

# Giving Birth to the World

*by Sam Rasnake*

## *Landscapes*

*— after Agnès Varda*

Inside every person is a landscape  
of highways, the sea, old apartments,  
abandoned houses, sidewalk cafes,  
trees standing against the winter blue  
of hopeless skies. Life's a contradiction.  
There's a thin hope, a dream — then  
we're swallowed by a this is what  
I want kind of living. And we know  
nothing but now — There's a path  
we follow, and though we pass opening  
after opening, we never leave the trail,  
following it beyond the thinned edge  
of everything we see — and disappear.

## *Rituals*

*— after Chantal Akerman*

“Today is a large canvas,” Mother would  
say. Many faces look out at me — but it's  
a stranger who has been living my life.  
That seems an awkward shift, but I've  
only known exile. Life inside a box.  
Yet, I must have doors and hallways —  
and real time passing through my body.  
It's all fragmented, but the broken bits  
I piece together into something whole,

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recognizable, finished. At least to myself.  
It's my self-portrait. I title it *Chantal*.  
I can see the end. I always could,  
even if no one else could see it.

*Ambiguities*

*"In the time before..."*

— *from Herman Melville's Billy Budd, Sailor*

When the ex-legionnaire dances at the end of  
Denis's *Beau travail*, the moment is electric —  
a barrage of energy, a dance for his life, maybe,  
or death — breaking free — the first real moment  
the man has ever had — in tune with the planet,  
in tune with his body, his weakness, his deepest  
sins — and fear, most of all — nothing matters but  
the dance, and he's consumed by it — so when he  
vanishes, mid-song, down the stairs leading to  
a hot Djibouti night, we know the future past — or  
think we do: in Marseille, he made his bed, he lay  
down — his gun and guilt and whispers — a vein  
throbbed in his arm. Someone is always watching.

— *after Claire Denis*

