

Athar C. Pavis

The Virtual

You say it's something you can't stop —
I watch you watching as news pushes forward.
There is no respite from it — you keep up.
Meanwhile you live a life in beta version,
temporarily, you say: a virtual clipboard
holds who you really are. Will it be there
when finally you paste that latent person
on you somewhere?

It is as if a beast holds you in thrall,
hungry for time, like a black hole for light —
in automatic downloads, you control
nothing, in fact. Meanwhile the sun goes down,
another day has passed, another night
in pixelated hype. If you could hear again
the hush, and taste the brimming afternoon
like wiser men

in these defeated times you could still find
the old philosophy that YouTube misses,
the richer days Duke Berry left behind,
a contemplative look upon the world —
if you put down those surrogate devices
and listened to streets waking, the slow sweep
of that twig broom past centuries have heard
awaken us from sleep

you could, you would! I'm powerless myself
and have no clear idea of how it happened,
why the sun below the clouds is not enough
to lift the lidded universe you live in.
The paradox is this: the world that beckoned
become an algorithm, a Trojan horse,
and you a fake explorer stuck within
a life not yours.

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I've searched what I can search, but my search engine
can find no clue to its causality
unless, encrypted in a devil's bargain,
you've made a deal to save yourself from life.
Meanwhile the trees are blossoming. I see
awaiting you, still fragrant, the full sky,
vast oceans — and no hyperlink enough
to satisfy.

At the Market with Philip Roth

“Children are always disappointing,”
one friend announced.
And so are parents — expectations —
only the moment counts,
the “pointless meaningfulness of living,”
you say, and you are right.

The way the fish in rigor mortis
shine silver on the counter,
fruit overflowing in street markets,
figs bursting at the center,
the spectacle of their abundance,
seed-filled, in purple splendor.

Something about the saffron-colored
girolles piled up beside
eggplants, in polished black, and bulbous,
returns me to the world,
its cornucopia of things passing,
pointless, but what I need —

Because I want, despite the children,
disappointing or not,
this paeon to the earth it raises
so many live without —
and every day a thing of beauty
I had not thought about.

Noces

in difficult times, for H. from Camus

It's about seeing in the vacant lot
beside the broken glass and paper clutter
a rhubarb plant, and how fenced earth begot
three poppies growing there beside the gutter.

How red their petals are against the grey
of lidded skies and days on end confined,
as if their luster promised to repay
the passerby who stopped, a life defined

not by relentless soliton-like days
mowing all whitecaps in fixed amplitude,
but by these crests of feeling as intense
as rhubarb sprouting doggedly, displays
of things so unexpected in our mood —
these poppies pushing three heads through a fence.