Problems of Translation: Problems of Language

June Jordan
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dedicated to Myriam Diaz Diocaretz

I

I turn to my Rand McNally Atlas. Europe appears right after the Map of the World. All of Italy can be seen page 9. Half of Chile page 29. I take out my ruler. In global perspective Italy amounts to less than half an inch. Chile measures more than an inch and a quarter of an inch. Approximately Chile is as long as China is wide:

Back to the Atlas:
Chunk of China page 17.
All of France page 5: as we say in New York:
Who do France and Italy know at Rand McNally?

II

I see the four mountains in Chile higher than any mountain of North America. I see Ojos del Salado the highest. I see Chile unequivocal as crystal thread. I see the Atacama Desert dry in Chile more than the rest of the world is dry. I see Chile dissolving into water. I do not see what keeps the blue land of Chile out of blue water. I do not see the hand of Pablo Neruda on the blue land.
III

As the plane flies flat to the trees
Below Brazil
Below Bolivia
Below five thousand miles below
my Brooklyn windows
and beside the shifted Pacific waters
welled away from the Atlantic at Cape Horn
La Isla Negra that is not an island La
Isla Negra
that is not black
is stone and stone of Chile
feeding clouds to color
scale and undertake terrestrial forms
of everything unspeakable

IV

In your country how
do you say copper
for my country?

V

Blood rising under the Andes and above
the Andes blood
spilling down the rock
corrupted by the amorality
of so much space
that leaves such little trace of blood
rising to the irritated skin the face
of the confession far
from home:
I confess I did not resist interrogation.
I confess that by the next day I was no longer sure of my identity.
I confess I knew the hunger.
I confess I saw the guns.
I confess I was afraid.
I confess I did not die.

VI

What you Americans call a boycott of the junta?
Who will that feed?

VII

Not just the message but the sound.

VIII

Early morning now and I remember corriente a la madrugada from a different English poem
I remember from the difficulties of the talk an argument
athwart the wine the dinner and the dancing meant to welcome you you did not understand the commonplace expression of my heart:

the truth is in the life
la verdad en la vida

Early morning:
Do you say la mañana?
But then we lose the idea of the sky uncurling to the light:
Early morning and I do not think we lose:
the rose we left behind
broken to a glass of water on the table
at the restaurant stands
even sweeter
por la mañanita