

Diane Cluck, Touch Deprivation

they did an experiment with babies
back in world war II
and the babies all were orphans
so no one cared or knew
they called it touch deprivation
and this is what they did
if a baby started crying
put a hand out from its crib
the nurses glit on by
as if they'd seen nothing at all
the nurses glit on by
and checked the chart off on the wall
writing
nothing unusual here
subjects continue rocking
back and forth
as if they sense a
thunderstorm is coming
and that flock of springtime babies
nesting quiet in the lab
were just fist fulls of feathers
stuffing pillows after that
and those second world war nurses
who had killed the orphan kids
lived out cursed lives as spinsters
in trade for what they did
they did a similar experiment in new york
and this is what they did
they rolled out the sheets of tarmac
and sliced them into grim
then they filled the maze with people
but they told them not to touch
they convinced them it weren't civilized
and we believed as much
why do you apologize when you bump into my arm on the train
did you apologize three times like it really caused anyone harm or pain
being bumped into - do you, know you are the first person to touch me in a
month
and sometimes i like the feeling of accidental touch
an experiment with ladies
with ladies and with men
we could decide to lose our language
so that we might try our skin
strangers piggyback each other
the thrill of contact sport
and i finally could talk to you
but this time without words
cos' you don't realize how you pollute the game
when you keep speaking circles and your circles sound the same saying
i'm fine how are you i'm good how are you i'm fine how are you i'm good how
are you i find
it hard to relate to situations
where i am asked to speak