

*MEMORIES OF THE FUTURE,
THE DAYBOOKS OF TINA MODOTTI, 1986*

"In the Market"

(excerpt)

... like a gunshot. . . I was back in the Panteon
I'd toured with Edward, back with the dead.

I can't think what made us go.
With the taste of coffee still in our mouths
we'd made love. With the straw pattern of the petate
imprinted on our skin, we'd washed in the sun.
Down the steps to the fusty vault, I felt his semen
leave me, wet on my thigh. Why would we have wanted
to see bones? That is, I'd expected bones,
not bodies warped in tight skins, in brown
naked hides. Not the scythe of grins, all flesh
made rind. And not the pod of a fetus with its empty
suck at a leathery breast. Edward said—
the ultimate still life, a monumental theme.
But I heard the baby smack its lips, and I fled.

I found myself in the market, touching onions one
by one. I traced silhouettes of shoots and calla stalks
on air, watched one bud split its caul and the white
spathe open. Cold, I let street life slip over me.
I searched each face, in each heard a dry, deathly
smack of the tongue. But I realized for the first time
power—the power to see a world buried in daylight.
I was a lens—and I saw.

There rose up for me
that day in Guanajuato's streets the dead and the living—
they breathed through my breath, they rinsed through
my pores their blind needs. They were hands
scrubbing clothes, they gripped shovels
and newspapers, lifted cones of bananas, carried
crossbeams on their backs. They went down in the mine
to a source like their mother—they danced in the dust's
brief abundance. Together they endured . . .