

John Barton / ALL THAT ENTERS MUST PASS THROUGH: LOVE, THE VIRTUAL BODY, AND THE DECLINE OF THE NATION-STATE

"the interior has achieved another coup d'état"

This body: its constitution
beyond amendment and spastically tense, the upper
and lower chambers of the heart loud with endlessly ringing

bells and filibusters remembered from the past: my 60s childhood,
premature bed times, random Montreal mailboxes blowing
up into the October Crisis, house arrest

after school and the War Measures Act, *just watch me*
watch reruns of soldiers on Ste-Catherine preempt cartoons
in fast-moving black and white; a few more armchair assassinations

from Pierre Laporte to Kanasatake and the body is pure
instant-on, panicked, the gastric tract
lubricated by spoonfuls

of mineral oil, though less and less sense
of self slips by the body's apparently undefended border,
a tight-assed customs officer opening my briefcase with a smirk.

Who knows what anyone's wrongs and rights are anymore, inside
or out; but let go and the dollar always
sinks, down the drain, streams

of unemployed in Pickering, 20,000
competing for 300 jobs, all systems gone
immuno-deficient, factories shutting down and moving south.

The body and its seized-up conveyer belts: economic
depression become somatic, the remotest
cells starving

for love, its currency inflated
each time we kiss. The text written in our bodies.
But who has time to read? We watch the country lose sight of itself.

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Love, you want to leave
and I don't want to

let go. Montreal newspapers
spell your name in the skimmed headlines,

an acrostic rubbing off in my hands
as I turn

the pages, sentiment
I can't wash off or away: smeared

toxic inks absorbed by an epidermis that lets
things in and not out,

living in a federation
whose borders we say are not

up for negotiation (no matter how restless
the natives).

Inside the body, the psyche balances
thyroid and liver, brain and heart, the involuntary

nervous system impartial
unless thrown off

by something not quite withstanding.
In this cold country: Montreal a veritable

city of romance. How I would miss its snow
filled streets and packed

cafés with you gone,
its museums suddenly empty and cinemas

recycling endless matinées of your absence.
Or my absence, for I would come

here no longer, unable to revisit
what we have now become, ghosts fitfully

asleep under the icy sheets of economic slowdown.
Once I would have given you

freedom of the city, would have
left my Metro pass and keys locked inside

an apartment leased in both our names before
catching an Ottawa-bound Voyageur bus,

left you to this life, to the divisive
polis at its heart that you want to map, but I can't

leave you no matter where we draw
borders we won't discuss.

You are inside of me even when
I am on the outside, my ancestors since

the Plains of Abraham dug deep as compost into
the churchyards of the Eastern Townships.

My kind are taught to contain
ourselves, the imperial flourish

of an irritable bowel almost
Victorian in its habits.

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All that enters must pass through.
Goods cross into Detroit from Windsor.
All that enters must pass through.
Eros uploaded with the food we eat.
All that enters must pass through.
Praise Gaia for the Information Highway.
All that enters must pass through.

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In a 500-channel universe we are still
what we eat: stock-piled mother's
milk, CNN, take-out

pizza, 24-hour
shopping — the body

a network of networks: bloodlines,
nerves and the intestines.
Hopelessly

entwined for what centuries
must feel like, we let ourselves

let go of our limits, forget whatever borders
we did not choose and pick up
speed, our baud

rates pushing against those
of light and infinity until the connection somehow

fails and now, though you are gone, you are everywhere,
projected against the blank screen
of my stand-alone

conscience or suspended
in memory. In the virtual, the sewage

of your desire washes through my less-and-less
carbon-based circuitry, your sweet
white noise I call up

repeatedly, all language
a simulation, sentient and magic.

Language heals, not love or medicine. Language is zero
and indivisible. Language lets go
of what it withholds

and gives up nothing,
metaphor its viscera and lower colon.

Language is a microchip I collect (picking up
after the virtual cows) and burn
for warmth.

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Our bodies speak
in languages we do not comprehend

yet we know who we are, distinct despite
the ether's apparent lack
of borders.

Let us go then, love,
let us let go: something always

dis- or reconnects us to something.
What we singly burn inside
our bodies

joins in loose constellations,
frayed networks of light ablur in the wheeling

night skies — vaporous trails of opposing
headlights filmed in time-
lapse along

the trafficked
and sinuous Route Transcanadienne.