

SELF-PORTRAIT IN
TWENTY-THREE ROUNDS

SO MY HERITAGE IS a calculated fuck on some faraway sun-filled bed while the curtains are being sucked in and out of an open window by a passing breeze. I'd be lying if I were to tell you I could remember the smell of sweat as I hadn't even been born yet. Conception's just a shot in the dark. I'm supposed to be dead right now but I just woke up this dingo motherfucker having hit me across the head with a slab of marble that instead of splitting my head open laid a neat sliver of eyeglass lens through the bull's-eye center of my left eye. We were coming through this four-and-a-half-day torture of little or no sleep. That's the breaks. We were staying at this one drag queen's house but her man did her wrong by being seen by some other queen with a vicious tongue in a darkened lot on the west side fucking some cute little puerto rican boy in the face and when me and my buddy knocked on the door to try and get a mattress to lay down on she sent a bullet through the door thinking it was her man – after three days of no sleep and maybe a couple of stolen donuts my eyes start separating: one goes left and one goes right and after four days of sitting on some stoop on a side street head

cradled in my arms seeing four hours of pairs of legs walking by too much traffic noise and junkies trying to rip us off and the sunlight so hot this is a new york summer I feel my brains slowly coming to a boil in whatever red-blue liquid the brains float in and looking down the street or walking around I begin to see large rats the size of shoeboxes; ya see them just outta the corner of your eyes, in the outer sphere of sight and when ya turn sharp to look at them they've just disappeared around the corner or down subway steps and I'm so sick my gums start bleedin' every-time I breathe and after the fifth day I start seeing what looks like the limbs of small kids, arms and legs in the mouths of these rats and no screaming mommies or daddies to lend proof to the image and late last night me and my buddy were walking around with two meat cleavers we stole from Macy's gourmet section stuck in between our belts and dry skin lookin' for someone to mug and some queer on the upper east side tried to pick us up but my buddy's meat cleaver dropped out the back of his pants just as the guy was opening the door to his building and clang clangalang the guy went apeshit his screams bouncing through the night off half a million windows of surrounding apartments we ran thirty blocks till we felt safe. Some nights we had so much hate for the world and each other all these stupid dreams of finding his foster parents who he tried poisoning with a box of rat poison when they let him out of the attic after keeping him locked in there for a month and a half after all dear it's summer vacation and no one will miss you here's a couple of jugs of springwater and cereal don't eat it all at once we're off on a holiday after all it's better this than we return you to that nasty kids home. His parents had sharp taste buds and my buddy spent

eight years in some jail for the criminally insane even though he was just a minor. Somehow though he had this idea to find his folks and scam lots of cash off them so we could start a new life. Some nights we'd walk seven or eight hundred blocks practically the whole island of manhattan crisscrossing east and west north and south each on opposite sides of the streets picking up every wino bottle we found and throwing it ten feet into the air so it crash exploded a couple of inches away from the other's feet – on nights that called for it every pane of glass in every phone booth from here to south street would dissolve in a shower of light. We slept good after a night of this in some abandoned car boiler room rooftop or lonely drag queen's palace.

If I were to leave this country and never come back or see it again in films or sleep I would still remember a number of different things that sift back in some kind of tidal motion. I remember when I was eight years old I would crawl out the window of my apartment seven stories above the ground and hold on to the ledge with ten scrawny fingers and lower myself out above the sea of cars burning up eighth avenue and hang there like a stupid motherfucker for five minutes at a time testing my own strength dangling I liked the rough texture of the bricks against the tips of my sneakers and when I got tired I'd haul myself back in for a few minutes' rest and then climb back out testing testing testing how do I control this how much control do I have how much strength do I have waking up with a mouthful of soot sleeping on these shitty bird-filled rooftops waking up to hard-assed sunlight burning the tops of my eyes and I ain't had much to eat in three days except for the steak we stole from the

A&P and cooked in some bum kitchen down on the lower east side the workers were friendly to us that way and we looked clean compared to the others and really I had dirt scabs behind my ears I hadn't washed in months but once in a while in the men's room of a horn and hardart's on forty-second street in between standing around hustling for some red-eyed bastard with a pink face and a wallet full of singles to come up behind me and pinch my ass murmuring something about good times and good times for me was just one fucking night of solid sleep which was impossible I mean in the boiler room of some high-rise the pipes would start clanking and hissing like machine pistons putting together a tunnel under the river from here to jersey and it's only the morning 6:00 a.m. heat piping in to all those people up above our heads and I'm looking like one of them refugees in the back of life magazine only no care packages for me they give me some tickets up at the salvation army for three meals at a soup kitchen where you get a bowl of mucus water and sip rotten potatoes while some guy down the table is losing his eye into his soup he didn't move fast enough on the line and some fucked-up wino they hired as guard popped him in the eye with a bottle and I'm so lacking in those lovely vitamins they put in wonder-bread and real family meals that when I puff one drag off my cigarette blood pours out between my teeth sopping into the nonfilter and that buddy of mine complains that he won't smoke it after me and in the horn and hardart's there's a table full of deaf mutes and they're the loudest people in the joint one of them seventy years old takes me to a nearby hotel once a month when his disability check comes in and he has me lay down on my belly and he dry humps me

harder and harder and his dick is soft and banging against my ass and his arm is mashing my little face up as he goes through his routine of pretending to come and starts hollering the way only a deaf mute can holler like donkeys braying when snakes come around but somehow in the midst of all that I love him maybe it's the way he returns to his table of friends in the cafeteria a smile busted across his face and I'm the one with the secret and twenty dollars in my pocket and then there's the fetishist who one time years ago picked me up and told me this story of how he used to be in the one platoon in fort dix where they shoved all the idiots and illiterates and poor bastards that thought kinda slow and the ones with speeth spitch speeeeeeech impediments that means you talk funny he said and I nodded one of my silent yes's that I'd give as conversation to anyone with a tongue in those days and every sunday morning this sadistic sonuvabitch of a sergeant would come into the barracks and make the guys come out one by one and attempt to publicly read the sunday funnies blondie and dagwood and beetle baily and dondi, with his stupid morals I was glad when some little delinquent punched his face in one sunday and he had a shiner three sundays in a row full color till the strip couldn't get any more mileage out of it and some cop busted the delinquent and put him back in the reform school he escaped from, and all the while these poor slobs are trying to read even one line the sergeant is saying lookit this stupid sonuvabitch how the fuck do you expect to serve this country of yours and you can't even read to save your ass and he'd run around the barracks smacking all the guys in the head one after the other and make them force them to laugh at this guy tryin' to read until it was the next guy's turn, and when we

got to this guy's place there was three cats pissing all over the joint crusty brown cans of opened cat food littering the floor window open so they could leave by the fire escape and he had this thing for rubber he'd dress me up in this sergeant's outfit but with a pair of rubber sneakers that they made only during world war two when it was important to do that I guess canvas was a material they needed for the war effort or something and anyway so he would have me put on these pure rubber sneakers and the sergeant's outfit and then a rubber trenchcoat and then he'd grease up his dick and he would start fucking another rubber sneaker while on his belly and I'd have to shove my sneaker's sole against his face and tell him to lick the dirt off the bottom of it and all the while cursing at him telling him how stupid he was a fuckin' dingo stupid dog ain't worth catfood where'd you get your fuckin' brains surprised they even let ya past the m.p.'s on the front gate oughta call in the trucks and have you carted off to some idiot farm and where'd you get your brains and where'd you get your brains and when he came into his rubber sneaker he'd roll over all summer sweaty and say oh that was a good load musta ate some eggs today and I'm already removing my uniform and he says he loves the way my skeleton moves underneath my skin when I bend over to retrieve one of my socks.

LOSING THE FORM IN DARKNESS

IT'S SO SIMPLE: THE man without the eye against a receding wall, the subtle deterioration of weather, of shading, of images engraved in the flaking walls. See the quiet outline of a dog's head in plaster, simple as the splash of a fish in dreaming, and then the hole in the wall farther along, framing a jagged sky swarming with glints of silver and light. So simple, the appearance of night in a room full of strangers, the maze of hallways wandered as in films, the fracturing of bodies from darkness into light, sounds of plane engines easing into the distance.

It is the appearance of a portrait, not the immediate vision I love so much: that of the drag queen in the dive waterfront coffee shop turning toward a stranger and giving a coy seductive smile that reveals a mouth of rotted teeth, but the childlike rogue slipped out from the white-sheeted bed of Pasolini; the image of Jean Genet cut loose from the fine lines of fiction, uprooted from age and time and continent, and hung up slowly behind my back against a tin wall. It's the simple sense of turning slowly, feeling the breath of another body in a quiet room, the stillness shattered by the scraping of a fingernail against a collar line. Turning is the motion that disrupts the vision of fine red and

blue lines weaving through the western skies. It is the motion that sets into trembling the subtle water movements of shadows, like lines following the disappearance of a man beneath the surface of an abandoned lake.

He was moving in with the gradual withdrawal of light, a passenger on the shadows, heat cording his forehead and arms, passion lining the folds of his shirt. A handsome guy with unruly black hair, one eye like the oceans in fading light, the other a great vacant yawn shadowed black as the image of his leather jacket, all of it moved with mirage shivers over his heavy shoulders. There is a slight red color like a bruise or a blush to his cheeks, the muscles of his face smoothing into angles: hard jaw and a nose that might have once been broken. I was losing myself in the language of his movements, the slow rise and fall of a cigarette as he lifted it to his lips and brought it back down again, each drag leaving a small spherical haze to dissipate against his face.

Outside the windows the river light turned from blues to grays to flashes of rain. A serious dark veil ran the length of the horizon; there's a texture to it, a seediness like dream darkness you can breathe in or be consumed by. It swept down bringing with it strong waves and water, sending tiny people running for cars or shelter among the warehouse walls. Headlights began appearing, rain swinging through the holes in the roofs, through the windows emptied of glass. Sounds of dull puddles spreading along the floorboards. The stranger turned on his heel in the gray light and passed into other rooms, passing through layers of evening, like a dim memory, faceless for moments, just the movements of his body across the floor, the light of doorway after doorway casting itself across the length of his legs.

The river was dirty and coming toward me in the wind. A sixteen-wheel rig parked idling near the corner of the warehouse. Through the dark windows I could see this cowboy all the way from Wyoming sitting high up in the front seat, a woman with a blonde bouffant seated next to him raising a bottle of whiskey to her lips. The refrigeration motor hummed while big gauze-covered bodies of cattle swung from hooks in the interior of the truck. Out along the waterfront asphalt-strip cars were turning and circling around. Headlights like lighthouse beacons drifted over the surface of the river, brief and unobtrusive, then swinging around and illuminating the outlines of men, of strangers, people I might or might not have known because their faces were invisible, just black silhouettes, outlined suddenly as each car passes one after the other, pale interior faces turned toward the windows, then fading into distance.

Sitting in the Silver Dollar restaurant earlier in the afternoon, straddling a shining stool and ordering a small cola, I dropped a black beauty and let the capsule ride the edge of my tongue for a moment, as usual, and then swallowed it. Then the sense of regret washes over me like whenever I drop something, a sudden regret at what might be the disappearance of regular perceptions: the flat drift of sensations gathered from walking and seeing and smelling and all the associations; and that strange tremor like a ticklishness that never quite reaches the point of being unbearable. There's a slow sensation of that type coming into the body, from the temples to the abdomen to the calves, and riding with it in waves, spurred on by containers of coffee, into the marvelousness of light and motion and figures coasting along the streets. Yet somehow that feeling of beauty that comes riding off each

surface and movement around me always has a slight trace of falseness about it, a slight sense of regret, felt at the occurring knowledge that it's a substance flowing in my veins that cancels out the lines of thought brought along with time and aging and serious understanding of the self.

So there was that feeling of regret, a sudden impulse to bring the pill back up, a surge of weariness with the self, then the settling back and the wait for the sensations to begin. I smoked a fast cigarette and the door opened bringing with it sunlight and wind.

Restless walks filled with coasting images of sight and sound: cars bucking over cobblestones down the quiet side streets, trucks waiting at corners with swarthy drivers leaning back in the cool shadowy seats and the windows of buildings opening and closing, figures passing within rooms, faraway sounds of voices and cries and horns roll up and funnel in like some secret earphone connecting me with the creaking movements of the living city. Old images race back and forth and I'm gathering a heat in the depths of my belly from them: flashes of a curve of arm, back, the lines of a neck glimpsed among the crowds in the train stations, one that you could write whole poems to. I'm being buoyed by these discrete pleasures, walking the familiar streets and river. The streets were familiar more because of the faraway past than the recent past – streets that I walked in those odd times while living among them in my early teens when in the company of deaf mutes and times square pederasts. These streets are seen through the same eyes but each time with periods of time separating it: each time belonging to yet an older boy until the body smoothes out and lines are etched until it is a

young man recalling the movements of a complicated past. I can barely remember the senses I had when viewing these streets for the first time. There's a whole change in psyche and yet there are slight traces that cut me with the wounding nature of *déjà vu*, filled with old senses of desire. Each desire, each memory so small a thing, becomes a small river tracing the outlines and the drift of your arms and bare legs, dark mouth and the spoken words of strangers. All things falling from the earth and sky: small movements of the body on the docks, the moaning down among the boards and the night, car lights slanting across the distance, aeroplanes falling as if in a deep surrender to the rogue embraces. Various smiles spark from the darkening rooms, from behind car windows, and the sounds of the wind—plays along the coast sustained by distance and leveled landscapes, drifting around the bare legs and through doorways and into barrooms. Something silent that is recalled, the sense of age in a familiar place, the emptied heart and light of the eyes, the white bones of street lamps and moving autos, the press of memory turning over and over. Later, sitting over coffee and remembering the cinematic motions as if witnessed from a discreet distance, I lay the senses down one by one, writing in the winds of a red dusk, turning over slowly in sleep.

The tattooed man came through the sheets of rain, and swinging headlights from cars entering the riverside parking lot caught him among the fine slanting lines of wind and water. Late this evening, I was sitting by the dock's edge, sitting in the rain remembering old jersey showers as a kid and the quiet deliciousness of walking through coal-gray streets where trees leaned over

and by the fields where nuns in the cool green summers would hitch up their long black skirts and toss a large white medicine ball to each other in a kind of memory slow motion.

Over the jersey coast, seen through the veils of rain, the old Maxwell House coffee cup, a five-story neon cup of white, tipped over on its magical side with two red neon drops falling from its rim and disappearing into the darkness of the brush-covered cliffs. The tattooed man came up suddenly and sat down beside me in the rain like a ceramic figurine glazed with water running down the smooth colors of his shirtless chest. Huge fish fins were riding his shoulders and tattooed scales of komodo dragons, returned from the wilds of jungular africa, twisting outlines and colors of clawed feet and tails smoothing over his aged biceps and the cool white of his head, shaved to permit tattoos of mythological beasts to lift around his neck like frescoes of faded photographs of samurai warriors: a sudden flash of Mishima's private army standing still as pillars along the sides of the river.

He had a tough face. It was square-jawed and barely shaven. Close-cropped hair wiry and black, handsome like some face in old boxer photographs, a cross between an aging boxer and Mayakovsky. He had a nose that might have once been broken in some dark avenue barroom in a distant city invented by some horny young kid. There was a wealth of images in that jawline, slight tension to it and curving down toward a hungry-looking mouth.

Sitting in a parked car by the river's edge, he leaned over and placed the palm of his hand along the curve of my neck and I

was surprised how perfectly it fit, stroking me slowly, his arms brown as the skin of his face, like a slight tan quietly receding into a blush. He seemed shy for a moment, maybe because of what he saw in my eyes, but the heat was pumping inside the car and the waves, turned over and over by the coasting winds, barreled across the surface of the river beneath darkening clouds. Some transvestites circled down from the highway, going from car to car, leaning in the driver's windows checking for business.

He eases his hands down toward my legs and slides it back up beneath my shirt, saying, "Take it off." I reach down and lift the sweater and the t-shirt up together and pull them over my head, dropping them to the floor where my pants are straddling my ankles. He pulls off his green naval sweater revealing a t-shirt the color of ice blue, reaches down and peels that off too. We are looking at each other from opposite sides of the car. He's got a gleaming torso, thick chest with a smooth downy covering of black hair, brick-red nipples buried inside the down. He leans and bends before me licking my body softly down my sides, one hand massaging slowly between my legs, his other hand wetted briefly against his mouth and working his cock up until it is dark and red and hard.

When he lifted away from my chest I saw his eyes, the irises the color of dark chips of stone, something like the sky at dusk after a clear hot summer day, when the ships are folding down into the distance and jet exhaust trails are uttered from the lips of strangers. The transvestites were back and leaning in the window refusing to go away. We pulled our clothes back on and closed up the car, heading toward one of the abandoned structures.

Inside one of the back ground-floor rooms there are a couple of small offices built into the garagelike space. Paper from old shipping lines scattered all around like bomb blasts among wrecked pieces of furniture; three-legged desks, a naugahyde couch of mint-green turned upside down, and small rectangles of light and wind and river over on the far wall.

I lean toward him, pushing him against the wall, lifting my pale hands up beneath his sweater, finding the edge of his tight t-shirt and peeling it upward. I placed my palms against the hard curve of his abdomen, his chest rolling slightly in pleasure. Moving back and forth within the tin-covered office cubicle, old soggy couch useless on the side, the carpet beneath our shifting feet reveals our steps with slight pools of water. We're moving around, changing positions that allow us to bend and sway and lean forward into each other's arms so that our tongues can meet with nothing more than a shy hesitation. He is sucking and chewing on my neck, pulling my body into his, and over the curve of his shoulder, sunlight is burning through a window emptied of glass. The frame still contains a rusted screen that reduces shapes and colors into tiny dots like a film directed by Seurat. Pushing and smoothing against the tides, this great dark ship with hundreds of portholes entered the film. His head was below my waist, opening his mouth and showing brilliant white teeth; he's unhooking the button at the top of my trousers. I lean down and find the neckline of his sweater and draw it back and away from the nape of his neck which I gently probe with my tongue. In loving him, I saw a cigarette between the fingers of a hand, smoke blowing backwards into the room, and sputtering planes diving low through the clouds. In loving him, I saw men

encouraging each other to lay down their arms. In loving him, I saw small-town laborers creating excavations that other men spend their lives trying to fill. In loving him, I saw moving films of stone buildings; I saw a hand in prison dragging snow in from the sill. In loving him, I saw great houses being erected that would soon slide into the waiting and stirring seas. I saw him freeing me from the silences of the interior life.

Stopped in the Silver Dollar just as dusk was rolling in, paid for some takeout coffee, there's a group of ten drag queens standing outside leaning on shining car fenders, applying lipstick and powders out of tiny mirrored compacts. One young man in a tight white t-shirt, hard white arms, no more dreams, heavy beer belly, had fallen on his face moments before. A couple of his teeth having popped out, there were two vermilion streaks running down the sides of his mouth and some cops were standing over him as he lay on his back, his cheekbones glistening and arms flailing like in some stream, backstroking his way out of this world, out of this life, away from this sea of blue uniforms and white boneless faces, away from this sea of city heat and faraway motion of his eyes fluttering behind dark sunglasses. Walked onto the pier and stood with my back to the river and way over the movements of the city was what looked like a falling star, a photographic negative of one in the night: a jet streak short and vertical falling from the sky, like a falling jet with a single illuminated flame tracing the domed curve of the heavens, a scratch in the sky, a blinding light caught in the scratch from the unseen sun, and slowly changing direction and connecting the rooftops of the buildings one after the other.

In the warehouse just before dark, passed along the hallways and photographed the various graffiti on the walls, some of hermaphrodites and others of sharp-faced thugs smoking cigarettes; in passing through a series of rooms, saw this short fat man with a seedy mustache standing in a broken closet filled with old wet newspapers and excrement and piss, standing with his hands locked behind his head and with a hard-on poking out through his trousers from beneath a grimy heavy overcoat: he was doing this strange dance, undulating his hips, sweat rolling down the sides of his face, beneath dark glasses, grimacing and stabbing the air with his cock and saying in a loud whisper: "... come in here ... I'll make ya feel so *good* ... so *good* ..."

Later, about 3:00 a.m., a terrific storm swept down on the city, the waves rolling like humpbacked whales just beneath the water's surface: whole schools of them riding first toward and then away from the piers. With another coffee I stepped along the walls of the warehouse and ducked beneath the low doorway to get out of the rain. Somewhere in the darkness men stood around. I thought I could hear the shuffle of their feet, the sense of their hearts palpitating in the coolness. Dark cars outside the windows slowly covered in rain, headlights clicking on suddenly, waves slashing at the pier and huge pieces of unhooked tin, torn down by the wind, clanging and crashing against the upper walls. I thought I saw a person in a white jacket disappearing as I reached the upper hallways. Walked around sloshing hot coffee over the rim of the open cup with every few steps. Looked out the side windows into the squall, tiny motions of the wet city. Inside, for as far as the eye could see, there was darkness and waving walls of iron, rusting sounds painful and rampant,

crashing sounds of glass from remaining windows, and no sign of people: I realized I was completely alone. The sense of it slightly unnerving in the cavernous space. Street lamps from the westside highway burn in the windows, throwing shadows behind staircases and burying doors and halls. Walked out on the catwalk and watched the terrific gale and tossing waves of the river from one of the side doors. Huge panoramas of factories and water tanks were silhouetted by green roof lights and cars moving down the highway seen only by the red wink of their taillights.

Walking back into the main section of the warehouse I stopped in one of the rooms facing the elevated highway. The rain had slowed down and the streets were burning with a brassai light and texture. I suddenly felt a hand on my crotch in the darkness and turned toward the dark void where the face should be, stepping back as I did so. The hand belonged to a small, dwarfish man, someone out of an old Todd Browning image. I put my hand to his shoulder and said, "Sorry . . . just walking around . . ." And as I passed through a series of rooms, he followed from a distance, sliding along the walls and appearing unexpectedly in the doorways ahead of me, the rise and fall of his cigarette describing a clear arc, like a meteorite, then disappearing into the shadows of his face. As I left by the back stairs, he drifted out of a room over to the top of the staircase and stood silently watching me descend from view.

Standing in a waterfront bar, having stopped in for a beer in mid-afternoon: smoky sunlight riding in through the large plate-glass windows and a thumping roll of music beating invisibly in the air. Over by one window and side wall, a group of guys

are hanging out playing pool – one of them is this chicano boy, muscular and smooth with a thin cotton shirt of olive green, black cowboy hat pushed down over his head, strong collarbones pressing out, a graceful curve of muscles in his back and a solid chest, his stomach pressed like a slightly curved washboard against the front of his shirt, muscles in the arms rising and falling effortlessly as he gesticulates with one hand, talking with some guy who's leaning into the sunlight of the window; in his other hand the poolstick is balanced against his palm, a cigarette between his fingers. He leans back and takes a drag and blows lazy smoke rings one after the other that pierce the rafts of light and dissolve within the shadows. The guy that he was talking to looked like some faraway character straight from the fields of old skittering wheat and someone I once traveled with by pickup truck with beer cans in the dusty backseat and buzz in the head from summer: dark eyes and a rosy complexion, roughly formed face made of sharp lines and his hair cut short around the sides and back of his neck. Standing there sipping from a green bottle, I could see myself taking the nape of his neck in my teeth as he turned and stared out the window at the rolling lines of traffic for a moment. Light curved around his face and the back of his head, the shaved hair produced sensations that I could feel across the palm of my hand, my sweating hand, all the way from where I stood on the other side of the room. He looked around after turning away from the windows and set his eyes on me for a moment, studying me for indiscernible reasons, and I felt myself blush: felt the movement of the bass tapping against some chord where the emotions or passions lie, tilted my head back and took

another swig from the beer, a humming gathering from my stomach and rising up past my ears.

He turns away and the chicano guy leans over the pool table for a shot, his back curved and taut like a bow, arm drawing back to softly clack the balls on the table: a couple dropping into the side pocket, and for a moment the two of them were lost in the drift of men entering the bar. I move over a few feet to bring them back into view and some sort of joke developed between them. The country boy reaches into the bottom slot of the table and withdraws a shiny black eight-ball and advances toward the chicano, who drew back until his buttocks hit the low sill of the window. He giggles and leans his head back at an angle and lets a hardness come from his eyes. The country boy's face turned a slight shade of red in the light and he reached out with his hands: one hand pulling the top of the chicano's shirt out and the other deftly dropping the eight-ball into the neckline. The ball rolled down and lodged near his belly and the two of them laughed as he reached in, hand sliding down the chest and stomach retrieving the ball. I took a last swig from my beer, overcome with the sensations of touch, of my fingers and palms smoothing along some untouched body in some imagined and silent sun-filled room, overcome with the heat that had been gathering in my belly and now threatened to overpower me with a sense of dizziness. I barely managed to place the bottle upright on the nearby cigarette machine and push open the doors, into the warm avenue winds, push open the doors and release myself from the embrace of the room and the silent pockets of darkness and the illuminating lines of light thinking it was Jacques Prevert who said "why work when you have a pack of cigarettes and

sunlight to play with?”, and listened to the horns of ships along the river, far behind the fields of buildings and traffic, turned a corner and headed across town.

Passing down a long hallway there were glimpses of frescoes, vagrant frescoes painted with rough hands on the peeling walls, huge murals of nude men painted with beige and brown colors coupling several feet above the floorboards. Some of them with half-animal bodies leaning into the room’s darkness with large outlined erections poised for penetration. Other walls contain crayoned buddhas and shining gems floating above their heads in green wax. One wall where a series of black wire-strewn holes pull apart the surface, where crowbars and hammers searched out copper pipes and wires, but still filled with floating faces almost japanese with pink high-boned cheeks and multi-colored eyelids, a stream of hair touched by loving or by winds, small crudely drawn lanterns serving no discernible purpose but to genie these faces from the vague surface of the plaster.

Passing doorways in slow motion, passing through shadowed walls and along hallways, seeing briefly framed in the recesses of a room a series of men in various stages of leaning. Seeing the pale flesh of the frescoes come to life: the smooth turn of hands over bodies, the taut lines of limbs and mouths, the intensity of the energy bringing others down the halls where guided by little or no sounds they pass silently over the charred floors. They appear out of nowhere and line the walls like figurines before firing squads or figures in a breadline in old times pressed into history. Stopping for a moment, I thought of the eternal sleep of statues, of marble eyes and lips and the stone wind-blown hair of

the rider's horse, of illuminated arms corded with soft unbreathing veins, of the wounding curve of ancient backs stooped for frozen battles, of the ocean and the eyes in fading light, of the white stone warthog in the forest of crowfoot trees, and of the face beneath the sands of the desert still breathing.