

THE RESISTANCE

*Y si entre estos caminos
...vuelvo al recinto de mi propia vida:
un jardín solo, una comuna pobre...
—Pablo Neruda, "El Egoista"*

I remember those districts lashed with rain
through three Vancouver seasons: our modest houses
or three-storey walk-ups stuccoed
or wooden-sided, a drenched tricycle
toppled over on the small wet lawn,
Ford vans, old Chevy station wagons, rusted Dodge four-doors
and Austins, Valiants, Volkswagens with the hood a different color
resting at the curbs after work
—the gutters miniature streams in the steady downpour—
all the vehicles gone before 8 a.m. Clouds low over the inlet
obscuring the North Shore mountains. And the gale through the afternoon,
then even fiercer toward supper as the gusts
drove sheets of water onto the roofs' mossy shingles,
liquid that rattled and banged
descending the downspouts
during the cooking, and each hour of the night.

And every dwelling alive with the promise
of those who inhabited these neighborhoods
of slick sidewalks, corner stores with steamed windows,
empty half-flooded gardens with rotting fences along the back lanes,
streets soaked under the endless maritime spray: the promise
echoing in the shouts, the droning speaker at the podium
of union meetings, protest meetings, action planning meetings
with water pooling on the scuffed floors
under our boots and shoes and from our saturated coats
hung on the backs of the old wooden chairs.

Outside, smell of wet malt or fish offal
through the blustery days. Hours we squelched along sodden asphalt
in front of dripping buildings or industrial fences
with our strike placards covered by flapping plastic
on which water beaded, our defiance secured around our necks
by damp string as the rain
which was never on strike worked its way inwards through seam
after seam of jackets and shirts, layer after layer
until it reached our insurrectionary skins.

I remember the jammed bus
with its windows fogged and beaded against the downpour
as I returned from work, clothes stained by sawdust and
sheetrock dust. Or driving to the factory
through the early morning storm, windshield wipers ceaselessly
clearing the flood, the line of vehicles splashing through puddles
into the employees' parking lot, the rain falling equally
on mobile construction cranes, ship's chandlers,
lumber mill booming grounds, cannery docks,

and hotel beer parlors:
the Europe, Anchor, Waldorf and more—
designated haunts of the railway workers, or posties, or longshoremen,
the fabricators of steel cable, builders of off-road logging tractors
and the rest of us: the rain hammering against the high windows
while over terry-clothed small round tables
we conducted the incessant planning of a new day
free of the endlessly falling water—utopian (why not?), revolutionary
(why not?)—as our arguments proposed liberationist means
of production, distribution, public wealth: the saturated words
merging, then flowing off every manufactured surface
into office lunchrooms, plant cafeterias, tugboat galleys
and onto the leaflets spewed forth from the battered mimeograph
or old offset printing press in basement or storefront rooms
with the squall showering its pellets of spray
against the glass and outer walls.

And other windows

where under the warmth of the duvet
she and I, side by side and naked,
sipped hot coffee from cups
with a sugared rim, the downpour
driven by wild surges of the sea wind
against the first light of dawn,
the time clock and my toolbox waiting,
her office typewriter waiting,
the resistance waiting another day
under another season's steady rain.

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