

Hell No, We're Here!

(Excerpts of extended text - 1992)

Life in New York is amazing, thrilling, fantastic, exiting
But hectic as hell!
I have a list of 1440 things to do each day
That's one per minute
And I'm always late
Shit, late again
Can't slow down, or you'll get behind on the rent
And they'll throw you out in the street
But there's no more room on the street
It's full, overbooked, you know —Besetzt —
70,000 - 90,000 homeless people in New York City
No room for me
Better hurry up, on your toes little one
Keep that nervous system kicking, creative, slamming, jittering, jazzed, jamming
Keep dancing to discharge the distress so you don't die
Drumming, dancing for joy, exhilaration — a soaring sense of delight and flight
Do you know that on any given day in New York
You could take at least 4000 dance classes of every kind and culture?
That is, if you had an extra few thousand bodies
I like one-a-day — It's my vitamin, my medicine, my joyous mood momentum
My release and relief
So I don't go crazy and explode from this excess energy raging inside my body
And go down in history
As the first case of spontaneous combustion
Of a little, but very horny human on fire
Anyway there's so much to do in the city
If only you had some time and money
But there's certainly none of that around to spare
Gotta keep working, keep pushing — pay the price

In the midst of the madness
It's March 10th, 1992, my 40th birthday!
I got a phone call, a letter, a fax from Steirischer Herbst Festival
And Austrian Television, saying "Come to Austria, to Graz
You'll open the festival
The theme this year is "America Nowhere"
And I said "What?"

They said "The festival theme is America Nowhere"
I said "What!?"
"America Nowhere!"
I said, "Hold everything!"
American Nowhere? American Nowhere?
I said, "Slow down
I've got to think about this"
And I started looking around
Asking everyone in sight about their American Experience
I'd go to the library to do research
But whoever programmed their computers
Had something else in mind
I'd do a subject-search for "Homelessness"
The computer would bring up "homeliness" (I tried not to take it personally)
I'd print "Grass Roots Organizations"
It would kick up "grass seed"
I was getting nowhere fast
Nowhere? 'Nowhere'? "American Nowhere"!?
Maybe Graz was right?
And the weeks and months were slipping by
I was trying to work, to write
I interviewed all my friends and relatives about life in America
They were little help
All they'd say was "hmmm", followed by that sick, sullen smile that says
'You know what it's like and I don't want to get into it'
I was on my own — The time was passing
I was busy as hell with every distraction and demand imaginable
I imagined a vacation to rest, relax and write in the sun
On some tropical island-or-other
That's my ongoing American Dream — Dream on
But I had to get away, so I grabbed my notebook and pens
And left my loft and phones and frenzy and went across the street
To sit and write by the Hudson River
There's about a meter and a half wide concrete strip, a stinky, funky ledge
On the other side of the parking lot
Before you fall in the very polluted Hudson River
I watch the garbage float by awhile
Making sure there was no bloated dead dog like last time
No — Just trash and birthday balloons today, and of course condoms, always condoms
Well at least someone's having safe sex
At least Someone's having sex!

I see a very stiff looking man's leg sticking out up ahead
I go to investigate, praying it's not a dead body
No time for distractions
As I get closer I notice the leg is jittering slightly
He's not dead — it's definitely quivering
I stop — Maybe he's masturbating
I retreat quickly to my mat and sit to face the sun
This is my island living — Manhattan
North of me a few blocks, is the men's floating prison barge
With a caged-in basketball court on the roof for their exercise
They're pegged and penned "The Nightmare Team"
Perhaps you've heard of them?
Perhaps they've dreamed of you?
They didn't make
Barcelona.
South of me somewhere is Ellis Island
Where many of our ancestors, (at least those not brought over on slave ships)
Passed through from Europe and other places years ago
To begin their new life in America
And I'm looking straight at the Statue of Liberty
Actually it's her left, almost left-rear side
She's facing out to sea, to welcome the immigrants coming to this land
And I recall what the Sioux medicine man, John Fire Lane Deer
Said about the Statue of Liberty when he came to New York
He said:

*"She faces the wrong way. She turns her back on Mister Indian.
She tells the white men from across the ocean, "Come On!
Steal some more Indian land!"

(*from Crying For a Dream by Richard Erdoes, Bear & Co. Publishing)

That's how it's been for 500 years since Columbus hit the Americas
By mistake and miscalculation and has been celebrated since
And in typical consciousness of control and colonization
Took claim to an inhabited land, thousands of miles from home
And began a genocide of the real "Americans"
The Indigenous people and keepers of this once beautiful, sacred land
I look at the Hudson River, a huge and impressive expanse
New York on one side — New Jersey on the other
Still quite fantastic, polluted as it is — We're trying to clean it up —
And my imagination takes off backwards
Wiping out all the ugly boxed barricades and structures

Constructed to secure us from the threat of one another
And I imagine instead Native people planting inland and fishing along the far shore
Canoes in the river — The sound of Native women working
And kids laughing, diving in the crisp, clear water
Oh it must have been magnificent here
Before the Europeans arrived and took siege of this land

But we're alive now — vital and vibrant
There's a movement that's been marinating, been in incubating
Hibernating, conscious and concentrating
Watch out — Don't miss the momentum
A seasoned energy is emerging anew
Maybe

American Nowhere?
Hell No, We're here
We're here amidst this mess of ruling megalomaniacs with grand illusions of superiority
Ignorance fed and bred of protected privilege — pathetic patriarchs
Sporting safe suits patterned of power and position
Utilized as dangerous disguise to camouflage the corruption, disguise the lies
And dirty dealings with tyrants and monarchs of greed
And allegiance to fortunes and militaristic malfeasance — little mercy to the masses
Interventions for economic/power gains, whitewashed as righteous human rights aims

But all is not lost — We're here with keen observance of the perversions
We're here — Allied to the disenfranchised
Searching for the sight and strength to supersede
The insidious self-serving monopolists who stole and took claim to our earth
Who deceptively, illicitly purchased the planet for personal profit
Engaging in an ongoing dehumanizing devastation
And an irreversible environmental undoing

America Nowhere? Hell No, We're here
Trying to break our engagement with apathy
To fight the forces that deliberately divide — that 'I, Me, Mine' mentality
The 'Them and Us' mode
False premise of prejudice — Cultivated by small minds and stingy spirits
And we're here trying to concentrate the common cause
That consolidates our courage and commitment
Toward an antidote to the deadly decline
And recession of our most basic needs and rights

Trying to keep in mind that we're a fortitude, a force unfathomable if united
Trying to conjure hope from a human well sucked dry by disappointments
And attacks on our individual autonomy, if not our lives

But we're here amidst this mess, reemerging intermittently
In grass-roots, community-based day-to-day actions
To counteract the corporate-governmental acts of treason
Defying any sustaining reason
A siege of our very aspirations for all future generations

And we're busy trying to mobilize past inertia
If only we had some space between the rent raise and the job decline
While we're kept so preoccupied with threatening visions of our demise
A very uncertain security in this hash reality
Of three and half million Americans homeless and hopelessly demoralized
100,000 American kids homeless today
Yeah, we're trying to endure the legacy of a long and very Republican
A very revolting reality

And we're here — 36 million Americans below the poverty line
Panicked, distressed, over-stressed
Watching organized, calculated, tolerated corruption
Designed to covet the prize and keep us down and out of the running
Infiltrating our neighborhoods with guns and drugs — Courting constant crime
No jobs, no apparent options for our inner-city youth to otherwise survive and thrive
And we're angry, we're on fire
We are bubbling, simmering, brewing, chaffed and charred
Exploding at the seams, with flames of accumulated rage
At the constant blatant injustice thrown in our face
Even despite video proof — Rodney King
Yeah, we're a fucking flaming riot inside
But folks are here, fighting to educate their kids
%o house and feed their families, working two and three low-wage jobs sometimes
Righting to stay afloat, 'cause they've got the fighting spirit
We've got the fighting spirit — Especially when provoked
Up against a still rather rampant racism
Up against a stone right-wing conservative wall
Of reactionary resistance to our very existence

And the chips are down and out
And they stole all our damn chips and trump cards, Greedy bastards
And we've got no more to lose
And no reliable candidate of change of conscience to choose
To sufficiently challenge and wake up, shake up the status quo
To know that the real enemy is greed and inequity
And we know that many wealthy white men world-wide
Arrogantly still think they own the earth
And the bottom line here is, we're 36 million Americans below the poverty line
In a country that spent \$33.7 million on defense and only \$1.8 on children's health
Where the top 1% of the population is worth more than the bottom 90%
One in eight American kids goes to bed hungry each night

And we're lucky to get up alive
And we're watching a million or a million and a half HIV infected
Quite likely expected to get sick with AIDS and die
And we're dying to make a difference and we won't let them die alone
We won't let them die alone
And we're trying to defy the government's
Avoidance of our sickness and deaths
And we're sick to death of a system with chronic symptoms
Of terminal denial and indifference

And we're here — Now
Trying to reverse a style of sexism
Marketed so slick and seductive and subliminal sometimes
It just sort-of slips in there without asking our consent
To satisfy their delights, against our wills and rights
Kind of like a chronic commercial rape syndrome
Perpetuating historical vicious violence against women world-wide, world-wide
Well we don't often practice clitoral mutilation
As they do in several countries
But in modern America
Every minute someone is sexually assaulted
One in three women will be raped at some point in her life
Every three to six minutes a woman is raped
Every ten minutes a little girl is molested
One in four women are introduced to sex through rape
Every fifteen seconds a woman is beaten by her husband or male partner

And we are sick to death of sexual harassment and assault
On our jobs or walking down the street
Our breasts and butts are not community property
Or unconnected pieces of meat for your entertainment
Unwelcome callous touch or scrutiny
And if you find you cannot control yourself, please go commit yourself
And leave-us-the-fuck-alone to live our lives in safety and peace
And even having to deal with all that shit
We still only make sixty-some cents to the Man's dollar

And why do many men think they can wage war
Using our bodies as their battle grounds?
We hear of an estimated 20,000 - 50,000 women, children, nuns
Raped in Bosnia for example

It's a sorry sight of some evil sick shit we see surrounding us
Horrors in the former Yugoslavia — And Somalia, Ethiopia, Uganda, Mozambique,
Cambodia, El Salvador, Guatemala, China, Tibet, South Africa, Haiti
And on and on and on...
And Germany: Neo-Nazi racist terrorist violence against Africans,
Cambodians, Vietnamese, Romanians/gypsies...
With frighteningly wide-spread support of white-supremacist ignorance
With vile Heils Of "Foreigners Out" "Auslander Rays"
"Germany for the Germans", "Deutschland den Deutsche"
It sends a chill up my Semitic cellular spine memory and Romanian genetic juices
Auschwitz isn't that far past

But we're here — Crying vicariously, wondering what the fuck to do
Wondering how to somehow inspire attitude and actions
Of courage and compassion to help someone survive
Wondering how and why the ruling and war lording world
Seems to think another life could possibly be any less precious than their own
And we're trying to summon the antibodies to begin a tiny semblance
Of a healthy humanity with a heart intact, in fact
With a renewed ignited spirit of mutual responsibility and generosity
Is this a possibility? Am I naive? Sure, but is this a possibility?

Planet Nowhere? Hell no, we're here
Somewhere ("Somewhere over the rainbow")
But we're tending a harsh and challenged sick soil of society
Hungry for the healing infusion, the hand-on effort — all hands — All hands

This is an undertaking of substantial struggle and resource
To make it through this life, alive inside

Well, we were looking for a role model — Someone to emulate
We looked up and down, to our left and right
But there was hardly a sign of a human heart in sight
We're in trouble — We're in Trooooooble
We've gotta dig down deep to find a friend
Better dig down deeeper to find a place of peace

In the country we breathe deeply, look at the stars
Mountains, trees, wildflowers or fall leaves on fire
If lucky we're graced with the warmth of sun and ocean to soothe and heal us
In the city especially, we look to our artists to help fill us and feed
Our deeper thirst for nourishment — Like to a spiritual creative well we go
And we're grateful for the richness of characters, colors, textures, tones
And the sounds that cause us to sing inside
Catapulted to a heightened state of rhythmic melodic motion
To move all our innermost molecules
Oh the power of music, of art: Spirit manifest to aid us on our way
We're here with a music born in this land, music so amazing with a depth and
intensity so far-reaching it makes you want to scream
Oh my god — Jazz — Jazz, The blues, Gospel, Soul, Rhythm and Blues, and more
Many mighty musics — That fill and uplift and enliven
Artist are our teachers who grace our lives - Our medicine people

And we honor the countless anonymous workers and warriors
Helpers and healers who dedicate their lives to tend to the ailing
And heal the injustices — Little lasers of light that cut through
The damned darkness and doom, despite the odds
And shine for everyone in need
Beings of conscience who care beyond measure
And care to keep giving
The real fabric of our world's deeper soul, making life more bearable
Like flowers busting up through uninviting
Seemingly unyielding concrete
A burst of color and breath of open air.

In dominant white society as it has developed, (devolved?)
A person gains status by the accumulation of possessions and property

An Indian gains respect by giving possessions away
It is a central principal in Native American religion, philosophy and way of life
Giveaway — If someone has food, everyone who is hungry eats
It is as simple as that — That is the Native way
It is our task to cultivate those precious life-giving seeds of great wisdom
And spiritual strength for the benefit of all beings and the survival of our planet

* "All Sioux ceremonies end with the words "Mitakuye Oyasin" (All my relations) —
meaning every human being on the Earth, every plant and animal, down to the
smallest flower and tiniest bug.

In the words of a Lakota Sioux holy man:
There is a word meaning "All My Relations".

We will live by this word.

We are related to everything.

We are still here!

Mitakuye Oyasin"

(*Crying For A Dream by Richard Erdoes)

America Nowhere? Hell no, we're here
We're here in every color and culture we co-exist
Yeah it's a wild field of hybrids, of hybrids trying to act normal
A country who only possible identity is diversity
But some of whose constituents got hung up in the false illusion
Of a single input of origin and non-sense of superiority
But we're a land of a hellified growth of hybrids, kind of like a composite
Like a crazy quilt — clashing sometimes
Yeah, like a bright handcrafted patchwork
Original design of a mixed up crazy quilt
You know, a little genetic material from here
A little genetic material from there
A full spectrum of possibilities, enriching our hearts
If we dare to open amidst the craze and cruelty

Did you ever want to go to sleep for a long time?
Did you ever want to go to sleep for a longgggggggg time?
Did it ever get so bad you felt like sleeping for a decade or two?
Couldn't peel yourself out of bed?
So you lay there like a lump?
Only trouble was, when you finally woke up
It was the same old shit
Did you ever want to go to sleep for a longgggggggggg time?

Did you ever wish you could just sleep through this one irritable incarnation?
And when you'd come back, everything would be all right
Everything would be wonderful!
And everyone would be soooo kind! Yeah, right!
Why do you think all newborn babies scream and holler and cry like they're dying?
They take one breath, look around and Scream!,
"Back here again?! Oh no! Same old shit! Aaaaaaaah!!!"
Well it looks like we're made to keep trying, keep trying
Until we finally get it right

The night comes on — I move alone, barefoot
Naked through the shadows in my loft my oasis in New York City
I listen in and around, and hear the grumblings
Of beings who have passed through
To tell their tales, served up from the gut of all grief and exaltation
Suddenly a lightning bolt, a scream at the top and bottom of my lungs
An ancient voice wailing through all eternity
Cries out from deep inside me
A presence, an energy that cannot possibly be sustained nor contained
I watch, whirling, dizzied by this densely populated storm inhabiting me
And I beckon one full and steady, generous breath
From the belly of the earth
To rise up and revive us
Carrying, elevating all hovering spirits
For final release from this grave gravity

I play in the night shadows
My body chasing the voices and laughter that light up my sky
I open my mouth to sing, and welcome all souls to have their say
And I dance like a waterfall and a wild child
Till I'm utterly empty, and so alive — So alive
Don't fear — All is not lost — There is another way
There are so many many ways — And many kind and sacred ways
All is not lost — We are still here — Together?
We are still here

And the laughter tickles me inside
Dancing through my body
On until dawn, and on...
HELL NO, WE'RE HERE!