

ANDRE BRETON AND PHILIPPE SOUPAULT
“The Magnetic Fields (fragment)” (1920)

The corridors of the big hotels are empty and the cigar smoke is hiding. A man comes down the stairway and notices that it's raining; the windows are white. We sense the presence of a dog lying near him. All possible obstacles are present. There is a pink cup; an order is given and without haste the servants respond. The great curtains of the sky draw open. A buzzing protests this hasty departure. Who can run so softly? The names lose their faces. The street becomes a deserted track.

About four o'clock that same day a very tall man was crossing the bridge that joins the separate islands. The bells, or perhaps it was the trees, struck the hour. He thought he heard the voices of his friends speaking: “The office of lazy trips is to the right,” they called to him, “and on Saturday the painter will write to you.” The neighbors of solitude leaned forward and through the night was heard the whistling of streetlamps. The capricious house loses blood. Everybody loves a fire; when the color of the sky changes it's somebody dying. What can we hope for that would be better? Another man standing in front of a perfume shop was listening to the rolling of a distant drum. The night that was gliding over his head came to rest on his shoulders. Ordinary fans were for sale; they bore no more fruit. People were running without knowing why in the direction of the estuaries of the sea. Clocks, in despair, were fingering their rosaries. The cliques of the virtuous were being formed. No one went near the great avenues that are the strength of the city. A single storm was enough. From a distance or close at hand, the damp beauty of prisons was not recognized. The best refuges are stations because the travelers never know which way to go. You could read in the lines of the palm that the most fragrant vows of fidelity have no future. What can we do with muscle-bound children? The warm blood of bees is preserved in bottles of mineral water. We have never seen sincerities exposed. Famous men lose their lives in the carelessness of those beautiful houses that make the heart flutter. How small they seem, these rescued tides! Earthly happinesses run in floods. Each object is Paradise.

A great bronze boulevard is the shortest road. Magical squares do not make good stopping places. Walk slowly and carefully; after a few hours you can see the pretty nose-bleed bush. The panorama of consumptives lights up. You can hear every footfall of the underground travelers. And yet the most ordinary silence reigns in these narrow places. A traveler stops, changing expression. Wondering, he approaches the colored bush. Without doubt he wants to pick it but all he can do is shake hands with another traveler who is covered with stolen jewels. Their eyes exchange sulphurous sounds like the murmuring of a dry moon, but a glance disperses the most wonderful meetings. No one could recognize the pale-faced travelers.