

decades since minutes with moments to

by strannikov

paralysis prognosis

the paralytic's much improved:
remains inert for his own good,
no more complaints of clotted veins.

his circulation unimpaired,
afflicted nerves cut from their deeds,
his inert state he won't explain:

provoking questions about will,
motive, honesty—the cur!
a coward lying on his cot—

unless, in truth, his nerves are shot,
unless paralysis extends
to larynx, throat, his lower jaw? . . .

how sensitive to sharpened pins
might he be where his skin's so raw?

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i

the drive-ins now are dead and gone
where once we laught through splatter films:
our screens too small, our horrors do not fit—
no monumental screens are left,
no close-ups show us what we think we fear.

old long since mules turned 'to glue
days long passed we thronged to malls
(did Orwell's 1984 peak soon?)
since when our schools sat still in flames
since life loss'd laughs we once were sure we'd earned.

no weekend jaunts to slosh our booze
Hollywood shades in style no more
the Marlboro Kids all wheezed to death
(could stumbling eyes have led us here?)—
each new day increasingly an “if”.

our noveltries led us astray.
our schedules held no vast appeal:
old worlds entire judged time by counting moons—
superior we thought our maths
for counting dolls awards cocaine and brews.

we thought we knew what to resent
surmised the justice of our griefs
forgot to dig the depths of human need
maintained careers long since eclipsed
to eke out pics of facelift kings and queens.

ii

the news was read in clamoring voice—
some urgency some drama but no news—
now all alarms go off at once:
sirens whistles buzzers bells aclang . . .
something occurs, we know not what.

our currencies now lose their swearing voice,
we wonder why we heed their harsh commands,
the dimes we've earned now buy us squat
(just try to make a local call with one!):

economies now measure . . . less.

our focus yankt and pulled and tugged and pusht,
the prominent, they said, “significant”—
what mattered then, what matters now?
some conjured values blew our candles out,
we watch our screens all through our nights of scream.

our pixelated colors all have bled,
the hues the shades intensities have dimmed,
every other pixel sickened grey—
it's getting hard to trust the funny ads,
the pockets they're produced to fill.

we chased and chased, and now (surprise!) we're chased—
from vacant homes from public space from stage
(I'd planned to catch a play tonight,
but something else the theatre infects:
Poe's prophecy, a red death masque).

iii

what might it cost for us to breathe,
our bottled airs to breathe our lungs for us?
our horoscopes have fewer stars—
when might remaining stars align for bliss?
what day to come might we relax?

mishaps on this scale might queue in pairs,
some grim grey thing may lurk by close—
here now a war famine forests in flames
now cities burn erupt in rage—
we thought too soon we'd seen this world explode.

our teeth are only getting pulled
no fillings fill them, they don't fill our mouths,

our gums are bleeding red and white
this side of turmoil tumult grief and death—
remember still to brush your teeth today.

this life these lives a census of resolve:
who knows what kinds of sleeps we'll have
from solitary dens remotest caves?
all birds look down on empty streets
and marvel at the airs that lift their wings.

who might survive what days ahead
beneath enumerate suns and moons?
through days to be named one by one
new contests wait but will ensue—
each race to death begins anew.

town past known

could not recall where he once lived:
knew houses streets ditches trees—
could not recall the town's own name.

he'd lived there years, its name was called—
knew bushes vines gardens lanes
remembered lives that thrived, its name—?

could not forget the railroad tracks
the oaks the pines the dogwood blooms
azaleas in spring camellias rains—

could breathe its scents and sweat its heats,
knew store fronts and, sometimes, its bricks,
could see its slanted skies on autumn days . . .

he'd left the town some years ago—
he'd lived there years, years and years since,
it had had, he had known, its own name . . .

