

The harbour breathes

The bridge on the outer quai. The beautiful Sydney has been robbed of its culture as though to pay for beautiful geography. My body's been stripped and wounded and closed up again with plastic parts and metal plates. My heart's gone and the respirator works too hard to oxygenate the atmosphere and the sea spray contains so much detergent that it breaks down my protective layers. I've been torn into and inspected in all my pores and my bowels. Like robot-operated surgery. I wonder why I don't get more angry. Is my city your city, and the city your body like it's my body. Do you feel the lapping of our surf against your side, stroking and soothing your kidneys as the stinking black air pours down your throat, the Pacific for thousands of miles drawing off your wastage. The desert rising like a huge flat mountain beyond the Great Divide and like the natural consequence, the only possible result and closer to what I'm becoming than my love in my city in my body where the cosiness of the buildings bang up against each other and the warm dirty asphalt spreads like a blanket under my feet much more so than grass could.

I can't find you here, only the public faces. I'm searching at my temples amongst the hair to divine you. We've been dispersed and reorganized. I wonder if our people will get together again against the false culture and away from it. I feel stuck in the alien world of the personal. Woman's world. I have a map of it.

Another alternative: get on a plane and leave.

In the picture: The crowd in the room. The diagonal divides it into black and white. Our heads are in the dark half.

The blimp: Where are we going in this blimp?

Sydney, evil city. A dream runs through you. I'm swinging from a noose over the tank stream under the pavement. Hemmed in from everywhere, locked in the inky blackness. The shark vomited up a human arm in the harbour. The city is radial, all the arterial roads converge on the centre. Thousands commute and pack down in the office stacks. The harbour breathes out at night into the sea. City of the night, menacing and brilliant in the humid smog. Glassy and crystalline in the daylight then subterranean at night. Show city above hidden commercial transactions like the bridge

over the dark harbour. We look on helpless as though we're standing on a narrow ledge high up on a sheer glass wall.

The green of the jungle, wet, panting. We expect obstacle after obstacle where every part of the landscape has been made into a cliché. The quicksand, the insects, the vines and the trees covered in moss and meeting at the top. The dark jungle floor, the carpet. In one sense a sanctuary like a cathedral, where no sooner do we close the heavy wooden doors behind us and look, panting into the gloom, than the priest quietly moves out of the cloister with the army. The cardboard facade. Facade, facade.

I move to you, I need protection. You move away. You laugh. You puzzle. My urgency isn't yours. The whole world is a manoeuvre. I move, you move.

Everything is relative, human nature is faulty, there is no one truth. In the beating sun, my back up against a big rock, the heat and the piercing glare can purge all this out, substitute itself for the other kind of anguish, get me used to

it, to withstanding an oppressive force.

You retreat behind the facade back to the lollipop. Back to wander the streets of Toytown where people are still normal people, where you can savour the joys of life. The nice man who drives the bright new car. Where the routines are unbreakable, static, retrogressive.

In my city I found simple recognizable features. The arch, ornamental brickwork, post and lintel. From the sawdust filter, the duct crossing the lane in the air. The corrugated iron roofs, the planes at different angles. The simple church opposite the high-rise flats. The windows at footpath level, the glass bricks in the pavement. A

view of a section of the park at the end of the street by the school. I loved to hang around outside our house. I wanted to walk around more often than I had time. Up to the library, into town, back from town, down to the pool, up to the park, down the street to shop, to the corner shop. Or at night, to run fast from our front door straight across the road and in through the door of the shop directly opposite. I wove a life in and out of the streets, around the people, the buses and cars. I thought one day I could write about the street life. From the desk in my room on the third floor I watched the street at night. I wrote a poem about lying in the long grass under my grandmother's washing line. My grandmother's sheets were white patches against the sky. American abstract art arrived at the art gallery. There were English naturalist novels in the library, they were boring and depressing: a young English man is walking around a large English town in an overcoat

thinking about women. On my street there were men everywhere from all over the world. Spain, Greece, Italy, Yugoslavia, Germany, Fiji. Coming out of the residentials, gathering on the street, leaning against the front fences. I just happened to be there. It was selfconscious experience as it was happening. I thought I was there to remember, to notice. But to remember what? The things which occur to me now. Or which occurred to me then. The swinging saloon doors on the wine bar where people fell in and fell out? The drycleaner's shop which smelt of steam?

The cliches from English and American novels are all present here: the old person, a character around whom to weave a sketch or portrait, their bundles in a pram, the pathos of their way of life. A lonely bachelor leaning out of his window on a summer's night, smoking in the dark, wearing a singlet. Someone in a coffee lounge half-obsured by the reflections on the glass and construed as lonely. The brightly coloured laminex. The star- shaped suspended ceiling. Were these the first signs of disintegration or the signs of a community which contained them. The community was containing the changes but not the price rises. The next generation moved out to the west where housing was cheap and our city became the playground of the rich. In the western ghetto the characters become invisible and so does their plight. All this information is obvious, we know all this, this is what predicates our city lives and I just happen to live in this particular episode of social engineering.