

## “Maritime”

There's always been this dream that reason has, shearing off from the conceivable like pollen or Sahara dust: a windy day along Lake Michigan, cold water, cold war won. The ferroconcrete lakefront where yuppies jog with dogs and clouds of midges hover mating is a second nature, like the city it defines by exclusion. People sun themselves on yellow terry cloth across cement, water too clear to be clean. The mind, unable to rest in such fragments capital has shored up or left behind (man-made rock fissured to exposed steel rods, absence filled in with lichen and a sudden fear of heights: the undertow of Lincoln Park a marsh, contradiction buried in an unstable foundation), would be an inland gull or kite convenient to the lowest clouds, flat roofs of residential high rises across Lake Shore Drive and lunchtime traffic: crippled by a rising wind, untimely car tethered or tangled there. Would be a sign, NO DIVING SHALLOW WATER SUBMERGED ROCKS. Enlightenment comes later, or not at all, lampposts flaring on in orderly rows in summer, when days are long and promise stalls like a gull against prevailing currents and falling barometric pressures: every third bulb dead, burned out. Would be anywhere, almost. Over there, the real world of elevated trains and the Chicago school of architecture rises into the sphere of possession, claims the view south: the Carbide and Carbon Building or U.S. Gypsum tower. Market fluctuations and assorted human rights violations are duly noted in the ledger, cement that holds society together, the concrete world of what's smashed in order to make other things whole. That's what this afternoon America tastes of, floating tar particles and pulverized quartz on the tongue, wet sand trucked in from building sites to make a beach, closer to mud

without the salt to desiccate and keep it fresh: glass silicates and contained local conflicts, the debris disposed of carelessly (a rusting corrugated breakwater, collapsed causeway green-yellow algae plashes over, a drifting Fritos bag or this old woman asking if anyone can spare some coffee), also called the Third World here at home, but not it this neighborhood. The wind employs each cardinal point in turn, or pushes a low-pressure zone across the Great Divide: of which I thought I caught a whisper, echo, or response, anchor, answerer, or worse. Also, you figure.