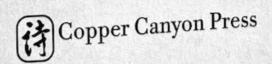
Directed by Desire

THE COLLECTED POEMS OF

June Jordan

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No Train of Thought

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A year runs long enough from force momentum trips the memory

hard dark tracks

rush hatred hearts nobody destination home away

parallels to scare the starting place start tracks together hard dark real long bloody tracks

pull pointless

killers kill people pointless killing (people) life killing (people) love killing (people)

partly (

killing

all of us ()

Poem from the Empire State

Three of us went to the top of the city a friend, my son, and I

on that day when winter wrote like snow across the moonlike sky and stood there breathing a heavy height as wide as the streets to see so poor and frozen far below that nothing would change for you and me that swallowing death lay wallowing still with the wind at the bloat of piled-up swill. And that was the day we conquered the air with 100,000 tons of garbage.

No rhyme can be said where reason has fled.

47,000 Windows

The Lower East Side of New York City offers, in itself, a history of American contradiction, devotion to profit, and the failure of environmental design for human life. People had to pass a law in order that ventilation and minimal, natural light be available to the immigrants who had no money for decent housing. Instead of tearing down the tenements that were unfit for human habitation when they were first erected, the reformers satisfied themselves by legislating phony windows blasted into the bricks. That was a hundred years ago. People still have to live in those Lower East Side hellholes. This is a poem about the law that passed some light and air into that deliberated slum.

than Jews and Italians in that whole early American place of New York when the city began being big: a perfect convergency confirmed congested with trade creating tolerance for trade requires abject curiosity or general indifference to anything that sells not well enough

to tell somebody else about it. And at the beginning of New York the world was selling well and so was tolerance along with trade that provocation to a polyethnic population trading every bit of time for money made the city made me take your eye for mine according to extreme prosperity and appetite.

- 2. In 1830 then the blurring crowd
 that overwhelming beggarly blur of people came
 they pushed into the seaport cornucopia of New York
 small many people forced
 from land from farms from food from family forced
 like seasons dictatorial
 the people fled
 political hostilities and hunger
 people fled
 that soon consuming triumph
 of elimination
 that machinery for triumph
 by a few.
- 3. Then in 1830 the Astors and the Vanderbilts left.
 They rode by carriage from the uproar trouble from arrival by the millions shoved their ships that wandered with the sea to make their glad delivery of travelers penniless and hellbent toward the welcoming coast of always America.

Those other ones they came not trading things but lives.

- 4. Unskilled millions crammed old mansions broke apart large rooms and took a corner held a place a spot a bed a chair a box a looking glass and kept that space (except for death) a safety now for fugitives from infamy and famine working hard to live.
- 5. In place of land that street the outhouse tenement testimonies to a horrifying speculation that would quarter and condemn debase and shadow and efface the privacies of human being.
- 6. Real estate arose as profit spread to mutilate the multitudes and kill them living just to live. What can a man survive? They say: The poor persist.
- 7. O the Chinese and the Irish and the names! The names survived. Likewise some families.
- 8. 1867 after the first and only Civil War men looked at others men again not targets.

 Looked at latrines six stories high people paralyzed by penury immobilized and children docked and hopes untied and lying loose and less than skeleton at the dirty waters by the building of a dollarbill venality

near to nothing at the doorway nothing only life and speculation: What can a man survive?

- 9. Men looked at other men again not targets and in 1869 they passed a law about the nightmare rising as they saw sick men and women nurse their babies although love is not enough to eat.
- 10. The Tenement Act of 1869
 was merciful, well-meant, and fine
 in its enforcement
 tore 47,000 windows out of hellhole
 shelter of no light.

It must be hard to make a window.

What Happens

What happens when a dog sits on a tiger when the fat man sells a picture of himself when a lady shoves a sword inside her when an elephant takes tea cups from the shelf

or the giant starts to cry and the grizzly loses his grip or the acrobat begins to fly and gorillas run away with the whip

What happens when a boy sits on a chair and watches all the action on the ground and in the air or when the children leave the greatest show on earth and see the circus?