe we'll come back in daylight and explore," she suggested as David came back to supervise.

"Neat," he agreed. "Old buildings are far out. It's criminal that they're tearing them down though, don't you think?"

He can't smell the poverty here, either, Fran realized as she agreed it was too bad the buildings were going.



The next evening they met just before dark, as soon as the workmen had left. The building they had worked in front of the night before was gone, knocked down and bulldozed in a single day, and the inside of a new apartment was hanging on the side of the building, its walls a garish turquoise.

"Must have gotten that paint on sale," David commented caustically, as they ambled past like tourists, checking out of the corner of their eyes to see if the coast was clear.

"I'm going in," David announced. They were standing in front of a building being prepared for demolition the next day, its door gone, dusk starting to creep into the entrance way. "Not me," said Jo, beginning to pull boards from a new pile of rubbish.

"Keep watch, then," David commanded.

Hoping the building wouldn't collapse around her, Fran walked into the dusty hallway. She had never done this before. What was she doing here anyway, in this dead apartment building—dying—she corrected herself. It's got until tomorrow morning. Her mood, as she climbed the first set of stairs to the landing, was nostalgic. She ran her hand over the fine grained cherry wood in the banister, wiping the plaster dust off, revealing the sheen of nearly one hundred years of use. It was beautiful.

Ahead of her, David and Lindsey moved quietly too, but she could see that they were not moved by nostalgia, but by the very newness of what they were experiencing.

"Look at this," David said in a hushed tone to Lindsey. "Look at the size of this kitchen. How could anybody ever cook in here?" He shook his head, disbelieving what was before him. The tiny two-burner stove had been wedged in a corner behind a chimney. Its gas lines had been disconnected, Fran could catch the lingering odor of gas trapped in the air of the small cubicle, but the workmen had not bothered to move the stove out. They climbed on up, looking randomly into rooms where the plaster sagged from the walls, the floors were covered with plaster and dirt, old wallpaper, and—in one room—several piles of shit.

"God, how disgusting," David wrinkled his nose fastidiously. "Somebody's been using this for his bathroom. It must be the workmen. You can't believe some people."

Fran did not contradict him, but she was sure it had not been the workmen. She only hoped whoever had been living in this abandoned building would not come back before they left. And would remember to leave tomorrow morning before the wrecking ball started to swing. She shuddered at the scenario her mind was creating and turned out of the room, away from David and Lindsey.

She took a few steps to the room across the hall and stuck her head in, checking for occupants, she thought as she entered the room. And then she stopped, confused for a moment. The room was fully furnished. Curtains flapped in the empty casements where windows had been removed without taking down the faded, torn, old gauze curtains. In the center of the room was a round oak dining table with four chairs tucked in under it. In the corner of the room was a rocking chair, moving slightly in the breeze coming in the open window.

It's the fourth floor, her rational mind told her. The guys just got tired of carrying stuff out and figured it would come down with the building. Why bother? But an unexplained panic was building in her gut. The chair was rocking in the



February breeze, abandoned, empty. But someone had rocked there not long ago and was gone now, leaving all of this behind her. Where had she gone? What had happened to her? Why had she left these things she had lived with for so long? For a moment Fran was near tears, and then the panic hit her again. She had once imagined herself living like this, alone in a small apartment with a few things she loved around her, her mother's old rocking chair, the dark wood spindled magazine rack she had brought with her to Jo's. It had been a comfort, this image of herself rocking, remembering the long life she would have had with Jo. She had always imagined she would live longer than Jo. After all, Jo was twenty years older. And Fran could cope better on her own, she knew that. She put one hand out to steady herself against the door frame, but there was no door frame, just rough plaster and nails. She couldn't see Jo sitting there rocking without her. It didn't work, that image.

"Far out," came David's voice over her shoulder. "Lindsey," he ordered, "look at this!" He pushed past Fran and walked over to the oak table. "It's oak, real oak. It's worth money. Who would have left such a thing?"

"It's old, David, and all marked up. Maybe they didn't want it. And imagine getting it out of here." She was warning him, Fran could hear, that she would not help him get the table out of the building.

Then his eye was caught by the rocking chair. "But look. Look at this wonderful old rocker." He sat gingerly in it, testing for strength. "It's fantastic. It's just what I need in my room for when I'm grading papers." He had already possessed it, oblivious to anyone else's desire.

They came down out of the building, David balancing the rocker upside down, the seat over his head. Don't let him kill himself, Fran prayed to no one in particular, watching where he put his feet on the debris-strewn stairs.

As they drove away from the building for the last time, Fran saw a shadow pass in front of the window up on the fourth floor, darkening for a moment the grey emptiness behind the casement, and in that moment the panic had come back into her again. Was it a man or a woman, she wondered, living up there? Had whoever it was lived there before, or just claimed the room now that its owner was absent? How did it feel to be spending a last night in a room that wouldn't even be there tomorrow?



RITA SPEICHER

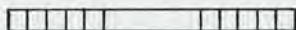
# EQUINOX:

## Three Occasions for Love and Landscape

Earth begins the sleep of the east  
The scent of crow and cobalt sweep the sky  
The colors up the lake to the other side of the public oaks  
imply narration with their point of view  
The opal yields its blackness between us the pact of seven stars

The state of Virginia takes the part of a minor character  
Someone we both know loved those blue ridge mountains  
She's the tiger in the triangle abandoned at birth in a Northern city  
You're the animation successive figures in motion on a plate  
No mind disturbs the season The geese are a blue meditation

I'm growing elderly and rather strict in my appreciation  
Love is not awful like need is a map without a river  
Love has more numbers has chrysanthemums has an idealist for the doorway  
The pleated highlands are an accuration migration  
Laughter is visible from the village in the manner of a cello

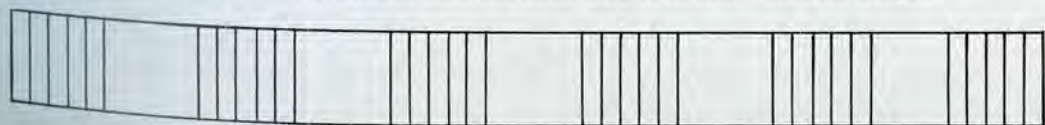




With me I carry no picture of her who like the stone seduces me  
 with its equivalent dispassion and need once touched assumes cool pleasure  
 from the incidental palm  
 Inland we stacked wood to justify the brandy and I arrived before her at the moment  
 Honey heated to amber poured into the bigger pot  
 and I waited through carrots and cabbage steaming  
 Delay the fist of guilt lumped sweet and sour on the plate  
 The seduction's core was ubiquitous  
 Her motion suggested an imitation of the sea  
 and I brushing the future with need mistook that conflict for grace  
 Still the correspondence between the event and the image  
 moves me more with passion than reform  
 In moonlight kneeling she is beautiful and stranger than I remember  
 The gate is hinged with possibility but she is surreptitious  
 I stare at the sea long enough to know the stillness of obsidian  
 Did I expect something different  
 Someone walks in the bamboo and the sea doesn't mind  
 I expected love and when I received patience I thought the mistake was mine  
 as in dice when the four is a jealous number and green  
 but I knew all along luck is the heart's decision  
 Between her window and my continent the illusion of loss produces argument  
 Aspen and Cyprus sisters freed by opposite grief



Above me the sweet thighs of angels weave a contented harbor  
 where oracles appear in the coral sponges of the sea  
 The hands of the youngest occupied with color are pure intention  
 as when the doe of October diverted the car and in costume those summoned  
 swelled the yard with roses for the first image of the journey  
 Before I arrived I saw summer White stone A triangle whose base was amber  
 Travel of three by memory to the disk of the shrine  
 The landscape's eye hums with intimacy  
 Now I am amazed by silences  
 The first song was courage and my generous youth limping after each autumn's prophesy  
 Grace of wind and winter of the body's final distraction  
 Lean death broke against the unrelenting rock  
 Not to mistake the movement of the dream for the tribe's mourning song  
 My palm unbraids the journey distinguished by mapstone propitious and yielding  
 At home lavender sweetens the altar and both of you among all familiar gestures  
 Vermilion slashed in quartz beside the mountain's alchemy  
 Embracing through distance nothing smells of sacrifice Neither of you would allow it  
 Your gifts reciprocal and lovely as intuition free my thirst  
 Dolphin urge Relief  
 Jasmine climbs into my lap happy and continuous landscape and the stone I swallowed forgets  
 After limitation a remote road to the sea opens the coastal heart totem in water  
 The shadow of a peach retrieves itself from the other side of torture spine of delight



"My community will not agree on what is wrong"  
— Muhammad, saying from the *Hadith*

Light big as earth  
ascends to heaven  
in a fiery red ball and does not  
by all accounts  
empty oceans sink the sun  
or tell you  
what you do or we  
when I say we

the national picture  
of me / citizen  
denizen I labor  
under loss of  
conventional war-  
fare so that  
guerrilla fighting in the Morazán province  
of El Salvador reported heavy  
and routine, Jean or national  
forgets federal for personal and did I  
forget to pay back the money  
I used to get myself a presentable-looking  
pair of pants? Do you know  
which pants I'm talking about? Like, no

doomsday in my new clothes and no one  
I ever knew said  
"I survived the atomic bomb" fallout  
or civil war anywhere  
within the confines  
of her own house. You  
tell me. Walk, hot city  
every day individual  
disco life adequate  
inner space and who  
goes out? People like fragile  
indefensible flame walk  
with cinema orange-red ghost  
whose allure flattened  
history 1945 the telling  
of the self thereafter  
shaded particular  
singing *I don't want  
to die this way*  
or live  
through organized final  
heat & light

II

The beautiful thing about lively  
irreversible self is magnanimous  
present Fuck 'em. Majority  
out of time Minority with a  
future? Who stands at the corner  
every rainy night  
peering into my windows? Was only  
a shadow of the self  
remembering the dry inside  
rooms of color  
the felt

in the warmth house  
in the know  
meaning of the body held  
to a situation called  
*my safe home*

the heavenly innocents  
are precious literal  
thoughts about grasp  
and youth  
hold my  
get some  
can I have more?  
health heart to habits of  
what I said when I was  
I am alive  
today for the big idea  
us and them  
or it us  
and them tangled members  
of a body us not  
pregnant with memory  
necessarily us portioned  
against bristling power  
that makes us  
too much alike  
and not enough ourselves  
met with one another  
so in the doing the going gets  
tougher than the felt edge  
of your skin  
beautiful  
thing self  
made sharp  
over the genuine gulf  
of reasoned living



### III Interlinear Handout

Get down get it on  
or freeze, sister.  
Every day move-  
ment says what you can do  
and what you won't. But,  
people are humble.  
Spare the rent and give them something  
they can eat that's good I mean  
filling a fistful of bright  
yellow cheese from the government or  
more news like

#### NAVAL WAR IN THE MISSILE AGE

hunt or be hunted from an earlier  
phrasebook suggests parity  
is the logic of the age so if you're  
worried about your balance of sea power  
in the Caribbean  
eat more cheese and  
throw your weight in

to the lucid world  
water

consensual adult  
"everything in its  
place" marriage of democratic  
existence to every  
day life is  
or is it not subject  
to disarray? Blasphemous  
change of patriotic heart means  
change is infinite not just  
bad or good not like  
the old days just to hear myself  
talking but for now melodic  
1982 if ever bone weary or nasty  
in love still the heart holds out  
against the fixed principle  
and does not  
*consent*

## ON BENDED KNEE

The news:  
She catches it with her mouth  
and tries to remember,  
"Where was I when this  
happened?" Not in bed  
or in shape but out  
running in angular light.  
She pants and this is  
(as she's standing in the kitchen)  
an arc  
of military advisers floats  
over the Caribbean.  
Will she see their black shoes  
gleaming in tropical sunlight?  
Will she work  
and pray? She chops  
the garlic, creams the eggs  
and makes a "to do" about the  
hot, buttery toast. Every  
day there's a little something  
to kick you down the big path.  
She'll stand there, thinking,  
"No place is a  
really good place"  
and she'll say this  
without meaning it  
to the next person she sees.

Jane  
Creighton

# TALL GRASSES RIPPLING IN THE WIND

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## FAY CHIANG

Tall grasses rippling in wind  
Sun melting fog  
I see the ocean from  
    the kitchen window  
    past tomatos  
    fallen off the vine  
    too soon  
    on a ledge.

Everyone is sleeping still.

On the sundeck,  
I see the road  
going off towards  
the freshwater pond  
birds swooping in arcs  
disappear into rushes  
    their calls  
    breaking early morning chill.  
The lighthouse beckons.

Slipping away  
from the house  
I pick  
mint leaves for tea.

By the pond  
sidestepping poison ivy  
I reach beyond brambles  
for blueberries  
covered in dew.

The ocean sings  
undecipherable tunes;  
she leaves her night's treasures  
along the shore:  
    small crabs, hermit shells,  
    stones glistening,  
    broken bits of this and that,  
    a bottle nestled in sand  
I gather these too.



Yesterday morning  
in a torrent of rain,  
pools of water whirling,  
rush hour traffic,  
horns blaring,  
pedestrians running for shelter,  
I left the city.

Mary choreographed  
this exodus of bags  
and groceries,  
connections for  
buses and ferries.

She told me:  
"Myron and Regina  
will meet us at the dock."

I think:  
Peter, you will never see this.  
I cannot tell you about it.

I want to say:  
Remember in '71,  
outside of San Francisco  
at Stinson Beach,  
you dragged clumps of seaweed  
onto the shore  
and you held it  
the way fishermen  
hold a prize catch.

Riding down highway #1,  
we stopped, stared into the sea,  
watched seals calling  
their young,  
and walked among  
that stretch of  
small yellow wildflowers  
shining by a footbridge.

We relished our new freedom  
away from the city,  
the family. Here,  
we discovered we were not  
only siblings,  
but friends.

We swapped stories:  
how you had arrived  
a few weeks earlier  
staying with our relatives,  
you had already seen the sights  
and wandered the streets  
of San Francisco.  
I told you  
about my weeks in  
Hong Kong and Taiwan,  
my hunger for a taste of pizza.

That summer,  
we were riders  
of the roads and highways:  
I hitched up and down  
the coast, back of farm trucks;  
you had whet your thirst  
for bus trips cross country.

Or in '78,  
gazing at the Mojave Desert  
at sunset, we gathered  
stones with Jean.  
John and Arlene showed us  
the fault line  
we touched with our toes.  
Imagine, we said, California  
floating away  
in the Pacific.  
Watching the sky turn  
fiery orange,  
a cool, calm blue descending  
changed the valley.  
Dark megaliths jut  
from the earth.

You would call me  
3 A.M. and talk  
from a phone booth  
taut with love/hate,  
the sorrow and pain  
over our father's death,  
and your own deep pain:  
too many X-rays,  
cancer treatments,  
blood tests, scars,  
operations.

3,000 miles apart  
we grieved over the loss  
of our childhood family  
warm and safe  
living in back of the laundry  
playing games after school,  
Chinese school and visits  
to grandma and grandpa  
on Sundays  
with Ed Sullivan on T.V.

We held onto  
what we knew of each other  
from another time.

I remember the night  
you were born.  
Ma and Dad went to the hospital  
and left me with Jean and Jan.  
I was 5, the eldest.  
In back of the laundry,  
in the middle of the night,  
shadows were large.  
They were crying.  
I said, "They went  
to get the baby."  
(That was you.)  
Jan was 2 years old  
and so frightened,  
she wet the bed.  
I changed her diapers,  
climbed a chair,  
reached for the candy tin  
on top of the refrigerator,  
raiding it.  
I doled out fistfuls  
of M & Ms to my sisters.  
All in one bed,  
they fell asleep.  
I waited till Dad  
came home. He asked me  
if I had been scared,  
I just shook my head  
and then he gave me  
a soft pat on the head.

In the morning,  
we were awakened  
by the doctor's call.  
"It's a boy."  
Peter, your sisters squealed  
and jumped on the bed  
with joy.

During the first few months,  
in the early morning hours  
you cried and  
I would crawl out of bed  
to feed you,  
change your diapers.  
Our mother, weak from delivery  
had to rest.

Cramped in the back  
of that laundry  
10' x 14' with a  
little corridor and kitchen,  
a man and a woman  
raised four children.

You were always mischievous,  
inventing things,  
building go-carts,  
or setting off firecrackers,  
drawing airplanes,  
building models,  
climbing fences  
with the kid next door,  
riding off on your bike  
through the back alleys  
of the neighborhood,  
or going down to the airport  
with your friends  
watching the planes take off.

A boy they said. The youngest.  
The only son among three daughters.  
In the silent language  
between fathers and sons  
he taught you the use  
of your hands and mind  
with simple tasks.  
His larger hand over  
your hand curved around  
a hammer feeling its  
weight and force and  
drive against a nail  
biting wood.

The two of you  
disappearing with the dog  
in the evenings,  
or shopping jaunts  
to get father-son things,  
perhaps the way Dad did  
with his father in China.



When you were 14,  
Dad died.  
At the funeral home,  
incense and smoke rising  
amidst the suffocating  
smell of carnations,  
we sat huddled in black.  
We burned paper money,  
bowed with incense sticks  
in our hands, and  
in turn we each spread  
a piece of cotton  
over our father  
lying there in the casket.  
To keep him warm  
on his journey,  
murmured the village people.  
We were told to be strong,  
not to cry for the sake  
of our mother.  
You were told  
you would be the man of the house  
for our mother to lean on.

To be a man  
To be the man of the house.

To be a woman  
To be the woman of the house.

We did not know what this meant,  
except it had nothing to do  
with our own maturation.

We were kids  
just a moment ago.

Shells lie fragmented in wet sand  
woven by threads of water.  
Seaweed floats  
like mesh on surf.

Slowly we've walked from the house.  
Mary's foot is in a cast.  
The motorcycle  
having skidded on sand  
on a ramp leading onto  
the BQE in Brooklyn,  
flung her into the road.

She told me,  
"A family stopped behind us  
and the man offered  
to take us  
to the hospital.  
An ambulance pulled up  
and we were taken  
to an emergency room  
of a city hospital  
where no one knew  
what was going on  
or what they were doing  
and they had no bandages."

We walk past a patch  
of rosehips  
and before we descend  
onto the beach  
we settle on the steps  
watching the waves  
cap  
thrashing  
like horses  
their hooves  
cutting a path  
through white foam

We are small  
in this landscape.

Her weight on my arm  
Mary balances on her crutch.  
We walk towards the sea,  
which sprinkles us with mist.

I say:  
Mary, it's like in the movie  
with Marlon Brando.  
"On the Waterfront,"  
where he's riding in the cab  
with his big brother  
and his big brother's been ordered  
to keep him in line  
or snuff him  
and he knows it, but  
he says to his big brother...

Mary says:  
What are you saying?  
You didn't kill him.  
Your brother was very sick.

I know, but he says in the movie  
"I could have been a contender,  
I could have been a somebody,  
instead I was a nobody.  
I thought you were my brother,  
you was going to watch  
out for me..."

Mary says:

Don't do this to yourself.  
You can't feel guilty  
over something  
you couldn't prevent.  
Especially after  
what you did for him.

Maybe there was something else.

Don't do this to yourself.  
It's not your fault.

Shadows grow long.  
Sand trickles through my fists.  
Gulls circle overhead.  
The ocean is crashing.  
It is crying.

At the morgue  
you looked pale  
sleeping with your mouth  
slightly open,  
a sheet drawn over your chest  
a dark blue mark  
around your neck.  
I thought,  
no, this is not you.

I hear the ticking of clocks.  
Healing has its own pace;  
nothing to do with logic.  
We are reminded:  
we are housed in frail bodies.  
Any breakage resounds loudly.

The house they said  
you were the man of  
wore at your spirit.  
In rage you tore at  
its walls wielding  
a crowbar shattering  
its bowels. Wanting  
to torch and burn,  
you were grieving.  
Memories of you and Dad  
working together,  
the loss clutching you:  
when you would  
panel the living room,  
tarpaper on the roof,  
sheetrock the basement,  
tend the temperamental boiler  
and the sidewalks,  
in a constant need of repair.

These rooms graced by our father's  
hands and spirit  
work and life.

These same rooms  
you kept your books,  
and models and records,  
tools and weights,  
boxes of tea and grains,  
your paints and writings  
I have packed these away for you  
they are in the cellar  
by your go-cart,  
the blue toy car  
you peddled up and down  
the sidewalk  
before you went to kindergarten.

This house, our father's house  
became cold and empty  
when he died.

Shrill with grief  
our mother walked hauntedly  
the rooms upstairs and  
downstairs in the laundry.  
She became increasingly frightened  
with your cancer  
your spleen operation  
when both of your lungs collapsed  
and each of your  
four hospitalizations  
in the psychiatric ward.



Peter, where did you go  
that you left me behind  
this time. I cannot  
show you these seashells.

Last evening at dusk,  
I was returning from the garden  
with tomatos and ran into  
Myron barbecuing dinner  
in the front yard.

He said:

"You have to love  
the things you need:  
the ocean, the air, this sand,  
the taste of blueberries  
and how the birds swoop  
to drink freshwater  
from the pond."

I watch Mary crochet a scarf  
as it grows longer every day.

Regina shows us a new recipe;  
I peddle to the store  
for ingredients.

Mary sets the table  
balancing on crutches.

Myron returns with a bucket  
of berries for dessert.

I chop vegetables, mix spices  
over a simmering pot.

The sun has set, the stars glisten.

Here, close to the ocean

we have come for comfort.

Cast propped up, crocheting,

Mary takes in the sun and

seabreezes, chatting with Regina.

I walk into the water,

glide and tumble with the undertow.

By the ocean,

we knit and heal, remain staunch,

remind each other of dreams.

Mary and I,

two women,

daughters of laundry

men and women

who have toiled

and continue to toil

with their hands and

bent backs.

Sometimes in a quandary  
we feel as though  
we step on quagmire:  
shadows of bats' wings  
on memories  
lived in silence

by our parents and families.

In our work, with our lives,  
we want to break this silence  
and tell the stories  
of their strength  
which is our legacy.

There is a time to rest.

Regina will take us  
to the next town tomorrow.  
Walking along the boardwalk  
past stretches  
of dunes and wildflowers  
we will take Mary and her crutches,  
her foot cushioned  
by the blanket  
we take to the sea.

Regina and I will take turns  
pulling Mary propped up  
like a princess  
in the red grocery wagon.

I wonder if the pears on the tree

I saw outside the grocer's/last summer  
are ripe yet,

and when Jean comes tomorrow  
on the 10 A.M. ferry

I will show her  
how to dig for clams  
in the bay.

# ALEXIS DE VEAUX

## Adventures of the Dread Sisters: Miss Pinto and The Bridge

"Miss Pinto and the Bridge" is the first of a comic book series entitled *Adventures of the Dread Sisters*, illustrated by the author.

We crossing. The Brooklyn Bridge traffic is slow going. Bumper to bumper and cars everywhere. Taxis blowing horns. Everybody making it to Manhattan. Us too. We got to get there soon, before the snow: threatening to cover the city. Plus we going to the Rally Against the Government Trucks Hauling Toxic Nuclear Waste through Harlem. Every day for a week on the radio they been saying: "don't worry folks, it's safe": but I dont believe nothing the U.S. government says these days. And personally, I'm through with governments. I'm for get rid of the government, give life back to the people.

We got 25 minutes to get uptown. Is that snow or soot I see falling up ahead? "Hope it ain't snow" Elora say "the windshield wipers ain't working too tough." So we slow dragging our wheels over the bridge. Crossing. The East River below. Brown water, and gray sky above. Gray Manhattan coming nearer. Gray other cars. Gray bridge. But inside Elora's pinto station wagon we: so Black.

We the Dread Sisters, me and Elora C. She's not my real sister but we are definite blood-kin the way we talk about everything; and think so alike and even look alike. We both short, and got big eyes. See all: hear all: know all; that's us. We both dreading our hair. Elora dreads is way longer than mine. Sometime she call me "baby dreads," or just "porcupine."

Our car is Miss Blue Pinto '72. And sometime when we out driving, I call Elora Miss Pinto the way she like to scoot in between bigger cars that don't move as fast.

Elora's a painter. She used to work summers on the boardwalk in Atlantic City, doing charcoal portraits: 3 dollars or 2 for 5. She's good, real good. And one day a old Black lady come by Elora's stall and want her picture done. "A old Black lady" Elora say. "Old and beautiful too." All dressed in black with a black hat-and-veil (I wasn't there this what Elora told me), and black satin church-gloves, and face as wrinkled as a tree. So the old lady told Elora she been watching



her all summer and she think Elora is magical, and Elora remind her of one of her own daughter (she had 7); and when could she get her picture painted. So Elora sat the old lady down and did her picture right then. Took her nearly 3 hours on a job that usually don't take her more than 20 minutes. By the time she was finished, there was a crowd of people standing around ooing and aaahhing, and everybody was saying how this old woman obviously jumped into Elora's eyes; and obviously come through her fingers. Obviously flowed onto the paper, thats how close to real the picture was. And the old lady was so happy. "Daughter" Elora say the old lady say "these is God's hands you got" and she kiss Elora's long fingers right there on the boardwalk. And then the woman press a brand new 20 dollar bill in Elora hand. "I can't take this much money, m'am" Elora tell her, but the woman just collect herself and her portrait and walk away humming "Lift Every Voice and Sing." Elora still got that 20 dollar bill. Which she keep in a black silk handkerchief tied with a red string and a little piece of paper: with the year 1967 written on it. "The same year Langston Hughes passed on" she's in the habit of reminding me since I was just a baby then.

Anyway: we caught in this no-moving traffic on the Brooklyn Bridge. Elora sucking her teeth and mashing on the brakes. She hate to be late. She on time for everything. *She do not believe* in colored people time, at all. "Perpet-u-ating stereotypes" is how she calls it. And we woulda been to the rally already: if it wasn't for me couldn't find my sketchbook this morning. Looked everywhere: including the bathroom (sometimes I hide it behind the tub so my nosey sister Toni won't go butting in my business). Then it dawns on me: I put it in the 'frigerator last night. Did so many hot drawings I had to cool them off. Stuck it back behind the vegetables where Toni never go. So I gets it and dash out the door jumping down the stairs 3 at a time because Elora is outside tooting fiercely on the horn.

Toni and me been living with Elora ever since we was babies. She adopted us. And now we living in a house in Brooklyn. She's our mother *and* father. And for my money, I wouldn't have it no other way. But Toni not like me and Elora. First of all she taller than both of us, and can't see a thing without them thick glasses she wear which she don't have to anymore. She be the last person to get up early/before noon on a saturday: she don't care whether its a life and death thing like a rally or not. "Elora" I say watching her light up one of those fat spliffs she love to smoke "I don't want to die in no nuclear war." "Ain't gonna be no nuclear war, pumpkin" she say firmly in her Colored and Progressive Peoples Campaign For Planetary Survival office-voice. "You got to think positive. Besides, God ain't gonna allow it." "White people don't believe in God" I fires back at her. And she don't say nothing, but roll down her window. December hit us slap in the face.

Elora smoke and stare out at the cars ahead of us. So I open my sketch book to the picture of Afata 12: which is this planet in the solar system Tray Ba. And the Tray Babas is these blueblack women who fly.

So I'm still waiting for Elora to say what she gonna say. When the traffic start to move a little, she close up the window. Elora's pretty. She's dark and satin in her skin. And her lips is dark too. And she got a mole above her right cheek like

somebody dotted her eyebrow. "It's what *you* believe that counts" she finally say "never play the game by the enemy's rules. Ain't no way somebody gonna try to kill me, and me not fight back. Whether it's bullets or bombs."

I'm watching the traffic. Out the corner of my eye, I can see Elora nodding her head indeed, indeed yes, the wool knot cap she wearing, bobbing back and forth yellow and white as sunflower. And here we are in the middle of the bridge with all these cars definitely going nowhere. And it's 10-to-the-rally. And me; I'm not so sure I accept what Elora saying. So I just keep drawing geometric patterns on the palms of the Tray Babas. Then she reach in the back seat and hand me a bunch of flyers and get some for herself. "Come on baby" she say "button up." And she pull her wool wraparound butter-yellow coat together. "When you can't get to the rally on time" she schooling me "realize the rally is all the time." So I fasten my pea coat (which I love) and circle my neck 2 times with my cloth come from Nigeria. And we jump out Miss Pinto. She take one lane; I take the other; and we passing out flyers and sure enough, just like Elora: here we are in another adventure, cause here come the snow.



## The Altar of Liberation

Love is one altar.  
An altar is a precipice.  
A category of experiences.  
Invisibility.  
Metamorphosis.  
Journey.  
Pain.  
Molting.  
  
A map;  
The bones.  
  
So it is.  
  
An altar of liberation.  
Libate;  
for me.





# Cheese Poem

Good Lord: the government is giving something away.  
the government is giving us  
high blood pressure and processed cheese: check it out  
line up at your community center  
line up at your church  
school: or favorite bar  
nevermind some whole wheat bread  
new shoes  
vegetables from the backyard:  
a lover who spends the night  
nevermind  
what you want.

"warning: this cheese has a high salt content"

nevermind whats underneath the mildew: is that  
some more tax breaks for you rich  
ketch-up for us poor

so I'm ungrateful:  
so its free  
so is cancer  
so is cold war.

caution: this cheese is dangerous to your health

the government has some nerve  
giving it away  
who needs it

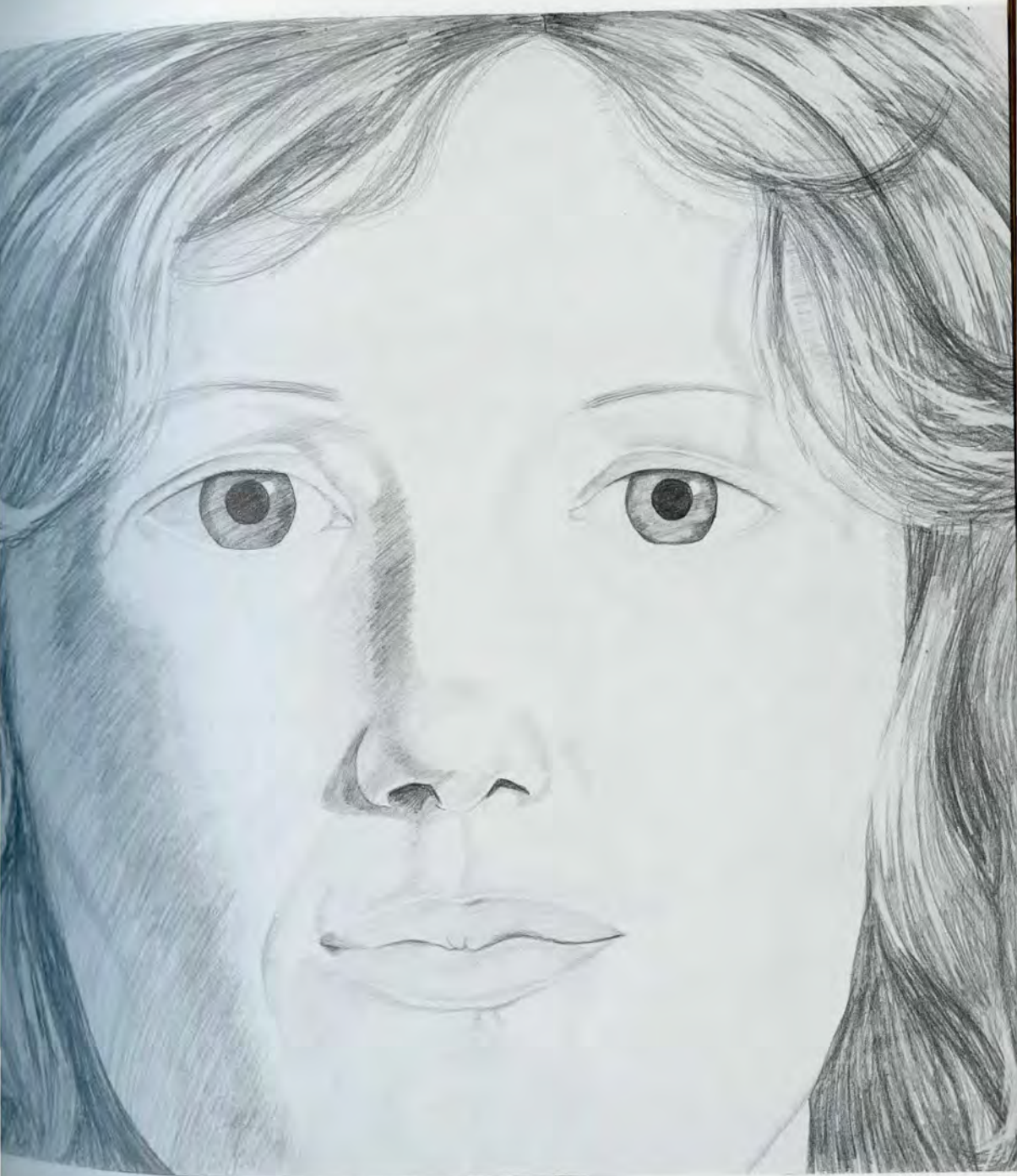
I need some: resurrect the cities: outlaw the Klan  
some j-o-b  
some a your tongue  
poems over breakfast  
apple on your breath

I want something real to go with  
something else besides  
this dry ass cheese.

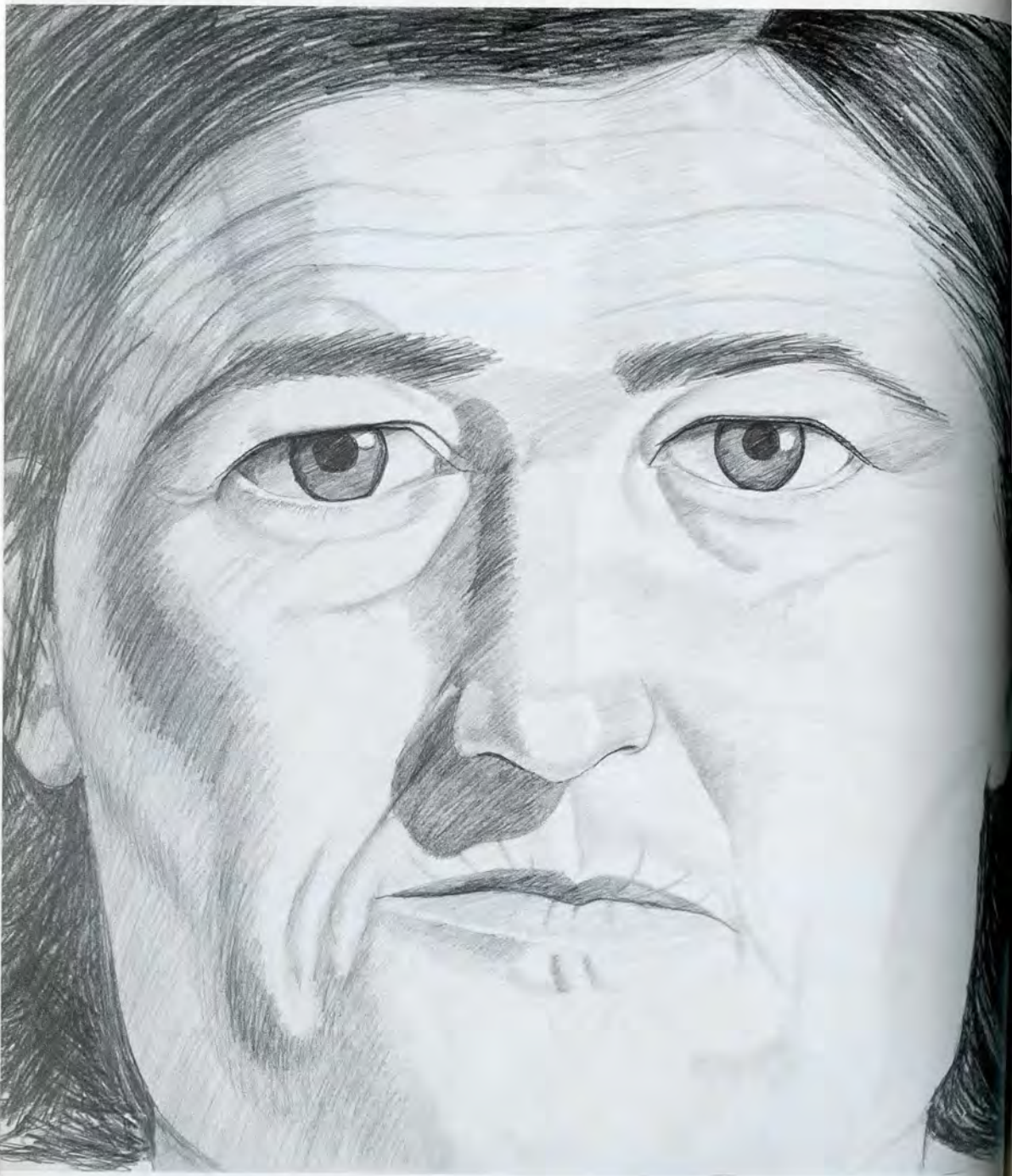


WOMENFACES





BEA KRELOFF













# THE DISENCHANTING

Three stories—three comings forth

The three stories I have chosen to rework in these poems represent traditional myths about women, particularly the dichotomy between the witch, the powerful, active and therefore threatening female figure, and the beautiful, passive maiden, valued for her looks, her selfless love, who waits to be rescued or awakened by a man.

These mythical female images are unraveled and rewoven to represent a new feminist model, the woman who undergoes the lonely journey from thralldom to independent life, the woman who acts as the catalyst for her sisters' awakening, and finally the woman who, in full rebellion, recognizes her oneness with her sister witch and merges with the witch in her full power and meaning.

It begins with another symbol, the witches' cauldron, where in myth the illusions and enchanting potions were brewed. We know now that the witches, the wicca, were the first scientists, seekers of truth, and that their cauldrons were tools in their search for what would heal, what would nourish, what would enlighten. We reclaim this among other symbols.

In a real sense, these are coming-out stories as ultimately are all stories of women emerging from myth and illusion.

## The Three-Legged Cauldron

In me the myths are melted  
down  
distilled in their essence, freed  
of illusion,  
impurities—  
peel off the layers of carefully  
concealed hypocrisy, the skin  
and rind of cleverly  
constructed lies, the husk  
that masks the underlying  
truth, the wrapping that distorts.  
Cut away right down to the hurting  
place, the hard seed, bitter  
pit, the core.  
Let fantasies burn off leaving  
what they may, the substance,  
no more.

In me the disenchanting spell  
is brewed,  
lost memories renewed,  
suspicions confirmed, directions  
clarified. What you thought  
was random fate  
fits into place  
as you gaze upon my stilled  
surface mirroring  
your one true face.





# Beauty and the Beast

## I the bargain

shelter  
a hunk of bread  
a moment to rest by the fire  
fair price for a daughter  
my father took his chance

was there a warning did i  
as i ran to greet  
him know did i with the ears within  
my ears hear  
the doors of childhood rusting  
shut

my sisters clung to me  
and wept for themselves to think  
which of us he would barter next  
what love could strike such a bargain

## II the palace

how many years ago was it i first  
recoiling from the damp stone  
paced all night the dead  
cold center of your torchlit halls  
fearing your tusk  
and hoof round every corner  
fearing to rest slid along the  
edges of your walled garden  
thick with poison weeds  
sat at your long table  
alone and fearing to eat  
what love could flourish feeding on such fear

how long was it before i unsuspecting  
let pity and familiarity prevail  
and closed my eyes to kiss you and opened  
to a smiling prince the warm  
light flooding our safe and private home blessing  
the lushness of our garden  
stately under tranquil skies  
what love could work such a transformation

## III the revelation

is it possible that a truth concealed  
may unveil itself through the instant  
of its own perceiving

how short or long a time was it  
before that snout would glimmer through  
and flickering remembrance would lift  
the corners of deceit to make  
so thoroughly enchanted me suspect  
the hoof inside your silver-buckled shoe  
that love could have worked such a transformation

## IV the coming out

and so at last i am  
leaving this palace of dreams i have learned  
what i can learn here and will remember  
to look back from time to time to check  
my progress between here  
and future points and with this leave  
taking hereby as is in my power to do  
i return you to your handsome tusk  
and beastly frame  
this is no enchanting but  
a restoration you are  
as you are and as you will  
be and nothing will bring me back  
somehow i will get to my sisters  
house but be that as it may  
the spell is broken and you must  
transform yourself



# Sleeping Beauty

## I The Birthday

It was no mistake your royal  
parents made to not invite  
that thirteenth fairy queen. They feared  
already what her gift might be.

A wild one she, and sometimes known to hold  
opinions better suited to a peasant  
or a witch, inclined to moonlight  
walks and forest mutterings—a guest  
not likely to bestow a grace  
suited for a princess to possess.



## II The Gift

you know now, don't you, that it was  
not pride or anger that inspired  
her most generous bequest  
but your own green, living heart she heard  
a pulse familiar to her ears,  
unnoticed by the rest  
that made her choose on your behalf to pluck  
you at some unsuspecting crossroad  
of your plotted destiny already laid  
before you like the rows of pretty  
dresses that would symbolize  
your unrelenting days.

## III The Promise

What did she whisper, the witch  
queen in your infant ear? Did she  
promise  
that the dream of sleep would save  
you from the sleeping dream, would save you  
from the false awakening that truly  
is the death of dreams?



Did she in desperation cast  
that one wish  
against the other doting  
twelve, already launching you  
toward some more fatal kiss?  
And did she play for time or know  
that I would come, that beauty would awaken  
beauty and true self  
would arouse true self  
from dreamless sleep  
to life?

## IV The Mystery Revealed

This then was the purpose  
of the thicket vine and sweet  
briar hedge that ringed the wall  
devouring princes for a hundred years  
who thought to take your chamber by assault,  
the labyrinth yielding to their show of force,  
then swallowing them, horse and sword and all

because she knew a certain gentler hand  
someday would come to part the tangled weed  
and sweet and thorny Eglantine  
piercing only slightly, would draw back to admit  
a woman who was not afraid to bleed.





# Rapunzel

I have come, letting down  
my hair as it were to tell you  
the truth about my life.  
Oh, to hear my mother speak  
of it you'd think the worst.  
She'd have you believe me  
a bundle of joy relinquished in fear  
to the witch who had cursed  
her for raiding her garden for, of all  
things, one mealy root, and so

I have come down from my tower  
to show you I am free to stay, to go,  
to test my worth,  
I have come to show you  
the witch-mark upon me—  
it was there from birth.

Now will you believe me when  
I tell you I do not need  
your brave attempts at rescue,  
your arrogance, your so-called love,  
your lust, your pity,  
your curiosity, your greed?

Do you think I have spent  
all my years in the witchtower  
idly growing my hair?  
Do you think at night  
when I'm alone my lamp  
burns not as a beacon  
but a flare?

And when I fly to the window  
uncoiling my braid  
at the witches word, on her return,  
do you think I'm afraid?



And why do you think  
she comes back to me always—  
to gloat at her prey?  
Idiot! The witch is my lover,  
my mother, my mentor, my most  
beloved friend—  
I choose to stay.

She teaches me in ancient signs  
and tongue to follow truly  
my ever branching path,  
to find my way past sorrow and desire  
to seek the arrow's arched  
trajectory to where the heart  
of truth resides, inside,  
inside. I love the witch  
of the tower, love her  
with infinite care,  
her good strong hands,  
her birdlight bones, her luminous brow,  
the scent of her in my hair—  
I love the witch of the tower;  
I am her  
I am  
her heir.



SUSAN  
SAXE





## Amazonas

## Chana\*

hermana  
este viaje  
no es  
simple

hay que cabalgar a tientas  
por nuevas costas  
por ignoradas cordilleras  
por bosques que no saben  
de humanos pasos

correr por las selvas  
palpitando en los mapas  
de las guerrillas

avanzar entre líneas

hay que partir  
antes del alba  
y olvidar  
que un día  
a alguien se le ocurrió  
que había que ensillar  
los sueños

sobre agua el viento de sus vespertinos cabellos  
extiende en su piel a las olas

el invierno con el encanto de sus tensos músculos  
sobre las aguerridas rocas que surgen de la nieve  
sobre fuego danza su cuerpo  
apacando ennegrece resplandece ennegrece

danza gitana energía que sube  
de sus poros furiosos de mujer

tristeza que golpea las sienes este suelo  
pidiendo pidiendo más  
táp-tap táp-tap-táp-táp  
exprimiendo este silencio  
táp-tap táp-tap-táp-táp

Chana la que sabe mujer  
que escande esta tierra siempre mujer  
esta tierra que ha leído siglos atrás.

*\*en caló. "la que sabe"*

# CUATRO POEMAS





Amazons

Chana

sister  
this journey  
is not  
simple

you must ride blind groping  
for fresh shores  
neglected ranges  
forests which have never known  
a human step

canter through jungles  
throbbing only in the heart  
of rebel warriors maps

advance between lines

you must take your leave  
before sunrise  
no longer remembering day  
that time when  
it first dawned on someone  
to harness  
your dreams

*the flamenco dancer whose name means "she who knows"*

as one with water her whirlwind hair of dusk  
billows against her flesh as waves

winter with the spell of her taut muscles  
upon rocks valiantly surging through snow  
as one on fire she dances her body  
ebbing dimming smoldering dimming

she dances gypsy energy fueled by  
the furious sweat of woman

sadness the beat of her temples this ground  
pleading pleading more  
táp-tap táp-tap-tap-táp-tap  
conjuring from silence,  
táp-tap táp-tap-tap-táp-tap

Chana she who knows woman  
who scans this globe always woman  
this earth having read it all centuries ago

*Trans: Susan Sherman*

MYRIAM DÍAZ-DIOCARETZ

# Mujer de la Tierra

En cada esquina  
de la ciudad  
hay un tumulto.  
Uno bastaría.  
Los periódicos  
anuncian hoy  
el rumor oficial:  
tu verdadero nombre es  
Juana Problema,  
eres hija de la selva,  
se dice que te llamas  
Juana  
Selva  
Problema.

Anoche, aclarando mis dudas  
sobre la hipocresía,  
exclamaste:  
¡Cuántas manos besa el hombre  
que quisiera ver cortadas!

Entretanto,  
los signos luminosos  
repiten *un indio es un ser que no  
se desarrolló, que nunca fue*  
DAN-DAN  
DAN-DAN  
DAN-DAN

en esas campanas que no escuchas  
resuenan el *mea culpa*  
el dulce desprecio  
y también AAAH  
los fantasmas de Carlos y Felipe  
montados en cólera por siempre  
porque ya no poseen  
los cuatro sacos de papas de tu campo.

¿Qué es una cruz?, preguntas.  
Madera seca. Durmientes.  
Un signo de derrota en los caminos.

No cedas a esos sueños que ahora  
te rondan.  
Sueños, a veces, ajenos,  
simples desperdicios  
del aire.

Tu sagrado árbol no está muerto.  
Morir, no puede.

CULTRUN  
CULTRUN  
CULTRUN

NO PUEDE MORIR  
porque se mantiene firme en ti

MAPU  
MAPU  
JUANA MAPU

permanecerá enraizado en ti

MIENTRAS TU TE NOMBRES  
A LA LUZ DE TU SOL OSCURO  
BAJO LA TIERRA  
MAPU





# Mapu

On every street corner  
there's an uproar.  
One would be enough.  
The headlines today  
call out the official  
rumour  
that your real name is  
Juana Problema  
that you are  
daughter of the wildwood  
They say  
your name is  
Juana  
Wildwood  
Problema.

Last night, answering  
my questions on hypocrisy,  
you exclaimed:  
Man kisses many hands  
he would like to see  
cut off!

Meanwhile the neon signs  
repeat over and over  
*an indian is a being who never  
developed who never really was*

DAN-DAN

DAN-DAN

DAN-DAN

those bells you don't hear  
ring the *mea culpa*  
the sweet disdain  
and also AAAH

Felipe's and Carlos' ghosts  
forever flying in a rage  
because they cannot own  
the 4 sacks of potatoes  
from your field.



What is a cross? you ask.  
Deadwood. Railroad ties.  
A sign of defeat in every road.

Don't give in to those dreams that  
now haunt you.  
Dreams, sometimes strange,  
simpleton squandering of air.

Your sacred tree is not dead.  
It cannot die.

CULTRUN

CULTRUN

CULTRUN

IT CANNOT DIE

because it stands firm in you

MAPU

MAPU

JUANA MAPU

It stands rooted in you

WHILE YOU NAME YOURSELF  
BY THE LIGHT OF YOUR DARK SUN  
UNDER THE EARTH

MAPU

*Trans: Sara Miles*

*Felipe & Carlos—two frequently used names of Spanish kings*

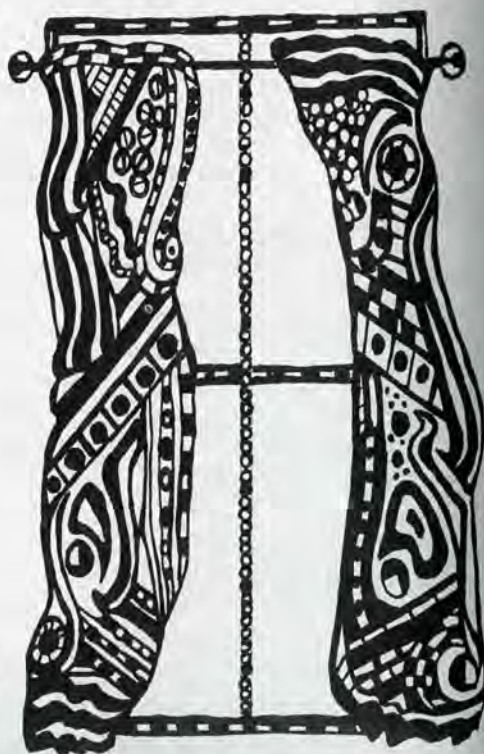
*cultrun—small drum from Arauco (the place of origin of the Indians of  
Southern Chile) used in religious ceremonies*

*mapu—Araucano term signifying "earth"*

# Encadenada

encadenada  
a la profesión de la palabra  
por mi propia voluntad noche  
a noche completo el borrador  
de mi vida pero a veces  
siento el impulso de levantar  
la cabeza sabiéndome girasol  
porque no todo en la vida  
es baile por ejemplo esa mujer  
lleva horas en el bar y por  
miedo a que nadie le hable hoy  
ha traído a su gato yo fui tu  
gato uno que baila y conversa  
pero gato al fin qué dices en tu  
defensa no estoy programado para  
eso modifique su afirmación el  
libro cruje tímido sobre la cama  
deshecha y he leído que el mundo  
está lleno de lenguajes como el  
hambre de tiempo estructurado  
o la dictadura del debería  
me entretiene recoger mi femineidad  
si se unen los mil pedazos más de  
algo interesante ha de salir ser  
crítico de los críticos también  
aburre porque lo mismo sería  
aunque más entretenido vivir en  
un conventillo e instalarme día  
y noche en la ventana sin que  
nadie me vea sería más fácil  
y más no sé ver quien entra  
y quién sale y con quién y cuándo  
y quién dijo y quién no dijo  
y cómo lo dijo y a quién  
porque detrás de todo comentario  
siempre hay una intención esas  
voces me pregunto qué pasó oigo  
carcajadas en Berlín no hubo  
tiempo de maletas ahora hay olor  
a empanadas en París y la gente  
se reúne en Nueva York pero  
hay lágrimas en una almohada  
de Estocolmo y silencio en  
Rumania me sé mi país de memoria  
y de corazón el mundo está lleno  
de lenguajes sé gentil y muéstrate  
serena sé vista y no oída

el sentido de autonomía es casi  
siempre una ilusión de todas  
maneras hay que promover cambios  
porque corren vientos de fracaso  
me engañaste me resisto a creer  
que mi antepasado derriñó aquel  
trabajo meticuloso con el calor  
de su avaricia y yo decidí no verte  
más inevitablemente te encuentro  
en una audiencia rutinaria qué hago  
yo ahí o en un recital poético qué  
haces tú aquí o cruzando la calle  
o bailando pero me canso de decir  
hola cómo te va no todo en la vida  
es baile mira eso la sangre y la noche  
mezclados en los senos de la mujer  
golpeada y sus lágrimas tienen el  
color y el sabor el mundo está  
lleno de lenguajes que no  
comprendo





# Chained

to the work of the word  
by my own will night after  
night I go over the rough-draft  
of my life but sometimes  
knowing myself as a sunflower  
I feel the drive to raise my  
head because not everything is  
dancing for instance look at  
that woman she's been in the bar  
for hours afraid that no one  
would speak to her today she's  
brought her cat I was your cat  
one that dances and chats but  
finally a cat what can you say  
in your defense sorry I am  
not programmed for this please  
modify your question the book  
rustles humbly on the unmade  
bed I've read that the world is  
full of languages like the hunger  
for structured time or the dictator-  
ship of musts I amuse myself  
collecting my femininity  
if only the thousand fragments  
would fit something perhaps  
something exciting might come up  
being a critic of critics  
is also boring because it  
would be the same It may be more  
interesting to live in a  
tenement house and to sit unseen  
eternally close to the window  
eternally unseen it would  
be easier and oh well to see  
who comes in and who goes out with  
whom and when and who said it and  
who didn't say it and how they  
said it and to whom behind  
every comment an intention  
always lurks those voices I  
wonder what happened I hear  
roars of laughter in Santiago  
there was no time for suitcases  
now I smell *empanadas* in  
Paris and people are having  
meetings in New York but there are  
tears on a pillow in Stockholm

and there is silence in Roumania  
I know my country by heart and  
by heart the world is full of  
languages: be nice and appear  
to be kind be seen and not heard  
the sense of autonomy is  
almost invariably an illusion  
in any case we must foster  
change the winds of failure are  
blowing strongly you disappointed  
me I refuse to believe that  
my ancestor melted that contrived  
colossal work with the heat of  
his greed and I decided not  
to see you again yet I come  
across you in an ordinary  
appeal what am I doing there  
or at a poetry reading  
what are *you* doing here or  
window-shopping on that avenue  
or dancing but I get tired  
of saying hi how are you and  
no answer not everything in  
life is dancing look at that blood  
and night mingle-mangling in the  
breasts of that beat up woman  
and her tears have color  
and taste the world is full of  
languages I cannot understand

*Trans: Sara Miles*



# Evergreen War

So Suctonius planned to attack the island of Mona\*, which although thickly populated had also given sanctuary to many refugees. Flat-bottomed boats were built to contend with the shifting shallows and these took the infantry across. Then came the cavalry. Some utilized fords, but in deeper water the men swam beside their horses. The enemy lined the shore in a dense mass. Among them were black-robed women, their whole appearance resembling the frantic rage of the furies... But then the general urged the Roman soldiers not to fear a horde of fanatical women.

*Tacitus*

## THE ANNALS OF IMPERIAL ROME

*\*Mona is an indigenous word that means bogland. The island was renamed The Isle of Anglesey after the invasion and subjugation of its inhabitants.*

Living in the little town of Cosmopolis near Aberdeen on Grays Harbor in the State of Washington, I was ten years old when police invaded our rented home and pulled from my arms my baby sister who was six months old. I had done much of the caring for this child since I was the eldest of seven children. My stepfather, who is Indian, had been unemployed as a logtruck driver for months during the depression of the early 1950's—still referred to as a "recession." We didn't have the clothing or small change necessary for attendance at school, and it is likely that some concerned, better-off citizen complained to the authorities. Well, six of us were farmed out in foster homes, my parents were accused of child neglect and my baby sister with dark skin, thick dark hair and eyes of my color has never been seen since. We assume she was adopted out and that she knows nothing about us, her own family.

*For Beth Ann Strong*

Romans shouted stern horses off rafts headon  
toward womyn and priests. Torch fire fell  
snuffed by the wet flanks of stomping mounts.

Roused against portentous swords, womyn  
wrestled harnesses and broke knuckled fists  
on truculent armor shockplated and bruise deaf.

For the weary dead, survivors reset the altars.  
Soldiers notched the only forest for a garrison.  
Over Môn, an eerie chant sought a future wind.

An offended ancestry, our unrelenting kin, wish  
our praise. Do we really feel the foreclosed  
distance and learn the shape of a hostile foe?

A daughter of another coast gazed doe struck  
as uniforms funneled in single file to pull  
a cooing infant from maternal arms so young.

A sister child with black hair and highbone  
cheeks madrona red will never taste venison  
perfumed cedar pungent, distinct from bear.

Do colossal figures ordering spread legged  
invade her dreams or remote semaphore arms  
that urge her to stop, search or wonder hard?

Ninety days of rain bring a needlefall, soggy  
woodpiles kill fire and slippery trestles slow.  
Sturgeon gills pant on a water rotten dock.

Strong are the winds splintering waves to spray  
Sorrowful are defeats and longings evergreen  
Faint is the moonmist shroud over night and na



# For Nora Paiz

*In March, 1967, after 15 days of eating only roots, Otto Rene Castillo, the prizewinning poet, and Nora Paiz were captured in ambush, tortured 4 days and finally burned alive.*

Are you on the lap of waves  
that skim to shore

Can we find you  
under the shade of the Ceiba

Do you hide among the teeth  
of wild street dogs

or do you lurk  
in secret chambers underground?

Are you lounging among the clouds  
magnifying lay of the land through a lens of rain?

Do you vocalize threats  
in Pacaya's roar spilling fire from its crater?

Do you carry water balanced on your head  
to a village of drought and thirsts?

We look beyond the probings of blood and ash  
nourishing the clenched roots of a charred sierra tree,

Tree they bound you to, tied by your own hair—  
your mother said, moving in the wind.

Though the press ignored your death  
and officials waved off the inquiries,

With the word "disappeared,"  
their ban of you fails.

We announce  
you are with us!

## ZOE ANGLESEY

one

Back in Minneapolis I became convinced  
that swimming in the hotel pool with none of the water  
over my head and all of the water warm as tea  
was maximal security

Back and forth across the lovely public  
tub I used my backstroke while I  
counted up the blizzard clouds  
above the low glass roof  
above my nose

Any other city you'd see vast erratic downtown  
tracts of wasting space specific as the blowing  
garbage or the car parts turned to rust  
on stony rubble smelling loud as now  
the shadows slight  
those planted trees as delicate as the surrounding  
snow  
stuck to steel construction cranes that red  
and yellow sway  
intentional across the frozen ground

# JUNE JORDAN

## POEM FOR DANA

two

Into Iowa and I  
flying arms folded cold against the view  
of trees extremely occasional below on flatland  
unresponsive to the everywhere bending sky  
|

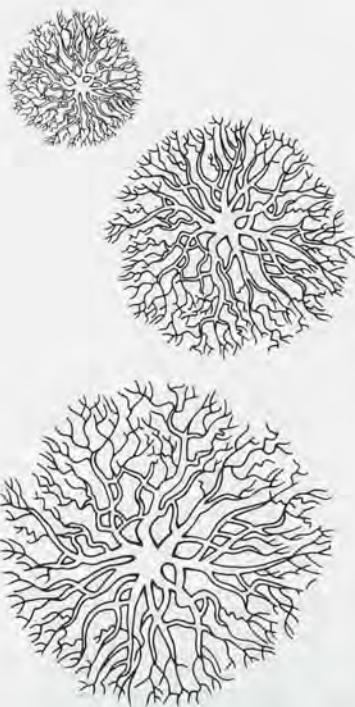
did not expect you suddenly large suddenly  
close beside me in a car or elevator  
miles of heat away from outdoor details  
like the stalks of pig corn sturdy on the light  
blue dirt or rosy hogs loose in late  
morning or the rooted quadrupeds the black  
clump cattle paralyzed on rounded sightlines icy  
as the earth itself

three

who can move from space to flesh  
who can knit her own wool cap to wear  
who can make the coffee makes the rest of it seem  
easier

four

adding the strawberries  
adding the cream





Willow

Salix (species unknown)

who names the tree poor at the end of the Union

Footbridge bounced under my body absorbing the night like birch

bark harboring stars in the heavyweight snowstorm circling

the lips the eyelashes

river making the ice move

under me

the Iowa river making ice move

33,000 feet high and over one wing of the Ozark DC-9 Fan

Jet 1

look for the place to build you a house

only of snow

who can handle the winter

will know what to do

next



# THE CEDAR TREES OF LEBANON

Bursting soft but kept by the structure of a spine  
the green parts of the tree cloud under the clouds.  
Under the axe the branches bleed red  
dust. The tree bleeds red. The blood  
of the cedar is red blood red body  
enfolded by unmistakable brown skin.

At the end of this century massacre  
remains invisible unless the victim  
skin reads white.

Night air and the smoke from the chimney  
puffs into a humid atmosphere obsessed  
by particles from burned up cedar trees  
a smell so defiantly sweet  
the stars freeze to resist that violent and swollen  
odor of a life transformed by fire.

At the end of this century massacre  
becomes a cluster of phosphorus  
events described by a woman carrying  
a mattress on her head without  
a destination.

At the end of this century a girl  
stands her ground next to a tree  
the Cedrus Libani  
that the thunder does not shake  
that the lightning cannot strike down



## LUISA VALENZUELA

### The Attainment of Knowledge

Senses and gods intersect in this part of the world, assuming these parts are of the world and not strung over the Andes, just beyond arm's reach. Above, An anguished blue. If only they knew, if they knew that anguish. But no. They recognize neither the desolation nor the blue. So many centuries living on their false islands made of straw, floating on the lake, islands regenerated daily; so many generations come and gone, nearly walking on water over these islands of rushes. Almost like Christ if they only knew. But they don't even know, as they sail their rafts, that they are themselves extensions of those islands—just as yellow, just as bright.

They know, yes, about the absence of sound, because their ears have been blessed so as to catch silence's most subtle nuances. That is why I said that the gods and senses intermingle in these latitudes. I also say it because, for them, the most sublime of states is color-blindness. A pure achromatic is venerated for the gift of standing undazzled before that inhuman blue that is the blue of the lake, before its reflection in the sky, before the sun's beating on the golden straw. Too much chromatic intensity for so much silence—that is why those who can perceive no color enjoy at least the dignity of priests.

More than one among them has claimed to see in black and white, feigning confusion, even mistaking the line of the horizon, but the masquerade does not disturb anyone there on the lid of the world. He who sees no colors is only greatly blessed within himself. The meager propitiations that on occasion his fellows render up are of little use.

Thus life goes by—briefly. Few of these people live to fifty. The old ones are more beloved than condemned, but they maintain a minimum of contact with the rest of the tribe.

They survive, growing wise, and for that very reason, nobody much wants to listen to them. Everyone dreams of building an enormous glass cage, so as to have them solely to look at. However, there is no way to get glass in the plateau. They encountered glass here only once, and that would have been fatal had they not lived on the water. The little piece of glass was lovely and much admired until it so condensed the sun's rays that a fire started. It was the first fire in their history, and nearly the last. It flared on a newly constructed island. The fresh straw burned for a long time, till the island burned its way free of the marsh and began to drift. A fire ship.

On the island was a hut of rushes and an old woman of material indistinguishable from that of which mortals are made.

They floated away—those flames which had once been an island with its old woman and hut—and from a distance provided such a spectacle that, for the first time, the common folk rejoiced in their ability to see colors, because red had not been part of their known spectrum up to that time. (The honored color-blind missed the flames, to their eventual misfortune: They did not know the color of combustion.)



The old woman of the island, on the other hand, knew more: she found out about heat and even the horror of burning. She learned too how the fire swallowed her cries, and when finally the water vanquished the flames, she remained floating on that immensity of the lake—that sea on the tip of the earth—on a tiny, charred island. She began to notice that her knowledge had grown with the heat of the flames, and she felt infinitely wiser than before, having survived her forced pilgrimage. But wise for what? To be unable to transmit it to anyone, as usual, especially among those who know only the ineffable? Like the wisdom of those on their floating islands of fresh straw, or those of us who believe ourselves secure with our feet firmly on the ground?

But the old woman wanted to break that silence, and so, in the middle of that lake so blue it seemed dreamt, impossible, indigo, she decided to communicate to the others what she had come to know. She decided to make them learn, at least, the lesson of fire. If she could only send them a spark! But no spark could brave the diaphanous air nor sail over the water. A defenseless spark, a tiny button of light. And regardless, her island had, by now, cooled off. Not even the sweet warmth of embers remained.

From flame to fire, from fire to ember to warm ash, to that other ash, dry and sterile, which with the wind's help covered everything with gray. These had been luminous transformations—pure, internal happiness in no way comparable to simple joy.

To tell them about the heat beyond that of the sun (the sun knows of these things, needing no enlightenment). She wanted to share the wisdom of fire with the others, with her brothers, those who, though beneath the sun, are unaware of any kind of warmth.

The old gray woman, covered with soot, a bit charred, poor old thing, scorched in places and, beneath that gray dusting of ash, completely browned not so much from the sun (which at such an altitude is so pure) but by that masterful fire which had taught her the principle of cooking in the flesh. And that, among so many other things, was what she wanted to communicate to her fellows: the possibility of transforming oneself at the same time the flame transformed the flesh. Such is the alchemical power of that inconceivable thing, burning and red, that she did not even know was called fire.

She sought among the dead ashes some sign of life, plunging her hands into them, sinking her forearms up to the elbows, knowing the danger of getting burned was now, for her, no danger at all. And after much searching she found a tiny glow beating in the heart of the ash. With that miniscule firebrand and the charcoal which had formed, she maintained for months a living flame. It didn't even occur to her to cook her dried fish over it, not wishing to defile it. She tenderly went about remaking her island. Harvesting new rushes which grew by the lake, she put them to dry in the sun and covered, bit by bit, that bed of ashes with buoyant reeds. Afterwards, she rebuilt her hut with the same rushes.

When she felt it complete, she set it all afire, thinking that somehow the others would understand her message, thanks to the dark cloud which the flames sent aloft. She thus reinvented, without meaning to, smoke-signals. It was as reinventing the telegraph without wires. In sum: another worthless holocaust. The others there far away could not or perhaps would not decipher her message.

Perhaps they already knew.



# LUISA VALENZUELA

## From: Dark Desires & the Others



### The River—Birth

A man and a woman are nurturing a river that flows between them, separating them. They are not nurturing it as one nurtures hope. No. They are feeding it, nourishing it with their fears. The river is the antithesis of other rivers. During a heavy freeze it becomes impassable and with certain thaws it is a mere trickle.

He never crosses the river. She believes that it is he who should cross and she waits on her shore and signals from time to time. Not very clear signals. Rather confusing signals, really. She waits, not completely sure whether she wants him to cross the river. He says he's afraid. She's afraid, too, but doesn't say so. Why? Their shared fear could very easily form a bridge across the river. But neither one wants to approach the other while crossing a bridge built from fear. As if there were other kinds of bridges.

She believes that it is he who should take the first step; at times scarcely a step separates them. Other times, leagues lie between them and the waters are rough and dialogue is impossible.

They must forget about the bridge and attempt to leap.

She believes that she has already made the leap. She believes she is on the correct shore, the far side. On his side of the river he believes that he is where he should be, and he takes on ballast that makes the leap impossible.

She observes, she speaks and listens to him and, at times, to complicate matters, she steps backward. Then he takes his mark as if to leap, but falls asleep on the track. It would seem that this is a rather soporific river they are nurturing between them. Although often they launch dreams upon it that sail like beautiful galleons, bedazzling them.

### The River—Bed

But let me tell you the unmentionable, the intolerable truth about this river: it is a river which sometimes performs the feat of issuing from the channel that gave it birth. Many are the humans who would like to imitate it, issuing from the channel that gave them birth, cutting the cord, the lines, to drift downstream. Sometimes this river achieves such a feat and that is when he and she appear on the shores because the river is no longer flowing in its bed and no one has any reason to remember the bed.



Each of them knows what a metaphor is, and so they are frightened. Each frightens the other, he infects her, and she him, through and through. Fear as a river, the river as a bed, the bed as bottom, unspeakable. On the bed, the river, on the river, the galleon, on the galleon, the masts, and both of them refusing to continue the analysis beyond the mizzen-sky-pole, avoiding the main-sky-pole as if it were the plague. And all this in spite of the fact that they have often sailed in other waters and know the rigging, know the terminology like the backs of their hands. They know what the masts and spurs and the set of sails are called; they know the main-topmost-studding-sail, and especially the foresail, the flying jib, and even the spanker. They know how to fit the first and second futtocks, and how to keep their lanyards taut. They know about forejacks and buntwhips. Sheets hold no mysteries for them. There is nothing she doesn't know about the limber-hole and the after-shrouds, and more than once he's run the mainsail up his pole. Things like that.

But a dream galleon presents indescribable difficulties and neither of them can summon the will to sail it, they are incapable of hoisting the canvas and sailing on the tide with all sails unfurled. Theirs is a phantom ship on a phantom river with a bed of unspeakable depths.

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### The River—Mouth

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After a while there comes a time when he all by himself plays at naval warfare and scuttles the galleons. With letters and with numbers—mostly with letters—one by one he covers all the squares until finally he scuttles the dream. Bursts another bubble. Though pricks would be a better word to use, anyone from Buenos Aires would tell you. They are both from that port city, but they overlook that ecstatic detail and drift on.

She, too, blows bubbles from time to time but afterwards she gets a headache or suffers mild secret indispositions. She doesn't admit it but she knows that these indispositions are a barrier, like the river.

A river of blood shall flow, says an old prophecy that recently she has revived in her writing, as well as in a less metaphorical sense—let us say, physiological.

She writes about the river, adulterating it, he blows new bubbles, the river buries them beneath a festive foam. When this new foam dissipates all that remains are the floating corpses of once-colorful fish. The galleons have vanished, Cleopatra has faded, the Nile flows a thousand knots in the distance. No dream happiness now, no possible leap. No river, no delta to facilitate an encounter, no separation, nothing.

And that is why it has been said: if you want to swim, dive into the deep, deep sea. Forget the rivers.

*Trans: Margaret Peden*

She has the soul of a watchmaker and believes that she can dismantle the mechanism. He—supposing he has one—has the soul of a trapper of larks. What he is building with hundreds of mirror-studded pieces of wood and shiny little pieces of tin are gigantic glimmering traps, mirrored traps, promises made never to be fulfilled—just the opposite. Which is why they glitter so.

At times she attempts to disassemble the traps but almost always finds pieces missing. He has been shrewd enough to remove them in time. He has put them in his pocket for a more propitious occasion, and when she tentatively reaches out to take some piece or to play with the reflections he starts kicking at the whole mechanism and disassembles it before she becomes too enthusiastic. Sometimes the shiny tin pieces fall on her and cut her.

He loves to kick things down and doesn't hide it and she knows that but just the same keeps coming back and allowing herself to be trapped by the reflections.

Occasionally she turns away, indifferent, and then very rapidly indeed he builds a castle made of glossy playing cards. And she, who has a special weakness for castles of glossy cards and who expects nothing more and believes that they are playing again, agrees to modify a merloned tower, to lower a drawbridge. Until once again he decides to demonstrate that this is neither a game nor a castle; it is but one more of his extremely clever mirrored lark traps, a synthesis of every misery.

## Ornithologies

The great flight of wide-spread wings, of feathers fanned like fingers. Predatory flight, talons at the ready. Sometimes you see them coming, swooping toward you, and you can only stand docilely letting them fly closer, threatening, while nearby little birds with gay feathers hop about, pecking without a care.

Glory resides solely in the swift flash of blue birds. Deep in the forest the blue woodpeckers spread their wings and appear against the nocturnal green of the pines in extravagant color akin to happiness

indigo blue

cobalt blue

methylene blue

none of these and all of them at once, a fleeting glimpse before they again fold their wings to exhibit the black of the crested hoods that shape the outline of their heads.

The blue of this bird is like the dreamed-of green of a quetzal in the impenetrable jungle. The hood of this bird is, naturally, feathered, not at all like other hoods, hoods made by man and usually donned for hunting or being hunted.

The hooded falcon awaiting its prey.

Another prey, human, hooded, awaiting the executioner.

The executioner, in his turn, hooded.

And the interruption of the flight. No more gleaming blue wings. Only wings hovering at the level of your neck, and feathers like fingers, closer, closing, squeezing.





**...from Nicaragua**



These photos were taken in tiny villages along the Nicaraguan-Honduran border, where the daily life of everyone is engaged in the constant attacks by ex-Samoza National Guardsmen, Honduran troops backing them up and the unspoken shadow of U.S. military advisors...the quality and dignity of the life among those peasants is something I could not have imagined...not in any kind of dream. Who are you killing? These are the people you are maiming, raping, kidnapping, torturing, cutting up into pieces...these are the people you call "enemy"...strong peasants with no dream but life. A life they have been fighting for for half a century... This is the statement, with these photos, with these poems, that I so much want to make...

As the war approaches, as death seems to stalk us from different directions and with different masks, as pain seems to be an element to reckon with—daily, solidly—I am bursting with poetry, the sun shining bright in my eyes, the privilege of this place and time engraved on every part of my body...

# Margaret Randall



## HOURS

Hours and their juxtaposition  
are important  
vital at times  
when winds brandish dark memories  
and will recedes  
to gravity's center.  
Vital now  
that the hour of the bombs  
cannot reverse itself  
and the hour of your body entering mine  
may not open and close  
its eyes again.  
A time for destruction  
which might have burst with life  
crying even now for life  
in the ashes of your body entering mine  
in the ashes of our whole and living dream.

*(Managua/September 1982)*

## MARCH 6, 1982

All last week you preened before the mirror  
viewing emerging breasts, then covering them  
with gauze-thin blouse  
and grinning: getting bigger, huh?  
The week before you wore army fatigues  
leveling breasts and teenage freckles,  
tawny fuzz along your legs.  
A woman. Beginning.  
Today you don fatigues again.  
Today you pack knapsack and canteen,  
lace boots over heavy socks  
and answer the call Reagan and Haig have slung  
at your 12 years.  
Yours and so many others...  
kids 14, 15, 18, so many others who will go  
and some of them stay, their mothers shouting  
before the Honduran embassy: "Give us  
our sons' bodies back, give us back their bodies!"  
At least that.  
All last week you preened before the mirror,  
moving loose to new rhythms  
long weekend nights. Junior High math. Sunday beach.  
Today you go off to the stacatto of continuous news dispatches  
and I, in my trench, carry your young breasts  
in my proud and lonely eyes.

*(Managua/March 1982)*

Standing alone against the night  
 I open to all its hidden sounds  
 soft rustle of branches, crickets, a cock  
 crowing somewhere beyond the trees.  
 Spots of light catch leaves and throw them out  
 in moving shapes.  
 The darkness is a living body  
 I want to bring to its knees.  
 Cradled in my shadowed arms  
 the old VZ: heavy wood and dark steel.  
 Ancient weapon I have carefully checked  
 making sure the chamber is full  
 and the barrel empty.  
 I have never shot this old Czech rifle  
 but the Smith & Wesson on my hip  
 tells me it's o.k. against the night.  
 O.k. against the night  
 defending this territory of the heart  
 and this territory of a nation  
 building its dreams against all odds  
 building its future against bits and pieces  
 of night.  
 Don't sleep, I tell myself at 2 a.m.  
 and again at 4 and at 5 and at 6.  
 Don't sleep  
 for the night has yet to come clear.  
 A people's dream is in the cradle of your arms.  
 A people's future in your eyes.

*(Managua/August 1982)*







### LETTER FROM NICARAGUA / two

I no longer felt the heat nor pain  
when the photographer put me on film  
in 1978. The  
charred black mass of my body  
was only the limited space of another life.  
A spark moved voids in that image  
and I emerged  
radiant, whole  
in the consciousness my dark remains evoked  
in an old woman in Lima,  
a teenager on Chicago's south side,  
a London poet,  
students in Camberra, a guerrilla  
in Morazán.

But my temperature rose searing  
Haig's lying hands  
when he held me up to damn my sisters and brothers,  
betray those who fought and fell  
and were born with me  
that long September day.  
In our new state we can only be used for life  
not death  
nor to justify those who would go on burning  
our names and eyes.

Now I suffer for earth and water,  
fire and air.  
Only by snuffing out the napalm in Beirut,  
reviving the peasant girl in Vietnam's smile,  
washing the blood from the streets of Chalatenango,  
the Bronx, Santiago, San Francisco Norte, Belfast, San Juan,  
will I be able to sleep  
in love  
at rest  
alert.

*(Managua/August 1982)*

# in the forest, there is a bird



*"And then, when one is hungry and thirsty,  
there is always someone to throw you out."*

*—A. Rimbaud*

There is a poem written between your liquid eyes, Drew Katzman  
a sweet poem, word by word  
it comes through your pores, shines on your sweat  
a poem to light, to the sun, to the song of birds  
to the tiniest vein in the flower's fluted petal  
to the last shout of summer, the moon in puddles  
the vendor's call, the children's games  
it's a poem of passion, of midnight  
an ambush for fear, an attack on wonder  
it's a piece of yourself or all of you  
whole in Nicaragua  
— between your liquid eyes —  
waking in Bismona  
covered by night in San Francisco del Norte  
a poem to your hands, naked, heavy and awkward  
— workers' hands, who would think they're the hands of a star —  
a poem to your poor unravelled heart  
inhabited — yes, now it is — by a constellation of stars.

On the border  
on the blue limit of Nicaragua  
there is a man, an actor, a heart, a star  
far from the Hollywood sky  
from the Broadway lights  
from the white and empty mansions of Beverly Hills  
without cigarettes — how prosaic the silence! —  
a good man  
his eyes opened wide on all the eyes in the world  
his tenderness exploding in all the world's tenderness  
quiet as he gathers the pieces of death  
from his United States in Bismona, Nicaragua  
a magic-man, his hair and pain uncombed  
his shirt dirty, his legs cramped  
a man with the soul of a guerrilla  
firing a poem from his liquid eyes  
body reddened by the sun, on fire, alive with love.

## rosario murillo





In Nicaragua  
thousands of miles from the babble  
where dawn blows and fills us  
with tiny, imperceptible miracles  
Drew Katzman, passport number #48979  
hope and knowledge in his fist  
illuminated  
made love without cameras, without screens  
alone. In silence. With thousands of silences  
and thousands of soldiers  
centuries of hunger standing up in his eyes,  
loved the Revolution, loved life  
and I loved him, this summer  
with his liquid eyes, clean, hopeful  
with his innocent star's heart  
his embrace sweet as the calm between battle and battle  
in Bismona, Zelaya, just before dawn.

—Feb. 10, 1983

*Trans: Margaret Randall*

*And you leave with a light  
and that light can last a lifetime...  
those moments of love in Nicaragua  
(Drew Katzman)*



This poem came out of an experience we had with a group of 20 North Americans who came to put their lives on the line, to protest the U.S. Military maneuvers...they were organized and led by Drew Katzman, a Hollywood movie actor, and they went out to Bismona, a forlorn group of shacks on the Atlantic Coast, some 16 kilometers south of the border with Honduras (and the maneuvers). Just previous to their arrival there, and in fact also during the time they spent there, there was heavy military action by the counterrevolutionary forces...three days before they came, 58 were killed and 5 of our soldiers, in a battle only yards away. While they were there, they could hear the mortar fire in the night, and one day had to run for the trench they had dug for their own protection three times in a single 24-hour period.... You can imagine what kind of an experience it was for these 20 very different (one from another) people....M.R.

# ELLEN SHAPIRO - PHILOSOPHY & THE BIG EXC EPTION-Why I Write Fiction

*An earlier version of this paper was delivered at the "Women and Language" panel of the Society for Women in Philosophy, Eastern Division Meeting, Smith College, Northampton, MA.*

I was once a student of philosophy: my memories include long hours at my library desk hidden in the periodicals, where I'd wrestle with ontological questions, checking my thesis for internal consistencies, buttressing the conclusions with what I hoped was sufficient proof. Whenever I felt frustrated or chaotic, I'd turn to a magazine; one of my favorites, believe it or not, was a special-interest monthly called *Ducks Unlimited*, and as I flipped the pages I'd be soothed by pictures of flying mallards and antique decoys, or I'd wonder why the "Waterfowl Artist of the Year" posed with an odd, defiant grin. Refreshed, I'd turn to some new formulation, but eventually that familiar anxiety would return: a shadow crept across the notebook and I'd begin to imagine that my argument contained holes so glaring that anyone (except myself, of course) would be able to see straight through them. Only one "logical" counterargument need be uttered and my work would topple like a house of cards, rendering me lost and speechless.

I once even nicknamed that fantasy "The Terror of the Big Exception" (making it sound like a B-movie calmed my nerves), and I felt its presence no matter how unchallenged or successful my work turned out to be. Now I'm not talking about doubt or skepticism or even the despair that the words won't flow; all these feelings are common and often necessary for the creative process. No, "The Big Exception" is a pointing finger, a patriarchal voice that says: "Your work is riddled with inconsistencies. I can't deduce your conclusions from the premises, which are themselves parochial and subjective. Even a child could see the emotional biases which cloud your argument."

Of course, many of these fears are symptoms of male-dominated, western philosophy: the positing of life as a problem to be solved, the inferiority of "subjective" writing, the defining of emotions as unreliable, false, and detached from the intellect, and most fundamentally, the existence of universal truths about human nature.

I always knew that what I wrote could be but a sliver of reality; the world contained more voices than I could even dream of hearing, let alone categorize. There were kind fathers who designed neutron bombs, women painting beautiful



images they say came directly from God, a grandfather who died in his sleep, leaving every present his family gave him stashed in a closet—neatly stacked and unopened. People twisted and bent and defied my every generalization, not, as that somber voice would have it, because I failed to appropriate enough of the world, but simply because human diversity was not to be contained.

The source of individual uniqueness is the body. By the body I mean not only physical and biological characteristics and the brain with its faculties for reason and memory, but also those qualities which traditional philosophy has usually discounted: emotions, dreams, unconscious messages, “irrationalities,” sense impressions (not sense data: I’m not concerned with what the traditionalists think they can measure). At the same time, the body is the personal manifestation of social experiences—whether they be of a racial, sexual, familial, religious or class nature. In other words, what an individual feels is subjective, but that subjectivity has also passed through and been influenced by a variety of social filters. So, for example, a lesbian sensibility would not be found floating in some universal realm, though an individual’s perceptions might certainly be influenced by her lesbianism.

Even when I was empathizing with the subject matter, I still found the language of philosophy difficult. For example, Simone de Beauvoir writes this passage about lesbianism in *The Second Sex*:

Never in the presence of husband or lover can she (the lesbian) feel wholly herself; but with her woman friend she need not be on parade, need not pretend: they are too much of a kind not to show themselves frankly as they are. This similarity engenders complete intimacy. Frequently eroticism has but a small part in these unions; here sex pleasure is of a nature less violent and vertiginous than between man and woman, it does not bring about such overwhelming transformations...<sup>1</sup>

de Beauvoir is describing the idealized characteristics of the lesbian. There are few, if any qualifications in the passage; the tone is transcendental, as if she had distilled some essence from every lesbian in the world. But of course I know of lesbians who do not feel completely genuine with their lovers, just as I know that some lesbians engage in highly vertiginous lovemaking. Now I don’t mean to sound petty. Obviously de Beauvoir isn’t claiming to describe each and every lesbian, yet there is nothing intrinsic in her language to allow for a diversity of life choices. And by not exploring her own subjectivity, de Beauvoir’s writing takes on an assumption of universality; a prescription for “the way lesbians are.”

And in my own work, I often found myself considering arguments because they fit within a particular jigsaw I’d created and not because they truly reflected what I saw in the world. For every assertion, I could think of many more exceptions: life was much more ubiquitous than my philosophy led me to believe. And so I finally had to ask myself a very difficult question: “Did my philosophical conclusions exist in the world as I really saw it?”

That thought made my head spin so furiously that I picked up a *National Geographic* and stared at the intricate shadings of a canyon at twilight.

Finally, I had to admit a few things. My writing had begun as an intuition from my experiences, but only in relation to specific times, places, and individuals. I knew I was talking about a few molecules of reality, but they were surrounded



by innumerable contrasting interpretations. And I found myself just as interested in what lay beyond the boundaries as I was in my preconceived definitions. Why, I questioned, had my thinking taken on this inside/outside dualism at all?

I thought of a possible resolution. After all, generalized speech certainly allows particular reactions and they are themselves a part and parcel of a diversified reality. However, as many people have experienced in conferences, for example, this kind of discourse can go on *ad infinitum* without the slightest reference to emotions, sense perceptions or any other information gleaned from the body. An argument can evoke many particular reactions, but as often as not they will come from detached, talking heads. Texts referring to texts, quotation upon quotation, and rarely is it remembered that the subject is living, fully-dimensional human beings.

The language of the powerful, whether they control a country or a particular academic discipline, reflects and maintains their dominance. Their power is a result of stripping-down a diverse and multi-faceted reality into a vision of the world as they would like it to be: provable, consistent, conquerable. Their dilutions are cast as universal standards by which all else is to be measured. It is this appropriation of complexity, this presumption of universality that enables the powerful to define, for example, the nature of a "valid" philosophical argument or the dictates of political policy.

Thus, dissidents in Latin America are labelled "terrorist," a pseudo-term which not only denies a wide range of opposition but also justifies their brutal suppression. The words "lesbian mother" are almost unrecognized in the ruling ideology; lesbianism is defined as a perversion and is not at all compatible with their idea of motherhood. By narrowing the meaning of these words, they have "proof" that lesbians are unfit mothers.

Similarly, traditional western philosophy tries to dilute complexity by positing the existence of universal laws of human nature and by defining only certain ways of thinking as valid. This hierarchical set-up allows a select few to be closer to "the truth" and thereby attain the system's validation. If philosophy were really interested in human diversity, it might well lose its distinct boundaries as a discipline, much as politicians would lose their power to appropriate the world.

And now for the really big question: Why did I stare at magazines during times of philosophical crisis? Simply because I needed to be grounded in the particular. To look at a facial expression or the colors of a landscape is to experience unique and tangible emotions. Those bodily feelings are the source and confirmation of a kaleidoscopic reality. The body grounds us; it affirms our differences and makes us splendid exceptions to attempts at creating static, predictable laws of human nature.

And so I stopped flipping through magazines and began teaching myself to write fiction. Fiction afforded me the opportunity to find out why, for example, a grandfather never opened his family's presents. I could imagine him not speaking to his daughter for the ten years since his wife's death, dying in bed with the TV on, looking annoyed rather than at peace, his white hair combed perfectly in place. The night table would hold a novel by Turgenev, a bowl of hard candy, and neatly lined photographs of his entire family.

Now by most philosophical standards, I've been quite audacious by taking this information and, without a speck of proof, creating fanciful elaborations. With



fiction, however, the authenticity comes with the telling.<sup>2</sup> That's why most writers find it difficult to talk about their work; the final standard for their writing is not a justification, which is considered essential for philosophical writing, but the individual integrity of the artist's vision.

Most importantly, fiction is the medium whereby "subjective" worlds can be explored with assurance. These visions are rooted in the individual characters and in what they say and do. Of course, there may be a character who pronounces on the ways of the world, but the words could never pass as universals, simply because the reader knows whose mouth they're coming from. To my mind, the most invigorating fiction dives to the center of its characters, gathering meaning from their ordinary gestures and words and then magnifying it all until the reader knows their world for all its complexity.

Consider a passage from Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*. Mrs. Dalloway has just learned that her husband, but not herself, has been invited to lunch with a prominent London hostess:

She began to go slowly upstairs, with her hand on the bannisters, as if she had left a party, where now this friend now that had flashed back her face, her voice; had shut the door and gone out and stood alone, a single figure against the appalling night, or rather, to be accurate, against the stare of this matter-of-fact June morning; soft with the glow of rose petals for some, she knew, and felt it, as she paused by the open staircase window which let in blinds flapping, dogs barking, let in, she thought, feeling herself suddenly shrivelled, aged, breastless, the grinding, blowing, flowering of the day, out of doors, out of the window, out of her body and brain which now failed, since Lady Bruton, whose lunch parties were said to be extraordinarily amusing, had not asked her.<sup>3</sup>

The physical action of the passage has Mrs. Dalloway grasping the bannisters, going up the stairs and pausing by the window. In addition, she has been snubbed by Lady Bruton and has imagined herself leaving a bustling party to stand solitary in the night. She feels apart from society, drifting away, her body and brain failing. Yet even as she talks of this physical deadening, every reference and perception is an enlargement of her sensibility. Mrs. Dalloway feels herself a failure, but the reader can see that it is her nature, with its feelings that roam and privately rebel, that causes her social discomfort. Virginia Woolf has created a character who has been left out of the rule-makers' parties.<sup>4</sup> Though she tries to fulfill her obligations, by listening to her body, Mrs. Dalloway has become a quiet outcast from the rigid expectations of her society.

Bodily information is not only a foundation for a work of fiction, it is very much involved with the process of writing. Many authors have said that a novel begins with a particularly vibrant image. The story I'm currently writing began with a scene of two women talking at a crowded party in Berlin. One is a Jewish American whose father landed in the second wave at Normandy. The other woman is German; her father was a Nazi assigned to the Warsaw Ghetto. The two women like each other. The American says, "My father fought against your father. From the time I was a little girl I was taught to hate you. And now we're at a party, laughing and looking at each other's eyes."

This story is being written because I want to know more about these women. Why is the Jewish woman in Berlin? What does the German woman feel about her

father's deeds? What happens if one falls in love with the other? Even if I thought I knew the answers, they would further evolve in the writing. As with most authors, I have found my ideas changing shape as I move along.

Many writers talk about their writing with a seemingly peculiar passivity. They say that the "story told itself to me"<sup>5</sup> or that they were "following language." And indeed, the process of writing involves a great deal of silence, waiting and faith. My own experience is that I hit my emotional extremes. For several days, my body feels incredibly scattered, as if my insides were flying off on their own. This feeling is interspersed with periods of darkness and gloom. This tension seems to be between what I think I ought to be saying versus what my body already knows. My body rebels at the faintest suggestion of "reasonable" pressure: I simply will not do as I'm told. During this period I may read around the topic, or clean my apartment several times, but basically my stance is one of waiting and of faith. The faith, which must be maintained through terrible bouts of despair, is the belief that my body will find its gravity, the voice that says: "Trust me. I know the things you've forgotten." And when I can finally listen to my body, which of course means listening to myself as a fully-dimensional person, the words begin to flow. And it always seems a miracle.

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953), p. 420.

<sup>2</sup> Susan Griffin, "Thought on Writing: A Diary," in Janet Sternberg (ed.), *The Writer on Her Work* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1980), p. 110.

<sup>3</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* (New York: The Modern Library, 1925), p. 45. Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich, Inc.

<sup>4</sup> Thanks to Eleanor H. Kuykendall for suggesting this idea.

<sup>5</sup> Joan Didion, "Why I Write," in *The Writer on Her Work*, p. 22.



# Hilda's Song

Patsy Rogers

The Poem was Written by Hilda, Aged 10\*

I shall be coming back to you  
From seas, rivers, sunny meadows, glens that hold secrets  
I shall come back with my hands full  
Of light and flowers.

Brooks braided in with sunbeams  
Will hang from my fingers.  
My heart will be awake.  
All my thoughts and joys will go to you.

I shall bring back things I have picked up traveling this  
road or the other.  
Things found by the sea or in the pine-wood.  
There will be a pine-cone in my pocket.  
Grains of pink sand between my fingers.

I shall tell you of a golden pheasant's feather.  
I shall tell you of stars like seaweed  
Moons will glitter in my hair...  
Will you know me?

I shall come back when sunset has turned away and gone.  
And you will untangle the moons and make me drowsy and put me to sleep.

In Loving Memory of Jane Chambers  
1937-1983

slowly but always flowing  
♩ = 66

*p* contemplatively

*legato throughout*

*p*

I shall be com-ing

back to you From seas, ri-vers, sun-ny mea-dows, glens that hold

SEE NOTE at bottom of page 1, another at top of page 2

NOTE The plus sign (+) is used to indicate the addition of ♩ to the total  
thus ♩ is equal to 5 eighths. ♩ is equal to 3 eighths etc

\*The poem by Hilda is from Hughes Mearns' *Creative Power: The Education of Youth in the Creative Arts*. Dover Publications, New York. Used by permission.

se - - crests: **Ritard** **A TEMPO** I shall come back with my hands full of light and

*cresc.*

PEDAL EACH BAR EXCEPT AS OTHERWISE SHOWN

flo - wers. **RIT. (POCO)** Brooks braided in with sun-beams Will hang from my

*mf* *dim.*

**A TEMPO (OR SLIGHTLY FASTER)**

(pedal each bar)

fin - gers **poco rit.** My heart will be a - - wake... **A TEMPO - returning gradually to contemplative**

*p*

NO PEDAL

(p sempre)

All my thoughts and joys will go to you. **Ritard -** **A LITTLE FASTER (♩ = 72)**

*pp*

**SOFT.** *DAZZLE (pedal continued)*



5/8 3/4

Rit... Molto (no) STILL FASTER (♩ = 10+)

pp

SOFT. NO PED. SOFT. NO PED. end soft. NO PED.

Rit. (poco)

JL (PEDAL ZACH BAR)

- (molto)

I shall bring back things I have picked up

A TEMPO

dim

cresc.

tra-vel-ing this road on the o - - ther, Things found by the sea or in the

dim

L etc.



pine - - wood.

*Rit. poco (optional)*

**A TEMPO**

There will be a pine - cone

*mp*

*mp*

*SOFT*

- in my po - cket, Grains of pink sand be - tween my fin - gers.

*cresc.*

*SOFT*

*SOFT*

*SOFT*

*SOFT*

*Rit. poco (optional)*

**A TEMPO**

I shall tell you of a gol - - den pheas - ant's

*mf*

*dim*

*dim*

*SOFT*

*SOFT*

*SOFT*

*SOFT*

(3/4) feather; I shall tell you of stars like sea - weed.

*mp*

*mf*

*mp*

*mp*

*SOFT*

*SOFT*

*SOFT*

*SOFT*



Moons will glit - - ter in my hair.... Will you

Rit. - - **SLIGHTLY SLOWER**  
(or A TEMPO  $\text{♩} = 96 \text{ or } 104$ )

*cresc.*

*f*

know me ?

*dim.*

*A TEMPO* ( $\text{♩} = 96 \text{ or } 104$ )  
or a little slower

*mp*

NO PEDAL

(L)

*Rit.*

(L)

*pp*

I shall come back when sun - - set has turned a -

**A LITTLE FASTER** or a tempo  $\text{♩} = 104$

*pp*

*sim.*



89

- way and gone, Rit. (molto) And you will un- tan- gle the moons and

*pp* *p*

*mp* *pp* *p*

etc.

94

make me drow-sy and put me to sleep. Rit. poco - - - molto A TEMPO (♩ = 104)

*mf* *cresc.* *mf* *4p sub cresc.*

99

Rit. - - Molto! I shall be TEMPO I (♩ = 66)

*mf* *dim.* *pp*

104

com-ing back to you From seas, ri-vers, sun-ny mea-dow, glens that hold

*p* *5/8* *5/8* *5/8* *5/8* *5/8*

*5/8* *8p*

(PEDAL EACH BAR)



se - crets: (poco rit. optional) I shall come back with my hands full of light and

(A TEMPO)

cresc.

flo - wers. Rit. (poco) Brooks braided in with sun - beams Will hang from my

A TEMPO

dim.

fin - gers Rit. - poco My heart will be a - - Wake...

A TEMPO

P

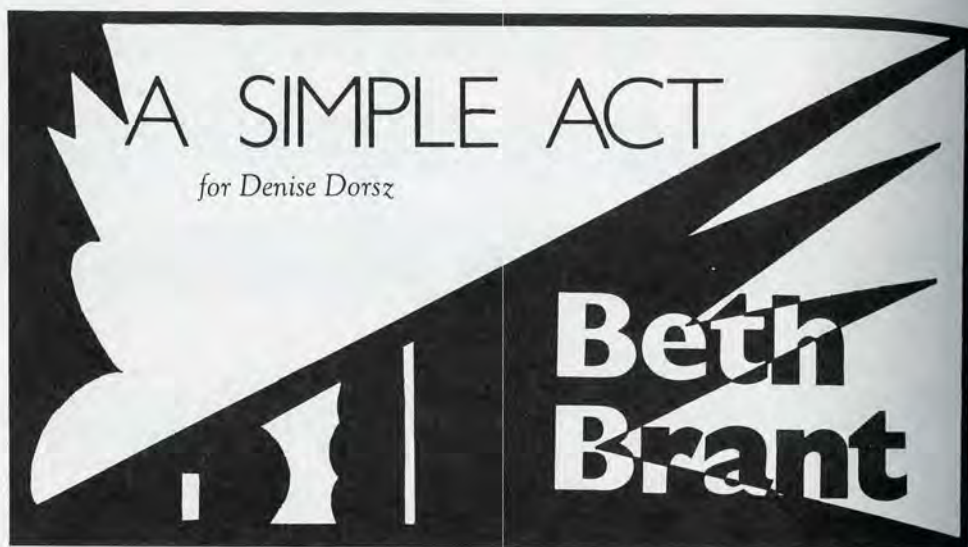
SOFT PED. EACH BAR

All my thoughts and joys will go to you.

Ritard (poco) - - MOLTO -

pp

9 7/65 (2/76)



Gourds climbing the fence. Against the rusted criss-cross wires, the leaves are fresh. The green, ruffled plants twine around the wooden posts that need painting. The fruit of the vine hangs in irregular shapes. Some are smooth. Others bumpy and scarred. All are colors of the earth. Brown. Green. Gold.

A gourd is a hollowed-out shell, used as a utensil. I imagine women together, sitting outside the tipis and lodges, carving and scooping. Creating bowls for food. Spoons for drinking water. A simple act, requiring lifetimes to learn. At times the pods were dried and rattles made to amuse babies. Or noisemakers, to call the spirits in sorrow and celebration.

I am taking a break from my hot room; from the writing, where I dredge for ghosts. The writing that unearths pain, old memories.

I cover myself with paper, the ink making tracks; like animals who follow the scent of water past familiar ground.

I invent new from the old.





## STORY ONE

Sandra... In the third, fourth, and fifth grades, we were best friends. Spending nights at each others' houses, our girl bodies hugging tight. We had much in common. Our families were large and sloppy. We occupied places of honor due to our fair skin and hair. Assimilation separating us from our ancient and inherited place of home. Your Russian gave way to English. Your blonde hair and freckles a counterpoint to the darkness of eye and black hair massed and trembling around your mother's head. My blonde hair, fine and thin, my skin pink and flushed in opposition to the sleek, black hair of my aunts, my uncle, my father. Their eyes dark, hidden by folds of skin. Anachronisms...except to each other. Our friendship fit us well.

We invented stories about ourselves. We were children from another planet. We were girls from an undiscovered country. We were alien beings in families that were "different". Different among the different. We were the hopes of all.

Your big sister, Olga, wore falsies. We stole a pair from her and took turns tucking them inside our undershirts. We pretended to be big girls, kissing on the lips and touching our foam rubber breasts. Imagining what being grown meant. In the sixth and seventh grades, our blood started to flow, our breasts turned into a reality of sweet flesh and waiting nipples. The place between our thighs filled with a wanting so tender, an intensity of heat from which our fingers emerged, shimmering with liquid energy, our bodies spent with the expression of our growing strength. When we began to know what this was, that it was called love...someone told on us. Told on us. Through my bedroom window where we lay on the bed, listening to the radio, stroking blonde hair...Roger, the boy next door, saw us and told on us. Our mothers were properly upset. We heard the words from them... You can't play with each other anymore... You should be ashamed...WHAT WILL PEOPLE THINK?

We fought in our separate ways. You...screaming in Russian as your father hit you with his belt. Cursing him. Vowing revenge. Your mother stood painfully watching, but did not interfere, upholding the morality of the family. My mother shamed me by promising not to tell the rest of the family. I refused to speak to her for weeks, taking refuge in silence, the acceptable solution. I hated her for the complicity we shared.

Sandra...we couldn't help seeing each other. You lived across the street. We'd catch glimpses of the other running to school. Our eyes averted, never focusing. The belt marks, the silences, the shame, restoring us once again, to our rightful places. We were good girls, nice girls, after all. So like an old blouse that had become too thin and frayed, an embarrassment to wear, our friendship was put away, locked up inside our past. Entering the eighth grade in 1954, we were thirteen years old. Something hard, yet invisible, had formed a thick shell over our memory. We went the way of boys, backseats of cars, self-destruction. I heard you were put in the hospital with sugar diabetes. I sent a card...unsigned. Your family eventually moved away. I never saw you again. Sandra...we are forty-one now...I have three daughters...a woman lover...I am a writer.

Sandra...I am remembering our losses.

Sandra...I am remembering...I loved you.



## CHAPTER ONE

We have a basket filled with gourds. It is woven from sweet-grass and the scent stirs up the air and lights on our skin. This still-life sits on a table in front of our bedroom window. In late afternoon, the sun glances around the hanging plants, printing designs on the wall, and on our arms as we lay on our bed. We trust our love to each others' care. The room grows dusky and heavy with words. Our lungs expand to breathe the life gestating in the space connecting your eyes to mine. You put your hand on my face and imprint forever in memory, this passage of love and faith. As I watch you come from your bath, I am infused with love and feeling. As you raise your arms to dry your hair, I reach to touch that curve of flesh coursing with blood...with life. I pull you towards me, my hands soothed by the wetness on your back and between your thighs. You smell of cinnamon and clean water. Desire shapes us. Desire to touch one another with our hands, our eyes, our mouths, our minds. I bend over you, kissing the hollow in your throat...the pulse leaping under my lips. We touch...dancers wearing shells of turtles, feathers of eagles, bones of our people. We touch.



## STORY TWO

The house I grew up in was a small, frame box. It had two stories. My sister, cousins and I shared a room on the second floor. A chestnut tree rubbed its branches against our window. In the summer, we opened the glass panes and coaxed the arms of the tree into the room. Grandpa spoke to the tree every night. We listened to the words, holding our breath and our questions in fear of breaking a magic we knew was happening, but couldn't name. Summer...1954.

In our house, we spoke the language of censure. Sentences stopped in the middle. The joke without a punch line. Chopped-off words before the meanings became clear. The mixture of a supposed-to-be-forgotten Mohawk, strangled with uneasy English.

I was a dreamer. Somewhere in the wishfulness of my mind, places of freedom were being created. Words that my family whispered in their sleep, could be shouted. Words that we were not supposed to say, could be sung out loud; like the hymns Grandma sang on Sundays. The secrets we held to ourselves. We swallowed them. They lay at the bottoms of our stomachs, making us fat with nerves and itching from inside.

The secrets we held to ourselves.

The secret that my mom's father refused to see her after she married a dark man ...an Indian man.

The secret that my uncle drank himself to oblivion most week-ends when he couldn't hitch a ride home to the rez, eight hours away. The secret that Grandma didn't go out much because a storekeeper called her a name and wouldn't wait on her.



The secret that Grandpa carried a heart inside him clogged with the starches, the fats, the poverty of food that as a young boy, as an Indian, he had no choice about eating.

All of us, weighted down by invisible scales. Balancing always, our life among the assimilators, and our life of memory.

And always, always, the faint tinge of shame, no matter how well we tried to accommodate...to fit in.

I had learned the lessons. I was a clever girl, quick to know. I kept my mouth shut. I kept the quiet.

One night in August, a fire in the basement.

Things burned.

Secret things.

Indian things.

Things the neighbors never saw.

False Faces...Beaded necklaces...Moccasins...Old letters written in Mohawk...

Turtle rattles...Corn husks.

Secrets brought from home.

Secrets protecting us in hostile places.

Did you lose anything? The neighbors stood, anxious to not know. The night air was still. It was hot. The moon hung full and white. The stars in a crazy design over us.

I looked for Sandra. Across the street, her face caught like a photograph in the window of her flat. We stared.

Did you lose anything? The question came again.

Just a few old things...and Grandma and Grandpa stepped into the house, led by my mother's and father's hands. My Grandparents tears were acid, tunneling holes in their cheeks.

Don't forget this night, kondirio. Don't forget this night.

Grandfather looked at me...the phrase repeated again and again...

Don't forget this night.

Grandfather's back became a little more stooped. Every day he looked a little more Indian. He lapsed into Mohawk at odd moments. His heart stopped in his sleep...heavy...constricted...silenced.

Grandmother's back became a little thicker. Her shoulders were two eagles trans-fixed on a mountain, checked in flight. Her hands grew large and knobby from arthritis. Still, she made the fry bread, the corn soup, the quilts, the jams, and changed the diapers of her great-grandchildren.

She never spoke of that night. She continued to sing the hymns, her eyes fading, watery with age. She died...her heart quitting in her sleep.

Summer, 1954.

I closed the windows and covered my ears to the knocking of the tree.

## CHAPTER TWO

In my room overlooking the back yard. Through the open window, I smell the cut grass, hear the vines on the fence make a whispery sound. The gourds rattle as a breeze moves along quickly, carrying a promise of autumn and change.

I sit at the desk, pen in my hand, paper scattered underneath; trying to bring forth sound and words.

Unblocking my throat...Untying my tongue...Scraping sand out of my eyes... Pulling each finger out of the fist I have carried at my side...Unclenching my teeth...Burning the brush ahead of me, brambles cutting across my mind.

Each memory a pain in the heart, but *this* heart keeps pumping blood through my body, keeping me alive.

I write because to not write is a breach of faith.

Out of a past where amnesia was the expected...Out of a past occupied with quiet...Out of a past, I make truth for a future.

Cultures betrayed by assimilation.

Cultures gone up in flames.

The smell of burning leather, paper, flesh; filling the spaces where memory fails.

The smell of a chestnut tree, its leaves making magic.

The smell of Sandra's hair, like dark coffee and incense, as we touched in pleasure.

I close my eyes at my desk. Pictures rapidly unreeling on my eyelids. Portraits of beloved people flashing by so quickly.

Opening my eyes, I think of the seemingly ordinary things that women do, and how, with the brush of an eyelash against a cheek, an electric pulse in the brain, the movement of pencil on paper, power is born.

A gourd is hollowed-out shell, used as a utensil.

We make our bowls from the stuff of nature. Of life.

We carve and scoop, discarding the pulp.

Ink on paper, picking up the trail I left so many lives ago.

Leaving my mark, my footprints, my sign.

I write what I know.





# NAGASAKI DAY: LOS ALAMOS

*from Michaele Uccella*

where they built the bombs  
(little boy for hiroshima  
fat man for nagasaki)  
was picked for its beauty  
purple hills  
aching sky

in a glass case in the museum at los alamos  
is a tiny pile of sand from a card that says  
sand from an island that  
no longer exists

they explain.  
before they made  
fat man or little  
boy, before they dropped them on  
islands of little girls, big boys, women  
of all sizes

they tested —  
like men who rape their neighbors before  
heading cross town —  
spitting fire across their  
own deserts, their own  
people blind and cancerous  
they blew up one of their  
own islands and said  
it was good

in the courtyard of the museum at los alamos  
are no statues of melting eyes, no  
nagasaki cancer, no seared hiroshima  
bodies of any size

just models  
of little boy  
and fat man  
painted white

for good  
to take pink hills from not-white  
people of all sizes. good  
to blow up  
islands of not-white people  
of all sizes

here are no accidents  
no mistakes. they like  
to stick their pins in maps  
they like to pay for women  
of certain sizes, or take  
and not pay.  
they like to decide. they  
like to decide

and when people of all sizes, fat  
girls, slight men, women  
with broad shoulders pile  
out of cattle cars  
(some of course already dead)  
to be stripped and searched and shaved  
and tattooed blue numbers for a name  
and murdered  
or used  
depending

here are men  
of certain sizes  
who like to click their heels  
and point  
you to the right  
you to the left  
you turn around let me  
look at you

August 9 1980 — (August 8, 1982)

## MELANIE KAYE

# THE MOON IN CANCER



The moon is orange tonight and sandwiched between charcoal clouds.  
Rachel is cancer  
tropical and lovable  
fluid and mean.  
Unlike me  
earthbound and melancholy  
indulging and always freely singing  
some womansung  
old  
didactic doo-ah:

'understanding is something that makes everything just fine.  
understanding is something that makes everything just fine.  
so I'll never be contented til you say that you are mine.'

The moon is orange and makes crabs scuttle  
scuttle from sand  
sometimes to cobblestone.  
Rachel is cancer  
charismatic and self-contained  
gregarious and predatory.  
Not like me  
who under the night's reflection in her window  
nightly and loudly sang  
some old settlin down song:

'don't drift too far baby  
stick around and stay near  
stick around and stay near  
cause I got everything you need rightcheer.'

The street made Rachel's time.  
And me trying to mime its joyful and desperate rhyme.  
Never once did she celebrate in my ear  
the promise of some old unauthored  
womansung refrain:

'I'm gonna straighten up and fly right  
and quit my raising sand.  
straighten up and fly right  
and quit my raising sand.  
so don't put me down baby  
cause I want you in my plan.'



And me loudly singing to the crescent moon  
of her hidden circumference,  
and boldly changing nouns and pronouns  
for her  
so she could hear the wisdom  
of some old womansung advice:

'girls, if you got a good woman  
better keep her by your side.  
said, if you got a good woman  
better keep her by your side.  
cause if she flag this train  
I'm sure gonna let her ride.'

But Rachel is cancer  
tropical, lovable,  
fluid,  
charismatic, self-contained,  
gregarious, predatory  
and mean.  
Unlike me  
who only ever wanted  
Rachel between me  
like the moon  
orange and sandwiched between  
charcoal clouds.

# Three Poems CHERYL CLARKE

# MIAMI 1980



Andy Young and Jesse Jackson are summoned to be firemen.  
In an election year Carter sends his attorney general.  
The Florida governor pleads only for a night of brotherhood  
and sends in 3500 national guardsmen.

In Vancouver, Washington not even a forest ranger can be found.

(and what to make of Vernon Jordan shot in Fort Wayne, Indiana  
and a mysterious blond who cannot be teased out of seclusion.)

Since Menendez tricked African artisans and agriculturists  
to settle St. Augustine in 1565—later to be counted among  
Florida's 40,000-odd slaves,  
where Maroons and Seminoles protected their vengeance in swamps  
where a displaced bourgeoisie can find asylum 100 years later  
a freak place where a ship can destroy a bridge toppling a  
busload of people to death by water  
where an abomination like Anita Bryant can fester  
and become a hero  
worthy of Disney World  
Florida has been a real Fantasia.

Jacksonville is the scene of a memorably ruthless episode over  
lunch counters in 1960 and '64.

Daytona Beach 1926: blacks are made to carry passes after dark.

(however in that same year a hurricane strikes Miami and blacks are  
forced by armed marines into the work of reclamation. A black woman  
is shot by one of them for protesting.)

Miami 1939: men in ritual costume burn 25 crosses and parade through  
the black section carrying effigies and signs saying: 'the klan will  
ride again in Florida if niggers try to vote.'



In Tampa 1980 an all-white jury acquits 4 Miami pigs  
for beating Arthur MacDuffie to death  
for forgetting that niggers have no rights white men are bound to respect.

Today 16 are dead in Miami  
and skies are not yet darkened by Mount St. Helens  
ending 100 years of silence with molten rock burning to ash  
over Western skies  
balancing the account.

Miami will stink with unfounded corpses  
and so will Vancouver, Washington  
so totally surprised a volcano  
can find her voice in the new world.

White sidewalks and buildings sprayed with blood  
white people claiming innocence of their fathers' transgressions  
white women in pincurlers bearing babies and rifles on their backs  
Arthur MacDuffie's mother begging Liberty City blacks to be  
more long-suffering: 'Turn to God. Turn to God.'

Liberty City.  
Liberty City.

News reports label Miami's violence 'grisly'.  
But vengeance is grisly.  
America will die by fire yet.

Observers repeat the fallacy about history.

Others feel we need a good ole fashion race riot  
to shake our complacency.

I hope not another Detroit.  
They never finished finding bodies in Newark.

And no matter how hard they try to make her a tourist attraction  
Mount St. Helens may yet grumble another 100 years.

CHERYL CLARKE

# The Johnny Cake



*(for Charley)*

Death frees people for new experiences  
at the funeral of my friend's mother  
I was to learn this.  
As no one in my family I cared about  
had died then  
I knew nothing of grief.

It was hurricane season.  
The mother's death had been sudden.  
My friend and I drove 95 South like thieves.  
Relentless as hunters.  
Through torrents.  
Through vaults of foliage  
Every now and then a palmetto.  
The car and inexperience between us.  
Miles and miles of curves and turns  
to his ancestral home  
where would be the body.

We arrived at the bungalow.  
The evening tropical.  
The gnats persistent.  
Her scent enveloping as the ocean  
a woman, the aunt, welcomed us  
with her body.  
Eyes hazel like his in that  
cocoa skin of theirs.  
He cried onto her breast all night.  
In rhythmic sorrow she rocked him.  
I watched from my pallet on the floor.  
Their noises kept me vigilant.

I rose early purposefully.  
Already she was moving through the rooms.  
Eyes topaz signals.  
Nipples protuberant against the sheer  
and floral duster.  
The covers fell from me.  
Following her, I passed looking askance  
at the black, naked beauty of my  
sleeping friend  
and the lace-shrouded corpse  
of the mother.

In the kitchen  
the aunt fed me peaches  
and showed me city pictures of her  
in bow ties and suspenders  
leaning over the mother seated  
wearing eye glasses and dark suits  
smoking cigarettes.  
Behind them tables and tables  
full of women and women.  
Intense people.  
Unceremoniously the aunt left  
to comfort my friend again.

By noon the kitchen was stacked with food.  
The rooms filled with the talk of bold  
independent women comforting the aunt  
and commending her on the body.  
They were distant with my friend.  
From their plates,  
they offered me forkfuls and spoonfuls  
of the rich fare they'd brought.  
They were solicitous of me.

My friend stood at the mother's corpse for hours  
that day.  
Tears standing in his eyes, amber-flecked.  
Every time the tears ran  
the aunt pressed his body to hers.  
Secretly, I distracted myself with photographs  
in boxes under beds,  
with a jigsaw puzzle the mother had started  
and the talk of the bold  
independent women.  
Early in the evening  
the aunt brought me cloying peach cobbler  
and watched me eat it and lick the plate.  
She licked the plate after me.



Death frees people for new experiences.  
So I was to learn at the funeral of my  
friend's mother.  
As no one I cared about had died yet  
I knew nothing of grief.

By dusk of the next day  
I had lit ninety candles  
under the aunt's tutelage  
in the room where lay the body.  
A sweet smell lingering at the edges  
of the box.  
In the yard the bold  
independent women gathered  
suited in pastel and warm colors.  
Their grief a vivid spectacle.  
Exquisite.  
A quartet of them jazzed songs of Jordan.

My friend enters the yard  
leaning heavily on the aunt  
a mauve veil covering her face.  
I walk behind them  
cleaving wild roses  
azaleas  
and purple geraniums.  
Through the surprising gauze  
the aunt stares at me  
her scent enveloping again  
and suffusing even the smell of flowers  
and strokes inside the thigh  
of my weeping friend.

The body lowered.  
The geraniums planted.  
The exequies complete.  
My friend regains his sense of place.  
Grows conscious of the aunt.  
The family makes room for him.  
He welcomes the bold  
independent women back into the house.  
Instead of cornbread  
he asks the aunt to make johnny cake.  
She laughs and grabs me like a playmate.  
Pulls me into the kitchen.  
We hold each other there  
for long moments.  
Tongues in throats.

In the other room  
my friend and the bold  
independent women talk  
of cars  
the weather  
and the road I would travel back.

In the kitchen  
the aunt slides her hand between my thighs.  
The same hand she mixes her dough with.  
I pull my tunic above my breasts for her.

I hear them in the other room  
talk of the mother  
the aunt  
their lives in the bungalow.

I welcome her hand inside my drawers.  
And come for the first time  
for the rest of the day.  
With the same hand she kneads the dough short  
and asks nothing back.

I give her my tongue in places she does not remember.  
And touch her there.

In the other room  
voices recede to a far corner.

Butter oozes from the hot and ready bread.

Death frees people for new experiences.  
I learned this at my friend's mother's  
funeral.  
As no one I cared for had died then  
I knew nothing of grief.

I left soon and by myself.  
For the trip back,  
the aunt and my friend filled the car  
with wild flowers  
stolen melons  
fallen cake.  
The sky was stark.  
There were gauntlets of foliage.  
Every now and then a palmetto.

CHERYL CLARKE



# Iris Zavala

## Kiliagonía

### I

Aquel pueblo enseñó que los espejos son inmortales y que cuando un azogue muere, busca otro cristal. Los espejos no perecen. En las aguas todo es mudable. No puede volverse atrás la fuente. No se detienen ni un punto el rápido transcurso de las horas. Un oleaje empuja otra imagen. Nunca es presente y siempre es lo mismo. Todo se transforma. El verano no tiene los mismos colores que el invierno. Lo primero que se ofrece a la vista es que todo se consume en el fuego, que todo lo cambia. La naturaleza segó mi fuente e hizo brotar otras. Aquélla es ahora un montón de ruinas en aquel emporio de riquezas y cuna de admirables varones que fue Ponce. Ese pueblo impulsó un tiempo el valor del mundo. Ya parece que su gloria declina. No desaparecerá su recuerdo. Sus descendientes gobernarán una ciudad sin igual en la tierra. Mis predicciones se empiezan a cumplir. Dejemos de matar los espejos. Que apacienten tranquilamente en las aguas.

*De agua nos engendraron a todos y de aire.  
Y aire y agua son todas las cosas que nacen  
y se engendran.*

*Lo primero  
entre todos los dioses el primero  
el amor se formó.*

Vive el pueblo de la muerte de las hermanas y vive el aire del agua. Vive el agua de la muerte del aire, y de la muerte del agua viven los hombres.

Yo volvía los ojos a la sombra de la casa. Iba con mucha humildad, dentro de las puertas de la casa, revolviendo los muchos y diversos peligros en mi memoria. Yo estaba allí, pero no me pregunten dónde o cómo. Estuve yo también cuando el milagro de la casa. Viéndola siempre cerrada, me tomó gana de saber quién vivía dentro. Se elevaba de la acera y volaba al infinito azul tan cercano e intangible. Luz ensombrecida allí por las persianas. Habitaciones de misterio daban al patio interior con pozo y filtro de agua. Luz y oscuridad. Juegos de luz y sombra. Con el pecho doblado y lleno de cautelas, penetré por sus sagrados recintos, por sus pasillos y sus galerías. Andaba muy triste con la luz filtrada por las celosías que tornaban las cosas a su principio. Cuántos años sin hablar. Silencio siempre. Tan grande historia no puede caber en tan pequeño discurso.



And to render this quite clear, I remark in the first place the difference that exists between the imagination and pure intellection or conception. For example, when I imagine a triangle, I do not conceive it only as a figure comprehended by three lines, but I also apprehend these three lines as present by the power and inward vision of my mind, and this is what I call imagining. But if I desire to think of a chiliagon, I certainly conceive truly that it is a figure composed of a thousand sides, just as easily as I conceive of a triangle that it is a figure of three sides only; but I cannot in any way imagine the thousand sides of a chiliagon as I do the three sides of a triangle, nor do I, so to speak, regard them as present with the eyes of my mind.

DESCARTES, *Philosophical Meditations*, VI

*Descartes Selections*, edited by Ralph M. Eaton, Charles Scribner's Sons: New York, 1955.

# Chiliagony

## I

That town believed that mirrors live forever—that when the quicksilver dies it seeks another glass. Mirrors never die. In the waters everything is mutable. The fountain can never return to itself. The swift passing of the hours does not stop for an instant. A surge of waves pushes another image forward. It is never present and it is always the same. Everything is transformed. Summer does not have the same colors as winter. What you first see is that everything is consumed in the fire, that everything is changed. Nature reaped my fountain and made others grow. That fountain is now a mountain of ruins in that emporium of riches and cradle of admirable men which was Ponce. There was a time when that town influenced the world. Now it looks as though its glory is declining. Its memory will not disappear. Its descendants will rule a city without parallel on earth. My predictions are beginning to come true. Let us stop killing the mirrors. Let them feed peaceably in the waters.

*We were all created of water and air.  
And all things that are born and created  
are air and water.*

*The first  
among all gods the first  
love was formed.*

The town lives from the death of the sisters and the air lives from water. Water lives from the death of air, and men from the death of water.

I turned my eyes to the house's shadows. I walked very humbly, inside the house's doors, revolving the many and various dangers in my memory. I was there, don't ask me where or how. I was also there for the house's miracle. Seeing it always locked, I wanted to know who lived inside. It rose from the sidewalk and soared to the infinite blue, so close and intangible. A clouded light there because of the blinds. Rooms of mystery opened to the inside patio where there was a water filter and well. Light and darkness. Interplay of light and shadow. My heart in knots and full of caution, I passed through its holy sanctums, through its galleries and corridors. I walked with deep sorrow by the light filtered through the shutters which restored things to their beginnings. So many years saying nothing. Silence always. So great a story cannot be contained in a discourse so small.

## II

Hay gentes tan fuera del orden natural, que por sola libertad se desvían de la misma verdad que interiormente saben y conocen. Me contaron que era pequeña, paso fino de anciana. —Abuelita ¿qué son las estrellas? Los ojos de Dios que observan. Rey de sotas riendo. Días eternos y sencillos para perdición de mil recatadas y buenas intenciones. —Ave María Purísima, Satanás acecha. Belcebú ronda, Luzbel vigila, ¡Vade retro!

Quien ha visto estos desvelos soñolientos sabe que llaves, tornos y paredes quedan a la voluntad libre de los fantasmas. En las noches sin luna aireaban la enciclopedia de pecados —Carmela, Suncha, Panchita, Fidela—. Con la brisca y el tabaco remachaban bien los clavos: —¿Fuiste a la novena? Tirábanse unas a otras, se disparaban deslizándose marañas de palabras: Ave María Purísima, sin pecado... sin pecado... No me espanto de su natural inclinación. Lo que me admira es que haya tenido capacidad para guardar el secreto tanto tiempo.

Vivieron con tanto recato, en tanto extremo, que entornaron la mentira. Yo, sabiendo la causa de su melancolía tan bien como de mi pena, quería irme de la casa, por parecerme que había hablado mucho, aunque amanecía el día.

## III

De niña yo le hurtaba el sonido a la casa y sin hilos atravesaba las habitaciones. Primera habitación. Interminable cama de poste y mosquitero blanco. Sábana de hilo blanquísimo donde tan blanca y muerta yacía un homero hermético: la tía mayor. Edipo sin hijos con dos enormes ojos azules y vacíos. A su lado un soplo de vida perdía sus arenas breves y estrechas en el último polo. Fue mi astrolabio y mi compás. De ella aprendía a medir el tiempo en aquella casa enorme y sin cronologías. En remolino opuesto sólo otro oía el acorde fragmentario de los faunos y buscaba sus pisadas y señales. Lola cantaba en los cristales de la fuente. Lupe, largo grano de tiempo, mostraba el camino de la luz con rueda oportuna. Carmela se estremecía volando libre al ritmo de su música. Voz de ayer: polka, mazurca, Campoamor. Fueron tres parcas o tres musas de la infancia. En todo caso tres sueños. Esa Lola no se fue a los puertos. —¿Te vas? ¡No puedo! Lupe rondó los arrabales de la vida en los umbrales del siglo y yacía ahora aplastada por su propia insurrección. La suya fue contra mí, invasora de sus mundos, quise absorber sus tierras. El sillón —mece que mece, mece que mece— aparentaba sus lebreles. Penetré el sagrado recinto y poseí al ilustre forjador de ensueños. Aquel viejo sillón enorme —mece-endormece—. Llegó la ira y la rebeldía, y lo defendió: ¡Coño, no me quites lo único que me queda! No se lo quitó, ella me lo dio y me adentré en su sueño.



## II

There are people so much outside of the natural order that by freedom alone are misled from the very truth, which inwardly they know and understand. I was told she was small, an old lady's fragile step. —Grandma, what are stars? God's eyes watching. Laughing king of knaves. Simple and eternal days of damnation from a thousand modest and good intentions. —Hail Mary full of Grace, Satan in ambush, Beelzebub lurks, Lucifer vigilant. Begone!

Whoever has seen that tired sleeplessness knows that keys, wheels and walls remain at the phantoms' free will. On moonless nights they aired the encyclopedia of sins — Carmela, Suncha, Panchita, Fidela —. They dug in their nails with tobacco and card games: —Did you go to the novena? They threw themselves against each other, they were released rattling off brambles of words: Hail Mary full of Grace, without sin... without sin... I am not surprised at their natural inclination. What I admire her for is having the capacity to keep the secret for so long.

They lived with so much circumspection, to such extremes, that they kept the lie half open. I, knowing the source of their melancholy as well as that of my own grief, wanted to leave the house because I thought I had talked a lot, although day was breaking.

## III

As a child I used to steal sound from the house and pass through the rooms without threads. First room. Endless bed of white post and mosquito netting. Sheet of whitest thread where a hermetic homer lay so white and dead: the eldest aunt. Childless oedipus with two enormous blue and empty eyes. At her side a breath of life was losing its brief and narrow sands in the final channel. She was my astro-labe and compass. I learned from her to measure time in that enormous house without chronologies. In an opposed whirlpool only another heard the fauns' fragmentary accord and sought their footsteps and signs. Lola sang in the crystals of the fountain. Lupe, large grain of time, showed the way of light with a timely wheel. Carmela shuddered flying free to her music's rhythm. Voice of yesterday: polka, mazurka, Campoamor. They were three fates or three muses of childhood. In any case, three dreams. That Lola did not go to the ports. —Are you going? I can't! Lupe circled the outskirts of life in the thresholds of the century and now lay flattened by her own insurrection. Hers was against me, invader of her worlds, I wanted to absorb her lands. The rocking chair — up down, up down — acted as her greyhounds. I got into the sacred precinct and possessed the illustrious forger of daydreams. That old enormous rocking chair — up down-to-sleep. Came the anger and the obstinance, and she defended it: Cunt, don't take the only thing I have left! I did not take it, she gave it to me and I went into her dream.



Ni quería ni podía apartarme de las hermanas, que todas eran de una misma edad y casi de una igual hermosura. El tiempo se salía de los términos para no dar espacio a su espacio. Tocaban ahora en las márgenes de la vejez, todas temerosas, todas tristes y todas hermosas. Entre todas había una que toda ella era rota y toda era penitente.

La vida te dejó bien marcada, repartida en los rincones de la casa y en sus múltiples copias. Gustosa entraste en el cuadrado de tu cuarto, límite de un sueño en tránsito y fuga. En la apacible vejez recorriste los países que abril dejó abandonados. Los retazos de tu memoria fueron el fresco de mi infancia. A las futuras edades no les quedó trazo en la memoria. Fuiste un rasguño en el tiempo y te saco del desván de mi conciencia.

Rompí en sueño y la visión desapareció. Corría el tiempo como suele. Entonces comprendí que dormía porque todos mis bienes son soñados.

Con el calor, el pueblo permanecía sin alteraciones. El día desmentía su nombre. Imaginaciones inverosímiles rondaban cada puerta, cada ventana en sombra. Presa magnífica de tardes sin prisa; se entretenían en recoger las horas. Procesión de sayas enlutadas que incensaban la iglesia. Campanas de duelo y rezo.

Las casas eran grandes, las calles desiertas. Perpetua cárcel el pueblo, principal protagonista de enigmas. Allí vuela el sueño al aire y con la fuerza de sus encantamientos encerró en su casa a todos los vecinos que en dos siglos no pudieron romper las cerraduras ni abrir las puertas ni horadar las paredes. Hasta que amansado, absolvió y desligó toda la ciudad. Hoy lo digo, aquel día quedé desamparada y llorando perpetuamente mi soledad.

Vuela al punto el pueblo por la gran ciudad de Ponce. Con sus enormes alas cubre el horizonte. La sombra de su vuelo eriza los cabellos. Es veloz y corriendo se fortalece. Su sombra se remonta por los aires y esconde su cabeza en la fuente. Es rápido de pies y de infatigables alas. Aguza las orejas y escucha. De noche vuela en la sombra y se confunde con ellas y nunca cierra los ojos al sueño. De día se instala en la plaza y en las casas y es mensajero de la envidia, los celos, la maledicencia. Por la noche anima sus penas en los tormentos del amor y aterra a la ciudad. Se complace en difundir palabras y llena de espanto a las hermanas.

El pueblo anda voldando  
las hermanas temblando  
No tiene esta o aquella forma  
no puede detenerse en criatura alguna.

Escondida en sus mil bocas viene la muerte. Si la encontrara le cortaría el cabello con la diestra. Disiparía así el calor y desvanecería el miedo de los aires. Digo que en los confines de la fuente se dibuja un monstruo alado.

Y puesto que el tiempo parece tardío y perezoso a los que en él esperan, corre a las parejas con el mismo pensamiento, y llega al término que quiere, porque nunca para ni sosiega.



I could not and did not want to leave the sisters—they were all about the same age and equally beautiful. Time stood out of its boundaries so as not to give space to its space. They belonged now in the margins of aging, all timid, all sad and all beautiful. Among them all there was one: she was all broken and all penitent.

Life left you deeply marked, distributed in the corners of the house and its multiple copies. Content, you entered the square of your chamber, limit of a dream in transit and flight. In mild old age you rehearsed the spaces that April left abandoned. The remains of your memory were the freshness of my childhood. An outline in memory was not left to future ages. You were a scratch on time and I pull you from the attic of my consciousness.

I broke out of my dream and the vision disappeared. Time was flying as it does. Then I understood that I was sleeping because all of my goods are only in dreams.

With the heat the town continued without changes. Day belied its name. Unlikely imaginations haunted each door, every window in darkness. Magnificent capture of afternoons without urgency; they amused themselves taking back the hours. Procession of mourning skirts which spread incense throughout the church. Bells of pain and prayer.

The houses were big, the streets deserted. Perpetual prison the town, main protagonist of enigmas. Dream flies there in the air and on the strength of its enchantments locked up all the neighbors in its house who in two centuries could not break the locks or open the doors or penetrate the walls. Until, subdued, it absolved and extricated the entire city. I say it today, that day I was left helpless and perpetually crying my loneliness.

The town flies through the great city of Ponce in an instant. It covers the horizon with its enormous wings. The shadow of its flight makes the hair bristle on their heads. It is swift and is strengthened speeding. Its shadow soars through the airs and hides its head in the fountain. It is fleet of foot and has indefatigable wings. It whets its ears and listens. At night it flies in the darkness and is confused with them and never closes its eyes to sleep. During the day it establishes itself in the square and in the houses and is messenger of envy, suspicions, slander. By night it animates their grief in love's torments and appalls the city. It amuses itself diffusing words and fills the sisters with horror.

The town goes flying  
the sisters trembling  
It does not have this form or that  
it cannot stop in any creature.

Hidden in its thousand mouths comes death. If I were to find it I would cut its hair with my right hand. The heat would dissipate and fear of the airs would evanesce. I say that in the confines of the fountain a winged monster throws its shadow.

And since time seems dilatory and lazy to those who hope in it, it runs along with the selfsame thought and arrives at its desired end, because it never stops or rests.



"Mentira todo bajo aquel sol contagioso. Engañan los árboles, las aves, los animales y hasta los peces. El tiempo está en las estrellas. Ave María". Turbada despertó de un vuelco. Tantos y tan exorbitantes males la perseguían que se engañaba con la sola apariencia. Andaba su libertad, en miserable esclavitud. La lisonja de su melancolía era aquel balcón, que la alejaba de lamentaciones demasiado personales. Yo no tenía noticia de las cosas, pero ella derrochaba y ostentaba su ingenio ante mí, mientras yo iba con mucha humildad por el agua delgada de la fuente.

Verdadera y solemne, Panchita peroraba sobre oficios y estados. Antón Gacitellero, en las mañanas. Describía abusos, vicios, engaños; la humanidad condenada en su despena de habladorías. —Hoy no se ha muerto nadie. La novena de la López estuvo vacía anoche. Libro de todas las cosas, espada en su lengua. La hembra ni por sueños ya, sola la espada que asesinaba honras, sin pecado...sin pecado...

En la noche: orden. No había otra compañía que la baraja cófrade. El día cansado de su forma, moría bajo el sol. Su pasión era ya un ánimo vagabundo, desocupado de toda virtud. El pueblerino gris o negro todas las mañanas. Repulgadas tocas obsesionadas por el cabello recogido. Vieja superlativa aquella, sin presunción de mocedad. Cadaver viviente de otros tiempos, en conjunción de vejez. Enflautadora de sueños, amanecida de voces: Ilustre alteradora de bélicas paces.

¡Qué prodigiosa forma palpitante!

Ahora hace falta recoger los trozos de prudencia. Yo daré buena cuenta de ti, seré tu justicia, conmigo subirás a descansar en el ancho balcón. Descuidado, tu sueño en vejeció y murió incrédulo. Tu envés y revés quedaron segados en los balaustres, como enigmas transparentes. Tú nada sabes de ello. Como el viento a lo largo de la noche toca en vano a los vidrios, hasta hoy tu tristeza errabunda permaneció en su sombra.

Como error ciego de la imaginación llegó aquella tarde el Kiliágono desconcertando noticias. Fragmentos de la casualidad en el pueblo, confusos avisos, especies vagabundas de la nada, mal formadas quimeras del despierto. Se debatía en argumentos de la noche, enloqueciendo los senderos del día. Amontonaba turba de imágenes que hurtaban discursos y vigilia al sueño. Supe entonces que el Kiliágono es un movimiento sin pasos, un polígono infinito, una nave sin timón. Pero así como es desde siempre y para siempre, afluencia de figuras, quemé mis mástiles, cobrando el derecho de mis fantasías.

El agua es indefinida e indeterminada. El horizonte no es el límite del mundo. La luz cenicienta proviene de los reflejos del agua reflejados desde Ponce. Sobre la figura de las partículas de agua, sobre las hermanas,

el Kiliágono reina.



"All lies under that contagious sun. The trees, the birds, the animals and even the fish delude. Time is in the stars. Hail Mary." Disturbed, she woke from an upset. She was pursued by so many and such extravagant evils that she was deceived by mere appearance. She walked her freedom, in miserable slavery. The flatterer of her melancholy was that balcony, which distanced her from overly personal lamentations. I did not know anything about these things, but she squandered and flaunted her cleverness before me, while I would go very humbly through the thin water of the fountain.

Sincere and solemn, in the mornings Panchita expounded on office and class, gossipmonger. She described abuses, vices, deceptions; humanity condemned in her stock of talk. — Nobody died today. Nobody went to Mrs. Lopez's novena last night. Book of all things, sword in her tongue. No longer female even in dreams, alone the sword that murdered reputations, without sin...without sin...

At night: order. There was no other company but the fellow deck of cards. Day, tired of its own form, was dying under the sun. Its passion was already a wandering animus, empty of all virtue. The townspeople gray or black each morning. Affected toques obsessed with the gathered hair. Superlative old woman that one, without presumption of youthfulness. Procureess of dreams, daybreaker of voices: Illustrious disrupter of belligerent peace.

What a prodigious palpitating form!

Now it is necessary to gather up the bits of prudence. I will answer for you, I will be your justice, with me you will go up to rest on the wide balcony. Careless, your dream grew old and died unbelieving. Your heads and tails were left reaped on the banisters like transparent enigmas. You know nothing about that. As the wind taps on the glass in vain in the dead of night, your wandering sadness persisted in its darkness until today.

Like a blind error of the imagination, the Chiliagon arrived that afternoon confounding time. Fragments of coincidence in the town, confusing advice, vagabond species of nothingness, misshapen chimeras of vigilance. It debated in nightly arguments, driving the day's byways crazy. It accumulated a crowd of images, which stole away discourses and kept watch over the dream. Then I knew that the Chiliagon is a movement without steps, an infinite polygon, a vessel without a rudder. But as it is forever and ever more, affluence of figures, I burned my masts, recovering the right to my fantasies.

The water is undefined and undetermined. The horizon is not the limit of the world. The ashen light proceeds from the reflections of the water reflected from Ponce. Over the figure of molecules of water, over the sisters,

the Chiliagon reigns.

*Trans: Susan Pensak*

# REBECCA

My grandmother came from the old country  
her father was a Rabbi so she went to school  
learned to read  
and married the man of her choice

In the countryside of Russia she ran barefoot in the grass  
that's all she told me about it  
"that's in the past," she said, "look to the future"

The generation of my grandparents  
traveled the length of Europe  
then the Atlantic ocean  
and now those that remain live in long narrow hallways  
and small dark airless rooms  
sitting  
they watch their bodies die around them  
and wait

In the old days  
when a person's hands grew stiff and feet swelled up  
and they couldn't remember their daughter-in-law's name  
they died  
but today a person should live as long as possible  
"I have lived long enough," she said  
"Oh No!" They said, "Don't say things like that!"

When my grandmother died we went to see her  
before anyone could move her  
her legs were stretched out and bent at the knee  
her head and neck were twisted to one side and upwards  
the folds of her skin followed her neck to the bottom of her chin  
where the bone made a clear line of the bottom of her face  
her mouth was gaping open



At the funeral the Rabbi while saying a prayer  
intoned  
the long and lilting Yiddish name that was my grandmother's  
I had never heard it before  
when my grandmother first came to America  
the immigration official asked her her name  
and when she told him  
he wrote down Rebecca

In the last place my grandmother lived  
her body lay in a bed with white sheets  
and blue soft blankets  
my mother placed her hand on my grandmother's face  
and noted though she had only been dead for an hour  
that already she was cold

As I left the room  
I saw in the hallway outside a painting  
a small group of dried flowers  
brown and red  
they stood gracefully leaning against the thin clear vase  
that held them  
stretching out past the vase to form a web  
through which I could see  
the black and white photograph of a young girl's face.

# Fran Baskin

## common weeds : the paradigm

their cycles

Oh to hell with that  
weeds r us  
my hands raw tryin to uproot queen anne/s lace

everything not cultivated,  
not selected, coming uncoveted, spreading  
spores in filth—

swell yellow flowers  
hair with runners, wire stems  
on the highway verge in  
the cracked pavement of the playground  
The crowd name! weeds  
uninspected

one kills  
one drives cows mad  
some spoil milk

drain ulcers  
trank bad nerves

making themselves, *ready or not*



### bane berry

bone set  
rod, golden  
rue and seal  
woundwort, snake root  
thistle  
wild carrot and geranium

Set the mower blades!  
Let's barber these witch remains  
Damn

Your belly can be taken  
by a wrong move

Your bone  
set  
Your snakey heart

Returned

Resealed

a wave of the common weeds  
a striped wall

wild carrots and geranium  
bull thistle, needles of the sky

they regroup after cutting  
their common names a secret code

re

appear



# MARTHA KING

## Chicory Blue

a  
field blue flower  
blue of  
mathematical cleanliness  
pales as day climbs  
endlessly yonder  
chicory empty  
chicory sky

chicory eye view  
the blue hole  
color of  
the other world

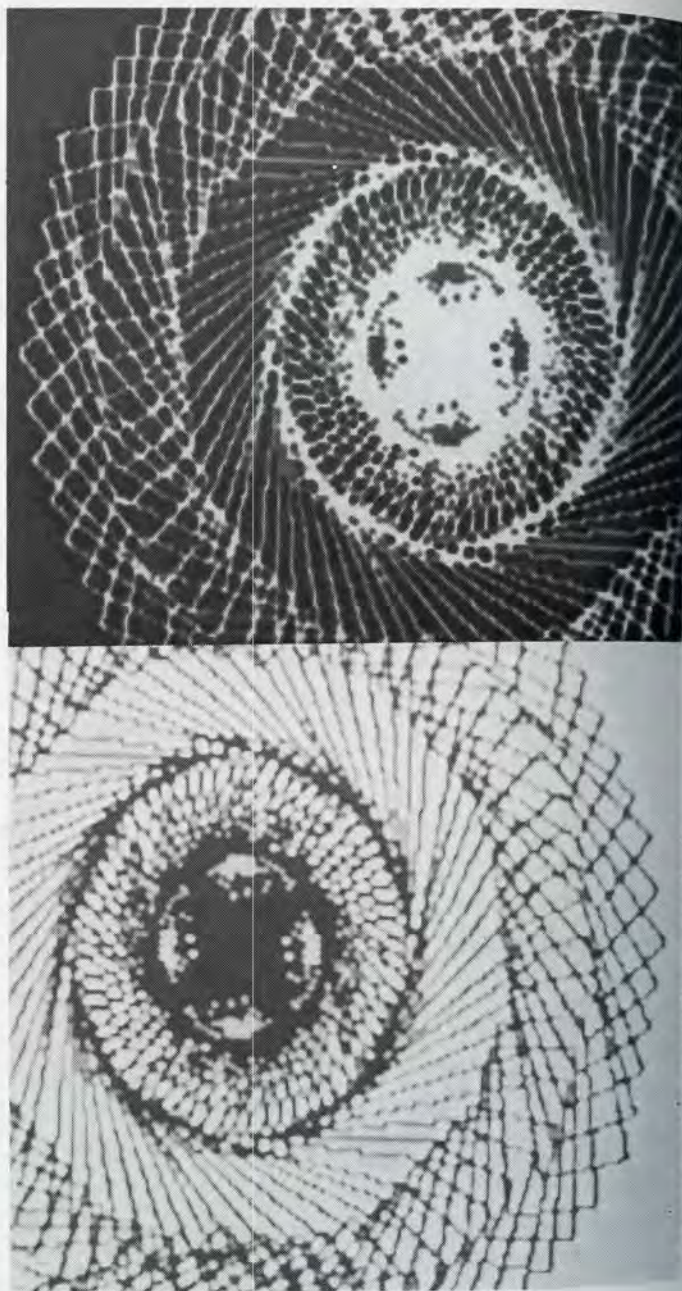
## wild grass

the sheaf  
of wild grass, fox grass  
lawny as  
the sheaf of wild grass, the sheaf alone: stalk of dry matter  
the stalk alone, a single tube  
there are  
millions of others color  
the hill

not natural; the hill would lose  
the hill lost flesh, lost trees, crops, steps  
I have not lost what ran in my head thinking of grass  
the one sheaf, what is unique, utterly useless, and unremarkable

a sheaf of fox grass  
dry yet soft enough to bend  
a single one  
that is no other





**women  
and the  
computer:  
a special section**



# Lynette Hirschman

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## ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE: what does it mean?

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What is *artificial intelligence*? What can it be used for? What *will* it be used for? How will it affect us? It is particularly critical for women to develop an understanding of *all* aspects of computer technology, since this technology at present is male-defined, male-controlled, and *funded primarily by the military*. If we, as women, wish to have any impact on the use of this new technology, we must begin educating ourselves in "high technology" areas, so that we can ask ourselves both: "What are the dangers of this technology?" and "How can we use this technology to further *our* political ends?"

### What is Artificial Intelligence?

We can define *Artificial Intelligence* or *Machine Intelligence* as machine performance of those "intelligent" functions normally associated with human beings. This includes communication *via* language (both spoken and written); vision, or the ability to recognize objects by sight; manipulation of oneself and other objects in space (i.e., the ability to walk without running into things, to pick up objects); the ability to solve complex problems requiring reasoning and judgment; and, most important, the ability to *learn* — that is, to increase one's ability to perform all these tasks, on the basis of previous experience.

In general, machines cannot do any of these things very well at the moment; in particular, they cannot learn in any significant sense. Current technology permits machines to exhibit limited "intelligent" behavior provided 1) the problem domain is *very* limited; and 2) provided that the task that the machine is expected to perform is very repetitive. For example, a vision program might be able to examine a kind of simple printed circuit board to make sure all the circuits had been correctly printed — provided that the circuit boards were all presented to the machine facing in the same direction; but the program would not be smart enough to recognize the same circuit board if it were placed upside down.

Similarly, industrial robots are now in use to perform certain highly repetitive tasks that involve doing certain limited actions to a small set of parts that are always presented to the robot in the same way. However, a robot could not be told "go to the other side of the room," given an unfamiliar room full of furniture.



It would not be able to distinguish the obstacles presented by the furniture from the obstacle presented by the wall (except perhaps by some very crude measure of size: the wall is a bigger obstacle than most furniture).

### Communication via Written and Spoken Language

Communication *via* natural language presents an interesting study in what today's computers can and cannot do. The term *natural language* here is used to refer to human languages (e.g., English, Chinese, Swahili) as opposed to *artificial* or *formal* languages, such as mathematical notation, or the various computer languages (BASIC, COBOL, FORTRAN, etc.). Normally, in order to communicate with a computer, a human must use a *computer language*. This creates a barrier to communication with computers, since most people don't speak COBOL or BASIC. Instead of expecting people to behave more like computers—speaking one of the computer languages—the approach of artificial intelligence research has been to try to make computers more like people (more “intelligent”). One aspect of this intelligence is to give machines the capability to communicate in human languages.

How does the computer go about “understanding” written language? It has 1) a grammar of the language, 2) a large computer lexicon, or dictionary, and 3) a program called a *parser*. The parser does all the work: the grammar and the lexicon are data and provide the parser with the necessary information about the particular language. It looks the words in each sentence up in the lexicon to determine what part of speech they are (e.g., noun or verb or adjective). It uses this information and the information in the grammar about what combinations of parts of speech can occur in the language in order to construct a syntactic analysis of a sentence. The lexicon also contains information about what each word means, in terms of some fairly limited set of semantic classes (the lexicon does not contain normal dictionary definitions, since the parser would not be able to read the natural language definitions). For example, the word *mother* might have an entry in the lexicon identifying it as a noun, with classes *human*, *female*, and *parent*, as well as an entry for it as a verb. We need both the grammatical analysis as well as the semantic information in order to understand a sentence. For example, the sentence *The mother of her friend is here* contains different information from the sentence *The friend of her mother is here*, even though both contain the same words. In the first sentence, *mother* is the subject, modified by *of her friend*, whereas in the second sentence, *friend* is the subject. In order to “understand” a sentence, the computer must associate both the correct grammatical function and the correct “meaning” (or set of semantic classes) with each word in the sentence. It can then convert the sentence into an internal form which it manipulates in its usual ways.

Understanding written language is difficult, and current programs do not do it very well. In general, the few successful applications have been in using language for very limited purposes—for example, for asking questions of a database. If the database contains a very restricted type of information (e.g. telephone numbers and addresses of people), then the kinds of questions one would want to ask are very limited, and the language understanding program doesn't do too badly. As soon as there are several databases containing complex information, the system tends not to work very well.



There are several reasons that language is difficult to understand. One is that there are generally many ways to say the same thing. The phrases *my friend's mother* and *the mother of my friend* mean the same thing, although they will look different to the computer. Another problem is ambiguity: a word or a sentence sometimes can have two distinct meanings, especially when taken out of context. An example would be: *Running machines can be dangerous*. This can have the meaning that a machine can be dangerous when it is running as opposed to walking! Or it can mean that it is dangerous to run a machine. Finally, people often use a shorthand to communicate, leaving out "obvious" information. In the right context, *Coffee, please* means *Please give me some coffee*. Also pronouns (*she, you, it*) are a form of shorthand to avoid repeating long phrases all the time. Thus a program must know about the context in which language occurs in order to "understand" it even partially.

Understanding spoken language is even more difficult because it requires everything that written language requires plus an additional first step. This step is to take a sound wave (the spoken sentence) and break it up into individual words. This turns out to be very hard to do, unless it is coupled with the "understanding," creating a kind of circular process. (If this seems strange, think about trying to pick out words when someone is talking in a foreign language — they all seem to run together!) There are no programs which can "understand" speech to any significant extent. What can be done now is to "train" a program to understand a limited number of distinct words; these words must be spoken one at a time with substantial pauses between them. Generally the vocabulary that such a program can understand consists of a few hundred words.

### Expert Systems

One of the few areas in which artificial intelligence technology has begun to provide programs of commercial interest is in the area of "expert systems" or (more modestly) "computer-based assistants." An expert system is a program which contains expertise about a particular area, coupled with the ability to reason with this expertise to solve complex problems. Examples of successful expert systems include MYCIN, a program for diagnosing bacterial infections; PROSPECTOR, a program for identifying likely places to prospect for mineral deposits; the various chess playing programs; and several programs providing assistance in diagnosing equipment failures for computer systems.

The contribution of artificial intelligence in these cases is to create techniques that allow a program to "reason" about information it has available. The reasoning procedures are based on symbolic logic and have something of the following flavor: if the system knows that 1) all nuclear power plants belong either to the Department of Defense or to private utility companies; 2) Three Mile Island nuclear power plant does not belong to the Department of Defense; it can conclude from these two facts that Three Mile Island nuclear power plant belongs to a private utility company!

The major problem in building an expert system is to provide the system with the necessary expertise. This currently requires both a programmer and an expert; together they work to get the necessary information into the system. One difficulty is that people do not store their expertise in ways that make it easy to transfer this expertise to a computer. Consider how difficult it is to give someone step by



step instructions on how to tie a shoe. Describing it correctly and in sufficient detail is far more difficult than actually tying the shoe! In general, the process of transferring one's expertise to a computer is a lengthy one, since the human expert may not be aware of all the information that she brings to bear in solving a problem. The expertise of an expert system thus tends to grow as the program is used and found to be deficient in certain places. However, in no sense can it be said to "learn": it merely accepts a transfusion of knowledge from the human expert.

## Learning

At the root of many of the computer's shortcomings in artificial intelligence is its inability to learn—that is, to exhibit adaptive behavior to improve its performance of a task based on feedback. In general, a system has a single technique for solving a problem. If that technique fails, it is stuck. For example, in natural language processing, the system tries to obtain a grammatical analysis of a sentence. If it cannot, it cannot proceed, even though it may know (from the lexicon) what every individual word means. Thus it could not "understand" *my mother her friend is here*, even though a human can easily understand the content of this sentence. One area of active research is to create systems that make use of multiple problem solving strategies. Even so, each system uses a fixed, pre-determined set of strategies; it cannot improvise or learn new strategies in the way that humans can when solving problems.

Part of the difficulty is that so little is understood about how humans learn. It is certainly an ability that distinguishes animate from inanimate objects. A crystal grows by adding molecules to its surface in a fixed pattern, depending on temperature, number and kind of molecules present and other variables. It is possible to grow very elaborate crystals, but the crystal does not "learn" how to grow. Given the identical conditions, the crystal will grow the same way each time; it does not get better at growing with practice or experience. Animate objects exhibit *learned* behavior. Each experience alters the internal state of the organism so that it may react differently upon successive repetitions of identical stimuli. Presumably evolution has favored the development of organisms that can exhibit adaptive behavior.

To date, computer systems have had little success in improving their ability to perform a given task by modifying their internal state based on feedback from previous experience. Note that merely "remembering" what happened previously is not sufficient for learning. Some modification of behavior based on this experience is required. When researchers in artificial intelligence claim that computers will be able to do anything that people do, this claim is based on ignorance of the complex functioning of the human mind. Underlying it is male arrogance and the perpetual male quest to create life: the notion that males can "engineer" anything—even intelligent life.

Learning is clearly related to the neuro-chemistry of the brain. It is unlikely that the information storing and processing mechanisms of the brain resemble current computer hardware. Therefore any claim that computers can learn is highly suspect, based on false assumptions of parallelism between "hardware" and the brain ("meatware" in the jargon of some boy computerniks). It does seem likely that continued research in this field will teach us a great deal about how people



learn and this is a proper focus for artificial intelligence research: gaining additional insights into the extraordinary complexities of the human mind. Based on this information, it will be possible to build more intelligent computer systems that may be able to incorporate some limited ability to "learn" in certain highly restricted situations, but it is a male fantasy that these semi-intelligent machines will replace humans.

### **Artificial Intelligence & the Military**

In the previous paragraphs, I have pointed to the motivations of male researchers to "engineer life." However, the immediate motivations behind artificial intelligence research are both more concrete and more sinister. *Almost all of the funding for artificial intelligence research comes from the Department of Defense.* (This is true, in fact, for much computer science research in general, and even for many other fields of science). In part, this is due to a peculiarity of the American political mentality which holds that national planning is highly suspect because it runs counter to the free enterprise system. However, in a high technology society, some centralized planning is a necessity, so politicians "hide" it in that most American of institutions, the military. Once in the Department of Defense, however, the military wants to get their money's worth. Therefore, artificial intelligence applications have been heavily focused on the needs of the military. The overall strategy seems to be to try to press America's technology lead in computers, and to make it pay off in military terms. Applications have ranged from relatively harmless, general purpose areas such as computer-aided instruction, to more grandiose plans for automated intelligence analysis, automated combat aircraft (an airplane piloted by a robot?), and even an automated commander! This is leading us to the VIDEO WAR GAME scenario, whereby World War III will be fought by two (or more) banks of computers as a giant, deadly serious, video game.

It is difficult to know how to react to these proposed (and, in some cases, funded) applications. On the one hand, I feel relieved, since the current state of technology is very far from really being able to support these applications. Therefore, at this stage, these applications are wasteful of taxpayers' money but won't do much harm, since they cannot really be made operational. On the other hand, I worry that the military may not realize that these programs will not work. Artificial intelligence has been oversold so much and so consistently that people have very exaggerated expectations. Suppose they believe the hype? The military will invest huge amounts of money in essentially unproven technology. This technology is highly vulnerable, for example, to electromagnetic disturbances such as those caused by nuclear weapons; the computer programs may contain program bugs; they are also vulnerable to infiltration and modification by hostile forces. In addition, it is not clear that the programs could handle unpredictable situations in a reasonable way. It is well known that computer game-playing programs can handle routine situations very well, but may behave bizarrely and unpredictably when confronted with a novel situation that the programmer did not envisage when designing the program. Finally, of course, computer programs have no ethics and no sense of moral responsibility. It is difficult to decide whether it is more terrifying to be in the hands of human generals or in the hands of automated generals.

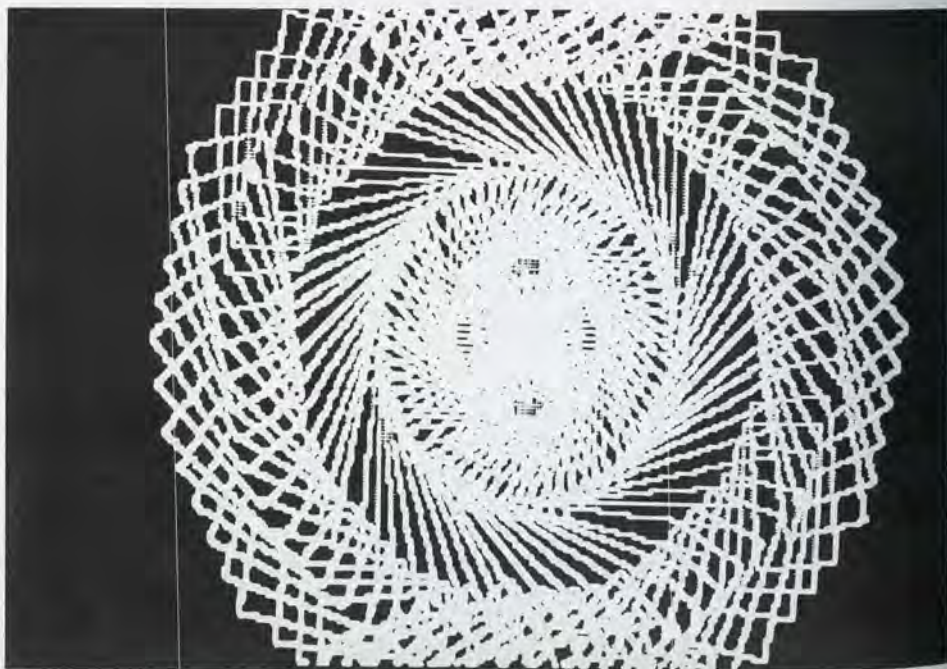


### Positive Uses of Artificial Intelligence

I would like to conclude with a few more cheerful remarks. Although the potential for harm in artificial intelligence is enormous, it also has potential for some positive effects. It is clear that computers are ushering in a change in technology at least as radical as the Industrial Revolution.

One of the points that I have tried to make in this article is that what computers are good at and what people are good at are different, at least in the short-term. Computers are good at performing highly repetitive tasks that require no learning, no adaptation to new situations. This is just the kind of deadening and "dehumanizing" work that people should *not* have to perform. In addition, computers (robots) can perform dangerous work that people should not perform. Of course, this creates massive shifts in employment patterns, and *it is critical for women and minorities not to be left behind in the "technologizing" of our society.*

Another contribution of artificial intelligence will be the democratization of expertise in certain areas. You will no longer have to pay an accountant to do taxes—you will just dial up an expert accounting program to help you. You will talk to this program in ordinary English (or Spanish, etc.), and the program will explain as much (or as little) of its reasoning as you wish to know. If you have a medical problem, you will dial up the medical diagnosis program; it will ask you about your symptoms and advise you about what to do. It will almost certainly be better at explaining things than most doctors. Similarly for legal problems, financial planning, vocational guidance, even vacation planning. Formerly esoteric, expensive expertise will become readily available to a very large part of the population at affordable prices. The impact of the expert system is analogous to the impact of the printing press in the medieval period: it will lead to demystification of expertise in many areas. It is in areas like these that we can begin to look for some benefits to be derived from computer technology.





# Beva Eastman

## WOMEN AND THE PERSONAL COMPUTER

When the word "computer" is mentioned within the feminist community, there is often an immediate negative response. The computer is a machine, a part of the new "male" technology. However, unless one wishes to live a life in isolation—without electricity, cars, telephones, phonographs, etc. (an option some women are trying) the presence of the new computer technology is impossible to ignore. In any case, most women do not reject the electric typewriter, or, for that matter, time-saving appliances like washing machines. After all, machines make no judgements. What we as people *do* with the machines is the problem. Now, low priced and compact, the home computer or "microcomputer" has capabilities that can change and enhance our personal lives and free us in ways not previously available. The joy of the personal computer is that it is just that—personal. It can be adapted to whatever use each of us would want. To be sure, there are and will continue to be abuses of the microcomputer, but as more and more individuals become involved with home computers, more and more creative ways are being found to make our lives easier. It is essential that the implications of the microcomputer in the home and office begin to be discussed carefully.

First—*what is a microcomputer?* In many ways, it looks like a small typewriter with the difference of additional keys and an output—what is typed appears on a monitor or television set instead of on paper. However, when this box-like typewriter is opened, the inside is filled with rows of small, black chips or integrated circuits and possibly some circuit boards upright in the back. These circuits and chips are the memory and microprocessor of the computer. Since the number of chips is limited, the memory is also limited.

Advertisements for home computers often use terms like 16K, 48K, expandable to 128K. This seemingly peculiar notation refers to the memory size of each computer. The K stands for 1024 bytes of memory. Therefore, 48K =  $48 \times 1024$  or 49,152 bytes of memory available in a 48K computer. When these numbers are



translated, 48K means 49,152 characters can be stored. Characters are single alphabet letters, numbers, or other symbols. Since an average double-spaced page has roughly 80 characters (spaces between words count) per line and 20 lines per page, this would mean that a 35 page paper is too long to be stored completely in the personal computer. However, this memory problem is solved by having a disk drive or a tape cassette recorder with the microcomputer. Memory is then stored—in the case of a disk drive, on 5¼ inch floppy disks which look somewhat like a square 45 rpm record. Since the disk's memory capacity is roughly three times the capacity of a 48K microcomputer, a 35 page paper can easily be stored on the disk. In the case of a tape cassette recorder, the memory is stored on tapes.

If a paper copy is desired, then a printer is a necessary piece of added equipment. These elements—the microcomputer, the monitor, the disk drive (or tape recorder) and the printer—are called *hardware*. Although the hardware in theory is essentially the same for all computers, each computer manufacturer has its own brand that is usually not compatible with the hardware from another. Also, there are additional pieces of hardware which can be purchased and added on to the computer: another memory board to expand the capabilities, another disk drive to help with filing systems, a modem to communicate with other microcomputers and services, paddles for games (better known as “joysticks”), and so forth.

Second—*how does a microcomputer or a personal computer work?* The computer works because it is given instructions called programs which can be purchased or written privately. These are called *software*. Word-processing, financial planning, filing systems, mailing labels, and educational programs, plus the multitudinous software in games are all now available. This means someone who has had no experience with a computer can purchase a word-processing software package and with some time spent learning different keyboard commands can write papers, letters, memos, and any necessary reports. The individual with experience on a computer can write her own programs.

Software is usually developed so that it can be modified to a special project; but the buyer of software, who is not a programmer, must be cautious if she has an unusual situation demanding a special program. Before she purchases a particular software package, she should request a demonstration of the software to see its capabilities; or, at least, she should ask to see the manual describing the software. The word-processing software package and filing system software that I use are adequate for what I want to do. However, I do have to write my own programs for educational situations.

### Uses of the Personal Computer

The question most often asked is “Well, if I purchase one of those computers, what can it do for me?” The answer is not simple, precisely because the home computer is so personal. However, there are broad areas where a computer is extraordinarily useful. A computer is at its best managing large amounts of information and data, whether this is a mailing list for a feminist or other social change organization, financial accounts, inventories, patients' records, students' transcripts, etc. The personal computer quickly and efficiently can process quantities of information that usually would take hours of personal time. For example, suppose a doctor had 500 patients and for the past two years had been prescribing



a particular new drug. If the doctor had just received notice that this drug was now being withheld and wished to notify affected patients immediately, instead of spending hours of time searching patients' records, within one morning the computer could do the search quickly and have all the individual letters typed and ready to send.

Another beneficial use of the computer is its filing capabilities. I am slowly, with the help of the microcomputer, organizing some paper pollution into an accessible filing system using disks. For example, since I serve on a Board of a small foundation, I now use the computer to keep track of grants made throughout the year. Previously, this job was done in a chaotic scramble at the end of each year. Now, after each meeting, I add the new decisions to the earlier ones, store them on a disk, and send out reports on request with little fuss. Since I can edit as I type or when I am sent a correction, what used to be a horrendous once-a-year task has changed into at most  $\frac{1}{2}$  hour after the four meetings per year. I use one of the software packages for filing data, which allows me to modify information in the file without having to retype the entire listing. Before using the computer, this job entailed time-consuming typing, phone calls, excessive editing, and trips for xeroxing. Now, the computer frees me for other tasks while it types up the reports.

This article is being written using *word-processing* software. I can change my mind about how to write a sentence as I type and not have to use "white-out." Every now and then, I have a copy of this printed to catch all the spelling errors. I can then easily change the errors without retyping pages. Word-processing allows statements or words to be placed anywhere within the text, sections to be deleted, and typing errors to be corrected. Since I am asked each year at work to up-date my resume, I used to have to re-type pages if listings were in the middle of the resume. Now, I can just insert the information directly into the resume and have the computer type up the new copy. What was a task to be postponed as long as possible has become a matter of a few minutes.

These uses of the personal computer are *general* applications. Each one of us can use it for whatever *particular* purpose we wish. For me, the most time consuming use of the computer is for development of educational programs. I have been using these small computers for over a year in the classroom; for the microcomputer with its easy accessibility has been an important learning tool for people to develop problem-solving and thinking skills, and to delight in learning. For another person, the computer could be used to help compose music, or to develop a billing system, or to create an inventory of a bookstore with multiple codes, or to help retrain nerve damage after a stroke. These uses are limited only by lack of imagination.

### **The Microcomputer, Mathematics & Computer Language**

If the problem of technology and machines does not bother a woman, then it is often the more serious problem relating to women and mathematics and/or logical thinking that discourages her. But Ernest's 1975 study, *Mathematics and Sex*<sup>1</sup> showed that mathematics is the one subject in elementary school that is not sex-linked, which means that just as many girls as boys like or dislike mathematics. More girls like English, and more boys like Science; but mathematics appears

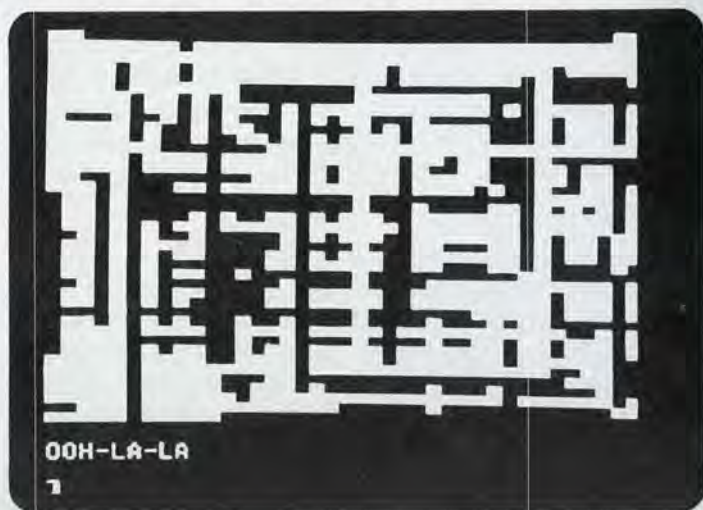


to be a neutral subject. The problem seems to lie with parents, teachers, counselors, and peers sending out those crazy messages: "What is a cute thing like you doing in Mathematics?" "You do not need this to take care of a home." "You will become masculine if you study Mathematics. Mathematics is for men."

The Ernest data was mainly for elementary school children, but the data in *A National Assessment of Achievement and Participation of Women in Mathematics*<sup>2</sup> showed that 13 year old girls are not different in mathematical ability from boys, both in problem solving skills and spatial relationships. The difference between boys and girls takes place by the end of high school and may be accounted for by the fact the girls are not encouraged or required to take mathematics in high school. Therefore, while girls may take only two years of mathematics, boys are encouraged to take at least three, if not four years.

*Eighty-five percent of all jobs now require some mathematics, and all future predictions show an increase of white collar jobs and a decrease in blue collar jobs. If women are not encouraged to study mathematics, we will be locked out of good paying jobs and kept in dead-end, low-level positions. It is essential that the social stigma and pressure on women not to study mathematics be changed.* Usually when a woman who responds negatively to mathematics is asked when this feeling started, she can pinpoint a particular incident or teacher in elementary school. Somewhere along the line, one step, say addition of fractions was lost, and there was no encouragement or support to learn the lost material. Since much of mathematics is cumulative, a section lost means gaps in knowledge and lots of frustration in trying to rebuild that knowledge.

However, learning a mathematical language may be totally unnecessary depending on the proposed use of the computer. The necessary information needed to operate a personal computer is really more similar to a foreign language. The advantage over the foreign language is that the words look familiar, but they have taken on new meanings. For example, the word NEW erases all memory of the last program and gives the user a fresh paper to begin again. HOME clears the screen of the monitor, and a word like GOTO tells the computer actually to go to a new location for further instructions. I do not use mathematics in my filing program, nor in the word-processing program. But I did have to learn new



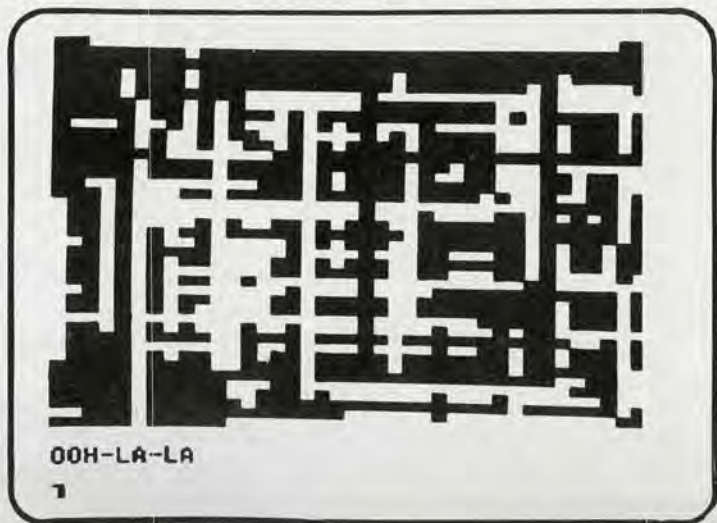


keystroke commands. For example, to underline a word in my word-processing program, I must use the following sequence of keys: 'esc', "shift", 'ctrl', "p". The "esc" or escape key is one of the new, additional keys, as is the "ctrl" or control key. To capitalize a letter, I must press the "esc" key and then the letter to be capitalized. On a regular typewriter, I have to use the shift key to capitalize, so this minor change does not cause much inconvenience. I find though I still have to check my capitals every now and then, for years of using the shift key to capitalize letters often prevails.

The trend to make the software extremely "user friendly" is developing. "User friendly" means that you, the user, could insert your disk with your program into the disk drive and turn on the computer, and within seconds, clear instructions would appear on the monitor as to what commands are necessary to run your program. But, at present, the user usually must set aside time to learn the key commands for whatever software she obtains. When I load the word-processing software into the computer, the "menu" which gives me options appears with odd symbols. If I did not have the manual, I would not be able to decipher those symbols. Manuals come with every software. Even games have a manual, although it may be only one page giving which keys work the game. Some of my students have a game without a manual, and many frustrating hours are now being spent in trying to find out how to work it!

However, if one wants to utilize the computer for functions other than those like filing, mailing labels, word-processing, the truth is that a certain knowledge of mathematics if not essential, is certainly helpful. Even if the educational programs to be written are in the field of reading, algebraic statements such as  $LET C = 1$  are necessary as a counter in a program to let your user know how many words she reads. Also, although the graphics software is better and better, some knowledge of polar coordinates is very helpful to do things like placing a "smiley face" within a program to reward a student for a correct answer.

The programming language that is used most often on the personal computer is BASIC, which stands for Beginners' All-purpose Symbolic Instruction Code. This language is not difficult to learn—the new words are accessible, the language is not highly structured, and programming in BASIC is highly responsive and





individualistic. This leads to another problem within the feminist community: *linear and/or logical thinking versus intuitive reasoning*. It is not true that only one way of thinking is allowed on a computer or that all programs are nothing but a bunch of lined-up soldiers. To be sure, some programs march right down without distractions, but others travel back and forth, have the beginning at the end of a program, and are bewildering in their fancy techniques. To program, one has to carry through an idea. *How* this idea is carried out is totally dependent on the individual's way of thinking. *Programming is using problem solving skills, and since most of us use these skills daily, as adults, the problem about logical thinking should not be the issue.*

The issue *should be* how one's thinking is used. Whether it is used to harm or to encourage, to destroy or to cooperate, to be racist and sexist, or to create a diverse, supportive, safe environment. Many computer games emphasize war, racism, rape, and killing. There is even a reading game for first graders, where the child is rewarded for recognizing a word correctly by being able to "kill" an alien. The new and exciting knowledge that women are discovering in all fields should also carry into computer games and programs. A woman graduate student is presently writing a program for elementary students with so much gentle humor in it, it makes me laugh when I see it, even at the different creative stages when the program is not running perfectly.

I used the word "creative" in the last sentence deliberately, for *the process of writing a program is a creative process*. An appropriate application of the computer demands not only a careful consideration of words to communicate effectively but also the innovative drawing of graphics to illustrate ideas. A word-processing software package can *in no way* write the letters or the article. A person must be there to write what *she* wishes. Even the most advanced so-called "poetry writing programs" are only the placing of words at random. The "poem" of random words can create an image only if the person reading these random words imposes meaning on them, or edits them in some way. These programs were also created by someone according to *their* rules and ideas.

### Security of Information

The last issue to discuss is security of information and data. If a group wants to put a confidential mailing list on a disk to store, how safe is it? The answer is that it is as safe as your files. Every disk can be unlocked — there is special software which was written just to unlock programs. However, it is fairly easy to make a program or a file on a disk inaccessible to most people. A technique of a secret word that is typed without appearing on the monitor will lock a program or data file. As a matter-of-fact, I practised this technique by using my first name to lock some programs. In locking one program, I must have accidentally pressed another key, because I can now not gain access to that program at all!!! To unlock this program, I would have to use one of the special software packages. Some people recommend that two secret words be used by two different people not knowing each other's choice. Then, if the disks are also locked in a strong safe, some security is guaranteed.

Also, what is wonderful about a microcomputer is that it does not have to communicate with the outside world. If the user wishes to "talk" with another microcomputer or call some information service, this is a deliberate decision. This means a microcomputer at home is extremely private.



## Future Vision for Women and Home Computers

Since the microcomputer's applications are developing so rapidly, the future is really now. One corporation has set up several cottage industries with women completing forms at home with microcomputers. Some women are pleased to fit in the work around the demands of the home. However, clear abuses are built into this plan, since the company saves money hiring the women as part-time workers and thus not paying any health benefits or insurance, and the women are clearly isolated from their sister workers making it harder for them to organize.

The list of possible abuses continue with recently discovered health hazards. Microcomputers and word-processors both use monitors for the output. People, usually women, who spend long, unrelieved hours before a monitor experienced eye damage, muscle and nerve strain, and even a change in the menstrual cycle.

Women must become actively involved with work contracts to insure proper coverage, with medical research to determine all hazardous effects, and with scientific research to create hardware that is not destructive to health. Unless women are knowledgeable about the computers, they will be put in jobs where time is spent in front of a monitor typing all day without any acknowledgement of health hazards.

Furthermore, the microcomputer, as with any computer, can be programmed to count the number of times the keyboard is pressed. This means that instead of applying for a typing job when one can type 50 words per minute, the future jobs will require so many "keystrokes" per minute. The computer will count the "keystrokes," and an assembly line production with so many "keystrokes" per day may be required of all typists.

Since the microcomputer can separate the various jobs to be done into separate pieces, women in offices may be assigned to one monotonous task instead of the numerous, diverse tasks a secretary usually does. If women do not become involved with the microcomputer, the decisions about the work-place will be enforced; and women will not be in any position to counteract these assignments.

However, this nightmare does not have to take place. The microcomputer is so flexible that if more women knew about this technology, they could actively and creatively decide how the work could be divided efficiently and still maintain a decent, safe, working environment.

What is needed is a computer center for women in each city, where a woman can learn about the uses of the personal computer in a supportive atmosphere, and where she could take classes, and/or rent hours on a microcomputer to do whatever she wished. Women must begin to have access to the technology of the computer for all purposes: mailing lists, creative writing, joyful games, graphics, sound, data management, etc. We women cannot allow ourselves to ignore this technology, for then decisions about the use of the technology will be made, *are being made* that perpetuate our culture's biases. The computer's uses, in making our lives easier, have only begun to be discovered, and women are needed desperately to develop innovative, humane programs in which diversity can flourish.

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<sup>1</sup>John Ernest. *Mathematics and Sex*, University of California, Santa Barbara, California, 1975.

<sup>2</sup>Jane Armstrong. *A National Assessment of Achievement and Participation of Women in Mathematics*, Education Commission of the States, Denver, Colorado, 1979.



# THE NEW TECHNOLOGY AND WORK: Computer Repairwomen Speak

Both Molly Jackson and Toni Russell repair computer hardware. One fixes printers, terminals and control units; the other works on peripheral devices and computer systems.

*Molly:* To begin with, I personally have very mixed feelings about computer technology and just what it means in terms of political struggle and the quality of our lives. On the one hand, it is opening up dramatic new job opportunities; on the other, there is a kind of insidiousness about the industry that frightens me. And even the increased job opportunities for women and minorities depend a lot on Affirmative Action programs being maintained and implemented.

*Toni:* It's certainly true that before you can even begin to speak about the new computer technologies and how they affect minorities and women, you have to understand how the industry as a whole is affected by Affirmative Action guidelines—guidelines which mandate that if a company has 25 employees and a government contract over \$50,000, the workforce must reflect the sexual and demographic characteristics of the population (which, for example, in New York City is over 50% female and 50% minority). A fact that to me only emphasizes the importance of entering these industries now. Once you have minorities and women in key positions in a company, they are in a position to make sure the guidelines are being implemented. They can act as a support unit and recruit job ready people. They know the demographic distribution of the city. They can put resumes into personnel. They can force issues at staff meetings.

*Molly:* Personally, my experience is different. I'm one of very few women in my field. There is a better balance of Black men to white men than women to men, but even that is low. I think it's all over now in terms of Affirmative Action. Even though we still have that department, once Reagan came into power, I have seen only white men hired. And yes, there's going to be activity and hiring within the computer and high tech industries, but there will also be a vast sea of people who're going to be outside that industry who will be unemployed and more who will be permanently "retired." It is the "benign neglect" concept—people will just be left to die or to fend for themselves because there's just not going to be enough jobs.



*Toni:* Look, in terms of Affirmative Action, there is an executive order out. They do have to hire if there is an available resource pool. That means hardware, software, management, operations, right down the line. The whole point is that you have to have a person in upper management to implement the guidelines. That's why it is so important to get women and minorities into those positions where they're more aware, more able to help. If you're in a position of management and there are a few of you, you can force certain unpopular ideas. If you become isolated, they can make life difficult—so the more people there are who see things the way you do, the more people you have to seek allies with. If someone has been discriminated against, there's a group to help. At training school, we formed a self-help group to get through. Companies get around the law because there aren't always qualified people to hire. That's why it's so important to get this information out—so people know what's happening and can get the proper information to enter these industries. Remember, by law the companies can be sued. And companies *have* been sued.

*Molly:* Sure, the law is there. But I still believe since the Kennedy days, the laws are not really being implemented all that well. For example, there are all sorts of laws about ecology, but they're chewing up the desert and the wilderness anyway. Laws have never meant much except to serve those who already have power. The other thing to remember is that I had absolutely no background nor any proven aptitude and they literally scooped me up off the street to fill a quota at a time when they needed a woman. If I'm out there, there are other women who are out there too—I'm not that unusual. If they were really sincere, they could find people and train them.

*Toni:* Where you work is in some ways a unique situation. The newer high tech companies are not so entrenched. They're smaller too and more dependent on government contracts and more vulnerable to suits.

*Molly:* That's true; however, the company I work for is acting the way they do in the middle of New York City where there is such a diverse ethnic and racial mix. Imagine what they and the rest of the companies are doing throughout the U.S. where things are much more white, much more racist.

*Toni:* Look, it's still a lot easier to get in and press things among the high tech industries than to take on institutions, and some unions for that matter, who have been institutionalized for a long time and haven't been any great shakes for women or minorities. A lot of these new companies don't have the same over-bearing structure to deal with as the older established companies.

*Molly:* I think the only reason any company ever did anything was because of an incredible civil rights and women's movement. It was a vast population of minorities and women in motion, and that's the only thing that will move anybody. To think that just because you have a smaller company, a liberal company, that this will benefit women—it's no real power.

*Toni:* I think you're missing my point. I've had discussions with my unit manager and asked why some companies have such strong Affirmative Action programs and he says because they want to play above board and comply with the law—



remember some companies have actually gone out of business because of losing these law suits. This has to be coupled with overall networking, and even then it's only one aspect of it. There are a number and variety of jobs opening up.

*Molly:* Maybe this is a good place to stop for a minute and clarify some of the terms and definitions we are using and what some of the jobs actually are and how you can get into them.

*Toni:* OK. The computer network includes the hardware, software and operations. When you talk about software, you're talking about programs that are put together using the computer languages and logic. We're in hardware. Software is the design, the application and the program that tells the computer what to do. Hardware is the equipment; the actual processors and the input and output devices that accompany the system. The operators are the ones who work in the computer room, input programs and monitor the system and make it run. Clerical jobs have been converted to data entry jobs. Data entry involves working at a keyboard, entering information to the computer. The systems analyst oversees the total operation. Communications equipment connects the users with the systems and connects other systems to each other. There are also management and some training positions involving all of the above. Some of this is visionary; you have to envision what you can do. The actual job of operations is repetitious, but it's easier than clerical work. And you get a much broader sense of economics, more of a sense of power. Operations means the implementation of an operating system. That's not the same as a supermarket clerk using an intelligent terminal, which is just an automated task where one is using an automated machine.

*Molly:* These computer jobs are in banks, manufacturing, finance, transportation, government, hospitals, etc. Any kind of business that has clerical work is being computerized. Word processing is one of the higher paid jobs. Word processing starts with basic typing skills. For example, I don't call bank tellers computer jobs. Computer jobs use the computer to execute other purposes. Tellers will be totally replaced. People will use cards. But this is, of course, only one area — there are jobs on all levels from management to work with hardware and software and in operations.

*Toni:* Remember, the computer by itself does nothing. After all, look what a computer system is based on. You have a central processing unit which does the arithmetic and logical operations and it also monitors what goes on in the total system. You have communications gear which allows you to interface between the terminals — your users — and also other systems, depending on what type of application you are using. Then you have tape drives and disc drives which are called peripheral devices which allow you to enter information from a previously established data base into the computer. And then you've got a printer which produces hard copy of the information which has been processed. Just to process information means nothing, you have to put it somewhere. Whether it's on tape or disc or printed out on a sheet of paper, it has to be "written down" — otherwise it means absolutely nothing to anybody. The computer doesn't generate data by itself. You have to tell the computer what to do. You have to tell the computer how to use the information that you're inputting into it. It merely executes arithmetic and



logical tasks. These things are all very complex. They're becoming more sophisticated, but they're far from automatic.

*Molly:* The head of the octopus is the computer room, the tentacles are the phone lines going out to all the remote equipment that is out there pulling in information out of the head and sending information back in. There are people back in the head that are putting on tapes to gather the particular information and are making sure the machines out there are actually on and connected to the system and operable. They do a myriad of things that I don't even understand, but basically they keep the brain of the thing functioning. So there are jobs connected with all these functions—with operations and word processing, data entry and management, repairing and keeping the system in order, programming, developing new languages. However, while I think that there's room for certain individuals to hustle and learn teleprocessing, communications theory and software and systems architecture, I think basically for most people, and a good example is hardware repair, it looks like there is a real tendency that the jobs could become much less challenging, much more rote. I'm still at the point where I'm challenged. But there are companies now going around with panelled trucks pulling out machines, taking them to a place where they pull the machine apart and keep changing parts until they find one that fits.

*Toni:* Yes, in the repair industry the number of jobs might increase slightly, but the nature of the job will change. There used to be a lot of little tiny boards, hundreds of boards, and hardwiring, and now it's different. They are making them simpler to repair; they are using more test equipment so that people without an engineering degree can repair them.

*Molly:* What's happening is that less and less is expected. You change whole parts called "field replaceable units" which are getting larger and more complex. Soon, we will probably just throw the whole machine away when it breaks because it is cheaper to replace it.

*Toni:* All of this underscores my point that now is the time for minorities and women to get in. As this continues to happen, women and minorities will be tracked into lower level jobs because there are going to be a few important upper level jobs and a lot of lower level jobs. One entry point is to be in a job, like the phone company or a bank, and put in for further training. The other is school. Get a six-month certificate in basic electronics and computer technology or programming and you can start off with that and you go around and get an entry level job and get further education and then decide where you really want to go and then you really learn. Political people sometimes have a tendency to analyze and theorize and by the time they decide to get in, it's too late. I feel sometimes you have to jump in and make your mistakes, learn from them and go on from there. If more people get into these high tech industries when they're opening up as opposed to when they're closed, it will be that much easier to struggle. I can't presume to solve the problems of every unemployed person in the country or in other countries—this is a global problem. This would be just one part of an overall struggle, and I wouldn't presume to draw conclusions about that overall struggle.



*Molly:* I think philosophically you have to. If you're within a company, you figure out what you can do, but you do have to look at the bigger picture. In some way, your actions have to jive with that bigger picture. Just to say that those few who can get aboard capitalism as it goes into this new phase are the ones who are going to survive—that's hardly the basis of what I would like to build a human society on.

*Toni:* But that's not what I'm saying. I'm dealing with my experiences where people who gain skills can translate them back into the community. In no way am I only talking about those who can "survive" this new wave of capitalism. Of course, I feel there are many places to struggle, but this is one *extremely important* aspect of that larger struggle. There are enormous benefits in terms of the overall political struggle if people can take these resources back into their community.

*Molly:* I actually feel very schizophrenic on this whole issue. I know how important it is that minorities and women get hold of this technology. You have to know what you're dealing with. We're going to be museum pieces unless we grab hold of it. I can give you an example where a simple change of technology made women more powerless. Before Europeans brought the horse to this country, women were the farmers and the gatherers and the beast of burden was the dog. Women had the dogs and as such, they owned the most valuable property in the tribe. When the horses came, the men took over the horses and immediately there was a change in technology—a living technology—but there was a whole shift of power. So that's a very compelling argument. But then there's another point of view which is how technology conditions you, draws you in and robs you of your human power. This technology makes fascist control quite probable. The data banks will have dossiers on everyone—instantly available to officials, institutions, employers, etc. The computerized cash registers and banking system will lead us into a cashless society where our bills, our taxes etc. will all be automatically deducted and all any of us will have for our time and labor will be a computer print-out of how our "money" was spent—like it or not. Add to this the growing network of communications satellites which can also be used for surveillance and repression. The picture is grim indeed. I can easily envision circumstances being such that in order to have any kind of dynamic, human society, you might have to live outside of this. Like outlanders. These companies can be very insidious. A big company sucks you in more and more. It's like a family situation. Take job security. A guy who smashed his body up hasn't worked for years, but he's still on the payroll. This gives everybody a tremendous sense of security. It's insidious!

*Toni:* Certainly, if there's one thing we can all agree on about this new technology it is that there are no easy answers, no easy solutions. But there are a lot of questions and no way even to begin to deal with them *unless you first know what's happening*. And I really feel very strongly that people can't struggle sufficiently from a position of powerlessness. If you don't know what's going on, quite simply, you will have very little to say and very little effect.

*Transcribed & edited by Colleen McKay*



# THE TYRANNY OF FORM:

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## Information Theory and Computer Technology

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SUSAN SHERMAN

In the 1960's, Marshall McLuhan, prophet of the new age and one of the first to realize the importance of the new electronic technology, wrote a counter-culture best seller, *Understanding Media*. In it, he predicted electronic technology would truly liberate an alienated and fragmented humanity. The fabled "Age of Aquarius" was finally dawning. Through advanced communication techniques, the world community, the "global village," was a real possibility. We could now, at long last, move from being overly dependent on our visual sense, a consequence of adopting reading as our chief method of learning, and rediscover the interdependency of all our senses, a true unity of perception, as a result of the increased use of audio-visual and mixed media. Moreover, for McLuhan, watching T.V. was biologically liberating because we are called on to creatively and actively construct the image which is the T.V. picture from a spectrum of dots, as opposed to the physical passivity of reading a book with its set type.

Quite simply, for McLuhan and his followers, the new media would change our whole way of being in the world. The age old duality between mind and body, thought and sensation, would finally be laid to rest. And all this would eventually happen *because of the very nature of the media itself*. The movement from the mechanistic, materialistic, deterministic model which emerged from the Industrial Revolution and the paradigm of the machine to the new non-linear, non-sequential model of electronic media would happen *regardless of the specific content of the media*. *Because the real content of the media is its form. It is the media itself and not its subject matter that "informs" the viewer.* Hence the meaning of the famous rallying cry, "The medium is the message."

## The Emperor's Old Clothes

It is only a small step from McLuhan's speculations to the more sophisticated proponents of modern "information theory" with their argument that information theory and electronic technology coupled with new discoveries in biology provide us *ex post facto* with a way out of the dilemma of the one-dimensional approach to the world generated by the Industrial Revolution. Old nineteenth century words like "forces," "drives," "energy" are already being replaced by the new jargon: "probability," "redundancy," "complexity," "entropy." The new theories are proclaimed life-based and complex as opposed to simple and mechanistic. Information theory is biological rather than mechanical. It is grounded in the "logic of life" rather than on the algebra of the machine. Organic math replaces the conventional equation.

It is important to note the new constellation of disciplines that is arising as a result of the emphasis on information theory and computer technology. As the old mechanism was grounded in physics, particularly Newtonian physics, information theory, its replacement, is grounded in biology, as evinced in DNA coding; in behavioral psychology, with the emphasis on learning theory; in those parts of philosophy relating to language, specifically that branch of language study devoted to structure and logic. There is a strong emphasis on statistics and probability theory, and the procedural language is mathematical computation. And, of course, the catalyst and *raison d'être* of this new alliance—computer programming.

Information theory owes a large debt to the theories of Claude Shannon who formalized ideas of communication based on his work with radio and the telephone—what noise is, how much "redundancy" is necessary to ensure the recovery of information, how entropy is an important component of communication. Some of these concepts were rendered mathematically by Shannon. The tie-in with people comes from the fact that the radio, telephone, television, computer, human beings (not only consciously, but *in their very genetic make-up*) are all information processors and symbol manipulators—transmitting information through coding, actively "informing" their environment, not only changing or effecting but, in a very real sense, creating their world.

*Information is not viewed here as a passive thing, it is an active process.* In fact, what we are seeing is the whole definition of communication and information as we think of it undergoing a subtle transformation. The two are actually merging into one concept in which what we think of as information (consisting of data that we, as human beings, interpret and then choose whether to use) and communication (which is the process by which data is transmitted) becoming first a unified process—literally "informing" us—and then an abstract process—one that takes place in the world of mathematical probability and statics rather than mundane activity. *Real creative activity, if you follow this argument to its logical conclusion, is thereby moved out of the realm of human interpretation and choice altogether. What creates, orders, chooses the world, what "in-forms" it, is the medium or, in the new lingo, the "code" itself.* Everything become subsumed under the code, which is now a biological process: the sender, the receiver, the message, the means and method of sending, the means and method of interpretation. The computer program disassociates itself from the programmer and user and goes its own way.



It is McLuhan on a new and, before recent computer technology, hitherto unimaginable level.

Formalism in its shiny old clothes.

### Scientific "Objectivity" and Human Understanding

Objectivity in our modern 20th century American high tech world means much the same thing as it has for Western civilization for hundreds of years—it means what is not tied down to a specific point of view or bias, what cannot be assigned personal value, what is consequently above the vicissitudes of human nature. The objective scientific experiment is verifiable and duplicable. It is without history. It is a theory of how we know the world based on a particular type of relationship between hypothesis and evidence-gathering, deductive and inductive logic.

For example, to study and understand the phenomenon of memory, people are given rows of nonsense syllables to memorize like PNB, MHI, TYI, FOU. Observations about "long-" and "short-term" memory are taken from the results of these experiments. Generalizations are made from them about how one learns and, consequently, *how one is best taught*. This test is a model of scientific objectivity. It examines memory in an unbiased way because the material doesn't relate to any of the tested subjects' preconceptions. The syllables are detached, general, completely removed from personal meaning, from everyday life; therefore, memory as an objective phenomenon can be measured apart from individual association, and *the results can be utilized regardless of individual background*.

In my freshman year of college it was compulsory to "volunteer" for one of these experiments, and I can personally verify "subjects" have trouble memorizing nonsense syllables—which should come as no surprise, since we are not often called on to memorize things that make absolutely no sense and are completely irrelevant to us. It might, in fact, be fairly argued that all the experiment tests, and tests quite well, is the process by which people learn nonsense syllables, or if you must generalize, how people memorize completely irrelevant material. The problem is that it is the results of this type of experiment that are used in making practical decisions about education and learning.

This type of test has gained notoriety through the still raging controversy over I.Q. testing and similar tests used to "track" students into different educational "lines"—in many cases permanently determining their future. The I.Q. test—a supposedly "objective" examination of a subject's ability to learn—turned out to be more objectionable than objective. The most accepted solution to the shortcomings of I.Q. tests has been to make the testing procedure even more abstract—correctly trying to eliminate the strong class, racist and sexist bias of the exam, but overlooking the fact that *class bias, cultural prejudice and sexism can be built into procedures as well as subject matter* and that a better solution might have been to call the whole process into question. A more appropriate response might have been to consider whether you can test an "innate" ability to learn at all. If you have to test, why not test what someone knows, in order to determine what they need to learn, and find out other information through more suitable means, including personal interviewing, counseling, and much more individualized procedures—which admittedly take more time and cost more money. Unless, of course, the real reason for the test is to siphon out "undesirables" to begin with.



It is interesting to note that many of the sections used on the standard I.Q. test (for example, the analogy and logical number sequences) are the same tests used to predict competence in computer programming skills. Not because the future programmers are being tested for their I.Q., but because these tests measure, or claim to measure, the "innate," "culturally independent" talent of manipulating mathematical concepts.

A basic problem with all this—among many other problems!—is that we, as living beings relating to other living beings, do not speak to each other as disembodied mouths. If we do, it is perceived as either intentionally or unconsciously evasive or hostile. Our language is not composed of nonsense syllables—at least it isn't as long as we can relate to what we're talking about. If our language "fails" us, loses meaning, it is because we have failed ourselves. It is not language that loses meaning, we are the ones who lose meaning—as individuals, as a collective. For us to examine language as a disembodied, abstract structure, looking at it for the meaning in our lives, is like looking at a gun and asking why it makes us killers.

As living human beings, we both speak *and* listen to each other's history from our own history; we relate to each other from our own point of view, our own place. We are not a scientific control group, hermetically sealed; we are a living community of complex, purposeful, creative individuals (whether individual be defined as a person, culture, community) who live a varied and *multi-layered* experience. We speak out of a certain space, from a certain time. *And sometimes it takes a kind of "suspended disbelief" to hear each other at all;* a "stopping" of our world, of how we are used to experiencing and understanding things, to literally *admit* another's existence—particularly if that existence differs radically from our own. It takes a suspension of logic to allow two wholly different conceptions to exist in the same place—conceptions that might or might not prove to be mutually exclusive. It takes security and it takes good faith. We must trust that our world will not be attacked or irrevocably shattered. *We must be open to the other.* And to do this, we must understand and trust ourselves, and we must have information—specific information, information that is more than words, that is action, motivation, feeling, connection.

"Suspended disbelief" is easier when relating to art, since we are not confronting a living being, and consequently, feel less threatened, more in control. But that is also an illusion. Because, if art reaches deeply enough and is alien enough, it can pose the same questions, excite the same fears.

To be able to temporarily suspend our own prevailing assumptions, our own reality. Knowing our world may never be the same again. Perhaps, at bottom, that is precisely what all learning, all growth, questioning, all communication is really about.

### **The Ethics of Expediency**

Each century, each generation, each nation, culture, sub-culture, group, each individual bases their view of reality on certain sets of unstated and often unconscious assumptions, assumptions that determine much about *what* we choose and *how* we make our choices. The choices of science are seemingly based solely on a set of standards of measurement and procedure aimed at achieving whatever goal the particular experiment involves. Beyond strict adherence to these profes-



sional standards, there is no other standard *per se* in scientific research, since only regulations appropriate to the formal aspects of an experiment or hypothesis are allowable as objective. Other than that, like any other citizen, scientists have to obey the laws of the particular society in which they live—kidnapping someone for an experiment, for example, would either be the subject of a grade B movie or would subject the offender to criminal prosecution. In fact, the needs of science often come in conflict with the laws of society.

However, it can be argued that modern science actually is based on a set of ethical assumptions as well as professional procedures and that *these values are expected to tacitly parallel those of the class in control of the society in which the scientist lives*. That modern science and scientific theory, although nominally cut off from a wider social perspective, is nonetheless, *in procedure as well as aim*, governed by a specific set of values, an ethics. And that, in our society, they are the ethics of expediency.

The word "expediency" is defined by Webster's New World Dictionary as "the doing or consideration of what is of selfish use or advantage rather than what is right or just..." The ethics of expediency is a set of values based solely on personal gain, on achieving the end you have set yourself regardless of any other consideration.

Our most modern tool is the computer. The computer is a multiplicity of machines, depending on its use. It is a game, a word-processor, a clerical aid, an instrument for saving lives, a weapon. The computer, by itself, cannot do anything. The assumptions on which the programming is based are the assumptions that belong to the architects of the system—the people who design the system. And, of course, those they design it for. There is always a factor of unpredictability built into a complex system, and some of the larger systems seem to be extremely unpredictable. But the computer apart from its designers, users, its human base, has no independence. It is a thing. To believe that the "decisions" or conclusions reached by using a computer are "objective," any more than science itself is "objective," because it uses a mathematical language and seems somehow detached, is one of the great and greatly useable myths of our modern age.

What this new technology means to us in practical terms in a context where the prevailing ethic is expediency and the motive is profit is not abstract. In the business community, it is reflected in the presence of workers who will never go back to their old jobs because business has been trying for years to find a way to circumvent the unions in order to fire them and automate. It is reflected in workers who will never be re-trained for new jobs because people can be found to replace them at lower wages—which is precisely what happened when the typesetting industry became computerized. It is reflected in the generation of a new kind of white collar factory worker, the clerical assembly line, not working directly with the means of production, not even controlling it indirectly through a key-board, but hooked into a central computer somewhere, performing a routine task—the new "piece-work."

In a political sense, the new technology is also reflected in the increasing disintegration of the United States as a privileged preserve, as more and more international mergers take place and business goes world-wide with a vengeance; and the attendant flagrant disregard for that part of the population not considered "useful." And along with this, the lowering of the work force's standard of living, not because of "equal distribution of wealth," because of greed.



The combination of information theory with behavioral psychology and computer technology is sure to have an enormous effect on education and particularly on studies of learning and how the process of education is conceived. What could be an enormously beneficial aid to education could turn into an incredible nightmare. Instead of using the new technology constructively to stimulate *both* the development of logical thought processes *and* creativity and teaching more effectively by using, for example, some of the new techniques combining computers and video, computer technology could be used to screen information reaching students, to eliminate the teacher *and other students* (the living presence of the classroom) altogether, and to further alienate a generation of students already "turned off" to their world.

The effects of the combination of information theory, computer technology and biology are impossible to predict. Here is a brand new field, and genetic engineering could well turn into the next atomic debacle — making the atom bomb and nuclear power plants look tame in retrospect. It deserves our most careful attention.

These are only a few examples. The point is that *without a political, theoretical and practical understanding of the new technology and the ideas behind it, we will not be able to delineate areas of important political concern* and the resulting mystification of the "new age of information" will mean that computer technology, instead of freeing us from dangerous and deadly work and enriching *all* our lives, will become a powerful instrument of oppression.

What is finally at stake is whether we choose to approach the world, *our* world, to *begin with* from a political and creative vision, or whether we allow ourselves to be hoodwinked into approaching the world from an a-moral point of view, from the point of view of profit and self-interest.

Logic, math, the computer, communication techniques, *even language*, are neither positive nor negative. In themselves, they are nothing. They are tools, and as tools they have no objectivity. They *are* objects. They are *always* used by *someone* for *something*.

Tools are political instruments, and they must be politically perceived.

### **The Computer as Metaphor**

In modern terms, information theory fits neatly into a schema in which creativity is subsumed under problem-solving and metaphor becomes synonymous with analogue. And, regardless of their protestations to the contrary, it is perhaps here that the greatest danger from theorists of the new technology lies — by the clouding of these distinctions, the computer itself becomes a metaphor for our thought process and ultimately the way we inhabit our world. Reality shifts from information we receive from a living environment to the secondary patterns of the computer screen.

It is interesting that the philosopher most immediately conjured up in texts on information theory, artificial intelligence and related subjects, and even specifically quoted, is Aristotle. An Aristotle cut off from his own context and re-interpreted through 20th century eyes. In any case, while he is cited because of his denial of Plato's ideal world of universals and his declaration that only through the particulars of this world can knowledge be gained, underneath Aristotle's reasoning is an abstract formalism just as great as Plato's. Aristotle's abstractions are biologically based; they are grounded in living relationships rather than on things, on motion



rather than stasis, on generalizations from the natural world rather than abstract ideas. But to use his arguments against Platonic Idealism to prop up information theory is misleading at best. First, because Plato has nothing to do with the mechanism which information theory cavalierly claims to supersede; and second, because the mathematical formulations behind information theory are easily as idealistic as anything Plato ever dreamed of.

The truth is, to speak of purpose built into nature, even if it is a materialist's version of Kantian "purposeless purpose"—without conscious intent—is scientifically suspect at best. Perhaps the main reason Aristotle has been dredged up again is the authority and respectability that can be gained by citing his theories of causality, which in a somewhat truncated form fit nicely into this updated argument of "creation from design."

Aristotle's theory of the "final cause," of potentiality and actuality—within the acorn, for example, is the oaktree waiting to be actualized—seems to fit perfectly with DNA coding; in fact, with the whole idea of coding. His discussion of multiple causes: formal, efficient, final, material defines complexity in opposition to the single cause-effect relationship of mechanism. His abstracting of logical relationships from activity and his tenacity in categorizing also lend themselves to the information theorist's agenda.

Also important is the idea common in the ancient world that art is craft, that the end must be kept in mind from the inception of the creative process—which is, indeed, a selecting out with an end in view. (Remember how important architecture was in Greece and what would happen if you didn't design a building with a particular end in mind!) There was also the attendant idea that all art is representational and mirrors something directly from the world we live in.

Within that general aesthetic, Aristotle believed plot was the most important element of tragedy, for him character and mood were secondary. It was action, albeit for Aristotle not action separated from character, that was the play. Action that had a logic, action as a set of relationships that could be reconstructed. A logic that was obviously in place from the first moment of the writing of the play even though its detail had to be worked through.

The tie-in with computer technology should begin to be clear. If that underlying logic can be computed, and there's no reason it can't be, what stops one from programming it into the machine and thereby discovering what the creative process is really all about. The type of logical process and creative selection we're talking about is, after all, an extremely complex but certainly determinable type of problem-solving. Many experiments, in fact, are being done on computers, tracing the development of plots, following exactly this pattern.

Besides which, any of our thoughts, feelings, fears, visions that can be put into language—and most can in art—should in theory be able to be translated and programmed into a computer and therefore, it follows, they are reducible finally to mathematical terms—their secrets revealed, their structure laid bare.

Like the human being, the computer is a symbol manipulator, and words are symbols. Anything that can be said can be coded. Although our specific thoughts are different, in terms of the structure of the way we think, we are the same. Some people even believe if a thought cannot be expressed in language, it can't be formulated at all. It remains chaotic, unintelligible, unrecognized.



The conviction is that as our skill with these new computer techniques grows, our ability to understand our own thought processes, our own creativity, will also grow.

It is true that literature uses words and through literature even emotion and highly complex ideas and experiences can be captured – but what does that mean? Is the literary metaphor really no more than a symbol substitution; is it really the same as analogies used in computer programs or I.Q. tests? Is the substance of the material always the plot?

Literature utilizes non-verbal speech. The poetic metaphor, for example, is more than logical manipulation; its purpose is to combine terms and construct new relations *from the full being of the poetic experience*. It is a unity – produced through creative use of language – smell and sound and touch and sight and thought, as well as problems, questions, hopes, dreams, lemons, sweetness, the red convertible, my mother's voice, a dictionary, B flat, a headache, a strand of red-brown hair. It is individual and unique. A point in time – 10 o'clock or the 1st of May. It is poignant, alive, *and it can be transmitted*, empathized with, understood.

It is not reducible to a paraphrase or a mathematical equation. It can not be plotted. It is not repeatable. It happens only once.

Complexity doesn't mean adding layers and layers of complication. Moving in numerous directions along the same plane. *The new technology is not complex; it is complicated*. A computer, a television set, a telephone, an automobile, a mill to grind grain all have one thing in common – they are all machines.

What McLuhan was looking for in his new electronic media has been here all the time. It can be reached with *any* medium – glance, gesture, music, words, paint.

The creative metaphor works because it brings things together that are *different in kind*. It works not only because of its surface technique, but because it reaches from what is open in the poet to what is open in the person who hears the poem. It touches what is beneath the surface. To leave that out is not to understand what a poem is. Our world is rich and varied and cannot be reduced to a set of ciphers, or a limited number of plots.

From the beginnings of our recorded history, there have been warnings about the dangers of making and worshiping images. Of mistaking the image for what it represents. The car is not our legs; the stick, our arms; the camera, our eyes – and the computer is not our brain. If we keep defining ourselves by our constructs instead of the living complexity we are; if we continue to view experience as a problem to be solved, the outside world as a manipulable pattern; if we continue to lose ourselves in machines we think we can control, that give us the illusion of certitude and power; if we continue to refuse responsibility for our own choices, throwing the onus back on inanimate matter, we give up any possibility of real and lasting change. We give up our own humanity.

To go against the prevailing definition of reality that one's society lives and, further, to struggle to change that definition, is one of the most difficult and revolutionary of all struggles, because it is to threaten the very structure on which society rests, what it values most.



# technology information sheet

## **JOB TRAINING**

Specific job definitions can be found in the Department of Labor's Job Titles Book available in the Reference Section of the Public Library.

Schools: The School of Continuing Education at New York University (Washington Square Campus) has an excellent computer program.

Some of the campuses within the city university system have various types of computer related training. Check Adult Education.

SCS, (212) 239-7000 has a certificate program in computer science and OIC, (212) 279-0100, (212) 636-7100 (Brooklyn) has a hardware and software program. Both schools are CETA eligible.

Women's Groups: Women in the Trades (212) 625-3776. N.E.W. (Non-traditional Employment for Women) (212) 420-0600.

## **FEMINIST BIBLIOGRAPHY**

ISIS #24, "Women & the New Technology." \$3.25. C.P. 50 (Cornavin), 1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland. Available at women's and some local bookstores. An overview of the effect of the new technology on women's work. Bibliography of resources – including women's groups.

*Taking Hold of Technology*, Topic Guide for 1981-83. \$4. American Association of University Women, 2401 Virginia Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20037. Excellent study guide for women. Perfect for women's study programs. Bibliography.

"Computerland is coming," by Linda Wittenberg. COMMONWOMON, Volume VI, #5. P.O. Box 242, Winooski, Vermont 05404. A lead article on the dangers of computerdom.

## **GENERAL BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Margaret Boden, *Artificial Intelligence and Natural Man*. Basic Books (paperback).

An extremely detailed, comprehensive, somewhat technical study. Positive toward artificial intelligence studies with qualifications.

Jeremy Campbell, *Grammatical Man*. Simon and Schuster (hardcover). A popularized, but not overly simplistic study of information theory by a definite advocate.

Michael L. Dertouzos and Joel Moses. (eds.) *The Computer Age: A Twenty-Year View*. M.I.T. Press (paperback). A comprehensive anthology covering all areas of computer study from the personal computer to politics. All men – and, except for Weizenbaum's essay, very enthusiastic about the new science, but packed full of information.

Lila L. Gatlin, *Information Theory & The Living System*. Columbia University Press. (hardcover). A book by a biophysicist tying together biology and information theory. One of Campbell's primary sources and much more rigorous.

Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*. (trans. & introduction by William Lovitt.) Harper Colophon Books (paperback). A very difficult anthology of Heidegger's thought on the dangers of technology, but more than worth the effort—especially the essay, "The Age of the World Picture."

Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media*. A Mentor Book (paperback). Where a lot of this originated. More interesting now than when written.

Bertrand Russell, *Mysticism and Logic*. Barnes and Noble (paperback). The classic on the benefits of scientific thinking.

Joseph Weizenbaum, *Computer Power and Human Reason: From Judgment to Calculation*. An excellent and highly readable explanation of the new technology and how it has gone awry. Full of information. Highly recommended.

The computer and information theory books all have extensive bibliographies for further reading.

# 13th MOON

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ZOE ANGLESEY has published poetry recently in *Sunbury 9*, #, *the Colorado State Review*, *Contact II* and others. She edited *Sunbury 9* and *Voices of New Women*. She was born in Forest Grove, Oregon, lived in the Pacific Northwest 20 years, has four daughters. Her book *Something More Than Force: Poems for Guatemala* was recently published by Adastra Press (Massachusetts).

FRAN BASKIN writes poetry, short stories and lives in New York City. She writes a weekly column on poetry and small presses for the *Villager* and has been active in organizing the New York Local of the National Writers Union.

BETH BRANT: Born and raised in Detroit. I am 41, a Mohawk, a lesbian, a cook. I live in a city where color is the rule, not the exception. I live in a city that is out of work, hungry, but sassy and spirited. Along with Denise Dorsz, I am co-owner of Turtle Grandmother Books, a mail-order service specializing in books by women of color.

FAY CHIANG is a poet and visual artist living in New York's Lower East Side and working in Chinatown. Since 1971, she has worked at the Basement Workshop with other Asian American artists developing Asian American culture. She was awarded a CAPS grant in 1982 and is currently working on a play.

CHERYL CLARKE (b. Washington, D.C.) lesbian poet in the tradition of the Afro-American. Taurus. Self-published first book of poems December, 1982: *Narratives: poems in the tradition of black women*. *Conditions* magazine editor.

JANE CREIGHTON was editor of the magazine "Sailing the Road Clear" from 1973 to 1978. Her book of poetry, *Ceres in An Open Field*, published by Out & Out Books is still available from Crossing Press. She is currently working on a travel book and is poet-in-residence in Edna, Texas.

ALEXIS DE VEAUX is a poet, playwright, novelist, freelance writer and performance artist born and raised in New York City. She has appeared on a variety of radio and television shows and has given numerous poetry/prose readings. She has written several plays and teaches writing and writing arts. She has published a novel, *Spirits In the Street* (Doubleday), an award winning children's book, *Na-Ni* (Harper and Row) and a unique biography of Billie Holiday, *DON'T EXPLAIN: A Song of Billie Holiday* (Harper and Row). The co-founder of FLAMBOYANT LADIES THEATRE COMPANY, she is also a Contributing Editor at *Essence* Magazine, and currently at work on a collection of short fiction and a novel.

MYRIAM DÍAZ-DIOCARETZ. Born 1951 in Chile. Poet, critic, translator. Ph.D. in Comparative Literature, SUNY at Stony Brook. Her work has appeared in several magazines, including *13th Moon*, *Letras Femeninas*, *Third Woman*, *Fem*, *Acta Literaria*, as well as in other journals in Spain, Latin-America and the U.S. She is author of *Que no se pueden decir*. Her book of poetry in translation *Adrienne Rich: Poems 1951-1981* will appear soon in Spain (Visor). She is currently writing on Black American women poets and editing an anthology of contemporary American women poets in translation. She recently finished a study of the poetry of Adrienne Rich, combining translation theory, semiotics, and feminism.

BEVA EASTMAN has a Ph.D. in Mathematics from Fordham University, teaches Mathematics at William Paterson College, and has enjoyed discovering the many uses of a personal computer this past year.



LYNETTE HIRSCHMAN has been active in the Women's Movement in Philadelphia for the past 12 years. She worked at New York University in the area of natural language processing for 8 years and now is the manager of a group in Artificial Intelligence in a Research and Development division of a major computer company in the Philadelphia area. She is interested in being in contact with other women in scientific and computer related fields to exchange ideas and information.

PATTI GAYLE JACKSON is a writer and a librarian who lives in Brooklyn. She is presently working on a collection of short stories and a novel.

JUNE JORDAN was born in Harlem and raised in the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood of Brooklyn where she began writing poetry at the age of seven. She is the author of 11 books, several of them award-winning, among them *Passion*, a selection of new poems, 1977-1981 and *Civil Wars*, a collection of political essays written between 1963-1980 (both published by Beacon Press.) She is professor of English at SUNY at Stony Brook. She has worked in film and in city planning, in addition to her many political activities, and has released two records of her poetry.

MELANIE KAYE grew in Brooklyn, now lives in Maine. She's written *We Speak in Code*, a collection of poetry available from Motherroot Press, and is a contributor to *Nice Jewish Girls/ A Lesbian Anthology* (Persephone Press) and *Fight Back! Feminist Resistance to Male Violence* (Cleis Press). She's a member of Di Vilde Chayes, a Jewish lesbian/feminist collective.

MARTHA KING's first collection of poetry, "*Weather*" was published in 1978 by New Rivers Press. Her poems and short stories have appeared in small press magazines including #, Chelsea, Glitch and others. Most recently, Lee/Lucas Press issued *Islamic Miniature*, a chapbook illustrated by Basil King, and one of her stories was selected for *Transatlantic Connections*, an anthology of current American fiction to be published in Scandinavia.

BEA KRELOFF is a painter who has exhibited in New York at the Brooklyn Museum, the Rosenhouse Gallery, Soho 20, Pratt Graphics Center, and the Stony Brook Museum among others. She moderated a panel at the International Festival of Women Artists in Copenhagen in 1980 and in February, 1983, she delivered a paper on "Power, Taste & Influence: The Dynamics of Collecting Women's Art" at the Women's Caucus for Art (CAA). She is presently chairperson of the Art Department at Fieldston School.

ANGELA LUECHT is working on an M.A. in Education, and specializing in Mathematics at William Paterson College. She taught Kindergarten students and enjoys creating supplementary mathematical activities which encourage children to think and grow for themselves.

LORRAINE MAGUIRE is studying Communication Design at Parsons School of Design.

JUDITH McDANIEL is a writer and teacher living in rural upstate New York. She has been published in *Conditions*, *Sinister Wisdom*, *Greenfield Review* and others. She has another novel, *Winter Passage*, looking for a publisher. She was a co-founder of Spinsters, Ink.

COLLEEN McKAY began her study of photography in Los Angeles in the early 1970's. During that time she was also very politically active in the women's movement and was one of the founders of the Los Angeles Women's Saloon. She has had her photographs published in numerous journals, magazines and newspapers including *The Nickel Review* and the *New York Times*. She is now staff photographer for *IKON* magazine and resides in New York City.

ROSARIO MURILLO is a poet and the Secretary General of the Sandinista Cultural Workers Association in Nicaragua.

DENISE PALMA studied Fine Arts for two years at Oneonta State College and is now in the Communication Design Department at Parsons School of Design.

SUSAN PENSACK's translations of the poetry of Alejandra Pizarnik have appeared or are scheduled to appear in *Open to the Sun* (Nora Jacquez Wieser, editor), a bilingual anthology of Latin American women poets, *13th Moon*, *The Poetry Miscellany* and *Sulphur*. Presently, she is working with Bill Zavatsky on translations of the haiku-like, sometime comedic one-liners called *greguerias* of the avant-garde Spanish man of letters Ramón Gómez de la Serna. In addition to ongoing acts of translation, Susan Pensack also writes poetry.



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

PATSY ROGERS is a composer and teacher who lives in New Suffolk, N.Y. "Hilda's Song" is from the ongoing collection WOMANSONGS, in which she has set to music poems written by women for performance by women's voices.

SUSAN SAXE, a lesbian/feminist, was jailed for anti-war actions in the 70's. She is now out and raising hell in Philadelphia.

ELLEN SHAPIRO lives in Brooklyn, N.Y. She was an editor of Out & Out Books and a 1982 CAPS recipient in fiction.

SUSAN SHERMAN edited the first series of IKON (1966-69). Two books of her poetry, *With Anger/With Love* and *Women Poems Love Poems* are being distributed by Crossing Press. She has just completed a manuscript of poems, *Drawing from Life* and is at work on a non-fiction book. She is presently on the part-time faculty of Parson's School of Design and N.Y.U.

RITA SPEICHER is the author of *Night Lives/Other Lives*, published by the Wild Goose Press. She received a CAPS award in poetry in 1981. Co-founder and Director of The Women's Writer's Center, 1975-1982, she is now a member of FREEHAND, an educational center for women writers and photographers in Provincetown, MA.

LUISA VALENZUELA. Born in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in 1938, was a journalist for many years until 1979 when she came to the United States as writer in residence at Columbia University. She has stayed in New York since. At present she is a Guggenheim fellow, a fellow with the New York Institute for the Humanities and a member of the Freedom to Write Committee at PEN American Center. She has published two collections of short stories with Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich and *The Lizard's Tail*, her novel translated by Gregory Rabassa, will appear June, 1983, from Farrar Straus and Giroux.

IRIS M. ZAVALA. Born 1936, Puerto Rico, she has received several fellowships, among them two Guggenheim fellowships. She was awarded the National Literary Award in Puerto Rico in 1964, 1965, 1972, and 1978. She has published 14 books of literary criticism on Spanish literature from the XVII to the XX century. She is co-author of *Historia Social de la literatura española*, the first Marxist literary history of Spanish literature (1979). She has edited several anthologies, including *The Intellectual Roots of Independence* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1980). Author of four books of poetry, her first novel *Kiliagonia* (Mexico, 1980) is scheduled to appear in English this year, published by Third Woman Press (Indiana University).

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