

Balance

Jude Aquilina

Charles Babbage once laboured away
to ease the load of his fellow men,
now machines whir, screens hypnotise
in perpetual imbalance of ease.

We mine seas, probe skies,
and jackhammer the stage
on which we stand
delivering our righteous sermons.

Fine as the tail feather
of a lyrebird, as a seahorse's spine,
as the baleen fringe in a whale's mouth,
the line of sustainable life.

Every humble egg in its high nest
beats to its own rhythm,
as does our blood, hours of sunlight,
the sky's trinity of cloud, rain, sun;
natural cycles make or break nations
as we dwell on a precipice
set to crumble from some flimsy decision.

Bombshells drop on streets,
bulldozers rip at forest lungs.
Fulcrum perfection faces extinction
as the clock ticks
slowly for the oppressed,
cash-register fast

for the dealers and gamblers.

The swinging
plumb-bob of joy and shame,
of power and poverty,
presides over machine-made seasons
endured in predictable chaos.
But see how the homing pigeons
lose their way
when a meteor strikes the moon.

Invisible Intersections

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The Wright brothers
opened the skyways,
for jets to lay their railway tracks:
vaporous white contrails
snailing across the blue
behind a darting fuselage
evaporating like promises
snuffed out by cloud.
If they stayed, they'd spread
a checkered tablecloth
over Earth.

Satellites trundle
through trajectories
like unravelling balls of wool
on the kitten claw
of space-age play,
intersecting
like synapses in the brain.
Imagine if these pathways remained:
tangles of visible thoughts
a mesh of orbiting strands
boggling and fouling up clarity.

Skies and minds
should be wiped clean
but satellites never sleep
and dream loops
keep firing,

a crazy frisson of sparks
in the ever-lightening
darkness
of mankind's race
to intercept
himself.

Moon Landing

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Half a decade ago,
the silvery moon dulled
to a greyish blot
on a flickering TV.

The idiot box,
as my father called it,
rocketed to Gladstone Avenue
just in time for neighbours
to crowd into Aunty Dulcie's
stuffy lounge room.

Tight packed as astronauts
we stood and sat, height-layered,
children almost touching the screen,
Mr Crowe perched in the kitchen,
leaning deadily in.

Silence eclipsed the room,
at the first sight
of a swollen-headed,
white-suited Armstrong
stepping into a blurry
slow-mo movie,
his umbilical cord
joining the world
to this moment.

Hopes of trapezing stars,
of decanting the milky way
and manning new planets
flew high back then.

Yet, now,
all that grows above
is a litter of satellites
and a gaping hole
in man's sunshield.

This black and white dream
of '69 seems like
a comic book cartoon
of action-hunting heroes
cutting a scar
into a mysterious jewel
that we wish we'd just
kept dreaming about.

Where is the Global Repairman?

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The sun seems closer
every summer
melanomas grow,
waterways shrink
and bushfire smoke
smudges satellite images.

Someone forgot
to switch the air-con to cool –
the little fire icon burns redder.

Is the switch broken?
Has the repairman
lost the instructions?

The fridges at either end
of Earth's house
have leaky doors
and ice cubes
are melting onto the floor.

The manual says
to rest the engine,
clean the filters
and mend the holes –
or the motor will burn out.

When our appliance
clunks to a halt
there is no after sales service,
no shop to purchase
a cheap replacement.

Presidential salesmen
do not provide refunds,
or free tickets to Planet B.