

ADAM SCHEFFLER

Self and Hive

You glimpse it in the face of the woman
 huddling by the subway station
who goes up to anyone who pauses
 to yell into their face
“Everyone in this city fucking hates me.”

As though we have a claim
on anyone we want here, even in the supremacy
 of our ugliness, or especially then—each
responsible for each, one sexual family
 linked, like amoebas entering the river of

Broadway at 5 PM, or like the sea hare
 that mates in chains, the one
in the middle acting as both male and female,
 like magic carpets flapping gelatinous
toxic wings. Passing under Grace Church now,

 strolling past fetish store
mannequins, coffee shops,
 and vertical groceries, past the brick school
like a castle spiny with surveillance cameras,
 I think why not undergo this dissolution,

why not relinquish the self.

 I slip the vendor a twenty, watching his face
impassive, as I collect my glittering change,
 and want to keep watching, want to enter
his life for a moment as he tips his frostbitten

face forward towards his wares—burning
flesh—to warm it. The merely personal seeming
foolish today, a delusion easily
escaped from, pretty, but insignificant like the seahorse
in the Union Square pet store unfurling

its single leg in its case, straightening it
to rise and float
over the two devil-red fire shrimp, like any one of
us decadent in our loneliness.
And I could already make out past the child-

smudged glass, the nearly
translucent haunch-fins like a secret of personality
revealed only to close friends—then out
to the other side of the glass where someone
is yelling at his wife, someone is shrieking

with delight as the chinchilla dances
manically across a spinning disk
like a communal heart. Okay, there's room for
loneliness, even for devastation
in the crowd, so many limits to what you can know

about these others, to what
they would let you know, and yet who needs these feelings
to be truly individual,
where does that need come from, that need
to be more or less than others,

to be different from in order to be real?
B told me sometimes that after
watching pornography, bodies joined together
like sea hares,
he talks to his own reflection, goes and stands

at the window looking through himself
over the city's streets and towers, that some impulse,
some greed, has heaped and dammed up
like the lines of traffic at the red light below.

B told me what a relief it is, then, and yes,

I can see that—until on the way home we come to
a complete halt at a well-dressed man
sitting right in the middle of the sidewalk
with his cloak spread out behind him,
who looks up at us and points to his mouth.