

ASSEMBLED PARTS

Infinite regression: the way
our mirrors reflect each other
and the corner of a painting
through an open door. Shadows
in morning light, white angles
and grey tones, faded wallpaper
still here from when we bought
the house, curtains which have
stayed up since we first arrived.

Endless diversion: everything
leads to somewhere else, other
things to learn or do, corners of
life we should have left unvisited.
Memories fade or are reinvented;
we shadow ourselves unobserved,
never learn from our mistakes.
Moments become years and
we never actually arrive.

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THE SHAPE OF THINGS

'A place is the opposite of empty space. A place
is where an event has taken or is taking place.'
– John Berger, 'Studio Talk'

It is the emptiness in which things happen,
the first appearance of snow this year,
the closest thing we have to home.

It is the space a work creates within itself,
the image of an empty room
without any windows or doors.

It is an act of resistance we do not yet understand,
a city where people fight each other,
refusing to accept someone else's rules.

It is a terrible prophecy of what might happen,
an aeroplane without engine or compass,
a country or nation insistent upon dying.

It is the angel of death whispering in a writer's ear,
the hammer or spanner used as a weapon of persuasion,
the lingering presence of the man we have just buried.

It is an old man's book for old men to read,
a pinch of wonder and half a dozen excuses,
a list of reasons why we should forget.

It is not night and it is not ignorance,
it is the interior from which everything comes,
trailing distance, full of affection, maybe even love.

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THE HEALING

as though knowing the cause
was an excuse for bad behaviour

as though a diagnosis
was an excuse for being ill

so anxious about anxiety
she made herself feel sick

pills and ointments, creams
online advice and information

crystals for their powers
angel invocations and dreams

silver foil wrapped boxes
to keep alien energies out

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IMPOSSIBLE DELAYS (Relentless Irrational Remix)

'Poems from poems, songs
from songs, paintings from paintings,

always this friendly
impregnation'
– Adam Zagajewski, 'River'

I have never felt the threat of poverty
or resisted incoherence. It is all talk
and communal provocation, all the same
but different, a swerve of understanding
so we accommodate impossible delays,
endless understanding and cancellations.

If you refuse to use the magical recipe
and flee Paradise, then good luck with
the struggle. I've never had much money
but it is too late for tears or gratuitous
introductions. I defer to tramps, barmaids
and utopians, arrange my words by rules

of my own invention, all borrowed from
transcendence or folklore. No more baubles
or autobiographical squibs, no procedures
which don't assist us to respond to human
experience. We need to know what we are
crying for, it is a joy to be incommunicado

and forget the things I can't forget. There's
little to be lost by discarding what we seek:
unknowable truths and conspiratorial webs.
Disreputable fictions are beaten and tortured
as the future performs its vital operations
without any fuss or lasting repercussions.

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COLLAPSED SENSES

Windows propped open to mist that tastes of salt.
It is always a shock to the body, the way autumn
arrives one summer night like an old friend.

Winter will be next, scavenging for food
in a poorly secured lunchbox. Persons unknown
are recently departed, a door swings on its hinges.

Nights are floodlit by stars as it turns cold

and I am looking for possible exit strategies,
dreaming of sunshine and a paradise breeze.

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A WAY OUT OF THE DARKNESS

On the film we can never see it,
it is either blurred or out of shot,
alluded to but only indirectly.

We are artfully reminded that it is all
a construct, shadows and spotlights
are not in the natural order of things.

Being human is no longer self-evident,
we are astonishingly inarticulate
when it comes to self-expression

or understanding our intentions
towards those who share our lives.
We must leave the silent museum

and face what is hard to name,
the terrible space between words
and what they are meant to mean.

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CAUGHT IN THE WEB

I am only too ready to follow diversions
from footnotes or references, indexes
and asides in the text, to buy new books
or start an online search in pursuit of
useless information. I am caught up
in a web of knowledge no-one needs,
need less and less as I get older.

Did you know there is a limited edition

box set with remixes and demos? A CD version with a different song? That she wrote under a different name? Neither did I, until a moment ago. Now, I want to find them, buy them, listen and read, even though the original is certain

to be better. In my room, piles of books and shelves of LPs collect dust, however often I sift through, looking for clues to answer questions I haven't asked. There is always far too much to know and not have enough time to digest it. Random information is not knowledge

and knowledge is not wisdom. The last supposedly comes with age, but only if you slow down and let it ferment. Dave, who helped fix our door, says I'm always in a rush, so he usually has a joint before he does work here. I layer paint and wish I was doing something else.

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LACKING DEFINITION

for/from Peter Dent

'it's impossible to tell if they are descending or ascending, entering or exiting, and whether it makes any difference and why.'

– Emuna Elon, *House On Endless Waters*

Words set off at a pace and go where they're asked to, no matter where they might end up. You have to wonder if having a plan is worth the bother, since each sentence has the right to go to where and how far it wants, maybe even beyond.

Between the trees are fragmentary truths, word-arrangements that cannot be put back into original form, the barest of bare bones going for texture over taste. They may be devotional observations but nothing is said.

If you tour the world we inhabit, you will find that shapelessness is the new form. I am never sure what is there when you finally arrive but don't worry about what went missing, it's just collateral damage.

We are bright and penniless, like to try everything out and never stop looking back. If

you get used to coming and going you will never be homesick; if you prefer to be broken then go ahead. We are lost and lovely imaginings, simply passing through.

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REINVENTING THE WHEEL

I never developed conversational skills,
which explains a lot about my memoirs.
They have an exaggerated sense of scale,
gradually became encrusted with fiction.

Mistranslation means miscommunication,
which means I often misunderstand,
end up mapping hedgehogs in the garden
or teaching neighbours to suck eggs.

I have learnt to drive several times
and can fall of my bike as easily as
limping to the doctor's or attracting
the attention of a lifeguard at the pool.

It is all so suburban and manageable.
I emerge from hibernation every Spring
and start work immediately: bike tyres
to be pumped up, guttering to clear,

windows to be cleaned. Soon, I will
rescue the garden chairs from the shed
and get to know the sky again. Our cat
is seldom amused, rarely deigns to be

sociable, especially late at night.
If I am good I may get to sleep inside,
if not I go for long walks and reacquaint
myself with myself, have a good chat

and listen to tomorrow silently arrive
before we finish talking for the night.
One day I will reinvent the wheel,
circle the square, and then depart.

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CORRESPONDENCE COURSE

Language migrates into dregs of being
as the postman puts a letter through our door.

Cut open, it spills selected art reviews
and new poems onto the dining table:

sometimes you discover more than
I thought I'd said, sometimes you

miss the point. I will write a letter
all over again, it is like going into fog

and wondering what I've confessed,
is about chemistry and shadows,

cuttings filed in appropriate books,
and the mixing-up of stuff. If you can

sidestep the life of Riley, words
may then arrive from out of the dark

and say hello. My theory is that poets
but not poems have always existed,

that the distance between stars
is no more than wishful thinking,

a desire for conversation and new vistas,
the only place for our dismantled dreams.

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