

Passages in the Continuous Present

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ABSTRACT

Passages in the Continuous Present

Rachel Kyne

This manuscript of poems presents an experiential narrative of anorexia nervosa. Told in the first person, the speaker's passage into and through the disease is chronicled in terms that describe the physiological, emotional, behavioural, and linguistic elements at its heart. The speaker's search for meaning in her experiences is complicated by her obsessive thought patterns, degraded physical condition, and distorted subjective reality, a situation that renders seemingly direct perceptions and innocuous beliefs suspect. Her conflicting desires for self-annihilation, thinness, recovery, certainty, and some version of "health" are formally reflected in the fragmented and collagiste aspects of the manuscript's three sections. Poems addressing elements of home and family are placed in dialogue with travel poems, in which the speaker must navigate questions of aesthetic perception, cultural belief, and the possibilities of translating her own experience. A particular pressure is placed on language itself as a determinant of identity and value, as the speaker struggles to articulate a self that is separate from the disease that structures her thinking. Over the course of the manuscript, common tropes of disease as a battle or a teleological journey toward wellness are refuted, as the speaker comes to the realization that in her case, recovery is possible behaviourally, but not cognitively. The choice becomes to continue living in spite of her own perceptions of her body, and to locate meaning and identity outside of her own instinctive beliefs.

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Part I:
Poem Without a Beginning

Poem Without a Beginning

First feel is fear.

Waking starts with glued eyes
and squelched cheeks, taste of pillow,
tongue if bitten by night accident.
Like sections of an orange,
outward from the centre
the body takes stock.

The inventory halts early; eyes
wrench open.
Arms connect flesh to flesh
where flesh should no longer be.
This is the space for air.
Crescendo. Terror.

It should be familiar—
treason is endless—
but that does not prevent the seize
of panic, sudden jerk awake
of spine, kneecaps, toes, hands clutching
at hips, ribs, thighs to see what
...there.
Fingers curled for warmth find arms
that disobey often, that lately trespass
beyond the circle of cupped fingers and thumb.
Pinch the slack, panic,
biceps should never
be that big.
Traitor.

Swallow your hate
with cold water, nothing else.

A longer walk today.
A bigger sweatshirt
so no one can see.

*

Toujours means *always*
and also,
still. In certain circumstances
it can mean both
at the same time
—forever
in both directions. I wake

every morning still
in that other self, the one of iron
that didn't eat
the last meal or morsel, that
slandered less
of space, that spread
less
inside skin, carved
more line
and less mass.

Survival is prolonged involuntary action.
Cells divide, proteins replicate,
the lungs breathe
themselves, the stomach
cannot resist
the drive to live. Phantom limbs
throb for years in empty sleeves.

The skeleton inside always—so close
to the surface, so quickly
covered over. They call it
recovery,
when bones sink
like shipwrecks under the rolling tides.
Memories swim unsanctioned
in the deeps. Bones
are always longing for the surface.

These arms are new.
They billow from tank tops and t-shirts, from clothes
that used to flap and flutter around my frame.
My favourite old sweater, dark blue,
softened from use, today
does not fit,
is too short, will not zip,
is a slap.

I blink

and am back in the darkness,
trying to thin my Giacometti jealousy, trying not
to fall apart, trying not
to want it back.

*

My parents' house is drafty and large.
There are fewer kids around now,
less noise, enough bedrooms for all,
but the linoleum floors in the kitchen still leach warmth from unslipped feet
and the chimney still breathes cold from its brick throat.

Of the five of us kids, only two still live at home.
I prefer the term, "Mailing Address."
My younger brother has a truck, a job, a useful
thick skin. He comes home to make toast,
leave crumbs, stash beers in the fridge,
sleep a few hours, wash his jeans
for work the next day. Every night
steel-toed boots thunk on the verandah.
He steals in at 2 a.m., opens the fridge,
leans into the light.
Lingers
until the motor kicks on. I hear him thinking
from upstairs,
from the girls' room in the gable
with the artsy posters
and stuffed bookshelves, the periwinkle wallpaper I liked
when I was twelve. The linoleum creaks
below. He pours a glass of milk. Yawns
through the floor, up the stairs,
down the hall.
Sleeps.

I lie awake
every night.
The bus to work comes early,
but I can't fall asleep until the house is brimming
with others' unconsciousness
and my chest loosens
and I can breathe.
My mother sleeps lightly.
I know every step that creaks, know not to flush or run the tap.
Can't handle taking more

from those I love.
Mind spins like a hamster wheel—what to pack,
what to wear, what to eat. Tomorrow
I must do better.
My parents work so hard. Children
are expensive. My father's limp worsens
with every worn-out winter coat,
every car insurance bill and course fee,
every school dance ticket, every opportunity
for our education
or happiness. My mother says
It gives him so much joy.
She is always tired.

There are things none of us talk about. We are worried
for the oldest, the one
with a house a half-hour south, the one
with a four month-old daughter, the one
with testicular cancer
and an uncertain prognosis.
I moved back
just in case.
The summer nights are chillier than I remember.

*

:::: Scream
red flash flare panic: throw
covers, roll, stumble past
black shapes, stub toes slam hands on wall
oak plastic light-switch
Snooze.

Heartbeats stutter shock
in the silence.

Freezingcoldshiver,
lightning-grab jeans t-shirt sweater undershirt socks panties bra deodorant contacts towel,
clasp warmth taut in clenched teeth down the hall,
dodge drafty currents that rise from downstairs
until at last
white bathroom light flames on unwilling eyes
and the door is shut against the house's dawn-breath.

Turn on the hot,
let the tap run away the tepid residue of night,

face the mirror.

Strip down. Study
front
profile
back
profile

Breathe—

rocks stick in the throat, acid
floods the tongue.

Push hands against belly.

Turn.

Stand straight, pinch
pallid flesh bread-dough rising
unstoppable, panic an undertow
black, choke it
back, breathe,
rub stinging eyes, dig nails *You don't deserve*
to live hard anywhere, first shaky step *Today I will do better*
into shower, tanned feet
etched white with sandal-straps and solid lines
of running shoes and socks, all those
evenings mornings weekends on the Seawall
trying to make myself
clean,

veins popping high in the hot water
but not enough, still concealed
in inches-deep padding
that jiggles
as my hands shampoo my hair, rinse, again, rinse, rinse
never enough
turn the nozzle on my head, close eyes, pray
to get warm, to melt
away. Chest red from the heat,
spine tight as a piano-string
against the constant chill.

The hot water is running out, the others
need to shower—

Count to three, wrench taps,
wring hair grab towel wrap steam-warmth
around me. Footsteps pad past
in the carpeted hall.

My mother's voice—*Use the fan!*

An exasperated flick on the switch outside the door
and a shuddering begins, moist fog swirls with fresh
cold.

She doesn't know
I do it on purpose.

The fan cools flesh too fast
and clears the mist too gleefully
from the mirror.

*

My brother has surgery
then post-op follow-ups,
more surgery. He cannot open the door to his car
or lift the small blond toddler who crawls happily around his feet
in case he tears his stitches.
It is a strange summer. The silence
in my parents' neighbourhood bombards my ears
when I get off the bus from work, when I walk down the avenues
of cherry trees, cedar hedges, and large houses
to the white one with the gable, the huge garden
where my mother loves to potter. Footsteps up our driveway echo
in the cul-de-sac across the street.

Postcards come from friends in Rome, the Philippines, China,
thumbtacks on a map, people I long to tell
I don't know what. Their worries
were my own last year. Each weekend
I go to church with my mother,
do errands with my father, take long walks to the beach
and drink coffee in the rain. At night I sit in the kitchen,
by the sliding doors that show the sunset. The light disappears.
I cuddle in my new sweater and drink green tea,
mug after mug, arms swathed
in dark blue wool
over long-sleeved cotton layers
with flannel pajamas and two pairs of socks.

My parents raise their eyebrows. They say that flesh
should not be so cold to the touch—
but there are certain aesthetic imperatives
that have to be met.
I smile and sell things

for nine dollars an hour, for a future
no one else can provide. Running to calm me, yoga to relax me.
One is responsible
for one's own happiness.
I must be doing something wrong.

*

My father: *You're too skinny.*
The older my parents become, the more out-of-touch they seem.
It's funny, I never realized
my mother was so plump, my father
so bulky. Of course I take after them both.
If I was a boy
I wouldn't have to explain my liking for baggy pants.

Everything hurts.
The inside of my thighs
blooms a constant purple.
Stacked bones
bruise; it's because
I am too heavy.
My knees make sounds
when they move.

Morning comes too fast.
I have to get up,
I'm going to miss my bus,
but I shrink before the day, the cold.
So tired of fighting. Curl up
out of bed; will do a hundred
before I stand. I wouldn't
feel tired if I weren't
so lazy.

*

Black-tracked pages baffle. Concentration
eludes me like a moody cat, turns tail
when presence is needed. It is easier
to tally traffic lights
than to decipher what these words mean.
Count telephone poles, watch rain
ribbon down the window.

I ride the bus and read. Every day
the same route to school,
planned and comforting. Different stops,
highschool, university, a kilt,
jeans, smaller jeans.
I like the corner seat, shoulder snug
against the heater, feet on my bag, legs curled, body tucked away
from the door, from the thought of cold.
If only hunger, like buses,
could be late
or not show up at all.

I started waking in Grade Eleven
at 5 a.m. to run in the dark, to handle stress,
to get in shape—no one else
had a growth spurt like that, so huge, grotesque,
sloppy. Winter was the hardest;
I dressed in leggings in the dark, dodged raccoons
under streetlights, pulled on shoes that never dried. My face always puffy
in the bathroom mirror. Faster by Grade Twelve
but still so soft, so lazy. Took naps on the bus
and picked at homemade vegetable wraps after orchestra,
banked awards, bought stock
in *discipline* and *motivation*, filled a box
with plaques and medals, scholarships
to pay for university tuition, acclaim
to make my parents proud, to make their struggles
worth it.

My father's hair increasingly silver,
his blood pressure higher, his diet suddenly
healthier. The year we all stopped eating fat
to protect our hearts.

My mother saw me running
the other day, in her van on the way to the post office.
She shouted, cried, drove me home, wouldn't listen
to reason. It was careless—next time
I'll take the trails, away from the street,
away from eyes. Disgusting,
how slack my thighs are.
I can never
give this up.

*

Tennisballs cut in half: rice.
Tops of thumbs: olive oil.
Hands without fingers: chicken breast, or trout.
Eaten slowly, with attention, and not
in stressful surroundings.
If I followed every rule, I would never
eat at all.

If I could follow every rule—

Hands like dinner plates. Measure it out.
Two fingers make a meat. Two eggs
make a milk. Two apples
make two breads
make one bagel
make two milks. Eyes like soupbowls.

I have not seen my weight
in years. They put me on the scale backwards
and talk me through the measure of silence,
the click of numbers and judgment.
I do not want to know—I am afraid
of what I might do.

Since my sister came to visit from Calgary
after seven months away
and saw my back as I changed my shirt
saw something the others had missed
saw something I still cannot see
I have not been allowed
to be a vegetarian,
to eat no fat,
to avoid dairy and pick
around potatoes. I do what I can. They're called
white lies
when they don't hurt other people. No one likes
to make her mother cry—better to humour her,
let all the others live happy
in their own warped reality. I do
what I have to, can't
trust anyone. At the clinic
they say that
two breads
makes a meal
with three proteins,
two veg,
one milk, and one

fat. The symbolism is not lost
even in anxiety.

My violin teacher said
I should have played the viola.
I have always had big hands. Sometimes I believe
people deserve what they get.

*

Walking up the hill
from the university under the bridge
I hear the wheeze of my heart
through my denim jacket, over the chirrup
of the traffic lights, the brakes and bass-beats of passing drivers.
Some of them move their lips in time, smile over
at their passengers,
talk on cellphones, cast distracted glances out the window,
sip on drinks
and eat snacks from bright cellophane bags.

They must be happy people.
It must be nice
to be that thin.

The lights change.
I turn up my music, bow my head
against the wind.

*

It is a myth that appetite disappears
when you eat less. I am never
not hungry.

First year of art school—a crush of exhaustion,
classes, sketchbooks, assignments, the morning commute
more brutal, bedtimes hypothetical
and subject to change. I move out in second year,
a basement apartment with my older sister, the one
trying to find herself in acting classes, alcohol, dance classes,
older boyfriends. My mother buys me
a rice cooker—the healthy child who avoids chips,
won't eat meat or cheese

or fat. Every day I wake to the sleepy sirens of the firehall across the street,
the thump of the grate outside the window,
the shriek of seagulls dissecting last night's garbage.
Then a shower, an apple, black tea, CBC radio,
and the walk through downtown across the bridge, the sun
flickering smartly through glass towers,
prickling my slitted morning eyes, glinting off the water,
whitening the fluffy wakes of the Aquabuses on False Creek.
Possibility is the smell of a fresh canvas and cut wood,
the taste of rain, saltwater-wind, or the day's first drip coffee.

I am my father's daughter. I have his hairline,
his philosophical rumination, his love for books,
his passion for art and beauty,
his obsessiveness. I started wanting my own apartment
when I was twelve,
when I learned how much life costs. I make him proud.
More meticulous than even he is
at counting things—hours late home
from work, dinners missed, degrees of droop
to the shoulders, ratio of tea to stress,
minutes run and miles covered,
grams of fat in peanut sauce, caloric content
of refried beans and cereal, minutes wasted
sitting still, all the things I now avoid.
Two jobs, five classes: broccoli, rice, beans, sacks of apples,
phonecalls to parents in the suburbs, soymilk
watered down to last the week,
sportsbras drying on the rack, jars of paintbrushes in the sink.
Need is another word
for harm.

*

My brother is recovering. We all wear yellow bands
for cancer that say
Live Strong. This fall is colder
than any I remember. I paint on an easel in my gable room,
bundled in fleece, wearing sneakers. Last year's downtown apartment
is far away. Soon,
if I work hard enough
I will get my own studio.
I will wake up early to run
and never be so weak
as to eat what I shouldn't. Then perhaps I will not
take up so much space.

The door slams downstairs. Dad is home.
Since Thanksgiving weekend, when my sister
burst into tears as I put on my pajamas
my parents have begun eating dinner
with me
every night. Nothing escapes.

*That is not all you're having. Is that all
you're having?*

Having
compels wanting. Don't encourage me.
I am insatiable.

It's a question of your long-term health.

Do you argue with gravity?
Or dispute time? Stop telling me
what to do. So tired,
it's already dark and I still
have homework to do, but first
I haven't walked today—

If this continues—

Numb. I wish I could believe them.
Willpower slips away
before warmth and sweetness.

Do not console me. Do not
call me "good." I know
when you lie. Kindness is often
a lie, as goodness is often a kind of
vanity cultivated by habit.
Now we will argue again about reality.

*Healthy, you say.
Irredeemable, I hear.*

I wish for bones and absence.
I wish for a shadow left
by nothing. Wisp, haze, smoke,
an echo preserved in wood long after
the carnage of sound has passed.
Paper doll, wire armature, shoelace—none
of these things is above my envy.
A silver rivet. Healthy is too huge

to be decent.
A frame for a painting, a nail,
an elastic band:
let me surround
but not fill, do not let your glance
fall so openly
on my face. If you are merciful
you will let me forget it is there.

*

Days pass,
an hour. I do not sleep at night
anymore, and I wander zombie streets
by day. Worried voices pursue me.
I am not allowed to walk to the bus
or lift a box
in case my heart stops. They say I cannot spare
the energy. I have to walk
or I cannot eat. These are not my rules.
I have to walk.

I walk
and phone my mother when I am afraid
I may faint. She comes and cries.

I walk.

School is a cliff-face I cling to for normalcy—
a schedule, a scene. I search for cracks,
follow water. Straight lines are impossible.
The climb takes years. People tell me what to do.
I am grateful or hate them.
I cannot make decisions
and wear many shirts at once; nonetheless
my acquired vocabulary is impressive.
DSM-IV, ED, CBT, BMI, ECT,
amenorrhea, bradycardia, osteoporitic, lanugo, mortality.

When one does not consume enough energy
the body eats itself.
This is not a metaphor.
It is intelligent design
or evolutionary insurance. The body will starve
each of its organs in turn
before it deprives the brain of food.

Muscle wastage is more than external; as ribs rise
the heart begins to shrink.

*

We go for coffee, my parents, younger brother, me,
a special weekday-evening treat. He gets out of his truck
when he sees us pull up.
He holds his phone.
He is crying.
He never cries.
It is a breakup, a girl. We sit and talk.
They drink their chai.
My mother dispenses wisdom. My father slurps and nods.
My brother blows his nose.

I rub his back, say sisterly things
how proud we are of him
how much we love him
how he doesn't have to change
for anyone.
Watch him sip his mocha
and try to breathe, try not to think
of how much milk I dripped
into my coffee, of how much lighter than black
it became, of how much space I now span
across the chair, how many blocks
I did not walk today.
The chai wafts spicy enticement. Can't
have it. There are rules.
I rub his back.

We come to this cafe often. Each time,
my father circles the parking lot, curses,
finds a space, turns up the volume, waits until the song has finished
to turn the car off. A parent always forgets something.
Eventually we make it inside, slide into air-conditioned jazz
and the scream of grinding beans,
pounce on the cushy chairs, the local papers,
the spot by the window.
My mother sits.
My father orders.
I help to carry the drinks.
The same. And always

Are you sure that's all you want? Have whatever you want.

There are rules.

You should have something, don't just get coffee, you should have something.

There are rules. I haven't
earned it. I have to earn it.

*Don't argue, it's cold, you've been outside, try the macchiato, get it with whip,
get a steamed milk, a latte at least, get a granola bar, get your hatred
on a plate.*

You are pushing my head underwater
and you smile with pride as I submit.

Isn't it good?

No one has a smile
like my mother.

Healthy, she says. My father
looks at me sharply, sees too much.
We both know
I hear something different,
the sound of two cats fighting, a child
dying—that is the voice
but it has words,
sees everything I do, Santa or
Jack the Ripper in the dark.
You're starting to have real arms, she exults
and my eyes fill with black.
I sip milk and start to cry.
I love too much,
too many things.

It is always the same.
Another loss, another weakness, another scene
of damaged intentions, of misplaced wills
and ruined gatherings.

We came out to have a nice time.

They say it's not me, but just look
at their faces,
this ugliness
infects everyone I touch.

Just do what you can do.

“Hurt”—both
noun and verb, an action that lingers

like a smell.
It's just your head.
Salted milk. Too tense
to swallow. Sip
and choke. My brother
rubs my back.

It's okay. Two pairs of red eyes. Three.
Just have what you want.

My mother's mouth moves, it
smiles, her eyes huge
and far away. I am so tired.

*

I count almonds
and chew them thirty times,
write it on a paper,
swallow.
Say to the empty kitchen
shutupshutupshutupshutupshutupshutup
please

Weep.

I cannot wonder if this will make me well.
Right now it has to
it has to be true
 you can't fix the mental before the physical and
 almonds are good for you, EFA's alleviate depressive symptoms
or the darkness will cover me
and I will forget how to breathe.

crumple

Breathe.

crouched on the floor hug elbows huge like the rest pinch skin scream make fists clutch hair
try to hurt.

*

I am lucky. I know

that I am lucky. The EKG
 said that my heart
 measures 4 beats faster
 per minute
 than the usual admittance threshold
 to the hospital. I should be grateful. I have escaped
 in-patient care, paper nightgowns
 and feeding tubes. Instead I get
 a cast of counsellors, clinics, specialized new
 treatments, medications,
 self-help books, newsletters, mantras,
 worksheets, the constant how-when-why
 called treatment. It helps
 that my father is a psychiatrist.
 He did his residency treating the sort of patient
 they say I am. Smart.
 Difficult.

Pathology manifests in strange ways.
 Before I learn that knowledge
 can be dangerous
 I start to fit the symptoms I read about.

This is how I learn about calories.

*

Father: You were always
 kind of tense
 always worried
 even as a child Mother:
 We were nervous
 when the twins were born
 that you'd get lost in the shuffle
 Big Sister:
 It must have been the yoga.
 You'd been running
 for a while, you seemed Big Brother: You know you can
 always
 talk to me. You know that.
 Mother:
 As a mother, for this to happen—
 Father: So cute.
 You were so cute.
 Little Sister:
 (by telephone) Hey, are you

okay?

Take care
of yourself, okay? Promise? Ohmygod
this party last night,

crazy

Mother:

For a mother to see...

I always think
what I could have done
differently.

Was there something.

Big Sister:

And then I don't know you just dropped

I mean it makes
so much sense.

Little Brother:

If Nick gets his dad's truck we're thinking of driving up to Harrison
on Saturday,
see the lake.

Want

to come? There's space, the dog can ride in the flatbed.

Father:

Gentle. Be gentle on yourself.

Mother: I bought chicken for dinner. I thought I'd do it in the oven
with peppers. Is that
what you'd like?

Big Brother: You know if you ever
need

you're always welcome
at our place

Big Sister:

Or when you became vegetarian.

Little Sister:

(by telephone) Are you

okay?

You have to
eat.

*

My thermostat lowers; my skin grows new hair.
Baths warm me ten minutes at a time, but the tub
leaves bruises on my spine. I have five
coffee-stained vertebrae. Every night:
There's nothing in that! they say, but
Yes—look at it glisten it's

everywhere too much and I am too big too much of everything.
My stomach still hangs out. I will never be

enough. Cut it out like cancer. Burn it out like warts.
Dissolve it, rinse my brain like some
dialysis of belief, make a slight incision to the right
of the nasal ridge and give me a new
personality, new eyes, some other skin—

You have so much discipline.
Murders make the news. If I felt
this much hate
towards another person
I would have to kill—

*You're so healthy—look how
small you are, if I was that
small*

I could wear anything. Right now
I don't want to die. Earlier
this afternoon, it's true, but then I am tired today—but
I can't be allowed
near other people. Ugliness infects.
Cover it up, set a quarantine.
These little pills
are not working.

Let me forget how to breathe.
Don't let my heart stop.

*

Saturday morning—the vacuum hums
from downstairs. My mother lets me sleep late
now that she worries for me.
No sound of rain. Going to take
a longer walk, get out of the house, go to the beach, shed some
stress, forget my body
in the smell of cedar and seaweed. Work off
the dinner I will have to eat tonight.
I hate not knowing what she's planning to make.
She hates not knowing where I go. A quarter
in the waistband, every walk, just in case.
*I'd rather you call me to pick you up
than have you walk all the way.*

My mother cooks expensive meals

calls the butcher by his first name
but cannot bear to watch at meals.
Each mouthful visible
she says
through the stretched vellum of my cheek.

My cheeks are airbags and overstuffed sofas.

She coaxes guilt from every
anxious pore, breathes comfort over pans
of oven-roasted vegetables, caramelized onions, sautéed fish, apple
crumble, pork chops, omelettes, custard—I cannot stand
how good it tastes, the audacity
of my greed. Her eyes. I tell her I love her
with yogurt, tuna, skinless
chicken breast, bread. Jaw's masticating pulse
beats as uncertainly as my heart.

You're huge:

*Fast walk down 16th, 128th, Crescent, beach trails, Marine, 152nd, 20th, 134th
+ you're so lazy + apple and nonfat yogurt + coffee (black, 1 sweetener) + green tea
= cauliflower picked from curry, one piece potato for parents, avoid the slick of oil in the pot,
spoonful of rice shit she made white again I don't believe that Dad likes it better, eat it
slow, don't give in,
seriously I can't I'm full I ate before I had an apple bar at Starbucks I had a snack when I came home no
thanks no dessert just tea I'll boil the kettle do you want some I have to go work I have a lot of reading to do
yeah I'm sure I'm fine.*

Loneliness is most unfair
to those who call themselves companions.

I'm fine.

*

There are armies in my head
pouring oil through my brain
and they dance in the cobble-stoned streets.
Darts and matches
flick from invisible hands. Everything
is screaming at once
 walls trees bones plates streets teeth eyes cars
Women and children first as always
but the gates are locked
from the inside.

My fault—

I built the town
wrong. Don't remember
when it wasn't a ruin.

Little Brother:

Hey now, take it easy there, it's okay, sssh.

Father: Minds
are strange things.

Mother: You need to have protein, protein
will give you

some energy.

Big Sister: That hippie

health store job. The yoga. You were fine until

Little Brother: Just

a coffee? You sure? The muffins are good. I have a doughnut every day
with the guys from the crew
and just look at what a specimen

of manly beauty I am, check out those arms,
trans fats are great. Dad's so weird about'em, though. You sure,
just a coffee? I'm
buyin'.

Father: You see
what's on your plate? That huge pile
of broccoli? There is nothing
in that. That is not

going to help you.

Big Brother:

Do you want me to pray

with you? I really think

Big Sister: It's just

food.

Look at me, I've put on
pounds
since highschool

Big Brother: —if you had a personal relationship

with Jesus Christ

Father: You see those tabloids? You're skinnier
than them, and just look
at them

Mother: There's no carbohydrate
in that, it's the carbohydrate

that'll help you sleep

Little Sister:

(by email) luv you, take care ok?

Father:

—and they're photoshopped.

Big Sister: Just try it. I have pasta every day

and it's so good. I can eat a vat
of pasta.

Little Brother: You're still
the same, you're still
my sister.

Big Sister: You know

they're just worried about you.

Mother: You can't. You just

can't.

To look at someone riding a bicycle
and think
how amazing.
How normal. Adding
against a process
of subtraction. I have always been
my own best editor.
Every moment is a choice.

*

It is another kind of nakedness
to encourage such awfulness,
such greed. To be supposed
to want this thing,
health. And now,
so long the fight,
so much
gained, you think
I am well, you think
I have won.

Remind me
what I am fighting for. Assure me
that the willful suspension of disbelief

keeps me alive, comfort me
with my own insanity, present
your physiological evidence, buy me
another book.

Recovery is literal
and absurd, the only thing
that keeps me going. One must re-
cover what has been exposed:
bones, weakness, mortality.
Slap mud on a wall, scrape it off.
Normal keeps shifting—don't tell me
to stop running. Two breads made a day
when I was strong.

Don't you know ribs appear
to best advantage with space
between them, ivory keys of a piano
with blackness in between? If one's heart
could truly knock
against the ribs, they would sound
like a marimba.

*

Let me begin again.

The female pelvis on its side
is smooth flukes of a humpback's tail
curling in prehistoric delight. Both sides scoop
air in equal measure.
Lain horizontal, parallel to sky,
water runs down the posterior ridge
and off the pewter edges
in elegant sheets, untangled by
fleshy lies that hide
the lines beneath, disturb the symmetry
of everything. A whale has only what padding
it needs.

Pelvis, upright, standing firm beneath my favourite
five-dollar belt, comfortable hollows
for hands to right and left, the mutinous centre
that touches. A country under siege.

The female pelvis is ivory expanse—

the iliac fossa, crest, sacrum, sciatic notch—bare
gorgeous bone, spare and perfect,
rock beneath snow, oak beneath bark.
Prone, it is the perfect curve
of the poster in the music room,
a tail mounted and framed,
eternal dive of grey whale
and West Coast sun behind the mountains.

Summer in Tofino, we were eight, ten, thirteen
years old, and freedom is the taste of Nutella
for special on our whole wheat Kaiser sandwiches,
sugar earned after squashed cheddar and tomato penance. The sweet
not sickly or scary then but savoured, slipping sideways in our mouths,
recoiling from sulfur hot-spring air and salty-cold spray, nostrils
and tongue in two worlds, pleasure unconsidered, welcomed, the day
unmeasured and unending, running between hot water and cold,
scraped toes from the barnacles, striped towels, sea otters,
my father laughing, a grey whale diving, and afterwards
the poster to remember. Rue for remembrance
in Ophelia's song, but she looked to water to forget.

I do not know what rue is but it must be grey—
some sort of herb, good in tea
for backaches or digestion, and for use
only when needed. Rue, regret, misunderstanding.
Does all memory require mourning? The whale
in the poster is invisible, diving beneath the surface
to sift plankton
and think deep ocean thoughts
in places far away from sound.
His tail is level with the horizon, and three ribbons of water
droop languidly to the surface, dark blue unmarred by foam or seagrass,
no cabins on the shore, nothing human in the world.

Years after that summer day,
when I decide to get
healthy, to get in shape, when I start to run, cut
cookies, pasta, rice, snacks, when I dye
my hair blue for high school graduation,
when I don't care what anyone thinks, since every
body is different, really, when it's all about
self-acceptance, when I can run
for hours, don't need Tampax
or a bra, they call this willpower, I will stare
at the poster on the wall
while I practice my violin, water dripping evenly
from the tail, chin tucked over wood carved

in luscious curves inevitable as the female pelvis,
centuries of concave space cupping eyes of all-seeing,
all-knowing deaf audiences.

When I go to art school and study the Venus
of Willendorf, those fertile breasts and belly, Lucien Freud,
Rubens and Botero, when I paint naked bodies that lounge
before me with flagrant, floodlit cellulite, when
my hero becomes Egon Schiele and his brushstrokes, his underfed
females, when I stop my friends
in the hallway with my clavicles,
their concern, when I can do it all for everyone
and be the best, almost perfect, almost
there,
when I wake every night for a year and a half
with dreams of food, when I resist
embraces, fall in love with Rilke and Rimbaud,
work three jobs to go to France, when I first hear
a word, Greek,
and a quiet
diagnosis, when I do not know
what it means, do not know that years can disappear
like the folds of an accordion, that 'better' and 'worse'
are just stickers on rotten apples, that wills
like bodies, may be broken,
I will look at the tail and note
with cynical smugness how the poster has been
digitally altered—how the whale is too balanced,
the foam too even, the barnacles
too stony, and the trees
too carefully arranged. The whale
will dive endlessly through ciacconas and concerti,
untouchable and blind
to its own tapered planes, eyes forward,
movement unheard, silent,
the blubber underwater and unseen, only the framed
flat perfection
of tail glinting that I will stare at and redraw,
lost in some passage of Bruch or Bach,
that I will long for in nature and not find in myself,
some honest spareness is all, a reason
to continue,
that I will run after, unceasing and unseeing,
until my pelvis, on its side, makes the curved flukes
of a whale's tail, fleshless,
with the ocean and a blanket stretched between
and I realize the horizon
still looks the same.

Part II:

Before the Beginning and After the End

Sestina

Summer evenings, while my sister practiced her flute alone,
tongues of soapy water sluiced down the drive:
my mother, bare-legged, hosed down the car to the stream
of Mozart, Poulenc, or Ibert. The cedar hedge blinked darkness
slowly across the lawn and watched the evening's mosquitos drifting
lazy menace upward from the damp. With luck, dinner was ready

by the time Dad came home—had to constantly be ready,
since we never knew when that would be. We ate alone
often, one or two children at the table, later drifting
upstairs to avoid my mother's tireless, diligent drive
toward homework, chores, showers, bed. Under darkness
our minds were our own and in the weightless stream

of thought preceding sleep, we swam, leapt the stream
like salmon tensed against the current, primed and ready
for rocks ahead. Autumn mornings brought their own darkness:
dawn alarms, uniforms, hot tea and oatmeal eaten alone
in narcissistic fatigue before the walk to the bus, the long drive
to the city. With paperbacks and earphones, with the rain, drifting

was easy, easy as the broken yellow lines that caught the eye drifting
and set the road to a metronome, turned the concrete to a stream
that flowed through the tunnel, over the bridge, up the flagstoned drive
to tiled hallways and tired classes, clicking clocks keeping us ready
for day's end when we might finally claim a breath, a minute alone
to scuff through leaves and fight the billowing quilt of darkness.

Streetlamps nailed yellow tacks into the purple sky. Darkness
made them buzz with greater zeal, like earnest evangelists drifting
house to house or picketing the liquor store on Sunday. Alone
on the walk home, stepping off the roaring bus into a sudden stream
of quiet, we took our time, counted steps, made sure we were ready
before we turned the final corner and trudged up the branch-strewn drive

to the verandah, wiped our feet, cast a last look back across the drive
in case that motor might be Dad—but the lights that cut the darkness
usually swept by without a pause, and besides, dinner wasn't ready—
yes, you can wash those potatoes and chop them for the soup, stop drifting
towards the T.V. and help, all I've had today is a constant stream
of chatter so do you mind, I can't lift this garbage can alone.

There is a noise in the drive and my father appears, absently drifting
in from the darkness to open his mail, smell the soup, ride the babbling stream
of news, sit down when dinner is ready. Upstairs, the sound of a flute practiced alone.

Sonnet to a Hip's Owner

for my father

Your leg dangles in air like an unanswered
question. Planted, it slants like a cliff-clung tree,
bent back against the earth with eyes to sea.
Your spine-seam curves, your axis tilts to the left—
liberal, loose, but rarely gauche or sinister.
By habit you sit to our right, lean,
sling the metal shadow over its partner
like a jukebox flipping discs—tinny,
but kind of sweet. Like a smelly dog. We
feel it in the room, wait for pop and buckle,
curse or worse. But you know silence—won't give
a laugh or 'what if' to the car that slid, kissed
your seventeen year-old hips and left you
walking in iambic pentameter.

Siena

Across the piazza ragged shouts channel laughter
curses blows scuffle leather
slam of ball on wall *Vai! Vai!* desperate
wire shadows grapple, black paperclips bend
and twist drive kick dive *porcamadonna!* hands slap hands
backs bums heads *como ragazzi* everywhere.
Darkness is irrelevant. Defeat is easily translated.
Ecco! rrrrip of tabbed cans
casual slurps clinks low voices recap
the post-game highlights.

Sudden calm
then glass
rattle
bottle
like cinema Skittles gathers speed
glottal
 down the slope
 faster
 feckless
 wicked
 jazz those cobbles play, off
kilter, on key.

Errancy is the order of the evening.
My companions are asleep, clutching backpacks like babies
to their chests. Tickets for the train they did not take
are tucked in khaki belts
with navy blue books that state
officially who they are. Mine with dirty pages,
different stamps and double languages.
Circumstantial fuckups make us friends. Laughing Spaniards
shared cigarettes and stories, then led us
to the campo, where the night is invited
merely for the theatrical.

On my back I try to sleep. Between the bleachers,
the world is a strip of black denim
punctured with familiar holes. Back home rain is falling
and my mother is cooking food I would not eat.
I breathe into the dark:
Mi dispiace.
The words return:
hard, must, stubborn, can't, more.
The bleachers will leave bruises.
Echoes jeer *should should should*

I peel them off, roll them into bullets
send them skipping like
cinema Skittles
 down the slope.

When the sky lightens, people will come with horses and flags
to race in circles around the piazza for the *contrada*,
the Virgin, the tourists. I will cheer them
and this thing that must be done, every summer
for four hundred years, as stubborn as hunger,
siamo stranieri
and tell myself I have no home but here.

London

grins in the concrete night, arms lash endearments
beer in the gutter *what the bloody* guitar beats
spill from exploding loudspeakers swell through
doors

rush
bodies tangled and clutching knots tighter clenching purse
in armpit, pulse-warm hands
on thighs hands whose slide twangs in-new-
ENdo *hey gorgeous* warm flick elbows anxious laughing
eeVAYszhun

repatriate the grabbed hand, tensile tossed in the wash of
liquid street spilled off
the grid, showgirl's violin-curves between the doors and all
of breath is a drinking, liquor on the air-tongue licks
cheeks, ear-nibbles arguments *c'm'ere sweetie* bus-bells
Where are you going?! Oh god brakes taxi!
turn right

wade—
is this how salmon do it, crave the flurry, last fight before the tranquil
fen that spawned their flesh,
the spawning still sprung in pretzel of bodies with death un-thought
before translucent beads of traffic-light *go* think of
those pale-blue sheets far away and
two arms together how hairs raise a certain awakens in the night, nothing clear
on these dark cobblestones when breath on the neck pillows your
beckoning in sleep and
drowsy hands to familiar smell
you lean close, flip over and

strange as grapefruits in a hardware store, white supermarket lights are sudden
bright implosions in the wreck
of steel and glass Oxford Street everything is aisles and staid high-
rises straight lines too starched for red dresses pick a path from beneath
the warbling feet of drunk-dancers and love-givers, one stop north
of sober your line springs taut potential for pirouettes over
cigarette pyres, stumble-blocks of newspaper and dropped
fry-cones hot
oil in your nose blood in your ears shudder the bones
always know which way to lurch
lean around pincer-lusts
about to puke propped against linoleum-lined pubs
inside tired arms wipe down tabletops
walled centuries sticky with smoke-smears *got a light?* shaking
head makes pink zags on the asphalt, headlights pour
out as the rain begins and his hand

across the street in her shirt she doesn't move her eyeshadow
is blue
slapped arm across your chest spins you, you spin
 out of someone's sweat brilliant curses flower in your fleeing
 steps and shouts dwindle behind your finger raised in farewell that's when
 fatigue hits,
tight shoes and frozen dentist face, so many popped
 smile-bubbles, throat dry eyes
on every corner bandstand and street
comedians sick of celibacy, loneliness floats
among strangers and shot glasses, almost
 there trajectory weakens all you can do is climb the stairs and collapse
on clean sheets

DSM IV-TR Criteria for Anorexia Nervosa

1. Refusal to maintain
body weight

[exercise as means to restraint]

minimally normal

vegetarian

(fat)

weight
age and height:
Weight loss

leading to

__lbs

shame

maintenance
body weight
<85%

steamed

of that expected

failure to make

__lbs

fat

expected

on the side

weight

fear

gain
period of growth,

no cheese

leading to

healthier

body weight
less than 85%

__lbs

disgusting.

of that expected.

2. Intense fear

no dressing

[exercise means restraint]

gaining weight

run

run

becoming

run

no milk

run

fat, even though

run

run

run

under
weight.

(healthy)

just mustard

(fat)

3. Disturbance

cut it in half

body weight shape

fit

harm-avoidance

experienced,
undue influence

(fat)

body weight shape

[exercise means]

self evaluation, or denial

seriousness
current

low

raw

__lbs

body weight.

guilt

fat

4. Amenorrhea

(at least
three consecutive
cycles)

I'm not hungry.

__lbs

napkin

postmenarchal
girls and women

shame

[restraint—]

Amenorrhea

can't can't can't can't

fat.

defined as

water

punish

periods occurring
only

FAT.

__lbs

following hormone

just tea.

must
must
must
must

(e.g., estrogen)

self-loathing

administration.

no milk.

__lbs

(heal?)

*no,
thank you*

In Rome

Sick, and spitting conjugations *in Italiano* under the sheets. *Ricordo il cielo.*
The *penzione's* yellow walls conjure postcards of happy nuns
and plump-cheeked children, slobbering dogs
and skanky geraniums flashing flesh in the night—
but the hallway is empty, the afternoon a white yawn
over the Castel Sant'Angelo. Down the hall,
a radio flutters static between two stations. Today
Rome is Roman like never before or again
and I am missing it. A boy yells below and in the echo

I am ten years old at camp, wretched with the flu, a fever
and no Mum, hearing shouts of Capture the Flag outside the nurse's cabin,
swallowing pine-needle pain because if I don't get better
I'll miss the canoe trip to Crystal Lake,
the starlight hike with flashlights at midnight,
the final-night fire-pit with the lifeguard's guitar,
last chance to swim, fish, climb, wander
the Eternal City I only have four days to learn.
Remember: *ricordo, ricordi, ricorda.*

The Italian word for *sky* and *heaven*
is the same in meteorology and Michelangelo—*cielo*,
a trapezoidal insult in blue from the window-frame. *Scordare*,
to forget, also means *to put out of tune*.

Light saunters across the room.
When it perches beside my head on the pillow, I snub its apology
and stumble to the bathroom, turn mysterious taps,
caldo, freddo, legs weak, a battery burnt out.
Jeans over pajamas to visit the shared kitchen

where an Austrian woman is eating chickpeas
with the concentration of a sadhu. One
at a time
balanced
on the tines
of the fork. Devotion
or discipline
—and perhaps
for her

neither encompasses injury. Her skin is tanned
and an English book on mindfulness
rests beside the bowl. I pretend not to watch
while the kettle rages its metal battle towards heat.
Cannot
not watch. That is how I eat, deliberately

slow, as if
stepping into a frozen river naked, always
in darkness, shrinking

from sight. *To see, vedere,*
to understand, capire. Hot water in the afternoon sun
blameless, but as the scent rises from the leaves,
ricordo, non posso scordare
another kitchen, mind screaming
silent under corner floodlights while the house sleeps,
careful not to slam the cupboard, save a banana for Dad's lunch, the house
beginning its morning a continent away, dawnlight
slanting into that other kitchen

where I know how to stack vegetables
to make them look bigger, how to fan a horizontal sweep
of rice-grains across the plate, how to place a napkin
carefully. Water, tea,
more water. Constant vacancy
acquires warmth, inverts the word *full*
like a photographic negative, plumps *hungry* to roundness
of a down pillow, the belly's gulf
comforting, the cold

nourishing. By now
I know my body
cannot compress further
but I cannot stop trying
to make it disappear.
Hunger, like need,
exists in the mind. Also pain—
hand held to the hot stove, flesh
absently burning—

In the small towns
of Umbria and Tuscany the women
regard me silently, pause before smiling; the men
more blatant, stare, or recoil
from my face, from the beautiful pear
I hold in my hand, the delicate green of pale cold
that reassures, the single thing I can bear to grasp
after forty-five minutes in the store, stomach and brain
revolting at the glass cases, revolting

the shopkeeper who yelled, *Per che non mangia? Mangia!*
Vieni qui, i guarda, tramezzini al prosciutto, al formaggio, guarda, cosa vuoi?
until I cried and the smells of the Ethiopian restaurant that drew me in
and the owner's question plunging cement piles into a riverbed, *If you are starving*

why don't you eat? then walking
outside with no answer and walking to forget his face and walking
all afternoon in the heat to remember *I'm not hungry* and walking deserted roads
until dark to achieve a reassuring
numbness and walking—

the chickpea woman is talking about natural foods and inner
wholeness as if I am supposed to know what she means
but her point has slipped down somewhere under the table
and her sighs of contentment and the slow
machination of her jaw and the brown globes
on the plate and the thought
of acquiring further mass
are making me nauseous and I want to lie down on the floor while someone
holds back the tide that rises

with the smell of the bland, terrifying broth I heat,
pleading for a truce between my two selves
and sore throat,
a calm
ten-minute ceasefire erupting
to a conflagration when I start to sip the soup
in my room weeping crazy Nero burning Rome playing his lyre
to the flames finishing the whole bowl not a thing left standing but still
the wonders that survive, perhaps tomorrow

I will go to the Vatican, see Michelangelo's sky, God's painted hands,
hold it all and remain empty, absent,
clean. I crawl into bed,
pray a Catholic prayer from childhood
to the framed poster of St. Peter's on the wall
for numbness, some grey
quiet until I am old and can hide fear and that body
in senility and a baggy cardigan, until the lines
become clearer between *it*

and *I*, until I discern,
finally, which section of the pie-chart
I will inhabit: the red 20%
that die, the green 30% they say
fully recover, or the grey remainder
that simply continue, calm in an empty room,
body hidden beneath a sheet,
staring into the blueness above and whispering *cielo*.

Au Cap Corse

The crust snaps like a campfire sparking when the long knife
aggresses it, when tanned hands peel back the brown quilts of tender, white beds
for *saucisson* and butter and roasted vegetables. We drool and order. *Asseyez-vous dehors*, she
says

—and we do, silent in summer's unpunctured dream of peace, sun-stunned
and sea-blasted on the dock's promenade. Children dive off a boat,
swim like shiny frogs in the cove's turquoise glass. The boat regards them,

content, its wooden generosity moulting this year's paint in curls
like a grand old lady trailing shawls. Heat vibrates. Our stomachs whine exhaustion,
thought pounded out of skin and brain by Mediterranean tumble-waves

and salt-sand flops, hunger blown into vacant shells of body
by the white furnace of horizonless sky, the afternoon's infinite curve toward colour
sensed first in seeping blue, in green orbs of eyes, the tips of crimson flowers

stolen for our hair. The children's island-heads inhabit dark-ringed
circles in the water, and their short braids flutter with their strokes, feisty tadpoles
tacked to burnished, laughing pebbles. The day's catch of mussels and crabs

languishes in buckets before the wooden shack that serves as café, restaurant, and bar.

Inside,
men in white t-shirts and navy sweaters tap boots against the brass rail, open cracked faces
shuttered by weather and hardship to talk, joke, and swear with friends. A dog sleeps.

Twilight slouches against the island's mountain-spine. Nestled from night in a westward
cove,
we breathe light and bite our nails, fester anticipation, knead hands on plastic chairs, we have
never
been this hungry, we could eat sand, or grass, or those strips of peeling paint

piled into a succulent salad with lemon on top, we are starving, Dominique's *pains au chocolat*,
Cecilia's licorice, my single, nibbled apple have evaporated inside of us like a desert's
memory
of green, and we are infant in queasy expectation. Heels clatter salvation:

la propriétaire, a magnificent, blue-striped ship with three white sails of plates, curtsying
before our embarrassment of *meris*. The bony fingers of our usual Paris baguettes shrivel
shame

before these plump palms, an entire loaf for each slaving traveler

cut in half, cut in half again, stuffed to dripping extravagance with grilled peppers, eggplants,

mushrooms, caramelized onions, tomatoes, whole fields bursting from the gaping, bready
maws
that mock our faltering jaws and puny teeth. We need vices and clamps, industrial elevators
with buttons stuck on Basement to squish these skyscraper meals, to make our gluttony
polite, but who could refuse this impossible effort to chew, or bear to miss such crunch and
slither,
this glorious ache that shivers below each ear, the glow of taste and colour and weight
that fills our stomachs like a tide mounting up the beach. I am shaking from pleasure and
relief
and fear. I am eating
forbidden bread and slick of oil, breaking every rule of less and less
in great, gulping bites, I am expanding like a sponge in soapy water, slopping need
from every fold, the empty plate growing a typhoon
of regret on the horizon, greasing the dark tunnels of depression that follow—
but for once the urge to punish falters, cracks with the shiny top of this fresh-baked loaf
and the sanctifying grins of friends and strangers. Tucked in a sun-spackled packet
of earth and sea, terror's rabid dog forgets its half-chewed foot
and falls asleep beneath my ribs. Its rank, furry smell smothers in a steam of thyme and
garlic,
the warmth of food soothing the electric jumps of heartbeat
that sound dizzy alarm below my shirt, fatigue permitting an inexplicable, golden instant
of relief from the metal pretzel of fear that locks my throat,
letting it sink, for this hour, to the clear bottom of the cove,
its spiked talons invisible under a temporary smear
of blindness, weight real or imagined
suddenly absent, half-buried in the sand,
and only occasionally glinting in the sunlight.

Spin this telescope around

Let me be small
and infinitely far away.

You say I am sick.
You say it is in my head.

But look:
spots on a leaf. The forest
is dying.

Trees are blind
and expand in girth
unashamedly.

Their dying is shameless.

Why praise them?
We steal their breath
and keep our fingers in the fall.

You say I am dying.
Rottenness
in the flesh.
Too many eyes.

A tree has no eyes
and does not eat.
No need to starve.

Let me be fuel and fuelless
let me be an empty burn
anomalous and absent
scorched earth of a star.

Let me return to air.

Waiting Room

Most of us slide in
before we realize
we are here. Folded into skin-slip envelopes
we come to be ripped open
shaken out
decoded.

In black leather armchairs, we sink to various depths
and touch or refuse to touch
the things that command obsession.
Stomachs to learn stamina.
Curves to flay away.
Arms to mimic fence rails.
Spines to teach walls straightness.

Glances shiver between us.
Value accrues
with the infinite reduction of mass.
When our names sound
we cross the carpet in silence.

Behind oak doors,
ballast is locked or lost—habitual life-rafts
picked apart, professionally plundered,
then restowed
for next week. The wreckage
read. Our alphabet
undone.

The waves begin at this door
or before, with the rattling elevator,
the tinned symphony and sympathy.
The secretary smiles.
Kleenex sprouts beside the couch.
We are full of violence
and calm as frogs in the pot.

There is nothing in this padded interior
that can harm. The flowers
are real; no kitsch admissible.
We wait politely
at the limits of sincerity
believing in nothing
but what is not there.

You must find the lightness inside you,

he tells me. His words slide
down violet tunnels into panic. Tines in the throat,
a bamboo box of Kleenex on the table to my left.

Beyond the pine-slat blinds, the world overflows
with del Sarto eyes and Matisse dancers,
Botero arms, Renaissance torsos, Giacometti bones praised

in cash and print. Concrete walls echo Banksy's colourful anonymity,
grimy sidewalks boast invisibility—and what must it be like
to not have a body. My thighs bloom

over the armchair. White peonies,
those exhausted cabbages, unfurl their vulnerable imaginings
onto the concrete under the window.

The professional across from me
listens with the attention of a deaf-mute translator,
leans back in his chair, scribbles something on a clipboard,

staples months and meal plans to a red folder,
plucks a manual from a wooden shelf. His arms
snake slender reassurance through the air with his smile, so many gentle questions

answers workbooks tissues petals and spent bedsheets,
there's so much laundry that piles up like orange peels and tea-leaves
when one has to unlearn one's first language an hour a week,

as green light through the leaves throws a shabby lace dress on the sidewalk.
Pacific blue shadows.
I do not miss Vancouver,

its basement suites and stucco, the smell of moldy walls and wet shoes, bubble tea,
the Skytrain's chime, coffee-steamed buses, or the eastern flight of crows
over Highway 1 in the afternoon—but

the mountains, ocean,
the moss breath
of rainy nights. Cherry blossoms in March. Here,

Montreal's May rainforest grows gardens overnight.
Flowers bud, burst, die in a day.
It is raining. The cushions in this office

make me want to sleep forever under the buttery lamplight,
the papery orchid on the wall,
the benevolent gaze of the professional

who picks at the knots in my mind. Each week
I watch the clock from this chair,
draw blueprints from an unknown basement in the dark,

explain the logic of evident fact,
of a disease that shows me I deserve to die
for being healthy, to die

because I am alive.
Metaphors may be useful
in coping with reality.

When I was a child I had a small white dog.
She walked paths in the yard, wore the grass down to dirt,
a woolly engine on the track.

She died. Nothing
grows there still.
Fingers picking, clipboard, cushion.

I wonder if it is all in my mind.
Light flits with the passing traffic, froth rots on the step.
My mind is only the world. My mind is

—so successful at hanging on, how much time
left today and when will they deadhead those peonies, there is nothing
more that they can give.

Inhale. Hold it. In your head
hum the opening notes of the *Goldberg Variations*. Do not
look down at your body. Take your mind out of this room, this terror, think

of March in Vancouver. Cherry trees clutch popcorn in green fingers,
burst into translucent laughter at the flickering sun.
Beneath the fragrant parasols of Burrard Street, Arbutus,

Nanaimo, and King Edward, sneakers pick up haiku petals,
trudge poetry into the house. Newspapers and needles hide under pale-pink snow;
cement sky, slickered asphalt, mountain ankles under cloud.

Two minutes left. The rain has stopped; outside
the sun is an invisible brightness. If you can just see
the light that is in you, he says.

Between belief and its absence
there is a grey-chaired waiting room
with classical music on the radio. I'm sitting there, humming.

The metronome ticks as I put on my coat: *dolce, piano*. One hundred sixty-eight hours
in seven days. Forty thousand one hundred fifty-two hours
in seven years. I pay by cheque

and go out into the proportioned world
of Montreal's fecund May aquarium. When I come back next week,
the peonies are gone. The cement stoop

is clear but for a pot of geraniums
that stick out their red tongues and tell me to stop
thinking about dead things.

Anorectic

To matter returning.
To air, to the gradual overthrow
of all sensation.

Disappear. Eviscerate
desire like hotel wallpaper lie
obsessive unnoticed observing all
flat.

Breaking out from the cavity of stomach
the dead
inverse womb between hips like fins reassures
empty as fingers
that meet around a bicep
as these concave thighs and cold
or bruises like cigarette burns
on the spine. Kneel
in this cloister,
peaceful habit of de Chirico dreams
shadow-skin unbroken covering
but not enough,
all eyes and mirrors always looking
—beyond this hood
nothing. No know no one.

Remove the physical. Draw closer
thin gossamer skin
so the blood, ruth, glass of these streets
becomes a pure mathematics
transfiguration. Watch: as the tree falls to grave
flesh intercedes
creatures feed, haunt the ruin of height
purge and eat one another until a bone-white prophet stands,
speaks of a city
sickly-salmon pink, soon to be scraped
clean.
Scapula, clavicle, vertebrae, mandible.

Long—
to sleep,
to run, desire crowding sense of knowthinkfeelknow
but still this skin

stretched like ducksfoot webbing defiantly present and
soft, paddling in circles.
Evaporate.

To matter returning. To air,
the gradual overthrow
of all sensation.

I me skin you eye fat rib flat sin cringe frail cry die?
—Fly.

Overture

Where was I going? I thought I would know
when I got there, someone would tell me.

It was not what I had imagined. Sounds
were louder, the wind was colder on my skin.

Can't ever stop. The climb uphill
always—bones are always the same size.

Strength is measured in resistance.
“I wish I had your body...”

Or fatigue. The heat
of sun on closed eyes.

Concrete. Infinite. *You'll never get there.*
I'll light the way forever; keep running.

Jacob wrestled his angel in the night.
Rilke his angels, his demons, precious.

You want me to stop? Tell the truth:
“Every angel is terrifying.”

See your shadow. “The *size* of it!”
Mother, father—forgive me, this imperative.

Walk. Wait. Coffee. Apple. Walk.
Look at the child—she's smiling. Perfect.

Go to the rock. No, as far as the tree.
Freedom in belief. The other tree.

The seagulls slip and dive in space.
What happened to you?

Too many selves. So much light.
I will never stop running.

My hair is thin. My arms, not yet.
Keep going. This weakness.

Beat your wings against the wind.
Swallow air. These tears.

III. And All is Always Now

Passages de Paris

This then, I thought, as I looked round about me, is the representation of history. It requires a falsification of perspective. We, the survivors, see everything from above, see everything at once, and still we do not know how it was.

(Sebald 125)

Passages de Paris

Wer aber *sind* sie, sag mir, die Fahrenden, diese ein wenig
Flüchtigern noch als wir selbst, die dringend von früh an
wringt ein *wem, wem* zu Liebe
niemals zufriedener Wille? Sondern er wringt sie,
biegt sie, schlingt sie und schwingt sie,
wirft sie und fängt sie zurück; wie aus geölter,
glatterer Luft kommen sie nieder
auf dem verzehrten, von ihrem ewigen
Aufsprung dünneren Teppich, diesem verlorenen
Teppich im Weltall.
Aufgelegt wie ein Pflaster, als hätte der Vorstadt-
Himmel der Erde dort wehe getan.

“Die Fünfte Elegie”
(Rilke, *Selected* 174)

But tell me, who *are* they, these wanderers, even more
transient than we ourselves, who from their earliest days
are savagely wrung out
by a never-satisfied will (for *whose* sake)? Yet it wrings them,
bends then, twists them, swings them and flings them
and catches them again; and falling as if through oiled
slippery air, they land
on the threadbare carpet, worn constantly thinner
by their perpetual leaping, this carpet that is lost
in infinite space.
Stuck on like a bandage, as if the suburban sky
had wounded the earth.

“The Fifth Elegy”
(Rilke, *Selected* 175)

Planes create their own particular brand of vacuum. Schedules unravel as the earth spins below, as metal tubes attempt emancipation from the laws of time, climate, and jurisprudence. Without circadian rhythm and terrestrial location, cracks form in identity. In the air, location is quantitatively precise and ontologically hypothetical, dependent on communal devotion to the placement of lines and the setting of clocks. Relax white knuckles. Prostrate yourself to the Mecca beneath your feet, where hours are equidistant and waking comes with morning. Seal minutes in Ziploc bags until instruments decree their release; tick with sound and fury. The fear of flying is the fear of dissolution.

For us, flying westward, through skies of luminescent cloud, time is frozen like a summer picnic—an endless, blinding afternoon. We taunt the revolution of the earth, dare it to pull ahead. The hours neither drag nor advance. There are no hours. Nothing moves. We sit in an unblinking sky, pulling books and Easy-Wipes out of bags, eating tin-foiled, plastic-wrapped food on fold-out beige tables, watching fluorescent scribbles cross a satellite image on a hand-sized screen, waiting in civil collusion for our release. An old Kevin Costner movie blares silently from screens glimpsed between stiff headrests. When it ends, plastic shades descend and polyester blankets unfold to an artificial evening. The half-inch of sky through the double-paned glass glows a Yukon summer dream of twilight. Children giggle alertness at their sleeping parents.

Home is a runway beyond the curvature of the earth, a glass door behind which friends and family will gather to collect us at some distant, delayed hour. The past is locked in the cargo hold's metallic permafrost, in wheeled suitcases tagged in tri-letter codes, strange capsules of other places and times far below. We have always lived in this tin-can desert of hangnails, air conditioning, and static electricity. Check your ticket—yes, that's it, my name. Sleep, wake, wish to sleep some more. Excuse me, the bathroom. Tepid tea, little packets of pepper, pre-programmed radio, BBC World Report, football scores from some eastern, all-knowing day. Read the same page three times. Ten minutes for two arms pulled from a sweater. An airport paperback is a bus speeding through a riot of dazzling streets, narrow alleys with bright laundry on the line, different numbers on the doors. Intersections pile meaninglessly one upon the other. Toothbrush left by the sink in the last town. Stewardesses move up and down the padded aisles. Green curtains are twitched and flicked aside. Could you please use the toilets in the centre? Certainly. Customs forms. Wheel-wobbling carts of coffee. Morning announced in soothing tones. The determined enacting of a day, desperate apprehension of displacement. And outside, the blinding white and blue. Is there an ending? Is this a ship? Is this a journey? Do we move?

Travel comes from the French *travail*, originally referring to a hard day's journey. *Journée*, *diurnus*, *diurnal*, *dies*. And the day too dies. Berlioz heard it—the *dies irae* flashing its guillotine-glint before the Witches' Sabbath (*Fantastique*). Madness bearing the blessing of death.

Passare, to pass, *passus*, a step.

Metaphor: transport.

Charon: You cannot pass without payment.

But one both carries and is carried—the road and the walker are the same. A pound of flesh, Portia said, but not a drop of blood; roads, like arteries, cannot be separated from the body they move through, or the bodies that move through them.

A landscape is always the suspension of a passage, and this passage occurs as a separation, an emptying out of the scene or of being: not even a passage from one point to another or from one moment to another, but the step [*le pas*] of the opening itself. This *step* is the immobilization in which forward movement is grasped as a basis or a “footing,” a span of the hand, the marking out of a measure according to which a world can be laid out. The walker stops, and his step becomes that of a compass, the angle and amplitude of a disposition of space, on whose step—at whose threshold, at whose point of access—a gaze presents itself as a gaze.

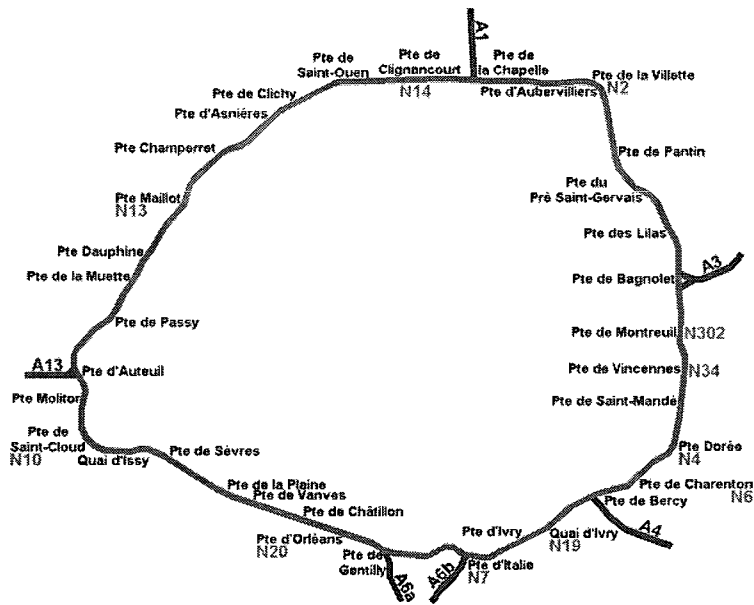
(Nancy 61-62)

Shrink into the window: look out over hours of razed prairie, snow-scarred fissures of the Rockies, smudge of summer forest fires in the west. Be glass; be transparent and invisible. The air outside this window is automatic ice, -40° C. Far behind us to the east, the Seine moves moodily into the dark. If I am all eyes, no one will see me; their gazes will fall through an empty frame of a door, into the endless beyond. Count ribboned rivers, follow headlights along the highways. Familiarity now reprehensible, the way ahead set, doors locked, metal

sealed, air piped into reluctant lungs, warm cave of family ahead—*No—let me go back*—Dig fingers into the swollen banks of arms, dig to hurt, to forget, to distract, to remember—

Descend lower, descend only
Into the world of perpetual solitude,
World not world, but that which is not world,
Internal darkness, deprivation
And destitution of all property,
Desiccation of the world of sense,
Evacuation of the world of fancy,
Inoperancy of the world of spirit;
This is the one way, and the other
Is the same, not in movement
But abstention from movement; while the world moves
In appetency, on its metalled ways
Of time past and time future.

(Eliot, *Four Quartets* 18)



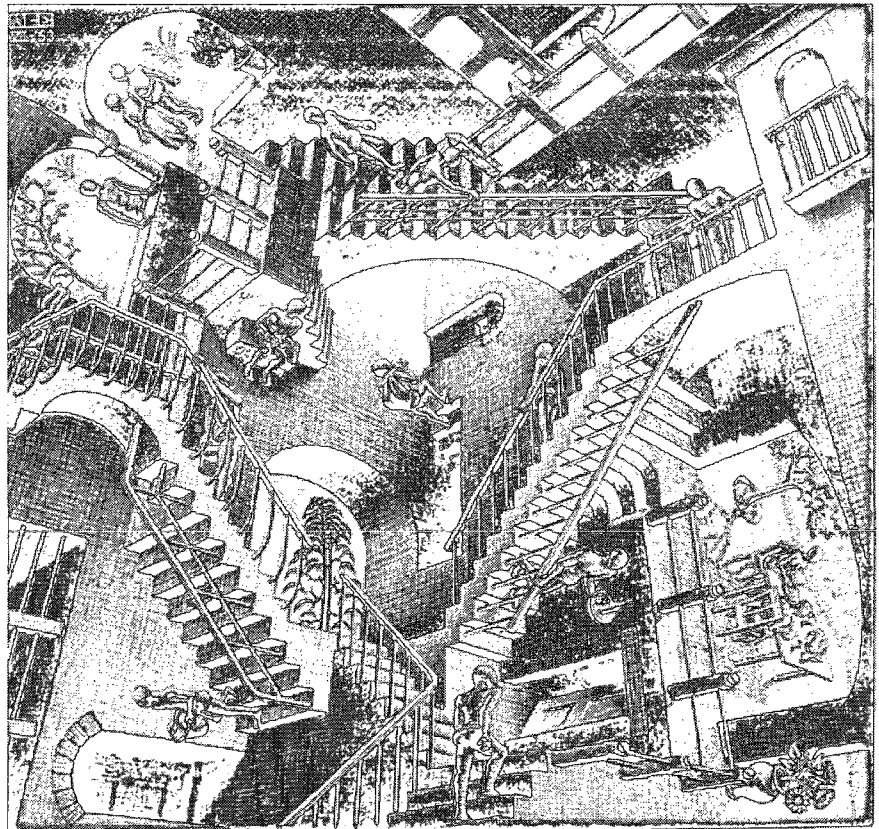
Bones move in space, lateral across the earth, vertical towards the air. Within an ossified cage, the heart pulses, cushioned from the external world by a slip of skin and a borderland of flesh. Safe as a goldfish in a toilet bowl.

Say your brain is lying to you.
Say you do not see the lie.
What is to separate your brain from the world?

It is possible to draw closer to the air.

It is possible to
reduce the distance
between oneself and
the world to the
thickness of a
butterfly's wing.

It is possible to
become transparent,
to raise bones like
beansprouts and
rake veins over the
thin frost of skin.



To reduce the gap between one's heart and the void to 40 uncertain beats per minute.

It is possible to walk

a line from the earth into space

without realizing the abyss below. Sight and perception are a greased slide. How do you unlearn what you were never taught? There is no fence between belief and reality. Home is the between-places, the sweep of streets and unfamiliar faces, the thrill of speed and effort that comes with hours of uncounted steps. Loneliness only burns when one stands still.

And what you thought you came for
Is only a shell, a husk of meaning
From which the purpose breaks only when it is
fulfilled
If at all. Either you had no purpose
Or the purpose is beyond the end you figured
And is altered in fulfilment.

(Eliot, *Four Quartets* 50)

You are with me, stranger, unspeaking, your gaze always on my back, watching need and greed battle in my brain. You are all eyes, invisible, as I wish someday to be.

We start in Paris, in the dark. Move through wooden doors into night coolness, into the lives of hundreds who prayed and saved and piled its walls. Only slowly do we become accustomed to the dimness, to the dusty murmurs that congregate in echoes at the feet of pillars. Stony roots branch to trees; and inexorably our gaze is drawn up, past the glass palettes that shimmer multi-hued daylight to the stories-high ceiling, peaked like praying hands.

I cannot breathe. The immensity overwhelms as the balance of mountains stands poised upon a pin. Musings of eight hundred years beat a silent pulse—how should one pray, what

should a God be, what should a house of God be, what kind of ant am I to raise my feelers so high?

When the organ starts, my chest vibrates like a cello. I wish with sudden violence that I could open my mouth and let the river escape in Gregorian chant, even as the choir begins and a single soprano touches the rose window above. Around the blocks of narrow wooden chairs, candles send incense to your nostrils. You imagine their heat, the sudden licking shock against the face as you bend close, concentrating, holding the long match steady then plunging it sharply into the sand. Cameras flicker like sparks in the gloom.

Je le portais [l'idéal] dans la rue, les pieds sur le verglas, les épaules couvertes de neige, les mains dans mes poches, l'estomac un peu creux quelquefois, mais la tête d'autant plus remplie de songes, de mélodies, de couleurs, de formes, de rayons et de fantômes. Je n'étais plus une dame, je n'étais pas non plus un *monsieur*. On me poussait sur le trottoir comme une chose qui pouvait gêner les passants affairés. Cela m'était bien égal, à moi qui n'avais aucune affaire. On ne me connaissait pas, on ne me regardait pas, on ne me reprenait pas ; j'étais un atome perdu dans cette immense foule.

(Georges Sand, qtd. in Nesci et al. 263)

Say there is a young woman of ambiguous origin and uncertain destination, oversensitive, magnetic, and unable to stop spinning.

Say she is sick. (She will not believe you.)

Say the relationship between causality and predicted outcomes is as yet undetermined.

Say she cannot stop for anyone. Say if she stops, the centrifuge of her brain will fly apart, her body disintegrate, her family dissolve. Walking toward, and away from, death; walking to stay alive and escape living.

Shave away fragments. See giants
in every mirror.
Dissolve gradually into space.

Anger's my meat; I sup upon myself,
And so shall starve with feeding.

(Volumnia, *Coriolanus* 4.2.50-51)



Rilke was reluctant to undergo psychoanalysis for fear of losing his angels
as well as his demons
(Goodall 47).

The Green Men are up already, sweating in their plastic suits and sunglasses, sweeping rubbish into the sluices of water through the gutter. One of them drives a small cart with a vacuum tube that plucks at leaves and cigarettes, runaway paper bags and newspapers. With their fluorescent vests and belts of tools, they resemble an alien army come to impose efficiency on the sleepy city, brandishing long brooms and rubber gloves. Their emerald suits match the UFO-shaped receptacles for wine-bottles. They do not look at us as we stride past them along the quai, our feet casting echoes like dice against the apartments *en face*.

It is early; the sun scampers over metal posts, glints fiercely against the monuments that challenge its supremacy. White clouds whip west along the Seine, playing tag through the Tuileries and towards the Pont de l'Alma. We do not speak. The wind in our faces rolls our scarves out like medieval flags; we let them stream, but tuck our chins deeper into our wool collars. Your hat is pulled closer than usual about your ears, and my scalp, unprotected, absently records the itch of cold. Across the river, the black shapes of the first, intrepid bouquinistes huddle around their shuttered lockers. *Un express au comptoir...* After the morning's caffeine shoots from pinched fingers to throat, the lingerers stand in the doorway of the café one by one, lighting their cigarettes and pulling on fingerless gloves while they gaze judiciously at the sky. *Oui, 'fait froid aujourd'hui*. Fortified against the bitter wind, they take more time than usual to arrange their stalls of paperbacks and prints, weighing them down with stones and small knick-knacks, checking the large elastic-bands that cradle postcards and old ephemera to prevent a breezy exodus into the Seine. Under their large overcoats, it is impossible to tell whether they are men or women. When they speak, their voices are guttural, their laughter like fingernails caught in rough corduroy. The clipped, hanging posters fan out from one side. Display in order, they hitch their coats and settle on

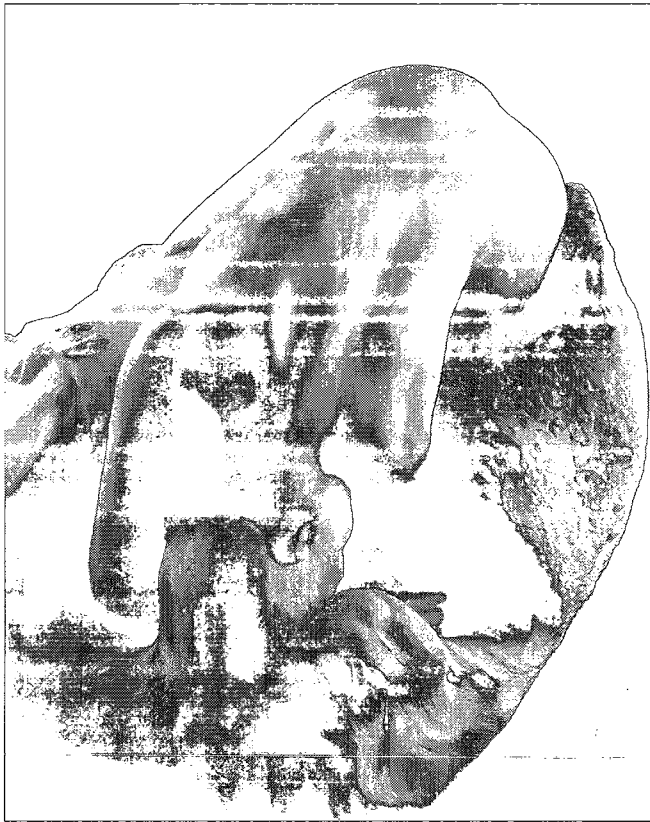
battered wooden chairs or barstools, open their books, let their eyes roam over the river, up the sidewalk to the first specks of approaching tourists.

The blue of this sky has never been seen before. The stripped trees slice it into translucent polygons, cast cobalt shades against the glassy eyes of the apartment buildings. Inside my coat, shivers of pure thrill wrench my ribs. The quai is empty. Our bid is the first. We could have walked through the Esplanade des Invalides, past the huge Air France building and across the great, grassy expanse to the other side of the golden dome, glanced past the flags of the consulates and taken the Rue de l'Université east—that might have been faster. But the day's clarity removes choice like heroin, the wind carries the taste of a distant sea, we breathe and swim, feet lapping at stone. We take the quai to watch the sluggish passage of boats on the river, to observe the crisp poses of the guards in front of the Assemblée Nationale, to count the bridges and the palaces we pass, to avoid the featureless intimidation of the Assemblée's gated back entrance and the security booth, the unmarked black cars whose windows swallow light, the lusterless grey of l'Université interrupted only by the flash of St. Germain, the bustle of the Rue des Saints Pères.

Leaving the golden arms of the Pont Louis-Alexandre behind, we walk east, towards Notre Dame, anticipating unplanned adventures. We pass the mammoth Musée d'Orsay, ignore the blank stares of the white-runnered tourists in line for their Impressionist encounter, warming their hands over sleep-hot mouths. They will forget their numb fingers when they step into the sculpture-filled concourse, shrink before Manet's *Olympia*, run imagined fingers over the stone waterfall of Rodin's *Danaïd*, meditate in the dim chapel before Degas's pastel dancers, trace the changing daylight of Monet's Amiens cathedral, joke about Van Gogh's ear and gaze uneasily into his swirling eyes, peer on tip-toe through the enormous clock-face of the old train-station, slip into the ecstasy of spilled light in Caillebotte's *Floor Strippers*, study the pulsing blue blood beneath the folded hands of Renoir's young girls, then retire, exhausted, to the overpriced café for a bottle of juice and a croissant. Open the guide, check off the list, decide what's next.

A city to see through the lens of a camera, to carve into a circuit of boulangeries and cafés, to squeeze pleasure from in plastic, controlled bursts, to sit endlessly eating if one is weak

enough to rest... or a city made for hours of wandering, for flirting with clichés, for testing limits of representation, for enduring speechless immensity, for tasting every meaning of cold.



An intoxication comes over the man who walks long and aimlessly through the streets. With each step, the walk takes on greater momentum; ever weaker grow the temptations of shows, of bistros, of smiling women, ever more irresistible the magnetism of the next streetcorner, of a distant mass of foliage, of a street name. Then comes hunger. Our man wants nothing to do with the myriad possibilities offered to sate his appetite. Like an ascetic animal, he flits through unknown districts—until, utterly exhausted, he stumbles into his room, which receives him coldly and wears a strange air.

(Benjamin 417)

Paris is an artist's sketchbook come to life—an ongoing architectural experiment. Centuries jostle against each other at every turn. Curving, medieval market streets shrug insolently at Haussman's wide boulevards; the Tour Montparnasse casts a steely glare at the Tour Eiffel; the necropolis of Père Lachaise haunts the bright bustle of the Rue de Rivoli. Standing between the open arms of the Palais du Louvre, one can stare westward and walk an invisible tightrope across the city, from the glass heart of I. M. Pei's pyramid to the Arc de Triomphe far to the west. Find your balance and begin.

From the terrace of the Louvre, stroll through the dust-coloured Arc du Carrousel and skip down stone steps into the rustling green of the Jardins des Tuileries. The air is cooler here. In winter, the black skeletons of the chestnut, ash, and elm trees rattle a bleak counterpoint to the scraping claws of crows on the iron lampposts. Today, the wind through the thick-leaved branches comes in waves, like an uncanny, air-borne sea, frothily pushing against the gravel path below. The toes of your shoes acquire a fine, white dust as you crunch quietly westward. Between the trees in every direction, fellow-walkers push prams or pace solitarily on trails parallel or perpendicular to yours. Follow the path straight, past the couples and old people resting on the iron benches, until you reach the wide stone pond. Its circular walls are straddled by children stroking the surface of the water with leaves or timorous fingers. Weave quietly around the newspaper-reading masses that lounge silently on hundreds of metal chairs around the pond, solitary figures smoking cigarettes and pulling bright scarves tighter around their necks.

At the park's end, pass through the iron gate into the stark, cobblestoned grimness of the Place de la Concorde. The sky seems suddenly immense, colourless, its flat glare of grey demanding a reason for your presence. To your right, the glittery hotels and shops of the Place Vendôme and the Madeleine watch a ceaseless parade of black, shiny cars whisk fashionistas, film stars, princes, and comtesses to the inner courts and salons of the privileged. (If you have to ask how much it is, don't bother.) To your left, beyond the stone balustrade in the distance, the Seine winds her way beneath bridges of stone, metal, and gold. On days like this, when the sky is torn between dusky gloom and unfiltered sun, the thumping scaffold of the guillotine seems still present, a bloody specter overlooking the incongruously clean cobblestones two centuries later. Wade straight ahead through a gap in the unmarked lanes of speeding cars. From the foot of the mammoth obelisk, launch your gaze down the Champs-Élysées to the distant blotch of the Arc de Triomphe, and begin to walk toward it, choosing a side of the avenue as you leave the Place de la Concorde.

Underfoot, the Métro's Ligne 1 moves smoothly along the city's axis, balancing the ornate, stone loads of former rulers that you pass on your route above. *Je me baladais sur l'avenue...* Sing in your head as you march up the Champs Élysées, past herds of Americans, Japanese, Australians purchasing elegantly-bagged souvenirs. After long minutes walking

this gauntlet of lights and logos, the menacing bulk of the Arc de Triomphe just ahead is a strange relief. Descend into the pedestrian tunnel, move easily beneath the arena of gladiatorial Peugeots zipping around the Place de l'Étoile. When you emerge under the stone ceiling of the arch, you see a small flame in the ground overlooked by carved names, *Ypres, Verdun, Somme*—the tomb of the unknown soldier. The small crowd of people gathered before it is somber and respectful. Here, at the Place de l'Étoile, the fulcrum of the path behind you becomes a compass. The city spins around you, opens itself, smiles mysteriously, and disappears around a corner.

Paris created the type of the flâneur. What is remarkable is that it wasn't Rome. And the reason? Does not dreaming itself take the high road in Rome? And isn't that city too full of temples, enclosed squares, national shrines, to be able to enter *tout entière*—with every cobblestone, every shop sign, every step, and every gateway—into the passerby's dream? The national character of the Italians may also have much to do with this. For it is not the foreigners but they themselves, the Parisians, who have made Paris the promised land of the flâneur—the “landscape built of sheer life,” as Hofmannsthal once put it. Landscape—that, in fact, is what Paris becomes for the flâneur. Or, more precisely: the city splits for him into its dialectical poles. It opens up to him as a landscape, even as it closes around him as a room.
(Benjamin 417)

The first printed work on linear perspective in art was a text by Jean Pélerin (pseudonym Viator), published in 1505 in Toul, France (Descargues 13). The checkerboard floors of Renaissance interiors emerge from a lone Pilgrim's eye, a silent watcher with steady gaze, to converge at a single vanishing point from which all things look even. Step off the path, away from the central position of the viewer, and the world distorts alarmingly.

I visit the Louvre by night every week, slipping out of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts and down the narrow sidewalk of Rue Bonaparte, across the broad pavement in front of the Académie Française and over the Pont des Arts, through the Cour Carrée to the pyramid glowing like a

golden prism in the crepuscular dark. The tourists who attend the Nocturnes au Louvre are quieter than those during the day; the school-tours and exigent American culture-hounds have retired to St. Michel for overpriced meals in authentic Parisian cellars, *prix fixe* dinners from bilingual menus. I wave my student card at the gum-chewing guards in the Richelieu wing and make the circuit of now-familiar friends that astound each time. Cupid and Psyche, hovering in an embrace so intimate that Canova became invisible as he sculpted them, so as not to disturb their touch. A twelfth-century Madonna gazing from a Byzantine icon with weary, unsurprised eyes. And upstairs, unnoticed in the corner tonight by the couples that drift through the Dutch galleries, two modest windows onto stillness. Vermeer's *Lacemaker* and *Astronomer*, so intent on their tasks that we are startled out of sound into the silence of their scenes. A pilgrim is someone looking for an answer. Vermeer's slow pace was legendary, his precision staggering even today—sand-grains mixed into the pigment, pearls of particular light. What is my question? The *Lacemaker* is calm, her face an unclouded bowl of thought as she pulls her needle through space. The *Astronomer* leans over the table, anxiously scanning a globe for validation. There is a point in crafting a painting at which the inquiry becomes the answer—an image uncreated by hand or will pops from its rectangular walls, astonished. Vermeer's lines of sight expand, unnoticed, into the lives of those he paints. The characters that people his day-lit rooms regard infinity calmly, gazing at an internal horizon with the unconscious self-absorption of pregnant women. What certitude can be found in an answer, in an end to an unmapped journey? What does time mean when one is locked in a broken clock, tripping but not advancing? Vermeer knew what was meant by actively stopping. To sew lace in a pure Dutch light—immanence unmeasurable, “still point of the turning world.” No movement, no hope, no possibility of penance or change, only inevitability, like the countries between notes at the beginning of the Goldberg Variations. I leave the paintings, terrified. What remains when one abandons belief in belief?

I came to Paris to study art, to learn about painting from the work of ancient hands. More truthfully, I came for some glimpse of a future, one in which I am alive, unresentfully. My parents were afraid of what I would do if I remained at home in my mind's darkness. They say I must rejoin the earth, stop tracing lines and dig in, attain purchase in solid presence. Garner flesh, cover bone.

They are trusting me to continue pushing against inner rules, to push as they have pushed for me, to accept bites of meat, pasta, or yogurt, to ignore the reflexes of self-revulsion, to tie myself to a sofa and a spoon instead of striding into the dark. Their fear makes me curious about my own lack of fear. If I fall, no one in Paris will notice; I am just another moving shadow, grey overcoat in the streets.

Initially, physical activity is used as a means of weight control, but with time it can become an end in itself. In the extreme, individuals with eating disorders can have difficulty refraining from exercise despite adverse physical consequences (e.g., an unhealthy decrease in body weight; decreased density; stress fractures). Additionally, symptoms reminiscent of drug withdrawal, including anxiety, depression, and irritability, often develop when these individuals are unable to exercise. The high comorbidity of drug abuse and eating disorders provides further evidence of a common neurobiological basis for these disorders.
(D'Anci et al. 6-7)

Movement is indeterminate. We are all drifting towards some idea of recovery. Every streetcorner brings another crossroads in the distance. The problem with a diagnosis is that there is always a third term. There is an internal experience of a state of affairs. There is an external experience voiced by others. And there is the illness itself—mutable and nonverbal. *Qui décide la route?* I am not allowed to look back; I cannot see a thing. Everything is an effort. Any amount too much. Longing to be between; to be unpinned; to bear no responsibility; to have no needs; to have no self—only the pure hinge-dance of legs and arms, face cut clean by wind, punishment craved and soothing, beauty always just ahead. The path suspended between life and death: Orpheus, Hermes, Eurydice. *“He has turned around.”*



AN patients perceive AN not only as a medical disease, but also as psychologically meaningful behavior.

This does not imply that the anorectic behavior is chosen or can be voluntarily controlled, or that the individual meanings that AN patients claim drive their anorectic behavior have etiological significance. It does imply, however, that to these patients the anorectic behavior, either from the onset of illness or later on, attracts a meaning.
(Epeset et al. 561)

Si on est honnête, on a tous le désir de frotter le corps contre le visage de la terre, de s'effacer au point de disparaître, de regarder l'infini en regardant la fin. De ne plus être. Too many decisions. How much, how often, how little, of what, how slowly, how expensive, how cold, how long before this storm blows over or flattens us all. The poem of the mind in the act of finding what will suffice.

My mother: every morning, CBC radio in her headphones, purple fleece jacket and a lust for wind and sea. During the silence of my adolescence, when we could not talk to each other without slammed doors, we both went to the sea for respite, alone. Eventually we went together, long walks over the bluffs, fragile beginnings of conversations, through the forest and down the wooden steps to the shore. The bones that push my face into the world are hers. We have the sea in our blood. Childhood sprang out of cedar trees, dirt paths, beach rocks, railway tracks—Crescent Beach, the Thousand and One Steps, Dogwood Park—an

entire geography discovered on foot, from the radius of a white house with green shutters.
Paths through the forest known without thought, avoided after dark if alone, tempted under
stars with the dog and a flashlight.

The wilderness just outside of the window, coyotes howling at night and deer sprinting
across the road. We never talked about the woods inside.

Is it like this
In death's other kingdom
Waking alone
At the hour when we are
Trembling with tenderness
Lips that would kiss
Form prayers to broken stone.

(Eliot, "The Hollow Men" 492)



My family did not recognize the red
shoes that kept me moving, dancing,
twitching, shivering until nothing else
fit. Can't believe anyone, not allowed
to believe myself. I do not know what
they see. My mind is only the world.

Lights change—follow the green. Hit the river, turn left. No maps. Only black-and-white rules. A loose-robed monk pads up ahead, dodged by a flock of startled pigeons.

Entrancing shadow of a sparrow—*suivez-le au bout de la rue, essayez de devenir où elle va, comment est-ce qu'elle plonge sans peur vers la fleuve*. What does the pleasure of a bird feel like? Like walking.

En marchant, on ne doit pas assumer son histoire. On construit une histoire dans chaque pas—chaque pas casse la croûte de l'inconnu, de l'impossible.

To walk is to sketch a new self, present the possibility of eternal revision.

To negotiate mass and volume.

To sew a seam upon the earth.

To catalogue time, to annotate place, to step over rifts, to wade through depths imagined and real.

To pawn eyes for wonders, or have them stolen in the night.

To take tea with Ceres and Persephone.

To encounter the limits of removal, the rigid ceiling of belonging.

To break through.

To make repairs and reparations.

To pay homage to beauty; to discard definitions.

To edit one's presence.

To confront the length of one's shadow, the intractability of one's weight.

To accept the most lucid and impenetrable versions of experience.

To kneel here, "where prayer has been valid."

To predicate survival on accidental physiological functioning.

To capture nothing at all.

To accept imperfection everywhere but in oneself.

To search without a goal.

To continue.

Dawn's deep along the quay. A hunched man with a lined face and unkempt hair strides towards you, a great stork in black. He peers apprehensively before him, hunches his shoulders against the clawing wind. There are other noises but you hear his heels, clipping

the pavement like the hollow hooves of a horse. You pass. When you look back a block later he is a bat, then a black beetle, and then he is gone.

The gutters are torrents, there are green men with brooms. They have the unthinking assurance of clockfaces. Within minutes the streets are clean. The men are gone. The gutter dries up. The day begins.

“Dialectic of flanerie: on one side, the man who feels himself viewed by all and sundry as a true suspect and, on the other side, the man who is utterly undiscoverable, the hidden man.”
(Benjamin 420).



Fig. 378.— Perspective View of Paris in 1607.—Fac-simile of a Copperplate by Léonard Gaultier.
(Collection of M. Guénebaut, Paris.)

Every year, salmon belonging to the genus *Oncorhynchus* return to the streams of their birth with the clarity of drawn magnets. Fifteen hundred kilometers, the distance from London to Moscow. The salmon swim upstream against the current, find a resting place in quiet water, dig a redd, then release a stream of ova into a hollow and fertilize them. The female salmon cover the eggs with gravel and rest. In the space of a few days, they die, their genealogically-embedded opus complete. What prompts this evacuation of self into other selves? What precipitates the removal of components at the suite of a long journey, the final emptying of body?

I remember standing on the banks of the Capilano river, among shards of granite dumped in awkward piles by migrating glaciers. Silent, mesmerized, watching silver fins and red bellies crest the water, leap plunging white-water bulls like master toreros.

Cannot sit in the same room as myself; cannot sit still. Too many eyes. Slip out from under the burning gazes, disappear into an endless flinch, a flutter of shadow in the streets.



The effects of poor nourishment on the heart are particularly worrisome...the heart diminishes in size, as does any other muscle in the body, and becomes weaker. Low blood pressure is the normal outcome of this process, together with impairment in the ability of the heart to increase oxygen delivery to the tissues while exercising. The mitral valve may prolapse and potentially fatal arrhythmias may occur.

(Giordano 16)

Un pèlerinage est une recherche singulière, un espoir qui se montre en chemins pris au bout et en jours de faim poursuivis sans arrêt. Tentant d'éviter les mesures de la vie quotidienne, de la bienfaisance, de la faute, du corps, de la nourriture, tentant d'achever tous les jours la mesure parfaite de chaque quantité qui constitue la vie, on n'échappe pas de se mesurer, de tout mesurer. On devient la mesure. On est toujours, et jamais, là.

In the streets, nothing is owned; experience slops wetly over the fragile walls that attempt to possess. Everything is anyone's, and no one is anyone. There are no claims to make or answer to; there are no needs. Walls are only other lines; the map of Europe is a child's drawing punctuated by rivers and mountains. From every corner the aspect is different. "Yours" and "mine" only stick to solid objects. Cities are fluid, different places in different lights, different possibilities for redemption and arrival.

They say I must decide between life and death. They say it is close. They say that concrete is really water, and I have forgotten how to swim. I look up at the stony arcades and wonder who is lying. Too many decisions. They say that people with this condition are disconnected from their bodies, unable to discern their needs, unconsciously exerting control. They say to believe the lie. Confusion swarms, tries to suffocate me—I cannot breathe the close air of this room, I cannot breathe. Escape outside, filter panic through the measured clap of steps, eat the streets in search of an epiphany.

The previous results strengthen the proposal that running and drugs of abuse activate similar neural pathways. More specifically, it has been proposed that the rewarding properties of both running and drugs of abuse are related to the activation of the dopaminergic reward pathways. In support of this proposal, both running and drugs of abuse increase dopamine release within the reward pathways, augment central dopamine levels, and alter dopamine binding.
(D'Anci et al. 6)

Flee the cold remoteness of my 7th-floor *chambre* after too many minutes of indecision and recrimination, checking and re-checking protrusions of flesh with mirror and clawing hands, chest tight from consciousness of grotesque imperfection—a glance at the clock lifts the tight lid of my mind, I'm late for class, *techniques de peinture aujourd'hui*. A coat to hide in, a bag of books and water. The metal door thunks shut, I spin full-tilt down the red-padded stairs, not waiting for the brass-caged elevator's rattly ascent. Head down as I cross the marble floor of the foyer—the entire wall is a mirror. Eyes on feet, hit the door, push the latch blindly and escape into the Esplanade, dodging quickly under the chestnut trees.

Ignore the *Pelouse interdite* signs, relish the feel of grass under rubber sole in this stony city, turn left toward the quai, and begin the heel-cadence that calms my breath and speeds my heartbeat. Back braced against inevitable blows from behind (*Everyone is looking at me*); up ahead, possibility of puncturing the infinite, pushing through the membrane of inadequacy (*I must do better, I will do better*). Slowly my chest expands, my shoulders loosen, I cannot meet the eyes of anyone, but for this moment I have outrun the choking dark. I invest in nothing, and none of the strangers I pass is concerned with me. We can make up stories as we nod brusquely in passing, and nothing will be any different. In the streets, we are all untethered and alive; the parts we play can blow away *comme des journaux jetés, ramassés le matin par les hommes aux vestons verts*.



Need draws. Need harms. Need kills. Better not to know. Better to keep moving, abandon the prickle of requirement and want like the drugging thought of rest, drop all that is not transparent in the purpled shadows of flying heels, dig pockets in the pavement with flitting steps, invisible to all but those others who walk unceasingly. They are also running, toward and away. In the instant between two steps one breaks free—almost. Gravity and desire spar. Inside, the mind is a calm stage of burnished sand. All has blown away; there is no *I* or shadow to remind one of what ties one to the earth.

As soon as one stands still, nets spring up between self and other.

One is dragged—

drown. Shrink into a million requirements.

Harden into a mold: Love.

Salted by need, obligation, and worry. Cracks form.

Break.

I have watched people fall apart and stitched them back together. I have soldered my parents, hollow with anxiety, through the summer of my brother's cancer. He survived; they survived. They cannot handle more demands. Need is harm. I must dispute Donne, be a country unto myself. Run from solitude. Run from communion.

The wind will scrape my presence away, remove my body from its inconceivable presumption. *M'effacer.*

Mais cette femme, cette femme : elle était entièrement repliée sur elle-même, penchée en avant, la tête dans les mains. C'était au coin de la rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs. Je m'étais mis à marcher sans bruit, dès que je l'avais vue... La rue était trop vide et s'ennuyait de ce vide ; elle déroba mes pas de sous mes pieds et les fit sonner de droite et de gauche, d'un côté à l'autre de la rue, comme avec un sabot. La femme eut peur et elle se détacha d'elle-même, trop vite, trop violemment, tant et si bien que son visage resta dans ses deux mains. Je pouvais le voir couché là, je voyais sa forme en creux. Je fis un immense effort pour ne pas détourner mon regard de ces mains et pour ne pas voir ce que s'était arraché d'elles. J'étais terrifié de voir un visage par l'intérieur, mais je redoutais cependant bien davantage encore d'apercevoir la tête nue, écorchée, dépourvue de visage.
(Rilke, *Carnets* 24-5)

Macbeth:

How does your patient, doctor?

Doctor:

Not so sick, my lord,
As she is troubled with thick coming fancies,
That keep her from her rest.

Macbeth:

Cure her of that.

Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased,
Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow,
Raze out the written troubles of the brain
And with some sweet oblivious antidote
Cleanse the stuff'd bosom of that perilous
stuff

Which weighs upon the heart?

Doctor:

Therein the patient
Must minister to himself.

(Macbeth 5.3.37-46)

I have not walked enough today.

I have to eat—

I cannot eat—

I have not walked enough today.



Wer, wenn ich schrie, hörte mich denn aus der Engel
Ordnungen? und gesetzt selbst, es nähme
einer mich plötzlich ans Herz: ich verginge von seinem
stärkeren Dasein. Denn das Schöne ist nichts
als des Schrecklichen Anfang, den wir noch grade ertragen,
und wir bewundern es so, weil es gelassen verschmätzt,
uns zu zerstören. Ein jeder Engel ist schrecklich.

Who, if I cried out, would hear me among the angels'
hierarchies? and even if one of them pressed me
suddenly against his heart: I would be consumed
in that overwhelming existence. For beauty is nothing
but the beginning of terror, which we still are just able to endure,
and we are so awed because it serenely disdains
to annihilate us. Every angel is terrifying.

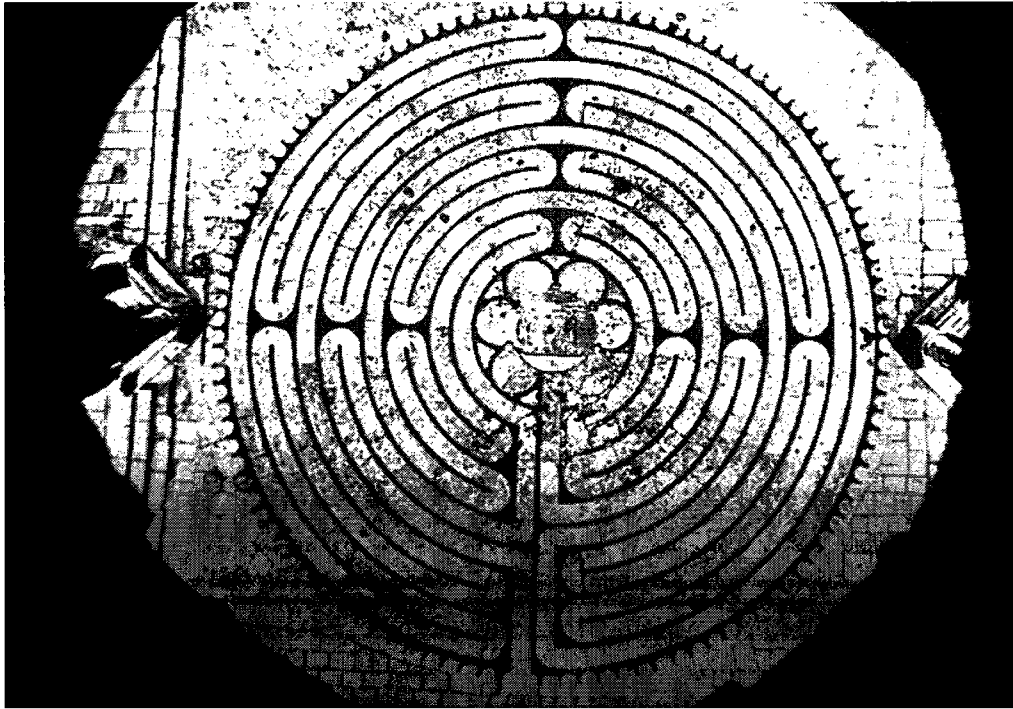
(“Die Erste Elegie”; “The First Elegy,” Rilke *Selected* 150-151)

[I]t is possible that the patients’ understanding of physical activity differed from that of researchers and controls. An example of the latter was a patient participant who stated that “I am not physically active – I only go for walks,” telling the researchers that she walked about 1 h daily without considering this as physical activity. (Bratland-Sanda et al. 4)

Walk quickly, confidently across the bridge, ignore the perplexed spinning of the tourists flocking the square. Up the hill, to the *carrefour* of Rue Monge and St Germain, through the small open-air market at Maubert-Mutualité to the Maison Kayser, my favourite boulangerie, and worth the walk across two *arrondissements* for the *petits pains aux raisins*—finger-shaped explosions of wheat and raisins baked to a dense crackle. *Je n’arrive toujours pas à manger les*

patisseries, malgré leur beauté et l'arôme incroyable qui tord l'estomac vide lorsque je passe devant les portes automatiques. Le corps reste obstiné, solide, présente, insolent. Je ne peux guère justifier le petit pain, c'est énorme! Tous ces raisins! Je ne pourrais jamais le manger sauf que j'ai la tête qui tourne et le cœur me frappe la poitrine, j'entends la voix de ma mère, You absolutely must eat, je me sens déchirée entre mes deux sois, mes deux chemins, ils me mentent en disant qu'il faut manger, ils me mentent toujours—mais je me rassure en marchant ici, en marchant pendant tout l'après-midi, en marchant jusqu'au point de tomber par terre. The bakery's sliding doors shudder and expel lines of contented Parisians to the sidewalk, arms laden with baguette, un pain traditionnel pour le déjeuner, évidemment un gâteau pour ce soir—mais non—mais oui! Regarde ces mûres, ravissantes, la croûte faite maison...—Bon alors, prends celui-là avec la grosse fraise dessus. I wonder how it is possible to make this decision so calmly, to bargain so easily with oneself. What must it be like to stop, rester à table avec la famille, bien manger, manger des choses interdites, manger et rester sans marcher, se reposer sans devoir se punir...qu'est-ce que ça veut dire <<avoir besoin>>? Sunday is my favourite day to walk the city. Dimanche, jour de la famille. I cross the river through the Cour Carrée, wend an unconscious trail through the Marais to the Place des Vosges, sit on the first, chilled grass of spring and watch grandparents in wool coats play with their progeny's toddling progeny. All day the bells will ring; and at night, when clouds have wrapped the city snug, I will return home, eat a bowl of soup at my desk, count the spires in the dusk, measure the scope of unmoving solitude, sink into blackness that only sleep removes.

Individuals with AN and those who have had lifetime diagnoses of both AN and BN tend to have negative mood states and dysphoric temperament. There is evidence that there is a dysphoria-reducing character to dietary restraint and binge-purge behaviors. This would suggest some interaction between pathways regulating appetitive behaviors and emotions. In fact, functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) studies support this hypothesis. When emaciated and malnourished AN individuals are shown pictures of food, they display abnormal activity in the insula and orbitofrontal cortex (OFC) as well as in mesial temporal, parietal, and the anterior cingulate cortex. Studies using SPECT, PETO15, or fMRI, found that when subjects ill with AN ate food, or were exposed to food, they had activated temporal regions, and often increased anxiety.
(Kaye 7)



You say I am repeating
Something I have said before. I shall say it again.
Shall I say it again? In order to arrive there,
To arrive where you are, to get from where you are not,
 You must go by a way wherein there is no ecstasy.
In order to arrive at what you do not know
 You must go by a way which is the way of ignorance.
In order to possess what you do not possess
 You must go by the way of dispossession.
In order to arrive at what you are not
 You must go through the way in which you are not.
And what you do not know is the only thing you know
And what you own is what you do not own
And where you are is where you are not.

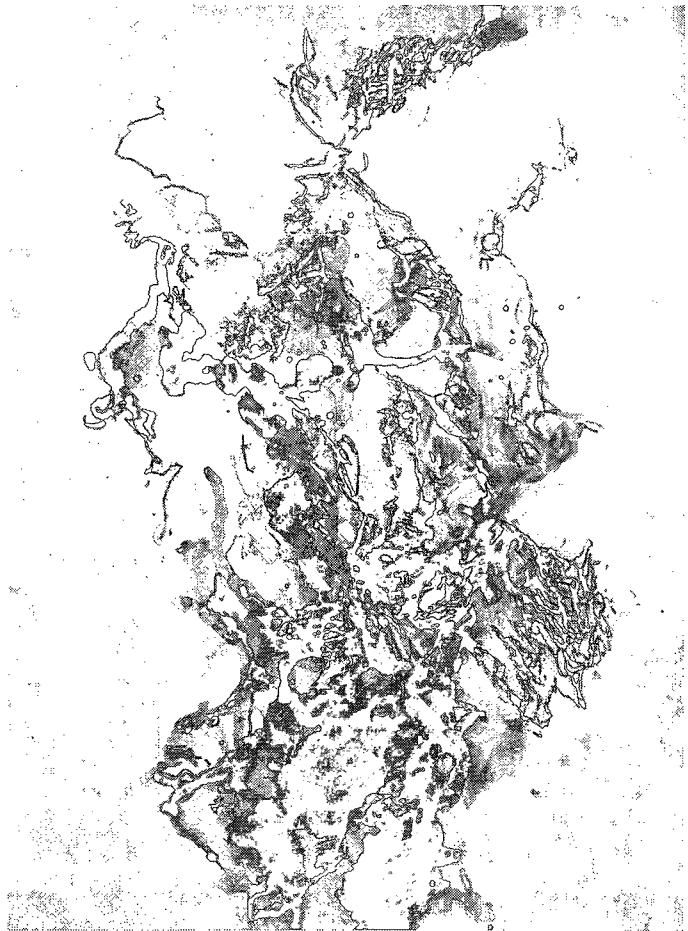
(Eliot, *Four Quartets* 29-30)

February: I catch the flu, feel my cough poke through the ridges on my chest. The wind is a damp brick off the Seine that catches the throat and makes the eyes tear. The days are getting longer, and I no longer need a *Plan de Paris* to find myself after a day's meander. I have made friends with a few other exchange students; we arrange small excursions a few

times a week to visit a museum, see an exhibition, or wander Père Lachaise. They seem so happy and normal, so excited before meals, so calm when we say goodbye and retreat to our own apartments for the night. They are used to me ordering only tea, believe my excuses about saving money. I wonder how they do it. My godfather comes to stay, wears the same navy blue sweater and corduroy pants I remember as a child. He has to sit down when he sees me—he says I have changed. We spend four days in the Alps, moving between Geneva, Annecy, and La Clusaz, visiting his family in the Jura. He writes to tell my family that I tasted steak and homemade crêpes. He too is a walker. We go to Fontainebleau and hardly speak, only walk the grounds under a misty rainfall and an enormous umbrella. No explanation needed.

My godfather is a religious man. His faith is intractable and astounding. When he says goodbye, I am seized with terror—what price to pay for these four days of bartered joy? So far to walk, so much to pay for. You must choose, he tells me. *Sois forte, ma fille.*

The peculiar irresolution of the flaneur. Just as waiting seems to be the proper state of the impassive thinker, doubt appears to be that of the flaneur. An elegy by Schiller contains the phrase: 'the hesitant wing of the butterfly'.
(Benjamin 425)



need
no *have to have will not stop thinking about*
I *wan*
T

just concentrate come on now you have work to do this is ridiculous you
already ate

remember already so undisciplined you weak
insatiable

that's why

you're fat

don't look don't look down don't even bother

there are miles
there of stretched flesh don't look no don't

okay fine so look with hands
grab feel that, you feel that, pinch
there yes and soft there too
disgusting you are disgusting
don't oh god you make me

sick don't sit have to fix have
to fix
no not still move
move ten more you fucking wimp

walk

I don't know many other things in my life that I looked forward to being over with any more than this experiment. And it wasn't so much . . . because of the physical discomfort, but because it made food the most important thing in one's life. . . food became the one central and only thing really in one's life. And life is pretty dull if that's the only thing. I mean, if you went to a movie, you weren't particularly interested in the love scenes, but you noticed every time they ate and what they ate.
(Harold Blickenstaff, participant in Minnesota Starvation Study, qtd. in Kalm and Semba 1349)

walk

walk
never stop
never

never enough

The death construct refers to an intention to die. Previously, death has been regarded as a possible and unfortunate consequence of AN. This study indicates that for some AN patients, to die may also be expressed as an intention of starving oneself. Even if the high mortality rate and elevated suicide rate associated with AN is well known, systematic research has so far not described AN as an intended method of dying.
(Epeset et al. 562)

to be anorexic. to
have an anorexic
disorder. to be afraid
to eat. to fear what it
will do to me. to be
afraid of the
accumulation of a
certain mass. to plan
strategies. to think
this is what i must do.
to choke desire. to kill
natural. to look at
someone on a bike and
think, how amazing.

how normal. to
separate oneself from
normal. to not be
good enough. to cut
oneself off. to set the
lines of the world as
hard. to establish
scale. to fail the test.
to wake ashamed. to
eviscerate love. to
empty it of meaning.
to assign ruthless eyes.
to cut one off from
oneself. to impose
cruelty. to assume it in
the world. to make
oneself unworthy. to
see things not as they
are. to believe them
into existence. to set
rules. to be god. to
deny a right to joy. to
gag freedom. to
blindfold truth. to
indulge in restriction.
to be unloveable. to
be unloveable without
this. to limit life. to
torture the brain. to
tell untruths. to avoid
friends. to forget to
laugh. to breathe guilt.
to sleep with shame.
to crush beauty. to be
always tired. to think
this is normal. to
dread cold days. to
watch people eat. to
walk around grocery
stores. to peer in
restaurants. to add up
numbers. to have a
new religion. to forget
the soul. to be
ambivalent in
recovery. to crumple
in terror. to have the
mind scream. to lose

the voice. to shrivel
inside. to crave
affirmation. to relearn
how to walk. to
corrupt intuition. to
not have the energy.
to not have a choice.
to do it because you
must. to be only
pretty if. to be only
pretty. to buy into the
scam. to forget the
rest. to not matter. to
want to leave. to not
cast a shadow. to
believe in value. to
have no value. to feel
one's ribs. to pinch at
flesh. to hide from
eyes. to be an
accomplice. to starve
a life. to run from
love. to be a ghost. to
float through streets.

A quoi bon continuer ma route et où aller?
Comme un papier vide, j'allais à la dérive le long des maisons
et je remontai le boulevard.
(Rilke, *Carnets* 83)

The imperative to self-erasure is the only reason to continue. I cannot remember what living looks like without these eyes. If I am not driven, pressed, wrung, scorched by the constant tally of energy in and out, I will dissolve into lazy expansion. The blackness will return in force, push my mind to uncontrollable ends, trigger spontaneous annihilation or an unintended explosion. The thought of my parents keeps my fingers clamped to a willed suspension of disbelief—*It will not always be like this.*

So many lies.

you must fight for life you must fight for this moment
for passion and energy and courage
to take it and use it to make something in goodness or
simplicity or excitement or failure or worthlessness or
unspeakable beauty you must fight



cadmium yellow
cadmium red
ultramarine blue
blanc de mendon
blanc de titane
terre de sienne brûlé
terre d'ombre naturelle

don't breathe it in.

huile de lin

un grain de soja pour que le mélange ne soit bon

add the oil to the pigment slowly, wet to dry

like baking. fold in. scrape and drag, scrape and drag, scrape and drag

jusqu'à vous avez une pâte. De jours entiers sans rien faire sauf mélanger les pigments, sans peindre, sans créer.

Il faut apprendre à voir.

Other days we work on our paintings, thick papers primed in gesso and taped to plywood, *d'abord un dessin en encre de Chine, jamais la graphite parce que ça flotte à la surface, mais l'encre de Chine reste toujours câchée, la première couche en blanc de Titane, les lumières, tu vois, et puis les ombres avec la terre d'ombre très très léger, ça ne peut pas être trop sombre car il faut garder la lumière, garder la lumière, comment tu vas garder la lumière si tu commences avec le noir.* Self-portraits and studies, masterpieces translated in tentative lines to learn how Rembrandt did it, or Renoir, or Titian. We sit for hours on paint-splattered stools, converse about art and love and loneliness in French, English, Hebrew, Korean, Spanish. *Elle—elle est canadienne, elle parle les deux langues, elle peut traduire.* We are friends with the model by now, she who surely was a flamenco dancer in Seville, who must have known Renoir and Matisse from the deep grooves in her cheeks, whose tragic eyes glimmer sardonically between poses, long fingers careful not to drop ashes on her chinoiserie robe or disturb the scarlet outline of her lips, she who piles black curls on her head without looking and silences the boys when she casually unwraps her satin belt.

The air smells like cancer. We have stopped drawing for the day to talk, or rather listen to our Bulgarian-Israeli-French master—*mardi, alors on fait la fête. Alex et Victor, vous deux, allez à l'épicerie, achetez les bonbons et biscuits, tiens, vingt euros, et surtout n'oubliez pas de vin.* Plastic cups rinsed of India ink, jars of cigarette butts emptied out and washed for wine or tea, Turkish coffee boiling on the hot plate next to damar varnish, the fumes wafting over the Bonne Maman *galettes* and Petit Écolier biscuits, ash dropping on the caramels. Cyril, the half-Alsatian, half-Algerian boy with the pale skin and amazing cheekbones reads from the textbook. I clutch a yellow mug of mint tea. Eating is not an option. It rained too hard

today to walk to school. *La pression du crayon dévoile la distance entre l'objet et le fond, la vitesse du crayon transmet le geste.* Avram, the teacher, stops him. *Regarde Rachel, sa pose, elle est belle, sa main à côté du visage, regard la ligne de son bras, les couleurs, l'olive et le jaune, et ses cheveux.* Paralyzed by eyes fixed on me. Be invisible: be wall. *Mais elle est si mince.* What is he talking about, what am I supposed to see, *regarder et voir ne disent pas la même chose.*

I fill this city with my steps. Angels appear
of stone and Rilke and solid fear,
dusty shadows on the concrete,
hollow voices on the quai.

Others, jostling, answer: guttural iron, polished oak,
tinny clamour of windowpanes. Old books and wrinkled hands,
covers smoothed like bones in the sunlight,
pages cracked and brown with cigarettes smoked for many lives.

Kings and promises fill the night—is this
what I am come to see? Or do I make this city
in my own image, blaspheme with nets of verse and thought?
Footsteps echo over bridges, gutters awash with blood and paper.

Forget meaning. Breathe
bells and stone, dust and circles
drawn upon the earth.
Know nothing; be nothing.

Theoretically, body image distortion might be related to the syndrome of neglect, which may be coded in parietal, frontal, and cingulate regions that assign motivational relevance to sensory events. It is well known that lesions in the right parietal cortex may not only result in denial of illness or anosognosia, somatoparaphrenia, the numerous misidentification syndromes, but may also produce experiences of disorientation of body parts and body image distortion.

(Kaye 7)

Paris reveals itself in details, gathered by astonished eyes as I wander the streets. The tiny lacquered tray on which a waiter carries *deux petits cafés* to the bookstore across the street. The steel smoothness of the metal casing that protects an unsuspecting trouser-leg from a bike-chain. Apologetic placards in store windows pleading for aesthetic understanding—*car la vitrine est en cours de réalisation*. The paper neckties worn by baguettes parading like grenadiers through the sidewalks. Their *basket* sneaker-wearing escorts.

Today a story in the weak sun, a pale light in which every tree and bench and speck of sand seems more present in its skin and more removed from the world than ever before. Exhausted *piétons* lounge limply along the Seine, airing themselves in a rare calm, like so many moth-balled sweaters. The river sends sparkles over the concrete. I walk between them carefully, hands in pockets and rubber soles silent. A young couple leans towards each other for a kiss and passersby smile indulgently. Winter light: honesty of wool and leather and clean-swept stone.

It is Easter, and the streets are full of *jonquils* carried by young children and grandparents. In Madrid, hundreds of people have been killed in bombings on the metro; their images careen from papers at the news kiosks every morning. Thousands of people attend memorial masses in Notre Dame, lines of black cars and security details streaming from the Palais de Justice toward the Parvis. The streets are more crowded than usual; descending into the crypt of the metro, faces regard each other with fear and incomprehension.

On a ramble over the right bank, I discover my favourite cereal in a small store, a safe food from far away. Only allowed to eat when I am moving; but nobody eats in the streets here. I call home often, looking for a door out of the cage of my own mind, some permission to rest.

Damn. Just wrote you a huge long e-mail and my internet time ran out just before I sent it. Brief summary:

Don't be silly about writing me back,
you're the busiest person I know, go to the
beach or write some poetry or be a
vegetable instead.

I'm always thinking about language here, so
you're always floating around in my head,
in between Rilke translated from German
into English and Jane Austen into French--
That's a good place to be

I think of rain and cedar and trees and
bikes and sand and sailing and miss you
very much. Thrilled to hear you're having
a less-icky semester and getting time to
write and take photos.

I'm doing a lot of what some poet I can't
remember said,
sitting emptily in the sun
receiving fire
that is the way to mend
an extraordinary world

or maybe just mend me. Trying to take real
care of myself for first time, scary and
good experience. Very, very interesting
recovering from an eating disorder
thousands of miles from home. Learning a
ton, feel a bit like a leaf uncurling from
the frost. Don't worry.

perfectly still
and only remotely human.

--phyllis webb. That's who it was.

Sending hugs and good book thoughts.

The evenings are warmer. We are all shedding layers. The dozen international students in my advanced French class break out of homogenous wool coats into stylish blazers and cardigans, parading national pride in flashy sunglasses, and hats. Michaela, the Milanese furniture designer who drops juicy *alloras* instead of *alors*, dazzles the boys with her bare belly and red stilettos. Etienne, *le professeur*, trades his somber scarf for a cotton flare of yellow beneath his coat, and switches to light leather loafers. Blond Ghislaine, *la petite suisse*, flings

pretty shawls over floating, pastel skirts. Jan, the quadrilingual German architect, buys a new pair of fluorescent orange sneakers—with his silver glasses, the only spots of colour in his all-black garb. I buy a jean jacket, terrified that lighter fabrics will not hide folds, afraid to show skin or unwrap the pale bulges of winter from their woolen casings. It is not quite the smallest size in the store—that one is too tight. I buy it anyway and calm my panic with the layers I can wear underneath, my favourite blue sweater over two undershirts.

Tonight after class, drunk on the un-biting air of this spring evening, we wander *en masse* onto the narrow sidewalk of the Rue Bonaparte, where a stand of bicycles has suddenly sprung up. We dart into the Rue de Seine and pool our money to buy a few bottles of wine, some strawberries, cheese, and biscuits, then turn back west toward the Pont des Arts, the wooden, pedestrian bridge that joins the Académie Française with the Louvre's Cour Carrée. Tonight, it is lined with laughing groups of people, teenagers and adults kissing against the railings, local picnickers stabbing cigarettes animatedly into the air, and giddy tourists plopped in messy circles strewn with shopping bags. To the west, the sky above the Grand Palais and the Tour Eiffel is a swath of peach. The Île de la Cité is a ship sailing out of seeping purple darkness, the smooth mooring-lines of the Pont Neuf draping gently across the Seine.

We find a spot near the centre of the bridge and sit down in a clatter of plastic cups. Lydia, a tall Austrian, stares out at the tour-boats making their noisy way down the river, booming landmarks in six languages. Her long arms are pale snakes in the darkness. I feel my waistband pinching my stomach. When the wine bottle comes to me, I pour a small half-glass (*I'll walk home, I'll take a longer walk tomorrow*) and make excuses for not touching the biscuits, for refusing the cheese—I have plans, I'm going to dinner, I'm saving my appetite, a lady in my building has invited me. Étienne looks quietly at me. *T'es sûre?* I smile confidently and nod, ask if anyone has seen any good live music lately. In a moment I am safe, invisible and forgotten beneath a lively debate over the best bars in Oberkampf. The streetlamps grow stronger as the darkness increases, and the faces around me turn orange under the sulphur light.

Cecilia, an Australian with a studio in the international arts building on the river, arrives with more wine, a radio, and a few baguettes. Soon we are dancing, wrapping arms around each other, and swearing to keep in touch when we all leave Paris. Lila, a busty, bubbly Swedish girl, whoops as her empty cup begins to blow across the bridge, spattering red drops onto the wooden planks. I can feel my heart race from fear and the sugar of the wine; it pulses uncomfortably against my chest, thudding irregularly against my ribs. Their grooves reassure beneath my fingers. *Alcohol is empty calories, you can't afford to be drinking, they must despise you, so huge, so disgusting.* I concentrate on my conjugations, try to drown the voices in my head with the satisfaction of automatic French, this language that lets me be a stranger to myself, a new person with a new tongue. When I can bear the tension no longer, at the hour one might conceivably eat dinner, I escape in a babble of goodbyes. Turning up my music—*can't be hungry*—I distract myself with motion, wander the Latin Quarter until my knees creak pain beneath me.

Ambivalence about recovery is a central feature of anorexia nervosa (AN). Patients with AN rarely seek treatment on their own initiative, the motivation to change is often low, approximately one half of the patients drop out of treatment, and treatment outcome is generally poor. The strong hesitance to change has been attributed to the function of the anorectic symptoms.

Different from many other patient groups, AN patients tend to appreciate their symptoms. This may explain their low motivation for change and play an important role in maintenance of the disorder through self-reinforcement rather than social reinforcement.

(Epeset 556)

City of Lights, City of Love, City of ten million tourists a year, each of whom believes it exists only for her. It's so romantic. Art student in Paris. Garret *chambre de bonne*. Pigeons, baguettes, accordions. Solitude as evidence of creative integrity.

There is nothing romantic about hunger. The flat ink of a postcard or an old book does not corkscrew the innards like the habit of constant holding-on, or empty the soul like the certitude of immanent inadequacy. Guilt flames with every taste of sweetness or fat, with every supposed indulgence, with every meal that leaves me full. It hurts to sit down—that bone is called the coccyx. Avoid wooden chairs, use a pillow for a cushion when working at a desk, refrain from sitting in the bath. Waking reluctant in the morning, knees ache from the pressure of stacked bones. Vertebrae bear bruises like birthmarks. Dull hair falls out in clumps; eyes are always circled in purple. The best anorexic is dead. All else is failure.

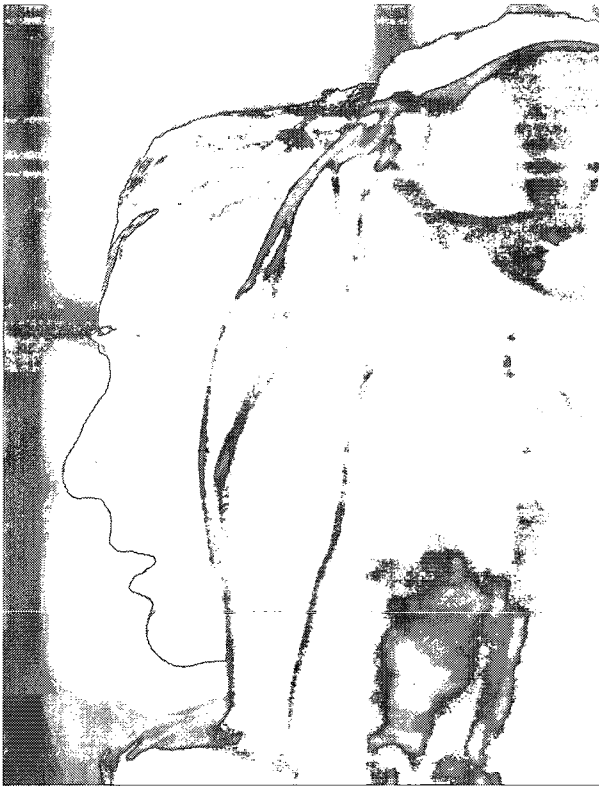
Kafka's hunger artist saw the game, took the logic to the end. I do not have that strength. Care too much, too many things. So much harm—I cannot be both alive and visible, stain on the vision of others. Who will tell my parents? Don't want to die—just not to continue.

I do not believe that these men sit by the sea all day and night so as not to miss the time when the whiting pass, the flounder rise or the cod come in to the shallowest waters, as they claim. They just want to be in a place where they have the world behind them, and before them nothing but emptiness.

(Sebald 52)

Not making a decision is still making a decision—cling, terrified, to an unseen cliff. One night I eat a banana and cinnamon crêpe, won't let the man put sugar on it. Walk the long way home, stunned at such audacity. Action is unconceivable; the only rest is in the stillness of constant movement, endless walks through the streets, arcades, cemeteries, Foucault's pendulum swinging in the Pantheon, how incredible to think this length of measured weight proved the rotation of the earth. It does not seem to budge. The arches bend around it. Yet somewhere on earth it is night; the world is turning outside of this measured view.

Leaning on the quai one day, facing north, I feel a prickle in my chest—not the usual cardiac jump that calls for chairs, water, food, or rest, but a sharp unfolding, a crocus' green stalk. I cannot name it. My body is accounted for abstractly. The wind-tunnel of inadequacy stops blasting in my ear, and for a few moments, I hear nothing but the rush of traffic, the calm slap of water against stone walls. I am here, for a moment, uncontrolled by hunger or obsession. This is how it starts.



Topophilia is the affective bond between people and place or setting... The word *topophilia* is a neologism, useful in that it can be defined broadly to include all of the human being's affective ties with the material environment.

These differ greatly in intensity, subtlety, and mode of expression. The response to environment may be primarily aesthetic: it may then vary from the fleeting pleasure one gets from a view to the equally fleeting but far more intense sense of beauty that is suddenly revealed. The response may be tactile, a delight in the feel of air, water, earth. More permanent and less easy to express are feelings that one has toward a place because it is home, the locus of memories, and the means of gaining a livelihood.

(Tuan 4, 93)

The city is slow to get up in the morning, and usually grouchy, unless *il fait beau*, in which case it springs out of bed with a fresh breeze over the Seine. It finds its swing by lunchtime (early afternoon), when baguettes flutter like flagpoles through the streets and the air is thick with the sounds of clinking cutlery and wineglasses and laughter. It hits a lull after lunch, the waiting time, when the tick of the clock slows to a crawl and overstuffed tourists slumber in the sun. Newspapers rustle in the Jardin du Luxembourg. Around 5 it shakes off its lethargy as cafes fill with the after-work crowd stopping for an espresso or an apéritif. Waiters turn like tops in a frenetic, graceful dance. By seven the tension is palpable, the streets are full of hurrying feet, the last baguettes are disappearing from the *boulangeries, qu'est-ce qu'on va faire?* and at last the evening begins, Paris shakes off her ennui and the volume rises. Panini and crêpes steam in the cooling air. Tourists clot the streets of St. Michel looking for an overpriced meal, plates smash outside the Greek restaurants, a swing band draws a crowd. Families sit down, the entrée, bread, wine, then the plat, more bread, a pause, salad, lightly dressed, cheese, perhaps a yoghurt, or dessert, sighs of appreciation, a café or a tisane in the salon. When dinner ends the night can begin. Jazz clubs start their first set, the sidewalks fill in front of the cinemas, students and vagabonds lounge along the Seine, shouting at the *bateaux mouches*. Laughter rings, tempers flare, lovers quarrel, children burst into tears. Lined faces fill the metro. Then traffic thins and Smartcars fill the sidewalks, absurdly jammed together like soldiers in a shop window. It is the early hours--the Tour Eiffel is dark, the trains have stopped. Tired couples walk home, or queue nervously for a Noctambus. Paris heaves a sigh and settles down. And for a dark, indigo-coloured hour the city sleeps, or pretends to, before the smell of bread rouses it reluctantly once again, to nurse its discontented overindulgences with a café and a cigarette.



But can I learn to live again

without the stumbling frantic habits
of days in wandering cities, unchained streets
and empty time, hunger chasing hunger
tracking trains
overground, steps per station tallied mechanical knees whisking
stacked heel
of boots, bags of books
bone-hurt deserved like bruises accidental on pelvis wooden
chairs unyielding hourly check recheck width and mass in pincer hands,
clutch flesh of pelvis hollow-kidneyed between ribs and sacrum, panic
mirrored eyes with walnut-pinched cheek huge
flagrant as flags of bread insistent in shop windows, gallows-baguette
and curved noose of thumb index-finger
around bicep squeezing all soft
from sight and hand, teeth tightening
to wake,
repeat

Can't do this can't believe them can't ruin it can't continue can't expand can't give in can't
lose discipline can't be so weak can't abandon willpower can't stand so much extra flesh
can't cover clean edges beneath can't give up can't not cover can't succumb such ugliness
can't ruin the picture can't colour outside the lines can't sprawl over the chair can't take up
space in the Métro can't spend so much on groceries can't take so much can't eat so fast
can't give up can't go out like this can't not fit pants can't be hungry can't be hungry can't be
hungry can't not go for walk can't not care can't give up can't be so greedy can't spend
money can't stop can't sleep can't stand next to mirror can't stand can't not fit can't loosen
belt can't spill can't want can't want can't be so hungry can't eat again can't go home can't be
lazy can't sit still can't sit can't bulge can't ruin sketch can't make it home can't stop can't be
hungry again can't get out of bed can't face my face can't be in public can't not resolve can't
break can't bargain can't be out of food can't afford can't take extra space can't be so ugly
can't be can't see can't see can't see can't fight can't fail can't give up can't want to fight can't
fight can't hate forever can't continue can't give up must must must almost there almost
there almost there appalled appalled appalled appalling almost

Enough food must be supplied to allow tissues destroyed during starvation to be
rebuilt . . . our experiments have shown that in an adult man no appreciable
rehabilitation can take place on a diet of 2000 calories [actually 2000 kcal (8368 kJ)] a
day. The proper level is more like 4000 [4000 kcal (16,736 kJ)] daily for some
months. The character of the rehabilitation diet is important also, but unless calories
are abundant, then extra proteins, vitamins and minerals are of little value.
(Ancel Keys, qtd. in Kalm and Semba 1351)

Nur manchmal schiebt der Vorhang der Pupille
sich lautlos auf—. Dann geht ein Bild hinein,
geht durch der Glieder angespannte Stille—
und hört im Herzen auf zu sein.

Only at times, the curtain of the pupils
lifts, quietly—. An image enters in,
rushes down through the tensed, arrested muscles,
plunges into the heart and is gone.

“Der Panther/The Panther”
(Rilke, *Selected* 24-25)

I couldn't talk then. Whole years disappeared in darkness, depression, malnutrition. And now, so many stories in this story—like climbing to the top of a mountain from a circular road, each ascent a different route, no two views the same. A pilgrimage is only completed if the destination is achieved, some covenant met between oneself and one's god. No destination, no achievement. Arrival is a verb; or as Thich Nhat Hanh says, we are arriving in every moment. The infinite indecision of every minute, every point in space, is gathered into the gap between words, the hovering potential between steps. What remains when one no longer believes in recovery? When recovery is a verb in the infinitive, never in the past tense?

The reality is you don't find yourself. There is no apex of self-realization or sudden redemption. You find recurrent patterns, malfunctioning neuro-peptides, deviant metabolism, cultural myopia, and a talent for ruthless self-destruction. Recovery is behavioural, not cognitive. There is no recovery.

Don't listen to metaphors about mountains—they are lying to you with their promises of achievement and enlightenment. The hard part is not getting to the top. The difficulty lies in stopping when one reaches the bottom again, breathless, and has to rejoin the world.

It is an open secret among pilgrims and other theoreticians of this traveling life that you become addicted to the horizon. There is a momentum of walking, hunger, roads, empty bowl of thoughts that is more luxurious—more civil than any city.
(Carson 144)



Europe's bones are the hands of an old person, swathed in transparent skin. I have walked their ridges and valleys, swung from Paris to Interlaken, Milan, Padua, Bassano, Venice, Ravenna, Florence, Rome, Bologna, Siena, Perugia, Cortona, Arezzo, Corsica, the Amalfi Coast, Bari, Montenegro, Belgrade, Novi Sad, Budapest, Prague, Krakow, Oswiecim, Berlin, Amsterdam.

In August Paris is a de Chirico wasteland, a mausoleum yearning for annihilation. The city I left three months ago is asleep under a shroud of monuments and hawkers. Germans, Italians, Americans, Australians, Japanese crowd the streets, chattering and pointing. I want to scream when they take my picture from air-conditioned tourbuses, from round café tables or church aisles. *'Shui pas Parisienne, même alors que je suis chez moi ici.* But in their eyes I look the part. My red leather flats, my chic haircut, my handbag, so cute, so neat, so desperate. *For beauty is nothing but the beginning of terror. . .*

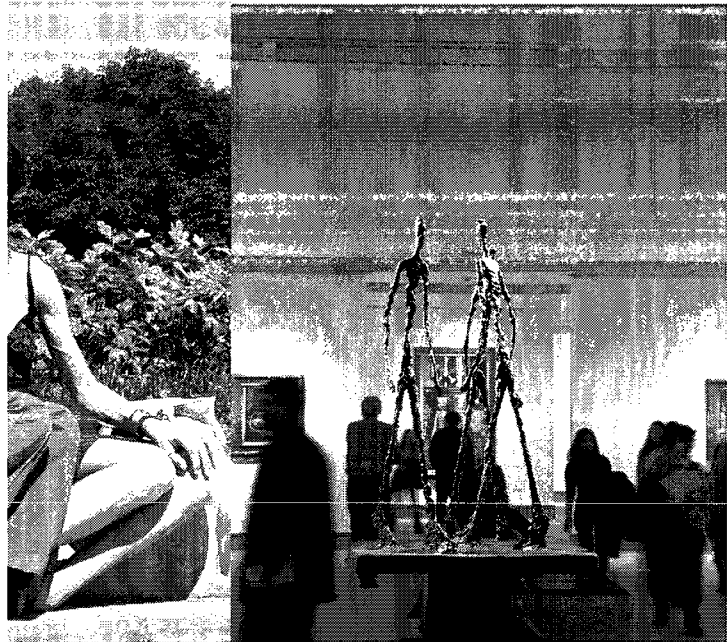
Body expands—

walk.

Nowhere to stop, nowhere to go, nothing to see but boarded-up cafés from other times, every corner a memory and a rip inside, how can I not have known how much happiness was here, I wish to do it all again, learn to stop and rest and eat—but no, to keep walking, never stop, never give in. My old apartment is locked, the concierge on holiday, so I stay in an under-the-counter hostel/flophouse on my first night back, a strange mixture of broke travelers and working girls who come and go all night, fall asleep in heels and sequins. *Unreal City, Under the brown fog of a winter dawn, A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many, I had not thought that death had undone so many.* Sick of guarding my things, I splurge on a cheap hotel, leave my pack and walk for two days through the scurf of memories and hopes, discarded beliefs and chrysalis imaginings.

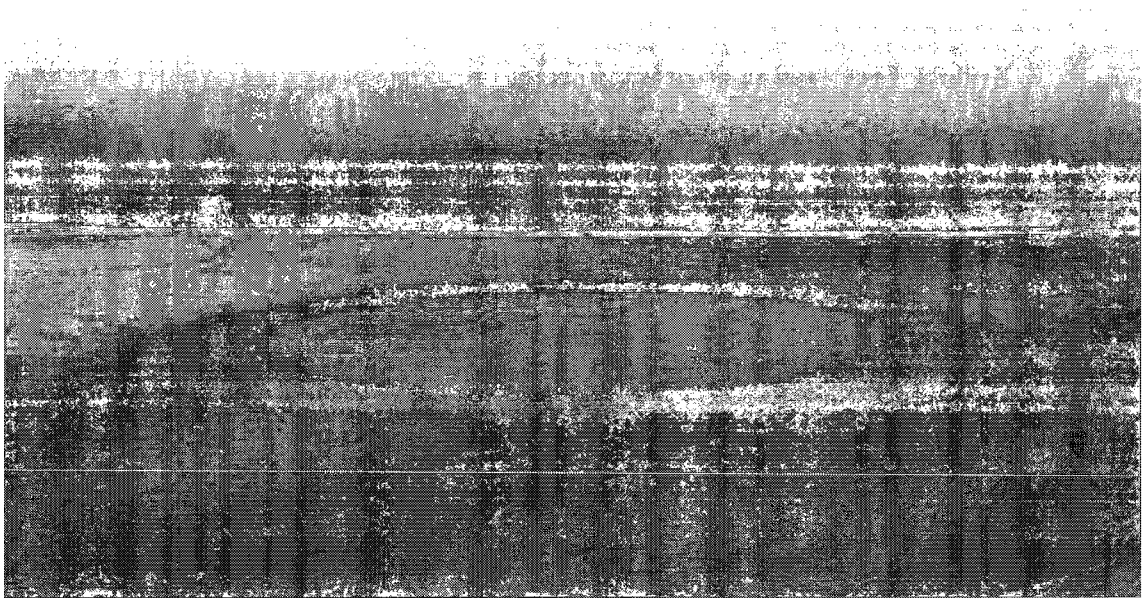
I pass a friend on the quai near the Tuileries, a ghost from the months before I left Paris, a fellow dreamer and student wearing a snappy straw hat. We seize each other then step awkwardly back, stumble over our recountings, what is it we cannot surmount? The dead white of the sun bleaches the conversation, that studio seems so long ago, we fall away to our own paths, silent. I must fly home tomorrow, to the home I do not want to call home, become a daughter and a sister and a friend again, I don't know how, I have forgotten, I do not want to remember. My family will see me. They will be revolted by the mass I have attained. They will not know how many miles my feet have taken in, the lines of maps drawn and unstitched in my skin, English fields and Serbian alleys and Budapest backstreets.

Food stolen, no guilt but shame for the wrong reason, meals from cans on doorsteps in the darkness, suspicious women watching as I choose an apple, agonize over a can of beans with sugar in it. I am fluent in English and French and Caloric Density. They want me to be well. I cannot pretend anymore. In my mind I slip outside, evade their looks, move through West Coast mist towards the sea, walk the bluffs and melt away.



The determined neutrality in the faces of my family and friends when I walk through the metal doors of the international arrivals terminal is indecipherable. I am eventually told that I have not put on weight, despite my certainty that I have expanded to obscene proportions. I am seven pounds lighter than when I left.

I had the general idea that I wanted to describe a journey, a journey that will make you experience death... in a word you would have to be an observer, or you could never really, fully be with the dead. It wasn't going to be something that was gonna say that it was alright, that it is all over, because it is not.
(Maya Lin, qtd. in Brokaw and Peterson 2)



“...a country far away as health.”

I thought it would feel different.

From the outside, at a different time, “neither from nor towards,” it looked different. There was no sensation in the dream of health; or if so, only a painting of sensation. And if the vision moved, it moved in slow, happy leaps, sepia clunk of missing movie-frames. And it was sunny, and summer, and the body I had then was not the body I have now—the lightness felt lighter, the knowledge of mass less acute. In the dream, the ensemble felt itself completely: sunlight, sky, grass, skin. There were bare arms, there was a blanket, there were

bare toes that gripped the stalks beneath them. Those others that were there, that have walked beside me, they were whole, too—smiling, pure, all motion and welcome and joy. And it was silent. And the trees that loomed like a feathered giant's wings overhead taught the grass what green meant, and the shadows what indigo could be before the night fell.

That was how I saw it. Years afterwards, I am here in brief, disorienting flashes, extracted for blissful moments from old habit and perception. Here the dream is different. The eyes I had in the dream are not these eyes. Concrete pillars, paneled walls, glass alcoves, sky grim as the snow draped on the painted signs. Somber brick, flaking stone—all is reduced to the mixed dregs on the palette, slashed with neon lights and telephone wires. It is never over. Do not look down; do not disturb the thin layer of ash over the glowing embers of obsession. Ignore the lines that sketch themselves in the street, sinuous whisper of shadow and bone, hard edges of black and white. Ignore the soft curves that keep the heart beating, that haunt present nightmares and sleepless nights, that turn mirrors into taunting certificates of inadequacy, that keep the possibility of recovery alive.

Forget belief. Forget body. Look to clouds, and pavement, and puddles. Look to fog. Look to Paris greys.

L'ai-je déjà dit? J'apprends à voir. Oui, je commence. Cela ne va pas encore très bien. Mais je veux mettre mon temps à profit.
(Rilke, *Carnets* 24)

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Notes to Quotations Not Cited Within the Text

- Title, Part 2 – “Before the beginning and after the end”: Eliot, T. S. “Burnt Norton.” *Four Quartets*. San Diego: Harcourt, Inc., 1943. 19.
- Title, Part 3 – “And all is always now”: Eliot, T. S. “Burnt Norton.” *Four Quartets*. San Diego: Harcourt, Inc., 1943. 19.
- p. 66 – “still point of the turning world”: Eliot, T. S. “Burnt Norton.” *Four Quartets*. San Diego: Harcourt, Inc., 1943. 15.
- p. 66 – “A pilgrim is someone looking for an answer”: echo of Carson, Anne. “Kinds of Water.” *Plainwater: Essays and Poetry*. New York: Vintage Books, 1995. 119-187.
- p. 67 – “He has turned around”: Rilke, Rainer Maria. “Orpheus. Eurydice. Hermes.” Trans. Stephen Mitchell. New York: Random House, 1980. 54.
- p. 70 – “where prayer has been valid”: Eliot, T.S. “Little Gidding.” *Four Quartets*. San Diego: Harcourt, Inc., 1943. 51.
- p. 87 – “I fill this city with my steps”: my own poem.
- p. 88-9 – Personal communication. Email. Mar 2004.
- p. 99 – “Unreal City, /Under the brown fog...”: Eliot, T. S. “The Waste Land.” *Modern British Literature*. Eds. Frank Kermode and John Hollander. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005. 478.
- p. 101 – “...a country far away as health”: Plath, Sylvia. “Tulips.” *The Norton Anthology of Modern and Contemporary Poetry*. Eds. Richard Ellmann, Robert O’Clair and Jahan Ramazani. Vol. 2. 3rd ed. New York: Norton, 2003. 601.
- p. 101 – “neither from nor towards”: Eliot, T. S. “Burnt Norton.” *Four Quartets*. San Diego: Harcourt, Inc., 1943. 15.