THE WANDERER, 1963

Black clouds took the sky like a tired army
And a charge of gritty wind
Sniped at the torn shoulder of my coat.
A swaying girl with stiffened yellow hair
Teased at her boy friend, “Pop looks cold.”
   “Here—buy yourself a drink!”
But I did not want their money.
I wanted them to be afraid.

   The bright brittle people
   In their shiny boxes,
   Wound up to IBM
   From nine to four—
   Dancers to the tango
   Of the ticker-tape—
   Jumping-jacks
   Of the time card—
   Clowns of Conformity.

I looked for fear:
There was a black man afraid to sit down in a bus
And a white man afraid to make him room.
I heard ten thousand screaming devils
   behind barred hospital windows.
I saw a hundred million mouths
   afraid to stop laughing.
And in a reverend circle
All the princely elders of the world
Decided not to dare to stop destroying it.

I know now
That in this Time of the Tranquillizer,
This Age of the Mushroom,
This Period of the Plastic Puppet,
This twentieth century of our poor Lord’s dying,
Men laugh—
But they are no less afraid
Than when they hid their wiser eyes in holy shame.
We all wander now.

—OLIVE HUGHEY