I shall seize what silence
and absence offer
and listen
as I tell myself
to the other
listen to the other
and hear her
tell herself
to me
In departure we find
salutary release
that essential escape
the other plane
virgin and vacant still
free of frozen thoughts
and a heart grown numb
to have then each sense alert
bared and keen
freed from trivia
I take in each smell
with my whole hand I push I palpate
I press, I seek out the bone
seek the muscles find
nerves viscera vessels veins
arteries and ducts I press
pinpoint the pain
where the brain raises barriers
I press harder still
until tears flow and surrender follows
Nothing more
but the bright gaze
keen and uncompromising
there
only
in the silence of the cave
lies that impulse of sincerity
talking of what is true
we will walk resolutely once more that same path
till we drive out arrogance
till we unmask the arbitrary within us
confront ourselves in our true light
and thus present what is pure
calm caring and patient
in the humility of paths
trod together
Fire

full roots

roots aflame

Smoke

hidden roots

roots in dark clouds of smoke

Ashes

elusive roots

roots in ashes

Earth

missing roots

roots flung into the wind

Alibi

diagnostic roots

without roots

And again alibi

roots without soul

my roots

so remote

multidimensional

so dubious

my roots undone

by the least breath of wind

Fear grips me

my name is no more

my footsteps upon the tree

where it lies on the ground

sink

And at the frontiers

roots without

roots without ties

Seeking

not seeking

wishing

not wishing

needing

neither needing

nor desiring

the void is the loam I feed on

the sky my mineral salts

can you hear me

in the mountain

in the ocean

serene

you as I know you to be
so sure
the cordyline by your door
as I saw you
your graceful movements
inscribed in the land
Kanak your roots
and my roots in embers
together sketch a faint horizon
and our breaths become one
17 JULY

THE OTHER

Fix your eyes on the distance
on a mountain's side
as if it were your heart
let the wind cool you
forget
the moment will come again
of the vision
that awareness without artifice
of the other

Have you found the time
to lift to your lips
the palm
that lay upon your skin
unannounced
such world-awareness
can draw a whole host of beings
of names impossible to forget
of others never spoken
of faces
of feet deep in dust

Come suddenly one evening
the other will
neither be your death
nor disquiet to you
merely
the nagging thought that you are alone in the world

with these others
my salvation and the ground
I have touched
together we shall be the other's
other
and then we will know
being
for each passing second
other than fear
other than domination
other than power
other than rape
and the burned hut
and the eyes red with blood
other than the hatred
of the barricades
of the ambushes
of the slaughter
the tears
and the blood
that other here
the soul
as it breathes
calms the body
and embraces beauty
for it is the foam
of the breaking wave
To live for the day
without ever allowing yourself
to steal or borrow
to feel fatigue or despair
to admit you have lived
to read Neruda
and then go off
to take the long last road
like so many others gone
after so many years
of refusing that dreaded silence
of fighting of falling
of victories
of joy
of periods of peace
of existence
in the face of foul oppression
To keep your gaze
high
and know you have not let yourself down
for any reason
the silent path
of love and compassion
the insistant will
To remain human in the face of the beast

To leave
having read
Machado Li Po
Omar Khayyam
Akhmatova
Jimmy Hendrix
Buckley father and son
at Bu Raï
the gaze of the old man
cross with him one last time
the final mountain
and leave still loving
stones and sand
that ground from which the children disappear
To have raised your voice
denounced what is unacceptable
rejected the easy chains
and submissive silence
when it seemed the only way
To leave
having read
the day as it dawns
on our friendship
Then dying is nothing
dying is not giving in.
I crossed a part of the bay right at the southern end in a small craft. The weather was cool and calm with a light wind from the south-east. Whispered discussions of people nearby about yachts in regattas on short legs/courses. Our craft could almost touch them. Other vessels were already there this morning. This sunny morning with a clear sky in the public square was still in a festive mood.

In Noumea this afternoon, I did nothing nor anywhere. On the other hand, I did recall when I crossed a large part of my Northern territory last month. Calm weather following a few days of storms. A patch of lawn between the trees and the bare rocks. Friends on the verandah to write, read, and talk and so await the moment to rake the dead leaves. Low tide releases odours freeing the stomach of bitter humours. At night five nights in a row a little rain keeps us awake and Tao is at peace. And then on the last evening, the unexpected arrival of a friend from Netchadt. I had lost contact with him until this moment this afternoon. Last month once again a peaceful stay.
What was it last night simply life the declaration of independence
First of all, grant us your pardon for having been inhuman for having been with no other thought but to have your land is like not being 

Now I want to be seen for what I am This is a special moment the time to slough off the old skin to be skeleton bone and cartilage and create our humanity anew 

From Knowledge and from Compassion will come the real being 

elsewhere is so far away we have our own lives to shape anew 

Now let us confront one another I see your skin your body the genealogies the poles planted in the ground and firmly planted there the old man leading his people 

Tell me you see the person in the other become human once more
BEING ALONE

What is this loneliness that kills
leaves us at dawn blind and bare
on virgin grass and and broken branch
What other loneliness saves us
when deaf to the echo of our souls
the days pass in the sunless lair
that urgency of being in the world
builds a bridge of rope and wood
above bottomless abysses
in which pile up our shed skins
Free from inquisitive gaze
I clasp beauty in close embrace
I love and I sing without restraint
the moment I find myself again
The hours of solitude feed
my thoughts tone up my muscles
send my breath deep down
back and so see the ego
dissolve before their manifold presence
See fear dissolve in the beat
of the body's rhythmic writhing
simmering on the city's fringe
To be alone to be true
excluding nothing
the heart welcomes the hand as it gives
Tell me of your land
my friend
that imprint of your soul
tell me of your blood
your soul's source

Teach me
to see my soul
when the path is not plain
show me in the song of the conch
the breath's birth

Land that is yours
host land
land of welcome
other blood
land to beach on and moor to
land to wait on to pass through
land
to come and die in
to be reborn in
land with no aim
except
simply living
since such is our destiny
on this earth
Kanak land
land for its own sake
land to breathe in
where to transgress
can mean combat
land existence

Many-faceted
mine is a chunk of concrete
but in the breathing of the ground
through this transitory shell
I can feel rise through my feet
heart mouth and gut
up to the mountains
the age-old existence I know so well
23 JULY

WAITING

I know
your waiting
I can see
it
ancient
come from afar
from the years without understanding
year of nothingness
your waiting
fills space
companions the circle’s arc
sunlight and blood lost
I hear
you tell of the land of the Kanak
tell of hope
that to heed the other
will lead us to men in their new-found pride
two destinies in one
as we live together
Let us be wary of closing our ears
to the words that tell
demand grasp give
take make
the Other Land
if we hear not we cannot breathe
waiting is cries
writing
simple everyday gestures
and listening
uplifts the heart a thousandfold
The echo of your waiting
shows me my own path
I shall follow it
faithful
to my innermost urges
and my heart races
many voices
an image of myself
on the face of her
to whom I listen
The clear blue tropical sky
will not hide forever
the uncertain gestures nor the stunted bodies
their strength gone
the fear of having all too often
submitted to terrible contortions
which an obtuse mind
dictates with the intransigence
of a camp warder

The cloudless sky
conceals nothing
of the fear
felt those who have never expressed
the incomparable thirst for freedom
when having long known the muzzle
they speak out at last
in words inscribed
on the bark of the banyans

No fear can free
no fear delight
the stranger
whom I know not
the newcomer
whom we know but too well
or too little
on whom is projected
my hell

As we breathe we become aware
we will rid ourselves of these bitter vapours
like cries of hate
if we gaze at the horizon
we look directly ahead
without threatening glance
nor convenient amnesia
nor fear that numbs the brain
To bathe then in the pure clear water
of our own home
BEING WITH THE OTHER

Giving is not a sacrifice
is nothing to sacrifice
neither my love nor my friendship
nor the beauty I cherish
nor the heart
surrender to
no sacrifice
loving this other
who is suddenly before me
evening of revolt
no sacrifice
hearing the waves
crash upon my skin
nor the family estate
nor the land I believe in
no sacrifice
taking the time
to follow the other path
The dead of the years of violence
have their blood the colour of earth
accompany those from the present
mingling with tears
love
and memory
thus to consign to darkness
selfishness
the passion for power
the AIDS of easy money
Let us one day offer them in joyful sacrifice
for they are but old skins
old rancour and resentment
old rifles old colony
which we fling at death
our aged body naked and exposed
ready at last to become drunk with perfumes
smelt but faintly the other night
And so sacrifice sacrifice
for life is full of riches
truth is found in forgetting self
who in their home
will now speak of useless deaths
of wasted destinies
instead of torrents swelling to life
CREATION

In a moment of great sorrow
God created
the universe and the earth
as we know
and then he returned
to his remorse
and we mortals
must take care of the rest
the earth and what goes with it
And so we created everything
higgledy-piggledy
the beautiful the ugly
in one neat package
a complete list of all we got wrong
would be too long
too sad and sickening
and the list of good things
well that needs some thinking about
but there must be some
As for us
we could tell of a few
from the crimes of colonialism
to the virtues of conscience
from the crimes of cultural extinction
to the virtues of friendship that transcends barriers
from the subtle evils of "I will teach you"
to the immediate benefits of "teach me your ocean"
and "all the rest" as stated above
"Died out of an inability to create
dance a song a text
or love or emotion"
that is the epitaph that awaits us
if we continue as we are
believing that we are unable
to have things as we would wish them
Man takes care of the rest
and of himself first of all
what an exciting thought
that we might assume a little ignorance
in welcoming the words of the other
Silence pursues me
even to what I hold most dear
my mind in tatters
I listen
to the sound of our mountains
as they tell me of my life
At peace now
I listen
to the whispering of the wind
between the walls
grubby walls each with its tale
each tagged with graffiti and covered in cracks
between early morning
and the anguish of certain nights
I listen
to the occasional sudden sound
soft or resounding
from the suburbs to the north the shanty towns
or the bays in the south
to those many sounds
the piles of stones
simulating symphonies
then lapsing as if surprised back into silence
the many mindless words
sound common sense and words of wisdom
which are but a single
unchanging heap
of rusting rubbish
that will not die
Through my lips through my footsteps
through my entire body
and the pores of my skin
I listen
to the thousand and one words of our land already here
As for those who are stubborn
still
a simple love
without character or thought
will bear them unfailingly
to the heart's heart
To have hope
this day
and in the void
inscribe a name
or paint a face
an idea
a wish
another time another sky
no more than waking
the simple expectations of a day
heralded by the dew
on the bamboo by the gate
Hope is that ability
to impose on absence
on the fading day
a fresh vision
The sun that every evening
promises its return
which it announces as it sets
those moments of wild imaginings
our whole attention
focused on the moment
awaiting the next new breath
To return
the children's gaze
without compromise
without hatred
a simple but sufficient hope
to see our land grow greater
made strong by our presence
and a virgin space
in which we can
invent a life for ourselves
To read the prints left
by a thousand feet and bodies stretched out
on the white soil
of the day to come
to see there the many directions of the diversely-peopled land
summoned in silence
by the divers lines
concrete bitumen and dampened earth
catch the void
To tell the truth
that we might survive
to tell the truth
holding nothing back
to feel flow beneath the skin the tide
of life
too many eyes averted
too many looks of disappointment
Who will come
to speak in our stead
no-one
so much the better
the field is free
and now we must occupy it
live and hold within us
humanity as the ultimate end
and so what if the honest word
exposes us to those who delight in thinking
of the risks that we will take
walking barefoot on the broken glass
of our former lies
the truth
its body and memory
bared
today
which is no ordinary day
otherwise
how can we look in the face
those who will follow us
our children
to tell their bitterness
having been deceived
by the arrogance
other sorry masks
retrieved from other places
from the dead of other battles
There exist elsewhere other meanings
there exist other doors
and other doors open
on other skies
I spend more time
hours and toil
reading the poet William Cliff
than those poets present here
he is as close to my heart
as those other itinerant writers
Borders of our states
in the eight directions
states of consciousness rather
some immutable reality
To read humanity in each encounter
while letting the body
of my house open itself
to the planet’s breath
Open and vulnerable
without adornment or distinction
without waiting
for replies or precise directions
With just enough of the void inside us
to gently rest our simple hearts
on the swelling tide that they may float
to the frontiers of other worlds
The eye laved with the salt of magical storms
to see that in the mirror of the beyond
dwells like a kindly irony
the true heart of our immediate neighbour
From a distance
it is true there are only
a few of us
packed skin to skin
on a few acres
of old earth
old sand
beneath a sky
too often mute
and for company
merely stones
that make no sense
Elsewhere
where we are called upon to go
our tenuous lives
begin to resemble
a journey from which there is no return
one of imminent death
so indispensible and with no guarantee
of a second birth
Drifting during these days
on the ocean’s face
the shadow of a memory
and my heart far from empty
it has snatched a few phrases
loneliness
and to love more
presence of the other
vigilance in the land of the living
Before leaving Sydney
I went and walked on waves of stone
over lichen large leaves and damp grass
on the ochre sand
which had worked its way among the dead branches
fallen from nearby trees
The sounds of our conversations
still echo on this swell
as it ends at Coogee
I heard in it confidences shared
when words and foam unfurl
foam light as the imprint of our lives
And in the thousand waves that beat ceaselessly on the rocks
I hear already the well-known sounds of those we love
fill the silent spaces
lost in the hubub
that unfurls behind us