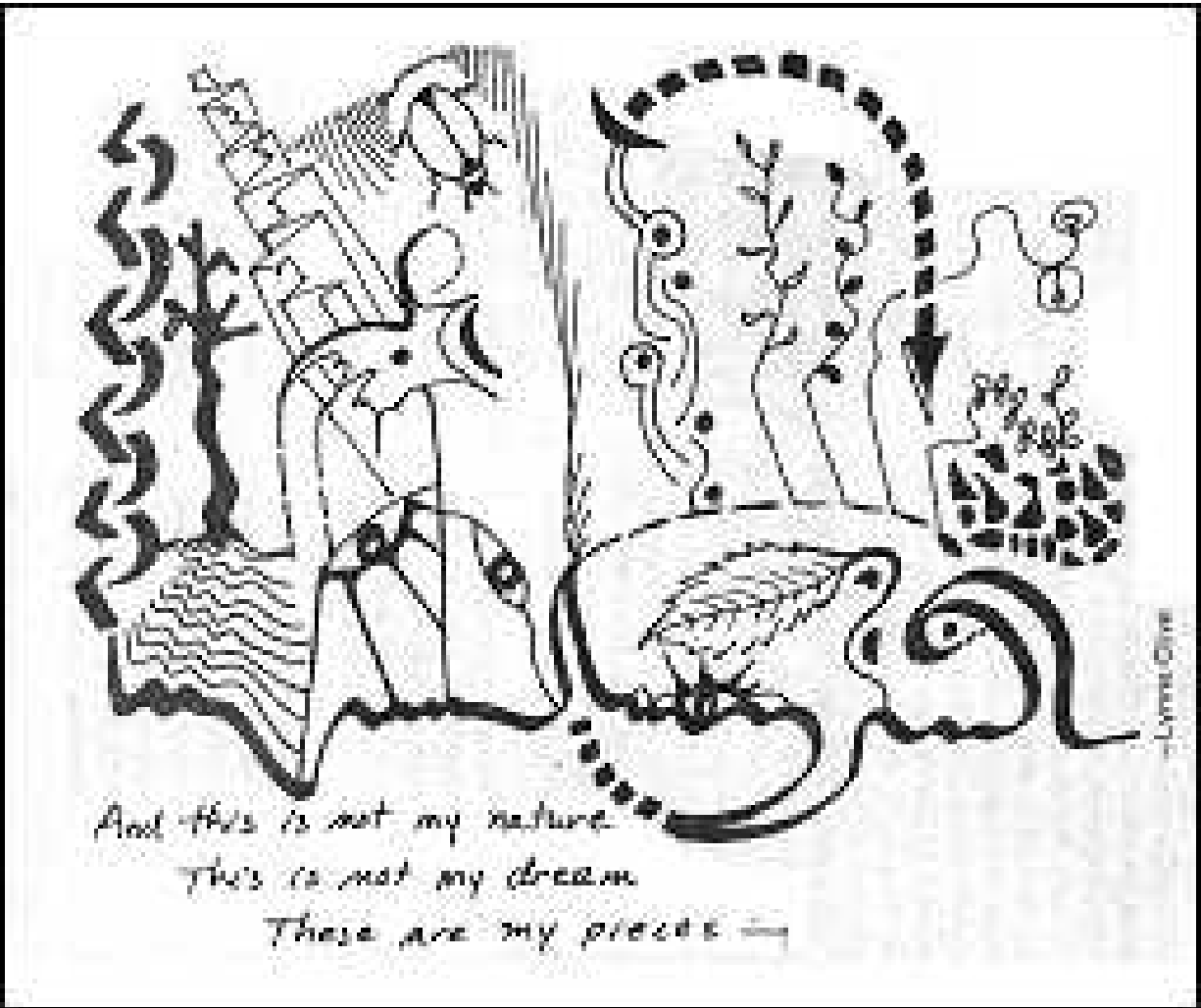


Mapping Distance

M.R.

1991



Lynne Clive

A stone's throw away—
here, behind the pane, housed,
relatively safe.
But you, you draw me out,
outside my house, outside myself,
you, homeless one,
urban nomad.
I think some sleepless nights
to join you,
to close this box and break
my pane, to move, walk
away, walk about.

.
But I romanticize you with daydreams
of comfort and choice
and know well the insults
of a poet's pretension.
Here, the real,
sharp as the edge of the broken
glass of my car
where you slept one January night
when the temperature plunged
below zero,
rank as your sickly shit
steaming behind my flowering bushes,
my stinking shoes sitting out
by the back door for days to remind me.

.
I give you the little others do—
a pittance, a quarter, a dollar, a pear,
the rest of our pizza from the parlor
after we'd stuffed ourselves
and met you in the street, you
in a ragged whining wheelchair, you
with no feet, no feet.

.
You said something about how kind
white women are. I thought how
full of guilt, how
powerless, how patronizing,
how inadequate.

.
I meet your eyes, I speak to you,
but always I walk away,
walk home, climb the stairs,
walk inside, close
and lock doors, windows.

.
In sleeplessness I wander through enclosures,
pace the hallways connecting the limits

of our longing.
I read about the ones who roam, who migrate.
The warblers return, invade our broken
spaces with the breath of their wild wintering.

.
I map the distance between nomadic
and vagrant, drifter and bum,
pilgrim and tramp.
I pull back the curtain, lift
the long-drawn blind.
I watch you watching the ground before you.
Then, sometimes, before the day returns
to circumscribe, I fall deep
into a sleep the dreams
of crossing over.



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<https://www.fiftheastate.org/archive/336-spring-1991/mapping-distance>
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