

A Semester in Rio

a new apartment, a new city
new walks exploring unknown streets
solving the mysteries of where to buy milk, tea, soap, meat, bread
where to rent videos, where to take my laundry
where to have a drink and listen to laughter and stories
new neighbors whose language I'm still learning

I've joined my voice to your twelve million
I don't play guitar, drums, or flute
my new neighbors expect me to sing

in the park near my apartment, rubber trees and jacarandas
shade couples on the grass and chess players by the coffee stand
well-tended plots of trumpet lilies, orchids, roses decorate walkways
children romp in the playground, ducks and pigeons scramble for breadcrumbs
could be anywhere, like in any big city everyone comes from everywhere

Saturday afternoons at four, men and women, retirees mostly,
take over the central square, they chat as they wait
for the sharing of song and dance that brings them here
for two hours they sing to each other
jondo samba fado caipira milonga
mementoes of faraway birthplaces
towns and villages in the interior of Brazil
across the oceans, from the other side of the Andes

a singer rises humming her melody
she takes her place in the middle of the square
her white blouse is buttoned to the top, despite the heat
she wears a light sweater, eyes lift towards the sky
the melody is no nightingale song but a deep growling noise

returning to a point of departure
returning to what will never be here
whenever we separate from our youth

she shares other forests hills grasslands fields
another place another past another her in a younger body
body's vibrations saying what words never could
sounds a musicologist could transcribe into notes undulating on the staff,
like skilled swimmers moving past the breaking waves
slipping back into the deep noise hidden inside the demure mask
of a woman with a history of desires that led her to a new home

eruption of roots in an age of chaotic movement
such rapid speed of change like a jet plane
carrying passengers and cargo across the continents
movement that seems so easy but requires so much force
has propelled us all into this park one Saturday afternoon
wandering turned into golden sounds
in the bustling solitude of a big city park
so much striving, planning, yearning
for this miracle to unfold