



the

blue

afterwards

*mourning
for
marilyn*



□ *Felix Shafer*
November 25, 2010

Marilyn Back i Presente!

December 13, 1947–August 3, 2010

You've gone past us now.

beloved comrade:
 north american revolutionary
 and political prisoner
 My sister and friend of these 40 years,
 it's over
 Marilyn Buck gone
 through the wire
 out into the last whirlwind.

With time's increasing distance from her moment of death on the afternoon of August 3, 2010, at home in Brooklyn New York, the more that I have felt impelled to write a cohesive essay about Marilyn, the less possible such a project has become. She died at 62 years of age, surrounded by people who loved and still love her truly. She died just twenty days after being released from Carswell federal prison in Texas. Marilyn lived nearly 30 years behind bars. It was the determined effort of Soffiyah Elijah, her attorney and close friend of more than a quarter century that got her out of that prison system at all.

Her loss leaves a wound that insists she must be more than a memory and still so much more than a name circulating in the bluest afterwards. If writing is one way of holding on to Marilyn, it also ramifies a crazed loneliness. Shadows lie down in unsayable places. I'm a minor player in the story who wants to be scribbling side by side with her in a cafe or perched together overlooking the Hudson from a side road along the Palisades. This work of mourning is fragmentary, impossible, subjective, politically unofficial, lovingly biased, flush with anxieties over (mis)representation, hopefully evocative of some of the 'multitude' of Marylins contained within her soul, strange and curiously punctuated by *shifts* into reverie and poetic time.

It's my hope that others, who also take her life and death personally, will publish rivers of articles, reminiscences, essays, tributes, poems, in print and online. May the painters paint, the ceramicists shape clay, and the doers Do works and with her spirit! Will someone come to write a book length biography, one capable of fairly transmitting Marilyn Buck's many sided significance: her character, political commitments, creative accomplishment and all-too-human failings

to people who never knew about her life? Is such a work possible about someone who lived nearly thirty years behind bars?

Shift: From the back pews of reverie a tinny reel-to-reel replays my voice in 1975 chanting the words of the legendary, early 20th century, labor organizer and member of the International Workers of the World (IWW), Joe Hill: "Don't mourn, Organize!". But right now, across the cemetery of dogmas, I have neither strength nor militant nostalgia for any such renunciation of mourning. Others may, but I cannot exhort myself or anyone else to refuse the dolorous walk.

Her precise twang shreds the air: cautioning against overindulgence saying, *Felix, brother, you better chill. I know you're sentimental just don't you dare go too far.* It's true. I'm from schmaltzy Brooklyn and she's straight out of the lanky plains of west Texas (as her friends say: "the Buck started here"). Parts of this piece are written with a 1960s-1970s vocab and it's more my own writerly failing than anything else, because for sure she's not a relic of the bygone at all. If I write that she was amazing would it be better to say awesome? Marilyn was a writer, a dialectical materialist, a freedom fighter, yoga teacher and Buddhist meditator who did not suffer fools gladly. She was modest and graceful. Behind the wall she was a teacher and a mentor to young women new to being locked up. Decade after decade in the drab visiting rooms of MCC-NY, DC Jail, Marianna Florida, Dublin-Pleasanton California, dressed first in her own clothes-then later in mandatory uniform khaki-she emanated dignified Marilynness: that unforgettable, natural style. Nowadays, when things go inexplicably lost in the house or pictures fall from the walls of her studio my partner Miranda (who was Marilyn's commune roommate in 1969-1970) says....*oh that's Marbu moving stuff around again....*one night in late September, I dreamed that a note was slipped under our front door. It read:

Dear anguish, you know an end is not the end it's never only an end at all

When I woke up I wrote: *Keywords: woman, sister, freedom lover, contra racismo y sexismo, yogi, theorist from internal exile, poet, collective worker, student, madrina,, artist, reader/writer, comrade-compañera, john brown, antigone, she who cuts through revolutionary enemy of the state*

Accounts of mourning sometimes cross over or, more accurately because mourning is a resistant, and aching tender verb, create a *transient* bridge from the bereaved privacy of the self --- to some sense of shared community. Some will, accurately, point out that this human connection is always a *bridge-too-far* but even so, gaps and all; it's what we have.

While she was alive and even more humbly now, I find myself in far reaching debt to Marilyn Buck and hope through the process of writing to move closer to what this relation means and might aspire to. Debt implies relationship. In ancient times, the symbol of suspended balance scales signified a weighing of life/death, good/evil and justice/injustice, not money-debt. It's no accident that in western myth and culture these scales are balanced by the figure of a woman-often blindfolded to signify impartiality and holding a sword, which represents the power to enforce justice (re-balance).

In her fascinating 2008 non-fiction book, *Payback (Debt and the Shadow Side of Wealth)* Margaret Atwood clarifies that in ancient Egyptian Africa a miniature of the goddess Ma'at (or her feather-representing justice and truth) was used on the cosmic scale to weigh good and evil in the heart of one who has died. The heart needed to be as light as a feather for the soul to be granted eternal life. Atwood goes on to say that along with justice and truth, Ma'at meant balance, the proper comportment towards others and moral standards of behavior. I don't know if Marilyn ever read about Ma'at, but she tried her best to embody these principles in steady resistance to our death-driven culture, which equates human value with money.

In our culture, psychologically "normal" citizens are produced to be consumers in the market. That's the bottom line for this dang shabang. Wrap around, cradle-to-the grave conditioning (branding) creates a default position for the self that our **worth =money**. People are left fearful, commodified and habitually driven: hating the never-ending **lack** (of money, power, status, looks, products & sex) in themselves and envying one another. Marxists refer to this as commodity fetishism. The tragic human dimension of vulnerability, loss, failing, mortality and mourning, which is also at the core of our being, is manically denied. Remember how after the terror attacks of September 11, 2001, the government exhorted everyone to go out shopping to show that our society was unbowed? Then we were

taken into a seemingly endless series of wars. Without the humility of mourning there is no learning from experience. Along with the three interlocking oppressions more traditionally named by the left: race, class and gender, envy and the avoidance of mourning constitute a base from which evil acts and fascist movements spring. Marilyn worked to renounce this deathly dynamic and sustained, in her everyday life, a radical ethic of gratitude, care and equality among people. She studied history/herstory and understood that human rights must be fought for and defended if they are to exist at all. There was nothing bogus about her.

I do not believe that I'm alone, among the many, many people who visited and who she befriended after she was captured, in this feeling of a political and personal obligation to, or better to say: *with* Marilyn.

Those of us fortunate enough to have known her before she became 'notorious' and 'iconic'--representations that never sat well with her and which being in Marilyn's presence were easily dispelled--remember how serious, determined, outspoken, beautiful and far from perfect she was. It's no secret that she made political mistakes along the way. The collective political-resistance project she was part of was defeated. Its members paid and some are still paying a very high price.

She came of age in the red-hot crucible of the 1960s and '70s when large movements from every corner of the earth were on the upsurge, challenging capitalist-imperialism with demands for revolution. It was an era of overturnings and extremes. Marilyn grew up in Texas--where racist and sexist dominator culture combined the toxic violence of america's segregated south and cowboy west. She witnessed racism everyday and, by high school and college, grew determined to do something to help bring an end to war and white supremacy.

Keywords: Mercurial time, oh old space Capsule: Go ahead crack the kernel's hard discontinuous shell; revisit our more innocent and less destitute history with this bite-sized *Almanac backgrounder*.

When Marilyn left home to find her way into the popular movement(s), Dylan was singing *The Times They Are A Changin'* & *Masters of War*, the SNCC Freedom Singers, Motown, R&B galore

and Nina Simone's thunderous Mississippi Goddamn! got people up and moving. It was the overflowing era of Vietnam, Black, Brown, Native and Asian people's power movements, the war of the cities: Watts, Detroit, Newark and hundreds of urban rebellions brought the fire this time. Draft cards were torched and many G.I.'s revolted against the war. Feminism and Gay liberation insisted that the *personal-is-political*. Student and youth cultural revolt(s) on a worldwide scale (including, although quite uniquely, the massive Chinese cultural revolution) had not yet been pacified and coopted by the market. National liberation movements in Southern Africa were bringing an end to direct, foreign and settler- colonial domination of their countries. The Palestinian people began asserting their national rights. Revolutionary organizations and guerilla movements, partly inspired by the Cuban example, were organizing above and below ground to strike against 'imperialismo yanqui' in Latin America. Radicals spoke of creating "2,3 many Vietnams" against empire.

Inside the United States, the vital foundation of all radical cultural and political developments was the civil rights and Black liberation struggle. Black people sang, "*I aint scared of your jail 'cause I want my freedom!*" This movement's organizing cry of **Black Is Beautiful and Black Power!** actually inspired people all over the world to throw off internalized oppression and fight the power.

Marilyn joined SDS (Students for a Democratic Society-the country's largest student organization) and helped edit their newspaper: *New Left Notes* in Chicago. She stood up against sexism in the organization. Moving to the Bay Area in late 1968, Marilyn joined in building the San Francisco Newsreel collective, which, like its counterpart in New York, made and distributed radical film documentaries about contemporary struggles. Some influential S.F. Newsreel films taught people about the *Black Panther Party*, *The San Francisco State student strike* (led by a coalition of Third World organizations, this was the longest student strike in U.S. history), *On Strike*-about the Richmond California oil refinery worker's strike, *Mission High School Rebellion* and many others. These films, used by organizers spreading news across the country, were an important part of an alternative press movement made up of hundreds of underground newspapers, radio and press services.

In western Europe & the USA, especially, white people in motion mainly expressed a middle class idealism, rage and utopian aspiration. Some younger white folks were learning that struggling in alliance with Third World peoples at home and abroad could actually help end the genocidal war in Vietnam, and advance civil and human rights. A new left was born. For many radical activists, leadership flowed-not from the Democratic Party- but from movements of color and figures like Dr. King, Rosa Parks, Malcolm X, Fannie Lou Hamer, Cesar Chavez. Importantly, we worked with and looked to grassroots leaders of color, in our schools, workplaces and communities for direction. We challenged our personal racism and the social system of white supremacy. Consciousness raising and women's liberation broke through to identify and challenge patriarchy. By the later 1960s, lesbian and gay liberation was gathering force. This was a cultural revolution(s) involving radically new, alternative sources of authority and legitimation which threatened the (mostly white, male, straight) powers that be. The rejection of 1950's jim crow apartheid/segregation and northern white suburbia, begun by the civil rights movement in the south, communist resisters to McCarthyism, early 2nd wave feminism and artists from the beat/hip/hippie generation(s) ignited a mix and mojo that many people, including yours truly, embraced.

You might say, without falling for romantic nostalgia, that a historical crack opened up through which it seemed just possible to break through the myopia, prejudice and privilege of empire into a better world. Or put it another way we, and this was by no means limited or merely conditioned by the exuberance of youth, had the experience of being deeply engaged with living history. Even as society was fast becoming more of a spectacle, during this brief pre-postmodern, pre-*internet* era, we knew that we wanted to be more than spectators. It was as if sleepwalkers in *death's hollow empire* were suddenly waking up.

In the advanced capitalist areas of Europe, Japan and the U.S. anti-empire activity led some small, yet significant sectors of the new lefts to move towards increased clandestine militancy, including

bombings and armed actions against their repressive governments.* Inside the U.S. solidarity with Black, Puerto Rican, Native American, Chicano/ Mexicano as well as international liberation movements, were a powerful motivating force for Marilyn and others.

The spirit of this global, historical moment is revealed by Karma Nabulsi, a Palestinian, writing about being a young revolutionary in the 1960s and 70s working to free his country:

The experience of revolutionary life is difficult to describe. It is as much metaphysical as imaginative, combining urgency, purposefulness, seriousness and hard work, with a near celebratory sense of adventure and overriding optimism – a sort of carnival atmosphere of citizens' rule. Key to its success is that this heightened state is consciously and collectively maintained by tens of thousands of people at the same time. If you get tired for a few hours or days, you know others are holding the ring.**

keywords: the hammer this time

Within the United States, all movements, organizations and individuals ranging from Dr. King to Malcolm X, from artists Nina Simone to John Lennon were targeted because they inspired people to organize for real change. Under the rubric of FBI-COINTELPRO (short for Counter-Intelligence Program) a vast campaign of ruthless and unconstitutional counter-insurgency against the people was sanctioned by both Democratic and Republican Whitehouses.

Far from a 'rogue' program led by a 'racist and demented' J. Edgar Hoover, what we call Cointelpro grew to involve the coordination of Pentagon, CIA, local and state police as well as the FBI. Its mandate was destroy/neutralize radical leaders, organizations and grass roots people through assassinations, fratricidal murders, frame-ups,

*This is a very incomplete and utterly heterogeneous list. UK: *The Angry Brigade*; France: *Accion Directe*; West Germany: *Red Army Faction & Revolutionary Cells*; Italy: *Red Brigade & Prima Linea*. Japan: *United Red Army*; The *IRA* in Ireland and the Basque *ETA* in Spain (both larger and with more support) grew out of centuries long colonization. Within the U.S. some of the revolutionary armed organizations were: Black Liberation Army, Fuerzas Armadas de Liberacion Nacional & EPB-Macheteros (Puerto Rico), Weather Underground, Symbionese Liberation Army, New World Liberation Front, George Jackson Brigade, Red Guerilla Resistance and United Freedom Front. To my knowledge, there has been no serious historical study of this global phenomenon from a left perspective. Undoubtedly, there are many still secret CIA and FBI files about this.

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psychological warfare and forced exile.* Malcolm X, Martin Luther King Jr., Fred Hampton, scores of Panthers and American Indian Movement members were assassinated as were some key members of the Chicano/Mexicano and Puerto Rican movements. Several Black Panther members were tortured so badly in New Orleans --in a manner consistent with current government torture practices--that trial courts threw out cases against them. The federal government unleashed a wave of high profile conspiracy trials, most of which, after sowing fear and draining resources, ended in acquittals. Nasty blackmails and bribery were used to recruit informers. This low intensity warfare, along with inner city drug plagues, wars on drugs leading to criminalization of Black and Brown youth, concessionary pacification (i.e., temporary poverty programs) and the end of the Vietnam war, succeeded in halting much of our forward motion. We were young idealists and we didn't see this coming.

Vastly expanded federal and state prison systems became the leading form of long-term social control over people of color. Today, with at least 2 million people warehoused under criminal justice control, the U.S. has the world's highest incarceration rate. One result of the hidden, domestic war is that there are over 100 political prisoners, essentially Cointelpro captives of the FBI, courts and prisons, who remain locked up for the past 25-40 years. They are some of, if not the, longest held political prisoners on earth.**

There are also people in permanent foreign exile, one of whom died this month at 63 years of age in Zambia. Michael Cetewayo Tabor was a former Black Panther leader in New York, a member of the Panther 21 conspiracy case (for which all were acquitted) and author of the incisive pamphlet: "Dope + Capitalism= Genocide." While countries the world over have released their political prisoners from the 1960s and 70s, some through amnesty and others paroled after serving long sentences, the U.S. still refuses to do so.

All this was a long time ago, but I believe that in many telling ways,

* See the books: *Agents of Repression & The Cointelpro Papers*, by Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall. The Reports of the U.S. Senate Hearings (The Church Committee) 1975, U.S. Government Printing Office. And, the new film, *Cointelpro 101* available from www.freedomarchives.org

** The Jericho Amnesty Campaign: www.TheJerichoMovement.com has been involved in efforts to win amnesty for many years. A campaign is underway to win the release of N.Y. State political prisoners.

when applied to empire and resistance, what the writer, William Faulkner, said in another context is true:

The past is not dead. In fact, it isn't even past.

In the introductory essay to her translation of Christina Peri Rossi's poetry book, *State of Exile** Marilyn writes of the trauma of imprisonment as an exile:

Exile may also be collective, as in the case of the Palestinian people, forced from their homeland, or the people of Darfur, murdered and driven from their lands. And there is another form of exile as well--internal exile--in which one is taken from the location of one's home and life and is transported to some other outlying, isolated region of their own country. We think of the gulags of the former Soviet Union, for example, or stories from centuries past, but the fact is that internal exile exists here and now, in the United States a country of exiles, refugees and survivors. Prison is a state of exile.

...I a political militant did not choose external exile in time and was captured. I became a U.S. political prisoner and was sentenced to internal exile, where I remain after more than twenty years.

keywords: revolutionary. enemy of the state. Alive !

After the terms *revolution, liberation, resistance, freedom* were thoroughly drained of signifying power by the predatory, vampire-like cartels in advertising and Hollywood, they could be banished to the merely unfashionable passé. It's not solely a question of who 'speaks' like this anymore but where in our society are these goals even considered to have meaning? Today, *enemy of the state* probably sounds more like a dark shiny movie title or an album download than something serious and politically contentful. Its most likely association is to *enemy combatant*--people whom U.S. state power locks up and can torture in lawless offshore dead zones like Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay. After 9-11 they stripped a huge layer of constitutional protection off.

Yet throughout history, empires and their regimes have singled out for attack and removal all who stood up for the disempowered to challenge the obscene 'order of things'. It remains a point of historical fact that Marilyn Buck was an enemy of empire and an

* City Light Books Pocket Poets Series Number 58. San Francisco 2008

enemy of the state. The national security state (laws, courts, prisons, police, fbi, military intelligence and other armed/security bodies) has long treated her, and the other political prisoners, as people to be buried alive.

To get a sense of this it's instructive to look at a very abbreviated account of what the government charged and convicted her of:

1 In 1973 Marilyn was convicted, in San Francisco, of two counts of buying two boxes of legal ammunition while using a false ID. At that time, her sentence of 10 years in federal prison was the longest-by far-for this offense in U.S. history. Many people believe that this disproportionate sentence came because the government was well aware of her close support for the freedom struggle of Black people in this country, particularly the Black Panther Party and the Black Liberation Army. During the early 1970's, the Black Panthers were under military, political and media attack by the FBI's Cointelpro, as of course was Marilyn.

Marilyn was particularly hated because she was a young, radical white woman, from the South, who crossed the line against racial privilege and white supremacy. She was unwilling to stand on the sidelines while good people were being hunted down and destroyed by our government. She was explicitly seen as a *race traitor*, a 'n----r lover' by the FBI/police and the state moved to make an example of her to frighten others, especially radicalized white women, from following this path. It was during this time that the FBI began to characterize Marilyn as the "sole white member of the Black Liberation Army (BLA)". And, in typical J. Edgar Hoover character assassination style, the bureau began saying that she had a "Joan of Arc complex."

Inside Alderson, West Virginia federal prison, Marilyn met the great Puerto Rican political prisoner and national (s)hero Lolita Lebron - who along with her comrades would be pardoned in 1979 by President Carter after they'd served 25 years.* Marilyn integrated herself in the community of women prisoners who did their best to

* Lolita Lebron, Andres Figueroa Cordero, Irvin Flores and Rafael Cancel Miranda assaulted the U.S. Congress in 1954 to bring attention to the colonial plight and harsh repression of Puerto Rico. Along with Oscar Collazo, imprisoned for an earlier attack on the residence of president Truman in 1950, they were released after serving more than 25 years in prison. Lolita Lebron died at 90 years of age on August 1, 2010--two days before Marilyn.

support each other. She worked at staying attuned to events, from Watergate to the persistence of radical movements and the U.S. withdrawal in defeat from Vietnam. After serving four years of her sentence, Marilyn received a furlough in 1977 and did not return to prison. Between 1977 and 1985 we must assume that she lived and worked underground.

2 Recaptured in 1985, at the height of the Reagan era, Marilyn underwent a total of four trials including two prosecutions for conspiracy based in charges from the clandestine years. As a member of the "Resistance Conspiracy" case she, along with Linda Evans, Laura Whitehorn, Susan Rosenberg, Tim Blunk and Alan Berkman were accused of taking actions to:

"influence, change and protest policies and practices of the United States Government concerning various international and domestic matters through the use of violent and illegal means"

Among the alleged actions (in which no one was injured) were bombings of: the U.S. Capitol Building to protest the illegal invasion of Grenada, three military installations in the D.C. area to protest U.S. backing of the Central American death squads, the apartheid-era South African consulate, the Israeli Aircraft Industries building, the Patrolman's Benevolent Association (to protest police murders of people of color).

While underground, Marilyn was also charged with conspiracy in the successful 1979 liberation of political prisoner Assata Shakur* and the 1981 expropriation of a Brinks armored car in which two police officers and a security guard were killed. The government contended that the conspiracy brought together Black and white North American radicals, under black leadership. To my knowledge, this was the first time since the pre-Civil War era of John Brown that blacks and whites stood accused of joining together to conduct guerilla activities. In this case, Marilyn was convicted of conspiracy, however neither she nor her co-defendant Dr. Mutulu Shakur (step father of slain musician and actor Tupac Shakur) were convicted of

* Assata Shakur was freed from prison by an armed clandestine action in which no one was harmed. Granted political refugee status, she lives in Cuba. Her autobiography, *Assata*, is available for people who want to learn about her life in the time prior to her liberation from prison. The website: assatashakur.org contains valuable information. On the day before she died, Marilyn received a tender, personal audio message from Assata deeply thanking her for her life and contributions.

any murders. Dr. Shakur was an original member of the Republic of New Afrika and a founder of the Lincoln Detox center in New York, which pioneered the use of acupuncture to help break drug addiction in the Black and Brown communities.

I feel a certain defensive avoidance about commenting, in shorthand, on this era's underground movements of the left, which, after all, came to their historical end many years ago. This is an essay of mourning and homage to Marilyn Buck who lived this struggle for many years; it's not an assessment of politics and strategy. Her clandestine years are held in protective secrecy by those who shared them. For her to have kept a journal would have been to put collective security in unacceptable jeopardy. Nonetheless, at minimum, it seems to me, we ought to recognize more about these contributions than a basic recitation of her charges and convictions. But the post 9-11 'war on terror' has had a chilling effect on such conversations, despite the fact that these organizations had absolutely zero in common with Al- Q'aeda or similar terror killers.

During Marilyn's powerful memorial celebration in Oakland, California on November 7, 2010, it was revealing to hear members of the Black Panther Party tell how her underground skills helped them survive the onslaught of Cointelpro. Marilyn's tribute in New York was held a week later at the Malcolm X and Dr. Betty Shabazz Center (formerly the Audobon Ballroom) in Harlem. As nearly 500 people jammed the room where Malcolm was assassinated, a moving message was read from political prisoner/pow and freedom fighter Sekou Odinga-who was also convicted for the liberation of Assata:

She was someone who would give you her last without any thought about her own welfare. I remember one time when she shared her last few dollars with a comrade of ours, and later I was in her kitchen and opened her refrigerator to find nothing in it and almost no food in the house. I told her she had to let comrades know when she was in need, and stop giving when she didn't have it to give. But she never stopped because that's just who she was.

There have been very few actions to liberate PP/POW's and Marilyn was involved with more than one. The roles she played were critical in not only liberation of POWs, but also in making sure they remained free, never thinking about the great threat and danger to herself.

For the most part, what remains of the left today dismisses these efforts as worthless adventurism or ignores them altogether. While there's much of real value and importance in some of these critiques, the fact that empire rests on its capacity to inflict unlimited violence

with impunity is rarely mentioned as something to organize against. Isn't it frankly obscene that ex-President Bush & high officials-obvious war criminals-who illegally invaded Iraq under a web of lies, causing hundreds of thousands of deaths, can walk free and add to their fortunes? Or that the top CIA executives who destroyed more than 90 hours of videotape (an illegal act in itself) showing their torture of suspects in contravention of International Law, won't be prosecuted by the Justice Department. Isn't it beyond acceptable that central components of the permanent government, the CIA and Pentagon, stand exposed before the entire world as conducting an illegal, organized program of torture against prisoners, deemed "enemy combatants", yet for which no one is brought to trial? Marilyn thought so. In her last year and a half she began writing a novella, partially set in Guantanamo, about torture and imprisonment.

The many-sided crisis of global capitalism, run away environmental damage and the decline of the U.S. empire, makes it likely that we are entering a new age of rivalry and upheaval. Not only is the U.S. deeply at war(s) in the Muslim and Arab world, conducting or backing counter-insurgency campaigns in many more regions, but the rise of both Blackwater style mercenaries and a mass gun glorifying, fascistically inclined Tea Party movement means that real violent momentum is on the right. On an immediate note, as I write this (November 5, 2010) the news comes in that Johannes Mehserle, the white terroristic cop, whose murder of an unarmed PRONE and handcuffed African-American Oscar Grant at an Oakland BART Station on New Years 2009 was captured on video, has been sentenced to only 2 years in jail. Counting the 140 days he already did before making bail, he is expected to serve in the neighborhood of just six months. In contrast, the African-American football star, Michael Vick, got 4 years for the violent crime of organizing brutal dogfights. This isn't a post-racial society. Once more the obvious: it's open season on Black and Brown people.

Although I'm not aware of any formal written self-evaluation of her underground political strategy, I do know that Marilyn engaged in ongoing reflection and complex dialogues with trusted comrades about this. When possible she tried to convey lessons to today's new movements facing infiltration, grand juries and conspiracy trials as a result of their militancy. Marilyn didn't romanticize the underground struggle and counseled activists strongly against militarist &

adventurist approaches. She changed as times changed AND she stuck to her principles.

keywords: Midlife- art and cutting through

By the end of the 1980's, while many of Marilyn's contemporaries were going through mid-life crises, occasioned by our fortieth birthdays, she faced the ugly, cramped, totalitarian, arbitrary, cruel, violent, life-sucking and repetitive regime of prison life. After all the court trials, she would be sentenced to 80 years.

What she had hoped was the bright glow of a revolutionary dawn would turn out to be the brief, fiery sunset of the passing era which had launched her.

Marilyn Buck was becoming a member of that extraordinary global minority: people who are imprisoned by the state for their political actions and beliefs. She sustained and was, in turn, sustained by this community of comrades and their strong webs of outside supporters and friends. In the Bay Area her diverse circle grew wide, warm and deep. The group, Friends of Marilyn Buck, was formed over a decade ago and is going strong today. Members of her family reconnected with her. While her physical range was totally restricted, the world came to her through amazing visitors from many continents and people's movements. She loved and mentored the children of activists, some of whom grew up visiting her. She helped raise her godchildren: Salim, Tanya and Gemma. Day in day out, Marilyn participated with, learned from, mentored, hung out, suffered and stood with women-social prisoners and political-in every prison where she lived for the past quarter century. And she is being mourned behind those walls by people who knew her and those who knew of her.*

When she was captured and imprisoned in 1985, I was a member of the Prairie Fire Organizing Committee and spent time in Washington DC working as a paralegal on the Resistance Conspiracy case. Around this time, I began to bring my three year old daughter, Gemma, on social visits with Marilyn. Over the next 25 years, the

* In the soon-to-be published (March 1, 2011) book, *An American Radical: Political Prisoner in My Own Country*, Susan Rosenberg, Marilyn's co-defendant, writes about daily life in the remarkable communities created by women in prison.

tender alchemy of love between them grew into a strong family relation of their own.

I imagine that many people spoke with Marilyn about what, along with political solidarity, might help sustain her over the long haul. Prisons are soul-murdering places and it is a testament to human creativity and spirit that many, many prisoners refuse to give in.

From early on we shared poetry and she sent me this poem, beloved by political prisoners the world over. Written in 1949, it's by the Turkish revolutionary poet Nazim Hikmet. In its entirety:

Some Advice to Those Who Will Serve Time in Prison

If instead of being hanged by the neck
 you're thrown inside
 for not giving up hope
 in the world, your country, your people,
 if you do ten or fifteen years
 apart from the time you have left,
 you won't say,
 "Better I had swung from the end of a rope
 like a flag" --
 You'll put your foot down and live.
 It may not be a pleasure exactly,
 but it's your solemn duty
 to live one more day
 to spite the enemy.
 Part of you may live alone inside,
 like a tone at the bottom of a well.
 But the other part
 must be so caught up
 in the flurry of the world
 that you shiver there inside
 when outside, at forty days' distance, a leaf moves.
 To wait for letters inside,
 to sing sad songs,
 or to lie awake all night staring at the ceiling
 is sweet but dangerous.
 Look at your face from shave to shave,
 forget your age,
 watch out for lice
 and for spring nights,
 and always remember
 to eat every last piece of bread--
 also, don't forget to laugh heartily.
 And who knows,
 the woman you love may stop loving you.

Don't say it's no big thing:
 it's like the snapping of a green branch
 to the man inside.
 To think of roses and gardens inside is bad,
 to think of seas and mountains is good.
 Read and write without rest,
 and I also advise weaving
 and making mirrors.

I mean, it's not that you can't pass
 ten or fifteen years inside
 and more --
 you can,
 as long as the jewel
 on the left side of your chest doesn't lose it's luster!

Marilyn Buck read poetry and wrote hundreds of poems in her lifetime. She's beloved by poets both within and beyond the borders of this country.

keywords: transformation is her talent for living

The high tide movements in this country and worldwide, which so moved Marilyn to transform herself had definitively ebbed. Not only had the political maps changed but also the rate of change accelerated. She kept abreast by reading voraciously, talking with visitors and conducting a far ranging correspondence. While by no means a Soviet style leftist, she watched the Berlin Wall fall in 1989 and then the consequences of the Soviet Union's collapse. The Reagan-daddy Bush era death squads and counter-revolutionary wars, from Central America to Angola, had bathed regions in blood to blunt popular revolutionary initiatives and, with the Chinese government and party's embrace of greed, the "socialist alternative" all but disappeared. Revolutionary forces laid down their arms. Marilyn loved Cuba and followed events on this brave, unrepentant island closely. The bombs of the first Iraq war rained down.

Even from behind the wire there were bright moments. On February 11, 1990, Nelson Mandela walked out of a South African prison and shortly thereafter was resoundingly elected president of his country. I remember visiting Marilyn, in 1990 at the Marianna Florida

maximum-security prison with my young daughters, Ona and Gemma and cheering his release.* As we slowly walked from the visiting room that day, they said, as they had many times before and would into the future, *"we want her to come home with us."*

By 1993, she was transferred to FCI Dublin in Pleasanton California- in the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Area, where she would live until the last months of her life. Over the years in Dublin she was incarcerated with many political prisoners.** As the 21st century got under her skin, Marilyn grew increasingly into a woman of many voices, passions and fundamental, lifelong commitments. She somehow bore bitter setbacks and crushing disappointments to the limit, with deliberation.

Tendencies towards dogmatism and rigidity softened and this, I believe, made her stronger. She had the capacity to actively turn from spells of frank despair-which could go on awhile- towards renewal, creative experimentation and her practical stance of being of use to others. This capacity to make a small and decisive inner turn away from the soul-murdering, isolating regime of prison towards a freedom of mutuality and care is, I believe, one of her great talents for living. At her N.Y. memorial tribute former political prisoner, Linda Evans, spoke about Marilyn's AIDS educational work among women inside. She also told us about how Marilyn organized a benefit in the prison chapel to raise funds for Black churches in the South which were being burned to the ground. This was her practice many times over.

Linked to this was her breadth of interest and penetration of thought. She read widely in natural sciences and literature. People who visited and corresponded know how engaged she was in thinking through the decline of revolutionary ideologies & movements over the past quarter century and how well she knew answers for the future would not come easy. Fluent in Spanish, she followed with great enthusiasm the new, heterogeneous radicalism, which has emerged in Latin America-Venezuela, Chile, Brazil, Argentina, Ecuador, Paraguay, over the past decade or so. When I

* Marilyn was imprisoned in Marianna FL with north american anti-imperialist political prisoners: Laura Whitehorn, Susan Rosenberg and Silvia Baraldini.

** Some of the women political prisoners she did time with in Dublin: Ida Luz Rodríguez and Alicia Rodríguez, Carmen Valentín, Dylcia Pagán, Ida Robinson McCray, Linda Evans, Laura Whitehorn, Donna Willmott and women from the Ploughshares and Environmental movements.

sent her some photos taken by a friend who documented the FMLN electoral victory in March 2009, she wrote back expressing her joy. In recent times as part of her ongoing effort to grasp how the world was changing beyond prison walls, she studied political economy with a group of women on the outside who were close supporters.

Earlier, somewhere around the late 1990's, I helped Marilyn re-enter college. Returning to school, in mid life, had been good for me and I hoped it could assist her growth in unforeseeable and surprising ways. She enrolled in New College of California where she went on to earn a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and her Master of Fine Arts Degree in Poetics with an emphasis on translation. One of her teachers, Tom Parsons--who coordinated her distance learning process, which involved sending tapes of classes inside to her so she could hear and do course work-- told me she was the most gifted student he'd seen. Two of her other teachers: the poet, David Meltzer and Latin American literature professor, Graciela Trevisan spoke at her Bay Memorial Celebration and have played important roles in the publication of her work. Marilyn's interest in women and feminism, poetics, literature, science, psychology and cultural studies began to flourish, allowing new bridges to unfold across the last ten years of her life. Those of us fortunate enough to visit and correspond found ourselves growing along with her in surprising ways. Marilyn locked down in the totally controlled penitentiary space was, paradoxically, our breath of fresh air.

Keywords: a revolutionary who dreams like a poet

The 21st century opened up and Marilyn was finding her own way towards a style in which humor, theory, art and the ironic began to dance with her politically radical common sense. From this dynamic a momentum grew within her, which allowed for tremendous personal change. For the long-term imprisoned revolutionary this can be an agonizing process. It is incredibly difficult to risk overturning dogmas, re-examining cherished beliefs while taking responsibility for how your actions--for better and worse--define you. There is the repressive State power, not as an abstraction but an everyday presence, which studies each political prisoner's psychology--emotions, vulnerabilities, moods, doubts, questions --in

order to determine pressure points to exploit.* The continuing goal, long after any hope of getting political to give up "actionable intelligence" (to further repression) was gone, becomes to break the resister so s/he will repent and discredit human principles of liberation. To have broken the imprisoned revolutionary's soul is a key objective of the authorities because any healthy counter-example to their total power is threatening. On this battlefield, and make no mistake it is a battlefield-a last ditch of significance- political prisoners, like Marilyn and her comrades, must be on the alert against psychological destabilization. Deeply questioning ideology, strategy and tactics in conditions of isolation (and political prisoners are often kept isolated from each other) and, in periods when the struggle is at very low ebb, is a risky and painful journey.

This long excerpt from Marilyn's incisive and raw essay, *On Self Censorship*,** reveals some of the way she thinks-feelingly.

.....Women are subject to censorship in a very distinct way from men prisoners. There is a disapproval of who we are as women and as human beings. We are viewed as having challenged gender definitions and sex roles of passivity and obedience. We have transgressed much more than written laws. We are judged even before trial as immoral and contemptible--fallen women. For a woman to be imprisoned casts her beyond the boundaries of what little human dignity and personal right to self-determination we already have.....

It becomes difficult to maintain personal relations because all forms of communication are subject to total intervention--all under the guise of security. We have no privacy--our phone conversations are recorded, every word we write or that is written to us is scrutinized, especially as "high profile prisoners."

Being locked up is physically and psychically invasive All body parts are subject to physical surveillance and possible "inspection." Never ending strip searches...one must dissociate oneself psychically, step outside that naked body under scrutiny by some guard who really knows nothing about us, but who fears us because we are prisoners, and therefore dangerous; political prisoners, and therefore "terrorists". The guard stands before the prisoner, violating the privacy of her body, observing with dispassionate contempt. It affects each of us. There is a profound sense of violation, humiliation, anger. It takes an enormous

* Two of Marilyn's comrades, Susan Rosenberg and Silvia Baraldini together with Puerto Rican Independence fighter and teacher Alejandrina Torres, were held in the underground Lexington (Control) High Security Unit, which was condemned by Amnesty International and denounced as a psychological torture center by the campaign which eventually forced its closure of in 1988. As this unit was being forced to close, the Bureau of Prisons was building many more control unit prisons. See the 1990 documentary film, *Through the Wire*, by Nina Rosenblum, on PBS.

** *On Self-censorship*, by Marilyn Buck. Published by Parenthesis Writing Series. ISBN 1-879342-06-5. 1991. Currently out of print.

amount of self control not to erupt in rage at the degradation of the non-ending assault. I do not think I will ever get used to it. However, being conscious political women enables us to understand and articulate the experience in terms of the very real psychic censorship.

Every time I talk on the phone I have to decide what I will say. I refuse to let the government know how I really am; but I do not want to cut myself off emotionally either. How can I keep saying, "Everything is fine"? It is not believable; and, it would promote the official position that these high-tech prisons are fine places, especially these maximum security prisons with their veneer of civility. It would be a declaration that no, there are no violations of human rights here. It is a dilemma.

I express my interior life in poetry when I have the wherewithal to put the lines down....I write a letter and reread it. I clench. I have a crisis of judgment about whether to send it as is. Should I say this? I do not mail the letter that day. By the time morning arrives again I decide to rewrite it. To couch my thoughts in vaguer terms. Will my vagueness and abstractions frustrate the reader?

I feel like I am diffusing, becoming abstract. I am censoring myself. Like a painter who disguises her statement in an abstract play of colors and forms on canvas....Only she is certain of the voice that is speaking and what she is conveying. And if the observer misses what is being said?

Self-censorship is an oppressive, but necessary part of my life now. For more than six years it has infringed upon my soul, limiting, constraining self-expression. Yet, it is a studied response--a self-defense--against the ubiquitous, insistent, directive to destroy our political identities, and therefore us.

Keyword: artist

Marilyn is one for whom the word *revolutionary* is truly earned and, yet, it's also far short of encompassing. She was a woman with probing interests in the arts, culture and natural sciences. She was a wordsmith who loved to sink her hands into the clay, making ceramic art that she sent out to people all over the country.

Marilyn was a prolific writer: well over 300 poems along with scores of essays and articles, which were widely published both inside the U.S. and abroad. Her Master's thesis became the translation of Christina Peri Rossi's, *State of Exile*, published by City Lights in 2008. She won prizes from the international writer's organization PEN and published the chapbook, *Rescue the Word*, and the CD, *Wild Poppies*, in which she (via phone recording) joined celebrated poets reading her work.*

* See her CD: *Wild Poppies* available from Freedom Archives & chapbook: *Rescue the Word* available from Friends of Marilyn Buck at marilyn buck.com

In late 1999, together with Miranda Bergman and Jane Norling, artists and comrades she'd known since 1969, Marilyn formed *surreal sisters*- a trio to explore art making and surrealism. This informal group continued doing art, studying and occasionally writing, for nearly ten years. In an unpublished (collective) 2003 essay, *Coincidence in Three Voices*, Marilyn writes:

....Three of us had been sister political activists, friends, housemates in the late 1960s and early 70s. Miranda and Jane were artists and activists. I was a political activist who had not yet discovered artistry, at least for myself. By the time the three of us convened in the visiting room of the Federal Correctional Institution (FCI) at Dublin CA I had my artist self, though it had taken me half my lifetime to realize that I was and needed to be an artist.

Three women, I behind steel gates and triple barbed wire, Jane and Miranda outside, both painters and muralists. What could we achieve as women dedicated to creating new visions, a new world through collective imagination?

As a prisoner, I feel flattened, forever categorized as only a prisoner- nothing more. I want to scream **I am not one dimension of a box, a box inside of a box!** What shall I draw to express this?

When I think about Marilyn Buck, I see a revolutionary who dreams like a poet.

One paradoxical feature of the 'obvious' is that not everyone takes the time to see it. We nod our heads at some outline, then say, *oh I already knew that*, and move on. So, at the risk of stating the obvious: under the most restrictive of circumstances, Marilyn continued to throw herself into processes of human transformation. Becoming an artist- and *being* an artist is always a process of *becoming*- was very much part of her destiny. She was neither a propagandist nor a left wing copywriter--though she could fulfill these functions when she felt called to do so. Her art making was valuable in, of and for itself.

Art is a particular area of freedom: a disciplined work/living space of engaged feeling, thinking and doing. Arts come to be created and live in a transitional space between *self and others* that is at the heart of all human cultures. Confined in prison, Marilyn was able to use art-making to express a full range of feelings, desires and relationships that became her powerful, alive response to the death driven system in which she was forced to exist. Her great capacity for hard work

was channeled into highly productive and creative pathways. She loved this part of her life and had plans to continue the creative work of writing and translation after she was released from captivity. There was the novella she'd begun writing. Skilled in the arts of translation—a bridge building art par excellence—she was working on a translation of Christina Peri Rossi's work: *Desastres Intimos*.

When you think of Marilyn Buck: the revolutionary
I hope you also discover Marilyn Buck: the artist

From late 2007 to a month before her death Marilyn was involved, with a few of us on the outside, preparing her selected poems for publication. The idea for the book began in conversation with Raul Salinas: a great advocate of Chicano and Native American resistance, a former long term federal prisoner, poet and writer who passed away in February 2008. The volume, tentatively titled: *Inside Shadows** is a collective labor of love that we all believed would widen her readership beyond the label: prisoner poet. Together we daydreamed plans for a public launch and readings. The last letter I received from Marilyn came about a month before she died when she was very ill with little energy left for work. It was pure Marilyn: an engagingly lucid 3 pages of comments and revisions to the book's table of contents.

Keyword: She who links us

Beneath the distorted balance sheets of credit card, mortgage & International Monetary Fund debt, after the loan sharks and the default dreads have been (momentarily) cleared from our mindset, there remains a debt between Marilyn and her communities that isn't about money at all. It's my belief that Marilyn's commitment to human solidarity with freedom struggles of Black and other (neo) colonized peoples on the global plantation, with women and all who are oppressed, was her genuine effort to help balance the scales of justice in a world thrown terribly out of joint by empire.

Over the years and, it seems especially these last months, some

* Her poetic collaborators intend to see *Inside Shadows* published by a major poetry press sometime in 2011. This is one aspect of our continuing collaboration with Marilyn. Check www.marilynbuck.com for this and other important ongoing information.

people have compared Marilyn to the anti-slavery warrior John Brown. The first person I ever heard say this was Kwame Ture (formerly Stokely Carmichael) who visited Marilyn in FCI Dublin and corresponded with her. At her Bay Area Memorial on November 7, 2010, former Black Panther and member of the S.F.8 Hank Jones spoke movingly of her as a John Brown of our time. At her memorial in Harlem, a number of Black revolutionaries honored her with this comparison. The essence of their point is not whether she played a comparable historic role but that she was one of the all-too-few who fought shoulder to shoulder with the Black movement. In speaking about white allies in the freedom struggle, Malcolm X called on people to fight like John Brown. It is in the historic context of what was the largest upsurge for Black liberation since the Civil War, that veterans of the Black struggle honor her today.

Along with John Brown, there is another older, historic personage who comes to my mind when I think of our sister Marilyn. This is a near mythic figure of someone we, in the left, don't talk much about: The woman Antigone, whose story was dramatized thousands of years ago in ancient, classical Greece. Briefly, Antigone was a young woman of privilege who was part of the royal court. Her two brothers slew each other in a conflict over the fate of the kingdom. The king decreed that the body of one brother, who had opposed him, must lie in the dust to rot and not be given decent funeral rites. Antigone- following an older just tradition- defied the king's command and buried him- thus providing him entry into the afterworld. She dared to act and broke what she considered the patriarch's unjust law. Under interrogation her sister begged her to lie and deny the act in order to save herself. This she would not do. Antigone's punishment was to be entombed/buried alive in a cave without food or water until she starved to death. The citizens had great sympathy for Antigone and the king's son loved her. Fearing for the legitimacy of his rule, the king had his soldiers open the crypt but it was too late. Antigone had chosen to take her own life rather than die by starvation. Through the ages, Antigone has been a symbol of women's resistance. I believe that by representing collective struggle with thought-through programs for liberation, Marilyn stood on the shoulders of Antigone and, in some ways, surpassed her.

If Marilyn links you in your own way, as she does me, with time's rich legacy of freedom struggle-she also links us with our losses.

Questions of who she was for/with each of us, how she lived, what she tried to accomplish and what commitments were willingly shared, must neither be quickly resolved nor stubbornly avoided. The work of mourning involves, along with other things, how each person finds meaningful answers, individually and with others, to the question of what Marilyn's memory and spirit calls us to do and be. I feel that this is what honoring her legacy means.

For now, the traumatic circumstances of Marilyn Buck's final year make all this exceedingly difficult.

When she died, some months before her 63rd birthday, she had served a total of nearly 30 years behind bars. The last 25 years were a continuous long march from arrest/capture in 1985 to her release in mid July 2010. Severely weakened by cancer, she finally left the prison camps and was able to live among us, outside the wire, for twenty days. During this time Marilyn visited with a lot of dear friends, supporters and family. She got to embrace some of her co-defendants who'd been released years earlier. She spoke on the phone, corresponded by email with more, and was cared for by deeply loving people among whom were my daughters, Ona and Gemma. As she has been for the past quarter century, her close comrade and attorney, Soffiyah Elijah, was a constant protecting presence.

There's just no getting around the great misfortune of her life's ending only 20 days after she left that federal prison system which held her continuously under the gun since 1985. Her will power was enormous and to remain vitally alive it had to be.

Can we even allow an hour to extend our imagination towards all the wonderful everyday things that she hoped to be able to do? What it would mean to be able to eat a good salad, to sit in the park, to spend as much time as she wanted with whomever she wanted, to walk outside in moonlight, to go dancing? She could stretch out in her own home; one that wasn't controlled by heavily armed state authorities. She was thinking about what kind of j-o-b might work out. Marilyn's family, people in the Bay Area and around the country, political prisoners and social prisoners with whom she'd spent much of her life, all expected her long internal exile to end in celebration and happiness. Above all. Above all this. Marilyn wanted to live.

She'd been thinking about how to heal herself from the chronic, complex stress of prison and what she wanted to accomplish with her life. In other words: during the early part of the last year and a half, Marilyn had begun allowing herself to really believe that she was finally getting out.

I think sometimes that even those of us who do prison work and have visited political prisoners over many years may not always consider how difficult it can be, for people enduring very, very long sentences in hardened institutions, to dwell on their past and/or the future. No matter how many visiting rooms I enter, there is a real gap between people who live inside the wall and those of us outside. The weight of what has been lost and will never come to be can build melancholy and despair in the healthiest of hearts. So when Marilyn could finally dare to consider what taking her dreams towards a real future outside might mean--many of us felt her exhilarating gust. As political supporters and friends we had an emotional stake in her freedom and in her victory over the FBI & Bureau of Prisons. This national political police-prison regime, so central to the deep, permanent state structure of Empire, has never stopped trying to break her and the more than 100 other U.S. political prisoners down.

I can feel Marilyn resisting the hint of any effort to make her heartbreak and suffering special by reminding us that

what's happening to me is what happens to thousands of imprisoned women and men who get sick in the system...remember that there are 2 million people caught somewhere in the prison-industrial complex--if you're going to write about me, remember I stand and fall with them.

Even as a release date of August 8, 2010 came into range, Marilyn's medical symptoms were emerging with force. She was acutely aware that other political prisoners with legally sound parole dates had, at the last minute, been denied release due to political pressure and legal trickery. One of the well-known agonies of imprisonment is that medical care--as it is for millions of the non-insured-- is often atrocious. I live in California where the state prison system, which holds nearly 200,000 people, has been under a court appointed special receiver for years because of woefully inadequate medical

facilities.

Political prisoners with life threatening illness have faced foot dragging, neglect and worse from their jailors. Lolita Lebron spoke about the severe medical abuse and radiation burns suffered by Puerto Rican Nationalist Party leader, Don Pedro Albizu Campos, when he was held in U.S. prisons more than a half century ago. My dear comrade, Black Panther/BLA political prisoner Bashir Hameed, who died of cancer in 2008 was, at one point, assaulted by police in his hospital room. From her own experience and knowledgeable of the cruel battles other political prisoners have waged for treatment, Marilyn was constantly forced to weigh how to effectively advance her health care needs before a totalitarian administration adept at both routine and calculated neglect.*

After MANY months of worsening symptoms during which she regularly requested and insisted on evaluation/treatment AND WAS DENIED she finally received a cancer diagnosis around New Year 2010. Major surgery followed about three weeks later and Marilyn reported that she was told the doctors were optimistic that they'd removed the malignancy. To my limited knowledge she had no follow up scans or any professional post surgical care by her doctors for well over a month. It's difficult to see how this can be said to meet any standard of acceptable medical practice. She received help changing her postoperative dressing from fellow prisoners. The Bureau of Prisons was very slow to diagnose her. They were slow to move and treat her. On March 12th she was informed the cancer had metastasized to her lungs.

Very early on the morning of March 13, 2010-the day of the *Spark's Fly* gathering in Oakland, CA (an annual event organized by women to support women political prisoners) which drew nearly 500 supporters from around the country to celebrate her impending release and the dawn of a new life- I was one of the friends she called to tell the devastating news. In only six months time, plans for life after prison turned into a last ditch battle to survive and get out at all.

* A growing number of U.S. political prisoners have died of cancer and other illnesses in prison. An incomplete list: Albert Nuh Washington, Kuwasi Balagoon, Merle Africa, Teddy 'Jah' Heath, Richard Williams, and Bashir Hameed. Others have faced and are facing life-threatening challenges both inside and after release on parole.

Soon thereafter, Marilyn went to the Carswell federal medical facility in a suburb of Fort Worth Texas. She would be transported from this medical prison to a local hospital for cancer treatment. Two women who she knew well were also being held at Carswell and they helped her very much. Miranda and I were able to visit Marilyn in Texas on May 1, 2010. We spent time together on Mayday and the next. Marilyn said, "*if it was up to my will, I'd have this thing beat.*" Gaunt and fatigued she used oxygen to help with breathing. She held herself with that incredible dignity and steadiness all who know her have experienced. Marilyn said, "so many women here are medicalized into the role of patient and the setup here is about making us this way. I do not want to become this. I think about how my Mother kept herself out of the hospital until nearly the end because she didn't want to become like that." She went on to confirm that, "In the eight weeks after surgery in Stanford (Stanford University in California) when I had no follow up tests- the cancer ran wild."

She was very very sick and we could see with our untrained eyes that this was a battle our elegant sister was unlikely to survive.

The question of government's role in Marilyn's death is in the air. It merits a real discussion about whether and how we might hold the state responsible for its (mis)treatment of her. This stark tragedy and rupture of hope has led some to believe she was killed by the government. Others dismiss this way of looking at it as conspiracy theorizing and paranoia. I have heard people, including former political prisoners, express either of these opposing viewpoints. In a way this process parallels the anger and sadness I feel. Saying "they did it" mobilizes rage against the system; honestly recognizing the very difficult prognosis of people with leiomyosarcoma, even under the best treatment situations, brings me to powerlessness and great sorrow. Ultimately, while this polarized way of looking and feeling is not so helpful, grieving-for me-involves allowing myself to go through all of it. We do know that living for long periods in hostile institutional environments of deprivation and stress degrades the immune system, damages emotional well being and can shorten the lifespan. Marilyn respected her doctor in Texas, felt that she had her best interests at heart and was giving her the right chemotherapy treatment. We do know that a stress free, loving environment, excellent diet and adjunctive treatments were not available. We do know that personnel at Carswell made cruel comments to her

expressing "surprise" that she was still alive.

Last year, during the many months prior to her diagnosis, when she was working through her own channels to get the administration to act, Marilyn didn't want her supporters to launch a public pressure campaign. I know that during the summer and fall of 2009 when this was raised her response was to tell us to wait. She was concerned that such a mode of action could be counterproductive. Throughout her life Marilyn took responsibility for her choices. And although I have kicked myself for not struggling with her more about this, it was her decision. In the face of our real powerlessness to reverse the outcome, her traumatic reality needs to be suffered, held and borne. But what we can refuse to accept-and work to change is the incarceration of the remaining political prisoners. We can come together to free them and to try to our best to make sure that no more die behind the walls. We can hold the repressive apparatus responsible. By doing so we contribute to a political and ethical environment that will help the untold resisters of today and the future who will undoubtedly rise and be jailed by our government. By holding the state responsible we challenge their vast, malignant system of social control that holds more than two million people: the majority of whom are poor and people of color.

keyword: She put her foot down and lived

Marilyn was out of prison for 20 days and in this time she lived to the loving limits of the possible. Miranda and I were honored to be able to visit her as I know others were. We brought the glorious quilt: *Marilyn Freedom*, made by women in the Bay Area and presented it to her. I said, *Marilyn you always were my John Brown*. It pleased her when I thanked her for getting our comrades and me out of a Junction, Texas jail in March 1969 (with a lawyer and bail) where we'd been held for a week. We were on our way to the SDS national council meeting in Austin and were busted at a roadblock. Things looked like they might turn violent in a small town Texas way. She laughed in that knowing, sly way of hers. Miranda gave her a long massage and the three of us held each other in silence, sharing a deep recognition of love and farewell.

Now, months later, on fog glistened evenings like this in San Francisco when I can only bear to be alone-and when solitude too is unbearable-great rip tides of grief keep on coming in as though

pulled by the pull of the weeping moon.

The moon is water. A sob throws open windows to the monsoon. Fragments of breath drift off. A house of living spaces falls into silence; memories of Marilyn's last year hurling past into that unforeseen horizon. Her-eyes-on us. I spraypaint the wall red: *she deserved more.*

From the websites and the blogs I feel the many who are weeping and honoring yet, in this same moment, can't those who knew or met her even once hear her voice speaking directly without panic, as though she has not fallen?

If I could I would organize a demo of we small earthlings against her death and we'd storm heaven to return her to live among us.

Yesterday, the sky over the city was enormous. A woman in a wheel chair was shopping for marigolds at the farmer's market. Open my eyes. The mirage builds itself; it is weightless and real.

Marilyn's articulate face turns from a wheelchair backlit by the sun of freedom in Brooklyn.

I want to impress her face into the great wall of the universe so that she can be seen from all points, accessible deep into tomorrow.

In 2004, Marilyn wrote an essay, *The Freedom to Breathe**

I am skinny-dipping. Stripping off my clothes, running into the water, diving down naked to disappear for a few breaths from the shouts and sounds of the world. Shedding clothes, embarrassments, care. The surface breaks as I return for air. For a few moments, I am free, opened, beyond place, beyond space...

Deepening my breath, lengthening my spine, I learn to discard my

* *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review*, Vol. XIII, No.3, page 84, Spring 2004

preconceptions and expectations – all the many hopes and fears and attachments that have given shape to my life. I learn to lay aside anxiety about what I am missing, what I do not have, what might happen to me in here. I confront the fact that I am, in truth, uncertain about whether I really want to release my fears, my anger. I am conflicted. Without the armor of my anger and self-righteousness, I become intimate with the many forms of suffering in this prison world – and so I feel vulnerable, exposed. Each day presents a new confrontation with reality. I want to run; instead, I breathe. One breath – the freedom to choose my response in that moment. In sitting, I encounter joy; I know that through this practice I can arrive at a place of genuine peace. The path is before me. It is my choice to follow.

In the 'everywhen', which comes late at night when I cannot sleep, I see Marilyn walking under a wide canopy of amiable stars. She's not in this world, but I can see her very clearly from here in San Francisco.

A woman of 62 years, whole, restored, vigorous and trembling with excitement. She's talking with other animated souls of the big-hearted revolutionary dead from all the ages that have come and gone on earth. They're wondering together about how they might assist us.

I'm still running with her chimes of freedom.