



The Divisibility
of Parts

WET LOVE

There's a couple in their early forties sitting across from us on the train. The woman has a cheap pad of writing paper and she's drawing on it with a black-ink pen. Her hand is making small repeated gestures; short lines curled into tight semi-circulars; capricious billowing mass. The man has his head against the headrest at an angle and he's leaning towards her slightly. His chin is nearly on her shoulder but not quite touching. He's been watching the clouds forming on the page. Occasionally he closes his eyes and seems to drift in and out of sleep. There's the soft humming of the carriage in motion but not much other sound. At one point the woman tilts her head towards the man and they kiss. Both have wonderful, youthful lips, but other parts of their bodies have aged less gracefully.

In the passages between carriages the windows are lower than they are in the rest of the train. Unless you bend at the waist, the only view is of the dirt beside the tracks moving past at a great pace. You're wanting to be looking at something but not wanting to bend at the waist so it's only dry earth and it's moving too quickly to keep your eyes fixed on anything. Your face is nearly touching the glass but not quite and your eyes are drifting in and out of focus so that sometimes it's just the earth but then there's also your reflection dissolving in and out over the other image.

There's a strobing of light on your face. The sun's piercing through the trees lining the tracks and the train's moving at a great speed. It's flashing on and off and when it's on you see more of your face in the reflection. You're focusing your eyes on the strobing face image and the moving background is a dynamic blur. It's closer than usual to be looking at your own surface and there are tiny spots of perspiration glistening at your pores. There are semi-translucent hairs in tight semi-circular curves across your cheeks and then occasionally a coarser hair in a looser arc. There are sun-spots in disc-shaped blotches where the skin bulges out slightly. There are intersecting diagonals finely folded into the skin surrounding your eyes. You're seeing it all really close and you're starting thinking about yourself as flesh. You're imagining the being inside of it as a kind of passage. It's still strobing on and off - the image - and on the surface there's all the details and degradations that suggest the kind of passage over time. You're recognizing the body and the passage of the body and your passage through the body. You're thinking about material presence and occupying flesh. You're thinking about those moments when you see your shadow accidentally and how there's a stronger sense of your presence than when you're seeing your own reflection in fine detail.

WET HATE

Once I wrote a story in which the first-person protagonist imagines a female character and describes the imagined spaces she inhabits. The narrator places himself in the midst of her world and navigates it by following her movements. Eventually he has sexual intercourse with the image he created. I tried to inflect the scenes with as much reality and as few a words as possible.

Flesh, fluids, physical textures, weather.

There still wasn't any reality in it beyond the projection.

I wanted the woman to be pure image - a construction founded entirely upon an unattainable ideal.

She had no voice. She was a description of movement.

Around the time of writing the story, I was in a relationship that was coming to an inevitable close. The girl I'd been seeing read the piece and was furious - she made an inarticulate telephone call to tell me so.

I deliberately hadn't thought it through. I was sorry.

I tried to take stock of the situation - assuming that what had bothered her was my inflated ideals, presented as active fantastic desire.

Writing stories is essentially a preoccupation. Perhaps preoccupying oneself with genuine desire in fabricated creatures is a touch feeble when there are real ones in the picture.

She really was beautiful.

When the fury had subsided I resolved to ask her about it. It was that point at the end of a relationship where the gap between you violently contracts for a moment before expanding out to whatever width. There's a flaring-up of complicity overriding your defensiveness and you feel even closer than when you were together. It was autumn and there was colour in all of the leaves but not much colour in anything else. We were sitting on a public bench facing east, angled at about a 35° towards one another. The more she said about it the clearer it became that it wasn't my pessimistic retreat into a fantastic, romantic ideal that had irked her. It was the sexual encounter with the woman in the story, not the actual activity of my writing it. She felt hurt and betrayed by the narrator.

She hadn't any voice but her skin was so beautiful that if you put a microphone up against it whilst she was sleeping you could record a soft humming sound.

DRY HATE

She's still surrounded by people but she feels as if she's already left. She's there but she's also watching over the scene and the events as if from a distance. She's observing the picture of things. She's her own third-person narrator. She's present but also she's embodying her conscious reflection. Her living is written bodily and the image of it is like light rebounding from a kind of mirror onto the surface of her perception. Or, it isn't really like a mirror and it isn't really even like a rebounding of light because all of it is instant and constant and there isn't any matter involved. The living of it and the conscious reflection are in parallel. She's one rider straddling two running horses.

She's a writer and a reader and both at the same time. She's a library of what's already been written and there's instant access to everything consciously. She's actually reading recollectively and actually writing presently. She's actually there and we're actually reading her and actually writing her simultaneously.

DRY LOVE

The streets are mostly empty and the air is coloured silver. There's a café near the corner and about seven small round tables near the doorway. Three of the tables are occupied and she's sitting at one of them reading Spinoza with difficulty. She's warm enough in a woollen sweater but her ears are cold and also the skin of her neck. There's a man at another table in a brown suede jacket with all his equipment laid out in front of him. There's a coffee with one cream and a cellphone in a holster and a bouquet of keys coded by colour. One of the two key-rings bears the faded insignia of some small company. The other one has 'St Martin' written in blue font sloping upward at a diagonal. There's a picture of a palm tree and a lump of sand with an umbrella stuck in.

She's trying to really read but there's a woman at the table beside her with really quite a voice. The woman is talking to her two friends about the value of particular playing cards in a particular game. It's the kind of voice that makes the face irrelevant because you already know the face or because the voice is more important than the face. This number is worth that much and this symbol amounts to that much and so on. The woman is leading her friends through a narrative about what happened last night when her opponent played a seven-of-something and she really hadn't been expecting it.

She pauses the reading and moves back up to nearly the top of the page on the left where Spinoza is saying that if someone were to ask him about why we're so inclined to divide quantity like we do, he'd answer that there are two ways to conceive of it. He'd say that there's one way and another way of conceiving of the amount of things. He'd say you can do quantity either with the imagination or with the intellect. He'd say that the imagination deals with abstraction whilst the intellect deals with substance. You can imagine the quantity of something without even seeing or encountering anything directly. Something appears in your imagination - anything or many things - and somehow you're able to conceive of the amount of it. Otherwise, you can encounter things in the world and be aware of their number without even imagining a thing. He'd say that most often we do it with the imagination, where we find quantity to be finite, divisible, and composed of parts. When we do it with the intellect - which is more difficult - we find it to be infinite, unique, and indivisible. She's guessing maybe this means that there's only really one kind of thing.

The woman at the other table is talking about how there's no use in buying a luxury car because if you look at those cars from Japan or Korea they have all of the features but cost like \$20,000 less.

There's nothing on her table except for the reflective metal surface and her elbows. She's looking at the pages but then she's seeing the reflection of something in the table and it's a group of birds in the sky. She's looking up and not really seeing anything apart from the fabric of an awning because she's sitting beneath it. She's looking down again and the birds are moving in an arc across the table and then off the edge of it. Her thoughts are on the birds or on the image of the birds and no longer on the book or on the page. It's crossing her mind that the image of the birds is the kind of image that would appear momentarily in a montage of black and white film - followed by another image of an empty town square or the spire of a church against the sky, and then cutting back to a close-up of the protagonist. She's thinking that maybe it's a privilege to witness this kind of image without it being a film because it won't be able to repeat itself actually.

Her eyes are still on the reflective surface and not on the surface of the page. There's a moment where there isn't much thinking at all and it's just a single image reverberating behind her eyes. The dark figures of birds against the silver light of sky. She isn't really expecting anything else but the birds are appearing again and making the same kind of arc just a few centimetres left of where they'd previously been. She's seeing the birds again but this time it's less of an image and more the reflection of something actual. She's looking up again and it's still the fabric of the actual awning but she's imagining the sky because she's already seen it as well as the dark figures and the arc. She's imagining the birds actually above her flying in actual loops and arcs and progressive curves. She's thinking of how the image is a direct result of the position of her body and the angle of her vision relative to the birds' position in the sky and the position of the reflective metal surface.

She's looking up from the table for a moment and catching a glimpse of the same birds reflected in the windscreen of a parked car. The arc is travelling down the glass and along the silver paint of the hood and the image is distorted by the various surfaces. The movement of the birds is slowing down and speeding up as it moves over the reflective contours.

EVAPORATION

It was about 4am and I'd been sleeping on the floor of the train station in waiting for the train. The building was cold and scarcely peopled. There were a few others camped out and using their luggage as a headrest. We were spaced remarkably evenly around the station, as if to be as far away from each other as possible. There was a police officer on patrol. He was circulating through the building - taking slow, even steps - as if measuring the gaps between us. When the departure time was approaching I looked at the sign that tells you when and where and made my way towards Gate 7. I was walking slowly up the staircase and emerging onto the platform and there was a young man approaching me. He was making eye contact from a long way off. I felt involuntarily certain that he wanted to talk to me. I thought about whether I recognized him or not and concluded that certainly not. He wasn't moving very quickly and for the next few moments all I really did was perceive the closing of the gap and our bodies getting closer together. It was less like we were moving towards each other and more like a contraction of the space between.

He doesn't say anything until he's a meter's distance from me and has come to a complete halt. He greets me in German - a few sentences that I can't understand. I respond in French.

“I'm sorry, I don't speak German. Do you speak French?”

“French?” he's saying in English, “What about English?”

“Yes, English is good.” I reply.

He's making a slow exhalation of breath and I can see his chest contracting. He turns away from me for a second and looks at something in the distance. I'm using the moment for thinking about how perhaps he isn't satisfied with any language at all. He's looking back towards me and there isn't any real expression on his face but his eyes look wise and confused at the same time. He isn't saying anything further. He's making a small nod and moving off on his way.

