

**Center**

At a quarter past four  
surrounded by Chinatown merchants

I tell him:

I outlasted the earthquake and water.

I'm 1989 splitting in two  
and what you're thinking right now,

I'm that too.

I'm a sweet girl

—I'm china—

like that woman you think  
would look better if she kept quiet

and messed up her hair  
and was somewhere else

but not here,

who'd look great naked

and stretched out

in a Modigliani painting.

I'm her,

and of course

sir,

it's true

I'm Modigliani.

I'm the star tip

and the paper strip that falls through the air on holidays,

the author of the theory

that the spirit

is a bone that can't be gnawed away at.

I'm the urge to fall apart and say something.

I can't afford a ticket to the movies,

but I'm in all of them  
and that's why I'm dirty  
and worn out  
and a sadder man than god.

By this time I'm cardboard  
and dough,  
the paper mat  
and the purple street corner  
and what you left behind at the station.

I'm a foot in the stirrup  
and the last thing that Paul thought  
and I can say anything because I'm dirty  
and I can't afford my own ticket to the movies.

I'm the author of the theory of the spirit,  
I'm one side of the spirit,  
I'm the ideal girl.  
I'm Chinatown,  
sir,  
for real,  
24/7  
and overrun,  
I have a street on every corner in the world  
and, naturally,  
I'm  
the only thing we've got left.