

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

