

VIVEK NARAYANAN

22 Hours

(music by Maarten Visser)

From the window of the shop you can see the road and its many or few people, at night, in the daytime, in its pauses at the fringe of movement, in its built contradictions or in what has been written on it. But, too subtle to bear, the road can only inhere in its use,

in its rows of suspended hats,

in its telephone booth beacons,

its cackle of shoes against tar.

The visible will be tyranny, and the audible no less. The visible does not tell you where things are.

This is why I often debate between sleep and wakefulness at the onset of morning.

(I do not mean that sleep makes immersion more or less visible. It is a state, a rate of change. What we know from life finds little use there in its dollhouse, sometimes but not always macabre. The brown of your age holds a clear glass. Nothing is too much too bear; even the cold flesh of the orange, it is alive.)

(I do not mean either that life will always manage to wake the visible tangible. It is true that the onset of morning is carried by the first far goods train, the first insomniac rooster, a rustling or a water pump shuddering to duty. It is true that some of these trucks have driven all night like news

of the body beside you, the body waking first to the body of diminishing warmth, then the body of sound, then the bodiless light in your window, the bird in the tree cut by cable at the fringe of the frame.)

And light: in your hand, in your palm, in your hat, in your boot

—movement—

but your immersions in this house seed the yen to go. It has left you its fading emblems, and sometimes those emblems have peeled for good.

The cream coloured sky is almost beautiful. Melancholy is simply a state of mind.

“If I listened to the words of my mouth, I might say someone else was speaking.”

If that’s true, I am he. Already, he’s on his way out of the house, down the stairs and through the gate with its hard plastic screen through which all image-detail crumbles to cruder figures:

to think you are looking out, or in, and are unable.

Are you him then, when suddenly you seem to believe, in the park with its insistent walkers, the still cream of the sky written by the patterns of birds?

Or nosing the brown, fresh, dug-up earth, longing for the blue of the road, even the remarkably congruent bright orange of a tracksuit, immersing yourself in that colour, unable to exhaust it, are you him?

Ah, word is the death of memory, of time, of time-lines, of your very life stretching back behind you; but you *walk* because you *can* walk.

You put little flags on each corner because otherwise it would not show the silt of its event.

That day, years ago, when the telephone line went dead, on this corner fringed by the shrine—resurrected as if nothing—where a mob gathered, carrying their own fire in the white-hot noon, and a man’s arm was so casually severed by a blade.

Yes.

Violence is dream-state but not dream. He walked on; the shops burst their grand windows on the road.

This corner, where at certain hours of the year a wedding band traps the traffic, surrounds and corrals it like an army in brightest colours—purple, pink, orange—a marching beat, a movement with padded shoulders and tasseled caps to the great house ahead, armies of servants under improvised canopies, the false façade fringed by tiny bulbs—

a palace for a day, an enthrallment—and music *not* longing, *not* the underside of birds as seen by eyes in a head in a breathing body spine resting on the grass

(wings like arrows across that faint blue sky, gauzy with clouds)

—but music here to march or dance to, music as befits the verve of the band, music to oil the wheels of alliance, of coronation until the current is cut, the current is gone, knowing, the current is never gone, the current rises up through your feet and out of you into the clapping crowd.

“I can’t imagine the opposite of this.”

“What would it be like, if it were otherwise?”

“What does it mean when someone has said my images are private?”

“These words are a defence against something. *Road*

is consistent in its potential and so too,

crowd,

brown,

sound,

or *windows* from which hands can safely be seen and heard. Happiness is communal but pain is rarely so. Though in the very image of happiness lurks the warmth of pain.

Then crows do not cackle, but it is myth makes them so. Telephones do not ring, but memory. The dead will not, cannot, rise; resurrection is human work. The sun receding, the darkness rising like a curtain, the sensation of certain movement in a sky that has had nowhere to go, the light wind that blows the curtains round and round, or the small black specks that appear on the eyeball, the magnification of certain noises (TV static, shoe on distant tar), the virtual disappearance of brown. Our planet's daily dying is also then a state, not an event. There can be no true debate against the onset of sleep.

Walking back
to your house
in the deepened
consequential night.

And the figure
like a hat
in the balcony
you have seen
is only yourself.

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