

Metro

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Translated from French by S. C. Delaney and Agnès Potier

You sit down on a bench. It's not a seat, but rather a sign suggesting a position of rest: half crouched, thigh-bones level, back squared or hunched toward the knees, pelvis crushed between both weights—a scale's balance beyond all use. Migraine. The head gone, migraine within its space. A wheel in place of a head, face swallowed in, head beneath heels that walk, scuff, roam, trail one another in sequence. Periodic blasts, whispered dances, sounds of a guillotine, squeals that make each tip of the vertebra ring.

Men's gazes slide down women's legs—solely to feed the lonely vice of the metro, now vibrating.

Down in the trench, at its center, are rails—two pairs, parallel and opposing. Your head grinding under these wheels that, from well overhead, bodies weigh down.

There above, just beyond the stairway, is a corridor where more bodies move, their characteristic scuffs like those of bottle racks being slid onto a platform truck. In groups of six, eight, twelve, they follow the corridor, go through the gates, waver before blue enamel plaques until they reach another corridor.

Straight away they're startled by a cry that makes them shudder. A blackish mass, pyramid-shaped, sunken (a pyramid in which the base inhales the top, its summit resisting and rising upward, then sinking down again, neck's sinews strained and bared beneath the skin, which like a lizard's stomach is wrinkled and lined with rhomboid crosshatching, upon which time's grit is deposited, damp with secretions), tarry matter heaped against a wall but pushed, by the archway's bend, toward the hallway's center. And it lets fly a wail that resembles a song, its eyes closed as the sound rushes out. It's an old woman that utters this cry, while, now and again in its vicinity, a coin drops and lands on the floor.

A woman sings. Voice so baneful, the corridor's proportions are thrown off-kilter. Sloping downward, the hallway is a hollow half-cylinder, the song knocking against the earthenware tiles wrapped around the vault. Long viscera, long belly down which men and women walk subterraneously.

The corridor ends at the cloaca. A cluster of men spills out of it and disperses, spreading themselves along each sole of stone, between which opens the trench with its rails.

The people stop there before it and grow quiet. Pleasant silences follow. The smiles of young women grow in number; with a charming pride they show off some washing powder, sweets, a bra, the child they put to use; then in your turn you smile, a little nervous, embarrassed, knowing you don't deserve all this kindness, so nice and so insistent.

The billboards are giant concave sheets across which run our words. The shifting blots create a fixed illustration (it would depict a whore having had her ovaries removed, or an eggshell just when a spoon penetrates—an image that's fully experienced). Our glances take the form of a spoon that rings, with creeping slowness, within the great effulgence of the billboards.

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