

## Snail Pose

on the wet sidewalk,  
the snail stretches out of its  
shell like a yoga instructor  
slowly modeling a pose,  
reaching skywards with its  
tentacles, flashes of flowering  
branches and shedding bark  
and the exquisite smells of  
wet grass and decomposing  
leaves, floating over the harsh  
surface of existence with  
an endless stream of mucus,  
like inner peace or an innate  
ability to exist within a realm  
of complete silence, apart  
from the noisy world of  
running shoes and bicycle tires,  
stretching out of its self-made  
shell and exposing its strong  
shimmering body to  
the morning sun before  
retreating to the cool  
curvaceous cavernous  
confines of self-satisfaction  
by crossing the busy  
walkway intact.

Lands End  
is here where  
the Pacific Ocean  
pounds the cliffs  
with white foamy  
waves and mist,  
where kelp-tangled  
shipwrecks lie  
undisturbed like  
half-eaten dead  
whales almost  
washing ashore,  
depositing the  
horror of their  
tragic ends

where kelp tangles  
the murky waves  
into illuminated  
scrolls and knots

where the ceaseless  
waves create shapes  
and soften rough edges,  
tearing away at the  
surface, digging deep,  
working the rocky  
land into a terrible  
and relentless work  
of beauty at all  
merciless hours  
of the day and night

the still waters  
trapped in Sutro Baths,  
once a place to swim but  
now a place to contemplate  
the moment of seabirds  
descending as gently as  
the hand of God over  
those black fathomless  
pools

disturbed only by noisy  
seagulls and an errant seal  
sending ripples of bodily delight

to witness the grace of such  
ghostly swimmers in modest  
swimsuits come back to life

but on Edison's silent footage,  
the pools echo screams of joy and  
surprise splashes mixed together,  
boisterous shouts of bravado and  
barks to make room resonate, the  
sound of splashing

close to two million gallons  
of saltwater being pumped in,  
Nature doing all the work  
during high tide; a glass, iron,  
wood and concrete colossus,  
massive tanks and pump station,  
steam trains to cross the sand  
dunes in style, wool trousers,  
hats and coats into a climate-  
controlled oasis, a mummy  
museum, a penny arcade, crowds  
of matching black swimsuits  
swelling to unmanageable  
numbers, lifeguards whistling  
from time to time over the  
rising clatter of a multitude  
of muted voices at once,  
the dead fighting all at once  
to speak

this rocky cliff pockmarked  
with hardy flowers that remember  
tales of the Yelamu Ohlone,  
of barefoot seal hunters in animal  
skins coming out of dome-shaped  
thatch huts, of shellfish gatherers  
patting the dust off of their  
nakedness, of a shaman dressed  
as a red-beaked healing spirit  
spreading his wings, fire pits  
lighting up dancers wearing  
shell and abalone jewelry at  
their strictly all-male  
sacred ceremonies

looking out from the trail,  
you can see ghostly images  
of heavily-insured historic  
wrecks and watery graves

an old trail leads to  
an old parking lot,  
an old make-out point,  
full of huge cracks,  
and boulders, bulldozers  
and yellow tape

a footpath trails off  
in the tall weeds  
and wild  
grass

Land ends  
where  
the imagination  
begins

## Hunger

orange sunlight cracks over the desert  
horizon like a mirage and makes our ears  
bleed prehistoric feathers and handprints,  
pours into every crevice and exposed  
layer of lost nomadic bones and smeared  
ochers, caves were our seasonal homes

like the absence of water, owning  
the future begins with finding the basics,  
sucking on bone marrow and chewing  
cartilage, silencing the noisy herds and  
then not compromising, moving fast as  
the river current to greener landscapes

we painted our faces the colors of our  
animal companions, growing tails and claws,  
we studied them and then became them

we carved small animals out of wood  
as our personal talismans and prayed to  
the distant stars to protect us from wind  
and rain, and fire kept us warm, casting  
shadows of our dead upon the walls,  
the fatty pieces of a four-legged beast  
offered to the twinkling gods who spoke  
in hisses and sparks

hunger keeps us awake, hunger keeps  
us alert, hunger pushes us to run faster  
and throw farther, hunger kept our women  
pregnant and our tribe moving

Are you hungry enough to understand  
this cracked message from the distant past,  
told in cave drawings? but someone must  
tend the fire and keep it from dying  
in the cold of night

We run like wild horses, running from  
and into danger, angry, agitated, tired  
and dirty, making the paths our people  
will rediscover, short but meaningful  
existences

a hundred thousand shells to build  
a mound- a testament to our hunger.

The accordion player  
and his husky dog in  
matching tawny coats,  
both brushed clean of  
lint and hair, outperform  
each other out of sheer  
joy of doing exactly what  
they want to do at the  
main exit for all subway  
and streetcar commuters

his songs taken from familiar  
TV sitcoms: meatier fare  
fill the tiled air with hope  
early every morning

the tunes skip from Chansons  
to contemporary Rock to  
silly melodies of our youth  
to bistro Standards

awake and dance, he says  
comically with his breathing  
box of bombastic music,  
squeezing song out of the air

His colorful starched collars,  
sorbet shirts and matching socks,  
his suits pressed with as much  
precision as his songs

the dog, short two heads,  
sometimes napping by his  
master's two-tone leather  
shoes, plays dead for a change  
and certainly for claps and  
cheers, but I am never sure  
if it is at his master's will  
or his own.

the accordion player  
commands his instrument  
the way the gods tell  
the winds which way to  
blow. He sits with his long  
legs bent close to him as

he balances the bellows  
between his awkward  
bony knees

an open case velvet-lined  
packed with odd shiny coins  
from those who can still  
hear the music within

The accordion player smiles  
at the tiny moment of happiness  
he can find within the crowds  
that pass him by in a rush  
to work

he plays as naturally and  
rapturously as a young  
Orpheus charming his  
way out of Hades

more music than man,  
impeccably attired, he lifts  
us up for a few moments  
as we rush up escalators  
that take us out of the  
underground as I fight  
the urge to look back  
and smile to myself

he pumps the air with tunes  
and get the last laugh as the  
rest of us have to scurry up  
escalators toward time clocks,  
supervisors and quotas.



## Putting On A Show, A Pantomime

Within the bird's long narrow beak,  
a plump green caterpillar, its feathered  
head aimed skyward; wide wings  
launch themselves off the concrete  
ledge; this hungry retired songbird  
has a snowy streak in its wings like  
middle age and pauses as if to show  
me a mouthful of accomplishments  
and pushes off our puny planet,  
defying gravitas.

