

**Vicki In Bits**  
**Dutton and Swindells**  
**2009**

*This is the transcript of the text of the art-work 'Vicki in bits', made as part of The 'Institute of Beasts' project, first shown in its entirety at KdMOFA in June 2009.*

I am becoming comfortable in the corporate world, the world of transit, in the hotels and in the airport lounges.

I am becoming at ease with the glances, the transactions, the exchanges of money and the transfer of bodies.

I am perplexed yet curious towards the feeling I have that I am disappearing, that I am witnessing myself becoming absorbed. I am an image skidding on the surface world of images.

A ruined reflection.

I think also that I am going blind.

Thoughts jump out at me without warning as though the thoughts are thinking me.

I imagine a thin membrane between myself and some other selves and I believe I am witnessing my slow dissolve.

There are random ruptures in the skin of things which may take the form of a realisation that I have, at best, around 300 months to live, maybe only 20 odd more summers, or a moment of wild envy when I realise that someone actually owns a building I may be passing while driving in from the airport.

Recently I was visiting a large hospital in Seoul and I felt an overwhelming sense of love for the patients. What would it be like to be you?

I love you

I love you

I "love" you.

I was once struck with the notion that a man in a wheelchair was one of the lucky few who had defined a purpose in his life.

I want to believe these thoughts are not really me but I know they must be. They leave me shaking my head to rid myself of them, as if I can fling them off like a dog shakes off water. Another is speaking in my ear, another is in my head.

I seem at times to be characterised by a sense of.....

Wanting.

An aching dissatisfaction with the way all things are.

It is a form of deep irritation, it seems wanting is my very nature.

I want to want, I need to want.

Another thing.

Often when I am flying I make notes in a little black book that make no sense to me later, as though being 27,000 feet in the air breaks some of the mental connections to things down on the ground, so thoughts and images only bubble from the earth upward towards the sleeping passengers in a random and arbitrary manner.

There is a homelessness to my thinking.

One note reads,

“A TRULY DEMOCRATIC ART”,

another reads,

“ the Exorcist backwards in Arabic”

another draws the words,

“ GREY LOVE” in bulbous cartoon lettering.

I look at pictures of S. ( Who is this child? Where is she going? ), my 10 yr old daughter, and turn them upside down. I want to risk something which is bordering on the superstitious, to let her image go free, pursuing nothing, disaffected, disconnected, floating, I don't know where, in some sea of disinterest. If I can set her image free will she be free also or will she be lost?

I mean my sentiments. I am no longer ironic. My irony is dead. I am finally at one with shallowness and can flit across and through spaces like dappled shadows beneath the trembling branches of a tree in spring. There, you see? My sentiments, my amateurishness, these are my mawkish but faint index in the world.

I remember seeing an elderly lady eating at a street market in Taipei, it was a moment of pure self-contained pleasure and I wanted to say something.

I wanted to thank her and to show her the tears of joy welling up in my eyes. My sentiments re-establishing the wide - eyed innocence I believe to be universal.

In this surface world of mirrors, polished chrome and walnut there is something basic, something which feels true to me. It is pure cliché. It is a transcendency to a flatter terrain. I used to think there was no rule to sentiment, about what has sentimental value to who, but now I realise it is not the thing itself but the conditions which create it and the conditions can be agreed on as long as they are only approximations, propositions and generalisations.

It is a subtle and momentary concoction.

I think these conditions have something to do with art. You have to be in the mood for sentiment like you have to be in the mood for art.

Set the conditions and then sit back and watch.

I am living a post-pure emotion life where sentiment is no longer even a sign of the the reduction of feeling but its summoning. Sentiment is the deeply felt memory of an approximation of feeling, a sense of an emotional life which probably never was. Sentiment in this sense is productive. It is a form of hope.

Every time I travel I feel the same gap opening up inside me and over the weeks, the world, instead of becoming a deeper, richer place as one might have expected becomes more and more shallow. Even the air around me is becoming thinner.

In this world where I find myself there are plenty of new sensations but they rarely seemed to grow into anything more, they just hang in the air being new. There is a violence about the way people speak around me and also a sense of seriousness about their knowledge of a place in the world and their easy entitlement to it. Business confers a kind of glow on people. Not the warm sheen of money but the oily aura of smooth transactions hiding ruthless events.

I am often so frightened.

I feel the familiar stab of envy. I am up in the air with the bats hitting the windows in the club class lounge of the Bangkok Intercontinental watching lightening flashes across the city below. There is the sound of a cork being pulled from a bottle some way off in a back room, carrying a muffled velvet echo and I think the thought that I will find myself encountering over and over again, " I wish I could be here".

Christ, I envy myself.

And the love for my child; the oceanic love and the necessary forgetting and the love and the forgetting and the love and the forgetting.

I remember always being superciliously amused by the idea of a wild animal padding up and down in a cage being explained as stress, but this is exactly what I feel, like I am gradually being eaten alive from the inside and all I can do is barely control my panic by doing something, anything, repeatedly.

And the love for my child, the oceanic love, yet the necessary forgetting.

All the negotiation and reasoned argument is spreading like a virus in my head and everybody seems to be talking simultaneously.

I sometimes have the sensation that it is all breaking up, some huge psychic implosion. I may see someone, some small event unfolding, someone delicately wiping a flake of food from their lips, and it will inexplicably tear into me. The world collapses around this moment, the world and everyone in it.

I remember the child playing with her toys on the tiled verandah of the house in Spain, infinitely happy to pick up the plastic figures over and over again as they are blown over by the warm breeze. Some drama being played out, a line of figures and a circle of figures, a stage with chairs, the imagination at full tilt fully insulated and trusting, a work momentarily balanced and complete. I am aware I am privileged to witness this.

I am in world of tending and keeping and there is no life other than the life I tend.

In a tea-shop overlooking the Taiwanese port city of Kaohsiung. Dragonflies are hovering around me. What travel offers us is the possibility which the quotidian represses, in travel we feel we are always poised. We are always on the cusp of the new.

A child in pajamas on the back of a scooter

I am back in Bangkok I am sitting in my hotel room, there are so many small lights, fitted into ceilings, by the desk, by the bed but there's still no light and what light there is all reflections, mirrors. My eyes are so tired, I think I'm going blind. My eyes are suffocating in these crepuscular evenings.

My eyes are so often focused on middle distance in the glaze of drink and forgetting that I am losing the ability to focus.

There is a peculiar smell in the room. I think it's the smell of me, a trace of damp and smoke. I laugh at this odour.

Outside the air-conditioned lobby everyone is in ruins. There is a warm rain dousing down the shit hole of Suckhumvit.

( I was grabbing at moments of closeness, sitting on the step of some hostess bar with the weeping girl next to me who suddenly leapt over the bar and reached out an umbrella. An act of kindness when all the other acts fell on stony ground, when the playing could stop. There was a coolness in the hands, a freedom to touch my hands and legs.)

This is my last gasp, either I am dying or part of me is dying. I am casting something off, I am becoming, I am becoming my failure, I am speaking my failure, I am moving onward and upward.

But my stomach sags, my shoulders sag, my mind sags. I veer between frenzied self-adoration to pure loathing. I suffer internal tensions, lesions and stresses. I feel like a buckling bridge.

Regrets, I've had a few.

This writing, its like I'm scuttling the ship.

To write without pretension means to write with every pretension you have. All I can do is spew out everything that has gone before in a different order.

Pigs to the trough, lambs to the slaughter, here we come.

Things are gnawing at me. Where is the good, where are the successes? How do I ascribe VALUE to things? Am I so insecure that everyone else's successes affect me so much, I do take pleasure in the failing of others but never close by, I can't stand to see myself seeing others suffer, I can't stand to see my acting.

I am religious in my loathing.

"Do text in Neon"

"There is no stable ground-There is no stable ground"

We were talking about the idea of psycho anaesthesia, about how if a connection to the future is ruptured then you don't feel anything in the present.

Feeling is an investment, there's no point allowing feeling if there is no future.

Indeed, this may be why everyone is so fucking obsessed with feeling, if you feel, there may yet be a future to feel about.

We were flying over the Gobi desert, the land below is streaked in the direction of the wind. It was dust, small mounds of dust run through with an irregular comb. The thoughts were rising and falling; the thoughts were dancing a slow dance.

I am walking along a corridor in Chiang Kai-Shek and I have the knowledge that my daughter walked in the same corridor but in the opposite direction only days ago. I feel this like a punch in the gut.

What is it with the recent past, like droplets of a person are still somehow in the air. I felt the same in the balcony lounge of the Intercon executive.

I revisited it to see again and again to confirm where they had been sitting.

I am Vicky, and I am in bits.

© Steve Dutton and Steve Swindells. June 2009