

Suddenly cycling

by Andreas Voldstad

When at lunchtime you seem to have definitely decided to stay in for the day, finding this current version of yourself to be unpresentable, having woken up from familiar dreams on a narrow bed in an all too human carpeted room, just a bit too small and too furnished to move freely, when your hair is unwashed, your body smells of stale bedlinen, your Amazon package may be delivered anytime between now and 10 pm, when the laundry is piling next to packets of crumbling crisps, when the weather is British and the bike paths closed from flooding, when the wind will throw you off your bike and the cars will kill you in incomprehensible roundabouts, when there's covid and fresher's flu on the doorknobs, when you're jealous of the productivity of the mould in the bathroom and the spider in the corner, weaving its mirror of life, a beautiful conceptual model, when you've been crawling around the same insubstantial research questions for so long that, your current hygienic conditions considered, you belong more with your fellow cockroaches than among alien humans, when the rotten cheese in your cupboard and sour wine on your shelf are increasingly tantalising, when you've thoroughly forgotten that you have a body, when you ignore a reminder on your phone to meditate because you definitely don't have time for that, but you've been sitting in front of your computer for so long that Netflix is judging you, and standing up would astonish your neighbours, these strangers whom you know intimately, who hear your every move through thin Victorian walls, when you could use some help, but, somehow, admitting you're stuck is not an option, when the motivational quote on your secondary screen is the only reminder of the remains of your (fragile and toxic) masculinity, when there's people out there, large and terrifying, when you've fled across the North Sea but family duty still haunts you, when, like your buttocks on the chair, the verbal violence of life has left its imprint on the mind, when you see hostile intentions even in the kindest of faces,

when you in spite of all this get up, gripped by discomfort and awoken by birdsong, take off your sweatpants, put on your waterproofs, bury your laptop in a rolltop, put on your helmet, the house shaking as the door slams behind you, a bell of enlightenment to all sleeping beings in the flat, fasten the lights to your bike - because it's the law and also you don't want to die - , when you cycle past the fake Gothic spires, the trapped public transport boxed in by congesting individualism, the signs of poverty, class division and the closed-off gardens of college disparity, the encamped compassion for the pain of the world echoing in the background, when surviving High Street you drive your legs into your soaking shoes, into the pedals and up the hill, when your body rejoices from the unexpected flow of movement, the spirit inspired by sudden freedom and speed, a glimmer of sun reflected in green leaves at the top of South Park, leaving the city beneath you as aspire to the heights housing the figures that brought you to this strange place, the Barefoot Professors and Spanish Saviours, when you're leaning lightly to one side, turning the corner of a junction, chest high and broad, a solid grip on the handles, when you realise with your feet that freedom resides in the residual, that you are the error term, that you have energy and tolerance to step out of transgenerational cycles and into life, when you're gently rolling over the soft mud and grass between the ancient trees of your department, - then for this day you have finally left your old shell, your history and karma behind, as you rise up to the production of knowledge and alleviation of suffering.

This sense of human Doing and Being will grow even stronger if you run into a colleague and suggest a coffee in the common room, just to see how they're doing in life.