

E V E ' S R I B



NO. 2, 1988



renee rotkopf



sculpture: growing pains (above)
thought waves (left)

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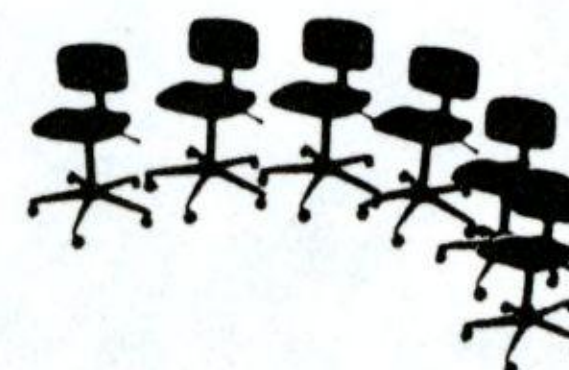
E V E ' S R I B



EDITOR'S NOTE

Freedom is the prerequisite to collective thinking and art is the manifestation of freedom, so we thought it only natural that a space for women's art be provided by a collective. Thus, we begat Eve's Rib. We found that art has a different meaning to all who experience it, and in this way it is a free-floating, free-living entity; a microcosm of the artist's spirit. We found that feminism is something we all experience individually, in our own words, on our own terms. Feminism, in a word, is freedom. Women often experience and express this freedom through their art; women in the arts is women in freedom. For those of us who participated in the editorial collective, Eve's Rib has been a vehicle for our own creativity: a matrix into which we have poured our love, vision and power, as women, as students, and as lovers of art and literature. The process of putting together this issue has excited, challenged, aggravated, exasperated and taught us. We hope that the magazine speaks out to you, as the product of our collective creative spirit.

The Editorial Collective, 1988



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Prinny Alavi © 1987



Eve's Rib, the feminist arts journal of Barnard College, is published annually. We accept submissions from students, faculty, and alumnae of Barnard/Columbia, as well as from artists and writers not affiliated with the University. We welcome submissions that are not sexist, racist, homophobic or otherwise discriminatory. Submissions can be sent to: Eve's Rib, McIntosh Center, Barnard College, 3009 Broadway, N.Y., N.Y. 10027. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means—graphic, electronic, photo copying, recording, without the permission of Eve's Rib and their Art Director, Prinny Alavi. Eve's Rib reserves the right to reprint any material which appears in this journal. All other rights revert to the authors or artists.

Sleeping Over

Franny French

IF or the most part we were alone, separated and secluded from the outside world. We finished just as the sun was going down. The twilight awakened us to our naked bodies; as if from a dream or a trance, in which, somewhere beyond nervousness, desire had struck us down. We'd fallen into what seemed an abyss of vulnerability, but, in our nakedness, we began again to think of the passage of time and other human interests of which the twilight reminded us. The transition from awkwardness to lust had not been as clearly marked as was the one from lust back to awkwardness, and so we were stranded there with each other, like two deserted people in a deserted place. At that time, more than any other, we had much to share. We were both tired, hungry, naked, sweaty and embarrassed.

The light bent up from Broadway, through the space between the shade and the window sill, and down to his face. It curled under his chin, nose, cheeks and forehead, making him look proud, prouder than he was. I thought of the light hitting my face in that way, making it angular as it sometimes is when I look at it in the mirror of my bathroom; cheek bones like Greta Garbo, but my face turned to mush, hard as I tried, I could not imagine it showing through the half darkness in the way his did.

I heard him get up and head for the shower, I thought of him washing me off. I heard him pull back the curtain and start to wash. Suddenly we were unequal, he was clean, and I was still sticky from the sex and the sweat of the night before. Soon I fell back to sleep, I dreamt of trains and travelling, but I was as big as a train, and

then I was running. His voice came from the bathroom, his morning voice, the one that wanted me to get out of bed instead of in it.

I pushed the elevator button, red arrow for down. Several times I pushed it, but I couldn't feel the elevator coming. I looked over at him closing the door. He looked suddenly heavy to me, almost fat in his polo shirt and zootish pants. I saw him as an old fat Southern man, maybe like his father. I heard him talk in a Southern drawl, and imagined that we were standing there years later than it was, looking very ordinary. When he turned round to me, it was him again. The drawl faded through the air, landed high up in a corner of the hallway and then burst like a soap bubble. "Did you see that?" I wanted to say, "you were fat and old and Southern for a minute there." When he turned round to me, it was him again.

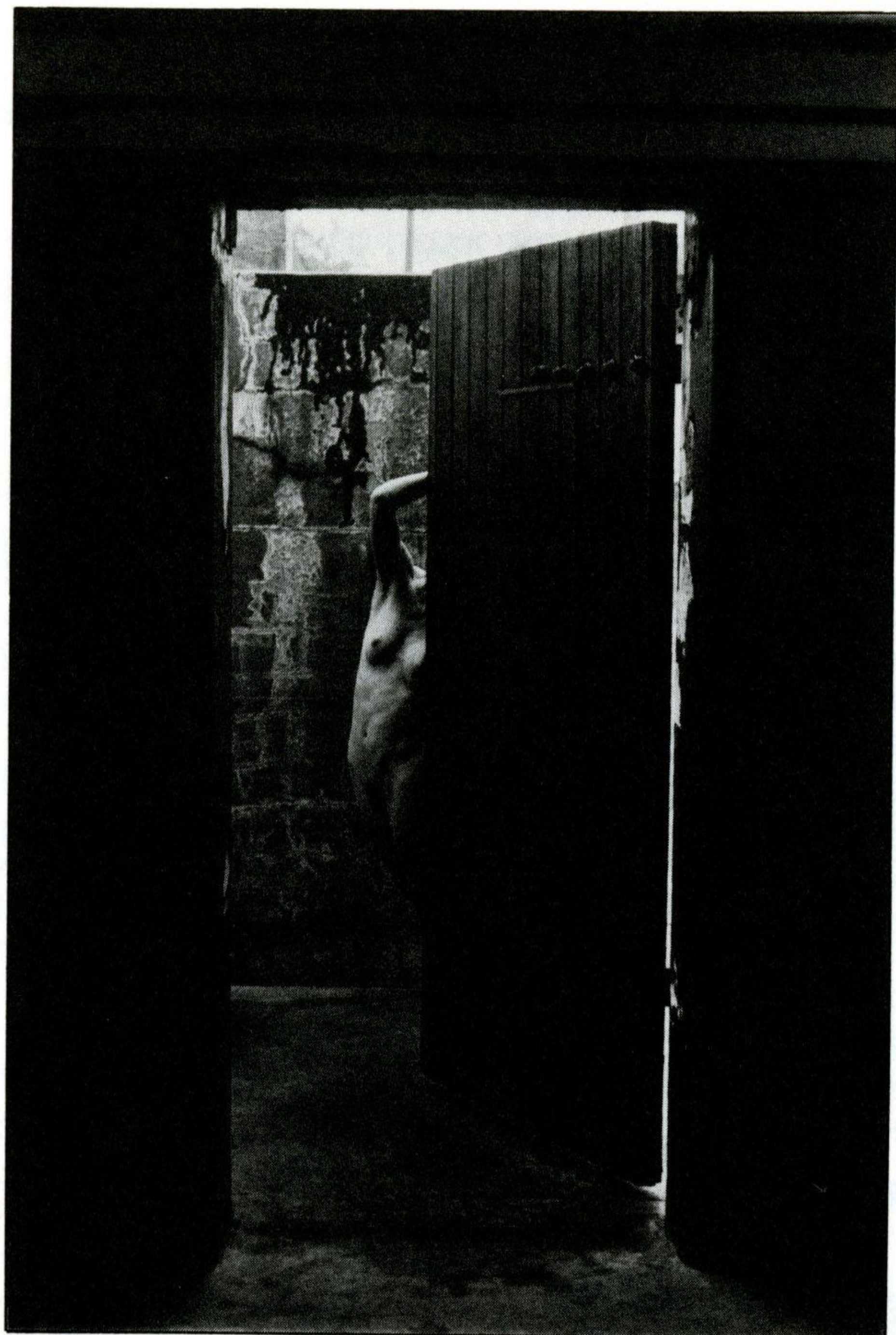
We rode the elevator down and kissed somewhere between eight and nine. He held his bookbag as if it were on his lap. "Damn, I didn't bring a pen," he said.

"I have one if you want," I said.

"You mean it?" he said, as if astonished that I would be so nice. "I won't give it back, you know."

"Keep it," I said.

On the street outside of his house we kissed again, and turning to walk away, I felt like my Greta Garbo self again. I turned round to watch him walking away, but the back of his head had a look that told me of course he wouldn't turn around. I saw a pigeon on the curbside of the street and I had the urge to stamp my foot and make it fly up, light as it was.



"The Fort" 1986, Prinny Alavi

By Last Light

You are making sunsets on the beach
guiding me through abandoned buildings
where the sea shines in
through missing windows

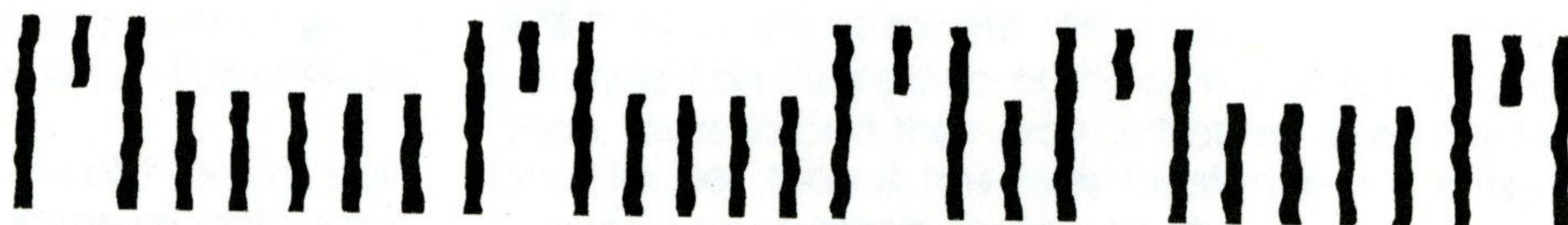
On the skeleton roof
it is cold
and I watch sand shiver below
as you hold me

And I hold you back
like you were still mine
pulling your warmth
against me

Until the sea
turns to black
and we are descending
condemned stairs

by last light.

Joan Dalin



strong, pressed-down thick pencil people everything
that is not them is space.
it must be a frightening definition
by negative borders.
I'll watch as he drops his head,
catching it in emptiness with
rounded palms, no inside cache,
like mine; a farmhouse attic
crawl space
for the inside baby—
adult needing
memories, and bringing first-love
letters to lips like pacifiers. having
no room for the child as father,
men strike out, descendants of
Vitruvius,
no tree stands
that straight.

I find no such proportion of reason
along my borders. it is said that we
women flower and it makes sense
even space is curved. perhaps that slow slope of
hips, that age-old compliance
is the answer
to imperfect spaces.
allies of the moon, daily cycles
are monthly cycles are life
cycles and as I follow these circles
I form an inside and
an outside. ruler, you
measure space, divide it
as you like, but the abstract
escapes. though I admire the simplicity of your additive properties,
this is no simple life.

the end of the story is:
I will take you
in my arms and
you won't find a formula
anywhere.

MEN

Amy Zalman

The lights were almost blinding as I stepped into the crowded auditorium. The applause grew to a thunderous cry. I stepped closer and closer to the neat little row of seats on the stage.

"Maman," I whispered to my mother's soul and spirit which I carried in my chest. "I am so proud of you and Papa."

The clip-clap-clap, as it rose to its loudest possible encompassing volume, reminded me of the strong Haitian rain as it beat rhythmically against the metal roof of my house and those of other houses nearby. I used to fall asleep bopping my head to the vibration of the rain as it forced itself onto my roof. I never felt so serene doing anything else.

I took my seat next to the two other well-dressed teenagers on the stage. Their satin caps and gowns glistened like well-polished silver coins officially decorated with the very large head of the president for life, the president forever. I was happy to know that mine looked the very same way.

"Now ladies and gentlemen," our principal said, as he turned quickly to face me. "It is with great pleasure on this very great day that I present to you the most successful members of this year's graduating class. First this year's inspiring address soon have the pleasure of hearing, Miss Laperle DesAntilles."

Graduation

My heart beat so loudly that I could hear it and, if I wished, dance to it. And with that I wished I were dancing.

Dancing elsewhere on top of a red and blue float of celebration, swaying my hands and smiling carelessly at a group of people with just as much a glow of exhilaration as I. Instead I was here, in a hot and jammed auditorium and I was filled with bitterness. Bitterness like that which is nursed by the green and unwanted sugar cane. Bitterness like that which overwhelms the heart of an unripe and unobserved mango accidentally picked up by a dry mountain rock.

The lights suddenly became unbearably blinding. As I tried to lift my feet to take me to the podium so I could recite my overly rehearsed valedictory address, I could not move myself.

"Maman," I pleaded. "Give me strength."

I felt more glued than ever, as though a huge basket made by baked starving little brown hands had fallen on top of me and swallowed me. "Papa, please help me," I begged. As soon as the words left my mouth I saw blood in front of me, blood as red as that which came out of the necks of roosters when Papa sliced them.

Pictures began to flash about me in all types of vivid colors. Soon images began to float in the air before me.

A young woman who works at a little newspaper and writes symbolic short stories about freedom and justice, is naked in a dim, stenching tiny room where roaches, mice and rats walk freely in and out. She hangs by her two wrists and blood flows from her neck. Her hair, her dark, coarse, beautiful hair is shaved and covers pieces of rotten bread and cheese on the foul floor. Every few minutes she is stabbed by a cigarette and pierced with laughter.

"Say something now!"

"Criticize your leader now!"

"Tell me how badly we rule!"

Her tongue falls out and she pleads for mercy and water. Mercy. But first water. Every supplication is appeased by an excruciating, slow slash with a razored whip.

Blood flows

and flows until the pieces of bread on the floor are soaked red.

"Your child is here! Your child is here! Watching. We'll have you all. We'll have your whole generation. One by one." In my chest I pray. God please let Maman die. She doesn't recognize me or else she would read the request on my face. Maman. Maman. Please. Die.

The basket was lifted momentarily, but I could see nothing except her face as it hung there cowardly dripping blood. Blood which she blows away from her lips with her hopeless, silent breaths. The applause hushed my voice as I cried. Maman. Maman. Please. Die!

I saw nothing until my face began to feel wet. As wet and cold as the poor Haitian farmer's feet which never had anything but dry air between them and the brown soil. The water is covering my face. I feel as though I am breathing my last breaths of air. I have no reason to go on. No reason to walk those last few feet to the beach. Maman dies. We flee. Papa falls overboard of the little homemade "boat" we take from Haiti. We lose him to the vastness of the ocean. A man on the boat yells, "No way we will give all the lives on this boat for just one life that's already lost anyhow." He does not even know my father. Another says, "One death for one trip is a great success. Let us thank the gods." They thank the gods joyfully.

My face is still wet when they put me in a filthy cell with two metal beds and six neighbors. We go to justice next month.

No one nudged me or told me to get up. Perhaps they could no longer see me buried with my pain, paralyzed on their stage at my own high school graduation. Tears forced their way out of my eyes. My heart beat louder than it has ever beaten in my entire life. I wanted my parents there with me.

I go before justice smelling of the avocado colored "food" they served the night before. I am so thin that my black skin falls in envelopes over my bones. After a month in the cells, the men—who also come to justice—have breasts bigger than mine. Someone dressed in a navy blue suit, carrying a black suitcase, says very professionally, "These Haitians here can't go back."

The judge asks me why I can't or don't want to go back. Don't I love my native country? How can anyone claim any kind of attachment to the human race if they have no pride in the land which bore their ancestors?

I say I love no country—no better or worse country—more than I love my country. I am here in your country because there are people in my own country who will pluck the hairs out of my skin and stab me with fire simply because my family has criticized the corruption, the thefts, and the murders. No one can put my words in the judge's language. I know he neither hears nor understands me. He neither wants to hear nor understand me.

There are people around us. Yellow, red, and almost beige people. They act as though they are not burdened with a burning wish to retell events which involve legal executions and human sacrifices. Yet they walk away with a square little green plastic card. I fall on my knees, devastated and destroyed. I plead in my Creole. Please let me stay. Please preserve me. Harbor me. Shield me. Guard me. Secure me. Surround me. Enclose me. House me. I sigh to justice. Justice. Please show me a little decency. I beg you. Come to my rescue. Save my life. They are bound to murder me. As soon as I set foot back on my soil, they will butcher me. They will slice me in fringy little pieces and their dogs will salvage me. They will decapitate me and stare into my silent eyes where finally they will find weakness and shame. They will make me suck my own blood through the straws of my guts. And every one who has ever spoken up will drink from me. No one will say anything. No one will know. The few who know will only live if they live in silence. I beg of you. Give me that paper. Let me stay. Save me.

I get no paper. I go as I came to prison.

Sweet voices floated outside the basket trapping me. What so proudly... twilight... bright stars through some night. Then some banners get waved over a land of the free and a home of the brave. Wasn't I brave enough?

A pastor comes into the hell and he prays for me. I think it is the day before I die or get deported because I cry and vomit all the time but no one comes to help me. And here comes this man with his Bible. Is he the first of the final rites? He asks me to confess all to God. Here God I confess all, I say. I hate this earth and everyone on it. I even hate this man of religion you've sent to me, because I know that if you find him a throne to rule he will become evil. So I hate everything and everyone and even you because you're evil for allowing people to become evil. I confess I want to go wherever Maman and Papa are. Whether they're above or below me, they can't possibly see as much evil as I'll be forced to see here.

Someone was speaking. I barely heard the familiar voice, but I recognized the words I did hear. Words urging self-love, pride, contentment, satisfaction. My valedictory address was full of the exact same words.

The pastor takes me to his home. His home has plenty of room. He takes in three men and two women besides me. My knees don't crack and I don't vomit. Soon I can walk very well again. I go to school and I like it very much. I especially like English. The sentences sound like songs full of notes created with the sounds of small rocks falling on large rocks in glass clear streams.

I like the school. I really like the chicken lunches. The children say, "it stinks." Sometimes I starve and don't eat it so they can't guess that in my country it could be a New Year's feast.

The children beat me and curse me. They curse my dress. They curse my speech. My body. My hair. My Haitianess. I get special beatings for my Haitianess. Sometimes, like Maman, I bleed. And like Papa, my dignity and claim to humanity drown in salty waters.

Applause screamed with everything but bitterness. Happiness, pride and love was all that drifted outside my tomb. Graduation. Graduation. Someone was almost whispering how meaningful a step it was.

I am proud now. I speak good English. Children beat me no more. I wear good clothes. I uncoarse my hair. I work, too. I have more money now than I need. How Americanized must I have become?

A laugh echoed around me. Americanized? I? The AIDS-carrier? The zombie? The voodoo beast? The caged? The homeless? The pitied? The despised? The feared? The ridiculed? And Americanized, too? Americanization? That is only the dream.

"This day," the principal announced, "is a milestone in all of your lives. As you sit here you should be thinking about how hard you've worked to get where you are now. In very small and of course limited ways, you should have relived parts of your yet very short lives which were, for you, the hardest of all.

"Cherish this moment in the perspective of how great and almost astronomical it is in the scheme of your lives. You have just begun. The sweeter parts of life remain ahead of you.

"Achieve them as you have achieved today. This very great and wonderful day. A day which will prove more enlightening and marvelous if you all—graduates—go out with all intentions of changing the worst thing which you have experienced in your lives so that all others yet to come will live to experience the difference you have made. Remember, those who know where they are going and remember where they've come from can neither be lost nor stopped."

The applause rose and rose until I could visualize it lifting the roof a bit higher. The bodies rose as well. In a great wave of unison. A sweet little song tingled my ears. I proudly carried myself out along with other members of my class.

A RECORD:

The first time ever I saw your face...

Amada Alcantara

I lay next to a sonogram monitor, shuddering from the cold treatment bed. They had made me drink a full quart of orange juice to expand my bladder. Robert, the room technician, smeared cold lubricating lotion over my abdomen and lower pelvis, then began rotating the square-shaped detector over my belly.

"Now don't move or you'll disturb the infant's position."

I giggled. My face felt flushed. It had never occurred to me that my movements influenced the position of the little person inside me.

"There, there, Mrs. Williams," Robert coached. "I know it's cold. Just breathe through your nose."

The jelly prompted my bloated bladder.

"I don't think I can hold the water in for long, you know!"

"Is that a threat, Mrs. Williams? Like all the other times you've been here. We always have this very same discussion. Don't we? Eh?"

"Yeah, yeah, I know. But what's a bloated woman to do? Besides, the last time I couldn't distinguish one thing from the other."

He pressed and rolled the detector directly above my bladder.

"I'm gonna burst. I know it, man."

"No, you're not. It's me pressing against your bladder."

"Whatever for?" I propped myself up on my elbows, causing the square sheet, my only covering, to fall to the floor. I had forgotten exactly how wide I had become during my seventh month of pregnancy.

"What have you . . . Don't, Mrs. Williams."

"Oops!"

"Don't reach for it. I'll get you a sterilized one. You young ones are the most restless, you know. If you don't be still we'll never get the testing done."

"I know. I know." I was frustrated. But I wanted to know if the baby was all right.

Robert pulled out my obstetrician's files.

"From the looks of this, Dr. Baxter wants more accurate measurements of the skull and the heart cavity."

"And the gender. What about the gender?"

"What about it? What about that book you've been reading? And what about your crazy vegetarian diet?"

"How do you know about those things?"

"It's here in your records. From the looks of it, you seem to be Dr. Baxter's adopted daughter. Everything he prescribes for you is such a big deal."

"Yeah, yeah, that's because I'm a negative on my second delivery. That's all. But how do you know about *The Teachings of Don Juan*?"

"I saw you reading it in the waiting room. I'm an Episcopalian, thank you."

Robert pressed again on the pubic bone and slowly pushed the detector over my belly button. He observed the monitor, taking breaks to jot down notes on the clipboard next to his stool.

"Hey, I think I'm gonna burst."

"So what does the Taki Indian have to say about being a negative mother?"

"So you're a skeptic."

Robert smiled to himself, unaware that I was looking at him.

"Not really. Just curious."

"Curious, Robert, you want to talk curious . . . Here I am at the end of the longest stretch of this pregnancy, and you want to talk curious! I don't even know if I'm carrying a deformed child, like that bitch Dr. Yon said I am."

"Now, now, Mrs. Williams. We're on your side. By the way, the fetus is completely formed now." He pointed to the screen. "See the bone structures?"

"No, I don't see bone structures. I see lots and lots of pathetic little dots. Like the ones I've been seeing every time I blow my bladder up and lie on this frozen slate."

"He did warn us about your temperament, you know," Robert said with a smile.

"Who? Budd?"

"Yes, Dr. Baxter."

"What on earth do you see?"

He looked over at my monitor. "Oh, your screen is maladjusted. Here, let me fix it for you." Robert fidgeted with

the screen for awhile. Then suddenly the dots became darker and more definite. I could see shapes, real shapes. Robert applied more jelly and rotated the detector.

"More waves should appear, to make a more distinct image. Wait, wait. See here, that's your spleen."

"Great, I have a spleen. Where's the kid? I'm nearsighted, you know."

"Yes, it's on your file." Robert rolled the monitor closer.

I felt a pang, from where I don't know. But I could see it! It wasn't like I expected it to be. It wasn't like looking at a child, all fleshy and soft. I saw beneath the skin. I saw what I had never before seen in a living thing: a living silhouette of a baby's skeleton. For a moment I was taken aback. I was afraid it was dead. I believed for a moment that that was all that was inside my stomach. All that had been in my stomach for seven months. I had been carrying a fetus without skin.

"Robert, where's the skin?"

My question, although quite serious, struck Robert as funny. He laughed.

"You've got to be joking, Mrs. Williams!"

"Hell no. I'm dead serious. Why can't I see my baby's skin and hair and face? You know, like a normal baby."

"Because this is not a normal situation, Jenny Williams. You're looking at sound waves of the fetus. The sound waves stop when they hit a solid mass. We're looking at what appears to be the skeletal and anatomical structure of the child."

"As long as the baby doesn't look like that when it's born, it's fine with me."

"Jenny, can we proceed with the testing?"

"Go on." In my excitement I had forgotten my bloated bladder. I became accustomed to the dots and soon was able to distinguish the different shapes. "What's that? Is that the skull? Look, it is the skull. And that's the eye socket, Robert. That's my baby's eye socket! And that ball in the eye socket. That marble. That's . . ."

"It's an eye, Jenny. Be still. Notice everytime you move, you jerk the fetus around. I'll show you the chest." Robert applied gobs and gobs of jelly over my belly button.

"Robert, that's a puddle." I tensed up a bit. "Robert, does that hole belong there?"

"I should say so, Jenny. That's the heart cavity."

"And that little yolk bobbing up and down . . ." I stopped for a moment. I was silent. I wanted to hear my mind resonate the word in my head for a moment. Heart. "Oh my God, Robert. I can see my baby's heart! She's alive."

Robert smiled. Try as he might his smile was not his usual professional grimace. This time I think he was actually moved. How could he not be? That little heart was beating steadily. With no signs of letting go.

"Yes, Jenny, and a well developed heart at that. Not too small, not too big."

"Let's find her hands, Robert."

"You're so sure it's a girl, aren't you, Jenny?" Robert traced the arm down to the elbow, then shot straight to the face. "I don't have to tell you what she's doing, do I?"

The baby was sucking her thumb. It moved in and out.

"Okay, let's check her legs." Robert shifted slowly to her abdomen, to a crevice, then to her legs.

"Wait a minue! Go back a bit. I saw a crevice."

"I'm not allowed to show the parents the infant's genitalia."

"Bullshit! It's a girl. I know it's a girl. Besides, I already have a boy. I've known it was a girl since I was a little kid. I just know I saw her vagina."

Robert was dealing with his professional ethics. He looked at the screen. I was propped up on my elbows, looking straight into his face.

"Dr. Baxter warned me about your temperament, but he grossly understated your diligence."

"Since you put it that way . . . well then . . ." He rotated the detector back to the groin area.

"It's my baby girl." I lay back, exhausted. Tears trickled past my temples. "Is she gonna make it, Robert?"

Is this story going to have a happy ending, I wondered? Seven months into a pregnancy I was told would never reach completion. Everything was wrong. Mother A negative, having second child of an O positive father. Bleeding the first three months. False labor every other month. Finally, under family pressures, I agreed to an abortion. The family made all the necessary arrangements, even taking my son for the weekend. And I leave them stranded in the hospital wings. Instead, I spend the day in the park, me and my belly . . .

And here we were together again. Around the bend. And what does my little girl do? She sucks her thumb . . .

I could hear Robert's voice slowly coaching me back.

"Let's wrap it up, Jenny Williams. The next time I see you it'll be in the delivery room."

Title song: Roberta Flack



LEXI LEBAN'S

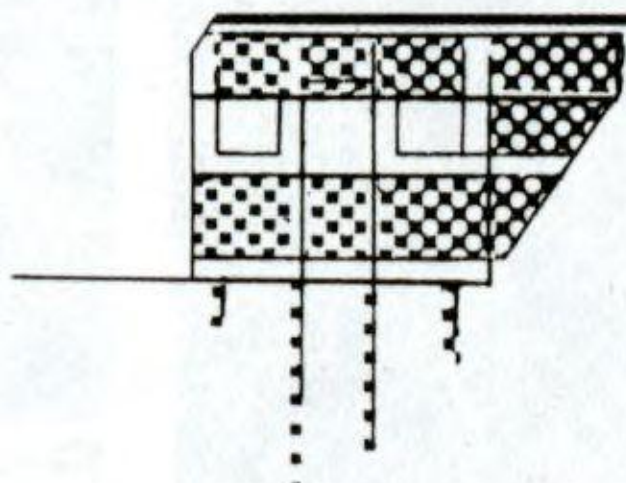
ACCELERATED

.....MONTAGE.....

New York City From One Woman's Perspective

All of the characters, events, and places depicted herein are not fictitious. Any resemblance to persons living or dead is purely intentional.

I do not claim objectivity. I have bias. Art is not life. Life is Art. "Reality" is always in quotes. I choose to share the following...



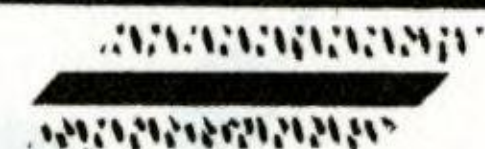
Part One — The Voyage Out

Syringe injected education
a drug in my veins
This rich white boys club is too empty
for me
So, here I stand
The coin is in the slot
I run for the train
I am afraid I will miss.
Aware of a menstrual stain
on the back of my lumberjack-like pants,
my paranoia sets in.
It is dangerous.
I could be exposed to ridicule, prejudice and
various other ills.
My coat is caught in the subway door.
I do not care
I am on the train at last
heading out to
Eat the City
I am tempted by this rotten apple.
Away from the
DULL GREY COLD DOMED PARTHENON
homerherodotussophoclesplatoaristotle
I am sick of
good people
against
bad things
I am in the subterranean world now.
I look around me inside the capsule
We are moving through
the dark wet tunnel
the stations flicker by
like a movie in fast forward
My eye is the lens
My mind makes the story.
First stop,
the doors open.
I release my coat from the door.

Part Two — Subterranean Blues

I sit.
Looking up I see
a blond haired, blue eyed boy
A cross hangs from his pierced ear
An old man crosses in front of the young boy,
sits down next to me and says hello
He takes my
"How ya doin'?"
as an invitation to tell me his life story
I pray he will get off at the next stop
He is disrupting my narrative
When he goes
my eyes pan the subway car.
Everyone is wearing a walkman
including the kid whose ear is pierced
He is probably listening to
"Born in the USA"
He is too young to know about Vietnam.
I laugh out loud
but nobody hears me
I take this opportunity to sing
"Everything's Coming Up Roses"
at the top of my lungs
It is more of a thrill
than singing in the shower.
I get no response
Blank stares, and heads nodding to the beat
This is what I see.
I hear a clink.
The drunk man at the other end of the car
who is walkmanless
throws a quarter at my feet.
I pick it up and keep it.
It is great to be able to earn a living
As a singer in New York City.
The woman sitting across from me is reciting
the ending of *Casablanca*
for the third time since I got on the train.
Her icy orbs stare into space
"It doesn't take a fool to know
that two people's problems don't amount
to a hill of beans in this crazy world.
Where I'm going you can't be
any part of..."
I wonder who told her she couldn't be a part of their
world.
Her look tells me
there is no such thing as love
between a

man
and a
woman.
There is only "and a" between them.
Bogie didn't love Bergman
nor she him
and out of the fog emerges
Ilsa and Rick
the beginning of a
"Beautiful Friendship"
I smell Ralph Lauren perfume and hear
the voice of Charles Nelson Reilly
Talking hands fly through
the air.
I look through the double doors
I see a young black teenage boy and a
cop
I cannot hear
but I know the words that pass between them
The cop is arresting the boy
for smoking a cigarette
A wall of racism
hate, anger, power
have made the confrontation predictable.
The handcuffs slam shut
I do not want to be a spectator.
I want to light a cigarette
I want everyone on the train
to light a cigarette
the cop
will have to arrest all of us
But then there is that walkman problem.
no one else noticed
I am overwhelmed.
I look up at the ads above me to avoid the problem
PLANNED PARENTHOOD
MARLBORO CIGARETTES
CHILD ABUSE HOTLINE
WILFRED BEAUTY ACADEMY
AIDS HOTLINE
CRACK PUEDE MATAR
ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS
Dizzy



RATED

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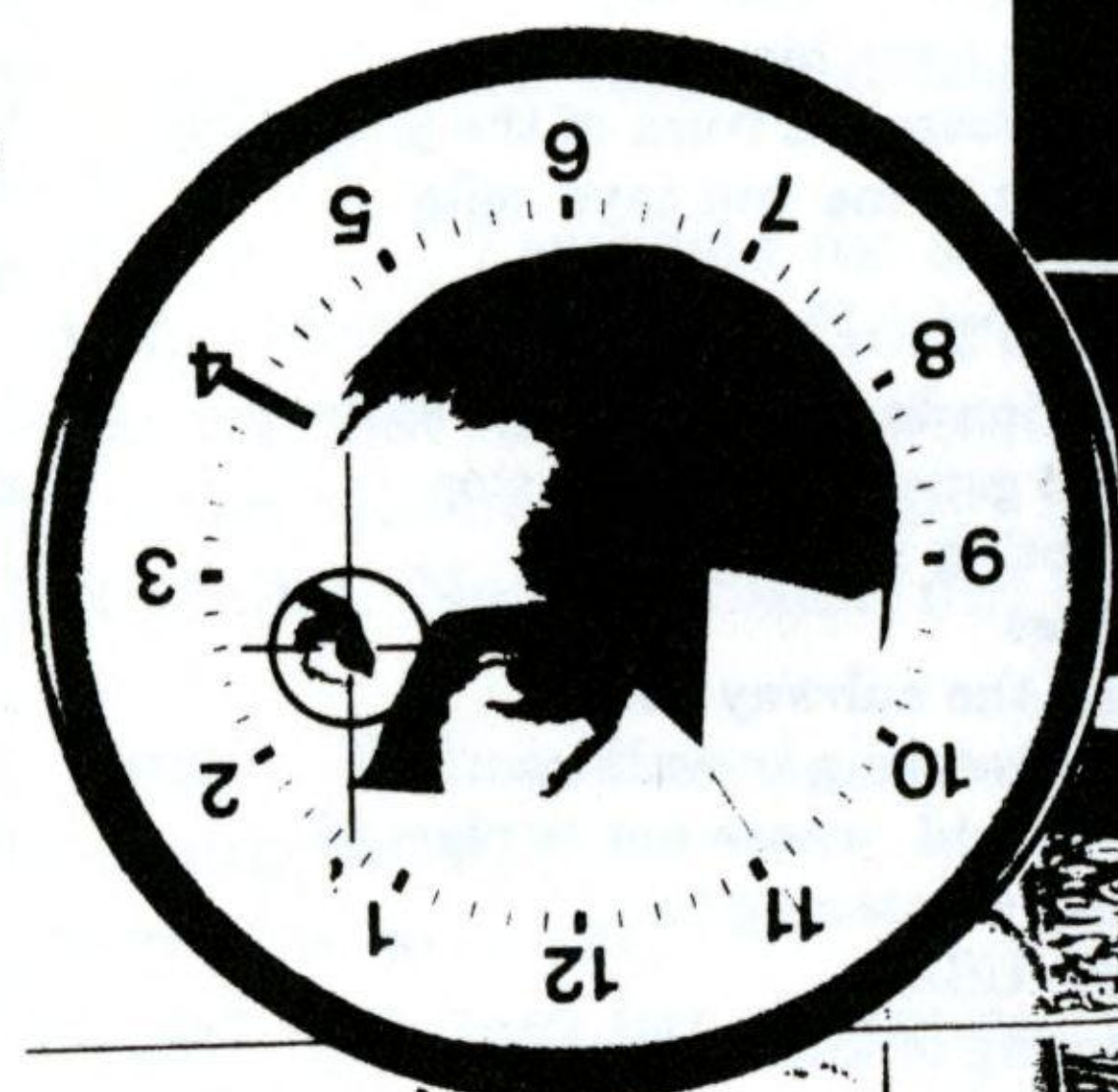


Palavi ©88

I stand up to walk to the front of the train
Looking down at the tracks
I think
of rollercoasters and wind through my hair
I cannot see what is around the corner
Until I am already there.
I have no plan
I am just moving down the track.
I decide I want to get off this train.
Through my thoughts
I hear the announcement
"This train will now be making
express stops"
The doors close
It is too late to get off
I am on my way to Brooklyn.

Part Three — Girls Just Want to Have Fun

I no longer observe and judge
That was too easy and too depressing
Now I act.
I am a lone runner in Riverside Park
breathing in the hydrocarbon haze
"I ain't missing you at all"
Blasts through the earphones.
Yes, I have succumbed to the walkman craze
It makes New York so much more beautiful
my pace quickens
"I ain't missing you at all."
I sing out loud with John Waite.
I know I am off key
I do not care that I am alone
I love being by myself
I am happy to be alone
I love being alone
I don't need anyone
I love solitude
I really love to have time
alone.
A young man is running toward me.
He perfects his style
speeds up his pace
trips
and falls
passing him
I laugh and feel no guilt
I am a bartender at night
A man leans over the counter
and breathes scotch into my face
"Do you do blow jobs?" he asks.
"Is that a new drink?" I reply.



Am I
Normal?





I am sitting on a bench in the park
A man sits next to me.
"Don't I know you?" he asks
I begin my monologue
I am 1/4 Native American 1/4 Japanese
and 1/2 Jewish American Princess
I am a member of the Sioux tribe
I believe in inner space,
reincarnation,
and Shirley MacLaine
I am a struggling performer
taking yoga
and going to business school at Columbia
"Oh really, what a coincidence" he says, "me too."
I exit stage left
I eat three pieces of pizza that I buy
at three different joints
The string of cheese
that extends from the pizza to my mouth
is one foot long
and I spatter tomato sauce on my shirt
Luckily, I am wearing red.
I twirl down the street
singing "Nasty Boys"
and looking up at the sky
No one stares
This is New York
I love it.
I cannot imagine myself
on any other pavement.
Another new friend in a dark bar
Five minutes and we are talking about
peace and love, Reagan and war
He asks me to marry him and have *his* kids
and go with him to Africa
I say yes
One half hour later we are both too drunk
to remember we are engaged
I leave the bar alone.
It begins to rain
From out of nowhere
the umbrellamen appear
\$2.00
I buy an umbrella
I am sitting alone in a restaurant
listening to a couple talk about
their dog Barcus for forty-five minutes
how his shit is really easy to pick up with
the pooper scooper and how he likes certain
breeds of dogs better than others.
I laugh out loud
I catch the people at the other table
trying to stifle their laughter
We are all laughing at the conversation
I leave feeling less lonely
It rains.
I buy an umbrella

Under the covers I am curled up
with a man I do not know
It feels warm and soothing.
The heat from his body
feels warm against my stomach
I open my eyes and look at his chest
I do not want to know his eyes or his face
I look over his shoulder, and out the window
as I reach down between his legs
to draw him inside me.
I ignore his sounds
and concentrate on the water running down
the window pane
the water dripping in the sink
I cannot come.
And I do not pretend.
Drunken dancing at night in a club
tomorrow I will miss the day
I will watch my four T.V.'s which
I found on the street at christmastime
Each gets a different Spanish UHF channel
I do not speak Spanish.
A whole apartment full of junk
It rains, I buy an umbrella
Inside the bar, there are only women
She touches my arm and I follow her outside
My heart is racing
as we crisscross a hundred streets.
I am not paying attention to where
we are going
For five flights I look at the spot
where her hair hits her back.
In her room she reads me her poetry
as if after this I will know her
Her voice is deep and soft.
I stroke her hair
I listen to her words carefully
Weaving my hand into her hair
I draw her toward me
and our lips meet
Her tongue slides into my mouth
We fit so well together
She reaches down, unzips my jeans
the sound of the zipper is extremely loud
my thoughts skip a step
and I feel her fingers inside of me
she draws the wetness out
and rubs it around my clitoris
I take hold of her hand, I am still afraid to receive
She lies back
I am going to give her all that I have to give
I touch her and kiss her
I kiss her fingers, arms, breasts, stomach
I part her vaginal lips and press my mouth
into the warmth and wetness there
I can hear her breathing
I love her response

She pulls me up to her embrace
I feel her body against mine
she is having orgasm
she wraps her legs around me
and rocks me back and forth.
I think that love
is not an easy thing to receive
She has handled herself well.

Part Four — Easy as ABC, Do Re Mi

From the caverns of dead men
and dead language
I am now among the living
I feel the beat of the music of the city
My journey back is filled with confusion
Going back to the University
I try to sift my experiences
through the philosophy I read
It doesn't mean much now.
116th and Broadway
The doors open
The doors close
I stay on the train.



EXIT



VEGETABLES

Complacent
Contented
Contemplative cattle
sit silently together
Alone with a ball of warm spit
Grass and juice—
Coffee and a newspaper
They stare at a box
Lowing in the right places
Once
The cattle were eaglets
Warm and soft
Strong and safe
Surveying the landscape made for them
To soar above
Until—
That perfect spot loomed up
A nest
A barn
A life

Now cattle
Now weary
Are sitting silently together
Alone with a ball of worn dreams
Waiting
To become
Vegetables

E.A. Goldschmidt



Photograph by Karen Tweedy-Holmes

T

MELANIE HAHN

THE DOUBLE EDGED SWORD

OF HERMENEUTICS:
SOME FEMINIST
RESPONSES TO

THE PROCESS OF INTERPRETATION IN JUDAISM

"All the new thinking is about loss./In this it resembles all the old thinking./The idea, for example, that each particular erases/the luminous clarity of a general idea. That the clown-/faced woodpecker probing the dead sculpted trunk/of that black birch is, by his presence,/some tragic falling off from a first world/of undivided light. Or the other notion that,/because there is in this world no one thing /to which the bramble of *blackberry* corresponds,/a word is elegy to what it signifies./We talked about it late last night and in the voice/of my friend, there was a thin wire of grief, a tone/ almost querulous. After a while I understood that,/talking this way, everything dissolves: *justice, /pine, hair, woman, you and I...*" — Robert Hass, "Meditation at Lagunitas"

"Indeed, all Jews who are preoccupied with fashioning a Jewish life have a stake in understanding the Halakhah (Jewish law). Regardless of their definition, secular or religious, all forms of contemporary Jewish life must arise out of a confrontation with the past. Whether one lives in harmony with tradition or in tension with it, one must contend with that tradition. Comprehending the Halakhah is necessary for a Jewish life, whether one seeks to follow Jewish law or depart from it." — Rachel Biale, *Women and Jewish Law*, p.8

"Breaking out of the circle requires anger, the 'wrath of God' speaking God-self in an organic surge toward life. Since women are dealing with demonic power relationships, that is, with structured evil, rage is required as a positive creative force, making possible a breakthrough, encountering the blockages of inauthentic structures. It rises as a reaction to the shock of recognizing what has been lost--before it had even been discovered--one's own identity. Out of this shock can come intimations of what human being (as opposed to half-being) can be. Anger, then, can trigger and sustain movement from the experience of nothingness to recognition of participation in being." — Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, p.43

Religion is about structuring the world. It is about giving order to the world in the face of utter chaos. It is about the pure and the impure. It is about imbuing the world with meaning, usually with divine approval. One can also see religion as being about interpretation: out of all the ways of looking at the data which the world presents to us, we choose a given world-view or system of beliefs. We voluntarily narrow our focus and categorize the world in one way instead of another.

In Judaism, this narrowing of focus is a complicated idea, because while Judaism does, of course, have a world-view, and a body of texts which are canonical and closed to re-vision, it also has built into it a flexibility or process of interpretation.

In regard to women, this complicated idea becomes more problematic, because women's lives are legislated in Judaism, but women have not (traditionally) participated in the process of legislation. This paper deals with attempts within the Jewish feminist community to come to terms with what I label the double-edged sword of process of interpretation in Judaism, as well as with the religious tradition as a whole.

In Judaism, canon is a problematic idea, as others before me have demonstrated. On the one hand,

there is a written body of laws, the Torah, which was revealed to the Jews in the desert at Mt. Sinai, after their liberation from centuries of bondage in Egypt. This is the Written Torah. There is also the Oral Torah, which is the whole body of interpretation on the Written Torah. This corpus of interpretation is believed at one and the same time to be the work of real commentators in history, and, since God is all-knowing, and must have known all future interpretations, to have been revealed at Sinai along with the Written Torah. Thus, canon, which we defined as that which is closed to revision, is, in Judaism, wide open to interpretation. There is an entire body of interpretation in Judaism stretching from roughly 200 C.E.,¹ with Judah Ha-Nasi's compilation of the Mishnah, through to the present. Nor is the interpretation dying out today. Witness the proliferation of Midrashim (commentaries on the text of the Bible).² Witness also the recent decision to ordain women as rabbis in the conservative movement, which was based on a reinterpretation of women's obligation to perform the commandments (mitzvot).³

Therefore the process of interpretation is alive and kicking in Judaism, even within the rigid confines of canon. Yet this process itself has two com-

ponents, which problematize what would otherwise be a fairly straightforward understanding of canon. On the one hand, there is interpretation for the sake of interpretation, as evidenced by the methodology used to study text. In Hebrew, the words for "study" and "learn" are identical. One studies or learns Torah by reading, but reading is not an individual process. Indeed, reading is nearly synonymous with discussing, with talking and exchanging ideas. One learns Torah in groups of two or three in a room with other students who are involved in the same process. The room is generally noisy; one learns by discussion and interpretation. This is one side of process in Judaism, which I label strictly "interpretive". It is *x*, studying and interpreting Torah, for the sake of *x*, for the sake of studying and interpreting Torah. This method is the basis of hermeneutics in Judaism.

The second component of the hermeneutic process in Judaism is related to the first, which is purely interpretive. This latter element I would label "legislative". This method involves the same technique of reading and discussing, but it also involves legislating prescriptions for life. It is *x*, studying and interpreting Torah, for the sake of *y*, legislating how Jews should live. Halakhah, or Jewish law, is an outgrowth of this process. Halakhah includes the Mishnah, of which one book of six is addressed specifically to women.

The process of Jewish interpretation is problematic in regard to Jewish women. Jewish women are excluded from the first method, interpretation, yet are very much included in the prescription for life covered in legislation. Thus Jewish women are in a strange predicament: they have had no authority in the process of shaping the canon, and yet, by their very definition, as women, there is a great corpus of material which legislates about their lives.

An understanding of the Jewish feminist movement and of all Jewish women's relationship to their tradition, must be traced to this division of process in Judaism. The paradox of the relationship between Jewish women and Jewish process of interpretation is that so many aspects of Jewish women's lives are covered by the legislation, yet women even today are not permitted to help legislate. Rachel Biale, as cited in the epigraph, points out that Jewish women cannot outrun or ignore the tradition. They cannot, especially in light of the Holocaust, simply opt not to be Jews. Rather they must engage in the hermeneutics which characterize Judaism. That is what she means by the statement that "all forms of contemporary Jewish life must arise out of confrontation with the past." By writing *Women and Jewish Law*, Biale intends for Jewish women to be aware of the two elements of process in Judaism, and she feels that women must begin to engage in that process themselves. This idea is a fairly radical one in Judaism. Most Jew-

ish feminists, who are trying to reconcile womanhood and feminism and Judaism, agree.

The Jewish feminist movement is only about twenty years old in the United States, and, as a young movement, it is represented by a full range of often contradictory opinions and beliefs. The simplest and most accurate understanding of the diversity which characterizes this community is provided by Jacob Neusner (who, it happens, is far from feminist). Neusner, in a little known, yet brilliant essay entitled "Thematic or Systemic Description: The Case of Mishnah's Division of Women,"⁴ provides a schema of methodologies which neatly summarizes the position of women in the Jewish tradition. He discusses two ways of examining Judaism and the treatment of women in the religion. The first is *thematic*. It looks at the theme of women in Judaism. Using this method, scholars collect data on women in a multitude of Jewish sources, and based on this catalogue of information, draw conclusions about different aspects of Jewish women's lives. The second method is *systemic*. This method looks at Judaism's treatment of women in the context of Judaism's treatment of other elements, in order to discern the system of Judaism which provides the basis for such treatment. To clarify: the first method involves listing the treatment of women in Judaism in terms of such aspects of life as law and leadership, women's relationships, women's involvement with Jewish communal life, and so on. The second method involves studying the treatment of women in a single given source, for example the Mishnah, and comparing this to the treatment of other elements dealt with in the same source. In the case of Mishnah, these other elements are 1) agricultural rules, 2) laws about festivals, 3) the system of civil and criminal law, 4) laws for the conduct of the cult and the Temple, 5) laws on the preservation of cultic purity in the Temple and in the domestic realm. The latter, systemic method is used to discern the system or world-view implicit in Judaism. Despite the fact that Neusner's article is astute in clarifying the position of women in Judaism, nothing has been written within the Jewish feminist community which uses the systemic method. I will return to the systemic method below and address why Jewish feminists would benefit from such a method, but first let us return to the first method, the thematic method, which is widely used by scholars in the Jewish feminist community.

At one extreme of the thematic method in Jewish feminism is Blu Greenberg, who is committed to both Orthodox Judaism and some aspects of feminism. In her book *On Women and Judaism: A View From Tradition*, she writes that both Judaism and feminism are ethical systems based on equality:

"Throughout the centuries, Judaism generated revolutionary ethical teachings. Why will it not now in-

corporate the lessons of feminism? Equality in various spheres long has been fundamental to Judaism; indeed, biblical teaching enjoins equality before law, equal ownership of property, equality of all men. Logically, therefore, should not feminist goals be embraced by Judaism today as a means of achieving equality for men and women in the eyes of God and the community?"⁵

This statement sums up Greenberg's position. Greenberg is a thematic Jewish feminist in that she considers such topics as Jewish women and liturgy, Jewish women and Niddah (the laws concerning menstruation), and Mikveh (the ritual bath), Jewish women and divorce, Jewish women and abortion. She concludes, in every area, that with a few touch-ups for equality's sake, Halakhah is quite valid and enriching for Jewish women. She ignores the fact that every topic she covers concerns women's relationships with men—there is no acknowledgement that women have areas of life which exist apart from men. Greenberg doesn't mention these other realms of life because they do not concern her, just as they did not concern the traditional commentators (poskim). Her primary goal is to encourage Jews to continue to identify with Judaism. Cynthia Ozick states: "Her book is an inescapable invitation to the audacity of the conscientious commitment."⁶ Note that commitment is to Judaism. Greenberg utilizes feminism because it happens to be compelling.

Another Jewish feminist writer who utilizes the thematic method is Susan Weidman Schneider, editor of *Lilith* magazine, and author of *Jewish and Female*. *Lilith* magazine is:

"named for the legendary predecessor of Eve who insisted on equality with Adam. After the Holy One created the first human being, Adam, He created a woman, also from the earth, and called her 'Lilith.' Adam said, 'You are fit to be below me and I above you.' Lilith said, 'We are equal because we both come from the earth.'"⁷

Lilith magazine is based on this history of equality which exists in mystical Jewish tradition, but which was suppressed. It is published quarterly and contains articles on liturgy, contemporary events, and theology. The magazine also contains fiction, poetry, and artwork. It includes news of Jewish women's activities internationally, and resources on every topic imaginable of concern to Jewish women.⁸

In addition to *Lilith*, Weidman Schneider has also published a tremendous (650 pages) sourcebook entitled *Jewish and Female*. The book includes three general sections: "Women and Religious Judaism: Beyond the Patriarchal Promise," "Defining and Transforming Our Relationships," and "Power and Participation in the Jewish Community." This handbook is organized topically to allow Jewish women to quickly acquaint themselves with Halakhah and to familiarize them-

selves with resources and options for coping within the Jewish community. Much like *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, a book first published in the early seventies to familiarize women with their bodies, their unique health concerns and the health care system available to women in this country, *Jewish and Female* is a broad thematic overview of concerns unique to Jewish women and ways in which the Jewish community does or does not address these concerns.

There are other Jewish women who write thematically about mixing Judaism and feminism. Susannah Heschel and Cynthia Ozick demand mention here and are worthy of further attention. Ozick in particular should be read because she argues, with the honesty and articulateness which characterize all of her work, that Judaism needs feminism in order to maintain the dynamism necessary for its very survival as a religious tradition.⁹

Since Ozick talks about the dynamism necessary to maintain the system of Judaism, her position marks an excellent bridge into Neusner's systemic method. At this point, there is no one that I know of who identifies herself or himself as a "Jewish feminist" who is also using this systemic approach. The systemic method, we will recall, is based on looking at the context in a given Jewish source's treatment of women. Thus, if we look at one source, in this case Mishnah, we find that Mishnah as a whole is concerned with an orderly concept of reality.¹⁰ Mishnah's section on women is concerned with making women fit that conception of reality. Through an intense study of the seven tractates which concern women, Neusner accurately concludes that each of the tractates is somehow concerned with "the formation, duration and dissolution of marriages."¹¹ Or to be more specific: "Mishnah's system of women deals with the transfer of women and of property associated with that transfer."¹² After examining the other topics besides women which are covered by Mishnah, Neusner concludes with a view which is definitely systemic, and which should come as no surprise: Mishnah as a whole legislates about things which are abnormal or anomalous. In the perspective of those men who wrote the Mishnah, women are abnormal, and men are normal. Neusner summarizes:

"Let me spell this out. Mishnah cannot declare a dead creeping thing clean. Mishnah cannot make women into men. It can provide for the purification of what is made unclean. It can provide for a world in which it is normal for woman to be subject to man—father or husband—and a system which regularizes the transfer of women from the hand of the father to that of the husband. The regulation of the transfer of women is Mishnah's way of effecting the sanctification of what, for the moment, disturbs and disorders the orderly world. The work of sanctification becomes necessary in particular at the

point of danger and disorder. An order of women must be devoted, therefore, to just these things, so as to preserve the normal modes of creation ('how things really are') so that maleness, that is, normality, may encompass all, even and especially at the critical point of transfer."¹³

That is, using the systemic approach, what becomes obvious is that women are ultimately problematic and anomalous because in their very essence they represent a challenge to the idea that maleness is the only normal way for things to be.¹⁴ Neusner argues persuasively that the thematic method doesn't lead to any sound conclusions, but simply to catalogues or lists of treatment of a particular theme. Yet his systemic method, while it may be more accurate both in terms of understanding one religious tradition—Judaism—and religious traditions in general, is not very encouraging for women who want to be active, "normal", dynamic human beings. Jewish feminists have tended to stay away from this method precisely because they are trying to reconcile their Judaism with their feminism. It is a question of aims. The systemic method makes such a reconciliation virtually impossible, because it reveals, in the end, that from a traditional Jewish viewpoint women are considered abnormal, something to be regularized and controlled.

Ironically, some feminists and feminist theologians are saying the same thing as Neusner but with a slightly different twist. Adrienne Rich, who has reached the same conclusions as Neusner but who expresses them in poetry and social commentary, writes of women's awareness of their anomalous position as exhausting—profoundly exhausting, physically, mentally, emotionally. Mary Daly describes a similar awareness in her early work when she discusses "women's liturgy." She discusses women's attempts to rescue liturgy from patriarchal religious traditions (and here I define patriarchal as that which sees male as "normal" and female as "abnormal" or "anomalous") as hopeless, because the form of liturgy itself is patriarchal and perpetuates the view of women as anomalous.¹⁵

These feminists' views agree with Neusner in terms of their pessimistic view of women as anomalous. But there is also an optimistic, even revolutionary view of women's anomalous position, which makes Neusner's systemic method more palatable to feminists who want to stress that Jewish women can still be involved with tradition in a positive way. This view is expressed by the third epigraph to this paper. Women as "anomalous," "abnormal" beings are in a fine position to see the limits of thought-systems, including canon and religious traditions which see any element as anomalous. Because of women's anomalous position in Judaism as expressed in Mishnah, for example, women can simultaneously learn Jewish hermeneutics and legislate Jewish law which moves

away from the fundamental fear of the anomalous. The same is true in other religious traditions. Women's awareness based on anger about their anomalous place, their lack of identity, can "sustain movement from...nothingness to recognition of participation in being...[and can offer] intimations of what human being (as opposed to half-being) can be" --for men as well as women.

In *The Ritual Process*, Victor Turner puts forth his view that members of societies are engaged in a dialectic between needing a structured world-view, and rebelling against that structure. Neusner does not mention Turner's dialectic, yet it runs implicitly throughout his argument and terminology. I suggest that women can lead the way in an acknowledgment of the whole process of the dialectic. When we human beings acknowledge the legitimacy of chaos, which, in patriarchy, women represent not simply historically, but intrinsically, in their bodies (as they differ from men's and in their ability to bear children), and when we recognize the need for order, we will be on the way toward really imbuing the world with meaning. I suggest that the three epigraphs which opened this paper can be viewed as a spiral: we begin with loss and dissolution of our thinking about religion (crisis of belief), we move to a wrestling with tradition. We move to shape new tradition, which cuts through the old. This new tradition in turn gives way to loss and the whole schema goes round again. This is what process is about. This is what formation of canon is about, and ultimately, this, it seems to me, is what religion and the study of religion is about.



Notes

1 C.E., or Common Era, is a phrase adopted by Jews who do not wish to use the term A.D., i.e. Anno Domini or Year of Our Lord, which refers to Jesus and the Christian tradition.

2 For example, "In Light of Genesis", a poem by Pamela White Hadas, which includes a long midrash entitled "The Departures and Voices of Sarah" was performed and videotaped as a reading/interpretive movement performance piece with drumming, lights and multi-media by Caroline Libresco and Alex Weil, Oberlin College, December 1985, December 4, 5, 1986.

3 The decision to admit women to rabbinical school at Jewish Theological Seminary was based on a reinterpretation that states that if women want to take on the mitzvot, which in Halakhah they are not obligated to observe, they must assume the same responsibilities as men.

4 The most relevant of several important essays included in *Method and Meaning in Ancient Judaism*, Missoula, Montana, Scholars Press, 1979.

5 Greenberg, Blu, *On Women and Judaism: A View From Tradition*, p.3-4

6 Cynthia Ozick's review/blurb on Greenberg's book goes directly to the heart of the matter. Greenberg is primarily concerned with Jewish commitment.

7 From the Alphabet of Ben Sira 23a-b, as cited on the masthead of *Lilith*.

8 A recent issue was published in Summer 1986/5746, and included an interview with Pauline Bart, co-author of *Stopping Rape*, on why Jewish women get raped. The magazine also included an article on new ways for women to use the Mikveh (ritual bath), which takes this ritual from being the preface to sexual intercourse with one's husband after menstruation, and makes it into a women's ritual having nothing to do with men or Niddah (the laws concerning menstruation). There was also an article on Renee Epelbaum, one of the "Madres" of Argentina who are trying to discover the fate of 30,000 people abducted by the army in that country from 1976-83 who are still missing. This issue was typical in the breadth of topics covered by the magazine.

9 See Cynthia Ozick, "Notes toward Finding the Right Question" in Susannah Heschel's On Being a Jewish Feminist, New York: Schocken Books, 1983

10 See Jacob Neusner, "Mishnah's Division of Women", pp. 79-100.

11 Ibid, p.88.

12 Neusner, p.93.

13 Neusner, pp.96-97.

14 I would add that this also becomes obvious cross-culturally if one takes into account the work of Victor Turner and Mary Douglas.

15 Daly writes: "A 'feminist liturgy' is a contradiction in terms, given the legitimating function of liturgy in patri-

archy to support sexism and consequently its offshoots: war, racism and all the destructive hierarchies of economic oppression. It is an attempt to put new wine, women's awareness, into the old skins of forms that kill female self-affirmation and turn female consciousness against itself." Mary Daly, Beyond God the Father, p.145.

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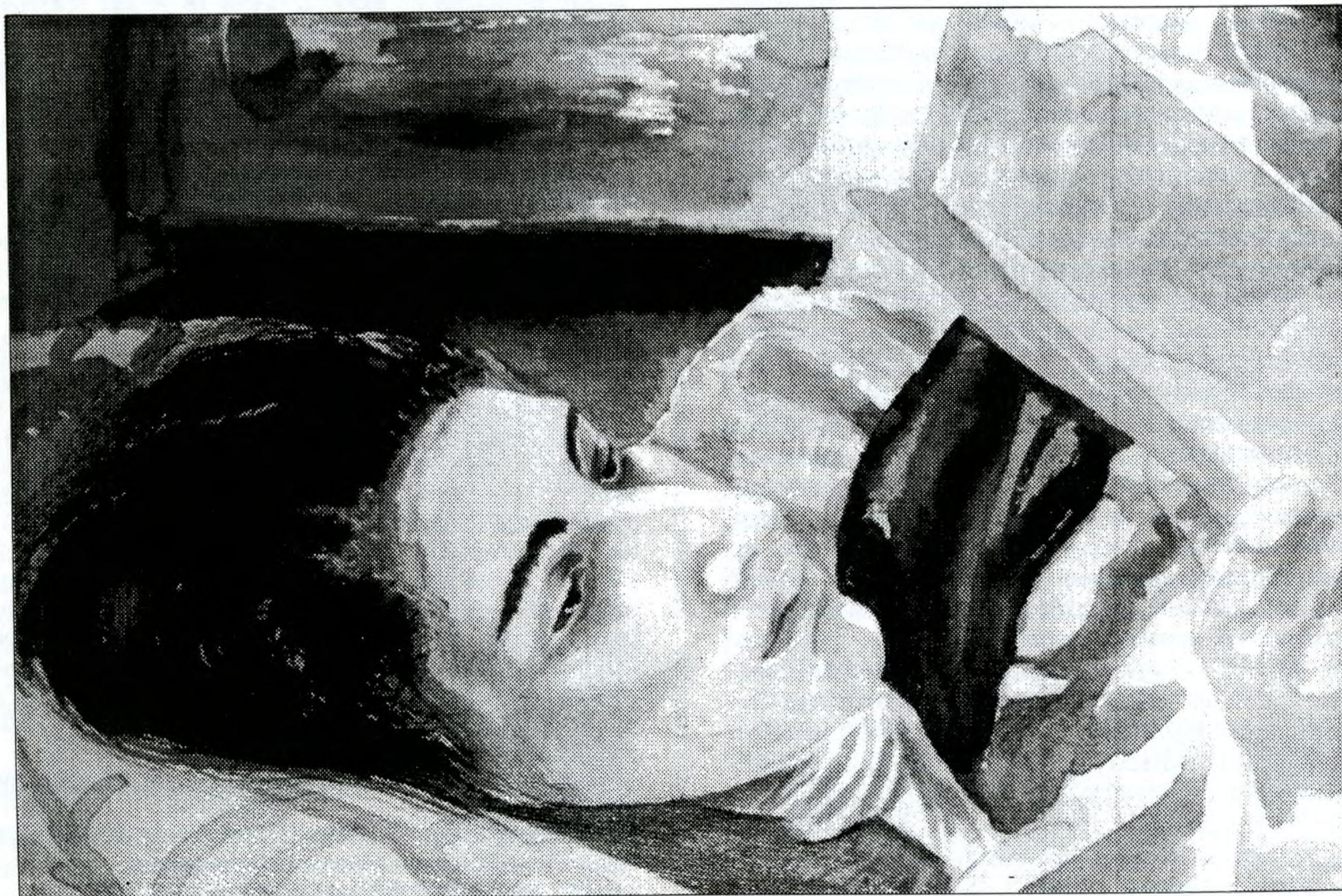
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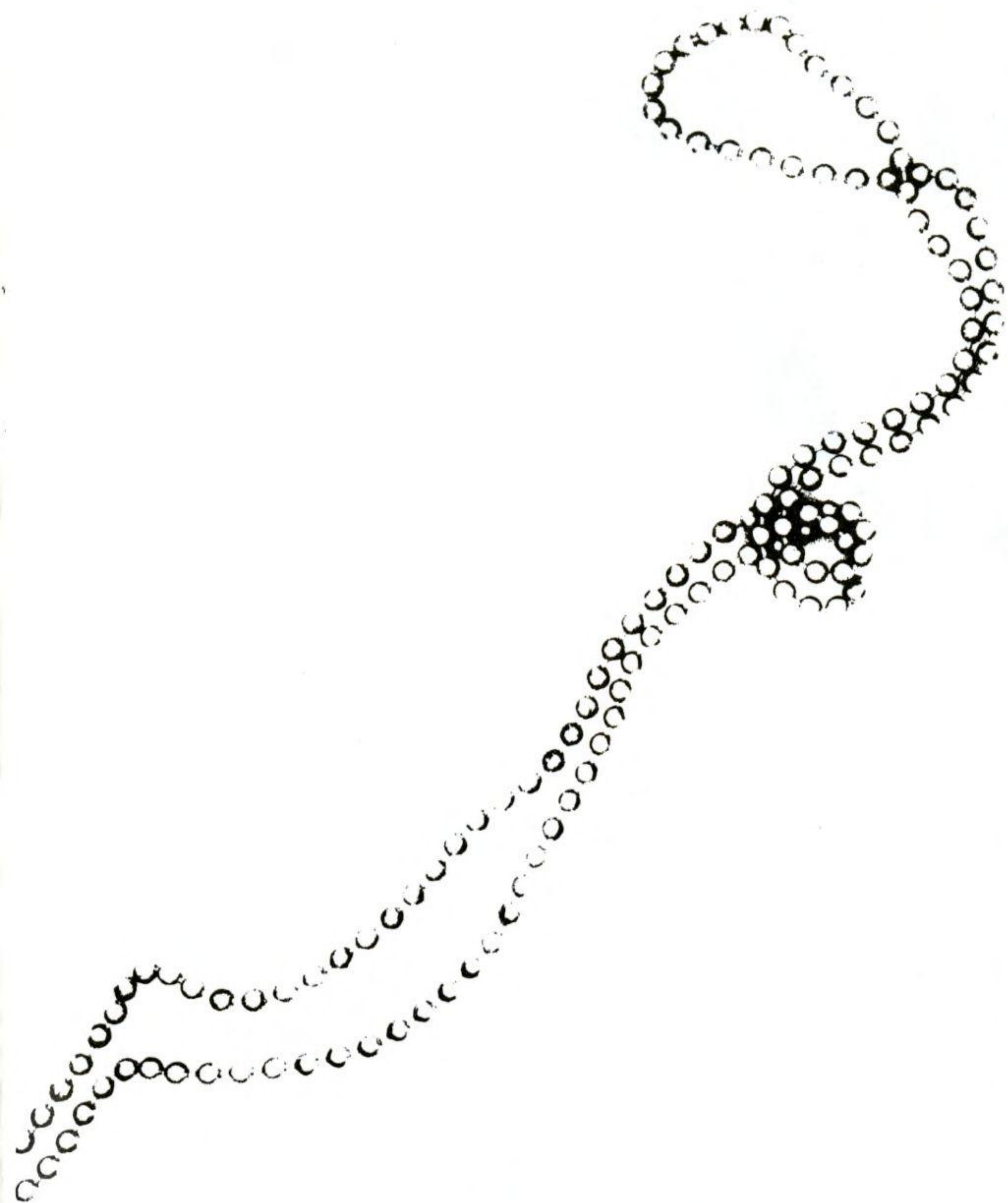
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"Laura" ink wash by Vanessa Gibbs

BOUQUET AIR



EQUAL PARTS
SUNSPECKLED RAISINS IN TOAST
AND FLOWERING FIRE AT FEET
CAUSE ROSIEST KISSES
ON PLUMPEST LASH PETALS,
BLUSH-BLOSSOM TICKLES
ON COZIEST TOES

BLUSH SENT TO TOES
(SENT FROM LASHES "WITH BEST KISSES"),
FOR IT'S A TULIP STROKE
ON WHITISH SKIN;
IT'S REDDISH TULIPS KISSING CALVES

RED LIPPRINTS ON LEGS
BLUSHFUL FACE PARTS AND FEET,
FOR IN PAIRS BOUQUET THINGS SCENTLY DANCE
—ALL THROUGH EASY-BLOOM ROOM AND EASY-BLOOM BREATH—
AND SCATTER STAR-LIKE BIGGEST BLOOM-DROPS

HILARY STEINITZ



Photograph by Karen Tweedy-Holmes

TO MY WIFE

FROM THE RIVER-MERCHANT

Written as a reply to Rihaku's poem, translated by Ezra Pound,
"The River-Merchant's Wife: A Letter"

My wife, I have seen your eyes in the river,
Washed away a thousand times by the storms,
Rain beats down fiercely here; it is grey,
Your letter rests crumpled and water-stained in my hands.
The characters of my name are strange to me.
I live by the flux of the river now.
When it is dark and silent, and I may rest along
The muddy banks, I hear your voice carried across
The peaks of rushing water.

When we were married, my wife, our voices were soft.
Yours echoed, it seems, off of clouds; mine melted into the earth.
The world was so high to me then,
When I looked down at you with your head bent toward the ground,
I was comforted by your smallness.

After a year passed, you governed me.
With your smile the sky opened its large mouth,
And breathed cool air upon my tired shoulders.
With your tears my fingers folded into my palms and
I longed to strike at the sky for its betrayal.

But in another year I had to watch you,
With your warmth still clinging to my skin, become
Smaller and smaller in the distance.
You were encased between the yellow ground and the yellow sky.
You held your hat on with one hand; the other clutched at your skirt.

The river was swift when I arrived in Ku-to-yen.
But I have been here long.
I have seen when the sun pours such heat upon us
That the waters cannot move.
It is then that in the brown stillness I can see you.
You are under an umbrella and your eyes are almonds,
Wrinkled because you are old.
It is raining on you and your letter lies in my hand.
To see my name is strange and it hurts me.
I have long since been through the narrows of the river Kiang.
I am not waiting for another letter.
I am waiting to hear your voice wash up next to me on the muddy
Banks of the river.

Katherine Tassi

Thief

My bricks are disappearing,
pulled out one by one.
I'd tamped them in so deep, I thought,
to a round and weathered, old rose finish,
below the knife-edged mortar
that I mixed with sweat and spit.
But with each new slant of light,
I find another raw mud hole
where a safe old brick once was.

I cast this dream
from a kewpie-eyed mold; it masks
my thief on his full moon foray
for the pullout smooth
and lethal as quicksilver.

Maybe the next sticky dawn
when I waken to thickened sheets,
new bricks will be laid
in my cleanly scarred mud,
with pink, fine-faceted edges.
Surely the mortar's still there; I manage
to slice myself on it daily.

Sara Mock



“Unlimited Reach” 1986, Prinny Alavi ©



**“Come now,
my heavenly
tortoise shell:
become a
speaking
instrument”**

Sappho
translated
by Mary Barnard

G



Greta Interview by Liz Sher

Greta Schiller is an independent filmmaker living in New York City. She is best known for her work as director and producer of the critically acclaimed *"Before Stonewall: The Making of a Gay and Lesbian Community,"* the first feature film on the history of the gay and lesbian subculture in the United States. *"Before Stonewall"* received two Emmy awards in 1987, for Best Historical Program, and for Best Research. Schiller is also known for her work as producer and director of *"International Sweethearts of Rhythm,"* which premiered in September 1986 at the New York Film Festival and which was recently awarded first prize in the Eighth International Women's Film Festival at Sceaux/Creteil. *"International Sweethearts of Rhythm"* is a thirty minute film which documents the career, during the 1940s, of the first interracial all-woman jazz band in the United States, and which also deals with issues of sexual and racial equality. With her partner Andrea Weiss, Schiller has founded her own production company, Jezebel Productions, in order to "meet the need for intelligent and innovative programs that provide a viable alternative to the mainstream media."



Still from the 1930's Broadway play, "The Captive."

LS: Why do you make films as opposed to working in another medium?

GS: I've been a film addict from as long as I can remember. I always have gone to movies. Always. Movies were always my salvation when I was a kid. I would go to movies by myself. I would go on Saturday afternoon. I would watch the feature three times. I was a movie addict. I

lived in a college town that had five or six cinema societies, cinema guilds and associations that showed a lot of classics and foreign films like for a dollar and there was always something to see. I used to go to those all the time. I had a really good film education in high school, just from going to movies. So I never thought of actually being a filmmaker until I came to New York to go to City College, just because I wanted to live in New York. Actually I'd heard that City College was a radical school. I was very political at the time—it was always called the Harbor of the Proletariat, and I thought that was romantic. I liked that. So I came to New York, and mostly did history and women's studies courses. But then one semester I took three film history courses and it was a very small department and Dennis DeNitto, who taught two of the film history classes said, picked me out and said "There's an intensive film production course here, twelve students a year, you make your own films, I think you should apply." So I applied.

LS: Had you ever made a film before?

GS: No. I'd never made a film before. For some reason, I'd never even thought of making films before he sort of picked me out. And so I applied and I went to the school for two years. Intensive, you know, twelve credits a semester. And I made films there. It was all sixteen millimeter and they had a mixing studio there and equipment and things and everybody worked on everybody else's films. At that time I did some documentaries, super-eight documentary films, but my thesis film was a narrative, a regular narrative acted film.

LS: But you were always a student of history.

GS: Yeah.

LS: That's your specialty. But I was still wondering why you do documentary films, instead of

dramatic or experimental films. **GS:** I have an interest in every kind of film. Partly the reason I started doing documentary films I think was because I wanted to be an independent producer/director, number one, and these film ideas just sort of *came*, happened. With "Stonewall," first of all. . . if I hadn't been so young and naive I don't know if I would have gotten into that film in the way that I did. It took almost five years of my life, from conception to completion. On the one hand I absolutely don't regret it because I really love the film and I think it made a really significant contribution to both the field of

ing sources for a documentary film, for someone who had not had very much producer experience. It was also a subject I felt really committed to and passionate about. And it was a form that I really loved.

LS: What do you love about it?

GS: Trick question. (Laughs) I like it on a number of levels. I love the idea of working with archival footage and found footage, footage that was shot for one reason, and finding new meaning to it. I like that. I'm a junk collector and a pack-rat anyway. So personality-wise it makes sense that I love that. I love giving a voice to people who have

their own blindness and not wanting to see it. But even those books about her are groundbreaking, just in the fact that a woman writer is being researched, written about, thought about, discussed and treated as a significant contributor to American literature. Now, ten years later, comes out this book that was written by this woman about Willa Cather's so-called lost years, the lost side of Willa Cather, which deals a lot with the fact that she's a lesbian, what that meant to her writing, and what kind of life she led and what her choices were. That is the most exciting thing to me. That's what



Source: Lesbian Herstory Archives

gay history and of documentary film. I don't regret it but I just think the kind of energy levels that I had to sustain for so many years—I don't know if I could repeat it again. And most of it was financing, and that's the story that you'll hear of independent documentary filmmakers, over and over. I was actually *lucky* in that regard. I got major funding, and actually finished the film in relatively few years. God, it took Rob Epstein seven years to make "Harvey Milk." He started like three years before we started "Stonewall"—just by way of example of how long a commitment people make to their projects. So in other words, the fact that I started in a documentary film was probably because I thought that there was more potential to get money from fund-

historically been denied it. It fits into my interest in history and my interest in politics. I think it's very political to make an historical documentary film that basically recovers a lost history, or a history that's been erased or denied. And also it's very exciting for me to be what I consider to be part of the cutting edge of feminist research and history. To draw an analogy, I am a Willa Cather freak. I read all her books. I know all of her novels, I've read biographies written about her. I've read the biography that her lover a/k/a her lifetime companion wrote about their lives together. The fact that she's a lesbian is repressed both by her—and she wanted it that way—and by the people who have done the research who don't do it out of respect for her but because of

I want to be a part of. You know, and I don't have the academic credentials to do that kind of research. The way I chose to pursue it, I do it through my film work, and work with historical people, which makes the information more accessible also. I think for example, again, the Willa Cather book would be an exciting book for people who are history freaks or students of history or students of lesbian history or women's history, or literature. But your average person is not going to see it. Whereas if I made that into a film and showed it on public T.V., ten million people will see it. So it's just another form of working.

LS: How do you feel about the whole notion of objectivity? Do you see your films as presenting some objective truth? Another



way to approach this question would be to talk about what kind of creativity is involved in making a documentary.

GS: It can be seen as journalism as opposed to a creative art form.

LS: Right. And in that light, films like "Stonewall" and "Sweethearts of Rhythm," which deal with groups that are traditionally oppressed, and which deal with their liberation, become a kind of political art.

GS: Absolutely. Again, I'm going to draw on the Willa Cather analogy, just as a way to get into this subject. It's sort of a multifaceted question and answer. She participated in the historical denial of her lesbianism in that she burned most of the letters, between her and her lovers. She allowed that 100 years after she died the letters that remained could be opened, or 50 years, or some long period of time. And that's the story that you find over and over again. So in trying to recreate that history, trying to acknowledge those relationships, to acknowledge that culture and

lifestyle, it's a creative thing in itself because the actual artifacts are not there. It's not like you can go into an archive and find the artifacts of that thing. You have to extrapolate from the shadows that you're able to find, to create something. You could take that one step further and say that's really what an historical documentary does, in some ways. An historical documentary film with a point of view.

LS: That's a little dangerous, though, when you say 'extrapolation.' It makes it sound like it's not really founded in fact.

GS: It is grounded in fact. It can be grounded in fact but not artifact. You know what I mean, the difference? My point of view is that there can be an objective truth, which the viewer can draw from the presentation. But that's a different thing from objectivity, that what an honest filmmaker should do is be honest about what their point of view is because there's always a point of view. From the angle that you set the camera at, to the way that you edit two images together, you are making choices and decisions. I think that that's a crisis in American television journalism today, this so-called need for objectivity. Like for example take "Star Wars." Well I think that it's totally ludicrous for a producer to make a so-called objective program on that issue, because that producer has a point of view, and I don't care *how* much they try to eliminate their point of view, they are going to have a point of view. It would be much more honest and have much more integrity for the viewer and for the producer to make it clear to the viewer what the point of view is. When "Stonewall" was being edited, what I tended to try to do was to put across my point of view as *de facto*, make it seem that the audience shared my point of view, although the truth of the matter is, very few people probably share my point

of view on gay history. So what I had to do, and what the struggle with Bill Daughton, the editor, helped me to do, was to make the film much more accessible. Because he would question, just for example, the phenomenon of butch/femme. This is a minor example of me just assuming that people are going to understand the concept that women actually dressed as and passed as men for protection, as well as for social and cultural role-playing. I would just assume that that's a concept that people would readily grasp. He said, Greta, get out of here, that's ridiculous. He didn't even accept the idea. So it made me have to view that whole section in a new way. Therefore I presented Marge Simmons giving her example of, we would be beaten up for queers, so we'd try to dress like a man and pass as a man.

And the other thing, in terms of the creative dynamic of the documentary filmmaking, is that there's a lot of bad documentaries that you see that put you to sleep. One of the things, when I was younger, that made me not like documentary films, was seeing them in school, especially this whole concept of voice of God, male voice of God telling you, you know, the brain works this way. But then I discovered that there was a whole history in England and the United States particularly, that I admire a lot, the social realist documentaries, and things like that. And the *Cine-ma Verite* and the whole way that, when the feminist movement first began in this country, the second wave of feminism, where documentary films were the form of expression, just of trying to get out the ideas, trying to control the media. When I learned about these things, my interest in documentary film was enhanced. Now it used to be, when I first started being interested in documentary films, when I

was in school, I thought that documentary films told The Truth, that you could tell The Truth, and be politically correct in documentary films. I don't really believe that any more. I don't even think that's the question, or an important question really. I think the important question is that you get people thinking, that you present information in a way that moves people, keeps their attention, excites them. I think that *that's* the important thing.

LS: This ties in with this whole thing about a feminist aesthetic. Because of your political views, and because of who you are and what you're interested in, you're in a position where you can really sculpt a different image of women, than what appears in the mass media. Is this being something that you consciously work with? Can you give me an example? I'm particularly interested in how you represent women—how you represent women physically, and as intellectual and spiritual beings.

GS: Well for example, when I choose an interview location in documentary film, it's very important to me that the location reflects the personality or the vibes of the person. One of the things for example, in "Stonewall," that I tried to do, was to always put the women in their work environment. So, even though there's not a direct reference to Bunny McCullough being a film editor, she's sitting in front of an editing machine, in an editing room, during her interview. And, Johnie Phelps, the lesbian in the WAC, is sitting in front of her printing press. Those are things that work on a subtextual level. Your average person doesn't say, "Oh wow, she must be a printer," because what she's saying is so amazing, but it works on another level. The other thing that's sort of a battle when I'm editing is, well let's say for example in the "Sweethearts of Rhythm," the question of lesbi-

anism among the women. Now, for me, that's a really interesting thing that I would want to have brought out. There's the whole question that many more of the bandmembers had lesbian experiences and attachments while they were touring than ended up living their lives as lesbians once they left the group. And many of them will participate in the historical denial of the existence of lesbianism among the women. And most of them are now older women who are ashamed and embarrassed of that part of their past, and then other women in the band have lived their lives as lesbians, are not embarrassed about it, don't hide it. So it was a delicate question of how I presented that particular question. Because on the one hand I wanted to be honest to the women who agreed to be interviewed in the film and to have them represented the way that they felt. On the other hand, I didn't want to participate in the historical denial that they were participating in. That was a big question. On a lot of levels. And so how I compromised was to say, okay, they want to not only deny their own self, and their own experiences, but they want to deny someone else's. I can respect their right about themselves, but I can't respect their

right about someone who's not into denying it. So I will represent her as who she is, and for the rest of the women, that's something they have to deal with on their own. Because I feel I had integrity representing them. I didn't put in stories that I knew about particular women and their relationships with other women—out of respect for those women.

LS: Have you encountered opposition in your work due to your gender, or due to your subject matter?

GS: Initially, in terms of technical things, like dealing with the lab, or equipment houses, I mean I would go in there with a male production assistant and they would talk to him and not to me. You know, a lot of that. A lot of that still goes on. But once I broke the ice and established myself where I have regular equipment houses and regular laboratories where I know the people, I don't get that. It might happen behind my back, but I don't get it any more. I've proven myself. I think I've had more problems in terms of the content of "Stonewall."

At the beginning of "Stonewall" I thought, God, an historical documentary film on a subject that is such an important question that nobody has ever done anything on, this is a groundbreaking film. I thought



Tiny Davis and Anna Mae Winburn (ctr.)
Photos courtesy of Sweethearts Project, Inc.



Still from the new movie "Tiny Davis: Hell-Divin' Woman."

that this film was going to be bought by every public library system. But actually what I found out is that there is a lot of homophobia, a lot of fear of homosexuals. And it's a lesson that I know from way back, and I know that people reclaiming their history is very scary to the powers that be. But somehow I forgot that in the making of "Stonewall."

LS: Well, you've evolved to a higher viewpoint and it's hard to drag the mass consciousness to that level. You have to get so much higher, before people will even take a little step.

GS: Yeah. That's true. That's really true. It's very funny to me. Just by comparative example, "Sweethearts," in its first six months on the market, has already been sold to almost every major movie and television station. It's already been bought by library systems and cable systems. I think this is partly because of the music, which gives it an entertaining element. It's been a much, much faster dissemination. Another part of that could be the fact that it immediately got recognition by premiering in the New York Film Festival, which gives it a stamp, right away, that "Stonewall" didn't get. It took longer to build up. "Stonewall" is a threatening film in many ways for many people. I mean, liberals kind of like "Stonewall," but if you're just kind of liberal straight person who kind of thinks gays are okay, if you see "Stonewall," you think, well, gays are weird. I mean, these people think it's okay to do certain things and to have these ideas. It's a little harder for people to accept than say a film like "Harvey Milk" which is totally within the straight system. I mean, this guy was an elected official, he's a nice Jewish boy who was in politics, who happened to be gay. He was murdered, along with the mayor. But what happened was, because these two films came out at the

same time, often a European television station or a public library system will have bought "Harvey Milk," and will say, "Well we have a gay film" and they really only want one gay film, and they want a gay film that doesn't threaten them.

LS: What happened when they were airing "Stonewall" on PBS—what was your experience with station managers?

GS: Well the way the public television network works is that there



The first homosexual rights march, Philadelphia, July 4, 1965.

are about 300 local stations around the country, and many of those stations have maybe one main station that programs for the three or four stations around the state. That's the way most of them work. So what you have to do is—even though the film was partially funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, which is the financial arm of PBS, and was being offered for free to public television stations over the national public television network, we still had to call every station manager and make sure they were going to air the show, send them the publicity materials. And for an independent film, they don't provide any support services for the publicity. You, as an independent producer, have to find the funds to do that. Big

series, like *Nova*, all have underwriters. They get millions of dollars from Mobil and Exxon, who can hire a publicist. I mean we have to hire whoever we can. There was no financial underwriting for the previous airdate of "Stonewall." So anyway, the response of the station management was very diverse. Like for example the woman in St. Louis said, "We have no plans to air this show, we don't think we have an audience for it." Total denial. Every place has an audience. It's homophobia, and it's ignorance. Ignorance of how many homosexuals there are. That for example was St. Louis. In other places, like Madison, Wisconsin, they offered absolutely no comment. They just said they weren't gonna run it. But the film did really well there on its theatrical run, the State Historical Society showcased it, in a series of films they did. Portland, Oregon said, when it was offered in December, they said it's Christmas, it's not family programming, and anyway we're showing an AIDS special, that's enough gay programming for a month. You'd be surprised. And in other places like North Dakota, they just aired it, nine o'clock, prime time, as a regular program. So you just cannot predict. The film already had a base of support from previous screenings, fundraising, and from general publicity, so that in many cities we had contacts. Where we were having problems getting the main station to carry the film, we notified supporters in those areas and had them organize letter-writing campaigns, phone campaigns, etc. Because they are public television stations, they do respond to pressure from the community, it's true, in many cases. So for example Portland agreed, through that pressure, to air it; Tampa, Florida aired it. This happens with any film. Any film that's just been released, gets a mixed bag of response from critics. Ju-



Found image: c.1910. Source: Lesbian Herstory Arch.

dith Christ highlighted it in T.V. Guide as a recommended film, and that's about as mainstream as you can get.

LS: For you, who are the most important filmmakers, either living or dead? In particular, female filmmakers, feminist filmmakers, experimental filmmakers?

GS: I love Maya Deren.

LS: I watched three or four of her films, short ones, and I found them so difficult to endure, on a certain level, because there's no structure.

GS: Well, there is a structure. It's nonlinear, though. I like her. I love the imagery in her films. I love the Italian neo-realist filmmakers. Contemporary filmmakers. This is terrible. I can't really think of any that really inspire me, right now.

LS: Well, what does inspire you, when you go in to see a film?

GS: I think in a general sense what inspires me is people who pursue a passion. People who persevere, whether it's a single woman raising a family or someone overcoming a disease. People who work full time and still write poetry. People who do groundbreaking feminist re-

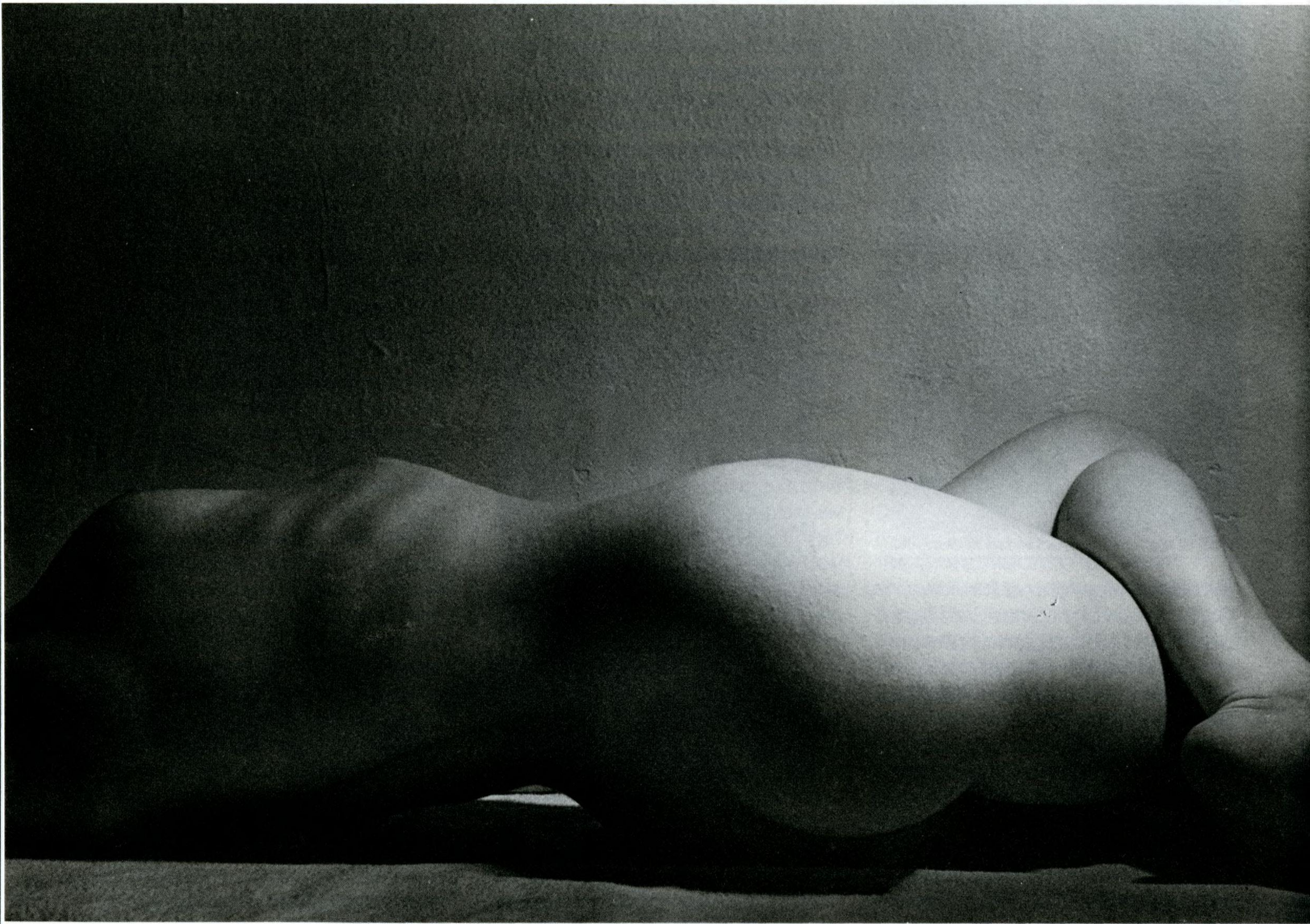
search. Individuals who persevere. I read a lot of biography and autobiography. My inspiration used to come from films a lot, but it doesn't come so much from going to movies any more. Unless it's an old classic. I really haven't seen too many new films or contemporary films that I'm excited about. I'm having a hard time with the transition from movie culture to video culture. I have a problem with letting go. I like to live in the historical past, even within my own lifetime. I still love the idea that a movie is only shown three times a year at the Thalia and that if you miss it you have to wait until next year. I can remember The "Wizard of Oz" being shown on television when I was a child and every year we would watch it and it was like the highlight of the T.V. season, and you would be afraid of the witch and it was like you'd think about her until the next year. And then when I came out and started hanging out with gay people, it had a whole different meaning—you know Dorothy DeSica and the whole gay imagery, and the whole identification with fantasy, watching it with faggots at big drag parties, and watching it on a color T.V. so you could see when the film became color. I mean that's sort of still where I'm at. I'm having a hard time with the idea that you can just go to the video store and get any movie that you want. You know, the whole commodity approach to film. And I have to get over it. It's my problem. If I want to survive and sell my film in that world I have to adapt to that. But I'm having a hard time accepting that that's what the future is, and that's what it is now, and that's the way people see films, and that's that.

LS: You mean movies are a dime a dozen.

GS: Exactly. Which is part of why there's such crap. It's like I go into a video store and the only movies I want to get are thirty

years old. I have a really hard time. And I know, for example, there's two narrative films I'm working on, one of them is an experimental narrative, and I know that one of the avenues through which I could probably get money for producing it is from a video company. Video companies are now making a product that is made-for-home video. They have a limited theatrical run for publicity, and to get some reviews, but basically they're produced for the home video market. And I know that I could probably get money from that source. They're shot on film, they're showed in movie theaters, they're sold to American, foreign and cable television, but the funding comes from Vestron Home Video or CBS Fox Home Video. That's where the money source is. That's the wave of the future. I know that three out of ten films that are produced lose money, never make money, and you have to deal with the other economic realities of the marketplace. I don't know if I want to do that, that's a decision that I have to start making, whether I want to work in that kind of venue, that market. And it is sort of related to a political and aesthetic questions. I can't really see making films like selling computers.





Photograph by Karen Tweedy-Holmes

a woman who was

a woman friend is
enveloping,
perhaps
a surrogate mother
or an old stuffed chair
with frayed armcovers
one fondly remembers fraying
with newly-cut teeth
as a child.

the crumbs
a woman trails behind her
as she weaves herself again and again
through the blind corridors
to the Minotaur
are her woman friend.

i lost one,
not in the heat of a duel
 (the pride of which
 may have served to
 swallow the
 sorrow)
but to the jaws of more tangible,
less substantive things
than our history—
a career move earning her
the sadly self-righteous applause
of the cynicism
we both denied,
but which i
tucked away under my breath
like a prophecy
long ago, on a day
when even the sun was our inside joke.

she shed me
as a shade of her childhood
fear of the dark.
sentiment
decayed into gesture,
with the
wrenching half-life
of fashion.
swift and clean as a blade
she dismembered a poem
written in blood
over many years,
image by hard-won image,
leaving none of the original words
unscathed.

as i gouge out,
these spikes of her,
all the love now pressing me
is powerless
to stop the bleeding.

Paige Sinkler





Photograph by Suzanne Sbarge

Jericho

Dissatisfaction is written here. How often, frightfully often, a vacant unseeing stare when he walks down the halls and all is noise, tumult, and things are changing, happening and one girl's laughing got a smile all over and one boy's whistling got his heart turned heavenward and a woman is crying head bowed face in the dust and still this boy's a-walking and he don't see cause his eyes ain't never been taught to open and he's a-stumblin' through this green fluorescent-light box and doesn't see the life that flows about him and boy he is a-static got no reaction got no reaction and here's this other woman and she's got a book slipping out of her hands cause she caught an eye or two; she saw the girl all smiles, laughing, and the heavenward heart was bursting akin to her own but last she saw the grieving woman crawl through the bustling corridor and also she has seen that boy that dead little boy who gets out of bed each morning and never wakes up she has seen the pungence all around seen the hollow, the shell, the rock glazed gaze and all her heart's beating fast hard with the searing ache crying break down these walls break down the hardness wasn't this the true story of Jericho? she thinks: where I am the army and God the trumpet, the magnificent sound that cracked the wall by Liz Sher

when dale went

—They cut down all the hay in the field behind our house that day, and me and Sarie got mad and went and asked them for a bale, for the horse. Only my mom said we couldn't have a horse, so it just rotted in the McGurdys' garage. When we came in all dirty with our hands blistered from dragging it up the hill she said what were we going to do with a bale of hay and it was the farmers' land, they were supposed to mow it and take it back for the cows to eat. Me and Sarie were just mad we couldn't crawl through it and trample down tunnels any more. It was partly our land, too, because we played in it, Sarie said, when our mom went back to her desk to do her work. Sarie was bigger than me so I believed her, even though I knew she sometimes lied.

So I stuck a band-aid on my hand, not because it really hurt but just because we could never wear band-aids unless we had a reason and this was one, and went to go return a stick of butter to the Burns, next door. We had borrowed one the week before to do some cooking, and now my mom told me to go bring it back and to remember to say thank you. I dawdled too much on the way there, to watch the big ant hole and all these fat black ants coming in and out carrying things. One of them was carrying another ant that was dead. I wondered if maybe the ants would like some butter, but it was already getting pretty squishy so I brought it to the Burns' house and knocked on the door, and Mrs. Burns answered. Mrs. Burns is white and fat with long blond hair, and Mr. Burns is black and very tall. That would make Katie gray, at least in arts and crafts at Day Care Center, but in real life she looks black like her dad only maybe a little lighter. When Mrs. Burns answered the door she smiled and said we didn't have to return things when we borrowed them, that she was glad to help us out. But she took the butter anyway and boy was I glad because it was starting to get very mushy and I figured if I had to bring it back it wouldn't even be a stick anymore. When I got home my mom was in her room working at her desk with a yellow pencil all chewed up in her mouth.

"Did you remember to say thank you?" she asked, brushing the hair out of my eyes when I went up to her.

"MMMhum. But Mrs. Burns said we

Jacqueline Shea Murphy

don't have to return things anymore, because she is glad to help us out." My mom looked at me for a minute, and I could see she was going to start to cry again. I wondered if maybe she was mad at me for taking so long so the butter had been mushy and that was why Mrs. Burns didn't want it. I stood by her for a minute and said, what's the matter mommy but she just waved her hand at me so I left. I went into the kitchen to get a 'nilla wafer, and when I came out I could see she was lying across her big bed with her head in her arms, crying.

—Sarie was playing with her doll Velvet in the playroom, the one with the hair that grew long when you turned the knob on her belly, or if you just yanked it hard out of her head. I asked Sarie if I could play, too, and she said yes but all she wanted to do was brush hair and dress them up, so I thought I'd get out the clay and try to make something. I liked the clay but my things were never very good because Sarie was the creative one. I made a red dinosaur. It was the nice smooth kind of clay that comes in sticks and smells good, and always stays soft except sometimes you have to knead it a little. Not the play-dough stuff that dries up if you leave it out. I liked my dinosaur, with his long, smooth neck, but I squished him up and put him back in the box when I was done, anyway. If they hadn't cut down all the hay we could have gone and made some more tunnels, but Sarie was still playing with her dolls and besides, Mr. Rogers was going to be on pretty soon.

"Mom's crying again," I said to Sarie. "Oh," she said.

On Mr. Rogers it was the one where his goldfish dies and he asks Picture, Picture what he can do about it. Picture, Picture says to put it in a glass of salt water and maybe it will come to life again, but it doesn't work. Then the train comes to take us to the Neighborhood of Make-Believe. I liked X the Owl best. Henrietta Pussycat says meow-meow every two seconds and is annoying. My mom would have told her to stop whining. Sarie came in and said Morgan, only babies watch Mr. Rogers but I didn't care. I liked it.

—My mom was in the kitchen cooking something so she must have stopped crying, and then Sarie went to get an apple, and when she came back she said she's not crying anymore. Mr. Rogers was over now and the News was on. Me and Sarie thought the News was boring, except when they had about the rocket to the moon, but Mom liked it. Today they had lots about Vietnam and some about the hippies having protests, except my mom said not to call them hippies. They had lots of them on the campus where she worked, with neat tie-dyed shirts like Sarie liked, and long straight hair, even the daddies. Sarie started jumping around the furniture, prancing about like a gooneybird and one day, we have no doubt, she will fly like one as well. That was in a letter my mom read me from The Scrapbook, about Sarie when she was little. My mom came in and told her to stop jumping on the furniture, and that dinner was ready so we should wash up.

We had to eat quickly because after dinner Mom was going to take a bath and then we were going to see Dale and Evelyn. Evelyn had just had a baby named Carmen. She told me she would have named it Morgan, only that was my name so maybe she would have got us confused. I didn't think we would be very easy to mix up, since the baby had a tiny red face and no hair, but I was glad Evelyn liked my name. But Dale was the best. He told us big whooping stories and gave us piggie-back rides whenever we wanted. Last time we had been there he had showed us how to roll our tongues so the two edges came together at the top. When you did it right he said you could drink out of it like a straw, almost. I had practiced and now I couldn't wait to go back and show him how I could do it, almost as well as him except not quite. My mom wouldn't let me practice with my milk, though, because she said it was too messy and we had to hurry.

—After dinner I put on the clothes my mom had put out for me and tried to brush my hair, but I couldn't do a very good job of it. So I took the brush and sat on the toilet seat in the bathroom while my mom took her bath, so she could brush it for me afterwards. My mom was so big she stretched from one end of the

when dale went

tub to the other, and even had to sit up some. She churned the water around to regulate it, and the soap suds swirled around her hair. She said that me and Sarie would have hair there, too, when we were big and our bodies were ready for us to have babies. My mom said babies grow from an egg inside the mother's youtris, which is not the same as the stomach. But she said they weren't big eggs like chicken's, but very very tiny, and that I shouldn't worry about them cracking because they don't have shells like that. Then I said then what do you need the father for and she said well the egg inside the mother hasn't been fertilized yet, and the father fertilizes it. But she said that even when we get big we wouldn't have scars on our bellies like the long brown stripe on her, because that was from the accident. I said oh.

At Dale and Evelyn's they had potato chips and pretzels, and I got to hold the baby if I was very careful. She was ugly, with a scrunched up face and pushed-in nose. Evelyn fed her, right there in front of everybody. Dale had gotten me and Sarie each a bubble blower and a jar of suds, so we sat on the porch for a while and blew bubbles out until they popped on the stairs or floated out. I told him about the ants I had seen in the morning and how one of them had been carrying a dead one, and he said ants were very strong, almost like Hercules, for their proportion. Sarie told him about the bale of hay and the horse, and he laughed and said they were right to give it to us. Then my mom came out for a while and we all talked, and Mom pointed out the big dipper and we all saw it, and then she and Dale talked about their experiments some, until it was cold and Sarie and I were tired and it was time to go inside. Evelyn had put the baby to bed already, and me and Sarie curled up on the couch because it was past our bedtime, too. We must have been there for a while, because the next thing I knew

Dale was carrying me to the car and the engine going hummm almost put me back to sleep.

I didn't quite fall back asleep, though,



cause Sarie kept poking me in the ribs.

"Umm, stop it!" I squirmed away.

"Dale's going to Michigan," she whispered.

"To where?" I froze stiff.

"To Michigan. It's hundreds and hundreds of miles from here." Her eyes gleamed in the shadow of the car behind us's headlights, and my mom stared

straight ahead.

"No sir," I answered, looking at her to see if she was teasing.

"Uh huh. Ask Mom. They were going to tell you but you were sleeping. I heard it."

I popped up and grabbed onto the back of the car seat where my mom was, to hold myself up.

"Mom, is Dale going to Michigan?" I asked.

She was silent for a moment. "Dale got drafted, pumpkin. He could either go to Michigan to teach, with Evelyn and Carmen, or he'd have to go to Vietnam."

"But . . . will we still see them?"

"Well, Michigan's a long way from here. Probably not too much." Sarie looked at me like, see I was right, but she was scared too.

"Dale's very lucky," my mom went on. "Not everyone who gets drafted has a choice. Sometimes they have to go fight. He was lucky to have an offer to teach." I watched the yellow lines in the middle of the road turn to a row of dashes, for a while, and then go back into double stripes.

"You wouldn't want him to get killed in the war, would you Morgan? We'll all miss him, but this is better for him and Evelyn and the baby." I didn't want to cry but I could feel the lump growing in my throat and starting to hurt.

When we reached home the McGurdys' dog barked and barked and Mom offered to carry me to bed but I said I could walk. I was awake, anyhow. When my mom came in to kiss me goodnight she sat down for a minute and smoothed the hair off my face.

"I wish he didn't have to go, too. I'm going to miss him and Evelyn a lot," she whispered. I nodded my head, but I didn't start crying until after she left. Then the tears ran down the sides of my face, falling soft and warm into my ears, because now he was gone and I hadn't even got to say goodbye.

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THE DIVORCEE

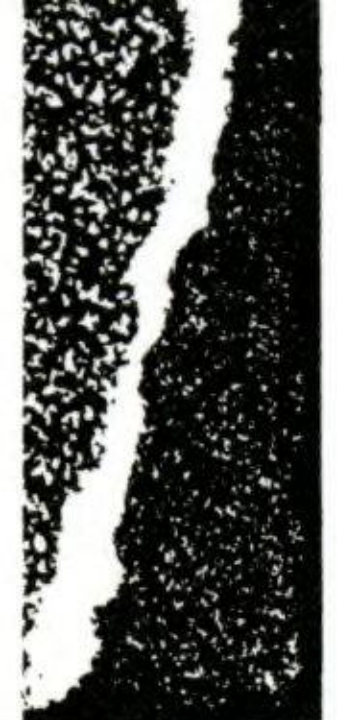
don't question
the amount of blood
my mother has wrung from her breast
for me
your sweeping glance
never caught full sight of me:
still a very little girl
still growing up,
born with a raincheck in her mouth
which,
now coiled and well-creased,
she has carried deep
in her pocket
since her primal birthday.

your arms
could not encompass
the monster
into which the awkward pain
of waiting for daddy to show up
has grown,
just below my stomach,
the relentless grip of its horny talons
threatening
to pierce my womb.

you could not weigh
the impossible amount of love
i demand
from lovers, friends, brothers,
mothers
because all they give is immediately
sucked down the raw hole
left by the exhumation of your oaths,
and which keeps drifting
wider like the oceans
because i do not have strength enough
to contain it
or hate enough to fill it.

hand-written by Gina Labdon

Puige Sinkler



INTERVIEW BY LIZ SHER AND PRINNY ALAVI

ON GENE BORIO'S DISCOVERY OF THE GALLERY

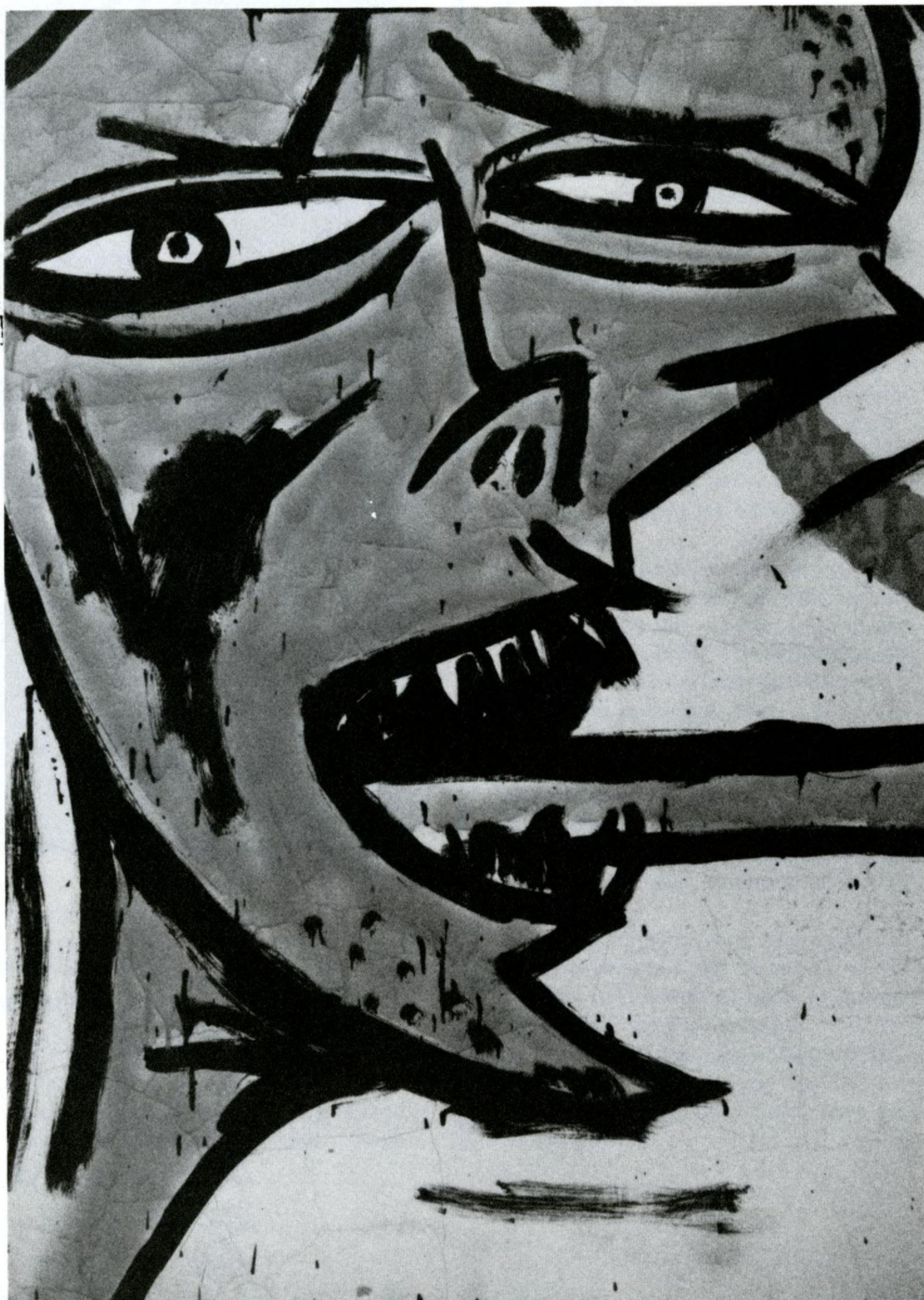
ON THE WATER



I'd heard from somebody someplace along the way that there was supposed to be a building, that they had all these strange sculptures in, and art-works, and things like that. It was an old pier, they call it the Spring Street Pier. All the old shipping records from the forties were there. There were a lot of boxes. And it had apparently been abandoned for a long time, and a bunch of artists apparently

came and did their work there. I used to run past the building and I used to take pictures of various things; they did sculptures and stuff on the outside.

Here they are (*shows photos of fiberglass sculptures*). They were on the outside, and then somebody would come along and burn them down. They put



Photography by Gene Borio

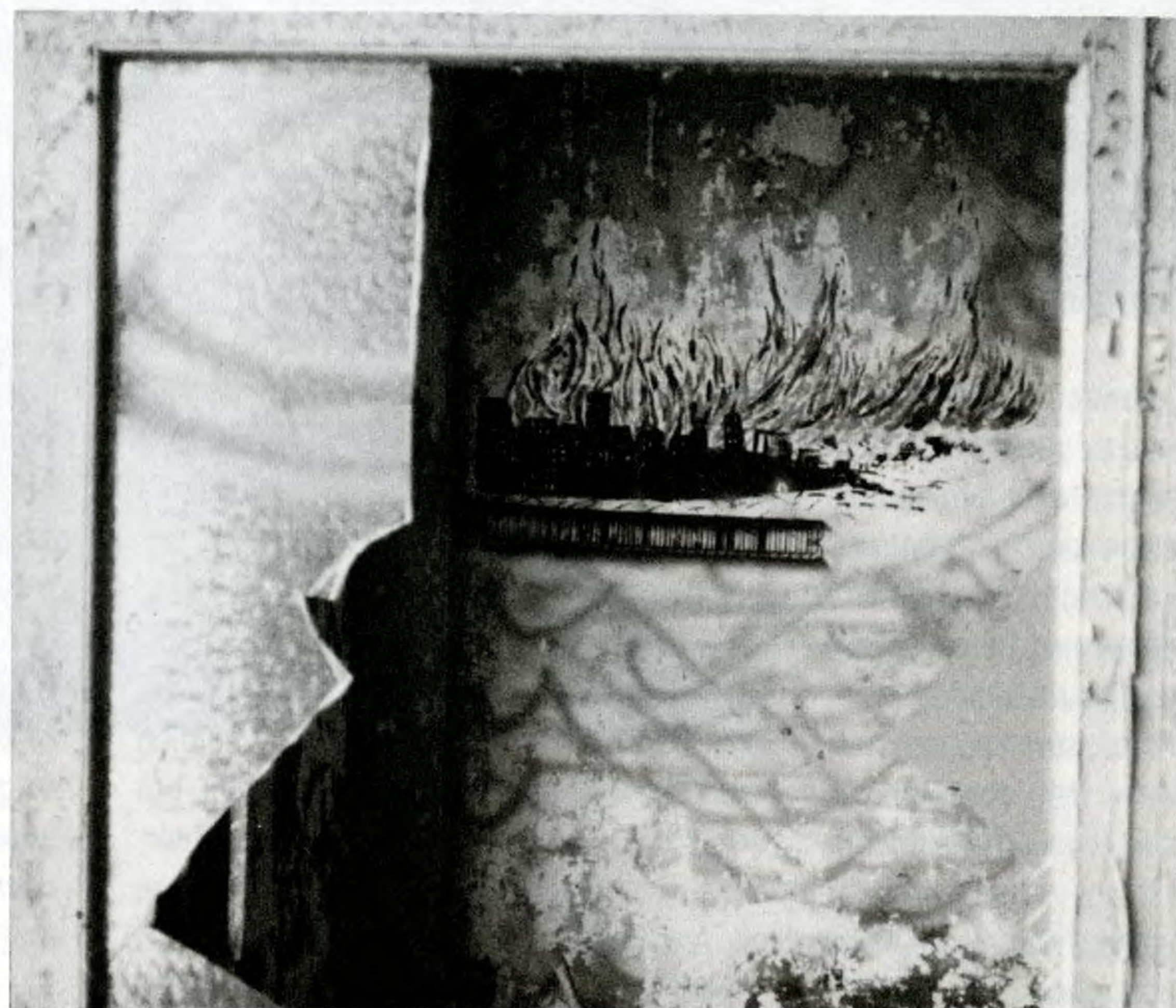
up a fence, at one point, to keep people out of the building. And then the shroud guy came and put this shroud up. It's as if it's a woman who's mourning whatever's on the other side. A loved one, or something. They didn't last long, these things. I don't know how many were put up all together. I remember this one in particular just didn't last more than a week. It was burned down, and then somebody drew a ghost of a ghost here.

So I said to my friend Zach, I said, I don't want to go in there alone, you want to go see what's in there? He's like an artist-type-person. He said sure. And so we went. Actually when I first heard about the Spring Street Pier somebody said that things would come out of the walls and stuff like that. I never saw anything like that. So Zach and I pried open that door *(points to photo)* and went up that stairway. It was totally deserted, *totally* deserted. And then we went down the hallways. And then we saw the things on the walls.

I look at all this today and I want to do something. I have questions, I have emotions, I wish I'd spoken to the artists, the construction workers. It's so rich and colorful. When I found out you were an actor, you don't, it doesn't inspire you to create anything, to do anything? It provokes something inside of me and I was wondering if it provokes something inside of you. Does it bring anger out? Would you have wanted to promote more of this kind of thing going on? Things like that. Or you've done it, it's in the past, and you're satisfied? In a way I am. It exists and it's a kind of wondrous thing to me. As itself. As something very individual. I don't like to get into the idea that this kind of thing should be done a lot. There's something about that that's kind of bandwagonish. Something like this exists as itself, and I think that's really neat, and in other ways, other places, it'll exist as something else. *It's an environment piece.* Yeah. *You go to museums and you see the environmental pieces there, they are so weird and abstract, or very naturalistic sometimes, but they're nothing like this. This has so much more life in it.* Because it existed in the way that it did, with no publicity, and just people getting together and doing this thing, it has itself. If you've got a bunch of writers from New York magazine coming down—*Then it becomes a trend.* Yeah, you know, it becomes totally different. *It's like Keith Haring, with his stuff on the street, and now they're selling it on t-shirts and posters.* It's different. Your emotional response to it is different, even though the art itself might be exactly the same thing. It changes your perception and appreciation of it. *Haring's stuff was great on the subway walls.* You know I've seen a lot of off-off Broadway stuff, things that a hundred people in the world have seen, or something like that. But there are moments from them that I treasure. I sit there and I think, this person presented this performance that was so incredible, but it's never gonna be on Broadway, you know, it's never gonna have a mass audience. There's something about that that's really touching to me, and that makes me appreciate the performance, a lot, and it's the kind of performance or a kind of play or thing that happens that, a mass audience is just not going to see it. It's just not going to happen. Whether because you know elements of its failure on a mass level or within itself, or whether the rest of the world simply isn't ready for it, or for whatever reason there is in the world, these are things that we take ourselves personally when we come across them, and we have to appreciate them for that, as that. Just like you know people love Jane Fonda—you know your niece or your grandmother that nobody knows, what they do sometimes will be more moving to you than anything Jane Fonda ever did. And nobody is ever gonna know about that. *You never met any of the artists?* No. Except the guy who did these stencils. He was an Italian. He said the Japanese had done a documentary



and the Germans had done a documentary there, and of course the Americans knew nothing about what was going on. I've never seen anything about it. I don't read art magazines and things, but every once in a while you read somebody refer to the Spring Street Pier. But for us it was just like completely unknown. We had no idea. It was like a museum that was dangerous and fun and exciting. *There's a freedom and wildness about it.* There is! There is! That I love! That's the kind of thing that really moves me. *The entry fee is the excitement of death!* *(laughter)*



But those were all the people I met there and we went there a lot. But this is the spring, after the summer when the artists were doing it. It's April of '84 that I first went there. *These were people who couldn't find any other way to have their art seen?* For a lot of them I think that's absolutely true. There's a guy named Prol who's gone on to be relatively famous on the lower east side art scene. *So many of these images are disturbing.* They're very angry, they're very violent. God, you know, I think it's also partly the milieu, you know, abandoned, desolate. The surroundings might've inspired or released their aggressions freely. *Yeah, it brings it out in you, you can do whatever you want or feel, you're not controlled by what can go in and out of the galleries.* Yeah. You know something happens when you take a picture or a painting and you say, this belongs in this setting, to be—in a frame. In a frame. —*To be viewed.* In a civilized area to be viewed. Something about that really takes away from what one has done, I think. That's what really moved me about the art at the Spring Street Pier. People just did these things, and they were meant to be seen right then and there in the exact spot where they were done.



There was an NYU film being filmed there one time when we went. It was an undergrad film, and I'm pretty sure it was silent. So when the NYU people were filming there was this rather tall young black guy with a big steak knife in his pocket, wandering around and just in general sort of acting tough. So, at a certain point I was about to leave and he called from above and he says, What are you doing here? I said, What business is it of yours? And he said, I'm the security guard here. And I laughed and I said, sure you are. And he says, Wait right there, and he started coming down fast, down the stairs. And I knew all he had was a steak knife, but still, it was bad enough. Anyway, so I'm not sure if I had anything or not, I might've had a rock, I might not have. Cause I tended not to go in there without some sort of protection. And I said, You stay right there, you don't come any closer. And he stopped. Well, you better get out of here, he said, and I said, that's exactly what I was doing. So. That was that. Then I went and I came back here, and I said, Zach, I think we better take another trip to the pier. I was worried about the NYU kids. So, Zach and I went back and by that time he'd left. The NYU kids were still there.

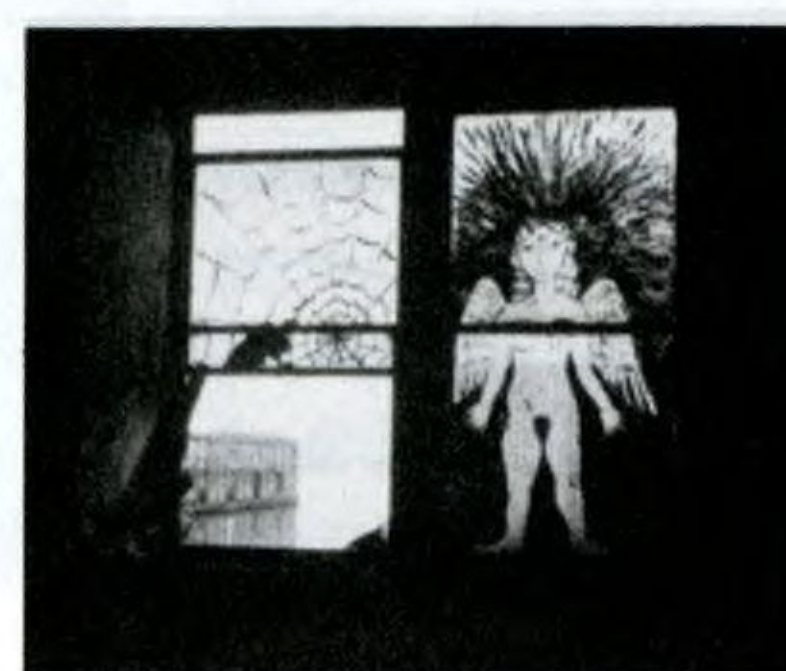
In this big room (*shows photo*), in this section here, they say, I think the Italian guy told me, that a woman had planted lawn in the summer-time, and that was growing there (*shows another photo*). This is one of those paintings in the interior, as they were taking the building down. *Were you there to get the reactions of the people who were tearing this stuff down? I mean, either they had no appreciation of what is this shit up there, or they were feeling like they were doing something they shouldn't?* I suspect that they had neither of these feelings. I would think that they'd think, oh, this is kind of neat, too bad it has to go!

The scariest time for me was one time when there wasn't much left of the building and I was in there taking whatever photos I could here and there. At that point the building had a twenty-four-hour guard, because it was real dangerous. And I was going into this place where I'd never been before cause it had always been so dark and dank. There was water on



the floor, it was dark, it was hard to get into. The guards were there and they obviously knew somebody was around, and they started looking for me all over the place. I was trying to keep silently one step ahead of them, and finally I wound up in a little place, it was like totally dark, my heart was pounding like crazy, it was just. . . *they* didn't even want to go in there. So you know I just waited silently until there was helicopter noise above about a half hour later. I used that to cover my retreat. And I finally got out. *Who owned this building, do you know?* Presumably the city. *And they tore it down.* And they tore it down. *I would have loved to have brought in some modern jazz dancers and created a performance here in this space and to have put in on video.*

(*Flipping through slides*) You know there was a tree growing from the second floor through the outside? It grew out through the steel siding, you know those corrugated panels, and it grew right up, into the light. There are a few positive images here. Most of these things are pretty scary. *Did you see the movie "Escape From New York?"* Yeah. Yeah I did. Yeah it's a lot like that. *Wouldn't it be funny if the artists started in this building and there wasn't enough room for them to do everything they wanted to do, and they started spilling over and going outside? Remember like in the streets you'd see the shadow of a black figure?* Uh huh. Shadowman (*flipping through slides*). It's all gone. There was another "shroud murder" written here. This is what it looks like now. *I expected to see a lot of Reagan pictures here, cartoons and stuff.* Here's a demolition shot of it virtually all gone. Now that's the guy Prol. Now he you can definitely get a hold of.



BALANCING

On an outlined flower I am
darkening the wrong petals.

"This could be interesting," I think,
but instead it is not. Instead
it is totally inaccurate. Outside
a plane's sound mounts, then silence mounts.

Joan Dalin

ICE

Understanding the crystal lattice structure of ice

I walk far out on the frozen lake listening
to the sound of contracting water watching
the sun as if it were not dropping
but evaporating
until a single crack cuts through
the solid water clear
to the other shore

the ice still holds
my body spread
like the palm of a hand

there is nothing beneath me
but a balance
trembling
with the added weight

Nancy Jesser

A JOURNEY HOME

each time I leave edwina's
african dance class
i feel so good
i sing and dance
in the streets

i feel as though
i've taken

a journey home

home to my mother's womb
caressed by her spirit
healed from the
violations
of the world

a journey home

hearing the rhythms
that she breathes through
her drum
takes me to a safe place
in my existence

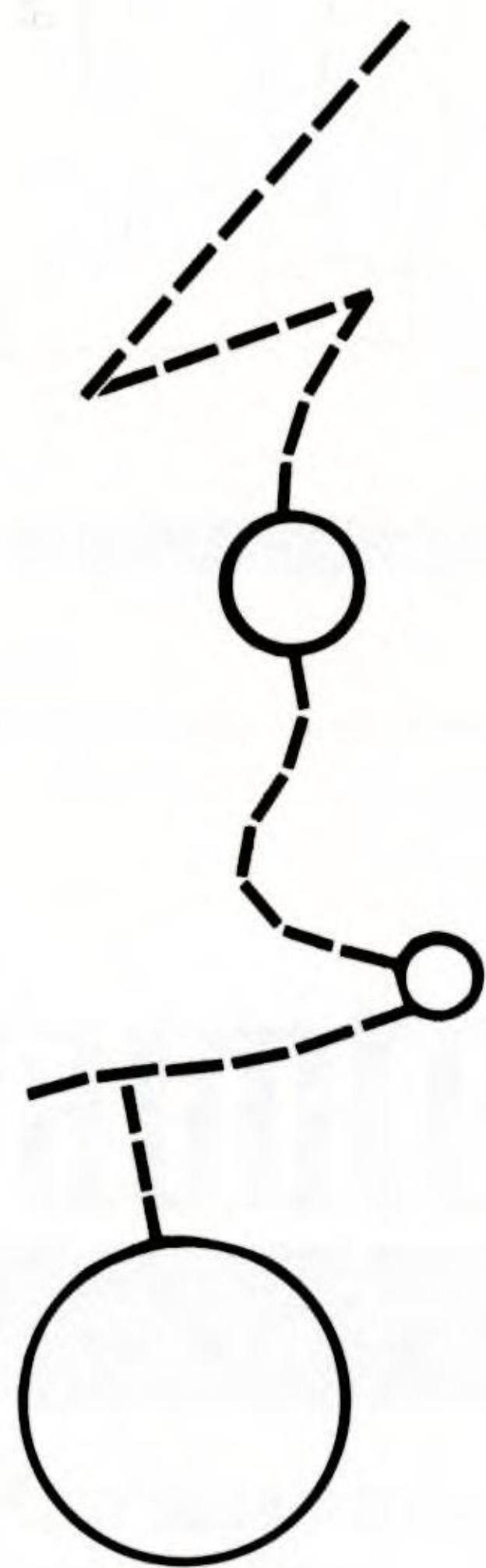
a journey home

learning the dance
frees my body
to love
to move
to take back
the essence
of who
i am

a journey home



Robin Ferguson



Positive reinforcement of the child, for
the benefit of
the parent. Someone
must have meant something else,
when they swept
me in their arms. Enfolded
me, while I wished for
grape bubble gum,
rubbery purple punctuation spil-
ling over the sides
of my mouth.
Dreams of stretchy serpents,
violet
violence to corrupt,
even in my own image. Misshapen
bubbles of energy, almost
circles tap dancing on my lips
at the library,
at the movies, even
at my grandfather's funeral.
It hid my stuck-out tongue as
I flaunted the sweet coating at my aunt,
endower of the ugly
yellow sweater. "Say thank you,
even if you don't like it"
I longed, then, for another tongue
of grape,
malleable,
more fun
than a hug.

Given gum today
I feel scratchy granules,
boring
insta-cavities. I find it
too corrupt,
in my own image.
It flirts in my mouth
like a kiss,
leaving me
the funny taste of
worn-out sucrose. (My mother pushed me forward then) so
I say "thank you" and
would die
for arms around me.


Amy Zalman

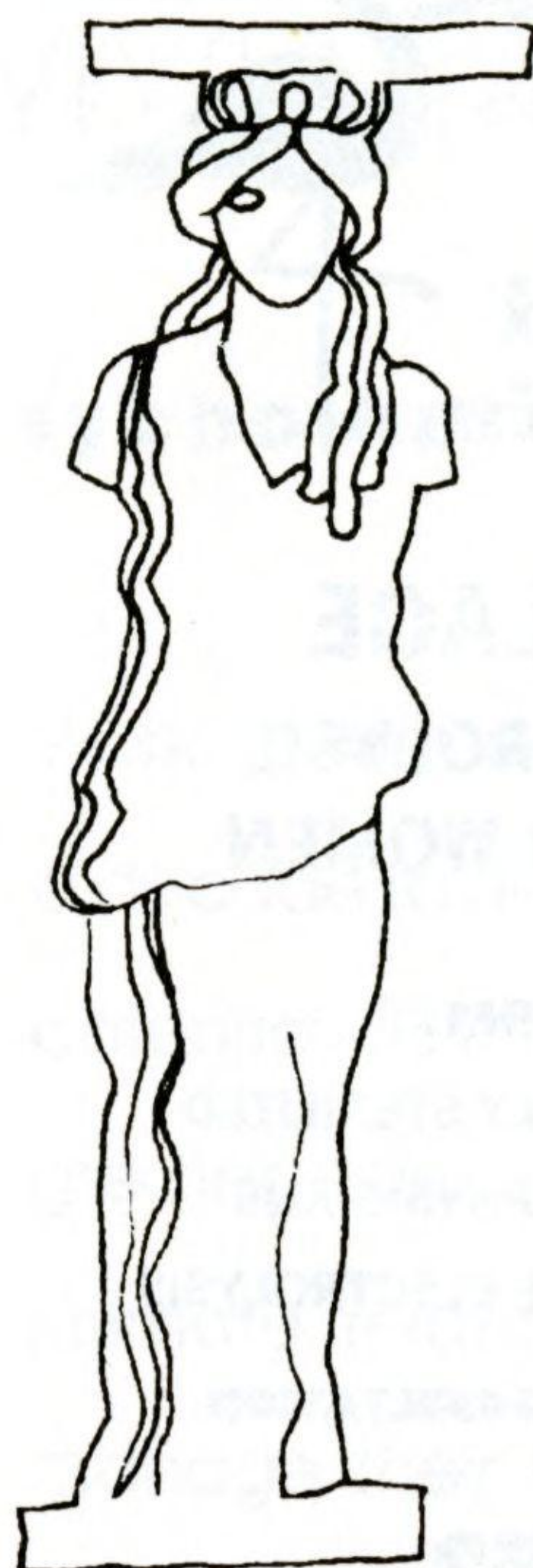
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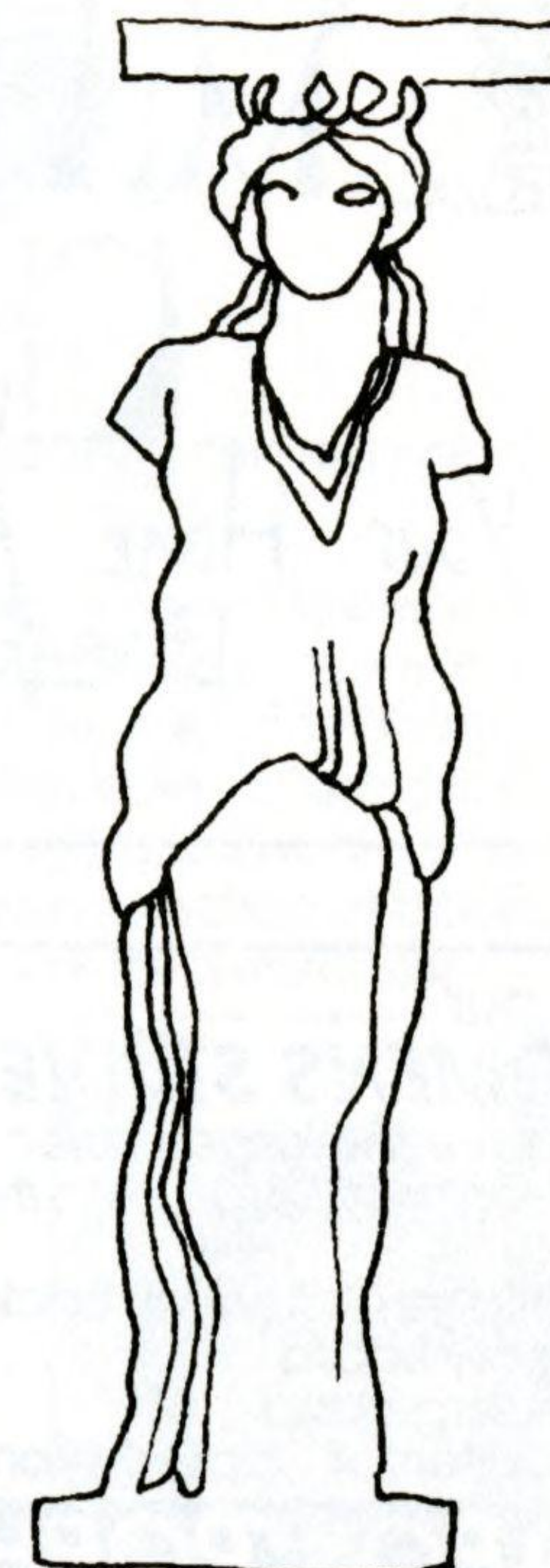
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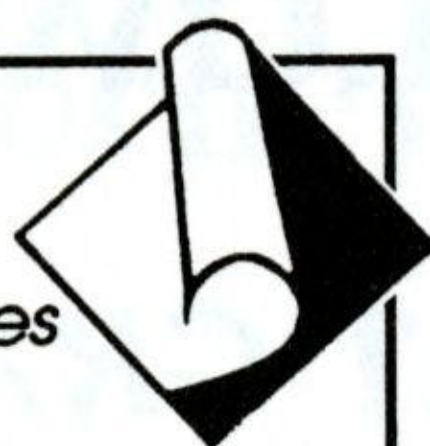
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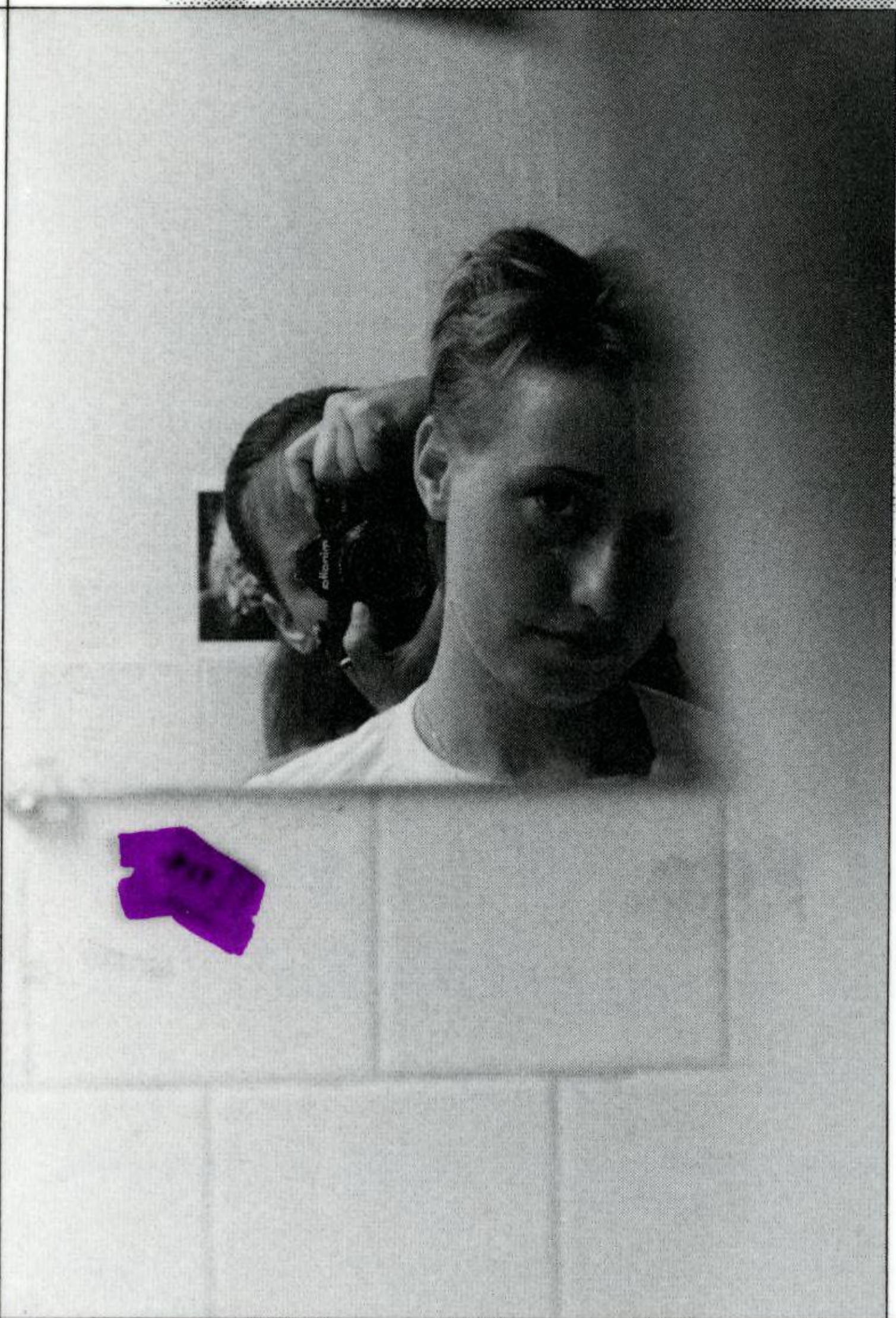
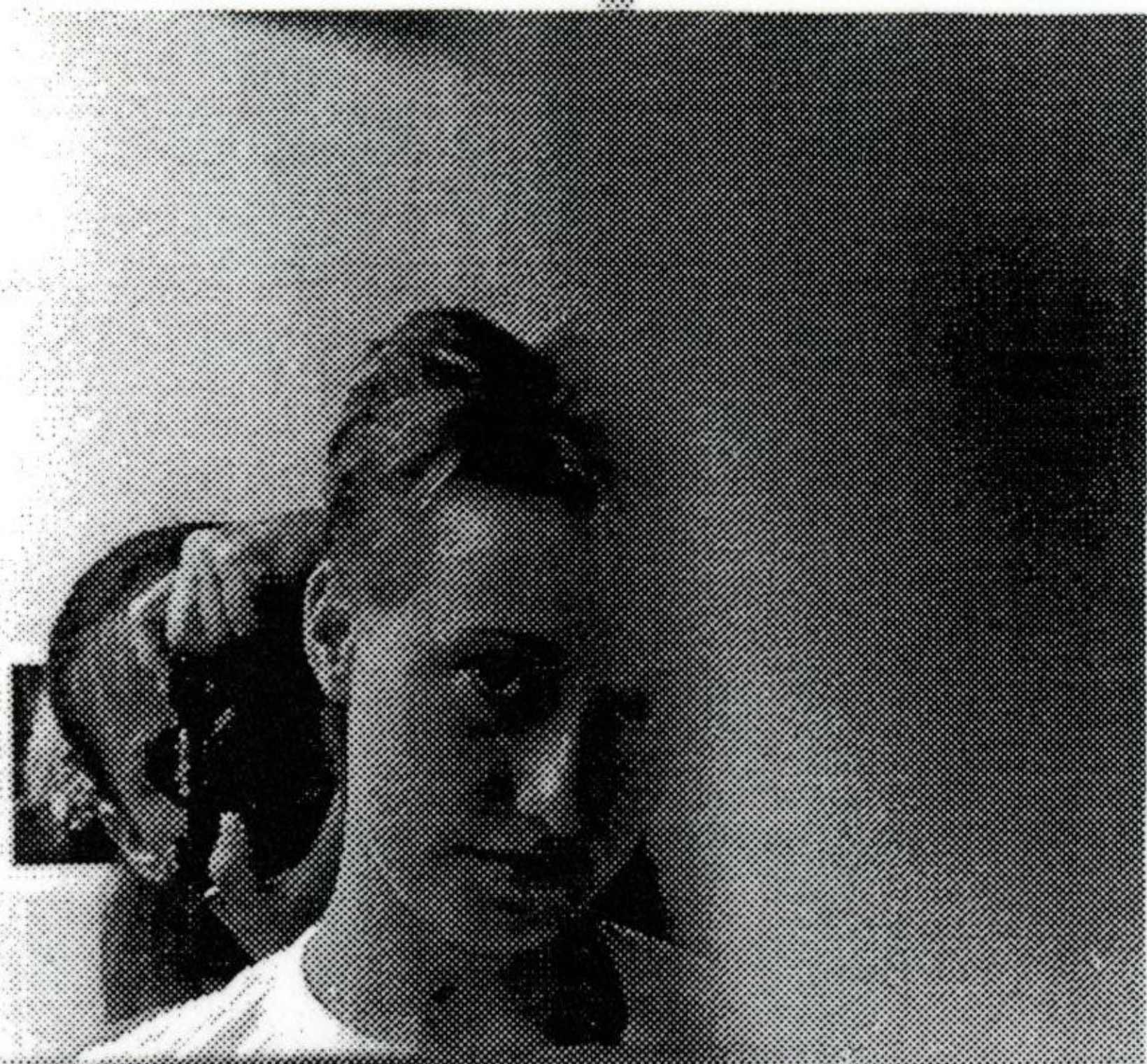
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