

In Transit

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Hiatus

A human being learns to piece together discrete elements of experience into the semblance of a whole - a routine, habit, a hook to peg the mystery of life onto, or a shroud to cover it. The metanarrative of our lives shape-shifts with the droll elusiveness of day shifting into night, with a brief indifferent twilight. so miraculous that it is trite. The impetus to pursue the ever fading light comes from different things - work, beauty, political freedom, relationship. This is always changing. always. even if we tell ourselves otherwise. Meaning hides behind the materiality of our lived experiences, perennially in the background, just beyond our sight.

We forget that we can be immortal except in brief, quickly forgotten moments between our frantic juggling of the many domains of experience that in their klezmer dance leave neon trails. This colourful display is a fetish in itself, a distraction - from boredom, from a striving for immortality, for meaning and absolution.

Modern life engulfs us like music in a ragtime club, and we lose control of our limbs as if if we did not turn into an electric spasm, something disastrous, something impossible would happen. Even when we are biding time (we are always "between jobs"), or in a gap, a low, or a sabbatical, we are part of the same race, it's merely a pitstop, we are still defined by the contours of the same map.

This virus is *deus ex machina*. It rises out of the sea of existence like a *loch ness*, and nothing is ever going to be the same again. The rules have changed, we are in a game we don't know. We attempt to gain a footing with the same languages, but we have entered alien territory. In our supreme confidence of controlled chaos, the virus upends our superiority, our carefully mismanaged systems, our entire edifice of normality. Even in our most hideous and horror-filled performances of human excess we do not come close to its great invisibility.

It is diminutive and transient as a nightmare at the edge of memory. Its conquistadorial gaze has the reach of entire continents or minuscule surfaces. It attaches, multiplies, and becomes with the suddenness that only death could conjure. Indeed, more often than not the surest marker of its presence is the corpse it leaves behind. Even then it is ephemeral. It is the only thing that we haven't colonised with nomenclature. It changes rules everyday, and mocks our great engines of science and artificial intelligence.

Most of all it has created a hiatus. It has forced us to stop mid-dance and try to imagine a different tableaux. But what we are seeing in this pause is the hideousness of the colours we trailed. Rather than evolve into a kind of introspective renaissance we have progressed into a thrashing, flailing monster of xenophobia, privilege, sadism, megalomania and distrust. Even this - ironically our best defence - the language of our doomed humanity, distracts us from ourselves. It veils the real discomfort that could only be a slow, torturous peeling of the layers that stitch together ordinary life and our systems of survival.

And so we respond with the words we know - the same hyperbole, the clinching violence, that drowns out the steady susurrus of a mind slowly at work, a heart that is truly free. We sing the same song, but in a slightly higher register. As it unfolds, we realise that this shrill screech is not music, and it never was. There is no synchronicity, no harmony - we had learned to ignore the missteps and the flatness. The complicated matrix held together by numerous deceptions and moving parts is nothing but a grand facade, and the set is falling apart.

This hiatus in thrusting the truly unfamiliar into our lives is reminding us that we have learnt to become comfortable with half-truths and distortions. Locked in a cascade of dominoes, we have learnt to ignore the fact that there are some things that we will never really know the truth of, and it is alright because the next scandal has already arrived.

If anything this pause makes me yearn for simplicity. I want to know again the shape of care, the face of kindness, the joy of growing together. I do not have an answer - I'm not able to hear yet what the moment is trying to say, but confronting the reality of this rupture is a start.

rationing light...

After Burroughs

The real virus doesn't flare
like **a frightening of feathers**
in spittle and rancid air

a cell germinates in the
chaos of punch-drunk mind,
and festers into shape -

the WORD

language attaches itself to the host
finds salvation. multiplies not through
sound, but the imprint of its becoming.

Hatred, shame and self-loathing are trapped
in the cage of the word. **Lust uncorked**
as rabid fear in a patchwork of

tight frames, fused with the hunger of the image.

**Like a sickness, the word buries its teeth
into the skin of the interface. and screams**

it is the word

fashioned into bullet

that starts the pandemic

Programming spread

the afternoon dragged its manacled feet into evening
the bridge was caught in a vacant day-dream
the birds unfurled as a confusion of songs

and below, on the street, scabbed with
alternating swathes of sewage,
the darkness stretched taut.

you put one sack of torn skin after another
your eyes black with thirst, your lips cracked
from the silence that laughter had become.

your slate is clean, your quarrels quelled
the seas have lost their green
you are looking for the broken shards

**of language spilt into the city's indifference.
death stalks each corner, moody peddler
who steals your conscience from underneath**

**your feet, as you continue to run.
every piece of evidence you find
is fashioned out of naked sensation.**

**every note is hollow, every conch shell
only pretends to hold the sound of the sea,
every torso is marked by the conviction**

of code.

Ghostcity

It is a night strung like a clothesline

between Eliot and kolatkar

between dead leaf carpets

and the last windkissed dancing greens

beneath carless flyovers and flailing tarpaulin

wind chimes and haggard father threatening

son with the curse of oblivion

'Look out can't you see?'

The virus will come

The government will come

tonight's ghost coughs

in the fumigated alleyway

between hysteria and silence

Trains

there's something about trains.

dictators and their sycophants like to say

"but the trains are running on time".

A civilisation could form around a train station

or a river. We are all waving triumphantly

from the relentless engine of development and progress

Pity these stupid labourers who come in the way eh?

Don't even know where to sleep.



bhaavna arora ✓

@BhaavnaArora



The plight and death of migrant workers is devastating and horrifying but in terms of common sense - How does one sleep on a railway track? There are platforms, sides of railway tracks and so many other places. Why railway track? [#Aurangabad](#)

Exodus

Maybe everything is an exodus from darkness
to darkness. fingers goaded by a third eye grow
accustomed to the shape of the wooden handle,
wrought iron railing, dust, rust and finally, light -
disloyal dot, mischeivous stranger skipping dreams,
trailing desire between fingers. We remember, always,
the start, and grope with the impossible barefaced trust
of **children discovering the form of purpose.**
love is the moistness of skin whispering
with **the undercover orchestra of memory,**
not feeling; soft palm cradling the contours
of comfort, but not quite, like an ill-fitting dress.
even words stand at the door of experience,
out of place in the ostentation of flourish.
when it turns into testimony, after all, it is lost.

**Darkness allows space for discovery, to find the edges
of your own voice. One could find the embrace of a life
by carving out the moonrise from the infinite excess of night,
rationing light like a physician bloodletting survival into the world.**

trains II*

Let it pierce through you. like the **certainty of angry eye.**

Let it sing. let it sink into rib holding skin like construction scaffolding.

Let it crush those selfsame hands that **coax cities out of stones, and mud.**

sleek arrow of naked design. Let it lick the wind as it hungers
through tracks used to the soporific hypnotism

of **the city's consigliere** - that warm breath that folds
in all the secrets. because you can't show them the real thing eh?
Somebody's gotta be the fall guy.

That is the job of the train is it not?
to bluster though barren desert,
sow industry, machine, loneliness, and neon.

plant city, scatter dream. order spawns into neat boxes.
Because we cannot see the future like a humdinger of a flick,
can't comprehend its **glitz and glam and happy fam,**

we use the sacred geometry of the box to cage
a wild thing, we train our people to be **self-reliant**
give a pair of eyes a relentless train of scrolling screams-

and we have memorised the *mantra*
of collective amnesia, we have chanced
upon the glossary of the simulacra

open. start. shut.

we poke uncertain ghosts into life
we lay the typefaces into opaque walls,
unmoving blocks. we turn mind into maze
and let it coagulate to the sound of muzak.
development's misshapen mess was scripted
with the myopia of **credits rolling in silence.**

open

how many fingers does it take to build a house?

how many broken nails? what **inventory of palms**

with scarred lifelines will this time delegate to the annexures?

Will the great purveyor of museums

dip his white gloved hands into the raging ink of

headlines - **orchards of death** - that stutter like they

have just learned to speak?

start

Eyes, whose visions lurched out of their frames

stronger than cities and their long stretches

of dingy, dark silences, have **clouded over.**

shut

Let this pen cauterize the smouldering tear

Let this poem suture headlines

Let its discordant breathlessness blanch raw flesh

Let the big man trip between the punctuation of rage

if stones could speak

they'd be eloquent as a crack

in the wall of **democracy's**

limestone maqbara

Fingers scrabbling on dry walls

have been frozen

in transit-

The travelers

the boatman delivers the promise
that floats between lovers' lips
the message that frees the prisoner
and stalls the onslaught in the dead of night.

everything is lost in translation.
in the Exodus, even god's message
needed the artillery of plagues
to convince the tyrant.

all that the messenger can call his own is the transit.

what is left behind was home, what is ahead
is a dream - that is why it is obscure.
and so the wanderer learns
the meaning of a friend, not what he
had left behind. not what is to come
but what is in between. under his chapped soles.

do you know what it is to surrender
to the expanse? to choose the companionship
of the road? **to claim the half-bitten moon as a mother,
and lie beside the corpse of the wind under a torn headscarf?**

do you know that a baby's unborn cry
stifled with the sound of our indifference
is a wee bit difficult to abbreviate
into the inked outlines
of a government register?

maybe transit is our default state of being
maybe we are truly ourselves,
we are truly counted, only in death.
when we are finally still.

no wait,
not for them,
not even then.

**something whose only name
is now...**

Landscape with rice fields and running child

Time is neither warp, nor weft,
nor the **red** of eyes blasted
tearlessly into reality
nor the road **snaking** through a painting
where the **grass** listens to the muffled thundering
of feet that have found their resting place

red as iron mines
and the weeping violin

Frisson

The door is ajar, the curtain flutters
in the cool draught coming out of the bedroom.
must be the balcony, must be the sea
aching to be anything but itself. *Is that what
happens when a sea is in spate? Is that the end
of the quest, the enlightenment of water?
knowing that it can be more than what contains it.*

The smell of roast peanuts hangs thin in the air
like the smell of young people laughing outside
the local *chaat-wala* by the juice junction where you get
thick *apus aam ras* with bits of cut mango on top.

A sprig of late afternoon sunlight knifes an unsteady path
in the dust on a book of Dhasal poems. a film strip
two-thirds into the book marks a time when eyes would breathe
to the lilt of alliteration, where every metaphor would flicker
through **cities of gaze** with the novelty of first touch.

Lives are lived in the hot breath that crystallises
on cold windows of buses hurtling through
the **new moon's escape into summer skies.**
Something more deafening than the fission
of planets, blacker than the smell of charred comets,
miraculous as the birth of a saviour in a country
that has decreed death to all first borns,
Something whose only name is now,
for a brief moment, *flickers.*

hairs stiffen in arms that discover each other,

two silences find that the birthplace of language
is not in the tongue, or the mind. the first words
were born

in the **dew drop's descent**

to the forest's understory.

eyes dissolve into their seas -
the end of the quest.

**Every breath after that is practice
to relive that. just that.**

the enlightenment of water.

