

# The Idea of Detroit

Jim Gustafson

1976

Detroit just sits there  
like the head of a large dog on a serving platter.  
It lurks in the middle of a continent,  
or passes itself off as a civilization dangling at the end of a rope.  
The lumpiness of the skyline  
is the lumpiness of a sheet stretched over  
what's left of a tender young body.  
Detroit groans and aches and oppresses.  
It amounts to Saturday night at a slaughter house,  
and Sunday morning bed  
with a bag of bagels and the Special Obituary Supplement.  
Air the color of brown Necco wafers,  
a taste like the floor of an adult movie theater,  
the movement through the streets  
that of a legless wingless pigeon.  
Detroit means lovers buying matching guns,  
visitors taken on tours of foundries,  
children born with all their teeth,  
a deep scarlet kind of fear;  
It breeds a unique bitterness,  
one that leaves deep deep gashes in the tongue;  
that doesn't answer telephones or letters,  
that carves notches in everything,  
that illustrates the difference between  
"rise up singing" and "sit down and shut your face."  
It forms a special fondness for uncooked bacon,  
for the smell of parking lots,  
for police sirens as opposed to ambulance sirens,  
for honest people who move their heads whenever they move their eyes.  
Detroit is the greasy enchilada  
smeared across the face of a dilemma,  
the sanctuary of the living dead,  
the home of Anywhere But Here travel agency,  
the outhouse at the end of the rainbow.  
Detroit just sits there

drinking can after can of Dupe beer,  
checking the locks on the windows,  
sighing deeply,  
know that nothing  
can save it now.

# fifth Estate

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