

*Undocumentaries*



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**Undocumentaries**

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For Jeff Sirkin





# Undocumentary



## Undocumentary

A girl like me falls in love  
with Yeats  
and never recovers  
from the stretch  
of recognition

more twistable now in parts  
made guilty by graduation  
and further distance  
from technical  
schools

there are perhaps questions  
of sincerity  
that leave me weak  
at the laptop

soft for those animal shapes  
ballooning into pity  
or pride

{A blame of labor raised me  
to tart up the phrase, to shove past  
the pardon into a belly  
alush with the fine dine  
of this land.}

Loop 1:

Minnesota men slice  
at the chests of pigs  
making musicals  
with their wrists

Loop 2:

After a flailing of sense,  
your chest contracts to grain  
the lung's last  
say

Keys strike against  
the footage of the past  
to defer the weight  
of the camera

Asking, who is  
the scab of me  
when no meatpacking walkout  
can suffice?

Documentary: The lyric of unrehearsed chemicals  
acts out the tensions of progress  
into a brighter but stiller image  
called fact or archive

Undocumentary: The man who joined  
old world industries of textile  
to dirt trucked in from the Ramapos  
is not a video  
to behold

All those men, acres of previous dye operations. The import  
of their bodies distributed in lawns all over Paterson, their  
products overseas.

(I meant to tell you  
the DEP's on top of it,  
now that the factory's  
gone bust:

The improperly  
stored chemicals  
"more than 140 55-gallon  
drums"\*  
have memorized their plan  
in your absence.)

\* *American Recycler*, February 2004.

There is no retelling the desire to be pulled into a condemned building by a man who will soon live in exile, or the nest of baby swallows in the handicap stall of a public bathroom in Mesilla. You offer it and everyone's a little uncomfortable with this type of architecture. The night we took the train to Newark to eat rabbit there was nothing anyone could do about the rain. We were subject to families greater than nature, yet there it was every time we left New York. From PATH station to restaurant, the houses tried to tell you about me, but even now the details distill to a fringe of dented aluminum. So all this roundabout mess of trying to describe a machine that never shuts down, a father standing in two inches of water or sitting on a wooden stool, a racket of heat, is proof of nothing, except the drive of what can't be told, a screen pushing off the pile up of bodies.

## **A Girl Like Me**





## Child Interpreters

*Experts say children lack the vocabulary and the emotional maturity to serve as effective interpreters. And two of every three mistranslations have clinical consequences.*

—*The New York Times*, 30 Oct 2005

The ability to convey hairless  
—as all good messengers—the  
gestural roughness of things,  
to talk to the oddly shaped head  
of the martian, this is a boy's  
navigational mastery. This a training  
for the day a girl transcribes  
him, tissue by tissue, to make  
breathing count. When she lowers him  
into the bathtub and presses his mouth  
to what is (suddenly familiar). Have you ever  
lowered someone into a bathtub? A sick  
mother, a small thing? An injured bird  
until he's no longer injured, but dead. Two bodies,  
one lowering and one lowered,  
a multiple nakedness sucked  
into slots that swallow  
the overflow? You grow weak  
with distraction: if porn is a cancer,  
is cancer a porn? Is sex a form?  
And sickness? A girl fills the water  
with imperfect relations;  
what a boy says  
a quiet metastasis.

The same's true of a girl's wildly populated  
bedside. When here come the warnings

against gargantuan gossip, said to distract from  
the erection of columns, the laying of marble.  
Have you ever seen the common nude?  
Nude taxi drivers? Nude subway strikers  
and strikees? The bagel guy nude in his ambulant deli?  
Or the uncommon: someone riding out  
their dying year—nude? We think beauty  
a rabble, so we organize clubs against and for it.  
The doughy shirtless bang tensions  
from the skin of a drum,  
a suffragist lesions a remarkable ass  
or a portrait of Henry James.

A girl's trying to get somewhere and a boy's trying  
to make the building taller, and still, the hospitals  
keep reporting the dead. What a girl says  
is a fuel, when she is still a girl, to make  
a book that drives like a book. But  
hospitals are exemplary architecture,  
if corridors are your thing, if you like  
to be led, that is. She's blind-sided in one eye,  
her heart fashionably late, and the lungs? What  
are we to say about the lungs? A girl and a boy mate  
air to clinical consequence, offering vocabulary  
in such wrongly portions.

The syntax of worry rewrites cellular codes.  
The past, a harrowing wave that never crashes, and true  
catastrophes rot floorboards without notice. This is the  
child to send into machinery, the one unable to distinguish  
the hazard of production from its twin sinister: a huckster  
parading the goods. All limbs being equal, a therapist suggests  
kindly: it's not a weakness, it's a sideshow.