

OSAGE AVENUE, PHILADELPHIA
MAY 13, 1985

I

a place of our own.
a row where we are known,
where hope, anguish, sweat,
have grown solid around us
in brick walls, porches and
pavement;
where bush here, flower there
mark birth or death or coming of age
of someone or something loved.
All these private histories
and meanings,
potted, rooted, surrender now
to delight any passerby.
Here the sweet hum of daily bravery
softens the air at five
when neighbors return to
hard-earned comforts.

II

We always knew, told each other that
after Vietnam,
Chile,
Grenada,
Nicaragua,
they would bring the war home,
set it out right
in our front yards.
We knew after Watts, Newark,
New Bethel Baptist Church,
they could bring the war
right on home –
set it out up close,
roll the armored trucks into our driveways,
deploy the copters
over our rooftops
issue bullet-proof paraphernalia
while trampling newly planted gardens.
we knew they could send our own sons
to mow us down near the corner store.
we always knew – but couldn't bring ourselves
to believe.

III

The MOVE-ing loudspeakers
belched an oratory
against impending horror,
denounced the terrorists
in the ugly voice
of the abused and dispossessed.

IV

The bombing is over.
there is a lull in the war
on this neighborhood of Africans
in the "New World."
11 are dead.
160 homes are ablaze.
the fire trucks are not coming.
250 refugees are in the street,
Osage Avenue, Philadelphia, U.S.A.,
"home of the free."

From *Rainrituals*, Broadside Press, Detroit, 1989.