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# PHOENIX

*from the collagraph by Chryssa Saj*

1.

Call it phoenix. Call it a city in the desert, red,  
I got out of a plane there, lizard on the runway,  
call it a bird.

Fire phoenix phoenicam  
call it a red bird lost in the blue of somebody remembering  
all nobody ever really knew about phoenixes but said, said  
they come from ash.

Sift your ashes over the paper  
and where the paper's wet with your blood or spit or sweat  
some ash will stick and marks will show. That is writing.

Inscribed by the adherent ash, where does this smart wet come from,  
snail trail, saliva, a finger wet from some new-found spring  
describes a word.

Call it phoenix.  
A word, any word, is the trace of a desire.  
Desire moves, desire burns  
itself out  
in each object it takes hold of,  
burns to ash and comes again.

Out of the ashes guess what rises. Always new a thing  
to want, a phoenix is a bird of wanting

not what it wants but wanting wanting.  
A phoenix is all wanting, crashing  
into the object of desire, dying, firing, flying  
up from the ruins of itself.

The only ruin is what you mean.

2.

Death the bird says, death  
is getting what you want.  
Even if you're a desert with a city in you.  
You have to go into the fire  
the fire is what you don't want at all  
and from it you come out again

same name no name nobody to be sure  
but somebody  
somebody to love me  
whoever I am

3.  
Tesselated. It's like a horse. We know  
in China the wind is green

runs on four legs through the dusty city  
never dirty never clean

the wind is like the moon.

Moonswept, the dismal prairie  
inland, speaking a language thick with consonants,  
a going-forward made of stops and starts,

to bright to see any but the brightest stars,  
I think you are a bird wants to fly out of me

4.  
Blue metabolism, why do you suck  
so hard my sky in,  
everything separates me.

5.  
Once I was sky  
and knew the distances  
between the actual  
and the real,

the pronouns of our romance are just virtual  
indicate no people  
only mark the corners of the chessboard,

the center called you, the edge called me.

6.

A road runs through your blue eye.  
No wonder the bird escapes from color.

The key to color leads out the same door  
a hand reaches always in,

your fingers light upon the latch of my attention,  
my fingers playing with the withies of your wall.

7.

But what do they do with a road when they come back to life?  
What do they do with time?  
Is the blood all the language of a small country,  
fish in a green field,

can I believe you ever again when you show me some stars  
and say That is the Coffee Roaster that one over there's the Porcelain Cup  
and you must be the Emperor of China and I must be the Yellow River  
with a little boat with silken sails you take your ease inside

(the pronouns are all virtual) hot night on the luminous canal.  
Of course I believed. I always believe a picture, or only a picture,  
you tell me there are three doors in the wall  
I go through all of them at once,  
behind one is a hill with a quiet black dog in the mist  
behind the second you wait for me with a glass in your hand  
ice cubes seem to sound, tinkling as you seem to walk.  
But behind the third door some stars are stored  
waiting for their blue names.

I don't want to help you here,  
you're on your own, I want to be quiet

and reconstruct the flowering tree in the churchyard,  
a blue paulownia its petals strewn over the long ago dead.

You have the whole kingdom of sensation to yourself.

8.

Walking through the streets of the skin  
small courtyards of accurate sensation

I call out at the gateway Who is there?  
And nobody answers, nobody ever  
answers but the walls form this square  
a fountain comes and goes in the center  
where down is just a dialect of up  
and there are benches worn as tombstones  
there are birds like refugees from the sky  
broken things children's faces  
filled with amazing absences  
the smell of darkness and no one there  
or just one, going garden to garden  
through the city, like a phoenix  
dying my way from house to house

until I come to the edge of the desert  
no walls no birds no explanations  
but there is always somebody there  
who a long time ago forgot how to talk.

15-16 June 2001  
Cuttyhunk

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There is always another coast beyond this coast.  
So emigration, my Vikings, is an eternal road

and all you have to go on is the salt  
taste of it left at the corners of your mouth

her mouth you find when you come  
to one more indecipherable shore.

15 June 2001  
Cuttyhunk

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Almost five a.m. two dark  
seagulls on the lawn in mist  
have told me sleep, sleep  
is better than this, it's all  
right, we have what happens  
under control, it will never  
come again but don't think  
this is realer than that  
only we're more beautiful  
is the word you use for this  
something the other side of now.

16 June 2001  
Cuttyhunk

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The question though isn't it is being old

There is a drawing of the sea,  
an absurdity,  
no line knows how to say that unflat surface  
the moving micromountains of the sea

which is itself all about saying, even singing  
as the Welshman said, not being there.

The sea is never there, never ever, the sea  
is always something else and on its way,

always away. Absurd art  
to hold it in some hand. Absurd sunlight  
to cast such accurate shadow —  
cool wind coming out of moveless fog how can that be  
and not even noon?

The king is dead in his bower  
the queen is on her white horse  
hurrying to the sea, nations change,  
people are seldom who they think they are  
dirty cities wait for all of us making hell of heaven,

heaven is streets lead forever to other streets

'and only man is vile.' Listen to that on your fucking radio,  
too many breakfasts come down to eat.

Mes poèmes zutiques I'm ashamed of now  
I took so seriously to say I want I want  
and now every pronoun is a question isn't it  
no word transacts a space from you to me.

16 June 2001  
Cuttyhunk



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There are too many stories after all  
translated from the Chinese, Lao-tse and all his old German  
being wise the way Americans play golf, easy, oxcart,  
smiling, doing deals, all of life converging on a shallow hole,  
  
too much wisdom, too many stories, too many voices in the silent night.

16 June 2001  
Cuttyhunk

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**I WANT TO WRITE A POEM  
THAT SHUTS UP FOR A LONG TIME OUT LOUD**

**WORDS THAT SAY NOTHING, WORDS THAT ANSWER  
NO QUESTIONS, I WANT**

**TO WRITE WHAT I DON'T WANT TO WRITE.**

16 June 2001  
Cuttyhunk

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Or the Chinese poet tossing  
his poems into the river  
I've tried that, the water  
always remembers

recites them to this day  
can't get away from poetry  
once something is in words  
it's never free

16 June 2001  
Cuttyhunk

## LET HER

Let send letter  
let her, letter what

litter left along the beach

poppies rosa rugosa beach pea

yellow red white purple letter

Send her let her let her know  
the litter left along the letter what  
every letter knows what every letter  
says

the rest the letter of what people mean  
litters the letters  
the few the so few letters left

2.

meaning is all wanting anyway  
meaning is an absent scholar pretending to be present  
meaning cheats meaning has another scholar raise his hand  
and cry present in a phony voice when meaning's name is called

here I am here I am

meaning is always missing  
always wanting

who is the teacher in this story?  
Who calls the name?

17 June 2001  
Cuttyhunk

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Hawk in fog  
crying above the house

hawk in wind

some weather coming  
hawk whistling

look up see nothing  
wind moving fog

hawk in the head

17 June 2001  
Cuttyhunk

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Vacationers spend a lot of time with doors  
going out and coming in and fetching  
fish from the dock and garbage from the kitchen  
and the wind comes in and out all day

Sometimes the night is quiet and no one goes out  
no one comes in  
sometimes the night is a door.

17 June 2001  
Cuttyhunk

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## STRANGE ALPHABETS

These are the experiments of common order  
to see how little we know of all the letters that write us  
mangy stars against the darksome sky below

17 June 2001

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But as it were the texture of it  
(rainstorm at sea) not just the light  
the Turner similitude of (how he differs  
from the bald abstract) opulent cloudwork  
always geared to a grasped horizon  
marked as here we see none — you can sail  
Turner's ocean but here you'd be on a reef  
before you hit Nantucket — troubles of color,  
troubles of shape. He invented a line,  
and so he invented a sea, a something seen,  
the horizon as orient, every  
painting staring into the East. Luminous  
sea fog customizing software values. Red  
is missing from fog. Here are sea roses.

17 June 2001  
Cuttyhunk



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Still at my age  
learning the alphabet  
what men call  
the ropes and  
rabbis call your face.

18 June 2001  
Cuttyhunk

---

With some discretion small faces turn  
to see where all the noise is happening  
a band of light beneath a band of cloud  
out over the Vineyard a strange radiance after storm  
the headlights of Atlantis.

18 June 2001  
Cuttyhunk

**(Passagework from *Phoenix to Forest Meadow*) (The Saj Project)**

1.

Have I seen enough of what I haven't seen?  
Wasn't looking. You showed me the picture  
as if you suddenly pulled off your dress  
and I ran out of the room.

I was a child

I knew nothing. I didn't want to see  
what I wanted to see, so much wanted to see.  
I have seen you every day of my life ever after

Do you understand? Any picture tells too much.

That is the beauty of Kandinski  
he first showed me how to see without looking

at the old Guggenheim mansion, his seasons  
like doors on the left wall in that narrow basement room,

doors, dance it, doors.

A picture is not something to look at  
or it is, but that observation has its own fatality,

a door is to go through.

Into his tropical Russia  
where blackbirds are bellowing in blue corn  
and his red house, yes his, not yours,  
ramps and stamps the wind up  
that spans the breadfruit and the sallow palm  
and the ocean is full of white horses

don't look at the horses the horses are houses  
don't look at the picture see my way in.

2.

I want everything to be a city.

Streets are realer than avenues realer than armies  
People live on them  
And look into their deep lives  
And out again at the ginkgo trees and the red horses  
Bay stallions of the insolent police.

That's what's the matter with the Guggenheim, say,  
Moved to an avenue, lives there  
For tourists and horses and parades, it became  
Part of the police,

Not the polis, polis  
Is streets. Those are the only options that we have.

Art comes from the side street  
Where we live, the only  
Place you'd find the people.

But I'm scared of the people.  
I'm scared of you when you take off your clothes  
Scared of seeing what I so much want to see.

3.  
of course I don't remember the picture  
I remember the feel of seeing it

the ardent desire it confused me with  
going into the early morning sun sheen on the sea  
and knowing they'll be swimming later,  
women and men and fish and sea birds  
and I am dry on land wanting them all,  
all, distinct, embraced in their particulars  
at the willed moment

my will, their flesh, the holy sea.  
That's what happens when a picture is.

18 June 2001  
Cuttyhunk

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Be my subject, little wolf.  
Let me answer at last  
Your actual desire.  
Let me be the man at your pleasure

Fulfilling forest and sky  
And all that zoo of feeling  
We escape from every morning  
And sit frozen with politeness all through breakfast

While you are busy at the edges of the actual  
That thing the natives call their woods.

18 June 2001  
Cuttyhunk

## OF CATS AND DOGS

Of course they can see things we can't see.  
But we can see things that aren't there.

18 June 2001  
Cuttyhunk