

# Factory

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Antler

**POCKET POETS SERIES**

**FACTORY**

**BY**

**ANTLER**

**NUMBER THIRTY EIGHT**

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“Factory inspired me to laughter near tears, I think it’s the most enlightening & magnanimous American poem I’ve seen since ‘Howl’ of my own generation, and I haven’t been as thrilled by any single giant work by anyone of 60’s & 70’s decades as I was by your continuing inventions and visionary transparency.... Nakedness honesty beautified by your self-confidence & self-regard & healthy exuberance, that exuberance a sign of genius, Bodhisattva wit... seems you have developed your sincerity & natural truth & come through to eternal poetic ground, unquestionable & clear... More fineness than I thought probable to see again in my lifetime from younger solitary unknown self-inspirer U.S. poet—I guess it’s so beautiful to see because it appears inevitable as death, that breakthrough of beauty you’ve allowed yrself & me.”

—Allen Ginsberg

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# **FACTORY**

**BY**

**ANTLER**



**CITY LIGHTS BOOKS**

# Factory

## I

The machines waited for me.  
Waited for me to be born and grow young,  
For the totem poles of my personality to be carved,  
    and the slow pyramid of days  
To rise around me, to be robbed and forgotten,  
They waited where I would come to be,  
    a point on earth,  
The green machines of the factory,  
    the noise of the miraculous machines of the factory,  
Waited for me to laugh so many times,  
    to fall asleep and rise awake so many times,  
    to see as a child all the people I did not want to be,  
And for suicide to long for me as the years ran into the mirror  
    disguising itself as I grew old  
    in eyes that grew old  
As multitudes worked on machines I would work on,  
    worked, ceased to exist, and died,  
For me they waited, patiently, the machines,  
    all the time in the world,  
As requiems waited for my ears  
    they waited,  
As naked magazines waited for my eyes  
    they waited,  
As I waited for soft machines like mine  
    time zones away from me, unknown to me,  
    face, flesh, all the ways of saying goodbye,  
While all my possibilities, like hand over hand on a bat  
    to see who bats first, end up choking the air—  
While all my lives leap into lifeboats  
    shrieking —“You can’t afford to kill time  
    while time is killing you!”  
Before I said *Only the religion whose command before all others*

*is Thou Shalt Not Work shall I hosanna,*  
Before I said *Not only underground are the minds of men*  
*eaten by maggots,*  
Before I said *I would rather be dead*  
*than sweat at the work of zombies,*  
The machines waited.

Now the factory imagines I am there,  
The clock keeps watching me while it works  
to see how much time it has left.  
How much does it get paid? Are coffins the safes  
where it keeps its cash?

I see my shadow working on the shadow of a machine.  
Everywhere I look I am surrounded by giant machines —  
Machines that breathe me till I become stale  
and new windows of meat must be opened.  
Each year of my name they ran, day and night,  
Each time I kissed, each time I learned a new word,  
or name of a color, or how to spell boy,  
Night, day, without stopping, in the same place running,  
Running as I learned how to walk, talk, read, count, tell time  
and every time I ever ran alone  
pretending to be a wild black stallion,  
They ran as I thought never (my eyes in the clouds)  
would my future corpse need to be buried  
premature in slavery of exchange to contemplate  
the leisure vacations of photosynthesis and limnology  
and the retirement of tombstone inscriptions  
into veils that veronica the earth,  
They ran, and I never heard them,  
never stopped to hear them coming,  
All the times walking to school and back,  
All the times playing sick to stay home and have fun,  
All the summers of my summer vacations  
I never once thought I'd live to sacrifice my dwindling fleshbloom  
packaging the finishing touches on America's decay  
For money to earn me so I can write in the future  
about what I am now, then am no longer,  
Shortening the lifespan of planet for 6¢ a minute  
so I can elegize the lifespan of beauty and my life,  
So I can say before my parents ever met  
machines were blaring the same hysterical noise,

So I can say they were waiting for me  
every mouthful of food I swallowed,  
So I can say they were waiting for me  
every time paper eyes of paper nakedness  
watched my hands perform the ritual of dreams,  
So I can say each second so many die so many are born,  
like rapid snapping of fingers, snap, snap,  
snap you live, snap you die, snap you live and die again!  
Each day of my life *is my lifel*

So, winding my watch before work  
with the galaxies of my fingerprints —  
each twist of my lifeline a dungeon of ticks —  
I wondered was it for this  
my hide'n'seek Huckleberryhood?  
And pondered how each day goes to its grave single file  
without the corpse of what I might have been,  
Yet the hour hand is so slow  
no one will ever see it move.

Each of the great works never written  
By those who work in factories so they can write words, what they say will  
be great words,  
Does not care, does not wait to be written—  
At the end of a day's work he who left his mind eight hours at his writing  
desk for the repugnance of metal on metal, noise on noise,  
Sits down with his pen as if he had already written the great words of his  
dreams.

His feet feel like nursing homes for wheelchairs,  
His ears an inferno of crickets,  
And he says—"I feel like the grave of someone I loved"  
And dreams of being hired to hammock-drowse outside where workers work  
to contemplate the utopias of sleep  
Or to conduct tours of the plant reciting by heart the godliest glossolalias  
of divine frenzy.

Each day, those reaching the cliff of their last words waterfall into the  
gorges of night, wondering

*How much do corpses get paid for working underground?*

*How much should they receive for urging their eyes to become the eyes on  
butterfly wings, peacock tails, and potatoes?*

*How much to package their innards into the innards of trees and leaves that  
creep down shirtfronts of children hiding in them?*

*How much to coax their hearts into the eight hearts of the hermaphroditic  
nightcrawler or into the pink stars that are the noses of moles?*

<em>What union do corpses join? How do they feel, more segregated  
than old people, when we keep them from humans that live—</em>  
as if their bodies weren't the bodies we loved  
and called by the names we loved them by—  
*and cut the dandelions from their faces?*

Perhaps I have never left the factory.

Perhaps I'm made to dream the 16 hours my identity flees.

It's the drug in the water that does it, remarkable.

To think I'll work here forever thinking I go home  
and return and do all sorts of things in between,  
like writing this poem—

Of course I'm not writing this poem!

I'm on the machine now packaging endless ends of aluminium  
for the tops and bottoms of cans.

Our foreman laughed—"You'll wake up in the middle of the night  
as if you're working. It's so easy  
you can do it in your sleep."

And I know that in one day owning this place

I'd make more than if my life worked my lifetime here.

In my lifetime I'd make more than all the workers combined.

Then I could envy those who make a million a second—

To them the prostitutes must be most beautiful  
and pornography religion that is never disbelieved.

To those, this memo, dashed during breaks in slavery  
whose chains regenerate faster than tails of salamanders  
or penis's reengorgement.

To my soul wondering if I have a body or not: Huck, Huck,  
look down at your funeral from lofts of the barn o' blue,

Look down at me dreaming my deathbed in factory,  
machines gone berserk, drowning in a sea of lids,

Dying where no one could hear my last whisper  
for industries of scholars to unhieroglyph—

Where the noise is so loud that if I screamed louder than I can  
no one would hear me, not even myself,

Where the bathroom stalls are scratched with the multiplication  
of men's lives in money, the most begging graffiti,

Where it is not I who wrote this tomb, but a machine,  
and the earplugs, and the timeclock

Waiting so many times to pick up the card that tells me my name,  
Where metal cries louder than human yearning to return

underearth,  
And the first shift can't wait to go home,  
And the second shift can't wait to go home,  
And the third shift can't wait for the millions of alarmclocks to begin  
ringing  
As I struggle with iron in my face,  
Hooked fish played back and forth to work by unseen fisherman on unseen  
shore, Day after day my intestines unwinding around me Until I am a  
mountain of waste  
From whose depths all that is left of me, a penis and a mouth,  
Dreams of reaching the peak of all I contained, Dreams of jerking that  
fisherman from the earth and dragging him to the pearls in the jaws of  
the giant clams of the sky...

## II

“All you have to do is stand here and package lids as they come from the  
press checking for defects every so often.  
Shove enough lids in the bag like this,  
Stand the filled bag on end like this,  
Fold over the top like this,  
Pull enough tape off  
and tape it like this,  
Then stack 'em like this on the skid.”  
How many watching me watch the woman teach me my job  
Remembered *their* first day on the job,  
Remembered wondering what the woman felt teaching them in a minute  
the work she'd done all her life,  
Showing them so fast all they needed to know?  
How many could still remember who they were in search of a living— Name,  
address, telephone, age, sex, race,  
Single, married, children, parents, what they do or why they died, Health  
record, police record, military record, social security #, how far in  
school, everywhere worked, why quit or fired, everything written here  
is true, signature, interview, the long wait, the call “you're hired”—  
Could still see themselves led through the factory to the spot they would  
work on, strange then and now so familiar?  
This is the hall big as a football field.  
Here are the 24 presses chewing can lids from hand-fed sheets of aluminum.  
Here are the 10 minsters chomping pop tops  
nonstop into lids scooped into their jaws.

Machines large as locomotives,  
louder than loudest rockgroup explosions, Screeching so loud you go deaf  
without earplugs, where the only way to speak is to gesture, Or bending  
to your ear as if I were telling a secret  
the yell from my cupped hands less than a whisper.  
Now the film of myself each day on the job begins.  
I see myself enter the factory, led to the spot I will work on.  
I see myself adjusting the earplugs to stopper the deluge of sound.  
I see the woman who showed me the job  
she'd done her whole life in a minute  
Let me take over, and the minute she left how I fumbled, how the lids  
gushed all over the floor  
And when the foreman rushed over and I hollered—  
“Something’s wrong! It’s too fast!  
No one can work at this speed!”  
How he stared and the stares of the others  
who couldn’t hear what I said but could tell.  
And I gulped, This “Beat the Clock” stunt  
must be performed *eight hours* before the lunatic buzzer itself becomes  
consolation prize.  
Yet sooner than I thought, I mastered the rhythms, turned myself into a  
flywheel dervish,  
And can’t deny being thrilled by the breakthrough from clumsy to  
graceful—  
Though old-timers scowled as if it took years to learn all the fine points.  
But long after my pride in doing such a good job turned into days crossed  
off the calendar each night before pulling out the alarm I woke to push  
in, up, eat, go, work, eat, work, back, eat, sleep, All the days I would  
work stared ahead of me the line of machines, behind me the line of  
machines, Each with a worker working as I work, doing the same job  
that I do, Working within sight of the wall clock whose second hand is  
still moving.

### III

Thus as the foreman watched me from the corner of his eye as I watched  
him from the corner of mine pretending to be doing my best  
as if I didn’t know I was under inspection, I relished the words I would  
write  
intoned in this factory where no one could hear them, swallowed in the  
shrill-greased ecstasy of machines as I led processions of naked acolytes

sopranoing Athenian epitaphs, candles in their hands.  
 To write this poem, to bring the word beautiful into Factory You must  
 never forget when the lids first come from the press they are hot, they  
 are almost slippery.  
 You must never forget since each tube holds 350 lids  
 and each crate holds 20 tubes and each day I fill 40 crates From my work  
 alone 280,000 lids each day—  
 huge aluminum worm wriggling one mile long into the cadaver of America.  
 You must never forget 14 million cans each day from a single factory!  
 5,110,000,000 cans each year from a single factory!  
 More throwaway cans each year than human beings on this planet!  
 Every high, every heartbeat of your life the machines have been running.  
 Every time you heard a pianissimo  
 the earsplitting machines have been running.  
 You've already spent more time working here than making love,  
 More time working here than lying on hills looking at the sky.  
 Each of your favorite books you must pilgrimage here to age, to absorb and  
 exude wisdom,  
 To think of those who worked here before you and those who will work here  
 after you.  
 You must say to yourself—"If I don't work here this poem won't be able  
 to write me." And asked—"What's that smell?" you must remember on  
 your clothes, on your skin, in your lungs and when the breeze is just  
 right through your bedroom window the smell of the factory.  
 You must brainstorm machines and workers are like poets and readers: the  
 poets eat sheets of steel and press them into words that are the ends of  
 containers,  
 The reader stands in one place shifting from foot to foot, crating and crat-  
 ing,  
 Searching for defects so the noisemaker can be shut down and while white-  
 coated mechanics scurry to fix it like doctors around a sick president,  
 he can take a break, get a drink, take a crap, unwrap some butterscotch  
 to suck on, glimpse a glimpse of second-shift sunset, watch the guard  
 lower the flag.  
 To birth this womb, to do for Continental Can Company what Walt Whit-  
 man did for America,  
 You must celebrate machine-shop rendezvous!  
 You must loafe observing a disc of aluminum!  
 You must sing the security of treadmills remembering where you are today  
 you were yesterday you will be tomorrow.

So, after suicide invites you through the naked mirror and poetry dares  
you to dive headfirst into the sky, After memorizing the discovery of  
fire, tools, speech, agriculture, industry,  
And all the inventors, inventions and dates  
of the last 10,000 years you got a 100 on in History, And after the ceaseless  
history of human war reads the eyes in your face,  
Faced with the obituary of man, Caught in the deathrattle of the world,  
from the deathblows of pollution, from the deathknells of overpopula-  
tion, from factories which are the deathbeds of Nature and the seedbeds  
of bombs,  
After contemplating the graveyard of elegies, the immortality of maggots  
and the immolation of the sun, Then, Antler, or whatever your name is,  
Enjoy returning prodigal to your machine to forget the view from the  
skyscrapers of money, to forget the hosts of human starvations belly-  
bloating or brainwashed in Mammon, to forget the sign over the entrance  
to Auschwitz WORK MAKES MAN FREE, to forget that working here  
you accomplice the murder of Earth, to forget the birds that sing eight  
hours a day daydreaming the salaries of worms, to forget how old you  
must be  
to be rich and young before you die, to forget your mother waking you  
from this nightmare  
is only a dream—  
So nothing called life can torment you with undertakings and your only  
responsibility toward mankind is to check for defects in the ends of  
cans.

## IV

All I have to do is stand here and do the same thing all day.  
But the job requiring five steps repeated over and over eight hours every  
day is not monotonous.  
Only the body and mind finding such work monotonous is monotonous.  
Those who gripe work is boring gripe they are boring.  
Yet if I work hours and the clock says only five minutes has gone by,  
If the last hour working seems longer than the seven before it, Won't my  
last day on the job seem longer than all the months that preceded it?  
Could I have been here more in one day than someone who's put in ten  
years?  
Or has he learned how to punch in and out fast as a punching bag?  
Don't we both know the way  
to the prong of our alarm in the dark?

How long could I work without looking up at the clock?  
How long before I was watching its hands more than watching my own  
package lids?  
It's not so terrible that every second dies  
or that whatever I am every second dies or that what we call death  
is death only of the final second, But it is terrible (not like movies that lead  
us down corridors to doors springing slimy buffooneries)— Terrible as  
having to eat meat killed in factories is terrible, as having to wear  
clothes made in factories is terrible, as having to live in homes built by  
strangers  
and exist among millions of strangers and be born and buried by strangers  
is terrible, Too terrible for terrible to have any meaning—  
that every second dies  
*whoever I could possibly be.*

## V

Standing in one place all day,  
Howl of machines too loud for anything but solitude,  
Rhythm of work-movements long ago involuntary as breathing,  
As seconds become minutes become hours become days become weeks be-  
come months  
What goes through your brain?  
What carries you away?  
What soars?  
Whatever thought me while I slaved, remember me now! Conceive me again!  
Inspire! Absorb! Engross me again! Come, power of this very spot—  
overwhelm me again!  
Fast-motion film of evolution  
on this spot where I work— Start from the start and leave nothing out!  
Provoke me as you provoked me then!  
Confront me as you confronted me then!  
Begin to consider me, everything that happened, is happening, will happen  
on this specific intersection of latitude and longitude!  
I dare you to run wild in me again!  
Show me every ocean, mountain, forest, glacier  
that once actually was where the machine is now!  
Show me the pageant of every creature born or died on this point on earth,  
that sexed here or ate here or played here or slept here for here was its  
home!  
Show me this factory grown old, abandoned in ruins!

Show me what stands where it stood  
every sunrise the next billion years!  
Let me piece together civilizations that don't yet exist from their imagined  
remains!  
How long before who's exactly beneath me on the other side of globe tires  
of thinking me?  
How long before what every living thing's doing as I work no longer fasci-  
nates me?  
Everywhere I could be and everything I could be doing right now— Stagger  
me with instantaneous travelogues!  
Seductive documentaries of every point on earth— Tantalize me again!  
O Reveille my Reveries to Revelry again!  
Which volume from the limitless libraries of my imagination should I curl  
up with first?  
The Complete Poetry of Australopithecus?  
The Complete Poetry of the Shelley of 3000?  
My autobiography before birth? My autobiography after death? Maybe  
you'd like to bury your nose in "Puberty of Smell"?  
Would you rather browse through "Charon's Coin Collection" or "Learning  
to Breathe"?  
Would you rather check out "Putting Mountains Inside Me" or "Turning  
Myself Into Earth"?  
Or why not let the wind turn to the page that begins—  
"Even the most ethereal vision of the mystic is knowledge much as an  
amoeba  
might be said to know a man."  
Or why not the snapshot album of the faces of everyone committing suicide  
this second?  
Every second I work millionaires younger than me are fulfilling my wildest  
desires.  
Do other workers love their genitals as much as I love mine?  
The middle-aged women know how much sex the young guys need to think  
and have.  
Old-timers pin nudes above their last stand, play tag with lids whizzed at  
each other, the foreman pretends not to notice.  
Wistful penises, wistful vaginas  
hark back to their boyhoods and girlhoods growing up oblivious to lifetime  
in factory.  
Ah, daydreams of fucking! It's true  
after six hours you've exhausted the repertoire but there's nothing like  
having a boner

when there's no way to touch it and it won't go away, And clearer than  
ever before the old man I become  
pictures my puberty passion—  
Just how my penis began making love to me, how girls' nipples swooned  
for my mouth, How the mirror put its lips against mine and kissed me  
deep with its boyish tongue!  
How many boys are assembling plastic models of dinosaurs in Wauwatosha  
this second?  
How many boys are pretending their hands are dogfighting biplanes in  
Wauwatosha this second?  
How many boys are riding bikes with feet on the handlebars singing in  
Wauwatosha this second?  
How many boys are playing "Engulfed Cathedral" on the piano in  
Wauwatosha this second?  
How many boys are reading *Martin Eden* in Wauwatosha falling in love with  
poetry this second?  
How many boys are jacking off in the Universe this second?  
What good does it do to say one second  
is to a human lifetime what a human lifetime  
is to the age of the Milky Way?  
What good does it do to say there are as many galaxies in the visible  
universe  
as stars in the Milky Way?  
What good does it do to say each of us is a planet or that there are millions  
of planets with life in outerspace?  
The workers look forward to lunch  
or fucking when they get home.  
Long nights of TV look forward to them.  
Weekends of movies and bars look forward to them.  
Cheering in football stadiums and buying things in stores and 50 weeks  
imagining a 2-week vacation, all are waiting for them.  
Does the baby inside the pregnant woman working ahead of me dream of  
a knock on the door and a check for a million?  
When she smokes by the vending machine on her break and it's not as if  
she's staring off into space but as if space were staring far off into her  
eyes, can the unborn tell the dead from the living?  
Are its ears already dumbfounded by stupor?  
Does it already treasure *Te Deums* of tedium?  
What good does it do to say each of us is a universe when we're bored with  
immortality already?  
Poetry keeps telling me I'm an obstetrician on 24 hour call to deliver the  
voice of God from my mouth.

Beethoven had a chamberpot installed in his piano stool— there wasn't  
 time to leave the keys.  
 I can't hear the Moonlight without seeing him write it, his britches around  
 his ankles.  
 How long would it take to hear all he wrote if I listened eight hours a day?  
 How long must I dream of squeezing as fast and thick and warm for hysters  
 to truck away for consumers to guzzle the hops of my nostalgia?  
 How much do beetles deserve for rolling dung into balls to cradle and suckle  
 their young?  
 Do ants carrying away my lips get overtime?  
 What kind of raise do corpses get?  
 What kind of promotion?  
 How long before the canteen of melodies you can hum runs dry?  
 Or all the poems learned by heart as you toiled, typed on small cards—  
 "Poets to Come," "The World Is Too Much With Us," "Man With the  
 Hoe," "Ozymandias," "Mezzo Cammin," "Divina Commedia #1," "There  
 Was a Boy," "In Paths Untrodden," "Gic to Har," "Ode to West Wind,  
 Melancholy, Grecian Urn, Nightingale, "Shine, Perishing Republic," "Fu-  
 tility," "The Broken Oar," "Hay for the Horses," "A Blessing," "To a  
 Stranger," "Strange Meeting," "The Waking," "In a Dark Time," "The  
 End, The Beginning," "Vulture," "Lines Writ by One in the Tower  
 Being Young and Condemned to Die" ... How long before they get sick of  
 chanting you aloud?  
 One June afternoon on my break  
 I walked to the plant entrance and found  
 A storm, incredible rain, lightning and thunder, sky suddenly so dark the  
 street lights came on, And noticed, on the ground by the open door,  
 Hundreds of cigaret butts left by those  
 who stood, at some time, on the same spot, Facing the guardhouse, the  
 parking lot, the lawn after that  
 to the street, the other factories this side and across, the busy freeway  
 beyond,  
 And realized no one working could hear the thunder, no one working could  
 see the rain.  
 Why aren't the workers memorizing geologic time charts on the job, dates  
 of eras and forms of extinction on their fingertips?  
 Are they bored with the full-length re-runs of their past? Aren't they happy  
 with a free lifetime supply of dreams? What ten desert islands have they  
 picked to take with them to Megapolis?  
 I can still hear them saying to each other—  
 "It seems I just get out of work and I have to go back."  
 or "I look upon it like it's just one big joke."

or “At least it’s not a concentration camp.”  
Have none of them heard the fog asking to be let in to engulf each minion  
in cool mist?  
Does no one remember how they first pronounced  
the Book of Job?  
Is no one intoxicated with their philosophy  
of getting high?  
Is this death’s way of greeting me  
at the beginning of a great career?

## VI

Millions of humans enter factories at dawn.  
How many have their arms raised to the sun?  
How many want to be late? How many demand to be fired?  
Faces leaving as I arrive, faces arriving as I leave—  
It’s too easy to say they are zombies.  
(Am I not also singing—“I have to go and die some more  
so that my corpse can live”?)  
Even a zombie can think all it makes in its life is to some no more than a  
penny.  
Even the daydreams of zombies are full of all that cocks and cunts can do.  
What does it prove that I can write  
*De mortuis nil nisi bonum*  
on the bags of lids bound for the minsters?  
I know I can die without having read any great, without having tried sex  
everyone I found, without climbing the highest or sailing the largest  
alone, and without scrawling the great worms of my dreams—  
I know life does not care how much we make of it.  
Nor does death care, unconcerned with our last words or the way we dispose  
of corpse and grief or whether these assumptions are correct or whether  
anyone says—  
“I will worship the spirit of the naked worm until death believes in me.”  
And I know the sun doesn’t care if we make our own clothes and build our  
own homes from skins of animals we hunt and kill for our food.  
When the bombsquad failed to locate the bomb  
Someone called up to say would blow up the plant And the foreman was  
ordered to order everyone back in, As the workers returned to drudgery’s  
smithereens  
while kids on summer vacation whizzed by on bicycles

How could I help wishing I'd been the disguised handkerchief phoning the  
bosom to go off?  
Ironic, thought I, if this anarchist explode under me as I slaved for the  
tycoon's cigar!  
Suddenly my fingers were once more setting fire to miniature models of  
military reality— plastic construction kits of death glued lonely nights  
watching horror films on TV—battleships named after states filled with  
matchheads and firecrackers demolished with joy.  
Yet what does this prove? Even these inklings can swarm in the corpse-  
brains of zombies.

## VII

Sometimes I wish there was a log cabin  
In the most deafening part of the factory where I could hermitage listening  
to the wind over the chimney, And every so often as I wrote peer out  
through the shade-edge to see the workers working so hard, And wonder  
if they ever figured out how many lids they touch in a day, Or if they  
ever open a can and wonder if they've already touched it  
Or what lips touched what lids they held in their hands, Or what they'd  
think of this poem. Or if they ever considered the can— How in 1810  
the first can was made, How the first skilled workers could make only  
one by hand an hour, How today's machines make 1000 a minute, How  
America uses 115 million cans each day, 200 billion cans used in the  
world each year, Each year enough metal used making cans to pave a  
ten-foot-wide highway to the moon!  
Soon no one will be left to lift old cans like skulls to contemplate who  
quaffed the ravished brides of quietness.  
The can-littered streams will remain long after America has to be memo-  
rized by the children of other planets.  
Who will remember Continental Can Company was the foremost aluminum  
polluter on earth?  
The five billion bacteria in a teaspoon of soil?  
The million earthworms per acre?  
What bug? What fish? What frog? What snake? What bird? What balu-  
chitherium or pteranodon?  
What paleolithic man?  
How can I apologize to primeval shorelines cluttered with beercans?  
Should I say I needed the money?  
Should I say my body is the bible of flies?  
Should I say each lid weighs more than an orgasm?

Should I say what if machineroar was rainsong or cricketsong?  
Should I say I'm a spy behind enemy lines, what top secret will I escape  
with?  
Should I say here's a free pass to the antique beer can collector's convention?  
Must the beer can on the mountainside always be part of the view?

## VIII

Now I understand why one Sunday night  
I found myself the only one working in factory,  
Given what is not given to every longing for loneliness: eight hours of pure  
underworld,  
Eight hours to imagine my life,  
Eight hours my machine the only one on loud as a bomb continually burst-  
ing.  
No one knew I imagined myself all ages working there.  
No one knew the instant I realized there were 24 presses and I was 24 years.  
No one asked if I strolled the blackened corridors planting a kiss on the  
jaws of each monster.  
No one guessed what the curled emptinesses without ends suspended from  
the ceiling on motionless conveyors in both directions to the vanishing  
point might hold for me,  
Or the gondolas heaped with punched-out scrap,  
Or words Chidiok Tychborn wrote  
the night before the chopping block recited by me to the giant metal dark-  
ness could he ever've imagined?  
No one smelled what I smoked in the bathroom stall on my break.  
No one saw me write Factories are our churches.  
We worship them more than forests.  
We worship them more than mountains.  
We'd rather drink from the tap than a stream.  
We'd rather open our refrigerator than a freshly killed deer.  
No one saw me feeling my way back  
through the long dark pillared aisles of virgin cans with names we all know.  
And when the foreman came by on his yellow scooter and from his lips I  
read LONG NIGHT  
What could I do but smile  
for tears to dance round his corpse?

## IX

Am I really from outerspace  
Looking through super-x-ray telescope  
Observing the life of one earthling  
Wondering what it's like being him so much  
my thoughts are the same as his 24 years?  
Or is it they captured me when my spaceship landed and doped me to  
forget the planet I'm from where I make a million bucks for this poem?  
Amazing how they can program robots to imagine!  
Making me think I'm alive! Making each memory seem real!  
As if I was ever outside the factory even once since I was born!  
As if there ever was a first day on the job so eager not to goof up!  
Don't they think I can figure it out? Don't they think I know science can  
animate a cadaver? Don't they think I can think I've been made to  
think that I'm human?  
Allowing me to flirt with this idea is the key, of course, to their control—  
so I can never be sure if they got me.  
The sea? The earth? The sky?  
They've all been invented for my sake.  
There's no History of Life, no Milky Way—  
All there is is this factory stretching in every direction forever!  
But it's not so bad—at least whatever computer card life they give you  
today really feels like it's happening, really feels like the one you've had  
all along.  
And they even let you imagine they've invented some pill that'll make you  
feel while you factory that you're foresting or mountaining or tasting  
your first drink from a stream  
Or the time and place and life of your choice— Would you rather be  
Tyrannosaurus or Teratornis? Would you rather be Neanderthal or Cro-  
Magnon? How about Whitman? You haven't been him for a while. Or  
Shakespeare? Remember how much fun it was the last time you wrote  
*Hamlet*?  
Aren't you getting tired of discovering the Grand Canyon every day for the  
last two weeks?  
Today why not discover fire  
or be Bruckner among the Sequoias?  
Today why not yell "I quit!" simultaneously in every factory on earth?  
Or clap your hands and naked slaves appear and dance before your throne!  
It's not so bad everyone's aware you're an experiment.  
So what if the news runs a continual live broadcast of every second of your  
life?

Be grateful only the most carefully screened geniuses are selected to know  
you,

That everyone you speak to knows their lines in advance, That even  
strangers must have degrees in automatonology, And that right now  
the scientists are letting you think this. They laugh. It's part of  
the hypothesis they're testing: One of them bends to another and  
says—"Let's see what he says when I turn this knob."

#### O HUMAN CANNONBALLS OF EPIPHANY

Can cans ever be canned? Can the can-can ever be canned?

Can cantos of cannonfodder ever be canonized or the Canticle of Canticles  
of Cannabis never be cantabiled?

Can canasta in Canada canyons or going to the can never be cantata'd or  
can't it be canted

because of cannibal cancer's uncanny candor making even cantaloupes can-  
tankerous?

Hum-drum! Hum-drum! Hum-drum!

I should be paid for discovering America is committing suicide with facto-  
ries!

I should be paid for wondering if I'm only a defect in the mass-production  
of zombies!

I should be paid for pondering if God packages universes the way I package  
lids!

I should be paid for combering if the sea ever gets tired of making the same  
sound!

I should be paid for writing *The Infinite Autobiography of This Spot  
Through Eternity*

I should be paid to stand on this spot before America was discovered!

What do I win for singing—"No one can stand where I stand because my  
body is in the way"?

I should be paid to memorize the epic of every split-second!

I should be paid for hearing the chorus of fliptops popped all over the globe  
this instant!

I should be paid for turning fished-out cans upsidedown to count how many  
years falling leaves pour out!

How much do I get for watching the sunrise?

How much do I get for sleeping under the stars?

How much do I get for exploring the undiscovered oceans and continents  
and claiming them in Mescaline's name?

How much do these words want to work in my lines?

Is this poem worth more than a skyscraper?

This book worth more moolah than ever made?

I should be paid for listening to music better than virtuosos play!

I should be paid to play Kick the Can or tie cans to the newlydead's hearse!  
I should be paid to fly a kite underground  
careful not to snare it in the roots of trees!  
What do I get for sisyphusing my face?  
What do I get for glutting my sorrow  
on the wealth of the globèd peonies?  
What do I get for knowing the hunting and gathering way of life represents  
99% man's time on earth?  
Or for knowing the slaves who built the pyramids carved graffiti praising  
Pharaoh on the giant blocks of stone?  
What do I get for knowing a billion dollar bills placed end to end would  
extend four times round the world and if you picked them up one per  
second it'd take 134 years?  
I should be rich for knowing the answers to so many \$64,000 Questions!  
I should be rich for crying the Tarzan Cry  
that brings the skeletons of extinction to the rescue!  
Before, I said—"There will always be room in my brain for the universe!"  
Before, I said—"My soul will never be bludgeoned by the need to make  
money!"  
Before, I said—"I will never cringe under the crack of the slavedriver's  
whip!"  
Now my job is to murder the oceans!  
Now my job is to poison the air!  
Now my job is to chop down every tree!  
I make food full of poison and say—"This is what you must buy! I'm in  
charge of torturing heretics  
and anyone who disagrees with the king!  
I spend eight hours a day crucifying saviors!  
I spend eight hours a day executing Lorcas!  
I make slag heaps out of human souls!  
I'm the first to go in the gas chamber after it's all over.  
The corpses are piled on top of each other, the strongest on top, the weakest  
on bottom, all naked, many still twitching, still bleeding from noses and  
mouths, vomit, shit and piss befouling the agonied postures.  
My job is to pull the gold teeth and shovel the bodies into the ovens.  
Thanks to my work, Wolf Grizzly Eagle Whale and other deities in the  
pantheon of pantheism are no longer a threat to organized religion.  
My job is to drop the Atomic Bomb on Hiroshima.  
Twenty years later, asked would I do it again  
I say—"Yes."  
O pay me for receiving the prophecies of the maggots of other worlds!  
Pay me for the planets where before I was born

I sang lullabies from my mother's vagina!  
 Let me be paid for bringing into Poetry  
 penises and vaginas that will give us the visions we have wanted them to  
 all along!  
 Let me be paid for rolling up my shirtsleeves and worshipping the ejacula-  
 tions of joy!  
 O I should be paid to give blowjobs to boys, one hundred a day for the rest  
 of my life!  
 And girls should be tickled pink for me to lick their cunts  
 till flying saucers come with frankincense and myrrh! Eureka! I will make  
 my fortune from plagiarizing death!  
 I will take the words from its mouth and it will not care!  
 I should be paid to say everyone's job is enlightenment!  
 I should be paid to run naked through the sprinkler  
 the hottest day of summer!  
 I should be paid to lie in a canoe  
 and drift over the lake all day!  
 What does it profit me to discover the pyramid  
 of cans in the supermarket?  
 I demand to know how much sphincter gets  
 staring brown daggers at its reflection!  
 How many smackers the tuckered-out eardrums?  
 How many frogskins the herculean heart  
 and hardworking gonads?  
 Where are my royalties for discovering the telephone?  
 And didn't I invent applause?  
 How many yachts and racehorses is that worth?  
 How many mansions? How many limousines  
 for going over the Niagara of Last Words on a tightrope? O pay me for  
 saying if 75 feet represents the age of the earth each step I take equals  
 100 million years!  
 O pay me for saying I could live the rest of my life  
 on the money it costs to make one 500-pound bomb!  
 O pay me for saying every five days one million more humans on planet!  
 O pay me for discovering the origin of writing  
 was to keep track of wealth and slaves!  
 O pay me for saying children who worked 12 hours a day were so tired they  
 fell asleep with food in their mouths!  
 O pay me for showing adults in factories  
 as tragic as child labor!  
 O pay me eight hours a day to do nothing  
 but make bombscare phonecalls!

O pay me to say a poem is the best way  
 to blow up a factory!  
 How many mediums of exchange do I get  
 for getting higher than ever?  
 The cry of the eagle gives me a million!  
 The taste of wild berries gives me a million!  
 The smell of black locusts gives me a million!  
 The feeling swimming naked gives me a million!  
 I'm rich with all the visions opening cocoons afford!  
 A billionaire of reincarnations that can never be bankrupt!  
 O pay me to dress up as Santa  
 and go down the Auschwitz chimneys!  
 O pay me for using so many exclamation points!  
 Each worth more than a skyscraper!  
 O pay me for crushing a can in each fist!  
 Workaday! Workaday! Workaday!  
 Pilfer your lifelong life away!  
 How can I think of quittin when dis is moh fuhn  
 dhan goin down da Big Muddy on a raf wif a runaway?  
 I guess I should tell you I'm really a zillionaire doing slave work just to see  
 what it's like—  
 Or wait a minute, is it that I took some drug  
 that makes me think I'm a zillionaire who took some drug to forget he's a  
 zillionaire to see what doing slave work is like?  
 O pay me for knowing they let me say this.  
 For picturing how the control panel in robotfactory headquarters reacts,  
 How it flashes and the dials jump when I say  
 the scientists are pleased with their creation.  
 One of them reads from the tickertape each word as I write it.  
 "Hey, listen to this," he smirks—  
 "I should be paid to say death restores us to soil  
 no matter how unenlightened we are:  
 All melt in the mouth of the earth:  
 Each one is scrumptious to the critters  
 to whom corpses taste good:  
 Each corpse a gift to the ground  
 for roots to open into everything beyond them, Opening slowly as the  
 Colorado unwrapped the Grand Canyon till once more you're dreaming  
 of gifts beneath the tree: So don't bother complimenting death.  
 Flattery will get you nowhere."  
 The scientists can't keep from clapping.  
 One of them bends to another and whispers—

“Remember when he raved about the laureate of blowjobs? “No, but is it true he said he got lost counting all the boyhoods he had?”

## X

O thinking so much makes me weary.  
Maybe I should pretend the masters  
Nodding their heads in the invisible auditorium  
in which continual dialogues are held  
on the progress of my computerized soul are only a dream.  
Maybe if I just stop thinking and look at the machines—  
the way the lids pour out like suicide battalions,  
the way I pretend to check for defects every so often,  
the way I shove enough in the bag like this,  
the way I stand the filled bag on end like this,  
the way I fold over the top and tape it like this,  
the way the rows of 'em rise on the skid like this—  
MMMMMM, that's better, now I'm myself again—  
All I have to do is stand here  
and package factories as they come from the press—  
Factories that make cans.  
Factories that make the machines that make cans.  
Factories that make the machines that make the machines that make cans.  
Factories that make factories.  
Factories that make factories that make factories that make everything that  
goes into cans.  
Factories that make canopeners.  
Factories that make electric canopeners.  
Factories that make candy and canoes.  
Factories that make candles and candelabras and incandescent lightbulbs.  
Factories that make cuckoo-clock canaries.  
Industries of canned laughter, canned applause, canned music.  
Telephone factories, television factories, radio, stereo, tape recorder factories,  
refrigerator, stove and toilet factories.  
Telescope factories, microscope factories, film, camera, movie screen factories,  
jukebox, roulette wheel and slot machine factories.  
Industries of nuts! Industries of bolts!  
Industries of bulldozers, roadgraders, steamshovels, cement mixers, steam-  
rollers, jackhammers, pile drivers and wrecking cranes!

Every building and street in every dot on the map and all the highways  
 between them constructed from products of multitudinous factories!  
 Factories of cars and toy cars, trucks and toy trucks, trains and toy trains,  
 planes and toy planes, ships and toy ships, spaceships and toy space-  
 ships!  
 Factories of money and factories of play money!  
 Factories of all that money can buy!  
 Mass production of pricetags!  
 Assembly lines of cash registers!  
 Application and paycheck form factories!  
 Lunchbucket and thermosbottle factories! Earplug and timeclock and  
 alarmclock factories! and self-winding watches given factoryhands at  
 retirement made in what factories!  
 Factories of lady's ware, men's ware, children's ware, baby's ware, silver-  
 ware, copperware, tinware, glassware, stoneware, woodenware, earthen-  
 ware, plasticware, furniture, souvenirs, knickknacks, novelties, gizmos,  
 geegaws, glockenspiels and greeting cards!  
 Ambulances, police cars, and buses from factories! Fire engines, fire escapes,  
 and matches from factories! Sirens, foghorns, steamwhistles, rockguitars,  
 grandpianos, every instrument in the orchestra including the baton and  
 the concert hall all hatched from myriad factories!  
 O every record I love I know where you come from!  
 O cookiecutters! birdhouses! buddhastatues and plastic vomit!  
 I know where you come from!  
 O awls, axes, adzes, augers, barrels, bearings, bellows, brads, crowbars,  
 corkscrews, crucibles, calipers, dumbbells, dollies, dibbles, drills, ex-  
 hausts, excelsior, forceps, faucets, gauges, gouges, gaskets, goggles,  
 hammers, hammocks, hangers, hoists, irons, icepicks, jewels, jacks,  
 keels, kilns, levels, ladles, lathes, mops, muzzles, mattresses, micro-  
 phones, nails, neon, napalm, ouija boards, pistons, pitchforks, pliers,  
 puncheons, quivers, quoits, ratchets, rounces, radar, roachclips, scales,  
 scalpels, snorkels, stencils, shovels, shoetrees,  
 squeegees, tweezers, trophies, trocars, tampons, trampolines, uniforms,  
 umbrellas, vises, valves, wormgears, wrenches, wigs, wire, yardsticks,  
 zippers—  
 I know where you come from!  
 And I know where the machines that make you come from! And all the  
 letters for alphabet soup!  
 Breweries, canneries, tanneries, creameries, (Name me something not come  
 from Factory) Brassworks, gasworks, refineries, binderies, Plants that  
 make barberpoles, barberchairs, dentistchairs, electric chairs, electric

knives, electric fans, electric shavers, electric blenders, electric blankets,  
 electric fireplaces, electric toothbrushes, electric eyes!  
*Everything in the Sears Roebuck Catalogue is not from the legendary herds  
 of buffalo!*

Typewriter sweatshops! Motorcycle sweatshops! Revolving door sweat-  
 shops! Intercom sweatshops! Mass production of straitjackets!  
 Mass production of bombs!  
 Vast spectrum of death machines of land, sea and sky!  
 More bullets than people who ever lived!  
 More bayonets than books ever written!  
 Better machines for killing invented so fast they're obsolete before used!  
 So much an hour mass production of crosses and flags! Purple-heart grist-  
 mills! Basket-case gristmills!  
 Industries of homicidal deceit:  
 glamorizing cigarets no different than Nazis telling Jews gas chambers are  
 shower rooms!  
 Millions of new cradles and coffins each year!  
 Corpses rolling down the conveyor belt of the funeral factory!  
 Slaughterhouse factories and all the tools of the slaughterhouse: cleavers,  
 bludgeons, meat-hooks, sticklers!  
 Fish, mammal, bird factories! Fruit, vegetable, grain factories!  
 Every bite processed in factories!  
 Strip me naked, abandon me in deepest woods in Canada— my body still  
 from Factory!  
 My flesh flesh of what factories raised from birth and murdered for my  
 mouth!  
 Supermarket Factories! University Factories!  
 Hospital Factories! Prison Factories!  
 Death Factories!  
 Stop! Don't you think I get the point?  
 All the floors of the department store and the elevator girl telling me the  
 goods on each as the doors open?  
 Is it necessary to list  
 every machine necessary to extract raw materials and every machine neces-  
 sary to transport them and every machine necessary to transform them  
 into iron, steel, aluminum,  
 and everything made from iron, steel, aluminum, and every machine nec-  
 essary to make it?  
 What do I get for unveiling the machinery that makes footballs, baseballs,  
 basketballs, tennisballs, bowlingballs, billiardballs, pingpongballs, snow-  
 mobiles, boxinggloves, golfclubs, sailboats, surfboards, scubagear, bath-  
 tubs, and easychairs?

Must we see the slaves behind every device of recreation and leisure? Must  
 we see the slaves behind every laborsaving device?  
 (Do you think it's trite to call them slaves?  
 Are you only a company man for Literature slaving on the disassembly line  
 of criticism?  
 Are you only a cog in the Poetry Factory?  
 How many poems by Zinjanthropus  
 appear in your Immortal Anthology?) Wheelbarrow factories! Kitchen sink  
 capitalisms! Staplegun generalissimos! Toothpick presidents!  
 Paperclip czars! Linoleum pharaohs!  
 Punchpress emperors! Pushbutton potentates!  
 Monopoly millionaires! Deodorant billionaires!  
 Electricity trillionaires! Computer quadrillionaires!  
 Quintillionaires of wood! Sextillionaires of rock!  
 Septillionaires of plastic! Octillionaires of oil!  
 Nonillionaires of flesh! Decillionaires of Oblivion!  
 The exact number of pennies ever made!  
 The exact number of papercups ever made!  
 The exact number of number two pencils ever made!  
 More rope! More tape! More pipe! More fence!  
 More wallets! More purses! More needles! More thread!  
 More envelopes! More stamps! More brushes! More paint!  
 More boxes! More bottles! More screws! More screwdrivers!  
 More washingmachines! More airconditioners! More vacuum cleaners!  
 More flashlight batteries!  
 Dynamos stretching to the horizon and still not enough!  
 More generators! More blastfurnaces! More concrete! More antennae!  
 Capitalisms of thumbtacks and thumbscrews!  
 Stockholders in tongue-depressors and rectal thermometers!  
 Manufacturers of lawnmowers, snowblowers, toenail clippers and machetes!  
 World's largest producers of arrows, slingshots, fishhooks, riflesights, de-  
 coys, traps, and raccoon death-cry calls!  
 Peddlers of pills and more pills and pill containers and prescription forms!  
 Industries for the Blind! Industries for the Retarded!  
 Where artificial flavor and color are made!  
 Where artificial flowers and grass are made!  
 Where artificial eyes and arms and legs are made!  
 and wherever they make boobytraps!  
 and wherever they make tiddlywinks!  
 and wherever they make doors and doorknobs and doorbells and hinges  
 and locks and keys!  
 Corporations of bulletproof vests and silencers!

Corporations of blowtorches, rivetguns and girders!  
 (And where do dildoes and bathyspheres fit in?) Every breath more parking-  
 meters and bankvaults and armored trucks and turnstiles and wedding  
 rings and vagina dolls and rubbers and rubberbands and rubber rafts  
 and lifepreservers and thingamabobs and thingamadoodles and gargle  
 and garbage trucks and garbage cans and sprinkling cans and aerosol  
 cans and "Eat" signs and "Stop" signs and "No Trespassing" signs and  
 switchboards and turbines and conveyor belts of conveyor belts!  
 And the world's largest producers of machineguns and chainsaws! And  
 20,000 a day extermination factory of Auschwitz!  
 And one billion gallons of gasoline burned in California each month! And  
 38 cigarets inhaled every day in New York City just by breathing the  
 air!  
 And even you, backpacks, compasses, and maps of the wild? must you be  
 from factories?  
*Et tu* mountain climbing gear?  
 And even icecream and kaleidoscopes and bubblewands and balloons and  
 swingsets and teetertotters and yoyos and marbles and frisbees and  
 skateboards and pinwheels and merrygorounds and beanies with pro-  
 pellers and the hall of mirrors?  
 Must we see the slaves behind every toy of our childhood? Must we see the  
 gyped lives behind the pantheon of laughs?  
 O souls llophoused by factories!  
 O geniuses imbeciled by factories!  
 O enlightenment shoplifted by factories!  
 Copying machine factories! Calculating machine factories!  
 Vending machine factories! Change machine factories!  
 Humans spending their lives making lipstick or eyeshadow!  
 Humans spending their lives making crystal balls or fortune cookies!  
 Humans spending their lives making calendars or blindman canes!  
 Working your way up to foreman in the insecticide factory!  
 Working your way up to employment manager in the squirtgun factory!  
 Working your way up to the top in the pay toilet factory!  
 40 years making piggybanks!  
 480 months making burglar alarms or handcuffs!  
 2000 weeks making wind chimes, wind machines or wind-up toys!  
 10,400 days of your life  
 making stopwatches or metronomes!  
 83,200 hours of your life  
 making miniature replicas of Rodin's Thinker!  
 4,992,000 minutes of your life  
 gluing the hemispheres of globes together!

299,952,000 seconds of your life cranking out the links of chains!

## XI

What have I forgotten?  
How many more should I name?  
Is there no end to this list?  
Factories that make newspapers every day  
and all the job openings in the want ads?  
Factories that make yellow pages and all the factories in the yellow pages  
of every city on earth?  
More factories than words in this poem!  
More than all the odes in praise of marijuana or blowjobs ever written!  
More than all the miles I'll ever backpack or canoe pristine primordial  
lake-forest-peak wilderness!  
Even if I toured every factory there is and each tour lasted only a minute,  
it would take centuries!  
No second of my life in which slaves are not slaving!  
Don't tell me it's trite to say they are slaves!  
Don't tell me it's banal to say every second counts!  
Don't tell me I use too many exclamation points!  
(Can there ever be too many exclamation points!)  
Don't tell me it's boring to see all the ways humans make human sacrifice  
of their lives!  
Don't tell me how leaves are factories!  
or of the factories of my bones and balls!  
I have milked by hand! I know the milking machine joke!  
I know I smell with an olfactory system!  
I know mitochondria are the power houses of cells!  
I don't need to be reminded honey is the busy work of bees!  
I don't need to be told the Sun is the Factory of Light!  
Death from the cornucopia of Factories!  
Death from the stupor, stupor, stupor of the daily grind!  
Massacre of land, sea and sky by stupendous machines!  
Mutilation of souls beyond recognition!  
Factories that have actually made enough bombs to blow up the Earth any  
second!  
Factories of the death-cry of America and Mankind and every Livingkind  
on my planet!  
Factories whose noise numbs the ear to Poetry!  
Factories whose God is not Love unless Love is Money!

Factories that make millions of books that say— “Without factories we  
couldn’t live.  
Behind everything we need to survive is a machine.  
Without factories you wouldn’t be reading these words.”  
I draw lines from all the things I own to the factories that made them and  
from each factory to the homes of its slaves.  
How long will it take me to work my whole life on each of the jobs in every  
factory on earth?  
Ah, epics could be written in each of them.  
How would this all be different  
if I’d worked where they make kites or fireworks, teaballs or plumbbobs,  
mannikins or sledgehammers, tuning forks or cattleprods, flamethrowers  
or shoppingcarts, wheelchairs or hearingaids, paper or fountain pens,  
pacifiers or puppets, or poured sand into hourglasses passing by on  
conveyor belt?  
Maybe I won’t be able to write unless I work in a factory! Even if I get rich  
I’ll have to buy a machine for the turret of my castle  
so I can go there and scribble to its ravenous roar:  
Except to make money, We are no longer responsible for our survival. We  
don’t have to hunt or kill our own food.  
We don’t have to build our own houses or tools, know how to make fire  
without matches, make our own clothes or canoes, be our own heroes,  
doctors, priests, and teach our children how to smell the weather.  
Once there were no cities or farms.  
Once there were no factories or slaves.  
Once everything ever made in factories did not exist.  
Is there no way to cut the umbilicus to factories?  
No way to be born into a world not made in factories?  
No way to unpledge this hopeless allegiance to suicide by factories?  
Not one stream left where the water flows free of human junk from source  
to mouth?  
No breath left to breathe anywhere untainted by exhaust pipes and  
smokestacks?  
Is it too late to ask—“What good is it if we’re immortal when we’re bored  
with eternity even before we die?”  
Is it time to begin to dream of the sphere in space where America exists  
before it was discovered?  
What was I born for? What was I born for?  
Is this a Factory I see before me?

## XII

Perhaps you've already stopped reading this poem, Perhaps you want to  
get paid for reading this far. Don't think I haven't caught you turning  
the pages to see how much longer it is to the end.  
Don't think I haven't caught you looking at the clock.  
How long does it take to write *I am growing oidi*  
What right do 24 years have to speak of age?  
This poem does not want to die, but it is very tired now.  
It has so many little children in it that want to go home, That want to be  
told a story they can fall asleep halfway through—  
Once, that day before the night I worked alone, past "No Trespassing" signs  
and barbed wire, Smoking the last words of centuries  
amid birch, oak, shagbark and grosbeak song,  
Exhaling into faces of trilliums and mosquitos, wanting everything to be  
high,  
In a small clearing I did what I always wanted to do— stripped naked and  
shat—  
My head and arms rising to the sun  
so that when they could reach no further  
I felt what my body would never be again touch me for the last time,  
smelling in the 93 million mile rays my remains, my source,  
And savoring the mystic perfume in that stench (Perfume that can be  
called nothing but mystic) And grabbing myself as if my hand were  
God I pulled my life from my testicles up and out the shaft of my  
blazing erection— splendid arcs of semen glittering through the air—  
Saying to my turds—"Be my past, be my boyish boyhoods small shap't  
and firmly carv'd, finely laid and sleek,"  
And to my semen—"Be my future, my future opening mouth between legs  
spread with naked joy in the wavering leaf-shade  
where Indian Pipes and Moccasin Flowers are still fringed with dew."  
An hour later Factory surrounded me.  
A week later pilgrimage found no trace of my conversion.

## XIII

What more can I say?  
The day came as I knew it would,  
The day that waited for me all along just as much as the machines waited,  
Just as much as the day I was conceived

And all the days before I had to become a slave, before I was taught to  
 spell money,  
 Before I understood my corpse  
 and everything beyond the disappearance of my corpse waits for me,  
 And just as much as the end of this poem Waited for me before the be-  
 ginning of time and for whoever reads it after the extinction of clocks,  
 The day I would quit waited for me, Waited for me to apply and be  
 hired, For the routines of slavery to be learned and the slow countdown  
 of days to be endured,  
 For me, it waited, patiently, that day,  
 Waited for me to pick up my paycheck so many times, To stare at the clock  
 as I worked dreaming of quitting so many times,  
 To think of all the things as a man I did not want to be, And for freedom to  
 long for me patient as worms all the days before they are human again,  
 While the odyssey of eternity on this one spot in the universe contemplated  
 itself—  
 While the infinite epic of each second in infinity touched me—  
 From the birth of the sun, From the birth of the earth, From the birth of all  
 life to the earliest men, From the discovery of fire, From the invention  
 of tools, From when each word was once a poem and what it was like  
 to live at that time when all men hunted and killed their own food and  
 carved the mammoth from the mammoth's tusk,  
 From the invention of farming and herding 10,000 years ago, From the  
 invention of writing 5000 years ago and printing 500 years ago,  
 From the first cities, from the first factories,  
 From the first swirl of the whirlpool whose vortex we spin in so fast no one  
 knows anymore what will happen, From having to stop writing these  
 words every ten seconds to tube or bag the lids of cans  
 And how this incantation rose and still rises and will never stop rising  
 from the catacombs of incomprehensible zombies!  
 And so, as I knew it would, the day came  
 When waiting in line to punch out it was for the last time, When for the  
 last time I would see the slaves race past me trying to be first from  
 carlot to freeway to bar to drink till they dreamed they were free,  
 When for the last time I would follow the way home past all the factories  
 that lay between giant in the aura of their power at midnight through  
 the empty streets in the rain.  
 How could I have known months after I quit as I lay waiting for sleep my  
 ears would still echo that roar, the din of presses and minsters?  
 How could I have known I'd bolt from bed at all hours gasping—"I'm late!"  
 only to realize I quit long ago the din of presses and minsters?

How could I have known years later driving past Factory the most seductive night of summer, seeing all the lights on, the smokestacks billowing, I would say—"Just think, people are working right now' and let the best grass I ever smoked remember me there

in the din of presses and minsters?

*How can you kill yourself if you're already dead?*

*How can you kill yourself with something made in a factory? How can you kill yourself before embracing the invisible tree above every stump?*

*How can you kill yourself before the arena packed with your future lives cheers you on?*

Before, I said—"If you've already stopped reading this you'll never know how it ends!"

Before, I said—"As long as there are slaves this poem will never end! As long as there are factories my metamorphosed remains will continue to ponder the wasted lives!"

Before, I said—"Poets should be paid to skydive naked to all the doors where slaves go in, proclaiming from the robes of their chutes how the corpse waits in the man the man waits in the boy the boy waits in the child the child waits in the baby

waiting all the orgasms of ancestors to be fucked into being

patient as maggots are patient all the days they must wait before they become human again, before they elegize again the wasted lives, before they can proclaim once more the immortality of death!"

What am I waiting for? I am free to go.

The next shift has begun. Why am I standing here watching them work?

There's nothing I can say they will hear.

There's nothing more to be seen.

I have shown the gouged-out souls.

I have shown the castrated souls.

I have shown the souls torn limb from limb.

I have shown the disemboweled souls.

Now you know the difference between hunting for money and hunting the woolly rhinoceros.

I have performed the adagio of the opening cocoon.

Because of me Poetry knows my childhood stacked coins into dank castles of smell.

Because of me Poetry knows it took 500 million man-hours to build the highest building in the world.

Because of me from now on every factory-made object unceasingly mantras—"I was made by a slave!"

I have not made my fortune in gravedigging machines or garbage disposals. I'm no plutonium tycoon or entrepreneur of nerve gas.

I'll never spend my life creating ways to make poison taste better and sell more.  
From mountaintops I have gazed more than the money of all time.  
From the start the rainbow has arched to my palate the promise of these words.  
I have inherited the earth.  
I have inherited the sky.  
I have tinkered this handmade craftsmanship in my own little shop.  
The Epic of Zombies has come from my hand.  
The Spectacle of Millions Slowly Tortured to Death Their Whole Lives has come from my hand.  
There aren't enough libraries for the screams.  
There aren't enough banks for the tears.  
Can't you smell the putrescent lives?  
The wasted lives, can't you smell them?  
I've escaped unburied from the untold miles of genocide tickertape gibbered from the monoliths of greed.  
I've escaped from the slaughterhouse of souls.  
I've closed my eyes by the machines and imagined I stood in the thunder and spray of the unknown falls drying—"Every city that exists will disappear!  
Every nation that exists will disappear!"  
Don't ask me how. Don't ask me why.  
All I know is numberless planets have realized Utopia.  
All I know is there will be no ghost dance for the nuclear bomb.  
All I know is no one will timemachine to our time to work in a tollway tollbooth giving correct change their whole life to car after car.  
O millions of sanddollars be left by the tide!  
O children radiant with soot emerge from the mines at last!  
O inside the pyramid stand on the spot where you look up and see through to the stars!  
Freedom! Liberty! Deliverance!  
(Am I the primitive man who invented those words?)  
I proclaim the resurrection of everyone who is dead that is still alive!  
No one will have giant keys in their backs any longer!  
No one will cut themselves and find clockwork inside any longer!

From now on no one will die discovering they had not lived!  
No more strangleholds! No more strangleholds!  
Ungag our souls!! Unstrangle our souls!! Unsmother our souls!!  
I PROCLAIM THE EXTINCTION OF FACTORIES!!!  
Already they are gone. Not a trace remains.  
I can hardly believe I am so powerful.  
There are no more slaves! No one knows anymore what money is!  
The utmost passion of eternity feels itself in every human being!  
Everything ever made in factories has disappeared.  
Once more a squirrel can travel from the Atlantic to the Mississippi from  
tree to tree without touching the ground.  
Once more the buffalo and passenger pigeon.  
Once more wilderness earth that is heaven.  
Once more wilderness men that are gods.  
I gaze down on the untouched continent. How many centuries have fallen  
away?  
Is this America?  
What should I call it?  
Am I the first man  
to set foot  
on this land?  
Here is the door.  
I'll open it now.  
All I have to do  
is open it  
and leave.  
For all I know  
the city will no longer be there  
and I'll walk into the absolute forest— Machines are not trees, machines  
are not clouds, Lids advancing forever are neither streams nor lapping  
shores, Clocks are not moons, moons are not coins, Coins are not the  
view from the mountaintop,  
jobs are not sunrise, work is not dawn:  
The Miracle of Factory passes from my life!  
“Working at Continental Can Co.” R!!P!  
Like a kite played higher and higher  
Pulls more gently as it gets smaller and smaller  
until it's hardly there, only a dot, and tugs like the memory of some unre-  
quited caress,  
So the years have come between me and that time,  
those factorydays of my past, those futile days of my life,  
But not until all factories are turned into playgrounds in moonlight,

Not until all applicants for factories must memorize this poem  
to be hired,  
Not until I'm hired to dress like a grasshopper and fiddle  
"O the world owes me a livin'" to the nation of ants  
Will I let go of the string.

And when the time comes to let go  
Let the last thing I remember be  
the night when the power failed,  
When the monsters that even now  
are preaching the same circular words  
that will outlive us all failed,  
When everything stopped and went dark,  
How in the sudden vast silence of factory  
I heard my own voice for the first time,  
And crouching at the feet of the machines  
In that dark broken only by exit lights  
how I closed my eyes  
Wondering if when I opened them  
I would be 15,000 years ago  
Beginning in the flickering of my torch  
to paint the antler'd dancer  
on the vault of my cave.

## About “Factory”

What do we do with a person who slowly tortures children to death? That is what Factories are doing, not only to the bodies and minds of children, but all human beings and all living things on earth. Faster and faster the air we breathe, water we drink, food we eat is poisoned by Factories. One ton of toxic substances per person in the United States are dumped into the air, water and earth every year! The flesh of Americans contains so much DDT it wouldn't pass federal standards for human consumption! Every day more cows, sheep and pigs are killed in America than all the Jews in concentration camps in WWII! Every year we use up enough trees to build a ten-foot-wide boardwalk 30 times around the world at the equator! Each year in the U.S. alone one million acres of oxygen-producing trees are paved over! When Whitman heard the workers singing their varied carols he had no idea it would be this way today. In Whitman's time Mannahatta was smaller than Milwaukee is now. When he died in 1892, the tallest building in Mannahatta was ten stories high.

Once people sang as they worked —songs of voyageurs, sailors, cowboys, harvesters with scythes. What songs do factoryworkers sing? The workers of today don't realize they're wielding the murder weapons of the World. They don't think eight hours a day they commit a crime against Humanity. They don't think eight hours a day no one can be proud working any job that contributes to Planet Death. Poets who find themselves in Factories to survive must never forget they are spies behind “enemy” lines, doing espionage for Humanity's Most Hopeful Future. What top secret will they escape with? Not for one second should they lose sight of the fact Factories are unceasing increasing erupting volcanoes —supertankers moored everywhere on earth continually spilling out death. What price do we pay for the miracle of Factory?

In a 1971 interview Albert Speer, Hitler's second in command, was asked in his prison cell in Spandau: if Hitler had admitted to him that he was exterminating the Jews, what would he have said to him. Speer replied he would have told Hitler: “You're killing the Jews? That is insane! I need them to work in our Factories!” In the same interview Speer said: “It is this vast gulf between our technological potential and our moral development that makes this age both so challenging and so terrifying. We now have the power to reach the stars —and to destroy our own planet... In a world terrorized by technology, we are *all* in Auschwitz.”

I sold myself to Factory in order to make money to buy freedom to study and write Poetry! I enlisted at CCC. Not Civilian Conservation Corps, but Continental Can Company, Plant 77, one of over 200 worldwide. Surrounded by barbed wire fence, along the Milwaukee River in Milwaukee, Wisconsin: the largest can company in the world under one roof. I worked in the press dept., packaging the tops and bottoms of cans into narrow bags or cardboard tubes as they came from a machine called a press which punched them from sheets of aluminum. The press machines were like huge machine-guns except rather than shooting bullets they shot lids —1000 a minute advancing toward me in a column down a long narrow chute. Once packaged, the lids were shipped by hysters to the other side of the dept, where they were run through machines called minsters, each of which cost half a million dollars. The sole purpose of the minsters was to stamp fliptops onto the lids. The minsters were even louder than the presses. Each new worker had his ears measured and was given a set of earplugs in a carrying case and was expected to wear them at all times on the job. They helped, but only somewhat.

When you lay in bed waiting to fall asleep, the sound of the machines would still be ringing in your ears as loud as if two shells were put next to them and you were hearing the sea. Two months after I quit, the machines still ringing in my years, I sat down with notes I'd written on the job and began arranging and expanding them into the 13 sections of "Factory."

I hear an empty can blown clattering down the alley in the wind. I remember those sweltering months in the bowels of the Factory. Thousands of poets (perhaps millions) are working in Factories as I write this. May poems more powerful and tender than I'll ever write leap from their brains! May they inspire others and may those others inspire others! May we live to see a time when it seems the world is not doomed, a time when each human enlightenment is worth more than all the money in the world!

## Antler

The author of this poem was born in Milwaukee and raised in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin. He was given the name Antler in his 18<sup>th</sup> year. Besides factories, he has explored wildernesses in southern Ontario, Upper Peninsula Michigan, Colorado and northern California.

All of parts I, II, and III and excerpts from parts V, IX, and XIII appeared in the Winter 1979/80 *CoEvolution Quarterly*. "Factory" is the central poem in the author's first book, *Last Words*, in the context of which he feels it is most fully perceived.

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