

I. Reconstruction

Far from where tractors grind out new foundations fed by fat pipes of gravel and sand that barge over sidewalks and steel girders clang in place of the bells they succeed and drills buzz like summer wasps spinning screws from height to height for sixty stories and glints of glass joust and cranes and ladders sway, I seek the enemy

II. 1944

Beneath the benign whiteness of Berlin's sky
razor-winged bombers once shaved
these shingles, their fiery cargoes
plunging, arms bursting, fingers
of shrapnel gouging
through roofs and rafters
blankets and babies
into basements
of black earth

III. 1994

Half a century has passed but bullet holes remain
scars I can see, open sores ingrained
with grime, discoloured hues effaced
and faded, a depleted palette
of charcoal
umber
ash

IV. Survivors

Long after their dread has been transformed
into tears and tales and monuments

I tread in the shadow of the wall
pushing my son's carriage over cracks

and rubble down labyrinths of loss
every breath cherishing a garden in the far

away land, the new world, white
chairs under a weeping willow

where my family stares
amazed to be alive

V. Köllwitz Platz

Rain sprinkles the square
like yesterday

I reach over to stroke
his silky hair, circle
the park again side-
stepping dogshit
needles and broken glass

We settle on a bench
sheltered by a tree

He swings his legs eagerly
chews the rubber nipple
as I spread liverwurst
coarse and grey
onto bread

VI. Street Children

Happy to kick stones along roads stained
with the past, never dreaming of fields

or apple trees, they did not believe
in wild flowers or yellow crayons

but harboured instead mirrors
of death, dark shades

accumulated in childhood, colours
they knew like the echo of walls

and the echo
of walls

VII. Study in Grey

Grey pervades
these dishevelled streets

ignored by investors
scorned by idealists
inconsequential in a history
scarred by genocide
and genius

Grey pervades
their wasted faces

disciplined
disfigured by
the constant beat
of misery

VIII. Walls

How did they ever hope
– did they?– to recover
when they were surrounded
by walls? The walls that formed

their prison, littered with
graffiti, barbed, guarded
by starved dogs, patrolled by
searchlights and oiled rifles

walls stunned with windows
where flower boxes do not
survive and sunlight falls
rectangular. Places

named window
that look back
and forth on-
to more walls

where even rain
washing freely
over brick walls
is stifled

in the whirlpools
of history

IX. In Charcoal

Yet for half a century
they did endure:

mothers, children, orphans
artists, workers, students, gays
dissidents, pacifists, anarchists...

boiling potatoes and lacing up boots, day after day
after decade, penciling portraits of *Mother and Child*

X. *Frontiers*

Assaulted by this streetscape
home to others, by frontiers
nearer than the compass of my
eyes, the reach of my voice, I
am shaken by my innocence
the minuteness of my world
happy or bleak

Would I, mired in
shadows and dirt
have kept on
drawing *Mother and Child*
for fifty years?

XI. *Reconciliation*

My arms outstretched I can
almost reach bleach-wet
laundry, a cooling soup
pot, a street-worn ball – but

I touch instead crumbled
mortar, flaking plaster, soot
sifted by the wind, blood
dripped from a gutter:

a sedimentary memory of *all*
our uprooted trees and
abolished families
distilled to dust