

Taj (0:14)
December 14, 2020

Taj (0:21)

There are so many people, and you don't know any of them. You haven't been this close to so many strangers for some time. Shoulder to shoulder, like a busy New York subway ride, very aware of your hands and feet, closer than would be comfortable almost anywhere else. You can smell the brown wool of the jacket in front of you, and pretty much all you can see is the green checked scarf on the neck of Wool Jacket. You hear the breathing of the young child being held on the right shoulder of the down jacket to your left, and the whispers of the matching peacoats jammed against your right shoulder. Whoever is behind you is wearing a nylon jacket—maybe an entire suit of the stuff, because every tiny motion that you can feel as they press against your back is an audible vweep or swish. Then there are other sensations less specific—whose cologne that is, where the BO is coming from. Who's eating Doritos. Such mysteries must be relinquished, given up, abandoned to the greater pile of mysteries of all that has fallen behind in the garbage heap of your past moments. At some point in the near future, the doors will open and the parade forward will begin, a festival of motion preceded by a tangible and practical anticipation of change, of movement. An anticipation that differs from the restrained, resigned one we now inhabit. This present anticipation is under control. A tightly-held rein limits our reckoning with the unknown future here, delimited by the publicly-known opening time, our experience of precedent, and communal norms of local crowds. This approach to the known unknown—this Being-With-Ignorance—this indefinite postponement of the extremes of panic/excitement/rage/ecstasy, is so familiar, it is almost an event in itself. Our conversations at times like this tend to determinedly avoid reference to the immediate future. We resort to small talk, avoiding present and practical immediacies: “Man, what a game, huh?” “Sure is warm tonight.” Short thoughts that only allude to the presence of the future through careful avoidance, as if by only glancing at it in our peripheral vision, we can keep its terror/excitement from becoming overwhelming. Don't think about it, and we can get through this. Don't look at it and it won't see us. If we pretend we aren't waiting, it won't seem so much that we are slowly falling, tumbling down at a rate of 60 seconds per minute, hopelessly, into the waiting arms of death.